

A Roman Nicolo Intaglio of Dionysus, set in a gold ring

Bezel: 18 × 14 mm · Ring size: UK "P" (US 7½)

Weight: 9.4 g

Intaglio: Roman art, 1st century A.D.

The oval nicolo — a banded agate whose thin, pale bluish-grey upper stratum has been cut through to expose the black layer beneath — is engraved in intaglio with the head of Dionysus (Bacchus) in profile to the left, wreathed with vine leaves and clusters of grapes.

The luminous two-tone effect, the cool blue silhouette set against a dark ground, is the prized signature of the nicolo and one of the most refined tricks of the ancient gem-cutter, who exploited the natural layering of the stone to give the design its depth.

Dionysus, god of the grape harvest, of wine and of ecstatic release — the youngest of the Olympians and, in myth, the only one born of a mortal mother — is fittingly crowned with the fruit and foliage of his own cult.

The intaglio is set in a closed bezel within a modern high-carat gold ring of the mid-20th century.