

The explorer and writer Sir Richard Burton asserted that diamond cutting originated in India and “a little before the fourteenth century drifted, like the cholera of modern days, west” (Burton 1869, 106n). The development of cutting in India will be covered in

this chapter. Burton seems about right in his chronology, and there is some evidence for early cutting or at least polishing, in India. Also, of course, determining where diamond cutting originated depends on what we mean by diamond cutting. As we have already seen, there are different ways to modify a diamond, and these developed at different times and possibly in different places.

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Diamond Cutting in India and the East

The Cutting Stages

Ignoring the lapidary use of diamond—that is, using diamond chips for drilling and engraving, and diamond powder for polishing them—we can distinguish:

- Cleaving (splitting) diamonds
- Bruting, which is rubbing two diamonds against each other to smooth edges or to adjust shape
- Polishing the faces or edges of a diamond crystal or cleavage fragment by rubbing it on a fixed flat surface with diamond powder abrasive
- Polishing a diamond on a scaife (a flat, rotating cutting wheel fed with diamond powder)

Detail of figure 14.3.
