

## TANZANITE; AND OTHER VARIETIES OF ZOISITE.

Çiğdem Lüle, PhD, FGA, GIA GG, DGA

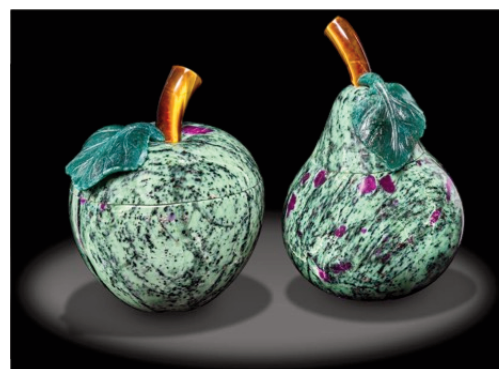
Soft blue and purple pleochroism of tanzanite has been dazzling gem lovers since the 1960s. Named after its type locality Tanzania, tanzanite gained a lasting niche in the colored stone market. Thanks to a strong advertising campaign by Tiffany & Co., tanzanite has become very popular within a few decades of its discovery and eventually was designated as a December birthstone, joining zircon and turquoise.

Tanzanite is a blue-purple variety of mineral species zoisite which also has other varieties that occur in pink, yellow, and green. Initially, these varieties were better known to mineral collectors than gem professionals due to their scarcity. Now, they are seen in the gem market with greater frequency and somewhat recognized by the consumer too. Interestingly, these varieties are mostly sold as “fancy tanzanite,” a practice not without its detractors. For example, the pink variety has been known as thulite found in several different locations, including Norway, Australia, and Italy since the late 19th century. It is colored by manganese and mostly known to be translucent to opaque, yet the transparent examples from Tanzania and Pakistan are often marketed as pink tanzanite. (Tanzanite has historically been understood to be the blue to purple variety of zoisite.) There is also an opaque green variety that is combined with ruby, known as “ruby in zoisite” and has been very popular for carvings for its striking red-green contrast.

The inconsistency in naming these varieties amongst members of the trade has caused some confusion for



*Faceted pink zoisite, 3.04 carats.  
Courtesy of Bonham's.*



*Ruby in zoisite pear and apple jars  
by Luis Alberto Quispe Aparicio.  
Courtesy of Bonham's.*

consumers. The terms pink, yellow, or green tanzanite are encountered, however, some dealers still use pink, yellow or green zoisite, which mineralogically is correct. Besides, zoisite varieties in pink, yellow and green are mined in different countries, not only in Tanzania. Some dealers have told the author that their preference for using the term tanzanite with these non-blue colors is simply a matter of practicality, since the term is used with transparent forms of these other zoisite colors. They believe that the customer would appreciate the value and the rarity of these varieties by making the connection to tanzanite. However, marketing them as fancy tanzanites is no different than calling heliodor as yellow emerald. Full disclosure and correct terminology should be considered the key for ethical trading.

Tanzanite has been marketed as an affordable alternative to blue sapphire, but it has its own place in the market. Due to its popularity, there are plenty of imitations of tanzanite, yet no synthetic production has been successful so far. The majority of tanzanites are heat treated to obtain the more desirable blue-purple color. In its natural state, the material often has a gray or brown color, although, naturally

occurring blue-purple colored material is known. Suchstones, when fine to extra fine quality (with no heat treatment), sell at a premium in the market. Gem professionals should also be aware of the coating of light-colored stones in order to pass them as better-quality material. Coated tanzanites have been detected in early 2000s or so, but not very commonly seen lately. ♦



Unheated tanzanite crystal from Meralani Hills, Tanzania. 352carats, 2.0 x 1.3 x 0.7 inches. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Gemworld International, Inc., 2640 Patriot Blvd, Suite 240, Glenview, IL 60026-8075, [www.gemguide.com](http://www.gemguide.com)  
© 2022Gemworld International, Inc. All rights reserved.

*All articles and photographs that appear are copyrighted by the author; the contributing person or company, or Gemworld International, Inc. and may not be reproduced in any printed or electronic format, posted on the internet, or distributed in any way without written permission. Address requests to the editor-in-chief.*

*The opinions expressed in this publication are the opinions of the individual authors only and should not necessarily be considered to be the opinions of the staff of Gemworld International, Inc. as a whole. Any website listings that appear in articles are for informational purposes only and should not be considered an endorsement of that company.*