

# The Turkish Charm

by Sally Thornton

December's child shall live to bless  
The Turquoise that ensures Success

In the last of my series on Birthstones I shall take a look at *Turquoise* the birthstone for December.

*Turquoise's* uniqueness as a highly prized gemstone goes back to antiquity and has been found widely amongst the ancient Egyptian, Sumerian and Mesopotamian artefacts dated before 3000 BC. Tutankhamen's tomb was filled with examples of *turquoise* inlay, beads and sculptures, whilst Cleopatra wore *turquoise* in her jewellery and probably used ground up *turquoise* for eye paint.

Thousands of years later the Spanish Conquistadors were, to say the least, surprised to find that *turquoise* was more highly valued by the native people than gold or silver; to this day *turquoise* is in many respects regarded by the Iranians in a similar way that jade is by the Chinese.

*Turquoise* has long been appreciated as a holy stone, a good luck charm or a talisman and found in every type of jewellery. It is thought to warn the wearer of danger or illness by changing colour. So regarded was it as a talisman that the Turks and Tibetans attached *turquoise* to the bridles of their horses to protect them from injury from a fall. Even now in Iran, camels, horses and mules often have *turquoise* beads tied to their tails.

In the Middle East it is traditional to set *turquoise* in gold, sometimes with diamonds. In the 19th century, with the opening of the Suez Canal, and Sarah Bernhardt's success in Cleopatra, Egyptian-style jewellery using *turquoise* and oxidised silver became highly fashionable amongst Victorian society.

The first known deposits of *turquoise* were found in ancient Turkey, then later in Egypt. It was first sent to Europe through Turkey, hence its name, which means "Turkish" in French. The highest quality *turquoise* is mined at the ancient Persian mine of Neshapur and is, to this day, still the most expensive. Currently, however, the most important supplier of *turquoise* is the United States where Native Indians, such as the Pueblo, made beautiful necklaces from shells covered with *turquoise* mosaics.

*Turquoise* is found as opaque deposits in nodules, or veins within host rocks, or as shallow crusts on the surface of rocks. The colour can vary from green to sky blue with or without a matrix or spiders web of black lines running through it. Sometimes *turquoise* provides a unique blue often described as "robin's egg" which is caused by the copper that is an essential part of its chemical composition.

*Turquoise* is relatively soft and has a waxy lustre, but it is porous so its colour may deteriorate if skin oils and cosmetics are absorbed whilst being worn. The majority of *turquoise* on today's market has, however, been treated to improve and stabilize the colour by soaking with artificial resin. Regardless of this, my advice is to wash your *turquoise* jewellery after you have worn it in mildly soapy lukewarm water using a soft brush and then wipe with a damp cloth.

I do hope you have enjoyed these very brief thoughts on *turquoise*, which is my own birthstone. For a number of years, I had wished it could have been diamond or maybe aquamarine but over the years, as I have learnt more about this beautiful stone, I have grown to love it so now, even if I could, I would not change it for anything.



North American Turquoise, Choral and Bone Necklace