

Call for Papers

Owning Gothic Ivories: Buying, Giving, Circulating

Conference, 25-26 October 2024 / London, British Museum (day 1) and V&A (day 2)



Over the last three decades, research on Gothic ivories has seen a significant shift from studies concerned with stylistic attribution and classification towards the investigation of their materiality, iconography, function, and – last but not least – patronage. Although we now have a much better understanding of the social, devotional, and cultural contexts in which especially religious ivories were commissioned and produced, overall, we still know comparatively little about the owners of Gothic ivories. This is especially true for the secular sphere, where it has not yet been possible to link any surviving fourteenth-century carving to its first owner.

This conference aims to return to the question of the ownership of Gothic ivories, an area which offers great potential for further discoveries, particularly (but not only) through the combination of art historical object analysis with evaluations of contemporary written sources such as inventories, wills, and other documents. Illuminating the stories of historic owners, be they individuals or institutions, and their Gothic ivories is the first aim of this two-day conference, while the second is to shed light on the later life of these objects, and on their transition into new ownership contexts and uses.

We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers exploring material across these themes that deal with either case studies or broader methodological questions. Papers which take an interdisciplinary approach, breaking the traditional boundaries between art history, history of collecting, museum studies or conservation, are particularly welcome. Topics of interest may include but are not limited to:

- Individual patrons and collectors of Gothic ivories.
- Commissioning, buying, and trading Gothic ivories.
- Gothic ivories in written sources.
- Gothic ivories in their archaeological contexts.
- The circulation of Gothic ivories.
- The adaptation, restoration and/or change of function of Gothic ivories over time.
- Object biographies of Gothic ivories in a conservation context.
- The provenance of Gothic ivories.
- The changing status and perception of Gothic ivories.
- The reproductions of Gothic ivories, i.e. fictile ivories, electrotypes, photography etc.
- The role of museums and curators as the custodians of Gothic ivories.

- The display of Gothic ivories through time in treasuries, private collections, and museums.
- The dispersal of Gothic ivories such as fragments, ensembles, and collections.

Please submit your abstracts of 250 – 300 words and a short biography of 100 words in one PDF document to Manuela Studer-Karlen (manuela.studer-karlen@unibe.ch), Naomi Speakman (nspeakman@britishmuseum.org) and Michaela Zöschg (m.zoschg@vam.ac.uk) by 15 January 2024. Please note that travel and accommodation costs for speakers will be covered, and that the conference papers will be published.

Conference and Publication Timetable:

- 15 January 2024: Deadline for submission of abstracts and biography.
- 15 February 2024: Feedback on abstracts.
- 25-26 October 2024: Conference.
- 31 January 2025: Submission of papers for publication.

Organised by Manuela Studer-Karlen (University of Bern), Naomi Speakman (British Museum, London) and Michaela Zöschg (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

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