



A 19th c. gold ring set with a Roman red jasper intaglio. Artemis Ephesus.

Intaglio 10 x 13 mm

TDD 58 - UK ring R^{1/2} - US 8^{1/2}

Total weight 4.26 gr

Roman period, 1st-3rd century A.D

Mounting late 19th c.

A late 19th-century gold ring set with a Roman intaglio carved in red jasper, presenting a richly layered composition of considerable iconographic complexity.

The central figure depicts the cult statue of Artemis of Ephesus in her canonical frontal stance: a turreted crown surmounted by a crescent moon, a sheathed body adorned with multiple rows of ovoid protuberances — long interpreted as breasts or votive offerings — and arms extended horizontally at either side with lateral supports. Flanking the goddess at the upper register, two celestial busts occupy the field: to the left, a radiate figure identifiable as Helios, the sun god; to the right, a crescent-bearing figure consistent with Selene, the moon goddess. Their paired presence is not merely decorative but theologically significant: they transform the image into a representation of the cosmic triad Artemis–Selene–Hecate, the Trimorphos or Triformis — goddess of sky, earth and the underworld simultaneously — a conflation well attested in Roman religious syncretism of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD.

At the feet of the goddess, two deer — the sacred animal of Artemis par excellence — anchor the composition firmly within the Ephesian iconographic tradition, mirroring the flanking stags well attested on Ephesian coinage and sculptural copies of the cult statue.

The composition as a whole places this intaglio within the well-documented category of magical and amuletic gems, for which red jasper was a favoured medium. The miniaturisation of the cult statue on a carved stone was understood to enhance its protective efficacy for the individual wearer, transposing the power of the colossus of Ephesus into a personal amulet. The presence of solar and lunar divinities flanking a central deity is a recurring feature of the PGM (Papyri Graecae Magicae) tradition, where Helios and Selene are attested together on magical gems as part of cosmological amulet programmes.

It is worth noting that the cult statue of Artemis at Ephesus was itself associated with the Ephesia Grammata — words of power inscribed upon the sacred image and widely used in magical formulae across the Roman world.

A closely related intaglio depicting Artemis Ephesia with the same complete iconographic programme — arm supports, flanking deer and celestial busts — is preserved in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 81.6.175, Gift of John Taylor Johnston, 1881, Gallery 171), confirming the canonical nature of this composition in Roman glyptic.

The present example nonetheless surpasses the Metropolitan parallel in both dimensions and quality of engraving, with a notably finer and more detailed incision throughout.