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WOODEN MIHRAB

EGYPT; 10TH CENTURY

H: 17 CM

The little wooden *mihrab* has a *Kufi* inscription in relief on the rim that includes blessings on the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and 12 Shiite imams. The text in the central panel refers only to the last of the 12 imams, al-Mahdi, who is said to have been hidden by Allah, but upon whose return the world will be redeemed.

The deceased must have belonged to the Twelvers, a branch of Shia Islam, who recognize exactly 12 successors to the Prophet.

A *mihrab* of this type was placed in the grave under the head of the departed. Some of the wooden *mihrabs* that have survived do, however, have holes at the top, which might indicate that they were also hung, perhaps in the home.

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Published in:

Christie's, London, 24/4-1990, lot 458;

Kjeld von Folsach, Torben Lundbæk and Peder Mortensen (eds.):

*Sultan, Shah and Great Mughal: the history and culture of the Islamic world*, The National Museum, Copenhagen 1996, cat.no. 41;

Kjeld von Folsach: *Art from the World of Islam in The David Collection*, Copenhagen 2001, cat.no. 417;

James W. Allan: “”My father is a sun, and I am the star”: Fatimid symbols in Ayyubid and Mamluk metalwork. The C.L. David Lecture 2000” in *Journal of the David Collection*, 1, 2003, p. 27, fig. 5;