

GABRIELLA TASSINARI

Giovanni Pichler. Raccolta di impronte di intagli e di cammei del Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere delle Raccolte Artistiche del Castello Sforzesco di Milano (Dattiloteche 1), Raccolte Artistiche del Castello Sforzesco Milano, Edizioni ennerre S.r.l., Milano 2012, 441 pages, illustrations (chiefly colour), 20 figures, hardcover, ISBN 978-88-87235-73-9

Gabriella Tassinari is a well-known scholar who has published extensively on engraved gems as well as other archaeological subjects. By conjoining various methods of archaeology and art history, she has become one of the main figures publishing on post-classical glyptics. Due to the fact that this is still quite a neglected area of studies, her contribution has a particular meaning.

No scholarly publication devoted to post-classical glyptic art can avoid referring to her articles about the production of gems made of glass-pastes in modern times (2009) or about the so-called “lapis-lazuli workshop” working in the 16th and 17th centuries in Northern Italy, possibly in Venice and Milan (2010). Numerous also are Tassinari’s papers devoted to the work of particular modern gem-engravers (1999, 2001, 2002–2003, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013). More recently, she has made significant contributions to studies of engraved gems. Given her work on the topic, the current book is particularly noteworthy, one which concerns a collection of casts made after engraved gems (both intaglios and cameos) executed by Giovanni Pichler (1734–1791), now housed in the Castello Sforzesco, Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere in Milan.

The collection includes three cassettes containing 127 red sulphur casts made after engraved gems executed by the most famous engraver of the second half of the 18th century, Giovanni Pichler, that once belonged to Prince Alberione XII Barbian Belgiojoso d’Este (1725–1813). Giovanni Pichler belonged to a famous family of engravers and was mainly active in Rome. His gems are of outstanding clarity and sharpness, and so great were his skills that often his own productions were passed off as ancient. He was one of the most sought-after engravers of his age, leaving 379 pieces attributed to his name. The book is divided into two parts, illustrating with superb colour photos the aforementioned casts, but also discussing the matters related to the history of the collection as well as the life and activity of Giovanni Pichler.

The first part consists of several chapters. The first one is devoted to the history of the collection of Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere of the Castello Sforzesco. Next comes the biographical background of Giovanni Pichler. Many interesting observations are provided, which makes the study a valuable supple-

ment to the already existing biographies of the engraver written by such authors as Gheraard De Rossi (1792), Pietro Magna (1844) and probably the most famous one Hermann Rollett (1874). Among other things, Tassinari highlights the versatility of Giovanni's talents. He had painted before he became an engraver. He obtained a good education, and so he was able to develop his skills to the point that his works were confused with ancient objects. In the wider spectrum, this memesis should be seen as an effect of the ideas presented by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in his monumental work *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). The mimetic character of art that imitates but does not simply copy, as Winckelmann restated it, is central to any interpretation of classical Enlightenment idealism of the second half of the 18th century. Therefore, Pichler's works do not lose anything from their originality.

Tassinari emphasizes the role that Giovanni Pichler played as a head of school of engravers in Rome. He taught several splendid artists like Antonio Berini (1770–1861), Giovanni Antonio Santarelli (ca. 1756–1826) and Filippo Rega (1761–1833). She points out that Pichler became a source of inspiration for later engravers too, for instance Edward Burch (1771–1780) and Johann Veit Döll (1750–1835). With special concern, Pichler's visit to Milan in 1774–1775 and his contacts with the Trivulzio and Belgiojoso families are described. Particularly interesting is a chapter about his contacts with the artistic and commercial society of Rome. In great detail, Tassinari describes the character of the work of the great artist as well as his particular style of engraving.

Thereupon, she turns to the uniqueness of the Milan collection of casts. This is highlighted by Tassinari's compilation of all known similar sets from Brescia, Edinburgh, Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg and Vienna, all of which are fully referenced. In short, the first part of the volume presents a very detailed study of one of the best engravers of modern times, one that is sure to have great impact on any future research in the field. In this, the author sets new standards. This is not simply a biography full of facts and dates, but a work that focuses on the collection of casts from Milan and joins with it observations of everything that was happening around the figure of the engraver when he produced this collection.

The second part of the volume is a catalogue. Nearly each individual object is presented with a large colour photo and with full cataloguing including numerous cross-references to Pichler's work held in other museums and private collections. The layout of the catalogue is very well organized. All basic data are provided, including the provenance of the objects as far back as they can be traced. All reproductions of the objects are listed as are parallels. In the section *osservazioni* the author provides detailed studies on the interpretation of the device depicted and the dating of the object. In some cases, the analysis of the portraits of historical figures

allows to date the original pieces with great precision. This section also includes all the information related to similar objects and discussions of possible attributions to the original gems if they have not been recorded yet. As a testament to the great diligence of the study, the bibliography is 45 pages long, and the indices faultless in their coverage of topics and persons.

Tassinari's book is a fabulous example of a most detailed study of one aspect of post-classical glyptic art. It is an important work, presenting not only 127 objects described according to a particular scheme, but it also is a highly useful biography and analysis of the activities of one of the greatest gem-engravers of modern times. Such publications are greatly needed. Hopefully, Tassinari's book will make it possible to find additional, but as yet unidentified original works of Pichler amongst the public and private collections. It will be especially useful for researches of unsigned pieces. A good example is an intaglio made of chalcedony, bearing a portrait of Joseph II (1741–1790), Holy Roman Emperor from 1765 to 1790 and ruler of the Habsburg lands from 1780 to 1790 (Fig. 1). Since 1886, the object has been held in the National Museum in Krakow and once belonged to the outstanding collection of glyptic objects assembled by Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński (cast no. I.1 in Tassinari's catalogue).



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