



## Scraper handle

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### **On display**

**Title/Description:** Scraper handle

**Object Type:** Implement

**Materials:** Mammoth ivory

**Measurements:** l.111 x w. 43 x d. 47 mm

**Accession Number:** 918

**Historic Period:** 19th century

**Production Place:** Alaska, North America, Point Hope (?), The Americas

**Cultural Group:** Inuit

**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1985

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The proper preparation of animal skins was essential to the effectiveness of clothing and boats in the Arctic. Women were responsible for this work, and around the Bering Strait and along the north Alaskan coast they used special scrapers whose handles were shaped to fit the fingers of their working hand. A stone blade, missing here, was set into the recess. Most scraper handles are of wood, but this example, for a righthanded woman, is carved from mammoth ivory. Even more rare is the engraving depicting caribou and a figure; caribou are appropriate since they provided skins for the best clothing.

Mammoth ivory, sometimes referred to as fossil ivory (though it was not strictly fossilised, just preserved in the Arctic permafrost), can be identified by its resemblance to contemporary elephant ivory, having a criss-cross appearance in section, quite different from walrus ivory with its 'bubbled core'. The remains of woolly mammoths dating from the last Ice Age were found in eroded river banks. Their tusks, far greater in diameter than those of the walrus, were especially suitable for scraper handles and ladles (see Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1982:41, i31-2).

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) p. 241.

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## **Provenance**

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia on the advice of Robert Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1985 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.

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