

A rare, Alto Adige, Venetian, cedar cassone dated 1636 and initialled IB with exceptional penwork decoration

Sold



REF: 10692

Height: 71 cm (28")

Width: 183 cm (72")

Depth: 61 cm (24")

Description

The top is made from three, cedar planks and retains traces of its fine penwork decoration. The centre of the interior has two amorini holding a cartouche bearing the initials 'IB' and the date '1636' which is resting on a classical urn and surrounded by stylized, foliate ornament. The left panel shows a Shepard playing the violin to his flock of exotic animals, including lions, unicorns, buffalo and deer. The right panel shows a lady invoking her plants to grow while a boy tends to them, in a typical Italian landscape. The border shows a man and a lady at either end and is decorated with a profusion of stylized scroll and foliate motifs.

The inner lid has ring hinges and a brass ring, opening to reveal a large open storage compartment below. The central front panel shows a shield surmounted by a crown and containing traces of a man, most likely the noble owner, astride a lion. A man and a woman stand either side. The left front panel shows a naked lady beside classical buildings with a skull nearby. The right front panel shows two naked ladies tied to a tree and being jeered at by a crowd. There are panels of figures within arches between the main front panels and cartouche that would have contained either the arms, initials or symbolic dates of the owner/s. The sides retain traces of penwork decoration. The bottom with a deep ogee moulding and standing on front bun feet and back octagonal blocks. Exceptional original colour and patina.

Provenance : Private Collection, England

Length 183 cm., 6ft., Height 71 cm., 2ft 4 in., Depth 61 cm., 2ft.,

These chests were made for noblemen and aristocrats from cedar specifically for storing their much prized and valued hangings, clothing and linens, since the wood repels moths and the sweet fragrance delicately scents fabrics.

They were considered as works of art, decorated with great skill and delicacy with a profusion of fine penwork. The mythological and symbolic images on the main panels are almost certainly taken from important engravings of the period.

I am currently researching the symbolism of this piece. These cassones are still collected by the cognoscenti, as much admired for the intrigue in the imagery as the extraordinary, profusion of fine, penwork decoration. They were inspired as, and continue to be, conversation pieces.

Such cypress or cedar chests, incised in bas relief and pyrographically engraved, have long been associated with Venice. The 'cypress chests' containing 'arras, counterpoints, costly apparel, tents, and canopies, fine linen, Turkey cushions ... pewter and brass, and all things that belong to house-keeping' are mentioned in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. One such cypress chest, filled with bed-hangings, was listed in the 1626 Inventory of Cockesden (P. Thornton, 'Two problems', *Furniture History*, 1971, p. 68). A group of related chests, surviving in English churches, are discussed by Charles Tracy, *Continental Church Furniture in England*, Woodbridge, 2001, pp. 142-157.