



**A round Russian Snuff Box from the 18th century.
£8,500.00**

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Of unusual design, the lid and exterior are decorated with a map of Siberia and the Russian Far East, featuring Cyrillic place names rendered in a polar projection. The sides are adorned with engraved-style allegorical scenes illustrating hunting, travel by dog and reindeer sled, and the exploration of the Russian Arctic. Veliky Ustyug – the birthplace of the famous Northern Niello craft.

The ancient technique of niello, borrowed by Russia from Byzantium, remained a favorite method of decorating precious metal objects for many centuries. The main center of niello art in Russia in the 17th and 18th centuries was the northern city of Veliky Ustyug, located on the trade route linking the European part of the country with Siberia. The first mention of Veliky Ustyug niello dates back to 1683, and by the 18th century, the city had become one of the centers for the production of silverware with niello designs in Russia. Veliky Ustyug owes its brilliant flowering of niello art to such masters as I. Zuyev, A. Moshnin, I. and A. Zhilin, F.K. Bushkovsky, and others, who created their own distinctive style of niello engraving in jewelry.

In the 18th century, such round or oval boxes were called Snuff boxes (for snuff). Today, in antique shops, they are often called box.

- ? Tobolsk (capital of the Siberian province). Unique snuffboxes commissioned by the Siberian governor, D.I. Chicherin, are known. They depicted maps of Siberia, the Arctic coast, Northern Russia, and the "newly discovered Aleutian Islands," with figures of local indigenous peoples on the borders.
- ? Veliky Ustyug. Vologda and Arkhangelsk masters were renowned for their intricate silver niello and often based their designs on actual maps of the Russian Empire at the time.

The natural and landscape features of each zone determined the different economic and cultural types and models of Russian adaptation to the region's extreme environment. While agriculture remained the basis of the Russian economy in the southern and western regions, in the Arctic zone, groups of long-established populations gradually developed a complex commercial economy, the main components of which were fishing, Arctic fox hunting, seal hunting, and hunting wild reindeer and fief. Later, mammoth ivory harvesting became widespread as a seasonal occupation. It is this group of old-time Russian Arctic residents, who managed to preserve their language and ethnic identity despite intense external influences, that is currently attracting the attention of domestic and international researchers. Of interest are the history of their origins and formation, directly linked to Russian polar navigation, their functioning in the new conditions of Russian culture, the degree of mutual influence with indigenous peoples, and the mechanisms for the preservation and stability of their ethnic self-identification.

The first documented Russian settlements on the Arctic coast of Yakutia appeared as early as the early 1640s—just ten years after the region's annexation to the Tsardom of Muscovy. By the end of the century, the entire northern part of Yakutia was covered with a network of temporary and permanent forts, "yasash" (taxpayer) and "industrial" winter quarters. Due to the natural and landscape features of the tundra zone, with permafrost soils, numerous lakes and rivers, an average annual temperature of -15°C, and snow cover for 8-9 months, there was a complete lack of opportunities for agriculture and cattle breeding. Fishing was, and remains, the primary occupation of the Russian Arctic elders. All fishing plots were traditionally assigned to individual families. This also determined the settlement patterns of the elders, who were scattered among small settlements of 1-4 farmsteads along the river.

The main mode of transportation for the Russkoye Ustyinsky and Pohodchany people was sled dogs. Unlike the northern Yakuts, who adopted reindeer herding from the indigenous peoples, the Russians were never able to master this mode of transport. Even during the forced introduction of reindeer herding on collective farms during the Soviet period, the Russkoye Ustye people, for example, hired Yukaghirs to care for them.[v] The reason for this was obviously the necessity of maintaining a nomadic lifestyle for the development of reindeer herding.

Measurements:

Height: 3.5 cm

Diameter: 8.4 cm