

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, case 10 (2023-24): Walrus Ivory Carving of Deposition from the Cross	
Statement from Expert Adviser	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the carving meets Waverley criteria one, two and three. See below
Statement from the Applicant	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria. The Reviewing Committee will designate an object as a 'national treasure' if it considers that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune on one or more of the following three grounds: a) Is it closely connected with our history and national life? b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance? c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history? The applicant agreed that the Waverley criteria applied.
Note of case hearing	See below
Press release	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 3 November 2023: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/walrus-ivory-carving-of-deposition-from-the-cross-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk
Recommended price	£2,006,595 (plus VAT of £40,131.90 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
1st Deferral period	2 February 2024
2nd Deferral period	14 June 2024
Note of outcome	

RCEWA – Walrus Ivory carving of Deposition from the Cross

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the carving meets Waverley criteria one, two and three.

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

1. Brief Description of object(s)

Deposition from the Cross, about 1190-1200, England (probably York), carved walrus ivory, 18.3 x 6.8 x 3.4 cm

This exceptional Romanesque ivory carving shows the tender moment in the story of the Passion of Christ known as *The Deposition from the Cross*, in which Christ's lifeless body is carefully lifted from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea. It would once have been part of a larger scene and would have included a cross (still partly visible), and perhaps other figures. Although a fragment from a larger object, this piece is otherwise in exceptional condition.

2. Context

Provenance:

Purchased by John Hunt (1900 -1976) and Gertrude Hunt (1903 – 1995); [REDACTED]

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It is unclear when, where and from whom John and Gertrude Hunt acquired *The Deposition*. Standard provenance checks on the websites listed on Looted Art: The Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945 have been completed and did not raise any concerns (including Lost Art, and German sales catalogues for the relevant period). Due to the value and significance of the object it has also been submitted to the Art Loss Register for additional checks.

Exhibitions:

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, 1970; see Konrad Hoffmann, *The Year 1200: a centennial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters, New York, 1970, cat. no. 56 - London, Hayward Gallery, 1984; see George Zarnecki et al (eds.), *English Romanesque Art 1066-1200*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984

Publications:

Willibald Sauerländer, 'Exhibition Review "The Year 1200," a Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. February 12 – May 10, 1970', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (1971), pp. 506-516, p. 5121 - George Zarnecki, 'English Art around 1180', in *Actas simposio internacional sobre 'O Pórtico da Gloria e a Arte do seu Tempo'*, La Coruña, 1991, pp. 299–308 (reprinted in Zarnecki 1992, pp.443-52). - Paul Williamson, *Medieval Ivory Carvings: Early Christian to Romanesque*, London 2010, pp. 408-411, cat no. 104

3. Waverley criteria

- The object meets Waverley criteria 1, 2 & 3

Waverley 1 - It is closely connected with our history and national life.

The Deposition is closely related to another walrus ivory fragment showing *Judas at the Last Supper* that was presented to the V&A by Dr W.L. Hildburgh in 1949. (A.34-1949; fig. 2; appendix 1). Both are of similar dimensions and scale and are carved in an identical style with the same heavy folds of drapery and bunched sleeves. Both were also secured to the background with two dowels. Although the V&A fragment is in less well-preserved condition than *The Deposition*, the stylistic relationship between the two pieces is so close that it is safe to assume that they formed part of the same ensemble, possibly a series of reliefs of the Passion of Christ used in a church or private devotional context. The *Judas* carving was found in or before 1769 in Norgate, Wakefield. This findspot matches the stylistic appearance of both fragments. In his catalogue of medieval ivories in the V&A, Dr Paul Williamson, Keeper Emeritus and Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum, convincingly argues that both fragments 'fit comfortably into a Northern English *milieu* of the late twelfth century, and a place of productions in York seems plausible'. The link to York is strengthened by the similarity of the 'tubular folds' of drapery in the fragments to life-size statues from St Mary's Abbey, of about 1190 (see appendix 1). The *Deposition* is therefore closely connected to one of the UK's most important medieval centres of artistic patronage, trade and religion.

Dr Williamson also links the type of cross on which Christ is crucified in *The Deposition*, in the form of a natural tree or *lignum vitae* to a mid-twelfth century English walrus ivory cross in the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, that has been described as a 'masterpiece of Romanesque art'. (63.12, fig. 3).

The extraordinary quality and condition of *The Deposition* rank it alongside two twelfth-century Romanesque objects of outstanding national importance now in the V&A: the Gloucester Candlestick, given to the Abbey (now cathedral) of St. Peter,

Gloucester by Peter, Abbot from 1104-1113 and the Becket Casket reliquary enamelled with scenes from the life of St Thomas Becket (figs 4 & 5).

Waverley 2 – It is of outstanding aesthetic importance.

Highly celebrated since being exhibited in 'The Year 1200' exhibition in New York in 1970, the carving, made from an unusually large piece of walrus tusk, is of extraordinarily high quality (appendix 2). The heads of Christ and Joseph are rendered with unusual attention to detail, and the expressive gestures highlighting the emotive quality of the work. From a technical point of view, the object belongs to the highest range of ivory carvings of the English twelfth century and so constitutes an exceptionally well-preserved survival of English sculpture of the Romanesque period.

The Deposition reveals an artistic personality of extraordinarily masterful skills not only in terms of ivory carving, but also in terms of their ability to represent human suffering, empathy and compassion in a particularly compelling and moving manner, so transcending the boundaries of both time and context in which the piece was made.

Dr Paul Williamson has described The Deposition as 'sublimely beautiful' and 'the most important medieval walrus ivory carving still in private hands'.

Waverley 3 - It is of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history.

The Deposition is particularly relevant for our understanding of early medieval ivories and it reflects the taste of the Romanesque period in an especially evocative manner. It is well-known to the national and international research communities of Romanesque sculpture, and medieval art more widely.

This object has also great potential in terms of further research from a Science Conservation point of view. In recent years, research questions surrounding pre-modern ecological globalisation, serial depletion and global trade networks have gained momentum, and consequently, much progress has been made in the development of minimally- and non-invasive scientific methods to analyse the historic sourcing and use of materials such as walrus ivory. Future research could give further insight in the circumstances of this object's making (a similar project is currently being developed on elephant ivory at the V&A and Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford).

This object could be used to help address the complex environmental questions surrounding ivory as an artistic material for wider audiences. The Ivory Act 2018 will soon be extended to walrus ivory and this exceptional piece would be the ideal candidate to provide the context of the history of walrus ivory.

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing	
Meeting date	Wednesday 13 September 2023
Object	Walrus ivory carving of Deposition from the Cross
Expert Adviser's objection	The Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, had objected to the export of the under the first, second and third Waverley criteria on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was so closely connected with our history and national life; it was of outstanding aesthetic importance and it was of outstanding significance for the study of early medieval ivories, as well as, from a Science Conservation point of view, pre-modern ecological globalisation, serial depletion and global trade networks.
Committee Members & Independent Assessors	All of the regular eight Committee members were present and able to inspect the carving. They were joined in person by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Committee.
Value on the licence	The value shown on the export licence application was £1,953,926, which represented the Sterling equivalent of the purchase price plus buyer's premium of \$2,500,000 USD on 7th July 2023 (Exchange rate: 1USD = 0.78157040000 GBP).
	<p>The applicant was informed that there was currently an interim process in place for Committee hearings. The Committee was still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, were required to inspect the object under consideration prior to discussing the case and voting. Any permanent Committee members or independent assessors who were not able to view the object were not able to vote.</p> <p>The applicant confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.</p>
VAT	The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT would be payable on the buyer's premium in the event of a UK sale.

Expert Adviser's comments	The expert adviser stated that they did not have anything further to add to their submission.
Applicant's comments	The applicant stated that they did not have anything further to add to their submission. They did not dispute that the carving met the Waverley criteria.
Committee's discussion	<p>The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They agreed it was a sublimely beautiful object, in remarkable condition for its age, and that it held outstanding research value. They noted it was an exceptionally large piece, and that the carving was the finest known surviving example of Romanesque walrus ivory.</p> <p>There was some debate over whether the carving was definitively made in Britain. The Committee agreed that stylistically, it appeared to be English, but there was only a very small group of surviving comparable objects. Furthermore, England was a centre of trade at the time, and additional research was desirable to determine its origin as well as how materials were used at the time, and how trade affected the movement of such objects.</p> <p>The Committee concluded that the carving was one of the most culturally and aesthetically significant objects they have considered, and that it could provide vital insight into several aspects of a time from which few objects have survived.</p>
Waverley Criteria	The Committee voted on whether the carving met the Waverley criteria. Of the 11 members, eight members voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. All 11 members voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. All 11 members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The carving was therefore found to meet the first, second and third Waverley criteria for its outstanding significance to the study of early medieval ivories, as well as the Science Conservation aspects of pre-modern ecological globalisation, serial depletion and global trade networks.
Matching Offer	In accordance with its policy that the date to be used for establishing the exchange rate for an agreed price in foreign currency should be assessed on a case by case basis to

	<p>ensure that the applicant got the benefit of any fluctuations, the Committee recommended the sum of £2,006,595 as a fair matching price, plus VAT of £40,131.90 (converted on the same basis) on the commission which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution. This represented the price at which the owner had agreed to sell subject to the grant of an export licence converted to GBP (xe.com) on 13 September 2023, the date of the hearing.</p>
Deferral periods	<p>The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of three months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the carving, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of four months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.</p>
Communication of findings	<p>The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.</p>