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A 14TH-CENTURY IVORY CASKET WITH SCENES FROM MEDIEVAL ROMANCES
THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE SO-CALLED *COFFRETS COMPOSITES* GROUP

Since the launch of the Gothic Ivories Project online database in 2008, medieval ivories have gradually become a more prominent subject of academic studies.[1] Even though the database includes approximately 5,000 items, there are still some objects unrecognised by or even unknown to scholars. A small ivory casket is the most recent, extraordinary discovery [Fig. 1]. It was sold by the Scottish auction house Lyon and Turnbull in Edinburgh to a private collector on 20 May 2021 for almost £1.4 million.[2] The uniqueness of this piece is related not only to its iconography, which will be discussed below, but also to its provenance. According to the auction house, this casket has, since at least the beginning of the 17th century, been in the hands of one noble Scottish family, the Bairds of Auchmedden and later their descendants, and kept continuously at Tornaveen House, the family's residence in Aberdeenshire.[3] According to information provided by the sellers, it is known that the casket was, since its acquisition, an esteemed object venerated as a family heirloom.[4]

Information on the casket is very scanty. According to family tradition, the 'Baird casket'[5] was supposed to have been crafted by Thomas Baird, a minim friar at a monastery in Besançon, Burgundy, before 1615.[6] In one of the let-

[1] The Gothic Ivories Project, initiated by Courtauld Institute of Art in London, is dedicated to medieval and neo-Gothic ivories preserved in public and private collections, as well as those whose location is currently unknown, see: *Gothic Ivories Project*, http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/ (last modified 1 April 2022).

[2] *Lyon & Turnbull*, https://www.lyonandturnbull.com/news/article/a-rare--important-french-gothic-casket/ (last modified 1.04.2022). I am particularly grateful to Mrs Kristin Schaeffer, administrator in the Fine Furniture and Decorative Arts Department at Lyon and Turnbull, for providing me with the additional information on the casket.

[3] On the Baird family, see: J.M. Bulloch, *On the Bairds of Auchmedden and Strichen*, Peterhead, 1934.

[4] This is a very unusual case for secular ivories. Another example of a casket whose presence can be traced with confidence to before the 18th century (when the ivories appeared on the antiquity markets) is the piece in the Cracow cathedral treasury, which since the late 19th century has been legendarily attributed to the Polish queen Hedwig d'Anjou (b. 1373/74, d. 1399). The casket in Cracow was 'discovered' in 1881 by canon Ignacy Polkowski, during a visitation of [?] the Cracow cathedral conducted by bishop Albin Dunajewski. The cabinet in which the casket was found was most likely sealed at the beginning of the 17th century. The attribution to the queen is rather doubtful, and it fits into the 19th-century custom of 'nationalising' medieval works of art. The casket appeared for the first time in the cathedral's 1563 inventory as one of the reliquaries containing relics of various saints: *Item theca seu scriniolum ex osse albo alias ex ebore, levibus laminis argeteis deauratis com smalcz circumquaque obductis compactum, cum clausura et manubrio, similibus decorate, ab angulis vero octo laminae parvae constringentes ipsum ebur seu ossa thecae ipsius, in qua servantur diversae sanctorum reliquiae*, see: *Inwentarz Katedry Wawelskiej z roku 1563*, ed. A. Bochnak, Kraków, 1979 [=*Państwowe Zbiory Sztuki na Wawelu: Źródła do dziejów Wawelu*, 10, ed. A. Franaszek], pp. 10–11.

[5] Since the casket belonged to the Baird family, I've decided to use the name 'Baird casket' to distinguish this piece from the other *coffrets* and to highlight its provenance. The current owner of the casket remains anonymous.

[6] *Genealogical Collections Concerning the Sir-name of Baird, and the Families of Auchmedden, Newbyth, and Sauchton Hall in*

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1. Casket with scenes from the story of the Holy Grail, Tristan and Iseult (?) and the wild men, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?), later mounts. Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

ters written by Thomas's uncle Andrew to Thomas's father Gilbert III, Andrew states that Thomas Baird was incapable of any of the sciences but he was supposed to be skilled in craft and mechanics. According to William Baird, the last of the Bairds of Auchmedden (b. ca. 1701, d. 1777), Thomas Baird was responsible for making 'an oblong, small chest of ivory 10 inches long, 5 broad, and 4 high, delicately carved in bas-relief, with the chisel, upon the top and sides into figures of knights-errant, distrest [sic] damsels, and enchanted castles, taken from some of the old romances which were so much in vogue in that age'.[7] The story that the casket had been created by Thomas Baird was likely fabricated by Thomas himself or invented later by his family. In the given circumstances, we could even assume that Thomas purchased the casket or was gifted it during his time as a friar and later sent it to his family as a souvenir. There is also the possibility that Thomas worked on the casket in some way; maybe he was tasked with repairing it. In any case Thomas Baird could not have made the *coffret*, as its style, which will be discussed further, indicates that it was produced in the first half of the 14th century, long before he was born.

The 'Baird casket' is made of six ivory plaques that were attached to the wooden base by small nails. The casket's brass handle and mounts are probably a later addition. The original handles and mounts that survive in the case of the so-called 'Hedwig casket' in Cracow and the casket at the Musée de Cluny in Paris[8] are made of enamelled silver and

Particular: with Copies of Old Letters and Papers Worth Preserving, and Accounts of Several Transactions in this Country During the Last Two Centuries. Reprinted from the Original MS. Of William Baird, Esq. (last of the family), of Auchmedden, ed. W.N.F. Fraser, London, 1870, p. 21, see also: *Lyon & Turnbull* (as in note 2).

[7] *Genealogical Collections Concerning the Sir-name of Baird*, p. 21 (as in note 6). In the 1870's the casket was in possession of W.N.F. Fraser.

[8] Cracow cathedral treasury, inv. no. WKW/eIII/05; Paris, Musée de Cluny, inv. no. Cl. 23840.

2. Enamelled lock with a lady handing the keys to a kneeling knight, front-side of the casket, Paris, ca. 1300–1320. Cracow cathedral treasury. Phot. public domain

are much more ornate and decorative [Fig. 2]. The ivory base on which the 'Baird casket' is placed is rather unusual for ivory caskets from the first half of the 14th century, and could be a later addition as well.[9] The surface of the casket is heavily cracked and yellowed. The plaques are slightly skewed, and the lock is missing. There are also some cavities in the ivory, which could indicate that the casket was used a great deal or often transported and moved around. Parts of the reliefs are gone, especially on the right side of the lock, which maybe was removed by force or fell off, damaging the casket. The interior of the casket on one side is lined with cloth, which is probably a later addition as well. Since the casket is now in the hands of a private collector and is not on display, this analysis of the 'Baird casket' will concern mostly its iconography, and less the aspects of its style, which certainly deserves a separate, more elaborate study.

Paula M. Carns was the first to analyse these scenes before the object was put up for auction. She recognised three scenes (two scenes on the right of the front panel and one on the casket's right side), most likely from the anonymous French courtly romance *La Queste del Saint Graal,*[10] which is a part of the larger literary cycle called *Lancelot–Grail* or the *Vulgate Cycle*, written ca. 1215–1235.[11] The third and longest part of the cycle tells the story of the young knight Galahad, an illegitimate son of Lancelot and Heliabel (Elaine) of Corbenic, who was, through his mother (daughter of the Fisher King), a direct descendant of Joseph of Arimathea, first known custodian of the Holy Grail. Galahad was considered the perfect knight (*Chevalier desirré*) – a title that was first used to describe his father Lancelot. The character of Galahad first appeared in the 13th century, much later than the majority of the Knights of the Round Table, and replaced Chrétien de Troyes's original Grail hero, Perceval.[12] Since

[9] This theory could be supported by the fact that the base of the casket seems misshapen, slightly bigger than the casket itself.

[10] This romance, due to its strong Christian undertones, was firstly attributed to the Cistercian circle, see: A. Pauphilet, *Études sur la Queste del Saint Graal*, Paris, 1980. However, a good understanding of the chivalric code and courtly way of life prompted the hypothesis that the poem could have been composed in the Knights Templar circle, see: K. Pratt, 'The Cistercians and La Queste del Saint Graal', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 20, 1995, p. 88.

[11] The cycle is divided into the following parts: *Lancelot Propre* (*Prose Lancelot*), *La Queste del Saint Graal, La Mort le Roi Artu*, *L'Estoire del Graal* and *L'Estoire de Merlin*. The name *Vulgate* relates to the theory that the author supposedly translated this text from Latin, see: A.M.L. Williams, *The Adventures of the Holy Grail. A study of La Queste del Saint Graal*, Oxford, 2001.

[12] The romance called *Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal*, was written by Chrétien de Troyes ca. 1185. It remained unfinished and is most likely Chrétien's last known work. The romance was dedicated to

3. *Galahad receiving the keys to the Castle of Maidens*, right side of the casket, Paris (?), ca. 1330, 19th c. mounts. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Phot. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Chrétien's romance *Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal* was left unfinished, and the knight never reached his goal, it left an open ending for later sequals. Even though there were quite a few new versions of this story (e.g. *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach),[13] Perceval was demoted to being merely Galahad's companion in the quest for the Grail. The popularity of Sir Galahad became quite evident not only in contemporary literature, but in medieval art as well, including the nine-piece group of the so-called 'composite caskets' (French *coffrets composites*) made of ivory. One of the scenes depicted in eight pieces from the group shows Galahad receiving the keys to the *Château des Pucelles* (Castle of Maidens) from the hermit, an episode that also belongs to the *Queste del Saint Graal* narrative [Fig. 3].

Galahad's story in the *Vulgate Cycle* began with the feast in Camelot on the night of the Pentecost, when King Arthur and all the Knights of the Round Table witnessed the vision of the sword in the floating stone. No one among those gathered was able to pull the sword out, and Lancelot prophesied that only a true Chosen One would be able to achieve this task. It is most likely that this is the scene depicted on the front panel of the 'Baird casket', where the sword is shown floating over the altar (?) or a table; behind it there is an open curtain, signifying the sword's

Chrétien's patron, Philippe, Duke of Flanders, who participated in the third crusade, see: Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal*, transl. J.M. Caluwé, Paris, 2017, p. 6–7. Gawain, another Arthurian knight, also seeks the Grail, as does Lancelot, who had seen the Grail but could not attain it due to his adulterous relationship with Queen Guinevere, see more: E. Baumgartner, 'The Queste del Saint Graal: from semblance to veraie semblance', transl. C. Dover, in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. C. Dover, Cambridge, 2003 [=*Arthurian Studies*, 54], p. 108.

[13] M.T. Bruckner, 'The Poetics of Continuation in Medieval French Romance: From Chrétien's Conte du Graal to the Perceval Continuations', *French Forum*, 18, 1993, no. 2, pp. 133–149.

4. *Iseult carried across the waters of the Mal Pas* (?); knight meeting a squire (?); scenes from *La Queste del Saint Graal* (?), front-side panel of the casket, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?). Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

supernatural power and holiness, emphasising that the quest for the Grail was planned by God himself [Fig. 4]. In the text of the romance, the block of marble in which the sword was placed is red, a colour that was associated with the Grace of the Holy Spirit.[14] The scene depicted on the left side of the floating sword shows a kneeling young man presenting his severed hand before the court, who are watching from the castle walls [Fig. 4]. Perhaps this could be a scene inspired by events from the *Queste del Saint Graal* as well. In the poem, Gawain, one of Arthur's finest knights, tried to pull the sword from the stone but was unsuccessful, as he was not a true Chosen One. This scene depicts one of the daredevils who tested themselves with the sword and was crippled in the process.[15] This further emphasises that only Galahad was destined to obtain the Grail. Oddly enough, neither this scene nor the previous one appears in other known medieval ivories, nor do they in the illuminated manuscripts, a source that often influenced them.

Soon after the unusual contest, a young man named Galahad was introduced by the sorcerer Merlin to Arthur's court. Galahad was seated in the only vacant seat of the Round Table (so-called *Siege Perilous*), which was reserved for the person destined to find the Holy Grail and was supposed to symbolise Christ's seat at the Last Supper.[16] However, before the Quest could be undertaken, the armourless Galahad was taken by King Arthur to see the sword in the stone, which he pulled out with ease, and was thus declared 'the greatest knight' by Arthur himself.[17] According to the poem, the sword had an engraving on it, which read: 'Ja nus ne m'ostera de ci, se cil non a qui costé je doi pendre. Et cil sera li mieldres chevaliers del monde' ('Never shall man take me hence but only he by whose side I ought to hang; and he shall be the best knight of the world').[18] The sword was Galahad's first weapon, and it accompanied him in many of his struggles for the Grail.[19]

The last scene, linked by Carns to the Grail storyline, is shown on the right-side panel of the casket. It depicts twelve young men standing at a table [Fig. 5]. The one in the middle is holding a sword upwards, and before them, a kneeling angel is bearing a goblet. Most likely this scene depicts the vision of the Holy Grail that occurred after Galahad took a seat on the *Perilous Siege*. The Twelve Knights of the Round Table symbolise the apostles, with Galahad in the middle as the Chosen One and a Christ-like figure.[20] The Round Table was often identified as the same table at which the Last Supper took place (which according to tradition was also supposed to be round), or a table made in the image of it that Merlin commanded Uther, Arthur's father, to execute.[21] Similarly, the scene of the vision of the Holy Grail was depicted, e.g., in the illuminated copy of *La Quête du Saint Graal*, dated ca. 1351 [Fig. 6].[22]

The scenes on the other side of the lock on the front panel and the episode depicted on the left side of the casket were interpreted by Carns as taken from the story of Tristan and Iseult in the redaction of the Norman poet

[14] A.M.L. Williams, *The Adventures of the Holy Grail*, p. 109 (as in note 11).

[15] *Lyon & Turnbull* (as in note 2).

[16] This motif was quite often depicted in the illuminated manuscripts, especially after *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory, written ca. 1485.

[17] This scene was depicted. e.g., in the manuscript containing three parts of the Vulgate cycle: *Estoire del Saint Graal, La Queste del Saint Graal, Morte Artu*, London, The British Library, MS Royal 14 E III, fol. 91, ca. 1315–1325.

[18] A.M.L. Williams, *The Adventures of the Holy Grail*, p. 114 (see note 11).

[19] Ibidem, pp. 107–109, see also: J.N. Carman, 'The Sword Withdrawal in Robert de Boron's *Merlin* and in the *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 53, 1938, pp. 593–595.

[20] As was pointed out in the auction description, the knight standing in the middle should be identified as Galahad, because he is not wearing a crown, as Arthur would have done.

[21] L. Hibbard Loomis, 'Arthur's Round Table', *PMLA*, 41, 1926, no. 4, pp. 771–784.

[22] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 5218 fol. 88.

5. *The Vision of the Holy Grail* (?), right side of the casket, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?). Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

6. *The Vision of the Holy Grail*, illumination in *La Quête du Saint Graal*, MS. 5218, fol. 88, Paris 1351, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris. Phot. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF

7. *Iseult carried across the waters of the Mal Pas by Tristan* (right side of the panel), 'Tristan Casket I', back-side panel of the casket, Paris, 1st half of the 14th c. The State Hermitage Museum, Sankt Petersburg. Phot. after: R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, New York 1933, pp. 55–56, pl. 89

Béroul.[23] Various episodes from this romance were illustrated on the previously mentioned composite caskets. In eight cases, there is a depiction of the most popular episode from the legend, called the *Tryst beneath the tree*, when the lovers are spied on from the tree by the jealous King Mark. The Tristan and Iseult scene depicted on the 'Cluny casket' in Paris is very unusual and comes from the short, late 12th-century poem *La Folie Tristan* (*Tristan's Madness*), surviving in only two known copies.[24] Carns's main argument supporting her theory is based upon the interpretation of the scene in which the knight is carrying the lady across the river on a horse (first scene from the left on the front panel, Fig. 4). In the romance, Tristan, disguised as a leper, pretended to be a beggar on the bank of the Malpas River. Queen Iseult was supposed to give her oath before King Mark and King Arthur concerning her not yet proven adultery. She recognised Tristan and commanded him to carry her across the river. It was only then that she could swear her ambiguous oath: 'So help me God and St. Hilary, and by these relics, this holy place, the relics that are not here and all the relics there are in the world, I swear that no man ever came between my thighs except the leper who carried me on his back across the ford, and my husband, King Mark'.[25] The image on the 'Baird casket' features a knight and a lady wearing a wimple, which is a typical attribute of married women. On the so-called 'Tristan casket I' in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg[26], the Malpas scene is also shown [Fig. 7]. However, Tristan is depicted as a leper (or a pilgrim), not a knight as on the 'Baird casket' – he wears a hat, a satchel and a short tunic, and just as in the text, Iseult is sitting on his shoulders, not on a horse. Seeing how carefully this scene was illustrated on the 'Tristan casket I', it is rather odd that on the 'Baird casket' the sculptor changed almost all the determining details, such as Tristan's leper costume, Iseult's crown and her distinctive position. There is a possibility that this scene of a river crossing was derived from an entirely different text or that it shows one of the *scènes galantes* that appear on the lids of the other composite caskets. The motif of the pair of lovers riding together on horseback was quite frequently used in gothic ivories and appears, for example, on the left side of the lid of the 'Hedwig casket' [Fig. 8].

The two remaining scenes, on the left side of the casket and second to the left on the front panel, are even trickier to interpret. They have been linked to the Tristan and Iseult romance as well, but this interpretation is mainly based on the attribution of the Malpas scene. The left side panel shows a tournament or a duel between two knights [Fig. 9]. According to Carns, it could depict the moment of the story in which Tristan, soon after Iseult's ambiguous oath, dressed up as a Black Knight and took part in the tournament organised by King Arthur and King

[23] Béroul's poem *Le Roman de Tristan* is known as the vulgar version of the legend and was most likely written in the second half of the 12th century.

[24] More on this motif see: P.M. Carns, 'Playing the Fool: La Folie Tristan on Two French Gothic Ivories', *Sculpture Journal*, 23, 2014, no. 1, pp. 51–63.

[25] R. Hexter, *Equivocal Oaths and Ordeals in Medieval Literature*, New York, 1975, p. 19.

[26] Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. F 60. The scene of the crossing was shown on the back plaque of the casket, next to the scene illustrating Iseult's ambiguous oath. For more on this casket, see: R.S. Loomis, 'The Tristran and Perceval Caskets Illustrated', *Romanic Review*, 8, 1917, no. 2, figs. 1–5, p. 196–209.

8. *Attack on the Castle of Love*, *Tournament*, *scènes galantes*, lid of the composite casket, Paris 1300–1320. Cracow cathedral treasury. Phot. public domain

Mark.[27] Duels between two or more knights appear in almost every medieval romance, as they were an important element of courtly rituals and life. Assuming that these scenes concern the Tristan and Iseult story, the image following the knight and lady on a horse could show Tristan meeting with his squire and his friend Governal after the events at Malpas [Fig. 4]. This could be supported by the fact that a man in a hooded cape (a squire?) holds the harness of the approaching horse. Governal and Tristan rescuing Iseult, and riding off on a horse, were shown in a manuscript with two stories: *Roman du Bon Chevalier Tristan* and *Fils au Bon Roy Meliadus de Leonois*,[28] dated ca. 1320 [Fig. 10]. These scenes will most definitely need further investigation, as I have not yet been able to find a convincing interpretation

Two other scenes depicted on the lid and back panel of the 'Baird casket' have been briefly mentioned, and just like the previous episodes, they are an iconographic rarity. The lid shows a group of wild men kidnapping damsels and imprisoning them in a castle guarded by a lion [Fig. 11]. In the next two sections, the damsels are being rescued by several young knights, who later fight off the wild men. Roger S. Loomis recognised the scene as a quite rare variant of the *Attack on the Castle of Love*,[29] an allegorical theme that is featured on many secular ivories, composite caskets included. According to Loomis, this motif could derive from real medieval festive games, in which men dressed up as wild men or beasts and kidnapped their beloved and other young ladies from the town.[30] People dressed up as wild men were an important element of medieval carnivals, especially in 15th and 16th century Germany (e.g., the Schembartlauf Festival in Nuremberg), but it is likely that this custom had much older origins.[31] The wild men or *woodwoses* were often the main heroes of folk plays and medieval theatre, which probably originated at the beginning of the 13th century. Robert H. Goldsmith mentions two plays that took place during Pentecost in Padua in 1208 (*Magnus ludus de homine salvatico*) and 1224, which involved people dressed up as wild men. Such practices were known even in royal circles. In the inventory of King Edward III's purchases, there is mention of a '*capite de wodewose*', which was

[27] *Lyon & Turnbull* (as in note 2).

[28] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, MS. Ludwig XV 5, fol. 91.

[29] R.S. Loomis, 'The Allegorical Siege in the Art of the Middle Ages', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 23, 1919, no. 3, pp. 255–269.

[30] Ibidem, p. 265.

[31] S. Kinser, 'Presentation and Representation: Carnival at Nuremberg, 1450–1550', *Representations*, 15, 1986, pp. 1–41.

9. *Duel / Tournament*, left side of the casket, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?). Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

a prop ordered for the 1348 Christmas play at Otford in Kent.[32] Probably the most famous of these events, due to its tragic outcome, was the so-called *Bal des Ardents* (or *Bal des Sauvages*) in 1393 which took place in the Hôtel Saint-Pol, Charles VI's residence in Paris.[33] The rising popularity of two texts – *Roman d'Alexandre* (after 1177) and *Marvels of the East* (ca. 1000) – could also be responsible for spreading the wild man theme. The first work recounted Alexander the Great's conquest of the East, and the second described the many fantastic beasts and species supposedly living in the East.[34] In numerous quests, Alexander and his companions encountered some wild men (*homines agrestes*), and these episodes were often depicted in the illuminated copies of the *Roman d'Alexandre* (e.g., in the Bodleian Library in Oxford).[35]

The juxtaposition of knights and wild men on the 'Baird casket' was certainly not accidental. Wild men were considered lustful and unrestrained, as opposed to knights who lived by the chivalric code, following the rules imposed by medieval society. Wild men, though lustful, could not develop love and adoration towards women – those emotions were shared exclusively between a lady and a knight.[36] However, in the written and oral tradition, there were some cases of knights and heroes becoming wild men due to heartbreak or failed courtship, e.g., Lancelot and Hercules.[37] A wild man, once civilised, could become a great warrior and a knight, and as Richard Bernheimer has stated, the lines between wildness

[32] R. Hillis Goldsmith, 'The Wild Man on the English Stage', *The Modern Language Review*, 53, 1958, no. 4, p. 481, see also: R. Lima, *Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama*, Lexington, 2005, p. 55.

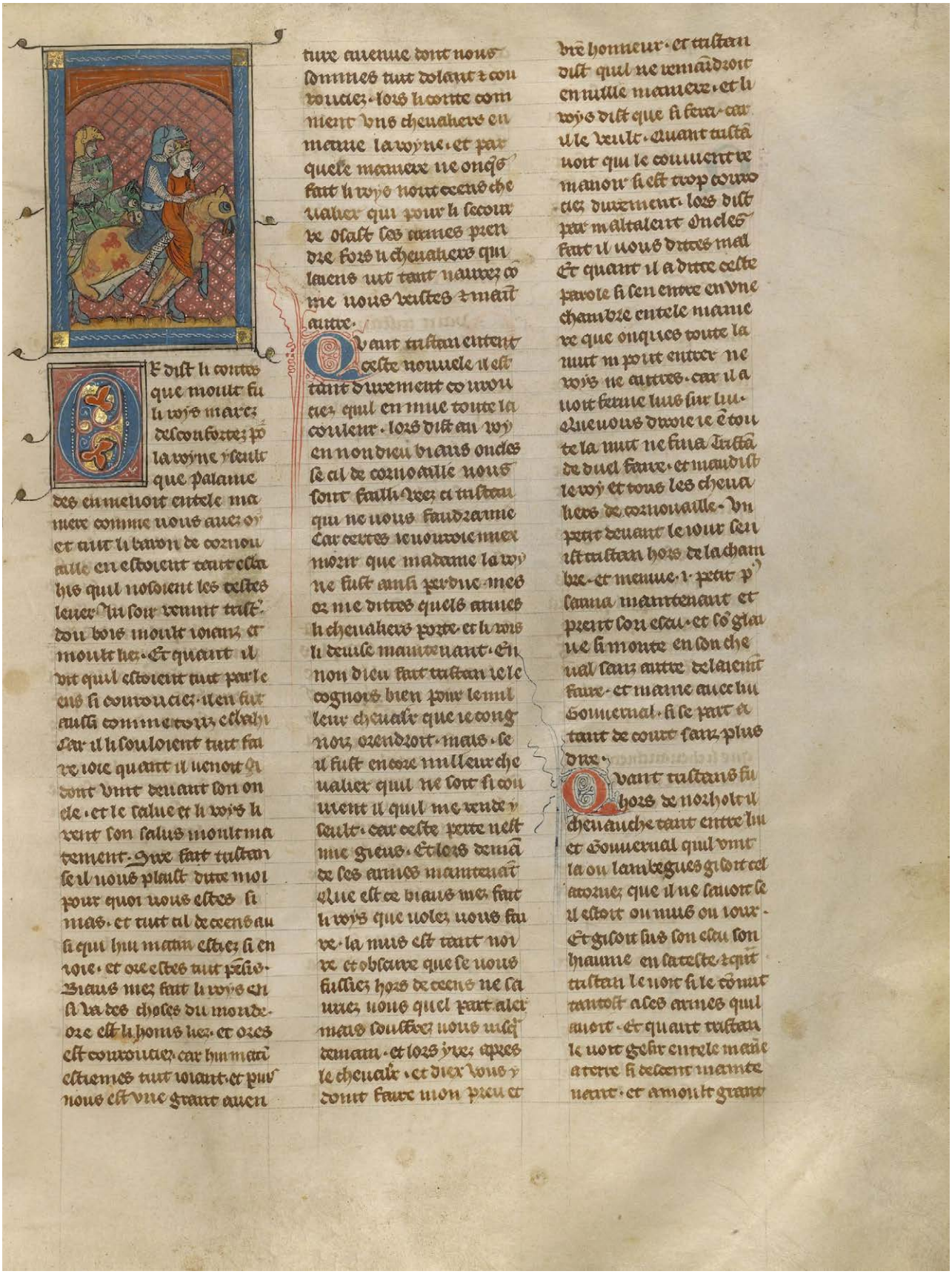
[33] The event was described in the fourth book of *Froissart's Chronicles*. The King of France, Charles VI, and his companions dressed up in costumes and masks made of linen and foliage soaked in resin. The material of their clothing caught fire from a torch. Four of the courtiers were burnt alive as they were bound to each other by a rope or a chain. The king survived as he was rescued by his aunt, Joan, Duchess of Berry. For more, see B. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, New York, 1978, pp. 503–505; J.R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France. Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's 'Contre les devineurs' (1411)*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1998, pp. 89–91.

[34] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology*, Cambridge, 1952, p. 89.

[35] Oxford, The Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 264, fol. 66v.

[36] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, p. 121 (as in note 34).

[37] D. Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Middle English Literature*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 189–196; R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, Fig. 27 (as in note 34).



10. *Tristan and Governal rescuing Iseult*, illumination in *Roman du Bon Chevalier Tristan, Fils au Bon Roy Meliadus de Leonois*, MS. Ludwig XV 5, fol. 91, Paris, ca. 1320–1340, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Phot. public domain

11. *Attack on the Castle of Love* with wild men, lid of the casket, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?), later mounts. Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

and knightship were often blurry.[38] The wild man became quite a popular motif in art from the beginning of the 14th century and was portrayed in widely different media, from decorative *drôleries* in the margins of illuminated manuscripts, enamels, and ivories to cathedral sculpture. The character of the wild man has most likely an ancient origin[39] and appeared simultaneously in western and eastern culture and folklore.[40] According to various ancient and medieval sources, the wild man could change his appearance (though he was always hairy), and he lived in seclusion, often in the woods or mountains, hiding in caves. His main traits were unstoppable lust and aggressiveness.[41] However, he was a friend of nature and possessed a considerable amount of knowledge unknown to humanity, therefore he also became a desirable subject of study by medieval scholars and alchemists.[42]

From at least the 13th century, wild men were most often depicted abducting a lady, and almost always competing with a human suitor. Most likely for the first time, a lady kidnapped by a wild man appears in the German poem *Diu Crône* (ca. 1220), and later e.g., in Antonio Pucci's Arthurian epic *Gismirante* (ca. 1350).[43] In the second story, Gismirante's lover is abducted by the wild man and held captive in his castle in the woods; she is forced to accompany her kidnapper, while she waits for the knight to rescue her.[44] Similar themes were illustrated in different media, including ivory.[45] The scene most often portrayed in the gothic ivories was the story of an old knight, Enyas, fighting with a wild man for a maiden's honour [Fig. 12].[46] The story is known only from one surviving example, which was written in the margin of the so-called Taymouth Hours.[47] The text says, *Ci uient* ***enyas*** *vn viel chiualer et rescout la damoysele* (*Here comes Enyas, an old knight, and rescues the damsel*). It is most likely that an original, longer romance of Enyas existed and was popular

[38] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, p. 18 (as in note 34).

[39] Most notable examples are King Nebuchadnezzar, who was cast among the beasts, and Enkidu, a friend of the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh, see: W.L. Moran, 'Ovid's Blanda Voluptas and the Humanization of Enkidu', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 50, 1991, pp. 121–27.

[40] A.O.H. Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', in *The Arthur of the Welsh. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh literature*, eds. A.O.H. Jarman et. al., Cardiff, 1991, pp. 117–45, see also: D.A. Wells, *The Wild Man from the Epic of Gilgamesh to Hartmann von Aues Iwein*, Belfast, 1975.

[41] G. Mobley, 'The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116, 1997, no. 2, pp. 218–219.

[42] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, pp. 9,10, 25, 26, 121 (as in note 34).

[43] M. Bendinelli Predelli, *Two cantari by Antonio Pucci*, https://www.academia.edu/34043530/Two_cantari_by_Antonio_Pucci_.pdf (last modified 13 April 2022), see also: eadem, 'Arthurian Material in Italian Cantari', in *The Arthur of the Italians: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture*, eds. G. Allaire, F.R. Psaki, Cardiff, 2014, pp. 105–120.

[44] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, p. 126 (as in note 34).

[45] Wild men were often depicted on the German *Minnekästchen* – small wedding caskets made mostly of wood.

[46] R.S. Loomis, 'A Phantom Tale of Female Ingratitude', *Modern Philology*, 14, 1917, no. 12, pp. 750–755.

[47] London, The British Library, Yates Thompson MS 12, 63 r.

12. *Enyas battling the wild man* / *Galahad receiving the keys to the Castle of Maidens*, right side of the composite casket, Paris, 1310–1330. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Phot. public domain

in courtly circles, but did not survive to our times.[48] Another common Arthurian poem featuring the wild man was Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain, ou le Chevalier du Lion*. In this story, Yvain meets *l'homme sauvage* at a fountain during one of his adventures.[49]

The *Attack on the Castle of Love,* including wild men, the motif mentioned earlier, appears on only a few Gothic ivories, apart from the 'Baird casket'. A similar but less elaborate episode showing a single damsel being abducted by two wild men and then rescued by a knight is depicted on the side panel of the now destroyed casket in the Louvre, dated ca. 1340–1350.[50] On this panel, there is also a depiction of a lion, connecting the Louvre and 'Baird' caskets.[51] In the matter of composition, scenes more similar to the 'Baird casket' are those on the panels of the so-called 'Academy casket'. Unfortunately, those panels are known today only from 18th century reproductions.[52] On the 'Academy casket' the wild men who abducted the damsels are punished by the knights for their boldness [Fig. 13]. In the Museo Nazionale del Bargello there is also a mirror cover (ca. 1340–1360)[53] that depicts a group of

[48] R.S. Loomis, *A Phantom Tale*, p. 754 (as in note 46).

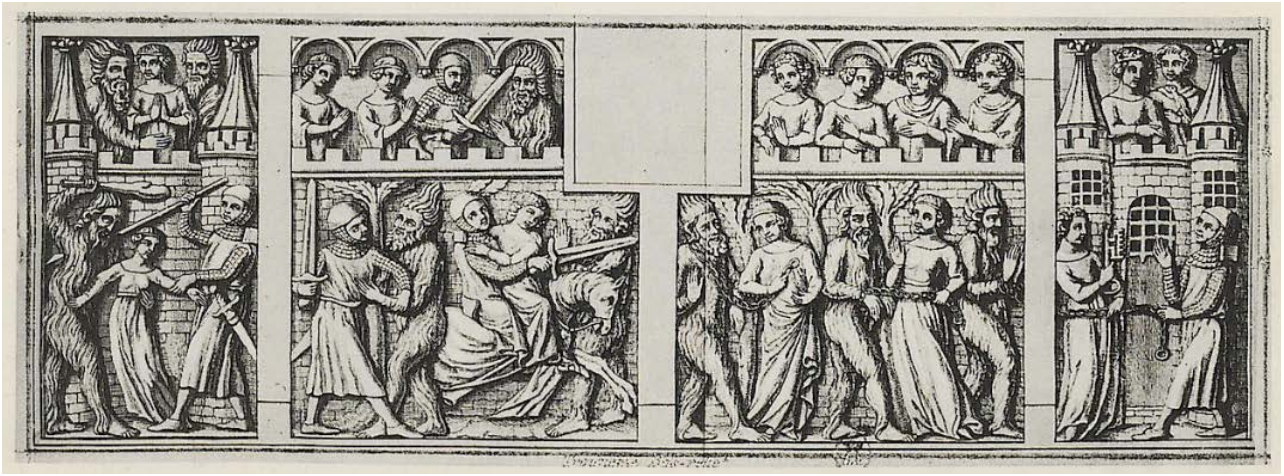
[49] T. Hunt, 'Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. N.J. Lacy et al., Cambridge, 2005 [=*Arthurian Studies* 62], pp. 156–168. The scene of Yvain's meeting with a wild man appears on a few ivories, e.g. one side of the casket in the British Museum, London (inv. no. 1855,1201.37, Dalton 369). See: J.A. Rushing, 'Adventure in the Service of Love: Yvain on a Fourteenth-Century Ivory Panel', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 61, 1998, no. 1, pp. 55–65.

[50] Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. OA 10960.

[51] Wild men were often associated with lions, and they sometimes appear together in the iconography as each other's companions or enemies, e.g., on misericord in Saint Andrew cathedral in Norton, Suffolk (early 15th century).

[52] Only one fragment of this casket has survived and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (inv. no. 2003.131.2). The casket was already dismantled in 1745, but all the panels were kept together in Charles Gros de Boze's collection in Paris, see: L. De Ravalière, 'Explications de quelques bas-reliefs en ivoire', in *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, vol. 18, ed. C. Gros de Boze et al., Paris, 1753, pp. 322–323, five plates facing p. 322. See also: G.B. Passeri, 'Monumenta sacra eburnean', in F. Gori, *Thesaurus Veterum Diptychorum Consularium et Ecclesiasticorum*, Florence, 1759, III, pl. XXII.

[53] R.H. Randall, 'Medieval Ivories in the Romance Tradition', *Gesta*, 28, 1989, pp. 30–40, esp. 34, fig. 8; see also: *Gli Avori del Museo*



13. *Wild men kidnaping damsels / Damsels leading the wild men on the leash*, side panel of the so-called '*casket de l'Académie',* Paris, ca. 1300––1320 (?). Object lost. Phot. after: R. Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques francais*, Paris, 1924, III, pl. CCXX, no. 1290

knights attacking a castle defended by wild men, and one lady, who is their prisoner.[54] It resembles one of the miniatures in the *L'histoire du Roi Alexandre*, dated ca. 1338––1344,[55] in which Alexander and his knights pursue wild men hunting in the river. On the Bargello mirror cover the wild men, just like the knights, hold crossbows, which makes them seem more civilised than the wild men on the 'Baird casket', who are armed only with rough clubs.

The scenes of wild men kidnapping maidens, and maidens being rescued, are most likely connected to the scene depicted on the back panel of the 'Baird casket', where the procession of chained wild men is being led by damsels and knights to the seated ruler and his court [Fig. 14]. One of the imprisoned wild men has a crown, which is a very unusual attribute for these creatures, especially in 14th-century art. Sometimes wild men and women can be seen wearing foliage crowns, a mockery of the regal symbol, but these featured more often in the 15th and 16th centuries. This scene, and the one on the lid, could be interpreted as the triumph of men and their knighthood over savagery and ferocity, identified as the main traits of every wild man. Women were often seen as the only true 'tamers' of the *wodewoses*, keeping them on a leash,[56] especially in the late medieval art north of the Alps (such as the Swiss tapestry, ca. 1400, in the National Museum in Copenhagen[57] and a *Minnekästchen* dated 1400–1450, in the Historical Museum in Basel[58]). A similar scene was also depicted on the 'Academy casket' [Fig. 13]. The wild men do not wear crowns here as they do on the 'Baird casket', but they are similarly bound and led by the women to be shown to the king and the queen in the castle. In the cathedral of Schwerin in Mecklenburg there is a 14th century (ca. 1375) Flemish brass double tomb plate of Bishop Gottfried I and Bishop Friedrich II von Bülow, with illustrations quite similar to both the wild men scenes on the 'Baird casket'. The effigies of the bishops support their feet on consoles decorated with scenes of wild men. On the first console, wild men have kidnapped a lady from her human lover and are delivering her to their ruler, a seated wild man wearing a crown, accompanied by a lion [Fig. 15]. On the second console, a banquet of wild men is shown, and in the middle, there is also a wild man wearing a crown [Fig. 16].[59] In both cases, the Schwerin tomb and the 'Baird casket', the wild men are shown as a group, society or even political organisation.[60] It seems that similar scenes were popular in funerary sculptures, especially from Flemish workshops, since in the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Cologne there is also a brass plate of Wicbold von Dobilstein, Bishop of Kulm (ca. 1398), from Altenberg Cathedral, decorated with wild men who are accompanied by lions.[61] On the double bronze tomb plate of Margharita and Johannes van Soest in Saint John the Baptist's church in Toruń (ca. 1358) there is a depiction of wild men at a banquet, located beneath the couple's feet as well[62].

Nazionale del Bargello, ed. I. Ciseri, Milano, 2018, p. 304–305, cat. no. VIII.50.

[54] Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. no. 130 Carrand.

[55] Oxford, The Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 264, fol. 63v.

[56] T. Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, New York, 1980, p. 89, cat. no. 17, figs. 51–52.

[57] Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet, inv. no. 9777.

[58] Basel, Historisches Museum, inv. no. 1870.508.

[59] H. Eichler, 'Flandrische gravierte Metallgrabplatten des XIV. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, 54, 1933, pp. 199–220, see also: S. Badham, S. Oosterwijk, '*Monumentum aere perennius*?, Precious-metal effigial tomb monuments in Europe 1080–1430', *Church Monuments*, 30, 2015, pp. 10.

[60] R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, pp. 127–128 (as in note 34). Berheimer argues that this motif could show some similarities between the wild men and dwarves.

[61] H. Eichler, 'A Flemish Brass of 1398', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 61, 1932, no. 353, pp. 84–87.

[62] An interesting approach to the wild men in funerary sculpture theme was proposed by Reinhold Heuer. According to him, "Northern people" believed that the human spirit, after death, travelled for three days before it reached its destination, visiting an enchanted forest inhabited by wild animals and wild men. The

14. *Wild men captured by damsels and knights*, back panel of the casket, Paris (?), 1st quarter of the 14th c. (?), later mounts. Private collection. Phot. Lyon & Turnbull Edinburgh

However, the scene on the back panel of the 'Baird casket' could also have a literary source, as the other episodes shown on the side panels are of Arthurian legend origin. It could have been derived from the late 13th or early 14th-century anonymous French *chanson de geste* called *Valentin et Sansnom*.[63] This poem is part of the so-called *Matter of France* (*Matière de France* or *Cycle carolingien*), an ensemble of texts (*chansons de geste*, legends, etc.) of French origin,[64] similar to the *Matter of Britain* or *Matter of Rome*. Unfortunately, the poem did not survive in the original version and is known mostly from its later adaptation *Valentine et Orson* (ca. 1475), as well as German (*Valentin und Namelos*) and Netherlandish translations.[65] The *roman* tells the story of twin brothers, the sons of Bellisant (or sometimes Phila), sister of Frankish King Pepin, and her husband, Byzantine Emperor Alexander. Due to malign rumours of her unfaithfulness, Bellisant was expelled from Alexander's court, and on her way to join Pepin, she gave birth to twins in the Orlean forest. Unfortunately, one of them was kidnapped by a bear, and when Bellisant ran after the animal to rescue the child, the other twin was discovered alone, taken in and raised at Pepin's court to be a knight. Orson, the twin taken by the bear, was raised in the woods and became a wild man. In the story, he is ultimately captured by his brother Valentine and taken

king of the wild men was supposed to be a gatekeeper of Paradise, see: R. Heuer, *Thorner Kunstaltertümer*, I, Thorn 1916, p. 13, see also: S. Kobielus, 'Treści ideowe z płyty nagrobnej małżonków von Soest z kościoła św. Jana w Toruniu', *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo*, 17, 1991, 95–123.

[63] B. Ferrari, 'Expressions figurées dans le roman de Valentin et Orson', *Le Moyen Français*, 60–61, 2007, p. 233–246.

[64] *Matter of France* concerned the topic of 'original' French heroes (e.g., Charlemagne, Roland etc.), as opposed to the *Matter of Britain*, which contained stories of the Arthurian knights of British origin.

[65] A. Haggerty Krappe, 'Valentine and Orson', *Modern Language Notes*, 48, 1933, no. 7, pp. 493–498.

15. *Wild men abducting a lady*, double tomb plate of bishops Gottfried I and Friedrich II von Bülow, Flanders, ca. 1375, Schwerin cathedral. Phot. after: R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology*, Cambridge, 1952, pl. 33

to King Pepin to be christened. Then Valentine and Orson find out that they are, in fact, brothers and experience many adventures together.[66] Depictions of this romance are very rare in 14th-century art; they became much more popular in the 15th and 16th centuries, especially in Germany and the Netherlands, due to the translations of the original *chanson de geste*. However, the scene on the back panel of the 'Baird casket' could be a depiction of the episode in the story in which Valentine captures his brother Orson in the woods. The crown on the wild man's head could highlight the fact that Orson was of noble birth and an emperor's son. The seated ruler could be Valentine himself (shown wearing the crown for the same reason as Orson) or, more likely, King Pepin. The wild man wearing a crown (Orson) and his feral companions could be being led, as in the story, to be christened by the king. In later, mainly German and Netherlandish art, there are sometimes depictions of Valentine capturing Orson, e.g., a woodcut after Peter Breughel the Elder (*The Wild Man or the Masquerade of Orson and Valentine*).[67]

The depicted scene could also be derived from the late 12th or early 13th-century poem attributed to Robert de Boron called *L'Ystoire de Saint Graal et la vie de Merlin*.[68] This romance was divided into three parts, two concerning the story of the Grail, linked together by a third, shorter story about King Arthur's (or, in some cases, Julius Caesar's) dream, which could be interpreted only by a wild man. Arthur's daughter Grisandoles, as a pure-hearted virgin, managed to capture a wild man, who then turned out to be Merlin in disguise.[69] In the early Arthurian work *Vita Merlini* (c. 1148), Geoffrey of Monmouth even assumes that Merlin became a wild man, not that he was simply disguised as one. In this work, Monmouth combined two different literary characters of Merlin – Ambrosius and Caledonius. The second sorcerer, the one who became mad and lived the rest of his life as a wild man, was believed to live in the times of King Arthur.[70] The seated man on the ivory casket could represent King Arthur (or Caesar), to whom the wild man is being led by the king's daughter and her courtiers. This interpretation could be supported by the scenes from the history of the Holy Grail that appear on the 'Baird casket'.

[66] B. Ferrari, 'Expressions figurées dans le roman', p. 233 (as ine note 63); For a closer study see also: A. Dickinson, *Valentine and Orson. A study in Late Mediaeval Romance*, New York, 1929.

[67] New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 26.72.45.

[68] *Lestoire de Merlin: The Volgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. O.H. Sommer, Washington 1908, II.

[69] T. Husband, *The Wild Man*, pp. 59–61, cat. no. 8 (as in note 56).

[70] N. Thomas, 'The Celtic Wild Man Tradition and Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Vita Merlini': Madness or 'Contempus Mundi'?', Arthuriana, 10, 2000, no. 1: *Essays on Merlin*, pp. 27–42.

16. *Wild-men banquet*, double tomb plate of bishops Gottfried I and Friedrich II von Bülow, Flanders, ca. 1375, Schwerin cathedral. Phot. after: R. Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology*, Cambridge, 1952, pl. 33

The unique iconography of the 'Baird casket', which seems to have been inspired by numerous (more or less identifiable) medieval texts and practices, most likely marks this piece as a tenth example of the so-called 'composite caskets' group. The composite caskets are early 14th century ivory *coffrets* which were first described by Raymond Koechlin in 1924.[71] The name of the group is derived from the various scenes depicted on the side panels of the coffers, inspired by popular, mostly secular literature (romances, poems and *lais*), but in some cases also religious texts (*apocrypha* or *exempla*), such as the unusual story of Solomon's judgement of three sons.[72] In his *magnum opus*, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Koechlin introduced seven fully preserved caskets with similar characteristics: the 'Hedwig casket' in the Cracow cathedral treasury [Fig. 17], and those in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum (both in London), the Museo Nazionale del Bargello (Florence), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City), the Charles Warde collection in Westerham, Kent (now at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham) and the Economos Collection in London (acquired by Henry Walters in 1923, since 1931 held at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland)[73]. Since Koechlin's publication, other composite caskets have appeared on the market. In 1945, one was found in a junk shop in Brighton and was later a part of the Lord Gort collection at Bunratty Castle in Ireland (since 1973 in the Winnipeg Art Gallery).[74] Another was purchased by the Musée de Cluny in Paris in 2007 from the François Baverey collection in Lyon.[75] In various museums and col-

[71] R. Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, Paris 1924, I, pp. 484––508, esp. p. 485.

[72] This scene was depicted only on the front panel of the Cluny casket. For more on this motif see, W. Stechow, 'Shooting at Father's Corpse', *The Art Bulletin*, 24, 1942, no. 3, pp. 213–225.

[73] Cracow cathedral treasury, inv. no. WKW/eIII/05; London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. 148-1866; London, British Museum, inv. no. 1856,0623 (Dalton 368); Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. no. 123 C; Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, inv. no. 39.26; Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, inv. no. 71.264.

[74] Winnipeg, Winnipeg Art Gallery, inv. no. G-73-60, see: D.J. Ross, 'Allegory and Romance on the Medieval French Marriage Casket', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11, 1948, pp. 112––142.

[75] Paris, Musée de Cluny, inv. no. Cl. 23840.

17. Composite casket with scenes from various romances, Paris, ca. 1300–1320. Cracow cathedral treasury. Phot. public domain

lections, there are also some loose fragments and panels, with iconography indicating their connection to the composite group.[76] The composite caskets, due to their elaborate and erudite iconography and exceptionally good quality of carved decoration, are now considered, despite many analogical scenes, to be products of not one but rather several Parisian workshops. These *ateliers* were considered to be the most skilled in the ivories manufacture in the 13th and 14th centuries. Quite diverse styles of reliefs, as well as the nuanced iconography, indicate that these caskets should be dated at least from the beginning of the 14th century (e.g., the 'Cluny casket', dated ca. 1300–1320) to the 1330s or even the 1340s.[77]

Although the iconography of the 'Baird casket' differs from that of the other nine *coffrets composites* (whose scenes, with few exceptions, correspond with each other), it shares with them the same idea of depicting scenes of courtly rituals and events from various medieval romances and legends (mostly by Chrétien de Troyes), as well as a few moralising and satiric stories popular in the 14th century, e.g., Aristotle ridden by Campaspe, or a similar story of Virgil in the basket, both falling within the 'power of women' topos. This practice, called *compilatio*, consisted of grouping various texts on related topics into one elaborate anthology. The sources of this practice can be found in the early Middle Ages, but it was not widely adopted until the 12th century, when it was used for creating ready-made references in religious texts, e.g. sermons.[78] At the beginning of the 14th century, the time when the caskets were made, this custom was also widely known in relation to secular literature: Paula M. Carns recalled the manu-

[76] A thorough search in the Gothic Ivories Project database revealed about sixteen fragments (lids and side panels), most likely remnants of now lost composite caskets. The number of surviving pieces indicate that the group was larger than anticipated and that these objects were perhaps a more common phenomenon.

[77] According to Élisabeth Antoine, the iconography of the Cluny casket, as well as its style (soberness of the drapery and Tristan's hooded cloak) indicates that the casket is older than other *coffrets composites*, see: É. Antoine, 'Casket: Scenes from Romances', in *Imagining the Past in France. History in Manuscript Painting 1250–1500* [exhibition catalogue], eds. E. Morrison, A.D. Hedeman, Los Angeles, 2010, pp. 284–286, cat. no. 56. See also: P. williamson, G. davies, *Medieval Ivory Carvings 1200–1550*, London, 2014, II, no. 227. For a more thorough study on dating and style of the composite caskets group see: D.J. Ross, 'Allegory and Romance', pp. 134–139 (as in note 74).

[78] P.M. Carns, 'Compilatio in Ivory: The Composite Casket in the Metropolitan Museum', *Gesta*, 44, 2005, no. 2, pp. 83–85, see also: L. Walters, 'Le rôle du scribe dans l'organisation des manuscrits des romans de Chrétien de Troyes', *Romania*, 106, 1985, pp. 308–315.

script in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ca. 1300, that is structured around several popular Arthurian and ancient stories from various authors, such as *Erec et Enide*, *Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Le Roman de Troie* etc.[79] In the case of the *coffrets composites*, the main topic linking all the scenes is love, imagined in numerous stages and of different natures. Those depictions and ideas of love often complement each other, but are set mostly in contrast with one another. Perhaps the purpose of making this '*compilatio* in ivory', as Carns put it, was to instruct the person to be given the casket (most likely a young lady entering adulthood) on many aspects of love – all of them in some way idealistic, but in many cases contemptible and naive, the opposite of the mature and socially acceptable love that the highborn lady, the owner of the casket, should expect in her married life.[80]

In the matter of the composition, the scenes on the 'Baird casket' are displayed in a manner quite similar to the other examples from the 'composite' group. The front panel of the casket is divided into four parts, concerning two separate themes – the Tristan and Iseult story (?) and the Grail storyline. Each side panel of the casket illustrates a single scene, which is a deviation from most of the pieces.[81] The back panel of the 'Baird casket' is organised similarly to the back of the 'Lord Gort casket' in the Winnipeg Art Gallery, which likely pictures Chrétien de Troyes' other hero, the knight Cligès, between two emperors.[82] Just as in the case of the 'Gort casket', the back panel of the 'Baird casket' is not partitioned into different storylines – one theme occupies the whole panel.[83]

The style of the casket hasn't been discussed yet. According to the auction house, the piece should be attributed to the Parisian workshop, and dated ca. 1330. Just as on the other *coffrets composites*, the knights on the 'Baird casket' wear armour components typical for the first quarter of the 14th century, such as bascinet helmets with visors and the decorative, square (sometimes round) shoulder plates called ailettes, which were depicted less frequently in art after 1325.[84] The characters on the 'Baird casket' were carved carefully and precisely, especially in the scenes on the lid and on the front panel. Despite the casket's partial damage and abrasion of the reliefs, the good quality of the carved decoration indicates a skilled artist, who was likely familiar with the contemporary monumental (stone and wooden) and funerary sculpture of the Île-de-France and Normandy. The characters are well-proportioned, with faces rather standardized, however they present some distinctive traits, such as slightly swollen eyelids (making their eyes seem almost cat-like) with visible eyeballs, as well as wide noses with prominent eyebrow arches – similar features are also present in the case of the composite casket in the British Museum.[85] The faces of the figures on the 'Baird casket' resemble some of the works from the first quarter of the 14th century, such as e.g., a carved marble group illustrating the preaching of Saint Denis, from the Saint-Denis abbey church (now in the Louvre, dat. 1300–1325).[86] The carved decoration of the 'Baird casket' is slightly less precise and detailed than in some of the other composite caskets (e.g., the casket in the Victoria & Albert Museum), but the armour of the knights and the characters' physiognomies, as well as the unusual iconography, indicate that the casket was likely made in the first quarter of the 14th century. Just like the other *coffrets composites*, this piece was possibly executed in one of the capital workshops that were familiar with the written texts, illuminated manuscripts and iconographic tradition. What could also point to Paris as the origin of our casket is the proximity of an intellectual center (the University of Paris), and the steady presence of the royal court, and therefore of courtiers interested in displaying their erudition and ambitions. Attribution of the 'Baird' piece to one of these, unfortunately not yet identified,

[79] P.M. Carns, 'Compilatio in Ivory', p. 70 (as in note 78). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fr. 1450. On the manuscript see: *Gallica*, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9060712k.image (last modified 5 April 2022).

[80] This idea was explored by Emily Ott in an unpublished conference paper, available via Academia.edu, see: E. Ott, *French Composite Caskets and the Loss of Innocence*, https://www.academia.edu/7705883/French_Composite_Caskets_and_the_Loss_of_Innocence (last modified 5 April 2022).

[81] The exceptions are both caskets in London, the casket in Baltimore and the casket in Birmingham, which feature a single scene on the right-side panel.

[82] The scene was recognized by Paula Carns, see: eadem, 'A Curious Collection in Ivory. The Lord Gort Casket', in *Collections in Context*, eds. K. Fresco, A.D. Hedeman, Ohio, 2012, pp. 246–274 (esp. 258–259). Richard A. Leson argued that the depicted scene could be derived from the *Histoire d'Outremer* by William of Tyre, see more: idem, 'Chivalry and Alterity. Saladin and the Remembrance of Crusade in a Walters Histoire d'Outremer', *Journal of the Walters Art Museum*, 68/69, 2010/2011, pp. 87–96.

[83] However, as Paula Carns argued, not the composition or programme, but rather the way the scenes were set together, makes the casket 'composite', see: eadem, 'A Curious Collection in Ivory', p. 247–248 (as in note 82).

[84] Élisabeth Antoine-König argued that those components of medieval armour that evolved quickly during the first quarter of the 14th century should be seen as a dating element for some of the medieval ivories, see more: É. Antoine-König, 'The Return of Gawain. Thoughts on Composite Caskets in the Light of Some Recent Acquisitions', in *A Reservoir of Ideas. Essays in Honour of Paul Williamson*, eds. G. Davies, E. Townsend, London, 2017, pp. 161–162.

[85] London, British Museum, inv no. 1856,0623 (Dalton 368).

[86] The rounded and plump faces of the women kidnapped by the wild men on the 'Baird casket' resemble the praying ladies from the Saint-Denis group. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. RF 462 A/B. See more: F. Baron, 'Sculptures', in *L'art au temps des Rois Maudits. Philippe le Bel et ses fils 1285–1328* [exhibition catalogue], eds. D. Gaborit-Chopin et al., Paris, 1998, pp. 133–134, cat no. 78.

Parisian workshops seems therefore most plausible at the moment.

The final interpretation of the scenes on the 'Baird casket', particularly those featuring wild men themes, is still open for discussion. Even if the story presented on the 'Baird casket' does not depict the legends of Valentine and Orson or Merlin, it has certainly arisen from the same tradition of contrasting two aspects of man: one courtly and chivalric and the other wild and unrestrained, sometimes appearing within the same person, as stated above. The wild man could have been a metaphor for a person as a mindless slave of his lust or an allegory of the primitive side of human nature. The scenes in which the wild man is a kidnapper and the knight a saviour most likely have a moralising tone and should be treated as the *exemplum*, because giving oneself up to lust and other pleasures was considered contemptible and shameful in the times when the casket was executed. The other *coffrets composites*, besides being examples of love-themed precious objects, were full of moralising and instructive motifs such as the story of Aristotle and Campaspe (warning [older] men against falling in love with younger women) and King Solomon and the trial of the sons (showing the importance of parent-child love). In the case of the 'Baird casket', the scenes dedicated to the wild man may have been contrasted with the Grail theme and its visibly Christian undertones. Galahad, as the virgin knight and protector of the ladies, could be contrasted with the wild men, but with the Tristan and Iseult story as well, since the romance of the two lovers was forbidden and adulterous.

Certainly, the 'Baird casket' is a splendid piece and should be the topic of broader analysis due to its uniqueness among other medieval ivories. The iconographic programme of the casket, which is completely different from the other known examples of the *coffrets composites* group, and even other Gothic ivories, could indicate that the casket was a special commission, maybe a gift for a particular recipient. Thanks to the number of surviving medieval inventories, we know that ivory caskets were quite popular gifts and collectibles, owned by English and French royalty and nobility such as, e.g., King Edward I, Queen of France Clemence of Hungary,[87] the wife of Louis X, Machaut d'Artois and later Jean, Duke of Berry, who owned about nine small ivory caskets, decorated with various scenes and ornaments.[88] Unlike the other composite caskets, the 'Baird casket' does not follow known and previously used episodes from popular romances, but depicts some less obvious and less common scenes, including the vision of the Holy Grail and the trial of the sword, as well as very rare (in the 14th century) wild men themes. We do not know the person behind this elaborate programme. Just as with the other *coffrets composites*, it was most likely a highly educated courtier, possibly connected to university circles, who was acquainted with various secular and religious, contemporary and earlier texts.

The 'Baird casket', which is currently in a private collection and not publicly accessible, raises numerous questions that have yet to be answered and will most definitely require further discussion in the future.

[87] M. Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion. The Inventory and Gift Giving of Queen Clemence de Hongrie*, Pennsylvania, 2019, p. 157, lot 156.

[88] *Inventories de Jean Duc de Berry (1401–1416)*, ed. J. Guiffrey, Paris, 1894, p. 273: *1014. Item, VII coffers d'yvoire à VI pans, à ymaiges eslevez, marquetez, fermans chascun à une clef.* and *1015. Item, de deux autres petis coffrez d'yvoire, fermans comme le precedens.* The small size of the caskets, in my opinion, disqualifies the Embriachi coffrets, which were considerably bigger than the ivory caskets from the first half of the 14th century.

SUMMARY

Elżbieta Musialik
A 14TH-CENTURY IVORY CASKET WITH SCENES FROM MEDIEVAL ROMANCES. THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE SO-CALLED *COFFRETS COMPOSITES* GROUP

The interest in gothic ivories has been gradually rising since the launching of the Gothic Ivories Project by the Courtlaud Institute of Art in 2008. Many unknown pieces have emerged, and some of them are still occasionally appearing on the art market. On 20 May 2021, the Scottish auction house Lyon and Turnbull sold to a private collector a gothic ivory casket. This ivory piece was not previously known to researchers – since the beginning of the 17th c. it had been in possession of one Scottish family, the Bairds of Auchmedden, and their descendants. The importance of the casket in the family tradition was based on a legend naming Thomas Baird, a minim friar in Besançon, Burgundy, as its sculptor. This precious family heirloom is a unique piece. Its iconography, centered around chivalric romances of the 12th and 13th centuries such as the quest for the Holy Grail and the romance of Tristan and Iseult, makes the casket a part of a broader group and the newest addition to the so-called composite casket group (fr. *coffrets composites*). The composite caskets were first described by Raymond Koechlin in 1924, and since then they have been the topic of many academic studies. With the new 'Baird casket', the group now consists of ten wholly preserved pieces, scattered in collections all over the world, including the cathedral treasury in Cracow.

The iconography of the 'Baird casket' differs from the other composite caskets, but the piece follows the same idea of compiling various medieval texts into one elaborate programme. The scenes depicted on the casket are very distinctive, illustrating less popular episodes from the Tristan and Iseult story, and the 13th c. romance *La Queste del Saint Graal*, featuring the new Grail hero, Galahad. This could indicate that this piece was a special commission. What makes the 'Baird casket' even more interesting is the scenes dedicated to wild men, depicted on the lid and back panel of the casket, which could have originated in medieval folklore or the written and oral tradition. These scenes are not featured on any other known preserved gothic ivories. In this study I would like to introduce the casket to a broader audience, and to present some ideas for interpretation of the scenes dedicated to the wild men, which were not discussed in detail before the object was put up for auction.