Reuse Value

Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture
from Constantine to Sherrie Levine

Edited by Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney

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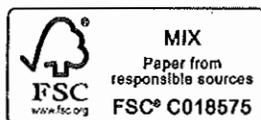
Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-mades

Dale Kinney

Just an inch high, the intensely blue head of lapis lazuli overpowers the shiny gilded body of a small bronze crucifix (Fig. 5.1).[1] The body was made in the eleventh century; the head is at least a millennium older and is, moreover, female. The combination is unsettling, or as Hans Wentzel once wrote, "off-putting" (*befremdlich*).[2] To his contemporary Richard Hamann-MacLean, however, the dramatic setting of an antique gem in a contemporary Christian artifact was a defining example of the effective medieval cult object: "Strangeness and inviolable clarity of form work together to give the whole an incomparable radiance and mystery."[3]

Hamann-MacLean included the crucifix in a much larger study of the persistence of classical antiquity in medieval art as an example of *spolia*, defined as the reuse or continued use (*Wieder- oder Weiterbenutzung*) of antique buildings or objects. In 1950, the study of *spolia* was a little-noticed by-way of art history, however, and the crucifix remained "more a curiosity than an artwork" for several decades.[4] Hermann Schnitzler's 1957 picture book of "Rhenish Treasuries" did not illustrate the crucifix, but only the other side of the cross to which the three-dimensional figure is attached (Fig. 5.2). This side is unproblematic and also historically useful, as its copper revetment is incised with inscriptions and the images of Archbishop Herimann of Cologne (1036–56) and Ida, his sister, who

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1   Kolumba. Kunstmuseum des Erzbistums Köln, Inv. Nr. H11. For a color reproduction see Surmann, *Das Kreuz Herimanns und Idas*, p. 3. I am grateful to Dr. Surmann for kindly making it possible for me to see the Cross in 2007, while the museum was closed awaiting relocation.

2   Wentzel, "Mittelalterliche Gemmen", p. 49.

3   Hamann-MacLean, "Antikenstudium", p. 166.

4   Klessmann and Klessmann, "Zum Stil des Herimannkreuzes", p. 9; cf. Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia".

Fig. 5.1   Herimann's Cross, front side
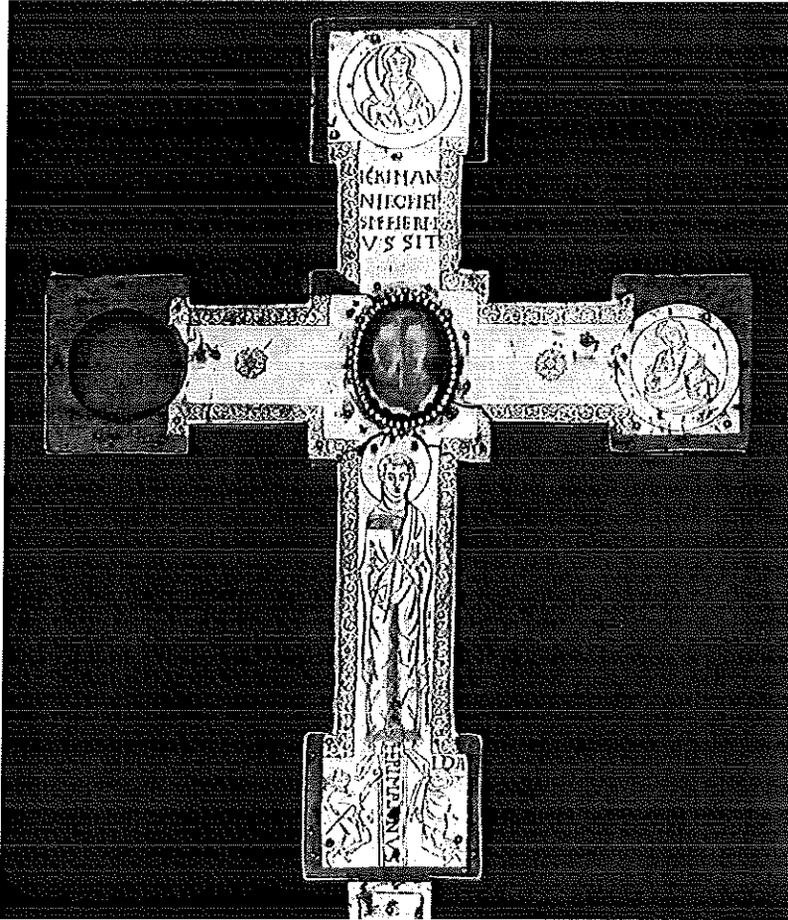
Fig. 5.2   Herimann's Cross, as depicted in H. Schnitzler, *Rheinische Schatzkammer*
(*Tafelband*, pl. 68)

was abbess of the women's foundation of St. Maria im Kapitol. It is because of
the verso that the entire ensemble is generally known as "the Herimann Cross"
or, more recently, "the Cross of Herimann and Ida".

Herimann's Cross is unique. As a case study, however, it raises the same
issues as other ancient figured gems in medieval settings, including trajectory,
conversion, *interpretatio christiana*, use or reuse?, and appropriation. These are
the rubrics of this essay. My purpose is not to explain Cross of Herimann, but
to use the history of its interpretation to think about the status of gems in the
discourse of medieval reuse.

The Cross

Herimann's Cross began to emerge as an object of art historical interest with the "Rhine and Meuse" exhibition of 1972. Respecting the division of expertise described here by Arnold Esch (Chapter 1), the catalogue contained two separate studies of it, one by an archaeologist on the date and identity of the cameo, and one by an art historian on the medieval significance of the cross as a whole.[5] The cameo (Fig. 5.3) – now generally agreed to be an imperial portrait rather than an image of Venus as was believed when Wentzel and Hamann-MacLean were writing – continues to have its own literature, as archaeologists debate whether the features are of Livia (d. 29 CE), Livilla (d. 31), or Antonia the Younger (d. 37); whether it was made as a fully rounded head or a relief; and whether its original use was to be held, worn, or set into a larger object.[6] This is a separate field of inquiry from the art historical study of the body, which seeks to localize the production of the medieval composite, to understand how it came to be made and how its curious amalgam of elements was perceived.

The art historical explanation of the 1970s used the traditional tools of style, iconography, and historical context to craft a unified account of the object as we have it today: a wooden *Krückenkreuz* (a cross with boxes at the ends of the arms) of a size (33.3 X 28 cm.) and with the fittings (albeit modern) to be carried in processions, having on its front the crucifix and on the rear, in addition to the engravings already mentioned, an inscription stating "Herimann the Archbishop ordered that I be made" (HERIMANN ARCHIEPS ME FIERI IVSSIT); two busts in roundels, thought to represent Virtues; and an oval rock crystal covering a recess for relics. The style of the body of Christ and of the engravings pointed to their manufacture in the abbey at Werden, near Essen where Herimann's and Ida's sister Theophanu (d. 1058) was abbess. The feminine face of the cameo recalled the early Christian iconography of the youthful Christ, which made its placement on the crucifix justifiable but did not fully explain it. The stone must have been of special significance to the donors, and since Herimann and Ida were quasi-royals – children of Mathilde, the daughter of Emperor Otto II and the Byzantine imperial niece Theophanu – the gem could have been a family heirloom. The images of Ida and an orant female identified as the Virgin Mary on the verso of the cross suggested that Herimann had it made for Ida's convent church of St. Maria im Kapitol. The Cross Altar of St. Maria im Kapitol was dedicated by Pope Leo IX on 5 July 1049, and Herimann's gift could have been made for that altar and/or for that event.[7]

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5   Bracker-Wester, "Der Christuskopf vom Herimannkreuz"; Wesenberg, "Das Herimannkreuz".

6   Bracker-Wester, "Der Christuskopf vom Herimannkreuz" (Livia); Megow, *Kameen*, p. 289 No. D4 (Antonia minor); Zwierlein-Diehl, "Das Lapislazuli-Köpfchen" (Livilla).

7   Wesenberg, "Das Herimannkreuz".

Fig. 5.3   Herimann's Cross, detail

The unacknowledged (and perhaps unintended) effect of this account was
to assimilate the crucifix to the standard interpretation of the reused reliefs on
the Arch of Constantine, brilliantly analyzed in this volume by Paolo Liverani
(Chapter 2). In both cases, a contemporary image – the portrait of Constantine
on the arch, the *corpus* of the crucifix – was made to fit an older artifact, and the
joining creates a unified, if oddly doubled representation that ennobles its subject
by investing it with the aura of the reused or appropriated part. In the case of
the crucifix, a relatively modest image of Christ on the cross is transformed
into a memorial of the piety of a noble family by the inclusion of a treasured
possession, which was also an imperial heirloom. Not (just) a representation of
the suffering Savior, the cameo-crucifix is a self-representation of the donors,
without whose participation the presence of the ancient gem is inexplicable.

In the 1970s, art history was unaccustomed to dealing with composite or
disjunctive works of art; they were considered "off-putting". The impetus was
to find a single intention or meaning. In the case of Herimann's Cross, the

successful (because satisfying and plausible) unitary explanation required that the front and back sides of the cross were made together, since without Herimann – who appears only on the verso – the crucifix loses not only its name but its context, the cameo loses its pedigree, and the combination of ancient gem and eleventh-century devotional object is once again reduced to curiosity. In fact, as a more recent study readily admits, there is no guarantee that the crucifix and the revetment have a common origin. The oak cross itself is modern and the incised copper sheets do not exactly fit it; moreover, holes visible on the verso indicate that the crucifix was once nailed to that side, partially covering the engravings.[8] In its present form, the assemblage cannot be traced back farther than the bequest of Johann Anton Friedrich Baudri (d. 1893), suffragan bishop and president of the Christian Art Association for the Archbishopric of Cologne, which founded the archiepiscopal diocesan museum where "Herimann's Cross" is now housed.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the ensemble continues to be considered "Herimann's Cross", and with the rising interest in *spolia* and the multiplication of treasury exhibitions since the 1980s, it is now a celebrity. Recent interpreters tend to exploit features of the cameo that were downplayed in the original interpretation – its color, the portrait features, its age – often to reiterate the same conclusion: as an heirloom of the imperial family, the antique gem represents imperial descent and makes the cross "a document of family solidarity".[9] Seeming to contradict the heirloom theory is material evidence that the cameo was once buried, but Erika Zwierlein-Diehl pointed out that both could be true; the gem could have been buried before it was acquired by Herimann's family.[10] Taking the interpretation in a new direction, Zwierlein-Diehl and Marie-Claire Berkemeier-Favre have demonstrated the susceptibility of the sapphire-blue head to Christian allegorization: it was the color of heaven and thus "a visible expression of the dying Christ's nearness to heaven", possibly also a symbol of his godly nature.[11]

If the art historical explanation seeks to normalize the crucifix by giving it a self-conscious, rational, and clearly definable program, the postmodern discourse of *spolia* points to cultural meanings that were not necessarily so controlled, or even intended. The range of meanings is expanded by the extension of the category "*spolia*" to include anything made before the time of the present setting. Thus Ilene Forsyth's essay on *spolia* in Ottonian liturgical and treasury objects replaces "antiquity" as the reference point for *spolia* with "history", arguing that these objects "evoke broad and deep strata of history" through the inclusion of precious ornaments of Roman, earlier medieval, and Islamic manufacture.

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8   Surmann, *Das Kreuz Herimanns und Idas*, p. 8

9   Beuckers, *Die Ezzonen und ihre Stiftungen*, p. 212.

10   Zwierlein-Diehl, "Das Lapislazuli-Köpfchen am Herimannkreuz", p. 387.

11   Berkemeier-Favre, "Das Schöne ist zeitlos"; Zwierlein-Diehl, "Das Lapislazuli-Köpfchen am Herimannkreuz", p. 393.

In the case of Herimann's Cross, the ancient gem worked in concert with early Christian and Byzantine allusions in the environment of St. Maria im Kapitol to induce "a whole range of references, one building on the other, none limited to Rome alone, and the whole depending for its ultimate meaning on the contemporary as well as the cumulative effect of these associations".[12] Implicitly invoking the literal sense of *spolia*, Forsyth posited a triumphalist message in these accumulations, "a triumph of the whole over its own component parts, the present over its varied past". Karen Rose Mathews' study of the use of *spolia* by King (and future emperor) Henry II (1002–14), which mentions Herimann's Cross in passing, is more inflected by the literature of the social sciences, proposing that as "appropriated objects", *spolia* functioned in the Ottonian economies of cultural and symbolic capital, as treasure and commodities, as well as in the more familiar role of the formation of imperial identity.[13]

Spolia

The use of the word *spolia* to apply to gems is sometimes just a matter of convenience, especially in English, which, unlike Italian (*reimpieghi*), French (*remplois*), and German (*Wiederverwendungen*), has no single word to denote "things that have been reused". Medieval people would have found the usage perplexing. In their lexicon, *spolia* still denoted possessions taken by force, and gems were prime *spolia*. Rival kings and chieftains seized them from one another; Christians took them from Muslims and vice versa; secular powers robbed them from churches and monasteries. In this respect, the Middle Ages was no different from Roman antiquity. According to Pliny, the Roman craze for gemstones began with the processions of *spolia* captured from Hellenistic kingdoms in the first century BCE. A "ring cabinet" (*dactyliothecam*) of King Mithridates VI was offered to Capitoline Jupiter, and Julius Caesar later placed six such cabinets in the Temple of Venus Genetrix.[14] Roman gods liked *spolia*; they were proof of their own efficacy and power. It was a concomitantly grievous offense to despoil them. Cicero described Verres' confiscation of a gemmed lamp-stand intended for the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter as an international disgrace to the Roman people as well as a crime against the god.[15] Not long before the sack of Rome in 410, according to Zosimus, the Christian empress Serena insulted the goddess Cybele by taking a jewel from the neck of her statue. The empress was punished with dreams and visions of death, and ultimately she was strangled.[16]

12 Forsyth, "Art with History", p. 154.
13 Mathews, "Expressing Political Legitimacy".
14 Pliny, *Natural History* 37.5.
15 Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4.27–32.
16 Zosimus, *New History* 5.38.

In a Christian reversal of the story of Serena, Bernard of Angers described the virgin saint Foy torturing her devotees with dreams and visions until they gave her the rings and bracelets she desired.[17] But while Foy might "wrest" (*extorserit*) a ring from a reluctant worshipper, this was not and could not be called spoliation.[18] *Spoliare* was used of pirates, thieves, impious or greedy lords, and sometimes to denote the unfortunate necessity of "stripping" altars and treasuries to fund capital or other expenses. Churches were considered despoiled when rulers confiscated their precious goods for redistribution, as when King Henry II took the goods of "many places" to enrich his foundation at Bamberg, or William Rufus (1087–1100) gave the spoils – reliquaries, crosses, Gospel books, and "ornaments" – of the English church at Waltham to Norman Caen.[19]

Spoliation creates winners and losers. St. Foy's seizure of jewelry was not spoliation because the donors were persuaded that they had gained spiritually in proportion to their material losses; the transactions between them and St. Foy, albeit coerced, were gifts. In the ideological economy of Christian salvation, both parties were enriched by the exchange. In contrast, the community at Waltham felt robbed by the benefactions to the churches of Caen. In the Waltham version of events:

[William Rufus] believed that the spoils of Waltham church would provide sure salvation for the souls of his father and mother lying at rest at Caen, if the altar there were adorned from the other altar at Waltham, dismembered as it were. It was as though the limbs of one's own true son were being cut off and offered as an acceptable and very precious gift to someone else's father.[20]

The objects donated to Caen were gifts (to Waltham) before they were *spolia*, and they were *spolia* before again becoming gifts from William Rufus to Caen. The community at Waltham privileged one moment in this trajectory; Caen privileged another. We might say that both were right, but to medievals, the alternatives were emphatically mutually exclusive.

Trajectory

Trajectories occur within economies. The seminal study by Arjun Appadurai concerned commodities and the trajectories of things into and out of commodity status. Luxury items like gems tend to evade commodification, however; they are "incarnated signs"; "goods whose principal use is rhetorical

17 *The Book of the Miracles of St. Foy* 1.16–22, in *The Book of Sainte Foy*.
18 Robertini (ed.), *Liber miraculorum Sancte Fidis*, p. 121.
19 Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Lateinische Schriftquellen*, vol. 2, p. 594 No. 4485; Feger (ed. and trans.), *Die Chronik des Klosters Petershausen*, pp. 90–91.
20 Watkiss and Chibnall (ed. and trans.), *The Waltham Chronicle*, p. 59.

and social".[21] In the Middle Ages, the trajectories of gems might include gifting, inheritance, spoliation, thesaurization, and entombment. All of these possibilities appear in *Beowulf*, a poem about a Germanic pagan hero written down by a Christian a generation or two before Herimann and Ida were born. To cite just one example, the neck ring given to Beowulf by Wealhtheow is simultaneously a pledge of friendship, a talisman, an heirloom, and a battle spoil (ll. 1191–1214). Beowulf re-gifts the ring to Queen Hygd to wear as an adornment, or so the poet "heard" (ll. 2172–6). Without the poet's hearing, without his voice to narrate them, the histories of such objects, and with them their cumulative metonymic relationships to ancestors, heroes, and allies, would be lost.

The economy of prestige goods is generally the same from one culture to another: as wealth, they facilitate the accrual, distribution, and transmission of power; as representations of wealth, they maintain or assert power through its display. In these fundamental respects, the economy of the archaic pagan world of Beowulf was no different from that of the Christian clerical world of Herimann and Ida; nor was their economy different from that of the more secular world of late Rome, from which many of their prestige objects were inherited.[22] In all of these contexts, the circulation of prestige goods by means of gift, bequest, purchase, theft, or seizure sustained or disrupted social hierarchies, defining and constituting their élites. In all of these economies, gems and gold combined to give the highest material value to prestige items, including dress, jewelry, furniture, vessels, and weapons.

Trajectories take objects from production to consumption. Often the "production pole" is indeterminate, but in the case of figured gems, it is encoded in technical and iconographic features of the imagery.[23] From these features, modern archaeologists can read out the time and place of manufacture of an antique cameo to within a reign or even a decade, as in the case of the blue head of Herimann's Cross. This form of consumption requires knowledge commensurate with that invested in the gem when it was made. In the Middle Ages, the knowledge gap was much greater, even though the temporal distance between production and consumption poles was shorter than it is today. Like some modern inter-cultural consumers, therefore, medieval consumers of ancient cameos tended to mythologize their origins. Both Gervase of Tilbury (d. 1228) and Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) ascribed the production of images on gems to non-manual (psychological or astrological) forces. According to Gervase, the etymology of *capmahu* (cameo) is *caput* (head) + *mahu*, an exclamation of wonder (as in "oh! there's a head!").[24] This

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21 Appadurai, "Introduction", p. 38.

22 Henig, "*Luxuria* and *Decorum*".

23 Production pole: Appadurai, "Introduction", p. 41.

24 Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury* Otia imperialia 3.28; Zwierlein-Diehl, "*Interpretatio christiana*", p. 71.

is not to say that medieval consumers – especially literate ones like Herimann and Ida – did not recognize sardonyx, amethyst, chalcedony, and other stones carved with the images of pagan gods or emperors as Roman. But their Rome was a mythical space where wonders were normal, not the reasoned array of dates and facts it is for us.

Conversion

Within the larger pattern of trajectories, objects may have singular biographies. The stages in these biographies are rarely encoded in the object; they exist in supplements, like the oral traditions of *Beowulf* or the parchment documents that accompanied donations to churches. Biographies added value, placing the contemporary possessor of an heirloom in a genealogy of heroic, saintly, or high-born predecessors, or documenting the origin of a trophy or gift. Gems could have quite eventful biographies. For example, the jewels with which Abbot Suger decorated the great crucifix of Saint-Denis came from two cups owned by King Henry I of England (1100–35), which had been seized by Stephen of Blois with the rest of the king's treasury when the king died. Stephen gave them to his older brother Thibault, Count of Blois and Champagne, who had better claim to the throne; in other words, they were *spolia*, returned to their rightful owner as a bribe. In thanks for a favor, Count Thibault broke up the cups and gave them to Bernard of Clairvaux to sell in order to finance the building of new Cistercian monasteries. Bernard (or his representative) offered them to Abbot Suger, who was known to be in the market for precious ornaments, and Suger was happy to buy them for the very large sum of 400 pounds.[25] According to Christopher Norton, the mechanism of this trajectory was a secular diplomatic negotiation in which both abbots, Bernard and Suger, were involved. Suger represented it very differently, however, as a "delightful but excellent miracle", by which, "giving thanks to God", he acquired a bounty of hyacinths, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and topazes from the treasures of King Henry, "through the hands" of King Stephen, from the alms of Count Thibault. Unlike William Rufus, Suger may have had doubts about God's pleasure in receiving *spolia* from a Christian source, even at two removes.

When they were known, biographies like those of King Henry's gems or the Eleanor Vase, also acquired by Abbot Suger, established mutually beneficial "memorial networks" that ennobled the consumption pole of the trajectory – the final recipient in a chain of bestowals or bequests – and complimented the memory of the donors.[26] It did not always follow that these genealogies

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25   Norton, "Bernard, Suger".
26   Beech, "The Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase"; Buc, "Conversion of Objects".

continued to determine the object's significance. Witness the very large sardonyx cameo with a Roman emperor in the guise of Aesculapius that was given to the abbey of St. Alban by King Ethelred (991–1016), whose name was inscribed on its mount. If given before 1005, it would have been among the "noble carved stones" and gems that Abbot Leofric kept to someday decorate the shrine of St. Alban, when everything else in the treasury was sold to feed the poor during a famine.[27] When it was drawn and described by Matthew Paris in the thirteenth century (Fig. 5.4), however, the cameo was renowned not for this genealogy but for its power to protect women in childbirth. Placed between the breasts of the birthing mother and then moved slowly toward her "nether regions", the gem caused the baby to flee before it, out of the womb.[28] Perhaps its ability to terrorize the unborn child had something to do with its imagery, which Matthew describes as a "ragged man" holding a spear in one hand and a little boy in the other.[29]

Philippe Buc dubbed the endpoint of these biographies – the object's translation from a profane social life into the possession of a church – conversion. Conversion might entail physical transformation, as with the pagan idol melted down to form a chalice or the wine from donated land used for the eucharist, but not necessarily. The gemstones in the rings of King Louis VII, lesser secular lords, archbishops and bishops that were presented to the altar of the Holy Martyrs at Saint-Denis would not have been changed when set into the altar's new frontal, any more than the stones from the bracelets and rings that were relinquished to St. Foy and wound up in the covering of her statue.[30] As Buc defined it, conversion was a political event. It both stood for and produced a relationship of inequality; in its new use, the gift instantiated the acceptance of a hierarchical order in which the ecclesiastical recipient was at the top. As recognized also by the devotees of St. Foy, divine favor required a display of sacrifice to the institution through which it was channeled. The sacrifice would be rewarded with commemorative recommendations, so converted objects were vehicles of memory, whether or not they survived conversion in their original form.

Interpretatio christiana

Conversion is not the same as exorcism, consecration, or *interpretatio christiana*, all of which effected changes to the object. Exorcism is a cleansing ritual, like

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27 Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, p. 108.
28 Wright, "On Antiquarian Excavations", p. 445; Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris*, pp. 45–8.
29 Zwierlein-Diehl, "*Interpretatio christiana*", p. 70.
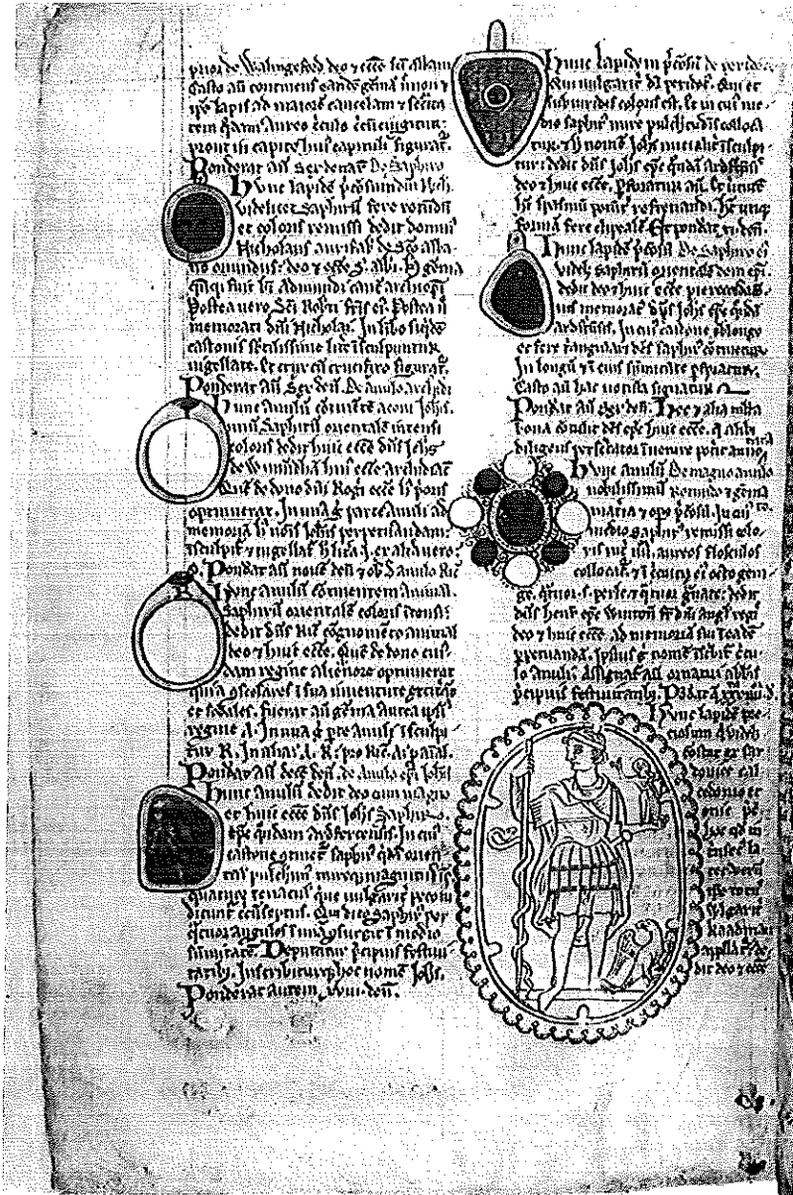30 Panofsky (ed. and trans.), *Abbot Suger*, pp. 106–7.

Fig. 5.4   The cameo of St. Alban's drawn by Matthew Paris

baptism. It was produced by blessing. Several benedictions to be said over "vessels made by the art of the Gentiles" are known, for example:

God, who cleansed all things for the faithful by the coming of your son our Lord, attend propitiously to our prayers, and cleanse also by the abundance of your grace these vessels, which have been taken from the depths of the earth after a span of time by the indulgence of your mercy, and *returned to the uses of men*.[31]

The last phrase should be read against the final episode of *Beowulf*, in which a treasure buried by the last survivor of "a highborn race" is disturbed, first by a common thief, and then by Beowulf himself. Calamity ensues. The hero is slain, and the thanes rebury the ill-omened treasure with him:

They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,
gold under gravel, gone to earth,
as useless to men now as it ever was (ll. 3166–8).

Evidently the hoard was a ritual deposit protected by a religious taboo; it was never again to be used.[32] Violating the taboo unleashed great trouble for the Geats. Exorcism liberated objects from such dangerous spells or habitation by un-Christian spirits, making it possible for Christians to use them without fear of punishment or contamination.

Consecration did the opposite, adding power to objects rather than neutralizing or expelling it. In the description of it by Gervase of Tilbury, the consecration of gems appears to be a Christian rationalization of the ancient belief in the medicinal and other powers of rare stones that went back to the late Hellenistic period. This quasi-scientific, quasi-magical tradition was transmitted through the Middle Ages by a series of treatises "on stones", which was represented in the eleventh century by the *De lapidibus* of Marbode of Rennes, probably composed before 1090.[33] Marbode introduced his work as coming from "Evax", King of Arabia, who wrote it down for Tiberius, the successor of Augustus (ll. 1–2). It was "secret" lore, which Marbode professed to be passing on to "a few friends" (l. 7; since there are 125 surviving manuscripts, the secret must have got out quickly!). Every stone had its own *virtus*, a set of powers that constituted its particular "personality".[34] According to this wisdom, sapphire – as lapis lazuli was known in the eleventh century – is the "gem of gems", "fit only for the fingers of kings"; it fends off treachery and enables its wearer to escape from prison; it also cools the innards and reduces enervating sweat; heals ulcers; and if dissolved in milk clears up

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31   Wright, "On Antiquarian Excavations", p. 440; Krämer, "Zur Wiederverwendung antiker Gefäße", p. 328.
32   Tarzia, "The Hoarding Ritual".
33   Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes' De lapidibus*, p. 2.
34   Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes' De lapidibus*, p. 5.

cloudy eyes and relieves headache. To enjoy these powers the wearer of sapphire must maintain perfect chastity, however (ll. 103–29).

Gervase, in the more specific and analytical mode of the thirteenth century, informed his emperor (Otto IV, 1209–15) that many stones have intrinsic powers due to their nature (*Recreation for an Emperor* 3.28: *intrinsecam ... uirtutem plerique lapides habent a sua natura insitam*), and these powers can be enhanced with extrinsic ones through consecration:

There is no precious stone which may not be consecrated for the exercise of its extrinsic power with the herb of the same name or with the blood of a bird or animal, combined with spells, knowledge of which has come down to us through Solomon ... Words, herbs, and precious stones customarily bring as many remedies to human beings as are fitting, pleasing, or necessary to our human nature; but it is not the stones or their engravings that accomplish these things, it is not the herbs or their couplings: it is God, the supreme author of all that is, who accomplishes all these remedies through the words, the herbs, and the stones. An engraving is a sign of his power and is not powerful in itself. The quality imposed on a stone by the words of consecration extends and endorses its innate potency.[35]

According to Gervase, if it has been "adjured" (a term also used for exorcism), sapphire can "increase and preserve" the power of the powerful (*potestatem potentis*) and the affluence – the flowing of wealth to – the already rich.

Incidentally (to anticipate our return to Herimann's Cross), these passages make clear how severely our understanding is compromised by our ignorance of the biography of the crucifix's lapis lazuli head. If the gem were found in the ground of Cologne, or elsewhere, and converted by a churchman – Herimann or another – for placement in the crucifix, the gift would have represented the renunciation of a potential prestige good by a cleric who had (at least in theory) renounced worldly power and well-being anyway. If, on the other hand, the gem came from a royal or imperial treasury, whether directly or through intermediaries like the jewels of King Henry of England sold to Abbot Suger, the conversion would have constituted the deliberate removal of a potent asset from the economy of secular power; even, perhaps, a removal intended to deprive a specific secular power of its use. Unless we recover knowledge of the circumstances, we can never fully appreciate the topical significance of the cameo-crucifix in its originating milieu.

Unlike exorcism or consecration, *interpretatio christiana* neither cleansed nor empowered. As used by art historians, *interpretatio christiana* mostly refers to iconography, but it also covers the Christian allegorization of materials. With respect to imagery, *interpretatio christiana* is renaming, or un-naming. Renaming could be effected by inscription, as when a chalcedony cameo double portrait of the Emperor Honorius and his wife Maria (398–407) was inscribed, in Greek, "St. Sergius" and "St. Bacchus", thereby becoming a portrait of those

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35   Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury Otia imperialia*, pp. 615–17.

two (male!) saints.[36] Renaming was not a requirement, however, as evidenced by the countless uninscribed gems with Roman imagery on the liturgical implements, Gospel books and reliquaries in medieval church treasuries. In western Europe, virtually any precious object, if given with a pure heart and good intentions, could be converted as it was. To cite just one of dozens of possible examples, a first-century sardonyx cantharos decorated with Dionysiac masks and implements (the "Cup of the Ptolemies") was fitted with a worked gold foot and "consecrated" (*dicavit*) to the abbey of Saint-Denis "in faithful conscience" ("*[devota] mente*") by a ruler identified as Charles the Bald (840–77). The cup was used as a chalice into the eighteenth century. Erika Zwierlein-Diehl observed that even in the early modern period, descriptions of it overlooked the Dionysiac significance of the imagery and noted only the presence of trees, heads, animals and birds.[37]

To judge from the sources available, un-naming was the habitual medieval approach to non-Christian imagery. This is how Matthew Paris described the birth-aiding cameo of St. Albans (Fig. 5.4):

a certain tattered image [*imago*], holding in its right hand a spear on which a serpent creeps upward, and in the left hand a clothed boy holding some kind of shield on his shoulder and extending his other hand toward the image.[38]

Whether the author's "loss of iconographical literacy" was real or strategic, his description remains rigorously on the "pre-iconographic" level of Panofsky's famous schema of interpretation: that is, on the level of motifs recognizable through basic human experience.[39] No conventional meanings are recognized or admitted; there simply is no iconography.

Medieval consumers did not need to know the conventions of Roman iconography, although, of course, they sometimes did. Un-naming was a means of appropriation; it made objects with images available for new owners to use them. Sometimes, as with the Cup of the Ptolemies, un-naming deflected attention from figural decoration so that viewers could focus on the material. Material and color were almost always more valued than imagery, to the extent that figured gems were sometimes turned inward in medieval settings, which rendered the carving invisible.[40] In other cases, un-naming produced natural forms that could be "invested", in Panofsky's term, with new content.[41] If Charlemagne needed a seal ring, it was enough to find a gem with the carving of a bearded male head. Whether the male had the attributes

36 Mango and Mango, "Cameos in Byzantium", p. 62.
37 Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen*, pp. 259–60.
38 Wright, "On Antiquarian Excavations", p. 445 n.k.
39 Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 9; on Matthew's iconographical literacy: Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris*, p. 48.
40 Krug, "Antike Gemmen an mittelalterlichen Goldschmiedearbeiten", pp. 117–18.
41 Kinney, "Interpretatio christiana".

of a Roman general or of the god Serapis was of no consequence; both could serve, and both may have been considered Charlemagne's portraits. Medusa could become the Virgin Mary for the seal of Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim (d. 1022), and so on through numerous examples.[42] It is thus not so surprising that a sapphire face with soft, innocent-looking features could be put into service as Christ.

Use or Reuse?

Anthony Cutler challenged the habit of terming all objects in secondary settings "reused" by distinguishing reuse from "use", defined as the incorporation or employment of something old with a view to a need in the present. "Reuse", by contrast, would be the self-consciously historicist deployment of a heritage object in order to refer to the past.[43] Cutler thus situated "reuse" in the realm of authorial intention and its appreciation by the target audience. On these criteria the placement of the Roman cameo on "Herimann's" crucifix must be considered reuse, at least according to the prevailing interpretation that casts it as a representation, or "staging", of the lineage of Herimann and Ida and their prerogatives.

We can complement Cutler's analysis by framing the distinction in terms of the more readily observable criteria of practice, that is, of continuities and innovations in how an object or class of objects is employed over time. If I inherit a cooking pot from my grandmother and prepare meals in it night after night, by the criterion of practice I am using it. I might prefer to use it because of its associations with her, or because I believe old pots work better, or because I can't afford to buy a new pot as strong and large as her old one; whatever the congeries of reasons that might be described as my intention, the pot is still doing what it was made to do originally. If, on the other hand, I decide that the pot is too heavy, too clumsy, too pretty, too fragile, or too rare to use for cooking and instead plant flowers in it, I have reused it. The pot has taken on a new function, different from the one its maker intended for it.

From the perspective of practice, the use of gems is remarkably stable. Because of their rare and hard-won materials, they are sought-after and valuable in any economy. They are collected or hoarded, because while one gem could be an accident, many gems signify wealth and status. They are worn by people or objects; gem-encrusted implements and furniture are metonymies for the gem-encrusted people who own or use them. They are passed on to chosen successors or descendants, who will use them in exactly the same way. When Emperor Honorius married Maria in 398, he bestowed

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42 Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen*, pp. 253–6.

43 Cutler, "Use or Reuse?".

upon her the *ornatus*, the gems and other regalia that had been worn by Livia 400 years before.[44] Those same gems may have been worn by empresses in Byzantium 400 years later. It is an astonishing testimony to the perdurance of the Roman imperial office that so many of the great "state cameos" cut in the time of the Julio-Claudians survived in perfect condition for over a millennium, presumably in Constantinople, until they began to find their way into western church treasuries in the thirteenth century.[45] The magnificent sardonyx cameo portrait of Augustus set into the center of the Lothar Cross in Aachen around 1000 (Fig. 5.5) was an early arrival; it may have been a diplomatic gift to Otto I on the occasion of the marriage of his son to the niece of Emperor John I Tzimisces, Theophanu, in 972, or it may have been in Theophanu's trousseau.[46] This is the same treasure that many believe was the source of the lapis lazuli cameo on "Herimann's" crucifix.

In the face of such continuity, one could propose that the thousands of antique gems set in the precious metal coverings of medieval crosses, book covers, vessels, and reliquaries were not reused, but used. At some level, there is no difference between a gemmed candelabrum made for a Roman temple and a gemmed altar frontal made for a Benedictine abbey church. Yet on another level, the conversion of intaglio sealing stones from the rings of bishops and potentates into altar ornaments seems like reuse. Surely turning the portrait of an empress into the face of Jesus was reuse, as it was reuse to place a portrait of Augustus in a cross where it might serve as the image of another emperor, or of Christ.[47] Figured gems are thus a subset of "gems". They offered the possibility of reuse by Christians in the form of reinterpretation. Figuration was an opportunity for creative redeployment; figured gems were ready-mades, waiting to be transformed by recontextualization.

Appropriation

In a brilliant, wide-ranging study of the uses of classical art in the West in the Middle Ages, Salvatore Settis asked how the mythological imagery on ancient Roman sarcophagi was "read" by the Christians who used the sarcophagi for their own burial and by the sculptors who copied the reliefs for their own compositions. He concluded that, when the precise meaning of individual myths had faded with time and cultural distance, the imagery came to represent antiquity itself.

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44 Claudian, *Epithalamium*, 10–13.
45 Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen*, pp. 237–48.
46 Megow, *Kameen*, p. 155 No. A9.
47 Wibiral, "Augustus patrem figurat".

Fig. 5.5   The Lothar Cross
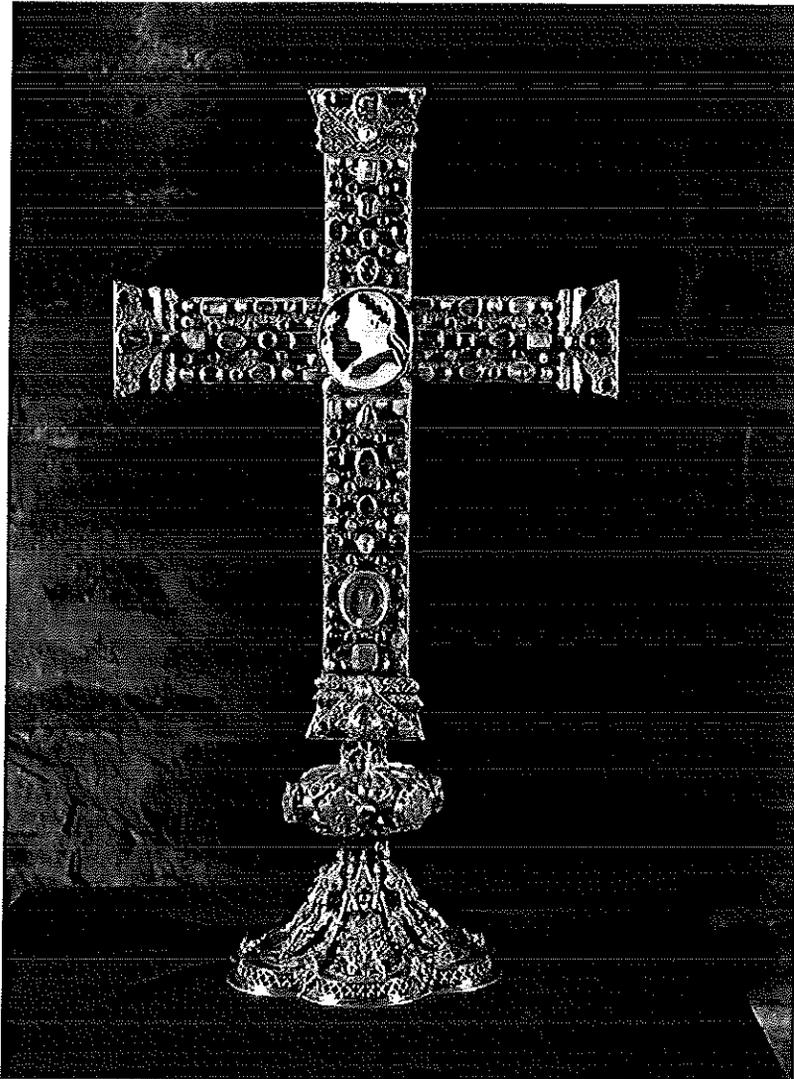
Having lost ... every precise reference to myths and themes that once were
generally understood, the sarcophagus reliefs could have spoken the generic,
indistinct language of a past age populated by extraordinary, unnamed figures of
gods and heroes, with broad dramatic gestures and ample, agitated drapery. And
so we might say that every sarcophagus wound up telling the story of Orestes

or of Phaedra, since no one knew the stories any more; but perhaps precisely for this reason every sarcophagus condensed, in its crowds of figures in motion, something *more* than those stories. From one piece in a series it tended to become, by its rarity, the indefiniteness of its meaning and the difficulty of making it out, an *exemplum* capable of representing the very face of antiquity.[48]

Like sarcophagi – and unlike the architectural elements discussed by several authors in this volume, as well as by Maria Fabricius Hansen in her book on *spolia* and appropriation – gems are self-sufficient objects.[49] They were made to function independently in a variety of possible settings. Their original context was not the physical matrix of a wall or building but a series of like objects fabricated for similar uses. Destruction of this context was a cultural, not a physical event, and its agent was time. Orphaned by time, figured gems and sarcophagi could continue to serve their original functions. For the medieval user, a precious stone with an intaglio image was a seal, just as it had been for the Roman who first wore it. For the medieval owner, however, the image no longer signified participation in the system of religious, cultural or political relationships in which it was meaningful originally. The image signified antiquity.

In Jean Baudrillard's "system of objects," antiques are "mythological" in another sense:

The way in which antiques refer to the past gives them an *exclusively* mythological character. The antique object no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to *signify* ... Yet it is not afunctional, nor purely "decorative", for it has a very specific function within the system, namely the signifying of time.[50]

Antiques represent a return to origins, to a state of completion and unity. They both instantiate and elude appropriation:

Mythological objects ... serve less as possessions than as symbolic intercessors – as ancestors, so to speak, than which nothing is more "private". They are a way of escaping from everyday life, and no escape is more radical than escape in time ... The antique ... remains in all cases "perfect"; it is neither internal nor external, but "elsewhere"; neither synchronic nor diachronic, but *anachronistic*; relative to its possessor, it is neither the complement of the verb "to be" nor the object of a verb "to have", but falls, rather, into the grammatical category of an internal object that gives expression to the essence of the verb in an almost tautological manner.[51]

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48   Settis, "Continuità, distanza, conoscenza", pp. 409–10.
49   Fabricius Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation*.
50   Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, pp. 73–4.
51   Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p. 80.

Conclusion

Baudrillard's theory is explicitly addressed to the "pullulation of objects" in the modern industrial world; yet many of his observations about antiques hold true for other times and cultures, and also apply to *spolia*. *Spolia* are always inevitably anachronistic with respect to their resettings; they are always "elsewhere" with respect to the work or site where we encounter them. It is the disjunctive reality of spoliate compositions like Herimann's Cross or the Arch of Constantine that has made them "off-putting" or displeasing to post-medieval interpreters. It is not only that they disrupt our aesthetic expectations. Anachronistic couplings are uncanny.

The challenge of *spolia* studies is to see anachronism without reducing it to iconography. Richard Hamann-MacLean, who was the first, as far as I know, to discuss the Cross of Herimann as *spolia*, managed to do this, finding in the combination of the ancient head and the medieval body "the timeless *numen* of a noble material in a remarkable form" that gave the whole an "incomparable radiance and mystery":

It is a form of reified mystery. Therein lies the secret of the effect of this cross and the specific character of this era's particular relationship to antiquity.[52]

Later scholarship moved away from this quasi-confessional form of explanation toward more objective interpretations grounded in the supposed connection with Herimann and Ida. Such accounts unify the gem and its setting by defining the whole as the product of more or less rational motives of self-representation. The treatment of the gem as a figurative *spolium* with connotations of antiquity and/or political and social prerogatives tames anachronism by making it a vehicle of deliberate expression. Even the fact that the head is female has been rationalized by the claim that medieval viewers saw it as simply youthful. Very recently, however, Veronika Wiegartz questioned this last claim and with it, the purely programmatic understanding of the reused head:

The precious object as such must have been the occasion of its use, without the need to undertake an excessive reflection on content. Why should the medieval observer not have felt the peculiar effect of the head and recognized the resulting departure from the norm as an expensive curiosity, as is still the case today?[53]

Antje Krug has argued that medieval consumers of ancient gems were well aware of the contradictions and even the absurdities posed by their desire for antique gems as status symbols and the uses to which they were put.[54] Why,

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52   Hamann-MacLean, "Antikenstudium", p. 166.
53   Wiegartz, *Antike Bildwerke im Urteil mittelalterlicher Zeitgenossen*, pp. 225–6.
54   Krug, "Antike Gemmen und das Zeitalter Bernwards".

she asked, should we not imagine learned clerics "roaring with laughter" at the use of a naked Omphale for the seal-ring of an archdeacon? Presumably no one laughed at Herimann's Cross; but that does not mean that the contradiction between the nameless blue female face and the body of the son of God was invisible or overlooked. In medieval studies, the potential of *spolia* as sites of such unsettling difference seems a likely new frontier.[55]

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