

G. Dembski, *Die antiken Gemen und Kameen aus Carnuntum*, Archäologischer Park Carnuntum, Neue Forschungen Bd 1, Phoibos Verlag, Vienna 2005, 196 pp., 146 tabs. Cased. ISBN 3-901232-53-2

This is a more than usually important publication of gems from the Roman provinces. While detailed provenances are lacking for most pieces the reasonable assumption must be that the majority are local finds, whether now in the museum or various private collections, whose holdings are included. Unlike almost any publication of material in Italy, except perhaps for Aquileia and excavated gems as from Pompeii, we can be reasonably sure that we are looking at ancient gems, not later copies or inventions. But it also means that the overall quality of the gems is relatively low and it becomes almost a different subject from the usual studies of fine intaglio and cameo engraving of the Roman world.

Dembski has a useful and lengthy Introduction about gems in the Roman empire, notably about materials, techniques, the glass gems (pastes) and the settings, and an overview of subjects. The section on dating problems observes that historically the Carnuntum gems should be dominantly representative of the 2nd/3rd centuries AD, which may prove a useful corrective to assumptions that anything worth looking at must be early Imperial.

One thousand two hundred and fifty-four gems are catalogued with photographs of originals and some impressions, at twice life size, some larger. Descriptions and comparanda are full and all are scrupulously indexed, setting a standard which many may not find the skill or time to emulate. It cannot be too much emphasised that image publication of such collections must be a high priority, for this rather neglected or isolated subject to be able to play the role it can in the study of Roman society and art, on a par with the relatively far easier and more systematic study of coinage.