

RELIQUARY

Unique ID: ESS-2C4836

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

A medieval reliquary pendant of lozenge shape with a suspension loop. The reliquary pendant is gold and dates from the first half of the sixteenth century.

The front panel of the reliquary is engraved with an image of a female saint, either the Virgin Mary or St Helena, supporting the cross. The cross is speckled in a manner suggesting that it is splattered with blood. To the left and right of the figure are foliate tendrils. The saint stands on a chequerboard design, probably indicating a tiled floor or pavement.

The back panel slides out to reveal a cavity, undoubtedly designed to contain a relic. This panel has suffered some damage and was upon discovery immovable, since it has been pressed at its bottom into the interior of the pendant. It is engraved with the five wounds of Christ and a profusion of droplets indicating blood. Devotion to the blood and wounds of Christ was one of the hallmarks of late medieval piety. The engraved detail was probably originally enamelled. Marilyn Hockey, Head of Metals Conservation in the British Museum's Department of Conservation and Scientific Research, undertook a procedure working under microscope and using a specially made miniature probe to prise the lid free. It now slides in and out along grooves cut into the side panels, as designed.

The contents of the reliquary were matted root hairs. They were examined by Caroline Cartwright, Organics Conservator in the British Museum's Department of Conservation and Scientific Research, under scanning electron microscope and small but identifiable fragments of the outer stems of flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) were also visible. These represented unprocessed flax stem pieces, possibly from flax plants grown locally. They are not processed flax fibres from linen textiles or clothing.

The side panels of the pendant carry on three faces the names of the Magi: Iaspar, Melcior, Baltasar (Jaspar, Melchior and Balthazar). The fourth side panel is engraved with foliate ornament. The letters of the inscription are of a type of Lombardic script in use in the sixteenth century, as evidenced, for instance by Sergeants' rings of the period.

There is a coiled suspension loop, which has a notch cut into it to enable the removal of the back panel.

The British Museum's Department of Conservation and Scientific Research conducted non-destructive X-ray fluorescence analysis of the surface of the pendant, which indicated a gold content of 69 to 73%, a silver content of 19 to 21%, with copper making up the rest of the alloy.

Notes:

Due to its age and precious metal content, the pendant meets the criteria for Treasure according to the Treasure Act 1996.

Find of note status

This is a find of note and has been designated: County / local importance

Subsequent actions

Current location of find: British Museum

Subsequent action after recording: Acquired by museum after being declared Treasure

Treasure details

Treasure case tracking number: 2009T256

Chronology

Broad period: POST MEDIEVAL

Subperiod from: Early

Period from: POST MEDIEVAL

Subperiod to: Early

Period to: POST MEDIEVAL

Date from: Circa AD 1500

Date to: Circa AD 1550

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 33 mm

Width: 25 mm

Weight: 8.68 g

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Sunday 17th May 2009

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Other reference numbers

Treasure case number: 2009T256

Materials and construction

Primary material: Gold

Completeness: Complete

Spatial metadata

Region: [Eastern](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Essex](#) (County)

District: [Rochford](#) (District)

To be known as: Hockley Area

Spatial coordinates

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector

Current location: British Museum

finds.org.uk