

AFRICA/ITALY

2022, the International Year of Glass

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CAMEROON

A member of the Akaa secret society, who has the elephant as a totem, wears the elephant mask decorated with glass beads at the Bamileke chefferie of Bafou.



THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS DESIGNATED 2022 AS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF GLASS – IYOG 2022

Glass is a material with really unique properties. It is used for a huge variety of purposes and has played an undeniable role in the history of humanity for over three thousand years. One of the earliest uses of glass was as beads, which were used to denote affluence as early as the Bronze Age and later became the subject of widespread trade across all continents.

In 2020 the art of glass beads was added to the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage.

In 1352 the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, left his native Tangiers and set out to the Kingdom of Mali. In his descriptions of the country and people's customs, Battuta wrote: *"In this country travelers do not carry provisions with them, and not even ducats*

or drachmas. They bring salt pieces, glass ornaments or custom jewelry that people call nazhms (strings of glass beads) and some spices".

The roots of Venetian glass production date back to ancient traditions and drew directly on the already flourishing production of the Roman and Byzantine eras. On the island of Torcello furnaces have been discovered containing fragments of glass and mosaic tiles within an archaeological context that dates back to the period 600-650 A.D.

Thanks to the Golden Bull granted to Venetian merchants by the basileus of Constantinople in 1082, Venice expanded the trade with the Southern Mediterranean basin. In the XV Century, after the fall of Constantinople conquered by Ottoman Turks in 1453, and above all thanks to the discovery of the New World, trade routes changed dramatically. The Gulf of Guinea became the new commercial pole where

Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English ships unloaded their goods for trading. Among these goods, Venetian glass beads were used as coins, with their "magic" beauty, handiness and resistance.

THIS PHOTO REPORT TELLS THE STORY OF THE VENETIAN GLASS BEADS AND HOW THEY WERE TRADED IN AFRICA, WHERE THEY ARE STILL USED BY A VARIETY OF ETHNIC GROUPS FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES.

The reportage was shot in:

Italy – Venice and Murano

Ghana – Female initiation of the Krobo girls

Cameroon – Sculptures and dances of the masks covered by glass beads



ITALY

The glass melting furnaces of various colors at the Effetre factory in Murano (Venice). It's the only one that still realizes glass canes for the processing of glass beads.



CAMEROON

Mask covered with glass beads, displayed at the chefferie museum of Foumban. This mask is used during the great Ngoun ceremony that takes place every two years.



GHANA

On Monday, fourth day of the Dipo festival, girls are dressed up in the best clothes and finest bead necklaces belonging to their family.



ITALY

Alessandro Moretti in the store of his laboratory in Murano (Venice), which contains many coffers full of old small glass beads called “conterie”.



ITALY

Folders of the old Venetian glass beads factories with various kinds of glass beads that were produced and sent abroad, mainly in Africa, where they were used for trade.



GHANA

On the last day of the initiation, girls are dressed up in their best clothes and finest glass bead necklaces belonging to their family.



CAMEROON

Performance, during a ceremony at the Bamileke chefferie of Bafou, with some elephant masks decorated with glass beads. These masks are worn by members of the secret society Akaa, where the elephant is their totemic animal.



ITALY

Glass beads (collection of Augusto Panini) made in Venice in the 13th-19th centuries and sent abroad, mainly to Africa, where they were used for trade.

ITALY

The "calli" in Murano (Venice) and the lighthouse which characterizes the island.





ITALY

After the last step in the oven, the block of molten glass is pulled from the "master" and his helper and turned into a long rod. The Effetre factory in Murano (Venice) is the only one that still produces glass canes for processing glass beads.

CAMEROON

Female mask, covered with glass beads, of the first half of the XIX century. The mask belonged to the Bamoun people and is exhibited at the museum of Foumban.



di tipo rosetta (chevron) di proprietà di un mercante di Odumase.



GHANA

During the initiation, after the rite on the sacred stone which has revealed their purity, girls wear the finest glass bead necklaces belonging to their family.



CAMEROON

Dances of Ntoussuen (elephant) wooden masks, covered with glass beads, of the Gbenkougbou secret society of the Bamoun people, in the village of Matoun.



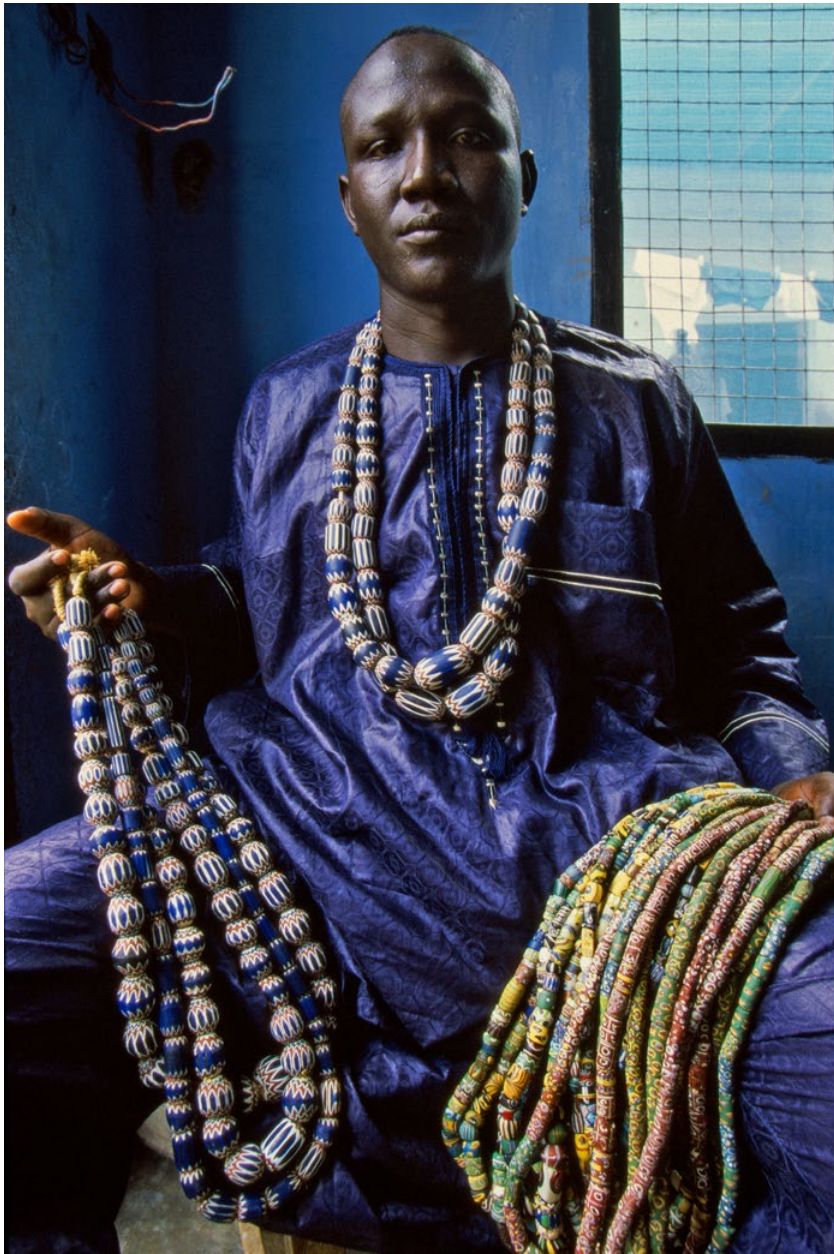
ITALY

Cooling of the glass block from which the glass canes will be pulled. Effetre factory in Murano (Venice) is the only one that still produces glass canes for processing glass beads.



ITALY

Glass canes with butterfly design made at EffeTre of Murano (Venice), the only factory that still makes glass canes for the processing of glass beads.



GHANA

A merchant from Odumase with some necklaces made with glass "chevron" beads of Venetian origin.



CAMEROON

Detail of an anthropomorphic royal throne of the XIX century, covered with glass beads: it belonged to Fotso I, Bamileke king of Bandjoun, and is exhibited at the Bandjoun chefferie museum.



GHANA

Washing the glass beads after they've been fired in Cedi Djaba's workshop in Odumase.

CAMEROON

Initiation of the young Bamileke from Bafoussam chefferie during the Nyang Nyang festival. On their neck they wear chevron glass beads.



Antiche perle di vetro veneziane di tipo "seta" (chevron) acquistate da un mercante di Odu, 1950s.



CAMEROON

Shoes covered with glass beads, displayed at the Bamileke chefferie museum in Bafut.



GHANA

Some of the women who help the priests celebrate the Dipo festival.



ITALY

The Fondamenta dei Vetrai
(glassmakers) canal in Murano
(Venice).



ITALY

Gianni Moretti owner, with his brothers, of the Ercole Moretti glass beads factory in Murano (Venice). He is measuring the diameter of the glass canes used for the production of the "millefiori" glass beads.



ITALY

Close-up of “millefiori” glass beads made by Venetian “conterie” between the 17th and early 20th centuries and sent abroad, mainly to Africa, where they were used for trade.



GHANA

After the rite on the sacred stone which has revealed their purity, girls wear the traditional straw headdress called Dipo Pee.



GHANA

On Monday, fourth day of the Dipo festival, girls are dressed up in the best clothes and finest bead necklaces belonging to their family.



ITALY

Glass beads of various kinds (collection of Augusto Panini) made in Venice from the 17th to the 19th century and sent abroad, mainly to Africa, where they were used for trade. Photographed laying on an Asafo flag of the Fanti population of Ghana.

