

Werk

Titel: Gemmae Antiquae Caelatae: Or, A Collection Of Gems

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T H E
P R E F A C E.

 *T*is not my Design to compose in this Place a History of Antique Gems or Ingrav'd Stones; Ingravure, with all the other Liberal Arts, owes its Rise to the Ægyptians; From the Ægyptians it pass'd to the Grecians, who carried this Work to its highest Excellence; The Romans at Length received It from the Grecians; But the Grecian Masters have ever preserv'd over the Roman, a Superiority in Taste and Execution. The Age of ALEXANDER produced a PYRGOTOLES, and the Age of AUGUSTUS a DIOSCORIDES, whose Compositions, in this Kind, will always stand for the Models of Perfection.

Ignorance triumph'd for some Time, under the Empire of the Goths and Vandals; And the Liberal Arts may be said to have touch'd upon their Ruin; They stood upon the very Brink of Eternal Oblivion, when the Pontificate of LEO the Tenth, saw the Arts and the Sciences revive at one Instant. An Æra of Time illustrious for Great Men in every Branch of Learning! Then They began to open their Eyes upon those Master-pieces of Antiquity,

tiquity, that still subsisted; and it is upon these excellent Models, too long neglected, that the first Good-Taste was formed; VALERIO DE VICENZE about this Time wrought upon Stones with Infinite Success.

Notwithstanding the Losses We have receiv'd, (to speak of the Gems in Particular) the Remains are not inconsiderable. We have yet Abundance of these little Pieces in our Possession. For this Species of Antiquities preserv'd Themselves better than any Other; Their Smalness and Solidity laid Them less open to the Injuries of Time. The frequent and different Uses, to which They were applied, whether in Rings, in Seals, or other Ornaments, made Them necessary, and their exquisite Beauty, made Them valuable. For the natural Splendor of the Stone, and the additional Perfection of the Work present, at one View, two Objects of Admiration.

*As to the Perfection of the Work, it is by so much the more wonderful, as the Execution is the more difficult. The Operator pursues his Operation through the Shade (if I may Use the Expression) of a thick Night. He is not permitted to see the Effect of his Touches, at the Time that his Touches give Life to the Stone. He cannot so much as judge of the Progress He makes, but by consulting, almost at every Stroke, the Impressions of the Wax; These are the only Eyes that give Him Light to examine his Performance. The Whole of his Design
must*

must necessarily have been finish'd and pre-determin'd, after a most exact and concise Manner, in his Imagination; since He has no other Guide to follow, but that original Idea in the actual Course of his Labor.

But the Difficulty of the Execution diminishes Nothing of their Perfection. These little Pieces are equal, in all Particulars, to the finest Statues of Antiquity. They have, besides, this Merit peculiar to Them; I mean the Facility, with which They multiply Themselves by almost an Infinity of Impressions. How great the Convenience that arises, from this single Circumstance, to the Curious? How great the Utility to the Learned? Comprized in these Figured Volumes, is to be found All that regards the Fable or the History, the Customs or the Habits, the Ceremonies or the Exercises of the Ancients. They give Us to know, as might be said, by Sight, the Faces and the Features of those great Personages, whose Characters and Actions are already painted and described by the Historians. I dare advance in further Commendation of the Gems, that They preserve a more perfect Likeness than the Medals, cast to represent the same Heads. The Relief of the Ingrav'd-Stones is more considerable, and the Lineaments more distinct; They have descended to Us with less Alteration than those Pieces of Metal, often worn, disfigured or eaten up with Rust. Nor is It to be wonder'd, that the Relief of the Gem is more fresh and lively than the Relief of the Coin. The Concavity

of the Ingrav'd-Stone screens the Relief from the Corrosion that damages the Medal. The same advantageous Situation defends It from Rubbing, and consequently from Wearing; for no Friction can take Place upon a Figure that is quite intrench'd and interior. The very Incision of the Instrument that produces the One, is susceptible of a more beautiful Detail, than the Mold or the Balance of the Minter. The Medals enjoy but one Advantage over the Gems; and That consists in their Legends or Inscriptions. Yet what Pleasure may the Curious draw by comparing, and explaining the One by the Other, whenever He would ascertain a true Likeness to either Gem or Medal? What Satisfaction more complete than when He can join the exact Resemblance of an Ingrav'd-Stone, to the Historical Proof of a Legendary Coin?

The Curious of the first Note in all Ages have paid a due Regard to these inestimable Pieces. The Search They have always made after Them, is a sufficient Testimony. The First that assembled, What We call a Cabinet at Rome, was SCAURUS, Son-in-Law to SYLLA. POMPEY the Great among other rich Donations, consecrated to the Capitol, the Cabinet of Rings taken from MITHRIDATES: A Collection, according to VARRO and other Authors, greatly preferable to That of SCAURUS. In Imitation of this famous Conqueror, CÆSAR, then Dictator, dedicated to the Temple of VENUS GENETRIX, Six Tablets filled with Rings. And to conclude
MARCELLUS,

MARCELLUS, the Son of OCTAVIUS, deposited a fine Cabinet in the Temple of APOLLO. For I will not insist upon the Example of HELIOGABALUS; unless it be to denote the Extravagance of his Fancy: His Passion for Them was so excessive, that He made Them serve for Ornaments to his Sandals: But ought not that Passion to have taught Him some little Care for their Preservation, and to have restrain'd Him from Debasing those Objects of his Admiration, by so unnecessary and so ridiculous a Use?

The infinite Service that may be drawn from Them towards the true Intelligence of Antiquity, not to mention their exquisite Beauty, has engaged the Learned and the Curious to publish the Designs of various Antiques, at different Seasons; and sometimes accompanied with Explications. LEONARD AGOSTINI procur'd a most beautiful Collection of Them. Beautiful I say, in Regard to the Workmanship and Execution: J. B. GALLESTRUZZI (who was also an excellent Painter) engrav'd Them in Aqua Fortis. LE POIS had put out One before GALLESTRUZZI. ÆNEAS VICUS, A. CANINI, PETER-SANTEZ BERTOLI, BEGER, LICETUS, MAFFEI, SPON, GORLAEUS, have labor'd in the same Tract with equal Success: Happy, had They preserv'd in their Designs, a more perfect Image of the Beauty of their Originals. But above the Rest, the Last is the most deficient. He scarce retains the least Trace or

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Air of the ancient Composition. His Design is so little, and at the same Time, so faulty, that the finest Subjects are no longer known, as they are describ'd in that Collection.

There appear'd lately in Holland a Suite of Gems, publish'd upon a Plan intirely new, and well laid. The Undertaker attach'd Himself singly to those Antiques that were mark'd with the Names of the several Artists, by whom They were work'd. This Project not only inform'd Us of the Names of the Artists, but was calculated to shew the different Manners of those ancient Masters. To which are subjoin'd, in the Explication, whatever Particulars are extant concerning their Lives. But the Ingravure of this Work is too Stiff and High; Loaded and Finish'd to such Excess; that the Copy deviates as much from the Purity as from the Size of the Original.*

The MEN OF VIRTUE will soon find ample Consolation, in the Appearance of a complete Suite of one of the finest Cabinets in Europe. They will acknowledge in these exact Copies the Beauty of their Originals. It would be sufficient to recommend the Merit of that Performance, if the Modesty of the Author would permit Me to mention his Name. I am however thus far Happy, that I have this Opportunity of preparing the World for the Expec-

* Images des Heros dessinées par J. A. Canini, & gravées par Picart le Romain, &c. A Amsterdam 1731.

tation of so valuable a Performance, but I should be doubly Happy if my Own could claim the same Advantage.

I must confess the Honor that has been done Me by some great Masters, who have not refus'd sometimes to assist Me in my Undertaking. I thought it not prudent to omit any Occasion that gave Me an Opportunity of Approaching more nearly the Beauties I meant to copy.

There remains no more for Me to say, than just to give an Account of my Proposal in this Collection. I have touch'd none but the most beautiful Pieces, that either never yet appear'd, or appear'd in an unbecoming Dress. I know that I have given some Few, that with very little Variation are engraved in other Collections; But the best Variation in Pieces of such Value, seem'd, in my Opinion, to merit a more particular Attention.

I could have been glad on the Occasion to satisfy the Curious, by notifying, both the Species of every Stone, and the Cabinet from which It was taken; but as these Ingravures were not wrought after the very Gems, but Impressions of those Gems, it was not possible for Me to judge of the Quality of the Stone: To say more of my Design, in the Choice I made, the Perfection of the Work was principally consider'd; and the Preference always paid to the Subjects of Composition; that is, to the figur'd

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Gems

Gems rather than the single Heads. But I thought It a Matter of Importance to give their just Dimensions; whether by describing their intire Form, when the Plate permitted Me, or whether by giving the two Diameters, when the Gems exceeded a certain Size. I judg'd this the rather necessary; because oftentimes the same Design appears in two Stones of unequal Volume, or if not the same Design, differing only in some minute Circumstance; And in either of these Cases, the Curious may easily assure Himself of That which served Me for an Original, by confronting the very Gem, its Impression, or Print, with the precise Magnitude of that which I follow.

