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**REMARKS ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE ENGRAVED GEMS AND CAMEOS OF NOVAE
(MOESIA INFERIOR)**

The collection of the Historical Museum of Svištov (Northern Bulgaria) includes at present 139 glyptic items, among them ten cameos. All of these come from the territory or the vicinity of Novae, a legionary camp established around the years 45–46 A.D., presumably by the 8th Legion (Augusta), which after Vespasian's ascension to the throne was relocated to Gaul and replaced in Novae by the 1st Legion (Italian) in the year 69. With time Novae evolved from a legionary camp guarding the Lower Danubian *limes* into a Roman and early-Byzantine city, which existed until the 620s (Biernacki 2003: 7–10) (Fig. 1).

The collection of glyptic items analyzed below, was first established in the 1920s. It was when Stefan Stefanov, the first Director of the Historical Museum of Svištov, purchased the first ancient objects which the local people had found while working in the fields near the city (Dimitrova-Milčeva 1987: 193). The collection has eventually grown into the second largest in Bulgaria, after that of the Archeological Museum of Sofia, and now includes almost 60 engraved gems and 10 cameos from Novae.

The earliest gems are dated to the end of the 1st and to the 2nd cent., when Novae was strictly a legionary camp. Most representations are of deities related to war, combat and victory. There are many gems depicting the superior god, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, typically shown in one of the three iconographic patterns: as the Capitoline Jupiter sitting on a throne in a hieratic attitude, standing with attributes or accompanied by other deities (Fig. 2/1). The most numerous, however, are gems bearing images of Mars Ultor (Avenger) (Fig. 2/2) and of Mars Gradivus marching at the head of an army and carrying the legionary emblems on his shoulder.

There are also images of the goddesses whom the army worshiped: Venus Victrix, typically portrayed with a shield, a Corinthian helmet and a spear in her hand (Fig. 2/5); Minerva, usually shown standing, wearing a Corinthian helmet and holding a shield and a spear (Fig. 2/6); and winged Victoria walking on the globe, most often depicted in profile with an oak wreath and the palm of victory in her hands (Fig. 2/7). Further

deities who are usually associated with the army, include the Dioscuri, the patron gods of the Roman cavalry. These are usually represented as naked youths, their hair held by diadems with the star of the Julii at the top (Fig. 2/3), leaning on spears or riding horses.

Due to their wide circulation, glyptic items were conducive to the popularizing of certain political ideas, and also testified to their owners' strong sense of identification with the state, loyalty and devotion. Moreover, engraved gems also featured portraits and symbols of emperors, the latter including the particularly popular Capricorn (Fig. 2/13), the emblem of the Augustus's cosmic and mystical destiny (Zenker 1999: 232).

Obviously, the legionary eagles and other emblems symbolized the legion itself. A sacred power which was ascribed to them gave them the status of guardian spirits. Very popular iconographic representations of the eagle showed it among the legionary emblems or with a wreath of oak leaves (a *corona civica*) (Fig. 2/15).

Later, as Novae began to evolve into a city, glyptic items from its territory were mainly decorated with images of civilian nature, related to agriculture, commerce and the crafts. Within this group, there are numerous gems with the engraved representation of: Mercury, the patron god of herds and herdsmen, roads and travelers, and commerce, usually depicted standing with the caduceus in one hand and a purse with money in it in the other (Fig. 2/4); Ceres, the patron goddess of agriculture (Fig. 2/9), typically shown standing with ears of grain in her hand (at the turn of the 3rd cent., this figure began to be portrayed as a syncretic hybrid with Fortuna, taking over her attributes: the cornucopia and the rudder); and Fortuna in a frontal view, with the cornucopia and the rudder (Fig. 2/8).

As the other small form arts, glyptics also developed its own language of symbols, signs, slogans and allegories. Personifications typically embodied moral values, but also welfare and affluence, good fortune, eternity, favourable condition of the spirit and the body, victory and desirable events.



Three personifications appear on the engraved gems of Novae: the Concordiae, identified with harmony in both the state and private spheres, especially in regards to spouses, siblings and co-rulers, which was represented by the gesture of shaking their right hands - *dextrarum iunctio* (Fig. 2/12) (Mikocki 1997: 50); Aequitas, identified with justice and illustrating the principal imperial virtues - shown with scales and the cornucopia (Fig. 2/10) (Mikocki 1997: 10); and Bonus Eventus, personifying fortunate events, and depicted as a young man with an epergne and ears of grain (Fig. 2/11).

Many engraved gems are charms of the *gryllos* and *abraxas* types, which allegedly provided to their owners more lasting benefits, e.g. successes in life or divine attention and protection. These were decorated with various symbols and short magic spells (*voces*).

Of particular interest are the gems with the *gryllos* type of images – fantastic combinations of the human body, animal, bird and fish body parts, and sacral objects (Fig. 2/14). These images are found on glyptic and toreutic items and in vase painting in the Balkans, dating as early as the 7th cent. B.C. Engraved gems of this type were expected to reduce the influence of sinister forces on people and to protect them from the evil eye, diseases and misfortunes. They were the most popular in Moesia in the 2nd and 3rd cent. (Dimitrova-Milčeva 1972: 40).

The collection also features a charm of the *abraxas* type. These were produced in Alexandria in Egypt and flourished in the 2nd and the 3rd cent. (Zwierlein-Diehl 1979: 39). They were usually engraved on both sides, their decoration included Egyptian as well as Greek, Jewish and Christian motifs. They often featured magic spells, typically in Greek. The reverse side showed the demon Abraxas, portrayed as a half-animal, half-man with a rooster's head and the extremities of a serpent, wearing an armor on his torso and carrying a whip in one hand and a shield in the other (Wypustek 2001: 183). The rooster, which was a solar bird, was believed to provide protection from the darkness and demons, while the snakes symbolized the nether world. Sometimes a lion's, a jackal's or an ass's head appeared instead of a rooster's (Dimitrova-Milčeva 1975: 126).

The collection of the Historical Museum of Svištov also includes eleven cameos, two of them are preserved in their original gold settings. They adorned medallions encountered from mid-2nd cent. A.D. until the end of the late Ancient period. Their iconography is typical for the art of the 2nd and 3rd cent. The items in the collection can be divided into four types of representation, characteristic of the provincial glyptics of that time: images of a child's

(Amor's) head, the *Genius Mortis*, women's busts, and Medusa's heads.

Of particular interest are the cameos showing a child's (Amor's) head (Fig. 2/18). Although the design of the relief is rather simple, it features a distinctive hairstyle: the hair is combed to the sides and covers the ears, with a braid in the middle of the forehead laid along the head. Scholars have identified these as *falerae*, military tokens of honor.

The motif of the *Genius Mortis* appears on many glyptic items (Fig. 2/17). The figure is always represented in the same iconographic pattern: standing, leaning on a torch by a sacrificial altar, with crossed legs. Most images are carelessly executed, and the Genius's head and wings are executed with the use mere lines. These items date to between the late 2nd and mid-3rd cent. A.D.

The glyptic female portrait is typical of the second half of the 2nd and the first quarter of the 3rd cent., or the period of the Antonines and the Severi. These images occur mainly in the provinces of Moesia Inferior, Moesia Superior, Thrace, Dacia and the two Pannoniae, as well as on the northern coast of the Black Sea. A few such items have also been found in the Rhenish provinces. The shared characteristics of these items include the shape of the gem, the model's position (usually shown in profile), and the way of portraying the hairstyle and the dress. The busts are executed in a fairly crude manner, typically by means of slanting lines, while the hairstyles most often in the current fashion of the imperial court are shown more realistically and in more detail than the faces and the clothes (Fig. 2/16).

Cameos bearing the image of Medusa's head and set in earrings, rings and medallions were used not only as adornments but also as apotropaic symbols (averting evil influence) (Fig. 2/19). In the 3rd and 4th cent., this motif was highly popular on the lower Danube and on the northern coast of the Black Sea.

The discussed items bear a wide variety of images, from a pantheon of deities through personifications of virtues and diverse symbols and charms to representations of wild and domestic animals, and date to the period from the 1st to the 4th cent. A.D. They come from various stages of the history of Novae and testify to the conditions of those times: the religion, the owners' position in the local community, their political sympathies, and fashion.

Several engraved gems and cameos from the turn of the 2nd cent. are of very high quality: they are extremely carefully and flawlessly made and have a thoughtfully designed layout of the image. These were apparently made in Italian workshops and brought to Novae by the soldiers of the *Legio*

I Italica, which was quartered there. In the 3rd and 4th cent., the motifs were engraved and carved in an increasingly crude manner, and the gems were made less painstakingly. In most images from the latter period, one notices shortened proportions, elongated faces, highly emphasized muscles and a greatly simplified technique of representation. The engraving on most of these relics is shallow.

The engraved gems and cameos were probably made in provincial workshops, whose customers were mainly the legionaries guarding the Roman *limes*, their families and the Romanized populations which inhabited the areas of the military bases at first and then the cities. Such workshops may well have operated in the Lower Danubian provinces: Moesia, Dacia and Pannonia. In terms of technology and style, they made use of the practices of Italian workshops and copied their designs (Sena Chiesa, Facchini, 1985: 13). One must remember, however, that the existence of glyptic workshops in the Balkans has not been archaeologically confirmed, and therefore it may be validly claimed that the region was supplied by the products of the workshops of Aquileia (until the 3rd cent. A.D.) and Campania (in the 3rd cent. A.D.) (Krug 1995: 189–190), especially since these small items were easy to transport. The gem engravers might also have been itinerants who carried the tools of their trade with them (Krug 1993: 270). Still, the Balkan scholars do not agree with this supposition and prefer to identify the locations of glyptic workshops as Viminacium (now Kostalec, Serbia), whose production included the cameos with female busts and with images of Medusa and Durostorum (now Silistra, Bulgaria), whose production included the cameos with portraits (Popović 1989: 11).

Since more than 200 glyptic artifacts, among

them unfinished engraved gems, have already been found in Novae and its area, it is tenable to claim that a local glyptic workshop in the city existed there in the 2nd and 3rd cent. Located at the junction of the communication route along the southern bank of the Danube with the road leading from the Barbaricum to the south, to Thrace and Byzantium (Biernacki 2003: 7), Novae would have been a reasonable location for such a business venture. Another possible site of the workshop is in Ratiaria (now Archar, Bulgaria). In the 3rd cent., the latter city was a major center of goldsmithery in Northern Moesia (Ruseva-Slokoska 1991: 17) which supplied all the Balkan provinces with its products; there is also evidence of its commercial and cultural interchange with the northern coast of the Black Sea and particularly with Chersonesus Taurica (Dimitrova-Milčeva 1980: 23). The existence of close contacts between these centers in the Antiquity is further supported by the similarities of the images, especially on the cameos with female busts and with Medusa's heads. Moreover, both cities had military origins, which ensured subsequent economic and cultural prosperity of the urban areas and of their art. Whatever the actual location of the workshop was, Novae clearly can boast one of the richest collections of glyptic items in the provinces. This, in turn, proves the brisk demand for this type of jewelry and also the high degree of the Romanization of the local population in the 2nd and 3rd cent. A.D. Although the local makers of the engraved gems and cameos followed certain generally accepted designs, their work also featured characteristics typical of the region, probably in order to satisfy the aesthetic and emotional needs of the local people.

Translated by P. Znaniecki

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РЕЗЮМЕ

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К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИКОНОГРАФИИ ГЕММ И КАМЕЙ ИЗ НОВ (НИЖНЯЯ МЕЗИЯ)

В собрании Исторического музея в Свиштове (Северная Болгария) хранится в настоящее время 129 гемм. Все они были обнаружены в Новах. Первоначально это был римский военный лагерь, охранявший римскую границу над Нижним Дунаем, в позднеантичный и ранневизантийский периоды преобразованный в город.

Геммы из Нов, датирующиеся I–IV вв., характеризуются большим разнообразием изображений: от богов, разнообразных символов и амулетов до диких и домашних животных. Иконография гемм неразрывно связана с различными периодами жизни в Новах и является отображением религиозных пристрастий, положения их собственника в местном обществе, его политических симпатий, а также моды. В I–II вв., когда на территории Нов располагался I Итальянский легион, явно доминируют изображения богов, связанных с войной, борьбой

и победой (Юпитер, Марс, Минерва, Венера, Виктория), со счастьем, удачей и здоровьем (Фортуна, *Bonus Eventus*, Асклепий и Гигия). В период, когда военный лагерь начал превращаться в город, появляются изображения, связанные с гражданским обществом, сельским хозяйством, торговлей и ремеслом: Церера, Меркурий, геммы с изображением животных. Популярными становятся также магические геммы, на которые был спрос и военных, и гражданских жителей города.

Представленный археологический материал по способу обработки и иконографии находит множество аналогий в других провинциальных центрах на Нижнем Дунае, Рейне, а также в Северном Причерноморье.

Перевод с польского Е.Ю. Клевиной

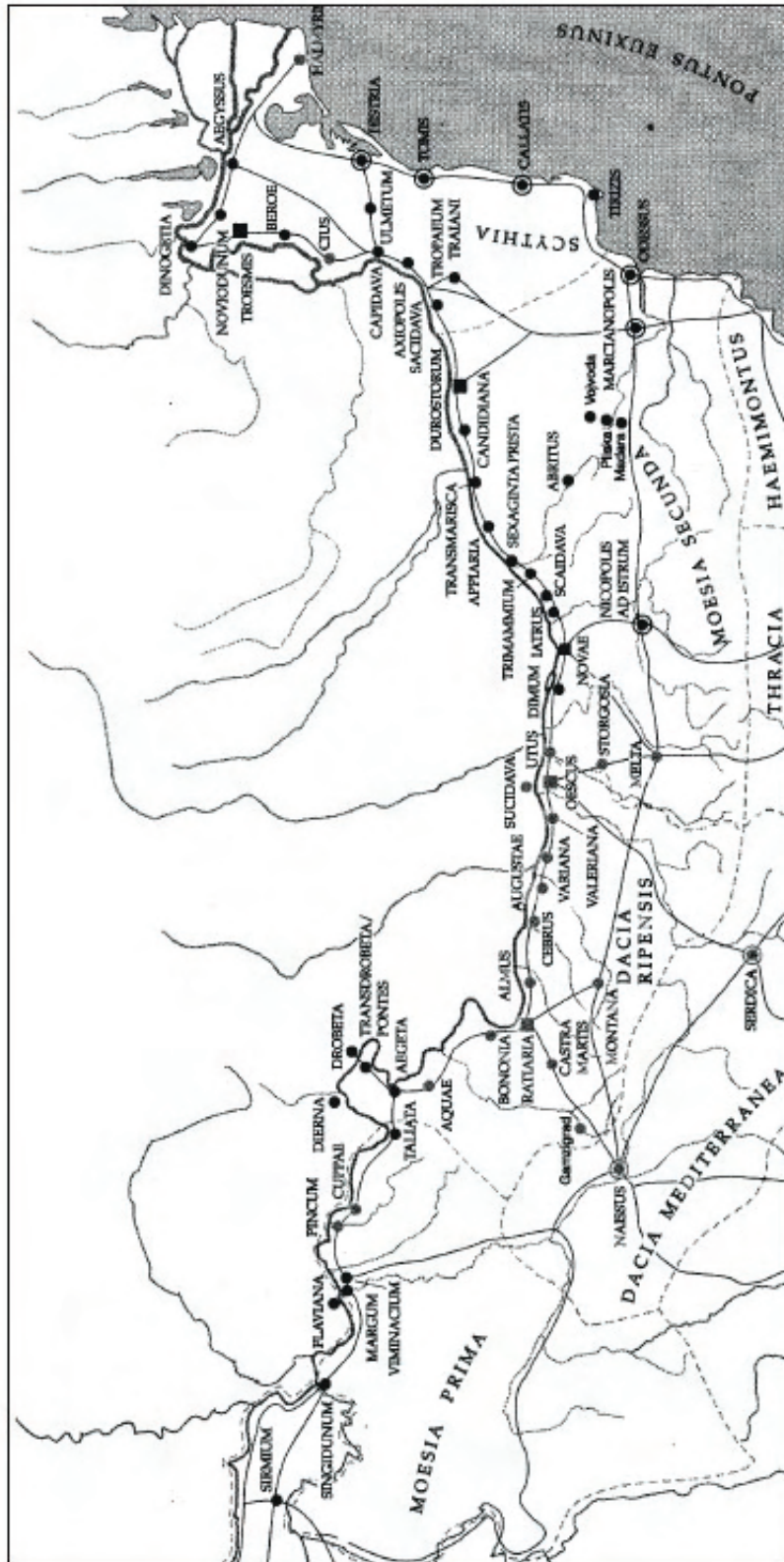


Fig.1. The limes on the Lower Danude in the late Roman period (drawing by K.Rupell)

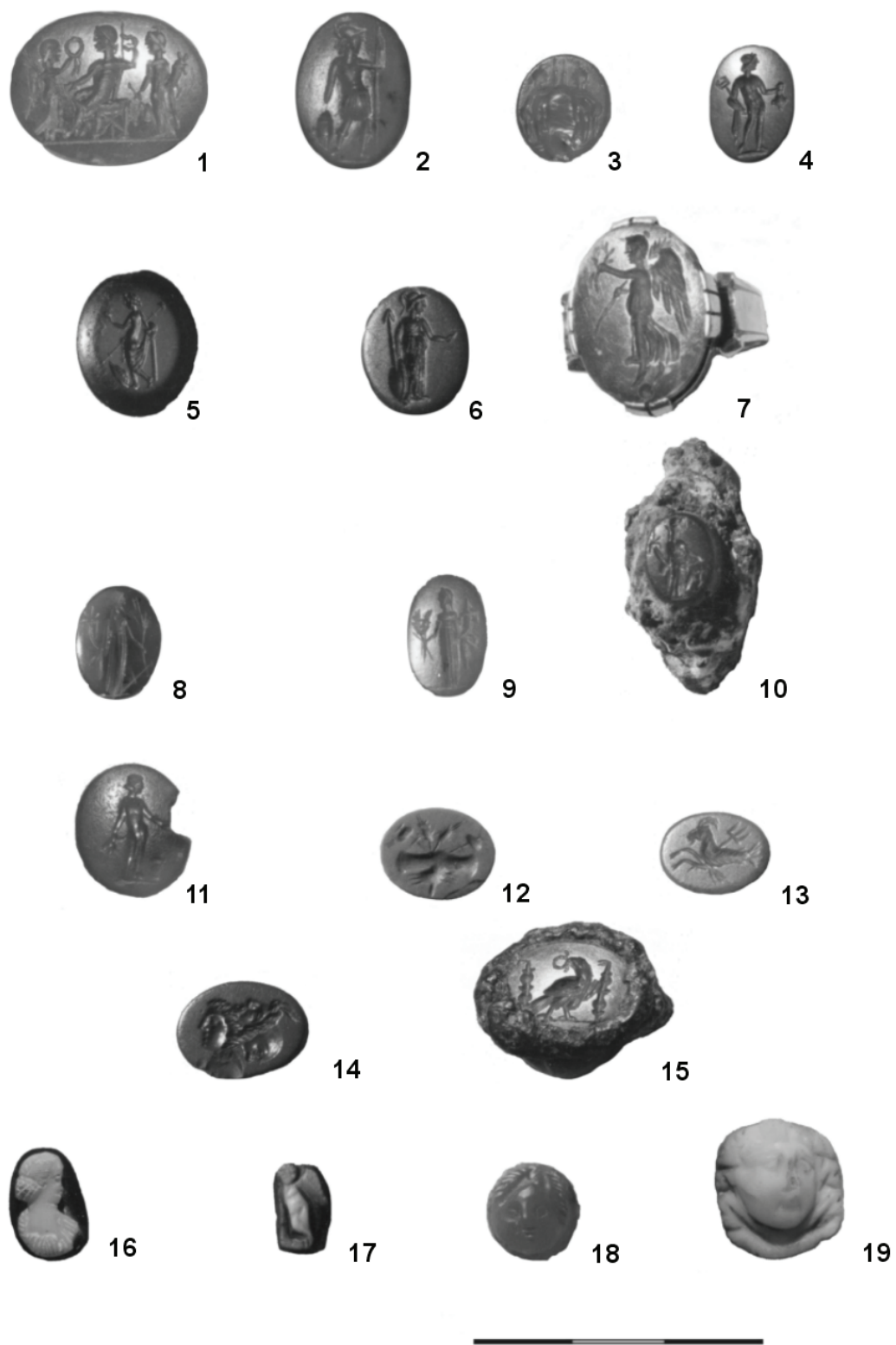


Fig. 2. The Gems and Cameos of Novae