



Pectoral Relic Cross (enkolpion)



3 250 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : En l'etat

Material : Vermeil

Description

Balkans, 18th-19th centuries
Gilded filigree silver, glass paste cabochons.
Dimensions: 72 × 54 mm
Weight: 27 grams
A rare pectoral reliquary cross (enkolpion) in gilded filigree silver, with a paw-shaped design and strongly flared arms, belonging to the tradition of portable reliquaries in the Eastern Orthodox world. Both sides are entirely covered with a remarkable filigree decoration of scrollwork, enriched with granulation and polychrome glass paste cabochons set in star-shaped mounts. A large blue cabochon, likely made of glass paste, occupies the center of the main face, while the four branches are punctuated by red and blue cabochons. The piece as a whole is a testament to goldsmithing of great finesse, characterized by a particularly harmonious composition and a

Dealer

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decoration of exceptional density. The cross is hollow and opens via a hinge mechanism, revealing a cavity designed to hold sacred relics. Its side walls are entirely openworked with an elegant lattice of spiral filigree, a particularly refined detail that contributes to the piece's visual lightness. Its closing mechanism, simple yet ingenious in design, is directly integrated into the object's construction, reflecting a functional design perfectly suited to its liturgical use. This type of object was worn around the neck by members of the clergy or high-ranking laypeople and served both as an object of personal devotion and as a reliquary intended to preserve fragments of sacred relics. A very similar example, of virtually identical dimensions (74×51 mm), is published by the international gallery Les Enluminures, which attributes it to the Balkans (probably Bulgaria), 18th-19th century, price 12000 dollars. Beyond the remarkable similarity in dimensions and overall silhouette, the two crosses share several technical characteristics: a hollow structure with entirely openwork side walls, an integrated mechanical locking mechanism, and an overall design that is particularly comparable. Our example clearly belongs to this same artistic and liturgical tradition. Condition In very good overall condition. The cross shows traces of a previous forced opening that resulted in the loss of one of the three hinges in the upper articulation system, as well as a few small, localized losses in the filigree decoration. To preserve its integrity, the two parts are currently held closed by a thin, discreet wire that can be easily removed. These long-standing alterations do not affect the object's interpretive value or its remarkable aesthetic balance. The construction principle, the closing mechanism, and its function as a reliquary remain perfectly discernible. Thanks to the exceptional quality of its filigree, the richness of its decoration, its openwork architecture on all sides, and its remarkable similarity to a published example, this reliquary cross constitutes a

particularly rare example of Orthodox religious
goldsmithing from the Balkans at the turn of the
18th and 19th centuries.