

# **Sacred stones and rituals in Roman Near East**

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The representation of deities in the form of rectangular or cubic stones, cut, semi cut or uncut, goes back to very ancient times throughout the eastern Mediterranean Sea (IV<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C.). The use of sacred stones is common to various Semitic groups of Arabic origin in the whole area of the Near East and been attested in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Many data confirm that cult of sacred stones was always popular and living during Roman times.

Sacred stones were venerated by worshippers. These divine representations are known by objects themselves, iconography but also by literary sources and inscriptions. These sources highlight the symbolic importance of these sacred objects which constitute receptacle of the divinity. Stones have symbolic meaning in the Roman Near East and they are sacred for worshippers.

In this paper, we will discuss symbolic meaning and use of sacred stones. Throughout religious ceremonies, various ritual acts were performed on these sacred stones. They could be dressed, paraded in procession. They could be anointed or sprayed with various liquids. They also received different types of offerings: incense, liquids, plants, tissues, etc.