

Last month I diverted from my series of articles on birthstones to talk about jewellery design and how you can have pieces made specifically for you. I hope you enjoyed it but I won't forget the July birthday girls and will see if I can talk about their birthstone, Ruby, next July. So now that I am back on track it is time for me to jot down a few little anecdotes on Peridot; the birthstone for August.

"Peridot" is a French word and is probably derived from the Arabic "faridat", which means gem. Peridot is the transparent gem variety of the mineral Olivine, a magnesium iron silicate mineral that occurs in basalts and peridotite rocks.



Peridot has been valued throughout history and according to folklore will bring its wearer success, peace, and good luck. It has been found in Egyptian jewellery from the early second millennium and legend has it that King Solomon traded with Egypt cedar trees from Lebanon for 12 goblets carved out of Peridot and 144 litres of soma. The Egyptians used their traded cedar trees for ramp logs to build their pyramids at Giza, whilst King Solomon was said to have been made wise and enlightened by the drinking of soma from the Peridot cups.



It was perhaps more widely used than originally thought, as a few jewellery historians are now convinced that some or maybe all of the Emeralds Cleopatra was famous for wearing, were not actually emeralds, but in fact Peridots from Egypt. It does seem that such mistakes were not uncommon. One famous large Peridot gem adorning the shrine of the Magi in the cathedral at Cologne, was for centuries also believed to be an Emerald, and only identified as Peridot late in the last century.

In ancient times Peridot was called the gemstone of the sun, and it was crusaders returning from the Holy Land who brought them back to Europe. The crusaders treasured these on their long absences from home because they believed they were meant to reinforce the wearer's faithfulness. Another strange legend says that the owner of a Peridot should have it pierced, strung on the hair of an ass and tied around the left arm! This practise, as far as I know, has died out!

Early miners looked for Peridot at night, as they believed that light from the moon made the crystals easier to find. After marking the locations of the crystals they came back in the daylight to dig them up. The Romans called Peridot the "Evening Emerald" since its colour did not darken at night but was still visible by lamplight.

Historically, the best quality Peridot came from Egypt or Myanmar and has been mined in the Red Sea for over 3500 years. The Red Sea island of Zebirget (St John's Island) was the source of the dark green Peridot used by the ancient Mediterranean civilisations. The Greeks and Romans knew this island as Topazios and so confusingly called the green gem topaz. To this day the largest known cut Peridot which weighs 319 carats was indeed found on the island of Zebirget and is now located in the Smithsonian Institution

in Washington DC. However, interestingly some cut stones came out of a meteorite, which fell in Siberia in 1749, and these still remain in Russia.

When assessing Peridot we look at its colour, with the best quality being an oily olive green. This green is caused by the iron within the stone and the proportion of iron present determines the shade and depth of colour. The stone is relatively soft with a distinctive oily lustre and some Peridots contain inclusions that resemble water lily leaves.

Today rounded pebbles of Peridot are found in Arizona, sometimes even in anthills having been collected by the industrious ants! In Hawaii there is a unique green sand beach where you can find a fun example of tiny gem volcanic Peridot. However of more relevance to those who appreciate Jewellery, a new deposit of Peridot was discovered in Pakistan in 1994 which produces fine



stones, some of over 300cts. These high quality stones came from the Afghan-Pakistan border region. The terrain is quite inhospitable and accessible only during the summer months as during the winter heavy snowfall usually blocks the mountain passes leading to the mines. During the spring, the hazards are from rock slides when snowmelt causes instability in the rugged passes. Mind you with the current political upheaval I would have thought rock slides would be the very least of their problems.

The beautiful oil green Peridot was an important jewel stone at the beginning of the 19th Century. It's popularity waned for some 50 years and did not regain favour until the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee when many older fashions in jewellery were revived.

Today Peridot pebbles are tumble polished for use in baroque jewellery. Dark green stones are faceted in step cuts to reveal and display its beautiful colour, whilst Peridot that is lighter green is cut with a multitude of facets to deepen the colour.

Popular again now in modern designer jewellery, Peridot with its pastel shades compliments other stones such as Citrine, Aquamarine and Pink Tourmaline.

***"The August maiden so sweetly coy,
Wears a Peridot, the gem of joy"***

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