



**Chinese export porcelain pen box (qalamdan) painted en grisaille and famille rose**

Qianlong period circa 1740

English or Dutch Market

Dimensions: 6 x 1 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches; 15 x 4 x 4.5 cm

A rare Chinese porcelain penbox and cover painted en grisaille to the lid with a ship at sea, the side and base with famille rose flowers scattered on a grisaille cell diaper, the interior of the lid with a Chinese river scene in polychrome; European silver mounts.

This is a previously unrecorded example of this rare shape, known as a qalamdan, a style of elongated Persian box intended to hold small tools associated with writing. Only a handful of examples in Chinese export porcelain are recorded.

The grisaille scene is unusual and previously unrecorded on Chinese export porcelain. The source print has not been found, though it is possibly from a book of emblemata, perhaps a frontispiece to such a book (see illustration for three examples).

Emblem books were very popular from the fifteenth century onwards and many of them feature ships at sea sailing on rough waters, and this image would also have appealed to a European travelling to Canton, who probably ordered this as a private commission for himself or a colleague.

References: Cohen & Cohen 2013, No 51, a similar penbox with mughal subject and the interior with a scene, La Belle Villageoise after Boucher.