



Disc bracelet

On display

Title/Description: Disc bracelet

Object Type: Ornament

Materials: Marble

Measurements: Diameter 131 mm

Accession Number: 1032

Historic Period: 1st or 2nd century

Production Place: Ban Chiang, Thailand

Stone bracelets with a T-shaped cross-section are one of the most distinctive ornament types of the later prehistoric period in Southeast Asia. They have been found widely distributed from South China to Malaysia, with occasional ones appearing in Indonesia. Most museum specimens lack context, but enough have been found in controlled excavations in China, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia for us to be sure that they were valuable ornaments placed on the arms of the dead at burial, and no doubt worn on ceremonial occasions in life.

The mottled grey-white colour and texture of the stone suggests that this example comes from northeastern Thailand, although whether it is from Ban Chiang in Udon Thani Province, as reported by the vendor, is open to doubt. However, stone, bronze and even glass bracelets of identical design have been found at Ban Chiang in excavations conducted in the mid 1970s (White, 1982: fig. 49).

Drilled hardstone bracelets, although usually not T-shape in section, were already being made in North and Central China in the Late Neolithic Period (c. 3500-2500 BC) and it is probable that the techniques were gradually transmitted southwards with the expansion of the Austro-Asiatic speaking peoples, reaching Southeast Asia only in the late third millennium BC. Many sites for manufacturing such stone bracelets have been noted in Thailand, Hong Kong and Vietnam, but only the late second millennium BC jade bracelet workshop site of Trang Kenh near Hai Phong in northern Vietnam is well reported in detail (Nguyen Kim Dung, in press). There it is clear that the bracelet centres were drilled out on some form of rotating jig, using jasper gouges and working from both sides, before the central core was punched out.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
