

# Magnificent Old Mine Emeralds

When we use the term "Old Mine Emeralds," we are often referring to gem-quality emeralds mined before the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Muzo, Cosquez and Chivor in what is now Colombia. After the Spanish Conquistadors confiscated the mines from the local inhabitants at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the stones were exported in quantity to Europe, Persia and India. Today, we generally use the term "Old Mine Emeralds" to signify the best-of-the-best in terms of an emerald's remarkable green color.

By Ioannis Alexandris, CEO Gemolithos

To understand the legend, lore and historical significance of *Old Mine Emeralds*, we need to take a journey back more than 500 years when some of the most magnificent emeralds began appearing around the world.

Before 1500, the first major source of emeralds was Egypt, followed by Pakistan (Swat Valley) and Austria (Habachtal Valley), although these localities were not producing what we would today consider gem quality emeralds.

Fine stones did, however, begin to come out of Pakistan in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Emeralds appeared in Russia around 1830, while India's emerald production came online in the 1940s, although it peaked in the 1950s. About this same time, Zimbabwe also began producing fine green emeralds.

Zambia's emeralds can be traced back to the 1930s, but production of fine quality stones started only in the 1970s. Although Brazilian emeralds were discovered earlier than the 1500, fine gems were only produced starting in the 1970s.

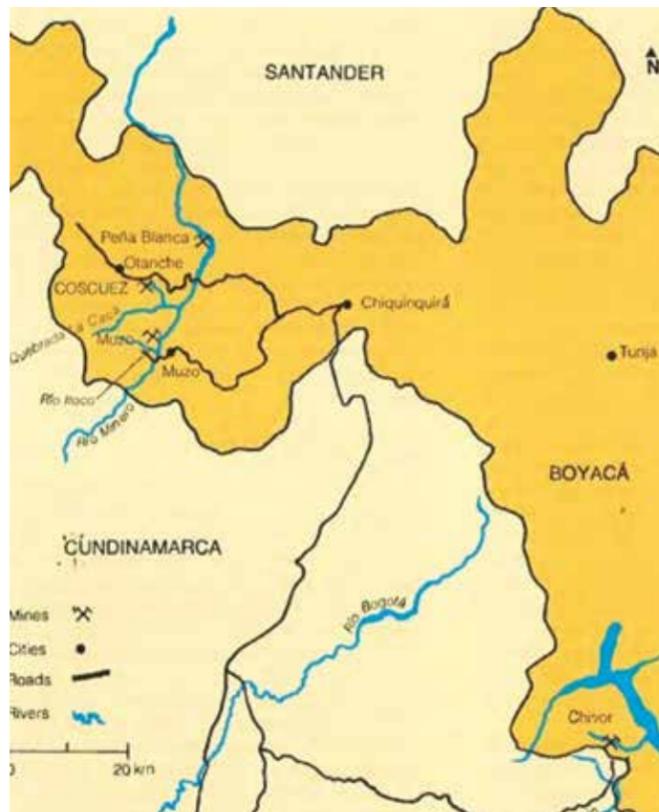
Other sources today include Madagascar, Afghanistan and Tanzania, among other localities. And, even though the emeralds from Colombia are considered the cream, stones from other locations are also considered to be fine gems.

## Historical Sources of Colombian Emeralds

Treasured by the local inhabitants long before the arrival of the Conquistadors, Colombian emeralds were found mostly in what is now the Boyacá State. The ancient and iconic Muzo Mine is located at the northwestern end of the NW-SE emerald belt in the section of the Andes Mountains known as the "Cordillera Oriental."

The other two ancient and historic emerald mines are the Cosquez Mine, situated about 10 kilometers north of the Muzo Mine, and the Chivor mines, which are in the southeastern end of the emerald belt, but also in the state of Boyacá. The Gachala mines are also situated in the southeastern end of this belt, south of Chivor, in the Cundinamarca Department.

The Colombian emerald story began in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in South America. Seeking primarily gold, they also sent large quantities of emeralds back to the court of King Charles and Queen Isabella. In 1594, the Spanish succeeded in locating and confiscating the Muzo Mine. Production started almost immediately and the output was prolific during the first few



Splendid example of a 28.88-ct Old Mine Emerald from Colombia.



This 217.8-ct inscribed Mogul emerald dates back to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Used for religious purposes, this 2,680-carat vessel was cut in 1641 from two Colombian emerald crystals that had grown together.

Photos opposite:

Top: The emerald belt in Colombia is located in a section of the Andes Mountains known as the *Cordillera Oriental*.

Bottom: The historical and iconic Muzo, Cosquez and Chivor mines are located in the western part of Boyacá State.

decades. The cruel conditions in the mines and a disastrous fire in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century put an end to the mining. It was only after Colombia gained independence from the Spanish in 1819 that exploitation began again.

## Multiple Journeys Travelled

These amazingly beautiful emeralds did not remain only in the treasuries of the European aristocracy, but they also travelled to Asia where they were collected by the rulers of the era. Fine emeralds made their way to the Ottoman Empire of Turkey, as well as to the Nizams, Sultans and Maharajas of India and Persia. The popularity of Colombian emeralds in these areas was due in part to Islamic belief that the green color in the Koran is associated with paradise.

In a similar manner in early Europe, emeralds symbolized faith and rebirth. The green gems were often used in ecclesiastical jewelry and some symbolic objects. The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria, for example houses a 2,680-carat vessel, which was cut in 1641 from two Colombian emerald crystals that had grown together.

One of the emeralds that can trace its history back to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and to the Islamic world is the 217.8-carat Mogul emerald. It even bears a date—1107 AH, the equivalent of 1695 to 1696 AD—and appeared during the reign of Aurangzeb, the sixth emperor.

Since the Mogul rulers were Sunni and the inscription is Shi'a, it is likely that the gem did not belong to Aurangzeb, but rather to one of his courtiers or officers. It was sold at Christie's in 2001 for US\$1.54 million and is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar.



In nearly all of Europe's kingdoms, courts and empires—Russia, UK, Prussia and France to name but a very few—magnificent emeralds from Muzo can be found. Given the political instability on the continent during this time, jewels were seen as a way to transport fortunes during periods of political uncertainty and distress. One example of gems that were repurposed from deposed monarchs or nobles is a necklace that was made from emeralds originally owned by Empress Catherine the Great II. The resulting necklace and earrings were ordered by the Marquis of Lathian around 1830 after he inherited the gems.



Necklace commissioned by the Marquis of Lathian using emeralds originally belonging to Empress Catherine the Great II. (Photo:



Many rulers in India brought their gems to very renowned jewelers at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to create amazing jewels, using both gems in their original form and re-cut gems.

The Maharani von Baronda (left) was an elegant woman who was part of European social life for many years. In this photo, she is wearing the "Chank" emerald, the 38.4-ct center stone in an emerald necklace. The stone was later re-cut to 37.82 cts and set in a ring (right) by Harry Winston. It is now in the Smithsonian in Washington DC.



Among the Colombian emeralds sent to India are the ones that make up this beautiful collar belonging to the Maharaja of Kashmir.



An emerald head ornament worn by Anita Delgado, a Spanish flamenco dancer who married the Maharaja of Kapurthala, thus becoming the Maharani of Kapurthala.

A very famous emerald piece that once belonged to Spain's Queen Isabella II and later to Empress Eugenie of France was the "Andean Cross," carved from a single emerald crystal weighing 45 carats. It was purchased by Cartier in 1931 after the Spanish royal family went into exile. To honor the remarkable gem, Cartier created an emerald and diamond necklace, made of more than 100 carats of the best emeralds available. The necklace was purchased by Simón Itturi Patiño (nicknamed *The Tin King* or *The Andean Rockefeller*) in January 1938 for his wife. The cross was later purchased by Van Cleef & Arpels who shortened the necklace to create a pair of matching earrings.

An important piece that belonged to Russia's Grand Duchess Vladimir was a pair of emerald earrings, which were later seen on the ears of Princess Gloria von Thurn und Taxis. They were first sold at Sotheby's Geneva sale in November 1987 to Prince Johannes von Thurn und Taxis, and again in Geneva in 1992. The earrings passed again through a New York sale in December 2008.

Another example of emeralds that once belonged to Grand Duchess Vladimir is the emerald and diamond necklace-tiara made by Cartier for Barbara Hutton Woolworth from emeralds that were previously owned by the Grand Duchess in the early 1900s. During the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Grand Duchess escaped with her life and her jewels.



Some of the emerald jewels that the Grand Duchess Vladimir took with her when she fled the Russian Revolution.



The 45-ct *Andean Cross* emerald belonged originally to Spain's Queen Isabella II, before changing hands several times.



An early photo of the Grand Duchess Vladimir in her finery, wearing the emerald jewels in a crown.



Fabulous Colombian emeralds found their way into the treasuries of rulers around the world, including the Ottoman Empire. These gems are now in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul.

Following the death of the Grand Duchess in 1920 in France, her son Grand Duke Boris inherited the emeralds and sold the necklace to Cartier. The Parisian jeweler then created a beautiful sautoir for Edith Rockefeller McCormick. After her death, Cartier repurchased the jewel and sold it to Barbara Hutton Woolworth in 1935. In 1947, she had the gems re-polished and set in perhaps one of the most famous tiaras of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1965, the Tiara was sold to Van Cleef & Arpels, which recut some of the stones and sold them individually.



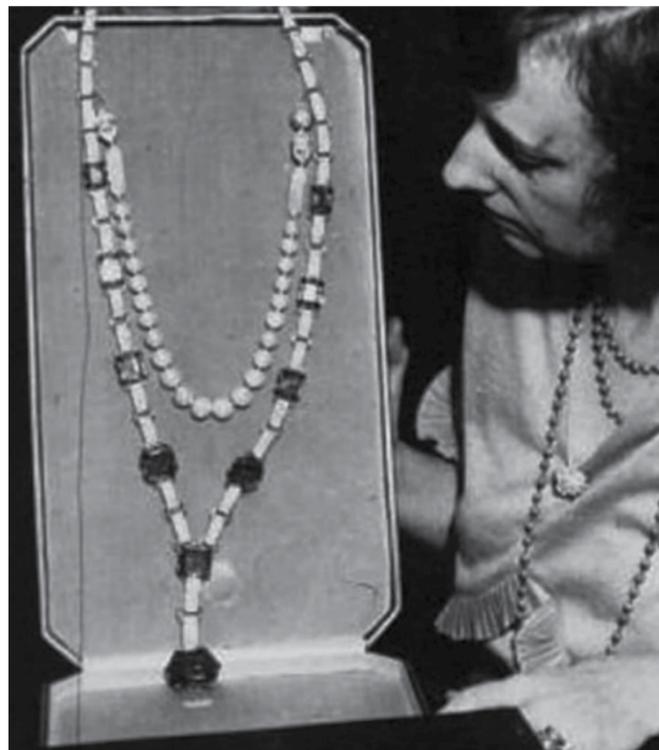
The emeralds from the jewels of the Grand Duchess Vladimir (above left and on previous page) passed through several iterations, including a sautoir made by Cartier for Edith Rockefeller McCormick (left) and then a fabulous tiara for Barbara Hutton Woolworth in 1947 (above). In 1965, Van Cleef & Arpels purchased the tiara and re-cut some of the stones, which were then sold individually.



Another important piece that belonged to Grand Duchess Vladimir was a pair of emerald earrings, later seen to be worn by Princess Gloria von Thurn und Taxis, shown here.



This fine emerald necklace (above) was a wedding gift from Napoleon Bonaparte Stephanie Beauharnais (below) upon her marriage to the Grand Duke of Baden. It was made by Etienne Nitot et Fils, 1800's and is now in Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

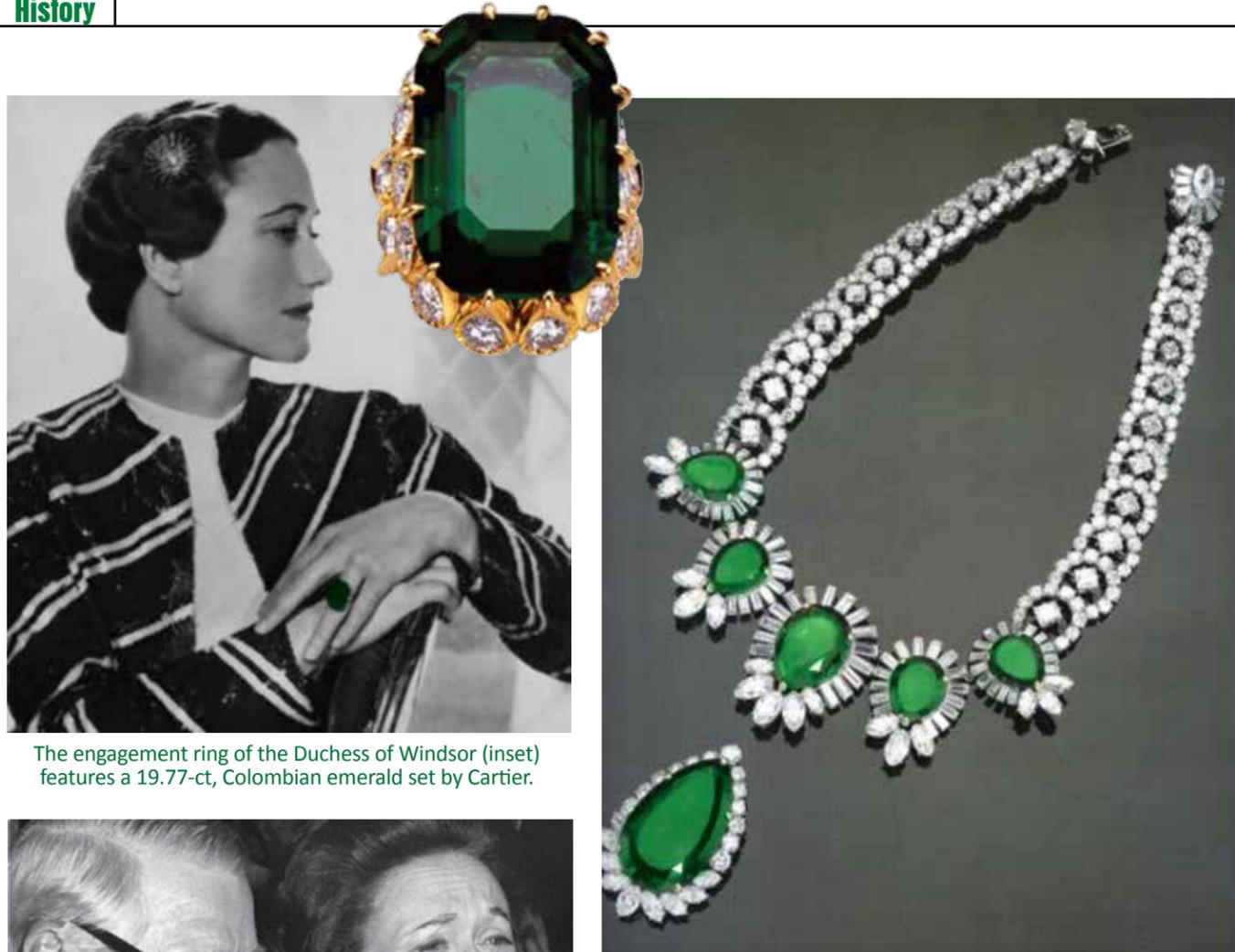


The Rockefeller Emerald by Raymond Yard. This magnificent 18.04-ct sold at Christies, New York in 2017 or US\$5.5 million. Originally placed in a Van Cleef & Arpels brooch, it was purchased by John D. Rockefeller in 1930. In 1948, his son David Rockefeller inherited the emerald and had Yard mount it in the present ring.



This remarkable tiara was created by Harry Winston in the 1950s from Old Mine Emeralds for Empress Farah Diba of Iran, the third and last wife of Shah Reza. The stones may have been cut in India and total more than 220 carats.





The engagement ring of the Duchess of Windsor (inset) features a 19.77-ct, Colombian emerald set by Cartier.

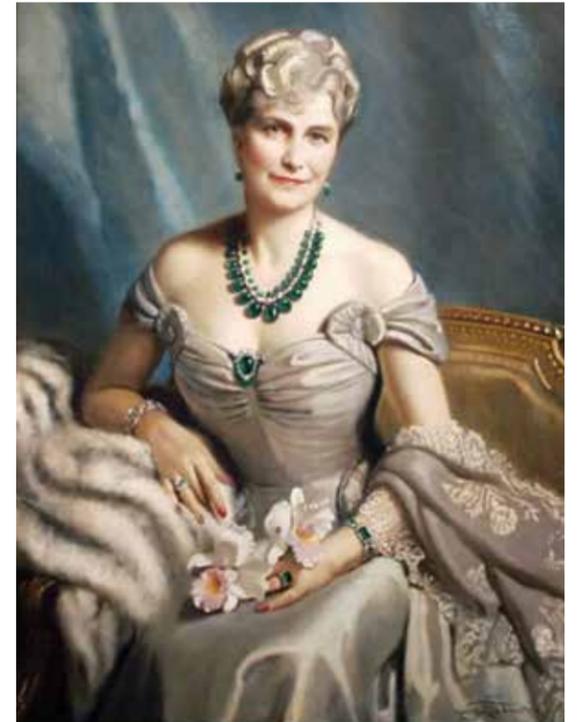


Marjorie Merriweather Post with her niece Barbara Hutton Woolworth, wears a brooch created by Cartier in 1928, featuring an engraved center emerald that dates back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Left and above: With her husband the Duke of Windsor, the Duchess of Windsor wears a Cartier necklace featuring a 48.95-ct emerald pendant that once belonged to King Alfonso XIII of Spain.



Marjorie Merriweather Post wears a necklace created by Cartier in 1929, featuring an tumbled drops from an old piece of Indian jewelry.



Elizabeth Taylor loved emeralds. Here, she is wearing a Bulgari necklace created in the 1960s, a gift from Richard Burton.



Considered the most beautiful woman in the world, Dame Elizabeth Taylor was also one of its most important collectors of jewelry and she especially loved emeralds. A Bulgari-created emerald necklace was a gift to her in the 1960s from Richard Burton. The necklace sold at auction for US\$6.12 million, much higher than its estimate of \$1M to \$1.5M. The pendant sold for US\$6.50M.

The images on these pages are but a few of the many examples of *Magnificent Old Mine Emeralds*, whose value is based not only on their beauty and quality but also on their historical significance. *Photos are courtesy of the author, various museums, auction houses and archival footage.*