North America

For thousands of years prior to European colonization, Indian civilizations made the North American continent their home. Anthropologists place the more than three hundred North American Indian tribes into broad cultural groups, organized by geographic areas: Woodland (southeastern and northeastern), Great Lakes, Plains, Intermontane, Southwest, California, Northwest Coast, and Subarctic. The linking of cultural characteristics with environments developed as an aid to interpreting the diverse life-styles and material cultures of a wide range of tribes.

North American Indian languages appear to have no word for art; artistic expression was fully integrated into many aspects of life and not treated as a separate activity. Objects were crafted to serve a host of functions, both secular and sacred. The extent of their complexity and that of the overall artifact assemblage depended on the life-style of the group and the resources available to them.

Although each group of Indians produced objects specific to their customs and beliefs, all North American Indians seem to have shared an appreciation for beads. At least eight thousand years before Europeans crossed the Atlantic, Indians were making, wearing, and trading beads of shell, pearl, bone, teeth, stone, and fossil crinoid stems.[1]

Imported glass beads, first introduced to North American native populations by Christopher Columbus in 1492, had a significant economic and aesthetic impact on Indian material culture. The earliest glass beads were gifts from explorers and missionaries, but in the sixteenth century the small seed beads became an important medium of exchange in the expanding North American fur trade. The availability of these small beads, along with the introduction of trade cloth and thin steel needles, led to the decline of age-old decorative techniques, including quillwork, and the rise of beadwork as

272. *Typical Southwestern jewelry assembly of turquoise, coral, bone, shell, and silver beads. Southwestern tribes valued shell beads over those of glass. Shells symbolize water to a people for whom rainfall is crucial to survival. Among the southwestern Indians, turquoise and silver jewelry became an important repository of wealth.*[I]

These necklaces were probably made between 1920 and 1950, but the disk and tabular beads are ancient forms. Center turquoise tabular bead, second necklace from top: length, 3.5 cm. Bottom two necklaces: collection Ivory Freidus

the predominant Indian craft. While some beadworkers followed earlier geometric quillwork patterns, many Indian women borrowed heavily from European motifs. Embroidery, needlepoint, lacework, and even Oriental Caucasian rugs, brought to the New World by immigrants and carried across the continent by settlers, provided designs that were translated into beadwork. An unforgettable Cree bag decorated with beads in a flame-stitch pattern to resemble an eighteenth-century Hungarian needlework pocketbook (plate 292) is one example of the widespread European influence.

The blend of Indian imagination and European designs and materials reached a particularly successful synthesis on the Plains in about 1870. The Crow and other tribes created beautiful beaded adornment for themselves and their horses. In the East, however, many tribes were no longer making beadwork for their own use by this time. They had long since depleted their beaver supply and were reduced to earning money by mak-

ing beaded souvenirs of "authentic Indian clothing," often to European specifications of design and color and for shipment to European markets.

The intermingling of Indian and European beadmaking concepts is perhaps best exemplified in the story of wampum—the most important shell bead in North American history. Although wampum existed before the arrival of Europeans, it was the introduction of steel tools by the Dutch that greatly expanded wampum production into an industry that had broad political and economic ramifications for both Indians and colonists.

Beads of Indigenous Materials

While North American Indians typically made beads from local materials, they eagerly sought imported stones, shells, and metals to make rare beads that would be prestigious. Extensive trade networks crisscrossed North America. Native copper from Lake Superior, sometimes in the form of rolled tubular or rounded beads, was traded several hundred miles away in the Midwest and Woodlands from as early as 3000 B.C.[2] Prehistoric Southwestern cultures traded turquoise throughout the western regions and into Mexico. Marine shells from the Florida coasts were traded north, made into beads in Illinois, then distributed to the agricultural societies of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Illinois river valleys about A.D. 1100. Dentalium shells from the Pacific Northwest were traded throughout the Plains, and Minnesota pipestone (catlinite) was widely traded through the Great Lakes and Plains regions for more than two thousand years.

Beads made from locally available freshwater pearls were popular among prehistoric cultures of the Mississippi and other major river valleys of the Midwest. Both marine and freshwater pearls were reportedly seen by early European explorers in many parts of the New World, including Virginia, Maine, and California.[3] Archaeologist Stuart Struever, in his book *Koster*, describes the discovery near St. Louis of a first-century A.D. grave in which a high-ranking member of the Hopewell culture was buried in a log tomb with armlets and necklaces of freshwater pearls:

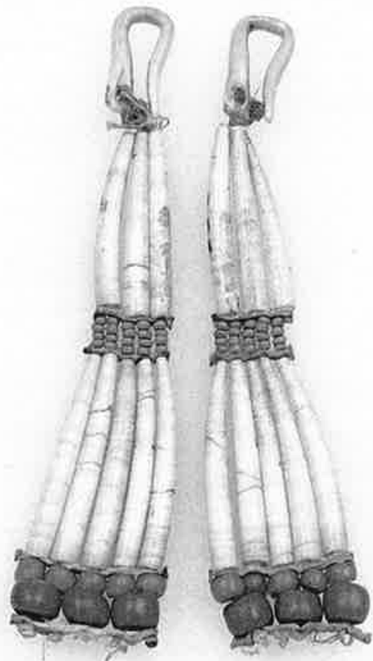
> The chest of one woman was covered with quantities of freshwater pearls and cut-shell beads. The way these were arranged suggests that they had been attached to a garment, now deteriorated. As I looked at the carefully placed pearls and beads, I experienced one of those moments that occasionally come over every archaeologist of feeling intensely the common humanity we share with the people whose past we have discovered. The woman apparently was among the elite in her society. Her garment must have been made very painstakingly to achieve that effect and I suspect it was a sign of her rank or wealth or both. Pearls are very rare in freshwater clams, and it would have taken an incredible amount of human energy to gather that many.[4]

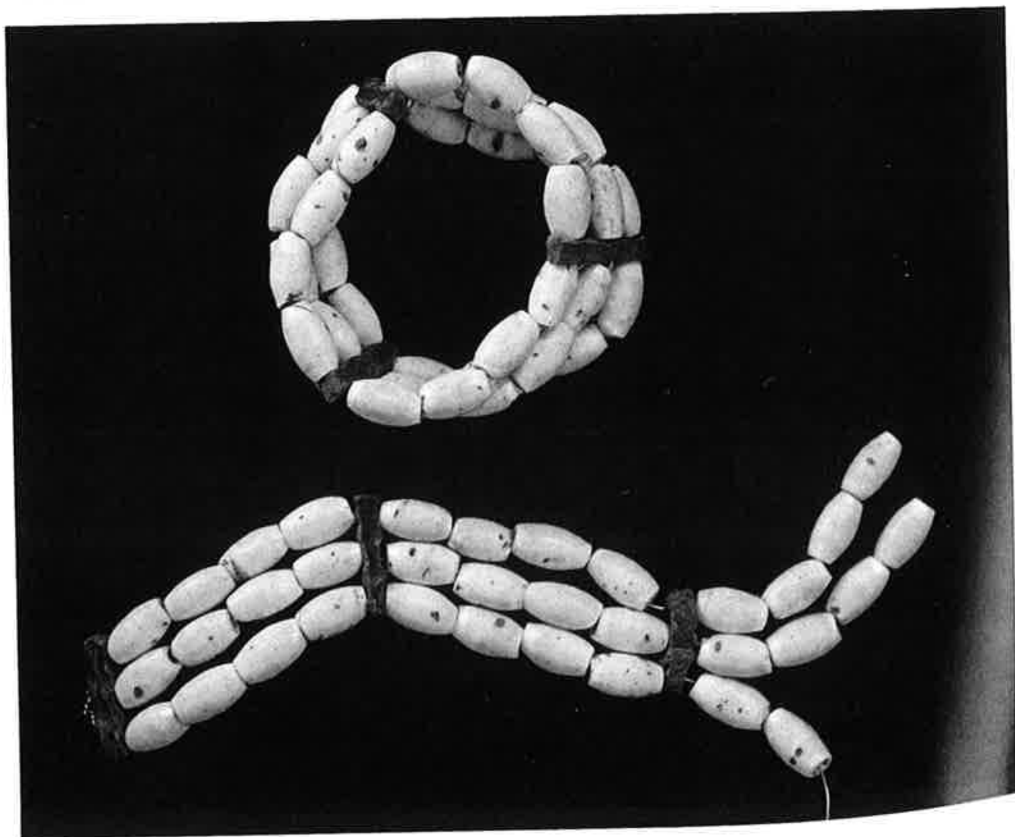
We must rely on the observations of early travelers and explorers for our knowledge of beads made of perishable materials. It has been recorded that Pocahontas wore a necklace she made of rose hips. Along the eastern coast of North America, the seeds of chinquapins were frequently worn and eaten right off the string.[5]

Indians used and esteemed beads made of shell above all others, and the raw materials often traveled great distances. Shell of the *Busycon*, a species of conch found along the Florida coast, was traded north on the Mississippi River into the Midwest. Pacific coast shells, particularly *haliotis* (abalone), are commonly discovered in prehistoric sites in New Mexico and Arizona. A string of fifty beads made of *olivella* shells

OPPOSITE, TOP: 273. *On-site photograph of an adult human skeleton lying on a bed of thousands of shell disk beads. The bead mosaic resembles a hawk in profile. This skeleton was excavated at Cahokia, a major center of the Mississippian culture (A.D. 900–1350), near St. Louis, Missouri. Marine shells found eight hundred to a thousand miles from their original Florida Gulf or Atlantic Coast sources are evidence of trade between cultures in the southeast and Midwest during prehistoric times*

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: 274. *Large black stone bead attributed to the Chumash Indians of the Pacific Coast (southern California). The shell inlays are held in place by asphaltum. Length, 3.8 cm. Private collection*





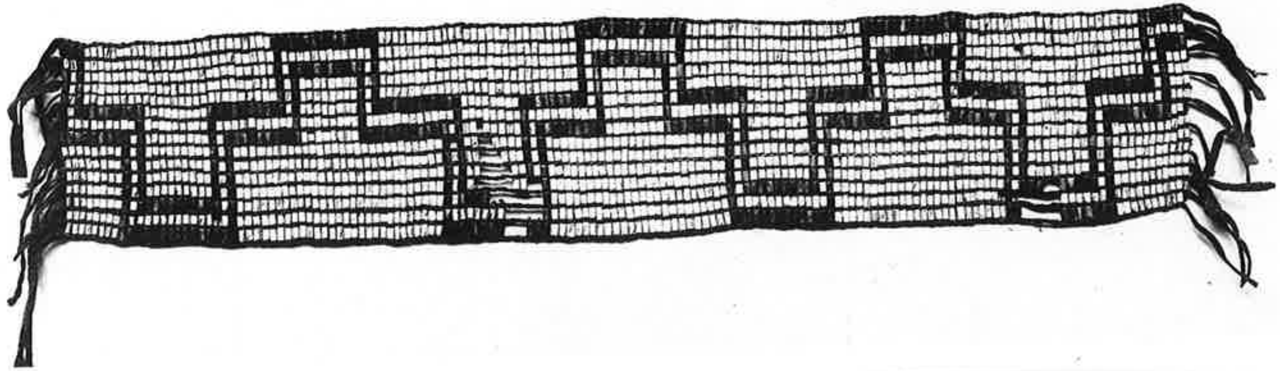
TOP LEFT: 275. *Earrings of* Dentalium pretiosum *shells and glass trade beads, worn by an Inuit girl. They were collected at Hershell Island. Dentalium shell had both monetary and decorative value. The shell was distributed through intertribal barter from the Pacific to the Arctic. Length, 6.7 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

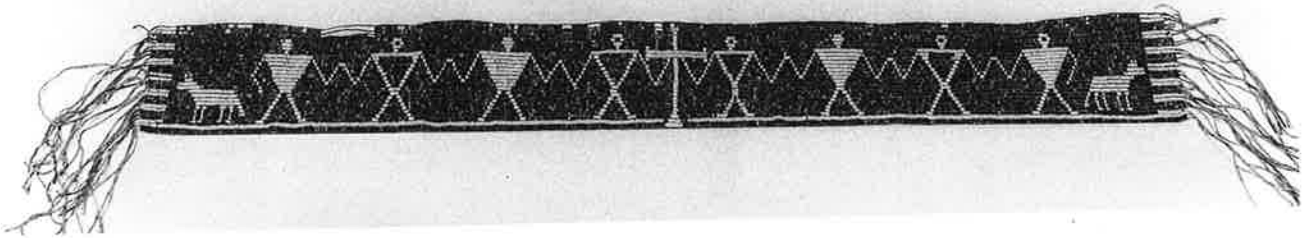
TOP RIGHT: 276. *A Yakima bridal headdress. The bride's wealth is reflected in the use of highly valued dentalium shells. The Chinese coins and imported blue glass beads came into the Northwest with the trans-Pacific fur trade during the mid-nineteenth century.*[11] *Length, 32 cm. Denver Art Museum*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: 277. *Three-string bracelet of white, opaque, wound-glass trade beads, collected in the Upper Missouri Valley in the 1850s. They are typical of the large, coarse beads carried by early Plains traders. Length, 25.4 cm. Smithsonian Institution, Washington,* D.C.

ABOVE: 278. *Glass beads dating to the early Spanish exploration of the New World, similar to those mentioned in Columbus's log entry of December 3, 1492: "The admiral caused them [the Arawak Indians of Watling Island in the Bahamas] to be given hawks bells and brass rings, and small green and yellow glass beads with which they were well content."*[III] *Typical beads: diameters from 0.3 to 0.45 cm. Private collection*

LEFT: 279. *Dakota (Sioux) necklace of Venetian beads, fossil crinoid stems, and bear claws strung on leather thongs, c. 1850. Grizzly bear claws were highly prized and worn only by leaders. Length, 49 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*





TOP: 280. *A wampum or "freedom" belt, believed to have been given to William Penn by the Delawares in Pennsylvania in about 1762. The belt is said to commemorate land transactions at Shackamaxon, the estate where Penn lived. Wampum belts are one of the few remaining records of the many negotiations between Penn and the Indians of Pennsylvania. The belt's geometrical design symbolizes the meandering paths of the Indians across their land. As far as the Indians were concerned, when they gave this belt to the colonial representatives, they retained the right to cross their land when needed, an interpretation that led to many title disputes.*[IV] *Length, 62.3 cm. Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York*

ABOVE: 281. *A Christianity conversion belt. This late seventeenth-*

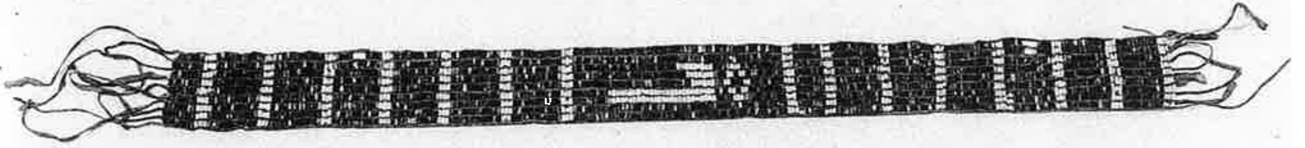
originating on the California coast, was excavated from a Nevada site dating to 6000 B.C.[6]

The best-known shell bead was wampum: small, cylindrical, centrally drilled white and purple beads made primarily of the quahog clamshell. Strung on leather thongs or woven into belts with sinew thread, wampum was sometimes worn as decoration but developed far greater significance as currency and was used for objects commemorating major political and ceremonial events.

Averaging a quarter of an inch in length and an eighth of an inch in diameter, the white beads were made from the columnella of univalves, periwinkles, or conchs, while white and purple beads came from the Atlantic Ocean clamshell. Although the introduction of European steel tools facilitated the manufacture of large quantities of wampum, the bead appears to have already occupied an important place in pre-European East Coast Indian life. In 1497, Jacques Cartier, a French explorer, encountered shell beads he called "esurgny" near present-day Montreal. "The thing most precious that they have in all the world, they call it esurgny; it is as white as any snow: they take [the shells] in the [St. Lawrence River]....Of them they make beads and wear them about their necks as we do gold, accounting it the most precious thing in the world." Esurgny was possibly wampum. After Cartier, wampum is not mentioned for over a hundred years. Later, the Dutch recognized its economic, social, and political importance to the Indians and introduced the concept to English settlers in 1628.[7]

North American Indians had no written languages, therefore messages were transmitted through symbolic designs. Woven wampum belts developed as a device for recording important events. Signaling peaceful, warlike, or other intentions between tribes (or between tribes and the colonists), the belts were manufactured using beads of one color, with symbolic designs in another color. White represented peace, promise, and good intentions, whereas purple conveyed hostility, sadness, or death. A white belt might therefore express an alliance or peace; a purple one announced war.

Although no Indian culture developed a universally recognized series of hiero-



century wampum belt, which is 27 rows wide and has nearly 10,000 beads, certifies the conversion of an Indian tribe or village to Christianity. The white beads symbolize the pascal lamb, Christian cross, and the white man, while the darker ones represent the Indian. Length, 153.7 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal

LEFT: 282. *A lithograph published in 1825 depicting Nicholas Vincent Tsawanhonei, chief of the Huron, holding the wampum belt commemorating the Treaty of Montreal, an agreement reached between the French and Huron allies and the English. It was recorded in wampum in 1701. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

ABOVE: 283. *The Wampum belt commemorating the Treaty of Montreal depicted in plate 282. Length, 89.9 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

ABOVE: 284. *Detail of a quilled bridle cover. Quillwork, a decorative technique created by North American Indians, became the prototype for much native woven and embroidered beadwork. Denver Art Museum*

RIGHT: 285. *A Cheyenne pipebag, c. 1880, that combines beadwork with quilling. Small glass seed beads are used here to reproduce drawings of men's war exploits. The subject matter is unusual. Beadwork was made by Plains women, who typically created abstract geometric designs, leaving it to the men to paint naturalistic forms.*

In most tribes, tobacco was cultivated and smoked by men only. The tobacco plant had a sacred character and was invariably used on solemn occasions, accompanied by prayers. This finely beaded bag depicts the "awe and respect with which the ceremonial pipe and tobacco were treated. When not in ceremonial use, the pipe bowl and stem were taken apart and stored separately in the bag; only when they were united did the pipe actually become charged with supernatural power."[V] *Length, 99 cm. Denver Art Museum*

TOP: 286. *Iroquois (Mohawk) womens' half-leggings of fine blue trade cloth with white, yellow, red, and green beadwork. The beadwork design is adapted from ribbon-work appliqué, a European style taught to young Huron and Iroquois girls in French mission schools. Made in 1894. Length, 42.5 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

BOTTOM: 287. *Micmac female headdress of blue black trade cloth, with double-curve design and rows of scallops, created in fine seed beads and sewn with moose hair. These floral patterns, typical of prevailing French neoclassical taste, merged neatly with curvilinear forms used by Woodland Indians for centuries. Bilaterally symmetrical patterns, such as this double curve, may originally have been made by Indian women literally biting patterns into folded sheets of birchbark. Length, 39.3 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

North America: *Distribution of Beads and Bead Materials, Prehistory to Early 20th Century* A.D.

glyphics, the wampum patterns were known by most tribes. A few images were almost immediately recognizable: a hatchet design woven into a belt meant war, while figures of two or more people holding hands meant peace and friendship. The width and length of the belt corresponded to the importance of the event.[8]

A simple square weave was used to make wampum belts. The warp threads consisted either of leather or fiber cords, while the weft elements were made of vegetal fibers or sinew threads (fig. 7). The first officially recorded wampum belts were made by the Pennsylvania Susquehannock Indians in the 1620s.[9] Twenty years later, wampum belts were reported among the Iroquois, who eventually dominated their manufacture and trade among Indian groups. European colonists employed wampum in transactions with the Indians and among themselves. All thirteen original colonies used wampum as currency. Massachusetts made it legal tender in November 1637. New York was still fixing the exchange rate in 1701.[10]

The use of wampum spread throughout North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is found in Rock Island, Wisconsin, about 1675–1700, and as far south as the mouth of the Mississippi River by 1762. Lewis and Clark gave it to the Sioux and Arikara on the Missouri River.[11] Eventually, the demand for the bead exceeded the capacity of East Coast Indians to provide it. As a result, European colonists in New York and New Jersey started manufacturing wampum in the 1740s for use in the Indian trade. A wampum factory established in the mid-eighteenth century by John Campbell of Passaic, New Jersey, was operated by his descendants until 1917. In addition to the manufacture of wampum, some tubular glass beads seem to have been made to imitate wampum as well.

The Glass Bead Trade

Most of the beads introduced to the New World by Europeans were made of glass, a material unknown to the native cultures.[12] The first documented glass bead in North America was excavated from the site of Vinland, the short-lived Viking colony situated in what is now Newfoundland and abandoned about 1347. This clear, spherical bead may have been part of a rosary worn by a Viking woman. The Vikings traded extensively with northeastern Indian groups, so it is not certain whether the first glass bead was a personal ornament or imported for trade.[13]

Prehistoric North Americans' appreciation for beads helped the Spanish explore and colonize the New World. One of Christopher Columbus's first acts upon reaching the Bahamas in 1492 was to offer glass beads to the Arawak Indians. His October 12 log entry is the earliest record of glass beads in America:

> A large crowd of natives gathered there....In order to win the friendship and affection of that people and because I was convinced that their conversion to our Holy Faith would be better promoted through love than through force, I placed some of them with red caps and have some strings of beads which they placed around their necks, and with other trifles of insignificant worth that delighted them and by which we have got a wonderful hold on their affections.[14]

Using glass beads to win Indian friendship was a prevalent custom in the days when England, France, Sweden, Holland, and Spain all vied for control of North American territories. The practice lasted through the American Revolution, when gift-giving gradually gave way to trading beads for fur.

Through the fur trade, glass beads had a significant effect on North American Indian life. Early explorers found the American continent teeming with wildlife and

TOP LEFT: 288. *The beadwork designs on this early twentieth-century Inuit woman's parka* (amautik) *reflect two important eras of Eskimo history. The tiered geometric designs and triangular forms recall patterns of skin tattooing, a traditional ritual practiced by Inuit women. The use of glass beads and the decorative floral motifs show the influence of trade with foreign whalers.*[VI] *Length, 124 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

TOP RIGHT: 289. *An Inuit dance apron (probably early twentieth century). Length, 51 cm. Collection Tambaran Gallery,*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: 290. *Inuit amulets from Koopuck, c. 1875. Ivory fetishes or charms in the form of fish, seals, and whales, were combined with glass trade beads and attached to pieces of skin. The red glass beads are Venetian; the deep blue and turquoise wound-glass beads are possibly of Chinese manufacture.*

Fetishes were used as aids in capturing animals and in appeasing their spirits. Length, 10 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal

ABOVE: 291. *An early eighteenth-century European pocketbook, decorated with flame-stitch needlework. Width, 21.7 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

LEFT: 292. *This Cree firebag belonged to Chief Bear. A slender hide bag with a long fringe incorporating brass beads, it has fine solid beadwork in a diamond design on one side and a serrated design on the other. The beadwork is obviously influenced by the flame stitch, a Hungarian needlework technique of the kind used on the European pocketbook in plate 291. Length (including fringe), 93.9 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

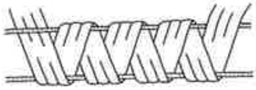


FIG. 2. Appliqué Quillwork: *quills are folded between two rows of stitches.*

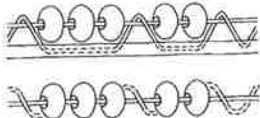


FIG. 3. Appliqué Beadwork: *overlay or spot stitch.*

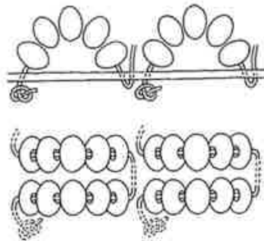


FIG. 4. Appliqué Beadwork: *"lazy" stitch.*

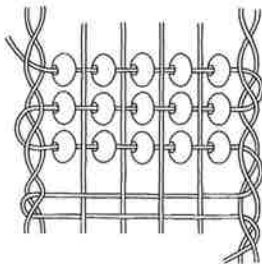


FIG. 5. Woven Beadwork: *single-thread weft and warp.*

soon established a system in which horses, guns, alcohol, and other items were exchanged for the fur pelts so coveted in Europe. When glass beads were introduced as a trade item, they were widely sought after by Indians for their colors and ease of use. They often replaced Indian-made beads of bone, shell, copper, and stone.

Beads were important to the early fur trade because they were compact and easily transportable. One beaver skin was worth a six-foot string of small blue beads in Sault Sainte Marie in 1860, or one "bunch" of seed beads at Fort McPherson in the Canadian Northwest. The red bead known as *cornaline d'Aleppo,* or "Hudson Bay beads" to traders in the north, carried an exchange value of six beads to one beaver skin.[15]

Lewis and Clark found the so-called Russian (a smooth or faceted blue glass) bead to be especially valued by the Indians on the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest (Bead Chart 112). They noted that:

> In the evening seven Indians of the Clot Sop nation came over in a canoe; they brought with them two sea-otter skins for which they asked blue beads and such high prices that [we] were unable to purchase them without reducing our small stock of merchandise. Merely to try the Indian who had one of these skins, I offered him my watch, handkerchief, a bunch of red beads, and a dollar of the American coin, all of which he refused and demanded '*ti-a-co-mo-shack*' which is chief's beads and the most common blue beads, but few of which we have at this time.[16]

Catholic missionaries in North America regularly gave beads as gifts to potential Indian converts. Writing from the Illinois country in 1694, Father Gravier noted that: "It is true that the hope of getting a red bead—which is a fruit the size of a small bean, which has been sent to us from Martinique or other Islands (Oh, that I had a bushel of them!)...incites the children to answer well; but they must answer very well for several days to obtain either the rosary, the red bead, or the cross."[17]

The first glass beads traded in quantity were for necklaces that were, for the most part, available in white, blue, and black. These colors were cheaper to produce than red or yellow beads, thus providing a greater margin of profit to the trader. Indians may also have requested beads in white, blue, and black because they suggested the white and purple shades so treasured in shell wampum. Blue beads were particularly popular in the Plains, possibly because that color was rare in Indian dye sources.[18] In the western Great Lakes region about 1675, the French introduced smaller "pony beads," thus named because they were transported by traders on ponies. Beginning about 1840, colorful, tiny seed beads, usually two millimeters or less in diameter, were traded in bulk, the result of the standardization of manufacturing techniques in Venice and Bohemia, which made it possible to produce beads of uniform size, shape, and color.

Polychrome glass beads were particularly prized by Plains tribes and were used as offerings to the spirits. These complex glass beads, of Venetian or occasionally Bohemian manufacture, were not as widely distributed as glass seed beads. Probably due to their greater cost, polychrome glass beads are found sparingly in archaeological sites throughout most of the continent.

There is much confusion over how glass beads were introduced to Arctic peoples. It is likely that "Russian" or "Siberian" beads were not made in Russia, but were carried by Russian traders to the west coast of North America, subsequently moving eastward via intertribal trade. These beads may have been acquired by the Russians in China (where they had been imported from Europe) and brought to the Northwest coast as part of the fur trade. Alternatively, the beads were made in Venice or Bohemia,

shipped to Hong Kong by English trading companies, and traded to Russians who brought them to the Northwest coast; or they may have come directly from Europe, brought by English merchants to the Hudson Bay Company posts in Canada.[19]

There is, incidentally, no evidence for the legend that tells of the Dutchman Peter Minuit purchasing Manhattan for twenty-four dollars worth of glass beads. This colorful story was first mentioned by historian Martha J. Lamb in 1877 and subsequently repeated in numerous books as well as a famous painting by Alfred Frederick.[20]

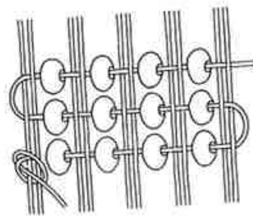


FIG. 6. Woven Beadwork: *single-thread weft and double warp.*

The Impact of Imported Glass Seed Beads

American Indians used beads in two basic ways: stringing and beadwork. Beadwork involved appliqué (embroidery) on a piece of animal skin or cloth, or the creation of a fabric of beads by weaving them on a loom. With the introduction of seed beads, the ways of decorating clothing and objects changed dramatically. Whereas large beads were strung and pony beads used sparingly to outline areas and edges, glass seed beads, aided by the availability of thin steel needles, covered entire surfaces.

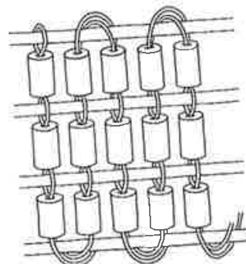


FIG. 7. Woven Beadwork: *cylindrical shell beads on double weft and single-warp threads. This was the technique generally used for making wampum belts.*

Traditional decorative methods were influenced significantly by the introduction of seed beads. Large necklace and pony beads did not supplant the indigenous practice of quilling and painting. However, with the appearance of quantities of inexpensive seed beads, women began to sew, embroider, and weave beadwork equal in quality to the finest quillwork and paintings.

Quillwork was a unique American Indian technique. Each region had its own styles, colors, and sewing methods; it was developed to perfection by tribes of the Pacific Northwest, Great Lakes, and eastern Plains before the first European beads entered the New World. Whitish porcupine quills were softened in water, flattened, colored with vegetable dyes, and fastened to skins in patterns resembling embroidery (fig. 2).

Appliquéd glass beadwork developed from this earlier quillwork. Indian women, who had previously decorated objects by the time-consuming technique of quilling, quickly realized that many familiar patterns could be executed more easily in beads when cloth fabrics replaced buckskin. By 1800, quillwork appears to have been generally abandoned, although in a few areas, it continued long after beads were available.

Woven beadwork produced in the Woodlands, Great Lakes, and eastern Plains was significantly influenced by quilling. At first sight, the ribbed surface of quillwork can be mistaken for small cylindrical beads strung on the weft, the thread carried by the shuttle. A variety of weaving techniques, usually based on the square weave, was used for making beaded wampum belts, sashes, and bags.

In glass beadwork appliqué, two basic stitches are encountered: the "overlaid" or "spot" stitch (also called "couching") and the "lazy" stitch (figs. 3 and 4). The sewing technique of the overlaid stitch is like that of quillwork: several beads on a sinew thread are attached to buckskin or cloth by another sinew thread sewn across it. This stitch is ideal for the floral and other curvilinear patterns favored by the Woodland Indians.

The "lazy" stitch was primarily used by Plains tribes for geometric patterns not requiring the intricacy of the overlaid stitch. It consisted of rows of beads sewn only at the ends, creating the ridged or scalloped effect distinct to the central and western Plains. Lazy stitch—nicknamed for the ease with which it could be used to cover large areas—was an ideal technique for geometric and abstract forms characteristic of Plains art. It is also a perfect example of the type of beadwork that derived from designs previously done in quillwork.[21]

OVERLEAF: 293. *A Cherokee shoulder bag. The ammunition pouch carried by eighteenth-century British soldiers became the prototype for the shoulder bags worn as part of men's dress clothing among tribes in the southeastern U.S.*

Although the bilateral figures on the lower left strap resemble prehistoric Southeastern symbols engraved on shell and stone disks, the designs on this pouch were probably invented by the beadmaker.[VII] *Pouch: width, 20.3 cm. Denver Art Museum*

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294–97. *The beadwork designs on these four bandolier bags, dating to about 1875, illustrate the influence of the environment on the aesthetics of Indian groups in four geographic areas—the Woodlands, Great Lakes, and eastern and western Plains. In the eastern Woodlands, abundant plant life and soft, dappled light led to the use of curvilinear, flowing forms with naturalistic leaf and floral patterns (top left). For the western Plains tribes, the use of geometric, angular patterns mirrors the stark, strong forms so prevalent in dry grassland landscapes (bottom right).*[VIII] *The elaborate geometric patterning of the eastern Plains, on this Dakota (Sioux) bag (bottom left), which is said to have been owned by Sitting Bull, shows the influence of Caucasian rug designs on Plains Indian beadwork. Included in the household furnishings of settlers moving West, Oriental rugs became a source of new designs, which the Dakota incorporated into their beadwork. These patterns became identified as "Indian design" when taken East with the Buffalo Bill shows. Plate 297: length, 26.7 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

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Beadwork of the Plains Tribes

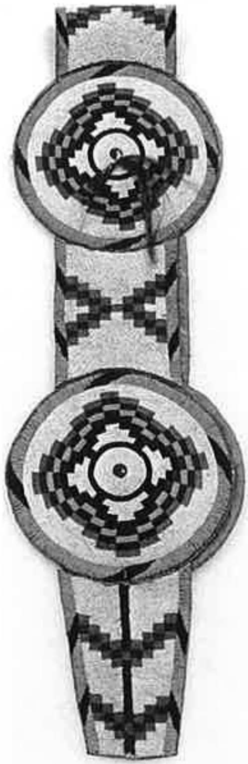
Indian cultures developed in ways that reflect their natural environment. Thus, the Haida of the Pacific Northwest, who lived in immense spruce and redwood forests, were prolific woodcarvers; the Pueblo people, whose lives were organized by mythology and rituals tied to maize agriculture, symbolized this ideology in much of their pottery; and the Plains people adorned their abundant supply of animal hides with paint, quills, and eventually beads. Frederick Dockstader explains in *Indian Art in America*: "Their work revolved and grew out of the natural resources provided by their Creator. In turning these resources into artistic objects, they returned the compliment."[22]

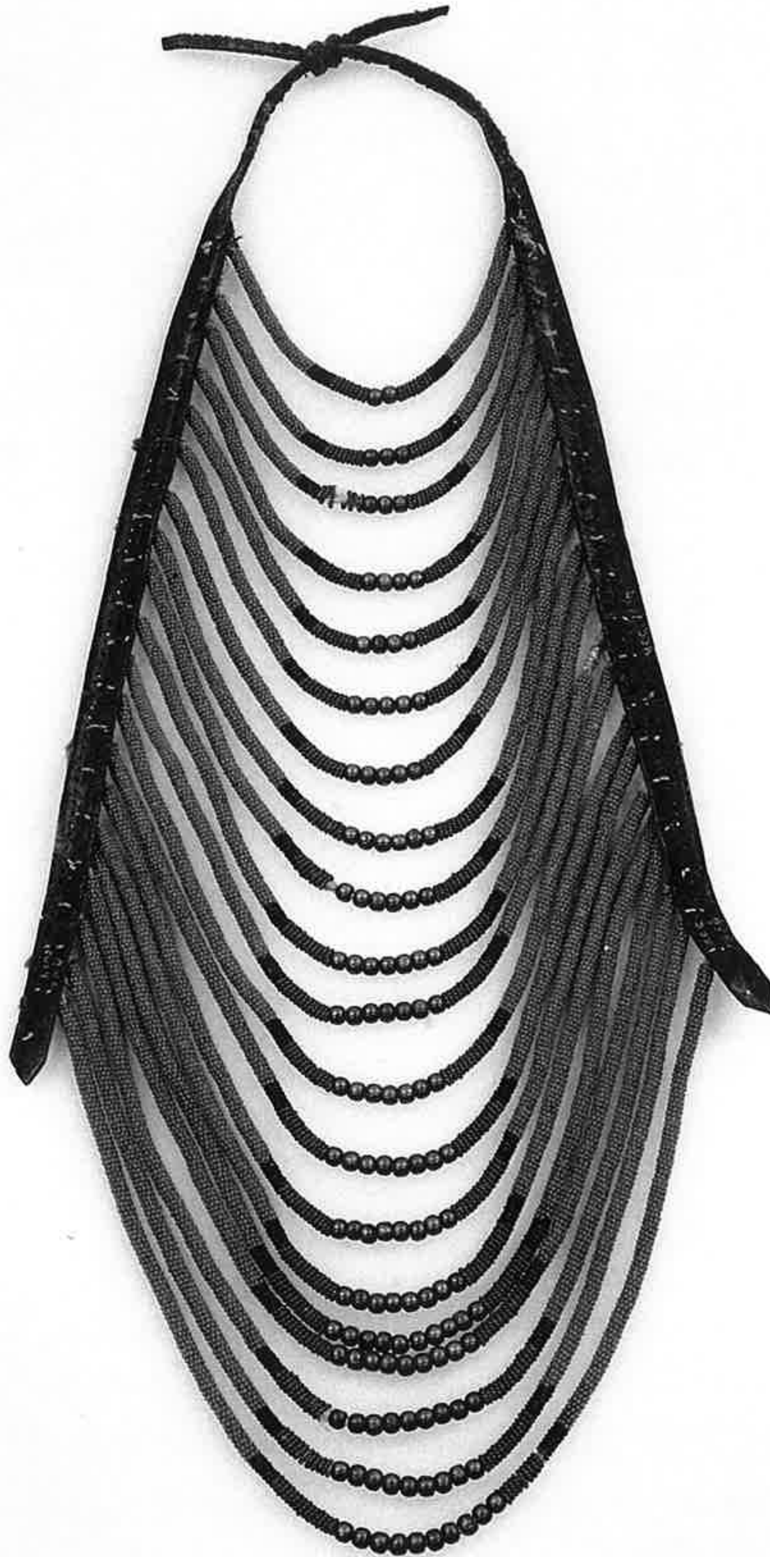
The people of the Plains, a vast grassland stretching from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains, depended almost entirely on the buffalo for food, clothing, shelter, and most of their raw materials. Their nomadic existence, intimately tied to the seasonal movements of the buffalo herds, precluded many material possessions. Consequently they wore small, easily transportable objects that served several functions. A beaded bag of soft leather could be worn, hung in the tent as decoration, and rolled up for removal to a new campsite at a more promising hunting ground.

Although personal possessions were few, Plains Indians fashioned garments from animal skins and elaborately decorated them with beadwork. Each tribe employed its own distinctive designs and techniques. The care devoted to adornment reflected their views of the spiritual world. Respect for the buffalo was paramount, for this animal

OPPOSITE: 298. *A Dakota (Sioux) woman with a beaded dentalium shell shirt and long dentalium shell and leather earrings—typical adornment for Plains women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Photograph taken c. 1886. Smithsonian Office of Anthropology, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection*

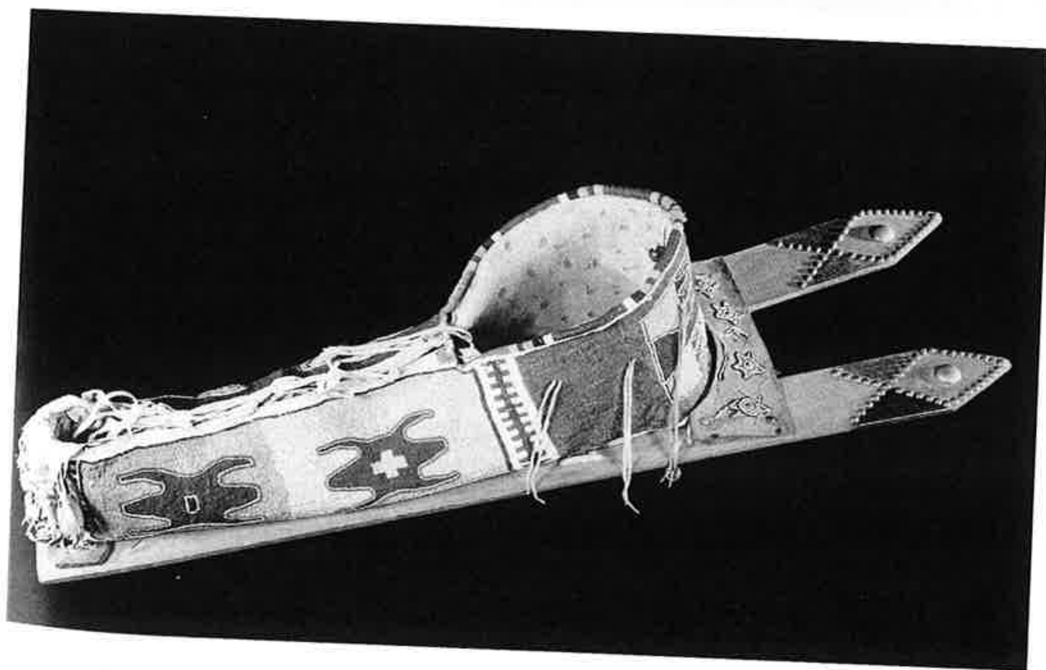
299. *Blackfoot Indians in full beaded regalia, Calgary, Alberta. Photograph taken about 1920. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*





ABOVE: 300. *Beadwork blanket strip used to cover the seams of the buffalo robe of an Assiniboine Indian. Similar objects are held by two Blackfoot men (far right) in plate 299. Rondel: diameter, 24.5 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

RIGHT: 301. *Blackfoot loop necklace from the Canadian Plains. This is a man's necklace of brass and colored glass trade beads strung on rawhide. Length: 63.5 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*



TOP: 302. *Dakota (Sioux) girl's dress, made of buckskin covered with solid beadwork sewn in "lazy" stitching (see Fig. 3), c. 1880–85. This technique is effective for decorating large areas with the strong, geometric designs characteristic of western Plains art. The light blue background is a typically Dakotan motif. Length, 28.5 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

BOTTOM: 303. *Many American Indian women went to great lengths to provide secure carrying cases for infants. This can be seen in the elaborate care taken to decorate the cradleboard for the child of Kiowa Chief I-See-O. Reinforced with a protective rawhide lining and supported on a wooden frame, the cradleboard could be carried on the mother's back or leaned against a tree or rock. The pointed stakes in the frame of this Plains tribe cradleboard shielded the baby in case of a fall from a horse.*[IX] *Length, 112 cm. Smithsonian Institution, Washington,* D.C.

TOP: 304. *The red ochre backing identifies these as the moccasins of a shaman. The circle is a recurring (Blackfoot) Plains motif; it has neither beginning nor end and symbolizes the sun, the moon, the calendar year, and life itself.*[x] *Length, 26.7 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

BOTTOM: 305. *A buckskin "dream vision" shirt with decoration oriented to the wearer ("self-directed"). It is painted, beaded, quilled, and adorned with strands of human hair. The symbols stand for two red hands. Length (across shoulders), 160 cm. Acquired by the Smithsonian Institution in 1899 from Crow Indians in Montana. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*

OPPOSITE: 306. *A Midewinin song "reminder" panel. The Midewinin, or Grand Medicine Society, of the Great Lakes region was an institution that cured the sick and functioned on behalf of the tribe's welfare. Since ceremonies were lengthy, there were memory aids to help recall the correct sequence of prayer and song. Members carried cloth plaques like this one to help them remember the magic songs. Length, 31.8 cm. Denver Art Museum*

alone supplied all the basic needs of the community. The relationship was refined:

> The skins of game were more than just practical, everyday material for clothing and shelter for they contained some of the spiritual power of the animals from which they had been taken. In life the skin had given the animal its form. Wearing it, or resting in its shelter, symbolized and reinforced the constant and powerful spiritual bond between game and the people whose survival depended on the continued generosity of animals in surrendering their lives. Beautifying a dressed skin not only benefited its human owner but also did honor to the spirit of the animal. Art was part of the customary, indeed obligatory, propitiation of the slain animal to obtain its good will and prevent its wrath and revenge.[23]

Plains Indians believed the world was filled with power that resided in objects, animals, or even people. To obtain this power and to establish a communication with his spiritual guardians, the Indian kept a solitary vigil. This visionary experience often produced "vision art"—highly personal, original creations. It was felt that knowledge obtained in this manner would diminish in sacred power if shared with other people. During these meditations, various devices were used to direct and concentrate thought. "A comparison with the use of mantras in Buddhistic meditation is justified insofar as many Indians refer to their spiritual guardians as 'soul-spirit.' It resides in themselves. Self-directed decorations are Native American mantras."[24]

The Plains people decorated themselves, their homes, and their possessions; above all, they ornamented and honored their horses. Horses, introduced in the Southwest by the early Spanish explorers, gave the Plains Indians much greater mobility. With the horse, buffalo hunting shifted from drive-and-ambush techniques to collective hunting, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of buffalo killed.

The Crow of the upper Missouri River were among the richest and most beautifully adorned Plains tribes. Charles Larpenteur, who traded with the Crow in 1833, described the visible results of their abstinence: "As they do not drink, their trade was all in substantial goods, which kept them well dressed, and extremely rich in horses; so it really was a beautiful sight to see that tribe on the move."[25] Crow beadworkers lavished care and skill on paraphernalia that was visible when the camp was on the march; special emphasis was given to the accoutrements of the horses.

Much of the Plains Indians' decoration was created specifically to be viewed in motion. The Indian craftsman had the "movement of the body, the graceful motion of the horse, and the wafting of the Plains breeze in mind when he developed the corona of feathers, the elaborate fringe, and the many pendants of cloth, leather and beadwork."[26]

Beadworkers took pride in their ability to do fine work. If a man wished to compete with a neighbor who owned a pair of fully beaded moccasins, he could have his wife bead his moccasins on the soles as well as on the tops. (However, moccasins beaded on the soles, known as "spirit moccasins," were designed primarily for burials.) A competitive woman might bead her dress all the way to the bottom edge instead of restricting her beads to the yoke.

Intertribal trade and gift-giving often involved objects of beadwork, resulting in the frequent merging and reinterpretation of styles. For example, the floral motifs of the northeastern Woodland were transformed into stylized floral patterns of the Great Lakes (plates 294–97). As tribes moved west in search of game and fur in the nineteenth century, artisans of different tribes were in contact more often.

Exposure to European styles directly affected Indian creativity. Along the colonial frontier, Indians observed the floral motifs on furniture and clothing of the

307. *The Metis of southern Canada are people of mixed Indian and European ancestry who built a distinct intermediate culture. This mid-nineteenth century costume combines native and foreign elements. The coat is an exact copy of a Prince Albert jacket, although it is made of leather and decorated with Indian porcupine quill embroidery. The half-leggings have typical Metis beaded floral patterns. Denver Art Museum*

ABOVE: 308. *Blackfoot ceremonial "medicine pipe." Pipes of this kind, with long, elaborate stems, were used for formal smoking at important meetings, including religious ceremonies to summon divine help in various undertakings. This pipe is decorated with an unusually large number of beads. Length, 95.2 cm. Plates 308–9: McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

RIGHT: 309. *Blackfoot stone and leather war clubs of various types were used in hand-to-hand combat. This aggressive, beaded image was intended to be seen by the enemy in the last flash of his life. Length, 50.8 cm.*

ABOVE: 310. *Cheyenne saddle blanket from the 1840s decorated in typical western Plains beadwork. The availability of large "pony" beads led to the design of bold, geometric patterns. Length, 178 cm. Denver Art Museum*

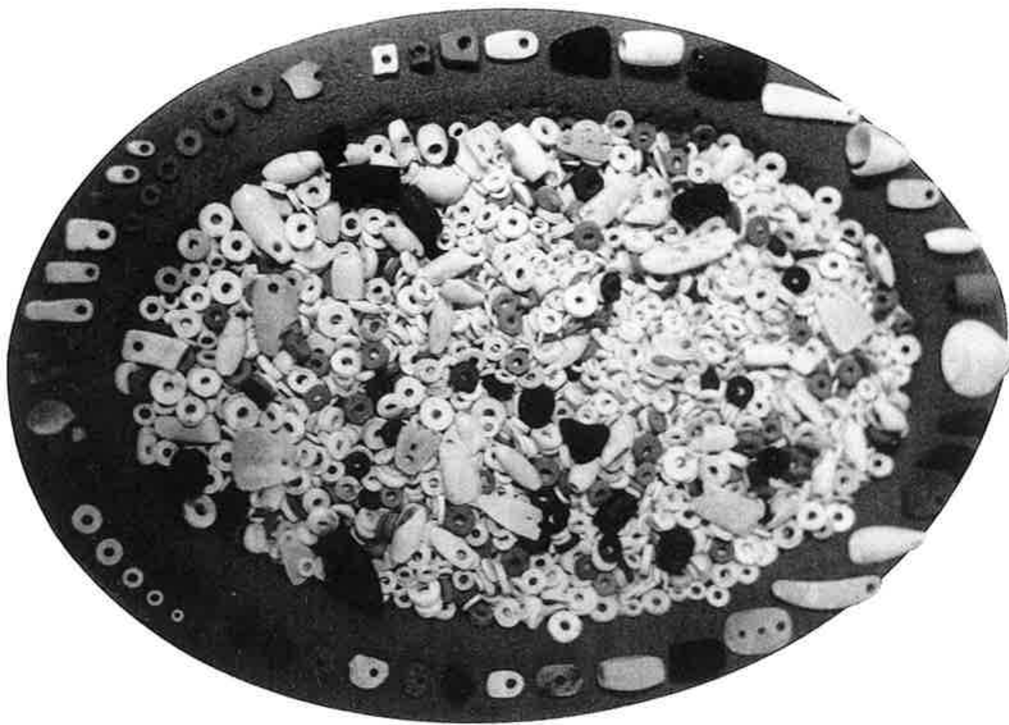
TOP LEFT: 311. *A late nineteenth-century Metis dog blanket and bell harness from the MacKenzie River basin. The Metis traded their craftwork throughout the northern and central Plains and into the Northwest Territories.*

The western Sioux referred to the Red River Metis in Minnesota as the "flower beadwork people," and throughout the Northwest many Indians confirm the Metis origin of their own floral designs.[XI] *These artifacts reflect the Indians' encounter with European culture on the American frontier.*[XII] *McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

BOTTOM LEFT: 312. *A Cree ceremonial saddle from the early 1900s owned by Yellow Horse. The form of the saddle shows early Spanish influence, yet it has the Woodland style of floral decoration, which had spread to the Plains. Length, 48.2 cm. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal*

ABOVE: 313. *Turquoise frog beads from excavations at Salmon Ruin, New Mexico. Salmon was a site of the Anasazi culture and dates to the late eleventh century* A.D. *Frogs were a symbol of water and fertility to the Anasazi. Right bead: length, 0.9 cm. San Juan Archaeological Research Center and Library, Bloomfield, New Mexico*

RIGHT: 314. *A nineteenth-century stone fetish from Zia Pueblo, New Mexico. Stone fetishes were kept by Pueblo families as personal spirit helpers. This example may represent the twin war gods. The shell bead attachments (including abalone from California) are gifts of gratitude to the spirit represented by the fetish. Height, 21 cm. Denver Art Museum*



315. *A collection of typical bead shapes and materials (turquoise, stone, and shell) of the prehistoric Anasazi culture (A.D. 400–1500). These beads, pendants, and inlay pieces were buried in a pottery jar. The 2,969 items are so varied in size, shape, and materials that it has been suggested they may represent the stock of some ancient trader.*

Beads are found in quantity in many prehistoric Southwestern excavations. For example, at Chetro Ketl ruin in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, an excavation of the Great Kiva (subterranean shrine) disclosed over 17,000 beads of shell and stone in strands up to seventeen feet long.[XIII] *Mesa Verde Museum, Colorado*

Dutch, German, English, Swedish, and French settlers. Religious orders in French Quebec established mission schools where the local Huron and Iroquois girls were taught embroidery, mainly in the floral designs of the French Renaissance. Substituting dyed moose hair for silk thread, eighteenth-century Indian girls in eastern Canada developed an elaborate floral style that was also incorporated into beadwork.

European decorative styles appear to have had a marked influence on some tribes. Similarities between the beadwork on Sioux bags and the designs on Caucasian rugs, much used in America at that time, were caused by "settlers moving west with their possessions [who] might have brought such rugs, and the Sioux and other Plains Indians might have seen them in homes, or at trading posts, and finding that the geometrical patterns were not so different from their own, adopted some of the new elements" (plate 296).[27]

Eventually, beaded artifacts were produced by the Indians specifically for European tastes. Many of the early explorers and traders collected examples of native arts and crafts and sent them home. A strong interest in these articles developed among the European elite, and this stimulated production of highly decorated objects for export. The gradual shift from products made for tribal use to mass-produced beadwork souvenirs reflected the Indians' absorption into the modern American economic system.

American Indians have never ceased to love beads and beadwork. Today, on several Plains reservations, notably the Lakota of the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations, beautiful traditional beading continues. East of the Plains as well, American Indian beadwork is still very much alive. It has experienced a rebirth which can be seen at any powwow in Wisconsin, Michigan, or New York.[28]

In the Southwest, Navajo and Pueblo artisans create well-crafted bead jewelry that reflects the influence of the ancient Hohokam, Mogollon, and Anasazi cultures. Working in turquoise, jet, stone, bone, coral, and shell, the same materials used for the past six thousand years, Indians of the Southwest still maintain a vital bead industry with little dependence on glass beads.