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BEADS; THE ROLE THEY PLAY IN AFRICAN AND NORTH
AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURES.

BY
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INTRODUCTION.

The aim of this thesis is to contrast two different continents, Africa and North America, through their beads and beadwork.

The history of beads has many influencing factors in the cultures of both continents; such as environmental factors, the availability and distribution of raw materials and exposure to Western cultures and technology.

Many different environments influence both African and North American Indian societies. For example; deserts, tropical rain forests, woodlands, savannas, and fertile river valleys in Africa. Natural resources are distributed unevenly within these regions, and the structure of different, economic, political and religious systems reflects variations in the natural setting. For example, the arid grasslands and deserts of Kenya and the Sudan are occupied by subsistence-level herders, such as the Turkana, Samburu and Dinka tribes. As these tribes are constantly seeking fresh supplies of food and water for their livestock, bulky material possessions are impractical. Therefore, they focus on body adornment as a means of artistic expression, rather than decorating the home.

American Indian cultures developed in ways that reflect their natural environment as well. For example, the Plains tribes nomadic existence was linked with the seasonal movements of the buffalo herds, preventing many

material possessions.

Beads are central to the lives of all Africans. Beaded objects served to distinguish rulers from ordinary people, and were an essential part of everyday dress, worn to signify their age grade, marital status and station in society.

In contrast, the care the North American Indians devoted to adornment reflected their views of the spiritual world. The North American Indians believed the world was filled with power that resided in objects, animals, or even people. Their highly original creations of beadwork were produced to obtain this power and to establish a communication with his spiritual guardians.

The different tribes I have chosen illustrate the variations in both cultures. Although, due to lack of detailed research into selected tribes available, I have, on the whole, concentrated on the tribes where published research is available. I have described the characteristics of the different tribes showing visual references. These visual references are not described in detail, as the meanings behind the artefacts are not always clear.

It is important to understand that beads and beadwork of both cultures are highly personal to the tribes.

The National History Museum, Dublin, gave me permission to study and photograph their unpublished collections of North American Indian and African art. Their collections include beadwork from Canada and beads and beadwork from Africa, mainly. Having access to a primary source of

these artefacts added another, and important, dimension to this thesis.

HISTORY OF BEADS.

The earliest beads are known from the Paleolithic period. Among primitive peoples, they were worn as much for the magical as for decorative purposes. Therefore, little variation was allowed in their shapes and materials.

In prehistoric times beads were worn not only around the neck, but around the hips, over the ears, threaded through the nose, and even attached to the eyelashes. In the Stone Age, the earliest beads probably were plant seeds; but by Acheulian times, collars of seashells and small fossils were bored for stringing, and, from the Aurignacian and Magdalenian periods, whole necklaces of pierced shells have survived, some of them carried long distances from the sea. The shells were traded from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, in exchange for furs and good flint tools.

By the Neolithic period beads were universal, though probably more treasured for their effect of warding off evil than as decoration. A bone or stone bead of double-ax shape was popular in this period, especially in Northern Europe, Britain and Southern France. Beads of stone, bone and amber, pierced through their narrower ends, became common in the late Neolithic period in Scandinavia and are found in Megalithic graves of

western Europe.

Meanwhile, the Minoan and Mycenaean peoples of Crete and the Aegean developed gold beads of great originality and beauty in the shapes of polyps, lillies and lotuses; there are also a number of spherical Mycenaean gold beads decorated with granulated patterns. Beads of opaque glass with impressed circlets of glass of a different colour came to Britain and western Europe in the late Bronze Age. Their precise origin is unknown, but they were probably manufactured in the Mediterranean.

Since the Middle Ages, beads have been used on an extensive scale for trade and barter. Explorers have found them invaluable as gifts for primitive peoples, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this trade in beads was enormous. Their importance was well-known to the Spanish conquistadores, whose gifts of Renaissance glass beads manufactured in Venice are said to have been worn until recent times by primitive peoples of Brazil.

Not only have beads been used since the beginning of civilization as jewellery but also as ornamentation for clothing, known as beadwork. The simplest and earliest American Indian beadwork may have been a string made from bone, shell or seeds. 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. (Archaeologists working at Tule Springs, Nevada, have found a bead of

white caliche, possibly dating to 11,000 B.C., perhaps the earliest known bead from North America).

Imported glass beads, first introduced to North American native productions 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.

In the nineteenth century floral designs became popular. The Eskimos of Greenland and North America used beadwork to ornament thigh boots and tunics, the women achieving a magnificent cape effect with mesh beadwork. Some American aprons represent the best known form of beadworks since the nineteenth century; the designs are geometrical.

The earliest known African beads are dish-shaped forms made of ostrich eggshells recovered from Upper Paleolithic (10,000 B.C.) sites in Libya, and slightly later Neolithic sites in the Sudan.

Before imported glass beads were readily available in any quantity in East Africa, jewellery was made sometimes of iron and clay, but mainly of animal and vegetable substances: bone, hair, horn, wood, roots and seeds. Ostrich eggshells were chipped and rounded into beads, a process used in Kenya since at least 7,000 B.C.

Archeological sites at Ife in Nigeria have revealed that glass was being produced locally before European

contact. But it was the 'trade bead' of glass from European and Middle Eastern sources that Africans seized upon and used with consummate skill in both art forms and self-decoration.

No matter what the material of which they were made, beads were used for a wide variety of purposes. Different tribes, societies each have different purposes (meanings) for beads. For example, in Zulu society, beads marked changes in status through life of both males and females.

African beadwork is used to ornament ceremonial head-dresses, leggings and bags, and among the Yoruba of Nigeria, to create human or animal figures on a cloth core. It is also used to cover calabash vessels (Nigeria, Cameroon, eastern and southern Africa); aprons (Angola and southern Africa), and tribal masks (Cameroon and Congo).

Chapter 1.

NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN BEADS AND BEADWORK.

More than three hundred North American tribes are placed into broad cultural groups, organized by geographic areas. These are the Woodlands (southeastern and north-eastern), Great Lakes, Plains, Intermontane, Southwest, California, Northwest Coast and Subarctic. (Fig. 1.) 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.

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, weaving, and trading beads of shell, pearl, bone, teeth, stone and fossil crinoid stems (9, p 261).

There are many factors that effect the artistic production of the North American Indians. For example, the quantity of artistic production is directly related to the problems of securing a livelihood. Where food is abundant and easy to obtain, a good deal of leisure time is available for artistic production. An abundance of art is found in the Pacific Northwest area because of the easily available foods. Likewise, there is little artistic production to be found in the desert areas of Nevada.

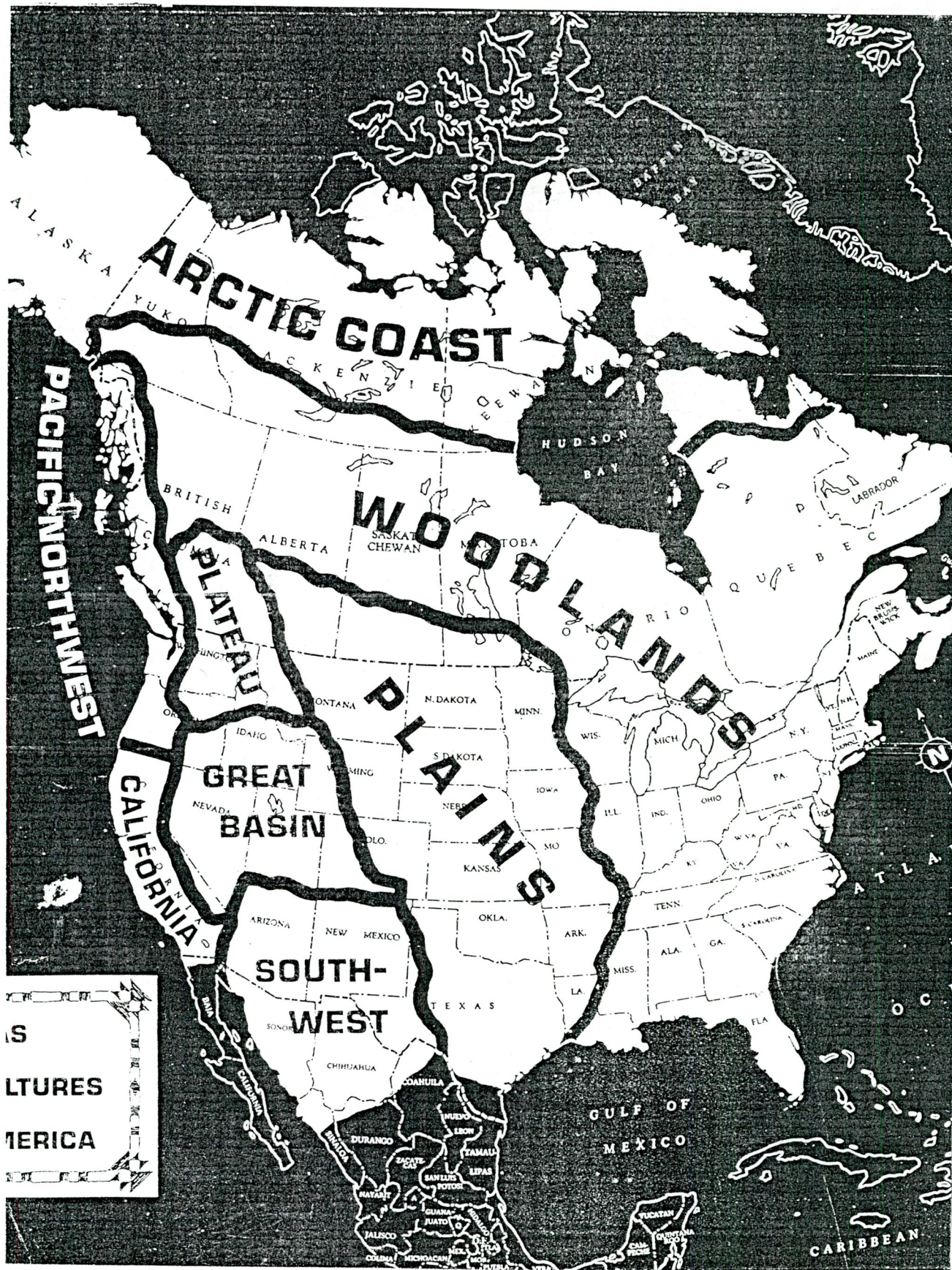


Figure 1. Map of North American Indian Cultures.

There are other factors involved in addition to the food supply. For example, the Indians of the Great Plains region generally had an adequate supply of food in the form of bison, but their very dependence on this animal forced the people into nomadism. Their nomadic existence, closely tied to the seasonal movements of the buffalo herds, made many possessions impractical. Consequently they wore small, easily transportable objects that served several functions. Therefore the weight, size and ease of packing were important factors to be considered in the design of even the simplest everyday utensil. (Figs. 2,3).

Uncertainty about the real origin of Indian objects is effected by tribal custom. Most Indian groups engaged in exchanges of gifts with other groups during informal visits or peacemaking. When such exchanges continued over a long period, they contributed to a blending of tribal styles. A basic similarity of style then emerged for the participating tribes. The beadwork style of the Crow and Nez Percé tribes is due to this kind of reciprocal influence. (13, p 120).

Still more significant is the fact that most tribes preferred to part with gifts other than their own work. Consequently much of the material collected from any one tribe as their production, may in reality consist of gifts from quite another tribe.

Most of the principal North American collections of Indian artifacts were created between 1860 and 1930 in large museums in eastern and central North America. It is inevitable, therefore, that most of the standards by which traditionalism in Indian art is judged depends upon

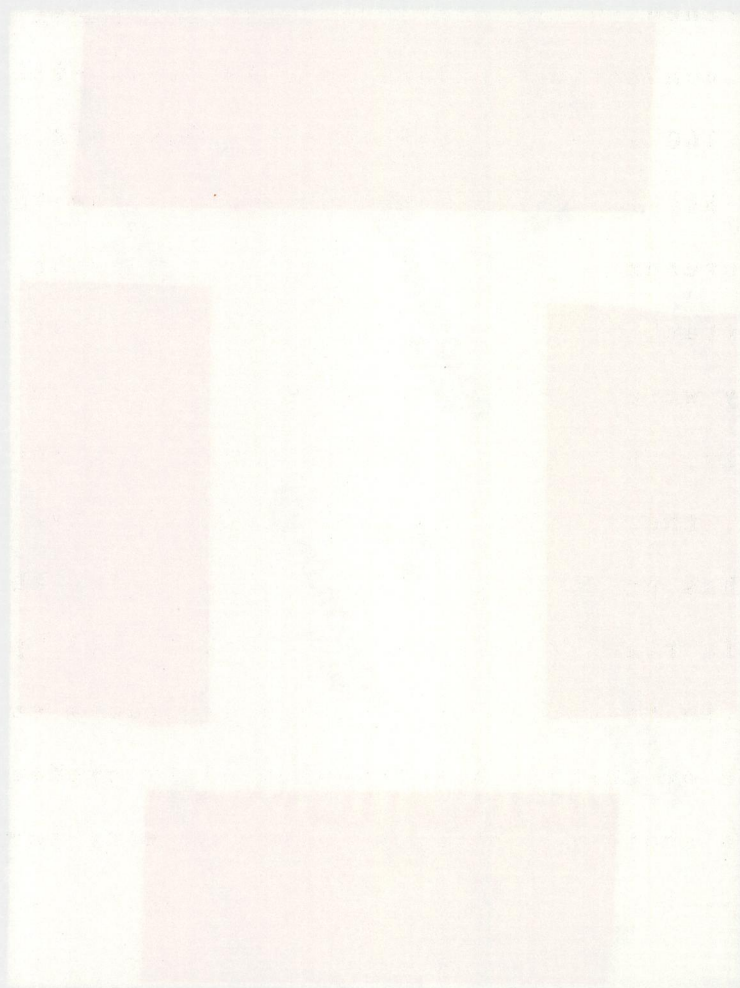


Figure 2. Canadian pocket pouch for pipe. 1880.
National History Museum, Dublin.





Figure 3. Canadian belt made of wool and beads
with fringes of quills. 1882.
National History Museum, Dublin.



the collections for purposes of definition and comparison. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, saw enormous upheaval in the lives of the North American Indians. During this period, formerly independent tribes were confined to reservations. The Daves Act of 1887 proposed converting Indians into American citizens by allotting 160 acres to each head of household. The final military battles between Plains Indians and the United States Government were fought. In Canada the potlatch - the important Northeast Coast Indian feast at which goods and money were distributed - was banned by an 1884 law. Ironically, this was the peak period of collecting. As a result, the most traumatic period in Native American history has provided the material basis for the definition of what is traditional and what is not. (13, p 68).

Break in tradition occurs when artifacts created within one tribe or culture are transferred by exchange, trade or war to another. This can occur at many levels. At the most basic level, alteration of meaning takes place when a raw material travels from its place of origin. (13, p 74).

Sometimes Western trade introduced raw materials whose acquisition influenced art without necessarily altering the form of artifacts or their symbolic content; the most significant of these trade items were beads, which were used for decoration and ceremonial artifacts.

The wide variety of materials introduced by Europeans, in some instances, had a radical effect, being readily accepted by the Indians as more colourful than native equivalents, or better suited to their purposes.

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Originally they were supplied as gifts to win Indian friendship and alliance. This was particularly true in the days when Europeans were a minority, but also during the days when England, France, Spain, Sweden and Holland were all vying with one another for control of territory. The custom of gift-giving lasted well through the period of the American Revolution and was gradually replaced by the trade in furs.

European manufacturers even duplicated Indian crafts on a mass production basis. If the Indian valued such things as wampum beads laboriously handmade of clamshells, Europeans would and did manufacture them in quantity for Indian trade. Others, finding the wampum industry too difficult or costly, had special imitation wampum made of glass beads. Likewise, dentalium shells were supplied by traders throughout the Plains, and abalone shells were traded into the Southwest.

The easy availability of glass beads in many colours spurred their lavish use, and ultimately promoted polychromy. The preference for bright colours, once they became available, proves that the pastel quality of some of the work in native dyes was the result of technological limitations rather than aesthetic considerations.

A good deal is known about the creative Native American adaption of motifs and materials of European origin, and their spread over the past two to three hundred years. The most obvious example is the use of small coloured glass beads for embroidery and some weaving all across the continent, but especially in those regions where embroidery with dyed porcupine quills served as a model.

Designs themselves spread; floral motifs, probably learned initially from the French in Canada, replaced earlier designs (mainly geometric ones) as they spread first over the Northeast, then the Southeast, and finally the Plains and Subarctic, reaching the Northwest Coast in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. (13, p 33).

WOVEN BEADWORK AND THE WAMPUM BEAD.

The best known shell bead was wampum: small, cylindrical, centrally drilled white and purple beads made primarily of the quahog clamshell. Strung on leather throngs 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. (8, p 266).

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. Among the Iroquois, they acquired the character of memory devices in which the designs, based on the contrast between the white and purple beads, were associated with conventionalized meanings. From the Iroquois the use of memory belts spread to most other tribes of the Northeast. In wampum, unlike quillwork, representational designs, as well as geometric patterns, occur. (Fig. 4.).

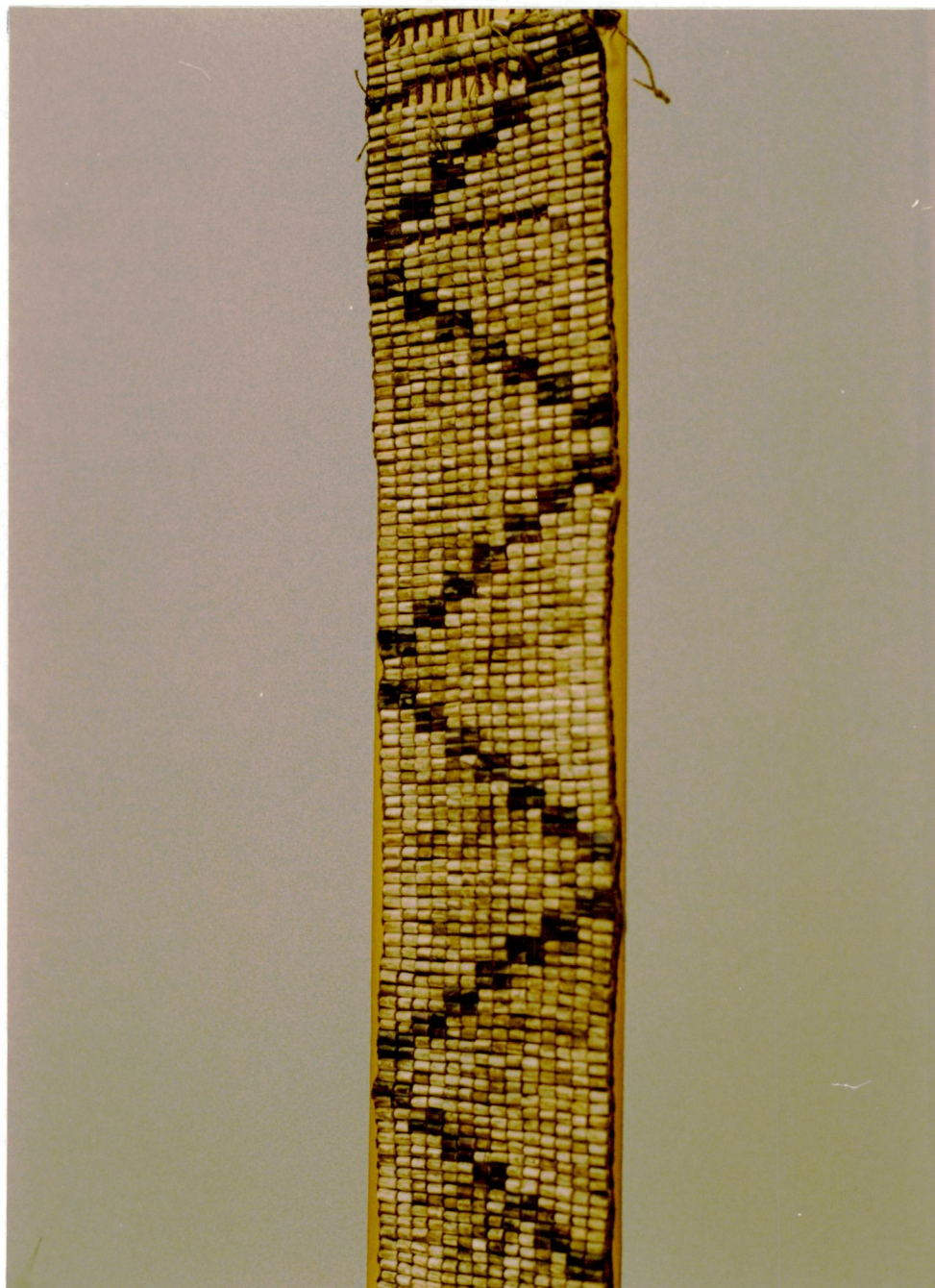


Figure 4. A wampum belt of the Mohawk (iroquoise) tribe, made of white and purple shells. Length 2', 1.5", width 3.75". 1885. National History Museum, Dublin.



North American Indians had no written language, therefore messages were transmitted through symbolic designs. Woven wampum belts developed as a device for recording important events. Signalling peaceful, warlike, or other intentions between tribes (or between tribes and the colonists), the belts were manufactured using beads of one colour with symbolic design in another colour. 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. An example of a wampum belt recording an important event is shown in Figure 5. This belt is 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 Shacka-maxon, 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 representative, they retained the right to cross their land when needed, an interpretation that led to many title disputes. (9, p 266).

Although no Indian culture developed a universally recognized series of hieroglyphics, 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

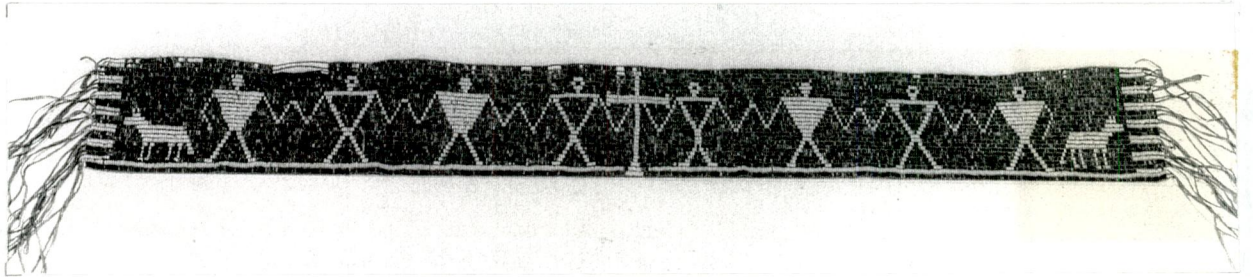


Figure 5. Delaware wampum belt given to William Penn in Pennsylvania in about 1762. Length 62.3 cms. Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York.



holding hands meant peace and friendship. The width and length of the belt corresponded to the importance of the event. Figures 6 and 7 show a wampum belt commemorating the Treaty of Montreal. Figure 6 is 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. Figure 7 is the actual wampum belt depicted in figure 6. (9, p 267).

Trying to capitalize on the native liking for wampum, white traders introduced tubular glass beads into the Northeast. However glass wampum were never wholeheartedly accepted, and only a very small number of specimens survive from the eighteenth century Northeast, in which woven imitation wampum are used for decorative purposes. Their use remained sporadic throughout the nineteenth century.

Other types of glass beads proved to be more popular among the tribes, especially the small "seed" beads which came in a great variety of colours, and were often woven into garters, belts, or panels sewn on to pouches and bags. (14, chapter 5).

"Pony" beads, so called because they reached the tribes on the backs of traders' ponies, are larger than "seed" beads and were especially popular on the Plains during the early nineteenth century. In pony beads, blue and white were favourite colours, with some beadworkers using black, red and amber. In the pony-bead period, the Blackfeet and Sioux seemed to prefer dark blue backgrounds. (17, p 61).



Figure 6. Lithograph published in 1825 depicting wampum belt in Fig. 7. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.

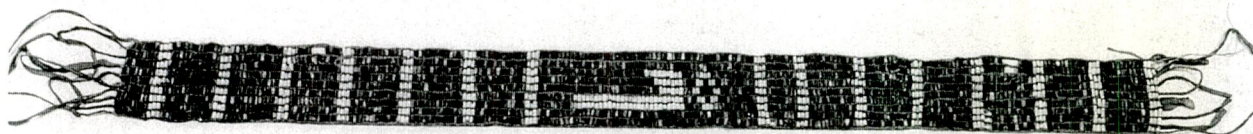
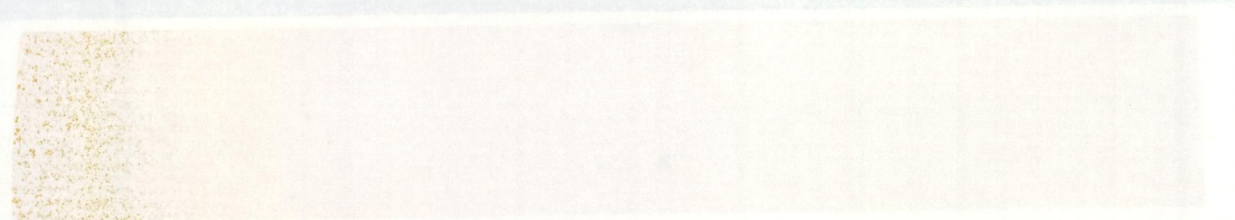
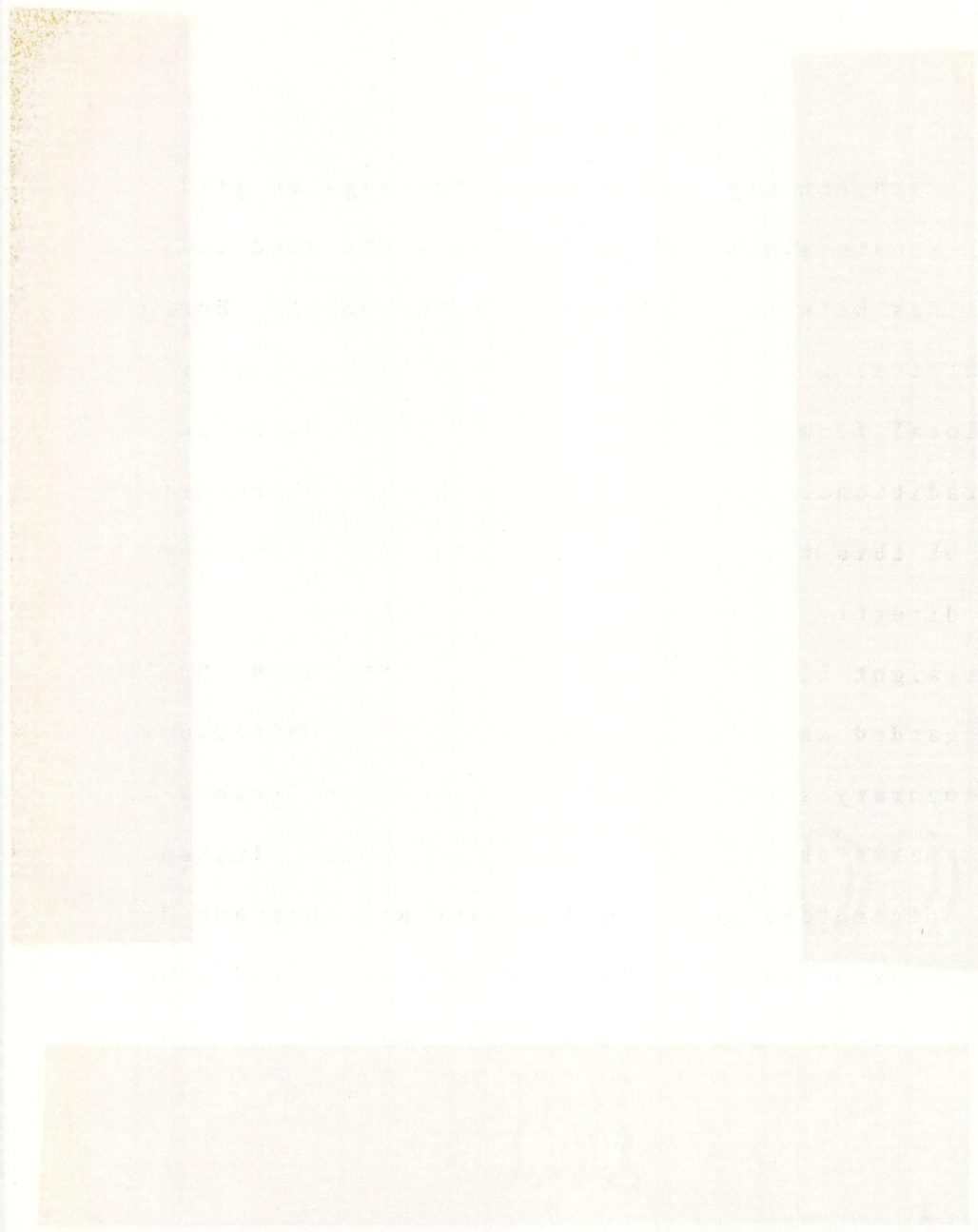


Figure 7. Wampum belt commemorating the Treaty of Montreal. Length 89.9 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.



Traditional fingerweaving techniques were not ideally suited to the new uses of these beads, and the breakthrough came only after the hole-and-slot heddle was adopted by the tribes of the western Great Lakes during the early nineteenth century. This was a rectangular grid consisting of alternate slots and perforated slots used to form sheds (openings between the threads of the warp). Horizontally symmetrical geometric designs, sometimes faintly reminiscent of floral forms, and, less frequently, realistic motifs in traditional conventionalization, are characteristic of most of this type of work. In the Subarctic, some patterns were directly copied from woven quillwork.

Straight lines in woven beadwork (figs. 8, 9, 10) must be regarded as the result of technical limitations, since contemporary sewn beadwork among the same tribes in the Great Lakes abounds in curvilinear forms. Instances of realistic motifs in woven beadwork are rare and late. On the Plains, where a rectilinear/abstract tradition was firmly established, woven beadwork never became of much consequence, as there was no suitable weaving apparatus. (14, p 122).

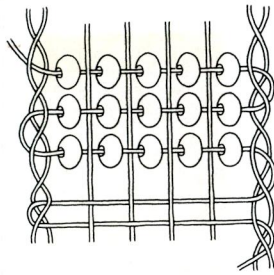


FIG. 8 Woven Beadwork: *single-thread weft and warp.*

Figure 8.

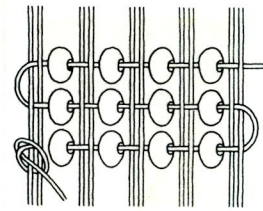


FIG. 9 Woven Beadwork: *single-thread weft and double warp.*

Figure 9.

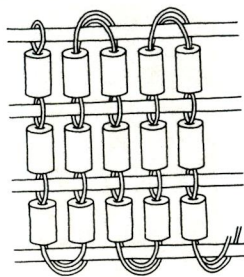


FIG. 10 Woven Beadwork: *cylindrical shell beads on double weft and single-warp threads. This was the technique generally used for making wampum belts.*

Figure 10.



FIG. 12 Appliqué Quillwork: *quills are folded between two rows of stitches.*

Figure 12.

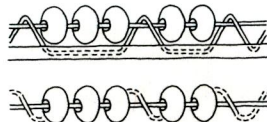


FIG. 13a Appliqué Beadwork: *overlay or spot stitch.*

Figure 13(a).

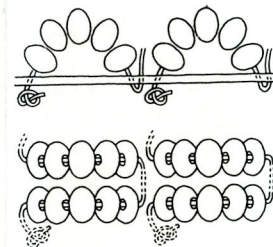


FIG. 13b Appliqué Beadwork: *"lazy" stitch.*

Figure 13(b).

Chapter 2.

NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN BEAD APPLIQUÉ

AND THEIR DESIGNS.

Quillwork was a unique American Indian technique. Whitish porcupine quills were softened in water, flattened, coloured with vegetable dyes, and fastened to skins in patterns resembling embroidery (Fig. 12). Each region had its own styles, colours, 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 (Fig. 11).

Appliquéd glass beadwork developed from this earlier quillwork. Indian women, who had previously decorated objects by the time-consuming technique of quilling, quickly realised that many familiar patterns could be executed more easily in beads when cloth fabrics replaced buckskin.

Glass bead appliqué did not become a major art until the nineteenth century. Early trade beads were regarded either as too expensive to be used in great numbers, or as otherwise unsuitable. Around 1800 a comparatively large opaque bead known as a "pony" bead was introduced and came to be the type most frequently used. From about 1840 onwards, smaller opaque beads replaced pony beads in Indian trade and became the standard material in bead appliqué and other beadwork.

Aboriginal beads were generally applied to a base by sewing each bead individually. This method, widely employed to attach dentalium shells or elk teeth,

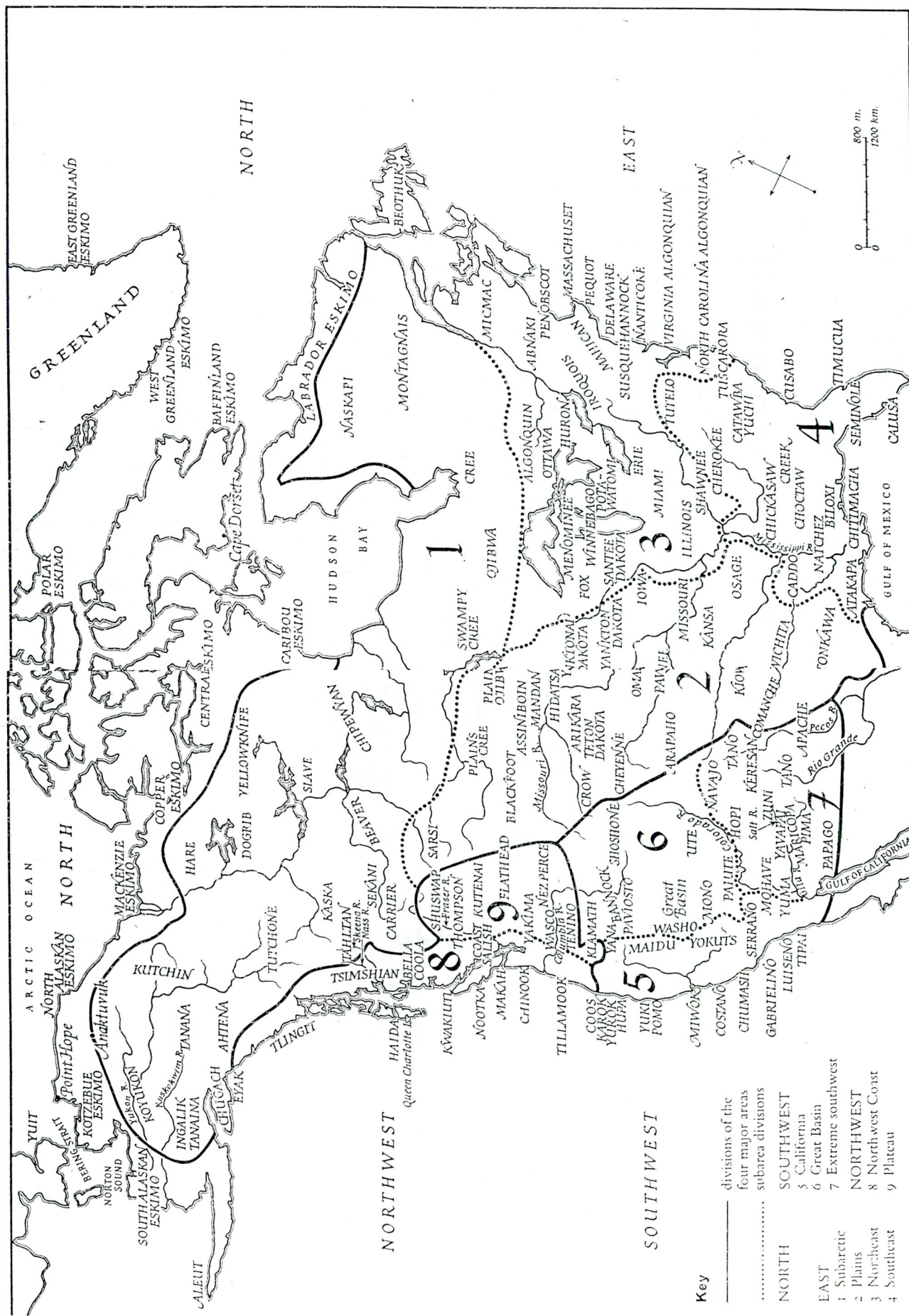


Figure 11. Map of North American Indian Tribes.

survived on the Northeast Coast in the use of imported mother-of-pearl buttons to outline the figures on cloth blankets, both with and without textile appliqué.

In glass bead appliqué only two basic stitches and one major variant are encountered. In the 'spot stitch' or 'overlay stitch' (Fig. 13a), a line of threaded beads is sewn to the base by means of a second thread catching the first one at short intervals. Both outline patterns and solid areas can be beaded in this way, curved lines pose no problem, and colour may be changed at will. This technique offers a wide variety of decorative possibilities and has an extensive distribution from the East to the Northwest. (14, p 142).

The 'lazy stitch' (Fig. 13b) employs a single thread both for threading and sewing large quantities of beads. Lines are straight and usually form bands of constant width, which make the technique easily recognizable. Lazy-stitch beadwork is typical of the Plains area and naturally lends itself to the creation of solid and straight lined designs. The same is true of 'Crow stitch', named after the tribe which made frequent use of it. Beaded lines are straight as in 'lazy stitch', but a second thread which runs at right angles overlays them in a similar way to spot stitch.

In the Northeast, the early nineteenth century of the Micmac and Iroquois was almost entirely made up of white spot stitch curvilinear patterns on a plain cloth or silk background. The major difference between Micmac and Iroquois styles is that the former shows a greater tension between straight lines and curves. The range of colours

increased with a growing interpretation of the old motifs as realistic floral designs. Beadwork also becomes more and more solid. Outlines are filled, but backgrounds as a rule remain blank. An example of Iroquois beadwork is illustrated in Figure 14. These are Iroquois (Mohawk) women's 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. In contrast, an example of Micmac beadwork is shown in Figure 15. This illustration is of a Micmac female headdress of blue black trade 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 this double curve may originally have been made by Indian women literally biting patterns into folded sheets of birchbark. (9, p 269).

Around 1860, Victorian needlework influences led to the adoption of embossed beading. Heavy floral designs in shaded colours were produced in lazy stitch rather than the traditional spot stitch, and padding gave the work a three-dimensional quality not unlike that of raised moose-hair appliqué.

In the Great Lake area, the development was similarly from stylized, white, and linear to realistic, polychrome, and compact floral forms (Fig. 16). While embossed work is rare, backgrounds are often filled and some straight lined patterns occur.



Figure 14. Iroquois (Mohawk) women's half-leggings of fine blue trade cloth with white, yellow, red, and green beadwork. Made in 1894. Length 42.5 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.

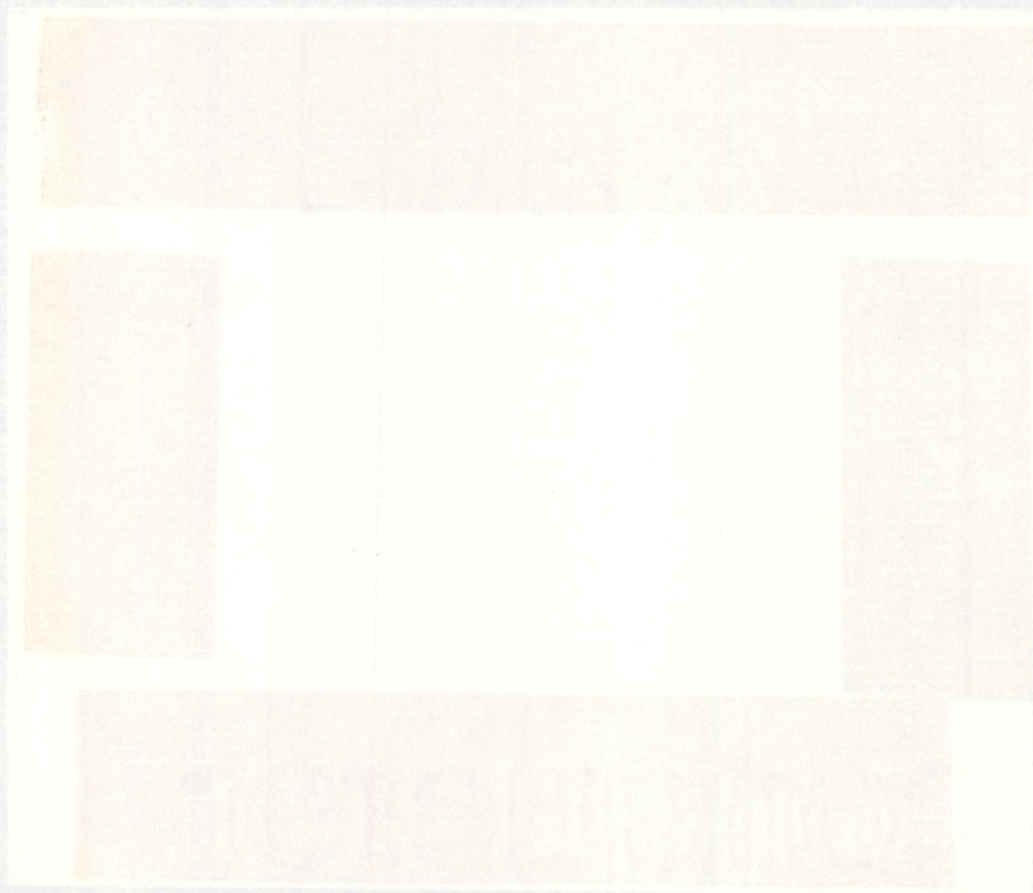
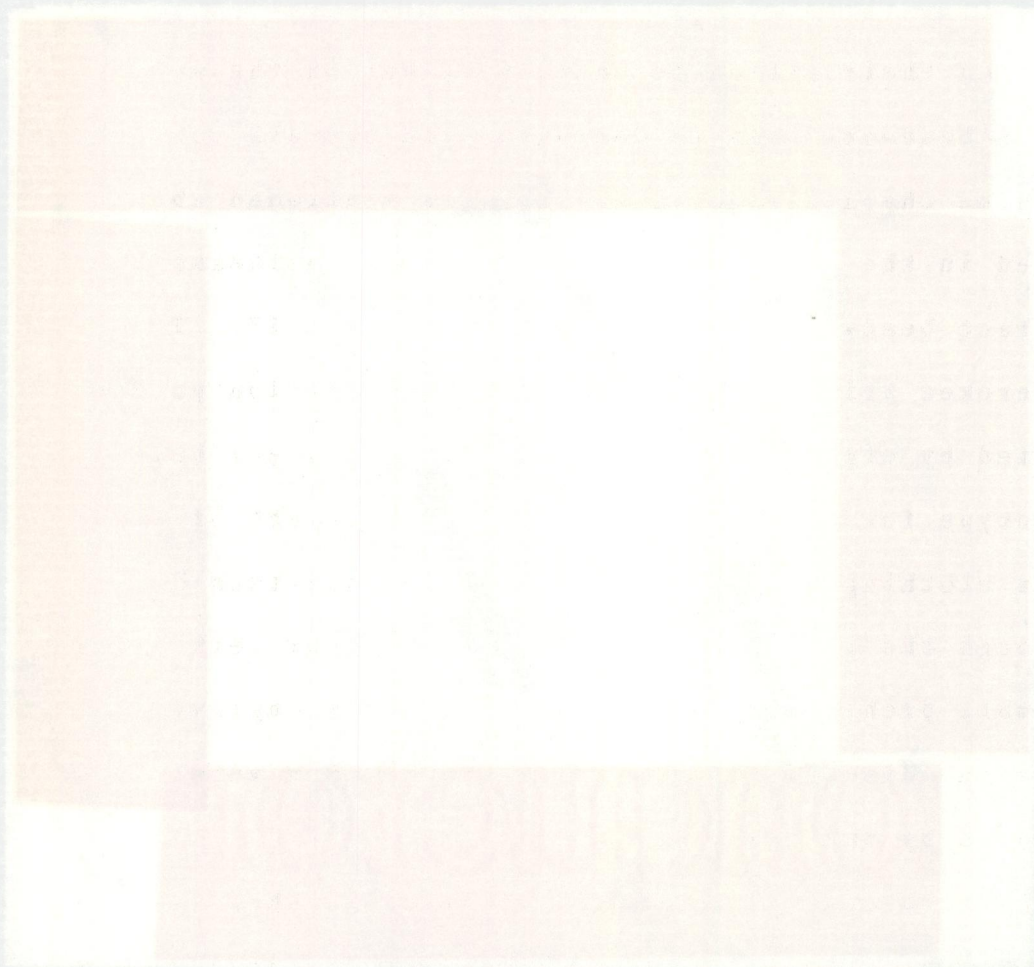




Figure 15. Micmac female headdress of blue black trade cloth, created in fine seed beads and sewn with moosehair. Length 39.3 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.



Figure 16. North American moccasin, 1912. Made from caribou skin decorated with coloured floral beadwork of French design. National History Museum, Dublin.



Southeastern beadwork appears never to have moved into the realistic floral decoration, but has remained curvilinear and abstract. Some types, like the scroll patterned sashes of the Choctaw and their neighbours, even retained their all-white character, but on the whole polychrome beadwork came to dominate. In overall composition, the same characteristics in beadwork mentioned above prevailed in the Northeast. An example of Southeastern abstract beadwork is illustrated in Figure 17. This is a Cherokee tribe 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 discs, the designs on this pouch were probably invented by the beadmaker.

Plains beadwork in general is distinguished by geometric designs in lazy-stitch work, usually covering extensive spaces (Figs. 18, 19). Designs are formed by a method similar to that employed in rectangle band quill appliqué. Many of the early patterns are taken from quillwork and, less commonly, from parfleche painting; in about 1870 several central Plains tribes (Teton, Dakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Assiniboni) adopted intricate geometric designs apparently taken from Oriental rugs brought to the frontier by white settlers. The new designs were often given new symbolic interpretations. Along the eastern and northern margins of the Plains spot-stitch bead appliqué similar



Figure 17. Cherokee shoulder bag. Pouch: width 20.3 cms. Denver Art Museum.

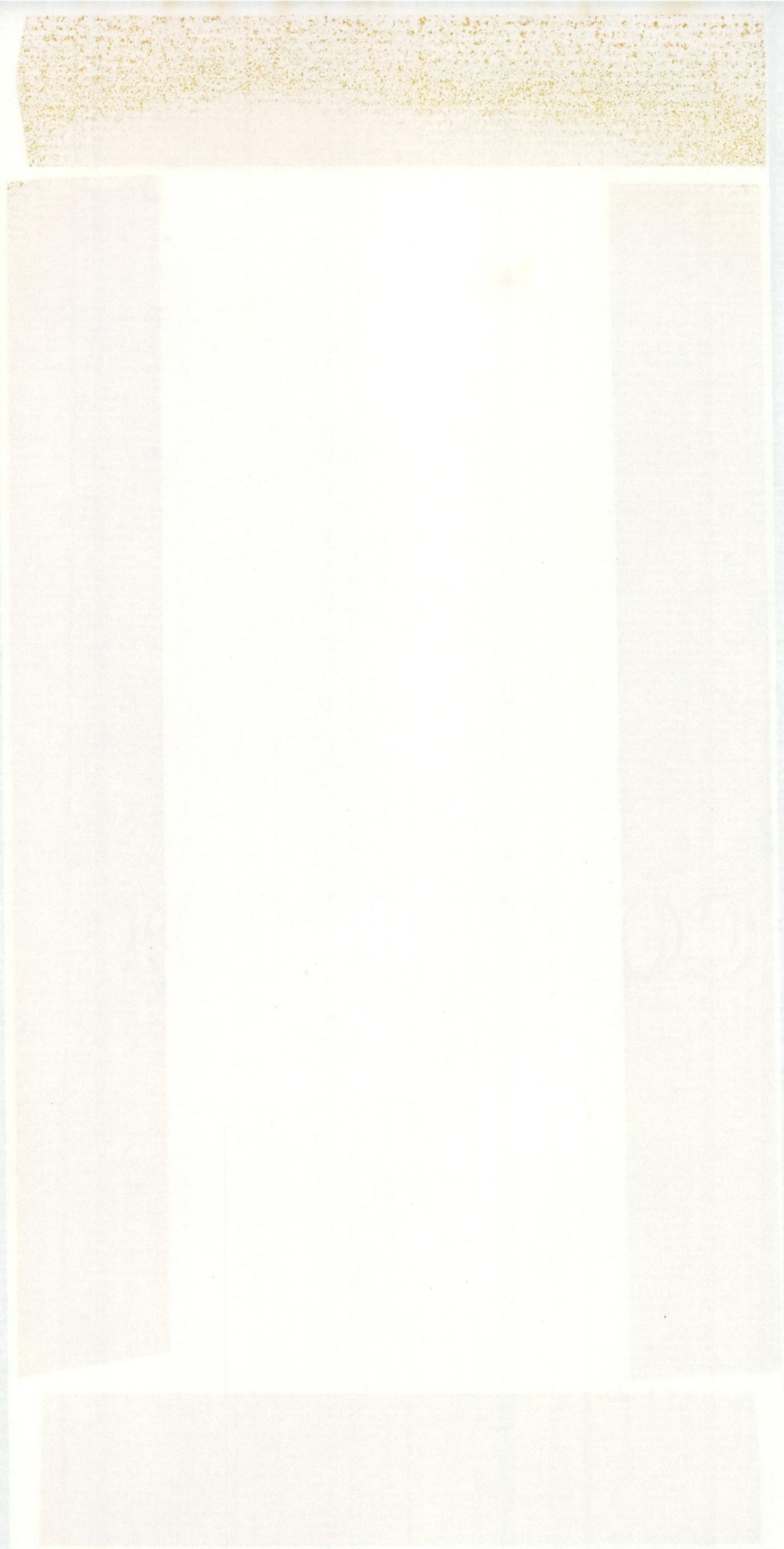




Figure 18. North American Chiefs beaded bag,
1880. Canadian. National History
Museum, Dublin.

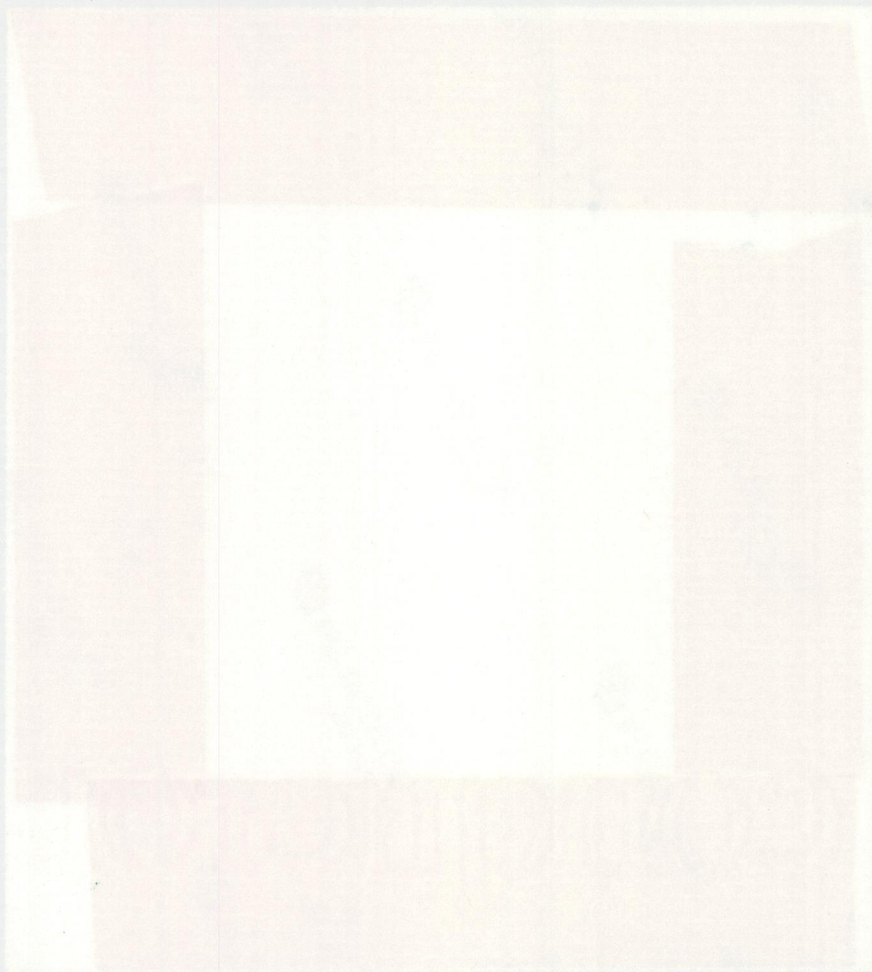
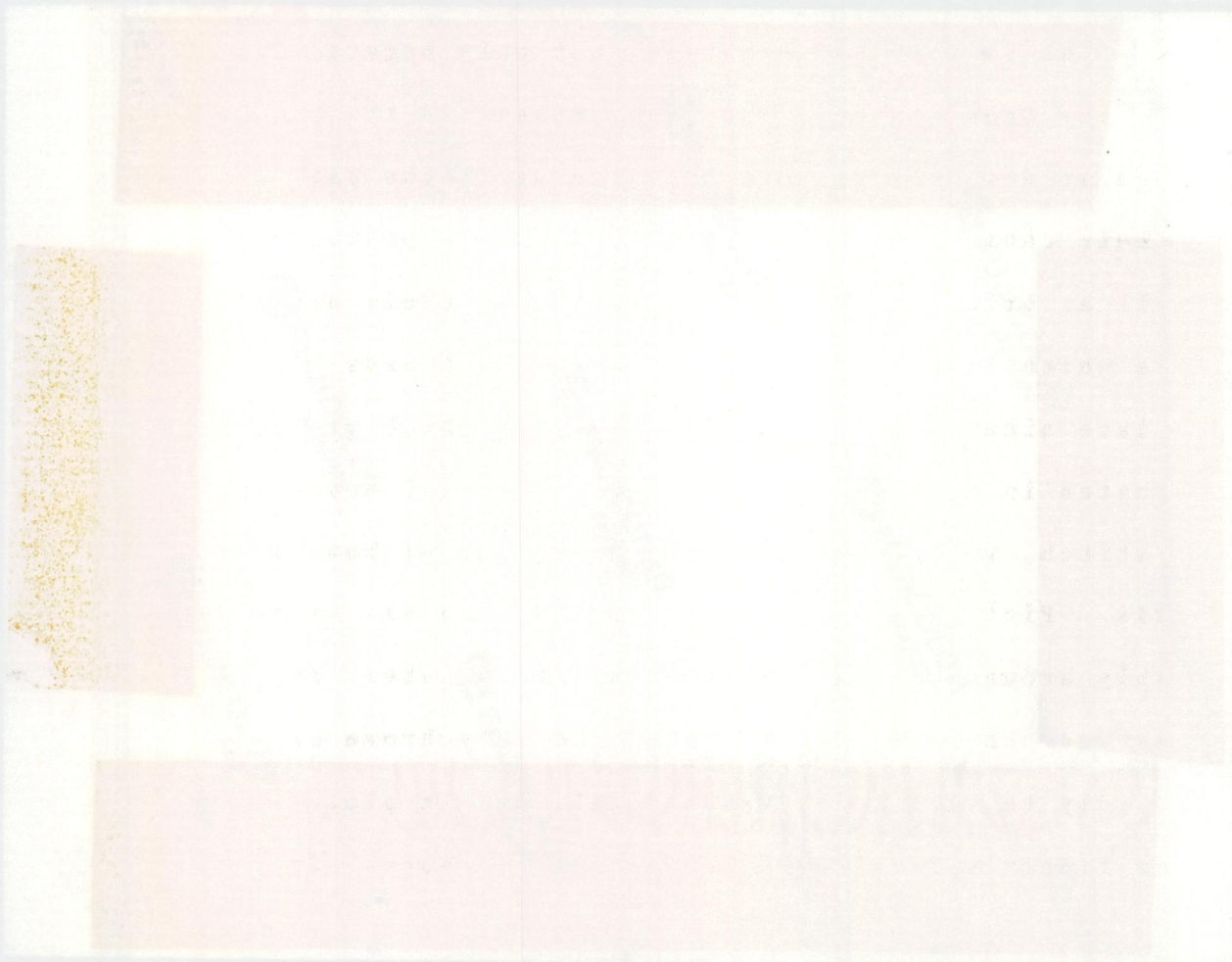




Figure 19. Close-up of Figure 18.



to that of the Great Lakes area is found. Floral beadwork was probably introduced to the Kiowa by the Delaware upon their removal to Oklahoma..

Of all the tribal styles of Plain beadwork, that of the Crow is the easiest to recognize, not only because of their use of the Crow stitch. The Crow emphasized the same simple triangular designs as those found in parfleche painting, and their choice of colours (including many pastel shades as well as bright colours) is as unique as their use of single white lines to outline geometric patterns.

A late nineteenth-century development which perhaps originated in the Central Plains is pictorial beadwork in lazy stitch, with realistic representation of humans and animals. Pictorial beadwork in spot stitch was taken up, probably around the same time or slightly later, by the Yakima and other Plateau tribes. The polychrome style can hardly be said to be traditional, but it produced some of the finest solid beadwork ever done in North America.

In the Subarctic a floral style spread from the Great Lakes region all the way to the Northwest Coast, co-existing with earlier styles taken from local quillwork patterns. On the coast itself, bead appliqué was used mainly to outline designs in the traditional symbolic style, but solid beadwork appears on smaller items such as collars or aprons.

In the figures 20-23 the beadwork designs on the four bandolier bags, dating about 1875, illustrate the influence of the environment on the aesthetics of Indian groups in four geographic areas - the Woodlands, Great Lakes, and

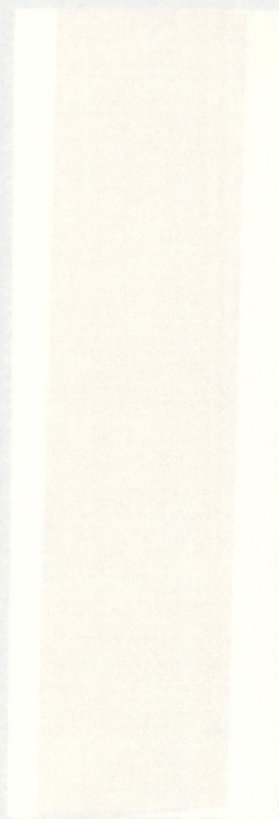
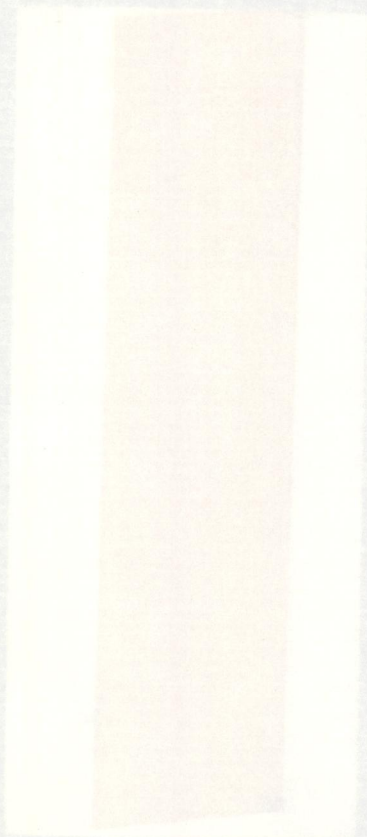


Figure 20.
Eastern Woodlands
bandolier bag.



Figure 21.
Western Plains tribes
bandolier bag.

From McCord Museum, McGill University,
Montreal.



CONFIDENTIAL

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Figure 22.
Eastern Plains, Dakota
(Sioux) bandolier bag.



Figure 23.
Western Plains tribes
bandolier bag; length
26.7 cms.

From McCord Museum, McGill University,
Montreal.

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 (Fig. 20 top left). For the western Plains tribes the use of geometric angular patterns mirrors the stark strong forms so prevalent in dry grassland landscapes (Fig. 21 top right). The elaborate geometric patterning of the eastern Plains on the Dakota (Sioux) bag (Fig. 22 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. There were more simplified geometric patterns made by Indians of the western Plains (Fig. 23 bottom right).

THE GLASS BEAD TRADE IN NORTH AMERICA AND AFRICA.

In North America trade between tribes occurred long before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. On the Plains the Crows were noted as traders in traffic between the Upper Missouri River village people, especially the Mandans, and the Pacific coast. In Figure 25 a three-string bracelet of white, opaque, wound-glass trade beads, collected in the Upper Missouri Valley in the 1850s.



Figure 25. Three-string bracelet of white, opaque, wound-glass trade beads, collected in the Upper Missouri Valley in the 1850s. Length 25.4 cms. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

They are typical of the large coarse beads carried by early Plains traders.

The spread of craft styles and techniques, for example floral designs in beadwork, resulted from communication and exchange between various Plains groups.

The most common product of Indian trade was the glass bead. Glass beads were trade items carried by Christopher Columbus. They were popularly received and their use as objects of exchange with the American natives never diminished. 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 (Fig. 24).

Through the fur trade, glass beads had a significant effect on North American Indian life. When glass beads were introduced as a trade item they were widely sought after by Indians for their colours and ease of use. They often replaced Indian-made beads of bone, shell, copper and stone.

The first glass beads traded in quantity were for necklaces that were, for the most part, available in white, blue and black (Fig. 26). These colours 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

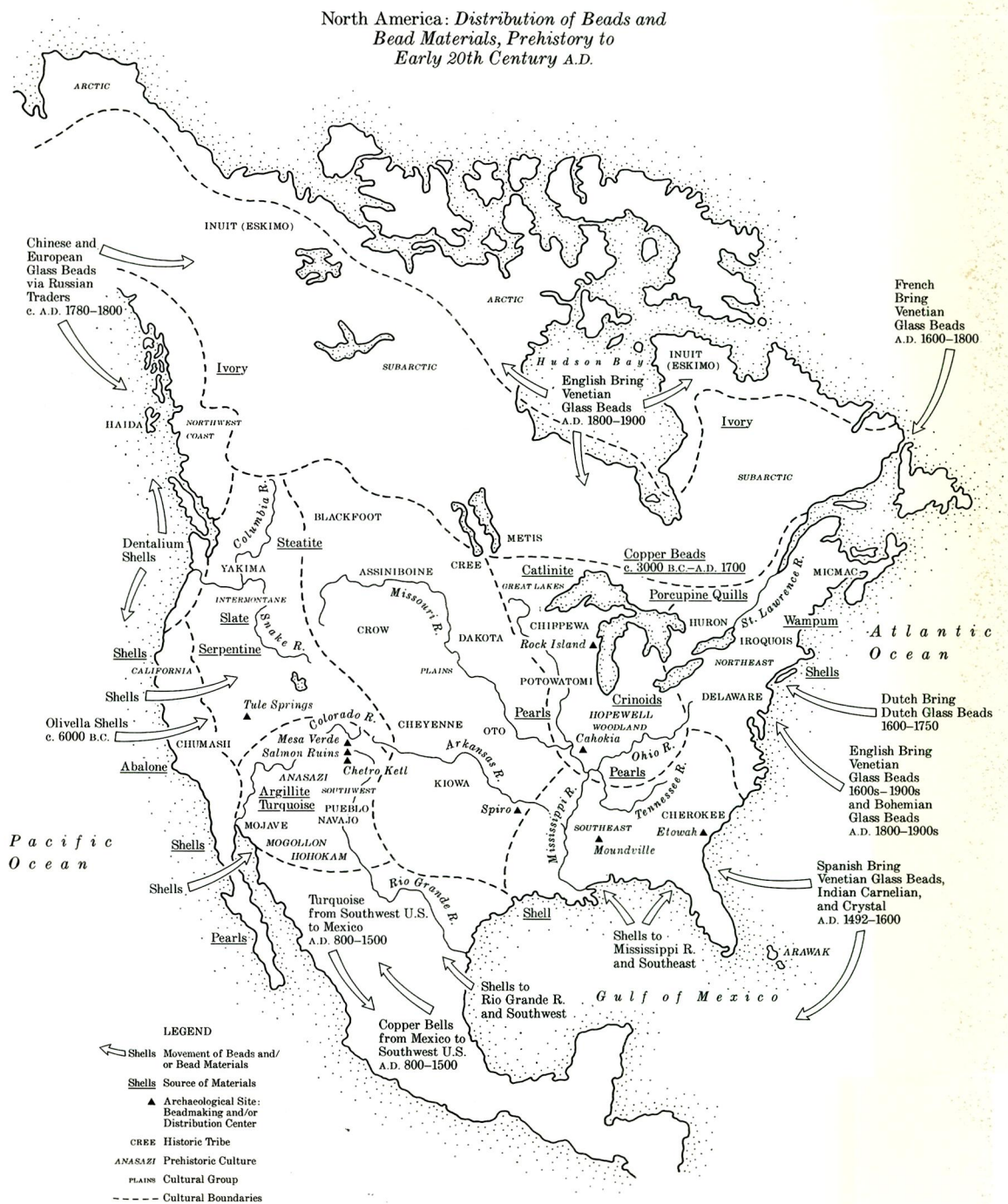
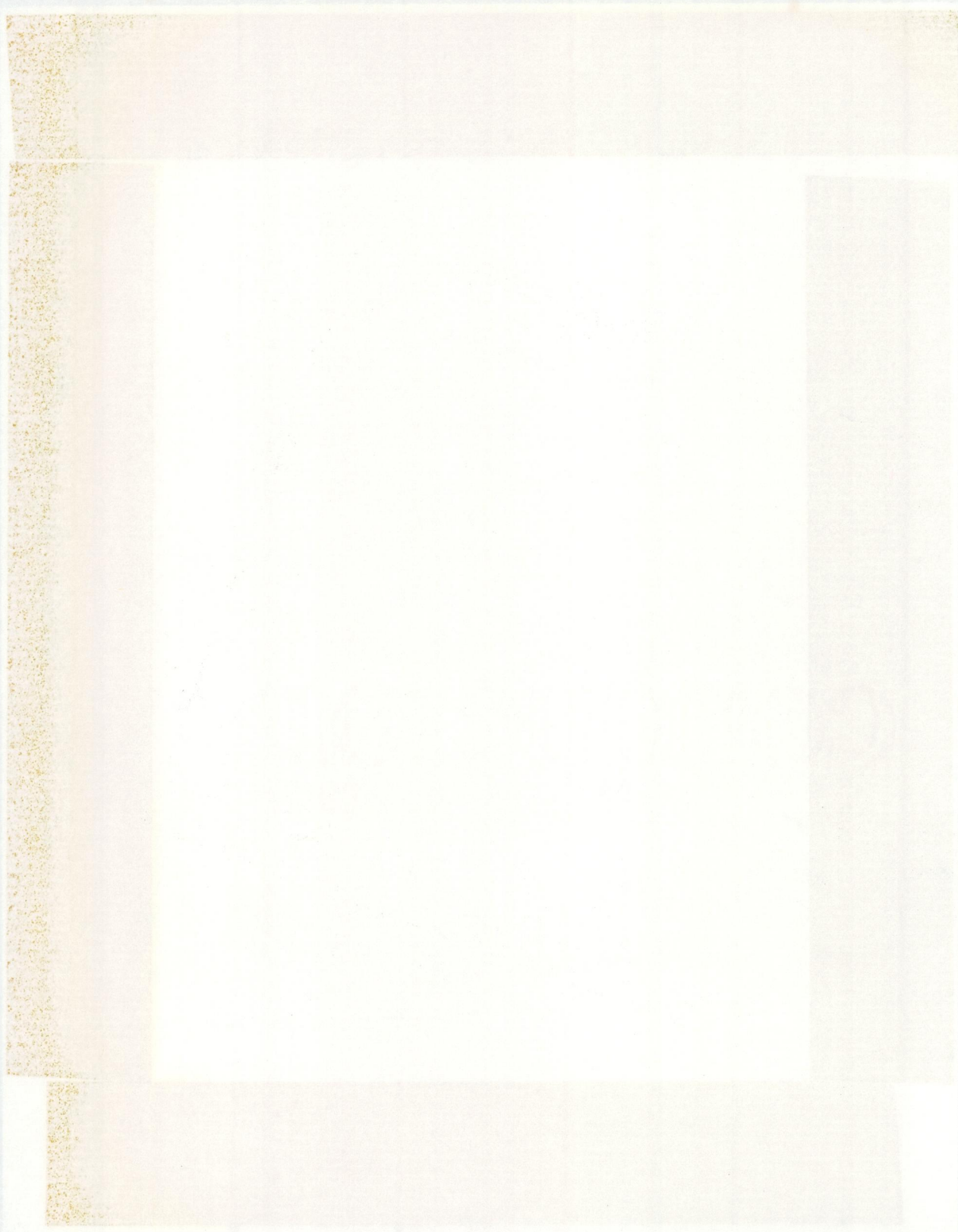


Figure 24.



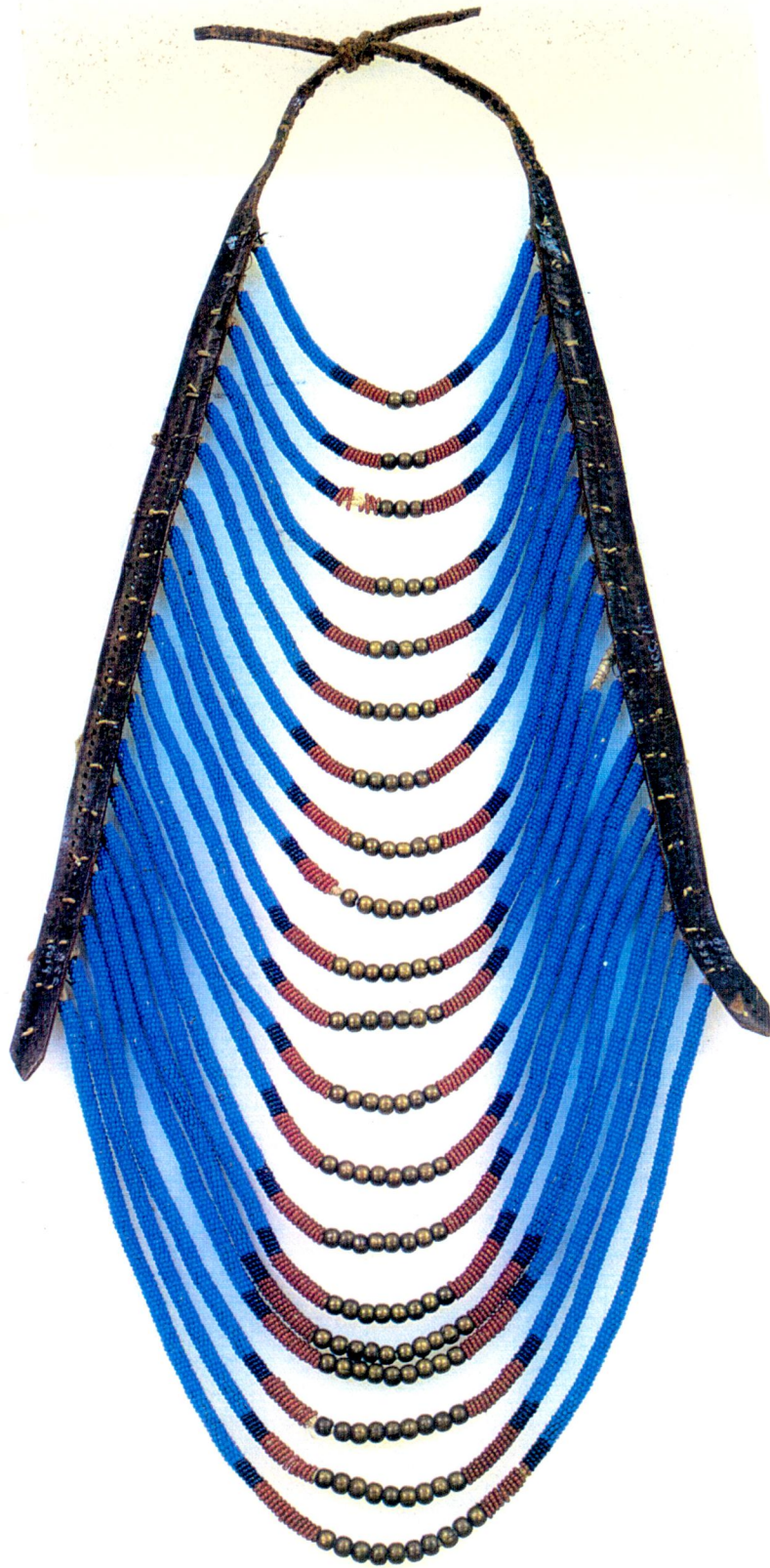
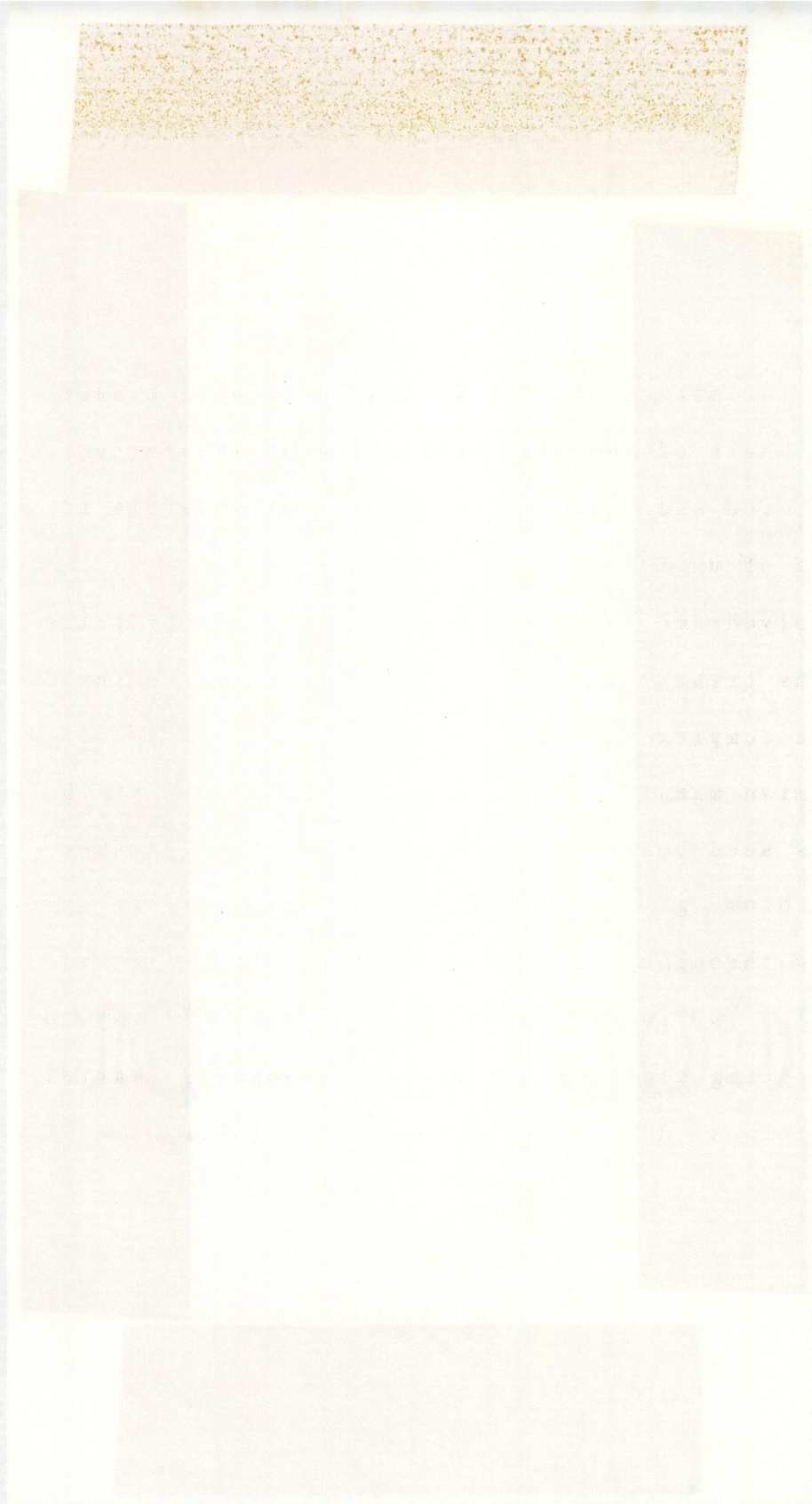


Figure 26. Blackfoot loop necklace from the Canadian Plains. This is a man's necklace of brass and coloured glass trade beads strung on rawhide. Length 63.5 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.



the Plains, possibly because that colour was rare in Indian dye sources. In the Western Great Lakes region, about 1675, the French introduced smaller pony beads. Beginning around 1840, colourful, tiny seed beads, usually two millimetres 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 colour.

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.

With the introduction of seed beads the ways of decorating clothing and objects changed dramatically. Traditional decorative methods were influenced significantly by the introduction of seed beads. Large necklace and pony beads did not take over the native 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.

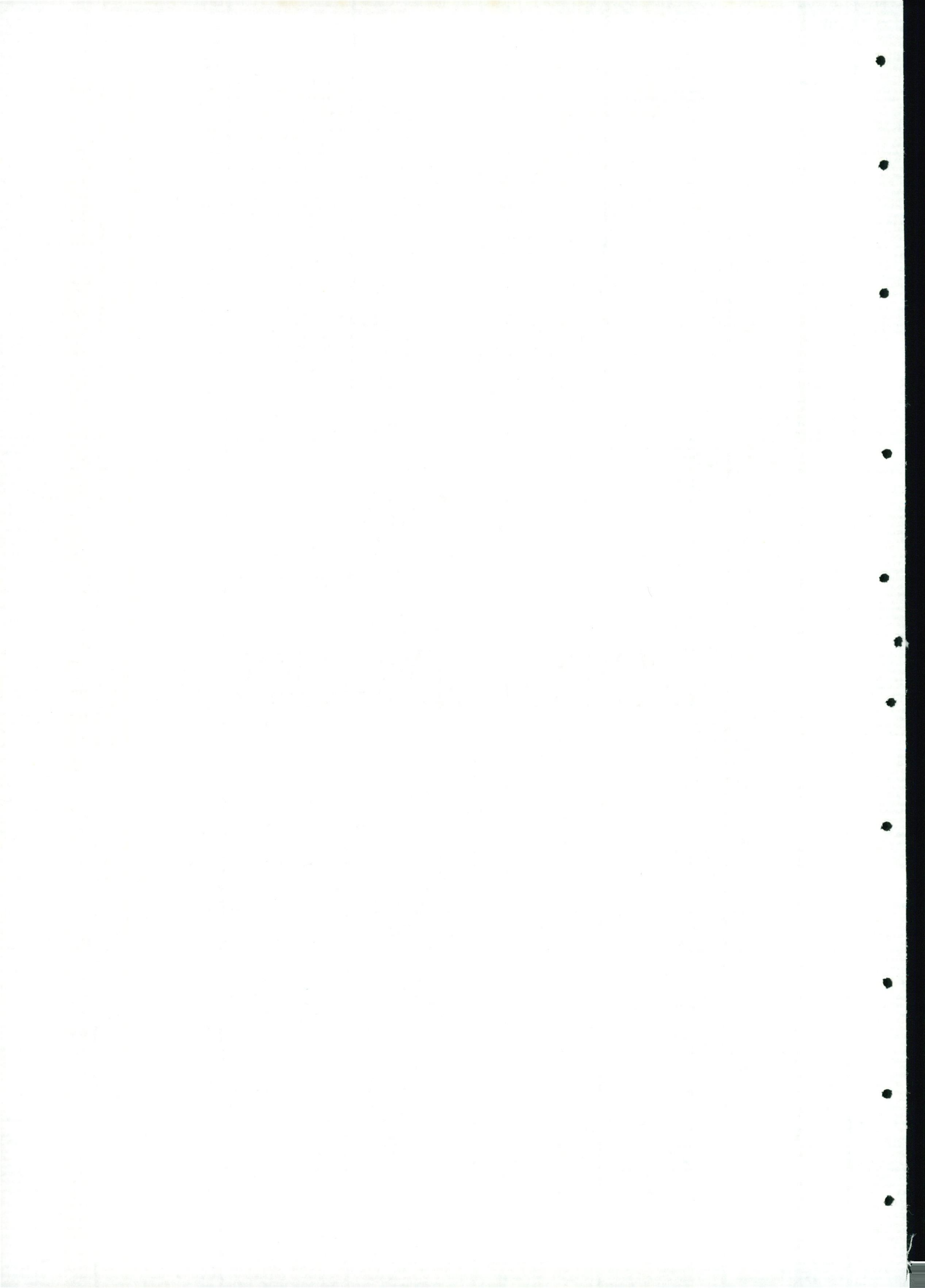
Glass beads are the most common feature of African adornment and were imported into the continent from before the Christian era. However, most archaeologically recovered beads were manufactured in India. Small opaque glass beads found along the East and South African coasts

were produced in India as early as 200 B.C., and have been found in African sites dating to about A.D. 200, suggesting that strong trade relations existed between the two continents (Fig. 27).

The history of glass manufacturing south of the Sahara is still unclear. Although some of the world's earliest known glass beads came from Egypt. Glass beads were traded south from Egypt, but the beadmaking technology does not seem to have accompanied them.

By the ninth century more than 165,000 stone and glass beads were used in ceremonies at Igbo-Ukwu to adorn bronze sculptures and staffs. The large quantity of these beads indicates their importance to the local population. Most of the glass beads are of blue and yellow drawn-glass, probably of Indian manufacture, although some may have originated in the Islamic world. Several hundred years later, glass beads were made at Ife in Western Yorubaland from imported glass. Glass bead manufacture seems to have been an important industry in Ife, for fragments of the crucibles were found all over the town. The industry seems to have been long discontinued, the nature of the crucibles forgotten, and a supernatural significance attached to them. A complete crucible had been used to store beads at one shrine, and another was said to have been the "Drum of the Creator of the Earth". The re-discovery of these bits of glass led to the foundation of a new industry in Ife.

By the turn of the ninth century, mass-produced beads from Europe were being traded by the million along the East African coast. These were known as 'trade-wind'



*Africa: Bead Materials and Distribution Patterns,
Prehistory to the Present*

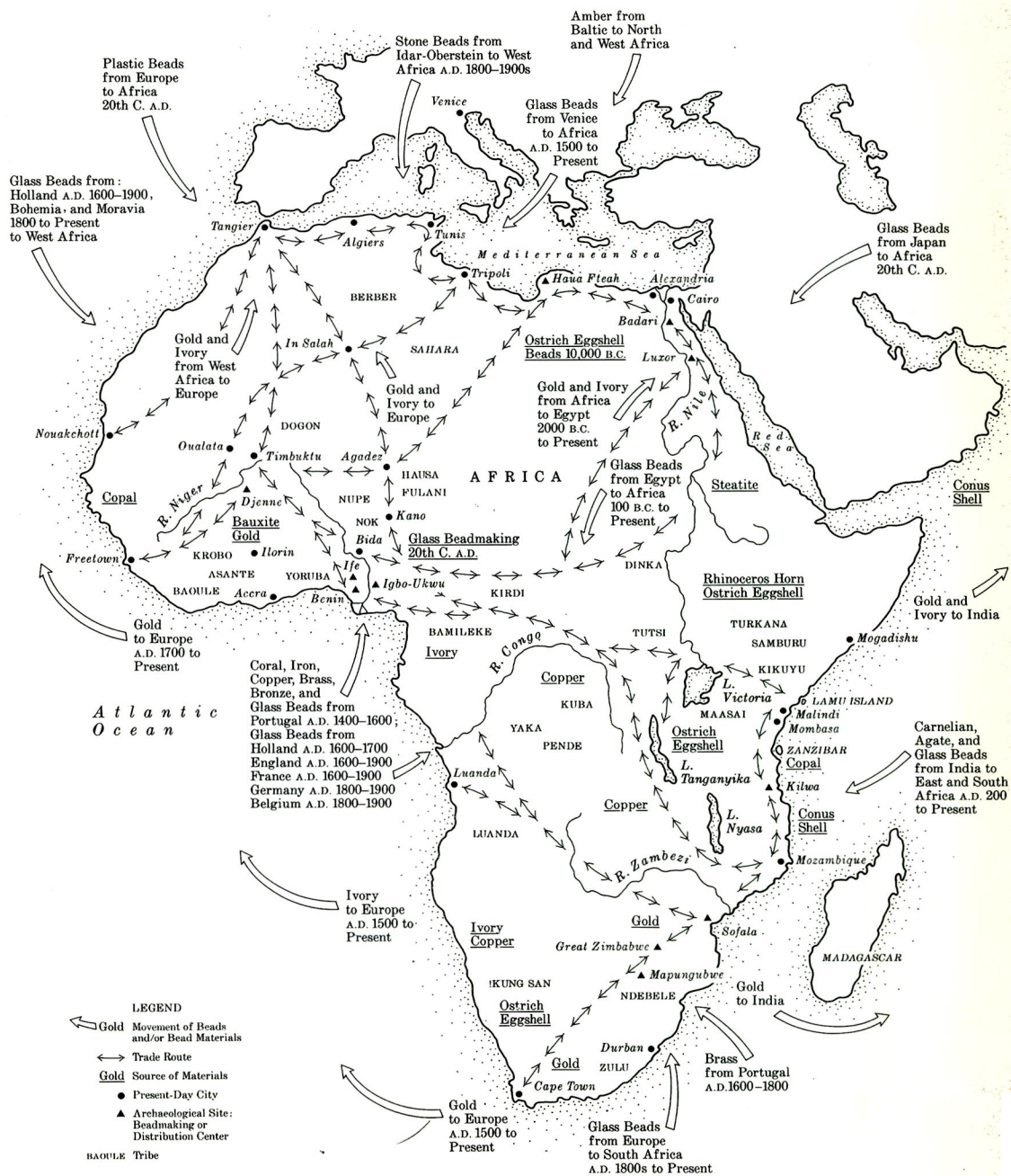


Figure 27.

beads in Kenya, and as 'pound' beads (sold by the pound) in Sudan; small, regular and brightly coloured, they were easy to work with and appealed to the Nomads. The Africans seized upon them and used them with consummate skill in both art forms and self-decoration.

Since the sixteenth century, glass beadmaking in sub-Saharan Africa has been concentrated in to-day's Niger, Nigeria and Ghana. This tradition remains intact, and to-day Bida of Nigeria and Kroba of Ghana are two of the most important African glass manufacturers. There are pockets of glass beadmaking elsewhere on the continent, including the Mauritanian towns of Kiffa and Oualata, where craftswomen have developed exquisite polychrome glass beads. Beads from imported glass scrap continue to be made in both West Africa and Mauritania using two basic techniques: traditional winding and drawing, and using ground powder glass. Powder glass beadmaking is almost unique to Africa, where it has become a sophisticated art form.

Chapter 3.

THE AMERICAN INDIAN PLAINS TRIBES.

American Indian cultures developed in ways that reflect their natural environment. Thus the Plains people adorned their abundant supply of animal hides with paint, quills, and eventually beads.

The Plains comprises of a vast grassland stretching from the Great Lakes to the Rocky mountains. Its people 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 were small, easily transportable objects that served several functions.

From an artistic standpoint the Plains is not an homogeneous area. Certain traits are common throughout the entire region, but even these are generally stylistically distinguishable. For example, most Plains tribes produce skin garments and horse trappings elaborately decorated with bead or porcupine quill embroidery, but each tribe that does so uses distinct designs and techniques.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the Plains area was uninhabited by Europeans, and as a result very little pre-1850 Plains material still exists. Therefore little is known about early Plains

styles. The early Plains material which has survived seems to indicate that even in the pre-1850 period Plains people were prone to elaborate decoration of garments with beads or quills.

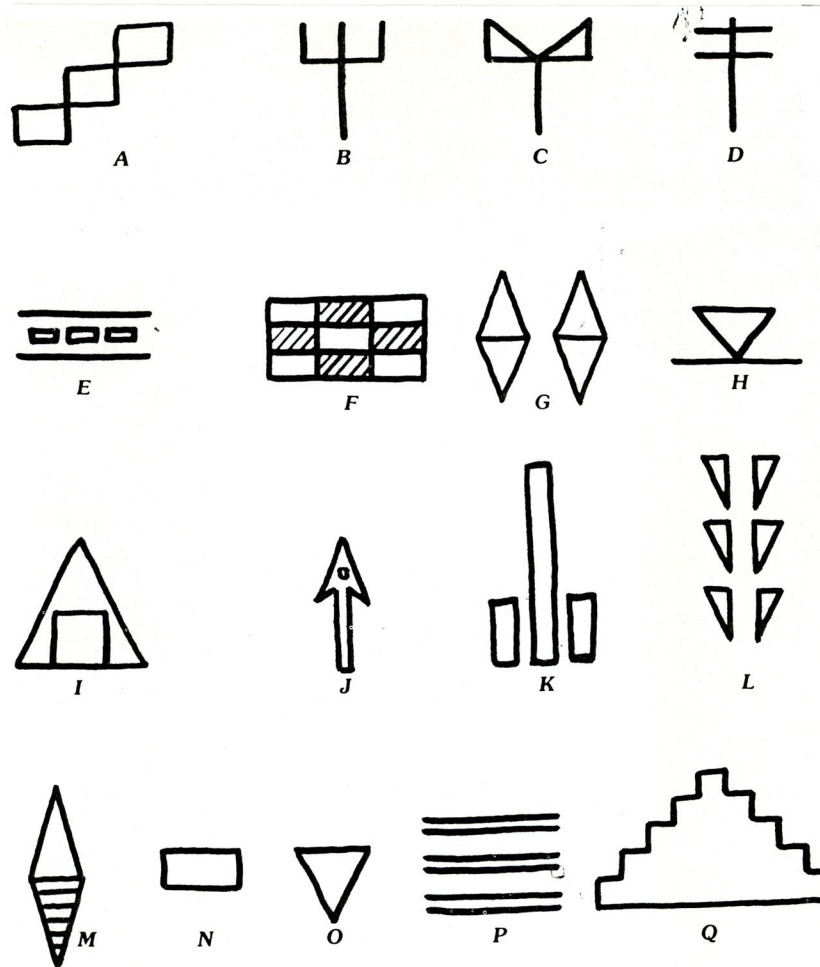
In the early part of the nineteenth century beads were introduced into the Plains, and although some quillwork has continued up to the present, beadwork soon began gradually to replace the older tradition. Early beads were fairly large, known as pony beads, and were mostly white, black and blue, so that early Plains beadwork is characterized by bold designs in blue and white, or black and white. A major reason for the great use of these three colours is their relative cheapness to produce, which therefore afforded a greater margin of profit to the traders who carried them. Right up to the present day, with improved methods of colouring glass, it is still more costly to produce beads in reds and yellows, while black and white remain the least expensive of all.

The smaller glass beads known as seed beads were in use in the Western Plains as early as 1830, and probably by that date the Western Plains Indians were in position to obtain any of the usual trade items available to Eastern Indians of the period. When Astor withdrew from the fur trade in 1834, a host of independent traders entered the field and established a chain of trading post all along the eastern foot of the Rockies. Keen competition must have forced these independent traders to stock a wide variety of goods.

When we consider the period after 1850, we are on much surer ground because of the vast bulk of artifacts collected and still in existence. Warfare between Indians and United States troops was at its peak during this period; soldiers often took souvenirs of battles, many of which are now on deposit with the United States National Museum in Washington, D.C. By the late 1860's most of the Plains Indians were placed on reservations, a course which, while altering their way of life, also made Plains material plentiful for the collector. A careful analysis of this material reveals distinct styles and influences in many directions, both into and out of the Plains area.

The groups of the Central Plains, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapah, are considered most typical of the Plains area. They all produce quantities of beaded articles. The beads are sewn in the lazy-stitch and geometric designs.

The Sioux living in North and South Dakota are particularly fond of covering large areas with bead and quillwork, usually in not more than four or five different colours. The designs are often developed by combining triangles and straight lines. Elements commonly used by Sioux women are shown in Figure 28; the names attached to the symbols here were given by particular beadworkers. They cannot be thought of as forming a symbolic code understood by all beadworkers of the tribe, and certainly not of the Plains area in general (17, p 59). In the Sioux tribe, vanity takes the form of trying to outdo others. For example, if a man wishes to compete with a neighbour who owns a pair of fully beaded moccasins, he



Western Sioux designs and names by which they were some-
times known. A: twisted; B: full-of-points; C: forked tree; D: dragonfly; E:
filled up; F: tripe; G: feathers; H: leaf; I: tent; J: arrow; K: three-row; L: ver-
tebrae; M: whirlwind; N: bag; O: pointed; P: trails; Q: cutout. The names
varied among beadworkers. Adapted from Clark Wissler, *Indian Beadwork*,
Guide Leaflet No. 50 (New York, American Museum of Natural History,
1931).

Figure 28.



can have his wife bead his moccasins on the soles as well as the tops. Figures 29 and 30 illustrate elaborately beaded moccasins.

The Sioux lazy-stitch technique is shown in Figure 31. 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 (9, p 281).

The Crow of Southern Montana use an overlay sewing technique. Triangles prevail in their designs which are very similar to, and perhaps derive from, those painted on their parfleches. You can see these designs in Figure 32. These people are fond of using as many colours as possible, up to twenty or so, on a single item, and of having them all blend into a pleasing design. Still another characteristic of Crow beadwork is the technique of outlining a central design motif in white beads running in a different direction from the rows of background beadwork. This style is not found among the Blackfeet, the northern neighbours of the Crow, or among the Sioux to the south. However, it has a wide distribution to the west and southwest from the Crow centre. The Nez Percé in Idaho seem to have copied the Crow style with the greatest fidelity, and much Nez Percé beadwork is indistinguishable from that of the Crow. Other typical Plateau groups such as the Yakima, Umatilla and Walla Walla seem to have borrowed the style from the Nez Percé. From the Southwest come occasional examples of beadwork produced by the



Figure 29. Canadian pair of moccasins, made of soft brown leather and with brown cloth patches and flaps embroidered with fine glass beads, 1920. National History Museum, Dublin.

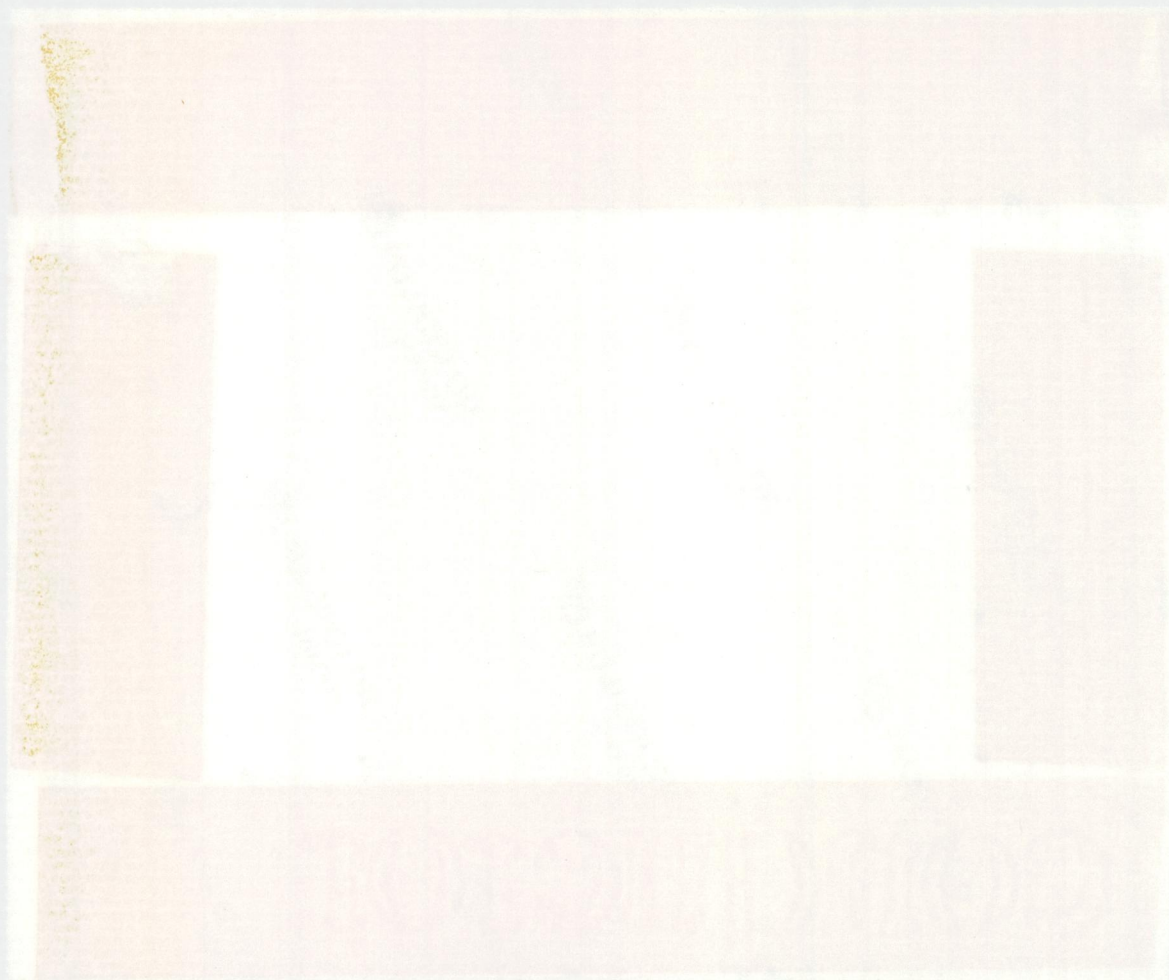




Figure 30. Close-up of Figure 29.

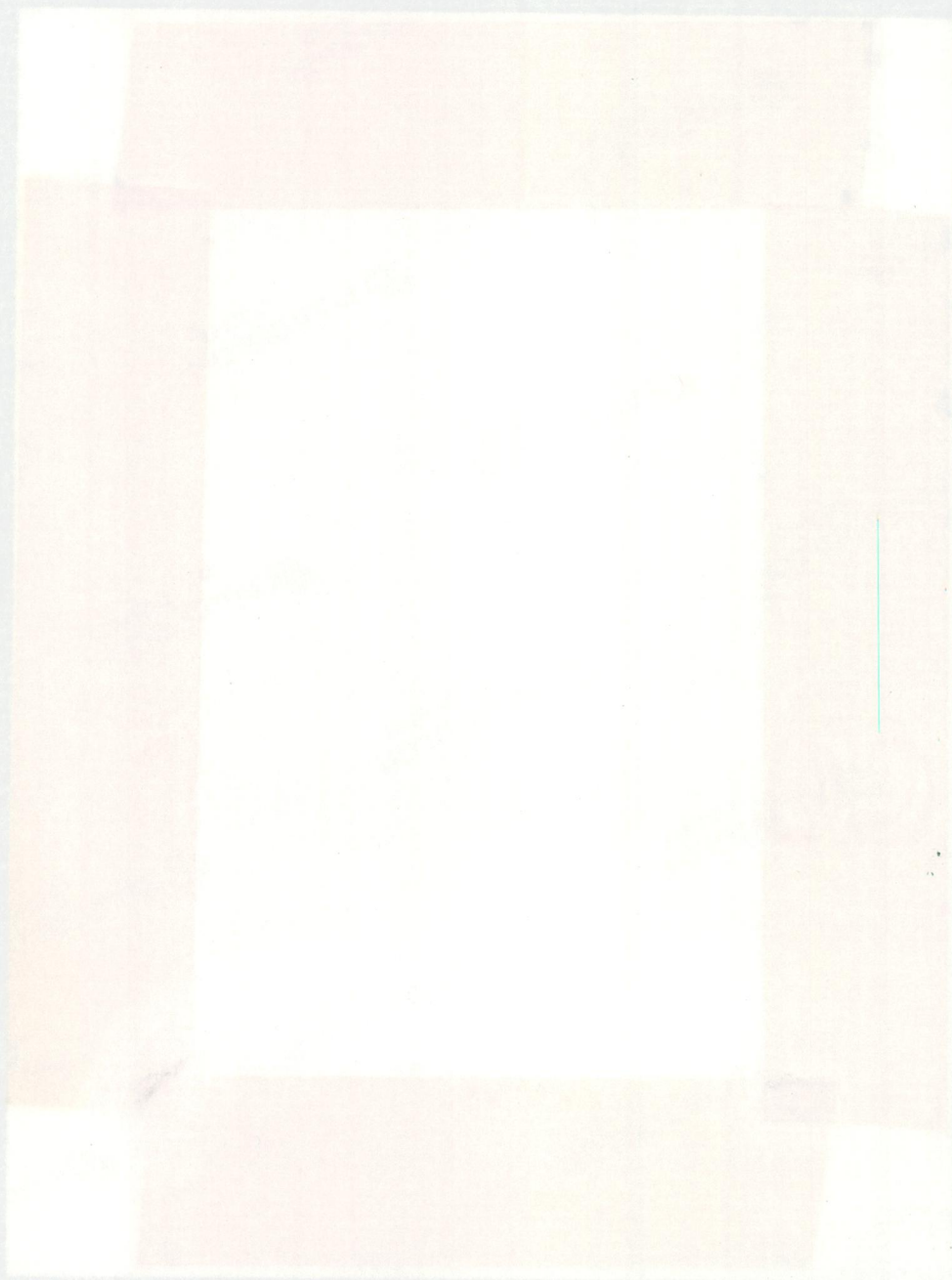
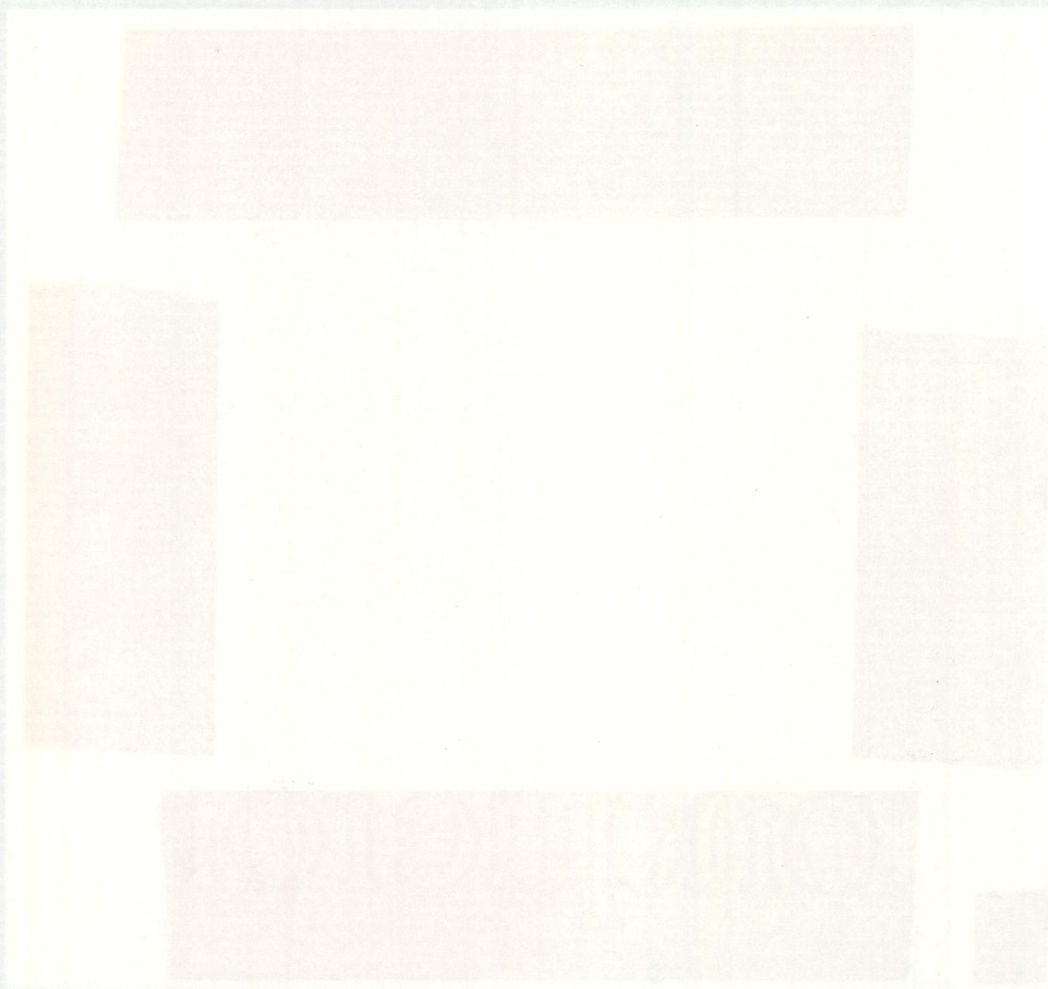
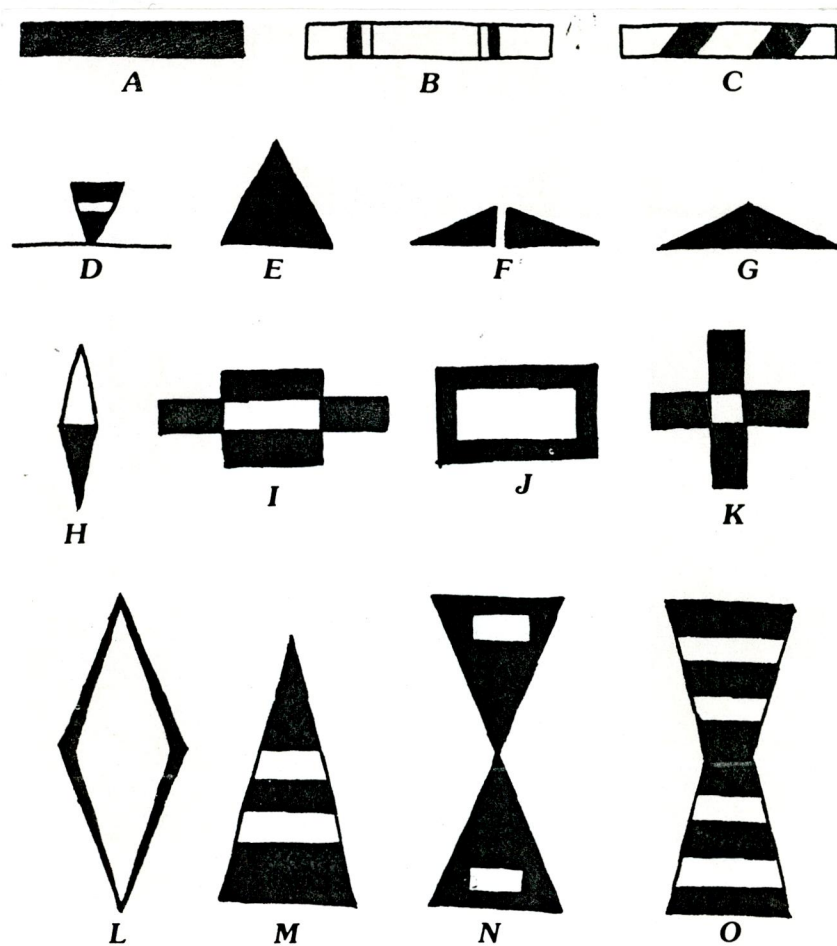




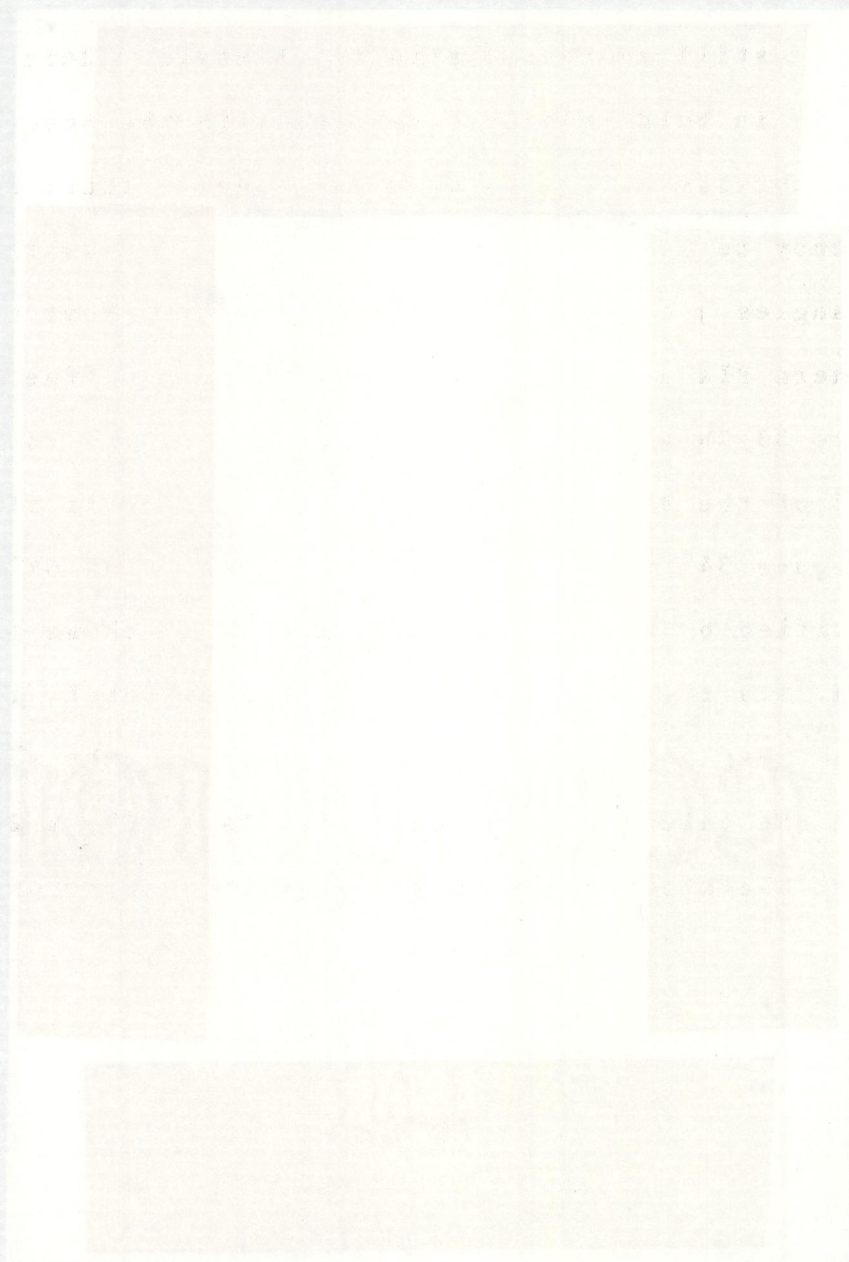
Figure 31. Dakota (Sioux) girl's dress, made of buckskin covered with solid beadwork sewn in 'lazy' stitching, c. 1880-85. Length 28.5 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.





Crow designs. A: stripe; B: stripe divided by transverse stripes; C: stripe divided by diagonal stripes; D: isosceles triangle subdivided by narrow horizontal stripe; E: equilateral triangle, usually solid color; F: small right triangles, standing on broad base; G: isosceles triangle with wide angle, broad base; H: "feather" design; I: four rectangles surrounding rectangle of contrasting color; J: rectangle outlined in solid color, also called block; K: cross; L: diamond; M: triangle with three horizontal stripes; N: hourglass with two white rectangles; O: hourglass with four horizontal stripes.

Figure 32.

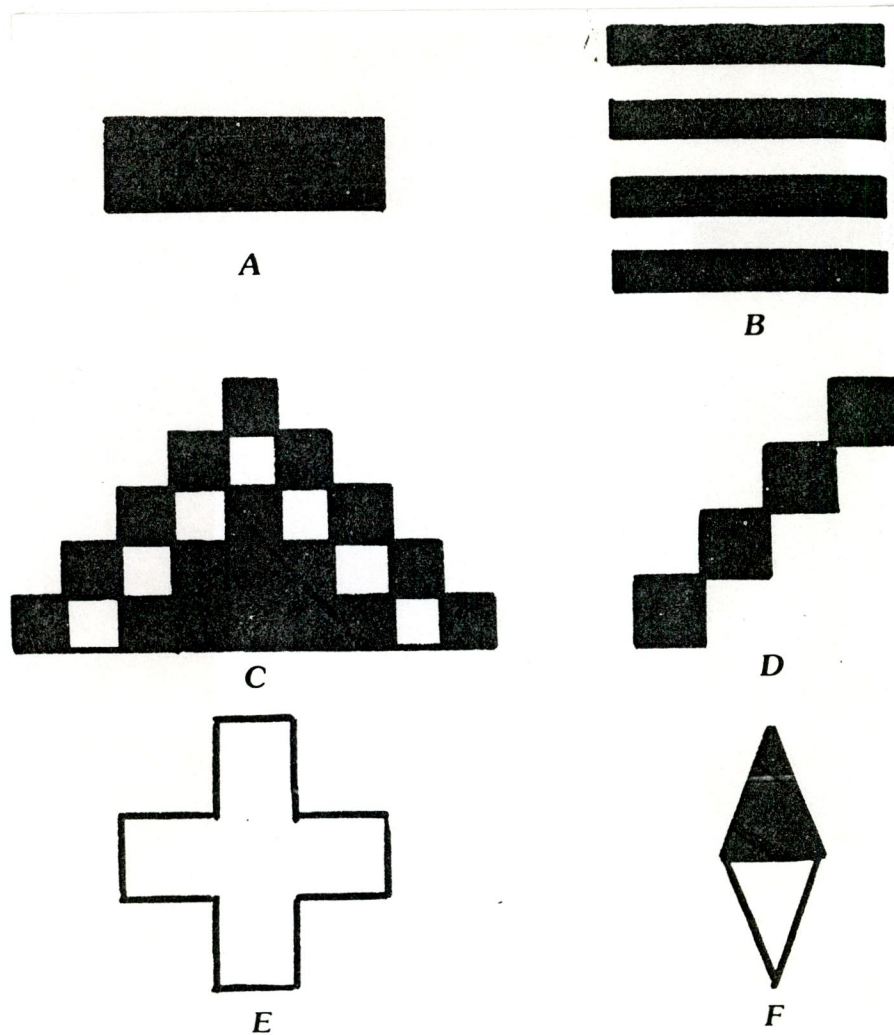


Shoshone and Ute, which bear a strong resemblance to the Crow style, and were undoubtedly derived from it.

The Northern Plains, comprised of portions of northern North Dakota, Montana, and parts of southern Canada, evolved still another distinct sub-style. Here the beadwork is in bold geometric designs with the beads applied in an overlay stitch in straight lines. There is a tendency to develop all the lines by using small solid rectangles joined from corner to corner. Most of the Northern Plain's work is limited to four or five colours. Figure 33 shows the Blackfoot design motifs. Another motif of the Blackfoot is the circle which is illustrated in Figure 34. These are a pair of moccasins of a Shaman identified by the red ochre backing. It shows the circle, which is a recurring (Blackfoot) Plains motif, it has neither beginning nor end, and symbolizes the sun, the moon, the calendar year, and life itself (9, p 282).

The Blackfoot tribe is probably the centre of this style to-day, but it may have originated, at sometime in the past, through influences from the Upper Missouri River tribes. The style extends among the Assiniboin and Montana Gros Ventre, the Yanktonai, and in slightly modified form, among the Sarcee and Plains Cree. An example of Cree beadwork is illustrated in Figures 35 and 36. A pouch bag of glass beadwork on a crimson cloth, with a sun motif.

The Blackfoot tribe also decorated objects that were used for important meetings, ceremonies, and in combat. Examples of these objects are illustrated in Figures 37



Blackfoot designs. A: stripe; B: series of parallel stripes; C: "mountain"; D: checker row; E: cross; F: "feather." Adapted from John C. Ewers, *Blackfeet Crafts* (Lawrence, Kansas, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1945).

Figure 33.

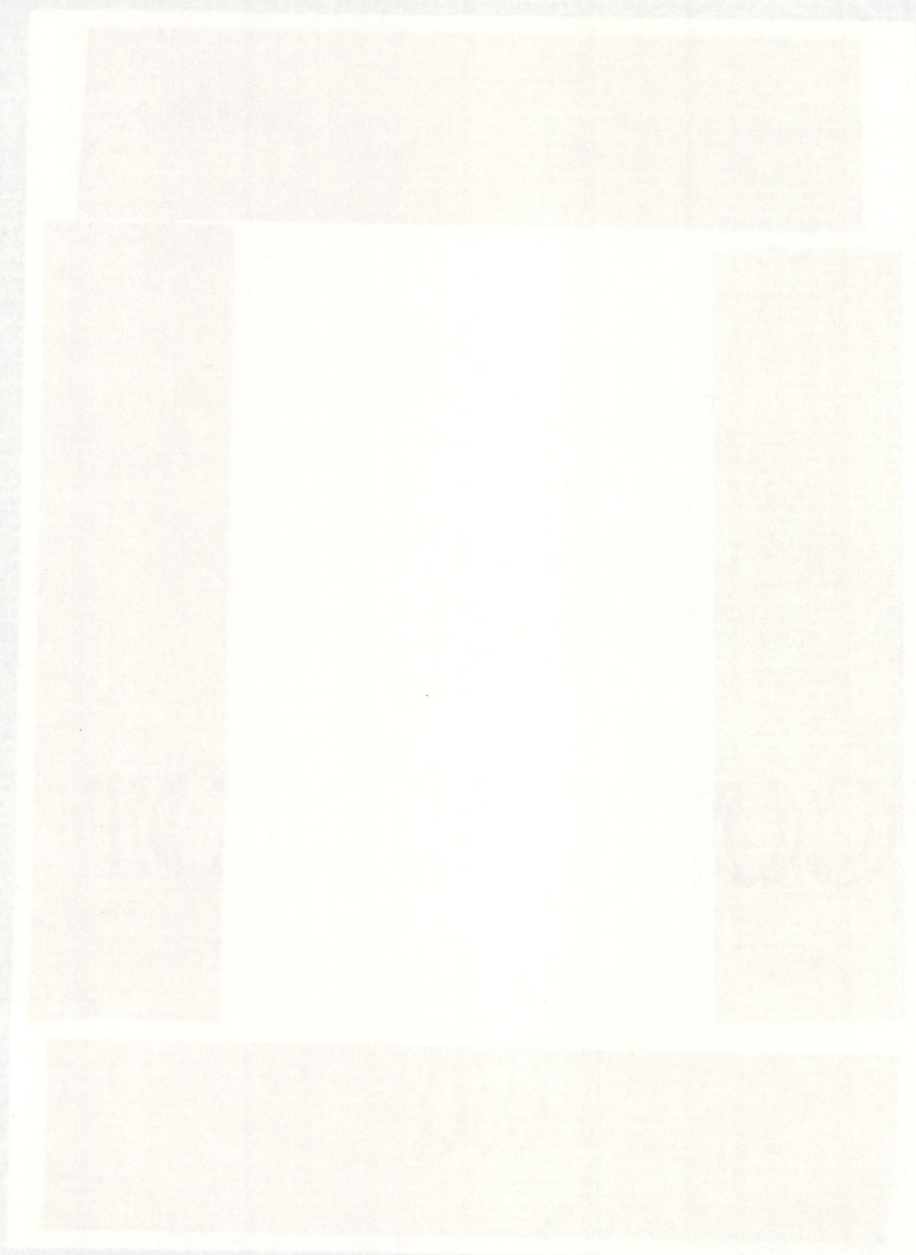




Figure 34. Moccasins of a Shaman. The circle is a recurring (Blackfoot) Plains motif. Length 26.7 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.

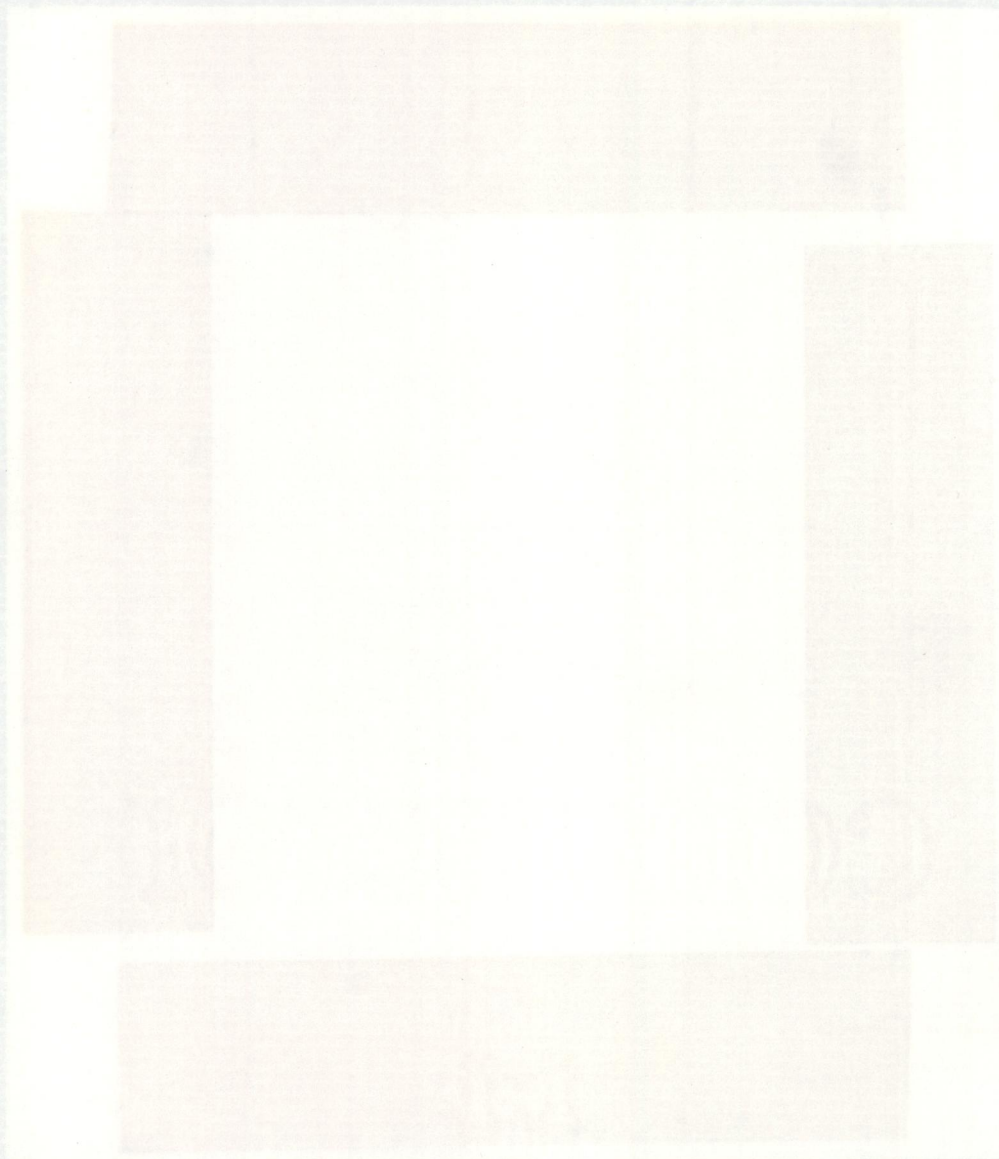




Figure 35. A pouch bag of Cree origin, with glass beads on crimson cloth. It has blue and white grosgrain silk ribbon; yellow and dark green cotton tape; black, light blue and yellow cotton thread; large oval glass beads in black, turquoise and red; woven beadwork on sinew in white, red, turquoise, black, yellow and green opaque glass beads and translucent red and dark blue glass beads; yellow, maroon, deep rose and white wool yarn. Length 49.5 cms, (excluding tassels), width 26.5 cms. Collected c. 1800-1809. National History Museum, Dublin.

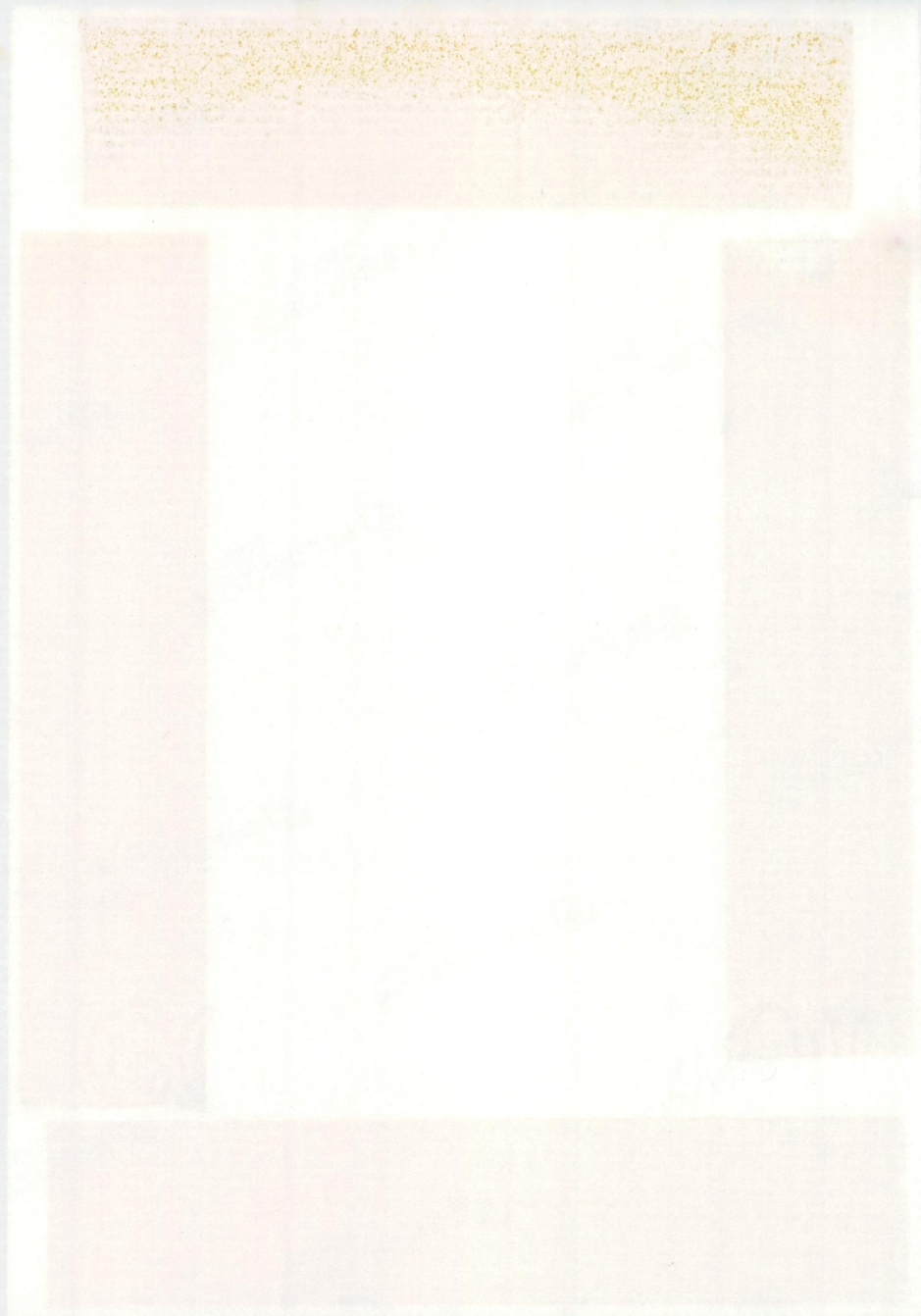
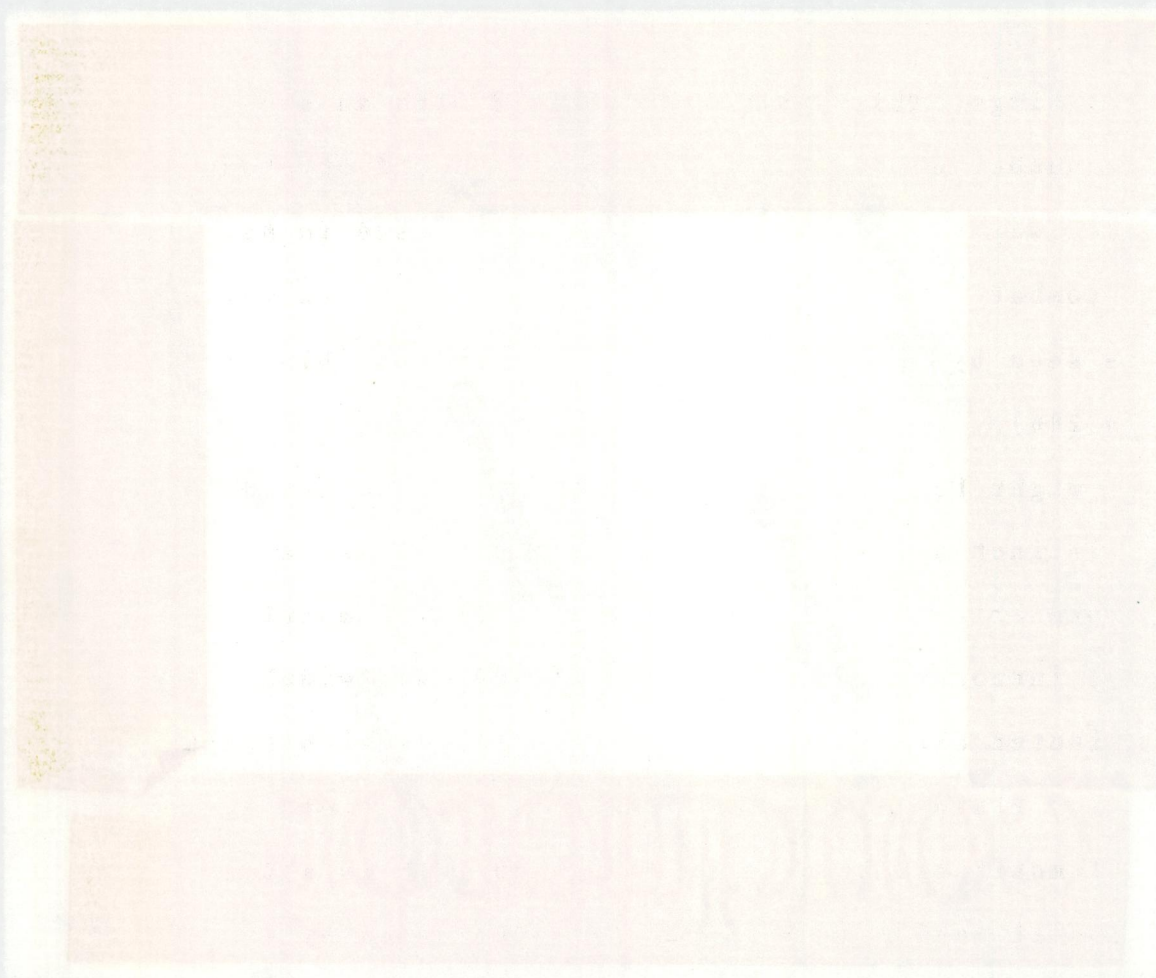




Figure 36. Close-up of Figure 35.



and 38. Figure 37 is 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. In Figure 38 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 (9, p 286).

It might be well to mention here that another different and distinct style is also popular in the same area, in the form of an overlay beadwork in a floral motif. This style, introduced sometime before 1900, was widely distributed all across the Northern Plains with Plain's Cree and Plain's Ojibwa peoples. An example of this floral motif can be seen in Figure 39. It is 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 (9, p 287). These two numerous tribes were great travellers, and probably carried the style clear up into the interior Athabascan tribes of Alaska. The Montana, a group of these people settled on the Rocky Bay reservation near Harre, where they continued to influence neighbouring tribes.

Another style is found in the Southern Plains area among the Kiowa, Commanche, and Southern Cheyenne tribes.



Figure 37. Blackfoot ceremonial 'medicine' pipe. Length 92.5 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.

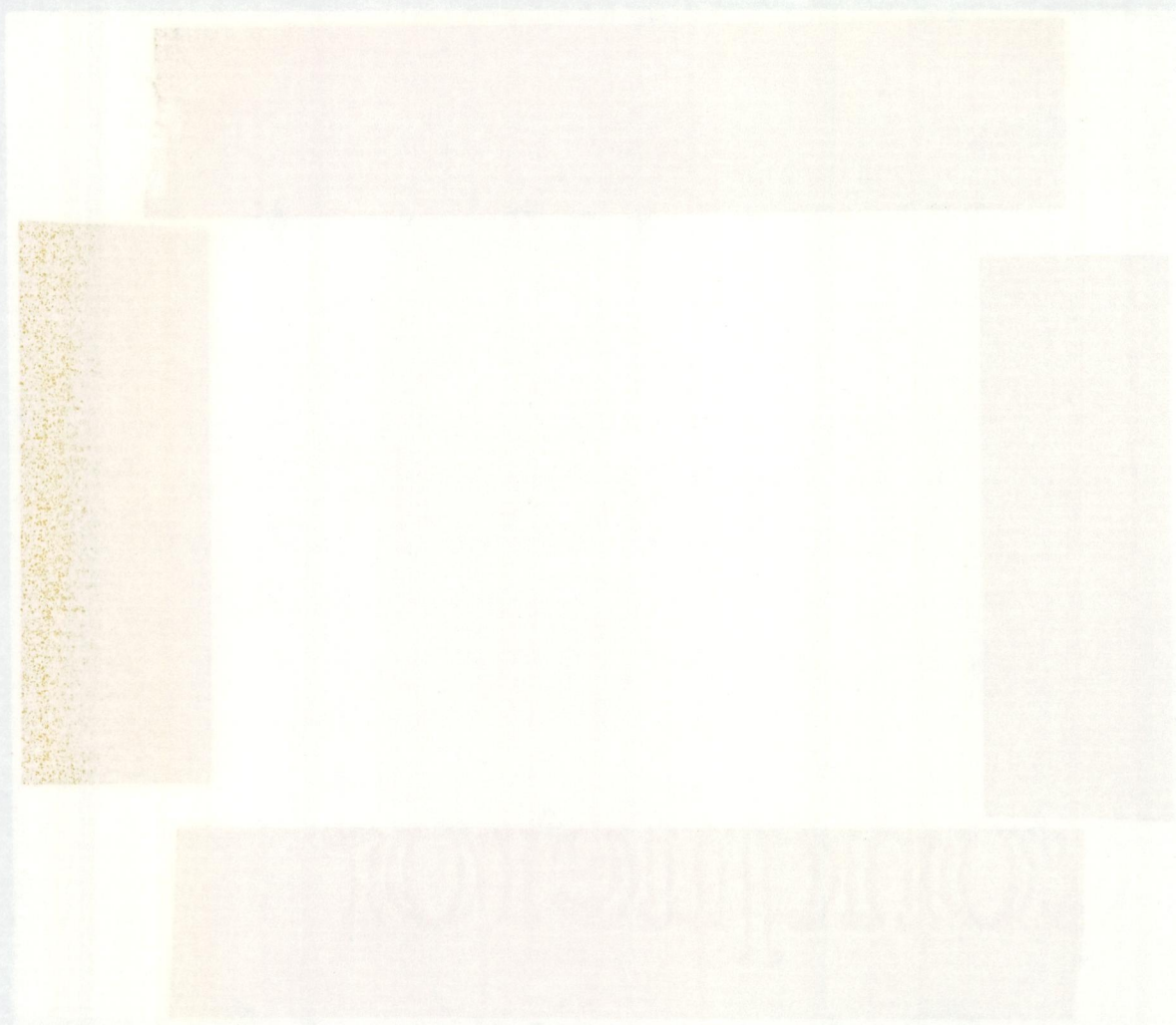
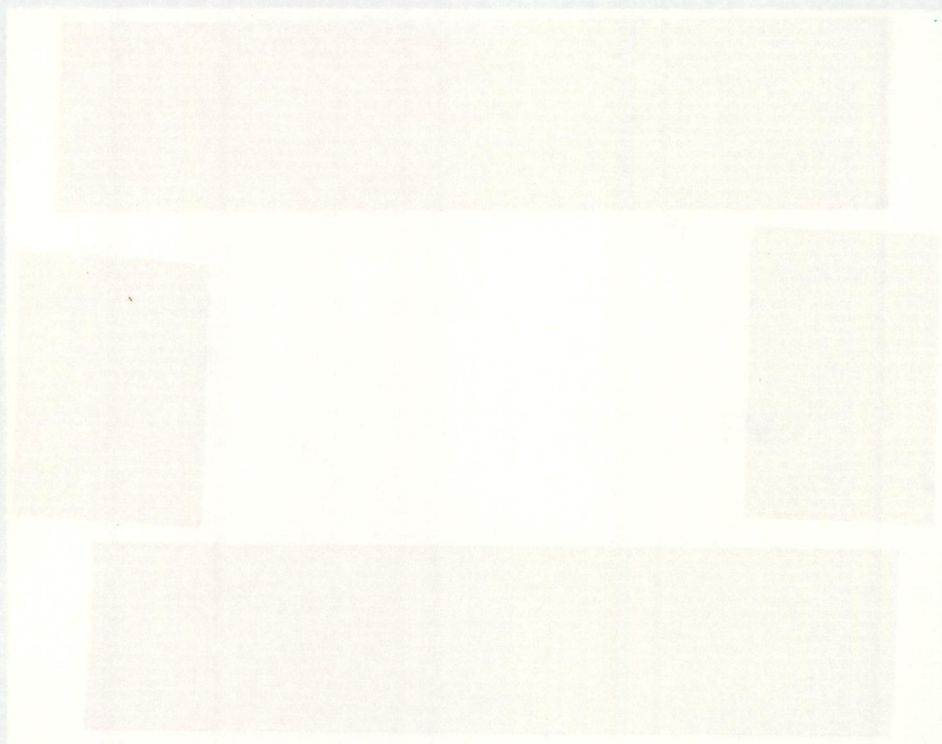




Figure 38. Blackfoot beaded war club.
Length 50.8 cms. McCord
Museum, McGill University,
Montreal.

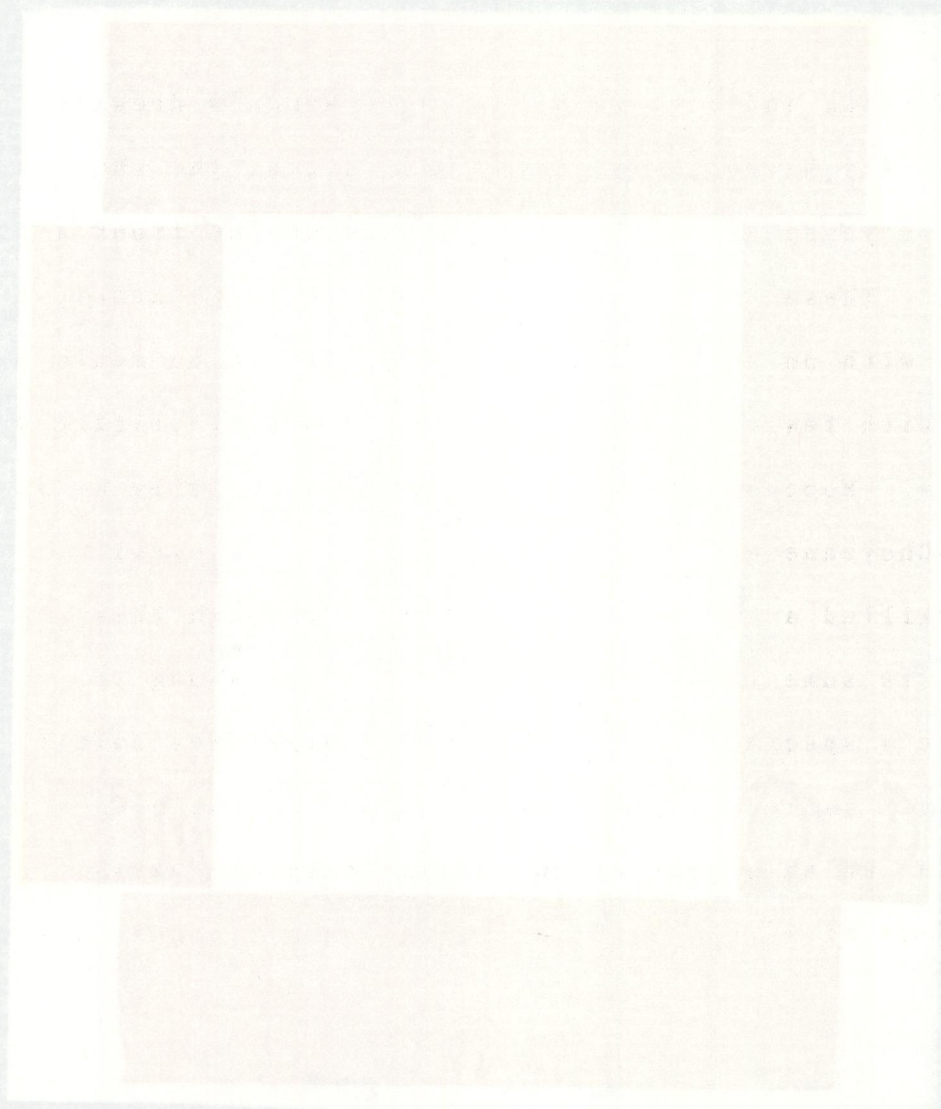


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Figure 39. A Cree ceremonial saddle from the early 1900's, owned by Yellow Horse. Length 48.2 cms. McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.



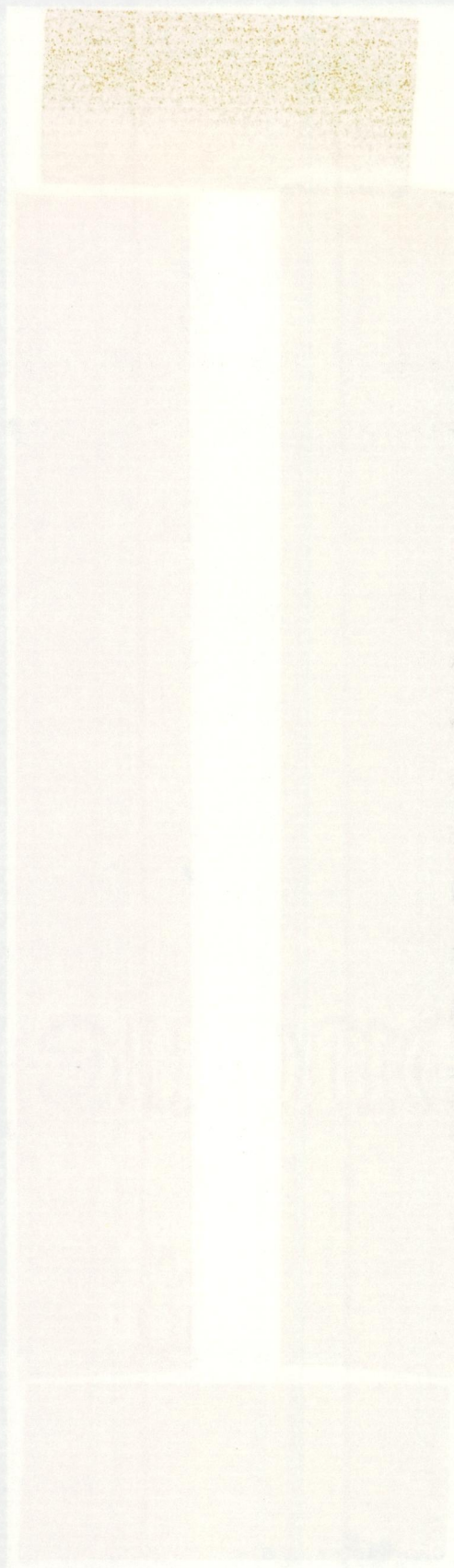
Here beaded decoration takes the form of light, delicate bead trim in contrast to the large, bead-covered areas employed in the north. Shirts and leggings from this region usually lack the fully beaded strips on sleeves, shoulders, and down each legging. Women's dresses generally have only a simple band across the shoulders; the Cheyenne add an additional band on the front and back. These designs are normally simple geometric units done with only one row of the lazy-stitch on men's garments and with few colours - much like an oversimplified Sioux style. Moccasins, however, are normally fully beaded by the Cheyenne and sometimes by the Kiona as well.

Skilled artisans gained prestige through their labours. This is sometimes carried to an extreme among the Cheyenne where a special women's society was organized solely to produce sacred items. This Guild of Southern Cheyenne women had an organization in many respects parallel to that of men's military societies. The women recognized as the best bead workers within the tribe would meet together to make tepees, tepee linings, pillows and bed sheets, all in standard form. Various members of the guild would proudly recount the number of linings they had beaded, much in the way a man would recount his war exploits.

An excellent example of Cheyenne womens beadwork is Figure 40. A Cheyenne pipebag 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



Figure 40. A Cheyenne pipe-bag, c. 1880, that combines beadwork with quilling. Small glass seed beads are used here to reproduce drawings of men's war exploits. Length 99 cms. Denver Art Museum.



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 (9, p 268).

The Kiowa are also noted for two other distinct forms of bead decoration. One is the use of an abstract floral type element; it is difficult to define, but distinct from floral styles found elsewhere, and is usually carried out in an overlay bead sewing technique. The other distinct form is a peculiar bead sewing stitch which is actually a form of beadnetting. Formerly it was used by the Kiowa and Comanche to decorate moccasins, baby carriers, and beaded pouches. It is now known as the 'gourd' stitch or the 'peyote' stitch, because at present it is used by Indians everywhere to decorate fans, staffs, and gourd rattles used in the Peyote ceremonies of the Native American Church. These two styles may have been introduced to the Kiowa by displaced Delaware Indians from the East Coast. Delaware and some Shawnee had an abstract floral style much like that of the Kiowa, and both tribes used the gourd stitch in making garters and other ornaments. In addition, the Delaware were in the

Texas area as early as 1820, when they came into contact with Kiowa as they still do to-day.

Chapter 4.

AFRICAN BEADS AND BEADWORK.

Beads became essential elements of personal adornment in almost every African society; but how they were (and still are) obtained and used depended on the group's social, political, and economic structure and on its role in the trade system. For example, the Turkana, Samburu, and Dinka tribes are constantly seeking fresh supplies of food and water for their livestock, therefore bulky material possessions are impractical. Artistic expression focuses on ornamenting the body. In these tribes, both men and women wear beads as an essential part of everyday and ceremonial dress that communicates their ethnic affiliation, age grade, marital status, and wealth. The societies are organized according to age sets, a series of clearly defined levels through which each member of the group passes; childhood, warriorhood, and old age for men; childhood, womanhood, and marriage for women. Passage from one age set to the next is signalled by changes in clothing and adornment, including beads whose styles, colours, and assemblages beautify their wearers and communicate important information about them (9, p 137). (Fig. 41).

Until this century, artisans in East Africa made beads of local organic materials such as shell, roots, seeds and bone, strung with palm fibres or giraffe hair.

Africa 1987



Figure 41. Map of African tribes.

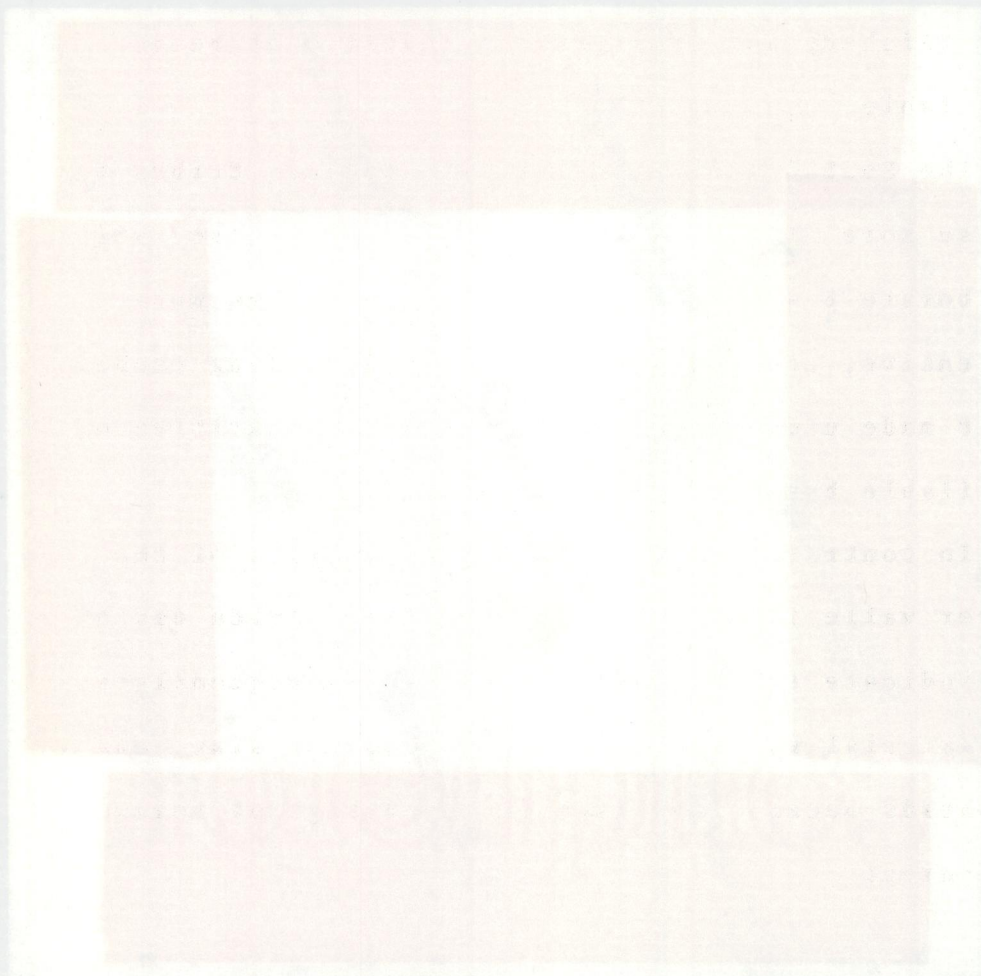
When foreign trade invited contact with the Europeans, glass beads frequently replaced those made locally (Fig. 42).

No matter what the material of which they were made, beads were used for a wide variety of purposes. In Zulu society, beads marked changes in status in life of both males and females. In the past Zulu who wore beads reserved for royal use without the king's consent were put to death. Among the Lovedu beads played a part in the rites of ancestor worship, and so important were they that ancestors might cause an illness to a loved one as a reminder that their beads were to continue being worn to assure their continued prestige in their afterlife. The Kikuyu used a sacred bead in the ceremony of oath-taking, for perjury was believed to result in the death of the perjurer and serious harm to his relatives. Among the Thonga, as soon as a child had cut his incisors, a white bead was tied to one of the hairs above his forehead to help the rest of the teeth to come through normally. If this were not done, it was believed that the child would not become intelligent. The Thonga also wore large white beads in the hair, or sometimes hung short strings of small beads from the head to indicate possession by spirits (7, p 104).

Personal and domestic adornments have long been the predominant modes of artistic expression in South Africa, and beadwork specifically is an important art form in the region. For centuries, small quantities of glass



Figure 42. A necklace of blue beads from Abyssinia/Kenya borders, They were used for a gift or sale, 1880. Length approx. 15 inches. National History Museum, dublin.



beads originated in India and were imported into South and East Africa, where they served as status symbols. By the end of the nineteenth century, trade in the more uniformly shaped and smaller glass seed beads was fully established, and much greater quantity of beads were now available.

The Southern African Zulu and Ndebele tribes used these more plentiful beads to create distinct and elaborate beadwork. Embellishments became more extensive, and the tribes developed beading techniques that made unusual use of the greater quantities of available beads.

In contrast, beads are worn by peoples of the fertile river valleys of central and western Africa essentially to indicate social rank. Status was frequently expressed in material wealth, so that the amount, size, and weight of beads became important in the design of beaded adornment.

SOUTH AFRICAN BEADS AND BEADWORK.

The beadwork tradition is common to the black peoples of southern Africa, and has ritual, economic and social significance. Among the Zulus, who possess a distinctive national dress and elaborate ornamental tradition, special emphasis is placed on social relationships, as the symbolism of dress and beadwork mark the values and the stages of social development through which the individual passes. Groupings determined by age, sex,

marital, and kinship status prevail, and the dress and bead configurations worn attest to one's appropriate group affiliation. From ancient times, bits of bone, horn, shells, polished wood fragments and animal claws have been pierced and strung to fashion necklaces and belts.

Zulu beadwork has a number of different types, consisting of simple strings of beads, largely flat constructions with multiple strands of beads attached at the corners, single or multiple beaded ropes used as girdles (Fig. 43), beadwork covered objects like sticks, snuffboxes (Fig. 44), dolls, gourds (Fig. 45), and belts (Figs. 46, 47), and clothing, like shirts (Fig 48) and shawls typically of leather. But it is their love-letters, ubala abuyise, meaning 'one writes in order that the other should reply', the existence of which is unique to them. This most symbolic Zulu beadwork is a private and public communication of the status of ones love life. As they possessed no written language, much of their communication took this visual form. Using beads imported and made from local materials, women of every stratum had made love-letters, simple strings of beads worn around the neck or about the head which feature several favourite colours, probably those most obtainable from the trading posts. Blue may represent gossip, thought, or sky; red can symbolize 'eyes red with weeping' from 'seeking ones lover in vain', or can symbolize blood or fire; yellow can be for riches or poverty; white which means love and purity (9, p 134). White beads of bone,



Figure 43. Kaffir, Zulu, women's beaded girdle, 1879, and beaded arm ornaments 1893. National History Museum, Dublin.

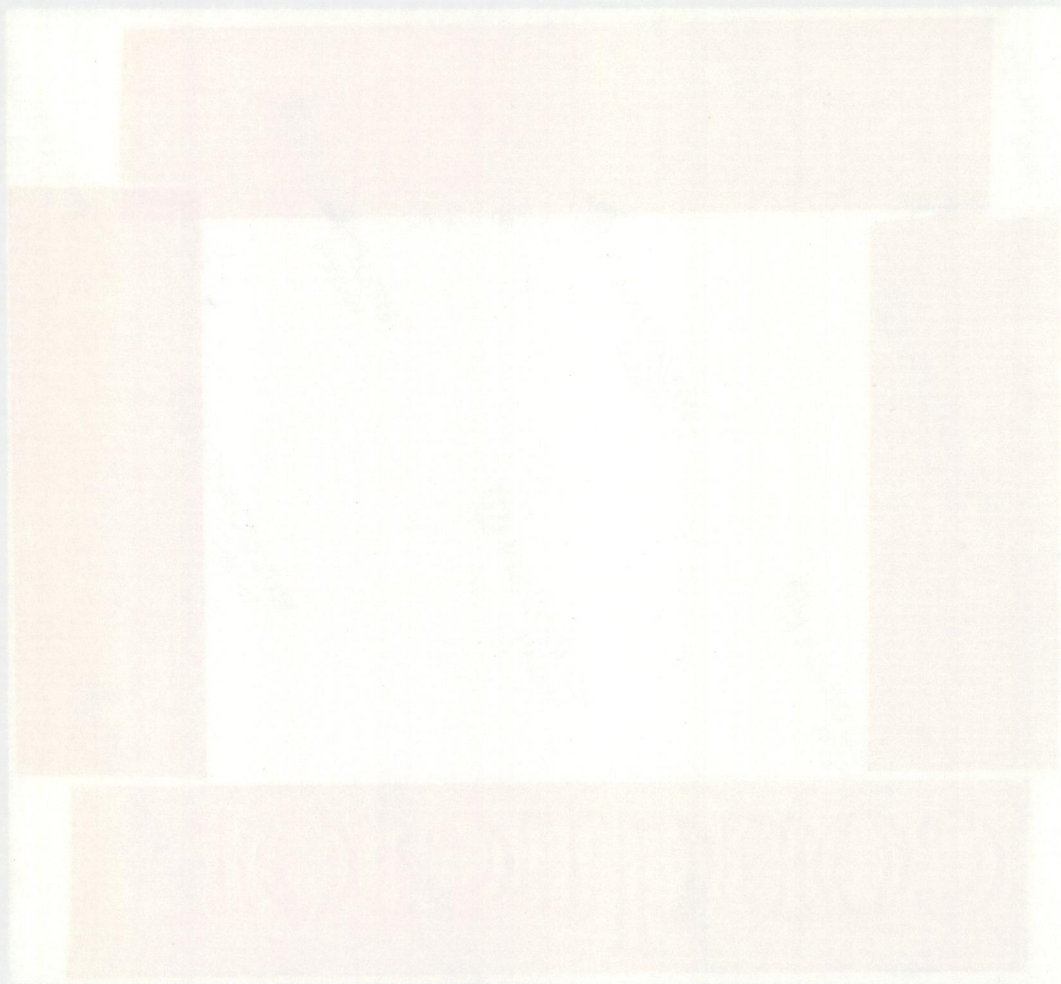




Figure 44. On the left, a Zulu bamboo snuffbox, covered in beads, 1897. On the right is an ornament worn by unmarried women; white and red beads, and strings of white beads with brass buttons on the ends, from Natal, South Africa, 1890. Length 2'10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Transferred from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, to the National History Museum, dublin.

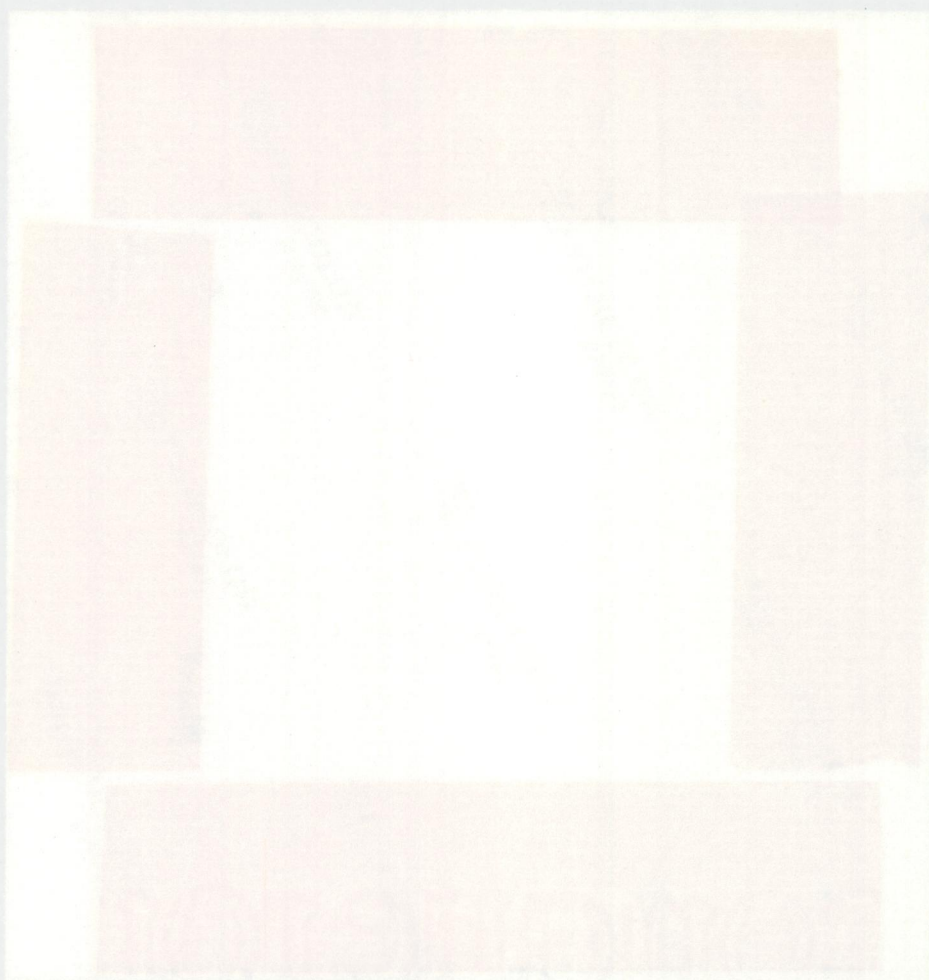




Figure 45. Gourds, covered with glass beads,
from Bechuanaland, South Africa,
1888. Diameter 1.9" and 1.75".
National History Museum, Dublin.

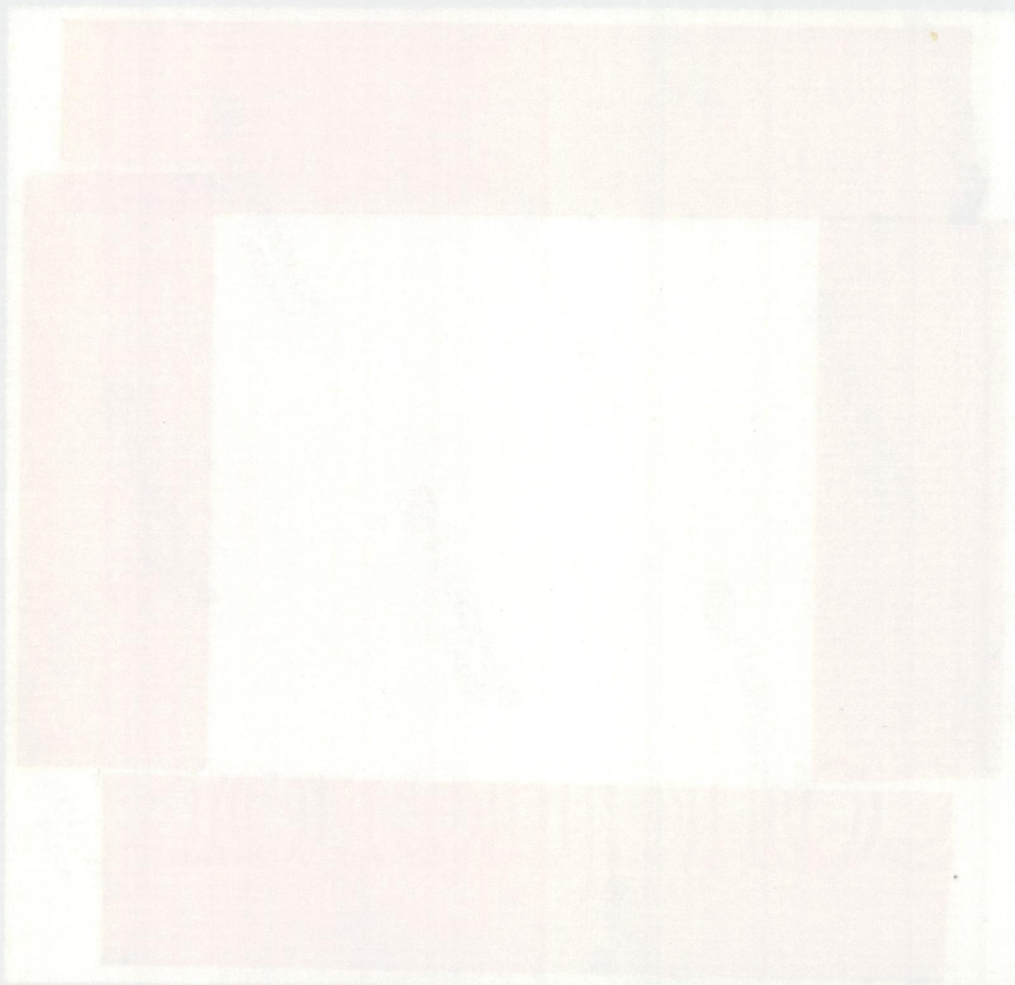




Figure 46. A belt (Isibopo) made of beads arranged in diagonal compartments of blue and white which are separated by outlines of yellow beads, South Africa, 1880. National History Museum, Dublin.

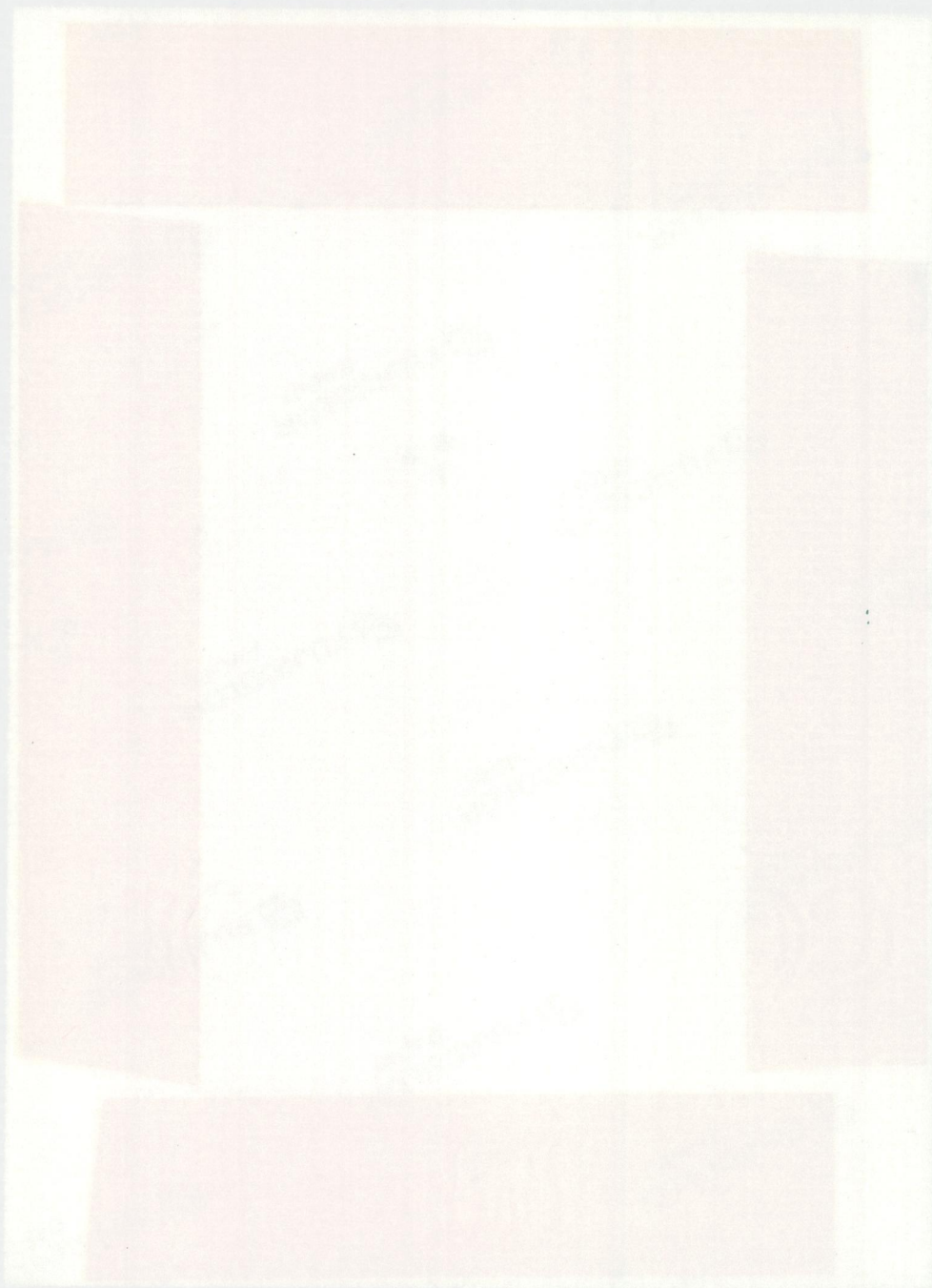




Figure 47. Leather belt with buckle decorated with red, white and blue beads. Length 26", from Matabeleland, South Africa, 1932. National History Museum, Dublin.

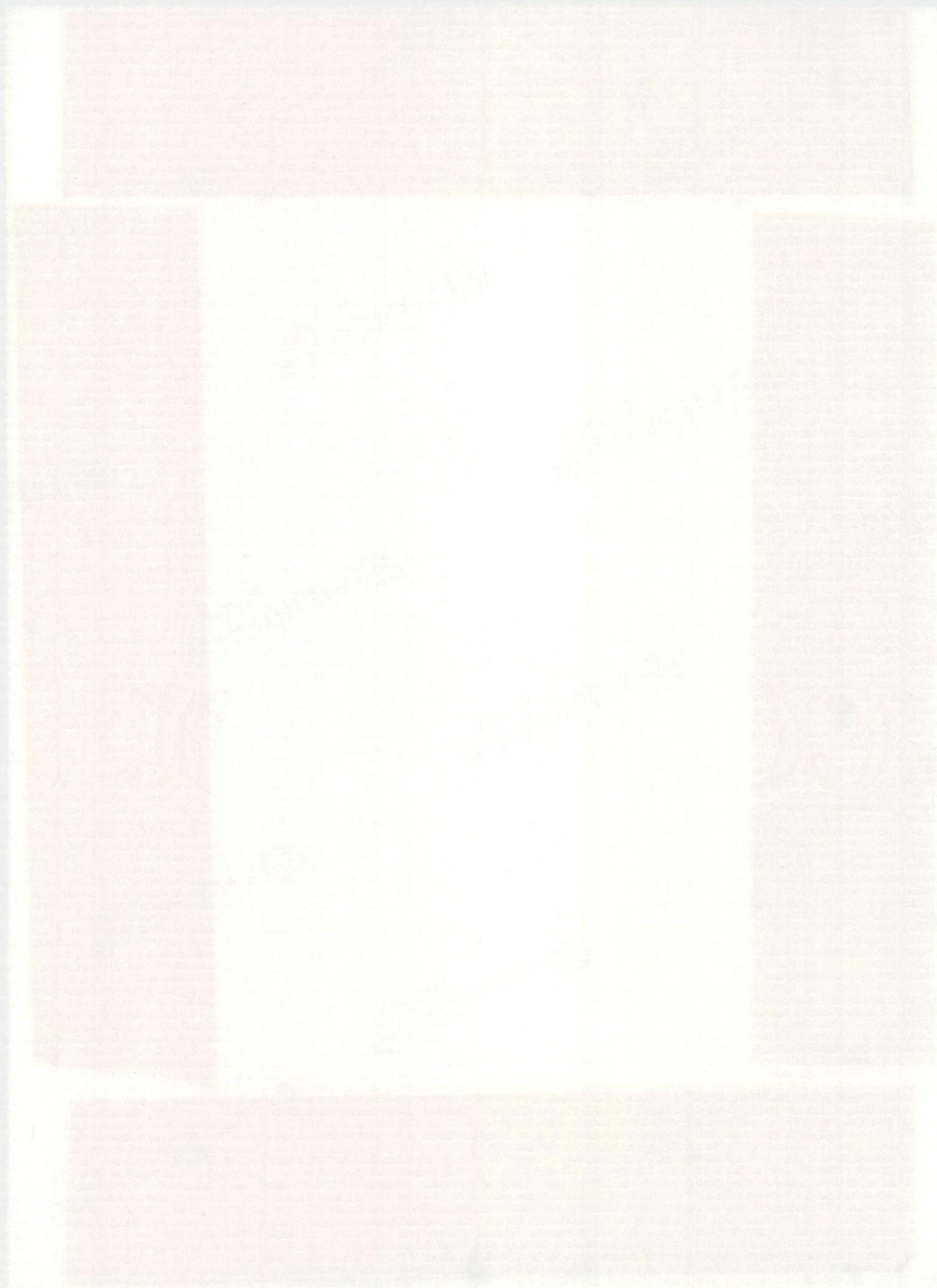
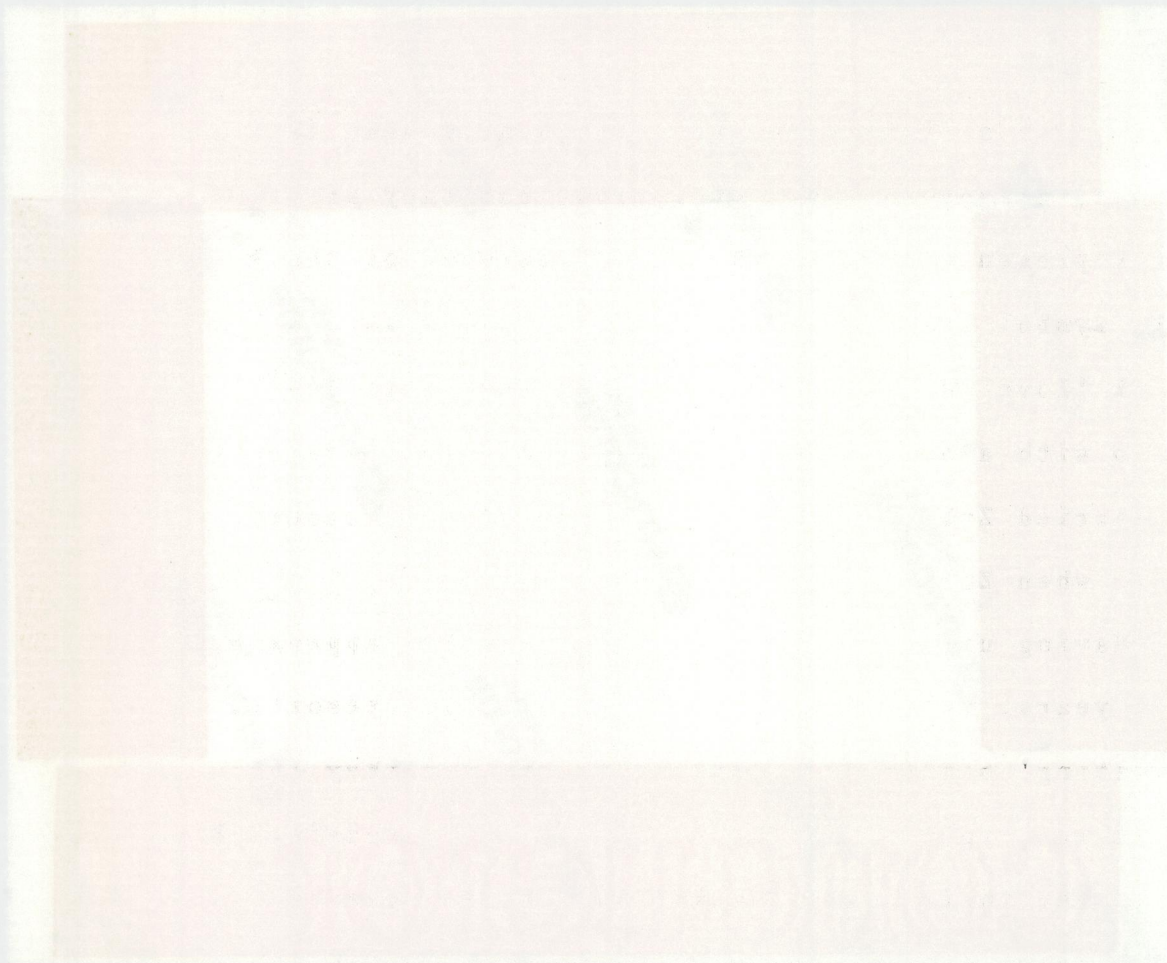




Figure 48. A Zulu apron, formed of a long fringe of white and black beads attached to a girdle of leather, 1893. Length 2'5", width 1'0". National History Museum, Dublin.



ithambo, or milk, ubisi, always convey a positive message: love, purity, goodness, happiness, virginity, or good luck. Black, green, pink, yellow, blue and red beads generally have positive or negative meanings. For example, black beads, isitimane, most frequently mean darkness, gloom, disappointment, or sorrow, but they are also used to represent a very dark-skinned person, or the kaross, the symbol of marriage (18, p 84). An example of a beadwork 'love letter' collar is illustrated in Figure 49, also with a beadwork bag similar to those worn by young unmarried Zulu men in the early twentieth century, the time when Zulu men began wearing beads.

Having used large numbers of beads for approximately 120 years, it is the young girls who have resorted to 'writing' beaded love letters to the men they love. Zulu men, in turn, proudly display them, wearing them all over their heads, necks, and chests, greater numbers signifying greater numbers of wives or lovers in a reflection of wealth and status. In addition, men will enlist their sisters in producing an appropriate love-letter destined for the female of their affection.

Once married, the woman dons the distinctive flared head-dress to indicate her changed status. One of the most distinctive African tribal hairstyles worn in the Tugela Ferry-Durban region is a beehive type head-dress of elaborate construction. Beadwork on the head-dress conveys messages about her virginity before marriage, her feelings towards her in-laws, whether or not she has borne children, and the type of marriage in which she is



Figure 49. Beaded collar with small patterned panel (left) Zulu. On the right beadwork bag worn by young unmarried Zulu men in the early twentieth century. Collar length 36 cms. Collection Tambaran Gallery, New York.

involved. Married women alone may wear this head-dress (Fig. 50).

Zulu beadwork seems always to have been aimed at strong polychrome effects. The range of patterns includes lozenges, triangles and small rectangles in solid blocks of colour, or horizontal or zigzag bands, often spaced out by lines of black beads. The impression is one of vivid contrast rather than subtle shading (2, p 20), (Fig. 51).

NDEBELE BEADWORK.

Beadwork is one of the oldest and most essential of the decorative arts practised by the peoples of southern Africa and, among the Ndebele, it has markedly influenced an additional art-form for which they are noted, the decorative mural painting of their homes. It is a beadwork tradition that tells us the story of the Ndebele from infancy through to death. The story of an individual's life may be read in the composition of the beads.

The complexity of beadwork as cultural icon is apparent from the very first days of the individual, as the four to five-day old infant, who, during a ceremony in which grandparents traditionally select a name, is adorned with a khetsa a small beaded collar, constructed primarily of white beads. The child wears this initial necklace for approximately two years, after which it is passed on to another child.

A baby boy is dressed in a beaded loincloth made of

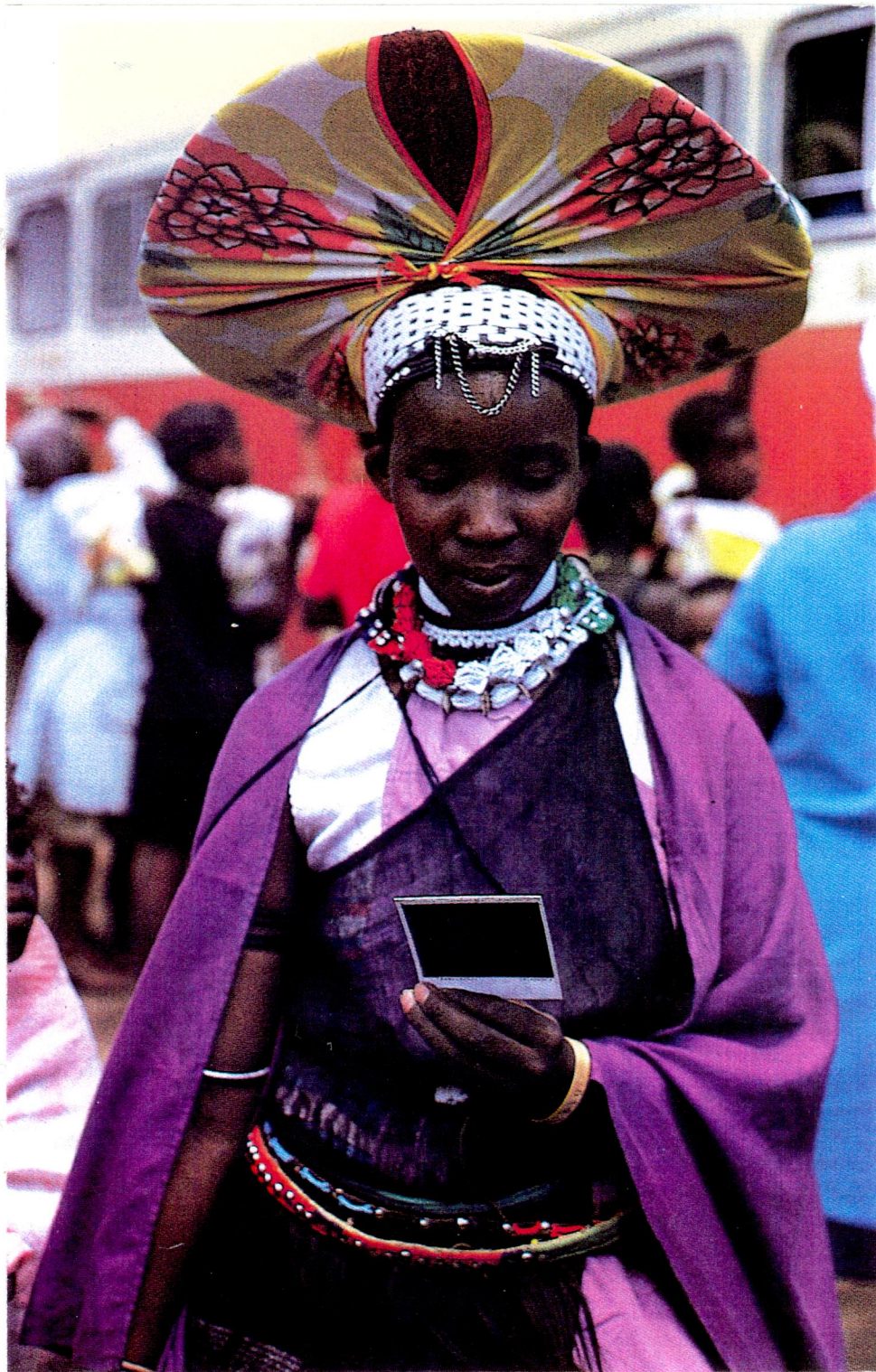


Figure 50. Beaded headband conveying message of social importance, Zulu. Tugela Ferry, Kwazulu, South Africa, 1980.

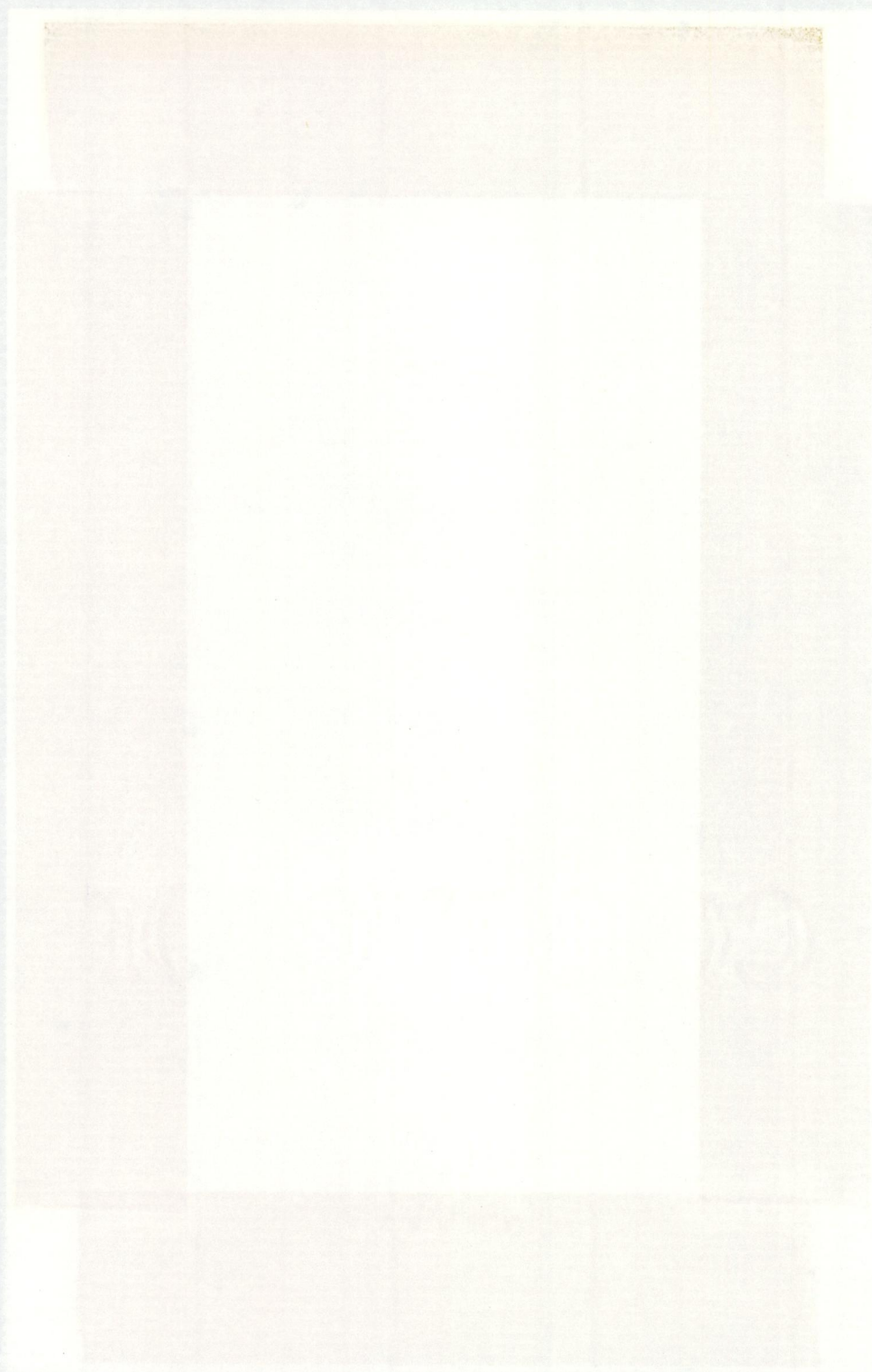
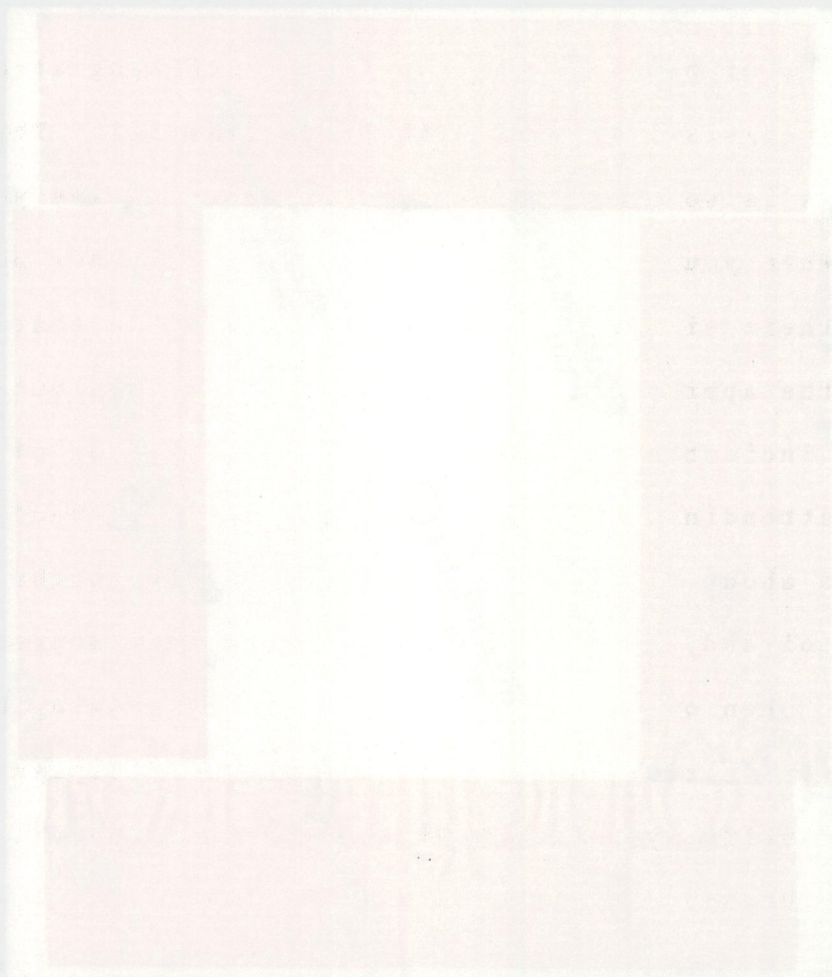




Figure 51. Zulu women's necklet of green, black, red and white beads. An example of a solid block of beadwork with zigzag pattern, 1897. National History Museum, Dublin.



leather, lebeshu, and two strings of white and red beads, dikhoso. At four months, the girl wears a ghabi, a beaded loincloth made by the maternal grandmother. This frontal skirt is about ten centimetres square and has a border of beads at the top from which hang strands of twisted sisal trimmed with beads (Fig.52). This type of dress is worn until the girl is about twelve years old.

When youngsters approach puberty, further portrayal of their situation is made visible by the characteristics of the appropriate beadwork. A white flag outside the hut indicates to the community that the son of the house is attending the initiation or mountain school. The boy, aged about sixteen, spends three to six months at the school and, during that time, the mother mourns for him. Her token of mourning is expressed by growing her hair, and by wearing long strips of beadwork, siyaya. These side veils symbolize tears because her son will now progress from boyhood to manhood (Fig.53). When the boy returns from the school, he wears a Cleopatra-type beaded head-piece with beaded band which frames the face, towo, as well as a beaded skin-blanket, lenaka. When the initiate arrives home, a new name is given to him, which is only used by the parents.

During puberty, the young female also attends initiation school. At that time, she wears a skirt made of unravelled hopsacking. The skirt, titana, is beaded around the border, although the skirt remains unbeaded when a girl is not a virgin. During the initiation



Figure 52. Ndebele children wearing beadwork loincloths, ghabi, KwaNdebele, South Africa, 1980.

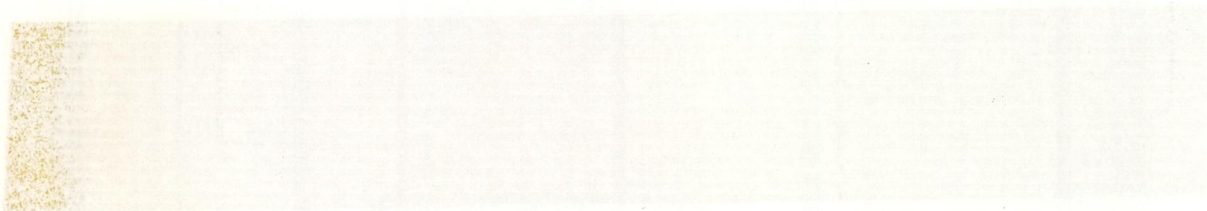




Figure 53. Long strips of beadwork, siyaya, symbolize tears, worn by a Ndebele woman. KwaNdebele, South Africa, 1980.

1870

1871

1872

ceremony itself, the initiate wears six hoops of beads around her waist. These hoops, nkolanane, mimic the elongated figures of fertility dolls. One week after the initiation, some of the hoops are removed and passed on to other initiates. The puberty rites end with the graduate wearing a new beaded garment, the rectangular pepetu, or maiden's apron, indicating that the young woman is now available for marriage (Fig. 54).

Beaded hoops, which women wear from youth through their married lives, are also significant, and they are removed only upon the death of a husband. As is the case with the apron styling, different types of beaded hoops indicate different stages in a woman's life.

Beadwork plays a role in the courtship rites of the young Ndebele as well. If a woman receives a beaded tab or love-letter and wears it instead of dropping it to the ground, she indicates that she loves the sender. He then wears a headband with two beaded flaps, sikilitti, to cover his ears, which symbolically prevents him from hearing other females. This is one of the few times in which men wear beaded adornment.

As might be expected, the beadwork associated with marriage and the marital ritual is more complex and diverse. The bride-to-be and friends begin work on the beadwork design, add a heavy beaded shawl across the shoulders, and create a beadwork border. Her beadwork bridal cloak is one of a woman's most cherished possessions.

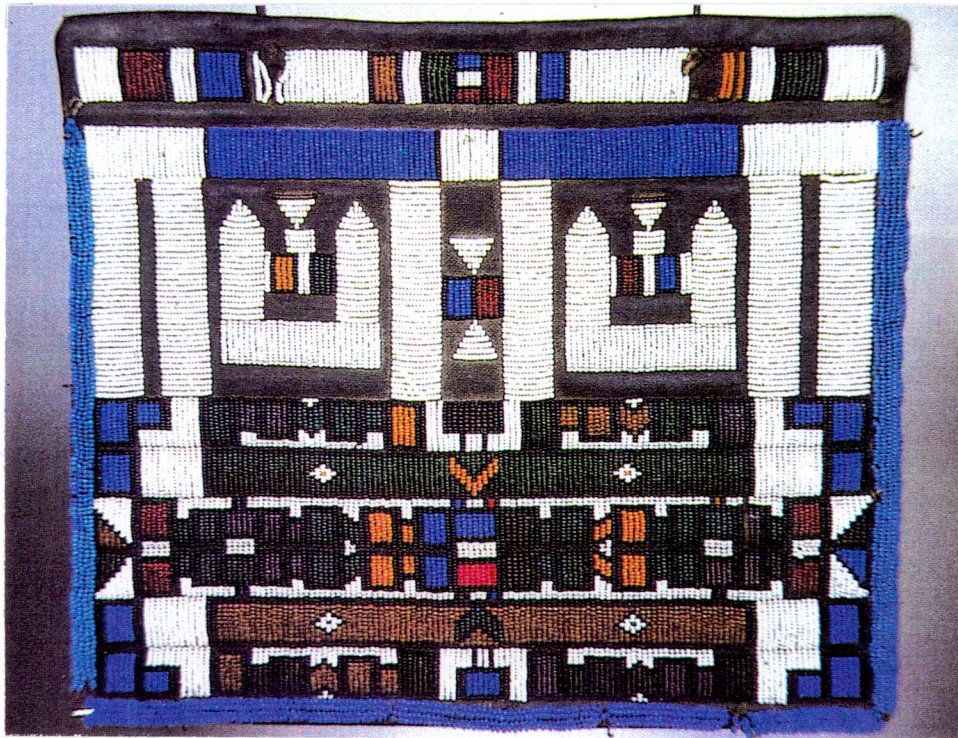


Figure 54. Young Ndebele maiden's apron, pepetu. KwaNdebele, South Africa, 1980.

On the wedding day, the young woman reveals her changed status by changing her pepetu for a new apron, the wedding apron, jocolo, which she will wear until she bears a child, at which time her transition from adolescent to mother/artisan will be complete and she will remove the jocolo to replace it, finally, with the symbol of motherhood, the beaded mapoto. The jocolo, whose five panels are said to symbolize the deposit of five head of cattle towards the bride-price, lobolo, is made by the paternal grandmother (Fig. 55). The groom's family pays for the bride and her dress. Occasionally, there is an additional miniature panel on either side of the five panels. This signifies that the wearer is not the groom's first wife (Fig. 55, example on right).

White beads predominate in the complete bridal costume (Fig. 56). The bride emerges virtually hidden from view and is weighed down by the elaborate attire. The long, beaded wedding veil, nyoga, is a snake-like train which hangs from the shoulders and trails on the ground, creating a wave-like motion as the bride walks and dances. Like the jocolo, often as long as 1.5 metres and approximately 20 to 40 centimetres wide, the nyoga is made by the paternal grandmother. Square holes across its width means the bride is not the first wife, while a flap woven at the end of the train indicates that the bride is a virgin. If the patterns are divided into three to five sections down the length of the train, the bride

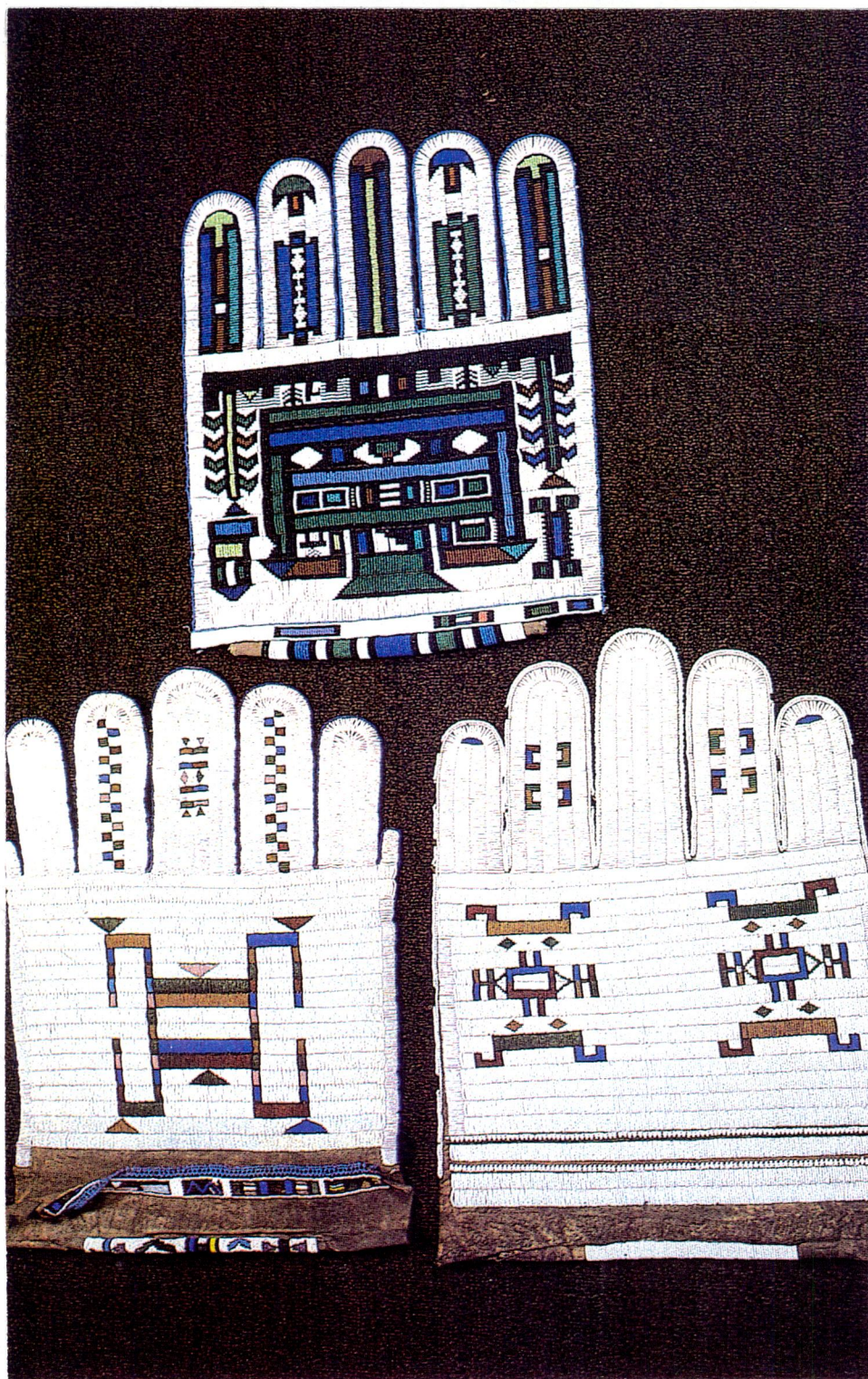


Figure 55. Five panelled jocolo worn on the wedding day, Ndebele. Rhoda Levinsohn Collection.

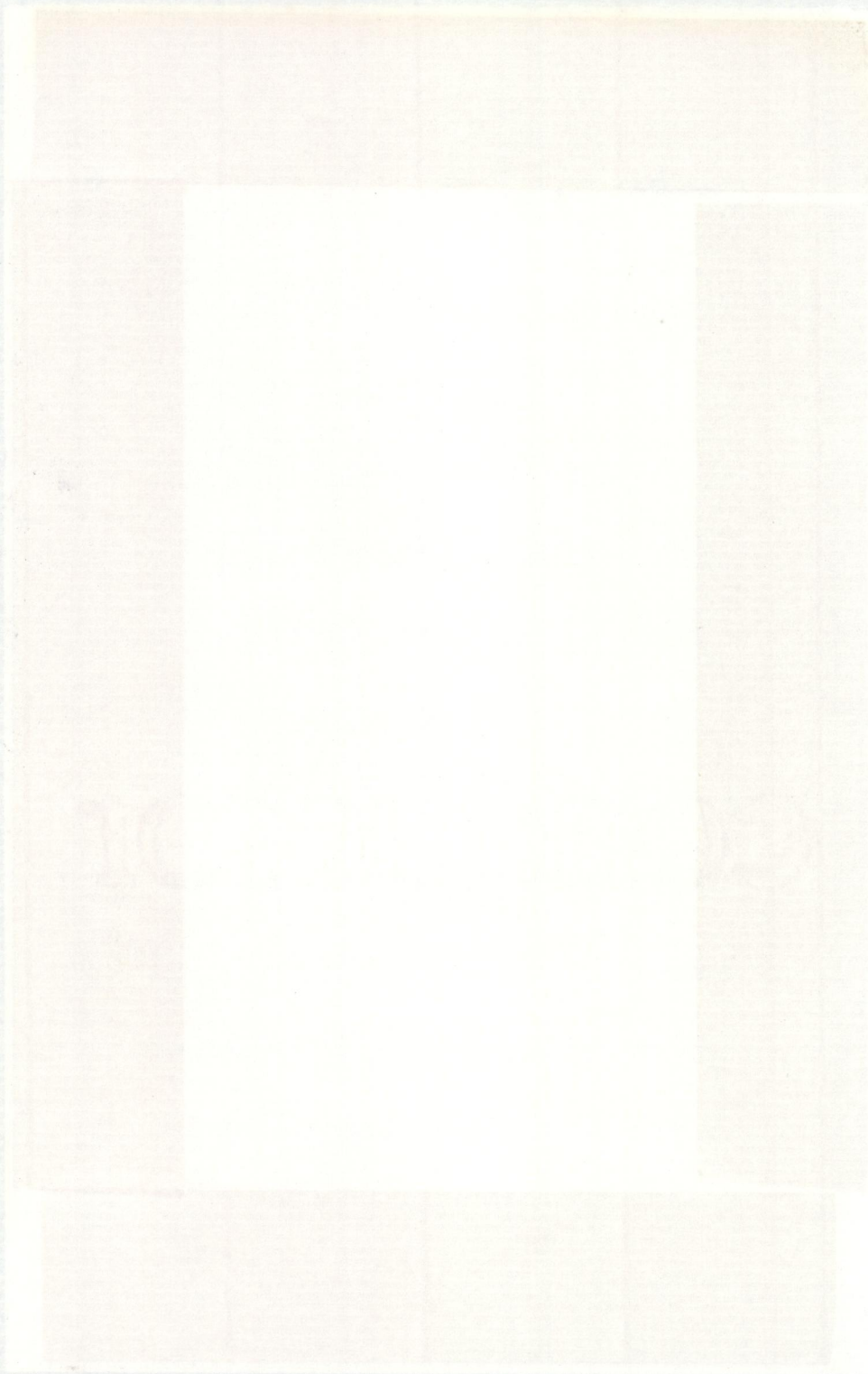
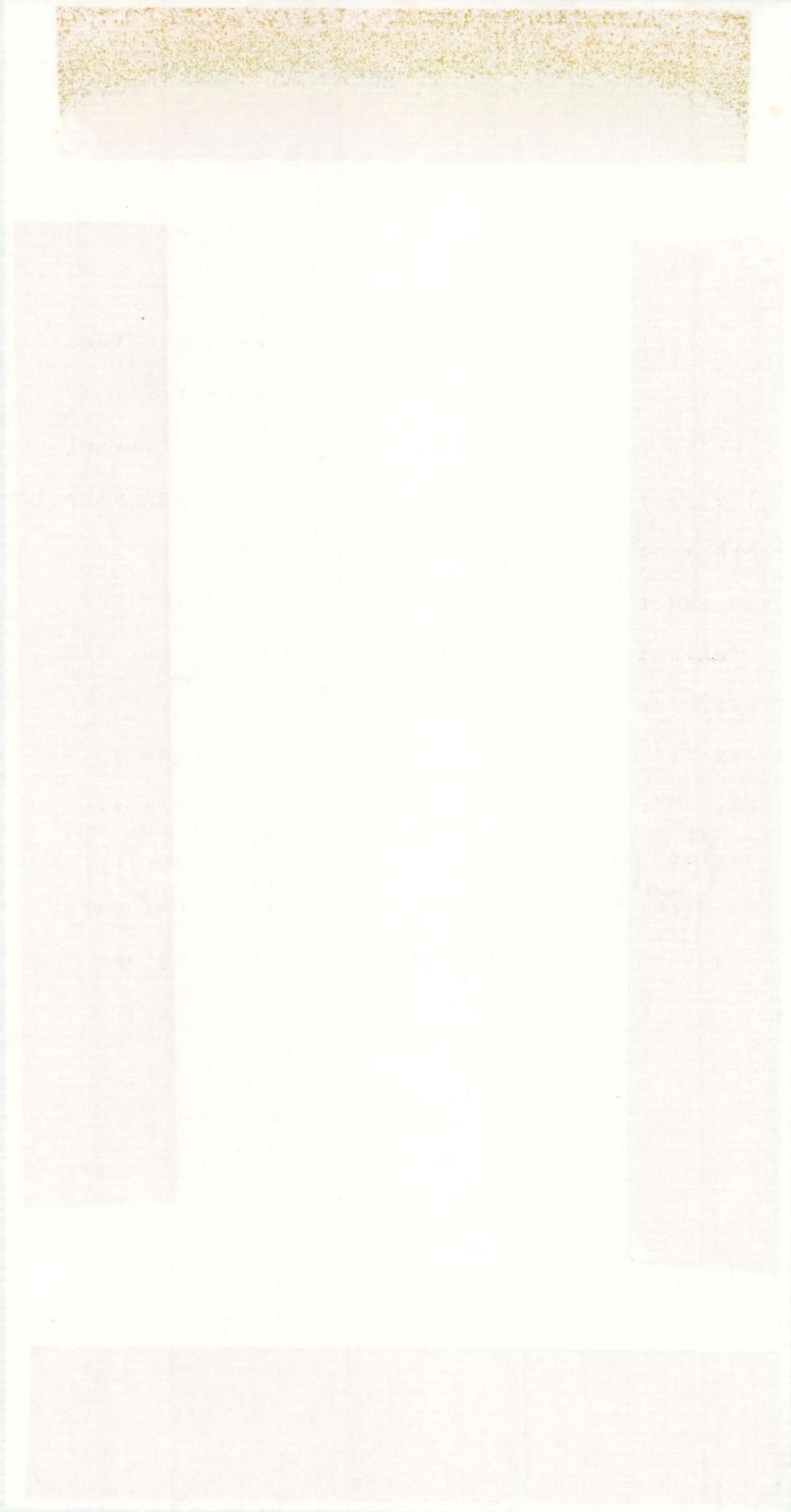




Figure 56. A complete Ndebele bridal costume.
KwaNdebele, South Africa, 1980.



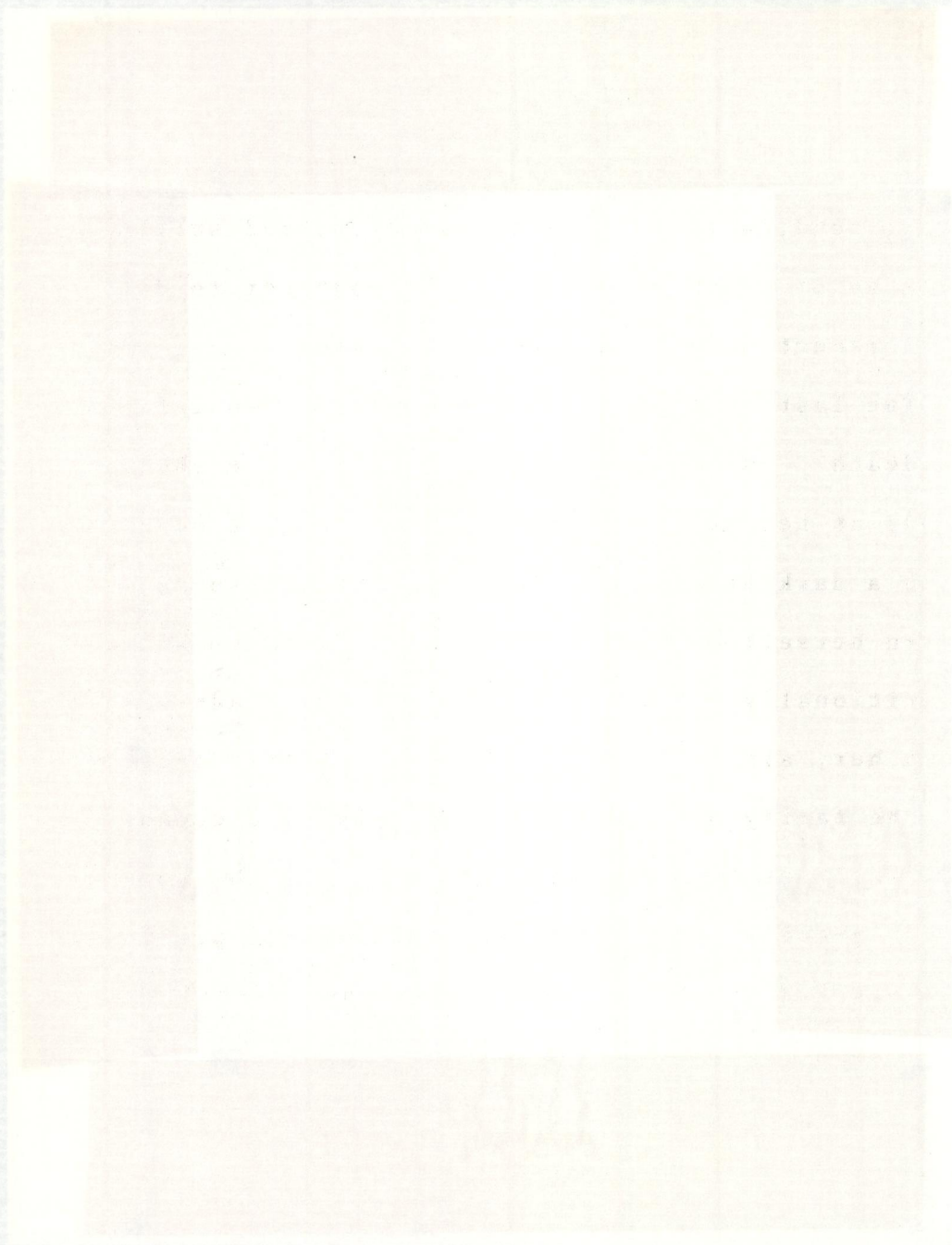
is notified that her husband intends to take more than one wife, and by wearing the train, she agrees to his intention. Designs vary, as the older examples seem to be predominantly white and less patterned than those of more recent creations. Westernization's effects are evident in newer designs which are geometric, often three-dimensional in effect, and include triangles, rectangles, parallelograms, diamonds, arcs, and wavy lines, and they may include alphabetical lettering.

In addition to the heavily beaded train, the bride wears the following: a white beaded headband about 2.5 centimetres wide, umgaka; a beaded front wedding veil, siyaya, to cover her face (Fig. 56); a wedding blanket, orara, which has been beaded by the bride's sisters; and the prized bridal cloak.

Once the young married woman has borne a child, her status as a parent is revealed by changing her jocolo for a mapoto, an apron of goatskin or canvas base which is beaded using the lazy-stitch, sewing typical of this kind of Ndebele work. The mapoto is distinguished by its size, texture, and shape. It is rectangular, having two flaps on either side of the base, with beaded tassels between the flaps. The mapoto in Figure 57 is at least fifty years old. Architectural symbols of houses appear on the top panel, with abstract designs resembling aerial views of the kraal (homestead) below it. Ndebele beadwork designs frequently mirror the tribe's painted murals (9, p 135). Decoration of the mapoto varies,



Figure 57. This mapoto, a beaded apron worn by married Ndebele women, was made of glass beads sewn on beaten goatskin. At least fifty years old. Width 45.72 cms. Private collection.



although it appears that modern mapoto are more colourfully beaded than those made before the 1970s. This difference is true of Ndebele beadwork in general; older work is marked by a predominance of white in the background, more subdued colouration, and subtle linear designs of greater intricacy, in contrast to designs of more recent origin as previously noted.

The last cycle marked by Ndebele ceremonial beadwork is death. When widowed, the Ndebele woman sheds her beads at her husband's funeral and wears a beadless skin with a dark blanket. After a year of mourning, she may adorn herself with some of her prized possessions. Traditionally, when a female died, her beads were buried with her, although to-day these are either passed down in the family or sold. Increasingly, the economic difficulties faced by the Ndebele force the women to sell rare, precious artefacts like initiation, pre-initiation, and married women's aprons, belts, and fertility dolls used in traditional rituals and never before readily available to the marketplace. Garments that were passed down from generation to generation as treasured possessions or dowries are now dispersed, threatening a valuable cultural heritage (18, chapter 5).

WEST AFRICA, FEATURING YORUBA BEADWORK.

The Yoruba, one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria seem never to have established a single political entity but a common origin and cultural heritage are indicated by their language, even with its many dialects.

Hundreds of Yoruba orisha (spirits) are honoured in beadwork; every family or clan has its own spirit, and every event in life - birth, sickness, or death - is related to an orisha. The Yoruba myth of creation relates that the holy city of Ife was the centre of the world, the city in which their kingship originated.

In the Yoruba religion, it is believed that the deity Obalufou invented beads for use by men and gods.

Coloured beads were associated with various facets of worship of the 'divine hierarchy'. Priests of Oduduwa, creator of the earth, wore white beads, while priests of Shango, the thunder god, wore necklaces and wristlets of black, red, and white; devotees wore red and white. Worshippers of Shango's mother, Yemaja, whose domain was water, wore blue or crystal-clear glass beads.

While bodily decoration and clothing were available to all who could afford them, beaded clothing was reserved for the king. Figure 58 shows a Yoruba face panel or mask for a late nineteenth-century egungun, a masquerade cult dancer. Cowrie shells, once the means of economic exchange among the Yoruba, still signify prosperity. The cowries surrounding the face of the dancer symbolize the affluence and power of the lineage that the masquerade honours. The abundant use of beads and the bird motifs suggest the mask belonged to a royal household (9, p 138).

Among the Yoruba, beads serve many functions. Local bead production played a definite role in the economy.



Figure 58. Yoruba face panel or mask.
Late nineteenth century.
Length 39.3 cms. Private
collection.

The individual expressed his or her personal, aesthetic preferences within cultural guidelines. The symbolism of beads: their colour, material, size and shape, and area where worn on the body, helped the individual to communicate non-verbally his religious beliefs, either as worshipper or priest, and to establish identity, indicating sex, age, wealth and status. For example, waistbands were of great significance. Traditionally, a bride wraps her waist with numerous strands of beads, signifying that she is a virgin. Society used beads as symbols to provide a feeling of unity to the various sub-groups; to validate the authority of the king; and to explain the differences in rank among the rulers and confirm their succession. An example of beadwork used for worship is shown in Figure 59. It is one of a pair of nineteenth century dance panels, worn by a Yoruba priest or priestess at the time of an annual festival, and made of locally woven cotton cloth and imported European glass seed beads. The faces that appear on many beaded bags or panels are conceived as images of the spiritual power of the worshipper.

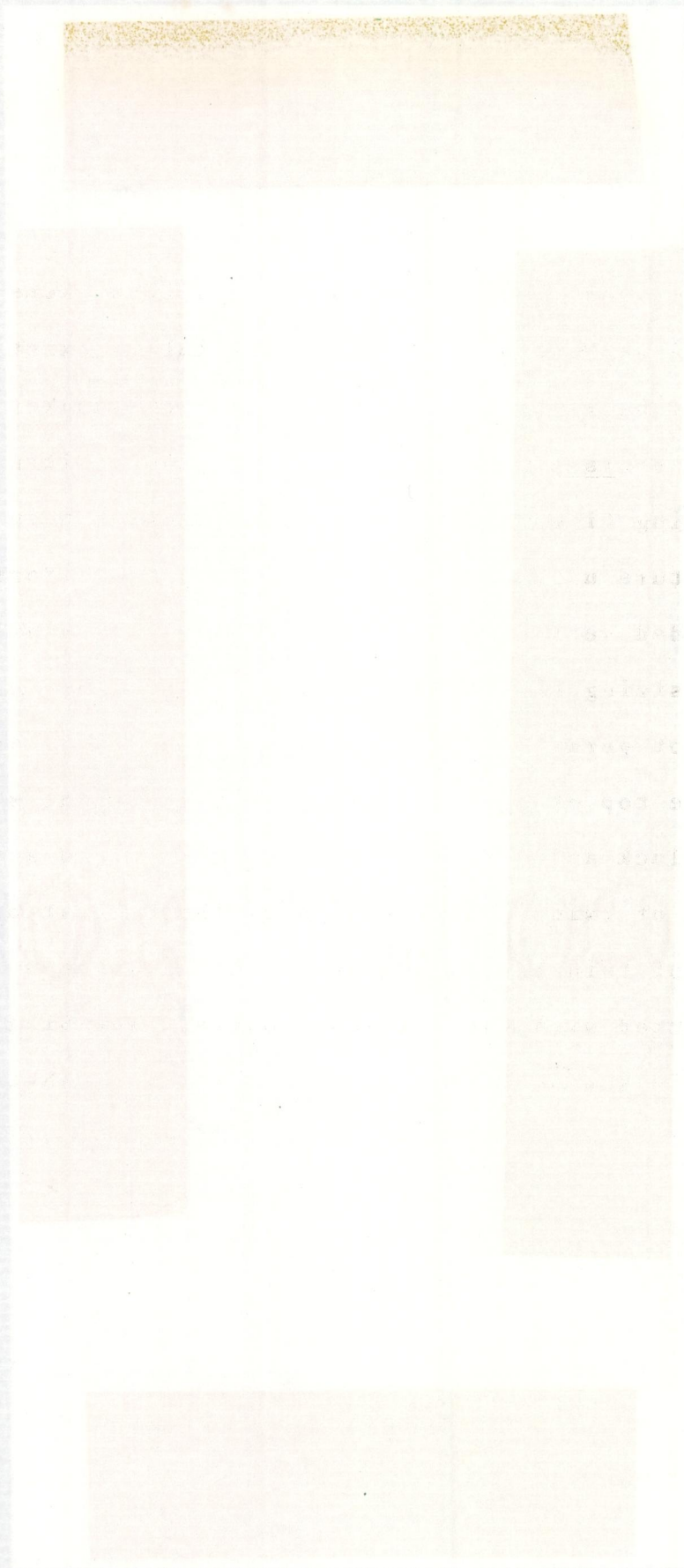
The changes in the shape and material of the symbol of Yoruba ruling power, the crown, indicate the receptiveness to change and the emphasis on wealth and status, which are basic to Yoruba culture. Figure 60 illustrates an early twentieth century Yoruba beaded crown. Beaded royal crowns are revered objects in Yorubaland. According to Yoruba myths, all obas who



Figure 59. One of a pair of nineteenth century dance panels, Yoruba. Length 34.9 cms. Private collection.



Figure 60. Early twentieth century Yoruba beaded crown, from Ikere. Height 63.5 cms. Collection Ruth and Paul Tishman, New York.



have the right to wear a beaded crown - there are currently about fifty - claim to be descended from Odudua, the first king of Ife.

The crown shown in Figure 60 is from Ikere, and is considered one of the most beautiful in existence. It was probably created by the famous crownmaker and carver Olowe of Ise, whose trademark was the crafting of free-standing figures - a masterful achievement in beadwork sculpture unsupported by wood. As in all Yoruba crowns, a beaded veil hangs over the face of the divine king, emphasizing his separation from the commonpeople, who are not permitted to gaze on his face. The small figures at the top of the crown (at the feet of the standing bird) mean luck and wealth, blessings thought to accompany the birth of twins: the Yoruba have the highest per capita rate of twin births in the world. Royal symbolism is connected with the kneeling couple. The bird at the crown's summit, which may represent some abstract link with the divine, peers down at the king's face, centering further attention on his powerful being.

EAST AFRICA.

The artistic energies of pastoral and nomadic peoples are often focused on their own persons, to celebrate and ornament their bodies. The Samburu of northern Kenya are such a people; indeed like many other pastoralists, they have virtually no visual art other than personal decoration.

The Samburu are a nomadic, Massai-speaking group of

cattle herders. Their country, a vast expanse of thorn-strewn semi-desert, occasionally relieved by partially forested mountains, is stark and barren, but very beautiful.

The human body itself is the armature for sculptural masses of beads (women) and for numerous ornamental accents and bands (male) which in turn reflect age, status, and of course, tribal aesthetic preferences as well as personal taste. For both sexes personal adornment can be graphed from a minimum during infancy through a crescendo of weight and visual intensity in the prime of life, then to a falling off, in middle and later years, when dress ceases to be a major preoccupation.

Samburu girls like to wear many strands of loose beads rather than the flat collars illustrated in Figure 61 favoured by their neighbours, the Massai. Their flat neck collars are made of beads threaded on wire and spaced with strips of cowhide. Nborra, the long blue beads, are worn only by married women, as are the beaded snuff containers suspended round their necks. Massai say that blue beads are 'God', as they are the colour of the sky He inhabits, and green beads are 'vegetation after rainfall', the symbol of peace (15, p 27).

A beautiful young, unmarried Samburu girl has many admirers, who make gifts of beads, which both define and reinforce her beauty. By age sixteen, a girl will often have a substantial collection of necklaces, indicating her great desirability and thereby helping to secure a

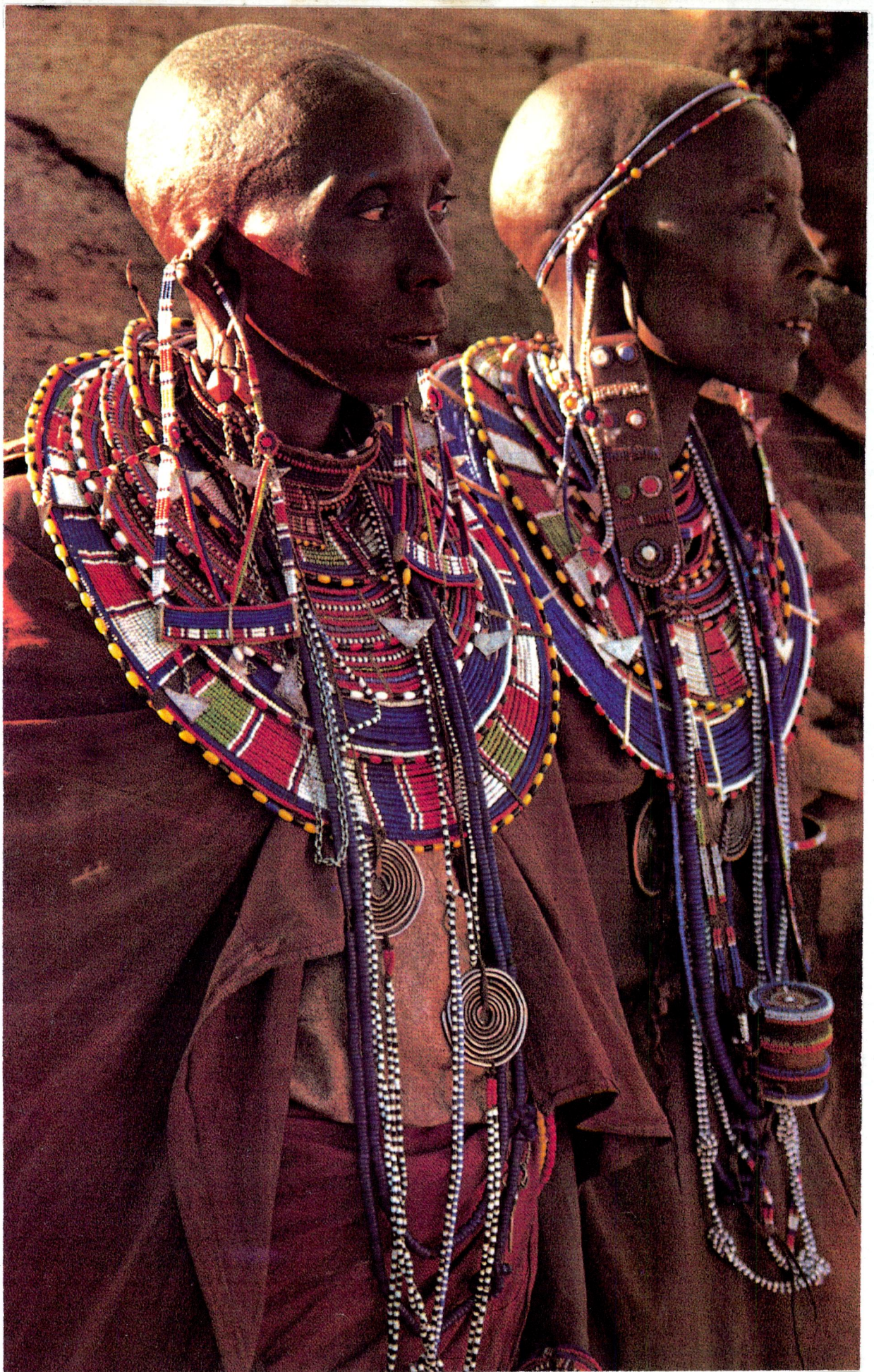
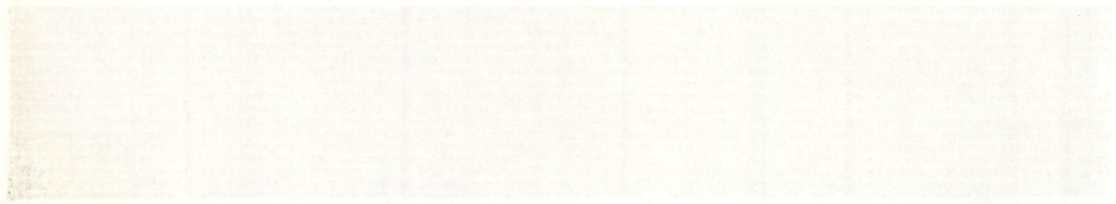


Figure 61. Massai married women wearing beaded flat neck collars and beaded snuff containers.



proposal of marriage (Fig.62). It is held by Samburu men that women do not have enough beads until their chin is supported by their necklaces.

Figures 63 and 64 illustrate the necklaces worn by married Samburu women. The necklaces in Figure 63 are symbols of prestige, representing years of gifts. Figure 64 shows a giraffe-hair and red glass bead necklace, which is worn at dances and ceremonies and is coated with a mixture of animal fat and red ocher. These necklaces are believed to enhance the wearer's fertility.

Bachelor Samburu warriors devote much time to decorating themselves to attract young women. They accent and highlight their well muscled, shining bodies with narrow bands, circlets, and bandoliers of beads around the neck, chest, waist, arms, and legs. Such effects give warriors their distinctive and proud appearance (Fig. 65).

Beads are worn by men in most African pastoral societies, although the number of beads they use decreases once they become elders of the tribe. One of the most fascinating articles of Men's adornment is the beaded corsets of the Dinka tribe, (Sudan). Figure 66 shows Dinka cowherders of southern Sudan with beaded corsets fitted tightly to their bodies. The colours of the corset indicate the wearer's age group: red and white are for ages fifteen to twenty-five; pink and purple for twenty-five to thirty; and yellow for those past thirty. Figure 67 illustrates a Dinka woman wearing a beaded corset which is rarely seen. This one

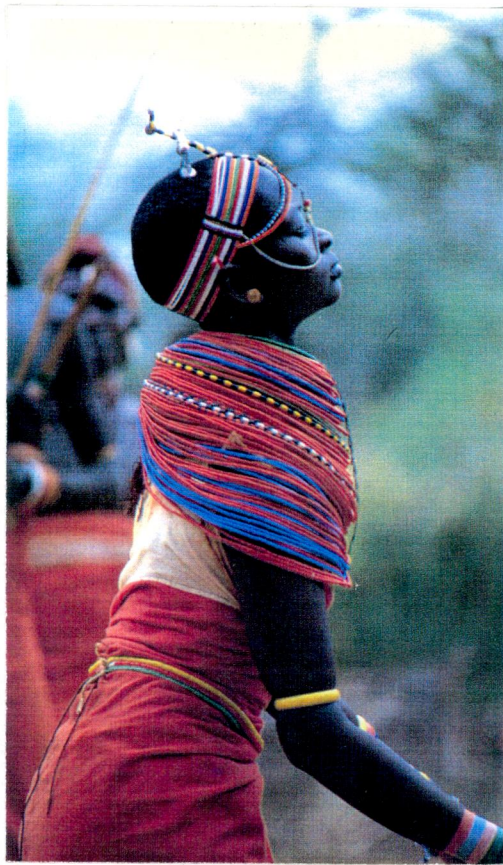


Figure 62. A young unmarried Samburu girl, dancing.

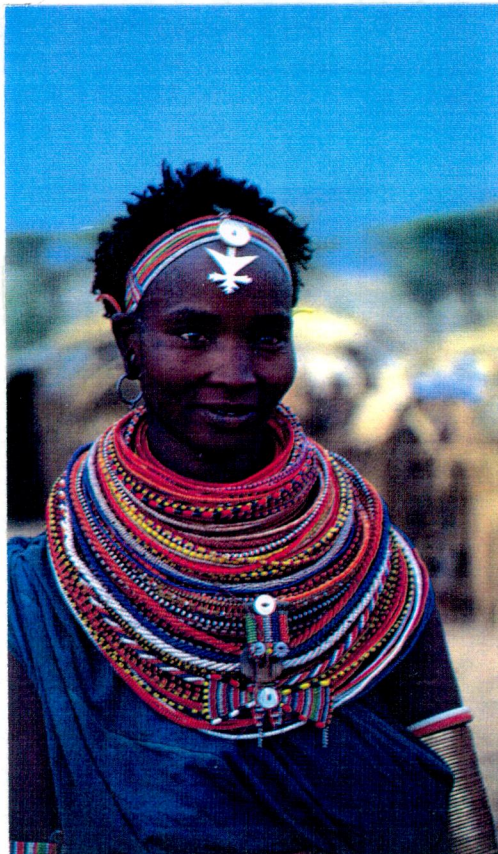


Figure 63. Married Samburu woman wearing beaded necklaces.



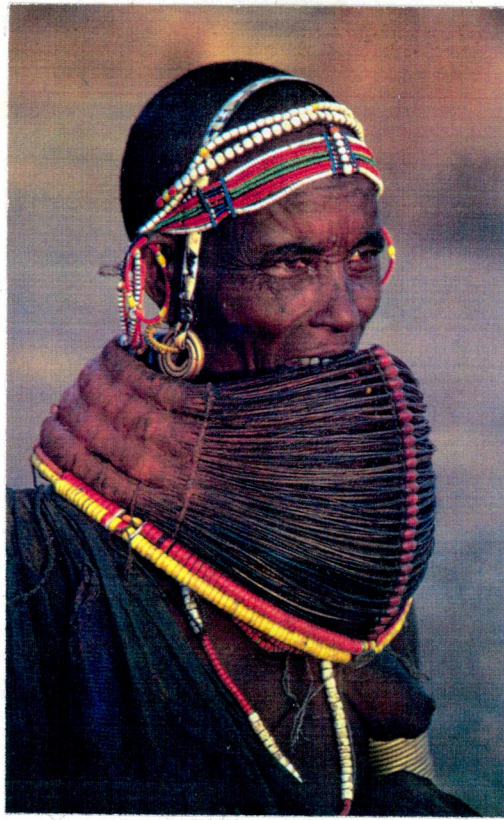


Figure 64. Married Samburu with a giraffe-hair and red glass bead necklace.



Figure 65. A Samburu warrior displaying beads, bracelets, and an elaborate ochre hairstyle.

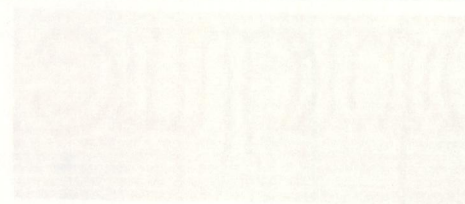
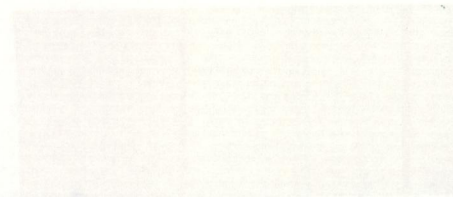
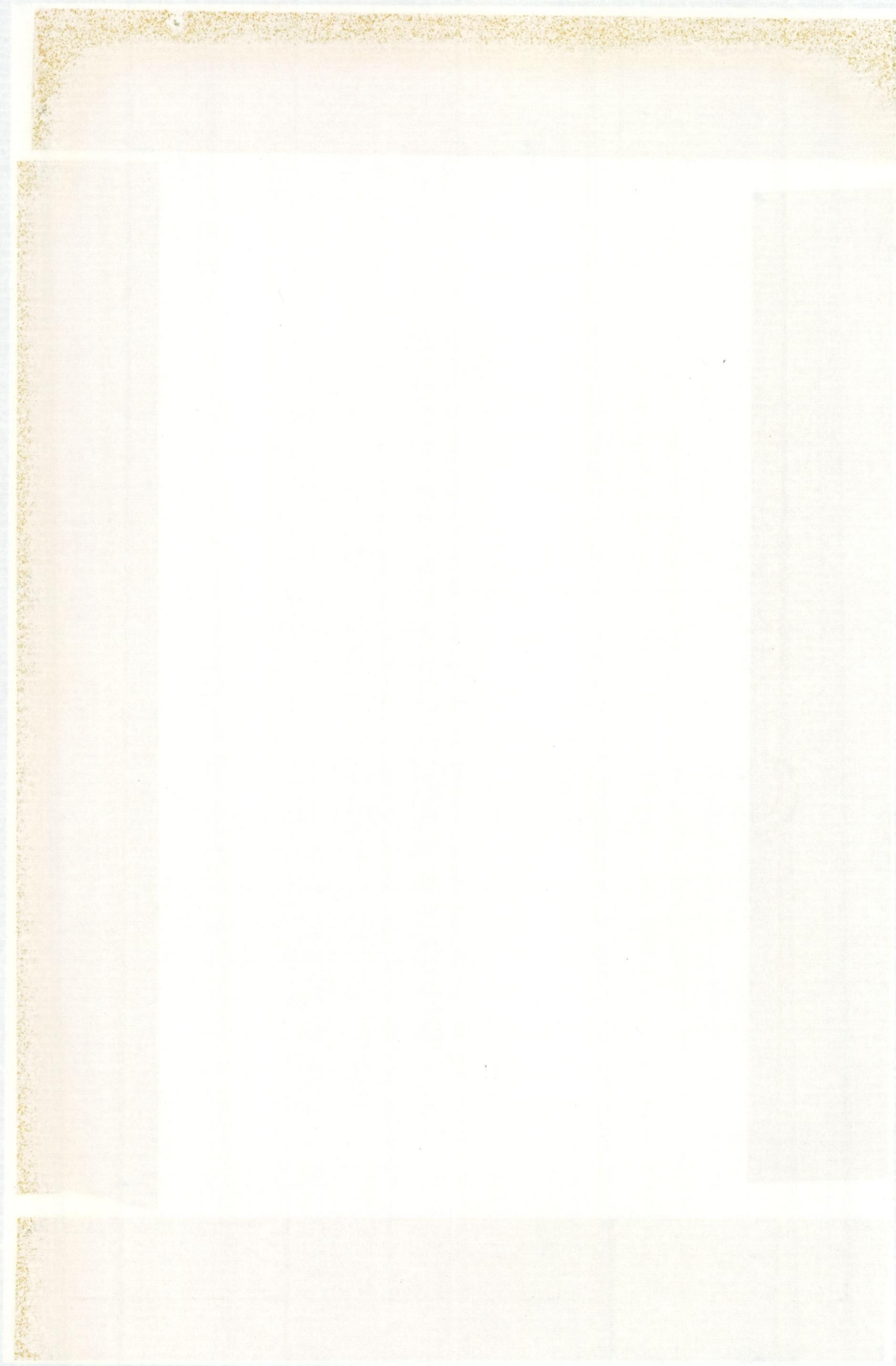




Figure 66. Dinka cowherders of southern Sudan
with beaded corsets.



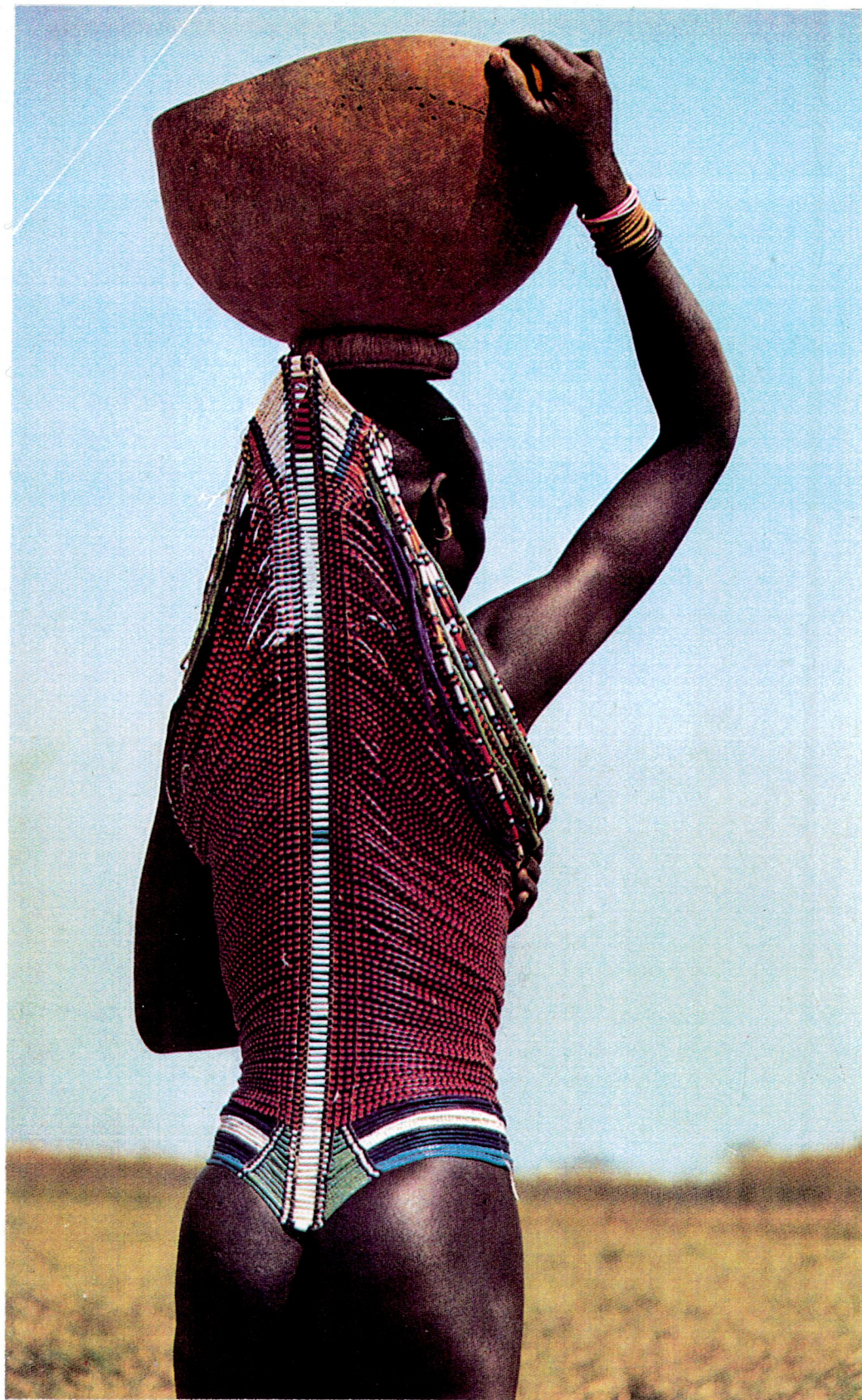
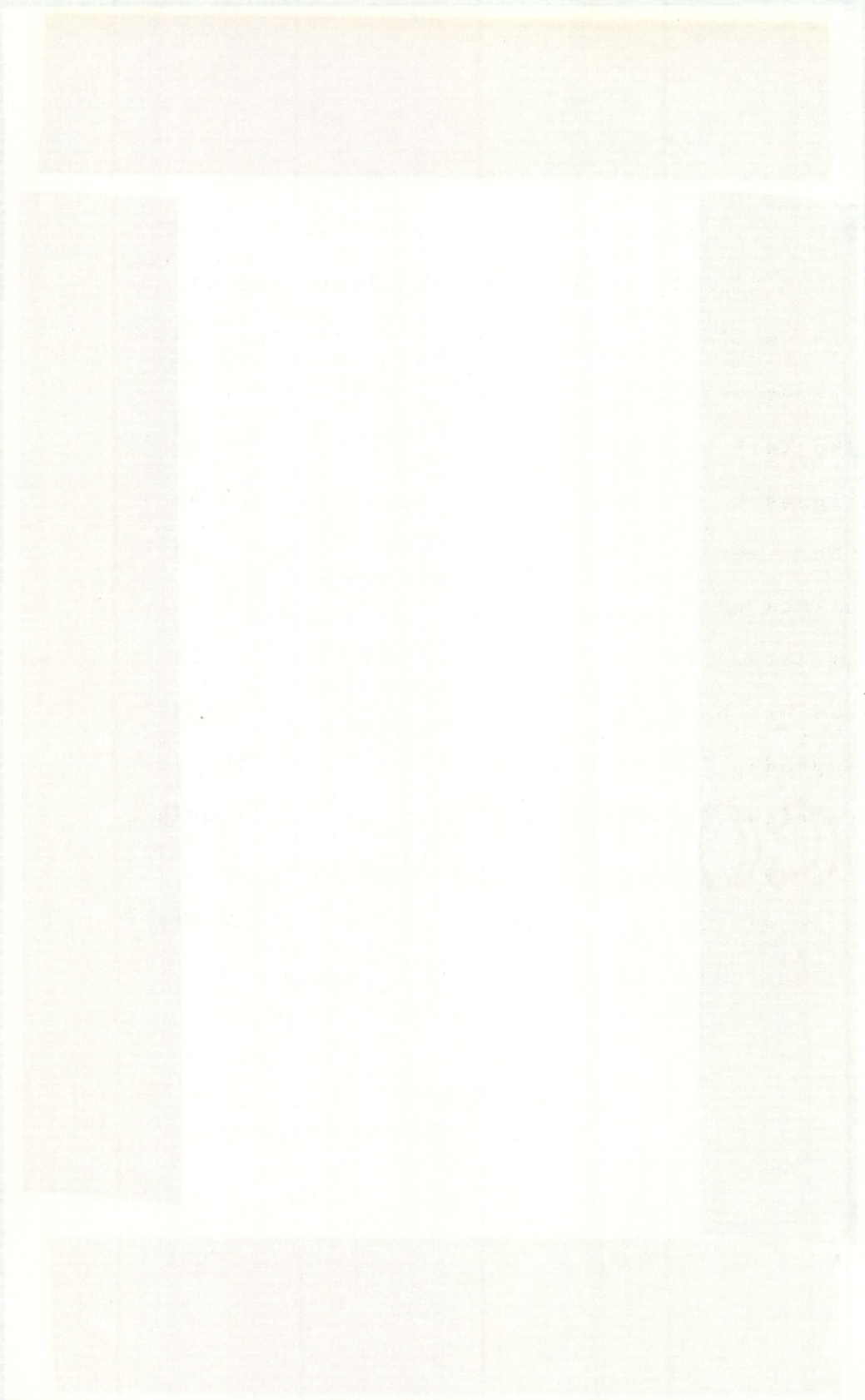


Figure 67. Dinka woman wearing a beaded corset.



is particularly unusual because of the height of the projection at the back; its size indicates that this girl belongs to a family with considerable wealth in cattle. The corsets, supported by two rigid wires at the spine, are sewn tightly in place at the front and there they remain until they are cut open, which, for a woman, is on the occasion of her marriage (15, p 50).

The Turkana are nomadic pastoralists living in a harsh environment (Kenya), yet they create superb beadwork from leather, metals, wood, glass and shells. Figure 68 shows a Turkana girl with many layers of necklaces, representing her wealth. When a young girl is ready for marriage she covers her body with ochre and fat, wears an elaborate bead pendant necklace and an ostrich feather in her hair. An ostrich eggshell belt, n'gakirim, holds up her long beaded skirt (Fig. 69).

Turkana are well known for their ostrich eggshell beads which have been made in East Africa since at least 7,000 B.C.

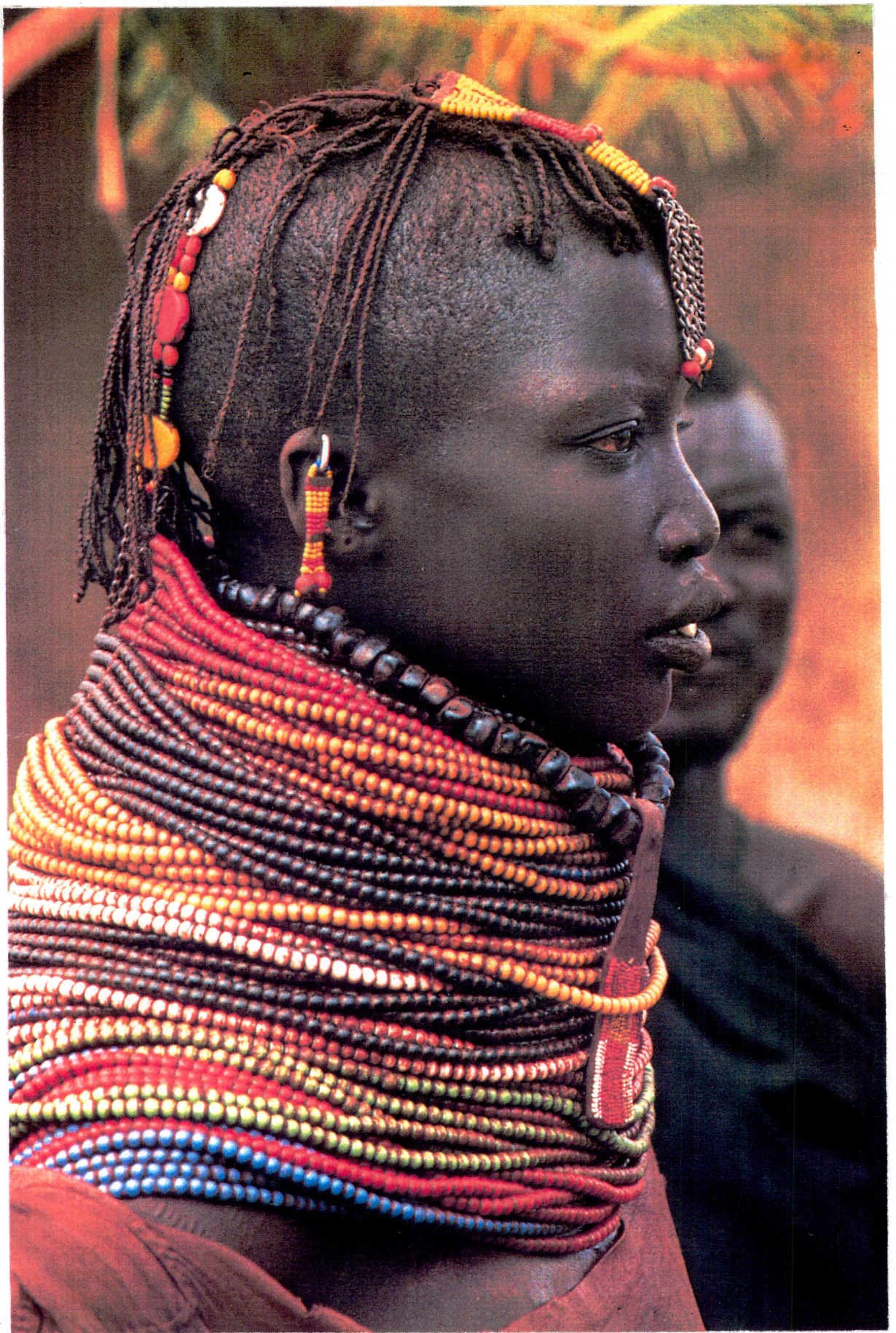
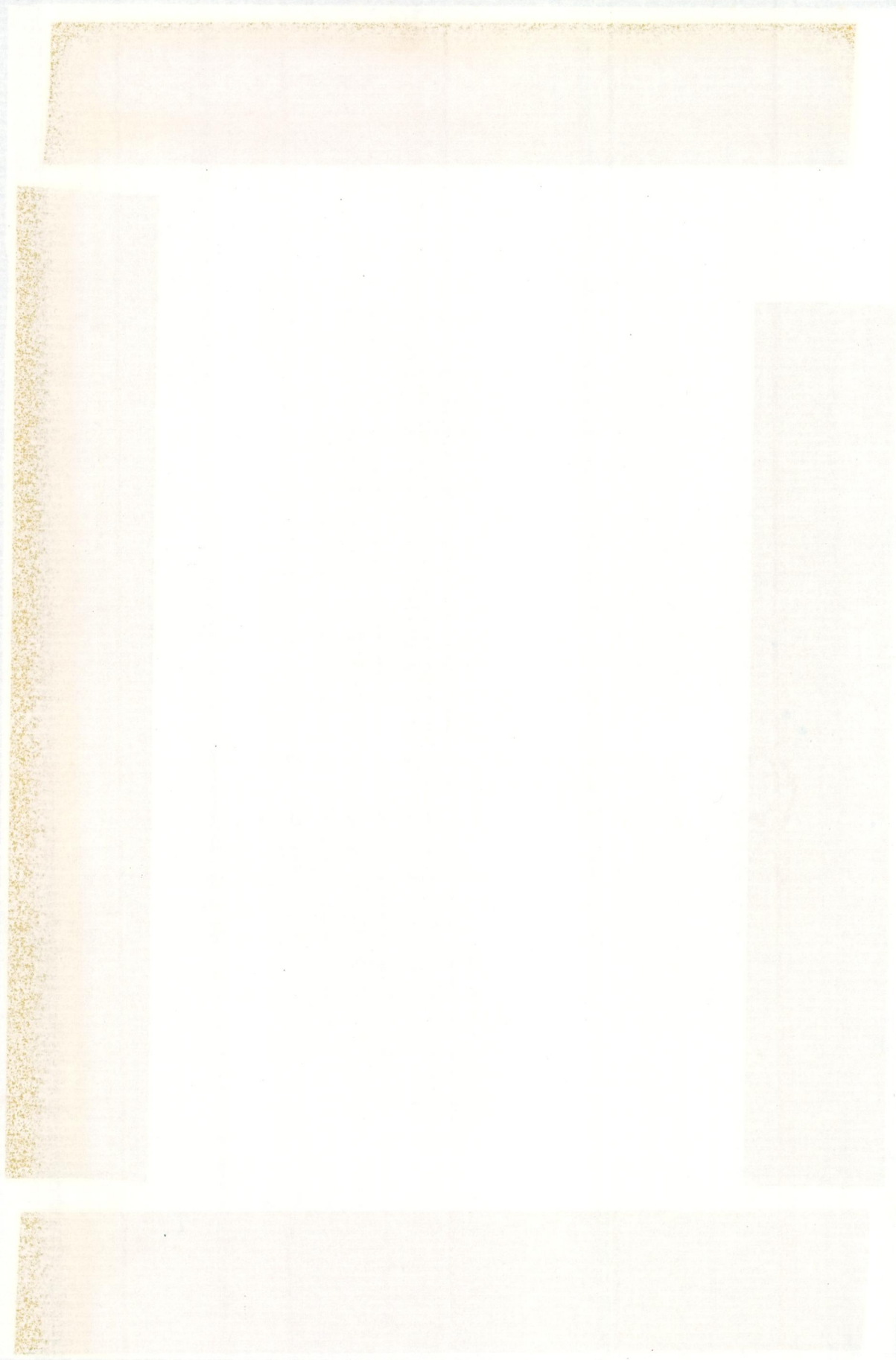
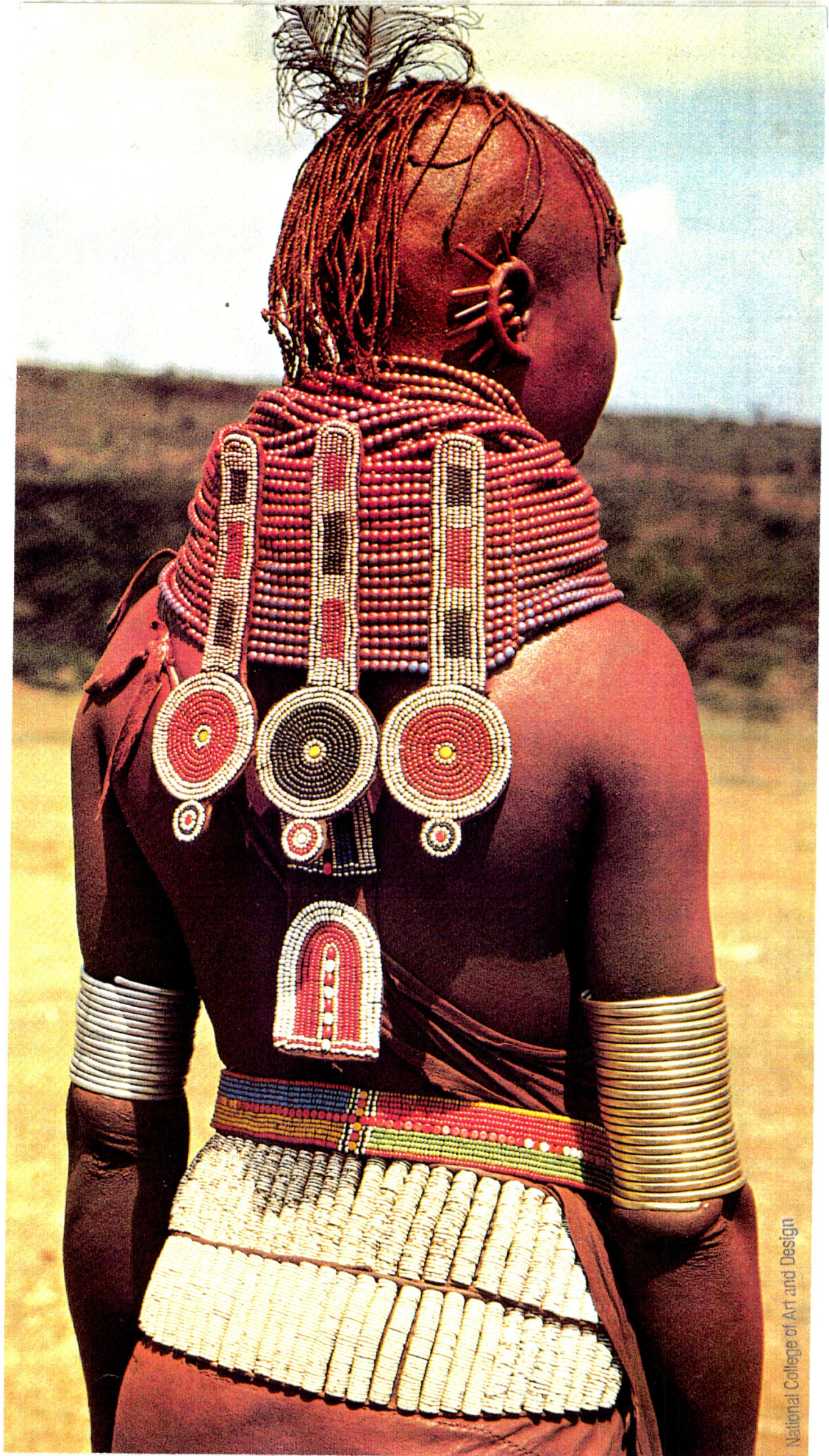


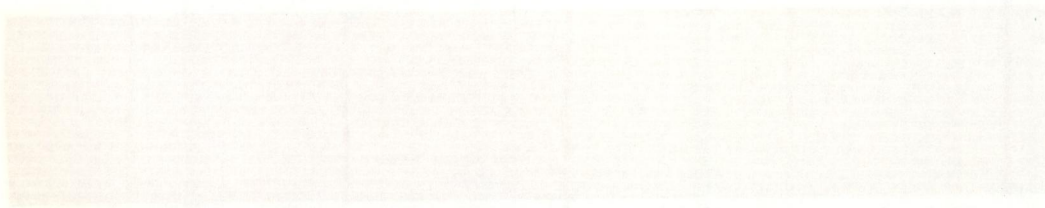
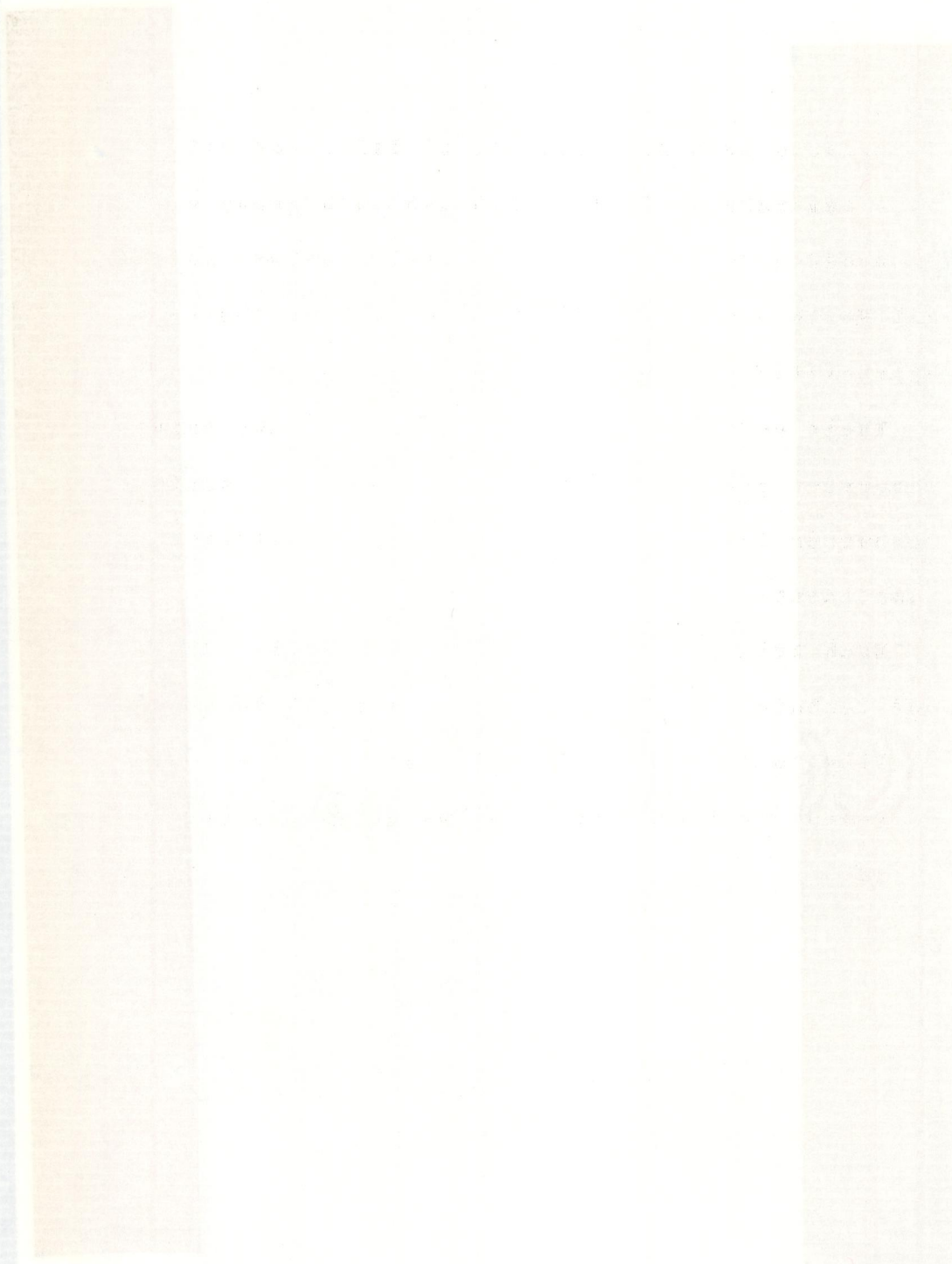
Figure 68. Turkana girl with many layers of necklaces, representing her wealth.





National College of Art and Design

Figure 69. Young Turkana girl adorned with beads.



CONCLUSION.

North American Indian artistic expression was fully integrated into many aspects of life, and not treated as a separate activity. 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.

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.

Each tribe employed its own distinctive designs and techniques. Beadworkers took pride in their ability to do fine work. The care devoted to adornment reflected their views of the spiritual world.

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.

Exposure to European styles directly affected Indian creativity. Along the colonial frontier, Indians observed the floral motifs on furniture and clothing of the Dutch, German, English, Swedish, and French settlers.

Eventually, beaded artefacts 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 their 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, and to-day on several Plains reservations, beautiful traditional beading continues.

Although each African culture has evolved distinctive patterns of bead use, several unifying themes apply throughout the continent. Although both Islam and Christianity are practiced in Africa, they have been shaped to accommodate animistic beliefs in inanimate objects that, whether created by nature or man, have spiritual force, like the North American Indian. This is why African artefacts often have a strong aesthetic presence, even if they are not necessarily technically sophisticated. It is also why we often respond strongly to an African necklace, independently of any knowledge about its origins, use, or shared meaning.

African adornment has been and is essentially a community art. The forms taken by beaded necklaces, bracelets, hats, and aprons are usually determined by

a set of commonly held standards. For the most part, artist and wearer are not expressing their private feelings or inspiration. Rather, personal touches are executed within generally accepted limitations, so that beaded adornment, like all African art, unifies the community by conveying and reinforcing common understandings.

Beads were, and still are, used in Africa to create objects representing spiritual values basic to the survival of the community. These objects play a major role in rituals ensuring continuity of the group: birth, circumcision, marriage, warriorhood, kingship and death.

The importation of beads had important consequences for African history. Glass beads were bartered by Africans for incense, ivory, tortoiseshell, rhinoceros horn, palm and coconut oils, timber, pig iron, and gold. The same tightly structured trade networks that for centuries moved gold and ivory from the interior to West African ports, bringing beads back on the return trips, later served the slave trade. Between 1500's and 1867, slavers shipped perhaps fifteen million Africans to the Americas, routinely exchanging European-made glass beads for their human cargo.

The most common factor between African and the North American Indian cultures is that they have societies (tribes) without writing, where art objects,

beadwork can acquire extraordinary importance as visual records. On a deeper level, works of art are endowed with complex meaning and serve as repositories of traditional knowledge. They are dense concentrations of ancestral wisdom that must be preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations.

CATALOGUE OF ARTEFACTS FROM NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM.

Figure 2.

Register No. 2. 1880: 1926.

'pocket' pouch for pipe.

Canadian.

Donor: J. Campbell.

Figure 3.

Register No. 2. 1882: 3879B.

A belt formed of wool and beads with fringes of quills at both ends.

Canadian.

Figure 4.

Register No. 3. 1885: 273.

A wampum belt of the Mohawk (Iroquois) Indians. White and purple shells. Length of belt 2', 1.5" x 3.75".

Canadian.

Presented by The Parroat and Sevin Fellows, Trinity College, Dublin.

Figure 16.

Register No. 13. 1912: 763.

North American moccasin. Made from Caribou skin decorated with coloured beadwork of French design.

Given by W. Ruddock, The Hall, Rathdown, Co. Wicklow.

Figures 18, 19.

Register No. 2. 1880: 1913.

North American Chief's beaded bag.

Canadian.

Figures 29, 30.

Register No. 15. 1920: 20, 21.

Pair of moccasins, made of soft brown leather and with brown cloth patches and flaps embroidered with fine glass beads. Probably Canadian.

This collection was left to the museum by Sord Faruham.

Figures 35, 36.

Register No. 8. 1902: 323.

A pouch bag of glass beads on crimson cloth, length 49.5 cm. (excluding tassels), width 26.5 cm.

Figure 42.

Register No. 2. 1880: 2053.

Zululand.

Necklace of blue beads. They are more likely to be from Abyssinia/Kenya borders, though Zaire is a possibility. A bunch of beads used for sale or gift.

Figure 43.

Register No. 1. 1879: 261.

Kaffir, Zulu.

Womens beaded girdle
also

Register No. 6. 1893: 782, 783.

Zululand.

Arm ornaments, beaded.

Figure 44.

Register No. 7. 1897: 231.

Zululand.

Bamboo snuffbox - covered with beads.

also

Register No. 6. 1890: 712.

Natal, South Africa.

Ornaments worn by unmarried women; white and red beads, and strings of white beads with brass buttons on the ends. Length 2'10½".
Transferred from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

Figure 45.

Register No. 5. 1888: 560, 561.

Bechuanaland, South Africa.
Gourds, covered with glass beads. Diameter 1.9" and 1.75".

Figure 46.

Register No. 2. 1880: 2057.

Belt (Isibopo), made of beads arranged in diagonal compartments of blue and white which are separated by outlines of yellow beads.
S. Africa.

Figure 47.

Register No. 16. 1932: 7004.

Matabeleland, S.Africa.
Leather belt with buckle decorated with red and white beads.

Figure 48.

Register No. 6. 1893: 686.

Apron, formed of a long fringe of white and black beads attached to a girdle of leather. Length 2'5", width 1'0".
Zululand.
Presented by J. R. Hickson, Esq.

Figure 51.

Register No. 7. 1897: 232.

Women's apron (umfozi) of green, black, red and white beads, necklets too.
Zululand.

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