

Onyx From Ain Smara (North-Eastern Algeria): A Natural Stone To Be Considered As A Global Heritage Stone

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Large amounts of the finest quality onyx are extracted from the Ain Smara quarry, in north east Algeria. It is used for decorating buildings around the world. In 1814, during the restoration of the White House, in Washington, experts used large blocks of onyx from this quarry. This onyx, in contrast to many other types, is characterized by bright colours and structures. Onyx was very popular in ancient Greece and Rome where it was carved with highly valued images and scenes. There, onyx was considered to be linked with instinct and intuition and has been associated with business and management capabilities in some areas since ancient times. Different societies had different legends about this material and many used it to decorate their most precious buildings. Information from geochemical, petrographical, and other studies will help us to characterize this natural stone, compare it with onyx from many other places and to make a case for proposing it as a candidate Global Heritage Stone Resource. This will improve present knowledge of this material and help the stone extraction industry in Algeria



The picture : onyx, striped, semiprecious variety of the silica mineral agate with white and black alternating bands.