

A 19th century gold brooch set with a large agate cameo. Bust of Psyche.

Dim. 4.9 x 4.6cm

Total weight: 26.6 gr

This very beautiful gold brooch features an openwork border decorated in scrolling foliage and is set around a large three-layer agate cameo depicting the bust of Psyche. A symbol of the soul and metamorphosis, the figure is represented in left profile, the head inclined, the downcast eyes and her delicate mouth closed suggest introspection and melancholy. The hair is arranged in a chignon held by a three-tiered headband and adorned with butterfly wings (finely executed in the deepest layer of the intense brown-colored stone). She wears a drapery, and on her shoulder rests a butterfly, symbol of the soul, also carved in the most intense layer of the stone.

Psyche, whose name derives from the Greek word for "soul" or "breath of life," represents one of the most profound and enduring symbols in classical mythology. Originally featured in Apuleius's "Metamorphoses" (The Golden Ass, 2nd century CE), the story tells of a mortal woman whose extraordinary beauty rivaled that of Venus herself, leading to both divine jealousy and ultimate transformation. Psyche embodies the human soul's journey toward enlightenment and divine love. The mythological trials represent the soul's purification process, moving from earthly concerns to spiritual transcendence.

Like many mythological subjects from Antiquity, the figure of Psyche appears in the art of engraving and jewelry across successive periods. However, the symbolism of this feminine figure found particular prominence in Neoclassical glyptics, highlighting the values of purity, beauty, nature, and melancholy that were highly prized during this Era.