



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

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**Anonymous Artist**

17<sup>th</sup> century  
Vice-Regency of Peru

**TRUNK OR PORTABLE  
WRITING DESK**

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17<sup>th</sup> century

Vice-Regency of Peru

## ***Trunk or Portable Writing Desk***

Cedar and fruit tree woods

Clasp and keyhole, handle and hinges made of hammered wrought iron

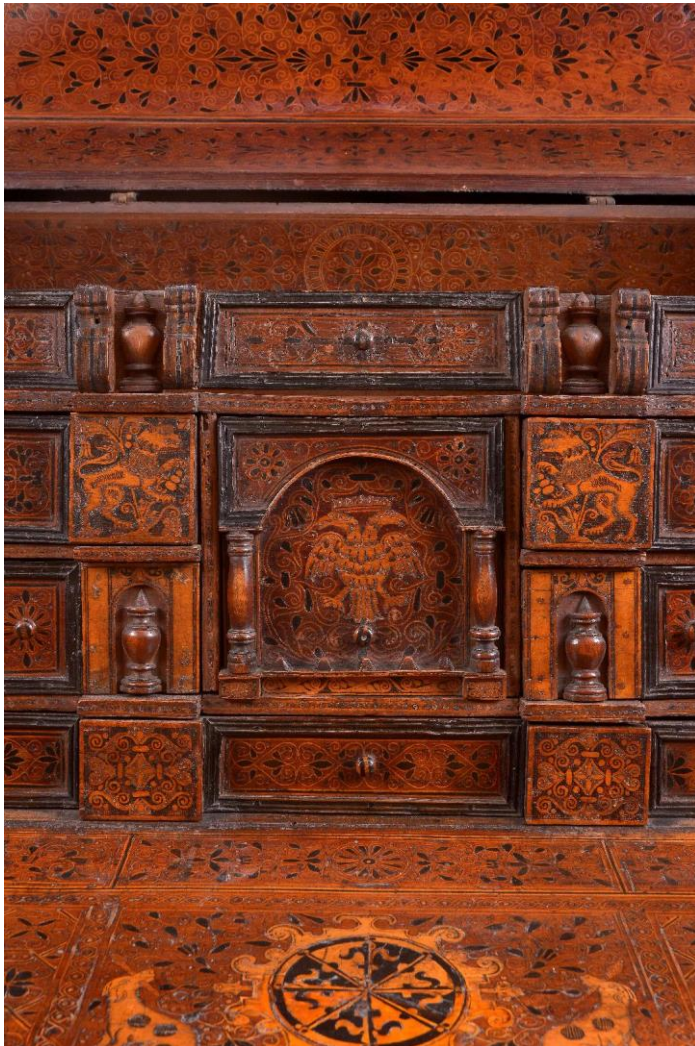
55 x 84 x 40 cm

86 x 84 x 71 cm (opened)

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A fantastic trunk or travel bureau; a portable piece of furniture consisting of a prismatic box and domed lid made of cedar wood. Delicately inlaid with marquetry featuring geometric and floral motifs, this exquisitely fine work was executed in dark and light woods from fruit trees such as the orange, pear and lemon, amongst others.



It presents a collapsible front section that, on opening, reveals a central drawer with a crowned two-headed eagle motif, the symbol of the Habsburg monarchy, framed by baluster columns; a simple design which reproduces an architectural entrance on a small scale. Around this drawer we find three rows of drawers of varying sizes arranged symmetrically, with their respective handles, and decorated with marquetry depicting little geometric elements in Moorish style, motifs in the shapes of crosses, stars, plants and lattice-work typical of the Mudejar style.

Framing this central motif with the two-headed eagle, and separating it from the little side drawers, we observe a decoration of architectural style made up of niches with flower vases, surrounded by scrollwork with decoration featuring Renaissance motifs. The rampant lions on each side are

executed in, and framed by, fine marquetry featuring abstract geometric and plant motifs. Both the lions' fur, their anatomy and the vegetation in which they are contextualized were carried out with painstaking detail and naturalism.

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It is important to note that on opening the upper domed lid one can observe compartments that served to store writing material; pens and ink, thereby denoting this outstanding piece of furniture's evangelic function for preaching and teaching.

The inside face of the collapsible front panel features the shield of the Dominican Order, made up of a fleur-de-lis cross on a field of argent (white) and sable (black), referring to the two colors of the habits of

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the Order. The shield or escutcheon is then flanked by two dogs carrying flaming torches in their mouths in allusion to the dream of the mother of Saint Dominic, the Blessed Juana de Aza, and to the evangelical and preaching mission of the Order, with Saint Dominic as “the Dog of the Lord”. The presence of this shield suggests that this trunk may have been commissioned by a high-ranking Dominican priest.



This collapsible front section, which folds down on hinges, served to protect the lavish inner drawer section and its valuable contents. Furthermore, it could be used as a folding desktop for writing, thereby reflecting the trunk’s increasing complexity, setting it apart from the simple storage box or chest, the specialization of the functions of everyday life and the growing evangelization and the process of reading/writing in Vice-Regal society.

It is worth highlighting the skill with which these motifs were executed. The dogs with their flaming torches are portrayed with great naturalism, using the technique of marquetry inlay. Their bodies, made up of light and dark woods, stand out against a dark background presenting the geometric and floral motifs of Moorish tradition. Furthermore, the shield of the Order is executed in the same fashion, with

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marquetry in light and dark wood, with an exquisite aureole, made up of typically Renaissance scrollwork, surrounding and framing the shield.

The outside of the folding front section, the top of the domed lid and the sides of the trunk present the same kind of symmetrical decoration, consisting of rectangular frames made up of lattice-work of a Mudejar origin, with flowers in the middle surrounded by geometric and floral marquetry, in turn framed and surrounded by guarding lines containing them.

The support and transportation elements include handles on the sides, hinges for the lids and a locking device, all made of hammered wrought iron. The keyhole is round and intricately fitted to a delicately-detailed clasp. All of these iron elements allowed the piece to be carried, transported and to withstand blows and knocks.

The piece stands on four spherical legs.

## **Spanish furniture in Vice-Regal America, the art of storage and transportation: chests and trunks**

The chest is a piece of furniture whose origins go back to the middle ages, and which served both to store the widest range of objects and to transport them on the frequent travels carried out by the noblemen of the time. They were generally short pieces of furniture consisting of an extremely broad rectangular box with a lifting lid. Their original function was to store clothes, domestic utensils and valuable items for their transportation from one house to another, in time becoming yet another decorative piece of household furniture.

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Trunks, meanwhile, were chests designed for travelling, normally featuring a curved lid, side handles and studs, hinges and side-reinforcements. They could also be used for storing items such as white linen, clothes, books and jewelry and so on. They were extremely popular as portable bureaux among the clergy and civil servants working in the Vice-Regal administration.



Mother-of-pearl case with Mudejar lattice motifs, Peru, 17<sup>th</sup> century Museo de Artes Decorativas Collection, Chile



Trunk, Peru, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Museo de Artes Decorativas Collection, Chile

In America during the Vice-Regal period, items of furniture were an expression of the tastes that the Spanish empire popularized throughout its dominions, undergoing a *mestizo* miscegenation of materials and models present in successive artistic styles.

Furniture evolved in a context of luxury and ease, alongside the expansion of cities and the ceaseless evangelical efforts of the religious Orders. In colonial America, the way the cities developed with their churches proved a framework for a habitat that demanded more complex furnishing. The new resident *conquistadores* and their descendants, both white and of mixed race, as well as the member of religious Orders, tried to emulate the lifestyles of a Spanish metropolis, which called for pieces of furniture such as tables, chests, cases, trunks, beds, the famous portable travel bureaux and chiffoniers. Classical pieces of Spanish furniture that not only offered efficient solutions in terms of utility, but also provided a symbolic value with regards status and power. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the chest and all its derivatives, including cases, chiffoniers, trunks, waste paper baskets and so on, constituted the most representative part of Spanish furnishing. It was as such that the furniture arriving in the Americans depended on the shapes and sizes

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that could be transported, and what would facilitate the transfer of the Hispanic lifestyle into Spain's New World dominions.



Bargueño with Taquillón 17<sup>th</sup> century, Spain, Salamanca, carved, gilded, polychromed wood.

Height: 112cm; Width: 156cm; Depth: 56cm



Bargueño with Taquillón, Carved and polychromed wood,

Height: 112; Width: 140cm; Depth: 50cm

## Techniques and new materials

With Europe's colonial expansion throughout the world, specifically the Hispanic expansion into the New World and the Portuguese entry into Asia, new materials emerged for the manufacture of furniture. Ebony, mahogany, jacaranda and rosewood were contributions from the New World, as well as a number of variations of fruit and tropical tree woods such as apricot, pear or orange.



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These were joined by woods such as cypress or pine, local woods, which served as the support and structure in lavish designs with geometric motifs featuring little rhomboid, square or triangular patterns. Hispano-Islamic lattice-work became widespread, being used within both the Hispanic context and that of Vice-Regal America, subsequently being joined by Italianate marquetry.

Local carpenters undertook works in a Renaissance style, with Mudejar elements, combining geometric and floral motifs. It was without doubt the Arabs who introduced their technique of *taracea* (marquetry inlay) into Europe, a characteristic element of Hispanic storage and transportation furniture up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was replaced, as we mentioned above, by marquetry of Italian origin. The word *taracea* derives from the Arabic "tarsi", meaning encrustation, and it consisted in inserting pieces of wood of varying colors and other materials in order to create a range of ornamental motifs. To execute this intricate task, artisans would make use of the materials provided by nature: rabbit glue to attach the small pieces to the supports; vegetable dyes to stain the wood; resins and lacquer to add shine and luster to the wood used.



Enconchado trunk Mexico, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Wood, mother of pearl and tortoiseshell, silver locks.

Height: 40 cm; Width: 60cm; Depth: 32cm

Other materials originating from the colonies were also used for the encrustations, such as tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl and ivory, which came from Spanish colonies in the East, and which transformed the piece of furniture into a luxury item.

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Sewing box, Perú, late 17<sup>th</sup> century, wood inlaid, mother of pearl, tortoiseshell and silver.

14 x 44 x 35cm



Enconchado trunk, Mexico, 17<sup>th</sup> century, wood, mother of pearl and tortoiseshell, iron locks

Height: 40 cm; Width: 60cm; Depth: 32cm

## The Dominican Order

Saint Dominic de Guzmán (Caleruega, 1170 - Bologna, 1221) was a Spanish priest who founded the Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominican Order. A member of the Canons Regular of Osma, in 1203 he had to accompany his bishop on a mission to Denmark. Shocked by the spread of Albigensian heresy

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among the Cathars, he chose not to take part in the armed crusade decided on by the Pope, and insisted on continuing with his peaceful preaching among the heretics. The monastery he founded in Prouille in 1206 became the spiritual and material center of his activities. Having turned down a number of bishoprics, in 1215 he gathered a few companions together and obtained Pope Honorius III's confirmation of the founding of his order (22 December 1216) with its own title, "order of preachers" (21 January 1217). On 15 August 1218 he sent 16 friars to Paris, Madrid, Bologna and Rome, and gave himself up to preaching and running his order, which was finally established in the first General Chapter of Bologna (1220), which granted him an original statute of mendicant poverty, outside of the Franciscan Order. In 1221, Dominic split his Order up into eight provinces. In 1234 he was canonized by Pope Gregory IX.



St. Dominic de Guzmán, Doménikos  
Theotokópoulos/El Greco, oil on canvas, ca. 1600,  
75 x 58 cm

Saint Dominic de Guzmán was a good holy orator; a number of texts have been attributed to him, although there is no firm basis for this. The Pope granted him the job of reader, which consisted of censoring texts and interpreting the Scriptures. His endeavors were built on the notion that heresy should be combatted through preaching, which is what he did with the Albigensians or Cathars who, with the support of the French nobles, believed in the evil nature of the body, which it was necessary to defeat through extreme austerity. Dominic hoped to combat such ideas not with weapons, but with the word of preachers who, on the one hand benefitted from a solid university education in theology and, on the other, expressed their spirituality and rejection of the mundane in both their person and way of life. Along with Saint Francis of Assisi, Dominic de Guzmán was at the center of a religious upheaval that was crucial to the evolution of the medieval spirit and the Church itself.

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## Saint Dominic, the “Dog of the Lord”

According to the site [www.dominicos.org](http://www.dominicos.org), “The Golden Legend (Saint Dominic’s earliest biography) tells of a vision that his mother, the Blessed Juana de Aza, had before Dominic was born. She dreamt a dog leapt from her womb with a flaming torch in its mouth. Unable to comprehend the meaning of her dream, she decided to seek the intercession of Saint Dominic of Silos, the founder of a famous monastery nearby. She made a pilgrimage to the monastery to ask the Saint to explain the dream to her. There she understood that her son was going to light the fire of Christ in the world through preaching. In gratitude, she called her child Dominic, like the saint from Silos. This name is extremely fitting, given it comes from the Latin Dominicus, meaning “of the Lord”. From Dominicus we get Dominicanus, the Latin name of the Order of Saint Dominic. However, using wordplay, it has been argued that Dominicanus is really a combination of Domini (Lord) and Canis (dog; canine), meaning the “Dog of the Lord”, or “guardian of the vineyard of the Lord”.

In his letter of 4 February 1221 to all of the bishops of the Church recommending the Order of the Saint, Pope Honorius III said that Dominic and his followers had been “named for the evangelization of the entire world”. And in another letter, this time addressed to Saint Dominic (18 January 1221), the Pope called them “pugiles fidei” (knights of the faith, defending it against whatever opposed it). That is what Dominic did his whole life; defend the faith using his life as an example, and with his tireless preaching against the heresies of Languedoc in the south of France, and in his desire to be a missionary among non-Christians.”

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## The Dominican Order's arrival in America

The first religious order to arrive in Peru was the Dominican. During the initial conquest process, the Order of Preachers or Saint Dominic was represented by Friar Vicente Valverde, the priest who asked the Inca Emperor Atahualpa to renounce his beliefs, and who would later become bishop of Cuzco and protector of the Indians in the face of Spanish abuses. The religious orders that arrived in Peru had different methods of evangelizing the indigenous people: the Dominicans were known for disseminating scholastic teachings, focusing on popularizing the Gospels through colleges and higher education centers. The Dominicans also emphasized the knowledge of native languages and local customs in order to evangelize properly. Fruit of this concern was the "Lexicon or General Vocabulary of Peru, known as Quechua", by friar Domingo de Santo Tomás, and published in 1560. This work was a major contribution, as it helped improve understanding of indigenous grammatical and conceptual forms.

The Dominicans quickly set up monasteries across the entire Peruvian Vice-Regal territory, although they always maintained their educational approach, devoting themselves to teaching the Catholic faith throughout the whole region.

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## The Shield

Before the shield came the seal, used as a sign of validation by convents and hierarchies of the Order, being used since its outset in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of the crucifix in the seal is the exclusive privilege of the Superior General or Master of the Order, as set out by the Chapter of Bologna in 1240.

The oldest known example of this liliated shield dates from 1419-20, and features on the pedestal of a sculpture of Saint Dominic, a beautiful alabaster image, preserved in the Dominican Monastery of Caleruega, and which previously stood in the entrance to said monastery.

It would appear that this image was commissioned by Fr. Luis de Valladolid, a Spanish provincial of the day who attended the Council of Constance, travelled through France and Italy, and knew the Order's tradition when it came to its most popularly widespread heraldic emblem. As such the statue bears witness to the fact that at the time the liliated shield was the preferred emblem of the religious institution.



The elements of the escutcheon can be summarized as follows: the fleur-de-lis cross on an argent (white) and sable (black) field. The cross is the emblem par excellence for any Christian and all the more so for a priest. In some shape or form it always accompanies Saint Dominic, and it is also frequently present in the seals of the friars of the Order. The cross is therefore a generic element of the shield, which is made more specific by the addition of the fleur-de-lis detail, and sometimes further embellished by the argent and sable field, representing the colors of the Dominican habit.

This link between the lily and the Dominican family, which derives from its Founder, becomes all the stronger if we bear in mind that the coat of arms of the Aza family included a fleur-de-lis cross: "a red

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cross with fleurs-de-lis at the ends". It is therefore hardly surprising that the fleur-de-lis often appears in connection with the Order right from its outset.

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