



Chinese and Venetian Glass Beads Excavated from Fais Island in Micronesia

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Over 830 glass beads were excavated from a late prehistoric cemetery site on Fais Island in the Caroline Islands, Micronesia. In one of the 13 excavated burials a young woman had more than 310 glass beads around her wrist. Bone collagen from this burial was dated by AMS to 387 ± 64 BP.

The associated glass beads were classified into three groups based on colour and size. A sample from each group was examined for evidence of manufacturing technique. The chemical composition was determined using an X-ray microanalyser.

The first group consisted of more than 300 pale green, transparent glass beads which are less than 2 mm in diameter. The chemical composition is high in PbO (75.22%) while low in MgO. Such a high lead content is characteristic of Chinese glass. The manufacturing technique could not be determined because the surfaces were too eroded.

The second group contains several yellow, translucent glass beads. The chemical composition is also high in PbO (54.8%) and low in MgO. The beads were made by winding. The combination of winding and high lead strongly indicates that the beads were made in China.

The third group had only one white, translucent glass bead. It has particular white stripes which suggest that it is a "gooseberry" bead which was made in Venice between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

In conclusion, both Chinese and Venetian glass beads co-existed on Fais island around the time of European contact. They are likely to have been brought in from an area which had access to both beads. Island South-East Asia is tentatively considered to be the source area.