Finch & Co

A RARE CHINESE IVORY IMPERIAL COURT TABLET OR 'HU'

A RARE CHINESE IVORY IMPERIAL COURT TABLET OR 'HU'
LATE MING DYNASTY, MID 17TH CENTURY
SIZE : 49 CM LONG – 19¼ INS LONG

LITERATURE

THESE TABLETS OF IVORY WERE CARRIED BY COURT OFFICIALS WHILST ACTUALLY STANDING IN THE IMPERIAL PRESENCE. THEY HELPED DIRECT THE EYES DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE HU AND DISCREETLY AWAY FROM THE FACE OF THE EMPEROR. THEY WERE USED AT LEAST AS EARLY AS THE TANG PERIOD AND AS LATE AS THE 17TH CENTURY. THEY WERE RETAINED AND PRESERVED BY COURT DOOR KEEPERS AND COLLECTED ONLY ON ENTERING THE PALACE AS IT WAS AN OFFENCE TO KEEP THEM AS THEY GAVE ACCESS TO RESTRICTED AREAS OF THE PALACE. IN THE 16TH CENTURY THERE WERE NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS THAT THEIR DISTRIBUTION WAS ONLY LAXLY SUPERVISED. BY THE QING DYNASTY THEY HAD FALLEN OUT OF USE AT COURT, BUT CONTINUED TO BE A SOUGHT AFTER ANTIQUARIAN CURIOSITY, BEING COLLECTED AND DISPLAYED IN ALL THE MOST IMPORTANT EUROPEAN 'WUNDERKAMMER'.