



***MAXWELL
SOMMERVILLE***

***ENGRAVED
GEMS***

Maxwell Sommerville

Engraved Gems

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

EGYPT.

PERSIA AND BABYLON.

THE ETRUSCANS—ETRURIA.

PHŒNICIA.

GREECE.

ROMAN.

ABRAXAS.

EARLY CHRISTIANS.

BYZANTINE.

MEDIÆVAL.

RENAISSANCE.

SUCCEEDING DECLINES AND REVIVALS.

SOME TYPES OF REMARKABLE GEMS.

Bacchus and Ariadne.

Jupiter Ægiochus.

The Triumph of Constantine.

RELIGION ON STONES.

HISTORIC CAMEOS.

ANIMALS AND BIRDS.

ANTIQUÉ PASTES.

MYTHOLOGICAL.

CHINESE, BURMESE, AND SIAMESE.

AZTEC OR MEXICAN.

RETROSPECTIVE.

INDEX.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

My former treatise, "Engraved Gems, their Place in the History of Art," being largely illustrated and inconvenient in size, I have abridged the work and with new material prepared this volume.

The various epochs of gem engraving from the earliest eras down to the XVIII. century are briefly described.

Many people throughout the year cast passing glances at my glyptic collection in the Free Museum of Science and Art of the University of Pennsylvania.

They express great admiration of the beautiful objects in stones of many colors and interesting designs.

It was never intended to make only an attractive display; what I have always desired and hoped for was that a proportion of our visitors would recognize in my life's work a contribution to science.

It is a classified representation of the glyptic work of more than forty centuries, so carefully arranged that those who care to learn through the medium of those beautiful engraved stones, cylinders, seals, and Gnostic tokens, may inform themselves intelligently on the science which these gems of all epochs so thoroughly exemplify.

Men in this Western World during the last three hundred years have been engrossed in the pursuit and acquisition of fortunes.

A fair proportion of the population now having secured competency, that condition once assured, with increased opportunities for intellectual culture and the enjoyment of

art, the development of refined tastes and pursuits in America has been marked by the formation of many private collections. Amateurs have gradually become connoisseurs in manuscripts, ceramics, enamels, engravings, ancient coins, armor, and arms. Happily, each is engrossed in his particular branch of antiquities.

It is to be hoped that we may all profit by their researches, and that the antique objects acquired by them may be stored in the Archæological Museums of the world, that all who will may view them and learn from them.

MAXWELL SOMMERVILLE.

Presuming that the majority of my readers would understand the Latin inscription from an engraved stone, which decorates the cover of this book, I have not given any translation. By request I add the following explanation:

NON SOLVM NO|BIS NATI SVMVS|ORTVSQVE
NOSTRI|PARTEM
PATRIA SI|BI VENDICAT PARTEM|PARENTES
PARTEM AMICI|

“Not alone for ourselves were we born, and of
our
birth our country claims for itself a part, our
parents
a part, our friends a part” (vindicat for
vindicat).

On the reverse of the stone, which is not shown, is the inscription—

MORTIS MORES OMNIBUS ÆQUALES.

This is one of those peculiar maxims so often found in the Latin language, as it is employed in epitaphs. The simplest manner in which it can be translated is as follows:

{manners}
“The {customs} of {are} equal for
{usage } Death {is } all.”
{law }

Death is here personified, as was Peace, Justice, Concord, etc., by the Romans.

MAXWELL SOMMERVILLE.



ENGRAVED GEMS.

[Table of Contents](#)

When specimens of any ancient art industry are brought together and classified in a museum it is interesting to compare each piece and trace the work from the hands of the different nationalities through all the transitions and changing history of past centuries.

My collection exemplifies the progress in execution of engraved gems from the most primitive eras through periods of varying excellence and of inevitable decline. The

quality of the execution approaches perfection and degenerates as in a geometrical progression repeating itself in reverse; advancing and improving in fineness up to nearly the end of the first century, the century of Christ, and from the beginning of the second century retrograding to the base of mediocrity at the end of the fifth century.

The sixth and seventh centuries, the Byzantine period, yielded a group of principally religious cameos, abundant, curious, and of great interest.

This was succeeded by several hundred years not of repose in the art, but of wretched ignorance, when man almost ceased to create a connecting link in the history of the glyptic art. With rare exceptions, the specimens of that time scarcely merit the designation of gems: it was a period that may be reasonably identified as the night of art, when, alas! in the darkness blows were stricken which destroyed and reduced to fragments much that was precious and beautiful, and vandalism, contributing nothing that was fair, robbed us of a large part of our inheritance.

The progression alluded to is, in my estimation, only a question of comparative beauty. If we seek for, or are capable of appreciating, the most interesting, that which gives us history, we must find it at the beginning of that progression—the era of the Babylonians—with its messages handed down to us on their wonderful cylinders.

My path of research has led me where are gathered stones—engraved stones, art-links in a carved chain reaching from the earliest cylinders and seals of the Persians, centuries before and beyond those wonderful stone books, the inscribed temples of Egypt.

Whilst considering and studying these specimens of the work of the ancients we will walk upon the crumbled ruins of by-gone centuries; our retrospective view shall be where changing elements, rust, and age have spared but traces of palaces and temples; we will stroll beside the pebbled course of a rapid stream until we reach a grove where I oft have been, and found a rich repast; no shrines, no obelisks, no statues, naught but these precious little stepping-stones, by which we will follow the stream of thus revealed history, and in the vale of antiquity, with these miniature monuments, study and enjoy the indelible portraiture of ages.

Palaces, obelisks, statues, and the walls of ancient cities have rarely been preserved to us, other than in decay, ruin, and fragments.

Yet engraved gems, those smaller monuments on hard stones, have been spared in the very débris of these larger structures, and we are thus enabled to secure examples of the handiwork of one branch of art, covering many epochs and periods.

My earnest eyes have looked up to and gazed upon the silent monuments and shrines of men, who during long centuries have rested from their scientific labors. A wanderer in lands adapted to my researches, my object has been to learn something of these mute monitors and to bring back to my native land examples of the special branch of ancient art which has been the pursuit of my life. Many discouraging moments, even years, have been passed, yet always with the hope that my labor and its results might some day be appreciated.

Years ago while rejoicing in the possession of the glyptic portraits of the Emperors Tiberius, Caracalla, Constantine, and that of Faustina, I thought with pleasant anticipation of the moment when on returning from voyages of acquisition I might introduce them to intellectual friends of "Science and Art."

These gems are here being considered in their respective epochs. Those who desire to inform themselves on the science of "Engraved Gems" will find in these pages a brief view of that subject; it is in response to many friendly demands, and shall be as concise as reasonably possible, in keeping with ancient records on engraved stones, cylinders, and seals. Your attention is asked to this general view of the subject, with the hope that it may enlist some inquirers and admirers of this glyptic question, so little esteemed or understood in these days; a subject not only representing a branch of art covering a period of forty odd centuries, but a science through whose engraved gems we have been enabled to enrich our knowledge of the ancient history of the world.

Each nation which in ancient times practised the glyptic art, produced a certain style or quality of execution.

After serious study of the general subject of glyptology, one finds that the work of each epoch, and of each nationality, bears some unmistakable trait. These features we can almost always recognize as emanating from a certain people.

So completely have we acquired an acquaintance with the various characteristics of each nation's handiwork in

engraving gems, that we are enabled also to discern the epoch; not to a year, but within a century or even a decade.

In proportion to the rudeness of the incisions we recognize the barbaric condition of the people among whom they were incised; also in proportion to the fineness of the incision, beauty of conception, and execution of the design, do we estimate the civilization of the epoch and of the people.

Some of the nations who have bequeathed us engraved gems were, in two respects, the first sculptors. They were first, not only because none of ability had preceded them, but rather were they first in art rank, and in excellence of conception; their execution has never been surpassed; their statues and high reliefs have never been equalled in modern times.

Many of those colossal art works in stone have been transported to the Vatican, to France, England, Austria, Germany, Russia, some even to America; we are all conversant with them. Therefore, you can readily imagine how we define and classify the work of each epoch and nation, when a miscellaneous mass of engraved gems are placed before us for classification.