

# A SIXTEENTH CENTURY SPANISH COLONIAL TRADE BEAD FROM WESTERN OKLAHOMA

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*A glass trade bead was surface collected at the Goodwin-Baker site, 34Rm-14. Subsequent investigation has revealed that this bead with a square cross section originated in the sixteenth century Spanish trade. In view of the presence of this distinctive time marker, some sixteenth century activity at this site is indicated. The ultimate source of the other materials of apparent Southwest influence or origin found at this site is still to be determined. Also, whether the site's primary occupation was late prehistoric or early protohistoric remains to be demonstrated.*

## INTRODUCTION

While surface hunting at 34Rm-14 on October 3, 1970, I found a glass bead that was square in cross section. Although extensive surface collecting at an eighteenth century French contact site (34Ka-3) on the Southern Plains had provided some familiarity with glass beads (Sudbury 1976:48-65, 78, 93-94), the 34Rm-14 specimen was unique in my experience. Inquiries about this bead yielded extremely interesting information.

The author participated in the University of Oklahoma Archeological Field School held at 34Rm-14 in the summer of 1970. The few available archaeomagnetic and radiocarbon dates have been interpreted to suggest an occupation during the "early A.D. 1400s" (Swenson 1983:8). This date is somewhat later than was expected based on initial impressions formed while working the site in 1970. A brief preliminary study of the 34Rm-14 pottery sherds and other artifacts has been published (ibid.) as well as a more detailed study of the trade pottery from two other roughly contemporaneous Southwestern Oklahoma sites (Baugh and Swenson 1980; Baugh 1982). Southwestern sherds and other trade items were also reported from the somewhat later (ca. 1700) Little Deer site in Custer County, Oklahoma (Hofman 1978).

## THE BEAD--A DESCRIPTION

In cross section, this small glass bead is square with slightly rounded corners (Figure 1 a-f). The bead measures 4.9 mm thick, 6.2 mm long, and has an average hole diameter of 1.65 mm. Using a standard swatch plate, the thin exterior glass layer most closely resembles translucent Independence Blue, and the thick inner core is transparent Turquoise (Bustanoby 1947:Plate 8). These two layers both have drawn air bubbles in them, suggestive of manufacture by the hollow cane technique. A thin white layer is present between the inner and outer layers. The bead has not been tumbled. One end is square and the other end is irregular, possibly indicating that the bead was broken. Both ends of the bead demonstrate a uniform patina. This bead was found near the location of House Number 2, a small wattle-daub structure which was excavated during the 1970 Field School.

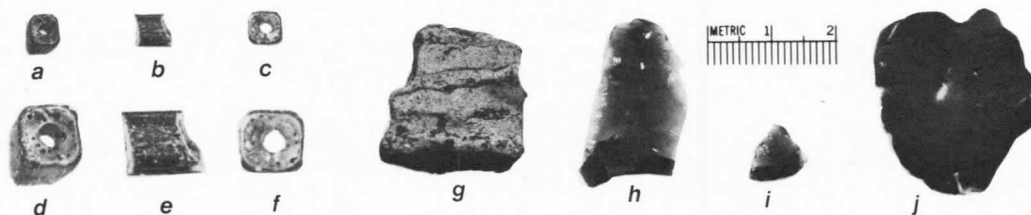


Figure 1. Artifacts surface collected from 34Rm-14: a-f, glass trade bead (three different views at two scales); g, indigeneous corrugated sherd; h-j, worked flakes of obsidian. Photograph numbers a-c and g-j are actual size; photograph numbers d-f are two times the actual size.

## THE BEAD--IDENTIFICATION

Shortly after finding this bead, it--along with other surface collected artifacts--was loaned to the Oklahoma Archeological Survey for study. March 30, 1975, I mailed the bead to Mary Elizabeth Good for evaluation. Suspecting that the bead might be of early Spanish origin, Mary Elizabeth suggested that I contact Charles Fairbanks of the University of Florida for a more definitive identification (Good 1975). In part, the response from Fairbanks (1975) was as follows:

The bead you sent is clearly an example of the type *Nueva Cadiz Plain*. This was a type first recognized by the late John M. Goggin. I have published a description in [Fairbanks (1968)]....

Your example is one of the darker types, but the color seems to fall within the Nueva Cadiz range. It is smaller in diameter and much shorter than most of the specimens that I have seen. In these respects it resembles in some ways the type *Peru Corner Facetted*, except that the corners have not been ground away. I would not hesitate to place it in the type *Nueva Cadiz Plain*.

The specimens from the site of Nueva Cadiz must date from the first years of the 16th century. I feel that most specimens, except for heirlooming, fall between 1500 and 1550. We have recently seen some from the Lawrence burial mound on St. Simon's Island, Georgia, that were accompanied by late protohistoric pots and crude iron 'celts', evidently dating from the period of Spanish exploration rather than the later mission period. Morrell, [1964] .... reports one from the central Alabama area where it just might be a relic of the De Soto expedition...

In general, Nueva Cadiz Plain and Nueva Cadiz Twisted beads come from early historic sites and are not accompanied by any number of other trade materials.

A recent definitive study (Smith and Good 1982) of sixteenth century beads in the Spanish New World trade prompted another inquiry about the origin and current understanding of the 34Rm-14 bead's place in an overall Spanish bead chronology. The received response states:

The bead does not quite match any of the examples in the Smith and Good (1982) Peruvian bead book. It closely resembles our #46, but the core of your bead is a lighter shade of blue. It also closely resembles our #56 in color, but lacks the corner facets of this Peruvian variety. Both of these Peruvian varieties were rare in the sample of beads that we analyzed.

It is my opinion that the core color is the least diagnostic feature of these early beads. Apparently whatever color of glass was on hand was used for interior colors. This is quite apparent in the numerous varieties of chevron beads. Thus, the fact that your bead does not exactly match any of the Peruvian specimens is probably meaningless. I would consider your bead our #46 for all practical purposes.

Dating is another matter. We know the Nueva Cadiz beads were in use as early as 1519 (Smith and Good 1982:7) and we suspect that most of them were out of fashion by about 1560. However, it may be that the length is an important factor. Very long tubular beads apparently went out of fashion in the mid-sixteenth century, but I have suggested that the shorter varieties continued to be used along side spherical beads perhaps commonly until 1575 and perhaps sporadically until near 1600 (M. Smith n.d.).... Your bead is of course a short variety. In summary, your bead could date to the first half of the sixteenth century, but perhaps dates later in the century (Smith 1984).

In addition to the Spanish Nueva Cadiz beads, Fairbanks (1975) also noted that:

During the early Huron phase from Lower Canada there are some square tubular beads, almost always in an opaque red that were made by the same technique.

Harris (1982) presents a study of a sample of beads including square twisted red core beads from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, as well as information about Spanish beads from Peru. Good (personal communication) believes the red core "Nueva Cadiz" was not present in the Spanish trade and thus is not of the true Nueva Cadiz tradition. She also indicated that they appear about 50 years later than the Spanish-origin Nueva Cadiz with which she is familiar (Harris 1982:6-11; Smith and Good 1982:51-52).

#### DISTRIBUTION OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY SPANISH TRADE BEADS

The original study of Spanish trade beads was conducted by Goggin, and published by Fairbanks (1968). This publication described a few early beads from several sites. The volume by Smith and Good (1982) is the most comprehensive work available on sixteenth century Spanish trade beads. The bulk of the collection which they had available for study was obtained from South America (primarily Peru). However, as the Spanish were traversing both North and South America in the sixteenth century, the bead sample from both continents is assumed to have been relatively homogeneous. Of the 129 bead types reported (*ibid.*), 36 types were noted as having been reported from the relatively small North American sample available. The majority of these came from the southeastern United States, with specimens identified from only four sites west of the Mississippi River (Figure 2). The 34Rm-14 bead is the only Nueva Cadiz bead reported west of the Mississippi (Smith, personal communication).

In addition to these reported specimens, Wedel (1959:86, 498-500) cites several beads from Kansas which could conceivably be sixteenth century beads originating from Spanish contacts. The first reference noted was due to the extensive efforts by

"Udden in 1881-88, at the Paint Creek Village site south of the Smokey Hill River, a few miles southwest of Lindsborg, McPherson County.... Discovery of a fragment of chain mail in one mound and of two glass beads on another persuaded him that the site had been visited by the Spaniards, perhaps even by members of the Coronado expedition."

The specific description and type of these beads is not known, but they could conceivably have been Spanish contact beads. Among the collections deposited in Peabody Museum from an 1879 mound excavation near Marion in Marion County, Kansas, "One obsidian flake and two glass beads, one of them a star [chevron?] bead, were also noted." These two Kansas sites are indicated by a "\*" on the map reproduced in Figure 2. Two of the sixteenth century Spanish beads from the Hawikuh, New Mexico, ruins (Figure 2) were "star" chevron beads (Orchard 1975:96-97); these beads were identified as type #79 by Smith and Good (1982:33, 43, 50-51).

#### DISCUSSION

Virtually everyone agrees that the 34Rm-14 bead originated from sixteenth century Spanish trade sources. Nearly a decade ago, Fairbanks felt that this bead was almost certainly from the first half of the sixteenth century. Smith currently feels that the small varieties were in vogue roughly the first half of the sixteenth century although they may have continued to see service in the third or even the fourth quarter of that century.

It seems most likely that the 34Rm-14 bead was obtained from the Southwest, presumably traded by Indian intermediaries between 34Rm-14 and the actual locations of direct Spanish contact. A corrugated sherd was surface collected at 34Rm-14 the same day that the bead was found (Figure 1g). It appears that this Southwest influence sherd is not an actual trade ware, but is "the indigenous Little Deer type, replicating the corrugated decoration." (Swenson 1984). A study of trade ceramics from several other area sites did indicate the presence of some sixteenth century sherds of Southwest origin (Baugh and Swenson 1980). Obsidian of probable Southwest origin was also found at 34Rm-14 (Figure 1h-j).

Several synopses on various aspects of the Spanish presence in the Southwest, and of the Indian's exchange mechanisms, have recently been published (e.g., Brew 1979; Fork 1983; Lange 1979; Sands 1979; Simmons 1979; Woodbury 1979). Obviously, the Coronado expedition, which apparently reached its easternmost extent in central Kansas near Lindsborg (Strout 1984:6), is the only sixteenth century Spanish excursion known to have come even close to 34Rm-14. As there is no evidence that Coronado's expedition entered this part of western Oklahoma, it remains most likely that this bead arrived through indirect Spanish contact. This bead is at



least suggestive that 34Rm-14 may have been occupied during the very early protohistoric period. The detailed study of the excavation and resulting materials that is currently being prepared will hopefully give a more complete picture of the period(s) of occupation at this site.

#### CONCLUSIONS

At present, a glass bead from 34Rm-14 is the earliest firm archaeological evidence of indirect white contact in the present-day state of Oklahoma. It appears certain that this bead originated from sixteenth century Spanish contacts, presumably from the Southwest. Whether this artifact is the result of an accidental loss by an individual traversing the site, or is actually evidence that the site was inhabited during an early protohistoric component remains to be determined. The possibility of a sixteenth century occupation at 34Rm-14 must certainly be seriously considered.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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