

*Speaking with Beads: Zulu Arts from Southern Africa.*

**Jean Morris, with text by Eleanor Preston-Whyte.** Thames and Hudson, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110. 1994. 96 pp., 1 b&w fig., 147 color figs. \$19.95 (paper).

This book is built around photographs taken by Jean Morris mainly in the Msinga and Nongoma areas of KwaZulu/Natal. Some of the photos date back to the mid-1970s, while the rest were taken between 1989 and 1991. The bulk of the text that accompanies the photos has been provided by Eleanor Preston-Whyte with a contribution by Geraldine Morcom who writes about the beadwork used by the members of the Nazareth Baptist Church, more commonly known as the Shembe.

The photographs are excellent and provide a good record of both the continuities and changes in beadwork styles in these areas over the past few decades. The text, however, sometimes does not come up to the same level.

Chapter 1, "Voices from the Past," provides a concise, mostly accurate review of the history of bead trade and the use of beads in the early days of the Zulu Kingdom. Some errors in detail do occur (e.g., Dingiswayo was not Shaka's uncle) but do not detract seriously from the overall story. It is unfortunate, however, that all of the beadwork chosen to illustrate this chapter comes from only one museum. As is evident from the photos, the Campbell Collections of the University of Natal, Durban, contain some visually stunning examples of early beadwork, but these early-period holdings are not well documented. An example of the difficulties that this presents can be seen in most of the captions which claim that pieces are from the Greytown area ca. 1890-1900. These objects come from a collection which was assembled by Douglas Giles, a magistrate who served in various areas of Natal including Umzinto, Port Shepstone, the Bergville area, Bulwer and Greytown from 1884 to 1923. He then retired near Greytown where he died in 1938. The collection was donated to the museum by his widow in 1949. No specific information accompanied the collection so it can only be assumed that it was collected roughly between 1880 and 1920, and, although it is likely that some of it came from the region he served, there is no way to identify which

pieces these are. In any case, they were certainly not all from the Greytown area. Furthermore, some of the captions are not consistent with the museum's records: the three belts on page 12 are not from the Giles collection and have no information to accompany them so should not be attributed to the Greytown area.

The statement in page 11's caption that "the colour combination of blue next to white identifies the item as originating in the Greytown area, 1890-1900" is curious and one would like to know the source of this information. In any case, so many different groups use blue and white together that it can hardly be counted on as a marker for any specific area. Similarly the statement on page 15 identifying neck ornaments as coming from Southern Natal ends by stating that "the beads are typically larger than those commonly used in Northern Zululand at the time." There are too many exceptions to this broad statement for it to be of much use to researchers. Another strange choice is the trade bead sample card reproduced on page 17 which depicts beads which were seldom, if ever, used by the Zulu. The card itself states that most of them are called Basuto beads; i.e., used by the Sotho.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the information that beads, beadwork pieces and entire outfits can convey to the observer capable of "reading" them. Most of the information is useful and accurate but, unfortunately, the attempt to use the names of Msinga conventions or styles, which were brought to light and explained by Frank Jolles, is largely unsuccessful. Of 14 attempts to apply the names of these styles to beadwork pieces, only four are accurate (Frank Jolles: pers. comm.). Other errors which could mislead researchers include using names which are not accurate, at least for the area from which the piece comes: on page 46 the necklace called *ngqi* is actually called *amapasi* by the people of Msinga, and on page 55 *ucu* is used when the correct name should be *isibebe* or another local variation (an *ucu* is a single string of beads, usually very long).

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the Nazareth Baptist or Shembe Church. It describes the origins and development of this Zulu church and discusses the dress and, particularly, the beadwork made and used by the members. Chapter 5 discusses the production of beadwork for the fashion and beadwork market,

while Chapter 6 describes the *umhlanga* or Reed Dance which brings Zulus together dressed in traditional finery to watch the young women of the Zulu nation dance. As the authors point out, this annual festival has also become an important political forum for the king.

*Speaking with Beads* will be valued especially for its wonderful photographs. Serious researchers will also benefit a great deal from the detail, such as the place and date, supplied with the field photos. However, the reader searching for accurate, detailed information could be misled by the captions in Chapter 1, and will certainly be confused by the misuse of terms describing "styles" in Msinga beadwork. It is a great pity that Jean Morris passed away shortly before the release of this book, but it will stand as a testimony to her skill and artistry as a photographer and observer of the Zulu people.

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*Collectible Beads: A Universal Aesthetic.*

**Robert K. Liu.** Ornament, Inc., P.O. Box 2349, San Marcos, CA 92079-9806. 1995. 256 pp., 309 color figs., glossary, list of bead organizations, index. \$49.95 (cloth) + \$6.55 domestic and \$9.50 foreign postage.

Spurred by the ever-increasing interest in bead collecting worldwide, Robert Liu set out to provide the bead aficionado with reliable information on collectible beads. He thus chose "to include only beads and some pendants that were available on the marketplace within the past two decades." Also, as this book is aimed at the collector, the less interesting and more inexpensive beads produced primarily during the past two decades were not considered either. While these restrictions definitely limit the subject matter, the diversity of the beads that are covered is quite impressive, nonetheless. Surprisingly, there is no price guide, seemingly *de rigueur* for a book aimed at collectors. However, Liu rightly points out that such would essentially be a waste of time as prices vary so greatly from one dealer and one place to another.

Rather than be pedantic, the author has kept the text succinct, letting the more than 300 color photographs and their captions convey much of the information. And the illustrations are superb, as one would expect of a photographer the caliber of Robert Liu. All of us who publish on beads have much to learn from his work.

To put beads in their proper perspective — as items long sought and used by peoples all around the world—Robert chose to approach the subject largely from a cultural-geographical perspective. Thus, the first part of the book deals with six relatively distinct regions: Africa; China and Taiwan; Japan, India, Himalayan Countries, Thailand, Philippines, and Indonesia; Middle East and North Africa; Precolumbian Americas; and The Americas and Europe.

While dealing with the entire continent excluding the area that encompassed ancient Egypt, the chapter on Africa emphasizes the west coast from Morocco to Nigeria. This part of the world has been a principal source of collector beads since at least the late 1960s, when boxcar loads of millefiori and other European-made beads began to flood into the United States from that continent. Then some of the beads began to be bought back by Africans, while others found their way to markets in the Near and Far East. After discussing the complexities of the African bead trade, Robert takes the reader on a tour of the various beads that this continent has made available to the collector. Both local and imported manufactures are included.

China and Taiwan, the subject of chapter 3, are collectively the second most prolific source of collector beads in the world. Following resumption of trade with the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s, the subsequent influx of Chinese beads and jewelry was one of the largest to hit the United States. Among the most intricate and beautiful of the imports are the early glass beads which, unfortunately, have been increasingly faked in recent years. Other imports to be discussed are beads composed of various natural organic and inorganic materials, as well as synthetic inorganics, especially glass.

The next chapter takes in other selected Asian countries, including Korea and Japan, India and the Himalayan countries, Thailand, The Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The great diversity of beads, both old and new, to be found here makes this