

500 year old reliquary statuette of Saint Christopher at risk of leaving UK

- Bar is to allow time for a UK gallery or institution to acquire the work
- Statuette is a companion piece to another reliquary, of Saint Sebastian, in the V&A Museum

A German late Gothic statuette of Saint Christopher that dates back to the 15th century is at risk of leaving the country unless a UK buyer can be found to save the work for the nation.

Valued at £10 million, the statuette is a remarkable object from the great age of European masters such as Hans Holbein and Albrecht Durer.

A gift to the Monastery of Kaiserheim in South Germany in 1493, the statuette was paid for in part by Duke Frederick of Saxony and depicts the figure of Saint Christopher in parcel-gilt silver on a hexagonal reliquary base. It shows the Saint wading through a river, holding a staff in his left hand, with the figure of the Christ Child sitting on his right shoulder.

Compared with other pieces from the same period, experts considered the work to be almost unrivalled in its sculptural beauty and delicate detailing.

A companion piece to another reliquary now in the V&A museum, a figure of Saint Sebastian, this magnificent and rare object has very few comparisons in the UK or abroad.

Culture Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

This breathtaking piece is testament to the outstanding skill of goldsmiths in the 15th century. I hope that a UK buyer can be found so the statuette can stay in the country along with its companion reliquary, the figure of Saint Sebastian.

The Minister's decision follows the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA). The committee were deeply moved by the piece which they considered to be a wonderfully modelled sculpture.

Committee Member Pippa Shirley said:

This wonderful object, the product of enlightened patronage in one of the preeminent artistic centres north of the Alps combines sculptural brilliance and technical skill with the most touching humanity, tenderness, power and realism. You can feel the water

tugging at the Saint's legs as he strides across the river with his precious burden, his cloak billowing around him in the wind. Silver sculpture of this date is rare, and objects of this quality rarer still, so even though it is well documented, there is much to learn, about how and by whom it was made, the relics it contains and its relationship to its companion, St Sebastian, as well as its later history. All of this means that its departure would be a great loss to the nation.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was of outstanding artistic quality and was of major importance for the study of 15th century European goldsmiths' work with associations to several important historical collections, which added to its significance.

The decision on the export licence application for the reliquary will be deferred until 3rd October 2021. This may be extended until 3rd April 2022 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £10,000,000.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the statuette should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. Details of the statuette are as follows: The object is a German late Gothic parcel-gilt silver statuette of Saint Christopher on a reliquary base, probably made in Augsburg, dated 1493. The figure of St Christopher wore a gilt tunic and a billowing cloak with a gilt lining. He is shown wading through a river, holding a staff in his left hand and with his right hand on his hip. The figure of the Christ Child sat on his right shoulder holding onto the Saint's hair with his left hand, with his right hand raised in blessing. The figures are standing on a hexagonal reliquary base engraved around the shoulder with a Latin inscription. The base stands on six plinth feet each with an architectural column above with pendant foliage between and scroll bases. The plain band above each is engraved with a name and initial. The relic is contained within three curved glazed panels that were surrounded by applied foliage wreaths and figures of the seated Christ Child. Between the panels are figures of an Abbot, above a coat of arms, and St George in armour, beneath canopies (now missing a third figure and two coats of arms).
3. Provenance: A gift to the Monastery of Kaiserheim in 1493, ordered by the Custodian of the Abbey Treasury, Brother Adam Medelin on behalf of Abbot George Kastner and paid for in part by Duke Frederick of Saxony. Presumably sold following the secularisation of the Monastery of

Kaiserheim in 1802. Prince Petr Soltykoff: his sale [Catalogue des Objets d'art et de haute curiosité composant la célèbre collection du Prince Soltykoff], Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 8 April-1 May 1861, lot 173, as: Autre Reliquaire de grand travail et de même forme, par le même artiste, également en argent partie doré. Il représente saint Christoph portant le Christ enfant et s'appuyant sur un arbre ébranché. Inscription et date de 1593 [sic]; purchased by Baron Seillière; Sir Julius Wernher, 1st Bt. (1850-1912), by 1901, Bath House, London, by whom bequeathed, with a life interest to his widow, Alice, Lady Wernher, subsequently Lady Ludlow (1862-1945), to their son Sir Harold Wernher, 3rd Bt., G.C.V.O. (1893-1973), Bath House, London, and from 1948, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, and by descent; sold Christie's, Wernher Collection, 5 July 2000, lot 53, hammer price £1,763,750.

4. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.
5. The [Arts Council](#) champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.