



Pendant or toggle for float with Janus Head

On display

Title/Description: Pendant or toggle for float with Janus Head

Object Type: Head, Pendant

Materials: Walrus ivory

Technique: Carving, Drilling, engraving

Measurements: h. 90 x w. 32 mm

Accession Number: 1189

Historic Period: Old Bering Sea (500 - 1200 AD) and Punuk (800 - 1200 AD)

Production Place: Alaska, North America, St. Lawrence Island (?), The Americas

Cultural Group: Old Bering Sea

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1999

This is a striking and unique Janus head toggle or pendant of two faces with deeply engraved lines that indicate tattoos on the cheeks, chin and forehead. The eyes are squinting and the mouth is barely open. The nose in relief with engraved eyebrows give the shape of a whale's tail. [1]

We know from an ancestral frozen, mummified body that Old Bering Sea women tattooed at least their hands, fingers and forearms. [2] The tattoos found on the woman have close resemblance with Old Bering Sea motifs that have been found on objects such as harpoon heads or counterweight-stabilisers. Old Bering Sea (500 - 900 AD) and Punuk (800-1200 AD) might have followed similar practices for making tattoos as more recent St Lawrence Island Yupik. There were two techniques, one with a tattooing needle and the other with an in-line hand poking tool. As pigment, urine and preferably of an elderly woman was mixed with the soot of cooking kettles. [3]

Paul Silook, a renowned Sivuqaq (St. Lawrence Island) Yupik scholar, recounted the traditional use of tattoos on Sivuqaq.

When a girl is six years old, she must have tattooing on her face and cheeks and on her chin. This tattooing means that when she grows up to be a woman, she should have a different face than that of a man or people thought it looked nicer if she had this tattooing. Few women had tattooing on their hand. It meant that her great-grandmother had this tattooing. Nearly every woman has different tattoos. Some one way, the others another way, as their grandparents had. Sometimes they had tattoos on their joints. This means when they carried a dead man's or a dead woman's things to the mountain with the funeral.

There are different kinds of tattooing on a man. One is that when his brother died, they tattooed all the brothers on their chin, one on each side of the chin. ... There were many different kinds of tattoos for a man. When he was a very little boy and if he often cried, they put a tattoo between the eyes on the nose. Another is that if the head always ached, he should have a tattoo in front of his ears. Sometimes they tattooed over the eyes. It means when he had killed a man or they tattooed on their shoulders.

When he had struck a whale for the very first time, he had tattoos on every one of his joints or when he shot a bear for the first time. Also when he was a little boy and unhealthy, they tattooed him in the middle of the chin clear down near his neck. Only one man that I have seen had a tattoo kind that a woman has. He thought if he should have these tattoos he would live healthier. [4]

Paul Silook's reference to healing and tattoos is important to bear in mind when looking at ancestral Bering Strait carvings of faces with lines. The tattooing with pigment had healing or spiritual guarding force. [5] This pendant or toggle (for float?), however, might have belonged to a whaling captain or an *angatquq* [*angakhut* or spiritual leader]. The tattoos could have been references to successful hunts. As with the dormant role of the *angatquq* due to colonialization across the Arctic, traditional tattooing with needle or hand poke also became dormant. More recently, however, revitalization initiatives have reawakened traditional tattooing in various Indigenous communities including other Inuit. [6]

[1] Lars Krutak, 'Of Human Skins and Ivory Spirits: Tattooing and Carving in the Bering Strait', in *Gifts from the Ancestors: Ancient Ivories of Bering Strait*, ed. by William Fitzhugh, Aron L. Cromwell, and Julie Hollowell, Strait (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2009), pp. 190-203, (p.197, fig. 17); see for a wooden Point Hope mask with a whale tail, Amber Lincoln, 'The First Arctic Culture in North America', in *Arctic: Culture and Climate*, ed. by Amber Lincoln, Jago Cooper, and Jan Peter Laurens Loovers, (London: Thames & Hudson in collaboration with The British Museum, 2020), pp. 199-206, (p.206)

[2] George S. Smith and Michael R. Zimmerman, 'Tattooing Found on a 1600 Year Old Frozen, Mummified Body from St. Lawrence island, Alaska', *American Antiquity*, 40(1975), pp. 433-437

[3] Otto Geist in George S. Smith and Michael R. Zimmerman, 'Tattooing Found on a 1600 Year Old Frozen, Mummified Body from St. Lawrence island, Alaska', *American Antiquity*, 40(1975), pp. 433-437 (p.436)

[4] Paul Silook, 13 August 1917, in Lars Krutak, 'Of Human Skins and Ivory Spirits: Tattooing and Carving in the Bering Strait', in *Gifts from the Ancestors: Ancient Ivories of Bering Strait*, ed. by William Fitzhugh, Aron L. Cromwell, and Julie Hollowell, Strait (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2009), pp. 190-203, (p.197).

[5] Lars Krutak, 'Therapeutic Tattooing in the Arctic: Ethnographic, Archaeological, and Ontological Frameworks of Analysis', *International Journal of Paleopathology*, 25(2019), pp. 99-109

[6] Lars Krutak, 'A Long Sleep', *Reawakening Tattoo Traditions in Alaska*, in *Ancient Ink: The Archaeology of Tattooing*, ed. by Lars Krutak and Detter Wolf, (Seattle: University of Washington Press), pp. 286-293

Provenance

According to the vendor Miriam Shiell, the object was excavated at the village site of Gamble, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, in 1999.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Miriam Shiell Fine Art, Toronto, in 1999 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
