Finch & Co



**ANCIENT BERING STRAIGHT ESKIMO CARVED WALRUS IVORY DRAG HANDLE DEPICTING A TRANSFORMATIVE HALF MAN-POLAR BEAR**

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THE LONG NECKED BEAR WITH A SHAMAN CROUCHED RIDING ON HIS BACK, WEARING A MASK (?)

FINE AGED COLOUR AND PATINA

BERING STRAIT

EARLY PUNUK 800 - 1200 AD

SIZE: 3.5CM HIGH, 10CM LONG, 1.5CM WIDE - 1½ INS HIGH, 4 INS LONG, ½ INS WIDE

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**LITERATURE**

DURING THE WINTER TIME, A RINGED SEAL, IS BROUGHT HOME OVER THE ICE WITH THE AID OF DRAG HANDLES. THIS SMALL SCULPTURE HAS A DUAL FUNCTION ACTING AS A HANDLE AND AS AN AMULETIC HUNTING CHARM WHICH ASSISTS THE HUNTER IN FINDING HIS PREY, GUIDING HIS HARPOON AND APPEASING THE SPIRIT OF THE ANIMAL. MANY 'HALF-

CREATURES' ARE KNOWN IN ESKIMO MYTHOLOGY AND ARE FREQUENTLY ILLUSTRATED IN THEIR IVORY CARVINGS, ESPECIALLY ON DRAG HANDLES.

ANIMAL TRANSFORMATION IS A BASIC CONCEPT OF WESTERN ESKIMO THOUGHT AND IS DESCRIBED IN MANY LEGENDS AS WELL AS DISPLAYED IN THEIR ART. DESPITE THE TRANSFORMATION AN ANIMALS 'INUA' OR SPIRIT WILL NOT CHANGE, AND THIS ABILITY RESULTS IN AN UNPREDICTABLE WORLD IN WHICH THE TRUE IDENTITY OF ANY GIVEN CREATURE IS NOT CERTAIN. THESE TRANSFORMATIONAL CAPABILITIES LIE WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF THE SHAMANS WHO MAKE USE OF THESE POWERFUL SPIRITS IN THEIR CEREMONIAL PERFORMANCES AND RITUAL MAGIC.

POLAR BEARS ARE PRIZED AND RESPECTED SEA MAMMALS AND LIKE WHALES THEY ARE REGARDED AS ESSENTIALLY HUMAN. THE YUPIK ARTIST SUSIE SILOOK, EXPLAINED THIS CONCEPT AT A WORKSHOP 'GIFTS OF THE ANCESTORS' HELD IN ANCHORAGE IN MAY 2005; 'THEY SAID THAT WHEN THEY CUT UP A POLAR BEAR IT'S JUST LIKE A MAN ON THE INSIDE. THE BONES AND EVERYTHING. THEY RESPECT IT BECAUSE IT'S A HUNTER JUST LIKE WE ARE YOU KNOW. THAT'S WHY IT'S SO HONOURED'.

**PROVENANCE**

EX EUROPEAN PRIVATE COLLECTION

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