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Gemstones—Quality and Value, Vol. 3: Jewelry

By Yasukazu Suwa, 144 pp., illus., publ. by Sekai Bunka Publishing, Tokyo, 2001. US\$95.00*

This beautifully illustrated and designed book helps explain “the factors that determine the quality of jewelry” in a way that most readers will understand and appreciate. Mr. Suwa accomplishes this by separating the book into two main sections. In the first, “Gemstone-Oriented Jewelry,” he examines 26 individual pieces of jewelry and explains the features that make each one unique and desirable. He then focuses on specific aspects of each jewel in an educational format that teaches the reader what to look for in similar jewelry. For example, the chapter on a “band-type emerald and diamond ring” explains why the diamonds are set in platinum while the emerald is set in gold (because each metal flatters the color of the particular stone). Mr. Suwa further adds that the emerald in the ring is from Zambia and is untreated. In the next few pages of the chapter, he moves into a more general discussion of treated vs. untreated emeralds and the versatility of band rings.

The second section, “The Quality of Jewelry,” is especially informative for those unfamiliar with the jewelry trade. Here Mr. Suwa reviews quality, value, and price. He also takes the reader through design conception, choice of materials, fabrication, evaluation of the jewelry’s condition (porosity, solder marks, etc.), remodeling, and recirculation (resale). Diagrams illustrate various jewelry parts. The book finishes with a chapter on trends and traditions, and a useful jewelry glossary.

As a reference, this volume accomplishes much. The areas discussed are well illustrated and organized, and a convenient section on “How to Use This Book” is included. Rather than just deal with a particular type of setting, stone, or style, *Gemstones: Quality and Value* achieves distinction by taking actual pieces of jewelry and teaching the reader how to evaluate them. As the author clearly states, the book is not a technical manual. However, it does succeed as an overview. At the very least, it will give the reader a deep appreciation for jewelry of quality.

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Mogôk: Valley of Rubies & Sapphires

By Ted Themelis, 270 pp., illus., publ. by A & T Publishing, Los Angeles, 2000. US\$89.00

This reviewer has anxiously awaited Ted Themelis’s Mogok book for more than two years. When I saw a copy at the 2001 Las Vegas JCK show, I knew that my long wait was justified. From the pleasing dust jacket through the plethora of maps, drawings, and photographs both old and new, it was obvious that the author’s love for Mogok and Burma (now Myanmar) had been transferred to the pages of this book. This hardcover book measures 22 × 29 cm (8.6 × 11.4 inches), and has more than 500 illustrations.

Chapter 1 covers the history of Burma. As complicated as that history might be, Mr. Themelis manages to make it both understandable and

accurate. Sidebars of interesting legends, together with the pictures and graphics, hold the reader’s attention even through complex dynastic names and tongue-twisting transliterations from Burmese into English.

In the following three chapters, Mr. Themelis plunges directly into the cultural melting pot that is Mogok, covering the town’s varied lifestyles, religions, cuisines, and superstitions. While some readers may find certain details unnecessary, many of them relate back to the gems themselves.

Gem trading from early times to the present day is covered in chapter 5, and chapter 6 examines how the lapidaries of Burma and Mogok have changed over the years, with influence from Indian, British, and most recently Thai lapidaries. An interesting explanation of why Burmese cutters leave extra weight on their stones is provided (i.e., not just for higher weight yield, but also so subsequent buyers can improve the stone if they desire).

Chapter 7 covers notable rubies and sapphires from Mogok, and includes a wonderful story on a major piece of rough that eventually produced a 25.55 ct faceted ruby. However, the tables that list major stones produced from 1630 to 1999 contain many stories with little substance or substantiation. For example, an item on page 229 reads: “1928. A 437-carat blue sapphire was found in an unspec-

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ified area of Mogok. It was valued at over £11,000." Even though mystery and intrigue are a big part of the gem business, items such as this still leave the reader wishing for more solid information.

"Burmese Court Regalia" is the subject of chapter 8, with an interesting account of how so many valuable palace rubies and other gems disappeared the night of November 28, 1885, when the British occupied Mandalay. The British returned several items, but retained others.

Chapter 9 contains numerous examples of Burmese jewelry, in both traditional and modern settings. Concluding the book is a four-page selected bibliography, a one-page glossary, and an index.

Mogok lacks information on geology, mineralogy, and specific mining areas, as well as pictures of rough. According to the author, however, these topics will be covered in the second volume, which this reviewer eagerly awaits.

This book's main flaws are those found in many self-published productions. It lacks professional editing and polish. Numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and traditional publishing symbols are found throughout the book. Many photos and plates lack credit information (e.g., p. 203), and many statements lack references (e.g., pp. 12–13). These diminish the value of a book that is aimed, at least in part, at an academic audience. Another serious defect is seen in the photo reproduction. All of the book's photos should have been sharpened in the pre-press stage, and virtually all have unnatural color casts.

However, such distractions are minor when compared to the overall value of the work. Since his first visit to Mogok in 1996, Mr. Themelis has immersed himself in everything Burmese and, especially, Mogok. This included travel to the British Library in London, private libraries, various museums, and, of course, the area itself. The author's impassioned love of Mogok provides insights not found in any other modern book on this region. *Mogok—Valley of Rubies* e

Sapphires is a must for every gemologist's library. It captures all aspects of Mogok's gem and jewelry industry—the history, romance, intrigue and, most importantly, the enchantment of a truly enchanted land.

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Southwest Silver Jewelry

By Paula A. Baxter, 212 pp., illus., publ. by Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2001. US\$49.95

When an author writes about a subject he or she loves, it really reaches the reader. Such is the case with this beautiful book, which examines and pays tribute to the first century of Navajo and Pueblo metal jewelry making in the American Southwest. The historical information is enlightening, and is complimented by the high-quality presentation and numerous large-format photos that illustrate the evolution of this jewelry.

Telling a story that starts in the 1860s, the author points out that the use of silver for jewelry was a relatively recent development for Native Americans. Metals were not considered to be "spiritual" materials, but the natives loved the pale luster of silver because it reminded them of the moon. Early work involved the melting of coins to make practical items (such as buttons and belt buckles) and objects for personal adornment. When these items were seen by the white settlers and Native Americans both locally and from other regions, a commercial market slowly began to develop. This book recounts the fascinating tale of how ingenious Native Americans created tools out of available materials after learning skills from blacksmiths and Mexican silversmiths, and how each tribe branched off to create a unique style that continues to evolve.

Silversmithing production steadily expanded during the "first phase" (1868–1900) of Southwestern Indian jewelry. At first, the techniques were crude due to the tools available, but as

lapidary work developed and skills were perfected, more complex designs began to appear. Stones first appeared in the silver jewelry around the 1880s, usually as a single polished center-piece mounted in a bezel. The first gems used were small pieces of local garnets, turquoise, malachite, or shell. Since the supply of turquoise was initially scarce, traders imported Persian turquoise to meet demand. By 1900, however, new mines in the southwestern U.S. yielded plentiful supplies. Photos in the book show the transition from simple early designs to beautiful and intricate works of modern art.

The book also helps readers distinguish the work of the Navajo, Zuni, and Hopi tribes. It clearly explains terms such as *old pawn* vs. *dead pawn*, and it includes tips for collecting, a list of prestigious pre-1970 Indian artists, and a value reference guide. The pricing guide is understandably vague, since most of the hand-wrought items are unique and their age or origin is frequently difficult to determine. Nevertheless, this guide provides a good starting point for establishing values. Readers will learn to better recognize authentic Indian jewelry and to appreciate the art and designs, which are ever-changing but at the same time are always returning to—and honoring—their past. The enthusiasm of the author is infectious, and leaves the reader wanting to take a trip to the Southwest in search of silver treasures.

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Jewelry Wax Modeling— A Practical Guide for the Jewelry Model Maker

By Adolfo Mattiello, 161 pp., illus., publ. by Du-Matt Corp., Guttenberg, NJ, 1999. US\$38.95*

This is an excellent book for someone who wants to get started or learn more about the art of wax carving. Descriptions of 11 ring projects are

designed to take the reader from the very basics to the very advanced. At the beginning of each project is a beautiful painted rendering of the design, accompanied by photos of the actual wax at different stages. The in-depth, step-by-step instructions—with nicely done graphics and measurements—make the lessons very easy to follow and understand.

This guide is filled with many unique and time-saving tricks and tips. In addition, it includes a few tool modifications that will help the reader achieve higher levels of craftsmanship.

Many of the projects contain stone-setting styles that involve skills that are considered rather advanced, such as pavé work and channel setting with baguettes and round stones. It would be helpful to have some previous stone-setting skill and experience. If you do not, the author recommends that you do the prep work for the stone setting, finish the ring in metal, and then seek the assistance of a good stone setter. This should be seen as a challenge rather than a discouragement.

With patience and determination, the reader can learn a great deal from this book.

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Western Queensland Opals— Exploration and Geoscience Data Sets

CD-ROM, Queensland Government Department of Mines and Energy, 2000, free of charge [e-mail: lcranfield@dme.qld.gov.au].

Geographic information systems (GIS) provide a new, powerful way to look at spatial data such as geology, gem and mineral occurrences, and land status. This CD-ROM provides an extensive set of data for opal occurrences in the Cretaceous sedimentary rocks of western Queensland, Australia. Also included are several short HTML (Web browser) files that summarize the contents of the CD, introduce opal in western Queensland, note sapphire and chrysoprase occurrences in Queensland, and give related information on noncommercial collecting (fossicking) regulations. The text on opals is a few pages long, with only two illustrations, but, unfortunately, it is not integrated into the GIS data sets. The latter are quite extensive, with information on geology, structure, opal occurrences, land status, regional geophysics, and topography.

The CD is simple to use. It opens immediately with a Web browser running under Windows 95 or higher (in

my case, Windows 98 under Virtual PC on a Macintosh). The GIS data sets are in ESRI ArcView and MapInfo formats, which are suited to regular GIS users. In addition, a stand-alone viewer, ArcExplorer, is included along with easy-to-follow instructions.

As a geologist and teacher, I found the data sets and background quite interesting, but the information on opals is rather thin. This CD would be of interest to those prospecting in or visiting western Queensland opal districts. On the other hand, it has little to offer for those primarily interested in the gemology or detailed geology of these occurrences. Nevertheless, the Queensland Department of Mines and Energy is to be commended for publishing this CD-ROM; there is a coming revolution in the use of electronic publication with incorporation of approaches such as GIS that simply cannot be done in print.

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Correction: The Summer 2001 Book Reviews section listed the retail price of *The Practical Guide to Jewelry Appraising* by Cos Altobelli as \$49.95. This price is for AGS members only. The actual retail price is \$64.95.


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