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MAN-IN-THE-MOON BEADS

Michele Lorenzini and Karlis Karklins

The unique and memorable design of man-in-the-moon beads has intrigued researchers over the years. These distinctive beads were identified in the 1960s by George Quimby as being chronologically diagnostic of Middle Historic Period sites (1670-1760) in the western Great Lakes region. The present study more clearly defines both the temporal and geographical instances of man-in-the-moon beads while taking into account possible cultural and historical implications. This project has led to the compilation of information regarding many specimens previously unknown to most researchers.

INTRODUCTION

The man-in-the-moon bead is unique among North American trade beads. Unlike other trade beads which are adorned with such universal elements as stripes, dots, and floral designs, these bear decorative elements that relate to Old World mythology. The man-in-the-moon has been a popular part of European folklore since at least the Middle Ages and its likeness has appeared in countless illustrations over the centuries. In this particular instance, the term "man-in-the-moon" is used to designate a crescent moon which has a distinct nose, eye, and mouth. It is not to be confused with other "men-in-the-moon" which are mentioned in Old World mythology (Jablow and Withers 1969) or with the plain crescent moon found on many molded beads exported to the Middle East from Europe.

In addition to its thought-provoking appearance, the man-in-the-moon bead's relatively short temporal span makes it an ideal temporal indicator. Consequently, it was decided that the authors would collaborate in a research project intended to: 1) establish the bead's core geographic distribution area;

2) confirm and possibly tighten existing dates of circulation; 3) determine how many different designs were represented in archaeological collections; 4) trace the origins of these beads and perhaps determine the place of manufacture; 5) determine who were the principal traders and recipients of these beads; and 6) provide insight into the cultural context of these beads, both within the traders' and recipients' world.

DESCRIPTION

The man-in-the-moon beads are fairly standard in size, shape, and color. They are of wound manufacture and tabular in form (disk shaped). The beads were formed by winding glass around a metal mandrel until the desired size was achieved. While still in a plastic state, the semi-globular or barrel-shaped beads were pressed flat to impart their distinctive shape. The designs were then trailed on the surface. In all observed cases, care was taken so that the eye of the man-in-the-moon was always left open. Before the glass hardened, the applied decoration was marvered or pressed into the surface.

The specimens found on North American sites are uniformly made of a transparent ultramarine (medium cobalt blue) glass (Munsell 6.25PB 3/12). The design is of opaque white glass. Several near-identical specimens discovered in France have amber-colored bodies (Opper and Opper 1992:5-6; Fig. 1). The American specimens range from about 15 to 20 mm in length (parallel to the perforation), 16 to 23 mm in width (perpendicular to the perforation), and 4 to 8 mm in thickness. The single French example which could be measured is 15 mm long and 17 mm wide.

An examination of well over 100 specimens reveals that there are two basic design varieties:

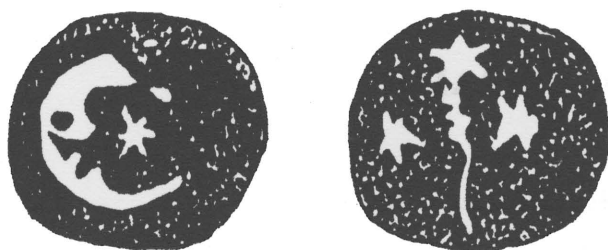


Figure 1. Amber-glass man-in-the-moon bead from a talisman necklace in the Carnac Museum, Morbihan, France (Opper and Opper 1992:6, Fig. 9).

Variety 1. Side A has the crescent man-in-the-moon on the left side facing a single star on the right side (Fig. 2, top; Pl. IVB). Side B depicts a star with a tail (a comet) in the center with a star on either side (Pl. IVC).

Variety 2. Side A has the crescent man-in-the-moon in the center facing left with a star on either side (Fig. 2, center). Side B has the same basic configuration as the first variety.

While the Kidds described the beads as having five-pointed stars, beads with six-pointed stars seem to predominate (Karklins 1998:pers. obs.; Wray 1983:46). In all cases the axis of the perforation was parallel to the long axis of the moon and comet.

Variety 1 corresponds to variety WIIIC1 in the taxonomic system developed by Kenneth and Martha Kidd (1970:63, 86). They also described another variety, WIIIC2 (Fig. 2, bottom), but this now appears to be just a sloppier version of WIIIC1. To minimize confusion in 30 years of bead literature, we have designated the real Variety 2 as WIIIC3.

DISTRIBUTION

To date, a total of 142 man-in-the-moon beads have been found at 24 sites in the eastern United States (Table 1). In terms of geographic distribution, Variety 1 (WIIIC1), which accounts for 111 specimens or 78% of the total, is present throughout the core area. This variety ranges from New York in the east to South Dakota in the west and south into central Illinois. Variety 2 (WIIIC3), which is represented by 22 specimens (15% of the total), has only been found at five sites in the United States: Gould Island in northeastern Pennsylvania; Old Birch Island Cemetery in western Ontario; Old Mobile near the Gulf Coast in

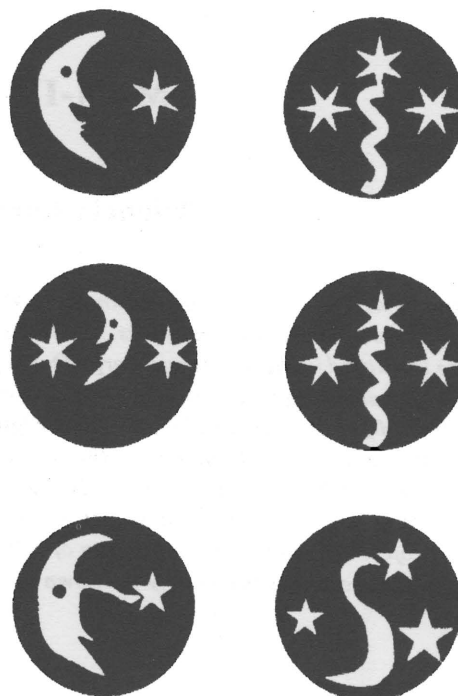


Figure 2. Man-in-the-moon bead varieties. **Top:** Variety 1 (Kidd variety WIIIC1); **center:** Variety 2 (Kidd variety WIIIC3); **bottom:** obsolete Kidd variety WIIIC2 (drawing: M. Lorenzini).

Alabama; Port Dauphin, on the coast of Alabama; and Presidio Santa Maria de Galvé at the western extremity of the Florida panhandle. The remaining 6% were either too poorly described or preserved to determine their variety.

With regard to archaeological context, taking all 142 beads into consideration, 91 or 64% of the total are from unknown, surface, or disturbed contexts; 51 specimens (36%) are from sound archaeological contexts such as burials, features, or unit levels. Of those from sound contexts, 44 specimens or 86% are from burials. Comparing the distribution of the two varieties, 80% of Variety 1 (WIIIC1) and 77% of Variety 2 (WIIIC3) came from burial contexts.

Superimposing the find spots onto a geopolitical map of the 1640-1750 period reveals that the bulk of the specimens fall within the French sphere of influence with most of the rest coming from bordering lands under the control of the British or Spanish (Fig. 3). Consequently, it is postulated that the French supplied these beads but did not necessarily produce them. It is interesting to note that no man-in-the-moon

Table 1.
Summary of Site and Specimen Information for Man-in-the-Moon Beads.

NO.	FIND SITE	STATE/ PROVINCE	OCCUPATION PERIOD (SPHERE OF INFLUENCE)	VARIETY (QUANTITY)	CONTEXT (COLLECTION METHOD)
1	Huntoon Site (Wray 1983; Martha Sempowski 1997:pers. comm.; Karklins 1998: pers. obs.)	New York	1710-1745 (French)	WIIIc1 (8)	unknown (unknown)
2	Townley Read Site (Wray 1983; Martha Sempowski 1997:pers. comm.; Karklins 1998: pers. obs.)	New York	1710-1745 (British /French)	WIIIc1 (15)	1 burial (collector) 14 unknown (unknown)
3	Sevier Site (Greg Sohrweide 1997:pers. comm.)	New York	1715/20-1745/50 (British/French)	WIIIc1 (2)	surface (controlled)
4	Lanz-Hogan Site (Bennett 1982)	New York	1720-1750 (British)	WIIIc1 (2)	burial (controlled)
5	Van Etten Site (Lisa Anderson 1997:pers. comm.)	New York	1720-1750 (British)	WIIIc1 (1)	burial (unknown)
6	Knouse Site/Wapwallopen Village Site (Kent 1984; John Olandini 1997:pers. comm.)	Pennsylvania	1740-1760 (British)	WIIIc1 (15)	burial (looted)
7	Gould Island Site (Weed and Wenstrom 1992; Stephen Warfel 1997:pers. comm.)	Pennsylvania	?? (British)	WIIIc3 (1)	unit level (controlled)
8	Plain City area (Converse 1978)	Ohio	pre 1750? (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	surface (unknown)
9	Ft. Michilimackinac (Stone 1974; Lorenzini 1997:pers. obs.)	Michigan	1710-1720 (French)	WIIIc1 (8)	1 feature (controlled) 7 unknown (controlled)
10	Old Birch Island Cemetery (Greenman 1951; John O'Shea 1997:pers. comm.; Lorenzini 1997:pers. obs.)	Ontario	1750-1760 (French)	WIIIc3 (14)	burial (controlled)
11	Mahler Site (Mason and Mason 1995; Lorenzini 1996:pers. obs.)	Wisconsin	1680-1710 (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	feature (controlled)
12	Bell Site (Behm 1993; Lorenzini 1996)	Wisconsin	1680-1730 (French)	WIIIc1 (26)	surface (controlled & collector)
13	Marina Site (Birmingham and Salzer 1984)	Wisconsin	1715-1730 (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	burial (controlled)
14	Rock Island (Mason 1986; Lorenzini 1996: pers.obs.)	Wisconsin	1670-1730 (French)	WIIIc1 (5)	2 mixed (controlled) 3 feature (controlled)

Table 1. Continued.

NO.	FIND SITE	STATE/ PROVINCE	OCCUPATION PERIOD (SPHERE OF INFLUENCE)	VARIETY (QUANTITY)	CONTEXT (COLLECTION METHOD)
15	Lake Koshkonong area (Mike Erickson 1997:pers. comm.; Lorenzini 1996:pers. obs.)	Wisconsin	?? (French)	WIIIc1 (4)	surface (collector)
16	Newell Fort (Hall 1991; Floyd Mansberger 1996:pers. comm.; Lorenzini 1997:pers. obs.)	Illinois	1711-1720 (French)	WIIIc1 (19)	unknown (collector)
17	Blood Run (Dale Henning 1999:pers. comm.)	Iowa	1700-pre1725 (French)	? (8)	1 surface (collector) 7 burial (collector)
18	Crane Lake area (Douglas Birk 1997:pers. comm.)	Minnesota	mid-1730s (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	unknown (collector)
19	Larson Site (Bill Billeck 1999:pers. comm.)	South Dakota	1700-1750 (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	unknown (collector)
20	Rosa Site (Bill Billeck 1999:pers. comm.)	South Dakota	?? (French)	? (1)	unknown (controlled)
21	Skidi Pawnee Village (Watson 1995; Bill Billeck 1999:pers. comm.)	Nebraska	1700-1750 (French)	WIIIc1 (1)	unknown (collector)
22	Old Mobile (Waselkov 1991; Greg Waselkov 1996:pers. comm.; Lorenzini 1996:pers. obs.)	Alabama	1702-1711 (French)	WIIIc3 (1)	unit level (controlled)
23	Port Dauphin (George Shorter 1999:pers. comm.)	Alabama	1715-1725 (French)	WIIIc3 (2)	unit level (controlled)
24	Santa Maria de Galvé (Marie Pokrant 1999:pers. comm.)	Florida	1698-1718 (French/Spanish)	WIIIc3 (4)	3 burial (controlled) 1 unit (controlled)
25	Morbihan region (Opper and Opper 1992)	France	?? (French)	WIIIc* (1+)	unknown (unknown)
Total Beads:142					

beads have been found in Canada east of the Great Lakes, an area which was dominated by French Catholics during the period under discussion.

TEMPORAL PLACEMENT

The attribution of the man-in-the-moon beads to the Middle Historic Period (1670-1760) by Quimby (1966) and by Mason (1986) is confirmed by our findings (Table 1). They also reveal that this date range is applicable to the entire eastern United States and the adjacent portions of Canada, not just the western Great

Lakes region. The recovered temporal data further reveal that the core period for man-in-the-moon beads was between 1700 and 1750 (86% of the dated sites were occupied during this period) with a modal date of 1720.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Because the crescent man-in-the-moon is so closely tied to European folklore, what led to this design being placed on beads intended for trade to the Indians of North America? Likewise, what

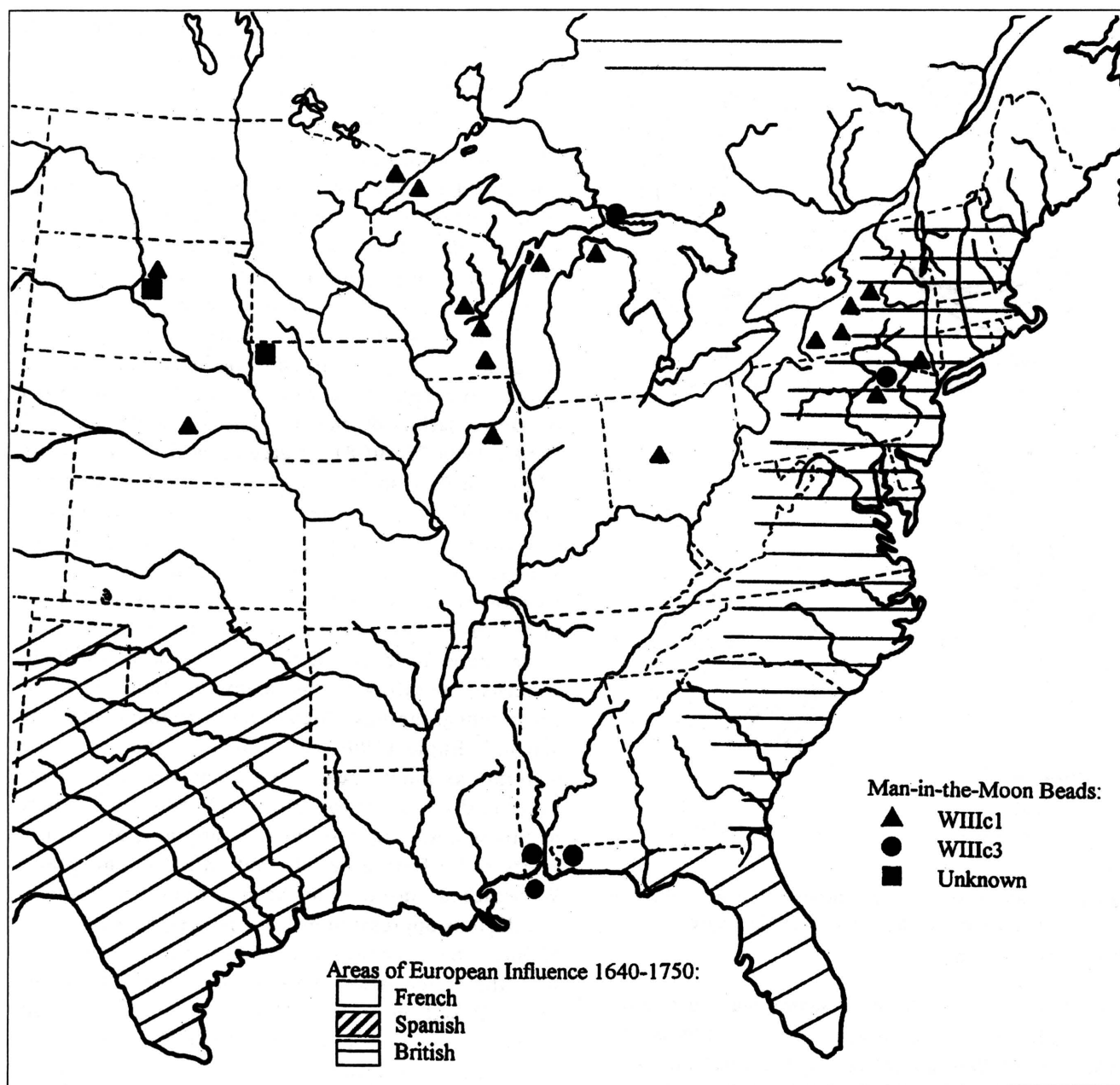


Figure 3. The distribution of man-in-the-moon beads in North America (drawing: M. Lorenzini).

significance did they hold for the recipients? Certainly man-in-the-moon legends do exist among the North American Indians (e.g., the Otoe of Nebraska [Anderson 1940:46-52]), and the crescent moon with a human face has been noted on Quapaw hides (Lorenzini 2000:pers. obs.) and purportedly in some rock art images as well but their cultural significance remains obscure. That they are relatively scarce suggests that the beads may have only been traded or

given on special occasions or to selected persons. Their preponderance in graves also suggests that they were revered by their owners.

George Conover (1889) was one of the first to tackle the interpretation of the man-in-the-moon design. He recounts an observation made by General John S. Clark that “they were not designed as a Christian symbol or of any significance as connected with Jesuit or Roman Catholic missions—simply a

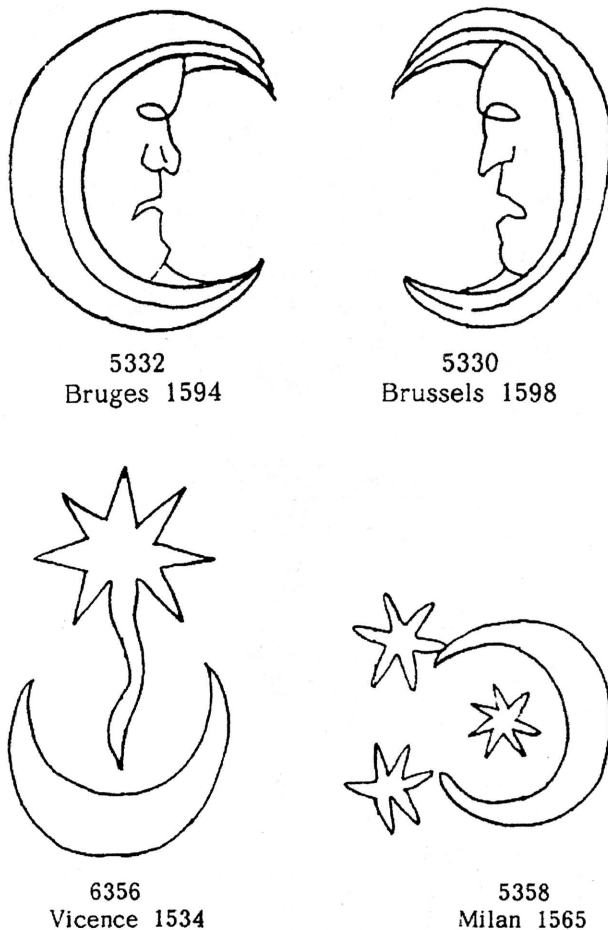


Figure 4. Watermarks on paper produced in several European centers during the 16th century (after Engle 1990:81-82).

Venetian polychrome bead, of which many are found among Indian relics.” Conover also details a letter sent in 1888 by Mr. William Bryant of Buffalo, New York, while traveling in “Old Spain, [which was] once dominated by the Moors.” He included a sketch made by his daughter of a “tile-mosaic over the portals of one of the halls of the Alhambra, Granada, Spain.” This tile-mosaic is of numerous small stars around what appears to be a comet with a tail. This is quite similar to the “B” side of the man-in-the-moon beads.

William Orchard (1975:99) had little to add:

It has been said that in all probability such beads were made by Venetians for trade among the Moors and that the designs have reference to Moorish traditions. Few of these beads evidently

found their way to the American Indians, and aside from the probability that their form and design pleased the natives’ fancy, it is not likely that they were regarded as of any other value.

More recently, Anita Engle (1990:74) has postulated that the crescent moon is an allegorical representation of Amsterdam with its core of crescent-shaped streets and canals, and that the beads are of Dutch origin. She notes the presence of several styles of man-in-the-moon watermarks on paper produced in several French cities, as well as in Belgium and Luxembourg, during the latter part of the 16th century (Fig. 4), as well as on a silver badge worn by Dutch sailors during the siege of Leiden in 1574 (Engle 1990:75, 80-81). Agreeing with Bayley (from an unidentified source) “that these symbols formed a means of intercommunication and spiritual encouragement between the mainly artisan communities engaged in the struggle for religious freedom which culminated in the Reformation,” Engle (1990:76-77) believes that the man-in-the-moon beads “were made for fellow-believers and kindred spirits in America,” pointing to “the many heretical sects and Protestant groupings which sought freedom in the New World.” Engle (1990:78) concludes that both the watermarks and the beads “represent some significant event in the struggle for religious freedom on the part of this widespread movement of artisans, of varying crafts and differing beliefs, but united in one goal.” Were the man-in-the-moon beads produced as symbols of religious oppression or was the design just a flight of fancy on the part of some beadmakers who may have seen the watermarks? This we will probably never know. Based on what we know of the Dutch bead industry, however, it is doubtful that the beads were produced in Holland. No such beads have been uncovered in any of the archaeological excavations undertaken in Amsterdam and elsewhere in Holland (Karklins 1998:pers. obs.). Furthermore, such decorated beads are more in the realm of the Venetians who excelled in this type of work. All the early wound beads recovered in Amsterdam are of plain varieties; none have adventitious decoration. Finally, the date of the beads as suggested by the archaeological evidence postdates most of the activity to which Engle refers.

There remains another possibility—that the beads may have been considered to have talismanic properties by those who brought them to North

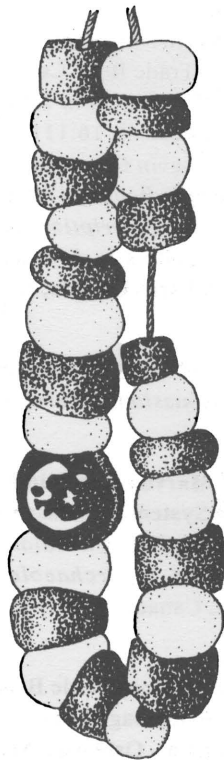


Figure 5. Talisman necklace in the Carnac Museum, Morbihan, France, which incorporates the single amber-glass man-in-the-moon bead shown in Fig. 1 (Opper and Opper 1992:5, Fig. 7).

America. The few amber-colored specimens found in northwestern France were part of talisman necklaces composed of various old beads put together by country folk during the 19th century and earlier (Fig. 5; Opper and Opper 1992:5-6). Such necklaces or *Gougad-Pateraenneu* were believed to protect the wearer from evil spirits and bad luck. It is by no means certain, however, that individual man-in-the-moon beads were believed to have similar properties in the 17th and 18th centuries.

In the absence of any historical documentation, it is altogether uncertain how the aboriginal recipients viewed man-in-the-moon beads. That they were held in some esteem is evidenced by their association with so many burials over a wide area. There is no way, however, to tell if the beads were thought to be imbued with supernatural powers or possibly signified a

sympathy for or allegiance to religiously persecuted French traders. It may simply be that they afforded the wearer a showy display of wealth or power (Pl. IVD).

CONCLUSION

The status of man-in-the-moon beads as distinctive horizon markers for the Middle Historic Period (1670-1760) in eastern North America remains unchanged. The evidence further indicates that they were primarily distributed by the French who are known to have been supplied with beads by the Dutch during the 18th century (Karklins 1983:113) although the beads themselves were probably made in Venice. Whether the beads held allegorical significance for those who distributed or received them remains uncertain. While Anita Engle presents some very interesting and thought-provoking evidence in support of this, much more documentary research is needed to validate her hypothesis. Consequently, the mysterious man-in-the-moon beads remain almost as enigmatic as before.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Plate IVC. *Man-in-the-Moon*: Side B of Variety 1 man-in-the-moon beads from the Townley Read site (1710-1745) (Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York)(photo: K. Karklins).

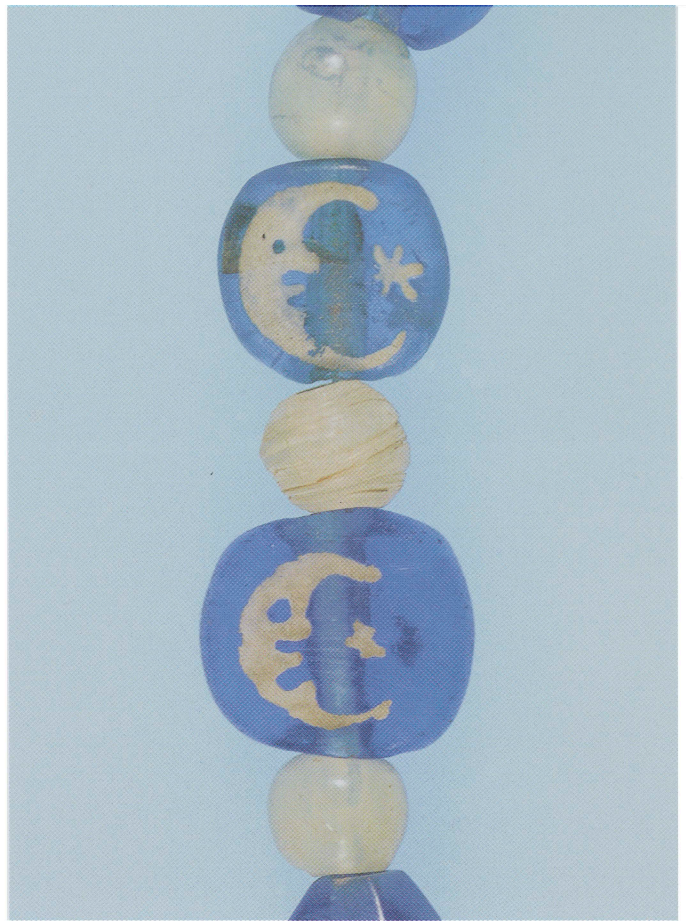


Plate IVB. *Man-in-the-Moon*: Side A of Variety 1 beads from the Seneca Townley Read site (1710-1745) in western New York state (Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York) (photo: K. Karklins).

Plate IVD. *Man-in-the-Moon*: Group of Variety 1 man-in-the-moon beads found at the Townley Read site (Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York)(photo: K. Karklins).

