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Banjaluca Felt Prayer Hanging

Western Ottoman Empire, 19th century

Felt, embroidered and appliquéd

183.5 cm high, 127 cm wide

Stock no.: A3064

This large embroidered and appliquéd felt textile hanging was made in Banja Luka, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1527 until it fell to Austro-Hungarian forces in 1878.

On a grey ground, a small Tree of Life flanked by two flower stems on each side and a hanging lamp are placed within a *mihrab* or a prayer niche. The outer border has stylised fish scale motifs, the wide border scrolling flower motifs on yellow ground and the inner border also depicts fish scale designs, popular in the Ottoman decorative arts. The central niche is enclosed by vegetal and floral scrolls. Above the *mihrab*, there is a benedictory inscription in Turkish interspersed with small flowers and abstract designs.

Banja Luka was well-known for its embroidered and appliquéd hangings, and the pieces made during the Ottoman period show both European and Ottoman decorative styles. Many of the textiles were placed on a wall and used during prayer as *qibleh* cloths. The design on this textile, a niche with a hanging lamp, would have emphasised the setting of the prayer. It has been suggested that the large felt wool textile panels were used in campaign tents as *qibleh* cloths. The decoration on this textile is unusual, though a comparative panel, dated to pre-1800, is pictured in Roderick Taylor, *Ottoman Embroidery*, 1993, pp. 140–41.

