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- 2 Letters to the Editor
- 4 News/Reviews
- 10 Pendant Glass Beads from San Pedro Quiatoni, Oaxaca, Mexico by Donald Cordry
- 13 V The Intriguing Mystery of the Quiatoni Beads by Stephen C. Johnson
- 17 General Considerations on the Storage and Display of Beads, With a Method for the Display of Single Beads by Robert K. Liu, Ph.D.

24 Faience: Technical Aspects and Beads of Simple Form by Robert K. Liu, Ph.D.

The Cover: Persian faience beads c. 100 B.C.-100 A.D. (upper 3 strands) and Egyptian faience beads, New Kingdom-Late Period, c. 1580-305 B.C. Since the sites for these beads are not known, the dating is only approximate. To avoid overlap, description of beads on the cover are included in the article on faience. Scale 1:1. Photography by Phil Shima.

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THE INTRIGUING MYSTERY OF THE QUIATONI BEADS Stephen C. Johnson*

Bead types and shapes are fairly standard — so standard that entire classification systems have been worked out as an aid to analysis and identification (Beck, 1928; Kidd & Kidd, 1970). Accordingly when an unusual type or shape appears, it may be of more than passing interest. If it is purportedly 16th century, found in the New World, limited not only to a certain area but to a specific town, and possibly of Venetian manufacture, then it is certain to be of more than passing interest.

Figure 1 shows a string of what are called Quiatoni beads by the relatively few persons acquainted with their existence. Named from the town in which they were originally found in Southern Mexico (there are no more to speak of), they have occasionally appeared in literature dealing with Mexican Indian costume and jewelry. Donald and Dorothy Cordry report having seen them in 1941-42, and picture them in a single strand in their subsequent 1968 book. Mexican Indian Costumes. Davis and Pack present them in Mexican Jewelry (1963), and their latest appearance is in the 1974 edition of Artes de Mexico, dedicated solely to Mexican jewelry. Both Davis and Pack, and Beatriz Barba de Piña Chan (in Artes de Mexico) state definitely that the beads are 16th Century, and although neither they nor the Cordrys exactly say so, all strongly imply at least through showing them strung together with Venetian beads, that they are of Venetian manufacture.

Intrigued by these beads, I have recently made contact with the Cordrys. While I generally rue the fact that eminent authors dealing with native Guatemala costume had all too frequently ignored the necklaces and beads, the Cordrys are a wealth of information. As their classic book reflects, they took careful note of trade beads encountered in their native costume studies, and fortunately for posterity, have taken pains to learn what there is to know about beads in Mexico. Accordingly they are quite an antidote to my complaint on Guatemala observers.

It is interesting to note that the Cordrys did not commit themselves to a date, as did the others, for the beads' manufacture. They recall, however, having seen at some point, possibly in a Mexican regional museum, a piece of natural rock crystal worked in the distinctive Quiatoni shape. The rock crystal bead was pre-Conquest. This leads to speculation (and I give Donald and Dorothy Cordry full credit for the observation) that the peculiar shape may have had some significance prior to the Conquest. It can be postulated that the Spaniards, upon arriving at the Ouiatoni area, and becoming aware of this significance, then commissioned the production of these beads as a commercial article. It is certainly odd, however, that the distinctive shape is unknown as far as the author is aware, anywhere else in the meso-American area, or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

Because of this lack of widespread distribution. I am willing to further suggest that perhaps they were an item of local manufacture, produced in the Puebla, Mexico glass works alluded to by Sorensen (1971). Sorensen states that crystal-white, blue, and green glass was known to have been worked in Puebla as early as the late 1530's, and goes on to add that "Little is yet known of their products. There were even exports to Guatemala and Peru." Since these crystal white, blue, and green colors predominate in the Quiatoni beads, since Oaxaca is quite handy to Puebla, and since these beads are not known outside of Mexico, might not these Ouiatoni beads be one of the missing products of the infant glass industry of the New World? It's hard to imagine them having been manufactured in Venice, and not being at least tentatively introduced somewhere else in the world.

Yet there is a tantalizing indication that the beads may have been, in fact, produced in Venice. Two, of the perhaps half dozen people I have been able to discuss the beads with, have pointed out to me that the beads are "signed." Sure enough, in many of the beads, on the reverse side of the closed loop at the top, there are wave lines as if in script, which have been suggested to me as reading "Murano." Figure 2 shows enlarged views of the reverse side of the loop.

My own opinion is that this "writing" is actually an impression left by an instrument used to clamp off the bead when the glass was still hot, as indeed some of the beads have been clamped instead of wound at the head to end the making of the particular bead. The Murano "signature" story is intriguing, however, and I will leave it to the reader to see if anything can be deciphered from the "writing" on the beads.

Apart from the signature issue, the construction of the beads is quite simple. They are drawn glass, with the top having been twisted, or clamped (as noted above) into a closed circle at one end. Frequently the tops have been encircled one or more times and dots of different colored glass are added in a collar effect. The bottom end of the bead has two basic shapes. Some are flattened, as if stubbed into a flat object while the glass was being cooled, and others have a tear drop effect caused by a bulbousness at the base. Construction features of the pendant beads are shown in Fig. 3.

The size of the beads in my collection ranges from 10mm to 70mm, and I also possess a single double bead. I won this bead in a coin toss from a sporting banking acquaintance, and its most puzzling aspect is how it could have been drawn, yet still look as if it were meant to be separated along its longitudinal axis (split). Most other double or triple wound beads that I have examined were clearly meant to be broken at the indentation, but this would be presumably very difficult to do with a double drawn glass bead.

The predominating colors are crystal white, green and blue, although I have a few purple specimens as well as some crystal-white with a definite pinkish tinge.

Are they one of the first glass products of the New World? Are they Venetian? Are they 16th Century? Are they known elsewhere in the world? These are the mysteries of the Quiatoni beads, and hopefully this article can draw some illuminating information.

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Editorial Comment — In talking with Federico Jimenez about his collection of Mexican necklaces, he made the following comments about the San Pedro Quiatoni beads: he had seen the inscription MIR or MUR on the backs of some beads; green was the rarest, purple next, with blue or clear the most common; some blue beads, similar to those from S.P.Q., have been excavated from Peruvian sites; that the birds represented on the silver earrings are probably turkeys. If it can be documented that the Peruvian beads are the same as those from Oaxaca, this observation would favor a European origin for these beads. Other beads of proven Dutch or Venetian manufacture, such as small chevrons and Nueva Cadiz cane beads, have been found in Peru. I noted that some of his clear S.P.Q. beads had black or blue polychrome decoration. In looking over the method of forming the suspension loop of these beads, it appears that most, if not all such beads, required the use of a tong-like instrument. One end of the tongs was inserted into the hole of the suspension loop, which served to enlarge this hole, which otherwise tends to close up in the flame. The other end clamps down upon the free end of the loop, flattening it for better adherence to the neck of the rod.



Fig. 1. Necklace of pendant glass beads and antique Venetian polychrome and eye beads. Alternate style of stringing with coral beads are shown in Cordry, 1968; La Joyeria Mexicana and Alhajas Mexicanas. A. Bird Coll.

15



Fig. 2. Enlarged view of above necklace, showing reverse of loop. Demonstrates clamped loop; on specimens examined, none really seem to bear inscription "Murano."



Fig. 3. Construction features of pendant glass beads.

A. Thin, vertical lines on clear glass pendant bead are elongated air bubbles produced during drawing of the glass rod.

B, **C**. Beads with applied polychrome decoration; clear bead with both clear and colored decoration. Dark bead courtesy of D. Cordry.

D. Copy of pendant glass bead, made by Editor to investigate construction of the San Pedro Quiatoni beads. This version made from formed Pyrex rod, loop not clamped. Shape of copy differs considerably from prototypes made of hand-drawn rod, with clamped loops.