

is no surprise to read that so many pieces have spiritual connotations.

Hector's insistence on excellent-quality photographs helps elevate the field. Some may carp at Hector's use of "pretty pictures," but being in the pretty pictures camp myself, I find that nice photography performs a number of important functions: it consistencises the presentation so that the reader may more easily concentrate on the material; it legitimizes the work by the attention paid to it; and it enables the serious reader to more accurately understand what the writer is trying to convey by having clear, easily readable—and pleasurably viewed—pictures to examine. I once asked the Japanese bead manufacturer Mr. Katsuoka why the books he published had so many pictures and so few words and he shrugged and said, "Nobody reads." Sadly I think he is more right than not, so pictures must often bear the weight of conveying the writer's message. If that must be so, it's best that they be good, clear, and preferably in color.

Finally, Hector has instituted a practice that I hope, in this web-based era, may be taken up by authors and publishers everywhere. That is the establishment of an errata page on her website for errors found in her book and she encourages her readers to email her if they spot any. While many of those she's noted so far are editing or simple spelling errors, some are more serious and correct erroneous information, such as a reference to preparations for a funeral ceremony which are in fact preparations for a wedding ceremony, and for another photo, clarifying that the image of three sashes was upside down and so the caption identified the top and bottom pieces incorrectly. This is a valuable addition to the general field of writing. Who better to know the errors in their book than the author him or herself?

Valerie Hector may be contacted at <http://www.valeriehector.com/>. Add `errata.html` to this address to reach her errata page.

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Beads of Borneo.

Heidi Munan. Editions Didier Millet, 121 Telok Ayer Street, #03-01, Singapore 068590. 2005. 144 pp., 204 color figs., 10 b&w figs., index. \$30.00 (hard cover).

Beads have occupied an important place in the culture of insular Southeast Asia. A number of significant publications have highlighted the long presence of beads and beadmaking in the Indonesian archipelago. In Borneo, one of the archipelago's largest islands, beads have played a prominent role as heirloom items, in rituals, as talismans, and as decoration for clothing. Yet, the literature on the place of beads and beadwork in the history and cultures of Borneo has been surprisingly fragmented. *Beads of Borneo* by Heidi Munan, a veteran bead researcher and the Honorary Curator of Beads at the Sarawak Museum, helps to address this issue by providing a descriptive account of contemporary functions of beads and beadwork in this country.

Munan is concerned with the way in which beads and beadwork remain meaningful and are integrated into contemporary culture in Borneo. The main focus of the book is on the stories and accounts about beads and beadwork that she has gathered from her research as Borneo moved into the 21st century. The book is abundantly illustrated and divided into seven chapters, with the first two providing a brief background for her subsequent discussions about the different functions of beadwork.

The population of Borneo consists of a number of cultural and linguistic groupings who have different uses for beads and diverse attitudes towards these objects. In her opening chapter, Munan emphasizes this heterogeneity in an accessible way for those less familiar with Borneo without trivializing its complexity. She also highlights an instance of the exchange of beadwork; for example, when Maloh beaded garments are found in Iban and Orang Ulu longhouses. Whereas bead uses may vary, the products of each culture are not necessarily isolated and this suggests that we need to be aware of the impact of interaction and exchange. In addition, Munan notes that the introduction of religions such as Christianity and Islam has encouraged the locals in some cases to re-evaluate the role of beads in their culture.

Most of the beads in Borneo were imported, and the second chapter of the book provides an overview of the main methods of beadmaking, the sources of beads, and the trade of beads. While to the bead collector and researcher, the material of which a bead is made and its origin are important in characterizing and understanding it, Munan makes a point that is very salient to appreciating bead culture—that for some local owners of beads, such information is irrelevant. What is important for them is that the beads were handed down from their mothers or grandmothers and great-grandmothers, or that beads were brought back by their ancestors from abroad. Beliefs about the origins of beads

can also differ on a generational basis, with a few elderly people believing that beads “grew” in the ground, whilst others are aware that beads were imported.

Chapters Three to Six are concerned with the functions of beads in Borneo: their uses in ritual and rites of passage, as symbols of wealth and status, and as decoration and personal ornamentation. Munan enriches her descriptions with the personal accounts of locals, enlivened with extracts of local verses about beads to show that there are numerous ways in which beads take on meanings. The significance of beads in many instances relates to their associative qualities—the physical characteristics of beads, the circumstances through which they were obtained, their provenience, and their history (or “biography” as anthropologists might put it). In other cases, the mystique of beads imbues them with special qualities, such as the potential to invoke the presence of spirits, or protective powers. The types and colors of beads used vary from group to group, as do their storage or display. The valorization of old and new beads, and whole and broken beads also differs.

Today, beads and beadwork take on a role as markers of cultural identity, transforming their contemporary meanings. In Chapters Five and Six, Munan discusses the changes in the way beaded clothing is used and what effect this has had on beadwork. Garments that were once strictly for ritual purposes have now become traditional dress. She provides examples of local designers who seek inspiration from traditional beadwork. New beads and beadwork are produced to satisfy a demand for ethnic fashions and tourist souvenirs.

The final chapter is a descriptive list of the most important types of beads in Borneo societies. Each description is helpfully illustrated with a photograph that facilitates the identification of a seemingly bewildering array of bead types. The local names are also provided. In addition, almost all the beads types she discusses are indexed (doughnut beads are an exception), allowing the reader to cross-refer between the final chapter and the rest of the book, making this section a useful reference. Even though bead researchers have sought to develop a consistent and systematic method of characterizing beads based on their shapes, colors, materials, light-reflecting properties, and manufacturing processes, bead nomenclature can be confusing simply because of the existence of the myriad varieties. Munan seems to be aware of the difficulty and provides straightforward descriptions in English to identify beads alongside common local names. It would also have

been helpful, however, if she had consistently included descriptive terminology used in standard bead studies to facilitate cross referencing with other publications; for example, doughnut beads are disc or sub-oblate beads, whilst pyjama beads are polychrome striped beads.

The book includes a bibliography which, whilst not exhaustive, does list important literature both on beads and on Borneo history and culture. Given that the book appears to have been written for a wider non-specialist audience, it would have been useful to organize this according to topic, particularly as certain areas (e.g., bead trade and bead manufacturing processes) were covered in a cursory manner but have already been written about in some depth by other researchers.

In her preface, Munan stresses that bead tastes and concepts have changed markedly over the last century. By bringing together a wealth of accounts, Munan deftly evokes a picture of beads as material objects that have played and continue to play an important part in giving form to the traditions and cultures of Borneo. By allowing her observations and the stories she tells to speak for themselves with minimal re-evaluation, she succeeds in demonstrating that the potency of beads is in their evocation of local lore and myth and as things imbued with social and personal histories. The insights she provides prompt questions about the extent to which beliefs about beads have persisted or become modified and transformed, and how the past itself is interlaced into the present. Although they remain unanswered within the loose historical framework of the book, taken as a whole, *Beads of Borneo* can, in fact, serve as a valuable springboard for in-depth studies that address such questions.

Munan mentions at the outset that her intention is to deal specifically with beads themselves; what she terms “small things.” Yet, its overtly modest scope and brevity will not confine her book to being only a record of the contemporary notions about beads in Borneo. It also encourages us to take a closer look at larger issues such as tradition, memory, and cultural identity, and the relationships between small things such as beads and the wider processes of cultural change.

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