Cabinet and stand

Place of origin: Spain (made)

Date: ca. 1560-1600 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Walnut with inlay of box, bone (some stained green), and other woods; the stand of carved walnut

Museum number: 294-1870

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 63, The Edwin and Susan Davies Gallery, case WE, shelf EXP []

Public access description

The inlay on this cabinet (escritorio) suggests a wide range of influences. It combines flower vases and small-scale geometric patterns in the Spanish mudéjar style derived from Islamic woodwork. It centres on a coat of arms (probably fictitious) and illustrates, unusually, a scene (here Noah's ark) reminiscent of Italian pictorial inlay. By the late 16th century cabinets were highly fashionable in Spain, and inventory references to the royal palaces in Madrid indicate that they were used in many rooms. Many of these were imported from Italy, Flanders and Germany. In 1603 an edict of Philip III prohibited the import of Nuremberg cabinets to Spain, because they threatened the trade in Spanish cabinets. Equally, a petition on behalf of Spanish furniture makers claimed that cabinets imported from Germany were being made in Spain for about half the price of the imported product.

Descriptive line

Spanish, late C16

Spanish, late C16; from cabinet, six turned legs, arcading; diaper pattern, 2' 2 1/2" x 2' 11 1/4"

to cabinet, Spanish, late C16

Physical description

Fall-front cabinet (escritorio) with pictorial inlay on the exterior showing Noah's ark, with animals and trees, the buildings of a city, and so-called 'plateresque' decoration of large-scale arabesque scrolls and formal motifs. The cabinet contains twelve small drawers and two cupboards. The interior is inlaid with formal motifs, including foliate scrolls and birds. With a demountable walnut carved stand consisting of two end units with baluster turnings, joined by a central arcaded section.

The exterior of the fall front (supported on three butterfly hinges) with a central coat of fictitious arms, (made up of the royal quarterings of Castile and Leon supported by the eagle of Isabel the Catholic) overlaying a black eagle with outstretched wings, and a cast metal escutcheon (damaged and with sections missing) mounted on felt, and held on 4 slotted screws (probably 20th-century). Across the lower half of the fall-front the inlay includes Noah's ark with gangplank, into which numerous animals, mostly in pairs (lions, horses, deer, oxen, sheep, goats,
c1580 of a mannerist type of ornament has not been used consistently, and has tended to indicate Spanish architecture – often with combining late gothic and mudéjar features, in particular the motif of stylised vase with elongated linear stems. However the term, first used Aguilo calls this type of ornament plateresque (based on the Spanish word for silversmith, platero), apparently to indicate intricate ornament Barcelona. Inv. no. 64165 as 1530-60, Catalan).

Palau Robert: Moble Català. (Barcelona, 1994), cat. no. 30 describes a comparable piece (Museu d'Arts Decoratives. Ajuntament de scene similar in style to the V&A cabinet.

an Italian 16th century cabinet of similar form and plateresque decoration, the exterior of the fall front depicting in bone and walnut a figurative its exterior decoration with Noah's ark (most employ plateresque decoration with geometrical and renaissance derived ornament), the wide and many other similar cabinets in Spanish and private collections.

Burr p.38 supports the idea of an Aragonesque origin. Another, similar example in Osterreichisches Museum fur Angewandte Kunst, (Vienna), Neapolitan tarsia incastro.

bone engraved, inserted directly into the veneer). Aguilo notes an Italian influence in the use of engraved, tinted bone reminiscent of Tarazona in the 16th century. The type is called traditional pinyonet decoration (veneered decorated with small cuttings of dyed boxwood and such works are from Aragon, especially the cities of Zaragoza and Tarazona (NE Spain). A marquetry (Taracea) workshop is documented in Regarding this type of decorated cabinet: Aguilo, Estrado y Dormitorio, (Madrid, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, 1990), see #19) suggest that such works are from Aragon, especially the cities of Zaragoza and Tarazona (NE Spain). A marquetry (Taracea) workshop is documented in Tarazona in the 16th century. The type is called traditional pinyonet decoration (veneered decorated with small cuttings of dyed boxwood and bone engraved, inserted directly into the veneer). Aguilo notes an Italian influence in the use of engraved, tinted bone reminiscent of Neapolitan tarsia incastro. Aguilo suggests that walnut, box and bone are the conventional materials. Burr p.38 supports the idea of an Aragonesque origin. Another, similar example in Osterreichisches Museum fur Angewandte Kunst, (Vienna), and many other similar cabinets in Spanish and private collections. In comparison to other examples (dated mid to late 16th century) illustrated by Aguilo, the V&A cabinet's seems relatively unusual in terms of its exterior decoration with Noah's ark (most employ plateresque decoration with geometrical and renaissance derived ornament), the wide border of alternating veneers, and the lack of a hinged lid (though this latter feature does not seem to be universal). Aguilo cat. no. 260 shows an Italian 16th century cabinet of similar form and plateresque decoration, the exterior of the fall front depicting in bone and wanut a figurative scene similar in style to the V&A cabinet.

Palau Robert: Moble Català. (Barcelona, 1994), cat. no. 30 describes a comparable piece (Museu d'Arts Decoratives. Ajuntament de Barcelona. Inv. no. 64165 as 1530-60, Catalan).

Aguilo calls this type of ornament plateresque (based on the Spanish word for silversmith, platero), apparently to indicate intricate ornament combining late gothic and mudéjar features, in particular the motif of stylised vase with elongated linear stems. However the term, first used c1580 of a mannerist type of ornament has not been used consistently, and has tended to indicate Spanish architecture – often with
candelabra and grotesques, combining late gothic, Muslim and renaissance elements.

Aguilo, p. 98 argues that escritorios (particularly those of German marquetry) were usually supplied with travelling cases, citing a documentary reference c.1500, that these might be in the form of an external box, or in the form of an external nailed leather covering as in “escritorios de Flandes guarnecidos de cuero (1579, inventory of Magdalena Durango), an example illustrated cat. 257. Very few survive.

According to Riano (The industrial arts in Spain by Juan F. Riaño, 1890) by the late 16th century cabinets were highly fashionable in Spain, and inventory references to the royal palaces in Madrid give the impression that they were found in many rooms. Many of these were imported from Italy, Flanders and Germany - and by 1603 an edict of Philip III prohibited the import of Nuremberg cabinets to Spain. Equally, a petition on behalf of Spanish furniture makers claimed that cabinets and escritorios of the type imported from Germany were being made in Spain for about half the price of the imported product.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O109549/cabinet-and-stand-unknown/