

Diana SCARISBRICK – Claudia WAGNER – John BOARDMAN, *The Beverly Collection of Gems at Alnwick Castle. The Philip Wilson Gems and Jewellery Series Bd. 2.* London/New York: Philip Wilson Publishers 2016, 320 S., 480 farb. Abb.

Since the 18th century the ancient Percy family, earls of Northumberland has been collecting engraved gems. Their assemblage is presently housed at Alnwick Castle. Traditionally referred as the Beverly Gems,¹ now they are published in a fabulous book prepared by the top researchers in the field of glyptics: Diana Scarisbrick, Claudia Wagner, and Sir John Boardman from the Beazley Archive, Oxford.² Their new volume is a sizable and richly illustrated book that for sure will be of much interest to archaeologists, art historians, and all people interested in gem engraving and the history of collecting.

The book starts with a short preface outlining the basic scope and history of the project embarked on by the Oxford researchers (p. vii). This is followed by a list of the abbreviations that are used in the book, including essential guidance to the catalogue entries (pp. viii-xiii). Next, the history of the collection is presented (pp. xv-xxv). This section, deeply researched and fully referenced to the archival material, is written in an approachable way by Diana Scarisbrick. The conclusion to the first part includes commentary on the records of the Beverly Gems and casts as well as the previous scholarship devoted to them.³ While the merit of earlier works should not be diminished, it is only with the present book authored by the Oxford researchers that we have a thorough study of the whole collection.

The catalogue part of the book, which follows the collection's history, presents the glyptic material in an innovative way. The standard procedure for presenting museum gem collections is to arrange them in a more or less chronological order, grouping subjects together. While this arrangement is only partially applied here, it was right to make some modifications to the usual way of doing things. The primary division is by object type: 1. Cameos, 2. Intaglios, 3. The Emperors Necklace, and 4. Glass Portraits. Within these four sections, the ma-

¹ As explained in the reviewed book, the term 'Beverly Gems' is used to refer to the gem collection at Alnwick Castle due to its association with Lord Algernon Percy, 1st Earl of Beverly (1749–1830).

² All the co-authors have made impressive contributions to the study of glyptic art and the history of collecting. Selected publications include: Boardman (1968); *idem.* (1975); Boardman/Scarisbrick (1977); Boardman – Vollenweider (1978); Boardman (2001); *idem.* (2002); *idem.* (2003); Wagner/Boardman (2003a); *idem.* (2003b); Scarisbrick (2008); Boardman et al. (2009); Scarisbrick et al. (2016).

³ Among which the most significant is the catalogue by Alfred D. Knight published privately in 1921 (see: Knight 1921).

terial is divided into standard thematic groups (Groups and Figures, Single Figures, Male Heads and Busts, Female Heads and Busts, Animals, Monsters, Objects, and Other, etc.). However, priority is given to the works signed by ancient and modern gem engravers; these works comprise a separate category in the case of cameos and intaglios alike.

Because the items are grouped according to the subject-matter, ancient and post-classical specimens are set together and actually, we are presented with a brilliant opportunity to compare the differences between the works of ancient engravers and their modern counterparts, who often tended to imitate the techniques and styles of their predecessors. This method works especially well in regards to the signed gems; thus, the authors make it easy to spot the falsifications of ancient signatures and illustrate the clever attempts made by modern artists to mislead our attention. Interestingly enough, the collection contains some genuine gems as well as their contemporary or later copies (for instance: nos. 91 and 235; 175 and 176; 221 and 219) or glass moulds replicating gems cut in semi-precious stones (for instance: nos. 95 and 96). Even within modern glyptics, there are some pieces that were inspirational for later gem engravers (for instance: nos. 104 and 142).

Now we would like to comment on specific objects from the Beverly Gems collection that caught our attention. There are 89 cameos (including 4 fragments of cameo glass disc plaques or vessels – nos. 25-29), out of which 56 are recognised as ancient works. Among the ancient specimens, there is an important piece signed by Boethos (no. 3) and another one – no. 4 – signed by Thamyras, though in this case it is right to regard the signature with some suspicion. Probably the most recognisable is item no. 6, which has posed an interpretive problem for researchers for a long time now.⁴ The four fragments of cameo glass (nos. 25-28), which are perhaps parts of vessels and disc plaques, are extremely interesting. With regard to item no. 26, we would like only to suggest that the figure in the Phrygian cap and holding a sword in a sheath is definitely a female. Not only is this suggested by the feminine dress, but also by the lap and breasts, even though the latter are only slightly marked under the folds of the

⁴ The discussion over this cameo basically touches on two issues: the identification of the figure and its potential propagandistic value, since some researchers (Vollenweider [1966] 60; Simon [1986] 159; Megow [1987] 172-174) see here Octavian riding a Capricorn and thus that the cameo is an allusion to his victory at Actium in 31 BC. However, other interpretations are possible, see, for instance: Zwierlein-Diehl (2007) 131; Platz-Horster (2012a), no. 27; Gołyźniak (forthcoming), no. 228.

drapery.⁵ There are a good number of ancient cameos presenting single figures at various activities (nos. 29-49). Item no. 36 raises some doubts about its antiquity.

Moving on to the cameos with portraits, there is only one Hellenistic cameo in the set, but it is an extremely valuable one, for it presents the head of a Hellenistic king. The identity of this ruler is difficult to pinpoint, but the portrait is clearly based on Alexander the Great. The Beverly collection includes an astonishing group of Roman portrait cameos, including an unprecedented portrait of Brutus (no. 56). Since Octavian, Juba II, and possibly Mark Antony employed gem engravers to cut intaglios with their own portraits, it seems reasonable that Brutus used the services of such artists too. Among other portrait cameos in the Beverly assemblage, there are highly impressive heads and busts of members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (nos. 57, 58, 60, 62-63, 65). Many of these cameos were manufactured at the imperial court, probably in support of propaganda campaigns. It seems doubtful that item no. 57 is a portrait of Drusus the Elder.⁶ This cameo was most likely cut a bit later, around AD 20 and perhaps presents Tiberius (compare the nose, the treatment of the hair, and the receded lips with item no. 211).

Regarding other ancient cameos, the collection contains a marvellous fragment of a much bigger sardonyx presenting the head of a horse and the mane of another one, but it is the part with the inscription which absorbs the attention of the viewer. We agree that this might be the end of Dioscurides' name. As to the lyres on items nos. 87-88, we believe these are ancient cameos.⁷

Turning now to the modern cameos, a beautiful bust cut in jacinth and signed by Matteo del Nassaro (1515-1547/8) opens the catalogue (no. 1). There are also other pieces signed by top engravers of the 18th and 19th centuries, including Giuseppe Girometti (no. 2) and Antonio Berini (no. 5). There are a few Renaissance pieces showing figural group studies, among which item no. 10, once in the Lorenzo di Medici (1449-1492) collection, catches the viewer's attention. Some of these mostly 16th-century works once belonged to the celebrated collection of Cardinal Grimani (nos. 3, 6-9, 20, 34). Among the cameos with single figures, there are casual subjects of heroes, deities, and so on reflecting the admiration for Greek and Roman culture in the classical and post-classical

⁵ Compare the figure from the Beverly cameo with that of Paris (paired with Aphrodite) on the fragment of an onyx cameo, now in the British Museum, London – Vollenweider (1966), pl. 38.2.

⁶ Compare this to other possible portraits of Drusus the Elder: Walters (1926), nos. 3579 and 3590; Megow (1987), no. C8; a laurate head of a Julio-Claudian prince, possibly Drusus the Elder, in the National Museum in Cracow (Gołyźniak [forthcoming], no. 715).

⁷ Compare: Platz-Horster (2012b), no. 60, with a long list of parallels.

periods (nos. 50-53). As regards the heads, Roman emperors are a common subject, as are other prominent personalities from the ancient world, like Brutus, Maecenas, and Cicero. Some of them, however, cannot be identified (nos. 59, 61, 67, 69-74). The group of cameos is closed by an item with an engraved skull indeed reflecting the idea of *memento mori*.

The intaglios group numbers exactly 188 pieces. This part of the catalogue begins with a beautiful bust of the young Heracles shouldering a club, signed by Aulos (no. 90). This piece does not seem to be an ordinary bust of the hero, not only because it is signed but also because of the facial features which to some extent suggest a portrait. The treatment of the hair is typical for the Augustan period and the scanty beard or long sideburns are not common in regards to Heracles. Vollenweider suggested that we identify this image with the Numidian king Juba II (52 BC-AD 23) in the guise of Heracles.⁸ We concur with this opinion: Juba II identified himself with Heracles, and he was reported to have been a great enthusiast of gemstones, quoted several times by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*.⁹ Perhaps he hired Aulos to work at his court; other gem engravers, such as Gnaios/Gnaeus and Dalion, might have been welcomed by him as well.¹⁰ Juba II spent some time at the Augustan court and perhaps his aim was to imitate Augustus' patronage of glyptic art by commissioning gems for himself. This would also explain the hairdo typical for Augustan glyptics here.

Surprisingly enough, the Beverly collection is even richer in regards to authentic gems signed by ancient masters. Item no. 91 presents a fragment of amethyst cut with a bust of young Heracles wearing a lion skin. The short sideburns rather exclude Omphale. The gem is highly problematic and has been the subject of discussion for a long time now. What the co-authors say about the works of Dioscurides is true: they were frequently copied and his name appeared on a number of modern gems as a false signature to mislead the buyers of gems in post-classical times. Nevertheless, the lettering style appears to be ancient. Nor are there any strong arguments against the gem's genuineness.

⁸ Vollenweider (1966) 43.

⁹ Pliny, *NH*, 37.9, 18, 32, 35; Boardman (1968) 27; Sena Chiesa (1989) 275-276.

¹⁰ It is possible that Gnaios worked at the Numidian court, for the British Museum in London has an aquamarine with an image of Heracles signed by Gnaios (see: Zwierlein-Diehl (2007), ill. 477, p. 416), similar to the work of Aulos, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has an intaglio with a portrait of Juba II's wife, Cleopatra Selene (40 BC-AD 6), also signed by Gnaios; see: Vollenweider (1966) 45; Boardman (1968) 27. As for Dalion, he might have cut a laureate portrait of Juba II; see: Zwierlein-Diehl (2007), ill. 479, p. 417.

The last signed ancient intaglio in the collection is another amethyst, this one bearing a grazing cow with Apollonides' signature above it.¹¹ It is our belief that this gem is truly ancient and that the signature is original, not added later. Actually, it is tempting to suggest that this gem could have served as an inspiration for other gem engravers. The subject of a grazing cow was highly popular, especially in the Augustan period. This could be explained in various ways – the subject might even have been regarded as propagandistic in character.¹²

Some of the next gems presented in the catalogue clearly illustrate the problem of post-classical imitations and ancient gem forgeries (nos. 93-99). However, many modern gem engravers took great pride in their own work and aimed to surpass the ancient masters; hence, they put their own signatures on the gems that they engraved. The Beverly collection includes 12 intaglios executed and signed by top engravers from the 18th and 19th centuries (nos. 100-111). Here, let us only list their names, as more information is to be obtained in the catalogue: Filippo Rega, Nathaniel Marchant, Edward Burch, William Harris, Lorenz Natter, Giovanni Pichler, Antonio Passaglia, Alessandro Cades, and Robert Bateman Wray.

Having dealt with signed intaglios, the rest of the book deals first with unsigned ancient pieces and then unsigned works by modern artists. Two beautifully cut Etruscan scarabs (nos. 112-113) open up the part on the ancient pieces. Next come Italic and Etruscanised Roman Republican carved gemstones. The co-authors of the book provide us with precise information about the engraved devices, revising previous scholarship and explaining some vague motifs, as in the case of item no. 132. This is surely another advantage of their work. We would like to make only one remark as regards item no. 116. Although this highly popular subject is indeed usually linked with Heracles, the forthcoming catalogue of ancient engraved gems in the National Museum in Cracow provides one piece with a similar motif, which, according to the inscription cut on the stone, shows one of the Argonauts, Iolaos, Heracle's nephew and companion.¹³

Multifigured scenes appear on the next group of Beverly Gems. In contrast to the previous one, here we have a mixture of both ancient and post-classical works. Among them, there are a few objects which are difficult to classify. One example is item no. 134, which shows a battle being waged at one of the walls of Troy. This is a copy of one of the Marlborough gems and, in our opinion, a work of modern date (18th century). Item no. 141, which presents a boxer (pro-

¹¹ On Apollonides and his works, see: Zwierlein-Diehl (1986), nos. 142-143; *idem.* (2005) 338.

¹² Rambach/Walker (2012).

¹³ Gołyźniak (forthcoming), no. 44.

bably engaged in a fight with another boxer) and a prize vase, should be dated a bit earlier, most likely to the second half of the 1st century BC. Another problematic intaglio is item no. 143. Although the subject is a bit unusual, the stylistic features of the engraving suggest that it is an ancient work from the 1st century BC.

More than 50 intaglios in the Beverly collection present subjects involving single figures (nos. 149-205). Among them, there is an archaising image of Hermes/Mercury standing with a caduceus (no. 149). This piece may belong to a series of stones representing deities like Apollo, Neptune, and Zeus, most likely executed by the same hand¹⁴ or, at least, belonging to a broader Neo-Attic tradition from the 1st century BC.¹⁵ Item no. 150 indeed commemorates a naval victory, and even though it is impossible to ascribe the gem to some specific politician, basically it seems that there are only two options: Sextus Pompey or Octavian. Quite exceptional is no. 157, which represents Diomedes stealing *pal-ladion*. This is undoubtedly one of the finest representations of this common motif, and we suggest dating it precisely to Augustan times. Another exceptional piece is no. 158. Various interpretations have been assigned to this gem, including the reference made by Vollenweider – which is hardly convincing – to Pompey the Great.¹⁶ The type of stone used – garnet – and its shape, combined with its concave back and particular workmanship, not to mention its quite large dimensions, lead us to the conclusion that it is a Hellenistic and not a Roman piece, one which should be dated to the 1st century BC. Thus, no certain identification can be made unless Alexander the Great in the guise of Achilles is considered.

Turning to intaglios with heads and busts, the Beverly collection contains many unusual objects. First of all, there are two Hellenistic intaglios bearing a portrait of Alexander the Great (nos. 206-207). On item no. 206, the head is cut to the right, which suggests that the stone was not used for sealing purposes, but rather that it was set in a ring and proudly carried on someone's finger. There are also heads and busts of Roman emperors and private portraits. As regards item no. 215, it resembles late Roman Republican portraits of various men with a bare shoulder, usually taken for Julius Caesar or Cato.¹⁷ Therefore, we suggest this intaglio to be dated a bit earlier, to the 1st century BC. Furthermore,

¹⁴ For Apollo, see: Furtwängler (1900), vol. I, 186; vol. II, pl. XXXIX.4. For Neptune: Lippold (1922), pl. V.1. For Zeus: Maaskant-Kleibrink (1978), no. 193.

¹⁵ Zwierlein-Diehl (2007) 139–140. The subject of Hermes itself may derive from a famous intaglio signed by Aetion, now in Paris, see: Richter (1971), no. 116. In the National Museum in Cracow, there is a similar representation of this deity cut in garnet (Gołyźniak [forthcoming], no. 231), and one more is in a private collection (Wagner/Boardman [2003a], no. 68).

¹⁶ Vollenweider (1972-74) 111-113.

¹⁷ For various interpretations, see: Vollenweider (1972-74) 122-124; Zwierlein-Diehl (1973).

recently, Lang has shown that at least some of these busts should be regarded as representations of philosophers and thinkers and this might be the case here.¹⁸ The Beverly cabinet provides us with yet another genuine head portraying Brutus, this one cut upon an intaglio (no. 216 and compare it with the cameo no. 56). There is also a fascinating emerald presenting a portrait of a Roman attributed to Agathopous (no. 232).¹⁹ Vollenweider put forward the idea that Agathopous worked from the late Augustan period at least up until AD 42.²⁰ However, this view is hardly convincing and we share Furtwängler's opinion that Agathopous was a Greek immigrant engraver working in Rome around the middle of the 1st century BC.²¹ He used exceptionally precious materials which were particularly hard (aquamarine, emerald), and his engraving techniques, involving deep cutting, betray much of the Hellenistic spirit. For these reasons, it is appropriate to date item no. 232 to the 1st century BC, though it may be that the date should be limited to the middle of the 1st century BC.

The Beverly collection includes many more intaglios with male heads and busts of both ancient and modern date. There are some clear copies of ancient pieces, such as item no. 235, which, as has already been indicated, is a copy of item no. 91, as well as less obvious forgeries and imitations.

Turning now to the female heads and busts in the collection, the authors propose dating item no. 245, which bears a problematic portrait of a veiled woman, to the 2nd century BC. While the portrait is labelled 'Sappho,' it may be possible to identify the portrait with other figures, for instance, Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great.²² Item no. 246, which bears the bust of Livia in the guise of Ceres, is also noteworthy due to its possible propagandistic meaning.²³

The very end of the catalogue contains some *varia* and the book ends with the history of James Tassie and Catherine the Great's links to the Beverly collection. Also mentioned are other gems that once belonged to the cabinet but are not presently at Alnwick Castle. It is good to know that the co-authors plan to embark on a new research project devoted to these gems and that their results will be published. The last element of the book consists in useful indexes of the

¹⁸ Lang (2012) 77-78.

¹⁹ Regarding Agathopous, see: Vollenweider (1966) 77-79; Zazoff (1983) 318, pl. 93.3.

²⁰ Vollenweider (1966) 77-79.

²¹ Furtwängler (1888) 211-212, pl. 8.15.

²² Although considerably later, her image appears on Roman medallions, and it may be that intaglios were influential in establishing the type, see, for instance: Dahmen (2007) 31-38, pl. 26.4-5.

²³ On this issue see, for instance: Flory (1995).

previous collections, artists, subjects, and inscriptions as well as a pictorial index of all the Beverly Gems presented in the catalogue.

To conclude, the new catalogue of the Beverly Gems authored by Oxford specialists is a wonderful contribution to general glyptic studies, and it entirely meets the reader's expectations. Some of these gems had previously been known, but now, presented in wonderful colour photographs and fully referenced to the newest scholarship, they have finally been elaborated on in the way they very much deserve. The publication includes a considerable group of modern gems which is a warmly welcomed achievement since this area of glyptics is usually neglected. The collection may be spoken about with the highest esteem due to the high number of signed pieces and many items of absolutely top quality. The variety of gemstones employed for the intaglios and cameos (including some rare types like emerald, ruby, or lapis lazuli) makes this cabinet unique. Besides, almost all the gems are set in collector's rings and other mounts, which confirms that the Percy family employed the highest standards in their collecting practices. In consequence, this publication will be of interest not only to archaeologists or art historians but to every admirer of classical and post-classical art.

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