

# Glass medallion in the shape of a lion's head mask

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The collection of glass vessel fragments from the excavations at Kom el-Dikka spans a period from Hellenistic to Mamluk times and abounds in a variety of forms, techniques and colors and ranging from everyday use to the heights of artistic achievement and luxury (Rodziewicz 1984: 239–243, 347, Pls 72–74, Fig. 348; Weinberg 1977, 133–136; Kucharczyk 2004; 2005; 2007; 2009; 2010). Vessels with applied elements are a distinctive category of Roman glasses. The repertoire of these appliqués is considerable: colored glass trails, blobs of deep colored glass, but also glass medallions. To date, the archaeological excavations in Alexandria have yielded three medallions with theatrical masks (reg. nos SM/1515/70, W1/3053/78, W1/3455/80) and three with a lion's head symbolizing strength and power (reg. nos R/1669/71, W1/3199/79, W1/3614/81).

The medallion presented here is yet another lion's head image (reg. no. 6.10.07) [Fig. 1, top]. It was found in 2007, in the fill of a trench dug in the Early Islamic period to salvage building material from a big wall lining the west side of street R4 (Rodziewicz 1984: 260). In Late Antiquity, this wall separated a complex of public buildings from a dwelling district located further to the east. The context contained a mixed assemblage, extending from Late Roman to Early Islamic times, but the medallion can be dated on other grounds to the Late Roman period in general.

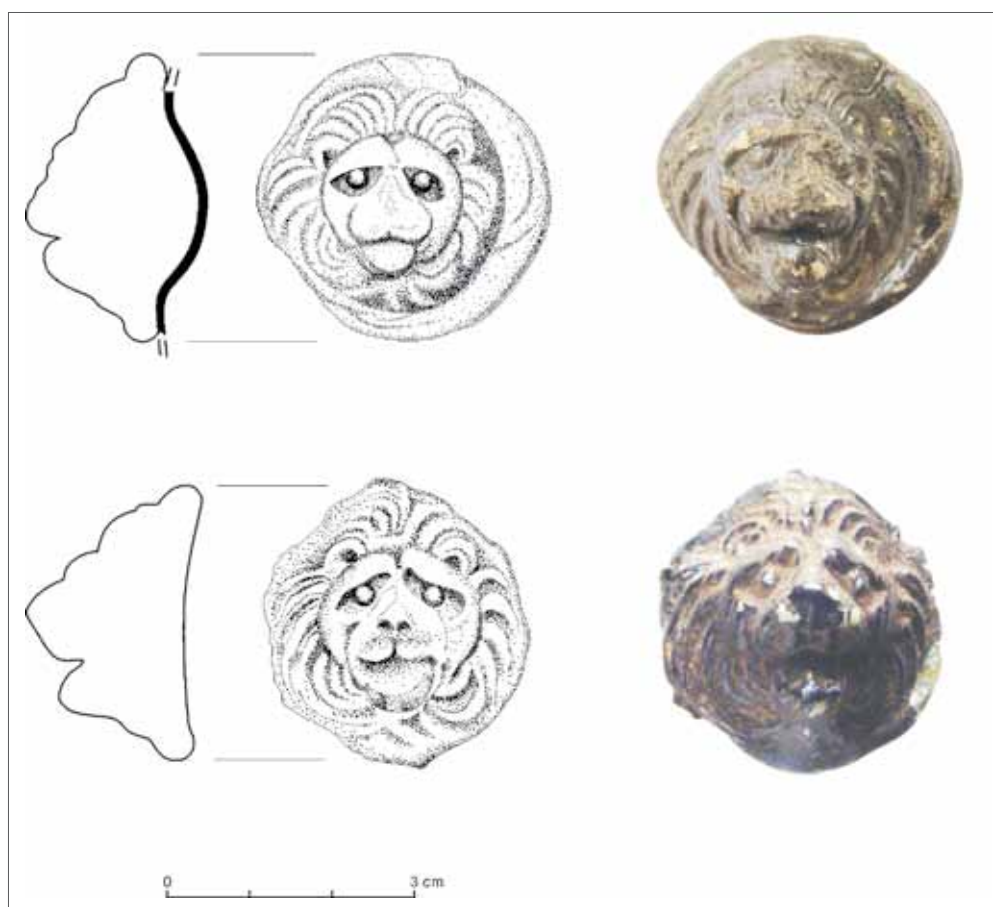
The other medallions from the Kom el-Dikka excavations share this problem of uncertain chronology, since only two were discovered in stratigraphically dated contexts. A lion's-head mask (R/1669/71) can be assigned to the early 3rd century at the latest (it was found together with a fragment that is interpreted as a lid for a cylindrical pyxis with a gilded figure of a cupid: Weinberg 1977: 133–136). In turn, one of the theatrical masks (SM/1515/70) came from a test pit in the theater area, from layers dated to Late Antiquity.

In any case, the dating of medallions as such is made even more difficult by the fact that they remained in use for long periods of time, quite a few of them being apparently preserved for secondary purposes, possibly as keepsakes or amulets, after the vessels which they had decorated had been broken (Isings 1971: 36, No. 115, found in a sarcophagus from the end of the 2nd or early 3rd century at Stein).

The medallion from Kom el-Dikka bearing a frontal lion's-head mask in high relief (max. height 2.2 cm) is roughly circular (max. diam. 3.7 cm). Prominent eyes, half-open muzzle and locks of the mane add to the realistic treatment of the relief. The appliqué

was formed by pressing a decorated mold into a thick disc of glass, then applying it to the body of the jug, thus creating a prominent circular bulge on the inner surface of the vessel where the medallion was applied. The vessel wall, merely 1 mm thick, can still be observed at the back. Both the medallion and the vessel it decorated were made of dark green glass. It now looks as if it were entirely black with some areas of iridescence.

It is not possible to say anything precise about the form of the vessel to which the medallion was once attached. It may have been either a globular or conical handled jug, or bulbous flagon with the medallion being a decorative, lower terminal for a handle (Isings 1957: probably similar to Forms 13 and 52b or 120b, d). The more durable handle attachments were more likely to survive than the thinner vessel.



*Fig. 1. Glass lion's head medallions: from Kom el-Dikka (PCMA UW excavations, reg. no. 6.10.07), top, and from Ptolemais, Libya (University of Warsaw excavations, reg. no. G/078/05) (Drawing E. Kulicka and M. Momot; digitizing M. Momot)*

All the medallions found on Kom el-Dikka appear to have been made in Egyptian workshops. It should be noted at this point that molded decorative attachments representing various subjects are traditionally dubbed of “Egyptian origin”. The number of finds from Egypt can be cited in confirmation of this attribution. Beside the said medallions from Kom el-Dikka, there are 25 unpublished examples in the collection of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. Another two medallions are held in the Museum in Ismailia, four come from Douch and one from Kellia (Arveiller-Dulong, Nenna 2001: 430). Published medallions include eight pieces from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Edgar 1905: nos 32762–32770, theater masks and one lion's mask). Single examples of medallions with theatrical masks are also known from Saqqara (Smith and Jeffreys 1977: 25, Pl. IV,4) and Oxyrhynchus (Cooney 1976: 157, No. 1827). The appliqués with a female head had been recently excavated at Medinet Madi (Silvano 2007: 222–223, Figs 1–2) and in the Basilica in Marea (reg. no. MA 77/09).

Medallions with lion's heads have been found at el-Hibeh (*Le vie del vetro* 1988: 106, No. 31), Fayum (Hayes 1975: 144, Nos 605, 606, the latter probably found in Palestine) and Pelusium (Bonnet *et alii* 2007: 269, Fig. 7).

Interestingly, medallions with lion's heads in museum collections outside Egypt are also traditionally ascribed to Egyptian workshops: Athens (Clairmont 1977: 11–12, Pls II:37, III:38; Weinberg, Stern 2009: 108, Pl. 24:269), Corinth (Davidson 1952: 98, Pl. 54, No. 618), the Louvre (Arveiller-Dulong, Nenna 2005: 438–439, Nos 1221–1226); Corning Museum of Glass (Whitehouse 2001: 233–234, Nos 814–816). To this list one can add also a jug with spiral grooving and a lion's-head mask under the handle from the Hermitage, found in the Black Sea area (Kunina 1997: 288, No. 175a–b). The mask from the National Museum in Warsaw is unprovenanced (Filarska 1962: 82, Pl. XXII, No. 77). An Egyptian manufacturer is also indicated for a unique lion's-head mask in the Freer Gallery in Washington, which is made of brownish-red opaque glass with yellowish markings in apparent imitation of marble (*Ancient Glass* 1962: 21, Fig. 59).

The lion's-head masks all depict the same subject, but they are widely different in style and quality of the image. The nearest parallels in terms of these criteria for the mask from Alexandria are the objects from Pelusium (Bonnet *et alii* 2007: 269, Fig. 7) and from Ptolemais (reg. no. G/078/05, dated by accompanying finds of coins from the 4th century) [Fig. 1, bottom]. On all three medallions the lion's heads are highly distinct and elaborate in detailing prominent animal features. The crispness of these elements could indicate a metal mold.

Frontal lion's-head masks on vessels found in the East were usually handle attachments, while those on vessels from the West adorned the walls. This is the case of a jar with ovoid body from Reims, where the medallions were applied in three horizontal rows (Isings 1964: 60–61, Fig. 2; see also Fig. 1 for a similar arrangement of the decoration on a large jar of the same shape from Cuyk (Northern Brabant), decorated with twelve female-head masks). A deep bowl from Højvang, Denmark, has two lion's masks applied

on the body of the vessel at mid-height on opposite sides (Isings 1964: 61, Figs 3–4). All these vessels can be dated to the 3rd–4th century and their findspots could indicate that they are of western, perhaps Gaulish origin. On a hemispherical bowl or lamp from the Corning Museum of Glass the three lion-head applications were fastened between three looped handles with trailed ends (*Acquisitions* 1962: No. 14, 4th century). An elegant cast vase on a stem with two lion masks applied opposite to each other below the vessel shoulder is a unique piece (*Museum News* 1961: 34–35).

The actual decorating of glass vessels with applied medallions in the Late Roman period is not a novel idea and should be seen as no more than a continuation of a tradition established in Imperial times (Isings 1964: 62, especially notes 18 and 19 with references for glass appliqué from this period). The range of subjects, however, was different in the earlier period. Images of Bacchus, Silenus, Eros and Medusa were quite numerous (Edgar 1905: 77–78, 32767, 32769–32770; Filarska 1962: 82, No. 76, 78; Berger 1960: 41, Pl. 6, Nos 90–93; Hayes 1975: 144, Nos 607a–b, 608; Clairmont 1977: 12, Pl. III:41; Price 1995: 183–183, No. 111; Foy, Nenna 2001: 90, No. 107; Arveiller-Dulong, Nenna 2005: 48, Nos 53–56, 65, Nos 57–58; Harden 1987: 118–119, Nos 50–51; Foy, Nenna 2001: 88, 125, No. 102). It is worth mentioning that the Portland Vase and other cameo vessels from the early Empire period also display similar cut masks beneath the handles and on the body, as well as on the interior (Harden *et alii* 1987: 58–65, 68–69, nos 29 and 31; Whitehouse 1991: 19–20, Fig. 5). Other subjects, such as theater masks, tragic as well as comic ones, were also attested (Edgar 1905: 77–78, Nos 32762–32766; Filarska 1962: 81, Nos 73–74; Masterpieces 1968: 60, no. 75; von Saldern *et alii* 1974: 194, No. 531; Auth 1976: 107, No. 123; Clairmont 1977: Pl. III:39; Arveiller-Dulong, Nenna 2005: 47, Nos 51–52 and 440, Nos 1227–1234). There are also medallions with several types of male and female heads (Filarska 1957: 81, No. 75; Saldern 1980: 32–33, No. 217, Zeus? Ares?; Clairmont 1977: 12, Pls II:39, III:40; Bucovală 1984: 62–63, Fig. 8; Sennequeir 1986: 13, No. 4; Harden *et alii* 1987: 204–205, No. 113, exceptional hanging bowl with six female-head applied medallions and additionally cut decoration, first half of the fourth century; Cool and Price 1995: 118–120, Nos 868–870 and references to British sites where medallions with head masks have been recorded). Quite rare are medallions with representations of Kybele and the Sirens (Filarska 1962: 82–83, Nos 79, 82), as well as rosettes (Harden 1936: 304, Pl. XXII:992; *Ray Winfield Smith Collection* 1957: 159, No. 326; Filarska 1962: 83–84, Nos 84–85). Medallions with a child's head also occur (*Fitzwilliam Museum* 1978: 36–37, No. 65a).

A vessel of particular beauty is one splendidly decorated with pre-formed ornamental motifs including birds, flowers, and shells, fish, turtles, dolphins, and other sea creatures. Vessels with marine elements dated to the 4th century used to be attributed to the important glasshouses of Cologne (*Acquisitions* 1965: No. 6, beaker with sea-creatures; Harden *et alii* 1987: 256, No. 145: dolphin cup; Doppelfeld 1959: 152–165, shells; Fremersdorf 1959: 62–65, Pls 82–83, fancy shaped flask with shells; Kämpfer 1966: No. 40, fluted beaker on stem with shells). To this list one can add the goblet with blue

and colorless shells from Limburg (Isings 1971: 18, No. 47) and colorless shells from Trier (Goethert-Polaschek 1977: 63–64, Pl. 40, No. 241) and Rome (Foy, Nenna 2001: 89, Nos 103–104). In some cases, mould-pressed shells adorned also the handle ends of *trullae* or handle decorations on pseudo-*diatreta* (Fremersdorf 1959: 12; Doppelfeld 1959: 162).

Medallions with imaged heads of emperors form a specific group among the decorated medallions found on Early Roman glass vessels. Such medallions with images of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus adorn the fluted goblets from Arles (Foy, Piton 1997: 11–22, end of 2nd century AD; other medallions depict Apollo or a young, idealized athlete: Fig. 4) and from Marseilles (Foy, Nenna 2001: 90, No. 106, second half of 2nd–beginning of 3rd century). The two medallions from the National Museum in Warsaw with female heads in profile possibly represent women from imperial families (Filarska 1962: 82–83, No. 80, Faustina the Elder?, No. 82, similar to portrait heads from the Sever family). Imitations of coins in glass were also used to decorate vessels (Fremersdorf 1959: Pl. 112).

Glass medallions appear not only on a variety of jugs and flagons. They can also be found below the U-shaped handles of glass cinerary urns reported from Dyrrachium (Albania) and Campania (*Masterpieces* 1968: No. 75). Different types of masks were not restricted to the decoration of glass vessels alone. The medallions at the base of handles on globular and conical glass jugs and flagons most probably copy the decoration on terra sigillata (Garbsch 1982: Nos 1, 11, 17, 21: rosettes, fish) and metalware of the 1st century AD (Massabò 2007: 103, 105, 109, bronze vessels with female masks and that of Satyrus from the vicinity of Vesuvius).

Although decorating glass vessels with applied disks of glass was a favorite method of ornamentation in the Roman era, it was also practiced in later periods. This technique was especially popular during the late Sassanian and Early Islamic period. While the method of decoration of the vessels from this time is based on Roman prototypes, the motifs are distinctly different. They include female figures, petal rosettes, plants, birds, horsemen and winged horses. These appliqués occur on various types of vessels such as vases (Dimand 1937: 207–208: a bird or a rooster and warriors on horseback; Carboni and Whitehouse 2001: 115–116, No. 43, birds; and more parallels), bowls (Kämpfer 1966: No. 52, winged horses; Hadad 2005: 22, Pl. 4, Nos 90–91, stylized flowers and dragon-peacock, and references for similar depictions on glass; Gawlikowska 2009: 31–33, Fig. 1A and Fig. 2, two roundels with birds, apparently from bowls, and bibliography for other vessels from various collections with similar representations; *Ray Winfield Smith Collection* 1957: Nos 387–388, medallions with a human face as well as Pegasus, birds, horned quadrupeds and horses) as well as on jars (*Acquisitions* 1961: 43, birds-peacocks?).

One unique find from Sassanian times is a male molded mask from Qasr-i Abu Nasr (Old Shiraz), which appears to correspond to an Early Roman tradition related to a type of head mask (Whitecomb 1985: 155, Fig. 59c and other parallels to similar finds from Iran).

As a point of interest, during the Early Islamic period glass medallions were applied not only on vessels, but they were fitted to architectural decoration. The colorful impressed medallions from the al-Sabah Collection with various motifs (for example, heraldic eagles, falconers, elephants, sphinxes and lions, and multi-petaled flower rosettes) in all probability have been set into stained-glass windows of Ghaznavid and Ghurid palaces in Afghanistan (Carboni 2001: 262, 272–283, cat. 73a–s: 12th century).

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i> , Berlin
AAAS	<i>Annales archéologiques arabes de Syrie</i> , Damas
ABSA	<i>Annual of the British School of Athens</i> , London
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> , New York
APF	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete</i> , Leipzig, Stuttgart
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> , Le Caire
BAAL	<i>Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises</i> , Beirut
BABesch	<i>Bulletin antieke Beschaving</i> , Louvain
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> , Paris
BdÉ	<i>Bibliothèque d'étude</i> , Le Caire
BEFAR	<i>Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome</i> , Rome, Paris
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
BSFE	<i>Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie</i> , Paris
CCE	<i>Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne</i> , Le Caire
CCEC	<i>Cahiers du Centre d'études chypriotes</i> , Nanterre
CdÉ	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i> , Bruxelles
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i> , Paris
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna
EtTrav	<i>Études et travaux</i> , Varsovie
GM	<i>Göttinger Miscellen</i> , Göttingen
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i> , Durham, NC
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> , Jerusalem
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> , London
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i> , New York
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> , London
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i> , Warsaw
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i> , Ann Arbor, MI
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> , London
KHKM	<i>Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej</i> , Warszawa
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , Zurich
MDAIA	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i> , Berlin
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i> , Wiesbaden
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité</i> , Paris
MIFAO	<i>Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
NC	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i> , London
NumAntCl	<i>Numismatica e antichità classiche</i> , Logano
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta</i> , Louvain
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i> , Warsaw
RACrist	<i>Rivista di archeologia cristiana</i> , Cité du Vatican
RBK	<i>Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst</i> , Stuttgart

*Abbreviations*

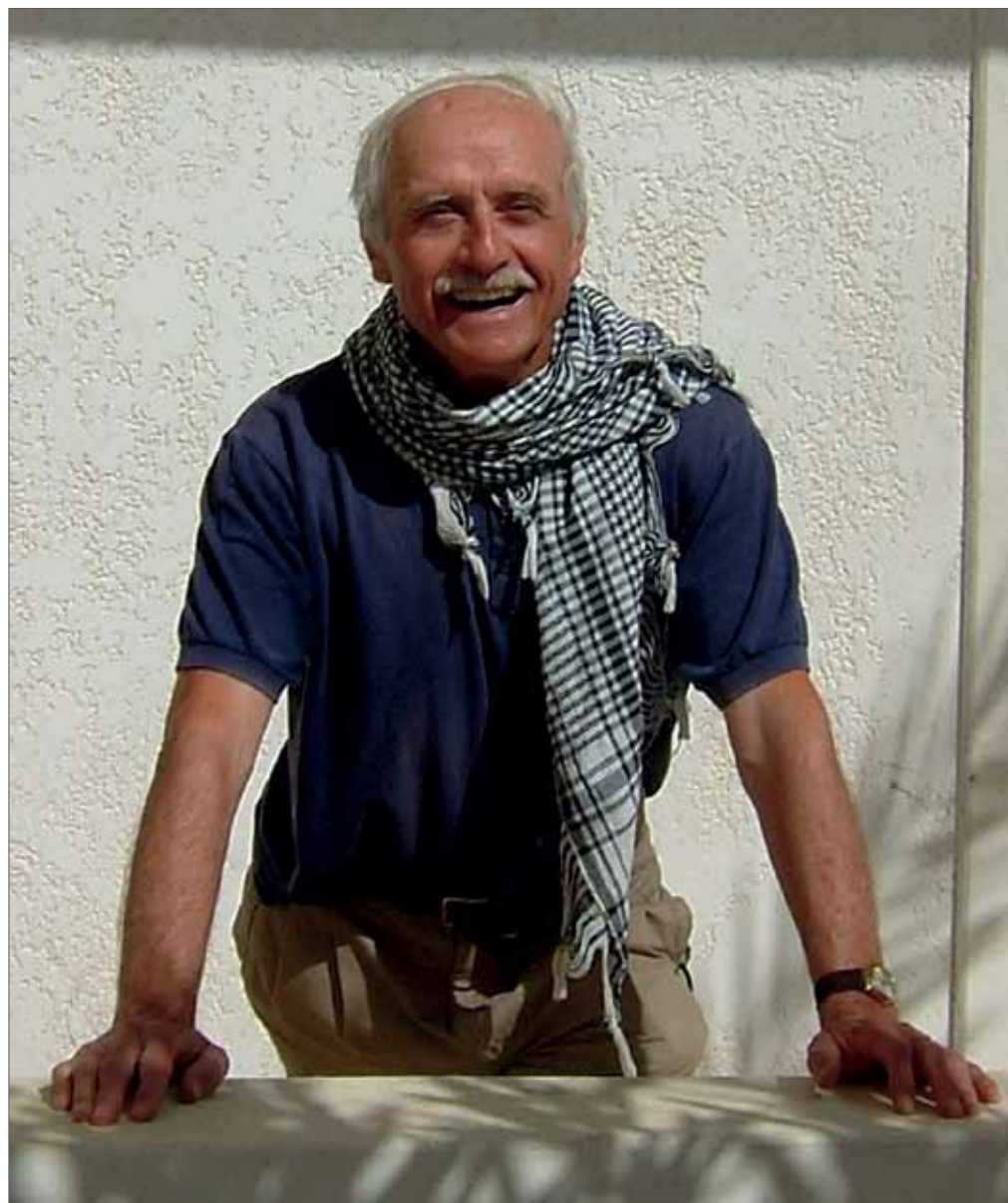
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<i>RDAC</i>	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, Nicosia</i>
<i>RdÉ</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie, Paris, Louvain</i>
<i>REPPAL</i>	<i>Revue du centre d'études de la civilisation phénicienne-punique et des antiquités libyques</i>
<i>RMNW</i>	<i>Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie, Warszawa</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali, Roma</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux, Louvain</i>
<i>SAAC</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization, Kraków</i>
<i>VetChr</i>	<i>Vetera christianorum, Bari</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Bonn</i>

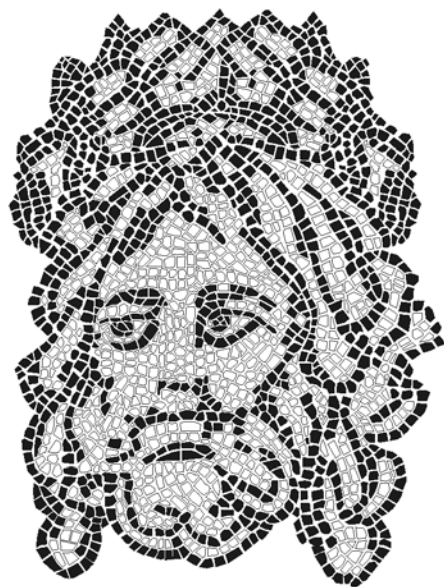
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<i>LCI</i>	E. Kirschbaum, W. Braunfels (eds), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , Rom: Herder, 1968–1976
<i>RealEnc</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart–Münich, 1893–1980

CLASSICA ORIENTALIA



# CLASSICA ORIENTALIA



Essays Presented to  
Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski  
on his 75th Birthday

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology  
University of Warsaw  
Wydawnictwo DiG

# Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology University of Warsaw

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