

VIII. *An abstract of a Discourse intituled, Reflexions on the Medals of Pescennius Niger, and upon some Circumstances in the history of his Life; written in French by Mr. Claude Gros de Boze, keeper of the Medals in the French King's Cabinet, etc. and sent by him to Dr. Mead, who communicated it to this Society. By John Ward, R. P. G. and F. R. S.*

Read May 31,
1750.

THE learned Author begins his Discourse with observing, that no medals of the Roman emperors, who reigned during the high empire, are more rare, than those of *Pescennius Niger*; that they are somewhat scarcer in silver, than in brass; and that it is the general opinion of antiquaries, there is not one extant in gold.

And tho' *Anthony le Pois*, who lived about the middle of the sixteenth century, affirms in his posthumous book of *Antient medals* (1), that he had a *Pescennius* in gold, and also some other persons: yet he thinks, that as it is not known what became of those medals, they were counterfeits; of which sort he has seen several, which being cast from silver ones of that emperor, were afterwards repaired more or less artfully with a graver. He is likewise of the same opinion with regard to those, which have been collected by *Mediobarb* from other catalogues; since
Mr.

(1) *Discours sur les Medailles antiques, etc. Paris. 1579. qu.*

Mr. *Vaillant*, the most knowing and experienced antiquary of the last age, in treating of the medals of this emperor sais expressly, *ex auro non observantur* (1); and Mr. *de la Bastie* has also remarked in his *Catalogue of the Roman emperors*, that notwithstanding what is said by *Anthony le Pois*, no medal of *Pescennius Niger* in gold is to be found in any known cabinet (2).

Sigismond Liébe, who in the year 1730 published the cabinet of the Duke of *Saxe Gotha*, under the title of *Gotha Numaria*, in order to prove it superior to that of the Duke of *Parma* published by Father *Pedruffi* (3), and equal at least to that of the antient Dukes of *Arschot* (4); has ranged the gold imperial medals of those three cabinets in three opposite columns: and when he comes to *Pescennius Niger*, he first remarks, that there is no gold medal of him in the cabinet of *Parma*; and then sais, that the ingraved one in the *Arschot* collection is generally acknowledged to be counterfeit and cast. He likewise declares his agreement with all other antiquaries, that there is no true one in gold; but, in order to render the comparifon more complete, he has ventured to place a false one of *Saxe Gotha* against that of *Arschot*, because it was one of the first in the collection, and not disapproved of by Mr. *Morel* (5).

But

(1) *Nunismat. Imp. Rom. praestantior.*

(2) *La science des Medailles, Tom. II. p. 398. ed. 1739.*

(3) See *Bandur. Bibl. Numar. p. CVII.*

(4) *Ibid. p. XXXVII.*

(5) *Goth. Num. cap. III. § 2. p. 49.*

But notwithstanding this prevailing opinion Mr. *de Boze* sais, that for upwards of thirty years, in which he has had the keeping of the King's medals, he has not ceased to inquire after a *Pescennius* in gold, as thinking it not impossible, but one might be found. Because, when a prince or general was proclaimed emperor, the first proof he gave of his authority, was to order gold or silver money to be struck as his coin in his own palace; the consent of the senate being only necessary for Latin brass coins, which were current at *Rome*, and required the usual signature S. C. for *Senatus consulto*.

In the years 1726 and 1727 he received accounts, as he sais, of one and the same gold medal of *Pescennius*, as brought from four different quarters; first from *Spain*, then from *Sicily*, afterwards from *Malta*, and lastly from *England*. But he found it to be false, as all others had done, who had seen it. It had been cast from a silver one of that prince, on the reverse of which is the figure of the goddess *Hope*; with the inscription of BONAE SPEI, which is the most common of any. Those in the cabinets of *Arshot* and *Saxe Gotha* have likewise the same reverse, and doubtless from the same origin.

About ten years afterwards a learned Englishman, who came from *Montpellier*, informed Mr. *de Boze*, that he had seen in a small collection of one Mr. *Veissières*, counsellor of the *Court of Aids*, two coins of *Pescennius* in gold; one of which was manifestly false, and the other deserved to be examined. Upon this information he applied himself to an eminent connoisseur (x), who viewed the two medals, as far

as

(x) *M. Bon, Premier President de la chambre des comptes, etc.*

as the delicacy of the owner would permit him; for he would not suffer them to be touched, as fearing lest some damage might insue from too near an inspection. However the Gentleman acquainted him, that they were both equally false; one being rough cast from a silver one, and the other carefully repaired, so as to give it some appearance of a genuine coin, when compared with the former, which it would not have, if viewed by itself: that the reverse was BONAE SPEI: and that such as they were, the owner would not part with them upon any consideration. But upon the death of Mr. *Veiffières* the examination of those medals became more easy, and served only to confirm the judgement given of them; and the intire collection was sold for little more than the weight.

At length, in the month of July 1748, Mr. *de Boze* had fresh encouragement to pursue his inquiry: which he did with greater attention, and better success, than before. A barefooted *Carmelite* of the convent of *Paris* shewed him a letter, which he had received from one of his own order at *Marseilles*, who lately arrived from the *Levant* (1), where he had been employed as a missionary. His correspondent acquainted him, that he had a gold medal of *Pescennius*, which the curious at *Marseilles* were desirous to purchase, and had offered him a considerable sum for it; but as he hoped to get more at *Paris*, especially if it was not in the King's cabinet, he desired him to let him know that, as likewise what value Mr. *de Boze* put upon

(1) *Le P. Elizée de St. Benoist.*

upon it. His answer was, that he would certainly give a good price for it, if it was antient; but that he could offer nothing, till he had seen it. The owner therefore brought him the medal, which was fair, well preserved, and free from any thing, which might occasion the least suspicion; so that he valued it considerably higher, than what had before been offered, and immediately purchased it for the King.

Soon after he shewed it to the greatest connoisseurs and most curious persons at *Paris*, who were charmed with the sight of so valuable and unexpected a medal in the Royal cabinet. And many both natives and foreigners being desirous of a draught of it, he ordered it to be engraved; together with a Greek medallion in silver, no less rare in its kind, of the same emperor, which is also in the same cabinet, having been purchased at *London* by Mr. *Vaillant* of Mr. *Falkner* (1), father of Sir *Everard*. A print of both these pieces accompanies this paper. See TAB. I. Fig. 3 and 4.

The gold medal, *Fig. 3.* has on one side the head of *Pescennius Niger* crowned with laurel, with this legend, IMP CAES C PESC NIGER IVSTVS AVG. And upon the reverse, the goddess *Concord*, represented by a female figure standing, with a diadem on her head, one of her hands elevated, and a double horn of plenty in the other; and round the figure only the word CONCORDIA. For the letters PP, placed below in the field, on the two sides of the figure, being the usual abbreviation of PATER PATRIAE,
are

(1) See *Numism. Imp. Rom. praest.* p. 216. ed. 1696.

are to be considered as part of the inscription surrounding the head of *Pescennius*. And it is well known, as Mr. *de Boze* observes, that in many medals of the Roman emperors nothing is more common, than to find on the reverse a continuation of those titles, which could not be contained on the same side with the head. But he thinks it has not been yet sufficiently attended to, that in many medals of the cities in *Lesser Asia*, and especially of those in *Cilicia*, where *Pescennius* was first proclaimed, the title *Pater patriae*, which they expressed by the two Greek letters ΠΠ, for Πατήρ πατρίδος, is scarce ever placed in the circular inscription on either side, but in the field of the reverse. For which reason he is inclined to believe, that this medal was struck at *Tarsus*, the metropolis of *Cilicia*, where that practice was more constant, than in any other place.

It would scarce be worth observing, he says, that in the word CONCORDIA the letter D is inverted after this manner α, since such mistakes are very common both in antient and modern coins; was it not to prevent any imaginary suspicion of its being done by design, as emblematical of a pretended concord between the two emperors *Septimius Severus* and *Pescennius Niger*. But this he shews to be highly improbable on the following accounts. First, that it is wholly inconsistent with the elegance, grandeur, and simplicity of antient monuments; and especially of those appointed by authority, which never admitted of any kind of ridicule. Again, that it is a manifest abuse of the language of medals to imagine, that when they exhibit the name or figure of
any

any deity, as *Concord, Plenty, Peace*, and others, any thing more is signified, than addresses made to them on the account of what is there expressed, and hopes of its being granted to the public. This he illustrates from several instances of imperial medals, which need not be here recited. And he further observes from the historians of those times, that *Pescennius*, at the beginning of his reign, might think it no difficult matter to have adjusted matters with *Severus* upon terms advantageous to himself.

The silver medallion mentioned above, *Fig. 4.* has likewise the head of *Pescennius*, crowned with laurel; and a Greek inscription round it thus abbreviated, ΑΥΤΟΚ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ Γ ΠΕΣΚΕ ΝΙΓΡΟΥ Δ. that is, *Imperatori Caesari Caio Pescennio Nigro Justo.* On the reverse is an eagle standing on a club, with the legend ΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΘΕΩΝ, *Providentia Deorum*; which is found also upon the medals of his predecessor *Pertinax*, with whom he is compared by historians both for his civil and military virtues. And Mr. *de Boze* apprehends, that as the eagle and club are the usual symbols of Greek medals struck at *Tyre*, this might probably have been coined there, either in the year 193, the first of his reign, or at the beginning of the following year; that is, before the two defeats, which he received, first near *Cyzicus* in the *Hellepont*, and after that between *Nicaea* and *Cius* cities of *Bithynia*. For then the cities, which *Severus* had artfully endeavoured to draw over to his interest, declared for him; more from a jealousy of their neighbours, as *Herodian* observes, than from any dislike to *Pescennius* (1). This revolt was
begun

(1) *Lib. III. cap. 2.*

begun at *Nicomedia* in hatred of *Nicaea*, which was very zealous for *Pescennius*, and grealy favouro by him. *Tyre* and *Laodicea* followed the example of *Nicomedia*, from an averfion to *Antioch* and *Berytus*. And in like manner *Perinthus*, in oppofition to *Byzantium*. In order to put a flop to this threatening mifcheif, *Pescennius* ordered fome of thofe cities to be plundered and burnt, particularly *Tyre* and *Laodicea*. But among all the cities, which espoufed his intereft, *Byzantium* behaved with the greateft gallantry; and even after his death held out a feige of three years againft all the power of *Severus*, till at length being reduced by famine it was taken, and the walls demolished. Mr. *de Boze* has given a fuccinct account of this tragical fcene from *Dion Caffius* (1). But as it was not his defign to write a narrative of all the occurrences relating to thofe wars, which may be found in the hiftorians, who have professedly treated of them (2); he employs the remainder of his difcourfe upon fome particular circumftances, which refpect *Pescennius*, and have not been yet fo througely confidered, as they deferve.

And he remarks here, that the accounts of hiftorians relating to the defcent of *Pescennius* are doubtful and uncertain; fome telling us, that he fprang from a patrician and confular family, which had been employed in the higheft offices of ftate, and dwelt long at *Rome* in great fplendor: but others, that his birth was obfcure, both his father and grand-father

(1) *Lib.* LXXIV. p. 844.

(2) *Herodian, Dion, Spartian, Mr. Tillemont Tom.* III.

father being no more than agents, or overseers, at the small town *Aquinum* in *Naples*; and that properly speaking he was a soldier of fortune, who raised himself gradually to command the forces in *Syria*, and gained some precarious honours, and a limited consulship, by the interest of the freedmen of *Commodus*, but principally of *Narcissus* the gladiator. But there are several antient *Inscriptions* yet preserved, besides other monuments, which may afford some light in this affair. *Gruter* has seven in his *Collection*, with the name of *Pescennius*; and there are some others in *Reinesius*, *John Baptist Doni*, and *Anthony Muratori*; and a Greek one in the *Miscellanea* of *Spon*, with Γ ΠΕΣΚΕΝΝΙΟΣ ΟΝΗΣΙΜΟΣ. But the great variety in the *cognomen* of these persons render it wholly improbable, that all of them should have been of the same family with the emperor *Pescennius*; since there is no family, even in the most flourishing times of the republic, which appears to have contained so many branches distinguished by a different *cognomen*. And therefore he supposes most of them to have been freedmen or clients, who usually assumed the family name of their patrons, of which he produces many instances; besides others of foreign princes, who paid the like compliment to the Roman emperors.

But *Philip à Turre* has published the fragments of two *Inscriptions* (1), containing the rites and ceremonies of the *Fratres Arvales*, who were a college of priests of great esteem and dignity at *Rome*.

Now

(1) *Frament. inscript. Frat. Arval.*

Now among the members of this college mention is made of one *Pescennius Niger*. And as those *Inscriptions* are dated in the fourth consulship of *Commodus* and second of *Aufidius Victorinus*, which answers to the year 183 of our common *aera*; *Muratori*, who has since republished them, sais in a note, that this is the same *Pescennius*, who ten years afterwards was advanced to the empire. But here, as Mr. *de Boze* very accurately remarks, he has not observed the difference of the *praenomen*, which in all the remaining medals of this emperor is *Caius*, but in both the inscriptions *Publius*; nor taken care, as he might have done, to support his opinion, notwithstanding that difference in the *praenomen*. For *Commodus*, who has usually the *praenomen* of *Marcus*, has sometimes that of *Lucius*; and *Geta* either *Lucius* or *Publius* indifferently; as *Aemilian* has *Caius* and *Marcus*. These are the only instances, which have occurred to him; but he thought it proper to mention them, that if any new medal of *Pescennius* should be found with *Publius* as the *praenomen*, it might not be rejected merely on that account.

For a further illustration of his family he refers to some passages in *Spartian*, who relates, that in the gardens of *Commodus* at *Rome* the figure of *Pescennius* in mosaic work was placed among those of the most intimate friends of that emperor, as performing a sacrifice to *Isis* (1). The same writer likewise sais, that six persons of the name of *Pescennius* were

(1) *Frament. inscript. Frat. Arval. p. 76.*

were put to death by *Severus*, all of them men of eminence and dignity (1). And he further adds, that his house at *Rome* was remaining in his time, and went by the name of *Pescenniana*; on the pediment of which was placed his statue, which had been sent him as a present *a rege Thebaeorum*, as he expresses it (2). But what the real character of the person was, called here *rex Thebaeorum*, has not hitherto, as Mr. *de Boze* remarks, been rightly settled; with this inquiry therefore he concludes his discourse.

Casaubon, and after him *Salmasius*, *Reineccius*, and Sir *John Marsbam*, suppose there was then a governor of that part of *Aegypt*, subject to the *Romans*, to whom they gave the title of *Rex*. But as this notion is no ways countenanced by history, he thinks it cannot well be admitted; and then proceeds to offer his own opinion with equal learning and address. *Augustus*, after the defeat of *Antony* and *Cleopatra*, having reduced *Aegypt* into the form of a province, divided the government of it among several persons of the equestrian order; not thinking it safe to intrust a nation so unsteady, daring, and always given to change, in the hands of senators, who were otherwise too powerful. This division of *Aegypt*, as *Arrian* observes, was made by the *Romans* in imitation of *Alexander* (3). And the governors, as *Strabo* says, appointed by the emperor, tho persons of moderate rank, had τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως

(1) *Frament. inscript. Frat. Arval.* p. 69.

(2) *Ibid.* p. 78.

(3) *Arrian. De exped. Alex.* L. III. c. 5:

ἑασιδέως τάξιν, *the authority of a king* (1); or, as *Tacitus* expresses it, were *loco regis* (2). And agreeably, to this *Spartian*, speaking of the emperor *Severus*, tells us, that notwithstanding he granted to the *Alexandrians* a civil jurisdiction for their private concerns; yet in all other things he subjected them to the absolute government of a person sent by the emperor, *ut sub regibus ante vivebant* (3). From these reflexions Mr. *de Boze* thinks it may naturally enough be imagined, that this *king of Thebes* mentioned by *Spartian* was no other than a Roman knight, who commanded at *Thebes* with the authority of a king; and might be so called there, in common with the governors of other parts of *Aegypt*; and even at *Rome* too in their ordinary discourse. Which may seem the more probable, if it be considered, how free the Romans made with that name, and to how many things they applied it; as *rex sacrorum*, *conviviorum*, and others. He further observes, that the custom of giving the title of *king* to one of their own magistrates obtained also at *Athens*, and some other cities of *Greece*; and then concludes his discourse with a favourable character of *Pescennius Niger*, taken from ancient accounts.

G. C. May 28.
1750.

J. Ward.

- (1) *Lib. xviii. pag. 797.*
 (2) *Hist. Lib. i. cap. 1.*
 (3) *In vit. Sever. p. 70.*

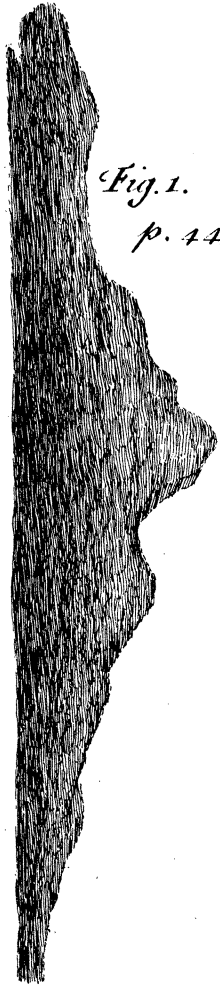


Fig. 1.

p. 443.

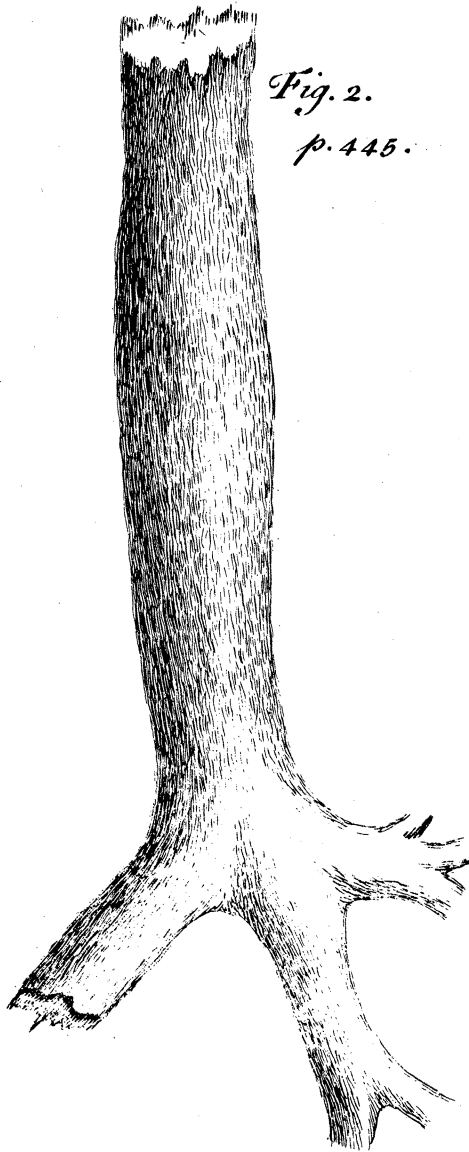


Fig. 2.

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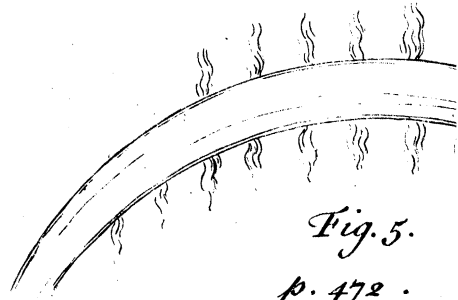


Fig. 5.

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Fig. 3.

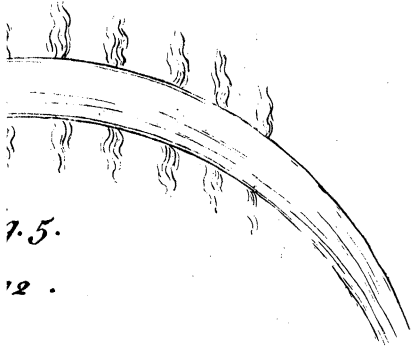
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E CIMELIO RE



Fig. 4.

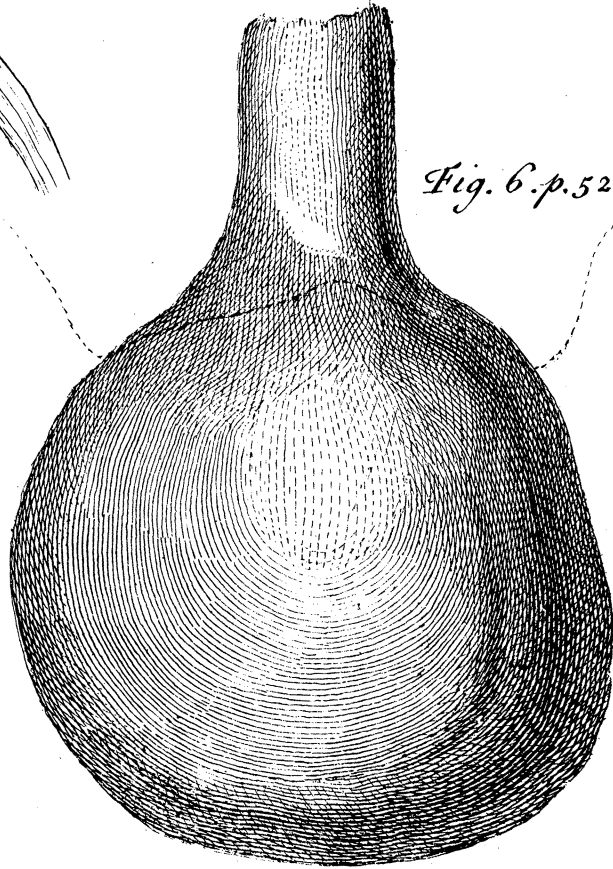
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7.5.

12.

Fig. 6. p. 520.



A circular seal or coin. The central figure is a woman standing, holding a staff or scepter. The text around the border includes "CONCO" on the left, "P" in the center, and "VID" on the right. There is a small "R" on the left edge.

9.3.
56.

LIO REGIO

A circular seal or coin. The central figure is an eagle with its wings spread, perched on a branch. The text around the border includes "HIPONCIA" on the left and "NIA" on the right. There is a small "R" on the left edge.

9.4.
58.



Fig. 1.
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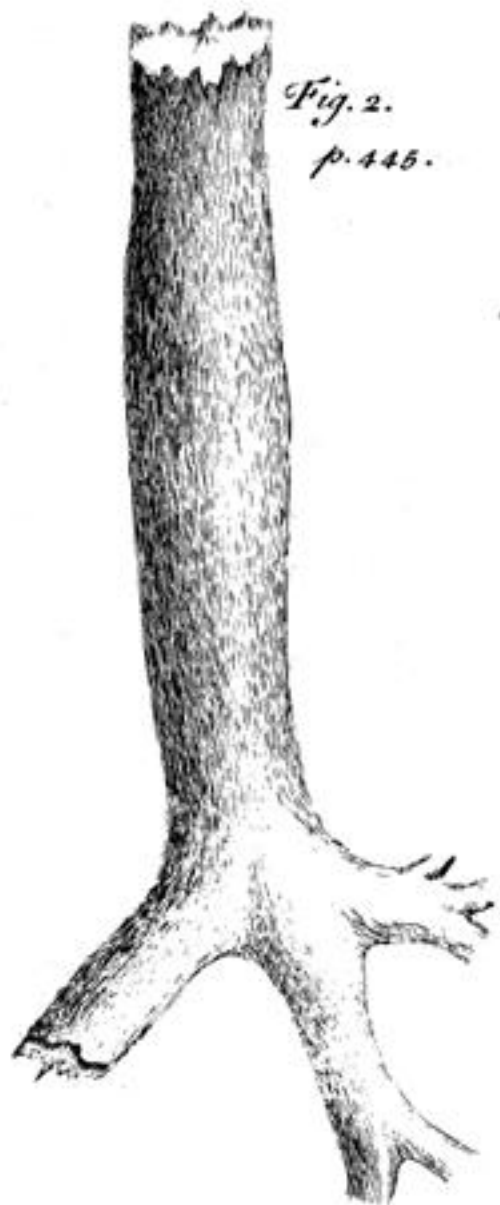


Fig. 2.
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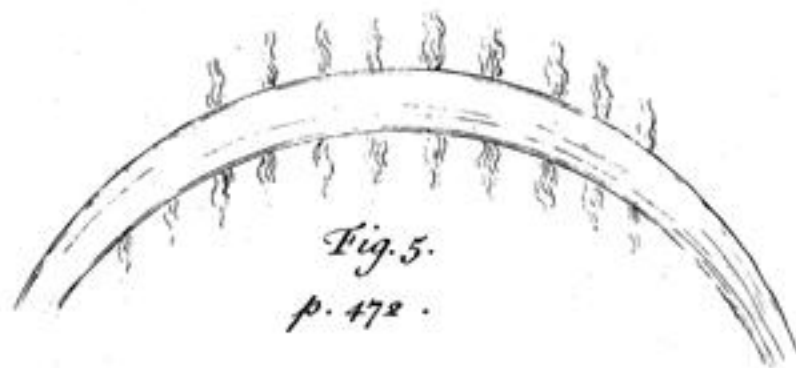


Fig. 5.
p. 472.



Fig. 3.
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E CIMELIO REGIO

Fig. 4.
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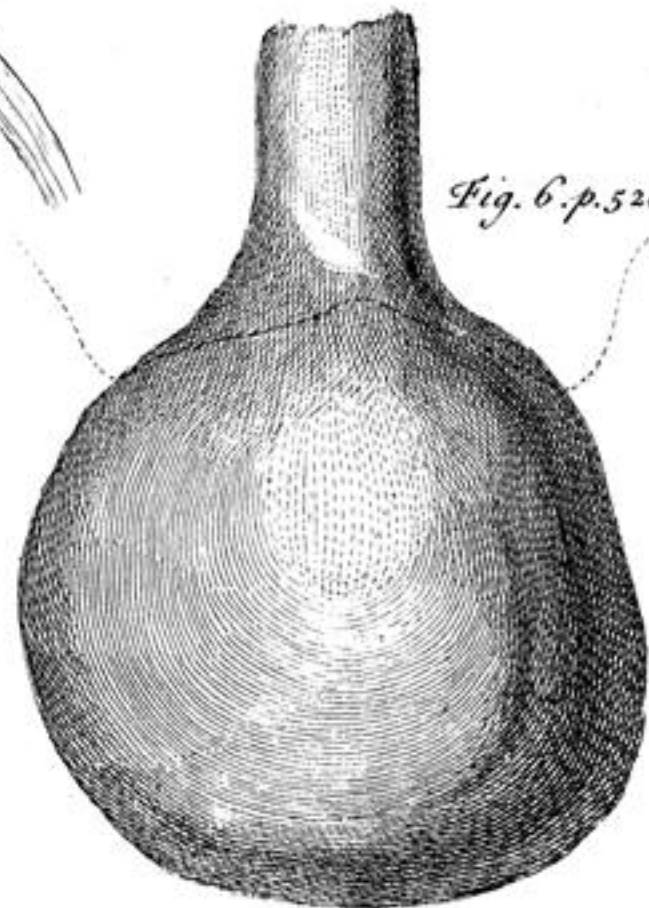


Fig. 6. p. 520.