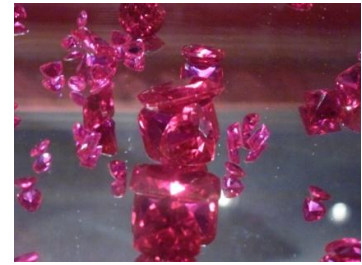


BLOOD/STORIES: BURMESE RUBIES & LOD ISRAEL'S ROMAN MOSAIC

Write-up Prepared by Ed Mazur

Thirteen attended CTPA's initial educational/familiarization offering for **2012** at the Field Museum on **January 25**. The two exhibits make an interesting "double feature" with an "M" for Mazur rating of four stars for the Mosaic and two stars for Blood/Stories.



Synthetic Rubies (by Donna Primas)

BLOOD/STORIES: BURMESE RUBIES

Continues Through Sunday, May 13, 2012

A group of guides gathered for two exhibits that require no additional charges after admission. For **BLOOD/STORIES**, this is one of the positive points of this very small and minimalist exhibit. If you or a group comes to see beautiful Myanmar (Burma) rubies—you will be disappointed. This is an exhibit with a definite political point to drive home—that Myanmar and the global trade of rubies and jade affects the everyday existences of the country's citizens—frequently in a not positive fashion. Myanmar's rubies generate almost \$500 million dollars (U.S.) annually for the country's authoritarian rulers and only minimal benefits for those who extract the gemstones and craft them into breathtaking jewelry.

BLOOD/STORIES are based on visually moving **photographs taken by Christian Holst** and offer an intimate view of the hardships caused by national resource exploitation and the crises confronting Myanmar's populations. The exhibit is enlightening albeit depressing. The group had a universal reaction somewhat akin to "Is this all there is?" If you want to see rubies you had best visit the museum's halls of gems and jade. The only rubies in the exhibit are synthetic ones in a display at the entrance. Genuine Myanmar rubies have been banned since 2008 in the U.S. and many other countries.

The exhibit features four kiosk power point displays that are difficult to read and follow because of color contrast problems. More than jewels, the exhibit raises awareness of cheap labor, sexual violence, child sexual predation, government control of the gems, restrictions on basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and press, global trade, vanity and the role of the ultimate end user—purchasers of rubies.

Myanmar has a lengthy history that includes colonization, imperialism, authoritarian rule and "independence." The country's rubies came to the attention of Europeans in the 1400s as a result of exploration by European spice traders. Myanmar or Burma as it was known until 1989 was colonized by the British, subjugated by the Japanese, liberated by the British in 1945 and became independent in 1948. Over time the military staged a series of coups that led to the nationalization of the ruby industry (mining, cutting, and carrying of rubies by any entity other than officially sanctioned government officials is strictly prohibited). This prohibition is enforced vigorously and severely.

Relations between the U.S. and Myanmar have been less than positive. Myanmar has curtailed civil liberties and had under house arrest for many years Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Kyi, a leader opposed to the ruling powers. She was released in November 2010, perhaps an indication of a "thaw" between the two countries. In 1997, the U.S. government imposed economic sanctions against Myanmar and prohibited any new investment by U.S. individuals or entities. Recently, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton visited Myanmar, met with Mrs. Kyi among others. Hopefully, this highly political exhibit is not the final chapter of Myanmar rubies.

NATURAL WONDERS: A ROMAN MOSAIC FROM LOD, ISRAEL

On loan/on display until Sunday, April 22, 2012



Small section of Lod Mosaic (The Field Museum)

This exhibit is in an area adjacent to the Myanmar presentation. The massive 14 foot x 23 foot mosaic floor of more than two million tiles is one of the world's largest and best preserved. Discovered in 1996 in Lod, Israel, which is located near the eastern Mediterranean coast of Israel, the images demonstrate the owner's wealth, power, and connections to the Roman elite circa 300 CE. Rome's legions conquered this area in the first century BCE and ruled it for the next seven hundred years.

The mosaic depicts stories of trade, cultural exchange and nature of its time period. This piece of art originally served as the decorated floor of a banquet room in the house of a wealthy Roman merchant of Lod. The tiles illustrate a unique record of biodiversity including animals native to the region such as hares, partridges, dogs, cattle, and others such as peacocks and tigers brought from Asia and lions and rhinos from Africa.

The exhibit also includes the possibility, if working, of using an interactive touch screen to create one's own mosaic. Unfortunately, for our group, technology had taken the day off and we were unable to demonstrate our artistic and design skills. The LOD Mosaic is on loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Shelby White and Leon Levy Lod Mosaic Center.



Detail of Mosaic (by Donna Primas)