

224 A CHALCEDONY BARAKA BEAD

*Inscribed with the name of Atziz Kwarezm Shah  
Central Asia, 1127–1156  
Size: 2.5 cm*



Sometimes tiny objects pack a mighty punch. This one certainly does. Beads such as this were given by Sufi teachers to their disciples to wear about their person, to act as receivers of *baraka*, providing a connection with the energy with which their teacher was working. At different times, and in different places, different minerals were deemed most effective. In the 14th century, in Central Asia, opal was the stone of choice; later a green stone mined near Kandahar by a Sufi shaikh, Shah Maksoud, worked better. In more recent times, rutile quartz proved more effective. In 12th-century Central Asia chalcedony agate best performed this function, of which this bead is an example.

Atziz Kwarezm Shah, whose name and titles are inscribed on the bead, was the second Kwarezm Shah; he ruled a mighty empire, embracing Iran, parts of Central Asia and Turkey from 1127 to 1156. The genealogies of Central Asia are famously difficult to unravel, because, apart from rulers, exact dates of lifetimes are absent. According to tradition, the Sufi teacher of Muhammad I, first hereditary ruler of Kwarezm, was Hussein Balkhi, to whom the Sultan gave his daughter in marriage. If this was so, Hussein Balkhi was the brother-in-law of Atziz, as well as his spiritual guide, and thus this bead may have been given by him to Atziz. The absence of the title ‘Sultan’ in the inscription, which you would normally expect, supports this possibility, since no man was a sultan

in the presence of his teacher. The tantalizing link is that Hussein Balkhi was Jalaluddin Rumi's grandfather. The problem is the span of time involved, since Rumi was born in 1207. As a result, modern scholars consider the attempt to link Rumi's family to royalty to be a familiar exercise in burnishing their credentials – as if Rumi needed it! I'm not so sure; tradition usually contains particles of truth, however scrambled they may become.

Nowadays, the idea that stones can have a function beyond what normally we are able to observe is regarded by 'serious' folk as fanciful, to say the least. And those who believe in the marvellous properties of crystals and suchlike are seen as part of the Lunatic Fringe. These crystal-believers may be fairly loony, but at the same time they may not. Perhaps they respond to an intuitive feeling that we are linked to the inanimate in Creation, although the knowledge of how to make use of this connection seems almost entirely absent.

In 1660, the English antiquarian, John Aubrey, was excited by his acquisition of what he called 'a curious Turkey', meaning a turquoise stone ring. He noticed that it has become nubilated, or cloudy, at north and south. 'It is a much more curious ring than I knew it to be when I bought it.' He observed it over the next five years and noticed that the constellation-like nubilations moved and changed, which intrigued him greatly. In 1663 Aubrey was elected to the newly founded Royal Society, and remained close to Robert Boyle, one of the founders of modern chemistry, and president of the Society for a decade. In 1666 he loaned the ring to Boyle, who was curious about the movement in stones. I'm not sure if Boyle's comments survive, although drawings were planned every two or three weeks to chart the movements. But it is interesting that until relatively recent times the most eminent scientists were able to consider minerals as part of an animate cosmos, rather than merely the inanimate product of geological events. The Stone of Scone reflects an intuitive understanding of minerals, as also does our love of precious gems, which surely reveals some pull beyond their enormous monetary value.