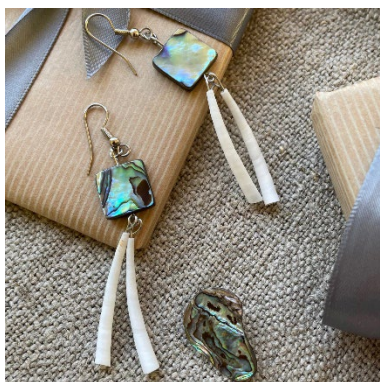




LIČ'WÍŁDAŋ RESEARCH CENTRE

We are continuing regular newsletter updates to share exciting history from the Archives with the communities. Some of you know all about these beads but others do not, so it is a pleasure to introduce Vol. 2, Edition two of; **Tales from the Vault.**



The Story of Trade Beads

Long before Europeans arrived, we thrived in a vast trade network rich in culture and craftsmanship. Beads were always part of our lives, carved from shell, pearl, bone, stone, and fossil. Among the most prized were dentalium shells, small ivory-colored mollusks resembling tiny tusks, symbolizing wealth and status long before glass beads appeared.

Dentalium: The Original Trade Beads

Harvested from the deep, cold waters off Vancouver Island, dentalium was both beautiful and valuable. Coastal Nations braved the open ocean in dugout canoes, using specialized tools to scoop the shells from the seafloor. Worn in regalia and exchanged in trade, dentalium reached as far as the Great Plains.

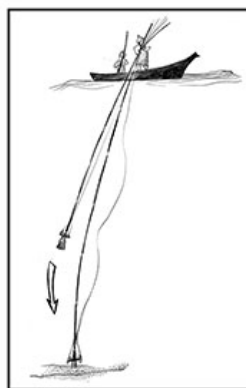


Figure 11.9

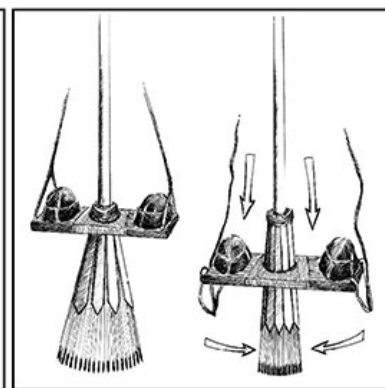


Figure 11.10



The Arrival of Glass Beads

European traders introduced glass beads from Venice and Czechoslovakia, recognizing their value in our trade networks. Vibrant, easily strung, and abundant, these beads quickly became part of our traditions. Some, like the Hudson Bay "White Hearts" and "Russian Blue" beads, were especially prized. We embraced their beauty but never abandoned our own traditions, adapting them into our regalia while maintaining our cultural identity.

Russian Blue Beads

These deep blue, faceted beads - despite their name - originated in Venice. Russian traders acquired them from American and English merchants in exchange for furs. Crafted with remarkable precision, they were shaped, drawn, cut, and polished to enhance their brilliance. Some of these beads contain lead, likely to enhance their shine. In some cases, lead levels exceed safe standards. It's best to keep them off the skin, wash hands after handling, and keep them away from children.

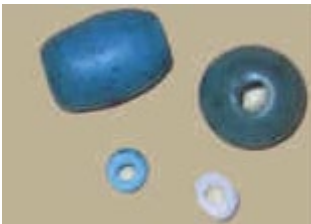




LIḡWÍŁDAX̌W RESEARCH CENTRE

The Art of Glass Bead Making

Venetians revolutionized bead-making in the late 1400s, drawing molten glass into long tubes that were cut, polished, and smoothed in rotating drums. By the 1500s, demand was so high that unfinished glass tubes were sent to Czechoslovakia for finishing before being shipped worldwide.



Padre Beads and Chevron Beads

Among the most sought-after glass beads were the deep blue "Padre Beads," essential in trade by the late 1700s. Chevron beads, with their star-like layered designs, were rare and provide insight into early trade routes. Though less common during the fur trade era, they are found in sites dating to before 1600.

Button Blankets

When the Hudson's Bay Company began trading wool blankets to our people, we transformed them into new forms of regalia. Traditionally, we used abalone or other shells for decoration, but glass beads and pearl buttons added new dimensions. Worn during potlatches and ceremonies, these "Robes of Power" displayed lineage, wealth, and artistic mastery. Their red inner borders, originally dyed with salmon eggs, symbolize the strength and vitality of cedar.



The Enduring Legacy of Trade Beads



Though trade routes shifted, some beads faded while others, like dentalium, remained cultural symbols. Beads still enrich our regalia, dances, and ceremonies, connecting us to our ancestors.

Seeing these beads always takes me back to summers on Quadra, where family members would find them buried in their front yard gardens. As a child, I didn't grasp their significance, but now I do. They are more than just trade beads; they are tangible links to history, and to our ancestors.

Trade beads help to tell a piece of our story. Though glass beads were incorporated into our trade systems, they never replaced our ways. Our relationship with beads - whether from the ocean, the earth, or another continent - remains a testament to the vast networks our ancestors built, the adaptability and resilience of our culture, and the ways we continue that legacy today.