



ANTHEA FINE ARTS



A RENAISSANCE AGATE CAMEO. THE OLYMPIAN GODS .

Circa: Late 16th century - 17th century

Agate

3.9 x 3.9 x 0.4 cm (1 1/4 x 1 1/4 x 0 1/4 inches)

Late 16th century - 17th century

The scene depicts Jupiter, supreme ruler of the gods and heaven enthroned and flanked by his sons, Mercury (the messenger god) on the left, holding the caduceus and wearing the pesos. Meanwhile on his right, Mars (the god of war) helmeted and holding spear, and shield. Below the three gods, the torso of Neptune (the sea god, and brother of Jupiter), rears upwards from the waves.

The pyramidal arrangement of the group is consistent with the Renaissance virtues of harmonious, stable and unified composition espoused by Giorgio Vasari, and references Raphael's 1516 design for the frontispiece of the Aeneid, which was engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi.

Yet in this work, the absence of the zodiacal frame suggests that the piece was inlaid in a larger work, today missing.

Four other such 16th-century Zodiac gems exist, both carnelian and of similar size and both originally in princely collectors cabinets. The first, in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (inv. no.3706; described as Italian, 16th Century. The other comparable gem is in the Cabinet des Medailles, BnF, Paris (inv. N°58.2391, This is of exceptional quality and seems likely to have been in the collection of Peirsac (1580-1637), the eminent French antiquarian of the early 17th century, and was acquired by the French Royal Collection). The onyx intaglio (The Walters Art Museum, inv. 42.502) identified as 4th century AD or 16th century. The Arundel Zodiac (Sotheby's, July 15 2021, lot 11).

