

Harpoon Lance

ORIGINS

Date: Exact Time Period Unknown

Place: Inuit Communities, Modern-day Alaska

Materials: Walrus Ivory



A walrus ivory hunting lance

Donated

By: Unknown

DESCRIPTION

The artifact's color is tan with different with blemishes along the handle and blade. The blemishes are a darker shade of tan and there is one specific change in color towards the tip of the blade that is different than the others. That particular change has more of a reddish tint than all of the other colors on the artifact. The blade is surprisingly sharp for the assumed age of the artifact. Along the handle, there are many small notches in which it is believed that the creators of the artifact used as grips for their hands. There is also a scratch/crack that runs upwards along the handle. Lastly, there is a small hole at the top of the handle that could have been used for storage purposes or the hole was created later by people other than the Inuit. The yellowish tint comes from the oxidation of the walrus ivory. Normally, the ivory would be whiter however exposure to air has caused it to gradually become more yellow over time.



Handle

Blade

Notice the variation of colors in different areas

Use within Culture: Hunting and fishing was a major part of the Inuit culture. The animals hunted included seals, walrus, whales, polar bears, caribou, muskoxen, birds, and foxes. Shrubs and grasses were also gathered but in the Arctic areas, those resources were scarce. Around 75% of their diet consisted of fatty meats such as seal, whale, polar bear, and walrus. That amount of fat would be unhealthy for the most humans, however, the Inuit were for the most part in shape and healthy. Polar whales along the pack ice, or the hunting grounds of the Inuit, surfaced for air and when they did, the hunters struck with weapons such as harpoons and spears. Their weapons were usually made from tusks, bones, or stone.

One notable predator they hunted was the Nanuk, the Great Wanderer, or more widely known as the polar bear. These beasts could weigh upwards of 300 kilograms and could easily drag beluga whales onto the ice and kill them with their intensely sharp claws. The polar bear was not usually hunted for its' meat however for its' hide for clothes and houses. The meat was eaten in circumstances where the hunter or others had no other choice due to its poor taste.

Seals were particularly difficult to hunt because of the amount of time it took to sometimes kill one. There were many holes around the ice and seals would use random holes to come up to breathe. A hunter would have to not move a muscle waiting outside of a hole until a seal surfaced. A danger to a hunter could be the Walrus due to its weight and enormous tusks which is what the harpoon lance is made from. Stories have been told about walruses pulling hunters below the ice during a trip and killing them. They also hunted the beluga whale and the narwhal. All of the bones and hides from the animals were used in everyday Inuit life for hunting, cooking, building, and textiles.

Report written by: Joe DeSantis