

## CAMEOS WITH PORTRAIT OF NERO, A CHARIOTEER, AND A LION

Roman, Circa 1st - 2nd century A.D. and 3rd century A.D.

Sardonyx and Gold

W: 13.30 cm (W: 5.24 in)

Reference: 19743



All once serving as the central element of an elaborate necklace of the 3rd century, each cameo mounted in an oval bezel with a pierced-work palmette frame, joined to each other by hooks and loops, an additional hook above the central element, centered by a large stone, carved in three layers, brown on white on dark brown, with a portrait bust of the young Emperor Nero, circa 54-59 A.D., in profile to the right, wearing a cuirass below a paludamentum pinned on his right shoulder by a small circular brooch, a laurel wreath in his wavy hair, the ties hanging behind, the hair and costume exploiting the brown layer of the stone, the face and neck white, the background dark brown; to the left a cameo of a lion, circa late 2nd-early 3rd century, carved in three layers, brown on white on blue-black, the beast walking to the right on a short groundline, his head lowered and turned out slightly to his right, with a full mane and articulated eyes; and to the right a cameo of Victoria driving a quadriga, circa 2nd century, carved in three layers, brown on white on blue-black, the goddess winged, wearing a high-belted tunic, holding the reins in her right hand and a palm branch in her raised left hand, the horses all rearing, the nearer with its head turned out to its right.

During the later Roman Empire jewelers frequently re-used older stones in their work. What is extraordinary in this case is that the central element displays a magnificent 1st century A.D. cameo of a youthful Emperor Nero, whose memory had been officially condemned (*damnatio memoriae*) at the end of his tumultuous reign. This suggests that by the 3rd century, when the cameo was remounted, either that his physiognomy was no longer recognized, or that his popularity endured despite his condemnation.

### PROVENANCE

Ex- US private collection, early 1990s; Christie's, New York, 7 December 2006, lot 256.

### PUBLISHED

Christie's, New York, 7 December 2006, lot 256.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

For related cameos of the youthful Nero, sculpted when he was less than twenty years of age, see the examples in Paris and Bonn, nos. A93 and A94 in MEGOW, *Kameen von Augustus bis Alexander Severus*, and no. 59 in HENIG, *The Content Family Collection of Ancient Cameos*. For a cameo of Victoria, driving a biga rather than a quadriga as here, see no. 135 in HENIG, *op. cit.*; and for a similar cameo of a lion, see no. 165 in the same publication. For pierced-work jewelry with palmette frames see pp. 109-135 in YEROULANOU, *Diatrita, Gold pierced-work jewelry from the 3rd to the 7th century*.