

BOOK REVIEWS

The History of Beads: From 100,000 B.C. to the Present, Revised and Expanded Edition.

Lois Sherr Dubin. Abrams, 115 West 18th Street, New York, NY 10011. 2009. 396 pp., 475 color figs., foldout timeline, index. ISBN 978-0-8109-5174-7. \$75.00 (hard cover).

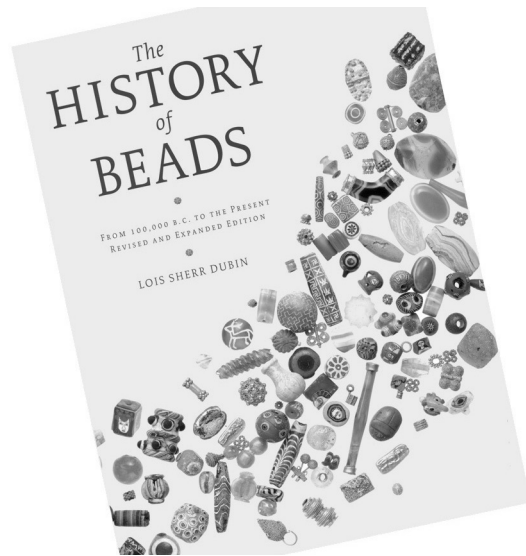
The Worldwide History of Beads.

Lois Sherr Dubin. Thames and Hudson, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX. 2010. 396 pp., 475 color figs., foldout timeline, index. ISBN 978-0-500-51500-6. £39.95 (hard cover).

This book, with the title *The History of Beads: From 30,000 B.C. to the Present* and 364 pages in length, came out in 1987, published by Thames and Hudson in the UK and by Abrams in the USA. A “Concise Edition” came out in 1995, published by Thames and Hudson; this was a paperback costing £12.95, with 136 pages and the important pioneering Timeline. Now, some 23 years later, a second, revised edition has come out. The title for the North American edition is *The History of Beads: From 100,000 B.C. to the Present, Revised and Expanded Edition*, while the UK edition is simply entitled *The Worldwide History of Beads*. Aside from spelling differences (American vs. British), the text is identical in both.

The new edition is 30 pages longer than the first but, until we get to page 317 and the chapter on “Contemporary: Europe and North America,” the pagination and the chapter headings are the same within both editions. The subject matter is treated partly by theme and partly by chronology or region. We start with “Introduction” and “The Beginnings” before going on to “Antiquity: From Neolithic times to the Roman Empire” and “Europe: The Late Roman Empire to the Renaissance.” The following three chapters deal with “Prayer Beads,” “The World of Islam,” and “The Age of European Expansion.” Seven chapters follow that deal with beads on a regional framework: “Africa,” “The Far East: China, Korea, and Japan,” “India,” “Central Asia,” “Southeast Asia and the South Pacific,” “Middle and South America,” and “North America.” After that, Lois Dubin takes up special themes with “The Special Beads: Amber and Pearls,” “The Magical Eye Bead,” and “Contemporary:

Europe and North America,” the last chapter focusing on the great explosion of craft beadmaking that began in the latter part of the 20th century. Bead shapes, the Timeline chart with its key and glossary, notes, and a bibliography make up the rest of the book. The notes, incidentally, often give important information that got omitted from the main body of text, as well as references.



The most obvious change in the second edition lies in the maps that come with each chapter; these are now in color, and consequently are much easier to follow. Indeed, an increased use of color is evident in that 70 illustrations in grayscale were replaced with images in color, and 200 new photographs were taken for the new edition. The author is well served in both editions by photographer Kiyoshi Togashi whose pictures are of a consistently high quality. It is a bonus for the serious bead reader that Dubin is meticulous in giving dimensions in all her captions. Most captions are close to the illustration concerned but there are many cases where one has to flip pages backwards or forwards to read them and a caption may even be split over two pages. Those on pages 247-250 are an extreme example of this.

There are some errors to point out. On pages 79, 82, and 85, the Tibetan double thunderbolt *dorje* is misspelt *djore*, an error that is repeated from the first edition. The double-page spread of beads traded in Africa is given

as being in the collection of the British Museum at the Museum of Mankind, London, although the Museum of Mankind as a separate entity closed in 1997. There is a case of proofreading carelessness on p. 258 where the caption for fig. 267a is given as a drawing of a pattern on a bead; this was present in the first edition, absent in the second. The caption should have read "Detail of birdman rock carvings." In my view, the line detail drawing in the first edition is more informative than the photographic image that was retained. Photographic images are often inferior to line drawings, as can be seen by comparing the bead forms illustrated in Horace Beck's classic publication with those on pp. 362-363. In the chapter on amber and pearl, there is still no mention of the Dominican Republic, a major source of amber.

In Africa, my area of special interest, there are surprising gaps and errors. When it comes to ancient beads, the map facing p. 20 shows the sites of Grotte des Pigeons, Haua Fteah, and Enkapune, but does not show that of Blombos Cave in South Africa, which has even older beads, although the name of the site is squeezed into the extreme bottom left of the Timeline. The site of Mapungubwe in South Africa is incorrectly listed as a tribe in the Index, with no mention of the "garden roller" beads or the connection with the Indo-Pacific bead trade from eastern India and further east except in a footnote that gives no credit to Claire Davison's work on bead analysis or the work of Peter Francis, Jr. There is no mention of the finely worked straw beads made in Mali as an alternative to filigree gold, though the Timeline shows (incorrectly) such a bead as made in Ashanti, Ghana (no. 1246). It might have been worth mentioning the great development of beadmaking and beadworking as a means of generating cash among women, especially in eastern and southern Africa.

Throughout the second edition, there was an effort to adhere to the pagination of the first edition. The final section, "Contemporary: Europe and North America," was much expanded (from 14 pages to 45) and rightly so in view of the great number of artists creating glass beads and beadwork. Beads made of plastic, especially polymer clay (Fimo), are featured; also paper as shown in the picture of a group of women in Oaxaca, Mexico (p. 325). Unsurprisingly, nearly all of the examples illustrated originate in North America and a great many pictures illustrate seed beads used to form ornaments of great complexity, which might put them outside the scope of a book on beads.

There are quite a few small typos throughout the text and captions. In the Bibliography there seems to be no

consistency in listing book titles, which may or may not be italicized. More titles originate in North America than Europe, which is normal for a book produced in the USA, but causes some surprising omissions.

To sum up, even with its omissions and irritating captions and typos, the first edition was a landmark publication in the field of bead studies and the revised edition with enhanced illustrations and Timeline is worth adding to the bookshelf.

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Phoenix Rising: Narratives in Nyonya Beadwork from the Straits Settlements.

Hwei-Fe'n Cheah. NUS Press, National University of Singapore, AS3-01-02, 3 Arts Link, Singapore 117569. 2010. xvi + 384 pp., 206 color figs., 22 B&W figs., glossary, index. ISBN 978-9971-69-468-5. \$55.00US (paper cover).

Hwei-Fe'n Cheah has written extensively on the beadwork and embroidery of the Nyonyas of the Straits Settlements and Netherlands Indies. *Phoenix Rising* is the culmination of these efforts to build a picture of Nyonya fiber arts and to place that work in a larger cultural context, both regional and worldwide. She builds on earlier work by Ho Wing Meng and Eng-Lee Seok Chee.

