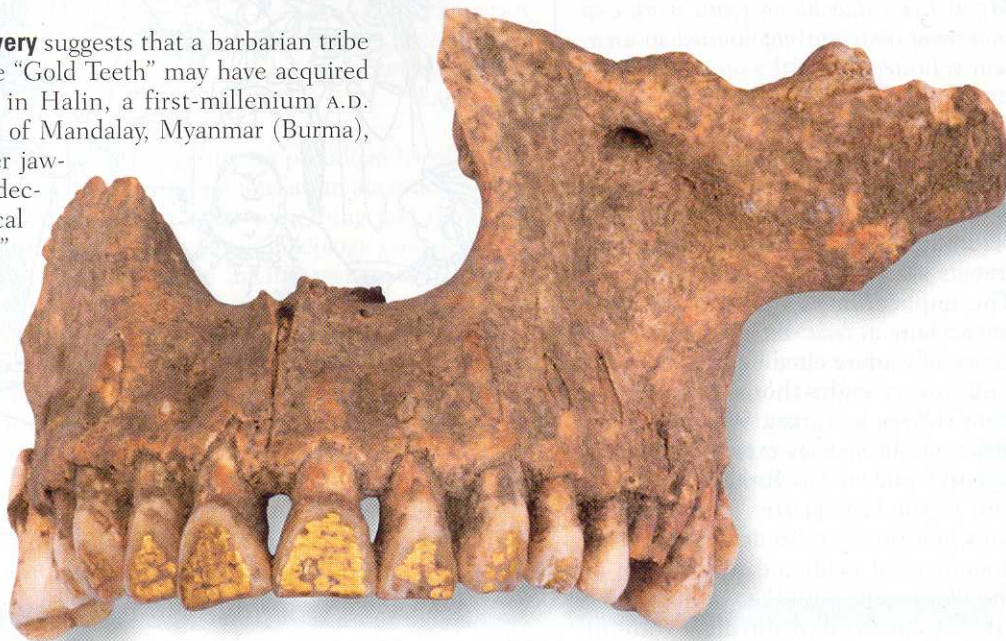


Dental Wealth

A recent archaeological discovery suggests that a barbarian tribe known to the Chinese as the “Gold Teeth” may have acquired its name quite literally. Farmers in Halin, a first-millennium A.D. walled city some forty miles north of Mandalay, Myanmar (Burma), discovered a skeleton whose upper jawbone contained eight teeth highly decorated with gold. Chinese historical records mention a “Gold Teeth” tribe living in the area between Burma and what is now the Chinese province of Yunnan over a thousand years ago.

Each of the eight teeth had been drilled with a pattern of tiny holes, and these were packed with gold foil. The pain of drilling must have been considerable. Earthenware containers thought to have been used for distilling alcohol have been found at Halin, suggesting a form of anaesthetic was available.



This thousand-year-old jawbone, featuring teeth with gold foil inlays, may have belonged to a member of the Gold Teeth tribe.



Discoveries of stone and bronze tools indicate that Halin has been continuously occupied for more than three thousand years. The city was part of an ancient trade route between China and India. The gold teeth and their owner most likely date to the first millennium A.D., when both the resources and technology were available to provide this elegant form of cosmetic dentistry. While gold bands were used by the Etruscans to repair teeth, and the Maya of Central America decorated their teeth with precious stones, the gold foil inlays from Halin appear to be the earliest example of dental work from mainland Southeast Asia.

—BOB HUDSON