

## Conference 'From cylinder seals to Lippert's dactyliotheca'

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### Abstracts (alphabetical by surname)

**Rika Gyselen (CNRS, directeur de recherche émérite, Mondes iranien et indien):**

*'Sasanian seals: owners and re-users'*

The inscriptions and in addition the iconographic motifs sometimes identify owners of Sasanian seals: Sasanian kings and queens, regional vassal kings, prime ministers and counsellors of the Court, members of high nobility such as the *Kārens* and *Mihrāns*, high dignitaries and senior officials, scribes, Zoroastrian priests, and men and women of whom we only know the name and who may belong to the Zoroastrian, Christian or Jewish communities. However, most of the seals are anonymous, though they were used in public life as their impressions on clay bullae highlight this. Their authenticity was strictly regulated by officials.

Some passages in Arabic historiography suggest that a Sassanian king could have owned several seals, each of which was used in a very specific context. Owning several seals is also now explicitly proven for other important figures, such as army generals during the sixth century. A number of seals bear the stigmata of ownership change.

**Jørgen Hein (senior curator of the Royal Danish Collection at Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen):**

*'Princely splendour: some cameo vessels from the middle of the seventeenth century and their patrons'*

This contribution discusses ten cameo vessels in European princely collections. They are made of enamelled gold and decorated with mounted cameos and a few gems. None of the vessels has a maker's mark or an artist's signature. Most of the cameos can be dated after 1500 and the painted enamel is decorated with typical flowers, animals, birds and larvae, which dates the production of the vessels around 1650. But where and for whom were they made?

The manufacture of the vessels has been attributed to ateliers in Prague, based on the lapidary work, or to the Netherlands, based on the painted flower enamel. However, the gems could be bought as half-products all over Europe and likewise the new fashion of the flower decorated enamel rapidly spread over Europe. Consequently, the vessels might have been produced in any great goldsmith's city north of the Alps. Only two of the vessels have a *terminus ante quem*. First a beaker in St. Petersburg, which is listed in 1661 in the collection of Leonora Christina Ulfeldt, a morganatic daughter of Christian IV of Denmark. Second the tureen in Leiden, which is recorded in the estate of Amalia van Solms in 1666.

**Keynote lecture by Martin Henig (Member of the Faculty of Classics at University of Oxford and honorary Professor at University College London):**

*'Roman gems in old collections and in modern archaeology'*

Cameos and intaglios have been valued and collected since Antiquity and they have been studied ever since the Renaissance for what they can tell us about Ancient Greece and Rome. Some, indeed, carry with them an impressive pedigree concerning earlier usages, for example as jewels in Medieval *Ars Sacra* or as items in earlier collections (though few have had so exciting a ‘biography’ as the ‘Great Cameo’ from the Dutch Royal Collection, celebrating Constantine’s victory at the Milvian Bridge, now in Leiden).

In the past two centuries there has been an increasing archaeological component as gems have been excavated as site finds alongside other small objects. These are sometimes well stratified and thus the time of their loss can be fairly closely dated, although it is sad that all too seldom have those engaged in fieldwork evinced a real appreciation of the long history of glyptic study. On the other hand collectors and those engaged in cataloguing collections of gems have too seldom engaged with the physical contexts in which these objects were used and mislaid, and they too often judge gems simply according to their supposed aesthetic qualities. This paper will attempt to bring together the archaeology of gems in the study and the archaeology of gems in the field.

**Marianne Kleibrink (professor emeritus Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology, Groningen University):**

*‘Cassandra on seals. Ring stone images as self-representation: an example’*

To understand what kind of role engraved gems played in private and political interaction and thus in history, we have to unravel the use of their images in auto-representation. Engraved gems are different from other ancient objects in that their images can be considered as directly related to the self.

Kassandra, the subject of this contribution, is deliberately chosen, because – in respect to her tragic fate - who could possibly be interested in being associated with this Trojan heroine? Yet there are relatively many seal-stones with Kassandra and in a variety of iconographies, showing her transformation from Trojan war casualty to Rome’s prophetess of a golden future.

**Valentin Kockel (professor emeritus for Classical Archaeology, University of Augsburg):**

*‘A treasure, a schoolmaster, a pass-time. Dactyliothecae of the 18th and 19th centuries and their function as learning aids in schools and universities’*

“This dactyliotheca is used in classes across German grammar schools to illustrate the classical authors and ancient customs; an exercise that is just as entertaining as it is useful, but which has not yet been discovered in France”.

These are the – no doubt idealising – words used by Strasbourg Professor Jérémie-Jacques Oberlin in 1796 to describe the employment of Lippert’s dactyliothecae in German schools – and to differentiate it from French teaching practices of the time. This contribution to the conference tracks the spread of gem cast collections and their actual use in classroom environments, which included the creation of specific editions for schools. Some school texts of ancient authors specifically refer to Lippert casts in footnotes. As such, it is hardly surprising that from the very beginning, Caspar Reuven’s wishes for the archaeological collections at Leiden included dactyliothecae in addition to plaster casts of statues and cork models of key architectural monuments.

**Attilio Mastrocinque (professor of Roman history, University of Verona):**

*'Invocations to Hermes and Aphrodite on two gems in Leiden'*

The inscriptions on two of the Leiden magical gems are the topic of this contribution to the conference. The first is an invocation to Hermes, which can be translated as following: "Oh Arcadian! You who bring prodigies to the mind, you who bring gain!". The second text invokes Aphrodite, and can be translated in this manner: "Oh goddess of Cyprus, of Kanopos! You, having rose pink hands, hiding and giving protection, you who excites desire (with your) lovely form, the gracious one, the Paphian, and furthermore Isis, oh Boubastis whose face inspires desire. Oh! For the love of Severus".

**Diederik Meijer (associate professor Near Eastern Archaeology (retired), Leiden University):**

*'A beautiful collection of Mesopotamian cylinder seals'*

This contribution will start with some words on the genre of cylinder seals, which in Mesopotamia for a long time replaced the stamp seals used from early prehistory onward. Cylinder seals can be seen as the corollary of the ever increasing complexity of society from ca. 4.000 BC onwards. They are important because their representations can be classified stylistically, and can help in dating archaeological contexts. Furthermore they provide insight into the realm of thought of the early Near East.

A few seals from the collection of the former Royal Coin Cabinet will serve to illustrate these points. This collection originated in the early 19th century and consists solely of seals derived from the art market, so that no archaeological data are available. Their attribution to specific classes is thus an art-historical endeavour based on stylistic characteristics. Yet, some seals carry cuneiform inscriptions which may help in their classification.

**Gertrud Platz-Horster (former vice director Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin):**

*'Some cameos in Leiden – Roman to Baroque'*

Apart from the still discussed large 'Hague Cameo' or 'Gemma Constantiniana' and the fine 'Livia'-Cameo, little is known about the 449 cameos in the collection. Among some 4.300 gems and cameos, they originate from the former Royal Coin Cabinet in The Hague, founded in 1816, then transferred to the GeldMuseum in Utrecht, and acquired by the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden only in 2013.

For this paper eleven cameos have been selected which may provide an idea of the large chronological and iconographical frame of this stock. They stand exemplary for portraiture or political device; they match stunningly with parallels in the Berlin or other old royal collections, and they add remarkable items to a recently identified late antique workshop. The origin and the treatment of the material will be discussed as well as the changing of taste for cameos during this long period.

**Marcia Pointon (professor emeritus in History of Art, University of Manchester):**

*'The importance of gems in the work of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)'*

In his 1672 'Life' of Rubens, Giovanni Pietro Bellori reported on the origins of the contents of the museum the artist assembled at his house in Antwerp.

“Aveva egli adunato marmi, e statue, che portó, e fece condursi di Roma con ogni sorte di antichità, medaglie, camei, intaglio, gemme, e metalli;”

“He had collected marbles and statues which he took [with him, presumably] and had [= caused to be] brought to him from Rome with every sort of antiquities, medals, cameos, intaglios, gems, and metals;”

It is a well-known fact that Rubens, with his friend and correspondent Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc, planned to publish a volume on gems. This work never materialised, though some correspondence relating to it is in print. Detailed research by Nancy Thomson de Grummond and by Hermance Marjon van der Meulen-Schregardus revealed something of the extent and character of Rubens's collection of gems.

This paper will not add to what is known of the contents of this collection. Rather it will seek firstly to cast light on the relationship between Rubens's interest in gems and his wider fascination with precious stones, secondly to establish a connection between his achievement as a painter of mythology and portraits and his interest in gems, and thirdly to consider the significance of minerals as materials in Rubens's intellectual and artistic milieu. The approach is that of the historian of early modern visual culture. The aim of the paper will therefore be to bring together areas of Rubens's work that have been viewed as discrete territories.

**Claudia Wagner (senior research lecturer at Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford):**

*'Post-classical cameos, their makers and users'*

One of the major luxury arts of classical antiquity was the production of gems and finger rings, prized and expensive throughout history. In the long tradition of the gem engraver the cameo is a comparably recent invention - probably introduced by workshops in Alexandria by the 2nd century BC. They present in relief, mostly on layered stones (usually sardonyx), subjects similar to those on intaglios, and often demonstrably by the same artists. They were popular from the 1st century BC for both secular and religious subjects, and in their function as jewellery, often for women, but also for imperial portraiture and even propaganda, when the stones can be quite large. In particular the great cameos, one of the major arts of classical antiquity, were much admired. They served as important source of information on classical figures and myth.

Inspired by these, Renaissance artists began to rival the earlier engravers with innovative designs. In the Renaissance famous collections were formed, such as the Medici, the Gonzaga and the Farnese collections. Many were published, some even in the 16th century, and attracted not only the attention of nobles and kings in Austria, France, and even Britain, but also in the Dutch Republic, where a collector Abraham van Goorle (Gorlaeus) proudly published his extensive collection of provincial gems of the Roman Empire. The Rijksmuseum van Oudheden has benefitted hugely from such diverse collecting and the post-classical cameos reflect techniques, shapes and iconography which had spread throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. Many represent copies of ancient and even early Renaissance gems, but also original designs with classicising motifs, portrait

studies and more complex groups were created. This contribution will attempt to give an overview of some of the collections highlights: cameos engraved in beautiful materials such as the deep red jacinth bust of a woman from the 16th century, motifs treasured in the Renaissance, such as the sardonyx of four layers copying the famous Cesati cameo, Cupid taming a lion, much admired by Vasari, portraits of rulers and kings, exotic men and women.

**Hanco Zwaan (senior researcher taxonomy and systematics, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden):**

*'The original RMO ancient gem collection: gem identification and applied research techniques'*

The original collection of gems in the department of Classical Antiquities of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (RMO) consists of in total 267 gems, largely intaglios, of which 55 belong to the 'Guillon collection'. This collection was part of a large collection of historical art objects (Musée Guillon), at the time put together by Charles Guillon, a notary, politician and collector, based in Roermond (1811-1873). Then 212 gems of the RMO collection were derived from legacies and also from various excavations, among which the Velsler tunnel site. In the inventory, many of the engraved gems were indicated to be of Roman age and were loosely identified or just labeled as 'stone'.

Standard equipment used to establish the physical properties of modern gemstones could be used partially to identify these ancient gems properly. With the aid of more advanced techniques, such as Energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence (ED-XRF), Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR) and Raman spectroscopy, the identity of the stones could be fully characterized. As a result, in 96 cases (over 35% of the total number) the originally given names, present in the inventory, could be corrected.