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"EYE" BEADS IN THE SOUTHEAST

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"Eye" beads are glass trade beads decorated with circular elements, or "eyes," usually of millefiori cane. In the northeastern United States, where eye beads are more plentiful, they are often referred to as "flush-eye" beads, since the decorative eyes are usually marvered flush into the surface of the bead. While eye beads were made in the ancient Mediterranean world (Eisen 1916), no serious study of them has been made in the New World. This paper will discuss eye beads in the southeastern U. S. of the Early Historic Period (pre 1670), when eye beads are most common and can be used as valuable chronological indicators. This paper will assemble the present evidence for the dating of Early Historic eye type beads and present a classification scheme that is also expandable to include eye beads of later periods. Finally, a catalog of eye type beads in the Southeast is presented, along with distributional data.

Eye Beads as Chronological Indicators

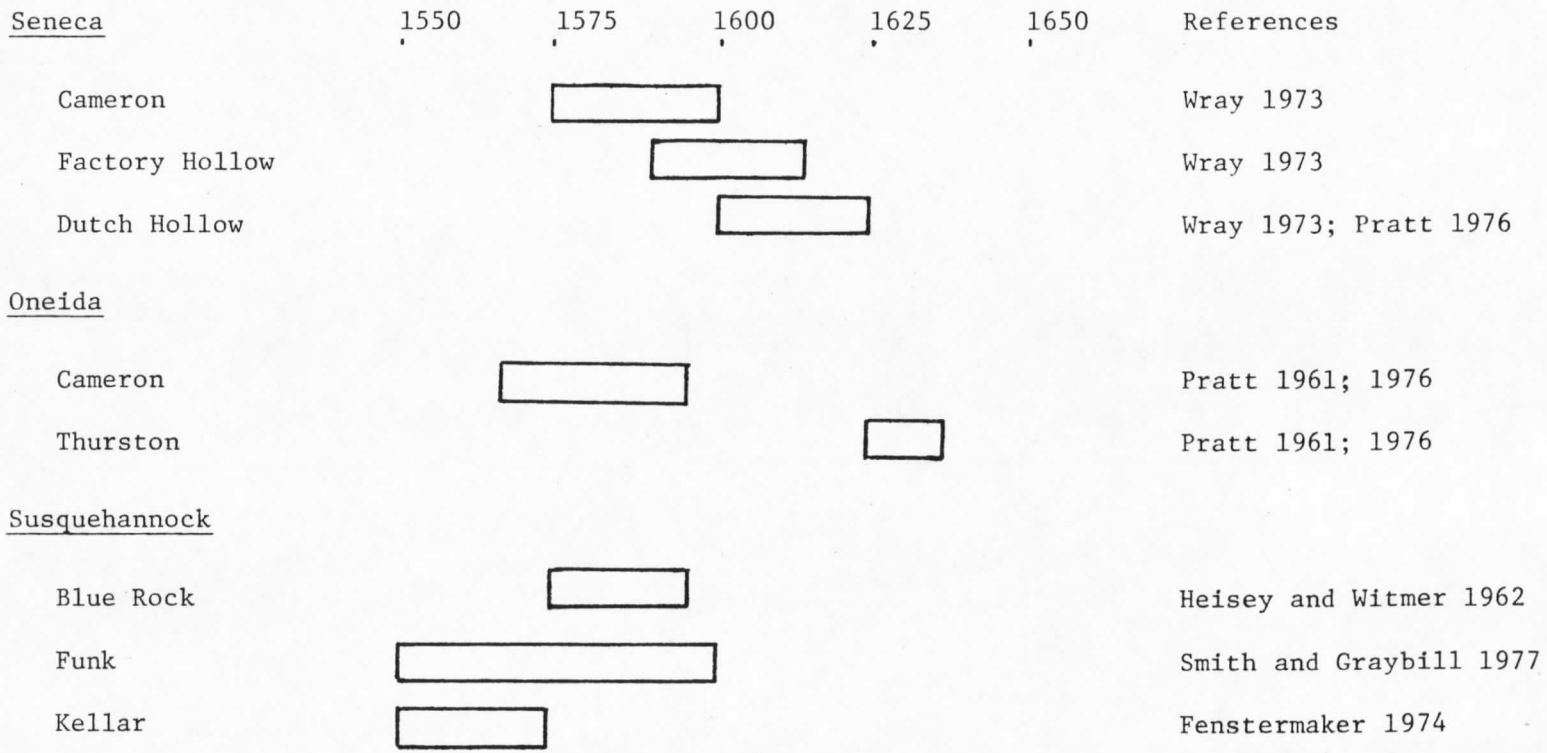
While different varieties of eye beads are known, all appear to date from the same, rather narrow time span, since sites producing eye beads frequently produce several varieties. They have been found in South America, the southwestern U. S., the southeastern U. S., and in the northeastern U. S. Indeed they appear to constitute a horizon style, and as such can provide excellent chronological control for contact period Indian sites. It is the contention of the author that eye beads were traded in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Since eye beads have not been found on historically documented sites, their dating rests on seriation studies of historic sites in the northeastern U. S., their association with other European objects, their absence from certain sites of known date, and inferences derived from studies of their distribution. First, external (non-southeastern) evidence for the dating of eye beads is discussed, then the internal evidence for dating eye beads in the Southeast is presented.

Perhaps the best line of evidence for the dating of eye beads comes from established archaeological sequences of Seneca, Oneida, and Susquehannock archaeological sites in the northeastern U. S. These towns moved periodically and thus allow rather accurate seriation of artifact types, including glass trade beads, even though exact calendar dates of occupation are unknown. Sites that produce eye beads are listed in Table I along with the published estimates of the occupation spans. Estimates for most sites range from A.D. 1575 - 1600, with a few sites believed to be occupied as early as 1550, and at least one as late as 1637. The mean date for the sites is 1592.3, and only two sites have an occupation believed to originate in the seventeenth century. The Late Thruston Site, 1625 - 1637, has produced eye beads, but their presence may be the result of heirlooming (Pratt, personal communication). Omitting the Thruston site dates, the mean date would be 1586.8. Thus the evidence from the Northeast is reasonably consistent with a sixteenth century placement for eye beads.

TABLE 1

Eye Beads in the Northeast



European evidence, although circumstantial, is none of the less also suggestive of a sixteenth century placement for eye beads. Karklins (1975) has made an extensive study of the glass bead industry in Holland, and has produced evidence that beads were manufactured there as early as 1597. In his study of 550 classifiable glass beads representing 226 types, no eye beads were present. Since Venetian craftsmen were imported, it is assumed that the technical expertise to produce eye beads was present. This suggests to this author that eye beads had gone out of style by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Obviously, a larger sample of Dutch beads would be desirable.

Finally, one South American site has produced eye beads. At the Valentim cemetery (Site A-4 in Meggers and Evans 1957: 58-59), two eye beads were found along with a Nueva Cadiz Plain bead. This latter bead type is known to date from the earliest periods of the Spanish conquest of the New World (Fairbanks 1967). This lends additional credance to a sixteenth century placement for eye type beads. The general absence of eye beads from Spanish contact sites that produce abundant Nueva Cadiz type beads suggests that these distinct styles overlapped very little in time, and that eye beads are generally later in time.

Evidence for dating of eye type beads from the Southeast is also circumstantial. In Florida, at least three burial mounds and one other site have produced eye beads. These sites include the Mulberry Mound (Smith 1956), Seven Oaks (Smith 1956; Fairbanks, personal communication), Philip Mound (Benson 1967), and Bishop's Hammock (Williams & Mowers 1979). The Philip mound collection also contained the earlier Nueva Cadiz types. Seventeenth century Spanish mission sites in Florida have not produced eye beads (Penman 1972; Boyd, Smith, and Griffin 1951; Deagan 1972). This suggests that eye beads date to the late sixteenth century, since I suspect that the use of burial mounds decreased rapidly in the late sixteenth century with the arrival of Spanish missionaries. Again, the sample size of published beads from the missions is small. Increased samples could alter the interpretation.

In the interior Southeast, eye beads have been found in one site in Georgia, two sites in Tennessee, and three sites in Alabama (See Fig. 1 and below). Elsewhere I have interpreted the distribution of these beads in the interior as suggestive of trade or gifts from the DeLuna expedition of 1560 and the Pardo expedition of 1566-1568 (Smith 1976; 1977). These beads invariably form portions of necklaces of a variety of glass beads, and we know specifically that the Pardo expedition distributed necklaces as gifts (DePratter and Smith 1979). At the Bradford Ferry site in Alabama, eye beads have been found in direct association with Clarkesdale bells, a type which Brain (1975) believes dates to the mid-sixteenth century

Eye beads apparently went out of style in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Although a few eye type beads with drawn cane bodies are known from late seventeenth or early eighteenth century contexts in New York (Wray 1973) and South Carolina (Storey n.d.: Type 198), these beads are unlike those I have attributed to the sixteenth century. The colors of the New York specimens are different, and the South Carolina

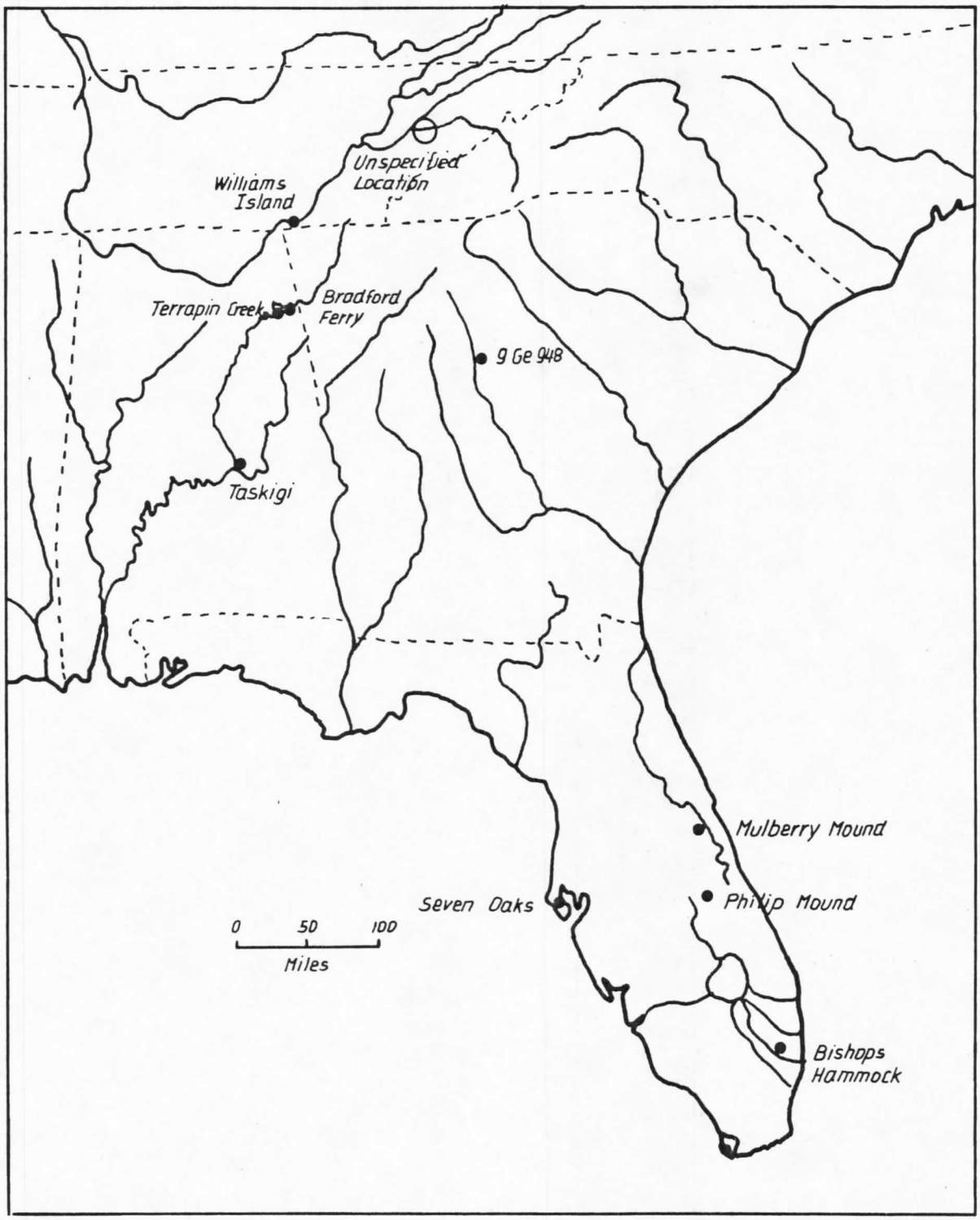


FIGURE 1. Distribution of Eye Beads in the Southeast.

unique specimen is a long tubular bead with a stripe and an eye. Eye beads again become popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but these types are constructed of wire wound bead body with added eyes, and are readily distinguishable from the early types. It thus appears that drawn cane type eye beads can be used as excellent time markers for the last half of the sixteenth century. Perhaps excavation at Santa Elena or St. Augustine will provide beads in an historically dated context to confirm this analysis.

Classification of Eye Beads

The classification of eye beads is based largely on the bead classification scheme devised by Lyle Stone (1974) with a few changes. Definitions of all terminology utilized to describe manufacturing techniques and bead strucuture can be found in Stone (1974), except for the Fused Class described below. Figure 2 graphically illustrates the four level classification scheme.

At the Class level, eye beads are divided according to the manufacturing techniques of the main bead body. Class I contains all beads formed by the drawn cane technique. These beads are invariably tumbled. Class II contains all beads formed by the wirewound technique. Class III is newly defined to include beads constructed entirely of millefiori canes fused together into a tubular mass and is called Fused beads. Class II and III beads are common on sites of the late eighteenth through twentieth centuries and will not be discussed further in this paper. Class III beads are typically found in the nineteenth century African trade.

The next level of classification, the Series, refers to the structure of the body of the bead. Series A refers to beads of complex construction, that is, beads with bodies of simple construction with impressed decoration. Series B refers to beads with composite construction, that is, beads with bodies of several concentric layers of different colors of glass (compound construction) with impressed decorations.

The third level of classification, the Type, refers to the type of eye decoration. Eye types (Fig. 3) include the Sunburst eye, which appears like a flower, five pointed star, or dot surrounded by rays; the Circular Eye, made up of concentric circles of two or more colors of glass; the Chevron Eye, made up of multilayered, toothed chevron cane; the Star Eye, consisting of a central star surrounded by rays; and the Dot Eye, made up of simple monochrome dots. This latter eye type has not been observed in Early Historic samples, but is included for later use in classifying late historic samples. Other types of eyes may eventually be noted, and can easily be added to the list of types. It should be noted that virtually all early historic period eye beads have three equally spaced eyes per bead.

Finally at the Variety level, beads are classified according to color.

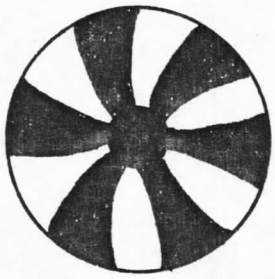
FIGURE 2

EYE BEAD CLASSIFICATION

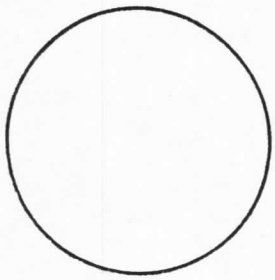
CLASS	SERIES	TYPE	VARIETY
(Manufacturing Technique)	(Structure)	(Eye)	(Specific Color Combinations)
I. Drawn Cane		Sunburst	
	A. Complex	Star	
II. Wirewound		Dot	
	B. Composite	Circular	
III. Fused		Chevron	

FIGURE 3

Eye Types



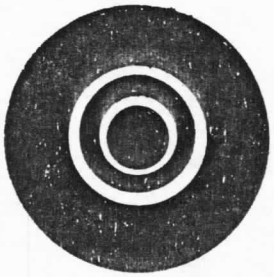
Sunburst



Dot

Star

Star



Circular

Chevron

Catalog of Eye Beads from the Southeast

Class I, Series A, Type--Sunburst, Variety 1. Turquoise blue body with red and white eyes (Fig. 4). This type is found at the Taskigi site, Bradford Ferry site, and Terrapin Creek site in Alabama (Smith 1976; 1977) and the Philip Mound in Florida (Benson 1967). Two Beads of this type were apparently found by C. B. Moore at the Mulberry Mound in Florida (H. Smith 1956), but the description by Hale Smith does not allow a positive identification. This is the most common eye bead in the Southeast.

Class I, Series A, Type--Sunburst, Variety 2. As above but also has white stripes parallel to the perforation between eyes (Fig. 4). This type was found at site 9Ge948 in Georgia (Smith 1979), the Philip Mound in Florida (Benson 1967), and at the Bradford Ferry site in Alabama (Smith 1976).

Class I, Series A, Type--Sunburst, Variety 3. Translucent turquoise blue body with two eyes consisting of a black dot surrounded by red and white "rays." Only one bead of this variety is known. It was found with a burial on Williams Island, Tennessee (Smith 1976).

Class I, Series A, Type--Circular, Variety 1. White body with three blue and white eyes (Fig. 4). This bead was found in the Southeast at the Bradford Ferry and Terrapin Creek sites in Alabama (Smith 1976; 1977). This specific type also occurs in the northeast at the Seneca Cameron site (Wray 1973) and the Susquehannock Blue Rock (Heisey and Witmer 1962) and Funk sites (Smith and Graybill 1977). This is another relatively common eye bead type in the Southeast. The presence of this bead in the Northeast and Southeast suggests a Venetian origin to me, since Venice was the major bead producer in the sixteenth century.

Class I, Series A, Type--Circular, Variety 2. White body as above but with eyes made up of three concentric rings (inside to outside) of red, white, and blue glass. This type has been reported from a site near a tributary of the Tennessee River east of Knoxville (Gene Wright, personal communication).

Class I, Series A, Type--Chevron, Variety 1. Opaque navy blue olive shaped body with four chevron eyes composed of four concentric zig-zag layers of glass (inside to outside): blue, white, red, and white. This bead was recovered on Williams Island from the same burial mentioned above (Smith 1976).

Class I, Series A, Type--Chevron, Variety 2. Opaque medium blue olive shaped bead with four, unequally spaced chevron eyes composed of concentric layers of glass (inside to outside): translucent green, opaque white, brick red, and white; with red, white, and blue stripes placed in the teeth. A final layer of clear glass covers the circumference of the eye cane (Fig. 4). This bead was found at the Seven Oaks site, Florida (Smith 1956, Fairbanks, personal communication). A bead which appears similar was found at the Bishop's Hammock site, Broward County, Florida (Williams and Mowers 1972: 25).

Left to Right:	Class I,	Series A,	Type - Sunburst,	Variety 1
	I	A	Sunburst	2
	I	A	Circular	1
	I	A	Chevron	2

FIGURE 4. Selected eye beads from the Southeast.

Class I, Series B, Type--Sunburst, Variety 1. Compound layered bead body of translucent blue over opaque white over a translucent blue core. The eyes are red and white sunburst eyes and are identical to those on Class I, Series A, Type--Sunburst, Variety 1 above. This variety has been found in the Southeast at the Terrapin Creek site in Alabama (Smith 1976; 1977).

Conclusions

Eye beads are excellent chronological indicators for the second half of the sixteenth century. To date, eight varieties of eye beads have been identified from ten sites in the southeastern U. S. The author is interested in collecting additional information on the distribution of early bead forms.

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