

MEDIEVAL IVORIES BROUGHT TO LIGHT

When in 1924 the French scholar Raymond Koechlin published his three-volume study of French Gothic Ivories, his catalogue numbered 1,328 objects and was illustrated by some 500 images. Since then, many more ivories have surfaced in auction houses as well as private and public collections; valuable articles and catalogues have been written; scientific examination and increasing expertise have all shed more light on these exquisite objects.

On **15 December 2010** the Gothic Ivories Project, hosted by The Courtauld Institute of Art, goes online promising a “Koechlin for the twenty-first century”.

www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk makes available the first 700 objects from a database that already numbers more than 3,000 ivories. A detailed entry has been written for each piece and the vast majority are illustrated by high resolution colour images, with multiple views. The final number of objects looks set to triple Koechlin’s figure.



Relief, Virgin and Child (detail)
French or Netherlandish
c.1300-1350
© The Courtauld Gallery

“The project has been made possible by the collaboration of numerous institutions”, comments the Project’s director, Professor John Lowden, “but it is not only the major museums that will benefit from this resource. Many Gothic ivories are still in private collections, and the website will enable owners to identify what they have.”

Project manager Dr Catherine Yvard adds: “The support we received from institutions around the world has been astonishing: all major collections have joined us and smaller collections have also been enthusiastic. We are equally interested in including objects in private collections, so as to be as comprehensive as possible. The website will be accessible to all and is designed to welcome collectors and curators as well as students and scholars. As so many Gothic ivories were divided up for sale in the nineteenth century, there is a very real chance of being able to identify what have been thought to be missing parts of a whole. The website makes possible searches by many aspects of content, provenance, function and so on.”

The project has been funded to date primarily through the generosity of Thomson Works of Art Ltd., in memory of Ken Thomson, an enthusiastic collector of ivories.

Notes to editors

The production of ivory objects flourished in the Gothic period, especially in France: delicate statuettes, minutely carved diptychs and triptychs, mirror backs and wonderful caskets with secular scenes have survived in collections around the world. The last comprehensive survey of Gothic ivories contained over 1,300 items and was published by Raymond Koechlin in 1924 in his seminal work *Les Ivoires gothiques français*.

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