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"Ancient Gems from the Bay of Naples in the Sommerville Collection"

Maxwell Sommerville (1827-1904) -- starting successfully as editor and later becoming an idler and a passionate collector -- was one of the pioneers of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. In the decades after the Civil War, he amassed a voluminous collection of engraved stones: gems, cameos, rings, talismans, etc., which he eventually donated to the Museum in 1891.

The Sommerville Collection of Ancient Gems shows above all -- given the emphasis of Sommerville's activities in travelling and collecting -- findings from the Italic peninsula. Besides Etruscan scarabs of the fifth to third centuries B.C.E. these are especially gems and glass gems of the Italic-Hellenistic and the Roman-Republican period. In this context, the Campanian workshops play an outstanding role. The heritage of the pre-Roman cultures, especially the late Etruscan workshops and the tradition of the Greek culture of the Magna Graecia, was adopted in the third and the second century B.C.E. in Naples and the Campagna and refined into a characteristically regional style. Undoubtedly, Roman-Republican stonecutters as models forming their own new style used the gems of these Campanian workshops.

The lecture traces this development with selected examples of the Sommerville collection. First, the sources and models composing the style of the Campanian workshops are introduced: the Greek Hellenistic glyptic, then the late Etruscan scarabs and its characteristic A-globolo-Style as well as the Hellenistic middle-Italic workshops. Then, examples from the Campanian glyptics are shown, with the help of which the close connection with the genuine Roman glyptics of the second and the early first century B.C.E. can be produced. Examples out of this sector can prove the stylistic and topical specialities of the late Roman-Republican workshops and reveal the style and the repertoire of the genuine Roman glyptic.