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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

A VICTORIA-FORTUNA INTAGLIO INSCRIBED “ZOH” FROM CAPIDAVA (SCYTHIA) IN ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Abstract: The 2015 rescue excavation in the area of the only Christian cult building *intra muros*, at the edges of the Late Roman fort Capidava (Topalu, Constanța County, Romania) brought to light a carnelian intaglio showing Victoria-Nike crowning Fortuna-Tyche, bearing the inscription ZOH, “life”, or perhaps “may he/she live”, found in the destruction level of a building predating the Christian monument. We discuss the archaeological, stratigraphic, epigraphic, and iconographic implications of this unique gem from a military settlement on the Danube frontier, buried close to the middle of the 4th century AD. The gem is exceptional in being one of the very few discovered in a stratigraphic excavation and the only one to associate, by means of an inscription, Fortuna and Victoria with the rhetoric of „life”, at the crossroads between propaganda, pagan piety and Christian devotion.

Keywords: *Capidava, Late Antiquity, inscribed carnelian intaglio, iconography of Victoria-Nike and Fortuna-Tyche, ZOH / “ζωή” / “ζώη”*

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A carnelian intaglio set in a poorly preserved silver ring was retrieved during the 2015 archaeological season in Capidava. It was found in an archaeological layer within the only Christian cult building known in Capidava, during the large-scale rescue excavations led there by the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța (MINAC) and its partners, in the framework of the restoration and conservation project¹ they ran in Capidava in 2015 with European funding. The archaeological excavations were directed by Irina Achim, as per the collaboration protocol between the University of Bucharest and the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology (Bucharest).

Our finds stem from a stratigraphic unit dated to the final moments in the occupation of a Roman building *intra muros*, conventionally named CR 02, which was later superimposed by the Christian compound². While the artistic execution of the bezel and the intaglio may appear rather modest, the associated stratigraphic context is remarkable: a hoard of 44 bronze coins,

¹ The project “Restoration, consolidation, protection, conservation, and valorization of the archaeological site “Cetatea Capidava” (SMIS code 31212), financed via The Regional Operational Program 2007–2013. The site restoration was completed after 2020, when the site also saw additional non-invasive investigations, in the framework of the Limes National Program, see OPRIȘ/MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2024, 230.

² A substantial overview of the 2015 excavations within the Palaeochristian church at Capidava, including the numismatic results, was published by ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018-2019, who also discuss the topography of the buildings predating the church and of CR 02 in particular (208, fig. 4, 9); more on CR 02 in the excavation report ACHIM *et alii* 2016, 134–135, Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Personal objects retrieved from occupation layer US 8 within the Late Roman compound CR 02 (Photo: C. Nicolae, IAVP).

dating from the first half of the 4th century AD³, as well as other items made of iron, bronze, and bone (ivory ?) were found together in a sealed deposit⁴ (Fig. 1), offering a wealth of data about the evolution and the function of CR 02. As to the intaglio, which will be discussed in detail in Part 2 of this paper, it shows Victoria crowning Fortuna, the only such gem in our corpus of 39 gems below to be inscribed. The inscription itself, ZOH / „ζωή”/ „ζώη”, testifies to the

³ All dates AD unless specified.

⁴ From this sealed deposit were retrieved two bronze objects of which one could be a wire bracelet with tapered ends, an object made of bone (ivory ?); a fragment of a marble platter rim, exhibiting a “raven’s beak” profile; and a bronze coin hoard dated to the first half of the 4th c. – discussed in ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, 206–212, Fig. 12–14.

linguistic complexity at Capidava (Latin vs. Greek) as well as to the Christian - pagan religious dynamics (Fig. 2/1-4).

1. THE SITE AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

*Castellum Capidava*⁵ is a small fort (1.3/1.5 ha) on the banks of the Danube, halfway between Axiopolis and Carsium. The citadel was erected during Trajan’s Dacian Wars on a limestone terrace overlooking the right bank of the Danube.

⁵ For the history of the site, its topographic development, and its monumental heritage OPRIȘ/RAȚIU 2017, 13–24, Fig. 1, 11 and, more recently, ACHIM/MOREAU 2023, 388, 390, Fig. 5 (with additional bibliography on the *intra muros* Christian monument), and OPRIȘ/MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2024.



Fig. 2. Capidava intaglio: 1. Obverse; 2. Reverse; 3. Bevelled edge; 4. Silver bezel (Photo: C. Nicolae, IAVP).

The local military fortification⁶ was in use from the early 2nd c. all the way to the end of the 11th c. Throughout the Late Roman period, the fort's plan underwent successive changes: first during Aurelian or Probus, then again in the mid-4th c., and finally at some point between the end of the 5th c. and the beginning of the 6th.

The early Christian church in the NE corner of the fort is an iconic monument for the modest fort of Capidava in Proto-Byzantine times. It was constructed no earlier than the end of the 5th c., on a piece of land that had been densely built in previous periods.

The rescue excavations carried out in the summer of 2015 inside the church, within the limits of a pre-existing trench dated to the 2000s that spanned the entire width of the nave, aimed to investigate the foundations of the north and south perimeter/lateral walls of the cult building (Fig. 3–4). On this occasion, in the vicinity of the church's northern wall, two Late Roman buildings were partially uncovered, which closely succeeded one another in time, on the parcel where the church was later to be built (Fig. 5).

The latest building (CR 01) extends north of the church, in the direction of the defensive wall, which it abutted, and appeared to be chronologically posterior to the Z9 wall, located at the eastern limit of the excavation, in both trenches dug there in 2015. Z9 was part of a large Late Roman building (CR 02), whose exact configuration continues to elude us even after the rescue excavation in 2015, given that the median part of the Christian edifice nave could not be investigated.

The aforementioned sealed deposit, which yielded the silver ring with the carnelian gem, belongs to US 8, a complex stratigraphic unit inside CR 02,⁷ consisting of a substantial layer of yellowish-brown loam, of medium to high compaction, including specks of charcoal, poorly-sorted gravel with no sand, scattered mortar traces as well as pottery shards and a few pieces of military equipment (e.g. three belt fittings). Our ring was found together with the objects listed above (see note 4), including the coin *Hoard 1*, consisting of 44 coins, which can be divided into two groups of bronze coins. The first comprises 37 coins⁸ making

⁶ During the late antique period, Capidava retained its military function and the citadel became, in turn, the headquarters of cavalry units (*Equites scutarii* and *Cuneus equitum Solensium*) responsible for controlling a ford on the Danube – see OPRIS/RAȚIU 2017, 15, notes 9–10; OPRIS/MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2024, 228.

⁷ This layer (US 8) was also identified in the southern profile of the excavation unit *Northern Naos* – see ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, Figs. 10–11. We refrain from discussing or illustrating here in detail the site stratigraphy, as this was abundantly done in ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, esp. 206–212.

⁸ The series opens with a *folles* of Licinius, minted in Thessaloniki in 312–

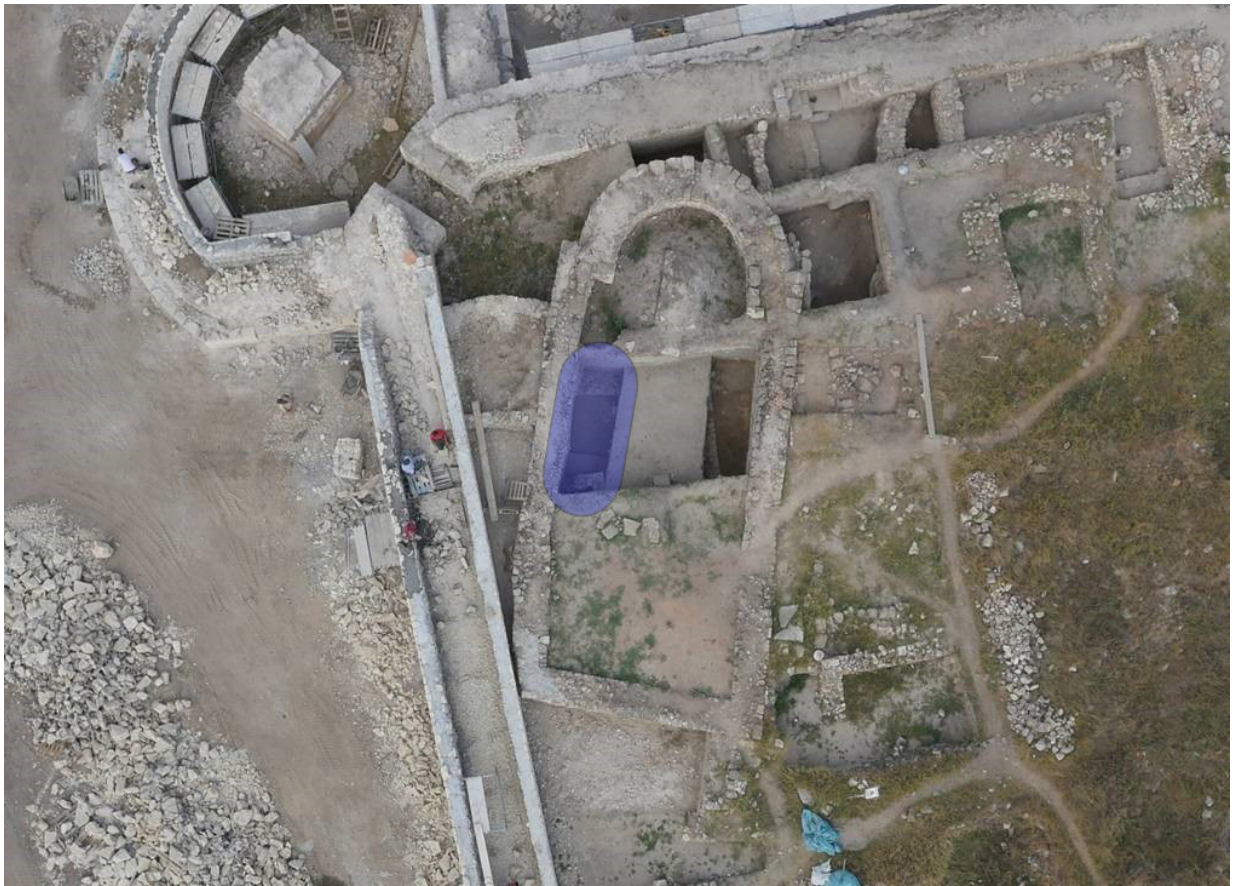


Fig. 3. Vertical aerial view of the remains of the Early Christian church (Photo: D. Ștefan, 2015).

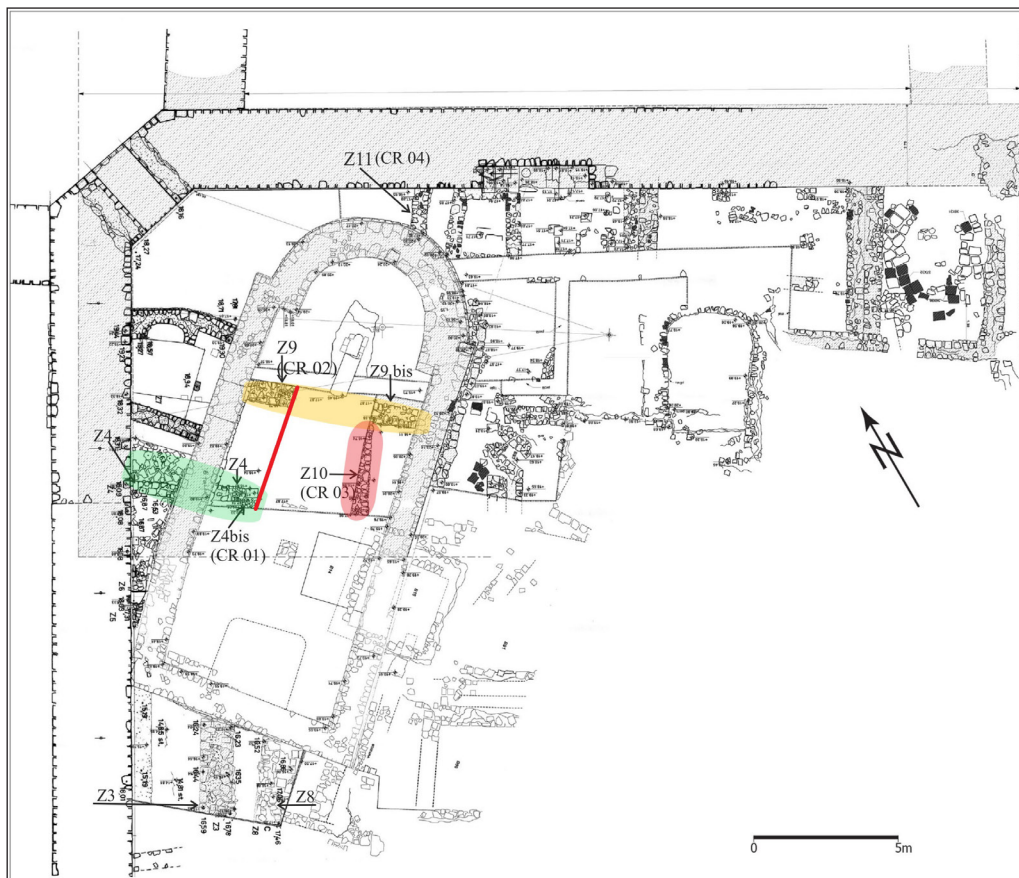


Fig. 4. Detailed plan of the remains discovered within the precinct of the Early Christian church at Capidava (architect A. Sion, with contributions by I. Achim and R. Cîrjan, 2020).



Fig. 5. View from the north of the structural features predating the Christian church on the same plot, near its northern perimeter wall, indicating the area where the sealed deposit yielding the gem was identified (Photo: I. Achim, 2015).

up the core of the deposit; the second comprises six additional coins discovered on the northern flank of the church, as well as a seventh retrieved from the layers inside the church, at the edges of the area investigated in the 2015 season. Their chronology and state of preservation, comparable to those in the core of *Hoard I* point to their belonging to the same batch, with the mention that they could have been displaced from their initial position during construction works for the church,⁹ which explains why most of them were found by the fortification wall. This batch of coins lends significant support to the idea of a violent destruction of building CR 02 around the middle of the 4th c.

On the other hand, the pottery retrieved from the same stratigraphic unit as the ring and gem, whether found at the same depth or at somewhat greater depth,¹⁰ is highly fragmented, and consists of shards from almost all categories: transport amphorae, table ware, and very few coarse cooking wares (Fig. 6)¹¹.

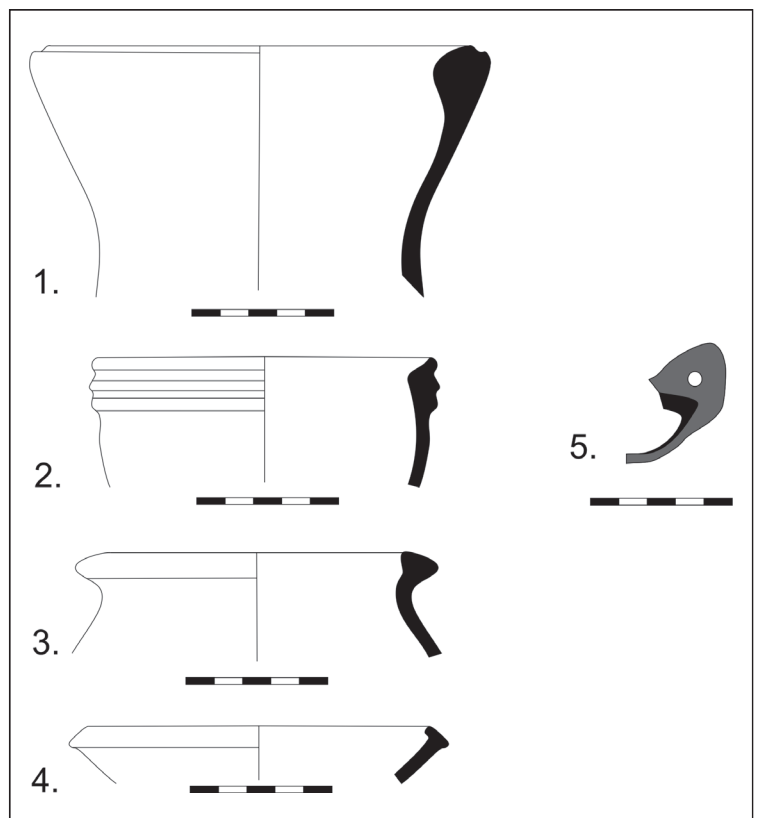


Fig. 6. 1–5. Ceramic finds from occupation layer US 8, which yielded the gem (Drawing: A. Streinu, 2021).

313. The latest two coins date back to 341–348; for a detailed discussion of this hoard, ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, 206–210, 230–234, pl. I–II, with bibliography.

⁹ Also discussed in ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, 214, 216, with Fig. 3.

¹⁰ Ceramic assemblages having inv. nos. 106 and 156/2015 and a tiny lamp fragment - inv. no. 53/2015/MS.

¹¹ The identification and typological classification of the ceramic

The identifiable shards come from amphorae and pouring vessels, dating from the 2nd-3rd centuries to the Late Antique period. Such fragments, illustrated here, originate from a Dressel 24 *similis* amphora (Fig. 6/1)¹², a fine table amphora with dull red slip¹³ (Fig. 6/2), a cooking pot (Fig. 6/3)¹⁴ and a dish (Fig. 6 /4, subjected to considerable secondary heat alteration). Among other shards, we mention here the presence of LRA 2 body shards (ceramic assemblage with inv. no. 106/2015). The last fragment was part of a lamp, namely the fragmentary shoulder, with elevated handle, decorated with three strings of granules¹⁵ (inv. no. 53/2015/MS). The elevated handle and granule decoration is also found on Late Antique lamps, as on some examples from Tomis¹⁶, Asia Minor lamps and even on the local production at Halmyris¹⁷. Given the diverse assemblage in which it was discovered, the lamp fragment (inv. no. 53/2015/MS, certainly intrusive in this layer) could be dated to the 5th-6th c., the items in the ceramic assemblage with inv. no. 106/2015, likely from the 4th c. (corroborated by the monetary finds), while those in 156/2015 date to the 2nd-3rd c.

It is worth emphasizing that the same stratigraphic unit US 8 also yielded – albeit from somewhat greater depths¹⁸, down to the lowest limit of the investigated area, as low as the foundation bedding of the church's northern perimeter wall – some personal items of military equipment.¹⁹ With

assemblage in this group were carried out by Dr. Alina Streinu (Bucharest City Museum).

¹² OPAIȚ/IONESCU 2016, no. 81 at Callatis with details about the fabric; HONCU/STĂNICĂ 2019, 219, fig. 3/6 and see also the extensive references for finds in Moesia; OPAIȚ/Tsaravopoulos 2011, 288. Fig. 14/a–b, likely Chian.

¹³ Similar to OPAIȚ 2004, Pl. 4/2 at Topraichioi and OPAIȚ 2004, Pl. 3/6 at Niculițel, 4th-5th c.

¹⁴ HONCU 2017, 43–44, nos. 2 and 4 dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD; close to our site are finds at the rural settlement at Fântânele – SUCEVEANU 1998, Pl. VII.10, Pl. IX. 41, Pl. XII. 101; at Histria – SUCEVEANU 2000, 113–117, type XXXV dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD; BĂDESCU/CLIANTE 2015, 219, nos. 43–44/fig. 4. 3–4, dated to the end of the 6th c.–beginning of the 7th c.; at Argamum – HONCU 2017, no. 2, Pl. 1.2; at Callatis – OPAIȚ/IONESCU 2016, Pl. XXII-XXIII, nos. 129-131; at Tropaeum Traiani – BOGDAN CĂTĂNICIU/BARNEA 1979, Fig. 146, nos. 4.1 and 5.2, together with early Roman materials from the 2nd and 3rd centuries; at Măcin, in close proximity to Arrubium – PARASCHIV 2004, Pl. III, no. 13. A similar find comes from the rural settlement at Sarichioi-Sărătura – BAUMANN 1995, Pl. XVI, no. 7 with a grooved body and numerous finds at the settlement at Acic Suat – STREINU 2019, type 1.

¹⁵ Early Roman type Loeschke VIII; BRONEER XXV; PERLZWEIG 1961, no. 124; ICONOMU 1967, type XVIII/XX; BAILEY 1980, type O/R – BAILEY 1988, Pl. 104, Q. 3090-3091 (Ephesian); ICONOMU 1986, type XIV, var I; DENEAUVE VIIIb; BUSSIÈRE/LINDROS WOHL 2017, Bussière DX 6 (Asia Minor); GHERGHE/COJOC 2011, Pl. 44, no. 29 (Sucidava); KUZMANOV/MINČEV 2018, no. 181 (Odessos).

¹⁶ ICONOMU 1967, type XXVIII/fig. 49 and Fig. 159 – no. 698.

¹⁷ HAYES 1992, type 2; ICONOMU 1967, type XXVIII; TOPOLEANU 2000, Var. C, no. 542, 544–555; DENEAUVE type XII, no. 1135; OPRİȘ 2003, Pl. LXIII, nos. 427–429 (Capidava); STAWOSKA-JUNDZIŁ 2008, 176, no. 47 (Novae); BĂDESCU/BOTTEZ 2014, no. 4 (Asia Minor/Ephesus or Miletus); TOPOLEANU/CROITORU 2015, 178, no. 50 (Callatis, West Pontic workshop); TOPOLEANU 2016, 98, Pl. X/DA 2–5 (Troesmis); GHERGHE/COJOC 2011, Pl. 34/157–158, no. 158 (Sucidava, with decorated base); HANOTTE 2018, p. 57, fig. 14.

¹⁸ Depths ranging between 3.06 and 3.56 m below the reference point inside the nave (elevation 19.52m above sea level), which served as the datum point for all measurements within the Christian building – see ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018–2019, 205, 210, Figs. 8–9, 11 (Southern profile of the excavation unit designated as *North Naos*).

¹⁹ Three bronze and iron fungiform studs – inv. nos. MS 78, 84 and 93/2015 – stemming from belted with *Ringschnallengulum*-type buckles. For the

them were both Eastern and Western sigillata wares²⁰ (e.g., South Gaulish sigillata/La Graufesenque/Samian ware, Drag. 35 cup – generally dated to 70-230; Çandarlı/Eastern Sigillata C plates, Hayes Form 4 – dated to the 3rd c.; Pontic sigillata plates, Zhuravlev Forms 4.2 and 6 – both dated between the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd c.), some of them presenting with traces of fire exposure. This fire was most likely responsible for the destruction of a military building existing in this area of the fort at the end of the 3rd c. – beginning of the 4th c.

2. ARCHAEOMETRIC INVESTIGATIONS

While, as mentioned above, the actual hoop of our ring was not retrieved, and the metal bezel was poorly preserved, to the extent that restoration proved impossible, archaeometric investigations of the bezel and of the gem itself have shed additional light on this unique artifact.

2.1. X-Ray Fluorescence²¹

For the qualitative and quantitative determination of the elemental composition of the bezel, two XRF instruments²²—one portable and one stationary—were employed. These allowed the simultaneous investigation of several points on the outer surface of the bezel, as well as on its base. The results indicate that our ring was fashioned from an alloy containing 76–78% silver, and established the presence of other elements (e.g., gold 1.5–1.6%; copper 0.07–0.09%; iron 0.3–0.7%; manganese 0.01–0.03%). The bezel base was made from an alloy with a higher silver content, approximately 83%, with some gold (1.2–1.5%) and copper (0.3–0.7%). However, it must be noted that the XRF results are strongly affected by the surface deposits and advanced corrosion on the artefact, which precludes the establishment of a fully reliable compositional profile.

2.2. X-Ray Diffraction²³

This investigation of our gem enabled the identification of a compound containing Si and O, exhibiting a quartz-type structure²⁴ (hexagonal lattice, space group P3₁21), with the unit-cell parameters presented in Table 1. Thus, the identified

presence of this type of personal equipment accessory in the North Pontic area, in Germania, or in the Lower Danube basin, see TREISTER 2000–2001, 113–114, Fig. 1/7 (112); ZHURAVLEV 2003, 90–91, n. 13, fig. 1/5–10; see also for Dacia: CIUGUDEAN 2011, in particular 101, notes 16-28; BARBU *et alii* 2020, 133, Fig. 6/4; PETCULESCU 2024, 406, nos. 27-29, Pl. 4/27-29.

²⁰ The identification and typological classification of the ceramic assemblage in this group were carried out by Dr. Iulia Iliescu (FIUB).

²¹ Investigation performed by Dr. Daniela Stan (email: daniela@nipne.ro), (IFIN-HH), Bucharest, on 7 June 2022.

²² Equipment used: the portable Tracer 5⁺ spectrometer from Bruker Instruments (for various points on the outer surface of the bezel) and the stationary Midex spectrometer (SPECTRO MIDEX) for analyzing the base of the bezel.

²³ Investigation performed by Dr. Vasile-Adrian Surdu (email: adrian.surdu@upb.ro), UPB-CNMN, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnologies, Department of Oxide Materials Science and Engineering and Nanomaterials, on 23 June 2022. Equipment used: PANalytical Empyrean with Cu K α radiation.

²⁴ This structure was identified by comparison to the database ICDD PDF4+ 2022, card 04-016-2085.

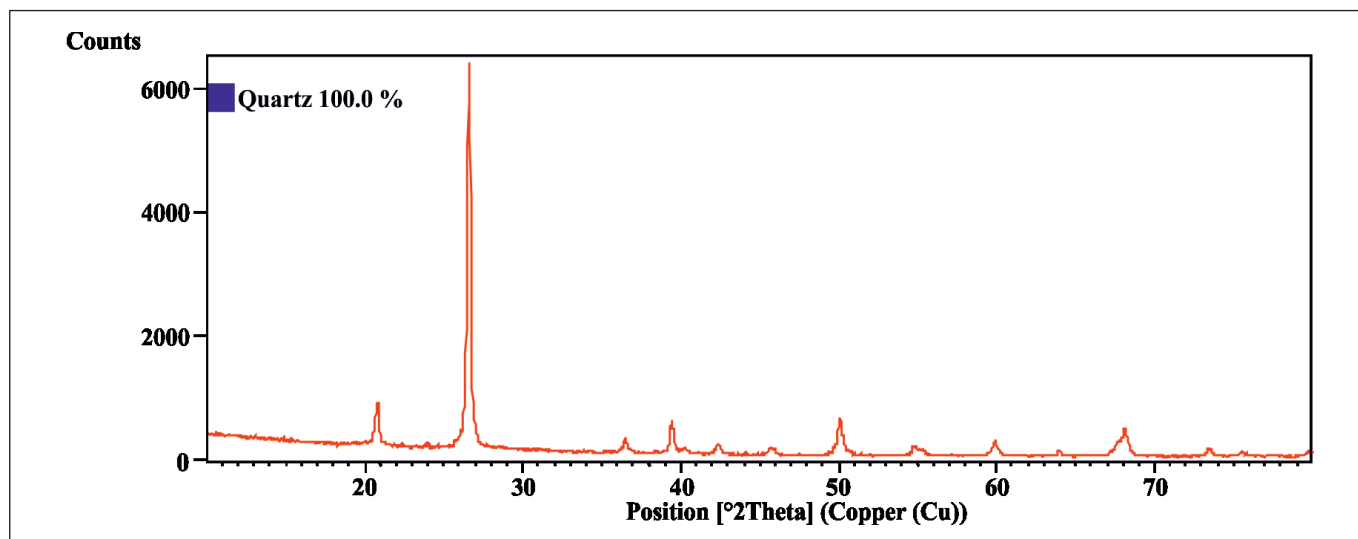


Fig. 7. X-ray diffraction pattern of the gem from Capidava (Dr. V.-A. Surdu, 2022).

structure corresponds to a carnelian, the precise geographic source of which remains to be determined (Fig. 7).

2.3. Optical microscopy

The gem was subjected to microscopic examination²⁵ according to which the piece displays numerous polishing striations on both sides (Fig. 8.1). The engraved lines of the decoration and of the inscription are consistent and appear to have been executed within the same working interval (Fig. 8.2). The inscription exhibits comparable incision lines, but, to judge by how the lines in the letter Z slightly overlap Nike’s foot, it appears to have been executed last, during

Table 1. Unit-cell parameters of the gem from Capidava

| Structure and profile data: | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Formula sum: | Si _{3.00} O _{6.00} |
| Formula mass/ g/mol: | 180.2529 |
| Density (calculated)/ g/cm ³ | 2.6446 |
| Space group (No.): | P 31 2 1 (152) |
| Lattice parameters: | |
| a/ Å: | 4.9173(5) |
| b/ Å: | 4.9173(5) |
| c/ Å: | 5.4041(7) |
| alpha/ °: | 90 |
| beta/ °: | 90 |
| gamma/ °: | 120 |
| V/ 10 ⁶ pm ³ | 113.16580 |

²⁵ Investigation conducted by Dr. Monica Mărgărit (e-mail: monica.margarit@valahia.ro), Valahia University of Târgoviște, Faculty of Humanities, Department of History, on 5 August 2022. Equipment used: a Keyence VHX-600 digital microscope (Valahia University of Târgoviște, Faculty of Humanities), with an integrated camera and magnification lenses ranging from 30x to 200x.

the actual manufacturing process (Fig. 8.3) - in other words the inscription was not added years later, as is the case with certain gems (see our corpus below no. 39, Spier 2013 cat. no. 750). On the arm with which Fortuna holds the rudder, in other words unrelated to the mounting, a deterioration of the gem’s surface can be observed, apparently post-dating the incisions. It was caused by chemical/ionic contact, not mechanical impact, with an approx. 1mm² triangular metal surface, that produced an alteration of the stone’s surface, and a possible transfer of material at high temperature (Fig. 8/4) - perhaps during the fire that destroyed the building. This metal surface may have been the point of a sharp tool, perhaps of copper alloy, that of the bronze bracelet found near it, or indeed, of some sharp metal element on a wooden casket in which these private valuables may have been kept.

3. ART HISTORICAL, EPIGRAPHIC, AND FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The 2015 Capidava inscribed intaglio was discussed briefly, in French, by Isvoranu, Achim 2018-2019, 211-212, Fig. 14. Its deposition was dated to the first half of the 4th century, due to an association with a hoard of coins ranging from 312 to 348. The importance of finding a gem in a stratigraphic excavation cannot be overemphasized, given that, for the immense majority of gems known today, the provenance information is limited to, at best, the name of the site. The oval-shaped carnelian, with flat surfaces and a beveled edge, was found set in a partially preserved bezel, whose hoop was missing altogether. It measures 18 × 14.7 × 4.5/3.5 mm and, in terms of its shape in cross-section, falls into type P2 of H. Guiraud (Guiraud 1988, 29, fig. 9/P; Guiraud, Roulière-Lambert 1995, 363, fig. 3) or possibly type F2 (intaglio with flat face and oblique edge) of M. Henig (Henig 2007, 9, fig. 1; Henig *et al.* 1994, XXV, Fig. 1).

3. 1. Iconography

The gem features, on the left, Victoria-Nike, in profile, with half-spread wing and wearing a chiton, about to



Fig. 8. The gem: technology and engraving details. 1. Polishing striations of the gem 50× magnification; 2. Engraving detail, 150× magnification; 3. Inscription detail, 30× magnification; 4. Gem engraved surface, contact zone with a metal object, 100× magnification (Photos: Dr. M. Mărgărit, 2022; scales are in µm).

land (standing on tiptoe). She turns to the left with arm extended, raised, holding the (laurel) wreath with ribbons. A palm branch rests over her shoulder. On the right, facing her, Fortuna-Tyche, draped in a chiton, standing frontally, turns her head surmounted by a *modius* (?) to the left. Her right hand is resting on the tiller head, while the rudder blade is at her feet. In the crook of her left arm she holds the cornucopia. Groundline visible only on her side. The lower register, between the two goddesses, features a two-line Greek inscription, in angular letters: ZO / H, of which the last falls below the decorated field. The letters in the first line exhibit a slight inclination toward the right.

The engraving is so frantic that certain details (particularly the palm branch or the *modius*) can only be recognized upon comparison with gems of a less impressionistic style. However, this is certainly not the product of an unskilled craftsman, but rather that of a master who set out to finish particularly quickly. This is rarely remarked upon, but was correctly grasped by Sena Chiesa (1966, 246) who notes about her gem cat. no. 632 that, despite the very simplified rendering, it was „non privo di vivacità espressiva nelle figure allungate e scattanti.” Also Maaskant-Kleibrink (1978) discussing gems with the engraving technique that

she notoriously called „imperial incoherent grooves style”, to which belong many cornelian images of Victoria or Fortuna in the 3rd c. as well as ours, emphasized „incoherence” as an aesthetic of speed and confusion, with a frantic use of the tubular drill and fine wheel (also Guiraud, Roulière-Lambert 1995, 369).

Overall, our piece is datable towards the end of the 3rd c. and during the first decades of the following century.²⁶

The stone — carnelian — is the most common among gems with this iconography (at least 50% in our corpus of 39 similar gems seen by us)²⁷ and among gems in general, while both Fortuna and Victoria are each, taken individually, among the most represented subjects in Roman glyptic art²⁸. However, the Capidava piece is unusual on a number of counts compared to the corpus of analogies compiled below. **1.** It is, with Sena Chiesa 1966 cat. no. 632, the second

²⁶ CRAVINHO/AMORAI-STARK 2011, 113 for difficulties in dating gems.

²⁷ As is apparent from any quick survey of FURTWÄNGLER 1896, cf. GUIRAUD/ROULIÈRE-LAMBERT 1995, Fig. 2, GRAMATOPOL 1982, 208 for Dacia and Scythia etc.

²⁸ GRAMATOPOL 1982, 209. Amongst gems in Romanian collections, Fortuna and Victoria rank third and eighth, respectively, in frequency of representation.

largest piece - only Spier 1992 cat. no. 370 is larger, 19.7 × 13.6 × 3. **2.** It is one of the few pieces (fewer than 20% in our corpus below) where the silhouettes of the goddesses are parallel to the minor axis of the oval. This is certainly a result of the artist's plan to create room for a central inscription. In any case, nowhere in the corpus below do we see a central empty space where one could have potentially inscribed letters at a later date. **3.** It is the only one where the original composition design also features an inscription. In two other cases, there is an inscription on the backside of the gem. On one, Spier 2013, cat. no. 750, XAPIC was added much later, on the other, Brandt et al. 1972, cat. no. 2919, the inscription IAW was added, probably at the same time, on the reverse. The Capidava inscription is all the more striking as Victoria-Nike and Fortuna-Tyche are not individually associated with ZOH inscriptions on gems (be they taken to mean „ζωή”, „life” or, less likely, „ζώη”, „may he/she live”), making this an exceptional find. **4.** It is the only one in our Victoria-Fortuna corpus stemming from a modern stratigraphic excavation. Closest comparisons from this point of view are the clay *cretulae* from the Nomophylakion building in Cyrene, dating in the 1st c. BCE-1st c. AD, as reported more than a century ago (Maddoli 1963-1964, cat. nos. 275-277), and the gem Ignjatović 2017 cat. no. 179 found in 1969 in Kalemegdan, near Dizdar's gate, „discovered within disturbed archaeological layers, but it, without doubt, belongs to the layer associated with the earlier military camp” (Ignjatović 2017, 112). **5.** Finally, in our corpus below, our gem stands out for its simplified and rather frantic engraving, which hardly finds analogies among the pieces that are truly poorly engraved, such as Bizzarri 1987, cat. no. 180, V. Scherf et al. 1970, cat. no. 162, Sena Chiesa 1966, cat. no. 630, Țeposu 1960, cat. no. 17; Isvoranu, Achim 2018-2019 have already pointed out similarities to the gem in Ignjatović cat. no. 164.

The interpretation of the piece (without taking into account the inscription for now) can only proceed from the fact that both goddesses are cornerstones of imperial propaganda from Augustus onwards. For Sena Chiesa 1966, 245-246 the joint presence of the two goddesses has „un evidente significato augurale”, an evaluation followed to the letter by Mandrioli Bizzarri 1987 and Casal García 1991,²⁹ while Gołyźniak 2020, 85 rightly sees in a similar (but un-inscribed) piece an amulet of „good luck and prosperity”. Greek-speaking civilians or soldiers, of Oriental origin or not, stationed in Capidava must have responded well to the iconography of this piece, whether it was an heirloom or a luxury good, on the affordable side, arriving through the ports of Tomis, Callatis, and Histria.

²⁹ Generally for Fortuna and Victoria alone on gems, ZWIERLEIN-DIEHL 1973. Victoria and Fortuna together, RAUSA 1997, 125-141 (LIMC), with entries 143-147, who notes the „valenze ideologiche” in the association of Fortuna with either Concordia, Felicitas, Genius militaris, Salus, Spes, or indeed Victoria. Victoria-Nike crowns many other divinities on late Roman gems (Mars, Roma, Hermes, Zeus), RICHTER 1956, 300; Fortuna crowned by Hermes, GRAMATOPOL 1974, 63, cat. no. 311 (=LIMC Fortuna 133). Victoria and Fortuna on gems in Romanian collections, GRAMATOPOL 1974, 61-63, cat. nos. 287-311, Victoria 316-334, Gramatopol 1982, 205-214. Overall context, SPIER 2013.

3.2. Corpus

We will list below the 39 gems known to us (including the *cretulae* no. 2-4) showing Victoria-Nike crowning Fortuna-Tyche in the manner of the Capidava gem. We have also indicated some eleven additional similar gems, which we were not able to see. We will indicate where they differ from ours. All dimensions in mm.

1. Porter 2011, no. 364, 84, (with ill.) Indo-Greek seal, around 2nd c. BCE. Carnelian, dark orange-brown. Tyche on left. Rudder not mentioned in the description (our Fig. 9).

2-4. Maddoli 1963-1964, cat. no. 275-277, 84 and Plate 18, ill. 275-277. Date: 1st c. BCE - 1st c. AD, from Cyrene. Three very similar clay *cretulae*, all described briefly as „Nike che corona Tyche”. Cat. no. 275, 13 × 10; 276, 11 × 10; 277, 13 × 8. Found in Cyrene „immerse in uno strato di cenere e di carboni che attesta la fine violenta dell'edificio in cui erano contenute, il Nomophylakion... in seguito a un incendio” (p. 39). They were sealing papyrus documents, the equivalent of fine clay casts.

5-6. Țeposu-David 1960, no. 16, 528, Plate 1/10. Red carnelian, 13 × 9 mm, no. 17, 529, Plate 1/11, similar, more cursory work, red glass paste, 14.5 × 11.2. Date 2nd-3rd c. (datation by F. Rausa in LIMC 144), both from Micia. (The author also references a parallel in Stanislaw Kurnatowski, Gemma rzymska, znaleziona na zamku średniowiecznym w miejscowości Międzyrzecz Wielkopolski, in *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*, vol. 23, part 3, Warsaw, 1956, pl. XXVI - *non vidimus*).

7-8. Ignjatović 2017, cat. nos. 164 and 179, 110 (illustration) and 112 (description) (see our Fig. 10). Date: 2nd - 3rd c. In Belgrade. For. cat. no. 179, „discovered in 1969 in Kalemegdan, near Dizdar's gate... Fortuna wears a polos and holds a palm tree branch... discovered within



Fig. 9. Gem from Porter 2011, no. 364, 84, our corpus no. 1.



Fig. 10. Gem from Ignjatović 2017, cat. 164, Fig. 110 (illustration), our corpus no. 7.

disturbed archaeological layers, but it, without doubt, belongs to the layer associated with the earlier military camp in Kalemegdan, i.e. the period between first decades of the 2nd and the end of the 3rd c.” Type of stone not indicated, likely carnelian. Fortuna on the left.



Fig. 11. Gem from Marsden 2011, Fig. 2, p. 428, our corpus no. 10.

9. Nardelli 2005, Fig. 11 at p. 241. Green jasper. 12.6 × 10.5 × 2.3. Venice Arch. Mus.

10. Marsden 2011, Fig. 2, p. 428, 16 × 12.5, Severan in date. Norwich Castle Museum, “reasonably certain that it was found with a metal detector in the vicinity of Caistor St Edmund in Norfolk, the Roman settlement of *Venta Icenorum*”. Clear, bright orange carnelian. Fortuna facing away from Victoria. Both figures on groundline. Our Fig. 11.

11. Gesztelyi 2000, no. 137, p. 60, ill. 137, 14 × 12, 2nd c. Brigetio (but also “Fundort unbekannt”). Off-white carnelian.

12. Tudor 1967, no. 14, p. 213, Fig. 2 no. 13 (*sic*). 12 × 15, date: 2nd-3rd c. (p. 225). From Romula. Gray jasper. Rudder considered doubtful/hardly visible.

13-16. Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978 (four pieces in The Hague). Cat. no. 676, p. 256, 15 × 12.5 × 4.5, 2nd c. Red carnelian ringstone. Cat. no. 832., p. 291, 13 × 12 × 2, 1st-2nd c. Orange-red carnelian ringstone. Cat. no. 831, p. 291, 11.5 × 11 × 2, 1st-2nd c. Cat. no. 878, p. 302, 12 × 10 × 2.5, 2nd-3rd c. Dark red carnelian ringstone.

17. Spier 1992, cat. no. 370, p. 136, image above description. 19.7 × 13.6 × 3.6, 1st-2nd c., Getty Museum. Mottled jasper, red with inclusions of gray chalcedony. (The author also references another analogy in M. Henig and M. Whiting, *Engraved Gems from Gadara in Jordan: The Sa'd Collection of Intaglios and Cameos* (Oxford, 1987) no. 124 - *non vidimus*).

18. Henig 2007, cat. no. 305, pp 128-129 Plate X, ill. 305. 16 × 12 mm. Alcester, Warwickshire. Victoria with chiton with overfold. Carnelian. (The author references as a parallel a gem in Leiden, Rijksmuseum u. 1931/2. 46 - *non vidimus*).





Fig. 12. Gem from Gavrilović Vitas 2021, p. 176, shown in Fig. 12 a, our corpus no. 20.

19. Casal García 1991, cat. no. 310, p. 148, $13 \times 11 \times 3$, 1st c., in Madrid. Reddish carnelian.

20. Gavrilović Vitas 2021, no catalogue number, described at p. 176, shown in Fig. 12 a. Type of stone not indicated, appears to be orange-red carnelian with dark (hematite?) grains. From Ritopek. (At p. 175 the author mentions briefly „one gem from Veliko Gradište and two gems of unknown provenience” (unillustrated) with the same iconography, referencing an unpublished PhD Diss. of Ivana Kuzmanović Novović (2005), 272–274, T. XXIII - *non vidimus*). Our Fig. 12.



Fig. 13. Gem from Gołyźniak 2020, cat. no. 41, p. 85, our corpus no. 24.

21. Henkel 1913, cat. no. 1507, Pl. 75, 118. End of 1st c. From Rhineland.

22. Richter 1956, cat. no. 360, p. 83, Pl. 46/360. Major axis - 15 mm. Not dated. Nike wearing a chiton with overfold. Groundline under each figure. Red jasper.

23. Furtwängler 1896, cat. no. 2571, p. 120, Pl. 23, ill. 2571. Carnelian.

24. Gołyźniak 2020, cat. no. 41, p. 85 with ill, $15.8 \times 12 \times 3$, 2nd c. In Tbilisi. Red carnelian ringstone. Victory dressed in a peplos. Fortuna wearing laurel wreath. (The author also references two similar gems in M.N. Lordkipanidze *Sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo muzeumis gemebi* [Gems of the National Museum of Georgia] 1954–1967 vol. I, nos. 14 and 19 - *non vidimus*). Our Fig. 13.

25-26. Hamburger 1968, cat. no. 65-66, p. 10; ill. 65, 66. 2nd-3rd c. From Caesarea Maritima. Nike crowning Fortuna-Isis-Tyche. Type of stone not indicated.

27. Dimitrova-Milčeva 1980, cat. no. 82. $14 \times 11 \times 3$ mm. 1st.-2nd. c., in Sofia, from Novae (chance find). Isis-Fortuna half turned to right, tiller head to the right of the



Fig. 14. Gem from Brandt *et alii* 1972, cat. no. 2919, ill. T283, 2919 a-b, our corpus no. 38, photo by C. A. Faraone at <https://phoinixplatform.org/object/4311/?fs=search&fp=1964>.

body, rudder blade appears to the left. Victoria has one foot on a globe. (The author also references the catalog by T. Kibaltchitch, *Gemmes de la Russie méridionale*, 1910, IX 280 - *non vidimus*.)

28-32 Sena Chiesa 1966, cat. no. 629-633, p. 245 - 246, Pl. 32. Cursory work, 2nd-3rd c. Some of the from the same workshop. In Aquileia. Cat. no. 629, 12 × 10. Carnelian. Cat. no. 630, 13 × 11, dark green jasper. Both goddesses with *kalathos*. Cat. no. 631., 17 × 13, carnelian. Cat. no 632, 18 × 15, onyx, „expressive in the elongated and lively figures.” Cat. no. 633, 12 × 11, carnelian.

33. Napolitano 1950, cat. no. 38, same workshop in Aquileia as Sena Chiesa 629.

34-35. V. Scherf *et alii* 1970, cat. no. 111, p. 37, Pl. 14, 2nd-3rd c. In Braunschweig. Calcedony (= LIMC 144). Cat. no. 162, p. 97, Pl. 42, 1st c. BCE-1st c. AD. Glass paste, Göttingen Univ. (= LIMC 143). Fortuna with globe.

36. Mandrioli Bizzarri 1987, cat. no 180, ill. 180, 10.5 × 9.6 × 2.3, 3rd c. In Bologna. Orange carnelian. *Tyche-Fortuna* with rudder horizontally behind her. Cat. no 180, ill. 180, 13.4 × 11.9 × 1.9, 3rd-4th c. In Bologna. Rock crystal. *Tyche-Fortuna* with a modius or the flower of Isis, rudder placed horizontally behind her body, „hair and drapery represented by dense parallel lines, recalling the style of Sasanian intaglios.”

37. Fossing 1929, 225, Pl. 19, 1666, 3rd-4th c., Thorvaldsen Museum. Glass paste.

38. Brandt *et alii* 1972 (AGDS I.3), cat. no. 2919, ill. T283, 2919 a-b, 12.7 × 9.7 × 1.9, 3rd-5th. c AD. Banded onyx (blue-white) in Munich. Isis-Tyche crowned with *kalathos* and stalks of grain on the left. Nike with palm branch in left hand. Each on their own groundline. On the reverse, inscribed *Ιάω* and unidentified signs. Our Fig. 14.

39. Spier 2013, cat. no. 750, p. 136, Plate 105, Cat No. 750 a and b. 11.3 × 11.1 × 2.2., 3rd-6th c., said to be from Israel, private collection. Cornelian, stained white. Nike crowns Tyche on one side, engraved in the 2nd c. (?), while

the other side was later reused to engrave „a horse graz[ing] left, XAPIC below, within linear border.” Our Fig. 15.³⁰

3.3. The inscription

Inscribed roman gems are rare, fewer than 1 in 20, on a sample of over ten thousand intaglios analyzed by Guiraud/Roulière-Lambert 1995. Campbell Bonner has summarized in his classical work on magical amulets the views on gem inscriptions as acclamations which, when coming in one-word form (ZOH, XAPIC, XARA...), are little more than a wish for good luck. They nevertheless retain some apotropaic character and express some underlying religious conviction, generally typical for an Oriental mentality (Bonner 1950, 174-177; further for Oriental, particularly Syrian, origin, Gradwohl 2012, Mouterde 1930, 72; for wishes on gems in general, Richter 1956, 250).³¹ This makes it clear that the interpretation of our inscribed gem must proceed from its function as a talisman or amulet.³² Given its iconography, it therefore instantly becomes apparent that the gem embeds a number of contradictions between public and private; sacred and secular; official and personal; political and social.

A more reliable sense of what the inscription ZOH signifies (whether „ζωή”, „life” or even „ζώη”, „may he/she live”) can be inferred by perusing the corpus of Spier 2013. Most prominent here is his cat. no. 1, p. 18. (third quarter of the 3rd c.), a banded agate intaglio, 31 × 24.5 in KM Vienna, with busts of a man, woman and child. The inscription reads „good luck to Pancharios with the lady Basilissa and Paulina”; between the heads, the wish ZOH, „life”; below, acclamation IC ΘΕ-OC, „(there is) one God”. This illustrates the ambiguity between the traditional pagan wish of life to the family, and the Christian undertones (also Aubry 2012, 243; already Furtwängler, „wohl christlich”). The other example is Spier’s cat. no. 748, a cornelian cameo in Paris (perhaps associated with marriage) inscribed with three good wishes for the wearer, XAP/ IC/ ZOH/ ΥΓΙΑ, therefore placing „life” between „grace” and „health” (Bonner 1950, 177).

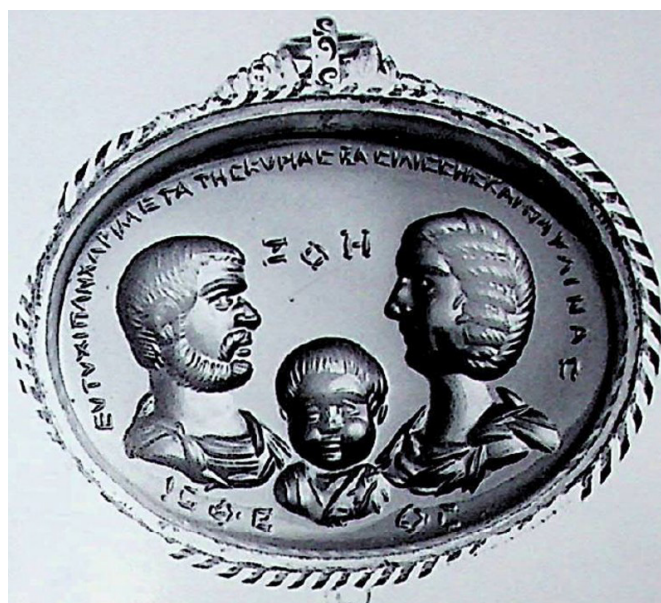


Fig. 15. Gem from Spier 2013, cat. no. 750, p. 136, Plate 105, our corpus no. 39.

³⁰ We have eschewed the inclusion in this corpus of gems with Victoria crowning Fortuna that are patently different from ours. It is worth, however, mentioning here four such types from the British Museum: Walters 1926, cat. no. 1759, p. 188, Plate 23. 12 × 9. Plasma. “Tyche of Antioch seated on a rock in profile to r., holding out two ears of corn and poppy in r. hand ; she wears a mural crown.... Below her is a half-figure of Orontes to front, swimming...; on the l. a small draped figure of Victory flies up, with palm-branch in l. hand, offering a wreath to Tyche.” Cat. no 3070, Paste imitating amethyst, 14 × 11, „Fortuna (?)... with cornucopia in l. hand, holding out in r. a draped figure of Victory holding wreath; at her feet, a modius containing ears of corn; on the r., part of a cargo-boat is visible.” Cat. nos. 1665 and no. 3025 (the latter inscribed XAPA - joy), both show Victory holding crown and Fortuna on either side of the radiated head of Helios, or of his head confronting the head of Selene, respectively. Finally, Smith, Murray 1888, cat. no. 1191, plasma (?), „Fortune, draped, standing to front, caduceus and ears of corn in r. hand, two cornucopias in l.; at her feet, two quadrupeds and a rudder; a diminutive Victory places wreath on her head”.

³¹ Alexandria is often invoked as the origin of such pieces, not without reason, but this often turns out to be just the comfortable go-to option, when in fact we know little about the gems’ geographic provenance, NAGY 2011, 75-81, esp. 77; see also the reservations of GORDON 2011 as to the Alexandrian origin. Regarding inscriptions on intaglios, with statistical observations on their nature, content, and language, see the considerations of RAUX/POMARÉDES 2015, 169–171, notes 5–10, Figs. 11–12.

³² ISVORANU/ACHIM 2018-2019, 212 “objet personnel de type porte-bonheur”. Dembski’s interpretation as “Liebeszauber” based on ZOH (his cat. no. 1243, at p. 174) seems excessive, see context in PAVEL 2022, 63-86.

Now, XAPIC inscriptions can also straddle the two worlds, see Spier's no. 721, a sardonyx (?) with two fish and anchor, inscribed H XAPIC, no. 749, a cornelian showing, within a wreath, the letters ΘΥ XA/ PIC EY/ TYXOC/ ΦΟΠΙ, „Grace of God, good luck to the bearer”, and particularly Spier cat. no. 750, with a horse grazing inscribed XAPIC on an older piece with Nike and Fortuna (note that the grazing horse is very similar to the one on a Christian piece in London BM, Spier cat. no. 739, with a cross and the inscription „Lord, help Ioulianos”). This makes clear that the invocation „life” operated as a shared cultural idiom, intelligible and effective in both pagan and Christian contexts. Also note that Walters cat. nos. 1665 and 3025 associate the inscription XAPA (joy) with Nike and Tyche.

Spier (2013, 137; cf. Aubry 2012, 240) has underlined that this is also valid for the more active acclamation ζήσας, the equivalent of Lat. *vivas*, found mainly on text-cameos, used in the 3rd c. by both pagans and Christians alike - in the case of the latter, often with the addition ἐν Θεῷ or *in Deo*, see the sardonyx cameo in Spier's catalogue, no. 737, inscribed ΗΡΑΚΛΙΤΟC ΖΗCΕC ΕΝ ΘΕΟ (cf. no. 736, sardonyx, ΜΑΡΙΑ/ ΖΗCΑΙC/ ΠΟΛΛΟΙC/ ΕΤΕCΙΝ.) All of these mirror a similar Latin usage on Christian gems, as illustrated in Spier's cat. no. 172 („Deusdedit, *vivas in Deo*” - a common Christian formula in the 4th c.), with chi-rho monogram and a wreath.³³ The inscription ZOH is attested in Scythia during the 4th c. on pottery vessels, e.g. on the body of a ceramic vessel from Tomis (unknown findspot) in the collections of the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța, to which E. Popescu assigned a funerary function (IGLR 58). More significant is a series of three jugs decorated with grooves found in Late Roman tombs from Callatis, with the incision ZOH in the shoulder area³⁴. In these instances, the Christian meaning of ZOH, although probable, has not been demonstrated archaeologically. In fact, the inscription may have made perfect sense, for different reasons, to both pagans and Christians. ZOH will later acquire a markedly Christian meaning as part of the ΦΟC ΖΟΗ formula, attested in Scythia during the 5th-6th c. on e.g. the fragmentary marble crosses nowadays in the collections of the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology (IGLR 49a-b, 50). It will continue to feature amply on artefacts elsewhere in the Eastern Christian world, e.g. on silver rings produced in Byzantines and imported by Crimean Goths in the second half of the 7th c. (Chajredinova 2019).

³³ Well-attested variants are V, VI, VIBAS, VIBAS IN CRISTO, VITA XPS, VIV, VIVA IN [chi-rho], VIVAS, VIVAS IN, VIVAS IN DEO, VIVAS TVIS, VIVATIS, see e.g. SPIER's cat nos. 52, 54, 55, 57, 59, 754-756; other examples in DALTON 1901 cat. no. 12-15, 54, 605 inscribed ΥΓ //// ΤΑ VIVE VIVAS ΠΙΕ ΖΕΣΕC, 636 with busts of St. Peter and St. Paul and Christ and inscribed ΒΙCΥΛΙV C ΔΙΓΝ(ΙΤΑC ΑΜ)ΙCΟΡΟΜ VIVAS ΠΙΕ ΖΕCΕC, and 713 inscribed ΗΡΕΝΝΙΑ ΠΟΡ VIVAS ΙΝ [chi-rho]). Closer to Capidava, GRAMATOPOL 1982, 257 mentions a sardonyx 16/117 from Tomis with VITA MEA between ivy leaves.

³⁴ Tomb 122/ Trench XI, 1966, Roman-Byzantine necropolis (PREDA 1980, 95, M. 122, Pl. X, LXIV/M.122.2, dated by coins to Aurelian's reign); tomb 174/Trench XIII, 1967, Roman-Byzantine necropolis (PREDA 1980, 99, M. 174, Pl. LXIX, M. 174.2, date not available); Hypogeal tomb /M2, Oituz street, Trench S1, 1996-2003 seasons, fragmentary jug decorated with grooves from a tomb dated by a coin from Licinius to the first half of the 4th c., further examples from Constantinian period (ALEXANDRU/ CONSTANTIN/IONESCU 2018).

Now, a Victoria-Fortuna gem is utterly pagan in form and meaning; however, it may have been perceived by its wearer as crypto-Christian, or as Christianized, due to the ambiguous inscription and perhaps other hidden clues. One such clue may come from focusing on the rudder - the truly specific attribute of Fortuna, more so than the cornucopia or the mural crown, in the sense that cornucopia, although her most frequent attribute, can also belong to the paraphernalia of other divinities as well. Indeed, there is a formal similarity of the tiller head-*cum*-rudder blade ensemble to the chi-rho monogram³⁵.

The only potential association of Nike, Fortuna and a „life” inscription so far was described by Cravinho 2017, cat. no. 29, p. 196, Plate 3, no. 29 (our Fig. 16). This is a 2nd c. green and red jasper (heliotrope), with a winged syncretic goddess combining, among others, attributes of Victoria and Fortuna (wing; rudder): „below, the letters I (on the left) and Z (on the right)... the inscription IZ, the equivalent to HZ (the negative form of ZH), an abbreviation of the Greek word ΖΗCΑΙC”. This, however, remains speculative.



Fig. 16. Gem from Cravinho 2017, cat. no. 29, p. 196, Plate 3, no. 29.

ZOH inscriptions on gems are exceedingly rare. Gradvohl 2012, 439-447, Figs. 1-3 (see our Fig. 17) describes a pendant made of glass paste and lead/pewter and a glass cameo illustrating frogs and inscribed ZOH and ZOHN (generally produced in Syria). They were found in proper stratigraphic excavations in Pannonia, in Late Roman graves securely dated with coins. She interprets them as health preserving amulets, or, where accompanying two busts (man

³⁵ As far as we are aware, this has not yet been suggested in the scholarly literature. NARDELLI 2005 has noted the funerary connotations of the rudder.



Fig. 17. Glass paste pendant from Gradwohl 2012 , Fig. 1, p. 441.

and woman), as alluding to marriage. In turn, Dembski 2005 records in his comprehensive catalogue two text-only gems from Carnuntum with the inscription ZOH. The first is his cat. no 1243, p. 174, a white/red-brown banded sardonyx in ancient gold ring, with a one-line ZOH inscription within a raised border, 2nd-3rd c., private collection (CIGP 26, there with different dimensions). Dembski describes this inscription as „probably the invocation of the desired power, therefore certainly also a kind of erotic spell” (*Liebeszauber*). His cat. no. 1130, p. 164 (our Fig. 18) is a carnelian, rust-red with dark fleck, with ZOH ”in Dreiecksform angebrachte griechische Buchstaben”, *Mus. Carnuntinum* 17.960, 3rd-4th c. (CIGP 31, there with the less likely date 2nd-3rd c.).³⁶ The form of these letters shows substantial affinity with those on the Capidava gem.

It is likely that the iconography of our scene is inspired by similar scenes on coins from Hadrian onwards; scholars have indeed spoken of a „stylistic interpenetration between coins and gemstones” (Aubry, 2012, 245)³⁷. In the Orient, influential must have been the coins minted through the reigns of Commodus and Caracalla, although many of them have a somewhat different design, where a diminutive Nike is standing on a column and crowns Tyche. They were in any case abundant; „over the course of Elagabalus’ reign, Edessa produced at least eight different issues with Nike crowning Tyche” (Dandrow 2021, 116)³⁸. It is true that none of the 44 coins in the hoard associated with the Capidava gem show Victoria or Fortuna, but this does not invalidate the theory that in general this type design may have been based on coins.

The Greek inscription and the Oriental style of the artifact are clearly interesting in a fort on the Danube. We must bear in mind that, throughout the 3rd and 4th c., in

³⁶ For further three-letter inscriptions on gems, DEMBSKI 2005, 163, cat. nos. 1114, 1115, 1119. Fortuna with three-lettered inscriptions, GRAMATOPOL 1974, cat. no. 321 reading MNU, cat. no. 105 reading ADP. Three-letter inscriptions are possibly abbreviations of *tria nomina*, GRAMATOPOL 1982, 206.

³⁷ Further on the influence of coins on gem iconography, GAVRILOVIĆ VITAS 2021; TUDOR 1967; RAUSA 1997 under LIMC cat. no. 148 (illustrated, Fortuna with Victoria in hand).

³⁸ HAMBURGER 1968, 10 references Phoenician coins minted in Ptolemais (Akko) by Septimius Severus, Elagabalus, and Valerian.



Fig. 18. Gem from Dembski 2005 His cat. no. 1130, p. 164, Pl. 116, 1130.

an environment that is predominantly Latin-speaking, two epigraphic mentions from Capidava demonstrate the presence there of Greek speakers, Valerius (IGLR 222) and Lucinus (IGLR 225), while a third inscription on a shell limestone slab, retrieved from Tower 1, still retains a few Greek letters (IGLR 224). Such written testimonies demonstrate the occasional presence of Hellenophones in Capidava, albeit without informing us whether they were in the military or not. The epigraphic evidence further shows that, between the 2nd and the 4th centuries, quite a few Greek-Oriental individuals—or bearers of Greek names—are mentioned in six inscriptions, most of them funerary, erected at Capidava and written in Latin. They are Caius Iulius Hermes and his wife, Iulia Rhodope (first half of the 2nd c. – ISM V, 25); Cocceius Helius (2nd c. – ISM V, 29 and 30); Euticus, a slave employed in the customs service at Capidava (2nd c. – ISM V, 45); Aurelius Hermes and his wife, Aurelia Melite (3rd c. – ISM V, 42); and Trygitianus, the Romanized form of the Greek name Trygius (3rd-4th c. – ISM V, 43).



Fig. 19. Gem from Mouterde 1930, 72, Fig. 7.

Two final observations are in order. First, in such gem inscriptions, Zoe is likely to never have represented an actual proper name; Dosoo 2024, 106 argues that even in Egyptian magical texts, Zoe „does not seem to represent a real name, but rather a placeholder for an unnamed mother”, a symbol for the mother of mankind. Second, and more importantly, the inscription ZOH, ζώή, should perhaps in the future be analyzed in closer connection to IAW, Ἰάω. It is not impossible that the unusual character of the Capidava gem may owe something to the craftsman's / owner's reflex familiarity with the divine name on gnostic gems and magical amulets. They are, in fact, occasionally juxtaposed, as on a Syrian onyx, around 200 AD, where the inscription names „Iao, Lord of all things”, and the last two lines read, again, IAW and then ZOH (of which all three letters with bulb-tipped strokes) (Mouterde 1930, 72-74, Fig. 7; our Fig. 19). Crucially, we have seen that Brandt *et alii* 1972, 2919 (=AGDS) (our Fig. 14) has a Nike crowning Tyche scene with IAW on the reverse.³⁹

In conclusion, the gem described in this paper is exceptional in that it is one of the very few gems with a well-documented archaeological provenance (the thoroughly published rescue excavations in Capidava in 2015), and the only one inscribed ZOH („ζωή”/ „ζώη”) in connection with the Victoria-Fortuna iconography, for which we present an exhaustive corpus. The Capidava cornelian intaglio offers tantalizing glimpses into how Classical iconography, Late Roman theological and magical formulae, and the early Christian and Gnostic language of „life” were parts of the same mental continuum. Greek-speaking soldiers of Oriental origin or civilians in Capidava may well have been sensitive to the way this gem straddled both pagan and Christian piety, and imperial propaganda.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FIUB

Faculty of History, University of Bucharest.

IFIN-HH

“Horia Hulubei” National Institute for Research and Development in Physics and Nuclear Engineering.

³⁹ On jasper gems with the Anguipes in the Campbell Bonner database we see a round shield where IAW is inscribed on two lines, just like the ZOH on the Capidava gem, W/AI, or IA/W respectively (CBd-3780 in Liverpool and CBd, no. 2357 in the Getty Mus.).

IAVP

Institutul “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology I de Arheologie “Vasile Pârvan” din București.

UPB-CNMN

Politehnica University of Bucharest, National Center for Micro- and Nanomaterials.

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