

Book Review

Stone Beads of South and Southeast Asia: Archaeology, Ethnography and Global Connections, edited by Alok Kumar Kanungo, Gandhinagar, Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar & New Delhi, Aryan Books, 2017, xvi+444 pp., illus.col 250 b/w 116, INR 4,500 (hardback), ISBN-13: 978-81-7305-585-0

Archaeological objects, even minute beads, are not mere objects *simpliciter*, rather they have layers of significance across many planes, be they archaeological, technological, scientific, relating to material culture, and the like. The book, *Stone Beads of South and Southeast Asia: Archaeology, Ethnography and Global Connections*, is based on the proceedings of an interdisciplinary workshop on History, Science and Technology of Stone Beads at the Archaeological Sciences Centre, Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, with leading experts in South Asian archaeology.

Objects or artefacts as archaeological markers partake of many aspects such as the processes that produce, the things they use every day, analysing the economic and social history of the objects as also their relevance to the material culture, and, consequently, the people whose form of life they are part of. In archaeological reports, the Introduction to the book comments, beads, courtesy 'their smallness', tend to be overshadowed by showier and larger objects such as pottery and terracotta. However, it is their very size that allows beads to be portable, and thus their study is of salience for global connections of cultures, in this case of South Asia with the world.

The book has four sections. Of these, the first discussing the importance of and literature on beads is perhaps the most comprehensible to non-specialists in so far as it enumerates Sanskrit and Tamil literary and epigraphic references to the bead-making industry and its social and ritual significance.

Kishore K. Basa's chapter, 'Small Find, Immense Impact: Importance of Bead Studies', is an overview of the research undertaken on stone beads in South Asian contexts and also in terms of beads as markers of four interrelated phenomena: typology, technology, trade and exchange, and symbolic value, which also define the parameters of the themes discussed in the rest of the articles.

R. S. Bisht insightfully traces and comments on the continuity of the Harappan civilization into the Vedic, saying, 'The Rig Vedic terra firma comprising Punjab, Sindh, Haryana, north Rajasthan western Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat corresponds well to Harappania of yore' (p. 26). While acknowledging that these are in the domain of proto-history, he alludes to the technique of sewing beads on garments described in the *Yajurveda* to make meaningful patterns as seen in the bearded man of steatite from Mohenjo-Daro. Bisht's article underscores text-artefact correlation in Vedic and post-Vedic literature, especially in the references to *ratna* and *maṇis*, and artisans involved in making these in the *Arthaśāstra*. The connections between source areas, literary references, and actual excavated material cultures, however, are clarified only from the historic period onwards.

An interesting approach to reading archaeology is seen in the textual analysis of early *Tamizh* texts and epigraphs pertaining to sacred gemstones, 'Ratnatin Tiruvābharāṇaṅgal of Brihatīswarā Temple' Beads and Ornaments in Early Tamizh Texts, both by V. Selvakumar. He especially highlights the *Chozha* records enumerating the quality and quantity of each donation and even the source from which these jewels were acquired, revealing the economic status of the temple as well as the piety of the donor rulers. These references unfortunately cannot be identified with the current collections, as the 'terms and parts of ornaments mentioned are no longer preserved in contemporary society'.

Given this limitation, a useful approach to study archaic material is through ethno-archaeology, covered in the second section of the book, which explicates on the technology and crafts traditions of bead-making, especially of the Harappan civilization and related cultures, and on the symbolic value and trade of beads for the Naga tribespeople.

The intensive studies by Jonathan Kenoyer on the artefactual history of the Harappan civilization over decades are well represented in the book. He gives the history of stone beads and drilling in South Asia through a study of raw materials as well as the communities that converted these into beads through heat treatment, drilling, shaping, colouring, and mounting beads into ornaments from Mehrgarh to current Peshawar. In another article, Kenoyer specifically looks at the

typology, technology, and documentation of stone beads, significantly tracing their history through the chronological framework of the Indus tradition, such as ‘the discovery and development of constricted cylindrical drills using hard stone, Ernestite,’ (p. 154) during the Harappa Phase, which allowed beadmakers to produce long and slender carnelian beads used for trade in other regions as far west as Mesopotamia.

As is demonstrated by two articles in the current volume, Kambhat or Cambay, with its continuous tradition of production and trade in stone beads, is significant for studying the history and ethno-archaeology of the bead-making industry. The first article, by Bhan, Kenoyer, and Vidale, looks at the workshops, guild organization, actual production processes, transactional networks, and gendered division of labour. The second, by Kanungo, studies Kambhat through an ethno-historical lens, tracing the history of Cambay mainly through colonial records, especially with reference to beads and their production. The description of guilds and their changing structures, including the gendered nature of work in post-colonial society, makes a valuable addition to the history of industrial organizations and their decline.

Given the nature of South Asian archaeology that in its practice has usually privileged exploration of regional cultural extension as well as chronological cultural sequences; case studies from South Asia receive maximum attention in the volume. Harappan lapidary traditions are comprehensively examined. Evidence from early historic layers such as from Ahicchatra, rather summarily presented here by Bhuvan Vikrama, deserves further enquiry.

The first site examined is Mehargarh, one of the earliest sites to exhibit coherent stone bead-making, with specialization mainly in lapis lazuli and carnelian. The trace of vegetal glue resin found from the site makes it unique in the pre- and proto-historic paeleo-technological environment. Vidale, Mariottini, Sidoti, and Zahir challenge Law’s widely held view on sourcing of raw material, using X-ray Diffraction (XRD) data to identify the precise mineral content of different stones and thus probable area of origin. Based on their study, the authors assert that shared knowledge of technology between the Eastern Iranian Plateau and the upper Indus basin of the fourth millennium BCE should not be attributed to trade contacts, but as a result of ‘a general diffusion of this technological adaptation among the wider contact of craft communities of Middle and South Asia from 4000 to 2000 BCE’ (p. 251).

Three papers discuss bead-making techniques found from sites in and around Gujarat. These include an overview, ‘Stone Bead Production Through The Ages,’ by Kuldeep Bhan; an exploration of shops, techniques, and source bases from early Harappan sites such as Datrana, tracing material remains of beads and work of contacts with other centres by P Ajithprasad & Marco Madella and a comprehensive survey of stone drill making at Dholavira by V.N Prabhakar.

Discoveries of amuletic beads and figurine beads based on Indian mythological and religious symbols such as *triratna* summarized by Bunchar Pongpanich from two major sites of Bon Don Ta Phet and Khao Sem Kaeo in Thailand and minor sites such as U Thong along with Tamil inscriptions identifying a goldsmith’s touchstone from Klong Tom raises further questions about the archaeological context to the ‘Indian connection’ with Southeast Asia.

The fourth section is devoted to scientific analysis of stone beads using XRD and Scanning Electron Microscopic analysis on the drills, stones, and finished beads.

The book is a collection of scholarly, well-researched, and well-presented articles on stone bead archaeology in South Asia and its diffusion into other parts of the world. Most of the contributions are amplified with technical data regarding chemical analysis of stones, morphology of drills, micro abrasions and use patterns that reinforce theories and hypotheses about catchment areas, as well as spheres of circulation for raw materials and technology.

The significance of bead studies in particular and artefact research in general for understanding social and economic organization in archaic cultures is underlined in most of the papers. Kenoyer and others also examine the religious and ideological implications of beads for the social groups that produced them and also for those who consumed them: as ‘signs’ of hierarchy, transactions, and negotiations within the group and also with communities outside. The scholarly text, illustrated with appropriate images and tables, and technical analysis, is a significant contribution to object-based archaeological data on South and Southeast Asian pre- and proto-historical periods and is a welcome addition both for the serious scholar and the inquisitive student.

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