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Online Book Reviews

Pearls

By Hubert Bari and David Lam, 336 pp., illus., publ. by Skira Editore [www.skira.net], Milan, Italy, 2010. US\$85.00

Hubert Bari and David Lam have created a delightful work, teaming with photographer Christian Creutz to produce this valuable resource. For a study of natural pearls, readers have long turned to Kunz and Stephenson's 1907 masterpiece, *The Book of the Pearl*. Since the late 20th century, writers such as Farn, Dickinson, Shirai, Ward, and Newman have contributed smaller but very helpful books on cultured and natural pearls. In recent years, enthusiasts have been treated to two important reference works, Elisabeth Stack's *Pearls* (2006) and Paul Southgate and John Lucas's *The Pearl Oyster* (2008). This new volume will be a welcome addition to the pair.

The book was published to accompany the *Pearls* exhibition held at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar, which ran from January to June 2010. In the preface, exhibit chair Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani expresses her hope that the reader will discover the many aspects of the pearl and better understand the scientific and cultural layers "that play a part in the creation of this small but miraculous orb."

Six chapters deal with the nature and formation of the pearl, the various mollusks, the history of pearls, the age of great fisheries (1850–1940), cultivation, gentlemen-farmers, and, in a final section titled "Hommage to Mademoiselle," fashion designer Coco Chanel and her love of the gem.

The 350 photographs are stunning.

The reader begins to appreciate the depth of the Qatar museum collection, starting with the 21 rare and unusual natural pearls featured on the cover. In addition, Bari and Lam have traveled the world to collect photos of the finest specimens from other important collections, including those of Hussein Alfardan, the British Museum, major pearl producers, numerous national archives, the Mikimoto Museum, and noted gem photographers such as Christian Creutz, Tino Hammid, John Koivula, and Jeff Scovil.

The illustrations aren't limited to photos of pearls, shells, and pearl jewelry. There is a rich tapestry of maps, early book illustrations, and photos of pearling vessels and farms through the ages that detail our fascination with the queen of gems. For many this will be an opportunity to grasp the richness of the pearl's history in the Arabian Gulf. One begins to appreciate how pearls have influenced the lives of the people who have sought them through the millennia and across the continents.

The richly told text offers a remarkable compilation of interesting items. This reviewer takes exception, though, to the authors' belief (from the beginning of chapter 3, "The Pearl: A History of Indifference and Passion") that the absence of pearl jewelry artifacts from early cultures shows that they valued shell more than pearls. Rather, the pearl was likely so rare and so prized that these treasures were kept hidden, much the way diamonds were hidden in ancient India. Only further translation of early texts will serve to reinforce one point of view or the other.

One wishes the authors had included an index, always a time-consuming task and often done just as the book is scheduled to be published. Even so, this is more than a coffee table book—one wishes to locate the photos, facts, and stories throughout it. Regardless, *Pearls* will be a remarkably affordable and treasured addition to any pearl library.

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Terra Spinel Terra Firma

By Vladyslav Y. Yavorsky with Richard W. Hughes, 204 pp., illus., privately published [http://spinelbook.com], 2010. US\$95.00

This masterful work showcases the beauty and amazing color variations found in spinel. Vladyslav Yavorsky's sincere passion is captured through each photograph and thoughtful description. He covers all the major sources with images of some of the finest examples of spinel. Every page is a new delight, as the photos seem to come to life. Yavorsky's eye for color is revealed through his pairing of the endless palette of spinel hues with images of landscapes, textiles, and beautiful people from the faraway places where these gems are found.

For those interested in the history of spinel and a bit of lore, coauthor Richard Hughes provides just enough information to capture the reader's interest while leaving one hungry for more. Hughes touches on gemology and briefly explores the history of famous spinels mistaken for rubies.

While not a scientific book, it does capture the beauty and essence of one of the most unique and underappreciated gems available.

The tour of spinel-producing countries begins in Burma, continuing through Sri Lanka and on to Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Madagascar before ending in Vietnam. Each section features a map and a brief summary highlighting the spinel-mining areas of that country. Along the way, Yavorsky shares his photographic and cutting skills, as every page reveals yet another fabulous spinel, friendly miner, or remote landscape. The kaleidoscope of gem colors includes ruby red, jacaranda lavender, metallic gray, vivid pink, saffron orange, cobalt blue, and many more, from the softest pastels to the most intense neon colors imaginable.

Yavorsky best sums up his relentless passion for discovery when he writes, "Thus I continue to travel with loupe and camera, ever seeking to expose a hitherto unrevealed face of a crystal, person or landscape, attempting to highlight that which is worthy. This is my quest, to be faithful and relentless in my search for beauty."

At the end of the book, there is a delightful surprise in the final pages showing spinel's plethora of colors. This pictorial treasure is a must for any gem enthusiast or designer searching for inspiration from one of the most unique and beautiful gems in the world.

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Colour of Paradise: The Emerald in the Age of Gunpowder Empires

By Kris E. Lane, 280 pp., illus., publ.
by Yale University Press
[<http://yalepress.yale.edu>], New
Haven, CT, and London, 2010.
US\$40.00

Emerald green is unlike any other color in gemology. Despite comparisons to the color of spring pastures,

the green of emerald is more often approached than attained outside the gem world. Here, Kris Lane presents an exhaustively researched treatise that broadens our understanding of emeralds plucked and pillaged from Colombia as they crossed the seas to Asia and Europe, centuries before their modern appearance in jewelry showcases and museums. This scholarly book tackles aspects of the emerald trade that are not widely published but are as extraordinary as the gem's elusive color.

To the Muzos, Muiscas, and other pre-Columbian tribes who valiantly but unsuccessfully attempted to protect their magical caches from European marauders, emeralds were considered essential to aspects of tribal life beyond soothsaying, jungle healing, and the preservation of female chastity. Lane presents the anguish of emerald's forced entry into global trade in painstaking detail. The subtext of his in-depth review of trade records, sailing manifests, diaries, and even shocking shipwreck discoveries underscores how incomplete our assessment remains of the wild global ride taken by *esmeralda*.

The book's subtitle references the shortcuts to empire-building unleashed by the harnessing of gunpowder, which elevated conflict from an era of crossbowmen, archers, and rams to better war through chemistry. The gunpowder empires held sway from the 16th century, when Moguls ruled Muslim Asia and European explorers colonized the Americas in search of gold and riches. Though pestilence proved nearly as effective as pugnacity in European hegemony over the New World, the net effect was the eventual wresting of emerald riches from native Indo-Americans into the hands of European explorer-warriors and multi-ethnic merchants, with ragtag adventurers and would-be fortune hunters bringing up the rear.

Lane, a history professor at the College of William and Mary, cites primary sources obtained from multinational archives, libraries, anthropologists, diaries, translations, and other

documents that date to some of the earliest 16th century Spanish explorers. Deeper into the text, Lane delivers on the promise of his title by connecting the rare color of this exotic stone to the green Paradise of Islam. Here, the trained Latin Americanist argues that the Ottomans, Persia's Safavid dynasty, and particularly the Moguls caught "emerald fever" over a gem they interpreted as a means of divine protection. These rare treasures from another side of the world offered a link to the heavens, the ultimate fulfillment that awaited those fortunate or victorious enough to possess them. In this way, emeralds signified another manifestation of the powers bestowed on their regal owners. Lane also details the importance of emeralds in elaborate gift-giving rituals afforded to the highest ranks of these ruling civilizations, which he interprets as dramatic assertions of dominance and power rather than as acts of generosity, recognition, or reward.

Though European courts were also enamored of emeralds, their passion was more accessory-driven and hardly elevated to the fever pitch of South Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Lane shows how the initial arrival and subsequent notoriety of emeralds in South Asia conferred an "Oriental" provenance to the gem that supplanted its New World origin. Europeans, whether influenced by the blinding glitter of gold or a New World association considered *déclassé* at the time, came to see emeralds as Eastern objects of desire, showcased by rulers such as the despotic Nadir Shah. Lane traces this paradoxical exaltation of emerald as the gem passed from Asia and back through trade routes to Europe, where it would eventually be coveted and collected by the imperial courts, though never to the same degree as the Near East, the Indian subcontinent, and Asia.

An epilogue reviews the post-colonial turmoil of the Muzo mines, the rediscovery of the Chivor region's Somondoco mines in 1890, and 20th century emerald mining in the era of capitalists, attempted government

takeovers, and later the emerald bosses known as *esmeralderos*. Most of it isn't very pretty.

The book includes 16 well-chosen full-page color plates, as well as a variety of diagrams, maps, illustrations, tables, and appendices that detail emerald production over these earlier centuries. These should well serve future emerald scholars and historians.

Although it is a dense and difficult read, Lane's labors will be appreciated by emerald and gem scholars who seek deeper understanding of the often barbaric and tortuous history associated with one of nature's most resplendent wonders. The documentation and annotated footnotes alone may send generations of scholars back to the archives to uncover other layers behind emerald's many mysteries, from the depths of shipwreck-littered ocean floors to the impenetrable collections still sequestered in banks and subterranean vaults of countries where Americans are no longer welcome.

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Twentieth-Century Jewellery: From Art Nouveau to Contemporary Design in Europe and the United States

By Alba Cappellieri, 248 pp., illus., publ. by Skira Editore [www.skira.net], Milan, 2010. US\$85.00

Broad in scope and beautiful in presentation, this book is nevertheless a bit intimidating. It truly covers the entire history of 20th century jewelry. And a fascinating century it was for jewelry—from Art Nouveau to Art Deco, from Tiffany to Trifari, from high art to pop art, from 1900 to 2008, the author covers it all.

The discussion is divided into six eras: 1900–1918 (“Art Nouveau and Mode Blanche”); 1919–29 (“Art Deco: White, Black and Tutti Frutti”); 1929–46 (“Somewhere Between the International Style and Organicism”);

1947–67 (“From the New Look to Pop”); 1968–78 (“From Radical to Global”); and 1979–2008 (“From Materialism to Minimalism”). Each section attempts to portray what was happening in society, art, architecture, and fashion, and how those and other factors influenced jewelry materials and styles, and how it was worn.

This book is an ambitious undertaking, and it largely succeeds. The historical information is fascinating, meticulously researched, and annotated. (I particularly liked the easy-to-read glossary.) It is lavishly illustrated with many beautiful and unique pieces of jewelry.

I do feel the content would have been more interesting (or perhaps easier to absorb) if the illustrations had appeared with the corresponding text, but virtually every one of them appears in a separate section titled “Works.” One must wade through some rather daunting text to reach this aesthetically satisfying section of images. And some of the captions were far removed from their related images, requiring careful examination to match descriptions with photos. I did appreciate the fact that so-called costume jewelry and art jewelry were not ignored; their inclusion gave the book a very well-rounded feel. I would recommend this work to anyone wishing to view the amazing evolution of jewelry and wearable art during the last century.

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Jewellery from the Orient: Treasures from the Bir Collection

By Wolf-Dieter Siewert, 320 pp., illus., publ. by Arnoldsche Art Publishers [www.arnoldsche.com], Stuttgart, Germany, 2009. US\$85.00

Dr. Ümit Bir was a Turkish native living in Germany who began collecting silver cultural objects in the late 1950s during his travels across Europe, North Africa, and Asia. His collection, now comprising more

than 3,000 objects, has resided at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig since 2004. Siewert's book is a review of 775 artifacts from this collection.

Yet this book is far more than an exhibit catalog. It is better described as a historical and ethnographic review of the cultures and peoples who produced these objects. Siewert provides comprehensive details on antique silver jewelry that many in our industry have encountered, yet struggle to research and appraise. Until now there have been few, if any, books on silver's cultural influence written with such depth. This historical read reminds us that silver ornamental jewelry and objects have spanned the globe throughout the centuries. High-quality color photographs and details appear on every page.

Sections of the book cover silver's impact across the European Orient, the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, and trade routes traveled by nomadic people. The stories describe how both men and women of different cultures used this jewelry to convey meaning in every aspect of their lives: religion, love, death, marriage, fertility, medicine, travel, education, status, and the rise and fall of empires. We better understand how the jewelry we handle today has deep-rooted meaning, and how these family treasures become collector's items over time. We are reminded that jewelry did not start out as a fashion statement the way we know it today. Many of the items shown in this volume do not even appear as modern jewelry: swords, amulets, head dresses, belts, heavy bracelets, cigarette holders, and chest dresses worn by men.

Although not a light read, this book is valuable to appraisers, collectors, museums, auction houses, and anyone interested in the meaning of the exotic and difficult to identify silver jewelry and objects that might pass through their hands.

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