

The Brescia Casket (München/online, 16 May 25)

Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Katharina-von-Bora-Str. 10, Raum 242, II. OG,
80333 München / online, May 16, 2025

Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte

An Exemplary Object Biography Between Art History, Technical Art history, and Reception History.

The so-called lipsanoteca (reliquary) in the Museo di Santa Giulia in Brescia, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, is a unique artifact crafted from ivory. On stylistic grounds, the casket has been dated to the second half of the fourth century. It is considered to be one of the earliest figuratively decorated early Christian reliquaries, although its original function is not documented.

The 38 carved scenes show, among other things, the oldest Passion cycle in art history. As the largest surviving ivory casket from late antiquity, it is an invaluable testimony to the use of luxury artifacts in an early Christian context. The casket has an importance that extends far beyond the borders of Italy, which is reflected, among other things, in highly diverse copies from different eras throughout Europe, from St. Petersburg to Mainz.

Even though the object is featured in all standard works on late antiquity and ivory carving and its iconography and iconology have been the subject of several monographs, its long history, characterized by decontextualization and dismantling in modern times, remains largely unexplored.

Against the background of current debates on material culture and object studies, a fundamental interdisciplinary study of the Brescia Casket is of crucial importance, since it considers almost all aspects of the relationship between people and artifacts, i.e. their production, history, preservation and interpretation, spanning a range of epochs.

The technical examination is intended to record and analyse the production technique, the original appearance, traces of use and changes to the casket. Only non-destructive and non-contact methods such as examination with a stereomicroscope and a range of imaging techniques will be used for this purpose.

The aim is to create an exemplary object "biography" in which we address the methodological question of how a pre-modern object can be examined across the various phases of its conception, use, reuse and musealization. This methodological approach combines art history, historiography, technical art history and conservation science.

In this workshop, the first results of the research will be presented for discussion with international experts from other institutions.

PROGRAMM

13:00 Welcome Coffee

14:00 Greetings

Dominik Brabant, Vice Director of the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in München

Stefano Karadjov, Director of the Fondazione Brescia Musei

14:20 Introduction – Researching a Fourth-Century Ivory Casket and Why it Matters: Research Questions and Methodological Approaches

Esther Wipfler, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in München – Forschungsstelle Realienkunde;
Adrien Palladino, Masaryk University, Department of Art History, Brno; Catharina Blänsdorf, Archäologische Staatssammlung, München

Gajane Achverdjanová, Masaryk University, Department of Art History, Brno: Filmic Impressions of the Research Project

15:00 Presentations

Adrien Palladino and Esther Wipfler: Early Medieval or Modern? A "Copy" of the Brescia Casket in Saint Petersburg and the Issue of Copies and Emulations

15:20 Matilda Cartolari, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in München: The Brescia Casket Twentieth-Century Exhibition History – Paradigm Shifts in Italian Art Policy

15:40 Discussion

- Coffee Break -

16:20 Catharina Blänsdorf: Towards a Construction History of the Casket

16:40 Elisabeth Fugmann, vorarlberg museum, Bregenz, und Thomas Fischer, Universität Köln: The Casket's Lock – A Reused Spolium?

17:10 Discussion

17:20 Davide Bianchi, Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences: Beyond Function: The Iconographic Significance of Wooden Caskets from Late Antique Pannonia

17:40 Marie Delassus, Département des arts de Byzance et des chrétientés en Orient, Musée du Louvre, Paris: Late Antique Caskets with Bone Carvings from Egypt

18:00 Gudrun Bühl and Hiltrud Jehle, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Bode-Museum: On the Making and Dating of early Byzantine Ivory Pyxides from the Berlin Collection

18:30 Final Discussion

This conference is financially supported by: Gerda Henkel Stiftung

PARTICIPATION: The event will be broadcast in parallel via Zoom. You can register for the meeting at the following link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tNhbdLACQ2icIFAM3aaf0g>
Recording of the event or parts of the event as well as screenshots are not permitted. By participating, you accept these terms of use.

ORGANISATION: Esther Wipfler, Adrien Palladino, Catharina Blänsdorf

PROJEKTPARTNER: Museo Santa Giulia, Fondazione Brescia Musei; Archäologische Staatssammlung, München; vorarlberg museum, Bregenz; Center for Early Medieval Studies, Department of Art History, Universität Brno; Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Forschungsstelle Realienkunde, München

Reference:

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