

I noted that *rangée* was not in the Arabic text, but was a French word the translators were using to mean a “string of beads.” *Rangée* means to put things in order or in a file (to arrange them).

Nazhim was used as “bead,” but I now realize why. *Nazhim* means the same as *rangée*; that is, to put something in order or in a file. It also has the meaning “to string (esp. pearls)” (Madina 1973:675). Post (1911:734) wrote: “The verb *nazam* in Arab., coupled with *lulu* = ‘pearl.’ signified ‘to string pearls.’ Coupled with *s’hir* = ‘poetry,’ it means ‘to arrange verses.’” In short, the translators of Ibn Battuta translated the word literally.

However, in Ibn Battuta’s day, at least in West Africa, the Arabic verb had apparently been transformed into a noun. The correct reading of the passage would be “ornaments or baubles of glass, which are called beads.”

“Bead” in Swahili

While poking around an online dictionary site, I checked out the word for bead in a Swahili dictionary (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/swahili/>). Swahili is a Bantu language, spoken natively by some 4 million people, but used by another 30 million as a link language (Crystal 1987:314). Bantu is one of many languages with a complex system of classifying nouns. These classifications are not always arranged with Aristotelian logic. For example, there is an insect class, but the word “insect” is classified in the “human being” category (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/swahili/>). As a result, words for beads appear in several different classifications in Swahili, though they all seem to make sense.

In the class of “things with curved outlines,” *tinda* is a “string of beads to go around the neck.” In the class of “powerful things,” *mdundugo* is a “charm said to make one invisible,” and *mzumai* is a “bead of the Muslim rosary [sic].” In the classification of “collections of discrete things,” *shada* is a “string of flowers, beads,” and in the category of “religious things,” *mzumai* again appears as a “rosary [sic] bead.” I do not know any Swahili. It would be interesting to learn if there are any other associations with these words. To the best of my knowledge, *mzumai* is not Arabic nor derived from that language.

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27. SOME REMARKS ON BODOM BEADS, by Peter Francis, Jr. (2002, 40:10-12)

Recently two articles have appeared on the subject of Bodom beads (Stanfield 2000-2001; Liu et al. 2001). I do not claim to have all the answers about Bodom, but I do believe that some facts have been overlooked in these two articles and ought to be brought to attention.

The principal concern here is the origin of these beads. The fact that the Krobo of Ghana make beads that they call Bodom and that (sometimes) resemble Bodom is not sufficient to assume that true Bodom were made by them as Stanfield (2000-2001:68, 74) asserts. As Stanfield (2000-2001:64) himself points out, the word is of Akan origin and it was likely introduced to the Krobo by Lamb (1976:37-38). Lamb, who was not trained as an ethnographer, took the word of Mr. Tettah, his informant, at face value when he “emphatically” stated that the Bodom he was shown were of Krobo origin. Unfortunately, that is not sufficient. If it were, I would, for example, be convinced that chevrons were made in Yazd, Iran, or that Indian mosaic beads originated in Egypt.

While some beads may be called Bodom in Kroboland or the markets of Accra, this is no more definitive than all the many beads that have been called “aggrey” or “padre” or any number of names. Bodom are beads of the Asante and related Akan speakers. For his “long paper” (roughly a bachelor’s thesis) for the University of Ghana, Quarm (1989) distributed complex questionnaires to fellow students of different ethnic groups in Ghana concerning bead lore and use. His conclusions included:

Among the Asante and the Akim a big yellowish ancient glass bead called Bodom is the significant bead... (Quarm 1989:35); In the Akan areas of Akim, Nzima and Aowin ancient glass beads like the ones called gyanie, aboo, Bodom are the most popular while the Krobo and the Ga people use ayeblibi, kpokyiky... (Quarm 1989:37); The Akim and Asante people of the Ebiredze, Koona and Ahine clans also use strands of beads with a big Bodom bead in it (Quarm 1989:52).

Nowhere in the survey were Bodom beads associated with the Krobo: they were always affiliated with the Asante and other Akan-speaking groups.

How old is powder-glass bead making in the territory of modern Ghana? Stanfield (2000-2001: 66) refers to "limited" archaeological data putting the date back to the 1600s and cites Bowditch's confused, long, rambling footnote that contained a reference to "boiled" beads as the only pre-1900 European account of them (Stanfield 2000-2001:65). In fact, the "limited" archaeological evidence I listed (which Stanfield cites) consists of six sites, two of which are late 18th century. Of the others, Ywifo Heming is the most tightly dated to 1690-1710 (Bellis 1972:85). Additionally, there is a much earlier and more complete European description than Bowditch's written by Barbot (1746:231) discussing what he had observed in 1704: "The third sort of false gold, grown pretty common among the Blacks, is a composition which they make of a certain powder of coral [i.e., glass beads] which they cast." Stanfield (2000-2001:68-69) asserts that the yellow glass of Bodom was recycled from 19th-century yellow Venetian beads. He gives no reason for this assumption except that it "seems obvious" to him. If so, the yellow would be a lead glass, but no one has tested this. Note above that Barbot in 1704 referred to locally made powder-glass beads as being yellow ("false gold"). Other yellow beads were available in this part of West Africa much earlier than the Venetian lead-glass beads, including the yellow wound beads made at Hebron (Francis 1990).

However, there is even more, older, and in the case of Bodom, significant evidence that I have cited (Francis 1993:11). Stanfield simply ignored it, while Liu et al. perhaps never saw it. Powder-glass beadmaking, apparently using the "wet core" method like that of Bodom has been documented archaeologically in Mauritania from the 10th to the 12th century. Such beads and a number of molds were uncovered at Tegdaoust (Vanacker 1984:46-51), assumed to be the remains of the city of Aoudaghost (variously spelled) (Robert 1970). As is well known, this is the method used today in Mauritania to produce the so-called "Kiffa beads."

Could it be that Bodom were made in this region? As I have also pointed out, there is a strong tradition among the

Asante that Bodom came from the north. Lamb (1976:37) asked Kwame Daaku, who was collecting oral tradition among the Asante, to inquire specifically about Bodom. Among the Adanse, who claim to be the original Asante, informants interviewed in all sixteen villages he covered acknowledged the importance of Bodom and in twelve (three quarters) of the villages they said the beads came from the north (Daaku 1969:266, 315). The same thing was said to be the case by the Asante of Asokore-Koona, who reported that Bodom came from north of Jenne in the interior Niger delta (Meyerowitz 1951:50, n. 2). Thus, it is often, not "sometimes" (Stanfield 2000-2001:64) asserted by the Asante that Bodom came from the north.

I shall conclude by repeating what I have written before.

Even though the evidence is scanty, we can form a tentative hypothesis about Bodom origins. Oral traditions are often accurate, and the conviction of a northern origin is strong among the Asante. A powder-glass bead making technique a thousand years ago at Tegdaoust, north of the inland Niger delta, is pertinent, especially if they were made on cores. Kiffa beads, technically similar to Bodom, are made in southeastern Mauritania, where Tegdaoust is located. Ghanaians may have once made beads this way, but if so, they have forgotten. Could it be that Bodom were made in this area, controlled by the ancient Kingdom of Ghana and later of Mali? Modern Ghana received considerable cultural input from the Malian Kingdom (Wilkes 1962). This hypothesis takes into account their reported northern origin, the lack of the technique in Ghana, and a related technique surviving in Mauritania, as well as explaining their rarity (Francis 1993:12).

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28. BEAD-DECORATED GLASS ARMLETS OF BONTUKU, WEST AFRICA, by Richard A. Freeman (1989, 14:12-14)

[Ed. note: Extracted from Richard A. Freeman's *Travels and Life in Ashanti and Jaman*, 1898, Archibald Constable, Westminster, pp. 230-233, the following item describes the innovative use of glass beads as decorative elements by the glass-armlet makers of Bontuku on the Guinea Coast of West Africa during the late 19th century. It would be interesting to see if such armlets have or can be identified in ethnological or archaeological collections.]

Mahama Ba-Katchina... is in many respects a somewhat distinguished member of Bontukian society; distinguished by his genial and pleasant manners, by his extensive travels and knowledge of the African world, by his skill in the manufacture of glass armlets (*tagulai*), and lastly, I regret to say, distinguished among his fellow Mahommedans by his too convivial habits.

The means and appliances by which Mahama carries on his curious craft are nearly as simple as those of the tailor whose house we have just visited. The furnace consists of a large water-jar buried in the floor, its mouth opening on the surface; its bottom being perforated, two tubes are led into it, their opposite ends being inserted into two goat-skins, which are worked alternately as bellows by a small boy who squats between them. The fuel is wood, which, in the intervals of rest, smoulders into charcoal, and when roused by the blast of the bellows gives out a clear, white, smokeless glow. The other appliances consist of a few pairs of rude iron tongs, thin iron rods, a heap of broken Dutch gin-bottles, and a narrow wooden tray filled with tiny, many-coloured beads, such as are used at home for ornamenting mats.

The first proceeding is to stir up the dull embers with one of the iron rods, and then the word is given to the small boy, who rejoices in the curious but not uncommon name of Allah, whereupon the bellows are worked vigorously for a few seconds until a bright white light issues from the mouth of the furnace.

Mahama now selects from the heap of broken glass a large fragment of a Dutch gin-bottle, which he holds with tongs in the mouth of the furnace, not bringing it in contact with the glowing embers. Presently the glass reaches a dull red heat, and then its angles become gradually rounded, and it shows evident signs of softening. The workman next seizes the softened mass with a second pair of tongs, and pulls it out into a narrow strip, the two ends of which he joins by pressing them together. The tongs are now discarded, and the softened red-hot ring of glass is played about over the mouth of the furnace on two rods until it has been modelled into the desired shape and size. The next step is the ornamentation of the surface; which is achieved by carrying the ring (still in a red-hot state) on the two rods, and rolling it quickly along the tray of beads, of which numbers adhere to the molten surface. The armlet is then returned, thickly incrustated with beads, to the furnace, where the beads quickly melt down into a uniform, many-coloured mass, completely covering the original white glass. The still soft armlet is now stretched slightly, so that the spots of different colours are drawn out into lines, producing a kind of marbled or agate-like appearance; and with a little more modelling, the article is finished and set aside to cool.