

The exchange, production, and use of glass beads and artifacts in Southeast Asia from the Iron Age to the post-Angkorian period

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This paper will review and summarize current evidence for the exchange, production, and use of glass beads and artifacts in Southeast Asia covering approximately two millennia. I begin with a discussion of the earliest appearance of glass beads and jewelry (bracelets, rings, and earrings) during the Iron Age period (approx. 500 BCE – 500 CE), which is often taken as material evidence for contact with South Asia. Recent compositional work by the author and other scholars has identified several types of glass recipes used to produce beads and artifacts that were circulating on different exchange networks that shifted over time and space. The author has argued that some of these fluctuating trade networks might be related to the growth of an early state level society located in the Mekong Delta region.

In addition to the exchange of beads, there is also evidence for the production of glass beads at several locations in Southeast Asia. I will review some of this evidence and tie these possible production locations into the broader exchange networks observed by the distribution of finished products. As most glass objects have been found in burials, I will also review some patterns in the distribution of glass beads at different sites that might tell us about the status of individuals who used and wore these beads.

Over the course of the first millennium CE, burial rituals in mainland Southeast Asia changed. Fewer people were buried in inhumation burials with grave goods, which have resulted in the discovery of fewer glass beads. However, recent work at two Angkorian period sites has identified glass beads and objects in non-burial contexts associated with elites. Work by the author and others have identified the glass recipes at these sites that show connections to glass production centers in China and the Middle East. There are also similarities to glass beads and objects in circulation at other maritime sites in Southeast Asia. Although the purpose of the glass beads is unclear, I will propose some ideas about how these beads might have been used.

Lastly, I will discuss glass beads associated with post-Angkorian (15-17th century CE) upland communities in Southeast Asia. Glass beads were found within jar burials in Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains, which show connections between these people and maritime trade networks in Southeast Asia. I will also share preliminary work on

heirloom beads found in more recent upland communities of mainland Southeast Asia. These later examples show the continued importance of glass beads to certain communities within Southeast Asia.

Overall, this paper aims to summarize the broad patterns of exchange within Southeast Asia as reflected through the glass artifacts as well as changes in how glass beads were used by people over time.