

PREFACE

I was born into a traditional family with a legacy in the gem-trading business. In my childhood, I was surrounded by the gemstones, jewellery and design techniques that, consciously or unconsciously, shaped these blissfully happy years. As a teenager, I became fascinated with the wonders of ancient ornamental art, a passion which endures to this day. It became the driving force for my decision to formalise this interest academically, first with a Master's degree in Archaeology and subsequently with a research degree, an ongoing pursuit till my PhD degree.

As was expected of me, when I reached 18, I became involved in the family's jewellery business. At that time, I had no access to a wide range of books on Southeast Asian jewellery of early Eras of the Myanmar Region. Thus, I convinced myself to make my own personal contribution to this genre of printed literatures. Here, I am much delighted to present the first edition of this book, an illustrated overview on ancient jewellery and ornaments from Myanmar, by a Burmese national. Southeast Asia is where I hail from, currently reside and the area of my main academic pursuit.

The information in this book has been painstakingly collected over a period of almost three decades, travelling tirelessly to remote and inaccessible areas of Myanmar. I personally collected the information and documented the items to ensure the integrity of the data in this book. The project has not been without its vast challenges mostly due to lack of specific publications on the topic, and also the unequivocal requirement to establish the provenance of objects, often collected in non-scientific contexts.

This book is a comprehensive as well as comparative study, a typology based on style, technology and materials of ornaments from various eras. Most of these ornaments can be identified, through design and stylistic features, to a specific historical context, since each period is characterised by its own cultural traits. It is hoped that this book will shed light on the chronology of jewellery and ornaments of ancient Myanmar, from the dawn of the country's history to the Konbaung, the last dynasty of Myanmar.

The Pyu Period is deemed Proto-historic and their culture is a unique phenomenon of early urban civilisations. Their written records have yet to be deciphered but not for lack of academic endeavours. We can, however, admire this advanced culture from an archaeological perspective, by trying to reconstruct the important role it played in the early development of Southeast Asian culture. Relatively little research has been conducted on their culture and lifestyle and much of contemporary research centres on their architecture, numismatics and, to a lesser degree, their burial customs.

The Pyu enjoyed colossal wealth. In addition to using coins minted from gold or silver, they also made conspicuous use of jewellery. Objects of personal adornment can give way to significant details about their wearers. Jewellery is a reliable indicator of many aspects of society - changing styles, rank, status, abstract symbolism, to name a few - are all reflected in personal items of each era. In Myanmar history, each and every period represents their own unique, style and types of

ornaments and jewellery. Besides, in terms of their technology, fashion and design indicate distinctive ornamental cultures as well. Thus, it is quite easy to distinguish the type of jewellery which belongs to the different periods in the Myanmar jewellery history.

As so often happens in other parts of the world, it is highly likely that objects in gold have been smelted in order to separate and extract the gold from other metal content. The smelting is carried out by people unaware of the cultural heritage value of these objects. All too often, the primary consideration is the outward monetary value of gold or other precious metals and the financial gain that can be derived from "recycling" one of these priceless objects into a contemporary piece of jewellery. It will always be a matter of conjecture how much of our ancient heritage has been lost in this way but, fortunately, what has been spared is sufficient for academic analysis and interpretation. Pieces are becoming increasingly rare, however, and this is elevating their already high status to sought-after items among collectors, scholars and museums.

This book covers the Myanmar historical periods starting from the Bagan era to the last dynasty, Konbaung. Each period will define the highlight of jewellery evolution that is based on their typology, technology, style and design. Therefore, the literary history of each era is described only briefly in this book as many academic books are already published and easily available.

My extensive fieldwork in archaeological missions has complimented my academic knowledge which has resulted in an experience that has been instrumental in bringing this book into existence. As a gem and jewellery trader as well as an archaeologist, I've had many decades of experience in the industry with ancient jewellery and artefacts from Myanmar described in this book. Experience is one of the most crucial factors in researching ancient ornamental jewellery and artefacts as it is essential for distinguishing the authenticity of ancient beads, jewellery and artefacts. For example, Mogok is the major source of gem mining in Myanmar, and most of the native people and gem traders from Mogok have the experience of distinguishing the authenticity of gemstones. It is quite easy for them to identify the gemstones with the use of their experience and knowledge even though some of them lack basic education in gemology. In fact, most of them have no formal education from any of the internationally recognized gem institutes. Therefore, in as much as a gem dealer or jeweller acquires his knowledge from practicing his trade, I derive my confidence from a long association with ancient beads and jewellery; as a researcher, archaeologist, gem and jewellery trader.

I am proud to present this book and I warmly invite scholars around the world to engage in mutually-beneficial exchanges on the region's ancient ornaments. This book is my contribution to the topic and a labour of love for a long-held dream. The pieces detailed in this publication are primarily from private collections.

With the aim of providing a reference for scholars, and to bring my knowledge to the wider public, it is my ardent wish to widen my research of ancient artefacts. It is hoped that this book will be helpful to academicians, scholars, art historians, collectors and the general public as a useful source of reference.

Prologue

We regularly hear of archaeological discoveries around the world where ancient skeletons are discovered to have been buried with their wealth, or a cache of coins or jewellery hidden from invaders or bandits that were never uncovered until discovered in modern times. Many of these finds are accidental or informal and, not the result of official academic excavations, but the result of hobbyists with metal detectors, or simply people hoping for a little income from treasure hunting.

These historical resources need to be analysed not just through their place in archaeological stratigraphy, information which may be long lost, but through examining their type, form and manufacture, comparing them with other finds to try to get a picture of what was made and owned during different historical periods.

Terry Tan is perhaps uniquely qualified to review and analyse the ancient jewellery that has been found so prolifically in the "Golden Land", Burma/Myanmar, since he brings both the discipline of academic study and a lifetime of experience in the gem business, assisted by his creative eye as an internationally renowned designer.

There are not many people who could pounce with such delight on a pile of ancient jewellery, whether in a museum storeroom or a remote rural farmhouse, and be able to characterise it, locating it in time and space, and fitting it into an accessible historical narrative. Terry Tan's knowledge, skills and enthusiasm shine out through the pages of this book.

Dr Bob Hudson
Asian Studies Program
University of Sydney,

Foreword

Terence Tan has done an enormous service to art historians and the art world in general, in documenting the rich, but often obscure, origins of creative expression among the peoples of Myanmar. The beauty, the sensitivity and the technological skills employed in those distant ages convey a definite awe to us as we are brought face to face with forms, styles, colours and an aesthetic thinking that connects us to our forebears across the millennia.

But while Terence's work, especially his masterful descriptions of ornaments from prehistory to historical periods, will be much appreciated by scholars, it is the people of Myanmar who will benefit the most from this work. A global audience can now appreciate the origins and dimensions of Myanmar's early culture and its unique contribution to the cultural development of Asia. A veil has been lifted from the past to reveal a richness and wonder of which Myanmar can be truly proud.

Dr. Paul Beresford-Hill, MBE
Director-General
Mountbatten Institute, New York

This book is a labour of love, the result of Terence's long involvement in the field of ancient ornaments, as a researcher and professor, offering his own interpretation on the creations of ancient craftsmen in his homeland. It is Terence's sincere wish that this book will fill a gap on this particular topic and that it may be beneficial to other researchers in the field of ancient ornaments from Myanmar.

Terence Tan received the national literary award in 2015 for his publication of "Ancient Jewellery of Myanmar (From Prehistory to Pyu period)". He has researched the ancient ornaments of Myanmar for almost three decades. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration, a Master's degree in Archaeology and is a PhD in Anthropology. He has presented numerous papers at international conferences and has been a visiting professor in Thailand at Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok) and Chiang Mai University. He was invited to present his work in the USA at the universities of Yale, Harvard and Northern Illinois University, in the UK at Jesus College, Oxford University, in France at Nanterre University, in Netherland at Leiden University, in Japan at Doshisha University in Kyoto, in Singapore at the National University (NUS). In his native Myanmar, Terence has lectured extensively at Yangon University and at other learning institutions such as Pyay archaeological institute. His publications include several books and some articles in journals and magazines, including *Arts of Asia*. Terence is also an accomplished gems dealer, jewellery designer as well as a visiting curator at some museums in Europe and China. He's got inspiration from ancient jewellery and ornament to become a unique designer in the industry. Adding to Tan's long credit is the intriguing display of T&Q private collection at a solo exhibition in New York, and at the National Museum in Yangon.

This book on ancient ornaments is the first of its kind in Myanmar and one of the first in the region. The book covers ornaments from Prehistory to the historical periods which include the last dynasty of Myanmar called "Konbaung-Yadanarbon era".

In this book, Terence addresses the unique sequences of evolutions in typology of ornaments and jewellery throughout Myanmar ancient histories. It is within possibility to distinguish the changing styles of periods because each era has its own unique type of styles, designs and fashion. Therefore, Terence traces ornamental evolution in Myanmar and offers new concepts and hypotheses borne out of his years of involvement in the field. Undoubtedly, his long-term commitment to research has fulfilled his dream of publishing this insightful book.

