Finch & Co



ENGLISH SAILORS SCRIMSHAW ENGRAVED WALRUS IVORY ESKIMO INUIT HARPOON BLADE

AN UNUSUAL ENGLISH SAILORS SCRIMSHAW ENGRAVED WALRUS IVORY ESKIMO INUIT HARPOON BLADE PROFUSELY DECORATED WITH MEN HUNTING WALRUS SHIPS AND SAILORS FLYING THE UNION FLAG THE REVERSE WITH A SPOUTING WHALE BRITANNIA RIDING A SEAHORSE AND THE ROYAL COAT OF ARMS BETWEEN A LION AND UNICORN
OLD SMOOTH CREAMY PATINA
MID 19TH CENTURY
SIZE: 37CM LONG – 14½ INS LONG

LITERATURE

THE WALRUS PROVIDED THE ONLY NATIVE SOURCE OF IVORY IN EUROPE AFTER THE DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, WHICH HAD ACCESS TO AFRICAN ELEPHANT IVORY. PRIOR TO THE VICTORIAN ERA 'MORSE' IVORY PROVIDED THE ONLY REGULAR SUPPLY. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A LONG HISTORICAL TRADITION OF CARVING WALRUS TUSKS THERE WAS NO ARTISTIC CUSTOM OF DECORATING THE SURFACE WITH ENGRAVED DESIGNS. SCRIMSHAW IS THE ART OF THE 19TH CENTURY WHALER, BUT WAS MORE USUALLY ENGRAVED ON SPERM WHALE TEETH.
WALRUS MEAT AND HIDES WERE ESSENTIAL TO THE SUBSISTENCE LIVES OF THE ESKIMO WHO WORKED THE IVORY TUSKS FOR HARPOON BLADES, SNOW KNIVES, SLED RUNNERS AND AMULETS. THIS HARPOON BLADE WAS PROBABLY COLLECTED BY A SAILOR FROM THE INUIT WHILST HUNTING FOR THE GREENLAND WHALE IN THE SEAS OF THE ARCTIC OCEAN, AND ENGRAVED ON THE LONG VOYAGE HOME.