

EARL JAM, VASAN SITTHIKET, DINOSAUR DROPPINGS, MAKEOVERS, GERMAN FOOD, BASKETBALL, MICROBUS ROUTES

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ONES TO WATCH

DINOSAUR DADDY

With dinosaur fever still running high, theories abound as to the cause of the creatures' demise. "Some people even believe that they were wiped out by AIDS," says Boonman Poonyathiro, with a conspiratorial chuckle. "Actually, I believe they became extinct after comets struck Earth."

Another man, another theory? Not exactly, for Boonman has a vast collection of million-year-old dinosaur droppings, in addition to what is probably the world's most valuable and important collection of tektites

- mysterious black objects which have aroused even fiercer scientific debate than dinosaurs.

So when Boonman speaks, academic types tend to listen. "Tektites are found in only four regions of the world," Boonman explains. One of them is Isaan, where he gathered his collection.

"There are various theories as to where they came from. The one favoured by the Americans is that they fell to Earth after a lunar volcano erupted. The Russians favour the notion that they're from another planet, while others hold that they are a fall-off from comets.

"There was another theory that they were indigenous to Earth, but were bounced into the atmosphere when a comet struck Earth, then fell back again in their peculiar state."

The latter belief was popular until 1989, when Boonman, through his contacts, acquired the two largest pieces of tektite ever found in the world. They weighed in at exactly 24.1 kilograms each, more than double the previous heaviest, and have become known as the Thai Twins. "It was a very important discovery, because they are too heavy to have bounced beyond

the Earth's atmosphere," says Boonman, "so they must have fallen from the skies."

Boonman's personal collection, including the Twins, is on display along with thousands of pieces for sale at his business, the House of Gems, at 1218 New Road, Bangkok. Apart from their scientific importance in helping answer some of the questions regarding the Earth's origins, tektites are revered as lucky charms.

Although their official name is Hin Saket Dao, ("rocks from the planet"), Thais have long referred to tektites as the dung of Lord Buddha's cow, so they soaked them in water, which they either drank or bathed in. People also polish them and wear them as amulets, and believe that if they are kept at home, they'll protect the house from fire.

The tektite sells for about one baht per gramme, with pieces ranging in size from 10 grammes to three kilos. At 700,000 years old, Thai tektite is infantile in world terms compared to several million years in other regions.

Dinosaur droppings, which are part of the coprolite family (fossilized excrement of fish and reptiles), sell for about five baht a gramme depending on size and shape.

"The droppings vary in colour, so we can tell whether the dinosaur was vegetarian or not - the meat eaters' are much darker and heavier." *Michael Cooper • photos by Rikki Ercoli*

