

## A jewelry box turned reliquary

“The bridal gift that became a relic container”

- carved bone and ivory, inlaid wood, iron
- 15th century
- Workshop of Northern Italy (Embriachi style)

A young couple belonging to the important Pallavicino and Coiro families was going to get married. The future bride received a precious jewelry box, containing wedding presents.

The bride later donated her jewelry box to San Donnino Cathedral, where its



extraordinary beauty was greatly appreciated. The precious box was used for containing relics, although now it does not contain any. It was not unusual for secular objects such as jewelry cases to become devotional items after serving their purpose as wedding present.

The jewelry box is made of different kinds of wood (boxwood, pear tree and poplar), painted and inlaid with a particular “Carthusian” technique; the interior is lined with pink silk. Its sides are decorated with small plates of ivory and carved bone representing men and women in gallant attitudes, protected on the corners by female figures armed with club and shield. The lid shows on the long sides couples of winged cupids floating around and holding a disk against a background of rose leaves; on its short sides are the crests of the married couple’s families.



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The Embriachi family was famous for the production of carved ivory objects. They worked in Florence and Venice from the end of the 14th to the middle of the 15th century.

**Carthusian (“alla certosina”) technique:** A decorative technique imported from Arabian artisans and preserved by the friars of Saint Bruno (founder of the Carthusians). It consists in carving wood in small geometrical dowels, which were later on put together without adhesive.

At first it was only used with wood. Later the most prestigious workshops began using it with ivory and mother of pearl.

**Embriachi o Obriachi (sec.XII):** Originally from Florence, this family moved to Venice after a political exile and created a workshop specialized in the use and decoration of ivory. They produced valuable objects, medium and small in size, that soon became very sought-after all over Europe.