



An Engraved Turned Wooden Cup. English, Dated 1636.



21 500 EUR

Period : 17th century

Condition : Bon état

Description

An Engraved Turned Wooden Cup. English, dated 1636. Material Turned pearwood, engraved with foliate and geometric decoration. Measurements Height: 20.5 cm. Diameter (rim): 10.2 cm. Description A rare early seventeenth-century standing cup finely turned from pearwood, its bowl and foot engraved with foliate and geometric ornament. Around the body are detailed depictions of a white hart, a wyvern and a unicorn amidst stylised foliage, all executed in precise line incision. The upper border is composed of an arcade of semi-circular arches enclosing rosettes, while the foot is similarly ornamented with concentric geometric bands of roundels and leaf motifs. Above the inscribed date 1636 appear the initials T.F.S.. The surface retains a rich, warm

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patina from prolonged handling and age. The vessel's elegant proportions and lively engraving place it among the more sophisticated survivals of seventeenth-century English treen (domestic woodenware), a class of object once ubiquitous but now exceedingly scarce. Cups of this type were often both functional and commemorative, their inscriptions or dated ornament suggesting presentation or marriage pieces. Provenance: A. H. Isher & Son, Cheltenham, acquired from the Owen Evan-Thomas collection, 1945 (with original correspondence and invoice dated 10 November 1945).
o Dr J. R. B. Thomson, Tharpe, Kent (purchaser from A. H. Isher & Son).
o By descent.
o Accompanied by copies of the original invoice and correspondence from A. H. Isher & Son, circa 1945.

Context: Although not the example illustrated by Owen Evan-Thomas, closely related cups are discussed in *Domestic Utensils of Wood*, EP Publishing, 1973, pp. 38-43, pls. 14-16. Evan-Thomas identified these engraved pearwood vessels as outstanding examples of English vernacular wood-turning and engraving of the seventeenth century, probably produced in workshops active in the West Country or the Midlands. Comparable cups in the Victoria and Albert Museum bear the arms of King James I and the Prince of Wales (later Charles I). Most are of turned pearwood, incised with heraldic animals, and of near-identical design, suggesting manufacture in a single workshop or by a single master turner working in the reigns of James I and Charles I. The precise function of these cups remains uncertain. While some writers proposed their use as communion vessels, the Canons of Winchester had forbidden wood for the Eucharist as early as 1071. Later research supports the theory that they served as prototypes for silver chalices; a silver example, formerly in the Robert Hoe Collection (New York 1911, lot 1397; *The Connoisseur*, vol. 2, 1902, p. 51), replicates the design of V&A cup W.50-1913 and bears the same inscriptions and devices (communication from Malcolm Jones, March 2018). Edward Pinto

also suggested that they may have been ceremonial vessels connected with the Royal Cupbearers or the insignia of an exclusive seventeenth-century society, perhaps akin to the later Honourable Order of Little Bedlam, founded by the 5th Earl of Exeter in 1684 (Treen and Other Wooden Bygones, London 1969, pp. 34-37). A related Standing Cup and Cover of turned and engraved pearwood, decorated with similar arched panels enclosing a stag, a mythical bird and a unicorn, and dated 1648, is recorded in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, 2nd Series, Vol. XII, p. 351 (1889). Such parallels affirm a distinctive ornamental vocabulary within seventeenth-century English turnery. The heraldic imagery and rhythmic geometric ornament evoke allegories of endurance, nobility and rebirth, recurrent themes in post-Reformation domestic art. The survival of its original surface and its continuous documented provenance since 1945 render this a particularly distinguished example within the corpus of dated English wooden cups. Comparable examples are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, including cups W.50-51-1913 and 275-to-C-1872, of similar design and bearing heraldic animals beneath arched borders, attributed to the early seventeenth century. The British Museum likewise houses a group of engraved pearwood cups (1885,0508.121-123; 1908,0519.1) decorated with mythical beasts and floral motifs, further indicating a shared stylistic origin. A Standing Cup and Cover of related type, dated 1648 and engraved with a stag, a unicorn and a bird, is described in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, 2nd Series, Vol. XII, p. 351 (1889). Further examples include the cup dated 1620 published by O. Evan-Thomas (Domestic Utensils of Wood, 1973, p. 42, pl. 16); the cup from The W. J. Shepherd Collection of Treen, Sotheby's, 30 November-1 December 1983, Lot 512; and several later parallels: Seward Kennedy's Cabinet of Curiosities and the Tony

Robinson Collection of Treen Drinking Vessels, Christie's, London, 22 November 2016, Lots 250 and 277; and Syd Levethan: The Longridge Collection, Christie's, London, 11 June 2010, Lot 1011. These together establish a coherent typological and decorative tradition within seventeenth-century English engraved pearwood.