The Traditional Culture of the Miami Indians of Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Farming

The Miami Indians did their cultivation with hand tools. All of the farming tribes used a straight pointed stick for some part of the routine. This stick was used for making a hole for planting the grains of corn, beans, or squashes, although it could also be used to break up the ground for planting. Hoes were probably universal for the Woodland Indians like the Miami. The blade of the hoe was often made from an animal bone, most often the shoulder blade.

Corn was the principal item of cultivation. Corn was the staple item in the Miami diet, and its harvest was celebrated by a fall festival. When the ground was sufficiently dried out, usually about the first of May, the dead stalks of the previous crop were burned and the ground was prepared with a sharp, pointed stick. The sowing, cultivation, and harvesting were primarily done by the women, although the men might assist in the harvesting. The harvest concluded with a festival and a feast, given in the night (Kinietz, p. 172). Besides corn, the Miami Indians also grew beans, squash, melons, pumpkins, and gourds.

According to Nicolas Perrot, "the kinds of food the Miami like best, and which they make most effort to obtain, are the Indian corn, the kidney-bean, and the squash. If they are without these, they think they are fasting, no matter what abundance of meat and fish they have in their stores; the Indian corn being to them what bread is the Frenchmen" (Kinietz, p. 173).

No information as to whether the Miami used fertilizer or whether they eventually reduced the fertility of the soil by
cultivation, is given. Fertilizers were probably not used by the Miami because authors suggest that almost all Indians did not employ fertilizers, other than the ashes from burned-over land.

A significant characteristic of the Miamis was their cultivation of a soft white corn that was completely different from the flint corn of their neighbors. The fact that it was not to be found among other nearby tribes tends to support the hypothesis of earlier Miami contact with Indians in the Southwest, where many varieties of this grain had developed (Anson, p. 20).

Food Gathering

Through the summer and fall, the women and children filled their leisure hours by gathering wild fruit, berries, and nuts. They collected these in birchbark buckets, makuks, fastened at the waist. The woodland area had an abundance of wild food: cranberries, gooseberries, June berries, blueberries, black and red raspberries. Fruits included cherries, grapes and choke cherries. Nuts included acorns, hickory nuts, hazelnuts, beechnuts, and butternuts. Vegetables included wild potatoes, wild onions, milkweed, and the root of the yellow water lily (Ritzenthaler, p. 16). When wild plants were fully developed, special attention was given to gathering herbs for medicine. Most varieties of herbs were in blossom around August, which made identification of them easier. However, they could be gathered at any other time -- the roots in the spring and fall, and the bark during the summer.
Fishing

Fishing was a year-round occupation. With plenty of lakes and streams to draw from, fish were easily obtained. The Miamis, along with all Woodland groups, used a wide variety of methods for catching fish. These methods included the use of fishhooks, nets, spears, traps, lures, bait, and a line used for trolling (Ritzenthaler, p. 16). The nets were made of bark-fiber cord and nettle-stalk twine. Bait varied, but was often nothing more than a piece of an old blanket. Hooks were usually made of deer bone, native copper, or, later, wire. Trolling was done from the canoe, with the line twisted around the paddler's wrist and then around the paddle itself. The action of the paddle moving through the water wiggled the line and attracted the fish. The traps were often used; one method was to build a V of rocks across a stream, with a runway at the center over which the fish would be directed and then clubbed. The fish were cooked in a variety of ways: boiled, roasted on spits, dried on scaffolds in the sun or over a slow fire. There seems to have been little dependence on fishing, perhaps because of the abundance of game which was at their disposal.

Hunting

The food secured by hunting formed a considerable part of the Miami's diet, as it did for all Woodland Indians. The principal game hunted by the Miami were the deer and buffalo. The hunting expeditions in the late autumn were communal affairs in which the entire village, with the exception of a few old men and women who
were unable to march, took part. Everyone went on the hunt for two reasons: the women and children would not be left open to attack in the absence of hunters, who were also warriors, and the women could assist in removing the flesh from the slain animals and smoke it for preservation. The favorite method of hunting the buffalo was to surround a herd and set fire to the dead grass on all sides of it except for a few places at which the hunters gathered. The buffalo, to escape the fire, attempted to run at these openings, where the hunters waited.

In his observances of the Miami, La Salle noted that as many as two hundred buffalo were killed in one day (Kinietz, p.174). The animals killed were divided according to the number of persons of hunters in each family. Elk, beaver, and several kinds of fox -- the red, the black, and the silver-gray -- were also hunted. The bear was not killed without a special ceremony and apology, for this animal was greatly revered by all Woodland Indians, including the Miami. When an Indian boy killed his first animal or bird, his parents held a Feast of the First Game. Prominent men of the tribe were invited to the Youth’s Dance and, in this way, the boy was encouraged to be a good hunter and provider.

Most commonly used on the hunt was the bow and arrow, its relative crudity necessitating a stalking technique and shooting at close range. After white contact, guns soon replaced the bow.

Much of the meat was boiled, in metal containers when they became available and, before that, in pottery vessels. Meat was roasted, as well as boiled. It was also cut into thin slices, dried over a slow fire, and then pounded between two stones, and
stored in birchbark containers. The tallow rendered from the fat was stored in the large intestine and bladder of the animal and then made into soap. The grease from animals was used to season berries and wild rice. Even the bones were pounded into a powder and mixed with dried meat and grease to be eaten later, uncooked.

Most Indian groups ate two meals a day. Later, when they had contact with the whites, they grew accustomed to the idea of eating three times a day.
II. The Life Cycle

Birth

Among most Woodland tribes, including the Miami, a child was born in a special hut, for the blood connected with its birth was unclean. As the time for birth approached, the mother was placed in a separate cabin which faced her husband's. In her final labor, the women knelt on a reed mat padded with a blanket while a few experienced women assisted her. The newborn baby was bathed in hot solution containing aromatic herbs and charred pieces of wood from a tree that had been hit by lightning.

After the child's birth, the woman remained in the special hut for about fifteen days, under the care of several women. When a woman wished to return to her husband, she bathed in a river or in her cabin during inclement weather. The husband, being informed of her readiness to return, shook all the skins in the wigwam, threw out all the ashes of the hearth, and lit a new fire (Kinietz, p. 203).
Almost immediately after birth, the baby was fastened to a cradle board (Figure 2). The cradle board served as a bed, as well as a baby carriage. When the mother went on a journey, she slung it on her back and held it in position by means of a buckskin tumpline. Children spent most of their time on these cradle boards until they were two or three years of age. They were usually weaned by that time and also were ready to walk.

**Naming**

In the Miami culture, there was no particular period fixed for naming children; however, the baby was almost always named by the time he or she left the cradle board. Quite often, the parents would agree on a name, but even more frequently, the mother would go to an old woman of her acquaintance about twenty days after the birth, and having presented her with a small quantity of goods, asks the woman to give the child a name (Trowbridge, p. 37). Soon after this, in the presence of only the family, the woman takes the infant in her arms and begins a sort of ceremony, addressed to the infant, in which she describes a dream she has had. The ritual concludes by the woman drawing an inference from each part of the dream described, pertaining to a point in the character of the infant. For example, if she saw a deer in her dream, the baby will be swift on foot. She then gives him a name descriptive of one of the circumstances of her dream, taking care, however, that it is a name that is usually given to the members of the particular tribe to which the child belongs.
Figure 2

Child wrapped in a cradle board
Childhood

All through childhood, Miami Indian boys and girls learned from their parents, their grandparents, their brothers and sisters, as well as respected older members of the tribe. Children were treated well and frequently indulged. Miami boys and girls lived in a paradise of permissiveness, as did most Indian children (Anson, p. 23). Parents seldom raised their voices to reprimand a child, and corporal punishment was equally rare. What would be treated as a catastrophic event by a white parent was regarded with casual calmness by the Indian. This lack of tension on the part of Indian parents was reflected in the personality pattern of the child during his youth and later as an adult.

On the whole, boys were taught by their fathers how to fish and trap, and their roles as hunters and warriors were conditioned from infancy. Mothers taught their daughters how to make a wigwam, how to chop wood, how to gather berries and roots, and how to prepare buckskin, sew it into clothing, and decorate it. At an early age both boys and girls learned how to recognize plants, how to gather and dry them, and which ones had medicinal value.

Puberty

The youth of the tribe, both boys and girls, fasted for several days at the onset of puberty. At the time of puberty, a boy was encouraged to go into the forest for several days at a time, fast during the day, and dream at night. The fasting dream, or vision quest, was of the utmost significance to the individual. The dream gave him a guardian spirit who would guide and protect
him the rest of his life. It equipped him, in some cases, with the power to cure; it granted him the ability to prophesy, and it provided him with a supply of songs and names.

When a girl was ready for her first menstrual cycle, she went for four days and nights to a little wigwam her mother had built away from the main camp. Ordinarily, a girl asked the gods to reward her with a long life, a good husband, and a large number of healthy children. In her puberty hut she was allowed almost no food, taking only a little water.

Marriage

Ordinarily, marriages were arranged by the family of the young man. Although marriage within the clan was banned, cross-cousin marriage was practiced by nearly all the Woodland groups, including the Miami. Most marriages were monogamous, but polygamy was sanctioned, and an important man could have two or three wives.

Marriage involved no formal ceremony, but the couple was instructed in the skills that their society required, and tribal games, dances, and music were displayed. Best of all, there might be visitors from other tribes to entertain. Normally, the couple merely went off by themselves for a few days. Perhaps they went to a lodge of their own, but on the whole, they lived, for a while at least, with the girl's parents.

Death Customs

When someone in the village died, his hair was braided, and his body was washed and dressed in his best clothing and wrapped in
sheets of birch bark. A section of the wigwam wall -- always toward the west since the land of the dead was located there -- was removed so that the body could be taken out to the grave. Four persons, not related to the deceased, are appointed by the relatives to carry the body to the grave. The corpse is followed to the grave by the near relatives first, who are joined by those more distant and by the friends of the deceased. After the body was placed in the grave, one of the elder relatives, or in some cases the Meda priest, conducted a ritual that addressed the deceased directly (Trowbridge, p. 30). When the ritual was completed, the relatives walked in procession around the grave, and each one laid a hand upon the chest of the deceased. Food and tobacco were placed in the grave, which would be needed by the soul during its four-day journey to heaven. Also, the item most valued by the deceased was put in the grave. After this, the body was buried, while the relatives ate some food prepared by women of the village.

The Meda priest carved a grave marker that pictured the totem of the deceased -- an animal, bird, or fish carved upside down to denote death. Certain songs and speeches were delivered by the priest, many of which pertained to the four-day journey for the soul to traverse the "road of souls". The Miami believed that at the end of the fourth day the soul entered heaven, a large village of Indians, where he joined the souls of his relatives and friends. On the fourth day after the death, a feast was held to celebrate the soul reaching heaven.

The custom of mourning for the dead was strictly adhered to by
most Miami villages. The husband and wife mourned for each other for at least one year. Men could not handle medicines or weapons while they were in mourning. They often painted their entire faces black, but, if they were only in partial mourning, they merely painted a black circle around each eye. A widowed woman also painted her face black and was not to marry until after the charcoal had worn off. Old clothes were worn by one in mourning, and he or she refrained from going to public places (Trowbridge, p. 33). Also, one in mourning was not allowed to touch a child, for it was thought that this could cause illness or even death to the child.

Brothers, sisters, and children of the deceased mourned for about one year. At the end of the year, the son, if the deceased was the father, or the daughter, in case of the mother's death, adopted a successor to the deceased (Kinietz, p. 202). The adoption procedure included a ceremony consisting primarily of various dances. When the ceremony was completed, the successor to the deceased was looked upon as a mother or father by the family that adopted them. Even though the successor remained in his or her own home, they were depended upon for advice in all matters by the adopting family.
III. Social Life

The Miami settlement pattern was one of rather small, semi-sedentary groups living together. Such settlements were referred to sometimes as "villages", and other times as "bands". As was the case with most Woodland tribes, the Miami villages were small, seldom containing over a few thousand people. There were exceptions -- during the summertime, when several hundred people might live together, and during a time of major warfare. Activities such as religious events or a lacrosse game might attract a large group, but living and activities were essentially small-group operations.

Miami society was kin-oriented, with patterns of interpersonal relations almost exclusively those of kinship (Ritzenhaler, p. 47). Ties of blood and marriage bound the group into a network of relationships, each with its appropriate behavior pattern. Ordinarily, everyone in the local community was related. Kinship ties also formed bonds between the various communities. Miamis
also lived in a classless, egalitarian society, although certain individuals, like chiefs, priests, and shamans, were accorded more respect on the basis of their positions, knowledge, and abilities with the supernatural forces.

The smallest social unit was the nuclear family: husband, wife or wives, and their unmarried children. What could be termed a microcommunity was composed of a number of families related by blood or marriage, cooperating particularly in hunting and food gathering. A number of adjacent microcommunities, under a political leader, made up a band.

In addition to family affiliations, every individual was a member of a clan, a unilineal group with stipulated descent. A man of a certain clan was required to marry a woman from a different clan (Anson, p. 17). Among a few bands, the clan was a ceremonial unit and had a naming function. Each clan had a stock of personal names from which the parents could choose, so long as it was not used by anyone else. Upon the individual’s death, his name reverted back to the clan pool.

**Dual Division**

The majority of the Woodland Indian tribes were divided into dual divisions called moieties, which took two distinct forms. The Miami were divided into Earth and Sky moieties on the basis of clan. Therefore, the clans named for those creatures that dwelt in the sky formed one division, and those named after land dwellers, water-inhabiting animals or fish formed the second division. According to most observers of the Miamis, there were only two
functions of the dual system; these were marriage regulation, which meant one had to marry into the opposite moiety, and reciprocal burial. There was also evidence that in some cases moieties lived in separate halves of the village.

**Government**

As compared to the government of other Indian nations, the Miami's political organization was not highly developed. Chieftainship was of a relatively weak nature. There was little need for strong civil leadership, and it was not unusual for a shaman or priest to exert greater influence and possess greater prestige than the chief.

Each clan had its own chief, and one of the clan chiefs was chosen to rule the whole nation (Kinietz, p. 180). Chieftainship followed hereditary lines. The course of descent was from the father to the eldest son. A village chief was elected by a village council from a number of hereditary candidates on the basis of personal qualities and abilities.

The duties of the village chief were purely civil, although he had the power to intercede in the event that a war leader wanted to engage in a war that the chief felt was unnecessary. His major role was one of maintaining peace and order in the community, making decisions, and determining a course of action with regard to the welfare of the tribe. During the treaty-making period with the whites, he was the tribal representative, as well as the one who signed the treaties. In any significant decisions, the chief was aided by a clan or tribal council. Village chiefs were often
aided, on a day-to-day basis, by a "town crier" who made public announcements and ran errands.

By 1700, the grand council of the village and clan chiefs was held at the village on the St. Joseph River. Not long after this, it was always held on the headwaters of the Maumee River. Although the name Kekionga (present day Ft. Wayne) was applied to the tribal council village, there were, at times, as many as seven separate Miami villages within a few miles of the Maumee source, and the councils were not always held at the same one.

War chiefs were also present in each village. They reached these positions by demonstrating their bravery and capacity for leadership against the enemy. They held the position only as long as their war parties were successful. The major role of the war chief was sole management of the war parties, including the planning of any attack. During periods of extended warfare, the tribal war chief became the principal Miami figure at councils and treaty negotiations. The war chief also had an assistant. Together, they commanded a body of warriors who served as police, controlling communal hunts and maintaining order in the village (Newcomb, p. 70).

Warfare

Miami Indian warfare was waged primarily for the glory of the participants. Warfare was waged neither for acquisition of territory nor for commercial gain. It was engaged in for two reasons: to avenge a slain member of the tribe or to gain personal war honors. The acquisition of scalps as tokens of bravery and
skill of the warriors was very important to the Miamis. In fact, adult status was achieved by a male only after participation in one or more war parties. With this dependence on warfare as a criterion of social standing, it was evident that the Miamis would be engaged in war at least every few years to provide for each new group's coming of age.

The attack would begin just before dawn. The warriors would rush the enemy camp with clubs and bows and arrows, unprotected by such devices as shields or armor. Those who killed a foe were awarded the highest honor -- an eagle feather to be worn in the hair. During the raids, scalping was common. A circular portion of the scalp was cut from the crown of the enemy's head. On the journey back to the village it was stretched on a hoop. Back at the village, all the scalps were carried on sticks or poles in a Scalp Dance. After this, the warriors gave them to a female relative.

Even though warfare never attained the prominence it did among the Plains tribes, it was still of considerable importance in the Miami value system. Many observers of Miami raids regarded the Miamis as almost invariably successful warriors, a tribute to either their courage or their sagacity (Anson, p. 15). A successful warrior was assured of respect and prestige in his tribe, and for the rest of his life, it was his privilege to relate his heroic feats.

Games and Dances

The Miamis were extremely fond of games, and the men divided
their spare time between playing them, feasting, and dancing. Games were played for a variety of reasons: for sport, for gain, in honor of a visitor, and in honor of a deceased person. Women also played some games, particularly those played in honor of a dead person. Betting on the games was also customary. The Miamis, like most American Indians, were inveterate gamblers.

The most popular men's game was the ball game, lacrosse (Figure 3). The name was derived from the French term "jeu de crosse", for the racket with which the game was played. The object of the game was to drive a wooden ball about the size of a tennis ball to the goal of the opposing side with the rackets. Normally, a game lasted until five goals had been scored by one team. Quite often, village played against village, or sometimes even tribe against tribe. All observers of the game described it as extremely dangerous, with injury, and even death, not uncommon (Trowbridge, p. 62).

Another game commonly played by the men was the moccasin game. Wages invariably were placed by those watching the game. To begin the game, four men sat on opposite sides of a blanket. Four small balls, one of which was marked, and four moccasins were all that was needed to play the game. The object was to hide the balls under the moccasins, in full view of the opponents, who then had to guess with accuracy where the marked ball was hidden. Early white settlers took over the game so zealously that in Indiana a statute specifically forbade gambling at the moccasin game, and stiff fines were set (Ritzenhailer, p. 122).

Other games played by the Miamis included dice games and other
Figure 3
A game of lacrosse
guessing games similar to the moccasin game. There also were many
shooting games, in which the bow and arrow was used. These games
tested the player's strength and accuracy with a bow. Large bets
were often placed on these games, so they were taken very seriously
by everyone who played them.

Dances were also held for a variety of reasons. They were
given in honor of the dead, in welcome to strangers, in cementing
alliances between nations, in preparation for war, and for
pleasure. It is impossible to tell how often the dances were
performed strictly for the sake of dancing. It seems most likely
that the dances were used as a means of expressing themselves on
very definite occasions.

The dance most often described by observers of the Miami was
the calumet dance. The feature that gave this dance its name was
the calumet. This term is a corruption by the French of the name
they gave to an early tobacco pipe of the Indians, from the
resemblance of the long stem of the pipe to the reed or "chalumeau"
of peasants. Usually, the dance was given upon the visit of a
distinguished foreigner. It was also reported that the dance was
performed for the important purposes of strengthening peace or
waiting for war, for public rejoicing, or to ensure a prosperous
voyage.

Two other dances that were commonly performed by the Miami
were the discovery dance and the feather dance. Both dances
involved a recital of a warrior's martial achievements. They were
often performed upon the return to the village after a war raid or
an important hunt.
IV. Material Culture

Miami material culture was relatively simple, and it is often forgotten that a considerable amount of time and effort was spent in merely gathering all the materials needed for clothing, shelter, tools, and other essentials for living. Then, when these items had been collected, more hours were devoted to the manufacture of the various articles.

Clothing

The Miami Indians usually wore even less clothing than many other tribes of the northeastern woodlands. The French called them Miami and only occasionally used the name Twightwees, while the English called them the Naked Indians or Twightwees almost exclusively (Kinietz, p. 167). The origin of this name is not known, but it is believed to come from Twau Twau or Tawa Tawa from the Algonquian word, tawa, meaning "naked" (Anson, p. 20).

The men of the tribe definitely deserved the name, naked
Indians. In spite of the severe weather of the Great Lakes region, the men wore only skin shirts, leggings, and moccasins in winter, all made of tanned buckskin. Robes made from buffalo hides were worn in the coldest weather. During the summer, the men wore only a breechcloth and moccasins, enabling them to display their intricate tattooing. Miami men wore utilitarian, roughly dressed, unornamented skins most of the time. Fringed, beaded, and quilled clothing was worn only for festive or solemn occasions.

Contrary to the men of the tribe, the Miami women were described as fully clothed, at all times, wearing skin clothing reaching to the knees. The basic garment was a sleeveless dress made from two deerskins, one for the front and one for the back, sewn together at the shoulders and belted (Ritzenthaler, p. 59). Shawls, bonnets, and leggings were added when the weather was severe, especially in the winter. Most Miami women wore moccasins that were decorated with beads or ribbonwork.

**Tattooing**

The Miamis were first known to the English, as well as other groups they encountered, as the tattooed Indians, and certainly the men of the tribe deserved the name. Several explorers of the Great Lakes region noted that as youths they were tattooed from the shoulders to the heels, and as soon as they reached the age of twenty-five they had their stomachs, sides, and upper arms tattooed so that their entire bodies were covered (Kinietz, p. 169). The women of the tribe were also tattooed, but not as completely as the men. Their decoration was limited to the cheeks and the arms.
The tattooing procedure began by attaching two or three pointed fish or animal bones to the end of a piece of wood. These bones were soaked in a sort of black paint, made from crushed, soft charcoal and water. The bones are then forced into the skin at least two or three millimeters. The tattoos that were created faded only slightly after many years.

Shelter

The most common type of dwelling used by the Miamis was the dome-shaped wigwam (Figure 4). Its shape varied somewhat, sometimes circular, but at other times oval in shape. Saplings were set in the ground in a circle to form the sides, and bent so they could be twisted and locked together where they met in an arc at the top. Additional saplings were attached horizontally around its circumference to reinforce the frame and support the rush mats or bark which was used as a covering. These dome-shaped lodges would be home for about four Indians.

Inside the wigwam there was a central fireplace, located directly below the hole in the dome roof. Around the inside perimeter low benches were constructed for beds. The beds were made of sticks and brush, and were covered with animal skins.

In the summer Miami tribes constructed rectangular lodges or longhouses (Figure 5). In each village there was at least one longhouse in which councils and ceremonies were held (Kubiak, p. 26). The framework was made of saplings set in two long rows and curved at the ends. These saplings were bent or curved inward toward the middle of the lodge where they were twisted and tied
Figure 4
Dome-shaped wigwam

Figure 5
Mat-covered longhouse
together to form an arc. More saplings were fastened horizontally, with strips of bark to strengthen the framework and provide support for the outer covering of rush mats. These were overlapped like roof shingles. Poles and sticks were leaned up against them to hold the mats in place. An opening, varying in width from one to two feet or more, ran the length of the lodge along the ridge of the roof. Directly underneath this opening fireplaces were made, the number depending on the number of families in the lodge.

Both longhouses and wigwams provided excellent shelter from the elements, but they were not ideal dwellings. They were described by many as dark and smokey; they often burned down. Mice, fleas, and body lice even plagued the inhabitants (Newcomb, p. 66).

Along with the dome-shaped wigwam and the longhouse, the Miamis constructed three other specialized structures: the menstrual hut, the sweat lodge, and the Medicine Lodge. The first was a small hut near the family dwelling, generally constructed like the wigwam, to which the menstruating woman would retire during her period. Food was brought to her, and she had no further contact with her family or anyone else. The sweat lodge was a small pole framework completely covered with bark or cloth. Hot stones were put inside, whereupon the person using the hut stripped, and doused the stones with water to produce steam. These lodges were used for personal therapy or for ceremonial purification. The Medicine Lodge was a wigwam-like structure, except that it was much longer -- up to one hundred feet in length -- according to several explorers who frequented Miami
villages (Raudot, Letter 55).

The Miamis, like most Woodland Indians, did not spend a great deal of time in their houses. They regarded them as shelters from inclement weather, as places to sleep, and as storage areas for their possessions. Most of their time was spent out of doors and, weather permitting, most of their cooking and eating was done outside.

Decorative Arts

Although they were concerned more with utility than aesthetics, the Miamis exhibited considerable skill and some flair for the decorative arts, as shown in women’s weaving, quillwork, beadwork, and ribbonwork. Pottery was crude in technique, form, and decoration. The men’s artistic endeavors were confined largely to sculpting human and animal figures on bowls and ladles, and the freestanding fetish figurines. Contrasted to the decorative arts of the Southwest, Miami arts and crafts have attracted little attention or interest on the part of the outside world. This may be due to the fact that the Miami’s products were not particularly adaptable, ornamentally, for the white man’s personal wear, as was Navaho silverwork, or for household use, as were Navaho rugs and Hopi pottery.

Quillwork

Quillwork was an ancient art of the Miamis, along with other Woodland Indian tribes, and nowhere outside North America was porcupine quillwork found (Ritzenthaler, p. 72).
Dyed porcupine quills were sewn with sinew onto buckskin clothing or moccasins, knife sheaths, and medicine bags. The quills were dyed with native vegetable dyes. They were flattened with special bone flatteners; then they were embroidered onto the buckskin with sinew thread. Quills were also woven on looms to make belts and decorative strips that were later applied to clothing.

Beadwork

When the Europeans introduced glass beads, the Miami Indians switched from quill to bead embroidery. As with the quillwork, beadwork lay in the women's domain. Miami women used both loom and embroidery techniques. By the loom method the women produced belts, garters, head bands, necklaces, and decorative bands to be fastened onto buckskin or cloth (Figures 6 & 7). Bead embroidery became popular on clothing and on the famous bandolier bags, which were worn for decoration on dress occasions. To a degree, the bags were a symbol of wealth, and an individual might wear as many as a dozen, although one or two was the usual number.

Silk Applique

Silk applique, or "ribbonwork", was another art form extremely important to the Miami Indians (Figure 8). They cut patterns from silk and sewed them as decoration onto cloth garments. Ribbonwork was practiced, especially by the Miamis and other Indian tribes of the Great Lakes region, perhaps as
Figure 6
Beaded garters

Figure 7
Beaded decorative bands
The earliest work was done with silk ribbon. While ribbonwork was found mostly on women’s dresses, it was occasionally used to decorate men’s leggings, moccasins, and cradle-board wrappers. Although geometrical designs were used to a considerable extent, the majority were floral.

Weaving

The ability of the Miami Indians and other Woodland tribes in the art of textiles has been overlooked by many. This ingenuity is well by the variety and kind of woven articles: fiber and yarn bags, sashes and garters, rush and bark mats.

Bags for carrying and storing sacred objects and household goods were woven of basswood, nettle fiber, and buffalo wool (Figure 9). Twining was the technique used for yarn bags; this was done with a warp suspended between two thick, springy sticks set vertically in the ground. A pair of colored yarn weft strands were twined around two warp strands until a row around the entire bag had been completed. On the earlier bags rows of zoomorphic designs were common. Thunderbirds and spirits, as well as humans, were interspersed with bands of geometrical motifs.

Sashes and garters were woven of commercial yarn in three or more colors, a favorite being deep red. Finger weaving was a popular technique, in which the yarn strands were wound around a short stick in parallel rows and interlaced with one
Figure 8

Silk appliqué

Figure 9

Woven bags made from basswood and yarn
another (Driver, p. 159). Netting and braiding techniques were also used to make yarn sashes and garters. Women wore sashes around the waist as decorative belts. The men wore them around the waist for decoration, but occasionally one was worn over the shoulder or wound around the head in turban fashion. Garters were worn just below the knee, by both men and women, to support the leggings.

The most common woven mats were those made of bulrushes. They served as floor coverings and house partitions or were laid on the ground for serving food. The designs of the mats were geometrical, but zoomorphic motifs, particularly the thunderbird, appeared on mats that served as wrappers for war bundles. Where bulrushes were scarce, a similar kind of mat was woven from the inner bark of red cedar. Still another type of mat was made of cattails, but sewn, rather than woven, and used as a wigwam covering.
V. Religious and Ceremonial Life

The world of the Miami Indian was filled with a host of spirits ("manito"), which inhabited trees, plants, birds, animals, and cosmic phenomena. Those of major importance were the sun, the moon, thunder, lightning, the four winds, and the thunderbirds. Offerings of tobacco were being made constantly to protect the Indians' health, assure their safety in storms, plead for help from the spirits, or express their gratitude for past favors.

Religion

Religion was primarily an individual affair with the Miami Indian, and one that he practiced constantly. Organized group activities were comparatively rare. The supreme power for the Miamis was the sun, which was the maker and master of all life. They believed in a future state of rewards and punishments, correspondent to their good or evil conduct while on earth. They also believed that the soul of the deceased set out to travel to
the regions of the west. If the individual had led a good life and deserves the favors of the Great Spirit, he was transported to a place where the souls of the deceased enjoyed an eternity of bliss (Tooker, p. 20).

Another part of Miami religion that had primary value was the Indian's guardian spirit. This was an especially helpful personal spirit acquired during the vision he experienced while fasting as a youth. The individual's spirit power was also significant, and certain people, particularly shamans and priests, were recognized as possessing spiritual power to an extraordinary extent.

Rituals and Ceremonials

The major religious ceremony, the Medawin, was held only once or twice a year. The Medawin was the primary ceremony of the grand medicine society, to which membership was obtained by preliminary instruction and formal initiation. This was done at one of the semi-annual meetings held in late spring and early fall. The instructions and ceremony were under the leadership of a Meda, who was a priest that practiced the art of magic and prophecy through communion with the spirits (Anson, p. 24). The ceremony lasted two to eight days, depending on the number of candidates. It was held in a long, semi-cylindrical lodge that had been constructed for that purpose.

A candidate for the ceremony was one who had been ill or who had dreamed that he should go through the Medawin. He held a feast to announce his intentions, to which he invited friends and a Meda priest. If the priest agreed he should go through the ceremony,
the preparations were made.

The public ceremony was directed by the priests, who did the speaking and the singing, and directed the dancing, the feasting, and the ritualistic maneuvers. The major ceremonial objects included medicine bags, water drums, bear claws, and a pipe bowl, which served as aids to the priests (Figure 10). An essential feature of the public initiation was the magical "shooting" of the shells at the candidates; this was to drive out the sickness and renew health.

Another ceremony that was common to the Miamis was the Brave Dance or Chief Dance. This was a religious ritual in which the guardian spirits of a number of people were enlisted to assist one or more individuals. Originally, it was a ceremony held before a war party was sent out. A group of people entreated their guardian spirits to protect the warriors and to ensure their success in battle.

Throughout all the rites, ceremonies, and religious observances of the Miamis, tobacco was the unifying cord, the avenue of communication between the human element and the spiritual powers. It was believed that the "manito" were extremely fond of tobacco and the only way they could obtain it was from the Indians, either by smoke from a pipe or by offerings of the dry tobacco itself. Tobacco was consumed primarily in pipes and was smoked by both men and women, but not by the children. Smoking the pipe for ceremonial and offertory reasons seems to have been about as common as smoking it for personal satisfaction.

Another interesting ritual was done in the appearance of the
Figure 10

Medicine bag and sacred objects used by the Meda priest
new moon. The Miami year was divided into two seasons, Summer and Winter. Each season contained the appearance of six new moons. The Miamis had symbols for each new moon or month, which corresponded to events that occurred at that particular time (Figure 11). The descriptions were as follows:

Summer moons:

May - Crane, because in that moon cranes are seen flying over
June - Whippoorwill, because in that moon the whippoorwills are seen flying over
July - Hilling corn moon
August - In this moon the corn is fit to eat
September - In this moon the elk run
October - The moon of the narrow fire

Winter moons:

November - Running moon for the deer
December - The young bucks run in this moon
January - In this moon the bucks drop their horns
February - In this moon bears have their young
March - This is the bear cub moon
April - The sap runs in this moon and the ravens are most numerous

Shamanism and Medical Practices

Much of the curative function in traditional Miami culture was delegated to the shaman or medicine man, a specialist recognized for his rapport with the supernatural. They enjoyed extremely high status in the village, and were generally one of the most feared and respected persons in the community, for they possessed the power to practice evil as well as good.

Shamans were male, with rare exceptions. Although their powers had been obtained during the vision quest, they remained latent until fairly late in life. Not until one had attained
Summer moons

Winter moons

Figure 11

Miami symbols for the months or each new moon
middle age or more could he actually practice. It was thought that if a novice shaman began too early he might forfeit his power.

There were two types of shamans, conjurors and the sucking doctor. Of the two, the conjuror had the wider powers, for he not only could heal magically, but also possessed an ability to determine, among other things, such causes of illness as sorcery and breach of taboo (Axtell, p. 184). The sucking doctor removed the cause of the disease by sucking it out of the patient's body. Both kinds of shamans were solicited with gifts of tobacco. Their ceremonies to cure disease were held in the evening or at night, and a small group of witnesses were present.

The Miami Indians also employed techniques of mechanical curing, such as cupping and sweat baths. Most cupping practitioners were women, and there were no supernatural procedures connected with it. Cupping was simply done by making an incision near the ailment and bleeding the patient to remove the problem. The most common ailments handled in this manner were headaches, rheumatism, and blood poisoning. The sweat bath's primary purpose was curative, but it also played a role in a few rituals. It was resorted to for the relief of such ailments as colds, fevers, and rheumatism. Many types of herbs were also used to treat a variety of ailments.
Bibliography


