Finch & Co



A RARE MARINE IVORY TEETOTUM GAMBLING BALL

A RARE MARINE IVORY TEETOTUM GAMBLING BALL
EARLY TO MID 18TH CENTURY
SIZE: 4.5CM DIA. – 1¾ INS DIA.

LITERATURE

THE LATIN WORD 'TOTUM' MEANS THE WHOLE; THE WHOLE STAKE. A TEETOTUM BALLS ACTS SOMEWHAT LIKE A SPINNING DICE, BUT IS A MANY FACETED SPINNING TOP THAT HAS EACH SIDE NUMBERED AND SO UNLIKE A DICE WHEN THROWN THERE IS AN EQUAL CHANCE OF ANY NUMBER TURNING UP. MOST TEETOTUM BALLS ARE INCISED WITH THE NUMBERS 1-32, HAVING 32 EQUALLY FACETED SIDES.
GAMBLING BY STAKING A BET ON THE THROW OF A TEETOTUM BALL PROBABLY HAS ITS ORIGINS IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY WHEN A FOUR SIDED BALL WAS INSCRIBED WITH LETTERS AND NOT NUMBERS: T FOR TOTUM (WHOLE), A FOR AUFERRE (TAKE AWAY), D FOR DEPONERE (PUTDOWN), AND N FOR NIHIL (NOTHING). THESE LATIN TERMS DETERMINED WHETHER THE SPINNER OF THE BALL HAD WON OR LOST ACCORDING TO WHICH LETTERED SIDE LANDED UPPERMOST FACING THE PLAYER.