



A Grand Tour two-layer agate cameo of a bearded man after the emperor Caracalla, set as a gold pendant.

A gold pendant with smooth rub-over bezel, set with a two-layer agate cameo carved with the bust of a bearded man in profile to the right, seen from the back.

The white layer stands out in high relief against a translucent blue-grey ground. Dense, drilled curls, a short curly beard and a brow creased by a frown give the face its tension. A mantle falls in parallel folds over the shoulder, and the head turns away from the body.

Historical context – Grand Tour glyptic

The composition closely follows a Severan onyx cameo in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: the bust of Caracalla seen from the back, the head in profile over the shoulder (inv. 42.11.31, ca. A.D. 211–217). In the 18th century, Caracalla's portrait was one of the most copied on the Grand Tour, led by the celebrated Farnese bust in Naples. Here the Roman engraver keeps the imperial formula but softens its violence: the soldier-emperor becomes a figure of the antique gallery.

Iconography and symbolism

Caracalla wanted a portrait that inspired fear: the furrowed brow and the sudden turn of the head were a deliberate break with the serene image of the Antonine philosophers. The same emperor granted Roman citizenship to all the free inhabitants of the Empire in 212 (Constitutio Antoniniana), and yet posterity remembered only his cruelty.