

# ENDURING MYTHOLOGIES. ANCIENT GEMS DEPICTING THE HERO HERCULES - ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND COLLECTION PIECES FROM ROMANIA

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *Hercule, geme, cameo, antichitatea greco-romană.*

**Abstract:** *This paper features 21 glyptic pieces, gems and cameos, engraved with the image of Hercules and/or other associated mythological characters. They are currently in the collections of some Romanian institutions, but also from abroad, all reflecting the importance that the cult of the demigod / hero had in Antiquity, and the appeal of this type of gem for modern collectors. The pieces were dated between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and are made of carnelian, jasper, sardonyx, onyx, opal, agate, glass and emerald.*

**Rezumat:** *Articolul de față prezintă 21 de piese gliptice, geme și cameo, gravate cu imaginea lui Hercule și a personajelor mitologice asociate. Ele se află în prezent în colecțiile unor instituții românești, dar și din străinătate, reflectând importanța pe care cultul semizeului/eroului o avea în Antichitate, dar și atracția acestui tip de geme pentru colecționarii moderni. Piese au fost datate între secolele III a.Chr. și III p.Chr., lucrate din carneol, jasp, sardonix, onix, opal, agată, sticlă și smarald.*

This paper features and discusses all known ancient gems from the territory of Romania with depictions of the Greek hero, *Hercules*, or related to his mythology. The surprisingly small lot consists of 21 pieces, currently in the custody of eight Romanian museums and collections and only one in the Kunsthistorisches Museum's collection in Vienna.

Unfortunately, there are only two items from a known archaeological context, as the rest of the gems are currently part of museum collections and lacking proper documentation regarding their provenance. One item, **no. 3**, discovered at Sucidava or Romula, is now lost and only a wax copy was preserved until 1936. The last three gems placed in the *Aliena* section of this paper have a degree of uncertainty whether they are depicting Hercules or his love interest, Queen Omphale, well known from the mythology and sometimes rendered with some of the hero's attributes such as the lion's fur or the club, both in Antiquity and on modern reproductions. Either way, the representations are related to the mythology and cult of the hero and worth including in this discussion. The last gem, (**no. 21, Pl. V/20**) depicts a man's head from profile, with features that could be interpreted as a representation of a lion's fur. Eight of the gems

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are mounted into golden adornments – rings, medallions and pin, some since Antiquity, others much later in Medieval or Modern times.

Within this lot there are only two cameos made from glass paste (**nos. 4-5, Pl. III/4, Pl. IV/5**), the first on black background, second with brown background, both with the same iconography.

From an iconographical point of view, there is a variety of depictions with several themes, ranging from the infant and young *Hercules*, to the representations of the twelve labors of the hero and other less famous episodes, including the already mentioned association between *Hercules* and Queen Omphale, as well as with Cacus or even Nessus.

Regarding the illustrations, unfortunately the gem from Romulais currently lost and the Brukenthal collection is inaccessible for some time due to some bureaucratic issues, therefore we did not have access to the artifacts.

### **Collections and collectors**

Currently, the pieces featured in this paper are in the collections of specialized institutions, both in Romania and abroad. These are the Numismatic Cabinet of the Romanian Academy (CNBAR), the National Museum of History of Romania (MNIR) and the Bucharest Municipality Museum, as well as the National Museum of History of Transylvania in Cluj (MNIT), Brukenthal Museum from Sibiu, Mureș County Museum in Târgu Mureș (MJM), “Alexandru Ștefulescu” Gorj County Museum (MJGAS), Drobeta Turnu-Severin Iron Gate Region Museum (MRPF) and Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The background of the collections they currently belong to is significant as it preserves, for some of the intaglios, details about their provenance and travels throughout centuries.

In attempting to decipher the hidden meaning behind the choice of a particular representation, as well as the popularity of such adornments, we engage the aid of ancient authors. In this case, none is more prolific than Pliny the Elder. From his extraordinary work we find that a collection of precious stones was called *dactyliothecae*, a Greek term meaning *repository of kings*, while in Rome the first to possess one was Scaurus, the step-son of Sylla, followed much later by King Mithridates, whose collections were donated to the *Capitolium* by Pompeius Magnus<sup>1</sup>.

Generally, gems were collected by the rich and famous, in Antiquity or in Middle Ages and among famous collectors we know of Julius Caesar, Livia Augusta, Octavian, and many others.

Most of the pieces are currently in the Numismatic Cabinet of the Romanian Academy (CNBAR collection), published in a volume from 1977 by M. Gramatopol, later republished in 2011. It includes gems previously in the Bălăcescu collection (**nos. 11, 13, 14**), but also from the Orghidan collection (**no. 16**). Through the testamentary donation of the engineer Constantin Orghidan on August 29, 1944, his collection came into the possession of the Romanian state, being transferred in 1953 to CNBAR<sup>2</sup>. Starting with 1971, part of the collection was first

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1. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.5 – following his example, Caesar consecrated six *dactyliothecaeto* the temple of Venus Genitrix and Marcellus, son of Octavia, donated one to the Temple of the Palatine Apollo.

2. Gramatopol 2011, p. 11.

exhibited by MNIR, and in 1977, the collection was ceded to it in the form of a loan<sup>3</sup>. Currently, this collection of gems is therefore divided between CNBAR and MNIR. Unfortunately, between the first and second publication of the collection there are differences in the number of pieces photographed as well as some of the illustration.

In 1963, the Romanian Academy acquired Corneliu Bălăcescu's collection<sup>4</sup>. Lesser known than the Orghidan collection, it reflects the fact that its owner had several public offices at the time that allowed him to travel, including that of Romanian commercial attaché south of the Danube, but also a membership in the higher forums of the Romanian Numismatic Society. Therefore, the collection of gems consists of pieces from the south of the Danube, on the territory of the Upper and Lower *Moesia*.

Several pieces from this catalog are part of the Maria and dr. George Severeanu collection. This lot of artifacts, consisting of two gems and one cameo, entered in the collection of Bucharest Municipality Museum (MMB) in 1939, and one was later transferred to the MNIR (**nos. 4, 6, 21**). After the discovery, the glass cameo reached the antiquities market, where it was seen and described by V. Antonescu in 1923<sup>5</sup>. Sometime after this date, the piece entered the collection of Dr. George Severeanu. Following his death in 1939, his wife fulfilled his last wish and initiated the donation procedure of the valuable collection to the Bucharest Communal Museum, the future Bucharest Municipality Museum. The afore mentioned object appears in the general inventory register (RGI of MMB) as no. 20884/1949 - gold objects category, Severeanu Donation. In 1967, the jewelry was published by M. Gramatopol and V. Crăciunescu, as part of this collection. The necklace with the medallion was transferred in the following period to MNIR, more precisely in 1973, in whose collection it is still at present<sup>6</sup>. The other two pieces are both intaglio gems, one mounted in a modern gold necklace assembled in Paris in 1922, the other singular, which has remained unpublished until now. Both are currently on display in the George Severeanu Museum.

One item stands apart, piece **no. 3**, as we are dealing with a wax mold, which was part of the collection of M. Istrati Capșa and is currently, theoretically, in the collection of the Museum of the Iron Gates Region Drobeta Turnu- Severin (MRPF). The private collection was formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the initiative of Maria Istrati Capșa and was enriched by her son, doctor Constantin I. Istrati. It was bought from the legal heirs by the Romanian authorities in 1921, after the doctor's death and wandered through several institutions until 1924 when it was exhibited in the Cultural Palace of Drobeta Turnu-Severin, where it was seen and published in 1936 by D. Tudor. In 1950, the collection became part of the newly created MRPF patrimony<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, nowadays the mold is lost, in part due to the fact that the pieces can no longer be found in the museum's collection.

One of the cameos, **no. 5 (Pl. II/4)**, is in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Unfortunately, although the details of its provenance are preserved, it is not known how

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3. Petolescu 1995, p. 10.

4. Gramatopol 2011, p. 12.

5. Vasilescu 1923, p. 14-15.

6. <http://muzeulbucurestiului.ro/muzeul-george-severeanu.html>; Gramatopol, Crăciunescu 1967, p. 150, cat. no. 160; Hamat 2019.

7. Tudor 1936, p. 212; Neagoe 2009, p. 19-20.

it arrived in the institution's collection, nor the period. It is certainly a 19<sup>th</sup> century acquisition, probably from the period of discovery, which is why the location is still detailed.

The Brukenenthal Collection is currently housed in the museum bearing the same name in Sibiu. Largely based on the collection of Baron Samuel von Brukenenthal, its main nucleus was formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with gems and cameos acquired from the antiquities trade and which do not originate from the territory of Dacia (unfortunately we have no further information at present). When it was published in 1965, Lucia Țeposu-David's work detailed 148 gems, without the cameos which were meant to be published later, but for various reasons remained unpublished<sup>8</sup>. Overall, the collection is extremely valuable, consisting of exceptional pieces, but unfortunately very little is documented, as the information about their discovery and purchase is largely lost.

### Contexts of discovery

Of the 21 pieces in our catalog, the exact context of discovery is known for only two of these, **nos. 4 and 20**. For the rest, only in few cases the place of discovery is known, and for most of them, especially those that are part of old collections, there is no mention of the place or conditions of discovery (**nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19**).

The first of the pieces with a known context of discovery is the cameo discovered at Drobeta (**no. 4, Pl. II/3**). According to the 1923 publication, the piece was discovered in 1896, during excavations in Mr. Metzger's yard, at Drobeta Turnu-Severin, 147 Calea Traian. It is mentioned that, at a depth of 2 m, a vaulted brick tomb appeared, containing a stone sarcophagus. Inside were found the remains of a skeleton and several adornments, along with our piece, as well as two coins. The first is a bronze coin with the legend *Gordianus Pius Felix AUG(ustus)* and on the reverse *P(rovincia) M(oesia) S(uperior) COL(onia) VIM(inacium)*, and the second is a gilded bronze coin issued in the time of *Severus Alexander* in Nicea; both coins are currently lost and their description survives in the first publication of the finds from 1923. The set of funerary adornments is completed by two gold bracelets and a coral tiara, which, unfortunately, were also lost<sup>9</sup>.

The second piece with a known context of discovery is the gem mounted in the medieval ring from Căpreni, Gorj County, **no. 20 (Pl. V/19)**. It is part of a batch of three medieval rings that have mounted Roman gems, all discovered in the same location, following preventive archaeological research in the cemetery at Căpreni, in 2018. The ring is part of the inventory of tomb no. 723, discovered at a depth of 0.80 m from the current level. The piece is a signet ring, made of cast bronze, with an oval bezel in which the Roman engraved carnelian intaglio was mounted (later cracked)<sup>10</sup>.

In the case of four artefacts, we still have some preserved information about their place of discovery (**nos. 1, 2, 3, 5**), namely Porolissum, Deda-Bistra Mureșului, Romula and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. The gold ring from Deda-Bistra Mureșului was discovered by means of a metal detector in the area near the Roman border. Although the ring was discovered outside

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8. Țeposu-David 1965, p. 83.

9. Antonescu 1923, p. 14; Hamat 2019, p. 102-103.

10. Marinoiu, Hamat 2020, p. 230-231.

the *limes*, the area was certainly under Roman control and the presence of Roman towers and a connecting road in the area is hypothesized. The ring was discovered in the fall of 2010, at Cetățuie, an area already known for other discoveries of Roman jewelry, although not related to our ring<sup>11</sup>. The piece was published in 2013, with some omissions.

As for the pieces from the Bălăcescu collection, we only know that they were purchased from the south of the Danube and M. Gramatopol added that they came from the territory of the two *Moesiae*<sup>12</sup>.

### Morphology and Typology

From a methodological point of view, the 21 pieces will be featured in the following order: from the point of view of the material, the shape and the incised decoration.

Concerning the materials used, we are presuming that we are dealing mainly with quartz varieties, among which three jaspers (**nos. 2, 12, 15**), four carnelians (**nos. 8, 11, 17, 20**), three agates (**nos. 7, 10, 14**), three sardonyx stones (**nos. 13, 16, 21**), two onyxes (**nos. 1, 19**), to which is added one opal (**no. 18**) and an emerald (**no. 9**). Three pieces are made of glass (**nos. 4, 5, 6**) and a piece about which we have no mention of the material (**no. 3**). As can be seen, most of the gems are made from common, easy to come by, as well as very cheap materials such as quartz and glass, while only one is made from an expensive stone- the emerald.

In terms of colorings, most of the pieces are black (**nos. 1, 4, 7, 10, 14, 19**), six pieces are red or red-orange (**nos. 2, 15, 8, 11, 15, 17**), four brown (**nos. 5, 13, 16, 21**), single pieces are green, blue, yellow or white, as well as one whose color is not mentioned in the initial publication.

The most commonly used stones are monochromatic, translucent and opaque chalcedony, together with polychromatic ones, mostly because the cost of manufacture and sell make these the best suited for commerce on the provincial market for the middle classes. Carnelian, jasper or agate are among the preferred materials for engraving in the Greco-Roman world<sup>13</sup>. Carnelian was called *sarda*, with five known varieties, mainly extracted from India, becoming a common and popular medium for adornments, again with the exception of the brownish ones<sup>14</sup>. As for the glass paste variants, Pliny mentions such imitations of green jasper. What is even more interesting is the retelling that jasper was worn as an amulet<sup>15</sup>. Agate was once a popular stone but fell in disrepute, probably due to the numerous and plenty of varieties discovered which filled the markets. The black variety was called *antiphates* and was highly appreciated by magicians as it was believed to have the power to counteract fascinations (e.g. malevolent magic, evil eye)<sup>16</sup>.

Equally valuable are sardonyx and onyx, as well as layered agate used especially for making cameos. In Rome, the famous people of the day, including Scipio Africanus and

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11. Man 2013, p. 505.

12. Gramatopol 2011, p. 12.

13. Sagiv 2018, p. 16-17.

14. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.31.

15. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.37.

16. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.54.

Emperor Claudius wore it with pleasure, according to Pliny's records<sup>17</sup>. Along with emeralds, sardonyx was a favorite of emperor Claudius' and it was believed that even the ring of the very fortunate Polycrates had one on the bezel. First worn by the elder Africanus, these stones came from India, Africa and Armenia, although the honey-colored ones were disapproved of<sup>18</sup>. Together with these varieties, opal was also popular, a rather rare stone, as well as glass, the latter to fill the need for luxury at an affordable price.

The most expensive stone used in glyptic is the emerald-*smaragdus*, third in the hierarchy of precious stones according to Pliny<sup>19</sup>. Theophrastus noted that they were also extremely rare and endowed with magical powers over the water in which it was placed in but also over the eyes that gazed at it<sup>20</sup>, considered a stone that governed luck<sup>21</sup>. Its scarcity has also turned it into a symbol of rank<sup>22</sup> and therefore was and still is one of the most desired stones by all those who have the financial means to purchase it. In Pliny's detailed listing of precious and semi-precious stones, we encounter the emerald so well due to the intensity of its green color and the resemblance to the natural world. However, apart from the very interesting information that emperor Nero used to watch gladiator fights through an emerald, Pliny also tells us that it was forbidden to engrave the surface of this very pricy stone so not to be damaged<sup>23</sup>, interdiction which obviously did not stop some artisans to do just that.

Concerning the shape, most of our pieces are included in the forms P2, 3 and 5 as classified by H. Guiraud<sup>24</sup>, as flat 1, 2, 3, 5 in the classification of J. Spier<sup>25</sup>, and by M. Henig as F1,2,3 and 5<sup>26</sup>.

### Iconography and chronology

The typology of the representations consists of a variety of depictions of *Hercules*, at different ages and in several hypostases, either alone or with other characters from his mythology. As the sole character, on a single gem *Hercules* is represented as a toddler (**no. 9**), while on three other gems he is represented in the first years of his youth (**nos. 1, 7, 10**) and the rest depict him at the age of maturity. Associated with other characters from his mythology, *Hercules* is depicted with centaurs (**no. 15**), the giant Antaeus (**no. 2**), Cacus or Lycas (**nos. 3, 6**), Omphale (**nos. 19, 20?**), a nymph (**no. 18**) and the mythical creatures Cerberus (**nos. 4, 5**), Artemis's deer (**no. 6**), the Erymanthian boar (**no. 12**), Mares of Diomedes (**no. 6**), Cretan Bull (**no. 16**), as well as a reference to the Stympalian birds (**nos. 13, 14**).

17. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, III, 37, 23.

18. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.23; 37.2, Pliny also wrote that a similar ring was on display at Rome, deposited by the emperor Augustus in the Temple of the Concord.

19. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, III, 37, 16-19.

20. Theophrastus, *De Lapidibus*, 8, 22-27.

21. Hamat 2016, p. 811.

22. Pliny wrote a revealing account about the immense value of jewelry, as Empress Lollia Paulina attended a banquet adorned with pearls and emeralds worth 40 million sesterces, see Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 9, 117.

23. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 37.16-18, also because some were also very hard to penetrate; Pliny enumerates 12 varieties of emeralds.

24. Guiraud 1988, p. 29.

25. Spier 1992, fig. 5.

26. Henig 1974, fig. 1; Henig *et alii* 1994, fig.1.



*Hercules alone or performing his labors*

Beginning with the youngest depiction, gem **no. 9 (Pl. III/8)** is an emerald engraved with the image of *Hercules* as a toddler killing the serpents that Hera had sent against him and is in fact the first manifestation of his special power of divine origin. The demigod is represented as a chubby child, on his knees and with his hands raised holding the two snakes. Unfortunately, the only existing image of the gem, the one from 1971, can not offer anything more. The piece was not photographed for the second editions of M. Gramatopol's thesis republished in 2011. Having only an old photo to go on and information about the material, we can state that it was a luxury item, with a good quality engraving, probably from an important workshop and it can be dated to the first two centuries of the Empire. An analogy for our gem is found among the glass gems discovered in Britain, at Wroxeter<sup>27</sup>. Other analogies are a sardonyx gemstone currently kept in Munich and dated in third century AD, a carnelian from the first century BC kept in Copenhagen, a Hellenistic onyx cameo from the Harari collection in London and a glass ring stone from Munich<sup>28</sup>.

The iconographic motif is quite old, originating in the art of classical Greece, as evidenced by the painting of an Attic *stamnos*, discovered at Vulci and dated between 480-470 BC<sup>29</sup>. It was often used in Roman art and the scene was depicted on several types of materials. The best known is the fresco in the House of the Vetti from Pompeii<sup>30</sup>, where one can notice almost the same type of rendering as in the case of our piece. Another similar representation is on a mosaic, discovered in Antioch and dated to the second century AD<sup>31</sup>. In both cases the design is meant to protect the houses and their inhabitants from the evil eye<sup>32</sup>. One other possible origin for this representation is the Egyptian art, perhaps the child Horus strangling the snakes or the dwarf Bes, or even Pataikos and they were intended to ward from evil, and especially from snakes<sup>33</sup>.

On the first gem from our catalog, **no. 1 (Pl. I/1)**, discovered at Porolissum, *Hercules* is depicted naked, standing, walking to the left. The framing is done by the horizontal line under the hero's feet, the positioning is a bit off, and the depth of the representation is quite shallow. The body has well-defined muscles, on the shoulder and on the right forearm hangs the fur of the lion of Nemea, and on the left is the club supported by the forearm, with the tip pointing towards the back of the hero. The gem is no very well preserved, with an obvious crack on the back, while the surface shows unevenness due to use and age.

Two other gems, from the CNBAR collection (**nos. 10-Pl. III/9, 11- Pl.IV/10**), also depict *Hercules* standing, covered by the lion's skin and in one case armed with a club, while in another with a spear. The engraving is superficial, the details are rather sketchy and the framing is not refined. The musculature, on the other hand, is rendered quite well. In both cases, the stone is damaged. Unfortunately, both pieces no longer appear in the 2011 republishing of

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27. Marshman 2015, p. 284.

28. Boardman *et alii* 1988, p. 828; Faraone 2013, p. 95.

29. Louvre Museum, collection of Edme-Antoine Durand, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Sully, first floor, room 43, case 23, accession number G192.

30. Faraone 2013, p. 94.

31. Faraone 2013, p. 93-94.

32. Faraone 2013, p. 92; Faraone 2018, p. 121-122.

33. Faraone 2013, p. 96- 97.

the collection. *Hercules* is similarly depicted on some Etruscan-era scarabs, currently in the Fitzwilliam Museum's collection<sup>34</sup>, or on one gem from Viminacium<sup>35</sup>.

Five of the pieces in this paper depict solely the head of *Hercules* (**nos. 7, 8, 17, 20, 21**). On three pieces the head appears covered with the Nemean lion's fur. In one case, the find from Căpreni (**no. 20, Pl. V/19**), it is unclear whether the depiction is of *Hercules* or Omphale's. The gem depicts an engraved image of a head adorned with the fur of a lion. The decor is neatly made, the engraving is of good quality, the image well centered. All these details suggest a high quality associated with a specialized workshop. A very good analogy for our gem is in a museum at Budapest. The gem has an unknown provenance and was dated in the second half of the first century, associated with the image of *Hercules*. Another gem decorated with an image identified with *Hercules* originates from Trier and dated to the first century BC - first century AD. Two other analogies are currently in a museum at Izmir, both carnelian and much more similar to our piece. On the other hand, there is a second possibility, suggested by some cameos, namely, that this type of representation can be identified with the head of Queen Omphale, adorned with the lion's fur. This is the case of the cameos in the collection of the British Museum and dated between the first century BC - second century AD<sup>36</sup>, but also of a cameo currently in the collection of the Louvre<sup>37</sup> and one gem from Pompeii<sup>38</sup>. One other analogy was found in Vindolanda and dated between 120-130 AD<sup>39</sup>.

Such imagery has its origins in the double rendering of the heads of Omphale and *Hercules*, as can be seen on the cameo from the Hermitage Museum, dating from the first century AD. A famous depiction of the Queen's head covered with the fur, near the head of *Hercules*, was found in the so-called House of *Hercules* at Pompeii<sup>40</sup>.

Another case in which the head of hero is covered with the fur of the lion from Nemeais on the sardonyx **no. 21 (Pl. V/20)**, mounted in a modern necklace. We see an adult man, with a long beard made by messy incisions suggesting well-defined curls and hair rendered in the same way, obvious on the nape of the neck under the fur. The top of the head is covered with fur, the muzzle being slightly suggested by the specific curvature, as well as the small incisions that suggest the hairs. The details of the face are well sketched, the lips are narrow, the nose is straight and prominent, the eyes are wide open, the eyebrows are simply rendered and the narrow forehead shows a good quality engraving, slightly deepened in places. A good analogy is the piece from the same lot, **no. 7 (Pl. III/6)**. The finish is slightly different, which creates rounded spaces that suggest volume. The beard is much shorter, bushy, the fur covers the top of the head, the forehead is narrow, slightly frowning, and the face is full and rounded. The

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34. Henig *et alii* 1994, 65, p. 335.

35. Kaić 2012, p. 807, fig. 5.

36. Gesztelyi 2000, p. 47; Krug 1995, p. 54, no. 12, Pl. 46; Laflı 2012, p. 137, nos. 28, 30; British Museum, see the gems with Omphale's image from the online museum collection's, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=omphale>.

37. Bibliothèque nationale de France Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. cat. no. Bj1647, see <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010345246>.

38. Pannuti 1983, p. 94, cat. no. 137.

39. Greene 2006, 72, cat. no. 9.

40. Hermitage Museum, inv. cat. no. GP-12465, see <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/18.+carved+stones/1002316>; Sena Chiesa 2011, p. 232; Marinoiu, Hamat 2020, p. 239.



engraving is of good quality, slightly deepened and with good framing of the subject. Although this piece falls within the classical standards, it was placed in the *Aliena*, precisely because of shadow of a doubt about the framing.

On two gems is represented the bare head of the hero, one from the collections of the Brukenthal Museum (**no. 17, Pl. V/15**) and the other from the Numismatic Cabinet of the Romanian Academy – CNBAR (**no. 8, Pl. III/7**). The demigod can be easily recognized by his short, bushy beard and specific hairstyle. Unfortunately, the engraving is of low quality, the facial details are very poorly rendered. An analogy, from an unknown location, is now in the museum at Sofia<sup>41</sup>. Further analogies come from Gaul, from Lons-le-Saunier<sup>42</sup> and Britain, the latter mounted in a medieval ring<sup>43</sup>.

Gem **no. 12 (Pl. IV/11)** shows *Hercules* adorned with the lion's fur walking to the right, holding a cup and a bow in his right hand and lifting the club with his left; at his feet is a quiver and the Erymanthian boar. The scene is mainly about the fourth labor of Hercules, the capture of the wild boar from Erymantus and what drives him to Eurystheus, but it also contains some special details. First of all, in *Hercules'* hand is a drinking bowl, which makes us think of *Hercules Bibax*, the party-goer mortal, knowing that the hero used to drink, sometimes even excessively, which was the source of the punishment with the 12 labors. Therefore, the drinking bowl in the hero's hand is an allusion to the reason for the punishment, represented in this scene by the boar from *Erymantus*. Furthermore, we have to take into account the fact that *Hercules*, like other heroes, often appears in the Dionysian cycle in the late antique art<sup>44</sup>. The engraving is of very good quality, the details of the head and the muscles highly visible, and the framing is well done. *Hercules*, along with the wild boar of Erymantus, also appear on a gem from Gaul, at Les Granges-Contardes, dating to the second century AD<sup>45</sup>, but this is unfortunately not an exact analogy.

The sixth labor, catching the Stymphalian birds is represented on gems **nos. 13 (Pl. IV.12) and 14 (Pl. IV.13)**. *Hercules* is shown kneeling on a rock, aiming his bow. The engraving is superficial, with very few details, but with a good framing. Very good analogies for our piece are currently in the British Museum's collection. The scene is depicted on a Hellenistic-era scarab, but also on glass gems dating from the first-third centuries and discovered in Britain<sup>46</sup> and a carnelian ringstone currently kept in Paris and dated also in the first century BC, with the same type of representation<sup>47</sup>.

The cameo **no. 16 (Pl. V/18)** is of Etruscan origin and bears engraved the scene of the capture of the Cretan bull, the seventh labor. In addition to the engraving specific to the era, the chosen subject is quite unusual and scarcely used. A similar piece, an amethyst gem, comes

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41. Dimitrova- Milcheva 1980, p. 61, cat. no. 128.

42. Guiraud 1995, p. 386, cat. no. 28.

43. Henig 2008, fig. 6.

44. Sena Chiesa, 2011, p. 233.

45. Guiraud 1988, p. 135, cat. no. 423.

46. British Museum inv. cat. no. 1987, 0212.261, 1772, 0315.365, 1923, 04001.741 si 1923, 04001.728, see <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG60415>.

47. Richter 1971, no. 272.

from an unknown location in Gaul<sup>48</sup>. Another carved carnelian gem was discovered in Grocka, Dubočaj site and it was found during the archaeological investigation from 1964, dated at the end of third - beginning of fourth centuries AD.<sup>49</sup> Two other carnelian gemstones, one in London and one in Boston, both dated to the first century BC, depict the same scene<sup>50</sup>, just as an aquamarine rings stone signed by *Anteros*<sup>51</sup>.

One last gem featuring the hero and his labors (**no. 6, Pl. III/5**) is still novel, made from blue glass. *Hercules* is at the center, naked, with his club in his left raised hand. He is flanked by two horses with raised front legs and tails in the wind. Beneath the hero's feet, on the left, is a fallen character, probably Cacus, and on the right a deer, running with its head turned toward the hero. The legs of all the characters are on the bottom line, and the oval frame of the gem is delimited by a simple border. The scene clearly depicts two labors, the capture of Artemis' deer - the third labor and the capture of Diomedes' man-eating mares - the eighth labor. The fallen character may also refer to the tenth labor, the capture of Geryon's herd, and it could be interpreted as Geryon or Cacus, being known that Cacus is killed on the way back, when the hero stops with the cattle at the place where Rome will rise. Certainly, as in the case of the gem **no. 3**, we are seeing a male character, which excludes the fight with an Amazon, a subject that appears on similar pieces. As depicted lying directly on the ground, we believe that Lycas' death can be ruled out. Given the type of representation and the attributes of the characters, we also believe that it is a representation from the first-third centuries, a rather long period, but since we have not been able to find an analogy for our piece so far, given the complex scene rendered, at this time, we cannot narrow the dating.

#### *Hercules in fight scenes – Antaeus and Cacus*

The first with this iconographical motif is gem **no. 2 (Pl. I/2)**, a jasper mounted in a gold ring. The hero is portrayed as a middle-aged man with a large beard, who raises Antaeus in his arms above the ground. The latter is depicted in this scene as an impervious young man, with a smaller stature and who tries in vain to fight the deadly grip. Both characters are rendered nude, with well-defined muscles; the marking line is defined at the bottom, under *Hercules*' the feet. The engraving is of good quality, not too shallow, with rounded spaces defined by the drill, to emphasize the volume. The details of the hair, muscles or face are well rendered. Only one mistake can be noticed, namely, the left foot of the hero's leg is abnormally rendered, suggesting a correction due to a bad framing of the subject. The fight with Antaeus is a favorite subject in the representations related to the life of *Hercules*. On the way to the Garden of the Hesperides, the hero meets the giant Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Gaia. The epic fight between the two is seen as a metaphor for the fight between good and evil, as in Greco-Roman mythology the giant is blamed for the deaths of a large number of people. Analogies for our gem can be found in Britain at *Caerleon*, Mill Street and Richborough<sup>52</sup>.

48. Guiraud 1988, p. 135, cat. no. 419.

49. Gavrilović 2014, p. 107, cat. no. 69; Krunić, Ignjatović 2017, p. 156, cat. no. 151.

50. Walters 1926, cat. no. 1867; Lippold 1922, pl. 39, 1.

51. Lippold 1922, pl. 35, 4.

52. Henig 1974, p. 101; Marshman 2015, p. 284.

The wax mold (**no. 3**), taken from a gem discovered at Romula, preserved the image of a naked man fighting a male character fallen under his feet. D. Tudor identified the two characters as *Hercules* and Antaeus<sup>53</sup>. Given that the second character is already on the ground, it is unlikely that he is Antaeus, knowing that the hero only succeeded to defeat him by holding him in his firm grip and lifting him from the earth. Therefore, the character who fell to the ground can be identified, in our opinion, with the giant Cacus or the servant Lycas. The legend of Cacus, the giant who lived in a cave near Aventine Hill and could spit fire, is much closer to the Roman mythology. In this tale, *Hercules* was passing by and after an attempted robbery by the giant, saved the nearby inhabitants and strangled him. After killing the giant, according to tradition, Hercules founded *Ara Maxima* in *Forum Boarium*, the place where the temple of *Hercules Victor* still exists. This legend was considered so important in Roman society that it is introduced in the *Aeneid*, where it is told by King Evander to Aeneas<sup>54</sup>. Through it, the Romans legitimize their right to rule directly from Hercules, among other mythologies. Analogies for this piece are also found in Britain where several gems with such a representation were discovered in various sites in the province<sup>55</sup>.

#### *Hercules and Cerberus*

One of the lesser-known episodes depicted on the glyptic adornments is that of the capture of Cerberus, represented in the current catalog by two cameos, discovered at Drobeta and Ulpia Traiana (**nos. 4 - Pl. II/3- Pl. II/4**). The cycle of representations of *Hercules'* fight with Cerberus includes several scenes, from the actual fight to the tying of Cerberus, the depiction of *Hercules Victor* - standing or sitting and especially *Hercules* walking and dragging Cerberus, or *Hercules* with chained Cerberus sitting in the company of other characters. The piece from Drobeta was first published in 1923 by Dr. V. Antonescu<sup>56</sup>. In 1967 the gem is republished by M. Gramatopol and V. Crăciunescu, as part of a collection<sup>57</sup>, while recently interest on the piece was resumed on the occasion of the exhibition on antique Romanian gold and silver<sup>58</sup> and in an article discussing the two pieces also included in our catalog<sup>59</sup>.

The gem is mounted in a gold medallion as part of a necklace with agate beads. Considering the type and style of the cameo it was probably made in the period from the end of the second century or even at the beginning of the third and until the middle of the third century. Glass gems and cameos with this type of representation are later dated than those made from semi-precious materials<sup>60</sup>. The cameo in white relief on black background depicts the last of *Hercules'* labors, the submission and bringing of Cerberus, a subject with various approaches in Roman art as well as a series of gems and cameos, of which our piece is a part of. The scene shows the moment *Hercules* tied Cerberus' neck with a rope to be brought to Eurystheus. The

53. Tudor 1936, p. 213.

54. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1.40.1; Vergilius, *Aeneid*, VIII.

55. Henig 1974, cat. no 433- 436.

56. Hamat 2019, p. 102.

57. Gramatopol, Crăciunescu 2008, p. 192, cat. no. 160.

58. Dumitrașcu, Mărghitu 2013, p. 488-489.

59. Hamat 2019.

60. Hamat 2019, p. 104-106.

monstrous animal is struggling; his heads are in the grip of the noose that the hero has already put around his neck. With his right hand, the hero tightens the noose whose rope is seen tense in his hand. The body of the beast is held below one of its knees, keeping it lying on the ground, while the other knee rests on the ground and the upper part of the body leans forward, above the animal, to subdue it. Although it is no longer noticeable on our piece, due to usage or the bad mold, the analogies show that the lion's fur must have hung behind *Hercules*, and the cloak was under his feet. Unfortunately, the bottom of the cameo is just an amorphous setting that doesn't allow much to be noticed or guessed<sup>61</sup>.

Our second cameo featured is in the collections of Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna<sup>62</sup> and originates from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, with inv. no. XI 880<sup>63</sup> (**no. 5, Pl. II.4**). It was first published in 1979 in Romania, as part of the collections of Romanian origin in Vienna and again in 2007 by E. Zwierlein-Diehl<sup>64</sup>. At the time of republishing, E. Zwierlein-Diehl thought that this piece dates to the first century AD. Unfortunately, the information regarding the artefact is very scarce. However, there is a noticeable similarity with the previous cameo, from Drobeta, but of a lesser quality, although they are both made out of two layered glass.

The scene of the capture of Cerberus is represented in other artistic fields, such as on a relief discovered at Colonia Narbo Martius-Gaul, where *Hercules* is already victorious and drags Cerberus tied with a rope<sup>65</sup>, or on a sarcophagus from Asia Minor, dating to the Hellenistic period, where we find the hero dragging Cerberus also by the rope<sup>66</sup>. Chained to the foot of the hero while chatting to Alcesta, Cerberus is painted on one of the walls of the catacombs on Rome's *Via Latina*, a representation dating back to the fourth century<sup>67</sup>. Numerous monetary issues with the submission of Cerberus and his binding by the hero were struck in several locations in the Roman Empire during the second-third centuries AD<sup>68</sup>. This rendering on coins of the third century may be related to the unfolding of imperial propaganda, as this iconographic motif focused on the hero's twelfth labor, appears usually during the reign of Gordian III. On the other hand, it is very difficult to prove this statement, even when discussing the cameo from Berlin<sup>69</sup>.

In the Greco-Roman world, the twelfth labor became frequent in art, due to both the attributed connotations and the popularity of the demigod. The twelfth labor, however, is less frequently represented in glyptic. In the minor arts, it led to the birth of a series of gems, centered on the labors of *Hercules* and endorsed by the work of a famous engraver, *Dioskourides*. It appears on both gems and cameos, made from sardonyx and glass and the most famous pieces are now in the custody and care of large museums and collection, e.g. Altes Museum in Berlin,

61. Florescu, Miclea 1979, p. 82, cat. no. 6, fig. 230; Hamat 2019, p. 104.

62. Hamat 2019, p. 105.

63. Florescu, Miclea 1979, p. 82, cat. no. 6, fig. 230.

64. Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, p. 414, cat. no. 463.

65. Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/hercules-and-cerberus-from-a-relief-in-narbonne-france-news-photo/1162777339?adppopup=true>.

66. Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/hercules-with-cerberus-from-a-sarcophagus-in-asia-minor-news-photo/586342796?adppopup=true>.

67. Berg 1994.

68. Hamat 2019, p. 104-105.

69. Gołyźniak 2020, p. 185; Hamat 2019, p. 105.

Catherine II's collection from the Hermitage, just as the pieces preserved in Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Thus, the best-known analogy for our cameo is currently on display at Altes Museum in Berlin. This is an identical cameo made of sardonyx attributed to Eutyches son of Dioskourides, or even the latter<sup>70</sup>, and bearing the signature ΔΙΟΣΚΟΥΡΙΔΟΥ (*Διοσκούριδου*), engraved in the workshop of Augustus's court artist and therefore dated in the first years of the Principality<sup>71</sup>.

Another famous analogy is a Roman agate cameo, of unknown origin, part of the collection of Empress Catherine the Great's, currently in the custody of the Hermitage Museum and dating from the first century BC - first century AD<sup>72</sup>. In the collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum is another carnelian gem purchased from the Aquileia area and dated to the first century BC<sup>73</sup>. Two other analogies are known, one currently on sale on a large auction site, a glass intaglio dating back to the first century BC- first century AD<sup>74</sup> and another sardonyx cameo now in the Metropolitan Museum's collection<sup>75</sup>. The latter has no known place of discovery and was dated to the same period. A black glass gem, currently in the collection of the British Museum, also bears the same type of representation, dated between the first and third centuries AD<sup>76</sup> and a second glass cameo from the same museum's collection is dated in the first century AD<sup>77</sup>. Cerberus' submission is seen on a yellowish glass gem discovered in Roman Britain at Durnovaria-Dorchester, Dorset<sup>78</sup>, and on another black glass gem dating to the third century and discovered at Lilley in Hertfordshire<sup>79</sup>.

Interestingly, this scene has enjoyed widespread popularity during the Renaissance or modern times, with many well-known examples. In Romania, a modern reproduction is in the CNBAR collection<sup>80</sup>. However, we note that in Dacia there is no artistic representation of this exact type, as the one on the cameo from Drobeta but there are two situations in which the fight and capture of Cerberus appear. The first is on a relief discovered at the palace of the *Augustales* from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and there is the possibility that there was also the representation of the twelve labors, in the opinion of M. Bărbulescu. Unfortunately, it has been fragmented. The second case is a two-register relief, discovered at Tibiscum, which probably

70. Gramatopol 1991, p. 57; Zwierlein- Diehl 2007, p. 413, cat.no. 462.

71. Altes Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. FG 11062, see [http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection\\_lightbox.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=7&sp=3&sp=Slightbox\\_3x4&sp=12&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=16](http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=7&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=12&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=16); Middleton 1891, 86.

72. Hermitage Museum, inv. cat. no. 63, see [http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html\\_En/index.html](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/index.html).

73. Kunsthistorische Museum, inv. cat. no. Antikensammlung, IXb 660, see <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/59852/>.

74. Marti Classical Numismatics, [https://www.vcoins.com/en/stores/marti\\_classical\\_numismatics/258/product/roman\\_glass\\_intaglio\\_imitating\\_nicolo\\_hercules\\_tying\\_up\\_cerberus/999009/Default.aspx](https://www.vcoins.com/en/stores/marti_classical_numismatics/258/product/roman_glass_intaglio_imitating_nicolo_hercules_tying_up_cerberus/999009/Default.aspx).

75. Richter 1956, no. 637, p. 128, pl. 72.

76. British Museum, inv. cat. no. 1923, 0401.730, see [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1923-0401-730](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1923-0401-730); Walters 1926, p. 3145.

77. British Museum, inv. cat. no. 1873,0502.165, see [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1873-0502-165](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1873-0502-165)

78. Henig 1974, p. 101.

79. Marshman 2015, p. 284.

80. Gramatopol 2011, cat. no. 801.

represented all of *Hercules*' labors, among which the representation of the capture of Cerberus can also be seen on<sup>81</sup>.

Cerberus, on the other hand, is also summoned in sexual magic<sup>82</sup>, present even in the curses associated with the use of the *tabellae defixiones* in the Greco-Roman world<sup>83</sup>. On gems he rarely appears on his own, rather with Serapis<sup>84</sup> or *Hercules* in other guises than this current one.

#### *Hercules and the centaurs*

Another well-known episode in the iconography of gems is the revenge killing of the centaur Nessus, as depicted on our gem **no. 15 (Pl. IV/14)**. Although at the time of publication, M. Gramatopol identified the centaur with Pholos<sup>85</sup>, considering the fact that the legends mention several centaurs killed by *Hercules*, among which the most famous are Chiron, Pholos and Nessus, we are inclined to believe that the latter's vanquish is depicted on this gem. First indication arises from the legend that tells us that Nessus is guilty of the death of *Hercules*, who, maddened by his poisoned clothing, kills him. Secondly, we know that the deaths of Chiron and Pholos were a mistake, and so we believe that Nessus is a more appropriate attribution. Thirdly, as *Hercules* seems to be strangling him, it is most certainly Nessus, as both Pholos and Chiron are killed with poisoned arrows. This episode is depicted in the frescoes at Pompeii<sup>86</sup>, but also on other works of art from the archaic Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods.

#### *Hercules and his love interests*

The myth of Omphale was well known and referenced in the ancient world but to a lesser extent in the time of Augustus. The Queen of Lydia's enslavement of the hero was seen by the ancients as the triumph of love over all things. Modern approaches related to the study of Greco-Roman magic regard the gems with the representation of *Hercules* as talismans for the protection of the belly region and therefore the image of the Queen, in some particular hypostases, is also related with the protection of the woman's womb, from the involuntary movements of the uterus to the danger of the delivery<sup>87</sup>.

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81. Bărbulescu 1978, p. 226-227; Hamat 2019.

82. Zellmann-Rohrer 2016, p. 57.

83. Cerberus appear also in the magic papyrus in particular, one dated in the fourth century A.D, from Thebes currently kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France Paris, PGM IV.1872-1927 (BnF cod. suppl. gr. 574, ff. 21v-22r), in which an exorcism was invoke; Cerberus appear on a *defixio* discovered in Carnuntum and on six curses tablets from Rome and Este, all of them are addressed to Cerberus, Pluto and Proserpina; on a curse tablet from Germania Superior-Mainz mentioning Mater Magna and *canes*- probably Cerberus; in Panticapeum there is a possible mention of Cerberus on a ceramic fragment, *ostrakon*, from fifth/fourth century BC., on which ὁ κύων – the dog- refers to Cerberus, the one who bites the genitalia to the object of the spell τὴν ψωλὴν δάκοι; in an ancient text mentioning the fact that the three headed dog fed on human flesh; on a twelfth-century *Euchologion* of the monastery Mt. Sinai (Ms. No.973, dated 1153 AD.), the three headed black Abra who eat people's bones and destroy their flesh, clearly an allusion to the ancient Cerberus and converted an older spell for headache - see Collins 2008, p. 83; Betz 1986, pp.71-72; Urbanova 2018, p. 200, 434- 440, 443, 512, 515; Hesiod, *Theog*, 311; Kotansky 1994, pp.63-64.

84. Veymiers 2009, p. 63- 68, 82-84, 89, 116-119, 131, 136- 138, 142, 145, 147-151,161-162, 167, 173, 189, 196-197, 199, 205, 211- 212, 220, 281 with the catalog; Veymiers 2011, p. 241- 242, 250, 252- 255; Veymiers 2014, p. 211, 218, 221- 222; Veymiers 2020, p. 309, 315-316, 319.

85. Gramatopol 1977, p. 132.

86. Hercules and Nessus, MAN Napoli Inv. 9001.

87. Dasen 2008; Dasen 2021.



In our catalog we have two gems engraved with the image of the Queen, **nos. 19-20**, and considering the analogies, we believe that they belong to the period of the first-second centuries AD<sup>88</sup>, even though the image continues to be used throughout the third century AD<sup>89</sup>.

The first representation of the Queen on gem **no. 19 (Pl. V.17)**, from the Brukenthal collection, is dated to the last century of the Republic or the first century of the Empire. The onyx was engraved with the representation of the Queen wearing the *exuvia leonis* and the club of the hero. Omphale adorned with the lion's skin and armed with the club usually appear in Roman glyptic between second century BC and first century AD<sup>90</sup>.

The analogies for this early engraved gem are found in Gaulat Lons-le-Saunier<sup>91</sup> and in Britain at Fox Hill<sup>92</sup>. Other analogies are currently kept in the collection of Kunsthistorische Museum, with an unknown place of discovery and dated in the first century AD<sup>93</sup>. A red carnelian gem from the Danicourt collection kept in the Musée municipal de Péronne<sup>94</sup> and another amethyst gem, currently a part of the collection of Gulbenkian Museum from Lisbon<sup>95</sup> are both dated in the same period. A carnelian gem, from a private collection and dated on the first century BC<sup>96</sup>, bears the same type of representation. A nicolo cameo, with the representation of the Queen is currently in the Hermitage museum<sup>97</sup>.

The second gem associated with Omphale has a high degree of uncertainty whether it actually depicts the head of the Queen or *Hercules*. The uncertainty of this representation is not so unusual, if we take into account the fact that the two of them overlap each other in mythology, art or magic.

The opal gem **no. 18 (Pl. V.16)** shows another side of our hero, namely the love conquests he made throughout his life. It depicts a scene of seduction that takes place in nature and therefore L. Țeposu David considers that the gem depicts the love encounter with a nymph<sup>98</sup>, an identification with which we can agree. As for a more accurate identification of the character, this cannot be achieved due to the lack of clues and the fact that *Hercules* was indeed a great conqueror in this domain as well.

However, a similar amethyst gem is currently in one of the Florence museum's collections, bearing the signature of the engraver *Teukros* and was dated during the time of Augustus' reign<sup>99</sup>. The young woman could be perhaps *Iole*, as G. Sena Chiesa identifies her on a cameo from Brescia or on the gem from Florence or even on a gem signed by *Dioskourides*, now lost<sup>100</sup>. Another assumption is that she could be *Auge*, as it is mentioned on a silver cup

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88. Marinoiu, Hamat 2020, p. 239.

89. Guiraud 1995, p. 386.

90. Dasen 2018, p. 63.

91. Guiraud 1995, cat. no. 29, p. 387.

92. Henig 1974, p. 102.

93. Kunsthistorische Museum, Antikensammlung, IXb 1347.

94. Dasen 2008, fig. 1, p. 266.

95. Gulbenkian Museum from Lisbon, inv. no. 2726.

96. Dasen 2018, p. 63.

97. Pannuti 1994, p. 2012, cat. no. 180.

98. Țeposu- David 1965, p. 85- 86

99. Furtwängler 1900, p. 323, pl. X, fig. 15.

100. Sena Chiesa, 2011, p. 232.

from the Rogozen treasure<sup>101</sup>. All these potential suggestions show once again that the imagery of *Hercules* seducing a nymph has its roots in the art from the time of Augustus, and evolved between the second and third centuries AD<sup>102</sup>.

## Conclusions

The glyptic series of the representations of *Hercules*, together with his acolytes, was framed in the larger series of heroic depictions and is considered by most specialists as ranking immediately after the series of the gods, as proven by the large number of gems and the popularity enjoyed in Antiquity.

In terms of depictions, *Hercules* is a deity quite common on imperial gemstones and cameos, which is due to the fact that he was quite easily recognizable by means of his club<sup>103</sup>, but also to the fact that he is one of the favorite deities of a large percentage of the ancient society<sup>104</sup>. From the point of view of his birth and the life he led, he fulfills the condition of duality, god and hero<sup>105</sup>, a status that can account for the success he enjoyed among ancient people<sup>106</sup>, regardless of social class or profession. The popularity of the demigod also explains his choice as an alter-ego, as in the famous cases of Commodus or Caracalla<sup>107</sup>, and the lesser-known cases of Claudius II *Gothicus* and Maximinus *Thrax*<sup>108</sup>. In fact, in medieval and modern glyptic, *Hercules* had important adorers and became the favorite of Cosimo I de Medici, protector of the family and of Florence<sup>109</sup>, but also of Stefan Werbőczy, whose two seals on documents, rendered the representation of the hero<sup>110</sup>. Gems with his image have been reused in medieval seals in England and Hungary<sup>111</sup>, just as the one from Căpreni, or copied in modern and contemporary glyptic. His popularity in modern times is also underlined by the fact that many of the artifacts are mounted in modern or contemporary jewelry.

As far as the documented fashionable use of demigod decorated intaglios is concerned, we can state that in Britain they were worn equally by both sexes, adults and children, from the middle of the first century to the beginning of the fifth centuries AD.<sup>112</sup> The presence of gems depicting *Hercules* near or in military camps must be considered normal, as the demigod was one of the protectors of the army<sup>113</sup>, in Britannia but also on the Danube limes where gems with the representation of the hero appear mainly in sites related to military presence<sup>114</sup>. In the case

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101. Boardman et alii 1988, p. 822-823.

102. Sena Chiesa, 2011, p. 232- 233.

103. Marshman 2015, p. 110.

104. Marshman 2015, p. 111.

105. Henig 1970, p. 258.

106. It seems that in Britain, Hercules is the most popular character in glyptic art, see Marshman 2015, p. 142.

107. An intaglio depicting Caracalla as Hercules, crowned by a Victory, was discovered in Lincoln, Britain, see Marsden, Henig 2002; a modern cast of a Roman gem from Slovenia depicts Commodus with the attributes of Hercules, see Nestorovic 2005, p. 38.

108. Zwierlein-Diehl 2011; Marsden 2011, p. 167.

109. Aschengreen Piacenti, Boardman 2008, p. 53.

110. Gesztelyi 2011, pl. 3 and 4.

111. Gesztelyi 2011; Henig 2008.

112. Marshman 2015, tab. 4.7 and 4.13.

113. Henig 1974, p. 93; Guiraud 1995, p. 386.

114. Henig 1974, p. 93; Kaić 2012, p. 806-807.

of Gaul, between the third and the fourth centuries AD, *Hercules* is outranked by Theseus, and the heroes' cycle is represented only on 8% of gems and cameos<sup>115</sup>.

In the case of Dacia, at the end of the 70's of the last century, M. Bărbulescu inventoried 52 inscriptions and 85 figurative monuments, including gems<sup>116</sup>, a total reaching 90 in 2003<sup>117</sup>. The statistics have been supplemented with other types of representations over time<sup>118</sup>.

Making no exception, on the territory of Lower Moesia, *Hercules/Herakles* enjoyed great popularity, his cult being attested by a rich epigraphic, sculptural or numismatic material. Let us not forget that Callatis is a colony of Heraclea Pontica, whose mythical founder is our hero<sup>119</sup>. We will not exhaustively list the evidence of the cult, but we do mention the figurines with the representation of *Hercules* from Durostorum, the relief of *Hercules Saxanus* from the ancient quarry at Cernavodă, the *ex-voto* from Bugeac, the figurine with the representation of the god, the lion from Troesmis, the torso of *Hercules* from Slava Cercheză<sup>120</sup>, as well as numerous other finds (e.g. figurines, reliefs, *aediculae*, altars, or small finds decorated with the image or attributes from the legend of *Hercules*) discovered at Tropaeum Traiani, Ulmetum, Noviodunum, Tomis, Callatis, Histria<sup>121</sup>, Halmyris<sup>122</sup>, or the area of Poșta-Telița<sup>123</sup>. Also, on Bulgarian territory there are discoveries related with the cult of hero in Novae<sup>124</sup>, Almus, Sadovec, Vraca<sup>125</sup>, Madara, Gorotsvet<sup>126</sup>, Nicopolis ad Istrum<sup>127</sup>, Odessos<sup>128</sup>, Negovanovți, Kranevo<sup>129</sup>.

It is important to highlight two aspects regarding the presence of this particular cult on the territory of ancient Dobrudja. The first is the endurance of the cult in the province up until the fourth century AD<sup>130</sup>. The second is the misfortune of not having gems engraved with the image of the hero, discovered here. What has become obvious concerning the territory of present-day Romania, is the fact that there is ample evidence of the cult since ancient times. This presence was enhanced by the Roman conquest of Dacia and especially by the flourishing of the cult during the Severan dynasty<sup>131</sup> and lasts until the fourth century, when all the old gods will subvert and be replaced by the new Christian religion.

As can be seen from the study of gems and cameos, *Hercules* is a divine hero with many sides and therefore with many attributes, but since he is *par excellence* a military deity, exponent

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115. Guiraud 2011, p. 128.

116. Bărbulescu 1977; Bărbulescu 1978.

117. Bărbulescu 2003, p. 179.

118. Bărbulescu 2003, p. 166; Nemeti 2005, p. 137-141; Ota 2006; Marinoiu, Hamat 2020; Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000; Piso 2001, p. 81-82, no. 101 and 66-68; Ciobanu 2018; Diaconescu 2018; Zăgreanu, Deac 2014, p. 211-213.

119. Covacef 1975, p. 399.

120. Iacob 2013, p. 99, 102, 171.

121. Covacef 1975, p. 403- 426; Covacef 2011, p. 110- 119.

122. Matei- Popescu 2010, p. 82.

123. Baumann 1991.

124. Aparaschivei 2012, p.173.

125. Matei- Popescu 2010, p. 104, 108, 110, 206.

126. Koleva 2018.

127. IGBulg II, 674.

128. Ruseva-Slokoska 1991, p.176.

129. Dimitrova-Milcheva 1980, p. 60-61.

130. Covacef 1975, p. 423- 424.

131. Popović 2001, p. 43.

of physical strength, defender from the dangers of battle, he is also protector of the earth's riches and hot springs, healer, guardian of the gates and protector of the house and heritage, family welfare, protector of merchants, god of slaves, protector and ruler of the souls of the dead, and not least, protector of the imperial house<sup>132</sup>.

Another reason why *Hercules* enjoyed such a wide appreciation is his devotion to the cause of humanity, by eliminating the dangers that threatened the common people. His deeds brought him immortality as one of the few mortals who earned his place among the gods, and was therefore a worthy example to follow<sup>133</sup>. These are some of the reasons for which the gems and cameos engraved with his image were reused in the Middle Ages and copied during the Renaissance and modern era. They became associated with the Christian virtues, the triumph of the Cross and also with the splendor and power of ancient Rome<sup>134</sup>.

Gems gathered and featured in this paper depict many of the episodes from his life, especially some of the 12 labors, the capture of Artemis' deer, the Erymanthus boar, the Stymphalide birds, the Cretan bull, the man-eating mares, or the submission of Cerberus. Wearing *exuvia leonis* suggests the hero's first labor, just as the killing of Cacus references bringing Geryon's herd. Not all labors are represented exactly, some are merely suggested, through much more interesting and relevant episodes selected by engravers. The murder of Cacus implies the dynastic connection that the hero has with Rome and therefore this became the chosen engraved episode. We must also not forget that *Hercules* is one of the few mortals who managed to defeat death without weapons, thus acquiring mythical fame, a deed suggested by the capture of Cerberus. The motivation for using this type of representation is very complex, in the sense that there are several paths to follow that lead to more plausible explanations. The simplest of these is that *Hercules'* struggle with Cerberus represents, in concrete terms, the struggle between life and death, good and evil, light and darkness. Therefore, this scene had primarily an apotropaic role, following that Hercules is the hero who defends people from evil, and for this reason he is very much loved by them<sup>135</sup>. Another explanation is that *Hercules'* fight with Cerberus has a more complex understanding linked with magic. Many spells related with Cerberus refers to the exorcism of the headache or a more violent role as an instrument in punishing the enemies. It is well known that the three headed hound's food is human flesh and bones<sup>136</sup>.

C. Faraone emphasizes the fact that the demigod was a protector of humankind, therefore merits to be honoured with the epithet "He who wards off evil (*Alexikakos*)" or "The son of Zeus, resplendent in victory (*Kallinikos*), *Heracles*, lives here. Let no evil enter", and states that many of the representation of his struggles with natural and unnatural monsters, which include the strangling of snakes as a baby, are representation of protection and therefore, they can be regarded as amulets. The main problem with transferring this meanings on these types of gems, after C. Faraone, is the fact that we cannot be sure where is the border between myth and magic in the case of an unscripted amulet, and much worse, in the case of an amulet with no

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132. Bărbulescu 1978, p. 228- 230; Ciobanu 2018, p. 38; Hamat 2019, p. 106-107.

133. Marsden, Henig 2002, p. 421.

134. Sena Chiesa 2011, p. 234, 236-237.

135. Hamat 2019.

136. See above note 82.

context<sup>137</sup>. Thus, we can only presume that a part of them belong to the magical *instrumentaria*. In one of the cases - the cameo from Drobeta, we can say that the context of the artefact and the black colour can both resonate with the answer of an ordinary man from Cyzicus in the fourth century BC to Diogene: Hercules wards people from their greatest enemies: poverty, disease and death<sup>138</sup>. The woman buried inside the brick coffin from Drobeta relied on *Hercules* to protect her in the underworld and vanquish death. The same level of personal protection can be invoked for the image of the hero strangling the snakes, carrying the Cretan bull, hunting Stympthalian birds or the boar from Erymanthus<sup>139</sup>.

Other examples of the special relation between the representation of *Hercules* and protective magic are some of the gems engraved with the image of Omphale. Together with the hero, her representation can provide protection for women against illness, especially of the womb and also a much-needed ally against the painful and terrifying childbirth. We cannot exclude the possibility that the gem from the Brukenthal Museum's collection belongs to this category of magical talismans, engraved with some particular type of representation of Omphale that provides protection mainly for women. As a pair, Omphale and *Hercules* are guardians of seductiveness, health of the reproductive organs as well as reproduction<sup>140</sup>, and therefore they are connected with magic, in some particular cases.

On the other hand, *Hercules* is also depicted in more ordinary scenes, sometimes in a state of intoxication - *Hercules Bibax*, conquering a nymph or a mortal, or yielding, like any ordinary man, to the love embodied by the power of women through the appearance of representations of Omphale. A known acolyte is the little herald of love, Cupid, but unfortunately, on the gems in the Romanian collections there are not yet documented such depictions. The murder of Nessus is also part of the cycle of episodes related to his daily life, as revenge for the physical and spiritual poison of which the centaur was guilty.

Concerning the iconography and chronology, it can be said that the gems from this lot have a broad dating that extends from the last century of the Republic to the third century AD, likely provincial imports, not local products, with the exception of the gem from Porolissum<sup>141</sup>. We have only other exception, namely the Etruscan scarab, much older than the rest of the pieces, but its presence is not uncommon, as such artifacts were usual acquisitions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, throughout Europe.

We also have to mention that some of the gems are still embedded in ancient jewelry, like the ring from Deda or the necklace from Drobeta, proof of the fact that in Antiquity, these gems are a part of jewelry worn by women but also by men, adults or children.

As concluding remark, we add the fact that in the Romanian collections there are also a series of medieval and modern pieces engraved with the image of *Hercules*, which we intend to republish in a future paper, focused on the issue of replicas and reproductions of ancient gems.

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137. Faraone 2013, p. 98-99; Faraone 2018, p. 115- 116.

138. Faraone 2013, p. 87-88; Urbanová 2018, p. 227; Faraone 2018, p. 116; Ps.-Diog. *Epistle*, 36, see Weinreich 1915.

139. Faraone 2013, p. 98.

140. Dasen 2015, p. 187.

141. Gudea 1989, p. 206; Hamat 2011, p. 106; Hamat 2018, p. 711.

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## Catalog<sup>142</sup>

1. Gem; onyx<sup>143</sup>; systematic excavations at Porolissum (Jac, Zalău County), 12.8x9.6 mm; precarious state of conservation; Young *Hercules*, seminude, left profile, holding the club in his left hand and lifting his right hand in the front; MNIT, inv. no. 2668, A 124, second-third centuries AD. **Pl. I/1**

*Reference:* Gudea 1989, p. 799, no. 73.

2. Gem, red jasper<sup>144</sup>, metal detector discovery at Cetățuie, Bistra Mureșului (Deda, Mureș County), 20x15 mm; *Hercules* fighting Antaeus; mounted on a gold ring; Mureș County Museum, inv. no. 8574, second-third centuries AD. **Pl. I/2**

*Reference:* Man 2013, p. 505, no. 129.

3. Wax mold after a Roman gem from Romula - modern Reșca; 11x10 mm; *Hercules* wearing the fur of the Nemea lion, battling a man fallen to the ground; M. Istrati Capșa collection, probably MRPF Drobeta-Turnu Severin; second-third centuries AD.

*Reference:* Tudor 1936, p. 213, no. 44, Tab.VIII 13.

4. Cameo, glass paste, white relief on black background; Drobeta - modern Drobeta-Turnu Severin; 41x29x5 mm; *Hercules* fighting Cerberus; mounted in a gold medallion, MNIR, inv.no. C491/3; first in the Maria and dr. George Severeanu collection; end of the second century- first half of the third century AD. **Pl. II/3**

*Reference:* Dumitrașcu, Oanță Mărghitu 2013, p. 489, no. 119.2; Hamat 2019.

5. Cameo; glass paste, white cameo on brown background; Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa-modern Sarmizegetusa; 21,7 mm; *Hercules* fighting Cerberus; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. XI 880; first half of the first century AD. **Pl. II/4**

*Reference:* Florescu, Miclea 1979, p. 82, no.6, Fig. 226; Zwierlein- Diehl 2007, p. 414, no. 463; Hamat 2019.

6. Gem; blue glass paste, oval, irregular; unknown; 25x23x7 mm; *Hercules* flanked by the Mares of Diomedes, the deer of Artemis and fallen Cacus; MMB, Maria and dr. George Severeanu collection, inv. no. 28159; first-third centuries AD. **Pl. III/5**

*Reference:* unpublished.

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142. The description of each piece entails the type, material, provenance, dimensions, iconography, current location and inventory number, dating and reference. Gem no. 21 lacks dimension as it is mounted in a necklace currently on display.

143. Carneol in the referenced publication.

144. Carneol in the referenced publication.



7. Gem; black agate; unknown; 17x14 mm; head of *Hercules*, to the left, wearing the fur of the Nemea lion; mounted in golden ring; CNBAR, inv. no. 36; second century AD. **Pl. III/6**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 131, Pl. XIII, no. 270.

8. Gem; carnelian; unknown; 11x10 mm; head of *Hercules*, to the left, mounted in a gold ring; CNBAR, inv. no. A.Sig.5; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. III/7**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 131, Pl. XIII, no. 271.

9. Gem; emerald; unknown; 10x7 mm; infant Hercules strangling snakes; mounted in a modern necklace; CNBAR, inv. no. 393/C.O., first-second centuries AD. **Pl. III/8**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 131, Pl. XIII, no. 272.

10. Gem; black agate with white layer; unknown; 16x13x4.5 mm; *Hercules* walking to the right, with his club and wearing the skin of the Nemea lion; CNBAR, inv. no. 321; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. III/9**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p.131, Pl. XIII, no. 273.

11. Gem; carnelian; uncertain, south of the Danube(?); 13x11x4.4 mm; *Hercules* standing, holding the club in his right hand and the spear in his left; CNBAR, inv. no. 178; Bălăcescu collection; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. IV/10**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, pp. 131-132, Pl. XIII, no. 274.

12. Gem; yellow jasper; unknown; 12.5x11 mm; *Hercules* walking to the right, holding a bow, a cup and next to the Erymanthian boar; mounted in a modern silver brooch; CNBAR, inv. no. 105/3; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. IV/11**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 132, Pl. XIII, no. 275.

13. Gem; sardonyx; unknown, south of the Danube; 13x12x4 mm; *Hercules* kneeling, aiming his bow to the left; CNBAR, inv. no. 176; Bălăcescu Collection; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. IV/12**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, 132, Pl. XIII, no. 276.

14. Gem; black agate with blue layer; uncertain, south of the Danube (?); 13x11x3 mm; *Hercules* kneeling on a rock, aiming his bow to the left; CNBAR, inv. no. 179; Bălăcescu collection; second-third centuries AD. **Pl. IV/13**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 132, Pl. XIII, no. 277.

15. Gem; red jasper; unknown; 11x10 mm; *Hercules* from the left, killing *Nessus*; mounted in a modern tie pin; CNBAR inv. no. 33/O -8585, second-third centuries AD. **Pl. IV/14** (in one of the publications the image was mirrored).

*Reference:* Gramatopol 1977, p. 132, Pl. XIII, no. 278; Gramatopol 2011, Pl. 10, no. 278.

16. Gem; sardonyx<sup>145</sup>; unknown; 17x13 mm; *Hercules* fighting the Cretan Bull, lifted above his head; CNBAR, Orghidan Collection, inv.no. 9031; fourth-third centuries BC. **Pl. V/18**

*Reference:* Gramatopol 2011, Pl. 1, no. 20.

17. Gem; carnelian; unknown; 17.4x15x6.1 mm; head of *Hercules* with beard, to the left; Brukenthal Museum Sibiu, inv.no. 1058; first century BC- first century AD. **Pl. V/15**

*Reference:* Țeposu- David 1965, p. 85, Pl. I, fig. 14.

18. Gem; opal; unknown; 24.1x18.6x 2.7 mm; *Hercules* nude, standing on a rock, next to his club and with his right arm around a nymph lifting her robe; Brukenthal Museum Sibiu, inv. no. 769; first century BC- first century AD. **Pl. V/16**

*Reference:* Țeposu- David 1965, p. 85- 86, Pl. I, fig. 15.

### *Aliena*

19. Gem; onyx; unknown; 26x21.6x2 mm; Omphale with the fur of the Nemea lion on her shoulders, walking to the left, holding with both hand the club on her right shoulder; Brukenthal Museum Sibiu, inv.no. 1075; first century BC-first century AD. **Pl. V/17**

*Reference:* Țeposu- David 1965, p. 86, Pl. I, fig. 13.

20. Gem; carnelian; necropolis at Căpreni; 24.69x14 mm; head of *Hercules*, adorned with the lion's fur/ Queen Omphale adorned with the lion's fur; mounted in a gold signet ring, „Alexandru Ștefulescu” Gorj County Museum, first-second centuries AD. **Pl. V/19**

*Reference:* Marinoiu, Hamat 2020, p. 238, no. 7.

21. Gem; sardonyx; unknown; ca. 20x10 mm<sup>146</sup>; head of *Hercules*, from left profile, bearded, possibly wearing the fur of the Nemea lion; mounted in a modern gold necklace; MMB, Maria and dr. George Severeanu collection, inv. no. 71980; first-second centuries AD (?). **Pl. V/20**

*Reference:* unpublished.

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145. Agate in the referenced bibliography.

146. The gem is mounted and therefore difficult to measure its exact dimensions

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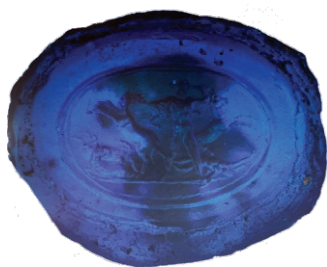


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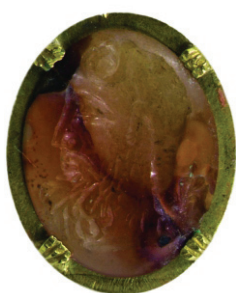
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