Dental Modifications in North American Woodlands Period Populations

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Introduction
Contact and trade with Mesoamerican culture has been considered to be a significant influence in the transition of the North American Indian hunting and gathering subsistence in the Woodland period, to the agricultural settlements of the Mississippian period. Iconography in pottery and metalwork, stone blade technology, and the appearance of dental modification in the Midwest and Southwest has led some anthropologists to speculate that either actual Mesoamerican population movement took place; or that dental modifications spread village-to-village from Mesoamerica as a result of strong trade networks. Assessing where and when these dental modifications occurred is important for understanding the interaction between these populations.

Methods
Examined anterior dentition of individuals from the Natural History Museums’ Illinois, Georgia and Ohio American Indian collections for evidence of dental modification by notching, filing or intentional chipping of the occlusal surface or labial surface of the crown.

Results
- Re-evaluated three Illinois specimens previously described by Stewart and Titterington (Figure a, Figure b, Figure c below).
- Identified one additional specimen with clear indication of dental modification in the Illinois collection (Figure d below). No specimens with dental modifications were identified in the Ohio or Georgia collections.

Conclusions
- While Illinois, Ohio and Georgia sites were roughly contemporaneous, populations in Ohio and Georgia do not appear to have culturally modified their teeth.
- Further consideration of cultural differences between these populations is necessary for understanding why they did not adopt this cultural trend.
- The differential findings from Illinois versus Georgia and Ohio give no further support to the theory of Mesoamerican influence.

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