

Carlo Costanzi (1705–1781) (attributed to). A beautiful chalcedony intaglio set in a later gold and diamond brooch-pendant. Portrait of Alexander the Great.

Dimensions. Stone 19 × 22 mm; Mounting 25 × 30 mm;

Total weight 19.92 g

Intaglio: early 18th century. Later mount.

A beautiful chalcedony intaglio attributed to Carlo Costanzi, bearing the helmeted portrait of Alexander the Great, set in a later brushed gold brooch-pendant with diamond-set borders.

Alexander is shown in bust, the helmeted head in profile to the left. The helmet, its bowl ornamented with a figured scene in relief, releases the hair in long undulating curls falling to the nape; drapery covers the shoulder. The engraving, deep and ample, models the volumes of the face — straight profile, full lips, wide-open eye — with the virtuosity of the great Settecento engravers, declared heirs of the antique gem. The impression reveals the full refinement of the modelling, down to the helmet's decoration.

Carlo Costanzi, called *il cavaliere* Costanzi Napolitano, trained by his father Giovanni in the family's Roman workshop, was among the most celebrated gem engravers of 18th-century Europe. Sought after by courts and great collectors, praised for his portraits and his interpretations after the antique, he raised glyptic to the rank of the fine arts. The head of Alexander, ideal sovereign and heroic model, is among his documented subjects.

Iconography

Alexander the Great, conqueror and pupil of Aristotle, was for the 18th century the very embodiment of the ancient hero — youth, genius and glory united in a profile. His helmeted portrait, inherited from

Hellenistic coinage and ancient gems, was a favourite subject of connoisseurs' cabinets.

The mount

Later gold brooch-pendant with brushed rectangular frame, two diamond-set borders on white gold; the reverse fitted with a pin and a bail: the jewel is worn as a brooch or as a pendant.

Comparanda

For the same subject and by the same engraver see: – Paoletti, vol. II, p. 311, no. 384, 'Agate intaglio of Carlo Costanzi'. – Cades 63, 'opere del cav. Carlo Costanzi Napolitano', 49: 'Testa Alessandro Magno in agata'. – Le Gemme dei Medici al Museo degli Argenti, p. 397, no. 580.