Jewelry casket - with courting scenes

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	18842
Artist/Maker:	Embriachi, Baldassare / worshop
Date of production:	late 14th century
Place of production:	Venice
Inscription:	nincs
Materials:	bone; horn; wood
Techniques:	carved; inlay
Dimensions:	height: 16 cm length: 30 cm depth: 19 cm

The sides of this oblong wooden casket are covered by narrow, carved bone panels representing the meeting, conversation and farewell of two youths, framed above and below by coloured geometric inlay. The lower part of the truncated pyramidshaped, elaborately-designed lid is decorated with a convex bone panel displaying hovering, winged figures and figures without wings in long clothes, holding an empty heraldic shield on the long side and a text ribbon on the short side. The Museum of Applied Arts has three more of these boxes and several fragments, and there are many similar objects of secular and ecclesiastical purpose held in other collections. They must therefore have been produced in a workshop set up for serial production. One of these, well described in the sources, was the Embriachi workshop. Baldassare Embriachi (worked between approx. 1390 and 1425–1430) maintained a significant bone carving workshop first in Florence and then in Venice. Bones of land mammals (cattle and horses) were used instead of expensive ivory. Small oblong panels with a convex surface were carved in flat relief and made more sculptural by gilding and painting. The images consisted of long lines of figures set side by side. Also characteristic of the workshop is the geometric-pattern frame of bone, wood and horn inlays around the bone relief. The finished products, not made to specific orders, were made up from prefabricated elements. Favourite subjects were well-known scenes from the Bible (e.g. the story of Susannah) and classical mythology (the story of Paris) and love scenes from contemporary tales.

Literature

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