

Finch & C^o



SAILORS SCRIMSHAW SPERM WHALE TOOTH ETCHED WITH AN 'EROTIC SCENE'

AN UNUSUAL SAILORS SCRIMSHAW SPERMWHALE TOOTH ETCHED WITH AN 'EROTIC SCENE'
OF TWO LOVERS BENEATH A REGENCY TENTED PAVILION. INDISTINCTLY DATED 'JAN, 14, 1848'
FINE OLD SMOOTH AND GOLDEN PATINA

CIRCA 1848

SIZE: 18CMLONG, 7.5CM WIDE, 5.5CM DEEP – 7 INS LONG, 3 INS WIDE, 2¼ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

WHEN THEY ARE GREEN OR RECENTLY CAUGHT, SPERM WHALE TEETH ARE NOT DIFFICULT TO INSCRIBE. THEY ACQUIRE THEIR BRITTLENESS AND HARDNESS WITH EXPOSURE TO THE AIR. HOWEVER, THE SURFACE OF THE IVORY TOOTH WAS RIGID AND TOUGH AND REQUIRED A GREAT DEAL OF SMOOTHING AND POLISHING BEFORE IT COULD BE WORKED ON.

THE AUTHOR OF 'MOBY DICK' HERMAN MELVILLE REFERRED TO THE SCRIMSHAW PRODUCING IMPLEMENTS OF THE WHALE MEN: 'SOME OF THEM HAVE BOXES OF DENTISTICAL IMPLEMENTS ESPECIALLY INTENDED FOR THE SKRIMSHANDERING BUSINESS'. EITHER A SAIL NEEDLE WITH A BONE OR WOOD HANDLE OR A JACK KNIFE WITH ITS POINT GROUND TO THE PROPER SIZE WAS USED AND SLOWLY THE UNHURRIED ARTISAN PRICKED AND CUT HIS DESIGN. DAYS AND WEEKS SLIPPED INTO MONTHS BEFORE THE TASK WAS COMPLETED, BUT TIME MEANT LITTLE TO THE WHALE MEN, THERE WAS NO NEED FOR HASTE ON A LONG SEA VOYAGE. OFTEN ELABORATE BORDER HATCHING CONSUMED MONTHS OF METICULOUS EFFORT. TO COMPLETE THE JOB, INKING IN THE INCISED LINES WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY THUMB AND PALM USING ORDINARY BLACK INDIA INK OR NATIVE DYES FROM SOUTH SEA ISLANDS. SOMETIMES VARIED SUBSTITUTES WOULD BE USED DERIVED FROM SHIP'S PAINT OR TAR AND OFTEN SOOT FROM THE TRY WORKS WAS APPLIED OVER THE TOOTH TO PRODUCE THE DESIRED EFFECT.