



## Tall Pegu, Black Lacquer And Cinnabar, Gilt Candlesticks



6 000 EUR

Period : 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Lacquer

Height : 38 cm

### Description

Tall Pegu, black lacquer and cinnabar, gilt candlesticks. Artocarpus, cinnabar, thitsi lacquer, gold leaf. Pegu. Late 16th century. h. 38 cm (15 in). The first occasion on which scholars systematically studied the production to which these candlesticks belong was with Bernardo Ferrão, who classified the group as Indo-Portuguese (Ferrão 1990). This rare and significant group of so-called 'Luso-Asian' lacquers, a classification since contested, has since occupied Portuguese decorative arts' historiography, resisting a consensual identification of its place of production. Ferrão, for instance, noted as characteristic features : 'the style and decoration, the lacquer coating and in some examples, the presence of coats of arms, inscriptions in Portuguese, figures and

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mythological scenes, from classical and Christian European culture [...] all following the canons of Renaissance art'. Other hypotheses have assigned the production to India, specifically Kochi or the Coromandel Coast, based on the supposed use of anjili wood (*Artocarpus hirsutus*) and the known trade of lacquer from Pegu into India (Dias 2013; Carvalho 2001). The attribution of these candlesticks to Burma, however, is now supported by strong archival and material evidence. The Indian hypotheses are contradicted by the fact that the species required for 'true lacquer' (thitsi or urushi) are not found on the subcontinent. Furthermore, literary and documentary sources from the period, such as the account book of Pêro Pais (1512), show that the 'lac' (alagar) imported from Pegu to India was in fact shellac-based sealing wax, transported in sacks, and not the viscous sap of true lacquer, which requires sealed jars for transport (Thomaz 1966). Scientific analysis has decisively confirmed that the material used on this group of objects is Burmese thitsi lacquer, derived from the sap of *Gluta usitata*, and that the wood is *Artocarpus integer* (sonekedat), a species native to South-East Asia. The use of the shwei-zawa technique further supports an attribution to the workshops of the former kingdom of Pegu. This specifically Burmese method involves carving the lacquered surface in low relief, then highlighting the motifs with gold leaf (shwei-bya), producing the characteristic contrast between the matte black background and the gilt decoration. Several material similarities further connect these candlesticks to the writing boxes of the same group -- notably the use of a black ground made from a mixture of thitsi lacquer and soot, and a vivid red lacquer composed of powdered cinnabar. The adoption of a European form such as the candlestick, executed using East Asian materials and techniques, finds parallels in other Asian productions made for the Portuguese market, and at least one pair of gilt-lacquer candlesticks is recorded in the collections of

Duchess Catherine of Portugal in 1564. See Ferrão, 'Mobiliário', in História da Arte em Portugal, Vol. 8, Lisbon, 1990 ; Ferrão, Mobiliário Português. Dos Primórdios ao Maneirismo, vol. 3, Porto, 1990 ; Carvalho, 'Beyond Goa: 'Luso-Indian' art in the Bay of Bengal', in The World of Lacquer: 2000 years of history, Lisbon, 2001 ; Crespo, Choices, Lisbon, 2016 ; Gschwend, Lowe and al., The Global City. Lisbon in the Renaissance, Lisbon, 2017.