

A Neoclassical sard intaglio of a conquered province, signed ΣΕΛΕΥΚ, after a model by Pichler, set in a gold ring

Intaglio 21 × 18 mm.

18k and 22k gold

Ring size EU 62.5 – US 10 – UK T½ (resizable); gross weight 17.94 g.

Intaglio: Neoclassical, late 18th – early 19th century

Mount: later, in the Grand Tour style.

Condition: surface with scratches and wear consistent with age. Signed ΣΕΛΕΥΚ in the field.

A large sard of warm honey colour, engraved in intaglio and set in a gold ring with a plain bezel and tapering shank.

A woman sits on the ground to the left, her cheek resting on her hand in an attitude of mourning, her body wrapped in heavy drapery. Before her stands a trophy of arms with a crested helmet, cuirass and round shield. The Greek signature ΣΕΛΕΥΚ runs vertically beside the trophy.

Historical context – Neoclassical Glyptics

The composition follows a model by Giovanni Pichler, recorded in the Paoletti impressions as La Dacia conquistata and La Bulgaria. Tassie's impressions, catalogued by Raspe in 1791, describe the subject as a conquered province copied from a relief in the court of the Palazzo dei Conservatori. The Greek signature, of a type also found on the Poniatowski gems, reflects the period's taste for antique-sounding artists' names.

Iconography and symbolism

The province seated on the ground beneath a trophy is the Roman image of conquest, struck on coins and carved on triumphal monuments. Yet the engraver lingers on her grief rather than on victory. Virgil had already set out Rome's mission: to spare the subdued and to subdue the proud, parcere subiectis et debellare superbos (Aeneid VI.853). Here it is the subdued who hold the gaze, and defeat becomes contemplation.

References

Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 2006 (1998), p. 55, figs. 5–6, nos. 226 and 228; Raspe 1791, nos. 7867–7873.