

A 19th century Gold Brooch set with an Agate Cameo. Portrait of an Emperor.

agate, with a brooch mount

cameo: 17.4mm., 0.68in. diameter

32.6mm., 1.28in. overall; 9,05 gr

Italy, first half of the 19th century

A finely carved hardstone cameo depicting the profile bust of a Roman emperor, possibly Claudius, facing right. The subject is rendered in high relief in the white upper layer of the onyx against the dark brown ground, displaying masterful lapidary craftsmanship. The emperor is shown with characteristic wavy hair, aquiline profile, and draped shoulders in the classical manner.

The cameo is set within an elaborate gold mount of exceptional quality, executed in the Etruscan Revival style fashionable in early 19th century Italy. The frame features a double rope-twist border surrounding the stone, enclosed by an openwork gallery of scrolling wire tendrils and cannetille rosettes with granulated spheres. This type of intricate goldwork was particularly associated with Roman workshops, notably those active around the Vatican and the Via del Corso.

The subject matter and style reflect the deep fascination with Imperial Rome that permeated the decorative arts during the Neoclassical period, when Grand Tour travelers commissioned such pieces as souvenirs of their Italian journeys.

Literature

For comparable examples of Italian cannetille gold mounts, see Judy Rudoe, Cartier 1900–1939, and Geoffrey Munn, Castellani and Giuliano: Revivalist Jewellers of the Nineteenth Century.