Finch & Co



A VERY RARE BERING SEA ESKIMO HUNTING HARPOON

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MADE FROM THE TUSK OF A NARWHAL, PROBABLY USED FOR HUNTING WHALES AND NARWHALS. THE CARVED NARWHAL IVORY THUMB PIECE LASHED TO THE SHAFT WITH SEALSKIN CORDS. THE SOCKET PIECE AND POINT MISSING. OLD SMOOTH PATINA.
18TH CENTURY
SIZE: 116CM LONG – 45¾ INS LONG

LITERATURE

BOWHEAD WHALES WERE TOO LARGE FOR ONE HUNTER TO TAKE ALONE. IN PARTS OF THE EASTERN ARCTIC SEVERAL MEN IN KAYAKS HUNTED THEM IN A GROUP. IN NORTHWEST ALASKA, ASIA AND GREENLAND, CREWS OF MEN USING OPEN BOATS CALLED 'UMIAKS' HUNTED BOWHEADS. A STANDARD CREW CONSISTED OF EIGHT MEN, INCLUDING SIX PADDLERS, ONE HARPOONER AND ONE HELMSMAN ALL OF WHOM CONCENTRATED ON THEIR SPECIALISED TASK IN CONTRAST TO THE KAYAK HUNTER WHO HAD TO PROPEL AND STEER HIS CRAFT AND HANDLE THE HARPOON AND LANCE ALL BY HIMSELF.
A THIRD FORM OF HUNTING WAS USED IN THE PACIFIC ESKIMO AREA WHERE SEVERAL DIFFERENT SPECIES OF WHALE WERE TO BE FOUND. A SINGLE KAYAK HUNTER ATTEMPTED TO PLACE A LIGHT POISON TIPPED LANCE INTO A WHALE AND THEN IMMEDIATELY RETURNED HOME AND BEGAN A SERIES OF RITUAL PROCEDURES DESIGNED TO KILL THE WHALE BY MAGIC, WHILE OTHER HUNTERS IN KAYAKS MONITORED THE MOVEMENTS OF THE WHALE. AS IT SWAM ABOUT THE LANCE WORKED ITSELF PROGRESSIVELY FURTHER INTO ITS BODY AND THE POISON BEGAN TO SPREAD. IF THE LANCE HAD BEEN PROPERLY PLACED THE WHALE EVENTUALLY DIED. HOWEVER, WHALES OFTEN EXPIRED FAR FROM WHERE THEY HAD BEEN STRUCK AND THOSE HARPOONED BY HUNTERS FROM ONE VILLAGE WERE FREQUENTLY RECOVERED BY THOSE FROM ANOTHER, BUT SINCE THE SAME HUNTING TECHNIQUE WAS EMPLOYED ALL OVER THE REGION THERE WAS A SUPPLY OF DEAD WHALES FLOATING OVER AN EXTENSIVE AREA ULTIMATELY YIELDING SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.

THE ESKIMO PEOPLE WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO PLEASE THE SPIRITS OF THE MAJOR GAME ANIMALS THEY DEPENDED ON FOR THEIR SUBSISTENCE AND SURVIVAL, AND THIS UNUSUAL HARPOON MAY HAVE BEEN MADE AND USED TO HUNT NARWHAL IN THE BELIEF THAT ITS FAMILIAR TUSK WOULD CHARM AND APPEASE THE NARWHAL'S SPIRIT.