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SIXTEENTH CENTURY SPANISH BEADS

by Marvin T. Smith

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief description of early Spanish trade beads which are important time markers on protohistoric archaeological sites.

This paper will briefly describe several important types of glass beads that can serve as valuable time markers for dating archaeological sites. These are the bead types traded by the Spanish long before the French or English entered the Southeast. Very few of these beads have been reported from Mississippi; they are more numerous in Alabama and Arkansas. By presenting this paper, I hope that more of these beads will be recognized in collections from Mississippi, thus extending our knowledge of their distribution. The beads will be discussed under three time periods: 1500-1560, 1560-1580, and 1580-1630. These date brackets are not absolute, but are approximations based on accumulated knowledge of the distribution of these bead types over the Southeast. All the bead types discussed are shown in Figure 1. Additional information can be obtained from the references listed at the end of each section.

1500-1560

This is the period of initial Spanish exploration in the Southeast. Beads of this period found in archaeological sites would come from two sources: occasional contacts by Spanish ships in the Gulf of Mexico or the expedition of Hernando de Soto. To date, no beads of this period are known from Mississippi. Beads of the earliest period include varieties of the types Nueva Cadiz Plain, Nueva Cadiz Twisted, and chevron beads (Figure 1). Nueva Cadiz beads are long, tubular beads with a square cross section.

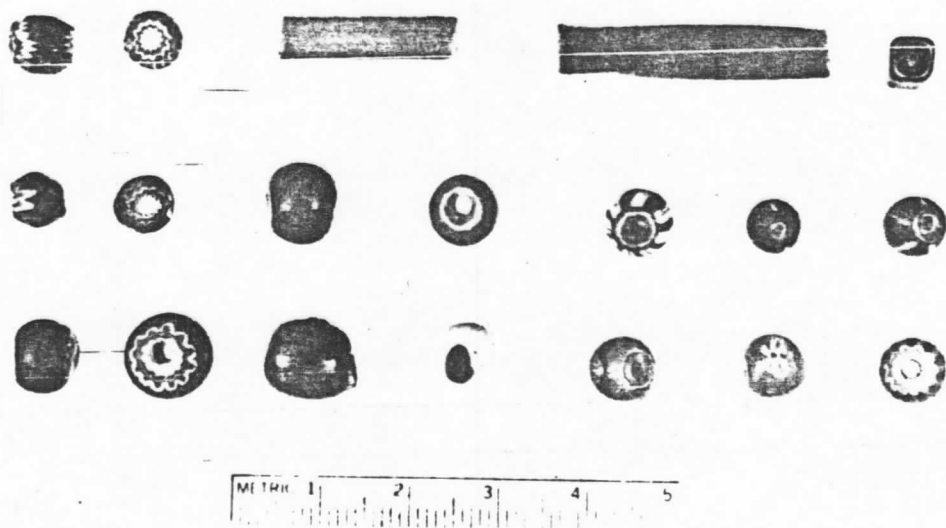


Figure 1. Early Spanish Glass Beads

Row 1. Early sixteenth century beads

Faceted chevron side view; chevron end view (note seven layers); Nueva Cadiz Plain; Nueva Cadiz Twisted; Nueva Cadiz end view showing square cross-section and three layers.

Row 2. Ca. 1560-1580

Faceted chevron; faceted chevron; turquoise blue bead; three-layer (blue/white/blue) bead; three layer (blue/white/blue) bead with white stripes; translucent navy blue bead with two red and two white alternating stripes; translucent blue bead with five white stripes.

Row 3. Ca. 1580-1630

Tumbled chevron side view; tumbled chevron end view (five layers); turquoise blue bead; white eye bead with blue and white eyes; multi-layered (blue/white/blue) eye bead with red and white eyes; turquoise blue eye bead with red and white eyes; green tumbled chevron end view.

Scale in centimeters.

They are usually made up of three concentric layers of glass, although single layer beads are also known. These beads most often have an outer layer of turquoise blue, a thin white middle layer, and a dark blue core layer. Navy blue, green, and colorless examples are also known.

Chevron beads, known for their concentric layers molded in zig zag patterns, are also common in the early period. These early chevron style beads usually have seven layers of glass (outside to inside: navy blue, white, red, white, green, white, and green) and have facets ground on the ends. The green layers can be colorless or blue. Beads of this type have been recovered at the Parkin Mound in Arkansas and at Bear Point, Alabama.

Marvin Smith and Mary Elizabeth Good are currently completing a book on 120 varieties of beads of this early period for the Cottonlandia Museum in Greenwood, Mississippi. This museum has an excellent collection of these early beads on display.

(Fairbanks 1968; Smith and Good in press)

1560-1580

This is a transitional period in terms of bead styles. The long, tubular Nueva Cadiz beads drop out of the trade about 1560. The seven layered, faceted chevron beads continue throughout the period, although some chevrons with fewer than seven layers have been reported. Spherical necklace beads, about five mm in diameter, become the standard. Turquoise blue beads are most common, and navy blue, green, and purple beads, as well as striped beads (usually blue and white) are common. Some of these beads have the multiple layers characteristic of the beads of the earlier period. Eye beads, that is necklace beads with circular impressed decoration, also appear at this time.

(Griffin and Smith 1948; Smith 1977a, 1977b, in press; Smith and Good in press)

1580-1630

During this period, there is a shift in chevron bead styles. The seven layered, faceted chevron beads of the previous periods are replaced by spherical, tumbled chevron beads of five or rarely four layers. These chevrons can have blue or green exterior layers. Eye beads reach their greatest popularity at this time, only to disappear by about 1630. Spherical beads as described for the previous period are still most common; the chevron beads and eye beads are quite rare, and may be limited to one or two examples per necklace.

In Florida, this is the period of increasing missionary activity. It is likely that beads and other European trade goods reached the interior Southeast, including Mississippi, from the Spanish who were beginning to be increasingly active in Florida. Such trade was no doubt carried on by Indian middlemen.

(Smith 1977b)

Beads can be very useful time markers for the archaeologist. We are still refining our bead chronology. Any finds of these important early bead types should be reported to professional archaeologists in the state, or contact Marvin T. Smith, Department of Anthropology, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 36211.

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EVERYMAN'S GUIDE TO ARROWHEADS: PART I

by Samuel O. Brookes

ABSTRACT

This paper is offered to aid the layman in classifying projectile points. There is no attempt to name and date individual point types, but rather to identify certain combinations of features which place them in gross time periods. Rough classification of this kind should make it possible to identify the components present on any site yielding projectile points.