

BOOK REVIEWS

Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture, and Meaning.

Lidia D. Sciama and Joanne B. Eicher (eds.).
Berg, Oxford and New York (distributed by
New York University Press, 70 Washington
Square South, New York, NY 10012-1091).
1998. i-xvi + 317 pp., 86 b&w figs., 2 appendices,
index. \$19.50 paper cover (\$55.00 cloth cover) + \$4.00 postage.

Although the main title suggests that this book ought just to be about different sorts of beads with lots of information, pictures, and details about how they are made and who made them (and wouldn't such a book be a wonderful resource to have on our shelves?), the subtitle conveys that it is much more specialized. It is essentially an academic book with a heavily anthropological slant. This is not surprising as it represents the published proceedings of a one-day workshop on "Gender in the Making, Trading, and Uses of Beads" which was held in Oxford, England, in 1995, sponsored by the Cross-Cultural Centre for Research on Women at the University of Oxford. The workshop is a continuation of earlier cross-cultural studies of women and crafts which produced such volumes as *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning* (1992, edited by Barnes and Eicher) and *Carved Flesh/Cast Selves: Gendered Symbols and Social Practices* (1993, edited by Broch-Due, Rudie, and Bleie), all published in an ongoing series by Berg.

Having set the book in perspective, it is worth summarizing what it aims to do and the various subjects each author covers, since anyone with an interest in studying, collecting, researching, or using beads will find something of interest in this volume. The initial plan before the workshop was to examine the labor conditions of women who make, thread, or otherwise work with beads around the world and to analyze their activities as traders, entrepreneurs, and employers of other women in a number of different

geographical and cultural areas. Other themes to be looked at were present-day uses of beads and a broad historical overview of the processes and trade routes involving large quantities of glass beads mainly made in Europe and traded around the world; beads which are now making their way back to Europe as well as to other markets, their value much increased.

However, the scope of the book was enlarged because the range of knowledge and the variety of approaches presented by the workshop participants and later contributors required it. The book's emphasis shifted from the manufacturers to the exchange, uses, and symbolic meaning of beads, and the questions asked changed from the makers of beads to the objects themselves, with gender as an embracing theme. Thus, the volume covers a range of time from prehistory to the present day, and various aspects of beads in countries as diverse as Chile and China.

Beads and Bead Makers contains twelve chapters and two appendices, each with its own references section, rather than a comprehensive bibliography for the whole book. It is true to say that the depth of bead knowledge covered by most articles is not insignificant; this book should be looked on as a good bead resource, not just as a work of anthropology. Some of the articles are archaeological in scope, others are by ethnographical specialists or social historians.

The main topics covered are: making and exporting beads from Venice from the Medieval period to the present day; gender in the beadwork used in African aesthetic and ritual culture; hand-blown glass Venetian beads which are used as a family emblem on the island of Buguma in Nigeria; making and using *lantana* beads in Nigeria; a history of Christian rosaries in the Andes of Chile; why red beads are important in Ecuador; beads used by African Americans in the U.S.A. before the Civil War; the ways beads are used and perceived in the Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans; beads used by the Kelabit

people of Sarawak, Borneo; Greek beads of the Mycenaean period—the age of heroines in Greek tradition and mythology; archaeological investigations into ancient Chinese beads; what beads mean to craft producers supported by Oxfam; and “Don’t get your Necklaces in a Twist!” or specialist bead terms for researchers and collectors.

The contributions are all packed with useful information, and are illustrated with 86 black and white drawings and photographs. This is where, I am sorry to say, the book is weakest, because somewhere in the scanning or printing of many of the photographs they became dark or overinked and the detail has been completely lost or obscured. I have a paperback copy, so I’m not sure whether this unattractive feature also appears in the hardback edition, but the photographs of Sarawak beads in Figs. 10.3 and 10.4, for example, are atrocious, while the adorned Uduk women in Figs. 1.9a and 1.9b have been reduced to mere silhouettes! I would also have preferred a little tighter proofreading to get rid of silly little mistakes such as “Neckless” instead of “Necklaces” in the Table of Contents. Furthermore, the Gemmological Association is at “Greville” Street, not “Groville” (p. 305), my address for the Bead Society of Great Britain is “Casburn Lane” not “Cosburn Lane” (p. 305) and, as any good bead researcher ought to know, they are Nueva “Cadiz” beads not Nueva “Cad” (p. xi)!

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Glasperlen Christbaumschmuck/Glass Bead Christmas Tree Ornaments.

Waltraud Neuwirth. Selbstverlag Dr. Waltraud Neuwirth, P.O. Box 11, A-1194, Vienna, Austria. 1995. 320 pp., 167 color figs., 95 b&w figs., ATS 640 (hard bound) + ATS 85 surface postage.

Many people’s happiest memories revolve around Christmas, a joyful occasion to celebrate the birth of Christ and exchange gifts and good cheer with loved ones and friends. At the center of the event was—and

continues to be—the beloved Christmas tree, frequently a scruffy one hacked down in a nearby woods. Yet, even the most lopsided and malformed tree could be turned into a dazzling wonder through the addition of tinsel, garlands, and a variety of ornaments. With so many fond memories attached to them, it is no wonder that many people admire and collect Christmas tree ornaments. If you fall into this category, you will love Waltraud Neuwirth’s newest book.

Written in German and English, the book deals with the Gablonz-industry Christmas tree ornaments collectively produced in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Austria during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The text is relatively brief, the English portion taking up only 20 pages. It surveys the different forms of ornaments that were produced, as well as the beads and other components that went into their composition. While several kinds of drawn and molded beads were utilized, hollow or blown beads were the principal constituents. Composed of thin, non-transparent glass to obscure each ornament’s wire framework, the hollow beads were ideal for Christmas tree ornaments as their extremely light weight kept even a small tree’s branches from sagging.

For the bead researcher, the section devoted to hollow beads contains useful information concerning manufacturing techniques (including interior ribbing and silvering/gilding) and nomenclature. Another section discusses how to date and determine the place of manufacture of the beads and the ornaments they compose. A list of the principal regional manufacturers and merchants of Christmas tree ornaments during the first half of the 20th century occupies six and a half pages.

An additional 28 pages are devoted mainly to German technical articles concerning the manufacture and marketing of beads and ornaments, especially silver- and gold-lined blown beads, from the late 19th century to the present. There is much valuable information here but the technical language that pervades the material apparently made it too difficult to translate for the benefit of English-speaking readers. This is unfortunate, but understandable.

The concise text is much enhanced by a profusion of excellent color and black-and-white illustrations of a wide variety of ornaments and their components, some on sample cards. German/English captions