

THE COLLECTION OF CARDINAL SFONDRATI

Artist: Various
Date: XVI Century
Dimensions: Various
Material: Engraved, embossed and gilded silver; rock crystal; copper
Inventory Numbers: 61810-11; 61818-19-20; 61838, 61840, 61843, 61846, 61850.

Total Cost: € 23.795,00

STATE OF PRESERVATION:

The surface of these objects is completely covered with dust and bi-products of the metal corrosion. There are also generalized small abrasions.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:

- Cleaning with immersion in Salts of Rochelles
- Washing with de-ionized water
- Systematic cleaning of all the surfaces
- Chemical cleaning of the golden, copper, silver parts
- Accurate cleaning of gems, hard stones and crystal
- Stabilization of the residual products of corrosion
- Consolidation of possible small fractures
- Protective final varnish
- Photographic documentation



In the fall of 1599, Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati (1561-1618) the owner of the Basilica and Monastery of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, undertook the excavation beneath the altar of the presbytery in order to search once again for the relics of St. Cecilia after spending several years of his mandate in the patient search for holy relics and with the permission of Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605).

Here, in a case of cypress wood dating from Papacy of Paschal I (817-824), Cardinal Sfondrati found the remains of the tomb of the Saint according to the image of one of the most poetic sculptures by Stefano Maderno (1599). Other relics, identified as those of Sts. Valerian, Tiburcio and Massimo, are associated with Saint Cecilia and were found in a sarcophagus near the box containing the remains of the Saint. A third coffin, located close to the other two, held the remains of Popes Urban and Lucius. For a month, starting from October 29th, the relics were exhibited in a chapel and open to the devotion of the faithful. On November 22nd after a solemn religious ceremony, the most important pieces were reburied under the altar. At the request of the Cardinal, smaller pieces were sealed inside appropriate containers and replaced in the chapel where they have remained for over three centuries.

As part of the 1935 restructuring of the convent, these reliquaries were transferred to the Vatican Library. The relics were provided with new containers and returned to the Basilica.

The collection of Sfondrati reliquaries now consists of forty pieces of different styles displayed in four windows of the Room of the Tributes in the Vatican Museums. The majority of them were inscribed in Latin by the archaeologist Antonio Bosio (1575-1629). With the exception of a couple of pieces of an earlier age, all the artifacts date back to the end of the 16th century, while the geographical area they represent is enormous, including twenty-three pieces from Germany, two from Flanders, ten from France and eleven from Italy.

