



Neck ornament

On display

Title/Description: Neck ornament

Object Type: Necklace

Materials: Fibre, Hair, Whale ivory

Measurements: l. 292 x w. 200 x d. 80 mm

Accession Number: 876

Historic Period: Late 18th/early 19th century

Production Place: Hawaiian Islands, Oceania, Pacific

A number of traditional Hawaiian art forms underwent an increase in scale and technical refinement during the period following initial European contact in 1778 and prior to the dramatic religious and political changes of 1819. This was in part a response to the political and ritual centralisation which was taking place in Hawaii at the time and was also facilitated by the increasing availability of metal tools. This trend is noticeable in wood temple images and also in hook-shaped ornaments of the type shown here (*lei niho palaoa*), for only smaller examples in whale ivory, wood or shell were collected during Captain Cook's visits (see Kaeppler, 1978: 91-3).

The Hawaiians did not hunt whales, but relied on stranded sperm whales as their source for ivory. However, in the last years of the eighteenth century, European traders began to supply large whale teeth and even walrus tusks to Hawaiian craftsmen, thus allowing the development of the larger form.

Of these larger necklaces this example is unique, for the artist has refined the basic form by adding two ridges at right angles to one another on the underside of the hook pendant. It is suspended between thick looping bunches of 8-ply braided hair, which are joined by a fibre cord passing through a hole in the pendant. Walrus ivory pendants can normally be distinguished from whale ivory ones by the crystalline core which runs down the centre of the tusk.

The hook shape is an ancient Polynesian design form. An example of a hook neck pendant, possibly dating to AD 1000, has been excavated on Hawaii Island (Rose, 1980: 126,197), and related objects were also made by the early Maori (Mead, 1984: 179; Duff, 1950: 110-22.).

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) pp. 30-31.
