

WHO WEARS THE BEADS?

**2,000 Years of Ornaments from
an Archaeological Site on Guam**

By Judith R. Amesbury, MARS
and Cherie K. Walth, SWCA

WHO WEARS THE BEADS?

In 1989 Micronesian Archaeological Research Services (MARS) conducted an archaeological excavation at a site on Saipan called Chalan Piao, which is one of the oldest sites in the Mariana Archipelago. People were living there 3,500 years ago or possibly even earlier.

At Chalan Piao, the MARS archaeologists found more than 400 cone shell beads and fragments of cone shell bracelets. No human remains were found during the excavation, so the archaeologists could not say who would have worn those ornaments.

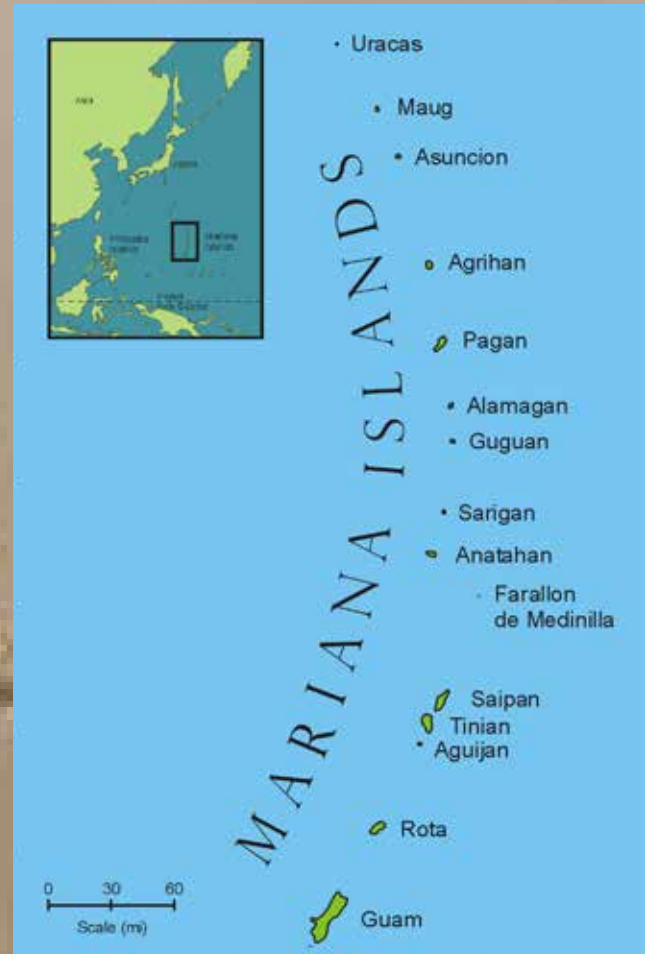


Figure by Barry Smith.

**Were the ornaments that
were found in archaeological
excavations in the Mariana
Islands worn by men or
women?**

**Only by the respected
older people or also by
children?**

**By people during the
Pre-Latte Period or the
Latte Period?**

What is meant by the **Pre-Latte Period** and the **Latte Period**?

In the Mariana Islands, the long Pre-Contact or Prehistoric Period began with the arrival of the first people by at least 1500 BC and ended with the arrival of Magellan's ships in AD 1521. The Pre-Contact Period is divided into the Pre-Latte Period (approximately 1500 BC to AD 900 or 1000), before the latte stones were constructed, and the Latte Period (approximately AD 900 or 1000 to 1521) when the latte stones were constructed. The Post-Contact Period is the years since European Contact in AD 1521.



Figure by Robert Amesbury.

Now an excavation on Guam has revealed the remains of Pre-Contact people who were buried wearing ornaments made from shells and shark teeth.

In 2006-2008 an archaeological excavation took place at Naton Beach on Tumon Bay, Guam. More than 400 human burials were recovered. This includes more than 150 people who lived during the Pre-Latte Period and more than 250 people who lived during the Latte Period. Archaeologists had never seen that many Pre-Latte individuals before. The earliest burials date to at least 2,500 years ago. Shell beads from four of the Pre-Latte burials were radiocarbon dated to about 500 BC or even earlier.

Let's look at the Pre-Latte ornaments.

Type 1 *Conus* beads

This style of cone shell bead was named Type 1, because this is the style that was most common at Chalan Piao, Saipan, where the cultural deposits dated to as much as 1,000 years earlier than the burials at Naton Beach.

More than 370 beads of this type were associated with burials at Naton Beach. All but six of the beads were associated with Pre-Latte burials. More than 80 percent of the Type 1 *Conus* beads were found on Pre-Latte females.



Type 1 *Conus* beads.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Type 1 *Conus* bead.
Magnified.

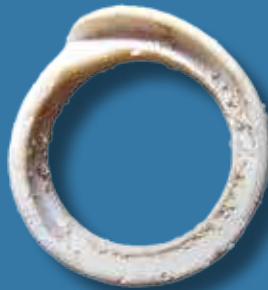
Live *Conus eburneus*.
Photo by Dave Burdick.



Type 2 *Conus* bead or circlet

Only one bead or circlet (small circle) of this type was found during the Naton Beach excavation. Ordinarily one artifact would not be called a “type” but other *Conus* circlets like this one had been found at Chalan Piao, Saipan also. This circlet was found with the Pre-Latte burial of a middle-aged man (age 35-50). Also buried with the man was an unusual adze (a woodworking tool) made from the hinge portion of the giant clam shell, *Tridacna*, or *hima* in Chamorro.

Type 2 *Conus* beads.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Pre-Latte *Tridacna* adze.
Top view.
Photo by Rich Olmo.



Pre-Latte *Tridacna* adze.
Side view.
Photo by Rich Olmo.

Pre-Latte female, age 18-25,
with more than 430 Type 3 *Conus* beads.
SWCA photo.



Type 3 *Conus* beads

More than 1,150 Type 3 *Conus* beads were found, and all but three were associated with Pre-Latte burials. More than 75 percent were found on Pre-Latte females.

One Pre-Latte woman wore more than 430 of these beads, as well as a cone shell bracelet on her left arm. The beads would have been strung on a cord made from plant fiber or possibly human hair. The cord was not preserved in the ground, but the beads were still arranged on the woman as they had been strung. The beads seen in the photo on the skull were loose beads that were placed there during the excavation.



Type 3 *Conus* bead.
Magnified.



Type 3 *Conus* beads.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



CM

Anadara beads or circlets

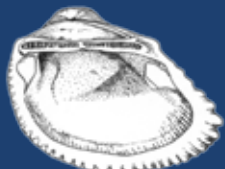
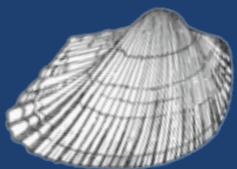
There are other beads or circlets that look like the Type 2 *Conus* circlet, but they were not made from cone shells. They were made from the shells of the ark clam, *Anadara antiquata*. We discovered this when we looked at the beads under the microscope.

Forty *Anadara* circlets were found only on Pre-Latte burials, and all but three were found on Pre-Latte females. One young adult female (age 20-35), shown in the photo, had a necklace of 17 *Anadara* circlets.



Anadara circlets.

Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Anadara antiquata.

Figure by Robert Amesbury.

Pre-Latte female,
age 20-35, wearing
a necklace of
Anadara circlets.

SWCA photo.

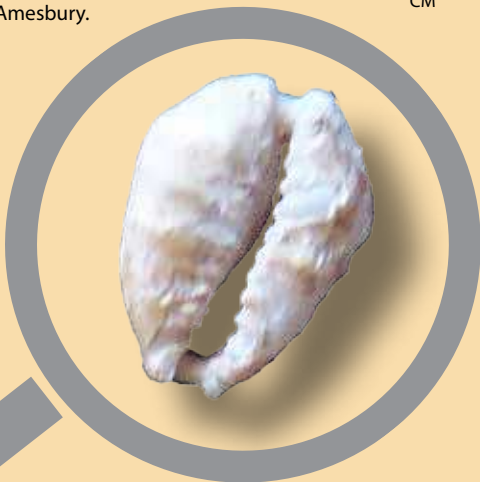


Cypraea beads

One Pre-Latte burial of a female, age 30-40, contained 11 *Cypraea* beads. The beads were made from shells of the money cowry (*Cypraea moneta*), which were used as money in many parts of the world. A few beads like these were found at Chalan Piao, Saipan also.



Cypraea beads
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Cypraea bead.
Magnified.

Live *Cypraea moneta*.
Photo by Dave Burdick.



Tiger shark teeth

One Pre-Latte young adult female, age 20-35, was buried with 12 tiger shark teeth. Yikes! Tiger sharks are the most dangerous sharks in the Mariana Islands!

This woman was someone important. She must have been highly respected. In addition to the tiger shark teeth, she had 51 Type 1 *Conus* beads, 10 Type 3 *Conus* beads, a fishhook made of *Isognomon* shell, and a pumice file, which may have been used in making shell artifacts.



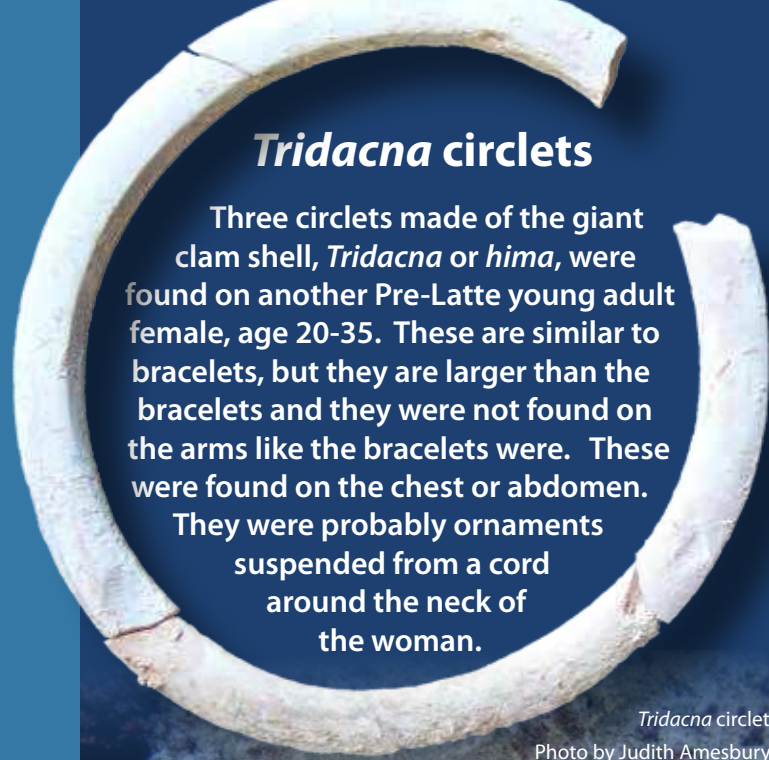
Drilled tiger shark teeth.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Tridacna circlets

Three circlets made of the giant clam shell, *Tridacna* or *hima*, were found on another Pre-Latte young adult female, age 20-35. These are similar to bracelets, but they are larger than the bracelets and they were not found on the arms like the bracelets were. These were found on the chest or abdomen.

They were probably ornaments suspended from a cord around the neck of the woman.



Tridacna circlet.

Photo by Judith Amesbury.

Live *Tridacna*.

Photo by Dave Burdick.



Conus and Tectus bracelets

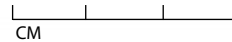
Eleven bracelets were found on eight Pre-Latte burials. Seven of the bracelets were made from *Conus* shells and four were made from *Tectus* shells. Five of the burials were females, one was a male, and sex could not be determined for two of the burials, including the infant shown on this page.

This baby died between birth and the age of two months. The infant was buried with a necklace of 118 Type 3 *Conus* beads and a cone shell bracelet on each arm. The plastic letters seen in the photo indicate where beads were collected by the archaeologists.

The three individuals who had two bracelets wore one on each wrist. Of the four individuals with one bracelet, three wore the bracelet on the left wrist, and one wore it on the right wrist. The only male wore his bracelet on the upper left arm.

Pre-Latte infant buried with 118 beads and two bracelets.
SWCA photo.

Two *Conus* bracelets
Photos by Judith Amesbury.



Pinctada shells

Three unmodified shells of the black-lipped pearl oyster, *Pinctada margaritifera*, were found on three Pre-Latte burials, one male and two females. The shells were found in approximately the same position on each of the three burials, toward the left shoulder or the left side of the chest.

The male had the largest shell (nearly 35 cm long), placed with the dull outer side up and the pearly side toward his body. He also had an exquisitely crafted fishing weight, about the size of a golf ball, made of *Tridacna* shell or *hima*. The female with the *Anadara* necklace also had a *Pinctada* shell with the lustrous pearly side up.



Tridacna fishing weight.



Pre-Latte male, age 20-35, with the largest *Pinctada* shell and a *Tridacna* fishing weight.

SWCA photo.





Example of *Pinctada margaritifera* shells. The *Pinctada* shells from the Naton Beach Site disintegrated due to age.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.

Pre-Latte female, age 20-35,
with *Anadara* necklace and
Pinctada shell.
SWCA photo.

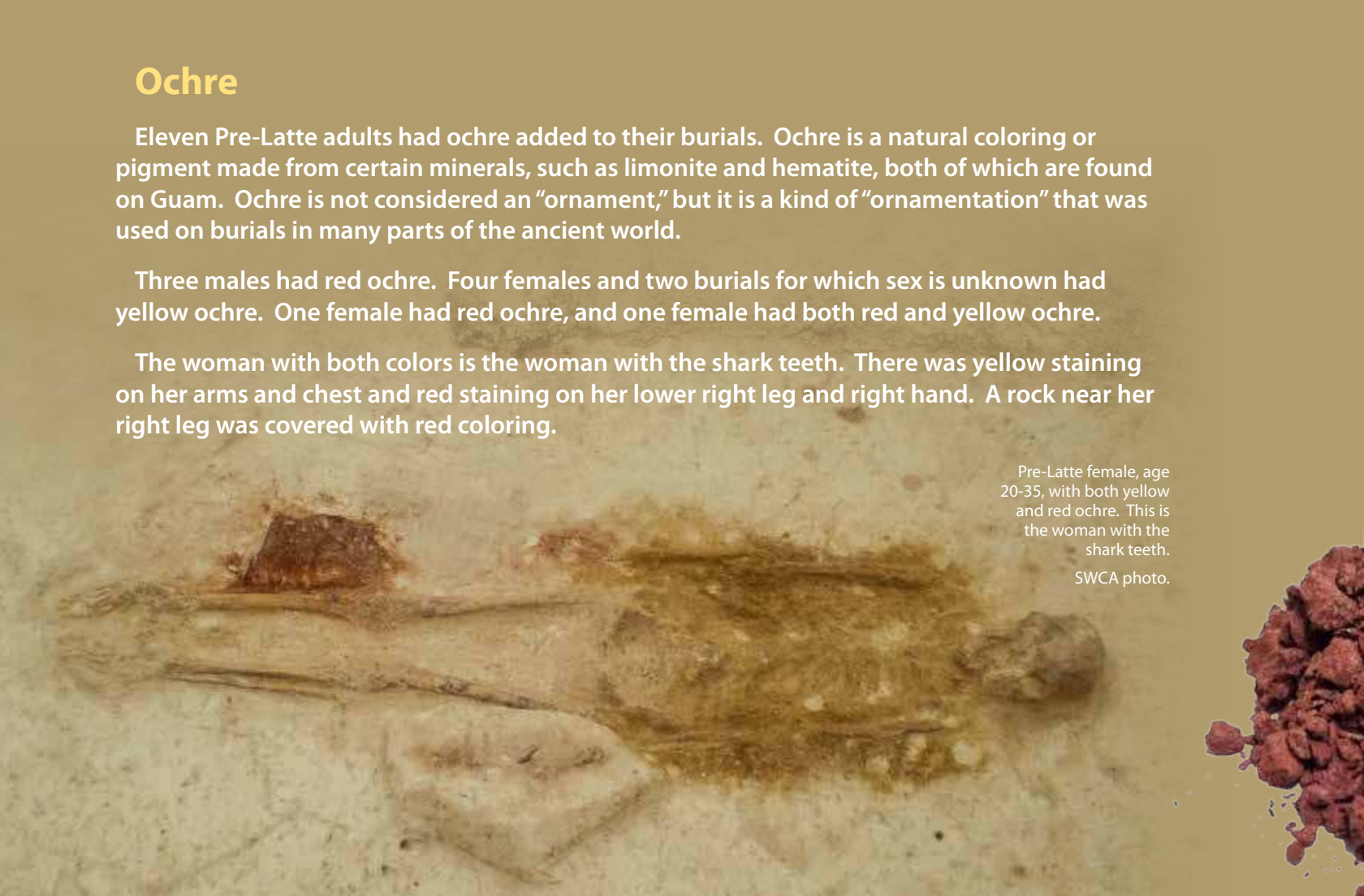


Ochre

Eleven Pre-Latte adults had ochre added to their burials. Ochre is a natural coloring or pigment made from certain minerals, such as limonite and hematite, both of which are found on Guam. Ochre is not considered an “ornament,” but it is a kind of “ornamentation” that was used on burials in many parts of the ancient world.

Three males had red ochre. Four females and two burials for which sex is unknown had yellow ochre. One female had red ochre, and one female had both red and yellow ochre.

The woman with both colors is the woman with the shark teeth. There was yellow staining on her arms and chest and red staining on her lower right leg and right hand. A rock near her right leg was covered with red coloring.



Pre-Latte female, age 20-35, with both yellow and red ochre. This is the woman with the shark teeth.

SWCA photo.

Who wears the beads in the Pre-Latte?

Number of Pre-Latte burials	170
Number of Pre-Latte burials with ornaments	41
Percent of Pre-Latte burials with ornaments	24
Number of ornaments	1,650
Female to male ratio of burials with ornaments	20:9
Ages of individuals with ornaments	Birth to 50



Guam ochre.
Photos by Judith Amesbury.

Now we'll take a look at the Latte Period ornaments.

Type 4 *Conus* beads

Two *Conus* beads, different from the previous types, were found on two Latte Period burials. Two beads would not normally be considered a type, but because beads like these had been seen in other Latte Period sites on Guam, these were called Type 4 *Conus* beads.

In each of the two photos, the Naton Beach Type 4 *Conus* bead is on the left, and the similar beads on the right are from another Tumon Bay site. In the bottom photo both beads are unfinished, but very similar.

Type 4 *Conus* beads.
Photo by
Judith Amesbury.



Type 4 *Conus* beads.
Photo by
Judith Amesbury.



Shark teeth

No tiger shark teeth were found with Latte Period burials, but two Latte Period burials each had one shark tooth, which are thought to be from the silky shark. One of these shark teeth was found with the burial of a male and the other with a burial for which sex could not be determined. Drilled shark teeth similar to these were found at Pagat, Guam also.

Drilled shark teeth
from two Latte
Period burials.
Photo by
Judith Amesbury.



Spondylus beads

The nine *Spondylus* beads in this photo were found in eight Latte Period burials. Four of the burials were adults and four were young people, including an infant about age 2, one child about age 4, another child age 5-9, and an adolescent age 12-20.



Spondylus beads from eight Latte Period burials.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.

Spondylus bead.
Magnified.



Live *Spondylus*.
Photo by Dave Burdick.



Who wears the beads in the Latte?

Number of Latte burials	258
Number of Latte burials with ornaments	17
Percent of Latte burials with ornaments	7
Number of ornaments	23
Female to male ratio of burials with ornaments	7:2
Ages of individuals with ornaments	2 to 50

Although there are more Latte burials than Pre-Latte burials, fewer of the Latte burials have ornaments.

Also the number of ornaments on Latte burials is far fewer. Only 23 ornaments were found on Latte burials compared with 1,650 ornaments on Pre-Latte burials. Even if we add the additional *Spondylus* beads on the next page and the Post-Contact burial beads, there were only 62 ornaments after the Pre-Latte Period.

More *Spondylus* beads

These five *Spondylus* beads were found at the edge of a Pre-Latte burial, but probably were not buried with that individual. *Spondylus* beads are generally found in Latte Period contexts, and these beads are most similar to the *Spondylus* beads from the Post-Contact burial. These five beads are not shown on the tables of Pre-Latte or Latte ornaments, because their time period is not known.



Spondylus beads.
Magnified.



Spondylus beads with time period unknown.

Photo by Judith Amesbury.

Modified teeth

Pre-Latte inlaid teeth

The Pre-Contact people did not stop at decorating their bodies with ornaments and their burials with ochre; some also modified their teeth. One Pre-Latte male had his two front teeth prepared for inlays. The inlays may have been present while he lived, but removed after he died. We don't know what material was inlaid, but probably it was semiprecious stone or metal, even jade or gold. Archaeologists have never before seen burials with inlaid teeth in the Marianas.



The two front teeth of a Pre-Latte male were prepared for inlays, but the inlaid material is missing.

Photo by Cherie Walth.



Two Latte Period males had elaborate cross-hatching on their teeth.

Left: Photo by Cherie Walth.

Right: Photo by Nicolette Parr.

Latte Period incised teeth

Eight adult Latte Period burials had incised teeth. Many Latte Period people chewed betel nut, which stains the teeth a reddish brown color. When the teeth were incised, the designs showed up on the stained teeth. Three individuals, who were buried close to each other, had elaborately cross-hatched incising. These three people were two middle-aged males (shown above) and one middle-aged female.

Post-Contact burial of a young person about age 12.
SWCA photo.



The Post-Contact child

This burial was a young person, about the age of 12, whose sex could not be determined. The child was buried on his or her side. The skull is at the left side of the photo. The large *Spondylus* beads are at the waist.



Large *Spondylus* belt beads from the Post-Contact burial.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Spondylus beads

This 12 year old had more *Spondylus* beads than all other burials from the Naton Beach excavation put together. Seven large beads were found at the waist like a belt, and 19 smaller beads were found on the upper body like a necklace.

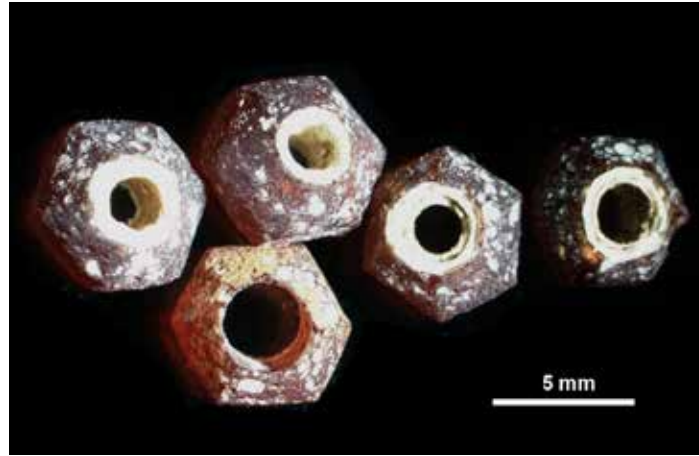
Small *Spondylus* necklace beads from the Post-Contact burial.
Photo by Judith Amesbury.



Glass beads

In addition, the Post-Contact child had eight small glass beads. The glass beads were made in Europe and carried on a ship to the Mariana Islands in 1521 or later. Magellan's ships carried 500 pounds of glass beads, and Father San Vitores, as well as many of the explorers and traders, also brought glass beads to the Mariana Islands.

These glass beads, closely associated with this burial, indicate that the child was buried after Contact. Apparently this 12 year old was living in the latte village at Naton Beach while people there were trading with the Spanish. Glass beads have been found at other latte sites and in other Post-Contact burials on Guam.



End view of five hexagonal red-over-white glass beads under the microscope.
Photo by Chris Lobban.



Side view of three additional hexagonal glass beads under the microscope.
Photo by Chris Lobban.

WHO WEARS THE BEADS?

The answer is

**both men and women,
both adults and children, and
both Pre-Latte and Latte Period people, as well as Post-Contact people.**

However,

**Pre-Latte women wore most of the ornaments at Naton Beach.
Twenty Pre-Latte female burials yielded 1,300 ornaments.
That is more than 75 percent of all the ornaments recovered.**

This booklet was funded by a
grant from Guam Preservation Trust
(Grant Number GPTG-16-01)



The MARS project "Who Wears the Beads?" was additionally supported with funds from Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency (CAHA), Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB), Ada's Trust & Investment, Inc. (ATI) and Duenas, Camacho & Associates, Inc. (DCA).

In-kind contributions were made by Micronesian Archaeological Research Services and SWCA Environmental Consultants.



Micronesian Archaeological
Research Services

SWCA
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS



natonbeachguam.com

Design by Card and Card Advertising.

©2016