



A gold pendant set with a large Neoclassical agate intaglio. Cupid saving Psyche.

Circa: 19th century

Intaglio : 2.1 x 3.2 cm (0 ⁷/₈ x 1 ¹/₄ inches)

Mounting: later. Gold (18k) ; 8,76 gr

19th century

Of this extraordinary mythological scene there is also an example in sardonyx, signed Pamphilos (*from the Townley collection-1815, London, BM. Cades 14, II B, 243*). The scene is described in the inventory of the Paoletti casts as: *'Psiche soccorsa da Cupido dal deliquio caginatogli dalla sua curiosità di esaminare il belletto ricevuto all inferno per portarlo a Venere, che era andato in svaporazione, e temendo li gastighi della Suocera, era prossima a morir di dolore, per cui mosso a compassione Cupido, dopo di averla ripresa delli suoi mancamenti, richiamo il belletto nel Vaso, e fece pace colla sua Sposa '.*

In fact, in this romantic scene, Psyche is sitting on the rocks, with one foot inside a trap (*symbolizing the punishment of eternal sleep*), suffering from pain. Next to her, the vase that she fatally opens, and in front of her, Cupid who advances to help her, following the butterfly (her soul).

At the center of Apuleius' work, The Metamorphoses, exactly in books IV, V and VI, the most beautiful and famous fable of antiquity opens: Cupid and Psyche.

Cupid falls madly in love with Psyche and takes her with him to his home, and makes her his wife, without ever being seen. The woman accepts this mysterious situation and initially obeys her husband, respecting his request to never fall into the temptation of knowing her identity.

Psyche will fall victim to her innate curiosity and at night, while her mysterious husband sleeps, she takes a lantern to look at his body. What she sees leaves her speechless, she falls even more in love with her wonderful husband, who now has a face and body of undeniable beauty. However, the god, struck by a drop of boiling oil from the lantern, wakes up and understands that his wife has disobeyed him and disappears, leaving Psyche alone. At the end, Psyche will be forced to face various vicissitudes carefully chosen by Venus, who in the meantime, has discovered everything and is even more determined to take revenge on Psyche. In the last test that Psyche has to face, still driven by her curiosity, she opens Proserpina's vase and falls into a deadly sleep. The happy ending of the fairy tale is represented by the best-known scene in the story: Cupid, seeing his dead woman, runs to her aid and wakes her up with a kiss. The two will finally be able to marry and be admitted to Olympus, with the "blessing" of Venus.

Literature

PAOLETTI, v.I, T.1, n°352