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SOME HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN ENGRAVED GEMSTONES FROM NICOMEDIA AND BITHYNIA (NORTH-WESTERN MARMARA)

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Cuvinte cheie: geme gravate, Nicomedia, Bithynia, Asia Minor, Turcia, perioada elenistică, perioada romană

Key words: engraved gems, Nicomedia, Bithynia, Asia Minor, Turkey, Hellenistic period, Roman period

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gemolojik buluntular, Nikomedia, Bithynia, Hellenistik Dönem, Roma Dönemi

Introduction

Numerous unpublished engraved gems are preserved in museums situated within the vast territory that comprises the region of north-western Marmara (**map 1**)¹. In this short paper seven, curated and exhibited in the Museums of Kocaeli (ancient Nicomedia) and one in the Museum of Bolu (ancient Bithynium-Claudiopolis) in the north-western Marmara region of Turkey, are presented and discussed. The Archaeological Museum of Kocaeli has existed since 1967, but was only opened to visitors in 2007. The Museum of Bolu was opened on 14 November 1981, but it was damaged in 1999 by the earthquake in Düzce. After a period of restoration, it was reopened on 18 May 2006. To a large degree this is a rescue publication of locally important material, which has not been published before and is now made available to the public and the scholarly world for the first time.

Nicomedia was a Graeco-Roman metropolis of ancient Bithynia in north-western Marmara and in AD 286 it became the eastern and most senior capital city of the Roman Empire, a status which the city maintained during the

¹ Local museums in north-western Marmara region of Turkey are, from west to east Kocaeli, Sakarya (established in 1989), Bilecik (established in 2007), Ertuğrul Gazi Museum of Söğüt (established in 2001), Bolu and Düzce-Konuralp (ancient Prusias ad Hypium, established in 2003). These museums own large collections of ancient Greek and Roman engraved gems almost all unpublished. There are also engraved gems from north-western Marmara conserved in the Museums of Istanbul and Ankara.

period of the Tetrarchy in AD 293-324. The area of Nicomedia constituted the north-eastern shore of the Propontis and the city was close to the great marble quarries of Proconnesus (Marmara Adası). Although Nicomedia was the capital of the province of Bithynia, its Graeco-Roman material culture remains little known: on 23 February 303 AD, the pagan festival of the Terminalia, Diocletian ordered that the newly built church at Nicomedia should be razed, its scriptures burnt, and its precious stones seized². This is almost the only recorded reference to gems in ancient Nicomedia. At least some of the Graeco-Roman gem cutters, who achieved a degree of personal fame throughout the Roman Empire, were most probably active in Nicomedia, Bithynia and Hellespont (for example in Lampsacus on the eastern side of the Hellespont in the northern Troad)³, which seems to have been notable for toreutics⁴ and gold jewellery, especially in the Late Antique period⁵.



Map. 1

The items from Kocaeli presented here were mostly assembled by acquisition from local salesmen and lack any archaeological context, although they seem to be funerary finds as suggested by the nature of their very well -preserved condition, as systematically excavated tombs in Nicomedia contained a

² Barnes 1981, p. 22.

³ Cf. Akyay Meriçboyu 2006.

⁴ For a mirror from Hellenistic Nicomedia, cf. Lafli and Kan Şahin 2021.

⁵ Cf. Deppert-Lippitz 1996, p. 59-60.

remarkable assemblage of grave gifts, including gold and imported glass jewellery and engraved gems⁶. Although Late Hellenistic engraved gems are much less often found than Roman period gems in Asia Minor, the number of gems dating to the Late Hellenistic period is large in Kocaeli, where many tumuli of this period remain. Garnets were particularly valued in this period⁷. This parallels the particularly high-quality workmanship exhibited by local toreutics during the Hellenistic period. These pieces of jewellery, all ancient gem-set rings with the exception of one unset gem (no. 5) and another (no. 7) which appears to be mounted in a modern ring, are particularly important, most of them having spent a considerable time inaccessible in the darkness of the Kocaeli Museum's vaults. In addition a small and beautiful cameo-set ring from Bolu Museum (no. 6) is included. Five rings set with plain gems or glass settings and one which has lost its setting, conserved in Kocaeli Museum, are published as an Appendix. It has been impossible to examine the material, except by way of photographs which were submitted to Professor Henig and consequently none of the items has been examined to assess its material in a scientific manner.

Catalogue – Eight gems from the Museums of Kocaeli and Bolu.

No. 1 (fig. 1). A torch and an ear of wheat. Museum of Kocaeli.

Garnet of reddish colour.

Oval shape. Highly convex. Intact and well-preserved.

Ancient bezel set in a modern gold ring. The gold collet of the bezel rises to secure the ring, as Chadour 1994, p. 31, no. 98 (from Olbia, set with a cabochon garnet depicting Demeter).

Dimensions. W. 10 mm, L. 14 mm, W. of ring 16 mm, metal quality 73% gold, weight of ring 3.9 grams.

Comparanda. A Middle-Hellenistic type, compare Fossing 1929, no. 37 = Plantzos 1999, p. 136, no. 705, an oval garnet depicting a grasshopper on an ear of wheat. An oval garnet in Munich, Brandt 1968, no. 382 = Plantzos 1999, p. 134, no. 648, depicts a torch though there the cutting is more refined.

Dating. Third to second century BC.

⁶ A rectangular tomb dating to the third century BC was found while a foundation was excavated in 1963 in the Tepecik District, which was established on a hill to the north of the ancient city of Nicomedia. A very finely crafted gold bracelet, Nike pendulum earrings, two gold rings, a Heracles knotted brooch and various gold pieces were recovered from the tomb: Ergil 1979. Furthermore, during the rescue excavations in 1992, in the necropolis of Gültepe Park Area, a pair of gold „children's" earrings from the Roman period (made of twisted gold wire) in Tomb A (p. 374, fig. 18), three gold earrings likewise of Roman date in Tomb B (p. 373, fig. 16) and a broken glass bracelet were found in Tomb C: Demir 1994, p. 360.

⁷ Also cf. gems from Amasya in north-eastern Anatolia, Laflı and Henig 2023.

Cultic comments. The device on our gem might indicate rites connected with Demeter, similar to the Eleusinian mysteries. The chief divinity of Graeco-Roman Nicomedia was Demeter, and Arrian of Nicomedia served as priest of Demeter and her daughter, „to whom the city is dedicated”. He mentions the Mysteries of Demeter who is often seen on the civic coins, holding her torch⁸, and indeed the most important religious shrine in Nicomedia was the temple of Demeter, which stood in a sacred precinct on a hill above the harbour. For the cult of Demeter in Nicomedia, see Boyana 2005.

No. 2 (figs 2a-b). A butterfly. Museum of Kocaeli.

Garnet.

Circular shape, highly convex as a cabochon. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a gold ring. For the form compare a gold ring, likewise with a cabochon garnet setting, in Chadour 1994, p. 29, no. 92, a ring which she dates to the third century BC.

Dimensions. Diam. 10 mm, Diam. of ring 16 mm, metal quality 74% gold, weight of ring 3.5 grams.

Comparanda. A Middle-Hellenistic type. For a butterfly depicted on a garnet and given a Hellenistic date, see Brandt 1968, no. 429 = Plantzos 1999, p. 136, no. 707. Two garnets depicting butterflies of similar appearance but set in Early Roman rings dating to the first century BC are published by Chadour 1994, p. 48, nos. 151 and 152. Boardman, Vollenweider 1978, nos. 338 and 339 show respectively a bee and an ant also engraved on garnets.

Dating. Third–second century BC.

No. 3 (fig. 3). The bust of Apollo in profile to the left. He has luxuriant hair bound with a diadem; in front of him his lyre. Museum of Kocaeli.

Cornelian.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a gold ring of Late Hellenistic form with collet surrounding the gem, type as Chadour 1994, p. 35, no. 112.

Dimensions. W. 10 mm, L. 14 mm, W. of ring 15 mm, metal quality 78% gold, weight of ring 3.6 grams.

Comparanda. Konuk and Arslan 2000, no. 5 but with laurel branch rather than a lyre. Richter 1971, no. 82 is a fuller bust, but a similar physiognomy, and she suggests the type is based on a statue of the fifth century BC.

Dating. Late second century BC–early first century BC.

⁸ Rigsby 1996, p. 447.

No. 4 (fig. 4). Pegasus flying towards the left. Museum of Kocaeli.

Agate, the front half cloudy white and the back half brown.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a gold ring with narrow gold collet around the stone. Ring type probably as Chadour 1994, p. 35, no. 112.

Dimensions. W. 12 mm, L. 16 mm, W. of ring 14 mm, metal quality 69% gold, weight of ring 3.4 grams.

Comparanda. This is a common subject especially in the first century BC. The pelleting especially of the hoofs and the joints of the legs as well as the material is indicative. For the subject and style see Sena Chiesa 1966, nos. 1212-1214 from Aquileia; Middleton 1991, no. 136 probably from Istria. Also Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, no. 1131. The ring is of a form contemporary with the gem.

Dating. First half of the first century BC.

No. 5 (fig. 5). A farmer stands beneath a tree in profile to the left, in front of him a pair of oxen. There is a ground line. Museum of Kocaeli.

Found in Nicomedia.

Cornelian.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Not set in a ring.

Dimensions. W. 12 mm, L. 15 mm, H. 3 mm, weight 1.2 grams.

Comparanda. Compare similar scenes of rural plenty on intaglios, Sena Chiesa 1966, no. 783, a farmer watching two animals lying down beneath a tree; Guiraud 1988, no. 614 from Mont Beuvray, Saône-et-Loire in Gaul where an old herdsman watches three cattle standing beneath a tree; also Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978, no. 558 for cattle beneath a tree. Henig, MacGregor 2004, no. 7.18 and Sagiv 2018, p. 49, fig. 7 depict herdsman ploughing with a pair of yoked oxen.

Dating. Late first century BC.

No. 6 (fig. 6). A tear-shaped cameo carved with the frontal head of a child with tousled hair. Such heads are usually identified as representing Eros. Museum of Bolu.

Found in the district of Kasaplar in Bolu which was a Roman necropolis site depending on the *chora* of Bithynium-Claudiopolis in eastern Bithynia⁹.

Onyx.

Tear-shaped shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a gold ring of early second-century AD form, as Chadour 1994, p. 71, no. 237.

⁹ This site is known in epigraphic sources from several Roman funerary inscriptions, cf. (among others) *L'Année épigraphique* 1954 (1955), no. 233 (on p. 68) (by Alf. Merlin).

Dimensions. W. 9 mm, L. 13 mm, W. of ring 12 mm, metal quality 78% gold, weight of ring 3.4 grams.

Comparanda. Henig, Molesworth 2018, no. 189 (suggesting an earlier date), with references. Eros heads are very common grave finds throughout Asia Minor, often set in gold rings dating to the second century AD.

Dating. Second century AD.

No. 7 (figs 7a-b). Two opposed, male and female portrait busts, her hairstyle comparable to Faustina II. Museum of Kocaeli.

Orange.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a gold ring that appears to be modern.

Dimensions. Diam. 12 mm, Diam. of ring 17 mm, metal quality 44% gold, weight of ring 3.7 grams.

Comparanda. Zwierlein-Diel 1991, no. 1734, a marriage ring belonging to a man called Fortunatus; Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978, no. 1169, of about the same date and not earlier as there stated.

Dating. Late second century AD.

No. 8 (fig. 8). A female portrait bust in profile to the left; Museum of Kocaeli.

Red jasper.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Set in a substantial gold ring with pronounced shoulders, as Chadour 1994, p. 106, no. 363.

Dimensions. W. 11 mm, L. 15 mm, W. of ring 14 mm, metal quality 87% gold, weight of ring 3.8 grams.

Comparanda. The portrait depicts, or is in the style of Crispina, wife of Commodus who died in AD 181. Comparison may be made with a red jasper intaglio from Scodra in Dalmatia, Middleton 1991, no. 206 = Henig, MacGregor 2004, no. 5.41; and another red jasper from the Rhineland, Krug 1980, p. 212, no. 202.

Dating. The intaglio is of late second century AD date, and the form of the ring which has pronounced shoulders dates to the end of the second or the early third century AD.

Appendix – five gold rings set with plain gems or glass settings, and one without setting from the Museum of Kocaeli

No. 9 (figs 9a-b). Transparent glass.

Found in Nicomedia.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved except where bent at its edges.

Dimensions. W. 11 mm, L. 16 mm, W. of ring 13 mm, metal quality 65% gold, weight of ring 4.1 grams.

Comparandum. Chadour 1994, p. 31, no. 100 for a ring set with a lense of glass.

Dating. Second century BC.

No. 10 (fig. 10). From a photograph the stone appears dense and opaque, and may be a garnet or a chalcedony.

Circular shape, convex cabochon. Intact and well-preserved.

The hoop of the ring expands towards the shoulders.

Dimensions. W. 9 mm, L. 10 mm, W. of ring 13 mm, metal quality 73% gold, weight of ring 3.6 grams.

Comparandum. Deppert-Lippitz 1985, no. 89.

Dating. First century BC.

No. 11 (fig. 11). Garnet.

Circular shape, convex cabochon. Intact and well-preserved.

Dimensions. W. 10 mm, L. 11 mm, W. of ring 14 mm, metal quality 76% gold, weight of ring 3.8 grams.

Comparandum. Deppert-Lippitz 1985, no. 99.

Dating. First century BC.

No. 12 (fig. 12). From a photograph the stone appears dense and opaque, and may be a garnet or a chalcedony.

Circular shape, convex cabochon. Intact and well-preserved.

The hoop of the ring expands towards the shoulders.

Dimensions. Diam. 11 mm, max. H. 6 mm, W. of ring 15 mm, metal quality 78% gold, weight of ring 4.6 grams.

Comparandum. Deppert-Lippitz 1985, no. 89.

Dating. First century BC.

No. 13 (figs 13a-b). From a photograph the stone appears dense and opaque, and it is not possible to assess its material.

Found in Nicomedia.

Oval shape. Intact and well-preserved.

Dimensions. W. 7 mm, L. 14 mm, W. of ring 11 mm, metal quality 57% gold, weight of ring 3.9 grams.

Comparandum. Deppert-Lippitz 1985, no. 101.

Dating. First century BC.

No. 14 (fig. 14). Gem missing from bezel.

Found in Nicomedia.

The wide circular hoop well-preserved except for being slightly bent at its edges.
Dimensions. W. 6 mm, L. 8 mm, W. of ring 13 mm, metal quality 85% gold, weight of ring 2.8 grams.

Comparandum. Chadour 1994, p. 53, nos. 169 and 170.

Dating. First century BC–first century AD.

Acknowledgements: Permission to publish these 14 items in the Museums of Kocaeli and Bolu was granted by the Directorate of the Museum of Kocaeli to Dr G. Kan Şahin (University of Sinop) on 15 March 2018 under permit 62901608-155.01/E. 228521. The photos of the gems in these museums were taken by G. Kan Şahin on 22 October 2018 to whom we would like to express our gratitudes.

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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SOME HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN ENGRAVED GEMSTONES FROM NICOMEDIA AND BITHYNIA (NORTH-WESTERN MARMARA)

ABSTRACT

In this brief paper eight Hellenistic and Roman engraved gemstones are presented, all of which are curated in the local museums of Kocaeli and Bolu in north-western Marmara. They are significant, as very few gemstones are published from the region. At the end of the article six gold rings with plain gems or glass settings and in one case with the gem missing comprise an appendix.

CÂTEVA GEME ELENISTICE ŞI ROMANE DIN NICOMEDIA ŞI BITHYNIA (NORD-VESTUL MĂRII MARMARA)

ABSTRACT

În această scurtă lucrare sunt prezentate opt gеме elenistice și romane, păstrate în muzeele locale din Kocaeli și Bolu, în nord-vestul Mării Marmara. Ele sunt importante, deoarece sunt publicate foarte puține gеме din această regiune. La sfârșitul articolului, șase inele de aur cu gеме simple sau cu monturi de sticlă și, într-un caz, cu gema lipsă, sunt incluse într-o anexă.

Nikomedia ve Bithynia Bölgesi'nden Hellenistik ve Roma Dönemleri'ne Ait Bazı Gemolojik Buluntular

ÖZET

Bu kısa makalede, Kocaeli ve Bolu Müzeleri'nde sergilenmekte olan sekiz adet Hellenistik ve Roma Dönemleri'ne ait gemolojik örnek tanıtılmaktadır. Bu bölgeden çok az değerli taş bilindiği için bu buluntular önemlidirler. Makalenin sonunda değerli taşlarla ya da cam boncuklarla bağlantılı olan altı adet altın yüzük bir ek içinde sunulmaktadır.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b



Fig. 3



Fig. 4a

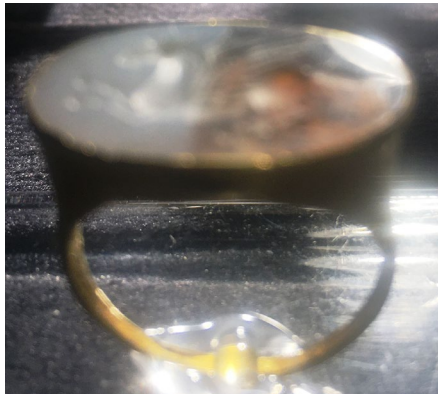


Fig. 4b



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7a

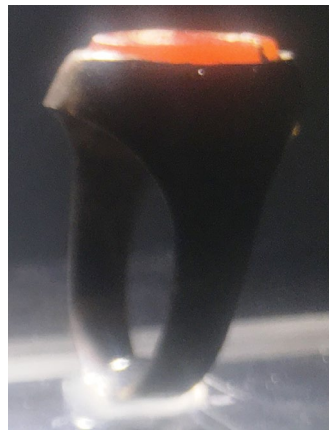


Fig. 7b



Fig. 8



Fig. 9a



Fig. 9b



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

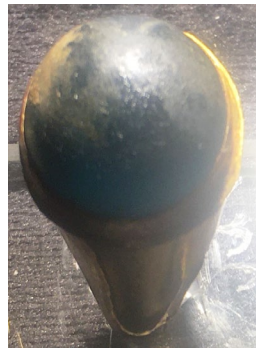


Fig. 12



Fig. 13a



Fig. 13b



Fig. 14