

NOTES ON PORCUPINE QUILLWORK*

The quills were first assorted according to size. The quills were kept in pouches of animal membrane, such as bladders. These pouches were about a span long, several times as long as wide, in shape like a very pointed narrow oval. The edging of the opening and the points were often decorated with either porcupine quill or beadwork.

For varicolored decorative designs natural undyed white quills and dyed quills were used. For dyeing a certain lichen imported from the Crows was used for a yellow color. (A specimen of this lichen was sent to the museum.) There is also another plant native in the Arikara country, which was used for yellow dye according to Mrs. Butcher, but she was unable to find a specimen for me, although she did make search. There was also a native blue dye, but my informants were unable to tell me what plant was used for this. They said buffalo berries (*Lepargyreaea argentea*) were used as a mordant.

In decorative quillwork the outline of designs was first drawn in "Indian ink," (specimen of which was sent to the museum for analysis), and then the outline was filled in with the quills. Sinew, of course, was the material of which the sewing thread was made. In old time, before they obtained steel needles from the traders, thorns were used as awls to make holes for stitching.

After stitching on the design, the work was cleaned by means of a white powder formed from selenite crystals. The crystals were reduced to a fine white powder by submitting them to heat, which drove off the water of crystallization.

After stitching and cleaning the work was finished by pressing flat as ironing is done on needlework by white women. At the present time Arikara quill-workers do use a flat-iron, but in old time they used a flat, smooth cobble-stone, and probably also a smoothing tool of bone, as the Omahas and other did.

* From Dawish (Mrs. Redtail) and others.