

This workshop is organized within the framework of the FWF-funded project »Caskets of Late Antiquity: Syncretic Images, Ritual Contexts and Production Techniques in a Time of Change« (FWF P 36846-G), based at the Austrian Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Building on the pioneering research of Helmuth Buschhausen and Dorottya Gáspár, the project offers the first systematic re-evaluation of late antique caskets and their fittings across the Danube provinces and neighbouring regions.

The workshop brings together archaeologists, art historians, and archaeometry specialists to discuss these small yet richly decorated objects, whose iconographic programmes juxtapose pagan and Christian imagery and open a window onto the religious plurality and private devotion of late Roman society. Rather than treating caskets merely as decorative artefacts, participants approach them as material evidence of craftsmanship, ritual practice, and identity.

Drawing on new finds, museum collections, and fresh analytical methods, speakers will present the latest research on the production, iconography, find contexts, and material analysis of late antique caskets, offering a comprehensive and interdisciplinary overview of this distinctive category of late Roman material culture.

ORGANIZERS

Davide Bianchi (OeAI at the OeAW)

Márton Méhes (Collegium Hungaricum Vienna)

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IN COOPERATION WITH

Collegium Hungaricum Vienna



International Workshop

Caskets of Late Antiquity

Materiality, Iconography and Identity

FWF Austrian
Science Fund

hu Collegium Hungaricum
Wien

9-10 November 2026

Otto Wagner-Postsparkasse
Collegium Hungaricum Vienna



Programme

MON, 09.11.2026

Otto Wagner Postsparkasse,
Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna,
Seminar Room 2-3, 3rd Floor

14:15–14:30

Andreas Pülz (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)

Welcome Address

Session 1: Pannonian Perspectives – Traditions of Research

Chair: Andreas Pülz (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)

14:30–15:00

Davide Bianchi – Szabolcs Gál (Austrian
Archaeological Institute)
Rethinking the Corpus of Caskets: the
CLA Project and the Legacy of Helmuth
Buschhausen

15:00–15:30

Friderika Horváth (Institute of Archaeology,
HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities,
Budapest)

Dorottya Gáspár (1942–2021).
Forscherpersönlichkeit und wissenschaftliches
Werk in der Erforschung des römischen und
frühchristlichen Pannoniens

15:30–16:00

Tamás Szabadváry (Hungarian National
Museum, Budapest)
A flying Victory or Apostle? The Early
Research on Late Roman Casket Mounts in the
Hungarian National Museum

16:00–16:30

Coffee Break

Session 2: Beyond the Rhineland – Regional Finds and Museum Collections

Chair: Davide Bianchi (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)

16:30–17:00

Sebastian Ristow (Archäologisches Institut,
Universität zu Köln)
Eine Standortbestimmung zum Umfeld der
spätantik-frühchristlichen Kästchenbeschläge
aus dem Rheinland

17:00–17:30

Anna-Laura de la Iglesia y Nikolaus
(Diözesanmuseum Freising)
Die spätantiken Kästchenbeschläge aus
der Sammlung Christian Schmidt im
Diözesanmuseum Freising

17:30–18:00

Ferenc Zámolyi (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)
3D Visualisation and Reconstruction of Late
Antique Pannonian Caskets: Methodology and
Construction Aspects

18:00–18:15

Coffee Break

18:15

Keynote Lecture
László Borhy (Eötvös Loránd University,
Budapest)
Alltagskultur der Römer in Pannonien mit Blick
auf die Spätantike

19:30

Dinner for speakers

TUE, 10.11.2026

Collegium Hungaricum Vienna,
Hollandstraße 4, 1020 Wien

09:15–09:30

Márton Méhes (Collegium Hungaricum)
Welcome Address

Session 3: Buried Contexts – Caskets in Grave Assemblages

Chair: Gabrielle Kremer (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)

09:30–10:00

Mónika Merczi (Hungarian National Museum
– Balassa-Bálint Museum, Esztergom)
Spätromische Gräber mit Kästchenbeigabe aus
Esztergom–Solva

10:00–10:30

Levente Nagy (University of Pécs)
Late Roman–Early Christian Casket Mounts
in Association with Grave Goods in the
Pannonian Provinces: Archaeological and
Religious-Historical Perspectives on Burial Rite

10:30–11:00

Ádám Bollók (Institute of Archaeology, HUN-
REN Research Centre for the Humanities,
Budapest)
Late Roman and Late Antique Caskets from
Burials in the Eastern Mediterranean: Finds
and Their Contents

11:00–11:30

Coffee Break

Session 4: Reading the Images – Iconography and Function

Chair: Basema Hamarneh (University of Vienna)

11:30–12:00

Davide Bianchi (Austrian Archaeological
Institute)
Pagan and Christian Imagery on Late Antique
Caskets: Iconographic Programs and the
Construction of Identity

12:00–12:30

Jaś Elsner (University of Oxford)
Social and Religious Implications of the
Iconography of Late Antique Boxes

12:30–13:00

Adrien Palladino (Department of Byzantine Art
and Eastern Christianities, Louvre Museum;
University of Hradec Králové)
Activating Iconography: Image as Interface on
Early Christian Reliquaries

13:00–14:00

Lunch Break

Session 5: Behind the Craft – Metal, Ivory and Manufacturing

Chair: Birgit Bühler (University of Vienna)

14:00–14:30

Mathias Mehofer (VIAS – Vienna Institute for
Archaeological Science, University of Vienna)
Archäometallurgische Untersuchungen an
Kästchen der Spätantike – Legierungspraktiken
und Kupferherkunft

14:30–15:00

Barbara Kainrath, Gerald Grabherr (University of Innsbruck)

Die Elfenbeinpyxis aus der frühchristlichen Kirche am Burgbichl in Irschen

15:00–15:30

Moisés Hernández Cordero (Austrian Archaeological Institute)

A Methodological Approach for Scanning Iconography and Craftsmanship Techniques of Late Antiquity Caskets

16:00–17:00

Closing Discussion

Venue

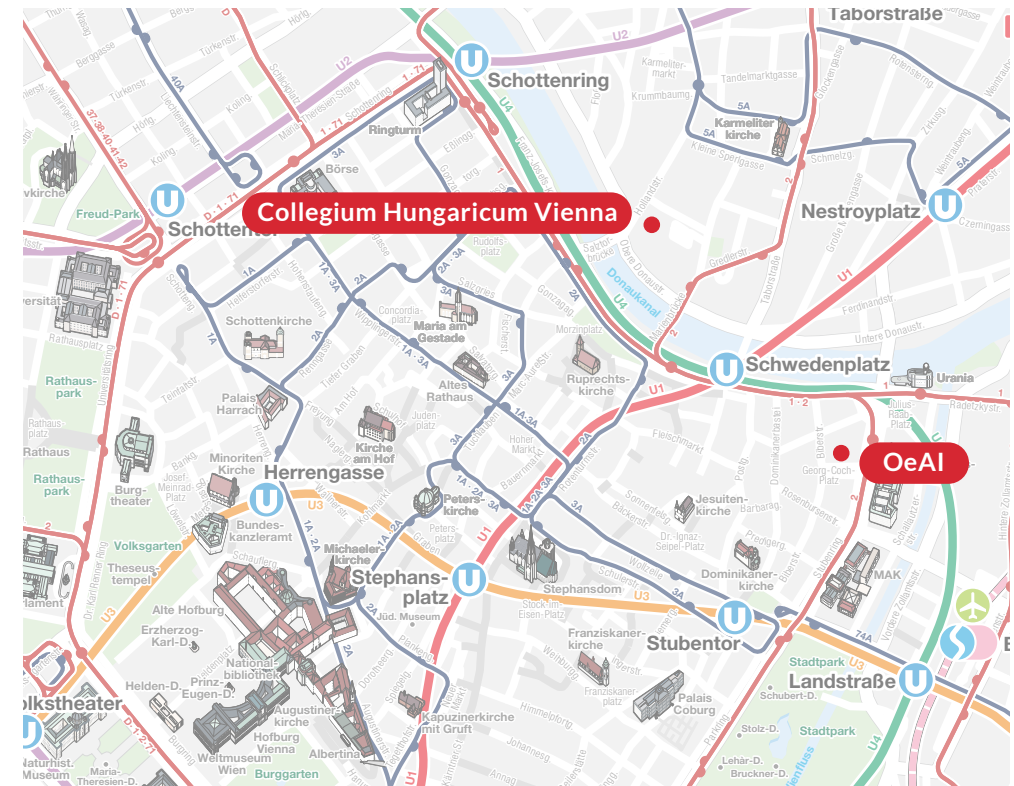
Day 1

Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW)

Day 2

Collegium Hungaricum Vienna, Hollandstraße 4, 1020 Wien

Otto Wagner Postsparkasse,
Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna,
Seminar Room 2-3, 3rd Floor



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Abstracts

Davide Bianchi, Szabolcs Gál

Rethinking the Corpus of Caskets: the CLA Project and the Legacy of Helmuth Buschhausen

Helmuth Buschhausen's work laid the foundations for the study of Late Antique caskets. Working in parallel with Dorottya Gáspár in Hungary, he assembled a pioneering catalogue of these artefacts, bringing together for the first time a substantial body of material scattered across collections and find contexts. Yet Buschhausen's contribution remained fundamentally catalographic in nature, without extending to a broader interpretive framework.

It is precisely this gap that Caskets of Late Antiquity: Syncretic Images, Ritual Contexts and Production Techniques in a Time of Change (CLA) sets out to fill, proposing the first comprehensive re-evaluation of Late Antique caskets – artefacts that combine refined production techniques with decorative programmes juxtaposing pagan and biblical imagery. Moving beyond this descriptive framework, the project reassesses the categorisation, function and find contexts of these objects across the upper Roman Danube provinces – Noricum ripense, Pannonia prima, Pannonia secunda and Pannonia Valeria – with selected case studies in Germany, Serbia and Croatia, and, through a special cooperation with the Hungarian National Museum, its collection.

Methodologically, the project combines typo-chronology with iconographic, social-religious and archaeometallurgical analysis (pXRF and SEM-EDXS at VIAS; chemical and lead isotope analysis at CEZA Mannheim).

Friderika Horváth

Dorottya Gáspár (1942–2021). Forscherpersönlichkeit und wissenschaftliches Werk in der Erforschung des römischen und frühchristlichen Pannoniens

Dorottya Gáspár (1942–2021) was one of the formative figures of Hungarian Roman provincial archaeology and of research into Early Christianity in Pannonia. Her name is above all associated with the study of Roman casket mounts. Her monograph *Römische Kästchen aus Pannonien* (Roman Caskets from Pannonia) remains to this day a fundamental reference work, whose significance extends far beyond the typological treatment of a specific class of small finds. Museum collections contain numerous small bronze mounts, hinges and structural elements whose original function remained unclear for decades. Through her exceptionally careful analysis, Dorottya Gáspár succeeded in placing many of these fragments back into their original functional and archaeological context. In doing so, she opened up a source group that had previously received little attention for the study of Roman Pannonia.

The paper interprets this scholarly achievement in relation to Dorottya Gáspár's personality as a researcher. She was not among the publicly prominent scholars, but worked in a reserved, consistent and exceptionally precise manner. Libraries, archives and museum collections formed the focus of her research. Her reserve, however, in no way meant scholarly isolation: she maintained close national and international professional contacts and was firmly embedded

in the scholarly community of Roman provincial research. Personality, scholarly habitus and scientific method formed an inseparable unity in her work. Her oeuvre exemplifies that scientific progress does not rest solely on new excavations, but equally on synthesising research that lends new interpretive power to find groups that were already known but not yet interpreted.

The paper situates Dorottya Gáspár's work within the research environment of the Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, and sheds light on her relationships with László Barkóczi, László Török, Ágnes Salamon, Andrea Vaday and Dénes Gabler. Starting from her research on casket mounts, it traces her path to her foundational work on Early Christian Pannonia, and shows how the careful analysis of Roman provincial small finds could lead to a new synthesis of the religious, cultural and art history of an entire province.

Tamás Szabadváry

A flying Victory or Apostle? The Early Research on Late Roman Casket Mounts in the Hungarian National Museum

The Hungarian National Museum has a long history in collecting Roman caskets, the first pieces probably entered the institute around the first half of the 19th century; however, early inventories have only few to no records concerning these items.

In parallel with the development of archaeology, some figural caskets came into focus by the end of the century, like the Alcsút casket in the 1880s, which also included a technical innovation: it was published with high-quality black and white photos for the first time. The research sprang up during the official excavations at Dunapentele (now: Dunaújváros, Intercisa) led by Ede Mahler and Antal Hekler; the Late Roman cemeteries of the so-called Öreghegy produced a surprising number of figural caskets, including Early Christian scenes. However, the new topic enjoyed only moderate interest among contemporary scholars (József Hampel, Antal Hekler and Ede Mahler were more interested in Classical and provincial Roman archaeology), as a young museum attendant, Géza Supka undertook an attempt to publish the known material of Christian caskets, but his museological career ended shortly after World War I, due to alleged political insinuations.

The usually low financial opportunities of the interwar period resulted in the cessation of the previous style of excavating, as it is seen in the case of Dunaújváros. However, in some (fortunate) cases, the museum was able to save prominent figural caskets from looting (Árpás casket or the silver fragment of Komárom, Szőny). However, although András Alföldi launched the epoch-marking series of *Dissertationes Pannonicae*, caskets did not have the focus of a systematic publication, except for short articles concerning minor topics.

Ferenc Zámolyi

3D Visualisation and Reconstruction of Late Antique Pannonian Caskets: Methodology and Construction Aspects

The study focuses on the 3D reconstruction of Late Antique Pannonian caskets, specifically the finds from Felcsút and Császárszék, surveyed through pointclouds, meshed surfaces, and orthoimages, with a visual comparison to a similar find from Pécs. The two samples were selected for their good state of preservation and accessibility at the Hungarian National

Museum in Budapest, while a broader photographic catalogue confirmed their typological representativeness. The aim is to document the carpentry and joinery of the wooden parts and the fastening system of the metal plaquettes and locks.

The caskets consist of a wooden structure onto which metal plaquettes were nailed. Plans derived from the orthophotos recorded dimensions, board shapes, dovetail joints (still used, with modifications, in cabinetmaking today), cuts and cavities for locks, and nail holes for the decorative plaques. Patterns of impressions suggest that plaques were mounted differently at different times, possibly due to ancient repairs or later restoration work.

The boards were modelled in 3D in a simplified, idealised form to show the joints, including the top and bottom boards with rabbet joints inserted into dados. The assembly process is presented as a reconstructed 3D film sequence; it remains uncertain whether the entire construction process (splitting/sawing, marking, and the possible use of specialised tools such as rabbet planes) can be virtually reconstructed, since tool marks are difficult to attribute with certainty.

Finally, the study addresses whether caskets were made to order for specific sets of plaques or produced separately and later assembled: measurements (in Roman units) offer only partial clues, given the natural warping of wood over time, although casket sizes still appear to have been roughly standardised.

Sebastian Ristow

Eine Standortbestimmung zum Umfeld der spätantik-frühchristlichen Kästchenbeschläge aus dem Rheinland

Late Antique – Early Christian casket mounts are known from the Rhineland, mostly from grave finds dating from shortly before, or from the middle and second half of, the 4th century. The northernmost example is the casket with biblical scenes from the Mariëburgplein in Nijmegen (Netherlands). Mounts from further caskets are known from Cologne, from the Aachener Straße and the Luxemburger Straße, as well as from the Von-Werth-Straße near St. Gereon. From Trier there is a fragment from the Gilbertstraße and part of a silver ornamental plate, whose original application on an object cannot be determined. In addition, there is a very well-preserved example from the Mainz castellum suburb of Mainz-Kastel, now kept in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn. The Late Antique repoussé sheets from Wiesoppenheim near Worms, reworked into a beaker and placed in a Frankish male grave, are a further example. Here it is certainly questionable whether the Christian scenes still played any role and could even be read and understood. Not preserved is a related object of the genre under discussion, a gold-glass casket decorated with Christian scenes from Neuss. That the phenomenon of bronze-mounted caskets with Christian decoration was still current in the Merovingian period is shown by the find from Grandcourt in eastern Belgium.

The paper presents these examples and sheds light on the Early Christian background in the Rhineland against which the pieces were used, since, as part of grave assemblages, they offer interpretive possibilities within the evidentiary field of personal Christianity. In this respect, the increased density of sources along the Rhine, Meuse and Moselle allows for a comprehensive presentation and interpretation of the process of Christianisation between the metropolises of Trier, Mainz and Cologne, as well as in the countryside, at individual sites located along land and water trade routes.

Anna-Laura de la Iglesia y Nikolaus

Die spätantiken Kästchenbeschläge aus der Sammlung Christian Schmidt im Diözesanmuseum Freising

The Munich art collector Christian Schmidt (1940–2023) assembled over the course of his life a private collection comprising around 3,000 objects, focused above all on the period of Late Antiquity and Byzantine art and culture. The collection ranges from large sarcophagus reliefs to tiny gems and also includes substantial holdings from the sphere of everyday life. This collection is already well known in scholarly circles through several major special exhibitions in which Christian Schmidt was represented with numerous loans (among others: Byzanz – Das Licht aus dem Osten, Diözesanmuseum Paderborn, 2001; Die Welt von Byzanz – Europas östliches Erbe, Archäologische Staatssammlung Munich, 2004). In the meantime it has passed into the ownership of the Diözesanmuseum in Freising and has been displayed there in dedicated rooms since 2025. The collection also includes 27, in part interrelated, fragments that can be identified as Late Antique casket mounts. These are currently being studied as part of the ÖAW research project “Caskets of Late Antiquity,” as is a series of embossed metal reliefs, which are more likely to be relief icons or icon mounts. Since Christian Schmidt’s objects were acquired through the art trade, from other collectors, or at auctions, none of the items has a secured provenance or find context. All questions regarding historical, chronological and geographical classification, as well as art-historical and iconographic analyses, can therefore so far only draw on the objects themselves. The paper aims to give an overview of this collection, situate it within the broader collecting context, and present the display of this comparatively difficult-to-convey art period in the Diözesanmuseum Freising.

László Borhy

Alltagskultur der Römer in Pannonien mit Blick auf die Spätantike

After the Roman conquest, the northern part of Illyricum became part of the Roman Empire as a province. It was not only the Latin language that took hold and became official, but also the practice of writing and the custom of placing inscriptions in both public and private contexts. Previously unknown art forms spread among the Illyrian and Celtic population as a result of the acculturation processes referred to as Romanisation: buildings and houses were erected in the Roman manner, decorated and heated with wall paintings, and baths and public buildings for entertainment such as theatres and amphitheatres came into being. The same applies to the minor arts, whose artefacts attest to the presence, spread and embedding of Roman iconography in everyday life.

We can form a picture of the spread of Roman culture and its presence in a northern frontier province of the Roman Empire, where Greek-language Anacreontic poems appear on mass-produced necklaces and the great poets of Roman poetry are depicted on roof tiles. Late Antiquity offers observations at least as fascinating as the period of the province’s conquest, for one can see how functions were, for example, superseded through reuse, and how earlier Roman iconography lived on in Christian art.

In the paper, particular emphasis is placed on Brigetio, since the speaker directed archaeological excavations there for a quarter of a century, whose finds provide a far more detailed picture of Roman culture in Pannonia and its level than had been assumed on the

basis of our previous knowledge.

Mónika Merczi

Spätrömische Gräber mit Kästchenbeigabe aus Esztergom–Solva

Solva, Roman Esztergom, formed an important link in the Pannonian limes. The early timber-and-earth fort was built on the castle hill during the reign of Claudius, the stone fort under Trajan. From the 2nd century onward, soldiers and their family members were buried on a hillside opposite the castle hill. An independent section of the late cemetery, comprising 335 burials, was excavated by Márta H. Kelemen in 1986–1990. The cemetery, opened between 330–350, remained in continuous use into the first half of the 5th century. Nine grave groups could be distinguished within the cemetery.

The vicus was located in the area of the later royal town and in the so-called Water Town district. The associated late cemetery was established on an abandoned part of the vicus. Of this, Márta H. Kelemen excavated 5 graves on Arany János Street 5–7, and a further 67 graves on Kossuth Street 14–18. The period of use of the cemetery can be placed between the last third of the 3rd century and the end of the 4th century. The archaeological find material from the graves was processed by the excavator and published in 2008. The results of the anthropological analysis carried out by me have so far only been partially published (for the fort cemetery).

From the fort's cemetery, 8 graves (2 brick graves, 3 stone cist graves, 2 brick burial chambers and one stone burial chamber) are known to contain caskets as grave goods; these were located within five grave groups (Groups I, III, IV, V, VI). Only one individual was buried in each of the brick graves. The other grave forms contained the skeletal remains of several individuals, though often in a disturbed state, so that the association of the caskets can often only be determined with difficulty. In one grave, human bones could not be identified. In the vicus cemetery, only one grave with a casket could be identified (an earth grave with a wooden coffin and one skeleton, from Arany János Street). In analysing these graves, I take into account the grave types, the accompanying finds, and the results of the anthropological analysis.

Levente Nagy

Late Roman – Early Christian Casket Mounts in Association with Grave Goods in the Pannonian Provinces: Archaeological and Religious-Historical Perspectives on Burial Rites

The joint research project “Frühes Christentum in Ungarn,” conducted by the Department of Archaeology at the University of Pécs and the Institute of Archaeology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, is preparing a new comprehensive monograph on the Hungarian territory of the Pannonian provinces about Early Christian archaeological finds and monuments from the 4th and 5th centuries CE in Transdanubia. The monograph's catalogue, which is currently more than 90% complete, lists a total of 87 surely Early Christian artefacts from known sites and contexts.

Of these, 14 caskets decorated with surely identifiable biblical scenes from the 4th century are currently known, for which Krisztina Hudák has developed a new chronology within the 4th century. She divided the casket mounts into three chronological groups, dating the first group to the middle third of the 4th century CE, the second group to the second half of the 4th century

CE, and the third group to the last third of the 4th century CE. Of the 14 sites containing Early Christian casket mounts, only six examples were found from more or less well-documented Late Roman graves near the village of Császáz, in the southern and southeastern cemeteries of Dunaújváros (Intercisa), in the cemetery of Dungeon Hill at the Late Roman fort in Ságvár, and in the southern cemetery of Szentendre (Ulcisia/Constantia).

The aim of my paper is to examine the burial customs associated with these six graves – mostly documented from older excavations – that contained decorated caskets with Biblical scenes as grave goods, and to draw religious historical conclusions based on these grave goods. In my analysis, I will also consider, as a comparative case study, the burial rites and grave good practices of 13 more or less well-documented Late Roman graves in Transdanubia, where other small finds decorated with Early Christian symbols (rings, fibulae, pottery, pendants, spindle whorls) are found among the grave goods, possibly reflecting individual or collective Christian identities of their users.

Ádám Bollók

Late Roman and Late Antique Caskets from Burials in the Eastern Mediterranean: Finds and Their Contents

Although Late Roman caskets decorated with large copper-alloy sheet fittings and elaborate figural imagery are rightly regarded as a characteristic feature of the western Roman provinces, the evidence from the Eastern Mediterranean suggests a somewhat more complex picture. This paper brings together the scattered evidence for caskets from mortuary contexts across the eastern provinces in order to reassess the Egyptian finds within their broader archaeological and cultural context and to explore regional patterns in the funerary use of caskets.

Wooden caskets formed an integral part of everyday material culture throughout the Roman period. While their wooden components survive only under exceptional preservation conditions, their metal fittings constitute a recurring category of archaeological finds from both settlements and burials across the Roman world. In marked contrast, however, Late Roman caskets with large copper-alloy sheet fittings are overwhelmingly concentrated in the European provinces, with only a small number of examples from the Nile Valley having been recognised since the early twentieth century. By examining the chronology, geographical distribution, and funerary contexts of casket finds from the Eastern Mediterranean, the paper considers their social setting and the objects they may have contained. It argues that the eastern evidence provides a comparative framework for interpreting the Egyptian discoveries and explores whether the funerary use of caskets differed between the eastern and western Roman provinces.

Davide Bianchi

Pagan and Christian Imagery on Late Antique Caskets: Iconographic Programmes and the Construction of Identity

Late Antique caskets, originally private, lockable containers for personal belongings, were frequently deposited in funerary contexts across the Upper Danubian provinces. Their decorated mounts display a striking iconographic range, combining mythological subjects – including the labours of Heracles, Bellerophon and the Chimera – with biblical scenes drawn from both Old and New Testament repertoires, sometimes on the same object.

This paper examines how such combined programmes functioned within necropolis that show no clear spatial segregation by confession, where objects bearing mythological, biblical, or mixed imagery were deposited side by side, without any evident correlation between iconography and burial location. Rather than reading these caskets as straightforward markers of Christian identity, the paper argues for a more cautious, layered interpretation. Biblical imagery attests to familiarity with Christian narrative without confirming an owner's affiliation, particularly given these objects' long domestic use-lives prior to burial. The coexistence of mythological and Christian motifs is read instead as evidence of a shared, regionally specific visual language, in which confessional boundaries were fluid rather than fixed.

Drawing on iconographic analysis and archaeological contextualisation, the paper reconstructs how these intimate, once-domestic objects negotiated religious, cultural, and social identity across a lifetime of use, before being chosen to accompany their owners into the grave.

Jaś Elsner

Social and Religious Implications of the Iconography of Late Antique Boxes

This paper will explore the iconographic strategies of the visual framing of boxes in Late Antiquity – as objects in stone, metal, bone and wood (including sarcophagi but extending to much smaller objects such as reliquaries and pyxides) – to examine how decorative considerations enabled the function of this category of material culture.

The intention is to be specially sensitive to the pragmatic function of a box as a container which was made to be opened and closed (even in the case of sarcophagi, so many of which were reused or had bodies added to them). The span of items ranges very broadly from objects of the household (from the humble to the elite) to sacred materials used in relation to cult (not only by Christians).

Adrien Palladino

Activating Iconography: Image as Interface on Early Christian Reliquaries

Early Christian reliquaries, alongside vessels repurposed for relic veneration at the end of Antiquity, are defined by visual profusion. Their imagery ranges from the dense, programmatic narratives of the Brescia casket to the distilled individual scenes adorning the San Nazaro and Nea Herakleia caskets, as well as smaller capsellae like those from Castello di Brivio or the capsella Africana. Others, such as the scrinium-type casket at Novalja, rely on the rhythmic repetition of paradigmatic images, while still others deploy elemental Christian motifs. Despite being ultimately conceived for concealment, the persistent recurrence of visual themes across diverse media forged a highly cohesive semantic universe, articulating core Christian concepts through a shared visual language. Far from being static theological statements, these images resonated deeply with the specific historical and spatial realities of their making. They reflect a period of visual invention that was remarkably fluid and multifaceted, rather than monolithic.

While contemporary scholarship often sidelines traditional iconography in favour of material or spatial studies, it remains a potent analytical tool when freed from purely taxonomic readings. This intervention reflects on moving beyond treating iconography as a cipher to be decoded, approaching it instead as a dynamic, intermedial system embedded in Early Christian

reliquaries. By analysing the interplay between recurrent imagery and material form, this paper attempts to trace how these hidden objects were activated. In doing so, it asks not merely what these images meant, but how they functioned, showing that iconography is the very mechanism that transforms concealed vessels into active interfaces between the faithful and the divine.

Mathias Mehofer

Archäometallurgische Untersuchungen an Kästchen der Spätantike – Legierungspraktiken und Kupferherkunft

In the course of the ongoing FWF project „Caskets of Late Antiquity,“ 47 samples from Late Antique caskets were analysed by X-ray fluorescence and lead isotope analysis at CEZA Mannheim. The aim of these investigations was to analyse, on a material-analytical basis, connections or differences between individual caskets or casket mounts, and to investigate the provenance of the copper used. A close chemical match can also point to production in the same workshop, whereas differing composition suggests either different workshops or different starting metals. Additional material analyses were carried out by pXRF and SEM-EDS.

Tin bronzes, brasses with a low tin content, as well as quaternary Cu-Zn-Sn-Pb alloys, could be identified. While tin concentrations largely remained below 5 mass per cent, zinc values reached a maximum of 22.3%, and lead content up to 6.8%. The evaluation of trace elements revealed two groups: on the one hand, caskets of the 4th century CE, characterised by low nickel and elevated silver contents. The second group, originating from the Eastern Mediterranean (Inv. nos. 1201, 690 and 523), comprises pieces from the late 5th century CE, attributed to the Early Byzantine period. These show elevated nickel contents of around 0.1% and correspondingly lower silver contents. Whether this distinction, which could point to different workshops or material supply networks, is also reflected in the lead isotope analyses still remains to be evaluated.

Barbara Kainrath, Gerald Grabherr

Die Elfenbeinpyxys aus der frühchristlichen Kirche am Burgbichl in Irschen

Im Jahr 2022 wurde in der Reliquienkammer des großen frühchristlichen Kirchenkomplexes in der Siedlung auf dem Burgbichl in Irschen (Kärnten) ein Marmorschrein entdeckt. In diesem waren die Fragmente eines zerbrochenen Reliquienbehälters deponiert. Nach langer und sorgfältiger Konservierung und Restaurierung der Einzelteile aus Elfenbein zeigte sich, dass es sich um ein künstlerisch, qualitativ hochwertiges Werk handelt. Die dargestellten christlichen Themen sind in der Kombination einzigartig und teilweise unklar in der Deutung. Die Diskussion dieser Szenen stehen im Mittelpunkt dieser Präsentation, aber es werden auch der archäologische Befund und die spezielle Geschichte des Reliquars vorgestellt.

Moisés Hernández Cordero

A Methodological Approach for Scanning Iconography and Craftsmanship Techniques of Late Antiquity Caskets

Caskets in Late Antiquity represent a great opportunity for iconographic and private objects research but also for 3D scan techniques applied into heritage remains. The combination of wood and metal in the same item makes them a perfect object study for improving and

adjusting techniques in data capture. For this reason, two different techniques (Laser beam and Photogrammetry) were tested to evaluate geometry and texture quality for the project's needs. With the outcome of those, a workflow was designed to acquire and fulfil the requirements of the project during the 2025 fieldwork season at the National Museum of Budapest and in Vienna. This presentation intends to highlight the value of an accurate methodology for 3D data acquisition through a Structure from Motion Multi View Stereo (SfM-MVS) approach for craftsmanship and iconography details in the proposed caskets. A detailed analysis of the quality but also the setbacks and problems encountered in the process will be summoned. Further remarks will be made also for timing, resources spent during the capture of the data and processing of the files for the final product delivered to the project.

Finally, an introduction for further analysis and research possibilities will be presented for the audience to identify the utility of such method into an historical research project.