

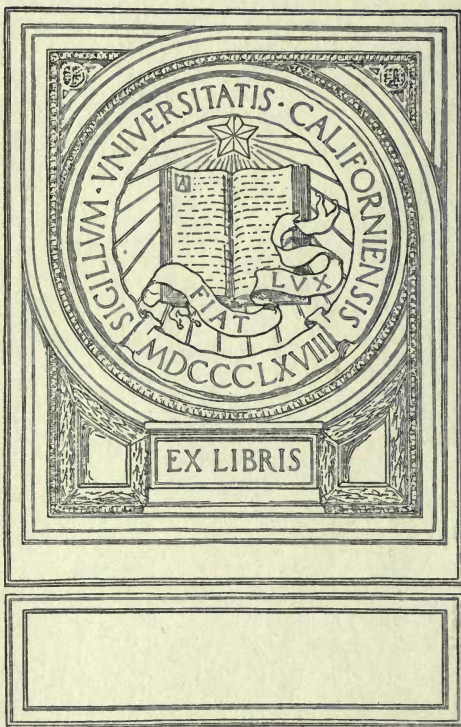
UC-NRLF



QB 361 153

NK  
5585

K5



*Faint, illegible handwritten text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.*

INTERNET ARCHIVE

Digitized for Microsoft Corporation  
by the Internet Archive in 2007.

From University of California Libraries.

May be used for non-commercial, personal, research,  
or educational purposes, or any fair use.

May not be indexed in a commercial service.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY BOND

T.C.  
E. Waterton Esq

with C. W. King's Compts

King, C. W.

Mediseval gem engraving

NK 5585

K5

## MEDIÆVAL GEM ENGRAVING.

BY C. W. KING, M.A.

ALL who have written upon the Glyptic Art assume that gem engraving was utterly extinct in Europe during the whole extent of the Middle Ages—that is, from the coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor of the West in the year 800 down to the middle of the fifteenth century (1453), when Greek fugitives from Constantinople re-established its practice in Italy. The continuance of the art within the Greek empire during that period does not enter into the question, for this, together with all the other arts of antiquity, maintained a feeble existence there down to the very last, as numerous camei, some in fine sardonyx but the greater part in blood-stone, remain to testify. The agreement of these in style with the bezants of John Zimisses and the Comneni shows that the manufacture of such ecclesiastical decorations (their subjects are always Scriptural) was prosecuted with considerable briskness between the tenth century and the thirteenth. No Byzantine *intagli* were, however, produced during the same period, for if such had existed, they would be easily recognisable by the same unmistakeable stamp of the epoch impressed upon them, both as to subjects and their treatment, that marks the Byzantine camei and ivory carvings. The reason for this extinction of intaglio engraving is obvious enough; signets cut in hard stones were no longer in request, the official seals for stamping the leaden bullæ authenticating public documents were, like coin-dies, sunk in iron; whilst those for personal use were engraved in the precious metals.

Camei were the ornaments above all others deemed appropriate for reliquaries and similar furniture of the altar; a tradition dating from imperial times. In the estimate of art then current, the value of the material and the time expended

in elaborating it counted for much. Another consideration also influenced this preference, the greater facility of executing a tolerable work in relief than in intaglio: a fact declared from the first by the nascent art producing the perfectly modeled Etruscan scarabs, which serve as vehicles for such barbarous intagli upon their bases, and confirmed by this second childhood of the Byzantine school.

It is at first sight apparent, from two considerations, that the (genuine Gothic artists never attempted engraving upon hard stones.) The first, and this an argument of the greatest weight, is that no gems are to be met with exhibiting purely Gothic designs. We know from the innumerable seals preserved, both official and personal, many of them most elaborately drawn and artistically executed, what would be the designs that gems engraved by a hand contemporary with these seals must necessarily have exhibited; for, as the analogy of the two arts requires, the same hand would have cut the intagli in stone and the seals in metal. Thus at a later time we find that the famous gem-engravers of the Revival, such as Il Greco, Matteo del Nassaro, and Valerio Belli, were also die sinkers. Any gems, therefore, engraved either in Italy, France, or Germany between the years 900 and 1453 would necessarily present such subjects as saints in ecclesiastical or monastic costume, knights arrayed in the armour of their times, and, above all, architectural embellishments, canopies and niches, the customary decorations of the mediæval seals in metal.

Besides this restriction as to subjects, the drawing of those ages has, even in its highest correctness, a peculiar character never to be mistaken, and which even pervades the paintings of the Italian school down to late in the fifteenth century, and those of the German for a century longer. Lastly, a class of subjects distinct from any known to antique glyptic art, armorial bearings arranged according to the rules of heraldry, would have constituted a large portion of anything executed in those times for seals, and yet such are wholly deficient.<sup>1</sup> Again, in the choice of the antique intagli set in mediæval seals, there is often evident a desire to pick out some figure agreeing with the owner's cognisance. And indeed some of the metal seals exhibit in their heraldic animals an attempt to

<sup>1</sup> See note 4, page 325.



copy representations of the like objects upon gems. Antiques of the class being so highly esteemed from the supposed mystic virtues of both substance and sigil, doubtless, had it been within the mediæval engraver's power, a gem would have been preferred by him for the purpose when about to execute the signet of a wealthy patron: on this consideration our second argument is founded. (The great number of antique gems set in mediæval privy seals sufficiently proves how much such works were in request. The legends added upon the metal settings enchasing them show how the subjects were interpreted to suit the spirit of the times, often in a sense so forced as must have tried the faith of even their simple-minded owners. Certainly, had it been possible to execute in such valued materials designs better assimilated to the notions they desired to embody, such would have been attempted in a manner more or less barbarous, but still bearing unmistakably the stamp of Gothic art.) This remark applies exactly to the latest intagli of antiquity, or rather to the earliest of mediæval times, the date of which can be accurately ascertained, the signets of the Emperor Lotharius. One is set in the cross that he presented to the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle, an oval crystal,  $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  inch in dimensions, engraved with his head in profile covered with the closely fitting Roman helmet seen upon the contemporary coinage. Around runs this legend cut in the stone, in imitation of a favorite Byzantine invocation which is found upon the *aurei* of the same epoch—

+ XPE ADIVVA HLOTHARIVM REG.

—“Christe adjuva Hlotharium Regem.”—Both the style of the portrait and the lettering agree with those seen on the Carlovingian *sous d'or*.

Still more curious, because betraying more of a national character, is the other seal of Lotharius,<sup>2</sup> of which an impression only exists attached to a document, dated 877, preserved in the archives of the department of the Haute-Marne, a bust in full face, the hair long and parted, with seemingly a nimbus over the head, having the hand upon his breast, and in the field something like an arrow, perhaps intended for a palm-branch. The entire design shows the taste of the age, retaining no reminiscence of the antique even in its lowest

<sup>2</sup> Figured in the *Revue Archéologique* for 1858.

decline.<sup>3</sup> The beveled edge shows that the stone was a nicolo about  $1\frac{1}{4} \times 1$  inch in size. On the metal setting is the legend, cut in large letters—

LOTHARIUS DEI GRACIA REX.

The Byzantine camei themselves supply a further illustration; they exactly agree in character with other bas-reliefs of the same origin in whatever materials they may be executed, ivory, box-wood, marble, or bronze.

Amongst the Transalpine nations, at least during the last two centuries of the period above indicated, heraldic devices would have been beyond all others the subjects to employ the seal-engraver in preference to those of a religious character. In fact, Agricola writing soon after 1450 mentions the engraving of coats of arms upon the German onyx as then in common use, without the slightest allusion to that art as having been but recently introduced into Holland. However, as Bruges was then famed for its jewelers (L. de Berquem flourished there at that time), no doubt every new invention in the lapidary's art speedily found its way thither, and was cultivated to the utmost. It is on record how munificently similar discoveries were remunerated by the wealthy of those times, as Charles the Bold's liberality to the inventor of diamond-cutting conspicuously testifies.

Briefly to sum up the substance of the preceding arguments. (For the space of five centuries the Gothic seal-engravers were employed in executing an infinite number of signets in metal, to which business all their skill was devoted, as the elaborateness and occasional merit of the work manifestly proves. The designs on these seals were invariably in the taste of their age, being either religious or heraldic, and generally accompanied by architectural decorations.)

(The style of all these ages has an unmistakeable character of its own, from which the simplicity of the artists could never deviate by an attempt to revert to antique models; indeed, whatsoever Gothic art has produced shows the exact date, almost the very year of its production. Yet nothing, to speak generally, displaying the Gothic style has ever come to light amongst the profusion of engraved stones preserved, not even amongst those set in church plate, which would have admitted as more appropriate to its own destination any

<sup>3</sup> See the "Trésor de Conques" for the strange intaglio of the Saviour in amethyst, of this period.

contemporary work, had such been attainable.) As a proof of this, immediately upon the Revival we find the most eminent gem-engravers employed almost exclusively in executing crystal plaques with intagli of Scriptural subjects for the furniture of the altar.

Nor did such an exclusion of contemporary works (had any existed) arise from a disregard of the productions of the glyptic art. The rudest works of antiquity are to be seen enchased in Gothic goldsmiths' work, honored with the same precious mountings as the finest and most costly stones. It was enough that the subject suited the taste of the goldsmith, the art exhibited therein was altogether disregarded. It is very plain besides, that, (in consequence of the prevalent belief in the virtue of sigils, all engraved stones were esteemed as more valuable than those not engraved) even though the latter were of a more precious species. Again, it was not its mere antiquity that gave the sigil its virtue: that was derived entirely from the heavenly influence under which it had been made, and therefore the same and invariable whatever was the date of its execution. For example, we have abundant proof that, as soon as the art was revived, the manufacture of astrological talismans flourished quite as vigorously as of old under the Lower Empire. The case therefore stands thus. We find signets as important as ever, and their execution employing the best skill of the age, but taking for their material only metal; whilst, nevertheless, antique intagli in gems were more valuable than ever, and adapted to the prevailing notions by the most forced interpretations. The supply, too, falling so short of the demand that the very rudest were accepted and highly prized by persons not destitute of an appreciation of the beautiful, or at least of the highly finished—and, nevertheless, in spite of all this love of engraved stones, not a single production existing of that class which can be assigned to a Gothic artist. From these considerations we are forced to agree that the general conclusion of archæologists is well founded, and that the art during all the above period was totally extinct in Europe except within the precincts of Constantinople.

It is true that a passage or two in the works of mediæval writers seem to contravene this conclusion, for example, where Marbodius, writing at the close of the eleventh century, directs how to engrave particular sigils on the proper

gems : such as a vine entwined with ivy on the sard ; a lobster with a raven on the beryl ; Mars and Virgo holding a branch on the calcedony, &c. ; directions which at first sight would appear to indicate the existence of artists capable of executing his directions. But in reality the passage proves nothing, being no doubt merely transcribed from the same more ancient sources whence he drew the materials for his Lapidarium.

We come now to consider a most interesting class of monuments, and which may be pronounced exceptions to the above rule ; few indeed in number, and their origin forming the most difficult problem to be encountered in the history of this art. These exceptional pieces are what Vasari alludes to (*Vita di Valerio Belli*) where, treating of the engravers of his own age, the Cinque-Cento, he has these remarkable words:—(“The art of engraving on hard stones and precious stones (*gioie*) was lost together with the other arts of design after the fall of Greece and Rome. For many and many a year it continued lost so that nobody was found to attend to it, and although something was still done, yet it was not of the kind that one should take account thereof. And, so far as there is any record, there is no one to be found who began to work well and to get into the good way (*dar nel buono*), except in the times of Martin V. and of Paul IV. (1417 and 1464).”) Thenceforward it went on improving until Lorenzo the Magnificent, &c.” Vasari’s “*buono*” always means the classic style ; the expression “although something was still done,” cannot be understood as meaning nothing more than the Byzantine camei that occasionally found their way into Italy, or works done in that country by the Greek artists, so much employed before the springing up of a native school, as painters and architects, like Buschetus, the builder of the Duomo at Pisa, and those who raised S. Marco at Venice in so purely Byzantine a style. The mention of the two popes indicates the place of the practice and the improvement of the art as Rome itself ; in fact, we know that Paul IV. was a passionate lover of gems, and left a magnificent collection, purchased of his heirs by Lorenzo dei Medici, and incorporated in his own, a sufficient proof of the taste and judgment exhibited in bringing them together. A cameo portrait of the pontiff amongst them is said by Giulianelli to be a fine per-

formance, and to show the hand of an accomplished artist, affording the best confirmation of Vasari's statement.

But to go back to the very earliest times in which any traces of the art appear, Scipio Ammirato (Hist. Flor. p. 741) mentions a certain Peruzzi, "il quale era singolare intagliatore di pietre," as forging the seal of Carlo da Durazzo. This was in the year 1379.<sup>4</sup> Here then is an instance, not to be looked for at so early a period, of a prince having for his seal an engraved gem, and that apparently not an antique, else the Florentine artist had not been competent to imitate it so exactly. Again, Giulianelli (p. 76) quotes Gori's *Adversaria* to the effect that (before the year 1300 the Florentine Republic used two seals—both engraved stones. The first, large, for sealing public documents, was a plasma engraved with a Hercules (one of the supporters of the city arms), with the legend running round it—SIGILLVM FLORENTINORVM. The other, small, for letters, bore the Florentine lily; legend—SIGILLVM PRIORVM. The mention of the large size of the former seal, as well as the subject in such a stone, suffice to show that this plasma was not an antique intaglio fitted into the seal with the legend added upon the metal, whilst the engraving upon the second must necessarily have been done expressly, as no such device could have been supplied by the relics of antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Giulianelli also remarks, with some plausibility, that, in the same way (as the art of mosaic-working was kept up at Rome during the ages following the fall of the Western Empire, there is reason to believe that the art of gem-engraving may in like manner have been maintained there. ) That the Italian lapidaries could at all times shape, facet, and polish the softer stones, such as

<sup>4</sup> The signet of Jean sans Peur, Duke of Burgundy (d. 1417) is preserved. His arms are engraved upon a pale sapphire, which is colored underneath with the proper heraldic tinctures. In the Waterton Collection I observed a shield of arms very skilfully cut in a fine jacinth, and set in a ring evidently by its fashion belonging to the first half of the fifteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Trésor Sacré de Saint Denys* (1646): S. Louis.—"L'anneau du mesme glorieux Roy Saint Louis qui est précieux: Il est d'or semé de fleurs de lys, garny d'un grand saphir quarré sur lequel est gravé l'image du mesme saint avec les lettres S. L., qui veulent dire *Sigillum*

*Lodovici*. Sur le rond de l'anneau par le dedans sont gravez ces mots, *C'est le Signet du Roy S. Louis, qui y ont esté adjoustez après sa mort*" (p. 107). The wedding-ring of the same prince is said to have been set with a sapphire engraved with the Crucifixion; the shank covered with lilies and *marguerites*, allusive to his own name and his wife's. This attribution is a mere *custode's* story. Mr. Waterton lately examined the gem, and puts it down at a much later age: the king, a full length, has the *nimbus*, showing the figure to be posterior to his beatification. It probably belongs to Louis XII.'s time.

amethysts, garnets, emeralds, is apparent from the number of antique gems of those species extant, but recut into the then fashionable octagonal form for the purpose of setting in mediæval rings. Vasari's second date indeed, 1464, might be supposed to have some connexion with the influx of Greek fugitives after the fall of Constantinople eleven years before. But Vasari would certainly not have discerned any "improvement" in what they were capable of producing, for Italian plastic art was by that time fully perfected, as we see by Luca della Robbia's terra-cottas, not to mention the bas-reliefs of Ghiberti and Donatello. And again, in all probability very few of the artist class fled from Constantinople, the Greeks naturally enough preferring the tolerant Mohammedans to their persecuting rivals of the Latin Church. The emigrants were the nobles, special objects of jealousy to the conquerors, and the grammarians, whose learning was greatly sought after in Italy and most liberally remunerated. Besides this, Byzantium, when the empire was once more re-established after the expulsion of the Franks, who had held the city during the first half of the thirteenth century, did nothing more for art, its vitality having been utterly exhausted by the grinding tyranny of those barbarians. When Vasari specifies two particular periods after 1400, and quotes the pontificates of two popes as manifest epochs of improvement in the glyptic art, he must be referring to works done in Italy and by Italians. It is very provoking that Vasari, usually so loquacious, should have passed over this most interesting dawn of the art with such contemptuous brevity. He mentions no engraver by name antecedent to Gio. delle Corniuole, who worked for Lorenzo dei Medici, and had learnt the art from "masters of different countries" brought to Florence by Lorenzo and Piero (his father, not his son, it would seem) to repair (*rassettare*) the antiques they had collected. These expressions prove that the art was flourishing already in other places before it was domiciled in Florence; and this was perhaps the reason why the patriotic Messer Giorgio passes so slightly over these earlier celebrities—"vixere fortes ante Agamenona." Milan was long before noted for its jewelers; Anguilotto Bracciaforte was celebrated in the fourteenth century. These lapidaries cut into tables and pyramids the harder precious stones, such as spinels and

balais rubies, and even polished the diamond before L. de Berquem's discovery in 1475 of the mode of shaping that stone; and therefore, as far as the mechanical process was concerned, they were fully competent to engrave intagli. The engravers named by Camillo Leonardo, in 1503, as then the most eminent, and who therefore must have been working for many years in the preceding century, in the school of the quattrocentisti, are Lionardo of Milan, Anichini of Ferrara, Tagliacarne of Genova, Gio. Maria of Mantua. "Their works, equal to the antique, were diffused all over Italy," which presupposes a long-established reputation previous to the date of his "Speculum Lapidum." Some of these may have been Vasari's "foreign masters."

It was in the year 1488 that Lorenzo founded the Accademia di S. Marco, appointing as president the aged Bertaldo, the favourite pupil of Donatello, for the cultivation of all the fine arts, including the glyptic. But it was long before this, and in his father's lifetime, that he had summoned the foreign engravers above alluded to: inasmuch as Gio. delle Corniuole learned the art from them it must have before been extinct at Florence. Vasari's expression, "diversi paesi," would, in the language of his times, apply to the states of northern Italy almost as strongly as to Flanders, or to Alexandria, for to the Tuscan even those of the next city were foreigners and "natural enemies."

As the die-sinkers of his age were, as a matter of course, the most eminent gem-engravers, such was probably the case in the century before; and Pollaiuolo, whose dies for the Papal coinage he so highly extols, may be supposed likewise to have tried his skill upon gems, and to have inaugurated the improvement that dawned in his times at Rome, where he and his brother worked till their death in 1498. And since the earliest works quoted by Vasari are both portraits in intaglio—that of Savonarola (put to death in 1498), by Gio. delle Corniuole, and the head of Ludovico Sforza (Duke of Milan from 1494 to 1500), executed in ruby by Domenico dei Camei<sup>6</sup>—we may conclude that the pieces done in 1417 and 1464, which began to show signs of improvement, were similarly portraits, and in intaglio. Such was naturally the first method in which the die-sinker

<sup>6</sup> He doubtless executed in the same gem the portrait *in relief* of his conqueror

Louis XII., now in Her Majesty's collection.

would essay his skill upon the new and refractory material, and the one in which the result would be most serviceable to his patron. No camei of that age are to be found that can be imagined to exhibit the improvement mentioned by Vasari, and the supposed cameo portrait of Paul IV., above quoted, I very much suspect belongs to a later pontificate.

Vasari's hints, coupled with these facts, throw some light upon the origin of that rare class of intagli mounted in massy gold rings made after the mediæval fashion, which, both by the intrinsic value of the stone and of the setting, evince that they were designed for personages of the highest rank, being the greatest rarities that the age could produce. On this very account such are the precise objects likely to exhibit the most novel and most admired improvements in the art. First amongst these ranks the spinel in the Marlborough Collection engraved with a youthful head in front face, wearing a crown of three fleur-de-lys. (See woodcut, fig. 1.) The intaglio, in a small square stone, is deep-cut and neatly done, but the face is quite the conventional Gothic head seen on coins, and exhibits no individuality whatever to guide us in attributing it to any particular personage. It is set in a massy gold ring ribbed longitudinally, and chased with flowers in the style prevailing about the middle of the fifteenth century, a date further indicated by the lettering of the motto engraved around it on the beasil—*tel il nest*—"there is no one like him." It is evident that both intaglio and ring are of the same date, for, besides the Gothic fashion of the crown, the work of the intaglio has nothing of the antique character, and, though highly polished internally, does not appear to have been sunk by the antique method; this last remark, indeed, applies to the entire class now under consideration. The portrait may be intended for some Italian prince of the age. The only circumstance against this explanation is that the motto is in black letter, a Tedescan barbarism unknown in Italy, where the round Lombardic continued in use until superseded by the original Roman about the date of 1450. The species of the gem at first suggests to us the famous portrait of Ludovico Sforza already noticed; but, that being on a ruby the size of a *giulio* (*i. e.*, an inch in diameter), it follows necessarily almost that, like the heads on the improved coinage of the times (imitated by Henry VII., and by James IV. of Scotland in





Fig. 1.—Intaglio on Spinel. Marlborough Collection.



Fig. 2.—"Signet of Matthew Paris." Waterton Collection.



Fig. 3.—Intaglio; Fourteenth century?  
Examples of Mediæval Engraved Gems.



his bonnet-pieces), the latter would have been in profile in somewhat slight intaglio, stiffly drawn, yet full of character, like the contemporary relief in ruby of Louis XII. just mentioned.

The Marlborough gem was described in the old catalogue as the "Head of a Lombard king;" but not only does the form of the crown contravene this explanation, for these barbarians, as their coins and the contemporary Frankish *sous d'or* attest, aped the diadem of the Byzantine Cæsars; whilst for their signets they had their own image and superscription cut on massy gold rings, of which Childeric's is a specimen, or on large gems of the softer kinds, as in the two seals of Lotharius above described.

Mr. Albert Way discovers in this little portrait a resemblance to that of our Henry VI. upon his great seal. Of this similarity there can be no doubt; yet, unfortunately, such a coincidence is far from deciding the question, such portraits being entirely conventional, and suiting equally well any number of contemporary princes. He conjectures that the ring, a lady's from its small dimensions, may have belonged to Margaret of Anjou, which is, indeed, supported by the loving motto, "There is no one like him." This pleasing and romantic theory has, doubtless, several circumstances in its favor. This princess coming from the south of France (if we allow that the art in Italy was sufficiently advanced to produce such a work), her position would have enabled her to procure its best and earliest performances. Her marriage with Henry VI. took place in 1445, a sufficient time after the first epoch (1415), named as that of an improvement in the art in Italy. Her father, the "good king René," had been dispossessed of Naples in 1442, only three years before; he was himself an artist as well as a poet, and introduced many useful arts into Provence, glass-making amongst the rest. The last being then chiefly cultivated with a reference to art in the production of elegant vessels or of painted windows, there is a probability that gem-engraving likewise may have shared his patronage. Such an attribution of the ring would also explain the appearance of the black letter, used till late in the following century by the French, in the motto, and the general style of the jewel itself, which certainly is not of Italian workmanship. But enough of attributions founded upon mere probabilities. In

the Uzielli collection there was a somewhat similar work (procured in France by Bööcke), a female head in front-face very deeply cut in an octagonal amethyst, but quite in the stiff Gothic manner of a metal seal, and certainly not antique, not even to be referred to the Lower Empire. It was set in a very heavy ring made like a many-stranded cable, a fashion much used throughout the fifteenth century, and, indeed, extremely tasteful. Here, also, both gem and ring are apparently of the same date, but there is no inscription of any kind to assist conjecture. Of such heads given in full face more shall be said when we come to a most interesting specimen of the kind.

A greater affinity to the "Henry VI," both in material, execution, and lettering, is the jacinth intaglio now in the Braybrooke collection, set in a weighty though plain ring, which is said to have been found in Warwickshire. The device is a triple face combined in one head, seen in front, but differing altogether in treatment from the three masks thus united so common in Roman work. Here, indeed, a certain Gothic grimness pervades the design, and the hair is done in a manner totally different from the ancient, being represented by thick straight strokes, each terminating in a drill-hole. The intaglio, highly polished, is deeply sunk in the stone, and executed with the very greatest precision. On the beasil is the motto *noel* twice repeated. This triune face is the cognisance of the noble Milanese family, the Trivulzi, being the rebus on the name, "quasi tres vultus." The style of this intaglio, so bold and forcible, yet full of a Gothic quaintness, has no similarity whatever to the Roman antique. There can be little doubt that we have here an actual gem cut at Milan about the year 1450. A supposition which would account for the use of the black letter in the motto, will plausibly indicate at the same time the former owner of this valuable signet. Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, surnamed "the Great," born in 1441, having been slighted by Ludovico Sforza, became the most active partisan of his mortal enemy, Charles VIII., and afterwards of Louis XII. and François I. What, then, more natural than that he, a general in the French service, should inscribe upon his family signet the well-known Gallic war-cry, "Noel," *i. e.*, Emanuel, "God be with us," and that in the character still prevailing in his adopted country?

Our third example is analogous to the last in many respects. It also is cut in a precious material, a large and good sapphire, and is a female face in profile, the head covered with a cloth after the fashion of the Roman *contadine* (see woodcut, fig. 2). It is worked out in a manner resembling the preceding, allowance being made for the difference necessitated by the superior hardness of the stone, the most difficult (after the diamond) that ever taxes the engraver's skill. The intaglio has an extraordinary polish, but in technique equally as in design it differs totally from the few antiques extant in this stone, and yet more from the numerous examples in it executed after the Renaissance. Round the bezel, in neat Lombard letters, runs the warning, TECTA LEGE LECTA TEGE, a favorite motto for mediæval seals. On the authority of this motto the signet has been attributed to Matthew Paris, and the head-cloth fancied to be a Benedictine hood; apart from all other considerations, so valuable a ring was beyond the station of a monk like that chronicler. The Lombard character may appear on works made in the same year as others inscribed in the black letter, supposing the former executed in Italy, the latter by a French or German jeweler. The subject is undoubtedly the very one that we should expect a mediæval engraver to select for so valuable a stone—the head of the Madonna. There is an attempt to represent curls where disclosed beneath the head cloth, the conventional drapery for such a type: blue is, moreover, the color appropriated to the Virgin Mary. This ring, also massy and valuable, was found in cleaning out an old well at Hereford. Thus we have, within the circle of my own experience, three intagli on precious stones, and bearing a certain family resemblance to each other.

Last to be described, but not the least important, is an intaglio on an occidental cornelian, not a *sard*. It is a female bust in front face; upon the head is a sort of diadem, placed horizontally; round the neck is a chain, supporting a small undefined ornament. At first sight this bust reminds one of the type upon the coins of Licinia Eudoxia in the fifth century; but there can be no doubt, after examination, that it is designed for a Madonna. The work indeed is very tolerable, but the face has the usual impudent and smirking expression that marks the female heads in the later ages of

Gothic taste; certainly such a manner was foreign to the Roman hand, even in the lowest stages of the Decline. Imperial portraits, even after the execution had become quite barbarous, are still successful in preserving a certain rude expression of dignity and repose. This stone is not set as a ring, but in an octagonal silver seal, in shape far from inelegant. The legend on the setting—PRIVE SVI E POY CONV—"Privé suis et puis connu," is well cut in bold Lombardic letters, like that on the ring last mentioned. This seal, found at Childerley, Suffolk, in 1861, was ceded by the late Mr. Litchfield of Cambridge to the Prince of Wales.

All the above described engravings distinguish themselves at the very first glance from the innumerable examples of really antique intagli adapted to mediæval usages. The latter, whether the finest Greek or the rudest colonial Roman, have an air of antiquity about them which cannot be mistaken, in addition to the characteristic shaping of the stone itself. For all antique gems (excepting the sard, the red jasper, and the sardonyx, when cut transversely by the older Greeks) have always a surface more or less convex, and more especially so in the case of the three precious kinds we have been considering, but which in all these is perfectly plane. The work also betrays in every line the heavy touch of the engraver accustomed to cut seals in metal.

It is only a matter of wonder why the Italians, at least in the great trading cities, Pisa, Venice, Genoa, did not sooner attain to proficiency in gem-engraving; in constant intercourse as they were with the natives of Alexandria and of the Syrian ports, to say nothing of their artistic relations with the Byzantine Greeks, in all which regions the art was extensively practised, the more especially amongst the Mohammedans, in the cutting of Cufic, and later of Persian calligraphy with the accompanying arabesques and floral decorations. This is the more singular as the Italians are known to have learnt many arts from the Arabians, especially those established in Spain, such as the manufacture of ornamental glass, enameled wares or Majolica, and damascening metal. Many Italian words relating to the arts betray the sources whence the latter were derived, being pure Arabic, such as *zecca*, *tazza*, *gala*, perhaps also *cameo*, &c. It is not however unlikely that some amongst the ruder talismans, on which Hebrew letters appear, were

made in the interval preceding the date of 1417, hinted at by Vasari as the space when something continued to be done, although it was of no account. Yet, had the Italians, before the year 1400, practised gem engraving even to this limited extent, we should expect to find a class of intagli existing, of which no examples have yet presented themselves, namely, the patron saints of the respective cities, just as the contemporary Byzantines were doing with their St. George, Demetrius, and Theodore, and their own mint-masters in the types of their national coinages. We should expect often to find on gems the well-known figure of St. John of Florence and his old lion, *Marzocco*; the "Tota Pulchra" of Pisa; the Santo Volto of Lucca; St. Martin; and above all the Winged Lion of Venice. The last was the especial device for a merchant's signet, and therefore does it figure on so many counters or Nuremburg Rechenpfennings.

Sometimes indeed a calcedony or cornelian is found bearing a regular "merchant's mark," but all known to me seem later than 1500, and may have been engraved as late as Elizabeth's reign, which has left abundance of signets of this sort in metal.

To return to the triple face on the jacinth above described: its most strange magical-looking aspect irresistibly suggests an equally strange hypothesis to account for it. It strongly resembles the heads of certain mysterious statuettes bearing Arabic legends of unknown purport, figured by Von Hammer (*Mines de l'Orient*, vol. vi.) as the very images of Baphomet that the Templars were accused of worshipping. It certainly would well represent the "ydole avec trois faces" specified in the articles of accusation. Hence sprung the but too seductive idea that some dignitary of the Order, stationed in the East, might have employed a native engraver to execute to his commission this image on a precious stone, and the same theory would account for the other female heads similarly on precious stones, whose style is evidently contemporary with this triplet's. In that case all such female heads would typify the Female Principle so important in the Gnostic scheme, their Achamoth, or Wisdom. As on the Roman talismans of the sect a Venus appears for her to the eyes of the uninitiated, so a bust that would do duty for a Madonna might have served to baffle the curiosity of the

profane, when adopted by these the latest cultivators of the Gnosis, to typify their mystic *Mete*.

In such a sense the enigmatical motto "Though secret, I am afterwards known," and the injunctions to silence would be highly appropriate, the true meaning of the devices being only understood by the "free, equal, and admitted brother;" but such an explanation, tempting as it is, will not stand a closer investigation, for it is based upon a mere chimera. The figures so laboriously collected by Von Hammer manifest in everything the spirit of the Cinque Cento and a certain inspiration of Roman art, for in some the idea has evidently been borrowed from the Hercules wrapped in his lion's skin, whilst the armour in others is much too classical in its details to have been of the work of the Templar times. The astrological symbols, too, so profusely interspersed are not even as ancient in form as those employed by the Gothic architects in their sculptured decorations, but exactly correspond with those found in printed books of the sixteenth century. The Arabic inscriptions also are in the modern Nesghi, which had not superseded the Cufic in the ages in question; and this circumstance alone suffices to demolish the whole fabric he has so ingeniously reared. All these considerations united show that these figures, if not altogether modern forgeries, were made to serve some purpose in the proceedings of the alchemists or astrologers in the train of the emperor Rudolph II., or perhaps, as certain Masonic emblems denote, they had reference to the arcana of the Rosicrucians. The latter flourished amazingly in Germany after the year 1600, before they were merged into the Freemasons sometime in the next century; and, seeing that the motives of these statuettes are evidently borrowed from Florentine bronzes, the latter explanation is, perhaps, the nearest to the truth. At this date the notions of the Kabala and mysticism of every kind flourished most vigorously; indeed, the astrology and alchemy of the preceding ages were simple science conducting its investigations according to the rules of common sense, when compared to the extravagant theosophy established by Paracelsus and his disciples.

From all this we are driven back to the conclusion before attained from other data, that these mysterious intagli, instead of being early mediæval works, are specimens of the earliest



revival, and belong to the school of the quattrocentisti. By the very beginning of that age the Italians already sought after engraved gems as works of art, as appears from Cyriac of Ancona's letter respecting the coins and gems collected by the Venetian admiral, Bertuccio Delfin, the first possessor of that famous amethyst, the Pallas of Eutyches. His words describing the latter prove that the merit of a fine intaglio was perfectly appreciated before the year 1450.

A silver seal, "of fourteenth-century work," found on the site of the Priory of St. Mary Magdalene at Monkton Farleigh, Wilts, displays a female head in nearly front face (intaglio), covered by a veil drawn closely under the chin. (Wilts Mag. vol. ii., 389). The legend is CAPVT MARIE MAGDALENE in the Roman letter that first began to supersede the round Lombardic. But the design of this intaglio is too fine and full of the classical taste to be referred to the early Revival. Its motive may be even from a work of the Augustan age, the portrait of some imperial lady in the costume of a votaress of Isis. It is almost identical in design with the terminal figure in the Townley Gallery, mis-named the Venus Architis.

Mr. Albert Way has favored me with an impression of a seal, containing an intaglio, perhaps the most indubitable example of a mediæval engraving of all yet mentioned. It is a female bust, with a band around the head, and another under the chin: the hair is tied in a large bunch at the back of the head, a fashion peculiar to the early part of the fourteenth century. In front is a spray with flowers, a Gothic lily in its conventional form. The execution of the intaglio, highly polished inside, though far from rude, differs entirely from the antique. The subject, I have no doubt, is "Santa Maria del fiore," and engraved by an early Florentine; perhaps a specimen of the skill of Peruzzi, that "singolare intagliatore di pietre;" an artist capable of such a performance in that age would well merit such a reputation (see woodcut, fig. 3).

The engraved stones set in mediæval metal works, even in the most important pieces remaining, such as the shrine at Cologne, and that of St. Elizabeth at Marburg, are all of Roman date and of trifling artistic value—probably because they were extracted out of Roman jewelry then in existence belonging to the latest times of the empire. The finer works of Greek art, ancient even to the Romans themselves, had,

one may well suppose, disappeared in the ages following the fall of the empire, and are now the fruit of modern research amongst the remains of long-buried Italian and Grecian sites. Of this fact, the scarabei are a proof, now so abundant, yet unknown to the mediæval jeweller, or to the earlier collectors after the Revival, almost in the same degree. In fact, the whole domain of archaic Greek and Etruscan art may be said to have lain in darkness until a century ago, as that of Assyrian did until our own times.

Not more than two engraved gems, both camei, with designs in the genuine Gothic style, have come under my notice. Of these the first can easily be accounted for, and adds no argument to either side of the question; not so the second, which set us as hard a problem in its class as the ruby forming the first subject of this dissertation.

To begin with the first cameo, formerly in the Uzielli collection. The Madonna, a half-length and in front face, holds before her the Infant supported on a cushion resting on the balustrade of a balcony containing them. They are enshrined in a deep canopy sculptured in the latest Gothic or Flamboyant style. But, since this style lingered on in France and Flanders late into the sixteenth century, in a sacred subject like this (especially as it may have been the copy of some ancient sculpture of peculiar sanctity), the introduction of Gothic ornamentation does not necessarily prove that this piece was executed before the year 1500. It may in fact have been done on this side of the Alps long after the classic style had regained its ancient dominion in Italy. The work is very smooth and rounded in its projections, although in the flattest possible relief; and its whole manner reminds one strongly of that characterising the cameo portraits of Henry VIII. and his family, of which there are several known. In all likelihood it was the work of some French or Flemish engraver in the reign of François I. But the seal-engravers mentioned by Agricola in Germany and Holland towards the end of the preceding century, had they attempted cameo-cutting, would have adhered to the Gothic manner. The stone is a black and white onyx, the relief in the dark layer,  $1\frac{1}{4} \times 1$  inch.

The second is an agate-onyx, 3 in. high by 2 wide. In the white layer, most rudely carved, Christ Ascending, holding a long cross; before him, a kneeling figure, a subject

frequently seen in sculptures upon tombs. It is not possible to describe the rough chipped-out execution of the relief, the stone appearing as if cut away with a chisel. Neither work nor design bear resemblance to Byzantine camei, even the rudest of the class. The only plausible explanation is to suppose it the first essay of some German carver, who had acquired some slight notion of the mechanical process from the Italian inventors, and had attempted a novelty as to material, following his own national taste in everything else. The stone seems to be a true agate-onyx, perhaps of the German species, not the softer alabaster-onyx often used for camei at a later date. This curious piece is supposed to have been found in Suffolk. The outline of the stone being irregular, it is difficult to conjecture the purpose it was intended to fulfil, perhaps to be set in a cross, or some object of sacred use. Even in this case, bearing in mind that a work in this mediæval style would have been consistent with the state of art in England long after 1500 (the Gothic type was for many years retained by Henry VIII. in his coinage), this monument does not necessarily carry us back to the first period mentioned by Vasari, still less to the times preceding it.<sup>8</sup>

After all, upon consideration of these data, the only conclusion that they justify seems to be one not very dissimilar to that generally adopted by archæologists, that the purely Gothic artists, down to the early Revival (this is until after 1400), never attempted gem-engraving. Vasari, in his remark that "something continued still to be done," must refer to the feeble productions of the Byzantine cameo-cutters; but his "improvement in 1417" may apply to Italy, and be the source of the singular intagli in precious stones, whose peculiar character is only to be explained upon this supposition; whilst the Gothic camei may be ascribed to Teutonic apprentices in the new art, and so be in reality much posterior to the early period properly the subject of our investigation.

<sup>8</sup> Chabouillet (*Glyptique au Moyen Age*; *Rév. Arch.* 1854, p. 550) has published three camei in the French cabinet, which he considers not of Byzantine origin. The first, Christ teaching his disciples, he ascribes to the tenth cen-

tury; the next, Christ in flowing robes standing under a vine, to the thirteenth; the third, the Adoration, an exquisitely finished piece, to the close of the fifteenth. He judges them Italian.









RETURN TO the circulation desk of any  
University of California Library

or to the

NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station  
University of California  
Richmond, CA 94804-4698

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

- 2-month loans may be renewed by calling  
(510)642-6753
- 1-year loans may be recharged by bringing  
books to NRLF
- Renewals and recharges may be made  
4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

AUG 15 2003

MAR 17 2006

JUN 15 2006

DD20 15M 4-02

LOAN DEPT.

LD 21-100m-7,'40 (6986s)



Gaylamount  
Pamphlet  
Binder  
Gaylord Bros., Inc.  
Stockton, Calif.  
T. M. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

M84231

NK5585  
K5

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

