

Line Tighteners

OBS line tightener in the form of a seal, 6.8 cm



Punuk line tightener with a bear and a whale in high relief, Wales, Alaska, 11.5 cm

The line tightener shown below is for towing a large animal such as a walrus or a small whale. By comparison with the OBS example shown above and three similar objects in the Menil collection (A8371, A8470 and A80158), it can be concluded that a small missing portion next to the whale contained two line holes with their axis in the front to back direction.

For purposes of towing, a few cuts are made around the animal's neck, through which an encircling line is passed. Both ends of the resulting U-shaped loop are then passed through the line holes and through the ring of the clip (i.e., the raised band enclosing a large line hole, covering a depression on the otherwise flat underside), which is then pushed to the neck in order to make it tight. The smaller example shown above is used for towing a harpooned seal or other small animal, and is also regarded as a hunting talisman or amulet (Sergei Arutiunov, personal communication).

The example shown below can be identified as Punuk based on the well-developed sculptural features characteristic of early Punuk, as compared to engraved OBS art (on which whale images are infrequent). Moreover, early Punuk burials show that the people of this subculture not only hunted whales in addition to pinnipeds and birds, but also the polar bear, which was probably one of the chief figures of early Punuk mythology based on the large number of carved ivory polar bear images found in Punuk burials (Bronstein et al., 2013).

Bronstein, M.M., Dneprovsky, K.A., and Savinetsky, A.B. (2013): Ancient Eskimo Cultures of Chukotka, in press.





Bruce White photos



Front and rear views of the raised band on the flat underside