

# The Route of Lapis Lazuli: Lapis Lazuli Trade From Afghanistan to Egypt During Mid-Late Bronze Age

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**Abstract.** Lapis lazuli, as a luxury prevailing in the Middle East and the Near East, has long-distance trade across Asia and Africa. This trade was influenced profoundly by both the geographical environment and the political situation along the way. Therefore the study of lapis lazuli trade has great significance in the interpretation of the trans-regional history at the same time. Based on the related geographical environment as well as the political environment and viewed from the perspective of trade routes and means of exchange, this article will aim at the study of lapis lazuli trade from Afghanistan to Egypt during mid-late Bronze Age from the level of history.

## Introduction

Lapis lazuli is a semi-precious stone, the surface of which is blue with spun gold, 'hue like heaven', and is used as a precious material in areas like Egypt and Sumer. In the ancient Egyptian language, lapis lazuli was called 'shbd' which meant heaven or blue stone. In ancient Egyptian religious beliefs, lapis lazuli had been endowed the meaning of resurrection and was often embedded in amulets. However, there was no mineral resources of lapis lazuli in Egypt, according to chemical composition analysis and some investigation on mineral deposits, the origin of lapis lazuli, unearthed in Egypt, have been located in Badakhshan of Afghanistan by the academic circles. However, the distance between Afghanistan and Egypt is so far and they belong separately to Asia and Africa. Therefore the question how to conduct such long-distance trade in ancient society has aroused the interest of the author.

Lapis lazuli has a long history of trade in the Middle East and has been found in the extensive areas of Afghanistan and Egypt. In Mundigak, Afghanistan, lapis lazuli ornaments of the late fourth millennium BC have been discovered. In the Indus valley, the use of lapis lazuli can be traced back to Baluchistan and Sind of the Harappa period. However, in the Mesopotamian region, the earliest lapis lazuli appeared at the Ubaid period, while the earliest lapis lazuli emerged in Egypt at the end of the fourth millennium BC. Thus, as early as around 3000 BC, the trade of lapis lazuli has already reached as far away as Tigris and Euphrates and Egypt (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971).

Until now, many scholars have studied the trade route of lapis lazuli. In "The Lapis Lazuli Route in The Ancient East", Sarianidi discusses how the trade of lapis lazuli in the Ancient Indus Valley, Pakistan, Iran and Mesopotamia. But Sarianidi did not research on the trade in the west of Mesopotamia too much, and the scope of its research was also larger in time span, without focusing on the trade in one period.

Herrmann studied early Lapis trade from 3500 BC to around 2500 BC in "The Lapis Lazuli: The Early Phases of Its Trade", mainly according to the geographical landscape of lapis lazuli origin place Bada Hector and Iran plateau, and analyzed the trade routes of lapis lazuli in detail.

Majidzadeh focused his research on the Khorasan region, in an effort to rebuild a trade route between the central and the north of Iran. But the researchers focused their research on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, and at the most extended in the Mesopotamian plain, which was rarely included in the Egyptian region. In the above study, only one route was selected mostly to be analyzed. And there is few study on the trade outline of the Near East and few study of induction and integration of the paralleled multiple trade routes in the same period. Previous Scholars mostly focused on the lapis

lazuli trade routes before early Bronze Age, fewer researchers concentrated on the trade routes of the late period of mid-late Bronze Age.

In this article, the author summarizes the paralleled existence of three main trade routes in mid-late Bronze Age, and focus on the difference and relationship among them. The author tries to construct a trade network that it takes Afghanistan as starting point, Iran plateau as the preceding stage of trade, and Mesopotamia as the post phase of trade. It is constructed through induction and reorganization of the scattered archaeological findings and comparing the processing technology of the lapis lazuli in the different locations.

In the past, the related research mostly focused on the trade routes and the craft of lapis lazuli, rather than focus on means of exchange and operation group, also lack of the attention to the political and cultural connotation of lapis lazuli trade. Therefore, the author has joined political, geographical, economic and other factors to try to undertake a deeper study on the trade form and culture of lapis lazuli in this period.

### **Delimitating the Scope of Research**

The time range of lapis lazuli trade studied in this paper is limited to the mid-late Bronze Age. In the mid-late Bronze Age, or about between 2000 BC and 1000 BC, big countries such as Babylon, Mitanni, Hittite and Egypt raised one after another in the near east. Lapis lazuli trade also has entered into the most mature prosperous stage. During this period, with the strength of each country, a new pattern of international communication was built among big powers. Lapis lazuli trade is closely related to political diplomatic situation among countries. On the one hand, changes in national politics have influenced the trade route of lapis lazuli. On the other hand, lapis lazuli is also often used as a gift to maintain relations between great powers.

Therefore, the study of lapis lazuli trade under the background of the mid-late Bronze Age has become a very interesting topic. Moreover, the archaeological and document literature of this period is relatively abundant, which can help us to paint a more complete picture of lapis lazuli trade. Geographically, the study of this paper includes a wide range of areas which extends westward from the producer Badakhshan to Egypt. In addition, this paper sets Egypt as the ultimate destination for this trade, and therefore the discussion of the mode of trade operation will be carried out around the destination Egypt.

The author will focus on the discussion on the lapis lazuli trade in the mid-late Bronze Age from two angles which are the routes of trade and the manner of trade operations.

### **The Routes of Lapis Lazuli Trade**

First of all, it is necessary to determine the origin of lapis lazuli trade, which is the country of origin of lapis lazuli. The main producing areas of lapis lazuli in the world are South America, Lake Baikal area and the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan ( V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971) . The source of lapis lazuli in the Middle East is mainly in the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan which is called Kerano-Munjan today. The geographical features of Badakhshan area are full of valley and bare rock and are rich in mineral wealth. The local abundant river routes also determine the important status of waterway transportation in lapis lazuli trade. From the mining area of Badakhshan, other areas can be reached to north or south along the Kokcha River. Among the routes to the north, at first Jurm and Faizabad region would be reached, and then the trade would be carried through the east-west Khorasan Road to Balkh (Georgina Herrmann, 1968) .

Subsequently, the specific routes of trade need to be determined. In this article, three feasible routes from Afghanistan to Mesopotamian plain in the mid-late Bronze Age will be discussed which are two routes on land and one route along water. North route and south route are set on land which go through the Khorasan area of northern Iran and the Kerman region of southern Iran respectively. The water route at sea enter into the Persian Gulf from the ports of India or Iran, then pass into the Mesopotamian plain along Bahrain area in the Arabian Peninsula. These three routes cannot be

completely split apart and have some repetitive parts, but the general direction of them can be clearly determined.

### **The North Route Passing through Khorasan Area**

On land, the north route of lapis lazuli trade would pass through Khorasan region in Iran ( V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971). The character of this route is that the archaeological evidence of lapis lazuli found along the way is conclusive, and the route itself is largely limited by the geographical environment. This route, following the arrival of Silk along the Khorasan area, is divided into two branches of north and south. The northern branch were formed earlier which focused on Gawra, while the southern branch was formed subsequently and traded around the southern Susa region.

The Mesopotamian lapis lazuli trade was originally centered in the northern Gawra region. The earliest lapis lazuli was excavated in Mesopotamia region, which was found from archaeological site of Gawra XIII layers in the late Ubaid period (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). The archaeological evidence found in Iraq and Afghanistan can push the establishment time of the lapis lazuli trade forward to around 3500 BC (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). It can be proved that the Northern Ubaid culture may have monopolized the long-distance trade of eastern Iran area because there were no lapis lazuli remains excavated from the southern Mesopotamia ruins. (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). And, in a region, in a long time, such a long-distance trade often takes a lot of manpower and material resources, also often needed strong management institutions to maintain the trade operation. In the Mesopotamian plain of Ubaid period, only the north existed strong political power enough to sustain the trade of lapis lazuli, and the south did not have such a force. Thus, the trade of lapis lazuli flows to the more powerful regions of the political power, and the route selection of trade should be coordinated with the political environment at that time. The reason, on the one hand, is that only the powerful have enough capacity to guarantee the operation of trade; On the other hand, is that only aristocratic stratus has the demand for such luxuries as lapis lazuli, so trade naturally points to them.

From a geographical perspective, the northern route is greatly affected by the natural landform. Investigating on the remaining lapis lazuli in Gawra XIII-XI, we can find that Gawra culture had close connections with Tepe Giyan culture (V C), Sialk culture (III 4-5) and Hissar culture (I B) in trade. These sites finally connected with each other to form a east-west road.

The specific choice of trade routes is also largely subject to the topographic features of the region. This is the Iranian plateau, although it seems to be a vast area, one side of it is a vast desert saline-alkali basin, and the other side is the barren hills in the middle of the plateau. As a result, the actually suitable habitation area is small and the early human settlements can only be distributed in Damghan, Semnan, Saveh and Kashan. Therefore the route that the caravan could travel was determined by the terrain. This route was later called as the Great Khorasan Road which even lasted to later time and was used as the road of silk.

Along the archaeological remains, and in accordance with the topography, a trade route from east to west can be determined from Khorasan to Hissar, then passes by Qum, Ravi, Saveh, Hamadan, Kangavar, Kermanshan, up to Ghasr-e-Shirin (Y. Majidzadeh, 1982). The Road, also known as the Great Khorasan Road, was used in the "Silk Road" trade after the Christian era.

From the perspective of political situation and geographical environment, the author analyzes the formation of north branch of lapis lazuli trade in the north route. Constrained by the geography of the Iranian plateau, until the late Bronze Age, has not changed from Afghanistan to the lapis lazuli trade routes from Afghanistan to Sialk. But on the Mesopotamian plain in the second half of the trade, with the change of political situation, the northern road developed another branch to the southern Susa region.

Along with the decline of Gawra power, the trade ties between northern Gawra area and Iran reduced gradually since Gawra X-IX period. Each trading site in Iranian plateau also began independently development (such as Giyan V D, Sialk III 6-7 and Hissar I C culture) (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). After the collapse of Sialk III culture, the trade declined more in the north, and the

subsequent redevelopment of Sialk IV was strongly associated with the southern Susa C culture. The same pottery, cylinder seals and Elamite tablets at the same age has proved this. The city Susa of Elam controlled the Sialk region and from now on the Elamites had begun to control the trade between Iran and Mesopotamia (Georgina Herrmann, 1968).

From now on, the trade of lapis lazuli in the south began to flourish centered on Susa. Until the Jemdat Nasr period (about 3100-2900 BC), the trade of lapis lazuli was able to be rebuilt again. This time, the area of the total trade was greatly enlarged and expanded till the area of Egypt. During this time, the lapis lazuli appeared in the first time in Uruk, Khafajah as well as Ur of the southern Mesopotamia, but lapis lazuli was declining in the discoveries in the north (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). So far, the south branch of north route of lapis lazuli trade is initially shaped in Jemdat Nasr period, and Susa region was taken as boundaries to be separated from the north branch, went deep into the region of southern Mesopotamia. Also limited by the geographical environment, this south branch route was also not changed much until the late Bronze Age.

The author put the two branches routes into the north route of land trade routes, because at the beginning of the trade the two branches both went along the river from Khorasan to Hissar and they both take Hissar, Kashan and Sialk as transfer station in the trade. As a front gate to connect the Mesopotamian plain and the Iranian plateau, the Susa region began to play an increasingly important role after lapis lazuli trade flourished in the south.

It can be seen that the direction of commercial route has a lot to do with the rise and fall of the north and south regimes and has been greatly restricted by the natural environment of the region. The influence of political situation and the limitation of geographical environment has become the important characteristics of the north route of lapis lazuli land trade. And the south route of land trade appeared later have distinct trade route and transfer station with the north route mentioned above, and also increased many new processing sites and source area of lapis lazuli, the author will discuss in the detailed in the following paragraphs.

### **The South Route Passing Through the South Part of Iranian Plateau**

First, it is necessary to determine how the trade routes of south route were established. The amount of lapis lazuli goods in Archaeological excavations can prove Mesopotamia in the ED I (about 2900-2700 BC) has a long interruption of lapis lazuli trade, till ED II (about 2700-2600 BC) the trade was able to be rebuilt. In the early of second millennium BC, although the lapis lazuli trade has been restored, the number of lapis lazuli used to make Seal is very few, and in many cases the scraps will be used to make the Seal (the practice shows that the recycling of lapis lazuli which indirectly proves that in Mesopotamia during this period the raw materials of lapis lazuli got sharply reduced). Since the Old Babylonian period (about 1800-1600 BC), there was no new raw materials of lapis lazuli. This long period of decline in the trade volume of lapis lazuli may be related to the overall decline of trade in the Persian Gulf region (P. R. S. Moorey, 1994).

Although lapis lazuli trade has not been restored to its former prosperity after the period of ED II, this trade reconstruction is still worth exploring. Much of the speculation about this trade reconstruction comes from the Sumerian clay matrix of the epic "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta". In ancient Iran, mountainous country Aratta was rich in lapis lazuli. And the King Enmerkar of Uruk, through a "cold war", forced Aratta to provide lapis lazuli, gold and silver for trade (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). Thus, the trade between Mesopotamia and the Iranian region was reopened.

This new route formed in the ED II period is the southern route passing through Aratta, which is the south route of lapis lazuli trade discussed by the author. Compared to the north route, the south route is more varied and changeable. The south route contains a number of areas of origin and processing sites of lapis lazuli, so the south route is actually a trade network that collects lapis lazuli from more than one point and then spreads lapis lazuli to the different points of the trade network. On the research of the south route of trade, we can see how the three most important factors including the source area, processing sites and destination have affected the form of the trading routes and also can bring new ideas for us to interpret lapis lazuli trade.



Next, it is needed to determine the composition of the south route. The first problem to solve is the exact location of Aratta mentioned in the epic. It is widely believed to be in the eastern part of Sumer, but there is still a lot of controversy about where it is located. By “pieces of lapis lazuli”, “lapis lazuli were extracted from stones” and words such as “lapis sediments” appeared in the epic, presumably the area should have a lot of lapis lazuli raw materials. The area is rich in mineral resources of lapis lazuli (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971). As Anshan and Aratta were depicted as two adjacent cities in the Epic of Enmerkar, there are also some scholars believe that Arrata could be the Kerman area today.

There are also historical records of the presence of mineral resources of lapis lazuli in the south-central Iran, near Kerman. In 14th century BC, Hamd-Allah Mustawfi, the finance minister of Sudan, he once wrote, “although the best mineral resources of lapis lazuli is in Badakhshan, in Mazanderan, Dizmar of Azerbaijan and Kerman there are also part of lapis lazuli mineral reserves” . At the same time, Can Te once as the messengers of Mongolia in 1259, was sent to Hulagu, he wrote in his diary that lapis lazuli was found in the mountains of southwest Persian. Although the records are far from the Bronze Age and now in these areas the lapis lazuli cannot be found, but probably around 1000 BC, the region is still a mineral resources of lapis lazuli (Georgina Herrmann, 1968). It can also be speculated that in ED II period during which the lapis lazuli trade was recovered in Enmerkar, the region around Kerman did have rich mineral reserves of lapis lazuli.

There was also archaeological evidence of mineral resources in Shahdad, not far from the eastern part of Kerman. Therefore, some scholars have speculated that Shahdad is the Aratta in the epic. In addition, in Marhashu of south-central Iran, a kind of lapis lazuli with green dots is produced which is known as the Marhashu lapis lazuli. And accordingly, in the Chagai mountains located in the southwestern border of Afghanistan and Iran, a kind of lapis lazuli with green dots also can be found which might be associated with the Marhashu lapis lazuli. This also reminds us not to ignore the impact of small mineral resources in trade.

Although we cannot determine accurately that whether or not Aratta is located in the current Kerman region, it is certain that a group of lapis lazuli mines in the south-central part of Iran have begun to play an increasingly important role in the trade. The route of the lapis lazuli trade in the Iranian region has also shifted from the Khorasan Road in the north to the south passing through Aratta, Anshan and Susa (Y. Majidzadeh, 1982).

In addition, a batch of the processing sites of the raw materials of lapis lazuli has been found elsewhere in southern Iran, which further proves the development of lapis lazuli trade in the south. In Shahr-I-Sokhta, archaeologists have found a lot of lapis lazuli and only 10% of them are processed products, some of which have the drilling trace while the rest 90% is processing waste, flaking, or is the raw material of lapis lazuli, among of which the heaviest can reach to 0.5 kg. This suggests that the lapis lazuli had been partially processed in Shahr-I-Sokhta before arriving at Sumer (Y. Majidzadeh, 1982).

In Shadad, for example, there is evidence of similar processing of lapis lazuli. In the middle and late of 3000 BC, the lapis lazuli raw materials and the unfinished ancient beads has been also found Tepe Malyan (also known as Anshan) (Y. Majidzadeh, 1982). Thus, the south route of trade exists, and on the processing skills along the way all have the characteristics in common, so these beads are likely to be processed in the same region, then be carried on trade transportation, and processing techniques have been promoted and disseminated in the process of trade.

To sum up, we can find the different processing sites along the south route and some possible places of origin, and these scattered locations also affect the direction of the whole trade route. So the whole south route and north route is different, it is not a single road, from the beginning to the end but a collected road from different regions, and spread the different processing sites, finally reach exchange trade networks in the Mesopotamia region.

### **Maritime Route Passed Through the Persian Gulf**

The third trading way was lead along water. Lapis lazulis was at first traded along the Hindu Kush Mountains out of Afghanistan and then was transported from the southwestern parts of Hindu Kush to Beluchistan and Seistan. Finally, the precious stones were loaded by the ships along the Persian Gulf to Mesopotamia (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971). It was also recorded in some Sumerian poems that ships came from Mesopotamia back to Aratta loaded with fruitful goods.

There is also the possibility that the caravans who carried out the lapis lazuli trade first overland to the Indus Valley and then by sea to the Sumer area along the Persian Gulf. Because the Indus Valley was once thriving with the use of lapis lazuli. Along Oxus river in Shortufai of India, the raw materials of lapis lazuli as well as some evidences of manufacturing lapis lazuli beads were discovered about three thousand BC ( P. R. S.Moorey, 1994). In fact, Badakhshan is surrounded by channels, the largest river is the Helmand river, and its source is directly upstream to the Indus river. The Kabul River, which flows directly from the Hindu Kush to Pakistan and into the Peshawar valley. So it is quite possible that the trade of lapis lazuli is along one of these tributaries, from the entrance of India into the Persian Gulf, and then reaches to the Sumerian region. Some archaeological findings from the ancient port of Lothal have also confirmed the statement (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971).

In addition, there are other documents on the water trade road of lapis lazuli in Sumer area. The royal inscription and administrative tablets are found in the Sumer between 2300 and 1800 BC, recorded trade ships were from Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha. The ships first voyaged in Bitter sea, also known as the “Lower”, or “of the Rising Sun” is in the present Persian gulf , then berthed in Ur area, sometimes even went deep into the port of inland river in Agade (namely Akkad) (Georges Roux, 2001) .

Therefore, there is a long close business contact between Mesopotamia region and the Arabian Gulf coast, and close contact was built among Bahrain, Oman, Arabia and Baluchistan and the Indus valley to further improve the trade picture. Ships carrying cargo such as lapis lazuli, apparently from the ports of India and eastern Iran, passed through the Persian Gulf ports of the Arabian Sea and eventually reached Mesopotamia, it has formed the unimpeded maritime route of lapis lazuli trade. And politically, can prove that, from period of the king Man-ishtusu in Akkad (about 2269-2255 BC) to the period of the King Sargon II in Assyria (about 721-705 BC), the Mesopotamia regime has been trying to monopoly the trade in Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha, or expand their control of the three locations (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971).

In conclusion, we have constructed the three main routes of lapis lazuli trade. But we should also see that these three business routes are not absolutely separate, and there are also intersections and linkages between each other. And when new branches emerge, the old routes are not completely abandoned. This creates a complex and diverging trade network.

From the passing sites, the trade along the route has the origin, processing site, the place of sale. Although a few main trade routes can be constructed, the route of trade itself cannot be such a single linear. Although there are small producers of small production, their output still has to be transported outward, which constitutes a number of sources of trade. And in the trade, the status of lapis lazuli is varied, some were spread in the form of raw materials, some were at first processed and shaped in somewhere and then transported to the sales area, and the processing sites are not uniformly distributed on the main route of trade, this constitutes transportation network staggered along the route of the raw materials and goods.

From the perspective of geography, the great feature of the trade process is the interleaving of water and land routes. The largest source of lapis lazuli, Badakhshan, is in the valley, so from the beginning, the transportation of trade is much more through water power. In the following areas, the Hindu Kush Mountains, the Indus valley, Mesopotamia and so on are also distributed in the developed water network, which can help transport the goods. Moreover, cities and villages are often distributed along the water, and trade must be carried out along the water.

From the historical process, the trade routes are also very diverse. Different periods are influenced by the political environment, and the use of each route is strong or weak. But even before ED II period of “no lapis lazuli flowing”, Enmerkar king will still be able to know source of lapis lazuli, suggesting that small amount of trade is still ongoing. Therefore, in the relative decline of a trade route, this route is not likely to be abandoned, but only relatively small.

Therefore, the three routes intersect each other from time and space, and set up a complete lapis lazuli trade network. Rather than the result of a linear transport, it is a result of dispersal and collection of cultural and geographic communities. In the lapis lazuli trade, the spread of the part is raw materials themselves, the spread of the part is the processing techniques, and the spread of the part is that the stone is endowed with the political and cultural connotations.

## **The Trade Mode of Lapis Lazuli**

First of all, we must delimit the research scope. To study on the trade mode, the author will take Egypt as lapis lazuli trade destination to be discussed, therefore, this paper focuses on the discussion of the trade situation from the Mesopotamian plain to Egypt, without attention to the trade before the Mesopotamian plain.

### **Trade Routes**

Prior to the study of the trade mode, it is still important to identify lapis lazuli trade routes from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Trade between the two places is indirectly mediated by businessmen in Syria. In Drehem economic literature of Ur third dynasty (about 2112-2004 BC), the earliest records written in cuneiform contrast to Bruce (Byblos), and mentioned at that time the trade among Ibdati the rulers of Byblos and Mesopotamia and other coastal areas of Syria (William A. Ward, 1964). To be one of the most important trading ports in the world, Byblos was politically vassal of Ur third dynasty. As a result, the known direct trade range with Mesopotamia has been extended to at least the Syrian coast. Syrian businessmen will take the goods imported from Mesopotamia, either by the land route passed through Syria-Palestine into Egypt, or by boat passed through the Syrian coast ports to enter in the Nile delta (William A. Ward, 1964).

The Syrian region, as the international trade center at the time, also established close trade relations with other regions. In northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia, trade was begun in 2000 B.C. The existence of an international trade union, including Syria, was also documented in the second phase literature in Kanish (Kul Tepe) (about 1974-1836 BC) in Asia minor (V. I. Sarianidi & L. H. Kowalski, 1971).

Until the Old Kingdom, Egypt's interest in the east was limited to Syria-Palestine. It was not until the middle second millennium BC that Egypt and Mesopotamia began to establish direct links in politics and culture (W. F. Leemans, 1960). Evidence of the most famous is Tod treasure of Amenemhat II in the 18th century BC, and Tod treasure contains the lapis lazuli from Afghanistan and cylinder seals made of lapis lazuli of the third dynasty of Ur. On the cylinder seals of lapis lazuli, there is an inscription of the cuneiform in the Hammurabi period (Nai Xia, 1946). W. F. Leemans (1960) thinks that Tod treasure is likely to be collected by the ruler of the Syrian specifically for Amenemhat II. It is therefore more likely that a direct trade activity between Egypt and Syria will be carried out.

Therefore, we can see that there is nearly no direct business activities between Egypt and Mesopotamia, but take Syria as the medium to exchange goods indirectly (in Late Bronze Age, however, Mesopotamia as well as countries in other areas will import lapis lazuli to Egypt in the form of gift exchanging between international big countries. And the route of was mainly through Egyptian and Syria coast to make marine trade (such as the sinking ship of Uluburun in the Late Bronze Age). Of course there were also some of the trade which were carried on land passing through Palestinian.

### **The Form of the Operation of Trade**

According to the operational form of trade and the people who were in charge of the trade, the lapis lazuli trade with Egypt can be divided into two categories. One was private trade through commoners

and the other was the trade at the governmental level. The former were mostly dominated by private vendors, and sometimes officials were involved. The latter was in the name of the exchange of gifts between great powers which was actually also a disguised form of trade.

We first examine trade on a private level. In ancient Egypt, thanks to the Nile which runs through the whole land, trade was mainly carried out by boat. Apart from the vessels belonging to the officials involved in the trade, there were some ships belonging to the temples. For example, the inscriptions of pHarris I. 46, 2 mentions that “many traders” are attached to the temple built by Ramsess III (Edward W. Castle, 1992). Till the Ramsess Period, the domestic trade in Egypt were mostly grasped in the hands of the royal family, temples and officials. But there were also many private vessels of the commoners involved in the trade, officials can require the private vessels to trade at any time.

In addition, there was also lapis lazuli trade in the name of gift exchange between great powers. For example, in the Letter of Amarn in the 14th century BC, Burnaburiash II of Babylon sent ten lapis lazuli and lapis lazuli accessories to Egypt, Mitanni king Tushratta gave presents of many gold decorated lapis lazuli or direct lapis lazuli accessories. It is clear that the royal family is directly involved in the supply of lapis lazuli (P. R. S. Moorey, 1994).

The trade with Assur and Hittite is just like this in which they provide lapis lazuli, horses and carriages to get the gold in Egypt. Thus, it can be seen that lapis lazuli is at least as valuable as horses, and plays a significant role in the association between great powers. This trade was also an important factor in maintaining international relationships among the great powers.

### **Currency Used in Transactions**

During the Bronze Age, trade in Egypt was in the form of barter, while gold and silver were used in the Near East as currency. For example, in this period of Mesopotamia, silver was mainly used as currency. According to recording texts of Ugarit, the local government used silver to pay government functionary (Edward W. Castle, 1992). Therefore, in the international trade with other countries, gold and silver is the payment method of Egypt.

The land of Egypt was rich in gold, and Egypt was one of the biggest exporter of gold at that time. Around the 14th century BC of Ugarit, one shekel of gold was equivalent to three or four shekels of silver, but in the new kingdom until Ramsess IX in Egypt, a shekel of gold was equivalent to only two shekel of silver. Due to the gold price was lower in Egypt, the Syrian businessman could use the same amount of silver to exchange more gold in Egypt than in Mesopotamia, then go back to the two river regions exchange for more silver to get price difference. As a result, Syrian businessmen all wanted to trade to Egypt for more gold (Edward W. Castle, 1992). The proportion of gold and silver in Egypt, which was much lower than foreign countries, had also become a big reason to attract Syrian businessman for the long-term trade with Egypt.

In addition, Egypt and Mesopotamia used the same kind of coins at that time which was gold and silver bracelets that could be cut. This uniform currency which flows around the Near East, has also become a major factor to make the flow of trade more smooth. In Egypt, such gold and silver rings appear in the tomb of Rekhmire and the tomb of Sobekhotep which can be opened and strung together. It is likely that people at that time made the gold and silver into rings attached to the arm to take currency with them more conveniently, and when they wanted to use the currency, they could just took the rings down and cut them into pieces to be weighted out for the trade. Egypt's main metal weight unit is deben, but by the New Kingdom a new weight named “shaat” or “sniw” appeared which was estimated to be equal to 1/12 of the weight of deben. In Egyptian, “shaa”, which is similar to “shaat” and “sn”, means “cut” itself (Edward W. Castle, 1992). The emergence of the “shaat” weight unit may also be used in order to adapt to the cutting bracelet in the mode of the currency.

Other parts of the Near East also have this tradition. In the text of the third dynasty of Ur, the payment method has been recorded that cutting equal value of metal rings were used as the currency. In Ugarit and Mageddo, the silver rings were also broken into pieces (Edward W. Castle, 1992). Indeed, at least before the New Kingdom, the use of spiral-shaped metal rings and their fragments as money had become a way of paying for the entire cresent area.



## Conclusion

To sum up, we can see the trade of lapis lazuli from Mesopotamia to Egypt, with its own fixed trade routes and the crowd to operate trade as well as the widely circulated currency. At the same time, the lapis lazuli trade also has its own significance, either to meet local aristocratic tastes or to maintain the relationship between the great powers, and is closely connected with Egypt's gold trade. From this, we can see how the trade of lapis lazuli is closely related to the social culture and international relations of Egypt and how to be endowed with important cultural connotations.

So far, the author divided this paper into two parts, in the first, from Afghanistan to Mesopotamia the trade routes are analyzed, and then from Mesopotamia to Egypt the forms of trade are analyzed and the preliminary analysis is finished to set Egypt as the destination of the lapis lazuli trade during mid-late Bronze Age. In this process, we both see how the trade routes in different historical periods has been influenced by different factors and has made great changes, and also see how trade can interact with diplomatic relationships between countries and economic culture of a nation. Thus, it shows the importance of the lapis lazuli trade during mid-late Bronze Age in the Near Eastern world.

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