

7/21/13

Punuk ivory handle consisting of a bear head with inlaid baleen eyes, on a long "body" consisting of longitudinal sections separated by grooves, with four lashing holes at the end, 26.3 cm



This object, found together with other Punuk artifacts, was probably used as a handle for a shovel blade or large spoon or scoop made from wood or bone (walrus scapula). For examples of scapula shovel blades, see Geist and Rainey, 1936, Plate 24-6 and -7, and Collins, 1937, Plates 50-6 (OBS) and 60-12 (Punuk). It is likely that the grooving functioned not merely as decoration, but also to provide a better grip (especially for hands coated with blubber, as they often were).

Literature:

Collins, H.B. (1937): *Archaeology of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska* (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, Vol. 96, No. 1), Washington, DC.

Geist, O.W. and Rainey, F.G. (1936): *Archaeological Excavations at Kululik, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska*. Miscellaneous Publications of the University of Alaska, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.