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AMULET CASE, SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SILVER INLAID WITH NIELLO

IRAN OR AFGHANISTAN; 10TH-11TH CENTURY

L: 11.2; DIAM: 3.5 CM

Deep-black niello is an alloy of silver, lead, copper, or bismuth sulfides that is ground into a powder and then melted into depressions in the object. There is a striking contrast between the shiny polished silver and the black niello. More tones can be obtained by parcel gilding the silver.

Amulet cases have been known since the early Islamic period. They could be opened and contained invocations or quotations of varying lengths from the Koran. Many amulets are finely decorated like jewelry and were worn either openly or under the clothing.

The *Kufi* inscription of the cylindrical amulet case expresses only general wishes for good luck for its owner. Its detailed ornamentation exploits the tones of silver, gold, and niello in a refined fashion.

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