Casket - Saints and other figures

Object: Casket

Place of origin: Italy (south, made)

Date: 12th century-13th century (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Carved ivory on wood, painted and gilt

Museum number: 603-1902

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

This casket is an example of the exchange of artistic ideas between Europe and the Middle East. It was made in Sicily or southern Italy. The painted and gilded decoration includes sirens, birds and Christian saints, all in the local style. But there is also an inscription in Arabic, which expresses good wishes for the owner.

In the medieval period, luxury goods from the Islamic Middle East found a ready market in Christian-ruled Europe. The prestige of these imports was so great that luxury goods made in Europe were often decorated in Islamic styles.

Descriptive line

Ivory casket with Christian imagery as well as a blessing in Arabic, Sicily or southern Italy, 1100-1200.

Physical description

Wooden casket with a truncated pyramidal lid, covered with ivory panels decorated in outline and gilded with medallions containing a seated musician, animals and interlaced ornament; at either end is a siren with a cruciferous nimbus; in front two figures of standing saints holding books and long staves; on the edge of the lid is an inscription in naskhi script. On the ground are scattered bird and foliage designs. With gilt metal mounts.

Dimensions

Height: 18 cm, Width: 36 cm, Depth: 19 cm

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603-1902

Object history note

Formerly in the Cathedral at Bari, Southern Italy

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O106774/saints-and-other-figures-casket-unknown/