



Antique Indian Colonial Silver, Horn & Yak Tail Fly Whisk, India – 1728-1800
£3,750.00

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

An unusual antique Indian colonial silver antelope horn and yak tail hair fly whisk (chowry), finely engraved with a decorative border and the armorial crest of the distinguished Monson (pronounced Munson) family of Burton, Lincolnshire and bearing their motto, 'Prest Pour Mon Pais', which translates as 'ready for my country'. The armorial features a baronial crown which dates the whisk to after 1728, the year in which George I created the peerage.

According to the description of a 19th century Indian fly whisk within the collection of London's V & A Museum, fly whisks with "..... a plume of yak tail hair in an elaborate holder - are the most frequently used and depicted emblems of royalty. Chauri are swayed on either side of the ruler by dedicated officials called chamardar. Chauri derives from the Sanskrit word chamara, meaning fly-whisk, which is extremely close to the word for 'yak'."

The horn is believed to have come from a large male Chinkara or Indian gazelle (*Gazella bennettii*) which is native to India, Pakistan and Iran. The ringed horns of the male, normally 15 to 25 rings, appear almost straight when seen from the front but in profile take a lightly 'S' shaped curve.

The whisk's silver mount is unmarked but the high quality of engraving on the armorial suggests it was made by a colonial silversmith working in one of the principal colonial silver manufacturing centres, Madras and Calcutta at this time, most likely Madras, where William, George and William John Monson are all known to have resided – although it is not known which of the three purchased the whisk.

The Monson family's association with India spanned the period from 1725 until 1800 and the fly whisk (chowry) would have been purchased in India after 1728 as a necessary deterrent to the unwelcome attention of flies, particularly during the intense summertime heat.

William Monson was the first member of the family to travel to India. He went in 1725 with £1,000 initial capital from his father which he transported as silver bullion, converting it into pagodas (the South Indian currency) upon arrival. William Monson worked for the East India Company at Fort St George, Madras and served as Sheriff of Madraspatnam (Madras) in the year 1734. As was common practice at this time, he was also trading on his own account, assisted by his brother in London, whilst working for the East India Company in Madras. After several hiccups he started to make some money but lost most of it after the Battle of Madras when the French occupied Madras and confiscated several private warehouses, including Monson's, following the defeat of the British garrison. William left India and returned home to England in 1747, leaving behind four horses, (which would have been extremely expensive and probably imported from Persia), and his two faithful servants who had been with him for the twenty-two years since his arrival in India.

William's nephew, Sir John Monson, 1st Baron Monson of Burton, was created a peer of the realm by George I in 1728. He was a Privy Councillor and was appointed the first Commissioner of Trade and Plantations in 1737, what would now be termed, President of the Board of Trade.

In 1758, Major George Monson (1730-1776), his youngest son, who was also the grandson of the Earl of Rockingham, sailed to India with the Draper's Regiment. The previous year, George had married a widow four years older than himself, Lady Anne Hope-Vere, the daughter of the Earl of Darlington and a great grand-daughter of King Charles II. George Monson and his wife both hailed from aristocratic and very well connected families and George held a position at Court as Groom of the Bedchamber of George, Prince of Wales, keeping this position after the Prince succeeded to the throne and became King George III. George Monson was elected a Member of Parliament for Lincoln in 1754. Re-elected in 1761, he retained his seat until 1768.

When he arrived in India, George travelled to Bombay and Madras before distinguishing himself during the siege of Pondicherry in 1760, after which he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He had been seriously wounded but recovered and in 1761 was given command of the 96th foot, distinguishing himself during action in the capture of Manila in 1762 after which he was promoted again; attaining the rank of brigadier-general in 1763. After the Peace of Paris he returned to England and in 1769 he became a full colonel and aide-de-camp to King George III, who is reported to have said about him that 'though not a strong man he had excellent brains'!

Appointed to the Supreme Council of Bengal in the Regulating Act of 1773, Monson returned to Calcutta again in 1774 with his wife, Lady Anne. George and Anne became active and prominent figures in Calcutta society. A contemporary diarist, Macrabe, described Anne as 'a very superior whist-