



PROANTIC
LE PLUS BEAU CATALOGUE D'ANTIQUITES

Magical Roman Engraving On Brown-green Jasper. Phoenix.



4 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Très bon état

Description

1.9 x 1.6 x 0.3 cm Mounting available upon request
Roman art, 2nd-3rd century
Provenance Formerly in the private collection of J.A. Mariaud de Serre, Paris
Oval intaglio, flat surface. A bird stands facing right on a ground line, its head encircled by a radiating crown, its tail feathers spread. In the field, an eight-rayed star and five Greek letters in two groups on either side of the bird: ?? and ???. The radiating crown identifies a solar phoenix, the Greco-Roman successor to the Egyptian Bennu of Heliopolis, the bird of the primordial mound and the first sunrise. Herodotus (II, 73), Pliny (HN X, 2), and Tacitus (Ann. VI, 28) transmitted the legend to Rome, where the phoenix became the imperial emblem of Aeternitas. Green jasper is the material traditionally associated with solar and

Dealer

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regenerative amulets: it is a talisman of renewal, not a decorative motif. This intaglio differs from the Bonner "Phoenix class"--a bird on a globe and column, surrounded by solar animals, on black hematite--in that it features a simpler composition on green jasper and is significantly rarer. The two-part inscription follows a convention found on gems of this type (see CBd-2, CBd-502, CBd-1046). The sequence ?? ??? is not attested in any published corpus; it is transcribed as it appears on the stone. The image's survival is exceptional. Christian apologetics adopted the bird as proof of the resurrection; alchemists subsequently made it the emblem of the rubedo, the "work of red," based on the logic that matter must be reduced to ashes before coming back to life--*cineres nostri*, "our ashes." It appears throughout the engraved corpus of the 16th and 17th centuries, having entered it through the humanist interpretation of ancient gemstones as hieroglyphs (Horapollon, printed in 1505; Valeriano, 1556). Stones of this type are at the origin of this lineage. Comparative Literature Á. M. Nagy, "The Phoenix and the Benu Bird on Magical Gems," in *Phoenix: Myth(s) and Sign(s)*, Bern, 2001, 57-84 -- C. Bonner, **Studies in Magical Amulets**, Ann Arbor, 1950 -- S. Michel, **Die Magischen Gemmen**, Berlin, 2004 -- A. Mastrocinque, **Sylloge Gemmarum Gnosticarum**, Rome, 2003-2008, I, 72-73; *Les intailles magiques...* BnF, Paris, 2014 -- R. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, Leiden, 1972.