

# Ruby Takes Spotlight At 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Sinkankas Symposium

By Tao Hsu, GIA



Bill Larson presents a beautiful ruby rough sample.

**N**amed after a well-noted gemologist and lapidary, the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Sinkankas Symposium took place on April 6 at GIA's world headquarters in Carlsbad, California. The event was co-organized by the San Diego Mineral & Gem Society (SDMS) and GIA. Ruby was the theme gem of this year's symposium. More than 150 attendees gathered in Carlsbad to share the history and lore of this beautiful gem.

## Ruby Localities

Roger Merk, the royal convener and organizer of the symposium for the past 11 years, kicked off the event with his opening remarks. Dr. George Harlow, curator of minerals and gems at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, gave the first presentation of the day on "The

Mineralogy and Geochemistry of Ruby from the Mogok Belt." He discussed the geological complexity of this intriguing metamorphic belt and explored the role that trace elements played as ruby origin indicators. This work was published in the June 2013 issue of *American Mineralogist* with co-author Will Bender. Harlow also pointed out the importance of keeping all the original analysis data well-organized and recorded by scientific gemology journals for the usage of future researchers focusing on related topics.

GIA's Distinguished Research Fellow, Dr. James Shigley, summarized the geological conditions and environments of ruby formation, and the main ruby deposits around the world.

Bill Larson from Pala International has been a very committed veteran of the gem and mineral world for the

past 50 years. Larson took the audience with him on a virtual tour of the world's important ruby localities while unveiling multiple breath-taking ruby crystals that have been crossed during his intensive traveling. This tour turned out to be a fiesta for connoisseurs.

Immediately after this tour, Elise Skalwold of Cornell University, a respected contributor and editor for multiple trade and scientific journals, presented for the first time at the Sinkankas Symposium Dr. Allen M. Bassett's remarkable career as a geologist and the three decades he spent in Nepal studying the geology and developing an integrated jewelry industry for this country. Inspired by the specimens in Cornell's Heasley Mineralogical Museum, Skalwold started her research on this partially mystic life story, and she will unfold it in her upcoming book.





*From left: Sinkankas speakers Dr. James Shigley, Elise Skalwold, Nathan Renfro and Nathan's wife.*

## Rubies Of South Asia

Following Skalwold, another first-time Sinkankas speaker Gary Bowersox talked about "The Rubies of Afghanistan and Tajikistan." As the leading explorer of gemstones in the South Asian area, Bowersox introduced the history of ruby mining with numerous maps and photos based on his 42 years' experience. He also presented some estimates about the current local production of fashioned and rough rubies.

A well-known author for rubies and sapphires, Richard W. Hughes brought the audience back to the year 1885 in Burma. In his presentation, "Pigeon's Blood: Burma's Mogok Ruby Mines," he guided the audience through the history of how the mines had been operated and specifically clarified the real meaning of the legendary term "Pigeon's blood," which is not derived from the blood of pigeons, but from the bright red ring in the iris of their eyes. At the same time, Hughes shared his intriguing opinion about how one should look at modern gemology.

GIA's Nathan Renfro, the Carlsbad Lead Analytical Specialist of colored stones, gave an interesting talk on ruby faceting. He explained to the audience

how to use computer-aided technique plus spectra-aided color prediction to optimize the color of faceted rubies. As a bonus, Renfro also showed the group some fascinating photomicrographs of inclusions in rubies.

## Ruby Photography

Robert Weldon, GIA's manager of Photography and Laboratory Publications, reviewed the history of

ruby photography, the new era of digital photography on rubies, and gave the attendees three simple tips on correcting ruby color in Adobe Photoshop. Weldon also spent some time taking questions from the audience.

GIA's West Coast Identification Services Director, Shane McClure, gave the last presentation of the day on Ruby Treatments. The presentation reviewed the history and new trends of ruby treatment techniques such as heating, dyeing, fracture filling and lattice diffusion. He also shared the most common treatments seen in the current market based on his wealth of experience from the daily services at the GIA lab.

Dr. George Rossman, who was assigned as the last speaker of the day, was not able to make it to the event. Merk gave a brief summary of Rossman's presentation, "Why Rubies are Red."

In between presentations and during breaks, attendees spent some time networking and enjoying the small publication market set up by GIA and SDMS. With the satisfaction from this symposium and with Rossman's paper leaving questions on the minds of participants, attendees are looking forward to another gathering next year. **IA**



*Richard W. Hughes explains to the audience that the term 'Pigeon's blood' was derived from the red ring of the iris of pigeons.*