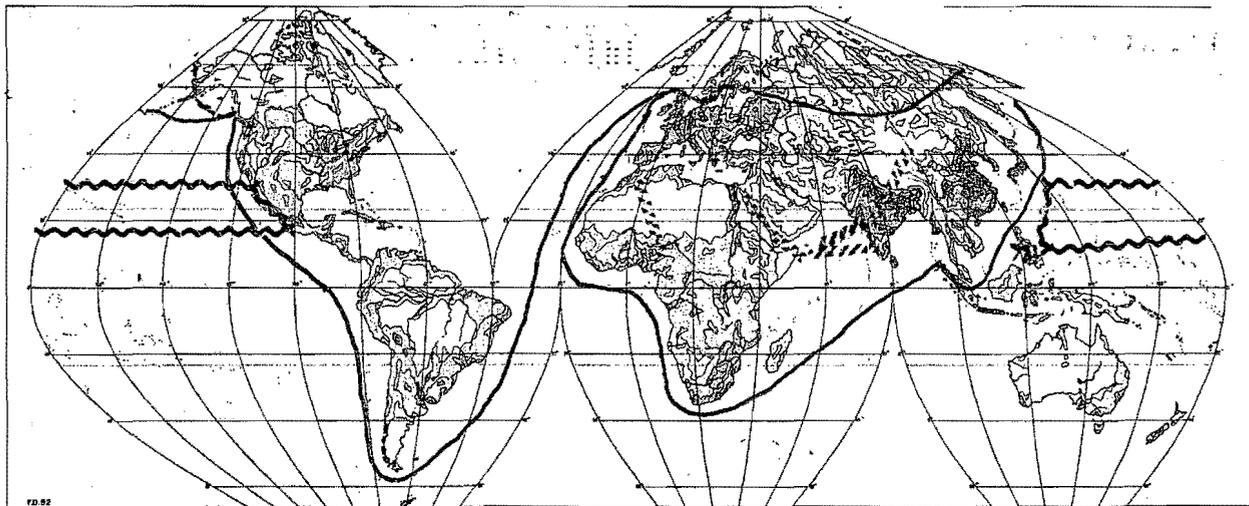


The MARGARETOLOGIST

The Bead Trade Around the World (and what it can tell us)

Before the days of container ships and jet travel, long, arduous journeys were undertaken in order to conduct trade. Beads were not the only cargo, of course, but they were always present and often key commodities. An examination of some of these routes teaches us something about the history of the bead trade and the history of trade in general.



Some World-Wide Trade Routes:

- ~~~~~ Coral. Africa - Septa to Benin. Asia - Alexandria to Broach and Cochin, India, and beyond to Tibet and China.
- ~~~~~ Spanish Galleon Route. Acapulco to Manila and return via California.
- Russians to Alaska. Land Route - St. Petersburg via Kiakhta to Sitka.
Sea Route - St. Petersburg around Europe, Africa, and Asia to Sitka and return around the Americas.

The MARGARETOLOGIST is published twice a year with the most current information on bead research, primarily our own.

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Through the Eye of a Needle

In *Margaretologist* 4(2) 1991 I began my investigations into the meaning and mechanics of the trade in beads. Trade is one of the four behavioral patterns people apply to beads (manufacturing, use, and disposal are the other three).

Some of the conclusions in that issue were: 1. Trade often begins as gifting, becoming commercial later; 2. Some trade in beads is in the hands of large concerns, but much of it is done by individuals on a smaller scale; and 3. Bead trading networks can be classified as small-, medium-, and global-scale in size.

In Chapter 18 of *Asia's Maritime Bead Trade* (2002, U. Hawaii Press; available on TheBeadSite.com) I opened the discussion of a "social history" of bead traders, along the lines of what I did for beadmakers in the journal *BEADS* 6 (also available at TheBeadSite.com). It was not as easy to do. Traders are an eclectic bunch, including rulers and the very wealthy, but also many people at lower social levels. While most beadmakers are organized into guilds or similar groups, few traders are.

To study the bead trade we must remember that traders are intermediaries and often more than one person is involved. For example, in any maritime bead trade, it takes someone to bring the beads to a ship, someone else to haul them across the water, and yet another to distribute them on land. Very often, the first and third steps require more than one person as well.

This issue looks at the bead trade from a different perspective, by examining three "case studies." Two of these, coral and Chinese glass beads, are two of the half dozen or so global trading networks. The other one is also global, but served a small, local market: Alaska. I hope that this issue will further our understanding of the means and significance of the bead trade.

➤ **Want to take a Bead Tour? Where? When? We will tailor tours for you and small groups. Contact me.**

From the Home Page at www.thebeadsite.com click on Galleries (left side) to see the color plates for *Margaretologist* 14(2) and 14(1) – the last issue; sorry it's late.

Calendar

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The Margret Carey "Gotcha" Award She takes it again.. (page/column/paragraph/line)

1/3/4: read "Story starts on page 5."
 1/Schema: Galicia, not Galacia.
 3/1/3/8: 'led', not lead.
 5/2/2/8: insert an 'r' to read Patemotriers
 5/2/3/4: Revellos to Revello
 6/1/1/2: insert an 'r' to read Patemotriers
 6/1/3/1: Margariteri, not Margaritari
 6/2/3/3: Paternosteri, not Paternostri
 6/2/4/2: Goggin, not Goggon.
 6/2/4/10: as above.
 7/2/1/16-17: are to are being
 10/1/1/6: Compostella, not Compestella.
 10/1/1/7: insert 'a' to read "on a par with".
 11/2/4/9: Kashmir not Kashmire

Important Notice for Internet Users

When you change your Internet address (your ISP disappears or you switch from AOL), please inform me. Everyone is entitled to the monthly bEad-Mail, but Members also get the occasional Mini-Marg. Both are informative. Email me by going to TheBeadSite.com and clicking on "Contact Us." Indicate that you are a Member and this email address is new or that you had not given me your address before and wish to receive the newsletters.

The Bead Trade Around the World

Case Study 1: Coral

Corals are made by tiny primitive animals called polyps that build a structure with which they anchor themselves. There are two major types of coral. The best known consists of lime and is represented in reefs and other formations. Gorgonian or horny coral employs the complex protein gorgonin instead of lime.

When one speaks of coral for beads or jewelry, precious red coral, *Corallium rubrum* is usually meant; this is how the word is used herein. The animals who make it are particular about where they live, choosing just the right temperature, salinity, and pressure. This restricts their range to the Mediterranean Sea, though other *Corallium* species inhabit Asian waters, particularly around Japan.

Corals reproduce in two ways. Male and female polyps are always strictly segregated, usually in different colonies. The male discharges sperm into the water, and some enters the females to fertilize the eggs. The eggs are released into the sea and develop diminutive swimmers. Those that survive sink to the floor and attach themselves to hard surfaces, though never metal. Once settled, the polyps mature and secrete lime around the point of attachment. Over the lime, a skin-like coenosarc develops. In time, this will bud, producing new polyps asexually. In this manner, the colony grows (Webster 1970:455-456).

Diving for coral (dredging is more often used today) is an example of the search for bead materials as major factor in exploring many of the Earth's least hospitable places. Why else (except for pearls) would anyone go to the bottom of the sea? The same can be said for the deserts and mountains of the world where turquoise, gold, lapis lazuli, and other bead materials are found.

Coral has been admired for millennia, particularly where it is imported. I have no record of its first use, but it was certainly long ago. At an early period, it was carried to far-away lands where it was admired and appreciated. It has given rise to the word for "bead" in Russian, Czech, Polish, Dutch, and Yiddish.

The Pull of India

Coral is reported archaeologically in India as early as 1700 BC or so (Deo 1971:351). I have not seen this specimen and do not know if it was properly identified nor if it was precious red coral. It is one of the few identifiable gems in the *Mahabharata* and was to be worn on golden chains. This lengthy epic cannot be precisely dated, but its core may be as early as 1000 BC. It is mentioned in the *Vayu Purana*, one of the earliest of this body of literature. Again, precise dating is impossible with oral literature; it may have been begun around 500 BC and was still being edited a thousand years later (Wheatley 1961:204-205).

By the historic period, we have unequivocal evidence of the demand for coral in India. It was so great, that it drove up the price so that the Guuls, living on the northern edge of the Roman Empire, could no longer afford it (Warmington 1928:263). *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, an anonymous first century travel account, noted coral from Rome sold at several Indian ports (Casson 1989:81, 85). Coral beads at Berenike, Egypt, Rome's port for the Indian trade, all appear to have been headed to India (personal observation).

A cache of records found in the Jewish *geniza* of Cairo dates to the 10th and 11th centuries. A *geniza* is a depository for papers no longer needed but not discarded because they contain the name of God. They tell us that coral from North Africa

and some islands was shipped through Alexandria to India. It was one of the leading wares in the trade and was always in demand (Goitein 1961:170; 1973: 147-248).

The first European to sail to India, Vasco da Gama of Portugal, was given a letter for his king in 1498 from the ruler of Calicut. It requested gold, silver, coral, and scarlet in return for the spices and precious stones from his country (Birdwood 1891:163).

India has long been the most important market for coral.

A century and a half later (1639), the officers of the (British) East India Company in Surat, India wrote to their counterparts in London, "Next to broadcloth, coral is 'the most stable and vendible commodity' that Europe produces." (Foster 1912:208) Later in the 17th century, the French jeweler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier wrote:

Although coral does not rank among precious stones in Europe, it is nevertheless held in high esteem in the other quarters of the globe....

The common people wear it and use it as an ornament for the neck and arms throughout Asia, but principally towards the north in the territories of the great Mogul, and beyond them, in the mountains, of the Kingdoms of Assam and Bhutan. (Ball 1889:132, 136)

India also sold coral to Tibet, China, and elsewhere. When Max Bauer wrote *Precious Stones* in 1903, India was still the major market for coral (Bauer 1968:614).

The Demand for Raw Coral

With the incessant appeal of coral in India and the relative wage differential between it and some of its trading partners, there is no surprise that Indians preferred importing raw material to work at home. In the early 15th century, Ma Huan sailed with the enormous fleets under the command of

Zheng He, a eunuch of the Chinese court. At Cochin he described the Chetti, a small but wealthy merchant caste of South India:

[In the case of] coral-stems, the Che-ti reckon the weight in chin when they purchase them; they hire craftsmen, who cut up [the stems] into pieces, and on a lathe fashion them into beads, which are washed and polished until they are bright and clean; they, too, are bought [according to] their weight in fen and liang. (Mills 1970:136; insertions Mills')

A *chin* equals 1.31 pounds (779 g), a *liang* is 48.7 g, while a *fen* was only 0.37 grams. Coral was bought in bulk and sold at jeweler's weights. The profit was no doubt large. The English found in the 17th century that the Indians wanted to do the same thing then (with amber as well). A letter to the Company in London in 1646 reported on the Portuguese selling coral:

[The coral beads are] exceedingly well liked, but so dear that no man dares venture upon them, rendered so (we conceive) by the extraordinary charge of their making, whereas in these parts those artificers [artisans] labour for little, and of the [raw] coral they buy of us make beads which, being cheap, are of readier vend than these [European ones]. (Foster 1914:36; square bracket insertions mine)

Coral in West Africa

An understanding of the use of coral beads in West Africa is complicated by several misconceptions. One has to do with the identity of the material itself because:

1. Dutch visitors and those who sailed with Dutch ships used the Dutch word for bead (*kraal* pl. *krallen*), which usually got translated into English as "coral."

2. The most valued bead on the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) is now called *ag-grey*, but was originally called *cori*, (Francis 1990), easily confused with "coral."

The other is the misperception that Euro-

peans introduced coral into the region (De Negri 1967:210; Clark 1986:27). Coral had been imported long before. Al-Qazaini (d. 1275 AD) wrote:

At Sebta (Ceuta) they fish for the coral (marjan) tree which is unequaled by any kind of coral extracted in any regions of the sea and at Sebta there is a market where it is cut, polished, made into beads (kharaz), pierced and strung. From there it is exported to all lands but carried mostly to Ghana and all the lands of the Sudan, because in those lands it is much used. (Levitsion and Hopkins 1981:130; insertions theirs).

Septa is Arabic for Ceuta, a Spanish enclave on the northern coast of Morocco. Interestingly, at about the same time (ca. 1225 AD) the Chinese writer Zhao Rugua also put the ultimate source for coral in Morocco (Francis 2002:154). Ghana in the passage above is not the modern state, but the ancient kingdom in what is now roughly southern Mauritania.

Europeans may have been responsible for the vogue of coral in Benin, the most powerful West African kingdom at the time. It was not the modern country of that name (I know this is confusing; just bear with me), but was in western Nigeria.

First brought by Europeans in 1522 (Clark 1986:27), coral quickly became popular in Benin. For twenty months beginning in July 1522 Francisco Fernandez, a Portuguese factor, imported "44 [and three-eighths] ounces of barrel-shaped coral beads (the most valuable variety), 33,844 pieces of small coral, 97 strings of glass beads, 28,959 loose glass beads, two strings of red beads fashioned from bone, and 84 large enamelled ones" (Ryder 1969:40; square brackets my insertion).

The red bone beads may have been imitations. "Artificial Flemish corals... 'The estimation of them is much in vallow there'" were among goods the English took

to the region (Ryder 1969:80). We recognize them as red drawn Dutch glass beads. Imports of coral, artificial or real, were commonplace for a long time (ibid.:56, 182 n. 3, 193, 295, 340).

Coral was a royal monopoly in the Kingdom of Benin

Coral gained particular status in Benin. Read and Dalton (1899:22) wrote:

The principal personal ornaments represented in the castings and on the tusks are composed of beads, the majority of which were undoubtedly made of coral. All travellers to Benin have noticed the fondness of the people for coral beads, a taste which was also shared by their neighbors on the west.... Imitation red coral has been largely imported into West Africa in the last and the present centuries.

Certain ornaments of coral, especially the broad collars, necklaces and anklets, served as marks of rank. These ornaments are said by Burton to have been kept in the possession of the king, who himself "ennobled" deserving subjects by investing them with his own hands. Beads thus served the same purpose as the badges of orders of knighthood in Europe, and appear to have been regarded with veneration in Benin, for there was an annual feast called the "Coral Feast" at which the king's store of beads was ceremonially sprinkled with blood.... The narrow necklaces and anklets were probably worn by persons in an inferior station.

The British invaded Benin City in 1897 and many items Read and Dalton described come from that raid, including cast bronzes (I have just seen these again in the British Museum) and ivory carvings. Both show people wearing many tubular beads, but of what material is impossible to say. De Negri (1964) said beads were long associ-

ated with the Oba (King) of Benin. At first, they were glass (*aggrey*), then in the 15th century red jasper *lantana* beads (called "agate" in the article) were introduced, only to be superseded by coral in the next century. In the 17th century elaborate netted clothes and headdresses developed alongside the usual strands.

Case Study 2: Chinese Glass Beads in America

It was long assumed that China was not an important glass beadmaker or exporter, but that notion has been put to rest (Francis 1986a; 2002:54-71). Beginning in the Southern Song (1127-1279), Chinese glass beads become by far the dominant beads throughout Southeast Asia. Arab and other traders also took them to East Africa in some quantity. They are also found in the Americas and increasingly being identified on archaeological sites there.

There were two mechanisms for this trade. The more recent one is discussed in the third "case study" below. The older and more elaborate one is discussed here.

Less than two months after Columbus returned to Europe after stumbling into the Americas, Pope Alexander VI issued bulls that established a "Line of Demarcation" down what was thought to be the center of the Atlantic. In 1494, the Treaty of Torde-sillas between Portugal and Spain ratified the line, moving it slightly westward.

The Line of Demarcation had enormous affects on world history.

The Spanish-born Pope directed that all "new lands" west of the line were to belong to Spain, while Portugal could continue to exploit those east of the line. The Spanish had the church's blessings to settle most of the Americas (Brazil, east of the line, may have been secretly known to

Portugal). Portugal soon rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed to the riches of Asia. Protestant powers ignored the "Pope's Line" whenever it suited them.

Portugal established a chain of enclaves around Africa and later in Asia to facilitate trade with the Orient. The Spanish soon discovered that two enormous continents stood in their way.

In 1519, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sailing for Spain, rounded South America and after 98 days across the Pacific reached the Philippines. Although killed there, he was the first captain to encircle the globe because he had earlier visited the Spice Islands (Moluccas, Indonesia), which lay east of the Philippines.

The Philippines was technically in Portugal's "half of the world," but the smaller country could not dislodge the stronger Spain. Spain wanted it because it was the "gateway" to China.

The Philippines was Spain's (and later the USA's) gateway to China.

When I first identified some beads at St. Catherines, Georgia (see last issue) as Chinese, David Hurst Thomas, the excavator, asked me how they could possibly have gotten to the site. I shrugged and said, "The Galleon Trade."

The Galleon or Manila Trade was a system the Spanish devised to bring the riches of Asia to their doorstep. It was complex, but for some 250 years, it linked China with Spain via the Philippines and Mexico (Schurz 1939). (A shorter form of this account was in the last issue.)

The crux of the trade was that silver was more highly valued in Asia than in Europe. Disappointed at not finding much gold in America, the Spanish profited from the silver of Taxco, Mexico and Potosí, Bolivia by exporting much of it to Asia. Silver was shipped to Acapulco. Every year one

or two galleons (many of them built in the Philippines) left Acapulco to sail straight across the Pacific to the archipelago and thence to splendid Manila Bay.

Their arrival was anticipated. Ships from all over Asia met them. Merchants came from Japan, Southeast Asia, India (including Portuguese Goa), even Persia and Turkey, but above all from China (Cummins 1971:304-308).

The silver was exchanged for the goods of all Asia. Duties were declared (mostly undervalued) on the merchandise, some of which was smuggled or secreted in hidden compartments on the ships. The cargo and passengers bound for America and Spain then set off for the return trip. The voyage to Mexico was not as salubrious as that to the Philippines. Ships had to sail north to catch winds that were not as trustworthy as those blowing west. It took two or more months, rather than one. Food spoiled and clean water was scarce. The first landfall was along the California coast, where the missionaries sent natives out in canoes filled with lemons and oranges to combat the scurvy epidemic that plagued every cruise.

Then the galleons turned southward toward the grand but malignantly humid port of Acapulco (a gap was later punched into the surrounding mountains to promote winds to clear the air). Acapulco was deserted most of the year except for the departure and return of the ships. Goods were unloaded and taken along the treacherous China Road that led to Mexico City.

At the capital of Nueva España the goods were distributed in several directions. The very best continued to Veracruz and were loaded onto another galleon. This sailed for Havana, where it met galleons from the eastern side of Spanish America to form an armada for mutual protection against Protestant pirates (many of whom worked for their kings). If successful, the armada

made it to Seville and the treasures of Asia reached the Court and favored families.

The Spanish living in Mexico took a large portion of the goods. As a privileged and wealthy class, they had first choice. Asian, especially Chinese, fashions, designs, and customs took root in Mexico. The "national dress" is the *China-poblana*, said to have been invented by a Chinese (or Indian) princess (or not) living in Puebla. To this day, the antique shops of Mexican cities are stuffed with Chinese gewgaws, souvenirs of this elaborate trading network.

Asian goods from the galleon trade went to different customers.

A third destination for Asian products was the indigenous population. To be sure, this did not include fine vases or silken robes, but did encompass mundane things, such as glass beads.

Chinese Beads in America

We have literary and archaeological evidence that the Chinese employed beads in this trade. Antonio De Morga listed the items they brought to Manila in 1609 including: "tacle, which are beads of all kinds, strings of cornelians, and other beads and stones of all colours." (Cummins 1971:306) *Tacle* may be how the Spanish heard *tsáu chù* or *tú chù*, Chinese trade terms for "glass beads" (Williams 1966:20). The wrecked galleon *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, which sank off Saipan in 1638, was carrying Chinese glass beads (Francis 2002:170).

There are few published reports of Chinese beads in America before California statehood. The reason is simple: since no one thought of China as a glass beadmaker, no one considered that Chinese beads might have been in the galleon's cargo.

How do we recognize Chinese beads? The same way we recognize the origin of

any artifact by: 1.) Direct evidence of manufacture, 2.) Identifying diagnostic technical characteristics, and/or 3.) By spatial and temporal distributions. With one exception, we have no direct evidence for Chinese glass beadmaking. The crucial technical hint is the presence of lead when other glass beadmakers never or sparingly used it in their glass. The distribution is the least certain of these three, but may still be helpful (Francis 2002:72-76).

Lead and copper-ruby glass are technical markers for Chinese beads.

The most easily recognized technical attribute is a dusky, translucent red (ruby) glass, heavy in lead and colored with copper. The Chinese made this glass at least by 1013; Europe did not make it until the early 19th century. It was popular. From ca. 1450 to 1600, ruby glass beads made up over 14% of all beads excavated in the Philippines (Francis 2002:75-76, 80-81). One of the bead types on the galleon wreck off Saipan was of this glass (I was only sent fragments by the salvagers, so don't know what shape(s) were involved).

Ruby glass beads have been reported in three sites in Louisiana at dates earlier than the Venetians were making ruby glass with gold (Francis n.d.). As discussed in the last issue, we also have some at St. Catherines, Georgia.

A cobalt blue bead on *La Concepcion* has been analyzed and found to contain lead; this also points to China. There were also two stone bead types: carnelian and a cornerless cube that is possibly garnet. The Chinese did not work many stone beads for a long time (the notable exception being jade), but these might have been from China or India. If the garnet (on a copper or bronze wire) were part of a Spaniard's

rosary, it could even have been Bohemian.

Several other glass beads at St. Catherines look as though they may be Chinese, but my identifications are tentative. They are all wound and of translucent glass. Five are green oblates of slightly different sizes and colors. A green-blue melon bead very closely resembles some Chinese beads in the Center's collection. These were all probably made in Boshan, site of the only excavated glass factory in China. A coin of the Yuan period (1280-1368) was found, but the factory is probably earlier. Boshan is still the center of beadmaking. These beads would not have contained lead, as lead was not employed in Boshan glass (except perhaps very early).

Another bead that I have long identified as Chinese is the light blue opaque oblate known to collectors as "padre" beads. This is a collector's term, but fitting. Unfortunately, it has become quite abused of late and I see all sorts of beads given this name, including some in the African trade.

The more we know about Chinese beads the more Chinese beads will be identified in America.

True padre beads have a "satiny" sheen and are made of a light blue glass mixed with white. Aside from their distribution (they are said to have been brought into the American southwest by Spanish priests), I identify them as Chinese because similar beads with the color subtly mixed with white are known to be Chinese. These include the older bead with a rolled-up or "jelly-roll" mosaic decoration (new beads with this decoration are monochrome). I have also seen this decoration on a bead that would otherwise be called a padre.

The white wound oblate heirloom beads in two Mixe villages in Oacaxa, Mexico must have come through this trade. A girl receives a strand (often mixed with some

19th century colorful Bohemian beads) when she is one year old. All her life, she collects more: her groom must give her some; she may buy some; and her mother's beads are split evenly between her daughters at death. An elderly woman may wear several pounds (up to 2 kg) of these beads. As the source of the original beads dried up, white oblate 19th-20th century European Prosser beads have been substituted.

During my Bead Identification Workshops at the Bead Museum in Glendale AZ recently, Bonny Rockette, one of the students, recognized a bead she had found at a site in Arizona. It is made from multiple winds of a thin ribbon-like cane or stream of medium light, opaque blue glass (green and white ones are less common). The edges of the glass streams often corrode, leaving an effect of a spiral decoration. These beads, heavy in lead, were popular in Southeast Asia, especially in the 16th century. This is the first of these beads recorded in the Americas.

I expect many more Chinese glass beads will be identified in American sites, especially those colonized by the Spanish. There are also Chinese glass beads in Alaska, our last "case study."

Case Study 3: Beads to Alaska

Alaska was the last great landmass discovered by Europeans. It was settled by Russia in its attempts to extend its empire, which at its maximum included California and Hawaii. It was a natural extension of the colonization of Siberia.

In 1740, Vitus Bering, a Dane, led a Russian expedition across the strait later named for him to explore the new land. This European voyage of discovery was comparatively late and many participants were literate. Hence, unlike earlier explorations, we have no less than three journals

of this first trip to Alaska.

Sofoen Khitov and Sven Waxel (Golder 1922:99, 272) both relate that when Khitov and G. W. Steller visited Kayak Island they took a basket and a copper-stained stone from a hastily abandoned hut. Bering ordered that they return to leave (in Khitov's words), "16½ arshims of green material, 2 iron knives, 20 Chinese strings of beads, 2 iron pipes for smoking Chinese tobacco...." Kharlam Yashin, apparently the keeper of the logbook of the *St. Peter*, the expedition's ship, recorded that Bering ordered presents to be given to men who were in a small, open boat near the ship. These were, "4½ arshims of red cloth, 2 mirrors, 3 strings of Chinese beads, small bells" (ibid.: 147).

The bead trade to Alaska opened with Chinese beads.

Thus, the bead trade to Alaska opened with Chinese beads. How did the Bering party obtain them? They had come across Siberia and bought them at Kiakhta (Maimatchin to the Chinese), a town that straddled the Siberian-Mongolian border.

As is often the case, neighbors China and Russia did not get along. The first Russian embassy to Beijing in 1656 was dismissed with these words, "Since the ambassador is ignorant of our ceremonies, it is improper to give him audience. Their tribute is refused and he is ordered to return to his own country." (Fu 1966:20) Nor did the second audience in 1660 go any better, "[The Czar] sent Us a proud and impolite memorial, yet, when foreign countries begin to follow Our culture, We should forgive and tolerate them, in order to show Our kindness toward strangers." (ibid.:24).

Russia was in an imperialist, expansionist mode and frequently clashed with China. The "Red-haired barbarians" and "bandits," as the Chinese called the Russians,

also drove tribal people (whom the Chinese called "hunters") into conflict with China. However, the Russians persisted and in time the Chinese reluctantly accepted them. In 1693, Russians were allowed to trade in Beijing, but only 200 of them for 80 days every other year; they had to furnish their own horses and camels and were to receive no provisions (Fu 1966:106-107). In 1728, the Chinese let Russian students learn Chinese and Manchu and were given "silver and rice for their monthly allowance." (ibid.:160)

In 1729, it was declared that all trade with Russia was to be conducted at Kiakhta (Fu 1966:60). From then on, Russian merchants coming by land or sea were told to go to there instead. This remained the case until they and the other "Red-haired barbarians" (all of whom were of the same ethnic stock, the Chinese chronicles noted) began the Opium War in 1840.

The Englishman William Coxe visited Kiakhta in its heyday and reported that among Chinese items that the Russians allowed in duty-free were "glass corals and beads" (Coxe 1790:241). Some items he enumerated were probably going west to Russia, but the bulk of the beads would be going east to Alaska.

The Russians bought many of their beads from China.

This was only one way that beads got to Alaska. Echoing the Spanish galleon trade, Russia set up an around-the-world voyage that skirted Europe, Africa, and Asia to supply Alaska and return by sailing around the Americas and up the Atlantic (Okun' 1951:34). This was as long and arduous as the trip across Siberia. Beads were likely part of the cargo, but I have no direct evidence for this.

The Chinese closed Kiakhta between 1785 and 1792 and G. I. Shelikov, later to

establish the Russian-American Company, proposed to trade with the Portuguese enclave of Macao, but little came of that. He also registered a complaint that was common in the barren outpost. One of his men "has been drinking ever since the day he arrived and I do not hope for anything better for the future. I cannot sober him up." (Tikhmenev 1979:20)

Not being allowed to trade directly with China made it hard for Russia to get beads for their Alaska trade.

It was easier for the Russians to sell their furs and buy their beads and other goods through third parties. The governor of Alaska, A. A. Baranov, contacted Yankee (mostly Bostonian) skippers to conduct this trade soon after the Russian-American Company was begun in 1799 (Khiebnikov 1973:61-64). In 1810, J. J. Astor's American Fur Company was allowed to enter the trade (ibid.:77-78), and in 1839 the Hudson's Bay Company was given the same privilege (Gibson 1976:157, 201). Other European explorers and traders also brought beads. After 1867, the trade was principally in American hands.

What beads were involved in the Alaska trade? My reports on Reese Bay, Unalaska Island (Francis 1987, 1988a, 1989) and on the pan-Arctic Crossroads of Continent exhibit (Francis 1988b, 1994) show a wide variety. Seed beads (*biser* in Russian) were most numerous, but other European glass beads, including Dutch, Venetian, and Bohemian ones, were also used. After around 1860, however, the demand for beads by the Alaskan natives began to wane in favor of rifles, tobacco, and liquor.

The most prized beads at the beginning of the trade were Chinese. Of those, simple wound blue beads were outstanding. They are likely the ones that the Bering expedition had with them.

In 1778 when Captain James Cook's expedition reached Alaska, blue glass beads were very much in demand. At Prince William Sound, James King, Cook's companion, wrote that the natives were suspicious of English beads, though they came in many colors and sizes. They preferred, "their blue beads; these of which they set a very great Value, have not the good shape of English beads, but are manufactur'd by some Nation ruder in the art than ourselves, they are a bead about the size of a large current berry, & intended to be (but are not) round." (Beaglehole 1967:1418).

Blue beads moved a long distance in the Native trade.

Cook found these beads odd because he was in a place he knew the Russians had not yet visited. He wrote, "They are in possession of... a few sky blue beads.... These they seemed to value very much, and I had some difficulty to purchase two or three to satisfy my self [*sic*] whether they made of glass or some substance they might have amongst themselves." (Beaglehole 1968:265; insertion mine)

I have no doubt these were the same blue beads treasured along the Columbia River when Lewis and Clark arrived in 1804. Since they did not have them, they nearly starved to death. Only their white beads were worth anything. Demand was for the blue bead, the *tia commashuk*, the chief of all beads. (Francis 1986b:44-46) Records of the American Fur Company confirm this. John Ebbets in Canton (Guangzhou) in 1811 noted that "Beads that answer Columbia's River are plenty here" (Porter 1931:461), while J. J. Astor wrote in 1813 that from Canton to the northwest coast one should carry, "Buttons & blue pound Beads - all of which are very good for the Coast" (ibid.: 539).

Conclusions

What lessons can be drawn from these examples of world trade? For one thing, it is clear that wherever there is a demand for beads, traders will go to great lengths to supply them. Of course, beads were not the only item traded along these routes, but they were always there and in some cases were among the most important articles among the cargo.

The variety of tastes is always interesting. When it comes to coral in India, there was a steady demand for millennia. It was so great and apparently so wide-spread that we have records of raw coral being imported so that beads could be made cheaper in the country itself, evidentially for selling to those were not so wealthy.

On the other hand, fashion changed quickly in Benin (*aggrey* to *lantana* to coral) and in Alaska (beads to vices and guns). We have cases of particular beads and beads as a whole going in and out of style. I have noted this elsewhere. In Madagascar and eastern Africa, round carnelian beads came to be favored over hexagonal cylinders. There was also a demand for European seed beads, but this was probably a continuation of the popularity of Indo-Pacific beads (Francis 2002:188-189).

Finally, an understanding of the bead trade as carried out between China, the Philippines, Mexico, and Spain allows us to begin to recognize Chinese glass beads in Spanish colonial situations. I expect that the identification of Chinese glass beads in these contexts will become increasingly likely as time goes on.

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