Finch & Co



A FAROESE SAILORS SCRIMSHAW STEEL KNIFE THE HANDLE AND SHEATH MADE OF CARVED BALEEN INLAID WITH WHALEBONE MOTHER OF PEARL AND BRASS DEPICTING TWO WHALES

A FAROESE SAILORS SCRIMSHAW STEEL KNIFE THE HANDLE AND SHEATH MADE OF CARVED BALEEN INLAID WITH WHALEBONE MOTHER OF PEARL AND BRASS DEPICTING TWO WHALES HARPOONS A WHALEBOAT AND A HEART

LATE 19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 17.5CM LONG - 7 INS LONG

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LITERATURE

BALEEN WAS A CHALLENGE TO CARVE, A HEAVY MATERIAL 'MYSTICETI' MADE OF COMPLEX PROTEIN KERATIN THAT DEVELOPS AS TWO PARALLEL ROWS OF NARROW PLATES HANGING FROM THE ROOF OF THE WHALE'S MOUTH. IT IS EXTREMELY STRONG, FIBROUS, BRITTLE AND DIFFICULT TO WORK, BUT IT CUTS AND SCRAPES EASILY AND COULD BE STEAM BENT. MOST OBJECTS WERE MADE FROM PLANKS OR STRIPS CUT FROM DRIED AND POLISHED BALEEN PLATES. RIGHT WHALE BALEEN HAD BEEN USED IN EUROPE SINCE THE MIDDLE AGES, AND IN THE REST OF THE WORLD FROM THE 17TH CENTURY, BUT THE BEST BALEEN FOR SUPPLENESS AND DURABILITY CAME FROM THE WESTERN ARCTIC BOWHEAD WHALE TAKEN IN LARGE NUMBERS IN ALASKAN AND SIBERIAN WATERS FROM THE 1840'S. IT IS SAID THAT THE FAROESE WHALERS USED THESE SMALL KNIVES IN PILOT WHALE DRIVES.

PROVENANCE

CF: HULL CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY SCRIMSHAW COLLECTION (W5.268)