



THE FARNESE CUP

VALERIA SAMPAOLO AND LUIGI SPINA

The largest carved hardstone cup to have survived from the ancient world has come down to us through the ages probably without ever becoming an archaeological find: its peregrinations took it from Alexandria to Rome and thence to Constantinople, before it returned to Rome in the fifteenth century, where it was bought by the sharp-eyed connoisseur Lorenzo de' Medici. It then joined the Farnese Collection, from where it reached the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

The intriguing story of the cup's vicissitudes as it passed from one glittering court to another is matched by the still not wholly resolved interpretation of the scene depicted on its inner face, which has been the subject of a number of different readings and continues to be a matter of debate. The work is a tour de force of the carver's art, with the figures in the inner scene and the terrifying face of the Gorgon on the outside picked out with unerring skill, exploiting every shade of the sardonyx agate of which it is made.

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Valeria Sampaolo has been conservator of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. The author of several publications, she focuses in particular on research into the early excavations in the Vesuvius area and on establishing the provenance of the Museum's frescoes, whose new display arrangement she curated.

Luigi Spina is a photographer. His work focuses on amphitheatres and the civic dimension of the sacred, the links between art and faith, the search for ancient cultural roots, and the physical impact of classical sculpture. His published works include *L'Ora incerta* (2014), *The Buchner Boxes* (2014), *Hemba* (2017), and *Diario Mitico* (2017). Spina has collaborated with Valeria Sampaolo and 5 Continents Editions to create the series *Rare and Precious Objects in the Archaeological Museum of Naples*, whose titles to date embrace *Memories of the Blue Vase* (2016), *Amazzonomachia* (2017), *Centaurs* (2017), *Seven Sages* (2018), and *Zephyr and Chloris* (2018). He has also published *The Dancers at the Villa of the Papyri* for 5 Continents Editions's Tailormade series.