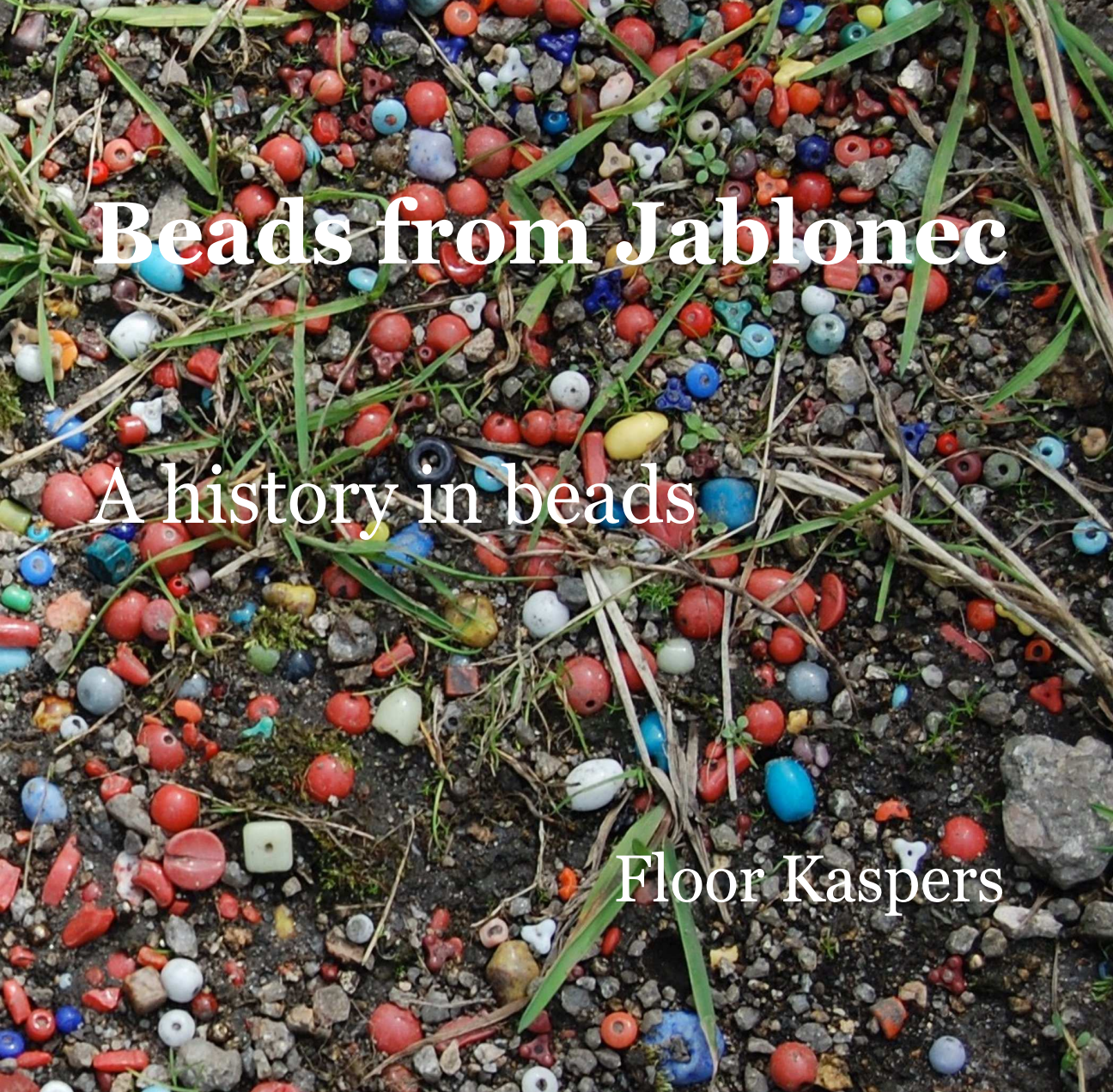

Beads from Jablonec

A history in beads

Floor Kaspers

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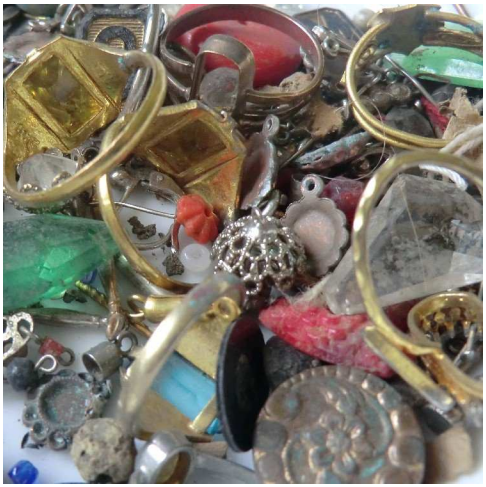
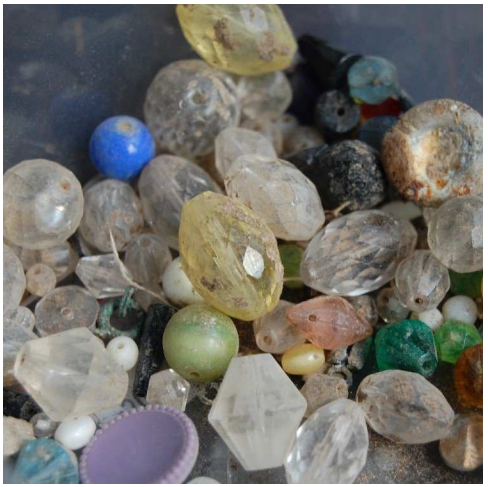




Contents

Preface

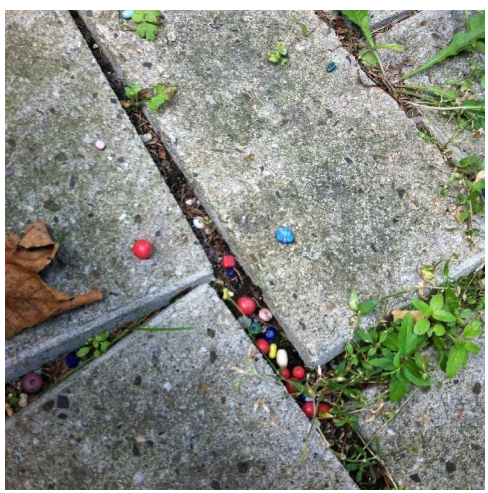
Sitting in a house, on 'Pink Street' in Jablonec, working on this book, it seems as though the history of the glass industry landed on my doorstep. This large house was built in 1893 by a German glassmaker, Konrad Weberlich. Remnants of the glass can be found in some of the flowerpots in the garden.

Walking along the path in the garden, I find scattered beads, made by the Redlhammer company, which used to be just across the train tracks. They were strung into jewelry by one of the many families that worked from home in this cottage industry in the 1960's. They had moved into this house after it became council property in 1945 when the German owners were forced out.

One of the neighbors just brought by a set of sample cards of beads from the Preciosa company, where she used to work in the 1990's, after the revolution of 1989. In the street by the house, a piece of glass cane, used for molded beads, got pressed into the asphalt.

Some people come to the Jablonec region for the art deco houses, the skiing, hiking, cycling and the great outdoors.

I came for the beads.

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Introduction

There are many ways to record the history of a city. Through its people, through its architecture, through its culture. This book tells the history of the Bohemian town of Jablonec Nad Nisou through the beads and jewelry that were made there. The beads coming from Jablonec tell a story of technological advances, economic prosperity, war, fashion and political revolutions.

Following the chronology of the history of Bohemia, chapter one focuses on early beadmaking in the Jablonec region, and the start of making glass stones and beads from composite glass. The second chapter shows the great rise of the town of Jablonec and the bead and jewelry industry. It introduces some of the great names of glassmakers and exporters coming from Jablonec, such as Hoffman, Riedel and Swarovski. Chapter three deals with the period between 1918 and 1945, where the Jablonec industry was at first focused on producing fashionable jewelry, and inevitably having to deal with the Second World War. What happened to the bead and glass industry in Jablonec in 1945, after the German glassmakers were expelled and a communist government took over, can be read in chapter four. Chapter five focuses on the period after the 'Velvet revolution' with many changes to who was in charge of which company making beads and glass. In the final chapter, I discuss the current state of beadmaking in Jablonec.

Jablonec Nad Nisou is the current official name of this town known for beads, jewelry and glass. Previously, it was known as Gablonz, the German name. In this book I will refer to Jablonec nad Nisou (which means Jablonec on the river Nisou) as Jablonec, as do most Czechs.

Some of the sources for this book, especially when it comes to the period after 1945, are highly politically charged. Deliberate propaganda or simply information being seen though the eyes of a certain political system can make it difficult to get a genuine idea of what was going on in Jablonec at that time. In this book the aim is been to show the different sides of a story and let the readers use the

information from historical sources to make up their own mind.This book could not have been made without the help of many people. Zdenka, for her hospitality, J-ME and Guy from Wild Things Beads for sharing their knowledge of Czech beads, Carole Morris for allowing me to photograph beads from her collection and Kateřina Hrušková from the Jablonec Museum of Glass and Bijouterie for showing me treasures from their collection.

A special thank you goes to everyone at Beadcollector.net, for sharing knowledge, stories, and pictures of beads, and to Joyce and David for making Beadcollector.net a remarkable place.

Floor Kaspers, September 2014

1. Early glassmaking in Jablonec 1550-1750

European glassmakers in the 16th century were mostly in need of one thing for their craft: wood. It was needed for fuel, but also for making potash, an ingredient for glass. Several early glassmakers' settlements in Germany were getting depleted of wood and they were on the move. In the thick woods of the Jizera mountains in the North of Bohemia, wood was in ample supply. The first 'Glashütte' or glass workshop was opened in the Jablonec area in 1550. A second one opened up in 1558 and a third in 1567. Glassmaking was at that time a monopoly of three families, Preussler, Schürer and Wander. According to Jargstorf (1) it was not just the search for wood that attracted the glassworkers from Germany. After the Hussite wars from 1419 tot 1436, the area was in dire need of an economic boost. The landlords would attract these craftsmen, mostly glassworkers but also textile workers and merchants to their area, in order to make more money from their land than just from farming.

In 'Gablonz an der Neisse' (2) a clear picture is laid out of the relationship between the landlords and the glassmakers. These landlords had known from other regions, like Bavaria, that glassmaking could bring in large annual fees or taxes, and wanted a piece of it. They set up a set of rules for the glassmakers with a system of privileges. Each glassmaker was given a clear set of rights and obligations, and the glassmakers were also held responsible for their workers. For example, some glassmaking families were also allowed to brew beer, a profitable business at the time, while others were not. Many glassmakers were not allowed to do their shopping for things like brandy and salt at other places than those appointed by their landowner. Apparantly, the privileges they were given by the landowners were reduced every time a new settlement started.
At the time, the glassmakers mostly made things like (small) windows and glass items like cups. Only some would occasionally make beads, which were mostly used as rosary beads.(3) Their products were solely made for the upper class, as glass was an expensive

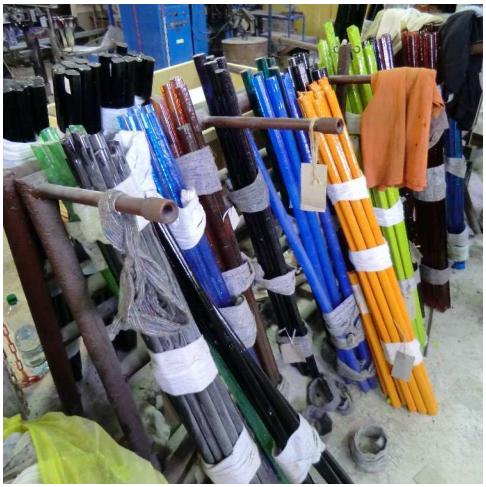
and luxury product at this time. The glassmakers would usually do their own sales and marketing. Glass production would take place nine months a year, and the other three months were spent selling their wares.

1.1 Changing times

In the 18th century, a lot of things changed for the Bohemian glassmakers. Different historical sources contradict each other on what happened exactly when and what the connections were between different developments.

Several things happened:

- The Venetians were able to make ruby red glass, competing with the garnet stone from Turnov, a town near Jablonec.
– The stone cutters from Turnov started running low on good local granate stones.
– Glass stones, resembling garnet, were being made from so called 'Turnov Paste' a composition glass.
– Glassmakers in Jablonec started making glass rods from composition glass.
– The Jablonec glassmakers invented a type of tongs for molding glass into stones and beads.



1.2 Composition
Composition glass is a type of glass with a varying degree of lead added to the glass. It allows for an easier flow of the glass when melting and molding it and shows more sparkle than regular glass. It was the start for developing a wide range of glass colors made to mimic gemstones.
'The history of Gablonz is inseperably connected with composition, the easily fusible leaded glass with colors resembling precious stones: one reads about chrysolite and chrysopropase beads, about beads named for garnets and rubies, sapphires and aquamarines, amber and amethysts, topaz and turquoise and about coral and crystal.' (4)

1.3 Connection to Venice
According to early sources, much of the knowledge for making the composition glass came from Venice. Van der Sleen (5) reports that in the 18th century the Jablonec glassworkers would import their glass from Venice. According to Jargstorf (6) however, that may be true for the Bavarian beadmakers, but is disputed when it comes to Bohemia. Another often described and detailed history is of how the Fiser brothers from Turnov, who were granat cutters, went to Venice in 1706 to learn the secret of this beautiful ruby red glass. In 1715, the Turnov stone cutters were able to make this glass themselves, and started facetting it into beautiful stones and beads. (7)
Even though this seems like a very plausible tale, it is probably not accurate. Peter Francis, who documented this story in 1994, also discredited it in 2000 (8). He writes in his article on Ruby glass: 'Wander in 1789 attributed the beginning of Bohemian beadmaking to: 1) A desire

to imitate pyrope garnets that were the backbone of the Turnov industry and 2) The brothers Fiser developing red glass in 1711 after a five year stay in Venice. Virtually all histories of Bohemian glass (mine included) repeat the tale. However, it is now clear that it rests in the sands of myth rather than the rock of history.'

Apparantly, there is evidence that suggests that even before 1706, the former stonecutters were able to make composition ruby glass.
Knob (9) writes: 'On the basis of findings of glass and production tools in 1927 as well as of documents from the 18th century it is possible to state that the brothers Fiser are merely a legend. Neuwirth agrees: 'One can definately assume that in the second half of the 17th century the production of false stones in the Italian manner was widespread in Turnau (Turnov, ed.) and its environs. The often repeated story of the Fischer brothers from Turnau is beginning to sound like a legend.' Interestingly enough, there are similar stories of Venetian glassmakers heading for Bohemia to gain the secret recipe

of the clear Bohemian crystal glass. Knob goes on to state that the documented sources from that time from Turnov looked at this glass from the perspective of stone-cutters. He also writes how secretive the glassmakers from Turnov were when it came to their techniques. Either way, the knowledge of making this type of glass, the composition glass, of which the ruby glass is an example, was picked up by the Jablonec glassmakers. With their extensive knowledge of glass, they were able to make a great success from this new glass type.

How this process exactly took place, is unknown. The glassmakers in Jablonec were Germans, the stone-cutters in Turnov were Bohemians, speaking Czech.
Urban describes it as follows (10): 'The language border, in the past identical to the boundary where the succes of the Jablonec exporters commenced and the glory of the Turnov stone-cutters ended, has often limited historical knowledge. Thus connection of the Turnov glassmaking tradition with its Bohemian background of two centuries with similar work in Freiburg, Idar Oberstein and Gmünd and finally with the glass-making incursion of the master glassmakers of the Jizera Mountains is an urgent task.'

In short, by Neuwirth: 'The beginnings of Bohemian composition lie in obscurity; the clues get lost in the 17th century.'



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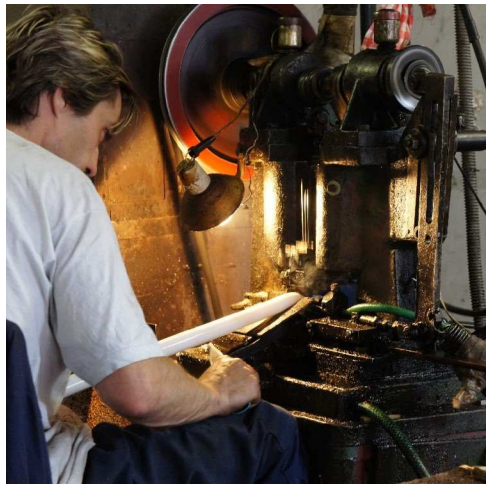
2. Jablonec glassmaking on the rise 1750-1918

In the years from 1750 to 1918, the Jablonec beadmaking industry took a huge leap. Not only did it greatly improve the quantity and quality of glass beads that were produced, Jablonec also managed to produce a staggering variety of beads. Starting with molded glass stones, they quickly turned to molded beads, facetted beads, drawn beads, seed beads, blown beads, Prosser beads and lampwork beads. And that is just the variety when it comes to beads. Jablonec also became a major producer of all types of glass buttons, technical glass, chandelier parts, flasks, decorative glass, etc.
When it comes to the beads, most of these types of beads were also made in other regions.
For example Venice was the main producer of lampwork beads at the time, while the French Bapterosses factory made the big bulk of the cheap Prosser beads. Jablonec was specifically known for the molded beads and the facetted beads.



2.1 Molded beads

Molding is a technique in which molten glass is pushed into shape with the use of a mold. Usually the mold has two sides to make a round, square or any other shaped bead. Beads can also be molded with a single mold, with the bottom being pushed against a flat surface. Large glass rods are placed in a furnace which heats it until it is soft enough to be shaped in a mold. The ends of the rod are then placed in large pliers, either manually or mechanically. The hole in the bead is made in the same motion as the molding of the

beads. The pliers or tongs needed to create these molded beads were invented in the Jablonec region. They were used first for the glass stones and later for the glass beads. According to an article from 'Die Perle' a 1920 German trade journal (12) this method was invented by accident: 'The method is said to have been invented by chance by a glass beadmaker who dropped the metal bar or wire he wound beads with into the glass mass and when he fished it out with tongs, he noticed that the glass adhered to them took on its shape. Tongs with several bead-shaped molds haven since been in wide use.' It is quite a romantic story, but probably not a very accurate historic account of how tongs came to be used for making molded glass beads. Either way, by the 1850's there were many different types of tongs being used, each with different benefits and possibilities. Since that time, the original principle of making the molded beads still remained the same, but the molding process has since been mechanized a great deal.

Right: tongs welded into a window screen

2.2 Facetted beads

With a history in Turnov of stone-cutting, it is no surprise that the Jablonec region also became known for the facetting and cutting of glass stones and beads. Facetting of stones was done to make the glass sparkle, and catch the light. Especially with glass of a high lead content, the facets created a great play of light in the beads, stones and in the chandelier parts. For the cutting of stones and glass, a power source was needed. They found this source by using the power of water. Water mills on the river Nisou were used to power grinding wheels that were used for the facetting. Venice did not have a source of running water, and could at that time, before electricity, not easily make these beads. This was a great advantage for Jablonec.

Before beads are facetted, they first have to be made into a basic shape from which the facets can be cut. This can be done by molding the beads or by making them from drawn tubes of glass. The molded beads with facets consist of two categories. First are beads that are molded into a shape that already has facets in the mold. The so called 'vaseline' beads', often found in West Africa, are examples of these beads with facets that come straight out of the mold. Sometimes the facets would be 'touched up' by a minor facetting process to sharpen the edges of the facets. Another type of facetted molded beads are beads that are molded into a basic shape, and the facets are made completely by cutting. The majority of facetted beads are currently made this way. They used to be facetted by hand on a large vertical stone wheel in a water mill or a horizontal grinding plate on a foot-powered treadle. Currently they are

made by machine, where large numbers of beads are ground simultaneously on large turning wheels.

2.3 'Russian beads'

Facetted beads made from drawn glass tubes were also made in Jablonec. The best known example of these beads are the so called 'Russian beads' or 'Russian blues'. Some 'Russian blues' are also molded facetted beads, but most are drawn beads. Picard (13) : 'It appears as if the Bohemians designed this bead to be an inexpensive trade bead. They drew tubes with six of seven sides and a large hole. These were cut into lengths approximately equal to the diameter of the tube. Then each end of the dividing line between adjacent sides of the tube was ground off, creating beads with eighteen or twenty-one facets.'

These beads got their name from being part of the Russian fur trade in the North of America, but were also traded all over America and many parts of Africa. For quite some time, the beads' origin was unknown. In 1971, Sorensen (14): 'This bead was no doubt traded by the Russians along our northwest coast, but certainly not exclusively, because

Russian blue beads, from Beadcollector.net

it is one of the most widely distributed glass beads in the United States and is very frequently found in the Southwest. Evidence is quite strong that this bead may have been traded first by the English in the Northwest. Some collectors still insist that the 'Russian' beads were made in Russia, but there is no evidence that the Russians made any glass beads at this early date. There is some evidence that these beads were made in Venice, shipped to China,

perhaps by the English companies, where they were traded to the Russians as well as other fur traders and companies.' In 1989, Harris writes (15): 'We now accept that the beads probably originated in Bohemia and first made their appearance in Russian America in the early 1800's. The only mystery is how the Russians obtained them. The Bohemians sent wagon trains of their glassware all over Europe, including Russia. The Russian American Fur Company may have bought the beads from such a train and shipped them to the colony.'

2.4 A prospering town

Jablonec prospered, especially from the 1850's onward. They had made the switch from only making components for jewelry, like beads, metals and glass stones to making jewelry themselves. In the 1860's, large trading companies started in Jablonec, exporting both components and jewelry all over the world. In 1880 8000 tons of glass and 4000 tons of metal were made into jewelry in the Jablonec region. (16) 'The town reflected the wealth of its 21.000 citizens, who had cooperated to equip their Gablonz with an infrastructure that many larger cities envied. The gassworks (founded in 1872), the electricity works (1891), the impressive theater (1907), the indoor swimming pool (1908) and Bohemia's finest gymnasium (1898) were all initiated and financed by the citizens.' Not just the great public works showed the wealth of the city. Jablonec became scattered with beautiful villas in the art nouveau and later the art deco style. These villas belonged to glassmakers and jewelry makers. Some of the most impressive villas also belonged to the exporters of glass, beads and jewelry.

2.5 Heinrich Hoffmann (1875-1939)
Hoffmann was an importer, exporter, designer and producer of different types of glass items. Above all, he was a businessman, with a keen sense of style and marketing. During the turn of the century, the company had offices both in Jablonec and in Paris. He had close ties to the Emperor of Austria, and was appointed special council to the Emperor in 1916. After WWI, the export business grew, and Hoffmann quickly employed more than 500 people. With the economic crisis of the1930's things went downhill. The demand for luxury good such as jewelry, glass perfume bottles and chandeliers dwindled. In 1939, Hofmann died unexpectedly. Most likely he took his own life, after a series of financial setbacks.

The exterior of the massive building used by Hoffmann for his business is decorated with the faces of men with beads from all around the world. The men have features ranging from Native-American, Indian, African to South American. The interior of the building is even more impressive, with two huge

stained glass windows.

It is a tribute to the global trade, and shows immense pride in the role the Hoffmann company played it in this trade.

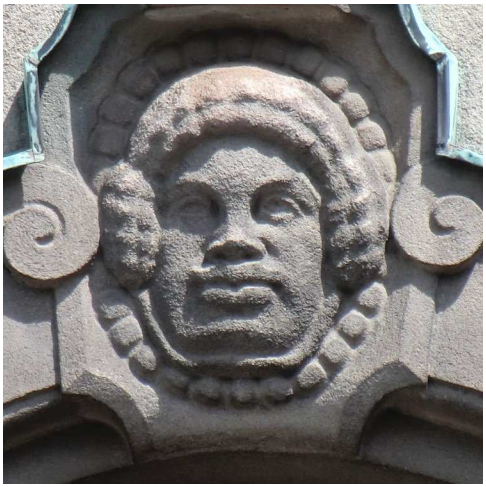
The first window shows a regal lady spilling beads and jewelry from a horn of plenty. Above her head a butterfly is pictured, which was the logo for the Hoffmann products. At her feet are little children, catching the beads and decorating themselves with their prizes. It shows how at that time the

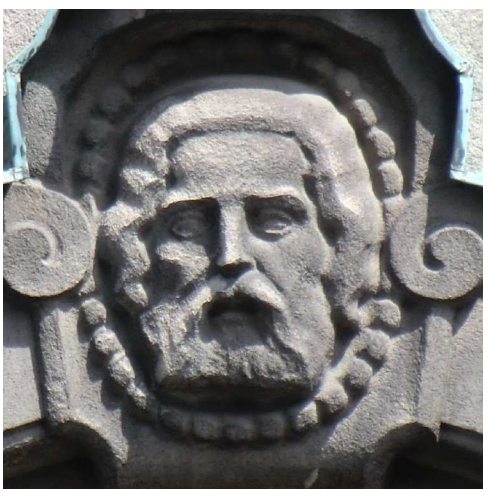
different people they were exporting their goods to were seen from their perspective. Between the children the coat of arms of the city Jablonec can be seen: the apple tree. Next to the main window, on both sides the transport modes of the worldwide trade are shown: a big sailboat and a steamtrain.

The second window can be seen as a major promotion of the Austrian Empire. Again a regal lady, representing Austria. Above her head, the initials of Hoffmann: H.H. Surrounding Austria are the parts of the world that Hoffmann did business with: Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Again, they are pictured as small children. The detailing in these windows is great. The European child can be seen with a bible at his feet, while the Asian child has a little buddha besides him. The African child has an Egyption sfinx sitting next to him.

The Hoffmann building is currently being used as a police office.


EUROPA
ASIEN
AFRICA
AMERICA
AUSTRIA





2.6 The Riedel glass dynasty

The Riedel family can be seen as one of the great contributers to the succes of Jablonec in this period. Jargstorf writes: 'The Riedels had an important part in making Gablonz the leading beadmaking area north of the Alps. In the 19th century, the Gablonz bead industry became the only important rival to the Muranese/Venetian bead industry.'

The various Riedel glassworks in the area were the main suppliers of glass rods and tubes to the cottage workers who were pressing and cutting the glass. The succeeding Riedel family members in charge of factories managed to achieve a greater quality of glass, and mostly a huge variety of glass colours that had not been seen before.

One of the more special types of glass, uranium glass is also attributed to the Riedel family. Franz Anton Riedel (1786-1844) apparantly invented this type of glass in 1830 (18). The original colors of this incredibly brightly glass were yellow and green. They were called 'Annagelb' and 'Annagrün', meaning 'Annayellow' and 'Annagreen'. It is said that Franz Anton named the

glass after his daughter, Anna. Other sources claim the glass was invented in 1834 by Joseph Riedel (1816-1894), Franz Anton's nephew, and that he named it after his wife, Anna. (19). This would have been impressive, as Joseph would have been only 18 at that time. They do refer to the same Anna though, as Joseph married Franz Anton's daughter, his niece. However, there are already sources describing uranium glass in 1817, which predate the names of 'Annagelb' and 'Annagrun'.

Also, there are glass fragments found from as early as 79AD that contain uranium oxide.

Uranium glass is still being made today, in the same factory that was built by Joseph Riedel in 1847, albeit no longer owned by the Riedel family.

JOS. RIEDEL, POLAUN

GLASFABRIK — STEPHANSRUH


KANO
EXHIBITION
1959

2.7 What the customer wants

One of the successes of the Jablonec industry was their export strategy. Not only was it highly organized by different large exporting companies, the Jablonec beadmakers were also very much 'in tune' with their customers' needs. Francis (20) describes it as follows: 'While the Czech beadmakers imitated some Venetian fashions, they also developed styles all their own. Some appealed to European tastes, but early on they were doing a roaring business overseas. They developed new varieties to sell to specific markets in Africa, the Middle East and India. (..) They also developed a system by which 'sample men' roamed the globe, sometimes for two years, visting the remote corners of Asia, Africa and America. These men would buy a few of the most valued beads they encountered to send home, where the beads would be imitated in glass, no matter what their original material. These tactics explain the fact that some unlikely items were made in Jablonec, such as Islamic prayer beads and pendants with Quran inscriptions on it.

Left: Glass pendants from the Picard Museum
Above: Islamic prayer beads

Some of these beads are know as 'Hajj' beads, as they apparantly were a popular souvenir for the pilgrims returning from Mecca.
Today still, prayer beads are one of the most popular souvenirs for pilgrims.

Other examples are snake beads, made to imitate real snake vertebrea and large elongated glass facetted beads, resembling agate beads from Idar Oberstein.

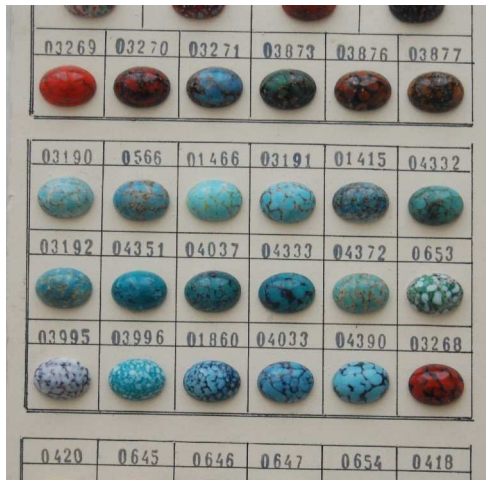
Some of these items are hard to distinguish from the original, such as the glass talhakimts or tanfouks intended for the Touareg tribes in Northern Africa. The original versions of these glass amulets were made from agate in India and later in Germany. Another example are glass cowry shells made to resemble the cowry shells that were popular in many countries, and in some African countries were considered currency.

Part of making these glass beads and stones was not just to get a shape that suited the overseas costumers, but also mimicking the original materials. They had already mastered making transparant glass colors that resembled for example ruby, amethist, amber and aquamarine. Victorian fashion of black mourning jewelry was also a popular product at that time, as were beads imitating coral.

Top left: heart shaped pendant with image of Mecca.
Top right: talhakimt pendants
Right, clockwise: glass stones resembling opal, glass 'wedding beads' for West Africa, glass resembling jet, beads resembling cowry shells.

2.8 'Hubbell beads'

Of special interest were turquoise colored beads. They were especially popular for trade with Native Americans. They are often called 'Hubbell beads' (often misspelt Hubble beads). Sorensen writes in a 1971 article on trade beads in the magazine Arizona Highways (21): 'Some very interesting beads, but very recent as far as Indian trade beads go, are Arizona's own ' Hubbell' beads. These unique blue glass beads were traded by Don Lorenzo Hubbell at his Ganado Trading Post and closely resemble the finest turquoise. The 'Hubbell' beads were apparantly made for a short time in Czechoslovakia sometime after the First World War and were in quite wide-spread use by 1926.
Today, according to Indian trader Dick Le Roy, you can show some of the older Navajos a string of these beautiful beads and their almost instant comment will be, 'Ah, Hubbell beads'. The idea caught on fast with the Navajos and they could pawn their valuable turquoise and wear the imitation glass 'Hubbell' beads.' According to some, these turquoise



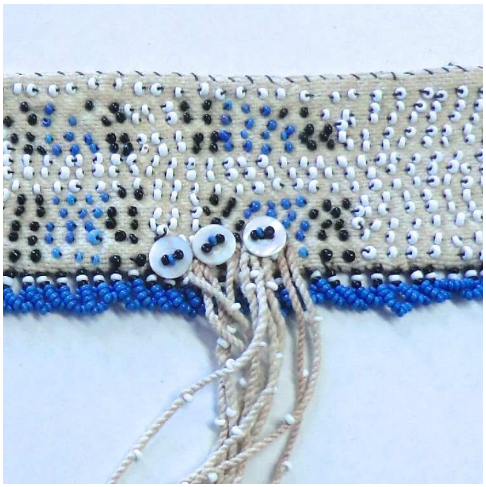
beads were made especially for Hubbell, but that seems unlikely. There is no reason why the Czechs would not sell these popular beads to anyone they could. Beads and stones from glass imitating turquoise are still being made in Jablonec today.

2.9 Albert Sachse

One of the masters in 'pleasing the overseas customers' was Albert Sachse (1851-1921). His first business was with a partner, Franz Assam. Their company Assam & Sachse was founded in Jablonec in 1876. One of the main products of this company were glass bangles that were exported to India. These bangles were rings, cut from large glass tubes and were decorated by cutting and guilding. Later on, bangles were also made by lampworkers shaping thin rods of glass into a circle. In the late 1800's, Sachse set up his own export company by the name of A. Sachse & Co.
This company quickly gained momentum (22): 'As early as 1895 he set up a branch in Venice. (..) At the beginning of the 20th century the company Sachse ran workshops in Berlin, Hamburg, London, Moscow, Paris and Vienna and beside Venice, it took its share in the production of glass pearls in Bayreuth, Germany. In the Jablonec headquarters alone, almost one hundred people found employment. (..) Before the First WorldWar it had branches in Lagos (today's Nigeria), Porto-Novo (Benin), numerous business partners in Abidjan,

Glass bangle pieces found in a stream near Jablonec

Grand-Bassam (Ivory Coast) as well as in Accra and Cape Coast (Ghana).'
As said, one of the things the Sachse company was good at, was documenting local beads and objects, to be made into glass in Jablonec. (22) 'He managed to place his employees in German expeditions, which revealed the secrets of the Black Continent and helped to cover the costs of the expeditions. The Sachse's salesmen could study the taste and demand of

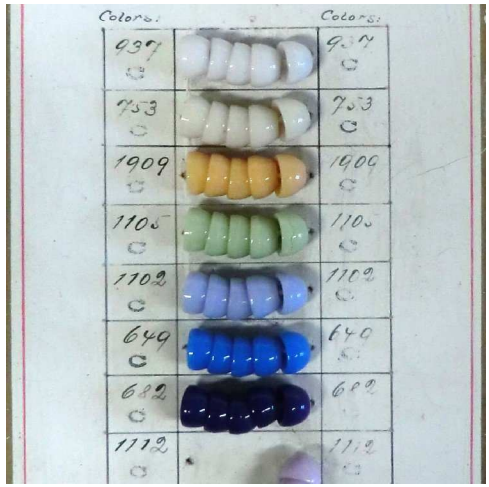


native people and, by way of exchange, gain artefacts from them, which then served as models in the jewellery production.' Not only did Sachse gain great insight into local demands, he also gathered a great collection of African and Asian artefacts, which is currently owned by the Naprstek museum in Prague and the Museum of glass and Costume Jewellery in Jablonec.
'The focus on exotic markets brought the firm high profits, but it was also the cause of its fall.
During the First World War, Sachse suffered big financial losses. Far-away markets were lost and new ones impossible to find.' In 1920, his business was sold to the Venetians. With his money from the sale, he invested in the production of German wax beads, but the fall of the German Mark made him lose his investment.
Albert Sachse died in 1921.

Left: Glass piece with Asian image, resembling stone or horn.
Right: Detaill of a beaded neckpiece from South Africa in the Sachse collection, Jablonec

2.10 Prosser beads

Prosser beads are the first beads that were made in factories in large quantities. They were available in a variety of colors and shapes. They were uniform in size and they were cheap to produce. The process, which can be seen as a mix between glassmaking and porcelainmaking, was first invented by the Prosser brothers for making buttons in 1840 in the UK. Jean Felix Bapterosses from France started making buttons and beads with this technique just a few years later.



The arrival of these beads on the world market created quite a stir, and they were popular in many countries. Obviously, the Czechs wanted their share, and they got their chance during the French depression in 1873, It is said that French workers who were unemployed moved to Jablonec, and started working at the Redlhammer factory. From that time on, Prosser beads were no longer just a French product, but also a Czech product. The beads from the factory in Briare, France and Jablonec are hard to distinguish from one another. It does appear, though, that the Czechs were able to create a greater variety of shapes than the French did. The huge Redlhammer collection of samplecards is shown in Neuwirth's book 'Beads from Gablonz'. The variety in the Prosser beads alone is impressive. Comparing the Redlhammer samplecards to the Bapterosses samplecards, there are shapes that the French did not produce, but the Czechs did (24) 'The Redlhammers produced a wider variety of Prosser bead shapes, like scalloped shapes, stars, tulips and chain beads. It could be because the

Redlhammer company was already familiar with the technique of molding glass beads, it was easier for them to produce a wide variety of shapes.'

Apparantly, the quantity of the Prosser beads that were produced, made some think that these were the 'new' glass beads, and that they stopped making the 'regular' molded glass beads. Van der Sleen (25) writes in 1973: 'Since the beginning of this century, they have changed the composition of their glass beads by adding a proportion of clay, or better feldspar, to the batch, so that their product ought to be called porcelain beads. These beads are no longer drawn or wound, but are formed in a press, such as is used for making pastilles, and then baked. Although the beads are opaque, this process gives them an appealing lustre that distinguishes them from glass beads. Pressed beads can also often be distinguished from glass beads because of the equatorial band, sometimes hardly visible, which they posess.' However, Prosser beads were just one of the Czech types of beads, made by only one producer in Jablonec. The Redlhammer company, by then part of

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the State Company of Jablonex, stopped making Prosser beads in the 1980's. The process of making and firing these beads which the Czechs call 'sinter beads' became too expensive when fuel prices went up.

2.11 Swarovski, beads from Jablonec?
One of the renowned names in todays bead market is that of the Swarovski company. People know it as an Austrian company, but few know of it's Czech roots. Daniel Swarovksi was born just outside Jablonec in 1862. He was born into a local glasscutting family, and Daniel learned the trade from his father. Inspired by a visit to the 'First Electrical Exhibition' in Vienna in 1883, he started working on an electrical machine to cut beads. He combined the Czech knowledge of making high lead glass stones and beads and the knowledge of cutting this glass to make it sparkle with the new invention of electricity. Francis writes (26): 'By the age of 30 he had applied for a patent on a machine which allowed him precise cutting of glass jewelry stones (e.g. Rhinestones). The invention gave him an advantage over

Sample card of crystal beads by Jablonex

the other glass stone cutters of the Jablonec region and he felt the need for increased secrecy to develop his ideas. Bohemia was then part of the Austrio-Hungarian Empire and in the Tyrolian mountains of Austria he found the place he was looking for.' He started his new business in 1895 in Wattens, which is now Austria. In the first period, he still made use of the crystal lead glass that was produced in Jablonec. In 1911, the Swarovski business started their own glass

Facetting machines

production. Swarovski beads and other glass products are still in production today. Their company website describes their founder as follows (27) : 'The man with a mission and a crystal-clear vision. Visionary genius, humility and altruism are rarely found in one package, yet according to those who knew him and the record of his achievements, Daniel Swarovski, founder and producer of the world's most flawlessly brilliant crystals, possessed them all.' Daniel Swarovski died in 1956 at the age of 93.

3. Following fashion, crisis and war 1918-1945

The period after the First World War and the Versailles treaty was a very productive period for the Jablonec jewelry industry, but it also planted the seeds for the dramatic turn of events for the Jablonec companies in 1945. Before 1918, the tensions had already been rising between the Czech and the Germans in Bohemia. With the Treaty of Versailles it was decided that the Germans in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire could not join Germany. The country of Czechoslovakia was founded (28) which consisted of 6.7 million Czechs, 3.2 million Germans and 2 million Slovaks. The Bohemian Germans were called 'Sudet Germans', after the area of Sudetenland in which the majority of the population was German.
When the economy and the jewelry industry was going well, the politics did not really matter. And in the 1920's the jewelry industry was certainly going well. One of the important factors for the jewelry industry to be booming at this time, was the close cooperation between the glassmakers, the metalworkers and the people putting the finished jewelry together, the Gürtler. Complete jewelry pieces, made with glass, stamped and plated metal and rhinestones, finished to a high standard and according to the latest Parisian fashion were exactly what Jablonec could deliver. In 1884, there were 561 Gürtler working in Jablonec. In 1930 this number had gone up to 4379. The Czechs shifted their focus from the specific desires of those

in Africa and Asia to the European and American market. In 1920, 6.8 million kilo's of fashion jewelry and related goods were exported from Jablonec by 667 export firms. Just two years later, in 1922, the number had risen to 11.3 million kilos. It is estimated that at this time about 25,000 people were working in the factories and workshops of Jablonec, and another 10,000 people were working from home. Up to 98% of the total production was exported to other countries.

3.1 Exotic tastes

Some of most striking pieces of jewelry to come from Jablonec in the 1920's and 1930's would be inspired by Egyptian, Asian or African imagery. The Oppers describe it as follows (30): 'Lifestyles changed rapidly during the period after the first World War, Modern women, more liberated than before, preferred fashions that were easier to wear. The appearance of affordable jewelry imitating semi-precious gems allowed women of fashion to choose from a large variety of adornment. In the 1920's, costume jewelry invaded both Europe and the

United States, having originated in France where Parisian designers made it to enhance the high fashions of the day. Scheherezade, Salome and Cleopatra emerged as heroines. Oriental and Egyptian exotica became quite the rage. After the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 Egyptian motifs such as pharaohs, scarabs, sphinx, mummies and hieroglyphs appeared as popular themes in jewelry, as did Oriental motifs such as elephants, pagodas and buddhas.'

Left: Sample cards of seed beads to be shipped to Bombay in 1938
Above: Images from a variety of Egyptian and Asian inspired jewelry, image by Howard Opper.


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3.2 Neiger brothers

One of the companies that made this exotic jewelry a great succes was the Neiger company, by the brothers Max and Norbert Neiger. Norbert took care of the business side, while Max was the main jewelry designer. They made long strands of Egyptian inspired jewelry, impressive brooches with delicate metalwork and detailed glass pieces, and fashionable brass flower pendants and brooches. Jargstorf (31) writes: 'The most important retailers and exporters bought from the Neigers. The high quality of the jewelry was matched by extremely effective presentations of each new collection. The former employee Ernst Seidel explained one such presentation for a 1935 design (..) To present this line, 150 of these brooches were arranged in the presentation room, hidden under a cloth. When all the important clients had assembled in the room, the cloth was suddenly whisked away. The full splendor of the collection, in 150-fold repetition, was exposed to each buyer's dazzled eyes.'
In the 1930's, with the global economic depression, many businesses in Jablonec struggled and unemployment went up drastically. Apparently, the

employees at Neiger were lucky, according to one employee: 'During the Great Depression, he wrote, no one was made redundant. In the very worst period, we just had to stop working and were not paid anymore. But soon, new orders came in again and we started working again.'

In 1938, this part of Bohemia was taken over by the Germans. The Neiger brothers were Jewish and fled to another part of Bohemia. Later, they were arrested in Prague and were both killed in Auschwitz in 1942.









Left and previous page: exotic beads, jewelry and jewelry components from the collection of the Jablonec museum

3.3 Occupation

As said, many Sudeten Germans were not pleased to be citizens of Czechoslovakia, but as long as business was booming, Czechs and Germans worked together. However, when the depression hit, it hit Jablonec bad.

Many Sudeten Germans felt they were being let down by the national government and turned to National Socialism. In 1938, the local National Socialist party gained momentum and was supported in an election by a majority of the Sudeten Germans. Not long after this election, Hitler occupied the Sudet part of Bohemia.
For many of the German glassmakers in Jablonec, they hoped that this would bring new freedom for them, free from the Czechoslovakian rule. However, their hopes were unfounded. Many of the Jews in Jablonec either fled or

were persecuted. The Americans would boycott the jewelry from Jablonec, which was now part of the 'Third Reich'. Many factories were ordered by the German government to either shut down, and stop using materials for this useless and decadent business of jewelry, or they were made to produce military materials.
Other factories would produce glass, plastic and metal items that were part of the 'Winterhilfswerk' or 'Winter help work'. This was a program during the Nazi regime that helped finance charity work. It ran from 1933 until 1945 during the winter months. Especially the 'Hitlerjugend' would collect money from people, and in exchange people would receive a small trinket or token, made in Jablonec. There is a great variety of these winter relief items, ranging from glass pendants with the faces of famous Germans on them to little plastic flowers or cartoon figures.

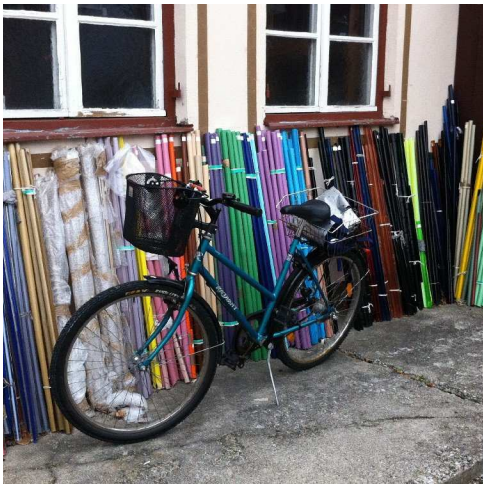
Above: unfinished pendants from the 'Tag des Wehrmacht' and 'Winterhilfswerk' glass portraits, all found near Jablonec.
Right: Street sign in Jablonec: Koralkova, which means 'Bead Street'.


KORÁLKOVÁ
34

4. Expulsion and communism 1945-1989

After the war in 1945, the Czechs turned on the Sudeten Germans. They blamed them for their collaboration with Hitler in 1938 and for the hardships of the war. Pressured by Czech resistance groups, the decision was made by the Czechoslovakian government to expell the Germans from Bohemia. Before this formal decision, in the chaotic summer of 1945, many Sudeten Germans were the victim of random revenge, and many were killed. After the formal decision, the expulsion was a more organized procedure with the Sudeten Germans being moved to camps, and being given orders to leave the country for either the 'American zone' which became now West-Germany, or the 'Russian zone' which became East-Germany.'
About 3 million Sudeten Germans were forced to leave. Those that were allowed, or sometimes forced, to stay were for example those that were valuable to the local economy because of their technical knowledge.

What it meant for Jablonec, was that the great majority of glassmakers, beadmakers, and 'gurtlers' were expelled. They were not allowed to take valuables with them, and had to leave their workshops, factories, villas and machines and tools behind. Jargstorf (32) shows an example of an expulsion notice: 'Such notices gave 3 million Sudetengermans one day's notice that they had to evacuate Bohemia. The letters stated that they were to leave the keys to their houses and workshops with the newly-installed Czech authorities, and that they were forbidden to take any valuables with them.' However, especially in Jablonec, some glassmakers were told to stay, and teach the Czechs in their factory about the machines and production. The little that remained of the Jablonec jewelrymaking industry during the war, came almost to a complete stop in 1945. In many places around Germany, beadmaking and jewelrymaking continued by the expelled Sudet Germans. On of the main new European beadmaking towns was Neugablonz, or New Jablonec, which was built on the ruins of an ammunitions factory near the town of Kaufbeuren in Bayern, Germany.



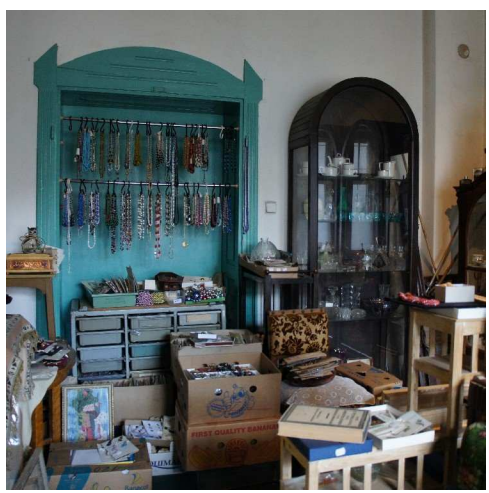
'When the communists came, the Germans had to go'

The history of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Jablonec and surrounding areas is a complicated one, but still aptly summarized in a quote by Mr Vavlac Janacek. He runs a small antique shop in the center of town. The shop is filled to the brim with old beads, jewelry, sample cards and buttons. It is a feast for the eye, and a feast for any collector. When in the shop, an elderly lady is selling off her old stash of jewelry and antique glass bits and pieces. She comes in very often, Janacek says, disposing of the old stock from her husbands company for money, one piece at a time. And she is not the only one. Slowly but steadily old attics and workshops get emptied out, beads and glass finds its way to second hand shops, get dumped or end up in the hands of collectors from abroad. Five boxes are sitting on top of each other, each with elaborate sample cards of Jablonec made

Left: Glass rods and beads in Neugablonz

necklaces from the 1970's to the 1990's. Tiny boxes show Egyptian revival jewelry from the 1930's and there must be a lot hiding in other boxes.

Few people in Jablonec would speak of what happened in 1945, when the Sudet Germans were forced to leave their homes and their companies. Janacek has no qualms about explaining this chapter in his town's history. Within a few sentences, he summarizes the whole history of the bead and jewelry industry in Jablonec.

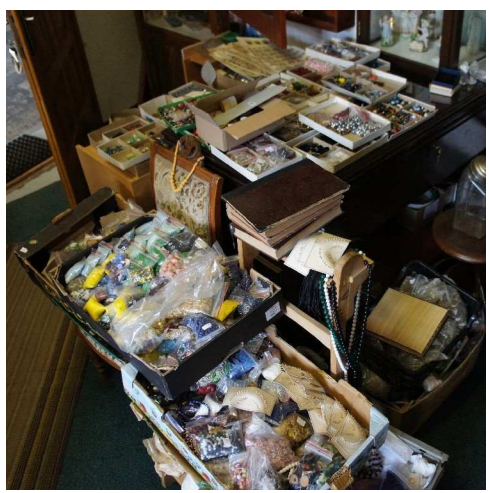


'The Germans came 200 years ago, and they worked together with the Czechs. One person made this, the other made that. Together they built large and small companies, and business flourished. Their homes became bigger and bigger, one even more decorated than the other. When the war came, the seperation between the Germans and the Czech started. The Sudet Germans wanted to be a part of greater Germany. So when the communists won, the Germans had to go. They started new companies in Neugablonz. The Czechs that remained

continued the business. They built massive factories and made beads and jewelry by the truckloads. They determined what the worldwide trends were. They held fashion shows, and all new jewelry designs were carried all over the world on the sample cards with the latest necklaces sown onto them.'
After the fall of communism, small companies were set up. However, they can not really be as strong as the previous major company of Jablonex. They can't manage their export on a large scale and they are not adapting to trends quickly enough. Fashion is changing too quickly for them. The Chinese, they are adapting quickly. They go into shops, buy things, old and new, and copy them.'

Janacek is not very optimistic about the future of the bead and jewelry industry in Jablonec. His final oneliner pretty much sums it up:
Jetzt ist alles schluss.

Now, everything is finished.

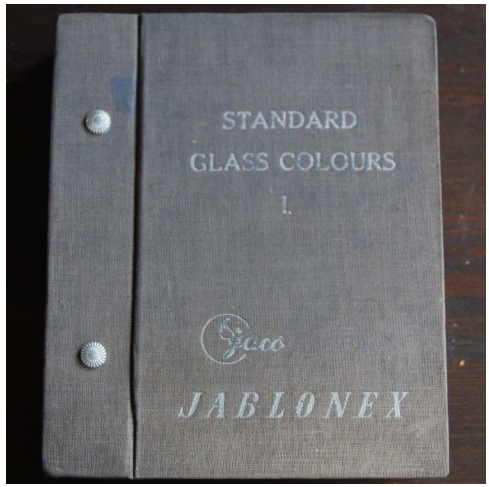


Left: Abandoned factory building in Jablonec

4.1 The rebuilding of the glass-industry and the start of Jablonex

Czechoslovakia found itself with a great number of small workshops and factories and under a communist regime. It is difficult to get a true sense of what happened in the late 1940's and the 1950's, because a lot of the sources from this period are strongly tainted by the political views of that time. For example, one source will state that the communists thought nothing of the whole frivolous jewelry industry, until in the late 1950's. Other sources will state that the Communist government quickly planned to rebuild this wonderful Bohemian industry.

Marek's book on the history of Jablonec from 1973 (33), gives an interesting view of how the business and the start of Jablonex was seen in that time. 'The Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia brought to an end the period of uncertainty as to the future of Jablonec's most typical industry – bijoutery. The decision to renew the tradition of Jablonec production was confirmed by the 11th



Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and laid the foundation stone to a new expansion of this branch. Five national enterprises, the Jablonec Glass-Work, Zeleznobrod Glass, Preciosa, Glass Bijoutery and Bijoutery, concentrated in the Industry of Jablonec Bijoutery, the greatest economic production unit in the glass and ceramics industry, today produce the jewels of our age – bijoutery – in the Jablonec district and elsewhere. After this concentration of the specialised workshops, years ago, the trust management was responsible for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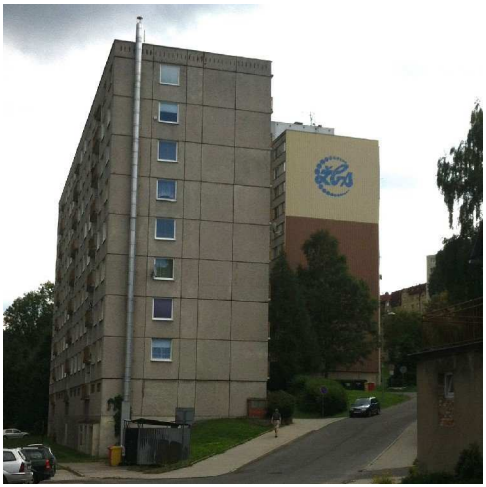
thirty-seven plants and two hundred seperate workshops, in which cottage work continued to play a significant role. In the last decade, hundreds of millions were invested in the construction of a grand production centre, the new Bijoutery Works, national enterprise, sited in the vicinity of the dam. This represents a permanent investment of the socialist society into this industry. (...) The concentrated, well organized export centre in the new building of the Jablonec enterprises exports the Jablonec jewelry into the whole world; the priority given to trade with the fraternal countries.'

4.2 In the eye of the beholder

A description is also given of the way the old villas were seen during the communist era: 'A boom at the turn of the century changed the old traders' houses to Art Nouveau style – the style of the rich merchants and the industrial bourgeoisie. Dozens of ostentatious houses were built in the town. (..) The new villa districts of the rich bourgeoisie were to help one forget that in the same town there lived thousands of occasional workers with their families, inhabiting abject

dwellings in the attics and basements of old workshops and private houses, from the high rents of which other Jablonec entrepeneurs, who specialised in human poverty, lived comfortably and well.'

The communist regime took pride in the way they managed to rebuild (parts) of Jablonec: 'On the outskirts of Jablonec, new housing estates have been built (..) In the town centre new residential tower blocks have been erected and the old houses of the former centre are being pulled down to make room for new blocks of houses.



Dozens of new high points have joined the four or five old dominant buildings – the multi-storey architecture of the socialist age. The panoramatic appearance of the town has changed in less than a decade thanks to the white multiple-storey buildings set agains the dark background of the forests. And it continues to change.'

Today, the offical city's website recalls this period of building as follows: 'Blocks of flats which buried the village of Mseno nad Nisou on the outskirts of Jablonec were built and they completely changed the picturesque suburbs of Jablonec. The demolition of the old Hotel Merkur constituted the culmination of the trend of insensitivity towards the historical buildings in Jablonec nad Nisou, the clearance of developed areas and the twenty-year construction of housing estates.'

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COLOURS

4.3 Jablonex

The State company of Jablonex, which settled into its massive headquarters by the dam in Jablonec in 1961, has controlled the Czech glass and jewelry industry until the changes in 1989. All of the factories were part of this one state-run company, and all the export went through this one channel. It is said that this is actually the main reason why the Czechoslovakian government decided to invest in the 'Bijouterie' market again: they were a window into the Western world. The export offered a change for the strugling economy to gain access to hard currency, and after all, glass and jewelry from Jablonec was still renowned in the world fashion market. A lot of the work shifted from smaller workshops to the big new factories. However, most of the old factories, like the Redlhammer factory, were now part of the Jablonex empire. They no longer went by the names of their German founders, but by a number. Also, as before, a lot of work was done at home, mostly by women, who would make the jewelry and string the beads into hanks.

It is hard not to be impressed with the level of organisation that Jablonex

showed. All of the glass colors were numbered and these numbers were used consistently throughout the entire production process. All of the sample cards follow the same system, and the information was laid out in several languages in all of their publications. Jablonex had offices in several 'Western' countries, which was remarkable considering the cold war tensions between East and West. According to a defected member of the Czech intelligence service, Joseph Frolik, these offices' main purpose was not exporting beads and jewelry. (34)

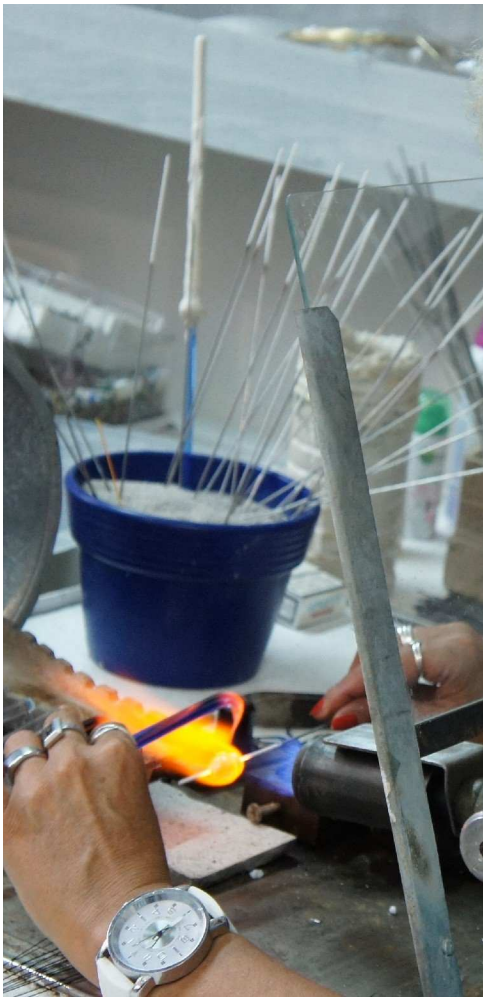
'According to testimony by Joseph Frolik (1975) in the U.S. Senate, Jablonex and several other foreign trade enterprises provided commercial cover for agents and officers of the communist intelligence services. These foreign trade companies operated all over the world and combined their legitimate activities with the illicit transfer of embargoed military technology to the communist bloc.'

Above left: Sample card book of glass colors by Jablonex.
Above right: One of the many Jablonex products: military medals.
Right: View on Jablonec.

4.4 International jewelry business and exhibitions

After the decision was made to start investing in the production of costume jewelry again, it was important for Jablonec to show to the world that they were 'back in business' and that they were still in tune with the fashion of its time. The first national exhibition of costume jewelry in Jablonec was called 'Costume Jewellery for the Whole World' and was held in 1959. It was a succes, and in following years, more exhibitions would follow, each one bigger than the previous one. According to Nova (35) it was at this time, that the Czechoslovak regime truly committed to the industry and the export possibilities: ' A major factor in stabilizing the tradition (of exhibitions, ed.) was the ruling passed by the government's exhibitions committee on 19th December 1960. As part of the talks on the concept of the Liberec Exhibition Markets (LVT), a schema was approved to hold costume jewelry exhibitions in Jablonec nad Nisou at the same time every year. The years spent advocating the importance of the costume jewellery industry, which

brought indispensable foreign exchange funds to the socialist economy, finally came to fruition and the centrally managed economy agreed to support this industry and the region it was concentrated in.'
From 1965, the exhibitions were a truly international event with both producers and representatives from around the world. It was also at this time that Jablonex was strongly promoting the Czech jewelry
industry: 'In the 1960's the foreign trade concern Jablonex tried to maintain the position of Jablonec costume jewellery on the European markets, which required a fast response to fashion trends. Promotion abroad was stepped up from the second half of the 1960's. In 1965 Jablonex showed a collection of costume jewellery in Cannes at the same time of the film festival. 'The exhibition in 1968 is seen as one of the most impressive exhibitions in Jablonec. It was held in the period in which Czechoslovak citizens gained more freedom, also known as the Prague Spring, and the atmosphere at the shows is described as 'relaxed'. It was for the first time that individual designers would show their work.
After the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, the Sovjets decided that this turn towards more civil liberties was unacceptable and troups from the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia. The period that followed is called the 'Normalisation' in Czech history and refers to how the Sovjet regime would force the Czech back to the normal and accepted forms of communism. This normalisation also affected the international shows, which became more and more a political, cultural and social event.



From the late 1970's onwards, the exhibitions were not that frequent, and they pretty much stopped in 1987.
Even though Jablonex was mainly focussed on export, and making sure that this would run smoothly, several people in the bead industry in the 1980's (36) recall that distribution of Czech beads was not going that well. Especially when it came to certain very specific Czech seed beads, like charlotte cut beads, they were not readily available 'The supply issue was so weird, that we just decided that the Czech industry must not care about demand or making muchmoney. We figured they didn't need the business back then.'

Right: lampwork beads being made

4.5 The dark side of the Jablonex industry

The Czech industry was known as a rather secretive industry. One of the reasons for this secrecy may be that, as become publicly known in 1988, part of the production took place in prisons. A newspaper article in 1988 'Scandal of slave labour in prison's glassworks' by John Sweeney stated that a certain share of the Jablonec production was done by (political) prisoners. One of the sources of the article was Stefany Tomalin, who owned a London bead shop. (36) 'Tomalin told the London Observer that a former Czech political prisoner, Jaroslav Javorsky, had visited her shop and had recognized the beads he made in Valdice Prison, near Jablonec. Javorsky said that gone man was expected to produce around ten thousand beads a day.

A year earlier, in 1987, the Czechoslovakian human rights organisation Charter 77 also wrote about the prison conditions and stated: 'The Czechoslovak penal system serves mainly as a source of cheap labor, especially for enterprises manufacturing glass jewelry.'

How large the share of the total

production of Jablonex was made in prisons, is difficult to determine. Francis writes in 1991 that the anonymous sources connected to the industry he spoke to say that it was just a small share: 'They contend that a rather tiny percentage of the total production of Czech beads are made by prison labor. Only one prison in the region is involved (though other prisons produce other goods), and the output is small. Moreover, Jablonex is not (officially) aware of the practice, and does not knowingly export beads from this source. The beads are slipped into lots coming from other producers and thus enter the market surreptitiously.' Considering the grip that Jablonex had on the production and export of all of the glass and jewelry that came from the area, it seems unlikely that they were not aware of this practice. Since 1991, the number of sources reporting on the grim working conditions in the prisons have grown.
In 2010, I asked several people about their knowledge of beads being produced in prisons during the communist era. One woman who used to work for Jablonex made no secret of the fact that work was done in prisons. She saw it as non-issue: people in

prisons needed to work too, to make money.
She was not able to say if it was a large or a small portion of the work that was done in prisons.
Most likely, the Czechoslovak prison system was indeed a source of cheap labor, and a fair share of the shiny beads and jewels that were exported by Jablonex were not as sparkly clean as they would make it seem.


PAS JABLONEC a.s.
Vzdušná 25
VÝROBA SKLA
A BIŽUTERIE
PAS JABLONEC a.s.
IČO: 25411322
DIČ: CZ25411322

5. Private enterprise and competition (1989-2013)

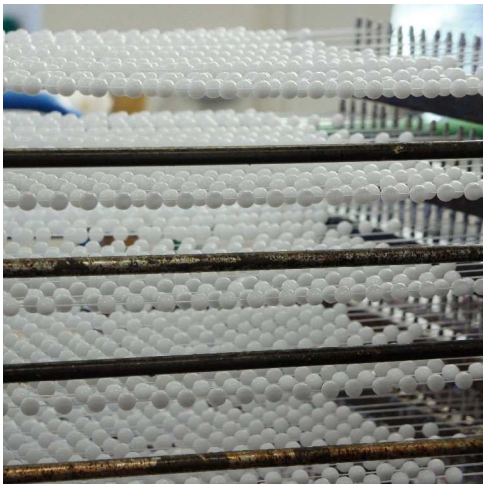
After the 'Velvet revolution' that ended the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989, Jablonex lost it's state monopoly. Private ownership of businesses was allowed, and many producers jumped at the chance to have their own business producing glass, beads and jewelry.

Above and next pages: production of glass pearl beads

We have no choice. We need to continue to preserve the bead and jewelry making tradition for future generations. It is what we do, it is who we are.

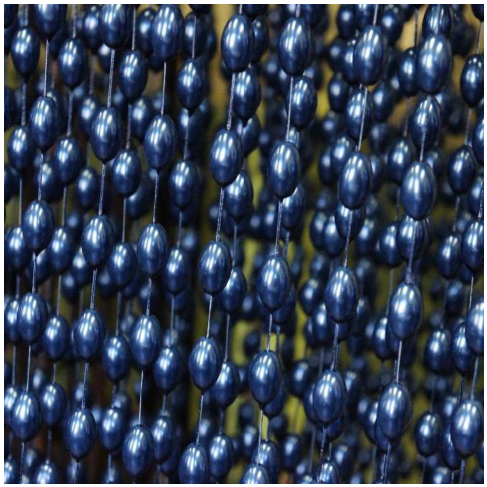
The quote above from mister Silhán, the director from the factory Pas in Jablonec, sums up what his general feeling is of the current glass, jewelry and bead business in Jablonec. The history of the industry shows a long list of both major achievements and periods of serious decline. The current period is certainly not a period of booming business, and many local businesses are struggling.

After the revolution of 1989 the possibility for starting a private business enticed many people who were working in the state business of Jablonex to start their own company. The state monopoly on beadmaking crumbled. Factories were privatized, new companies were set up. It was not easy though. Silhán recalls the first days of doing business and taking risks in a country quickly changing and developing. What is currently a major factory with different locations, started



off as a small business, making metal parts for rosaries, working out of a garage. It was difficult to find customers all over the world as a small business, when the world was still used to having a single export company from (then) Czechoslovakia. He bought a factory hall in 1992, where industrial machines were repaired, and this is where Pas managed to extend their business. Glass beads became part of their production process, including cutting beads, and homeworkers who would string the beads into hanks. When they expanded even further, they became more and more independent from other companies.
They set up their own store, production of packaging materials and expedition. For the first three years in the factory hall, they employed between 12 and 16 people.

They expanded their capacity with a second location in Prizna street, which served as a production house for waxed pearls. Their story of expansion continued when they started making firepolished beads, and bought their current location. It was a large empty



factory building, suited as a workplace for their more than 40 employees. An important step in the companies' production was made when they started producing their own glass. It gave them more control of their production line, and made them again less dependant on other companies. Within ten years from moving out of the garage in 1992, they had a flourishing business with more than 100 employees, and another 100 people working on making jewelry from home. After the period of expansion, things have become more and more difficult for bead business in Jablonec, including Pas. Silhan estimates that since 2007 almost 60% of the 30.000 workers in the bead and jewelry industry in the Jablonec region have lost their employment. He states: *The current situation is critical, and it is even worse than the period of the second world war.*

There are two main contributors to the current crisis, according to Silhán. The first has to do with the choices from the Jablonex group and Preciosa. They sold their equipment to India and

China, and by doing so, they sold the techniques and expertises built by the craftsmen of Jablonec. Once this craftsmanship gets lost, all potential to innovate and develop gets lost. The Preciosa company has taken over Jablonex, and is currently the largest producer. However, according to Silhan, Preciosa is currently selling their products too cheaply, without factoring in the cost of development and craftsmanship. This makes it even more difficult for other companies to stay afloat when facing the other main contributor the current crisis. The competition from China and India is huge. They are able to work quicker and cheaper. Silhán reports representatives of Chinese companies visiting trade shows, and soon after, the latest Czech designs are available from China at a much lower price. They will compromise originality and quality, but they can offer very affordable beads in bulk due to low wages and in part by state subsidies in China. Silhán believes that the luck of the Czech bead industry will turn in their favour once again. The craftsmen, the designers and the factories are still there, as are the contacts with customers all over the world. New markets, like Brazil in South America are looking for good quality jewelry and beads. Through the course of the interview, Silhán notes that nobody ever asks about the history of his company. It fills him with pride to think about how he overcame the struggles in the beginning, and built his business. It also strengthens his confidence that they can overcome the current crisis.

'*We are all struggling, but we need to remain optimistic. This too shall pass.*'

Right: Marble storage from a glass marble factory


Mikrokuličky
0,20-0,30 mm
500 g

5.1 Competion

Even though it was no longer the state's monopolist, Jablonex did continue as a business after 1989. In 1991 Peter Francis (39) wrote (in the same newsletter as his article on prison labor in Czechoslovakia) that his center for bead research was contacted by Jablonex, and he was invited to visit them. In 1992 he writes (40) 'Our correspondent in Jablonec, Czechoslovakia, soon to be the Czech Republic, reports that privatization is moving along and in two or three years 15 to 20 seperate companies are expected to emerge. As 30% of their business was with East Europe and this market has dried up, the current amount of export is down, but they remain optimistic about the future.' A few years later, in 1995, Francis visits Jablonec and describes the current state of the business. Seed beads at that time made up 50% of the bead industry, 30% by molded beads 15% firepolished beads and 5% lamp wound beads.

It is quite difficult to track all the changes in ownership of the different companies at that time (41) : 'The

newly liberated industry is changing quickly.
The major seed bead maker is the Ornela factory in Zasada, a small town southeast of Jablonec. Ornela is being privatized. Currently it is jointly owned by many different concerns: management, employees, banks, other glass and bead companies and the local governments. In a few years it will be totally privatized.
The major exporter remained Jablonex. It had been about 30% privatized via the coupon or voucher system by late 1995.'

The owners of Wild Things Beads write what happened next (42) :

'By 2000, there were over 60 agents and exporters listed in the phone book in Jablonec, and growing. Also during this time Jablonex was buying up businesses. They purchased the last independent glassworks factory in Jablonec; Jizerske Sklo. Jablonex now controlled what glass could be made, when it would be made, and for how much it could be sold. They also purchased Ornela, the last seed bead factory in Europe.'

But, small cracks were beginning to develop in Jablonex foundation around this time. Managers of different divisions within Jablonex were either being fired or were quitting to start their own bead businesses. The economic crisis was being felt early on in Jablonex, as sales were falling dramatically to competition that was rising around them.'
Jablonex stopped their business in 2008 and Preciosa bought what was left of Jablonex. 'By 2010, Jablonex was in the last month of closing down its flagship retail store "Jablonex Palace" based in its corporate headquarters building. A month later, it reopened as "Preciosa Palace" in the same location. Nothing looked different.'
It is said that Jablonex sold machines to India and China, something which is not looked upon favorably by other local companies. It has increased the competion they are facing.
Jablonex used to own a great deal of real estate in Jablonec and the surrounding areas. Factories, offices, and shops.

Currently, the website of Jablonex reads:

Welcome to the website of JABLONEX. The company underwent a successful restructuring into a real estate company. Our goal is to develop large areas and create the best business center in the region Jablonec. Venues offer a combination of office, warehouse and manufacturing space in a single location.

Right: Molded beads for the new millenium, from the collection of Carole Morris


Made in
Czech Republic
2000
2000
2000
2000
2000
2000
2000
2000

5.2 Preciosa

The Preciosa company started in 1948 when 7 large crystal factories and 18 smaller companies merged into one company. The brand 'Preciosa' already dates from 1915. From the 1990's onward they became a private company, that eventually turned into a conglomerate of many factories in the region of Jablonec. They currently produce glass canes, tubes and rods for technical purposes, decorative glass products, and making molded beads and lampwork beads. In another factory they produce seed beads. Furthermore, molded glass beads, glass stones, rhinestones, chandelier parts, wooden beads, etc, are all made under the brand of Preciosa (currently Preciosa Ornela).
In 2013, the Jablonec Museum of Glass and Jewellery dedicated an exhibition to the 65th anniversary of Preciosa with a showcase of the variety of their products and their history. The company website of Preciosa states (43) : Despite the many setbacks which occurred during the course of the 20th century, this industry maintained its exceptional position in the world markets and the production and development of the traditional range of Jablonec goods has continued successfully in the new millennium.'

5.3 Seed beads

Seed beads are one of the main products of Preciosa, just like they were a major product for Jablonex. Seed beads are made by drawing a long thin hollow tube of glass, and cutting it into small pieces.
The first seed beads were apparantly made in Jablonec around 1800, but only in small quantities. These beads would be simple, and the rough edges would be polished of by tumbling them. In the late 1800's, a greater variety of seed beads was being made. Some would be facetted to give them extra sparkle, and others would be heated again to round off the edges to make rocailles. The beads are generally made from round tubing, or from tubing with 6 edges.


BeadShop
PRECIOSA

5.4 Production methods

When Peter Francis visited Jablonec in 1995, he was able to see the different production methods and steps for making seed beads. He describes three different ways of making the glass tubes for seed beads (46). The first method is mostly used for specialty glass, where the glass needs to go through a process of heating and cooling (striking) to obtain the right color.

The second method uses a mold in which the glass is poured, and then a metal pin is inserted. By machine, the glass is drawn into tubes, while the shape of the metal pin gives the holes a specific shape. This is how the seed beads made with for example square and triangle holes are made. The third method uses another machine. The glass falls off a hollow mandrel that is pointing towards the ground whilst compressed air is blown into the mandrel to create the hole. The glass tubes cools along some type of conveyor system.

Further steps are sorting the tubes by diameter, cutting the tubes into small pieces, filling up the holes for the heat-tumbling of the beads to round them

off without closing up the hole, cleaning out the holes and sorting the tiny beads for further treatments.

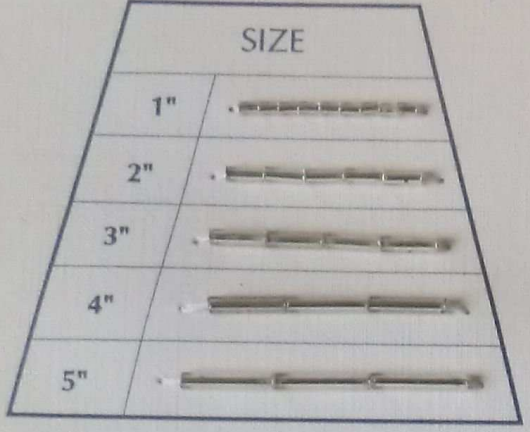
Seed beads can be decorated in several ways. Quite common is silverlining the beads, dying the holes of the beads in a range of colors and coating the beads. The seed beads used to be made in sizes starting at beads smaller than 1mm. The smaller sizes are no longer made, unless a large order were to come in. Czech seed beads are usualy sold strung into hanks.

5.5 Charlottes

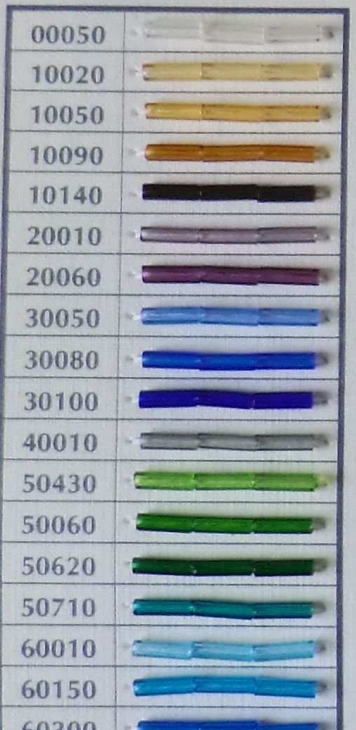
A popular seed bead is the charlotte cut bead, also known as charlottes. They are rounded seed beads with one cut facet. It is said that in the 1800's, these beads were actually made in Venice, and then facetted in Bohemia. (44) 'In 1841 Altmuller wrote: 'Venetian beads frequently go to Bohemia to be ground and facetted. This even done with the finest knitting beads which also acquire their facets this way...and then become a new commercial article the two distant countries both have a part in.' Altmuller was describing what are now called charlottes. They are

Animal head covered in seed beads, collection museum of Jablonec

small rocailles strung on wires and held against a rotating wheel. This gives them tiny facets.
These charlottes were known for being difficult to get. A bead store owner recalls: (45) 'The very desirable Charlotte Cuts, made in Czechoslovakia, were the most difficult to obtain. The Native Americans loved these because they were used in much of the very best beaded work on



Natural transparent colours



Natural colours silver lined (sq. h.)

Natural colours silver lined (r. h.)

buckskin in the late 19th c. They look fabulous in this work. Back in the 80s, I was told that they only did a production run of each color of Charlottes once every 5 years. In those days, availability of the Czech beads was so bad that bead stores were on waiting lists to obtain specific colors from the main source General Bead used at the time, Elliot Greene in NYC. I remember what a big deal it was to get black Charlottes, because everyone wanted them.'

In the 1990's, the Czech seed bead industry was faced with strong new competion by Japanese companies Miyuki and Toho. The cylinder shaped beads, known as delicas, were invented by the Miyuki company in the 1980's. They are known for being more consistent in shape and size and have bigger holes than the Czech beads. Those involved in beadweaving appear to have embraced these new beads, even though they are more expensive than 'regular' seed beads.

Above left and left: sample cards with Czech bugle and seed beads.
Above right: seed beads with an 'antique' picasso finish, York Beads


ČESKÉ PERLIČKY ZÁSADA
GBZ
GLASS BEADS BY ZASADA
ZÁMEČNICTVÍ ŽELEZÁŘSTVÍ

6. Beads from Jablonec today

The glass, bead and jewelry-industry in Jablonec is struggling. Competition is stiff on several fronts. Finished fashion jewelry, facetted beads, molded beads and many other beads are cheaply available from China. Lampwork beads are made cheaply in India, Indonesia and increasingly in China. High quality seed beads are coming from Japan and for crystal beads, Swarovski is the brand to beat.
For those visiting Jablonec, it shows. Many small workshops, factories and bead shops have closed down in recent years. Highly skilled workers in small workshops will be the last generation doing this work, like pressing glass buttons and cabochons. Talking to local businesses, some are very optimistic, others are more pessimistic. Many local shops have started selling beads online, cutting out exporters. Other producers have decided to focus more on specialized high quality products. One of the interesting developments is the new course that is set out by Preciosa. Preciosa is investing strongly in marketing, focusing on the history of

the glass industry. Their brand is presented as 'Preciosa, Traditional Czech Beads'. Both Preciosa and other Czech bead producers have recently put themselves back on the 'beadwork-map' by introducing a whole range of new two-hole seed beads. It is one of the signs that show that the Czech bead industry is not giving up. In 1991, the Association of Glass and Costume Jewelry was set up in Jablonec, with the intent of promoting the local industry, export and production. They have recently revived the tradition of international exhibitions to show off the local products.

The pessimist will say that beadmaking in Jablonec can no longer be profitable, and that the current generation will be the last generation of beadmakers. The optimist will look at Jablonec' volatile history and see how beadmaking always has survived through tough times. Perhaps in 2050, it is time for another book on 'Beads from Jablonec'.


PRECIOSA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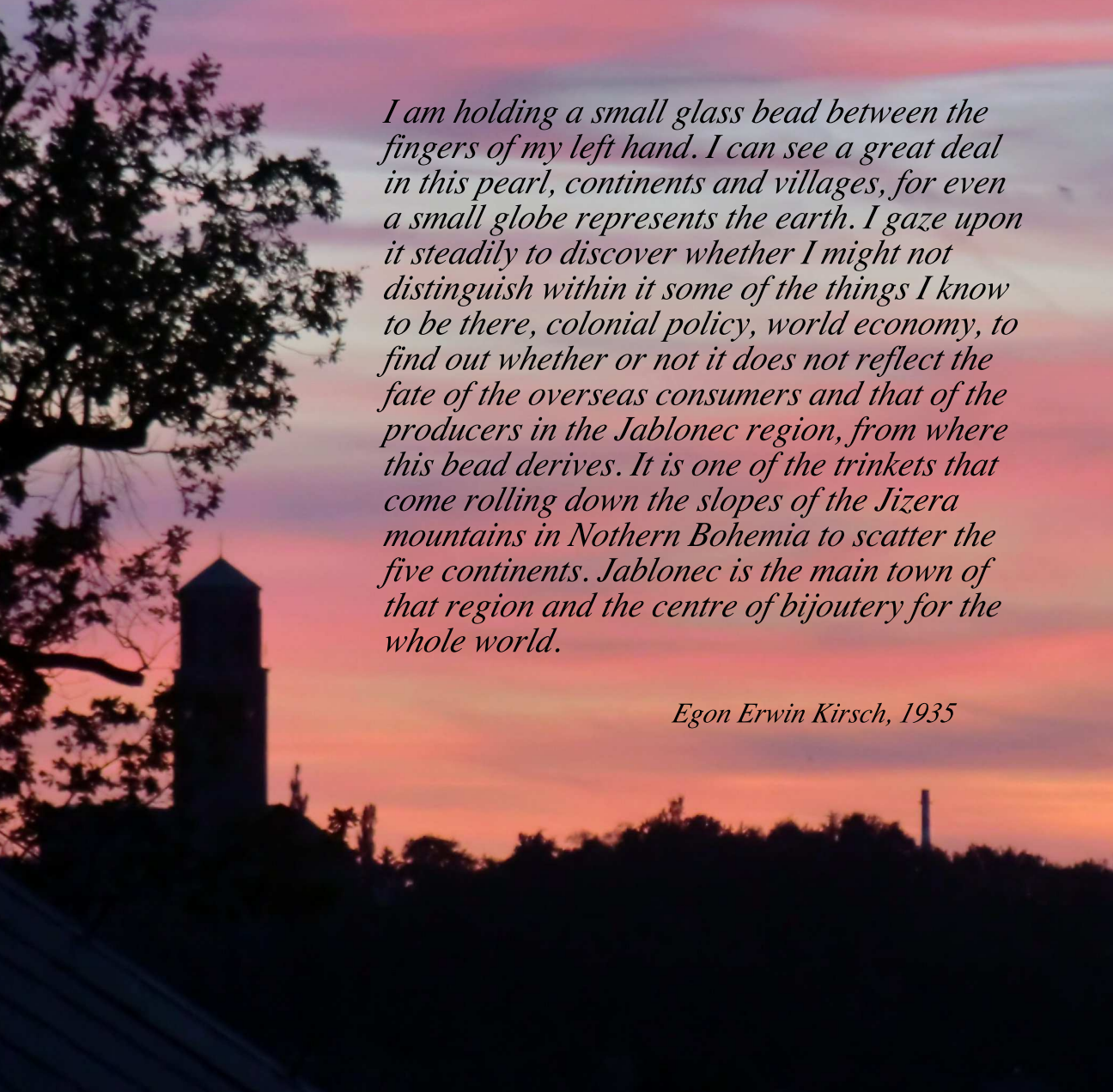
blurb


I am holding a small glass bead between the fingers of my left hand. I can see a great deal in this pearl, continents and villages, for even a small globe represents the earth. I gaze upon it steadily to discover whether I might not distinguish within it some of the things I know to be there, colonial policy, world economy, to find out whether or not it does not reflect the fate of the overseas consumers and that of the producers in the Jablonec region, from where this bead derives. It is one of the trinkets that come rolling down the slopes of the Jizera mountains in Nothern Bohemia to scatter the five continents. Jablonec is the main town of that region and the centre of bijoutery for the whole world.

Egon Erwin Kirsch, 1935