



Silver-Mounted Casket

Sri Lanka, probably Galle, 18th century

Ebony and silver

20cm long, 14cm wide, 10cm deep

Stock no.: A5672

This Dutch-colonial box sits atop four rounded feet. It has two inner compartments with removeable lids, suggesting that it was a betel box. Betel boxes are typically small caskets, around 20cm in length, with silver or gold handles on their shorter lengths.¹ The smaller compartments were designed to hold a pot of slaked lime and a round container holding the rolled up betel leaves. The large compartment would have held the requisite tools, such as cutters.² Whilst Dutchmen smoked tobacco, chewing betel was seen as the reserve of Dutch women. A watercolour by Jan Brandes, now in the Rijksmuseum (accession no. [NG-1985-7-2-15](#)) shows a Dutch woman taking tea and betel. Her female slave sits on the ground holding a betel box.

The casket is carved with curling foliate tendrils terminating in flowers, a motif typical of the Sri Lankan port town of Galle. Examples of two caskets originating from Galle in 1800 are illustrated on page 32 of *Asian Art and Dutch Taste*, and a chair from Galle held in the Peabody Essex Museum is illustrated on page 378 of *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*.³ The box is mounted with floral silver fittings at the corners and around the lock, which contrast with the ebony of the body.

¹ Veenendaal, Jan. *Asian Art and Dutch Taste*. The Hague: Waander Uitgevers, 2014. P. 120.

² *Ibid.* P. 120.

³ See Veenendaal, Jan. Op. Cit. Figs 37 and 38, p. 32; Jaffer, Amin, and Karina Corrigan. *Furniture from British India and Ceylon : A Catalogue of the Collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2001. Fig. 186, p. 378.