Finch & Co



FRENCH NAPOLEONIC PRISONER OF WAR WORK COCONUT 'BUGBEAR' SNUFF BOX

AN UNUSUAL FRENCH NAPOLEONIC PRISONER OF WAR WORK COCONUT 'BUGBEAR' SNUFF BOX IN THE FORM OF A PUFFERFISH WITH BEAKED MOUTH STARRING EYES AND SCALY BODY

CIRCA 1810 - 1830

SIZE: 4.5CM HIGH, 4.5CM WIDE, 10CM, LONG - 1¾ INS HIGH, 1¾ INS WIDE, 4 INS LONG

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LITERATURE

AS EARLY IMPORTS TO EUROPE, LIKE OSTRICH EGGS, COCONUTS WERE GREAT RARITIES AND WERE COSTLY OBJECTS CARVED BY SKILLED CRAFTSMEN AND MOUNTED BY SILVERSMITHS. MUCH LATER IT WAS REALISED TO BE AN IDEAL MATERIAL IN WHICH TO KEEP SNUFF AS ANY BOX FASHIONED FROM IT IS DRY AND DURABLE, BUT LIGHTWEIGHT ENOUGH TO BE COMFORTABLE FOR KEEPING IN THE POCKET. THE NAPOLEONIC PRISONERS OF WAR CLEVERLY ACCENTUATED THE 'BUGBEAR' MARKINGS BY CARVING THE COCONUT INTO A GROTESQUE AND SURREAL FACE OF A PUFFERFISH.

BLUNTHEAD PUFFERFISH OF THE FAMILY 'TETRAODONTIDAE' ARE FOUND IN TROPICAL AND TEMPERATE SEAS AND ARE SMALL STOUT-BODIED FISHES WHICH WHEN THREATENED INFLATE A SAC-LIKE EXPANSION OF THE GULLET DRAMATICALLY EXPANDING THEIR SIZE AND BECOMING SPHERICAL IN SHAPE. THEY ARE CONSIDERED THE SECOND MOST POISONOUS VERTEBRATE ON EARTH, BUT IT IS CONSIDERED A DELICACY AND EATEN WIDELY IN JAPAN WHERE CHEFS TRAIN FOR TWO YEARS TO BECOME SPECIALIST 'FUGU CHEFS'. THE SMALL SLICES OF PUFFERFISH FLESH ARE SAID TO BE DELICIOUS INDUCING A KIND OF EUPHORIA.