

A Roman garnet intaglio with an ant and a poppy flower, set as a gold pendant

Garnet 13 × 10 mm; total height 21 mm. 1

8k gold pendant; gross weight 2.24 g.

Intaglio: Roman, 1st century BC – 1st century AD.

A drop-shaped garnet with a convex face, engraved in intaglio and now set in a plain 18k gold bezel with a suspension loop.

At the base, a small ant; above it rises a stylised plant motif, most probably a poppy capsule crowned by its radiating stigmatic disc and flanked by curling stems. The engraving is economical and quick, typical of small personal seals.

Historical context – Roman Glyptics

Deep red garnets reached Rome in growing numbers after the annexation of Egypt opened the Red Sea route to India. Pliny groups them among the carbunculi, the most prized of the fiery stones (Natural History XXXVII).

Iconography and symbolism

To the Romans the ant meant foresight: Virgil shows it storing grain against a needy old age (Georgics I.186). Cicero makes it an omen of wealth, as ants put grains of wheat into the mouth of the infant Midas (De divinatione I.78). Ovid has Jupiter turn ants into men, the Myrmidons, to repopulate Aegina (Metamorphoses VII). Paired with the poppy, the plant of Ceres, the image becomes a compact prayer for harvest, abundance and continuity.