

A ROMAN INTAGLIO FROM LONDON

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One of the smaller items recovered from the commercial spoil tips following the archaeological excavation at Billingsgate Lorry Park¹ is a red jasper intaglio brought into the Museum of London for recording.



Fig. 1 Roman intaglio from London.

The oval stone measures 11mm × 9mm and is flat on both surfaces (Henig type 1). The device is Mercury standing to the front, facing right². He holds his caduceus (upper part removed by chip) in the crook of his right arm. His money bag is suspended from his outstretched left hand. A short cloak (*chlamys*), is draped around his right arm.

The type, based on a Greek sculptural prototype, is a very common one³, but it is nevertheless satisfying to have at last a gem from Roman London, depicting this deity, for Mercury was pre-eminently a god of trade and commerce, to which London was devoted in Roman times as now⁴.

The use of red jasper for the intaglio and the attractive patterning employed in the rendering of Mercury's hair and the musculature of his body, suggest that the object should be dated to the middle of the second century AD when London was still at its apogee. The intaglio remains in private ownership⁵.

NOTES

1. For details of other Roman artefacts recovered from the Thames waterfront at Billingsgate Lorry Park, see Jones 1984; Henig and Chapman 1985.
2. Description is of actual gem.
3. cf Henig 1978, Nos 38–47, App 32, App 95.
4. A variant of the type is represented by a small bronze in the BM from the Thames at London Bridge see Merrifield 1969, 172–3, Fig. 49b.
5. Since writing this article, the intaglio has been acquired by the Museum of London, accession no. 87.128. The authors wish to thank Sue Goddard for the illustration.

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