STUDIES IN ANCIENT ART AND CIVILIZATION 17
Kraków 2013

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MONSTERS, CHIMERAS, MASKS OR GODS?[1]

Abstract: *The National Museum in Krakow contains an outstanding set of gems collected by Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński (1818-1889). Within this extensive group of objects, two very rare intaglios bearing a particular intriguing motif, the double-headed device, stand out from the rest. Since the very beginning, scholars have interpreted this kind of depiction differently and many different hypotheses have been drawn. This paper aims to explain the meaning of this strange iconography and from whence it originated.*

Keywords: *Bes; Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński; Dionysos; double-headed device; gems; intaglios; Phoenician scarabs; Silenus*

Since 1886, the National Museum in Krakow has had the privilege of hosting a part of the Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński (1818-1889) collection of gems (Śliwa 2012a, 301). Within this extensive group of specimens, comprising 2517 cameos, intaglios and other glyptic objects in a variety of materials from different periods, two rare gems of unusual beauty stand out. Seen one way, they both depict the chubby face of a young boy, with long hair raised towards the sky. But turn them upside down, and it is the face of an old bald and bearded man that appears.

The first intaglio is made of garnet (almandine) with a ruby-violet colour. It is very clear, translucent and biconvex in shape, with the front side only slightly convex. It is an example of very fine craftsmanship in material

[1] This work was financially supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education from funds for research in the years 2012-2016 as part of the 'Diamond Grant' programme, statutory research project no. DI2011 005641.

DOI: 10.12797/SAAC.17.2013.17.17

typical of the late Hellenistic period and belongs to the group taking the name of 'small convex garnets' and dating to the 1st century BC (Plantzos 1999, 90-91). The provenance of such specimens is not certain. It is assumed that they were made in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea basin i.e. in mainland Greece, Alexandria and the Levant. However, garnets were especially popular in the Hellenistic period so other places and parts of the Europe cannot be excluded (Plantzos 1999, 91). The device engraved upon the gem depicts a combination of two heads or, one should rather say, two faces or masks. The first shows a youthful, even childish, chubby face of a boy. He has a double chin, full lips, a large flat nose and curly hair raised toward the sky. There is a tuft of hair above his forehead. Upon turning the intaglio upside down, another face appears. It is the depiction of an old bearded man with a long moustache, a small mouth, a similar large, flat nose, and a bald head.

The second intaglio bears a similar depiction. It is made of chromium-bearing chalcedony and is translucent green with some black inclusions. The shape is highly biconvex with the apex removed from the back side. Stones of this kind and shape were employed in Roman glyptic from the last third of the 1st century BC to the beginning of the 2nd century AD and were possibly produced mainly in Italy or in the western parts of the Roman Empire, with the latter seeming more plausible (Platz-Horster 2010, 187). The gem depicts a combination of two faces or masks. The first belongs to a chubby boy with full cheeks, a big, short, flat nose, a small, slightly open mouth with full lips, wide-open eyes and curly hair directed towards the sky. As in the case of the first intaglio, when one turns the specimen upside down, another face can be noticed. It is the depiction of an old bald man with a beard and moustache and a large, flat nose, small mouth and big eyes.

What is the meaning of this rather strange iconography and where did it originate? In the absence of scientific evidence, there can be no definitive answer. The combination of two masks/faces like those presented on these intaglios seems to be connected with a wide group labelled mask-animal gems or mask-animal combination gems. Gems of this type usually date from the late Hellenistic period to the 3rd century AD (Śliwa 2012b, 380). However, this term is not entirely suitable for the composition being discussed here because there is no animal. To be more precise, the term 'mask combination' should be used instead. All in all, the similarity of the concepts is clear and one can therefore classify gems with such iconography as belonging to a group of engraved gems which can also be

named 'hybrids' or 'fantastic mixtures' (Lapatin 2011, 88). Due to the variety of depictions, scholars have had many problems with the nomenclature of gems containing 'combinations'. In the past, many different names were used to describe these mixtures such as chimeras, monstra and grylloi among others. Grylloi is the designation which was particularly popular. This name derives from the term used by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 35.144) to describe a strange figure painted by Antiphilos and meant as a caricature. According to recent studies of this problem, however, it has been ascertained that the term grylloi is quite imprecise and should not be used in reference to the mask-animal combination occurring on engraved gems (Zwierlein--Diehl 2007, 142; Lapatin 2011, 88-98; Śliwa 2012b, 380).

It is still not clear from whence the complicated hybrids originate. Some scholars believe that they come from eastern culture. Similar compositions can be found in Achaemenid, Carthaginian, Sardinian and Archaic east Greek glyptic art (Roes 1935, 232-235; Henig 1974, 128; Dimitrova-Milcheva 1981, 14-15; Berges 2002, 181-185; Lapatin 2011, 89; Śliwa 2012b, 382). J. Śliwa (2012b, 382-383) pointed out that in Egyptian iconography there are also some examples of the use of similar motifs. Concerning the reversible double-mask which occurs on the presented intaglios, a similar design with an upside-down, double head of Bes or Gorgoneion can be found on Phoenician scarabs. There are some known examples which were excavated from the cemeteries of Sardinia dating from the 6th and 5th century BC up to the 4th century BC (Ebers 1883, 95, pl. G29 = Furtwängler 1900, vol. 1, pl. 15: 71 and vol. 2, 73 = Boardman 2003, 106, no. 34: 4; Furtwängler 1900, vol. 3, pl. 113 = Walters 1926, 45, no. 369, pl. 7 = Boardman 2003, no. 22: 7; Leroux 1899, 19, no. 39, pl. 4). There are also some similar compositions in Archaic Greek glyptic art. A pseudo-scarab, made in pale green steatite with a representation of two heads featuring a young boy and an old bearded man on the back side, which is kept in the British Museum, could be a good example. However, this object is problematic and many different interpretations have been drawn. A. Furtwängler (1900, vol. 1, pl. 8: 14 and vol. 2, 38) claimed that it is a double mask. J. D. Beazley (1920, 16-17, no. 23) suggested the depiction was 'a youth wearing a helmet'. In turn, H. B. Walters (1926, 58, no. 480, pl. 8) interpreted it simply as 'two conjoined faces'. The final proposal was suggested by J. Boardman (2001, 180, no. 281) who described it as 'two heads, crown to crown, one bearded'. Lastly, three clay casts bearing exactly the same motif, which were found in a temple's archive in Carthage, are very important for this study (Berges 2002, 204-207, nos 138-140). The archive, alongside the whole city,

was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. As a result of the great similarity to the objects in Krakow, one can suppose that these casts from Carthage cannot be much older and that they were probably produced in the early Hellenistic period.

If one adheres to Furtwängler's (1900, vol. 3, 113-114, 288, 298, 352--353) interesting hypothesis about the origins of the mask-animal combination gems, one could suppose that the aforementioned Phoenician scarabs and Archaic Greek pseudo-scarabs could have been the prototypes for the later Hellenistic and Roman specimens. Some other scholars (Dimitrova-Milcheva 1981, 14-15; Overbeck and Overbeck 2005, 100; Lapatin 2011, 89) have agreed with him. M. Henig (1974, 128) highlighted that the Phoenicians tended to borrow ideas and designs from other cultural spheres and used them for their own purposes. The clay casts from Carthage seem to make such suppositions even more probable. According to D. Berges (2002, 183), one should include objects bearing the reversible heads motif in the general category of mask-animal combination gems. He also associates them with Phoenician culture. But where could the Phoenicians have borrowed this particular motif of the double head from? Berges (2002, 184-185) claims it derives from Eastern territories and that they were probably connected with Mesopotamian gods. However, the most likely candidate for the prototype of the reversible heads motif is the Egyptian family deity, Bes. As indicated above, among Phoenician scarabs there are some with depictions interpreted as the double head of Bes, so this design could have been borrowed from Phoenician art and then transferred to Sardinia, as well as to Carthage, where their colonies were situated. As Furtwängler (1900, vol. 3, 288) presumed, mask-animal combination gems could have been transferred to Italy and then later developed in the Roman period. As already mentioned, the double head on Phoenician objects can be interpreted as a depictions of Bes or Gorgoneion. Such specimens are supposed to have been amulets with apotropaic functions (Furtwängler 1900, vol. 3, 114; Berges 2002, 183). Bes, the protector of the family, could have also secured the owner against the so-called 'Evil Eye' and other such bad spirits and dark forces. The deity was sometimes confused with the Greek satyr. Both Bes and the satyr have a similar appearance and thus the second also became a protector against evil (Boardman 1968, 28-29). Bes was widely used in Archaic Greek art, as was the case with other figures such as Medusa and Centaurs, which were sometimes conjoined with animals (Boardman 2001, 142-143). Although there is no known example of usage of the motif of reversible heads during the Classical period, borrowings from Egyptian-Phoenician art to Greek,

such as the deity Bes, are nevertheless present (Boardman 2001, 306). However, as J. Boardman (2003, 72) has pointed out, Bes was only confused with the satyr and not adapted, thus it is impossible to consider the satyr as the equivalent of Bes in Greek culture and art.

All these considerations, however, have two weak points. Whereas the latest Phoenician scarabs dated to the 4th century BC, the first intaglios with a double-headed design dated to the 1st century BC (such as object cat. no. 1 presented here), and thus there are few connections which can be drawn. The most striking are three clay casts from Carthage, which should probably be dated to the early Hellenistic period (Berges 2002, 204-207, nos 138-140) They belong, however, to Phoenician culture and there are no linking objects to be found either among the Italic gems (usually dating from the 3rd to the 1st century BC) or among the Greek, Classical and early Hellenistic specimens. One cannot therefore state with certainty that this motif was borrowed directly by the Greeks and Romans, although this eventuality also cannot be excluded. This could also result from the current state of research and the rarity of the objects with reversible heads devices. However, the problem is even bigger when one carefully compares the motifs used on scarabs and pseudo-scarabs with those employed on later Hellenistic and Roman intaglios. The intaglios from the Krakow collection do not depict two symmetric repetitions of the same face. Both objects show the combination of the face of an old man with the face of a child. Therefore, the motif cannot be interpreted as the double had of a satyr, the equivalent of the double head of Bes in Greek culture. It appears that in Greek and Roman culture, they may not have had exactly the same meaning as in Phoenician culture.

Two similar intaglios are kept in the Musée d'Art et d'Historie de Genève. The Swiss scholar M.-L. Vollenweider (1979, 331, nos 365--366, pl. 105) proposed the hypothesis that these gems represent a young male prostitute and his go-between, but this suggestion appears to be quite far-fetched. In the Marlborough collection, there is an analogous object recently described as: 'The facing head of a satyr (animal ears?) to be read as young or (inverted) bearded' (Boardman *et al.* 2009, 133, no. 276), but it seems to be more probable that the motif depicts two separate creatures. A. Nestorović (2005, 36, no. 72, pl. 7: 14) interpreted this unusual composition as 'the head of Silenus, combined with the head of a satyr'. This proposal seems to fit better, because it is obvious that on these gems one of the faces belongs to a child. Therefore, it may be a young satyr and Silenus, who was always depicted as an old creature. However,

the device engraved on the gems from the Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński collection can be interpreted as the face of Silenus conjoined with the face of the infant Dionysos. This combination seems to be the most suitable interpretation. Silenus is frequently used for other similar juxtapositions such as with the head of Minerva, Maenad or with animals (Henig 1974, 128; Overbeck and Overbeck 2005, 100; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 142). He is known to have been a tutor of the young Dionysos and he later became one of the attendants of the god, always heavily drunk (Simon 1997, 1132; Rose 2005, 128-129). In glyptics, there are some motifs that probably refer to the same subject, such as Silenus playing with the infant Dionysos or where Silenus holds a child on his knee (Agostini 1657, 29, no. 137; Walters 1926, 230, no. 2236; Fossing 1929, 76, no. 380, pl. 5; Brandt and Schmidt 1970, 32, nos 726--727, pl. 84; Dimitrova-Milcheva 1981, 57, no. 122; Casal Garcia 1990, 96, no. 78, pl. 21; Dembski 2005, 104, nos 529-530, pl. 52). Figural scenes in which a young boy effuses an offering from a kantharos before Silenus represent another example (Agostini 1657, 28, no. 133; Furtwängler 1900, vol. 1, pl. 46: 9 and vol. 2, 221; Boardman and Wagner 2003, 14, no. 73, pl. 18). This theme was used not only in glyptic, but also in vase painting and sculpture. In W. H. Roscher's (1965, 472) *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* one can find a drawing of a scene on a Greek vase depicting Papposilenus in front of Mercury holding the young Dionysos in his hands. Another example is a sculpture from the Louvre in Paris (inv. no. MA 922), a replica fashioned after the lost original made by Lysippus (active *c*. 370-300 BC), which shows an old Silenus holding the young Dionysos in his hands (Simon 1997, 1130, no. 215). The head of the young Dionysos was also sometimes connected with the head of an animal, especially the head of a bull calf (Roes 1935, 235). As one can see, the motif engraved on the gems from the Krakow collection can therefore be interpreted as the juxtaposition of two gods, Dionysos and Silenus.

Despite his wild nature and addiction to wine, Silenus was appreciated because of his great wisdom and ability to predict the future. This fact is reported in several ancient literary sources. For instance, in Aristotle's *Eudemus* (*c*. 354 BC), a surviving fragment of which is quoted in *Moralia, Consolatio ad Apollonium* (27.115b-e) by Plutarch (1st century AD), Silenus shares some of his wisdom with King Midas. In addition, some comparisons between Silenus and Socrates made by an angry Alcibiades during a symposium were recorded in *Symposium* (215-216) by Plato (427--347 BC). The moral of this story is that true wisdom can be hidden behind

an ugly appearance. Another play on ideas referring to the double meaning of the subject which the motif on the gems suggests can be observed in the story of a picture of a horse created by Pauson and described in *Varia Historia* (14.15) by Aelianus (*c*. 175-235 AD). According to the description, the double meaning is expressed by the picture itself (we have to recognise it ourselves) in the same manner in which the equine picture of Pauson may express the ambiguous thoughts of Socrates.

This story is very important as it occurred during the 5th-4th century BC and thus it may be assumed that Greek artists were capable of presenting complicated compositions such as double meaning depictions. Consequently, this particular motif used on the gems described here does not necessarily derive from a different culture or earlier prototypes. Even if it was borrowed, its meaning was completely different in the Greek-Roman cultural circle. Similar examples of double meaning devices are present in Greek and Roman literature, philosophy and various kinds of art. This design could therefore have been rediscovered in the Greek and Roman sphere. Further proof for this statement may be found in the material used for gems with such devices as it indicates that they were produced across the whole Roman Empire at nearly the same time. As mentioned at the beginning, the small Hellenistic convex garnets (cat. no. 1) were probably produced in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea basin in the 1st century BC and the convex chromium-bearing chalcedony gems (cat. no. 2) in the western part, possibly in Italy, starting from the last third of the 1st century BC.

The mystery of the origin of the motif has most likely been solved. However, it should be stressed that the argument for the origin of the reversible heads of Silenus and the young Dionysos from the Greek and Roman cultural sphere and the borrowing of that motif from the Phoenicians, albeit with a completely new meaning, applies only to this depiction. There is still insufficient knowledge about the origins of other sorts of mask-animal combination gems. The use of Silenus conjoined with the infant Dionysos seems to be intriguing, but not uncommon, as shown above. The popularity of the creature itself on the gems is great, especially in this sort of mask-animal combination gem. One could therefore connect the kind of depiction used on the intaglios from the Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński collection with a Dionysiac cult. It cannot be ascertained if the intaglios bearing such devices in Greek and Roman culture were treated as apotropaic amulets, seals or as another sort of personal object. It is possible that they were devoted to the wisdom of Silenus, presented more as a tutor of the god rather than a drunk attendant of his circle,

and then quite simply to the Dionysiac cult. The playful type of depiction, according to the fragment of Aelianus's *Varia Historia* (14.15) mentioned, existed much earlier than the gems. Perhaps the gem-engraver merely intended to depict two figures from the same subject on the same object at the same time in the simplest possible way.

Catalogue

1. Intaglio. A face/mask of Silenus combined with a face/mask of the infant Dionysos. (Inv. no.: MNK IV-Ew.Zł-573; Pl. 1: 1-2).

*Datin*g: 1st century BC.

Stone: Garnet (Almandine) of ruby-violet colour, very clear translucent. Biconvex shape, front side only slightly convex. Mounted in an octagonal, gold-plated bezel of the 'Stosch' type, made in Florence *c*. 1750.

Dimensions: 12 x 11 x 4mm.

State of publication: Unpublished.

Description and interpretation: A combination of two faces/masks: an old, bald, moustached and bearded Silenus with a young, chubby boy – Dionysos. The beard of Silenus doubles as the hair of the youth. A very fine work in material typical of the late Hellenistic period belonging to the group of 'small convex garnets'.

Comparanda: Gori 1731-1732, pl. 46: 3-4 = Reinach 1895, 28, no. I.46.3-4, pl. 23; Story-Maskelyne 1870, 36, no. 213 = Boardman *et al*. 2009, 133, no. 276; Vollenweider 1979, 331, nos 365-366, pl. 105; Nestorović 2005, 36, no. 72, pl. 7: 14.

2. Intaglio. A face/mask of Silenus combined with a face/mask of the infant Dionysos (Inv. no.: MNK IV-Ew.Zł-2058; Pl. 1: 3-4).

Dating: Final third of the 1st century BC – 1st century AD.

Stone: Chromium-bearing chalcedony of a green colour with many black inclusions, translucent. The shape is highly biconvex with a cut off apex on the back side.

Dimensions: 12 x 9 x 4mm.

State of publication: Unpublished.

Description and interpretation: As gem cat. no. 1, but here the material and the style of engraving indicate a dating of the object to the final third of the 1st century BC – 1st century AD.

Comparanda: As above.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr. Gertrud Platz-Horster for her kind help and in particular her suggestions concerning the dating of the Stosch type mount, as well as all the remarks which greatly improved this text. I also would like to thank Hadrien Rambach for referring me to a remark by Adolf Furtwängler about one of the Phoenician scarabs from Tharros, and for providing detailed information on the subject in general. I must also thank him for allowing me to read his forthcoming article (written with Norbert Franken) on this type of gem during the Renaissance. Finally, I thank Edward Bigden and Leah Southers for their assistance in improving my written English and I would also like to express my gratitude to the National Museum in Krakow for allowing me to publish these objects.

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Pl. 1. 1 – Face/mask of Silenus combined with a face/mask of the infant Dionysos (inv. no. MNK IV-Ew.Zł-573) from the collection of the National Museum in Krakow. Photo by Photographic Studio of the National Museum in Krakow (Scale 5:1)
2 – As above, inverted view
3 – Face/mask of Silenus combined with a face/mask of the infant Dionysos (inv. no. MNK IV-Ew.Zł-2058) from the collection of the National Museum in Krakow. Photo by Photographic Studio of the National Museum in Krakow (Scale 5:1)
4 – As above, inverted view