

LAPIS LAZULI

*One of the oldest stones that
human kind recalls*



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Genuine Lapis Lazuli

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Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this report is to introduce one of the oldest stones that human kind recalls, as well as its usages throughout history, and its properties and features:

Lapis Lazuli.

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Lapis Lazuli

I. Introduction

There are many minerals and gems in the world, some of them with the tradition of being birthstones, other associated with different moods or feelings. However, among all those beauties, there is a special stone used since ancient times, found in few locations in the world. Having the longest tradition of being considered a gem, and still an extremely popular choice today, it is called Lapis Lazuli.

II. Overview of the Mineral

The name Lapis Lazuli comes from the Latin “Lapis” for stone and from the Persian “Lazward” that means blue, so literally speaking its name means “blue stone”. However, the name Lapis Lazuli was not its first name; it began to be used in the Middle Ages. In ancient times, it was called “sapphire.”¹

Unlike most gemstones, Lapis Lazuli is considered a rock, composed primarily of lazurite, calcite, and pyrite. It has a distinctive blue color due to the Lazurite and is lightly dusted with small flecks of golden pyrite.

Lapis Lazuli is found in big deposits; however, good quality stones are found at few locations, only the Badakshan area of Afghanistan and the Andes Mountains in Chile. Other less important

¹ “Lapis Lazuli,” July 15, 2008, <<http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/BiologicalSciences/Faculty/scal/gems/lapis.html>>

sources are Siberia, Angola, Myanmar, Pakistan, California, Colorado and Baffin Island, Nunavut.

III. Lapis Lazuli in History

Lapis Lazuli is a stone with a great past, which goes back around 6000 years. In ancient Egypt, Lapis Lazuli was one of the first gemstones to be worn as jewelry. The Egyptians used to exchange their emeralds for Lapis Lazuli to use it for decoration, as a stone for carving bowls, sculptures, amulets and small ornaments. Cleopatra wore ground Lapis Lazuli as cosmetic eye shadow. Assyrians and Babylonians used it for cylinder seals. It is clear that Lapis Lazuli was very popular in the ancient centres of culture around the Mediterranean, since archaeologists often find articles made of this beautiful stone. The Romans believed that lapis was a powerful aphrodisiac. We can find at the Berlin Museum, a 1600 B.C. Egyptian papyrus which mentions the curative effects of Lapis Lazuli. In like manner, Dioscurides, a first century AD Greek healer in his work said that Lapis Lazuli prevented high blood pressure and depressions, headaches and cramps. Furthermore, a recipe is mentioned which recommends 60 grains of Lapis Lazuli to recover from labor or birth, and rubbing Lapis Lazuli on eyes and temples and then leaving it on the chest, will result in a good sleep.²

It seems that Napoleon believed in Lapis Lazuli magic powers, since he wore a scarab made of Lapis Lazuli, during his Egyptian campaign.³

² Gisela Schottler, "Mysterious Lapis Lazuli," The Rockcollector – Newsletter for the Rochester Lapidary Society, June, 2006: 5 <<http://www.rochesterlapidary.org/RockCollector/2006/June-2006.pdf>>

³ Ibid.

One of the eight Buddhas in the traditional Tibetan tangkas is the Medicine Buddha, which is completely made of Lapis Lazuli. This “Healing Master of Lapis Lazuli Radiance” is very well-known because of its reputation for treating both mental and physical diseases⁴. Lapis Lazuli was chosen to be the color of the principal Medicine Buddha due to its apparent healing effects in visualization practices, as well as its tradition of being a symbol of purity and rarely.

In some cultures, it was believed that Lapis lazuli was a holy stone with magical powers.

Lapis Lazuli is also very well-known in the world of art as a source of ultramarine paint. This paint was made of ground Lapis Lazuli and it was used since the sixth and seventh century AD in cave paintings in Afghanistan, also in Chinese paintings, and Indian murals. This ultramarine color made of ground Lapis Lazuli was the only one available for painters in those times; therefore, it was very expensive. Its price was comparable or exceeding the price of gold. Many pictures of the Madonna were created using ground Lapis Lazuli.

IV. Care, Use and Symbolism

It is important in the care of Lapis lazuli to know that it should not be in touch either with acidic substances, with too much sunlight or hot water. Lapis Lazuli is sensitive to those factors; however, jewelry made of Lapis Lazuli, similarly to jewelry made of turquoise, is always sealed and protected with a special wax during craftsmanship.

Lapis Lazuli is used either by males or females and the most common jewelry includes rings, bracelets, earrings, and necklaces.

⁴ “Medicine Buddha and Tibetan Medicine,” May 23, 2007, <<http://www.tibetan-medicine.org/medicinebuddha.asp>>

Many people recognize Lapis Lazuli to be the stone of friendship and truth.⁵ In addition, it is said that people who own it have harmony in their relationships. The stone gives them the power to be authentic and also be able to give an opinion openly⁶.

Lapis Lazuli “is an alternate birthstone for September in the European/American system and according with the Article has prominent positions in other systems as well.”⁷

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, being the oldest gemstone that human kind recalls, Lapis Lazuli seemingly makes an excellent choice for a piece of jewelry that not only makes people look great, but also gives the possibility to take advantage of its magical powers.

⁵ “Lapis Lazuli,” May 23, 2007, <<http://www.gemstone.org/gem-by-gem/english/lapis.html>>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ “Lapis Lazuli,” May 22, 2007, <<http://www.gemsociety.org/info/gems/Lapis.htm>>

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