

Caylus, Winckelmann, and the art of 'Persian' gems

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Figure 1 *De beelden nevens den trap, ter oost syde*, Plate 127 from Cornelis de Bruijn, *Reizen over Moskovie, door Persie en Indie*, 1714. Amsterdam: R. en G. Wetstein, J. Oosterwyk, H. van de Gaete, boekverkopers.

In historiographical studies that assess European knowledge of Persian antiquities in the eighteenth century, the sculptures of Persepolis and nearby Naqsh-e Rostam are the usual points of reference.¹ In the early part of that century, European audiences gained access to relatively accurate representations of these sites through the illustrated travelogues of Cornelis de Bruijn, John Chardin, and Engelbert Kaempfer (fig. 1).² Engravings of the Persepolis reliefs were well-known to Anne-

¹ Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Jan Willem Drijvers, eds, *Through Travellers' Eyes: European Travellers on the Iranian Monuments*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1991, 3-15; Ali Mousavi, *Persepolis: Discovery and Afterlife of a World Wonder*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.

² Jean Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient*, Amsterdam: J. L. de Lorne, 1711; Cornelis de Bruijn, *Reizen over Moskovie, door Persie en Indie*, Amsterdam: Gedrukt voor den auteur door Willem en David Goeree, 1711;

Claude-Philippe, comte de Caylus and Johann Joachim Winckelmann, two men whose philosophies and writings on ancient art helped establish a history of art that privileged the art of the classical world, especially classical Greek art, above the art of non-classical cultures like Persia and Egypt. Yet in Caylus' and Winckelmann's most notable publications, the class of objects identified in the eighteenth century as 'Persian' gems are as prominent, if not more so, than the Persepolitan sculptures. Although his lecture to the *Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres* in 1758 addressed in some detail the subjects and style of the reliefs at Persepolis, Caylus' multi-volume *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises* (1752-1767) (hereafter, *Recueil*) offered an extended and in-depth assessment of the many so-called 'Persian' gems in his personal collection.³ Winckelmann, for his part, examined 'Persian' gems and casts of 'Persian' gems in the gem collection of Baron Philipp von Stosch while preparing a sales catalogue for Stosch's heir; the catalogue was published as the *Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron de Stosch* (hereafter, *Description*) in 1760.⁴ Winckelmann later incorporated his findings on this material into his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) (hereafter, *Geschichte*), where, despite being able to expand his discussion of Persian art beyond the realm of gems, he remained focused on these small objects.⁵ Both Caylus and Winckelmann sought to trace the development of art in antiquity and emphasised the autopsy of objects as a critical component of this process. The Persepolis reliefs were accessible to them only as engravings, but the 'Persian' gems in European collections could be handled and viewed without the distortions of a drawn illustration. As a result, the 'Persian' gems became the raw materials for their pioneering studies of the art of ancient Persia and for the construction of art history's fundamental cultural hierarchy.

The art of the ancient Near East in early modern Europe

The objects known to Caylus and Winckelmann as 'Persian' gems were a diverse set of (mostly) ancient Near Eastern seals.⁶ Cylinder seals and stamp seals from the ancient Near East were collected alongside classical and modern engraved gems as early as the seventeenth century, although the seals' eastern origins were indiscernible for want of contexts or comparanda that could securely identify their

Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico – physico – medicarum fasciculi V*, Lemgo: Heinrich Wilhelm Meyer, 1712.

³ Anne-Claude-Philippe, comte de Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, Paris: Desaint and Saillant, 1752-1767; 'Sur les ruines de Persépolis', *Histoire et mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 29, 1764, 118-48.

⁴ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron von Stosch*, Florence: André Bonducci, 1760.

⁵ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Dresden: in der Waltherischen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1764.

⁶ For an introduction to ancient Near Eastern seals, see Dominique Collon, *Near Eastern Seals*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

culture of origin. The earliest documented case is a pair of Mesopotamian cylinder seals in the collection of Paul de Praun (1548–1616), a Nuremberg-born merchant who operated in the silk trade in Bologna.⁷ Although these and presumably other ancient Near Eastern seals in European collections were not recognised for what they were, early modern historians of art were discussing the arts of the ancient Near East.⁸ Giorgio Vasari integrated Belus, Semiramis and Ninus, the pseudo-historical patrons of Babylon, into his review of art's earliest stages in the preface to his *Vite*.⁹ In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Joachim von Sandrart and Pierre Monier both regarded the Near East as an important way station in the transmission of art throughout the ancient world.¹⁰ The generally positive perceptions of ancient Near Eastern art conveyed in these histories, including Monier's favourable comparison of a statue of Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in the Book of Daniel to the Laocoon,¹¹ depended upon textual references to the Assyrians, Babylonians, Israelites, Persians, and Phoenicians in biblical and classical sources. These written records of royal, divine, and animal sculptures accurately convey some of the major subjects of ancient Near Eastern art, but their laconic remarks provide only cryptic suggestions regarding its form.

Concurrent with the writing of these histories, diplomats, traders, and missionaries were travelling to the ruins of Persepolis and offering interpretive and sometimes conjectural illustrations of the architecture and sculpture therein.¹² With the publication in 1711 and 1712 of more accurate illustrations in the travel accounts of de Bruijn, Chardin, and Kaempfer, readers could better appreciate the forms of

⁷ Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, 'Über die persepolitischen Inschriften', *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur*, 4, 1777, tab. I. On the Praun gem collection, see Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, 'Die Gemmensammlung des Paulus II. Praun', in Katrin Achilles-Syndram, ed., *Die Kunstsammlung des Paulus Praun: Die Inventare von 1616 und 1719*, Nuremberg: Stadtrats zu Nürnberg, 1994, 69-83.

⁸ Such references contribute to Kaufmann's observation that early modern histories of art were less Eurocentric than they are often imagined to be. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Eurocentrism and Art History? Universal History and the Historiography of the Arts before Winckelmann', in A. Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel, eds, *Memory and Oblivion. Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art held in Amsterdam, 1-7 September 1996*, Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996, 35-42.

⁹ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de piu eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani: da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostril*, Florence, 1550, pt. 1, 111-112.

¹⁰ Joachim von Sandrart, *L'Academia Todeca della Architectura, Scultura & Pittura: oder Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, Nuremberg: Miltenberger, 1675-1679; Pierre Monier, *Histoire des arts qui ont rapport au dessein*, Paris: Pierre Giffart, 1698.

¹¹ Monier, *Histoire des arts*, 35.

¹² Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Introduction. Through Travellers' Eyes: The Persian Monuments as Seen by European Visitors', in Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Drijvers, *Through Travellers' Eyes*, 3-15; Mousavi, *Persepolis*, 95-101.

Persian art alongside the authors' commentaries.¹³ These commentaries often contained personal reflections upon the aesthetic qualities of the sculptures, although the bulk of their narratives were concerned with describing the ruins and interpreting their history and functions. Jean Chardin, like most European travellers, expressed astonishment at the grandeur of Persepolis and its remaining ornaments and punctuated his lengthy and detailed descriptions with adjectives like 'grand' and 'marvellous.'¹⁴ What Chardin saw at Persepolis forced him to reconsider the Greeks as the innovators in the arts and sciences.¹⁵ Cornelis de Bruijn, an artist himself, paid more attention to the artistic qualities of the sculptures; he observed an absence of musculature and movement, which he surmised was either the habit of the times or a sign that art had not advanced that far, and he took a favourable view of their proportions.¹⁶ Kaempfer evaluated the quality of the tomb reliefs at Persepolis and Naqsh-i Rostam relative to one another.¹⁷ Such comments upon aesthetic matters constitute only a fraction of these travellers' narratives, and the greater impact of these works derived from the images that they made available to those interested in the art, culture, and history of Persia.

In fact, the identification of one ancient Near Eastern seal as a 'Persian' gem was a direct consequence of the new illustrations of Persepolis. In his *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (1722), Bernard de Montfaucon associated a Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal with ancient Persia because the seal's motif of a worshipper at an altar led him to think of a similar scene upon the façades of the tombs at Persepolis, familiar to him from Chardin's book.¹⁸ Montfaucon included representations of both the seal and the tomb relief in a single plate (fig. 2). The seal had been described as 'antique' by Michel Ange Causeo de la Chausse when it was first published in 1690, but Chardin's illustration permitted Montfaucon to propose a more specific cultural attribution.¹⁹ Montfaucon also included an Old Babylonian cylinder seal among a number of '*petites idoles égyptiennes*' in *L'antiquité expliquée* seemingly because he associated the seal's rendering of a scorpion with the scarab beetles of ancient Egypt, but he said nothing about the seal in his accompanying text.²⁰ For Montfaucon, the identification of the origins of these two artefacts was

¹³ Much debated ensued regarding the merits of each author's illustrations. See Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 155-59.

¹⁴ 'grand' and 'merveilleux.' Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin*, vol. 9, 47ff.

¹⁵ Chardin, *Voyages de monsieur le chevalier Chardin*, vol. 9, 91.

¹⁶ De Bruijn, *Reizen over Moskovie*, 223.

¹⁷ Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum exoticarum*, fasc. 1, 352; Josef Wiesehöfer, 'Engelbert Kaempfer in Naqš-i Rostam und Persepolis', in Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Drijvers, *Through Travellers' Eyes*, 87.

¹⁸ Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, Tome second, seconde partie, Paris: F. Delaulne, 1722, pl. CLXXX, 401.

¹⁹ Michel Ange Causeo de la Chausse, *Romanum museum sive thesaurus eruditae antiquitatis*, vol. I, Rome: Fausti Amidei, 1690, no 50.

²⁰ Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée*. Tome second, seconde partie, pl. CLXXXV.

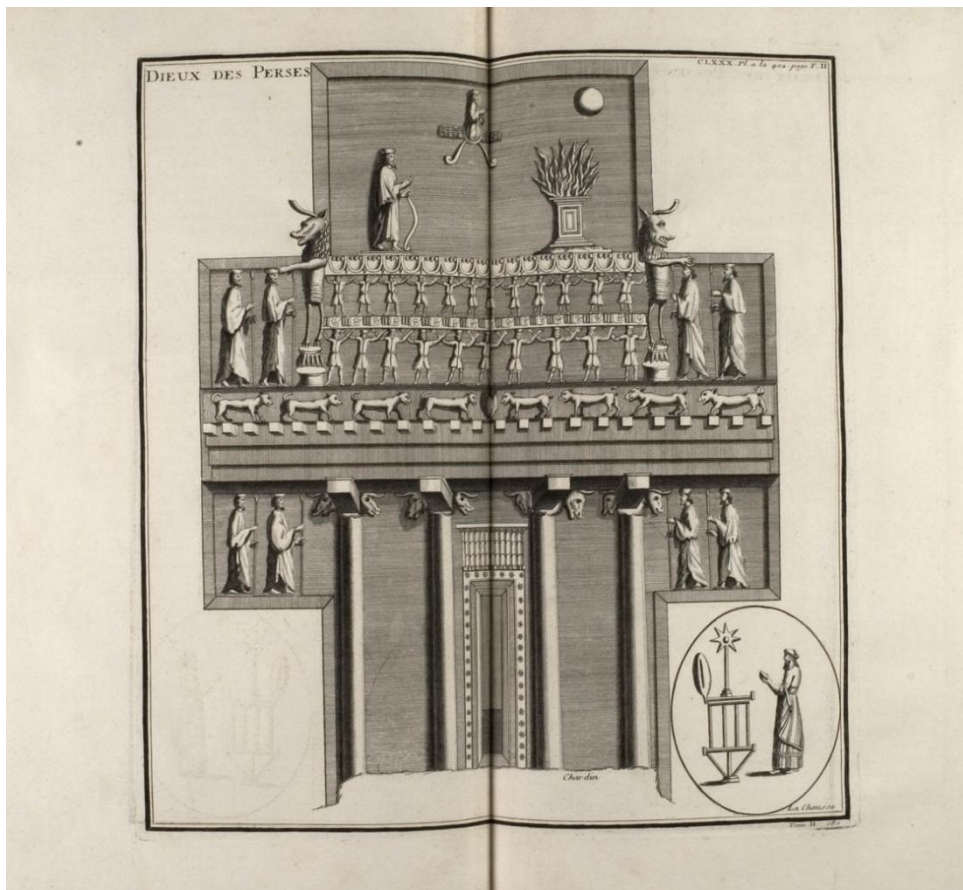


Figure 2 *Dieux des Persees*, Plate 180 from Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, Tome second, seconde partie. *La religion des Egyptiens, des Arabes, des Syriens, des Perses, des Scythes, des Germains, des Gaulois, des Espagnols, et des Carthaginois*, 1722. Paris: Florentin Delaulne, Hilaire Foucault, Michel Clousier, Jean-Geoffroy Nyon, Etienne Ganeau, Nicolas Gosselin, and Pierre-François Giffart.

connected to his desire to understand the objects as visual evidence of ancient spiritual beliefs and practices, not as aesthetic objects. Others at the time, though, were more cognizant of the artistic qualities of ancient gems.²¹ Early on, the ancient Near East was left out of accounts of the evolution of gem engraving, as in Francesco Valerio's preface to Philipp von Stosch's *Gemmae antiquae caelatae* (1724). There, art carves a path from ancient Egypt to Greece and on to Rome without passing through the ancient Near East.²² The region does appear in the studies of Pierre-Jean Mariette, who has been heralded for envisioning a history of gem engraving based on form and not on subject matter.²³ The historical overview in the first volume of his *Traité des pierres gravées* (1750) cites biblical and classical sources

²¹ For the aesthetic turn in gem studies, see Krzysztof Pomian, 'Mariette et Winckelmann', *Revue germanique internationale*, 13, 2000, paragraphs 18-27.

²² Philipp von Stosch, *Gemmae antiquae caelatae*, Amsterdam: Bernard Picart, 1724, v-vii.

²³ Kristel Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2014, 191-243.

regarding the use of engraved stones in the ancient Near East, with examples including Jezebel's use of a seal in the name of her husband, seal-rings used in the Persian court to authorise royal decrees, and Herodotus' claim that each Babylonian had a seal.²⁴ Nonetheless, of actual Near Eastern gems Mariette mentions only two similar Sasanian seals thought to represent a 'Persian or Parthian' prince in the section of the book dedicated to a review of earlier gem studies.²⁵ By the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a sense that the ancient Persians had a tradition of engraved gems, but what that tradition looked like and how it fit into the history of art were very much open questions. These questions would soon be addressed by Mariette's collaborator on the *Traité des pierres gravées*, the comte de Caylus.

Caylus

In the past few decades, the reputation of Caylus as a central figure in the development of art history has grown. Long exceeded in reputation by Winckelmann, whose approach to ancient art paralleled his own in many respects, Caylus' contributions to the discipline's empirical and comparative methods are now more widely recognised.²⁶ One pivotal difference between Caylus and Winckelmann is in the way in which each organised his major published work. Winckelmann created a historicised narrative of the art of antiquity within a single, synthetic treatise (the *Geschichte*) while Caylus presented a series of accumulating commentaries upon specific works of art from Egypt, Etruria, Greece, Rome, and Gaul (the *Recueil*).²⁷ Over the course of the *Recueil*'s seven volumes, Caylus worked to define the characteristics of the art from these cultures using gems, sculpture, paintings, metalwork, and pottery as primary evidence. He stressed the importance of first-hand observation to his method, and he primarily discussed and illustrated objects that he himself owned or had examined. As new objects came into his possession, Caylus revised and expanded his views until the final, posthumous volume of the *Recueil* appeared in 1767. Caylus' conclusions may have changed over time, but he was consistent in his method; he evaluated objects using all evidence at hand, including form, material, technique, iconography, inscriptions, and provenance. The many passages in the *Recueil* on 'Persian' gems reveal Caylus to be refining his understanding of these objects based on the evidence introduced by

²⁴ Pierre-Jean Mariette, *Traité des pierres gravées*, Paris: Pierre-Jean Mariette, 1750, vol. 1, 4-5.

²⁵ Mariette, *Traité des pierres gravées*, vol. 1, 403-4.

²⁶ Alain Schnapp, 'La méthode de Caylus', in Irène Aghion, ed., *Caylus, mécène du roi - collectionner les antiquités au 18e siècle*, Paris: Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2002, 53-63. For a comparison of the methods of Winckelmann and Caylus, see Elisabeth Décultot, 'Winckelmann et Caylus: Enquête sur les rapports de l'histoire de l'art au savoir antique', in Aghion, *Caylus, mécène du roi*, 59-78; Elisabeth Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Enquête sur la genèse de l'histoire de l'art*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, 168-71, 227-39.

²⁷ Décultot, *Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Enquête*, 232-33.



Figure 3 Plate 12, no. II from Anne-Claude-Philippe, comte de Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, vol. III, 1759. Paris: Desaint & Saillant.

each new specimen.²⁸ The variety and unusual nature of the gems, which included cylinder seals, stamp seals, and scarabs from diverse times and places, did not provide a clear path to interpretation; instead, they allowed only conjectures that, to him, were still worthy pursuits.²⁹

Despite his faith in the empirical, Caylus was not immune from interpretations shaped by the mind's eye. A most remarkable aspect of his treatment of 'Persian' gems is the appearance of a female figure in his illustration of one Old Babylonian cylinder seal (fig. 3).³⁰ The goddess in the original seal wears a horned crown as an emblem of her divinity, but in Caylus' illustration she is attired in a veil and head covering like a contemporary Ottoman woman. Clearly, Caylus misread the scene, partly due to his unfamiliarity with Old Babylonian iconography, and partly because of the difficulty of seeing details in the small seal. The causes of

²⁸ For a discussion of this approach in relation to 'Etruscan' vases, see François Lissarrague, 'Les vases étrusques' du comte de Caylus', in Aghion, *Caylus, mécène du roi*, 75-6.

²⁹ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. II (1756), 34. On conjecture in the eighteenth century, particularly Winckelmann, see Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 118-27. For a comparison of Winckelmann and Caylus regarding the value of conjecture, see Décultot, 'Winckelmann et Caylus', 66-8.

³⁰ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), pl. XII, no. II.

Caylus' mistake, though, are less remarkable than the nature of it. To resolve the problem of a baffling image, Caylus turned to a slightly more familiar example of Oriental femininity: the Ottoman woman. Caylus had travelled to the Ottoman Empire in 1716 in the entourage of the French ambassador to Constantinople.³¹ Such direct experience with the sartorial modes of the Ottomans, if not printed images of the same, would have provided him with visual models for an image of an Oriental woman. The decision to resort to a contemporary Ottoman model as a suitable resolution of any uncertainty regarding what was, to him, a scene filled with ancient Persians betrays an Orientalist tendency to equate the ancient Orient with the modern Orient.³² This act should not diminish the significance of Caylus' contribution to the study of 'Persian' gems, however. His work on these objects was more sustained, in-depth, and earnest than any before him.

All of the 'Persian' gems treated in the *Recueil* were part of a study collection Caylus assembled while conducting his researches. Rather than build a collection to keep for his own pleasure or as a sign of his personal wealth and erudition, Caylus gathered objects for short-term examination only.³³ He deposited many of the objects, including most of the ancient Near Eastern seals, in the royal *Cabinet des médailles et antiques* in Paris during his lifetime.³⁴ The artefacts' passage from Caylus to the French king avoided, as stated in the forward to volume one of the *Recueil*, the detriments that can occur upon the owner's death.³⁵ In essence, Caylus' goal was to preserve the objects for future study, whether in print through his publication or in the French monarchy's presumably permanent and increasingly accessible collection. Caylus is known to have acquired antiquities from existing collections and new discoveries, often with the help of agents and generous benefactors posted throughout Europe.³⁶ One regular source was Paolo-Maria Paciaudi, an antiquarian monk in Rome who shipped boxes of antiquities to Caylus.³⁷ Paciaudi was responsible for sending Caylus at least one of his 'Persian' gems. In a letter dated 22 Sept. 1760, Caylus identified an item previously shipped to him as a Persian stone

³¹ Irène Aghion, 'Le comte de Caylus (1692-1765), gentilhomme et antiquaire', in Aghion, *Caylus, mécène du roi*, 20.

³² It also affirms the Enlightenment roots of Saidian Orientalism. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

³³ Alain Schnapp, 'De Montfaucon à Caylus: le nouvel horizon de l'Antiquité', in *La fascination de l'antique, 1700-1770. Rome découverte, Rome inventée*, Paris: Somogy, 1998, 143.

³⁴ Louis Delaporte, *Catalogue des cylindres orientaux et des cachets assyro-babyloniens, perses et syro-cappadociens de la Bibliothèque nationale*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1910, nos. 69, 105, 158, 209, 481, 490, 551, and 584.

³⁵ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. I (1752), vi.

³⁶ Aghion, 'Le comte de Caylus (1692-1765)', 25; Irène Aghion, 'Collecting Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century France: Louis XV and Jean-Jacques Barthélemy', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 14:2, 2002, 200-1.

³⁷ Julie Boch, 'L'archéologie comme projet esthétique: *Le Recueil d'Antiquités* de Comte de Caylus', in Nicholas Cronk and Kris Peeters, eds, *Le comte de Caylus: Les arts et les lettres*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, 80-82.

akin to the monuments at Persepolis.³⁸ Although there is no indication of how Paciaudi got this particular seal, the letters between the two men speak often of missionaries to Egypt and the Levant as procurers of antiquities. Only a few of Caylus' 'Persian' gems are connected with a specific provenance; there are cylinder seals said to come from Egypt and Antioch, and a stamp seal more surprisingly (but not impossibly) from France.³⁹ Caylus did not hesitate to ask his sources to find specific kinds of antiquities for him, and surely his own purchases were driven by his academic interests, but one cannot know whether the 'Persian' gems that passed into his hands did so as a result of Caylus' general acquisitiveness and openness to curious finds or whether he himself sought out the type.

Persia did not constitute a distinct cultural category deserving of its own section in the *Recueil*. Instead, all of the 'Persian' artefacts, which included an inscribed vase and a handful of small metal sculptures in addition to a dozen or so gems, were inserted into the sections dedicated to Egyptian antiquities for reasons that were made clear in the first volume of the *Recueil* (1752). There, he presented two inscribed Mesopotamian cylinder seals, which he imagined were amulets worn around the neck: a lapis lazuli seal from the Akkadian period and a greenstone seal from the Isin-Larsa period (fig. 4).⁴⁰ According to Caylus, both seals were found in Egypt, but Caylus recognised that a geographical source was no certain indication of cultural origins, especially for small objects like engraved gems and coins. As a result, this information had to be weighed against other evidence when determining the seals' place of manufacture. In favour of an Egyptian origin, Caylus found that the inscriptions on the cylinders resembled more some 'hieroglyphic' inscriptions found in Egypt.⁴¹ However, in the important question of *goût*, or the standards of taste and decorum which Caylus believed coursed through all imagery produced by a given culture, the seals did not appear to be Egyptian. Instead, the figures matched ancient descriptions of Persian costume as well as forms of dress visible in

³⁸ This may be one of two Achaemenid-period seals published in the fourth volume of the *Recueil* in 1761. Cylinder seal: Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. IV (1761), pl. XXII, no. II; Stamp seal: Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. IV (1761), vignette on 71, discussed on xvi. For the letter, see Charles Nisard, ed., *Correspondance inédite du comte de Caylus avec le P. Paciaudi, Théatin (1757-1765)*, Paris: L'imprimerie nationale, 1877, vol. I, no. XLIII (22 September 1760), 206. Nisard suggests that the object is the stamp seal. Earlier, on 10 July 1759, Paciaudi sent Caylus an intaglio with what he thought was a priest that was neither Greek nor Roman, but probably Etruscan. The seal was purchased in Rome for a high price. In the third volume of the *Recueil*, published that year, is an ancient Near Eastern stamp seal that could fit this admittedly vague description. Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), pl. X, no. IV.

³⁹ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. I (1752), pl. XVIII, nos. 1 and 2, 54; vol. III (1759), pl. XXXV, no. IV, 140; vol. IV (1761), pl. XXI, no. III/IV, 63. Ancient Near Eastern seals have been found in northern Europe. See Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 138.

⁴⁰ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. I (1752), 54-57, pl. XVIII, nos. 1 and 2.

⁴¹ The forms of the cuneiform signs on these early cylinder seals do indeed differ from the cuneiform script used at Persepolis.

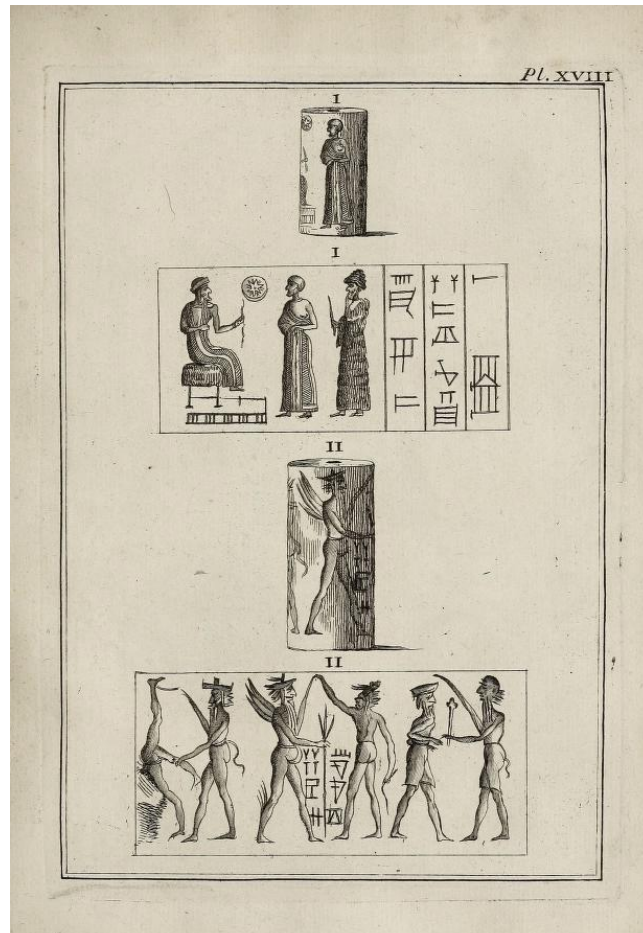


Figure 4 Plate 18, from Anne-Claude-Philippe, comte de Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, vol. I, 1752. Paris: Desaint & Saillant.

the Persepolis reliefs published by Chardin and de Bruijn. To resolve the contradiction between the cylinders' Persian and Egyptian features, Caylus turned to ancient history and remembered that the Persians once ruled Egypt, and he proposed that these artefacts blended Egyptian and Persian traditions. The cylindrical amulet type, he claimed, was Egyptian in origin, but the Persians adopted it and added Persian imagery. In support of the type's Egyptian origins, he cited the cylinder seal published earlier by Montfaucon as an Egyptian amulet.

Caylus' initial views on the Egyptian connection in the 'Persian' gems were subsequently affirmed in later volumes as he came across new examples. In volume two (1756), a Syrian cylinder seal with Egyptian motifs seemed to confirm the Egyptian origins of this type of object,⁴² and a few years later, in volume three (1759), a Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal suggested similarities between the dress of Persian and Egyptian priests, which Caylus took to be an indication of a deep-rooted exchange between the two cultures.⁴³ Bi-directional cultural exchange was

⁴² Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. II (1756), pl. IX, nos. II and III, 35.

⁴³ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), pl. X, no. IV, 45-6.

evidenced further by two more cylinder seals, one allegedly produced in Egypt by an Egyptian artist for a Persian consumer - in this case, the '*dessein*' (a term encompassing a number of modern art historical concepts such as style, line, and composition) was Egyptian but the scene was Persian – and, vice versa, one of Persian '*goût*' and hence manufacture depicting an Egyptian theme.⁴⁴

The confidence with which Caylus expressed his belief in Persian-Egyptian cultural connections by the third volume of the *Recueil* derived not only from the expanded set of 'Persian' gems by then in his possession, but also from a separate study he undertook on the ruins of Persepolis. Although Caylus never saw Persepolis himself, he found in descriptions and engravings of the remains much to support his belief in Egyptian-Persian connections. In the lecture delivered to the *Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* in 1758 while he was in the midst of publishing the *Recueil*, Caylus emphasised similarities in the spirit of the constructions of the Egyptians and Persians, as well as common motifs and forms in their imagery.⁴⁵ According to the published summary of his remarks, Caylus was generally astonished by the magnificent scale, expense, and durability of Persepolis, which he viewed as a series of temples constructed long after the destruction of the city by Alexander, although by whom and when he is undecided. His more specific observations on the art of Persepolis contrasted the incised carving of Egyptian relief sculpture with the raised relief of the Persepolis panels, and he claimed the space between Persian legs as an advantage over Egyptian sculpture, but he fundamentally believed that the two cultures shared features as a result of cultural exchange.

Fresh from the presentation of this lecture, Caylus incorporated two drawings of details from the Persepolis reliefs as vignettes in the third volume of the *Recueil*.⁴⁶ Such vignettes allowed Caylus to illustrate objects not in his possession, an exception to the mission of the *Recueil*. The Persian vignettes in volume three consist of a detail of the god in the winged disk that closes out the prefatory matter and an array of armed guards from the Apadana that follows immediately thereafter as the opening to the Egypt section. In his explanations of these scenes, Caylus not surprisingly emphasised how they demonstrate contact between Egypt and Persepolis,⁴⁷ but the more extended discussions of the Persian-Egyptian connection in this and other volumes of the *Recueil* were prompted by the 'Persian' artefacts in his collection: his many gems, a vase with a bilingual hieroglyphic/cuneiform inscription, a golden bull pendant, and two bronze statuettes.⁴⁸ In Caylus'

⁴⁴ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), pl. XII, no. II, 49-50.

⁴⁵ 'Sur les ruines de Persépolis', 122-37.

⁴⁶ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), xxxvi and 1.

⁴⁷ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), xxxi.

⁴⁸ Vase of Xerxes I: Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. V (1762), pl. XXX, 79-81; bull pendant (actually a work of the Greek Bronze Age): Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. II (1756), pl. XI, 42-6; statuettes (actually early modern creations): Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. V (1762), pl. XXXI, 83-84.

examinations of these artefacts, the reliefs at Persepolis largely remain in the background, emerging periodically as a point of comparison for inscriptions and particular visual details, such as dress in the seals or granulation in the gold bull. Yet Caylus hinted in volume four of the *Recueil* (1761) that he might have had much more to say about the reliefs at Persepolis, were the *Recueil* not so decidedly focused on the individual objects at hand. While addressing an Achaemenid stamp seal showing a king in combat with a mythical beast, Caylus remarked that a similar scene appears on the reliefs at Persepolis; the latter he described as 'more avowed and authentic than a simple engraved stone.'⁴⁹ The adjectives Caylus used here emphasise the authoritativeness of the Persepolis reliefs as records of ancient Persian culture and its art. One imagines that, had he undertaken the task of writing a comprehensive history of ancient art as Winckelmann would endeavour to do, the Persepolis reliefs would have occupied a prominent place in his discussion of Persian art. Instead, despite his demonstrated interest in the Persepolis ruins, Caylus remained committed to the parameters of the *Recueil* as a work introducing and analysing objects in his possession. These artefacts were Caylus' immediate concern, and it was there that he focused his attention. As a result, 'Persian' gems are central to the presentation of 'Persian' art in the *Recueil*.

Caylus utilised provenance, iconography, shape, and inscriptions to identify 'Persian' gems and evaluate what he perceived to be their complex cultural history, but what of their art? In prefatory remarks to the *Recueil*'s first volume, Caylus claimed that a culture's '*goût national*' was reflected in iconography and manners of dress as well as '*dessein*.'⁵⁰ Caylus considered '*dessein*' as he tried to distinguish Persian from Egyptian, but despite his references to a Persian *goût* recognisable in certain gems, Caylus did not offer much synthetic discussion of Persian artistic sensibility and its formal manifestations in the *Recueil*. Instead, his connoisseurial thoughts are interspersed among the independent presentations of particular objects, and such thoughts are rare. One Old Babylonian cylinder seal is 'worse' and 'less distinct' than the others presented before it, but this comparison does not render an absolute judgment of Persian art.⁵¹ His most explicit assessment is a description of one Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal's execution as 'shapeless' and its composition as 'bizarre', with an implication that other Persian gems are similarly made.⁵² Importantly, Caylus admitted that these assessments emerged only 'to us', thereby linking his aesthetic judgments to contemporary tastes.⁵³ Through this, the evidentiary value of an object's form (the '*goût national*' that identifies its locus of production) was separated from its experiential value (the

⁴⁹ '*plus avoués & plus authentiques qu'une simple pierre gravée.*' Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. IV (1761), 63.

⁵⁰ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. I (1752), vii. On the history of the concept of a national style, see Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur*, 205-6.

⁵¹ '*plus mauvais*' and '*moins distinct*.' Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), 139.

⁵² '*informe*' and '*bizarre*.' Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. III (1759), 45.

⁵³ '*à notre égard*.' Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. IV (1761), 62-3.

viewer's judgment of its aesthetic merit). For Caylus, an assessment of the aesthetics of ancient Persian art was just one tool in his arsenal, and a very intuitive tool at that. For the next scholar to this topic, the study of ancient aesthetics was not a tool, but rather the objective.

Winckelmann



Figure 5 Glass paste copy of Neo-Babylonian eye-stone with warrior head (*Description* no. 126). Stendal: Winckelmann-Museum.

Although he never mentions Winckelmann by name, Caylus' explanation of his decision to place the 'Persian' gems within the *Recueil*'s Egyptian sections, which appears in volume V of the *Recueil* (1764), may have been a response to Winckelmann's treatment of similar items as purely Persian artefacts in his *Geschichte*, which first appeared in late 1763.⁵⁴ Winckelmann had earlier decided upon the Persian character of these gems while studying the gems and gem casts in the collection of Baron Philipp von Stosch between September 1758 and September 1759. It had been Stosch's wish that Winckelmann work on his collection, and his request was fulfilled posthumously when the gems were in the hands of his heir, Heinrich Wilhelm von Muzell-Stosch. The end product, the *Description*, served Muzell-Stosch as an advertisement for the collection to potential buyers, but for Winckelmann it was a serious academic undertaking.⁵⁵ Most of the 3,444 items

⁵⁴ Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités*, vol. V (1764), 37-8.

⁵⁵ Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*.



Figure 6 Glass paste copy of an impression of a Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal (*Description* no. 127). Stendal: Winckelmann-Museum.

included in the catalogue were Etruscan, Greek or Roman, but there were also Egyptian and Near Eastern objects.⁵⁶ The latter set included a Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal (no. 127, fig. 5), an Achaemenid-period cylinder seal (no. 130), four Greco-Persian gems (nos. 135, 136, 138, and 139), a Phoenician seal (no. 128), and three Sasanian seals (nos. 131, 132, (?)134), and glass paste copies of an Achaemenid stamp seal (no. 137), a Sasanian seal (no. 133), and a 'cameo' that depicted a helmeted warrior surrounded by a cuneiform inscription (no. 126, fig. 6). The 'cameo' was actually an inscribed Neo-Babylonian eye-stone (an agate whose natural banding recalls the concentric circles of an eye) carved at a later date with a Hellenising image of a warrior in relief.⁵⁷ These thirteen items plus one Etruscan gem (no. 129) were classed together as 'Persian' gems in the *Description*.⁵⁸ That the

⁵⁶ A set of casts of the items included in the *Description* has been digitised at <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/sammlungen/1000461>.

⁵⁷ William W. Hallo, 'Rudolf Erich Raspe aus assyriologischer Sicht', in Andrea Linnebach, ed., *Der Münchhausen-Autor Rudolf Erich Raspe: Wissenschaft - Kunst - Abenteuer*, Kassel: Euregioverlag, 2005, 78-79.

⁵⁸ Winckelmann does not explicitly refer to numbers 128-139 as Persian in the text of the *Description*, but the summary of the section's contents on page 1 mentions only Egyptian and Persian gems. Since numbers 128-139 appear after the two gems explicitly described as Persian (nos. 126 and 127), it would seem that he regarded these as Persian as well.

Persian label could be applied to objects from such a broad range of cultures and time periods shows that the category was still taking shape. When Winckelmann wrote the Stosch catalogue, he was aware of Caylus' early ideas on 'Persian' gems, having copied into his notebooks some of Caylus' text on cylinder seals from Volume I of the *Recueil*.⁵⁹ The few seals published by Caylus were enough to suggest but not exhaust the possibilities of 'Persian' gems.

The number of 'Persian' gems in Stosch's collection would have been even larger had three inscribed cylinder seals not been sold to Giovanni Battista Carafa, duca di Noia of Naples before the catalogue was published. Writing to Muzell-Stosch in the summer of 1759, Winckelmann lamented the loss of these examples and the monetary value they could bring in a sale.⁶⁰ (Carafa may also have purchased a scarab from the Neo-Assyrian period.⁶¹) Because of its overall size, Stosch's collection is more likely to have contained 'Persian' gems than other collections at the time. Yet a collector as focused on gems as Stosch built his collection with specific interests in mind, among which may have been a desire to collect a set of 'Persian' gems. Over the course of Stosch's lifetime, antiquarian knowledge concerning ancient Persia grew, and he was apparently familiar with a good part of it, as both Persia and Persepolis were represented in his atlas of maps and prints.⁶² Stosch also consulted Montfaucon's publications while preparing his own 1724 volume on signed gems (having met the author years before in Paris), and therefore could have read Montfaucon's writing on Persepolis and the 'Persian' gem.⁶³ This source would surely have helped Stosch appreciate the similar Neo-Babylonian-type seal in his possession. Stosch also lived to see the publication of the first two volumes of the *Recueil* in which Caylus put forth his initial ideas about 'Persian' gems. Hence, numeric probability alone may not account for the inclusion of so many 'Persian' gems in Stosch's collection. Instead, they might have been the result of an effort to fill his gem collection with representatives of Persian engraving. As for the sources of Stosch's 'Persian' gems, one can only wonder which part of his broad and diverse network of antiquarian contacts provided him with these rare objects.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Décultot, 'Winckelmann et Caylus', 72 and 78 (Ill. No. 3).

⁶⁰ Winckelmann, *Briefe, Zweiter Band*, nos. 274 (9 June 1759) and 282 (7 July 1759).

⁶¹ Murr, 'Über die persepolitischen Inschriften', 132.

⁶² *Catalogue abrégé de l'Atlas du feu Baron de Stosch*, appended to Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, nos. CCCI-CCCII.

⁶³ On Stosch's use and appreciation of Montfaucon, see Peter Zazoff and Hilde Zazoff, *Gemmensammler und Gemmenforscher: von einer noblen Passion zur Wissenschaft*, Munich: Beck, 1983, 42-44.

⁶⁴ He was in contact with Paciaudi, one of Caylus' sources for 'Persian' gems. On Stosch's network, see Jörn Long, 'Netzwerke von Gelehrten. Eine Skizze antiquarischer Interaktion im 18. Jh. am Beispiel des Philipp von Stosch (1691-1757)', in Jan Broch, Markus Rassiller, and Daniel Scholl, eds, *Netzwerke der Moderne. Erkundungen und Strategien*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2007, 203-26.

In the absence of the manuscript catalogue that Stosch prepared for his collection, it is not possible to know what he thought of his 'Persian' gems, or whether he did in fact see them as 'Persian.' Winckelmann used Stosch's manuscript while preparing the *Description*, and the arrangement of the gems in Winckelmann's catalogue was derived from Stosch's own ordering. However, Winckelmann and Stosch had fundamental disagreements about the art of the ancients,⁶⁵ and the contents of the entries in the *Description* are undoubtedly Winckelmann's own, especially in matters of their art. In fact, a letter Winckelmann sent to Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn while he was working on the Stosch catalogue claims that he sought to enlighten the reader of the art of the gems whenever their subjects were well known.⁶⁶ This was something lacking in Stosch's own studies of gems. Valesio's introduction to Stosch's treatise on signed gems (*Gemmae antiquae caelatae*) was dedicated to the art and art history of gems, but these subjects are missing from Stosch's commentaries on the individual gems.⁶⁷ Thus, it would not be surprising if Winckelmann found Stosch's manuscript catalogue of his collection deficient in this arena. Ultimately, Winckelmann's approach to the art of gems relied upon precedents set by Caylus and Mariette.⁶⁸ In the introduction to the *Description*, Winckelmann assigned gems unmatched importance as evidence of artistic practices.⁶⁹ Although such praise may have served to augment the value of the volume in which it appears, gems did, in fact, figure significantly in Winckelmann's scholarship. While Winckelmann was writing the catalogue of the Stosch collection he was simultaneously completing the first draft of the *Geschichte*. Comparisons between the two works have shown that Winckelmann worked through some of the principles and practices of the *Geschichte* in the *Description*.⁷⁰ For his views on Persian art, Winckelmann's time with Stosch's gem collection proved to be crucial.

Winckelmann began his study of Stosch's collection in September of 1758, starting with the Egyptian and Persian classes. His work was immediately fruitful. In late October of that year, he wrote to several contacts about having already composed many sheets ('*Bogen*') for these categories and mentioned an essay ('Reflections on the art of the ancient Egyptians and Persians') that would soon

⁶⁵ Elisabeth Décultot, 'Eine Geschichte der antiken Kunst im Kleinen: zu Johann Joachim Winckelmanns *Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron von Stosch*', *Antike und Abendland*, 58:1, 2012, 168-9.

⁶⁶ Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *Briefe. In Verbindung mit Hans Diepolder herausgegeben von Walther Rehm, Erster Band 1742-1759*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1952, no. 262 (13 January 1759), 445.

⁶⁷ Décultot, 'Eine Geschichte', 171-2.

⁶⁸ Décultot, 'Eine Geschichte', 172-8.

⁶⁹ Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, ix.

⁷⁰ Zazoff and Zazoff, *Gemmensammler und Gemmenforscher*, 99; Décultot, 'Eine Geschichte', 178-87; Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, 77-86.

appear.⁷¹ This essay was never published, although its contents are surely reflected in the *Description* and, thereafter, in the *Geschichte*. In the former, the 'Persian' gems appear at the end of the first class, which is dedicated to 'Egyptian' gems (mostly gems of the Hellenistic and Roman period with Egyptian themes).⁷² This integration of the 'Persian' gems into the Egyptian section – there is not even a sub-heading to separate them – does not signal Winckelmann's acceptance of Caylus' hypothesis regarding the Egyptian origins of 'Persian' gems. In fact, Winckelmann rejected Caylus' conclusion that contact between the Egyptians and the Persians contributed to the forms of 'Persian' gems; such cross-cultural exchange was incompatible with his notion that art developed within the confines of specific national contexts.⁷³ Rather, the inclusion of the 'Persian' gems in the Egyptian class reflects more practical matters that Winckelmann could also justify intellectually. Winckelmann originally intended to give Egyptian and 'Persian' gems each their own section in the catalogue.⁷⁴ Later, though, in a letter to Muzell-Stosch, Winckelmann stated that he could not grant 'Persian' gems their own independent section because of their limited number.⁷⁵ Their insufficient quantity may be related to the sale of the cylinder seals to Carafa. Winckelmann's solution to a numerical problem was to append the 'Persian' gems to the much larger set of Egyptian. As products of Persia, which, like Egypt, was outside the classical tradition of gem engraving, the few 'Persian' gems needed to be kept separate from the gems of Etruria, Greece, and Rome, whose more numerous examples were treated in the remainder of the catalogue, divided according to subject matter.⁷⁶

Justification for this separation can be found in Winckelmann's commentaries on the 'Persian' gems. The *Description* is, as its name suggests, primarily a descriptive catalogue. In separate entries, Winckelmann offered basic information about the objects, including their subject matter, material, and shape. Occasionally, though, extended discussions of iconographic or aesthetic matters were presented for individual objects, essentially those which Winckelmann

⁷¹ Winckelmann, *Briefe, Erster Band*, no. 247, to Heinecken (28 Oct 1758), 42; no. 248, to Bianconi (29 Oct 1758), 428; no. 250 to Uden (10 November 1758), 430.

⁷² For the 'Egyptian' gems, see Max Kunze, 'Dalle gemme egizie alla storia dell'arte', in Alfred Grimm and Gianna A. Mina Zeni, eds, *Winckelmann e l'Egitto: la riscoperta dell'arte egizia nel XVIII secolo*, Ligorretto: Museo Vela, 2004, 106-23.

⁷³ Décultot, 'Winckelmann et Caylus', 70-73.

⁷⁴ Winckelmann, *Briefe, Erster Band*, no. 251, to Albani (14 November 1758), 432.

⁷⁵ Johann Joachim Winckelmann. *Briefe. In Verbindung mit Hans Diepolder herausgegeben von Walther Rehm, Zweiter Band 1759-1763*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1954, no. 279 (16 June 1759).

⁷⁶ Pomian, 'Marianne et Winckelmann', 58. In the fourth class ('Ancient History') were some classical gems with Persian historical subjects, such as the 'education of Cyrus' and the 'coronation of Darius', and Parthian royal portrait gems. These Near Eastern personages were well within the purview of the classical historians upon whom Winckelmann relied for his discussion of ancient history. Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, 404-5.

selected as the 'most important, difficult to explain and most beautiful.'⁷⁷ Comments on 'Persian' gems were restricted to two examples: the cast of the inscribed eye-stone and a Neo-Babylonian-type stamp seal with a figure before an altar (figs. 5 and 6).⁷⁸ Regarding the former, the warrior head inspired a comparison between the skill of Persian artists and Egyptian artists. Winckelmann concluded that, even though the Persian king Cambyses brought sculptors from Egypt, the best Persian artists exceeded the Egyptians' ability to render human heads. (In private correspondence Winckelmann questioned the date of the warrior head, suggesting that it was Parthian, but any doubt was ignored or eliminated by the time he published the Stosch catalogue.⁷⁹) If in Winckelmann's estimation they surpassed Egyptian sculptors, Persian sculptors lacked in comparison to Greek sculptors. In his discussion of the Neo-Babylonian-type seal, Winckelmann explained why Persian art never reached the same level of achievement as Greek art. According to ancient Greek historians, Persian culture avoided nudity and prohibited renderings of gods as humans, and hence, Winckelmann argued, the Persian artists were less advanced than the Greeks, who were pushed to achieve artistic excellence by their pursuit of the ideal, nude human body and the representation of gods as men. He ended this second commentary with a notice that many Persian gems had been mislabelled as Greek not only because of a lack of comparative examples, but also because of a misunderstanding of the '*manière*' and '*déssein*' [*sic*] of Persia.

In his two commentaries on 'Persian' gems, Winckelmann mentions the reliefs from Persepolis as points of comparison for iconographic and figural elements like the rendering of Persian visages and the functions of a certain weapon, but he does not enter into a wider consideration of the reliefs, which would have been an inappropriate undertaking for this particular work.⁸⁰ The more logical place for an assessment of the reliefs would have been the *Geschichte*, Winckelmann's comprehensive account of the history of art in antiquity. In this work, the Persians (together with the Phoenicians) were given their own brief sub-section following Winckelmann's longer discussion of the Egyptians and their art.⁸¹ Although the

⁷⁷ 'der wichtigsten, schwer zu erklärenden und schönsten.' Winckelmann, *Briefe, Erster Band*, no. 262 to Hagedorn (13 January 1759), 445.

⁷⁸ Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, 28-31.

⁷⁹ Winckelmann, *Briefe, Zweiter Band*, no. 274 (9 June 1759) and no. 282 (7 July 1759); Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, 28.

⁸⁰ Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, 28-29.

⁸¹ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 73-77. The posthumous, second edition from 1776 differs from the first mainly by the addition of a paragraph discussing Persian metalwork (one coin and one '*viereckter*' stamp) (125) and a concluding sentence citing the Greek sculptor Telephanes' work for Xerxes and Darius as evidence of the Persians' own awareness of the limitations of their artists (130). *Johann Joachim Winckelmanns Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Wien: in akademischen Verlage, 1776.

For an introduction to Winckelmann's work on Persian and Phoenician art, see Axel Rügler, 'Winckelmann und der Orient', in *Begegnung mit dem Fremden. Frühe Orientbilder im 17.-19. Jahrhundert*, Bonn: AsKI, 2006, 35-7, plus catalogue entries on 48-52.

passage on Persian art largely reiterates the points he made in the *Description*, Winckelmann filled in the historical and cultural background with observations about the Parthians under Persian control, more citations of ancient sources about Persian habits, and a brief foray into the ornamentation of Persian architecture. There is not, however, an expanded corpus of Persepolitan sculpture introduced into the discussion. The nature of this synthetic work would have allowed Winckelmann to devote considerably more space to the reliefs from Persepolis and to introduce further observations about Persian art based upon them, but his focus remains decidedly upon the 'Persian' gems. Conceivably, Winckelmann was too pressed for time to expand his analysis of Persian art in the *Geschichte* to include more on the Persepolis reliefs, or he felt that an expansion would not add much to his argument. However, the privileging of gems in Winckelmann's analysis of Persian art seems instead to be due to a distinction he drew between sculpture in the round and sculpture in relief, to his relatively poor knowledge of the Persepolitan sculptures, and to his preference for discussing objects that he himself had viewed.

In the opening remarks of the section of the *Geschichte* dedicated to Phoenician and Persian art, Winckelmann opined that 'there is little hope of discovering large and significant works of sculpture, from which we would have drawn more light and knowledge' about the art of these two cultures, although he noted that Persian reliefs were preserved.⁸² The sculptures of Persepolis were embedded into staircase walls, doorframes, columns, and cliff faces, and thus to Winckelmann they did not qualify as 'sculpture' proper. Perhaps as a result of this distinction, Winckelmann acquired only a general sense of the art of Persepolis from the available sources on the topic. In the *Geschichte*, Winckelmann cited de Bruijn in reference to the heads of Persian figures, but his only other stated source concerning Persepolis is a brief, unillustrated seventeenth-century account of the ruins.⁸³ From this second source he gleaned a Persian male habit of wearing hair long in 'strips or braids', but a glance at the extant renderings of Persepolis would have immediately made clear that this is a poor description for the bundle of curls borne by men in the reliefs.⁸⁴ Winckelmann must have been more confident in his knowledge of the 'Persian' gems than in his knowledge of Persepolitan reliefs. Although he mentioned the Persepolis reliefs at the beginning of his discussion Persian art, Winckelmann moved quickly to an overview of the gems, starting 'among those

⁸² For the text of the *Geschichte*, I offer the translation by Harry Francis Mallgrave of the first edition of 1764. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, introduction by Alex Potts, translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006, 145. For the German, see Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 69.

⁸³ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 74, notes 4 and 5, and 76, note 2. Winckelmann attributes the seventeenth-century account to Greave, but the author is not named in the compilation where it appears ('Description des Antiquitez de Persepolis, appellées maintenant Chimilnar, traduite de l'Anglois', in Melchisedec Thevenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux qui n'ont point esté publiées*, tome 1, Paris: Thomas Moette, 1696.).

⁸⁴ 'in Strippe oder in Flechten.' Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 76.

that I have seen' with the two published in Caylus' first *Recueil* volume, the three in the collection of Carafa (formerly in the Stosch collection), and the many in the Stosch collection.⁸⁵ Thereafter, Winckelmann repeated the general characteristic of Persian art and culture that appeared before in the *Description*. Although he might have drawn attention to specific reliefs among those illustrated by Chardin, de Bruijn, or Kaempfer that illustrate his points, he chose instead to cite particular gems. For example, when discussing the Persian form of dress he mentioned a gem in the collection of Carafa.⁸⁶

The centrality of the 'Persian' gems to Winckelmann's discussion of Persian art is underscored by a comparison with his treatment of gems in the Egyptian section of the *Geschichte*. Whereas gems form a significant component of his discussion of Persian art, Winckelmann had much less to say about Egyptian gems. He mentioned only two Egyptian gems individually, both of which he had examined in the Stosch collection.⁸⁷ In the more elaborate instance, he approvingly compared the diligent carving of a gem featuring the goddess Isis to the best Greek gems; this appears within a discussion of the high level of finish exhibited by Egyptian sculpture.⁸⁸ The few mentions of specific Egyptian gems appear in an explication of Egyptian art that is many times longer than the discussion of Persian art. The remainder is focused on Egyptian sculpture, particularly sculptures in Italian collections.⁸⁹ It was in these sculptures that Winckelmann found the strongest evidence for his general opinion regarding the characteristics of Egyptian art and its history. In contrast, Winckelmann had no direct access to Persian sculpture. The only examples of relief sculpture from Persepolis in European collections at the time, a few fragments brought back by Cornelis de Bruijn in 1704 or 1705, were not widely accessible, if known at all.⁹⁰

Modern scholars have debated whether Winckelmann's views on ancient art were shaped more by his personal observation of the art in question or by the ancient texts and early modern art criticism that he read.⁹¹ In other words, they

⁸⁵ It is unclear to me how Winckelmann would have seen the gems in Caylus' collection, given the fact that he never travelled to Paris and Caylus never visited Rome. Perhaps during their correspondence Caylus sent Winckelmann casts of the gems.

⁸⁶ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 75.

⁸⁷ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 51-52 and 63. He also mentions fifteen Anubis gems in the Stosch collection, but declines to discuss them and other late Abraxas gems as art. Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 59-60.

⁸⁸ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 63. This gem is also singled out as the pinnacle of Egyptian gem engraving in the introduction to the art of engraving that appears in the first chapter of the book. Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 18.

⁸⁹ Max Kunze, 'Winckelmann und die ägyptische Kunst', in *Begegnung mit dem Fremden*, 40.

⁹⁰ Lindsay Allen, "'Come then ye classic thieves of each degree": the social context of the Persepolis diaspora in the early nineteenth century', *Iran*, 60, 2013, 208.

⁹¹ For an opinion in favor of Winckelmann's empiricism, see Alex Potts, 'Winckelmann's Construction of History', *Art History*, 5, 1982, 377-407. For a critique of this view and an opinion in favor of Winckelmann's literary debts, see A. A. Donohue, 'Winckelmann's

question whether his views were *formed* by encounters with objects or whether his assessments of the objects *conformed* to inherited paradigms. The similarities between the writings of ancient and modern authors and Winckelmann's views on individual works of classical art are evident. For Persian art, however, there were no inherited art historical paradigms, ancient or modern, only fleeting assessments of Persepolitan sculpture by European travellers and interpretations of Persian iconography such as that of Montfaucon. Caylus' *Recueil* and his lecture on Persepolis had begun to take up the question of the history and characteristics of Persian art, but his analysis of the aesthetics of Persian art was more intuitive than it was made explicit. Thus, Winckelmann's analysis of Persian art was largely dependent upon his own researches, rather than any existing opinions, and Winckelmann considered the question of Persian art most intensively during his study of the Stosch gems. Although he called upon what little he had discerned from the Persepolis reliefs, the gems formed the core of Winckelmann's conception of Persian art.

Yet, even if Winckelmann had to invent the defining characteristics of Persian art, ancient and modern sources that presented Persia as the antithesis of Greece in all manners of culture undoubtedly predisposed him towards a particular view of Persian art.⁹² Whatever features of Persian art were revealed by his study of the Stosch gems, Winckelmann's conclusions fit neatly into an opposition between east and west that had its roots the ancient sources Winckelmann cited. In the *Geschichte*, the Persians, Phoenicians and Egyptians – three 'southern and Eastern peoples' – serve as foils to the Greeks. Winckelmann compared the effects of the 'monarchical governments' of the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians and the democracy of the Greeks on the production of art, thereby enacting an Orientalist emphasis on despotism as a defining characteristic of eastern lands. He also feminised the Orient: when discussing the garments of the Persians, Winckelmann compared Persian male dress to Greek women's dress and hypothesises, following Plutarch, that the Persians would have found Greek male garments to be 'effeminate.'⁹³ In these judgments, Winckelmann transmitted the ancient foundations of Orientalism to his historical enterprise via empirical observations of 'Persian' art.

Regarding the debate over the relative importance of autopsy and inherited ideas in Winckelmann's work, the most important conclusion to be drawn from Winckelmann's examinations of 'Persian' gems is that, whatever the reality was, autopsy was the ideal. Given the opportunity to develop his presentation of Persian

History of Art and Polyclitus', in Warren G. Moon, ed., *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition*, Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin, 1995, 327-53, especially 329-38.

⁹² On the sources in and of the eighteenth century, see Pierre Briant, 'The Theme of 'Persian Decadence' in Eighteenth-Century European Historiography: Remarks on the Genesis of a Myth', in John Curtis and St. John Simpson, eds, *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East*, London: IBTauris, 2010, 3-15.

⁹³ Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 75.

art with a more extensive treatment of the Persepolis reliefs, Winckelmann elected to double down, so to speak, on his knowledge of 'Persian' gems. With only a few such gems known, no free-standing sculptures to examine first hand, and no ancient accounts of the development of Persian art to draw upon, Winckelmann was not able to apply his paradigm of the rise and fall of art to Persia. He could describe the nature of Persian art, but he could not develop a chronological schema tracing its history. In the end, though, this was not a disappointment for Winckelmann, whose concerns were greater than a desire to characterise the history of art for any individual ancient culture. Instead of lamenting the poor availability of Persian art, he accepted it on the basis that more works would not offer more information about 'art in general', writing that 'From the little that can be adduced or said of the art of the ancient Persians, this much can be concluded: little that is instructive regarding art in general could be learned from it, even if more monuments had been preserved.'⁹⁴ Persian art was ultimately of scant interest to Winckelmann and his quest to find and understand beauty in ancient art. Beyond its historicising tendency, Winckelmann's work was an effort to explain the particular aesthetics of the best Greek art in the manner of an erudite connoisseur with the ultimate goal of inspiring contemporary artists.⁹⁵ In that matter, Persian art was not very helpful. Winckelmann must have realised the irrelevance of Persian art to this aspect of his project already during the production of the *Description*, as the Persians are left out of his overview of the beauty in gems in the preface to that volume.⁹⁶

Winckelmann judged the merits of Persian art to be few, whether as aesthetic objects or as a case study for his system explaining the development of art in antiquity. Winckelmann was not the first to disparage the art of ancient Persia, but he proposed a causal connection between Persian culture and the forms of Persian art. In doing so, a response conditioned by eighteenth-century aesthetics was tethered to historical circumstances, with art serving as an indication of the nation's degree of cultural advancement. Henceforth, Persian art would be seen as inferior to classical art not because the collector or scholar regarded it as such, but because the historical circumstances of Persian art's production – the climate, religion, and society of ancient Persia – did not allow it to reach a higher level of sophistication or beauty. The 'Persian' gems, more so than the Persepolis reliefs, provided Winckelmann with empirical evidence for these conclusions.

The art of 'Persian' gems after Caylus and Winckelmann

Working concurrently, and partly in dialogue with one another, Caylus and Winckelmann defined the characteristics and, to the extent that they were able, history of 'Persian' gems in a short period of time between 1752 and 1764. Their

⁹⁴ Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 149; Winckelmann, *Geschichte*, 77.

⁹⁵ Alex Potts, 'Introduction', in Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 17.

⁹⁶ Winckelmann, *Description des pierres gravées*, ix-xi.

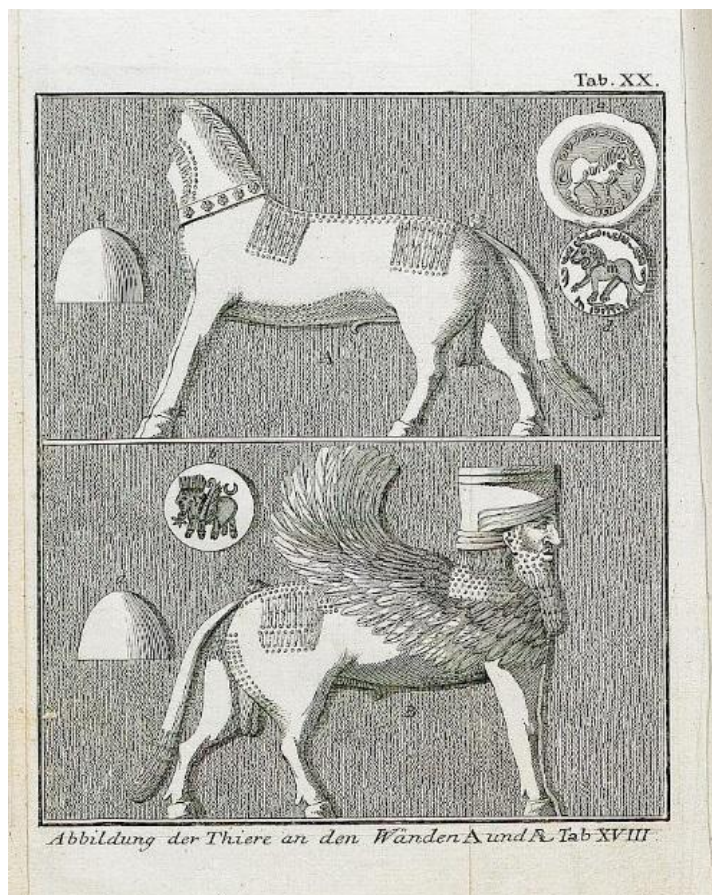


Figure 7 *Abbildung der Thiere an den Wänden A und B Tab XVIII*, Plate 20 from Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern*, vol. II, 1778. Copenhagen: Möller.

interpretations had laid the groundwork for further study of 'Persian' gems, but publications featuring 'Persian' gems in the remainder of the eighteenth century were sporadic and limited in scope. C. G. Murr's philological treatise from 1777 on the cuneiform script contained an illustrated plate with representations of the two cylinder seals from the Praun collection and a Neo-Assyrian scarab seal at the time in the British Museum, but formerly in the collection of Sir William Hamilton and before him Carafa.⁹⁷ The seals' utility to Murr was foremost as examples of ancient script, not as aesthetic objects, although he included comparisons to other published seals and Persepolis reliefs. The next year, Carsten Niebuhr illustrated two Sasanian seals that he had acquired during his travels in the Near East alongside animal sculptures from Persepolis and remarked that the work of the gem-cutters was 'only worse' than the work of the sculptors (fig. 7).⁹⁸ These seals were later studied in the supplement to Pierre François Hugues, Baron d'Hancarville's *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et les progrès des arts de la Grèce* (1785), where the author's exposition of

⁹⁷ Murr, 'Über die persepolitischen Inschriften', tab. I.

⁹⁸ 'nur schlechter.' Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern*, vol. II, Copenhagen: Möller, 1778, tab. XX, 126.

Persian antiquities contributed to his exploration of the common roots of pagan religions.⁹⁹ D'Hancarville commented specifically upon the religious symbolism of the bull and astral symbols on the one seal, and the association of the lion on the other seal with Persian monarchies. He also considered the age of these seals according to their iconography, inscriptions, and shape and reached the conclusion that one was the oldest engraved stone known to him.

If the study of the art of 'Persian' gems was limited in the late eighteenth century, the collecting of 'Persian' gems during this same period was not as rare as the publication record suggests. In fact, there are more 'Persian' gems attested in European collections during the second half of the eighteenth century than ever before, as the number included in the catalogue of gem casts offered for sale by the Scottish cast-maker James Tassie in 1791 demonstrates.¹⁰⁰ Caylus and Winckelmann's critical views of 'Persian' gems did not dissuade collectors from acquiring such objects, although their conclusions appear to have forestalled new assessments of the gems' art. The catalogue of Tassie's casts, written by Rudolf Erich Raspe, utilised the structure of Winckelmann's *Description* to organise the Tassie gem casts,¹⁰¹ and Raspe credited Caylus and Winckelmann with introducing aesthetics to antiquarianism.¹⁰² In his few comments on 'Persian' gems, Raspe alluded to the disagreement between Caylus and Winckelmann as to whether the gems were Persian or Egyptian, and he repeated Winckelmann's hypothesis that Persian art's lack of refinement was due to the strictures of Persian religion.¹⁰³

Caylus' and Winckelmann's ideas are also strongly felt in Johann Gottfried Herder's sympathetic assessments of Persepolis and Persian art, although Herder questioned some of their fundamental conclusions. Herder's treatise on Persepolis of 1787 rejected Caylus' account of an Egyptian connection underlying the art and architecture of the site,¹⁰⁴ and his *Persepolitische Briefe*, begun in 1798 but only published posthumously in 1805, challenged Winckelmann's conception of the

⁹⁹ Pierre d'Hancarville, *Supplément aux Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et les progrès des arts de la Grèce*, London: B. Appleyard, 1785, pl. IX, F-G, 133-34.

¹⁰⁰ Rudolf Erich Raspe. *A Descriptive Catalogue of a General Collection of Ancient and Modern Engraved Gems, Cameos and Intaglios, Taken from the Most Celebrated Cabinets in Europe; and Cast in Coloured Pastes, White Enamel, and Sulphur*, London: J. Tassie and J. Murray, 1791; Melissa Eppihimer, 'A paradox of eighteenth-century antiquarianism: 'Persian' gems among the Tassie Casts', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 2015 (doi: 10.1093/jhc/fhv021).

¹⁰¹ Helge C. Knüppel. *Daktyliotheken. Konzepte einer historischen Publikationsform*, Ruppolding and Mainz, 2009, 70.

¹⁰² Raspe, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, vol. I, lvi.

¹⁰³ Raspe, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, vol. I, 64 and xvii.

¹⁰⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Persepolis: eine Muthmassung*, Gotha: Karl Wilhem Ettinger, 1787; Michael Harbsmeier, 'Before Decipherment: Persepolitan Hypotheses in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Culture and History*, 11, 1992, 47-49.

history and genesis of Persian art.¹⁰⁵ Although he repeated some of Winckelmann's explanations for the character of Persian art – the lack of nudity, which forced an emphasis on dress and ornament; the non-democratic context that produced the art – Herder fundamentally disagreed with Winckelmann regarding the sources of Persian art.¹⁰⁶ For Herder, Persian art was the result of an 'Asian' people adopting and adapting Greek art, bringing a Greek sense of movement and vitality in art to figures and subjects befitting Persian habits. Herder also leaned towards the Persepolis sculptures as the primary data for his studies. In the letter to Heyne in which he commented at length on Persian art, engraved gems factored into his discussion of the relationship between Persian art and Persian religion, and he envisioned their potential contribution to a chronology of Persian art, but in his assessment of the style of Persian art he used them primarily to show that the defining characteristics of Persian art and culture permeate even the lowest kinds of objects.¹⁰⁷ The specific gems Herder cites in the letter are those that were published in Caylus' *Recueil*.¹⁰⁸ Herder's emphasis on the Persepolis sculptures as the subjects of stylistic analysis, rather than gems, is a correction of sorts to Winckelmann's limited treatment of the Persepolis sculptures, providing another example of Herder's complex relationship to Winckelmann.¹⁰⁹

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, several developments pointed the study of 'Persian' gems in new directions. One key change concerned the gems' perceived ancient functions. During the eighteenth century, 'Persian' gems were foremost regarded as amulets with talismanic properties. This is not incorrect, as seals were indeed worn by their ancient users as protective objects. This amuletic role, however, was related to a seal's capacity to make indexical impressions signalling the seal user's authority. Early nineteenth-century discussions began to suppress the seals' magical functions in favour of their administrative ones; John Landseer decried considerations of the seals' talismanic properties as succumbing to 'romantic superstition.'¹¹⁰ The other major development in the study of 'Persian' gems was a shift in cultural attribution. In 1801, important

¹⁰⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Persepolitische Briefe*, in *Johann Gottfried Herder's Sämmtliche Werke zur Philosophie und Geschichte. Erster Teil*, Tübingen: in der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1805, 113-312.

¹⁰⁶ Herder was generally critical of Winckelmann's system explaining the origins and development of art the various ancient cultures as separate and independent processes. See Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, 225-29.

¹⁰⁷ Herder, *Persepolitische Briefe*, 133-52.

¹⁰⁸ Herder, *Persepolitische Briefe*, 139-44.

¹⁰⁹ On that relationship, see Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity*, 205-43.

¹¹⁰ John Landseer, 'The Engraved Gems, brought from Babylon to England by Abraham Lockett, Esq. Secretary to the Council of the College of Fort William in Bengal, considered with reference to early Scriptural History', *Archaeologia, or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 18, 1817, 373.

treatises on the cuneiform script brought forth evidence of its Babylonian origins,¹¹¹ and discoveries of seals in significant quantities at Babylon in the 1810s affirmed the link between the artefacts and the Babylonians.¹¹² As a consequence of this, the 'Persian' label that had been firmly affixed to ancient Near Eastern seals by Caylus and Winckelmann was loosened, with 'Babylonian' taking its place.

Subsequent to these changes in the study of the former 'Persian' gems, the study of Persian art was invigorated by the arrival in Britain of sculptures and casts from Persepolis and by further study of the sculptures that remained *in situ* by (mostly) British travellers.¹¹³ At times, the discussion hewed rather closely to the views of Persian art put forth by Winckelmann, as when Sir William Ouseley observed the absence of nude figures and women at the site, even citing Winckelmann in reference to the latter.¹¹⁴ Yet there was also a sense that much more could be accomplished through an art historical approach to the Persepolis sculptures. Robert Ker Porter, who published the first ancient Near Eastern seal impressions, was enamoured with the sculptures of ancient Persia and dedicated many pages in his published travel account from 1821-22 to their description and interpretation.¹¹⁵ An artist himself, Ker Porter was sent to the region at the behest of a Russian nobleman to produce more accurate drawings of Persian sculpture in order to 'obtain a true idea of the progress which the arts made amongst the Persians....'¹¹⁶ To do so would be to complete the task left unfinished by Winckelmann, who saw this as an impossible and unproductive undertaking. Ker Porter's attention to the sculptures must be viewed in light of his commission, yet the sharp contrast between his assessments of the Persepolis sculptures as works of art, which were often full of approbation, and his assessments of the objects formerly known as 'Persian' gems is undeniable and noteworthy. His comments upon the seals he found at Babylon are brief and concentrate on interpreting their

¹¹¹ Joseph Hager, *A Dissertation on the Newly Discovered Babylonian Inscriptions*, London: Wilks and Taylor, 1801, 50-51; Friedrich Münter, 'Undersogelse om de persepolitanske Inscriptioner', *Det kongelige danske Videnskabers-Selskabs Skrifter for Aar 1800*, 1801, 306-9.

¹¹² James Claudius Rich, 'Continuation of the Memoir on the Antiquities of Babylon', *Fundgruben des Orients*, 3, 1813, 197-200; Claudius James Rich, *Second Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818, pl. III, nos. 10-14; Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, 'Babylonische Talismane', *Fundgruben des Orients*, 4, 1814, plates following 86 and 182; John Landseer, 'The Engraved Gems, brought from Babylon.'

¹¹³ Mousavi, *Persepolis*, 123-33; Allen, 'Come then ye classic thieves'; St. John Simpson, 'Rediscovering past splendours from Iran: 19th century plaster casts of sculptures from Persepolis', *British Museum Magazine*, 36, 2000, 28-9.

¹¹⁴ Sir William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East, More Particularly Persia*, London: Rodwell and Martin, 1821, vol. II, 277-80.

¹¹⁵ Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, &c. &c. During the Years 1817, 1818, 1819, and 1820*, vol. I, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821, 576-678. For the seal impressions, see Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia*, vol. II (1822), 420, pl. 77g.

¹¹⁶ Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia*, vol. I, 'Preface', vii.

religious iconography.¹¹⁷ He speaks of 'workmanship', not art. Ouseley also wrote about seals, which he sensed were more often Babylonian than Persian, and analysed them in terms of their religious symbolism and workmanship.¹¹⁸ Ouseley's citations of Caylus and Raspe indicate that he was well-versed in existing views on these kinds of objects, and his criticism of the seals' motifs as 'ridiculous' and their execution as 'rude' displays continuity with the earlier assessments of the seals' artistic merits. Yet these glib comments are not comparable to a full appraisal of the art and art history of the engraved gems. In the spirited conversation about the art of ancient Persia that occurred in the early nineteenth century, the former 'Persian' gems played an insignificant role. The existing negative views of the gems' artistic worth, which originated with Caylus and Winckelmann, provided few incentives for their continued study as aesthetic objects, and the decline of gems as a privileged category of ancient art contributed to the gems' side-lining. For Caylus and Winckelmann, however, the 'Persian' gems had been at the heart of their studies of Persian art. The gems' novelty was certainly part of their appeal, as was the high value placed upon engraved gems during their lifetimes, but these miniature works of art enabled Caylus and Winckelmann to establish Persia's place in the history of art in no small part because they had seen them, while the sculptures of Persepolis were merely representations and descriptions in the works of others.

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¹¹⁷ Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia*, vol. II, 422-5.

¹¹⁸ Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East*, vol. I, 423-39.