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## SEVERAL NOTES ON ENGRAVED GEMS FROM SOUTHERN PANNONIA

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*Abstract:* Engraved gems from Eastern Pannonia are well known thanks to the scholarly work of professor Tamás Gesztelyi on the gems from *Brigetio*, *Acquincum*, *Intercissa* and *Gorsium*. *Carnuntum* in Western Pannonia yielded more than 1300 engraved gems, thus outnumbering all other findspots in the Province. In order to further complement the topography of gem findspots in Pannonia, this paper provides a brief conspectus of the engraved gems from *Siscia* in Southern Pannonia.

*Keywords:* engraved gems, glass gems, Roman period, *Siscia*, Sisak, Southern Pannonia, Northern Croatia, Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, Sisak City Museum

Professor Tamás Gesztelyi has devoted much of his scientific career to studying engraved gems from Pannonia.<sup>1</sup> This paper, dedicated to the esteemed professor on the occasion of his 80th birthday, will touch on engraved gems from Southern Pannonia, found in the territory of northern Croatia.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Considering Pannonia in its entirety, the majority of engraved gems have been found in *Carnuntum*, numbering more than 1300 items.<sup>3</sup> In the region of eastern Pannonia, the greatest number of engraved gems come from several sites along

<sup>1</sup> Gesztelyi 1987; 2000; 2001; 2005; 2009; 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The most significant number of gems in Croatia are found in museum collections. Several archaeological museums hold the most important glyptic collections, while a relatively small number of engraved gems are stored in the city and regional museums. Gems came to the museums most often as stray finds or as part of private collections that were donated to or purchased for museums. Only a small number of engraved gems in Croatian museum collections come from systematic archaeological excavations, that is, they have an archaeological context. For glyptic collections in Croatia see Nardelli 2011a, 1, n. 4 and Nardelli 2012, 133–134, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Dembski 2005. For detailed account on engraved gems findspots in Pannonia see Gesztelyi 2009, 157.

the Danube limes, with *Brigetio* outnumbering them all in such finds (144 items).<sup>4</sup> As for engraved gems from the Southern part of Pannonia, now belonging to northern Croatia, the city of *Siscia* (present-day Sisak) stands out.

*Siscia* was one of the most important Roman towns in southern Pannonia. It developed at the confluence of the Kupa, Sava and Odra rivers. The Roman army arrived to the region of modern-day Sisak for the first time in 159 or 156 BC, in an attempt to conquer *Segestica*, a Celtic stronghold.<sup>5</sup> During the war with the Delmatae, the Romans probably also laid siege to *Segestica* in 119 BC.<sup>6</sup> *Segestica* was finally conquered in 35 BC during Octavian's 30-day siege of the city during which a significant number of soldiers was mobilized.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, the sources no longer mentioned the name of *Segestica*, but exclusively that of *Siscia*.<sup>8</sup> During the *Bellum Pannonicum* in 12–9 BC *Siscia* must have been a key Roman military base.<sup>9</sup> A large number of legions under Tiberius' command arrived at *Siscia* during the *Bellum Batonianum* from AD 6 to 9.<sup>10</sup> Although no traces of a legionary camp have been discovered to date, a garrison had to be stationed in *Siscia* at the end of the uprising in AD 9.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the 15th and the 20th legions were stationed in *Siscia* some time before the uprising.<sup>12</sup> The 15th legion might have been garrisoned in *Siscia* until AD 14.<sup>13</sup> It is assumed that *Siscia* was the base of *legio IX Hispana*, which remained in the city from AD 42 to 45.<sup>14</sup> After that period, it is likely that only auxiliary troops remained in *Siscia*, and during the reign of Trajan we see a further decline of its military importance.<sup>15</sup>

The economic development of the city was primarily the result of its strategic significance.<sup>16</sup> Metallurgy was the most developed branch of economy in *Siscia*, largely based on the supply of iron from mines in north-western Bosnia.<sup>17</sup> The activities of a local bronze fibulae workshop were also confirmed in *Siscia* with

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<sup>4</sup> Gesztelyi 2001; 2009, 157–159.

<sup>5</sup> Hoti 1992, 135; Radman-Livaja 2004, 15. For classical literary sources on *Segestica* and *Siscia* see Hoti 1992, Domić Kunić 2012, Domić Kunić 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Radman-Livaja 2010, 179–182.

<sup>7</sup> Hoti 1992, 137; Lolić 2003, 133.

<sup>8</sup> Hoti 1992, 138.

<sup>9</sup> Domić Kunić 2018, 46; Radman-Livaja 2018, 158.

<sup>10</sup> It was probably five legions, see Hoti 1992, 140; Radman-Livaja 2004, 14; Domić Kunić 2018, 48, n. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Lolić 2003, 140; Radman-Livaja 2004, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Radman-Livaja 2018, 157.

<sup>13</sup> Radman-Livaja 2018, 161.

<sup>14</sup> Lolić 2003, 133–134; Radman-Livaja 2004, 18; Radman-Livaja 2012, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Radman-Livaja 2012, 171.

<sup>16</sup> Durman 2002, 26; Lolić 2003, 144, 148.

<sup>17</sup> Košćević 1994–1995, 41; Durman 2002, 25; Lolić 2003, 144.

the production of *Aucissa*, crossbow, and heavily profiled fibulae.<sup>18</sup> This workshop, which probably served the military, was in operation by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and gradually transferred from being a military to a civilian workshop centre of the region.<sup>19</sup> The following decades brought the increase in the urbanisation and the development of the civilian city, which was designated a Colonia under the emperor Vespasian. During the Emperor Gallienus' reign, an imperial mint was opened in Siscia in AD 262.<sup>20</sup> After the Diocletian's administrative reform the city became a capital of the province of *Pannonia Savia*. During the Late Antiquity the city was a seat of the diocese with last bishops being recorded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

### Engraved gems from *Siscia*

Engraved gems originating from Sisak are now kept in several museum collections in Croatia and abroad. The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb holds the most important collection of Siscian engraved gems, numbering 130 items.<sup>22</sup> Nine engraved gems from *Siscia* are stored in the Sisak City Museum.<sup>23</sup> Three gems are part of the Benko Horvat archaeological collection in the Museum of Contemporary Art.<sup>24</sup> Two more intaglios from Sisak are kept in the glyptic collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest.<sup>25</sup> To this number the unpublished gems from several recent archaeological excavations as well as the engraved gems from private collections should be added, thereby potentially increasing the number to over 150 engraved gems. With regard to the extant engraved gems from *Siscia* little data as to exact provenance is preserved beyond

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<sup>18</sup> Košćević 1994–1995, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>20</sup> Mócsy 1962, 566, 693.

<sup>21</sup> Jarak 1994; Gračanin, Bilogrivić 1994.

<sup>22</sup> A significant number of engraved gems and rings from Sisak were discovered during the dredging of the Kupa River, intensively conducted from 1900 to 1912/1913 (Vukelić, Radman-Livaja 2012). With more than 400 Roman engraved gems, the collection from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb is one of the largest glyptic collections in Croatia. It is only partially published, with F. Maixner (1881a; 1881b) being the first to publish the gems collected up till 1881 (he published 127 items). Since then, the gems were published on several occasions, mostly accompanying variously themed exhibitions. The entire collection of Roman engraved gems was analysed in the dissertation by the author of this paper (Kaić 2013). For a detailed account of the publications on engraved gems from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, see Kaić 2021b, 45, no. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Kaić 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Košćević 2000, 68, 69, 84, nos. 47, 50, 96. Three more engraved gems from Sisak in the Benko Horvat collection are the modern gems (Košćević 2000, 73–74, nos. 64, 65, 67).

<sup>25</sup> Gesztelyi 2000, 39–40, 45, nos. 16, 45.

their being for the most part stray finds from the Sisak area. Since most of the Siscian gems lack archaeological context, they have been dated according to their iconographic and stylistic features. Among the engraved gems from *Siscia* more than 60 are mounted in rings, which further helps in dating them. *Siscia* was located on the main road route going from *Aquileia* through *Emona* to *Sirmium* which facilitated the trade in engraved gems coming from *Aquileia*.

The engraved gems from *Siscia* mostly belong to the Imperial period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Yet, the largest number fall within the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, with several items dated in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the Augustan period. These gems certainly reflect the presence of the Roman army in the area of *Siscia* but also point to the arrival of various people who followed the army, such as merchants, artisans, and women. A glass gem<sup>26</sup> (**Fig. 1**), mounted in an iron ring, was moulded with the raised tropaion, embellished with a parade helmet, chest armour and two round shields on each side and with two spears thrust into the ground. It is dated to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>27</sup> The ring probably belonged to some Roman soldier garrisoned in *Siscia* during Tiberius', or perhaps even Octavianus' military campaigns in Illyricum.

The subjects on the Siscian gems are placed within the characteristic iconographic repertoire of Roman Imperial gems. Depictions of Cupid are the most numerous, closely followed by satyrs. The gods and goddesses are, as expected, frequently shown (Mercury, Minerva, Fortuna, Victoria and Apollo) as well as gems engraved with soldiers, various animals and multiple symbols. Gods Jupiter and Mars are, rather surprisingly, represented by only two items each. Amongst mythological subjects, the reddish-brown jasper<sup>28</sup> engraved with a symplegmatic portrayal of Leda and the swan should be mentioned; it portrays Leda, naked and wearing only bracelets on her right arm and leg and drapery around her left leg (**Fig. 2**). This erotic scene on a nicely executed jasper was perhaps intended to be a love gift.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence that gems "traveled" is presented by two glass gems from *Siscia*, one depicting a man leading a camel (**Fig. 3**)<sup>30</sup> and the other depicting a lion attacking a bull (**Fig. 4**)<sup>31</sup>. Both glass gems find parallels in identical items from

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<sup>26</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16186; brown-yellow glass; flat surface; 14 x 10 mm. Iron ring; shape according to Henkel 1913, 132, no. 1431, pl. 55.

<sup>27</sup> See Vollenweider 1979, 462–463, no. 523, Pl. 132.

<sup>28</sup> Sisak City Museum, red jasper, inv. no. 20252; reddish-brown jasper; flat surface; 13.04 x 15.81 x 3.23 mm. Dated to the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (see Kaić 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Henig – MacGregor 2004, 101.

<sup>30</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16338; Black opaque glass; shape 10; 12.28 x 13.98 x 2.82 mm. Purchased in 1912 from Milan Tkalac (Kaić 2013, 282, no. 343, pl. 86).

<sup>31</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16136; dark brown glass; flat surface; 9 x 12 x 2 mm (Kaić 2013, 295–296, no. 380, pl. 95).

*Carnuntum*, moulded from the same matrix.<sup>32</sup> Glass gems with the same motifs were found at several other sites as well.<sup>33</sup> The relatively early date of the first glass gem, that moulded with a man leading a camel (1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD) might reflect the movements of the Roman army from *Siscia* to *Carnuntum* or vice versa.

New evidence on the routes along which gems were distributed is provided by three glass gems from *Siscia*: a glass gem<sup>34</sup> imitating nicolo depicting a warrior with a beard (**Fig. 5**), a brown transparent glass gem<sup>35</sup> moulded with the representation of two ants (**Fig. 6**), and a brown transparent glass gem<sup>36</sup> figuring a crustacean and fish (**Fig. 7**). Of these three items, two are preserved in iron rings (**Fig. 5–6**) and are dated according to Henkel<sup>37</sup> within the early Imperial period, i. e. before the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. All three glass gems have direct parallels in glass gems from the hoard from the Viehmarkt site in Trier.<sup>38</sup> The hoard was found in a building between the forum and *thermae*. It contained about a hundred new bronze rings, 30 of which were decorated with blue or green glass gems. According to the shape of the rings, the hoard was dated to the period of the Flavian dynasty, i. e. the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>39</sup> A. Krug<sup>40</sup> places the glass gems from this hoard to the Hellenistic-Roman and Early Roman stylistic group which, according to A. Furtwängler, would correspond to the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. For several items A. Krug sees the closest parallels in the gems from Pompeii. She suggests that these glass gems were produced in a workshop in central Italy, and does not find enough analogies to place the workshop in a different place, for instance, in Aquileia.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, these gems represented imports, and were not a product of the local Trier glass gems workshop.<sup>42</sup>

The three aforementioned Siscian glass gems might also represent a product of the same workshop situated somewhere in central Italy, from where they could have come to *Siscia* by trade. Bearing in mind the vicinity of *Aquileia*,

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<sup>32</sup> Dembski 2005, 114, no. 614, 835, Pl. 61, 85.

<sup>33</sup> For all examples of glass gems with the same motifs see AGDS I/2, 213, no. 2027, Pl. 178. and Henig, MacGregor 2004, 88, no. 9.18.

<sup>34</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16349; glass as imitation of nicolo; flat surface; 11.53 x 9.34 mm (Kaić 2013, 291, no. 367, pl. 92).

<sup>35</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16356; brown transparent glass; flat surface; 8.27 x 7.58 mm (Kaić 2013, 298, no. 387, pl. 97).

<sup>36</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16134; Brown transparent glass; flat surface; 7.0 x 6.1 x 1.5 mm (Kaić 2013, 298–299, no. 388, pl. 97).

<sup>37</sup> Henkel 1913.

<sup>38</sup> Krug 1995, 198, 199, no. 10–5, 10–24, 26, pl. 42, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Krug 1995, 165.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

perhaps our three Siscian glass gems might point to the Aquileian workshop after all. Two preserved items were set in iron rings rather than bronze ring, and are dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. They also differ from the glass gems in the Trier hoard in the colour of the glass. The glass gems from Trier were made from blue or green glass, as opposed to the two items from Sisak that were made from brown glass and one that was made from blue-grey glass that probably imitates nicolo.

Engraved gems from the Later Imperial period in *Siscia* are scarce, compared not only to the 1<sup>st</sup> but to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD as well. It is therefore significant to find two polyedric engraved gems, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>43</sup> The first, a cornelian onyx<sup>44</sup> (**Fig. 8**), is engraved in a cameo technique with an image of a fish and an inscription on the lateral sides of the gem. The inscription reads: SI/VI/S/VI/VA/M. Another cornelian onyx<sup>45</sup> (**Fig. 9**) is not mounted in a ring, but is of the same hexagonal shape and has letters on the lateral sides, that perhaps form the legend that reads ME/M/I/NI/TV/I. Both rings could have been one more testimony on love sentiments expressed with these rings as tokens of love.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The position on important Roman roads that led further East and towards the interior of Bosnia as well as its river harbour turned *Siscia* into an important trading destination. The region of *Siscia* came into the sphere of Roman interest as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and for strategic reasons this interest particularly intensified in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The intense presence of the Roman army nearing the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC brought glyptic products to *Siscia*. Since usage of engraved gems is closely tied to urbanized areas, the large number of gemstones found in *Siscia* reflects the gradual urbanization and the increasingly Roman nature of the area during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Based on the iconographic, stylistic and technical characteristics, the engraved gems from *Siscia* remain in the frame of the standard Roman glyptic production of the Late Republican and Imperial periods, depicting mostly Roman gods and subjects associated with good fortune. We do not find unique motifs or images

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<sup>43</sup> Tomaselli 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16220; flat surface, hexagonal; 7 x 8 mm (Kaić 2017, 481–482, Fig. 6). The ring was purchased for the Museum collection from Milan Tkalac in Sisak in 1912 (ibid.).

<sup>45</sup> Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; inv. no. A-16362; cornelian onyx; hexagonal; 8.44 x 7.15 x 2.78 mm (Kaić 2017, 483, Fig. 9).

<sup>46</sup> Maaskant-Kleibrink 1986, 50–51, no. 103.

of local deities, whose cults were present and well attested in *Siscia*.<sup>47</sup> The engraved gems from *Siscia* represented fashion as well as the adoption of the Roman way of life on the local level, but also the availability of glyptic products in *Siscia* during the Imperial period, probably arriving there from the workshops in *Aquileia*. Understanding glyptic of the Roman province of Pannonia cannot be complete without considering the material from *Siscia*. The forthcoming publication of the Siscian gems in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb as well as future publications of the gems found during the recent archaeological excavations of *Siscia* will fill the current void in the knowledge of glyptics in Southern Pannonia.

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<sup>47</sup> Lolić 2003, 145–147.

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**Figures:**



**Fig. 1.** A glass gem moulded with a tropaion, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16186, photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 2.** A reddish-brown jasper engraved with symplegma of Leda and the swan, holding: Sisak City Museum, red jasper, inv. no. 20252, photo: B. Suntešić



**Fig. 3.** A black opaque glass gem, moulded with man leading a camel, holding: Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16338, photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 4.** A dark brown glass gem, moulded with lion attacking a bull, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16136, photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 5.** A glass gem as imitation of nicolo, a warrior with a beard, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16349, photo: I. Kaić





**Fig. 6.** A brown transparent glass gem moulded with two ants, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16356; photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 7.** A glass gem as imitation of nicolo, crustacean and a fish, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16134; photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 8.** A hexagonal cornelian onyx engraved with inscription, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16220, photo: I. Kaić



**Fig. 9.** A hexagonal cornelian onyx engraved with inscription, holding:  
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, inv. no. A-16362, photo: I. Kaić

