

Medieval Portable Altars

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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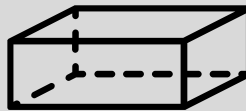
OVERVIEW

Portable altars were used in Europe and beyond from the sixth century to the early modern era. Between 1000 and 1300, hundreds were taken on missionary and military campaigns, including on crusades. Portable altars were also placed on a permanent altar to enhance the celebration of the Mass.

TIMELINE

- 401 CE**
Council of Carthage
States a consecrated stone with relics could be used for Mass
- 517 CE**
Council of Epaone
Forbids the use of wooden altars, declares all altars must be stone
- 787 CE**
Council of Nicaea
Declares all altars must contain relics
- 1310 CE**
Synod of Trier
Mandates portable altars must be large enough to hold a chalice and paten

TYPES



BOX

- Average size of a standard shoebox
- Most made in German lands
- Fairly heavy due to the amount of decoration



TABLET

- Thin and flat
- Most made in southern France, Spain, and Italy
- Still contain relics, despite having less depth than a box altar

FAST FACTS

- All medieval portable altars contained relics (remains) of saints. Some still do, as they haven't been opened since their creation in the Middle Ages.
- There are over 120 medieval portable altars that exist in museum, church, and private collections.
- The oldest surviving medieval portable altar is in Durham Cathedral (UK). It dates to the 7th century CE.

CURRENT KNOWN LOCATIONS

Austria	France	The Netherlands
Belgium	Germany	Russia
Czech Republic	Iceland	Spain
Denmark	Italy	Switzerland
England	Malta	United States