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Indigenous adornment in the circum-Caribbean

The production, use, and exchange of bodily ornaments
through the lenses of the microscope



Catarina Guzzo Falci

Adorning one's body was a widespread practice in the pre-colonial Caribbean, notably during the Ceramic Age (400 BC–ca. AD 1500). Despite the abundance of ornament collections recovered from the region and the scientific interest they have raised, much remains unknown concerning their biographies. This dissertation aims to elucidate evolving patterns in ornament production, use, and exchange through technological and microwear analyses. It is composed of four articles published in peer-reviewed journals. The first half proposes a research strategy for studying circum-Caribbean collections, which are markedly diverse in their origins, raw materials, and types. A critical evaluation of the potential of decontextualized assemblages for microwear analysis is carried out. Furthermore, the analysis of ethnographic museum collections is

conducted as basis for interpretation. In the second part, collections from two time periods marked by increase in ornament production and circulation are analysed: 1) the early part of the Early Ceramic Age in the eastern Caribbean; and 2) the Late Ceramic Age in the Greater Antilles. In each case-study, the differential presence of both certain technical products and of use-wear are combined to provide insights on exchange patterns. The biographical approach to ornaments contributes toward a new assessment of previous ideas concerning large-scale interactions and the social mechanisms responsible for them. The dissertation concludes by reflecting on the changing ways people have handled, engaged with, and ultimately regarded ornaments over the course of the Ceramic Age period.

