



A Roman magical hematite intaglio. Pantheistic deity.

Hematite

18 × 24 × 4 mm (mounting on request)

Roman art, 2nd-3rd century A.D

Oval haematite intaglio with bevelled edge, engraved on both faces. The obverse depicts a winged pantheistic deity standing on an exergue line, shown frontally in the hieratic manner characteristic of Graeco-Egyptian magical gems. The god bears two pairs of spread wings, emblematic of his cosmic omnipotence. His head is surmounted by a crown. Flanking the figure are stalks and flowers of poppy, a plant associated in Graeco-Roman magic with sleep, oracular dreams and the passage between worlds. Glyphs fill the field. The reverse is entirely covered with glyphs and characteres — non-linguistic magical signs arranged in registers — following the canonical practice of magical gem workshops of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD.

Magical gems, produced primarily between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, represent one of the most compelling witnesses to the religious syncretism of the late Roman Empire. Worn as amulets, they concentrate within a few square centimetres the Egyptian, Greek, Jewish and Oriental traditions. Haematite, prized for its apotropaic properties linked to its blood-red hue, is one of the favoured materials of these specialist workshops. The pantheistic figure with two pairs of wings embodies a syncretic, all-encompassing deity — an incarnation of universal divine power — frequently invoked in the Greek Magical Papyri.

Literature

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Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian, Ann Arbor, 1950 — Mastrocinque, Les intailles magiques du département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, BnF Éditions, Paris, 2014 — Gori & Passeri, Thesaurus Gemmarum Antiquarum Astriferarum, Florence, 1750 (Diatribes De Gemmis Basilidianis) — Michel, Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum, Londres, 2001.