

EUROPEAN TRADE BEADS IN FLORIDA

Karlis Karklins

The beads most often found in burial mounds of the early European contact period in this state were manufactured in Venice during the late 15th and the 16th century when that city was still the glass-making center of Europe. During that period the manufacture of small glass beads was prospering to such an extent that at one time their export to Czechoslovakia was more important than the export of other glasswares (Hettes 1960: 27). At the close of the 16th century, the art of glass manufacturing had spread to all parts of Europe. As a matter of fact, the first glass factory in America was already operating in 1609 at Jamestown, Virginia. Here, "beads, bottles, and trinkets were manufactured for barter with the Indians" (Phillips 1941: 16). However, it, like another built in 1621, lasted but a few years.

The manufacture of beads in general is accomplished in the following manner. Two glass blowers attach a glob of melted glass to their blowpipes and blow them into small, hollow bulbs which are then opened and joined so as to form a large bulb. When this has been done, the blowers walk rapidly apart all the while blowing into their pipes, thus drawing the glass out into a long, narrow, hollow tube, as the air blown into the liquid glass creates the hollow center. This whole process takes place in a matter of seconds while the glass is still very hot and plastic.

When cool, the formed tube is broken up into lengths of about a foot to facilitate easier handling. These are then annealed to strengthen the glass. After this process, they are chopped up on a sharp cutting edge to form rough beads.

In the next step of production, the rough beads are placed in an iron drum containing a mixture of charcoal dust and plaster. The drum is then heated and rotated simultaneously. This rounds the sharp, broken edges. The charcoal and plaster prevent the beads from sticking together as the edges melt and round off.

THE FLORIDA ANTHROPOLOGIST, Vol. 20, Nos. 3-4, September-December, 1967.

The most common type of glass bead found in pre-Seminole sites is a small perforated disc some 3 mm. wide, though they range in size from 2 to 4 mm. These are termed "seed beads." Though most commonly white or various shades of blue, their colors range almost the whole spectrum, including two-tone varieties. Another rather common form is a spheroidal bead averaging 7 mm. in diameter, usually being some shade of blue.

Other less frequently encountered types are so varied in form and color that to describe them would take more space than is here available. Suffice it to say that they come as tubes, spheres, ovoids, and numerous faceted types, and that they are often embellished with vari-colored lines and stripes, or composed of several layers of differently colored glass. Their size variation is quite vast, ranging from around 2 mm. to over 2 cm. in width.

It should be noted here that not all trade beads are made of glass. Some are made of silver--either in the form of seed beads, or as tubes made from a small sheet of silver. Others are amber, rock crystal, copper, lead, gold, or gilt-covered glass.

These same beads occur over much of the East. Their presence there is not difficult to explain due to the fact that early expeditions traveled great distances in North America, either by boat or by foot, encountering numerous Indians with whom they traded the same items.

We are now confronted with the question; who brought the European beads to Florida, and what purpose did they serve to both the European and the Indian?

The earliest mention of trade beads in the New World was made on October 12, 1492, by Christopher Columbus who, having landed on San Salvador Island in the Bahamas and taken possession of it in the name of Spain, gave some of the natives "red caps and glass beads to put around their necks, and many other things of little value, which gave them great pleasure..." (Olson 1906: 111).

In 1516, a pilot named Diego Miruelo sailed northward along the Florida West Coast on a trading cruise and reached Pensacola Bay. "Here he found the Indians friendly, and exchanged his store of glass [more than likely including beads] and steel trinkets for silver and gold" (Winsor 1886: 236).

One of the first direct references to trade beads in what is now Florida was made by the Spaniard, Cabeza de Vaca, a member of the ill-fated Narvaez expedition. On June

17, 1528, he reports that they met the Indian chief Dulchanchellin a few hours march east of the Apalachicola River. They "gave him beads, little bells, and other trinkets, and he gave the Governor the deerskin he wore" (Vaca 1961: 37).

When they had first reached Florida just two months previously and anchored in what is now Tampa Bay, the Spaniards traded "trinkets" (which probably included beads) to the Indians for fish and venison. Also in the neighborhood of Tampa Bay, in the year 1549, Friar Luis Cancer presented some gifts to the inhabitants in the hopes of gaining their friendship so that they might be converted to Christianity. The gifts consisted of such things as rosaries, knives, and machetes.

Pedro Menendez de Aviles, having sailed into Charlotte Harbor in February of 1566, gave the local Indians "beads, scissors, knives, bells and mirrors, wherewith they were much pleased" (Meras 1964: 148).

However, the Spanish were not the only Europeans trading or giving beads to the natives. In 1565, Rene de Laudonniere, the French Huguenot founder of Fort Caroline, writes that he "exerted every effort to trade mirrors, beads, knives, and hatchets for Indian corn to feed the colonists and for other commodities to establish trade between America and France" (Bennett 1964: 29).

From the above it can be seen that the Spanish, as well as the French, were primarily responsible for bringing trade beads to Florida. Other nations had nothing to do with this area. Even England had excluded itself until 1763, when, by the Treaty of Paris, Florida became a British colony. Also, the use of beads as tokens of friendship and items of trade to procure food are quite evident. However, trade for items usable in Europe was also slowly developing. The Indians were very eager to trade anything they had for whatever the Europeans would give them in return, and there were a number of colonists at Fort Caroline who occupied their time in trade. Articles obtained through trade with the native population consisted mainly of gold and silver (these are not native metals, but were obtained in barter from north Georgia Indians, or salvaged from wrecked treasure ships), pearls, hides, "civet-marten" skins, tobacco, and sassafras. For these commodities, the Indians were given trinkets and tools of no great value.

The trinkets, of course, included beads of which the Indians appear to have been very fond. Jean Ribaut, French Huguenot and friend of Laudonniere, states that he gave the Indians "littell beades of glasse, which they love and esteeme above Gould and pearles for to hang them on their eares

and necke" (Ribaut 1964: 93). This statement also indicates the manner in which the natives wore the beads as jewelry.

Another article of trade obtainable by the Indians living along the coast, and in much demand by the Spaniards, was ambergris. This is a solid, fatty substance secreted by sperm whales, and is used as a fixative in the manufacture of perfumes. In 1587, Father Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo wrote: "The Indian knows that the reward for one who finds such ambergris is great and hence he looks about for the whales so that he can gather large quantities of the material. When a ship approaches, he exchanges the ambergris with the Castilian who, in turn, give him glass beads. He delights in receiving these articles for he can then dress himself in a fashion he thinks attractive" (Covington 1963: 145). He also relates the "rate of exchange": "What the Indian received in trade at the frigate is not as valuable as the ambergris he exchanges. Ambergris is very valuable and there are no pearls, emeralds, gold or silver to equal its value. The Indian leaves one object and receives another worth one-hundredth its value, but he goes away happy and careful that no one steals what he has received" (Covington 1963: 146).

A problem arising here concerns the way in which the beads were presented in trade and gift. Were they traded loose, or by the string? Columbus tells us that upon encountering natives at Fernandina Island on October 16, 1492, he "ordered each one to be given something, such as a few beads, ten or twelve of those made of glass on a thread" (Olson 1906: 118), and that on November 2, he sent some of his men looking for spices, giving "them strings of beads with which to buy food if they should be in need" (Olson 1906: 137). In Florida itself, in May of 1566, Menendez had, among other things, "necklaces of glass beads" (Meras 1964: 192) to use for barter with the Calusa Indians in the area of Charlotte Bay. Thus, the indication is that the beads came along strung, in some instances at least, and it would seemingly appear that a string of beads, which can be worn immediately, would be more appealing and effective, especially as a gift, than a handful of loose beads.

Before proceeding further, it should be pointed out that all of the Indians mentioned in the narratives heretofore were of native tribes (Apalachee, Timucua, Calusa), and all of the beads involved were undoubtedly of Venetian manufacture, save perhaps those traded for the ambergris in 1587, which may be either Venetian or Spanish, as this was about the time that glassmaking was spreading over Europe.

The Spanish missionaries had been trying to convert the Indians ever since Ponce de Leon landed in Florida in 1513, and had varying degrees of success in the different

areas. By 1650, many of the natives were living around Spanish missions and were Christians, principally in the northern part of the state, and the St. Johns River drainage area. The Indians in the southern part and up along the west coast to Jefferson County were unaffected for the most part, and lived in their traditional ways.

In the very early part of the eighteenth century, several devastating raids were made by the English and their Creek allies on the Spanish missions. The result was that almost all of the Apalachees and Timucuas were either killed or taken prisoner. A similar fate befell the other tribes.

Those Indians who escaped the raids fled into the swamps and forests for refuge. Here they eventually met other Indians of various tribes who had migrated to Florida from Alabama and Georgia due to pressures put upon them there by the white man. A number of escaped Negro slaves were also encountered. They integrated, and about 1750, the "Runaways" or "Seminoles" were formed.

On November 15, 1765, at the Congress of Picolata, the English, who had two years previously taken possession of Florida, delivered numerous presents to the Creek-Seminoles of southern Alabama and Georgia, and northern Florida, in order to persuade them to peacefully relinquish their hold on two million acres of their territory located in the northeastern part of the Florida peninsula, so that the land would be open for safe settlement by Englishmen. The inventory of gifts included fifteen bunches each of black, and white, small, round beads. Additional items were given the next year and included thirty bunches of white "barley corn" beads (Covington 1960: 71).

In the Everglades area, MacCauley writes that in 1883-1884 Seminole squaws were very particular about the beads they wore. They utilized only cut glass beads, about a quarter of an inch or more in length, which were usually some shade of blue (Swanton 1946: 517). However, these beads were more than likely of American manufacture, thus not concerning us here. However, this does indicate what the Seminoles were using in the late nineteenth century.

Glass beads of European manufacture are not easily identified due to the fact that references are few and hard to come by. As trade beads have long been neglected in the literature, it is hoped that this paper has added some useful information to the subject.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, Charles
 1964 Laundonniere and Fort Caroline. University of Florida Press. Gainesville.
- Covington, James W.
 1960 English Gifts to the Indians: 1765-1766. The Florida Anthropologist, Vol. 13, No. 2-3, pp. 71-75. Gainesville.
- 1963 Pirates, Indians and Spaniards. Great Outdoors Publishing Co. St. Petersburg.
- Hettes, Kerel
 1960 Old Venetian Glass. Spring Books. London.
- Meras, Solis de
 1964 Perdo Menendez de Aviles. University of Florida Press. Gainesville.
- Olson, J. E. and E. G. Bourne
 1906 The Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York.
- Phillips, C. J.
 1941 Glass: The Miracle Maker. Pitman Publishing Corporation. New York.
- Ribaut, Jean
 1964 The Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida. University of Florida Press. Gainesville.
- Swanton, John R.
 1946 The Indians of the Southeastern United States. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137. Washington.
- Vaca, Cabeza de
 1961 Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America. Collier Books. New York.
- Winsor, Justin
 1886 Narrative and Critical History of America, Vol. 2. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. New York.

Tampa, Florida