*Turquoise & Shell*

Symbols of Southwest Native American Jewelry

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* This report was created by a student to fulfill an assignment for a Gemstone and Gemology course from Emporia State University.

Photo by S. Thornton
Cultural Groups:
- Anasazi
- Mogollon
- Hohokam

Photos by S. Thornton, 11/2012
“as emblems of the sky and water - the home of the sun and the source of rain - turquoise and shell are linked to growth and renewal, the forces central to so many of the dances” (Cirillo 8).
According to the Navajos, the Changing Woman was born on a mountain top as a small turquoise image after Mother Earth and Father Sky had come together (Powers & Barasch 12).

*Stories & Legends*

“According to the Navajos, the Changing Woman was born on a mountain top as a small turquoise image after Mother Earth and Father Sky had come together” (Powers & Barasch 12).

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012
Host rock can be:

* Igneous
* Sedimentary
* Metamorphic

USA locations are:

* Nevada
* New Mexico
* Arizona
* California
* Colorado
* Utah

Mines detailed at http://indianvillage.com/turquoisemines.htm

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012
* Color: sky-blue, blue-green, apple-green and robin’s egg blue

* Streak: white

* Luster: waxy

* Hardness: 5-6

* Density: 2.31-2.84

* Fracture: Conchoidal

* Crystal System: (Triclinic) seldom; grape-shaped aggregates

* Fluorescence: weak; green-yellow, light blue

* Refractive Index: 1.610-1.650

* Chemical composition: CuAl6(PO4)4(OH)8•4H2O

(Schumann 186)

* Properties of Turquoise

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012
When it is first mined, turquoise can have a beautiful dark blue color; however, after reaching air and light, it tends to lose this striking blue hue (Powers & Barasch 15).

“an ethereal indigo” (Powers & Barasch 15)
Easily Breakable

Care should be taken when the stone is placed in its setting.

(Rosnek 47)

Perspiration

Oils

Cosmetics

Household Detergents

(Schumann 186)

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012
**Imitations**

Magnesite and Howlite (earrings) are often dyed to resemble turquoise. Plastic is another common imitation (left drilled bead).

More on turquoise imitations and enhancements at http://www.bostonbeadcompany.com/beadopedia/beads/turquoise.htm

Photos by S. Thornton
*While turquoise was readily available to early inhabitants of the area, shell had to be traded via an extensive inter-tribal network that linked cultural groups to other regions and resources.*

http://phoenix.gov/recreation/arts/museums/pueblo/about/visitorinfo/materials/dfgoods.html

*“an elaborate shell-trade network”*  
(Dubin 467)
Abalone was made into pendants in prehistoric times. 
https://mbabramgalleries.com/native_american_prehistoric_abalone_pendants.html

*“coming from water, shell is a symbol of life”* (Dubin 460)

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012
Bracelets were made from *Glycymeris* shells by cutting a hole in the center large enough to allow the hand to go through (Dubin 467). Cirillo finds that “the hub of the shell also served as a base for mosaic designs” and this design was often turquoise inlay (22). With a hardness of 2½-4½, a cactus spear could be used to bore a hole through shell in order to string beads for necklaces (Schumann 256, Cirillo 22).

For more visit:
http://acstempe.com/home/postcard-glycymeris-gigantea-bracelet/
http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/southwest/231968.html

Image taken from Infinity of Nations - Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian
http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/southwest/231968.html
*Iridescent Nacre*

The natural iridescent luster of shell, known as mother-of-pearl, no doubt attracted First Peoples to its beauty.
Mother-of-Pearl

* **Color:** white, pink, silver, cream, golden, green, blue or black
* Translucent to opaque
* **Crystal system:** Microcrystalline
* **Hardness:** 2 ½-4 ½
* **Refractive Index:**
  1.52-1.66
* **Fracture:** uneven
* **Specific Gravity:** 2.60-2.85
* **Chemical Composition:** Calcium carbonate, organic substances & water
  (Schumann 256)
A Gentle Spirit

Turquoise and shell’s softness of color and texture reflect the gentle spirit which Hopi Indians saw in them (Powers 12).

Photo by S. Thornton, 11/2012


*Works Cited*

Fossil Ammonite with Mother of Pearl, Blue Hills, Kansas; Photo by S. Aber