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The Guy Ladrière Collection of Gems and Rings. London–New York:
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There are only a few contemporary collectors of engraved gems, and the Parisian art dealer and collector Guy Ladrière stands out as one of the most influential personalities in this area. His amazing collection of antique and modern rings, cameos, intaglios, and little works in the round consists of nearly three hundred pieces and is definitely one of the largest and best assemblages. We warmly welcomed the news that this particular cabinet would be published, not only because it includes rare and important works of art, but most importantly because the owner decided to share his treasure with the public – a noble gesture that will hopefully inspire other private owners to follow suit. The three co-authors – Diana Scarisbrick, Claudia Wagner, and Sir John Boardman – are well-respected authorities in the fields of ancient and modern rings, engraved gems, and the history of collecting, among others. They have all made an immense contribution to the study of glyptic art. There is not enough space here to list even just their major publications, but it must be said at once that the authors here provide the reader – whether he is a specialist on gems, a connoisseur, or a collector of ancient art – with another exceptional volume presented in a most handsome way.

The book opens with a brief but highly informative introduction by Diana Scarisbrick. In the best possible way, she has captured in words Guy Ladrière's passion for engraved gemstones. She tells the story of how this Parisian dealer of Old Master paintings and sculpture became fascinated with intaglios and cameos during his research on medieval rings at the Louvre. There, he came across a signet with an ancient ruby intaglio, which was the initial spark that burst quickly into a desire to attain knowledge about glyptic art. Monsieur Ladrière initially educated himself at the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris and then by way of visits to major museums across Europe. It is fascinating to see what his educational process consisted in. Once he acquired sufficient knowledge, he started to collect the art he so highly esteems. His impressive collection, presented on charts in the catalogue under discussion, includes a variety of objects ranging from little works in precious stones in the round, to cameos and intaglios, and to engraved finger rings. It covers glyptic material from antiquity down to the 19th century. As a result, reading this book is indeed not only a feast for the eyes but also a highly educational experience. One is served with an array of subjects, including important portrait studies from all the periods, so even if one has no previous experience with this art form one quickly becomes inspired to reach for other publications dealing with gems.

How is it that the book has such an effect on the reader? The reason for this is that all three of the volume's co-authors did their job splendidly. The book is aesthetically pleasing, for the photographs of the gems and other objects in the collection have been masterfully taken and printed in colour. This is the first advantage of this publication, and it is good to see that the presentation of gems in colour is now becoming a standard practice. What with the pictures having been printed in colour, the co-authors can rest assured that their work will attract far more readers. Fortunately, the intaglios have been photographed together with their impressions; this enormously facilitates their study, especially if they bear portraits. Moreover, the descriptions of the items are cohesive and provide the reader with a good portion of information. The best and most interesting pieces in the collection have received far longer descriptions. These include the agate cameo bearing a bust of a nymph (no. 66), the Staufer cameo depicting Heracles wrestling the Nemean lion (no. 108), the cameo with an Indian rhinoceros – the so-called “Marvel of Lisbon” (no. 125) – or another gem carved with a Staufer eagle (no. 129) as well as some other exceptional cameos (nos. 247, 250, 254), intaglios (nos. 142, 229 and 255), and rings (nos. 213–215, 221 and 230). These were often written by other experts of glyptic art, such as Antonio Giuliano, Jeremy Warren, Jeffrey Spier, Marian Campbell, and John Cherry.

There are many more intaglios and cameos that are exceptional in terms of their artistic virtuosity and unconventional themes. It is not possible to do more here than single out a few more of the highlights and report the general subjects as well as make a few criticisms. For instance, among the works in the round, there is a splendid agate portraying Queen Elisabeth I as Omphale – it is a highly propagandistic piece (no. 1). The collection includes a magnificent and rare turquoise bust of Emperor Domitian (no. 2), which might be compared to another one in chalcedony, now in Florence.¹ No. 3 depicts the head of a Ptolemaic queen, but dating it poses problems. It may be a 3rd-century BC work since heads of Hellenistic queens in precious stones were seldom copied or “invented” in the post-classical period, in contrast to the heads of Roman empresses. In our opinion, while no. 8, which presents an Isis vase, is indeed a bit suspicious, still it might be of ancient date – compare a similar vase believed to be an Osiris Canopic jar from Florence.² Furthermore, no. 10 might be an ancient work as well since there are many known examples from the Roman Imperial period that depict heads or even whole animals cut in precious stones (usually rock crystal).³

¹ GAGETTI 2016: 300–301, no. 68.

² GUIDOTTI 2016: 252–253, no. 43.

³ See for instance the eagle's head in: MUSCILLO 2016: 164–165, no. 4; and the horse's head in: GAGETTI 2016: 212–213, no. 26. More literature is indicated in the latter source.

Cameos constitute a second group within the collection, numbering exactly 120 items. They are carved from a wide variety of stones, such as agate, sardonyx, carnelian, and turquoise. Some are set as brooches or stickpins or in gold rings; one item is carved from a ring made out of one piece of red (Baltic) amber. The majority of the cameos are heads in profile. The most important pieces have probably already been indicated above, but there are more to explore. For example, there is a stunning bust of a Ptolemaic queen in the guise of the goddess Isis. She is identified with Cleopatra I Syra (c. 204–176 BC), but similar busts are quite popular, and it is difficult to precisely identify who the portrayed person is (or even whether this is a portrait at all). Comparanda pieces suggest that this cameo should be dated a bit later, to the second half of the 2nd century BC or even to the beginning of the 1st century BC.⁴ No. 28 is a fragment of a cameo featuring the head of Augustus. This is definitely a work of the Imperial Court workshop (most likely the one operating during Claudius' reign: 41–54 AD), close parallels of which can be found in Paris and London.⁵ No. 29 is an ancient work; we suggest dating it to around 20–40 AD. As to the identification of the portrait, it is not necessarily Divus Augustus, but perhaps Tiberius (14–37 AD) or Caligula (37–41 AD).⁶ The collection also includes a gallery of post-classical portraits of Roman emperors, generals, and philosophers (nos. 30–44). These were highly popular subjects during the revival of interest in ancient culture and art, from the Renaissance to the 19th century. No. 51, which depicts the bust of Severus Alexander (222–235 AD), deserves attention since Late Antique portrait cameos are scarce. This one must have been cut in the very early phase of the emperor's reign, if not before he took the throne. It is very close to a head in St. Petersburg⁷ and to a cameo in Vienna from a slightly earlier period; the latter piece reveals the same facial features and workmanship.⁸ The collection includes a wide selection of portraits of Renaissance personalities, including kings (nos. 55–59) and several studies of black Africans, the latter of which were popular at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries (nos. 60–66). With regard to the Late Antique cameos, there is one more with a private portrait of a woman – a highly popular subject – used as an earring (no. 68). Furthermore, there are an array of post-classical female portraits (nos. 69–77), eleven studies of Medusa's head (nos. 78–88), including two ancient pieces (nos. 78–79), and double portraits (nos. 93–100). Studies of figures

⁴ PLANTZOS 1999: 102, pl. 87.5–6.

⁵ MEGOW 1987: no. A.30 – a bust from the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris; and no. A.31 – a head from the British Museum's collection in London.

⁶ Compare with: MEGOW 1987: no. A.55 – Tiberius; and no. A.62 – Caligula.

⁷ NEVEROV 1971: no. 91.

⁸ MEGOW 1987: no. A.169.

follow afterwards, and we would like to share Martin Henig's opinion on no. 103.⁹ This rather large sardonyx cameo showing Zeus/Jupiter holding a scepter and taking a libation with his sacred bird, the eagle, at his feet, is an ancient work, possibly from the 1st century AD. The subject is only rarely found on cameos, but during Claudius' reign (41–54 AD), it experienced considerable popularity.¹⁰ This was due to the fact that the emperor often identified himself with Jupiter. In addition to this piece, a very similar head of Zeus/Jupiter can be found in the Guy Ladrière collection (no. 15); it is also considered to be of ancient provenance. Another exceptional gem proves that the art of carving precious stones in the Late Antique period was not entirely abandoned and that, with regard to the patronage of glyptics, the Severan dynasty is rightly called the "Renaissance" period. No. 114 presents a charging horse rider, which indeed might be Emperor Caracalla (211–217 AD). There are many more valuable cameos in the Guy Ladrière collection, such as no. 120, the style of which resembles works of Valerio Belli (1468–1546), or no. 124, a Hellenistic triple portrait cameo including intriguing iconography. However, we would now like to turn our attention to the part of the book that features intaglios.

With regard to the intaglios in the collection, there are several ancient portraits that stand out, such as no. 132, which depicts the head of Alexander the Great, or no. 134, a carnelian, done using an unusual technique and set in a gold ring. No. 135 is a remarkable portrait of Augustus in Burma ruby; it resembles the one that first inspired Monsieur Ladrière to begin his collection. There may be another portrait of Augustus in ruby (no. 137), and there may even be one more intaglio done in this uncommon material. This latter piece (no. 138) has the head of Emperor Caracalla engraved upon it, though it may be the case that this one is not ancient. These three objects alone show how remarkable the Guy Ladrière collection is. There are a good number of intaglios showing studies of single figures or groups. Some of them present puzzling iconography, such as no. 154. With regard to no. 164, we do not believe that it is ancient and propose dating it to the 17th century or later. Two Etruscan scarabs (nos. 172–173) supplement the cabinet so that it shows a selection of glyptic material for almost all the periods from antiquity down to the 19th century.

The Guy Ladrière collection includes a wide range of rings, and they constitute the next chapter in the catalogue. It starts with Greek and Roman rings (nos. 179–197), among which no. 182, which most likely bears the portrait of Sextus Pompey, caught our attention. This ring may have been made for propaganda purposes and used as a token illustrating support for Pompey's son. It is good to see so many diversified examples of this art, because in contrast to gems, Roman rings are a rather neglected

⁹ SCARISBRICK 2008: no. 91.

¹⁰ See, for instance: MEGOW 1987: no. A.87.

area of study. Then we move to the medieval period, which includes Merovingian, Lombardic, and Byzantine pieces. Some of these illustrate the popular practice of reusing ancient intaglios in medieval rings (nos. 223 and 225). All of them are testaments to the time and culture in which they were made. It can be said that the entire history of early Western rings can be found in this one collection. There are also rings with unengraved stones (nos. 231–238) as well as Renaissance pieces and jewels (nos. 239–244).

Those interested in Christian art will also find some interesting content in this book. A separate chapter is devoted to Byzantine cameos and intaglios (nos. 245–249) and to ones executed in the Staufer Imperial court (no. 250). Turning to the Renaissance and later times, there is a stunning double-sided cameo reflecting the style of Alessandro Masnago (c. 1560–1620) or his workshop (no. 254), as well as a beautiful rock crystal plaque close in style to the work of Giovanni Bernardi (1494–1553).

In the next chapter, we can admire cameos and intaglios cut by modern gem-engravers who signed their works, including Nathaniel Marchant (1739–1816), Charles Brown (1749–1795), Luigi Pichler (1773–1854), George Hewitt Cushman (1814–1876), and Antonio Berini (1770–1860). While several miscellaneous objects can be found at the very end of the catalogue (nos. 265–268), the last group consists of forgeries of “Mycenaean” rings (nos. 269–276). The book ends with useful indices of the collectors, artists, and subjects; it also includes a pictorial index. A glimpse at the list of the previous collections to which some of Monsieur Ladrière’s gems and rings belonged is enough to make it clear that his collection is exceptional. The co-authors of the book have succeeded in establishing the provenance of some of the gems and rings, including items which were a part of such cabinets as that of Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692–1779), Edouard Guilhou (?), the Marlborough collection (including one piece – no. 57 – that once belonged to Thomas Howard, fourteenth earl of Arundel (1586–1646)), and Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008), among others.

Archaeologists, art historians, and jewelry enthusiasts would benefit from adding this wonderful book to their library, as would anyone else who has a passion for beautifully engraved gems and intriguing rings. It is, in short, a special catalogue which combines both marvelous photography and erudite – yet approachable – descriptions of the objects. It is a book that takes the reader into a fascinating world of intaglios and cameos, where individual discoveries can be made on every page.

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