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History of Yukon first nations art

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Chapter Two-Geometric & Decorative arts

Geometric Period

I have identified the earliest art in the Yukon as the Geometric Period since the examples are geometric in nature. The materials used in the creation of the imagery went a long way in dictating the form the art would take; this resulted in the geometric style. Tools, drums, arrow quivers, etc. were painted with red ochre or charcoal and/or were engraved; clothing was painted with red ochre and decorated with porcupine or bird feather spine quillwork and fur robes were sewn together to form geometric patterns. There were decorative motifs as well as human, animal and other unidentifiable figures. The later chapters of this paper focus on human and animal images but in this chapter I focus more on the motifs and non-figurative art as a foundation of early Yukon First Nations art. The majority of imagery for the early Yukon falls into this category. I start off with some of the geometric patterns used and later show on what artifacts these designs were placed. Those common tools and items that often have the geometric designs engraved on them are items such as bone arm bands, bone skinning knives including metal knives and dentalia shells. There were certain motifs commonly used. Below in figure # 19 is a brief visual list of common motifs from the Geometric Period. These are the repeating cone, dot and chevrons; zigzags; crosshatching & complex patterns; crosses (or 4 directions symbols) and variations of these motifs. I will also examine the dot within a circle (Also called the Big Headed Starman motif by McClellan) design in detail.

There are no clear explanations about the early Yukon First Nations use of these motifs. Many of the Elders I spoke to about these motifs stated that they were put on the items "to make them fancy." I have looked beyond the Yukon for explanations and have found examples of these motifs in other cultures, like from old Europe and indigenous peoples throughout the world. While there are sometimes common explanations for some motifs, many times there are different thoughts about them. My objective here is simply to make you more familiar with the commonly used early Yukon First Nations motifs. I would also ask you to be aware of these motifs on the artifacts that I show in the later chapters.

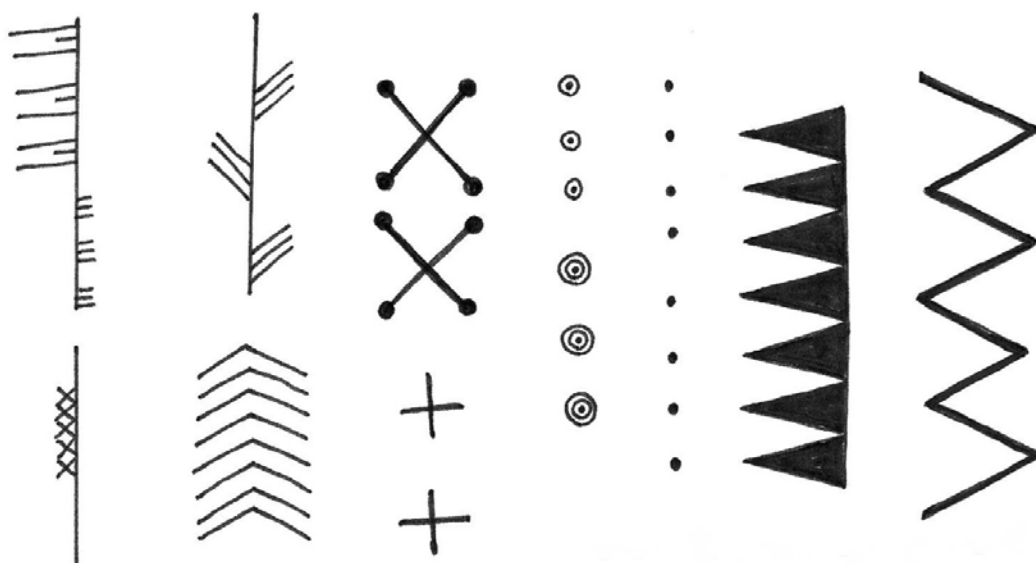


Figure # 19. Zigzag, repeating cone, repeating dot, dot within a circle, crosses, chevrons and various line motifs. UvK drawing.

Repeating cone, dot & chevron motifs

The repeating dot, repeating cone and chevron motifs were often painted on spoons, arrow points, clothing, drums and tools. A variation of the chevron motif was also used by the Inland Tlingit on the chests of human images. To see examples of these go to Chapter Five-Figurative Art. See figure # 20 for an example of a repeating dot motif on a spoon.



Figure # 20, example of the repeating dot motif: Inland Tlingit Spoon; CMC VI-J-56.

I could not find any information about these repeating dot motifs. Nor could I find any information from outside the Yukon that would have added any meaningful insights for Yukon First Nations art. While I could not find any references to the repeating dot motif, I did find some information about the rhythm in art, like the throb of resonance as in the notes of music. In *The Nature of Paleolithic Art* R. Dale Guthrie explains how Paleolithic peoples dealt with patterns:

Necklaces, bracelets, and amulets from the late Paleolithic are virtually all decorated with repeated abstract patterns. (...) For example, we see comparable abstract or geometric patterns among the traditional artwork of Plains Indian and Eskimo women. (...)

A number of Paleolithic pendants, buttons, and other accessories have deliberately notched edges or engraved zigzag patterns. We enjoy such patterns today and can see that the Paleolithic eye was likewise engaged. Increased numbers of edges or lines, such as toothed edges, toggles, parallel grooves, crosshatching, or beads on a string, catch and hold the eye longer, as part of their physiological affect on the brain. (Guthrie 2005: 202-203)

According to this, the rhythms caused by the patterns are pleasing, and therefore these may be the visual indicators or references to patterns we experience in life. Such patterns would be the seasons, waves in the water, clouds, our heartbeats and so forth. I find it interesting that the early Yukon First Nations visual patterns can be quite simple, like the repeating dot motif, but also more complex such as the quill work on the breastbands of clothing. This resonates with the early music patterns, which also have aspects of higher complexity. The early Yukon musical instruments were limited to the drum and some rattles, the former being rarer. The patterns created by the drum can be simple, like the repeating dot motif: bang...bang...bang. They can also be slightly more complex, such as the pattern, or rhythm, used for stick gambling: bang-bang...bang-bang...bang-bang.

Repeating dots were not only engraved or painted but later they were added in the form of buttons to provide the border on all button blankets. These button blankets were used while dancing to the repeating drum beat sound pattern. Maybe the repeating dots, or in this case buttons, were the visual link to the physical action of drumming and dancing. Below in figure # 21 is a button blanket from the Kluane Museum of Natural History in Burwash Landing. The blanket was made by Ms. Marge Jackson, a Southern Tutchone Elder. The square on the back may have been a common design made by people of her generation for at least the Southern Tutchone people. Ms. Annie Ned has been reported to also have made these style button blankets. Ms. Marge Jackson explained the square pattern on the back to represent a backpack. A backpack is of course essential for the people that live a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Note that the Inland Tlingit often place clan animals on the back but still use the same colored cloth and place the buttons around the edge of the button blanket. I will be examining button blankets in great detail in Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch & Death.



Figure # 21. Button blanket with repeating dots (buttons). Made by Ms. Marge Jackson. 1975.6, KMNH

Zigzag motifs

The zigzag motif and its variations can be found on many Yukon First Nations objects such as hats, bags, drums, tools, scratchers and clothing. See figure # 22 for two examples of the zigzag motif. The knife sheath was collected by Rev. V.C. Sims from Forty-Mile in the Yukon Territory along the Yukon River which would make the artifact Han. The zigzag pattern is created by the use of porcupine quills. The bone scratcher is from the Burke Museum and was collected by George Emmons from the coastal Tlingit in 1909. The artifact notes state that the scratcher was collected from the Chilkat Tlingit who themselves received it in trade from the Tutchone. Also see figure # 5 on page 30 in the introduction for the Tutchone drum that has a zigzag pattern painted around the edge.

While there is little written about these motifs in the Yukon, these zigzag and other related motifs were used by the coastal Tlingits in their baskets and Raven's Tail weaving from which they made blankets, leggings and dance aprons. It is generally accepted to have been adopted from geometric patterns from the Tlingit basketry, which in turn were adopted from the interior (Yukon) people's porcupine embroidery.

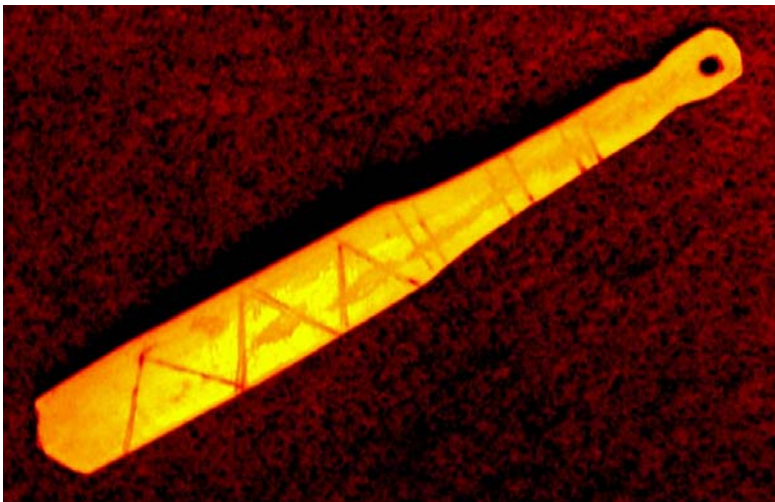


Figure # 22, Top: various zigzag motifs, top left: Knife sheath with quill embroidery zigzag, OLCM. Bottom: bone scraper; Burke Museum 1019.

In Emmons' *The Tlingit Indians* we can find the connections:

These designs of the Northern Geometric (Holm 1982; Samuel 1986) or Raven's Tail style (Samuel 1987) are clearly derived from those of Tlingit twine basketry... (Emmons 1991: 228)

And:

Design in basketry was geometric, and constituted a noticeably fundamental exception to the characteristic art of the Tlingits, who, in carving, painting, and weaving in animal fabrics employed only realistic or symbolic animal figures, totemic in character and connected with their social organization. It would, therefore, seem reasonable that this geometric character of design was borrowed, and, as none of the neighboring people employ such figures in any of their work, we may go beyond to the Athapaskan porcupine quill embroidery. This was similar in simple figures, and was well known to the Tlingit through [a common?] origin, intermarriage, and trade.

Possibly it was practiced by them to some degree, since old skin clothing ornamented with quill work was not uncommon among them. (Emmons 1991: 220-221)

In *The Tlingit Indians*, the editor, Frederica De Laguna, has made the following notes about the Tlingit basketry designs:

[It could be better argued that the geometric designs of basketry were named for fancier resemblances to objects than that they intended to represent those objects. Of the designs figured by Emmons (1903), six were named for features of crests (Killerwhale teeth, Raven tail); twenty-seven for other animals or natural features (shark tooth, fern fronds); twenty-five for manufactured articles (labret, shaman's hat). (Emmons 1991: 222)

As it states above the Tlingit method of identifying the geometric patterns is based on a resemblance to objects rather than the representation of those objects. So they are more of an identification of different geometric patterns. That is to say, the Killerwhale teeth pattern is not representing the Killerwhale. I think that one of the primary reasons for the geometric patterns is the nature of the material originally used by the Yukon Athapaskans in the creation of the patterns on clothing, which is the porcupine quill. This material dictates a geometric design. I therefore believe that the Athapaskan quill work was almost totally decorative and the resulting patterns on Tlingit blankets, baskets and other items were also largely decorative. Also note that the material used for the creation of the Tlingit designs is spruce root for the baskets, goat wool for the blankets, and so forth, which resulted in geometric designs. Even after the introduction of new materials such as beads, Athapaskan people at first continued with the geometric designs using the beads instead of the porcupine quills. The beads were later used in the creation of the new floral designs that make up the Beaded Period. Below in figure # 23 is a set of hide clothing in the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska.



Figure # 23. Zigzag breastband pattern on Athapaskan hide clothing; IV.B.4 SJM

The breastband pattern is a bold zigzag design created with large beads. The hide tunic was at first listed as interior Alaska; ‘Unlocated Athapaskan’ but later was changed to ‘Athapaskan Porcupine River’ which would make this Gwich’in. This is an example of a tunic that may be misidentified as I believe the tunic is from the south of the Yukon. The bold geometric pattern in the breastband is common in the south-central region and the hide is made of moose which was quite scarce in Gwich’in territory in the past. Furthermore, there were many other examples of south-central Yukon tunics in the coastal Tlingit region, because of all the trade. See Chapter Three-Hide Clothing to Dance Shirts for more information about tunic regional styles.

Outside the Yukon zigzag patterns can be found in many other cultures. In old Europe these patterns were used as far back as 7500 years ago. In Gimbutas’ *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, she states about zigzags from around southeastern Europe:

Stamped seals of this time period reveal the same tendency: almost all known seals are engraved with either straight lines, wavy lines or zigzags. Torrents of water shown as vertical zigzagging lines in separate panels depicted on early Vinča funnel-shaped vase may be related to the ritual of rain invocation. (Gimbutas 1992: 114-116)

And:

The relationship between water and the bear is further indicated by bear-shaped cult vases, abundantly represented in the Danilo, Sesklo, Butmir and Lengyel cultures. The Danilo bear-shaped vases are solidly covered with belts of zigzags, chevrons and striated diamonds, symbolic of flowing water. (Gimbutas 1992: 116-119)

Note that these zigzags are incised into water vessels and this may be the basic connection between the water flowing and the vessel. The Yukon zigzags were placed on various items and therefore I do not think that they represented water. It is true that the Athapaskan geometric patterns were weaved on the Tlingit cooking baskets but these same geometric patterns were also used on the breastbands of clothing and the basket motifs are not zigzags as in the European examples. In the middle Yukon River area the Tanana, Koyukon and the Ingalik Athapaskans all created clay pots and decorated them with lines and the repeating dot motif but I did not see the use of the zigzag patterns on the pots.

Cross hatching & complex patterns

The cross hatching or cross cutting design was mostly put on tools and pendants. See figure # 24 for two examples of cross hatching. The first on left is an awl that is designed to drill holes into the frame of a pair of snowshoes, so the lacing can be threaded through. When I found out that these awls were used to drill holes into the frames of snowshoes for the lacing, I wondered if the cross hatching was a reflection of the intended task of the tool. Did it facilitate the webbing of the sinew for the snowshoes? The webbing would look like the cross hatching on the awl. Unfortunately, only the maker of this awl knows the reasons for the design. The next example of cross hatching is on a shaman’s pendant which is part of a series of pendants. I will examine more pendants in later chapters. There is a wide range of designs on pendants and while no two pendants are alike cross hatching was one of the more common motifs used.



Figure # 24 crosshatching: Left: awl from the Kluksu Museum. Right: pendant from the CMC, JaVg-2:101

Cross hatching is sometimes related to the beaver. In the following image in figure # 25 is a carved wood spoon from the Museum of the North in Fairbanks, Alaska. This spoon was collected from the interior of Alaska by a teacher and collector, Rhonda Thomas. She lived in Alaska starting in 1937 and Fairbanks from 1957 until 1965. So this spoon is Athapascan and may be from the Fairbanks area and if so would make it a Tanana spoon.



Figure # 25, crosshatching on Beaver spoon, Athapascan. UA67-98-147. Museum of the North, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

While I did not find any cross hatching examples from the Yukon that definitely represented a beaver, the coastal Tlingits used cross hatching to represent beavers. The following is a coastal Tlingit visual representation of the traits of a beaver:

Beaver-Large incisors, flat, crosshatched tail. In sculpture frequently grasping horizontal stick in paws, or biting stick. (Vancouver Art Gallery 1967: unnumbered pages)

It would be fair to say that at times cross hatching did represent beavers in Yukon since the cross hatching was done by groups at least to the south and west of the Yukon. So does the following spoon from Forty Mile Creek represent a beaver? This spoon, part of the National Museum of the Natural History Smithsonian collection is listed as collected by I.C. Russell from the Upper Yukon at Forty Mile Creek, Alaska. There is a Forty Mile River in Alaska

that empties out into the Yukon River. Since the description is “Upper Yukon” I am inclined to think that I.C. Russell is referring to The Settlement of Forty Mile on the Yukon River. In the late 19th and early 20th century many Americans thought that the Yukon was part of the United States and at times locations in the Yukon were identified as Alaskan. In any case, it is most likely a Han made spoon. See figure # 26 for four views of the spoon.



Figure # 26. Upper Yukon spoon with cross hatching. 153413 NMNH.

The wooden spoon is unique as it is partly made of geometric motifs such as a repeating cone design, as well as what appears to be floral designs on the inside and outside of the bowl part of the spoon. There is also a button in the center of the spoon. Because of the floral designs, which did not start until the Beaded Period after the introduction of beads into the region, as well as the button, it could not have been made before the very end of the 19th century. The cross hatching on this spoon is also quite interesting. Does it indicate a beaver?

The top circle of the spoon handle could be thought of as a beaver tail yet the diamond shaped cross hatching in the second circle does not appear to be a beaver tail. Does that part represent something else? There also appears to be a small four-direction symbol at the button in the center of the bowl part of the spoon. This is a good place to begin examining the four direction motif.

Four directions/crosses

The four-directions or cross symbol shows up on a variety of items such as spoons and moose calling scapulas, but they are mostly found on drums. See figure # 27 for two Tanana painted drum cross designs that incorporate variations of the four-directions. These are followed by a Southern Tutchone drum and a photograph of well known Tagish man Patsy Henderson with his drum. The first Tanana drum was collected by Professor Robert McKennan and given to the present collection at the Hood Museum of Art in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1929. The drum is made with moose hide. The bottom Tanana drum is from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and was made by Walter Northway from Northway, Alaska. It was collected by William Simeone and was purchased by the museum in 1981. The drum is listed as Tutchone and perhaps this is because Walter Northway's grandfather was Tutchone and the Northway's have Tutchone relatives in the Yukon. Walter Northway was born in the 1870s and lived to be well over one hundred years old. He spoke Upper Tanana therefore I identify this drum as Upper Tanana. Note that the four direction symbol is made up of a yellow cross in the center of the drum as well as a red line beside one of the yellow lines. This may be to make the four directions design fancier or it may have a greater significance. Around the edge of the drum are a series of three red bands. It was fairly common to have patterns painted around the outside edge of drums.



Figure # 27, Tanana four-direction drum designs: Left; Walter Northway drum. 30.2.4601 HMA. Right; Tanana design from Northway, Alaska. 1981.3509.270081 Field Museum.

The right drum in figure # 27 is a fairly complex four direction design. The center almost appears like a snow flake design with four patterns fanning out from the center. The patterns are split into colours; one side of each 'fan' is mostly red while the other is mostly black.



Figure # 28, Top; Southern Tutchone design from the KMNH. Bottom: Tagish drum owned by Patsy Henderson. Jean Robbie fonds 93/115R#3, YA.

Note that the Tutchone drum in the left photograph of figure # 28 from the Kluane Museum of Natural History in Burwash appears to be the same as a four- pedal flower design seen in beadwork. Is there a relationship between the two? I have seen other examples of floral designs being painted or engraved. The drum in the right photograph is held by Patsy Henderson and also has a four directions design. While not exactly the same, another simple four- directions design can be seen on an early hide bag. This bag in figure # 29 was made by an Inland Tlingit woman in the early 20th century. The bag is now in possession of her granddaughter, Norma Shorty.

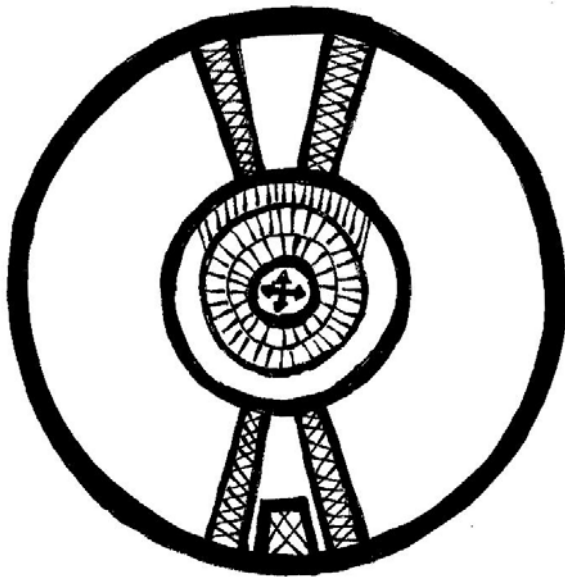


Figure # 29, Four direction design on hide bag. Norma Shorty collection.

While I could not find any reference to the significance of the four-direction designs from the Yukon, there are references to the significance of the number four. In *Part of the Land, Part of the Water* it is stated that the number four has a relation to the story of Crow creating the world after the flood:

In this story, as in many Yukon Indian stories, nothing happens until the fourth request or fourth try. Many old-time rituals and other events were also ordered in sets of four. Some Indians believed that the emphasis on the number four, or eight, symbolized the ideal makeup of a whole person with two arms and two legs, each made of two large bones. Their worldview, like that of many other American Indians, stressed the number four. (McClellan 2001: 254)

I did come across a reference to a drum design of the Beaver people from Northern British Columbia. It has the four directions and the related meaning is recorded in the *Handbook of North American Indians*. See figure # 30 for my drawing of the drum design from that publication.



Figures # 30, Beaver drum design based on their creation story, *Handbook of North American Indians*, page 354. Drawing after Ridington and Ridington 1970:52; Ridington 1978: cover. 50

This is what is written about the story in the *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 6*:

Creation

The world took on its form when *ya ke sede*, 'heaven sitter', the creator, drew a cross on the water and sent down various animals to find land. When muskrat came up with a speck of dirt underneath his nails *ya ke sede* placed the earth at the centre of the cross on the water and told it to grow. The structure laid out in this creation story is the structure within which both the visionary experience and everyday reality took place. In it are laid out the cardinal directions and their point of intersection from which up and down, heaven and the underworld, future and past spring into being. (Helm 1981: 354)

This is a common myth across northwestern North America, known as the Earth-diver myth. In all the stories an animal dives down into the flooded earth and brings back dirt that can be spread onto the world. In the Yukon “Crow creates the world” versions, the dirt is spread out in all directions like a pancake and the four directions are not mentioned. I wonder if this part of the story is not mentioned because it is lost in time or maybe because for a First Nations person of the past, the four directions were obvious. When we look at a drum collected from Teslin Lake by D.D. Cairnes in 1911 for the then Museum of Man, what is described as an eagle in the middle seems to me to be Crow. See figure # 31 below. This may represent the creation story of Crow spreading the earth in all directions. This is an example of an unidentified bird being called an eagle because of the high regard for eagles held by many other North American Native groups. As stated already in the previous chapter the eagle did not hold the same status for the Yukon Athapaskan people in the past. This is an Inland Tlingit drum and even though the eagle is one of their clans, they much more often depicted the crow than the eagle. This bird is painted in black only and in the same manner of other Crow depictions done by Inland Tlingits. It also has a rather straight beak.



Figures # 31, Inland Tlingit bird drum design with four directions. VI-J-80 CMC.

Are the above cross images related to the four directions? Or are they an adoption of the Christian cross? I think the four directions and the older cross images are one of the same and that the cross motif became confused with the introduction of Christianity to Yukon First Nations. When Elder Marge Jackson saw the cross design on a sheep horn spoon she commented that the cross was around a long time ago and was Christ’s cross. See figure # 32. Marge Jackson said that Jesus was here in the Yukon also. Many present day Elders easily mix First Nations spiritual beliefs with Christian beliefs, even as they are contradictory to us.



Figure # 32 cross design on sheep horn spoon from the CYFN collection.

Although this cross does not appear to be the same as the traditional Christian crucifix, but a design with a centre and equal arms going out in four directions, it does not stop Elders from making Christian connections. When Elders tell creation and many other traditional stories, they often comment about the similarity to bible stories. They make comments that Crow was like God or was Jesus. Also, when Crow changed into a piece of dirt or a pine needle to be drunk by the rich man's daughter, she became pregnant without a sexual encounter. The Elders comment that this is just like the Virgin Mary. Crow later is able to steal the sun and moon to give the world light and day.

First Nations people have blended traditional beliefs with Christian beliefs and this has contributed to the distortion or even the loss of traditional knowledge. This makes finding that traditional impression even harder. I think any incised images before World War Two would have little influence from Christianity. After World War Two, the connection with Christianity would have become stronger. This is excluding those artifacts that were made for the church by First Nations people who had adopted Christianity. In 1942 the Alaska Highway, Canol and Haines roads were built and by 1954 the Dawson Road was completed. These roads opened up the isolated settlements and assisted in the church clergy spreading their word and the mission schools obtaining students.

Of course the cross or four directions symbol was common throughout the world, including in Europe, long before the birth of Christianity. In *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* Marija Gimbutas writes:

The cross, with its arms directed to the four corners of the cosmos, is a universal symbol created or adopted by farming communities in Neolithic and extending into present day folk art. It is based on the belief that the year is a journey embracing the four cardinal directions. Its purpose is to promote and assure the continuance of the cosmic cycle, to help the world through all phases of the moon and the changing seasons. (Gimbutas 1992: 89)

From all that I have found I can conclude that the cross or four directions motifs held deep meaning for Yukon First Nations people of the past.

Dot within a circle (Big Headed Starman motif) motif

This motif is one of the most common designs found in early Yukon First Nations art. It is most often depicted on spoons and ladles but can occasionally be found on other tools such as knives, awls and carved animal objects. There is even a pictograph of two in the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations traditional territory. See figure # 33 for this design and variations of the motif found throughout the Yukon.

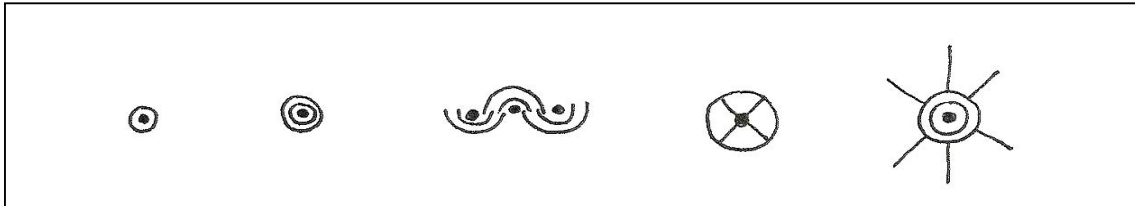


Figure # 33. the dot within a circle and variations of this motif. Uvk Drawing.

The neighboring Tlingits used these motifs sparingly, limited to petroglyphs and some spoons. George Emmons in *The Tlingit Indians* speaks about petroglyphs and shows various examples. In his drawing of the petroglyphs there are at least five examples that are exactly as, or close in design to, the Yukon circle within a circle motif. See figure # 34 for my adoption of Emmons' sketches.

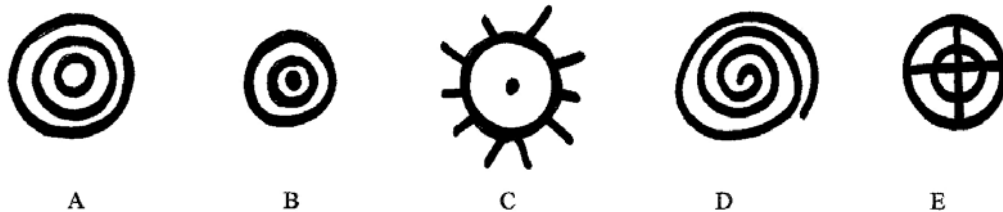


Figure # 34, adoption of George Emmons' sketches of petroglyphs in *The Tlingit Indians*, page 80. Uvk drawing.

A, B and C are described as being the sun. D is listed as a spiral and E is listed as a ceremonial rattle. I wonder if there is any relationship between the Tlingit sun petroglyphs and the Tutchone Big Headed Starman motif. This may add proof to the circle within a circle being a celestial image. These petroglyphs are found throughout the Tlingit territory, yet Emmons could get little information about the origins and meanings.

On the confluence of the Alsek and the Tatsheshini River in the Southern Tutchone traditional territory in northwestern British Columbia are a couple of petroglyphs. They are located on a small island. The petroglyphs on the island are described as a "sun" figure. See figure # 35 for my renderings of the 'sun'. At the second site is what is thought of as a killer whale, which is hard for me to make out and I did not sketch this image.

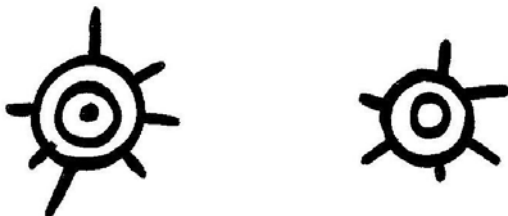


Figure # 35, sketches of petroglyphs on a small island at the confluence of the Alsek and the Tatsheshini rivers.

While at the southern edge of the Southern Tutchone, these “sun” petroglyphs may show a relationship to the circle within a circle found throughout the Yukon and may be linked to Emmons’ “suns”. These motifs and variations thereof show up on many items. See figure # 36 for some examples.



Figure # 36, snowshoe carving knife and awl from the Han people in the Royal Ontario Museum collection, 950-221-4 & 950-221-5 ROM. An artifact of unknown use from Fort Selkirk, Northern Tutchone territory. KeVe-1:1 CMC.

Besides the above items the motif most often showed up on spoons. See figure # 37 for examples of the dot within a circle motif applied to spoons in various patterns. Note that I have not come across two spoons with the same patterns, they are all unique.

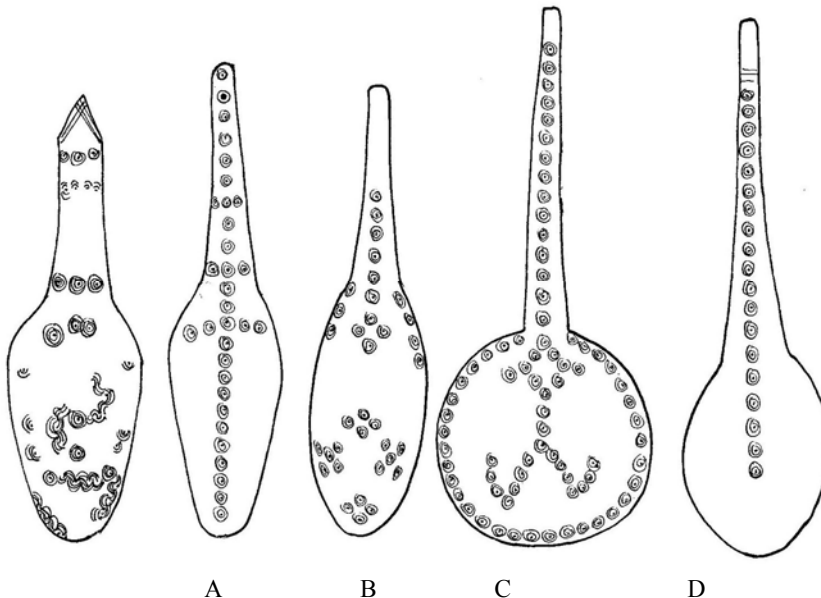


Figure # 37, a variety of circle within a circle patterns on different spoons: left to right; A; Inland Tlingit VI-J-49 CMC. B; Han VI-F-5 CMC. C; Southern Yukon First Nation spoon, MacBride Museum, D; Possibly Yukon spoon CYFN E; Han spoon, DCM. UvK drawing.

When I asked Elders about the meaning of the dot within a circle motif and patterns they all responded with: “to make it fancy.” None of the Elders recognized this motif as being anything other than a fancy design. Catherine McClellan does identify this motif as the Big Headed Starman in her book *My Old People Say*. I will discuss the Big Headed Star Man in more detail in Chapter Five-Figurative Art. This motif was mostly put on potlatch spoons and clearly was held in high regard. I also think the designs were a form of identification and of course each unique to the person who created it.

The spoon in Figure # 37A was purchased in 1911 at the Taylor and Drury store in Whitehorse by D.D. Cairnes and is listed as Inland Tlingit. The artifact catalogue card states: “Collector’s note says ‘potlatch spoon used for drinking grease at funeral ceremonies’.” Some of these patterns are quite elaborate. The motif itself appears to be engraved with a hand carving tool or other engraving instrument, since the circles are not exact like the other dot & circle motifs. The spoon in figure # 37B is from the Canadian Museum of Civilization Museum and was collected by E.E. Stockton in Dawson City between 1901 and 1906. The spoon is listed as Han and is made from mountain sheep horn. The information card states: “The spoon would be carved by a man after the horn was softened by immersion in hot water. A person drank from the side of the spoon.” The spoon in figure # 37C is on display at the MacBride Museum. There is no information on where this spoon came from. Because it is at the MacBride Museum, it is presumably Tutchone, Tagish or Inland Tlingit. Figure # 37D shows a spoon from the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) Collection. All the CYFN Collection was originally collected by the Anglican Church and they did not record who the maker was or where the items were collected, other than in their northern missionary areas. I cannot be more specific as to tribe. The last spoon in figure # 37E is in the Dawson City Museum collection and is Han. The dot and circle motif, or its variations, have also been used on bowls, all having different patterns, just like the spoons.

Bone knives

The two common types of bone knives were the gopher (ground squirrel) or small animal skinning knife and the dagger for bear defence. I will start off with the gopher skinning knives as they are the most decorated. There is a variety of designs applied to the skinning knives as a sign of individuality and identity. There may have been a number of women skinning gophers and everybody had their own identifiable knives. Many of these knives were also traded to the coastal Tlingits. On the notes of one of these knives in the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka is written ‘Leather dresser’ and as either Eskimo or Athapaskan. On the knife itself is written “Chilcat bone knife Presented by Sheldon Jackson”. This would make this obviously Athapaskan and most likely a Tutchone bone knife because of the high level of trading between the Tlingits and Tutchone. I believe this since these knives are rare on the coast and very common in the interior. Those few examples that show up on the coast were traded in from the interior. These knives are also made from the leg bone of caribou which do not inhabit the coastal areas. In the additional notes it states: “Use: Scraping leather & crimping the upturned sole of mukluks.” IV.X.35, SJM. As there are no gophers in Sitka and other areas of the Alaskan coast, the Tlingit woman might have used these knives for more than just skinning small animals, like working leather.

See figure # 38 of a bone knife on page 291 in *My Old People Say*. In this gopher skinning knife there is a “repeating circle” pattern that goes down the center of the knife while the edges are engraved with repeating half-circles. This knife was collected by Catharine McClellan for the Canadian Museum of Civilization from Aishihik, a Southern Tutchone village in the Yukon.

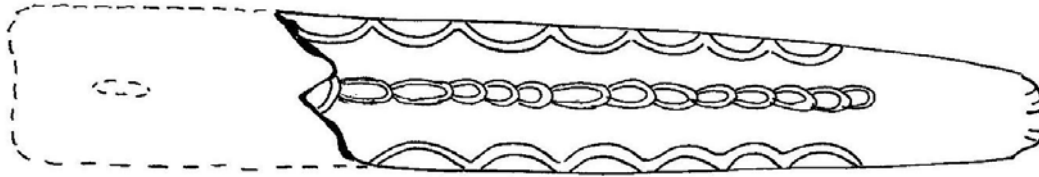


Figure # 38, gopher skinning knife. CMC. UvK drawing.

This repeating circle is also added to other items. In the following example the pattern is created with porcupine quills and added to a knife sheath. See figure # 39 below. The sheath is in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection and is listed as Loucheux (Gwich'in). It was originally collected by the Hudson Bay Company and was obtained by the museum from D.C. Ewing, a dealer. While the design is not identical they do look similar.



Figure # 39. Repeating circle design on Gwich'in knife Sheath. VI-I-73f CMC.

An example of another skinning knife that is in my personal collection can be seen in my drawing in figure # 40. I purchased this knife from an antique dealer in Whitehorse. She said the piece originally came from Carmacks (Northern Tutchone), Yukon Territory. This knife has a series of engraved lines coming out of the center line with a cross at the end of the pattern.

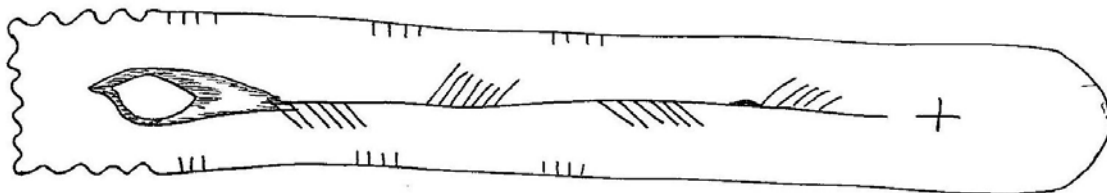


Figure # 41, Gopher skinning knife from the Carmacks area (Northern Tutchone). Ukjese van Kampen. UvK drawing.

In the next figure, # 42, is two examples from the Royal Ontario Museum that were originally collected from the Chilkat Tlingits in Alaska in the late 19th century. The Tlingits in turn received these knives in trade from the Tutchone sometime before that. The top knife is with a pattern that resembles the patterns on the breastbands of the hide clothing and on bone arm bands. For example, the pattern in figure # 67B on page 97 is of a Tutchone breastband and figure # 254 on page 249 is of a similar pattern on the left bone arm band.

This knife was collected around the Hootchi (Hutshi) River which is in the northern part of Southern Tutchone territory. Also note that the knife has what appears to be a floral design coming out of one end of the pattern and another (also floral?) motif at the other end. Maybe this is an example of a transition between the Geometric Period designs and the Beaded Period floral designs. The bottom knife also has a geometric repeating pattern. There is a series of small repeating cone motifs along the diagonal line on the grooved end of the knife.



Figure # 42. Tutchone gopher skinning knives; top: HK 2330, ROM. Bottom: HK 2329, ROM.

These are just a few of the many examples of gopher skinning knives in museum collections around North America and Europe. Each one is different with a wide variety of engraved designs.

In the Kluane Museum of Natural History there is another style bone knife; see figure # 43. This bone knife has a handle carved into it and does not have the same function as the gopher skinning knife. There are a number of these bone knives in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. Elder Johnny Smith stated that they were used in defense against bears. They have blunt edges and cannot cut anything but are designed to stab. Johnny Smith said that they were attached to a pole and used to stab into the neck of the bear. They were attached to the pole in preparation for situations where bears may be an issue such as when women were berry picking. Berry picking is also a time when bears are eating berries. The women would go out in a group, talking loud and singing, which functioned as a bear deterrence. They would have the bone knives attached to poles, ready to defend against a charging bear. On an added note, metal knives were also attached to poles and became spears for bear defense as well as for warfare.



Figure # 43, bone knife for bear defense. 994.99, KMNH.

Baskets

Baskets were made throughout the Yukon and the two main materials for baskets making was birch bark and spruce roots. I will not go into detail about the various weaving and birch bark techniques but will briefly examine the decorations on the baskets. Birch bark baskets were made throughout the Yukon while it seems that spruce roots basket weaving was strongest with the Inland Tlingit and with the Han, both using different weaving techniques. People in other areas weaved spruce root baskets but to a lesser extent than the two mentioned groups.

Spruce Root Baskets

With the coiled spruce root method the weaver can create geometric patterns in the basket. These patterns are created by weaving areas in different colours. See figure # 44 of a basket at the MacBride Museum where the pattern is clearly visible. Like all First Nations items, some had no designs incorporated in the construction, such as the basket in the Dawson City museum. See figure # 45. This basket is more of a bowl and the angle gives an excellent picture of the weave that spirals out from the center.

It seems that originally the geometric patterns in spruce root baskets were started in the interior and were adopted by the coastal Tlingit. Emmons has documented Athapaskan origins to Tlingit basket motifs which originated with Athapaskan quill work designs. People who do Raven's Tail weaving have told me that the weaving patterns were also influenced from the interior.



Figure # 44, Decorated spruce root basket. MacBride Museum.



Figure # 45, Han coiled spruce root bowl. DCM.

A lot of the baskets were made for the tourist trade in Dawson City around the time of the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 and afterwards. The next two examples are Inland Tlingit spruce root baskets. The Inland Tlingit made the finer woven baskets in the Yukon. The Coastal Tlingit woven baskets may have originated on the coast and found their way into the interior by trade or by women moving to the interior and carrying on with their basket making. The following two are in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection. The first was collected by D.D. Cairnes from the T&Ds store in Whitehorse during the summer of 1911. It is listed as made in Teslin and as Inland Tlingit. Judy Thompson noted that these baskets are made in the Coastal Tlingit style. In the *Handbook of Northern American Indians* on page 280 McClellan states that the Inland Tlingit examples were made by coastal woman who married interior men and brought techniques with them. The basket is made of spruce roots with a false embroidery using grass. False embroidery is a technique that is used to decorate twined baskets in which a third, colored weft element is incorporated into the outer wefts. These designs are not visible on the inside of the object. The false embroidery also slants in the opposite direction as the rest of the twining. See figure # 46.



Figure # 46, Teslin Inland Tlingit basket. VI-J-93 CMC.

The artifact catalogue states the following about four baskets that Cairnes collected, this being one of the four:

4 geometrically ornamented Indian baskets made in Teslin, “no other Indians in Yukon region are known to be able to make these baskets. They are said to have been used years ago for cooking purposes, water being heated with hot stones,” Purchased from Taylor & Drury, Whitehorse, Y.T.

As we see the basket has three bands of geometric designs, the top two bands having alternate squares and diamonds. The motifs are colored blue, beige and red. The bottom band has a series of horizontal rectangles.

The second basket in figure # 47 is also from Teslin. It was collected by Clement Lewis from Teslin Lake sometime before December 1912. The catalogue artifact card states:

Spruce roots are gathered by women in spring, heated and stripped then left to cure over the summer. After being soaked, they are split longitudinally and pith discarded

the lustrous outer strip being used for the weft. Grass for embroidery is gathered in early summer and bleached in boiling water or hot sand. The grasses hang in strips to dry, and are later dyed as desired.



Figure # 47, Teslin Inland Tlingit basket. VI-J-90, CMC.

The basket has four bands with an alternating motif sometimes referred to as a “wave pattern” and has a triangle in each space. Each triangle is pointed up except for the bottom band where every second triangle is pointed down. The main colors are red and black and the others are blue and yellow.

Birch bark baskets

Birch bark baskets were used throughout the Yukon. They were constructed in one of two main styles. The first and most common style was the folded basket. The second was a rolled or round style. See figure # 48 and # 49 for a folded birch bark basket from the MacBride Museum and a Han basket from the Dawson City Museum. Both these baskets have a zigzag pattern incorporated in the collar around the top.



Figure # 48, Southern Yukon First Nations birch bark basket. 1973.1.97.1 MacBride Museum.



Figure # 49, Han birch bark basket. DCM.

Below is the second common style, the round basket seen in figure # 50. This basket from the Dawson City Museum is taller and narrower, as it has to be since it uses only one strip from a birch tree. There is the common zigzag pattern collar around the top and this basket also has fringes hanging down from four points around it. This basket is not folded but stitched at a joining seam. The bottom is a separate piece, stitched with spruce root firming the base.



Figure # 50, round tall birch bark basket. DCM.

These baskets have been around for a long time and are still made in some communities. See figure # 51 of an early photograph of First Nations women with birch bark baskets in the Han village of Moosehide, just down river from Dawson City, Yukon. When the Southern Tutchone Elders saw this photograph they immediately said that the women were going berry picking. They also recognized the ladies but could not remember their names. In *Han: People of the River* on page 72 the caption of the same photograph identified the woman on the left as Henry Harper's wife. On page 71 of the same book it is written:



Figure # 51, Han woman berry picking, MacBride Coll. Vol. 2. 3873, YA.

Mary McLeod of Dawson City told Richard Slobodin that people picked berries in the late summer, cleaned them thoroughly, and packed them in birchbark baskets sewn with spruce roots. The baskets were then stored in underground caches and covered with willow branches and moss. Later, after it had snowed, someone was sent to retrieve the baskets and, according to Willie Juneby, the berries tasted just as fresh as when they were picked. (Mishler & Simeone 2004: 71)

These baskets do not have the zigzag collar around the top. In casual conversation I have been told that, on occasion, birch bark baskets have decoration applied to them. The Elders confirmed that at times baskets were decorated. With careful examination it appears that the basket that the woman on the right is holding has a pattern slightly less than half way up. It seems to be a series of “xxxx” motifs and may have been produced by bark biting or some other method. This is the only example of a pattern that I have seen on birch bark baskets.

Babiche & other hunting bags

Bags were an important item for First Nations people. Being semi-nomadic, bags were required for carrying tools and possessions. Not all bags were decorated. The most common bag to be decorated was the fire bag. This only makes sense since a fire is the center piece of a camp. It provides warmth and is used for cooking, protection and companionship. This bag was often small, with enough room to carry everything for making a fire: dry tinder and flint. There were also hunting bags to carry small game. These game bags were made of babiche and thus called babiche bags. The babiche bag didn’t take up much room but had the

ability to carry a large load. There were also general purpose bags, sled bags, ochre pouches, and many other special purpose bags but in this section I will only focus on the hunting bags.

Babiche bags were netted lengths of raw or slightly tanned hide and were decorated in various ways. At the Canadian Museum of Civilization I examined two bags. The first bag is of Inland Tlingit design collected by Clement Lewis and was delivered to the National Museum of Canada (now Canadian Museum of Civilization) on December 19, 1912. In figure # 52 the bag has an undecorated top except for four sets of fringes that have either swan or duck claws sewn at the top of the fringes. The bag itself has three red horizontal painted lines that span the length of the bag.



Figure # 52, Inland Tlingit babiche bag. VI-J-7, CMC.

The next bag shown in figure # 53 is Kaska and was collected by J.A. Teit in 1912. The catalogue card does not state where this bag was collected but Teit got a lot of the Kaska artifacts from Dease Lake, B.C. At first appearance this bag looks rather plain with only the sewn red and dark blue fabric along the top. However, if you read what is written on the collector's notes on the artifact catalogue card you will get more information:

Game bag woven of babiche. The front edge of the mouth is ornamented with red and blue cloth pinked to form a design. Ornamentation also occurs in the weaving by using darker, and lighter babiche, and by making the coils or meshes closer, and further apart. Also by twisting the babiche around itself (as in Plate 129, Mason Basketry) The Tahltans do not make these bags.

You can see that the maker incorporated definite patterns for decoration. I have not seen this on other bags, the exception being the babiche bag I examined in the Dawson City Museum.



Figure # 53, Kaska babiche bag. VI-H-15, CMC.

There was little information on the babiche bag in Dawson City. See figure # 54 for a front and back view. Although it is hard to see, there appears to be one slightly larger spaced row just at the blue bead level on the bag. I cannot tell if this is intentional or if it was just the way it was stretched after being finished. Compared to the previous two babiche bags, this one is quite decorated. There are more embroidered designs along the top with two sections; the uppermost being a zigzag pattern, while the bottom part is of a floral design. The bottom half of the bag has a series of mostly white tassels in the top row, followed by mostly red tassels with areas of white mixed in. The last and bottom row is mostly red with some touches of white. Like most babiche bags, the back side is undecorated.



Figure # 54, front and back view, Han babiche bag. 1978.1.648, DCM.

Most babiche bags are approximately twice as wide as deep but sometimes the dimensions vary depending on the intentions of the maker of the bag.

The next bag in figure # 55 is also used for hunting. It is the hide or fur hunting bag. Most of these bags were simple but this following example is made out of tanned hide as well

as strips of fur. This bag is on display at the MacBride Museum and is listed as “Hunting bag for supplies”. This bag was made by sewing a series of strips of fur together. There are a series of fringes with beads along the center and bottom of the bag. There is no flap or beadwork on this bag.



Figure # 55, fur striped hunting bag. MacBride Museum.

There were a number of other bags that Yukon First Nations made and I will examine various other bags in the coming chapters. Examples of other bags are octopus bags in Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch & Death and beaded bags in Chapter Four-Beaded & Floral Designs.

Dentalia

An important item to make clothing and other objects fancy was the dentalia shell. Interior people obtained these shells through trade from the Coastal Tlingits. The shells were popular and a sign of status. In the coming chapters you will see dentalia shells in the breastbands of clothing, on puberty drinking tubes, necklaces, belts and added to other items such as puberty hoods, knife sheaths, etc. The following is from *My Old People Say*:

Even today Southern Yukon natives consider dentalia to be the mark of a higher-class person or chief, and the Northern bands of Southern Tutchone, who had the most contact with the Han, Kutchin and Upper Tanana natives, seemed to value them most highly. (McClellan 2001: 317)

The value of dentalia shells may stem from their rarity as their only source seems to be the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia. The trade route for the dentalia shells would start with the Haida trading with the Tlingits who traded in their turn with the Southern Tutchone. Next, they would trade it to the Tanana and Northern Tutchone and in turn they would trade the shells to the neighbouring people until the shells would make their way into Gwich'in territory and beyond. The Hudson Bay Company also began importing the dentalia shells to their trading posts. The use of dentalia shells on girl's puberty hoods is described in *My Old People Say*:

Decorations were often very elaborate, for fond "paternal aunts" vied with each other to load the bonnets with dentalia and other beads so that their nieces' slightest motion resulted in delicious tinkling sounds which also warned off hunters. In each tribe, too, sometimes black feathers, usually from the crow, hung down from the back of the hood to ensure the wearer a life-long head of jet black hair." (McClellan 2001: 311)

Dentalia shells were also used as personal jewelry, as in the case of a Southern Tutchone dentalia choker that can be seen in the Klukshu Museum. See the top image in figure # 56. Besides chokers the shells were often used in belts that were made in the same manner as the choker but longer. Sometimes the belts were made fancier, as is the case with the belt in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC. This is a Tahltan made fancy belt shown at the bottom image in figure # 56.

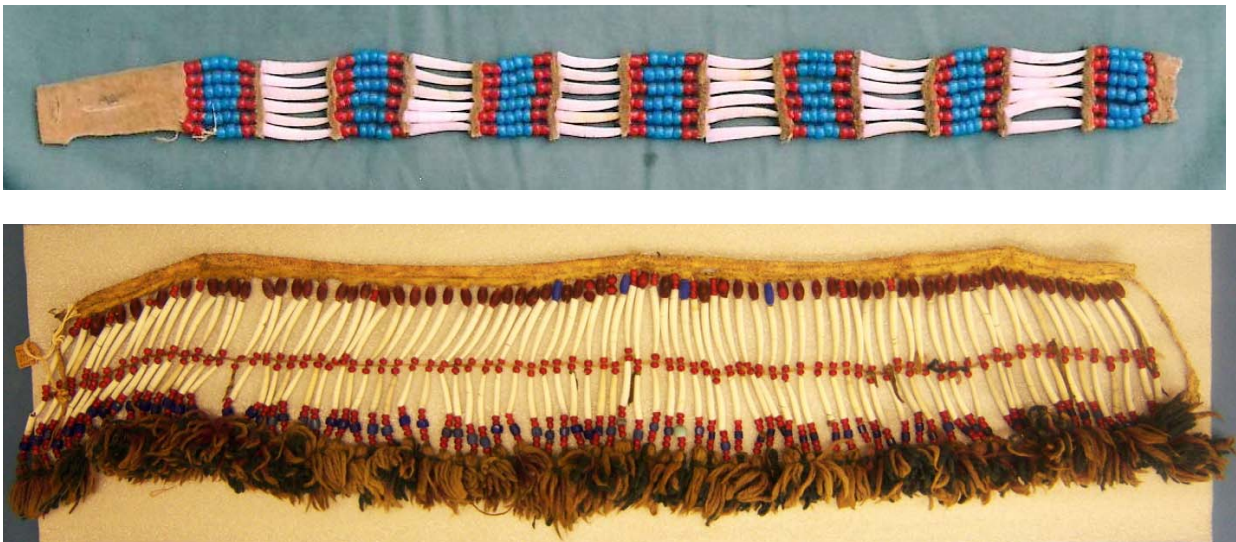


Figure # 56 top: Southern Tutchone dentalia choker. Klukshu Museum. Bottom: Tahltan fancy dentalia belt. 248519, NMNH.

Also in the National Museum of Natural History on the left in figure # 57 is a dentalia shell decorated knife sheath. This sheath is elaborately decorated and would have been a highly valued item. It is listed as Han so would have come from the Upper Yukon River area. In # 55 on the right is a dentalia necklace from the Field Museum in Chicago. The dentalia necklace is from the Tanacross people in eastern Alaska who border the Han people.



Figure # 57, Left: Han dentalia knife sheath. T1843, NMNH. Right: Tanacross dentalia necklace. 1982.3534.270135, Field Museum.

A final dentalia shell example is a Tahltan necklace below in figure # 58. This is a dentalia neck ring and it was worn for a year by a young woman who was entering maturity. It was collected by George Emmons in the upper Stikine River in 1909.



Figure # 58, Tahltan neck puberty ring. 2705, Burke Museum.

Besides the traded dentalia, abalone was also a popular item and was acquired through trade from the coastal Tlingits. There is little information on past use but the examples I have seen are abalone inlaid into a tool or other artifact. In the Yukon they are quite a bit rarer than dentalia shells.

Painting

In this section I will discuss the history of paints used by Yukon First Nations. Paint was used to enhance engravings by being rubbed into the lines of the tools and weapons and to create images on drums, arrow quivers and clothing. Paint was used for decorating the face for celebrations, mourning, war and berry picking. Painting was also used as a medium for preserving items. The majority of the painted images are in red, made from a mixture of red ochre and grease, pitch and/or water. There are some examples of black paint and rare references to blue and blue-green paints. In *The Kaska Indians*, after mentioning the use of red earth for paint, it is stated:

Pieces of bone, painted red and blue (blue-green color confusion obtained among the Kaska as among many American Indians) hung from coats. Blue pigment, obtainable in the vicinity of Pelly Banks, was mixed with grease or, to “really make it stick,” with balsam pitch. Black paint, the color that completed the aboriginal palette, also came from the earth but appears to have been little employed for clothing decoration. (Honigmann 1964: 65)

As we will see, red ochre was the paint of choice therefore I will first take a closer look at red ochre. I will next discuss charcoal, followed by the painted motifs and designs themselves. As to the use of blue-green paint, other than what is stated above, I did not find any other reference to the pigments used for making this colour. This may be because of the rare use of blue-greens before the introduction of trade paints.

Red ochre

Red ochre is obtained from the earth in what is called “Si-pits” (pronounced See-pits) by some Tutchone. Red ochre has to be sought out and prepared. It was used for a wide variety of roles, such as face painting and decoration for berry picking or ceremonies, painting tools, snowshoes and weapons, rubbing into snares to prevent stretching, and coloring and waterproofing clothing and hides. In *My Old People Say*, McClellan states:

Ochre was prepared by burning lumps of either red or yellow earth. The red colour was applied by dampening a twig or one’s finger and dipping it into a skin of powdered ochre. (McClellan 2001: 320)

Although I have not come across any mention of Tutchone methods of collection of red ochre in *My Old People Say*, McClellan does say this about Tlingit collections methods:

The person who takes the paint should leave a small gift of beads or some other item at the place where it is dug out. (McClellan 2001: 320)

The only written reference I found to red ochre sources is in Julie Cruikshank’s *Reading Voices*, where she mentions the Nisling and Donjek Rivers. (Cruikshank, 28) I inquired locally about red ochre sources and collection methods. I have been told by Elders of two local places where red ochre can be found. One is on a small mountain known as “Look-Out Mountain” or Nalin about twenty miles north-west from Whitehorse. The other is on Tatchun Creek, about twenty miles north of Carmacks along the Klondike Highway, and then about three miles in from the highway. I have yet to locate these places. When I asked Elder Gary Sam about additional sites, he inquired what I wanted to do with the “Indian paint”. I

told him I wanted to paint with it and he then informed me of the procedures of collecting. I was to sing a prayer, which he sang for me. Since this was an informal conversation, I did not record it and do not remember how it went. In addition he sang the song in Northern Tutchone, which I do not speak. After the prayer, I was to collect the Indian paint and then leave an offering. This could be tobacco, money or other valued object. (Sam, personal communication 2004) Once the ochre is prepared it is stored in a paint bag as seen in figure # 6 on page 31.

I have heard in casual conversation that ochre itself was used in ceremonial prayer, but have not learned more. It is clear that in the south-central Yukon and other areas, red ochre played an important part in creating visual imagery. In Jessie Jonathan's story "Äsùya and the Big Worm" (Äsùya is Beaverman) we learn where red ochre comes from. Äsùya kills the big worm and the red Ochre comes from its blood.

When the big worm was half way out of the den, Äsùya ran and jumped down on it. With the blade of his biggest spear, he cut off the head. Then he chopped up the worm into pieces and threw them out into space, saying, "Turn into rocks." That is how red ochre was made, from the big worm's blood. That is what they used for painting snowshoes. After the flesh of the worm had turned into ochre, he scraped some of it into his little bag. (Yukon Native Language Centre 2000: 98)

Another interesting point is the connection that the Athapaskans had to the other world, the sky or space. Besides the many stories that involve space such as the Big Headed Starman, the Two Sisters who Married the Starman and Crow Creating the World, we now have Äsùya hurling the flesh of the Big Worm into space, whose blood is red ochre. Also in space are the northern lights, and it is only the red northern lights which are a concern for people. For the three Southern Yukon tribes, the Tutchone, Tlingit and Tagish, the northern lights, if red, were a sign of trouble. It meant that a war was coming or lots of people were going to die. If there was a little bit of red, then one person was going to die a violent death. They believed that the northern lights were people who died violent deaths and now played in the sky. The Tagish could try and avert disaster by blowing the lights away with their breath and hands while shouting a war cry (McClellan 2001: 79). Other people say that you shouldn't whistle at the lights or you will be bothered. Also, when in bed, sleep sideways, for if you sleep facing up the lights will come down and burn you (Smith, J, personal communication. 2004). I wonder if there is a relationship between red ochre and the red from the northern lights. Both demand a high level of respect. I think all these points indicate the unique status of red ochre.

Charcoal

Charcoal is also used for painting, but in very limited quantities for most of the Yukon Athapaskans. It may have been mainly the Inland Tlingits who used it. It does not seem to hold the status of red ochre, perhaps because of the ease of obtaining charcoal from any fire place, while red ochre is only obtainable from certain locations. Yet in Julie Cruikshank's *Reading Voices* it is mentioned that there is a source of charcoal located at Takaadi T'ooch, just to the west of Carcross in the Tagish traditional territory. Takaadi T'ooch is Tlingit for "charcoal rockslide". I do not know the extent of the use of this charcoal. Charcoal from the fire does have some special properties, as ash and charcoal were often used in rituals involving death. Bits of charcoal were tied as amulets to children and also placed in houses to keep ghosts away, since ghosts were scared of charcoal:

Soon after a death, all close relatives in the sib of the deceased should have their hair cut by someone in the opposite moiety, although this is rarely done today. However, bits of charcoal are still often tied as amulets on children who lost a parent. 'They claim the ghost is scared of charcoal, I don't know why.' The children must wear it until the funeral is over and the danger of ghosts is lessened. Sometimes charcoal is put in the corners of a house if occupants seem to be bothered by the ghost of the person who has just died. (McClellan 2001: 373)

Another reason for the greater use of ochre over charcoal may be the staining and/or holding nature of red ochre. When I asked Gary Sam why red ochre was used far more than charcoal, he said that charcoal washed away easily. It is true that red ochre was used to waterproof clothing. In *My Old People Say*, McClellan states:

In the early days, the red ochre which was rubbed into the hides seems to have the same effect as a good smoking. The skins treated with it were fairly waterproof, and did not stretch or harden if they did get wet.

McClellan goes on to add:

This was probably due in part to the grease with which the ochre was mixed. Moosehide lines of gopher snares are still treated with red ochre so they do not shrink or stretch in the damp. (McClellan 2001: 260)

Red ochre was used to protect and waterproof many items and therefore used a great deal, while the use of charcoal remained limited. In *My Old People Say*, McClellan writes this about charcoal:

Powdered charcoal served for black. People used to dip their fingers into the powder and then touch their finger tips all over their faces to make dots. Men used black for war party paint, and occasionally as a sign that they are angry, but black can also be used for festive face painting. For Potlatches, peace ceremonies, and the like, a person might put on either black or red or both. (McClellan 2001: 320)

Honigmann, speaking of the Kaska Indians, mentions the use of black paint obtained from earth:

Black paint, the color that completed the aboriginal palette, also came from the earth but appears to have been little employed for clothing decoration. (Honigmann 1964: 65)

This may be the same type of charcoal that is found at Takaadi T'ooch.

Items painted

During my research I came across many things that were painted. The paint often had practical reasons such as waterproofing and preventing the stretching of hides, but it was also used for esthetic reasons. The painted items I have listed are either Tutchone, or from all three tribes in the survey that McClellan completed for *My Old People Say*: the Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Inland Tlingit:

- 1) "Some Southern Tutchone women rub the snare lines with red ochre so they will not stretch in the rain." Page 158.
- 2) On Southern Tutchone women, while berry picking: "They also painted their faces with red ochre, apparently just to be in keeping with the general festive mood." Page 200.
- 3) On Southern Tutchone gravehouses: "Painted trim, if any, is of red ochre paint." Page 249.
- 4) On Southern Tutchone adzes: "They reported that the thin strips of moose hide lashing and the wood on which the head rests were painted with red ochre." Page 254.
- 5) On Southern Tutchone women's change of techniques in tanning hides: "Another hint that the skin-tanning process has changed over the past few centuries is the statement made by Southern Tutchone women that in the old days nobody smoked skins to a brown colour; instead they were liberally rubbed with red ochre." Page 256.
- 6) About snowshoes: "Most men still paint at least part of the frames with red ochre...The only reason given for the use of the ochre is that it makes the snowshoes "fancy"." Page 276.
- 7) On arrow shafts: "Before they were to be attached (feathers), the shafts were painted with red ochre to a little below the bottoms of the bindings." Page 283.
- 8) On trail markers: "...an upright stick painted black means that there has been a death in the party." Page 294.

As we can see from the above list, many things were painted with red ochre and had a functional purpose. In the coming chapters, and especially in Chapter Five-Figurative Art, I will examine the images that have been painted to represent people, animals or scenes.

Closing comments

In this chapter I have familiarized you with the general forms of Yukon First Nations geometric art. I have given examples of items on which this art was represented and discussed the use of paint. This is not an exhaustive list. Some items have been left out and many I will discuss later in this dissertation. Many of these other objects had the same style motifs and patterns. Artifacts decorated with geometric designs that are mentioned in later chapters are bone arm bands and ritual drinking tubes in Chapter Six-Art of Rituals & Shamans and war clubs in Chapter Seven-Art of the Hunt & War. You will also be exposed to geometric designs that have been found on objects such as hats, clothing and footwear.