



Modern Faceted Garnet Pendant Available from AA Thornton

“RED HYACINTHS OF ANTIQUITY”

by Sally Thornton C W King *Antique Gems*

With the start of a New Year I am embarking on a series of articles on Birthstones beginning, of course, with the birthstone of January: *Garnet*.

Garnet is derived from the Latin *granum* for grain. This “grainy one” not only makes reference to the typical round shape of the crystal but also the colour of the red garnet, which is said to remind us of the red seeds of a ripe pomegranate.

Throughout history, garnets were found in jewellery from the early Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Many early explorers or travellers liked to carry garnets with them as the garnet was a popular talisman and protective stone. It was believed to light up the night and protect its bearer from evil and disaster. Legend says that Noah used the warm red of the garnet to illuminate his Ark through the dark nights.

Nowadays, we tend to associate garnets as these wonderful deep red gemstones that you often find in antique jewellery, but this is just part of the story as there is much more to these lovely gemstones. So what do we know about garnets?

Garnets are beautiful stones with high lustre and a strong colour and, generally, fairly hard and durable. They have been commonly thought as a substitute for Ruby as many garnets are, in fact, very nearly the same colour.



Dower & Hall Rainforest Collection Silver & Garnet Necklet & Earrings Available from AA Thornton

But what is so often forgotten is that garnet is a beautiful gemstone in its own right with colours that span the rainbow, from orange to red purple, to light and dark green. As garnets range in price from just a few to many thousands of pounds it is easy to see why they are one of the most misunderstood gemstones.

To make it even more complicated garnets not only have many colours but also many names. *Almandine* which is deep red, *Pyrope* which is red, *Rhodolite* which is violet, *Andradite* which is green yellow or black, *Grossular* which is brown orange or green, *Uvarovite* which is bright green and *Spessertine* which is brown, orange or pink, to name but a few. I will explain about some of these in greater detail.

The fiery red *Pyrope* was a gemstone colour much in demand in the 18th and 19th century. Garnets from a find in Bohemia were world famous at that time, and Bohemian Garnet Jewellery was traditionally set with large numbers of small stones which were close to one another rather like the seeds of a Pomegranate. Many examples of Victorian Garnet Jewellery contain small *Pyropes* fashioned in the rose cut style.

Another Red Garnet is *Almandine* named after the ancient city of Alabanda. This rich red garnet is generally a darker red than *Pyrope* and may appear black. Slices of *Almandine* garnet were used in the windows of churches.

Spessertine garnets, rich in manganese, are yellowish orange to dark brownish red and are much less common than the *Almandine* and *Pyrope*. Interestingly, in the 1980's in Namibia, a new find of intense orange

garnets were marketed under the name of *Mandarin Garnet*.

The name *Grossularite* is derived from the botanical name of the gooseberry and this green colour *Grossular* garnet was first discovered in Russia. However, the best known green garnet is the *Tsavorite*; Tiffany's in New York gave this name to this grass green stone, which was discovered in Tanzania in 1967.

The most valuable member of the garnet family is the green *Dematoid*. True *Dematoid* gemstones are found only in the Ural Mountains and the best quality can fetch thousands of pounds per carat. The jeweller Carl Fabergé loved this brilliant green garnet and used it in his creations.

Today, garnets are much sought after and much worked gemstone because they not only have classical gemstone colours red and green, which are so highly esteemed, but also have the fine hues in-between. Thanks to their rich colour spectrum, garnets can quite happily keep pace with today's changes of style and the colour trends of fashion.

For those who are thinking about gifts, garnets are said to inspire love, stimulate blood flow and enhance creativity and passion. So

“Let January's Maiden Be All Garnet gemmed with Constancy”

Unknown



A very rare suite of gold and garnet Late 18th century



Brooch by Louis Comfort Tiffany, America C1900 Opals, Demantoid Garnets, Platinum & Gold