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## Sub signo Capricorni. The Image of Capricorn in Glyptics: Literary Sources, Gemstones, Impressions, Drawings

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# *Sub signo Capricorni. The Image of Capricorn in Glyptics: Literary Sources, Gemstones, Impressions, Drawings*

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## Abstract

The relationship between glyptics and the circulation of images can be analysed from different perspectives, as seen in the case study of the image of Capricorn. The goat-fish monster entered the European collective imagination during Antiquity, when its image was spread on gems and coins. The popularity of this theme in the Augustan Age is unquestionable but, over time, the political meanings associated with Capricorn seemed to have faded, while others appeared. These meanings were fully recovered by 17<sup>th</sup> century scholars through the analysis of famous cameos and lesser-known gems. However, the protective and magical value of gems with Capricorn has always been and still remains remarkable. Further insights and comparisons are provided by some unpublished Capricorn intaglios and glass gems housed in the collections of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR) in Verona.

## Résumé

La relation entre la circulation des images et la glyptique peut être analysée selon différentes perspectives, dont l'exemple, dans le cadre de ce travail, sera fourni par l'étude de l'image du Capricorne. Ce monstre mi-chèvre mi-poisson est entré dans l'imaginaire européen dans l'Antiquité, en partie grâce à sa diffusion sur les gemmes, utilisées par un public intéressé par l'astrologie : les gemmes tantôt résumant tantôt anticipent les images présentes sur les monnaies. Le succès de ce thème à l'époque augustéenne ne fait guère de doute, mais plus tard les significations politiques de ce signe semblent disparaître, tandis que d'autres fleurissent. Ces sens furent redécouverts par les antiquaires du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle grâce à l'étude de camées célèbres et de gemmes moins connues. Toutefois, en association avec les gemmes, la valeur apotropaïque du Capricorne resta invariée. Quelques intailles et pâtes de verre inédites représentant ce sujet, qui se trouvent à présent au Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano de Vérone, offriront d'autres idées pour la recherche et la comparaison.

## Circulation of Images and Glyptics: An Introduction (A.M., U.V., G.T.)<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between the circulation of images and glyptics can be analysed from different perspectives. A preferred line of research focuses on the different meanings that images on gems may have acquired through space and time: iconographies change or are modified in the same way as their meanings. While the analysis of archaeological contexts and literary sources can help us recognize clear or hidden significances, it does not completely explain why a man or a woman chose a specific gem for sealing and for wearing in a piece of jewellery. We mainly look at engraved gems as little masterpieces, or as mysterious shrines of ancient myths – the same approach that Humanists and collectors and scholars of the Modern Age had.<sup>2</sup> There is in fact a specific and fascinating feature in gems: the engravings create, by impression, other images, which have been and are still one of the most successful ways to learn about and study the spread of classical art, both in ancient and modern times.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, for a few centuries, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. and the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E., gems were mostly a commodity, needed for a urban – and globalized – life, worn by men and women, expressing, if possible, the feelings, memories, ambitions of their owners. An undoubtable proof of the practice of sealing is given by thousands of clay *bullae* with gem impressions, which have been found in the ruins of public and private archives of the Hellenistic and Roman Ages in the Mediterranean and Eastern areas.<sup>4</sup> These impressions also offer a faithful picture of which images really circulated in glyptics during antiquity. On the other hand, the gems in the historical collections are mostly removed from their context, and groups

from dated findings are few. Only in rare cases we can follow gems from workshop to owners, and imagine the successions of owners from the first to the last ones. Indeed, in ancient times gems were often used for several generations. Finally, we can follow the reproduction of an image from a model (a coin, for example) onto gems and recognize series, workshops, and artists. We can also follow the circulation of images from the engraved stones on to other materials.

We will try to illustrate these lines of investigation by referring to an iconography that is still well recognizable nowadays: the Capricorn figure. The goat-fish hybrid entered the European collective imagination in the Classical Age and the gems bearing this picture have contributed widely to spread its iconography and the various meanings linked to it through the centuries.<sup>5</sup> Most of the gems we will present come from the collections of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR) in Verona, Italy, which houses a relevant group of intaglios with Capricorn: 40 exemplars, mostly unpublished.<sup>6</sup>

## Two Myths, Two Iconographies (A.M., U.V.)

Following the representation of Capricorn on gems, we start analysing literary sources: the glyptic images reflect indeed the different myths about the origin of the monster. The first myth revolves around the figure of Zeus and his childhood and is related to the Naiad Amaltheia. According to Ovid, Rhea decided to give the new-born Jupiter to a nymph, the Naiad called Amaltheia, who nourished him with the milk of her goat. The goat's broken horn became a symbol of abundance, the *Cornucopia*: when Zeus won over Chronos, he put his nurse and

<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Margherita Bolla, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano di Verona, who made gems and their images available for this article; Cristina D'Adda, Biblioteca Archeologica e Numismatica di Milano, for her assistance. Abbreviations follow *Année Philologique*; URL cited were requested on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are ours.

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, the term "modern" refers to the Modern Age (1500-1800).

<sup>3</sup> About collections in antiquity and in Modern Age: Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 108-109; 264-304; Maria Elisa Micheli, "Dactyliothecae romanae: tra publica magnificentia e privata luxuria," *RAL* Ser. 9, 26 (2016), 73-113.

<sup>4</sup> *Archives et sceaux du monde hellénistique*. Actes du colloque de Turin 1993, *BCH Suppl.* 29 (1996); Mehmet Önal, *Clay Seal Impressions of Zeugma - Kil Mühür Baskıları* (Ankara: Gaziantep Müzesi, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Although references to Capricorn on gems are common in studies on Augustan art and glyptics, only few papers are devoted to it; among them, Gaston Cœuret, Hélène Guiraud, "Une intaille «au capricorne», à Pouillé (Loir-et-Cher)," *RACF* 19 (1980), 29-34 (list of gems); Carina Weiß, "Virgo Capricorn und Taurus. Zur Deutung Augusteischer Symbolgemmen," *JDAI* 109 (1994), 353-369; Carina Weiß, "Capricorn und Tisch auf Augusteischen Gemmen," in *Folia in memoriam Ruth Lindner collecta*, ed. Carina Weiß and Erika Simon (Dettelbach: Röhl, 2010), 164-177; Paweł Gołyźniak, *Engraved Gems and Propaganda in the Roman Republic and under Augustus* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), *ad indicem*, provides a list of gems with Capricorn.

<sup>6</sup> About the collection: *Gemme dei Civici Musei d'Arte di Verona*, a cura di Gemma Sena Chiesa, testi di Gemma Sena Chiesa, Alessandra Magni, Gabriella Tassinari (Roma: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 2009).

her horn among the stars.<sup>7</sup> In another version of the myth, related by Hyginus,<sup>8</sup> Amaltheia is the daughter of the King of Crete. Again, she received and fed the little Jupiter with the help of her goat, and then she and her goat were put among the stars. The connection between the goat and the Cornucopia is highlighted also in Apollodorus' *Library*, where we can find mention of Cornucopia's extraordinary powers.<sup>9</sup> This association is also illustrated by Eratosthenes in his *Catasterismi* where Amaltheia is the mother of Capricorn.<sup>10</sup> The myth of Capricorn is related to the positive image of the Cornucopia, whose power could be understood as a good *omen* for the owner of the image.

Capricorn-Amaltheia is well portrayed in a group of gems, in which the lower part of the body of the animal becomes a horn of plenty. These intaglios appear as an evolution of an image of Cornucopia, common in Ptolemaic coinage and glyptics, ending in a head of goat.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, their images recall the double-body animals and figures common in Italic "a globolo" scarabs.<sup>12</sup> A couple of intaglios in Verona MATR collection presents this iconography: the blob style of the carnelian MATR inv. 26925 is well diffused, for example, on gems from late Celtic contexts in northern Italy and Gaul (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. until the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the carnelian MATR inv. 26926 reflects the calligraphic style of workshops engraving with wheel drills, in the last decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 1) Nevertheless this image seems to disappear after



**Figure 1.** Capricorn-Cornucopia. Intaglio, carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26926. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.



**Figure 2.** Capricorn with Cornucopia. Intaglio, burnt carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26928. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

the Augustan era:<sup>15</sup> in carnelians MATR inv. 26927-26928, (Fig. 2) Capricorn and Cornucopia are presented as separate, under the influence of Augustan coinage, that oriented the taste of the craftsman and of the owners, as we will explain later.

In these last gems, Capricorn appears as a sea-monster half-goat and half-fish. This iconography, created in the Near East during the Bronze Age to depict the monster *Suhurmāšu*,<sup>16</sup> constitutes the

<sup>7</sup> *Ov. fast.* 5, 115-128; particularly 121-124: "She suckled the god. But she broke a horn on a tree, and was shorn of half her charm. The nymph picked it up, wrapped it in fresh herbs, and carried it, full of fruit, to the lips of Jove." (James G. Frazer - G. P. Goold).

<sup>8</sup> *Hyg. astr.* 2, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Apollod.* 2, 7, 5: "Now Amalthea was a daughter of Haemonius, and she had a bull's horn, which, according to Pherecydes, had the power of supplying meat or drink in abundance, whatever one might wish." (James G. Frazer).

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Olivieri, *Pseudo-Eratosthenis catasterismi, Mythographi Graeci* 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897), 33-34. Eratosth. *catast.* 27: "Having gained the power, Zeus put him among the stars with his mother, the goat. For having found the shell in the sea, he has a fish-tail as mark of distinction."

<sup>11</sup> Cornucopia on hellenistic gems: Dimitris Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 98, tav. 79, nos. 637-638.

<sup>12</sup> For instance Ulrico Pannuti, *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. La collezione gliptica II* (Roma: IPZS, 1994), 58, no. 38; 70-71, nos. 49-50.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabetta Galletti, "Gli oggetti d'ornamento come indizio di acculturazione," in *I Leponti tra mito e realtà. Saggi in occasione della mostra*, ed. Raffaele C. de Marinis, S. Biaggio Simona (Locarno: Gruppo Archeologico Ticinese, 2000), 325-345: 332-333.

<sup>14</sup> On these different engraving styles see Hélène Guiraud, *Intailles et camées de l'époque romaine en Gaule (territoire français)*, *Gallia* 48ème Suppl. (1988, 2008), I, 38-44, II, 61-65.

<sup>15</sup> We mention a couple of rings with glass gems from the fortress of Haltern am See in North Rhine-Westphalia (before 9 C.E.): *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik*, Ausstellungskatalog (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1988), 599-600, kat. 442-443.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Green, "A Note on the Assyrian 'Goat-Fish', 'Fish-Man' and 'Fish-Woman,'" *Iraq* 48 (1986), 25-30: 25, and also Martin L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) especially 29, where the author underlines the correspondence among Greek and Mesopotamian myths and astronomy.



greatest part of the gems with Capricorn. Two almost contemporary intaglios of the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., a late Babylonian seal, depicting the goat-fish,<sup>17</sup> and an “island gem” portraying a goat with a long tail of a sea-snake (a *ketos*),<sup>18</sup> illustrate the far origin of the two iconographic versions. According to a Greek myth,<sup>19</sup> Aegipan (son of Pan or of Zeus himself) helped Zeus by returning him his sinews, which had been stolen by Typhon. The myth is also reported by Hyginus, in two different ways. Firstly, quoting the Eratosthenes’ version we have already discussed, Aegipan was put by Jupiter among the stars because he had helped him fighting the Titans.<sup>20</sup> The other version he proposes highlights a connection between the Capricorn and Pan. In fact, to avoid the Titans, Pan suggested the Gods to transform themselves into beasts and turned himself into a goat. Here, the great difference with the first myth is that Capricorn is Pan himself, later put among the stars by Jupiter.<sup>21</sup>

We can find Capricorn on roman gems too, as shown by some intaglios and glass gems now in MATR collection, whose main comparisons are related to Rome, Aquileia and other areas of early romanisation. Capricorn appears as a sea-snake in the glass intaglios MATR inv. 26951-26953<sup>22</sup> and in the grey jasper MATR inv. 26950, (Fig. 3) close to the products of the “Officina del Pegaso” of Aquileia (in this gem, only the subtle lines used to draw horns permit to better define the monster as a Capricorn).<sup>23</sup> The image of the goat-fish is even more diffused: in glass (MATR inv. 26946, 26955); in the fine, pellet style of the carnelian MATR inv. 26931; or in the onyx MATR inv. 26929 (Fig. 4). The monster, curiously, has no head because the stone broke during the engraving,



**Figure 3.** Capricorn as sea-snake. Intaglio, grey jasper. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26950. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.



**Figure 4.** Capricorn as goat-fish. Intaglio, banded onyx. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26929. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

forcing the craftsman to eliminate the damaged part in order to save his precious work.

### Coins and Gems with Capricorn in the Late Republican Age: An Increasing Popularity (A.M., U.V.)

Why, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E., do we find a remarkable number of images of Capricorn carved on intaglios, which, we argue, were produced by Italian workshops, or impressed on glass gems? Should we suppose a continuous tradition of gems production, by schools or workshops? Did other artefacts or trends increase the diffusion of these iconographic schemes? These gems confirm a phenomenon not foreign to ancient and modern authors: the diffusion

<sup>17</sup> The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, Morgan Seal 803 (<https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/time-cosmos/objects/late-babylonian-seal>).

<sup>18</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 42.11.12 (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254455>).

<sup>19</sup> Apollod. 1, 6, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Hyg. astr. 2, 28. “[Eratosthenes says] that the reason his [Capricorn] lower part is fish-shaped is that he had hit his enemies with murices instead of rocks.”

<sup>21</sup> Hyg. fab. 196. “By the gods’ will, Pan was included in the number of the stars, since his warning allowed the gods to flee Typhoon’s attack, also because he then turned into a goat, which is why he is called Aegocerus and, by us, Capricorn.”

<sup>22</sup> Comparisons from Rome, *Scalae Anulariae*: Liisa Harri, “Gemme in pasta vitrea e pietra dura. Altri materiali in pasta vitrea. Ipotesi di una bottega tardorepubblicana nell’area del *Lacus Iuturnae*,” in *Lacus Iuturnae II. Saggi degli anni 1982-1985*, ed. Eva M. Steinby (Roma: Quasar, 2012), 2, 253-297: 285, tav. LV, nos. 107-108.

<sup>23</sup> “Officina del Pegaso”: Gemma Sena Chiesa, *Gemma del Museo Nazionale di Aquileia* (Padova: Associazione Nazionale per Aquileia, 1966), 29, pl. LXXXIII, no. 1230.

of the science of astrology and the practice of horoscopes in Rome and in the prosperous cities of the *paeninsula*, in part due to the presence of a multi-ethnic crowd from Greece and the Orient.<sup>24</sup> Capricorn, Jupiter's helper, ascended to the sky, could be felt as a positive and apotropaic creature, from which help could be obtained for every-day life.<sup>25</sup> In Rome lived a critical mass of people virtually interested in such iconography, who encountered a new generation of glyptic craftsmen and artists, mostly arrived in Rome and Italy, with their knowledge and sketchbooks, during the Age of the Roman conquests, from Seleucian areas, Pontus, and even Alexandria.<sup>26</sup> Therefore it was easy for the customers to find their favourite gems under the sign of Capricorn.

We can note the same phenomenon in coinage. A little Capricorn is depicted on a *denarius* of C. Vibius Pansa (90 B.C.E.), on a *denarius serratus* of L. Papius (79 B.C.E.), and on a bronze coin of Q. Oppius (we accept it was minted around 80 B.C.E.).<sup>27</sup> The role of these Capricorns is debated: they could be symbols related to the minters, inspired by the rulers, or simply countermarks. In Rome, messages on coins (images and *legenda*) should be read, above all, as a proposal of the magistrate or emperor, with limited attention paid to users' comprehension. However, a recurrent symbol could create a sort of familiarity with its image, whatever its origins. So, after a few decades, during the Civil Wars, the young Octavian could easily impose the image of Capricorn on gems for his political propaganda. Here is a short list of

propaganda gems in MATR collections: inv. 27990, the adoption ring of Caesar for Octavian, with a Capricorn at the centre, dated around 44 B.C.E.;<sup>28</sup> inv. 26024, a maiden (Virgo Astraea) seated on a bull-goat (a double monster related to Caesar and Octavian);<sup>29</sup> inv. 26109, a young Octavian-Neptunus with a Capricorn near it, maybe related to the battle of Naulochus (36 B.C.E.); inv. 26947: a sculpture of a Capricorn on a base, as a tribute for the victory of Actium (31 B.C.E.).<sup>30</sup> All these gems are made of glass, the cheapest material for the replication of masterpieces created by artists also working for Roman mints. These glass intaglios, created with Octavian's supporters in mind, are said to have first been diffused among the comrades and clients of the future *princeps*.<sup>31</sup> We argue that they were the field where the political value of the image of Capricorn was tested, before its extended use after 27 B.C.E. And it is interesting that, even if Capricorn does not seem to be very attractive to modern engravers, a few post-classical, fine pieces revived some of these iconographies.<sup>32</sup>

### Augustus and Capricorn: The Choice of a Symbol (U.V.)

The relationship between Augustus and Capricorn has been deeply investigated by scholars for centuries, but it is not easy to find a unique explanation. According to Roman Emperors' biographer, Suetonius, Augustus was born on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 63 B.C.E., hence he was born under the sign of Libra.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Marcel Le Glay, "Magie et sorcellerie à Rome au dernier siècle de la République," in *L'Italie préromaine et la Rome républicaine. I. Mélanges offerts à Jacques Heurgon* (École Française de Rome, 1976), 525-550: 529-532; Wolfgang Hübner, "L'Astrologie dans l'Antiquité," *Pallas* 30 (1983), 1-24; Béatrice Bakhouché, "Augustus: les astres et la mutation de l'autorité à Rome," *REA* 114, 1 (2012), 47-72: 48-52.

<sup>25</sup> Even though Bakhouché, "Augustus," 54, says that the Capricorn could have some negative interpretations. Bakhouché quotes J.-H. Abry "Auguste: la balance et le capricorne," *REL*, 66 (1988), where the author highlights Capricorn's bad influence according, for example, to Vettius Valens *Anthologiae* 1, 2 who describes the Capricorn as κακῶν αἴτιον, ἀσελγές, λατρευτικόν, ἀνιγματοῶδες, διφυές, « source of evil, servile, riddling and double »; cf. also Cic. *orat.* 58-59 *gelidum ualido de pectore frigus anhelans // corpore semifero magno Capricornus in orbe*.

<sup>26</sup> A group of clay *bullae* with the goat-fish, from the archives of Seleucia on Tigris (Iraq), dated by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, is worthy of further study: Ariela Bolati, "Animali Fantastici," in *Seleucia al Tigri. Le impronte di sigillo dagli Archivi*, a cura di Antonio Invernizzi (Alessandria: Centro Scavi Torino Missione in Iraq II, 2004), II, 172-173, tav. 94, AF 101-104.

<sup>27</sup> Pansa: RRC, 342/5b; (British Museum, inv. 1949,0403.50); [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_1949-0403-50](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1949-0403-50); Papius: RRC, 384/1 (British Museum inv. R-8474); [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_R-8474](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_R-8474). About Oppius: E. Badian, "Q. OPPIVS.P.R.," *ANSMN* 29 (1984), 99-102; disagrees Bakhouché, "Augustus," 53, notes 32-34.

<sup>28</sup> Gemma Sena Chiesa, "Il potere delle immagini: gemme politiche e cammei di prestigio," *Paideia* LXVII (2012), 255-278: 263-264.

<sup>29</sup> Alessandra Magni in *Gemme Verona*, 78-79, no. 302.

<sup>30</sup> Alessandra Magni, "Per una storia della glittica "di propaganda": alcune riflessioni. I. L'antico. Gemme inedite a Verona," *La Rivista di Engramma* 170 (dicembre 2019) ([http://www.egramma.it/e05/index.php?id\\_articolo=3719](http://www.egramma.it/e05/index.php?id_articolo=3719)): 17, 19, 27, where inv. 26947, 26109 are preliminarily discussed.

<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, a part of these glass gems, evidently unfinished, didn't circulate in antiquity: Magni, "Propaganda," 17.

<sup>32</sup> A neoclassical Poniatowski gem, with a portrait, a little Capricorn and the signature of Dioskourides (Christie's, London: 1839-1529; <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/510E10F0-C324-4C81-8B43-FF212C5B91A4>); a cameo in St. Petersburg with a portrait of Octavian, a Capricorn and various symbols (Hermitage Museum, TP-12650: Golyźniak, *Propaganda*, 415, 93.P, fig. 813; <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/18.%20carved%20stones/1002501/>), that deserves further studies.

<sup>33</sup> Suet. *caes.* 2, 5: "Augustus was born just before sunrise on the ninth day before the Kalends of October in the consulship of Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Antonius, at the Ox-Heads in the Palatine quarter, where he now has a shrine, built shortly after his death." (J. C. Rolfe).

Then why the Capricorn, as Suetonius himself pondered,<sup>34</sup> is said to be the sign under which he was born? A great analysis of all the hypothesis given by scholars is to be found in Tamsyn Barton's *Augustus and Capricorn*, in which she shows the difficulty to come up to a definitive answer to the problem of Augustus' horoscope. Going from the Moon's ascendant of the day he was born, to the one of the day of his conception, which probably was in December, every hypothesis has been contemplated.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Barton shows that both the theory of the Moon's Ascendant and the theory of the sign of the month of his conception can be reconciliated with other theories, and that the answer is not likely to be found in astrology. Other possibilities have recently been considered by Beatrice Bakhouche, who has related the Capricorn to the sky of January 16<sup>th</sup>, 27 B.C.E. (when Octavian was declared Augustus by *Senatus*) and linked it to July 20<sup>th</sup>, 44 B.C.E. (when *Sidus Iulium* appeared) as well as to September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 63 B.C.E., including in her analysis astrological facts.<sup>36</sup> Our purpose, however, is not to decide which interpretation of astronomical phenomena is correct:<sup>37</sup> we are only trying to define the symbolic possibilities that the Capricorn offered to Octavian's and then to Augustus' propaganda, that very often reuses and resemanticises an old, quite diffuse image. Capricorn represents the union between the sea and the earth,<sup>38</sup> so it is perfectly suited to embody Augustus' will to pacificate the sea and the earth, after the battle of Actium. The Capricorn is also related to the Egyptian myth of Osiris, because he was reborn after Winter Solstice, *id est* in the sign of Capricorn.<sup>39</sup> Following this interpretation, it is clear that the rebirth of Osiris can be linked to the rebirth of the Roman Power

with Augustus, to the *aurea aetas* central to the emperor's propaganda.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the Capricorn represents the heavens' gate whereby the souls ascend to the divine ether, underlying even more the strong symbolic value of rebirth.<sup>41</sup>

The Augustan poets did participate to that symbolic propaganda by including in their literary works some references to the Capricorn. Horace in his *Odes*,<sup>42</sup> for instance, which P.J. Connor understands: "So 'the tyrant of the Western or Hesperian wave' contains reverberations that shift our thoughts from geographical astrology to politics. Within this rollcall of the possible ascendant birth signs, Horace took a quick shot at the supremacy of Augustus, a sharply worded suggestion about the nature of his dominance, or domination, in Rome."<sup>43</sup> It is therefore clear that the Capricorn was at the heart of Augustus' propaganda and that he has used it in a large variety of *media*, gems, coinage, public monuments, literary works, to reach the widest and most heterogeneous public at different levels of understanding. The symbols of that message, namely peace, rebirth, and power, became part of Augustus' program of creating a new *aurea aetas* for Rome and its Empire. Nonetheless, some messages were undoubtedly reserved for a more specific audience. While the Emperor's circle facilitated the edition of literary works about astrology (e.g. the *Astronomica* of Manilius *post* 9 C.E. or the Latin translation of *Aratea* by his nephew Germanicus, 12-14 C.E.),<sup>44</sup> charlatans and magicians were persecuted, as Cassius Dio remarks.<sup>45</sup> Astrology – this could be the

<sup>34</sup> Suet. *caes.* 2, 94. *Qua tamen post multas adhortationes vix et cunctanter edita exsilivit Theogenes adoravitque eum. Tantam mox fiduciam fati Augustus habuit, ut thema suum vulgaverit nummumque argenteum nota sideris Capricorni, quo natus est, percusserit:* "From that time on Augustus had such faith in his destiny, that he made his horoscope public and issued a silver coin stamped with the sign of the constellation Capricornus, under which he was born" (J. C. Rolfe).

<sup>35</sup> For further informations and discussions, see Tamsyn Barton, "Augustus and Capricorn: Astrological Polyvalency and Imperial Rhetoric," *JRS* 85 (1995), 33-51.

<sup>36</sup> Bakhouche, "Augustus."

<sup>37</sup> See also Eugenio La Rocca, "Augusto, il segno zodiacale del Capricorno e la decorazione frontonale di un'edicola dall'area del teatro di Marcello," in *Augusto. La costruzione del Principato* (Roma: Bardi, 2017), 107-163, especially 109-116.

<sup>38</sup> Bakhouche, "Augustus," 63 and La Rocca, "Capricorno," 114.

<sup>39</sup> La Rocca, "Capricorno," 119.

<sup>40</sup> La Rocca, "Capricorno," 115 and also Verg. *ecl.* 4 1-10, Nuccio d'Anna, *Mistero e profezia. La IV egloga di Virgilio e il rinnovamento del mondo* (Cosenza: Giordano, 2007) and Charles Guittard, "Siècle d'Auguste et âge d'or," *AAnthung* 55 (2015), 477-487.

<sup>41</sup> Bakhouche, "Augustus," 58 and La Rocca, "Capricorno," 110.

<sup>42</sup> Hor. *Carm.* 2, 17 : *seu Libra seu me Scorpis aspicit / formidulosus, pars violentior / natalis horae, seu tyrannus / Hesperiae Capricornus undae, / utrumque nostrum incredibili modo / consentit astrum:* "Whether Libra or the fearsome Scorpio watches me as the more powerful influence at my birth, or Capricorn the lord of the western wave, our two signs coincide in a quite miraculous fashion" (N. Rudd).

<sup>43</sup> P.J. Connor, "Tyrannus Hesperiae Capricornus undae," *Latomus* 44 (1985), 836-840: 840.

<sup>44</sup> Matteo Rossetti, "Gli 'Aratea' di Manilio: la catena dei segni," *La Biblioteca di Classico Contemporaneo* 10 (2019), 183-197.

<sup>45</sup> DC 56, 25: "Besides these events at that time, the seers were forbidden to prophesy to any person alone or to prophesy regarding death even if others should be present. Yet so far was Augustus from caring about such matters in his own case that he set forth to all in an edict the aspect of the stars at the time of his own birth. Nevertheless, he forbade this practice." (E. Cary and H.B. Foster).



message of the emperor's entourage – is a serious science, but dangerous if in inexperienced hands.

### Coins and Gems with Capricorn in the Augustan Age: The Success of the Image (A.M.)

The presence of Capricorn on coins, really discreet until the II Triumvirate, became of great impact in the Augustan era, after 27 B.C.E., in oriental mints,<sup>46</sup> and then in Rome and Western Provinces.<sup>47</sup> The circulation of the image of Capricorn between coinage and glyptics is clearly illustrated by some MATR intaglios, in which the iconography is completed variously by globes, as on the carnelian inv. 26940 (Fig. 5), and on the glass inv. 26944; by rudders, on the linear carnelian inv. 26937 (Fig. 6); by palm branches, on the agate inv. 26923-26924 (Fig. 7); by the trident, on the carnelians inv. 26940 (Fig. 5), inv. 26941. These symbols of power and victory, common on post-Actiac monuments too, were admitted by gem owners in their private lives and accepted on personal seals. While the figurative scheme is similar, the styles of these gems are different: we find old-fashioned a-globolo and pellet gems, and modern calligraphic, linear gems. Some pieces even show a mix of these different currents.<sup>48</sup> The archaistic gems created by the Officina del Tirso in Aquileia,<sup>49</sup> close to the intaglio inv. 26923 (Fig. 7), reflect a widespread taste in the Augustan art. On the other side, the mental image of Capricorn allows to recognize some really sketchy work, as the chalcedonies inv. 26933 or 26945. (Fig. 8)



**Figure 5.** Capricorn with globe and trident. Intaglio, carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26940. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.



**Figure 6.** Capricorn with rudder. Intaglio, carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26937. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.



**Figure 7.** Capricorn with palm branch. Intaglio, banded agate. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26923. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

<sup>46</sup> Maybe by inspiration of Attalic coinage: see *SNG, IV Fitzwilliam Museum*, *SNGuk\_0406\_4664* (drachm, Attalus I, mint of Alabanda: <http://www.syllogenummorum-graecorum.org>). Due to pandemic situation, I'm unable to better investigate this aspect of Augustan coinage, that could be inscribed into the fascination expressed by Pergamon all over the late Republican Age: Ann Kuttner, "Republican Rome Looks at Pergamon," *HSPH 97* (1995), 157-178. About *cistophori* with Capricorn and Cornucopia on reverse see e.g. Walter Trimmlich, "Münzpropaganda," in *Kaiser Augustus*, 486, 512-513, kat. 337 (=RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 493).

<sup>47</sup> Trimmlich, "Münzpropaganda," 486; Capricorn with globe: RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 174-175 (*denarii*, mint of Lugdunum, 12 B.C.E.); with cornucopia, globe and rudder: RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 125-130 (*aurei* and *denarii*, mint of Colonia Patricia, 18-17 B.C.E.). On the reverse of the remarkable *denarius* RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 124 (mint of Colonia Patricia, 18-17 B.C.E.), the image of Capricorn is a part of an allegorical composition with flying Aurora.

<sup>48</sup> See above, note 10. A glass gem now in British Museum (inv. 1923.0401.928: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1923-0401-928#object-detail-data](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1923-0401-928#object-detail-data)) shows a head of Octavian, carved in a classical style; below it, a Capricorn in a pellet archaic style.

<sup>49</sup> "Officina del Tirso": Sena Chiesa, *Aquileia*, 28-29, pl. LXXXII, nos. 5-11.





**Figure 8.** Capricorn. Intaglio, chalcedony. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26933. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

### After the Augustan Age: Variations and Persistence (A.M.)

After the Augustan era, the coinage ensures a continuous circulation of the image of Capricorn as goat-fish and, especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E., as sea-snake.<sup>50</sup> The image of double Capricorns supporting the *clipeus uirtutis*, created for gems such as the sumptuous cameos housed in New York and Berlin<sup>51</sup> and spread on glass intaglios as MATR inv. 27988, circulated on coins from the Julio-Claudian era until the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.<sup>52</sup>

However, beside replicas of Augustan types in the Flavian Age up to Hadrian's rule, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., Capricorn is once again a simple element in complex iconographies: as attribute of heroes and personifications, like *Felicitas* with Antoninus Pius<sup>53</sup> or *Tranquillitas* with Philip the Arab;<sup>54</sup> in top of standards, or under temples for Legions (for instance in Zeugma in Commagene, Turkey).<sup>55</sup> Gems with Capricorn from *limes* settlements are less numerous than one would expect from a symbol related to legions:

<sup>50</sup> RIC V *Gallienus* (joint reign), 361-362 ([http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.5.gall\(1\).361](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.5.gall(1).361)).

<sup>51</sup> Gołyźniak, *Propaganda*, 415, 90P-91P (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253042>).

<sup>52</sup> The last issue was under Pescennius: RIC IV *Pescennius Niger*, 44 (<http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.4.pn.44>).

<sup>53</sup> RIC III *Antoninus Pius*, 131 c-d (<http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.3.ant.131c>; <http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.3.ant.131d>).

<sup>54</sup> RIC IV *Philip I*, 9 (<http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.4.ph.i.9>).

<sup>55</sup> Kevin Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria. Northern Syria, 64 BC-AD 253* (London: Royal Numismatic Society, 2004), 464-465, 29 (Elagabalus), 31a (Philip I), 31b (Ottacilia Severa), 31c (Philip II).

we find, among them, five gems from Xanten,<sup>56</sup> a dozen from Carnuntum<sup>57</sup> and a sporadic presence in other sites. The circulation of the image in full Imperial Age is anyway confirmed by a number of clay impressions with Capricorn found in several archives (at Cyrene in Libya or Zeugma).<sup>58</sup>

### The Magic Capricorn (A.M.)

Among these clay *bullae*, some represent Capricorn accompanied by the Moon and inscriptions, perhaps *uoces magicae*. In antiquity as in the Modern Age, stones were given a protective function; images, inscriptions, rituals of consecration could increase it. But it is difficult to define the degree of magic of a gem or isolate a group of magical gems in scientific terms.<sup>59</sup> We can look to the continuous tradition of *Homo Signorum* - Zodiac Man, from antiquity to the Renaissance and beyond: here is confirmed the link between Capricorn, Saturnus and winter, in order to protect people from rheumatism; knees are the parts of the body reserved to Capricorn.<sup>60</sup> This protective function, linked to *melothesia*, can lead to the choice of a gem more than a simple Zodiac sign. Often gems show Capricorn in association with other Zodiac signs: with Cancer, in MATR inv. 26938<sup>61</sup> (Fig. 9) or with Scorpio.<sup>62</sup> In this last case, the protection of *genitalia*, ensured by the image of Scorpio according to the Zodiac Man, increases the power of the stone. In the quite ancient carnelian MATR inv. 26936 (Fig. 10), the figures of Capricorn and Scorpio are combined in a curious monster.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes these combinations

<sup>56</sup> Gertrud Platz-Horster, "Neue Gemmen aus Xanten," *Xantener Berichte* 30 (2017), 45-90: 64-65, no. 27 and the list provided.

<sup>57</sup> Günther Dembski, *Die antike Gemmen und Kameen aus Carnuntum* (Wien: Phoibos, 2005), 150-151, taf. 100-101, nos. 988-998.

<sup>58</sup> To Gołyźniak, *Propaganda*, 394, nos. 967-970, we add at least Gianfranco Maddoli, "Le cretule del Nomophylakion di Cirene," *ASA* (1963-1964), 39-145: 119, nos. 796-800.

<sup>59</sup> About the question see Véronique Dasen, Árpád M. Nagy, "Gems," in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 406-445; Maria Grazia Lancellotti, "Le gemme e l'astrologia," in *Sylloge Gemmarum Gnosticarum, BNum Monografia* 8.2.1-II (2003, 2007), I, 115-124. A magical Capricorn in MATR Verona is edited by Attilio Mastrocinque: *Sylloge*, II, 196, Vr 30.

<sup>60</sup> John Z. Wee, "Discovery of the Zodiac Man in Cuneiform," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 67 (2015), 217-233.

<sup>61</sup> Compare Idit Sagiv, *Representations of Animals on Greek and Roman Engraved Gems* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), 138, fig. 58.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Maddoli, "Cirene," 119, no. 797; *Sylloge*, II, 160, Ts 22 (yellow jasper). For the meaning of these gems see Lancellotti, "Astrologia," 122-123.

<sup>63</sup> Close to a sard in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 81.6.161 (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/245032>).



**Figure 9.** Capricorn and Cancer. Intaglio, black jasper. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26938. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.



**Figure 10.** Capricorn-Scorpio. Intaglio, carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26936. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

were also explained using the powerful system of images created by the Augustan circle (the Scorpio as the sign of Tiberius, the crab as Augustan coinage symbol . . .). Even if we cannot exclude it, we have to remark that this hidden political meaning got lost over the centuries and it does not seem to be mentioned, for example, in *Lapidaria* books that, from the Hellenistic Age to the Middle Ages, describe the properties and powers of the stones and their engravings.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Cantimpratensis (*De lapidibus pretiosis et eorum virtutibus* 1.1) cited a *taurum insculptum aut virginem vel capricornium*, that, among its virtues, *tutum*

## Gems with Capricorn in the Middle Ages: Readings, Re-appropriations, Imitations (A.M.)

The image of Capricorn disappears from coinage at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. At the same time, we note a change in production, diffusion, and use of the engraved gems. Among the new Christian gems, there are no images of Capricorn. Condemnation of astrology by Augustine or later by Isidorus of Sevilla<sup>65</sup> can partially explain this absence. In fact, even the *interpretatio Christiana* of the Zodiac, implemented for example by Zeno, Bishop of Verona (+ 371 C.E.), ends up condemning Capricorn. For Zeno it was a companion of the devil, symbolizing the sins, washed away by the Aquarius, while Christus was related to Aries, the young goat.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, while any political meaning slowly disappeared, along with coinage, the astronomical, astrological, and magic value of Capricorn continued, more or less openly, throughout the Middle Ages. In these centuries, ancient gems were collected as *spolia*, reused on holy crosses, altars, or reliquaries, where the view of the carved image was difficult and apparently the gems lose the faculty to generate impressions and to circulate. Little evidence ensures that the original meanings of the gems were correctly understood by scholars, but new interpretations were given to them.<sup>67</sup> Collected free, unset stones were used to generate impressions that then inspired artists who illuminated books, for example.<sup>68</sup> A tradition of astrology and astronomy

*facit gestantem* (Matteo Milani, "Trattato delle virtuose pietre," *Carte Romanze* 3/2 (2015), 109-149: 120-121). The description recalls the cited gem MATR inv. 26024, but any political meaning is lost.

<sup>65</sup> Aug. *De Genesi ad litt.* 2,17: *Ideoque fatendum est, quando ab istis vera dicuntur, instinctu quodam occultissimo dici, quem nescientes humanae mentes patiuntur. Quod cum ad decipiendos homines fit, spirituum seductorum operatio est:* "It must be admitted that when they predict the truth, their predictions are caused by a wholly mysterious inspiration, that human minds undergo without their knowledge. But when it happens to deceive souls, it is the work of spirits of deceit". Isid. *Etym.* 3 27: *Astrologia vero partim naturalis, partim superstitiosa est. . . . Superstitiosa vero est illa quam mathematici sequuntur, qui in stellis auguriantur, quique etiam duodecim caeli signa per singula animae vel corporis membra disponunt, siderumque cursu nativitates hominum et mores praedicare conantur:* "Astrology, however, is partly natural, and partly superstitious. . . . Superstitious astrology, however, is the one that the Mathematicians [astrologers] follow: they vaticinate from the stars, relate each part of the soul or of the body to the twelve signs and attempt to predict births and behaviour by the courses of the stars."

<sup>66</sup> Francesca Tasca Dirani, "Il Sermone dello Zodiaco di Zeno di Verona (I, 38). "Astrologia Praedicabilis" ed inculturazione", *Angelicum*, 83, 3 (2006), 533-556.

<sup>67</sup> Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Interpretatio Christiana. Zur Bedeutung der Gemmen in Mittelaltlicher Schreine*, in *Die Gemmen und Kameen des Dreikönigsschreine 1.1.* (Köln: Verlag Kölner Dom, 1998), 61-104.

<sup>68</sup> Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Il medioevo fantastico*, transl. Fulvio Zuliani, F. Bovoli (Milano: Adelphi, 1983), 51-62, 85-94. The practise of copy gems on manuscripts is diffused in

manuscripts assured the continuity of the image of the Capricorn in books, until modern times, and also from books to other media.<sup>69</sup>

Examples of the reuse of gems with Capricorn in the Middle Ages seem however rare and, apparently, rather late.<sup>70</sup> We know, for instance, of an ancient gem with Capricorn as a part of a 13<sup>th</sup> century seal, housed in Wien.<sup>71</sup> More frequently, the gems with Capricorn could inspire, directly or indirectly, sculptures depicting Zodiac, seasons, monthly jobs. Here are a couple of examples of Italian Romanesque art: the first specimen is a marble relief from the prothyrus of Modena Cathedral, said to be the work of Master Wiligelmus (1130). A section of it replicates the theme of Capricorn represented as a man, riding the goat-fish.<sup>72</sup> The figure is inscribed in a limited space, which is unusual for this type of representation, but typical of gems. A gem was used as a model, with the intermediation of impressions, or drawings inspired by impressions (because of the opposite orientation); an intaglio, now in a private collection, which dates from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E., provides a good example of this rare iconography.<sup>73</sup> A second specimen, on the Portale dello Zodiaco in the Sacra di San Michele in Piedmont, masterpiece of Nicolaus (1128-1130),<sup>74</sup> represents the Zodiac sign of Capricorn as a winged sea-snake, inserted in shoots of acanthus. Winged Capricorns, as the carnelian MATR inv. 26948 (Fig. 11) are



**Figure 11.** Winged Capricorn. Intaglio, carnelian. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26948. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

rare;<sup>75</sup> but a tradition of winged monsters of oriental origin, depicted on medieval cameos inspired by drapery, is known and studied.<sup>76</sup> So, during the lower Middle Ages, the image of Capricorn as goat-fish or sea-snake circulated and is recognizable in association with the Zodiac and Months, due to the replicas on public monuments: an image and a link with astrology that is still valid today.

### Ancient Gems with Capricorn in Modern Age: Reproductions and Interpretations (A.M.)

As the discovery of the archaeological past offers to Humanists new subjects and objects of study, the collections of gems, so called *dactyliothecae*, already diffused in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, become indispensable both for the comprehension of mythology, history, and art, and for the status they conferred to their owners. The story of the Cameo Grimani, a masterpiece of Late Republican Age, depicting the young Octavian (perhaps as Aegipan) riding Capricorn,<sup>77</sup> is emblematic of the progressive

the 15<sup>th</sup> century: Toby Yuen, "Glyptic Sources of Renaissance Art," *Studies in the History of Art*, 54 (1997), 136-157: 138-142.

<sup>69</sup> Images of Capricorn on manuscripts, collected by The Saxl Project, are available here: <https://www.thesaxlproject.com/assets/Uploads/00-Capricorn-masterfile-15b-Jan-2017.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> The two gems with Capricorn in the Shrine of the Three Magi of Cologne were set in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Dreikönigschreine*, 103, 262-263, nos. 141-142.

<sup>71</sup> Eduard Melly, *Beitraege zur Siegelkunde des Mittelalters* (Wien: Volke, 1846), 253, pl. 3, no. 11. About the question: Caroline Simonet, "The (Re-)Use of Ancient Gems and Coins: the Presence of Antiquity in Medieval Sigillography," in *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laura Whatley (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 355-396.

<sup>72</sup> Antonio Milone, "Relief with lions, fantastical beasts and a human figure", in *Il duomo di Modena. Atlante fotografico \** (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1999), 85, fig. 75-76, nos. 75-76 (76). The figure is interpreted as a man dominating a monster, without any reference to Capricorn. An image of the relief is provided here: <http://www.medioevo.org/artemedievale/Images/EmiliaRomagna/Modena/Modena130.jpg>.

<sup>73</sup> For the cited gem: *Bertolami Fine Arts, E-live Auction 62*, London 2018, lotto 2 (<https://auctions.bertolamifinearts.com/it/auc/62/e-live-auction-62-i-glittica-londra-16-settembre-2018/1/>). About Aigokeros/Capricornus: Carina Weiß, *Die antiken Gemmen der Sammlung Heinrich Dressel in der Antikensammlung Berlin* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 136-137, no. 51.

<sup>74</sup> Enrica Pagella, *I cantieri degli scultori*, in *La sacra di San Michele. Storia arte restauri*, (Torino: STET, 1990), 77-101, especially 77-88 (*La porta dello Zodiaco e l'atelier di Nicolò*). Images of the Portale here: <https://www.arenario.net/momenti/momenti37.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Another example: Dembski, *Carnuntum*, 151, pl. 131, no. 997.

<sup>76</sup> Elisabetta Galletti, "Stoffe di pregio di tradizione orientale come modelli per la produzione suntuaria carolingia. Il caso dei cammei vitrei monocromi della "Croce di Desiderio" a Brescia," in *Arti minori e arti maggiori. Relazioni e interazioni tra Tarda Antichità e Alto Medioevo*, ed. F. Bisconti, M. Braconi, M. Sgarlata (Todi: Tau Editrice, 2019), 85-118.

<sup>77</sup> Now in the Beverley Collection, Alnwick Castle: see Gołyźniak, *Propaganda*, 222, 417, no. 10.131 (bibliography and discussion). On the iconography: Gertrud Platz-Horster, "Nuove gemme di Xanten e di Augsburg," in *Aquileia e la glittica di età ellenistica e romana* (Trieste: Editreg, 2009), 129-140: 136-137.



awareness acquired by collectors and scholars. The first modern owners of the cameo understood neither the subject nor its political meaning.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless in a few years the cameo became famous, as it was reproduced in the plates dedicated to the Grimani collection by the engravers Enea Vico and Battista Franco, and produced, from these ones, a cascade of copies and variations on different media (stuccos, pottery...<sup>79</sup> Eventually in the catalogues that scholars and collectors produced starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the illustrations of which were continuously replicated and published, Capricorn is clearly interpreted in its historical meaning. A turning point for the understanding of the symbolic and historical value of Capricorn was the *Dissertatio de Gemma Augustea* by Albert Rubens (1643), son of the well-known painter and gem collector Pieter Paul Rubens.<sup>80</sup> This great onyx cameo, depicting Augustus enthroned, accompanied by historical and allegorical figures, and surmounted by a Capricorn inscribed in an eight-ray star (the *Sidus Iulium*) has been known since the Middle Ages; the scene was probably intended as the Elevation of the Cross. Around the year 1600, it had been purchased by the Emperor Rudolph II, without the iconography being fully recognized.<sup>81</sup> Eventually Albert Rubens, supported by historical and antiquarian sources, came to a complete understanding of the iconography of the *Gemma Augustea*, and so of the Capricorn.

This new, scientific interest in glyptic subjects, already well-spread in Europe, turned to more common, less precious gems as well. We will remain in Flanders for some examples. In the *Dactyliotheca* that Abraham Gorlaeus (1549-1608) dedicated to his collection, we can find a couple of images depicting an intaglio close to the carnelian inv. 26926

<sup>78</sup> In a letter from Venice, dated 10.13.1498, the agent of Isabella d'Este Tolomeo Spagnolo describes the figure as a "mostro marino che era mezo beccho e mezo pesce, cum uno nudo in su la schi(e)na"; on Enea Vico's engravings, the young is called "Palemone": see Yuen, "Sources," 154, note 33.

<sup>79</sup> Yuen, "Sources," 143-144; Denise La Monica, "Battista Franco, Enea Vico e le stampe dei Cammei Grimani," *ASNP*, Serie 5, 6, no. 2 (2014), 781-903: 810, 899; Marcella de Paoli, "Ancora sulla fortuna delle gemme Grimani. Un paradigma efficace," *Engramma*, 150 (ottobre 2017) ([http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id\\_articolo=3253](http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3253)).

<sup>80</sup> Alberti Rubeni *Dissertatio de Gemma Augustea*, ed. Heinz Kahler (Berlin: Mann, 1968), 11-12.

<sup>81</sup> Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen*, 244: in the Inventory of the Imperial Treasure (1619) the *Gemma Augustea* is described as "kunstreiche Tafel von weißen Relief auf schwarzem Onyxgrund mit Planeten und Nymphen". About the *interpretatio Christiana* of the cameo in Middle Ages, see Markus Lörz, "Die mittelaltlicher Geschichte der *Gemma Augustea*," *Concilium medii aevi* 9 (2006), 159-173.

(Fig. 1) discussed above.<sup>82</sup> Martin Henig has reconstructed the journey of this gem: in 1612, it arrived in the collection of the Prince of Wales, Henry Frederic Stuart. After many vicissitudes, Elias Ashmole took a wax impression of it in 1660, for the Inventory of Royal Coins and Gems he was preparing.<sup>83</sup> We can value the distance between the wax impression and the printed image, that classicizes the intaglio, corrects some particulars, and offers an interpretation of them. But we can also note the evolution (or revolution) from the drawings of Cameo Grimani edited by Vico and Franco. They depicted only the figures and not the entire cameo; instead, the Gorlaeus' plates, even less artistic, show the gem as set in its ring, with its negative engraving and impression.

We can also follow the path of another Flemish gem, depicting a Capricorn surmounting a war ship, now in the Royal Dutch collection, included by Jacob De Wilde in 1703 in his book *Gemmae selectae*.<sup>84</sup> The drawing of the gem offers a correct interpretation. However, of greater significance is the project where the image of the gem is included: a plate dedicated to Jupiter and a selection of quotes from the *Astronomica* of Manilius (1 4 23) and the *Tristia* of Ovidius (1 9) that could clarify it. Gems depicting ships were thought to bring good luck in the Middle Ages, as Jean de Mandeville, late author of a *Lapidarium*, remembered.<sup>85</sup> When we read a glass intaglio such as MATR inv. 26861, which is closely related to the gem in the Royal Dutch collection, we interpretate it, as Jacob De Wilde did. Yet, we should remember that only the creators of the prototype in the Augustan Age were aware of these symbolic meanings; the craftsman and the owner of the gem, probably, would have agreed on the auspicious value attributed to it by Jean de Mandeville.

<sup>82</sup> Abraham Gorlaeus, *Dactyliotheca seu annulorum sigillarium... promptuarium* (Delft, 1601), no. 85; Martin Henig, "Gems from the Collection of Henry, Prince of Wales, and Charles I," in Kirsten Aschengreen Piacenti, John Boardman, *Modern Gems and Jewels in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (Royal Collection Trust, 2007), 269-281: 273, 277, no. 40.

<sup>83</sup> Henig, "Gems," 269-281.

<sup>84</sup> *Gemmae selectae antiquae e Museo Jacobi de Wilde...* (Amstelaeami, 1703), pl. 4, no. 13; Gabriella Tassinari, "Per una storia della glittica "di propaganda": alcune riflessioni. II. Il post-antico," *La Rivista di Engramma*, 170 (dicembre 2019), 33-65: 50-52 ([http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id\\_articolo=3720](http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3720)).

<sup>85</sup> Baltrušaitis, *Medioevo*, 92, note 57.



## The Image of Capricorn on the Impressions of the Gems: A Survey (G.T.)

In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the crisis of the graphic representations of the gems in the plates of the glyptic publications, unfaithful and not responding to the scientific needs of the study of the gems, revealed the best way to study the originals: the casts. Thus, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries a phenomenon with multiple aspects emerged: the collections of impressions, in different materials – the most common, wax, sulphur and plaster – obtained from intaglios and cameos. Alongside the collections of private casts, the series of casts arranged in cases, accompanied by explanations, proliferated; a flourishing commercial activity especially in Rome, the glyptic and Grand Tour capital, to satisfy the numerous requests of scholars, collectors, travellers, specialists, *amateurs*, places of education and academies. The competition between the mould manufacturing factories was strong; and private individuals also manufactured them. Encyclopaedias of ancient and modern iconographies, the *dactyliothecae* were instruments of documentation, knowledge, and analysis of gems; they constituted an essential and irreplaceable vehicle for spreading them in a wide, easy, and economical way. The link between Capricorn and Augustus is found both in milestone texts in the glyptic field and in more modest ones.<sup>86</sup>

However, the role played by the major collections of casts to document and circulate the image of Capricorn was limited. Eloquent example: there is no gem with Capricorn (and more generally no propaganda gem) in the conspicuous collection of the famous Roman manufacture Paoletti (Bartolomeo (1757-1834) and his son Pietro (1785-1844/5)), who held a “monopoly” of the vitreous matrices, taken from ancient and modern intaglios and cameos, indispensable to make the casts.<sup>87</sup> There is only one cast of an onyx intaglio, which represents Capricorn, from the well-known manufacture founded in Rome

by the German Christian Dehn (1696-1770)<sup>88</sup> and continued by his daughter Faustina and her husband Francesco Maria Dolce, and by their sons. One of them, Federico Dolce wrote a text (1790;1792) accompanying two hundred impressions, where the cast of the Capricorn intaglio does not appear. Dehn formed a “museum” of more than 5000 intaglios, cameos, and glass replicas, ancient and modern. Thus, in the indispensable catalogue with commentaries (often erudite and long-winded) of more than 2000 casts published by Francesco Maria Dolce (1772), this intaglio, which is in the section of the celestial signs and constellations, is defined as an ancient original in the Dehn museum; it has been observed that it has the tail composed of the horn of Amaltheia to indicate the fertility that this sign brings to the earth.<sup>89</sup> In the large 19<sup>th</sup> century series of scagliola casts, made in Rome by Tommaso Cades (1772-1840),<sup>90</sup> of ancient and modern intaglios and cameos, in book-shaped boxes with a corresponding catalogue, there are five casts, placed either between the Zodiac signs or among the weapons, with Capricorns alone, accompanied by cornucopia and globe, and above the galley.<sup>91</sup> To these, one can add the cast of a New York cameo with a double Capricorn with head within *clipeus uirtutis*.<sup>92</sup>

A glass intaglio with the head of Augustus with the Capricorn and the dolphin under it, now at the National Archeological Museum of Florence, was published in the text of Leonardo Agostini *Le gemme antiche figurate* (1657). The fame and influence of this text, translated, reprinted, and enriched, explains the presence of the glass intaglio among the casts of the conspicuous *dactyliotheca* of the German Philipp Daniel Lippert (1702-1785), sold in commented series, from 1755 to 1776, with great

<sup>86</sup> On Dehn and the activity of the Dehn-Dolce manufacture, see lastly Gabriella Tassinari, “Winckelmann e la glittica del suo tempo”, in *Winckelmann, l'antichità classica e la Lombardia*, ed. Elena Agazzi, Fabrizio Slavazzi (Roma: Artemide, 2019), 245-248, where previous bibliography.

<sup>87</sup> *Descrizione Istorica del Museo di Cristiano Dehn ...* (Roma: Generoso Salomoni, 1772) tome II, 0, 39, no. 86.

<sup>88</sup> On Cades collection, see *Dactyliotheken. Götter & Caesaren aus der Schublade. Antike Gemmen in Abdrucksammlungen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Valentin Kockel, Daniel Graepler (München: Biering & Brinkmann, 2006), *ad indicem*; Helge C. Knüppel, *Dactyliotheken. Konzepte einer historischen Publikationsform*, Stendalen Winckelmann-Forschungen, 8, hrsg. Max Kunste (Mainz: Franz Philipp Rutzen, 2009), *ad indicem* (essential bibliography).

<sup>89</sup> *Descrizione di una Collezione di N. 8131 Impronte in smalto possedute in Roma da Tommaso Cades ...*, 18, II H, nos. 73-75; 47, IV M, nos. 8-9.

<sup>92</sup> *Descrizione Cades*, 37, IV C, no. 301.

<sup>86</sup> Tassinari, “Propaganda,” 35-39.

<sup>87</sup> Lucia Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *La collezione Paoletti. Stampi in vetro per impronte di intagli e cammei*, I-II (Roma: Gangemi, 2007, 2012).

success and diffusion, particularly in Germany.<sup>93</sup> The intaglio is also documented among the thousands of casts made by James Tassie (1735-1799) and his nephew William (1777-1860), popular in the English market and with a vast trade.<sup>94</sup> The Tassie collection, whose catalogue was compiled by the writer and antiquarian Rudolf Erich Raspe, contains the largest number of casts with Capricorn, alone, double or with other elements such as cornucopia, rudder, trident, dolphin, bird; but some originals are probably not ancient.<sup>95</sup> Particularly interesting is a sulphur Stosch in the Tassie collection, described as a Capricorn ending in fish, with the trident and the signature ΦΑΡΝΑΚΗC. As Raspe points out, it is a beautiful gem that looks like a copy from a Capricorn by the same master, but smaller and without a trident, published by Philipp von Stosch in his *Gemmae Antiquae Caelatae*.<sup>96</sup> In fact in his revolutionary book (1724), the great scholar and collector Stosch published, among the seventy signed gems, a carnelian intaglio with a sea horse, signed ΦΑΡΝΑΚΗC ΕΠ, that was in the Farnese collection in Parma and is now missing.<sup>97</sup> Extremely significant: a famous intaglio is copied, modified, interpreted, and circulated widely, as testifies its presence, for example, in the collection of casts of the King of the Netherlands.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusions (A.M., U.V., G.T.)

Sometimes our background as scholars, built on centuries of antiquarian research, leads us to see in the figures of gems what we wish to see. We can



**Figure 12.** Capricorn, cornucopia, crow and dolphin (or shell). Intaglio, yellow jasper. Verona, Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano (MATR), inv. 26939. Ph. Giorgio Fogliata. Courtesy of the Museo Archeologico al Teatro Romano.

take as an example a sardonyx now in the British Museum collections.<sup>99</sup> Its oldest image is an impression created in the workshop of James Tassie.<sup>100</sup> By Tassie's impression, and not by directly observing the original gem, a drawing made at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and now in the British Museum as well, was generated.<sup>101</sup> The artist enlarged some particulars of the intaglio, but he did not improve the image or offer any interpretation of the gem, only a description. A sketchy gem (MATR inv. 26939; Fig. 12) shows a similar iconography, collecting symbols of prosperity and wealth, generically related to Augustan themes (the Apollo's crow, the Capricorn) and a less clear figure (a dolphin or a sea-shell, according to the myth of Capricorn-Aegipan we have seen).<sup>102</sup> The stone – a yellow, magical jasper – is typical of Imperial glyptics since the Flavian dynasty and testifies the long duration of these subjects. But what is the monster engraved on these two gems? A Capricorn, as described in Tassie's catalogue? Or a Hippocampus? While the London gem shows a head with horse's mane, the Verona gem is not that accurate.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Tassinari, "Propaganda," 35-37, where examination of the intaglio, of the publications, and also bibliography on Lippert.

<sup>94</sup> Alessandra Magni, Gabriella Tassinari, "Gemme vitree e paste vitree: la questione delle officine," in *Siti produttivi e indicatori di produzione del vetro in Italia dall'antichità all'età contemporanea*, ed. Marina Uboldi, Silvia Ciappi, Francesca Rebajoli (Cremona: AIHV – Comitato Nazionale Italiano, 2019), 76, where previous bibliography.

<sup>95</sup> Rudolf Eric Raspe, *A Descriptive Catalogue of a General Collection of Ancient and Modern Engraved Gems, Cameos as well as Intaglios, taken . . . by James Tassie, Modeller* . . . (London: C. Buckton, 1791), 225, nos. 3208-3222.

<sup>96</sup> Raspe, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 225, no. 3208.

<sup>97</sup> Philipp von Stosch, *Gemmae antiquae caelatae* . . . (Amstelaedami: Bernard Picart, 1724), 70-72, pl. L. See Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Glaspasten im Martin-von-Wagner-Museum der Universität Würzburg*, I (München: Prestel Verlag, 1986), 108-109, no. 151. Cf. furthermore Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli, *Collezione Paoletti*, I, 244, no. 526.

<sup>98</sup> Johannis Cornelis De Jonge, *Catalogue d'empreintes du Cabinet des Pierres gravées de Sa Majesté Le Roy des Pays Bas, Grand-Duc de Luxembourg* (La Haye: De l'imprimerie d'Etat, 1837), 20, no. 420 (defined amethyst intaglio).

<sup>99</sup> British Museum, Department of Antiquities, inv. 1814,0704.1470 ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1814-0704-1470](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1814-0704-1470)).

<sup>100</sup> Beazley Archive, 1149 (<http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/0A6FE4E8-0541-4B81-A572-2F6CC1BE42F7>).

<sup>101</sup> British Museum, Department of Antiquities, inv. 2010,5006.811 ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_2010-5006-811](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_2010-5006-811)).

<sup>102</sup> To this group of gems, never properly studied, belongs an intaglio from Caerleon: J. David Zienkiewicz, *The Legionary Fortress Baths at Caerleon. 2. The Finds* (Cardiff: The National Museum of Wales - Cadw, 1986), 129-130, pl. 5, no. 7 (terminus: 75-85 C.E.).

Therefore, we can see the monster we want to see: a Capricorn, created by our Augustan-formed mind.

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