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Indigenous adornment in the circum-Caribbean: The production, use, and exchange of bodily ornaments through the lenses of the microscope
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Abstract

Adorning one's body was a widespread practice among pre-colonial Caribbean societies. This is suggested by early historical accounts and by the abundance of ornament collections recovered from archaeological sites across the region. Despite the great scientific interest they have raised, much remains unknown concerning ornaments. Previous research has given primary attention to their intricate iconographic depictions and to the identification and tentative provenance of exotic lithic materials. This dissertation aims to elucidate the ways people dealt with and regarded ornaments. Bringing together the concepts of object biography and *chaîne opératoire*, an integrated approach is proposed to shed light on aspects of the life of ornaments beyond their role as finished items on display on the human body. Technological and microwear analyses are thus combined in a method for extracting biographical information from each studied artefact. A set of controlled experiments provides the basis for interpreting the techniques and tools used in ornament production. In this manner, the approach developed casts new light on evolving patterns in ornament production, use, and exchange.

The dissertation is composed of four articles published in peer-reviewed journals. The first half proposes a research strategy for studying circum-Caribbean collections, which are striking for their diversity in origins, present conditions, state of preservation, raw materials, and types. First, an evaluation of the potential of decontextualized assemblages for microwear analysis is carried out (Chapter 2). This is achieved through the study of a legacy museum collection retrieved from north-central Venezuela in the early 20th century. Similarly to many Antillean collections, it is composed of figurative ornaments made of marine shells in different degrees of preservation, with no associated production debris or detailed information on contexts of recovery. In the next chapter, the limits and possibilities afforded by use-wear analysis in the study of bodily ornaments are explored (Chapter 3). An ethnographic museum collection is analysed to provide reference for biographical and microwear interpretation. Composite ornaments are examined, including items such as necklaces,

labrets, and arm bands from across the lowlands of South America. Among the contributions of this study are insights into how individual components from a given necklace develop use-wear in relation to the complete assemblage.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on archaeological debates around bodily ornaments in the Ceramic Age Caribbean (400 BC–ca. AD 1500). Over the last decade, researchers have stressed the interconnected nature of past Caribbean societies, most clearly expressed in the circulation of goods, people, and ideas between islands and surrounding continental masses. Ornaments have been integral sources of evidence for reconstructing past interaction networks. Here, two time periods are the focus of inquiry, as they are marked by intense ornament production and circulation across the Antilles. First, the early part of the Early Ceramic Age in the eastern Caribbean is studied, being represented by a large assemblage from the lapidary workshop site of Pearls on Grenada (Chapter 4). This collection encompasses beads and pendants of several lithic raw materials, namely amethyst, carnelian, diorite, nephrite, jadeitite, among others. The next chapter centres on the Late Ceramic Age period in the Greater Antilles (Chapter 5). This period is represented by the recently excavated settlement sites of El Cabo, Playa Grande, El Flaco, La Luperona, and El Carril located across the Dominican Republic. Diverse raw materials are represented in the form of beads, pendants, earplugs, and ear-spools, including calcite, diorite, mollusc shells, skeletal materials, and fossilized wood. Furthermore, data concerning raw material provenance and archaeological contexts of deposition is incorporated. In each case-study, the differential presences of both certain technical products and of use-wear are combined to provide insights on exchange patterns. It is through this approach to the study of material exchange that we are able to extrapolate the data obtained for each site, in order to grasp regional processes that had thus far remained elusive.

The dissertation is concluded by an overview of how the biographical approach applied to bodily ornaments contributes toward a new assessment of previous ideas concerning large-scale interactions and the social mechanisms responsible for them. Raw material specialization, the sharing of technical knowledge, and the importance of technical performance are addressed for each time period. Particular attention is given to the changing ways people have handled, engaged with, and ultimately regarded ornaments over the course of the Ceramic Age period.