

LATE ROMAN GOLD BRACELET

Ro-Late, 3rd-4th century A.D.

Gold and Emerald

D. 6.8cm

Reference: 19046



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The articulate bracelet consists of two basic parts. One is an elaborate hoop, which is composed of rhomboid gold elements with additional granulation. The second is the central ornament, which is made up of six square box settings around a seventh setting that is similar but rectangular in shape; all are set with emeralds. Both parts are held together by hinges that allow the bracelet to be opened. At a first glance, the design seems to be rather simple, but closer examination reveals sophisticated details. The unusually high settings become wider toward the top, giving the center a particular weight and rhythm. The flush setting a method used to present the surface of the emeralds at exactly the same level as that of the broad rims of the gold boxes not only creates visual harmony but also forecasts a technique that later became popular in the garnet jewelry of the Migration period. The dark green color of the emeralds, no doubt carefully chosen for this bracelet, is enhanced by the smooth color of the surrounding gold rim. In contrast, the hoop, with its relief surface, tiny globules, and small openings between the single elements, creates a glittering effect that seems to contradict the discreet elegance of the centerpiece.

This type of bracelet repeats the basic format of finger rings composed of bezel and hoop. (The hinged bezel-hoop system seems, in fact, to be typical of the period of transition from late Roman to early Byzantine styles.) The closest parallel is a finger ring in a late antique treasure found at Thetford in England, now in the British Museum, London. The bezel of the Thetford ring consists of an almost square box setting surrounded by eight circular ones. The hoop was composed of a series of small settings that might be imitated by the gold elements of the bracelets. This piece belongs to a group of exquisite arm ornaments of the late antique period, which are characterized by a central ornament that is hinged to a hoop, and that consists of an arrangement of settings with precious or semiprecious stones and their imitations in

glass. They are found exclusively worked in gold as well as with colored inlays. Particularly close to this piece are a bracelet in London, said to have been found in North Africa; a bracelet from Egypt, now in Berlin, and a piece of unknown provenance in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

PROVENANCE

Ex collection Georges Zacos; collected in 1960s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For late antique bracelets in general, see C. Lepage, *Les bracelets de luxe romains et byzantins du II^e au VI^e siècle: Etude de la forme et de la structure*, Cahiers archéologiques 21 (1971), p. 1-23.

For the finger ring in the Thetford Treasure, see s. C. Johns and T. Potter, *The Thetford Treasure* (1983), p. 85, pls. 3,8. For the bracelet in the British Museum, London, see F. H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Jewellery, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman, in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (1911), no. 2824 ; in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, see C. Metzger, *Un bracelet byzantin en or au Louvre*, *Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 1 (1990), pp. 7-11; and in the Antikenmuseum, Berlin, see A. Greifenhagen, *Schmuckarbeiten in Edelmetall*, vol. 2 (1975), pl. 51.