

ON AN ANTIQUE PASTE CAMEO, FOUND AT STANWIX,
NEAR CARLISLE.

By C. W. KING, M.A.

A LITTLE relic of the Roman occupation of this island has lately been brought under my notice, possessing considerable claims to our attention on the grounds of art and history, but much more from the circumstances under which it was discovered.

This object is a circular disk, $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. in diameter, of opaque, lavender-coloured antique paste, bearing a female bust in half-relief, and in front-face, with the hair *waved*, *parted* down the *middle*, and falling in *one ample tress* far down over each shoulder upon her bosom. These latter particulars in the treatment of the figure will be shown, in the course of this inquiry, to be of essential importance towards the identification of the original of this portrait.



As regards the first consideration mentioned—that of artistic merit—this work is of the highest order; for although cruelly corroded by time and friction upon the surface, it still shows itself, at the first glance, to have been cast from

a *gem* executed in the very noblest style of the Augustan Age. The discovery, therefore, of it at Stanwix (the supposed *Æxelodunum*), near Carlisle, is a very memorable event in the history of Roman-British remains; for though old Leland, just awakening from the night of Gothicism, speaks with admiration of the "cornalines marvellously well entayled" frequently turned up then, as now, in the same locality, yet our more familiar acquaintance with the highest antique art forces us to acknowledge that the glyphic works, bequeathed by the Romans to this soil, are always mediocre, generally barbarous, and unmistakeably the productions, not of the Italian or Asiatic artists of those times (far less of the earlier Grecian masters), but of the semi-civilized die-sinkers at the mints of Lugdunum and Treviri, and possibly of those working at Camulodunum and Augusta.

The *material* also is worthy of a passing notice. This opaque, light-blue paste, of the colour of *zaffre*, is the kind mentioned by Pliny¹ in his valuable account of the glass-manufacture of his day, as being an imitation of the lapis-lazuli, "*sapphiros imitatum*;" and our cabinets attest that it was a favourite medium with the Roman *vitriarii* for their imitations of camei, especially those of considerable volume. For the ancient *sapphirus*, our lapis-lazuli, ever retained that pre-eminence in rank which its beauty and rarity had given it amongst the first inventors of glyphics, the Assyrians, and Egyptians; even after the opened trade with India had rendered the stone comparatively cheap and common at Alexandria and Rome. Even at the end of the fourth century, Epiphanius mentions one kind of it as dignified with the title of "Royal;"² and in the eleventh century the Norman poet, Marbodius, copying some lost ancient original, describes it as only conceded to the hands of princes.³ For this reason, important intagli, probably the privy signets of the personages represented upon them, continued during the whole course of antiquity to be engraved in lapis-lazuli, from that of the Macedonian Perseus (in the Blacas Cabinet) down to that of Phocas, the Byzantine emperor (in the Martigny collection). Of *camei* in the same stone may be cited a fine Messalina (Marlborough), and a Crispina (Praun). At the head of works in the imitative

¹ xxxvi. 67.

² "De xii. gemmis quæ erant in vesti-

mentis Aaron," cap. v. *Sapphirus*.

³ *Lapidarium*, v. *Sapphirus*.

paste stands the Townley, "Bonus Eventus," or the youthful Caracalla so complimented, a plaque eight inches square; and other important specimens of the same material may be seen in the show-cases of antique glass in our National Museum.

When first discovered, the paste under consideration retained its mounting, described as being "of silver filigree," but so oxidised by the action of the salts of the earth where it had lain, as to fall to pieces immediately when handled. This circumstance is to be regretted, for, if preserved, this mounting would have shown the destination of the ornament, whether for a pendant jewel or for a fibula. By the description "filigree" (work of which the Romans made no use) it is almost certain we ought to understand that cut and pierced pattern-work, beginning to come into fashion (for silver plate alone) in Pliny's day,⁴ under the name so expressive of its nature, "Opus Interrasile," and which, from the reign of Severus downwards, became the general style of mounting for all sorts of jewels. Illustrations of this kind of work in *gold* are common enough; good examples are certain fine medallions⁵ set in broad, pierced borders in the form of pendants, in the French Cabinet; the massy rings of the Tarsus and Rouen treasure-troves, of the reign of Severus Alexander;⁶ and, what bears immediately upon the present question, the pretty *gage d'amour* ring, found at Corbridge, pierced *à jour* with the "posy" (in Elizabethan phrase) *ÆMILIA ZESES*,⁷ "Long life to thee, Emilia!" The silver ornaments of that period, probably obtained by melting down the current denarii (then largely debased with lead), were caused by this pierced-work ornamentation to expose innumerable surfaces to the destructive influences of the earth, and rapidly decomposed into a black, brittle sulphuret, falling to pieces on the lightest touch. But other circumstances render it most probable that this paste in its completed state was designed as a pendant for the neck. By a singular coincidence, the only lazulite paste that ever came under my notice, still preserving its antique mounting

⁴ "Interradimus alia (vasa) ut quam plurimum lima perdiderit." H. N. xxxiii. 19. "Découpé à jour" is the French term for it; and better than our own.

⁵ Particularly the two of Postumus, found in the same hiding place with the celebrated "Patere de Rennes."

⁶ Caylus engraves a very elaborate example of a ring of this kind with broad open-work shoulders, set with a gold quinarius of Maximin, found at Hen, near Amiens. Rec. d'Antiq. v. pl. 112.

⁷ Figured in Arch. Journ., vii. 191.

(of gold), was a beautiful bust of *Abundantia*,⁸ in intaglio, and of smaller dimensions: one of the most interesting pieces in the Hertz collection. The Marlborough cabinet possesses a fine sardonyx cameo of a hippocampus, retaining its original and curiously-constructed gold framing for the same purpose; not to mention its numerous and magnificent examples of the Cinque-cento jewels of the same nature, the first idea of which was evidently borrowed from similar legacies of antiquity; lastly, may be adduced of all others that most interesting illustration, the great cameo of St. Alban's (of whose specific virtues Matthew Paris has left so full and amusing a history, together with an invaluable drawing by his own hand), which was in a silver frame of elegant pattern of the same *opus interrasile*, the taste of which bespeaks a higher period than the rude Saxon king's who presented it to the monastery.⁹ It is true that large circular camei were also used for ornamenting, or rather composing, fibulæ (the usual destination of the Medusa heads so common in relief), a fine example of which is the one fastening the mantle on the shoulder of the Spada Pompey; but as a much more substantial frame for our paste would have been required in such an employment, it may more reasonably be supposed to have been mounted, and worn as a pendant jewel.

I have left for the last the determination of the most important question of all—the *personage* represented in this noble specimen of ancient portraiture. An antiquary, distinguished by his zealous investigations of Roman remains in Northumberland and the parts adjacent, discovers in this cameo a portrait from the life of Antinous himself, whom he furthermore supposes to have accompanied his imperial patron into Britain, and to have left behind him this imperishable memento of the honour done by his visit to the barbarians of the North. But, unfortunately for this romantic hypothesis, the celebrated favourite of Hadrian made no pretensions to *feminine* loveliness, but gained the admiration of the world as the most perfect embodiment of the Grecian idea of *male* beauty—the ancient Achilles returned to life. This is proved by the noble Marlborough gem of him in that very character,

⁸ That is, some empress in that character, according to the rule of the times.

⁹ Figured in the *Archæologia*, xxx. 414.

with spear on shoulder ; also by the medallions struck in his honour, giving him the actual title of $\text{HP}\Omega\text{Σ}$; on all of which his head appears with the short, close-clustering curls of the Thessalian hero. But to descend to sober reality, if anyone capable of judging of likenesses will refer to the plaster-cast of the "Gemma Augustea" (the noted Vienna cameo representing the Family of Augustus¹), he will at the first glance recognise the same bust (identical in pose, *chevelure*, and benign expression) as belonging to the woman seated on the ground with her two little boys standing by her, on the left hand of the Emperor. She is holding up a cornucopia, and wears round her neck a heart-shaped *bullæ*. As to her personality, there can, in this composition, be no room for doubt ; she is *Antonia*, daughter of M. Antony and Octavia, niece to Augustus, and wife of the hero of the scene, his beloved step-son, Drusus ; whilst her two children are the afterwards so famous Germanicus, and the Emperor Claudius. Again, let the same critic minutely examine the head of the same princess on the *reverse* of the beautiful gold medal² struck in her honour by either her grandson or son (where she is figured under the form of *Ceres Legifera*, holding the long flambeau and cornucopia of the beneficent goddess, with her head in the same pose as in the cameo just quoted), and he will feel his first impression converted into certainty. Or, if further evidence be wanted, let him compare the fine Marlborough cameo (figured in Raspe's Catalogue at No. 11256, but there mis-called an Agrippina), where also Antonia appears with the attributes of Ceres, and he will discover, one might almost say, the actual cameo upon which the paste we are considering was moulded. Lastly, if none of these means of forming a judgment be at hand, let him but cast his eyes upon the lovely Townley "Clytie rising from the sunflower" (to retain the familiar name), now so deservedly popular through its elegant *reduction* in Parian, and he will immediately recognise the head on the Axelodunum relic in the marble bust that deifies the same virtuous lady as an Isis reposing on her lotus flower.

Antonia's claims to such eternity of fame were well-

¹ Of which an admirable copperplate, the actual size, may be seen in Montfaucon's great work ; also, copied more recently, in Krause's "Pyrgoteles."

² A very correct drawing of it, magnified to show the details, will be found in the Penny Cyclopædia, article "Antonia."

founded, and the ample manner in which they were acknowledged both during her lifetime, and after her decease, may be accounted for in several ways. She was the widow of Drusus, the idol of the Roman people, and whose popularity went on increasing after his death through the very unpopularity of his brother, Tiberius. She was the mother of the equally beloved and equally regretted Germanicus; and she had the credit of saving the empire and the Cæsarian line by her detection of the conspiracy of Sejanus at the very moment it was ripe for execution. To the last-named service allusion seems to be made in the sense of the *CONSTANTIA* of the legend on the medal already quoted. She received the highest honours from her grandson, Caligula, upon his accession to the empire, although he is accused of having afterwards, in his capricious madness, hastened her death—a gratuitous crime, and probably laid to his charge on no surer grounds than his bad reputation. When her son Claudius succeeded his short-lived nephew, Antonia obtained from his filial piety a large share of the honours he paid to the deceased members of his family. As this Cæsar (the James I. of antiquity), besides his love of books, was also a patron of the glyptic art—for Pliny notices his fondness for the sardonyx,³ evidently meaning that gem in the *camei*, of which so many with his and his wives' portraits are still preserved—it seems to follow naturally that his mother also should have received under him her part in this most imperishable kind of monument. I am not ignorant that it has been the traditional custom to attribute all cameo-heads of this particular type to *Agrippina*, wife of Germanicus; but its appearance on the *Gemma Augustea*, executed before her birth, as well as on the medal of Antonia (pointed out here for the first time) are sufficient to overthrow such an identification.

It may perhaps be acceptable to such of my readers as are unacquainted with ancient glyptics to explain the *composition* of the paste before us, and also the *process* of its fabrication. All the antique imitative lazulite that has come under my examination is of the same close-grained texture, and the same shade of light blue (or lavender colour). Its hardness

³ "Singulorum enim libido pretia singulis (gemmis) facit, præcipueque æmulatio, velut cum Claudius Cæsar smaragdus induebat vel sardoniches." (H. N.

xxxvii. 23.) The emperor brought the sardonyx into fashion by wearing it alternately with the emerald, the gem the most valued of all in his day.

is declared by the polished surface the small ring-stones of the sort retain in spite of all the injuries of time and wear. The composition appears to be the same with that of the Egyptian blue enamel, the "artificial cyanos" of Theophrastus,⁴ so largely applied to the decorative productions of the national art. That such enamelling had for its object the making terra cotta and steaschist pass for true lapis lazuli is made evident by Ælian's notice that the "High Priest of the Egyptians used, when administering justice, to wear round his neck an image of the goddess Truth, carved in *sapphirus*."⁵ The nature of this badge of office is abundantly attested by the existence of the numerous tablets in artificial cyanos, bearing figures of deities, and similarly intended for pendant jewels. Sir H. Davy found by experiment that the cyanos used in Roman fresco-painting could be exactly reproduced by fusing together, for the space of two hours, 15 parts pure carbonate of soda, 20 pulverised flint, and 3 copper filings. A similar mixture, the proportion of flint somewhat increased for the sake of hardening it, would produce a paste with all the qualities and appearance of the antique specimens. As Alexandria, upon the decay of Sidon, became the chief seat of the glass manufacture (one of its fabricants, Firmus, being actually wealthy enough to dispute the empire with Aurelian), it is more than probable that paste gems "*vitreæ gemmæ e vulgi annulis*,"⁶ formed a large part of her exports; and that, for the species requiring it, the artificial cyanos (the invention of the country) was especially put into requisition.

The actual process of making paste gems can be briefly described, if minute technical details be omitted. The impression of the work to be imitated is taken in a mixture of fine tripoli and pipe-clay, rammed down in a little iron case of the dimensions required. This forms the *matrix*, which, after drying, is placed within the furnace, with a bit of glass of the proper colour laid upon it. This is watched until observed to become plastic, and then carefully squeezed down with an iron spatula coated with French chalk to prevent adhesion. After annealing, the glass, on removal from the matrix, presents an exact counterpart of the

⁴ "On Stones," chap. 53.

⁵ "Varia Historia," xiv. 34. "Truth" is known by the tall feather rising from her head, and which, placed alone, is her

hieroglyphic.

⁶ Pliny's term for the manufacture. H. N. xxxv. 30.

original gem, whether in cameo or intaglio. For camei of two or more strata, so many layers of different coloured glass must be employed, and the relief afterwards touched up with the usual engraver's instruments, to remove superfluities and to level the field. Some of the antique examples, thus worked over, can hardly be distinguished from camei in true sardonyx.

In that valuable storehouse of information upon every antique matter conceivable—the "*Recueil d'Antiquités*," Caylus gives a detailed account of experiments made by his friend, Dr. Majault, in attempting to recover the ancient process of paste-making, and which he justly styles "*Un des articles les plus curieux et les plus interessans de ce Recueil*."⁷ The result of these experiments was the discovery of the method of producing all the beautiful patterns of inlaid flowers, the "*millefiori*" and "*Egyptian Mosaic*," so much admired in antique jewels of the sort; it is likely our own glass-makers might derive some valuable hints from the study of the researches in their art, carried on so sedulously by the indefatigable old Frenchman.

⁷ Vol. i. p. 298. A fuller description of all the processes will be found in Mariette's *Pierres Gravées du Cabinet du Roy*, i. p. 209, in the section "*Des Pierres gravees factices, et la manière de les faire*," written

at a period (1750) when the manufacture had been brought to its utmost perfection through the researches of the chemist Homberg, under the patronage of the Regent Orleans.