



A descriptive analysis of Blackfeet Indian beadwork
by Elizabeth Mae McCoy

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE in Home Economics
Montana State University
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Abstract:

Assuming that the Indian beadwork is distinguishable on a tribal basis, it may express social and cultural patterns and reveal tribal history. The subjects for this study are the Blackfeet Indians. They were selected because of their outstanding ability in the art of dress and use of ornamentation. Beginning as the Algonkin and Sioux nations, the Blackfeet nation today consists of the Bloods, the Piegans, and the Blackfeet. They reside on a reservation in northwestern Montana and adjacent Canada.

Interviews with native Blackfeet revealed that among their tribe the most popular use of beads was for decoration and that geometric forms dominated. Blackfeet beadwork can be identified by observing the way line, color, and bead application methods work in geometric designs. Evaluation of the beads, the base materials, the designs, and the method of application can establish a general classification for beaded specimen. Although accuracy is limited, it appears that Blackfeet beadwork reached its peak in the mid 1800's.

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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF BLACKFEET INDIAN BEADWORK

by

ELIZABETH MAE McCOY

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial
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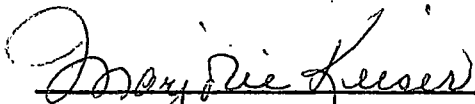
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ABSTRACT

Assuming that the Indian beadwork is distinguishable on a tribal basis, it may express social and cultural patterns and reveal tribal history. The subjects for this study are the Blackfeet Indians. They were selected because of their outstanding ability in the art of dress and use of ornamentation. Beginning as the Algonkin and Sioux nations, the Blackfeet nation today consists of the Bloods, the Piegans, and the Blackfeet. They reside on a reservation in northwestern Montana and adjacent Canada.

Interviews with native Blackfeet revealed that among their tribe the most popular use of beads was for decoration and that geometric forms dominated. Blackfeet beadwork can be identified by observing the way line, color, and bead application methods work in geometric designs. Evaluation of the beads, the base materials, the designs, and the method of application can establish a general classification for beaded specimen. Although accuracy is limited, it appears that Blackfeet beadwork reached its peak in the mid 1800's.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Among the Plains Indians there is little recorded history. Writing as a way of communication was nonexistent in their culture. As the old traditions of story-telling and picture writing fade away, so does the culture of the tribes. Much valuable information is therefore lost to coming generations.

Many scholars have suggested that arts and crafts may be a means of helping to establish historical accounts. As Coster says, "Their art was a means of communicating their emotions, and in it they expressed the characteristics of their race." (Coster, 1916: 301) This suggested that some tribes gave these conventionalized designs a symbolic value. (Wissler, 1941: 134) It also suggests that the arts and crafts of the Plains Indians may be used as an historical account of the tribes.

Art expression may be one of two types. It may be of a religious, or purely decorative connotation. In the former, which was a more serious art, there was a tendency toward the realistic. In the latter, highly geometric forms were constructed. These characteristics are discernable in the craft work of the Plains Indians. The religious art, for example, appeared in paintings on the Blackfeet tipi and the figures on the ghost dance shirts of the Dakota. On the other hand,

horse trappings, clothing items other than ceremonial costumes, and moccasins often supported the geometric decorative art expression.

(Wissler, 1941: 137)

Beadwork, being a popular craft of the Plains Indians, was no exception as a communicative art expression. It was used to communicate their beliefs and to decorate their clothing. For the most part, beadwork may be found on clothing, horse trappings, ceremonial props, and moccasins to mention just a few.

Many tribes were classified as Plains Indians. In general, they were Cheyenne, Sioux, Gros Ventre, Crow, Blackfeet, and Assiniboin. Of those inhabiting the upper reaches of the Missouri, two were outstanding. As described by George Catlin:

The several tribes of Indians inhabiting the regions of the Upper Missouri . . . are undoubtedly the finest looking, best equipped, and most beautifully costumed of any on the Continent. . . . As far as my travels have yet led me into the Indian country, I have more than realized my former predictions that those Indians who could be found most entirely in a state of nature, with the least knowledge of civilized society, would be found to be the most cleanly in their persons, elegant in their dress and manners, and enjoying life to the greatest perfection. Of such tribes; perhaps the Crows and the Blackfeet stand first; and no one would be able to appreciate the richness and elegance (and even taste too), without seeing them in their own country. (Roehm, 1966: 62)

The reservations of both the Crow and the Blackfeet are within the boundaries of Montana. Both tribes used ornamentation widely in their clothing and clothing accessories. The study of this ornamentation in either tribe could be a valuable resource in recording their

culture. Because of their outstanding ability in the art of dress and use of ornamentation, the Blackfeet tribe was chosen for this study.

If beadwork is to be used as a clue to history, changes need to be recorded, and an attempt made to interpret it in terms of social and cultural patterns. Several museum curators have indicated this study will be valuable as a means of authenticating Blackfeet Indian beaded specimen.

This study was therefore undertaken to find information needed for further recognition and understanding of Blackfeet Indian beadwork designs. Its objectives were to:

1. Identify characteristics of beadwork designs that are attributable to the Blackfeet tribe
2. Interpret the symbolism
3. Reveal the changes of the bead craft

Four basic assumptions have been made:

1. Blackfeet Indian beadwork is distinguishable from other Indian beadwork.
2. Blackfeet Indian beadwork reveals social and cultural patterns.
3. The designs of Blackfeet Indian beadwork have changed over the years.
4. A primary reason for these changes was due to outside influences.

Chapter II

BLACKFEET INDIANS

Location

The North American Indians may be classified by language, culture, and physical characteristics. It is, however, more usual to consider them as political or social groups, or tribes. It is under such group names that the objects in museum collections are arranged. The cultures of many tribes are quite similar. Resemblances are nearly always found among neighbors and not among widely scattered tribes. It is convenient, therefore, to group them in geographical or cultural areas. (Wissler, 1941: 17)

The Plains Indians acquired their name from the geographical area they inhabited, the Great Plains.

The area stretches from central Alberta all the way south to the Mexican border. It is bounded on the west by the Rocky Mountains, and on the east by the Missouri River. It includes parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. . . . This was the home of the Blackfoot, Crow, Sioux, (Dakota), Cheyenne, and Comanche Indians, among other. (Driver, 1961: 16)

(Fig. 1)

In the northwest corner of this outlined land area, next to the Rocky Mountains in Montana and in adjacent parts of Alberta, Canada, were the Blackfeet tribes: the South Piegan, North Piegan, Blood, and North Blackfeet. (Wissler, 1966: 102)



Fig. 1. Plains Indian Area

With the immigrations of civilization to the western United States, the territory of the Blackfeet Indian tribe continued to be diminished. The ultimate move was the establishment of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. This tract of land was located in northwestern Montana surrounding Browning. (Fig. 2)

Tribal Division

The origin of the Blackfeet tribe has been traced to two tribal families, the Sioux and the Algonkin. Noted in the family trees of each of these major tribes is the Blackfeet name. (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4)

A. Algonkin-Wahashan Stock: Plains Country

1. Cree
2. Blackfoot
3. Gros Ventre or Atsina
4. Blood
5. Piegan
6. Araphaho
7. Cheyenne

Fig. 3 (Wissler, 1966: 68)

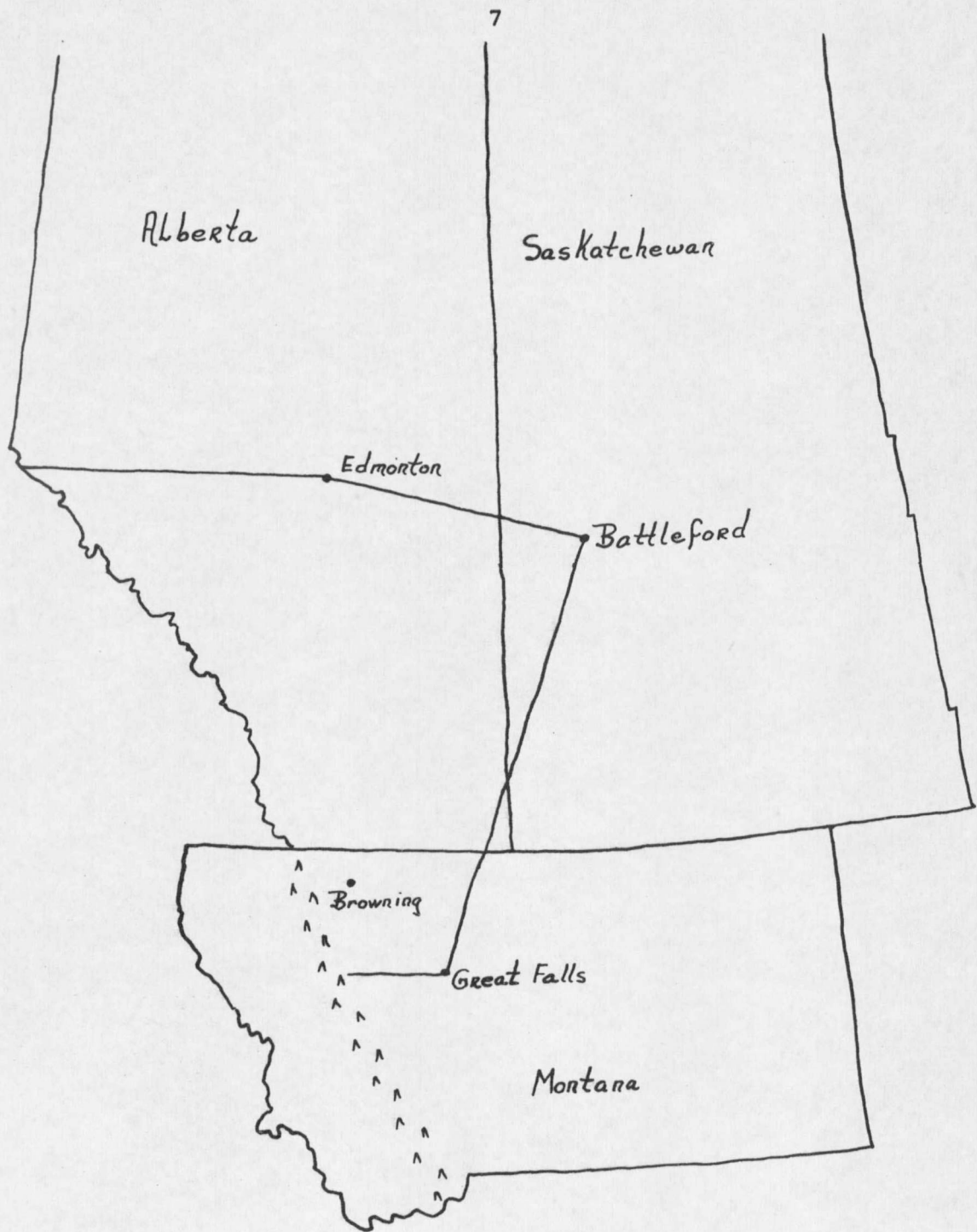


Fig. 2. Blackfeet Area and Reservation
(National Geographic Society, 1970: 56)

B. The Hokan-Siouan Stock: The Siouan Family

1. Dakota Tribes
 - a. Eastern Dakota
 - b. Santee Dakota
 - c. Teton Dakota
 - (1) Blackfeet Sioux
 - (2) Brule (Spotted Tail)
 - (3) Hunkpopa (Sitting Bull)
 - (4) Miniconjou
 - (5) Ogalala (Red Cloud, Crazy Horse)
 - (6) Sans Arc
 - (7) Two Kettle
 - d. Yankton Dakota (Waneta)

Fig. 4 (Wissler, 1966: 174)

There is reason to believe that the Algonkin once held all the territory north of the 38th parallel westward to the Rocky Mountains, and that the Sioux forced their way up the Missouri Valley, from the south, splitting the western Algonkin. (Wissler, 1966: 173-174)

This theory, among others, attempted to explain the origin of the Blackfeet.

The study of Indian Languages, . . . can be extremely valuable in the knowledge it provides of the backgrounds and prehistoric origin, movements, and cultural developments of individual tribes and bands. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 14)

.....
 Language characteristics, for instance, provide clues to early links between different people, help indicate the approximate time and place in which people were once located, point to centers of dispersion, and illuminate migrations, divisions, contacts, past associations, and content of prehistoric cultures. And language borrowings from other tongues--or the lack of them--can often clarify relationships between stronger and advanced cultures. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 15)

It has been noted that the Blackfeet language was Algonkin in nature, which may have indicated that the Siouan Blackfeet were engulfed by the already established Algonkin Blackfeet.

According to the Siouan family tree, the Blackfeet were a part of the seven sub-tribes of the Teton-Dakota division. (Fig. 4) As these Indians worked their way up the Missouri Valley to the Algonkin Blackfeet territory, the two groups may have melted together to form what is known today as simply the Blackfeet Indian Tribe. After the emergence of these two groups of people under a common name, the tribe again divided into four sub-tribes: the South Piegan, North Piegan, Blood, and North Blackfeet.

Including these four tribes, at the time the Blackfeet were at the height of their power, about 1830, it was estimated that the total population was between 10,000 and 18,000 people. Unfortunately, with civilization came disease unknown to the Indians. In 1836 the first epidemic of smallpox took its toll among the Blackfeet. Again in 1845 and 1857 smallpox struck the tribe, leaving the population about one-third its former number. (Wissler, 1966: 106)

Life Style

Although the Plains tribes never constituted more than one-fifth of the United States Indian population, they have captured a large share of the world's interest.

Their fierce resistance to the white invaders, their famed horsemanship, and their colorful costumes are so familiar that many people think of all Indians as dashing raiders on horseback, dressed in fringed buckskin and flowing war bonnets. (Mattson, 1951: 60)

It was not until the horse appeared, about 1730, that the best known aspects of their culture developed. (Mattson, 1951: 60)

The nonagricultural nature of the Plains Indians was at its prime by the end of the eighteenth century. The horse had facilitated the pursuit of the buffalo and the maintenance of a buffalo-based economy which the plains seemed to dictate. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 110) The buffalo meant not only food, but also clothing, homes, weapons, ceremonial props, and many other items for the Plains tribes. Without the buffalo the life of the American Plains Indian would have been quite different. As it was, however, the plains were bountifully stocked so life was quite comfortable. (Roehm, 1966: 60-62)

The Plains Indians moved their campsites often as they followed the massive herds of buffalo from range to range. If game was scarce, it often became necessary for bands to split into small units and hunt different areas to obtain enough food. When these bands, or in some cases tribes, came together, the members of each assembled their tipis in a circle or semicircle. It was at this time that social visits, games, gambling, and foot and horse races occurred, as did councils and ceremonies. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 120) Usually when the tribes assembled

it meant there was plenty to eat for all the members. (Spargur, 1971: Interview)

The Plains Indians, as a whole, fought courageously with the white man to keep their land and freedom. Even though the Blackfeet had a reputation for being warlike and ferocious, the nation did not openly engage in war with the white man. Instead, they fought their hated neighboring Indian bands who invaded Blackfeet country for buffalo and horses. The Blackfeet were serving as scouts and allies, while other tribes of the Plains area were fighting with the white man. Nevertheless, because of these activities the Blackfeet gained the reputation for being the most hostile of all Plains Indians. Most of the neighboring tribes and whites became fearful of the powerful Blackfeet. One authority cites an exception to this.

It is an interesting fact that . . . the first white trader, in fact the first white man, who is known to have visited them . . . has left it on record that he spent the winter with them and was treated with the utmost friendliness. (Belden, 1884: 327)

Spargur suggests that Indian traditions express a peaceful life in those days, at least until the white man appeared. There was little cause for war. Conflicts, when they arose, were generally caused by extending or protecting hunting grounds, or from the theft of a woman by other tribes. (Spargur, 1971: Interview)

The social organization of the Blackfeet Indians was not a complex institution. It was, in fact, a loose confederacy having no

overall chief. Each tribe, the Piegan (North and South), the Blackfeet, and the Bloods, divided into bands headed by a civil chief and a war chief. (Werner, 1971: 3-4) These bands or subdivisions are sometimes referred to as gentes and take their name from some peculiarity or habit. They have no special duties, "medicine", or "totem".

(Grinnell, 1971: 208) Within this confederacy existed Blackfeet societies.

Blackfeet did not join the Blackfeet societies for pleasure, but to fulfill vows, generally made because of sickness, or for some remarkable escape from danger. The leading societies ruled the camp, and helped the chiefs to administer public discipline. They protected the tribe's sources of food, and secured equal opportunities for all. They strictly enforced the rule that private advantages must be surrendered to the public good. Under the exercise of such police regulations and the enjoyment by all of equal rights and a joint ownership of game and lands, no individual could claim or annoy special privileges. The societies compelled everyone to submit to their rule, but they never annoyed or interfered with people who obeyed their commands. (McLaughlin, 1970: 34)

The families of the Blackfeet were very closely knit. Within this unit, definite roles were laid out for the members. Generally the men were the warriors and the hunters. Most of their time was spent resting and hunting as often their hunting parties would be gone for days or weeks. (Spargur, 1971: Interview) In contrast, the women of the tribe were the workers of the families. Among their duties, they prepared all the food, tanned all the hides, erected and took down the tipi, carried the water, dug plants, and brought in the meat. Even

though the woman was the worker, she was very highly regarded as indicated in a statement recorded by O'Hara: "mat-ah-kwi-tam-sp-i-ni-po-ki-ni-mi-o-sin". "Not found (is) happiness without woman." (O'Hara, 1934: 46) Today, the women's position is very similar to the white society although they are not as forward. (Werner, 1971: Interview)

They are a proud and intelligent people. The principal downfall the past 100 years was due to the unwise use of liquor, their failure to work together, and the greed of the white man. Gradually they are bettering themselves. Particularly in the last two decades, they have made remarkable progress in self government, ranching, oil and gas development, new housing, industry, and educational facilities. (Werner, 1971: 8)

Religion and Mythology

The religion of Indians was a complex institution. Gods were not shared by any two tribes although each individual had his own helpful power, or Great Medicine. (O'Hara, 1934: 53)

All religious ceremonies and practices or medicines of the Plains Indians originated in dreams or visions. (Wissler, 1941: 113)

". . . dreams were interpreted as communications with the unseen."

(Wissler, 1966: 25)

Supernatural visions, an important element in the life of the Plains Indians, were sought by both men and women through dreams and private quests. Usually, when they were in their late teens, youths would be sent by themselves to lonely places to seek a vision. After fasting and sometimes self-torture, the youth would dream that he was visited by a supernatural being who would become his personal guardian. The spirit would teach him certain magic songs and prayers, instruct him in a personal ritual and in ways of behavior, and tell him what objects to bring together to form his own

personal charm that would protect him and help him through life. Thereafter, whenever he required it, the Indian would continue to seek guidance from his special guardian, carrying the sacred objects wrapped in a skin, which white men called a "medicine bundle". Men who had strong visions often became shamans, and were believed to possess magical powers, including the important ability to heal sick persons. But special training was frequently required to conduct the various tribal rituals and carry out spiritual duties. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 120)

As were all Indians, the Blackfeet were prejudiced and superstitious. Nothing was undertaken without first consulting their guardian spirit. (O'Hara, 1934: 27)

Now, when a Blackfoot . . . went out to fast and pray for a revelation, he called upon all the recognized mythical creatures, the heavenly bodies, and all in the earth and in the water, which is consistent with the conceptions of a (n) . . . localized power or element manifest everywhere. . . . If this divine element spoke through a hawk, for example, the applicant would then look upon that bird as the localization or medium for it; and for him . . . was manifest or resided therein. . . . Quite likely, he would keep in a bundle the skin or feathers of a hawk that the divine presence might ever be at hand. (Wissler, 1941: 112)

The practice of sacrificial offerings was common among the Plains Indians. (Wissler, 1966: 125) Beaded items, calico yardage, and decorated clothing were often given to the gods in the ceremony of offerings followed by the Sun Dance. (O'Hara, 1934: 57)

One of the most important rituals of the Plains tribes was the Sun Dance, whose participants had made vows to enter the ceremony in return for supernatural assistance. Held annually in the summer, the religious event was observed in various forms. Generally, however, it included a dance conducted in an enclosed area around a painted pole that had been fashioned from a sacred tree, felled with a special ceremony. The participants, carry out their vows in return for spiritual help, danced extremely simple steps and went

without food and water--sometimes for days--until, in many cases, they dropped in a trance and had a vision.
(Josephy, Jr., 1969: 120)

Tribal myths often consisted of tales about the activities of some mythical hero with supernatural attributes. He had the power to create or transform the world, to right great wrongs. This human form often appeared as a trickster who played trivial and vulgar pranks.
(Wissler, 1941: 107) The Blackfeet gods were the Sun and Napi, a supernatural being. Napi was a trickster who was a combination of strength and weakness, wisdom and kindness, and who did good for those who did right. To achieve his favor, offerings of the usual type were made. If, however, a prayer was for life, the sacrifice of a finger would favorably influence the god. (O'Hara, 1934: 53)

Myths were nearly universal in the Plains. Usually they took the form of having the submerged earth restored by a sort of human being who sent down a diving bird or animal to obtain a little mud or sand. (Wissler, 1941: 106) "Migration legends and those accounting for the origins and forms of tribal beliefs and institutions make up a large portion of the mythology for the respective tribes and must be carefully considered in formulating a concept of the religion and philosophy of each." (Wissler, 1941: 109)

Chapter III

BEADWORK OF THE BLACKFEET

Introduction

Paint and quill embroidery were the traditional arts of the Plains Indians. Designs could be easily rendered in paint on flat surfaces. It seems logical, therefore, that the art forms used in beaded figures were first developed in the techniques of painting. (Ewers, 1939: 45) It was not until the white man arrived that applied designs became a favorite decoration. He brought with him and made available beads and ribbons which became popular adornment items for decorating personal belongings. (Whiteford, 1970: 87) The bead eventually almost displaced the original art of porcupine quill embroidery. (Wissler, 1941: 133)

In general, realistic, decorative, and other art forms seem to have been developed on the northeastern border of the United States, while the geometric art form was most commonly used in the southwestern area. The Blackfeet family tree shows relationships from both, the Algonkin of the northeast and the Sioux from the southwest. (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4) It seems, therefore, that there are two influences from opposite directions which reinforce the common suggestion that the geometric art of the Plains area was introduced from the southwestern part of the continent. (Wissler, 1971: 137-138)

Beadwork, for the Blackfeet Indians, served to record historical events and render personal belongings more attractive. Early forms were realistic, but through the years these became conventionalized and were regarded only as decoration. Although beadwork was somewhat less important to the Blackfeet than other Indian tribes of the northern Plains, it shows historical content. (Whiteford, 1970: 6)

The American Indian does not produce much handmade clothing and equipment today due to the scarcity of raw materials and the general adoption of white man's clothing. There are, however, festive occasions, whether staged for the benefit of Indians or whites, that still require the traditional items. In some instances these handmade materials are used as gifts from the maker to other members of the tribe. "These are usually excellent in design and workmanship and reveal a vitality and strength that promise to survive no matter how much the new life of these people may modify the style of their future work." (Mattson, 1951: 64)

Design and Art Forms of the Blackfeet

Among the Plains Indian tribes there was a great diversity of form and expression in art. In each tribe the designs were influenced by religious and social customs. Plains Indian art, however, had some common ground. The designs were surface decoration characterized by



Fig. 5 Saddle Bag

Beaded by the Blackfeet in the late 19th century. Shows the lazy stitch on deerskin



Fig. 6 Saddle

Beaded by the Blackfeet in early 1900's

Saddle Blanket beaded by Blackfeet in the mid 19th century. Shows lazy stitch on deerskin.

Fig. 5 & 6
 US Department of the Interior
 Indian Arts & Crafts Board
 Museum of the Plains Indian
 Browning, Montana

boldness of design and skill in space filling, with a relation between form, media, and material. (Appleton, 1971: 2)

Whether the design was purely decorative or had some religious connotation depended on the purpose of the structure. The purpose of the design also determined whether men or women constructed the figure. "Neither sex worked in the style of the other." (Mattson, 1951: 62)

The realistic decoration of objects used in rituals and religious ceremonials was the work of men. Handled similarly were war deeds, hunting scenes, and historical record. (Appleton, 1971: 20) The women were restricted to using abstract designs. They consisted of geometrical units such as squares, triangles, and diamonds. (Appleton, 1971: 20) It was in the area of the abstract that the beadwork found its greatest success. The geometric forms were an effort to make things "pretty". (Appleton, 1971: 1)

The traditional designs consisted of angular abstractions. They appear quite complex but can be resolved into basic geometric forms such as triangles, rectangles, lozenges, straight lines, and dots. (Wissler, 1941: 134) They are constructed in various combinations to make up the desired decorative form. (Spier, 1925: 96)

The principles that lie at the foundation of all design are illustrated in Indian works. "Repetition, symmetry, rhythm, straight and curved line arrangements, light and dark space relations, color values, are carefully related and produce patterns of simple beauty and

artistic merit." (Coster, 1916: 301) The designs . . . are symmetrical and the lines are smooth and of uniform width. . . . Carelessness is largely a matter of irregularity in line and shape, . . ." (Spier, 1925: 97) For example, on a parfleche there might be a slight difference between the flaps, in the number of bars or triangles used to fill an area, and of failures to transpose colors to render the flaps symmetrical about a longitudinal median. "The feeling for symmetry is so strong . . . that the asymmetry of the whole design are . . . symmetrical about either the longitudinal or the transverse axis of the design." (Spier, 1925: 97)

When Blackfeet decorative figures are reduced to the basic geometric forms, two major shapes dominate, the square and the rectangle. These generally are found massed together to make up a larger triangle. (Hunt, 1954: 58) The native Blackfeet refer to this shape as the arrowpoint or the mountain design. (McKnight, Spargur, Higgins, 1971: Interviews) Fig. 8

The type of lines used makes each tribe distinctive. Some are straight and carefully drawn while others are careless. When the latter occurs, it is largely a matter of irregularity of smoothness or uniformity. Some lines are curved. This is not necessarily carelessness since these curves are symmetrically placed. According to many authorities, the Blackfeet commonly use the curved line in their designs. (Spier, 1925: 97) The native Blackfeet, however, indicate

Fig. 7 Saddle Blanket

Blackfeet
Mid 19th century



Fig. 8 Cradle

Blackfeet
Early 1900's



Fig. 7 & 8
US Department of the
Interior
Indian Arts & Crafts
Board
Museum of the Plains
Indians
Browning, Montana

that straight lines and corners are the most popular usage of line. (Higgins, 1971: Interview) The width of a line should also be considered. Lines are described as narrow or broad. The Blackfeet tended to use both types or medium lines. (Spier, 1925: 97)

While primary colors red, yellow, and blue were used most often, other dominant colors can be found in various tribal works. Even in the three sub-tribes of the Blackfeet nation, one color will dominate in one group more than in the other two. The Blackfeet basic colors were strong bold hues of red, yellow, blue, green, black, and white. The Bloods, part of the Blackfeet nation, used yellow as a more dominant color. (Higgins, 1971: Interview) The larger figure in the Blackfeet design is usually of one color while the smaller units around it are of many colors. White generally served as the background color, although other hues such as light blue or green have been used in the Blackfeet designs. (Hunt, 1954: 58) Fig. 9, 10, 11.



Fig. 9 Legging

Blackfeet
Late 19th century

Fig. 9
US Department of the
Interior
Indian Arts & Crafts
Board
Museum of the Plains
Indians

Fig. 10 Womens' Pipe Bag

Blackfeet
Late 19th century



Fig. 11 Bridle

Blackfeet
Early 1900's



Fig. 10 & 11
US Department of the
Interior
Indian Arts & Crafts Board
Museum of the Plains Indians
Browning, Montana

Uses of Blackfeet Beadwork

The Blackfeet Indians used beadwork decoration as a method for emphasizing pride in design and workmanship of personal belongings. With the beads they developed a complex art form that added "beauty" and adornment to clothing, tools, riding equipment, household items, and ceremonial props. (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 22) In general, beadwork may be found on almost any item of personal belonging on which beauty could be enhanced, or has some religious significance or power.

The clothing of both sexes was colorfully adorned with beadwork. (Josephy, Jr., 1969: 119) Generally, the decorations on mens and womens clothing were similar and adhered to a common tribal style. (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 26) Items of clothing on which beadwork may be found are dresses, shirts, vests, leggings, moccasins, breechcloths, and robes. Accessories such as necklaces and hair ornaments also make use of the bead.

Old-time Blackfoot dresses were commonly decorated with a band of beadwork across the front that curved downwards toward the center. Another beaded band often covered the shoulders, and small beaded symbols were applied on other parts of the dresses. A downward-pointed triangle was generally beaded on the lower front of the dress--presumably as some traditional symbol of womanhood. A narrow beaded band usually edged the bottom of the dress, while thongs and fringes often hung in profusion. Blackfoot women preferred larger-than-seed beads for their dresses. They used both pony beads and glass tube beads on the capes. Time saved made up for the beauty lost. Large beads were also strung on the long thongs, while thimbles and drilled coins were attached to their ends, and Deer hooves and cowrie shells were tied into the fringes. (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 27) Fig. 12



Fig. 12 Annie Calf Looking

Glacier Studio
Mr. & Mrs. D. J. Schmidt
Browning, Montana

"Cloth dresses were decorated in a variety of ways, in addition to, or instead of beadwork." (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 27) "Many times the beaded or quilled yokes from worn out dresses were repaired and worn over plain cloth dresses." (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 29) Fig. 13



Fig. 13 Cape

Blackfeet
Early 1900's

Fig. 13
US Department of the
Interior
Indian Arts & Crafts
Board
Museum of the Plains
Indian
Browning, Montana

Beadwork was most commonly found on mens shirts in stripes that were worn down the arms and over the shoulders. "Blackfeet shirts often had a large beaded medallion in front of the chest, as well as fringes of white-with-black-tip Ermine skins." (Hungry Wolf, 1971: 37) Figures 14 & 15



Fig. 14 Man's Shirt

Blackfeet
Late 19th century
Ermine Tails

Fig. 15 Man's Shirt

Blackfeet
Mid 19th century
Wool Fabric
Medallion

Fig. 14 & 15
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