

From Nature to Technology: The Decline of Lapis Lazuli Trade and the Rise of Egyptian Blue Frit in Proto-dynastic Egypt

The aim of this contribution is to highlight a correlation between the development of the synthetic pigment known as *Egyptian Blue* and the sudden interruption of the lapis lazuli trade both in Egypt and the Near East during the Proto-dynastic Age.

The current state of research focuses mostly on retracing the trade routes of lapis lazuli and on reconstructing the manufacturing process by analysing the distribution and typology of archaeological finds such as items, by-products and tools; on the other hand, most studies on blue frit aim to demonstrate its use outside the chronological framework of Pre-classical and Classical Antiquity, or to suggest new possible applications of its main feature (long-lived luminescence in the NIR) in many aspects of modern technology.

This research approaches the topic from an innovative framework: by retracing the distributional pattern of both lapis lazuli and blue frit in Egypt during the Proto-dynastic Age, the paper will enquire whether there are overlaps or substitutions in the employment of both materials.

The first section analyses the distribution paths, quantity and social variability of lapis lazuli until its production was interrupted, focusing mostly on Egyptian tombs.

The second section outlines the development of the blue frit technology and its geographical distribution, while taking into consideration social implications, in Proto-dynastic Egypt.

The final section will advance a hypothesis: a correlation in the employment of the natural and the artificial pigments, taking into account both similarities and differences, will be illustrated.