

Alexander Diaz

Jung, Y

CIS270WX

Writing 1

Help Received: See References Below

Alexander Diaz

The Mighty Zulu

Among the many tribes of central and southern Africa stands, one mighty group of people that sets themselves apart from all others. This ancient tribe goes by the name of Zulu. Among all of the Bantu tribes, the Zulu, translated meaning people of Heaven, are the largest of South Africa's ethnic groups. Although the Zulu people of today have modernized themselves and now live in big cities, there are still some groups who follow their ancient warrior ways including their customs and festivals. One of these customs being their elaborate and colorful beadwork that they have mastered over centuries of creating them. The beadwork is created to this day for many of their revival ceremonies that they celebrate in remembrance of their great culture.

The Zulu people have many non-verbal cues of expressing what they wanted, respect, and just plain enjoyment. Orally they communicated through a unique language called Isizulu, which is a series of clicks made through their tongue and different parts of their mouth. Dance and drums were also a major part of Zulu culture letting them express their rituals through extravagant feasts and symbolic ceremonies. This was one of the cornerstones of Zulu heritage

that is still practiced to this day. There are many ways technology has affected Zulu culture and heritage and has even expanded on it. But the most interesting of these forms of non-verbal expressions were the elaborate and luxuries beadwork that the Zulu people created for various emotions and expressions.

The use of bead work as a form of non-verbal communication amongst the Zulu people was an astonishing discovery. For thousands of years, the Zulu made beaded items from stone, seashells, bone, wood, seeds, ostrich egg shells and metal. In terms of seeds, they used hard gray ones and a bright red type called Makhokha--both resembled beans. They traded for ostrich egg beads, which were made by the Khoisan people. By the year 1000 A.D., semi-precious stones such as verdite, agate, soapstone and quartz crystal had gained popularity. The modern, more urban, Zulu rely on plastic beads and higher quality glass beads. A seafaring culture called the Phoenicians imported the first glass beads, called seed beads, into South Africa from ancient Egypt. Arab camel caravans later took up the trade which exchanged seed beads from North African areas and India for slaves, gold and ivory from southern Africa (White). Beadwork to the Zulu people can be a sign of almost any emotion or symbol. Beadwork is the pride and joy of the Zulu . It is what sets them apart from their surrounding counterparts. Their beadwork represents a range of meanings to include: punishments, warning, love letters, encouragement, grief, anger, sadness, tiredness and many more.

Zulu Bead Jewelry Positive Meanings of Colors

- green - contentment, bliss
- blue - faithfulness
- red - strong emotion
- black - marriage
- white - love
- yellow - wealth
- pink - adds emphasis to a promise

Zulu Bead Jewelry Negative Meanings of Colors

- green - illness
- blue - hostility, ill feelings
- red - anger, impatience
- black - death, sorrow, despair
- white - has no negative meaning
- yellow - badness
- pink - poverty

(Zulu Bead Jewelry)

The design and colors of the beadwork together convey a message. For example a particular beaded necklace worn by a women may inform men that she is unmarried.

Communicating relationship status and sexual intentions in this subtle manner helps the Zulu people avoid awkward social situations such as an unmarried man approaching a married women. (Zulu Bead Jewelry). But when the male does want to wed and unmarried female the male will present the beads to his woman of choice and if the woman wears the beads it is a sign

of acceptance and arrangement for marriage. This also initiates the need for a price on the bride, which is usually livestock paid to the father.

The beadwork that the Zulu implemented within their everyday lives spread outwards to other tribes, each creating their own rhythm of music that correlates to their ceremonies and their own beadwork to represent different emotions and/or significances. For instance the only shape used by the Zulu in their bead jewelry is the triangle. How the triangles are positioned within a particular beadwork signify different meanings. An example being a triangle facing downwards signifies an unmarried woman, a triangle facing upwards signifies an unmarried man. (Zulu Bead Jewelry). Beadwork was adopted by the surrounding tribes of central and south Africa but were different in design and nature. But their bead design were not only used for emotion. Their whole religion was based around the many ceremonies they had in part with their several drums and fancy bead outerwear. Beadwork was the main source of style in any ceremony creating lavish outfits to represent the many symbolic gods that they believed in.

As the technology spread across the globe, many different cultures and societies adopted the beadwork whether it be for joyful ceremonies or preparation for war. Every civilization at one point or the other has had the beadwork as a main decoration in their broad selection. Suddenly the economy is boosting with different bead makers building different style beads and creating new fads. The handmade bead work is sold to tourist as gifts, and is an important income source for the Zulu people. (Zulu Bead Jewelry). There is even a plethora of online stores which sell authentic Zulu beadwork to anyone around the world. During wartime the beads became a vital body decoration signifying who was head and who was lead man in the front. Even in ancient Egypt the illustrious beadwork was worn by Pharaohs and high ranked alike. Beads

spread to virtually every corner of the world becoming one of the most well-known and liked forms of jewelry. It has affected numerous cultures and has shaped the very fabric of fashion. Different societies used beads as a way of showing power or the significance of a particular person. The Zulu merely started the tradition of using beads to symbolize the emotions and occurrences but other cultures adapted the same technology and easily twisted it with their own understanding and beliefs.

Beadwork is a technology that never faded out of use as the ages passed by. Beadwork has found their place in this new world. Beadwork has definitely not gone out of style and the meanings have still stayed mostly the same. Giving someone you like a nicely made bead necklace is just what the Zulu's did for courtship and today it is not a bad present for the girl of your dreams. Some beads even turn different colors to signify what mood it thinks you're in. Not to mention a nice set of beads as either a necklace or bracelet is just a sign of someone with good fashion sense and even higher class.

Beadwork may be from a time long ago but they have not faded into the pages of textbooks. Every day one can see it in use, though it may not be as frequently used as in the Zulu culture, the technology still serves its purpose. Beads are significant in today's fashion world. Ultimately this technology has shaped the way we see jewelry in our own culture and for the cultures that come after us. Beadwork will be forever immortalized either in the pages of textbooks or on the body of man.

Works Cited

Griffin, Dana. "About the Zulu Culture." EHow. Demand Media, 26 Apr. 2010. Web. 13 Feb.

2015.

Hamlett, Christina. "About the Zulu Tribe." Travel Tips. USA Today. Web. 13 Feb. 2015.

Kenneth, David. "The Beliefs & Traditions of the Zulu People of Africa | The Classroom |

Synonym." The Classroom. Synonym. Web. 13 Feb. 2015.

White, Kathryn. "The History of Zulu Beadwork." EHow. Demand Media, 04 May 2010. Web.

23 Feb. 2015.

"Zulu Bead Jewelry." *ZULU BEAD JEWELRY*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2015.