

23. 1 AMETHYST AND 33 CRYSTAL BEADS

Go Hang, Go Dung, 1st century B.C.–3rd century A.D.
Crystal and amethyst, L: 41 cm
Long An Museum

24. INLAID BEAD

Go Hang, 1st–3rd century A.D.
Carnelian, L: 4.3 cm × D: 1.8 cm
Long An Museum

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D. E. Eichholz, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 181, 263.

2

Peter Francis, Jr., *Asia's Maritime Bead Trade: 300 B.C. to the Present* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 117.

3

Louis Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong. Tome 3. La Culture du Fou-Nan*, Text, 4 vols. (Paris: L'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1962), 152–65.

4

Francis, *Asia's Maritime Bead Trade*, 7.

5

Ian C. Glover and Bérénice Bellina, "Alkaline Etched Beads East of India in the Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Periods," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 88 (2001): 191.

6

Ibid., 191, 208; Francis, *Asia's Maritime Bead Trade*, 7, 8, 110–11.

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I would like to thank Mark Fenn, conservator, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, for his insights on the technical aspects of this bead.

23. Amethyst is found in the central highlands of Viet Nam, and crystal is a common mineral found in most geologic settings; both are a form of quartz. In the first century A.D., Pliny the Elder discussed gemstones, saying that the rock crystal of India "is preferred to any other," and the Indian amethyst is of the first rank.¹ In ancient times, Indian rock crystal was worked (and found near) the southern city of Kodumalan in Kongu (the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu); there is no evidence of raw stone being exported.² Much early scholarship tended to view many of the beads in Southeast Asia as imports, though these crystal and amethyst beads could just as well be imports as of local production.

In fact, evidence of stone bead production in Southeast Asia exists at all of the sites that indicate the making of Indo-Pacific glass beads. Excavation at Oc Eo revealed bead production at that site (see cat. nos. 36–37). The French scholar Louis Malleret noted stone bead-making that included rock crystal, amethyst, carnelian, agate, sardonyx, plasma/cryso-prase, and garnets.³ The artisans fabricated a range of shapes and sizes, many of which are represented here: round, flat rectangular, faceted, and both biconical and faceted cylinders.

24. Etched carnelians were produced by the Indus Valley civilization of northwestern India by the end of the third millennium B.C., and continued to be produced in that region, as well as elsewhere in India up to the modern era. Although we know they were traded to Oman by 2300 to 2100 B.C.,⁴ archaeological evidence suggests these etched beads were not traded to Southeast Asia until the first millennium B.C.⁵ Their occurrence over a wide area, and the fact that they were imitated outside the area of production, indicate that they were highly valued. While archaeologists have assumed that etched carnelian and agate beads found in Southeast Asia were imported into the area, recent scientific research suggests this may not be the case, and that at least some of these beads are of Southeast Asian production.⁶

This large example is unique in both size and production among finds from either South or Southeast Asia. Most beads are decorated with concentric or linear patterning, rather than the plant motif found on two sides of this cylinder. Furthermore, its white incised lines appear to have been deliberately filled with a white substance, rather than being caused by the dissolution of silica, with the attendant refraction (scattering) of light that is seen in Indian etched beads and other beads possibly etched in Southeast Asia.⁷

LITERATURE

Bui Phat Diem, Dao Linh Con, and Vuong Thu Hong, *Khảo Co Hoc Long An: Nhung The Ky Dau Cong Nguyen*, 2001; Peter Francis, Jr., *Asia's Maritime Bead Trade: 300 B.C. to the Present*, 2002; Ian C. Glover and Bérénice Bellina, "Alkaline Etched Beads East of India in the Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Periods," 2001

