A 19th c. gold ring set with a Roman carnelian intaglio. Melpomene, muse of tragedy.

Stone: 9 × 13 mm · Ring size: UK R · US 8.5 · TDD ~58 · Total weight: 4.61 g

Gold ring, 19th century

Intaglio: Roman, 1st century AD.

A 19th-century gold ring set with an oval Roman carnelian intaglio. The engraved stone depicts Melpomene, muse of tragedy, standing draped in a high-girt peplos: she raises a tragic mask surmounted by the onkos in one hand and holds an inverted parazonium — a short sword — across her body, a column rising behind her. The warm orange stone is held in a closed bezel, the hoop of plain polished gold.

The tragic muse — mask, sword and column — belongs to an iconography long favoured in ancient glyptic; a well-known Hellenistic prototype of the type is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum (Boardman & Vollenweider, Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Finger Rings, I, no. 350). The same subject on carnelian is recorded among the Paoletti impressions (no. 211, Melpomene Musa della Tragedia), where the original is given as a carnelian intaglio from the Jenkins collection in Rome (Dolce 1772, II, p. 8, L 42; impressions: Dolce 1790, II, 89; Raccolta 1802, no. 331; Cades 15, II C, 14). The stone was later mounted in a nineteenth-century gold ring.