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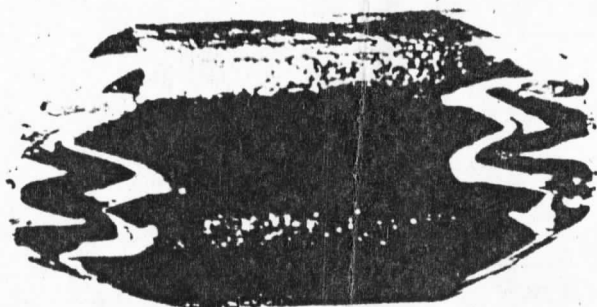
CHEVRON BEADS IN CALIFORNIA

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THE STAR OR CHEVRON GLASS BEAD is one of the most distinctive time-markers in New World archaeological sites and is an important indication of trade relationships in the 16th Century. These early glass beads were produced in Venice and tend to be large (up to an inch or so in length). They are made of multiple layers of glass and the ends are usually cut in facets so that the appearance is that of a blue bead with banded red-white-and-blue ends. Viewed from the end, the facets cause the colored bands to form "stars" or "chevrons," this giving rise to the name of the bead.

The only California bead of this type which is known to me and which is likely to be a 16th-century bead is that at the Southwest Museum (Figure 1). Collected many years ago, there is no information on this specimen other than its place of origin: Catalina Island. Chances are that this bead was picked up by a visitor to Avalon (which is on top of a large Indian site) who gave it to the Southwest Museum. It could have got to the Indians by way of the expedition of Cabrillo (1542) or (less likely) the shipwrecked survivors of the Cermeno party (1595) or the Vizcaino expedition (1602).

Beads of this kind are widely found and occur in archaeological contexts in Florida, Mexico and Central America, and along the west coast of South America in Peru and Chile. They turn up



The chevron bead from Catalina Island.

where the Spanish went in the 16th Century, but these beads are never common and were apparently never traded in quantity, perhaps because they are hand made and had more than casual value to both Spanish and Indians. A recent review of the chevron beads is that of Smith (1977).

One other chevron bead from California is published and attributed to the Cabrillo expedition. It is from the Yokuts cemetery excavated by Walker (1947) in the San Joaquin Valley. However, while this is clearly a chevron bead it is not of 16th-century age. Such beads continued to be produced in smaller forms and slightly different colors until the mid-19th Century. Beads closely comparable to Walker's example occur in the Dan Frost collection of trade beads at the Illinois State Museum, representing a merchant's collection from the 1840-1860 period. These beads are considerably smaller than the earlier chevron beads and tend to have the exterior layer of translucent green rather than the opaque blue of the 16th-century types. It makes more sense to view the Walker find as a 19th-century bead, since Cabrillo was nowhere near Yokuts territory and since the site has thousands of other glass beads of the 19th Century.

A complexity in using chevron beads as trade markers or for dating is that such beads have been commonly used for generations

as heirloom pieces, particularly in Africa, and in recent years they have been imported into the U.S. in great quantities for collectors in this country. It is inevitable that some of these beads will get lost and wind up in city dumps, vacant lots, and (heaven help us) archaeological sites, particularly if they are in urban areas. Any surface finds of these beads after World War II will have to be rigorously evaluated against the possibility that they are recent intrusions and not 16th-century beads of Spanish origin.

As to why more chevron beads have not been found in California, among the hundreds of thousands of glass trade beads recovered from archaeological sites in the state, the reasons are several. There were few visitors to California in the 16th Century, and those were explorers who were not interested in trading with the simple tribes of California. They were also neither missionaries nor settlers, and in their brief visits to California there was little likelihood of presents being distributed to the Indians. Although some minor trade is mentioned in the early accounts, so little in the way of European objects changed hands that the odds are heavily against the finding of authentic trade items from 16th-century contacts.

Beginning in 1769, with the establishment of San Diego Mission, the Indians received large amounts of glass beads as presents from the missionaries. All of the California missions that have been excavated have yielded glass trade beads. However, by this time the chevron beads were no longer being used in the Indian trade and the missionaries were dispensing small and simple glass beads, mostly blue or white in color. Chevron beads were still being manufactured in Venice but they were apparently too costly to be incorporated into the Indian trade in California, which was confined to the cheapest glass beads available. In some cases it appears that beads traded to remote areas like California included factory rejects: beads of imperfect shape or color which had little value in the worldwide market.

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