

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE ENGRAVED GEMS FROM ROMULA*

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Abstract. *La Romula exista cel mai important centru de prelucrare a pietrelor gravate din întreaga Dacie, fapt demonstrat de numărul mare de piese descoperite aici. Tematica era una extrem de bogată și trata diverse și complexe scene cu personaje divine, mitologice, alegorice, făpturi fantastice, creaturi grotești, sau cu simboluri zoomorfe, vegetale sau cu un caracter gnostic. Iconografia panteonului roman, tradițional și sporit ulterior cu divinitățile orientale, reprezintă majoritatea subiectelor tratate. Se observă o frecvență a divinităților războinice, cu un caracter militar. O principală caracteristică a glipticii o reprezintă influența tipurilor monetare. În iconografia pietrelor gravate, o bună sursă de inspirație, în special pentru portretistică, au constituit-o efigiile imperiale. Materialul necesar acestui meșteșug se afla la dispoziția meșterilor gravori pe tot cuprinsul teritoriului roman administrat. În acest scop, nuclee de rocă (carneol, jaspurile roșu și galben, agate negre, verzi, cenușii) proveneau din Banat și Carpații Meridionali. În prezent, numărul exact al pietrelor gravate ce pot fi considerate ca provenind în mod cert de la Romula este imposibil de precizat. Cifra lor este relativă și depinde de mai mulți factori. Prin urmare, am procedat aici la selectarea unui număr de piese, pe care le-am reprodus grafic, în vederea unei mai bune imagini de ansamblu și abordări a problemei.*

Keywords: *gemstones, mythology, carnelian, Romula.*

The reasons that gave rise to the conquest of Dacia and were strictly strategic irrevocably sealed the faith of the Dacians nation. Under the protection of the Roman Empire the new province experienced a rapid and spectacular evolution.

A direct consequence of the profound ethno-social, economic and cultural transformations consisted in the development and progress of a new art. The impressive number of monuments and sculptures, ceramic, plastic, mosaics and ornaments found in Roman Dacia area proofs the practicing of various artistic crafts.

Glyptics or the art of carving semi-precious stones (gems) or hard precious stones (rarely) has reached the highest peak in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. All this time were carried out on industrial scale especially intaglios (gems engraved in depth)¹. A major requirement of finery and sealing stones led to the emergence of a true glyptic industry. This wide spread use of such accessories has initiated and develop the appearance of glyptic workshops with a large area of distribution².

This leads us to understand one simple thing, namely that glyptics, among other miniature arts, was one of the artistic industries of Roman antiquity.

Romula has been the most important centre of production of engraved gems around Dacia, as demonstrated by the large number of pieces found here³. Most definitely that these sorts of workshops were functional elsewhere, too⁴.

The engraved gems from Romula came first to the attention of Professor Dumitru Tudor, starting with the first decades of the last century. He gathered and reported them in different studies or short details so that the first batch of engraved gems was published in 1936 and had a total of 29 pieces⁵.

Currently, the exact number of gems that can be clearly seen as coming from Romula is impossible to say⁶. This number is relative and depends on several factors such as: stage of research, publication research and the possibility of accessibility regarding information which was published⁷.

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¹ Mihai Gramatopol, *Arta romană în România*, București, 2000, p. 111.

² The engraved gems from Dacia circulated south of the Danube, as proven by the Bălăcescu Collection (see *Ibidem*, p. 109), and resemble those from Thrace, Moesia Inferior and Moesia Superior. Very good analogies we find at Archaeological Museum of Sofia (see Alexandra Dimitrova-Milceva, *Antike Gemmen und Kameen aus dem Archäologischen Nationalmuseum Sofia*, Sofia, 1980, passim). However, glyptics paperboard models of Dacia circulated throughout the Roman Empire (see Alexander Stuart Murray, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems in the British Museum* (Departament of Greek and Roman Antiquities), London, 1888, passim or Gisela M.A. Richter, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems of the Classical Style* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), New York, 1920, passim).

³ Mihai Bărbulescu, *Interferențe spirituale în Dacia romană*, Cluj-Napoca, 1984, p. 36.

⁴ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 109

⁵ For further details, see Dumitru Tudor, *Oltenia arheologică. Colecții de antichități din Oltenia*, AO.XV. 86-88. iulie – decembrie, 1936, pp. 373-389.

⁶ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

Something that needs attention at it is the quality of the artwork that the gems received at the time of publication. Therefore, I proceeded here to select a number of pieces⁸ that I reproduced graphically, in order to a better overview and approach of our issue.

The glyptic theme at Romula was extremely rich and reached diverse and complex scenes with divine characters, mythological, allegorical, fantastic and grotesque creatures⁹, zoomorphic symbols, plants or with a gnostic type¹⁰.

The iconography of the Roman pantheon, traditional and subsequently increased with oriental gods, represents most of the subjects treated¹¹. It is sufficient to observe with a simple overview of the parts a certain frequency of deities with a military character¹².

Therefore, Minerva, the roman goddess of wisdom and sponsor of arts, trade, and military strategy¹³, was rendered wearing a long draped garment, armed with shield and lance. According to the well-known artistic cannon, the goddess wears on her head the helmet with characteristic panache. In some cases was engraved only the portrait of the divinity: these pieces have a clean execution, facial details have been carefully crafted, with an obvious attention for details or the elements that make up the helmet¹⁴ (Pl. I/1-2).

The way in which is represented the supreme god Jupiter is an extremely common and well known in the engravers repertory¹⁵. It was shown uncovered from the waist up, sometimes sitting on a throne. On his head he wears a crown and holds in his hands glorious attributes: the sceptre and lightning (in some cases a "patera"). Frequently Jupiter is seen with the eagle, his primary sacred animal which held precedence over other birds in the taking of auspices, and became one of the most common symbols of the Roman army¹⁶ (Pl. I/3).

Other subjects were treated on the gemstones such as representation of god Mars shown in wearing characteristic attributes¹⁷. Nude or semi-nude, he often wears a helmet or carries a spear as emblems of his warrior nature (Pl. I/4; Pl. III/30). Second in importance only to Jupiter, he was the most prominent of the military gods in the religion of the Roman army¹⁸.

Even the goddess Venus, which was considered protective of fauna, fertility, marriage and family, worshipped as a symbol of beauty and love, was represented here armed with shield and lance¹⁹ (Pl. I/5).

From the engraved gems of Romula couldn't miss representations of the goddess Fortuna. Symbol of fortune and personification of luck in roman religion, also known as the goddess of fate²⁰, Fortuna was the patron of the city²¹. In terms of style she was always represented on gems standing and wearing a draped garment, caught around the waist with a type of belt. In one hand, according to the usual canon, the goddess holds the horn of plenty (*cornucopia*). With the other arm Fortuna supports the stern²² (Pl. I/6-9).

Oriental divinity Sol also appears rendered in glyptic themes from Romula²³. The god was represented either with a whip urging the four horses (Pl. II/10): in such representations Sol is always accompanied by astral signs, as stars and the moon²⁴; or nude, wearing only a whip and holding small sphere (Pl. II/11). A good characteristic for his identification remains the ray crown worn²⁵ (Pl. II/12-13).

⁷ For more information on the situation of Roman Dacia engraved gems, see *Ibidem*, pp. 107-111.

⁸ The engraved gems illustrations from the present paper have been redrawn after Dumitru Tudor, *Monumente inedite din Romula*, I, in *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor istorice*, 1938, p.14-19, fig.19-21; Idem, *Oltenia romană*, II, București, 1958, p. 98, fig. 28; Idem, *Romula*, București, 1968, p. 22, fig. 7/1, fig. 7/3, fig. 7/5, fig. 7/6; Corneliu Mărgărit Tătulea, *Romula-Malva*, București, 1994, fig. 37/1, fig. 37/2, fig. 37/3, fig. 37/4, fig. 37/6, fig. 37/7, fig. 37/8, fig. 37/9, fig. 37/10, fig. 37/11, fig. 37/13.

⁹ C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 109-110; Mihai Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹¹ Dumitru Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, III, București, 1968, p. 23.

¹² M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

¹³ Anca Balaci, *Mic dicționar mitologic greco-roman*, Sibiu, 1966, p. 254.

¹⁴ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/7, fig. 19/31; Idem, *Romula*, fig. 7/1; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/6.

¹⁵ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

¹⁶ A. Balaci, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

¹⁷ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/16; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/9.

¹⁸ A. Balaci, *op. cit.*, p. 62 and p. 239.

¹⁹ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/4; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/4.

²⁰ A. Balaci, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

²¹ D. Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23.

²² Idem, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/1, fig. 19/9, fig. 19/10; Idem, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; Idem, *Romula*, fig. 7/5; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/1, fig. 37/8.

²³ C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁴ Analogy see in Gisela M.A. Richter, *op. cit.*, no. 351, p. 171, pl. 77, with bibliography.

²⁵ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/3, fig. 19/11; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/3.

Some representations can be given to the cult that worships the goddess Victoria. Typological speaking she was represented constantly on the move, winged or holding a spear and a crown²⁶. Different postures were found when Victoria seats next to Fortuna²⁷.

From the group of infernal deities is well represented Thanatos, the god of death. Rendered in the characteristic position²⁸, cross-legged, resting in his right hand an inverted torch and with his left hand supports his head slightly tilted to the right²⁹.

Other smaller deities, in addition to those already mentioned, also enjoyed great popularity: medicine gods Aesculapius and Hygia³⁰; goddess Ceres rendered wearing a vegetal crown, sceptre and holding in her hands a bunch of wheat spikes³¹; the goddess Diana³², Hercules³³ and Mercuries³⁴. In terms of style the type of representations was classic.

The couple Serapis and Isis enjoyed a distinct attention³⁵. Often mistaken with Jupiter, Serapis possesses thaumaturgy attributes. Further away, Amor, Genius, Pan and satyrs³⁶ (Pl. II/14-15), all these secondary divinities form the entire landscape of Romula glyptics³⁷.

Numerous are the engraved gems which indicates bucolic scenes (Pl. II/16-18). Compositions like these often include the presence of a shepherd found accompanied by a goat. In most cases, a vegetal element completes the composition³⁸. The scenes were rendered with a pleasant movement³⁹ and the details of the characters were treated up to the smallest inch⁴⁰ (Pl. II/16).

There was no exception for the subjects that were engraved on the surface of gemstones, images related to domestic or wild animals⁴¹, such lion, bull, wolf, wild boar or various insects⁴² (Pl. II/19-20). Representations of lions with bull heads located above or in front of them, with stars or moonly horn probably symbolized victory against enemies⁴³ (Pl. II/21).

Among birds, the eagle enjoy a special meaning⁴⁴ as a symbol of the god Jupiter⁴⁵ (Pl. III/22-23). Among other attributes, usually signifies strength and military power⁴⁶.

Images of fantastic creatures, by oriental origin, abound in glyptics representations⁴⁷ (Pl. III/24). An important place is allocated to Capricorn⁴⁸, mainly used as a zodiacal symbol (Pl. III/26).

In the same category of fantastic representations take part some elements of grotesque characters formed like from a mixture of living forms, combined by a human head and animals head⁴⁹ (Pl. III/25), or

²⁶ Dumitru Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/26, fig. 19/27; Dumitru Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; Corneliu Mărgărit Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110, fig. 37/10; Mihai Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁷ A gemstone with a similar representation, see in Alexandra Dimitrova-Milceva, *op. cit.*, fig. 82.

²⁸ Almost identical gemstones to those identified at Romula, see in *Ibidem*, fig. 148 -149.

²⁹ C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, fig. 37/20.

³⁰ For similar hypostasis to those engraved on gems at Romula, see in A. Dimitrova-Milceva, *op. cit.*, fig. 104 – 110.

³¹ A similar representation of the goddesses Ceres, in *Ibidem*, fig. 76.

³² Good analogy, particularly for this gemstone, see in *Ibidem*, fig. 49.

³³ Identical subject engraved on gemstone, see in *Ibidem*, fig. 130.

³⁴ D. Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Mihai Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 112. For analogies, see A. Dimitrova-Milceva, *op. cit.*, fig. 63-73.

³⁵ Corneliu Mărgărit Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Mihai Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³⁶ Almost identical gems to those discovered at Romula, see in Adolf Furtwangler, *Beschreibung der geschnittenen Steine im Antiquarium (Königliches Museum zu Berlin)*, I, Berlin, 1896, no. 2947, p. 135 and pl. 25.

³⁷ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/5, fig. 19/20; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

³⁸ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁹ For analogies, see A. Furtwangler, *op. cit.*, pl. 62 and Gisela M.A. Richter, *op. cit.*, no. 173, pl. 42, with bibliography.

⁴⁰ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/12; D. Tudor, *Romula*, fig. 7/3; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 110, fig. 37/11.

⁴¹ D. Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23.

⁴² Similar representations, see in A. Furtwangler, *Die antiken Gemmen*, Berlin, 1900, pl. XXIX, no. 35 – 43; pl. XLV, no. 64 – 69.

⁴³ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/13; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

⁴⁴ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/34; Idem, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 109; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Various representations of Aquila, similar to the ones found at Romula, see in A. Dimitrova-Milceva, *op. cit.*, fig. 196-211.

⁴⁶ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁴⁷ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/32, fig. 19/35; Idem, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 109; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 111. A gemstone engraved with an identical subject see in A. Furtwangler, *Beschreibung ...*, no. 6615, p. 243 and pl. 47.

⁴⁸ Similar subjects, see A. Dimitrova-Milceva, *op. cit.*, fig. 224-225.

⁴⁹ For analogy, go to A. Furtwangler, *Beschreibung ...*, pl. 46, no. 6544.

poultry beaks⁵⁰. Other subjects include symbolic images⁵¹ or various vegetal motifs, inscriptions⁵² (Pl. II/18), zodiacal and gnostic representations⁵³ (Pl. III/31-33).

The hypothetical quality of talisman gems that were engraved with various scenes and magical formulas helped to increase sales of these items especially to the lower income population. For this reason when the request for such ornaments became too big it happened to be manufactured by a different coloured glass paste. These products represent a very accessible way to those with more modest resources⁵⁴.

A very special category of engraved gems is that of human representations⁵⁵ with portrayal pretensions⁵⁶ (Pl. IV/34-35). In this respect, the main feature of glyptics is the influence of monetary types⁵⁷. In engraved gems iconography, a good source of inspiration, especially for portraits⁵⁸, were the Roman effigies⁵⁹ (Pl. IV/36).

It is worth to mention some data in terms of raw material used by engravers artisans. The material needed for this craft was available to them throughout the all roman territory. Softer rocks were the ones that were explored more, namely: red jasper, scarlet and yellow, black agates, green grey or multilayer agates and carnelian. These materials were missing at Romula, so it is likely that these rocks were brought for processing all the way from Banat, Carpathians area or elsewhere, outside of Dacia⁶⁰.

After the rocks were processed, then were sent to the craftsmen to use⁶¹. For engraving gems were used various iron chisels with different profiles, helped by an abrasive paste made of a ceramic binder diamond powder driven by a lathe⁶².

Production of these pieces fell from the 4th and 5th centuries, due to bad circumstances that Dacia and Moesia Inferior were at that time. Condition most likely caused by the carpho-gothic invasions and the advent of Christianity⁶³, given the fact that the followers of this religion were hostile regarding roman glyptic iconography. However some Christian symbols may encounter engraved on gems during this period.

Finally a special mention should be made regarding the number of engraved gems discovered at Romula. The most difficult part in this study is due to their dispersion almost immediately after discovery; the thing is that so many of them have disappeared over time in antiquities trade⁶⁴. And sadly, this reality is a common situation for most miniature artefacts.

The considerations explained and exposed in this resume is a first approach to the engraved gems from Romula, which obviously does not ends the issue. As to which I will return in the future on this subject both interesting and important to the history and archaeology of Romula.

⁵⁰ Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Evul mediu fantastic*, București, 1974, pp. 13-49; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 109; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121

⁵¹ For various forms of horns of plenty engraved on gemstones surface, similar to the ones discovered at Romula, go to A. Furtwängler, *Beschreibung ...*, pl. 47, no. 6621-6652.

⁵² *Inscriptiile Daciei romane*, II (IDR II), București, 1977, no. 484 - 492, with bibliography; Gheorghe Popilian, Ștefan Chițu, Marin Vasilescu, *Villa suburbana de la Romula, jud. Olt*, MCA, XVII, Ploiești, 1983, I, București 1992, p. 231, fig. 1/10.

⁵³ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/2, fig. 19/28, fig. 19/36, fig. 19/37, fig. 19/38; IDR II, p. 256, no. 661, with bibliography. Analogy at Dinogetia (see Nicolae Gudea, *Note de arheologie creștină. 7. Despre o gemă gnostică de la Garvăn / Dinogetia, Moesia Inferior*, in *Classica et Christiana*, 6/2, 2011); C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ *Enciclopedia civilizației romane*, București, 1982, p. 355.

⁵⁵ For analogy, a engraved gem with the representation of a young man making libation similar to the two pieces from Romula (see in text), can be found at A. Furtwängler, *Die antiken ...*, no. 75, p. 210, pl. XLIII.

⁵⁶ Look for analogies in Alexander Stuart Murray, *op. cit.*, no. 985 and 1510; M. Ernest Babelon, *Catalogue des camees antiques et moderne de la Bibliotheque Nationale*, Paris, 1897, p. 175 and pl. XXXVII; Gisela M.A. Richter, *op. cit.*, no. 213, no. 217 and pl. 54.

⁵⁷ C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁸ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, fig. 19/8, fig. 19/33; C.M. Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 109; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁵⁹ For similar pieces, see M. Ernest Babelon, *op. cit.*, p. 156, pl. XXXIV and A. Furtwängler, *Die antiken ...*, no. 24, p. 230 with pl. XLVIII.

⁶⁰ D. Tudor, *Oltenia romană*, 1968, p. 23; M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁶¹ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

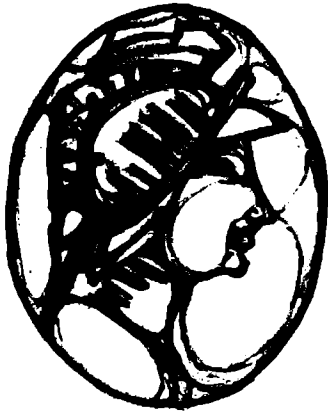
⁶² *Enciclopedia ...*, p. 355.

⁶³ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-124; *Enciclopedia ...*, p. 355.

⁶⁴ D. Tudor, *Monumente inedite ...*, p. 14; Mihai Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

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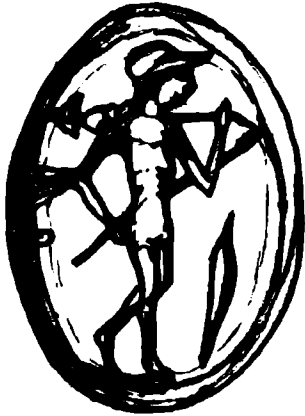
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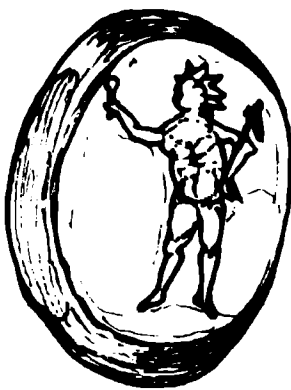


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Pl. I



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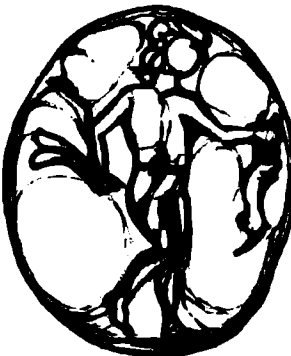
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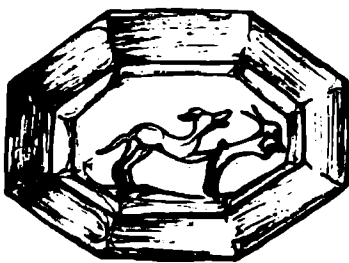
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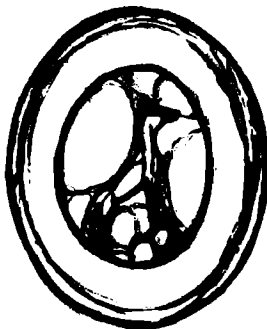
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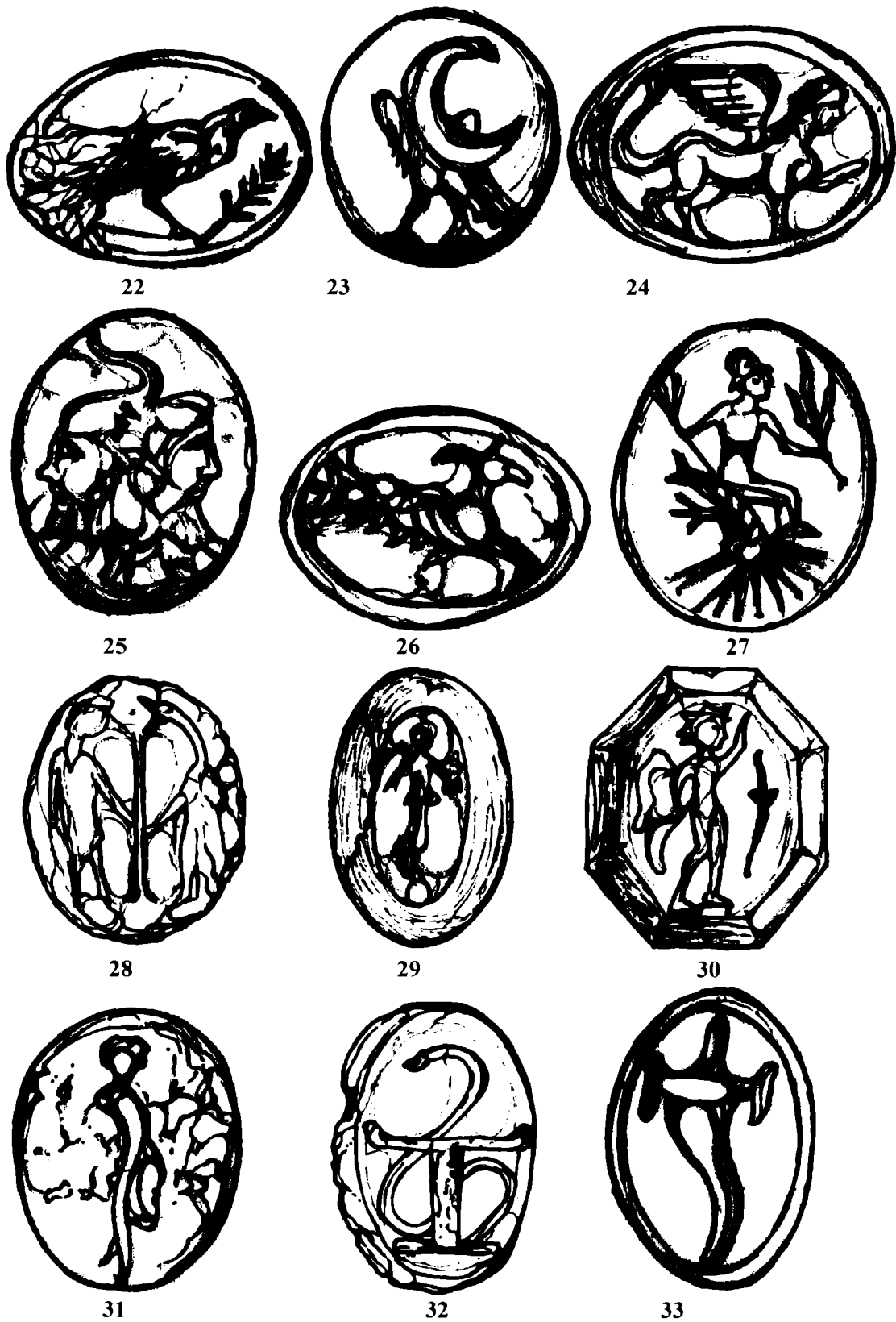


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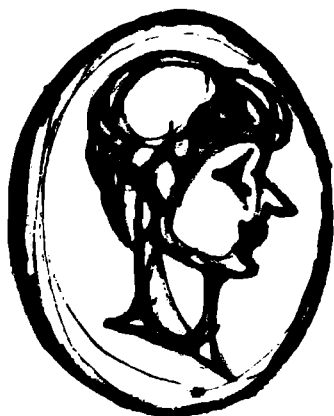


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Pl. II



Pl. III



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Pl. IV