

A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF 17TH- AND 18TH-CENTURY LEATHER ORNAMENTS FROM MARYLAND

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Abstract

Leather ornaments represent an underutilized artifact type that often suffers from misidentification during artifact cataloging and neglect during artifact analysis. This paper summarizes efforts to compile a large sample of leather ornaments from sites all over Maryland on the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* webpage so that they will be available for comparative study. Research conducted as the project progressed makes it evident that stylistic changes in leather ornaments have temporal significance, and there are many possible avenues of investigation that might allow the ornaments to make a more robust contribution to site analysis.

Introduction

Leather ornaments are decorative metal items with two or more tines on the back that are designed to pierce and then fold around leather to hold the ornaments in place. These artifacts are found on sites across Maryland, but they generally do not occur in large quantities on any one site, and they have received little attention from archeologists. As a result, leather ornaments are often misidentified, and even if they are properly identified, a lack of consistent terminology in catalogs makes it difficult to study them. Leather ornaments might have appeared on personal items such as pouches, belts, firearm slings, and sword straps, but their use on clothing became unpopular by the early 16th century (Egan 2005), so it is likely that most examples found in Maryland represent fittings for riding and harness horses.

Unfortunately, so few leather goods survive from the 17th and 18th centuries that researchers cannot look to existing examples to learn how the ornaments would have appeared in context, and what the different sizes and shapes might mean in terms of the function of the original leather item they adorned. Even still, the shapes themselves can be analyzed for temporal changes, and it is possible that archeological context might reveal more about how and when different ornaments were used. It is crucial, however, to have more than just a few examples to compare if this particular artifact category is to have any hope of contributing significantly to artifact analyses.

Making Small Finds Diagnostic

The following discussion of leather ornaments is based on research conducted as part of a project to add “small finds” to the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* webpage (<http://www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/index.htm>). Small finds were targeted for addition to the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* website because they tend to be underutilized in archeological analyses. These miscellaneous artifacts like toys, coins, thimbles, keys, and utensils almost always reap more excitement when found than even the most narrowly datable ceramic sherd, but there are several factors that prevent archeologists from using them to make a significant analytical contribution when it comes time to write the reports.

First, some small finds lack stylistic shifts through time that might give them chronological significance. Tacks and pins, for example, change little over time until the 19th century. Other small finds do change over time but reference materials about those changes are either nonexistent, hard to find, or they focus only on complete museum-quality examples and do not represent the day-to-day objects that are typically found in the archeological record. For example, where does one get a good book that specifically covers stylistic changes in spurs, bridle bosses, or plain iron scissors? Another problem is that small finds occur in small quantities and intrasite typological analyses lack the sample size needed to see changes over time. Imagine finding as many smoker’s companions, keys, or cufflinks on one site as there are bits of ceramic or glass. No doubt these artifacts would then be incredibly revealing, but realistically even ten examples on one site would be unusual. As a result, if there were some practical formula for dating keys by ring size, for example, one might never know. Until someone finds 55,000 keys on one well-stratified site, these artifacts will never create the kind of legacy that Harrington’s pipe stems generated.

The addition of Small Finds to the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* webpage is an attempt to increase sample sizes available for comparative study by drawing from thousands of collections curated by the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory (MAC Lab) and partners who have volunteered their data (currently Prince

George's County's Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Anne Arundel County *Lost Towns Project*). For each group of artifacts added to the small finds portion of the website, an introduction to the artifact type is provided, and photos of each example are shown along with specific context information and background on the sites where they were recovered. The Small Finds section is not taking artifacts that are already diagnostic and providing their documented date ranges; it is instead using photos and provenience information to build an accessible data set. If there are stylistic shifts, then the individual artifacts added should start to correlate to different date ranges as the sample size grows.

The goal of this project is to disseminate information about small finds that will help people recognize them, utilize them as potentially diagnostic dating tools, and include them in nuanced analyses of archeological sites. Leather ornaments were the first artifact category included in the project, and this article summarizes the research and comparative analysis of the ornaments that took place as the process of creating the website progressed.

Leather Ornament Identification and Terminology

One of the indicators that leather ornaments are a worthwhile artifact category to target for web publication is the lack of consistency in how they have been cata-

loged. As a repository for archeological collections from all over Maryland, the MAC Lab curates artifacts that have been excavated by many different archeologists in the region. Not surprisingly, the catalogs generated by different sources contain variations in terminology used for similar objects. This creates a problem for anyone trying to locate specific artifact types, because it is necessary to search catalogs for every term that a cataloger might have used to describe the object of study. Even where electronic databases exist, the search can be cumbersome, and the leather ornaments exemplified this phenomenon. Among the catalog terms used to describe leather ornaments are: adornment, attachment plate, book clasp, boss, clasp, clothing clasp, escutcheon, harness hardware, mount, rivet, stud, tack, and unidentified object. No doubt there are others yet to be discovered.

While some of these terms (e.g., stud, adornment, boss, mount, and harness hardware) are not necessarily inaccurate, others (e.g., clasp, book clasp, rivet, attachment plate, and tack) imply functions that leather ornaments did not serve. Leather ornaments were generally decorative and were not used to attach leather to anything other than perhaps another strip of leather (Figure 1). Although some leather ornaments that have long narrow shapes and extra long tines probably served as "keepers" or metal strap holders (Figure 2), they did not have an active function as a closure of some kind as the term clasp might imply. The term "tack" is similarly misleading. Like

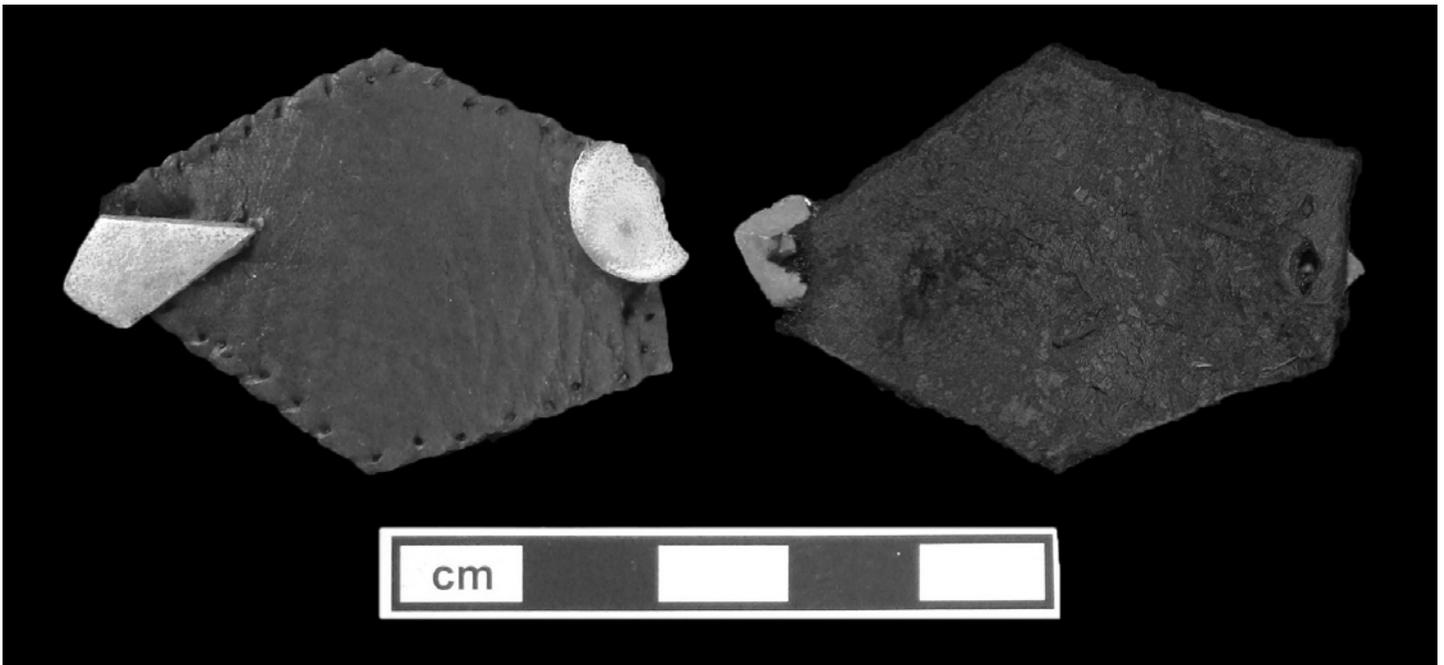


FIGURE 1. A leather fragment from a water-logged well feature at the Addison/Oxon Hill Plantation (18PR175, Lot 2341) has one whole and one partial leather ornament attached. Stitching is apparent on the edges where the fragment was probably attached to another piece of leather, concealing the tines of the metal ornaments between the two layers. The context date range for this example is ca. 1720-1750.

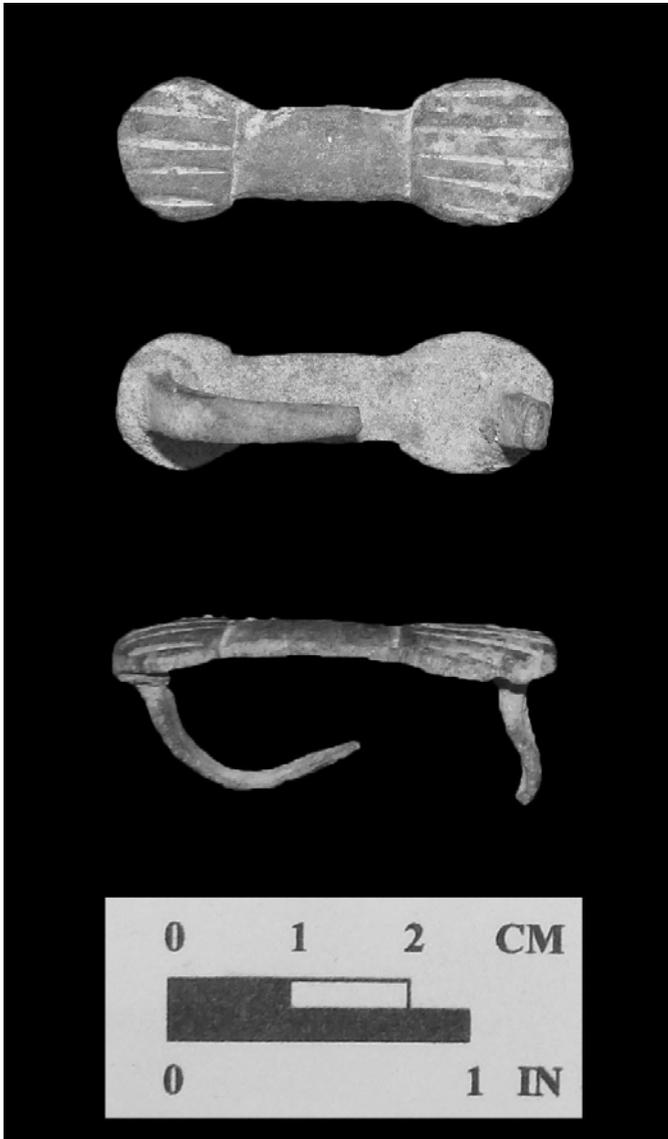


FIGURE 2. An example of a “keeper” or strap-holder style ornament from Addison/Oxon Hill Plantation (18PR175, Lot 9000). Front, back, and side views are shown. The context date range for this example is ca. 1689-1800.

leather ornaments, brass tacks on items such as chairs, trunks, coffins, carriages, saddles, and sedan chairs were often purely decorative, but they were generally nailed into objects made of wood. Tacks might have helped hold leather covers in place on trunks, saddles, and upholstered furniture, but wood was the medium that held them in place and they required only one tine to be nailed down. By contrast, leather ornaments needed multiple tines to pierce and grip leather in order to stay on straps and fittings that had no wooden base. This is not to say that there was no

functional overlap whatsoever; single-tined tacks could be used on leather in a pinch if the tine were bent enough, and large decorative metal pieces with multiple tines occasionally adorned high-end furniture. In general, however, a circular flat or domed tack with a single tine is considered furniture-related, while small ornaments with multiple tines on the back can be attributed to leather adornment (Rivers Cofield 2008).

“Mount” is a term commonly used by curators and metal detectors in the United Kingdom (Clark 1995; Egan 2005; Egan and Pritchard 1991; UKDFD 2005), but this word, along with “adornment,” “boss,” and “stud” were not adopted at the MAC Lab because all three have great potential for ambiguity since they could accurately describe other types of artifacts like jewelry mounts, bridle bosses, collar or clothing studs, and other adornment items. Unfortunately, this decision precludes the use of historic terminology because leather ornaments are referred to as “studs” in 17th-century documents. For example, definitions for “fillet” and “nose band” in Randle Holme’s 1688 *The Academie of Armorie* read:

Fillet, is that as lieth over the Fore-head, and under the fore-top: if the Horse have trapping this is usually adorned with a Rose or such like of Leather set with studs... Nose band, a Leather that goeth over the middle of his Nose, and through Loopes at the back of the Head stall and so buckled under the Cheeks. This is usually adorned as the Fillet, if the Horse be trapped & studded.

(Alcock and Cox 2000:Chapter 3, Item 34a)

Studs are also listed in two 1692 inventories of a saddler, Richard Cooke, of Hereford, England whose goods were repeatedly inventoried and seized to pay debts. Among the supplies for his saddler’s shop were, “3 papers of studs,” and a “box of buckles and studds [sic]” (Morgan 1947:264-265).

Finally, the term “harness hardware” is problematic because it implies a functional specialization that is too specific. Archeologists have a tendency to lump horse-related goods into the “harness” category, but technically this term only applies to equipment for animals that pull vehicles such as carts, coaches, and carriages. Riding equipment therefore does not fall under the purview of “harness hardware.” Admittedly, many straps and fixtures used on horses may manifest the same in the archeological record whether they were for riding or driving, but the historical distinction between owning a horse for riding and owning a coach or carriage is significant, and lumping these goods under the “harness” category glosses over a potentially important avenue for analysis.

The descriptor “leather ornament” was adopted because it is general enough to include fittings for all kinds of leather, but descriptive enough to exclude other kinds

of studs, bosses, and mounts. The argument could be made, however, that it is too specific for this type of artifact, since studded horse trappings for the uppermost echelons of 17th- and 18th-century society might have been made of textiles. In colonial Maryland, however, the likelihood that such fanciful bridles and harnesses were used even by the uppermost levels of society is indeed very small. Furthermore, ornaments intended for use on textiles likely varied from those used on leather because more delicate attachments would be required. This difference in morphology might allow catalogers to separate leather ornaments from textile ornaments, as in one possible example of a textile ornament from a 17th-century site in St. Mary's County (Figure 3).

The Life of a Leather Ornament

The many leather ornaments that have been recovered on 17th- and 18th-century sites in Maryland probably originated in England where specialized trades and industries assembled their wares for sale and export. In 1688, Holme attributed the production of leather horse fittings to the saddler, who made not only saddles, but also the various leather straps used for riding, such as the fillet and nose band mentioned above. Bits and bosses, however, were the domain of the spurrier or lorimer (Alcock and Cox 2000: Chapter 3, Item 34a). This separation persisted and perhaps became more refined in the 18th century. Diderot's 1752 *Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry* separated harness makers from saddlers, but still considered bit-making the domain of the

spurrier. It is unclear from these sources whether spurriers worked with copper alloys to make bosses and studs for use on horse furniture, or if they concentrated only on iron work and the tinning process needed to protect bits from the corrosive effects of saliva (Diderot 1752:177-178). It may well be that foundries dealing only in cast brass made both bridle bosses and leather studs and then sold these either to spurriers for attachment to bits, or saddlers for attachment to leather. It was in the saddler's shop, however, where all of the pieces ultimately came together.

English saddlers exported riding accoutrements to the colonies in large quantities. For example, 17,793 bridles and 5,861 saddles of English manufacture were exported from London to Maryland and Virginia in the single year that spanned Michaelmas (September 29) 1697 to Michaelmas 1698 (Great Britain Board of Customs and Excise 1697/98). While leather ornaments themselves are invisible in the customs records, it is likely that they arrived attached to these bridles and saddles.

Once in Maryland and distributed to the horses of the colony, the leather ornaments were finally in a position to fulfill the destiny their makers intended for them—dressing up the noble (and not so noble) steeds of the settlers. Bridles, saddles, and their attached decoration were intended to be mobile artifacts—traveling around according to the needs of their owners and spending time in storage between trips. No doubt many of the leather ornaments recovered by archeologists found their way into the archeological record through incidental losses as horses moved around. Others could have been lost as the equipment was transferred from storage to the horse and back again. Seventeenth- and 18th-century probate inventories indicate that horse gear could be stored pretty much anywhere from lofts and outbuildings to dwelling halls and chambers. Leather ornaments might therefore be recovered on excavations of any colonial road, dwelling, outbuilding, or yard if they were lost during travel or storage.

Depending upon environmental conditions and the frequency of use, leather horse equipment might be expected to last about six or seven years in the Chesapeake (Richard Nicoll, personal communication 2007). Even under ideal conditions, a lifespan of more than 20 years would be unlikely. While certain equipment might have endured longer, it is likely that anything surviving for a long period of time probably did not work very well and was therefore set aside. Items recovered archeologically are more likely to be there because they fell apart or were thrown away after regular use rendered them unserviceable. Bits, buckles, stirrups, and other metal components of the gear could sometimes be candidates for reuse, but leather pieces that suffered from rot, mold, or cracking would be abandoned or discarded (Richard Nicoll, personal communication 2007). Presumably the ornaments



FIGURE 3. This small, lightweight, white-metal ornament from the Rousby site (18ST751, Lot 141) might have been used on a textile. The site was occupied by an illiterate brickmaker, John Halfhead, and his family from ca. 1652-1676. In 1684 the site was purchased by Christopher Rousby who was murdered less than a year later. Neither Halfhead nor Rousby would be expected to have high-end horse trappings made of textiles, so this artifact might have been clothing-related.

that gripped them, too impractical to remove for reuse on other horse attire, usually shared their fate.

Dating the Leather Ornament Assemblage

At the time of this writing, the MAC Lab and its partners have compiled 98 leather ornaments from 25 different archeological sites for study. Although the sample size is still far too small to create a legitimate dated typology, definite trends have emerged that support testable hypotheses about the relative age of certain ornament styles. Similar motifs have appeared on multiple sites, and when they do, it is often clear that although the general shape is the same, the ornaments were made from different molds. This indicates that certain styles were widespread enough to be adopted by multiple foundries, or popular enough that molds would wear out and new ones would be made in the same general form until that shape went out of fashion.

It is also clear from changes in motifs over time that fashionable styles such as baroque carvings and curvilinear rococo lines had some influence over horse fittings just as they influenced art, interior decorating, clothing, and other aspects of 17th- and 18th-century material culture. It is therefore possible to begin grouping the leather ornaments by appearance and comparing motifs to dated contexts. For example, so far Tudor roses (n=12), openwork ornaments (n=4), and stylized arrows (n=10) have only appeared on sites with 17th- or early 18th-century components (Figure 4, Table 1). Stylized arrows in particular commonly show up on sites that have no post-1700 components whatsoever (e.g., 18CH281, 18ST677, 18AN1084, 18ST751), and the three arrows that come from a site with a ca. 1711-1754 date, 18CV91, actually have a slightly different shape than the others and may be a later iteration of the motif. By contrast, plain domes (n=27), "bat-like" or bowtie-shaped ornaments (n=3), and asymmetric ornaments that look like axe heads (n=7) have not yet appeared on sites without mid-late 18th-century components (Figure 5, Table 2). It is therefore possible to hypothesize that arrows, openwork, and Tudor roses are generally earlier than plain domes, bat-like, and asymmetric axe-like ornaments. As more examples are recovered, this hypothesis will be tested, and hopefully date ranges will be refined.

Other motifs show similarities, but have yet to cluster around any particular archeological date range. For example, three sites (18CV60, 18PR175, and 18DO58) have yielded rather large leather ornaments, sometimes with a shell-like motif incorporated (Figure 6). These ornaments are so consistent in size and general shape, that they most likely occupied a specific part of horse dressage that was prominently displayed. Unfortunately, the sites where they have been recovered all have long occupations that span the 17th and 18th centuries, and the exca-

vated contexts are not narrowly datable, making it impossible to determine the time period based on archeological provenience. If horse trappings kept pace with furniture styles, however, then it is likely that these ornaments date to the first three quarters of the 18th century when similar shell carvings and curvilinear shapes were popular on Queen Anne and Chippendale furniture (see Figure 7; Eberlien and McClure 1914; Kimerly 1913; Krill and Eversman 2001).

Finally, several ornament shapes have yet to appear in large enough quantities to draw any conclusions (Figure 8, Table 3). This is not unexpected, since it is unlikely that horse ornamentation was so uniform that all of the fittings were mass-produced in just a few styles. Again, a larger sample size would be useful to determine which of these ornaments are really unusual as opposed to just underrepresented in the current assemblage.

Analytical Considerations

In addition to helping archeologists date sites where leather ornaments are recovered, the examination of this artifact group might also contribute to a better understanding of the social context of those who had owned the leather ornaments. What can leather ornaments tell archeologists about horse ownership, the affordability of decorative horse fittings, and how these might represent mobility and status? Are there sites where leather ornaments were recovered, but no other horse-related artifacts, such as bits, horseshoes, and stirrups were present? Are there sites where historical documents indicate the presence of horses even though no leather ornaments were recovered? These and other questions might lead researchers to a better understanding of the interpretive value that this group of small finds could have. The following discussion is intended to explore some of these questions using examples from the assemblage.

The Rise of Horse Ownership

One of the trends that emerged as the Small Finds website developed is that leather ornaments are relatively rare on the early sites, with only one or two per site through the early 18th century. While this could be a function of the sample itself, several of the early sites with low numbers of ornaments had either Phase II excavations (18HA30 and 18ST677), extensive research excavations (18CV83 and 18FR72), or full data recoveries (18CV271 and 18CV279), so it is unlikely that the archeology limited the potential for finding ornaments. Instead, the pattern may indicate that access to horses or decorated horse equipment was somewhat limited in early colonial Maryland. Until the last quarter of the 17th century, horses were relatively expensive, and they may not have been a top prior-

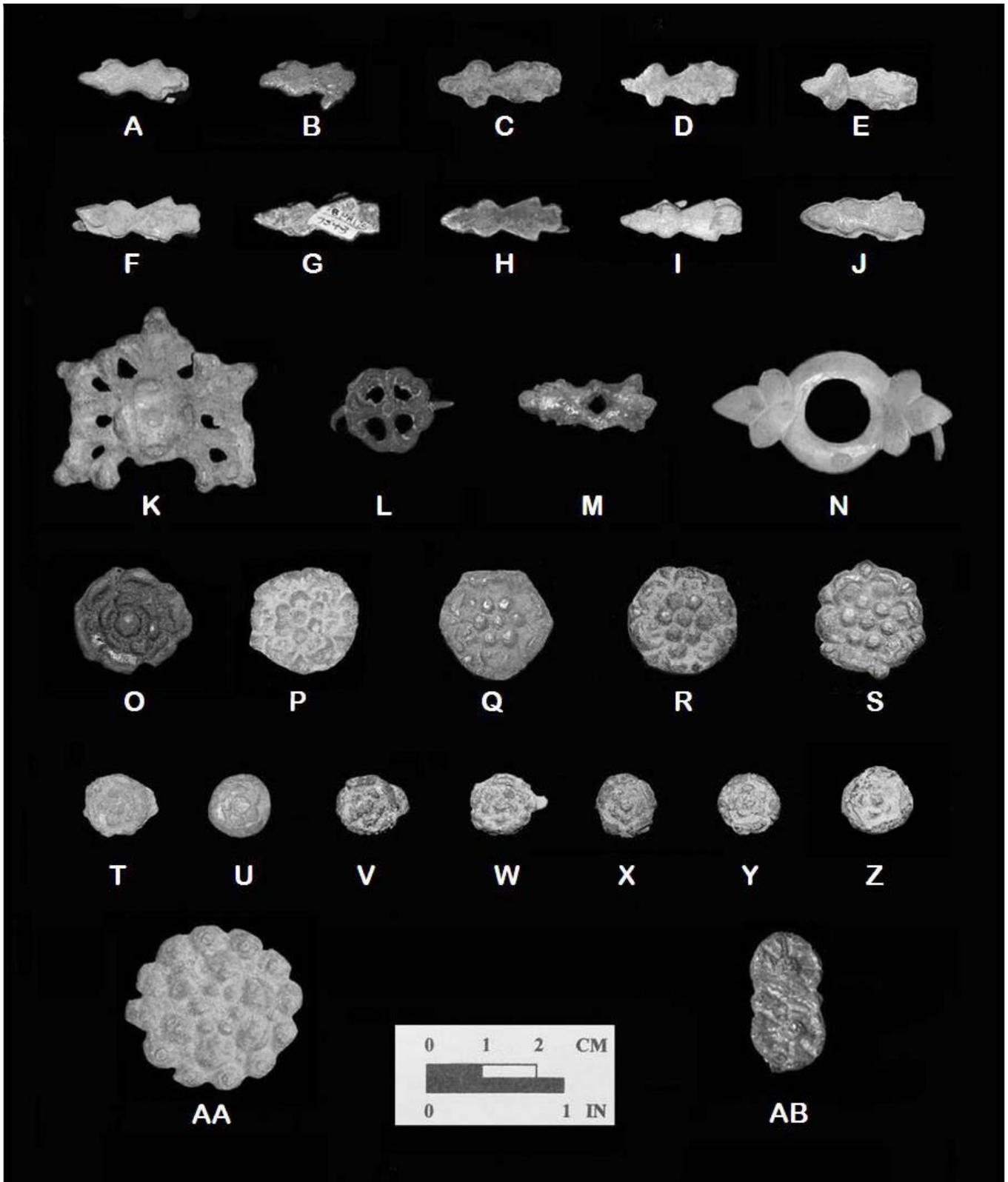


FIGURE 4. Stylized arrows, openwork ornaments, and Tudor rose style ornaments. Some Tudor rose symbols, such as AB above, show side-by-side roses indicative of the white and red roses that were emblems of the families in the War of the Roses. Most examples show the two roses superimposed on one another (O-AA). See Table 1 for context and date information.

TABLE 1. Site and provenience information for stylized arrows, openwork ornaments, and Tudor roses, most of which are shown in Figure 4. These styles have yet to appear on sites without 17th or early 18th-century components.

FIG. 4					SITE/CONTEXT
KEY	SITE	LOT	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	DATE†
A	18AN1084	160	Unit 144, Strat. 1	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
B	18CV83	178	Unit 170B	Plowzone	ca. 1689-1711
C	18CV91	216	Unit 8339A	Plowzone	ca. 1711-1754
D	18CV91	TBD	Unit 8639B	Unplowed midden	ca. 1711-1754*
E	18CV91	TBD	Unit 8641B	Unplowed midden	ca. 1711-1754*
F	18CH281	55	Unit 27120A	Plowzone, site core	ca. 1650-1680
G	18PR175	7543	F.6, Layer O	Cellar/magazine	ca. 1687-1730
H	18ST677	775	Unit 1, F.AA2-VI, Strat. VI	Cellar or trash pit	ca. 1660-1690
N/A	18ST704	726	F.12, Strat. 4, L.3	Borrow pit	ca. 1675-1700
I	18ST704	732	F.40	Posthole intruding F.12	ca. 1675-1943**
J	18ST751	220	Unit 13, L.10	Fill layer	ca. 1652-1900
K	18CV60	N/A	Unprovenienced	Unknown	ca. 1650-1770
L	18CV279	72	Unit 72	Plowzone	ca. 1651-1685
M	18HA30	204	Unit 40, L.1, W ½	Plowzone over fireplace	ca. 1680-1710
N	18ST704	867	F.119, W ½	Posthole intruding a 17 th -century dwelling area	ca. 1675-1814
O	18ST390	13	Unit 32368A	Plowzone, Magazine area	ca. 1666-1690
P	18AN39	N/A	Unprovenienced	Cellar fill	ca. 1700-1790
Q	18AN1084	164	Unit 47, Strat. 1	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
R	18AN1084	237	Unit 83, Strat. 2	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
S	18AN1084	256	Unit 98, Strat. 1	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
T	18CV91	167	Unit 4046A	Plowzone	ca. 1711-1754
U	18CV91	175	Unit 5842A	Plowzone	ca. 1711-1754
V	18AN1084	145	Unit 36, Strat. 2	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
W	18AN1084	147	Unit 37, Strat. 2	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
X	18AN1084	180	Unit 55, Strat. 1	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
Y	18AN1084	199	Unit 64, Strat. 2	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
Z	18AN1084	215	Unit 72, Strat. 2	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1685
AA	18CV60	N/A	Unprovenienced	Unknown	ca. 1650-1770
AB	18ST390	13	Unit 32368A	Plowzone, Magazine area	ca. 1666-1690

† Context date ranges are given where possible, but when artifacts are from plowzone or other disturbed contexts, the overall date range of the site is given instead.

* Artifact processing and analysis are incomplete for this unplowed midden deposit because excavations are ongoing; the date range of the site, not the context, is provided even though the deposit is undisturbed.

** Given the presence of an identical ornament in an undisturbed portion of the ca. 1675-1700 feature, it is safe to assume that this artifact dates much earlier than its context implies.

ity for individuals trying to work off periods of indentured servitude and establish themselves as planters. Even those who could afford horses might not have been able to afford decorative horse trappings as opposed to plain ones. Additionally, horses were generally used only for riding in the 17th century. While the 1697/98 London customs records list thousands of bridles and saddles worth over 6730£ among the imports from London to Maryland and Virginia, the total value of all horse collars and har-

nesses imported was just under 83£, and only two coaches and one chariot were listed (Great Britain Board of Customs and Excise 1697/98). Given that the use of horses was so limited, it is not surprising that 17th-century assemblages tend not to yield a great deal of horse-related adornment.

The earliest sites that have more than two ornaments are the ca. 1658-1685 Chaney's Hills site (18AN1084, n=9), and the ca. 1666-1740 Mattapany-

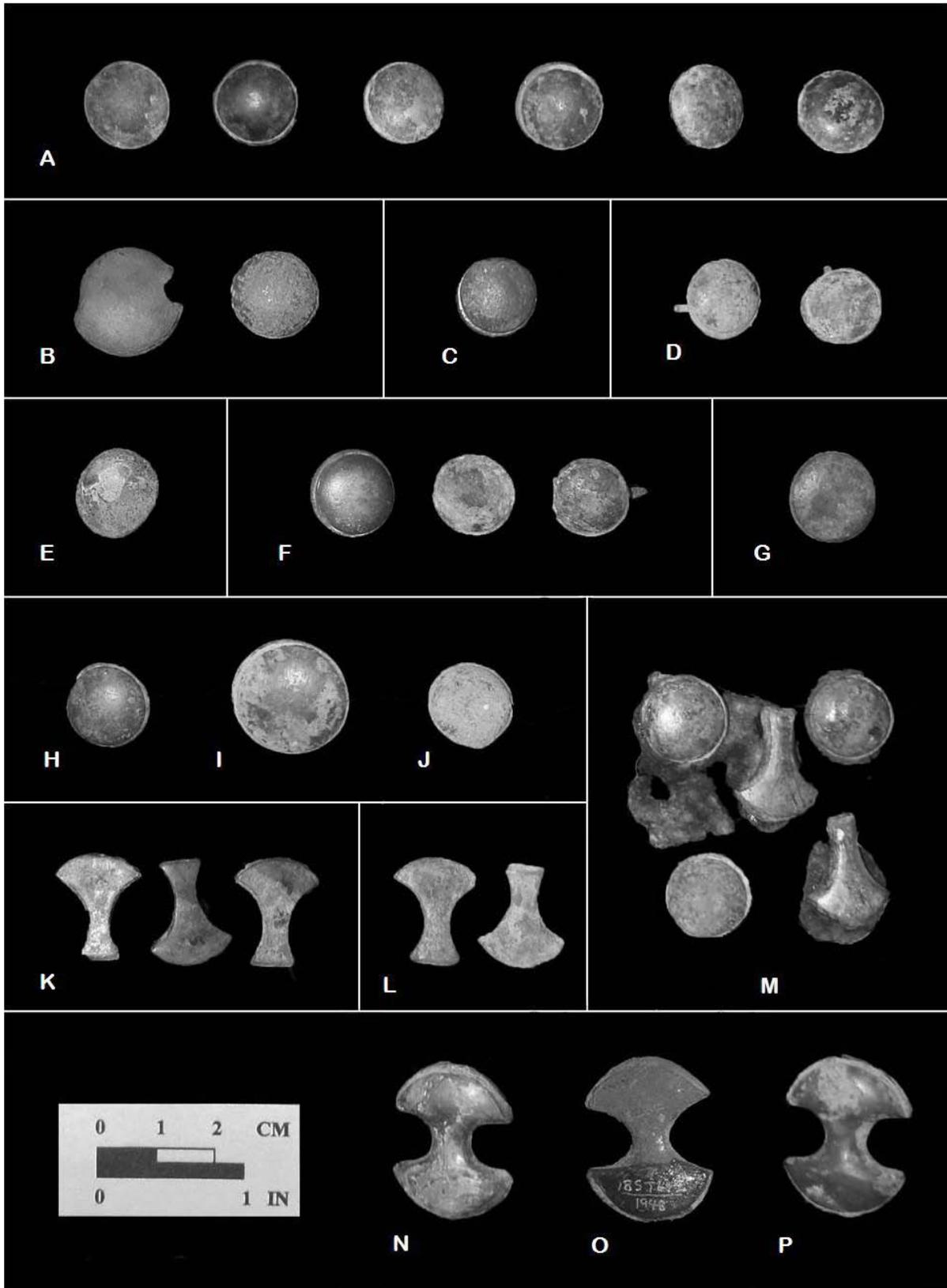


FIGURE 5. Plain domes, axe-like ornaments, and bat or bow-tie shaped ornaments. Axe-shaped ornaments and plain domes appear together on one leather fragment in example M above. See Table 2 for context and date information.

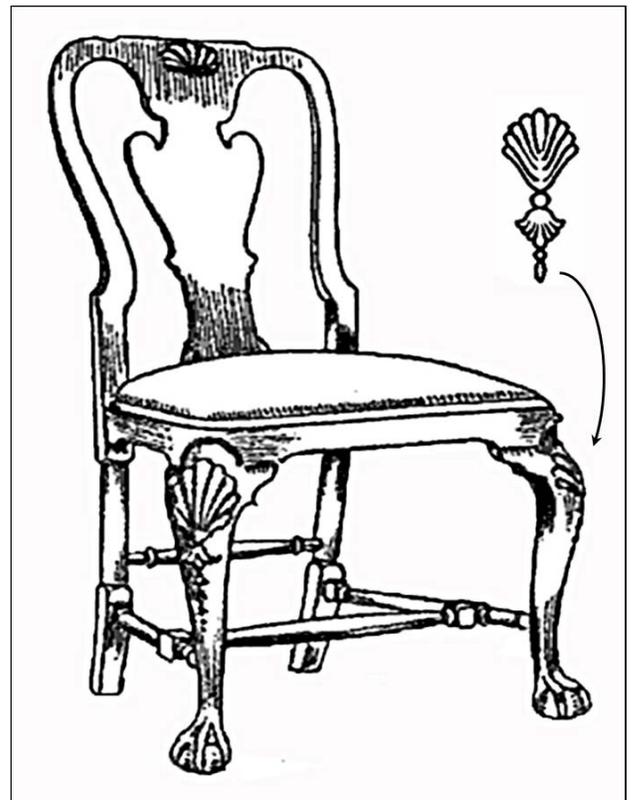
TABLE 2. Site and provenience information for styles shown in Figure 5. These styles have yet to appear on sites without mid-late 18th-century components.

FIG. 5						SITE/CONTEXT
KEY	SITE	COUNT	LOT	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	DATE†
A	18AN39	6	N/A	Unprovenienced	Cellar fill	ca. 1700-1790
B	18BA282	2	860	Area 1B, Unit N185, W465	Plowzone	ca. 1737-1806
C	18BA282	1	839	Area 1A, Unit N255, W450	Plowzone	ca. 1737-1806
D	18CV60	6*	N/A	Unprovenienced	Unknown	ca. 1650-1770
E	18DO58	1	20	Unit 13	Near fireplace	ca. 1670-1770
F	18DO58	3	257	Unprovenienced	Unknown	ca. 1670-1770
G	18PR510	1	20064	MH-15, Strat. III	Main house, cellar entry	ca. 1790-1970
H	18PR175	1	2235	F. 1002, L. 4	Well feature	ca. 1711-1895
I	18PR175	1	2244	F. 1002, L. 13	Well feature	ca. 1711-1895
J	18PR175	1	2319	F. 1002, L. 33	Well feature	ca. 1711-1895
K	18AN39	3	N/A	Unprovenienced	Cellar fill	ca. 1700-1790
L	18PR705	2	566	F. 17	Possible quarter/overseer's house	ca. 1730-1790
M	18PR175	5**	2301	F. 1002, L. 34	Well feature	ca. 1711-1895
N	18PR705	1	743	Mechanical Trench 5, near F. 18	Yard near a possible quarter/overseer's house	ca. 1730-1790
O	18ST642	1	1948	F. 16, L. 8	Subfloor pit	ca. 1780-1800
P	18ST704	1	844	Unit 84, L.4	Impacted A horizon	ca. 1675-1943

† Context date ranges are given where possible, but when artifacts are from plowzone or other disturbed contexts, the overall date range of the site is given instead.

*Only two of six are shown.

**Leather survives on these examples, showing that the axe-shape and dome shape decorated the same piece.



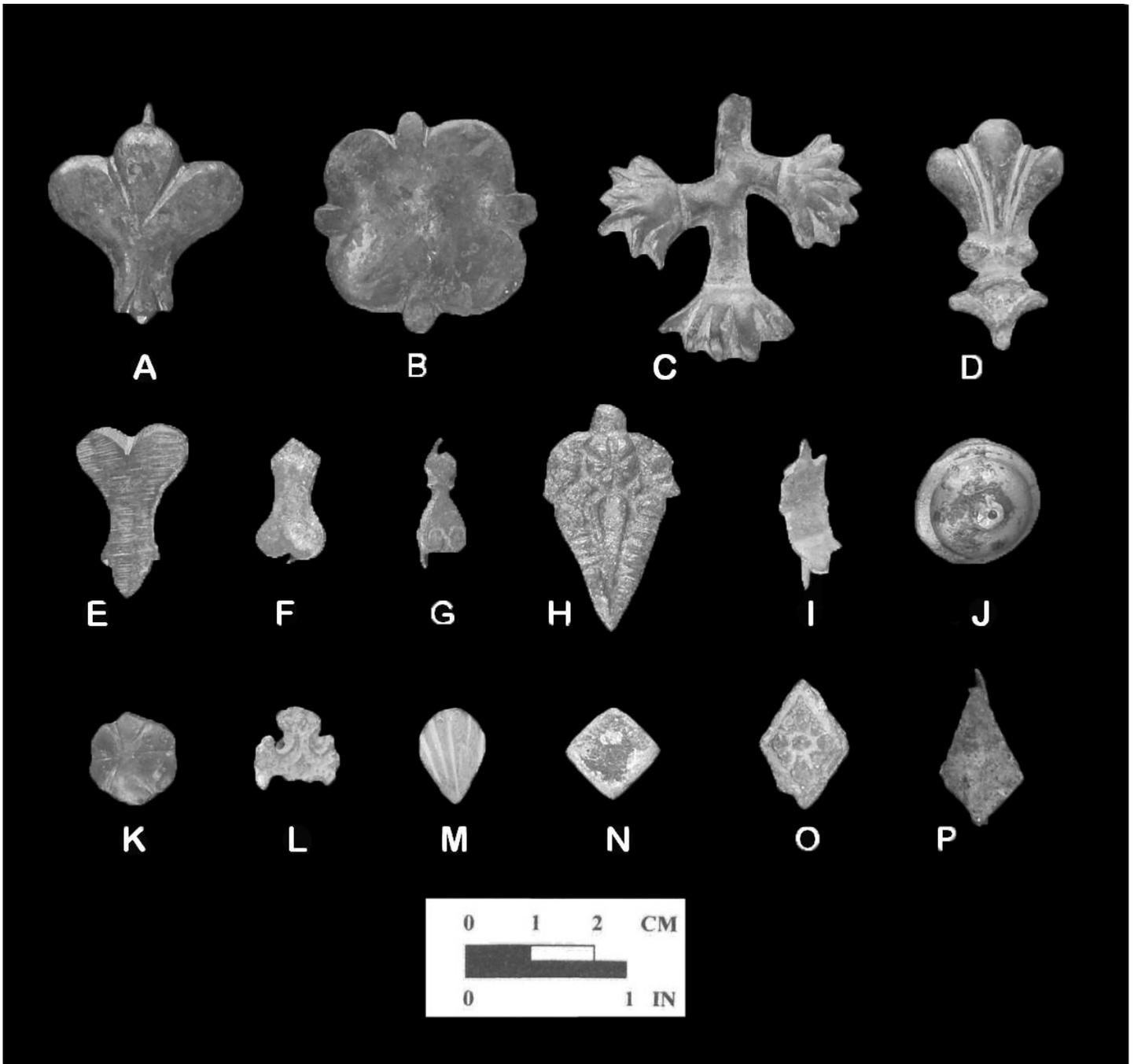


FIGURE 8. Miscellaneous leather ornaments that may have one or two examples, but have yet to cluster in any particular date range. See Table 3 for context and date information.

FIGURE 6 (*left*). Front and back views of four large ornaments that exhibit shell shapes and curvilinear lines like those found on Queen Anne style furniture. Left: 18CV60, unprovenienced, site date is ca. 1650-1770. Center top: 18PR175, Lot 9608, context date is ca. 1687-1730s. Right: 18PR175, Lot 2308, context date is ca. 1711-1895. Center bottom: 18DO58, Lot 257, unprovenienced, site date is ca. 1670-1770.



FIGURE 7 (*right*). Queen Anne chair with a detail of the shell carving on the leg. Adapted from Eberlien and McClure (1914:11) and Kimerly (1913:85).

TABLE 3. Site and provenience information for miscellaneous ornaments in Figure 8.

FIG. 8					SITE/CONTEXT
KEY	SITE	LOT	CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	DATE†
A	18PR175	52106	Unit 5001, L.1P	Fill over ca. 1740-1780 possible meat house	ca. 1700-1820
B	18ST704	518	Unit 26, L.5, S ½	ca. 1700-1814 hearth over a ca. 1675-1700 midden	ca. 1675-1814
C	18AN39	N/A	Unprovenienced	Cellar fill	ca. 1700-1790
D	18PR175	8096	Unit S 252, E 235	Possible early fill or occupation layer	ca. 1700-1800
E	18CV169	N/A	Unprovenienced	Surface find	ca. 1660-1690
F	18AN39	N/A	Unprovenienced	Cellar fill	ca. 1700-1790
G	18CV92	TBD	Unit 2767Q	Unplowed topsoil	ca. 1660-1690
H	18ST704	610	Unit 39, L.7	Mixture of F.12 fill, ca. 1675-1700, and later yard activity	ca. 1675-1814
I	18CV357	25	STP N 5150, E 4350	Shovel test	ca. 1675-1725
J	18CV83	666	Unprovenienced	Probably plowzone	ca. 1689-1711
K	18ST233/329	146	Unit 25743A	Plowzone	ca. 1650-1750
L	18CV60	N/A	Unprovenienced	Unknown	ca. 1650-1770
M	18CV271	48	Unit 1415C	Plowzone	ca. 1658-1690
N	18CH778	1	Surface	Surface	ca. 1670-1740
O	18CH778	1	Surface	Surface	ca. 1670-1740
P	18PR175	2320	F. 1002, L.40	Well feature	ca. 1720-1750

† Context date ranges are given where possible, but when artifacts are from plowzone or other disturbed contexts, the overall date range of the site is given instead.

Sewall site (18ST390, n=6). At first glance, the Chaney's Hills site seems to be an outlier, but it does not actually have evidence of more than one or two bridles because eight out of the nine leather ornaments have matching Tudor rose motifs and probably came from the same piece of horse equipment (see Figure 4[Q-S, V-Z]). Mattapany-Sewall, on the other hand, has six completely different styles of leather ornaments, most of which are from a pre-1690s component (Figure 9). This variety might be an indicator of several different bridles, which makes sense because from ca. 1666-1684 Mattapany-Sewall was the home of Charles Calvert, the Governor of Maryland who became the Third Lord Baltimore in 1676. It was also the location of Maryland's primary weapons magazine from about 1671-1690. Numerous proceedings of the Maryland Assembly at the time reference hiring mounted guards to protect the magazine, which could account for the relatively high density of leather adornment compared to other plantations (Chaney 2000:39).

By the mid-18th century, the trend of finding one or two ornaments per site is over. With only two exceptions, the sites that date into the third quarter of the 18th century all have at least three leather ornaments. One exception is the NAVAIR (18ST642) site, which was inhabited by tenants or enslaved laborers and will be discussed below. This increase in leather ornaments follows a dra-

matic drop in the price of horses in the last quarter of the 17th century and the increase in diversification of trades among local populations (Bradburn and Coombs 2006:149). By the 18th century, tobacco was no longer the only game in the town. Town centers had been established outside of St. Mary's City, such as London Town, Annapolis, and Charles' Town, and people were able to provide more services locally. While importation of horse-related goods no doubt continued, harness and saddle makers may have been living in Maryland by this time, repairing damaged imports and selling their wares to an increased number of horse and cart owners on surrounding plantations. Additionally, generations had passed since the founding of the colony, and many people had established stable, profitable ventures that provided wealth and increased access to more expensive consumer goods. As a result, this period saw an increase in the use of horses for driving coaches and farm equipment, and by the end of the 18th century the use of brass decoration became popular for heavy harness horses that pulled carts and plows (Keegan 1974; Stratton 1878). The increase in leather ornaments over time may therefore be an indication of a greater number of horses, the ability of horse owners to afford decorative horse trappings, and more diversified use of horses both at home on the plantation and abroad for transportation.

Status and Social Climbing

The presence of leather ornaments on a site is not only an indicator that individuals could afford horses, but that they could afford to deck them out as well. So far, the sites analyzed have yielded ornaments in proportions that would be expected based on what is known of the income and status of the inhabitants. As more sites and ornaments are compiled, however, this may not always be the case. Like clothing, riding equipment and carriages could be far more visible to the outside world than the interior of one's home, particularly in colonial Maryland where plantations were scattered and towns often existed more to accommodate seasonal court sessions than to serve as centers of domestic life. As a result, colonists who wished to demonstrate their membership among society elites might prioritize fine clothing, horses, and horse dressage over domestic furniture or elaborate architecture. Some might have had the wealth to dress the part both at home and abroad, but if a plantation site yields a relatively large amount of leather ornamentation compared to a small or shoddily constructed main dwelling, these artifacts may indicate that the inhabitants were aspiring social climbers—more concerned with outward appearance than the creature comforts of home.

Non-Horse-Related Functions

Finally, it must be noted that the equation “leather ornament = horse” may not always be true, and context should be seriously scrutinized before drawing any conclusions about horse ownership. Four sites in this study stand out as potential cautionary tales. First, Heater's Island (18FR72), a 1699-ca.1712 settlement and fort occupied by the Piscataway Indians, yielded a small shell-shaped leather ornament and a larger symmetrical ornament that probably served as a “keeper” or strap holder (Figure 10; Curry n.d.). These items may have been from equipment for horses at the settlement, but the absence of other horse-related metal such as horseshoes, stirrups, bits, and bridle bosses in the assemblage indicates that something else might be going on. One possibility is that copper ornaments were desirable to the Piscataway for reuse of some kind. It has been well-documented that copper was highly valued by American Indians at the time of contact with Europeans in the Chesapeake, and that Indians used scraps and other copper goods they acquired through trade to make copper points, cones, and personal adornments (Mallios and Emmett 2004). The two leather ornaments from Heater's Island do not appear to have been intentionally modified, but they may have been sewn on to something to add decoration. This possibility could also account for the single arrow-shaped leather ornament recovered at another American Indian settlement, the Posey

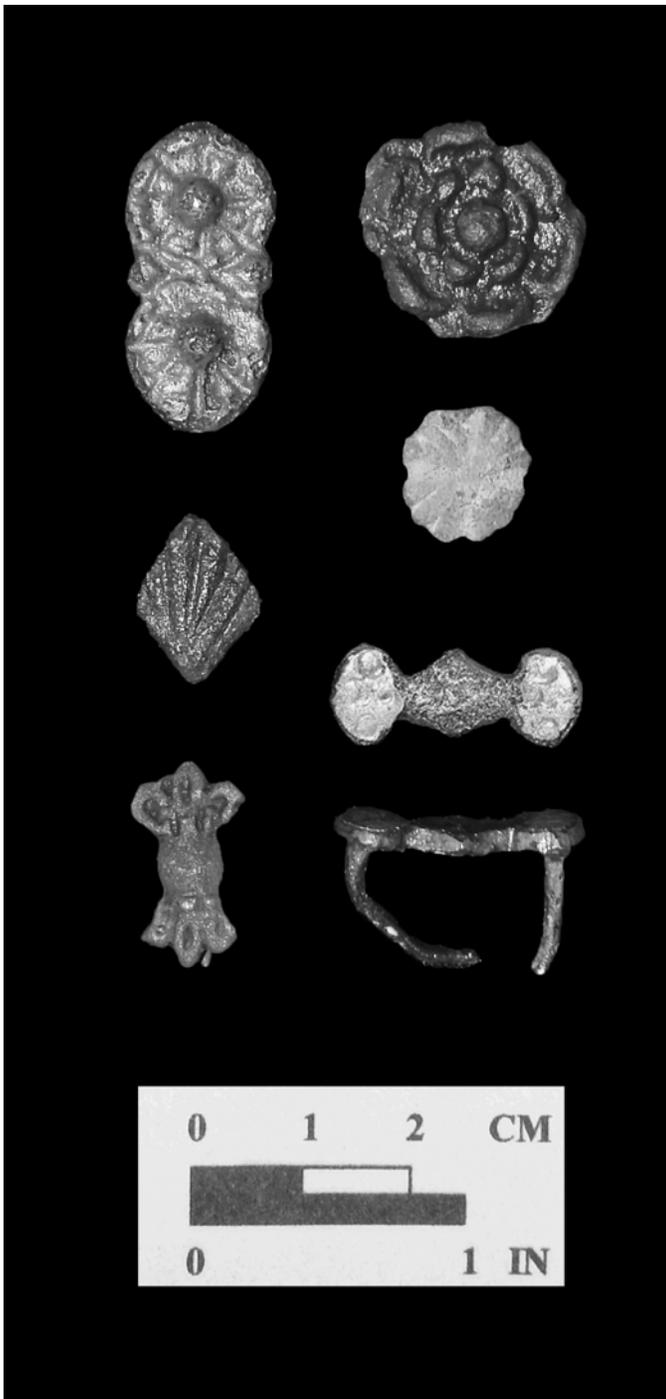


FIGURE 9. Leather ornaments recovered at the Mattapan-Sewall site (18ST390) show a variety of styles. All ornaments are shown from the front, but the keeper on the bottom left is also shown in side view.

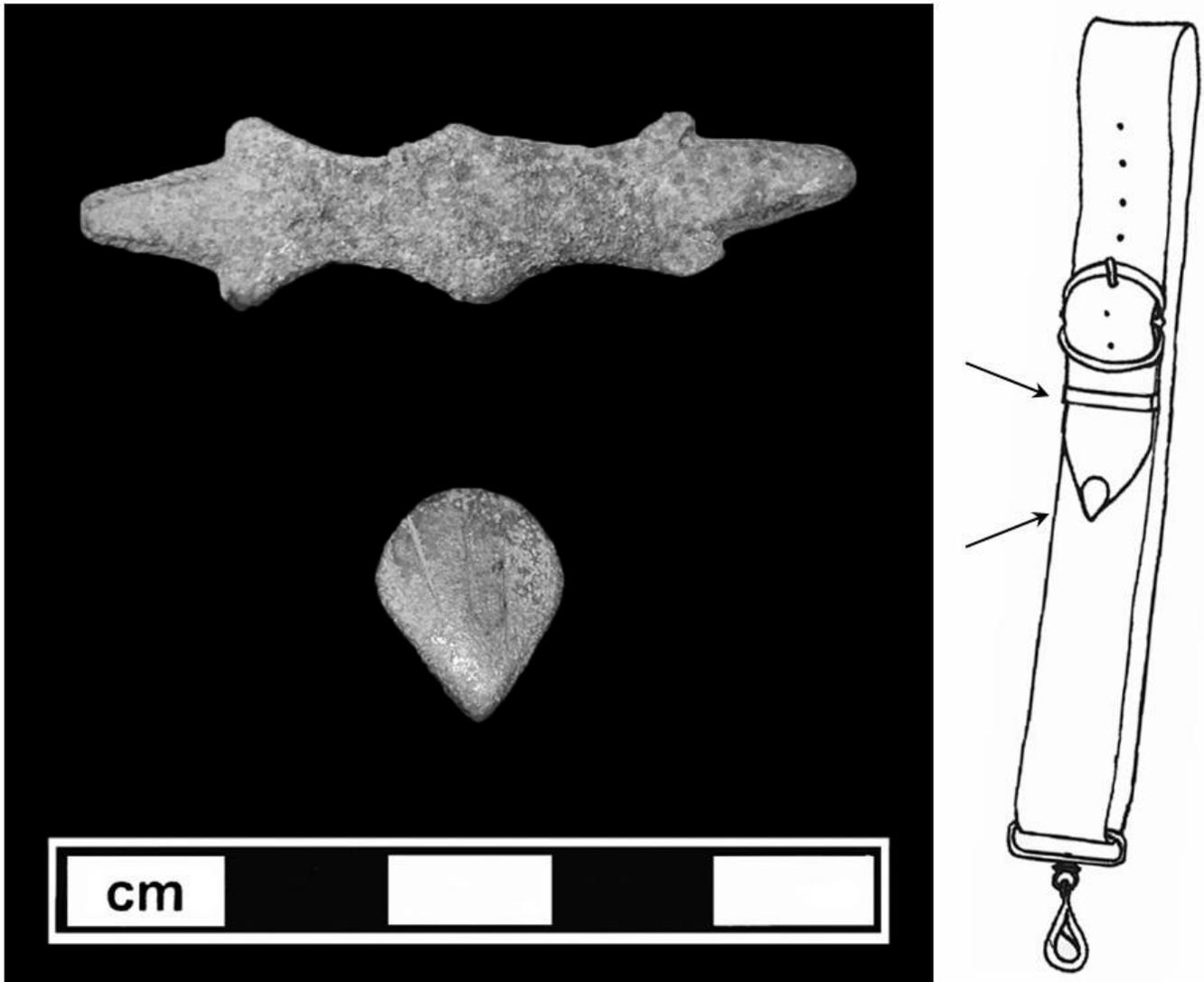


FIGURE 10. Leather ornaments recovered from Heater's Island (18FR72), may represent a strap holder (*top*: Feature 7) and strap end (*bottom*: Unit 107) for a carbine belt or other firearm accessory (*right*).

site (18CH281), which dates from ca. 1650-1680 (Figure 4[F]). No other potential horse hardware was recovered at that site either, but copper scraps were present and some had been fashioned into points and possible baubles (Harmon 1999).

Another possibility is indicated by an abundance of firearm parts in the Heater's Island assemblage, such as a frizzen, frizzen spring, buffer, gun barrel fragment, sear, main spring, trigger, and dog lock screw. Some firearms were accompanied by shoulder slings that hooked to a rod or ring attached to the weapon, making it easier to carry, and these might have decorative metal fittings. A mid-17th-century carbine belt, for example, could have exactly one strap holder and one pointed strap end ornament (Figure 10; Blackmore 1990; Waller's Horse 2009). If the two examples at Heater's

Island did come from such a strap, then an ornament found at Patuxent Point (18CV271) that looks identical to the Heater's Island shell ornament may represent a strap decoration as well (see Figure 8[M]).

Two other sites included in this study warrant particular attention as having the potential to yield ornaments from military accessories. Mattapan-Sewall (18ST390), which has been mentioned above, and Addison/Oxon Hill (18PR175) both housed weapons magazines, and though both also yielded horse hardware, it is possible that at least some of the leather ornaments from these sites represent fixtures for military accessories rather than horse adornment. Interestingly, each of these two sites has an example of the "keeper" or strap holder ornament. Since only three sites had this type of ornament and all are linked

with firearms or arms storage, there may be an association between decorative strap holders and military gear. Perhaps riding equipment was more likely to have iron or leather strap holders while straps worn on the person for swords or firearms merited more decorative copper alloy ornaments. Although the three examples in this study can hardly be considered a pattern, the possibility that keepers might not be associated with horses is worth examining further as the assemblage of leather ornaments grows.

Another site where a leather ornament may have meaning beyond horse-ownership is NAVAIR (18ST642), a ca. 1750-1800 dwelling that was occupied by tenants or slaves. The site is located about a mile away from the plantation's main dwelling and it represents a structure that was presumably built on ground-laid sills. Complete exposure of the site revealed two sub-floor pits and a brick chimney, but no post holes or foundations (Watts and Tubby 1998). As a tenant or slave quarter, NAVAIR begs the question of whether the presence of horse-related artifacts indicates horse ownership, as opposed to just horse maintenance and care. A horseshoe, snaffle bit, bridle boss, and leather ornament were recovered at the site, indicating that a horse or mule was present, or that the inhabitants carried the horse hardware to the site from elsewhere. The shoe and snaffle bit could have been used on a work animal such as a mule, but the leather ornament might be a bit dressy for a work animal unless an old horse bridle was being reused, and the bridle boss is from a curb bit that offers more control for stopping and steering which is more likely to be associated with a riding horse. If the inhabitants were enslaved, does this mean they were allowed to own a horse? Did the plantation owner assign a horse to certain slaves for their use? Or were they tasked with caring for horses that they themselves did not own or use? Furthermore, if enslaved Africans were present at the site, did their cultural worldview motivate them to use horse hardware in different ways?

No artifact caches or other obvious anomalies in artifact content or distribution exist at NAVAIR to establish any particular spiritual practice or ethnic affiliation, but it is notable that the decorative horse hardware—the bridle boss and the leather ornament—was found in the bottommost layer of a rectangular subfloor pit next to the fireplace along with other personal items such as buckles, buttons, and utensils (Watts and Tubby 1998). Also in this provenience was a fragment of a small engraved copper alloy teaspoon handle with a knob at the end. This teaspoon would have been part of a set that included sugar tongs and a mote spoon (Jull 1980). No other fragments of utensils from the tea set were recovered at NAVAIR, and it is unlikely that the occupants could have afforded such a set, so the evidence suggests that the decorative fragment may have been reused as an article of personal adornment such as a pendant. A great deal of

other domestic debris, such as ceramics, nails, and faunal remains, was recovered in the same context, so it would be misleading to imply that the contents of the pit were exclusively personal, but the discovery of a potentially altered and reused decorative copper artifact along with two copper alloy horse ornaments (and no iron horse hardware) might suggest that the leather ornament and bridle boss could have been reused for their decorative properties as well. It may be that the shapes of these artifacts resembled symbols that enslaved Africans might recognize. For example, the bat-like ornament might be related to a West African symbol for “goodness” (Figure 11; Faiik-Nzuji 1996).

Though none of the leather ornaments found at the sites discussed above definitively represent non-horse-related origins or uses, these sites do urge us to pause to consider the probability that some of them were never used on horses, as may be the case with Heater's Island and the weapons magazine sites, and others may have started out as horse adornment, but then took on new meaning later, as may be the case for NAVAIR. Both interpretations are undoubtedly conjectural, but also undoubtedly possible.

Conclusions

The leather ornaments thus far compiled for inclusion on the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* webpage demonstrate stylistic differences over time that can be dated by context information. Although the sample size of tightly dated leather ornaments is still too small to enable the production of a useful seriation graph, the potential is certainly there. Already it is possible to make some general predictions. For example, arrows, openwork, and roses tend to be older than plain domes, bat-like shapes, and asymmetrical axe-like ornaments. Whether this trend will hold up as more ornaments are recovered remains to

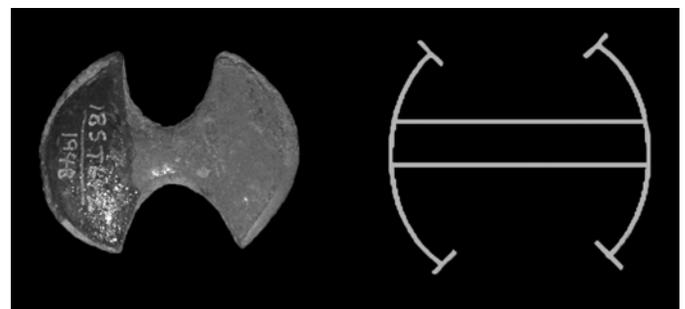


FIGURE 11. The NAVAIR site (18ST642, Lot 1948) leather ornament (*left*) may have been collected by enslaved inhabitants of the site for its decorative properties. The shape may have resembled a symbol that the slaves recognized, such as a West African pictogram for “goodness” (*right*).

be seen, but if it does, then it should be possible to assign approximate date ranges and use leather ornaments as temporal diagnostics.

This study has also shown that leather ornaments can contribute to nuanced analyses that look at issues such as horse ownership, militia activities, firearms, status, and reuse. As with so many other small finds, simply placing leather ornaments in functional categories such as “clothing group” or “transportation group” when compiling percentages and statistics for reports might reflect a misunderstanding of how they were used, or pigeon-hole the artifacts into categories that do not always apply. This does little to advance explorations of what they might mean, and in some cases perpetuates erroneous identifications. The addition of leather ornaments and other small finds to the *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland* webpage is certainly not a panacea that will suddenly make contextual analyses quick and easy, but it does provide well-researched identifications, examples of assemblages, descriptions of sites that might have comparative data, and information about where to go for more details. The potential for exploring multiple possibilities and interpretations of leather ornaments is therefore accessible and waiting to be exploited.

Photo Credits

All photos and figures by Sara Rivers Cofield of the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory, and all artifacts courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust unless noted below. Figures 3, 4 (I, J, N, O, AB), 5 (O-P), 8 (B, H, I, K), 9, and 11 courtesy of the Naval District Washington, Southern Region (Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Webster Field Annex, and Solomon’s Complex). Figure 4 (A) courtesy of the Anne Arundel County *Lost Towns Project*; original photo by Shawn Sharpe. Figure 4 (F) courtesy of the Naval Support Activity South Potomac. Figure 4 (M) courtesy U.S. Army Garrison, Aberdeen Proving Ground. Figure 5 (B-C) courtesy of Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum.

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