Document generated on 10/11/2024 11:27 p.m.

RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

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Volume 32, Number 1-2, 2007

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069589ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1069589ar

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Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

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Cite this article

Bugslag, J. (2007). A “Lost” Ivory Casket in the Gort Collection at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *32*(1-2), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.7202/1069589ar

Article abstract

Après avoir été longtemps oublié des chercheurs, un coffret d’ivoire provenant de la collection Gort de la Winnipeg Art Gallery, vient d’être identifié. Il s’agit d’un rare exemple d’un coffret de type « composite », décoré de diverses scènes romanesques et allégoriques, à avoir survécu dans son intégrité. Les doutes quant à son authenticité demeurent sans fondement. Des photographies du coffret de la collection Gort découvertes dans les archives du Victoria and Albert Museum permettent de mieux saisir le lieu d’origine du coffret et mettent en évidence l’assemblage très particulier des pièces d’ivoire qui reprend, dans ses principes, celui du coffret de la Châtelaine de Vergi du British Museum. Nous analysons l’iconographie des scènes décorant le coffret en regard de la réception de l’oeuvre et du processus d’adaptation des sources littéraires vers la sculpture en relief. De plus, nous démontrons que les particularités iconographiques et stylistiques de ce coffret reflètent une distanciation du milieu parisien qui jouait un rôle de premier plan dans la production d’ivoires profanes au XIVe siècle. Le coffret de la collection Gort serait en effet le fruit d’un atelier régional. Bien que nous ne puissions localiser de façon précise cet atelier, nous pouvons affirmer, en nous basant sur des affinités stylistiques et iconographiques, qu’il a aussi produit les ivoires de Niort et de Saint- Pétersbourg.

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A "Lost" Ivory Casket in the Gort Collection at the Winnipeg Art Gallery

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Résumé

Après avoir été longtemps oublié des chercheurs, un coffret d'ivoire provenant de la collection Gort de la Winnipeg Art Gallery, vient d'être identifié. Il s'agit d'un rare exemple d'un coffret de type « composite », décoré de diverses scènes romanesques et allégoriques, à avoir survécu dans son intégrité. Les doutes quant à son authenticité demeurent sans fondement. Des photographies du coffret de la collection Gort découvertes dans les archives du Victoria and Albert Museum permettent de mieux saisir le lieu d'origine du coffret et mettent en évidence l'assemblage très particulier des pièces d'ivoire qui reprend, dans ses principes, celui du coffret de la Châtelaine de Vergi du British Museum. Nous analysons l'iconographie des scènes décorant le coffret en regard de la réception de l'œuvre et du processus d'adaptation des sources littéraires vers la sculpture en relief. De plus, nous démontrons que les particularités iconographiques et stylistiques de ce coffret reflètent une distanciation du milieu parisien qui jouait un rôle de premier plan dans la production d'ivoires profanes au XIVe siècle. Le coffret de la collection Gort serait en effet le fruit d'un atelier régional. Bien que nous ne puissions localiser de façon précise cet atelier, nous pouvons affirmer, en nous basant sur des affinités stylistiques et iconographiques, qu'il a aussi produit les ivoires de Niort et de Saint-Pétersbourg.

In the late 1940s an ivory casket came briefly to light before sinking once again into obscurity (fig. 1).[1] It now lies deep in the reserves of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.[2] Richard Randall can certainly be forgiven for not having included this work in his exemplary catalogue of medieval ivories in North American collections.[3] It is by far the oldest work of art held by the gallery and is entirely unexpected in a region of Canada not known for medieval collections. Moreover, it has not often been exhibited, and its fragile state of conservation has kept it out of public view for most of its recent history. Thus, even though the casket has been published, it has been "lost" to scholarship for some time.[4] It is now possible not only to reinstate this work among the small, precious group of complete secular ivory caskets that have survived from the fourteenth century, but also to interpret it as valuable evidence for the still little-known phenomenon of "provincial" ivory production.

The casket forms part of the Gort Collection, donated to the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1973 by an English nobleman, Lord Gort, and his wife, Lady Gort. It was brought to Canada from England in 1948 to be loaned anonymously to the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Montréal, but shortly thereafter it was transferred to the Winnipeg Art Gallery, once again on anonymous loan until its donation. The casket was apparently acquired by Lord Gort in ca. 1945, when he found it in a "Brighton junk shop."[5] There is a gap in the casket's history between this date and 1934, when it had been brought for evaluation to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where it was examined and photographed (fig. 2). At that time, the work belonged to a Miss Walker.[6] According to observations made at the Victoria and Albert Museum, a note then on the lid, written by John Hesketh Lethbridge, stated that the casket had come to his wife through her mother, Lady Hoare of Aclands. These are well-known Devon families. John Hesketh Lethbridge married Julia Hoare in 1827. Julia Hoare (b. 1800), in turn, was the daughter of Sir Henry Hugh Hoare and Maria Palmer Acland (1766–1845). It would thus seem that the provenance of the work can be traced back to this prominent family as early as the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

David Ross, who apparently never questioned the casket's authenticity, considered it Paris work from the first half of the fourteenth century.[7] Subsequently, however, questions of authenticity were raised. The gallery files currently list the casket as a French work of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, although it was formerly described as a seventeenth-century copy of a fourteenth-century original. Deletion of the reference to the work as a copy in the gallery files is undoubtedly based on a 1989 examination of the casket by Hans Nieuwdorp of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Antwerp; despite commenting on iconographic peculiarities, he judged it a genuine late medieval work.[8] Previously, however, in 1971, Ferdinand Eckhardt, the then director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, sent out photographs of the casket to knowledgeable experts, all of whom expressed some reservations about the authenticity of the piece. The most positive response came from Francis Salet at the Cluny Museum in Paris, who wrote: "It is a French piece undoubtedly of the fourteenth century, but really, I cannot in any manner guarantee the authenticity simply from viewing photographs."[9] More circumspect was Florens Deuchler, then at the Cloisters in New York, who wrote: "It is very hard to tell whether this ivory box is genuine or not without being able to look at the original. My first reaction was skeptical..."[10] The most acerbic response came from John Beckwith at the Victoria and Albert Museum, who wrote: "It is always difficult to give an opinion of an object from photographs, but I should say that the casket is probably French and not much earlier than the middle of the nineteenth century. It seems to me a palpable fake."[11]

Certainly one factor that speaks against the work being a

Figure 1. General view of the Gort casket. Winnipeg Art Gallery, Gift of Lord and Lady Gort (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).

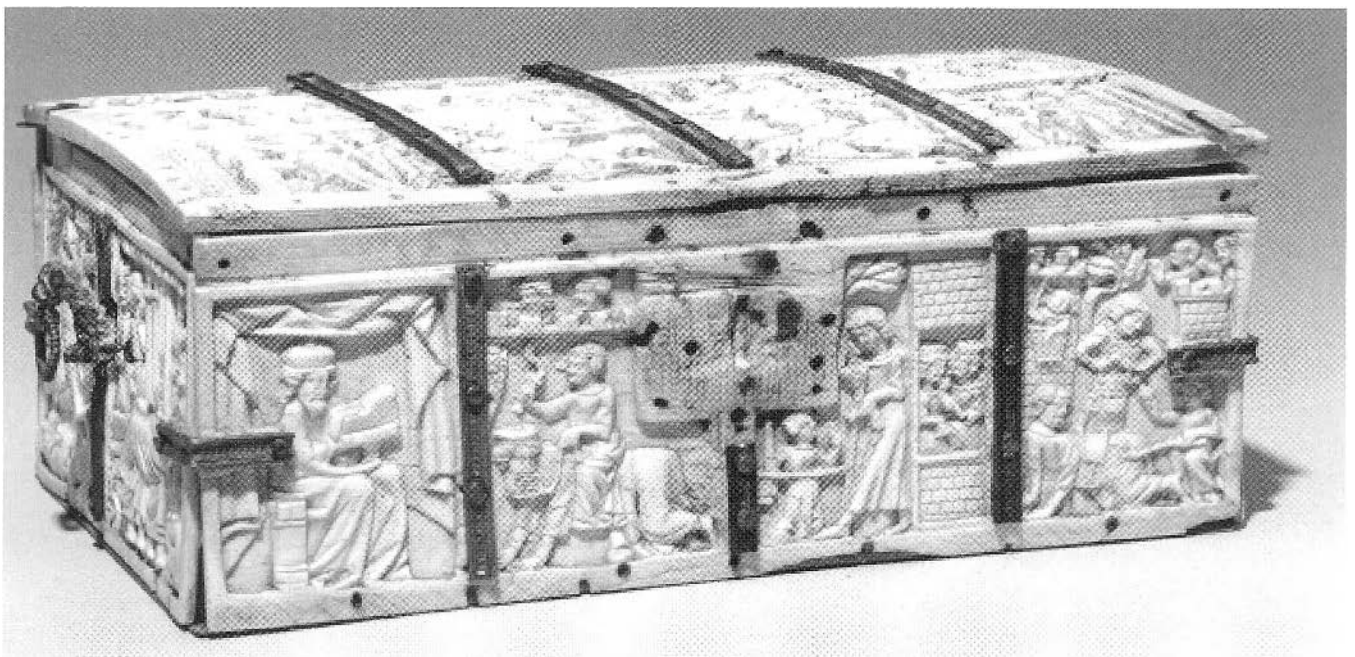
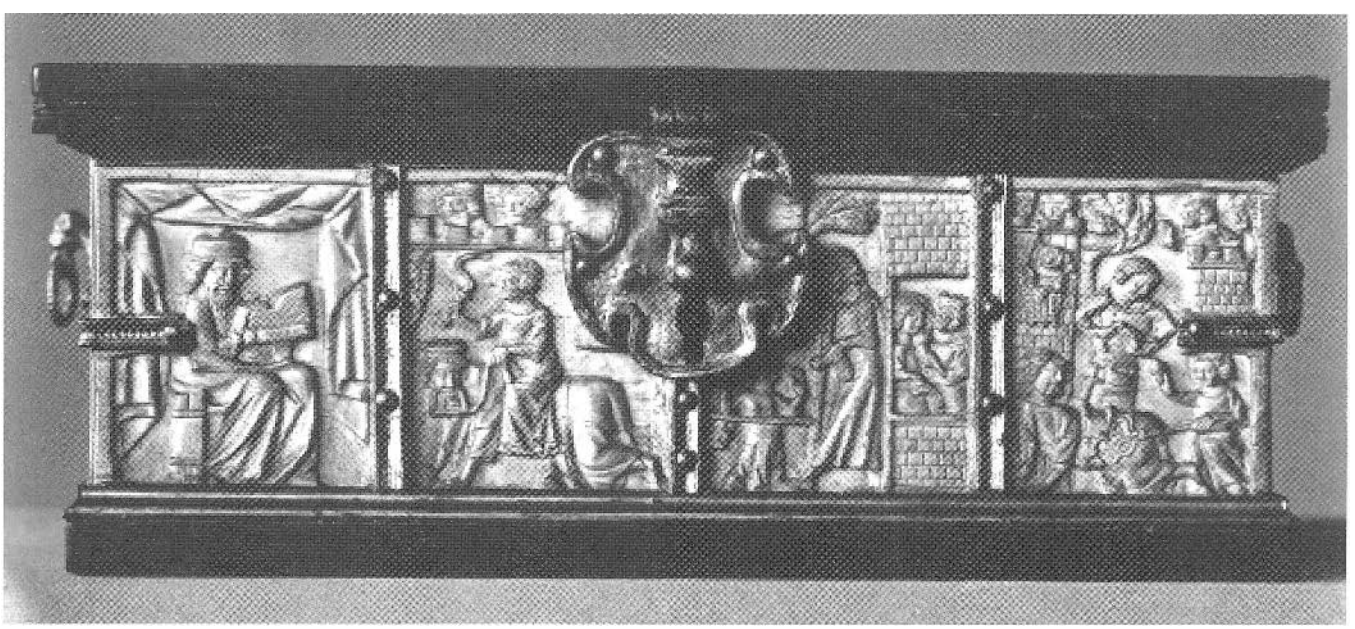


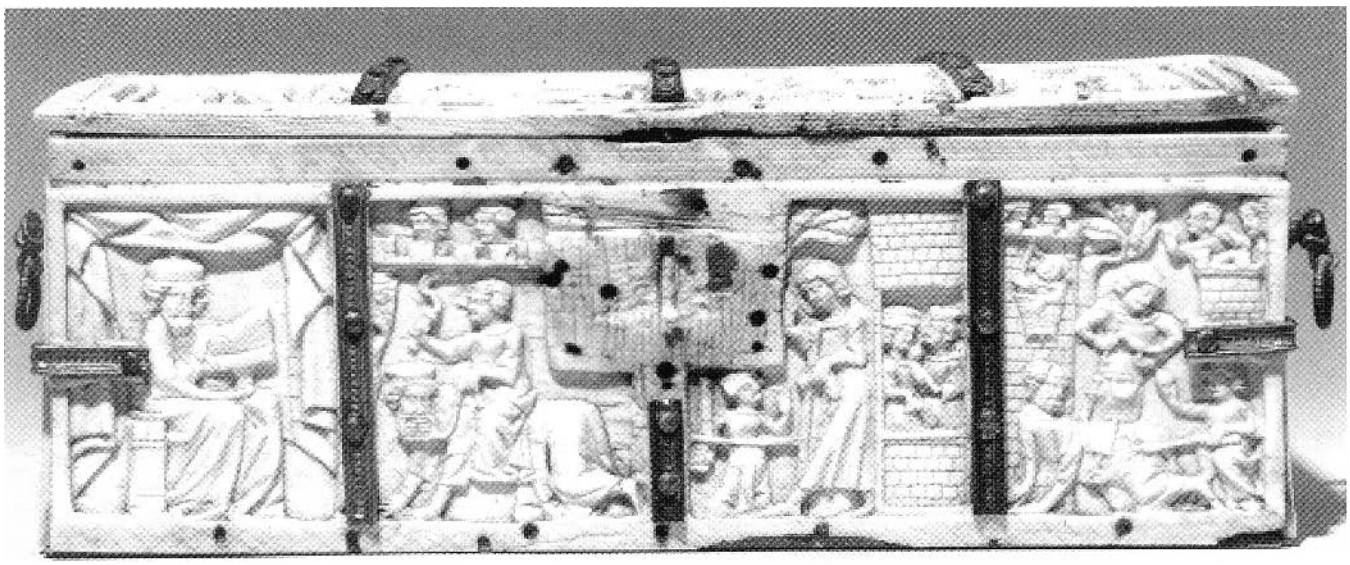
Figure 2. Front of the Gort casket in 1934 (Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



modern copy is its very damaged condition. The ivory is extensively cracked, usually either where holes have been drilled or following deeply incised outlines of figures, just where one would expect it.[12] There are lots of holes and breaks, many discoloured, probably by metal fixtures. Even more telling is the wear on the surface, which bespeaks long use.

There are other arguments against the work being a modern copy. Not only can the provenance of the work now be traced back to a time when good medieval copies were unthinkable, but also aspects of the work's iconography and style argue for its authenticity as a genuine late medieval work. Moreover, a great deal more is now known about the modern copying of

Figure 3. Front panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).



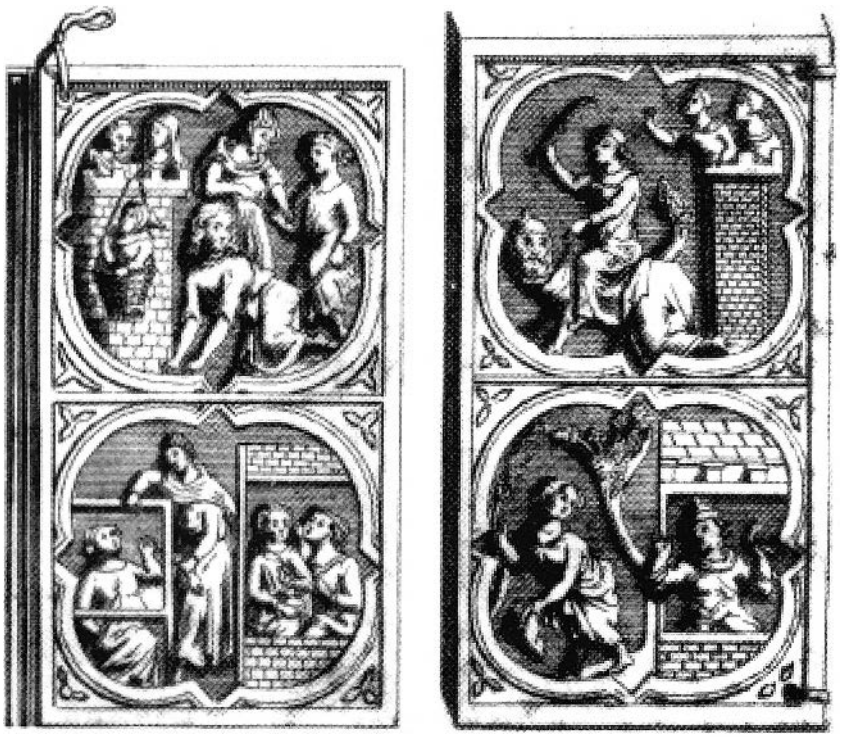
medieval ivories, and this work does not fit the emerging profile that might be expected of such works.[13]

Skepticism about the work's authenticity, I would contend, arose from disciplinary norms based on the production of Paris, which dominated courtly ivories during the fourteenth century.[14] The work's distance from those norms, however, has been misinterpreted. Rather than giving evidence that the work is a modern copy, the distinctive aspects of the Gort casket can be interpreted, I believe, as depending on its origin outside of Paris, in a "provincial" centre of ivory production. Although there has been growing interest of late in non-Parisian centres, they are still not well known.[15] The widespread characterization of all centres of ivory production outside of Paris as "provincial," moreover, is indicative of the still predominant interpretive place of Paris in the study of Gothic ivory production. However, while the presumed centrality of Paris is perhaps in general indisputable, it has also led to a circularity of argument that has unduly normalized canonical expectations. What is needed to break out of this circularity is a firmer idea of the character of ivory production away from Paris. Rather than using "Paris" as the starting point for such a project and characterizing other centres of production in terms of distance from Paris, the starting point needs to be grounded in works themselves, works that can reasonably be considered non-Parisian and that can be used as a basis on which to develop profiles of non-Parisian centres of production. The Gort casket is thus a doubly important work, not only adding to the corpus of late medieval secular ivory caskets but also providing a basis on which to establish non-Parisian character.

The casket consists of four side panels and a now unattached lid, all carved in relief. The back panel and lid have matching hinge marks. The bottom panel is a modern replacement, and the interior is lined with thin sheets of hardwood, covered in velvet, also apparently modern. The casket measures 8.6 cm or 3 1/4 inches high, 25.5 cm or 8 7/8 inches wide, and 13.9 cm or 5 1/4 inches deep.[16] The panels are held together with bronze fittings, undoubtedly not medieval and now partially broken.[17] Their condition has deteriorated since the casket was photographed in 1934 (fig. 2), and the lock plate has disappeared. From the character of the scrolls on the lock plate and the ram's-head ring handles at the sides, the metalwork appears to date from the early modern period.[18] It is certainly not original, since the shape of the lock plate does not conform to the now-damaged rectangular area of scored and drilled ivory at top centre of the front panel (fig. 3), which would have accommodated the original lock plate, and the modern lock plate overlapped considerably the relief imagery around it.

The 1934 photographs also show that the casket was held together by means of moulded wooden framing elements along its top and bottom edges. These were apparently removed between 1945 and 1948, and only fragments of this dark hardwood still adhere to the rebated strip at the top of the side, front, and back panels, and to the scored bottom strip, both of which exhibit numerous drill holes, probably from various periods. Although these wooden strips appear to match the early modern metalwork, this distinctive construction technique may well replicate the original arrangement. The top of each side panel is indented and unfinished, and has been scored, presumably to aid in attaching something to the surface. The bottom edge of each side panel, while unindented, is similarly unfinished and

Figure 4. Ivory writing tablets (Photo: after Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliqué*, Paris, 1722).



scored, and both feature numerous drill holes. Moreover, while the thickness of the ivory panels varies considerably, they average 2.5 mm, and are thus much thinner than the ivory panels usual in medieval caskets. The front and back panels are slightly thicker, rebated at either end so that the end panels fit snugly into them. As well, such caskets usually have double corner brackets, rather than the single ones here.[19] In all these features, the Winnipeg casket resembles the Châtelaine de Vergi casket in the British Museum, which may similarly have featured framing pieces in wood or some other material.[20]

The narrative subjects carved on the five faces of the casket are diverse in nature, but, in general, the combination of scenes included here is typical of a group of medieval ivory caskets that Raymond Koechlin called "composite."[21] Only seven other complete composite caskets survive, as well as fragments from fifteen others.[22] These composite caskets, which feature imagery from a variety of courtly and romance sources, were a popular type of secular work, undoubtedly intended to hold jewellery or toiletry items for a noble woman. Some, at least, would have been given to a woman by a suitor or husband in the context of courting or marriage ritual.[23] A predominantly female audience for the imagery may thus be implied. As Paula Mae Carns has recently demonstrated, for many of these caskets, a sophisticated process of *compilatio* has resulted in programmes of largely literarily inspired imagery, which themselves exhibit a creativity that cannot be reduced to complete subservience to or derivation from courtly literature. The selection of scenes may vary, but there are common juxtapositions, some of which can be noted here. It may be doubted, however, whether the Winnipeg casket was the product of the same "literary culture" that produced the majority of surviving composite caskets, which Carns associates with workshops in Paris.[24]

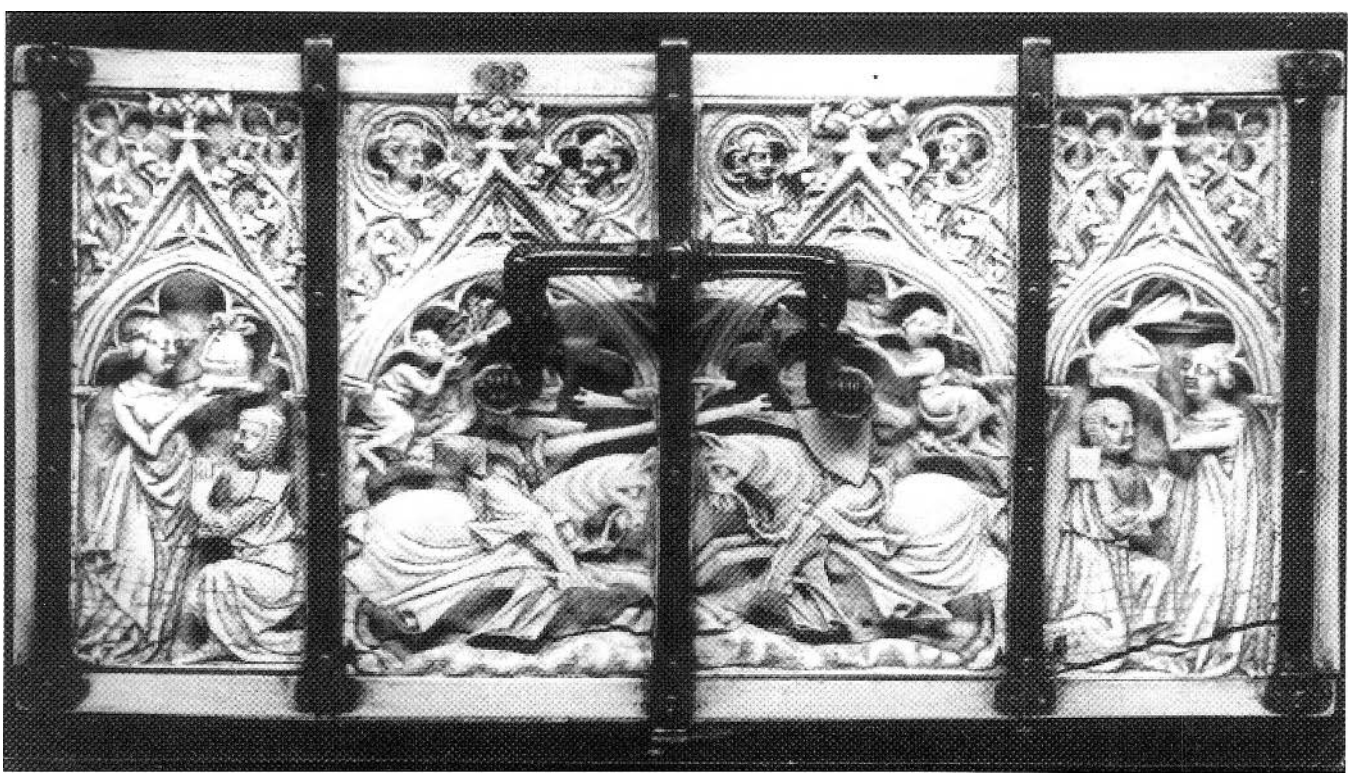
The lid is dominated by a jousting scene (fig. 5).[25] In the large bottom register, two knights joust at centre, accompanied by heralds blowing trumpets, while to either side, a kneeling knight receives his crested helm from a noble lady and a female companion holding a jousting lance. In the narrow top register, we see the noble audience of the joust below, sitting behind an openwork lattice draped with cloths. These two elements were quite commonly included on the lids of composite caskets. What is unusual here, however, is that the joust and its audience are not represented together, but instead are separated by a register of depressed, cusped quatrefoils containing courtly scenes. While such courtly scenes are also common on medieval ivory caskets and other courtly ivories, they form a separate subject from the joust, and the manner in which they interrupt the jousting scene is virtually unique.

This distinctive arrangement can perhaps partly be explained by comparison with the lid, featuring various courtly scenes, of an ivory casket in the Hermitage in St Petersburg (fig. 6).[26] On the lid, under an arcade of four arches, are repeated the exact subjects of the bottom register on the lid of the Gort casket, the joust flanked by arming scenes. They are close both in iconography and style, and the lack of an audience above the joust in the Hermitage example may give evidence of the manner in which the lid of the Gort casket was initially conceived from different models. Even more than that of Gort casket, the authenticity of the Hermitage casket has been questioned.[27] Arguments against its authenticity must be re-evaluated, however, in light of the new evidence provided by the Gort casket.

The four cusped quatrefoils on the lid of the Gort casket actually include five separate scenes depicting amorous couples,[28] two being included in the first in the series where, on the left, a pair of lovers meet, and on the right, a man kneels before his lady and receives a circlet or garland, signifying her acceptance of his devotion to her. This circlet occurs quite commonly in such courtly scenes, but here, rather remarkably, it figures in each of the four quatrefoils. In the second quatrefoil, in which the scene is framed by curtains, the lovers are playing chess, but

Figure 5. Lid panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).

Figure 6. Lid of an ivory casket with romance scenes. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum (Photo: The State Hermitage Museum).



rather than making a move, as was usual, the lady is once again offering a circlet. This may be intended to signify tribute to the winner of the game being played here, a game that commonly symbolized the romantic nature of such dalliance. In the next quatrefoil, the man is kneeling again, this time before the lady seated in front of him, and there is another figure standing to the left. The latter may be intended to represent the man's page, although more usually his identity as a page would be indicated by representing part of a horse, or even a pair of horses. The figure here, lacking a horse, is thus somewhat ambiguous. In this scene, the lady is not offering her circlet, which she holds rather proprietorially against her breast. The lady also retains her circlet in the fourth quatrefoil, where we see, presumably, the same three individuals as in the previous scene: the ambiguous figure standing at the left, and the two lovers, both seated here, the man with his legs prominently crossed, as in the chess scene, and chucking the chin of his beloved, a gesture indicating erotic attraction.[29] While there are certainly peculiarities within this series, its slightly repetitive nature is typical. It seems natural to read these images as a narrative sequence, although it cannot be identified, yet the repetition of pairs might also have been intended as a series of famous lovers, as was occasionally enumerated in contemporary literature.[30] Such iconographic ambiguities not only occur throughout the imagery on the Gort casket, but also are not at all uncommon in general among secular Gothic ivories.

The lid is in a somewhat deteriorated condition. There are four ivory plugs in the centre, where presumably at least one metal handle was formerly attached. As well, there are some rather severe cracks, principally one in the centre, emanating from the right edge, and one near the top, emanating from the left edge. The surface, as well, appears quite worn, and the wearing is most severe along the front edge at either side, as one would expect through long use.

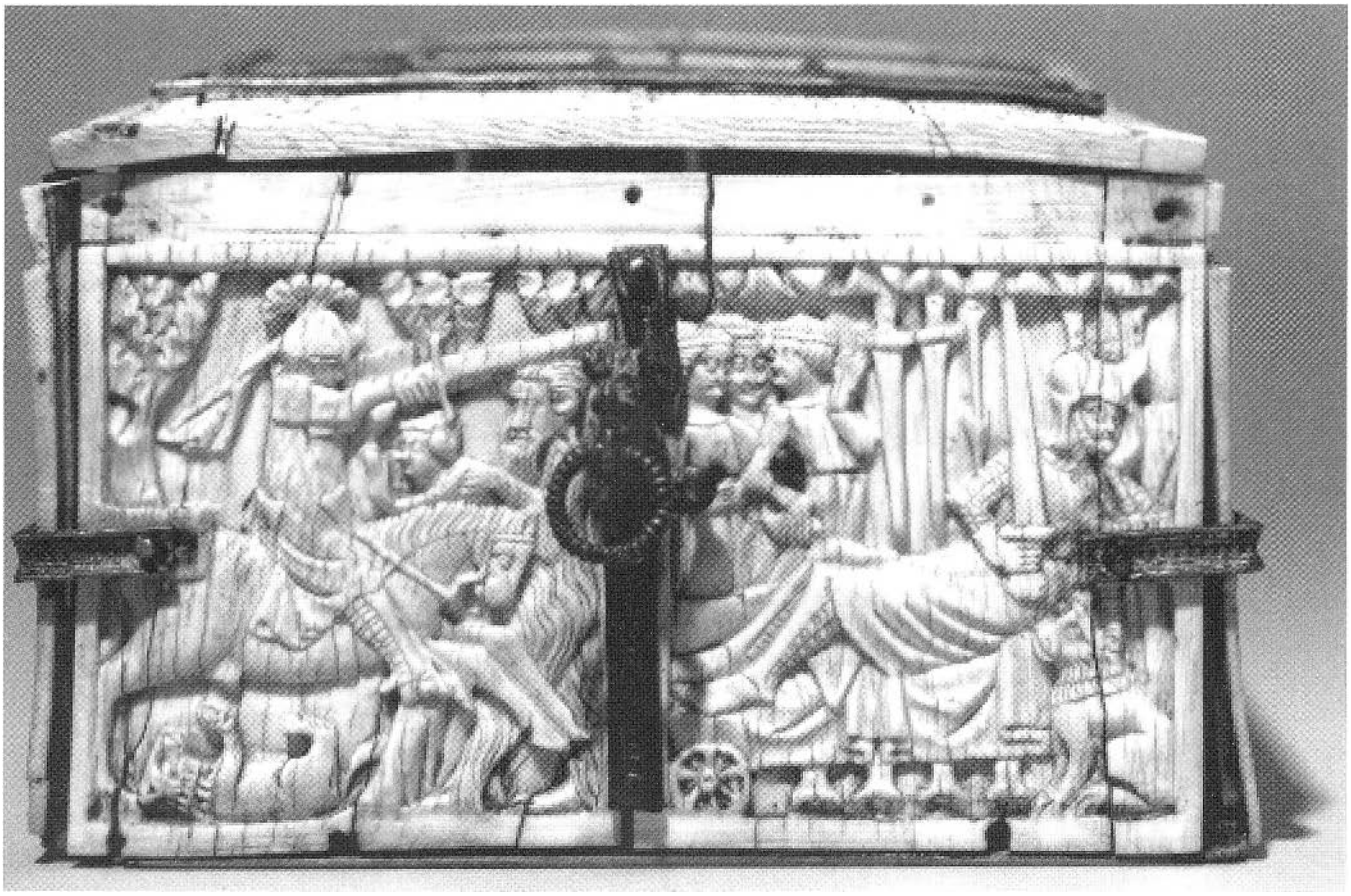
The front face of the casket, which is in the best condition of any of the panels, features two completely separate narrative subjects, depicting, on the left, two legendary episodes concerning Aristotle and, on the right, two concerning Virgil (figs. 2, 3). Aristotle was a common subject on composite caskets in precisely this position. On the left, Aristotle, framed by curtains, is reading before a lectern. More usually, he is shown teaching, with the young Alexander the Great standing in front of him on the right. As is usual, this is combined, in the next scene, with the besotted Aristotle being ridden by the beautiful Phyllis, as she is usually called.

This was a popular story in the later Middle Ages, and belongs to what is now known as the "Power of Women" topos.[31] It first appeared in the early thirteenth century in a sermon of Jacques de Vitry, and was popularized in the *Lai d'Aristote* by Henri d'Andeli.[32] As they commonly appeared on composite caskets, the juxtaposition of the two scenes contains a humorously ironic contrast, between the wise Aristotle advising the young Alexander not to pay undue attention to women, and then being made a complete fool of by Alexander's beautiful mistress (or wife). In revenge for dampening Alexander's attentions, she uses her wiles to attract Aristotle, and when he seeks to consummate his passion, she feigns compliance on the condition that Aristotle first let her ride him like a horse. She then alerts Alexander, who watches with great amusement as his wise tutor is thus humiliated. More usually, Alexander alone looks on from the battlements, but in some versions, as here, he is joined by other onlookers. There is a contrast here between youth and age; often, in fact, these scenes were accompanied on the fronts of composite caskets by the subject of the Fountain of Youth, which, here, is located on the right end panel.

On the composite caskets, the Aristotle scenes were also sometimes accompanied by other subjects, such as the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. Here, however, the two scenes on the right depict another medieval Power of Women topos, Virgil in the Basket, which can only be traced back to the end of the thirteenth century.[33] Virgil had a legendary identity as a magician in the Middle Ages, and in this episode, he falls in love with the emperor's daughter. When he confesses his desire to the young woman, she sees an opportunity to outsmart the wisest of men. She arranges a tryst wherein she would have Virgil drawn up to her tower room at night in a basket. But when he is halfway up, the basket stops, and the whole next day his embarrassment is exposed to public amusement. Thereupon, Virgil resolves to take revenge. By his magic, he extinguishes all the fires in Rome and determines that they may only be relighted through the humiliation of the emperor's daughter: she must appear naked in public and allow the populace to kindle their torches or candles from the fire magically emanating from her genitals.[34]

Virgil in the Basket was often represented, in a variety of contexts, but it was sometimes, as here, combined with the Aristotle scenes, pairing the two wisest of "Cupid's most illustrious victims," significantly both clerks rather than knights, as appear on the other sides of the casket; this was another common juxtaposition in both courtly literature and art. The clearest iconographic model for the Virgil scenes on the Gort casket is found on a mid-fourteenth-century ivory tablet in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. It features the same two pairs of scenes, not side by side, as here, but one above the other, where the narrative order is clearer. Randall identifies the bottom two scenes of the tablet as representing Campaspe at her loom and being bribed by Alexander, and Hans Neiuwdorp also suggested these identifications for the corresponding panel on the Gort casket.[35] Although there may be some confusion with the Campaspe story in these images, however, Smith convincingly identifies them as Virgil and the lady sitting in conversation

Figure 7. Left end panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).



within the small edifice, and Virgil approaching the lady "at her loom" to arrange the tryst.[36] The first scene of the pair apparently represents a misunderstood version of Virgil arranging his tryst with the emperor's daughter through an open window, as on the early fourteenth-century *Maltererteppich* in the Augustinermuseum, Freiburg im Breisgau.[37]

A pair of lost ivory writing tablets illustrated for Bernard de Montfaucon in the early eighteenth century, which included two scenes each of Aristotle and Virgil, is also close in iconography to the Gort casket (fig. 4).[38] In both scenes of the humiliation of the emperor's daughter on the Walters and Monfaucon tablets, she is clothed but with her skirts hiked up to her waist; on the Gort casket, not only is she fully covered, but also she has rather anomalously been given a beard.[39] David Ross perceptively noted that the tower with two observers on the right has migrated from a model close to the Montfaucon tablet's scene of the mounted Aristotle (fig. 4).[40] The iconographic lapses in these two subjects indicate that the carver did not have access to literary sources and did not fully understand his visual models of the subject matter being carved.

On the left end panel, the subjects change, once again, and feature two romance scenes (figs. 7, 8). The one on the right relates to Sir Gawain and is quite common on medieval composite caskets. This depicts the Perilous Bed, one of the adventures Gawain had in the Château Merveil, many versions of which are included in Arthurian romance literature. According to Chrétien de Troyes in *Le Conte del Graal* of ca. 1175, Gawain is transported to a magnificent castle, where the noble inhabitants are awaiting the perfect knight to free them from a magic spell. To rescue them, the knight must withstand the perils he encounters in a room of marvels. Gawain first lies on a perilous bed equipped with wheels and bells. Immediately, arrows and bolts fly in through the windows and rain down on his shield. When this attack stops, a lion is loosed on Gawain, who succeeds in cutting off the lion's claws, which it fixed in his shield, and its head, as well. He then becomes lord of the castle and is congratulated by the beautiful damsels of the castle, whom we see at the left.[41] Only one of the wheels of the Perilous Bed is depicted here, while the other is hidden by the lion who is presumably waiting his turn, since the swords and bolts are still raining down. There are also bells beneath the bed.

A less conflated version of this episode is depicted on most

Figure 8. Detail of left end panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).

of the composite caskets.[42] Usually, it comprises three separate but disordered scenes: the rain of bolts and swords, Gawain's combat with the lion, and the thankful damsels. As well, they are usually combined with an unrelated scene of Lancelot on the Sword Bridge. These confusions are, in fact, common among Arthurian scenes on ivory caskets, and Roger and Laura Loomis concluded from this that, in general, ivory carvers "could boast little first-hand acquaintance with the Arthurian story."[43] Here, all three narrative elements of the Gawain story have been conflated into a single scene. There are certainly precedents for this, on an ivory mirror case in the Museo Civico in Bologna and on the end panel of an ivory casket formerly in the De Boze collection, which has since been lost, but was depicted in an engraving of 1753.[44]

The conflation goes even farther on the closest comparison to the Gort casket, an ivory plaque in the Musée Bernard d'Agesci in Niort (fig. 9).[45] The similarities, in fact, are striking, with all elements of the composition in the same conjunction, so that the lion masks one of the wheels of the bed, and in both, we see the further iconographic peculiarity that Gawain's shield is not represented. There are even stylistic similarities here, with the open visor of Gawain's basinet and his armour represented in remarkably similar fashion, both conforming generally to a mid-fourteenth-century date, with plate-metal demi-greaves worn over chain mail on the legs, for instance.[46] There must have been a common, but rather rare model that both works followed, and both undoubtedly originated in the same centre of production.

The scene to the left is not associated with Gawain, despite the dead lion beneath the knight on his charging horse, attacking the wild man on the right.[47] This appears to be another scene that is common on caskets, which comes from a now-lost

Figure 9. The Perilous Bed. Ivory plaque. Niort, Musée Bernard d'Agesci (Photo: Bertrand Renaud, Musée de Niort).

romance involving the exploits of an elderly knight named Enyas. This is the often-represented episode of Enyas rescuing a damsel from a "wodehouse," or wild man.[48] This scene most commonly accompanies a scene of Sir Galahad receiving the keys to the Château des Pucelles, and their pairing is commonly taken to indicate an intended contrast between the wodehouse, as an incarnation of brutal lust, and Galahad, as an archetype of chastity. It goes without saying that such a contrast is lost on the Gort casket. Instead, two knightly rescues of damsels are combined.

On the right end panel is another common subject of composite caskets, the Fountain of Youth (fig. 10).[49] The fountain on the right occupies the entire height of the panel, while the rest of it is divided into two horizontal registers, with a wagon bringing the elderly to the fountain below, while more elderly people, above, walk towards the fountain and towards the youthful people next to it. The fountain itself resembles several other examples on ivory caskets, such as that on the Walters Art Museum's composite casket, which also has two registers to the left, but the exact composition of this left half is closer to that on an early fourteenth-century ivory mirror back also in the Walters Art Museum, where the rejuvenated figures at the right of the top register are entering a building, probably the Castle of Love, which is entirely absent on the Gort casket. But just as on the casket, in both registers on the left the elderly approach the fountain, on foot above and in a horse-drawn cart below.[50]

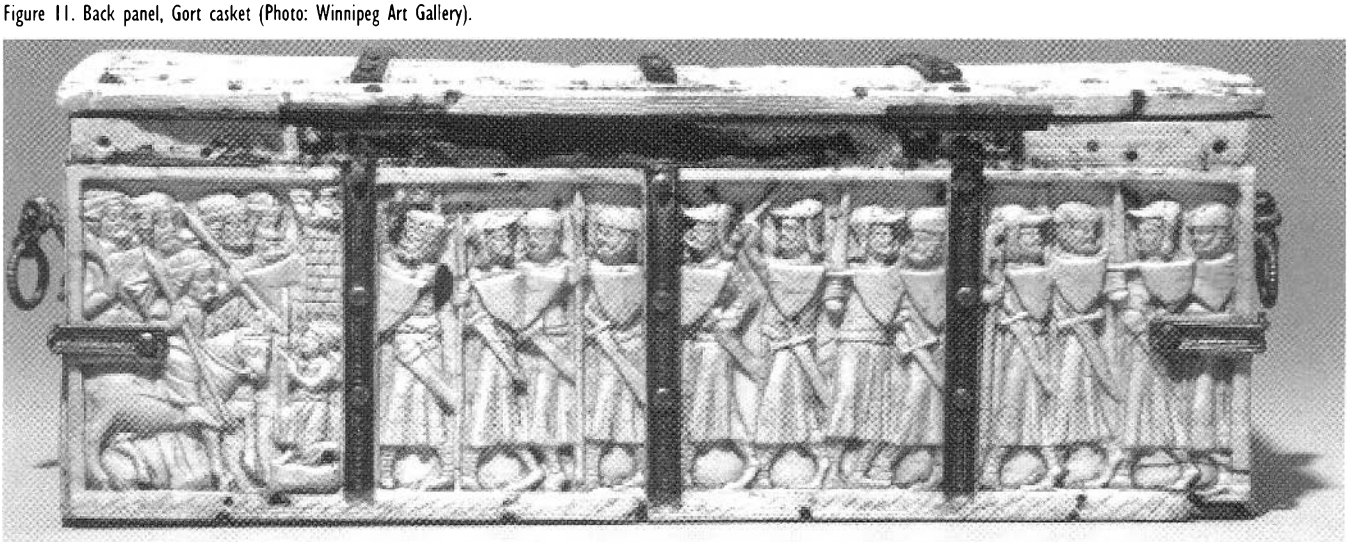
Both end panels are in very bad condition, with several severe vertical cracks. The right end panel, in fact, is now separated by a break running along the left-hand side of the fountain. Undoubtedly, these cracks are due to the thinness of the ivory panels.

The subjects thus far enumerated have been easily recognizable by comparison with the group of medieval composite caskets identified by Koechlin and other secular ivories. The rear panel, however, presents probably two subjects that have not yet been identified (fig. 11). In the left compartment, five armed men on horseback confront a small kneeling figure, seemingly holding up a lance in front of a crenellated structure. The three right-hand compartments seem to depict a single procession, with a king brandishing a sword above his head, while leading on foot eleven armed knights in long surcoats, carrying shields, spears, and swords.

Although comparisons with other ivories have so far not yielded any suggestive comparisons for these scenes, that on the left is not unlike illuminations commonly found in manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Conte del Graal* – for example, the

Figure 10. Right end panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).

Figure 11. Back panel, Gort casket (Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery).



frontispiece of a manuscript of ca. 1275 in the Bibliothèque Nationale – which depict Perceval kneeling before five mounted knights, his hands clasped in prayer, in front of his mother's house in the forest.[51] Due to his naïveté and lack of proper religious training, he has mistaken King Arthur's knights for angels and is worshipping them, thus attracting him initially to knighthood and drawing him to King Arthur's court.[52] Of course, if the scene on the Gort casket does represent Perceval, there should be three javelins – or, in some accounts, two – stuck in the ground beside him, but iconographic lapses are

common in this material. Although it is quite different in appearance, this very scene is represented on an ivory casket in the Louvre, which has saints on the lid and a series of scenes on Perceval around the sides;[53] there, however, Perceval is holding a bow, rather than a javelin, as in the version by Wolfram von Eschenbach and quite distinct from the Chrétien de Troyes version. His dress is also peculiar. Loomis suggests that it is supposed to reflect a rude "Welsh" garb, which is not evident on the Gort casket. This certainly constitutes, however, a precedent for this scene on an ivory casket.

As for the procession, there appears to be no comparative image that might suggest an identity. If the scene on the left does indeed represent Perceval, then the knights in this scene are those of King Arthur, which might suggest King Arthur and his knights as the subject of the procession, but that is little more than a guess.[54] The frieze-like arrangement of the figures may have been suggested by a new chivalric subject just coming into vogue at this time, the Nine Worthies, one of a number of new themes that were in the process of supplanting the older corpus of courtly and romance subjects.[55]

As is amply evident, the iconography of the casket is open to much criticism. There are seemingly many misunderstood and curious details. Koechlin, however, was of the opinion that the average medieval ivory carver was far from being an expert in iconography and more commonly was simply copying traditionally structured scenes by rote rather than working from originary texts.[56] If there are more iconographical malapropisms than usual on this composite casket, it is perhaps because of its relatively late date, probably in or just after the mid-fourteenth century, when ivory production was on the wane, and when literary tastes were changing.[57]

Despite the iconographic lapses, the Gort casket, with its light-hearted courtly and romance subjects, functioned, like the other composite caskets, as a fitting, romantic gift for a noble lady. Such an exchange quite literally put the "power of women" in a woman's hands, equating it with the power of love, which has the ability to rejuvenate the elderly, as it stimulates youth. The imagery, as was usual, contains contrasts between youth and age, submission and domination, clerks and knights,[58] all combining to aid in the construction of social expectations and desires that characterized the romantic interests of the chivalric noble classes. While the majority of the composite caskets, which undoubtedly represent Paris work, reflect the cosmopolitan culture of the capital, the lack of "literary culture" evident in the laboured iconography of the Gort casket just as probably gives evidence of distance from such courtly erudition. It is more likely that it emanated from a "provincial" centre of ivory production – that is, a non-Parisian centre that looked distantly and at second-hand to Paris for inspiration, but which received courtly works in a derivative manner. At a remove from the literary sources that initially gave rise to so many aspects of the genre, visual constructions were free to drift from those sources in unexpected ways that transformed – and even obliterated – narrative intentions. Given the loose approach to iconographic details in many courtly ivories, and the Gort casket in particular, many recipients of such works were probably not interested in a close reading of the imagery; rather, in the words of Marshall McLuhan, the medium was, essentially, the message.

The style is difficult to evaluate. The work is summary and not of the very highest quality, which makes its relationship to clear stylistic trends ambiguous. On the lid (fig. 5), not only do the quatrefoils lack the precision of layout typical of such frames, but also the latticework balcony above is quite awkwardly managed.[59] Moreover, in the fabrics cast over the balcony and framing the second quatrefoil, it is clear how uncomfortable, in general, the carver was with drapery carving. The most articulated draperies are the robes of the two women arming kneeling knights at the bottom corners. These feature complex arrangements of broken folds and long sweeping tubular folds emanating from the waist. Although these become more nebulous in the garments of the woman on the bottom right, they appear to look forward to new trends of the 1370s.[60] Thus, despite the absence of new styles in clothing[61] and armour[62] developing in the mid-fourteenth century, the casket should be dated to the middle of the fourteenth century, ca. 1340–60.

The historiography of fourteenth-century ivory carving is dominated by Paris, but increasing attention has been accorded recently to other centres of production in northwestern Europe, more or less inspired by Paris.[63] These centres are not yet well known, but it seems evident that the Gort casket did not originate in the refined ambience of the capital. As with the highly novel manipulation and combination of the subjects, the style is undoubtedly derivative. While bearded heads are typically elongated, those of the women feature distinct but receding chins, aquiline noses, and bulging eyes with well-defined eyelids; they appear closer to Mosan than Parisian facial types (fig. 8).[64] As well, the quatrefoils on the lid (fig. 5) feature subcusping, a rare attribute of such frames that does not characterize Parisian ivories. This feature, too, indicates manufacture outside of Paris, perhaps in southern Flanders or the Rheno-Mosan region, and perhaps in England, given the work's known provenance and since subcusping is known on English ivories, such as the Grandisson ivories.[65] A non-Parisian origin would also help to explain many of the unique features of the casket, and its stylistic similarities to works such as the Niort plaque (fig. 9) and the Hermitage casket (fig. 6) provide a solid base for further reconstructing this regional centre of production, although it would be premature to localize it yet.

Although certainly not of the highest quality, the Gort casket is an important addition to the small corpus of surviving

composite caskets. Its constructional technique is unusual, but not without precedent, and its condition, as recorded in 1934, presents valuable evidence for reconstructing the original form of this and other comparable caskets, such as the Châtelaine de Vergi casket in the British Museum. Its iconography is also important for reconstructing the copying process for secular ivories at this late stage of medieval production. And the Gort casket may also eventually play an important role in the study of regional centres of ivory production.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and particularly the registrar, Karen Kisiow, for making the Gort casket available to me, for access to their files, and for photographs. I would also like to thank Dr Paul Williamson for generously providing me with information and photographs from the files of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Dr Vladimir Matveyev of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and messieurs Gendron, conservateur en chef, and Renaud, photographer, of the Musée de Niort for sending me photographs. The anonymous reader for *RACAR* also made valuable suggestions concerning the issue of regional centres of production, only some of which have been practical to include here.

Notes

1 It was published by David J.A. Ross, "Allegory and Romance on a Mediaeval French Marriage Casket," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XI (1948), 112–42.

2 Winnipeg Art Gallery, acc. no. G–73–60.

3 Richard H. Randall, Jr, *The Golden Age of Ivory: Gothic Carvings in North American Collections* (New York, 1993). Neither is it listed in the magisterial Raymond Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 3 vols. (1924; repr. Paris, 1968).

4 The most recent reference to "the so-called Lord Gort Casket" still lists its location as "unknown"; see Paula Mae Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory: The Composite Casket in the Metropolitan Museum," *Gesta*, XLIV/2 (2005), 69–88, at p. 85, n. 3.

5 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 112.

6 The casket was brought to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Miss Walker's cousin, Mrs. Verrall King, perhaps the wife of a printmaker of that name, active between 1910 and 1930, who apparently specialized in topographical views of medieval monuments.

7 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 134–39, based his dating largely on his unsound belief in the existence of an "archetype" of this type of composite casket, from which he traced various recensions. Although he judged the Gort casket a "special order," he placed it fairly late in his series, although still before mid-century.

8 Winnipeg Art Gallery files, letter from Hans Nieuwdorp to Gary Essar, assistant curator, 14 December 1989.

9 Winnipeg Art Gallery files, letter from Francis Salet to Ferdinand Eckhardt, 12 July 1971.

10 Winnipeg Art Gallery files, letter from Florens Deuchler to Ferdinand Eckhardt, 28 June 1971.

11 Winnipeg Art Gallery files, letter from John Beckwith to Ferdinand Eckhardt, 17 June 1971.

12 A crack stabilized by a rivet on the left end panel, visible just to the right of the central bronze fixture (figs. 7, 8), dates from before 1934. Other cracks have developed since the casket's arrival in Canada.

13 See Jaap Leeuwenberg, "Early Nineteenth-Century Gothic Ivories," *Aachener Kunstblätter*, 39 (1969), 111–48. The catalogue of the 1997 exhibition *Images in Ivory* contains a section, not on "fakes" but what it more problematically calls "Pastiches, Revivals, Forgeries and Open Questions," which re-evaluates as genuine several works that were suspected, on stylistic or iconographic grounds, of being modern; see Peter Barnet, ed., *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, exh. cat. (Princeton, 1997), esp. 280.

14 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. I, 4–7, gives an informed picture of the centres of Gothic ivory production in Europe. While acknowledging documentary evidence for regional centres of production throughout western Europe, including several in northern France, he finds it difficult to attribute specific works to any centre except Paris: "Quoi donc de plus logique que de placer le centre de l'ivoirerie à Paris?" Yet, at the same time, he raises doubts: "La prééminence de Paris en matière d'ivoirerie n'en doit pas moins être tenue pour certaine" (7). Moreover, in his preface he is apologetic about his lack of success at fixing the provenance of Gothic ivories and is skeptical about future prospects for doing so: "Je crains que ceux qui viendront après moi ne trouvent guère plus pour fixer la provenance de nos monuments" (iv). This is still, essentially, the view of Danielle Gaborit-Chopin: "La place prépondérante de l'ivoirerie gothique parisienne est un fait incontestable de l'histoire des arts précieux au Moyen Âge ... Si prééminente était l'influence du style des ivoires parisiens qu'il est difficile de définir des ateliers travaillant hors de France, à plus forte raison hors de Paris." See *L'Art au temps des rois maudits. Philippe le Bel et ses fils 1285–1328*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1998), 138–39.

15 Studies of such regional centres are, however, beginning to appear; see Richard H. Randall, Jr, "Dutch Ivories of the Fifteenth Century," *Nederlands Kunsthistorich Jaarboek*, 45 (Zwolle, 1994), 127–39.

16 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 141, gives different dimensions. His overall dimensions are smaller, and he records a slightly greater thickness of the ivory.

17 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 141, claims that the bronze was gilded, but not much evidence for that survives. The Winnipeg Art Gallery files list the material as brass.

18 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 141–42, gives a description of the form and condition of the casket in ca. 1948. On uncertain grounds, he judged the metal and wood mounts to be not earlier than the nineteenth century.

19 Usually, there was also more effort made to accommodate the corner brackets with the relief carvings into whose fields they impinge. Here, pictorial elements commonly disappear behind the brackets and are disrupted by them, rather than being organized around the brackets.

20 British Museum reg. no. M & LA 92,8–1,47; O.M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Ivory Carvings of the Christian Era ... in the British Museum* (Oxford–London, 1909), cat. no. 367. The Châtelaine de Vergi casket, however, does not appear even to have had single corner brackets. On the Châtelaine de Vergi casket, see also Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. II, 462, no. 1307.

21 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 484–508; vol. II, 449–60. See also Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (New York, 1938), 66; Ross, "Allegory and Romance"; Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995), 168ff.; Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory."

22 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 168.

23 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 169–74; Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 44.

24 Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory."

25 There appears little justification for the claim in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 112–14, that such "tournament" scenes evolved from an "archetype" involving the Siege of the Castle of Love, which occurs on some composite caskets.

26 On this casket, see Otto von Falke: "Das Tristankästchen der Eremitage," *Pantheon*, 1 (January–June 1928), 75–80, esp. 80 and fig. 8. Also similar are tournament lids in the Barber Institute of Fine Art, Birmingham, and the Kästner Museum, Hannover; see, respectively, Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. II, 454–56, no. 1287 and no. 1289; Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 114–15.

27 Ross, "Allegory and Romance"; and Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 497, n. 4.

28 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, 375–83; Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 116–17.

29 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 155.

30 Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 24–25.

31 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 66ff.

32 For the most complete treatment of the theme of "the mounted Aristotle," see Smith, *The Power of Women*, 66ff. See also Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 499–501; Jean Adhémar, *Influences antiques dans l'art du Moyen Age francais. Recherches sur les sources et les thèmes d'inspiration* (1939; repr. London, 1968), 297–99, 313–14; Richard H. Randall, Jr, "Popular Romances Carved in Ivory," in Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 63–79; Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 118–20; Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory," 71–72.

33 See Smith, *The Power of Women*, 156ff.; Adhemar, *Influences antiques*; Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke (London, 1895), 325–39; Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France*, tome II (Paris, 1958), Livre IV: "Le miroir historique," 348–51; John Webster Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer: Studies in Virgilian Legends*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, vol. X (Cambridge, MA, 1934), chap. V: "Virgil in the Basket," 136–97, chap. VI: "The Mage's Revenge," 198–206, chap. X: "Iconography," 254–67.

34 Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer*, 136–37; Smith, *The Power of Women*, 156.

35 Richard H. Randall, Jr, *Masterpieces of Ivory from the Walters Art Gallery* (New York, 1985), 228–29, no. 337 (acc. no. 71.267).

36 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 188–89.

37 The *Malterer teppich* contains a pair of scenes of the Virgil story: Virgil arranging a tryst with the emperor's daughter, in which she is enclosed in a compact tower; and Virgil being pulled up the tower by the lady in his basket. It also contains other pairings from the Power of Women series, including Aristotle and Phyllis; see Smith, *The Power of Women*, 152–68.

38 Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée*, III (Paris, 1722), vol. 2, pl. 194. Illustrated in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," fig. 30a; Adhémar, *Influences antiques*, pl. XXXIX.

39 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 122–25, refusing to consider such iconographic lapses, completely misunderstands the humiliation of the emperor's daughter. He identifies the "bearded" emperor's daughter as Virgil, and in the previous scene, he mistakes the loom for a window, as was probably originally intended. The confusion definitely dates back to the fourteenth century, for the woman holds a shuttle that Ross mistakes for a sword. It would appear that nude depictions of the emperor's daughter in this scene would have to await printed versions. See the mid-sixteenth-century example by Georg Pencz, misnamed "The Courtesan on the Fire-Stake," in F.W.H. Hollstein, *German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts, ca. 1400–1700*, 31 (Roosendaal, 1991), 236–38, no. 137.

40 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 122.

41 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 130–33; Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 70–73, figs. 136–42; Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory," 76–79; Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes* (Chicago, 1994), 124–25.

42 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. II, 449–54, nos. 1281–85.

43 Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 70–72.

44 Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, figs. 140 and 142.

45 Niort, Musée Bernard d'Agesci, Inv. no. 914–1–143; Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. II, 424, no. 1201.

46 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. II, 424, no. 1201, dates the Niort plaque to the first half of the fourteenth century, but it is dated to the mid-fourteenth century in *Art français du moyen âge*, exh. cat., Québec, Musée du Québec, and Montréal, Musée des beaux-arts (Paris, 1972), no. 54.

47 The dead lion, although present in other such scenes, probably resulted from another iconographic confusion and remains unexplained; see Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 130.

48 Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 128–30; Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 76; Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 505–7. Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory," 79–80, raises doubts about the usual identification of this knight as Enyas and refers to him as "the Mystery Knight."

49 Anna Rapp, *Der Jungbrunnen in Literatur und bildender Kunst des*

Mittelalters (Zurich, 1976); Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 396–98, 491; Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 125–28.

50 On the Walters Art Museum's composite casket, see Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 2, 449–51, no. 1281; Randall, *Masterpieces in Ivory*, 224–25, no. 324. On the Walters Art Museum's mirror back, see Randall, *Masterpieces in Ivory*, 222–23, no. 323; Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 2, 388; vol. 3, pl. CLXXXII, no. 1067.

51 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 12596, fol. 1; see Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*, 13–15, frontispiece, and fig. 1.

52 Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*; Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 73–74; Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 513–16; vol. 2, 463–64.

53 Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux, Ve–XVe siècle, Département des objets d'art, Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 2003), 361–63, no. 132; Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 73–76, fig. 145.

54 A less likely possibility is that the "king" represents Perceval's father, Bliocadran, who had eleven brothers. They all would have been dead by the time Perceval encountered Arthur's knights but are important in establishing Perceval's genealogy. Bliocadran, however, although a powerful noble, was not a king. See Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*, 91.

55 On the Nine Worthies, see Loomis and Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, 37–40; *Paris 1400: Les arts sous Charles VI*, exh. cat. (Paris, 2004), 220–25.

56 Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français*, vol. 1, 486–87.

57 As an indication of changing literary tastes, Sandra Hindman points out that most of the forty-four extant manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes's works date between ca. 1275 and ca. 1325; there is only one later manuscript, from the second half of the fourteenth century, and none from the fifteenth century; Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*, 2, 191. See also, Alison Stones, "General Introduction," in Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones, and Lori Walters, eds, *Les Manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes: The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1993), I, 1–8.

58 Smith, *The Power of Women*, 155ff. See also the convincingly close reading of the composite casket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory."

59 It should be noted, however, that in comparable scenes on the lids of composite caskets, such as that in the British Museum, which are generally of much higher quality, often the very similar lattice-work is also somewhat awkwardly managed.

60 Compare the general lines of this drapery, however misunderstood, with the female saint of ca. 1380–90 in the Louvre; Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, 457, no. 199.

61 On the new fashions that were revolutionizing noble dress, see Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340–1365* (Woodbridge, 1980).

62 On the casket, knights invariably wear long, sleeveless surcoats, extending below the knee, over their largely mail armour. Where visible, all knights wear plate schynbalds or demi-greaves, probably poleyns, and gauntlets. On the lid and left side, knights also wear aillettes. The jousting knights on the lid and Sir Enyas wear great helms with a fan-shaped crest or panache, and Enyas clearly wears mantling behind his helm (cf. Sir Geoffrey Luttrell in the Luttrell Psalter of ca. 1325–40). The kneeling knights on the lid also wear a cervellière under their helm. The jousting lances all have coronel heads. Sir Gawain and some of the knights on the back panel wear hounskull-type basinets with hinged, snouted visors raised. The latter are perhaps the most up-to-date pieces of armour, which on the whole seems quite conservative, undoubtedly reflecting the copying of older models; see Claude Blair, *European Armour, circa 1066 to circa 1700* (London, 1978); David Edge and John Miles Paddock, *Arms and Armour of the Medieval Knight: An Illustrated History of the Weaponry of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1996).

63 On the state of this relationship, see Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, 266–71. Carns, "*Compilatio* in Ivory," 69, is typical in giving all surviving composite caskets a Parisian provenance.

64 For example, Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, 434, no. 187.

65 According to Neil Stratford, "There is no evidence that England saw a vigorous production of Gothic ivories; most of the ivories that are attributed to England seem to have been one-time commissions, carved in a recognizably insular style." See his entry for the Grandisson Triptych in the British Museum in Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 188–89.