



Heart-shaped Silver Pendant Set With A Toadstone. German, 15th / 16th Century.



17 250 EUR

Period : 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Sterling silver

Description

A Heart-Shaped Silver Pendant Set with a Toadstone. German, late 15th / early 16th century. Dimensions: 3.8 × 3 × 1.5 cm (excluding loose bail). This rare silver pendant, formed as a heart and likely intended as a protective amulet for a loved one, is set with a large toadstone of mottled grey and brown hues. On an engraved ground, the toadstone is surmounted by two stylised flowers, with a third positioned below, all enclosed within a delicate rope-twist border. The reverse is finely engraved with the Christogram IHS, surrounded by flowering foliage--a fusion of devotional symbolism and apotropaic intent. Talismans of this type embodied a double protection: the supposed magical efficacy of the toadstone, coupled with the divine invocation of Christ. Toadstones were believed to possess

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powerful medicinal and protective properties.

Folklore held that these mysterious stones were found within the heads of living toads and that they would sweat, change colour, or heat up in the presence of poison. Worn against the skin or applied directly to bites and wounds, they were thought to draw out venom and ward off evil.

Their use was endorsed in medieval texts, including the Book of Secrets (13th century), which recommends swallowing the stone to purge internal corruption--after which it could be recovered and reused. A literary echo of this belief appears in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (c.

1599): "Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head." Despite their

mythical origins, toadstones are in fact the fossilised teeth of *Lepidotes*, a genus of ray-finned fish that inhabited prehistoric waters during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, approximately 200-100 million years ago. Their rounded, button-like form made them ideally suited for jewellery and devotional settings from the medieval period through to the 18th century.

The Christogram IHS, derived from the first three letters of the Greek name for Jesus (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ), was reinterpreted in Latin as *Iesus Hominum Salvator* ("Jesus, Saviour of Men"). It was widely used in Christian iconography and adopted prominently by the Jesuit Order. This pendant, with its rich intersection of natural science, myth, and faith, offers a poignant insight into the devotional and protective practices of late medieval Europe.

Comparable Examples: For related pendants incorporating toadstones, see: - British Museum, Toadstone amulet, Museum no.

OA.1379 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1379 - Victoria and Albert Museum, Toadstone amulet, Museum no.

8012-1862 <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O383290/amulet-unknown/>