

Washington Matthews

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# Navajo Silversmiths

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## **Navajo Silversmiths**

*Second Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the  
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1880-1881,  
Government Printing Office, Washington, 1883, pages 167-178*

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Minden jog fenntartva!

Among the Navajo Indians there are many smiths, who sometimes forge iron and brass, but who work chiefly in silver. When and how the art of working metals was introduced among them I have not been able to determine; but there are many reasons for supposing that they have long possessed it; many believe that they are not indebted to the Europeans for it. Doubtless the tools obtained from American and Mexican traders have influenced their art. Old white residents of the Navajo country tell me that the art has improved greatly within their recollection; that the ornaments made fifteen years ago do not compare favorably with those made at the present time; and they attribute this change largely to the recent introduction of fine files and emery-paper. At the time of the Conquest the so-called civilized tribes of Mexico had attained considerable skill in the working of metal, and it has been inferred that in the same period the sedentary tribes of New Mexico also wrought at the forge. From either of these sources the first smiths among the Navajos may have learned their trade; but those who have seen the beautiful gold ornaments made by the rude Indians of British Columbia and Alaska, many of whom are allied in language to the Navajos, may doubt that the latter derived their art from a people higher in culture than themselves.