

AMIR M O H T A S H E M I



Spanish Escritorio ("Writing Desk")

Spain, 16th-17th century

64.4 cm high, 111 cm wide, 38 cm deep

Stock no.: A5056

Characteristic of sixteenth century Mudéjar furniture, this rectangular writing cabinet, popularly known as a *vargueño*, is made of walnut and richly decorated with numerous devices of geometrical ornament with inlaid coloured wood and bone which together form stunning floral motifs and with borders composed of stars, diamonds, triangles and squares. In addition, the edges of the cabinet are decorated with ebony and white-coloured wood. Intended to be used as furniture for travellers, there is an iron lock plate with its original key to keep precious items secure. Its elaborate iron hasp is decorated with a shell motif, and on the lower section of the door there are two groups of three inverted shell-shaped motifs, also made of iron, covering the hinges. The door opens downwards to serve as a writing desk and reveals nineteen fitted drawers of varying sizes which are also profusely decorated with geometric designs in floral motifs highlighted in bone and coloured wood.

Perhaps amongst the most distinctive pieces of Spanish furniture, cabinets in this form were originally known as *escritorio* ("writing desk") in the sixteenth century, rather than by the more common name, *vargueño*, which was introduced in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This change of name came about supposedly because such cabinets were made in the town of Vargas in the province of Toledo during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such practical pieces later rested on trestle stands of the same width but were not connected to the cabinet itself. Moreover, they were usually Mudéjar ornaments, as is evident by the combination of Western European and Islamic motifs. Indeed, on this cabinet there is an emblem shape centralised on the door with Arabic inscriptions running diagonally through which includes the word *lillah* ("to God").

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a smaller cabinet with similar star and diamond designs which form floral motifs (Accession Number: W.104:1-1921).

Further Literature:

María Paz Aguiló Alonso. 1993. *El mueble en España, Siglos XVI-XVII*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.

Colum Hourihane. 2012. "Spain, V: Furniture". In *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture, Volume 2*, edited by Colum Hourihane, pp. 612-37. Oxford: Oxford University Press.