



“Who’s Getting Amethyst in Ancient Egypt?”

Dr. Kate Liszka (California State University, San Bernardino)

Lecture: July 12, 2025 1:30 p.m. ~ 3:30 p.m

Ticketed Onsite Event: Free for Bowers and ARCE Members | General \$15

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Kate Liszka is a Professor of History and the Pamela and Benson Harer Fellow specializing in Egyptology at California State University, San Bernardino. She received a PhD in Egyptian Archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania in 2012 and was a Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow and Lecturer with the Society of Fellows at Princeton University from 2012–2015. Liszka is the Director of the Wadi el-Hudi Expedition in Egypt’s Eastern Desert along with Meredith Brand and Bryan Kraemer. Since 2014, they have conducted eight archaeological seasons thus far, discovering dozens of new archaeological sites with hundreds of new inscriptions. She enjoys studying questions of labor, administration, identity, pastoral nomads, and Egyptian-Nubian interactions in the ancient world. Her areas of specialization are Nubians in Egypt, the Medjay, ethnicity and identity in Antiquity, multicultural Interactions in frontier regions, and large-scale

Four thousand years ago, amethyst was extremely rare and precious. Because it had both religious connotations and was one of the only natural sources of the color purple in their visual spectrum, amethyst was sought after greatly, by everyone. Throughout most of the Ancient Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2000-1700 BCE), the pharaoh commissioned large expeditions of over 1000 people to mine amethyst at Wadi el-Hudi and Dihmit South. Soldiers guarded the workers around the clock. Bureaucrats tracked every piece of raw amethyst. Prospectors continued to seek out other veins of amethyst nearby. And donkey caravans of raw amethyst were sent to the pharaoh's treasury, to be turned into breathtaking jewelry. The pharaoh then gifted these rare wonders as objects of prestige to his family, his courtiers, and his international allies. However, the pharaoh's expeditions did not control a restricted monopoly over amethyst mining. Other small groups of people including pastoral nomads and Nubians mined amethyst directly. Site 21 was located only two kilometers from large Egyptian amethyst mines, but was mined frequently throughout the Middle Kingdom by various groups of desert Nubians. Their amethyst entered an informal economy and made their way into the tombs of non-elite Pan-Grave, C-Group, and Kerma Nubians, as treasured items for the afterlife. Amethyst was so important it was worth sneaking around the Egyptian state to acquire it.

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