

Pre-1908 Enameled Silver Gilt Sugar Tongs, Moscow-hallmarked for probable export to Great Britain.

With the exception of one area of white enamel that shows minor flaking and a section of dark blue enamel border that has a tiny chip, this instrument is in very fine to excellent condition. The overall length is 104mm, it is 24mm across the base, and it weighs 36 grams. The heavily enameled discs for grasping sugar cubes are 18mm in diameter.

The hallmarks are as interesting as the tongs are beautiful. The silversmith's personal hallmark is unique and we cannot identify whose it is; the presence of the Russian Imperial Eagle immediately above it lends itself to a possible interpretation that the unknown smith possessed a royal warrant to provide silver objects to the Imperial Russian government and to the Romanov family. Another mark is the traditional horizontal oval showing a kokoshnik head, the silver content (88) and the Greek letter delta (which indicates the city of origin as Moscow). Stamped directly over the oval, however, is a mark that appears to be an X. According to references that we found (see pages 14 and 21 in "Catalog of Hallmarks on Items in Precious Metals, 1917-2000 (USSR and Russia)" by N. Troepol'skaya), that character would have been applied by customs officials who were certifying that the tongs were intended for export and that all necessary duties had been paid. The small mark with the head in an oval (rather than a more commonly seen head in a circle) was also applied by officials at the same time. It is worth noting that a silver content of "88" is higher than the "84" seen on most pieces of pre-1917 Russian silver.

You may be familiar with the story that Karl Faberge had difficulty for a brief period of time importing some of his silver items into Great Britain from his Russian workshops. His English competitors bitterly complained that the silver he used was not up to the British sterling silver standard. Even though Faberge attempted to explain that a slightly lesser grade of silver worked better for the purposes of applying enamel, he was given no choice and had to raise the level of the silver he used. As a result of that incident, chances are that all silver being imported into Britain from Russia, no matter who the manufacturer was, had to meet the British sterling standard (roughly the Russian "88") after that point; so, no matter who our unknown smith was, he also had to use a higher grade of silver or give up the British market.

The tongs are a delight to hold and feel much more substantial than they first appear. Unlike the silver cigarette cases that many collect but which have almost entirely lost their functionality in today's society, these attractive sugar tongs could still be completely functional in a modern home (although the original Russian owners probably used them only for display).

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\$1,100.00



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