

**A bridal box emblazoned with the arms of the Da Bagnaia and Anastasi families
Italy, Siena
Early 15th century**



35 cm (diameter); softwood, paper and pigment

Inscription: *Domine doce me facere voluntatem tuam* ("Lord, teach me to do your will")

Provenance:

Private Collection, Paris

This vividly painted casket, emblazoned with the arms of the Da Bagnaia and Anastasi families, belongs to a rare type of object that a bride in Renaissance Italy would receive from her husband on their wedding day. The body of the box is decorated by a lush arcaded garden with columns that support round-headed arches. The spandrels are decorated with blue foliate details and the plant life varies with each bay. The lid is painted with a heraldic display in which two Siennese families pronounce their union. The coat of arms is split between two hedgehogs of the Da Bagnaia family and the griffon with seven stars of the Anastasi family. The crest atop the helmet shows a small figure wearing a wreath, his hands intertwined, perhaps alluding to the union. A scroll with an inscription runs across the lid, reading *Domine doce me facere voluntatem tuam* or *Lord, teach me to do your will* (Psalms 143).

The box was originally meant to be filled with smaller gifts that would commemorate the marriage, such as such as jewellery, silver, and letters. As noted in relation to a similar exchange, for example, when Francesco de Medici sent his bride a chest in 1432, it included 'a silver basin, a headdress and collar decorated with pearls, a skein of wool, and two silver girdles.'¹ These types of possessions were extremely important for a woman in this period as she was not allowed to own any 'immobile' property, such as land. If she was to become widowed, it was only the 'mobile' property, such as precious boxes, jewellery and furniture, that she could claim.²

¹ Andrea Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 2009), 107.

² Isabelle Chabot, 'People and property in Florence and Venice.' in *At home in Renaissance Italy*. (London, 2006), 78.

While receiving precious chests was not especially unusual among wealthy brides in Renaissance Italy, this example belongs to a rare group that George Swarzenski first published in 1947.³ Unaware our example, Swarzenski noted that only four other examples survive, including one in the Louvre Museum in Paris, one in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and two that were in the Figdor collection at that time (figs. 1 – 4). Swarzenski also noted that the decorative forms on these painted round boxes are particularly characteristic of late Gothic style in Tuscany from 1400 – 1440. Other Tuscan examples have since been identified from this period, such as the two lidded chests in the Victoria & Albert Museum or the box in the Ashmolean Museum; however, these are characterised chiefly by their sculptural stucco decoration and not by painting (fig. 5 - 6). Our example bears the closest resemblance to the bridal box in Boston, which uses a similar array of vivid colours, a simplified figural style and two coats of arms on its lid. While the imagery painted on these boxes was not always related to the celebration at hand, both our example and the example in Boston also clearly commemorate the union of two families, marking their intimate and personal character.

Literature:

Bayer, Andrea. *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. New York, 2009, 107.

Chabot, Isabelle. 'People and property in Florence and Venice.' in *At home in Renaissance Italy*. Marta Aymar-Wollheim (ed.) London, 2006, 76-85.

Popoff, M., *Repertoire d'héraldique italienne, Toscane (hors Florence), Arezzo, Borgo San Sepolcro, Fiesole, Lucca, Montepulciano, Pisa, Pistoia, San Gimignano, Siena, XIIIe-XIXe siècles*,

Swarzenski, Georg. 'A Marriage Casket and Its Moral.' In *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*. Boston, Vol. 45, No. 261 (Oct., 1947), 55-62.

³ Georg Swarzenski, 'A Marriage Casket and Its Moral,' in *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*. Boston, Vol. 45, No. 261 (Oct., 1947), 55-62.



Fig. 1
Giovanni di Paolo
Wedding Casket with the Triumph of Venus
1421
Painted wood, 14 x 29 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Fig. 2
Marriage box
Italian (Tuscany)
1400–25
Museum of Fine Art Boston 47.116



Fig. 3
Domenico di Bartolo
Bridal box
Italy, Siena
c. 1420 – 40
Albert Figdor Collection (now Berlin Museums?)



Fig. 4
Bridal box
Italy, Florence
c. 1430
Albert Figdor Collection (now unknown)



Fig. 5
Lidded box
Italy, Tuscany
c.1450
V&A 488-1899



Fig. 6
Box
Italy, Tuscany
First half of the 15th century
Ashmolean Museum 1899.28