

## BOOK AND DVD-VIDEO REVIEWS

### *Gem and Ornamental Materials of Organic Origin.*

**Maggie Campbell Pedersen.** Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, Linacre House, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX2 8DP, UK, and 200 Wheeler Road, Burlington, MA 01803. 2004. i-xiv + 268 pp., 203 color figs., glossary, index. £35.00 (hard cover).

This is one in a series of technical books on specific gem materials, each written by an accredited specialist and FGA (Fellows of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain), and certainly a good reference book dealing with all the precious organic materials is a valuable addition to the series. It matches the other Butterworth Gem series books in size, hard-cover format, and price.

The majority of readers will probably be those who want to identify something they have in hand, and will consult a book like this to find the likeliest possibility. The book concentrates on materials valued highly in our western traditions rather than the common ones (such as seeds) so popular with less-developed cultures.

Maggie Campbell Pedersen is an experienced gemmologist as well as an excellent gem photographer, and treats the whole subject from a gemmologist's point of view. The book is much more readable and fun than some of the others in the series which concentrate on comparing physical and chemical data and geological statistics in order to identify stones. Organic materials are so varied and unique that identification has to be predominantly visual and, even so, the variations within one substance are enormous. Consequently, the book provides many clear objective photos and close-up details. The photos are numbered to reflect each chapter, which seems to match the system in the other books in the series. The materials are discussed in 13 chapters, and real and fake examples are dealt with under each heading.

The longest chapter is on Amber and Copal, which are both of particular interest to Maggie. She has visited numerous historic sources, researching these fossil resins in particular. There are a large number of good magnified images illustrating the many properties and variations of the substances, which are not easy to show when the materials may reflect light, transmit it, refract it, or even fluoresce.

Amber inclusions, sunspangles, fractures, deterioration, and crazing on surfaces are all clearly shown.

Ivory, Bone, Antler, Rhino Horn, Horn, and Tortoiseshell each have a separate chapter. The rationale for this seems to be that the various common bone and horn-like substances divide into these categories by the composition of the material. Antler, though often called "deer horn" is in fact composed of the material of bone but contains more collagen, while rhino horn is composed of compacted hair fibers, so is correctly described as "keratin." Horn is mostly keratin as is Baleen, though the latter is discussed in the Miscellaneous chapter, where the reader will also find "Hornbill Ivory," yet another keratinous substance. The Ivory chapter includes tooth and tusk materials from elephants and other animals.

There are also chapters on Shell (which includes mother-of-pearl), Jet, Pearl, and Coral, while all the other substances she lists are found either in the Miscellaneous or Plastics chapters.

If your object is black, you may have to go through the alphabetical lists in the Jet chapter before you can determine that it might be "Bois Durci," though the only example of this is illustrated in the chapter on Plastics. You would then discover that it is made from albumen, possibly derived from ox blood, mixed with very fine sawdust and then molded. It was invented in France in 1855. Shellac, however, can look similar and the earliest shellac dates back to the same decade.

The Miscellaneous chapter includes animal vertebrae as beads, carved vegetable ivory, nuts, feathers, leather, and some insect parts, but quills and claws are only mentioned in passing. There are many omissions, however, including wood which is a huge category in its own right. Other disappointing omissions are natural flowerheads, grasses, seeds, shells used intact, fossils, and petrified organic materials which are so relevant to beads as the base material for the many decorated Pumtek beads—very important items in a bead collection. And what about Bezoar stones, the stomach stones of cattle, etc., which were preserved as charms against poison, cherished in former times and set into amuletic jewellery? Because of these omissions, a researcher will also need to consult other sources to get a complete picture of organic substances used for ornaments.

As far as I can judge, the information she does give is generally correct.

The author also discusses such issues as storage, conservation, and protecting endangered species. Of the 268 pages, there are seven near the end devoted to “charts,” three to a glossary, and five for an index, which could have been much more comprehensive.

If you wish to consult this book in a practical way to identify or learn more about the material of a particular piece, you still have to start with some idea of the substance, then find the pages that refer to it and see if there is a match. This book should also be useful to those with a general interest in the subject but the price is steep unless you will be using it frequently, in which case I would certainly recommend it.

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*World on a String: Parts One, Two, and Three.*

**Diana Friedberg and Lionel Friedberg.** Zepira International, Los Angeles, CA. 2004-2005. \$24.95.

For bead researchers, I recommend viewing each of the *World on a String* DVDs at least three times. Really!

The first viewing is to see what is included in this historic series. Parts One, Two, and Three are already being shown on Public Television. Diana is traveling from Guatemala to Tahiti, the U.K., Brazil, and onward to tell the story of stone and modern Art Glass beads for Parts Four and Five. Because all are bound to become the “lingua franca” between bead lovers and everybody else, bead researchers will want to be conversant with the material in *World on a String*.

The second viewing is to remind yourself of why you fell in love with beads in the first place. You will also reaffirm that beads are a touchstone to world cultures, social issues, history, and hope.

By the third viewing, you are familiar with the enormous content of the series, and can give yourself the pleasure of viewing each scene of each section of each part as an art

piece. *World on a String* has so far won eight international awards for documentary film making.

I do want to offer this caveat: whatever your particular area of study or collecting, you will certainly wish that you had at least ten minutes on camera—or ten more minutes if you are one of the many interviewees—to present your special knowledge and expertise. As you see, however, the scope of the film and consider the range of the potential audience, you are likely to accept the necessity of a simple overview of history, theory, and current bead research. What is in the films is documentation of beadmaking and bead use as it has never been shown before... in all its dynamic, gritty glory.

Each of the DVDs has a theme. Part One, *The Eternal Bead*, is an overview of all types of beads. Part Two, *The Tiny Mighty Bead*, is about glass seed beads. Part Three, *The Sacred Bead*, views beads being used in various religious contexts. Each part is an international journey. Diana is often invited to lecture at screenings, and her tales of reaching some of the locations (26 countries so far) sound like Doctor Seuss and the troubles of getting to Solla Sollew.

Here is the itinerary for *World on a String, Part One: The Eternal Bead* (2004, 93 minutes): Bead beginnings and early beadmaking and use; Bushmen in Southern Africa; The Fertile Crescent; The Indus Valley, agate, and carnelian; Mesopotamia and Egypt; India, beads made by cottage industry and mass production; Venice, glass working traditions; Ghana, beadmaking and the marketplace.

After watching *The Eternal Bead*, I appreciate the beads that I wear, study, and string even more than before. For example, the portraits of “the men who breathe glass” had a profound impact on my feeling for the simplest glass beads from India. Now when I look at those beads I see not only their shape and color and translucence, but the fierce heat of the glass furnaces, the traditions and economy of entire communities, and the smokey, handsome faces of the glassworkers who accept beads as their life.

“The men who breathe glass” is my lone reference to the commentary of the films. I had planned to use many quotes from each part’s narrative, but as I prepared this text I realized that all the narrative, as written and read by Lionel Friedberg, is itself a work of art. Trying to select an occasional elegant phrase was just too difficult because the whole narrative is beautiful and expertly designed to be part of the viewing experience.