



A rare and fine set of eight Elizabeth I beech/sycamore, polychrome-decorated and gilt roundels or trenchers, in original fruitwood box, circa 1580

£ POA



REF: 4415

Height: 8 cm (3.1")

Width: 16 cm (6.3")

Depth: 15.5 cm (6.1")

Description

Each of typical thin circular form, with differing floral decoration and written verse ('poesies') to one side, the ring-turned and punched-decorated box with finial surmounted domed lift-off lid, diameter of each roundel 12.4cm, (9).

It is commonly thought the plain side of an Elizabethan roundel was used at the end of a special dinner, as a serving trencher for sweet meats, marzipan or sugared 'treats'. Once consumed, the roundel was turned over to reveal verse which diners might read, sing or simply discuss. However, their fine delicate appearance does not suggest continued washing or cleaning. Furthermore, they never appear to bear knife marks (which could be explained by only finger food), but they are rarely stained or marked from confectionary as one might expect.

See J. Levi, 'Treen for the Table' (1998), p.133. Although possibly intended to serve food these items were certainly part of after-dinner entertainment, to encourage social discourse, see Victoria Yeoman, 'Speaking plates: text, performance, and banqueting trenchers in Early Modern Europe', in *Renaissance Studies* Vol. 31 No. 5, pp. 755-779. There is some consensus they were sent as New Years gifts. See George Puttenham, 'The Arte of English Poesie' (1589). A fore-runner of the Victorian Christmas cracker, complete with 'motto' or 'joke', they certainly remain a vestige of lavish Elizabethan social-elite entertaining, in fine well-preserved condition.