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MAGIC IN LATE ANTIQUITY: THE EVIDENCE OF MAGICAL GEMS

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This article examines the main problems related to the so-called magical gems (semiprecious stones engraved with demons and characterised by the presence of symbols and inscriptions) in order to illustrate the contribution that material can make to our knowledge of magic and popular beliefs in Late Antiquity. Magical gems reflect a complex material culture and activities performed in order to achieve a number of different purposes (divination, protection against dangers, healing, etc.). These aims were sought by invoking superhuman power by means of the images represented and of the formulas inscribed on the gems. In order to address the complex problems raised by this kind of archaeological material, it will be necessary to limit the discussion to a few examples from the available evidence.



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