



CAMEOS

From Frederick II to René of Anjou

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From Frederick II to René of Anjou



13 May – 3 June 2021

SAM FOGG



In pte xp̄i me. fat. a. 1449. ♡

Petrus Christus
A Goldsmith in his Shop
1449
MET

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Introduction

In this exhibition, which features the smallest objects that we have ever brought together, two large personalities emerge – Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194–1250) and René of Anjou (1409–1480). Celebrated for their art patronage, the reigns of these two rulers represent the peak of cameo production in the Middle Ages. Frederick II and René of Anjou possessed a unique understanding of cameos as tools to represent their reign, employing miniature engraving on precious stones to communicate their identity and to encourage personal associations. The ‘proto-renaissance’ of Frederick II’s court and the humanist revivals in René’s time were the driving force behind the artform and as the art of glyptics was deeply rooted in antiquity, it is no surprise that it flourished at a time when there was a renewed interest in the classical past.

Cameos and intaglios were collected throughout the Middle Ages, often to be refashioned and reinterpreted as amulets, seals and reliquary ornaments. In the words of Abbot Suger, ‘the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial.’ These precious stones were thought to possess miraculous powers and some of the most celebrated objects from the medieval period, such as the Saint-Foy reliquary in Conques or the shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne, gained their fame precisely from the carved gems incorporated into them.

Our exhibition is as small as the objects themselves because only five precious gems take the stage here. They range from the early thirteenth to the late fifteenth centuries. Included are two rare lion cameos from the court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen and one of only four known cameo portraits of René of Anjou. Together these objects help us understand the history of cameos but they also give us a glimpse into an artform which had a monumental impact on the medieval viewer.

Frederick II Hohenstaufen
The Shrine of Charlemagne
c. 1215
Aachen Cathedral

1 A large cameo of a lion from the court of Frederick II



Renowned as a great patron of art and architecture, Frederick II Hohenstaufen has been defined as both the ‘first Renaissance tyrant’ and as a ‘messiah-emperor’- his true persona often shrouded by overzealous historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries¹ Although recent research argues that Frederick was not as atypical of his contemporaries as assumed earlier, his unique circumstances certainly set him apart from them. Growing up in Sicily, he ruled over a diverse population of Christians, Jews and Muslims. The artistic boom of his court, often called a ‘proto-renaissance’, was a testament to the cultural fusion in Southern Italy, which was also inspired by its Roman, Byzantine and Islamic past. Creating links with the Imperial past was especially important because the Holy Roman Emperors saw themselves as successors to the Roman Empire. The art of glyptics, which was intimately linked to the allure of the Roman age, was instrumental in establishing that continuity and in skilfully communicating Frederick’s authority.

This impressive cameo is decorated with a walking lion in profile. Almost certainly made at the court of Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194 – 1250), its skilful carving is a testament to the art that flowered in Southern Italy in the first half of the thirteenth century. Although this artwork is miniature in its form, it depicts the lion realistically – the animal has a slightly open mouth, almond shaped eyes and a thick, stylised mane. It is carved in two layers of sardonyx, a stone that has been used in the production of cameos since antiquity. Associated with strength, stability and protection, its richly coloured layers allowed the craftsmen to carve away the top orange layer of sard, revealing the creamy white layer below. This contrast in colours gives the image three-dimensionality, attracting attention when worn.

This lion cameo is one of only three known examples based on the same model and argued to originate in the court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen. They are all dated to circa 1230. The first of these is a lion cameo now in the Hermitage Collection in St Petersburg (fig. 1). The second cameo from this group is in the Historisches Museum in Basel and it is incorporated into the late thirteenth century reliquary of Saint David, which also includes an antique cameo of Gorgon’s face taking the place of David’s head (fig. 2-3). The close similarities in the style, the carving technique and stone colour of the Basel cameo suggest that this may have been carved by the same hand as the present example. A comparison can also be found in the two cameos of Hercules and the Nemean Lion, which are located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and in the Ladriere Collection, also attributed to Southern Italy during the reign of Frederick II (figs. 4 – 5). The stylistic details of the MET example, particularly the facial features of the lion and the carving of its body, offer a closer parallel than the Ladriere example even though both emphasise the importance of lion imagery for the court of Frederick II.

1, William Tronzo, ‘Introduction,’ in *Studies in the History of Art* Vol. 44 (1994), 12.

Southern Italy c. 1230

17 x 23 mm (cameo); sardonyx cameo set in a modern gold ring on a white paper backing, minor repair to upper left corner

Provenance
Previously set into a 19th century diamond mount;
Private Collection, UK

Literature
Draper, J. D. ‘Cameo Appearances,’ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, March 8–January 29, 2005.

Kagan, Ju. *Western European Cameos in the Hermitage Collection*. Leningrad, 1973.

Kahsnitz, R. *Die Zeit der Staufer* Vol. 5. Stuttgart, 1977.

Scarbrick, Diana, Claudia Wagner, John Boardman. *The Guy Ladriere Collection of Gems and Rings*. PWP: London, 2016.

Wenzel, Hans. ‘Staatskameen’ im Mittelalter,’ In *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen Staatskameen im Mittelalter* (1962).

Zwierlein-Diehl, Erika. ‘Interpretatio christiana’: Gems on the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne.’ In *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*, ed. Clifford Malcolm Brown. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997.

Fig. 1
Sardonyx Lion cameo
Southern Italy
c. 1230
Hermitage Collection, St
Petersburg (K-2953)



Fig. 2
Detail of lion cameo in the
Saint David Reliquary
Southern Italy
c. 1230
Basel Treasury



Animal cameos created at the court of Frederick II were long argued to be associated with both the family and the official coats of arms. Among these are the eagle cameos, which survive in several guises (fig. 6). As Hans Wenzel has pointed out, while the eagle was used in the official sphere, the lion was used in the private sphere.² Lions had a particular significance for Frederick II because his family on his mother's side used an image of a lion as a symbol of their dominion in Southern Italy. While it is certain that these cameos were associated with the Hohenstaufen family, 'it remains undecided, whether they were bestowed by them as "symbols" or "orders", whether they were worn by court officials as a symbol of their office, or whether they actually were worn by the Hohenstaufens themselves.'³ Still, the freedom with which some of these cameos are carved illustrates that heraldry was not the only driving force here. Lions, without a doubt the most widely depicted animals in Romanesque art, were drawn from a broad spectrum of liturgical, textual, and visual sources, see for example the tomb monument to Frederick II in Palermo Cathedral (fig. 7). Lions were carved on thrones, on church portals and put up in town squares because they



Fig. 4
Cameo with Hercules and
the Nemean Lion within a
Garland
Southern Italy
c. 1220-40
MET Museum



Fig. 5
Hercules and the Nemean
Lion with a Dragon
Southern Italy
c. 1220 - 40
Guy Ladriere Collection,
Paris

2, Hans Wenzel,
"Staatskameen' im
Mittelalter," In *Jahrbuch
der Berliner Museen
Staatskameen in Mittelalter*
(1962).

3, *Ibid*, 77

Fig. 3
Saint David Reliquary
from the Treasury of Basel
Cathedral
Southern Italy
c. 1230
Historisches Museum, Basel





Fig. 7
Tomb monument to
Frederick II
Palermo Cathedral

symbolised justice, power and authority.⁴ In Rome, for example, an ancient statue of a lion sinking its teeth into a horse, now in the Capitoline Museum, stood on the terrace in front of the Senatorial Palace, representing Rome's secular authority. The lion was the symbol of Rome until the 15th century and live lions were even kept in cages on the Capitoline Hill to 'embody the living image of the city's political authority.'⁵

Ancient lion cameos probably served as models for our example as they too were collected by wealthy patrons in the middle ages and early Renaissance. Cameos were famously also incorporated into reliquaries, as we have seen in the King David reliquary from the Treasury of Basel Cathedral. A lion cameo carved in sardonyx also once decorated the shrine⁶ of the Three Kings in Cologne cathedral, being prominently placed above the head of the Virgin and Child on the open shrine. As Erika Zwierlein-Diehl has argued, in this instance, the lion could be interpreted as a symbol of the incarnation, the resurrection, Christ himself, or of Saint Mark but the meaning was changeable depending on the circumstances.⁷

In this case, the image of the lion in Frederick II's court would have remembered the importance of the lion in antiquity but it would have also assumed a meaning which was more in tune with medieval traditions, symbolising power, justice and authority.



Fig. 6
Cameo of an Eagle with a
Hare
Southern Italy
c. 1240-60
Hermitage Collection, St
Petersburg (K-2141)



4, The four lions of Parma Cathedral also flanked the episcopal throne. Adalbert Erler, *Das Strassburger Münster Im Rechtsleben Des Mittelalters*. (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1954), 19; Dirk Jäckel, *Der Herrscher Als Löwe : Ursprung Und Gebrauch Eines Politischen Symbols Im Früh- Und Hochmittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006). The throne of Solomon is described in the Second Book of Chronicles as a 'throne of ivory, and overlaid with pure gold; and there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting place and two lions standing by the stays; and twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps.' See Warwick Rodwell, *The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone: History, Archaeology and Conservation* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 35.

5, Mazzoni, *She-Wolf*, 50.

6, Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, "Interpretatio christiana": Gems on the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne,' in *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*, ed. Clifford Malcolm Brown (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 74.

7, *Ibid.* 74.

2 A small cameo of a lioness from the court of Frederick II



This delicately carved cameo of a walking lioness is a unique survival from the court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194 – 1250). Although small and carved in low relief, the details on this cameo are exceptional. Particular attention is paid to correctly depicting the animal's body, accentuating the curve of the delicate tail, defining the ribs and even attempting to show an expression on its face. The muscular tension and the posture of the animal successfully achieve the portrayal of movement. The lack of a mane and the teats on the animal's belly identify this as a lioness. Its size and subject matter allow us to speculate whether this cameo may have been made for a female recipient; however, without more information, this remains a question.

Stylistically, the cameo can be compared to several examples that survive from the court of Frederick II. In subject matter, the most notable comparative is a cameo of a panther now in the Suermondt-Museum in Aachen, which depicts the animal leaping through space with a fierce expression (fig. 1). Though originally thought to be 12th century, recent scholarly publications firmly attribute this to the reign of Frederick II and identify it as a lioness.¹ Carved in low relief, the 'panther' cameo exhibits a similar attention to details and a comparable style of carving of the head. The shallowness of our relief and the incised details can also be compared to a cameo of a horse in the Hermitage Collection (fig. 2). Characteristic of the Southern Italian Staufen period, both animals are carved into the reddish layer of sard with a creamy white background behind them. Both cameos also illustrate a fascination with naturalism – their delicately carved muscles emphasise movement while the incision lines along the legs and the mane express a graphic quality.

As seen in the previous entry (Cat. 1), cameos were particularly prized at the court of Frederick II. As a part of a wider phenomenon, the popularity of cameos was just one way to communicate the Holy Roman Emperors to be the true successors of the Roman Empire. The revival of gem carving in this



Southern Italy
c. 1220 – 1250

10 x 17 mm (cameo); sardonyx cameo set in a modern gold ring, in very good condition

Provenance
Private Collection, France

Literature
Draper, J. D. 'Cameo Appearances,' *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, March 8–January 29, 2005.

Kagan, Ju. *Western European Cameos in the Hermitage Collection*. Leningrad, 1973.

Kahsnitz, R. *Die Zeit der Staufer* Vol. 5. Stuttgart, 1977.

Scarisbrick, Diana, Claudia Wagner, John Boardman. *The Guy Ladriere Collection of Gems and Rings*. PWP: London, 2016.

Wenzel, Hans. "Staatskameen im Mittelalter," In *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen Staatskameen im Mittelalter* (1962).

Zwierlein-Diehl, Erika. "'Interpretatio christiana': Gems on the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne." In *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*, ed. Clifford Malcolm Brown. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997.



Fig. 1
Cameo of a Panther (or Lioness)
Southern Italy
Early 13th century
Aachen, Suermondt-Museum

period enabled patrons like Frederick II to reinterpret the subjects depicted in ancient cameos to serve a Christian message but also to reinterpret the legacy of the Roman empire. As a result of this demand for cameos at the court of Frederick II, a diverse group has been identified in the scholarship. Though the carved details and the quality may vary, most of the cameos have a characteristic style. What is more, they all look to antique models for inspiration, especially as these survived in large numbers. These models are clearly cited and our example is no exception. A lion cameo carved in low relief in the Hermitage Collection (1st century) or a goat cameo from the British Museum (1st – 2nd century) serve as two comparable examples (figs. 3 – 4).



Fig. 2
Cameo of a Horse Grazing
13th century
Sardonyx
Southern Italy
Hermitage Collection, St Petersburg K-4582



Fig. 3
Lion cameo
1st century
Rome
Hermitage Collection, St Petersburg 12618



Fig. 4
Sardonyx cameo engraved with a tethered goat lying down
1st – 2nd century
Rome
British Museum 1824,0301.49



Frederick II Hohenstaufen
"Manfred manuscript" of De arte
venandi cum avibus
late 13th century
Biblioteca Vaticana, Pal. lat 1071

3 Cameo with the profile of René of Anjou



A prince of the blood and a brother-in-law of Charles VII of France, René of Anjou (1409-1480) was known by contemporaries as Le bon roi René (the good king René). Although he bore many impressive titles, including King of Naples and Sicily, Duke of Anjou, Count of Provence, Duke of Bar and Duke of Lorraine, he struggled with his own political affairs, finding himself more comfortable in the world of art. Born at the time of the Renaissance and personally fascinated with the humanist revivals happening in Italy, René was a celebrated patron of the arts. He boasted a large collection of manuscripts and precious gems, some of which he is known to have mounted and given away as gifts. Surviving account books from the court of René of Anjou give us a glimpse into his artistic patronage and even provide the names of some of the artists that worked for him, including Nicolas Froment (1435-1486) and Francesco Laurana (c. 1430-1502), who has been said to have brought the Italian Renaissance to the south of France. René's close contacts with Italy probably fuelled his interest in the art of glyptics. Classically influenced gem-engravers were encouraged in Italy early on in the 'wake of humanist learning and collecting of antiques.'¹ Artists like Botticelli, Veronese and Giovanni Bellini reproduced ancient cameos in some of their paintings, and plaster casts of ancient cameos were widely disseminated in Italy. In René's court, we have evidence that at least two cameo artists worked for him, namely Jehan Saillart and Thomas Pigne. However, scholars agree that there would have been more than just these two glyptic artists present.

Astonishingly detailed, this rare portrait cameo of René of Anjou is one of only four known cameos depicting his likeness. The cameo is carved in two layers of onyx and while the creamy top layer is markedly thick to allow for detailed carving, the pinkish layer below is beautifully translucent due to its shallowness. René is depicted in profile, wearing a grooved hat with a skull-cap beneath, which is twisted by the pressure of the hat. His coat is lined with a fur collar. The distinctive portrait of the ruler is extremely naturalistic including his prominent chin, small nose and bushy sideburns. Delicately carved wrinkles frame his eye, his mouth and even his ear, while the sagging skin below his chin realistically portrays the aging flesh of its sitter. Two other cameo images of René of Anjou depict the sitter in a similar way. The first, now in the British Museum, was formerly in the collection of Henry Howard, Fourth Earl of Carlisle (1694-1758) (fig. 1). Carved in three layers of sardonyx, this cameo also presents the sitter wearing a grooved hat, now with a feather, and a coat with a fur collar. Carved from a shallow piece of stone, this cameo has the effect of being incised rather than being treated like a three-dimensional object. Ormonde Maddock Dalton attributed the British Museum example to Thomas Pigne in 1915; however, this was at a time when no other cameo of René of Anjou was known to the author.² The second example is the René of Anjou cameo in the Ladrière Collection, which was once owned by Caroline Bonaparte (1782-1839) (fig. 2). This example is carved in three layers of sardonyx and here the portrait assumes a more corporeal nature. The final known cameo depicting René of Anjou is now in the Cabinet des Médailles de la Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (fig. 3). This example depicts a much younger René with much less detail. These characteristics distance it from the group, yet its corporeal quality and deep carving possess some affinity with our example.

France
c. 1470

21 x 18 mm (cameo); onyx, impeccable condition, set into a modern gold ring

Provenance
August Merklein Collection, Nuremberg (1865-1940);
Thence by descent

Literature
d'Agnel (ed.), G. A. *Les Comptes du Roi René publiés d'après les originaux inédits conservés aux Archives des Bouches-du-Rhône*. Vol. I. Paris, 1908.

Forrer, L. *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists*. Vol. IV. London, 1909.

Dalton, O. M. *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems of the Post-Classical Periods in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography in the British Museum*. London, 1915.

Giard, J-B. 'Un camée du Roi René par Francesco Laurana', in *Trésors monétaires I*, Supplément II. Paris, 1989.

Gennaioli, R. *Le gemme dei Medici al Museo degli Argenti: Cammei e Intagli nelle collezioni di Palazzo Pitti*. Florence, 2007.

Scarlsbrick, D. *The Art of Gem Engraving from Alexander the Great to Napoleon III*. Fukuoka, 2008.

Scarlsbrick, D., C. Wagner and J. Boardman. *The Guy Ladrière Collection of Gems and Rings*. London, 2016.

1, Gordon Campbell (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 411.

2, Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems of the Post-Classical Periods in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography in the British Museum* (London, 1915).



Fig. 1
Cameo of René of Anjou
c. 1470
British Museum



Fig. 2
Cameo of René of Anjou
c. 1470
Guy Ladrière Collection,
Paris



Fig. 3
Cameo of René of Anjou
c. 1450-60
Cabinet des Médailles, Paris

The attribution of these cameos has long been a subject of interest; however, scholars agree that not enough evidence has been found to ascribe them to particular artists. What is more, the present example does not seem to be carved by the same hand as any of the other surviving examples, though it bears the most resemblance in style to the Ladrière cameo, which is the most corporeal of the three. The variations in style, however, can be explained by the fact that at least two cameo carvers (Jehan Saillart and Thomas Pigne) worked as at the court of René of Anjou. Although attempts have been made to attribute the cameos to them, the lack of evidence about any particular work by these artists makes those attributions speculative. It has also been suggested that these cameo portraits may have been based on the medals of René or on the marble bust of René, both made by Francesco Laurana, or on the painted portrait of René in the Matheron Diptych by Nicolas Froment, which was completed in 1480 (fig. 4).

Outside of René's court, our portrait can also be compared stylistically to a small group of Northern Italian cameos, which share with our example a more realistic treatment of facial features and a corporeal quality in the carving – suggesting perhaps that our cameo was carved by a Northern Italian artist working at the court of René of Anjou. For example, a cameo of Ludovico Sforza dated to the 1490s, is carved so that the white onyx stands in a substantially high relief, leaving a translucent pinkish layer beneath (fig. 5). The carving of the facial features, though slightly more idealised in Ludovico's case, are also analogous. Based on Vasari's account about a group of artists who engraved gems, this cameo has been attributed to Domen-

Fig. 4
Nicolas Froment
René of Anjou, detail from
the Matheron Diptych
1480
Musée du Louvre, Paris



ico dei Cammei from Milan, who is cited in the account to have carved an intaglio portrait of Duke Ludovico Sforza on a ruby. As Ludovico probably also had more than one cameo artist working in his court, however, this attribution is also not definitive. A closer analysis can also be drawn with the cameo of Borso d'Este in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, dated to the 1460s (fig.6). In this example, again, the substantial depth of the portrait relief illustrates a similar treatment of the stone; however, this example is also carved with an attention to minute detail and with veristic facial features, which include an incredibly realistic portrayal of flesh.

Much like the example of Borso d'Este, our cameo is not an idealised image of the sitter but rather recognisable portrait of a man. This fascination with portraiture is not unusual as the 15th century has often been dubbed the century of the individual. Portraiture was on the rise and rulers found themselves experimenting with different ways to represent their identity. In previous centuries, heraldry was the primary vehicle to accomplish this but by the 15th century, rulers also experimented with portraiture, personal mottos and heraldic badges. In this example, we have a fusion of these types because cameos represent a wearable symbol, which would have been recognisable in court but which also showed a real likeness of the king. The present cameo thus represents a major contribution to the existing corpus of contemporary hardstone depictions of the King, which exemplify the re-emergence of glyptic portraiture before the High Renaissance.



Fig. 5
Domenico dei Cammei
Cameo of Ludovico Sforza
Northern Italy
1490s
Kunsthistorisches Museum in
Vienna (Antikensammlung,
XII 485)



Fig. 6
Cameo of Borso d'Este
Northern Italy
c. 1460
Kunsthistorisches Museum,
Vienna (Antikensammlung,
XII 1074)



4 Cameo of the Virgin in mourning



A beautifully carved cameo of a mourning woman, who wears a veil which is elegantly folded to cover her head. The top of her veil is decorated by a six-pointed star, possibly to allude to the Virgin as the 'star of the sea.' Remarkably expressive, she has a downcast gaze, heavy eyelids and a tear that runs down her cheek. Her youthful round face is articulated by fleshy cheeks, a pointed chin, and pursed lips. Her brows are delicately carved to catch the light and to show the heaviness of the naturalistically depicted flesh.

A popular theme in Europe before the Reformation, the iconography of the weeping Virgin appears in sculpture, painting and manuscript illumination and in other glyptic carvings. Two comparable cameos are an example that survives in the British Museum, dated to c. 1500, and an example in the Pitti Palace, dated to the 15th century (fig. 1 - 2). Although the frontally facing Virgin is depicted with similarly veiled hair, the lacking expression and the crude carving makes this only an iconographic comparison. A particularly close example in painting is the illumination of a Weeping Madonna by Georges Trubert (1469 - 1508), court artist to René of Anjou in the last decade of his life (fig. 3). Surrounded by a golden aureole with stars, the Trubert Madonna is thought to have been copied from a Byzantine icon owned by René. The court of René also makes for an interesting link because he led the revival of the art of glyptics in 15th century France. The analogy with Trubert Madonna is striking because the painted image possesses the same emotional energy and stylistic traits as our cameo.

The size and subject matter of this cameo allow us to speculate whether this mourning virgin may have been carved to be a part of a rosary – its inclusion in such an object would have been common practice in Northern France and the Netherlands from the fifteenth century. As a model for all Christians, the veneration of the Virgin was immense in the Middle Ages. The star that she wears on her veil and her association with the cosmos may seem odd at first but it was a common iconographic link throughout Europe. As the medieval Marian hymn, Ave maris stella (Hail, star of the sea) clearly spells out, the Virgin Mary has been described as a star as early as the 9th century. The verse in the Canticle of Canticles (VI: 9) echoes this by asking, 'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?'; and similarly, the Song of Songs is thought to have described the Virgin with the following: 'Who is this who shines like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as the stars in procession?' Worn as an amulet or as a part of a rosary, this emotionally charged cameo focuses on the humanity of the Virgin, inviting its owner to contemplate her sorrow.

France
c. 1450 - 70

25 x 17 mm; agate cameo framed by a historic gold pendant, in good condition with a delicate hairline crack across the bottom

Provenance
Private collection, France

Literature
Dalton, O. M. *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems of the Post-Classical Periods in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography in the British Museum*. London, 1915.

Scarlsbrick, D., C. Wagner and J. Boardman. *The Guy Ladrière Collection of Gems and Rings*. London, 2016.

Sciacca, Christina. *Illuminating Women in the Medieval World*. Getty, 2017.

Wenzel, Hans. 'Mittelalterliche Gemmen in den Sammlungen Italiens.' In *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*. Vol. 7 (July, 1956), 239-278.



Fig. 1
Cameo of a veiled woman
c. 1500
France
British Museum 1912.0527.1



Fig. 2
Virgin Cameo
France
15th century
Palazzo Pitti



Fig. 3
Georges Trubert (1469 - 1508)
Weeping Virgin
France, Provence
c. 1480 - 1490
Getty, Ms. 48 (93.ML.6), fol. 159



5 Cornelian intaglio with a tonsured cleric



A silver seal-matrix with an inscription on the frame, set with a cornelian intaglio. The oval matrix has a loop handle on the back decorated by a fleur-de-lys, while the front is inscribed by a motto, which reads: *Amye chere fetes ma pere* (dear friend, celebrate my father?). The motto is framed within two rows of pearled ornament and punctuated by a six-pointed star, similar to the ornament on a signet ring in the Victoria & Albert Museum (fig. 1). The cornelian intaglio is carved with the image of a bust of a tonsured man in profile to the left. He has large almond-shaped eyes, a prominent nose and a youthful expression. His hair is carved in tight ringlets, decorating his forehead and the back of his neck, while the crown of his head is clean shaven.



The intaglio bust clearly emulates ancient models, such as a sapphire intaglio in the Victoria & Albert museum, also set into a seal matrix with an inscription in the same style and format as ours. (fig. 2). As Hans Wenzel pointed out, 'busts were all but unknown in western relief sculpture' in the first half of the 13th century and so they would have been modelled 'exclusively on small-scale sculpture', such as antique gems¹¹. Still, the manner of carving and the iconography of our intaglio clearly position it within the thirteenth century. The style of the bust, including the ringlet-like hair and the facial features, can be compared to two intaglios in the British Museum and in the Oxfordshire County Museum (figs. 3 – 4). Both examples are also good comparisons for the seal matrix, their oval frames decorated by inscriptions and pearled ornament. Although these are both localised in England, most intaglios of this type are thought to have been made in workshops in Paris.

France
1250 - 1300

2.1 x 1.7 cm; cornelian intaglio set in a silver seal; two hairline cracks appear at the top right of the intaglio, otherwise in very good condition

Provenance
Private Collection, France

Inscription
AMYE CHERE FETES MA PERE

Literature
Adams, Noel, J. Cherry and J. Robinson (eds.). *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*. London: British Museum, 2008.

Cherry, John, J. Berenbeim, L. de Beer (eds.). *Seals and Status: Power of Objects*. London: British Museum, 2018.

Wenzel, Hans. 'Portraits "à l'antique" on French Mediaeval Gems and Seals.' In *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. Vol. 16 No. ¾ (1953), 342 – 350.



Fig. 1
Signet Ring
c. 1300
France
V&A M.290-1962

As the loop on the back indicates, the intaglio was probably meant to have been worn as a pendant, and as such, it would have been used to authenticate documents and to sign letters. Although the inscription is enigmatic, objects such as this would have often displayed the owner's affiliations or loyalties. Moreover, such inscriptions would have acted as mottos and would have thus been incredibly personal – often understood only by a select group of individuals. As Martin Henig has noted, 'gem seals were often employed as "secret" seals (secreta) by their owners, or as counter-seals (contrasigilla) by others called to witness the official seals of officials, ecclesiastic or lay, and were far more intimate and personal' than other types of seal. ²



Fig. 2
Signet Ring
c. 1300 (intaglio: 1 century BC)
V&A 89-1899



Fig. 3
Intaglio with the head of a veiled woman
England
c. 1300
British Museum 1881,0312.1



Fig. 4
Head of a Woman
13th century
London or Paris
Oxfordshire County Museum,
Woodstock

1, Hans Wenzel, 'Portraits "à l'antique" on French Mediaeval Gems and Seals,' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* Vol. 16 No. ¾ (1953), 342.

2, Martin Henig, 'The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios set in Medieval Personal Seals, mainly found in England: An aspect of the Renaissance of the 12th Century,' in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals* Noel Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson eds. (London: British Museum, 2008), 25.





Sculpture of Frederick II
13th Century

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