

A late-16th century, Alto Adige, cedar cassone with fine penwork decoration

Sold



REF: 10848

Height: 69 cm (27.2")

Width: 166 cm (65.4")

Depth: 61 cm (24")

## Description

The top is made from three, cedar planks retaining traces of its fine penwork decoration faced with a cleated edge decorated with brass studs. The centre of the interior has two amorini holding a cartouche which is empty and surrounded by stylized, foliate ornament. The left panel shows a hunting scene with a beast about to be slaughtered. The right panel shows the beast being slaughtered. The border shows knights at either end and is decorated with mythical beasts amongst a profusion of stylized scroll and foliate motifs. The inner lid which has probably been added later, is covered in an old Venetian velvet and has ring hinges and a brass ring, opening to reveal a large open storage compartment below.

The central front panel has typically lost most of the penwork decoration but shows in relief a cartouche surrounded by an upper border of figures with male figures below at either end and beside each panel. The panels show figures in relief but the penwork decoration has been rubbed away, the lower border of scrolling acanthus leaves remains. The sides retain traces of the original penwork decoration. The bottom with a deep ogee moulding and standing on bun feet. Old repairs & restorations to losses. Exceptional original colour and patina.

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.

They were often given as bridal chests and the penned initials of the couple often survive in the cartouche on the inner lid. These cassonnes were exported all over Europe and are frequently mentioned in English inventories of the 16th and early 17th century. They came in various sizes and in several qualities. This is a particularly fine specimen

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.