

# PRINCELY GOLD NECKLACE WITH LARGE PENDANTS OF PEARLS, SAPPHIRES AND EMERALDS

Byzantine, 6th-7th century A.D.  
amethyst and glass  
Height: 73 cm  
Reference: 16833



This outstanding necklace is among the finest pieces of early Byzantine jewelry still preserved today. It is constructed of gold, beads, sapphires, emeralds, amethysts and glass paste.

The most important ornament of the necklace is a cross-shaped pendant composed of oval sapphires. On each side are three other wheel-shaped and disk-shaped pendants. They are separated by small cylinders. The rest of the necklace includes rhomboid and cylindrical elements decorated with precious stones and connected by small gold links. The clasp consists of two other medallions, to which a hook and a loop are soldered. The entire setting is made of gold, including that of the pendants in the shape of shallow cups. The beads are combined with precious stones such as sapphires, emeralds and amethysts.

The many precious stones and beads, as well as the splendor displayed by the very complex structure of the necklace, are absolutely unique. Only an extremely wealthy person would have been able to acquire such a treasure and only a very high-ranking woman could have worn it. It is almost incredible that such a valuable, fragile necklace escaped vandalism (breaking up to salvage prized materials)! Although the beads have suffered from dryness, they are almost all still in place. Six rhomboid cabochons (gemstones or glass paste) are lost. The four circular settings are also empty; they would have contained other precious stones, enamel or cameos (especially in the two elements placed on the décolleté). The necklace is perfectly structured (precious stones, beads, rock crystal, glass paste and enamel), with a flawless alternation of the materials and colors. The piece is very elaborate and shows highly technical skills. This trend for splendor was often criticized by the clergy, like the Christian author Tertullian, who exhorted the faithful to exercise greater modesty.

Examples of cameo necklaces are documented thanks to the Egyptian necklace belonging to the treasure of Antinopolis, now in the

Antikenmuseum in Berlin (inv. 30219508b), and by a large medallion featuring an Annunciation, housed in a private collection (cf. J. Spier). The use of enamels is attested by the rich bindings of liturgical books and by gold altarpieces such as the Pala d'Oro, the retable of Saint Mark's Basilica, in Venice, utilizing the same mounting technique

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## PROVENANCE

Ex-property of British collection, collected to 1981

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