



Imperial Rhodonite

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Rhodonite is a natural stone first discovered in the 1790s in the Ural Mountains of Russia near Sidelnikovo. It was used for ornamental carvings, massive inlays and beautiful jewelry made famous by Czars and nobles. It became the national stone of Russia in 1913.

The use of Rhodonite can be traced to its origins within the production of the Imperial Lapidary Work. In 1721 the Imperial Lapidary Work – the first factory for hardstone carving in Russia – was founded in Peterhof near Saint Petersburg. Some years later other state stone manufactories followed: Ekaterinburg in 1726 and Kolyva in the remote Altai Mountains in 1786. These laboratories came under the administration of Count Aleksander Sergeievich Stroganov in 1800 and in brief time he revolutionized the Russian lapidary industry. He was an art connoisseur, he lived in Paris, absorbing its Enlightenment culture, and he was a leading European collector. He contributed decisively to raising the quality of Russian lapidary products by modernizing the working processes. From the aesthetic point of view, he promoted the spread of the Neoclassical style, thanks to the involvement of the architect and designer Andrei Voronikhin.

After discovery, Rhodonite was called *orletz* by the locals, Russian for *Eagle Stone*, because people began to notice eagles in the region often carried small pieces of the stone to their nests. It soon became tradition to place small Rhodonite stones in their babies' cradles as well. The custom was later extended to giving Rhodonite to travelers as a protective stone. Massive blocks of *orletz* containing Rhodonite and other manganese minerals weighing up to 48 tons apiece were mined from this location and many mines throughout the Urals.

Rhodonite is a manganese inosilicate, $(\text{Mn, Fe, Mg, Ca})\text{SiO}_3$ and member of the pyroxenoid group of minerals, crystallizing in the triclinic system. It commonly occurs as cleavable to compact masses with a rose-red color, often tending to brown because of surface oxidation.

The Ermitage Museum's collection in Saint Petersburg preserves many precious and decorative objects made from Rhodonite, in classical style: pillars, vases, lamps, tiles, table-tops, candelabums, boxes, cups, serving bowls, sculptures, for Russian aristocracy, especially the Russian czars. Currently it is used for jewelry pieces, such as necklaces, bracelets and pendants. It is occasionally carved into ornamental objects, ornate tiles, and small statues. The deep pink to red transparent forms are occasionally faceted as rare gemstones. Among collectors Rhodonite could reach high value especially when it forms in large crystals.

This mineral was officially named Rhodonite in 1819 by Christoph Friedrich Jasche, from the Greek *rhodon*, meaning *rose*, in relation to its characteristic pink color. It has been referred to as Peach Blossom Jade, Vermilion Jade, or Pink Marble; and in the Urals as Orletz, Bakan, Hornstone, or Ruby Spar.

It is an interesting note that Sergey Mikhaylovich Prokudin-Gorsky – the famous photographer in color who explored the entire Russian Empire, for the Czar Nicholas II, between 1905 and 1915, took some images of the city of Ekaterinburg, the Imperial Lapidary Work, working machineries, and some carved objects among which pieces made with Rhodonite can be found.

At present the Russian Rhodonite mines are exhausted. DCCAC is pleased to have access to the

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last remaining stocks of the authentic Imperial Russian Rhodonite and to highly skilled artisans who can process this hard material. DCCAC is please to offer its support and its knowledges to artists interested in developing projects employing this rare material.

