

Bead Replicas An Alternative to Antique Bead Collecting

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer



From the Stone Age to the present, beads are the one class of objects found in all world cultures, and clearly represent a form of global cultural heritage. Traded from continent to continent, from the Old to the New World, these unique ornaments have linked people in distant communities for thousands of years. Passed from generation to generation as heirlooms, many beads link the past to the present, and over time, such antique beads gain incredible value because of their historical significance and in some cases, spiritual powers.

Until recently, beads were considered relatively unimportant for understanding the development of human cultures. They were baubles, classified as minor antiquities and given little consideration by archaeologists or art historians. Archaeologists themselves are known to have collected beads from their excavations and made ornaments for their wives or friends. However, with changes in archaeological research techniques and changes in the questions that people ask about the past, it turns out that beads are in fact one of the most important forms of information on ancient trade and exchange networks, ancient technological developments, and even provide insight into ancient beliefs and rituals.

In antiquity, beads were produced by individuals for personal use or exchange within one's own community. They were also produced in specialized workshops or by entrepreneurs for trade to local or distant consumers. Ornaments made from beads were often buried with the dead as offerings, hidden away in a hoard for later use, or more commonly, lost in the course of daily activities when an ornament broke or was discarded. When contemporary archaeologists discover an ornament or bead workshop they can learn about the ways in which a culture organized production, what types of styles were most valued, as well as the overall stylistic development of the ornament. Lost beads found in streets or trash dumps provide a different perspective for understanding the distribution of wealth throughout a settlement and the relative value of specific items. When beads are found as a part of burial offerings, they tell us about the relative value of beaded ornaments as well as the rituals that may have been involved in their use and burial. The most important factor for accurate dating and interpretation of beads is to record the precise contexts where they were used and buried.

Many antique bead collectors are interested in finding out more about the beads that they own.

Above: REPLICA TRUNCATED CARNELIAN BICONES, made by Inayat Husain, Khambhat, India; 1.3-1.7 centimeters diameter. Photographs by Robert K. Liu except where noted otherwise.



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The final
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 Ava Motherwell,
 The Whole
 Bead Show.
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The journey is being there...

They want to know how old they are, who made them or how they came to be found in a specific region. However, when beads are removed from the archaeological sites without proper recording and documentation, it is impossible for specialists to provide information about their age or the cultural context in which they were made or used.

In the past, antique beads that reached the market for collectors were casually collected by children after a rain or in the course of agricultural activities, and rarely when someone accidentally discovered a rich burial. Such beads, found in disturbed contexts, have little interpretive value to archaeologists or scholars interested in understanding the role of beads in a specific society.

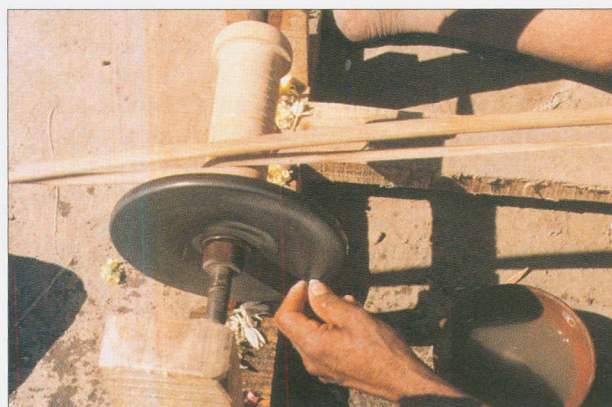
Antique dealers would often buy such beads to supplement the more lucrative trade of sculptures and pottery. But, antique bead collectors of the present are living in a very different world from the bead collectors of the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With the rise of global markets and international trade those days are gone forever. The demand for antique beads in New York, London or Hong Kong has led to the wholesale destruction of ancient burial grounds and habitation sites by local entrepreneurs who often use bulldozers and mechanized sifting to collect beads for sale to specific markets. This destruction of archaeological sites for personal profit and sale to a limited number of elite collectors is seriously threatening the archaeological record of past cultures and the destruction of our common global cultural heritage. This situation has reached such alarming proportions that bead collectors and scholars, as well as local governments have begun to criticize and in some cases ban the trade of antique beads.

The solution to this problem is not simple, but involves multiple approaches that need to be implemented and supported by concerned individuals and local governments. Most countries have laws that are designed to protect their cultural heritage and discourage the destruction of archaeological sites, but when there is a demand, entrepreneurs always rise to the occasion and meet the demand by hook or by crook. In most regions the laws made to protect sites are rarely implemented and this situation was clearly demonstrated at the Third International Bead Conference in Washington, D. C. (November 1995), when one could walk from stall to stall and view beads from the Paleolithic to the present that had been looted from sites throughout the world. The United States has laws banning the import of illegally obtained antiquities, but clearly beads seem to be able to slip through customs departments in foreign countries as well as here.

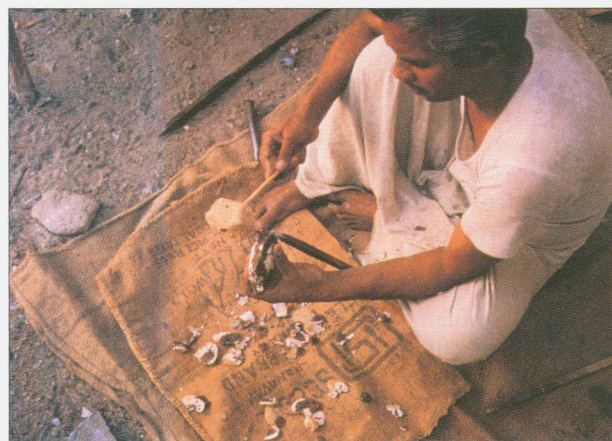
Who is to blame for this looting and smuggling? Many people have resorted to pointing fingers and accusing antique bead collectors, or the professional bead dealers of destroying the record of specific cultures. In fact everyone is to blame: the local governments for not enforcing the laws, local entrepreneurs for digging up the beads and destroy-



PRATAP BHAI, hand drilling long carnelian beads; Khambhat, India.



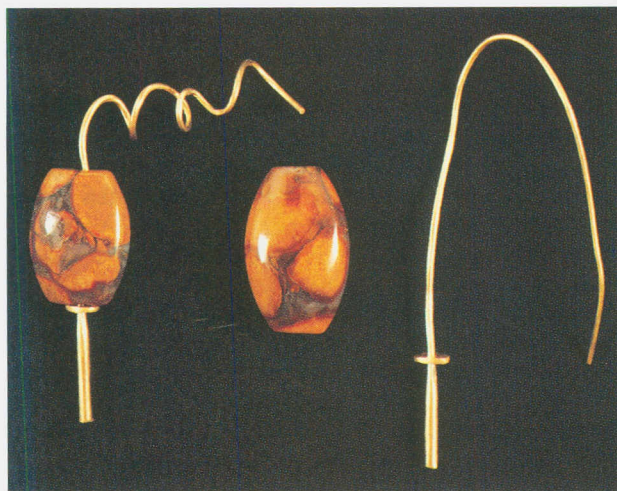
INAYAT HUSAIN, hand polishing agate beads in Khambhat.



INAYAT HUSAIN, chipping agate bead blanks. Photographs by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer.



GOLD JEWELRY from Mohenjodaro and Harappa, 2600-1900 B.C.
Photographs top of page by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer.



REPLICAS of pendant beads from Mohenjodaro produced by Inayat Husain of Khambhat, India.

ing the sites, bead dealers who buy the beads, and bead collectors who purchase them from the bead dealers. The solution however does not lie in leveling accusations, but rather in finding an alternative that can satisfy the global consumers and stimulate beadmaking in all parts of the world.

The first step is to educate bead dealers and collectors about the consequences of their actions. When a site is destroyed to obtain antiquities and beads, the record of an entire culture can be lost. Furthermore, the information that is most important to bead collectors, bead technology, trade and chronology, is also lost. My personal view is that rather than destroying more sites, bead dealers and collectors should be working together with archaeologists and local governments to study ancient beads and to preserve the knowledge about such beads. In conjunction with these studies it is important to stimulate the production of replicas that can fill the consumer's demand for antique-looking objects and also provide valuable income to traditional artisans who are being forced out of existence by modernization and mechanized production.

Replica production is a viable alternative to looting and would help solve the problem of fakes which are already quite common. For example, many tabular agate and onyx beads from Central Asia that are sold as antiques are in fact being produced by modern workshops in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

The cost for producing replicas is the same as for fakes, but the poor artisans who manufacture them do not benefit from their sale as fakes, because they are shielded from bead dealers by middlemen. None of the professional bead dealers that I have met in the West intentionally sell such fakes, but clearly someone is profiting from the practice, and unsuspecting consumers are obviously the ones who pay. By making replicas and selling directly to bead dealers, the traditional artisans would make more profit and reinvigorate many dying technologies. The availability of such bonafide replicas would eventually make it unprofitable to destroy entire sites for a few beads.

For the past twenty years I have been involved in the excavation of archaeological sites in Pakistan and

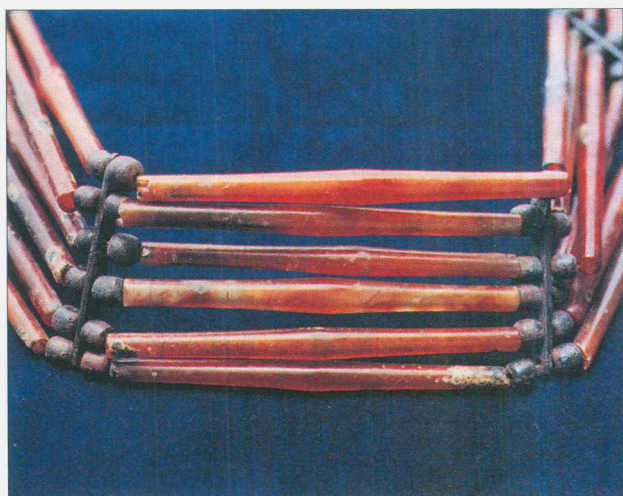
India, with a specific focus on the manufacture of ornaments and beads during the Indus Valley Civilization, which dates from around 2600

to 1900 B. C. (Kenoyer 1986, 1992). In conjunction

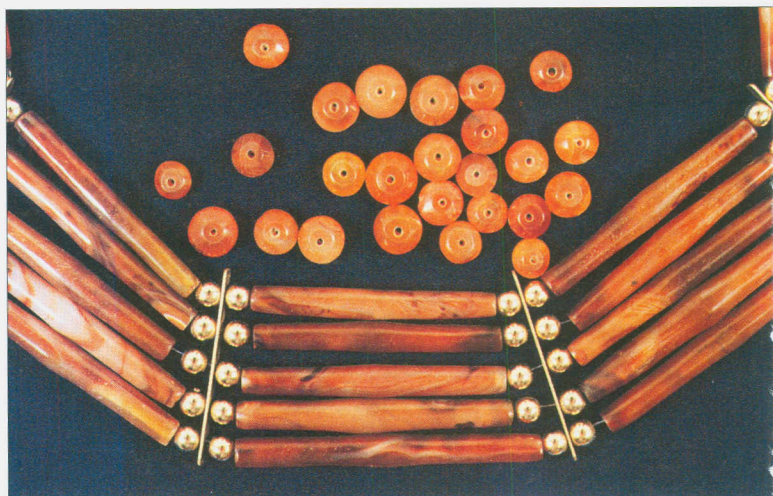
with this archaeological research, I have been involved in the study of traditional agate beadmaking in Khambhat, India and the replication of ancient beads to understand the manufacture and production of such



REPLICA LONG BICONES AND A TRUE ANCIENT BICONE prototype (center) from Afghanistan. Replicas made by Inayat Husain, center bicone is 6.7 centimeters long. Note larger perforation of ancient bead, compared to small holes in replica.



CARNELIAN and bronze bead belt from Mohenjodaro, Pakistan.



CARNELIAN BEAD REPLICAS made by Inayat Husain.

ornaments (Kenoyer, Vidale and Bhan 1991). In Khambhat the master beadmayer, Inayat Husain, was able to produce exquisite replicas of Indus beads, such as jasper beads with natural eye designs and carnelian beads made in short as well as long biconical forms. These types of beads are the most common shapes found in many Indus period ornaments and many of his beads are now available on the market. I also worked with a lapis beadmayer in Peshawar, Mullah Ashoor, who was already creating many antique bead shapes to meet the demand of local bead dealers (Kenoyer 1992b). The lapis beads produced by Mullah Ashoor and his many sons can now be found in bead shops throughout the world, along with lesser quality copies made by other artisans. In conjunction with stone beadmayers, I have also worked with jewelers in Karachi and Delhi to produce the types of gold and silver beads and mounts that the Indus craftsmen used to accentuate their stone beads. At present I am working with some colleagues to develop an exhibition on replicas of ancient gold jewelry from South Asia. Due to the high quality of gold and silver crafting required for producing Indus style gold and silver ornaments, it has been difficult to produce such ornaments for the general market, but my hope is that eventually such components can be made more economically.

Another type of ornament that could be produced for the modern market is the glazed faience bead (Kenoyer 1994). Ancient Indus craftsmen produced a wide variety of colored faience that was made to imitate turquoise, carnelian and even lapis lazuli. Experimental replicas that I have produced would be quite marketable if they were made in large quantities as is currently done in Egypt, where most of the faience beads and ornaments on the market are replicas. I am currently working with local artisans in Pakistan who traditionally work with glazed

ceramics and glass, to reproduce some of the quality Indus objects before the original Indus faience ornaments become in demand. Such beads are rarely marketed because the glaze is usually eroded and they are not as attractive as stone beads. [Editor's note: For decades, Carol Strick has been reproducing Egyptian faience beads and ornaments in the United States.]

Although there will always be a demand for original antique beads, the availability of high quality replicas made with authentic techniques and materials might gradually outstrip the demand for illegally looted archaeological objects. In this way perhaps a few sites can be properly excavated, while other sites can be saved for future generations of scholars to study using new and more advanced techniques than are available to us today.

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