Italian marriage chests or cassoni were emblazoned with the coats of arms of the families about to be linked with each other, and decorated with stories connected to love, romance and marriage. This panel is from a cassone which is thought to have been made in Florence and would have formed part of a pair, one of which is now lost. It probably illustrates the events associated with marriage, rather than any particular story. The participants are shown in the contemporary costume of about 1430. The left panel depicts the exchange of rings, the central one the journey to groom’s house, and the right-hand one the wedding feast. The female figure in the centre stands by a column, the symbol of fortitude, with the scrolled inscription ‘don te io il cor meo’ (I give you my heart). The two families remain unidentified.

Cassone panel with three scenes of a marriage ceremony, ca. 1430, Florence

Originally this panel formed part of a cassone. Dove tails cut into the front of the panel at both ends are partly concealed by side pilasters, which contain the (unidentified) arms of both panels. The ‘feet’ have been sawn off. The borders along the top and bottom of the panel are decorated with a gilt gesso scroll pattern alternating with gothic octofoils. A keyhole was cut into a central octofoil, probably at a later date. The cornice moulding at the top was nailed to the main panel, whereas the moulding at the bottom has been removed.

The panel has been reduced in depth towards the bottom, creating a wedge-shaped profile, thicker at the top. Two vertical wooden wedge-shaped backets have been fixed (probably glued) to the back of the panel, which in turn are fixed to a modern plywood backboard so that the panel ‘floats’ forward of the backboard, and equidistant from it.

Dimensions
Height: 45.7 cm, Width: 134.6 cm, Thickness: 8 cm

This cassone was bought by the South Kensington Museum for £18 from an unknown source and no other records survive as to its provenance. Judging from its style and costumes, it would seem that the cassone was made in Florence in about 1430, and would have formed part of a pair, one of which is now lost. At some later (unknown) date, possibly between about 1825 and 1850, the front was sawn free from the rest of the cassone and used as a wall picture.

Historical significance: This cassone panel records episodes of a marriage ceremony of about 1430, judging from the costumes of the participants. Furthermore it has come down to posterity in the form of long rectangular picture rather than the front of a marriage chest, as would have been its original function. Cassoni would have seemed increasingly cumbersome pieces of storage furniture as chests began to acquire drawers, but the fashion for all things connected with the early Italian Renaissance induced dealers and owners to salvage the front panels and sell them off as pictures to hang on walls.


Historical context note
Italian Marriage chests or cassoni were emblazoned with coats of arms of the families about to be linked with each other, and decorated with stories connected with love, romance and marriage. This example most likely illustrates the process of marriage, rather than any particular story, in contemporary costume of about 1430. Rather than use Medieval Romances or Classical Myths, the artist depicts contemporary practices such as the exchange of rings and musicians hailing the arrival of the bride, reinforced with allegorical figures and symbols of the bridal virtues, Constancy and Fortitude.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17318/scenes-of-a-marriage-ceremony-cassone-panel-unknown/