ORNAMENTATION AMONG THE AMERICAN INDIANS

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In nearly every collection of Indian artifacts will be found some articles which were once part of the personal adornment of our native Americans. This is at least partly due to the fact that every American Indian wore some token to indicate personal, tribal or ceremonial distinction at one time or another.

One of the most common type of ornaments is beadwork in some form. Beads were made of many materials. Shell, bone, steatite, clay, quartz, serpentine, magnetite, turquoise, jasper, hematite, soapstone, slate, copper, pearls, ivory, horn, claws, teeth, quills, seeds and nuts were used.

The shell beads were probably the first to come into use, since the shells of mollusks were probably used for utensils at a very early time. Being found near water, naturally they would be used as a dipper. Natural perforations occur in such shells as the haliotis and a thong could easily be slipped through and tied, thus enabling the shell to be transported by hanging about the neck. Some of them were later artificially perforated to facilitate carrying. These became valuable from a utilitarian standpoint. The Indian began to wear them and here is born an ornament.

Beads were worn by both sexes, most commonly hung around the neck but strings were also worn on the arms, wrists, waists, lower limbs, hair, and sewn on headdresses, coats, leggins and moccasins much as the Indians do yet today.

Copper beads were probably first made by perforating small glacial nuggets which may or may not have been worked. They were probably picked up because of their pleasing color and upon beginning to work them, the Indian found that he was not chipping as was true of stones, but was shaping, so he continued to hammer the masses until the desired shapes were reached. The use of copper as ornaments probably originated near its source of supply which was the Lake Superior region but became disseminated through trade, being more valuable as it went farther from its source. Most of the copper beads would be considered crude from a standpoint of craftsmanship as they were quite often made by beating the copper out into sheets and rolling it so as to leave a hole, or beaten out into a wire and coiled to make a spring like bead. These beads vary a great deal in length but not so much in diameter. This working of sheets of copper was probably responsible for giving some experimenter the idea of plating with copper. This became quite an art. Hollow reeds were well adapted to being plated with copper and it did not take so much of it to accomplish the same effect as before. I have a hollow reed core of such a bead in my possession. A headdress belonging to an important personage found in a Hopewell Mound near Chillicothe, Ohio by Moorhead, consists of a high frontal piece made of sheets of copper covered with indented figures out of which also a pair of horns imitating the antlers of a deer. The antlers had been of wood plated with copper. Wolf jaws have been found covered with thin copper sheets. Shell, bone, and wood have also been found covered with copper. Long copper breast plates on each side of the chest have been found in burials. These probably were worn as protection and ceremony as well as ornament. The chief uses of copper as personal ornaments are as beads, gorgets, bracelets, pendants, breastplates, pins—perhaps worn in the hair, ear disks, ear rings, and lip ornaments. Although the pleasing color, ease of working and ability to take a high polish, must have made copper very valuable to the Indian, it seems to be found chiefly in association with Hopewell burials.

Shell beads are the most common of all. I believe the greater part of these are the flat disc beads. They are made from many kinds of fresh and salt water shells. Beads of conch shells from the Gulf of Mexico have a wide distribution and are found in all stages of development into utilitarian and ornamental objects. Tubular, cylindrical, and barrel shaped beads were made from the central column of the conch while thick discs were made

from the shoulder. The cylindrical beads usually show part of the whorl groove but in some cases it is entirely absent. Usually they have been drilled from both ends. The disc beads were made from pieces of shell which were first grooved or notched and broken out. They were then drilled, usually from both sides and the circumference ground to a circular rim. Sometimes they were ground smooth on the flat sides. Very likely the polished pearl-like finish made very attractive ornaments.

In the Don Dickson collection are two strings of beads—one of cylindrical conch shell beads making a string over 18 feet long and another over 15 feet made of over 900 discs of conch shell. In each case the entire string was found about the neck of a single individual. All the beads are carefully made and uniform in size.

Beads made by rubbing off the shoulders of small shells such as the Marginella and passing the string through this opening and through the natural one are frequently found. Sometimes openings are rubbed in two opposite sides for stringing. In the removal of the Powell mound in the Cahokia group thousands of these Marginella beads were found. They were placed together with alternating layers of bark with as many as five layers of beads over some of the burials.

Shells having a natural conical spiral shape were often drilled through the shoulder for suspension. I have one such that has been cut off and had some object placed in it in such a way that it serves as a rattle which was strung with the other beads.

Strings of fresh water clam shells have been found on the ankle. These have been closed on the inside by flat pieces of wood or shell and pellets inserted to give a musical rattle on movement. There are usually two strings encircling the ankle.

Tubular or barrel shapes seem to predominate as types of stone beads although disc beads are also found. These were harder to make and probably this accounts for their scarcity. The materials for these beads were slate, steatite, cannel coal, quartz and hematite. The last are rather rare.

Tubular bone beads which are sections cut from a hollow bone are found quite often to be in strings encircling wrists or ankles. I presume this is from the fact that they made a more or less musical rattle when loosely strung. These beads may be quite short but are usually from one to two inches long.

I have in my possession a tubular shell bead 2⅝ inches in length and ⅝ inches in diameter that is curved to such a degree that one would consider drilling impossible; yet a drilling the size of a medium broom straw has been made 1¼ inches from one end and 1⅝ inches from the other. This makes ¼ inch wasted drilling where they meet. By twisting, the straw can be pushed through the hole. Light will not come through because of the amount of curve. To say that the Indians were skillful at this work is certainly an understatement.

Considerable value must have been attached to bone beads as I have one which was worn until ⅝ inch of its 1½ inch length is worn through. It has a high polish.

Pairs of bone rings over an inch in length and about the same in diameter have been found in burials. The position would indicate that they may have been used to slip over the braids of hair.

Canine teeth of the bear and incisors of the elk were used in strings about the neck. The bear teeth were usually drilled and hung in such a way as to have all the points turned the same direction which was usually toward the left of the wearer. They have frequently been found to have one or two drillings which reach to the natural hollow of the tooth. Some have been found with fresh water pearls set in, glued with the gum of certain resinous trees. Mr. Charles Harris and I took a string of 10 elk incisors from about the neck of an individual in a burial mound in Schuyler Co., Illinois. These white gleaming teeth made a very attractive ornament and were likely trophies of a former hunt as well. At the Don Dickson mounds at Lewiston, Illinois, can be seen a bracelet of the jaw bones of a wolf, teeth intact, which are drilled for fastening together with thongs. In the same collection is an ornament which was probably worn suspended from the neck and is made from the upper human plate with teeth intact. It is drilled in front and back for suspension. Another odd necklace is made from finger bones

drilled through the ends into the natural hollows and strung lengthwise.

Fresh water pearls are found in great abundance in some burials. They were especially plentiful in the Ogden mound in Fulton County.

Some clay or pottery beads are occasionally found but are not very well made as a rule. They were probably made by people lacking in material or skills to make better beads.

Pendants and gorgets of many kinds made chiefly of stone and shell make up a class of ornaments upon which the American Indian seemed to ply his greatest skill. Pendants are found mainly in Hopewell sites. They hung from the neck of the wearer, took many unusual shapes and sizes but nearly all were bar like in shape. Some of the larger, heavier stone gorgets have been found singly on the inside of the wrists. These may have been bow string protectors as some suggest and undoubtedly had some deep significance as a charm to the wearer. However the most beautifully made are the circular gorgets of shell, engraved with the spider, cross, or rattlesnake, and sometimes with the bird and human face inscribed. Another rare ornament that may belong in this class is a shell object usually about 8 or 10 inches long and 3 or 4 inches wide, which is more or less dipper shaped. These have been found on the forehead of the wearer, small end up. Most of these have three perforations, one in the center and the other two toward the small end.

Colorful adornment in the form of paint was used to indicate tribal, ceremonial, or individual distinction on important occasions such as at deaths, feasts, wars, or marriages.

Paints were used by both sexes on face, body, and sometimes the hair. Pigments were made from iron bearing minerals such as ochres and stained earth. Black was derived from charcoal, soot, or graphite, green and blues from copper bearing ores, red and yellow from hematites, white from limestone or kaolin, and browns, yellows, oranges, and purples from stained earth. These pigments were mixed with some animal grease or saliva and applied. In some tribes the grease was applied first and the powdered pigment rubbed on. Red, the color signifying the blood of life and death was the most used as it was thought to give the wearer added powers of protection or charm. Black was the usual color worn at a death and was probably not so much a sign of mourning as hope for protection from the departed spirit.

Feathers of the eagle to be worn in the hair or made into fans were held in high esteem. The standard value at one time was one pony as equal to twelve perfect black tipped golden eagle tail feathers. Feathers were worn only after being won by an act of bravery. The number, mofoling and coloration varied in individual tribes. Only a few of these colorful war bonnets have been preserved.

In conclusion, I hope that in this brief compilation concerning the Red Man's habits of adornment will be found some things of interest and use to the members of the Society.