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Keeping a Crooked Sixpence: Coin Magic and Religion in the Colonial Chesapeake

ABSTRACT

This article explores the probability that a silver sixpence, recovered at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex in St. Inigoes, Maryland, represents an everyday item that had supernatural significance for the individual(s) who once owned it. Between 1637 and 1942, the land that now comprises Webster Field had been home to a Jesuit settlement. Throughout this period, coin magic was practiced in the British Isles, and silver sixpences incorporated many of the symbolic properties that made them useful as protective amulets, emblems of vow-making, and other less defined representations of luck. The presence of such a coin at St. Inigoes is indicative of the interplay between folk traditions and church-sanctioned religious objects employed at the settlement, and coin-bending practices are examined through archaeological finds in the Chesapeake.

Introduction

Archaeology is a discipline that is often able to provide concrete information and a tangible connection to events that took place at a particular site: what kind of house was constructed, what food people ate, where the discard pile was, etc. In order to really understand a culture, however, the discipline must look beyond events and consider what people thought about the sites they created. Belief systems may not always manifest through material culture, and when they do, the items involved may be everyday objects that acquired power in some way. In such cases, a great deal of historical documentation is needed to justify interpretations linked with the supernatural. For example, archaeologists are generally comfortable saying that a horseshoe was used to shoe one's horse, but an exceptional context would be needed for an analyst to argue that a horseshoe was used primarily as a lucky talisman. There is plenty of documentation of "lucky horseshoes," but the magical nature of the object is treated as conjectural—if mentioned at all—while the horse-related function is fact. Many ordinary items had magical applications though, and these amulets and talismans offered real emotional benefits to those who believed in their power.

How many times have archaeologists had the vague thought: "There's something going on here," only to remain mum in the report about that "something" for lack of evidence? It is too impractical to consider every potential supernatural use for every ordinary object, when folk beliefs vary so much and speculation can go on indefinitely. And yet, there is something fundamental and important missing from archaeological literature if the default interpretation is always the most obvious—and most boring—one. When there are documented cases of mundane objects involved in supernatural pursuits, and such spiritual functions are plausible within the context of the site studied, then there is no reason *not* to explore the fascinating idiosyncrasies of magical material culture.

As a case in point, during construction at the World Trade Center site in New York City, the discovery in mud of a truncated, water-logged ship afforded an opportunity to consider coin magic in sailing vessels. The ship had been a small Atlantic trading vessel in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was deposited in early-19th-century fill as waterways were transformed into dry land for development. In July 2010, the ship was transported from New York to the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory for cleaning and stabilization, as study and analysis of the vessel progressed. As one of the curators who assisted in this effort, the author discovered a copper-alloy coin while cleaning one of the muddy central timbers. Lucky coins associated with ships date back thousands of years, at least to ancient Greece, and the discovery of this coin between the stern and keel post indicates that it was part of the longstanding tradition of placing coins in strategic locations in ships as they were built (Tarabay 2010). Although the World Trade Center ship's coin was too heavily corroded for a definitive identification, its copper-alloy composition points to a low denomination, such as a penny. This suggests that as currency

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it was not a precious coin, but it was valuable as a talisman that was used to solicit safe and prosperous sea travel. The placement of the coin gave it the context needed for its magical function to be understood.

It can be more difficult, however, to understand an artifact's magical uses if there is no specific context to point to known historical practices. In an effort to take on the challenge of interpreting ordinary objects of magic with limited context, the following narrative explores the potential supernatural significance of a 1596 English sixpence that was recovered in 1984 during a controlled surface collection at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex in St. Mary's County, Maryland (Figure 1) (Pogue and Leeper 1984). Coins are well-documented magical objects and have often been examined by archaeologists for their significance as amulets, particularly if they are pierced or otherwise altered (Singleton 1995:130; Stine et al. 1996:60; Davidson 2004; McKitrick 2009). The Webster Field sixpence has damage suggesting that it was once bent into thirds. It is unlikely that the fold lines resulted from post-depositional trauma, because the lines along the folds are more worn than the rest of the coin, and none of the wear appears to be the result of trowel or plow damage. It was not recovered in a bent state, however, so someone seems to have flattened it before it entered the archaeological record (Rivers Cofield 2010). This presents an interpretive question: why would someone keep a bent sixpence long enough for it to show wear, and then flatten the sixpence again before it entered the archaeological record?

Archaeological context at Webster Field fails to narrow the possibilities for interpretation. The property had been continuously owned by Jesuits from 1637 to 1942, so it was most likely one of the Jesuits' laborers, tenants, or students who was responsible for depositing the coin at the site. The sixpence was a surface find, so it could have been lost at any point in the 300-year occupation of the site by Jesuits, and its meaning may have changed several times over the period of use. Similar bent coins have been found on other sites in the colonial Chesapeake (Kelso and Straube 1997; Mallios 1999, 2000; Karen Shriver 2012, elec. comm.), and these are useful for comparison, but the multivalent nature of coin symbolism makes it unwise to assume direct relationships between the uses of these artifacts across sites. Some coins have narrow dated contexts, but the Webster Field coin does not. The many applications of silver sixpences from the 17th to 19th centuries are therefore explored here, and then comparative material is examined to look at the wider significance of such objects in the region.

The Many Uses for Silver Sixpences

Silver coins, and sixpences in particular, were associated with a variety of magical protections and practices well before European settlement of the Chesapeake. Such coins could supposedly cure illness, ward off witches, strengthen prayers, divine the future, or simply bring good luck. They have been associated with rituals such as marriage and birth, and depending upon the significance bestowed on them, they were curated and passed down by individuals who valued their magical properties (Davidson 2004:30). The symbols encompassed by sixpences can be secular, magical, and religious in nature, resulting in a multilayered object with widespread applications in human ritual.

The elements that might imbue sixpences with supernatural properties are:

1. The silver metal itself, which could act as a protective charm, or in some cases be used as an offensive weapon against evil forces;
2. The cross on the shield, which is an important element of the charm incorporating both Christian and pre-Christian symbolism, such as the Celtic cross;
3. The depiction of a monarch, which may be associated with healing powers;
4. The alteration of the coin by bending or perforation; and
5. The number represented in the coin's denomination. Six is a multiple of three, and three is a symbolically powerful number associated with sacred concepts, such as the Holy Trinity (Augé, this issue).

The combination of these elements on silver sixpences increases their symbolic and supernatural value. Documented applications for the coins are therefore abundant, and the following paragraphs outline a selection of possible uses for sixpences that can be found in the historical

FIGURE 1. This silver sixpence depicts a crowned Queen Elizabeth I with a Tudor rose behind her head on the obverse, and a shield with a cross through it on the reverse and the date 1596. The legends are not entirely legible because of wear; they contain Latin phrases having to do with the authority of the queen (obverse, *top*), and the saying, "I have made God my helper" (reverse, *bottom*). Differential wear, bend marks, and a small crack indicate that it was once folded into thirds over the center and retained in that condition for some time. However, the coin seems to have been flattened again prior to deposition (Rivers Cofield 2010). (Photo by Cait Shaffer, 2009; courtesy Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Webster Field Annex, Naval District Washington.)

record. These examples of coin magic are discussed in the past tense because they represent recorded history, but this is by no means meant to imply that the traditions have died. Even though sixpences are no longer minted as a form of English currency, people who have ever said a little rhyme in their heads while picking up a "lucky" penny are aware that coin magic still exists, and many of the practices outlined below continue in some modified way.

Currency

Silver sixpences obviously began life as a form of currency. While pounds of tobacco were the primary means of exchange in 17th-century Maryland and Virginia, many coins have been recovered archaeologically, as have weights that were used to verify the values of different kinds of coins (Kelso and Straube 1997; Chaney and King 1999; Mallios 1999, 2000; Sperling and Galke 2001). In fact, one such weight was recovered at Webster Field, indicating that there was a need to verify coin values there, despite the predominance of tobacco as currency until the 18th century (Sperling and Galke 2001). It is not unreasonably rare for coins to remain in circulation for 100 years or more, so the anomalous age of the 1596 sixpence at Webster Field may not be as significant as its condition. The alteration of the coin by bending was a deliberate act that symbolically removed the coin from circulation, though the monetary value of the coin was in the silver, and that remained unchanged. The Webster Field coin had been bent into thirds for a prolonged period, but it is possible that it was re-flattened when its owner needed some fast cash.

Coin Bending and Prayers to Saints

By the time this coin was minted, bent coins had a centuries-long history of use in sacred ritual. The bending process is believed to represent the blending of Christian worship and pre-Christian practices that include the "killing" of an object to be devoted to a deity (Merrifield 1987; McKitrick 2009). As early as 1307, it was considered "the English custom" to bend a coin as part of a vow to a particular saint. According to Merrifield (1987:91), the "coin was bent, usually by doubling it over across the middle, in the name of the saint who was invoked, and this constituted a vow to take it on a pilgrimage to his shrine and to present it there." The practice was employed in times of crisis, such as stormy weather while at sea. Bent coins purportedly turned back flames and cured the sick. Most often, they were bent over the affected area of an injured or sick person. However, the practice was only effective if the exact coin bent at the time of crisis were taken on the promised pilgrimage (Merrifield 1987:91; Finucane 1995:8). Since no other coin would do, the tradition called for people to retain the bent coin until they could fulfill their promise.

This tradition fits well with anthropological literature on the meaning of sacrifice in religious rites. While many Western interpreters are reluctant to view sacrifices to deities as utilitarian something-for-something exchanges, the assumption that gods are entitled to some form of tribute from humans seems to be a cultural universal (De Waal Malefijt 1968:209; Womack 2005:67). The offering generally needs to be something that is personally owned by the giver, that has value to the giver, and that is transferred voluntarily. Additionally, to emphasize the transfer of the offering, it is either destroyed or transformed (Firth 1996:93–95). In this case, the coins are bent not only to signify the promise of the pilgrimage, which is itself a sacrifice of time and effort on the part of the giver, but also to remove the coins from general circulation as currency. Their essence has been transferred to the saint in question, and any monetary value they once had has been symbolically negated by the applicant's choice to "spend" that coin on spiritual welfare, rather than on material goods or worldly services. Silver was an appropriate material for ritual repurposing in a capitalist market economy where currency represents a tangible manifestation of wealth. When coins are bent to strengthen a prayer, it is both a sacrifice and a ritual expression of belief in the saint that is the object of the appeal, and the ritual itself is intended to affect a specific positive result (De Waal Malefijt 1968:189).

Love and Marriage

The Protestant Reformation condemned the "cult of saints" as superstitious "popery," making the use of coins as sacrifices to these

intervening spirits taboo among the religiously educated. Merrifield (1987:92) suggests that coin bending did not die out, however, but instead took on new meaning as a vow made to loved ones on earth. He argues: "Bending a coin had always been regarded as a symbol of devotion and of a vow; when the worship of saints was condemned as idolatrous, it was re-directed to a secular purpose, and bent coins came to be used as love tokens" (Merrifield 1987:115–116). The practice of offering a bent coin as a vow of love emerged in the Elizabethan period and continued into the 18th century (Merrifield 1987:115–116). A very common marriage ritual in 17th- and early-18th-century England involved an exchange of significant tokens, such as a ring, a bent coin, or a coin broken in two so that each party could keep half (Stone 1992:19; Cressy 1997:241).

A bent 1708 Portuguese 1,000 reis gold coin recovered in 2011 at Ferryland in Newfoundland, Canada, was probably used as such a love token (Gaulton and Tuck 2012). As a gold coin, it lacks the protective symbolism associated with silver, but its sacrifice to a beloved one is all the more potent for its high monetary value. Gold symbolizes wealth, and the bent gold coin symbolizes the transfer of wealth or sharing of wealth with the recipient.

Although this practice is not supernatural per se, it may explain how coins came to be associated with weddings as symbols of luck. Today the ring is the symbol most strongly associated with marriage vows, but coins were a part of wedding superstitions well into the 19th century, as indicated by the original ending of the rhyme that became popular in Victorian England: "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue, and a Silver Sixpence in her Shoe" (Choron and Choron 2010:50). This tradition incorporates a lucky coin that can double as a symbol of wished-for prosperity. Many variations exist for using coins in weddings. One of the more unusual practices was recorded in County Leitrim, Ireland, in the 19th century: "The groomsman used also to give the groom a crooked sixpence, and the latter, having killed a magpie, slit the bird's tongue with the coin, and, leaving it therein, buried the bird with a horse's shoe under the hearth iron. This was done for good luck" (Duncan 1894:187).

The coins as symbols of love and luck also infiltrated non-marital exchanges. For example, a letter published in a 1791 newspaper includes a description of a young woman who always wore a pierced bent sixpence tied on a ribbon around her neck because her brother gave it to her as a keepsake (*Dunlaps' American Daily Advertiser* 1791). Additionally, coins bent into an S shape were among the items commonly dropped off with children at the Foundling Hospital of London from ca. 1739 to 1800. The hospital's policy was that the children be left there anonymously to give them a chance at a fresh start in life. Since names were not exchanged, mothers were permitted to leave strips of fabric, ribbons, medals, and other unique offerings that were retained and cataloged in case the parent returned (Bright and Clark 2011). Coins left with the infants could have served as symbols of love or a vow that the parent would return.

The monetary value of sixpences was integral to their influence as sacrificial objects and gifts, but when the buying power of the sixpence declined in the 19th century, its potency declined. One 1843 newspaper story offers an anecdote about how sixpences fell out of favor as engagement symbols in Scotland:

> In some of the country parts of Scotland, a custom prevails of young men giving their watches in trust to young women for whom they have declared their attachment. The watch is kept carried in the bosom of the fair one until the anxious couple are united in the bonds of wedlock, when, as a matter of course, the pledge of sincerity is given up to the original owner. This is imagined to be an infinitely better plan for securing the fidelity of sweethearts than that of breaking a sixpence. A watch is a valuable and highly-prized article. It is worth at least, a couple pounds, and the loss of that sum by an individual in an humble condition of life is a very serious matter. (*Pittsfield Sun* 1843)

Pocket watches were the more valuable possession, and therefore offered young women more security than a sixpence. While the objects exchanged over time have changed, the watches and sixpences both acted as a type of collateral. In this sense, they are similar to the bejeweled engagement rings used today as the traditional down payment on marital fidelity.

Witchcraft Protections

A decidedly supernatural application of bent silver coins was their use as apotropaic amulets that protected dairies from the effects of witchcraft (Merrifield 1987; Milnes 2007; McKitrick 2009).

Harm to domesticated animals, including dairy cows, was among the most common charges associated with accusations of witchcraft, and as colonial dairy workers would not have fully comprehended the effects of bacteria, temperature, and the environment on milk- and butter-making, the dairy was ever in need of protection against unpredictable forces (Macfarlane 1970:108; Milnes 2007; Bever 2008:165). According to Merrifield (1987:162), the "difficulty often encountered in butter-making was of course attributed to malevolent witchcraft, and in Yorkshire dairymaids kept a crooked sixpence handy as a 'churn-spell' for dropping in cream that obstinately refused to become butter." In 1880s Scotland, bent silver coins were still used for this purpose, and they were preserved with great care over long periods of time (Davidson 2004:30).

The coins could either be dropped in the churn, placed under the churn, heated and introduced to milk, or even buried in the four corners of the dairy (Duncan 1893:180; Milnes 2007). The concept also traveled to North America, particularly with immigrants of German descent. Dropping a silver coin in the churn continued as a protective practice in parts of Pennsylvania until at least the 1920s, and a West Virginia woman who was interviewed in the year 2000 used a silver 50¢ piece to break the spell when she believed that witches had cursed her milk (Kenyan 1929:173; Milnes 2007:139). Of great importance in the West Virginia case was the inscription: In God We Trust on the coin, which increased its power, perhaps in the same way that the cross increased the protective properties of sixpences (Milnes 2007:139).

For the witch that simply would not be repelled by the mere presence of a sixpence, however, silver coins were recommended as ammunition. The most frequent appearance of this technique in folklore seems to be associated with pesky witches who disguised themselves as hares as they executed their malicious plans (Nicholson 1897; Begg 1945:274–275). Such coins were effective when no stone or regular bullet was able to bring about the demise of a hare-witch. One story recorded at the Scottish Isle of Skye in 1922 reported:

> A man made several unsuccessful attempts to shoot a hare but always failed. In his dilemma he consulted a wise man, who advised him to take a sixpence for the purpose. The man followed this advice and the next time he did not fail. But instead of a hare his own wife lay dead before him. (MacCulloch 1922:213)

Coins as witch bullets could also be employed in the dairy. A 1915 record of Pennsylvania Dutch superstitions noted that silver was always considered an antidote against witchcraft, and shooting bewitched milk with a silver coin would dispel the evil (Fogel 1915:178). Such a technique offered both the psychological security of using an apotropaic device, and the cathartic release that must have resulted from shooting the source of frustration.

Healing

Countermagic was also employed in situations where one's own health was considered to have been compromised by a curse. Perhaps the most famous application of coins in healing was the affiliation of a touch-piece with the King's Evil, which encompassed maladies such as scrofula, carbuncles, and boils. Almost all English monarchs, from Edward the Confessor (d. 1066) to Queen Anne (d. 1714), offered "the King's cure," or healing by royal touch, to sufferers of these ailments (Thomas 1971:192–204). The healing touch was so popular that it was considered one of the measures by which legitimacy to the throne was determined. For example, the healing touch of Elizabeth I was "cited as proof that the Papal Bull of Excommunication had failed to take effect" (Thomas 1971:195), and when the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles II, plotted to make himself heir to the throne, his supporters published accounts of the miraculous healing powers he and his sister had shown in curing the King's Evil (Clark 1680; Harris 1681). Early rituals surrounding this practice included the gift of a coin to the sufferer as alms, and the sick were instructed to wear the blessed object around their necks until they were healed (Hills 1686:8). The gifted coin or touch-piece was widely considered a charm in which the curative nature of the royal touch was deposited (Thomas 1971:196). Those who believed in the healing power of the royal touch also took to "wearing royal rings and portraits as personal talismans" (Thomas 1971:195). By extension, coins that depicted monarchs might act as substitute medicine when the actual touch of the king or queen was not readily available, such as in a colony far from the royal family.

At some point in the 16th and 17th centuries, any individual who happened to be a seventh son also took on a reputation for healing powers, and these genealogical rarities also incorporated sixpences into their curative rituals (Thomas 1971:200; Parman 1977:108). Variations of the practice persisted at least into the 20th century. For example, in 1902, folklore in Ross-Shire, Scotland, held that

> a sixpence obtained from a seventh son is supposed to be a cure for scrofula, boils, and carbuncles. The seventh son blesses the sixpence, dips it three times in water, this water the patient must drink; this is repeated three days in succession, and the sixpence is suspended round the patient's neck. (MacDonald 1903:371)

Even as late as the 1970s, similar traditions persisted in the islands of Scotland's Outer Hebrides, though by that time some cultures dropped the need for the seventh son altogether, and instead only required "silver water" in which certain coins had been immersed (Gregor 1888:264; Parman 1977:108–109). This kind of beneficent magic was largely driven by the desire for cures and healing, and the line between magic and folk medicine was a porous one. Controversy existed about what was a true cure and what was merely superstitious ritual or witchcraft (Bever 2008).

Infant Gifts

By the 19th century it was common for sixpences to be involved in certain gifting traditions surrounding the birth of a new baby (Brown 1910; Carrick 1929). Callers customarily brought a newborn infant a present of "a new-laid hen's egg, a small packet of salt, and a sixpence when paying a visit to the newly-made mother" (Carrick 1929:279). According to Carrick (1929:279), the silver sixpence was then employed to divine the child's future personality: "The coin was placed in the infant's right hand; if it was grasped and held it was a sign of tightfistedness; if held loosely, of generosity; if it fell to the ground, of prodigality." This tradition lasted into the 20th century in some rural areas. In 1946, one Worcestershire village resident reported that after a birth in the family, a local farmer brought a sixpence to the door and offered it, saying: "A tanner for the babby," and in north Worcestershire until the 1940s it remained common practice after a birth to leave a bowl in a conspicuous place for visitors to deposit the silver coins (Brown and Jones 1957:502).

Divination

The 19th-century use of sixpences to divine the future was not limited to predicting the personality of a baby. The tradition of cooking a sixpence into a cake, a Christmas pudding, or even creamed potatoes, often with a thimble and a ring, could foretell the destiny of those who partook of the meal (Courtney 1886; Frazer 1888; Rose 1920). The person who found the sixpence would die rich, the one who found the ring would marry within the year, and the person who found the thimble would never marry (Courtney 1886). Perhaps worse than the prediction of a lonely life, however, was to pull nothing from the cake at all, which in some areas was considered a sign of early death (Rose 1920).

Exploring Meaning

Given the documented uses of silver coins outlined above, it is difficult to assign any one definite meaning or application to the silver sixpence recovered at Webster Field. Once people recognized the sixpence as a source of power, that recognition led to the invention of new applications. In some cases the coin invoked power over the supernatural—as a sacrifice to a saint during a prayer, as a protective amulet to repel witchcraft and disease, as a divination tool, or as a beneficent magical object to attract luck—while other uses for the coins were more sentimental and earthbound expressions of love. In each case, the coin represented a significant symbol of some kind, and these symbols were not always mutually exclusive. As Wagner (1986:7) notes in his work on symbols in culture: "Innovative meanings are emergent—they preempt one another and draw force and credibility from one another." As social contexts and cosmology surrounding the coins changed, so too did their symbolic role within rituals of interaction with the supernatural or loved ones in society.

There are many possibilities for interpretation, but the context of the Webster Field coin is

too broad to be of much help in narrowing down its potential meanings. Unfortunately the coin was recovered during a surface survey of Webster Field in 1984, and though it was located in an area of the property that had been the ca. 1637–1750s core of the plantation, the possibility that it was lost during a later period of occupation cannot be eliminated (Pogue and Leeper 1984). A contextual study can therefore only be done by looking at the site as a whole and, for comparative purposes, similar bent coins found elsewhere.

Jesuits at St. Inigoes

The Jesuits of early colonial Maryland were among the initial colonists to travel there, and their primary goal was the conversion of American Indians (Beitzell 1976; Schroth 2007:23). The proprietors of Maryland, the Calverts, were Roman Catholics who encouraged Jesuit efforts, primarily because the Jesuits were eager to help make the Maryland colony a success. As openly Catholic politicians in Anglican England, the Calverts had to show loyalty to the king above all other masters, especially the pope, if they wished to keep their charter; so, they did not show blatant favoritism to the Jesuits. On the contrary, the Calverts had to appeal to both Protestants and Catholics in order to attract settlers to Maryland, and they dictated that the two groups should live together in a spirit of tolerance. The result was a majority Protestant population governed by a Catholic elite, and none of Lord Baltimore's policies could suppress the tension that this created (Krugler 2004). Rebellion erupted in 1644, and Jesuit and proprietary holdings were ransacked as Protestants took control of Maryland for about four years (Krugler 2004; Schroth 2007:26). Even after the Calverts regained power, Catholics had lost a great deal and remained in a tenuous position. Jesuits returned with a greater focus on the spiritual needs of the colonists and less attention to Indian missions (Schroth 2007:26).

The settlement at St. Inigoes was located on the St. Mary's River just south of the main Jesuit mission in Maryland's colonial capital, St. Mary's City. Members of the Society of Jesus founded a tobacco plantation there in 1637 to grow crops and raise profits in support of their missionary work (Beitzell 1976; Galke and Loney 2000). Catholicism was ever-present in plantation management decisions, and it seems that the Jesuits made an effort to ensure that the population of the plantation was comprised of practicing Catholics. In the 17th century, Jesuits specifically recruited Catholics as indentured servants, and they purchased contracts of indentured Catholics in Virginia, where they felt that these servants were living "among persons of the worst example" and were "utterly deprived of any spiritual means" (Curran 1988:61). When the shift from indentured to enslaved labor took place around the beginning of the 18th century, Jesuits showed concern for the spiritual needs of these laborers as well. Murphy (2001:34) notes that "their spiritual concern to treat the slaves as equal in dignity to all other baptized Catholics restrained the Jesuits, in conscience, from material exploitation of them." Such considerations trumped economic concerns for the Jesuit planters.

After another Protestant rebellion overthrew the Calvert proprietary in 1689, about 15 years of anti-Catholic legislation closed the St. Mary's City chapel and pushed Catholic worship into hiding. Jesuits remained in Maryland, but they retreated to private plantations, such as St. Inigoes, which served as bases for Catholic operations (Galke and Loney 2000).

Archaeology and Religious Artifacts at St. Inigoes

Several archaeological surveys and excavations have been conducted at St. Inigoes as a part of ongoing cultural resource management activities undertaken by the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex, which was established when the Navy acquired the property from the Society of Jesus in 1942. No full data recoveries have taken place, but Phase I and II excavations conducted in the 1980s and 1990s have revealed the changing layout of the plantation over time. Archaeologists located the initial 1637 plantation center, an early-18th-century manor, and an adjacent (unexcavated) cemetery (Pogue and Leeper 1984; Sperling and Galke 2001). Around 1750, the plantation center moved from one portion of the property to another, possibly because of depleted soils. An 1820 drawing of the plantation includes the newer manor house, as well as an orchard,

stable, weaver's house, windmill, blacksmithy, chapel, and other support buildings. This complex was the center of activity throughout the 19th century (Smolek 1983; Dinnel 1984).

Physically, St. Inigoes is typical of a 17th- to 19th-century Maryland plantation that sought to sustain itself and make profit through farming, so there is nothing particularly "Jesuit" about the plantation layout. By unearthing religious artifacts, however, archaeology has contributed to the understanding of the faith practiced at St. Inigoes. Among the objects recovered are a brass plaque for a crucifix, a cruciform silver reliquary pendant, and two medals depicting Jesuit saints (Figure 2). Such artifacts played an integral role in religious rites at the site. The silver cross pendant, for example, is designed to hold a sacred relic, such as a piece of the true cross or a bone associated with a saint. The 1642 annual letter from Maryland Jesuits to

FIGURE 2. Religious artifacts from Webster Field Annex archaeological projects. *Top left*: Plaque for a wooden crucifix reading: INRI, an abbreviation for the Latin phrase that means "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." *Bottom left*: Silver reliquary pendant designed to hold a sacred relic. *Center*: Medal depicting St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (*top*), and St. Francis Xavier, one of Loyola's followers and the patron saint of foreign missions (*bottom*). *Right*: Medal depicting St. Charles Borromeo, patron saint of catechumens, catechists, bishops, clergy, seminarians, spiritual directors, and apple orchards, and invoked for colic and intestinal problems (*top*) and an image of the Holy Spirit over five figures with the inscription: ROMA, which indicates that the medal was made in Rome, Italy (*bottom*). The latter image presumably represents the five Spanish saints canonized in 1622 (Rivers Cofield 2010). (Photos by Cait Shaffer, 2009; courtesy Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Webster Field Annex, Naval District Washington.)

Rome states that Father Andrew White, S.J., wore such a reliquary and used it to bring about a miraculous cure when a local Indian was speared in an ambush (Curran 1988:70–71). The saint medals also offer insight into the beliefs of the St. Inigoes inhabitants. One depicts two canonized founders of the Society of Jesus: Ignatius Loyola, patron saint of the Jesuits, and Francis Xavier, patron saint of foreign missions. The other medal honors St. Charles Borromeo, who is considered the patron saint of the clergy and Catholic educators, keepers of apple orchards, and is invoked for colic and intestinal problems. As spiritual leaders for the fledgling colony, Jesuits at St. Inigoes were heavily involved in Catholic education, and practitioners of the faith at various levels were present at different times. These artifacts represent church-approved material expressions of the Roman Catholic faith, but it is unknown whether the practice of folding a silver sixpence would have been acceptable at the Jesuit plantation. If a coin was bent as an offering to a saint, then this was clearly integrated into Catholic belief systems, but it does not necessarily follow that the Catholic clergy approved. The sixpence, therefore, offers a focal point for the examination of the interplay between church-sanctioned religious practice and folk magic.

Faith and Folklore

One of the most prominent arguments made by Protestant reformers was that the Roman Catholic Church promoted idolatry and superstition, which deviated from a true path to godliness. For example, Puritans tried to stamp out "the superstition of being touched for the healing of the King's Evil" in 1647 when they controlled England, and a Quaker whose sister had been touched by Charles II called the practice "the remains of a popish ceremony" (Thomas 1971:197). Even the less stringent Anglicans took issue with many non-sanctioned folk traditions. For example, Anglicans tended to credit Catholics with the existence of fairy lore. Fairy stories enjoyed widespread popularity in medieval England, and they too incorporated sixpences. Among other ideas, fairy lore encouraged maids and housewives to please fairies by keeping a tidy home and leaving an offering of milk and bread before going to bed at a proper hour each night (Manning, this issue). Fairies would only come if the household were in bed, and they would only leave rewards, most commonly a sixpence in one's shoe, if the home and hearth were clean (Briggs 1959; Hand 1981). The Reformation was hostile to such fanciful beliefs, and associated them with Catholicism (Thomas 1971:610). In the early 17th century, Anglican bishop Richard Corbet wrote a poem called *The Fairies Farewell*, which triumphantly credited the Reformation with driving the fairies away (Percy 1887:369; Thomas 1971:610). The poem begins:

> Farewell rewards and fairies!
> Good housewives now may say;
> For now foule sluts in dairies,
> Doe fare as well as they:
> And though they sweepe their hearths no less
> Than mayds were wont to doe,
> Yet who of late for cleanliness
> Finds sixe-pence in her shoe?

The association of Catholicism with fairy lore is rather unfounded, however, since these beliefs had been around well before Christianity reached the British Isles. Fairies were simply adapted into new traditions as Christianity spread, and the pre-Christian aspects of the practices were by no means advocated by Catholic doctrine (Thomas 1971:610; Merrifield 1987). The same is true for magic coins. In fact, one 16th-century French Catholic clergyman passionately mocked the use of bent coins and other charms, even when it was part of an appeal to a saint:

> Idolatry reigns at present in so many people; some trust in wearing talismans, others in lighting candles, others in saying novenas in honor of Saint Chy of Saint La [nonsense names], and then they must eat two [of something], then one, and then put a bent coin into the water, which afterwards they must drink and then take it [the coin] to Saint-I-don't-know-who; and all these things and others are nothing but superstitions of the devil. (Muchembled 1982:219)

Corbet's argument that the Reformation disposed of such folk practices is not well founded, either. Many magical practices, such as astrology and wizardry, actually enjoyed a boom after the Reformation (Thomas 1971:636–639). Thomas (1971) argues that magic fulfilled immediate personal needs that religion did not. As mentioned earlier, there is no distinct boundary between religion and magic when it comes to the use of sixpences or many other artifacts, for that matter. The symbol of the cross, the motto "In God We

Trust," and the invocation of saints all strengthen the power of folk magic within Christian belief systems, which indicates that, anthropologically speaking, sixpences are no less "religious" in nature than saint medals or reliquaries.

Many volumes have been written about magic and religion, and several researchers have attempted to differentiate between the two, with little success. As De Waal Malefijt (1968:14) argues: "Criteria used by various scholars to delineate the supposed realms of magic and religion are not mutually exclusive. Manipulation and supplication, utility and celebration, and individual communal purposes subtly shade into one another." Sebald (1978:150–151) lists several differences between magic and religion—magic is this-worldly, while religion is otherworldly; magic is direct and personal, while religion is indirect and mediated, etc.—but ultimately he agrees that at their core religion and magic are the same because "both approaches are a quest for power." This makes religion and magic sound self-serving and almost Machiavellian in nature, but it is not really such a negative notion. Instead it points to a human need to combat a universal condition of perceived helplessness.

Psychological studies have demonstrated that all humans are motivated to seek power over important events, whether the motivation is the fear of negative circumstances or the hope for future happiness and good luck. When control is not possible, the perception of control can have positive psychological benefits (Vyse 1997:201). Religion and magic both offer prescriptions for taking control, and, placebo or not, if people feel better, then their faith is reaffirmed when their anxiety is alleviated. Additionally, Vyse (1997:201) points out that superstitions persist in part because they help pass the time in a meaningful way:

> From time to time, we find ourselves waiting for important events to happen. Sometimes, the thing we are waiting for dominates our attention and prevents us from doing anything else. We wait while a loved one undergoes surgery; we wait in our seat for the big exam to be passed out. ... In these situations, we are anxious about the outcome of an uncertain event, yet there is little or nothing we can do to affect the outcome directly. This period of uncomfortable quiescence is one of the times when superstitious rituals are most likely to occur.

The same psychological benefit might result from bending a coin or saying a rosary. The major difference between religious practice and superstition, then, is that the clergy is likely to approve of one but not the other.

Ideally, neither Catholic nor Protestant practice would include the use of coins as amulets, though Catholics and Protestants probably would not have disapproved of their use as symbols of love. For both groups, defense against witchcraft and illness was best left to God or the clergy. In 1700, John Bell (1700:9) stated that the best way to help the bewitched was by "fasting and prayer, for God only can best free us from Divels, and in the use of his means alone it is, that we are to expect a blessing." If this answer to curses left Protestants dissatisfied, the Catholic Church at least retained rituals that offered a sense of immediacy, though these were only sanctioned if one went through the clergy. Protestants who wanted to take immediate action had to look outside the reformed church. They could either turn to Catholic rituals or practitioners of magic, such as cunning men. Sebald (1978:218) describes this as follows:

> Protestants acknowledged God's Providence and dismissed the old mechanical protections as empty symbols, lacking any efficacy. The bleakness of the new religion increased by denying the importance of guardian angels and the intercessionary power of saints—all the while stressing the reality of Satan and the scope of his worldly dominion. It is therefore not surprising that Protestants who felt helpless when confronting witchcraft retained old Catholic formulas. (Sebald 1978:218)

Magic provided a means to take immediate action, and Thomas (1971:639) notes that "the century after the Reformation thus constituted a transitional period, during which a variety of magical agencies continued to offer their services to those for whom the Protestant notion of self-help was too arduous." Thus, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft continued to be an important part of 17th-century English belief systems.

Coin Magic across the Catholic/Anglican Divide

Additional archaeological examples of folded silver coins in the Chesapeake indicate that coin bending occurred in predominantly Anglican

Virginia as much as, if not more than, it occurred in Maryland. Several Elizabeth I sixpences have been recovered, as have pierced silver coins and bent coins. For purposes of comparison to the Webster Field sixpence, only silver coins that were bent in two places, but not pierced, are discussed here. Two parallel folds are unlikely to result from post-depositional damage, increasing the likelihood that coins were deliberately altered. The bent coins include a ca. 1619–1625 James I penny from Flowerdew Hundred, an Elizabeth I sixpence (ca. 1583–1603) from the Sandys site, a Dutch two-stuiver coin (ca. 1610–1619) from James Fort, and a ca. 1582–1584 Elizabeth I sixpence from the Reverend Richard Buck site (Kelso and Straube 1997; Mallios 1999, 2000; McKitrick 2009; Karen Shriver 2012, elec. comm.).

The Dutch coin from James Fort was found in the plowzone, so context provides little additional information about its use. The coin from the Sandys site, occupied ca. 1630–1650, was recovered in a somewhat rectangular, shallow pit feature of unidentified function. Given the connection between coin magic and dairies, it is tempting to propose that the pit might represent dairying activities, but the only other artifacts recovered from the provenience were pipe fragments, one of which was from a rare multi-bowled pipe, so the function of the feature is unknown (Mallios 2000).

Slightly more promising is the context of the folded James I penny at Flowerdew Hundred (Figure 3) (Karen Shriver 2012, elec. comm.). This coin was recovered in a rectangular pit on the east side of the stone foundation of Abraham Peircey's imposing dwelling. The pit has been interpreted as a possible unfinished pit house or cellar. Deetz (1993) interpreted a Bellarmine neck found in the same pit as a ceramic fragment repurposed to serve as a funnel. The presence of a bent silver coin and a funnel could also suggest that this pit was used as a dairy. Recessed pits on 17th-century sites are often interpreted as dairies because they would stay cooler than structures at or above ground level. The bent coin was recovered in the northwest corner of the pit against the stone foundation of the dwelling, which is a relatively cool spot with easy access to the home and, therefore, a good location for the storage of dairy products. In some accounts of the use of coins in dairies, protective coins were buried in the four corners of the dairy, and this coin may represent such a protective measure.

The most intriguing context for a folded silver coin in the Chesapeake, however, is that of a folded and halved Elizabeth I sixpence (ca. 1582–1584) recovered in Burial 2 at the Reverend Richard Buck site (44JC568), which is located about a mile north of Jamestown Island. The site is named after the Reverend Buck because he was the first patent holder on the property, but it is unlikely that he lived there. Reverend Buck was a busy clergyman and seems to have resided in Jamestown until he died in 1624 (Mallios 1999). Archaeological evidence indicates that the Buck site dates to the period between ca. 1630 and ca. 1650. At that time the land was owned by a series of Buck descendants, some of whom were not yet of age. Various neighbors and legal guardians took charge of the landholdings and other assets. It is possible that one or more of Buck's orphaned children lived at the site, but occupation by tenants and indentured servants seems more likely (Mallios 1999, 2012, pers. comm.).

Life at the Buck site was apparently quite difficult. The wells kept going bad, soil was poorly suited to crops, and people kept dying. Nine burials were excavated, including four children and five adolescents or young adults, the oldest being about 35 years old. The sixpence was recovered in one of the adult burials, Burial 2, that of a 22–26 year old male interred ca. 1640–1650 (Kathryn Barca and Doug Owsley 2012, elec. comm.). The coin had been folded into thirds, and it was broken in half perpendicular to the folds (Figure 4). One piece was found just above the skeleton's left radius, and the other was found just below the left radius (Figure 5). Excavators interpreted the coin as having been bent around a ribbon or other material to make a bracelet. At that time, however, preliminary analysis suggested that the individual was female. Skeletal preservation was poor, with less than 25% of the skull and less than 25% of postcranial bones intact, making sex estimation difficult prior to detailed analysis in the lab (Mallios 1999). Severe deterioration of the body and skeletal remains also compromised the exact placement of the coin in relation to the body. The coin seems to have settled near the left elbow, but since the arms were crossed across the chest, it is possible that the coin had been placed in the deceased's right hand, although no bones from the hand remain (Seth Mallios 2012, pers. comm.).

Several notable characteristics of Burial 2 indicate that he was treated differently from

FIGURE 3. Top and side view of a silver coin with two bends, from the northwest quad of Flowerdew Hundred's pit house (44PG64). James I silver penny, 13 mm diameter, third coinage, 1619–1625 (Karen Shriver 2012, pers. comm.). (Photos by author, 2011; courtesy Flowerdew Hundred Collection, University of Virginia Library.)

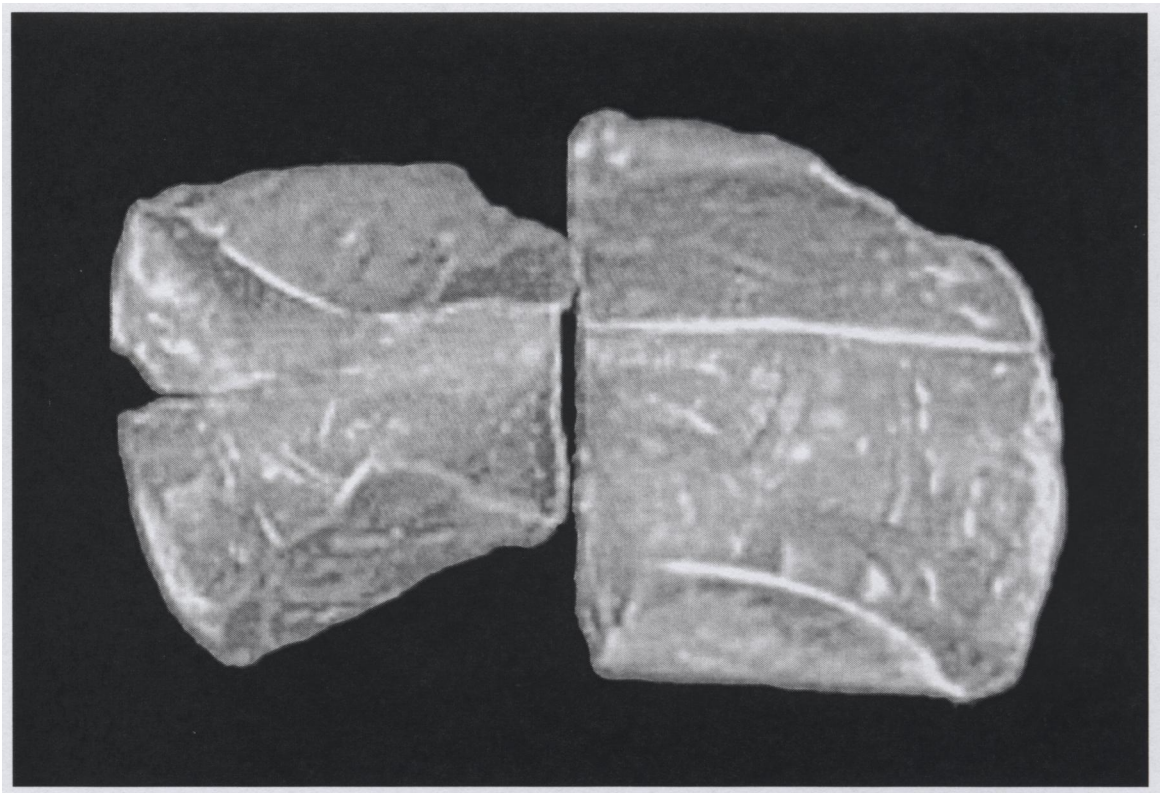

FIGURE 4. Ca. 1582–1584 Elizabeth I sixpence from Burial 2 at the Reverend Richard Buck site (44JC568). The coin has been folded twice and cut in half. It was recovered near the right hand and left elbow of the woman interred in Burial 2 (Mallios 1999:36). (Photo courtesy Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.)

other individuals at the site. First, the sixpence was the only grave good present in any of the nine burials. In fact, grave goods are rare in postmedieval Christian burials in general. Medieval burials sometimes yielded coins, and these were occasionally bent. Deliberate placement of coins over the eyes, in the mouth, or at the shoulders also occurred in a fraction of medieval graves (Gilchrist 2008:15–17). The practice seems to have been irregular and unusual, however, and a survey of colonial burials in the Chesapeake region has failed to identify any additional cases of silver coins used as grave goods in this way (Neiman 1980; Owsley et al. 1990; Doepkins 1991; King and Ubelaker 1996; Riordan 2000; Kelso 2006). The Buck site example is therefore exceptional.

The treatment of the man in Burial 2 is also exceptional in that there was no evidence of a coffin, and his legs were far enough apart to suggest that he had no burial shroud either (Mallios 1999:35). If he had been shrouded, the wrapping was carelessly done, leaving his knees loose. This is unusual for Tudor and Stuart England, where propriety dictated that "[n]o one was lowered to the grave without some sort of covering. It was a point of human dignity to observe that only animals were buried naked" (Cressy 1997:430). It is possible that no shrouds were available when the young man died, in which case he may have been buried naked or in a simple shirt that would not bind the legs or leave a trace. Archaeological evidence suggests that life at the plantation was dismal, so its inhabitants may have been too starved for resources to waste valuable cloth on intangible concepts like propriety and dignity. Perhaps the coin, an object with fewer practical applications for daily survival than fabric, was offered to make up for the indignity of an improper burial.

Such an interpretation seems less plausible, however, when the orientation of the body is considered. Burial 2 was interred with his head at the east end of the burial shaft, contrary to

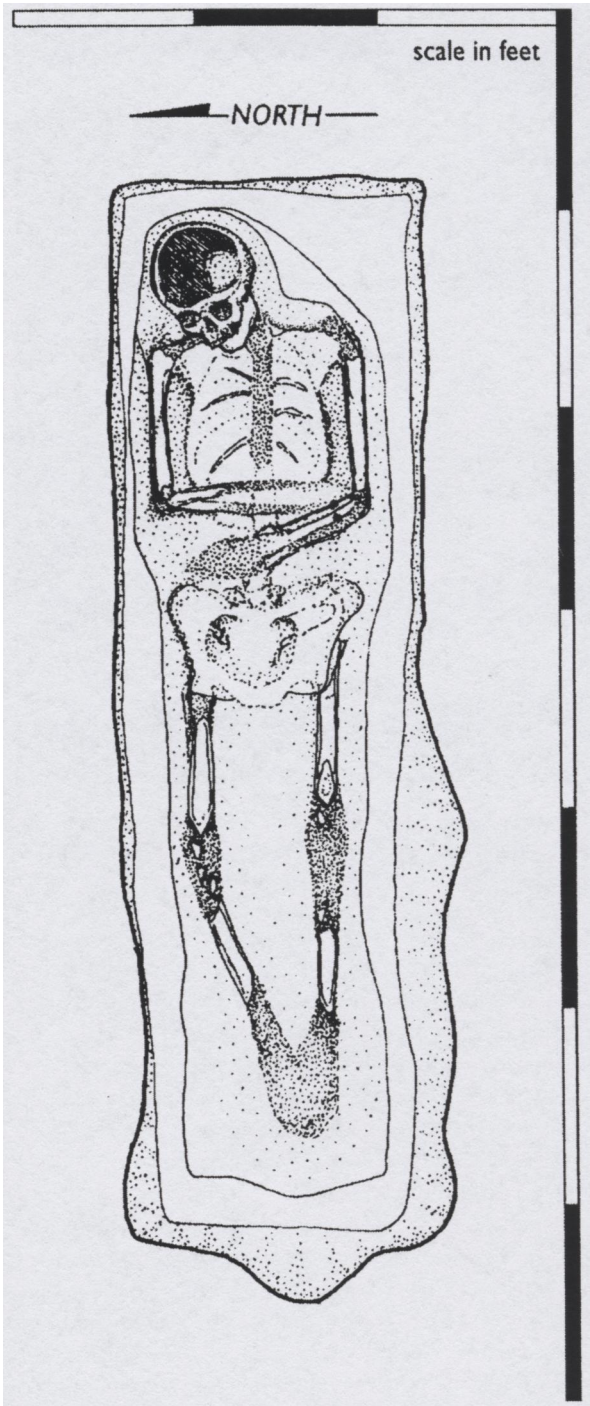

FIGURE 5. Plan view of Burial 2 at the Reverend Richard Buck site (44JC568). The distance between the knees may indicate interment without a shroud (Mallios 1999:35). (Figure courtesy Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.)

Christian tradition. Only five of the nine burials had discernible orientations, and two of them were buried with the head to the east. This reverse orientation could indicate disrespect or social exile (Riordan 2000). Analysis of the site's chronology indicates that the two reverse burials, Burial 2 and Burial 8, were roughly contemporaneous with each other, but not contemporaneous with the other seven burials. Burial 8 had a shroud but no coin. If both individuals had been buried around the same time it is possible that they were buried by the same people, and the reverse orientation was a misunderstanding of appropriate placement. This does not explain the difference in wrapping, however.

Reverse burials have been noted for men and women elsewhere in colonial Chesapeake contexts, but none of them had grave goods or lacked a shroud, and some even had coffins (Neiman 1980; Riordan 2000). A female burial excavated at Historic St. Mary's City had a reverse orientation, and although she was buried in a coffin, this woman was also interred on the north side of the chapel, another indicator of ritual impurity (Riordan 2000). Similarly, a female at the Patuxent Point site in Maryland was interred in a shroud and in a reverse orientation spatially separated from other burials. The presence of an infant skeleton in her pelvic region indicates that she died during late pregnancy or childbirth. Archaeologists have interpreted this burial as a possible belief in the practice of "churching," whereby women are considered impure while pregnant and must undergo a purification ceremony after giving birth (King and Ubelaker 1996:116; Cressy 1997). The church tried to eliminate this practice, but some people believed that women who died in childbirth did not deserve Christian burial, and, notably, the "churching" ceremony was sometimes perceived as a charm against witchcraft (King and Ubelaker 1996:116). This could not explain a west-facing orientation in a male burial, however.

According to Cressy (1997:465–466) reverse burial was uncommon, and burial outside a churchyard was reserved for suicides or individuals who were irreversibly excommunicated. Unbaptized infants, excommunicated offenders who had some hope of regaining favor with the church, and Roman Catholics were generally given

the benefit of the doubt and buried on a traditional east-facing orientation in Anglican churchyards. Additionally, offenses that did lead to reverse burials did not preclude the usual dressing of the body (Cressy 1997:430). Typical English customs seem to have been blatantly flouted in the case of Burial 2, yet someone interred him with a magically powerful silver coin.

What could have happened when this man died? Were the people who buried him so poorly equipped that they denied him a shroud? Were they simply confused as to whether the body was to face the rising sun or the setting sun, or was every aspect of the burial deliberate and indicative of this individual's social exile? Why was he buried with a coin when the other aspects of the burial pointed to disrespect? The multivalent nature of bent silver coins as symbols of magic and power offers too many possibilities. The individual in Burial 2 could have kept the coin on hand because he suffered from boils or carbuncles, or had a pilgrimage promise to fulfill. It is also possible that the coin in the burial was a symbol of devotion offered by a lover. If the coin was a symbol of betrothal, but the groom died, then perhaps the bride placed both sides of the coin in his grave, signifying the end of her commitment to the vow that the coin symbolized. Alternatively, the coin may not have been this man's possession at all, but rather an apotropaic device placed with him by someone involved in his burial. If he was suspected of sorcery or cunning, this might explain the reverse burial and lack of shroud, and the coin could have been added to the grave as an amulet to prevent his spirit from rising to harm the living. What is most disconcerting from an archaeological perspective is that, even with such a specific context and unusual manner of burial, the presence of a bent sixpence near this man's hand does not provide any answers.

Discussion

While the lack of context associated with the Webster Field sixpence is unfortunate, the folded sixpence from the Buck site illustrates that even exceptional contextual information does little to narrow the potential for interpretation of coin magic in the colonial Chesapeake. Comparative data do suggest, however, that coins bent into thirds are primarily a phenomenon of early settlements. It is tempting to think that bent coins may have enjoyed greater popularity when colonists were still struggling to establish stability and safety, but a survey of coin alteration overseas indicates that larger social trends were at work.

In an effort to graph the popularity of bent coins over time, the author conducted a visual survey of coins recorded by metal detectors on the UK Detector Finds Database (2005). Using two-dimensional photos to look for evidence of bending is not ideal; examination in person is needed to see some bends and to rule out post-depositional damage. Still, a certain degree of error in one direction or the other is somewhat mitigated by the large sample size. About 3,000 coins dating from A.D. 1500 to the present were included in this study, and all coin denominations were considered, not just sixpences (Figure 6*a*).

Three categories of coins were noted: two bends (n=129), which includes anything bent into three sections or an S shape; one bend (n=211); and pierced (n=54). Coins with one bend might easily be written off as post-depositional damage, but when a chart is made showing the occurrence over time of coins with two bends vs. one bend, the quantities correlate well (Figure 6*b*). Both coins with one bend and coins with two bends are far more frequent in the period from 1550 to 1600 than in any other time period studied. This indicates two things: first that the bends are probably deliberate because accidental damage should be consistent over time, and second that coin bending declined in the 17th century. Piercing rates rose in the 17th century, possibly as a response to the rise in milled coinage that may not have been as easy to bend as thin, hammered coins (Friedberg 1962). The results of this survey, combined with the contexts of other bent coins in the Chesapeake, argues for a relatively early deposition of the Webster Field coin, which in turn points to early-17th-century coin magic, rather than later traditions.

The veneration of saints was part of daily life at St. Inigoes, as evidenced by the medals recovered there, so the bending of a coin as part of a pilgrimage vow seems a good possibility. Similar medals were recovered at James Fort, although whether they were there as copper trade goods or as indicators of continued adherence to Catholic concepts of saints is unclear (Kelso 2006:187–188). In a culture where divine intervention was

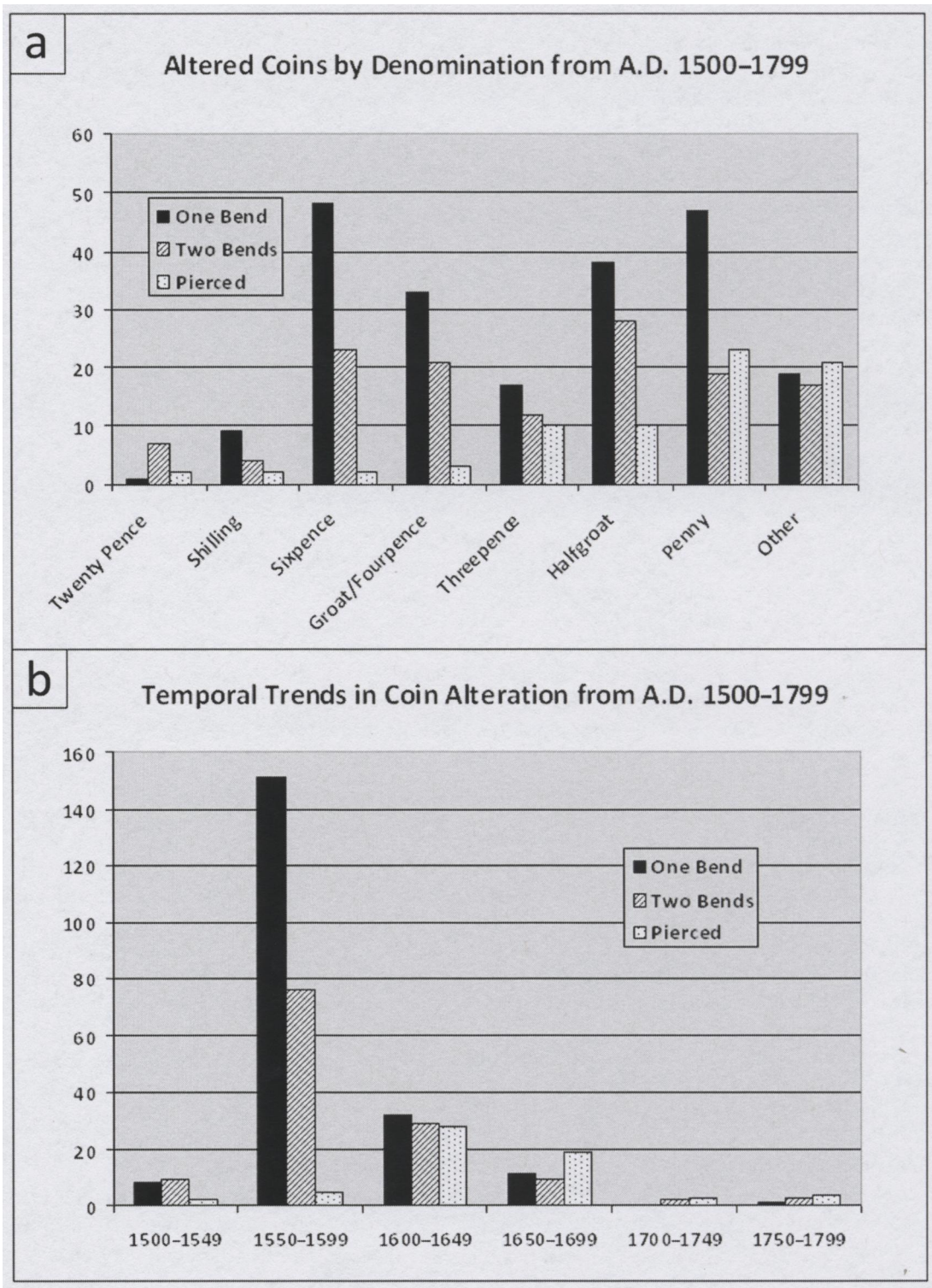

FIGURE 6. Chart of coin alteration from 1500 to 1800 based on a visual survey of 3,094 coins recorded on the UK Detector Finds Database (2005) between June 2005 and 16 August 2012. Approximately 13% of the coins appeared to be altered with one bend, two bends, or piercing: a. (*top*) shows which coin denominations exhibited alteration; and b. (*bottom*) shows the different kinds of alteration over time. Although photo examination is not expected to be completely accurate, the overall trend through time can still be considered significant because of the large sample size examined. (Graphs by author, 2013.)

seen as occurring in every matter from illness to crop success, the more weight people could put behind their appeals the better. Any early settler who knew of the coin-bending tradition might have employed it in prayer. While Merrifield (1987) argues that the association of bent coins with saints declined after the Reformation, the English Catholics that settled Maryland clearly chose to defy forced conversion to Anglicanism, and they continued to venerate saints, so they are equally likely to have continued other practices that Protestants frowned upon. If the sixpence was used as part of a vow, then it may have been lost before the promised pilgrimage was complete, or St. Inigoes itself, as a center of Jesuit activity, may have represented a sacred site to a Maryland Catholic whose pilgrimage options were limited.

The churn-spell idea also has some contextual support thanks to the coin's proximity to a nearby structure that may have served as a dairy (Sperling and Galke 2001). Though not found in the structure itself, a special coin kept specifically for warding off a witch's influence on butter might have been lost anywhere in the work area or living quarters of a dairymaid. The context of the Flowerdew Hundred James I penny supports a potential connection between silver coins and dairying in the colonial Chesapeake.

The saint-vow and churn-spell functions may have the most contextual support, but the other possibilities cannot be ruled out. Weddings might well have taken place at St. Inigoes, as there was clergy there to perform the rites, and after the St. Mary's City chapel was closed in 1704, St. Inigoes often served as a de facto chapel and center of Catholic worship. No doubt birth, illness, suspicious rabbits, and the consumption of the occasional Christmas cake also constituted part of life at St. Inigoes and may have given some residents cause to keep a sixpence handy. The Webster Field sixpence shows no sign of having been fired from a gun, but that does not mean it was not curated by an individual who believed in the importance of keeping such ammunition on hand just in case.

It is also possible that the use of the sixpence was something other than that listed here. For instance, the main character of a silly poem published in 1802 kept a bent sixpence in his pocket solely to help him pry open the stubborn lid of his snuff box (*Weekly Museum* 1802). Furthermore, practitioners of English coin magic came in contact with other ethnic groups, such as enslaved African laborers, sparking the adaptation of coin symbolism to new material expressions (Davidson 2004). The cross-within-a-circle motif on the obverse of the sixpences resembles an African Bakongo Yowa cosmogram as much as it does pre-Christian Celtic cross charms. Davidson (2004) argues that coins could be easily concealed from prying owners who sought to quash non-Christian beliefs among slaves, allowing for the private use of protective charms. Even if coins used by enslaved populations were not concealed, owners may have been more familiar and comfortable with coin charms than with other African-derived belief systems, such as voodoo or obeah (Davidson 2004).

Conclusion

So why keep a crooked sixpence? Throughout the 300-year Jesuit occupation of St. Inigoes there were many reasons that may have far outweighed the cash value of the coin or its silver content. Special coins could have been curated over a long period of time and passed on to multiple people. Since the Webster Field coin was bent and then later unbent, it may well have served more than one purpose. Perhaps it was used by a 17th-century dairymaid to make a vow to a saint, and as she held it awaiting her pilgrimage, she added it to the butter churn when she suspected the influence of witches. Maybe it was given as a crooked love token, and then flattened for use as a first gift to an infant girl. Perhaps that infant lived to wear the same special coin in her matrimonial shoe. Whatever its story, this coin was probably not just cash, and it offers a clue as to the emotions of those who believed in its power.

There is no possibility that archaeologists will ever be able to understand fully what the coin meant to the people who carried it, but it is still worth consideration as a focal point for understanding the cosmological worldview of the people who lived at the site. While the Catholic teachings of the Jesuits who settled the plantation provided its inhabitants with a broad understanding of God and answers to the greater issues of human existence, they did not completely fulfill each person's spiritual needs. Some people took measures outside approved

church practices to try to help themselves. The same measures were taken on many Anglican sites, showing that individuals of both denominations were willing to look beyond the church. A sense of helplessness is a problem for any human who wants to influence the future, cure an illness, or avert a crisis. The coin offered an opportunity to take action over forces that could not be controlled. The psychological relief of *doing* something could have reduced anxiety, regardless of whether the butter came, the storm passed, or the illness abated. Taking immediate action, not the theoretical and indirect action of putting one's fate in God's hands, was a cathartic endeavor facilitated by the act of coin bending.

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