BEADS FROM THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND, NEW YORK CITY: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

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Excavation of the African Burial Ground in New York City yielded the skeletal remains of more than 400 individuals. This paper is a preliminary discussion of the beads associated with seven of the burials. The in situ *bead configurations of three of the interments are distinctive and appear to be indicative of cultural practices of Africans in 18th-century New York. The configurations include necklaces and possibly wristlets, as well as waistbeads. The latter represent the first recorded instance of such use by Africans or African descendants in North America. These objects provide insight into the religious or ritual behavior of the people who utilized the burial ground.*

INTRODUCTION

The General Services Administration of the United States government erected a 34-story office building at Broadway, Duane, Elk and Reade Streets, on a site that historical-period New York maps indicated was the location of an African burial ground. Excavation of a portion of the burial ground began in May of 1991. Located at 290 Broadway, the site is two blocks north of City Hall in the heart of lower Manhattan, New York City (Fig. 1).

During the Dutch and British colonial period, this was a hilly, ravined area which lay well north of the city limits and was considered undesirable.The Maerschalck maps are among the few from the Colonial period that delineate the location of the six-acre cemetery (Fig. 2). Since these maps indicate the presence of the burial ground, historians have long been aware of its existence (Weathers 1993). The general public, however, became aware of the existence of the burial ground through the excavations.

The burial ground, which dates from at least 1712, may have had its origins in the late 17th century after Trinity Church banned burials of Africans in its church yard in 1697 (Trinity Church Minutes 1697). Throughout the 18th century, the cemetery was the primary location available to New York's African and African-descendant population, both enslaved and free, for the burial of its dead. The human remains are among the earliest and largest historical African-descendant population excavated in the Americas.

As the 18th century progressed, the cemetery began to serve divergent functions. Portions of the land were being used commercially by the Remmey and Crolius potters for the disposal of waste from their manufacturing process. The cemetery was still in use during the American Revolution and some of the burials and artifacts date from this period. When the burial ground was closed around 1795, the land was filled and leveled, and lots were subdivided as the city continued to expand and encroach on the land.

Loft buildings erected in the 19th century stood on a portion of the site until construction began for the federal office tower in 1991. It had been thought, therefore, that the deep basements of the structures which had been erected along Broadway and Reade Street had destroyed any evidence of the 18th-century cemetery, and that few, if any, burials would have survived the urbanization process (Edwards and Kelcey 1989:147). Maps did indicate that Republican Alley and Manhattan Place had never been developed and it is here that the first burials were found (Fig. 1).

The subsequent discovery that approximately 400 burials, predominately Africans and African descendants, had survived the urbanization process was unexpected given the multiple use and frequent disregard for the funerary function of the site. Although the land was privately owned, it had been appropriated for use as a burial ground and ownership and boundary lines had been in dispute for most of the

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18th century. The burials had survived because up to 28 feet of landfill eventually covered the site.

The tremendous importance of the burial ground became apparent as the excavations proceeded. Public awareness heightened and the African-American community became increasingly concerned about the desecration of an African ancestral site which held great spiritual and symbolic significance. The burials were exhumed by Historic Conservation and Interpretation, Inc., of Newton, New Jersey, and the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team working through Lehman College. The last month of the excavation was supervised by John Milner Associates which, along with Howard University, continue to direct the project.

Through the actions of then-Senator Gus Savage, Mayor David Dinkins, Peggy King-Jorde and hundreds of committed members of the descendant community, excavations were halted as of July 1992. As a result, construction of the pavilion portion of the office building was cancelled in order to avoid disturbing any additional burials. Approximately 200 burials which remain interred at the site would also have been exhumed had the descendant community not intervened. In November of 1993, the skeletons were transferred to Howard University in Washington, D.C., for cleaning and further study. A third of an acre of grassed-over fenced-in land nestled among some of the most valuable real estate in the world now marks the site of the African Burial Ground. A sign reads:

> The enclosed area is the preserved part of the original African Burial Ground. Closed in 1794, the African Burial Ground once covered more than five acres–about 5 city blocks.... African men, women and children were buried in the original cemetery. Unearthed during building construction in 1991, the site is now a National Historic Landmark and within the New York City African Burial Ground and Commons Historic District. This surviving remnant of the burial ground is dedicated to the people who are buried here and to all who were enslaved in the city's early history from 1626 until July 4, 1827, Emancipation Day in New York.

The archaeological and historical significance of the site is compelling. The human remains and associated artifacts of the Africans and African descendants exhumed from the burial ground represent tangible evidence of the lives of the ancestors. The harsh conditions of capture, transatlantic passage, enslavement and servitude were not conducive to artifact retention. As is often the case, the beads and other grave goods are part of the lasting legacy of this historic population.

Approximately 560 burial-related artifacts were recovered from the burial ground. The presence of shroud pins, the most common artifact, reveals that many of the burials were wrapped in pinned shrouds. Although only the beads will be discussed here, buttons, finger rings, cufflinks/sleeve buttons and coins were also recovered from the site. One additional bead and a pendant were recovered during the course of lab work at Howard University.

THE BURIALS AND THEIR BEADS

A total of 145 beads representing 14 varieties was recovered from seven of the burials. This number may change if more beads are discovered in the pedestaled human remains being cleaned at Howard University. With the exception of a faceted amber bead and a bone bead, all were glass of either drawn or wound manufacture.

The beads are classified using the expanded version of the taxonomic system developed by Kenneth and Martha Kidd (1970) as presented in Karklins (1985). Varieties that do not appear in the Kidds' lists are marked by an asterisk (*). Colors are designated using common names, though the specimens from Burial 340 also have the appropriate Munsell color codes (Munsell Color 1976) appended. Diaphaneity is described as transparent (tsp.), translucent (tsl.) or opaque (op.). In the following text, Pl. = color plate, R. = row and # = position in the row.

Burial 107

A female believed to have been about 30 or slightly older at death, Burial 107 was interred in a hexagonal coffin oriented east-west with the head at the west end. Coffin nails were recovered, as were two shroud pins, indicating that the deceased had been wrapped in a shroud. The single associated bead was

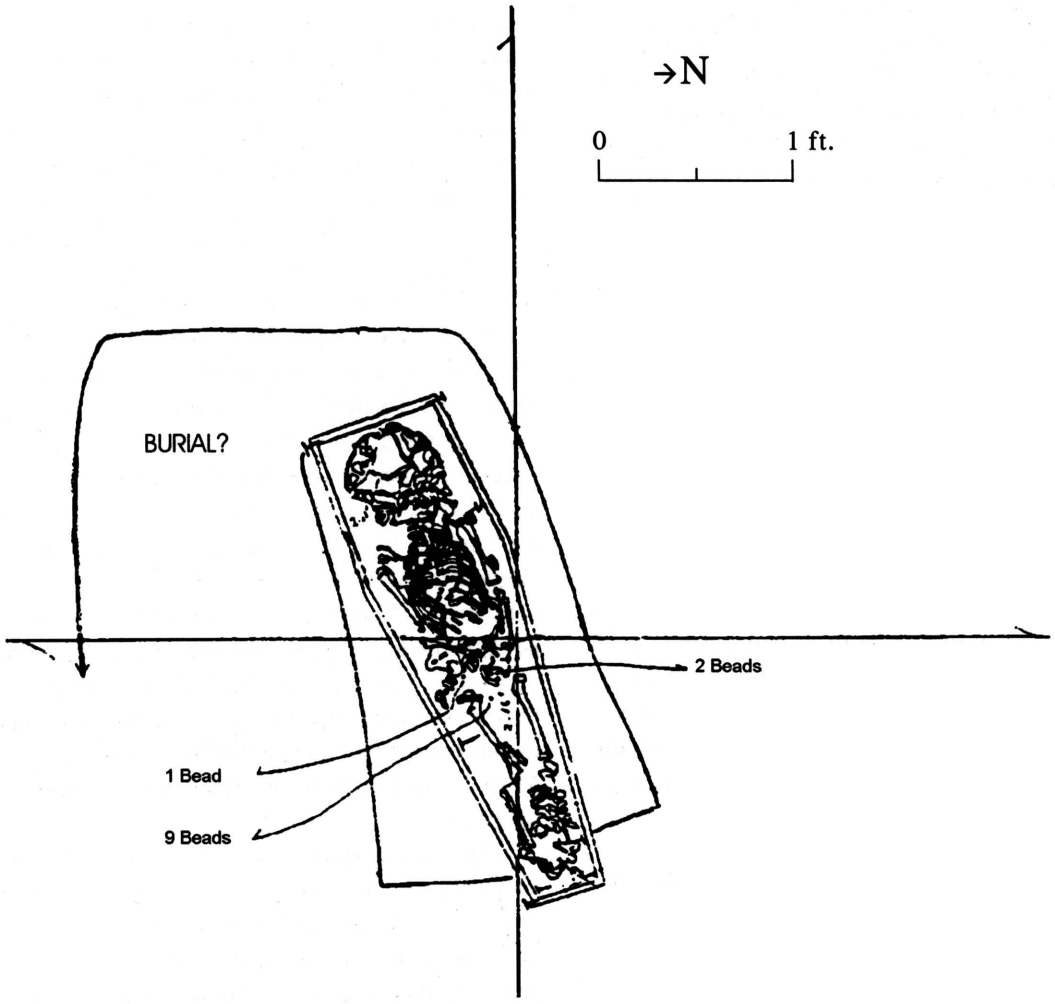

Figure 3. Field Drawing of Burial 187 showing the location of some of the associated black beads (drawing by Margo Schur; furnished by the U.S. General Services Administration).

the ear during cleaning and analysis of the remains at the Howard University laboratory:

Ia1. Tubular; op. redwood cased in clear glass; small size; 1 specimen (not illustrated).

Diameter: 3.5 mm
Length: 9.0 mm

Burial 187

Burial 187 was an infant interred in a child's coffin (children represented as much as 45% of the interments at the burial ground). This individual had 22 small black beads in association. Several of the specimens were found in situ; the rest were recovered while screening the soil from the central portion of the burial (Parrington 1993). It was determined from the placement of the *in situ* beads that the child had originally been buried with beads at the waist (Fig. 3):

IIa6. Round; op. black; pitted surface; small size; 22 specimens (Pl. IA, R.3, #3-4).

Diameter: 2.2-3.0 mm
Length: 1.5-2.5 mm

Burial 226

This burial, also an infant in a child's coffin, was laid to rest with eight beads around the neck. The method of manufacture for these remains problematic. A thick crust resulting from the decomposition of the glass in its archaeological context obscures diagnostic details, although one bead which is broken in half appears to have a yellow core.

WIb? Oblate; possibly tsp. yellow; weathered surface; medium size; 8 specimens (Pl. IA, R.3, #2).

Diameter: 4.0-4.8 mm
Length: 2.7-3.8 mm

Burial 250

Disturbed by the intrusion of a later burial, the remains of Burial 250 appear to be those of a female. She was buried in a trapezoidal or "tapering" coffin oriented east-west with the head at the west end. A large black bead was found in a mass of metal corrosion in the central portion of the burial; a metal button was found in this area as well. Due to the disturbed nature of the burial, the exact location of the bead could not be determined.

WIb*. Round; op. black; very large size; 1 specimen (Pl. IA, R.3, #7).

Diameter: 13.0 mm
Length: 11.0 mm

Burial 340

Burial 340 is that of a woman who appears to have died between the ages of 28 and 35. Her remains were discovered in May of 1992, two months before excavation of the site was halted. As with the majority of the burials in the African Burial Ground, this one was oriented east-west with the head at the west end (Fig. 4). Her body had been pinned in a shroud and placed in a "tapering" wooden coffin. Little of the wood remained and, with the exception of coffin nails, no coffin hardware was encountered. A clay pipe was also recovered, but it is from a disturbed context and poorly provenienced.

This individual is of great interest as she was buried with a strand of approximately 100 beads around her pelvis. All but five of these were found *in situ* (*see* cover). The exceptions (small yellow and turquoise specimens) were recovered by water screening loose soil. The strand, which represents eight bead varieties, also includes what appear to be cowrie shells (Pl. IB). The precise number and conclusive identification of the shells as cowries has yet to be determined.

Although preliminary field analysis indicated that Burial 340 was not interred wearing wristlets, the alternating yellow and turquoise pattern of beads at the right side may well represent such an ornament (Pl. IIA), and the five beads recovered from the fill may have formed a continuation of the alternating color pattern (the yellow beads appear white as a result of a heavy layer of glass corrosion). These two bead varieties, which are approximately the same size, are smaller than the beads on the waist strand, further suggesting that they may have been part of a separate ornament. Though the postulated wristlet beads rested next to the hip a good distance from the burial's right hand, the distal end of the radius had separated from the wrist bones sometime after the disintegration of the surrounding tissue and had slipped to the side (Fig. 5). It could easily have pulled a wristlet with it in the process.

The hands apparently rested on each hip and were not crossed at the groin, bringing the wrists in approximate line with the pelvis. Although the right hand was present and pronated (palm down over the pelvis), the bones of the left hand were missing, further complicating the question of whether or not the burial was wearing wristlets.

In addition to the waistbeads and possible wristlet, Burial 340 exhibited dental modification. Her right first incisor was modified, either by filing or chipping, to a gradual "bow tie" or "hourglass" shape. Her right lateral incisor appears to have been modified to a "point" or "peg shape." The left dentition remains buried in the soil matrix which was excavated with the pedestaled skull and will be analyzed by the Howard University bioanthropologists who are cleaning and examining the bones.

Seven glass bead varieties and one amber specimen were found with the burial:

IIa*. Circular; tsp. light gold (2.5Y 7/8); weathered surface; small size; 14 specimens (Pl. IA, R.1, #1-2).

Figure 4. Burial 340 (furnished by the U.S. General Services Administration).

Figure 5. The pelvic region of Burial 340 showing the relationship of the right hand resting on the lower abdomen with the disassociated radius in the upper left. Note the patterned, possible wristlet beads at the head of the radius (for a detailed view, *see* Pl. IIA)(furnished by the U.S. General Services Administration).

Diameter: 3.1-3.8 mm
Length: 2.0-2.8 mm

IIa*. Circular; tsp. blue green/turquoise (10BG 5/6); pitted surface; small size; 25 specimens (Pl. IA, R.1, #3-4).

Diameter: 3.4-3.8 mm
Length: 2.0-2.6 mm

IIa55. Oblate to barrel shaped; tsp. cobalt blue (5PB 2/6); medium to large size; 59 specimens (Pl. IA, R.1, #7). Several of the beads exhibit small projections, some rounded and others broken and blunt, on their ends indicating the *a speo* method of heat rounding drawn beads (Karklins 1993:31-32).

Diameter: 5.3-7.5 mm
Length: 4.0-7.1 mm

IIj2. Barrel shaped; op. black (5PB 2/1) decorated with three decomposed, op. white, trailed wavy lines that encircle the bead perpendicular to the perforation; large size; 1 specimen (Fig. 6; Pl. IA, R.2, #3; IIB, upper).

Diameter: 8.1 mm
Length: 8.3 mm

WIb6. Globular to oblate; tsp. light gold (2.5Y 7/8); weathered surface; large size; 6 specimens (Pl. IA, R.1, #5-6).

Diameter: 6.2-6.6 mm
Length: 4.7-4.8 mm

WIIc?. Faceted; color obscured by weathered surface; four concave, pentagonal, pressed facets encircle either end; flat ends; medium size; 3 specimens (Pl. IA, R.1, #8; IIB, lower).

Figure 6. Drawn bead variety IIj2 (left) and wound bead variety WIIIb* (right)(furnished by the U.S. General Services Administration).

Diameter: 5.5 mm
Length: 5.0-6.0 mm

WIIIb*. Irregular barrel; op. blue (5PB 2/1) decorated with a wavy gilt stripe around either end; large size; 1 specimen (Fig. 6; Pl. IA, R.2, #1; IIB).

Diameter: 6.1 mm
Length: 6.2 mm

Amber. Faceted globular; red (10R 3/8) with internal fractures; medium size; 1 specimen (Pl. IA, R.2, #2). Fourteen trianguloid facets with rounded or worn edges alternate around the body of the bead; the ends are smooth.

Diameter: 5.0 mm
Length: 4.7 mm

Burial 428

This burial was interrupted by a stone wall and a builder's trench. A portion of a rectangular coffin was evident. The deceased was oriented east-west, head at the west end. Two faceted beads were recovered from an unspecified location within the grave:

WIIc2. Pentagonal faceted; tsl. light gray; eight pressed facets; dull surface; large size; 2 specimens (Pl. IA, R.3, #5-6).

Diameter: 8.0-9.0 mm
Length: 7.5 mm

Burial 434

This burial was situated next to and oriented in the same direction as the previous one. The skeleton was in the process of being uncovered when the excavation was shut down. A single bone bead was found at the western end of the grave:

Bone. Irregular form; badly decomposed shaped mammal bone; medium size; 1 specimen (Pl. IA, R.3, #1).

Diameter: 5.0 mm
Length: 4.0 mm

COMPARATIVE BEAD DATA

Most of the burial ground beads—principally the monochrome drawn and wound specimens—are not particularly useful as temporal indicators, and are of little help in assigning the burials with which they were found to a specific period of cemetery use (Karklins 1995: pers. comm.). The large black drawn bead with inlaid trailed wavy lines (IIj2) which was found with Burial 340 is quite distinctive and has correlatives at several Iroquois sites in eastern and western New York state (Rumrill 1991:38-41; Wray 1983:46). The dates of the sites range from 1682 to 1750, an absolute correlation with the African Burial Ground. The two pentagonal-faceted beads (WIIc2) found with Burial 428 have been found at numerous sites around the world, and appear to date primarily to the 1700-1760 period (Karklins and Barka 1989:74). Dates for the other distinctive beads remain to be determined.

Comparing the burial ground bead assemblage to other African-descendant sites in North America and the Caribbean has begun, and some comments may already be made on similarities with the beads and beaded objects found at the Newton Plantation site in Barbados. The beads from this site were examined in order to gain an understanding of bead usage among Africans and African descendants during the 18th century. Use of the Newton Cemetery began in the last quarter of the 17th century and continued into the first quarter of the 19th century (Handler and Lange 1978). The temporal range of the Newton Cemetery site (which yielded more than 900 beads) corresponds with that of the African Burial Ground.

Not only is the Newton Plantation cemetery contemporaneous with the African Burial Ground, it also contained a burial with a definite *in situ* configuration of beads with cultural similarities to Burial 340. The Barbadian burial (no. 72) was that of a man identified as an Obeah practitioner or folk doctor who had been buried with "a unique and elaborate necklace with obvious, but generalized, African characteristics...." This object consisted of "seven cowrie shells, twenty-one drilled dog canines, fourteen glass beads of various types, five drilled... vertebrae from a... bony fish (not shark), and one large reddish-orange agate [carnelian] bead" (Handler and Lange 1978:125). This unique object may well have been brought to Barbados from Africa (Handler and Lange 1978:131).

Although not identical, a decorated wound bead variety from Newton Plantation (var. no. CISCT3Vg) is similar in color, shape and decoration to a drawn bead (IIj2) from the African Burial Ground. SEM/EDS analysis of these two beads revealed that they had similar chemical compositions (Table 1: nos. 40.79 and 35iiJ2). It is, therefore, possible that the two were produced at the same place.

Similarly, both sites produced beads (variety WIb6) composed of heavily corroded light gold glass (Fig. 7; Pl. IA, R.1, #5-6) with a distinctive "squat teardrop" shape. While Karklins (1995: pers. comm.) believes that such beads are simply aberrant forms of globular beads resulting from rushed or careless bead manufacture, this shape is, nonetheless, represented and separately identified in other 17th- and 18th-century collections. It has been described as truncated pear shaped by Harris (1984) and a truncated cone by Rumrill (1991). Since this shape is represented at two African-descendant cemetery sites, it is conceivable that the possessors of these beads were unaware that their shape was the result of a manufacturing anomaly and may have sought them for their distinctive form.

Figure 7. Examples of "squat teardrop" WIb6 beads from Newton Plantation, Barbados; the specimens measure about 6.5 mm by 4.5mm (photo by C. LaRoche).

COMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS

Although the African Burial Ground is a tightly dated site, elemental analysis of some of the recovered beads was undertaken in an attempt to understand their chemical components with the hope that this information might eventually help in determining or corroborating their date ranges. The extent to which the beads might have been curated or heirloomed would affect their reliability as chronological indicators for the burials with which they were found, a problem noted in Africa (DeCorse 1989; Opper and Opper 1989:18).

Table 1. SEM/EDS* Compositional Surface Analysis of Glass Beads from the African Burial Ground (% by weight).

Bead No. Variety Color	340.16 IIa55 blue	340.19 IIa* turquoise	340.20 IIa* light gold	340.78 WIIIb* blue/gold	340.79 IIj2 black/white	35iiJ2 WIIIb* black/white
Na_20	13	12	-	17	14	14
MgO	3	3	-	5	4	4
$A1_2O_3$	3	7	1	3	3	4
SiO_2	63	58	39	55	54	58
K_2O	5	3	<1	1	2	4
CaO	9	8	<1	8	10	8
P_2O_5	-	1	-	-	-	-
C1	1	1	-	1	<1	1
TiO_2	«1	«1	-	«1	«1	«1
MnO	«1	-	-	3	7	5
Fe_2O_3	1	3	1	2	2	1
CoO	«1	-	-	-	-	-
CuO	-	1	-	«1	«1	-
PbO	-	3	58	2	2	<1

*AMRAY Model 1100 Scanning Electron Microscope/Kevex Model Delta IV, Energy Dispersive Spectrometer. Analysis performed by Mark Wypyski, Assistant Research Scientist, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- not detected. Also sought but not detected: Cr_2O_3, NiO, ZnO, As_2O_3, Sb_2O_3, SnO_2 and BaO.

Elemental analysis using Scanning Electron Microscopy with Energy Dispersive Spectrometry (SEM-EDS) was conducted through the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Seven specimens (six from the burial ground and one from Newton Plantation) were analyzed. Technical and philosophical constraints precluded sample taking or coating the beads in preparation for analysis. Consequently, the qualitative results are more reliable than the quantitative results. Obviously, the findings have limited application but they do provide a glimpse of the chemical formulas for selected burial ground beads.

Five of the seven, both of drawn and wound manufacture, were found to be composed of soda-lime-silica glass with high levels of magnesium (Table 1). The sixth specimen (Table 1: no. 340.20) was found to be made of glass with a very high lead content and only barely detectable levels of aluminum, potassium and calcium. Analysis revealed that the seventh specimen, a red faceted bead (no. 340.75), was not glass but an organic material, most likely amber (Mark T. Wypyski 1994: pers. comm.). The chemical formulations revealed by the analysis may provide directions for further research. The high lead content of the light gold (IIa*) bead, for example, may prove diagnostic.

INTERPRETATION

Bead Use

Seven of the burial ground interments had beads in association. Found in undiagnostic contexts, the beads in four of the graves served unknown functions. However, in the three remaining graves, the beads were found *in situ* in diagnostic loci. In one case, the burial of an infant (no. 226), the beads comprised a necklace. In the other two instances, an infant (no. 187) and an adult female (no. 340), they served as waistbeads, apparently the first recorded instance of

this practice in North America. It is possible that Burial 340 may also have been interred wearing one or more wristlets.

Waistbeads have been in evidence on the African continent for millennia (Yarbrough 1987). They have ontological, spiritual, metaphysical and historical meaning (Owerka 1991). To properly understand them we need to review the role of beads in African culture.

Beads played an important ceremonial role at each stage of life and would have served overlapping functions. The essential nature of beads and the protective properties they possess are best approached through an understanding of African traditional religion and the deeply religious nature of traditional African peoples (Mbiti 1969).

In traditional Africa, it was, and often still is, common to recognize and welcome the key moments in the life of the individual: the turning points and rites of passage such as birth, puberty and initiation, marriage, procreation, old age and death; entry into the community of the departed; and, finally, entry into the company of the spirits (Mbiti 1969). Frequently, these key events were marked with religious ceremonies and rituals in which beads often had a role (Sackey 1985). Beads were strongly associated with royalty and were symbolic of the historical status and wealth of a family.

"Africans... believe in the latent energy in things which is not visible in outward appearance but can be seen in the effects produced by use" (Parrinder 1976:23). Charms and amulets both accessed this force and protected against it. Therefore, charms, amulets and talismans were used for seriously religious intentions to secure a feeling of safety, protection and assurance. Beads would have imbued the wearer with spiritual power. They were worn as protection against the "evil eye" and to bring good fortune as well.

At birth a child began the journey towards eventual death and subsequent entry into the spirit world of the ancestors (Mbiti 1969). It was the custom in many parts of Africa to bury personal belongings, such as ornaments and beads, with the body. One entered the afterlife with the things that were a necessary part life. There are examples of beads being recovered from royal tombs and from other African and African-descendant funerary contexts (DeCorse 1994: pers. comm.; Handler and Lange 1978; Karklins and Schrire 1991; Shaw 1977).

Beads were particularly important for the protection of infants and children, and the presence at the African Burial Ground of two children adorned with a beaded necklace and waistbeads, respectively, seems to indicate that this continued to be true for New York's colonial Africans. Soon after birth the baby would have been decorated "with little strings of beads tied around its waist, its nect [sic], its arms, wrist, or ankles" (Turnbull 1966:59). These would also have been powerful charms meant to protect the child from evil spirits in life and death and would have been needed to accompany the child into the afterlife. Archaeological evidence suggests a ritualistic use of beads in the mortuary context among New York's first African Americans, paralleling archaeological evidence from the African continent.

Waistbeads functioned on at least five different entwined levels. The funerary context of the beads is the culmination of a lifetime of meaning. Waistbeads were indicators of spirituality, status and wealth. In addition to decorating and enhancing the body, the beads possessed erotic power which would have encouraged fertility. They were also apotropaic and were often viewed as valued heirlooms to be passed on from generation to generation.

Throughout life, many women of West and Central Africa wore strands of beads around their waists to emphasize their figures and their procreative role (Gordon and Kahan 1976), and this is a time honored tradition throughout much of the African continent. According to Opper and Opper (1989:9), in 1763, Demanet observed that "A woman would not consider herself dressed if she didn't have a certain number of sufficient necklaces and belts...."

Waistbeads also served an erotic function in Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Chad and the Sudan, among other countries (Francis 1992). In Ghanaian culture, "eggs, sex organs, and all the other parts of the body involved in procreation are believed to be endowed with a certain degree of sanctity" (Antubam 1963:63), and waistbeads played a provocative role in procreation. Fertility and procreation were regarded as sacred functions. Through the enhancement of sexuality, waistbeads aided in procreation which ensured personal immortality through living memory.

The sound of the rattle of the beads is reported to evoke an "auditory erotic response" in men (Francis 1992; LaRoche 1994).

In many African countries, waistbeads were and continue to be valued as heirloom pieces which were handed down from generation to generation (Ruth Rose 1993: pers. comm.), and this practice should be considered as a possibility for Burial 340. The practice of heirlooming beads could skew the interpretation of the data, leading to incorrect interpretation or temporal placement of the burial. Some of the beads from the strand could potentially be older than others.

Color Preference

Of the 145 beads analyzed from the African Burial Ground, 41% are blue, 19% are yellow, 17% are turquoise, 17% are black, 1.5% are red, 1.5% are light gray and 3% are of indeterminate color. If turquoise is included in the blue category, that group's frequency increases to 58%.

For Burial 340, of the 110 beads, 55% are blue, 23% are turquoise, 18% are yellow, 3% are of indeterminate color; black and red comprise less than 1%. If turquoise is included in the blue category, its frequency increases to 78%.

While no attempt was made to thoroughly research color preference at the African Burial Ground, the predominance of blue beads there does prompt a number of observations. Interestingly, none of the beads found in association with children were blue. All the blue beads were found with one burial (no. 340), the woman interred with the waistbeads.

According to primary accounts, a preference for blue beads existed among Africans between the 15th and 18th centuries (DuToit 1974:18; Quiggin 1949:37), a period during which Burial 340 would have been alive. The predominance of blue beads from African-descendant sites in the Americas may suggest that this preference for blue beads continued once the Africans landed in this area. Increased statistical analysis of color frequencies from a variety of sites, coupled with a statistical analysis of available colors within specified temporal ranges, may shed further light on this.

Cabak (1990) lists African-descendant archaeological sites which have produced blue beads, and discusses some of the possible origins and explanations for this perceived preference for blue beads.

Areas for Further Research

There is a dearth of information pertaining to bead use among the first generations of enslaved Africans in the Americas. There is also little evidence of wide-spread European bead usage for any purpose other than trade during the 18th century. Beads were often dismissed by early European observers, such as explorers and traders, as jewelry or trinkets which simply soothed the savage and superstitious mind. It was an attitude of misunderstanding that denied the deeper meaning or spiritual significance associated with beads, and slants the historical perspective.

For those studying beads used by Native Americans, there are sufficient bead assemblages for comparative analysis. Bead chronologies for New York and neighboring states have been established and can provide comparative data and temporal ranges for contemporary sites (Bradley 1983; Kent 1984; Pratt 1961; Rumrill 1991; Wray 1983). The circumstances surrounding the African Burial Ground are unique and care must be taken to not generalize about the beads on the basis of Native American sites, especially because the process of bead acquisition is unknown for New York's early Africans. More research is needed to determine the relationship between the two groups.

Furthermore, beads bound for North America (and probably the Caribbean) on slave ships came via Africa and would have been traded there as well. Karklins and Barka (1989:70), Killick (1987:9) and DeCorse (1989:45) have stated that North American bead literature may be used to infer the probable temporal ranges of bead varieties found in Africa. This will have implications for assessing the beads available in West Africa during the first half of the 18th century, the indicated temporal range when the individuals represented by some or all of the bead-associated burials at the burial ground would most likely have lived and died in New York. There are several archaeological indications which, when considered in conjunction with the bead chronology, suggest that Burial 340 may have been interred before 1742 (LaRoche 1994). Further research will be required to confirm this theory.

The African population living in New York during the colonial period could have been either enslaved or free and the question of bead acquisition is an

important one. The question of how Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas acquired beads has not been adequately addressed despite the recovery of hundreds of beads from African-descendant archaeological contexts (e.g., Handler and Lange 1978; Karklins 1989; Karklins and Barka 1989).

In the case of Burial 340, this is a particularly compelling question because the possibility exists that she could have brought her beads with her through the Middle Passage. Obviously, this is a theoretical though plausible point. Primary descriptive accounts do exist which describe men and women on board slave ships wearing beads around their necks, arms and waists (Handler and Lange 1978:147; Stiverson and Butler 1985).

The Middle Passage was originally misrepresented as a breach in the history and culture of African descendants in the Americas (*see* DeCorse 1991; Herskovits 1958). There is, however, ample physical and cultural evidence to the contrary. The burial ground waistbeads represent a cultural continuum. Waistbeads can claim a long cultural tradition in Africa and are represented in the early archaeological record of the continent (Addo 1994; Yarbrough 1987). The beads from the burial ground represent a continuation of this cultural tradition which is still evident on both continents today (LaRoche 1994).

DeCorse (1992) and others (Armstrong 1985:265; Jones 1985:195; Lamb 1971:35) have made observations about cultural continuity in the midst of social change. Dr. Dodson (1993) of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture observed: "Africans carried cultural resources with them in the early stages of acculturation." As the burial ground beads and other artifacts, in addition to the human remains, continue to be analyzed, these early stages of acculturation should become more clearly understood.

DISCUSSION

> ...in the case of burial practices... the force of the notion that material culture is an *indirect* reflection of human society becomes clear. Here we begin to see that it is ideas, beliefs and meanings which interpose themselves between people and things. How burial reflects society clearly depends on attitudes [toward] death (Hodder 1987:3).

This is a preliminary assessment of the beads from the African Burial Ground. The presence of these artifacts in burial contexts indicates that the social, religious and status connotations associated with bead usage were important to some of New York's Africans in the Dutch and colonial era just as they were for Africans on the home continent.

While African-descendant archaeological sites yielding beads have been studied (e.g., DeCorse 1989; Handler and Lange 1978; Karklins and Barka 1989; Singleton 1991; Smith 1977), more research is required to properly understand the use of beads among Africans in the Americas, particularly during the early years of their enslavement. Certainly no research exists concerning bead usage among New York's early African population.

Beads were found with less than two percent of the African Burial Ground interments. Quantitative analysis of the presence or absence of beads or other artifacts in a burial context cannot be the sole determinant of significance, however. The oppression that was a reality for New York's enslaved African population, coupled with the lack of autonomy or freedom to exhibit a full range of cultural expression, probably renders conventional interpretation of quantitative statistical models inappropriate.

It may be that the use of beads was discouraged, or that beads were simply hard to come by. It may also be that, as Handler and Lange (1979:149) have suggested, beads were valued and may not have been placed in graves on all occasions. In the case of the burial ground interments, it is suggested that beads were buried with persons held in high esteem. However, further research needs to be conducted to affirm this.

Although the beads were recovered in the heart of New York City, there are factors which dictate that the initial research be focused on the African continent for much of the interpretation. The waistbeads from Burial 340 are the only known example of such bead use in a mortuary context in the Western Hemisphere. Thus, there are no comparative examples from this side of the ocean on which to draw. There are no European antecedents for waistbeads, and beaded belts rather than waistbeads are the Native American cultural tradition. The use of waistbeads within the present context is considered a reflection of an African cultural tradition.

Furthermore, the modified teeth of Burial 340 strongly imply that she was born on the African continent. The archaeological and historical record suggest that the practice of tooth modification did not continue once Africans arrived in the Americas (Handler 1994). When considered in conjunction with the modified teeth, the waistbeads are another strong indicator that this woman was probably African-born and would have known and remembered her cultural traditions. Further skeletal analysis should clarify this question. The shaped teeth and the *in situ* waistbeads suggest that Burial 340 died and was buried before she had become acculturated. The burials speak to the presence and survival of the African cultural tradition in colonial New York.

Both beads and cowries were items of barter during the colonial period (Einzig 1949; Quiggin 1949) and would have been valued monetary possessions. The blue bead with gilt decoration (WIIIb*) is unique in this assemblage and was probably viewed as significant considering the economic status of enslaved Africans in New York during this time period. Amber was probably esteemed for both its spiritual and medicinal properties (Abel 1983). To have been buried with a strand of beads which was surely prized suggests that this was a well-respected woman. The source of that respect, whether spiritual, royal, familial or economic, has yet to be determined.

CONCLUSION

The African Burial Ground is the oldest and largest historic African-descendant cemetery so far excavated in North America. It is not directly comparable with other North American sites. If, however, we take a more global view of the African experience in the diaspora during the late 17th and 18th centuries by drawing on Africa, the Caribbean and North America for examples and explanation, a pattern of bead usage does begin to emerge.

The burial ground excavations uncovered individuals with beads at the neck, waist and, possibly, wrist. These were intended to adorn the dead and accompany them on their journey into the afterlife. Waistbeads served multiple functions and were associated with a lifetime of meaning. They were meant to impart status, spirituality and power as they protected and graced the wearer.

The configurations of strung beads at both the African Burial Ground and Newton Plantation on Barbados imply ritualistic burials for important and esteemed individuals. Beads were valued items of barter on the African continent during the temporal range of these cemeteries and it would appear, from the burial customs, that some Africans and their descendants also valued beads in the Americas.

The historical and archaeological significance of the site has led the African-American descendant community to be vigilant in its oversight of this project. The archaeological record, coupled with historical documentation, is providing a historical perspective which heretofore had been obscured. The recovered beads are just one indication from the burial ground that New York's early Africans knew and maintained their cultural traditions despite the conditions imposed upon them.

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