

IVORY

HISTORIC CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

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IVORY AND ITS WIDESPREAD USE IN CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

Elephant ivory in large and small quantities has been incorporated into cultural artifacts for thousands of years. As long ago as 1600 BC workshops in Mycenae were producing ivory boxes and furniture inlaid with ivory for export to the Greek mainland. In Egypt during the reign of Tutankhamun it was used as inlay in luxury goods, such as chests or head supports.

Ivory has been carved, valued and appreciated in Africa, Europe, India, the Far East and America. Its use charts and reflects the changing culture of the world over many centuries and over widely differing cultures.

The items illustrated in this short document demonstrate the widespread use of ivory in a range of antique objects, objects which were created at a time when elephants roamed Africa in their millions and the source of the material was primarily animals that had died from natural causes. To the uninitiated, 'antique ivory' conjures up images of carved tusks or figures made entirely of ivory, but these are in a minority. Its use is far more widespread, ranging from small pieces of inlay on wooden tea caddies through to thin slithers used as a stable base for the portrait miniatures that proved popular in 18th-century Europe and North America.

GREEK & ROMAN IVORY

Ancient items, such as this Greek couch-end ornament in the form of a satyr's head dating from about 200 to 100 BC, have survived the centuries. Couches made of wood and bronze were often decorated with a pair of satyr's heads in bone or ivory, inlaid into the ornamented sides.



This Roman ivory figure of Aphrodite Pudica was also probably an attachment from a banqueting couch and dates from 100 to 200 AD.

Further examples of Roman ivory can be found in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore.

Objects such as these demonstrate not only the extent of trade between the Romans and Ethiopian merchants, but also the social development of Roman society. At this time a Roman consul would have worn a crescent-shaped ivory buckle attached to his sandal as an outward sign of his high rank.

PORTRAIT MINIATURES

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was common for the middle classes to carry small oval portraits of their loved ones or family members on their person. Many thousands of such portraits were painted, sometimes in oils and sometimes in the delicate medium of watercolour. The portable nature of the portraits meant that, although protected in a metal and glass case, they were subjected to fluctuations in temperature and humidity, as well as knocks.

It was therefore important that they were painted on a stable medium. One favoured example was thin slithers of ivory.



Many artists specialised in portrait miniatures and their style can be recognised. Above is a portrait of General Foot, painted in watercolour on ivory, by Andrew Plummer (1763-1837). It measures just 2½ inches in height. Shown left is a portrait of a lady by Nathaniel Plimmer, dated c. 1800, again watercolour on ivory.

Sitters for such portraits include some of the most famous and influential people in the history of the last 300 years.

The portrait to the right is of George Washington, wearing the blue uniform of a general and the Order of the Cincinnati. Painted in watercolour on ivory in 1789 by John Ramage (c. 1748-1802), the miniature achieved the highest price ever achieved at auction for a portrait miniature (\$1.2 million).



On some occasions portraits are carved as an ivory relief. This example is mounted on glass and dates from between 1790 and 1810.

IVORY INLAY IN WESTERN EUROPEAN AND INDIAN DECORATIVE ARTS

In Western European culture ivory has been used for hundreds of years to adorn a wide variety of objects, both commonplace and important.



Small amounts of ivory were often used to decorate the keyhole escutcheons of chests of drawers or tea caddies, such as this Georgian caddy, c. 1800, in satinwood.

Items incorporating ivory are often commonplace antiques, made hundreds of years ago and still in widespread ownership and use in Europe and America.

From France is shown (right) a Louis XVI period mahogany & brass banded tric/trac or games table. The interior features a backgammon board inlaid with ivory & ebony.



This very high quality English desk made by Hamptons of Pall Mall dates from 1870. It features small ivory escutcheons around each lock.



For many centuries craftsmen in the Indian subcontinent have been working ivory, some of it Asian and some of it African. One such important example is shown here and dates from Goa in the late 16th century. This object, the Hohenzollern cabinet (after the family name of the Prussian monarchs), is made from Indian coromandel, sumptuously inlaid with scrolling designs of mythical sea creatures, and naginas with double coiled trails, all exquisitely formed of natural and stained ivory. Objects such as these are of great cultural importance.

The influence of the Portuguese was prominent in encouraging the creation of furniture under European influence. This then spread to the British.

Shown here is an important Anglo-Indian inlaid ivory and teak writing or dressing table, made in the Indian south-eastern coastal town of Vizagapatam. It dates from around 1740.



More examples of ivory's use can be seen in inlaid cabinets, including this early 17th-century tortoiseshell, etched ivory and walnut table cabinet made in Antwerp.



Illustrated on the left and dating from 1743 is the elegant Walpole Cabinet made by William Hallett, incorporating carved ivory reliefs.

Even on large items of furniture, such as this exquisite English Regency japanned side cabinet, it can sometimes be possible to find small amounts of ivory. In this case the drawers display ivory handles.



Historical events have provided the subject matter of the craftsman's art.

Shown below is a rare English gold and tortoiseshell snuff box mounted with a fine carved ivory "micro miniature" depicting Admiral Horatio Nelson's historic battle of Trafalgar formation of a double line of frigates on a blue-stained ivory sea. Contained in a contemporary gilt tooled red Morocco box this item will have been made between 1805 and 1810.



Ivory was used for many everyday objects. In the early 19th century subscribers to theatres would gain admission to their seats using ivory tokens, such as this one shown right.



Walking canes frequently displayed ivory handles. This is a late 17th century English Puritan-style cane and features a malacca shaft, silver collar and cord hole.

THE USE OF IVORY IN MEDIEVAL AND LATER RELIGIOUS OBJECTS

In Europe ivory was valued for centuries as a foil to the blaze of metals and stones used in devotional religious objects.

Workshops produced magnificent carvings that demonstrated the highest pinnacles of European design and craftsmanship, which were displayed in churches and other religious foundations.



The ivory diptych (right) depicts seven scenes of the Passion of Christ, and dates from 1360-1370. It was made in the workshop of the Master of the Passion Diptychs, in Cologne, Germany.



To the left is an early 17th century German ivory relief of the Madonna and the Sleeping Christ attributed to the craftsman Kriebel, Jürgen, ca. 1580/90-1645, possibly from Madgeburg.



To the right is a fine Flemish carved ivory figure of Christ Crucified 'Christo Vivo' dating from the second half of the 17th century.

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS IVORY

It is only natural that African indigenous craftsmen have drawn upon the ready availability of elephant ivory as a medium for their work. Because ivory is not durable under hostile environmental conditions few ancient carvings from African sites have stood the test of time. However, the arrival of European traders on the west coast led both to the preservation of late medieval African ivories and to the influence of European tastes on African traditions over the last 500 years.



Shown left is an example of a 'Loango'. These form part of a tradition of ivory carving from the West African coast which goes back to the fourteenth century. This example dates from circa 1860. Typically the scenes depicted on them are vignettes of life at the time when they were carved. Not only are these carvings breathtakingly executed, but they also give an historical insight into life on the slave coast. The scenes show missionaries, trade (including slavery) and everyday activities; they are an important visual and graphic record of life at the time.

Examples of these carved tusk can be found in numerous museums worldwide, including The British Museum.

JAPANESE NETSUKE

In 18th-century Japan both seals and netsuke developed into a compact art form of ivory masterpieces.

Netsuke were small toggles, by means of which a small pouch, pipe or nest of boxes ("inro") was suspended from the waistband ("obi") of the traditional Japanese robe, the kimono.

Illustrated here is a shishi and cub, by the 18th-century artist, Tomotada from Kyoto, and dated between 1760 and 1780. Netsuke were carved from a number of materials including both wood and ivory. This example is from ivory and measures just 2 inches (5 cm) in length.



THE ART DECO MOVEMENT

Ivory has been used as a heat insulator in tea and coffee services, as well as cutlery handles for more than 100 years. This beautifully designed Art Deco tea set by Stower & Wragg dates from 1938 and demonstrates the highest quality craftsmanship.



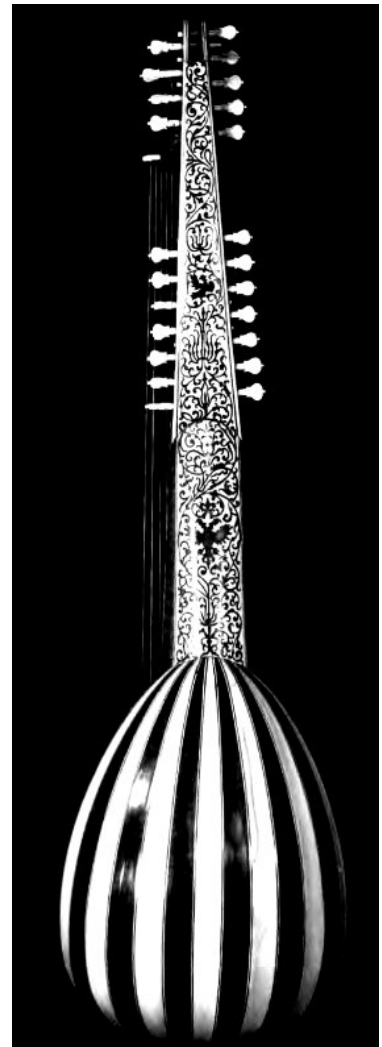
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

In addition to the extremely widespread use of ivory for the keys of pianos, it also featured as a decorative and practical material for many other musical instruments.



Violin bows have long used ivory as a means of holding the horsehair in place at the “frog” end of the bow. Additionally many early stringed instruments have used ivory decoratively to great effect. Illustrated right is a type of two-headed lute, known as a Theorbo, made in Venice in about 1620, by Christopher Choco. This exquisite example was constructed from rosewood, ivory, ebony and snakewood.

To the left is a seven-keyed ivory mounted boxwood flute by Monzani & Co. of 24 Dover Street, London, dating from about 1840.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

SCULPTURE AND WORKS OF ART



A carved ivory book cover of Christ Enthroned
Byzantine, 6th Century
Sold to the French State in 2011 for €2.5 million



A carved ivory group of the Virgin and Child Enthroned
Paris, 1250-1280
Sold in Paris 2011 for €6,337,800



A carved ivory group of the Massacre of the Innocents
By Leonard Kern, German, 1620-1630
Sold in Paris 2013 for €301,000



A turned ivory cup and cover
German, 17th Century
Sold in Paris 2009 for €301,000



A carved ivory group polyptych centred by a Virgin and Child
Paris, circa 1330
Sold in London 2005 for £590,000



A carved ivory relief of the Heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel
German, 12th Century
Sold to the French State in 2011 for €2 million



An ivory group of the Flagellation of Christ by Jacobus Agnesius
Italian, c. 1640

Sold in London, 6 December 2016, for £965,000

FURNITURE

THE BRAND CABINET



Sold in London 2012 for £1,217,250



The Walpole Cabinet
© Victoria and Albert museum



Interior of Horace Walpole's cabinet displaying his collection of miniatures.

THE BRAND CABINET

In 1743, the antiquarian Horace Walpole (d. 1797) designed a cabinet for the display of 'medals' for his 'very intimate friend', Thomas Brand (d. 1770) of The Hoo, Hertfordshire, and one for himself, a miniature 'Classical Temple of the Worthies', conceived to complement the classical interiors of his displayed at his pioneering Gothic masterpiece, Strawberry Hill, Middlesex, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (W.52-1925) (Ed. W.S. Lewis, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, New Haven, 1937-84, vol. XX, p. 434). Both cabinets' Palladian architectural form was possibly inspired by the designs of William Kent (d. 1748) for the Walpole family seat at Houghton, Norfolk, in particular door cases at the property that resemble the triangular pediment of these cabinets. Walpole had a lifelong friendship with Brand, the pair were educated at Eton and Cambridge, Walpole later affectionately describing Brand as 'our old schoolfellow' in correspondence with another Old Etonian and antiquary, 'Cardinal' Cole, (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. I, p. 198). Brand was very much part of Walpole's set, making the Grand Tour to Italy in 1738-39, as did Walpole from 1739-41. In 1754, the year of Brand's second visit to Italy, Walpole had no hesitation in recommending Brand to his friend, Horace Mann, the British Envoy in Florence, 'you will love him much, if he stays anytime with you' (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XX, p. 435). With a shared interest in classicism stimulated by their respective Grand Tour expeditions, these cabinets were undeniably a testament to the friendship of the two men.

The two cabinets, embellished with classical ivory bas-reliefs that differ in subject matter to reflect the personal taste of their respective owners, were intended to house classical antiquities; in July 1743, Walpole wrote to Mann, 'I have a new cabinet for my enamels and miniatures just come home, which I am sure you would like: it is of rosewood; the doors inlaid with carvings in ivory' (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XVIII, p. 277). Supplied within a couple of years of Walpole's return from the Grand Tour in September 1741, their date suggests that they were the first pieces of furniture commissioned for Brand's and Walpole's growing collections of antiquities, and are therefore highly significant (Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior*, New Haven and London, 1989, p.74). Walpole used all the space available in his cabinet to hang enamels and miniatures including the back of the cabinet doors, and one can assume that Brand did likewise. While Walpole's collection comprised a miscellany of portraits including 'Venus, Cupid, and other figures in enamel', family members and friends, we know that in 1938, the Brand Cabinet contained five wax medallion

portraits inscribed on the backs in Walpole's hand, one of them by Isaac Gosset representing Colonel John Selwyn of Matson, Gloucestershire, who died in 1757 and was the father of George Selwyn, Walpole's friend (A Description of the Villa of Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orlford at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham With an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, etc. 1774, p.77; Ralph Edwards, 'Cabinets made for Horace Walpole and Thomas Brand', *The Burlington Magazine*, March 1939, p. 131).



View of Walpole cabinet at Strawberry Hill

The Horace Walpole Cabinet was moved from Arlington Street to the 'Tribune', named after the Medici treasure room in the Uffizi in Florence, at Strawberry Hill after 14 April 1763 when the room's refurbishment was complete, the cabinet forming the focal point of this *Wunderkammer*. Almost certainly Walpole conceived his cabinet for his Arlington Street address because of its classical interiors, which contrast to the Gothic splendour at Strawberry Hill. Given that Brand made no significant modifications to The Hoo until 1760-64 when William Chambers remodeled the house, it is likely that he too intended his cabinet for his London property at no. 22 St. James's Square. It presumably moved to The Hoo from where it was sold by his descendant, Viscount Hampden in 1938 [The Contents of The Hoo, Whitwell, Herts', Christie's London, 20 October 1938, lot 72, £262.10s. (to Harper)].

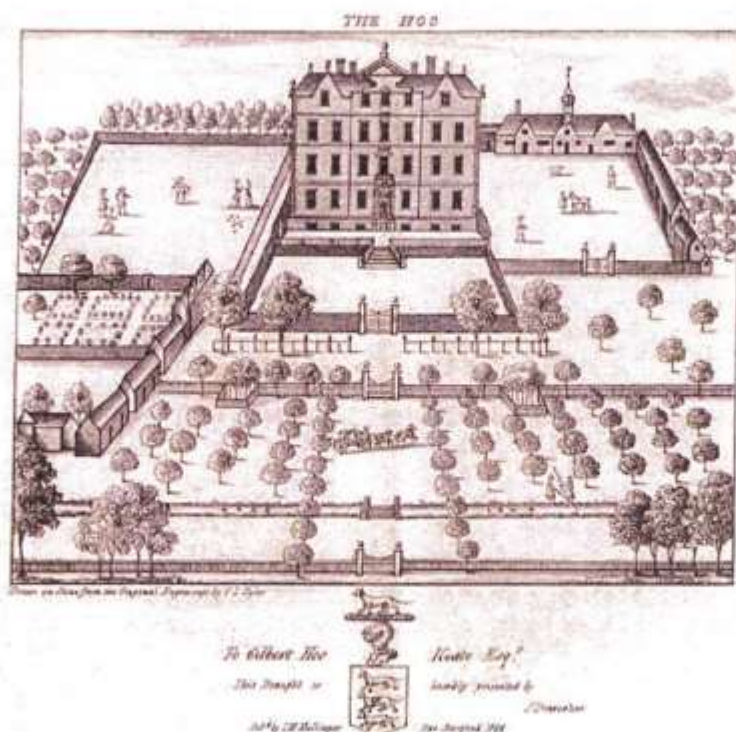
WILLIAM HALLETT SENIOR

While the maker of the Brand and Walpole cabinets is not known, it seems likely that they were executed by the 'great and eminent cabinet-maker' of Great Newport Street, London, William Hallett Snr. (d. 1781) (Ralph Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 131). Hallett was renowned for his markedly architectural style reflected in the Palladian design of the cabinets. Furthermore, Walpole is known to have patronised Hallett at Strawberry Hill, and undoubtedly at Arlington Street. On 20 September, 1755, Walpole paid Hallett for '2 Sophas for eating room' and '8 black gothic chairs', the total bill amounting to £73 11s. 4d. In May 1763, Walpole, the antiquarian, determined to acquire 'two tables and eighteen chairs, all made by Hallett of two hundred years ago' from Lady Conyer's sale at Great Staughton (Paget Toynbee, *Strawberry Hill Accounts, A Record of Expenditure in Building Furnishing, Etc. Kept by Mr Horace Walpole From 1747 to 1795*, Oxford, 1927, p. 6 and p. 82). Interestingly, the artist Edward Edwards (d. 1806), who as a young man worked at Hallett's workshop drawing patterns of furniture, later made many drawings at Strawberry Hill, including one of Walpole's cabinet in situ in the 'Tribune' in 1781 (*ibid.*, p. 82).

THE DESIGN

The Palladian form of these cabinets with Baroque carving and classical ivory plaques demonstrates the eclecticism of the antiquarian interests of Walpole, Brand and their contemporaries. The Walpole cabinet has the addition of plinths on the pediment to support the 'Worthies' but there is no evidence Brand's cabinet ever possessed these (Ralph Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 128). Walpole described the timber as rosewood, and in 1939 it was pronounced kingwood but has now been identified as padouk, the same wood used for the Brand Cabinet (Ed. Christopher Wilk, *Western Furniture 1350 to the Present Day in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1996, p. 96). Furthermore, the veneers and crossbanding on the two cabinets closely correspond. The detail of the carving of the Brand Cabinet is larger in scale, particularly in the leaf moulding at the base and in the floral swags but the carving of the supporting eagles' heads and the swags on both cabinets is similar recalling the craftsmanship of Grindling Gibbons, possibly by Jacob Frans Verscovers. Walpole was certainly patronising Verscovers, in correspondence to Mann writing, 'There is a Fleming here, who carves exquisitely in ivory, one Verskovis; he has done much for me and where I have recommended him' (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XIX, 26 June 1747). Additionally, in *Anecdotes of Painting*, Walpole refers to a 'cabinet heads of eagles by Verskovis' (H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting*, 1862, Works III, p. 481).

The subject matter of the classical ivories on the present cabinet of an amatory nature also contrasts with the rather more sedate ivories of the companion cabinet. As part of Brand's Grand Tour to Italy, he visited Rome where he had arrived by 11 March 1738, and it is possibly in this city-state that he purchased his set of ivories, later to adorn his cabinet (J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800*, compiled from the Brinsley Ford Archive, New Haven and London, 1997, p. 117). Brand was certainly collecting in this period, it was while in Venice in 1738 that he is believed to have acquired a series of four works by Canaletto, two of which, 'The Piazzetta di San Marco, Venice' and 'The Grand Canal, Venice' (see Christie's London, 2 December 2008, lots 45 and 46). Alternatively, the ivories may have been purchased on his behalf by Walpole, who was certainly obtaining unidentified 'commissions' for Brand in 1765, 'Don't think I have forgot your commissions: I mentioned them to old Mariette [Pierre-Jean Mariette, collector] this evening, who says he has got one of them, but never could meet with the other' (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XL, p. 384).



The Hoo, Hertfordshire



THOMAS BRAND

Thomas Brand was born circa 1717 into an educated and wealthy family of landowners and city merchants, inheriting The Hoo, a 17th century mansion in Hertfordshire (as a minor) from his mother Margaret, widow of Thomas Brand Senior. Following Brand's return from his first Grand Tour to Italy and, like Walpole, with sympathies firmly in the Whig camp, he became MP representing Shoreham in 1741 followed by Tavistock in 1747, Gatton in 1754 and Okehampton in 1768. In 1754, Walpole described Brand's connections as being 'entirely with the Duke of Bedford' implying that he was a *Pittite* (a supporter of William Pitt the Younger, Britain's youngest prime minister) (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XX, p.435). In 1749, Brand married Lady Caroline (or Carolina) Pierrepont, daughter of Evelyn Pierrepont, 1st Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull, and half-sister of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but following her premature death Brand, to 'dissipate his grief' started travelling extensively (*ibid.*). In June 1754, he returned to Italy spending time in Rome where he was buying paintings on his own account and for William Wentworth, 2nd Earl of Strafford, a fellow member of the *Dilettanti*, including Wilson's *Eco ful in Arcadiae* (private collection). From Rome he moved on to Florence where he met up with Mann who wrote to Walpole on 12 April 1755 that Brand was spending 'his whole time in the Gallery [the Uffizi] and seeing other curiosities' (Ingamells, *op.cit.*, p.117).

The ornate and slightly risqué nature of the ivory plaques on the present cabinet correspond to what is known of Brand's personality largely derived from Walpole's letters. That he was a natural *bon viveur*, despite being afflicted during a certain period by grief at the death of his wife, is evident. Walpole described him as 'naturally all cheerfulness and laughter' (W.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, vol. XX, pp. 434-435), and in correspondence wrote 'You love laughing; there is a King dead [George II]; can you help coming to town?' (*ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 186). Both Brand and Walpole were quintessential patrons of the arts; Brand was a Director of the Opera and an early member of the Society of *Dilettanti* from 1741, in *dilettanti*, George Knapp (d.1778), masquerading in Van Dyck costume holding out a Correggio-like drawing of a Madonna with his left hand, harking back to Van Dyck's 'Inigo Jones' (Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti, the Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-century England*, Los Angeles, 2008, p.40).





THE IVORY MEDALLIONS

Although the disposition of the ivories on the Brand Cabinet is identical to that on its counterpart designed by Walpole, the overall tone is more light-hearted as has been noted above. Despite taking classical sources as a starting point, in fact only three of the ivories are common to both: the Walking Lion, probably derived from a bronze by the sculptor Giambologna, the Farnese Hercules, and a profile of the Gorgon Medusa. In general, Brand seems to have instructed the artist (or artists) responsible for mortals. The two main rectangular reliefs depict *Jupiter and Io* (after the painting by Correggio now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and *Leda and the Swan*, another of Jupiter's dalliances with a human partner. In addition, the cabinet includes a plaque of *Cupid carving his Bow* (after the painting by Parmagianino, also goddess of love. These latter consist of the *Callipygian Venus*, the *Venus de' Medici* and the *Venus with a Dolphin*, thought in the 18th century to be after a model by Michelangelo but now recognised to be a composition by Giambologna. The theme is continued with the pairing on the left door of the cabinet of Hercules opposite Omphale, who so dominated her lover that she is usually depicted, as here, in possession of both his club and lion skin. The remaining reliefs all seem to be portraits after ancient sources apart from the plaque in the lower left corner of the right door. This appears to be a contemporary or near contemporary portrait, and may depict an individual with a particular significance for Brand himself.

Just who might be responsible for creating these ivories remains a difficult question, and judging by the varying facture of the plaques it seems likely that there was more than one artist. Certainly there was a booming trade in Italy for small ivory reliefs after classical subjects: These were produced as souvenirs of the Grand Tour by artists such as Giovanni Battista Pozzi (c. 1670-1752), whose relief of *Diana and Calisto* is documented in the collection of the Duke of Portland in 1725/26 (see C. Theuerkauff, *Elfenbein - Sammlung Reiner Winler*, Munich, 1984, no. 61, pp. 114-117). However, many of the same subjects continued to be produced in ivory, wood, and even glass paste by men such as William Tassie (d. 1860) well into the 19th century (see N. Barker ed., *The Devonshire Inheritance - Five Centuries of Collecting at Chatsworth*, Alexandria, 2003, no. 197). The ivories could easily have been purchased for Brand through one of the contacts he had made while on the Grand Tour himself, or it may be that Brand's friend Walpole purchased them for Brand when Walpole acquired the ivories for his own cabinet.

The apparent difference in the treatment of several of the plaques, perhaps most notable in the two figures of *Leda* suggests that more than one artist was responsible for these ivories. On the Walpole Cabinet, it is documented that the Flemish artist Jacob Frans Verscovers (or Verskovis) carved the standing figures which adorn the pediment, as well as the festoons and eagle heads below. It therefore seems likely that Verscovers was responsible for these elements of the Brand Cabinet, and may have been asked to carve a number of the ivory plaques to supplement plaques which had been purchased in Italy.



KEY TO THE SUBJECTS OF THE IVORY PLAQUES

1. Walking Lion, after Giambologna
2. Classical Head
3. Venus Callipyge, the original in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples
4. Classical Head
5. Farnese Hercules, the original in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples
6. Jupiter and Io, after Correggio, the original in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
7. Omphale with Hercules' club and lion pelt
8. Classical Head
9. Faun with Pipes, the original in the Louvre, Paris
10. Classical Head
11. Classical Head
12. Cupid with his bow, after Parmigianino, the original in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
13. Classical Head
14. Venus de Medici, the original in the Uffizi, Florence
15. Ieda and the Swan, after the antique
16. Venus, formerly thought to be after Michelangelo, after Giambologna,
the original in a Private Collection
17. Contemporary Portrait
18. Belvedere Antinous, the original in the Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican
19. Medusa
20. Ieda and the Swan





A pair of George III ivory-mounted bois satine marquetry tripod stands
Attributed to Mayhew & Ince, London, c. 1775
Sold in London 2012 for £61,250

HISTORIC CHINESE WORKS OF ART



A PAIR OF FINE AND RARE IMPERIAL ENGRAVED TURNED IVORY BOWLS
18TH CENTURY

Each bowl supported on a short straight channelled foot with gently rounded walls and a slightly everted rim, one finely incised with a scholar dressed in flowing robes holding a wine cup, seated on a gnarled tree branch beside rockwork being tended by a boy, all within a fenced garden setting, the other incised with two attendants in a pavilion next to a cliff, all amidst vaporious clouds, both bowls incised with a ten-character poetic inscription ending with a two-character seal mark, the bases with the seal mark *gong zhi* 3¾ in. (9.5 cm.) diam. (2)

Provenance

The poems read:

(on the bowl with scholar holding a wine cup):

'Xian bei hai fan ju, bao zhuan qie tiao lan'

which may be translated as 'The heavenly cup of wine suggests the hint of chrysanthemum, the delicious food carries an aromatic taste'.

Seal marks 'Qing Yue'.

(on the bowl with a pavilion):

'Ran han deng hua man, fei shang yun qi han'

which may be translated as 'Dipping my paint brush into ink with the lantern lights shining bright, I raise my wine cup in the cold air with clouds above me'.

Seal marks 'Gan Yin'

These rare imperial ivory bowls are a perfect combination of smooth carving and perfectly balanced proportions ideally complemented by delicate decoration. The technique of ivory decoration seen on these bowls, comprised of incised lines filled with black ink or lacquer to resemble ink painting, has a long history in China. A rectangular plaque with the image of a tiger in finely incised lines on its upper surface was excavated in 1968 from a Han dynasty tomb at Mancheng in Hebei province. This is now in the collection of the Hebei Provincial Museum (see *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Gongyi meishu bian 11 zhu, mu, ya, jiao, qi*, Beijing, 1987, no. 82). Tang dynasty ivory rulers preserved in the Shoso-in, Nara, Japan were also decorated using this technique

(illustrated by R. Soame Jenyns and William Watson in *Chinese Art III*, New York, 1982 edition, p. 159, no. 112). However, between the Tang and the Qing dynasties this technique of ivory decoration appears very infrequently. A rare Ming dynasty ivory brushpot decorated with an incised design of the Three Friends of Winter, preserved in the Palace Museum, Beijing, is illustrated in *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Gongyi meishu bian 11 zhu, mu, ya, jiao, qi, op. cit.*, p. 78, no. 90. In the Qing dynasty, however, two versions of the technique were used. One of these had the fine lines of decoration against an uncoloured ground, as on the current bowls. The other version had a dark, usually black or red lacquer, ground on which the designs appeared in reserve with fine line details. An example of this latter type of decoration can be seen on an ivory table screen dated to AD 1771 in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (illustrated in *Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing*, London, 1984, p. 146, no. 162).

An 18th century brushpot belonging to the Sir Victor Sassoon Chinese Ivories Trust, which is decorated with a delicate landscape with figures, and an early 18th century archer's thumb ring from the Sloane Collection at the British Museum, which is also decorated with figures in landscape, are closer to the current bowls in both style and technique. Both these comparative pieces are illustrated in *Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing*, *op. cit.*, p. 153, no. 181, and p.177, no. 239, respectively.

This type of decoration as applied to the current ivory bowls is specifically designed to resemble fine Chinese ink painting. The continuous landscapes on the bowls are reminiscent of those on traditional hand scrolls painted on silk or paper, and this impression is reinforced by the ten-character calligraphic inscriptions and the two red 'seal' characters incorporated into the decoration of each of the bowls.

The figures, landscape and buildings on these ivory bowls are delicately and beautifully rendered. The poetic inscriptions are lines from the works of famous Tang dynasty (AD 618-907) poets, and reflect aspects of the pictorial decoration. One comes from a poem by Wang Wei (701-61) and can be translated as:

'The heavenly cup of wine suggests the hint of chrysanthemum,
The delicious food carries an aromatic taste.'

The other inscription comes from the 8th century poet Zhang Zirong, and can be translated as:

'Dipping my paintbrush into ink with the lantern lights shining bright, I raise my wine cup in the cold air with clouds above me.'
As if to reinforce the imperial origins of these bowls, the calligraphic inscriptions on the sides align perfectly with the *Gong zhi* (made for the palace) seal mark incised into each base and coloured red.

The theme of both decoration and inscriptions on these bowls is the life of the Chinese literati, while both bowls also carry connotations of Daoist reclusion. The scholar drinking wine while seated on a terrace beside a table bearing antiques may be intended to represent the celebrated poet Tao Yuanming (AD 365-427), who is known for his love of chrysanthemums. Not only does the vase on the table beside him contain chrysanthemums, but they are also mentioned in the poem inscribed on this cup. The two red 'seal' characters appended to the poem are *qing*, meaning noble or propitious, and *yue*, meaning moon.

On the other bowl, a scholar is shown inside a thatched pavilion, which may be a reference to the eminent Tang poet Du Fu (AD 712-770), who lived for a time in a *caotang* (thatched hut) in Chengdu, Sichuan province, where he wrote some of his most famous poems. However it is significant that the thatched pavilion on the bowl is shown to be high up in the mountains amongst the clouds. One of the seal characters appending the poem is an archaic version of the character *gan*. This character refers to a tree known as the Lang Gan tree, which grew in the Kunlun mountains, where the immortal Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, is believed to have had her palace. The medicinal uses of the Lang Gan tree are discussed in the famous *Bencao Gangmu* (Collection of Materia Medica), compiled by Li Shizhen (1518-93) and published in 1602. The form of the *gan* character seen on the bowl is no longer used, but appears in the *Kangxi Cidian* (Kangxi Dictionary), which was published in 1716, having been compiled following a 1710 order from the Kangxi Emperor, which required that the dictionary be completed in five years. The other red seal character appended to the inscription on this bowl is *yin*, which in this case probably refers to 'retirement' or retreat from public duties, and the tranquillity to which many Chinese literati aspired.

The shape, size of these bowls, coupled with the style and execution of their decoration, and the choice of decorative themes, suggests that they may originally have been part of the same set as two others still preserved in the Palace Museum, Beijing (illustrated in *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum - 44 - Bamboo, Wood, Ivory and Rhinoceros Horn Carvings*, Hong Kong, 2002, pp. 165-6, nos. 143 and 144), and a third, formerly in the collection of Robert Blumenfeld, which was sold in our New York Rooms on 25 March 2010, lot 846. This set of exquisite bowls was probably made in the palace workshops for the Kangxi emperor (AD 1662-1722). The esteem in which these bowls were held by the Qing court is reflected in the fact that one of the bowls in the Palace Museum has been given a gold lining, while the other has a silver lining. The two current bowls and the Blumenfeld bowl also appear to have formerly been fitted with metal linings. Such linings not only confirm the extent to which the ivory bowls were prized, but also suggest that these bowls may have been used on some special occasion, as opposed to being merely decorative.

Sold in London 2010 for £2,281,250



A LACQUERED IVORY BRUSH POT
KANGXI PERIOD (1662-1722)

The exterior of the brush pot is reverse-decorated with a continuous riverscape scene, depicting figures at leisure amidst stylised rockwork, tall trees and mountains, with a crane in flight above a natural spring. Another crane is perched on a pine tree, beside a ten-character poetic inscription. The scene is set between two key-fret borders.
5 in. (12.7 cm.) high

See a similarly decorated brush pot from the collection of Dr. Che Ip, illustrated in *Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing*, London, 1984, p. 154, no. 182. Another comparable brush pot of lobed form is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, illustrated in *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum: Bamboo, Wood, Ivory and Rhinoceros Horn Carvings*, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 158, no. 139.

Sold in London 2013 for £254,500



Chinese School, early 19th century
A seated Chinese lady holding a fan, in an interior
watercolour on ivory
5 7/8 x 4 5/8in. (14.9 x 11.8cm.)
in a Cantonese carved hardwood frame

Sold in London 2006 for £6,600

HISTORIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



Italian lute
First half of the 17th century
Solid ivory body



Single manual harpsichord
Jacob Kirckman
London, 1766
Ivory keyboard



Baroque guitar
Jean-Baptiste Voboam
Paris 1699
Ivory inlay and extensive tortoiseshell overlay



Three-keyed oboe
Giovannio Maria Anciuti
Milan, 1722
Solid ivory



Viola bow
William Forster Junior
London, late 18th/early 19th century
Ivory frog and adjuster



Baroque musette (French court bagpipe)
First half 18th century
Solid ivory chanter and shuttle drones



One-keyed flute
Thomas Stanesby Junior
London, second quarter 18th century
Solid ivory

