

# THE MYSTIC GEM OF BABYLON

By LOUISE SURGEY

CARNELIAN, the talisman gemstone of ancient Babylon still enchants the connoisseur of jewels with its red coloring and shifting beams of light.

The Babylonian citizen, befogged by sorcerers, depended implicitly on the carnelian to shield him from the black magic which he believed the Moon-god hurled earthward from time to time. Of course, the sorcerers may have been laughing in their wide sleeves at the credulous citizen, for the wisest of their kind considered black magic to be merely a form of bad temper and as such liable to disappear under the sunny rays of the carnelian.

The Babylonians, who were among the earliest to invent the processes of boring and engraving of stones, would in any case choose carnelian, a hard surfaced gem, for their handicraft. The cylinder-seal which every Babylonian carried upon his person and by means of which he stamped his signature, was made of carnelian more frequently than of any other stone. The style conscious Babylonian usually chose a well cut carnelian to ornament the top of his walking stick.

Carnelian was also the talisman of the wonderful, if tigerish, Kings of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar, or, more accurately, King Nebu-kukui-uzer, who built the walls Nimgur-bel and Nimitti-bel to protect and encompass Babylon, the city he loved more than his own life, treasured the carnelian above even the 'bricks of bright silver' with which he had adorned the Temple of Nebu, his deity.

When the silver and gold twelve foot statue of Bel-Merodach or Marduk, the god of Babylon, 'he who stands and walks' was taken in solemn procession through the great Ishtar Gate and onward to his glittering temple, the bright carnelian shone upon his horehead. For Marduk, to the Babylonians, was not only judge among his peers, he was also the happy god of Spring-time and a solar deity delighting in the sheen of the carnelian, a sheen which actually deepens under the sunlight.

Carnelian, prosaically and mineralogically speaking, is a reddish chalcedony, a name itself which goes far back into history. Chalcedony, a form of quartz, is found among agate gravels, or in volcanic cavities. Carnelian is translucent, its characteristic red coloring due to the presence of ferric oxide.

The Carnelian was favored by Etruscan craftsmen, honoured in Egypt where it was carved into scarabs and symbolic

amulets, even in buckles to be placed upon the dead. Egyptian court ladies brightened their more tedious moments by jingling the tiny carnelian replicas of hippopotamus and falcon which dangled from their golden bracelets. In Cyprus, in archaic Greece, this gemstone was esteemed, and it is still cherished in Northern Sweden and in Poland.

Yet, with the constancy which, as a gemstone it signifies, the carnelian clings to Babylon. There it shines through that memory world where Nebuchadnezzar builds, and wise men scan the heavens from the lofty towers of Babylon.

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## AUGUST, TWELVE NOON

*By* M. E. DREW

Transfixed by sun  
 I, pierced through, riveted by solar eye  
 to noon, eternal zenith.  
 All still, all stupified,  
 paralyzed by a turn of cosmic mood,  
 spike-stemmed flowers pin the earth to  
 stretched  
 proportions like a knitted garment washed,  
 pulled to a pattern.  
 The radii of rivers never move.  
 Birds are inert.  
 And from the palsied bough  
 even the aspen leaf hangs motionless.  
 Potential breeze is pressed by solid hills  
 to death. I wait,  
 and yet how wait when life is futureless  
 as pastless now.  
 I am aware of murder on the earth;  
 Time cancelled forever by summer noon.