Finch & Co



NETHERLANDS SILVER MOUNTED TABLE SNUFF BOX

AN UNUSUAL AND LARGE NETHERLANDS SILVER MOUNTED TABLE SNUFF BOX MADE FROM A GREAT GREEN TURBAN SEA SHELL 'TURBO MARMORATUS' FROM THE INDO-PACIFIC WITH KNOPS TO THE POLISHED SIDE SERVING AS FEET

MID 18TH CENTURY

SIZE: 5.5CM HIGH, 10CM WIDE, 7.5CM DEEP - 2¼ INS HIGH, 4 INS WIDE, 3 INS DEEP

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LITERATURE

DURING THE RENAISSANCE THE COLLECTING OF EXOTIC SHELLS BECAME A FASHIONABLE MANIA ALONGSIDE CURIOSITIES IN TAXIDERMY AND OTHER NATURALIA SUCH AS NARWHAL TUSKS. BEAUTIFUL SPECIMENS OF CLAMS, CONCHS AND OTHER EYE-CATCHING TROPICAL MARINE SPECIES WERE BROUGHT BACK TO EUROPEAN PORTS AND COMMANDED HIGH PRICES IN THE MARKETS ON THE QUAYSIDE. MANY OF THE SMALLER EXAMPLES WERE MADE INTO SHELL ARRANGEMENTS OR USED IN HUGE SHELL GROTTOS IN VOGUE DURING THE 18TH CENTURY ON ENGLISH ESTATES.

ALBERT SEBA, AN AMSTERDAM APOTHECARY (1665 - 1736) DEPICTED THE HEADS OF MONSTERS WITH SHELLS AND SOLD HIS COLLECTION, WHICH INCLUDED A CABINET OF EAST INDIAN CYPRESS WOOD CONTAINING 72 DRAWERS FULL OF EXAMPLES TO PETER THE GREAT IN 1717. HOWEVER, NO SOONER HAD HE DISPOSED OF THIS COLLECTION HE BEGAN TO BUILD ANOTHER, OFTEN BUYING FROM THE SHIPS AS THEY DOCKED IN AMSTERDAM AS HE WENT ON BOARD TO ATTEND TO THE SICK AND EXHAUSTED CREWS. TABLE SNUFF BOXES MADE FROM THESE EXOTIC TROPICAL SHELLS WERE STATUS SYMBOLS PRODUCED TO IMPRESS AND AMUSE ACQUAINTANCES WITH A PINCH OF PERFUMED SNUFF.

PROVENANCE

CF: A SIMILAR EXAMPLE IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM NEW YORK (1995.327) FROM THE COLLECTION OF CATHERINE THE GREAT WITH A RUSSIAN NIELLO ENGRAVED SILVER TOP HAVING SIMILAR KNOPS TO THE SMOOTH SHELL TO SERVE AS FEET