



PLATE I

Beadwork basket: king and queen with attendants. Beadwork, some parts in relief (stumpwork), other parts worked on wire. English, third quarter of the XVII century. Gift of Mrs. Thomas J. Watson, 1939 (Jeannete K. Watson), The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 7" x 31½" x 27"

## BEADS AND BUGLES

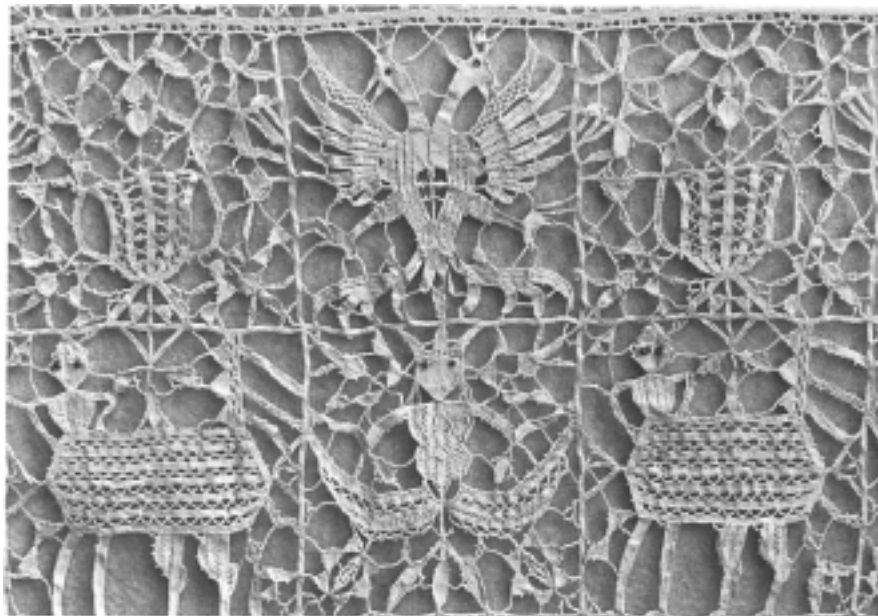
By JOAN EDWARDS

THE bright, shining little beads used for embroidery are made by the simple process of passing long thin canes (Italian *canna*) or hollow rods of glass through a chopping machine. Colour is sometimes added to the molten glass before the canes are drawn or else the beads are dyed, enamelled or colour-lined after manufacture. The machine can be adjusted to produce either small, round, seed-like beads which are known in the trade as *rocaille* (French *rococo* and *rocaille*) or long, cylindrical, tube-shaped beads called bugles (etymology unknown). Unlike most of the other materials used for embroidery, beads are virtually indestructible; the fabric to which they are attached wears and disintegrates, the thread frays and vanishes, but the beads survive burial in the ground for long periods of time, immersion in water, or constant exposures to extremes of heat and cold. It is interesting to note, therefore, that although beads and bugles have been used together on dress and on embroideries for many centuries, the words themselves do not appear together in literature until the mid-nineteenth century, when, in 1854 Godey introduced the readers of his *Lady's Book* to what he described as "The New Bead and Bugle Work . . . a graceful and pretty employment for the fingers which anyone with ordinary taste will have no difficulty in doing." The articles appeared also in London in *The Elegant Arts for Ladies Series* and consisted of instructions for arranging both round and cylindrical beads in rather uninspired border patterns for use on dresses and outdoor garments, and also for twisting them together on wires into "sprays and flowers for the decoration of ball dresses or for wearing in the hair."<sup>1</sup> The idea was, however, hardly a novelty and there is ample evidence on the surviving beaded baskets of the Stuart period alone (pl. I), to prove that beads and bugles had been used for wire constructions two hundred years before this time. In 1579, however, Spenser seems to be describing the use of bugles *without beads* for some sort of raised embroidery when he wrote

I wonne her with a gyrdle of gelt

Embost with buegle about the belt;<sup>2</sup>

and the household accounts and inventories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries record the existence of clothing which has been trimmed with bugles, pipes, graines, oes, spangles and pearls, but not with beads.



#### PLATE II

Cover: cut work and punto in aria; black bead-eyed figures. Spanish or Italian, ca. 1600. Gift of Mrs. Edward Luckmeyer, 1908, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 35" x 21½"

Documents preserved in the library of the Custom House in London show that between 1696 and 1776 beads and bugles were regarded by the customs officers as two quite distinct commodities which they listed separately in their immaculately kept records of imports and exports, as well as in their rate books or tables on which the rate of duty to be charged on 'goods of foreign merchandise' was calculated. Beads, we discover from this source, were made from a variety of materials such as wood, bone, jasper, jet, amber, coral, crystal, and so forth, each of which was valued differently in the rate books; and also they were imported by the gross or thousand, the implication being that they were large enough to be counted easily. Bugles, on the contrary, were imported by the pound, and without exception, the material from which they were made is not recorded; it was presumably, therefore, always the same. They were, however, classified under three different headings—Great Bugles, Small Bugles and Lace Bugle—and each of these attracted a different rate of duty. From this we may perhaps understand that though the duty on bugles was calculated on quantity, the duty on beads depended on the value of the material from which they were made.

The word bead is peculiar to the English language and comes from the Anglo-Saxon *bede*, to pray. It is unknown in, for example, France where a bead is called *perle* or *perle de verre*; in Germany where *glas-*

*perle* is used; in Italy where it becomes *perla*, and so on. Clearly, if commercial chaos was to be avoided, a trade name such as *rocaille* was essential. It is easy also to see how in English the meaning of the word *bede* came to be extended from the prayers themselves to the small, round balls "threaded for convenience of a string"<sup>3</sup> on which the prayers were counted, thus agreeing with Dr. Johnson's assertion in his dictionary of 1775 that beads were "used by the Romanists to number prayers." Prayer beads were necessarily large enough to be counted, they were also made from a wide variety of differently valued materials, and so it may well be that the majority of beads listed in the import figures were intended for sale by the paternostriers or rosary-makers who, from the earliest times, had plied their trade in the vicinity of the great medieval cathedrals and churches, and had, therefore, no connection whatever with bead embroidery or beadwork.

References to the export of beads are extremely rare, but bugles—especially Great Bugles—were imported and exported in very large quantities indeed through London and the other coastal ports, referred to in the records as "Out-Ports." They came from Venice, Italy, Holland, and Germany and were despatched to Africa, to the Canaries, to the English Colonies in North America, and to the Sugar Plantations of the West Indies. That they were not used in England but were, at the same time, of immense commercial importance is shown in a Parliamentary Act of 1765<sup>4</sup> the purpose of which was to facilitate the movement from one port to another, of goods imported from abroad but not intended for home consumption, to suit the convenience of the merchants and the sailing of their ships. The merchandise referred to included "such Coarse Printed Callicoes and other goods of the Product and Manufacture of the East Indies, or other places beyond the Cape of Good Hope, as are prohibited to be used or worn in Great Britain . . . and for encouraging the Importation of Bugles into this Kingdom, for the better Supply of the Export Trade thereof . . ." In search for a possible origin for the word "bugle" the idea has been put forward, apparently because of this reference to 'callicoe,' that it may have been some kind of fabric, but as it does not appear in the carefully itemized lists of materials from silks to hessians which were kept by the customs officers, the suggestion cannot be supported. One might more justifiably express the opinion that bugles were actually trade beads, and that the term itself, like *rocaille*, was originally a technical or trade name. If

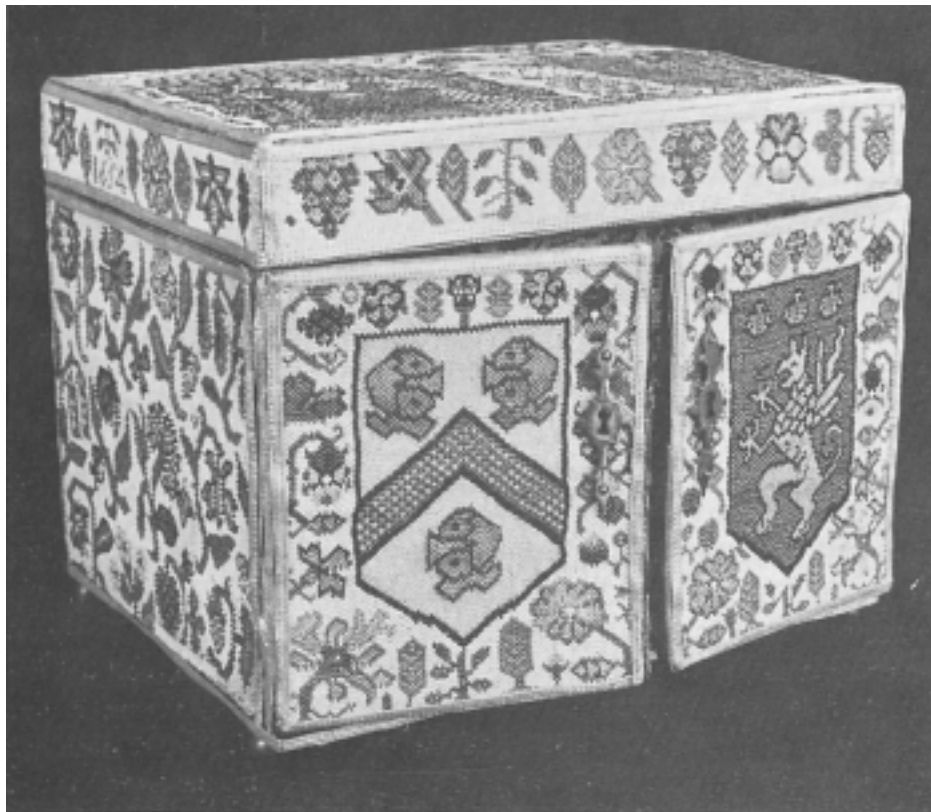


PLATE III

Beadwork casket: arms of Basnet and Dand families on doors, dated 1654 on side of cover. English, Coventry. Gift of Mrs. S. Suydam Cutting, The Cooper Union Museum. 9" x 11" x 8½"

this is so, it means also that bugles were not always exclusively long and tube-shaped as in modern use of the word but were originally of many different shapes and sizes.

The largest of the trade beads, presumably the Great Bugles, were extremely handsome; each was individually made by hand. The method involved is illustrated in an eighteenth-century manuscript in the Correr Library in Venice which shows a *perlina*, the name by which the makers of *conterie* or trade beads were known, seated at her work bench melting what appears to be a short rod of solid glass in a flame which she is controlling by means of a pair of bellows. The beads she has already formed have been placed in a dish beside her; they are not small and are few in number. There is also a drawing of another Venetian craftsman, a *margaritaro*, who is shown chopping up a bundle of long thin glass rods into very small beads which fall in a cascade into a basket on the floor; it would be very difficult to count them. The method is identical with that used today in the manufacture of embroidery beads; by it, long or round beads are produced as required.

Florio in his dictionary *Queen Anna's World of Words* (1598) defines *margaritaro* as "one that pierceth or boreth pearls; a maker of bugles"—but apparently not very big ones because of their association with pearls, and Dr. Johnson, who defines bugle as "a shining bead of black glass," illustrates this with a quotation from one of the Shakespearean sonnets:

'Tis not your inky brows, your black silk hair,  
Your bugle eyeballs, or your cheek of cream,  
That can entame my spirits to your worship.'

It seems unlikely that in this context he is thinking of "bugle" as anything except round, although he does not specifically say this; and he may also have been describing the bugle made by the *margaritaro*, although this was not necessarily always black.

Minute black glass beads were, however, used by Italian lacemakers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for marking the eyes of the figures, insects, animals, and birds which were often included in their patterns for *punto in aria* (pl. II); but although Dr. Johnson would have called these bugles, and the customs officers might have assessed them for duty as Lace Bugle, they were totally dissimilar from the beads used for the same purpose by Tudor and Stuart embroiderers, as



#### PLATE IV

Pin cushion: blue cotton with applied decoration of glass beads and bugles. English (?), mid-XIX century. Anonymous Gift, 1949, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 9½" x 7" x 3¾"

well as for their heavily beaded baskets, mirror frames, pictures and ornaments (pl. III). These were comparatively coarse, garishly coloured, and almost exactly the same as the smaller of the trade beads which were used with such effect by Africans and North American Indians and Pacific islanders for both embroidery and beadwork. Possibly the customs officers knew them as Small Bugle; they were certainly round as well as long.

It was, of course, inevitable that confusion between beads and bugles would ultimately occur, especially as the value and purpose of trade beads declined. In 1810 Thomas Mortimer in his *Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* is clearly on uneasy ground and although he defines bugles as "small glass beads of which large quantities are exported to Africa and there bartered on the Coast for slaves, ivory, gums, etc." he plainly thinks of them primarily as "beads." But beads he tells us are "coloured with manganese," and manganese added to molten glass turns it black; his beads are thus Dr. Johnson's bugles.

The muddle being by now complete, it is no wonder that the enterprising Godey felt able to introduce his readers to what he took to be a new and interesting craft, called "Bead and Bugle Work" (pl. IV).

#### REFERENCES

1. Godey's *Lady's Book*, XLIX, (1854), 267-68, 360-61, 453-54.
2. Spenser, E. *Shepherds Kalendar*, February 1. 66.
3. *Oxford English Dictionary*.
4. Parliament beginning 19th May, 1761 to 17th December, 1765.