Jade and Jade-like Artifacts in Philippine Collections
(Ling-ling-o and Bicephalous Earrings)

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Background Information

A v ery recent find by archaeologists from the National Museum and the U.P. Archaeological Studies Program led by Dr. Peter Bellwood from the Australian National University is a probable jade workshop at the Anaro Site, Itbayat Island at the Batanes in northern Philippines. At least 24 fragments that include some cores and chips believed to be remnants from the making of ancient jade earrings have been collected by these teams of archaeologists. This workshop is believed to be at least 3,000 years old. From studies conducted by the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, headed by Dr. Yoshiyuki Iizuka, the material is believed to be nephrite (a type of jade) sourced from Taiwan and Lan yu island (Botel Tobago), off Taiwan.

Ling-ling-o type earrings and the bicephalous (a two-headed type of animal earring) have been found at cave sites in Palawan by Dr. Robert Fox in the 1960s, mainly at Duyong (a bicephalous and 18 ling-ling-o type earrings) and some at the Uyaw Caves. Six earrings were found in a jar burial site at Guri Cave. These caves are all part of the Tabon Cave Complex in Palawan. These earrings are believed to be made of nephrite which have not yet been tested to determine its source.

A nephrite ling-ling-o was reportedly found also by Prof. H. Otley Beyer in Batangas. A ling-ling-o made of mica was unearthed by Barbara Thiel at the Arku Cave site at the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountains in northern Luzon.many years ago. There are several ling-ling-o type earrings made of mica (also sometimes called “Mindoro jade”) in some Philippine collections. A ling-ling-o made of clay was found by Amalia de la Torre at the Ulilang Bundok site in Batangas. Other clay ling-ling-o have also been recovered from Cagayan Valley and from Marinduque. A glass ling-ling-o was reportedly found in Palawan.

In the 1930s and 40s, Beyer collected thousands of adzes made of greenish-white jade from the Batangas-Laguna-Rizal area. When these were tested at the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, it was found that the oxygen-isotope count of the nephrite material was unusually high. Higher than that of any other jade material found in any part of the world. Therefore, Iizuka and his colleagues believe they have come from a local source. Since jade, like marble is a metamorphosed rock, geologists believe it is likely that sources of jade may be located in places such as Tablas, Romblon where marble are also found.

Most people have a tendency to call “jade”, stones of a green or greenish color. It will be difficult for the untrained eye to tell if these stones are real jade or if they are “jade simulants” (which are material such as mica or talc or soapstone which could be mistaken for jade but are really much softer. Serpentine, a type of hard stone is also sometimes mistaken for jade.

True Jade

The world recognizes two kinds of materials as “true jade”: they are nephrite and jadeite. Both of these materials are mineral aggregates and technically speaking “rocks”.

Green is the color most commonly associated with jade but these stones actually come in a variety of colors. Both nephrite and jadeite can even be white or colorless.

Nephrite is “a silicate of calcium and magnesium“ with some traces of iron. It is extensively found in China, although it also comes from other places. Nephrite is harder than granite and most steel. It measures 5.5 to 6.5 on the Moh’s scale. It is reputed to be the “toughest of all rocks” (with “tough” defined here as a measure of its resistance to breaking.)

Jadeite is “a silicate of sodium and aluminum”. It is usually colored bright green, a hue favored by jewelers. Jadeite measures 6.5 to 7.0 on the Moh’s scale making it slightly harder than nephrite but is not as resistant to breaking and may fracture more easily. Most of high quality jadeite used for jewelry today comes from Upper Burma.

Origin of the Term “Ling-ling-o”

When H. Otley Beyer discovered jade earrings in Batangas similar to those found at Sa Huynh sites in Vietnam in 1948, he noted that they appeared similar to metal ornaments (of gold, silver of copper) worn by the Ifugao, Bontoc, and Kalinga people of the Cordillera. Called “ling-ling-o by the local people, especially by the Mayaoyao Ifugao, Beyer decided to call his rare find by the same term.

It is possible that the "two-headed animal pendant" (bicephalus) could be an ear ornament since it has been found at Sa Huynh with the artifact placed next to the area in the skull where the ear used to be (see Reinecke illustration in his 1995 publication). Webster's dictionary defines "pendant" as an "ornament allowed to hang free". It is possible that this object was made for purely ceremonial or ritual use. It seems too large to be able to hang from the ear.

For our publication to be entitled: "The Jade Trail" (From Archaeological Sites to Museum Collections) which we hope to finish in time for the IPPA Conference to be held at U.P. Diliman from the 20 to the 26th of March 2006, we are using the term "Two-headed animal pendant". This term has been in use from Beyer to Fox, etc., and recently again by Bellwood.

Local Collections

The National Museum has custody of the finds of Robert B. Fox at the Tabon Cave Complex in Palawan. However, there are some 4 private collectors in the Manila area and 1 in El Nido, Palawan with collections of these artifacts. These consist of only a few specimen: (I have seen 2 bicephalous earrings similar to Dr. Fox’s finds from Palawan (and another two which might have come from Vietnam), several ling-ling-o type earrings of nephrite, several earrings of mica, several tubular beads and other miscellaneous items).

There on-going plans to publish a book on these recent developments. Talks are also on-going with Ayala Museum to hold an Exhibition on Jade and Jade-like Artifacts from Local Collections to coincide with the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association (IPPA) Conference which will be held in the Philippines from 20-26 March 2006.
