

An Italic agate intaglio with a bird perched on a lyre, set as a gold pendant

Intaglio 11 × 10 mm; total height 20 mm.

18k gold pendant; gross weight 1.69 g.

Intaglio: talic, 2nd – 1st century BC.

Condition: light surface wear consistent with age.

An oval dark agate with a convex face, engraved in intaglio and now set in a plain 18k gold bezel with a hammered suspension loop.

A small bird stands to the left, head raised and beak open as if in song. Its feet grip a lyre set obliquely beneath it, and the body of the instrument ends in a rounded terminal. The cutting is compact and lively, with the bird's plumage rendered in short, confident strokes.

Historical context – Italic Glyptics

Between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, workshops in central Italy carried the Etruscan tradition of gem engraving into the Hellenistic world. They produced small seals for an expanding clientele of Roman and Italic citizens. Animals and emblematic still lifes were favoured subjects, cut quickly but with a sure sense of the image.

Iconography and symbolism

The lyre belongs to Apollo and the Muses; a bird singing upon it makes a visual allegory of poetry and music. Lucretius claims that men imitated the liquid voices of birds long before they could sing songs of their own (De rerum natura V.1379–1381). Hesiod already calls the nightingale aoidos, "the singer", the poet's own name (Works and Days 202–212). The image thus recalls an ancient idea: music was

learned from nature before it was given to the gods.