



Bronze Box with Arabic Inscription

China, 17th /18th century (Qing Dynasty)

Bronze

5cm high, 10.5cm diameter

Stock no.: A5722

This solid-bronze circular box and cover date to the early Qing dynasty. The Arabic inscription on the lid, in reserve on a ring-punched ground, reads: الحمد لله (*Alhamdulillah*), meaning 'praise be to God'. The reverse is cast with a mark which reads 'made in the Zhengde period' (1505-1521).¹ The Zhengde Emperor (Zhu Houzhan) was the 11th emperor of the Ming dynasty, reigning from 1505-1521.² However, Zhengde reign marks (*nianhao*) continued to be used into the 17th and 18th century. The form of this box is in keeping with bronze boxes of the early Qing dynasty in the British Museum such as accession no. [1894.0108.26](#), a box of similar height but greater diameter, with the Shahada inscribed in Arabic on the lid, which has been dated to 1644-1800. A second Chinese bronze box in the British Museum (accession no. [1894.0108.30](#)) dated to the Qing dynasty and with very similar dimensions to the present box, is also inscribed with الحمد لله (*Alhamdulillah*).

This box may once have been part of a set, comprising a censer and a tool vase, designed to sit on a scholar's desk. Incense was used both to perfume rooms and clothing, but also as a mindfulness practice in Buddhist worship and for Muslim scholars.³

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

¹ With thanks to Dr. Rose Kerr.

² 'Zhengde', Encyclopedia Britannica, 1 January 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zhengde> on 7 February 2024.

³ 'A Brief History of Incense in China', *The Feuerle Collection*. Retrieved from <https://www.thefeuerlecollection.org/de/history-of-incense/> on 7 February 2024.