

Object Summary



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Polychrome Wooden Panels with Arabic Poetry Inscriptions

Dated 1271 AH (1854 - 1855 CE)

Syria

Ottoman

Wood, polychrome pigments

Overall: 106 1/2 x 45 1/2 in. (270.5 x 115.6cm)

This decorative niche (one of four) is called a kutbīyya (from the Arabic word kitāb, meaning book). It is designed to display books and precious

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objects within the qa'a, or reception hall, of a private home in Ottoman Damascus. Now located in the Ottoman gallery, it now holds brightly colored Iznik ceramics, fine glassware, and Ottoman textiles. The wooden panels surrounding the kutbīyya are decorated using a technique called 'ajami, a technique in which gesso is applied to the woodwork in relief, painted with washes of brightly colored glazes, and illuminated with metal leaf. The panel above the kutbīyya contains an Arabic inscription in gilded thuluth script: We were like the stars of heaven. The inscription is part of a poem by Abū 'Abdallāh Muhammad ibn Sa'īd al-Shanhājī al-Būṣīrī (1211–1294 CE). Al-Būṣīrī was a Moroccan-born Egyptian poet known for his poetry in praise of the Prophet Mohammed. The verse is continued on panels throughout the room.