



A Roman chalcedony intaglio set in a later gold ring. A young satyr dancing with a child.

Intaglio 12 × 15 mm

19th-century gold ring with engraved shoulders; ring size US 8½–10 (UK Q½–T½ / EU 58–63); gross weight 10.36 g.

Intaglio: Roman, 1st–2nd century A.D.; ring: 19th century.

Good condition; wear consistent with age; very small chips to the edge of the stone.

A massive gold ring, the hoop engraved with grooves and scrolls widening onto an oval bezel, set with a chalcedony intaglio.

A young satyr, his head laureated and turned to the left, bends forward on a groundline. He holds by the arms a small child standing on his feet, and the pair move together in a dance. The satyr's tail, the lean, bent body and the taut lines of the limbs are cut with a sure, economical hand.

Historical context – Roman glyptic

The motif recurs in Roman glyptic, with close parallels in several collections, among them a gem in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. Its source is Greek: the dance of adult and child already appears in Attic vase painting of the Classical period. Imperial engravers took up these Dionysian scenes, prized for their movement and their grace.

Iconography and symbolism

In the thiasos of Dionysus, the satyr is the god's companion, half-animal, bound to wine and to dance.

Here he becomes a teacher: the child learns the steps by standing on his feet. Plato wrote that the uneducated man is achoreutos, "one who has not learned the chorus", for among the Greeks, dance was the first school of the soul (Laws II, 654a). The gem shows that education in its simplest form — rhythm passed from one body to another.