

## Styled in Stone

For centuries, people around the world have used precious and semiprecious stones for practical and decorative purposes. This installation brings together an assortment of intricately crafted objects from China, France, Egypt, and Mesopotamia to demonstrate the significance and symbolism of stone in different cultures. The objects on view are styled from a wide range of materials that incorporate semiprecious stones, including jade, carnelian, turquoise, agate, lapis lazuli, serpentine, and rose quartz.

Societies have viewed and used stones in a variety of ways, and in some instances new lines of communications opened up to trade rare stones. Stone's natural beauty, combined with the maker's craftsmanship, reveals how, from the ancient past to the present day, people have placed a high value on the possession of these earthly treasures, and developed a relationship with inanimate materials that enriched their lives by endowing them with desirable qualities, such as high social status or longevity.

## Symbolism in Stone

Many of the stones featured in this installation acquired fetish-like status across various cultures in history. In Egypt, for example, lapis lazuli, a deep-blue stone, was thought to reflect the color of the sky. Ancient Egyptians thus associated it with holiness, creation, and resurrection. Europeans, on the other hand, valued lapis lazuli as a material that, when crushed, provided pigment ideally suited for the creation of richly colored paintings. Turquoise, a phosphate deposit of aluminum and copper, came to represent imperial victory and power in central Asian and Persian cultures. Carnelian, warm orange in color, garnered associations with blood. In Egyptian and Asian societies, it was thought to purify the system and have healing powers associated with protection and stability. Jade—an umbrella term that covers several specific minerals—has been revered in Chinese culture for over eight thousand years. Jade's unique properties include durability and low thermal conductivity. It is an excellent material for ornamental works since it is not easily corroded by acid or alkaline substances. Its beauty—evident only after it has been cut by a superior craftsman—has made jade working a longstanding tradition in Chinese culture.

## Snuff in China


Snuff bottles are palm-sized, miniature works of art, crafted from a wide range of materials, from glass to jade. First popularized in the seventeenth century, during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), these small containers, modeled after medicine vials, held personal supplies of powdered tobacco. Portuguese traders introduced tobacco to China in the 1600s. While Chinese law prohibited the practice of smoking tobacco during the Qing Dynasty, snuff was allowed because inhaling the powdered form was considered therapeutic in the treatment of many physical ailments. Most snuff bottles lacked decoration. A carved or embellished bottle was expensive and therefore represented wealth and high social status. Since precious and semiprecious stones are considered good luck by the Chinese, men often held a snuff bottle in their hands with the hope that its “**shòu**,” or good luck, would rub off on them.

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### Snuff bottle

Chinese, 19th or 20th century  
Turquoise embellished with metal

Bequest of Judge and Mrs. Daniel Beecher  
1955.84

The Chinese character **shòu**  repeats in a band across both the front and back of this bottle, pressed into the metal. A symbol of longevity, **shòu** is the most commonly found character on snuff bottles.



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### Winter melon snuff bottle

Chinese, turn of the 20th century  
Mutton-fat jade, with coral stopper

Gift of Lawrence M. Mead  
2009.08

In China, melons are symbolic of family unity, and the seeds represent growth and good health. The winter melon in particular is used during the Lunar New Year to make moon cakes, small rounded pastries with a rich filling.



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### **Guardian lion (“foo dog”)**

Chinese, ca. 1880  
Curly agate, with jade stopper

Gift of Lawrence M. Mead  
2009.04

The “foo dog,” represented here with horns, is considered a protector of the home or guardian of the emperor.



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### **God of longevity (Shòuxing) snuff bottle**

Chinese, ca. 1890  
Carnelian

Gift of Lawrence M. Mead  
2009.09

The god of longevity, depicted on this snuff bottle as an elderly man, smiles and holds a staff in his hand, while a gourd filled with the elixir of life stands nearby. It is likely that an older man would own such a snuff bottle in the hope of ensuring a long life.



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### **Snuff bottle**

Chinese, ca. 1800  
Jade, with ivory stopper

Gift of Lawrence M. Mead  
2009.10



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**Snuff bottle**

Chinese, late Qing dynasty  
Amethyst, with ivory stopper

Gift of Lawrence M. Mead  
2009.16



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**Wine cup**

Chinese, 19th century  
Jade

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.80



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**Amulet of mother and child**

Chinese, 19th century  
Jade

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1959.7



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### Lily pad amulet

Chinese, 19th century  
Agate

Gift of Susan D. Bliss  
1959.10

Depicting lily pads growing out of a woven basket, this amulet represents longevity and good luck.



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### Arc-shaped pendant (huang)

Chinese, Western Zhou Dynasty, ca. 1046–771 B.C.E.  
Jade

Gift of Herman A. Greenberg, Class of 1930  
1984.39

This flat semicircular piece of jade would have hung from a kind of necklace threaded through the holes seen on either end. It may have been strung with additional carved jade elements to form a complex pectoral worn by a member of the elite, according to the ancient Confucius texts collected in **The Rites of Zhou**.



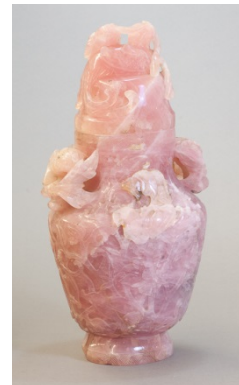
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### Lidded urn

Chinese, 19th or 20th century  
Rose quartz

In memory of Martha C. Hamlet  
1958.152

Flowers and leaves adorn the body of this urn, which once found use as an electric lamp. The electrical fixtures and pink shade that were added in the twentieth century have been removed, and the detachable lid, featuring a bird with its wings outstretched, has been reinstated.



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### **Cosmetic palette in the shape of a fish (tilapia)**

Egyptian, Predynastic period, ca. 3500 B.C.E  
Graywacke

Gift of Major Charles H. Morgan  
1944.1

The smooth surface of this flat stone served as a palette for the grinding of pigments, especially those used for makeup. Cosmetics in ancient Egypt—worn by men and women— included galena, a sulfide of lead, which was used for eye kohl, and malachite, which, when crushed, yields a greenish color. Stone palettes such as this one are the most common grave



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### **Plate**

Egyptian, 2nd Dynasty, ca. 2890–2686 B.C.E.  
Saqqara, Tomb 2322  
Calcite

Museum Purchase  
1958.6



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### **Relief of baboon**

Egyptian, 19th or 20th Dynasty,  
ca. 1292 – 1064 B.C.  
Limestone

Museum Purchase  
1958.8



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## Necklace

55 faceted beads

Mesopotamian, first millennium B.C.E.

Carnelian

Apparently sent by Dr. Henry John Lobdell,

Class of 1849

M.1855.6



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## Cylinder Seals

In use in ancient Mesopotamia for over two thousand years, cylinder seals represented authority and safeguarded private property, similar to the way keys, signatures, and passwords provide security today. Engraved with a variety of designs, the cylinders were rolled over moist clay to seal storage jars, bundles of merchandise, and doors. When the clay hardened, signs of tampering would be evident from the broken seal. A variety of relatively soft stones served as material for the seals, with marble and serpentine being the most common. After 2500 B.C.E., when metal engraving tools became widespread, craftsmen were able to work harder stones, such as deep-red carnelian.

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## Cylinder seals

Mesopotamian, Assyrian period, 900–600 B.C.E.

TOP: Carnelian

BOTTOM: Serpentine

Mead Art Museum Collection

SEAL.xx.2, SEAL.xx.10



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## Snuff in Europe

The popularity of snuffboxes in Europe rose in the eighteenth century. From their utilitarian origins, as a small place to store and carry tobacco, snuffboxes developed into more elaborate and coveted objects. By 1745 enamel work became a common feature, and by 1760, snuffbox design acquired classical embellishments. With the French Revolution, possession of these boxes became unfashionable because of their association with the upper class.

Snuffboxes were made in two sizes: larger boxes for communal use on a table, and smaller boxes that fit inside a pocket. The examples on view in this case are all designed for pocket use. Since extended exposure to air can cause snuff to dry out and lose its potency, pocket snuffboxes were made as airtight as possible.

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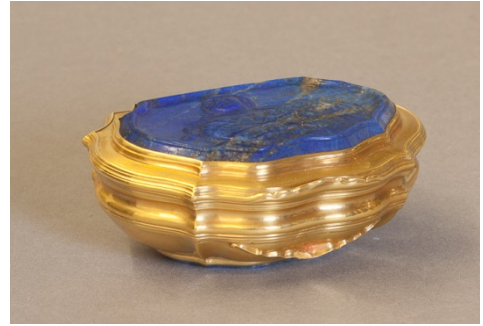
### Snuffbox with Roman Charity and basket of flowers

French, 18th century  
Lapis lazuli, gold

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.97

“Roman Charity” is the term ancient writers used to describe an act of filial piety. In the scene depicted on this snuffbox, Pera feeds her father, Cimon, who has been sentenced to die by starvation, with milk from her own breast.

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### Nécessaire box

French, 18th century  
Agate, gold

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.105.a–c

This box was used for carrying tools such as a ruler and a gold spoon for snuff.

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### Snuffbox

French, 18th century  
Alabaster, silver

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.111

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**Snuffbox**

French, 18th century  
Lapis lazuli, gold

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.101



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**Snuffbox**

French, 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Agate, gold

Gift of Miss Susan D. Bliss  
1958.100

