

# Body Arts Ornaments

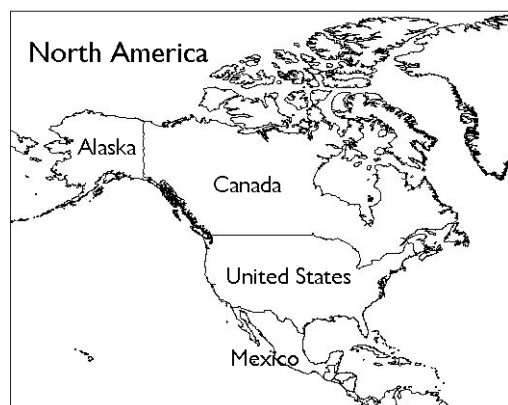
The Museum contains a wide variety of ornaments worn to mark stages and statuses in people's lives.

## Childhood

Many ornaments and items of clothing are worn by children to protect them from illness or evil. This picture shows an ankle ornament worn by a Pueblo Tewa baby from Santa Clara, New Mexico in the United States. The ornament is made from the hair of the baby's father. It was given to the collector by Santiago Naranjo. Santiago said that the ornament was worn by his sickly baby when he was working away from home

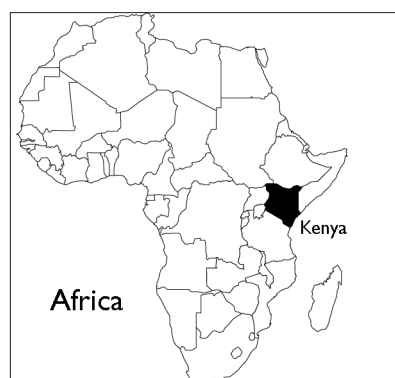


Ankle ornament, United States, 1911.86.11



to keep his baby 'from taking too much thought of her father' and becoming ill. Santiago's daughter Eulogia made *her* baby boy wear a similar kind of ornament even when his father was at home; she said this was 'because when a child is weak, we make a ring of someone's hair that is strong'.

## Puberty



Although in the West the onset of puberty is not generally marked with ceremony or ornament, it is in other parts of the world. The Museum's collections include ornaments worn by youths during circumcision ceremonies and other rituals marking their passage into adulthood.

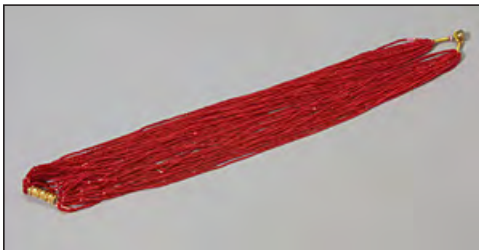
The photo to the right shows a Kikuyu shield. The Kikuyu are Kenya's largest ethnic group. Shields such as this one were worn by young Kikuyu men before their initiation as junior warriors. The shields were family heirlooms and the designs



Shield, Kenya, 1933.26.6

were often scraped off and repainted many times as each new generation of boys prepared for their initiation. The design for the front of the shields changed each year and men often adopted this design for their war shields once they become warriors. The backs of shields are always decorated with serrated lines.

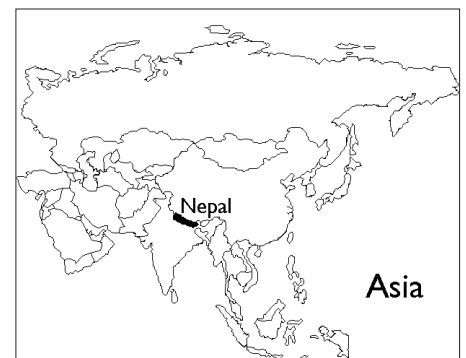
## Marriage



In the West brides traditionally wear white as a symbol of purity and chasteness. In many parts of Asia however red is the auspicious wedding colour. This picture shows a red necklace threaded with a large gold bead.

Necklace, Nepal, 2001.28.1

This is the traditional necklace worn by Hindu Nepali women as a sign of their marriage. Before a couple are married, the father of the groom purchases a gold bead and takes it to the bead seller who makes the necklace. After the bride and groom are married, the groom places the necklace around the neck of his bride as a gift from his family. The traditional colour of the necklace is red or green as these are said to bring luck, but after marriage the woman may wear the gold bead with different coloured glass beads to coordinate the necklace with her clothing.



## Adulthood



Mandarin hat button, China, 1887.26.35



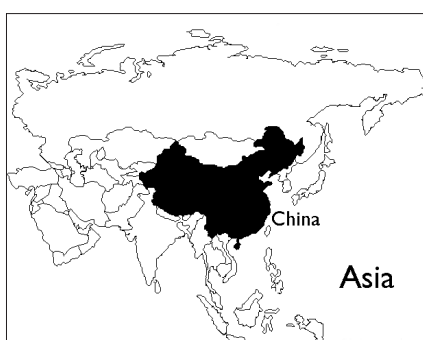
Mandarin hat button, China, 1896.62.122



Mandarin hat button, China, 1952.5.66



Mandarin hat button, China, 1896.62.124



Ornaments are often worn by adults to indicate their social and professional status. These hat decorations were worn by mandarins in the nineteenth century. A mandarin was a Chinese official; there were nine ranks each of which was distinguished by a particular kind of

'button'. These buttons were worn for everyday use but on special occasions the pink button would have been made of coral, the blue button would have been of a blue stone like sapphire, the clear glass would have been crystal, and the metal would have been gold.

## Death

In Victorian Britain a widow was expected to mourn her husband for at least two years. During the first year of mourning the widow dressed entirely in black and jewellery was generally not worn. Then after one year she was allowed to wear jewellery made of black cut glass and jet.

A popular trend was to incorporate a lock of the deceased's hair into mourning jewellery.

Hair of the deceased was also used to make the mourning jewellery itself. This necklace is part of a set of ornaments (including a brooch, hairpins and necklace) made in 1867 from the hair of a brother and sister who had recently died.



Necklace, United Kingdom, 1928.15.2.1

## Further Reading

Further information can be found in the Body Arts Gallery and on our Body Arts website: <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/bodyarts>

## Sources

SPRING, CHRISTOPHER, *African Arms and Armour*, London: British Museum Press (1993).

**Objects featured in this fact sheet can be found in the following cases:**

**First Floor (Lower Gallery) L41B for mourning jewellery**

**First Floor (Lower Gallery) L42A for hat buttons**

**First Floor (Lower Gallery) L43B for Nepalese necklace**

**First Floor (Lower Gallery) L44B for shield**

**First Floor (Lower Gallery) L45A for ankle ornament**

Fact Sheet compiled by:  
Jennifer Peck, Project Assistant  
DCF Redisplay Project  
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Revised by:  
Bryony Reid, Senior Project Assistant (Interpretation)  
DCF What's Upstairs?  
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