

How beads are made (in Ghana)

Introduction

In West Afrika for making beads the powder glass technique been in use for centuries. Glass is ground into a powder and mixed with dye, poured into moulds and baked in kilns. Often recycled glass or old, broken beads are re-used.

Making the moulds



Balls of pounded clay are flattened and cut to the right circumference. Size and thickness depends on the size and style of the bead.

Wooden sticks are used to make holes in the clay moulds. The small point on the end of the stick makes the deeper hole where a cassava stalk sits. The cassava stalk will burn out in the firing and leave a hole in the bead.





Because there are many different beads there also, of course, many different moulds.

For larger beads are made by a mould lengthwise.



After the moulds (still without the beads inside) dry, they are baked in the kiln. After this the moulds are ready for making glass beads.





Preparation of the glass

In a pipe with a metal bottom welded on, the glass is grinded. After pounding the glass is sifted to remove dirt and any larger pieces.



Filling the moulds

Before the mould is filled, it is dipped with a fine solution of kaolin clay and water, this coats the walls of the mould and acts as a release.

(Cassava) stalks are put in the centre of each hole



in the mould and the powdered glass is carefully put into the hole around the stalk.

After trays of bead mould have been filled with powder glass, they are ready for the kiln.



Firing and finishing



The temperature of the kiln does not have to be very high for powder glass as the powder fuses together rather than melts. The temperature of the kiln is judged by the colour of the flames.

The filled moulds are put into the kiln to bake. This process takes between 20 minutes to three quarters of an hour depending on the temperature of the kiln and the size of the bead being made.





When the beads come out of the mould they have rough edges and there are traces of the kaolin. The stalks have been burnt to ashes in the kiln. The beads are polished on a stone using sand and water.

Beads are washed and strung. It is traditional among the Krobo people that men make the beads and women string and sell the beads.



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