Emmett & White
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

Italian Banded Agate Cameo of Alexander the Great and Olympias

£1,650

Emmett & White Ltd
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REF: 4633

Description

A fine and rare Italian banded agate cameo, carved in the 17th century with a double portrait traditionally identified as Alexander the Great and his mother, Olympias, Queen of Macedonia. Later mounted in a silver ring during the mid-18th century, circa 1760, this compelling jewel brings together the virtuosity of Italian hardstone carving with the enduring European fascination for the classical world.

The layered structure of the banded agate has been skilfully exploited to give the profiles depth and distinction. Facing portraits emerge from the contrasting strata of the stone, their finely rendered features recalling the engraved gems and cameos of ancient Greece and Rome. Alexander the Great, one of antiquity's most celebrated rulers, and Olympias, his powerful and enigmatic mother, offered an especially resonant subject for collectors drawn to classical history, dynastic legend, and heroic portraiture.

During the 17th century, Italian gem engravers were at the forefront of a renewed appreciation for antique cameos and intaglios. Carved hardstone portraits such as this were prized by Grand Tour travellers, scholars, and aristocratic collectors, who valued them both as exquisite works of miniature sculpture and as tangible connections to the civilisations of antiquity. The later silver ring mount reflects the continuing admiration for the cameo into the 18th century, when classical subjects remained central to fashionable jewellery and connoisseurship.

The ring's long history-from its 17th-century Italian carving to its circa 1760 mounting-gives it exceptional presence. It is at once a jewel, a miniature work of art, and a fascinating object of classical revivalism.

UK ring size L

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