

IMPERIAL CAMEOS FROM SECOND CENTURY

BY

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The Coin Department of the Rumanian Academy possesses in its collection of carved gems a number of imperial cameos, six pieces of which are from the second century.

Their origin is too difficult to state precisely, because they come from private collections, constituted particularly in foreign countries.

The first cameo belongs to C. Bălăcescu's collection, and was purchased by its former owner in Bulgaria, some decades ago. The following five pieces are from engineer Orghidan's donation to the Rumanian Academy. In this latter case, we don't know even the place of the acquisition.

Galba. Sardonyx cameo in two layers: milk-white on white-violet background. 18 × 14 mm, 7 mm thickness. Laureate bust of the emperor to the left.

Galba's profile has some salient features which make him identifiable on the coins, where, certainly, the striking traits of the old age are disguised in the wrinkles of a muscular face, as on the gems or cameos, where the engraver's sincerity is compensatory doubled by the majestic air of dignity and of old age.

The aquiline nose, the little jutting out chin, the turned up lips and the jaw bone well cut up in the wrinkles of the cheek, gathered under the chin, are elements especially underlined in the engraved stones of the emperor. Their number is great. From those specified in the note, the profile of our cameo is similar to the cornaline gem from *Thesaurus Medicaeus* (Gori)¹. On the cornaline gem Galba's profile is more acute. Our cameo represents a stout head with a wrinkled cheek.

¹ a) Orléans collection: draped and laureate bust to the right. Sardonyx cameo; see Salomon Reinach, *Pierres gravées*, Paris, 1895, pl. 129, no. 33, b) in *Thesaurus Medicaeus* (Gori I) see S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, pl. 7, no. 6¹ and 6², respectively laureate and draped bust to the left and draped bust to the left, both cornaline gems, c) in *Cabinet du Roi* (Mariette) see S. Rei-

If the profile of the nose, of the chin and of the mouth would not give us the assurance of being Galba's portrait, the air of the whole piece would suggest Vespasian's portrait. Both, as generals of the Empire, one in Spain and the other in Judea, they led the life of a soldier, in campaign. Some little details of the profile are determined by the stretching of the white layer in which the relief is worked, in contrast with the cornaline gem whose surface was wholly to the engraver's disposal.

For instance, the leaves of the laurels wreath stop exactly on the profile line of the head and the bands of the wreath are not spread on the shoulders, but stuck on the neck. The wrinkles of the cheek and of the neck, difficult to observe because of the white colour which reflects the light, are worked with an exquisite mastership.

As a work of art the piece is remarkable. The proportions of the relief and of the background are well chosen. In our opinion, the stone is not contemporary with the emperor represented, but more tardive, belonging from the standpoint of style to Trajan's period. It is inspired or copies exactly a bronze coin issued during Galba's Government in the mint of Rome. It is possible also, having this bronze as pattern, to be engraved with the occasion of Trajan's commemorative issue (gold) of Galba².

Matidia : agate cameo in two layers : white on brown background. 31 × 24 mm, 10 mm thickness. Bust with diadem to the right. Besides the representations on the coins³, *Matidia*'s figure is known by some engraved stones : two gems from the Medici⁴ collection, a cameo of the same collection⁵ and a gem from the Orléans⁶ collection.

Chronologically we can consider the gem of the Orléans collection as posterior to those of the Medici collection, from the standpoint of the age of the personage represented. Our cameo shows *Matidia* around the age of twenty. We can establish only a relative chronology of the images of this personage because her birthyear is unknown (Dies in 120). On the other hand, the lack of female personages images in Trajan's family is in *Matidia*'s case a very serious problem. We can compare the profile of our cameo with that of the gem from the Medici collection (see note 4) which is similar to a portrait on the reverse of an *aureus* from Plotina. We have to point out the fact we have never met such a head-dress to any lady of Trajan's family. Moreover the hair raised in this

nach, *op. cit.*, pl. 102, no. 59 : draped and laureate bust to the left, oriental agate gem-d) in Marlborough collection, see S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, pl. 109, no. 15 and 16, respectively draped and laureate bust to the right and laureate head to the left; agate cameo in two colours. It seems that no. 16 is finished in modern times.

² M. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. I, London, 1923, p. 327, no. 110, pl. 56, no. 8 and H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. II, London, 1926, Trajan, no. 824.

³ H. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, vol. III, London, 1936, p. 281, no. 1088 and pl. 45, no. 1.

⁴ In *Thesaurus Medicæus* (Gori); see S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, pl. 8, no. 10⁷ and 10⁸, respectively draped bust with diadem to the left and draped bust to the left, both in cornaline.

⁵ S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, pl. 12, no. 21², profile bust three quarters to the left.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pl. 129, no. 37, *Matidia*'s draped bust to the right, red jasper.

manner and the inward similitudes between our cameo and the above mentioned gem, compels us to consider this portrait as representing Matidia.

Matidia's profile is severe and graceful, finely cut in the white layer of the stone, in the classicist manner of Trajan's period. Her figure, of the same temperance as the emperor's receiving the orderly report⁷ (Trajan's column — Rome), has a remarkable distinction by the face's luminousness and the plumpness of the chin and of the neck.

The hair is long, but gathered on the back in a hairnet sustained by a band passed over the loop and knoted around the head under the lock by which it is covered, leaving free the low part of the ear. Over this head-dress, on the forehead, sits a diadem, worked in *repoussé*, with vertical lines and points. A little fragment of the upper part of the diadem is broken. The stone has the edge in a right cutting angle.

The general impression is of an exquisite beauty and distinction characteristic to these great roman ladies from Plotina to Sabina and Crispina.

Hadrian : opal calcedony cameo in two layers : white on rose semi-translucent background. 31 × 24 mm, 10 mm thickness. Face bust, a little turned to the left. The stone has some natural clefts which were dissimulated by polishment, now visible by the time action.

Having at his disposal only a thin layer of white stone, the engraver made use of the following contrivance to suggest an alto-relief : he has extended in plan the left part of the head, carving the ear much more from the face than from the profile. The head-dress and the beard are characteristic to the first half of the second century and specific firstly for Hadrian's portraits⁸. In glyptics Hadrian's bust is very common⁹. The general expression of our portrait is that of a bust in Naples National Museum¹⁰. In glyptics we can refer to a cameo in *Cabinet de Médailles*¹¹ which represents the emperor laureate from the face, a little turned to the right. On our cameo, the naked bust, the rich beard and the hair, feign an aesthetical disorder, reminding a representation of Hercules. The engraver has insinuated this heroical aspect as an allusion to the wonderful physical constitution of the emperor, to his sportive life, spent in huntings, travels and competitions in fresh air, and finally to that *καλοκαγαθία* whose substantial and inward background was an unfathomable sense of architectonics and music.

This iconographical allusion is confirmed by the reverse of a medalion representing the emperor as Hercules, going to the right and carrying a tree, the club and lion's skin¹².

⁷ Antonio Frova, *Arte di Roma*, Torino, 1961, p. 253, fig. 211.

⁸ For the monetary iconography of the emperor, see Paul L. Strack, *Die Reichsprägung zur Zeit des Hadrianus*, Stuttgart, 1933; the plates at the end of the volume.

⁹ For his iconography, see S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, in the index, at Hadrianus.

¹⁰ Roberto Paribeni, *Il ritratto nell'arte antica*, Milano, 1934, pl. 233.

¹¹ E. Babelon, *Catalogue des camées antiques et modernes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, 1897, pl. 33, no. 291.

¹² H. Grueber — R. St. Poole, *Roman Medallions in the British Museum*, London, 1874, p. 3, no. 5 and pl. III.

The eyes with the pupils well marked and the half-open mouth evince the classicism of this period, suggesting rather a Roman alexandrianism. This unofficial heroical portrait of the emperor alludes by its impassive air the similitude with every one of his well-known busts ¹³.

The cameo is well accomplished as a work of art and, on my mind, posterior to the emperor's death, evincing characteristics of the antonine art, if we think at the bas-relief of Hadrian's epoch — Sabina's apotheosis in *Museo dei conservatori*, Rome, of which our piece appreciably differs by the manner of realising the emperor's portrait, short time before his death ¹⁴.

Faustina Junior: calcedony cameo in two layers: white on black background. 22 × 16 mm, 9 mm thickness. Bust to the right. The hair is combed in three great curls and gathered on the back in a loop sustained by a hairnet ¹⁵.

The profile is worked uncarefully; rather cleft than cut. The well-known portrait of Faustina Junior ¹⁶ was awkwardly generalized by the provincial artist who has harshly cut the folds of the peplos, leaving the lines unpolished. The neck of a disproportionate length (a feature of Faustina's portraiture) ¹⁷, is stiff. The work was probably unfinished. The reverse is uncut and unpolished.

Lucius Verus: sardonyx cameo in two layers: white-rose on a brown background. 30 × 22 mm, 6 mm thickness. Emperor's bust laureate and draped to the left. The stone has some dark streaks which go across the white-rose layer. The relief is parcimoniously framed, due to the reduced space occupied by the upper layer in the region of the bust, at the beard and at the forehead.

Besides the relief on the obverse, the stone has an intaglio on the reverse, representing the emperor's triumph.

We must confess the difficulty of the profile's identification, due to the features of the portrait, characteristic much more for a whole period, than for a certain personage. But only having at our disposal a rich iconography for Lucius Verus ¹⁸ was possible the comparison and the research of those features characteristic to the man, which were well-distinguished from all conventionalism in the portraiture.

The intaglio on the cameo's reverse is an explanation. It refers to Verus' triumph, after the Parthian victory, in summer of 166. On

¹³ Jean Babelon, *Le portrait dans l'antiquité d'après les monnaies*, Paris, 1942, p. 128.

¹⁴ Stewart Perowne, *Hadrian*, London, 1960, pp. 172–173.

¹⁵ Max Wegner, *Die Herrscherbildnisse in antoninischer Zeit*, Berlin, 1939, p. 50 and pl. 37.

¹⁶ S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, see the index, s.v.

¹⁷ J. Babelon, *op. cit.*, p. 131, H. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, 1938, pl. 92, F. Gneecchi, *I medaglioni romani*, Milano, 1912, vol. II, pl. 69, no. 5, 9, 10 and Grueber-Poole, *op. cit.*, pl. XXIII.

¹⁸ F. Gneecchi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pl. 22, vol. II, pl. 70, no. 1; pl. 74, no. 8 and 75, no. 7, Grueber-Poole, *op. cit.*, pl. XXV; Paribeni, *op. cit.*, pl. 269, 270 and 271; A. Frova, *op. cit.*, pp. 270–277; S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, see the index.

the coin issues, Verus receives firstly the title of *Parthicus Maximus* in August 165¹⁹, his colleague Marcus Aurelius only the next year.

The historians ascertain that Verus was present on the theatre of hostilities only *pro forma*, taking no part in the war, impassive even after a legion's massacre. He was retained by pleasures of every kind in Antiochia and in other towns of Asia Minor.

The profile kindly carved and the half-open mouth give to our cameo an air of melancholy and sensualism. The general impression corresponds to Verus' wishful and shallow character.

Lucius Verus is the son of Lucius Aelius, whom some scholars consider a natural son of Hadrian²⁰, adopted by the emperor some months before his death; but Aelius dies in 137, before Hadrian. At that time the emperor adopts Titus Aelius Antoninus, and Aelius' son, Lucius Verus, assuring also his succession in two generations. I want to point out a striking similitude between our cameo and two bas-reliefs of Hadrian's time, one representing the emperor's arrival, in *Museo Capitolino*, Rome, and the other, the emperor proclaiming, in *Museo dei conservatori*²¹.

On these two bas-reliefs, near the emperor is a figure analogous with our cameo, which represents Aelius Caesar, Verus' father. On the second bas-relief Aelius is only some months before his death, assisting to the proclaiming of Sabina's consecration. The similitude between the cameo and this bas-relief is explicable only by the fact that the father as well as the son are represented on both monuments at the same age. Aided by the triumphal scene on the cameo's reverse, we can date our portrait for 166. Lucius Verus was born on the 15th of December 130, consequently, when he has triumphed, he was 36 years old. Also, we can deduce by similitude the father's age, and, approximately, the unknown year of his birth — about 110.

On the reverse, the triumphal scene is opened by the winged victory, with the triumphal oak wreath in the right hand, followed by the emperor riding a saddled horse, keeping the bridle in his right hand and saluting with the left. In exergue, a trophy is decorated with two palms. In the left, the anchor and the dolphin, as navy's symbol, in the right, the winged caduceus with star, as trade symbol.

The piece as a whole is of fine art and scrupulously worked.

Pertinax — opal cameo in two layers: milk-white on dark gray background. 26 × 20 mm, 6 mm thickness. It is made of two plates glued together. Due to the semi-transparency of the opal and to the colour of the background, similar to that of the relief, it was added an agate plate on the reverse. Emperor's bust laureate to the right.

The features of this portrait suggest a bust in *Museo Vaticano*²², his profile being the same as on coins²³.

¹⁹ Max Bernhart, *Handbuch zur Münzkunde der Römischen Kaiserzeit*, Haale, 1920, vol. I, p. 288 and II. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 199.

²⁰ Stewart Perowne, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

²¹ A. Frova, *op. cit.*, pp. 270–272.

²² R. Paribeni, *op. cit.*, pl. 286.

²³ H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, part I, pl. 1.

In glyptics his profile is similar with that of Clodius Albinus ²⁴.

The relief of our piece is very low; some contours as for instance that of the ear, are only suggested. The hair and the beard are more traced than finished, to produce an obvious decorative effect.

The concise manner of the portrait treatment, announces the symbolic and psychological portrait of the third century ²⁵. As a sign for dating the piece, after the first half of the second century, is the hair dressed on the forehead, but leaving it open on all its length, arranged in right angle on the sides.

As beautiful as it is, the cameo can't be compared with the four masterpieces above described: Galba, Matidia, Hadrian and Lucius Verus.



These lines inform only on some of the most beautiful pieces from the carved stones collection of the Coin Department of the Rumanian Academy.

We hope to present in short time a catalogue which will put all our stones to the scholars' disposal.

²⁴ S. Reinach, *op. cit.*, see the index for Pertinax and Clodius Albinus.

²⁵ J. Babelon, *op. cit.*, p. 133.



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First Plate

1. *Denarius* of Galba 2. Cameo — Galba — Coin Department of the Rumanian Academy 3. *Aureus* of Plotina—tardive issue 4. Cameo—Hadrian. Coin Depart. of the Rumanian Academy 5. Cameo — Matidia — ibidem 6. Cameo — Hadrian — *Cabinet de Médailles*, Paris.



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Second Plate

1. Cameo — Lucius Verus — Coin Department of the Rumanian Academy 2. The reverse of the same stone 3. *Denarius* of Lucius Verus 4. Cameo — Faustina Junior — ibidem 5. Cameo — Pertinax — ibidem 6—7. *Denari* of Faustina Junior 8. *Denarius* of Pertinax.