



A Late 19th - early 20th c. gold chiseled ring set with a Roman Sard intaglio. Isis and Serapis with inscription.

Intaglio 13 × 15 mm

Mounting 18k gold - US 7 · UK N½ · EU 54

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

Mounting : Late 19th - early 20th c.

A chased yellow-gold signet ring, its shoulders engraved with foliate scrolls, claw-set with an oval sard intaglio of deep brown. The intaglio shows two confronted divine busts separated by a vertically retrograde Greek inscription. At right, a fine profile, the hair bound with a diadem and falling in locks over the neck; at left, a second figure crowned with a tall attribute, a calathos or modius. The pair is identified as Serapis and Isis, the great deities of the Greco-Egyptian pantheon.

Serapis, the syncretic god devised under the Ptolemies, fuses Osiris and Apis with the features of a Zeus-Hades; crowned with the modius, the grain-measure, he presides over fertility, healing and the underworld. Isis, his consort, goddess of magic and universal protection, ruled a cult that in the first two centuries A.D. spread throughout the Roman Empire. Shown as confronted busts, they embody the protective couple, bringers of prosperity and salvation.

Between the two profiles runs a Greek inscription in capitals, KOINTOY. It is the genitive of Κόιντρος, the Greek transcription of the Latin praenomen Quintus: "the seal of Quintus." The stone thus served as the personal seal of a man named Quintus, while placing him under the protection of the divine couple.

Scholarly Note & References

On Serapis gems the usual legend is a devotional acclamation — ΕΙΣ ΖΕΥΣ ΣΑΡΑΠΙΣ ("One Zeus-Sarapis") or Ἰλεως τῷ φοροῦντι ("gracious to the wearer"). Here the inscription is instead a personal name in the genitive: the stone belongs to the category of the personal seal placed under the protection of the divine couple, rather than the purely votive amulet.

An aside, unrelated to the stone: the same name, hellenized as Κόιντος, is that of the poet Quintus of Smyrna, author of the Posthomerica (3rd century A.D.). A mere homonym.

Literature

Reference corpus

R. Veymiers, Ἰλεως τῷ φοροῦντι. Sérapis sur les gemmes et les bijoux antiques (Brussels, 2009, with Supplements I–II), which catalogues more than 1,250 gems and jewels.