

A Gold Brooch set with a Late 18th c. Nicolo Intaglio — Youth and Satyr

Metal: Gold (brooch mount)

Stone: Nicolo (layered onyx with blue-grey upper stratum)

Intaglio dimensions: 2.3 × 2.7 cm (⅞ × 1 1/16 in.)

Brooch dimensions: 3 × 3.4 cm (1 3/16 × 1 6/16 in.)

Inscription: ΔΙΟΣ (DIOS) in Greek letters, engraved in reverse

Period: Italian, late 18th century

A refined gold brooch set with an Italian nicolo intaglio of the late 18th century, depicting a scene of Bacchic intimacy between a seated satyr and a standing youth.

The standing youth, shown standing with a staff or thyrsus beside him, is likely to be identified as the young Dionysus (Bacchus) — god of wine, ecstasy, and theatrical arts. Facing him seated on a rock, a satyr, one of the wild woodland spirits who formed the god's eternal retinue. The composition captures a moment of quiet exchange between the two figures, perhaps a pause in their revels, imbued with the gentle sensuality characteristic of late 18th-century neoclassical gem engraving.

The intaglio is carved in nicolo — a variety of layered onyx prized since antiquity for its striking contrast between a thin translucent blue-grey upper layer and a darker ground beneath. When engraved, the incised design appears darker against the pale surface, lending depth and legibility to the image. Nicolo was a favoured material among Roman gem engravers and was enthusiastically revived by Italian craftsmen during the neoclassical period.

The brooch mount, with its smooth polished gold bezel, is elegant in its simplicity, allowing the intaglio to take centre stage.

A sophisticated jewel uniting Bacchic mythology with the refined taste of the Grand Tour era — a testament to the enduring appeal of classical antiquity.