

A Roman magical bloodstone intaglio with a radiate chalice within an ouroboros

Bloodstone (heliotrope)

10 x 14 x 3 mm

Roman, 2nd–3rd century AD

Oval bloodstone (heliotrope), green jasper with red spots, both faces flat and engraved.

Side A, vertical oval: an ouroboros with a hatched body encircles a radiate vase with a gadrooned body on a foot. Three rays spring from the mouth, and three from each side, by the handles.

Side B, horizontal oval: a four-line Greek inscription, reading on the stone:

ΙΑΙΔΑΕΙΑΙ / ΙΗΙΗΙΗΩ ΖΗ·Φ·Ι / ΔΙΟC ΚΑΛΛΗ / ΝΙΩ

Lines 1 and 2 are voces magicae and a vowel series; the Φ is drawn as a ring-letter. Lines 3 and 4 read Διὸς Καλλην‹ίκ›ῳ, “[the favour] of Zeus to Kallinikos”. The name is written with η for ι, and the engraver omitted the K (cf. Καλλήνικος, IMS II 234).

Historical context: magical glyptics

Magical gems were engraved mainly in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, in the Roman East. They are amulets, not seals: the text reads on the stone itself. Their formulas of request often name the beneficiary (SGG I 234). Here the genitive of Zeus replaces the imperative δός and makes the god the source of the gift.

Iconography and symbolism

The vase is no ordinary vessel: it radiates, like the heads of the solar gods on the same stones. It stands for a receptacle of divine power, its light escaping on three sides. The ouroboros closes this radiance in a circle that keeps it for the wearer. Image and text answer each other: what Zeus grants, the vase holds and spreads.

Literature

COMPARANDA

- Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (CBd), Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest · CBd-1229

- CBd-1959 · inv. 29 ·Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

- SGG II Na 18 (Naples, MAN 27232/1370), héliotrope : ouroboros, ΦΡΗ ΔΟC NEIKHN XAPIN OΛBON.

- SGG I 234 ; SGG II VeC 5 : ΔOC MOI XAPIN NIKHN.

Vase sous ouroboros, non rayonnant : CBd-3501 (vase à épis) ; CBd-1449 (amphore et rameaux, jaspe vert et rouge, εὐθήνει).

References

Bonner, SMA, 1950 ; Mastrocinque, SGG I–II, 2003–2007 ; Michel, Die magischen Gemmen, 2004 ; CBd, Budapest ; PHI Greek Inscriptions, IMS II 234.