



# UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## Department of Archaeology Undergraduate Assignment

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<b>Assignment due date:</b>	<b>Course:</b>	<b>Approx. word count (where appropriate):</b>
27/03/19	A35	2,932

<b>Title:</b> <u>A35 Object Report – Glass Trade Beads</u>
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N.B. Originally submitted anonymously

## Introduction

In this essay I seek to question the validity of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's (MAA) information regarding object 1947.2276. I suggest that the beads were from the personal collection of the late Horace C. Beck, author of 'Classification and Nomenclature of Beads and Pendants' (cited by Karklins in his 2004 work) and mislabelled in the MAA records as "Mr H.J. Beck". I further offer a date of 1851-1869 for all the beads in the assemblage, as well as a place of manufacture and suggest which beads suit known tastes of 19<sup>th</sup> century communities in West Africa. By exploring the significance of taste and personal adornment in West Africa, I posit the beads' value to local trading communities on the West African coast.



Figure 1: Total assemblage of Glass Trade beads labelled as 1947.226

beads; four red spherical beads with orange and white patterning; four medium green tubular beads; two large white spherical beads; and one large white faceted barrel bead. The label on this string of beads reads 'Slave beads used by the Portuguese & Spaniards in the Rivers of the West Coast of Africa.'<sup>2</sup> In the following descriptions I adhere to Karklins' 2004 revision of Kidd and Kidd's 1970 classification system wherever possible, with a few suggested improvements where appropriate.



Figure 1a: The Levin Catalogue's Round Monochrome Beads (Karklins 2004: 54)

## Composition and Manufacture of Glass Trade Beads

### Spherical Monochrome Beads

These aforementioned 'large white ball beads' bear a remarkable resemblance to seven examples from the Levin

<sup>1</sup> Trade beads, otherwise labelled as akori, coris, accary, aigris, aggrey beads (DeCorse 1989: 44); this confusion demonstrates the difficulty in using primary sources of traders as reliable descriptors of beads traded.

<sup>2</sup> Note that these brief descriptions indicate my inexperienced first impressions when handling the beads in the museum; upon further investigation, I was able to confirm that these beads were more complex than my untrained eye could initially appreciate.

Catalogue of 19<sup>th</sup> Century beads – specifically, Plate IIIC, right column, row 13, and Plate VIA, row 1 (Karklins 2004: 51, 54). Plate IIIC is from the 1863 collection in the Museum of Mankind, and purportedly represent “Beads employed in the African Trade for Ivory”, whilst Plate VIA is found in the 1960 collection, and carries the designation “Beads such as are used by Traders in West Africa, & given in exchange for Palm Oil & other African produce (Karklins 2004: *ibid*). Karklins describes beads using the classification system of Kidd and Kidd (1970) which he himself expanded in 1985: using this system, he identifies these particular orb-like white beads as W1b5 (Karklins 2004: 44). This designates them as ‘round’, ‘pale blue’, giving them a Colour Harmony Code (CHC) of 15ca, and a Munsell Equivalent (ME) of 7.5B 8/2. He describes a ‘golden cast’. He labels them translucent, meaning they ‘transmit light but do not permit vision through the glass’ (Sprague 1985: 100).



*Figure 2b: MAA's large spherical bead.*

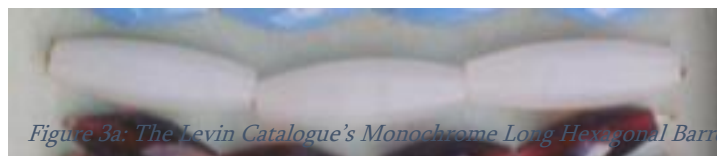
The MAA’s ‘Round Monochrome Beads’ are remarkably similar – however, I would tentatively suggest these particular beads as W1b1, owing to the cloudy grey appearance of the bead, rather than the blue and gold tints of the Levin collection. This light grey colouration would give the beads a CHC of c, and a ME of N 7/0 (Kidd and Kidd 2012: 44). The MAA beads match the Levin Catalogue’s samples’ diaphaneity, and Karklin’s measurements of ‘Length: 26.7-28.8mm, Diameter: 29.3-31.0mm’ are sufficiently close to my rounded measurements<sup>3</sup> of 3cm for both length and diameter to justify a claim of similarity. Additionally, the MAA’s beads verge on transparency: ‘Transparent beads permit vision through the glass’ (Sprague 1985: 100). Although this vision is very limited and clouded, a supporting description of transparency as ‘perforation is visible when it is held sideways to the light’ (Smith and Good 1982: 21) confirmed my decision to label the MAA’s spherical<sup>4</sup> monochrome beads as transparent.

#### Monochrome Faceted Barrel Bead

The previously described ‘large barrel faceted white bead’ is labelled in the Levin Catalogue as MPIIb – ‘Monochrome Long Hexagonal Barrel Beads’ (Karklins 2004: 49). They are found on Plate IVB of the 1863 collection, “Beads used in the African Trade, for slaves” (Karklins 2004: 52), and the aforementioned Plate VIA. Described as translucent, ‘light gray [sic]’, with measurements of ‘Length: 52.0mm, Diameter: 13.3mm’ (Karklins 2004: *ibid*), the Levin Catalogue example is comparable to the MAA specimen, as well as a slightly different example found on the Picard bead website

([http://www.picardbeads.com/trade\\_beads/c\\_284c.html](http://www.picardbeads.com/trade_beads/c_284c.html)).

I believe the MAA’s hexagonal barrel bead is also light grey, shiny in lustre (though not opalescent like the Picard example), and my rounded measurements of 5cm in length and 1cm in diameter match the dimensions of both the Levin Catalogue



*Figure 3a: The Levin Catalogue's Monochrome Long Hexagonal Barrel Beads (Karklins 2004: 54)*



*Figure 3b: MAA's barrel bead.*

<sup>3</sup> My research in bead typologies has revealed to me my mistake of using such vague measurements: upon first encountering primary sources, describing bead size as categorical variables of small, medium, and large, I believed my rounded measurements to be thorough. A more thorough investigation into the state of present-day bead research reveals that more precise measurements should have been taken.

<sup>4</sup> I find the label used in many classification systems of ‘round’ to be insufficient to describe the geometry of a bead, as ‘spheres and disks are both called round but are very different shapes’ (Sprague 1985: 99).

and Picard examples. However, although unstated, I believe Karklin's label of 'MP' refers to mold-pressing, an acronym similar to those of 'M' for molding and 'PM' for Prosser-molding found in DeCorse and Thiaw's classification system (2003: 88). There is no mention of a seam in the Levin Catalogue samples, and certainly no seams evident in the MAA example, which we would expect to find on mold-pressed beads – of course, the expensive faceted and 'elongated' beads could have their 'seam ground down' (Sprague 1985:

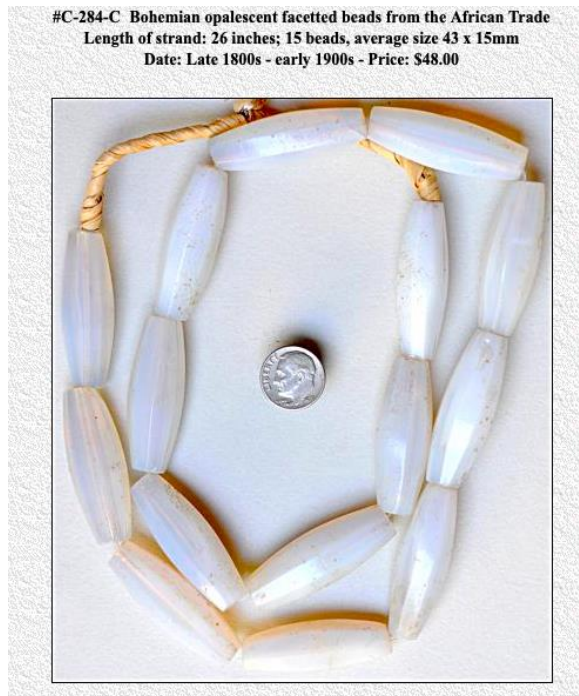


Figure 3c: Picard website's barrel beads.

95-96); expensive due to the way the light bounced off the faceted sides (Francis Jr 2009: 63), catering to the general West African preference for 'shinier' beads (Pawson 1997: 1). Additionally, Mandrel pressed beads rose in prominence 'after the middle of the nineteenth century' in Bohemia (Sprague 1985: 95), the suggested place of manufacture of these types of faceted and elongated barrel beads, demonstrated in the provenance of the Picard example.

However, I do not believe this to be accurate – instead, I suggest that the Levin Catalogue's beads were drawn, as evidenced by the presence of 'elongate bubbles parallel to the axis of perforation' (Karklins 2004: 49), a feature found in drawn beads due to the distortion of the 'originally round bubbles' in the manufacturing process (Sprague 1985: 90). On the other hand, the MAA's faceted beads are likely mandrel-pressed, due to their lack of bubbles characteristic of drawn and wound beads. The MAA beads are translucent, as 'light does penetrate the bead' (Smith and Good 1982: 21), however they

border on opaque due to their very limited diaphaneity.

#### Wound Beads with Inlaid Decoration

Figure 4a shows the beads Karklins labels 'WIIIb' and 'WIIIc' – an extension of Kidd and Kidd's Class WI beads, distinguished by their 'inlaid decoration' (Karklins 2004: 46-49). WIIIb are described by Karklins as cylindrical in shape, with a light grey translucent body decorated with a compound stripe of transparent scarlet (CHC of 7 pa and a ME of 7.5R 4/14) atop opaque white (CHC of a and a ME of N 9/0) around the middle, and 4 compound dots of transparent bright navy (CHC of 13 pg and a ME of 7.5PB 2/7) and opaque white glass 'swirled together around either end' (Karklins 2004: 46, Kidd and Kidd 2012: 44). These 'shiny' beads, measured at 'Length: 9.2-11.0mm, Diameter: 5.6-6.0mm' (Karklins 2004: 46) are identical to the MAA's same beads, matching my rough measurements of 1cm in length and 0.5cm in diameter. Comparatively, WIIIc has an opaque black body (CHC of p, ME of N 1/0), with a wavy opaque amber line wrapped around the middle (CHC of 3 lc and ME of 10.0YR 7/8) and wavy opaque white stripes either side of this amber line. Both WIIIb and WIIIc are found on Plate VA, part of the 1863 collection and labelled as "'Beads employed in the African Trade for gold'" (Karklins 2004: 53).

The Levin Catalogue's 'round' WI beads with inlaid decoration are identical to the MAA examples, although the MAA examples are in worse condition, with the MAA's WIIIb beads being broken, in some cases longitudinally, and latitudinally in other cases. Due to the difficulty of maintaining uniformity of beads in the manufacturing process of



Figure 4a: The Levin Catalogue's Class WI Beads with Inlaid Decoration (Karklins 2004: 53).



Figure 4b: MAA's Class WI beads with Inlaid Decoration





Figure 5a: The Levin Catalogue's 'Round' WI beads with Inlaid Decoration (Karklins 2004: 54)

such small wound beads, there is slight variation in the quality of decoration in both the Levin assemblage and the MAA assemblage. If these beads were well valued amongst the communities on the West African coast, they could be inclined to accept inferior quality beads – small beads, were valued amongst communities. Writing in 1684, Portuguese trader Coelho trading in Niimi, the commercial centre of Gambia, wrote that 'small black and white beads' were in favour amongst the locals (Coelho 1989: 2). It is likely that he is referring to 'seed beads', the only beads firmly distinguished by size, yet smaller beads in general were

preferred in Juffere: 'there continues to be a uniform trend toward smaller beads regardless of the other attributes selected' (Gijanto 2011: 658), which could also explain the low numbers of very large beads such as the large spherical monochrome beads in archaeological assemblages. This preference was sometimes manifested in secondary modification, when imported European beads were ground or cut into smaller pieces locally (DeCorse and Thiaw 2003: 88).

#### Spherical Wound Beads with Floral Spray Inlaid Decoration

Described by Karklins as having a transparent ruby body (CHC of 8 pc and a ME of 2.5R 3/10) with six floral motifs that are parallel to the perforation; three of these are opaque white leaves with an opaque russet orange stalk, whereas the remaining three are simply solid opaque russet orange. They are found on both Plate IIIC and Plate VIA, with measurements of 14.0-15.4mm in length, and 16.0-16.4mm in diameter, corresponding with the rounded measurements of the MAA samples as 1.5cm in length and 1.5cm in diameter. Despite the obvious variability in uniformity, the samples from the Levin Catalogue match the MAA samples very well, and both provide a quintessential example of Sprague's diagram figure 1j – a 'fancy' or 'polychrome' bead (Sprague 1985: 89, 94).

#### Flat 'Disc'/Tabular Beads with Inlaid Decoration

These flat venetian beads are described by Karklins as 'Flat "disc" beads' (Karklins 2004: 48); however, I find the description 'tabular', as stated on the Picard website



Figure 5b: 'wound floral spray or arabesque bead' diagram (Sprague 1985: 89)



Figure 5c: MAA's wound bead with floral/arabesque design



([http://www.picardbeads.com/antique\\_beads/no\\_10047.html](http://www.picardbeads.com/antique_beads/no_10047.html)) to be more appropriate, as this term adequately describes the flat and broad nature of the bead in a way that disc does not. These beads are easily the most distinctive in the MAA assemblage, due to their dull appearance and peculiar perforations, which are parallel to the broad sides of their body. Indeed, this perforation quirk makes these beads distinctive in any assemblage and made comparable examples or descriptions in the literature scarce. One probable reason for this lies in the perceived value of glass beads in West African coastal communities as a way of expressing wealth through materiality.

People living on the Gambia River in the 18<sup>th</sup> century prided themselves on their ability to adorn their bodies completely with beads, as a demonstration of their wealth, implied by easy access to European imports (Gijanto 2011: 645). The stringing of beads in this arrangement would allow for many less beads on a length of string, and so would not convey wealth in a desirable way. This could explain the difficulty of finding other examples of tabular beads strung in this way, as perhaps these were perceived as less valuable or suitable in West Africa. This is supported by the abundance of similar shaped beads with similar designs, but strung parallel to the flat edge, which are much easier to find examples of (see Figure 6d).

The great variation in these beads' colouration and decoration is indicative of the rapidly shifting tastes in beads as accessories of personal adornment - to demonstrate the rapidly shifting notions of taste in glass bead consumption, I examined Gijanto's example of Juffure trading histories. In 1725, 'mungee' beads were one of the primary imports for trade in the Niomi



commercial centre, yet by 1728, these had already fallen substantially out of favour with traders and local communities to cause an inundation of mungee beads in factory stores (Gijanto 2011: 642). A more recent example sees Ghanaian women ceasing to shun antique trade beads for their 'colonial' standing, and instead coveting them (Pawson 1997: 2). This presents an interesting dilemma of a dichotomy for bead researchers - temporal and spatial distribution of beads is both very stagnant and extremely varied; beads do not make a very effective short-term chronological indicator as successful styles of beads were imitated and continued for long times and by different factories (DeCorse and Thiaw 2003: 85). Additionally, areas such as Ghana still sell antique trade beads (DeCorse 1989: 44), which are preserved due to heirlooming and the use of centuries old beads in 'dipo', female rites of passage ceremonies among the Ga-Adangbe (Pawson 1997: 2).

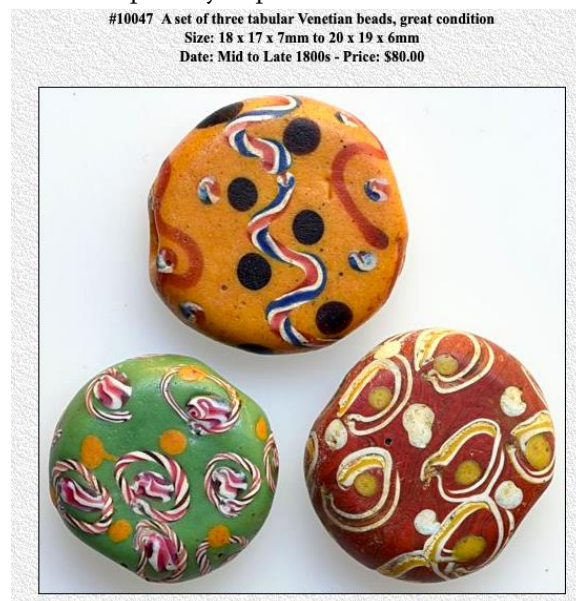


Figure 6c: Picard website's tabular Venetian beads

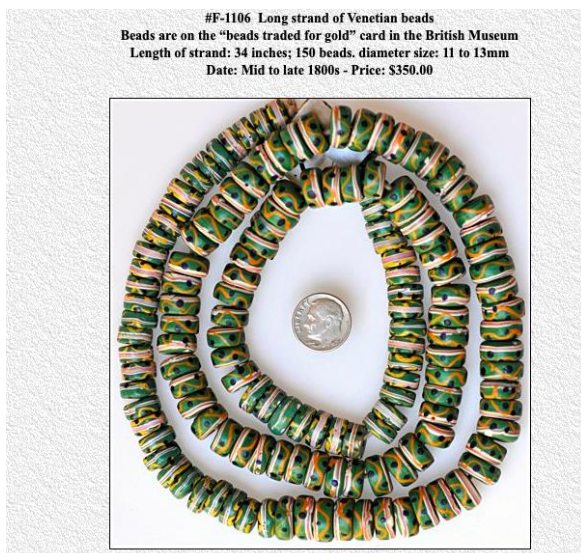
### Cylindrical Monochrome Beads

Figure 6d: Picard website's Venetian beads – although different colours, these beads display a very similar style of decoration to the tabular beads, and are much easier to find examples of, with perforations perpendicular to the broad side of the bead.

'streaky' appearance (Karklins 2004: 44) provides clear correlation between both the Levin examples and the MAA specimens, as well as matching DeCorse's description of an abundance of 'undecorated opaque yellowish-green, barrel-shaped beads', the most prevalent of the samples excavated at Elmina with 690 specimens (DeCorse 1989: 49). DeCorse uses associated material in the 'well-dated contexts' these beads were uncovered from to suggest a rough date of 19<sup>th</sup> century (DeCorse 1989: *ibid*). The MAA example exhibits a clear joint parallel to the perforation, due to the manufacturing process of winding glass around a wire just once around, instead of 'with very fine filaments several times around', which would prohibit this from occurring (Sprague 1985: 93). However, as these beads were featured very prominently in the Elmina excavations, it is likely that these were highly coveted beads – therefore, produced hurriedly, and with local Ghanaian people willing to accept an inferior product for the desired colour, shape, and size (Gijanto 2011: 663). This willingness contributed to the colonialist attitude that

Africans were 'primitive', with a 'childish inability to distinguish worthless baubles from things of genuine value' (Graeber 1996: 4).

Figure 6b: The Levin Catalogue's 'Class VII Beads with an Inlaid Decoration' (Karklins 2004: 53)



### Conclusions

Future classification systems should work on incorporating perforation descriptions, as the positioning and size of this feature has a larger impact than has been appreciated by researchers. Additionally, possible future research directions for the museum to embark on include analysis of the chemical composition of their bead assemblage – hints from documentary sources about sand being sourced from different areas at different periods of production in Venice and Murano factory contexts could provide possible confirmation of the proposed date of manufacture (Carroll Jr and Allen 2004: 19). However, this would be more reliable with a database of results to compare against, and bead research has not yet made this widespread commitment.

Despite the aforementioned difficulties in dating beads due to their continued use temporally and spatially, yet rapidly shifting tastes of local communities who acquired the beads, it is possible to venture a provenance for MAA's assemblage 1947.226. All of these beads have found comparable examples in the Levin Catalogue of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Trade Beads: this gives us a broad span in which to focus our attention. Additionally, the Moses Levin, purveyor of the beads, sourced trade beads from Venice, Murano and Bohemia between 1851 and 1869. As DeCorse explains, African assemblages of beads can be correlated with North American examples, as the two world areas exhibited broadly similar trends in bead consumption. The same beads in the Levin Catalogue have known comparisons identified in North America in the same

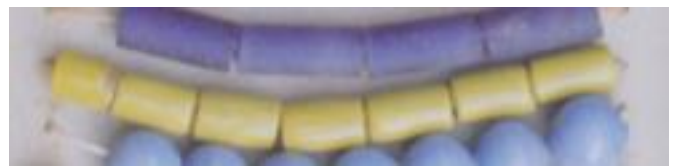


Figure 7a: The Levin Catalogue's 'W1a – Cylindrical Monochrome Beads' (Karklins 2004: 53).



Figure 7b: MAA's Cylindrical Beads



period of 1851-1869, and Karklins' assertion that the Levin examples 'represent current rather than old stock' (Karklins 2004: 50) suggests that these beads indeed originate from this period. Final support of this approximate date can be found in the rough estimates of provenance provided on the Picard examples of these bead types.

Significantly, all beads were likely manufactured in Venice, specifically the island of Murano, due to the 1291 legislative order for the glass making industry to be relocated to the island (Carroll Jr and Allen 2004:18); the exception is the barrel faceted bead, this specific elongated type likely being produced in Bohemia, due to the rise in prominence of the mold-pressed beads from Bohemia after the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Sprague 1985: 95). Although both MAA context cards, and the plates from the Levin Catalogue claim that some of these beads were used for the trading of slaves in West Africa (specifically by the Portuguese and Spanish according to the MAA information), Spain and Portugal, the last European nations to abolish the importation of West African slaves, did so in 1835 and 1836 respectively (Monroe 2011:408). We cannot know for sure who was in possession of the MAA's beads before Horace C. Beck, or their intended commodity obtained, as the great manufacturing centres of Venice, Murano and Bohemia enjoyed a lucrative business of supplying beads to multiple European powers; additionally, documentary sources of trading expeditions to West Africa are scarce in details regarding the value or descriptions of specific bead types.

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