

1993b West African Powder Glass Beads. *Ornament* 16(4):97, 100-101.

Sinclair, G. E.

1939 A Method of Beadmaking in Ashanti. *Man* 111:128.

Margret Carey
2 Frank Dixon Way
London SE21 7BB
U.K.

Les Perles: Au fil du textile.

Natacha Wolters. Dans le droit fil. Syros, 9 bis, rue Abel-Hovelacque, 75013 Paris, France. 1996. 152 pp., 158 color figs., 4 b&w figs., bibliography. 250 French Francs (paper cover).

In the introduction, Claude Fauque dedicates Natacha Wolters' book *Les Perles: au fil du textile* to the "dialogue between beads and thread." Superbly illustrated, the book describes not only techniques from the past, but also contemporary methods, principally from Europe. Throughout, the author provides unique insights pertinent to the history of beadwork.

The first of five chapters covers the renewal of interest in beads during the 1960s, and the further development of this interest in the U.S. in the 1970s. A history of beads follows, they being describing as rich in symbolism throughout the world since prehistoric times. Magical beads have entered into the composition of numerous talismans, adorning fetishes and decorating the accessories of magicians and sorcerers. Today, in Europe, simple beaded and sequined textiles made in China and India at bargain prices can be found everywhere in ready-to-wear shops. In contrast, wonderfully intricate creations by the high fashion industry show a grand extravagance in the use of materials and the mastering of beading techniques.

The translated title of Chapter 2 is "Man and Beads, or how man invented glass beads, made them last through the centuries, associated them with their rituals, wore them in town as well as in the country." The photograph of coral-colored bead samples from the Salvadori glassworks (France) is particularly interesting. Among other things, Salvadori is known for its reproduction of old colors from the past. However, Wolters' statement that Salvadori is the only

current producer of glass beads in France (p. 32) is somewhat misleading. Actually, Salvadori is the only maker of *seed* beads left in France, whereas there do exist several glass beadmakers, most of them producing for the high fashion industry (Opper and Opper 1991).

Following an explanation of how millefiori beads are made is a passage (p. 38) that mentions several names given to specific beads. Given the wide range of such names and their descriptions in the existing bead literature, more attention to already-published research would have strengthened this section considerably.

In her description of wax-filled blown glass beads, the author describes them as being made in only two colors: goldtone, made with yellow pigment, and coppertone, made with cinnabar. Other wax-filled blown beads were additionally decorated by applying *essence d'orient*, a nacreous coating, to the inside surface of the beads, as mentioned in another section by Wolters (p. 41). It should be noted that several other colors also existed, made to imitate stones used in jewelry. Colors were sometimes combined to give a jasper-like effect.

Glass beadmaking is then covered, followed by how beads were used in religious rituals. Wolters next discusses 19th-century costumes and fashions in both urban and rural areas. Page 48 shows two typical examples of early 20th-century postcards. Respectively, they depict a girl and a grown woman from Brittany, both dressed in their traditional Sunday finest. These postcards are particularly interesting because they are adorned with actual samples of beads and sequins attached to the cards. Unfortunately, the author dates these rare examples to the 1920s, whereas the postcards are typical of those published after 1906, but before the beginning of the Second World War. In fact, the stamp cancellation on one of the postcards shows a mailing date of 1908.

Brittany is a region that has long conserved the practice of wearing traditional costumes. This tradition is of such cultural importance that the French government has led an official inquest since 1990, seeking out and documenting Breton women who continue to wear these decorated costumes.

Embroidery using beads is covered in the third chapter of the book. Numerous examples are shown

and discussed, such as beaded fabrics from ancient Egypt and Byzantium, embroidered religious articles used in 17th-century French churches, and icons. Also shown is a 19th-century English chair entirely covered with beaded embroidery. Different techniques of embroidered beadwork are described. Every fabric is the result of a different and sophisticated technique, and these different techniques, used at different times during the evolution of this art form, serve to identify the age of the fabric.

The astonishing method called *sable* appeared in France at the end of the 17th century, and seems to have been perfected in Paris. It called for using the smallest seed beads available; up to 155 of these tiny beads being used to cover only one square centimeter! The beads were attached using a method influenced by both basket-weaving and lace-making techniques, and resulted in a very supple material.

In the fourth chapter, Wolters shows various examples of beads that have been embroidered, strung, knitted, woven, and crocheted to create purses, mittens and other items. In the 19th century, colored glass beads from Berlin offered a wide range of colors, allowing beadworkers to make whatever they wished. The goal of finished pieces from this period was to imitate intricate paintings. Motifs were, for the most part, symbolic; some of the more popular themes were flowers and other plants. Romanticized rural scenes were also very popular, as were patriotic and domestic subjects. Contemporary objects, such as a Zulu necklace and a bracelet from Togo, are also included in this section.

Loosely translated, the fifth and final chapter is titled "Crazy About Beads." Here, Wolters concentrates on collectors and artists alike. Examples shown include French masterpieces from beadworking studios, work by the House of Lesage and the House of Vicaire, and objects from the collections of the Berlin Museum of Decorative Arts, as well as the Museum of Fashion and Textiles in Paris. Also depicted are works by individual contemporary artists and pieces from private collections.

Several lines written by noted French bead author M.-F. Delarozière end the chapter. Having written the

marvelous book on Mauritanian beads, *Les Perles de Mauritanie*, she opened a whole new world of beads to European and American enthusiasts alike. It is regrettable, however, that Mme. Delarozière continues to describe chevron/star beads as possibly dating to the 1st century B.C., having been made in Alexandria. This is a very old story, one that has been debunked time and again by researcher/author Jamey D. Allen (1995).

All of the numerous color photographs in *Les Perles: au fil du textile* are of excellent quality and, for the most part, very informative. However, less emphasis should have been given to photos of loose beads whose connection with the subject of beadwork is questionable at best (pp. 30, 35, 43, 144-145). Additional photographs of work by the renowned embroiderer Lesage (who wrote the preface to the book), or by the author herself, might have been more appropriate.

Despite the small criticisms in this review, *Les Perles: au fil du textile* is very well written, and contains much well-researched information. It will make a significant addition to the library of most any beadworker, collector, artist or researcher.

REFERENCES CITED

Opper, Marie-José and Howard Oppen

1991 French Beadmaking: An Historical Perspective Emphasizing the 19th and 20th centuries. *Beads: Journal of the Society of Bead Researchers* 3:47-59.

Allen, Jamey D.

1995 Review of *Glass Beads from Europe*, by Sibylle Jargstorf. *Beads: Journal of the Society of Bead Researchers* 7:102-104.

Marie-José Oppen
9 Rue de la Faneille
66190 Collioure
France