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The Roman Past in 7th/13th-century Ḥama (Syria): A Bronze Cast with the Portrait of Nero in the Treasure of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II

Hadrien Rambach, Arianna D'OTTONE-RAMBACH, Erika Zwierlein-Diehl

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BEFORE ARCHAEOLOGY

THE MEANING OF THE PAST IN THE ISLAMIC
PRE-MODERN THOUGHT (AND AFTER)

Edited by

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The Roman Past in 7th/13th century Ḥamā (Syria): A Brass Cast of a Cameo with the Portrait of Nero in the Treasure of al-Malik al-Mansūr II

Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Erika Zwierlein-Diehl and Hadrien J. Rambach*

Introduction (ADOR)

More than a century after its publication, the 1894 *Guide* to the papyrus collection of the Archduke Rainer, illustrated with plates and drawings, still merits our attention¹. Amongst the drawings decorating the large chapter on Greek papyri by Karl Wessely (1860-1931)², the reader finds on the last page of the section dedicated to the son of Constantine I, a Classical portrait surrounded by an Arabic inscription under which the caption reads: “Brustbild vermuthlich eines der Söhne Constantin’s d. Gr. (Cameo aus dem Schatze des Sultāns Mansūr II. Muhammed von Apamea, reg. 1244-1284)”³ (*Possibly the bust of one of Constantine the Great’s sons, Cameo of the treasure of Mansūr II Muhammad, Sultan of Apamea*) (fig. 1).

In 1870, the papyrologist and numismatist Joseph Karabacek (1845-1918), had briefly referred to this item: “*Hatte doch der verdiente Orientalist A. Krafft auf der im Wellenheim’schen Kataloge Nr. 12368 beschriebenen, jetzt im kaiserlichen Münz-Kabinete bewahrten ovalen Messingmedaille mit dem Titel des Aijubiden Nāsir-ed-dīn Abū-l-Ma’ālī Muhammed (1244-1284) das schön gearbeitete Bildniss als jenes des Sultāns selbst bezeichnet, - während in diesem mittelalterlichen Kunstwerk nichts Anderes zu erkennen ist, als das mit Eichenlaub bekränzte und mit Paludamentum und Schuppenpanzer bekleidete Brustbild des Augustus. Eine treffliche Nachbildung von einem antiken Cameo! Ähnlich wie Krafft dachte auch schon im XVII. Jahrhundert Jobert, welcher in einem unserer Münzbilder das Porträt Saladin’s erkennen wollte. Auch die der Zeit nach zwischen diesem gelehrten Franzosen und jenem deutschen Gelehrten fallenden bezüglichen Arbeiten von Reiske, Barthélemy, Eichhorn, Adler, O. G. Tychsen, Assemani und Castiglioni bieten uns, obgleich manch’ gut ausgesprochener Gedanke nicht abzuleugnen ist, viele Irrthümer und Zweifel, deren Berichtigung und Lösung ich ein anderes Mal versuchen will*”⁴.

This piece was bought for the Kunsthistorisches Museum at the auction of the collection of Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim (1773-1848)⁵ (fig. 2). In the catalogue of the sale,

* The part of the text written by each author is identified by her/his initials: Arianna D'Ottone Rambach (ADOR), Erika Zwierlein-Diehl (EZD), Hadrien J. Rambach (HJR).

¹ Karabacek 1894. In this work, for instance, some examples of Arabic block-prints were published for the first time; see Karabacek (ed.) 1894, 247-250 and Schaefer 2014, 4. My warmest thanks go to Lucian Reinfandt who kindly gave me a copy of this invaluable publication when we met in Vienna in November 2016.

² See Harrauer 2007; Karabacek 1894, 61-130.

³ Karabacek 1894, especially 96.

⁴ Karabacek 1870, 299-300. This was published in the first volume of the *Numismatische Zeitschrift*, of which he was co-editor with Christian Wilhelm Huber. Joseph Karabacek (1845-1918) worked in a number of fields such as papyrology, the history of Islamic manuscripts, Arabic Paleography – he actually held the first chair of Arabic Paleography created in Europe (Vienna 1872) – and Islamic numismatics. Karabacek’s interest in numismatics influenced his student, Leo Ary Mayer (1895-1959), author of the *Bibliography of Moslem Numismatics, India Excepted* (1939), see Vernoit 2000, 38.

⁵ It is interesting to recall here the interest Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim had for Islamic coins and his correspondence with Simone Assemani, see Callegher 2015. Some Islamic coins of the Welzl collection were



Fig. 1. Karabacek 1894, p. 96

Karabacek made reference to his papyrus catalogue, in which the medallion was used as a decorative illustration rather than as a historical piece of evidence, and wrote: “*The appearance of this piece is so singular that its study, which was not carried out in the aforementioned work in which it was only used as a decorative element, now appears to be justified*”.⁸ In this new, and more detailed study, Karabacek correctly defined the item as a *Gussmedaillon* (a cast medal) rather than a ‘cameo’ as described in his 1870 note and in the 1894 *Guide*. He also provided some information about its size and provenance, deciphered the Arabic inscription – attributing the piece to al-Malik al-Manṣūr II (r. 642-683/1244-1284),⁹ son of al-Muẓaffar ‘Uthmān¹⁰ – and identified the portrait as that of a young Roman emperor, citing Kenner’s opinion according to which the portrait was depicting one of Constantine’s sons.

published in the catalogue of the Stefano Di Mainoni coin collection – the catalogue dedicated by De Mainoni to Welzl de Wellenheim, see Schiepati 1820, 3-4. For the catalogue dedication, and for the coins, see 59-60: no. XXXIV, 61: no. XXXV, 64: no. XXXIX, 98: no. LXI.

⁶ Wellenheim 1844/45, 2.2, 588, lot 12368. The sale catalogue is listed as Clain-Stefanelli 1985, no. 14141*. The conversion of the Viennese pound with a number of other weight measures is given *ibid.*, 798. The bronze item which is now in Vienna, as lot 12368 of the 1846 Welzl auction, sold for 4.50 Gulden (at the time, the ducat coin weighed 3,4909 grams of 98,6% fine gold). This price seems relatively high, considering that a Roman gold coin with the two portraits of Claudius and Agrippina sold for only 15, and a very rare Otho in gold for 26 (silver coins of Nero could be bought between 0.20 and 1.6). Most bronze Islamic coins seem to have sold between 0.20 and 2.5, and important gold dinars (lot 12162 - Bagdad AH 256 / lot 12323 - Alexandria AD 583 / lot 12444 - Marrakech AH 1008) sold for 14.4 and 19.1 and 20. We are grateful to Basil Demetriadi for giving us access to his partially annotated copy of the sale catalogue.

⁷ Wellenheim 1844/45, 1, introduction, 2, indicates that the catalogue is written using Mionnet as a model, with the rarity of the ancient coins being described between R and R⁸. Vol. 1.1, Introduction, 3, however, indicates that four degrees of rarity are being used, from R to RRRR.

⁸ “*Die Erscheinung dieses Stückes ist so singular, dass seine Besprechung, welche an dem genannten Orte dem ausschliesslichen Zwecke als bildlicher Schmuck nicht angemessen schien an dieser Stelle ihre Berechtigung haben dürfte*” Karabacek 1893, 1.

⁹ “*Die Inschrift nun belehrt uns über den Besitzer, dem die vorliegende Gestaltung des Cameo zuzuschreiben ist. Es ist dies el-Melik el-Manṣūr Abū-l-Ma’ālī Muhammed II., Fürst von Hamāh, regierte 642-683 H. = 1244-1284 n. Chr.*” Karabacek 1893, 5.

¹⁰ See Ibn Shaddād, *Description*, 216 and footnote 878.

which started in Vienna on 7th January 1846, the item was described as “*In Hama (das alte Apamea). El-Melik el-Manssur Nassireddin Ebul-Meali Mohammed. J. 642 (1244) – 683 (1284). Medaillon von Messing einseitig mit dem belorb. Brustb. des Fürsten. Umschr. erhaben geschnitten: Ehre sei unserm Herrn, dem Sultan, dem Könige, dem Siegreichen, Weisen, Eroberer, Glaubenskämpfer, Ordner, Wehrhaften, Begünstigten, Sieghaften el-Melik el-Manssur Nassireddunya w’eddin Ebu l-Meali Mohammed, Gott erhöhe seinen Siegesruhm! Oval. G. 18 u. 15. S.g.e. RRR*”.⁶ This oval single-sided brass item was described as very well preserved (*sehr gut erhalten*), and very rare (RRR) rather than unique⁷, which was probably erring on the side of caution, as no other example is attested.

After the publication of the 1894 *Guide* to the Rainer papyrus collection, Karabacek returned to this object in issue CXXIX (1893) – published in 1894/95 – of the *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. In this article,

Apart from a couple of passing references in the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*¹¹ and in the on-line *Thesaurus d'épigraphie islamique* respectively, this unique 'princely witness' (*témoignage souverain*) kept in the *Münzkabinett* of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna seems to have been almost forgotten by scholars, by Arabists, historians, archaeologists and art historians alike.¹² It seems opportune to reconsider this *unicum* in the light of more recent studies, and discuss its meaning from a cultural, historical and art historical perspective, with a modern image of the medallion brass cast¹³ and one of the original item which it reproduces.¹⁴ (fig. 3-3a)

The hybrid nature of the original object – of which the Vienna brass cast is a somewhat inexpensive εἶδωλον (*eidolon*) – is due to the association of two different cultures, a Roman gem, with an imperial portrait, and an Arabic-Islamic text. “*Objects with portraits of famous historical figures like heroes and kings,*” observed Avinoam Shalem “*might also be regarded as tools of cultural transfer as soon as they start to function in a sphere that differs in race and religion to their own place of origin*”.¹⁵ It also seems interesting to consider the two-way cross-cultural movement – back and forth between Europe and Islamic lands.¹⁶

Moreover, this brass cast is a valuable addition both to the study of the history of collecting and of the role of antiquarianism in medieval Islamic lands,¹⁷ as well as the history of



Fig. 2. Josef Kriehuber (1800-1876), *Portrait of Leopold Wézl von Wellenheim*, Vienna 1843, lithograph, 200 by 185 mm. Munich, *Porträtsammlung des Deutschen Museum*, inv. PT 03945/01. Picture from Wikipedia

¹¹ RCEA 1939, 171-172, no. 3849. Despite the fact that the medallion is not dated, the piece is listed under the year 617/1220-21, see *ThEI*, nr. 4019 (location unknown): <http://www.epigraphie-islamique.org/epi/consultation.php> (last checked July 2019). They follow Karabacek's attribution to Ḥamā, but give a date – 617/1220 – when the ruler was al-Kāmil Muḥammad I (r. 615-635/1218-1237) rather than al-Malik al-Manṣūr II, who is named in the inscription; see *ultra*.

¹² With the exception of Avinoam Shalem, who makes a brief mention of the cameo as an example of “*objects of the Antique period which were kept in medieval Islamic treasuries*” and reproduces a drawing of it – see Shalem 2005, 108 and fig. 3 – the bronze cast has been absent from major exhibitions and catalogues such as the exhibition devoted to Ayyubid art organised at the *Institut du monde arabe*; see Delpont and Makariou (eds) 2001. References to Karabacek's 1893 article are, however, relatively frequent: see Heidemann 2006, 102; Shalem 2007, 175; Shalem 2010, 298; and Shalem 2011, 13, footnote 7, although the bronze cast is never illustrated or discussed in detail.

¹³ I am grateful to Michael Alram, who kindly provided me with this picture and invited me to describe the object for the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* database.

¹⁴ I had the chance to identify the original cameo, set as a centre-piece of the Devonshire necklace, in September 2020 – when this contribution was already written. This discovery confirmed most of the hypothesis already made and has been integrated in the text.

¹⁵ See Shalem 2005, 106.

¹⁶ See Shalem 2011a, 2-3.

¹⁷ The symposium ‘Antiquarianism in the Islamic World’ (New York, Bard Graduate Center, May 9-10, 2019) attests to the growing interest in the perception of the past in the medieval Islamic world.



Fig. 3. Bronze plaquette, Vienna coin-cabinet, inventory MK_OR_000683 (39.4 by 31.9 mm, 33.10 grams). Fig. 3a Devonshire (UK), private collection, the original cameo with the rim inscribed in Arabic set as center-piece of the Devonshire necklace in 1856

collecting Islamic objects in Europe between the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁸ This paper aims to investigate the historical and cultural context(s) linking the Roman imperial gem to the Ayyubid prince in Ḥamā on the one hand and, on the other, the interest in such objects as collectable casts in 19th-century Europe.

The item under discussion leads us to ask three main questions:

- what is the central portrait, and where does it come from?
- when was it inscribed in Arabic, and who owned the cameo at that time?
- when was this brass cast made and how did Welzl acquire it?

1. *The object* (EZD)

Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Münzsammlung, Inv.-Nr. OR 683 (fig. 3): “*Ein Ovale Gussmedaillon in braun patiniertem orientalischen Gelbkupfer. Höhe 40, Breite 32 mm. [...] Auf vertieftem, von einer hoch emporsteigenden kräftigen Randeinfassung umgebenem Grunde ein belorbeertes, mit der Aegis bekleidetes bartloses männliches Brustbild. Rechtshin, in Flachrelief. Der abgedachte äussere Rand enthält die folgende, links vom Scheitel des Hauptes beginnende arabische Relieffinschrift [...]*”¹⁹ (“An oval cast medaillon of brown patinated oriental brass. Height 40, width 32 mm. A male, laurel-wreathed beardless portrait bust, wearing the aegis in flat relief, seen from its right profile, on a deepened background surrounded by a high rim. The bevelled exterior rim has the following Arabic inscription in relief, beginning to the left of the crown of the head [...]”).²⁰

The medaillon measures 39.5 x 31 mm. The central oval with the portrait measures 28 x 21 mm, it is the cast of a cameo.²¹ The reverse is completely blank apart from some scratches, a casting flaw near the bottom left and two spots repaired with another silvery material,

¹⁸ On collecting Islamic art in 18th and 19th century Europe, see Vernoit (ed.) 2000, Bates (ed.) 2008, Labrusse 2011, especially 139-144 and 317-357, Bosc and Jacotin (eds) 2013. For collectors of Islamic art between the 18th and 19th centuries, especially in Italy and in Rome, see Stasolla 2010, Cecutti 2013.

¹⁹ Karabacek 1893, 1–2.

²⁰ See *infra*, paragraph II.

²¹ I am extremely grateful to Michael Alram and Georg Plattner for checking all the questions concerning the object, making very helpful auxiliary photographs and sending me an impression; as well to the restorer René Traum, who made the impression and examined the repair at the back.

probably tin, as René Traum supposes (*fig. 4*). The larger spot at the middle of the top according to Georg Plattner could indicate that there once was a loop for suspension which had been worked off and the defect coated with tin. The smaller tin spot near the upper right rim possibly covers a casting flaw.

That the original was a cameo is evident from two facts: 1. the tip of the nose is missing, but its outline can be made out in the background²² (this, by the way, is proof of the high quality of the cast). 2. There is a combination of relief and engraving for the light facial hair: the initial curl in front of the ear is given in relief, while two double curls, curling in a different direction, are engraved.

This is now confirmed by the detection of the original in the Devonshire collection by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach. The material is layered sardonyx with a light brown upper layer used for the wreath, the aegis and the upper part of the rim. The hair, the loop of the wreath, the face and neck are white, as is the second layer of the rim, with a light shimmer of the upper layer on the hair making it looking fair. The background and the outer part of the rim are brown.

Karabacek was of the opinion that the whole object had been cast from a stone cameo. His argument was the damage to the inscription above the tip of the laurel wreath, which he saw as a conchoidal fracture (*muscheliger Bruch*) typical of cameos. His conjecture is now confirmed by the original cameo. The unusual frame formed by the upper light brown layer (at the Vienna brass about 1,8 mm broad and 1,8 mm deep) stems from the fact, that the bevelled part is now at a deeper level, the Arabic inscription being carved in relief out of the white and brown layer of the original bevel²³. Proving the presence of a very skilled gem engraver at the court of al-Malik al-Manşūr II.

2. *The cameo portrait* (EZD)

The portrait shows the bust of the young emperor Nero in right profile, wearing the aegis demonstrating that he is equal to Jupiter²⁴. He wears a laurel wreath with a small loop and floating ribbons at the neck. The hair is combed forward in short curls from the crest of the head: at the front it forms a fringe of rather long, slightly wavy curls combed from the centre to the temples. The aforementioned whiskers that end as engraved curls reach the level of his chin, evidence the soft hair of a very young man. At the neck there are two rows of short curls. The beardless face has a nose with a fleshy tip, typical of Nero, seen here in outline as described above. The eye is looking upwards, the gaze marked by a deepened pupil in the upper part of the eyeball. The mouth is closed, the corners a little downturned, giv-



Fig. 4. Reverse of the same

²² Also described by Karabacek 1893, 3f. I refer to examples described and/or visible in the photograph: the upper end of Victory's whip and the lash next to it on the Gemma Augustea, Zwierlein-Diehl 2008, 103 fig. 46; 264; the upper part of the wreath held by Victory on the cameo in Nancy (here p. 148 no. 2), and cf. the outline left by the former larger portrait in front of the face of Hadrian on the large Berlin cameo, Platz-Horster 2012 no. 57, 81, pl. 12 detail. The phenomenon is not rare, but is seldom described, and seldom visible in the respective figures.

²³ For the original outlook of the bevel compare e.g. Vollenweider 2003, colour plates nos. 83, 223 and *passim*. Platz-Horster 2012 no. 55.

²⁴ Former identifications with Constantius II. (s. ADOR p. 144), Tiberius and Geta (s. HJR p. 160) may be dismissed on the base of actual knowledge on their respective portraits.

ing some gravity to the otherwise youthful face. The aegis is knotted at the shoulder similar to a chlamys or paludamentum; under the knot a small part of the naked shoulder is visible.

The hairstyle, with the hair at the front parted in the middle, is very similar to the first type of Nero portraits, called the ‘Parma type’ after a statue in Parma. This was first found on coins of 51 AD, when he was made princeps iuventutis and assumed the toga virilis.²⁵ The aegis, however, the attribute of an emperor, shows that the Nero of the cameo portrait had already ascended to the throne, and the somewhat longer whiskers correspond to the second type of Nero portrait, that is, to the first portrait type of his reign. This is the ‘Cagliari type’ after the portrait head from Olbia in the Museo Nazionale, Cagliari, inv. 35533.²⁶ This type is found on coins between 54 and 59 AD.²⁷ As the hair at the nape of the neck is very short, as on an aureus of 54 AD showing Nero facing his mother Agrippina,²⁸ the cameo can be dated to not long after Nero came to power.

Nero was born on 15th December 37 AD and became emperor, not yet 17 years old, on 13th October 54 AD. At the time there were great hopes for a *saeculum felicissimum* (“an era of prosperity”) as Seneca puts it in the prooemium of his satire on the death of Claudius,²⁹ and among the praise for Nero in *De Clementia*, dedicated to the emperor, are the sentences “*nemo unus homo uni homini tam carus umquam fuit, quam tu populo Romano*” (No human being has ever been so dear to another human being as you are to the Roman people) and “*omnibus tamen nunc civibus tuis et haec confessio exprimitur esse felices et illa nihil iam accedere bonis posse, nisi ut perpetua sint*” (Yet today, all your citizens are compelled to acknowledge that they are happy and that nothing more can be added to these blessings, except for them to last for ever).³⁰ Tradition has it that there followed the five good years, the *Quinquennium Neronis*, a phrase attributed to Trajan by writers of the 4th century AD.³¹ Cameos reflected this general hope in the language of art.³²

Marianne Bergmann has listed most of the cameos that are known at present to depict the youthful Nero, i.e., datable prior to 59 AD.³³ There are three multifigure compositions.

1. (m) The cameo at the shrine of the three kings in Cologne with Nero as Jupiter enthroned, crowned with laurel by his mother Agrippina Minor. The iconography points to a date soon after 54 AD: Köln, Dreikönigenschrein, 80.4 x 64.5 mm.³⁴

2. (k, l) The cameo from the reliquary of René of Anjou in Nancy with Nero as Jupiter carried by the eagle, which must have been created at the end of the 54–59 AD period, given that Nero has a light fluffy beard reaching to his chin: Nancy, from the reliquary of René of Anjou, 71 x 60 mm.³⁵

3. (i) A small cameo with the busts of Nero and Agrippina at the tips of the outspread wings of an eagle in Paris, which can be dated to the beginning of Nero’s reign given the difficulties that arose later between mother and son: Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, from the cabinet of Louis XIV, acquired in 1674 from Achille de Harlay, 24 x 20 mm.³⁶

²⁵ Hiesinger 1975, 113 pl. 17, 2; 118 pl. 20 fig. 29; Boschung 1993, 76.

²⁶ Hiesinger 1975, 114f. pl. 21, figs. 33, 34. Bergmann – Zanker 1981, 321f. Boschung 1993, 76.

²⁷ Hiesinger 1975, 114 pl. 17, 3–8.

²⁸ Hiesinger 1975, 114 pl. 17, 1.

²⁹ Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* I 1. 28f.

³⁰ Seneca, *De Clementia*, I, 1, 5 and 7, 96f. See Griffin 1976, 133–171.

³¹ See Griffin 1984, 37, 84, 244f., for the historical events; see particularly chap. 3: *The Golden Age*, 50–66.

³² Bergmann, 2007.

³³ Bergmann 2007, 20 note 18 fig. 16. The lowercase Roman numerals she uses are given here in brackets.

³⁴ Megow 1987, 213 A 98 pl. 35, 1.2; Zwierlein-Diehl 1998, 109–117 no. 1.

³⁵ Megow 1987, 214 A 99 pl. 35, 3; Zwierlein-Diehl 2008, 172f. fig. 130; 321.

³⁶ Megow 1987, 213 A 97; Vollenweider 2003, 108 no. 119 pl. 77.



Fig. 5. Sardonyx cameo of Nero, 49 by 38 mm. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles.



Fig. 6. Sardonyx cameo of Nero, 20 by 18 mm. Saint-Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, inv. GR-12662

To date, there are nine smaller cameos, or fragments of such, that are known that bear the portrait of the young Nero, including the brass cast discussed here. I will first list the fully intact busts according to clothing, then the fragments.

Three cameo busts of young Nero show him wearing the aegis as in cameos no. 1 and 2, thus representing him as emperor. In the large cameo in Paris (5) the aegis has a gorgoneion in profile and Nero's bare shoulder is shown. The upper dark layer in the cameo in St. Petersburg (6) is not large enough to show the whole wreath and aegis. A small part of the bare shoulder is also visible here. The hair at the front and the five layers of curls at the neck correspond to the Cagliari type. The Tiberius-like profile of the face and the untypical thin neck may stem from the fact that this is a reworking of an older cameo, but this can only be established by examining the original.

4. Brass medallion, cast from a cameo in the Devonshire collection, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Münzkabinett, Inv.-Nr. OR 683. 39.4 x 31.9, discussed here.

5. (g) Paris, Cabinet des médailles, "ancien fonds", attested in the collection in 1838. 47 x 37 mm, laureate bust with aegis plus gorgoneion, right profile.³⁷ (fig. 5)

6. (h) St. Petersburg, from the Orléans and Crozat collections. 20 x 18 mm, laureate bust with aegis, left profile.³⁸ (fig. 6)

Two cameos show the young Nero in public dress. In a cameo in private possession (7) the breast is shown in a three-quarter view. The toga rests on both shoulders over a white tunica; on the right shoulder a small part of it hangs in perpendicular folds, while on the left shoulder it is twisted. On the cameo in the British Museum from the Payne Knight collection (8) only the right shoulder is visible, covered by a twisted fold of the toga. In both cases

³⁷ Megow 1987, 211 A 93 pl. 34, 6; Vollenweider 2003, 174f. no. 222 pl. 116 ("Geta"). I am grateful to Mathilde Avisseau-Broustet for providing me with a photograph.

³⁸ Megow 1987, 215 A 103 pl. 34, 11; Neverov 1988 no. 79.



Fig. 7. Private collection, from the Bessborough collection

Fig. 8. London, British Museum, from the Payne Knight collection, inv. 1824,0301.21

the toga is made from the upper brown layer of the stone, also used for the laurel wreath. I take this to represent the purple stripe on the border of the *toga praetexta* worn by boys before taking the *toga virilis*. We thus have here two portraits of the young Nero before 51 AD. In both cases the features correspond to those of a boy no older than 13. In cameo no. 8 he also seems to be wearing a bulla.³⁹ In a cameo in the British Museum from the Blacas collection (? 9) Nero wears the paludamentum of high officers and emperors. Wolf-Rüdiger Megow has questioned the ancient origin of the piece, but at the moment there is neither a detailed description nor a good illustration of the cameo available. If the shoulder is bare, rather than covered with the shoulder lashes of a cuirass, then Megow's doubts are confirmed.

7. Private collection, from the Bessborough collection, 33 x 26 x 5 mm, laureate bust, clad in tunica and toga praetexta, left profile (tip of nose probably missing).⁴⁰ (fig. 7)

8. (d) London, British Museum, from the Payne Knight collection, inv. 1824,0301.21, 22 x 13 mm, bust with tunica and toga praetexta, right profile.⁴¹ (fig. 8)

9. (e) London, British Museum, from the Blacas collection, 32 x 24 mm. Laureate bust with paludamentum, right profile.⁴² Renaissance?

The following four cameos are fragments and show no clothing. Nos. 10–12 are laureate heads. The head from the Müller collection (13) wears an oak wreath, an attribute of the reigning emperor in line of succession from Augustus.⁴³

10. (b) London, British Museum, from the Ferenc Pulszky collection, inv. 1868,0520.2. 28 x 21 mm, fragment of relief, frontal laureate head.⁴⁴

11. (a) Content Family collection. 30.3 x 28 mm, fragment, laureate head with part of neck, right profile.⁴⁵

³⁹ As on the statues in the Louvre and at Parma, Hiesinger 1975, 115f. pl. 19 figs. 25–27; pl. 20 fig. 29.

⁴⁰ Boardman, 2009, 170, no. 374. Boardman and Wagner 2019, 52–53, lot 34 (with full bibliography). I am grateful to Claudia Wagner for the photograph.

⁴¹ Walters 1926, no. 3621 pl. 42 (“Bust of youthful Roman emperor”). Megow 1987, 212 A 96 pl. 34,7. Online catalogue (“Portrait of Geta [possibly]”).

⁴² Walters 1926, 3618 pl. 42 (“perhaps Elagabalus”). Megow 1987, 215 A 101 pl. 34,8 (Nero, probably post-antique).

⁴³ See Hiesinger 1975, 115.

⁴⁴ Walters 1926, no. 3600 pl. 39 (“probably representing a member of the Claudian family”); Megow 1987, 212 A 95 pl. 34, 4.5.

⁴⁵ Henig 1990, pl. VIII, 34 no. 59.

12. (c) Private possession, from the Hamilton collection. No measurements of the fragment, fragment of face and $\frac{3}{4}$ of laureate head, right profile; back of head and neck restored by Giovanni Pichler, in a modern gold setting, ht. 52 mm.⁴⁶

13. (f) Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum, from the collection of Klaus Müller, KM 301. 23 x 18 mm, fragment, head with oak wreath.⁴⁷

All these smaller cameos are of high quality and made by engravers working for the court (apart from the probably misdated no. 9). They were luxury items with no practical purpose, and probably worn as brooches or pendants. They were either gifts of honour of the emperor, or from someone in his milieu, or bought by admirers of the emperor.⁴⁸

3. *The inscription* (ADOR)

عزّ لمولانا السلطان الملك المنصور العالم العادل الغازي المجاهد المرابط المثاغر المؤيد المظفر المنصور ناصر الدنيا
والدين ابي المعالي محمد اعزّ الله نصره

Karabacek himself provides an accurate reading of the inscription as well as a German translation⁴⁹: *Honor to our Lord, the sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr*,⁵⁰ *the Learned, the Righteous, the Warrior, the Champion of faith, the Fighter, the Defender of the borders*⁵¹, *the Supported by God, the Victorious, the Victor, Protector of World and of Religion, Abū al-Ma‘ālī Muḥammad – God glorify his victory.*

The script used in the rim of the gem is a *naskh*,⁵² which is comparable, given the style of the script and the type of protocol, with other contemporary artefacts in various materials (metal, glass, marble). In particular, it bears close comparison, both for the protocol

⁴⁶ Tassie – Raspe 1791, no. 11065 “Cameo Sir Win. [French text: “Guil”] Hamilton at Naples. A fragment” s.v. Heads of Augustus crowned with laurel (without restorations). Jenkins and Sloane 1996, 193 no. 68.

⁴⁷ Megow 1987, 212 A 9 pl. 34,9. Zwierlein-Diehl 2002, 43f. 92 Cat. no. 106 fig. 98.

⁴⁸ See Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 16 ff.: *Ehregeschenke und Sympathiebekundung*.

⁴⁹ For a French version, see RCEA 1939, 171-172.

⁵⁰ For the regal title of the Ayyubids “content to use the simple title of *al-Malik* [...]” but who did not dislike being addressed as *sultān(s)* despite the fact that they were not seeking an official investiture by the caliph, Balog 1980, 45-46. Sull’uso e il significato politico dei titoli *sultān* e *malik*, see Lewis 2005, 60-66.

⁵¹ This is a term relatively rare, that must have been chosen by someone very well acquainted with the nuances of the Arabic language. Karabacek comments on the term *al-muthāghir* – which he translates as ‘*dem Beschützer der islāmischen Grenzen*’ (protector of the Islamic borders) – strongly criticizing Lane Poole’s tentative translation ‘*powerful*’: a sort of distorted form of *al-mutā‘izz*, despite the fact that the sixth form of the root ‘-z-z is not attested, see Karabacek 1893, 2 footnote 2. Karabacek also quotes Michelangelo Lanci (1779-1867) who, in his *Trattato delle Simboliche rappresentanze*, suggested translating *al-muthāghir* as *sterminatore/trice*, see Lanci 1846, 79-80. Lanci, however, was not sure about the meaning of the term and he wrote as follows: “Del *mothāgheri* المثاغري, *sterminatrice*, per mani venutoci nello antecedente e nel pisano arnese, avrete in avanti copia di esempli da accertarvi sul senno che gli appiccammo. Non mancano al nappo alcune mende dall’artefice create; ma tu, sapiente lettore, le saprai vedere, condonare e al nostro tenore correggere” (‘As for *mothāgheri* المثاغري, *exterminator*, that we encountered in the object from Pisa and in the previous one, you will find afterwards more examples to ascertain the meaning we gave to it. The cup has a number of flaws made by the artisan; however, you, learned reader, will notice them, and you will forgive and correct us accordingly’), Lanci 1846, 80. Karabacek did not greatly esteem Michelangelo Lanci’s epigraphical expertise (“keineswegs als epigraphisches Genie hervorragende Lanci”), see Karabacek 1893, 2, footnote 2. Michelangelo Lanci’s works and knowledge of Arabic often produced mixed feelings, some strong criticism – and occasionally open scorn – on the part of his contemporaries, as did his later scholarship; see D’Ottone Rambach 2019 with bibliography. On the root *th-gh-r*, Dozy writes as follows: “III, en parlant de guerriers, *se tenir sur les frontières*”, see Dozy 1881, 1, 159. For some Ayyubids metalworks (a basin in the Freer Gallery – Washington DC, and a tray in the Louvre - Paris) in which the adjective *muthāghir* is employed, see Hoffman 2004, p. 130.

⁵² In the RCEA the script is defined as “*naskhī* ayyūbide”, see RCEA 1939, 171.



Fig. 9. Marble basin with the name of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II, dated 676 (AD 1277-1278). London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 335-1903

ing features regarding the inscription: the presence of diacritical points (e.g. on the letters *zā'*, *fā'* and *nūn*); signs of *muhmila* above the letters *'ayn*, *rā'* and *ṣād* and the barb-type of head-serif in the *alif*-s and *lām*-s,⁵⁶ typical of the Ayyūbid script.⁵⁷

Moreover, it should be stressed that, unlike many Arabic inscriptions on objects preserved in the Latin West – which might have had an exotic allure or been charged with talismanic power⁵⁸ – the Arabic inscription around a Roman gem bearing the portrait of an emperor was intended to mark possession, and to stress the continuity between past and present⁵⁹. What has been observed with regard to decorative borders – that are not meant to separate the scene from the context but, rather, to function *with* the object they frame⁶⁰ – is even more the case for epigraphic borders with an open statement.⁶¹

An interest in, and interaction with, the pre-Islamic and Islamic past is attested in Ar-

and the script, with the inscription on a marble dodecagonal basin (Ar. *birkā*) dated 676/1277-78, from Ḥamā, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.⁵³ (fig. 9)

Further contemporary and local comparative material is provided by the coin issues attributed to Ḥamā during al-Malik al-Manṣūr II's reign, which are only undated *fulūs*,⁵⁴ in addition to other archaeological finds.⁵⁵

As for the Vienna brass cast and its original cameo, from a palaeographical point of view, one notes the follow-

⁵³ Inv. No. 335-1903. The basin was acquired in Cairo in 1903 from Albert Daninos-Pacha, but Migeron did not know to which structure it originally belonged; see Migeron 1921, 4-5 and pl. II. According to oral tradition, the basin came from the *Dār al-Afṣā* ('House of Joy') on the shores of the Orontes to which other architectural elements (capitals and columns) are attributed; see Riis et al. (eds) 1957, fig. 4 and Pentz 2000, 137. For the inscription, see RCEA 1943, 233-234, no. 4749; ThEI, no. 2393; Wood 2019 online (last checked July 2019). A glass goblet also comes from Ḥamā, datable to the years 1225-1250, with an epigraphic band conveying a succession of wishes to an anonymous sultan, see Makariou 2001.

⁵⁴ Two of these *fulūs* name al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb as overlord – for a second time Lord of Damascus in the years 643-647/1245-1249 – and al-Nāṣir Yūsuf – prince of Aleppo (634-658/1236-1259) and later sultan in Damascus (648-658/1250-1259). The few *fulūs* struck by al-Malik al-Manṣūr II have their legends in *naskh*; see Balog 1980, 50; 252-253, nos. 835-840 and pl. XLI. For the Ayyubid coinage in Ḥamā, see also Korn 1998.

⁵⁵ See Ploug et al. (eds) 1969, especially 34-46 (metal objects, excluding coins) and 173-174 (inscription on vases and other objects in bronze and ivory).

⁵⁶ On the head-serifs as a helpful detail in determining the style of the script, and on their four main types, see Gacek 2009, 122-123.

⁵⁷ All these features can be found in the inscription on the marble basin now in London, see *supra*.

⁵⁸ Many examples can be given in this respect: here we shall limit ourselves to mentioning the Ballycottin brooch, combining an Arabic engraved gem and Christian mount in the shape of a cross – see Porter and Ager 1999; the so-called Crescent of al-Zāhir in Nuremberg – see Shalem 2011a; St Peter's cathedra in Venice, see D'Ottone 2015, especially. 24-26, and a peacock-shaped bronze ewer in the Louvre with a dual inscription in Latin and Arabic; see Grabar 2002.

⁵⁹ On the significance of this medallion, and other objects, and the past, see Shalem 2005, 107-108.

⁶⁰ The concept of a 'frame' that both separates a work of art from the outside and displays it, is a modern construct that does hold for the Middle Ages, see Bonne 2015, 208-209.

⁶¹ On the practice of *takhlīd al-ism* ('perpetuating the name') in the Islamic tradition of book collecting, see Touati 2006, 67.

abic sources, texts, monuments and artefacts. In Islamic times, not only Pharaonic Egypt or the Hellenistic and Sasanian periods were regarded as a meaningful past due to the monuments, the artefacts or the knowledge they produced,⁶² but the Roman empire had also bequeathed ‘relics of the past’ (*reliquiae antiqui temporis*) – namely works of art – through which particular historical myths or accounts were perpetuated.⁶³ Moreover, a dialogue with history is also attested as regards the Islamic past itself: from this perspective it is worth recalling the insertion of al-Ma’mūn’s (r. 197-217/813-833) name into the inscription of the Dome of the Rock, a construction that dates back to the 1st/7th century,⁶⁴ or the fact that a sultan of the Seljuk of Rūm (2nd half of the 5th/11th-beginning of the 8th/14th century) was in possession of a 3rd/9th-century Qur’ān.⁶⁵

4. Thirteenth-century Ḥamā: the historical and cultural context (ADOR)

In the mid-7th/13th century, Ḥamā was one of the six main principalities – together with Egypt, Damascus, Ḥoms, Aleppo and Jazīra-Armenia – that formed the Ayyubid state (566-647/1171-1250) in which the governor was related to the eponym of the dynasty, i.e., to Ayyūb or his brother Shīrkūh.⁶⁶ Moreover Ḥamā “was the only Ayyūbid principality that survived the imposition of Mamlūk authority on Syria in the aftermath of the Battle

⁶² The interest in ancient Egypt – its pyramids and language – in Islamic times is attested by a number of works, anecdotes and chronicles. Suffice to mention here: al-Ma’mūn’s expedition to the Pyramids – see Cooperson 2010; the case reported by Ibn Umayl (4th/10th century) of a certain Abū’l-Ḥasan al-Ṣiqillī, who acquired for his own interests a manuscript containing drawings as well as statues of Upper Egypt from a Melkite monk – see Mandalà 2018, 129 and the *Kitāb shawq al-mustahām fī ma’rifat rumūz al-aqlām* (“The Long-Desired Fulfilled Knowledge of Occult Alphabets”) a text traditionally attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya (fl. 4th/10th c.), but possibly a work by Ḥasan ibn Faraj – see Coulon 2017, 127-134. It should be stressed that this text, as Coulon points out, should not be seen as a cryptographic repertoire for magicians and talisman-makers, but as a pseudo-historical work reassembling a number of lost notions from a remote past, which might have found its way into the library of a powerful patron, see Coulon 2017, 133. For the edition of Ibn Waḥshiyya’s Arabic text and an English translation, see Ibn Waḥshiyya, *Ancient Alphabets*. It is also interesting to recall what has recently been noted by Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Annette Sundermeyer, that is, that the publishing and translation of *Kitāb shawq al-mustahām* was carried out in a period of European *Egyptomania* following the discovery of the Rosetta stone. This scientific and editorial undertaking was intended to contribute to the deciphering of the hieroglyphs and the cracking of their code. Ibn Waḥshiyya’s treatise is thus “one of the earliest Arabic texts ever translated into a modern European language and, eventually, also one of the first Arabic texts ever printed in England”, Toral-Niehoff and Sundermeyer 2018, 260-261. For 6th7th/12th13th century Syria, it seems also meaningful to recall the ‘Classical Revival’ in architecture and art, see Heidemann 2013. For the Hellenistic period the famous *Farnese Cup* is one the possible examples of a work of art in the Treasury of the Timurids, see Barbanera 2003, esp. 434-438; Shalem 2005, 107-108. The now lost drinking vessel from the treasury of Marwān II (r. 126-132/744-750) is linked to the Sasanians, as pointed out by Shalem 2005, 107

⁶³ See Shalem 2005, 101-102.

⁶⁴ “Thus the building of the Dome of the Rock implies, on the part of ‘Abd al-Malik, what might be called a prise de possession of a hallowed area, in the same sense that, as Max van Berchem has shown, the substitution of al-Ma’mūn’s name for that of ‘Abd al-Malik in the inscription was not the act of a counterfeiter or a vain-glorious prince but had a political aim: “*détourner à son profit le prestige religieux et politique attaché aux créations de ses prédécesseurs*”. In meaning, therefore, the Dome of the Rock should not so much be related to the monuments whose form it took over, but to the more general practice of setting up a symbol of the conquering power or faith within the conquered land. Such were the *tropaia* of the Roman empire” Grabar 1959/2002, 57 / 245. On the Dome of the Rock and its inscriptions, see Milwright 2016.

⁶⁵ See Kessler 1970, 14. For other examples of book collecting in Islamic lands, see Touati 2006. Although from a later period, it is interesting to recall that the Timurids collected Chinese religious copies of paintings made by Persian court artists that later on, in the 15th and 16th centuries, were cut up and pasted into albums, see Yusen 2017.

⁶⁶ See Humphreys 1998, 5.

of ‘Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260’.⁶⁷ The numismatic evidence during the reign of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II only consists of copper coins that were struck for local circulation, even though the city “was also an imperial mint, in the sense that dirhems were issued there by several overlords of the empire”.⁶⁸

Apart from his active opposition to the Mongols, al-Malik al-Manṣūr II also promoted literature and the arts and sciences in Ḥamā.⁶⁹ In 641/1243-44 he commissioned, for example, an astrolabe from the famous astronomer and mathematician ‘Alam al-Dīn Qayṣar b. Abī l-Qāsim b. Musāfir al-Abraqī (d. 649/1251)⁷⁰, who was assisted by Ibn Wāṣil (Ḥamā 604-697/1208-1298).⁷¹ Ibn Wāṣil had trained in religious studies and the rational sciences, excelling in the field of logic. He served, probably as secretary (Ar. *kātib*), to the courts of Ḥamā and Kerak, and became a reputed scholar with an interregional career. Indeed, in Ayyubid and early Mamluk times he held various posts – as professor and judge (Ar. *mudarris* and *qādī*) – in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Moreover, he was appointed, by the Mamluk sultan Baybars (619-675/1223-1277), as head of a famous diplomatic mission to southern Italy, to the court of Manfred, the last king of Sicily (1232-1266).⁷²

Ibn Wāṣil arrived in Apulia⁷³ in 659/1260-61 and met the Hohenstaufen king near Lucera, where a Muslim colony had existed since 1224.⁷⁴ Despite the fact that we do not know for how long Ibn Wāṣil stayed at the court of the Hohenstaufen, it is worth recalling how Manfred II praised the treatise on logic that Ibn Wāṣil composed for him:⁷⁵ “*O my judge! We did not ask you about the allowed and forbidden in your religion of which you are a judge. Rather we asked you about things which were only known to the ancient philosophers. You answered them although you had no*

⁶⁷ Hirschler 2014, 144.

⁶⁸ Balog 1980, 30.

⁶⁹ For Ayyubids as scientific patrons, see Brentjes 2011.

⁷⁰ See Hirschler 2014, 137 and 143. ‘Alam al-Dīn Qayṣar ibn Abī l-Qāsim ibn Musāfir al-Abraqī (d. 649/1251) had already crafted a well-known celestial globe in 622/1225 for the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt al-Kāmil Muḥammad I (r. 615-635/1218-1237). In the 17th century the globe entered the Borgia collection and is now in the *Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte*. Karabacek mentioned that the globe was by Qayṣar ibn Abī l-Qāsim, but he did not mention the link to Ibn Wāṣil, see Karabacek 1893, 5-6. On the *globus caelestis*, see Assemani 1790, RCEA 1939, 221-222: no. 3924; Gabrieli and Scerrato (eds) 1979, 349; Savage-Smith 1985, 218-219; Tonghini 1993; Carboni 2001. The inscription on the globe starts with the formula *bi-rasm* ... (‘destined for ...’), which is a recurrent formula on various artefacts, for example metalwork and manuscripts; see D’Ottone 2016, 309. On the close relationship between theoretical scientists, such as astronomers and mathematicians, and artisans in the production of astrolabes, globes and sundials, see Saliba 1999; particularly 641-644. On the link between libraries/treasures containing books, as well as astronomical instruments and gems, see Touati 2006, 105-106 and 118.

⁷¹ See Hirschler 2014 with bibliography.

⁷² See Hirschler 2014. For the coinage of Manfred, see Spahr 1976, 211-219 and pl. XXVI. It is for Manfred (or for Charles d’Anjou, d. 1285) that part of Ibn Buṭlān’s text *Taqwīm al-ṣiḥḥa* (‘Tables of Health’) was translated into Latin, see Glick et al. (eds) 2005, 469.

⁷³ For the multilingual context of 13th century Apulia, from where – apart from Latin and Greek manuscripts and documents – Hebrew, Arabic, Runic and Paleoslavic written texts (inscriptions, signatures, rolls and codices) survive, see Arnesano 2018, esp. 316-317. In addition to the handwritten multilingual evidence indicated by Arnesano, we could also mention the use of Hebrew in cameos and intaglios produced for the Hohenstaufen; see *infra*.

⁷⁴ Much has been written on the Muslim colony at Lucera; see, for example, Taylor 2003.

⁷⁵ Two works on logic by Ibn Wāṣil survive: one of these is the treatise *al-Risāla al-anbarūriyya* (‘The Imperial Treatise’), originally written for Manfred II Hohenstaufen, but later modified by the author, and known, thanks to the single manuscript copied in Ḥamā in 680/1281, by the title of *Nukhbat al-fikar fī tathqīf al-naẓar* (‘The Pick of Reflection on Logic’); see Hirschler 2014, 137-138. On the Arabic terms *al-anbarūr* and *al-anbaratūr* used for the Hohenstaufen kings – the first deriving from an oral and somehow informal tradition linked to Old French and the second from the written tradition of Latin chanceries, see Mandalà 2011, 247

books or other material with you which you could consult”.⁷⁶ This scene has parallels in other, rather well known, stories in which “difficult questions [...] illustrate that the encounter between the two aimed at testing each other’s knowledge, namely exchange of information”.⁷⁷ The diplomatic mission on which Ibn Wāṣil was involved was an ideal occasion for the exchange of royal gifts⁷⁸ and it does not seem unlikely that a gem such the one reproduced in the Vienna cast might have been amongst the presents of friendship and goodwill that he brought back to Ḥamā and presented to al-Malik al-Manṣūr in the 660s/1260s.⁷⁹ In this respect, it is worth mentioning the so-called ‘Sicilian renaissance’, linked to the production of engraved gems at the court of the Hohenstaufen, was based on antique models.⁸⁰

5. *When was the cameo engraved in Arabic?* (HJR)

The Arabic inscription names an Ayyubid governor of Ḥamā, who reigned 1244-1284 AD, so we can assume that the cameo was in West-Central Syria at that time. Naturally, the cameo might have local origins, but it seems rather unlikely considering that the few cameos which are documented as being ‘from Syria’ tend to be later cruder gems,⁸¹ so we share EZD’s belief that it is a genuine Roman gem from the court-school, which was brought from the West (Italy) to the East (Syria).

Before ADOR’s identification of the original item, of which the bronze plaquette is a cast, as the central cameo in the ‘Devonshire necklace’ (on which see more *infra*), we had made various hypotheses as to the possible nature of the original. A Roman engraved gem (in a gold mount? Likely. A Roman coin found locally in Syria⁸² (as this right-facing laure-

⁷⁶ Hirschler 2014, 149.

⁷⁷ Shalem 2005, 103, in which Shalem refers to the Biblical story of the Queen of Sheba visiting the court of King Solomon in Jerusalem. It worth emphasizing the lively dialogue between Muslims and the Hohenstaufen. This is attested by Ṣālih ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja’farī (c. 581-668/1185-1270) and his work *Kitāb al-‘ashr al-masā’il al-musammā Bayān al-wādih al-mashūd min faḍā’ih al-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd*, which contains the answers to the questions sent by Frederick II to al-Malik al-Kāmil in the year 618/1221-22 – see Mandalà 2011 – and by the text of *al-Masā’il al-ṣiqilliyya* (‘Sicilian questions’) by Ibn Sab’īn (Murcia-Mecca 614-669/1217-1271); see Amari 1853; Mandalà 2007 with bibliography.

⁷⁸ On diplomatic missions as privileged occasions for the exchange of gifts, see Shalem 2012.

⁷⁹ After his return to Ḥamā from his mission to Apulia, Ibn Wāṣil wrote the chronicle entitled *Mufarrīj al-kurūb fī akhbār Banī Ayyūb* (‘The Dissipater of Anxieties on the Reports of the Ayyūbids’) that is of great importance in the study of the Crusades; see Hirschler 2014. On the edition of the section of the *Mufarrīj* relating to the years 646-659, see Ibn Wāṣil, *Chronik*. Before the edition of Ibn Wāṣil’s chronicle, some excerpts – that Michele Amari included and translated into Italian in his anthological work *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* – were known through Abū l-Fidā’s work *Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*. In particular, on the arrival of Ibn Wāṣil in Lucera, see Amari 1880, 2, 106-107.

⁸⁰ See Barbanera 2003, 426-427. On the conscious decision, from a stylistic and chronological point of view, to employ classical models for imperial iconography, and for the production of ‘state cameos’ used by the emperors themselves or given as gifts to leading courtiers, see Di Berardo 2006. The fact that the Farnese Cup itself was a Hohenstaufen treasure, makes it another famous example of an ancient object that passed into their possession from the Muslim East; see *infra*.

⁸¹ For example, the three cameos found in Syria, which are illustrated in Helig and Molesworth 2018, nos. 108 (Hygeia standing), 160 (standing Eros) and 317 (ear-holding hand), are all marked by their crude style. Similarly, a facing Gorgoneion found in Syria (Babelon 1897, no. 166) is also poorly executed. To date, there have unfortunately not been any studies dedicated to Syrian finds, nor are there any museum catalogues regarding Syrian gem collections.

⁸² We are grateful to Jean-Marc Doyen for this suggestion. The number of hypotheses raised in the present study is explained by the fact that the item under discussion is not documented in any source apart from a ‘reticent’ monochrome reproduction. “*The role of the archaeologist is one of empathy, breathing life into the dusty relics, inspiration, imaginative reconstruction, affective affinity. Archaeology becomes a personal confrontation with the past, ultimately it is*



Fig. 10. Silver tetradrachm of Nero, struck in Antioch in AD 63, 25 mm, ref. Prieur 89, provenance: Ponterio, auction 117, New York, 18 January 2002, lot 326; Roma Numismatics, auction 3, London, 31 March 2012, lot 434.

697/1298), was sent to the court of King Manfred of Sicily (r. 1258-1266), whom he met near Lucera in 1260-1261. The fact that southern Italian gem-engravers working for the Hohenstaufen court had access to Roman models is well known; in fact, this particular gem of Nero could have served as model, for example, for the cameo of Frederick II (Manfred's father, r. 1220-1250), which is now set in a cross in Brescia.⁸⁶ (fig. 11)

Interestingly, it has been argued⁸⁷ that the Farnese Cup once belonged to Frederick II which we then know arrived in the East (as a gift?). Similarly, it seems quite plausible that the cameo bust of Nero was brought back by the same envoy, either as a personal purchase to offer to his master or rather as an official court gift

ate bust of Nero wearing an aegis around his neck strongly resembles silver coins struck in Antioch⁸³? This seemed impossible, as coins are round. (fig. 10) A complete Arabic creation with a motif *all'antica*? But no Arabic engraved gem of the 7th/13th century is known to us,⁸⁴ and if it were a metallic imitation of a Western artefact (as opposed to a cast), the style would not be so perfect, and there would not be such a clear distinction between the surround and the centre.⁸⁵ ADOR's discovery solves the mystery.

As we have seen, an envoy of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II, named Ibn Wāṣil (604/1208-

based on a longing for a dialogue with the past, getting beyond the objects to their human creators, being in their presence" (Shanks Tilley 2016, 12). This is such a case: our role is to breathe life into this complex object.

⁸³ Prieur 2000, 12-14.

⁸⁴ On the contrary, Babelon 1897, LXIII, writes that "*les relations commerciales de l'occident de l'Europe avec les pays musulmans, étaient plus fréquentes qu'on ne le croit généralement, et elles ont certainement apporté dans l'empire carolingien des produits de la verrerie et de la glyptique arabe si florissantes en Syrie et en Egypte. Ces gemmes, gravées à Alexandrie, au Caire, à Tyr ou à Damas, ont, aussi bien que les gemmes byzantines, servi de modèles aux artistes normands de la Sicile, et aux artistes des bords du Rhin et de la Moselle*", although he is referring to crystal ewers rather than cameos. "*On trouve la mention d'un camée avec des saphirs dans un inventaire dressé à Acre en 1266*" (Rey 1883, 230); this lists the property left by Count Eudes de Bourgogne (c.1231-1266), but the item in question would have been an ancient gem.

⁸⁵ We did not get the opportunity of an in-hand examination of the item, which would have allowed us to describe in greater detail the metal flaw at nearly 12 o'clock. The original cameo is not pierced, so if indeed the bronze plaquette shows signs of a plugged hole, then it would suggest that it is not a cast of the cameo itself, but a cast of a cast – the intermediary item having been pierced (in order to be hung as a pendant or rather nailed as a decoration to a piece of furniture or to a wall). It is noteworthy that this hole (?) is not precisely at noon, which means that – once hung – the bust would not have been perfectly vertical, causing the emperor to look towards the sky – as on the 'Christian' heads of Constantine the Great on some of his coins.

⁸⁶ For example, the sardonyx cameo that depicts the *Portrait of Frederick II (1194-1250)*, 55 by 37 mm, set in the so-called Cross of Desiderio (9th century AD, 127 by 100 cm), Museo di Santa Giulia, Brescia. See Kahsnitz 1977, 483 fig. 360; Sena Chiesa 2001, 365, fig. R; Sena Chiesa 2002, 206, no. 43. (Photo © <http://www.turismobrescia.it/it/punto-d-interesse/la-croce-di-desiderio>) On Hohenstaufen gems in general, see Wentzel 1941; Deér 1953; Wentzel 1955; Wentzel 1958; Wentzel 1962; Nau 1966; Kahsnitz 1977; Giuliano 1980; Weber 1981; Giuliano 1983; Giuliano 1988-1989; Di Berardo 1995; Pace 1995; Barbanera 2003; Di Berardo 2006.

⁸⁷ The Farnese Cup was acquired by Lorenzo de' Medici in 1471, but its provenance remains disputed: Panuti 1989 argues that it was already owned by Frederick II in 1239, but Barbanera 2003 disagrees and suggests instead that the cup travelled from Alexandria to Rome and then to Constantinople (in Antiquity) before going to Samarkand and then back to Italy. Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 247, raises another hypothesis, whereby the cup travelled from Alexandria to Pontus, to Asia Minor, and finally to Samarkand and then Italy.

Fig. 11. *Portrait of Federico II di Svevia (1194-1250)*, 13th-century sardonyx cameo, 55 by 37 mm, Museo di Santa Giulia, Brescia.

Fig. 12. Hohenstaufen cameo of *Athena and Poseidon*, sardonyx cameo, 95 x 78mm including gold mount. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des médailles.



The Arabic inscription was carved on the stone itself. An example of this technique (though in negative rather than in relief) can be found on the Hohenstaufen cameo of Athena and Poseidon in Paris,⁸⁸ which has a legend in Hebrew carved around the edge. (fig. 12) In the multilingual context of the Hohenstaufen court of the 13th century, a gem-carver capable of inscribing a stone in Hebrew would almost certainly have been able to do so in Arabic too; and if one makes the hypothesis that this was an official gift intended for an envoy to take back to an Arab prince, then it would make sense for the Hohenstaufen king Manfred to have had it inscribed. But the legend would most likely include the name of the donor in addition to that of the recipient; and furthermore, the type of script suggests that it was, in fact, inscribed in the East. Therefore, one must assume that the Arabic inscription was added in Syria.

The Vienna plaquette is evidence of a Roman artefact that had previously been in the East, and this is not the only example of a Western engraved gem that entered an Arabic treasury. Indeed, the Farnese Cup itself was seen and drawn in Persia by the artist Muḥammad b. Maḥmūdshāh al-Khayyām, c.1430.⁸⁹ (figs. 13-14) Much later, in a portrait by the artists Abū'l-Ḥasan and Hāshim, the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (1569-1627, 'the world seizer') is depicted wearing a three-string pearl necklace from which hangs a cameo, which may be a Roman bust of a bare-chested Apollo (or Bacchus), unless it is a 16th century bust of Livia (or Cleopatra or Lucretia).⁹⁰ (fig. 15) In fact, numerous Roman intaglios of great quality

⁸⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des médailles, sardonyx, 95 x 78 mm including gold mount. Owned by the French king in 1379. See Babelon 1897, 18-21, no. 27; Kahsnitz 1977, 1, 693-694, cat. no. 886 and vol. 2, pl. 660; Distelberger 2002, 60-62, cat. no. 17. See also Rambach 2011b, 280-281, pl. 31, where the author attributes the entire gem to the mid-13th century, whilst Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, 23-24, cat. no. 565, considers it to be possibly Claudian, but heavily re-engraved since antiquity. The cameo was already in the French royal collection in 1379. Rambach 2011b, 285, note 64: "I am most grateful to Shua Amorai-Stark for examining the Hebrew inscription engraved in Sephardic letters on this cameo. It reads וְכִי תֵאָדֶה-הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִהְיֶה הָעֵץ וְתֵרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל and is the first half of a sentence in Genesis 3:6. A study of the script reveals spelling mistakes and miscomposed letters, due to the incompetence of the engraver (and/or the incorrectness of his model). Indeed, and I quote Dr Amorai-Stark, 'the mistakes in the writing of certain letters, for example of the ש (sh) in הָאִשָּׁה (the woman) or the ט (t) in טוֹב (good); and some of the words are divided into units all show that the engraver did not know Hebrew', which indicate that neither engraver nor patron were Jews".

⁸⁹ Gem: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 27611/1782; see Pannuti 1994, 91-93, no. 68. Drawing: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, inv. Diez A. Fol. 72, 3, no. 2; see Belozerskaya 2012, 98, fig. 5-2.

⁹⁰ Miniature with the double portrait of Jahāngīr and Jesus, 62 by 54 mm, in a folio from the Minto Album



Fig. 13. Muhammad ibn Mahmudshah al-Khayyam, drawing c.1430 of *The Tazza Farnese*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, inv. Diez A. Fol. 72, p. 3, no. 2.

Fig. 14. Miniature with the double-portrait of Jahangir and Jesus, 62 by 54 mm. Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, inv. 07A12.

were exported to the East and reused at a later date, such as a bust of Tiberius (1st-century AD) which was later pierced and to which a Sasanian inscription was added (“*Mihkak, son of Frahad, looks towards the luminous heaven*”).⁹¹ (fig. 16) A noteworthy gem, which remains mysterious, is a carnelian intaglio in Paris, already described by Caylus and Mariette in the 18th century:⁹² although in appearance it is an ancient Roman gem with an added inscription in Arabic, the general style suggests that it is a Renaissance creation.⁹³ (fig. 17)

The Arabic inscription surrounding the gem can be read as a mark of possession, which is a rare occurrence with engraved gems.⁹⁴ An obvious, but highly important exam-

(Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, inv. 07A12); Wright 2008, 336-339, cat. no. 48. Other cameos, but of uncertain age, can be found in Mughal miniatures, such as in the supposed portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Hadī, Mīr Bākhshī to Shāh Jahān (Jahāngīr’s son), c.1640-1647 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. IS48:6/A1956); see Rambach 2011a, 139, footnote 19.

⁹¹ Yellowish grey chalcedony, 33 by 25 by 7 mm, “trouvée à Elam” in Iran, and given by Henri Seyrig in 1973 to the Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. 1973.1.516. Vollenweider 2003 no. 80; Betti Gariboldi 2009.

⁹² Carnelian, 30 by 25 mm. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. 58.1580; Chabouillet 1858, 217, no. 1580. We are grateful to Erika Zwierlein-Diehl for informing us of this gem, and for sharing her notes on its paste reproduction in Würzburg (inv. G 1250, 35 by 29 by 8.5 mm). We also thank Mathilde Broustet for providing us with a photograph.

⁹³ Moreover, as noted by Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, the shape of the anvil seems modern, and the exact motif has no ancient parallel.

⁹⁴ Important numismatic examples of ownership marks are the eagle countermark in silver or gold of the House of Este in the 16th century (see Rambach 2017 and Rambach 2018) and the rare, supposedly 17th-century, ‘crowned C’ (often, but mistakenly, believed to be the collector’s stamp of Queen Christina of Sweden; see Rambach 2017, 105-106).

Fig. 15. Mid-fifteenth-century plaquette of *Antonia Minor depicted as Ceres*, bronze, 51 by 42 mm (without suspension loop), 46.2 grams. Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, inv. Kress 1657.14.169.



Fig. 16. Intaglio bust of Tiberius, chalcedony, 33 by 25.7 mm, later engraved in Sasanian. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques, inv. 1973.1.516.



ple of this is the *ex-gemmis* of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-1492), who employed engravers to add his name to his most precious engraved gems.⁹⁵ One of his intaglios, an Augustan carnelian depicting Apollo and Marsyas,⁹⁶ is particularly relevant to this discussion as, before having Lorenzo's ownership inscribed on it after its acquisition in 1487,⁹⁷ it had been mounted in a ring by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) in about 1428 (or 1434-1443), with a spurious inscription that read NERO. CLAUDIVS. CAESAR. AVGVSTVS. GERMANICVS. P. MAX. TR. P. IMP. PP.⁹⁸ (fig. 18) This inscribed gold mount fostered the belief that the gem had originally been used by the Roman emperor Nero as his seal.⁹⁹ However,

⁹⁵ This inscription should be understood as LAUR.MED (for LAUREntius Rex MEDices/iceus) rather than LAUR. MED (for LAUREntius MEDices/iceus). See Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 266; Rambach 2011a, 140.

⁹⁶ Dark red carnelian intaglio, with lighter layers, attributed to Dioskourides (1st century IBNC.), 40 by 37 by 7 mm (carving 2.5 mm deep), flat front and slightly convex back. With Lorenzo de' Medici's *ex gemmis*. Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 26051. It was probably in the collections of Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) and his son Giovanni (1421-1463) by 1428, then acquired by Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan (1402-1465) between 1434 and 1443, and purchased in 1465 from his estate by Pope Paul II (Pietro Barbo, 1417-1471). On his death, it was bought by art and jewellery dealer Domenico di Piero (d. 1497), who sold it to Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-1492) in 1487. The carnelian intaglio remained in the Medici collection until the second quarter of the 16th century, when the widow of Alessandro de' Medici (c.1510/11-1537), Margaret of Austria (1522-1583), married Ottavio Farnese (1524-1586); it then stayed in the Farnese collection until their gem collection merged through inheritance with the Bourbon collection. In the late afternoon of 11th October 1972, Paolo Tinti was taking this item to be photographed for an exhibition, when he accidentally dropped it; it fell onto the marble floor and broke into five pieces.

⁹⁷ The gem has recently been identified with “una corn[i]uola con due figure intagliate in chavo, uno vecchio et una femmina, in uno chassettino d'ariento biancho” in Trevisan's inventory of 20-21 and 25 April 1465: Florence, archivio di Stato, Notarile antecosimiano 4823, 98v, quoted and commented on in Fusco and Corti 2006, 246 note 45 and pp. 335-336 doc. 202. If this identification is correct, the gem was undoubtedly of great value as it was kept in a silver box, despite no longer being in Ghiberti's golden mount; this gives a *terminus ante quem* for its unsetting.

⁹⁸ This is the actual title of the Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 37-68) on many ancient coins, being the abbreviated form of *Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Pontifex Maximus Tribunicia Potestate Imperator Pater Patriae*; see Medri 1978.

⁹⁹ Rambach 2011a, especially p. 132; Zwierlein-Diehl 2018. The association with Nero also made sense because of Nero's well-known veneration of Apollo and of his performances as *Kitharoidos*. The iconography of this intaglio was not fully understood for a long time, and not until Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) at least: see

as in the case of the present item, this carnelian was an ancient Roman gem set in an inscribed mount several centuries later.

6. *The recent history of the actual engraved gem* (HJR)

The gem reproduced by the Vienna bronze cast is currently set as the centerpiece of the necklace of the remarkable Devonshire parure, which was executed with several of the best engraved gems to be found in the 500+ collection of the Dukes of Devonshire, for Princess Marie Louise Peline von Dalberg (1813-1860), 2nd Countess of Granville, to wear at the coronation of Tsar Alexander II in Moscow on 7 September 1856.

Exhibited at Sotheby's in New York as recently as summer 2019, the parure was first studied in print by Charles Frederick Hancock¹⁰⁰, and more recently, and more scholarly, by Diana Scarisbrick¹⁰¹. This cameo is not included in the eighteenth-century selected catalogue of the Devonshire gem collection¹⁰², which would have given a *terminus ante quem* for the acquisition of the cameo. Could it be that it was rejected from the selection because of the Arabic legend, or was it purchased after the death of William Cavendish, 2nd Duke of Devonshire (1672-1729)? In any case, it is listed in Lorenz Natter's manuscript of 1761 entitled '*Catalogue de pierres gravées de la fameuse collection de Monseigneur le Duc de Devonshire*' (which is still preserved at Chatsworth House, and of which one can find copies in the British Library and Beazley Archive)¹⁰³.

The gem reproduced in the Vienna plaquette, depicting the bust of a Roman emperor surrounded by an inscription in Arabic, was described by Natter in 1861 as "*très bonne (sic) ouvrage*" (p. 58, no. 2). Then in 1857, Hancock described it as "42. *A Cameo of the Emperor Tiberius, forming the centre of the Necklace. A fine Roman gem, the head is white on a dark ground, the laurel wreath and border brown, outside the border is an inscription in Arabic, shewing that it formerly belonged to a Mamluk Prince of Cairo, called Alnaser Abu Sâadal Mahammed, who reigned about A. D. 1496*" (p. 10). And in 1986, Scarisbrick described it as "42. *Sardonyx cameo. Bust of Geta (obit. A.D. 212), wreathed and wearing aegis, facing towards the right. The beveled edge is inscribed in Arabic, translating: 'Glory to our Lord the Sultan, the Victorious King, the Wise, the Just, the Champion of Islam, he who fights the Holy War, Guardian of the frontiers, Warden of Islam, He who is Strengthened by God, the Triumphant, the Victorious Supporter of the World and of the Faith, Abu'l Ma'ali Muhammad – May God Glorify his Victory'. 32 x 40. Damaged. The inscription refers to Sultan al Mansur II of the Ayyubid dynasty, ruler of Hama in Syria 1244-84*" (p. 249), with the commentary: "*a portrait in the Imperial manner is the sardonyx bust of Geta, wreathed and wearing the aegis of eagle feathers and snakes alluding to the protection of Jupiter and Medusa. Subsequently such gems became the prized possessions of princely lovers of the art of engraving, who had them inscribed with their names – the hardstone counterpart of an ex-libris bookplate. In the medieval period this cameo belonged to the sovereign al Mansur II of Hama in Syria from 1244 to 1284, whose name and titles are inscribed in Kufic letters on the beveled edge. A bronze cast, now in Vienna, was acquired in 1846*

Chastel 1982, 48-49. Ghiberti himself believed that the gem depicted the three ages of man. In contrast, one wonders whom the Arab owner thought this gem depicted.

¹⁰⁰ Hancock 1857

¹⁰¹ Scarisbrick 1979a; Scarisbrick 1979b; Scarisbrick 1986; Scarisbrick 2003 (*non vidi*).

¹⁰² du Bosc 1730.

¹⁰³ I assume that this text is the same as that preserved in Natter's manuscript inventories of the collections of engraved gems of the Earl of Carlisle, the Dukes of Devonshire and Rockingham, preserved in the Research Library of the State Hermitage Museum, Inv. Nos. 46872, 46873. Those manuscripts must not to be confused with Natter's manuscript "Museum Britannicum", on which, see Kagan 2010 and Boardman Kagan Wagner 2017. A later manuscript catalogue, also at Chatsworth, is A. Strong's '*Report on the Devonshire Collection of Gems*', finished in 1909 by E. Strong.

Fig. 17. Sardonyx, 16.3 by 12.3 by 2.6 mm: Krakow, National Museum, inv. no. MNK-Ew-IV-zł-599, from the Schmidt-Ciążyński collection (private inventory no. 3713).

Fig. 18. Carnelian, 30 by 25 mm. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. 58.1580



with the coins and medals of Welzl von Wellenheim, and it belongs to a group of fifteenth-century replicas of famous gems, most of them from the collection of Pope Paul II, and ascribed to Roman workshop” (p. 243): she noted that the identification of the sitter as Geta was done for her by Marie-Louise Voltenweider, and that the reference to Karabacek was provided to her by Ralph Pinder-Wilson.

ADOR’s discovery of the actual stone is very important, but several of the questions asked in this article remain, and notably: where and why was the Arabic inscription added to the cameo, and when was the bronze plaquette executed?

7. *When and where was the brass cast made?* (HJR)

Karabacek only wrote about the original item, not taking into account the question of who created this uniface medal¹⁰⁴ or where and when it was made. Nevertheless, these issues should also be considered as this is the only item of this type whose existence is actually confirmed. Karabacek, who knew the bronze cast in Vienna but not the original in England, had not considered the possibility that this brass object is not the cast of an actual Roman-Arabic piece, but a modern object, created from scratch as a collector’s piece. Indeed, might it be an early 19th century fake, made to provide collectors with an orientalist item¹⁰⁵? Although this might defy logic, as its commercial value could never have been very high, this is admittedly not a convincing argument *per se*, as is proved by the existence

¹⁰⁴ We prefer to call this cast a ‘medal’ rather than a ‘plaquette’ despite being uniface, according to the definition provided by Frey Salton 1947, 184: “*Plaquette is the name given to a variety of uniface medal, usually of a quadrilateral, hexagonal, or octagonal form*”.

¹⁰⁵ Nineteenth-century goldsmiths knew how to make high quality forgeries which caused confusion for decades (see Kugel 2000, Krautwurst 2003 and Truman 2012), although these were all made at a later date than this plaquette: Welzl could not have acquired his piece prior to the early 1840s, whilst Reinhold Vasters (1827-1909) and Alfred André (1839-1919) lived even later. Similarly, Mosque lamps had been copied superbly, but also in a later period. For example, Philippe-Joseph Brocard (1831-1896) only seems to have been active from c. 1865 onwards, and both Eugène-Victor Collinot (1836-1882) and Théodore Deck (1823-1891) were active in the 1860s-1870s: see Labrusse 2011, esp. pp. 260-285 (chapter “Pratiques. ‘Renaissance orientale’, les ambiguïtés d’un mythe”). Nevertheless, some Western imitations of Eastern artefacts are attested quite early on, and it has, for example, been noted that “*Iznik has been one of the most reproduced of all ceramics – from the 17th century Italian pieces from Padua; 18th century Istanbul (Tekfur Serai), Kutahya, or Berlin; 19th century European copies by Cantagalli or Samson*” (Watson 2004, 520). We should also mention a turquoise glazed jar that entered the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1876 with a note reading “*Mr Caspar Clarke ... says that about a dozen jars of this design were made in Persia about 30 years ago for a French gentleman*” (Watson 2004, 524).



Fig. 19. Bronze plaquette of *Apollo and Marsyas*, cast from the Roman carnelian intaglio after it was set by Ghiberti – documenting the mount and its inscription, 44 by 42 mm. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 5173

that it was made.¹⁰⁹

Medals and plaquettes are often of major importance in the study of engraved gems. For example, it is thanks to plaquettes that we know that the right foot of the Wind on the aforementioned Farnese Cup was already missing in the late 15th century.¹¹⁰ Other examples are the four rectangular reliefs by Caradosso (on a silver inkstand that was described in 1525, now lost): two of them seem to have been reproduced in brass plaquettes, which not only let us know what they looked like, but also allowed Emile Molinier to attribute other artworks to Caradosso by comparing the style to those plaquettes.¹¹¹

of a (17th/18th century) intaglio engraved with a post-Classical head of Julius Caesar with a pseudo Arabic inscription¹⁰⁶ (fig 17). Nevertheless, the correct, neat and elegant inscription on the Vienna brass suggests that any such doubts would be out of place here, and that we are indeed dealing with the cast of an actual Arabic artefact as confirmed by the discovery – after those lines were written – of the original cameo.

It has been established that the earliest medal was created in Italy¹⁰⁷ long after the reign of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II, and that the Vienna item resembles a 16th century piece rather than a very early one. There was a tradition of making plaquettes and medals in Europe,¹⁰⁸ but not in the East, so it must be assumed that a Westerner created the item now in Vienna. This, however, does not tell us where the original object was found, as it could have been cast from a mould executed by a visitor. Nor does it tell us the date

¹⁰⁶ Sardonyx, 16.3 by 12.3 by 2.6 mm: Krakow, National Museum, inv. no. MNK-Ew-IV-zł-599, from the Schmidt-Ciążyński collection (private inventory no. 3713). We are grateful to Paweł Gołyźniak for informing us of this item. On the collection of Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński (1818-1889), see Gołyźniak 2017.

¹⁰⁷ The earliest medal was struck in the 1390s to commemorate Francesco I da Carrara (see Flaten 2012, 5 and Scher 2019, 282), whilst the first plaquettes were cast in the mid-1420s (Flaten 2012, 10), following Donatello's invention of *rilievo schiacciato* in c.1417 for the predella to the St George statue for Or'San Michele in Florence (Lewis forthcoming, and private communication by the author). Eimer 2019 indirectly discusses the issue of Arabic-made medals, reconsidering the earlier assumption that his plaquette of Sultan Mehmet II had been cast in Naples, "produced in the course of the gift-bearing embassies that the sultan exchanged in the mid-1460s". He notes, for example, that Pisanello's medal of John VIII Palaiologos was executed in the late 1430s in Italy and not in the East (he even adds "a specimen is thought to have found its way to the treasury in Constantinople", though that is where the sitter lived), and also that Mehmet wished to commission his portrait from Matteo de' Pasti, but that it was never made as "Matteo never reached the Ottoman court". Medals and plaquettes remained a Western tradition.

¹⁰⁸ Including in the 19th century, reproducing items by casting/electrotyping: see Vangelli 2019 regarding casts and Duncan 1992 on electrotypes.

¹⁰⁹ We are most grateful to Douglas Lewis for his comments on the Vienna plaquette, the coarseness and rough finish of which are unlike Italian Renaissance works.

¹¹⁰ Dacos 1989, 72.

¹¹¹ Legé 2019, 94.

Fig. 20. Bronze plaquette of *Apollo and Marsyas*, cast from the Roman carnelian intaglio after Lorenzo De' Medici had his name inscribed. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. A.402.1910

Fig. 21. The “Seal of Nero”, Roman carnelian intaglio, 1st cent. B.C., 40 by 37 mm, Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 26051.



The ‘seal of Nero’ is particularly significant in providing a direct parallel to the Vienna item, since it was immediately reproduced as medals and plaquettes,¹¹² the earliest of which include Ghiberti’s inscribed mount. It is believed that the poor-quality casts, which show the gem surrounded by Ghiberti’s band and legend, were made from a cast by Pietro Barbo in his Roman foundry at a time when the original intaglio was still owned by Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan (1402-1465). Barbo, who by then had become Pope Paul II, acquired the gem from Trevisan’s estate, and he was then able to have perfect bronze casts made. Later still, Lorenzo de’ Medici had bronze casts made in Florence with inscriptions proclaiming his ownership. (figs. 19-20-21) Therefore, the various states of the ‘seal of Nero’ medals and plaquettes also relate the history of it how it was collected,¹¹³ and the earliest indicate the settings that were subsequently melted down – something which probably happened to the original of the Vienna piece.

8. *The provenance of the plaquette* (HJR)

This brass plaquette appeared in the auction of the collection of Leopold Johann Welzl, who was born on 15th November 1773 in Hroby (in Bohemia, now the Czech Republic) and died shortly after 9th February 1848 in Vienna. A *kaiserlicher und königlicher Hofrat* (imperial advisor), who retired on 3rd November 1835,¹¹⁴ he had been ennobled as “Welzl von Wellenheim” on 1st February 1808. His arms are found on his certificate of nobility (*Adelsdiplom*)¹¹⁵, which could be the occasion for which he had a medal struck (in silver and in copper) with his name in a wreath on one side and his arms on the other¹¹⁶. (figs. 22-23) His appearance is known from two lithographs by Josef Kriehuber (1800-1876) dated 1843¹¹⁷ and 1846, and from a 1844 watercolour by Anton Hähnisch (1817-1897). (figs. 2-24-25)

¹¹² Caglioti Gasparotto 1997; Rambach 2011a, footnote 18.

¹¹³ It has been hypothesized that the plaquettes with an inscribed mount were not direct casts from the intaglio in its mount, but rather copies of the mount executed for the plaquettes. Indeed, Nicole Dacos did not believe that these “gothic” letters could be designed by Ghiberti (Dacos 1989, 72), while Francesco Rossi considered the inscription to be a late humanistic pastiche (Rossi 1989, 58, no. 63). Bertrand Jestaz, however, considered the letters to be normal *all’antica* capitals (Jestaz 1997, no. 81), and it seems most implausible that these plaquettes are not casts from Ghiberti’s mount.

¹¹⁴ Neumann 1868, 70-71.

¹¹⁵ These arms were described in Taschenbuch 1870, 449. On his ennoblement, see Frank 1974, 202.

¹¹⁶ VNP 1852, no. CXCIII, pl. LXXIV.641; Neumann 1870, 686-687 and pl. LXXIV.

¹¹⁷ Ref. Wurzbach 1955, 385. A modified version of this portrait was later used as frontispiece in Moltheim 1895.



Fig. 22. Silver token with the name and arms of Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim, 6.08 grams, 23 mm diameter. Sold by H. D. Rauch, auction 95, Vienna, 30 September 2014, lot 2162.

preparation for the sale of the collection.¹²¹ Wellenheim's Roman coins were described by the keeper of the Vienna coin-cabinet, Franz Vincenz Eitl (1800-1868), while Achilles Postolakkas (1821-1897) – future keeper of the Athens numismatic museum, but at that time a student in Vienna – catalogued the Greek coins.¹²² The medieval and modern coins were supposedly described by Josef von Bergmann,¹²³ then in charge of the coin collection of Ambras Castle (now part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum), although it seems unlikely that a single person could have been in charge of such a large and diverse group of items. The auction was so important that numerous dealers came from abroad to attend, notably the young Jean-Henry Hoffmann (1823-1897), who travelled from Paris. It is noteworthy that the collection had previously been sold on 4th February 1843 by Welzl to his eldest son, and

Despite his profound numismatic knowledge¹¹⁸, Welzl wrote very little himself: we know of an 1839 essay on the coins of the county of Gorizia,¹¹⁹ and of undated and unpublished texts on Roman/Byzantine coins and on coins from Friesach (a town in Carinthia).¹²⁰ He collected for over forty years and built up an exceptional *ensemble*. Suffice to say, an indication of the importance of his collection is that it contained nearly fifty thousand coins and medals (and a large numismatic library).

A catalogue was printed in 1844-1845, in

¹¹⁸ Durand 1865, 219: “*Welzl était très-versé dans l'histoire et connaissait parfaitement les langues française et italienne. Il fut membre de plusieurs sociétés savantes*”.

¹¹⁹ Wellenheim 1839.

¹²⁰ Wellenheim s.d.

¹²¹ Three volumes in-octavo: 380, 338, (2), 18; (4), 604, (2), 47, (1); (4), 805, (3) pages. The first volume described 16,767 + 198 lots of ancient coins (8,116 lots of Greek coins, 8,538 lots of Roman coins and 198 lots of seals), which were sold on 15th February 1847 (Greek coins) and on 18th October 1847 (Roman coins). The second volume described 12,428 + 861 lots, which were sold on 10th February 1845 and the third volume described 15,818 + 9 lots, which were sold on 7th January 1846. In total, the sale contained 28,240 lots of medieval and modern coins, as well as 861 lots of books. The catalogue was printed by J. P. Sollinger on behalf of the stamp dealer J. Bermann and Son, located on the Graben (not far from the shop of current Vienna numismatist Hans-Dieter Rauch). Although the title-page is in both French and German, as is the introduction, the catalogue itself is written in German only. Despite its appearance as a book, the volumes bear the information that the auction will take place at 105 Mülkerhof (now ‘Melker Hof’) and provides the dates. As for the Islamic coins in the Welzl Collection, there were just over five hundred pieces – catalogue numbers 12079-12608 – in the second part of the second volume of the sales catalogue. The Islamic section of Welzl coin collection included specimens issued by a number of Eastern and Western dynasties, both medieval and modern, including gold (dinars), silver (dirhams) and copper (fals) coins. From a chronological and geographical perspective, the Welzl collection of Islamic coins, covered a wide time span and a large swathe of the Muslim world, i.e., coinage issued in the central lands of the Islamic world (Omayyads and Abbasids), in Spain, North Africa and Egypt (Omayyads, Idrisids, Fatimids, Almoravids, Almohads), as well as those issued in the Eastern regions (Seljuks, Urtukids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Timurids). The Ottoman coins and the coinages of Iran and Afghanistan, together with those issued by Muslim dynasties in India and in Sumatra completed the Islamic section of the collection.

¹²² See Moltheim 1895, vi, and Barth 2001, 368.

¹²³ Considering that the auction took place in 1846, the Islamic section could obviously not have been written by his son, the Orientalist Ernst von Bergmann (1844-1892). We are grateful to Lutz Ilisch for his suggestion that the Arabic coins in the catalogue were described by Kraft.

it is the latter who actually offered them for sale at auction.¹²⁴

The collection was enormous,¹²⁵ and contained some very interesting items; it clearly contained a few forgeries too, as was noted in an article regarding Polish coins.¹²⁶ It is unfortunate that it was not illustrated, and so it is usually impossible to identify a coin or a medal as being the Welzl example (“*antiquités orphelines*” is the term used for ancient artefacts that have such an old legal provenance, but one that cannot be proved). There are some cases, such as the coins bought directly by the Vienna or Berlin museum at the auction, and a few pieces that retained their provenance-tickets until a later sale in which the provenance was indicated,¹²⁷ but these are very few and far between. The question arises in understanding (why and) how Welzl acquired so many Arabic coins.¹²⁸ Indeed, unlike his grandson, Leopold Ottokar Johann Walcher von Moltheim (1824-1911),¹²⁹ who was the Austro-Hungarian consul in Jerusalem and in Palermo and who therefore had easy access to local finds (despite only collecting Greek coins), Welzl never worked outside of Austria.¹³⁰



Fig. 23. The arms of Welzl von Wellenheim, as painted on his certificate of nobility of 1 February 1808. Size and location unknown. Picture from Wikipedia

¹²⁴ His Viennese wife Sophie, *née* Mußbrock (1777-1826), bore him two sons, Wilhelm Johann Michael (1799-1858) who was a court-valuer (*Hoftaxator*), and Cajus Augustus (1806-1888), as well as a daughter, Franziska (1796-1874). Welzl sold the collection to his son for a total of 57,340 Gulden, including “*seine Sammlung von Antiquitäten, Statuen, geschnittenen Steine (sic), Ringe und Siegel*”, Wellenheim 1917.

¹²⁵ 45,197 coins in total, see VNP 1852, 687. The intensity of his numismatic passion and dedication can be gauged from the fact that he was also a founding member of the *Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord* (1836), to which he gave 100 Francs.

¹²⁶ Mirnik 2002, 217: “*The famous Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim Collection also contained some contemporary forgeries of Polish coins: trojaks of Riga under Sigismund III and three of Poland under Sigismund III (Nos. 10877-10878, 11096-11098)*”.

¹²⁷ For example, lot 1541 in the Hirsch XXIV auction of May 1909 (the Roman coins from the collection of Consul Weber), a sestertius of Antoninus Pius with the she-wolf on the reverse was noted to be “*Aus Sammlung Welzl v. Wellenheim 1868*”. A search for “Welzl” on the database of recent numismatic auctions on CoinArchives.com (with several million records) provides very few matches. Only lot 6223 has been resold in the past 10 years with an identified Welzl provenance; his auction-catalogue is, however, often used as a reference book.

¹²⁸ Considering the time span in which Welzl collected Islamic coins, that is, the first half of the 19th century, we can say that he anticipated the larger wave of interest in collecting Islamic portable objects that gained momentum at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, see Graves 2018, 91.

¹²⁹ Wellenheim’s daughter Franziska (1796-1874) married Johan Georg Walcher (1785-1854) who was ennobled to “von Moltheim” two months before his death.

¹³⁰ “*Er sammelte durch vierzig Jahre mit Wissenschaft, Geschmack und seltenem Glücke, zumal er als vieljähriger Referent des Postwesens mit dem Provinzen und dem Auslande in einflussreichem Verkehre stand, so dass seine universelle Sammlung die grösste und zahlreichste war, wie wohl kein Privatmann in Wien je eine solche gehabt hat*” Bergmann 1863, 64.



Fig. 24. Josef Kriehuber (1800-1876), *Portrait of Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim*, Vienna 1846, lithograph, 200 by 185 mm. Munich, *Porträtsammlung des Deutschen Museum*, inv. PT 03942/01.

There are two sources that inform us of the coins that Welzl owned. First of all, of course, there is the auction catalogue. There is also contemporary literature as, following the normal practice of the time¹³¹, some of Wellenheim's coins were described by contemporary scholars.¹³² The catalogue of the Mainoni Collection is dedicated to Welzl who, like its author, had been made an honorary member of the Paduan Academy (*Accademia Patavina*) in 1819.¹³³ Stefano de Majnoni, who had recently spent ten months in Vienna in 1818-1819, had asked Simone Assemani's assistance in identifying some forty coins from Welzl's collection, and in 1819 Welzl had asked to be put into direct contact with Assemani.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, it does not seem that Arabic coins were an area of Welzl's expertise. As a letter sent by Assemani suggests, the latter felt the need to explain to Welzl that some of the coins that he had sent were from Persia, or from nearby India; they were recent issues and thus of no collectible value.¹³⁵

Final remarks

The brass medal in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, as well as its original, both merit renewed attention from a cultural, historical and archaeological point of view. Furthermore, they both deserve their own place in the history of collecting both in the East and in the West. Writing the cultural biography of the object(s) involved in this study¹³⁶ was particular challenging since it represents a dual, interrelated history of which we had until recently only one part (the brass cast). It does, however, link Europe and the Middle East, and various historical periods.

Erika Zwierlein-Diehl considers it highly unlikely that the Ayyubid governor of Hamā, al-Malik al-Manṣūr II, who owned the cameo and had it surrounded with the inscription with his name and titles, would have recognised Nero or any other Roman emperor from the portrait. Most likely, she suggests, he took on the, so to speak, 'ready-made' portrait as his own, just as Carolingian kings used ancient gems as seals, surrounding them with their

¹³¹ A typical example of a collector sharing his possessions with scholars is Don Carlo Trivulzio (1715-1789); see Rambach 2017a, Rambach 2017b, Rambach 2018, and Doyen Rambach 2020.

¹³² For example, Appel 1826.

¹³³ See Maggiolo 1983, 179 and p. 361; Maggiolo 2011, 569; Callegher 2015, 89; *Accademia Galileiana*, Padova, *ibnXXVI*, n. 2011.

¹³⁴ Callegher 2015, 89.

¹³⁵ Callegher 2015, 48 (“... *per di più monete correnti e perciò prive di ogni valore collezionistico* ...”).

¹³⁶ On the notion of the cultural biography of objects, which considers the object not as a passive thing modified during its use/life, but as a dynamic element in social interaction through which meanings are created, changed and renegotiated, see Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999. “Not only do objects change through their existence, but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected” Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170.

own names and titles.¹³⁷ In this respect, it is worth recalling the production of Arabic manuscripts in Syria and Iraq, between the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries, and in particular that of the work of Abū ‘l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (284-356/897-967) entitled *Kitāb al-aghānī* (‘Book of Songs’). A number of publications that include this text contain portraits of rulers – depicting an ideal person rather than a real one – in order to recall the influence of the patron, whose name is written in the sleeves of the figure and who paid for the copy of the text.¹³⁸

What is also of importance as regards the link with a pre-Islamic past, is the diffusion of manuscripts produced in the 7th/13th century in the Syro-Mesopotamian area that bear the portraits of classical authors (physicians, philosophers, scientists), often inspired by late-antique models.¹³⁹ Commenting on the portraits illustrated in the copy of Dioscurides’ *De Materia Medica* in the Topkapi Palace Library, Eva Hoffmann writes, “The use of a recognizable late-antique model for the portrait of Dioscurides in the mandrake scene carefully retains the specific meaning of the mandrake scene. The juxtaposition of the middle Byzantine quotation for the figure of Dioscurides with the fully Islamicized student figures on the other side of the frontispiece makes a deliberate contrast. [...] the deliberate juxtaposition of the Islamic style for the artist-scribes and the sharply contrasting, obviously Greek Byzantine style for the author-sage transcribes in pictorial terms the visual equivalents of the transmission process from Greek to Arabic, thus reaching the very essence of the work itself. As a whole, the late-antique author portrait was integrated into the thirteenth-century Islamic repertory with full understanding of the original context [...]”¹⁴⁰

Even though al-Malik al-Manṣūr II did not recognize the Roman emperor Nero, his Arabic inscription around the princely portrait on a genuine Roman gem echoes the contrast suggested by the aforementioned late-antique quotation in the illustrations of *De Materia Medica*. Rather than a simple juxtaposition of elements as in the *De Materia Medica* frontispiece, al-Malik al-Manṣūr II ideally embraced the past by putting his name all around it and thus representing himself through it.



Fig. 25. Anton Hähnisch (1817-1897), *Portrait of Leopold Welzl von Wellenheim*, Vienna 1844, watercolour. Size and location unknown. Picture from Wikipedia

¹³⁷ Zwierlein-Diehl 2007 p. 253f. figs. 839, 841, 842. The physical appearance of al-Malik al-Manṣūr II is unknown, as we have no identified likenesses, so we do not know whether he might have resembled the young Nero. However, the Carolingian kings (who re-used Roman intaglios for their own seals) provide an example of rulers taking on the portraits of others as their own.

¹³⁸ Touati 2006, 75.

¹³⁹ See Hoffmann 1993.

¹⁴⁰ Hoffmann 1993, 12.

The circulation in Syria of the coins of Nero that were struck in Antioch – with a portrait resembling that in the brass cast¹⁴¹ – would have possibly enhanced the memory of the emperor in this region, and it would have been a meaningful link to the past even if not perceived as specifically Roman. The existence of locally-found Roman coins with comparable portraits would have encouraged the Syrian governor to understand (and value) that this carved stone depicted a prince, just like himself.

¹⁴¹ Also seen in the Hohenstaufen court as an important link with the past, if we consider the gem on the Desiderium cross that represents Frederick II: “Uno splendido lavoro degli ateliers glittici medievali operanti alla corte di Federico II di Svevia è il ritratto dell'imperatore [...] con la caratteristica resa del profilo e dei capelli, posto a lato del tondo centrale del verso della croce in una evidente posizione privilegiata, a pendant con il grande cammeo con aquila già ricordato, forse rilavorato dalle stesse botteghe: i due splendidi pezzi ci confermano che ancora nel XIII secolo era ben chiaro il carattere ‘imperiale’ del lato posteriore della croce”, Sena Chiesa 2001, 365.

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