

ROMAN CHALCEDONY KANTHAROS

RomanChalcedony

H: 7 cm (2.7 in) D: 14.5 cm (5.7 in)

Reference: 21454



This marvelous and rare vessel was skillfully cut from a single block of chalcedony. The shape is characteristic for a variant of kantharos, a deep drinking cup on a low foot, with vertical handles linking to the lower body and rim but not exceeding the vessel's height. Their size is harmoniously balanced with the body proportions while the thickness corresponds to that of the wall, which is perfectly even in any part of the vessel. The hemispherical cup is based on a low profiled foot, the wide mouth is accentuated by a simple rim.

The surface of the vessel is overall smooth, polished and reflects the light; the effect of translucency and change of color natural for the stone structure were especially admired by gem and hardstone connoisseurs: when it is handled and turned, the cup appears from opaque milk-white to translucent light blue as if these hints reflect the clouds moving in the sky.

There are no exactly the same chalcedony bowls to be compared to this one. A bowl similar in dimensions and dated to the 1st century B.C. – 1st century A.D., with the Renaissance gold and enamel mounting from the Lorenzo the Magnificent treasury (Museo degli Argenti, Florence), does not have the handles. The identical shape of the recipient, including the handles) is found in the rock crystal cup (called skyphos; Romisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne) dated to the early Imperial time, the rock crystal kantharos from Begram, 1st century A.D. National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul), and the sardonyx bowl, 2nd 4th century A.D., also from the Medici collection (Museo degli Argenti, Florence).

As a material, chalcedony was used since the Minoan times, mostly for seals and beads. It became especially popular for the Ionic Greek and Graeco-Persian gems of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., and remained attractive for the carvers of gems and miniature sculpture through the Hellenistic and the Roman periods. The term "chalcedony" is not attested until the Byzantine period, it derives from the port city Chalcedon near Constantinople. Pliny the Elder, describing various

stones from the agate family, calls chalcedony iaspis, discusses different types of blue and green chalcedony, and informs that this type is called "sky-blue" in Persia and "north wind" in Greece (Natural History 37.115-118).

CONDITION

Complete; reassembled from four fragments; a large crack and a few natural interior cracks; surface weathered with traces of deposits, a few scratches, tiny chips at the rim and foot.

PROVENANCE

Ex- private collection, Beirut-Paris, 1960's.

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