



# Symbols and special powers

For thousands of years man has believed in the magic power of minerals, and of crystals in particular. Powers supposed to offer healing and protection...

Man has a curious and troublesome relationship with Nature. He is constantly in search of imagery confirming his place at the very centre of the universe.

## Supernatural powers

Stones and minerals play a special role amongst natural objects. Their colours and forms, and their impression of permanence and stability above all, speak of a power to escape time. From the ancient megaliths to the Philosopher's stone of the alchemists, stones with mysterious powers bestowing wealth and immortality have haunted man's imaginings. They continue to do so to this very day.

## Healing and protecting...

Minerals are believed to have the power to heal, by direct contact generally, or through the absorption of powdered crystals, or by infusion. In ancient times and through the Middle Ages stones were believed to have power in multifarious domains. There are stones that heal (smallpox, variola...), stones that sent mad, fire and thunder stones... These beliefs are reported in ancient almanacs and treatises on the earth's minerals (lapidaries)



De Proprietatibus Rerum, Bartholomaeus Anglicus

In the «On the Properties of Things» of the Franciscan monk Bartholomaeus Anglicus (1230-1240), some 104 stones, rocks and minerals are described in book XVI entitled «De gemmarum». This illumination presenting sapphire, rubies and white stones comes from one of the 45 hand-written copies produced in the 14th and 15th centuries, from the French translation by Jean Corbichon (1372). © BNF



De Gemmarum Lapidumque, a 1539 copy

The most famous medieval lapidary is the «De lapidibus» by Bishop Marbode of Rennes (1035-1123); of the 616 lapidary manuscripts in European libraries, 125 are copies of Marbode's. Marbode relied on Greek and Latin texts and described the supposed virtues and medical uses of every stone. Here are a few of the beliefs of the Middle Ages:

- \* agate dispels thirst and is good for the eyes;
- \* jasper can control levers;
- \* sapphire rejuvenates the body, protects from fault, reassures the timid, and soothes celestial anger;
- \* emeralds can help sooth-tellers and men of law, and bring the mad to their senses;
- \* beryls can sooth liver disease and wind,
- \* amethysts e protect from intoxication,
- \* haematites can cure diarrhoea,
- \* coral puts monsters to flight.



Stones from the sky / Ceraunium

Meteorite (Octahedrite IAB), Campo del Cielo, Argentine, Coll. Muséum de Grenoble

Polished axe, green rock, Saint-Egrève, Neolithic, Coll. Musée Dauphinois  
Neolithic axe heads like this one could have been considered as «thunder stones» with magic powers. Prehistoric tools were not recognised as such until after the 17th century.

