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PEN CASE, WOOD DECORATED WITH TORTOISE SHELL, IVORY, MOTHER-OF-PEARL, EBONY, AND BRASS

TURKEY; END OF 16TH CENTURY

H: 12.4; L: 35.2; DIAM: 12.2 CM

Pen cases or writing chests made of many different materials have always been produced with great care in the Islamic world, where the art of writing beautifully in particular was one of the most esteemed. This large case is no exception, and is one of the most splendid of its type. (See also 39/2000 and 35/1976.)

The pen case's decoration is an expression of an eclectic style that incorporates influences from large parts of the Islamic world. The Ottoman Empire was at the peak of its power in the second half of the 16th century and had widely ramified trade links.

The rich *katamkari* inlays, consisting of little mosaic-like elements, was especially widespread in Iran (see 35/2000), while the stylized plants in niches bring to mind Indian textiles and works in stone. Corresponding niches – both those on the sides and on the feet – are also known from Turkish architecture. There is moreover a clear link to contemporary inlaid Ottoman furniture,¹ while the extensive use of metal thread is unusual and is evidently known only from a bookbinding inlaid with tortoise shell dated to around 1560.²

The tray, the brass, and the painting inside are later additions and

probably date to around 1840, when the pen case in Istanbul was acquired by a diplomat at the embassy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

- ¹ *Oliver Watson: "The case of the Ottoman Table" in Journal of The David Collection, 3, Copenhagen, 2010, pp. 23-53.*
- ² *J. M. Rogers and Rachel Ward: Süleyman the Magnificent, British Museum, London, 1988, p. 118.*

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