

## BEADS FOUND IN INDONESIA

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by

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*Mrs Sumarah Adhyatman is an internationally known ceramic scholar, the Director and Curator of the Adam Malik Museum in Jakarta, and a Member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum in Jakarta.*

*Mrs Adhyatman's interest in export ceramics goes back to 1970. In 1973 she and Mr Adam Malik co-founded the Ceramic Society of Indonesia, of which she has been a Board Member and President. Both she and her husband, Mr T.K. Adhyatman, have promoted the activities of the Ceramic Society of Indonesia. Both are now Honorary Chairmen of the Society.*

*Mrs Adhyatman has written many books on ceramics, the most well known being Tempayan, Martavans (2nd ed. 1984); Antique Ceramics Found in Indonesia - Uses and Origins (1985) and Kendi, Indonesian Tradition Water Vessels (1987). In addition to ceramics, Mrs Adhyatman has also studied old beads found in Indonesia and her book Manik-Manik di Indonesia/Beads in Indonesia co-authored with Ms Redjeki Arifin, was published in June 1993.*

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**BEADS** are objects usually of round shape, which are pierced and strung together to decorate the body or an object. They are made of organic materials such as shell, bones, wood, wood-resin, seeds, coral and inorganic material such as glass, clay, ceramics, stone and metal.

Their durability, portability and universal attraction have made beads units of currency in many parts of the world. They represent the oldest form of art and were probably the first durable ornaments of men, desired not only for their beauty but also for their protective qualities.

It appears that since prehistoric times beads have played an important role in funerary rites in Indonesia as they are found in various stone grave sites from the prehistoric period (before AD 400) as in Pasemah (Sumatra), West Java, Gunung Kidul (Central Java), Besuki and Jember (East Java), and in Gilimanuk (Bali). The beads were often found with earthenware, ceramics, iron tools, bronze and gold ornaments.

In the classical period (AD 500 - AD 1500), beads might have been used as ceremonial prayer beads and also as adornment. Stone reliefs at the Buddhist temple Candi Borobudur depict court ladies wearing necklaces of beads. About AD 1400, the fashion of wearing beads in the court might have disappeared. Stone statues of royal ladies of the kingdom of the Majapahit period in East Java (AD 1300 - AD 1500) are wearing necklaces resembling gold jewellery. For the present, beads still play an important role as adornment and status symbol as well as in traditional ceremonies in various parts of Indonesia, especially in Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara and Irian Jaya.

The study of beads is relatively new. Only a few scholars have made a serious study of beads and their distribution. In 1928, Mr Horace Beck contributed a classification and nomenclature of Beads and Pendants to standardise bead terminology. Another well-known scholar is Mr WNG van der Sleen who gathered and published data from his studies of trade beads all over the world. For the last decade we owe much to Dr Peter Francis Jr from the Centre of Bead Research in the United States who has revealed the basic outlines of the manufacture and the distribution of beads in Southeast Asia.

However, the origin and dating of many old beads are still a mystery and will undoubtedly continue to present difficulties in the future. Also the process of beadmaking of many early beads cannot be fully explained and remains an educated guess.