Studia Humaniora Tartuensia

REVIEWS

10.R.6 (2009): Jaanika ANDERSON

Zwierlein-Diehl, Erika (2007) *Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben*. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter. XV, 567 p., 231 p. of plates. ISBN 978-3-11-019450-0.

Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben is a much awaited and substantial volume that expands upon the themes connected with the history of gems: their spread, materials, techniques, copying, casting, collecting etc. This is a useful and compendious publication for an experienced researcher, and also for any person who is interested in certain aspects of the glyptic art. The volume provides bibliography for further reading, and visual material. The main part of the text is 332 pages, the remainder of the volume, 237 pages, contains bibliography, illustrations, indexes of museums, collections and persons mentioned in the text and 990 black-and-white photos on 231 extra plates. The volume consists of a preface and twenty four chapters. The chapters have many subheadings, which makes it easy for the reader to follow the change of theme and focus on aspects of interest.

The beginning of the glyptic art dates back thousands of years and has enchanted people thereafter at least until the 19th century. Many catalogues have been published about the gem collections in different museums as well as in private possession, but German archaeologist Adolf Furtwängler (1853–1907) was for long the only person who had elaborately written about glyptic art. He published three volumes in 1900: the first two volumes contained pictures and descriptions of gems from different periods, the third was the description of the history of gem cutting from the earliest times until the 19th century.[1] In the 20th century Peter Zazoff was in the forefront of the field of writing about glyptic art. In addition to a history of ancient glyptics, he published a study with Hilda Zazoff about collectors and researchers of gems.[2] The book under review is notable for its wide treatment of the circle of themes connected with glyptics. This exhaustive publication is the natural continuation to the author's previous publications in this field.[3]

The first chapter is an introduction, where the author discusses some ancient literary sources on glyptic art. Special terms that occur in the text (such as "glyptic art", "gem", "cameo", "intaglio") are properly explained. The author continues with the theme of the usage of gems. She defines the gems as 1) signets; 2) gifts to show respect and sympathy; 3) jewellery, good-luck charms and amulets. The first group, the signets, is most elaborately described. The nuances associated with the use of signets for authentication and identification, as well their abuse are studied, as well.

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[1] Furtwängler, A. (1900) *Die antiken Gemmen. Geschichte der Steinschneidekunst im klassischen Altertum*. Bd. 1, 2, 3. Leipzig, Berlin: Giesche & Devrient.

[2] Zazoff, P. (1983) *Die antiken Gemmen*. München: Beck; Zazoff, P., Zazoff, H. (1983) *Gemmensammler und Gemmenforscher*. München: Beck.

[3] E. Zwierlein-Diehl has published many articles on different aspects of glyptic art.

The next seven chapters, 3–9, are devoted to the historical development of glyptic art: Minoan and Mycenaean gems; Geometric and early Archaic gems; Archaic Greek gems; Greek-Phoenician scarabs; classical Greek gems; Greek-Persian gems; Hellenistic Greek gems. In addition to a historical overview, the author discusses questions of attribution. The tenth chapter interrupts the linear history and gives a short overview of gem-cutters who were also known as cutters of coin stamps. Zwierlein-Diehl then continues with Roman gems: Etruscan gems are discussed in chapter 11, and are followed with chapters 12–16: Italian and Roman gems (3rd–1st century BC), Roman gems in the late Republic and early Imperial Era, Cameos and cameo vessels in the Julio-Claudian age, Roman gems in the late Imperial era (1st/2nd–5th century), cameos and vessels in the late Imperial era.

The last third of the book continues with different themes connected with glyptic art parallel with a historical overview. The next chapters focus on the magic amulets, early Christian gems and the destinies of some famous cameos, the afterlife of the ancient gems and gems during the Middle Ages.

Chapter 21 is one of the longest and one of the most interesting in the whole book, as it deals with collectors and connoisseurs of gems. The gems were collected as treasures already in ancient times, because the size of a gem is ideal for storage in limited space, which makes it easy to take it along from a journey as a souvenir. The author has described different collections of European monarchs, which were admired during the 13th–18th century. In addition, there were some private collections worthy of note during the 16th–20th century. The most famous person named in connection with this topic is Philipp v. Stosch (1691–1757), who was not only a collector; his aptness and financial opportunity made him one of the best connoisseurs of the gems. It is also informative to read about the smaller and not so well-known collections and their locations today.

A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to dactyliotheques — the collections of casts made of original gems, but from plaster, sulphur mass or sealing wax. The idea comes from the beginning of the 18th century. From that time there were beautiful pictures of gems available for all those who liked the gems but could not afford to buy the precious stones with cut pictures.[4] The 18th century was a time of interest in gems: these were studied and copied. Well-known were N. Marchant and the Italian family Pichler, a father and his sons, who also carved gems with ancient motives. The 19th century saw some new ways of gem-cutting, and the works of the famous contemporary artists like B. Thorvaldsen and A. Canova were cut into stone. This chapter also includes a discussion about copies and fakes of gems, because from the 16th century onwards it was usual that gem-cutters made copies from the most famous signed gems. Whether the gem was an ancient original, copy or fake was an actual question among the scholars in the 17th century.

The book concludes with chapters that focus on technical aspects of glyptic art. Chapter 22 gives an overview of the materials used in the glyptic art. Information is given about

[4] A more thorough study on the concepts of dactyliotheques was published by Knüppel, H. (2009) *Daktyliotheken. Konzepte einer historischen Publikationsform*. Rudolphing und Mainz: Verlag Franz Philipp Rutzen (*Stendaler Winckelmann-Forschungen*; Band 8).

gemstones (e.g., steatite, serpentine, agate) and other materials, such as ivory and glass, and also about the improvement of colours and artificial colouring of the material. In discussing mineral materials, Zwierlein-Diehl has used the hardness scale of the mineralogist Friedrich Mohs (1773–1839), because hardness is an important quality in the carving process. The author has also given references to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, which mentions the above-named materials.

The following chapter is about gem-cutting techniques. The best sources of information on cutting instruments are their traces on the gems. Sometimes the unfinished gems reveal the technique used for carving. The author has gathered pictures with written records from previous times, showing how the cutting was done at a workbench and what kind of instruments were used in the process.

The volume concludes with a chapter about glass gems and cameo glass. Glass as a material had some advantages: glass gems were cheaper than precious stones and carving the image on a glass cameo is much easier than to do the same on the natural layered semi-precious stone, such as sardonyx. The most famous example of carved cameo glass, the Roman Portland vase, has received a separate subchapter.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this work, which covers so many aspects of the glyptic art. The only thing one wishes for are some colour plates to comprehend the splendour of the gems and the grandeur of the cast collections of gems.