Trade Ornament Usage Among the Native Peoples of Canada

A Source Book

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blue and two white rows of beads. To the cloth at the top are sewn loose-ended strings of beads, each one ending with the front tooth of a caribou. The strings are intersected into various colours, viz. white, black, white, red, then white and black alternatively three times, and, finally, white and red (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 227).

On another pair of sticks (Plate 19, right) of identical provenience the cloth strips were black and decorated with several longitudinal rows of beads: "the first two white, followed by a strip of red cloth, then four white, twice two white, two purple and, finally, two more white rows" (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 227).

Caribou Inuit women also frequently wore brow bands of sheet brass salvaged from old telescopes. About 3.4 cm wide at the middle and narrowing toward the ends, they extended almost to the ears and were held in place by thongs tied to the ends. To enhance their beauty, the bands were sometimes decorated with glass beads. One specimen from the Padlimiut at Eskimo Point had a red cloth strip adorned with intermittent, double rows of beads in white, green and white sewn onto either thong adjacent to the band (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 229). Here also hung eight to nine lengthy strings of beads "intersected with white, blue, white, red, twice white and blue and, finally, red, ending in a white or light-blue loop" (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 229).

Long-haired men occasionally wore a brow band consisting of a narrow strip of cloth embroidered with beads. A Qaernermiut example from Baker Lake was trimmed with "two outer rows of white beads and, between them, two rows of alternate white and dark blue" (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 225).

Ear ornaments composed of a number of strings of glass beads joined at the top were sometimes worn by either sex. These were usually hung from only one ear. A pair owned by a Padlimio woman at Eskimo Point consisted of three fairly long loops of white, blue and red beads united at the top in a large, light blue specimen (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 230). Another set from a young Padlimio male at Eqalulingnaoq was formed of seven and eight strings, respectively, which were "intersected with twice white and red, twice white and blue and, at the bottom, once white and red" (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 229). Each strand terminated in a frontal caribou tooth.

Bead bracelets were worn by some women, but necklaces seem to have been ignored. Inexpensive finger rings were very much in demand. An unusual ornament worn pendant on the breast by some of the more affluent women (Fig. 130) was a cheap pocket watch taken to pieces, "the happy owner wearing the case, the dial and the works all separately" (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 1: 230).

Copper Inuit

Inhabiting the general vicinity of Coronation Gulf (Swanton 1952: 557-8), the Copper Inuit were first encountered in 1771 by Samuel Hearne during his famous journey to the mouth of the Coppermine River. The meeting had a tragic ending, for most of the local natives were massacred by the Chipewyan Indians who accompanied Hearne. With the possible exception of two pieces of worked iron, which may have been of European rather than meteoric origin, no trade goods were found among the plundered possessions of the deceased (Hearne 1911: 191).

The situation had changed but little when Captain Richard Collinson entered the area in 1852. The only foreign goods seen in the hands of the Inuit about Prince Albert Sound, western Victoria Land, were "Hongkong beads," while the following year, in Cambridge Bay further to the south, it was observed that the inhabitants possessed little or no iron and this "and the few and well-worn beads on their persons showed that this was in all probability the first time they had come in contact with white men" (Collinson 1889: 222, 286).

Following Collinson's departure, the Copper Inuit did not see another white man until the beginning of the 20th century. Then, with the arrival of the sportsman David T. Hanbury in 1902, the inflow of foreign goods and materials began anew. Tools

such as knives, as well as scrap iron and steel for local manufactures, were popular commodities (Klengenberg 1932: 229-30), but trade ornaments do not seem to have made much of an impact. No mention of any such items among the Coronation Gulf Inuit appears in the preliminary ethnological report of the Stefansson-Anderson Arctic Expedition of 1908-12 (Stefansson 1914), and the only imported baubles seen in the area during the course of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-18 were a few glass beads. The latter were used to adorn the bonnet-like dancing hats worn by influential persons on festive occasions. Usually formed of varicoloured strips of caribou fur, most of the caps had a white weasel or lemming-skin pendant at the back and the head and neck of a loon draped over the peak so that the bill pointed upward. "One of the valuable blue beads that reached this area from Siberia was tied to the nostril" (Jenness 1946: 31).

The availability of beads increased dramatically over the next few years so that by the early 1920s, the fur garments of the Copper Inuit were "tending to follow western Inuit patterns, and to be overlaid with bead-work" (Jenness 1946: 1). Slightly over a decade later, C.E. Whittaker (1937: 101) made no mention of beadwork on the clothing of the adult Coppermine Inuit, but did remark that the children's coats were "often ornamented with red and blue beads, tufts of coloured wool, or by dangles of ivory or bone, sewn to the front and back." The situation with the other classes of ornaments is unknown.

Mackenzie Inuit

With the Mackenzie River delta forming its core, the territory of this group of Inuit originally extended along the Arctic coastline from Franklin Bay at the mouth of Amundsen Gulf westward into Alaska to about west longitude 144° W (Swanton 1952: 558). Now, as before, the major settlements occupy the delta area (National Atlas of Canada 1974: 121).

In July 1789, Alexander Mackenzie became the first European to enter the region. However, according to local Indian informants, the Inuit thereabouts had already encountered whitemen to the west (from whom they procured iron) eight or ten years before (Mackenzie 1922: 284). As Mackenzie met none of the local Inuit, it is not known if they possessed trade ornaments at this time.

The next explorer to visit the area was Captain John Franklin who encountered Inuit just to the west of the Mackenzie delta in July 1826. Various items were distributed among the natives, with sewing articles being popular with the women, while the men were anxious for anything made of iron. However, both sexes also eagerly sought articles of adornment and there was seemingly no limitation as to what could qualify. As Franklin commented in his journal:

> *It was amusing to see the purposes to which they applied the different articles given to them; some of the men danced about with a large cod-fish hook dangling from the nose, others stuck an awl through the same part, and the women immediately decorated their dresses with the ear-rings, thimbles, or whatever trinkets they received* (Franklin 1828: 117).

Franklin then described the conventional ornamentation of the Mackenzie Inuit:

> *Every man had pieces of bone or* [dentalium] *shell thrust through the septum of his nose; and holes were pierced on each side of the under lip, in which were placed circular pieces of ivory, with a large blue bead in the centre...* (Fig. 131; Franklin 1828: 118).

A portrait of a young Inuit man by Lieutenant George Back suggests that an occasional male also hung strings of multi-coloured beads from his ears or hair (Fig. 132). However, the primary users of these embellishments were the women who used them to adorn their coiffures (Fig. 133):

> *Their own black hair is very tastefully turned up from behind to the top of the head, and tied by strings of white and blue beads, or cords of white deer-skin. It is divided in front, so as to form on each side a thick tail, to which are appended strings of beads that reach to the waist* (Franklin 1828: 119).

Figure 131. Middle-aged Mackenzie Inuit man, by Lt. George Back, 1826. A bone or ivory pin enhances the nose, while ivory labrets decorated with split blue beads protrude from the cheeks (Franklin 1828: pl. opp. 119)

Figure 132. Young Mackenzie Inuit man, by Lt. George Back, 1826 (Franklin 1828: pl. opp. 119)

Figure 133. Young Mackenzie Inuit woman, by Lt. George Back, 1826. Her hair is decorated with strands of glass beads (Franklin 1828: pl. opp. 118)

When Sir John Richardson (1851, 1: 355) met these people in 1848, he noted that many of the males still "transfix the septum of the nose with a dentalium shell or ivory needle." His associate, Dr. John Rae (1866: 150), added that "all the men wore cheek ornaments made of stone, ivory, or coloured beads,... the ones most valued being those formed of beads" (Fig. 134).

The following year, Lieutenant W.H. Hooper (1853: 265) recorded the use of small white beads to embellish women's frocks. The popularity of these ornaments was such that those sewn to a garment purchased by Hooper (1853: 265) "were particularly exempted in the bargain" and removed prior to delivery.

Children's garments were sometimes decorated with beads as well. An example seen by Father Emile Petitot among the Anderson River Inuit in 1865 was the frock of a five- or six-year-old that had been fashioned from the skin of a caribou fawn, the head of which, complete with ears and budding antlers, formed the hood. Pieces of red cloth edged with white glass beads marked the eyes, and the snout, which hung down over the child's forehead, was adorned with three blue beads (Petitot 1887: 79).

Beads were also used to garnish the complex hairdos of the Anderson River women, but in a fashion that differed somewhat from the one described by Franklin. The hair was first tied into a bun on top of the head. To this were added parcels of hair obtained from their husbands and lovers: a large bun on either side of the topknot and two side rolls which hung down onto the breast (Fig. 135). The ends of the rolls were wrapped with blue glass beads (Petitot 1887: 57-8).

When Frank Russell ventured into the Mackenzie region in the early 1890s to collect ethnological specimens for the University of Iowa, the principal ornament of the adult male living to the west of the delta was the labret. Several kinds were recorded, the most conspicuous of which had "half of a large blue bead attached to the marble flange and surrounded by a disk of walrus ivory 1.5 inches in diameter" (Russell 1898: 190). A no less striking variety consisted "of glass stoppers, with the heads ground down for flanges" (Russell 1898: 190).

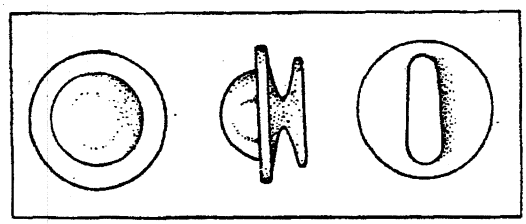

Figure 134. Mackenzie Inuit labret of white marble with blue bead appliqué; top, side and bottom views [after Savoie 1970: 154, Pl. 24, Fig. 14] (drawing by D. Kappler)

Labrets were not the only objects to be decorated with bead appliqués as evidenced by a combination "fishhook, sinker, and bait" procured from the Anderson River Inuit:

> *It is of walrus ivory, 4 inches long by .7 inch broad, and resembles a small fish in shape; the hook is a sharpened nail without a barb. It is weighted with five plugs on the side and a forked bar of lead upon the back; two small blue beads serve as eyes* (Russell 1898: 195).

Beads were also used in the fabrication of women's ear ornaments. A type common in the early 1900s was composed of black or blue beads and dentalia shells "strung on sinew, with an ivory hook, touched up with red or blue bits of wool" (Harrison 1908: 92; Whittaker 1937: 143) [Plate 20]. The components were arranged in alternating rows or bars:

> *The first of these bars – for the beads are so tightly strung together that the row is quite rigid – hangs horizontally from the hook itself; and from this bar, in turn, hang three of the sea-shells perpendicular-wise. From these, again, dangles the second row of beads, to which are attached three shells, as before; and the third of the beaded bars terminates the decoration* (Harrison 1908: 92).

The ornaments, which occasionally ranged up to 15 cm in length, were suspended from a hole in the outer edge of the ear, just above the aural aperture (Whittaker 1937: 143).

ethnology: the study of human cultures in historical & comparative perspective

ethnology - comparative and analytical study of cultures (cultural anthropology)

Figure 135. Mackenzie Inuit couple and their dogs. The ends of her hair rolls are wrapped with beads; he sports bead-decorated labrets (Savoie 1970: 173, Pl. 31)

Silver finger rings were also much worn during the early 20th century. While in the delta area in 1906, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1914: 157) came upon a woman who sported five broad bands. Those who wore only one placed it on the third digit of the left hand (Stefansson 1914: 157).

Discussion

The trade ornaments that found their way into the hands of the Canadian Inuit comprised a fairly variegated though unevenly distributed lot (Table 7). The greatest diversity was recorded among the Central group, followed closely by the Inuit of Labrador and the Mackenzie region, with the Caribou and Copper peoples having the least. This disparity does not seem to stem from any bias on the part of the two latter groups but is, rather, a reflection of their more isolated situation which retarded the inflow of a greater variety of trade goods and kept travellers and researchers from recording their material culture.

Glass beads were, by far, the most popular and widely distributed of the imported adornments. While they were employed for a variety of decorative purposes by all five Inuit groups, the greatest proportion served to adorn the inner coats (also termed jackets and frocks) of the women. The coats of the men and children were also occasionally embellished with beadwork but nowhere to the extent of the women's. Worn under an outer coat during the winter months but singly when the weather was warm, the most ornate inner jackets were produced on the northwestern coast of Hudson Bay and were the owners' most cherished possession (Orchard 1975: 158). These exhibited a dazzling array of beadwork, as many as ten different colours of various shades being used in their adornment (Mathiassen 1928: 175).

Small and even in size, except for some larger specimens that terminated free-ended strings (Mathiassen 1928: 175), the beads were applied in the form of embroidery and as fringes. In the former, the beads were sewn to pieces of coloured cloth which were then attached to the garment. Often found only on the breast, embroidered panels were sometimes also placed on the hood, shoulders, upper arms, cuffs, skirt and back, depending on the group involved. Geometric patterns – some of which were certainly borrowed from the neighbouring Indians – predominated, but such elements as flowers, stars, caribou and even European-style boots were also employed, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Except for those on the cuffs, skirt and centre of the hood, the embroidered panels usually had beaded fringe suspended from their lower edges. However, one or more bands of fringe, usually across the neck or breast, were sometimes also worn without any accompanying embroidery. Of various lengths, the fringes were not infrequently composed of in excess of a dozen horizontal bands of contrastingly coloured beads. A beaded loop, a single large bead, a caribou tooth or some other small object terminated the distal end of each strand.

Caps were the only other item of clothing to be decorated with beads. Worn by men, women and children, they were decorated in a variety of ways: with strings of small, multi-coloured beads hanging from the peak among the Central group; with embroidery along the edges in the Caribou region; and with a single blue bead attached to a bird's head atop the peak among the Copper peoples.

Items of personal adornment that were composed of or enhanced by beads included hair and ear ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, headbands and labrets. Essentially confined to women, ornamentation of the hair was performed in two basic ways. In the first, noted among the Labrador, Central and Mackenzie Inuit from 1773 to 1861, the hair was arranged into stubby side braids to which were attached bunches of strings of small beads. Usually exhibiting horizontal banding, the ornaments were tied on at the ears and often reached to the waist.

Common among the Central, Caribou and Mackenzie groups from 1826 to 1924, the second method was to wrap the hair with strings of beads or strips of beaded cloth. In the first variation, popular in the Mackenzie region, the hair was arranged into a topknot and two side rolls with the strings being used to bind either the bun or the ends

of the plaits or both. Sometimes only the topknot was bound and the side rolls sported tassels.

The second variation was utilized by the Central and Caribou women who plaited their hair into two long side braids which were often stiffened with wooden sticks. The braids were spirally bound with long strips of brightly coloured cloth bead-embroidered with longitudinal stripes and geometric designs. Several banded strings of beads were sometimes attached to the upper ends of the strips.

Beaded ear ornaments were found among all but the Copper Inuit and were principally the domain of the women. Found among the three eastern groups, the most common form consisted of several strands or, occasionally, loops of small beads joined together at the top, sometimes in a single large bead. The beads were usually arranged in horizontal bands of different colours but unpatterned examples were also produced during the early years of the 20th century. While the foregoing ornaments were composed entirely of glass beads, those of the Mackenzie Inuit were formed of alternating rows of beads and dentalia shells. Both styles seem to have been absorbed from the adjacent Indian tribes (Birket-Smith 1929, Part 2: 33, 39). Utilized by the Central Inuit during the early 20th century, another type of ear ornament consisted of a single large bead of glass or metal attached to the ear lobe.

Necklaces and bracelets composed of up to three strands of beads were worn by the women and some of the men and children of the eastern Inuit.

Brow bands of skin and cloth embellished with small beads were apparently used by only the men of the Central and Caribou groups. Those made of caribou or sealskin were the earliest and had a fringe of seal or caribou teeth attached to short strands of vari-coloured beads hanging from the lower edge. These were apparently replaced in the early 1900s by narrow cloth bands bead-embroidered with stripes and geometric figures.

The homemade metal headbands that were so popular with the women of the three eastern groups were sometimes adorned with beadwork. In the Central region this took the form of a string of multi-coloured beads that passed under the chin. Among the Caribou peoples, strips of bead-embroidered cloth and banded tassels of "seed" beads were affixed to the straps that secured the band to the head.

Another item of personal adornment to have glass beads incorporated into its fabric was the labret. Worn in holes situated at either corner of the mouth by most of the male population of the Mackenzie region, these ornaments of marble and ivory often had half of a large blue bead protruding from their outer face. Of all the different varieties, these were considered the most valuable. While at Cape Smythe, Alaska, Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1914: 201) discovered that only beads that broke accidentally were used for labrets, an intact specimen being "much more valuable than a pair of the best labrets made from the same sort of bead." This may well have been the case among the Mackenzie Inuit as well. The bead-halves, their broken faces ground flat, were held in place with seal oil boiled to a glue-like consistency (Stefansson 1914: 201).

Glass beads also served to decorate a number of personal possessions. Such items as needle cushions, skin and cloth amulets, doll's clothing and many types of cloth bags were variously embroidered with small beads. Multi-coloured stripes and geometric patterns were prevalent during the 19th century, while floral, double-curve and other "borrowed" designs became popular in the early 20th century.

Children's and magical dolls, wooden talismans, amulet bands, needle cases and smoking pipes were sometimes embellished with short strands or loops of small beads or simply several beads pendant on a string. Larger beads were occasionally attached to basal tassels on carrying bags.

The use of beads for inlay work was practised only by the Mackenzie Inuit. They inset small blue specimens in fish-shaped, ivory fishing lures to serve as eyes.

In addition to beads, the Canadian Inuit utilized several other imported ornaments: finger rings, lead drops, brass bells, hair rings, earrings and dentalia shells. The most widely dispersed of these

were the finger rings, they being found among the Central, Caribou and Mackenzie groups. Those of brass predominated during the 19th century with sheet iron and silver only coming into vogue after the turn of the century. Women were the principal users, some wearing up to three per digit.

Perforated, bean- and pear-shaped lead drops were also fairly popular among the eastern groups. The women sewed one or more rows to the borders of the skirts and tails of their coats, while the men attached them to the beaded strands on their talismans. Little brass bells were also sewn to the edges of women's coats; larger specimens were attached to the back. Small rings of brass served to secure and, presumedly, decorate the short pigtails of some of the female population.

Earrings of European manufacture were utilized by both sexes. Worn as intended by Labrador Inuit males, the women of the Mackenzie region used them to dress up their coats.

Dentalia shells were found only in the Mackenzie region. The men wore them in the septum of their noses, while the women combined them with glass beads to create ear ornaments.

Locally produced ornaments created by intentionally modifying imported materials consisted of metal headbands and pewter jinglers. The former were the most widely distributed, being extremely popular with the women inhabiting the three eastern-most regions. Up to 3.4 cm wide at the centre and narrowing toward the ends, the headbands were usually fashioned from sheet brass obtained in trade or salvaged from discarded objects, although sheet iron was also sometimes used. They exhibited a high polish and were sometimes serrated along the upper edge. Thongs attached to the ends and tied behind the head were used to hold the ornament in place. As mentioned earlier, beadwork occasionally enhanced the objects.

The headbands were apparently worn in two different ways. Up to the middle of the 19th century they were worn over the hair at the front of the head with the arms angling down to a point just forward and below the ears. In the period that followed, the bands began to be worn across the forehead with the arms extending almost straight back to the ears.

Pewter jinglers were a 20th-century manifestation of the Labrador Inuit. Made by melting down pewter spoons and casting the metal in soapstone moulds, they were sewn to the inside flap of women's duffle coats.

Utilitarian articles of European/American manufacture that served as ornaments among the Inuit comprised a most diversified group. Pewter spoon bowls, coins and buttons were the most popular items, with the latter having the greatest number of applications. A primary use among the Central Inuit during the early 19th century was the embellishment of women's hair, one or more being attached to the strips of cloth wrapped about their braids. One or two were occasionally also sewn to the skin coats of either sex, while rows of them adorned some of the men's cloth garments. In the early 1900s, a metal button was sometimes included as a component of a shaman's amulet band.

The spoon bowls and coins decorated the coats of the Labrador and Central groups' women. Cut from tea and tablespoons, the bowls, up to eight in number, were arranged in a vertical row on the front skirt of the garment. The coins, notably copper cents of various countries, were sometimes attached to the arms but the usual disposition was in vertical rows along the centre of the tail flap.

Other utilitarian articles that embellished women's coats during the 19th century included thimbles, brass wheels salvaged from abandoned scientific instruments and the tin tags from plug tobacco. The latter were strung on thongs to serve as substitutes for beaded fringe. In the 20th century, small cartridge cases terminated some of the beaded fringe found on women's coats (Mathiassen 1928: 177, 185). They were also suspended from contemporary needle cases.

Additional examples of innovative adornment included pocket-watch cases functioning as breast pendants, nails suspended from the bound tresses of the women and, among the males of the Mackenzie region, the use of fishhooks and awls to ornament the nose, and glass stoppers as labrets.

TABLE 7
INUIT TRADE ORNAMENT TRAIT LIST
(showing sex of user)

Ornament and Application	Labrador Group	Central Group	Caribou Group	Copper Group	Mackenzie Group
Shell					
Dentalia					
Ear adornment					F
Nose adornment					M
Glass					
Beads					
Amulets/talismans	M	M			
Bags	FM		F		
Bracelets		FMO	F		
Caps		M?	O	FM	
Dolls	FM	F			
Ear adornment	F	F	FM		FM?
Fishhooks					M
Hair adornment	F	FM	F		FM?
Headbands/brow bands		FM	FM		
Inner coats	FM	FM	FM	O	FO
Labrets					M
Necklaces	F	FM			
Needle cushions/cases	F	F	F		
Tobacco pipes		X			
Stoppers					
Labrets					M
Metals					
Awls					
Nose adornment					M
Bells					
Coats		F			
Buttons					
Amulets		M			
Coats		FM			
Hair adornment		F			
Cartridge cases					
Inner coats		F			
Needle cases		F			
Coins					
Coats	F	F			
Drops/jinglers/tags					
Coats	F	F			
Talismans	M				
Earrings					
Coats					F
Ear adornment	M				
Finger rings		FM	F		F
Fishhooks					
Nose adornment					M
Head bands	F	F	F		

INUIT TRAIT LIST (Cont'd.)

Ornament and Application	Labrador Group	Central Group	Caribou Group	Copper Group	Mackenzie Group
Metal (Cont'd.)					
Instrument wheels					
Coats		F			
Nails					
Hair adornment		F			
Rings					
Hair adornment		F			
Spoon bowls					
Coats	F	F			
Thimbles					
Coats					F
Watch cases					
Breast pendants			F		

F: female; M: male; O: child; X: indeterminate.