



A Sasanian hololithic chalcedony seal ring. Flower.

Ring size TDD 43 (US 2 / UK D)

Sasanian art, 4th–6th century A.D.

The ring carved whole from a single block of translucent greyish-white chalcedony — a hololith — the broad domed flat engraved in intaglio with a single flower, perhaps a poppy, borne on a slender stem with a pair of leaves. The hololith, a ring cut entire from one stone with no metal whatsoever, is a tour de force of the ancient lapidary: the hoop, shoulders and seal-face are worked from a single translucent mass. The form is known in the Roman world and was prized in the Sasanian East, where chalcedony was among the most favoured of all seal-stones.

Typology & iconography

Sasanian seals most often take the form of pierced hemispheroids or oval ring-stones; the fully hololithic finger-ring is a rarer and more demanding variant. Worn as a personal seal — the mark of identity and authority in Sasanian administration — its device belongs to the repertoire of single flowers and plants that is among the most frequent on Sasanian seals, where the flower is also shown held in the hand as a gesture of reverence and benediction. As an auspicious, beneficent emblem the flower evokes blessing and the renewal of life — floral imagery that would pass, centuries later, into the gardens and ornament of Islamic art.