Pomander

Place of origin: Italy (made)
Date: ca. 1350 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Partially gilded silver, niello
Credit Line: Bequeathed by Francis Reubell Bryan
Museum number: M.205:1 to 3-1925
Gallery location: Jewellery, Rooms 91, The William and Judith Bollinger Gallery, case 11, shelf C, box 7

Public access description

This pomander opens up into four small segments which would originally have held spices or perfumes. The pomander itself would hang from a long belt or girdle which encircled the waist or hips. Romantic inscriptions and imagery on girdles show that they were sometimes used as courtship or marriage gifts. Medieval Jewish marriage ceremonies included a formal exchange of girdles between spouses and Czech bridegrooms around 1500 are recorded as giving girdles to their new wives. This pomander may also have been a gift of love: the inscriptions on the internal segments record the story of the Judgment of Paris in which Paris was required to choose which of the three goddesses, Juno, Venus and Minerva was the most beautiful. The result of his choice set the Trojan War in motion.

Descriptive line

Pomander of partially gilded silver and niello, made in Italy, 1300-1400

Physical description

Pomander shaped as an apple, of silver, silver gilt, and niello. The sections of the body of the pomander are held in place by a pin with a screw section at the top, the whole attached to an octagonal gadrooned head to which is hinged a quatrefoil handle. Inscriptions run around the edge of each section relating to the Judgement of Paris, the interior and exterior decoration of scrolling foliage and geometric patterns.

Dimensions

Height: 6.5 cm, Width: 4 cm

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Object history note

Londesborough and Wyndham Cook Collections, Francis Reubell Bryan Bequest funds used to purchase the pomander from Durlacher Bros. New Bond Street. Shown in Leeds Exhibition, 1868. Sold at the Humphrey W. Cook sale at Christies’, July 10 1925, lot 434. Sold at the Londesborough Sale at Christies’, 8 May 1884, lot 137 (wrongly described as from the Bernal collection).

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O13437/pomander-unknown/