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### **CASSONE IN THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY SIENESE MANNER AT THE ROYAL WAWEL CASTLE IN CRACOW**

*To the memory of MARCELLO ROMANELLI, one of the employees of Villa I Tatti, being the Harvard University Center of Italian Renaissance Studies, who on 11 December 1994 generously presented me at Settignano some precious books, among them, Icilio Federico Joni's „Le memorie di un pittore di quadri antichi” published by the Società Editrice Toskana in 1932, thus stimulating my interest in cassoni and in forged art objects of the Italian Renaissance.*

*J.M.*



In the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Siena became one of the main centres in which works of art from the early Renaissance period were falsified<sup>1</sup>. This was largely due to the growing interest in Sienese art from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries which reached its peak after the famous exhibition in 1904 entitled *La Mostra dell'Antica Arte Senese*<sup>2</sup>. Icilio Federico Joni (1866-1946) is considered to be the prince among the Sienese forgers<sup>3</sup>. This artist, at some point also a lecturer in the Sienese Institute of Fine Arts, but above all a forger, produced a large number of artefacts – both religious and secular paintings, wood covers of books and *cassoni* or wedding chests, which found their way into many of the private collections and museums of Europe and the U.S.A. His paintings in the 'old style' were so refined that Bernard Berenson himself once bought two panels falsified by him<sup>4</sup>. Even today Joni's imitations of Italian primitives are sold at auctions as originals from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1932, at the peak of his fame and financial prosperity, he published his *Le Memorie di un pittore di quadri antichi con alcune*

*descrizioni sulla pittura a tempera e sul modo di fare invecchiare i dipinti e dorature*, which included many illustrations of his works<sup>5</sup>. In this book Joni describes how around 1900 paintings executed by him in the "old style" after his own inventions, found many customers by way of intermediaries or dealers. Previously, artefacts signed by him had sold badly; now the same artefacts considered to be originals from the Quattrocento, earned considerable amounts of money. Umberto Giunti (1886-1970), formerly known as the "falsario in calcinaccio" or "the forger in ruins"<sup>6</sup>, Gino Nelli and Iginio Gottardi were also great masters in the art of forgery in Siena<sup>7</sup>.

Works of the Sienese forgers also found their way into the hands of Polish collectors of art; and in time ended up in the collections of important museums. Two cases in point are the works of Giunti in the National Museum, Warsaw<sup>8</sup> and a *cassone* (marriage chest) housed in the Royal Wawel Castle, Cracow (fig. 1)<sup>9</sup>. It is the latter, depicting a wedding scene on its front, which is the subject of this article. The painted front panels of wedding chests usually depict

<sup>1</sup> A. OLIVETTI, G. MAZZONI, *Entre invention, restauration et vente: la peinture médiévale au début du XXe siècle*, *Médiévales*, 14, 1988, p. 75-86; G. MAZZONI, *Falsificazioni d'arte a Siena tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in: Bruno Marzi, a cura di M. Caciorgna e M. Pierini, Siena 1995, p. 199-236; S. MALATESTA, *I re dei falsi*, Repubblica (Cultura), 18 IX, 1992. For general observations concerning falsifications in Italy: M. FERRETTI, *Falsi e tradizione artistica*, in: *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 10, Torino 1981, p. 115-195. See also C. L. RAGGHIANI, *I falsi artistici*, *Critica d'arte* 8, 1961, p. 1-27.

<sup>2</sup> See also R. LANGTON DOUGLAS, *Burlington Fine Arts Club. Exhibition of pictures of the school of Siena and examples of the minor arts of that City*, London 1904.

<sup>3</sup> G. MAZZONI, in: *Siena tra Purismo e Liberty*. Catalogo della mostra di Siena, Milano-Roma 1988, p. 198-206; *Idem*, in: *Sembrare e non essere. I falsi nell'arte e nella civiltà*, a cura di M. Jones e M. Spagnol, Milano 1993, p. 222-225. *Idem*, in: *Falsi da Museo, catalogo della mostra tenutasi presso il Museo Poldi Pezzoli di Milano*, a cura di Andrea di Lorenzo e Annalisa Zanni, Cologno Monzese (Milano) 1998, p. 40-45. I am grateful to Andrea di Lorenzo for the photopies of the latter catalogue.

<sup>4</sup> D. HILL, *Berenson and I Tatti. Some recollections*, *Apollo* 76, (October) 1962, p. 594; MALATESTA 1992.

<sup>5</sup> The book was published at San Casciano -Firenze (undated), but 1932. English edition: *Affairs of a painter*, London 1936.

<sup>6</sup> A. MAZZONI, *Umberto Giunti. Da Sassetta a Fattori*, in: *Conferenze d'arte*, a cura di G. Mazzoni, Montepulciano 1994, p. 114-162. See also the up-dated version of this paper in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> MAZZONI 1995, p. 199-236, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> MAZZONI 1994, p. 119-121. See also his paper in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> S. ŚWIERZ-ZALESKI, *Mebel renesansu włoskiego w zbiorach Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu*, *Arkady*, 2, 1936, p. 381; T. MAŃKOWSKI, *Dzieje wnętrz wawelskich*, Warszawa 1952, plate 21; J. GOSTWICKA, *Włoskie meble renesansowe w zbiorach wawelskich*, Warszawa 1954, no. 1, fig. 1; *Idem*, *Mobili italiani del Rinascimento nelle raccolte del Palazzo Wawel*, *Antichità viva* 10, fasc. 3, 1971, p. 42, fig. 4-5; *Zbiory Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu*, ed. by J. Szablowski, Warszawa 1969, p. 11, fig. 104-105.

scenes from mythology, ancient history and much less frequently, the Bible<sup>10</sup>. However, at times their themes are also marriage rituals. What has survived to date from the majority of the *cassoni* are just the front panels (and sometimes also the *fianchi* or side panels) which are now exhibited in many of the museums around the world. The *cassone* in question is complete and has even retained its rounded lid; in a way it resembles late-Antique or medieval sarcophagi, and especially those preserved in Ravenna. The decoration is made in tempera and *gesso dorato* (gilded gesso).

This large chest, which measures: 170cm x 67cm x 57cm, rests on seven feet adorned with dolphins. Both the front panel and the lid (fig. 2) are divided by vertical and horizontal, ornamented strips into three sections or compartments of equal size. The two side sections of the front are coated with *gesso dorato* depicting plants growing out of vases flanked by birds with long necks (herons?). The central compartment is filled with a painted scene depicting 12 people in a room with a coffer-shaped ceiling and a draped curtain in the background (fig. 9). The three main *dramatis personae* are shown in the centre: a young woman, whose right hand is raised with an open palm, a young man, who is presenting her with a small casket which he holds in both hands, and a man standing between them, who is turning towards the woman, but pointing with his right hand at the man with the casket. The painting gives the impression that it has been restored many times. On both sides there are shields containing coats of arms, of which only one, on the right, is decipherable. The same coat of arms – depicting in all likelihood a dragon – is also to be found on the back of the chest (fig. 3), on the lid, and the side panels (fig. 4). In the latter the dragon is in *gesso dorato* and

placed in the centre of octagonal stars or rosettes. The lid, which is entirely covered with *gesso dorato* is decorated with as many as 15 coats of arms, thus each of the three compartments contains five (fig. 5). It also bears an inscription in capital letters, which reads: AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA. The chest appears to be a really old piece of furniture and made from at least two kinds of wood, including lime. The *gesso dorato* on virtually the entire surface has been worn away to reveal the underlying reddish clay bole.

The chest has been reproduced and briefly discussed in several publications dealing with the Wawel Castle, or furniture housed in it, though it has never been the subject of a separate study<sup>11</sup>. It is commonly described as a Florentine work dating from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Janina Gostwicka, the one time curator of the Furniture Department at the Wawel Castle, has until now been the major authority on this chest<sup>12</sup>. With regard to the coats of arms on its front, she was of the opinion that „they belonged to the families of the young couple: the Martelli or Grifoni (a similar coat of arms: a griffin – on a wedding chest in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo in Siena), the Baldinotti of Pistoia or the Faussonne of Siena”. The Royal Castle inventory files read as follows: „[...] chest belongs to works of art which are unique in the world. The combining in one piece of furniture a painting in tempera and gilded stucco is a rarity even in foreign art collections. [...]”. As to the authorship of the scene on the front with the figures, the inventory states that “[...] the closest stylistic links are with the so-called Maestro del *cassone* Adimari, who was active between 1435 and 1460, and whose work *Le nozze Adimari-Ricasoli* (the marriage of Boccaccio Adimari to Lisa Ricasoli took place on 22 June 1420)

<sup>10</sup> E. CALLMANN, *The growing threat to marital bliss as seen in fifteenth-century Florentine paintings*, Studies in Iconography, V, 1979, p. 73-92; J. MIZIOŁEK, *Soggetti classici sui cassoni fiorentini alla vigilia del Rinascimento*, Varsavia 1996; *Idem*, *The Queen of Sheba and Solomon on some early-Renaissance cassone panels*, Antichità viva 36, fasc. 4, 1997, p. 6-23; C. BASKINS, *Cassone painting, humanism, and gender in early modern Italy*, Cambridge 1998.

<sup>11</sup> See note 9 supra.

<sup>12</sup> GOSTWICKA 1954, p. 27; *Eadem* 1971, p. 42.

can be found in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence"<sup>13</sup>.

Since these remarks on the Wawel *cassone* were made, knowledge of the late medieval and Renaissance *cassoni*, as well as the methods used by forgers who falsified such *cassoni* five centuries later, has been much expanded<sup>14</sup>. Even a preliminary examination of the Wawel *cassone* shows, irrefutably, that it cannot be Florentine; this also applies to the coats of arms on it. However, more important is that it was most probably not executed in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chest may also incorporate some genuine parts. If this is so then neither the lid with its numerous coats of arms, nor the painted scene on the front belong to the latter. However, let us begin with evidence that the chest is not in the Florentine but rather the Sieneese manner.

From research undertaken in the last ten years it is now clear that *cassoni* decorated with painted scenes were developed in Florence in the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and not at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century as previously believed<sup>15</sup>. It was only in this early phase, which lasted until the end of the first decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, that the

*cassoni* made in Florence were sometimes divided into three compartments, but the paintings were usually put into many sided frames made of *gesso dorato*. From the second or, at the latest, the third decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the front panels of Florentine *cassoni* were decorated with uniform narrative paintings. It was in Siena, where the production of marriage chests became fashionable only around 1440, that *cassoni* were often made with their fronts divided into three equal compartments<sup>16</sup>. Two such front panels may serve as good examples. One of them, comprising three biblical scenes, can be found in the Oratorio di San Bernardino in Siena (fig. 6)<sup>17</sup>. The second, depicting scenes from chivalric life, was formerly to be found in Drey's antique-dealers shop in Munich (fig. 7)<sup>18</sup>. On this latter *cassone*, which I have never had the chance to examine, there are two coats of arms flanking the central scene as on the Wawel chest. There is no doubt that Gostwicka is right when she claims that the Wawel *cassone* is unique in that it combines compartments made in gesso with a painted one. It is also unique because of the large number of coats of arms on the lid.

Coats of arms are almost an inseparable part of many preserved *cassoni*, though in

<sup>13</sup>I am grateful to Stanisława Lenczowska and Jacek Foltyn for the possibility of consulting the Royal Wawel Castle file concerning the piece in question. The opinion that the style of the Wawel painting is close to the so-called Adimari *cassone* is hardly acceptable. The later is a piece of great quality; it was recently discussed in: *Il fratello di Masaccio. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni detto lo Scheggia*, [cat. della mostra], a cura di L. Cavazzini, Firenze-Siena 1999, no. 13, p. 58-61. See also L. BELLOSI, M. HAINES, *Lo Scheggia*, Firenze-Siena 1999, p. 7-8 and 81.

<sup>14</sup>Concerning falsifications of *cassoni* see among others A. G. DE MARCHI, *La derivazione dei modelli nei falsi 'primitivi'*, in: W. ANGELELLI, A. G. DE MARCHI, *Pittura dal Duecento al primo Cinquecento nelle fotografie di Girolamo Bombelli*, a cura di S. Romano, Milano 1991, p. 277-302, n. 614; MAZZONI 1995, p. 210-217; M. NATALE, C. RITSCHARD, *Falsifications, manipulations, pastiches. L'art d'imitier. Images de la Renaissance italienne au Musée d'Art et d'Histoire*, Genève 1997, nos. 14-15, p. 108-120.

<sup>15</sup>E. FAHY, *Florence and Naples: cassone panel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, in: *Hommage à Michel Laclotte. Etudes sur la peinture du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*, Milano 1994, p. 231-243; J. MIZIOŁEK, 'Florentina libertas'. La 'Storia di Lucrezia romana e la cacciata del tiranno' sui *cassoni* del primo Rinascimento, *Prospettiva*, 83/84, 1996, p. 159-176; *Idem*, *Cassoni istoriati with 'Torello and Saladin': Observations on the origins of a new genre of the Trecento art in Florence*, in: *Italian panel painting in the Dugento and Trecento (Studies in the History of Art)*, in press.

<sup>16</sup>The origins of painted marriage chests in Siena have so far not been studied sufficiently, cf. P. MISCIATELLI, *Cassoni senesi*, La Diana, IV, 1929, p. 117-126; C. BRANDI, *Giovanni di Paolo*, Florence 1947, p. 124-132; C. CHRISTIANSEN, L. B. KANTER, K. B. STREHLKE, *Painting in Renaissance Siena 1420-1500*, New York 1988, *passim*. See also J. MIZIOŁEK, *Observations on the artistic geography of Italian Renaissance domestic painting*, in: *Borders in art. Revisiting Kunstgeographie*, ed. by K. Murawska-Muthesius, Warsaw 2000, p. 107-116.

<sup>17</sup>P. SCHUBRING, *Cassoni. Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Frührenaissance*, Leipzig 1923 (1st edn. 1915), no. 442.

<sup>18</sup>SCHUBRING 1923, no. 934.

the majority of cases (especially on the earliest chests) they are indecipherable. They were located on the front or side panels but not on the lid, and are usually the coats of arms of the husband and wife; thus there are only two, and in exceptional cases there are four<sup>19</sup>. So why are there so many on the Wawel chest? As with another *cassone*, discussed at the end of this article, it seems to be based on the famous Sieneese *biccherna*, that is on the painted wooden covers of books in which the city accounts were recorded. The majority of these are currently housed in the Archivio di Stato in Siena (Palazzo Piccolomini)<sup>20</sup>. One of them, dating from 1473, is of particular importance to us, not only because of the coats of arms but also the scene it depicts (fig. 11)<sup>21</sup>. The bottom part is decorated with 12 coats of arms; some of which can also be found on the Wawel chest, including the most important of these: the coat of arms with the dragon. This fabled beast present on the Wawel chest (which is not a griffin as suggested by Gostwicka) is somewhat different from the beast in the *biccherna*, but in both examples the coat of arms is most probably that of the famous Borghese family from Siena<sup>22</sup>. It is also worth mentioning that book covers patterned on the *biccherna* were very popular at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore the coats of arms to be found on the lid of the Wawel chest of families such as the Saracini, Bichi, Luti, Arduini, Beccaria, and Piccolomini were universally imitated by Sieneese copiers of "old paintings", as well as forgers who were active in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>. Icilio Federico Joni began

his career by producing such painted book covers. He writes about these, and even reproduces one of them containing the coat of arms of the Piccolimini family (a cross with a *mezzaluna*) in his 'Le memorie di un pittore di quadri antichi' (fig. 12)<sup>24</sup>.

At this point it is worth dealing briefly with the *gessoed* strips which divide the front of the chest and the lid into three compartments (fig. 9). The plant motifs, like the rosettes on the sides, are of a rather low artistic quality. They resemble, to a certain extent, the motifs on other Sieneese chests and particularly the one with the biblical scenes (fig. 6). However, the closest analogy can be found in a woodcut housed in the National Gallery, Washington (fig. 10)<sup>25</sup>. It has long been known that this woodcut, which depicts the bust of a young woman in profile, identified by an inscription at the bottom as MONA LISA BELA, is a falsification. It is fairly obvious that the floral ornamentation on its frame is very similar to that on the Wawel chest. There is also a similarity in the woman's fancy headgear. It seems plausible that both artefacts were produced in the same workshop, or were even made by the same person. Not only the ornamental motifs but also the inscriptions would seem to indicate that this is indeed so.

To date the subject of the painted scene in the central section of the Wawel *cassone* has been interpreted as the betrothal or marriage of a young couple<sup>26</sup>. Though this is close to the truth, it requires a more detailed explanation of the marriage rituals of the times. Before the Council of Trent (1563),

<sup>19</sup> A rare instance of Florentine *cassone* with four coats of arms is the one in the Cini Collection, Venice, see N. BARBANTINI, *Il Castello di Monselice*, Venezia 1940, plate 190 with a long caption; V. BRANCA, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron*, Firenze 1992, fig. 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> *Le biccherne. Tavole dipinte delle Magistrature senesi (secoli XIII-XVIII)*, a cura di L. Borgia et al, Roma 1984.

<sup>21</sup> *Le biccherne* 1984, no. 68, p. 176 with colour illustration.

<sup>22</sup> For the coat of arms of this family see V. SPRETI, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, vol. II, Milano 1929, p. 130-135; *Le biccherne* 1984, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> At least half of them are pictured on the Sano *biccherna*; the other adorn several *biccherna* also to be found in the Palazzo Piccolomini, Siena.

<sup>24</sup> JONI 1932, plate between p. 132 and 133.

<sup>25</sup> J. A. LEVENSON, K. OBERHUBER, J. L. SHEEHAN, *Early Italian engravings from the National Gallery of Art*, Washington 1973, p. 551 (C-5).

<sup>26</sup> GOSTWICKA 1954, p. 27; *Eadem* 1971, p. 42.

wedding ceremonies in Italy were divided at least into three main acts or phases<sup>27</sup>. Sometimes these were enacted with prolonged gaps, sometimes lasting even several months. These acts were: *giuramento* or betrothal—concluding the contract between the two families; *anellamento* or *datio anuli*—the ritual of exchanging rings in the presence of a notary; *domumductio*—the ceremony of transporting the bride to the house of the husband. It should also be added that all three phases of the marriage were totally secular in nature. Even the official ceremony of marriage—*anellamento*—did not take place in church but in the bride's home. It was not the priest who presided over the matrimonial rites but a notary. It was the notary who spoke the vows and participated in the ritual of the rings. During the *domumductio* the bride had the right to ride a white horse, being accompanied by two riders and a group of relatives on foot, musicians and other attendants<sup>28</sup>. The marriage chests were often transported during such processions.

Other objects which were an inseparable part of the marriage were the *forzierini*—beautifully decorated, small boxes or caskets for jewellery<sup>29</sup>. In Siena these were known as *goffanucci* or *cofanetti*. A betrothed girl would only be presented with such a casket after *giuramento*. This ceremony was much less

important than the *anellamento*, *giuramento* and the *domumductio*, and the groom did not participate. The presentation of the gift to the bride was called *datio* or *dono del cofanetto* and took place with the help of a messenger, who was usually the brother of the groom, or his servant<sup>30</sup>. It is such a scene which is portrayed on the Wawel chest. However, compared with many portrayals of *anellamento* and some representations of *domumductio*, it appears to be almost unique<sup>31</sup>. There are only two known depictions of the presentation of caskets from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of these, a drawing made not in Italy but in Switzerland or Germany, portrays only two people (fig. 22)<sup>32</sup>. It is not even clear whether it does indeed depict a matrimonial scene. The second portrayal is an illustration in the *Aeneid* codex executed in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Apollonio di Giovanni (fig. 21)<sup>33</sup>. It shows a group of Aeneas's messengers headed by Cupid, bearing a casket of significant proportions which they present to Dido, who has come out to meet them in front of her house with a group of women. This scene, which is shown in the reality of 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence, gives us an idea of what *dono del cofanetto* could actually have looked like.

The difference between the scene pictured on the Wawel chest and the scene in the

<sup>27</sup> CH. KLAPISCH-ZUBER, *Zacharias, or the Ousted Father: Nuptial rites in Tuscany between Giotto and the Council of Trent*, in: *Eadem, Women, family, and ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. by L. G. Cochrane, Chicago-London 1985, p. 178-212; L. FABBRI, *Alleanza matrimoniale e patriziato nella Firenze del'400. Studio sulla famiglia Strozzi*, Firenze 1991, p. 177-193; M. SEIDEL, *Hochzeitsikonographie im Trecento*, Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz 38, 1994, p. 1-47. See also *Marriage in Italy 1300-1650*, ed. by T. Dean, K. J. P. Lowe, Cambridge 1998, *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> B. WITTHOFT, *Marriage rituals and marriage chests in quattrocento Florence*, *Artibus et Historiae* 5 (III), 1982, p. 43-59; SEIDEL 1994, p. 21-35; MIZIOŁEK, *Soggetti classici* 1996, p. 17-23. In all these publications are reproduced and discussed Renaissance representations of *domumductio*.

<sup>29</sup> H. KOHLHAUSSEN, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter*, Berlin 1928; G. SWARZENSKI, *A marriage casket and its moral*, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 45, 1947, p. 55-62; SEIDEL 1994, p. 36-40; J. POMMERANZ, *Pastigliakästchen. Ein Beitrag zur Kunst – und Kulturgeschichte der italienischen Renaissance*, Münster-New York 1995.

<sup>30</sup> C. CARNESECCHI, *Spese matrimoniali nel 1361*, *Rivista d'arte* 5, 1907, p. 35-40; M. A. CEPPARI RIDOLFI, P. TURRINI, *Il mulino delle vanità. Lusso e cerimonie nella Siena medievale. Con l'edizione dello Statuto del Donnaio (1343)*, Siena 1993, p. 171. See also MIZIOŁEK, *Soggetti classici* 1996, p. 15 and Appendice I, 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> For depictions of *anellamento* scenes see SEIDEL 1994, p. 6-17, fig. 7-16. See also R. L. PISETZKY, *Storia del costume in Italia*, vol. 2: Il Trecento e il Quattrocento, Milano 1964, p. 171-183, fig. 231-234.

<sup>32</sup> MIZIOŁEK, *Soggetti classici* 1996, p. 15, fig. 1.

<sup>33</sup> WITTHOFT 1982, p. 45, fig. 3.

miniature by Apollonio di Giovanni is easily discernible. It is also obvious how the former very closely resembles the composition on the 1473 *biccherna* referred to above, which is the work of Sano di Pietro, one of the most prolific of Siennese painters in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 14). Sano's painting depicts the *anellamento* of a very distinguished couple: Count Roberto Sanseverino and Lucrezia Malavolti<sup>34</sup>. The artist chose the moment when the groom slips the ring onto the finger of the bride, whose hand is held by the notary standing between them. The scene on the Wawel chest shows a more or less identical group of people gathered around the key *dramatis personae* (fig. 13). However, this time the bride was placed not on the right side but on the left. Furthermore, one more person was added to the central group – a man in a red gown and a conical hat standing next to the celebrant and pointing in a characteristic manner at the man with the casket. It is easy to see that the man in red is yet another character borrowed from the same *biccherna* that is the person shown on the far right hand side. The author of the painting on the Wawel *cassone* “transferred” him from the edge of the scene closer to the middle changing his features somewhat; instead of a youngster we now see a serious, almost grave man. Thus, the scene of the *anellamento* was transformed into a scene depicting the *dono del cofanetto*.

The characteristic figure of the man from Sano di Pietro's *biccherna* can be seen in at least one more panel, whose authenticity is as dubious as that of the scene on the Wawel chest (fig. 16)<sup>35</sup>. The figure was accurately copied, including the gesture of the right hand, in a painting which purportedly depicts scenes from life in Siena in the early Renaissance. The present whereabouts of this panel is unknown but a photograph of it, which has never yet been published, comes

from the Berenson Phototeca at the Villa I Tatti near Florence. It was found in a file labelled “FAKES”. The annotation on the back, probably made by Berenson himself, informs us that in the 1940s the painting was housed in an antique dealers shop in the U.S.A. On the fragment reproduced herein, are depicted scenes from within the city walls of Siena. The person making the characteristic gesture is not the only character the forger adapted from Sano di Pietro's *biccherna*. Lucrezia Malavolti herself (or the woman in white standing next to her) was the model for the woman giving alms, while the man standing next to her is a virtually identical copy of the notary from the *biccherna*.

Returning to the examination of the models used in the scene depicting the *dono del cofanetto* (offering of the casket), on the Wawel chest it can be observed that the bride was probably “borrowed” from yet another *biccherna* housed in the Archivio di Stato in Siena, this time dating from 1422 (fig. 17)<sup>36</sup>. It depicts only one person – a very finely dressed woman gazing at the sun. In his adaptation, the author of the Wawel chest painted a mirror image of the woman (a trick very often used by forgers) and he significantly changed her features. However, the dress is nearly identical, especially the outer garment with the characteristic light lining showing in several places.

There is no doubt that in order to paint the scene of the *Offering of the casket* its author had to have a good knowledge not only of Siennese art in the 15<sup>th</sup> century but also of the wedding rituals of the Renaissance, as well as on *goffanucci*. Such caskets were widely known since many have survived to contemporary times<sup>37</sup>. Joni himself, and other forgers alike, made very many *cofanetti* modelled on original caskets from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>38</sup>. These original caskets of various shapes, from round to

<sup>34</sup> *Le biccherne* 1984, p. 176; PISETZKY 1964, fig. 234; SEIDEL 1994, p. 13-16, fig. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Fiorella Giofredi Superbi, the curator of the Berenson Phototeca kindly helped me to find this photo.

<sup>36</sup> *Le biccherne*, 1984, no. 48, p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> See SEIDEL 1994, p. 36-40, fig. 36-38; POMMERANZ 1995, *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> See his *Le memorie* 1932, fig. after p. 188.



narrow and elongated (like the example in the National Gallery, Washington, fig. 20), reminiscent of the *cassoni*, are usually larger than the *cofanetto* depicted on the Wawel chest. I managed, however, to find a metal *forzierino* from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which is currently housed in the Bezael National Museum in Jerusalem (fig. 19)<sup>39</sup>. It is remarkably similar to that represented in the scene in question both in terms of dimensions and shape, including the rounded lid (fig. 17). However, even to paint the scene alone, the forger must have had a good knowledge of the wedding customs of the Sieneze in the early Renaissance period. Such knowledge was readily available around, 1900 in several publications, such as *Sumptuary Laws in Tuscany* and in various articles on household and marriage ceremonies<sup>40</sup>. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, works by scholars such as Biagi<sup>41</sup>, Carnesecchi<sup>42</sup>, Zdekauer<sup>43</sup> and Brandileone<sup>44</sup> were published, from which even today we can learn a great deal about medieval and early – Renaissance Italian customs.

In 1889, *Libro d'amore di carità* by a Florentine bishop, Giovanni Dominici, who lived at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, was published. This is what he had to say on

the symbolic value of the casket: “[...] e come bene esemplifica Ugo di Santo Vitore, chiaro dimostra Dio facessi umana natura sù come sua sposa; e perchè vedessi quanto da tale sposo era amata, mandolle il forzerino pieno di gioielli, e il forzerino non so s’ io mi dica il sommo cielo, ovvero esso Dio. [...] Or apri, di Cristo diletta sposa, questo forzerino, e ricerca quanti gioielli dentro vi ti manda l’amante sposo tuo...”<sup>45</sup>. Some twenty years later, C. Mazzi, in one of his articles, which appeared in a Sieneze academic publication, returns several times to the issue of the *goffanuccio* (*cofanetto*), explaining the rituals connected therewith<sup>46</sup>. Following the enormous success of the 1904 Sieneze art exhibition, many of the *pittori di quadri antichi* probably studied not only the artistic techniques used by old masters, including methods of gilding *gesso*, but also publications on the marriage rituals of their predecessors.

In 1988, a photograph from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was published which largely explains the “phenomenon” of the painting discussed in this paper (fig. 15). The picture shows a group of people gathered around a newly wedded couple who are joining their right hands (*dextrarum iunctio*) in the presence of a bishop,

<sup>39</sup> M. NARKISS, *An Italian niello casket of the fifteenth century*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, 1958, p. 288-295.

<sup>40</sup> *Legge suntuaria fatta dal Comune di Firenze l'anno 1355 e volgarizzata nel 1356 da ser Andrea Lancia*, a cura di P. Fanfani, Firenze 1851; R. CAGGESE, *Statuti della Repubblica fiorentina*, vol. 1-2, Firenze 1910; C. MAZZI, *Libri e masserizie di Giovanni di Pietro di Fece (Fecini) nel 1450 in Siena*, *Bulletino Senese di Storia Patria* 18, 1911, p. 150-171. See also M. A. ALTIERI, *Li nuptiali*, pubblicati da E. Narducci, Roma 1873

<sup>41</sup> G. BIAGI, *Due corredi nuziali fiorentini 1320-1493. Da un libro ricordanze dei Minerbeti*, Firenze 1894, p. 5-20.

<sup>42</sup> CARNESECCHI 1907, p. 35-40.

<sup>43</sup> L. ZDEKAUER, *La vita privata dei senesi nel Dugento*, Siena 1896. See also E. CASANOVA, *La donna senese del Quattrocento nella vita privata*, *Bulletino Senese di Storia Patria* 8, 1901, p. 3-93.

<sup>44</sup> F. BRANDILEONE, *Saggi sulla Storia della celebrazione del matrimonio in Italia*, Milano 1906, *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> G. DOMINICI, *Il libro d'amore di carità*, a cura di A. Ceruti, Bologna 1889, p. 431-432. Even more beautiful words concerning *goffanuccio* and its meaning are to be found in one of the sermons of Saint Bernardino from Siena, for citation and discussion on it see SEIDEL 1994, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> MAZZI 1911, p. 162 and 168. It is also worth citing a fragment of chapter XXVIII of the Sieneze *Statuto del Donnaio* from 1343, which relates to *Dono del cofanetto*: “E ancora non si possa offrire alla sposa, né ad altri per lei, un cofanetto pieno di doni o monili, come è antica consuetudine, e neppure un cofanetto vuoto. Solo lo sposo e nessun altro può inviare alla donna un cofanetto con monili e doni a suo piacere, purché il valore complessivo del cofanetto e degli oggetti in esso contenuti – borsellini, borse, cinture, strumenti per filare e oggetti simili – non superi 30 fiorino d’oro. Tale cofanetto cosù ricolmo può essere donato soltanto dopo la promessa di matrimonio e chi lo consegnerà portà ricevere dall’interessata o dai suoi consanguinei una mancia non superiore a 40 soldi, sia in denaro che in oggetti”, cited from CEPPARI-RIDOLFI, TURRINI 1993, p. 171.

who is fulfilling the role of the celebrant<sup>47</sup>. It is a scene imitating an Italian marriage ceremony at the turn of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, since the clothes of the bride and groom and those of the witnesses to the ceremony imitate, though not always to good effect, the garments worn at that time. What is interesting is that in this composition, so very like the scene discussed herein, also in terms of the number of participants, the role of the bride is played by Icilio Federico Joni himself. It would thus seem that the scene depicting the offering of the casket shown on the Wawel chest reflects to a certain extent a degree of enchantment with the early Renaissance, its rites and rituals. The forger, perhaps someone from Joni's circle, seems to have pondered on and celebrated an epoch which not only provided him with the inspiration for his "works", but also a means of subsistence. Thus, the Wawel forgery, like the scene in the photograph mentioned above, is undoubtedly a good example of Sieneſe forgers drawing an local traditions, and at the same time an interesting document of the Sieneſe neo-Renaissance. Foreigners, charmed by the beauty of Sieneſe art, were unable to distinguish an original from a forgery. Many forgeries right up until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been praised as being works from the very early Renaissance. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the works, including the Wawel *cassone*, only became forgeries as a result of being sold as 15<sup>th</sup>-century artefacts by intermediaries or dealers,

and were not presented as such by the *pittori di quadri antichi* themselves. Whatever the case may be, since 1924, when the chest was first acquired by the Wawel Castle collection, and until recently, it was believed to be an original piece from the middle of the Quattrocento.

\*

It is now well known that *cassoni* and other objects belonging to the domestic painting category, including *spalliere*<sup>48</sup>, which were hung on walls and were much larger than wedding chest fronts, were among the most frequently falsified objects from Italian Renaissance art<sup>49</sup>. Ellen Callmann has recently proved that most *cassoni* displayed in museums are 19<sup>th</sup>-century reconstructions<sup>50</sup>. Their painted fronts and side panels (*fianchi*), although frequently renovated, are usually original, but the chests themselves are more or less accurate reconstructions of the original *cassoni*. Let us put aside the question of such reconstructed chests, which has been sufficiently discussed by Callmann, and turn to some problematic painted fronts, several of which have recently become the object of passionate debate.

Three panels depicting wedding scenes, from a private collection in Milan, may be used as the first example. The panels depict a *Wedding Procession on its Way to Church*, a *Wedding Party* and *Transportation of the Bride to her Husband's House (Domumductio, fig. 25)*. They were recognised as fakes ten years ago<sup>51</sup>. Afterwards, numerous scholars, including Gianni

<sup>47</sup> MAZZONI 1988, p. 199, fig. 2. The photograph is reproduced also in Malatesta 1992. *Dextrarum iunctio* or a handclasp did indeed take place at the end of *giuramento*, this was the customary sanction of the contract between the two families, see KLAPISH-ZUBER 1985, p. 183. For the history and meaning of this gesture see CH. WALTER, *The dextrarum iunctio of Lepcis Magna in relationship to the iconography of marriage*, in: *Idem, Prayer and power in Byzantine and papal imagery*, Aldershot 1993, chapt. V, p. 271-283.

<sup>48</sup> A poor copy (or a forgery) of the so-called *cassone Adimari* (which is obviously a *spalliera* and not *cassone*), is housed in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva. For the discussion on *spalliere* see A. B. BARRIAULT, *Spalliera paintings of Renaissance Tuscany. Fables of poets for patrician homes*, University Park 1994.

<sup>49</sup> See O. KURZ, *Fakes. Archeological materials, paintings, prints, glass, metal work, ceramics, furniture, tapestries*, New York 1967 (2-nd edn.), p. 279-283; FERRETTI 1981, p. 174-175. See also publications referred to in note 14 supra.

<sup>50</sup> E. CALLMANN, *William Blundell Spence and the transformation of Renaissance cassoni*, *Burlington Magazine* 141 (June), 1999, p. 338-348.

<sup>51</sup> ANGELELLI, DE MARCHI 1991, no. 87, p. 56.

Mazzoni, were of the same opinion<sup>52</sup>. Last year, a superbly illustrated monograph of these paintings, with texts by art historians and conservators, was published by the famous *Casa Editrice Electa*<sup>53</sup>. The authors put forward the thesis, that the paintings were executed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (ca. 1285-1348) himself and derive from the front of a marriage chest, divided into three compartments, made for the Bulgarini – Cottone marriage in 1335. If this is so, this *cassone* would be the earliest known *cassone istoriato*<sup>54</sup>. The third panel, reproduced herein, shows the scene of *domumductio*. The bride on a white horse, preceded by two horsemen, with other horsemen and four footmen in assistance, is led to the house of her husband from the Bulgarini family. Curiously enough, the cavalcade following the bride includes a man who is holding a *goffanuccio* under his arm, which is extremely similar to the casket in the National Gallery, Washington (fig. 20). Moreover, at the end of the procession are two donkeys, carrying painted *cassoni* with rounded lids on their backs. The frame of the panel is adorned with the motif of a dragon with outspread wings.

Like many other art historians, I am of the opinion that these three paintings are not authentic. They are in the manner of Ambrogio Lorenzetti but were most probably made only in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *domumductio* scene itself is too literal and overdone, to say nothing of the scenes of love portrayed in the background, which are almost without parallel in 14<sup>th</sup> century

art<sup>55</sup>. As in the case of the Wawel *cassone*, this *pittore di quadri antichi* or simply the forger also had an excellent knowledge of old artistic techniques, and the marriage rituals of past ages. However, there is no doubt that the artistic quality of the panels is extremely good. In fact, it is almost too good.

There is a large group of either entire *cassoni* or only their fronts which are most probably fakes. At least three such fakes have been known for a long time through Schubring's and Piero Mischiattelli's publications. These particular fakes are a *cassone* from the Serristori collection in Florence (fig. 24)<sup>56</sup>, and two front panels, one of which once belonged to the Casa d'Arte Antica Senese Mazzoni (fig. 23), while the other is currently housed in the Ethnographic Museum in Kiev (fig. 28). The Serristori *cassone*, attributed to Pesellino – a mid-15<sup>th</sup>-century artist – depicts, among others, the scene of *domumductio*. Its authenticity is doubtful, not only because of the bride's exaggerated dress and the excessive number of trumpeters, but also the background scene with a baby, which is better suited to a *desco da parto* (birth salver) than a *cassone* painting<sup>57</sup>.

Not long ago, Gianni Mazzoni provided evidence that the panel depicting *The Story of Antiochus and Stratonice* (fig. 23) is indeed a work by Gottardi and Joni, despite the fact that beneath the painting are the remains of another, original composition<sup>58</sup>. On the left is depicted the scene of the discovery of Antiochus's illness by his doctor, and on the right his marriage (*anellamento*) to Stratonice<sup>59</sup>. The latter scene is almost

<sup>52</sup> See MALATESTA 1992. See also MIZIOŁEK, *Introduction, supra*.

<sup>53</sup> *Il cofano nuziale istoriato attribuito ad Ambrogio Lorenzetti. L'opera, le ricerche e i saggi di P. Torriti, M. Milazzo, A. Brogi*, a cura di A. Colli, Milano 2000.

<sup>54</sup> For the matter of the earliest painted marriage chests see J. MIZIOŁEK, *The origins of cassone painting in Florence*, Center 19, Record of Activities and Research Reports, June 1998-May 1999 (National Gallery of Art., Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts), Washington 1999, p. 100-104. See also note 15 *supra*.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. D. CARAFOLI, *Questo cofano vale una fortuna ma forse è falso*, *Il Giornale*, venerdì, 19 marzo 2000. For 15<sup>th</sup> century representations of *domumductio* see note 28 *supra*.

<sup>56</sup> SCHUBRING 1923, no. 276.

<sup>57</sup> C. DE CARLI, *I deschi da parto e la pittura del primo Rinascimento toscano*, Torino 1997; J. M. MUSACCHIO, *The art and ritual of childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven-London 1999, *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> MAZZONI 1995, p. 210, fig. 23-24.

<sup>59</sup> For this story see W. STECHOW, 'The love of Antiochus with faire Stratonica' in *art*, *Art Bulletin* 27, 1945, p. 224-25, fig. 1-2.

identical to that pictured on Sano di Pietro's *biccherna*. And, finally, the Kiev *cas-sone* front, supposedly dating from 1507<sup>60</sup>. A Sieneſe forger (who according to Mazzoni was Gino Nelli) included, among the ſeventeen coats of arms, portraits in profile of an assumed couple who are identified by the following inscriptions: "MARIA dei RICCI. Donna. di. Fiorenza. A. D. MDVII.>"; "NIC-COLO BENINTENDI Nob: uomo ramar-lengo di Fiorenza". In the catalogue of *cassoni* in the Soviet Union collections there is no mention of there being any doubt as to the authenticity of the work, moreover it was deemed to be a "rare ſpecimen", which it undoubtedly is. Not only the improbable number of coats of arms, but also the bride's absurd headdress indicates that the painting is a forgery. A ſimilar headdress can be found on at leaſt one other piece of work by Nelli – a *biccherna* in the "old ſtyle" housed in the Collezione Chigi Saracini in Siena<sup>61</sup>. Perhaps, as Mazzoni ſuggests, Nelli's choice of the name BENINTENDI was a way of confeſſing that the work of art was not authentic<sup>62</sup>. It is probable that the artist painting at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created this object "in the old ſtyle" without any intention of claiming that it was

authentic. It poſſibly only became a forgery when it was preſented and ſold as an original by an intermediary. According to the afore-mentioned catalogue it was purchased "after 1900".

The Wawel *cassoni* thus belongs to a large group of objects made in the "old ſtyle" (of which I have only diſcuſſed a few), created in a ſurge of admiration for early Renaissance Italian art at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was recognised as a fake at a time when, thanks to a donation by the *Fundatio Lanckoroński*, the Wawel Royal Caſtle obtained over twenty top-quality domestic paintings, and therefore it did not ſtir much emotion<sup>63</sup>. The panels acquired by Karol Lanckoroński in the laſt quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have a ſpecific reference point in the cheſt from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which imitates works of Sieneſe maſters from the Quattrocento. The latter with its ſcene depicting the *Offering of the Caſket* ſhould be viewed as further evidence of the enthuſiaſm of ſome Poles for Italian Renaissance art. Only, which are, ſpecialiſt technological examinations foreſeen will reveal whether it is a complete forgery, or a partial forgery, conſiſting alſo of original elements<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> F. FAENSON et al., *Italian cassoni from the art collections of Soviet Museums*, Leningrad 1983, p. 2, 20, plates 11-14.

<sup>61</sup> MAZZONI 1995, fig. 25.

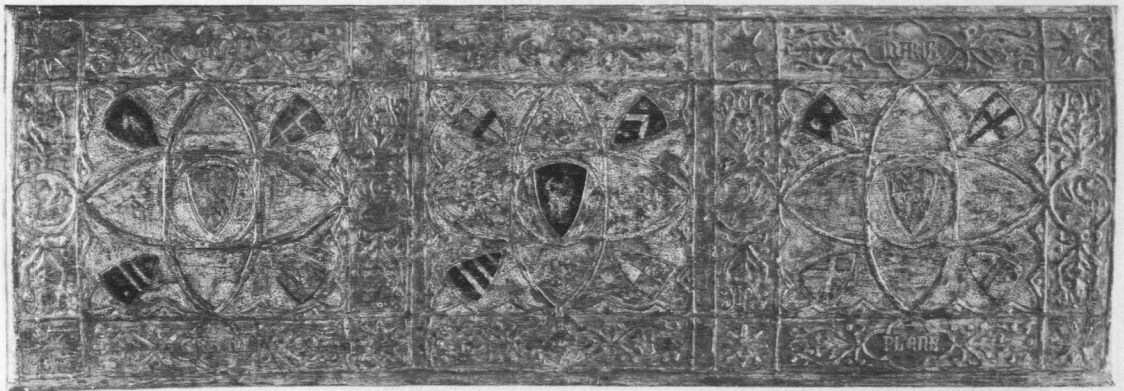
<sup>62</sup> MAZZONI 1995, p. 212.

<sup>63</sup> For this donation of 1994 ſee J. MIZIOŁEK, *The Lanckoroński collection in Poland*, *Antichità viva* 34, fasc. 3, 1995, p. 27-49; K. KUCZMAN, *The Lanckoroński collection in the Wawel Royal Caſtle*, *Folia Historiae Artium* 1, 1995, p. 135-144.

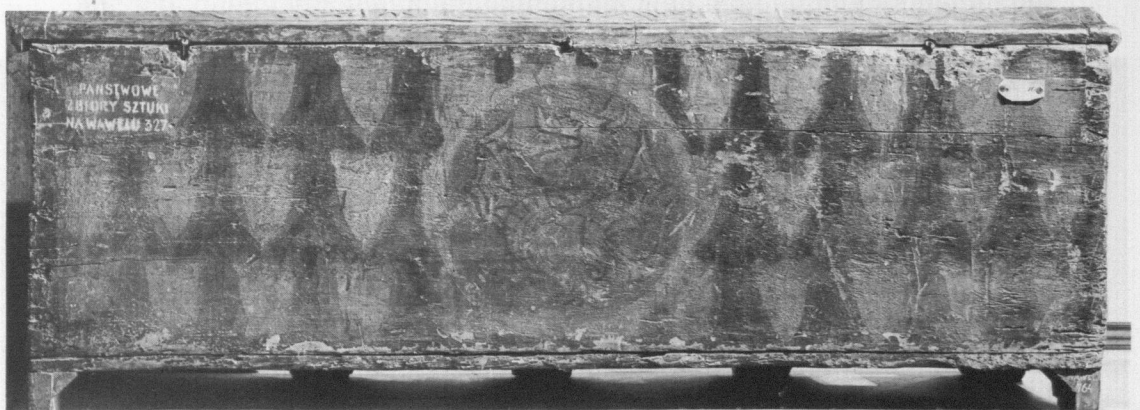
<sup>64</sup> Such long-awaited examination of the *cassoni* had juſt ſtarted as this paper was being printed.



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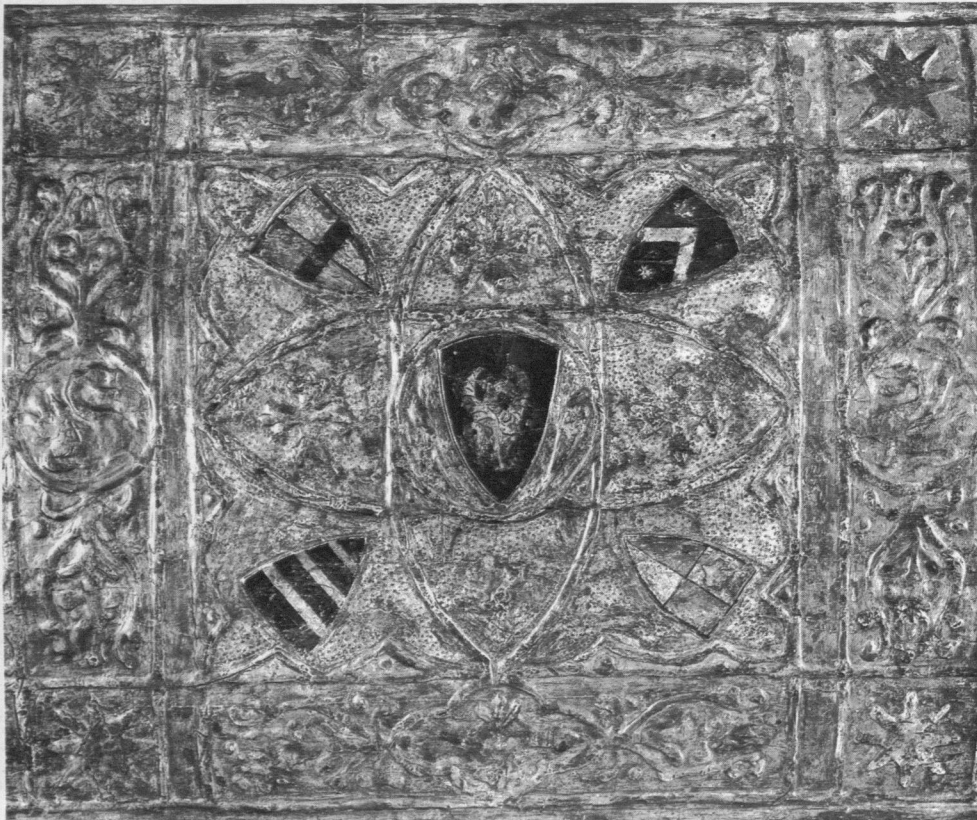


3

1. *Cassone* in the Sieneese manner, ca. 1910 (?) Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle
2. Lid of the *cassone* in the Sieneese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle
3. Back of the *cassone* in the Sieneese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle

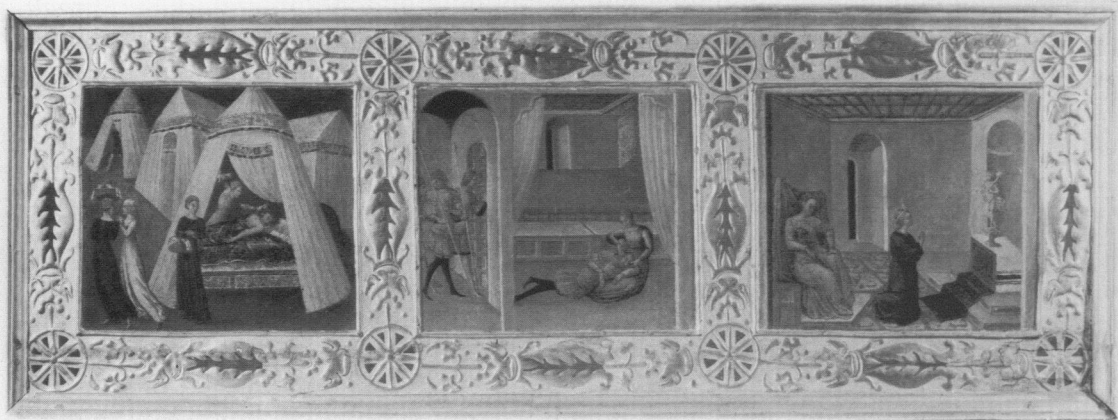


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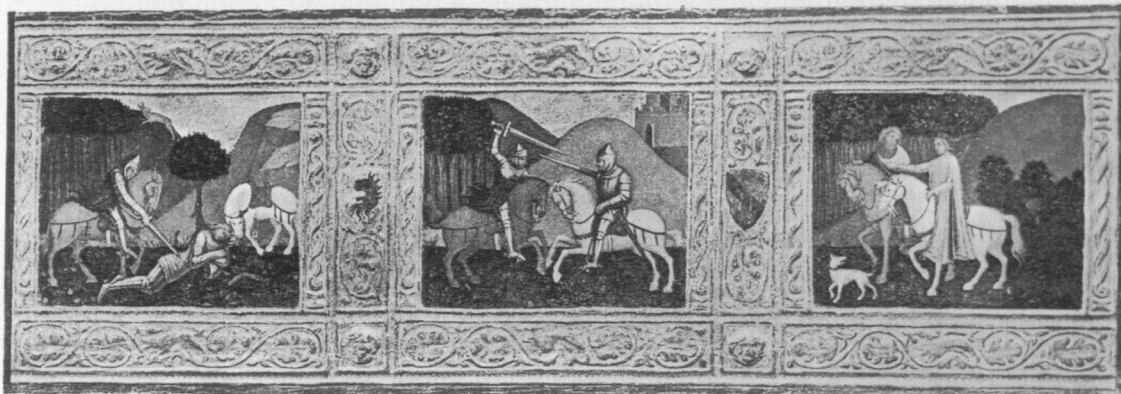


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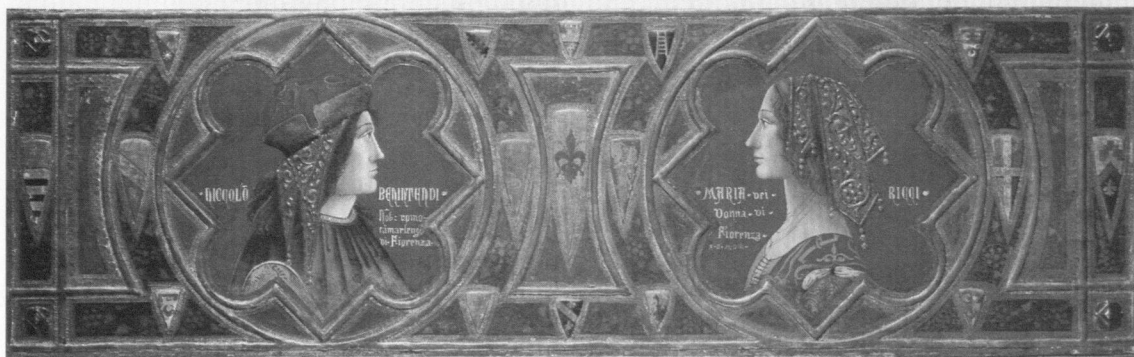
4. Side of the *cassone* in the Sienese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle  
5. Fragment of the lid of the *cassone* in Sienese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle



6



7



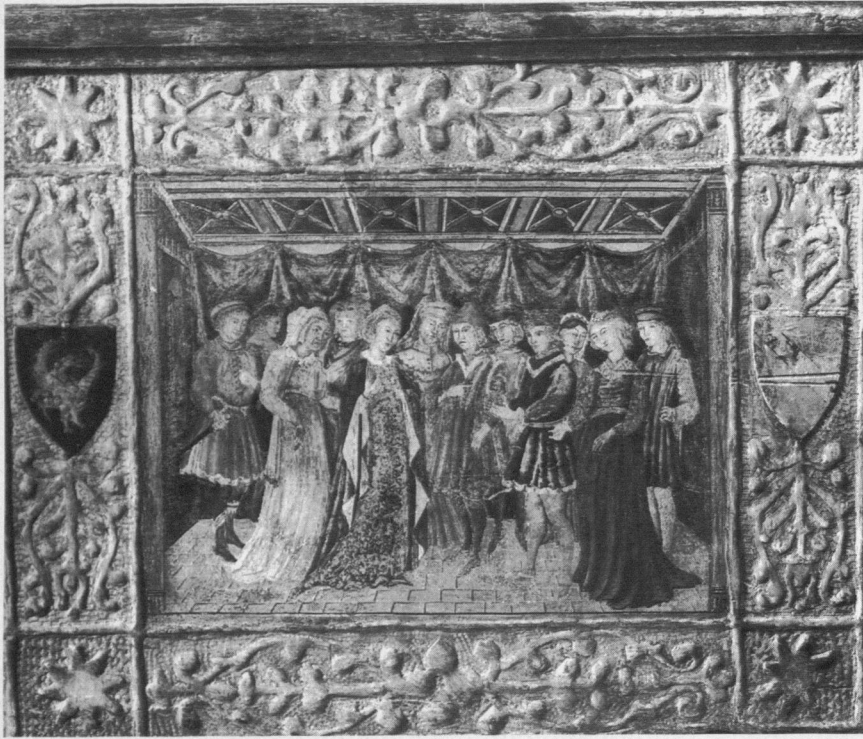
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6. Cassone with biblical scenes, ca. 1450. Siena, Museo presso Oratorio di San Bernardino.

Phot. Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici di Siena

7. Cassone with Chivalric scenes. Siena ca. 1450. Present whereabouts unknown. Phot. after Schubring 1923

8. Gino Nelli, Cassone front with portraits of the bride and bridegroom. Lvov, Ethnographical Museum. Phot. after Faenson et al. 1983



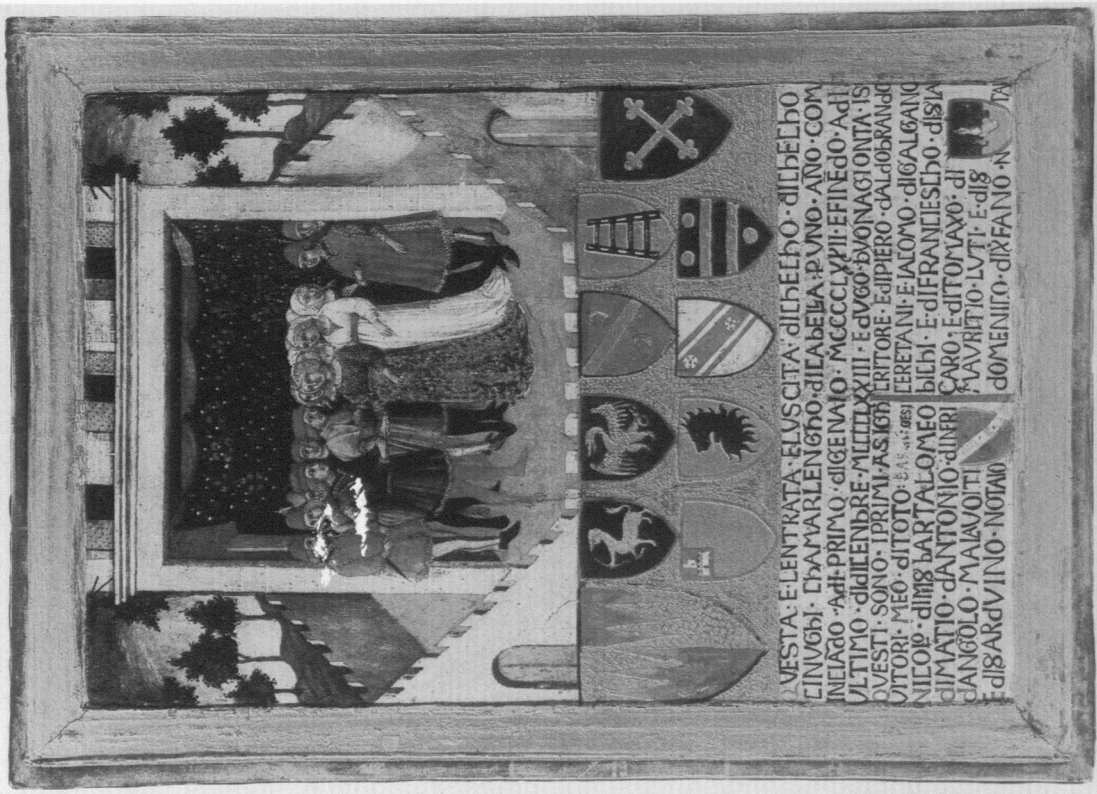
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10

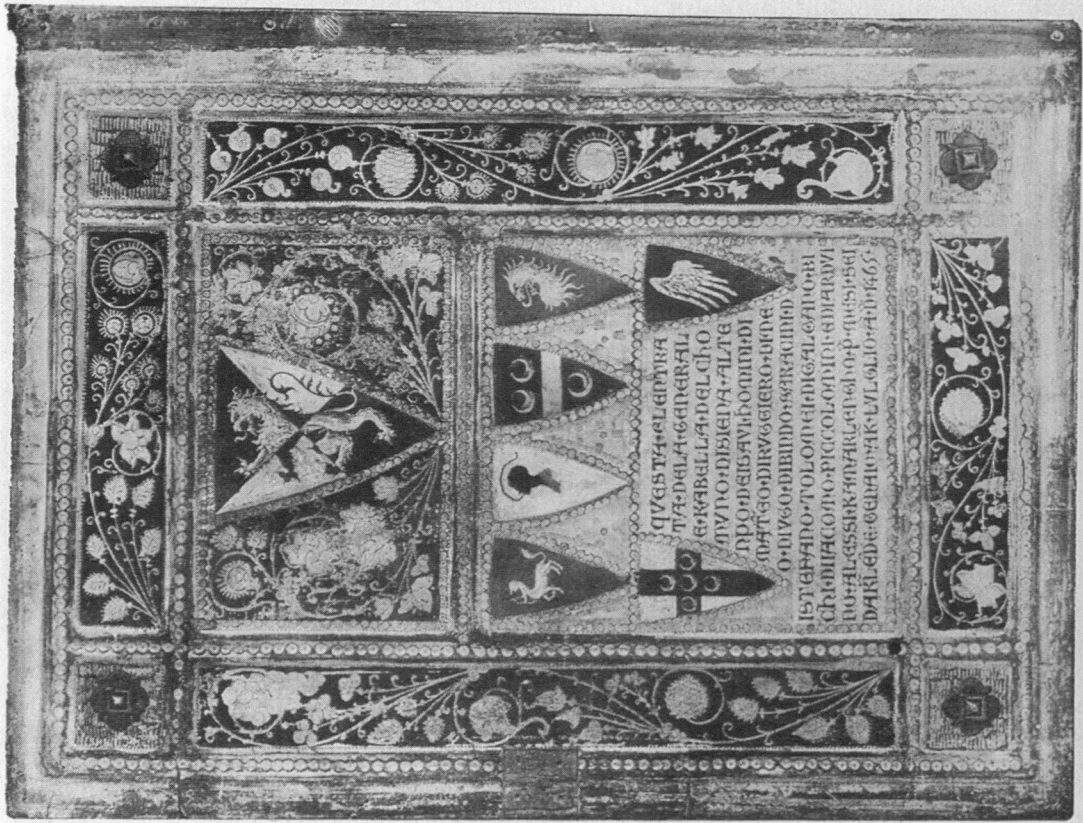
9. Central compartment of the *cassone* in the Sieneese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle  
10. *Mona Lisa Bela*, woodcut in the manner of the Florentine School. Washington, National Gallery of Art.  
Phot. after Levenson et al. 1973





11

11. Sano di Pietro, *Biccherna* of 1473. Siena, Archivio di Stato. Phot. Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici di Siena  
12. I. F. Joni, Book cover. Present whereabouts unknown. Phot. after Joni 1932



12

11. Sano di Pietro, *Biccherna* of 1473. Siena, Archivio di Stato. Phot. Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici di Siena  
12. I. F. Joni, Book cover. Present whereabouts unknown. Phot. after Joni 1932



13



14

13. Painting of the central compartment of the cassone in the Siense manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle.  
Phot. The Royal Castle

14. Sano di Pietro, *Scene of the Sanseverino-Malavolti wedding, biccherna* of 1473. Siena, Archivio di Stato.  
Phot. Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici di Siena



15



16

15. Marriage scene with Joni acting as bride. Photograph ca. 1900. Photoarchives of Gianni Mazzoni

16. Painted panel in the manner of the Sienese school, fragment. Present whereabouts unknown.

Photo. Florence/Settignano, Phototeca Berenson, Villa i Tatti



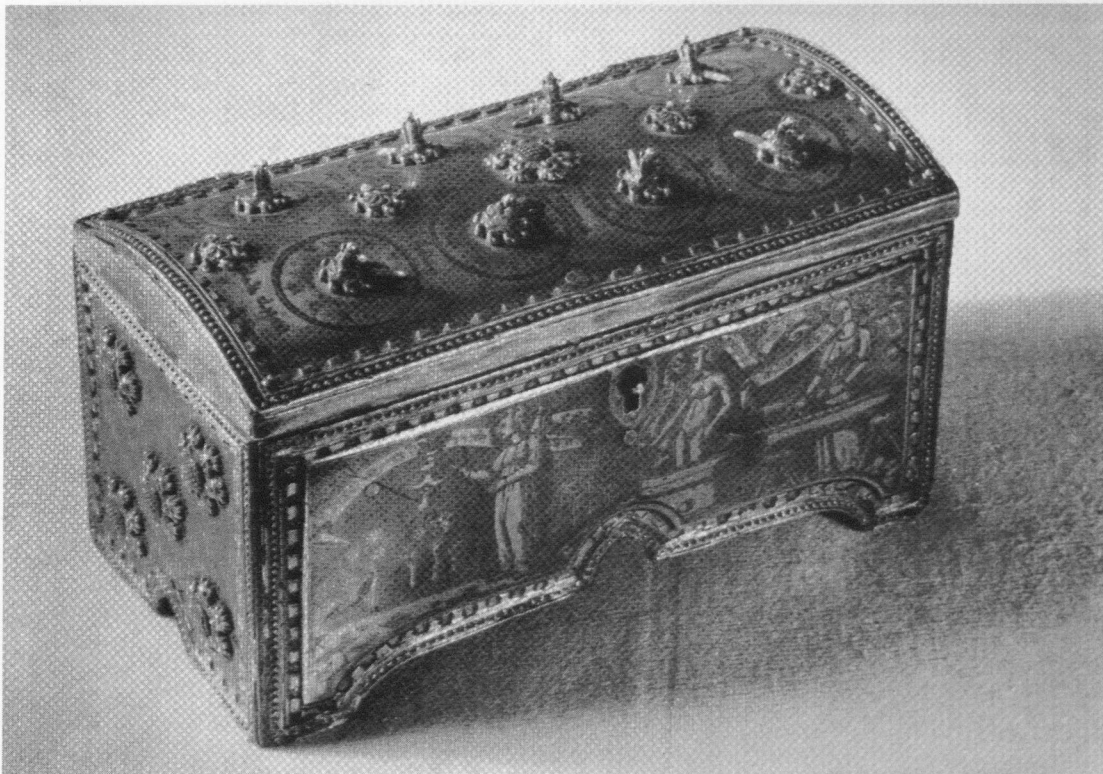
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17. *Biccherna* of 1422 ca. Siena, Archivio di Stato. Phot. Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici di Siena



18

18. Central compartment of the *cassone* in the Siennese manner. Cracow, The Royal Wawel Castle. Phot. The Royal Castle



19



20

19. Niello casket (*forzierino*), ca 1470. Jerusalem, Bezalel Museum. Photo after Narkiss 1958  
20. *Forzierino*, second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Washington, The National Gallery of Art



21



22



23



24



25

23. Igino Gottardi and Iclilio F. Joni, *The Story of Antiochus and Stratonice*. Present whereabouts unknown.  
Phot. After Mazzoni, 1995
24. *Domumductio*, fragment of a *cassone* front ascribed to Pesellino (a fake?). Florence, Serristori Collection.  
Phot. after Schubring 1923
25. *Domumductio*, compartment of a *cassone* in the manner of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century (?).  
Milan, private collection. Phot. After *Il cofano nuziale*, 2000