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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April Artifact of the Month: Hunting Hat from Anvik

SITKA – The April artifact of the month is a hunting hat collected by the Reverend Sheldon Jackson from the Athabascan village of Anvik on the Yukon River. (II.F.13) The hat was made by bending a single piece of wood into a triangular shape using steam and heat. The wood is sewn together at the back with root line and reinforced by a bent piece of wood spanning the seam. The back of the hat has a loop of grass, the type used for warps of grass socks, and is decorated on its outer edge with black Jaeger feathers. This closed-crown conical bentwood hat with its painted light blue surface and ivory embellishments is highly decorated with symbolic elements and reflective of the sophisticated work of a craftsman skilled in woodworking, ivory carving, and painting.



II.F.13 Hunting hat

Symbolically significant features of the hat include an ornate walrus head sculpture and bird imagery in the form of a pair of symmetrical oblong, rectangular ivory volutes flanking the sides, two carved ivory toothed bird beaks, and concentric circle designs representing birds' eyes and their faculty for vision. Bird imagery, realistic or abstract, is common to many hunting hats and visors and according to author Lydia Black, is polysemic, connoting "a crossing of boundaries – human and supernatural, the seen and the hidden, high and low, land and sea, life and death, procreation and killing, male and female, young and old." Predator birds and species that fly high or dive deep such as eagles, falcons, loons, murre, gulls, puffins, and cormorants and animals valued symbolically such as walrus, whales, and sea otters were commonly depicted or represented in bentwood headgear motifs.

Hunting hats were part of a man's gear for hunting on the open ocean or on ice floes. Functionally, they reduced glare of the sun off of water, protected the wearer from rain and sea spray, and facilitated the hunter's ability to hear. More than mere items of utility and decoration, hunting headgear served as talismans thought to attract prey and empower hunters.

Bentwood hats styled with short visors, like this one, were used by coastal peoples of Bristol Bay, Nunivak Island, Norton Sound, and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta regions until into the 1950s. Bentwood hats with more elongated visors were used on the Aleutian Chain and Kodiak Island. Though hats varied in shape, material, function, and wearer, many were decorated with ivory carvings, feathers, or painted figures. A similar hunting hat acquired by Sheldon Jackson in 1893 is in the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and featured in the publication, *Glory Remembered: Wooden Headgear of Alaska Sea Hunters*.

This hunting hat can be seen at the museum through April 30th. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Discounted winter admission is \$3. Visitors 18 years of age and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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