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**An Intaglio from Frocester Court, Gloucestershire**

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## Notes

### AN INTAGLIO FROM FROCESTER COURT, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

During excavations at Frocester Court in 1996 a cornelian intaglio (Fig. 1) was discovered in dark soil over a stone floor laid around A.D. 200. The stone gem is orange in colour with bevelled edges and a maximum dimension of 12 by 11 mm across; the slightly convex upper face measures 10 by 8 mm. The gem is 4 mm thick and it would have stood proud of its setting, a feature common to 3rd-century rings.<sup>1</sup>

The figure portrayed is apparently the Roman goddess Fortuna holding in her left hand (gem described) a cornucopia. In the other hand she probably holds the handle of a rudder and an ear of corn, both regular attributes of the goddess,<sup>2</sup> but it is possible that a leafy branch is represented, like that sometimes carried by Nemesis, goddess of fate. The closest British parallel to this feature is on a cornelian intaglio from a 4th-century context at Catsgore near Somerton (Somerset), which depicts a goddess (who looks like Minerva) holding a sceptre in one hand and a similar branch in the other.<sup>3</sup> On most gems showing Fortuna the portrayal of the goddess and her attributes is the reverse of that displayed on the Frocester stone. In addition the lack of a ground line is unusual.



Fig. 1. Cornelian intaglio from Frocester Court (R. Wilkins).

The gem is coarsely cut with thick grooves for the body and cornucopia in a manner described by Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink as ‘Incoherent Grooves style’. The style perhaps begins as early as the Antonine period but is especially characteristic of the 3rd century, when the art of gem engraving was in decline.<sup>4</sup> The Frocester gem was probably cut around the middle of the century. It is closely paralleled by intaglios from Caesarea Maritima, Israel, and Uum Qeis (Gadara), Jordan, which also show the goddess facing left.<sup>5</sup>

Good fortune in the face of uncertain weather and uncertain markets was of vital concern to countrymen in Roman times as it is now. The Frocester intaglio is certainly an appropriate find on a villa site. It may be noted that the hoard of mid 2nd-century gems recently found near Snettisham (Norfolk) included fourteen showing Fortuna (ten with cornucopia and patera and four with cornucopia and rudder). Other popular rural deities represented in the hoard were Ceres and her male counterpart Bonus Eventus (respectively twenty and twenty seven intaglios).<sup>6</sup>

The Frocester stone apparently provides the only known representation of Fortuna on an intaglio found in Gloucestershire. She is depicted in sculpture from Cirencester, Gloucester, the temple site at Lydney, and the rural settlement at Kingscote. There is also a relief of uncertain provenance in Gloucester City Museum.<sup>7</sup>

### *Acknowledgements*

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### *Notes*

1. M. Henig, *A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites* (BAR British Ser. 8, 1978), 35 fig. 1 A6. For probable setting, *ibid.* plates xlv (no. 417) and lxx (no. App. 177).
2. *Ibid.* plate x (nos. 322–3); E. Zwierlein-Diehl, *Die Antiken Gemmen des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien 2* (Munich, 1979), nos. 1545–52.
3. M. Henig, *Roman Engraved Gemstones*, plates xxix (no. App. 144) and xxvi (no. App. 73).
4. M. Maaskant-Kleibrink, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems in the Royal Coin Cabinet, The Hague: the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Collections* (The Hague, 1978), 326–45.
5. A. Hamburger, 'Gems from Caesarea Maritima', *Atiqot* 8 (1968), plate iv (no. 74); M. Henig and M. Whiting, *Engraved Gems from Gadara in Jordan: the Sa'd Collection of Intaglios and Cameos* (Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 6, 1987), no. 107. See also Zwierlein-Diehl, *Die Antiken Gemmen 2*, no. 1552, Fortuna facing right but style similar and ascribed to the 3rd century.
6. M. Henig, 'The iconography of the engraved stones', in C. Johns, *The Snettisham Roman Jeweller's Hoard* (London, 1997), 20–4.
7. M. Henig, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Great Britain. I fasc. 7 Roman Sculpture from the Cotswold Region* (British Academy, Oxford, 1993), nos. 24–6, 29–31, 80.

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## A RELIEF OF A *MATER* AND THREE *GENII* FROM STRATTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

A Roman sculptured relief has been discovered in a garden in Stratton, near Cirencester, within 100 m of the line of Ermin Street and c. 1 km from the site of the villa or temple at Daglingworth (RCHME 1976, 41). Although found buried amongst a quantity of walling stone, the relief is likely to have been used in fairly recent times to ornament a garden, many blocks of crystals and an ammonite having been recovered in the same area. The finder, an amateur archaeologist, recognized the Roman origin of the relief and passed it to Neil Holbrook of Cotswold Archaeological Trust who, subsequently, brought it to the attention of the author of this note.