Finch & Co



NETHERLANDISH CARVED BALEEN DOUBLE SIDED RELIQUARY PENDANT JEWEL

A RARE NETHERLANDISH CARVED BALEEN DOUBLE SIDED RELIQUARY PENDANT JEWEL
OF OVAL SHAPE CONTAINING TWENTY NAMED RELICS OF SAINTS
EARLY 17TH CENTURY
SIZE: 7.5CM HIGH, 5CM WIDE – 3 INS HIGH, 2 INS WIDE

LITERATURE

THIS CHRISTIAN AMULETIC PENDANT IS UNUSUAL IN BEING MADE OF WHALE BALEEN; A STIFF HORN LIKE MATERIAL THAT GROWS DOWN IN PLATES FROM THE ROOF OF THE MOUTHS OF 'RIGHT' WHALES. AS THEY SWIM WITH THEIR HUGE MOUTHS OPEN THEY SCOOP UP TONS OF WATER AND SMALL FISH AND THE SUSPENDED BALEEN ACTS AS A SIEVE ALLOWING ONLY FOOD OF A PARTICULAR SIZE TO ENTER THE COMPARATIVELY SMALL THROAT OF THE WHALE. BALEEN WAS USED OFTEN BY THE WHALERS TO MAKE VARIOUS ARTICLES FROM CORSET STAYS TO FISHING RODS, IN FACT ANYTHING THAT NEEDED STIFFENING, AND IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE INVENTION OF PLIABLE STEEL THAT USE OF WHALE BALEEN WAS ABANDONED.