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The Cowrie Shell in Virginia: A Critical Evaluation of Potential Archaeological Significance

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**THE COWRIE SHELL IN VIRGINIA:
A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

In Partial Fulfillment

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

by

Laurie E. Pearce

1992

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

I write in a time when scholars finally are taking steps towards expanding their field of vision from a limited focus on the stereotypical wealthy planter to a broader consideration of the lives of everybody else. "Everybody else" includes the middling and destitute classes, women, children, Native Americans, Orientals, Hispanics and Blacks all in the context of their respective and unique contributions. The material culture that remains in the archaeological record is difficult, if not impossible to interpret through the convoluted structure of our twentieth century minds. We must be prepared to view history as ever-changing and realize that there are no absolutes.

Through the use of an anthropological approach, we may attempt to understand and begin to resurrect these people whom time seems to have forgotten. This thesis attempts to objectively address the traces of African and European culture in Virginia concentrating on the cowrie shell. It is my hope that this study will serve to further enhance the proliferation of African and African-American studies and give a deeper understanding and appreciation of the endurance of their culture even under the reigns of slavery. It is our responsibility as archaeologists and historians to approach our sites and our documents as precious traces of people, who perhaps through each of us, can breathe once again.

THE COWRIE SHELL IN VIRGINIA:

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

INTRODUCTION

Knowing that cowrie shells are an element of modern African culture in decoration, divination and religion, this research began when an African-American professor and a non-archaeologist posed a simple question, "Are cowrie shells found archaeologically in Virginia?" After making a few phone calls, the answer was unequivocally, "Yes." Under the assumption that these shells originated in Africa and with the hopes of expanding African interpretation in archaeology, an excited survey of major archaeological digs in Virginia ensued. What surfaced was a collection of sites confined to the eighteenth century. This fact should not be terribly surprising since Virginia's main archaeological focus is the colonial period. What was surprising, however, was that no one was aware that these shells were found in so many other places and in such volume. In the relatively short period in which this author has researched, over two hundred shells (all of which are of the species Cypraea annulus or Cypraea moneta) from ten sites in Williamsburg, four sites in Yorktown and one site in outer Richmond have been located and analyzed in addition to reported shells from Monticello (Kelso, 1990:Personal Communication), Barbados (Handler and Lange, 1978:50), North Carolina and Louisiana (Singleton, 1990:157).

Generally, the cowrie may be described as a humped,

ovate, shell glossed with an attractive porcelain texture having a ventral aperture lined with small teeth. Cowrie shells are found all over the world and come in a wide range of color and sizes. The cowrie shells found on archaeological sites in Virginia, however, are small, generally white to buff in color, lacking a glossy texture and exhibiting a thin dorsal gold ring. These cowries have been positively identified as Cypraea annulus and are indigenous to the Indian and Pacific Ocean, and not to the Atlantic Ocean (Dr. Roger Mann, Personal Communication: 1991.) These shells are found off of the East Coast of Africa and were there harvested as currency. Through the centuries, cowrie shells have taken on many meanings extending well beyond a medium of exchange. These meanings take on an entirely new light when considered in the far away context of eighteenth century Virginia.

The cowrie shell found in North America is a "sexy" artifact and has come to assume a precarious position in exhibits and scholarship which take on the challenge of identifying archaeological traces of African people. As thrilling and timely as this may be, due caution must be taken before any conclusions about this African artifact evolves into an "Africanism." Now exhibited in cases alongside colonoware and mojo rings, the cowrie by association is given a new and not necessarily accurate meaning. Cowries may be an African associated artifact, however, records also indicate

European usage. As with each artifact retrieved archaeologically, all aspects of usage and realms of possible meanings must be accounted for in an objective interpretation.

The purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate the potential meaning of the cowrie shell found on archaeological sites in eighteenth century Virginia for both the African and the European. Two questions must be set forth: Who brought cowries to America?; and What meaning did the shell assume or retain once in America? In the world of the eighteenth century, the most common use of the cowrie was as a form of currency utilized by Africans and Europeans alike. That the cowrie continued to be used in this manner in America is doubtful. The meaning of the shell may have been in constant flux according to the context in which it was used.

What the shells do show is African contact, of some kind, at some point in time, and for some reason. This contact ultimately may or may not be reflected in the archaeological record yet it is significant that the primary deposit of the shells has been in middens associated with two slave quarters, domestic areas and workshop areas. What is truly needed to supplement these somewhat vague archaeological associations is a historical reference to cowrie shell usage in North America. As no reference has been located as yet, the interpretative

game begins.

Through the examination of ethnographic studies and an extensive survey of related literature, an analysis of the uses of cowries has been compiled. The Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta have assumed a wide range of uses throughout the ages and around the world including food, tools, gaming pieces, instruments, medicine, communication, decoration, divination, charms, religious symbols, ship ballast and currency. The cowrie could have been brought to the New World by Africans, retaining, approximating or even losing any of these original uses or by Europeans adapting African uses or as a curio-item/souvenir. There are four major divisions in the paper: the first reviews African-American studies in archaeology; the second concerns scientific data about the cowrie shell; the third surveys ethnographical and historical data and the fourth analyzes site history and archaeological context. Through these four avenues the significance and potential meanings of the cowrie shell found on archaeological sites in eighteenth century Virginia will come to light.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF SLAVE RELATED ARTIFACTS

Interpretation of African traits is not a new field, in fact many intriguing studies have been conducted over the last thirty years that have explored different aspects of potential artifactual africanisms. Africanisms are survivals of African material culture which may be seen in decorative arts and architecture (Vlach, 1987 and 1990); tobacco pipes (Deetz, 1988, Emerson, 1989:38); colonoware (Ferguson 1980); glass beads (Singleton, 1990:15, et al); conjuring kits (Singleton, 1990:14); rings of foreign materials (Parker and Hernigle, 1990:213, Kelso, 1986); pierced coins (Kelso 1986:30); gaming pieces (Parker and Hernigle, 1990:203, Klingelhofer, 1987:115); modified baculum (Pogue, 1990:12); smokey quartz crystals (Kelso, 1990:Personal Communication); and cowrie shells (Singleton, 1990,).

That the slaves could have transported many personal possessions does in fact seem improbable given the very nature of the slave trade (Pogue, 1991:7). That the slaves reworked their own independent culture even under the oppression of slavery cannot be denied. Given the weakness of the historical record, however, africanisms must go beyond assumptions about the mere artifact to deeper considerations of the archaeological context. In addition to artifacts

indicative of African manufacture, there are European artifacts, probably used by African-Americans in the New World including a variety of tools. The ensuing analysis is an overview of the best supported "africanisms" and slave-utilized artifacts which have been identified by various archaeologists and scholars in addition to cowrie shells.

Colonoware

In Virginia, Colonoware is a common form of pottery retrieved archaeologically in Virginia. A coarse and unglazed earthenware, colonoware was originally categorized as "colono-Indian ware" and considered to be manufactured by local Indians for sale to the Europeans and Africans in North America. Leland Ferguson was one of the first archaeologists to link colonoware directly with African-American manufacture noting its prevalence on domestic African-American sites and not at Indian sites of the same area (Ferguson, 1980).

A more likely, and admittedly safer explanation for the colonoware controversy is manufacture by both African Americans, Indians, and even Europeans; indicating more of a reflection of a socio-economic need than an ethnic distinction. What is confusing, however, is the fact that imported earthenwares and even locally made lead glazed coarsewares were affordable even to the most destitute

colonist and thus it is unclear why colonoware would be necessary. An additionally confusing issue is why, with such extensive potting technology, would Africans abandon their previous knowledge and skill to produce such comparatively crude forms? Colonoware usually takes the form of an undecorated bowl with a tooled rim. There is a strong correlation between colonoware presence and slave occupied sites which makes colonoware a useful tool in identifying slave presence on a site.

Tobacco Pipes or "Chesapeake Pipes"

A study of locally made tobacco pipes by Deetz (1988) and Emerson (1989) has produced exciting results in which the designs have been interpreted as possible African motifs. These pipes are more common to the seventeenth century than to the eighteenth century and this change is seen as a reflection of increased social distance between European Americans and African-Americans (Emerson, 1989:39).

As in the case of colonoware, there was probably a mixed manufacture of these pipes. This criticism is supported by the fact that there were a great many of these pipes in existence before Africans even were brought to America. Some of the design motifs seen as African-based are also common Indian motifs and therefore must be reconsidered before any

absolute statements may be made.

Tools

The tools uncovered archaeologically can, with all likelihood, be attributed to African usage and potentially, to African manufacture. Physical labor conducted in Virginia relied heavily upon slave labor. Farming tools such as hoes are documented in wills and inventories as being associated with the slave work force. A simple reference to "10 hoe hands and 5 plow boys" in Thomas Nelson's will of 1789 shows the usage of the hoe by these slaves left to his sons. That slaves were forging these very tools is not out of the realm of possibility. In the same will, Thomas Nelson leaves to his wife Lucy: the Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Shoemakers and Weavers upon his death showing specialized slave skill including metallurgy.

Gaming Pieces

There have been what are termed as "gaming pieces" uncovered on several slave associated sites in Virginia made of a variety of materials including bone, glass, wood and ceramic. Distinct from discarded or broken sherds, these pieces have been modified in some way to form a small, geometrical object. While the association with an African

tradition is a far reach, it may be inferred that these pieces were used in some capacity by African-Americans as well as Europeans.

Rings

Rings are a pan-cultural element and thus a find of a ring on an African associated site should not be unusual. As Dennis Pogue points out, "Clearly, the mere presence of finger rings has little potential for indicating an ethnic relationship, but their composition, design, and method of manufacture seem to offer the basis for such an interpretation" (Pogue, 1991:9). Rings made of foreign materials such as horn not found in North America in unique forms have been excavated for example, in Monticello's documented slave quarters. What is intriguing is the use of rings and other objects in conjuring which is distinctly African in nature (Puckett, 1926:314).

Beads

Glass beads have been linked to African-American presence as well. An exemplary excavation of a slave cemetery in Barbados (Handler and Lange, 1979:17) revealed several interments containing an excess of 900 beads. There is abundant documentary evidence which supports the use of beads,

both European and African, in decoration. Beads, especially those blue in color are thought to have provided ritualized protection against the evil eye (Singleton, 1990:15).

Admittedly these artifacts are exciting, however, it is only too easy to fall into the trap of overgeneralization. Archaeologists are subject to the same temptations as historians in assuming that one field alone may reveal any ultimate truths. While archaeology deals with the hard facts: bone, metal, structural remnants, ceramics and shell; there exists an infinitely larger realm of perishable materials which do not survive the archaeological record. Along the same lines, evidence uncovered is only discarded past culture and not necessarily reflective of primary behavioral patterns. As Fairbanks points out, "Our job is to deduce the behavior from what is available," (Fairbanks, 1985) and that is where the inconsistencies, complications and challenges commence. Unlike a pottery sherd or a glass bead, the cowrie shell has the unique advantage of scientific and taxonomic evaluation. The analysis of the cowrie shell will begin with this straightforward material and progress to interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO

SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

The Cowrie Shell Animal

The objective realm of natural science may be applied readily to the cowrie shell. The scientific aspect here includes detail of the cowrie shell animal, identification of the cowrie found on archaeological sites in Virginia and an explanation of inconsistencies. The cowrie shells housed in the Virginia collections are of two closely related and virtually indistinguishable species. These two species are identified as Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta.

From the family, Cypraeidae, these cowries all have smooth, tortoise-like or globular shells. Referring to Appendix G, the aperture is generally narrow with two lips denticulating in nearly all species. The anterior and posterior canals are small and the spire is overlaid with enamel in the adult. The glossy enamel is caused by the mantle which envelops the shell completely by the time the animal reaches adulthood. There is no operculum present and of about one hundred and eighty-five species known, the majority live in tropical waters and favor coral reefs. According to some authorities there are many genera in this family. Others admit only one genus, Cypraea, this simpler

alternative being followed here. The genus Cypraea, of which both Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta derive, exhibit considerable variation even within the given species when shells from different populations are compared (Dance, 1976:2).

Characteristics of Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta

In determining the specific taxonomic term of the cowries found in the collections appraised, a major difficulty was encountered due to the fact that the shells in these collections appear to not have matured to full adulthood. Peter Dance's, The Collector's Encyclopedia of Shells, notes that when immature, Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta may be virtually indistinguishable from one another because of such factors as similar size and lack of a glossy mantle which later envelops the matured shell. Site formation processes and the soil in which the shells were contained archaeologically could also have been responsible for the "worn down" appearance of the shells retrieved archaeologically. Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta are indigenous to the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is a term which refers loosely to the region from the coast of East Africa to the coast of New Guinea. Within this vast area there are hundreds of variations of cowrie shells. What is

significant about this generalized statement is that the genus Cypraea is absolutely not indigenous to the Atlantic Ocean. Hence, the presence of these displaced shells in North America may be attributed fairly securely to a human agent.

Cypraea annulus is the more probable classification of the cowries examined for two reasons. Firstly, Cypraea annulus is described as being small and mostly smooth; cream to ivory white in color with a bluish-grey dorsal area ringed with yellow-gold, (hence their popular name "ringed money cowrie" or "gold ringer"). As there are cowries in the Virginia collections which do not have visible this distinguishing ring, all of the shells may not be subsumed automatically under this general classification. The alternative, Cypraea moneta, must also be taken into consideration because of the similarity to annulus in basic shape and size and because there are some races of Cypraea moneta that have a dorsal gold ring. Cypraea annulus is from the Zanzibar and Madagascar waters located off of the coast of East Africa and Cypraea moneta is from the waters of the Maldives Islands. Both species were harvested as currency during the slaving period with Cypraea annulus replacing Cypraea moneta in circulation after some time. There is a considerable difference in size between the cowrie shells from the same site and from different sites and this diversity may be attributed primarily to natural variation. The typical

size range of Cypraea annulus and Cypraea moneta is from two to five centimeters. The shells from the collections viewed fall generally into these approximations. The questions still remain, however, as to which human agents, for what purpose, and what possible meanings did they hold in the new context of North America, if any? The history of the cowrie shell prior to its induction into the New World is considered with attention paid to potential African or European transporters

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL DATA

African Origins of Slaves Brought to America

This section commences with a review of the origins of the slaves brought to the Virginia area followed by documentation of West African and European usage of cowries from present to past. Joseph Holloway's Africanisms in American Culture, deserves careful consideration as documenting the origins of slaves brought to the United States. Creating a "steady human flow between Africa and North America," Africans were sold into slavery and came to relocate their cultures in the New World (Appendix E, Figure 4). In what Holloway refers to as:

The largest forced migration in history, the slave trade brought an estimated half-million Africans to what is now the United States over some 200 hundred years. This total is thought to represent about 7 percent of the entire transatlantic slave trade, though the exact figures are in dispute and the total volume of the slave trade may never be known. If one considers those who perished in the stockades and on the cargo ships in estimating the total volume of traffic to the New World, the total may well be over 40 million. So great was this traffic that "by 1850 a third of the people of African descent lived outside of Africa. African slaves came from diverse regions of Africa but particularly from those areas stretching along the coast through West Africa to Central Africa" (Holloway, 1990:1).

In reference to his chart below, Holloway states that the "most recent data on slave importation into Virginia reveals

that Virginia imported a large number of Africans directly from Africa. A report to the Board of Trade shows that between June 1699 and October 1708, 6,607 Africans were brought in, only 679 by way of the West Indies (Barbados). Between 1699 and 1775 Virginia imported 69,006 blacks, and Virginia was second only to South Carolina in the direct African importation of slaves":

TABLE 1

ORIGINS OF SLAVES FROM AFRICA IMPORTED INTO VIRGINIA

ORIGIN	# OF SLAVES
Direct from Africa	45,088
"Africa"	20,567
Gambia (incl. Senegal and Goree)	3,652
"Guinea" (Gold Coast, Windward Coast)	6,777
Calabar and Bonny	9,224
Angola	3,860
Madagascar	1,011
Via West Indies	7,046
Via other North American ports	370
	<u>52,504</u>

Holloway explains that the upper colonies, Virginia included, tended to prefer slaves from West Africa (Holloway, 1990:3). Through an examination of the sources from the slaving period, it is clear that slave owners in America had certain preferences for the origins of potential slaves in regard to duties to be performed. Holloway's Table below demonstrates the division of African cultures by duties at which each group was considered to be the most qualified:

TABLE 2
AFRICAN ETHNICITY PREFERRED BY NORTH AMERICANS ACCORDING TO
OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION	AFRICAN ETHNICITY PREFERRED	CULTURE
House Servant	Mandingo Yoruba (Nagoes)	Mande Cross River
Artisan	Dahomean (Fon), Fanti Bambara, Melinke Whydah, Pawpaw (Popo), Coromantee (Asante-Fante)	Akan Mande Akan
Rice Cultivator	Temne, Sherbro, Mende, Kishi (Kisi), Papel, Goree, Limba, Bola, Balante	Mande
Field Slave	Vai, Gola, Bassa, Grebo Calabar, Ebo (Igbo), Efik, Ibibio Cabinda, Bakongo, Malimbo, Bambo, Bantu, Ndungo, Congo, Balimbe, Badondo, Bambona, Luba, Loango, Luango, Umbundu, Ovimbundu, Pembe, Imbangala	Mano River Niger River

(Holloway, 1990:4-5)

African and European Usage of Cowries as Currency in West Africa

The most common use of the cowrie shell in the world of the eighteenth century was as a form of currency. The Europeans and Africans occupying sites in Virginia in which cowries are found, had contact with or were natives of Africa and therefore the cowrie transported to North America originally could have been used as currency. The cowrie was not used as currency in North America, however, and records

indicate that American slave traders had no direct access to cowries as did the British slave traders. The most illuminating source on the use of Cypraea moneta and Cypraea annulus as currency is Paul Einzig's work, Primitive Money in its Ethnological, Historical and Economic Aspects, published in 1966. Although not geared to archaeology specifically, Einzig is thorough and exacting, providing a literal wealth of information that may be readily applied to the field. Integrated into Einzig's research are primary references from slaves and slave traders in support of cowrie use in the slave trading period. Refer to Appendix E, Figures 1-3, for the specific geographical location of the areas mentioned below.

Among the Yoruba today, "owo" or cowries are still made as sacrifices to the diviner. Amounts are stated in the verses in terms of cowrie shells. In funerary services as well, cowries played a traditional role until the 1930's when instead of cowrie shells, shillings were put inside of the burial cloths so that the deceased could pay the gatekeeper of heaven (Bascom, 1969:67). Nearby, in Nzema, a similar ritual occurs as noted in Grottanelli's Python Killer, "Cowries or coins, or nowadays even banknotes, are tied to the shroud so that the deceased may pay the boatman for the ferry crossing the wide river separating "'ewiade from ebole' - this world from the next" (Grottanelli, 1988:14).

In Glaze's novel, Art and Death in a Senufo Village, cowries are an integral part of another funerary payment where upon a guest throws a few cowries into the room where the corpse lies as a gesture of respect. In addition to cowries, gifts of burial cloths and food are presented and by this means the guest both honors the dead and assists the funeral head with the expensive task of feeding large numbers of people and paying for the services of the various performers (Glaze, 1981:165). Donations are also asked for by initiates dressed as beggars who visit the elders of the village asking for cowrie donations (Appendix B, Figure 6).

In French Sudan, the cowries were replaced by French currency in 1940, yet were still in use for transactions in ritual products. In Togo, certain goods such as palm wine are, or were until recently, still paid for in cowries (Einzig, 1966:148). Cowries served as a store of value and the tendency to hoard cowries was still very strong even after the First World War. In the 1920's there still existed some treasure houses where the stores of cowries were reminiscent of "heaps of newly threshed corn" even after European coins had been introduced (Einzig, 1966:138). For a long time, European coinage was amassed as soon as it was issued and the gold and silver coins were often converted into jewelry known as "dead money". Although in the Cameroons in 1911, the import of cowries was prohibited, they were still in current

use at the time of the First World War. The store of value then consisted of wives, goats and bead necklaces, while the medium of exchange and standard of value was the cowrie. A wife cost anything from 15,000 to 50,000 cowries and a sheep or goat averaged about 1000 (Einzig, 1966:130).

The value of cowries was subject to wide fluctuations. Their quantity in each community depended upon imports from other towns and countries, which was not a simple process. Fluctuations in availability were caused by seasonal influences, political situations, and even weather conditions which affected the movements of caravans. There were also very marked discrepancies between their value at any given moment in parts of Mali and Niger.

In rich communities with an exportable surplus of goods the purchasing power of cowries was usually low because cowries were always in good supply. In regions where salt or some other object served as subsidiary currency cowries tended to be cheaper than in regions where they were the exclusive currency for small purchases, because monetary demand in districts with subsidiary currency was not so strong. As a general rule the value of cowries tended to be higher the further East the community was situated, because they were imported through West African ports, and the cost of their eastward transport tended to add to their value (Einzig, 1966:148).

In 1883, cowries were still used in the market place at Accra and in other towns of the eastern district for small purchases (Einzig, 1966:145). At the same time, however, in Ashanti, the import of cowries was prohibited so that they would not

compete with gold dust as currency. The Royal Niger Company simplified trade by denoting a head of cowries as a unit of account with a fixed value at 1s. 3d. The local market rate of cowries required meticulous daily attention. At this time an entire bar of salt cost the price of a captive, 20,000 cowries (Einzig, 1966:137).

Vast quantities of cowries were needed to meet the requirements of local trade and often other types of local currencies had to be used in order to carry on transactions. Oftentimes the trade was not a simple procedure. In Barth's experience in West Africa he notes: "At the middle of the last century anyone wanting to buy corn in the Kukawa market could not do so without the aid of cowries or dollars. If he had only dollars, he had to exchange them first for shells, then with shells he had to buy shirts and with the aid of the shirts he was able to buy corn." (Barth, 1857:354). Even if payment was made in other forms, the value was still stated in terms of cowries. The arithmetic system to calculate the amount of cowries owed is complex and innovative:

Nominally the decimal system was in operation. Nevertheless 8 X 10 was reckoned as 100; 10 X 80 (nominally 100) was reckoned as 1,000; 10 X 800 (nominally 1,000) was reckoned as 10,000 and 8 X 8,000 (nominally 10,000) was reckoned as 100,000, so that what they called 100,000 was really only 64,000 (Einzig, 1966:131).

The method is one way of securing advantage in retail trading.

As an example given by Einzig, "If 5 bars of salt were sold in a single transaction for 100,000 cowries, the seller only received 64,000 cowries. If, on the other hand, they were sold in retail in very small items, the sellers received a full total of 100,000 cowries" (Einzig, 1966:132). Valuable objects were regularly purchased with cowries and frequently 40,000 to 50,000 shells changed hands in a single transaction.

A serious disadvantage of the cowries was the devaluation which continued into the future due to the basic difficulty of transporting large quantities of cowries. C. H. Robinson's 1896 expedition in Hauseland dealt with this difficulty when one of the horses in the expedition became ill and was unable to continue its journey for many days. "The trouble is that we cannot sell it," Robinson remarked, "as its value in cowries would require 15 extra porters to carry, to whom we should have to pay all the money they carried and a great deal more besides; there is in fact nothing which we could get in exchange for it which would pay to carry with us." (Einzig, 1966:137).

Ironically, it is the slave who is second only in importance to cowries as currency. The cowrie shell was a necessity for day to day needs, however, slaves were important in the matter of large transactions. In the early 1890's, it is said of the slave in Nigeria that "He has been the cheque

book of the country and has been necessary for all large payments. Unfortunately he has a trick of dying while passing from hand to hand" (Einzig, 1966:138). The lack of an easily portable currency of high value is believed by many authors to have encouraged the institution of slavery. Slaves were an ideal currency in contrast to the cowrie shell in that they provided their own transport and could even serve as carriers of other bulky currencies. In 1898, African merchants or wealthy travelers expended not only the currencies carried by their slaves but also the slaves themselves throughout the course of the journey.

In Togo, Guinea Bay, the Ivory Coast, the Congo, and many other West African coastal countries, slaves were commonly used as currency in the addition to cowries (Einzig, 1966:146-154). The view was often expressed in those days that the introduction of coins would go a long way towards doing away with slavery. Einzig believes that in the 1890's, there "can be no doubt that the penetration of modern money was in fact helpful in that direction. Conversely, the disappearance of slavery went a long way towards reducing primitive money in Africa to absurdity, for in the absence of slaves the cost of transport of most kinds of primitive currency in long distance traffic became prohibitive" (Einzig, 1966:139).

In the 1890's, the wives of the Kings in the court of Dahomey prepared the cowries by sawing a holes across the backs of the shell and stringing thousands of them onto ropes. Cowries imported from the Zanzibar coast through East Africa were used in the 1880's and were accepted even then in payment for goods of high value, including slaves. By the year 1863, the value of cowries may be traced through reports by Tucker: value of two thousand cowries was 4s. 6d.; by Barth: value of two thousand cowries was 2s. and 1s. 5d.; and by Burton when still cheaper cowries were being imported from Zanzibar. The Zanzibar cowries are the owo eyo used as medicine that "drove the smaller, whiter Indian and East Indian cowries out of circulation as money although they are still used for ritual purposes" (Einzig, 196:150).

The native currency of the Nri-Awka and Northern Ika Ibo in the nineteenth century was the cowrie which was also used as currency for the Yoruba and the Benin people (Curtin, 1968:67). A quotation from Theophile Conneau's 1854 Adventures of an African Slaver lends more credence to cowries being transported by the slavers than the slaves: "...as they touch the deck they are entirely stripped, so that women as well as men go out of Africa as they came into it - naked. This precaution, it will be understood, is indispensable; for perfect nudity, during the whole voyage, is the only means of securing cleanliness and health" (Conneau, 1854:107). In 1848

in a statement from the "African Travels of Abu Bake," the author writes of Timbuktu, "For money or exchange they use a shell, al-wada (cowries), gold and silver" (Curtin, 1968:90). The "African Travels of Wargee" precedes the 1820's notation discussing cowries as, "current at Timbuktu for the purchase of provisions, but they are not taken in trade by Arabs; about 3000 of them are the value of the dollar" (Curtin, 1968:184). In 1821, Samuel Crowther refers to a slave who had been passed from master to master and was ultimately sold into the European slave trade: "In November he was sold for cowries, perhaps the first time into the professional and more impersonal slave trade" (Curtin, 1968:297). Law comments on the expansion of the Oyo Empire and the strength of the slave trade in Yorubaland:

It seems likely, indeed, that participation in the slave trade acted as a stimulus to local trade and manufacturing...Perhaps the only opportunity for ordinary people to benefit directly from the slave trade was in the supply of foodstuffs to trading caravans...But the Atlantic trade yielded a greater variety of imported goods, and in particular masses of cowry shells for currency. Much of the trade goods and cowries which the chiefs received in return for their slaves was not consumed or hoarded within the chiefly households, but was exchanged for local products, thus spreading the wealth from the Atlantic trade more widely. It is, it may be suggested, not merely a reflection of the point of view of the Oyo chiefs that the reign of Alafin Abiodun, the peak of the Oyo involvement with the Atlantic slave trade, was remembered as a time of great wealth, and more specifically as a time when cowries were abundant (Law, 1977:307).

For a time between the years 1770 and 1820, western Yorubaland

prospered under the Oyo and Ketu empires in the midst of an extensive trade network leading from the coast far north to Hausaland and Borgu, as well as eastward to Ijebu and Benin and westward to Abomey and Asante (Drewel, 1983:224). The cowries imported from the Maldives were more valuable than those imported from Zanzibar due to the higher the cost of transportation and the smaller and more convenient size of the Maldives shells.

In the eighteenth century, cowries' use as currency is equally well documented: "Certain items, such as the cowrie-shell currency at Whydah and at other places on the coast, had always had a recognizable rarity value in African eyes" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:176). By the mid-eighteenth century the European slavers were keen to the unique wants of the Africans with whom they traded; "goods ranged from fire arms, gun-flints and gunpowder to glass beads and to cowrie shells from the Maldive Islands which was then used in many places along the coast as currency" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:14). Captain William Snelgrave in the court of Dahomey in 1727 was said to be struck "by the efficiency with which the prisoners were received from the soldiers' hands by specially paid officials, who paid the value of 20 shillings sterling for every man and 10 for each woman, boy or girl. This payment was made in the popular currency from the Maldives Islands" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:92). In 1703, The African Royal Company

reported that a "...part of the price paid for slaves was the actual guns, iron bars, brassware, beads, calicoes and cowrie-shells for which the captive Africans were bought" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:165). Pope-Hennessey continues his discussion of the use of cowries in detail supporting the idea of cowries serving as partial ship ballast:

Called by the French Traders bouges and by the English bougies, the shells were gathered amidst the rocks and shoals of the Maldive Islands, off the coast of Malabar, transported as ships' ballast to Goa, Cochin and other Far Eastern ports, whence they were despatched to Dutch and English factories in India, sent in packages to Europe and there crammed in small barrels for the Guinea trade. They were of all sizes, but the smaller they were the more valuable they were considered. These milk-white shells, which one French trader describes as looking like olives, were bored and threaded by the Whydah Negroes, 40 to a string or "toque" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:181).

Due to the vast numbers of cowrie shells required for slave trading, traders utilized the shells as partial ballast during the voyage to the West Coast of Africa. Food stuffs and equipment needed for months of survival comprised the remaining weight and were later replaced by sand, gravel, or stones to compensate for weight loss as the supplies were expended.

Additionally, it was in this time that cowrie shell usage was at its peak as the most prized currency used for trading slaves. Captain Thomas Phillip's account of a slaving voyage to West Africa in 1693-94 to acquire slaves for the Barbadian market describes the use of cowries by both Europeans and

Africans. While at Whydah (or Ouidah) in Dahomey, he reported:

The best goods to purchase slaves here are cowries...The only money they have here are these cowries or shells we carry them, being brought from the East Indies...as soon as the negroes have them they bore holes in the backs of them, and string them on rushes, 40 shells on each, which they call a foggy; and 5 of such foggys being tied together, is called a galina, being 200 shells, which is their way of accounting their shell money. When they go to market to buy anything they bargain for so many cowries, foggys, or so many galinas, and without these shells they can purchase nothing (Phillips, 1746:243-244).

The Yoruba-Dahomey Wars which raged from 1698-1892 served as a major feeder into the slave trade and added to the Yoruba slaves already being exported from Whydah. Oyo, the largest and most powerful of the Yoruba kingdoms, sent its calvary against the Fon kingdom of Dahomey in 1724 and 1728, and, as a result, the King of Dahomey began to pay annual tribute to the Alafin, King of Oyo. Regardless of the reigning power at the time, members of both factions were swept into slaving and made up a large portion of the slaves taken to the Americas.

Numerous other references support the cowrie as currency along the west coast of Africa. The Africans of Whydah were known to have priced cowries far above gold-dust, and "rated a man's rank and power by the number of cowries and the number of domestic slaves that he possessed...The king of Whydah, who asked more for his slaves than his caboceers were permitted to

demand, further exacted a tithe-usually a dishful of cowries on every sale a caboceer made in public" (Pope-Hennessey, 1967:181). In a quote from slave trader, James Barbot: "The best commodity the Europeans can thither," reports Barbot of the Gold Coast at the end of the seventeenth century, "is Boejies or Cowries, so much valued by the natives: being the current coin there as well as at Popo (Ivory Coast), Fida (Dahomey), Benin (estuary of Niger) and other countries farther east (Congo and Angola); without which, it is scarce possible to traffick there." Slaves at Ardra on the slave coast, Barbot goes on, "are usually purchased, one half with European goods; and when they are scarce and dear in Europe, as it happens sometimes, we endeavor to satisfy the Adrasians with 1/3 or 1/4 part of them, and the other parts in merchandise; of which, generally, flat iron bars are next to the Boejies (cowries the most acceptable" (Davidson, 1961:90). At Whydah, goods had to be kept in a warehouse due to pilfering by porters transporting the cowries from ship to shore:

...for in the daytime they would steal the cowries, although our white men that attended the goods from the marine watched them, they having instruments like wedges, made on purpose to force asunder the staves of the barrels that contained the cowries, whereby the shells dropt out; and when any of our seamen that watch'd the goods came near such porters, they would take out their machine, and the stave would insensible close again, so that no hole did appear, having always their wives and children running by them to carry off the plunder; which with all our threats and complaints made to the king we could not prevent, tho' we beat them cruelly, and

pinion'd some, but it was all one, what was bred in the bone, etc., whatever we could do would not make them forebear. (Dow, 1927:60).

The famed travels of Olaudah Equiano bear support for the cowrie shell as currency but also illustrate the authors lack of exposure to the shell when he describes the town of Timnah, "Their money consisted of little white shells, the size of the finger nail: they were known in this country by name of core." Curtin identifies "core" as cowrie shells from Maldives used as currency in West Africa (Curtin, 1968:90). In the late 1600's, a warning was issued by Captain Phillips in his discussion of the problems of the slave trade. He noted that cowries, while being the best goods used to purchase slaves, could cause difficulties for the slave ship commander in that he had to be wary of making a true report of his trade goods to the king and his minions. "If they can discover that you have a good store of cowries and brass aboard, then no other goods will serve their turn, till they have got as much as you have" (Howard, 1971:81). While it would be presumptuous to claim that cowries were used exclusively as currency in slave trading, it may be said that they were a primary form of exchange in most regions.

Preceding the slave period in West Africa, goods generally were bartered, although money in the form of cowrie shells was the basis of trade for many centuries. William Bascom speaks of M. D. Jeffreys who has shown that the "cowry

shells were in circulation in Ghana and in the Songhay and Melle kingdoms before the arrival of the Portuguese, who soon began importing them." It was in 1515 that the King of Portugal issued a license to import cowrie shells from India to Sao Tome; by 1522 they were being imported into Nigeria from the Malabar Coast, and during the seventeenth century from the East Indies (Bascom, 1969:27). The cowries originally being imported were Cypraea moneta from the Maldivian Islands later to be replaced by the larger variety, Cypraea annulus from Zanzibar.

Cowries were the major form of currency in French Sudan over the centuries. Their use was referred to already in the sixteenth century by Leo Africanus, who stated that in Timbuctoo "In matters of small value they use certaine shels brought hither out of the Kingdome of Persia, 400 of which shels are worth a ducate." In Nigeria as well, cowries already played an important part as a currency in the sixteenth century. In 1589 Bird and Newton, two London merchants visited the Benin River and in their account they remarked: "Their money is pretie white shels, for golde and silver we saw none." Einzig's footnotes detail the purchase of natives selling the merchants two gallons of honey and honeycombs for one hundred shells. (Einzig, 1966:137). Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the greater part of the nineteenth century, cowries were imported

into Nigeria mainly through the port of Lagos and by land from Sudan both from the Maldives and from Zanzibar.

Uses of Cowrie as Currency in Other Parts of the World

East Africa

In 1911, the construction of the Uganda Railway forced European access and brought coins which slowly replaced cowries then in wide circulation. In 1902, the cowries that had been hoarded by the government to avoid rapid depreciation, were burned for lime. It is estimated that even after that destruction, there were still some 300 million shells in circulation in Uganda. Following this period, cowries continued to be recognized as a medium of exchange in trade between Africans for petty transactions despite governmental restrictions (Einzig, 1966:124). Leading up to these extreme actions were a series of laws resulting in the declaration of cowries as unacceptable payment for taxes in 1901. Having received information that large amounts were still being imported from German East Africa, the Government of Uganda placed an embargo on the importation of cowries. Before cowries were even introduced in Uganda, a poorly finished yet highly valuable blue bead was used as a means of payment. Equated to one ivory disc or one hundred cowrie

shells, it was very popular until cowries became more available. It was possible to buy not only cloth and food but even boats and slaves with cowries. The price of a woman was once set at two cowries, however, with the wholesale influx during the second half of the nineteenth century, they rapidly depreciated.

Among the Borana, in Southern Ethiopia, cloth, white metal bracelets and cubes, beads, cowries and chewing tobacco are said to have served as a means of payment. In Tanzania, cowries, too, became popular as a medium of exchange and a standard of value. In the interior districts of Mozambique, currency consisted of beads, bracelets of lead and copper, and brass wire, blue cloth and cowries. Zanzibar is noted as a major exporter of the cowrie in addition to the Maldives Islands. Cypraea annulus, instead of Cypraea moneta was the shell more commonly exploited in Zanzibar. Einzig notes of Zanzibar:

Zanzibar deserves attention not so much on account of its own primitive currencies as in its capacity as a purveyor of primitive currencies for the African mainland. A very large proportion of the cowries in circulation in Africa originated in Zanzibar. Originally most shipments came from the Maldives, but subsequently it was found more convenient to import cowries from closer quarters. The blue Zanzibar cowries are larger than the white Maldivian cowries and the latter are considerably more valuable, partly because of the higher cost of transport to Africa, and partly because once in Africa, they can be transported more easily and cheaply owing to their smaller weight (Einzig, 1966:27).

East Asia

In New Hebrides, located east of New Guinea, cowries are used as ornaments as well as means of payment (Einzig, 1966:51). Similarly, in Western New Guinea, cowrie shells are the local currency which has various "denominations" and serve as a medium of exchange, a store of value, a standard of value, a standard of deferred payments and means of non-commercial payment (Einzig, 1966:81). In China, cowries were used as currency during the Ancient Period and continued to serve as such throughout the Middle Ages. Marco Polo's travels describe "white porcelains found in the sea" which indicates cowries being in full use in the province of Yunnan (Marco Polo, Travels). When the Chinese arrived in the twenty fourth century B.C., they found cowries in general use by the native population as a medium of exchange. Einzig notes:

The Chinese invaders, who for many centuries constituted a minority of this population, regulated the circulation of cowries as well as that of tortoise-shells and other shells. References to cowries appear in Ya-King, the oldest Chinese book. The same book also mentioned tortoise-shell currency, used for large payments which would have required too many cowries. The use of cowries and other shells by the early Chinese as currency is also indicated by etymological evidence. The words denoting "buying", "selling", "riches", "prices", "cheap", "dear" and many others referring to money and wealth contain the ideographic sign denoting the word "shell" (Einzig, 1966:245).

Interestingly, the popularity of cowries as currency led to the use of metallic cowries around six hundred B.C. in an

effort to consolidate the shape of the currency with the advantage of the use of metals for monetary purposes (Einzig on Lacouperie, 1888). It has also been said that the idea of a hole in Chinese "knife money," which has subsequently evolved into a round coin with a square hole, was suggested by the stringing of cowrie shells (Einzig on Wen Pin Wei, 1914).

Middle Asia

Cowries were used until recently as currency in Laos having a fixed ratio to the Indo-Chinese piastre (Einzig, 1966:92). It was not until 1865 in neighboring Siam (Thailand), that cowries were displaced by the issue of lead token money. Eight varieties of cowries were in use at the same time as currencies for hundreds of years. In the seventeenth century there was a fixed ratio between cowries and in prevailing monetary unit known as the "cattu". For a long time, cowries remained the favorite medium of exchange in Siam for small transactions. Reaching back even into the fourteenth century, cowrie shells are a noted currency in Siam and kept a set ratio of 10,000 to 20 "taels" in paper money (Einzig, 1966:93). India used cowrie shells as currency which served as the original currency of the Meitheids in the late nineteenth century when they were worth four hundred to the anna (Einzig, 1966:105).

The Maldives Islands proceeded the coastal areas of Zanzibar as one of the first areas in which cowries, here Cypraea moneta were exploited on a large scale. Adding a tone of mystique to these shells, cowries were only allowed to be collected at certain phases of the moon when first exploited (Einzig, 1966: 374). Edrisi, writing in the 1100's century, stated that the King preserved the shells in his treasury and possessed the greater portion of them. Einzig comments, "Vast quantities had been exported throughout the centuries. As cowries were the staple export of the Maldives, this alone qualified them to act as currency, since they had always been assured of an unlimited demand" (Einzig, 1966:108). According to Abu'l Hasan Ali, in A.D. 916 the Queen of Maldives had no other money but cowries.

Due north of the Maldives, cowries were an early form of currency for India. Even one single cowrie had a fair purchasing power in fruits and vegetables (Einzig, 1966:242). Einzig recounts the writings of Pyard de Laval, who visited India in the sixteenth century, and noted that the people of Bengal used cowries for ordinary money even though they possessed gold and silver; kings and "great lords" were said to have houses built for the express purpose of storing their shells considered to be part of their treasure. All the merchants from other places in India took large quantities of cowries to Bengal, where they were always in demand in baskets

of 12,000. The early Indian mathematic treatise, Lilivati, portions of which were written in A.D. 628, contains reference to their monetary use. From the third century B.C., cowries were a currency and had a very high purchasing power in India. Twenty of them could pay for the daily wants of a man. While currency is only one aspect of cowrie shell usage, it is best documented historically. The ensuing chapter considers other realms of cowrie shell usage with a focus on ethnographical data.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHNOGRAPHICAL DATA

The following chapter looks into both utilitarian and ritualized uses of cowries. Documentation supporting these uses relies upon both ethnographical data and historical sources. None of these explanations, however, may be the correct explanation for the cowrie shell of the Afro-American or Euro-American in Virginia. While the uses may not be correct, they certainly prepare a sound base from which possible conclusions may be drawn.

Utilitarian Uses

Food

Food is perhaps one of the most obvious uses for the cowrie shell, although of the sources reviewed, there was no specific mention of Cypraea moneta or Cypraea annulus in this capacity. Not used to the degree that are other mollusks, the cowrie animal is definitely edible and is eaten in most islands of the Indo-Pacific where the cowrie is abundant on reefs. Cowries may be boiled, roasted over hot coals or eaten raw and are said to have a taste similar to that of an oyster (Allen, 1956,10).

Tool

Interestingly enough, the backs of the cowrie shell, were at one time used in Italy as a tool for burnishing paper: a technique for producing a high sheen in quality paper. Another tool function the cowrie has served is in ironing lace (Allen, 1956:7). The cowrie is also an instrumental tool in the theater of West African peoples. When tied around an empty gourd and shaken, the audience enjoys direct participation in the response to the performance at hand. Known as a "sekere" to the Yoruba, this instrument was said to distinguish between the status of the players by differentiating between the size of the gourd and the decorative nature of the cowries. This rattle is used today among many African cultures as an important implement in ritual and festivals.

Medicine

For the Yoruba of West Africa, the cowrie shell is used in traditional tribal medicine. Known as "owo eyo," this Yoruba term refers to the cowrie shell imported from Zanzibar (Cypraea annulus). One medicine utilizing cowries is for "eda," an illnesses caused by "germs" which inhabit the body and which need to be expelled before the body can be cured. Intended for use by a woman, this medicine includes

ingredients which seek to reverse the various harmful forces so that the body may return to a healthy state. Another kind of medicine using cowries is known as "oogun awure" and is employed as a medical aid for a hard working man to gain just reward for labors. Because they are perceived to have natural characteristics, the cowries in combination with other ingredients have the power to perform the required task because, either on their own or in combination, have the properties of effect sought for in the body of the patient (Buckley, 1985:76).

The cowrie shells found on Virginia sites archaeologically were, with all likelihood, not used as food, tools, or medicine. The cowries under consideration here are generally no bigger than a thumb nail and therefore would not great provide sustenance unless eaten in vast quantities and cowries of considerably larger size than the ones found on sites in America would be employed for these uses. The "ironing" qualities of the shell are a technique of the people of Italy for which there is no record of similar utilization in Africa or America as yet found. Furthermore, if the shells found in America were used as a musical instrument it would seem logical that more shells would be found in direct association with one another, yet, this is not the case.

There are restrictions throughout the legal ledgers on

poisonous medicines in a 1748 Code of Law in Colonial Williamsburg, for example, particularly as they refer to slave restrictions. Tate and other scholars believe that these restrictions arose from a fear that the Negroes continued to practice their tribal medicine and witchcraft brought from Africa (Posnanski, 1989). Whether used as a cure or used as a curse, the fear of "unknown" powers were enough to threaten the slave owners into believing that cases of poisoning could be attributed to their slaves. In some of the archaeologically recovered shells, the dorsal hump is sawed off and a possible explanation could be for medicinal use, however, a more probable consideration for this alteration is documented by slave traders for ease in transportation. It is doubtful that Europeans used the ground up cowrie for medicine and no support for this hypothesis has been found as yet.

Ritualized Uses

Games

Games may be considered one of the ritualized uses and the kind known as "Mancala Games" are commonly played throughout Africa, India, Madurai and Indonesia. Cowrie shells (Cypraea moneta and annulus) and nuts are used interchangeably as game pieces yet the rules commonly refer to

game pieces in general as "seeds." Similar in their basic goals and methods of play, the hundreds of known mancala games differ greatly in detail. The game boards are composed of a number of rows in which there are contained a number of cups (Appendix A, Figures 1 and 2). Although the game boards are often made of wood or stone, McCane's research shows that they may also simply be pressed into the dry earth. The goal is to redistribute the game pieces according to certain rules so as to accumulate as many as possible.

Boards aging almost 3,500 years have been found at Al-Qurna, Luxor, and Karnak in Egypt lending support to the agreement that the birthplace of the mancala game lies in the region around the Red Sea (McCane, 1991:1). Cowries were used across the Mediterranean as ballot-balls for vote casting in ancient Athens to which one may link their use today as game counters to that time or even earlier.

Decoration

Decorative arts of African peoples are richly ornamental and intertwine with long standing tradition. In twentieth century ethnographies, pictures abound with the use of Cypraea annulus and moneta as a decorative motif, detailed throughout Appendix B. Referrals to specific cowrie decoration in the eighteenth century are made predominately by slave traders

showing a trend of Cypraea annulus and moneta as an ever-present component of ornamentation.

In William Bascom's extensive work with the Yoruba in 1969, he notes the vast usage of cowries in the village (Bascom, 1969:86). The Drewals' research in 1983 of the Gelede festival practiced by peoples of Yorubaland shows a tradition of cowrie decoration as well. There is even a symbol adorning the top of many masks known as "owo eyo" meaning "cowrie shell" (Appendix B, Figures 2 and 3). The owo eyo is symbolic for the sacrifice of one's inner head or destiny (Drewel, 1983:159). Costumery is decked with strands of cowrie shells strung one on top of the other (Appendix B, Figure 4). There is a mask in which long flowing strands of cowries encircle two female figures (Appendix B, Figure 5). While the precise religious reference is uncertain, this mask may honor Orisa Oko, the deity associated with the hunt, plants, animal fertility, and the mothers. Devotees of this God reveal their ritual following by a double lozenge on the forehead, and the cult's principle icon, an iron staff, often clad in a garment of cowries or beads (Drewel, 1983:186).

In a secure archaeological context, a fantastic example of decoration is found on Newton Plantation in a Negro burial ground in Barbados (Handler and Lange, 1978 and 1979). The necklace found in Burial 72 is a beautiful example of personal

adornment which incorporates seven Cypraea moneta cowrie shells into its pattern (Appendix B, Figures 12 and 13). Handler and Lange provide primary referrals to decoration used by Africans during the slaving period but the referrals seem to be concerned more with beads than cowries. Of the few historical sources that mention beads, it appears that the use of beads for decoration and jewelry was common among the slave population. Griffith Hughes, reporting on the 1730's and 1740's wrote:

Our slaves, in their mirth and diversions, differ according to the several customs of so many nations intermixed. However, all agree in this one universal custom of adorning their bodies, by wearing strings of beads of various colors, intermixed sometimes by the richer sort of house Negroes with pieces of money. These beads are in great number twined around their arms, necks, and legs (Hughes, 1750:15-16).

When Lady Maria Nugent arrived at Carlisle Bay in Bridgetown during the summer of 1801, her ship was "immediately surrounded by boats, with naked men and women covered with beads, and bringing us all sorts of tropical fruits" (Handler and Lange, 1978:141). It is certainly plausible that the beads to which these sources refer include cowrie shell fashioned as beads as in the necklace from Newton Plantation. Handler and Lange tell of the Reverend Cooper Willyams who observed a slave sale in Barbados in 1794 noting: "some of them were decorated with beads given to them by their captors, bracelets round their wrists and ancles" (Willyams, 1796).

Communication

The cowrie's symbolic strength also extends into the realm of conveying information. An elaborate system of communication is employed among the Yoruba and is known as "Aroko," which was established to link the upper echelon of Yoruba society over long distances. Reeve Tucker, a West African missionary was aware of this "code of correspondence" and noted that three cowrie shells strung together meant: "I shall have nothing more to do with you;" four cowrie shells meant: "Your proposal is ridiculous;" five cowrie shells meant: "The matter is plain;" six cowrie shells meant: "I agree;" and a string of nine cowrie shells meant: "It is preferably so" (Tucker, 1948:409).

Among other Yoruba populations, the manner in which cowries are strung to one another and their association with other objects can convey an entirely broader range of meaning. The significance of the system lies in the fact that it is a specialized code limiting participation to initiated elites only and restricting information from the general public. In this way, the sense of importance attributed to these communicating symbols is greatly enhanced.

Divination

Of all the methods known to West Africa, Ifa divination is the most widely used and respected due to the intense training and preparation each individual diviner must undergo. There are thousands of verses to memorize and the gift of interpretation is given to but a few insightful males. Unlike Ifa, the casting of cowries is quite a less discriminating form of divining and is known to be practiced by men and women alike in Africa and abroad.

Simpler than Ifa divination and held in less esteem in Nigeria, sixteen cowries is more important in the Americas due to its wider recognition and more frequent employment. This acceptance may be due to its relative simplicity; to the popularity of Shango, Yemoja, Oshun and other Yoruba gods with whom sixteen cowries is associated; and to the fact that it can be practiced by both men and women (Bascom, 1980: 2). The cowries are cast on a basketry tray and the number of shells facing mouth up are counted (Appendix C, Figure 1) There are only seventeen positions or figures but memorization of the verses is as difficult and time consuming as learning those of Ifa. Bascom goes on to distinguish the differences between the divining system of Ifa and that of the sixteen cowries:

Further research is necessary to determine the occasions on which the two systems are employed. However, I

believe that when affairs of state are to be settled, Ifa divination is employed; but when the personal religious matters of kings or chiefs are involved, they may rely on sixteen cowries if they are worshippers of Orishala, Shango, or the other deities in whose cults this form of divination is employed (Bascom, 1980:21).

Contained within the verses of both Ifa and sixteen cowrie divination, are the predictions and the sacrifices to be made. The client seeking guidance selects the verse pertaining most to his situation and through divination an appropriate sacrifice is determined which is necessary to avert the evil or insure the blessing that has been predicted (Bascom, 1980:22). Almost always, cowrie shells themselves are part of that sacrifice serving as a symbolic honor as well as an actual payment.

Charms

Another interesting interpretation is the use of the cowrie as a charm. William Bascom points out the usage of a small vertebrae to symbolize bad and a pair of cowries tied back to back to symbolize good among the Yoruba. The significance of these two objects lies in their associations: the bone with death and the cowrie with currency (Bascom 1969:53). Joyce Allan's Cowrie Shells of World Seas is devoted entirely to every kind of cowrie shell and a considerable amount of time is engaged in describing the cowrie's usage through time, particularly as a charm.

Unfortunately, Allan does not footnote these fascinating references. Tracing records back as far as known, Allan discusses cowries used as charms against the evil eye, carried in hunting, or attached to fishing nets as sinkers and bearers of good luck. With its likeness to the organs of reproduction, the cowrie is said to bear the spirit and the voice of Venus, the Goddess of Fertility, which can be heard when the shell is held up to the ear. Allen does refer to the writings of Pliny which tell of the cowrie shell's consecration to Venus and some of the beliefs associated with it, which were current in the early life of the Mediterranean. Cowries were kept by the people of Pompeii perhaps for similar reasons.

A modern ethnography by Anita Glaze, shows the cowrie shell modified to create a symbol. A small cowrie (Cypraea annulus or moneta) inserted within the valve cavity of a large cowrie is an omen of pregnancy as shown in Appendix D, Figure 4 (Glaze, 1981:66). Cowrie shells were used as offerings to rivers and streams to bring a constant and strong flow of water, buried in the ground to insure abundant crops, and attached to homes and canoes. In India and Persia cowries were used as decoration for horses and elephants showing the belief, in Allan's opinion, in a good luck charm that would serve to ward off evil spirits and insure fertility in the race and in the crops (Allan, 1956:6).

Religious Symbols

Cowries were offered as gifts to the gods as a sacrifice. Interestingly, "most of the Yoruba gods to whom cowries are offered are linked to production" (Falola and Lawuyi, 1990:32). As a symbol of status and a sacrifice for increased production, the cowries assume a reciprocal relationship with the god to whom they are offered, if the god is pleased, the individual is protected. Robert Thompson's book, Flash of the Spirit, expands upon modern ethnographies and looks to the expression of African culture in Cuba and the Americas. A fascinating carry-over has been the continuation of the cult of Eshu. Thompson gives an example from western Togo from the early 1900's and compares it to the similar sculptures found here:

...a tiny rounded head of whitened clay, set on a rounded neck and shoulders also made of clay, the whole set, with feathers, within an earthenware dish similarly coated with whitish clay. This silent, staring little sprite like the head and shoulders of a human embryo suddenly exposed, projects an image that is at once spectral and unfinished looking. The gazing eyes recall the Afro-Cuban myths' burning orbs within the shell beside the crossroads. Diminutive dimensions and the use of clay as the main material recall the original animate fragments of laterite into which Eshu was divided. Adding a note of literal sacrifice, cowrie shells, the ancient Yoruba coinage, mark the eyes and mouth of these figures of Eshu, (Appendix D, Figure 2), (Thompson, 1983:22).

Thompson goes on to discuss the Yoruba of Bahia and their cultural allies, the Brazilian descendent of the Ewe (Gege)

and the Fon, who re-introduce the ancient household altar of Eshu with a small head and shoulders set in a dish or bowl. From a turn of the century account: "a ball of clay congealed with the blood of a bird, palm oil and an infusion of sacred herbs, reproduces a human face, the eyes and mouth of which are represented by three small shells or cowries, inserted in the mass before it dries" (Thompson, 1983:25). In a poignant statement Thompson says, "clay and concrete Eshu have symbolic resonance - sacrificial shells, where embedded, bring to life the spirit who, though reduced to shards, has nonetheless retained the energies upon which the development of our individuality stands" (Thompson, 198:26). Although Thompson is here referring to Africans in Cuba and South America, the force of his interpretation could ring equally true for Africans in North America.

It is of course possible that the cowries found on eighteenth century Virginia sites were used as gaming pieces, however, no board has been located, at least not one of a non-perishable material such as stone. What is questionable is whether game pieces would exist on a slaving ship voyage where Africans were commonly chained wrist to ankle. Whether this game was transferred to America as an amusement for slave traders is undocumented, but a possibility nonetheless. It is not unheard of to have "entertainment" on slaving ships in the form of forced exercise through singing and dancing on deck.

Games to pass the time on the long journey are also a possibility in this context. With such limited evidence of Afro-American material culture from eighteenth century Virginia, it may be presumptuous to extrapolate to such a degree.

The decorative function of the cowrie shell is very much tied into an expression of status and power and is notably worn by the upper strata of the society. As the cowries were offered as gifts to the gods, an individual attempts to rise to a comparable level by donning cowries, in turn elevating and justifying status (Falola and Lawuyi, 1990:29). It is necessary to be ever-cautious of the interpretations forced upon archaeological and historical records by our twentieth century mind. One of the typical explanations for the cowrie's presence on archaeological sites is its use as a bead or as a button. This explanation is of course a strong possibility and must be considered for both the Africans and the slave traders. A cowrie shell necklace would be an unusual gift for a daughter, sweetheart or wife upon return from sea. It is also possible that the cowries were given by the slave traders to their slaves for increased attractiveness on the selling block. The imagination runs wild with possibilities and yet all we know for sure is that one slave was buried with a unique necklace which incorporates cowries and perhaps signifies a special figure in the slave community.

Bascom makes an important distinction in identifying the cowries used in divination. The cowrie shells employed are not the ones (owo eyo) that were formerly used as money, but a smaller cowrie (owo ero). Cowries found on eighteenth century Virginia sites may be the owo eyo cowries from Zanzibar, Cypraea annulus, which could in turn imply that they were not used for divinatory purposes or they could be the unidentified owo ero. In either instance caution should be used in drawing direct correlations between a present day practice and a historical practice. The cowries pictured in Appendix C, Figure 1 are sawn in the same fashion that are the cowries found archaeologically. If the owo eyo is not used and the smaller cowries, owo ero are sawed it may be a special alteration for the purpose of allowing the shell to lie flat either mouth up or mouth down. By contrast the owo eyo used for currency were altered in this manner to allow the shells to be strung for easier transportation.

There is nothing to exclude the possibility of cowries being used as charms in America. The shell itself is small and could have been easily concealed on a slaving vessel in the hair or mouth, for example. One of the more interesting connections is that between the cowrie shell and religious symbols in the usage of a colonoware-like vessel for ritual

altars. The crude nature of the figure and the earthenware dish in Thompson's work call to mind the conundrum of colonoware, and with the frequency of cowries found in direct association with colonoware archaeologically, one cannot help but wonder if there is some correlation. There is an example of a face pot made in Ghana noted by Vlach, (Appendix J) which incorporates cowrie shells waxed onto the surface in random fashion. What is unclear, however is the date of the pot. If cowries indeed were attached to colonoware pots by wax, then it would seem logical that the shells would leave no impressions in the clay. It would be interesting to run tests for presence of wax both on the shells and on the colonoware sherds from the same contexts such as the shell from the Wetherburn Site, ER1029G.9N(5921).

It is, in any case, doubtful that the Africans were able to transport votive figures to America, however, there is nothing to say that they could not reconstruct similar forms here. It is not likely that the cowrie served any religious symbolism for the trader, however, it is possible to make the assumption that they were aware of the value of the cowrie shell and for that reason only, transported it to America.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXT ANALYSIS AND SITE HISTORY

While the Anderson, Hornsby, Chiswell, Jones, Brush-Everard, Wetherburn, Custis, Grissell-Hay, Lightfoot, Rogers, and Nelson sites' collections were viewed, the Bermuda Hundred and Monticello sites' collections were only studied by photograph. For each site in which cowrie shells were available to be viewed first hand, an in depth analysis is made regarding such aspects as: on which site the shells were found, to what date and in which layer (when available); a description and identification of the shells themselves; a discussion of the context in which the shells were found including associations with other artifacts such as colonoware. Refer to Appendix H for data listing.

The presence of slaves on the archaeological sites is also considered. Only primary sources are employed and the specific listings of names and sources may be found in Appendix I on a site by site basis. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's "Link Sheets" proved to be an absolutely invaluable resource for this avenue of study. The "Link Sheets" were compiled with the express purpose of detailing any available historical reference ever made to a particular individual ranging from Virginia Gazette advertisements to

slave baptisms. Not every reference to slaves owned by the people inhabiting these sites is detailed, however, enough evidence is provided to clearly demonstrate the existence of slaves at every site. To begin analysis, the two best case scenarios are given linking cowrie shell presence directly to slave presence: Monticello and the Hornsby Site.

Monticello

At the home of Thomas Jefferson in the well documented slave quarters known as Mulberry Row, one cowrie shell was recovered in an archaeological excavation. This shell was found in a context more closely associated with slave presence than any of the preceding and thus serves as a type case in this study. Found in a root cellar of a building documented as a slave quarter by maps of the period, this shell has been classified as Cypraea moneta, and is unaltered.

Hornsby Site

The Hornsby Site reveals a shell from a phase II excavation. Although James City County records have been lost, 44JC500 is from a root cellar of a slave associated outbuilding which dates between 1675 and 1715. The shell has been identified as Cypraea annulus showing a distinct gold ring. The dorsal hump has a small hole which has been sawed

in a planar fashion.

Anderson Site

Town blacksmith James Anderson appears to have owned at least four slaves between the years 1771 and 1803. The Virginia Gazette shows record of a runaway slave that was with Anderson prior to 1771. United States Census Records reveal one tithable slave and two untithable slaves in 1782. Finally, in 1803, an inventory and appraisal of Anderson's estate reveals a negro blacksmith valued at L600. These slaves, as well as others, were probably used in the forge operation.

Of a total seven excavated, there are three shells from undisturbed contexts in the James Anderson Site and these are pictured in Appendix F, Figure 4. ER1927P.10A is from a brownish gray sand layer laid below bricks that dates to post 1820. The shell is unaltered in any way and clearly exhibits the thin gold dorsal ring of Cypraea annulus. ER1946M.10A is from an arbitrary level of domestic grayish ashy fill forming the top level of a thick deposit. The ashes show no real stratigraphy and date to post 1720. The shell is unaltered and has the thin dorsal gold ring characterizing Cypraea annulus. The layer contains a quantity of oyster shell and there is colonoware association in the layers directly above

and below. **ER1946V.10A** is from a grayish ash fill level overlying a hard packed layer of mixed clay and loam dating to post 1745. The shell is altered by a distinct planar sawing of the dorsal hump and also has the gold ring of Cypraea annulus.

Chiswell Site

There are three Chiswells in Colonial Williamsburg's records and they include John, Colonel and his widow, all considered here for the sake of accuracy. John Chiswell was the owner of at least ten slaves between the years of 1753 and 1768. Six slaves are noted in the Bruton Parish Records for baptisms and three slave mothers are mentioned in these records as well. Dr. Bray's Association Papers also mention one slave of John Chiswell. The records for the Colonel indicate two slaves, both of whom are included in Dr. Bray's Association Papers in 1765. The widow Chiswell is noted as having had at least five slaves through the Bruton Parish Records between the years 1765 and 1767 including three slave baptisms and two slave mothers.

There are two shells viewed of three from a layer of primary refuse on the Chiswell Site which are pictured in Appendix F, Figure 4. **ER1613B2H(6225)** is from a deposit of mixed ash and clay dating to post 1770. This unaltered shell

is identified as Cypraea annulus due to the gold ring on the dorsal hump. Oyster shells and brick fragments are associated with the cowrie shell in this deposit. ER1613B2H(6227) is from the same deposit as the shell described above dating to post 1770. With the gold ring of Cypraea annulus, this shell is unaltered and has a broken outer lip as seen on the ventral side. The same association exists for this shell as for the previous shell.

Jones Site

While Thomas Jones has but one slave mentioned in a baptismal record from Bruton Parish in 1747, it is not unreasonable to assume he owned a far greater number.

There is one shell from the Jones Cellar Site and it is from a primary refuse layer. Pictured in Appendix F, Figure 4, ER1779W-66-4.C is from a post 1730's layer of primary domestic ash found in the west room of the cellar where a clay rammed floor had not been established. The shell is altered by a planar sawing of the dorsal hump and shows a gold ring indicating Cypraea annulus. There is a small groove in the edge of the planar cut probably caused by wear from the identification tag string.

Brush-Everard Site

Of the records examined, there are at least twenty four slaves owned by Thomas Everard between the years 1749 and 1772. Bruton Parish Records give the baptismal dates of fifteen slaves and mention the names of five mothers of the children. Three records refer to sales of slaves to Thomas Everard and one will which leaves a slave to the aforementioned. In addition, Dr. Bray's Association Papers mention two slaves belonging to Thomas Everard.

There is one shell found on this site shown in Appendix F, Figure 4. 29F00345 is from a ravine layer of trash fill from the house dating to post 1750. The dorsal hump has been sawn in a planar fashion, however, the gold Cypraea annulus ring is still evident. The shell is contained within the same fill layer as colonoware, a pierced coin, and a smokey quartz crystal.

Wetherburn Site

Henry Wetherburn, a wealthy tavern owner in Williamsburg in the mid 1700's, had at least thirty-four slaves according to records ranging from the years 1734-1764. In his will of 1761, there are listed twenty-five slaves. A probate record

shows an additional two slaves in 1750 and Bruton Parish records reveal nine slave baptisms and mention one slave mother. In addition to specific slave names mentioned in these records there is also evidence for slave sales on the Wetherburn property from the Virginia Gazette in 1746 and 1752 and an order and will record discussing a runaway slave in 1738. The Wetherburn excavations focused on the service yard where the slaves would have spent the majority of their time working.

Five of five cowrie shells are from a primary refuse layer on the Wetherburn Site and may be seen in Appendix F, Figure 4. Artifact association lists were not available, however context information is given for all but one cowrie shell. **ER1029G.9N(5921)** is from a layer dating post 1750 located on the south side of the kitchen wall. The shell is unaltered and has a slight reddish coloring on the ventral denticulation which could be attributed to artifact processing, depositional processes, or remnants of an adhesive such as wax. **ER1029D.9W(6224)** is from a grey ash layer found below an orange brick yard layer dating to post 1750. The shell is unaltered and has a clear dorsal gold ring of Cypraea annulus. **ER1024E.9N(6222)** has no context data available. The shell is unaltered and is identified as Cypraea annulus due to the gold ring. **ER1141L.9N(6223)** is from a brown sandy loam layer found below a combination mortar and orange brick layer

dating to post 1750. The shell is altered by a wide planar dorsal cut which obscures any presence of a gold ring rendering the shell either Cypraea annulus or moneta. ER1031P.9N is from a layer of brown sandy loam layer found below a shell yard deposit located south west of a porch complex. The shell is broken and could have been weakened from being cut. There is a trace of a dorsal gold ring indicating that the shell is Cypraea annulus.

Custis Well Site

Dr. James McClurg occupied the Custis site on which the excavated well is located. From the records examined there were at least four slaves in the possession of Dr. McClurg. St. George Tucker's letters contain a message to his wife referring to Dr. McClurg in 1781. It appears that the doctor has but three servants remaining after the ravages of the British troops. There is also a reference to a slave baptism in 1783 and the mother of the child in Bruton Parish Records.

Appendix F, Figure 4 shows the only shell from the Custis Well site and unfortunately there is no available contextual data. ER850X-43 is from the fill of a well on a site which post dates 1780. The shell is unaltered and has a distinct trapezoidal form with no dorsal gold ring and thus is

classified as Cypraea moneta.

Grissell-Hay Site

The Grissell-Hay property saw two Blairs as its owners: Archibald and John. Archibald had at least one slave, a mulatto woman, who was sentenced in 1728 to hang for arson. John Blair had at least fifty-seven slaves mentioned in various records during the years 1729-1782. Twenty-five of those slaves are in the Bruton Parish records for baptisms including one adult in 1747. The mothers noted in the Bruton Parish records number four. Three slaves were left to John Blair in a will and there is one record of a slave sale to the aforementioned in 1751. Dr. Bray's Association notes nine slaves and John Blair's personal diary provides references to twelve slaves. In addition to these records there are referrals from various orders, wills, deeds and inventories which account for an additional three slaves one of whom was to be whipped for breaking and entering and two others to be whipped for hog stealing.

The only shell found from Grissell-Hay Site is pictured in Appendix F, Figure 4 and is from a primary refuse layer. 29CA-290 is from a fill layer in a brick lined root cellar that post dates 1731. The shell is broken, probably due to weakening from being cut and there is no dorsal ring visible.

This cowrie has been classified as Cypraea moneta or annulus.

Lightfoot Site

Phillip Lightfoot was a wealthy land owner and his will reveals well over two hundred slaves inhabiting various properties owned by the deceased and left to his children in 1748. The cowrie shells associated with Lightfoot are from a walkway fill behind his homestead in Yorktown.

The cowrie shells from the Lightfoot site are seen in Appendix F, Figure 7. There is an excess of one hundred and fifty shells from this site and of those, only eighteen were accessible for examination. YO466/154/J, YO466/156/F (a), YO466/158/D (a), YO466/158/D (b), YO466/158/D (c), YO466/158/D (d), YO466/158/D (e), YO466/158/D (f), YO466/158/D (g), YO466/158/D (h), YO466/139/F (a), YO466/139/F (b), YO/466/118/E, YO466/118/F (a), YO466/118/F (b), YO466/118/F (c), YO466/M6/F (a), YO466/M6/F (b) are all from the same context from a layer in a service and dairy yard which post dates 1720. Of all the shells, only two are altered: YO466/156/F and YO466/139/F. The dorsal hump is sawn in a planar fashion and yet the gold ring is visible. These two shells and the remaining sixteen are thus given the overall classification of Cypraea annulus. The shells are loosely associated with colonoware found on the site and are directly

intermixed with sand and gravel that formed a walkway in the yard. The sand and gravel mixed with such a vast number of cowrie shells could be indicative of excess ballast (Garrett Fesler, Personal Communication, 1991).

"Poor Potter" or Rogers Site

William Rogers was known to have had at least forty-six slaves between the years 1710-1739. Thirty-six slaves are mentioned in Roger's will and inventory and an additional ten are detailed in various orders and wills records.

The pottery excavated dates to the period between 1720 and 1745.

Please see Appendix F, Figure 5 for seventeen Rogers Site's cowries that were available for examination. There are other several cowries from this site housed in various collections that were inaccessible at the time of this writing and therefore, are not included in this data. Y-12831 3Y/4722, Y-12835 3Y/27L2, Y-12833 3Y/37IB2, Y-12832 3Y/27LSA, Y-12834 3Y/27M2A, Y-12827 3Y/27F2, Y-12836 3Y/27Z2, Y-12828 3Y/27Z2, Y-12829 3Y/27L6, Y-12824 3Y/27L5, Y-12836 3Y/27L2-27S1 (a), Y-12836 3Y/27L2-27S1 (b), Y-12830 3Y/2752, Y-44231, Y-12823 3Y/27L2-27S1, Y-12830 3Y/2752, Y-12825 3Y/27E6 are all from the same context found directly in the workshop area of the kiln at the pottery site in Square 27 which post dates 1730. There are two broken shells that

appear to be unaltered and those are Y-123834 3Y/27LSA and Y-12824 3Y/27L5. There are three altered shells with the dorsal hump sawed off and those are Y-12823 3Y/27L2-27S1, Y-12830 3Y/2752 and Y-12825 3Y/27E6. All of the shells examined are Cypraea annulus as the thin dorsal gold ring is at least partially or entirely visible. The fact that colonoware is present at the site and that the shells are confined to the kiln workshop area is intriguing.

Nelson Site

The Nelson family was heavily involved in the slave trading business in colonial Yorktown. It comes as no surprise that hundreds of slaves stepped foot upon or lived near the Nelson house which was later excavated. William Nelson gave to his sons and daughters properties and slaves in many counties upon his death. Thomas Nelson's estate appraisal details over two hundred and fifty slaves owned by Nelson at one time on four different properties.

There are four cowries shells from the Nelson House site seen in Appendix F, Figure 6. All of these shells are from the same context and they include: Y-51214 4Y/29(S6-Y5), Y-51213 4Y/29Q4, Y-51212 4Y/28P9, and Y-51215. All of these shells were found to be associated with dairy and kitchen outbuildings post dating 1720 and were distributed in no

definite pattern. Y-51215 is the only shell from this site that is altered with dorsal hump sawn across the plane. The shells have been classified as Cypraea annulus due to the distinctive gold ring visible on the dorsal side.

Bermuda Hundred

The only data available for this shell is the history of the location in which it was found. Excavations were conducted on the waterfront area, documented as a slaving port. The shell is Cypraea annulus and exhibits the dorsal gold ring.

The following Table breaks down the pertinent facts. From the above section, the Table takes into account the average date range of the site; if there were slaves at least present on the site; whether the shells were modified by cutting and the number of shells viewed versus the number of shells known to exist for that particular site.

TABLE 3

COWRIE SHELLS FOUND ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN VIRGINIA

Site	Earliest Association	Slaves Present	Shells Cut	Shells Viewed
Monticello	1770	yes	1	1 of 1
Hornsby	1675	yes	0	1 of 1
Anderson	1745	yes	1	3 of 7
Chiswell	1770	yes	0	2 of 3
Jones	1730	yes	1	1 of 1
Brush-Ev.	1779	yes	2	2 of 2
Wetherburn	1750	yes	2	5 of 5
Custis	1780	yes	1	1 of 1
Grissell-H.	1731	yes	1	1 of 1
Lightfoot	1720	yes	2	18 of 150+
Rogers	1720	yes	3	17 of 17
Nelson	1720	yes	1	4 of 4
Bermuda 100	1700	yes	1	1 of 1

Total Shells Viewed = 59

Total Shells Cut = 15 or 27%

Total Shells in Virginia = 182+

*This total awaits further revisions upon confirmation of more cowries from Curles Plantation Site, Virginia, Poor Potter, Great Valley Road and Dudley Diggs.

This table presents some interesting statistics. The data range of sites on which cowrie shells are found is approximately 1675-1780. Although this range should not be considered absolute due to the fact that Virginia's archaeology focuses upon colonial history, the time period does bear some relevance. These eighty years saw a major influx of African peoples into America and an expansion of European and American trading networks having access to Africa. Slaves are present on every site mentioned as documented by primary historical research and this factor must be considered. It is, however, important to note that slave

presence on a site does not denote cowrie shells' presence on the site or visa versa. Euro-Americans were also living on the site and contact with slavers having cowrie shells is another, perhaps less likely possible explanation of the cowrie's presence.

While only 27% of the shells examined were cut, this percentage is significant if the sawing off of the dorsal hump can be linked to African alteration. The bores were known to have been made for the purpose of string great quantities of shell onto ropes for ease in transportation as well as for divination and decoration. This African alteration probably occurred years before the shell was actually deposited and after the shell passed through hands of many colors and nationalities. While most of the shells which are described as cut were sawn in a planar fashion, there are others that have simply been broken. Those which are broken may be considered not to have been a purposeful action, however, those that are sawn, may be considered to be a human alteration. This table should serve as an outline of the cowries found and further data added as accumulated and shared between institutions.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Through the evaluation of the sites presented herein, some tentative conclusions may be drawn. The cowrie shell found on sites in eighteenth century Virginia could have been utilized in any of the aforementioned manners including food, tool, medicine, gaming pieces, decoration, communication, divination, charm, and/or religious symbol. There is nothing to rule out these possibilities or any others that one could think of based solely upon the archaeological evidence. The cowrie shell could have been used by either the European (Anglo-American) or African as there is no site, which by nature alone, excludes the presence of one or the other.

The most intriguing sites are that of Monticello and the Hornsby Site. The cowrie shell from Monticello was excavated from a root cellar in the slave quarters of Thomas Jefferson. While slave presence can be documented here as well as the Brush Everard site. This cowrie was found in the root cellar of an outbuilding on the property suggesting a slave quarter structure or domestic area likely to be frequented by house slaves. Domestic areas were a primary living sphere for the slave and specifically, for women as most daily activities tended to center around this area of the household.

One of the most ambiguous sites is the Lightfoot site in which an excess of one hundred and fifty cowrie shells were uncovered along what has been interpreted to be a walkway. This walkway ran between the main house, well and kitchen outbuildings. The cowries were found in the sand and gravel mixture which comprised the walkway and it is postulated that the origin of these materials derives from ship ballast liner (Garrett Felser, Personal Communication:1991).

In the William Rogers or "Poor Potter" site, every cowrie shell excavated was associated with the kiln workshop area and the kiln itself. Documentary sources give some clues to the employment of slaves in his pottery manufacture indicating a possible explanation for the shells' presence, however, there is European presence as well on this site. What makes "Poor Potter" exemplary, however, is that it is not a domestic site but an industrial site. The primary deposit of cowrie shell tends to be in middens associated with domestic areas and workshop areas and not around the main house.

Although only twenty-seven of the shells were altered by cutting, there are still some interesting implications as before mentioned. The most probable explanation was for ease in transportation as stringing of the shells onto strings

allowed for easier carrying over any distance. There is no record of Europeans sawing off the backs of the shells, however, once the barrels of shells reached the ports of West Africa, the natives there sawed the backs off of the shells (Phillips, 1746:243-244). The cut shell modification for now may be considered to be an African modification.

What is sure is that the cowrie shell was transported to Virginia by some human entity. What is equally sure is that the cowrie has some form of cultural meaning when first acquired in its country of origin. What is unclear is if the cowrie shell retained, adapted or lost its original meanings upon reaching the New World. Unfortunately, no primary or secondary references have been located that include mention of the cowrie shells' use in America during the eighteenth century. The significance of the shell to whomever transported is as unclear as the meaning it would assume once over the cultural and symbolic border of North America. For the European, the cowrie could have been saved as a token of a trip abroad, appreciated only for its aesthetic beauty or kept as an example of a unique foreign currency. Slave traders could have dumped excess ship ballast into American waters in preparation for a voyage back to Europe, of which the cowrie could have been a component. Europeans could have used the cowrie to ornament the slaves up for sale or kept a trinket for themselves or a loved one. Europeans could have

used the cowrie as a token system within the bounds of the plantation itself as a reward to the slaves for good behavior and high productivity, thus recognizing the value of the shell to the Africans.

For the African, or his descendants, the meaning of the shell may have had a vast, and infinitely deeper range than that of currency or a souvenir. As an object that would have been easily transportable, the cowrie shell may have been a likely choice in light of a precarious future. As a currency, the cowrie shell might have been assumed to retain its buying power to wherever the individual was destined. The cowrie shell also connoted great protective power which may be seen in its use as a charm to ward off evil and bring good fortune.

The African transporter may have been simply wearing the cowrie as an ornament on his person upon abduction into the slave trade. The cowrie could have assumed a new role as a communicator of status among the slaves on the plantation whether the "massa" was cognoscente of the system or not. As a potent medicine, the cowrie could have been transported and used in practice in America, however, the only references known of its usage are among African cultures today. Cowries could have been brought as a part of a divining kit or a game set and used here for those purposes. The association with colonoware may suggest a deeper meaning in the reconstruction

of small household altars to African gods here in America perhaps hidden away in a dark kitchen corner. It is likely that through the years, the cowrie's initial meaning may have been adapted or forgotten altogether as the shell passed through generations or was simply discarded.

There is a legend which is still told today in the Republic of Benin of the cowrie shell. Slaves were said to be thrown into the sea and drowned. After some time passed, cowries grew on the body of the slave and the shells later would be harvested. The legend is technically inaccurate: firstly cowries do not grow in the Atlantic; and secondly, bodies of slaves were never used to grow cowries (Manning, 1990:99). Theoretically, however, the legend conveys a truly powerful message in that the slaves themselves were sacrificed for the power of the cowrie shell. It is a painful and ironic realization that slaves were not only purchased with these cowrie shells but the institution of slavery continued in Africa in some part due to the desire for these shells in all realms of daily life for both the African and the European.

Depending upon the context at hand, symbols may fall in and out of meaning through the mere passing of time; through a change in location; through a physical modification; through an association with other symbols; and all of these factors may be perceived in entirely different ways by different

individuals at one time or by the same individual over many times. The cowrie shell is a significant artifact. A new look into each of these sites is needed and further inquiries made into the cultural contributions by African present on these sites. While the cowrie shell may be seen as a vestige of African influence, the European usage of the shell cannot be denied or overlooked. It is this author's hope that it will be taken into more serious and critical consideration by the anthropologists, historians and archaeologists in future studies and site evaluations.

**APPENDIX A
GAMING PIECE**

- Figure 1.** Two rank mancala board with six cowries allotted to each hole, West Africa (McCane, 1990:103).
- Figure 2.** Conglak board with five cowries allotted to each hole, Indonesia (McCane, 1990:107).

**APPENDIX B
DECORATION**

- Figure 1.** Yoruba whisk broom handle with cowrie shell patterning (Thompson, 1983:65).
- Figure 2.** Gelede festival mask representing a bride covered by an "oja" or a cloth which is portrayed with hinged joints and topped by an "owo eyo," the Yoruba term for cowrie shell, symbolizing the propitiation of one's inner head or destiny (Drewel, 1983:159).
- Figure 3.** Gelede festival mask representing a "bayanni" for Orisa Oko with a projecting "owo eyo" (Drewel, 1983:62).
- Figure 4.** Gelede festival mask on a singing male masquerader named Ajakuena wearing a broad tray mask with a face in the center. Long, flowing strands of beads, palm nuts, cowrie shells and/or mirrors dangle from the rim of the tray (Drewel, 1983:86).
- Figure 5.** Gelede festival mask with strands of cowries encircling two female figures. "While the precise religious reference is uncertain, this mask may extol the wonders of Orisa Oko, the deity associated with the hunt, plants, animal fertility, and the mothers. Devotees of this God signal their ritual commitments by a double lozenge on the forehead, and the cult's principle icon, a iron staff is often clad in a garment of cowries or beads" (Drewel, 1983:186).
- Figure 6.** Rituals surrounding the collection of cowries as money at funerals are conducted on many levels, from people freely donating to amusing ritualized beggars, wearing cowrie shell rings, who question the elders for money. The elder addressed gives the expected response, "a jesting query about the masker's thirst and a small donation of cowrie shells placed in the bag according to a formula of

gestures known only to Poro initiates. Elders who have nothing to give regretfully tell the maskers, 'my waterholes,' i.e. pockets, 'are dry'" (Drewel, 1983:170).

- Figure 7.** Ritual dress of the blacksmith including bow, quiver, belt, leather bag, and cowrie shell clusters for decoration (Glaze, 1981:46.)
- Figure 8.** Yoruba performer with intricate cowrie embroidered chemise (Bascom, 1967:86).
- Figure 9.** Hunter's bard in traditional performance dress at a funeral for a Fodonon Elder with cowrie shell patterning (Glaze, 1981:44).
- Figure 10.** A single cowrie shell worn as a necklace (Davis, 1955: 52).
- Figure 11.** Gelede festival mask with a field of white dots on the platform which the authors liken to the "white cowrie shells on the face netting of the Egungun masker, suggest the spirit qualities of the 'being from beyond'" (Drewel, 1983:256).
- Figure 12.** Components of necklace found in Burial 72. The individual pieces came from diverse areas and include seven cowrie shells originating in the Indo-Pacific oceans, identified as *Cypraea moneta* by Handler and Lange. In addition to the cowries, there are: twenty-one drilled dog canines which are known to have been used as currency in some areas (Einzig, 1966:64); fourteen European-manufactured glass beads representing four different types; five drilled vertebrae from a large bony fish, and a large reddish-orange agate bead (Handler and Lange, 1979:48).
- Figure 13.** Burial 72 showing cowrie shells' approximate location (A) around neck area (Handler and Lange, 1979:49).
- Figure 14.** Reconstructed stringing pattern of necklace from Burial 72 including cowrie shell placement (Handler and Lange, 1978:129).
- Figure 15.** Actual photograph of excavated Burial 72 (Handler and Lange, 1978:126).
- Figure 16.** Components of necklace found in Burial 72 with scale (Handler and Lange, 1978:128).

APPENDIX A
GAMING PIECE

Figure 1

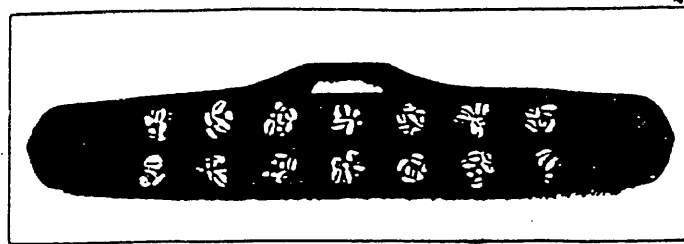
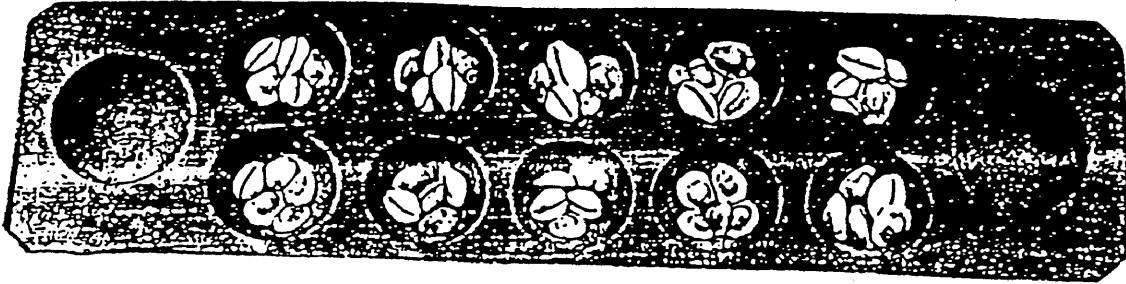


Figure 2



APPENDIX B
DECORATION

Figure 1

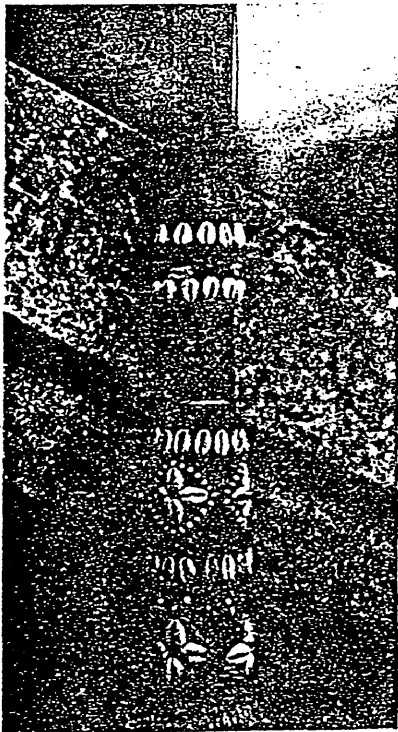


Figure 2

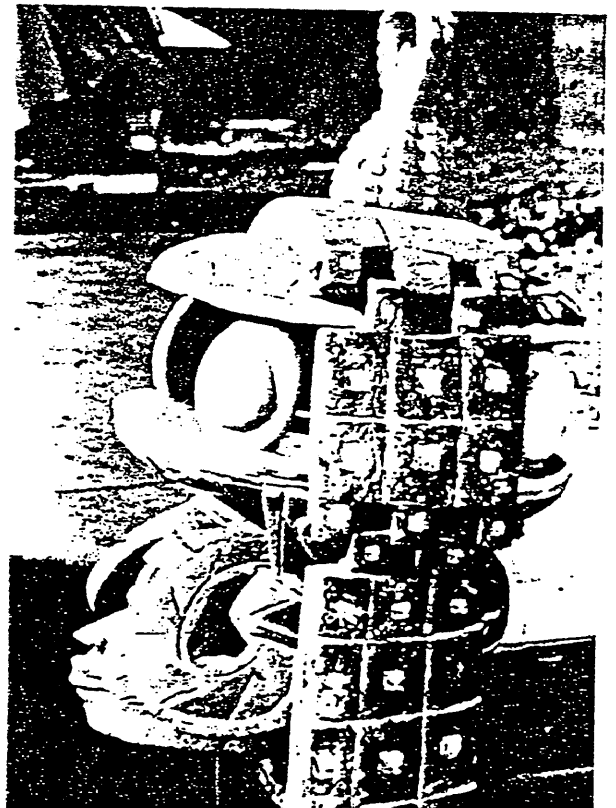


Figure 3



Figure 4

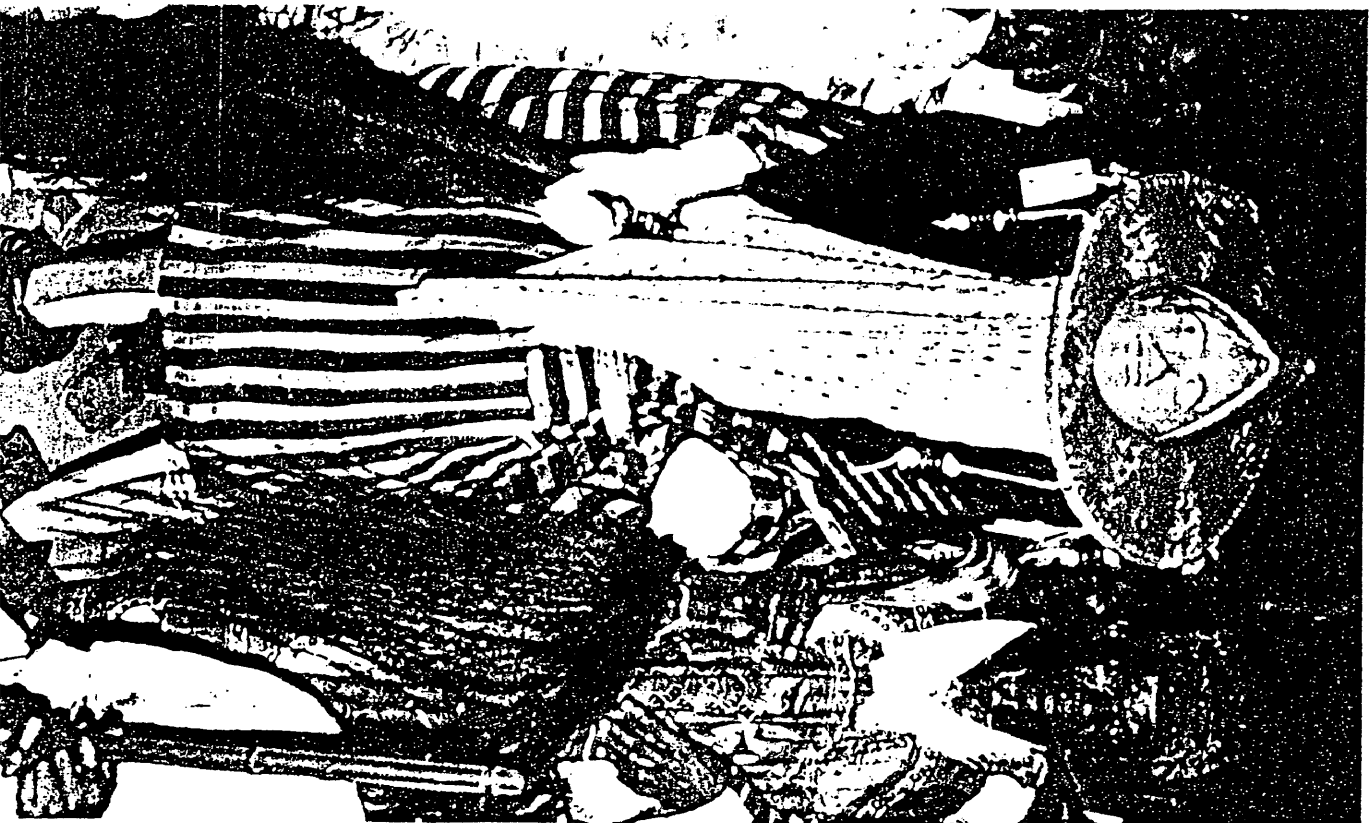




Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

Figure 12

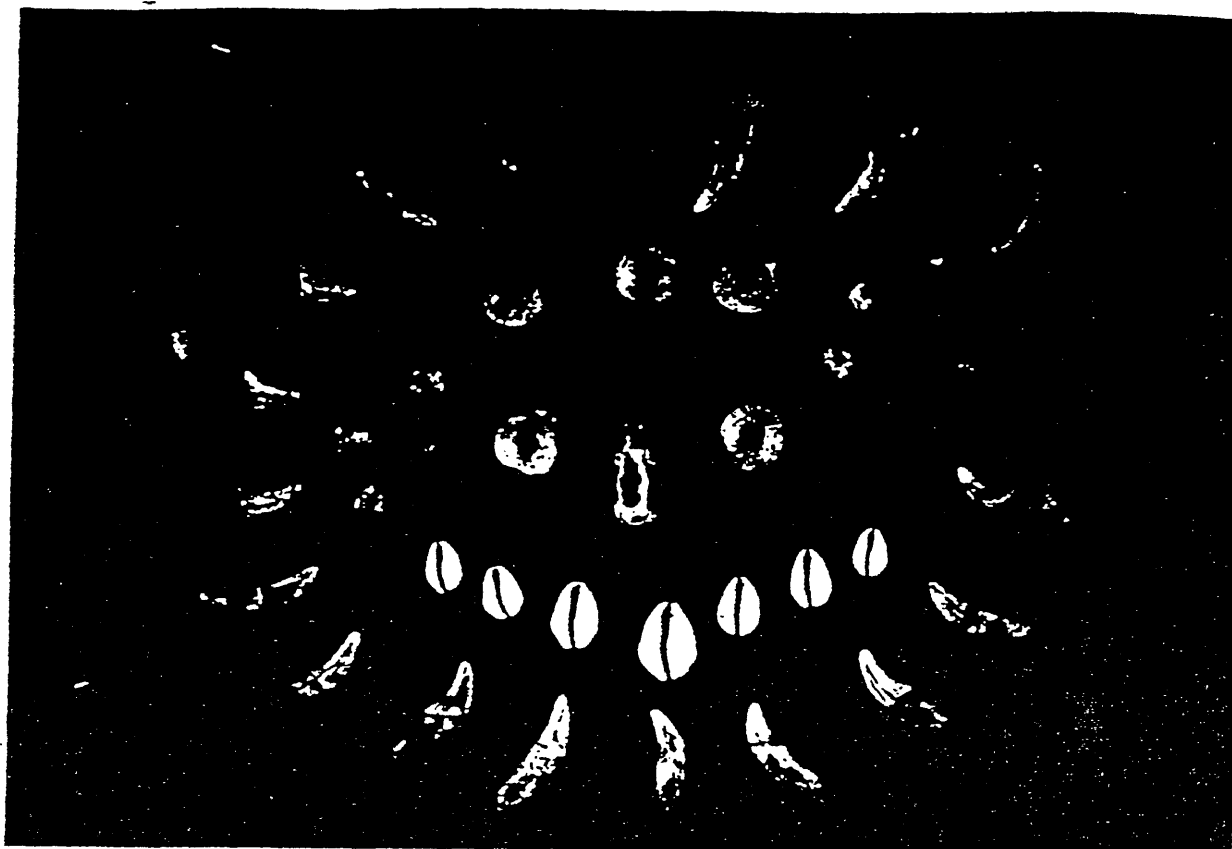
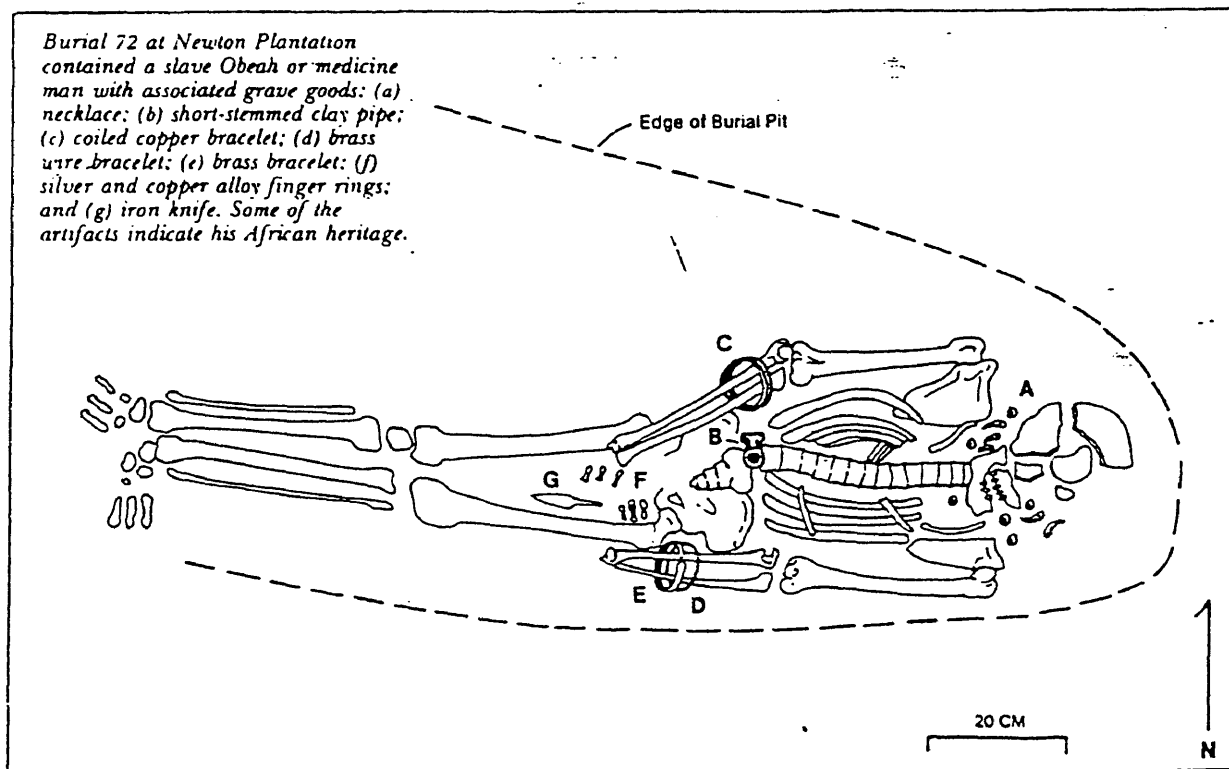


Figure 13



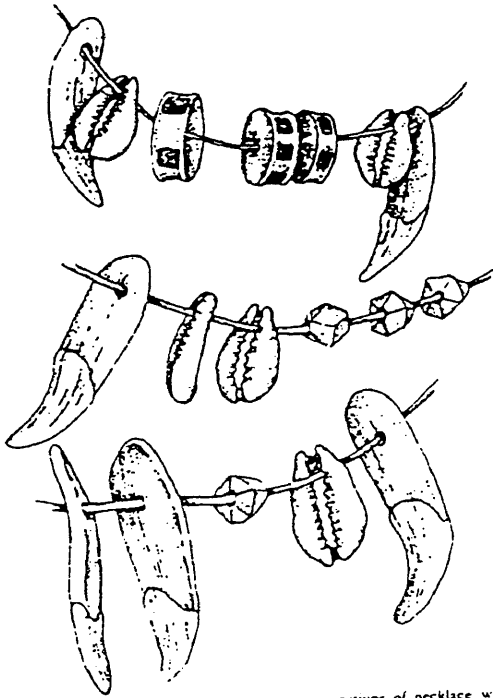


Figure 22. Reconstructed stringing pattern, sections of necklace with Burial 72, Newton cemetery.

Figure 14



Figure 19. Burial 72, Newton cemetery, upper portion of skeleton and associated artifacts in situ.

Figure 15

PLANTATION SLAVERY IN BARBADO

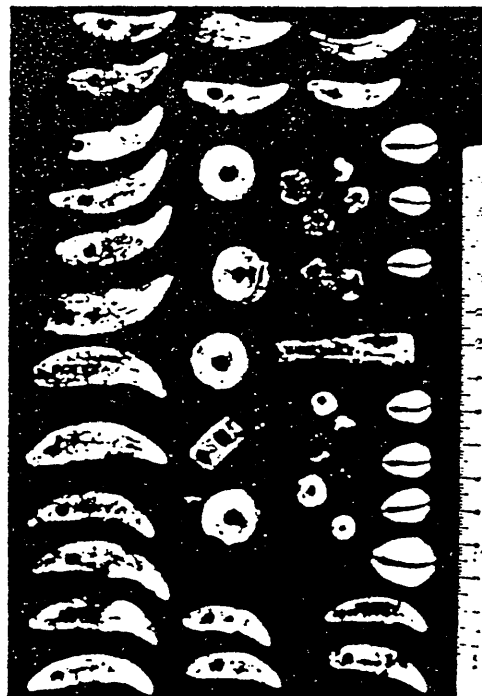


Figure 21. Components of necklace with Burial 72, Newton cemetery.

Figure 16

**APPENDIX C
DIVINATION**

- Figure 1.** Sixteen cowrie divination cast in the configuration known as Eji Ogbe, eight mouth up and eight mouth down (Bascom, 1980:1). Note the variation in size and shape of these cowries and compare to photographic appendix of archaeological sites in Virginia.
- Figure 2.** A divining bag from Oyo, made of cloth and decorated with cowrie shells, fourteen inches wide (Bascom, 1980: 4).
- Figure 3.** A divining chain or opele from Oyo with cowries at each end, fifty inches long (Bascom: 1980:6).

APPENDIX C
DIVINATION

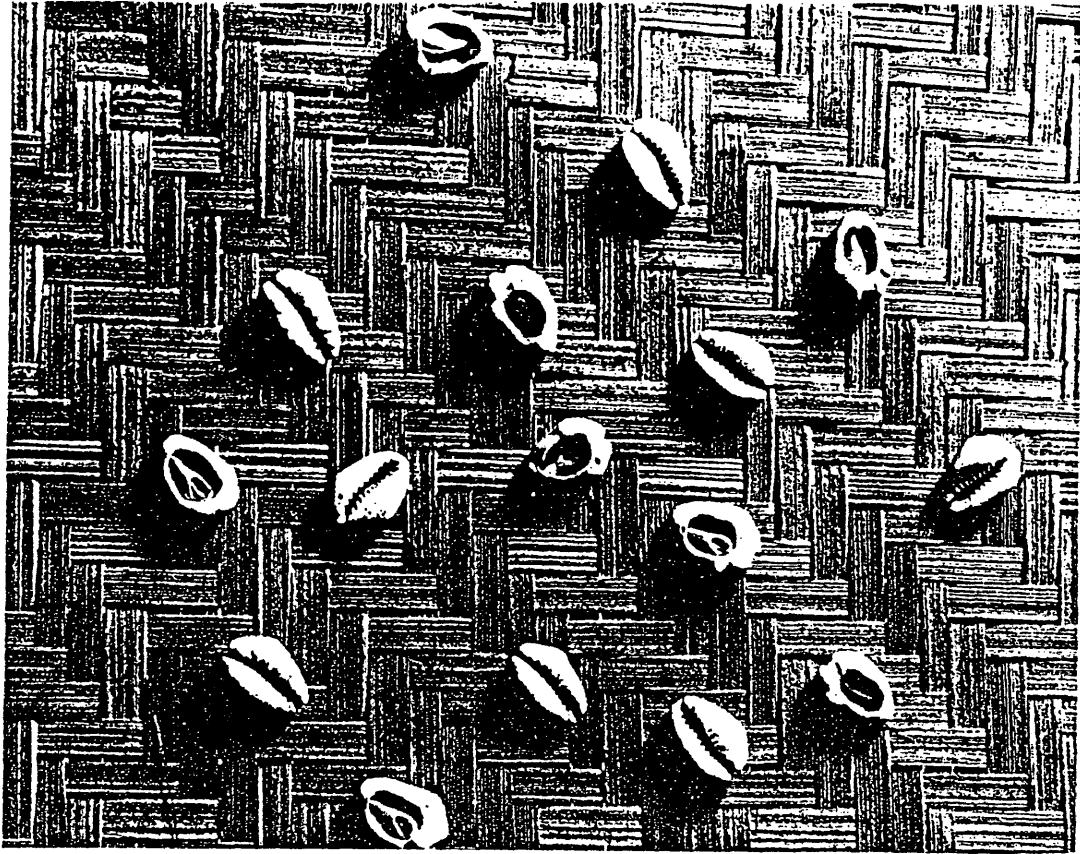


Figure 1

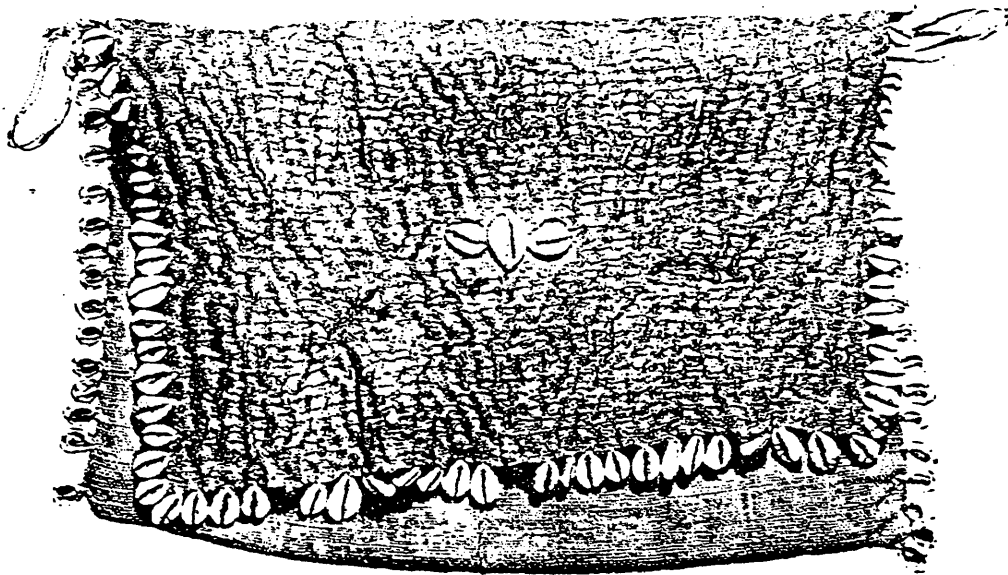


Figure 2

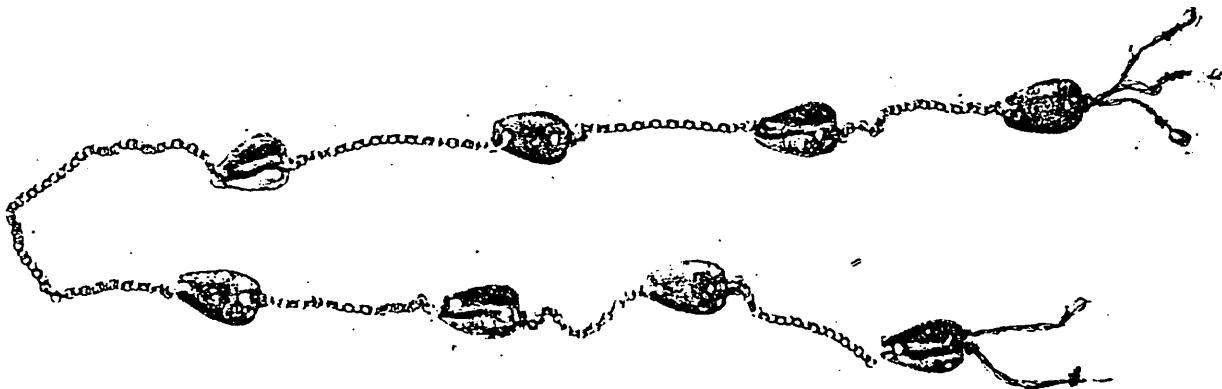


Figure 3

APPENDIX D
CHARM
RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

- Figure 1.** Detail of a basic display kit in divination showing the "cowrie within a cowrie" charm signifying pregnancy or prosperity, (on left, center of bracelet) (Glaze, 1981:59).
- Figure 2.** From Togo, West Africa a votive religious symbol to a Yoruba god represented by "a tiny rounded head of whitened clay, set on a rounded neck and shoulders also made of clay, the whole set, with feathers, within an earthenware dish similarly coated with whitish clay. This silent, staring little sprite like the head and shoulders of a human embryo suddenly exposed, projects an image that is at once spectral and unfinished looking...Diminutive dimensions and the use of clay as the main material recall the original animate fragments of laterite into which Eshu was divided" (Thompson, 1983:22).

APPENDIX D
CHARMS AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

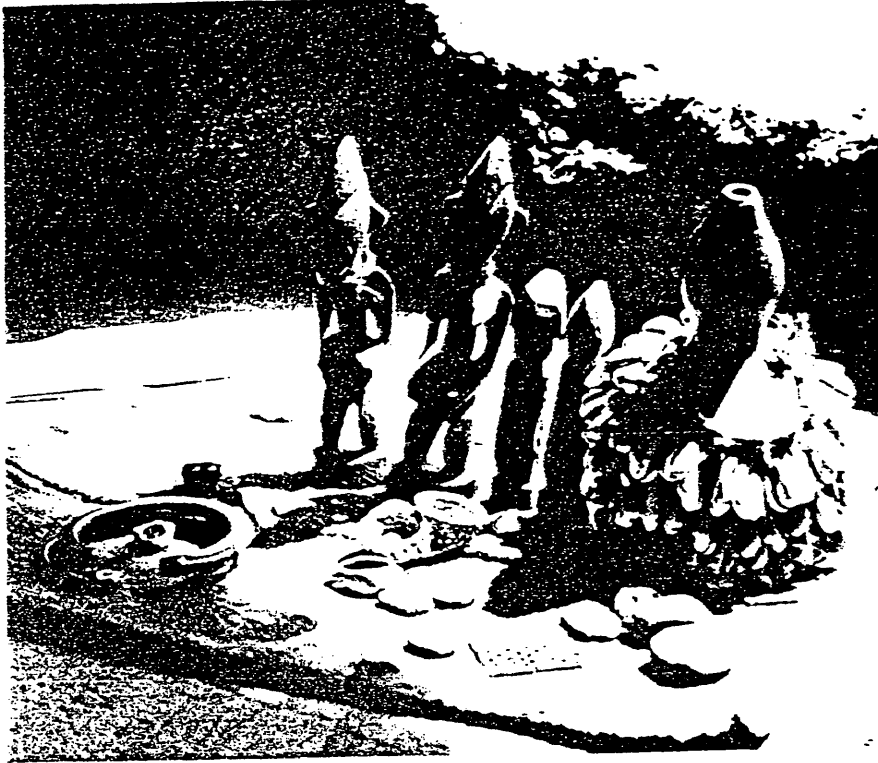


Figure 1



Figure 2

**APPENDIX E
MAPS**

Figure 1. Map showing location of cowries referred to or found archaeologically prior to the eighteenth century.

1. New Hebrides
2. Admiralty Islands
3. New Guinea
4. China
5. Laos
6. Siam (Thailand)
7. Madurai
8. Maldive Islands
9. Ethiopia
10. Uganda
11. Tanganyika (Tanzania)
12. Zanzibar
13. Rhodesia (Zambia)
14. Madagascar
15. Congo
16. Sao Tome
17. Nigeria
18. Benin
19. Togo
20. Ghana
21. Ivory Coast
22. Guinea
23. Brazil*
24. Barbados
25. Cuba*
26. South Carolina
27. North Carolina
28. Virginia

*Transported cowrie shells from Indo-pacific, today used by slave descendants in various contexts.

Figure 2. Detailed map of Nigeria.

Figure 3. Detailed map of Guinea.

APPENDIX E
MAPS

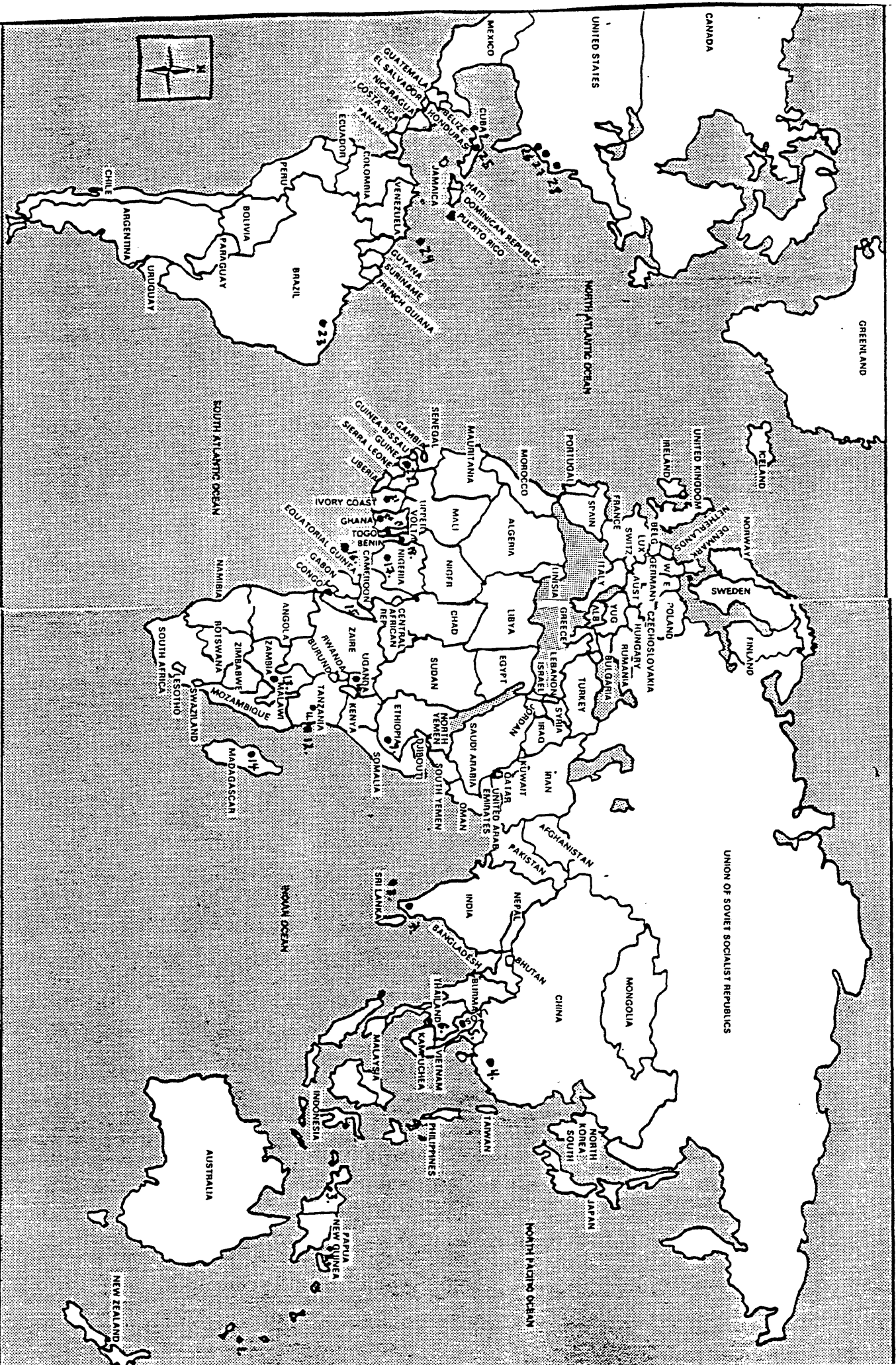


Figure 1

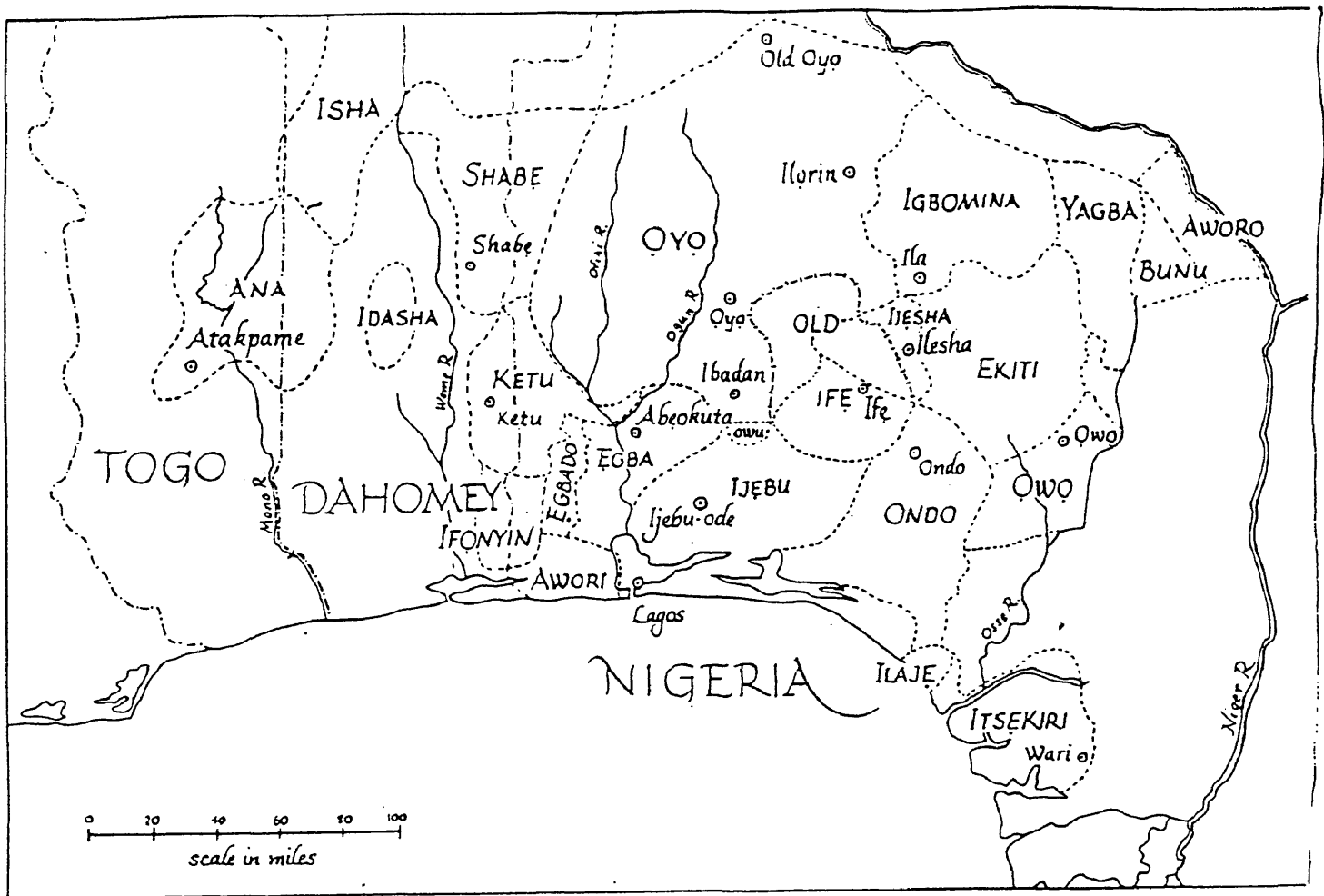
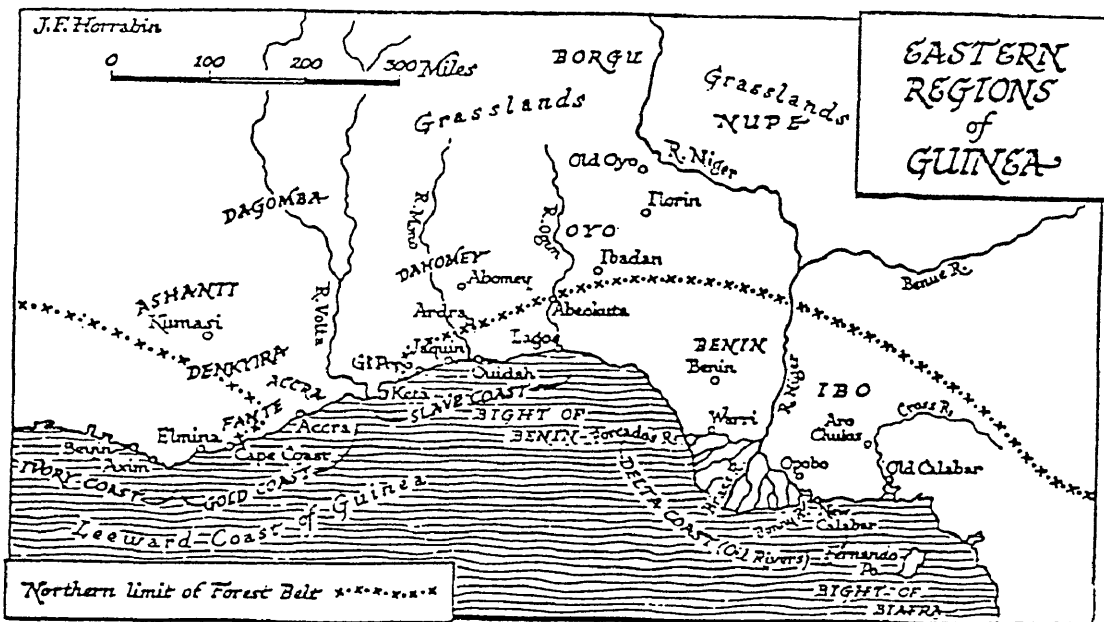


Figure 2



Note: The western limits of the Gold Coast went, in fact, as far as Beyin and a little beyond.

Figure 3

APPENDIX F
PHOTOGRAPHS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS
OF COWRIES IN NORTH AMERICA

- Figure 1.** Monticello - cowrie shell, top right corner (Kelso, 1986:30).
- Figure 2.** Bermuda Hundred - cowrie shell (Mouer, 1990:2).
- Figure 3.** Stagville/Bennehan Plantation - cowrie shell (Singleton, 1990:6).
- Figure 4.** Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Department of Archaeological Research - cowrie shells from bottom right to top left from Anderson (1-3), Chiswell (4-5), Jones Cellar (6), Brush-Everard (7), Wetherburn (8-12), Custis (13) and Grissell-Hay (14) sites. The upper photograph is of the dorsal side and the lower photograph is of the ventral side of the cowrie. Not all of the shells discussed in the outline were available to be photographed.
- Figure 5.** Colonial National Historical Park, National Park Service - cowrie shells from Nelson House site.
- Figure 6.** Colonial National Historical Park, National Park Service - cowrie shells from William Rogers site.
- Figure 7.** Yorktown Archaeological Trust, Jamestown Institute of Archaeology - cowrie shells from Lightfoot site. The upper photograph is of the dorsal side and the lower photograph is of the ventral side of the cowrie. Not all of the shells discussed in the outline were available to be photographed.

APPENDIX F
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS
OF COWRIE SHELLS IN NORTH AMERICA

Figure 1

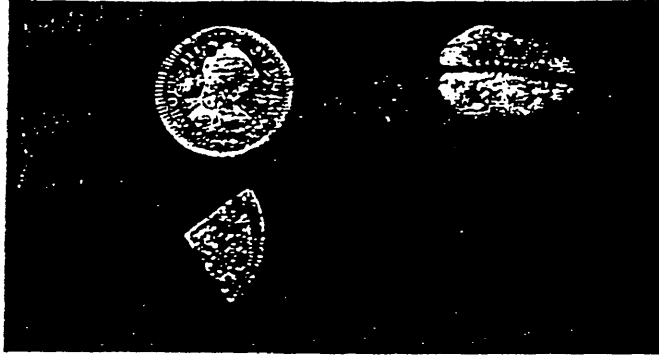


Figure 2

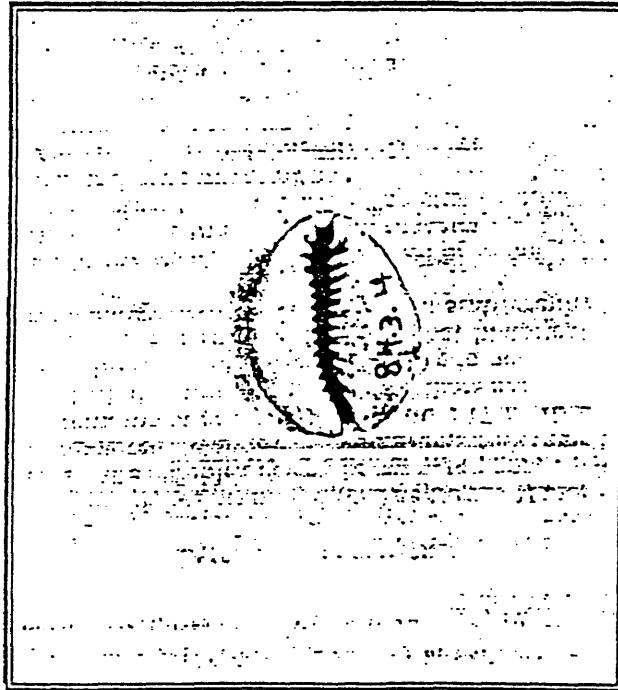
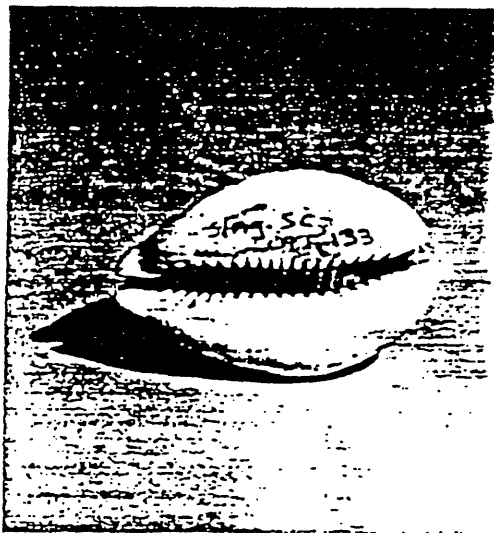


Figure 3

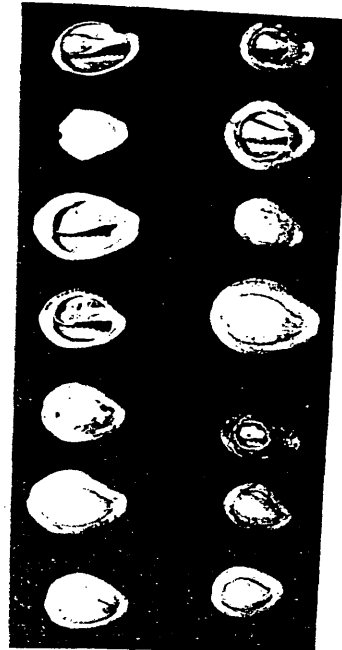


DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH
 COWRIE SHELLS PHOTOGRAPHED FROM:
 ANDERSON, CHISWELL, JONES, BRUSH-EVERARD, WETHERBURN,
 CUSTIS AND GRISELL-HAY SITES

Figure 4
 DORSAL VIEW

Grissell-Hay
 Custis
 Wetherburn

29CA-290
 ER850X-43
 ER1031P.9N
 ER1141L.9N(6223)
 ER1024E.9N(6222)
 ER1029D.9W(6224)
 ER1029G.9N(5921)

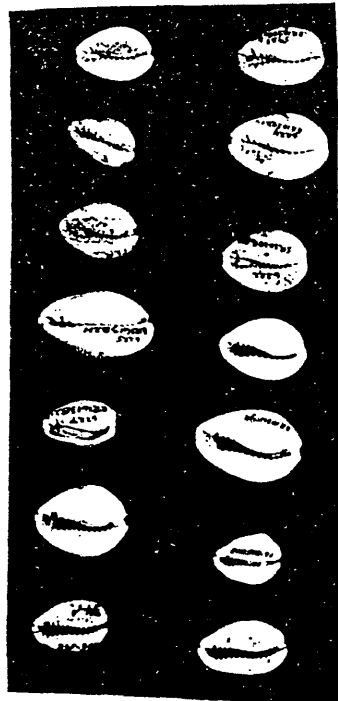


29F00345 Brush-Everard
 ER1779W-66-4.C Jones
 ER1613B2H(6227) Chiswell
 ER1613B2H(6225)
 ER1946V-10.A Anderson
 ER1946M-10.A
 ER1927P-10.A

VENTRAL VIEW

Grissell-Hay
 Custis
 Wetherburn

29CA-290
 ER850X-43
 ER1031P.9N
 ER1141L.9N(6223)
 ER1024E.9N(6222)
 ER1029D.9W(6224)
 ER1029G.9N(5921)



29F00345 Brush-Everard
 ER1779W-66-4.C Jones
 ER1613B2H(6227) Chiswell
 ER1613B2H(6225)
 ER1946V-10.A Anderson
 ER1946M-10.A
 ER1927P-10.A

COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
 COWRIE SHELLS PHOTOGRAPHED FROM:
 WILLIAM ROGERS SITE

Figure 5
 DORSAL VIEW

Y-12825, 3Y/27E6

Y-12830, 3Y/2752

Y-12823, 3Y/27L2-27S1

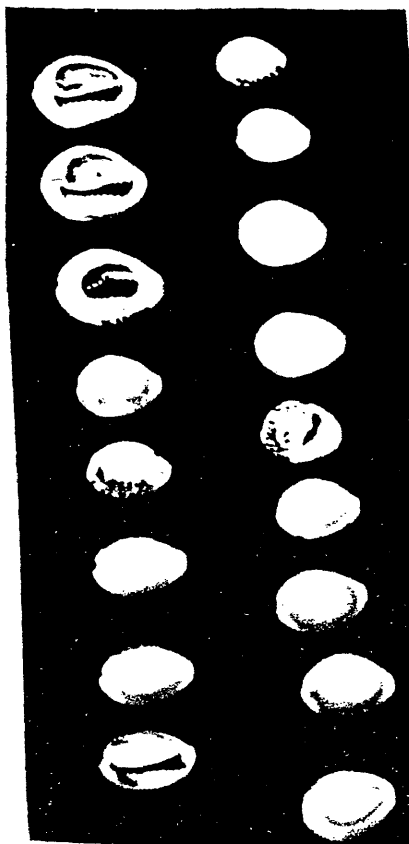
Y-44231

Y-12830, 3Y/27S2

Y-12836, 3Y/27L2-27S1(B)

Y-12836, 3Y/27L2-27S1(A)

Y-12824, 3Y/27L5



Y-12829, 3Y/27L6

Y-12828, 3Y/27Z2

Y-12836, 3Y/27Z2

Y-12827, 3Y/27F2

Y-12834, 3Y/27M2A

Y-12832, 3Y/27LSA

Y-12833, 3Y/37IB2

Y-12835, 3Y/27L2

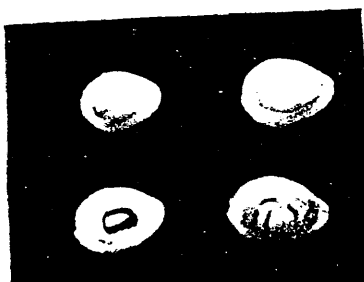
Y-12831, 3Y/4722

COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
 COWRIE SHELLS PHOTOGRAPHED FROM:
 NELSON HOUSE SITE

Figure 6
 DORSAL VIEW

Y-51215

Y-51212, 4Y/28P9



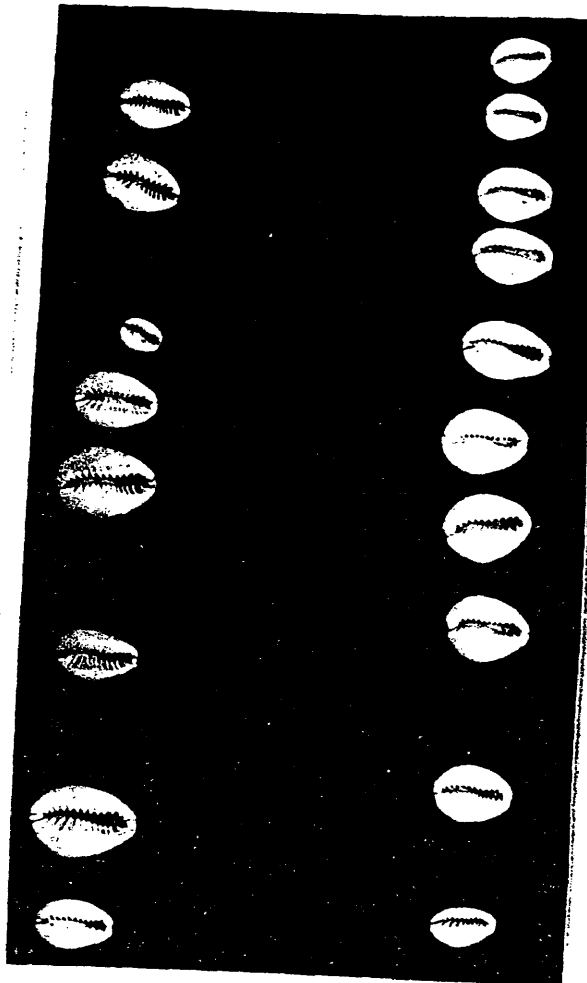
Y-51213, 4Y/29Q4

Y-51214, 4Y/29(S6-Y5)

YORKTOWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST
 JAMESTOWN INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
 COWRIE SHELLS PHOTOGRAPHED FROM:
 LIGHTFOOT SITE

Figure 7
 VENTRAL VIEW

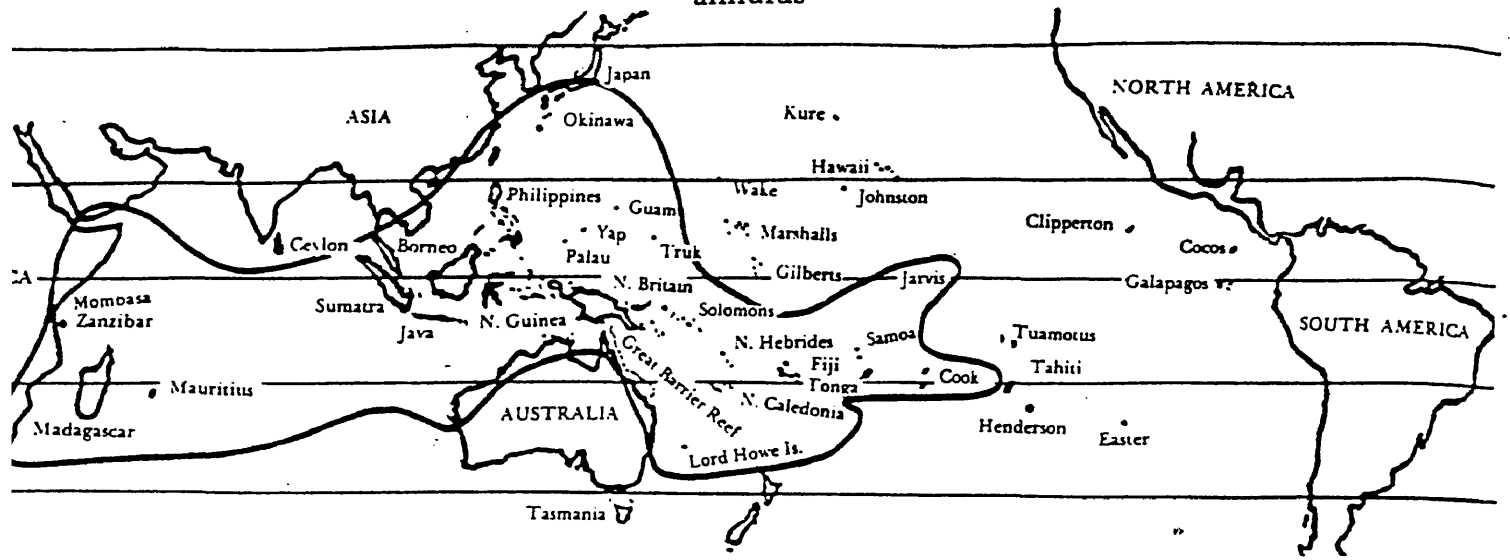
YO466/M6/F (B)
 YO466/M6/F (A)
 YO466/118/F (C)
 YO466/118/F (B)
 YO466/118/F (A)
 YO466/118/E
 YO466/139/F (B)
 YO466/139/F (A)



YO466/158/D (H)
 YO466/158/D (G)
 YO466/158/D (F)
 YO466/158/D (E)
 YO466/158/D (D)
 YO466/158/D (C)
 YO466/158/D (B)
 YO466/158/D (A)
 YO466/156/F (A)

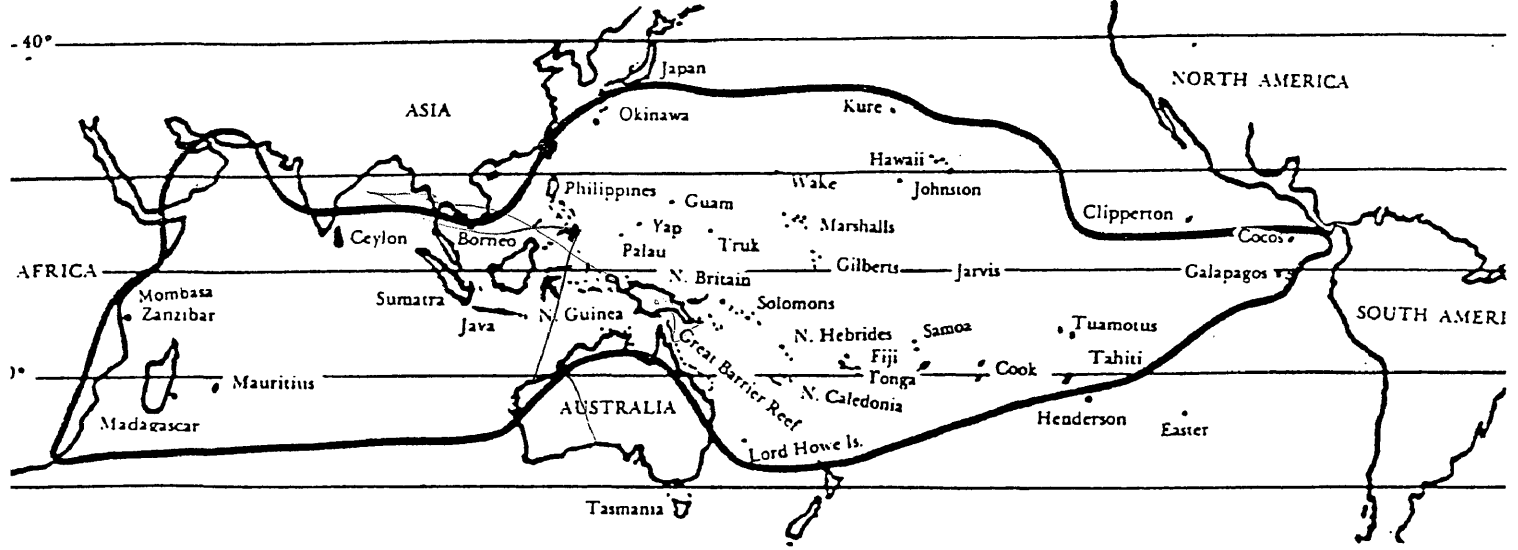
**APPENDIX G
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COWRIE**

annulus



GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF CYPRAEA ANNULUS

moneta



GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF CYPRAEA MONETA

APPENDIX H

The following appendix details the precise locations of known cowrie shells in collections from North American archaeological excavations. As this paper's focus is eighteenth century Virginia, the majority of material analyzed and research conducted concerns this area. Included, however, is every known reference to archaeological finds of cowries with future additions sure to follow as the popularity of this artifact increases. The actual site is in bold lettering followed by each cowrie shell found on that site noted by provenience number and if available, cabinet location to date. If the provenience is followed by an "*", the shell is pictured in Appendix F. The next lines approximate the earliest possible date of the site; association with unusual artifacts in the same square and soil strata level; notes on the context in which the shell was found; and the condition of the shell itself. The cowries noted as "Shell Cut" have been worked in such a way to suggest that the backs of the shells have been sawed off. All cowries examined are assumed to be Cypraea annulus unless broken or noted as Cypraea moneta. Not every collection was accessible, and not all of the shells from every collection could be made available, however, for the scope of this paper, a representative sample is presented for the Virginia region in the eighteenth century.

**APPENDIX H
LOCATIONS OF COWRIE SHELLS IN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS SURVEYED IN VIRGINIA**

I. Location of Cowrie Shells in C.W. Collection

A. Anderson Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. ER1927P-10.A*
Cabinet 1/L
Post 1945 or 1820
Colonoware association
Unaltered Shell
2. ER1927N
Not Found
Post 1745
Colonoware association
Unaltered Shell
3. ER1946M-10.A*
Cabinet 1/L
Post 1770
Colonoware association in layers above and below
Unaltered shell
4. ER1946V-10.A*
Cabinet 1/L
Post 1745
Colonoware association
Mixed in with crab claws, bones and grayish ash fill.
Shell cut
5. Not Found
Post 1745
Colonoware association with crab claws, bones and grayish
ash fill.
6. 10AG1991-
Not Found (in processing from 1991 field school I)
Highly disturbed context at back doorstep of museum.
Shell cut
7. 10AG1991-
Not Found (in processing from 1991 field school II)
Highly disturbed layer in hole of industrial area on edge
of previous Noel Hume excavation.
Associated with white ware, delft, modern glass etc.

B. Chiswell Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. ER1613B2H(6225)*
Cabinet 5/K
Post 1770
Colonoware association
Mixed in with ash and clay deposit with oyster shells and brick fragments in northern portion of area and uncovered by machine excavations.
Unaltered shell
2. ER1613B2H(6227)*
Cabinet 5/K
Post 1770
Colonoware association
Mixed in with ash and clay deposit with oyster shells and brick fragments in northern portion of area uncovered by machine excavations
Unaltered shell with broken inner lip
3. ER1613B2H
Not Found
Post 1770
Colonoware association
Mixed in with ash and clay deposit with oyster shells and brick fragments in northern portion of area uncovered by machine excavations

C Jones Cellar-Public Hospital Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. ER1779W-66-4.C*
Cabinet 16/B, Box 13
Post 1730
Colonoware association in next unit (square 67)
Found near iron nail head 1" collar and 3/4" collar, bottle glass and bone of a primary domestic ash found in west room where rammed clay floor hadn't been established
Shell cut (identification tag's string may have caused groove appearing in edge of cut area).

D. Brush-Everard Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. 29F00345*
Shelf in Ceramic ID Room
Post 1779
Colonoware association

Shell cut

E. Wetherburn Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. ER1029G.9N(5921)*
Cabinet 26/J
Post 1750
Unaltered shell with reddish coloring or wax on teeth
2. ER1029D.9W(6224)*
Cabinet 26/J
Post 1750
Unaltered shell
3. ER1024E.9N(6222)*
Cabinet 26/J
Post 1750
Unaltered shell
4. ER1141L.9N(6223)*
Cabinet 26/J
Post 1750
Shell cut
5. ER1031P.9N*
Cabinet 26/F
Post 1750
Shell broken, possibly weakened after being cut

F. Custis Well Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. ER850X-43*
Cabinet 7/G
Colonoware association on site
Shell cut
Cypraea moneta

G. Grissell-Hay Site (Appendix F, Figure 4)

1. 29CA-290*
Post 1731
Colonoware association
Excavated from a brick lined root cellar
Shell broken, possibly weakened from being cut

H. Hornsby Site

1. 44JC500
1675-1715
Cypraea annulus
-

II. Location of Cowrie Shells in Jamestown Archaeological Collection.

A. Yorktown-Phillip/William Lightfoot Site (Appendix F, Figure 7)

(150 or more shells total, 20 available for examination)

1. YO466/154/J*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
2. YO466/156/F (a)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Shell cut
3. YO466/156/F (b)
Not Found
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
4. YO466/156/F (c)
Not Found
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
5. YO466/158/D (a)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell

6. YO466/158/D (b)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
7. YO466/158/D (c)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
8. YO466/158/D (d)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
9. YO466/158/D (e)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
10. YO466/158/D (f)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
11. YO466/158/D (g)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel

- Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
12. Y0466/158/D (h)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
13. Y0466/139/F (a)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
14. Y0466/139/F (b)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Shell cut
15. Y0466/118/E*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
16. Y0466/118/F (a)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
17. Y0466/118/F (b)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and

- kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
18. Y0466/118/F (c)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
19. Y0466/M6/F (a)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell
20. Y0466/M6/F (b)*
Post 1720-1750
Colonoware present on site
Located in service yard and associated well, garden and kitchen
Part of a walkway mixed with sand and gravel
Collection still being processed.
Unaltered shell

III. Location of Cowrie Shells in National Park Service Collection

A. Yorktown-"Poor Potter" Site/ William Rogers (Appendix F, Figure 5)

1. Y-12831, 3Y/4722*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
2. Y-12835, 3Y/27L2*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell

3. Y-12833 3Y/37IB2*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
4. Y-12832, 3Y/27LSA*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
5. Y-12834, 3Y/27M2A*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell, broken on dorsal hump
6. Y-12827, 3Y/27F2*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
7. Y-12836, 3Y/27Z2*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
8. Y-12828, 3Y/27Z2*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
9. Y-12829, 3Y/27L6*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
10. Y-12824, 3Y/27L5*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site

- From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell, broken
11. Y-12836 3Y/27L2-27S1 (a)*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
 12. Y-12836, 3Y/27L2-27S1 (b)*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
 13. Y-12830, 3Y/2752*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
 14. Y-44231*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Unaltered shell
 15. Y-12823, 3Y/27L2-27S1*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Shell cut
 16. Y-12830, 3Y/2752*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Shell cut
 17. Y-12825, 3Y/27E6*
1720-1745
Colonoware present on site
From square 27 predominately
All shells directly within the kiln workshop area.
Shell cut

B. Nelson House Site (Appendix F, Figure 6)

1. Y-51214, 4Y/29(S6-Y5)*
 Post 1720
 Domestic Site with dairy and kitchen outbuildings with
 cowries distributed in no definite pattern.
 Unaltered shell
2. Y-51213, 4Y/29Q4*
 Post 1720
 Domestic Site with dairy and kitchen outbuildings with
 cowries distributed in no definite pattern.
 Unaltered shell
3. Y-51212, 4Y/28P9*
 Post 1720
 Domestic Site with dairy and kitchen outbuildings with
 cowries distributed in no definite pattern.
 Unaltered shell
4. Y-51215*
 Post 1720
 Domestic Site with dairy and kitchen outbuildings with
 cowries distributed in no definite pattern.
 Shell cut

IV. Location of Cowrie Shells in Other Virginia Collections

A. Monticello-Mulberry Row (Appendix F, Figure 1)

- 1 Shell
 Post 1770
 Found in Mulberry Row itself known to be the slave
 quarters
 Shell cut
Cypraea moneta

B. Bermuda Hundred (Appendix F, Figure 2)

- 1 shell
 1650-1850's
 Shell cut
 More information forthcoming concerning context and
 relevant associations

V. Location of Cowrie Shells Outside of Virginia

- A. Stagville/Bennehan Plantation, North Carolina (Appendix F,
 Figure 3)**

1 shell
 1800's
 In slave quarter

B. Ashland Belle-Helene Site, South Carolina

1 shell

APPENDIX I

Anderson, James:

Virginia Gazette R 8Ag71:31

U.S. Census 1782

Inventory and Appraisement of Estate, 25 Oct 1803

Chiswell, Colonel, widow and John:

(Colonel)

SPG Dr. Bray's Association

American Papers 1735-1774:

Part 2 Item 10-Nov 1765(2)

(widow)

Bruton Parish Records:

6 Jan 1765

17 Mar 1765

4 Oct 1767

(John)

Bruton Parish Records:

1 Jul 1753

4 Sep 1763

17 Mar 1765

2 Mar 1766

6 Jul 1766

9 Oct 1768

SPG Dr. Bray's Association

American Papers 1735-1774:

Part 2 Item 14-16 Feb 1761

Jones, Thomas

Bruton Parish Records:

6 Sep 1747

Everard, Thomas

Bruton Parish Records:

7 May 1749

3 Sep 1749

4 Mar 1750/1
 6 May 1751
 1 Jul 1751
 1 Jun 1752
 3 Dec 1752
 30 Sep 1762
 5 Jun 1763(3 entries)
 3 Jun 1764
 3 Mar 1765(3 entries)
 1 Dec 1765
 5 Oct 1766
 7 Jun 1767

SPG Dr. Bray's Association

American Papers:

Part 2, Item 5 - 30 Sep 1762

Record of Purchase:17 Sep 1764

Wills and Inventories (21) 86-87

Wetherburn, Henry

Bruton Parish Records:

1749 (2 records)

2 Jul 1749

Apr 1750

1 Apr 1751

1 Jun 1752

7 July 1752

6 May 1753

16 Mar 1761

6 Jun 1762

1 Jul 1764

Will: 16 Mar 1761

Bill of Sale to Henry Wetherburn:21 Jan 1750

Probate Record: 5 Dec 1760

Orders, Wills and Inventories:

(18) 129

(18) 456

(18) 676

Deeds and Bonds:

B4, pp 618-9

Virginia Gazette:

3Ap46:41
8D52:31

Custis, (Dr. James McClurg)

Letters, St. George Tucker: 11 July 1781

Bruton Parish Records:
1 Apr 1783

Grissell-Hay, (Archibald and John Blair)

Bruton Parish Records:

6 Sep 1747
5 Feb 1748/9
7 May 1749
3 Sep 1749
4 Mar 1750
10 May 1751
15 Sep 1751
16 Oct 1751
5 Jul 1752
15 Jul 1752
7 Mar 1753
May 1761
30 Sep 1762
29 Jun 1766
1 Sep 1766
26 Jun 1767
24 Jul 1768
9 Oct 1768
18 Nov 1771
Nov 1782

SPG Dr. Bray's Association

American Papers (1735-1774):

Part 2, Item 5 - 30 Sep 1762
Part 2, Item 14 - 30 Sept 1762
Part 2, Item 10 - Nov 1765
Part 2, Item 10 - 16 Feb 1769

John Blair Diary:

14 Jan 1751
23 Jan 1751
7 Feb 1751
15 Feb 1751
21 Feb 1751
23 Feb 1751

27 Feb 1751
8 Mar 1761
9 May 1751
14 Sep 1751
29 Nov 1751
1 Dec 1751

Orders and Wills:

25 Oct 1771
(16) 511
(16) 592
(18) 242

Deeds and Bonds:

(5) 461-4

Lightfoot

Wills and Inventories:

(20) 103-6
(22) 249-302

Rogers

Wills and Inventories:

(14) 368
(18) 537
(18) 553-557
(23) 100

Nelson

Orders, Wills and Inventories:

(16) 165
(22) 132-621
(23) 129
(23) 168
(23) 171
(23) 181-183
(23) 184-186

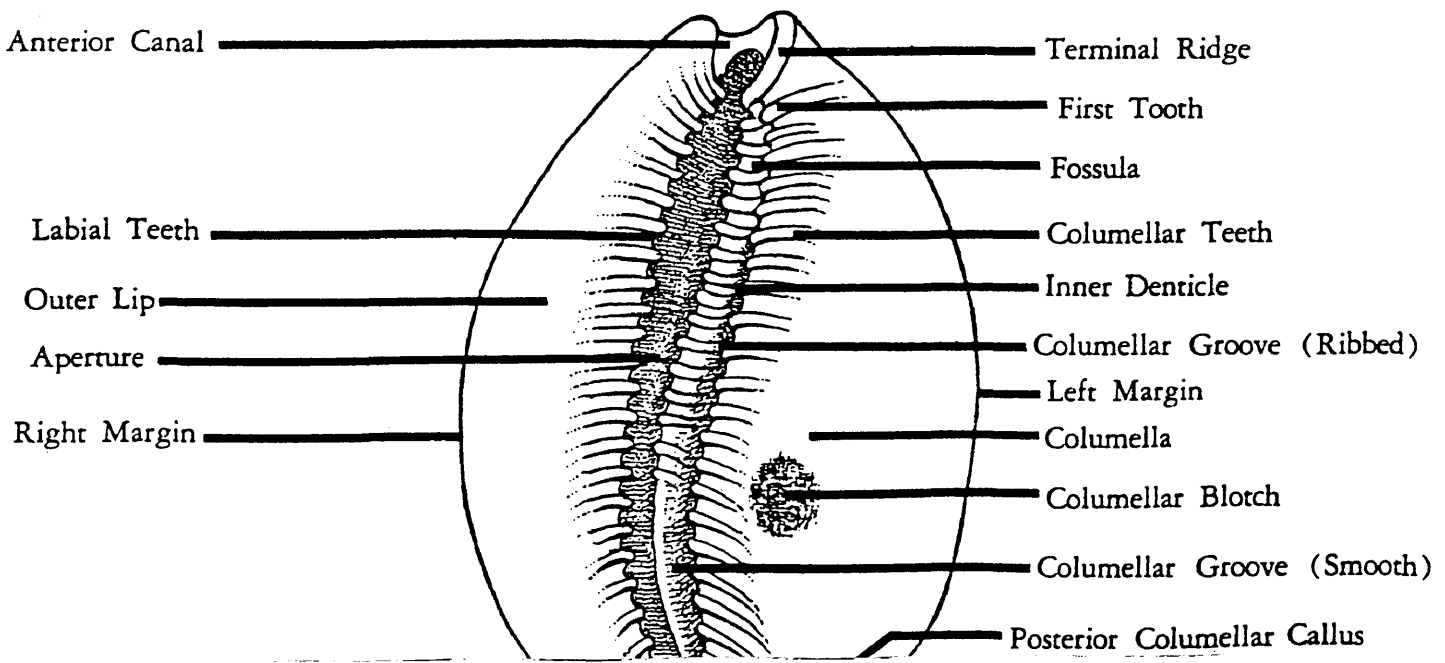
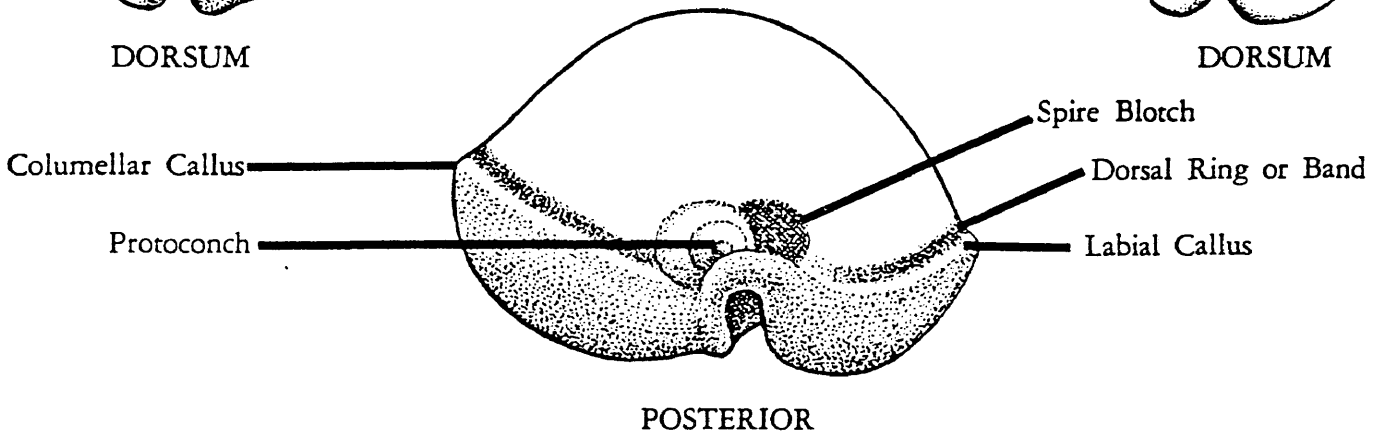
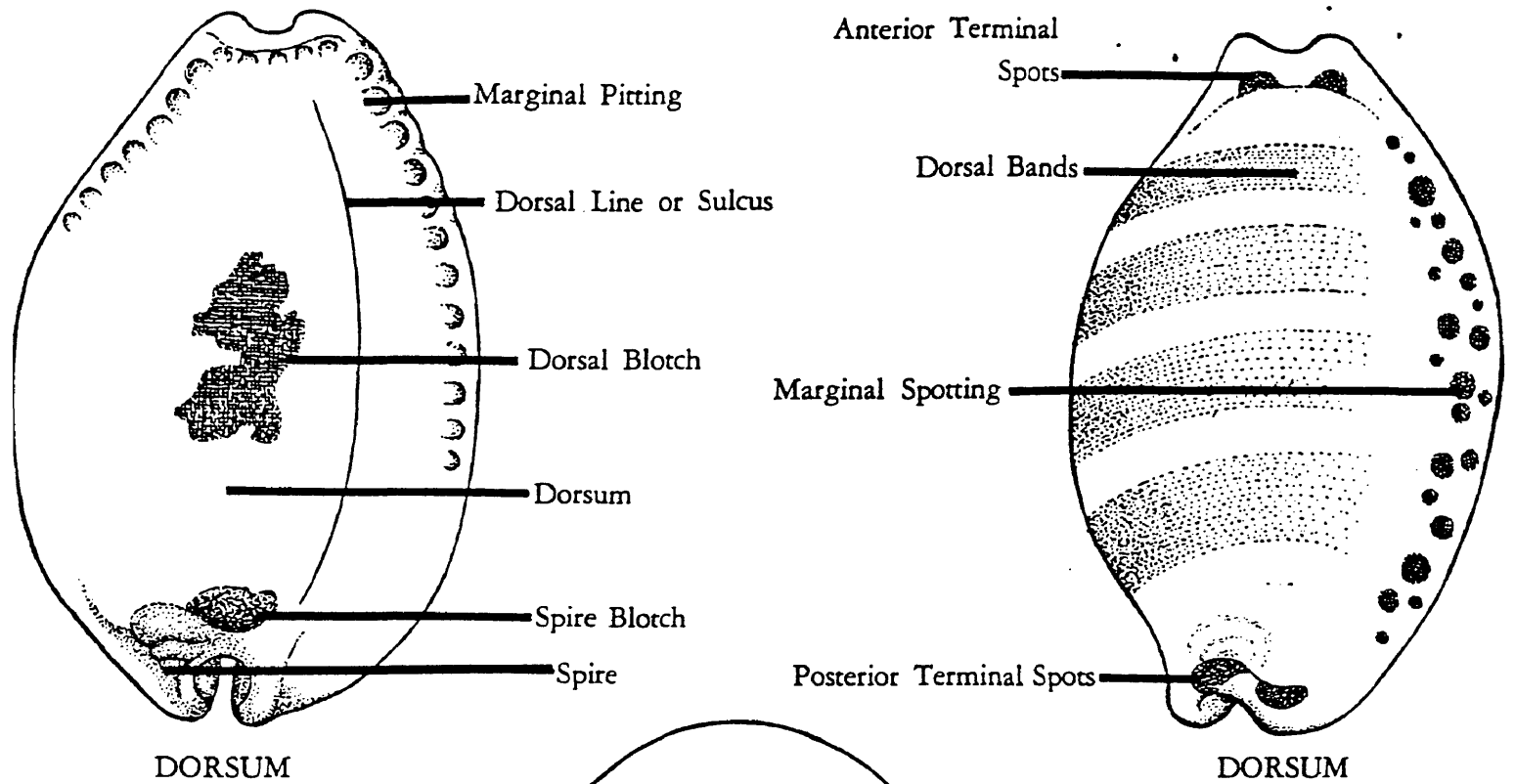
APPENDIX J

Figure 1. An example of a Face pot from Ghana with cowrie shells on the surface adhered with wax (Vlach, 1990:103)

APPENDIX J



CONCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS OF A COWRIE



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