

Cabinet
Ebony, bone and ivory
17th century – Italy

An Italian cabinet

Cabinets are special pieces of furniture, which were first made in Italy in the 16th century, then in other European countries in the 17th century. They are chests with many drawers that are established on a stand; their typical façade is inspired by Greco-Roman temples. Destined for the interior of the nobility, they later became a decoration for the bourgeoisie.

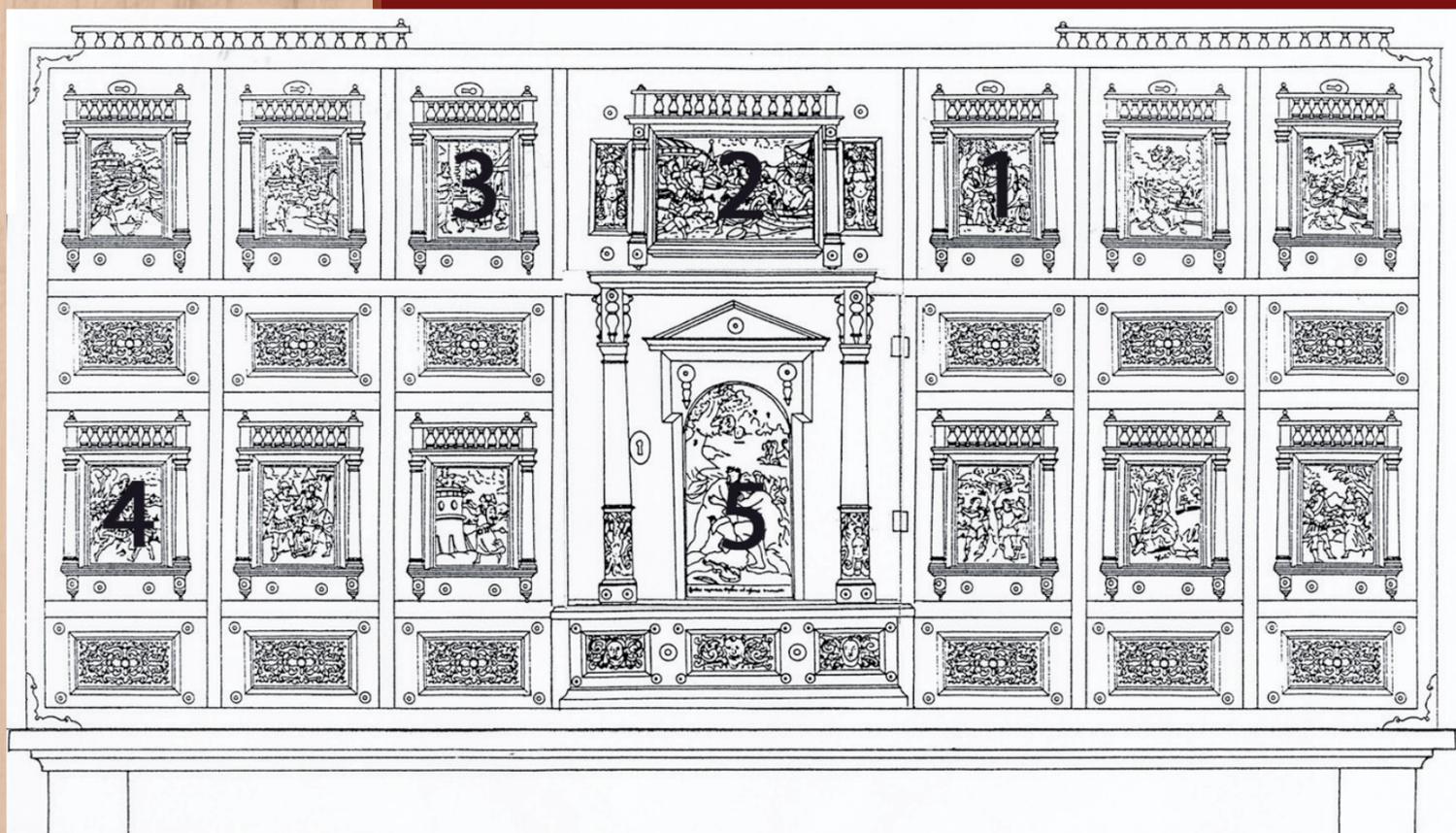
Benoît De Puydt owned 10 cabinets from which only seven could be sheltered by the town before World War I's destructions.

The ornament

This cabinet is made of Baltic oak covered with ebony from Macassar (South of India). The style is classical : its geometry was inspired by monuments from Ancient Greece and Rome. The ornament was made of ivory plates carved with mythological scenes, arabesques and mascarons; the columns and balusters are made of bone. We can see that the lower corners are reinforced with metal and that the side handles allow its transport.

All the carvings were not made by the same hand; number 5 for example is the work of a veritable engraver: volumes are effected by meticulous hatching work.

Some plates representing episodes of the Trojan War are not in chronological order. At the very bottom left, it is interesting to notice Aeneas escape, carrying his father Anchises on his back, and preceded by his son Ascanius. This composition can also be found in a detail from Raphael's painting called *Fire in the Borgo*, which can be seen at the Vatican. This is reminiscent of the circulation of carving collections which reproduced paintings of Masters and were used as models for designers.



Scenes from Homère's *Iliad*, 8th century BC

1. The judgement of Paris : Paris giving the apple to Aphrodite (Venus)
2. The kidnapping of Helen by Paris
3. Vulcain forging Aenea's weapons
4. Aeneas fleeing from burning Troy

Scenes from Ovide's *Metamorphoses*, 1st century :

5. Orpheus and Eurydice : Orpheus turning, Eurydice is called back to Hell