



**ANTIQUE ARMENIAN JEWELLED & ENAMELLED SILVER CASKET WITH  
POLYCHROME CLOISONNE ENAMEL & DOMED & HINGED COVER –  
18TH CENTURY**

**£4,850.00**

## ANTIQUÉ ARMENIAN JEWELLED & ENAMELLED SILVER CASKET WITH POLYCHROME CLOISSONNE ENAMEL & DOMED & HINGED COVER – 18TH CENTURY

This intricate and finely crafted jewelled casket is a stunning example of Armenian silverware showcasing the Armenians' mastery of working in precious metals and their expertise in enamelling.

The casket has been extremely well designed and superbly executed. It displays great symmetry and balance. The shape is very complex; with straight sides to front and rear and with matching stepped and scalloped sides to the other two, shorter, sides, surmounted by a domed and shaped hinged cover. The interior of the casket has been gilded and the well-engineered, seven-part hinge supporting the cover is still in fine working order. An object of this quality would only have been made for, or commissioned by, a very wealthy and high-ranking individual, family, or organisation.

This beautiful casket is eye catching and has great tactile appeal. It is a delight to hold and to examine closely. It is engrossing, offering a plethora of different surface treatments, colours, shapes and patterns to investigate, run your fingertips over or ponder upon. Every element has been beautifully crafted. Ropes of finely twisted silver wire form the raised walls of the cells holding the enamel. These cells vary in shape and have been arranged in panels. The design and shape of the individual panels vary but they are symmetrical and mirrored on the opposing side of the container. Each panel is framed by a simple silver border. There are many silver borders of differing form on the casket, such as rope, beaded and plaited, sometimes small and used singly and in other places much larger, or sometimes grouped, with different simple borders stacked to form a more prominent multi-layered border.

Just above the base of the container is a repeating enamel border which wraps around the sides of the casket at their lowest point. This differs from the other panels of enamel work, in that this border has also been hand pierced on two levels, with the silver background between some enamel motifs carefully cut out and removed.

The enamelling has been rendered in a pleasing muted palette of lemon yellow, ultramarine, turquoise and black. The colours used and the assorted shapes of the individual enamel motifs are typical of those found in Armenian metalwork of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some shapes are reminiscent of the wing of a bird, a leaf, a feather, a perching bird and drop or cone shapes. These are simple outlines containing one field to hold the enamel. One shape is different, resembling a face with two eyes, or inverted, a skull. This motif is used as a repeating border around the flat rim which surrounds the dome of the cover, and as a border to the left and right sides of the panels and to those on the front and back of the casket, also appearing occasionally, in various panels.

The casket bears no silver marks, stamps or signatures but may well have been made in the same workshop as some of the enamelled and jewelled items mentioned above and illustrated in 'Aspects of Armenian Art', by Hassiotis et al.

Enamelling, along with niello - a technique which was developed in, and emerged from Van - were the principal techniques used by Armenian master gold and silversmiths. Later, these techniques spread to other workshops throughout the Ottoman Empire and others within the Armenian diaspora. We do not know exactly where this casket was made. By repute, the workshops of the Ottoman Mint in Istanbul and those located in Van, were considered the finest.

"From earliest times, the art of ornamentation has played a unique role in Armenian civilization and its rich culture. The profound imprint of Armenian ornamental art is to be found in Armenian gold and silver-making. Among the characteristic and stylistically and pictorially diverse motifs in these twin crafts are those of flowers, animals, especially birds, and buildings. In addition to these themes, ornamental designs include symbols of faith and worship, expressed in rigorously geometric and free-flowing shapes." (History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan)

"In the eighteenth century, the wealth of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire was held in the hands of a small number of wealthy and influential figures. Supreme amongst these were a number based in Constantinople whose wealth stemmed from duties undertaken on behalf of the Ottoman Government, the Sublime Porte. This group formed a class of super-merchants, known as 'amiras' and due to their heightened contact with the Ottoman authorities, they were able to assert a greater influence on their own behalf as well as that of the whole Armenian community.