Finch & Co



A FINE AND LARGE WALRUS 'PENIS BONE' BACULUM HAND CLUB

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WALRUS BONE

ARCTIC / BERING STRAIT

19TH CENTURY OR EARLIER

SIZE: 48.5CM LONG - 19 INS LONG

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LITERATURE

IN 1604 STEPHEN BENNETT, AN ENGLISH SAILOR AND ADVENTURER, BROUGHT BACK TO LONDON A LIVING YOUNG WALRUS HE OBTAINED IN THE BEAR ISLANDS. IT EXCITED MUCH CURIOSITY: 'THE KING AND MANY HONOURABLE PERSONAGES BEHELD IT WITH ADMIRATION FOR THE STRANGENESS OF THE SAME, THE LIKE WHEREOF HAD NEVER BEFORE BEENE SEENE ALIVE IN ENGLAND'. TWO YEARS LATER BENNETT KILLED BETWEEN 600 AND 700 WALRUSES ON BEAR ISLAND IN SIX HOURS, AND IN 1608 A TOTAL OF 1000 IN SEVEN HOURS. THE FIGURES ARE STAGGERING AND THE OVERALL SLAUGHTER SO GREAT THAT THE WALRUS WAS PRACTICALLY EXTERMINATED IN THE AREA BY 1613.

ONCE KNOWN AS THE SEA HORSE, 19TH CENTURY NATURALISTS BELIEVED THE WALRUS TO BE THE LINK BETWEEN MAMMALS OF THE LAND AND THOSE OF THE SEA. THE MALE WALRUS LACKS ANY EXTERNALLY VISIBLE PENIS, AND IN ORDER TO CONTROL BODY TEMPERATURE IN FREEZING ARCTIC WATERS, IT IS INTERNAL AND SUPPORTED BY A BONE CALLED A BACULUM.

THE BERING SEA ESKIMO WOULD MAKE USE OF THESE NATURAL CLUBS WHEN HUNTING TO DISPATCH CAUGHT SEAL AND FISH.

PROVENANCE

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

CF:

FINCH AND CO, CATALOGUE NO. 6, ITEM NO. 15, FOR TWO ANCIENT FOSSIL PENIS BONE CLUBS