

BEADS FROM GABLONZ¹

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During the 19th and 20th centuries, Gablonz in northern Bohemia (now Jablonec nad Nisou in the Czech Republic) was a major producer and supplier of glass and ceramic beads to the world market. This production center created beads of myriad forms, using all the major manufacturing methods. This detailed study provides a thorough overview of the various methods including patent details as well as information concerning bead names, shapes, coloring, decoration, sizing, stringing, and historic prices. The text is accompanied by numerous illustrations of the beads under discussion and the tools and apparatuses used to make, size, and string them. There is also a well-illustrated section on the pre-1913 sample cards of two major Gablonz companies, the Redlhammer Brothers and the Mahla Brothers.

INTRODUCTION

Beads from Gablonz (Figure 1) sparkle at us from their sample cards in brilliant colors, silvered and gilded, shimmering in silky pastel hues. Jet black, they stand out from silk and tulle, lend radiant brightness to bead mosaics and decorate fabrics in dizzying variety. Embroidered and knit, they become neighbors to metallic beads; artistically braided into bell pulls, they serve both the eye and the ear; their sparkle crowns diadems and combs, clasps, and pins. From the matte-black of mourning to the splendor of jewelry for the theater, the entire range of emotions from pain to joy can be found in the sheen of carefully chosen beads. Nut-sized or as fine as a speck of dust, they align in rows for heavy necklaces or stream like unpolished spangles across surfaces, creating ornaments that appear to be painted with tiny specks of color.

Blown, molded, and wound from glass, pressed from plastic matter, the beads from Gablonz take on all imaginable shapes: spheres and olives, cubes and cylinders, rings and discs, spindles and spools, fruits and flowers. They bear fantasy names such as Atlas beads, morning-ray beads, feather and snake beads, boxers and toggles. Already at a very early time, they were spread over all the continents of the world. Many were lost, broken, or stored away and forgotten. Taking complicated paths, some of them have

managed to find their way back to Europe, back to Bohemia where they came from. How do we recognize them, these beads from Gablonz? What do we call their many different types? Who still knows about the flames and molds, the furnaces and tongs that brought them into existence?

Millions of beads made of glass and ceramic can no longer be properly interpreted. No one knows the time or place of their manufacture. In our search for clues, we would probably have found ourselves in a no-man's land if it had not been for the indispensable witnesses of the time: the sample cards and books, the licensing privileges and glass recipes, and the reports of travelers who stood gaping in the huts of the glassblowers and pressers, to whom the maker of composition glass closed his doors, who watched the long pulling processes used in glass factories for drawing tubes and were blinded by the glorious colors of the canes.

Like no other city, Vienna is favorably inclined to researchers: museums, archives, and libraries reveal treasures that leave one asking how it will be possible to master such richness (the Gablonz beads in a globally unparalleled collection reaching from Biedermeier to Art Nouveau, owned by the Technical Museum in Vienna, are a completely unexpected discovery). Only a fragment of the wealth of material uncovered can be forced between the two covers of a book. Therefore, despite its considerable size, this publication can show certain phenomena in highlight form only: the beads and sample cards from the turn of the 20th century and bead technology. It is hoped that a vivid impression will be provided by the illustrations which try to combine public property and the private passion for collecting. The explanatory text that accompanies them had to be kept within spartanic limits because of the volume of the sources available.

Using information taken from the collections in Vienna and in Kaufbeuren-Neugablonz (Gablonz Archive and Museum, Neugablonz Industry and Jewelry Museum, Kaufbeuren-Neugablonz), combined with privilegia in the Austrian patent office in Vienna and illustrative material from companies still active today, special attention is first directed to the production methods used for glass beads.



Figure 1. Map of the Gablonz region, 1895 (Lilie 1895).

Extensive chapters are devoted to drawn and mold-pressed beads and to wound and blown beads. Colors, shapes, and sizes and the problems of terminology are treated in special sections of their own. The sample cards from two Gablonz companies, the Redlhammer Brothers and the Mahla Brothers, are another important area. The contemporary documentation includes texts on the technology and history of Gablonz beads and is enriched with illustrations from the second half of the 19th century.

The technological introduction intentionally exceeds the temporal boundaries (Historicism and Art Nouveau) set for this publication so that certain procedures can be described better. Here, the collection in the Technical Museum in Vienna is indispensable; its richness is a continuous source of astonishment. Particular treasures among this diversity that is yet to be fully explored are the beads from the Biedermeier (from the “Imperial Chamber of Factory Products”) and Art Nouveau periods. Raw materials and semi-finished products, from chunks of composition-glass from Bohemia to cakes of enamel from Venice, from tiny thin-walled tubes for producing blown beads to the bugles and canes (smooth

and twisted, in filigree and network patterns) come to us along with sample cards and sample books.

Extremely delicate Viennese blown glass and wax beads, Venetian glass bead sample books with hundreds of embroidery beads, bunches of Bohemian Biedermeier beads, Riedel’s “ballotini” from the turn of the 20th century, and the necklaces of blown-glass beads are impressive in their many colors and techniques, with and without “belts” (smooth or in a broken line), melon-shaped mold-blown, or hollow wrapped.

Solid glass beads with stepped or rhomboid cuts belong to the high art of the glass cutter. Sophisticated coloring techniques (color in the batch; overlays; colored, silver, and gold linings) make subtle shading possible. There are many variations in the beads with metallic finishes, the copper-colored beads, the internally ribbed golden beads, the iridized and lustered beads. We have the “lamp blowers” or “glass spinners” to thank for the wound beads with decorative trailing from fine glass canes melted onto them. In the “Factory Products Cabinet,” special attention was always

given to technology, to a representation of the individual stages of the work involved, so that even today the creation of a bead can be followed in several stages: from the cane to the drawn bead, from the cut to the polished Bohemian bead. Semi-finished items, “squeezed” in molds, and metal mountings for the glass portions of rings, pendants, and earrings are also preserved.

BEADS FROM GABLONZ

Scatter and embroidery beads, rassades and rocailles, macca and charlotte beads, drawn and blown beads, wound and mold-pressed beads, silver and fine gold beads, wax beads, baroque and craw beads, pound and string beads, spindles and spools, bugles, glass corals, and glass garnets – the names are as numerous as the beads themselves and their meanings and interpretations vary in turn. From the Biedermeier period alone, there are inexhaustible varieties of Bohemian beads known to us; whether free-formed or “squeezed” (*gequetscht*), solid or hollow, they show an astonishing variety and range of modern and contrasting color: round and faceted, wrapped and striped beads, some with “belts” and aventurine bands, grooved and patterned, color lined, satin and silvered beads, in pale pastel shades, with silky surfaces and in bright Art-Deco color combinations (Plates 1A-1C, 21D-24B).

The great variety of Gablonz beads is revealed to us in the most important sources of the 19th and 20th centuries: the writings and statistics on the economy and the geography of Bohemia, the reports and commentaries on exhibitions, address books, etc.

One report from this time that is representative of many others, sheds light on the situation of Bohemian glass bead production: a Kreutzberg report from the year 1836 dealing with “glass compositions, beads, squeezed, and blown glass.” It states that some 10,000 people were involved in this branch of production which showed a profit of 2,000,000 florins:

The main seat of the glass coral, rocaille and chandelier stone trade is the market town, Gablonz.... The production is mostly headed by local entrepreneurs who supply the workers scattered throughout the neighboring dominions of Morchenstern and Kleinskall with samples and materials. The former are divided into: composition burners (*Compositions Brenner*), who melt the supplied glass batches in the most varied colors and shades, and then shape them into canes and tubes; glass and composition press-molders (squeezers) who shape the soft mass into raw chandelier and

jewelry stones with molding tongs; these are then further refined by cutting, which takes place in their own grinding mills, a single one of which often contains 6-15 work places, which the grinding mill owner turns over to individual workers to use in return for a fee; bead blowers, cutters, gilders and stringers, of which the latter (nearly 300 in the Dominion of Morchenstern alone are mostly children) string the finished beads onto wire and thread (Kreutzberg 1836:25, 26).

Gablonz Glass Smallwares

The beads from Gablonz (chiefly drawn, mold-pressed, and blown beads) were only a part – albeit a very important one – of the later so-called “Gablonz industry,” whose products are also known under the term “glass smallwares” or “quincaillerie;” the school founded in Gablonz in 1880 also used the terms “quincaillerie and bijouterie” in its name. At the beginning of the 19th century, “glass smallware” was frequently synonymous with “the small art of glass making” (Loysel 1818:264), “small glassmaking” or “small glass products” (Leng 1835:500) which is more direct and vivid than the expression, “glass smallwares,” in describing the size of the products. There are two main sources named here that are representative of many others during the periods of Historicism and Art Nouveau, which describe this production known far beyond the region’s borders.

In 1854, several Bohemian companies took part in the “General German Industrial Exhibition” in Munich. J. and C. Pfeiffer and H. Fischer from Gablonz, along with A. Pazelt from Turnau, showed “quincaillerie products” (including “ear drops” and beads in a variety of techniques: “partly hollow, partly solid, mold-pressed, painted, striped in all colors [such as pink, opal, ruby, black, garnet, coral red, Atlas, gold, silver], cut and uncut, round, elongated, tubular.” The Pfeiffer Company was awarded the “Large Commemorative Medal” “for the great beauty and inexpensiveness of their glass and quincaillerie wares and the unusually large size of the factory.” Fischer received the “Medal of Honor” “for the beauty and low price of his beads, stones and buttons made from glass” (Munich 1855:47).

Around 1880-1881, the following products from the District of Reichenberg were listed as glass smallwares:

1. Glass buttons, glass beads, glass jewelry, glass boxes, glass toys, glass pipe tips (imitation amber), spun glass, glass wool, etc.
2. Jewelry sets, brooches, earrings, finger rings, medallions, diadems, combs, hairpins, bracelets,