

ROMAN GEMSTONES FROM NORTH-EASTERN TURKEY

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Cuvinte-cheie: *geme, Amasya, Pontus, Asia Mică, nord-estul Turciei, secolele II–III p.Chr, perioadă romană.*

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Rezumat: *În acest studiu este prezentat un lot de geme romane, majoritatea datate în secolele II–III p.Chr., piese aflate în colecția Muzeului Amasya, din nord-estul Turciei.*

Abstract: *In this short paper a group of gemstones curated in the Museum of Amasya in north-eastern Turkey will be presented most of which belong to second-third century AD.*

Introduction

In this paper 16 Roman gemstones are presented, all in gold settings and currently curated in the Museum of Amasya in north-eastern Turkey. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods Amasya, ancient Amaseia, was the centre of the interstate road system and roads from south-western Pontus to Galatia as well as Cappadocia ended at this city (**Map 1**). From 300 BC. until 183 BC., it was the capital of Hellenistic Kingdom of Pontus. In 65 BC. Amaseia became the administrative centre of the new province of *Bithynia et Pontus*. As is very well-known, the city was the birthplace of Strabo, who was born in 65 BC. in Amaseia and died in AD. 23, likewise in Amaseia; he provides a full description of the city as it was between 60 BC. and AD. 19. Around 3 or 2 BC., Amaseia was incorporated into the Roman province of Galatia, in the district of Pontus Galaticus. Most likely, the ancient site of Amaseia is located just below the present city of Amasya; but archaeologically not much is known about this city, except that it was a significant military base for the Romans during the first and second centuries AD.

During the rescue excavations carried out by the Museum of Amasya in and around the city centre of Amasya, numerous burials and necropolis sites dated between the first and fourth centuries AD. were discovered. The most common types

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of burials are those in vaulted chamber tombs and cist graves. Three necropolis sites around Amaseia are known in archaeological literature, i.e., Uygur¹, Eski Şamlar and Kurşunlu (**Map 1**). These burial sites are of particular importance, as they provide further gem finds, some of them of high quality. However, there is no previous comprehensive study of the glyptic specimens curated at the Museum of Amasya.

Inaugurated in 1929, the Museum of Amasya was opened to visitors in 1980. In the museum Roman epigraphic materials from the ancient city of Amaseia and its extensive *chora* are especially numerous.

Material

There is a remarkable collection of gold, gem-set jewellery in the Museum of Amasya, fairly consistent in date, all being ascribable to the second or third centuries AD. There are four cameos in the assemblage, but of the remaining 12 no less than nine are garnets, rather than the carnelians and jaspers normally the most common materials for ring settings in this period. This large percentage is suggestive of a local source and a regional glyptic workshop in Pontus. Although some stones, the male portrait for example, are of good quality, the female figure, no. 7, is highly schematic and not of the quality one might expect from this normally prestigious stone. Three garnets are not engraved and this is reflective of a tendency from the third century to care more for the qualities of the stone itself and the decorative appearance of the metalwork than for the gems being engraved.

In this small collection none of the stones portray unusual, regional deities, and Herakles amongst the cameos, and Hermes and Artemis portrayed on gems were powerful protective deities, while Medusa depicted on another cameo deflected the Evil Eye.

Catalogue. Figured Gems

A. Cameos

No. 1 (Fig. 1). Cameo; onyx; bust of the youthful Herakles in profile to right.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 23 mm in Diam.; dimensions of cameo: 13 mm H × 8 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.7 grams.

His close-cropped hair is covered in tight curls. His lion skin drapes the base of his neck.

Herakles was a popular subject for cameos, but this type strongly resembles the young Caracalla who liked to identify himself as the Greek hero, as has been suggested in the case of examples excavated in an early third-century context at the fort of South Shields, County Durham in North-East Britain², and from a third-century treasure from La Haye-Malherbe, Eure in North-West Gaul³. Four examples from the Content Collection, now in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden⁴, are described

¹ Two gemstones are presented from this cemetery site; the first is no. 8 below and the second is a ring with an engraved garnet figuring the head of a Satyr, cf. LAFLI, BUORA 2023.

² HENIG 1986, pl. lxiva.

³ GUIRAUD 1988, p. 201, no. 993.

⁴ HENIG, MOLESWORTH 2018, p. 76–77, nos. 76–79.

as possibly representing the youthful emperor Caracalla in the guise of Herakles as is an example from Umm Qeis (Gadara)⁵.

Early third century AD.

The cameo is set in a contemporary oval frame with beaded surround, secured in place by claw-like projections.

No. 2 (Fig. 2). Two-layered cameo; onyx; mourning Eros Thanatos. Set in a gold ring.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of cameo: 11 mm H × 7 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

Eros is depicted with a full, round face surrounded by curly hair. There are hints of the feathering of his wings from a number of incised grooves. The upper layer, into which the image of Eros is engraved, is of a striking blue color which contrasts with the dark brown background color of the lower layer. The brown layer is the side of the cameo which would have been inserted into the round metal setting of a piece of jewelry, apparently here a finger-ring. The cupid's left hand grasps an inverted torch which symbolizes the cessation of life. This is a typical Eros-Thanatos cameo, serving as a "memento mori"-a continuing reminder to the wearer of the brevity of life. This is a very common type employed in rings, ear-rings, pendants and other types of jewellery⁶.

The ring approximates to the form Henig, type II, second century AD⁷.

Second century AD.

No. 3 (Fig. 3). Two-layered cameo; onyx; mourning Eros Thanatos. Set in a gold bracelet.

Oval shape. Dimensions of bracelet: 112 mm in Diam.; dimensions of cameo: 13 mm H × 8 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 29.2 grams.

The cameo is of the same type as the preceding, and was set in an oval surround with beaded border on a bracelet of thin sheet, laterally rilled but bearing comparison with bracelets which are ornamented with bands of ridging across the metal from an early third century hoard of jewellery found at Lyon in Gaul in 1841⁸.

Third century AD.

No. 4 (Fig. 4). Two-layered cameo; onyx; Medusa. Set in a gold ring.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 20 mm in Diam.; dimensions of cameo: 12 mm H × 8 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

The mask of Medusa is, perhaps, the most common and most widespread subject for cameos and was believed to deflect the Evil Eye⁹.

⁵ HENIG, WHITING 1987, p. 38, no. 411.

⁶ Compare HENIG, MOLESWORTH 2018, p. 171–117, nos. 160–182; SPIER 1992, p. 162, no. 449 (from Asia Minor).

⁷ See HENIG 2007, p. 177, pl. L, no. 711; DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 31–32, pl. 50, no. 140; CHADOUR 1994, p. 89, nos. 301.

⁸ COMARMOND 1844, pls. 2–4.

⁹ Compare MIDDLETON 1998, p. 64–65, no. 52 (from Nazareth, Galilee); MIDDLETON 2001, p. 55, no. 31 [from Giresun (ancient Cerasus)]; HENIG, MOLESWORTH 2018, p. 183–192, nos.

Third century AD¹⁰.

B. Intaglios

No. 5 (Fig. 5). Intaglio; garnet; Hermes standing frontally and facing right. Set in a gold pendant, with loop.

Oval shape. Dimensions of pendant: 22 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 20 mm H × 11 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.8 grams.

Hermes stands to the front; he is nude, although his chlamys is draped over his right forearm. He holds his kerykeion in his right hand and his money bag in his left hand. This is a common type throughout the Empire¹¹.

Second century AD.

No. 6 (Fig. 6). Intaglio; sardonyx; Artemis standing to the right. Set in a gold ring.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 18 mm H × 7 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

Artemis, fully draped, stands to the front and is facing right. She holds her bow in front of her. There is a ground line¹². Artemis is more often depicted running about to shoot an arrow with her bow, rather than standing as she is portrayed here¹³.

Second century AD.

The ring is of a simple form (a slim version of Henig type II)¹⁴.

The first century AD., but the type has a long life.

No. 7 (Fig. 7). Intaglio; garnet; standing female figure. Set in a gold ring.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 18 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 14 mm H × 6 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.0 grams.

A female figure wearing a long chiton stands to the front. Left arm raised. There is a short ground line. The execution is highly schematised¹⁵.

Second half of the second century AD.

No. 8 (Fig. 8). Intaglio; garnet; male portrait to left. Set in a gold ring.

Acc. no. A-98.1.2.

During the salvage excavations carried out by the Museum of Amasya in and around the modern city centre of Amasya, numerous burials dated between the first and fourth centuries AD. were discovered. As said above, three necropolis sites

192–204; SPIER 1992, p. 161–162, nos. 446–448 (nos. 447–448 from Asia Minor); HENIG, WHITING 1987, p. 38 nos. 407–409 (from Umm Qeis, Gadara); HENIG 2007, p. 179–180, nos. 725–731 (from various sites in Britain).

¹⁰ For contemporary rings set with Medusa cameos see CHADOUR 1994, p. 91, no. 307; HENIG, MOLESWORTH 2018, p. 187–188, no. 195.

¹¹ See KONUK, ARSLAN 2000, p. 88–92, nos. 64–68.

¹² Compare MIDDLETON 2001, p. 25, no. 9, a garnet from Giresun (ancient Cerasus); HENIG, WHITING 1987, p. 13, no. 76; ZWIERLEIN-DIEHL 1979, p. 197, no. 1454.

¹³ See KONUK, ARSLAN 2000, p. 38, no. 14; HENIG, WHITING 1987, p. 12, nos. 70–75 (from Umm Qeis, Gadara).

¹⁴ As DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 28, no. 108 which is ascribed to the first century AD., but the type has a long life.

¹⁵ The ring form CHADOUR 1994, p. 89, no. 301.

around Amaseia are known in archaeological literature: Uygur, a small rural necropolis located in the *chora* of Amasya, at a distance of some 32 km to the south-east where the present ringstone with the male portrait and a garnet intaglio figuring the head of a satyr were excavated (cf. note 1 above), Eski Şamlar, and Kurşunlu. This ring was found in a limestone sarcophagus excavated in 1998 at Uygur, encompassing only three burials which probably belong to one family. It was excavated near the left-hand fingers of the single skeleton inside the sarcophagus. Beside this ring, a very rich group of burial finds was unearthed in the same sarcophagus: a necklace of 20 brown stone beads strung on a gold wire on the skeleton, a silver denarius of Hadrian (AD. 119) was placed near the mouth, a bone hair pin lay under the skull, a bone splinter on the right shoulder edge, a glass unguentarium under the right hand, and there were also fragments of a glass bottle and a bone miniature cosmetic container. No anthropological analysis has been undertaken on the skeletal remains from this sarcophagus; but it most probably belonged to a female individual, in which case the portrait may have been that of her husband.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 22 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 13–15 × 3–5 mm; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 14.31 grams.

The head is bearded and occupies the centre of the cabochon. Note a bearded head, left on a flat garnet from Umm Qeis, Gadara¹⁶.

Second century AD.

References. DOĞANBAŞ 2015, p. 196; YÜCE, ÖZDEMİR 2000, p. 51, 52 no. 3; LAFLI, BUORA 2023, pl. 5.

No. 9 (Fig. 9). Intaglio; garnet; female portrait to left.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 22 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 11 mm H × 5 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.4 grams.

A female bust is depicted in profile to the left. Her hair is tightly bound. A calathus protrudes from her forehead suggesting identification with Tyche-Isis. The head is somewhat reminiscent of the head depicted on a carnelian intaglio from Maiden Castle, Dorset, England¹⁷.

The ring approximates to the form Henig, type II¹⁸.

Second century AD.

No. 10 (Fig. 10). Intaglio; garnet; female portrait to left.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 10 mm H × 5 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

This is a similar bust in near identical style, although without a calathus on its head. It is presumably the product of the same studio¹⁹.

Second-third century AD.

¹⁶ HENIG, WHITING 1987, p. 29, no. 278; The ring approximates to CHADOUR 1994, p. 88, no. 298.

¹⁷ HENIG 2007, p. 154, no. 487 which we would now date to the second century AD.

¹⁸ See HENIG 2007, p. 177, pl. L, no. 711; DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 31–32, pl. 50, no. 140; CHADOUR 1994, p. 89, no. 301.

¹⁹ The ring approximates to DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 28, pl. 43, nos. 106 and 107; CHADOUR 1994, p. 94, no. 320.

No. 11 (Fig. 11). Intaglio; garnet; lion to left.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 23 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio o: 16 mm H × 8 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.5 grams.

The lion prowls to the left. There is a ground line. Comparison may be made with the lions on sard and jasper intaglios²⁰.

The gold ring with its pronounced kink at the shoulders is a late second-early third century AD type²¹.

No. 12 (Fig. 12). Intaglio; glass?

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of intaglio: 15 mm H × 7 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

The gem is too damaged for identification.

For the ring see no. 9 above²².

Second half of second century AD.

C. Non-engraved gemstones set in gold rings**No. 13 (Fig. 13). Ring set with a garnet.**

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of garnet: 11 mm H × 4 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.3 grams.

The ring, with its pronounced kink at the shoulders is a late second-early third century AD type²³.

No. 14 (Fig. 14). Ring set with a garnet.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 20 mm in Diam.; dimensions of garnet: 9 mm H × 3 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 0.9 grams.

The ring is flattened at its shoulders, approximating to a late second-early third century AD. Type²⁴.

No. 15 (Fig. 15). Ring set with a garnet.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 22 mm in Diam.; dimensions of rectangular garnet: 13 mm H × 6 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.4 grams.

The triangle on the shoulder, looks towards keeled rings²⁵.

No. 16 (Fig. 16). Ring set with a sardonyx.

Oval shape. Dimensions of ring: 21 mm in Diam.; dimensions of sardonyx: 5 mm H × 3 mm W; metal quality: 98% gold; weight: 1.4 grams.

Compare the ring, likewise with a sardonyx setting²⁶.

Second century AD.

²⁰ KONUK, ARSLAN 2000, p. 132, no. 108, p. 136, no. 112.

²¹ As CHADOUR 1994, p. 105–106, nos. 362 and 363.

²² DEPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 31–32, pl. 50, no. 140; CHADOUR 1994, p. 89, nos. 301.

²³ As CHADOUR 1994, p. 105–106, nos. 362 and 363.

²⁴ As CHADOUR 1994, p. 105–106, nos. 362 and 363.

²⁵ As DEPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 32, no. 145.

²⁶ DEPERT-LIPPITZ 1985, p. 32, no. 141.

Acknowledgements

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Map 1 is included by arrangement with Dr. Sami Patacı (University of Ardahan) in 2023 to whom we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation.

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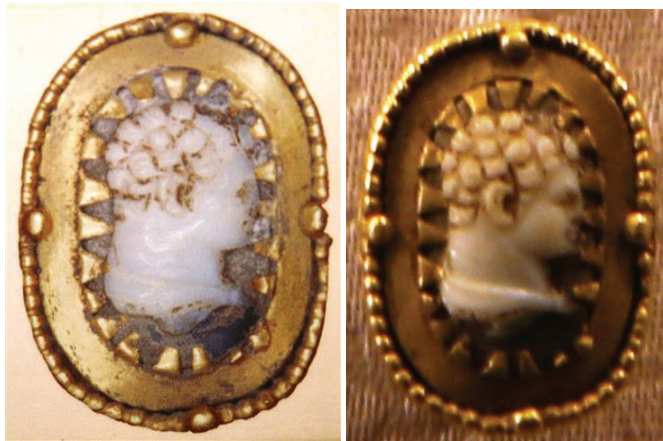
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Map 1. Sites in Anatolia to which reference is made in the text (by S. Pataci, 2023).



1a

1b

Fig. 1. An onyx cameo with the bust of the youthful Herakles (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



Fig. 2. A two-layered onyx cameo set in a gold ring with mourning Eros Thanatos (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



3a



3b

Fig. 3. A two-layered onyx cameo set in a gold bracelet with mourning Eros Thanatos (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



Fig. 4. A two-layered onyx cameo set in a gold ring with Medusa (photo by E. Laflı, 2018).



Fig. 5. A garnet intaglio set in a gold pendant with Hermes (photo by E. Laflı, 2018).

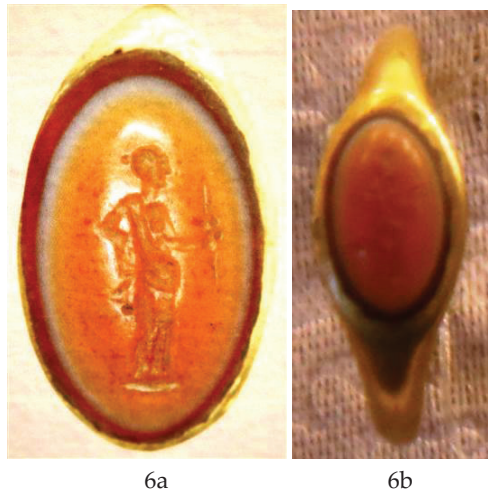
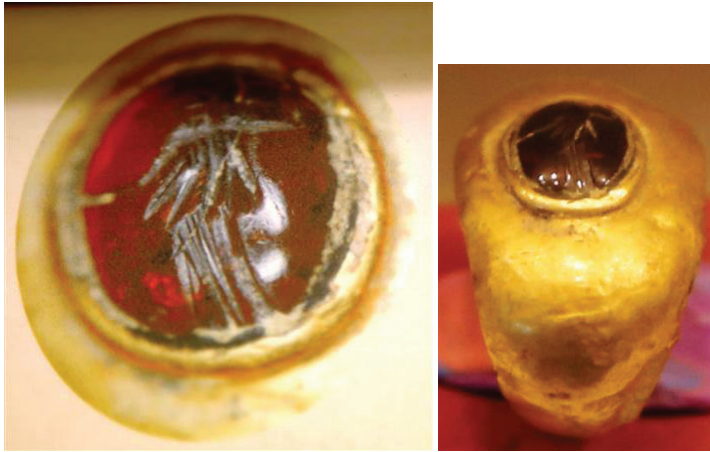


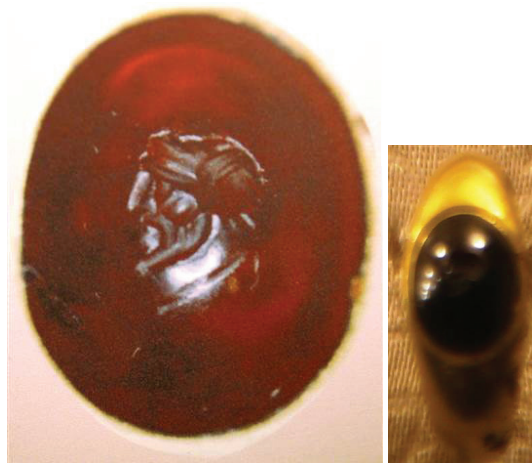
Fig. 6. A sardonyx intaglio set in a gold ring with Artemis (photo by E. Laflı, 2018).



7a

7b

Fig. 7. A garnet intaglio set in a gold ring with a standing female figure (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



8a

8b

Fig. 8. A garnet intaglio set in a gold ring with a male portrait (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



9a

9b

Fig. 9. Two garnet intaglios with a female portrait (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



10a

10b

Fig. 10. Two garnet intaglios with a female portrait (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



11a

11b

Fig. 11. A garnet intaglio with a lion (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



Fig. 12. A glass intaglio (?)
(photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



Fig. 13. Three ring sets with a
garnet (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).



Fig. 14. Three ring sets with a
garnet (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).

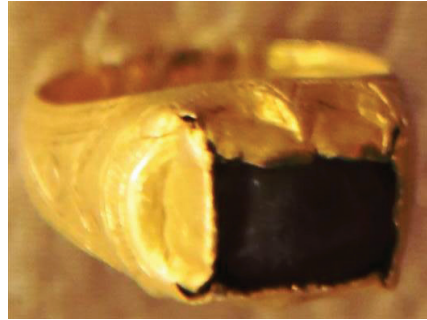


Fig. 15. Three ring sets with a
garnet (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).

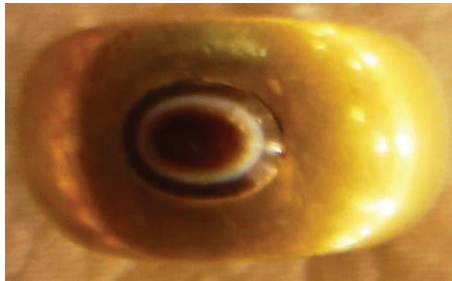


Fig. 16. A ring set with a sardonyx (photo by E. Lafli, 2018).