



Magical gems are about 1.5 to 3 cm long and made of semi-precious stones. The designs and inscriptions are not reversed, but carved to be viewed directly, which shows that these gems were not intended as seals, but as amulets and talismans. The shapes of the amulets suggest that they were worn as ring stones or pendants, larger and rounded shapes, as well as the evidence of wear, indicate that some were held in the hand and rubbed - a kind of manipulation to increase their efficacy. Magical gems generally were employed in three areas: for rebirth and redemption, as medical remedies or, for prevention, and as love charms. The imagery and inscriptions indicate a variety of influences - Egyptian, Oriental, Greek and Roman, as well as Jewish and Christian. Since the provenance of the magical gems is in most cases unknown, their place of origin is thought to be the ancient melting pot of Alexandria; moreover Hellenistic and Roman Egypt is considered to be the origin of the occult sciences. The production of magical gems peaked in the second and third centuries CE, a period of known syncretistic tendencies. But they continued to be produced well into the fourth century CE, and indeed had a considerable after-life in the mediaeval and early-modern periods.

## The Magical Gems in the British Museum

The world's largest collection of magical gems is here published in its entirety. The 649 entries give details of type of stone, measurements, shape, condition and provenance, as well as stylistic and technical characteristics. Images and inscriptions are described and discussed in relation to magical papyri or ancient magical practices and accompanied by bibliographical information and numerous comparisons. Each gem is illustrated by line drawings in the text and by photographs.



Review: Richard Gordon,  
Magical amulets in the British Museum,  
Journal of Roman Archaeology 15,  
2002, 666-670

Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum.  
ISBN 0 7141 2802 3

297x210 mm, 400 pages, 2 volumes, 8 color plates, 95 plates  
195 £

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