



## PREFACE TO THE CATALOGUE

The Kunsthistorische Museum's Collection of Sculpture and Decorative Arts brings together the treasures of several individual Habsburg collections. The collection of ivories is rightly renowned for its size and depth, but the outstanding quality of the objects and their unique artistic importance make it the best collection of its kind in the world.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century's admiration for small-scale sculptures is closely connected with „the period's strange affinity to close inspection“ as Alphons Lhotsky, the Kunsthistorische Museum's "house historian", put it so well.

Both courtly and non-aristocratic collectors favoured small-scale show-pieces that require close inspection and careful scrutiny, that ask to be picked up, examined and touched to be fully appreciated. The intimate handling of *Kunstammer*-objects only emphasized their private character. The virtuoso workmanship appealed to the connoisseur who was able to intellectually comprehend these complex artworks.

In keeping with the exclusive character of these objects d'art access to the Habsburg collections was strictly limited; only after paying a suitable fee were selected visitors allowed to enjoy these rare and precious objects.

A look at the history of the collection, which stretches back several centuries, shows that the ivories in the *Kunstammer* in Vienna were not collected according to a grand idea - it is only the collection, the location, that unites them. However, the imperial provenance of the ivory collection is a mark of quality that less important or later collections have rightly envied.

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