

## CHAPTER 4

# CHARLES OF LUXEMBOURG AND HIS RELIQUARY CROSS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRECIOUS STONES<sup>1</sup>

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Charles of Luxembourg (1316–78), King of Bohemia (r. 1346–78) and Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1355–78), is considered one of the most capable and effective rulers of the fourteenth century. The eldest son of John of Luxembourg (1296–1346), he was the second Luxembourg king to rule Bohemia and the second of his line to achieve the status of Holy Roman Emperor (his grandfather, Henry VII of Luxembourg, was Holy Roman Emperor in 1312–13). He held his royal throne and imperial position for 32 years. From the beginning of his reign, Charles made every effort to secure his status by associating his personal accomplishments with a prestigious imperial past. Links with the past were also emphasized

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in the funeral oration delivered on the occasion of his death in 1378,<sup>2</sup> in which Charles was praised as *alter Constantinus* and his large-scale programme of assembling holy relics celebrated.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, there are several parallels between Charles and Constantine the Great (r. 306–37). Each of them is credited with establishing a new capital for the empire he ruled. Constantine built a new imperial residence at Byzantium and in 330 renamed the city Constantinople, which became the capital of the Roman Empire (and remained the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for more than a thousand years). Charles' complex refurbishment of Prague from the 1340s, which transformed a rather provincial city into a new centre of the Holy Roman Empire, was one of the greatest achievements of his artistic patronage. Charles re-drew the religious map of Central Europe by amassing a huge number of important holy relics in Prague, thus making the city the spiritual centre of the Holy Roman Empire, and conferring on it a status that at that time was rivalled only by Paris and Rome. In this he followed Constantine, who after founding Constantinople made Jerusalem the spiritual centre of the Roman world by ordering the construction of Christian holy sites there.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Emperor Constantine is credited with developing an interest in the collecting and, crucially in the context of the present study, reuse of valuable objects of the past in the ceremonial objects that he commissioned for his personal use. Such recycling of objects from earlier periods in order to serve a new purpose had a long history in Roman artistic practices and had even become a widespread characteristic of late Roman art. Constantine created perhaps the most magnificent example of an ancient composite object: the Arch of Constantine in Rome, a major

2 See Josef Jireček, Josef Emler and Ferdinand Tadra (eds), *Fontes rerum Bohemicorum / Prameny českých dějin* 3 (Prague, 1882), 421–32, esp. 429; Rudolf Chadraha, 'Tradice druhého Konstantina a řecko-perská antize v umění Karla IV', *Umění* 16 (1968), 567–602; František Šmahel, 'Kdo pronesl smuteční řeč při pohřbu císaře Karla IV.?', *Studia mediaevalia Bohemica* 2 (2010), 215–20.

3 On the importance of Emperor Constantine as a role model for Charles IV, see Heike Johanna Mierau, in Andreas Goltz and Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen (eds), *Konstantin der Große: Das Bild des Kaisers im Wandel der Zeiten* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2008), 109–38; Kateřina Kubínová, 'Karl IV. und die Tradition Konstantins des Großen', in Jiří Fajt and Andrea Langer (eds), *Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument: Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im europäischen Kontext* (Berlin and Munich, 2009), 320–7.

4 The foundation of Constantinople took the imperial centre to the east of the Mediterranean and demanded a re-drawing of the political map quite as radical as that of the religious map – according to which Jerusalem became the privileged spiritual centre of the Roman world. See Jaś Elsner, 'Constantine – Perspectives in Art', in Noel Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006), 255–77, esp. 265.



Fig. 4.1. Ambo of Henry II, Treasury of Aachen Cathedral, c. 1024. Ivory, copper plate, gemstones, agate and rock crystal vessels, agate and chalcedony chess figures, oak parapet, height 146 cm. Photo © Archive of the author.

triumphal arch celebrating Constantine's victory over his rival Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312.<sup>5</sup> Numerous fragments taken from earlier Roman monuments and mounted in the arch perpetuated the majesty of Constantine, honouring and acclaiming his stature. Subsequently, the Roman practice of appropriating and recycling objects from different times and places became a common feature of numerous medieval religious dedications of various kinds.

Two of these tokens of devotion are of particular interest here: sumptuous composite objects that Charles of Luxembourg had seen and perhaps might even have had the opportunity to observe in detail. One is the eleventh-century golden pulpit (or ambo) (Fig. 4.1) with its monumental *crux gemmata* commissioned by Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1014–24),

5 The Arch of Constantine is today considered to be the first surviving public monument to boast the juxtaposition of objects from different periods. On this topic I have consulted Jaś Elsner, 'From the Culture of *spolia* to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000), 149–84; Elsner, 'Constantine', 256–60; and Jaś Elsner, 'Late Antique Art: The Problem of the Concept and the Cumulative Aesthetic', in Simon Swain and Mark J. Edwards (eds), *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 271–309, esp. 288–92.



Fig. 4.2. Cross of Lothair, Treasury of Aachen Cathedral, c. 1000 (cross), fourteenth century (base). Oak core, gold, silver, gemstones, cameos, height 50 cm. Photo © Domkapitel, Aachen, Pit Siebigs, Aachen.

and donated by him to Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel in Aachen,<sup>6</sup> the city where most German kings anointed to reign over the Holy Roman Empire were crowned King of the Romans (emperors-elect),<sup>7</sup> including Charles himself. Remarkably, the pulpit brings together various extraordinary objects, incorporating gemstones provenant from ancient Rome, Coptic Alexandria, and Fatimid Egypt. The other intriguing object is the Lothair cross. Made of oakwood covered in sheets of gold and of gilt silver and encrusted with gems and pearls, it is dated c. 1000, and supported by a later base. It is now kept in the treasury of Aachen Cathedral (Fig. 4.2). The cross, embellished with a Roman cameo of Emperor Augustus (first century AD) (Fig. 4.3), was thought to be a gift from one of the Ottonian rulers, possibly the Emperor Otto III, to Aachen Cathedral.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have assumed that both the pulpit and the cross served as ceremonial objects during the coronation rituals of the kings of the Romans; their primary purpose was thus to convey a message of power.<sup>9</sup>

Charles of Luxembourg was crowned as *rex Romanorum* at Aachen on 25 July 1349, and records of his itinerary indicate that he visited the city

6 Erika Doberer, 'Studien zu dem Ambo Kaiser Heinrichs II. im Dom zu Aachen,' in *Karolingische und ottonische Kunst: Werden, Wesen, Wirkung* (Wiesbaden, 1957), 308–59; Horst Appuhn, 'Das Mittelstück vom Ambo König Heinrichs II. in Aachen,' *Aachener Kunstblätter* 32 (1966), 70–3; Ernst Günther Grimme, 'Der Aachener Domschatz,' *Aachener Kunstblätter* 43 (1972), cat. 27, 38–43; Gia Toussaint, 'Cosmopolitan Claims: Islamicate *spolia* During the Reign of King Henry II, 1002–24,' *The Medieval History Journal* 15 (2012), 299–318.

7 This was the king's title after being elected emperor by the German princes (and then crowned in Aachen), before being crowned as emperor in Rome by the Pope. It designated the heir to the imperial throne between his election as emperor (usually during the lifetime of a sitting emperor) and his succession to the imperial throne after the death of the current emperor; but not all kings of the Romans made the journey to Rome for their coronation, and therefore retained their initial title throughout their reign. The practice of papal coronations ended in 1508. See Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Holy Roman Empire: A Short History* (Princeton, 2018).

8 Another remarkable stone recycled in the cross is the rock crystal intaglio of Otto's Carolingian predecessor, Lothar II, King of Lotharingia (r. 855–69), after whom the cross is named. Ginevra Kornbluth, 'The Seal of Lothar II: Model and Copy,' in *Francia* 17 (1990), 55–68. On the Lothair cross, see Grimme, 'Der Aachener Domschatz,' cat. 22; Norbert Wibiral, '*Augustus partem figurat*: Zu den Betrachtungsweisen des Zentralsteines am Lotharkreuz im Domschatz zu Aachen,' *Aachener Kunstblätter* 60 (1994), 105–30; Georg Minkenber, 'Lotharkreuz,' in M. Kramp (ed.), *Krönungen: Könige in Aachen – Geschichte und Mythos*, exhibition catalogue, vol. 1 (Mainz, 2000), 342–3.

9 Eliza Garrison, *Ottonian Imperial Art and Portraiture: The Artistic Patronage of Otto III and Henry II* (Farnham and Burlington, 2012), 96.

Fig. 4.3. Portrait of the Roman Emperor Augustus. Cameo at the centre of the Cross of Lothair, Treasury of Aachen Cathedral, first century, sardonyx. Photo © Genevra Kornbluth.



repeatedly.<sup>10</sup> He bequeathed various precious objects to the treasury of Aachen Cathedral and in 1362 commissioned the altar there dedicated to St Wenceslas.<sup>11</sup> In the light of these facts, Charles presumably had many

10 On Charles IV and Aachen, see Hans P. Hilger, 'Der Weg nach Aachen', in Ferdinand Seibt (ed.), *Kaiser Karl IV.: Staatsmann und Mäzen* (Munich, 1978), 324–6, 331–4, 461; Thomas R. Kraus, 'Studien zur Vorgeschichte der Krönung Karls IV. in Aachen', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins* 88/89 (1981/2), 43–93; František Kavka, 'Karl IV. (1349–1378) und Aachen', in Kramp (ed.), *Krönungen*, vol. 2, 477–84; Jiří Fajt, 'Karl IV. – Herrscher zwischen Prag und Aachen: Der Kult Karls des Großen und die karolinische Kunst', in Kramp (ed.), *Krönungen*, vol. 2, 489–500; Franz Machilek, 'Karl IV. und Karl der Große', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins* 104/5 (2002/3), 113–45.

11 The altar was founded by Charles on 20 December 1362. See Bedřich Mendl and Milena Linhartová (eds), *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Bohemiae*

opportunities to acquaint himself with earlier votive offerings preserved in Aachen Cathedral, including the pulpit and the cross, and these may well have served him as models for his own votive objects.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CORONATION CROSS

One of the commissions that Charles of Luxembourg is believed to have ordered was the jewelled reliquary cross kept today in the treasury of St Vitus Cathedral in Prague (Figs 4.4, 4.5).<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, the fourteenth-century inventories of the treasury do not tell us anything about this object; but it is known that in 1480 the cross was in deposit at Helfenburk Castle in Bohemia, which had once been owned by the Archbishop of Prague, Jan Očko of Vlašim, who maintained a close relationship with Charles.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the cross was preserved at Karlštejn Castle near Prague. The cross, thenceforth, was removed only on special occasions, such as for the coronations of Bohemian rulers. For this reason, the cross is today called the ‘Coronation Cross of Bohemia’.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, scholars began to pay attention to this object.<sup>15</sup> It was studied predominantly on the basis of formal criteria, by which scholars were able to categorize the object in terms of its age and style.<sup>16</sup> However, during the fourteenth century these criteria were of little

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*et Moraviae* VII/5, 1358–1363 (Prague, 1963), no. 1290; Percy E. Schramm and Hermann Fillitz, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser, Bd. II: Ein Beitrag zur Herrschergeschichte von Rudolf I. bis Maximilian I., 1273–1519* (Munich, 1978), 37–8. 12 Inv. no. K 25 (97).

13 At Helfenburk, a detailed description of the cross was included in the inventory of the objects kept there in 1480. See Václav Schulz, ‘Popis velikého kříže zemského z roku 1480’, *Věstník královské české společnosti nauk, třída filosoficko-historicko-jazykozpytná* (1897), 7–9.

14 František Fišer, *Karlštejn: Vzájemné vztahy tří karlštejnských kaplí* (Kostelní Vydří, 1996), 242, 261.

15 Franz Bock, ‘Der Schatz von St. Veit zu Prag: I. Abtheilung’, *Mittheilungen der K.K. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* 14 (1869), 9–35, esp. 27–31; Antonín Podlaha and Eduard Šittler, ‘České korunovační kříže v pokladu Svatovítském’, *Památky archaeologické a místopisné* 20 (1902), 1–14, esp. 1–9; Antonín Podlaha and Eduard Šittler, *Chrámový poklad u sv. Víta v Praze: Jeho dějiny a popis* (Prague, 1903), 167–74.

16 The cross was analysed in detail especially in the seminal writings of Emanuel Poche. See Emanuel Poche, ‘Einige Erwägungen über die Kameen Karls IV’, in Jaroslav Pešina (ed.), *Sborník k sedmdesátinám Jana Květa* (Prague, 1965), 82–93; Emanuel Poche, ‘K otázce ostatkových křížů Karla IV’, *Sborník Národního muzea v Praze / Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae, Series A – Historia* 21 (1967), 239–46; Emanuel Poche, ‘Umělecká řemesla gotické doby’, in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění 1/2* (Prague, 1984), 440–79. See also Schramm and Fillitz, *Denkmale der deutschen*



Fig. 4.4. Coronation Cross, front side. Gold, pearls, gemstones, rock crystal, glass, relics, with a new base made of gilded copper added in the 1520s, 62.5 cm x 41.5 cm. Treasury of St Vitus Cathedral, Prague. Photo © Courtesy of Prague Castle Administration/Jan Gloc.





Fig. 4.5. Coronation Cross, back side. Gold, pearls, gemstones, rock crystal, glass, cameos, and relics. Base of gilded copper added in the 1520s; overall dimensions 62.5 cm x 41.5 cm. Treasury of St Vitus Cathedral, Prague. Photo © Courtesy of Prague Castle Administration/Jan Gloc.

concern to those who viewed it. By the late twentieth century, scholars focused almost exclusively on the history of the relics incorporated into the body of the cross, regarding it as ‘the most prestigious reliquary from the Bohemian medieval past’;<sup>17</sup> their approach has been primarily to explore the sacred and devotional aspects of the object, based mostly on its iconography.<sup>18</sup> The considerable number of precious stones encrusted in the cross were implicitly downplayed or neglected in these studies.<sup>19</sup>

In the present essay, the Coronation Cross will be investigated from a different perspective: instead of the relics and the reliquary function of the cross, I shall focus on the carved gemstones, especially on the cameos, in an attempt to demonstrate that precious and semi-precious stones were not just ornamental elements decorating the cross, as is usually claimed. On the contrary, they significantly contributed to the talismanic character of the cross as a powerful apotropaic object, and crucially informed the construction of the visual message that the cross was intended to convey – a visual message that may have been linked to Charles, who presumably was responsible for commissioning the cross and who in all likelihood acquired and deliberately selected the gemstones displayed on this object. My intention in what follows is to analyse the cross not solely within the

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*Könige und Kaiser*, 65 (with earlier literature); Hans R. Hahnloser and Susanne Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der Hartsteinschliffe des 12. – 15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1985), 130, cat. 150. Most recently, the object was examined by Karel Otavský, ‘Zlatý relikviářový kříž’, in Jiří Fajt and Barbara D. Boehm (eds), *Karel IV. Císař z Boží milosti: Kultura a umění za vlády posledních Lucemburků 1310–1437*, exhibition catalogue (Prague, 2006), 111–14; idem, ‘Goldenes Reliquienkreuz’, in Jiří Fajt, Markus Hörsch and Andrea Langer (eds), *Karl IV. Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden: Kunst und Repräsentation des Hauses Luxemburg 1310–1437* (Munich, 2006), 111–14. See also Karel Otavský, ‘Zlatý relikviářový kříž’, in Ivana Kyzourová (ed.), *Svatovítský poklad* (Prague, 2012), no. 1; and Karel Otavský, ‘Relikvie, relikviáře a královské insignie’, in František Šmahel and Lenka Bobková (eds), *Lucemburkové: Česká koruna uprostřed Evropy* (Prague, 2012), 532.

17 Josef Cibulka, *Korunovační klenoty království českého* (Prague, 1969), 87–8; and Ivo Hlobil, *České korunovační klenoty: pamětní vydání ke vzniku České republiky* (Prague, 1993), 66–7.

18 See especially Fišer, *Karlštejn*, 246–52; Karel Otavský, ‘K relikviím vlastněným císařem Karlem IV., k jejich uctívání a jejich schránkám’, in *Court Chapels of the High and Late Middle Ages and Their Artistic Decoration: Proceedings from the International Symposium* (Prague, 2003), 392–8, esp. 394–5; Otavský, ‘Zlatý relikviářový kříž’, 111–13. One exception are texts devoted to technical analysis and conservation of the cross. For this aspect, see Jaroslav Bauer, ‘Korunovační kříž ostatkový ze Svatovítského pokladu’, *Technologia artis* 2 (1994), and the conservation report of 2003 written by Andrej Šumbera. The report is preserved at the archive of Prague Castle, nos 405.480/02, 405.611/02.

19 See for example, Otavský, ‘Zlatý relikviářový kříž’ (Prague 2006), 111–14.

context of visual history, but also as a material object.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of written evidence, this is crucial. Although the material analysis cannot provide the same level of information as a written historical record, it helps us to develop a better understanding of the long-lost and obscure ways in which exquisite objects functioned, and of how it was perceived in specific social settings in the distant past.

Furthermore, it should be noted that despite an impressive and valuable body of scholarly work on Charles of Luxembourg and his patronage, most of the studies related to the topic are dominated by nation-state narratives and mono-disciplinary perspectives, disregarding the multicultural features that are characteristic of the objects created in Charles' time. Studies of this type tend to interpret individual elements of the objects in isolation and ignore their composite nature. In contrast, my approach has been transnational and interdisciplinary, exploring the Coronation Cross as an amalgam of various elements while drawing upon sources in a range of disciplines – principally, those of history, history of art, material culture, and archaeology.

## THE COMPOSITE CHARACTER OF THE CORONATION CROSS

Close inspection of the cross reveals details about how this object evolved over time. Its current dimensions are 62.5 cm × 41.5 cm; it should be noted, however, that the cross has not retained its original form. Its original base disappeared before 1480 and a new one, made of gilded copper, was added later, probably in the 1520s. Thus, the object was partially redesigned, especially in its lower part.<sup>21</sup> In spite of this, the cross still possesses much of its initial composite character, retaining many of its original components which were in turn deliberately compiled from different periods and cultural contexts.

One such component is the gold body of the cross itself. The cross is shaped in the form of earlier medieval crosses, with its fleur-de-lys

20 On this topic I have consulted Chris Tilley et al. (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London, 2006); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011); Michael Yonan, 'Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18 (2011), 232–48; 'Notes from the Field: Materiality', *The Art Bulletin* 95 (2013), 10–37; Philippe Cordez, 'Die kunsthistorische Objektwissenschaft und ihre Forschungsperspektiven', *Kunstchronik* 67 (2014), no. 7, 364–73.

21 Emanuel Poche, *České umění gotické 1350–1420: Katalog uměleckého řemesla* (Prague, 1970), no. 427.

terminals dating to the thirteenth century. This indicates either that the cross is a fourteenth-century object deliberately designed in a thirteenth-century shape that originated with the Capetian kings of France, associated especially with the saintly King Louis IX of France, who was regarded as the most Christian king of that era, or that it is a thirteenth-century cross, remade about one hundred years later. In addition, the object follows the model of sumptuously jewelled early medieval crosses, *cruces gemmatae*, which were developed as part of the veneration of the Holy Cross at the beginning of the fifth century to signify the divine authority of Christ and of Christian emperorship.<sup>22</sup>

Noteworthy historical documents indicate that from 1350 onward Charles temporarily owned one prestigious *crux gemmata*: the Imperial Cross (1025–30, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. WS XIII 21) – a precious reliquary (the cross accommodated particles of the True Cross and the Holy Lance), and one of the most remarkable jewelled crosses of this period. In his role as Holy Roman Emperor, Charles guarded the cross and other imperial relics, and therefore must have had first-hand knowledge of them. His deeper interest in this object is demonstrated by his commission in 1352 of a new foot for the cross, made of gold-plated silver over a wooden core, engraved with a donatory inscription, and adorned with royal and imperial emblems, which emphasize Charles' personal connections with this precious object.<sup>23</sup> Like the Imperial Cross, the Coronation Cross incorporates portable objects that originally served different purposes: relics and gemstones. Both share one essential quality: in Charles' time, they were understood to possess divine power.<sup>24</sup>

22 Ilder Garipzanov, 'The Sign of the Cross in Late Antiquity', in *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300–900* (Oxford, 2018), 92. On jewelled crosses in the Middle Ages, see Theo Jülich, 'Gemmenkreuze: Die Farbigkeit ihres Edelsteinbesatzes bis zum 12. Jahrhundert', *Aachener Kunstblätter* 54/55 (1986–7), 99–258. Recent work on jewelled reliquaries includes Martina Bagnoli, 'The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries', in Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein and Charles G. Mann (eds), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (Baltimore, 2010), 137–47; Gia Toussaint, *Kreuz und Knochen: Reliquien zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 2011); Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park, PA, 2012), esp. 73–109; Ginevra Kornbluth, 'Active Optics', *Different Visions* 4 (2014); and Karen Overbey, 'Seen Through Stone: Materiality and Place in a Medieval Scottish Pendant Reliquary', *Res* 65/66 (2014/15), 243–58.

23 On the imperial insignia, see Hermann Fillitz, *Die Insignien und Kleinodien des Heiligen Römischen Reiches* (Vienna, 1954).

24 On this topic, see especially Christel Meier-Staubach, *Gemma spiritalis: Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*,

## THE RELICS

Charles of Luxembourg was one of the most avid collectors of holy relics in Christendom. Relics were objects of paramount importance, priceless treasures, and became central to his project of sacralizing the monarchy and himself.<sup>25</sup> Relics believed to have been in direct contact with Christ's body during his Passion formed the most precious part of his remarkable collection. Charles commissioned several of these to be incorporated into the Coronation Cross.<sup>26</sup> In the West during the medieval period, holy relics were much-desired commodities, sought after by resourceful men and women both within and outside the Church. Charles, one of the most powerful men in late medieval Europe, was no exception. Even though relics possessed no intrinsic material value, he sought them out in great quantity,<sup>27</sup> primarily because they were regarded almost universally as being important sources of personal supernatural power, for good or for ill, via possession and close contact with them.<sup>28</sup> That is why Charles and other medieval rulers amassed relics: not only to manifest their piety, but also to harness their sacred power for personal advantage and thus to bolster

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vol. 1 (Munich, 1977); Patrick J. Geary, *Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1978).

25 On the topic of the immense significance for Charles of the cult of saints and their physical remains, there exists a considerable body of literature. See especially Wolfgang Schmid, 'Vom Rheinland nach Böhmen: Studien zur Reliquienpolitik Kaiser Karls IV', in Ulrike Hohensee, Mathias Lawo, Michael Lindner, Michael Menzel and Olaf B. Rader (eds), *Die Goldene Bulle: Politik-Wahrnehmung-Rezeption* (Berlin, 2009), 431–64; Martin Bauch, *Divina favente clemencia: Auserwählung, Frömmigkeit und Heilsvermittlung in der Herrschaftspraxis Kaiser Karls IV.* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2015), 182–6; and David C. Mengel, 'Bohemia's Treasury of Saints: Relics and Indulgences in Emperor Charles IV's Prague', in Marie-Madeleine de Cevins and Olivier Marin (eds), *Les saints et leur culte en Europe centrale au Moyen Age (XIe-début du XVIIe siècle)* (Turnhout, 2017), 57–76.

26 The Coronation Cross contains fragments of the following major Passion relics: the Crown of Thorns, the True Cross, the sponge, a holy nail, and rope. On the relics and the Coronation Cross, see most recently Otavský, 'Goldenes Reliquienkreuz', and Otavský, 'Zlatý relikviářový kříž'.

27 According to Martin Bauch, the number of identifiable relics in Prague rose from 77 at Charles' accession to the throne to 605 at his death. He may have commissioned about 400 new reliquaries for them, costing around 40,000 gulden. See Bauch, *Divina favente clemencia*, 311–12.

28 Patrick Geary, 'Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (London, New York, and Cambridge, 1986), 169–91, esp. 175–6; Patrick Geary, 'Reliquien und Macht', in Falko Daim and Thomas Kühtreiber (eds), *Sein und Sinn, Burg und Mensch: Niederösterreichische Landesausstellung im Schloss Ottenstein und Schloss Waldreichs vom 5. Mai bis 4. November 2001*, exhibition catalogue (St Pölten, 2001), 353–4.

their authority. It is therefore plausible that the idea of consolidating the most holy relics of Christendom into a single object such as a cross might have occurred to Charles. The ownership of such a powerful object would have enabled him not only to demonstrate his devotion to God and to increase his prestige as a pious Christian sovereign, but also to participate in what was understood to be the relics' divine powers.

In Charles' time this idea, though not a new one, circulated widely through royal circles. One other extant example of such an object is the fourteenth-century reliquary called the Libretto of Louis of Anjou, today kept in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 4.6). The donatory inscription on the verso indicates that the reliquary was commissioned by Charles V of Valois, King of France (r. 1364–80), as a gift for his brother, Louis I, Duke of Anjou (1339–84), presumably around the year 1370. This small-scale object was created in the form of a book (dimensions, closed: 7.5 cm × 6.3 cm), its primary materials being gold, precious stones, painted parchment, and enamel, and also incorporating many holy relics. A considerable number of these are believed to be drawn from the most powerful relics of Christendom kept in the royal foundations of Sainte-Chapelle and Saint-Denis, such as the fragments of the True Cross, of the thorns from the Crown of Thorns, and of the nails and lance of the Crucifixion. These relics are set in the middle part of the reliquary, framed by pearls and rubies in enamelled compartments shaped like the objects from which they came, and therefore easily recognizable. The wooden fragment of the Holy Cross, the most important relic of all in the ensemble, dominates this central section. The libretto itself is foldable, and thus could be kept comfortably close to its owner wherever he went. Charles V's great-great-grandson, Charles VIII of France (r. 1483–98), is known to have possessed a powerful talismanic object identical, or almost identical, to that owned by Louis of Anjou. Charles V also commissioned similar reliquaries for other members of his family, and one of them

29 Giovanni Poggi, 'Il Reliquiario del "libretto" nel Battistero fiorentino', in *Rivista d'arte* 9 (1916), no. 3, 239–49; Rodolfo Gallo, *Il tesoro di San Marco e la sua storia* (Venice and Rome, 1967), 105–7; Bruno Donzet and Christian Siret (eds), *Les Fastes du gothique: Le siècle de Charles V*, exhibition catalogue, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 9 octobre 1981–1 février 1982 (Paris, 1981), no. 211, 260–2; Bertrand Jestaz, 'Le reliquaire de Charles V perdu par Charles VIII à Fornoue', *Bulletin monumental* 147 (1989), 7–10; Eva Kovács, *L'âge d'or de l'orfèvrerie parisienne au temps des princes de Valois* (Dijon, 2004), 174–9; Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art* (Oxford, 2008), 230–2; and Beate Fricke, 'Reliquien und Reproduktion: Zur Präsentation der Passionsreliquien aus der Sainte-Chapelle (Paris) im "Reliquiario del Libretto" (Florenz) von 1501', in Jörg Probst (ed.), *Reproduktion: Techniken und Ideen von der Antike bis heute. Eine Einführung* (Berlin, 2011), 34–55.



Fig. 4.6. Reliquary called the Libretto, front side. Gold, enamel, pearls, rubies, parchment, c. 1370. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence. Photo © Age Fotostock/Nicolò Orsi Battaglini.

is listed in the will of his youngest brother, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (1342–1404).<sup>30</sup>

Charles of Luxembourg was closely connected by marriage to the French royal house. His sister, Bonne of Luxembourg (1315–49), married the future King John II of France (r. 1350–64); their children included Charles V of France, Louis of Anjou, and other princes of the blood. Charles himself spent his formative years at the French court, married Blanche of Valois (1317–48), a sister of Philip VI of France (r. 1328–50), and certainly had opportunities to observe and become familiar with the enshrined relics preserved in the treasury of Saint-Denis in Paris. Similarly, his nephew Charles V of France might have known about the artefacts commissioned by his uncle, Emperor Charles of Luxembourg, after being crowned Holy

30 It is 'un precieux tableau que me donna mons. mon frere le roy Charles, dont Dieu ayt l'ame, ouquel a de toutes les reliques de la sainte chapelle du Palais et des reliques de l'église de mons. Saint Denys ...'; see Bernard Prost and Henri Prost, *Inventaires mobiliers et extraits des comptes des ducs de Bourgogne de la Maison de Valois (1363–1477)*, 2. *Philippe le Hardi* (Paris, 1908), 225, no. 1409.

Roman Emperor.<sup>31</sup> Diplomatic gifts played an important role here. For example, in 1377, Charles V, King of France, ordered a payment to Jehan (Jean) du Vivier, one of his goldsmiths, for two gold reliquaries given 'à nostre très chier oncle l'empereur de Rome', one of which contained 'une piece du fust de la vraye croix' (a piece of the wood of the True Cross).<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned above, the Coronation Cross similarly incorporated some of the most precious relics of Christendom, including thorns from the Crown of Thorns and pieces of the True Cross.<sup>33</sup> The latter are prominently positioned in the very centre of the front and back of the Coronation Cross. Moreover, the fragment of the True Cross in the front is lavishly embellished with precious gemstones and might have originally served as a pectoral as there is a loop at the top through which a cord or chain could be passed. A second fragment, the more substantial of the two, is framed in gold and dominates the back side of the cross. Both items were thought to have come from the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified. The True Cross was reportedly discovered by Helena, mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine; its remains were sent by her to him to serve as a symbol of his authority.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, relics of

31 Charles IV supported Charles V, French regent and the Emperor's nephew as son of John the Good and Bonne of Bohemia, throughout the difficult time when his father, King John II, was a prisoner in London. See Jana Fantysová Matějková, 'Bourbonský vévoda na dvoře Karla IV. (1357–1359): Poznámka k říšsko-francouzským vztahům v době zajetí francouzského krále Jana II. Dobrého', *Historie–Otázky–Problémy* 3 (2011), 77–87.

32 'Charles V ordonne de faire payer 116 francs d'or à nostre orfèvre et varlet de chambre Jehan du Vivier, pour deux reliquaires d'or garniz de cristaulz et de quatre grosses perles, c'est assavoir l'un pour mettre une piece du fust de la vraye croix, et l'autre pour mettre autres reliques, lesquies reliquaires nous avoan ... donnez à nostre très chier oncle l'empereur de Rome.' Léopold Delisle, *Mandements et actes divers de Charles V (1364–1380): recueillis dans les collections de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris, 1874), 795, no. 1602.

33 Podlaha and Šittler, *Chrámový poklad*, 167–70; Anatole Frolov, *La relique de la Vraie Croix: Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris, 1961), 513, cat. 731.

34 Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, 1992). On the relics of the True Cross, see Holger A. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das 'wahre' Kreuz: Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland* (Wiesbaden, 2004); Holger A. Klein, 'Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004), 283–314; Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Leiden, 2004). Constantine is said to have put some of the relics from his possessions under the honorific column with his colossal gilded bronze statue that adorned the Emperor's Forum of Constantinople. These relics included the crosses of the two thieves crucified alongside Christ, the alabaster vase with the perfume with which Mary Magdalene anointed Christ, and the object



the True Cross, including the ones acquired by Charles of Luxembourg, possessed both a special religious and historical potency. The religious potency signified redemption, while the historical one referred to imperial and regal legitimacy. Furthermore, in the medieval period it was believed that the True Cross had yet another special spiritual potency: it was used to guarantee the truth of statements or oaths. According to *The Golden Legend*, a collection of saints' lives written in the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine and one of the most widely read devotional books during the fourteenth century, the True Cross also possessed a power to cause the motion of water and the healing of the sick.<sup>35</sup> In addition, due to Constantine's legendary vision of the Cross and his miraculous victory in battle against Maxentius under the protection of the Cross in 312, the relics of the Holy Cross were highly prized as an apotropaic device and a source of protection and divine power. For this reason, the relics of the True Cross were part of the battle equipment of royal and imperial rulers, and were immensely coveted as amulets.<sup>36</sup>

## THE GEMSTONES

In addition to relics, Charles of Luxembourg also sought ancient coins, manuscripts, rare fabrics, jewels, objects of curiosity and, especially, precious gemstones, many of which he subsequently adapted to religious purposes in innovative ways. Charles' interest in these precious objects was driven in large part by the fact that, in his time, gemstones, like the holy relics of Christendom, were regarded as a source of spiritual power.<sup>37</sup> Despite the Christian Church's opposition to instrumental magic

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identified as the *palladium* of Athena. See Jean Ebersolt, *Constantinople: Recueil d'études, d'archéologie et d'histoire* (Paris, 1951), 71–3; and Holger A. Klein, 'Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople', in Franz A. Bauer (ed.), *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft* (Istanbul, 2006), 79–99, esp. 81.

35 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 2012), 278.

36 Byzantine emperors had carried such relics in battle since the sixth century. See Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 216, 247.

37 See mainly Fernand de Mély, 'Du rôle des pierres gravées au Moyen Âge', *Revue de l'art chrétien* 42 (1893), ser. 4, 14–24, 98–105; George F. Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (Philadelphia and London, 1913); Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Particularly in England* (Oxford, 1922); Christel Meier-Staubach, *Gemma Spiritalis: Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1977); Theo Jülich, 'Sakrale Gegenstände und ihre Materialien als Bedeutungsträger', *Rheydter Jahrbuch für Geschichte, Kunst und Heimatkunde* 19 (1991), 254–6; Lorraine Daston and

in nearly all its forms (the Church seems to have tolerated the tradition of the medicinal amulet),<sup>38</sup> precious stones were widely valued for their divine power when attached to limbs, hidden in clothing, hung around the neck, or simply kept in the house. Numerous medieval texts, in particular lapidaries, encyclopaedic compendia about gemstones, described in detail their appearance, their origins, and their perceived thaumaturgical and healing virtues. Lapidaries flourished at medieval courts, and some texts about gemstones emanated directly from imperial circles.<sup>39</sup> In addition, gemstones occupied an important place in medieval astrology as repositories of planetary forces. They were seen as part of the God-given order – symbols of the divine power of God – and were understood to have properties connected directly to Him. The foundation stones of the heavenly Jerusalem were said in scriptural texts to comprise various gemstones, including sapphires, chalcedonies, emeralds, and sardonyx; other biblical texts referred to gems used for the sumptuous decoration of the breastplate of Aaron the High Priest.<sup>40</sup>

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Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 2001), 75–6; Edina Bozoky, *Charmes et prières apotropâiques* (Turnhout, 2003); Gia Toussaint, 'Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein: Der Edelsteinschmuck von Reliquiaren im Spiegel mittelalterlicher Wahrnehmung,' *Das Mittelalter* 8 (2003), 41–66; Brigitte Buettner, 'From Bones to Stones – Reflections on Jeweled Reliquaries,' in Brigitte Reudenbach and Gia Toussaint (eds), *Reliquiare im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2005), 43–59; Elena Di Venosa, *Die deutschen Steinbücher des Mittelalters: Magische und medizinische Einblicke in die Welt der Steine* (Göppingen 2005). On ancient gems in the Middle Ages, see Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben* (Berlin and New York, 2007).

38 John M. Riddle, *Marbode of Rennes' (1035–1123) De lapidibus: Considered as a Medical Treatise* (Wiesbaden, 1977); Francis B. Brévar, 'Between Medicine, Magic, and Religion: Wonder Drugs in German Medico-Pharmaceutical Treatises of the Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries,' *Speculum* 83 (2008), 1–57.

39 One of them was *Otia Imperialia*, an encyclopaedic work written 1210–14 by an English cleric, Gervasius of Tilbury (c. 1150–c. 1235), and dedicated to his patron, Emperor Otto IV (1175–1218). In his work, Gervasius made consistent reference to objects that caused wonder, including gemstones. *Otia Imperialia* was translated into French and much read in the fourteenth century. See Shelag E. Banks and James W. Binns (eds and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor* (Oxford, 2002); Thomas B. Mueller, 'The Marvellous in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1990); Fritz P. Knapp, "'Wahre" und "erlogene" Wunder: Gervasius von Tilbury und der Höfische Roman,' *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 132 (2010), 230–44.

40 Revelation 21:19–21; Exodus 39:8–14. For English translations, see <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ufunuo+21&version=KJV> and <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+39&version=KJV> [accessed 31 March 2023].

Charles of Luxembourg, a well-educated man, was undoubtedly aware of the spiritual properties of gemstones. He may already have been acquainted with them at the court of his father, John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia. The fourteenth-century Latin *Epistola de cautela a venenis ad Johannem, regem Bohemie*, devoted to various forms of protection against poisoning, contains an example of this.<sup>41</sup> The text was written in the form of a letter by Johannes Hake (Johann von Göttingen, c. 1280–1349), a respected physician of his time who had studied medicine at the universities of Paris and Montpellier.<sup>42</sup> From 1324 Hake served as chaplain, personal physician, and *familiaris domesticus* to John of Bohemia, to whom the text was addressed. Hake had a good reputation as a doctor and had served from 1314 to 1318 as the personal physician of Louis IV of Bavaria (who was later crowned Holy Roman Emperor); in 1335, he was the personal physician of Pope Benedict XII. Hake is believed to have written his treatise around 1330, just before John of Luxembourg's campaign to gain territory in Italy in 1330–1; its chief purpose was to offer John of Luxembourg information about the best possible protection against poisoning. Hake especially recommended the use of an emerald (*smaragdus*). He described in detail the emerald's magical properties and explained how the stone could be recognized, where it could be found, and how it should be properly used by people who had been poisoned.<sup>43</sup> Charles of Luxembourg joined his father on the journey to Italy and in his

41 Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, XI.E.9, fol. 272r–277v, chart. saec. XIV et XV ff. 340, 21.5×15 cm. d. m.; see Josef Truhlář, *Catalogus codicum manu scriptorum latinorum qui in C. R. bibliotheca publica atque universitatis Pragensis asservantur. Pars posterior: Codices 1666–2752 forulorum IX–XV et Bibliothecae Kinskyanae – Adligata 2753–2830* (Prague, 1906), 157–8, no. 2056: 'Johannis de Göttingen, capellani Johannis regis Bohemiae, ad eundem regem tractatus de cautela a venenis. 'Gloriosissimo principi ... Johanni ... Bohemie Polonieque regi' ... 'una nux magna bene sana et electa' (158). On the content, see Milada Říhová and Martin Steiner, "'Gloriosissimo principi': Epistola de cautela a venenis ad Johannem, regem Bohemiae", *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Philologica* 2 (2004), 169–200; and Milada Říhová et al., *Lékaři na dvoře Karla IV. a Jana Lucemburského* (Prague and Litomyšl, 2010), 67–73, 97–103. For a complex evaluation, see Franck Collard, 'Une voie germanique de la "vénénologie" à la fin du Moyen Âge? Recherches sur quelques écrits latins spécialisés en provenance de l'Empire', *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 40 (2013), 57–77, esp. 62–9.

42 On Johann Hake, see Karl Wenck, 'Johann von Göttingen, Arzt, Bischof und Politiker zur Zeit Kaiser Ludwigs des Bayern', *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 17 (1925), 141–56; Arend Mindermann, *Der berühmteste Arzt der Welt: Bischof Johann Hake, genannt von Göttingen (um 1280–1349)* (Bielefeld, 2001).

43 Říhová, *Lékaři na dvoře*, 97–103.

autobiography reported how in Pavia a number of men from his entourage were poisoned while Charles miraculously survived.<sup>44</sup>

Charles himself owned at least one magical gemstone, contained within a seal ring. It was a powerful amulet with healing properties that Charles had inherited from his grandfather, Henry VII of Luxembourg, and which he used to seal a letter that he sent to the Metropolitan Chapter in Prague in 1354. In this letter, Charles described the ring as enclosing a ruby-coloured stone that possessed the power to stop bleeding.<sup>45</sup> In addition, as mentioned above, Charles had possession of the imperial crown, the magnificent jewelled object believed to have belonged to Charlemagne.<sup>46</sup> The lavishly decorated crown was reputed to have contained a wondrous stone, presumably a large opal, whose uniqueness earned it its own name – *lapis orphanus*, or ‘orphan stone’. The gemstone was already renowned in the thirteenth century; the German Dominican philosopher and friar Albertus Magnus (1200–80) wrote in his *De Mineralibus* (*Book of Minerals*) (c. 1248–52) that the stone with a hue of ‘gleaming white snow’ was said to preserve the royal honour.<sup>47</sup> The exclusivity of this object was

44 ‘Život císaře Karla IV’, in Jireček, Emler and Tadra, *Fontes rerum Bohemicorum*, 342.

45 In the letter sent by Charles IV to the Prague Chapter on 17 February 1354, this ring is described as follows: ‘... unum annulum ... cum gemma habente colorem quasi rubini, cuius virtute et tactu restringitur sanguinis fluxus.’ See Podlaha and Šittler, *Chrámový poklad*, 32.

46 Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Schatzkammer, WS XIII 1. The imperial crown dates from the second half of the tenth century. The cross is an addition from the early eleventh century; see Robert Folz, *Le souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne dans l’empire germanique médiéval* (Paris, 1950), 454. For further on the imperial crown, see Gunther G. Wolf, *Die Wiener Reichskrone* (Vienna, 1995); Hermann Fillitz, ‘Die Reichskleinodien: Ein Versuch zur Erklärung ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung’, in Hermann Fillitz, *Thesaurus mediaevalis: Ausgewählte Schriften zur Schatzkunst des Mittelalters*, ed. Franz Kirchweber and Werner Telesko (Ostfildern, 2010), 15–26.

47 ‘Orphanus est lapis qui in Corona Romani Imperatoris est, neque unquam alibi visus est, propter quod etiam Orphanus vocatur: est autem colore quasi vinosus, subtilem habens vinositatem, et hoc est sicut si candidum nivis candens seu micans penetraverit in rubeum, clarum, vinosum, et sit superatum ab ipso. Est autem lapis perlucidus, et traditur quod aliquando fulsit in nocte, sed nunc tempore nostro non micat in tenebris. Fertur autem quod honorem servat regalem.’ I quote according to *DE MINERALIBUS ET REBUS METALICIS LIBRI QVINQUE*. *Alberto Magno summe Philosopho. COLONIAE An. M.D.LXIX.*, 167–8. The passage has been translated as follows: ‘Orphanus is the stone in the crown of the [Holy] Roman Emperor, and has never been anywhere else, and therefore is called the orphan. Its colour is like wine, of a delicate wine-red, as if gleaming or shining white snow were mingled with clear red wine, and were overcome by it. It is a brilliant stone, and tradition says that at one time it used to shine by night; but nowadays it does not shine in

also emphasized in the inventory of imperial relics provided to Charles in 1350, indicating that Charles was familiar with the special power imputed to this gem.

It is therefore not surprising that the Coronation Cross incorporated not only several relics but also a group of precious and semi-precious gemstones. However, the description of the cross dating to 1480 reveals that, in Charles' time, the decoration of the cross was slightly different from what we see today. In addition to the sapphires, there were emeralds placed at the very top of each central fleur-de-lys. Thus, the cross was encrusted with precious stones which, from the fifth century at least, were reserved exclusively for use by emperors and their families.<sup>48</sup> The special status of these gems would probably have been maintained by their presumed magical properties. According to Albertus Magnus' *Book of Minerals*, a 'smaragdus' (emerald) 'increases wealth and confers persuasive speech in (pleading) causes; and suspended from the neck, cures hemitertian fever and epilepsy', while a sapphire 'makes a man chaste and cools internal heat, checks sweating, and cures headache and pain in the tongue .... They say that invigorates the body, and brings about peaceful agreements, and makes one pious and devoted to God, and confirms the mind in goodness.'<sup>49</sup> Both emeralds and sapphires are mentioned in the Bible; they adorn the New Jerusalem and are present in the High Priest's breastplate.

On the Coronation Cross, the precious gemstones are shaped mostly in the rounded form of cabochons, carefully polished and secured by simple claws made of gold. The gems themselves are set in such a way that each fleur-de-lys terminal of the cross is surrounded by stones and white pearls. This type of framing follows the model of the early medieval mounting of gems, such as the mounting of the intaglio portrait of Julia, daughter of the emperor Titus (Fig. 4.7), a large aquamarine engraved with the head of a woman and signed by the Greek engraver Evodos, made about AD 90, which decorated the summit of the Crest of Charlemagne in the

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the dark. It is said to preserve the royal honour.' See Albertus Magnus, *Book of Minerals*, trans. Dorothy Wyckoff (Oxford, 1967), 111. Albertus' work has also been known as *Mineralia, Lapidarius, Liber de mineralibus et lapidibus*, or *De mineralibus et rebus metallicis*. On the orphanus, see Estelle Morgan, "'Lapis Orphanus" in the Imperial Crown', *The Modern Language Review* 58 (1963), 210–14; Gunther Wolf, 'Der "Waise": Bemerkungen zum Leitstein der Wiener Reichskrone', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 41 (1985), 39–65; Arno Mentzel-Reuters, 'Die Goldene Krone: Entwicklungslinien mittelalterlicher Herrschaftssymbolik', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 69 (2004), 135–82, esp. 147–63.

48 Gerda Friess, *Edelsteine im Mittelalter: Wandel und Kontinuität in ihrer Bedeutung durch zwölf Jahrhunderte (in Aberglauben, Medizin, Theologie und Goldschmiedekunst)* (Hildesheim, 1980), 63.

49 See Albertus Magnus, *Book of Minerals*, 120, 115.



Fig. 4.7. Portrait of Julia, daughter of Emperor Titus, Italy, Rome, before 90 CE. Mount: France, ninth century. Aquamarine (intaglio); gold, sapphire, pearls (mount); 10.5 cm x 9.5 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques. Photo © BnF, Paris.

abbey church of Saint-Denis, Paris.<sup>50</sup> The preferred early medieval form of the reliquary cross was strongly influenced by the Carolingian mounting

50 Poche, 'Einige Erwägungen', 85–6; Blaise de Montesquiou-Fezensac and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, 'Camées et intailles du Trésor de Saint-Denis', *Cahiers Archéologiques: Fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen Âge* 24 (1975), 137–62, esp. 141; Peter Lasko, *Ars Sacra 800–1200* (New Haven, 1994), 18–19; Marue L. Vollenweider and Mathilde Avisseau-Broustet, *Camées et intailles II: Les portraits romains du Cabinet*

of gems, and Charles' famous namesake remained throughout his life a potent model of imperial rulership for the Luxembourg emperor. Charles' profound interest in Charlemagne may be reflected in the design of the Coronation Cross.<sup>51</sup>

## THE GEMSTONES AND THEIR IMAGES

On the verso of the Coronation Cross are cameos – gemstones with carved images. They serve as lids of small boxes protecting the relics. Generally ignored by previous scholarship, these small carvings have never been examined in any detail despite there being nine of them. Three cameos of this collection are Byzantine; they depict the Crucifixion (onyx, twelfth–thirteenth century), the archangel Michael (chalcedony, twelfth century), and a figure of Christ blessing (sardonyx, thirteenth century). Four of the gemstones are Western Medieval; these are carved in the form of another Christ blessing (amethyst, thirteenth century), a facing male bust (sapphire, thirteenth century), a pair of standing rulers (agate, twelfth century), and a portrait of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor (sardonyx, after 1220). Finally, there are two magnificent Roman imperial pieces, both made of sardonyx.<sup>52</sup> Scholars have assumed that the first of the two portrays Alexander the Great, but it may well be an idealized portrait of Claudius, created during his reign. The second one is a portrait cameo of Antonia Minor, mother of the emperor Claudius (Fig.

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*des Médailles* (Paris, 2003), 128–9, no. 145; Erik Inglis, 'Expertise, Artifacts, and Time in the 1534 Inventory of the St-Denis Treasury', *Art Bulletin* 98:1 (2016), 14–42.

51 The Holy Roman Emperors, including Charles IV, asserted their lineage from Charlemagne, who was also a holy figure, and believed that they were divinely sanctioned to lead Christendom. On the relationship between Charlemagne and Charles of Luxembourg, see Marie Bláhová, 'Nachleben Karls des Grossen in der Propaganda Karls IV', *Das Mittelalter* 4 (1999), 11–25; Machilek, 'Karl IV. und Karl der Große', 113–45; and Zoë Opačić, 'Karolus Magnus and Karolus Quartus: Imperial Role Models in Ingelheim, Aachen and Prague', in Ute Engel and Alexandra Gajewski (eds), *Mainz and the Middle Rhine Valley: Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology* (Leeds, 2007), 221–46.

52 On the cameos, see Hans Wentzel, 'Mittelalterliche Gemmen: Versuch einer Grundlegung', in *Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 8 (1941), 45–98, esp. 8, 51, 74–7, 82–3; Jiří Frel, 'Les portraits antiques en Tchécoslovaquie', in Jaroslav Pešina (ed.), *Sborník k sedmdesátinám Jana Květa* (Prague, 1965), 48–9; Jan Bouzek, Marie Dufková and Karel Kurz, *Antický portrét*, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Prague (Prague, 1972), 38; and most recently Ingrid Ciulisová and Martin Henig, 'An Imperial Portrait Cameo of Antonia Minor in a Fourteenth-century Reliquary Cross in Prague', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 174 (2021), 6–15 (OA <https://doi.org/10.1080/00681288.2021.1924984>).

4.8).<sup>53</sup> Most intriguing, however, is the fact that this cameo of Antonia was re-employed by Charles to commemorate a Christian saint. The original portrait was supplemented with a linear halo around the head and a monogrammatic inscription on either side. New palaeographical analysis confirms that the monogram shows 'S. CA', consistent with St Catherine of Alexandria, and that the gothic majuscule appears to be from the fourteenth century. Thus, in the fourteenth century, the ancient imperial cameo of Antonia Minor was rededicated to St Catherine, Charles of Luxembourg's heavenly protectress.<sup>54</sup> According to *The Golden Legend*, St Catherine was born a princess and, as such, was usually pictured as a crowned, luxuriously dressed woman.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the image of St Catherine not only corresponded with the existing cameo portrait of Antonia but also helped connect the cross directly with Charles and his strategy of self-promotion as a pious ruler.

According to Wentzel, the nine cameos' historical associations collectively link them to both the Eastern Roman and the Western Latin worlds. The Byzantine past is exemplified by the amethyst cameo depicting Christ blessing (depicted here as Pantokrator, ruler of all), the central image of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Western Latin world is evoked by the stone of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (Figs 4.9, 4.10).<sup>56</sup>

53 See Wolf-Rüdiger Megow, *Kameen von Augustus bis Alexander Severus* (Berlin, 1987), 290–1, and most recently Ciulisová and Henig, 'An Imperial Portrait Cameo'. The Prague cameo of Antonia Minor is comparable with the cameo of Antonia Minor preserved in the National Archaeological Museum in Florence (first century AD, and later additions. Sardonyx; height 49 mm).

54 Ciulisová and Henig, 'An Imperial Portrait Cameo'. Charles was keen on St Catherine, one of the most popular early Christian virgin martyrs in medieval devotion, and especially venerated her. According to his autobiography, he believed that it was St Catherine who ensured his victories in battles at San Felice near Modena in 1332 and again in 1340 when Charles took the Penede Castle, close to Lake Garda in Italy. Charles established a new Augustinian nunnery with the church dedicated to this saint in the New Town in Prague and was personally present at its consecration in 1367. Moreover, in his private oratory chapel at Karlštejn Castle, he had the picture of St Catherine painted on the stone mensa of the central altar. See Balázs Nagy and Frank Schaer, *Karoli IV Imperatoris Romanorum vita ab eo ipso conscripta et Hystoria nova de Sancto Wenceslao Martyre: Autobiography of Emperor Charles IV and His Legend of St. Wenceslas* (Budapest, 2001), 44, 150; Johann Friedrich Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii VIII: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Kaiser Karl IV. 1346–1378*, ed. Alfons Huber (Hildesheim, 1968, reprint of the edition Innsbruck, 1877), 372; František Ekert, *Posvátná místa král. hl. města Prahy*, 2 (Prague, 1884), 170–82.

55 Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 720–7.

56 Wentzel, 'Mittelalterliche Gemmen', 76–7; Hans Wentzel, 'Staatskameen im Mittelalter', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 4 (1962), 42–77, esp. 54–5; Rainer Kahsnitz, 'Staufische Kameen', in Reiner Hauss herr (ed.), *Die Zeit der Staufer:*





Fig. 4.8. Imperial portrait cameo of Antonia Minor, first century CE, sardonyx, height 3.7 cm. Incorporated into Coronation Cross, Treasury of St Vitus Cathedral, Prague. Photo © Courtesy of Prague Castle Administration/Jan Gloc.

*Geschichte-Kunst-Kultur*, vol. 5. *Supplement: Vorträge und Forschung*, exhibition catalogue (Stuttgart, 1979), 477–520, esp. 478–9); and *Die Zeit der Stauer: Geschichte-Kunst-Kultur*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1977), cat. 860, 676–7.



Fig. 4.9. Christ blessing, thirteenth century, amethyst, height 3.2 cm. Incorporated into Coronation Cross, Treasury of St Vitus Cathedral, Prague. Photo © Courtesy of Prague Castle Administration/Jan Gloc.

The first of these two cameos shows Christ holding a book, most probably the Gospel, and blessing with his right hand. The purple colour of the amethyst stone clearly signifies the imperial status of the figure. Although this medieval cameo was clearly inspired by Byzantine models, it was created in the Western Latin world.<sup>57</sup> And notably, the imperial seal

57 Gerda Friess, *Edelsteine im Mittelalter: Wandel und Kontinuität in ihrer Bedeutung durch zwölf Jahrhunderte (in Aberglauben, Medizin, Theologie und Goldschmiedekunst)* (Hildesheim, 1980), 63. On the Christ Pantokrator, see Nancy Patterson, 'Types of Christ', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1 (New York and Oxford, 1991), 438. For supposed Byzantine models, see for instance the cameo



Fig. 4.10. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor, after 1220, sardonyx, height 3.8 cm. Incorporated into Coronation Cross, Treasury of St Vitus Cathedral, Prague. Photo © Courtesy of Prague Castle Administration/Jan Gloc.

of Frederick of Hohenstaufen (1194–1250), made around 1220, served as a model for the anonymous master who created the cameo of Frederick now mounted on the Coronation Cross.<sup>58</sup> As on the seal, we see him in a frontal position, seated in majesty on a throne with his insignia: the crown, the sceptre topped with the cross in his right hand, and the orb in his left.

In Charles' time, both the reference to the Eastern Christian Church<sup>59</sup> and to Frederick would surely have resonated powerfully. Charles, like Frederick before him, was actively attempting to resolve what had been for a long time a burning political and religious issue: the Great Schism and the reunion of the Eastern Church with the West. In 1355, shortly after his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor, Charles was in touch with the Byzantine emperor John V Paleologos (1332–91), one of the principal initiators of political negotiations about this matter at the time; and some scholars have suggested that the Byzantine ruler also sent Charles a piece of the Holy Cross.<sup>60</sup> Frederick II is generally considered to be one of the most controversial imperial figures, well known for his clash with the papacy, his excommunications, and his persistent claims to universal power. Nevertheless, it was Frederick who in 1212 issued the charter of great significance for the Bohemian king, Ottokar I Přemysl, confirming that the royal title of the Bohemian kings was hereditary and thus perpetuating the hereditary form of the Bohemian monarchy.<sup>61</sup>

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showing Blessing Christ (bloodstone, c. tenth–eleventh century) from the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. A 160–1978; Paul Williamson, 'A Byzantine Bloodstone Carving in the Victoria and Albert Museum', *The Burlington Magazine* 122 (1980), 66–9.

58 Rainer Kahsnitz, 'Staufische Kameen', in Reiner Hauss herr (ed.), *Die Zeit der Staufer*, 478–9.

59 Helen C. Evans pointed out that Charles' interest in Eastern images may also have been inspired by his desire to emulate Emperor Constantine, founder of the Christian state that was still called 'the Empire of the Romans' in the fourteenth century and is today known as Byzantium. See Helen C. Evans, 'The Madonna of Most', in Barbara Drake Boehm and Jiří Fajt (eds), *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347–1437*, exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (New Haven and London, 2005), cat. 27, 156.

60 On this issue, see Miroslav Hroch and Věra Hrochová, 'Karel IV. a otázka obrany Balkánu proti Osmanům v polovině 14. století', in Václav Vaněček (ed.), *Karolus Quartus* (Prague, 1984), 205–14. For a wider context, see Joseph Gill, *Church Union: Rome and Byzantium 1204–1453* (London, 1979). On the piece of the Holy Cross sent to Charles IV by John V Paleologos, see Otavský, 'K relikviím vlastněným císařem Karlem IV.', 395.

61 Zdeněk Měřínský and Jaroslav Mezník, 'The Making of the Czech State: Bohemia and Moravia from the Tenth to the Fourteenth Centuries', in Mikuláš Teich (ed.), *Bohemia in History* (Cambridge, 1998), 39–58; and Martin Wihoda and Josef Žemlička (eds), *Zlatá bula sicilská: Mezi mýtem a realitou* (Prague, 2016). In

Apparently, Charles sought to benefit from the potency of the deliberately selected stones bearing these images. The relics gave the cross the character of a powerful apotropaic object, but the stones, particularly the cameos, imparted a narrative that was just as important. Supplementing the rarity of the gemstones and the spiritual and magical properties they were thought to possess, the cameos imbued the cross with tangible connections to the past. While the fundamental spiritual message conveyed by the relics was the legendary story of the True Cross, the cameos' multiple historical and artistic connections induced another discourse, the primary significance of which was to establish continuity between Charles' reign, the ancient Roman emperors, and in particular the Christian Rome of Constantine the Great. Medieval emperors regarded themselves as successors of the old Roman emperors and took seriously the topos of 'translatio imperii', understood here as an unbroken link between antiquity and modernity.<sup>62</sup> In their entirety, the cameos would have effectively supported Charles' imperial status and thus the special position of Bohemia and the Luxembourgs within the Holy Roman Empire.

Charles was a man of good education, literate and proficient in several languages, with a wide range of literary and theological interests acquired in his early youth in Paris, and later developed on his numerous travels around Europe. His learned interests embracing theology, history, liturgy, and more, found reflection in his own Latin writings.<sup>63</sup> However, a crucial

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spite of the ongoing papal antipathy toward Frederick and his legacy, for Charles IV, Frederick's art commissions remained an important source of inspiration. On connections between the Tower of Old Town Bridge built in Prague in Charles IV's time and the Capua gate near Naples commissioned by Emperor Frederick II in the 1230s, see Willibald Sauerländer, "Two Glances from the North: The Presence and Absence of Frederick II in the Art of Empire: The Court Art of Frederick II and the *Opus Francigenum*," in William Tronzo (ed.), *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II. Hohenstaufen*, Studies in the History of Art, vol. 44, Center of Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, Symposium Papers (Hannover and London, 1994), 188–209, esp. 197–200); and Ján Bažant, "Karel IV., "Staroměstská mostecká věž" a "pons animarum", *Listy filologické / Folia philologica* 120 (1997), 46–59.

62 Werner Goetz, *Translatio imperii: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorien im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 1958), esp. 237–57; Peter Hutter, *Germanische Stammväter und römisch-deutsches Kaisertum* (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 2000), 26.

63 Charles' writings include his autobiography (*Commentarius de Vita Caroli or Vita*), a new life of St Wenceslas (*Hystoria nova de sancto Wenceslao martyre, duce Bohemorum*), a coronation Ordo (*Ordo ad coronandum regem Bohemorum et Ordo ad benedicendum reginam*), and an introduction to his *Majestas Carolina* prepared in 1350–1. See Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, "Carolus quartus latinus: Karl IV. als literarisches Ego, als gestaltender Urheber und als geistige Autorität," in Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Cogor adversum te: Drei Studien zum literarisch-theologischen Profil Karls IV. und seiner Kanzlei* (Warendorf, 1999), 221–418; Anežka Vidmanová (ed.),

question remains to be answered: Was Charles aware of the visual message conveyed by the gemstones? The correspondence of Francesco Petrarca (1304–74), the illustrious poet, scholar, and antiquarian of exceptional curiosity and competence, offers a possible answer. A letter written by him in 1355 states that a selection of gold and silver coins bearing portraits of ancient emperors was presented to Charles by Petrarch, by then a well-known collector of Roman coins in his own right, when the two met in Mantua in December 1354.<sup>64</sup> This letter also relates that, on the occasion of their meeting, Petrarch gave Charles a brief outline of the great events in the life of each of the Roman emperors depicted on the coins, and that Charles studied these coins in detail (we even know that he later disputed the authenticity of one of them).<sup>65</sup> The actual coins have disappeared, but Charles was undoubtedly capable of distinguishing between the ancient images, and of reading the inscriptions on the coins. It seems that the cameos which came into his possession were later deliberately and by his explicit order re-employed on the Coronation Cross.

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*Karel IV.: Literární dílo* (Prague, 2000); Eva Schlotheuber, ‘Karl als Autor – Der “weise Herrscher”’, in Jiří Fajt and Markus Hörsch, *Kaiser Karl IV. 1316–2016: Erste bayerisch-tschechische Landesausstellung*, exhibition catalogue (Prague, 2016), 69–78; and Martin Bauch, ‘“Et hec scripsi manu mea propria” – Known and Unknown: Autographs of Charles IV as Testimonies of Intellectual Profiles, Royal Literacy, and Cultural Transfer’, in Sébastien Barret, Dominique Stutzmann and Georg Vogeler (eds), *Ruling the Script in the Middle Ages: Formal Aspects of Written Communication (Books, Charters, and Inscriptions)* (Turnhout, 2016), 25–47.

64 Charles met Petrarch in December 1354, during his imperial journey when he travelled to Rome to receive the crown. Petrarch’s letter from 25 February 1355 was addressed to Lello di Pietro Stefano dei Tosetti, a Roman noble and intimate friend of the poet. See Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus et variae*. Vol. 2, ed. Iosephi Fracassetti (Florence, 1862), 520. On Petrarch as an antiquarian, see Roberto Weiss, ‘Petrarch the Antiquarian’, in Charles Henderson (ed.), *Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman* (Rome, 1964), 199–209; and Angelo Mazzocco, ‘The Antiquarianism of Francesco Petrarca’, *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977), 203–24. For a wider context, see Charles C. Bayley, ‘Petrarch, Charles IV, and the “Renovatio Imperii”’, *Speculum* 17 (1942), 323–41.

65 See Charles’ correspondence with Petrarch’s student Niccolò Beccari of Ferrara (c. 1315–before 1374), a poet and presumably a tutor of Charles’ younger son, Sigismund. See Karel Hrdina, ‘Niccolò Beccari, Ital na dvoře Karla IV’, in Bedřich Jenšovský and Bedřich Mendl (eds), *K dějinám československým v období humanismu: Sborník prací věnovaných Janu Bedřichu Novákovi k 60. narozeninám 1872–1932* (Prague, 1932), 159–77; Hanno Helbling, ‘Le lettere di Nicolaus de Beccariis (Niccolò da Ferrara)’, *Bullettino dell’Istituto storico Italiano per il medio evo e Archivio Muratoriano* 76 (1964), 241–89.

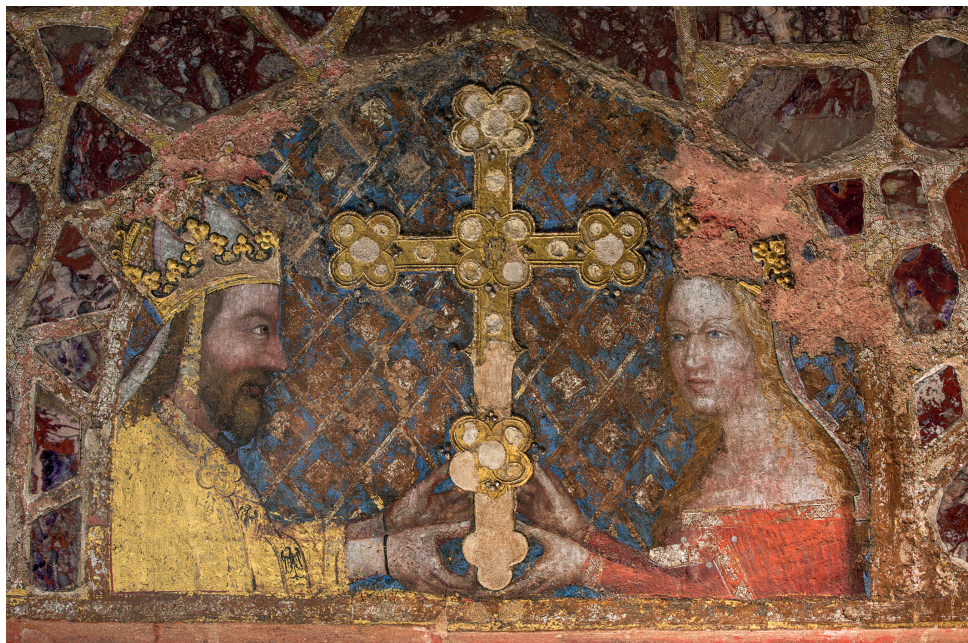


Fig. 4.11. Charles raising his reliquary cross with his third wife, Anne of Schweidnitz (?), before 1360. Fresco, gold, gemstones. Chapel of St Catherine, Karlštejn Castle. Photo © The National Heritage Institute, Prague.

## THE CORONATION CROSS AND ITS PURPOSE

The Coronation Cross is thought to have been made or remade in the late 1350s or 1360s, most likely shortly after Charles' imperial coronation in 1355. However, this object is not identical with the cross several times depicted in the small and the high tower of Karlštejn. Emanuel Poche argued that there probably existed two different crosses containing a similar set of Christ's Passion relics.<sup>66</sup> The first was the altered thirteenth-century cross with distinctive fleur-de-lys terminals, most probably one of the crosses Charles owned personally and later used during coronations. The second was the massive cross with quadrilobes painted at Karlštejn and celebrated as the Bohemian Cross (Fig. 4.11). This cross almost certainly found its temporary resting place on the altar of the Chapel of the Instruments of Christ's Passion, Charles' private oratory located on the

66 Poche, 'K otázce ostatkových křížů Karla IV', 239–46. According to Poche, the cross is comparable with crosses of Sens, Saint-Omer, and Gosse. See Jean Taralon, *Les trésors des églises de France*, exhibition catalogue, Musée des arts décoratifs (Paris, 1965), ill. nos 118, 120, 124. See also Jaroslav Pešina et al., *České umění gotické* (Prague, 1970), 337–8.

second floor of the Lesser Tower of the castle, and later dedicated to St Catherine.<sup>67</sup> In the course of time, the Bohemian Cross disappeared, as did the original base of the Coronation Cross after the object was offered as security for a loan by Vladislav II, King of Bohemia, in the 1470s.<sup>68</sup> In any case, it is evident that each of the two ornaments served both as precious reliquaries connecting the owner with Christ and as awe-inspiring multi-purpose objects – protective devices similar to the ancient cult object, the Palladium, the purpose of which was to repel enemies, ward off natural disasters, and guarantee divine protection – in this case to the Luxembourgs as rulers.

In addition to the Coronation Cross, at least two fourteenth-century gem-based objects traditionally linked to Charles of Luxembourg have survived and are extant today.<sup>69</sup> One of them is a silver crown with 22 cameos and intaglios. The other is the reliquary bust of Charlemagne on which the silver crown rests (Fig. 4.12); both are now kept in the treasury of Aachen Cathedral. Many of the cameos and intaglios that adorn the silver crown have Roman origins.<sup>70</sup> Notably, both the Aachen crown and the Coronation Cross are lavishly decorated with precious stones, including Roman cameos, and both display fleur-de-lys ornamentation. The magnificent silver bust of Charlemagne is ornamented with a large number of gemstones, many of them carved, and there are also numerous carved gemstones of different sizes mounted on his tunic. The Aachen silver crown is thought to be Charles' private crown, made in Prague for his coronation in Aachen in 1349 in the absence of the royal insignia of the kings of the Romans kept at this time in the hands of Louis of Brandenburg (1316–61), the eldest son of Charles' rival, Louis IV of Bavaria.<sup>71</sup> The crown is closely linked to the bust of Charlemagne and seen as analogous to

67 Jaromír Homolka, 'Umělecká výzdoba paláce a menší věže hradu Karlštejn', in Jiří Fajt (ed.), *Magister Theodoricus, dvorní malíř císaře Karla IV.: Umělecká výzdoba posvátných prostor hradu Karlštejna* (Prague, 1998), 96–153; Paul Crossley, 'The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia', in Sarah Rees Jones, Richard Marks and Alastair J. Minnis (eds), *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe* (York, 2000), 141.

68 Fišer, *Karlštejn: Vzájemné vztahy tří karlštejnských kaplí*, 261.

69 Poche, 'Einige Erwägungen', 87–9; Karel Stejskal, *Umění na dvoře Karla IV* (Prague, 1978), 85, 90.

70 Hans Peter Hilger, 'Anmerkungen zu der Reliquienbüste Karls des Grossen im Domschatz zu Aachen', *Aachener Kunstblätter* 48 (1978/9), 17–24; Ján Bažant, 'Medusa, Ancient Gems, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV', *Anodos: Studies of the Ancient World* 13 (2013), 35–50.

71 On the death of Louis IV in 1347, the imperial treasure was in possession of his son, Louis of Brandenburg, who refused to relinquish it. Charles formally received the imperial relics and regalia on 12 March 1350 in Munich. They were brought to Prague by Jan Očko of Vlašim and Guillaume de Landstein. See Robert Folz, *Le*





Fig. 4.12. Reliquary bust of Charlemagne, second half of the fourteenth century, oak wood, silver, gilded silver, gemstones, cameos, and intaglios, Treasury of Aachen Cathedral. Photo © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

the reliquary of St Wenceslas upon which Charles placed the royal Bohemian crown after his coronation as King of Bohemia in 1347.<sup>72</sup> Even the Coronation Cross is considered by some scholars as an alternative coronation cross for the kings of the Romans, created to complement the Aachen silver crown.<sup>73</sup> Charles' first coronation took place in Bonn in 1346, after he had been elected Rival King of the Romans in opposition to the Bavarian emperor Louis IV. This coronation took place in Bonn as neither Aachen nor Cologne would open their gates to Charles. Thus, one can speculate that all this was done presumably for a single particular purpose: to legitimize *ex post* the status of the Aachen silver crown and thus make the act of Charles' coronation as King of the Romans justifiable and thus acceptable. While this hypothesis may seem convincing, it is also true that no direct written evidence has survived to corroborate it. It should be openly acknowledged that no written historical record exists to confirm Charles of Luxembourg's having commissioned the Aachen silver crown, the reliquary bust of Charlemagne, or the Coronation Cross. However, there is non-textual, material evidence that can be used in much the same way as documents, offering insights at least as significant as those afforded by the traditional study of written sources, and thus shedding light on Charles' likely engagement in the creation of these objects.

Recent scholarship has already revealed that, in addition to the reliquary cross, the numerous Roman cameos displayed on the Aachen silver crown might have been re-employed on this object in order to link Charles of Luxembourg to his illustrious Roman imperial predecessors.<sup>74</sup> The same can be said about the Roman portrait cameos on the cross, including the cameo of Antonia Minor, which Charles re-dedicated to his preferred saint, Catherine of Alexandria. At the very least, this indicates that before their reuse the gemstones would have been selected deliberately, and that

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*Souvenir et la Légende de Charlemagne dans l'Empire germanique médiéval* (Paris, 1950), 453.

72 On the reliquary bust of Charlemagne, see Ernst Günther Grimme, 'Mittelalterliche Karlsreliquiare: Die Verehrung Karls des Großen, dargestellt anhand von Aachener Reliquienbehältern und anderen Werken der Goldschmiedekunst', *Aachener Kunstblätter* 16 (1957), 30–6; Ernst Günther Grimme, 'Der Aachener Domschatz', cat. 69; Hilger, 'Anmerkungen zu der Reliquienbüste', 17–24; Percy E. Schramm and Hermann Fillitz, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser. Bd. II: Ein Beitrag zur Herrschergeschichte von Rudolf I. bis Maximilian I., 1273–1519*, no. 30, 58; Karel Otavský, 'Aachener Goldschmiedearbeiten des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Anton Legner (ed.), *Die Parler und der schöne Stil 1350–1400: Europäische Kunst unter den Luxemburgern*, 4 (Cologne, 1980), 77–82; M. Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik im Mitteleuropa* (Munich, 1982), cat. 84, 196–7; Georg Minkenber, *Die Büste Karls d. Gr. im Aachener Domschatz* (Heidelberg, 2008).

73 Poche, 'Einige Erwägungen', 87–9; Stejskal, *Umění na dvoře Karla IV.*, 85.

74 Bažant, 'Medusa', 35–50.

the act of selecting the stones required the personal participation of a knowledgeable patron or his learned advisers.<sup>75</sup>

Equally important is the status of ancient cameos as rare and costly objects during the late medieval period. One example is Le Grand Camée de France, which was valued so highly that in early 1340 Philip of Valois, King of France, sent it from the Sainte-Chapelle to Pope Clement VI to Avignon as security for a loan.<sup>76</sup> Even in the fifteenth century, the valuations attached to precious stones significantly varied in comparison to paintings. Whereas the engraved gemstones of the Medici collections were valued between 400 and 1000 florins each, and the famous sardonyx cameo Tazza Farnese at 10,000 florins, the price of an average painting by a master of the stature of Filippo Lippi or Sandro Botticelli would have ranged between 50 and 100 florins, and a large fresco cycle, such as Ghirlandai's *Story of Saint John the Baptist* in Santa Maria Novella in Florence, would only have cost about 1000 florins.<sup>77</sup> Clearly, only the most powerful and resourceful individuals, mostly imperial and royal founders, could afford to own ancient cameos.<sup>78</sup> Charles was one of them. He assembled a considerable number of cameos and, as can be seen in the medieval inventories of St Vitus Cathedral, he incorporated many of them into precious liturgical vessels to serve as ecclesiastical *ornamenta*.<sup>79</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As the preceding analysis of the Coronation Cross has shown, the following conclusions can be drawn: First, the cross is a deliberately fashioned composite object into which various highly valuable elements

75 On Charles IV and his possible advisers, see Flaminia Pichiorri, 'Die Rekrutierung diplomatischen Personals unter Karl IV.: Zeitphasen und Verfahrensweisen', in Ulrike Hohensee, Mathias Lawo, Michael Lindner, Michael Menzel and Olaf B. Rader (eds), *Die Goldene Bulle, 835–68*; Václav Žůrek, 'Entre la cour et la ville: les gens de savoir au service de l'empereur Charles IV à Prague', in Léonard Courbon and Denis Menjot (eds), *La cour et la ville dans l'Europe du Moyen Age et des Temps Modernes* (Turnhout, 2015), 313–23.

76 Ernest Babelon, *Catalogue des camées antiques et modernes de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris, 1897), no. 264, 125–6.

77 Ernst H. Gombrich, 'The Early Medici as Patrons', in Ernst H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1978), 35–57, esp. 52.

78 Hans Peter Hilger, 'Die Reliquienbüste Karls des Grossen und ihre Krone im Domschatz zu Aachen', *Sborník mezinárodní vědecké konference Doba Karla IV. v dějinách národů ČSSR, Materiály ze sekce dějin umění*, ed. M. Svatoš (Prague, 1982), 269–73, esp. 272.

79 Antonín Podlaha and Eduard Šittler, *Chrámový poklad u sv. Víta v Praze: Jeho dějiny a popis* (Prague, 1903), iii–xxx.

of disparate origins were incorporated.<sup>80</sup> The special character of these elements, the spiritual features assigned them, and the message that they conveyed together indicate that all these components in all likelihood were acquired and purposely selected by Charles of Luxembourg himself. Second, my analysis revealed that the Coronation Cross was designed according to a pre-existing learned programme in which Charles was personally involved. The materialization of the programme was made possible by the reinvention of the *crux gemmata*, an early medieval type of cross lavishly decorated with gemstones. Basing their work on *crux gemmata* models, medieval craftsmen were able to supplement a group of holy relics incorporated into the cross with gemstones, including ancient and medieval cameos. The gems supported and reinforced the perceived supernatural power of the relics, imbued the object with multicultural features, and, moreover, created specific spiritual, geographical, historical, and artistic connections with the past that helped promote Charles' political agenda.

These findings confirm that the images of the cameos also effectively advertised more specific messages. The choice of the fleur-de-lys decorations on the cross was thoughtful, as that heraldic symbol linked the object with the kings of France, in particular St Louis IX, viewed at the time as the embodiment of the ideal Christian king. By employing that motif, a close bond between Charles of Luxembourg and the saintly royal authority of France could be made explicitly manifest. Finally, it is very likely that the Coronation Cross was originally one of the crosses owned by Charles personally; as such, it would have been seen only by a small group of courtiers entitled to enter the inner core of the royal castle, or by privileged and distinguished visitors such as foreign envoys who might have been in need of being convinced of the special divine protection conferred upon Emperor Charles of Luxembourg.

Overall, the preceding examination demonstrates that the Coronation Cross was not simply an ecclesiastical ornament, a reliquary designed to manifest Charles' piety, as it has usually been perceived, but rather is best understood as a multi-purpose object. It served the royal and imperial ambitions of Charles but also made him visible as a learned ruler who was

80 On this topic, see especially William Heckscher, 'Relics of Pagan Antiquity in Medieval Settings', *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 (1938), 204–20; Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996); Stefania Gerevini, 'The Grotto of the Virgin in San Marco: Artistic Reuse and Cultural Identity in Medieval Venice', *Gesta* 53 (2014), 197–220. On Charles of Luxembourg as a collector of gems, see Ingrid Ciulisová, 'The Power of Marvellous Objects: Charles IV of Luxembourg, Charles V of Valois and their Gemstones', *Journal of the History of Collections* 33 (2021), 1–13 (OA <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhaa023>).

well acquainted with the past of his illustrious predecessors. Furthermore, due to the presence of the relics and the gemstones, the cross was a powerful talismanic device.

Magnificent objects like the Coronation Cross can enlighten us about a period as a whole. As such, they often occupy a significant position in grand historical narratives. But grand stories require solid foundations. The in-depth examination of this kind of object helps us to avoid simple generalizations and revise accepted narratives. It also contributes to a better and more nuanced understanding of their ability to proclaim power and authority, here specifically of Emperor Charles and the Luxembourgs, including their spiritual connectedness both to antiquity and to the Christian world – a model that can be applied on a broader scale both to pre-modern Europe and beyond.