

FAMOUS DIAMONDS

By Ian Balfour, 224 pp., illus., publ. by William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., London, 1987. US\$34.95*

Ian Balfour is especially well qualified to write about famous diamonds, having spent a lifetime in the diamond industry both with De Beers and as a consultant to the important sight brokers, I. Hennig and Company. For many years he has been an avid student of the recorded history of the diamonds that have played a part in historical events. Many of his fascinating stories about these various diamonds have appeared in the magazine *Indiaqua*.

Over the years, a number of books have been written about diamonds known in history. One of the early efforts was Edwin Streeter's *The Great Diamonds of the World*, first published in 1882. It was followed many years later by Robert Shipley's *Famous Diamonds of the World*; Lawrence Copeland's *Diamonds, Famous, Notable, and Unique*; and the De Beers publication, *Notable Diamonds of the World*. No one, however, has written as entertainingly, nor researched so exhaustively to present complete stories, as has Ian Balfour. The book holds the reader's interest and seems to be very accurate.

In most instances, the coverage in *Famous Diamonds* is much more detailed than any previous work. The main body of the book consists of 75 entries of historically significant and well-documented diamonds, beginning with the Koh-i-noor, "the most famous of all diamonds," and concluding with the Premier Rose, the exceptional D-flawless gem cut only in 1978, but still the second-largest pear-shaped diamond in history.

This book is especially noteworthy in that Balfour spends considerable time discussing the historic situations surrounding these famous (and infamous) diamonds. As a result, the reader (gemologist and non-gemologist alike) cannot help but develop an appreciation for the many notable gems that have participated in human history. *Famous Diamonds* is very well illustrated and, where possible, modern photographs

BOOK REVIEWS

Elise B. Misiowski, Editor

of stones are shown. This book represents an important addition to the literature on diamonds and is enjoyable reading for all those interested in these fascinating gems.

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HOW TO CARVE JADE AND GEMS

By June Culp Zeitner with Hing Wa Lee, 130 pp., illus., publ. by Northern Gem Press, 1987. US\$21.50*

Carving is the most demanding of all the lapidary arts, because it requires not only the mastery of numerous techniques but also the artistry to ensure that the finished object is aesthetically pleasing as well as competently executed. Furthermore, no convenient supports (such as dopsticks for cabochons or the rigid mechanical devices of the faceting head) are available for the gem material during carving. The carver must hold his work in his hands while he guides it through the many intricate maneuvers necessary to reach and work on every surface. These demands are daunting, and it is no surprise that carvers are so few in number. The literature is correspondingly meager; thus another text on gemstone carving is most welcome.

June Culp Zeitner, author of many articles for various lapidary magazines, bases the information she provides in this book on the methods of carving employed by Hing Wa Lee, a superbly qualified master carver in the classic Chinese tradition. His masterpieces have been displayed widely and pictured in many journals; a considerable number of them, small to large, are illustrated here in black-and-white and color. An examination of the text shows that while considerable information can be at-

tributed to Lee, much more information that already is found in current books is incorporated by Zeitner. Aside from a short (well-illustrated and useful) section on how Hing Wa Lee makes small wheels, disks, ball-shapes, and the like, from the ancient Chinese shellac-abrasive melt, the reader will find few "secrets" revealed, or "tricks of the trade" explained, that are not already in print elsewhere. Basically, the ways in which hard gemstones are shaped, smoothed, and polished in carvings are the same everywhere—there are no secrets or skills, just a great deal of patience, trick, and experience. Both text and illustrations show that Hing Wa Lee uses modern, electrically powered tools, not the ancient foot-powered lathe-like bench.

The text begins with an appreciation of the artistry of carvings. A second chapter describes the gem materials, divided into classes according to hardness, the final class being "hard" gemstones of Mohs 7 or greater. Most of the attention here is paid to varieties of quartz; other species such as tourmaline and beryl unfortunately are passed off with few words. Chapters 3 and 4 give instructions for making numerous types of small tools to be used from shaping to polishing. Regrettably, very little is said about the use of slabbing and table saws for rapid removal of material. Chapter 5 contains step-by-step instructions on how to carve a series of small objects of increasing difficulty, from a stylized peach to a three-link jade chain. Chapters 6 and 7 are *pot pourris* and include brief discussions of many topics and supplements to matters previously discussed. Four appendices provide lists of supplies; matching pairs of buffs and polishing agents, and the Mohs scale of hardness; a very short and inadequate glossary that omits many terms that appear in the text; and a long list of subjects that could inspire designs for carvings.

*This book is available for purchase at the GIA Bookstore, 1660 Stewart Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404. Telephone: (800) 421-7250, ext. 282.

The bibliography includes several lapidary/carving books but consists mostly of articles from *Lapidary Journal*. The often excellent and informative articles that have appeared in *Gems & Minerals* and *Rock & Gem* are not included. The bibliography (and readers) also would have profited from inclusion of such excellent works on carving as F. W. Long, *Lapidary Carving*, 1982 (easily the best of the lot but now out of print); E. and L. Wertz, *Handbook of Gemstone Carving*, 1968; G. I. Hemrich, *Handbook of Jade*, 1966 (with considerable information on lapidary treatments of the jades); H. Hunt, *Lapidary Carving for Creative Jewelry*, 1980 (especially valuable for its instructions on tool-making); and F. W. Pond's *How to Make and Use Gem Carving Tools*, 1971.

The beginning carver will find a great deal of useful information in this book, albeit sometimes presented in disjointed fashion. The contribution by Hing Wa Lee on making shellac-abrasive tools is a most valuable feature of the work, but the remainder is primarily standard information on materials, tools, and techniques. The use of matte-finish text paper has resulted in less crispness of line than desired in the black-and-white photographs, with some dark areas showing little detail. In many instances, line drawings would have been far more helpful to the reader. The color photographs of carvings and some jewelry items are printed on a glossy-paper insert and paged with the text; they are mostly of high to very high quality. Zietner's book is a useful addition to a library of gemstone carving books.

JOHN SINKANKAS
Peri Lithon Books

LEGENDARY GEMS OR GEMS THAT MADE HISTORY

By Eric Bruton, 239 pp., illus., Chilton Book Co., Radnor, PA, 1986. US\$35.00*

Bruton, former editor of *The Gem-mologist* and author of *Diamonds*,

has taken on a very difficult task, one fraught with frustration because the records surrounding most of the world's most fabulous gemstones and their various owners are woefully incomplete. The researcher is often faced with more mysteries than answers, for gaps in the record are plentiful. Unfortunately, this book does little to provide answers to those mysteries. In addition, as intriguing as the title may be, little in the physical appearance of the book promises quality. The design is uninspired, and many of the 23 color and 75 black-and-white photographs vary from mediocre to terrible.

The book consists of 12 chapters with altogether fascinating titles, including: "Diamonds of Destiny," "The Greatest Gem of All Time," "Pearls of Great Price," and "Dealers and Collectors of Great Gems." Regrettably, the author's writing style, which is often disjointed and awkward, does not live up to their promise. In the first two chapters the reader is overwhelmed with dozens of names of Indian maharajas, Persian and Afghan shahs, Turkish sultans, Sikh chieftans, and so on. Yet each is usually given only a sentence or two in developing histories wherein the diamonds appear to have been passed around like hot potatoes. There are far too many characters and far too few stones to hold the reader's interest.

Bruton's meanings are often hard to interpret, and events and ideas frequently are poorly developed. In addition, the author often fails to provide a full description of the featured gem when he first introduces it. At the very least, the color, shape, weight, and (where known) date of discovery should be given at the outset. In some cases, one must read many paragraphs before learning an important detail of the stone. The date of discovery of Brazil's Star of the South is never given; nor does the author ever describe the color or mention the current situation of the Sancy diamond, which Streeter called "the very Sphinx of diamonds." Bruton also fails to identify

the Transvaal as part of the Smithsonian collection, where it has been since 1977.

The histories of many gems appear sketchy, hastily assembled, and not at all carefully researched. The Sancy diamond again provides a good example. Bruton states that "an unknown writer" declared that Charles the Bold lost the Sancy diamond on the battlefield in 1477. Bruton continues, "If the event is true, the stone lost by Charles could have been another double rose-cut stone, the Florentine, but not the Sancy because of its history" (italics added). First, he fails to point out that the confusion is unlikely because the Florentine was yellow and the Sancy is white. Second, Bruton does not explain what "because of its history" means in this context. Elsewhere Bruton writes about several stones sold to "the Gaekwar of Baroda," yet he never explains who this assiduous collector is, even in the "Collectors of Great Gems" chapter. As yet another example of the inconsistencies in this book, on page 107 the Noor-ul-Ain is described as though it hadn't already been introduced on page 53 and once again similarly described in the caption for plate 2. Interestingly, Bruton gives three different spellings: Noor-ul-Ain (p. 53), Noor-ul-Aim (plate 2), and Noor-ul-Din (p. 107). Further, the Orloff, a diamond that is currently on display at the Kremlin, is unaccountably included in the chapter "Famous Diamonds that Vanished."

What is most distressing is that there are so many similarly bad books, especially on gems, being published. It is apparent here, as in so many other books in this field, that the publisher is not giving the author the editorial support that he needs and, especially in this instance, deserves. *Legendary Gems* is yet another volume with far too many erroneous statements and details, a condition that is more serious than the fact that it is poorly written.

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