Finch & Co



AN EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE AND VERY RARE IVORY TEETOTUM GAMBLING BALL

AN EXCEPTIONALLY LARGE AND VERY RARE IVORY TEETOTUM GAMBLING BALL WITH ENGRAVED CROWN AND NUMBERS 1 - 32 ON THE FACETED SIDES

SUPERB MELLOW COLOUR AND GOLDEN PATINA

EARLY 18TH CENTURY / CIRCA 1710 - 20

SIZE: 7CM DIA. – 2¾ INS DIA.

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CF: FOR OTHER MUCH SMALLER EXAMPLES SEE FINCH AND CO CATALOGUE NO. 3, ITEM NO. 61, CATALOGUE 20, ITEM NUMBER 42, CATALOGUE NUMBER 21, ITEM NO. 35, CATALOGUE NUMBER 26, ITEM NUMBER 66, CATALOGUE 28, ITEM NUMBER 48, CATALOGUE 29, ITEM NUMBER 42 A-B, AND CATALOGUE NUMBER 33, ITEM NUMBER 47 FOR AN EXAMPLE DATED 1708

LITERATURE

THE LATIN WORD 'TOTUM' MEANS THE WHOLE; THE WHOLE STAKE. A TEETOTUM BALL 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.

THE ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER JOHN LOCKE (1632 - 1704) MENTIONS A 32 SIDED IVORY BALL IN 'SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING EDUCATION' (1693) IN SECTION 150 HE WRITES CONCERNING TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ… 'WHAT IF AN IVORY BALL WERE MADE LIKE THAT OF THE ROYAL OAK LOTTERY, WITH 32 SIDES…' THE ROYAL OAK LOTTERY WAS INTRODUCED IN 1630 BY CHARLES I TO DEFRAY THE EXPENSE OF CARRYING WATER TO LONDON AND WAS VERY POPULAR. LOTTERIES FIRST BEGAN TO BECOME AN ACCEPTABLE FORM OF RAISING MONEY FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDS UNDER QUEEN ELIZABETH I IN 1568 - 69. THE LOTTERY WAS STARTED IN ORDER TO FUND URGENT REPAIRS TO THE HARBOURS AND FORTIFICATIONS OF ENGLAND THEN UNDER THE THREAT OF INVASION FROM THE SPANISH. GREAT PAINS WERE TAKEN TO 'PROVOKE THE PEOPLE' TO PART WITH THEIR MONEY AND EVEN FORTUNE TELLERS WERE CONSULTED ABOUT 'LUCKY' NUMBERS. LOTTERIES LATER BECAME ESTABLISHED BY SUCCESSIVE ACTS OF PARLIAMENT, EVEN DURING THE TIME OF THE COMMONWEALTH UNDER OLIVER CROMWELL. THEY BECAME A POPULAR AND LUCRATIVE MEANS OF INCREASING GOVERNMENT REVENUE AND WERE REGULARLY CONDUCTED, BOTH IN LONDON AND THE COUNTRY, BY APPOINTED CONTRACTORS. LOTTERIES WERE NOT THEN CONFINED TO MONETARY PRIZES, BUT EMBRACED SILVER, JEWELLERY, BOOKS, PAINTINGS, TAPESTRIES AND EVEN LIVE DEER IN SYON PARK.

PROVENANCE

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

EX FINCH AND CO CATALOGUE NUMBER 36, ITEM NUMBER 30

EX PRIVATE IRISH COLLECTION

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