

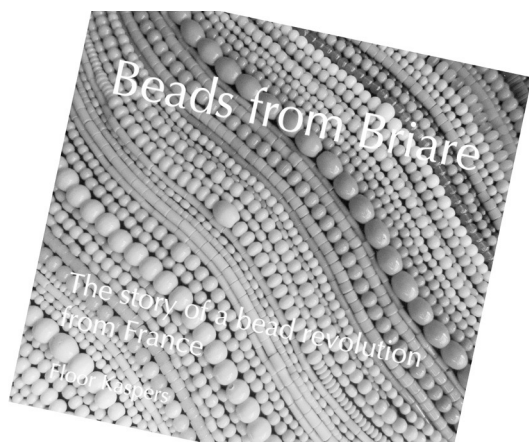
*Beads from Briare.*

**Floor Kaspers.** Marblings Publishing, Amsterdam. 2011. 74 pp., 6 B&W figs., 78 color figs. ISBN 978-9-49131-100-0. \$22.95 (paper cover); \$1.99 (Ebook, Apple iPad format <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/2602875as>)

At the beginning of *Beads from Briare: The Story of a Bead Revolution from France*, the author points out:

Most people tend to think of the intricate millefiori beads from Venice, or the drop shaped colourful beads from Bohemia, when they think of trade beads. However, when you look at the volume of beads that was made, plain beads made up the greatest part of them.... And it was exactly with these beads, that the French entrepreneur Jean-Luc Bapterosses made his success (pp. 10-11).

This book is successful because it not only delves into a subject which is not well known but also because the author has relied on her own observations rather than only citing other published research. The beads produced by Bapterosses in Briare, France, interest us because they appear in quantity among many types of beads in the African trade and elsewhere, and when Floor Kaspers became interested in them and first visited Briare in 2010 (the location of the Bapterosses factory and museum), she was allowed to visit the factory dump site. Here she found a wide array of discarded items including buttons, beads, tiles, and broken or malformed products which she categorized and which gave her a good idea of the factory's output, possibly dating back to as early as the mid-19th century, when Bapterosses set up production in Briare.



Beginning with the patent history, the book summarizes the unique chemistry and technology that created the

“revolution” mentioned in the book’s subtitle. This explains the slightly raised “band” around the center of many of the beads that makes them so identifiable, in their most common form. And indeed the bead’s unique placement between glass and ceramic adds to its interest.

Chapter 1 summarizes the scope of beads as trade items and their geographical range. The next chapter outlines the techniques used to produce most glass beads, both individually and in quantity (this helps us to better understand why certain beads cannot have been made by the Prosser method). Chapter 3 focuses specifically on “Prosser” beads which were made by a particular technique wherein finely ground ingredients moistened with milk were compressed in molds and then placed in furnaces to fuse the components. The author lists the characteristics that define a “Prosser” bead.

In Chapter 4 – which concerns the beads made at the Bapterosses factory in Briare – Floor Kaspers cites various documents including technical patents, eyewitness accounts, photos, postcards, and factory and company trade records, and presents a useful timeline for the company from 1813 to 1996. The company museum in Briare holds a collection of its products, though whoever did the displays was not the most informed scholar so not all the exhibits are reliably catalogued, and some items are wrongly ascribed. The author is diplomatic rather than critical on this matter.

Chapter 5 examines and lists the wide range of opaque beads Bapterosses developed and produced, from cylinders and spheres to pendant shapes resembling popular beads of other materials, coral, twigs, ovals, variegated layered colors resembling agate-like stripes, interlocking zigzag shapes, and a garish form with an oily-looking luster finish. Some beads exhibit colored designs applied to the surface prior to being fired. Chapter 6 concentrates on industrial rivalry with competitors in Bohemia and includes images of a number of sample cards from these companies which help us recognize how rapidly beadmaking methods were copied elsewhere.

*Beads from Briare* is well written and the paper version is a handy size with quality photographs mostly in beautiful color. It is also available in an EBook format for a very affordable price, a great trend which we hope is continued by other authors. The book is recommended to everyone who wants to know more about Prosser – or more correctly – Bapterosses beads.

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