



Gaming piece

On display

Title/Description: Gaming piece

Born: 1700 c. - 1799 c.

Object Type: game

Materials: Mammal tooth

Measurements: h. 38 mm

Accession Number: 433

Historic Period: 18th century

Production Place: Arctic, North America, The Americas

Images of swimming birds, some with human faces, have been found from the Bering Sea to Greenland, and date from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century. They are reported to have been used as toys, shamanic amulets and gaming dice. Referring to examples from northern Canada, Boas (1888: 567) noted: 'A game similar to dice, called tingmiujang - i.e. images of birds - is

frequently played. A set of about fifteen figures... belongs to this game; some representing birds, others men and women... the figures are shaken in the hand and thrown upward. On falling, some stand upright, others lie flat on the back or on the side. Those standing upright belong to that player whom they face... The players throw by turns until the last figure is taken up, the one getting the greatest number of figures being the winner.'

This specimen is carved from mammal teeth, possibly walrus (not tusk), and is pierced at the back. Bandi (1977: pls. 56-7) illustrates numerous birds similar to the image from St Lawrence Island.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 239.

Provenance

Acquired by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury in 1983.

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia circa 2000.
