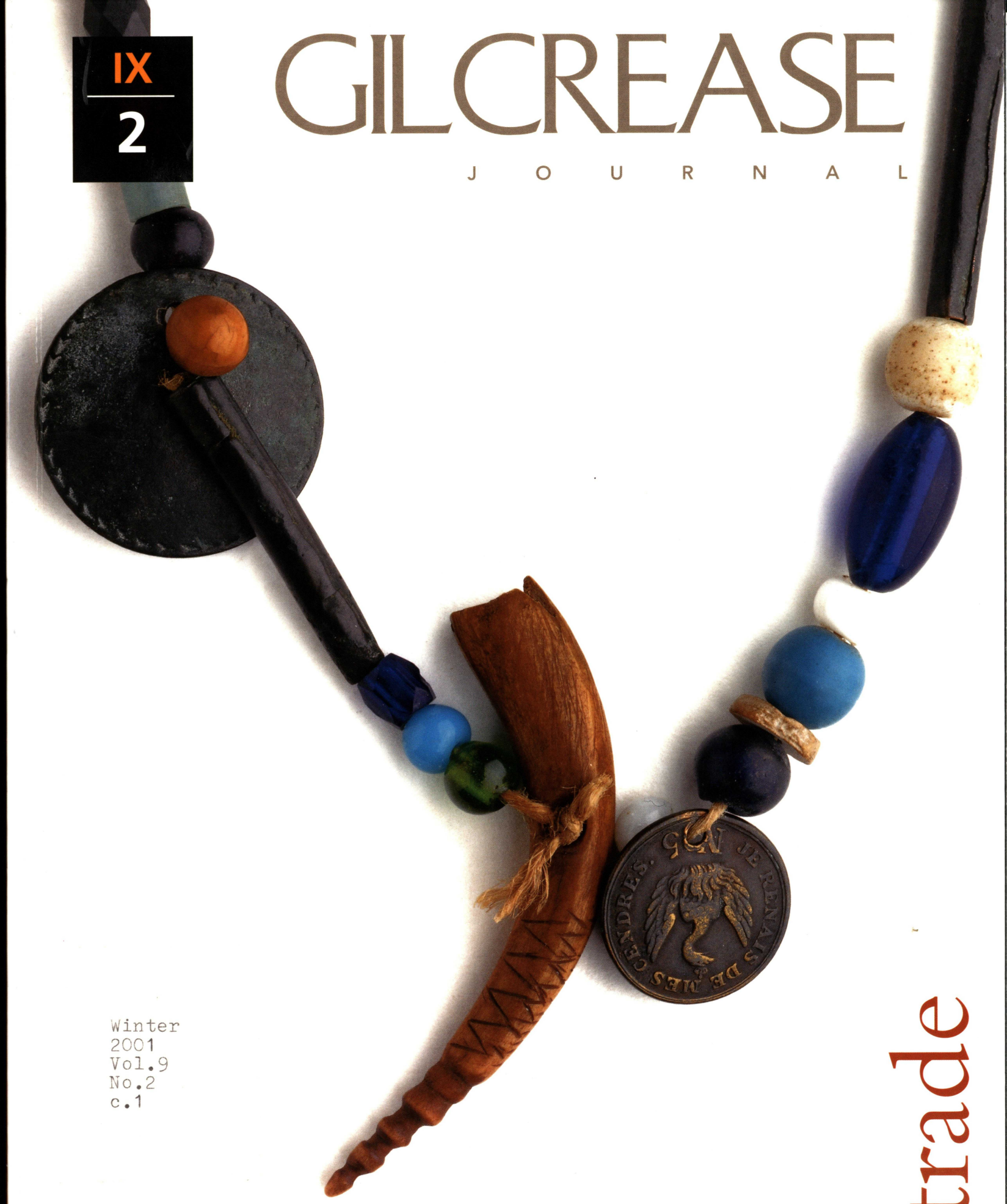
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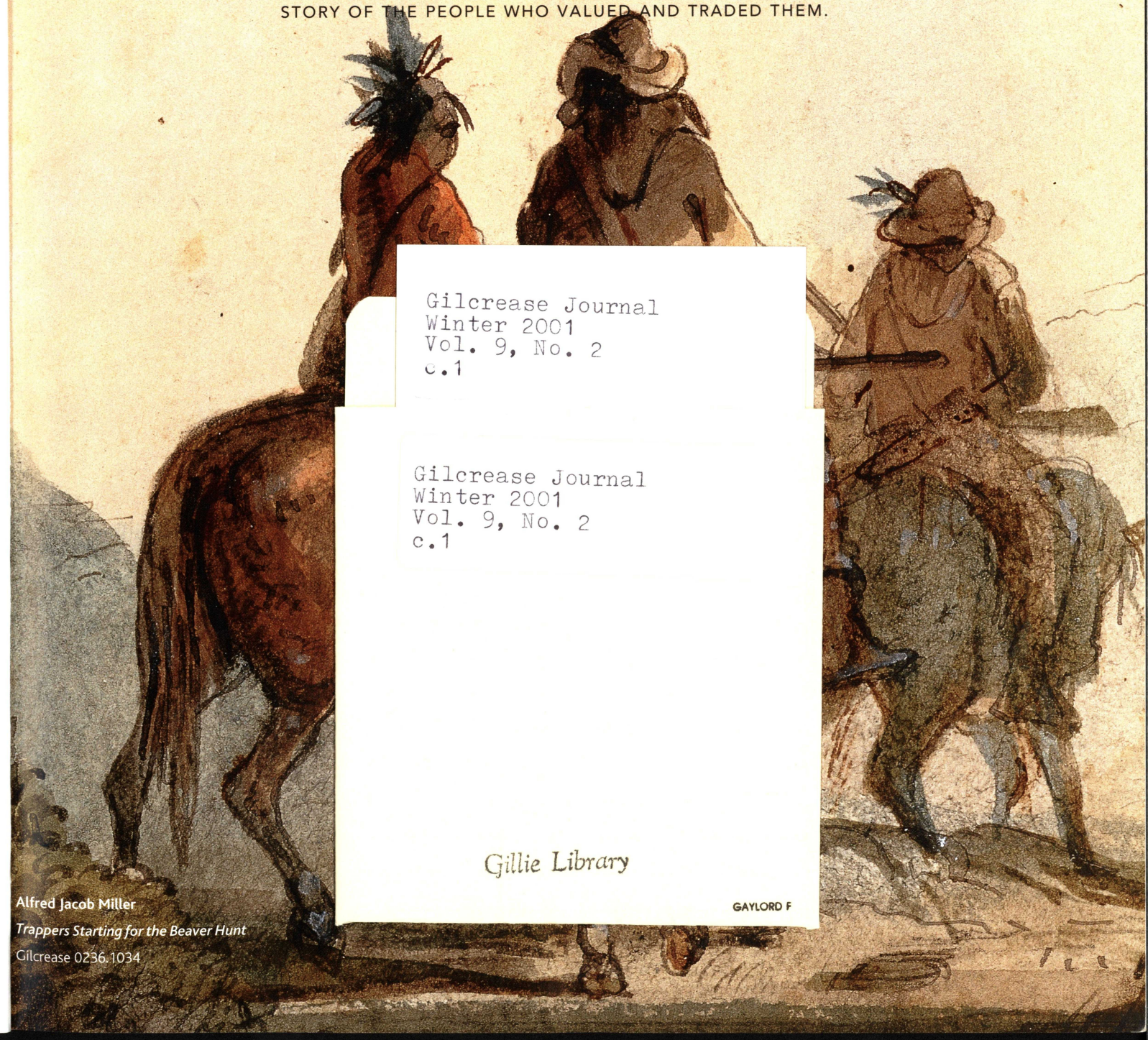
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trade

HUMANS EXCHANGE THINGS WITH ONE ANOTHER FOR MANY REASONS—POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC, EMOTIONAL OR RITUAL. IN PRE-CONTACT NORTH AMERICA, STATUS CAME MORE FROM WHAT WAS GIVEN AWAY THAN WHAT WAS ACCUMULATED, AND WHEN EUROPEANS ARRIVED WITH DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT PERSONAL PROPERTY CONSIDERABLE MISUNDERSTANDING WOULD ENSUE. HISTORIANS THEORIZE ABOUT ANCIENT TRADE PATTERNS BASED ON THE MYSTERIOUS TROVE AT SPIRO MOUND, AND THEY RECORD THE SAGA OF POST-CONTACT TRADE IN BEADS AND FURS. BUT THE OBJECTS THEMSELVES SPEAK TOO, THROUGH THEIR BEAUTY AND ENDURANCE. WHAT FOLLOWS IS THEIR STORY AND THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE WHO VALUED AND TRADED THEM.



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Alfred Jacob Miller
Trappers Starting for the Beaver Hunt
Gilcrease 0236.1034



Bear tooth necklace
Bear teeth, glass beads, leather cord. Gilcrease 84.196

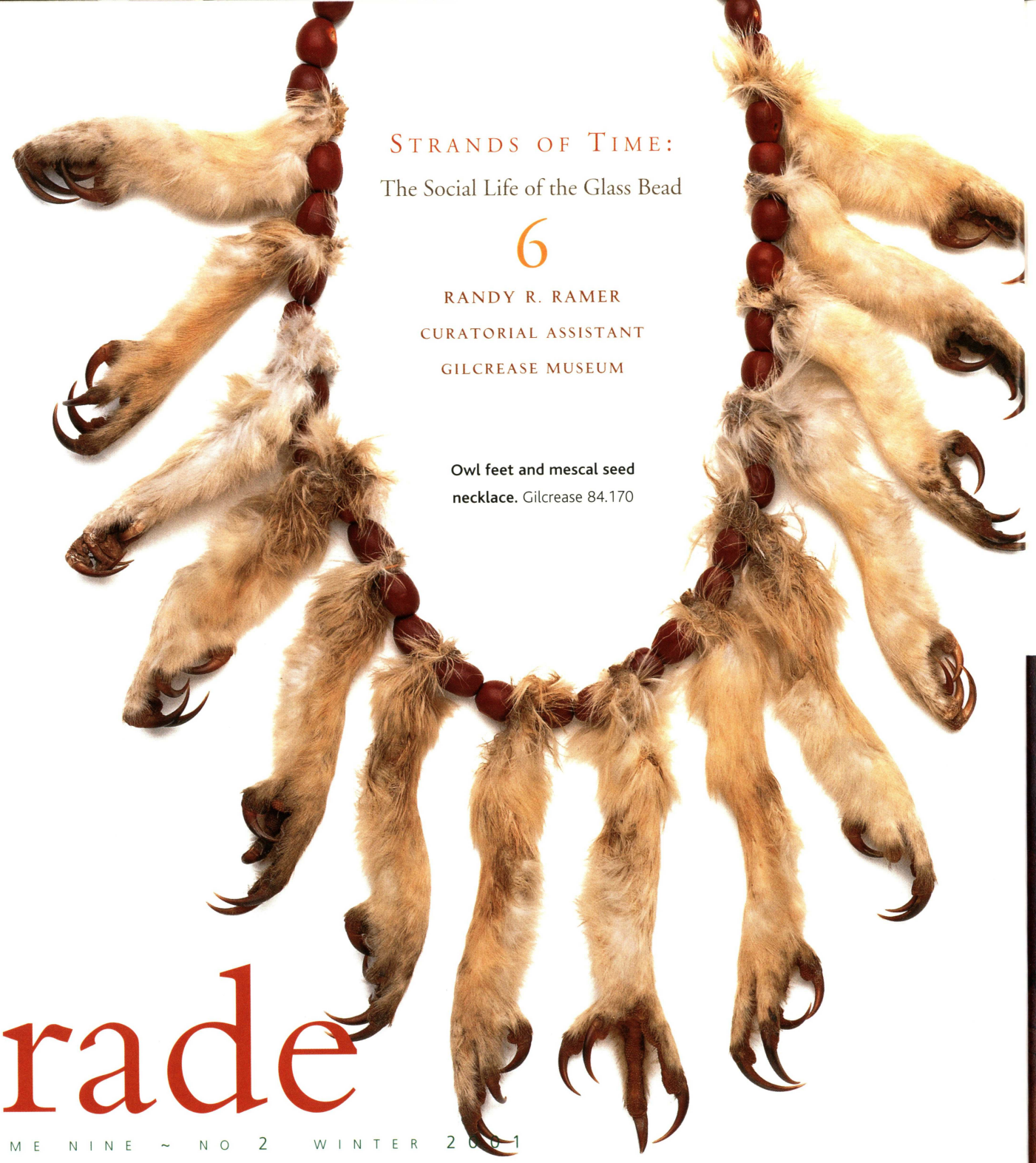




Engraved shell objects
Spiro Mound, Oklahoma, AD 700-1500, Mississippian Period. Gilcrease 9025.451 (hands) and 9025.20

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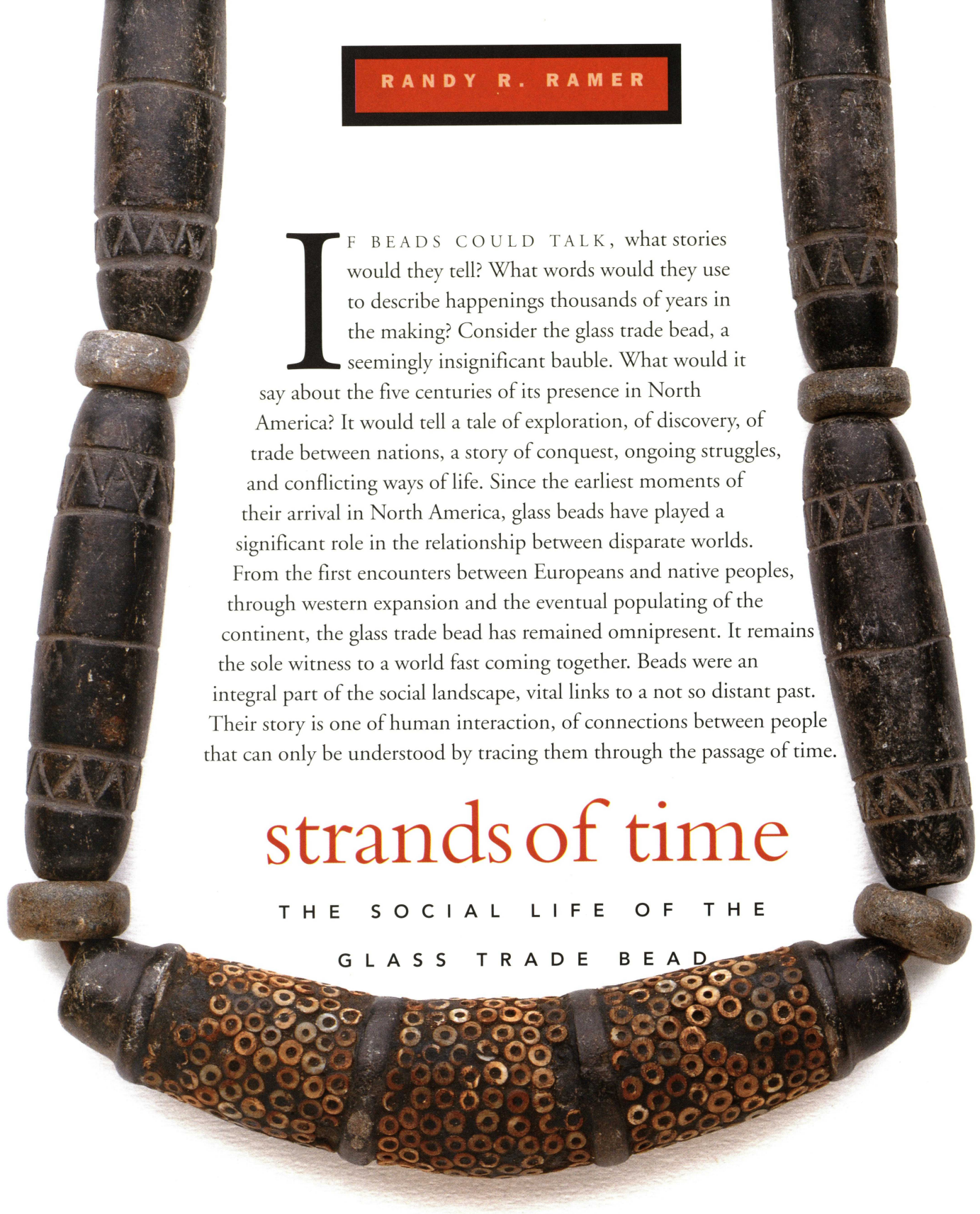
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strands of time

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE GLASS TRADE BEAD

RANDY R. RAMER

IF BEADS COULD TALK, what stories would they tell? What words would they use to describe happenings thousands of years in the making? Consider the glass trade bead, a seemingly insignificant bauble. What would it say about the five centuries of its presence in North America? It would tell a tale of exploration, of discovery, of trade between nations, a story of conquest, ongoing struggles, and conflicting ways of life. Since the earliest moments of their arrival in North America, glass beads have played a significant role in the relationship between disparate worlds. From the first encounters between Europeans and native peoples, through western expansion and the eventual populating of the continent, the glass trade bead has remained omnipresent. It remains the sole witness to a world fast coming together. Beads were an integral part of the social landscape, vital links to a not so distant past. Their story is one of human interaction, of connections between people that can only be understood by tracing them through the passage of time.



Chumash incised stone necklace
Highly stylized beadmaking techniques were used before trade beads entered the New World. The bottom link of this necklace is hardened asphaltum inlaid with small shells. Gilcrease 61.6799



Chumash shell necklace
This strand of hand-fashioned shells is from the California coast. Dating from the 16th to 18th centuries, it shows a strong adherence to traditional forms of adornment. Gilcrease 9036.536



Turquoise and shell necklace
This beautiful strand of adornments displays the craftsmanship that thrived long before trade beads became the vogue. Gilcrease 90.432

Long before the earliest endeavors of the Hudson's Bay Company and the advent of the North American fur trade, centuries before John Jacob Astor ever dreamed an empire, the glass bead had become a mainstay of explorers, missionaries, and fortune-hunting adventurers. Indeed, the first trade beads arrived in the New World with Columbus himself, and his journal entries of 1492 are careful to record their use in the first exchanges between Europeans and native peoples. Nearly half a century later, glass beads would enter the present day American Southwest with conquistadors from New Spain, Francisco Coronado documenting their use in 1540 during his famed but futile quest for treasure in the Seven Cities of Cibola. Even without gold, however, the Spanish would go on to lay claim to the entire region. Their colonies would assure a continuing supply of commodities from the Old World, beads becoming increasingly important among their staples of trade.

INDEED, THE FIRST TRADE BEADS ARRIVED IN THE NEW WORLD WITH COLUMBUS HIMSELF . . .

Throughout the continent, glass beads would eventually become the quintessential product of commerce between nations in the New World. British, French, and Dutch explorers used glass beads as did their Spanish counterparts, distributing them to native peoples who were intrigued with new possibilities for adornment and aesthetic expression. As the kingdoms of Europe vied for control over what was to them still a mysterious place, glass beads were gradually becoming a much admired form of decoration, passing from one world to another to find unique places alongside ancient adornment traditions. Beads of shell, stone, wood, and bone had been used for thousands of years in North America but glass beads were a thing altogether different. While traditional materials required many hours for the production of a single ornament, trade beads were relatively easy to come by. They were durable as well as pleasing to the eye, providing colors which had been scarcely seen outside of nature (Orchard, 1975).



Armor breastplate and brass stirrups
These 16th-century Spanish implements were used by conquistadors during the founding of New Spain. Spanish fortune hunters were integral in the introduction of glass beads on the continent.
Gilcrease 66.140, 63.345



Harpoon
Among the most important of Inuit tools. This harpoon has blue trade bead eyes that accent the carved features of a polar bear or wolf. Both animals could provide special powers during the hunt. Gilcrease 84.1354





Inuit stone and metal fishhook
This hook uses small, translucent beads and bird beaks to attract fish. Gilcrease 84.1479

Ivory fishhook
Ivory, metal, and baleen with glass trade beads. A rare use of beads as tools. Notice the greenheart eye and whiteheart centerpiece. This Inuit fishhook demonstrates a unique understanding of the attraction of beads beyond the aesthetic interests of humans. Gilcrease 84.1473

Glass trade beads would prove essential to European efforts of colonization. As the colonies moved inland, trade beads went with them, exchanged more and more for goods than as a mere act of friendship. Glass beads entered the New World on all sides of the continent, from the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, from Hudson Bay to the long stretch of the Gulf Coast. They continued to mark an ever-building European presence, traded along trails and outposts that increasingly dotted the landscape. By the eighteenth century, trade beads had spread all across the northern reaches of New Spain and up the western seaboard through the missions of Spanish California. They radiated from the inland waterways of French Louisiana, traded for furs which continued to provide relief to a war-burdened Gallic economy. In the far Northwest, Russian trappers were becoming well established along the coast, their trade impeded only by the elements and increasing



competition with French and British interests. By the late 1700s, Great Britain's own Hudson's Bay Company was extending its reach far beyond its firm commercial footing in the east. It had long dominated the northern trade, where "Hudson's Bay beads" had been a fixture for over a century. As colonial interests gave way to the ascendancy of "Americans," beads would continue to thrive as a central element of commerce, vital to the ever changing relationships between Old World and New World peoples. By the time Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery reached the mouth of the Columbia in 1805, glass beads had long been a constant element of life (Woodward, 1976).

The majority of the first trade beads in North America originated in Murano, an island just off the coast of Venice, Italy. The Venetians had practiced the craft of bead making for centuries and were the envy of the surrounding world for both the quality and creativity of their work. The island suited their trade perfectly. Not only did its isolation protect the mainland from the dangers of fire used in glass making but the secrets of the bead craft could also be more closely guarded. Business interests from all over Europe vied for the talents of the Venetian craftsmen. The government of Venice would ultimately pass laws forbidding the export of these trade secrets or even emigration of the glass makers themselves. These efforts were largely successful but a handful of craftsmen eventually managed to escape to cities across western Europe. Among these, sixteenth-century Amsterdam would would prove to be among the most successful, creating Venetian style beads for well over a hundred years.

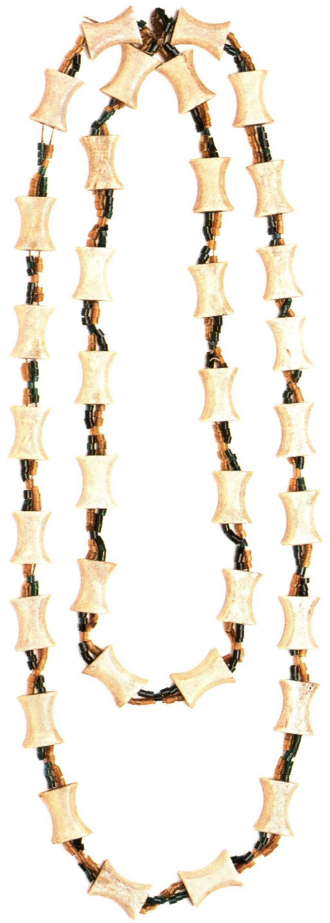
On the far side of the globe, China was to become a primary contender for the much sought after prize of the lucrative trade bead market. For years, "China" or "Canton" beads were a central feature of exchange along the Pacific rim of California to the islands beyond the Bering Strait. Until recently, these beads were thought to be of European manufacture. Today, however, experts hold that they and many other types of trade beads originated in the Far East, most notably during the



Inuit atlatl
From the 19th century. This tool is decoratively inlaid with ivory and glass trade beads—from China. Atlatls, used to add thrust to harpoons, were essential in the hunt for both seals and walruses. Gilcrease 84.1323

Inuit tool box
A wooden toolbox inlaid with trade beads from China, ca. mid 19th century. Gilcrease 73.317





Trade bone and trade bead necklace
This long strand of ornaments was entirely manufactured in Europe. The bone beads are probably camel. Gilcrease 84.121

Hudson's Bay bead necklace
A strand of white beads alongside both types of Hudson's Bay beads. The early variety, called "greenheart," has a distinct green to near black core. Their progeny, the "Late Hudson's Bay" or "whitehearts" were developed in the early 19th century. Together they became a staple of trade in the New World and were used extensively by the famous Hudson's Bay Company for over two centuries. Gilcrease 57.83

Qing (Manchu) Dynasty from 1644 to 1911. In fact, the much admired "Padre" bead of the desert Southwest, one of the most widely-used trade beads in all of New Spain, is a Chinese creation (Francis, 1999). These small, sky blue beads are believed by many to be the celebrated "chief beads" encountered by Lewis and Clark. In his journal entry from 1805, Meriwether Lewis records their prominence:

> Indeed, if the example of civilized life did not completely vindicate their choice, we might wonder at their infatuated attachment to a bauble in itself so worthless. Yet these beads are, perhaps, quite as reasonable objects of research as the precious metals, since they are at once beautiful ornaments for the person and the great circulating medium of trade with all the nations on the Columbia.

In only a few sentences, Lewis captures the essence of beads and their importance in the Northwest at the turn of the nineteenth century. All across the continent glass beads had become a centerpiece of commerce, especially in the bartering for the furs which were in increasing demand in ports around the globe. The lands of the North American interior were abundant with beaver and countless other sources of natural materials, goods which had become essential to the European and fledgling American economies. With the Corps of Discovery's return in 1806, any doubts regarding the bounty of the New World were completely set aside. Although the dreams of a Northwest Passage were expunged from the social and economic consciousness, tales of a veritable horn of plenty sparked considerable attention among the entrepreneurial thinkers of the day. In just a few years, the trade in furs





Tooth and bone necklaces
The strands at each end are made from the milk teeth of an elk along with trade beads from China. The small necklace in the center is made of eagle bones.
Gilcrease 84.142, 84.167, 84.143

would escalate beyond the wildest of expectations and the glass trade bead would be imported in quantities never before seen.

The fur trade of the nineteenth century was largely driven by European fashion. On the streets of Paris, London, and other cultural centers of the Old World, the beaver hat, made from the smooth underfur or felt of the animal, had become an essential social fixture—the literal crown of any respectable gentleman's wardrobe. Years of increasing demand had weighed heavily upon the beaver population of Western Europe. Across the Atlantic, however, the territories of North America were alive with promise. Furs from the New World would help to satisfy the demands of hat makers and wearers alike with only the fickle tastes of consumers to threaten an ever-building industry. Fashion preferences were changeable among the native peoples of America as well. The demand for certain types of beads fluctuated constantly, from one culture to another, from one season to the next. In a matter of months, beads that had once been popular could barely be given away, while others might remain in vogue for generations.

Beaver hat
A symbol of status and power, the beaver hat inspired the greatest influx of beads on the North American continent.
Gilcrease 85.99



Facing: Millefiori beads



Trade bead and talon necklace
This strand of eagle claws is interspersed with red trade beads and seed beads from Venice. Gilcrease 84.134

Padre beads
Sky blue "padre beads" were believed by some to be the "tia commashuck" or "chief's beads" of Lewis and Clark. These beads were traded throughout the Spanish Southwest and entered the Northwest Coast with the fur trade. Considered by most experts to have been manufactured in China. Gilcrease 57.32



FASHION PREFERENCES WERE CHANGEABLE AMONG THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF AMERICA AS WELL [AS IN EUROPE]. THE DEMAND FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF BEADS FLUCTUATED CONSTANTLY, FROM ONE CULTURE TO ANOTHER, FROM ONE SEASON TO THE NEXT. IN A MATTER OF MONTHS, BEADS THAT HAD ONCE BEEN POPULAR COULD BARELY BE GIVEN AWAY, WHILE OTHERS MIGHT REMAIN IN VOGUE FOR GENERATIONS.

Loop style necklace
This large collection of beads is from the Great Plains where bead necklace styles reached their zenith during the mid to late 19th century. Gilcrease 57.15





Chevron and hairpipe necklace
Unusual shaped chevrons combine with hairpipe bones. Gilcrease 84.2504

On both sides of the Atlantic, adornment was a significant force in the social lives of individuals. Beyond their decorative function, bead styles, like hat styles, could reflect a person's place within the social group. They could be used as literal displays of status and prestige, of power and cultural identity.

By 1807 the Hudson's Bay Company was nearing its 140th year of operation and was finally becoming a major influence in the far Northwest, but the expanding market had created a demand too big to be controlled by any single concern. Hudson's Bay competed with both the British-owned Northwest Company and the Russian-owned Russian-American Fur Company, rivals of each other for most of the preceding decade. Fur trappers from around the world descended on the continent with enthusiasm and vigor. Competition was exploding across the vast expanse from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean, over the Rocky Mountains and throughout the Columbia River basin. In 1808, an American, John Jacob Astor, would rise from obscurity as a small shopkeeper to begin the single most successful economic enterprise of the day. His American Fur Company and its subsidiaries would come to dominate the market in ways only dreamed of by his competitors, developing into the first American trust. In only a handful of years, he would become the wealthiest man in America (Hilfiker, 1991). Thousands upon thousands of pounds of beads would ultimately be imported by fur companies in the coming decade. In October of 1813 alone, Astor, in an account with the Northwest Company, himself purchased over a ton of beads with which to barter for native tanned furs (Astoria Inventories, 1813-1814).

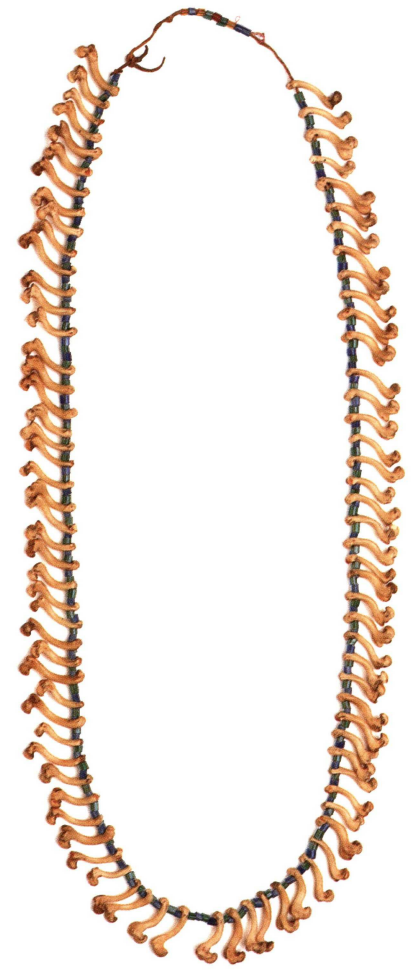
Red eye bead necklace
A strand of Venetian yellowheart and spotted whiteheart beads. Spotted beads were favored among the Crow for representing hail. Gilcrease 57.90



Hubbell beads
Simulated turquoise, these two strands show only some of the styles of Hubbell beads favored in the North American Southwest. Made in latter day Bohemia (Czechoslovakia), these beads are named for the Arizona trading post at Ganado. Gilcrease 84.2643 and 84.2654

Seed bead necklace, below left
This multiple-layered necklace shows an affinity for brilliant color, in this instance red, which often represented blood. Gilcrease. 57.10

BEYOND THEIR DECORATIVE FUNCTION, BEAD STYLES, LIKE HAT STYLES, COULD REFLECT A PERSON'S PLACE WITHIN THE SOCIAL GROUP.



Turtle bone and trade beads
An exquisite strand of trade beads and turtle leg bones. The glass beads were made in Bohemia. Gilcrease 84.119

A YOUNG MAN GRINDING FACETS ONTO GLASS IN BOHEMIA WOULD HAVE HIS WORK ADMIRED AN ENTIRE WORLD AWAY, WHILE ANOTHER JOINING HIS FIRST HUNT IN THE WOODS OF THE NORTHWEST COAST WOULD PROVIDE FURS GREATLY PRIZED BY THE COURTESANS OF BEIJING.

The increasing competition between fur traders quickly spurred competition between bead makers as well. Although Venice would forever claim the crown of the bead making world, an upstart in Eastern Europe challenged this claim in new and innovative ways. Bohemia had long been renowned in the art of cutting garnets. By the first decades of the nineteenth century, its talents had turned to glass cutting as well. Like the Venetians before them, the Bohemians developed their own styles of manufacture. In the 1820s, the beads they produced started a commercial and artistic rivalry that would continue into the modern era. Known today as the Czech Republic, Bohemia is still celebrated for its faceted blue and ruby-red beads. In fact, the translucent blue "Russian" beads of the nineteenth-century fur trade are not Russian at all but are among the Bohemians' most popular creations. Also known as "cut blues," they are still widely considered the standard in cut glass beads (Francis, 1999).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the demand for furs continued to thrive in the markets of Europe and Asia. Beads were traded in all shapes and sizes, colors and designs, limited only by the creativity and ingenuity of their makers from around the world. It was the global economy of its age, surmounting both language and cultural differences. A young man grinding facets onto glass in Bohemia would have his work admired an entire world away, while another joining his first hunt in the woods of the Northwest Coast would provide furs greatly prized by the courtesans of Beijing. The simple glass trade bead had marked a changing human experience, change that was inevitable as societies continued to converge.

"Russian" trade beads
Faceted, cobalt blue "Russian" trade beads were called so by fur traders in the far northwestern regions of North America in the early 19th century. "Russian" beads were actually made in Bohemia where competition had inspired new forms of manufacture. Gilcrease 57.51



Beaver tooth pendant
Seed beads delicately shroud a single tooth. One is obviously missing. Gilcrease 84.202

Chevron and seed necklaces
The glass trade beads of the Gilcrease Museum collection represent a wide variety of styles and places of manufacture. These seven layer "star beads" or "chevrons" were made in Venice. Also called "paternoster" or "our fathers" the chevron remains one of the most widely recognized beads around the globe. Gilcrease 84.2507 and 84.2509







Just as the great American fur trade had begun at the whim of fashion, a subtle change in that style would ultimately lead to its decline. Indeed, beavers would literally become old hat, replaced by toppers more popularly made of silk. By 1850, the trade which had expanded the popular imagination as well as the pocketbooks of financiers had come to a virtual halt.

Ways of life were continuing to change all across the landscape. The territories west of the Mississippi were fast becoming crisscrossed with trails, well-rutted paths formed from hooves and wagons freighting trade goods from the east. On the prairies and plains of the central continent, the great horse cultures that had emerged in the past century now thrived among a seemingly endless sea of buffalo. Army outposts appeared increasingly along the horizon. Western expansion was no longer just an idea but becoming a challenge deeply embedded in the American mind.

Beads were changing too—changes that would usher in new forms of cultural expression that still exist today. Since the early 1800s, "pony beads" had gradually become the choice of craftswomen who had traditionally used dyed porcupine quills to create patterns and decorations on Native American clothing and other personal objects. Called so after the "ponies" which packed them from the warehouses of eastern merchants, pony beads were originally from Venice where the long thriving industry continued to be a source of innovation. By the 1840s, the smaller "seed bead" had been developed. Its arrival in North America would eventually inspire native crafters to new heights of creativity. Small and seemingly minor in importance, the seed bead would encourage beadworkers to develop sewing techniques that allow patterns more elaborate than any before imagined. During the last half of the nineteenth century, the classic styles of native beadwork began to emerge, intricate geometric and representational designs revealing a given society's view of its place in the world. Quillworking societies became beadworking societies, where members would ultimately create an art form truly their own (Lyford, 1984).



Millefiori
Centuries of competition would continue to urge the development of new types of beads. The colorful millefiori or "thousand flowers" beads, made in Venice, would become popular in traditions around the world. Collected by artist William Leigh in Africa, these were a staple of the West African trade.



Doll with trade bead necklace
This doll demonstrates the importance of beads in the teaching of adornment traditions. Undoubtedly made by a mother, grandmother, sister, or aunt, it provided hours of enjoyment and comfort to perhaps generations of children on the Great Plains. Gilcrease 84.904

Beadworking was often more than just a social or creative practice. It was sometimes a solemn activity, a sacred process by which an individual could give her time and talent in a literal display of her devotion. Beads had long been considered a mere frivolous commodity by white traders. In journal entries reaching from Columbus and Coronado to the mountain men narratives of a handful of centuries beyond, trade beads were portrayed as worthless trifles with which to purchase the "friendship" of native peoples. Traders from Europe and the United States were largely ignorant of the role that beads played in the various value systems in native America. Beads and beadwork were often prized not only because they were beautiful but because they helped to represent convictions firmly rooted in a particular society. On the Great Plains, a Cheyenne woman could vow to bead a given object to assure the return of a loved one from war or to restore the health of a sick child. The beads that she used were given meanings far beyond any understood by those who traded them. The object that she created was a symbol of her belief, a profound yet personal telling of faith as well as affection.



Crow rock medicine
Fossilized mollusks or ammonites dangle amid an assortment of other objects. Each object was an offering to the sacred medicine contained inside the small bulb of leather. Rock medicines were kept with a sacred bundle and opened at the change of seasons. Bead offerings were thought to bring good luck. Gilcrease 84.960



Beaded pouch
A pouch of leather, glass, and beads. Gilcrease 84.2314

Beads and beaded objects sometimes become sacred themselves, regarded as supernatural beings that could be invoked to bring about health and good fortune (Lowie, 1982). Among the most significant is the Crow "rock medicine," a collection of seemingly trivial adornments gathered together on a strand of leather cord. The "rock" is actually an oddly-shaped stone contained in a swatch of buckskin which dangles amid an eclectic assortment of other objects. Kept within the sacred bundle, a rock medicine was revealed seasonally, in the spring and again in the winter, to assure both long life and continued success. It was sometimes removed to fulfill particular need, in an appeal to forces both powerful and revered. As the rock medicine was removed from the bundle, a special offering was expected from all those who witnessed its unveiling. Small, unusual objects would often be given, each fastened to the rock medicine as a permanent article of veneration. Beads were among the most important of offerings. They were gifts of beauty but also of power, the literal embodiment of a sacred belief, a virtue that could never have been imagined by their makers (Hanson, 1994).

BEAD ARTS AND CRAFTS ARE STILL PRACTICED ALL ACROSS THE CONTINENT, VITAL FORMS OF EXPRESSION MAINTAINED ALONG CONTINUING THREADS OF TRADITION.

Turtle pendant necklace
Acoma artist Wolf Robe Hunt created this collection of unusual objects. A turtle spine is the centerpiece amid eagle claws, dew claws, and buckeyes. The entire length is interspersed with trade beads from China. Gilcrease 84.2285



In the centuries since their introduction, glass trade beads have remained ever popular. Native American necklaces and beadwork are appreciated in places all around the world. Bead arts and crafts are still practiced all across the continent, vital forms of expression maintained along continuing threads of tradition. As our regard for their significance increases, our understanding of the relationships between those who made and those who traded beads continues to increase as well. Millions and millions of beads would ultimately be produced, many of which have survived to intrigue us in museum collections around the globe. The glass trade bead demonstrates why museum collections are important. Much of what we know about beads could only have been learned through their preservation. Private collectors have also been a valuable resource, their enthusiasm often a driving force in an area of study which has only in recent years gained much in the way of scientific consideration. Our knowledge of beads and their uses remains limited. It continues to grow, however, alongside an ever complex but long abiding fascination.

The stories that glass trade beads tell us are ultimately the stories of people. They speak to us in ways that only few objects can. They tell us stories of pride and ambition, of faith and perseverance, of the beauty in small things. Beads tell of the connections between cultural Others, of links that have long remained hidden beneath the surfaces of historical and social memory. They tell a story of merging traditions, of shared aesthetic values which transcend these cultural boundaries to reveal a single humanity. Beads passed from one set of hands to another. They crossed oceans and were passed on yet again to find meanings far from their places of origin. In North America, trade beads tell our story. It is ultimately a tale of the human experience, of fragile chains of being which continue in the long strand of a shared existence.

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1959 *Crow Indian Beadwork: A Descriptive and Historical Study.* New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.



Bear claw necklace
A brash but beautiful bearclaw necklace from the Great Plains. The claws alternate between faceted blue beads, topped with selenium red and uranium yellow beads from Bohemia. Gilcrease 84.2158

Gillie Library

GREGORY R. CAMPBELL

enterprise in the rockies

COMPANIES, TRAPPERS, AND TRAPPERS' WIVES IN THE 19TH-CENTURY FUR TRADE

MENTION of the Rocky Mountain fur trade conjures images filled with romantic adventure. The mountain men who participated in one of the shortest-lived socioeconomic enterprises of the West are often represented as the embodiment of the American free spirit. Elevated to the level of mythological figures, they are portrayed as everything from "civilized" men who reverted to a state of savagery to a "reckless breed" forging into the wilderness. Today these images are played out annually at rendezvous where men and women gather to reenact a frontier lifestyle they believe captures the American free spirit. In reality, the young men who entered the fur trade went to the north-central Rocky Mountains expecting to make their fortunes. Although most would achieve only moderate economic success, the risky pursuit of beaver trapping was seen as an avenue to wealth.

Charles M. Russell
On the Flathead
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0237.981



Albert Bierstadt
Mounted Trapper
Oil on paper
Gilcrease 0126.1171

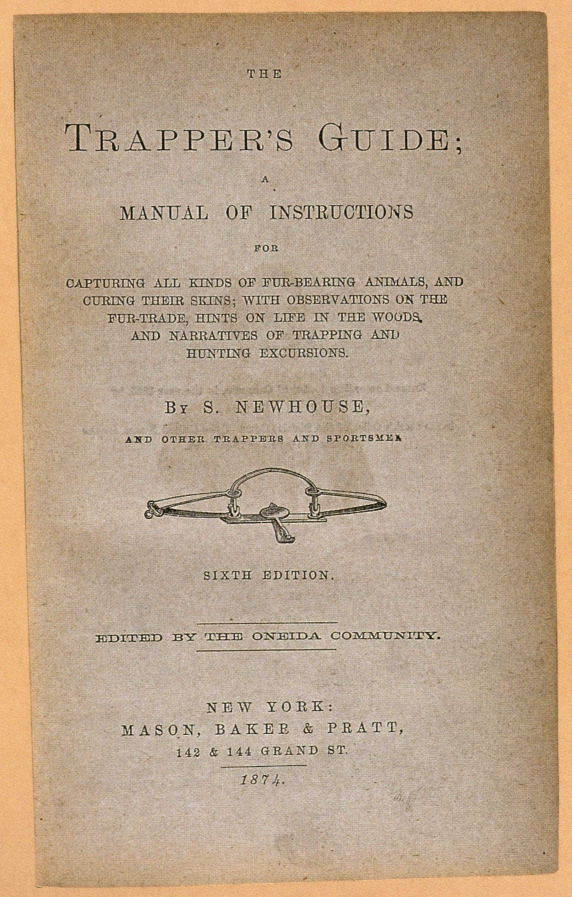
A GUIDE FOR TRAPPERS

Excerpts from sixth edition of *The Trapper's Guide, A Manual of Instructions for Capturing All Kinds of Fur-Bearing Animals, and Curing Their Skins; with Observations on the Fur-Trade, Hints of Life in the Woods, and Narratives of Trapping and Hunting Excursions*, by S. Newhouse, was edited by the Oneida Community, and published in New York by Mason, Baker & Pratt in 1874.

• The yearly production of raw furs in the whole world is worth from seventeen to twenty millions of dollars, and the whole amount of the fur-trade, including manufactured goods, reaches a value of not less than one hundred millions.

• Raw furs are divided by American dealers into two classes, viz., shipping furs, i.e. furs that are to be sent abroad; and home furs, or furs for use in this country. The leading articles among shipping furs are the Silver, Red and Cross Fox, Raccoon, Fisher, Wildcat, and Skunk. Among home furs are the Mink, Opossum, House Cat, Wolf, and Marten. . . Raccoon fur is the great staple for Russia; Red Fox for Turkey and the oriental countries, Skunk for Poland; Muskrat for Germany, France and England.

• All furs are best in winter; but trapping may be carried on to advantage for at least six months in the year, i. e. any time between the first of October and the middle of April.


THE

TRAPPER'S GUIDE;

A

MANUAL OF INSTRUCTIONS

FOR

CAPTURING ALL KINDS OF FUR-BEARING ANIMALS, AND CURING THEIR SKINS; WITH OBSERVATIONS ON THE FUR-TRADE, HINTS ON LIFE IN THE WOODS, AND NARRATIVES OF TRAPPING AND HUNTING EXCURSIONS.

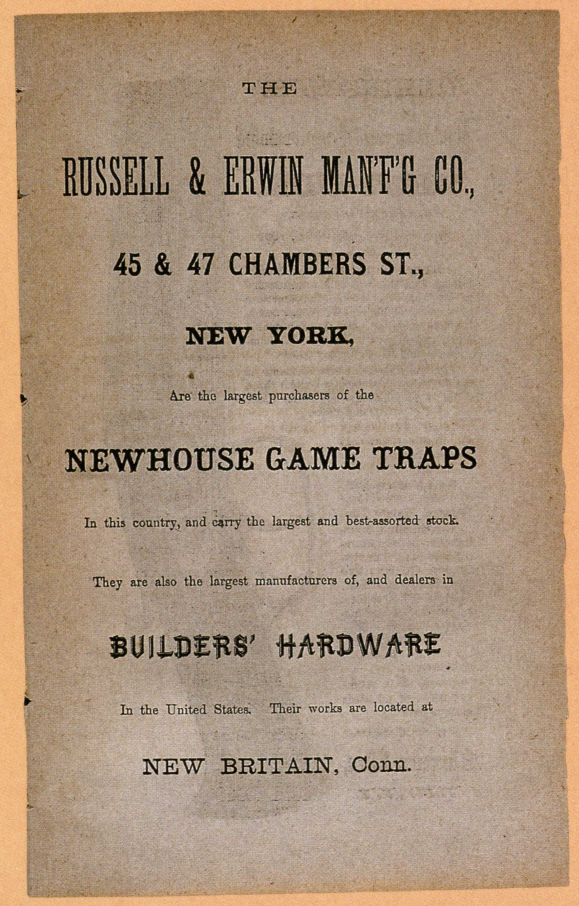
BY S. NEWHOUSE,

AND OTHER TRAPPERS AND SPORTSMEN

SIXTH EDITION.

EDITED BY THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY.

NEW YORK:
MASON, BAKER & PRATT,
142 & 144 GRAND ST.
1874.


THE

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PREVIOUS PAGES:

Charles M. Russell
On the Flathead, 1904
Watercolor on paper,
Gilcrease 0237.981



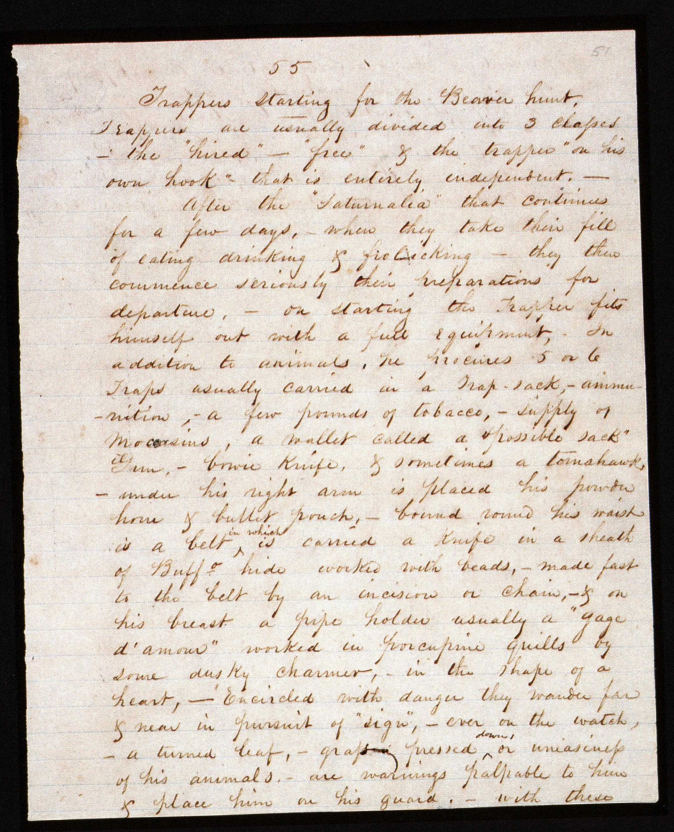
Karl Bodmer
Beaver Hut on the Missouri
Handcolored aquatint engraving
Gilcrease 4576.91.18

CAPITALISM COMES TO THE ROCKIES

BY 1794, ST. LOUIS, under a Spanish flag, launched annual trade expeditions up the Missouri River, eventually reaching the Mandan villages. Spain's northward sorties, like its alliance with France, were a weak attempt to quell the growing British influence in the region.

As the Spanish-French alliance maneuvered to drive out English traders from the northern plains, the United States government sought to extend its influence west. Toward this end, in 1796 it founded the post factory system to regulate Native American trade and intercourse. The system was not designed for profit; post factories exchanged fur, pelts, and other indigenous goods for American goods at or below cost. Instead it served a political agenda—by conducting an unprofitable trade with Native Americans, it was assumed that the United States could generate goodwill to reduce frontier hostilities, cement alliances in support of U.S. interests against other colonial powers, and instill an element of control through goods. Most traders, Congressional appointees, were culturally inept in Native American customs and exchange practices, and American-made trade goods were inferior to British goods.



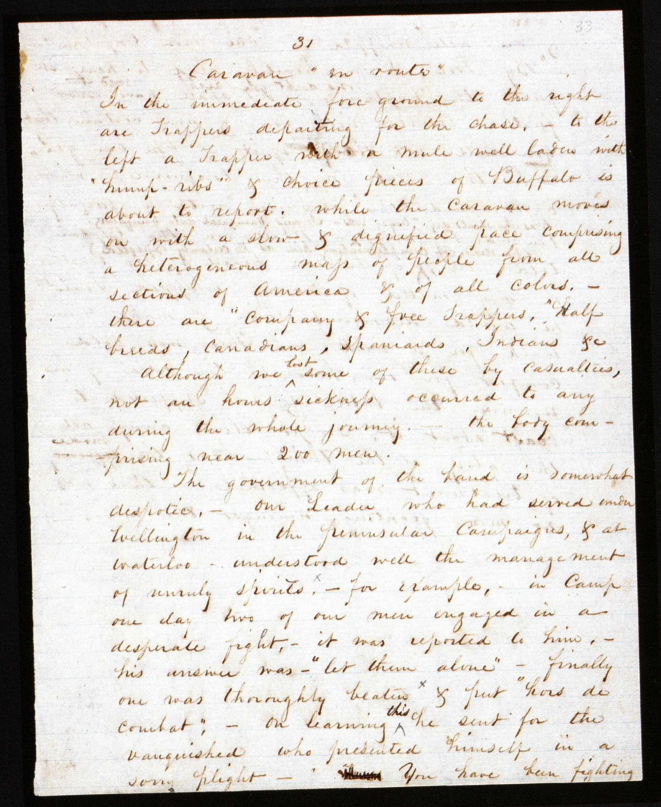


55

Trappers Starting for the Beaver hunt.

Trappers are usually divided into 3 classes — the "hired" — "free" & the trapper "on his own hook" — that is entirely independent. —

After the "Saturnalia" that continues for a few days, — when they take their fill of eating drinking & frolicking — they then commence seriously their preparations for departure, — on starting the trapper fits himself out with a full equipment. In addition to animals, he receives & is to Traps usually carried in a trap-sack, — ammunition, — a few pounds of tobacco, — supply of moccasins, a wallet called a "possible sack" Gun, — bowie Knife, & sometimes a tomahawk, — under his right arm is placed his powder horn & bullet pouch, — bound round his waist is a belt in which is carried a knife in a sheath of Buffalo hide worked with beads, — made fast to the belt by an iron screw or chain, — & on his breast a pipe holder usually a "gage d'amour" worked in porcupine quills by some dusky Charmer, — in the shape of a heart, — Encircled with danger they wander far & near in pursuit of "sign", — ever on the watch, — a turned leaf, — grass pressed down or insects of his animals, — are warnings palpable to him & place him on his guard, — with these



31

Caravan "en route"

In the immediate foreground to the right are Trappers departing for the chase, — to the left a Trapper [illegible] on mule well laden with "hump-ribs" & choice pieces of Buffalo is about to depart. while the Caravan moves on with a slow & dignified pace composing a heterogeneous mass of people from all sections of America & of all colors. — there are "Company & Free Trappers," Half breeds, Canadians, Spaniards, Indians &c

Although we lost some of these by casualties, not an hours sickness occurred to any during the whole journey. the Party comprising near 200 men.

The government of the band is somewhat despotic, — our Leader who had served under Wellington in the Peninsular Campaigns, & at Waterloo — understood well the management of unruly spirits. — for example, — in Camp one day two of our men engaged in a desperate fight, — it was reported to him, — his answer was — "let them alone" — finally one was thoroughly beaten & put "hors de combat" — on learning this he sent for the vanquished who presented himself in a sorry plight — "You have been fighting

FACING:

Alfred Jacob Miller
Our Caravan En Route to the Rocky Mountains (detail)
Oil on paper
Gilcrease 0126.726

Miller's *Rough Draughts to Notes on Indian Sketches* includes the artist's descriptions of many of his western subjects and experiences

Olaf C. Seltzer
Hudson's Bay Trapper
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0237.1272



But with the 1803 transfer of Louisiana Territory, Spanish and French political interests collapsed across the northern plains, creating an economic and political vacuum that the United States was anxious to fill. In service of this goal, President Thomas Jefferson launched the Lewis and Clark Expedition. A primary purpose of the Corps of Discovery was to find a route to the Pacific for future economic development. Among its many accomplishments, the expedition also confirmed that the upper Missouri River was extraordinarily rich in beaver and otter. Immediately fur traders set their sights on the region.

Prior to the expedition, American trade confined itself to the lower reaches of the Missouri River, but the Lewis and Clark report of the upper Missouri's bounty, combined with growing concern over British trade domination, encouraged American economic interests to penetrate the northern Great Plains and beyond. President Jefferson viewed the fur trade as the first stage in progressive settlement of the West. Traders and trappers, he believed, would pave the way for eventual American domination. In the context of expansionism, the fur trade was as much a geopolitical as an economic endeavor.

One of the earliest attempts to penetrate the area was undertaken by Manuel Lisa, a St. Louis Spaniard who changed his national loyalty and hastily organized the Missouri Fur Company to exploit the upper Missouri trapping grounds. His blanket strategy was to create a regional trade network by building a series of trading posts and sending large parties of trappers to hunt beaver along the headwaters of the Missouri. Accompanied by fifty men, he ascended the Missouri in 1807 and built Fort Manuel at the mouth of the Big Horn River. From this location, Señor Lisa dispatched trappers to the surrounding waterways to procure beaver pelts.

Despite some initial success, the enterprise was short-lived. The fort lay in the heart of Crow country. The Blackfeet, who occupied the Three Forks of the Missouri River region, would not tolerate the invasion of beaver men onto their lands. Nor would they permit a trading post to be located among their enemies, for fear that it might give them a military edge. Thus the Blackfeet began a sustained campaign to remove Lisa's men from the region. After a considerable loss of life and property, Lisa had to abandon his effort to monopolize the upper Missouri fur trade.

Although there were other attempts to establish an American presence in the northern Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and beyond, each failed in quick succession. The War of 1812, along with a dramatic drop in the price of beaver pelts from four dollars to two dollars per pound, doomed them to failure. Further, American traders feared that indigenous nations under British influence would disrupt their fur markets, forcing the price of pelts and furs to fall further. In response, Congress passed a law in 1816 that barred foreign interests from trading with Native Americans residing within United States territories.

In the period immediately after the War of 1812, American fur



Alfred Jacob Miller
Fort Laramie, 1851
Oil on canvas
Gilcrease 0126.727



Olaf C. Seltzer
Herald of the Fur Traders
Oil on canvas
Gilcrease 0137.884

trading activities on the upper Missouri remained relatively dormant. The St. Louis trade only revitalized in 1819, after the signing of the 1818 Treaty of Ghent. The treaty fixed the U. S. northern territorial boundary with Britain at the 49th parallel, but allowed for the joint occupation of Oregon Territory. At about the same time as the stabilization of this important political boundary came a sharp rise in market demand for beaver pelts.

While these events aroused the expectations of American trading companies, they also raised debate about the efficiency of the post factory system. In the halls of Congress, the government-sponsored system received mounting criticism over its lack of profit and its relative ineffectiveness in creating and holding Native allegiances to American interests. Leading the effort to disband the post factory system was Congressman Thomas Hart Benton, who would later become chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Another opponent was Mr. Ramsey Crooks of the American Fur Company. On 6 May 1822, private trading company representatives and entrepreneurs convinced Congress to abolish the post factory system.

Alfred Jacob Miller
Trappers Threatened by Indians
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0236.1094



The government withdrew from a policy of complete control over the Native American trade, though it still sought to regulate it through granting trading licenses to monopoly companies. This retreat sparked American interests and unleashed laissez faire capitalism to tap the fur-rich regions of the West (Clokley 1980:61). All that was required was a viable economic strategy to extract and market the pelts.

Ashley's Enterprise

With governmental regulations abolished, traders again set their sights on the fabled headwaters of the Missouri. On 20 March 1822 William H. Ashley, a Missouri politician, and Major Andrew Henry were granted licenses to trade with western tribes. This marked the beginning of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Initially, Ashley and Henry planned to ascend to the Three Forks of the Missouri and build posts there. From those locales they would follow the well-worn path of organizing a large party of men to hunt and trap the Missouri River and its major tributaries. After some limited success, their plans were derailed in 1823. That year, two keelboats laden with supplies destined for Henry's base camp at the mouth of the Yellowstone were attacked by the Arikara. Fourteen men were killed and most of the provisions lost.

In retaliation, six companies of U.S. troops under Colonel Henry Leavenworth, along with Dakota forces, laid siege to the Arikara villages. The brief skirmish resulted in little more than a symbolic victory for the government as the Arikara each night slipped out to the prairies. Arikara



Alfred Jacob Miller
Pierre, A Rocky Mountain Trapper
Pen and ink on paper
Gilcrease 0236.1060



Olaf C. Seltzer
Thomas Fitzpatrick, about 1824, Leader, Explorer, Trapper, Indian Fighters, and Head of Rocky Mountain Fur Co.
Oil on board
Gilcrease 0137.816

hostility continued to impact the fur trade. Faced with a dwindling capital base and fearful that his main transportation route to the upper Missouri would be blocked, Joshua Pilcher, who had succeeded as head of the Missouri Fur Company, abandoned Fort Vanderburgh and Fort Recovery. In fall of 1824 the Missouri Fur Company dissolved.

Arikara hostilities also prompted a change in the strategy for extraction of furs from the upper Missouri. Instead of ascending the Missouri to the Yellowstone, William Ashley diverted his company's interests to the north-central Rocky Mountains. In fall of 1823, he dispatched his most experienced trappers, Jedediah Smith, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and William Sublette, overland from Fort Lookout to the Rocky Mountains. He instructed Smith's party to link up with Henry's party on the Big Horn River. That union did not materialize. Henry and his men continued to trap the tributaries of the Yellowstone and Big

Horn Rivers, but were under constant threat of attack by Blackfeet warriors. Henry left the field in 1824 with few furs. His retreat from the region meant Ashley's abandonment of the upper Missouri fur trade as well. Henry and Ashley dissolved their partnership.

Meanwhile Jedediah Smith's party crossed the Continental Divide and found large reserves of beaver on the Green River tributaries. Some Crow whom Smith's party met showed them a wide depression in the Rocky Mountains south of the Wind River Mountain Range. Thus in 1824 the rediscovery of South Pass was made. The pass had been discovered in 1812 by Robert Stuart on behalf of the Pacific Fur Company under John Jacob Astor, but it was never used as an overland route.

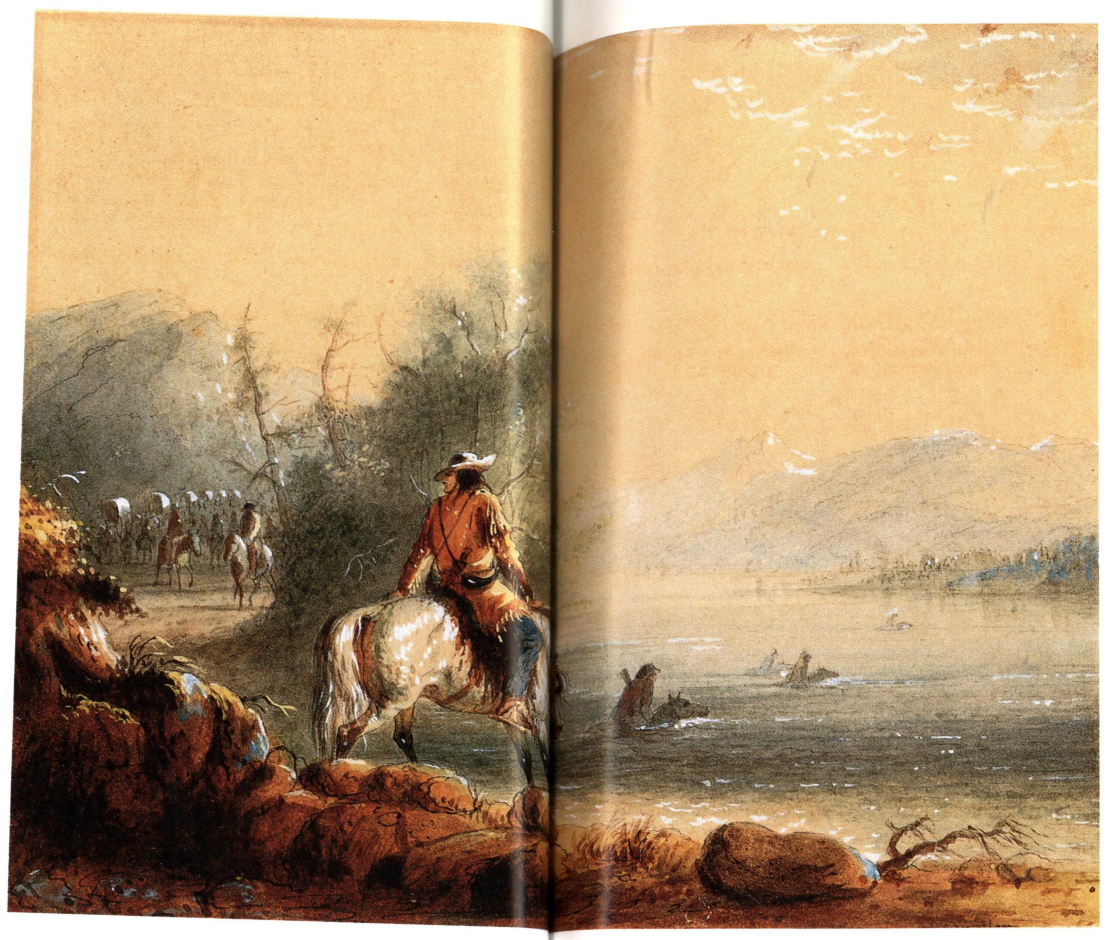
Thomas Fitzpatrick conveyed the good news to Ashley that year. Not only were the north-central Rockies filled with beaver, but they were accessible via an existing overland route by way of South Pass and the Platte River Trail. Ashley concluded that the trail could support transport trains to take the pelts to market and return with supplies for the trappers. The stage was set for him to push his operations to the westward side of the north-central Rockies.

Over the next two years, Ashley crafted a unique economic organization that would bring the fruits of the Rocky Mountains to market. He realized that a successful production system could be built based on Euro-American labor, a steady supply of beaver pelts, and an overland supply route. It would be a new type of organization that required the division of labor suitable to a large-scale enterprise.

No longer did a trader operate from a fixed location to exchange goods for pelts with Indian customers. Instead Ashley would hire Anglo trappers to live in mountains and prairies and catch beavers, eliminating the dependency on Indian labor. Because of its total reliance on Euro-Americans, this system could flourish only if trappers were willing to spend extensive periods in the mountains.

Within the Rocky Mountain fur system, there evolved two main categories of trappers. The first, the engagé, received his outfit from the company with the promise that he would give half his season's catch to the company to pay his debt. The engagé also was obligated to sell the other half of his peltry to the company at market value. This class of trapper was vital to the company's success, especially after other companies began to compete with it.

Alongside the engagés were the free trappers. These men furnished their own outfits, and, having no credit obligations, held no company allegiances. They could sell their year's catch to the highest bidder. Over the course of the Rocky Mountain fur trade era, free trappers grew in number. By the early 1830s several free trapper brigades were operating in the Rocky Mountains. Their commodities often determined the success or failure of the competing fur companies.



Alfred Jacob Miller
Caravan Crossing the River
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0236.1023

Contrary to popular myth, the Rocky Mountain trappers, whether engagé or free trapper, were not romantic spirits uninterested in material gain. They participated in a business well integrated within the American economy of the early nineteenth century. The fur trade, for many, was considered an avenue to wealth and prestige.

In advertising in the *Missouri Republican* for "Enterprising Young Men" to join his venture, Ashley was quick to point out that in the Rocky Mountains one could profit directly from his own energy and skill. Once Ashley enlisted enough men for his venture, the only missing element was a central location where pelts could be exchanged for supplies.

The Rendezvous System

Under Ashley's new way of doing business, it became necessary to appoint a designated location where Rocky Mountain Fur Company representatives and trappers could meet. William Ashley, his men, and fifty pack horses left in mid-winter of 1824 for the north-central Rockies. Arriving in mid-April, Ashley discovered that the Rocky Mountains furnished excellent resources for trappers and their animals to reside year round. Hence arose the rendezvous system, finely tuned to fit the rhythms of Rocky Mountain life.

Trapping in the Rockies followed an ecological cycle in which the rendezvous had to fit. The annual cycle began in late August when trappers dispersed for the fall hunt. Their dispersal from camps into trapping brigades coincided with the time when beaver settled in ponds in preparation for winter. At dusk the traps were set, and the trappers returned at dawn to raise their catch.

The beavers were skinned in the field and their pelts transported to camp. In camp, the pelts were cleaned, cured, and packed into bundles. As the trappers moved across the landscape, they often cached their beaver bundles over the winter and retrieved them the following spring. By late November, trapping halted as ice made it difficult to continue. If the fall season was poor, some trappers continued to work through the winter using a technique adopted from Native hunters. Using an axe or large wooden digging stick, they would break open the tops of beaver lodges to obtain the animals.

Preferably, winter camps were located mostly west of the Continental Divide, usually in sheltered valleys with abundant game and fuel. Some of the most favored sites were the Parks, the Blackfoot and Portneuf tributaries of the upper Snake, and the Wind River Valley. Some trappers, if they had Indian wives or developed amicable relations, wintered with Indian camps.

Winter was not a time of leisure. Trappers spent it repairing clothes, making pemmican, and preparing equipment for the spring hunt. It was

also the season that an agent for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was sent to St. Louis. He made a report to the company owners about the season's hunt, made sure contracts were fulfilled for them, and made arrangements for supplies to be sent to the next season's rendezvous.

Trapping again began in spring as soon as the ice melted away. This was the most important trapping season. Beaver still had their prime winter coats. As spring gave way to summer, however, fur quality declined. The beaver also became mobile as they sought out new locations, making trapping difficult and unprofitable.

It was during this mid-summer lull that the trappers with furs in hand moved to the pre-arranged site to meet the annual supply train from St. Louis. The rendezvous was a trade fair that combined economic exchange with social celebration. Trappers would exchange their furs and receive the next season's supplies. Company officials would sell their goods, sometimes at a 50 to 400 percent profit. An old French trapper for example, told Ruxton that over his career he earned $15,000, but the rendezvous had always left him broke.

The system held numerous economic advantages. It was highly flexible, and the rendezvous could move as resources shifted across the landscape. If the site was selected properly, local resources could support up to 1,000 trappers and Indians who would gather to conduct their business. One could conduct a year's trade without the costs of a fixed trading post.

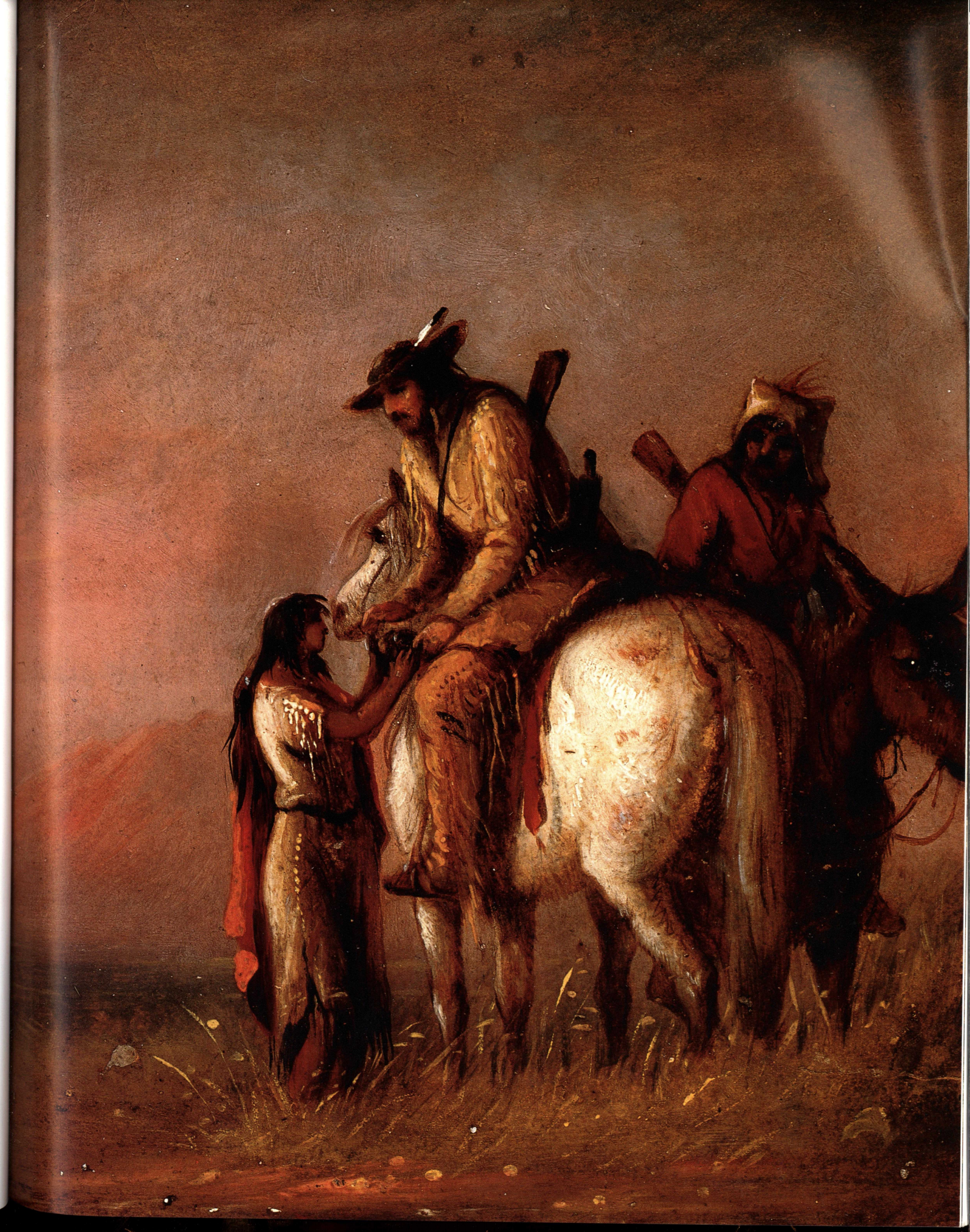
So efficient was Ashley's system that as early as 1822 one thousand men sought a living in the upper Missouri. During the 1824-25 trapping season the Rocky Mountain Fur Company amassed $50,000 in furs that sold at St. Louis. The following year, 125 packs of beaver were sold for $60,000. Ashley sold his enterprise in 1826 to the partnership of Jedediah Smith, William Sublette, and David Jackson. Under their direction from 1826 until 1830, Ashley's rendezvous system expanded. The transportation of supplies and pelts was reduced to only a forty-day caravan trip. It was able to sustain itself until 1834. Afterwards, the system began to erode, fading from the Rocky Mountain landscape.

Native Wives

The fraternal nature of trapper communities has been well documented, but the role of Native American women in the Rocky Mountain fur trade is seldom made explicit. The mountain men who went west seeking their fortunes spent an average of fifteen years in the field. During that time many took wives, the majority of whom were Native women.

Native American women were valuable links between their husbands, their own communities, and the distinct economic system of the fur

Alfred Jacob Miller
The Thirsty Trapper
Oil on paper
Gilcrease 0136.743



trade. Contrary to early nineteenth-century accounts of Indian women as "menials and slaves," Native women were valued members of trapping camps. As wives they contributed directly to the success of their husbands, participating in a unique frontier economic system.

While the rendezvous system provided the economic inducements to stay in the field of operations, trader-entrepreneur William Ashley and others recognized early the economic and social value of trapper liaisons with Native women. Rocky Mountain traders who financed operations adopted an unofficial policy encouraging trappers to take Indian wives. The rendezvous system allowed mountain men to remain in the wilderness indefinitely, free of the necessity to return annually to "civilization." Their need to return to settlements would be further reduced if they had Indian wives and families (Clokley 1980:159).

Of course the company's ultimate motive for encouraging trappers to take wives was profit. The trader-financiers were not only acutely aware of the value of Indian women's labor, but they also understood that Indian wives meant new customers at rendezvous. Along with trapping supplies, coffee, sugar, flour, firearms, and powder, there was also a demand for combs, earrings, scarlet cloth, ribbons, needles, soap, and other "fofarrow" for Indian. A married Rocky Mountain trapper, according to Osbourne Russell, was a "ruined man." Indian women



Alfred Jacob Miller
The Trappers
Oil on canvas
Gilcrease 0136.742



Alfred Jacob Miller
Indian Procession in Honor of Captain W.D. Stewart Near the Rocky Mountains
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0236.1092

desired rich dresses, horses, gorgeous saddles, and trappings to cover their steeds. To satisfy his wife, "the poor devil trapper sells himself, body and soul, to the Fur Company" (cited from Russell 1941:39). Acquiring additional goods along with their annual supplies forced some trappers into a spiral of credit and debt.

Native women and their families actively sought out marriages with trappers. Captain Bonneville told Washington Irving that "Among the Indian beauties at rendezvous, two free trappers discovered their two "whilom" (former) squaws, one a Ute and the other a Shoshoni. The trappers wanted the women, and the women wanted the wardrobe finery of the freeman" (Alter 1967:135). After some negotiation, each woman was bought from her respective relatives.

In another instance a Nez Perce woman voluntarily left her people and attached herself to a trapping camp. After some brief deliberation, she was assigned to a lodge. From that time on, the Nez Perce woman was considered one of the camp.



Karl Bodmer
Herd of Bisons on the Upper Missouri
Handcolored aquatint engraving
Gilcrease 4576.91.74

Marriage to a trapper had obvious advantages. It relieved the woman, in part, from some of the tasks necessary to life in her own society. This was because of the social and economic organization of trapping parties. Many trapping parties, especially those under control of the fur companies, had camp keepers. These young men were given a salary to process the beaver pelts, bale them, care for the stock, and guard the camp. Normally there were two camp keepers for every four trappers.

Another advantage of marrying a trapper was direct access to luxury goods. A Native woman's marriage allowed her to acquire such goods directly, without any dependence on her male kindred. Trappers often expressed their wealth and prestige through their wives. For the rendezvous cavalcades some trappers dressed their wives in the best red

trade cloth dresses, German silver necklaces and earrings, and other items of value, and paraded them on decorated horses through the camps as public expressions of their success as trappers. One trapper reportedly spent nearly $3000 on his wife's oufit.

For the trappers, marrying a Native American woman was simply good business. Trappers understood that a marriage made a connection to his wife's family and tribe. Through this union, his social power and influence within her group dramatically increased, affording him favorable connections over other trappers in trade relations. George Catlin commented that marriage to a Native woman became ". . . a matter of policy and almost absolute necessity, for the white men who are traders in these regions to connect themselves in this way, to one or more of the most influential families in the tribe. . . " (Catlin 1973:120).

Such a marriage also could prove valuable under conditions of hardship, during which the wife's family might provide the couple protection and shelter. After a near fatal stabbing, Milton Sublette spent nearly a year recovering among his wife's people in their Shoshoni camp.

Realizing the growing importance women held as links between Euro-Americans and their own kin systems, some Indian men attempted to regulate marriages and temporary liaisons between their women and trappers. As a Shoshoni camp moved away from the 1836 Horse Creek rendezvous, Sir William Drummond wrote in his journal that "There was many a head turned back in fond regret among the gay women who flaunted in new scarlet and glittering gems, their horses prancing with their tinkling housings. Lynx-eyed paramour and suspicious husband, alike were on the watch that they should not stray far from the line of march" (Russell 1941:37).

The value of marriage to a "woman of the country" is reflected in Alfred Jacob Miller's witnessing of a marriage at the 1837 rendezvous. Miller captured the scene in a stunning work. "Francois (a half breed trapper) is seated on a bank to the left, his hand extended to his promised wife, supported by her father and attended by an Indian Chief who holds the calumet, an article indispensable in all ceremonies. The price of the acquisition in this case was $600 paid in legal tender of the country; viz., guns $100, horse blankets $50, red flannel $20 per yard, alcohol $64 per gallon and sugar, tobacco, beads, etc. at corresponding rates." The high price of acquiring a bride reflects in part the women's value to their society as well as to the trapper's (Marsh 1884:76).

Although a woman's marriage to a trapper would separate her from her natal family and community, there evolved in the trapping camps scattered across the Rocky Mountains multi-ethnic residence groups organized around the rhythm of the trapping season. The mulatto trapper Edward Rose recalled how Indian women from enemy tribes found common bonds through their labor and the social circumstances of camp life. Chiespee, a Blackfoot woman recently brought to camp by her husband, according to Rose, "lodged with some of the free trappers'

wives (Shoshoni and Paiute) but was always ready and willing to make herself useful as nurse, cook or seamstress, or in any way [in which] her services would be of use to the trappers." These multi-ethnic groups of women worked cooperatively for the camp's capital gain.

Native women were an integral part of trapping economics. Their assistance relieved trappers of the time-consuming tasks surrounding the daily maintenance of camp life, allowing them to solely concentrate on hunting beaver. Dr. Wislizenous, meeting Trips and Walker, two trade agents, with their Indian wives at New Fork in 1839 found the "squaws. . . behaved most properly. They took care of the horses, pitched a tent, and were alert for every word of their wedded lords" (Wislizenus 1912:84).

The Earl of Dunraven made a similar but more detailed observation: "With an Indian wife to look after his bodily comforts, a man could devote himself to hunting, fishing, or trapping without thought or care. He may make his mind quite easy about all house matters. His camp will be well arranged, the tent pegs driven securely home, a good supper cooked. . . ; his clothes and hunting gear looking after. . . ; and all little trivial incidents of life that, if neglected, wear out one's existence, he will find carefully attended. . . " (Dunraven 1967:211-212).

As producers and consumers, Native wives contributed to a system that would result in permanent production communities in the Rocky Mountains. As cross-cultural bridges, indigenous women imparted non-European cultural behaviors to their trapper husbands. Along with knowledge of favored camping locations and the locations of their villages, they taught them tribal norms of behavior, acted as their interpreters, and imparted myriad other information useful to their survival and success. A mountain man's clothing, food, and life skills, as well as many customs and habits were largely derived from indigenous people. In that regard, Native American women were critical conduits for cultural ideas and material items.

After the collapse of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, most trappers did not abandon their Indian wives and children to return to the comfort of "civilization." Most chose to stay in the West, congregating in developing communities. Fifty-three percent of mountain men, the largest community, took their families out of the Rocky Mountains to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Settling in communities such as French Prairie, Champoeg, and Oregon City, they lived out their lives with their Indian wives not as daring "free spirits," but as farmers and ranchers. William Swagerty may have summarized the social world of the Rocky Mountain fur era best when he wrote that the trappers "adjusted quite well to the environment and requirements of social behavior among cultures with which they interacted and intermarried. This was made necessary in part by the seasonal nature of the fur trade." In this regard, Native American women played no small part.

Alfred Jacob Miller
Big Sandy/Green River
Watercolor on paper
Gilcrease 0236.1097





Charles M. Russell
Robe Traders at Fort Benton
Watercolor on paper, 1901
Gilcrease 0237.1323

The Erosion of Empire

The causes for the eventual collapse of Ashley's enterprise in the Rockies were many. Ecologically, intensive hunting led to the local mass destruction of fur-bearing animals. With their low reproductive cycles, beaver populations could never survive the intensive surplus hunting. As each area was hunted out, the trappers were forced to find new hunting grounds. By the mid-1830s, most of the core trapping areas along the Green River, north into Salish country, and west into Crow territory, were exhausted. The only areas left with beaver populations were in Blackfeet territory and the Colorado "Parks."

The extinction of the beaver reserves was heightened by Hudson Bay trappers. British brigades roamed the Green and Snake River country taking as much fur out of the region as possible in an attempt to halt American advances. Before American trappers arrived in force, the British attempted to produce a "fur desert" that would act as a buffer zone between the British Pacific Northwest and the expanding Americans.

The Blackfeet, despite their willingness to participate in the bison robe trade, continued to jealously guard their territory from American trappers. During the 1830s, they were killing an estimated fifty trappers a year. To protect themselves from Blackfeet attacks, the trappers had to organize themselves into brigades of up to 150 men. Many American furs ended up in Hudson's Bay warehouses, sparking charges that the company incited the Blackfeet to damage American success.

The region's economic complexion changed dramatically in 1828 with the union of the Columbia Fur Company and the American Fur Company. With its position strengthened, the American Fur Company now sought to control the upper Missouri River trade. Realizing that all trade routes out of the northern Plains converged at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, the American Fur Company built Fort Floyd there. It would evolve into Fort Union, the most prominent American Fur Company post adjacent of the northern Great Plains. Feeling its position secure, the American Fur Company then entered the Rocky Mountain trade with the goal of pricing the Rocky Mountain Fur Company out of business. Their trappers followed Rocky Mountain trapping parties, learning the best hunting grounds. Although the American Fur Company supply train often arrived late to the trade rendezvous site because it tried various travel routes to the Rocky Mountains, company officials often paid higher prices for pelts to lure the free trapper trade.

Further, transportation and operating costs became prohibitive. As long as a company could buy low at the rendezvous, sell supplies at exorbitant prices, and find a wide market where prices remained high, the system reaped a healthy profit. But as silk hats began to replace beaver felt hats, the domestic and international market for pelts fell. The price for beaver went from $3.50 a pound in 1833 to $2 a pound by 1840.

The system was further weakened when Chouteau withdrew his investments to concentrate on the evolving bison robe trade. Already bison robe prices reached $6 per dressed hide. Responding to the new market, fur companies abandoned the rendezvous trading strategy and the last rendezvous in 1839 came to an uneventful end. A pattern of fixed posts re-emerged across the northern Great Plains. From these locations temporary trading posts were supplied and relocated each season depending on the predictions of bison herd movements and the seasonal patterns of various Native American bands. The combination of seasonal and fixed locations served Indian needs well, providing points of contact near established indigenous trading sites or along major trading trails.

Time moved on and the trading patterns, goods, and relationships built on the Rocky Mountain fur empires were inexorably changed. The mountain men, however, remain a fixture of frontier mythology still remembered less for their practical and demonstrable place in the development of the 19th-century economy than for the partly fictional but more romantic gleam of strength and wildness that surrounds their image.

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Serpent effigy hairpin
This copper hairpin is formed in a serpent design. The most likely source of the copper is the southern Appalachian Mountains. Gilcrease 6325.151



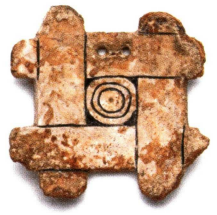
Human effigy pipe bowl
A crouching figure pipe of flint clay from the northeastern Ozarks. Pipes similar to this are known for Cahokia, the largest political-religious center of prehistoric America. Gilcrease 6125.200

All objects shown are from Spiro Mound, Oklahoma, AD 700-1500, Mississippian Period.

spiro

DON G. WYCKOFF

NATIVE AMERICAN TRADE A MILLENNIUM AGO



New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore: just a few key places in today's world trade and global economy. We know what this trade is all about: products, money, and profit. Some of us make a living working with businesses involved with world trade. Many of us hope that dividends from global companies will support us in our retirement. Clearly, the word trade as it is used today conveys special meanings to us. These meanings, however, do not go far in helping us to understand the nature of trade in the Southeastern United States a thousand years ago. Nor can we ask the people who were involved in it. They and most of their descendants are gone. But Native Americans of the previous millennium have left us a fascinating record, one that tells us about the places where they lived, governed, and worshiped and the material goods integral to these activities. For over a hundred years, archaeologists have studied the sites and materials left behind by these people. Ideas about their trade practices have changed over that time, but the

archaeological evidence has remained constant: marine shell, copper, select kinds of stone, and occasional pottery vessels. All come from sites scattered across what is now the Midwestern and Southeastern United States. Radiocarbon dated from A.D. 900 to 1400, these locations represent the Mississippian cultural tradition.

Mississippian Cultures

By A.D. 800, Native American societies were becoming culturally more complex along the lower Mississippi River, many of its tributaries, and along large streams in Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. These riverine settings host fertile terraces, scattered oxbow lakes, and backwater marshes. Here, diverse game, waterfowl, and fish could be hunted or foraged seasonally by traditional means. For many generations, the rich soils common to the valleys had nurtured squash, sunflowers, and amaranth; by A.D. 1000, these were increasingly joined by such Mexican-originated cultigens as corn and beans.



Pendant
Marine shell pendant of human hands and adjoining wristband design. The motif of circle and cross on the palms is frequently manifest in the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Gilcrease 9025.451

Excavations reveal that basket loads of select soil, often of particular colors, were deposited in prescribed ways to construct the mounds. Profiles show mounds enlarged in stages, perhaps at regular intervals of a decade or so.



Closely associated with the farming communities in Southeastern riverine settings is evidence for hierarchies of political-religious leaders. Manifest in different ways at villages and centers (where mounds were built), this evidence is believed to indicate the presence of complex chiefdoms. As populations grew, political-religious leaders gained importance and influence to the degree that they could solicit villagers to contribute produce and/or labor that ultimately benefited all.

Much labor was spent building and rebuilding religious and political centers for each society. Large flat-topped or rounded mounds characterize these centers. Excavations reveal that basket loads of select soil, often of particular colors, were deposited in prescribed ways to construct the mounds. Profiles show mounds enlarged in stages, perhaps at regular intervals of a decade or so. Functionally, the mounds served as foundations for important buildings such as temples, council houses, and mortuaries where deceased leaders and their kin or attendants were prepared for burial. Some mounds were the actual burial sites for deceased leaders.





Far left: Copper figure ("hawk elder")
Falcon design on thin copper plate. Produced by repoussé technique. Many such plates occurred with elite burials at the Spiro site. Gilcrease 6325.377

Immediate left: Copper plate (falcon design)
A thin copper plate shows a variation of the repoussé falcon design. The copper used for both the repoussé pieces shown here is likely to have come from the southern Appalachian Mountains. Gilcrease 6325.376

A society's homeland usually had several locations where mounds were built and political-religious leaders resided. Thus, far-flung communities were always closely linked with local civic-ceremonial centers where they could participate in annual cycles of planting, harvesting, and other activities important to their health and identity. In contrast are what archaeologists consider regional political-religious centers. Commonly amidst large communities or within localities with many villages, regional centers were typified by planned open spaces, or plazas, surrounded by multiple earthen mounds. The mounds frequently were aligned to observe solar and lunar events. Numerous regional centers are identified across the Southeastern United States, and many have been intensively studied. All have yielded clues to Mississippian culture ceremonies and trade.



Flared axe with basketry
A large copper nugget hammered into an axe form. The copper could be from north of the Cahokia site if not from the southern Appalachians. Adhering to the axe's surface are basket fragments. Gilcrease 6325.149

Southeastern Ceremonial Complex

For the period of A.D. 900 to 1400, artifacts of copper, marine shell, special kinds of stone, and pottery comprise the archeological evidence for trade. These artifacts occur in special forms. Those of copper, shell, and pottery are usually decorated with distinctive motifs. Archaeologists refer to these artifacts and artwork as the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Coming primarily from graves and tombs in or under mounds at local and regional centers, Southeastern Ceremonial Complex materials do indeed appear to be items worn or used by the political-religious elite in these societies. Among the artifacts are such status paraphernalia as cups, pendants, and beads carved from marine shell; scepters of stone or wood; sword-like knives chipped from beautiful flints; monolithic axes; and paper-thin copper ornaments and headdresses. All undoubtedly figured greatly in rituals and ceremonies presided over by these leaders. This ritual finery stands in marked contrast to the plain pottery and mundane tools common to houses, burials, and trash deposits at villages and farmsteads away from the centers.

These status goods are especially eye-catching because of the elaborate designs intricately engraved or embossed on them. Motifs like intertwined rattlesnakes, feathered serpents, hand-eye symbols, and human skulls beg comparison with Mexican and Central American imagery. Other recurring designs seem to be local variations of pan-Southeastern themes: human dancers in hawk or eagle costumes, for example. The rich array of human, animal-human, animal morphs, and flowing, interlocking designs displayed on Southeastern status and ritual artifacts is believed rooted in myths important to these societies as well as in ways the leaders used these stories to validate their political-religious roles and positions.

Southeastern Ceremonial Complex artifacts are reported from regional and local centers as well as some villages throughout the Southeast. When found at local centers and nearby villages, the objects

appear to have been redistributed by that society's most powerful leaders to select kin or representatives throughout the society. In some localities, leaders apparently exerted controls over their subjects to foster production of craft goods (such as shell beads, chipped stone hoes, and ground stone axe heads) that could be exchanged for exotic status goods.

Unlike today, when entrepreneurial middlemen interface between producers and consumers, prehistoric trade in status goods of exotic materials apparently was conducted between the political-religious leaders of neighboring and distant tribes. Elaborate ornaments, effigy pipes, symbolic weapons, and elaborate pottery filled with special foods or perhaps even salt (a valued commodity) were important to priestly chiefs or their emissaries as they negotiated inter-tribal alliances to enhance economic and political stability. After all, these were tumultuous times of growing populations, decreasing and depleting farmlands, warfare, and fluctuating climate (late Mississippian times correlate with the beginning of the Little Ice Age).

Etowah, Moundville, and Cahokia

Four places are especially noteworthy for their clues to Mississippian cultural development, ceremonialism, and long-distance trade. Although small at fifty-five acres, the Etowah site in northwestern Georgia has three large mounds, four small ones, and a village area surrounded by a moat and a wooden palisade. Occupied and virtually abandoned several times, Etowah's fortified village and sacred area were heavily in use between A.D. 1250 and 1350.

Unengraved shell core
Busycon sinistrum, shell core/columella
A pendant made from the core of a whelk shell. The species occurs off of Florida's south coast. Gilcrease 9025.684





Blade section
Segment of a large sword-like chipped stone biface with saw-toothed edges. Chipped from Mill Creek chert, which has bedrock sources in Illinois, not too far from Cahokia. Gilcrease 6125.4323

Mace (war club)
Crowned war club of Kaolin chert from near Cahokia. Object made by chipping the form out of stone and then grinding it to remove all flake scars. Although called a war club, it may have served as an emblem of authority. Gilcrease 6125.20842

Nearly twice as large as Etowah, the Moundville site in western Alabama was intensively occupied between A.D. 1200 and 1400. Moundville's residents helped build a cluster of sixteen substantial mounds, including one that ascends to sixty feet, in an area partially surrounded by a palisade. Moundville status items include pottery and large stone disks engraved with Southeastern Ceremonial Complex designs. Goods flowed to and from both Moundville and Etowah along the channels of a broad network that extended to the Gulf Coast, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and western Kentucky and Tennessee.

Cahokia was the largest, most complicated, and most populous of all the Mississippian centers. Situated primarily on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River near its juncture with the Missouri, the villages and mound-plaza components of the Cahokia site easily cover five square miles of marshy but lush bottomlands. At Cahokia's peak, A.D. 1050 to 1250, roughly, this setting was home to an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 people. This is the largest concentration of prehistoric American Indians known north of the Valley of Mexico. In terms of power and influence Cahokia's leaders undoubtedly rivaled those anywhere. Locally, Cahokia leaders planned and supervised construction of more than 100 mounds, most adjacent to formal plazas or open areas suitable for ceremonies,

dances, and public gatherings. Near Cahokia's center was a palisaded compound of some 200 acres where a major plaza and sixteen mounds stood. One mound is the largest prehistoric structure built north of Mexico; its base covers fifteen acres and its height is over 100 feet. East and west of Cahokia's central compound were some thirty other mounds, three other plazas, and a 200-feet-diameter "woodhenge" of large cypress logs.

Information on Cahokia trade is elusive, in part because troves of exotic status goods have yet to be found, documented, and traced to their sources. Existing information comes from materials from the few status burials uncovered at Cahokia and the occasional objects from nearby villages excavated before their destruction by highway, industrial, and urban expansion. The available findings bear witness to Cahokia craftsmen getting raw materials from the north (copper and lead), west (flint, flint clay, salt, and mica), and south (marine shell). Clearly, its location by major rivers leading in these directions must have been important in transporting such materials to Cahokia leaders and village artisans. Cahokia products like fine pottery or chipped stone hoes sometimes show up at distant sites in these directions.

Center on the Western Fringe: Spiro

If anyone wanted to control the flow of raw materials, finished goods, and ideas between Plains villagers and Puebloans and populous Southeastern chiefdoms, the people who founded Spiro picked the right place.

Regarding late prehistoric trade in the Southeastern United States, a regional center on the very western edge of the Mississippian cultural area provides a unique perspective. Located by the Arkansas River in eastern Oklahoma, the Spiro site isn't large, has few mounds, and was never intensively inhabited. Yet it has yielded more exotic status goods than all the comparable materials combined from Etowah, Moundville, and Cahokia.

Like Cahokia, the Spiro site seems strategically located. With the rugged Ouachita Mountains a few miles south and the dissected, steep, southern flakes of the Ozark Plateau immediately to the north, the Spiro site sits by the Arkansas River at the narrowest point in this river's huge (160,000 square miles) watershed. To the west lie the Plains and, ultimately, the Rocky Mountains, and to the east the Mississippi River and the diverse settings of the Southeast. If anyone wanted to control the flow of raw materials, finished goods, and ideas between Plains villagers and Puebloans and populous Southeastern chiefdoms, the people who founded Spiro picked the right place.

Eleven mounds, a possible plaza, and a few scattered houses with nearby domestic trash are recorded for the Spiro site. Traces have yet to be found for a protective palisade or any similar device that set aside part of the site as more important or sacred than another part. The mounds are in two clusters. Eight are arranged around an open oval area, possibly a plaza, on a twenty-feet-tall ridge running along a north-south axis in



Axe
A symbolic axe made from one piece of stone, a chlorite-schist with likely sources in the southern Appalachians. A symbolic garfish is depicted on the half area above the blade. Gilcrease 6125.18910



Axe
Ground stone is the material for this axe, or mace. Gilcrease 6125.1781

the western half of the site. The largest mound there was flat-topped, some 180 feet square at its base, and eighteen feet high. Another in this group was eight feet high and sixty feet in diameter, and the remaining six were less than half that size. All were built over the burned remains of special buildings, one of which had served as a mortuary. Three other mounds are on the bottomlands comprising the eastern half of the site. Here, two mounds are the low, circular kind used to bury burned or dismantled buildings. The third was composed of four conjoined mounds where Spiro's leaders and other important people were buried. Known as the Craig Mound, this elongated feature was thirty-six feet tall at its north end, nearly 300 feet long, and oriented northwest to

southeast. Two miles southeast of the Craig Mound, a 150-foot-tall mesa juts upward like a sore thumb. That Spiro's principal burial mound points towards it is our only clue that this highly visible landmark must have been important in Spiroan thinking and mythology.

The Spiro site's significance first became known when prehistoric graves in the Craig Mound were looted. From 1933 to 1936, this mound was leased and tunneled into by men searching for marketable artifacts. From deeply buried graves, the diggers retrieved and sold cloth, shell, copper, and stone objects never before seen or imagined by archaeologists and prehistorians. Some of these materials eventually wound up in responsible museums in such distant places as New York City; Washington, D.C.; Columbus, Ohio; and Houston, Texas. Fortunately for Oklahomans, Thomas Gilcrease obtained some of Spiro's plundered spoils and preserved them for study and display at the Gilcrease Museum.

Spectacular in form, design, and artisanship, Spiro's treasures gain significance when their contexts and functions are understood. This began to happen in 1936 when Oklahoma's legislature stopped the vandalism and instructed trained archaeologists to properly study the site and its contents. Between 1936 and 1941, extensive excavations were undertaken with crews funded by the Works Progress Administration. Disrupted by the second worls war, study of the WPA findings resumed in the 1960s under the direction of Dr. James A. Brown of Northwestern University. More research was done at the site between 1978 and 1982 by Oklahoma Archaeological Survey teams led by Dr. J. Daniel Rogers, now of the Smithsonian Institution. Today, the Spiro site is Oklahoma's only public archaeological park, and it is managed by the Oklahoma Historical Society. Notable collections of Spiro materials may be seen there as well as at such Oklahoma venues as the Woolaroc Museum, the Oklahoma Historical Society Museum, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and the Gilcrease Museum.

Archaeologists exposed burials at several elevations in the Craig Mound. Most were clustered where a prepared floor had once existed. Some ceremonial objects were on this floor. The majority were on thirteen litters made from cedar poles. These litters also held partial human skeletons, sometimes only a bone or two. Wherever found, the ceremonial or status goods were broken and incomplete. All evidence points to the exotic status materials being smashed and scattered before they were placed on the pole litters and brought to the Craig Mound for burial. Patiently reassembled by WPA workers, these ritual goods and elite paraphernalia comprise Spiro's notable contribution to our understanding of Mississippian ceremonies and trade.

The most numerous exotic materials at Spiro are cups and ornaments of marine shells. At least 550 engraved cups, 115 small and very large pendants, and thousands of beads are made from marine conch and whelk species that live along the Gulf Coast from the Florida Keys to Vera Cruz, Mexico. The pendants and cups are the principal medium for

Bushels of beads were dumped on the cedar pole litters at Craig Mound. Most beads are of sizes comparable to shells from Gulf Coast marine species.

Spiro's well-studied versions of Southeastern Ceremonial Complex art.

Bushels of beads were dumped on the cedar pole litters at Craig Mound. Most beads are of sizes comparable to shells from Gulf Coast marine species. Circular beads are most common but others were ground into elliptical and other elongated forms. A few beads and several large pendants are made from the spiraling core of conch or whelk shells. These cores suggest that whole shells, not just outer bodies, were brought to Spiro. A few beads are made from the small shells of the species *Olivella.* Recent analysis indicates these may be an olivella variety common to the Gulf of California. If this proves to be the case, these small shell beads represent the best evidence we have of Spiroan ties with Southwestern natives who frequently obtained such shells for ornaments.

Besides the many beautiful objects of foreign shell, the special burials at Spiro yielded over 300 copper plumes, hairpins, decorated and undecorated axes, and copper-sheathed ornaments and symbolic weapons. Showing no traces of smelting or annealing, these copper items were cold hammered from nearly pure nuggets. In many instances, they were hammered into paper-thin sheets. These were often ingeniously riveted together to form pieces large enough to cover carved wood forms or to emboss with hawks, hawk dancers, human faces, and other motifs representative of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Long assumed to have come from the Lake Superior region, malleable copper nuggets are now known to have glacial drift sources in Illinois and eroded bedrock sources in the southern Appalachian Mountains.

Galena, or lead, is another mineral foreign to the Spiro area, but crystalline hunks and balls of it occur by the dozens on the prepared floor and its burials in the Craig Mound. All of these pieces show grinding and abrading that produced a white pigment. Geochemical analyses reveal this mineral to have been brought from Missouri near Cahokia and from the northwestern Ozarks some 100 miles north of Spiro. Other exotic minerals used as pigments include glauconite, yellow ochre, manganese, and kaolin. These minerals' sources are far-flung, including southwestern Oklahoma, southern Arkansas, the central Mississippi Valley, and the southern Appalachians.

Pipes in unique forms and foreign stone are also characteristic of Spiro. Small pipes shaped by grinding represent pumas (or jaguars), birds, birds atop humans, and frogs. All are of soft limestone or kaolin that can be traced to outcrops in the Red River basin of southern Arkansas and adjacent Louisiana. Most intriguing are large, heavy pipes in the form of humans in warrior costumes, holding rattles, or even smoking pipes. Typically made from a red stone, these human effigy pipes were long thought to be of bauxite, an aluminum ore that can be found south of the Ouachita Mountains in Arkansas. Recent mineralogical analyses now reveal the material is flint clay, or "fire clay," which has a source in the northeastern Ozarks. Cahokia has also yielded a few pipes of this stone.



Engraved cup
Gulf Coast whelk shell cup engraved with human heads and bi-lobed arrow, another motif common to the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Gilcrease 9025.385

Exotic stone is also represented at Spiro by unusual but beautifully made maces, sword-like knives, and axe heads. The maces have crowned blades and tapering, stepped handles that were first made by flaking and then smoothed to the point that the flake scars were virtually eliminated. The Spiro examples are of Kaolin chert, or novaculite, that occurs in Illinois south of Cahokia. Symbolic axe heads were also made the same way from the same material. A flint from northwestern Tennessee is represented by segments of very long, bifacially flaked knives. Similar long knives are made from a brown flint that has bedrock sources in northwestern Kansas. Other large knives are of flint from central Texas and from the Flint Hills of north-central Oklahoma and south-central Kansas. From the elite burials also come worked and unworked crystals of clear quartz, the sources for which are in the Ouachita Mountains eighty to ninety miles south of Spiro.

Finally, scattered through the burials in Spiro's Craig Mound are pottery vessels and clay pipes in forms typical of those associated with cultures in eastern Arkansas and along the Red River in southwestern Arkansas, northeastern Texas, and southeastern Oklahoma.

Theories about the Spiro objects

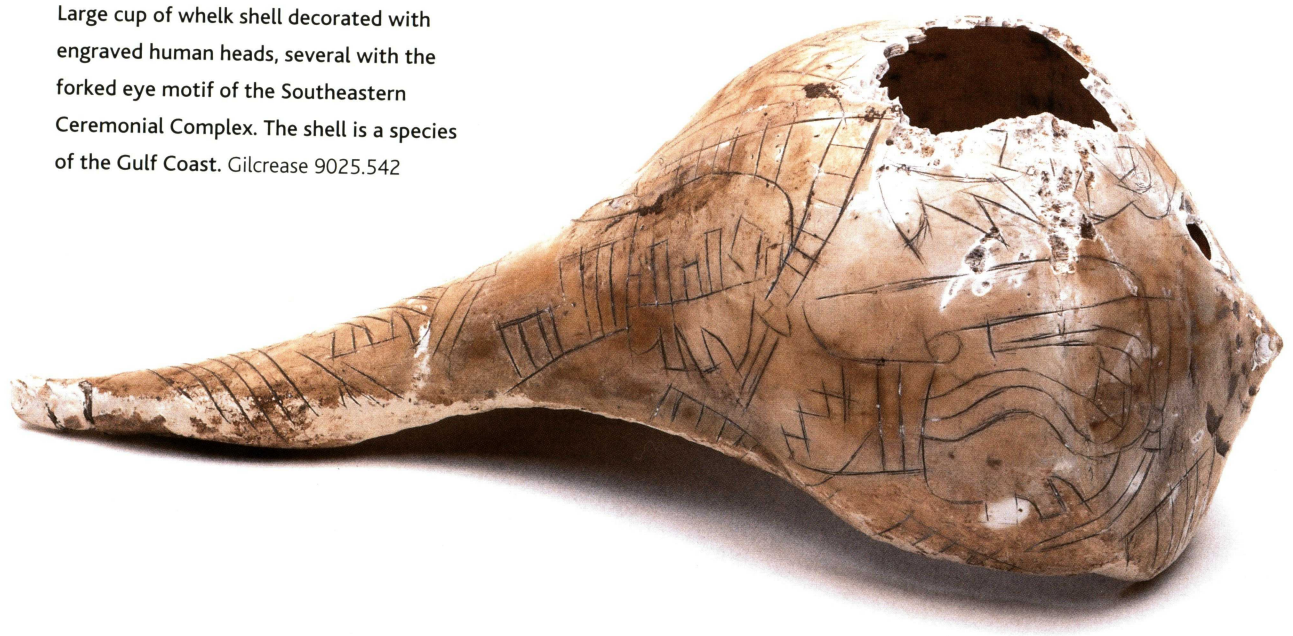
All who see the Spiro materials are impressed by the quantity, diversity, and artistry of the exotic goods from the burial mound. The exquisitely engraved shell cups and pendants, the handsomely decorated copper plates, the mysterious effigy pipes, and the array of other well crafted stone and mineral objects raise questions. Who made these things? What did Spiroans exchange to get these materials? Using the available evidence, the answers are surprising.

Despite the fact that archaeologists have referred to Spiro artisans and to even Spiro schools of art, we have no definitive evidence that Spiroans made any of the shell, copper, or stone objects of exotic material. After years of field work at Spiro, its affiliated local centers, and its numerous nearby villages, archaeologists have yet to recover tools or debris attributable to making or decorating fancy objects from shell, copper, or stone from Illinois, Tennessee, Kansas, or Texas. On this basis we have to conclude that most, if not all, of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex status goods came to Spiro in already finished form.

If not Spiroans, who made the elaborate things found there? The reasonable answer is craftsmen who lived near the sources of the materials or gifted artisans who resided at political-religious centers exerting some influence over people near these sources. Clearly, Cahokia was located near natural occurrences of copper, flint clay, and flint manifest by ornaments, pipes, and status objects found at Spiro. Likewise, Etowah and several local centers were near Appalachian sources of copper, stone, and minerals implicated by Spiro finds. Many Gulf Coast villages and some centers could have served as places where conch and whelk shells were periodically stockpiled and moved inland to artisans who shaped and decorated them into sacred cups and elaborate ornaments.

If Spiroans traded for their status goods, what did they exchange? That question, too, is difficult to answer with tangible evidence. Occasional finds of pottery similar to that made by Spiroans are reported at Cahokia. Some arrowpoints found in one of the few elite burials known for Cahokia reportedly are similar in form to those common to the Spiro locality and are made of similar materials. Elsewhere in the Southeast, obvious Spiro artifacts are essentially non-existent, except for the occasional pottery vessels found at prehistoric Caddo sites south of the Ouachita Mountains. Pottery also is the principal Spiro material that got to Plains village sites in Oklahoma and Kansas, but even across that vast expanse it is known from less than a dozen locations. Of course, Spiroans may have exchanged commodities that haven't been preserved, such as salt, food, hides, or wood. If that is the case, then we will always have a distorted view of Spiro as one node in a prehistoric Southeastern trading network.





Engraved cup *(left and right, dorsal view)* Large cup of whelk shell decorated with engraved human heads, several with the forked eye motif of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. The shell is a species of the Gulf Coast. Gilcrease 9025.542

Overall, no quid pro quo trading arrangement was operating at Spiro some 700 to 800 years ago. The kinds and quantities of Spiro materials found in distant places don't even begin to approach the character and numbers of exotic goods buried with Spiro leaders. The disparity could be explained by claiming that Spiroans were just better traders than their contemporaries. If that was the case, then leaders in distant chiefdoms tolerated "getting bested" longer than most people would. Two interrelated clues bear witness to a different explanation. The exotic materials are almost entirely ornaments, status symbols, and ritual objects, and they were destroyed along with the remains of people treated in very special ways when they died. The contexts at Spiro indicate that these individuals were placed in mortuaries before being carried on litters to a special setting that was then buried under a large, conical mound. Spiro's goods from distant places are associated with honored people. Could they not be gifts, things given out of respect? Perhaps the return on these gifts was knowledge, spiritual insight, and friendship. If we look at historical records of the Caddo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we see that their highest political-religious leaders were accorded special gifts for the same reasons. Spiro offers us a case of this practice back into prehistory.



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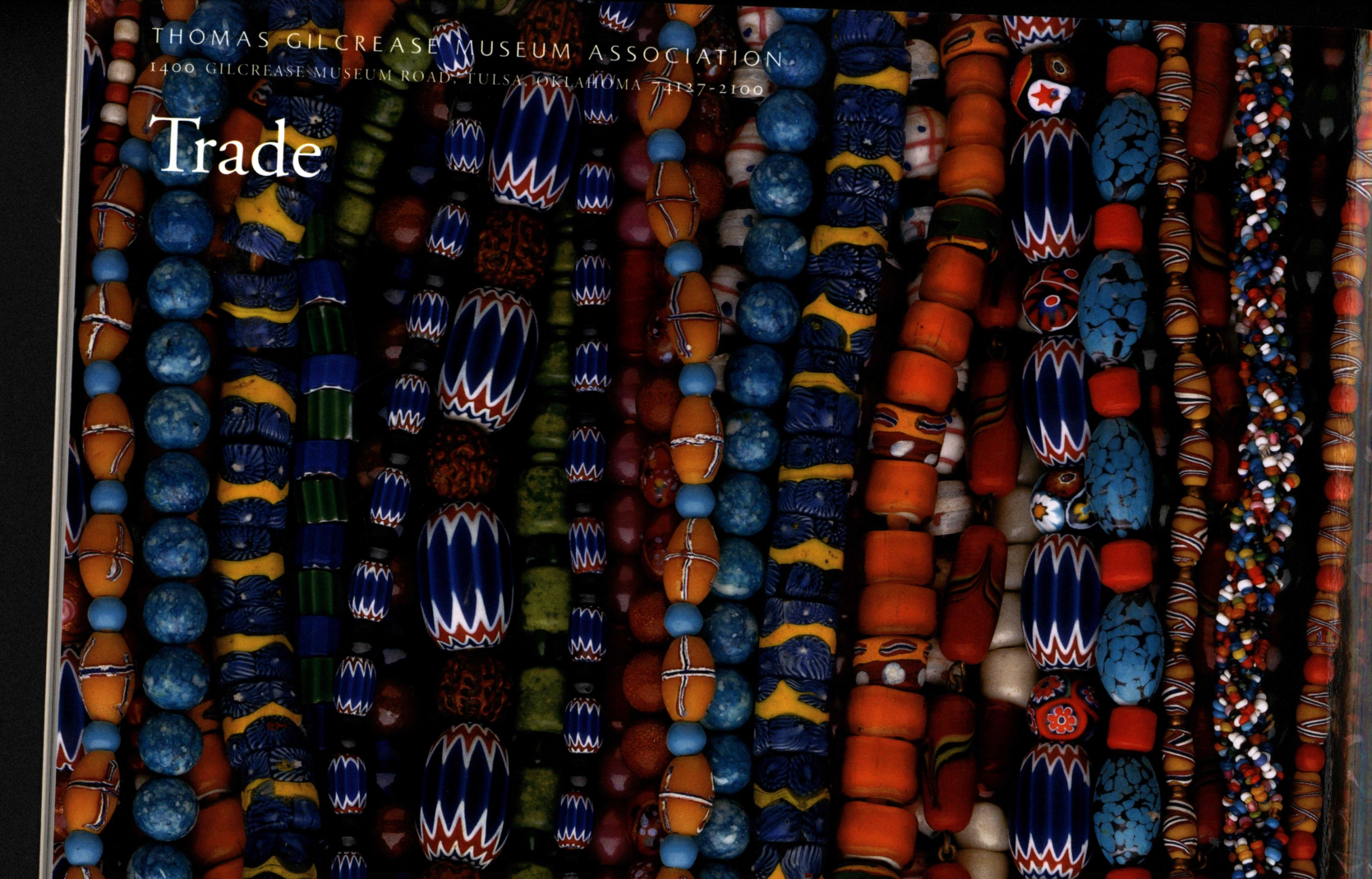
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Front cover: Amid beads from China and Europe, this necklace—an amazing collection of trade goods from the 19th century—boasts an implement from the Euro-African traditions of the Caribbean. The "Phoenix Button" at the bottom is a rare example of the military buttons forged for King Henri Christophe of Haiti in the early 19th century. (Gilcrease 84.166)

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