

# Agate (Aqiq)

## The wonderful secrets of Yemen

Sanaa. - Khalid Al-Dhababi

If you go to Yemen, beginning your tour from the capital Sanaa, don't forget that the first thing you should see is the old part of this city. And if you make it, you must first pay a quick visit to any store which sells Yemeni agates. You can find these shops in al-Milh Souq (The Salt Market). Here you will be able to discover the secrets of objects that you always dreamt about.



This visit means that you will pass pleasant moments listening to the agate salesmen who try by all possible means to convince you to buy their pieces. They have learnt, through their permanent contact with tourists of diverse nationalities, how to converse in several languages. You will also have the pleasure of learning how Yemeni agate is manufactured.

Agates are to be found in several countries in the world, but their reputation is linked to Yemen, to the extent that when you speak of agate, you are speaking of Yemen. Yemen has been known since ancient times for producing numerous varieties of metals and precious stones. And the agates whose fame overcomes their beauty and craftsmanship are among the

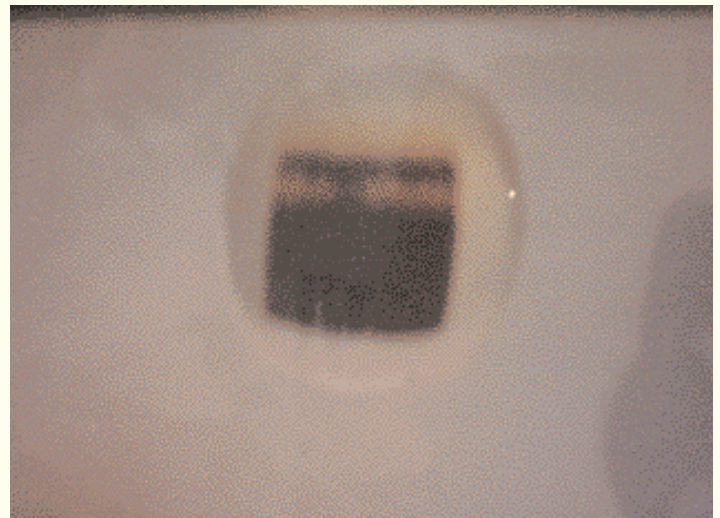
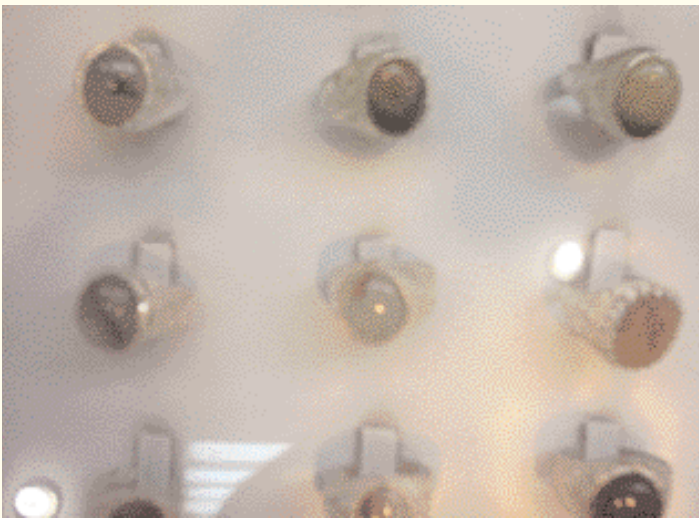
most important varieties referred to in legends and stories. There are those who think that agates bring happiness, good fortune and incalculable benefits while others believe that they cure illnesses.

They are many explanations and traditions about how the Yemenis discovered these precious stones. Many stories date their discovery to the time of the Himiarita State, while some historical sources point out that the engravings that the Yemenis carried out on mountains and rocks, as well as the construction of palaces and temples, allowed them to discover these hard stones that compete with gold and silver.

There are many advantages and uses for Yemeni agates which prompt people to buy them: their brilliant and captivating

colors, their strange dimensions, their decorations and dazzling forms, and their splendid beauty, which serves to decorate jewels of gold and silver. They are sold and can cut through glass without being damaged. The names of God are found on some agates. Also there are natural drawings of trees and eyes of animals and birds. According to experts on Yemeni agates, the actions of the sun's rays and rain that fell on these stones created these images.

This is what makes Yemeni agates the most famous in the world. And this why it is necessary to visit agate stores, which are full of foreign tourists, mainly Germans, Spanish and Japanese, as well as tourists from the Arabian Gulf, Egypt, Iraq and ➤



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Iran. They compete to buy agates at very high prices, sometimes more than 300 dollars for a piece. But some stones are only worth a dollar.

### Extraction and production of agates

Yemeni agates are precious stones of great quality. They are extracted from the depths of the mountains, mainly volcanic ones. To extract the agates requires extraordinary efforts as the rocks have to be carved with diverse iron tools. Only the experts and heirs of this tradition know where to find the best

stones, at a depth of less than 10 m and 8 meters. After extraction, the stones are cleaned, and broken. After that, the six-stage production operation begins;

- 1) the defects are eliminated and the stones are set in certain dimensions, according to the demand;
- 2) the stones are warmed to a certain temperature;
- 3) form is given to the stones;
- 4) the scratches caused by the previous stage are removed;
- 5) the stones are polished until they become totally flat;

6) they are made shiny and bright.

### The types of agates

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If you look for the most beautiful gift, Yemeni agate will always be very well received and appreciated by lovers of jewels. ■