A 19th c. massive gold ring set with a nicolo intaglio. Veiled Juno.

Nicolo intaglio 9 × 14 mm;

Gold ring, chased – ring size US 6½ (FR 52½ / UK M½)

Gross weight 10 g

French owl import mark for 18ct gold on the hoop (struck after 1893).

Ring and intaglio, mid-19th century.

The oval bezel rises in three stepped, ribbed mouldings to a closed collet; the shoulders, tapering to a rounded hoop, are chased on each side with a flowering stem within a pointed cartouche above paired scrolls, the lower hoop with a band of hatched ornament. The French owl mark struck on the hoop is the import mark for foreign 18ct gold, in use from 1893: it records only the ring's later entry into France, and shows that it was made abroad well before that date.

The nicolo, a two-layered onyx, shows the head of a woman facing right, veiled: the veil falls from the crown of the head over the neck and shoulder, the hair is dressed in short curls at the brow and a diadem shows beneath the veil. The profile is straight, the chin firm, the neck long — the Greek ideal as the 19th century understood it, engraved with precision and polish.

Historical context – The archaeological ring and the nicolo

Around the middle of the 19th century Italian goldsmiths turned to the forms of Roman jewellery, and the massive ring with stepped bezel and chased shoulders. The nicolo, the Romans' favourite stone for signets, was cut again in the 19th century for exactly this purpose: an antique-looking gem in an antique-looking mount, for a collector of the Grand Tour or its heirs.

Iconography and symbolism

The veiled and diademed head is the type of Juno, queen of the gods, as she appears on Roman coins and gems: the veil is the *flammeum* of the married woman, the diadem her sovereignty. Juno Regina watched over marriage and over the month of June that still bears her name; Jupiter's wife and sister, she is the only goddess who is his equal.