

“Conserving Ancient Beads Within Shifting Contexts: A Case Study among the Kelabit of Sarawak,” by Poline Bala, examines why ancient beads play important roles in the social life of the Kelabit of the highlands of Borneo and discusses efforts to preserve the value of such beads in contemporary Kelabit society.

“Exploring the Cultural Meanings Conveyed by the Paiwanese Beads,” by Kathy Chen Huei Yun, explores the way in which the visual patterns on the glass beads utilized by the indigenous Paiwanese peoples of Taiwan encode meanings.

“Jewellery in Action – Examples from East Africa,” by Martina Dempf, discusses the use of beads as adornment in East Africa with specific examples from the Toposa of the Southern Sudan, the Turkana of Kenya, and the Rashaida of Eritrea.

“The Story of Beads: Ghana/Africa,” by Akwele Suma Glory, presents a brief survey of a very complex subject, glass beads and beadmaking in Ghana, West Africa.

“20th-Century Chinese Glass Bead Curtains,” by Valerie Hector, begins with a look at the historical evidence for bead curtains in Imperial China followed by a discussion of 20th-century curtain iconography and the beads that comprise the curtains.

“Ancient and Modern Beads of Korea,” by Elaine Kim, introduces the reader to the World Jewellery Museum established in Seoul in 2004 by Lee Kang-won, followed by a lengthy discussion of the ancient and modern bead culture of Korea, as well as beads made by contemporary Korean artists and jewellery designers.

“An Overview of Beads in the Sabah Museum,” by Joanna Datuk Kitingan and Su Chin Sidih, consists only of an abstract and some images of Tenggara and Rungus individuals wearing beads.

“Borneo Beads in Literature,” by Heidi Munan, discusses publications that deal with the beads of Borneo and includes a bibliography of such publications as well as a list of Internet sources.

“Opulence in Organic Bead Jewellery,” by Stefany Tomalin, presents an overview of the various organic materials that have been used to produce beads around the world.

“Discovery and Research of Various Types of Beads in Bujang Valley, Kedah,” by Zuliskandar Ramli, discusses the glass beads of the early centuries A.D. excavated from sites in the Bujang Valley of Peninsular Malaysia. Most of these appear to be Indo-Pacific beads of local manufacture but there are also polychrome beads which appear to be imports.

As in the past, this volume was printed in time to be distributed at the conference, a commendable practice. Unfortunately, to meet the deadline, editing suffered. For example, in Plate XIV, which depicts a woman with a beaded headpiece, the caption incompletely reads, “Plate XIV: Girl with bead.” In the case of Valerie Hector’s article, no attempt was made to change her figure references in text to the appropriate plate number. Instead, the captions read, for example, “Plate XXII: Fig. 1 striped curtain.”

In Stefany Tomalin’s article, there are problems with some of the headings. For example, the heading “Fossils as Beads” (p. 159) looks to be a main section heading but should be the same as the other headings on the page. Further along, the sub-section “Operculum” (p. 161) also incorporates sea urchins, stone beads, and shell slices! In a number of instances, what appear to be the speaker’s personal notes have been included (e.g., pp. 164, 165, 175).

Despite these minor shortcomings, bead researchers and collectors will find this volume a good source for information on the beads and beadwork of various Asian and African cultures, past and present.

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Glass Beads: Selections from The Corning Museum of Glass.

Adrienne V. Gennett. The Corning Museum of Glass, One Museum Way, Corning, NY, 14830-2253. 2013. 88 pp., 55 color figs. ISBN-13: 978-0-87290-192-6. \$19.99 (paper).

This beautifully produced book is a companion to the exhibition “Life on a String: 35 Centuries of the Glass Bead” (May 18, 2013 to January 5, 2014) at The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY. The volume presents full-color photographs of 50 of the finest items from the exhibit along with information regarding their manufacture, history, and cultural context. The images can also be found on the museum’s website (www.cmog.org), sometimes with a bit more descriptive material, but are larger in the print version and for this reason alone, the book is worthwhile. A visitor to the exhibition mentioned the difficulty of seeing the items in the dim light needed to conserve the integrity of the items. In the book they are large, well lit, and clear.

A question I had from the beginning was “who was this written for?” Karol B. Wight, Executive Director of the museum, provides the answer in her Forward: “These entries... may inspire the reader to seek more information in the specialistic literature on beads.” The book, then, is for a glass lover or a potential glass-bead lover, not a bead scholar.

The format for the book has a heading for each item which provides information on provenance, time period, mode of manufacture, color, and dimensions, as well as the accession number. This is followed by a description of the item itself.

I have a quibble about the headings of some of the pages: “107 Beads,” “147 Beads,” “String of Beads,” and “Bead.” These contrast with the more informative headings such as “*Magatama* Amulet,” “Chevron Bead,” “Beaded Fringe Sample Cards,” etc. It would have been more instructive to write, for example, “Southern Indian Indo-Pacific Bead Strand,” “Malaysian Indo-Pacific Bead Strand,” and “Islamic-Period Trailed-Bead Strand” to give some distinction among the presently anonymous beads.

Tina Oldknow, Curator of Modern Glass, wrote about the six contemporary pieces in the book. Adrienne Gennett, formerly curatorial assistant at the museum, wrote about all the other items. Her expertise is in 18th-century English silver and 19th-century French furniture.

The selected items are arranged chronologically from a Greek or Cretan necklace with pendants (1400-1250 B.C.) to Kristina Logan’s “Constellation Necklace” of 2011. Often the items are or show beads that were common and much loved/valued in their time; too often we are shown great rarities which, while beautiful, do not really assist with understanding the bead trajectory through time. Examples of the well-known in the book are the Indo-Pacific beads, millefiori, the ubiquitous glass seed beads, and Czech molded beads. Of course, the contemporary offerings are unique, but still the products of their time.

The last six items in the book are contemporary works of art featuring glass beads and differ enormously from the others. They refer to historic events (Joyce Scott’s beaded memento of the Rodney King beating), are works of contemporary sensibility (David Chatt’s “108 Meditations in Saffron”), or are a reworking of ancient and modern (Laura Donefer’s “Blue Note Amulet Basket”). The other 44 items are anonymous, part of the stream of bead history.

For someone beginning to study beads, how beads are made becomes of paramount importance and it was the

descriptions of fabrication that often confounded me. On page 52, the illustration shows three faceted Czech glass beads made to imitate carnelian. The technique listed at the top of the page states “ground,” while the text below describes the invention of the two-part tong mold which was used to initially form these beads; the grinding being used for finishing and removing the mold seams. A more complete technique description would have been “tong-molded, ground.” The next page, “Snake Beads,” correctly describes them as “molded,” but misspells the manufacturer’s name, Redlhammer, as Redhammer in the footnotes. Further, the text about the glass carnelians suggests the “beads were made in imitation of garnets or other red stones, such as carnelian.” Garnet and carnelian are not at all similar and this is a surprising suggestion. A usage in the text, “semiprecious stones” is outmoded; current usage requires “gemstones” to refer equally to emeralds, agates, and carnelians.

In the case of the glass carnelians, only the second manufacturing phase was mentioned; in other cases only the first is. On page 34, the millefiori bead is described as “wound” with no mention of the additional need of fused canes or marvering, but for the chevron bead on page 30, techniques are correctly listed as “cased, drawn, ground.” It is more puzzling when two beads with similar decoration have the technique described differently. On page 22, “String of Beads” (Islamic-period trailed and feathered beads) is noted as being “tooled, decorated” in the heading, and in the text it is described as “trails were inlaid into the glass and then tooled to create patterns in feathered or geometric forms.” The term “inlaid” gives the wrong impression. At the same time, “Bead, Fancy Type,” a Venetian feather bead (page 33), is correctly described as “combed. Its colored trails were laid around the matrix... and a tool was used to drag the hot trails... creating a feathered pattern.” Apparently the similarity between these beads was not noticed. In the case of beaded objects (e.g., “Italian Beaded Fringe Sample Cards,” “Ceremonial Court Chain,” and “Beadwork Bag”), however, Gennett is much more at home and fills the text page with details concerning the uses, social rank, popularity, and design characteristics of the items as well as historical connections.

The beauty of the book is in the photographs of the beads and beadwork. It’s usefulness is in the text and bibliography, and the text leads to curiosity and further investigation.

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