

*The Bead Goes On.*

**Koos van Brakel.** KIT Publishers, Mauritskade 63, P.O. Box 95001, 1090 HA Amsterdam, Netherlands. 2006. 80 pp., 60 color figs. with an accompanying DVD. ISBN 90-6832-487-X. \$65.00 (hard cover)

The short title leaves one guessing. The subtitle reveals the subject of this book: The Sample Card Collection with Trade Beads from the Company J.F. Sick & Co. in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

J.F. Sick and Company were one of the principal suppliers of beads and other adornments to West Africa during the first part of the 20th century. The firm appears to have begun business around 1910 in Hamburg, Germany, with branches in Venice and Gablonz (now Jablonec-nad-Nisou in the Czech Republic). In the aftermath of World War I, the main office was moved to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In 1927, it was moved again, this time to Amsterdam. In a merger intended to increase the firm's market, the company was acquired in 1959 by Hagemeyer and Co. which operated in the Dutch East Indies. Due to the political and cultural changes that were taking place in the East Indies and West Africa at the time, this turned out to be a bad decision and the bead side of the business quickly went downhill. As a result, the office in Venice was closed in 1964.

The closure was, of course, a blow to the company and its employees, but there is a bright side to the event. Like many companies that dealt in beads, J.F. Sick and Co. issued sample cards and there were 197 such cards displaying 22,000 beads at the Venetian office at the time of closure. There was also a 50-page color catalog. Noting the historical importance of these items, one of the employees, a Miss Winkels, recommended that the cards be donated to the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and this was summarily done in 1964. This book documents and illustrates the collection.

The sample cards are assigned to four chronological groups: 1) 1910-1913 (cards 1-68); 2) 1920-1929 (cards 69-150); 3) 1930-1939 (cards 151-181); and 1948 onwards (cards 182-188). Some of these are illustrated in the book. The rest are on an accompanying DVD. They show the wide range of fancy and millefiori/mosaic glass beads that poured into West Africa during the first half of the 20th century, including various rosetta or chevron beads.

The reproduction of the printed J.F. Sick catalogue takes up slightly more than half the book. Attributed to the period 1919-1926, it provides color images of a wide variety of glass specimens produced in Venice and Bohemia, including millefiori/mosaic, fancy, rosetta/chevron, plain and striped pound beads, and several mold-pressed forms. There are also Prosser beads and buttons, gilt beads, and those of Vulcanite and stone. Agate finger rings and amulets, and "cheap jewelry" complete the inventory.

One very brief appendix discusses the three principal techniques used to produce the glass beads sold by the company, while another provides a descriptive list of other important collections of bead sample cards at various locations around the world.

While the book is short on text, the high-quality color illustrations make it a useful reference for those collecting or researching African beads. Most previous publications that deal with bead sample cards and books have concentrated on those of 19th-century origin. It is nice to finally see one that deals with the 20th century. The fact that the cards are so well documented gives them even more significance.

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