

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Beads of the World: A Collector's Guide with Price Reference.

Peter Francis, Jr. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 77 Lower Valley Road, Atglen, Pennsylvania 19310. 1994. 144 pp., 263 color figs., 15 b&w figs., price guide, index. \$19.95 (paper) + \$2.95 postage (North America).

It is very hard to review an essential handbook. How can one express a criticism of what sets out to be the first truly global guide by which all other future handbooks on the same subject will be judged? My bias is that of another collector, also an author, but with a very different experience of the World of Beads; i.e., from an Old World, English standpoint. I have other practical advantages: I am a dealer myself, currently in business, and experienced as a teacher of designing and threading techniques. I am in touch with hobbyists, collectors, and amateur and small-scale jewelry makers, and know very well how much such a collector's guide is needed, and how many people would buy such a handbook regardless of its quality.

Peter Francis is offering his complex and enormously detailed knowledge to create such an interest in collecting beads that it will make specialists of dabblers. Beads are so intoxicating just because, as he says, there are so many of them and they are so varied that there will always be a lot still uncharted, unlike coins and stamps. It is a subject that may involve research on any level, from reading to digging, from laboratory tests to rubbing beads against your teeth.

So taking on the task of evangelist/publicist to the average layperson for this new area of interest is quite a responsibility. Peter has prudently divided his book into three main parts: Section One, with three chapters that serve as an introduction; Section Two, *Bead Materials*; and Section Three on origins and use.

The first section introduces the subject, and shows the significance that beads have had throughout

human history, in virtually every part of the globe. It reveals how well they illustrate the development of primitive and increasingly sophisticated technology, and played a vital part in contact and exchange, and, therefore, in civilization. His way of assessing their fascination is just in terms of what they tell us about people. In the second chapter he makes useful suggestions for would-be collectors by recommending areas of specialization. Curiously, only after all that does he discuss the question "What are beads for?" in chapter three.

In Section Two Peter goes very thoroughly into the materials that beads are made of, allowing glorious comparisons across continents and across the centuries. He separates them in chapters four, five and six into "Organic," "Stone" and "Glass," respectively, which generally works except when he has to squeeze plastic in somewhere and decides to classify all plastics as eligible for inclusion in the Organic chapter. Of particular interest are photographs he has obviously taken on his travels of craftsmen at work on some of the beadmaking techniques in India.

Section Three, called "Origins and Use," is devoted to discussion of beads by geographical area of origin, divided into six areas that identify the chapters: Europe, the Middle East and India, the Far East, Southeast Asia, Africa, North and South America. I found plenty of interest in the chapters on the Middle East, India, the Far East and Southeast Asia as these are areas from which we are always getting morsels that don't match up, and it helps to have it as a complete menu.

However, on p. 13, Peter speaks of "six... truly global networks" of quantity production for extensive trading in a historic and contemporary sense; and they seem to be different from the six areas as defined in chapters 7-12. They include 1) the stone-bead industry of western India; 2) the coral-bead industry of the Mediterranean; 3) the eastern Mediterranean glass-bead industry; 4) the Indo-Pacific-bead

industry; 5) the Chinese glass-bead industry; and 6) the Western European glass-bead industry. Throughout the book he shows interesting pictures of modern glass beadmakers in Purdampur undertaking several beadmaking processes using techniques that are recognizably “low tech” or “traditional,” and we have examples of these products in enormous amounts in our shops which sell contemporary beads and ethnic accessories. But this is not what Peter includes under heading no. 4. Is the current production of lamp- and furnace-worked glass beads from India really too insignificant to count as a segment of the world bead scene?

Now we can no longer avoid mentioning the general visual impression of the book. Peter Francis states his priorities clearly enough in the preface: “It’s not really the tale of pretty little gew-gaws. It is the chronicle of our brothers and sisters around the world and throughout time.” If he did value beads for their prettiness or beauty, as a *very* large percentage of collectors do, he would have given far more attention to the prettiness of the illustrations and the clarity of what they show. Of the 266 photos which are meant to show clear details of beads singly or in groups, over 70 are unreadable, or the wrong way round, or have misleading captions. For example, what possessed him to do so many close-up pictures of beads laid on one particularly shocking pink blanket, especially the clear and frosted glass examples?

Looking through, there are photos of beads that do work visually, including the ones that acknowledge “Courtesy of” Albert Summerfield or Rita Okrent.

It is the publishers who must take responsibility for cheap color printing that reduces most of the dark hues to black, and renders every subtle shade of red exactly the same (*see* p. 61). And, if there was an art director, it is hard to imagine that the whole book could have proceeded without the photos offering some indication of scale, which is of critical importance with small treasures, as on p. 82, which has three color pictures of the typical glass beads of Indian and Pakistani manufacture, of three different scales but arranged so that you cannot grasp which are larger and which are smaller.

While having a go at the technicalities, isn’t it understood that proofreaders are employed to go through the text and check the spelling, grammar and syntax just to make sure that what is printed is

intentional and unambiguous? Even lacking a proofreader, every word processor nowadays has a “spellcheck” function. Apart from numerous inattentive slips, nearly 20 major spelling mistakes can be counted in proper names. Where in the world is Sameria (p. 52), for instance, and what are “bed curtains” (p. 31) and “tinkerers” (p. 71)?

It would be mean to argue individual points that are made; after all, how many of us have evidence to dispute it if Peter Francis shows a bead found in Africa and asserts that it was made in Germany, not Italy?

As a craftsman, however, I can’t overlook page 51 because you *cannot* straighten a badly drilled hole “with a thin file or small drill” — it is a guaranteed way to ruin a bead and break a perfectly good tool.

Peter Francis gives us references, not a bibliography as such, and some of the omissions are puzzling, as the budding collector is likely to need to know about basic stuff. Why has he forgotten to include Elizabeth Harris’ booklet *A Bead Primer* published by The Bead Museum, yet mentioned *The New Beadwork* of Kathlyn Moss and Alice Scherer which is about beadwork, not beads? Only one of the great number of jewelry-collecting books published by Schiffer, his publisher, is mentioned; surprisingly, neither of the volumes by Sibylle Jargstorf on the development of the Czech glass-jewelry industry are included.

Concerning the Price Guide, this is the section in any collecting book that can make you gloat or groan and, occasionally, laugh. In the role of dealer with many American customers it is useful to be *au fait* with what well-informed collectors understand to be the right price for a rare or special specimen, and equally useful to know the ceiling price for something exotic or unfamiliar that you may want to buy. It has already proved invaluable and educational: when offered glass beads from Plumbon Gambang a second time, I was able to point out the amount that we were overcharged when they were a novelty here and no one in London had seen them. Also, it is useful to demonstrate to customers how modest my prices are against some kind of impartial standard.

We still refer with reverence and gratitude to Beck and van der Sleen although most of their pioneer research work has been subsequently overruled, and it is likely that the same fate will befall any landmark book on a relatively new subject. So, while I simply

dare not sum up with any kind of verdict, I will admit that my copy is already well-thumbed despite the amusement and outrage, and I know it will bring more converts to the fold!

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Beads from the West African Trade Series.

Volume VII, "Chevron and Nueva Cadiz Beads," 1993. 128 pp., 40 color plates. \$35.00 (cloth) + \$2.50 postage (U.S.).

John Picard and Ruth Picard. Picard African Imports, 9310 Los Prados, Carmel, California 93923.

John and Ruth Picard have again presented the bead world with a visually stimulating work; this one covers chevron and Nueva Cadiz beads. The photography is the work of Forrest L. Doud, and he is clearly a master of his craft. The quality of the printing is also excellent, and the resulting volume is indeed beautiful.

This is not a scholarly work. There are no text citations to tell the reader when or where the information originated, and this fact may annoy the specialist. However, there are a few suggested readings that should prove useful for persons wanting additional information.

There are relatively few attempts to attribute dates to the bead varieties, but this is probably a positive attribute to the book. The reader is not presented with hearsay dating so common in the marketplace. Most of the information on dating comes from sample cards, some of which are reproduced in the book. These cards provide an abundance of useful information, and clearly show that many beads once thought (especially by collectors) to be very old were actually made in the 20th century. The publication of the sample cards is an important contribution to the bead literature. Further research into archaeological specimens could have provided additional dating information. For example, chevron bead no. 312 is undoubtedly an 18th-century variety as virtually identical beads with

red, blue, and green exterior layers are found at archaeological sites in the southeastern United States.

Some bead enthusiasts will surely complain that several of the illustrated beads are not chevron beads, especially some of the beads without molded layers such as nos. 116-119, 130 and 137. Others might argue that beads molded with flower-petal molds instead of star molds are not chevrons, even though the manufacturing process is virtually identical. To the Picards' credit, however, we should read their discussion of the term "rosetta" on page 5. Both chevrons (in the modern sense) and multilayered striped cane beads were apparently lumped together by the manufacturers according to the Picards. This is an interesting observation, although one wishes that it was better documented. Could we be dealing with a translation problem? The Picards' inclusion of chevron imitations is a useful addition to the volume.

Many readers will find the lack of a scale in the photographs a major shortcoming. However, text notations do reveal that the photographs are actual size, 125%, 200%, etc. The use of several sizes of reproduction can be annoying but, with careful work, most sizes can be established. Clearly, the reported scales of reproduction are approximate, as can be determined by checking the size of the illustrations with the reported bead sizes. For example, the large chevron bead (no. 61) on p. 25 is said to be 73 mm long, but is larger in the photograph.

The volume also discusses Nueva Cadiz beads. The Picards correctly note that there are two "generations" of these beads; those that date to the early to mid-16th century and those that date to the 19th-20th centuries. It is the reviewer's opinion that there is a largely separate third generation that dates to the first third of the 17th century, but some archaeological specimens have been attributed to the late 16th century suggesting continuity with the early to mid-16th-century specimens. This controversy will only be resolved by further research, especially an examination of the composition of "Dutch" vs. "Spanish" specimens.

Finally, credit is due the Picards for including the modern chevron beads of artist Art Seymour. His work is outstanding by any measure and, as the Picards note, should not be confused with older Venetian or Dutch chevrons.