

LINKED BUTTONS OF THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC, 1670-1800

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines an assemblage of linked buttons, also known as sleeve buttons or cufflinks, from 33 archaeological sites in Maryland and Delaware. As a transferable artifact of personal adornment, sleeve buttons could be moved from shirt to shirt, from sleeve to neckline, or even to a woman's waistcoat in lieu of laces. Additionally, individuals who might not be able to afford new clothes might have used sleeve buttons as a relatively inexpensive way to change their look with accessories. These buttons come in many different styles and are often decorated with paste insets, popular designs, such as hearts and flowers, or political motifs that allowed people to make a statement without making too much of a commitment. As a result, linked buttons are an ideal artifact of personal adornment to illustrate how individuals expressed and constructed their identity through clothing and accessories.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeologists study personal adornment with good reason. Not only is bodily adornment a universal characteristic of all cultures, but as Diana DiPaolo Loren summarizes in the introduction to her book *The Archaeology of Clothing and Bodily Adornment in Colonial America*, "clothing and adornment are a means of communication: a visual statement about status, prestige, gender, society, politics, and religion" (Loren 2010:8). Personal adornment may also signal one's occupation; whether it is a servant in livery, a kitchen maid, a military officer, or an elite gentlewoman. The cut of the garment, quality of the fabric, and richness of the trimmings all work together to form a picture that, when viewed by others, indicates which societal role the wearer plays, and therefore, how the viewer will interact with them. If archaeologists were able to completely reconstruct one's wardrobe and understand the signals sent by different garments in a particular time period, it would help them recognize an individual's aspirations, identity, and position in society.

Unfortunately, researchers are *not* able to completely reconstruct the wardrobes of individuals through archaeological excavations. Complete garments rarely survive in the ground, and without cloth and leather survival, the adornment artifacts that do survive, such as buttons and buckles, are out of context. Artifact analysts must have extensive knowledge of colonial costume in order to recognize the historic uses of such finds. Each individual adornment artifact therefore presents the researcher with a challenge to rediscover the artifact's original context in the search for meaning.

This paper focuses upon linked buttons and studs, which were removable accessories that could be used by individuals to update their fashions without replacing their garments. Most commonly called "sleeve buttons" or "sleeve links" in historic records, linked buttons became popular for widespread use in European fashion by the end of the seventeenth century, and they remained popular throughout the eighteenth century.

The dominant costume for men during this period was the three-piece suit, while women wore an ensemble of gown and petticoat, sometimes with a waistcoat or stomacher. Both men and women wore a shirt or shift underneath these garments. Although the cut and style of clothing did undergo gradual changes throughout this period, many updates to one's wardrobe were achieved through creative accessorizing. Removable buttons, stomachers, buckles, lace cuffs, pockets, ribbon, and strips of

embroidered fabric could be transferred from one garment to another, and they were regularly mixed and matched to one's individual taste (Takeda and Spilker 2010:17). Linked buttons and studs fall into this category of interchangeable accessories, and they retained a versatility that sew-on buttons for coats, waistcoats, and breeches did not have. From an archaeological perspective, they are among the most personal of personal adornment artifacts available for research because they can offer clues about individual political views, hobbies, beliefs, and occupations in addition to individual taste and aesthetics.

The author's research on linked buttons began with an effort to add these artifacts to the small finds section of the Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland webpage (www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/index.htm). Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland is an online research tool created at the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum for the identification of artifacts commonly found in the Middle Atlantic region. Unlike other sections of the Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland website, the "Small Finds" section does not target well-documented types of artifacts that appear with relative frequency. Instead, examples of less-frequently-found small finds are gathered in one place for comparative purposes in the hope that the diagnostic nature of these artifacts will be revealed as more examples are found. Linked buttons are an ideal category to add to the website because they have been recovered on sites all across Maryland, but they are found in limited quantities, so every known example in Maryland can be included on the website.

The website's "Small Finds" category entitled "Sleeve Buttons, Cufflinks, and Studs" yielded 34 examples when first launched in 2008. Since then, another 41 have been found within the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory's (MAC Lab's) collections. In addition, partner institutions such as the Lost Towns Project of Anne Arundel County, Maryland, and the Delaware Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs have offered access to their collections to expand the data set and geographical range.

Research conducted by the author prior to the launch of the original webpage drew heavily from an article about sleeve buttons by Ivor Noël Hume (1961). Although it was the most detailed account of sleeve buttons available, Noël Hume's article had little archaeological data to draw from when compared to the number of collections available for study today. The chronological indicators he proposed were an excellent starting point for analysis, but it remained to be seen whether they would hold up to future finds. Noël Hume suggested, for example, that link and shank styles changed over time, and that certain shapes, such as oval and octagonal buttons, enjoyed different periods of popularity and may have changed in size over time (Noël Hume 1961; White 2005). While subsequent literature has generally upheld the premises presented in Noël Hume's original 1961 article (Loren 2010; White 2005), the analysis of the assemblage that was included in this study supports some of Noël Hume's hypotheses and contradicts others.

THE ASSEMBLAGE

The assemblage included in this article is comprised of 357 linked buttons and studs from two Delaware shipwrecks and 31 terrestrial sites in 10 Maryland counties. The submerged sites included in the study are the 1798 Royal Navy vessel *H.M.S. Debraak*, and a trading vessel known as the Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck (Beard 1989; Krivor *et al.* 2010; Shomette 1993). Most of the terrestrial sites are domestic, but notable exceptions include a tannery, an iron furnace, and a military fort. Most of the domestic sites in the assemblage represent rural locations, but several sites that were located in population centers, such as Annapolis and London Town, are also represented.

It is important to note that many of the buttons included in the analysis did not have their links attached. While it is possible that some of these may have been sewn onto clothing, their similarity to known linked buttons and dissimilarity to coat and breeches buttons argues for their inclusion in this study. All but two of the examples in the assemblage pre-date the nineteenth century. Two of the buttons have definite seventeenth-century contexts, and about five or six others may also possibly date to the 1600s. The remainder of the buttons date to the eighteenth century, though these small finds are heavily skewed toward the last quarter of the eighteenth century thanks to the wealth of linked buttons recovered from the Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck (RIS). The RIS yielded the vast majority of the total assemblage, including at least 133 link-style buttons with discernible shapes, 15 links separated from their buttons, 23

molded glass insets for linked buttons, and 106 conical faceted glass insets for linked buttons or other jewelry. This total does not include beach finds or artifacts from the RIS that were on exhibit when this research was conducted. The large number of linked buttons recovered from the RIS suggests that it carried a shipment of imported linked buttons bound for the American market.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

An exploration of linked buttons in seventeenth and eighteenth-century historical records is necessary to inform analysts about how the objects were used over time. Similar types of accessories are still available to consumers, so it is important to evaluate whether present-day understandings of linked buttons are creeping into the analysis of these artifacts in inappropriate ways. Today linked buttons are almost exclusively associated with sleeve cuffs and are almost always referenced by the popular term "cufflinks," which first appeared in the late nineteenth century (O. E. D. 1991). Cufflinks tend to be associated with attire that aims to show high status, high income, or a "dressy" look. They are primarily marketed to adult men, though women and adolescents sometimes wear them as well. Although few archaeological interpretations of sleeve buttons have been published, the literature that has discussed linked buttons has tended to extend some of these current perceptions into the colonial period, namely the association of these artifacts with cuffs, men, and wealth (Bianchi and Bianco 2006; Bianco *et al.* 2006; Loren 2010; White 2005).

The background research conducted for this study, however, has found that these generalizations do not apply to uses of linked buttons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead, documents and archaeological associations indicate that linked buttons were relatively affordable accessories that enjoyed widespread use by individuals of different classes, sexes, and ages. Additionally, linked buttons were not worn exclusively on sleeves in the colonial period, so other parts of clothing must also be considered. The historical and functional context of linked buttons is presented here in an effort to help archaeologists examine the role that these artifacts can and cannot play in the interpretation of gender, status, and identity on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sites.

What do linked buttons say about wealth?

Archaeological literature has sometimes implied that the lower classes would have limited access to sleeve buttons, and that sleeve buttons were durable and would have likely outlasted the clothing they adorned. For example, Loren (2010:52) states that, "Because sleeve buttons could be transferred from one shirt to another, they were carefully curated, and it would be rare to find a person of modest social status with more than one set." The implications of this statement may lead archaeologists to interpret sleeve buttons as more precious than they actually were.

Historical evidence indicates that even individuals of modest means might not have been limited to owning only one pair of linked buttons at a time. White's (2005:62) analysis of store account books found that sleeve buttons were among the most affordable buttons available, and this makes sense in a society where metal content and weight had so much to do with value. The smaller and lighter the accessory, the more likely an individual was to be able to afford a better material, so it would be cheaper to buy a small pair of silver sleeve buttons than a full set of silver buttons for one's coat.

In ascending order of value, sleeve buttons were most commonly made of pewter, brass or other copper alloys, silver, or gold. Insets that were made of glass, crystal, or more precious stones could also affect the value of the buttons, but this increase in price had more to do with the value of the materials than the cost of manufacturing, since labor was relatively inexpensive (Takeda and Spilker 2010:18). Each individual who was faced with a decision about which accessories to purchase, and how much to spend, had the same choice that we have today. One could either get a more expensive accessory, such as gold sleeve buttons, and wear them all the time, or, for the same price, one could buy a variety of button styles made of less expensive materials to allow for different looks.

Run-away ads from the eighteenth century indicate that many people opted to buy better materials when they could. For example, a servant who ran away from Boston in 1730 wore, "a...Coat... with brass

Buttons; and Jacket ... with Pewter Buttons; a fine Shirt with Silver Buttons in the Sleeves" (Readex 2011:a). Another servant in Pennsylvania in 1742 had pewter coat buttons and brass sleeve buttons (Readex 2011:f), and a carpenter who jumped bail in 1746 wore silver shoe and knee buckles and gold sleeve buttons (Readex 2011:m). In each of these cases, the sleeve buttons were made with more precious metals than buckles or coat buttons.

If sleeve buttons were one of the most affordable ways to upgrade one's wardrobe, then the idea that all sleeve buttons, not just silver and gold ones, would have been worthy of careful curation is called into question. Additionally, some links were so delicate that their ability to survive daily wear over long periods of time is questionable. Perhaps because metal content was a factor in cost, not all sleeve buttons had heavy-duty links. People seem to have lost linked buttons on a regular basis, and archaeological examples show that many losses resulted from wear and breakage. Between 1738 and 1779 at least 15 ads appear for lost or stolen sleeve buttons in Boston and Pennsylvania newspapers (Readex 2011:b-e, i-j, l, n-p, r-u, w). In each case, the missing items were gold, which was probably the only material valuable enough to merit the cost of advertising. Perhaps the common losses are what motivated one importer to advertise "strong brass links" in 1761 (Readex 2011:v). The existence of such an ad indicates that consumers had the option of replacing fragile links with stronger ones offered by jewelers, and they were aware of differences in durability. It cannot be assumed that every purchaser believed their links would last, or were even worth repairing if they broke. Individuals might well have sought a balance between cost and durability as they set priorities for spending on these accessories. For example, a heavy, durable set of copper alloy sleeve buttons might have cost the same as a dainty, light pair of solid silver buttons, but fear of loss might not persuade everyone to choose the base metal over the silver. It would have depended on the priorities of the individual, and cost, aesthetics, and access to goods would all have been factors influencing the purchases.

Given the variety of options people had—precious metals, base metals, weak links, strong links, highly decorative, and plain styles—it is difficult to use linked buttons alone to make generalizations about economic status. Even the prices of such buttons as found in the primary historical record are of limited use because there is not always a direct correlation between the price of goods and the wealth of the individuals who used them. The economy of the colonial period, much like the economy today, was awash with credit-based transactions by people who lived beyond their means, and it is also possible that people who amassed great wealth may have done so, at least in part, by keeping their standard of living modest and avoiding extravagant purchases. Without assuming a direct relationship between cost and consumption, understanding how linked buttons reflect wealth or status requires a nuanced study of the relationship between the purchases made on a given site and the net worth of the individuals who lived there. The marriage of historical and archaeological data can allow for such analyses, and the assemblage examined in this study offers several tantalizing sites for such research. For the purposes of this paper, however, the goal is to understand a large assemblage from many sites, rather than a specific linked button from a specific context. In general, newspaper ads and account books indicate that linked buttons were affordable and used by individuals at all levels of society, so while their materials and decoration may offer insight into issues of class and status signaling in specific contexts, analysts should recognize that the association of all cufflinks with finer shirts, special occasion attire, or wealth is not something that applies to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

How were linked buttons used?

Linked buttons and studs were not only affordable, they were also quite versatile. Most linked buttons were intended for use on sleeves, and are therefore referred to as "sleeve buttons" or "sleeve links" in colonial newspaper ads and account books. However, linked buttons were not restricted to sleeves, nor were they the only sleeve closure available. Records also refer to studs being used as a closure instead of linked buttons. For example, a 1745 run-away ad for an Irish servant who had, "a fine shirt, and Silver Studs in his Sleeves" tells us that the stud sometimes substituted for sleeve buttons, and there are a few studs present in the Maryland and Delaware collections (Figure 1:E; Table 1; Readex 2011:k).

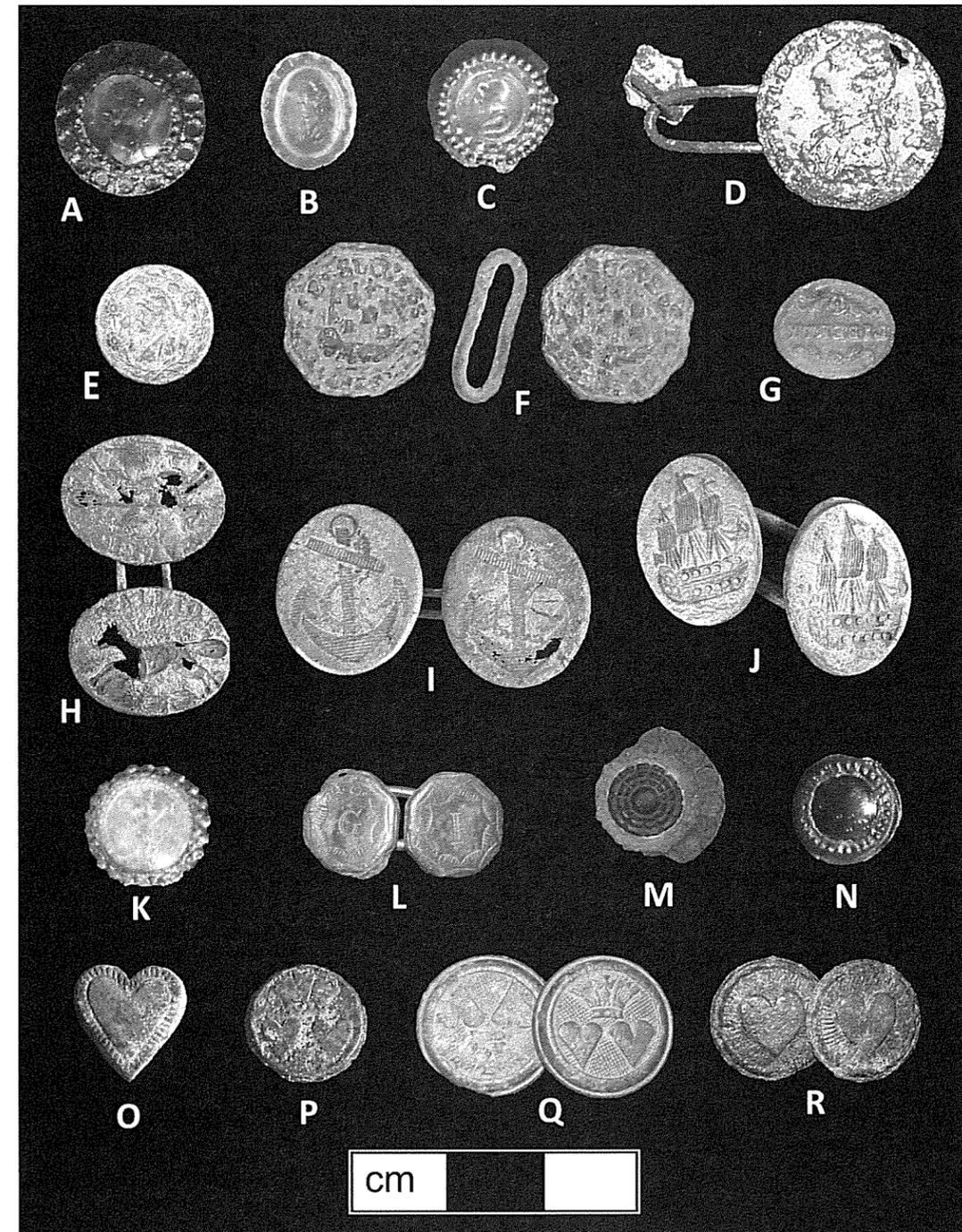


Figure 1. Sleeve buttons showing personalization such as busts (A-E), political themes (D, F-G), hobbies (H), occupation (I-J), religion (K), initials (L), possible mourning (M-N), and romantic heart motifs (O-R). See Table 1 for dating and provenience information. Photo by Caitlin Shaffer and Sara Rivers Cofield.

TABLE 1: SITE AND PROVENIENCE INFORMATION FOR SLEEVE BUTTONS SHOWN IN FIGURE 1

Letter	Site	Lot	Context	Site/Context Date†	Artifact Description
A	7SD91	2006.33.219	N10, E70, NE Quad, 0-12", South end of ship	c. 1770-1785	Pewter setting with clear glass inset molded with a bust motif
B	7SD91	2006.33.155	N50, E70, NW Quad, 12-24", Mid-ship	c. 1770-1785	Clear oval glass inset with a bust molded on the back
C	7SD91	2006.33.219	N10, E70, NE Quad, 0-12", South end of ship	c. 1770-1785	Pewter setting with clear glass inset molded with a bust motif
D	7SD91	2006.33.168	N50, E80, SE Quad, 12-14", Mid-ship	c. 1770-1785	Copper alloy Louis XVI coin-style button
E	18CV60	1	Unprovenienced	c. 1650-1770	Copper alloy stud with bust motif
F	18AN48	718	S185, W118, Plowzone	c. 1753-1763*	Copper alloy octagonal links with tall ships and the motto "SUCCESS TO THE BRITISH FLEET"
G	18APX12	19	Shovel Test, Non-site isolated find	1770s or later*	Clear oval glass inset with the motto "LIBERTY"
H	7SD47	86.13.762	HMS DeBraak, General site	1798	Copper alloy oval buttons depicting a jumping fox and the motto "TALLIO"
I	7SD47	86.13.438	HMS DeBraak, Section 3, Hull	1798	Copper alloy oval buttons with fouled anchor motif
J	7SD47	86.13.302	HMS DeBraak, Section 2, Hull	1798	Copper alloy oval buttons with tall ship motif
K	7SD91	2006.33.219	N10, E70, NE Quad, 0-12", South end of ship	c. 1770-1785	White metal button setting with glass inset molded with crucifixion motif
L	18AP52	96	Unit 2, F. 1103, L. 6, Cellar	c. 1720-1820	Octagonal silver buttons with the initials "I.G." (John Golder)
M	7SD91	2006.33.220	N10, E70, SE Quad, 0-12", South end of ship	c. 1770-1785	Pewter setting for black glass inset molded on top
N	7SD91	2006.33.166	N50, E80, NW Quad, 12-14", Mid-ship area	c. 1770-1785	Pewter setting for plain black glass inset
O	7SD91	2006.33.163	N50, E80, NE Quad, 0-12", Mid-ship	c. 1770-1785	Copper alloy button front with pewter-filled back, heart-shaped
P	7SD91	2006.33.163	N50, E80, NE Quad, 0-12", Mid-ship	c. 1770-1785	Copper alloy button front with pewter-filled back and crowned double-heart motif
Q	18AN39	165	Unprovenienced, Cellar fill	c. 1700-1790	Copper alloy with crowned double-heart motif
R	18QU28	85	Unit 1B-10b, ER#50D, SW corner, main dwelling foundation	c. 1675-1765	Copper alloy with heart motif

† 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.

* The dates for these buttons come not from the context, but from the political attributes of the buttons. Figure 1:F dates to the French and Indian War, and Figure 1:G is from the American Revolution or the period thereafter.

Other variations include abnormally large or heavy linked buttons that might have been used on breeches. For example, a pair of brass-backed iron buttons from a 1660s feature at the Swan Cove site in Anne Arundel County was probably designed for breeches, as was a button found on the RIS with both a diameter and link length over an inch. Linked breeches buttons can occasionally be seen on paintings that show the male waistline (Smith 1685; Van de Velde 1667). Paintings also show evidence of linked buttons at the neck, a spot seldom seen in portraiture because of the popularity of stocks in the eighteenth century (Figure 2; Bol 1669; Brandes 1789). Unlike linked breeches buttons, the linked buttons at the neck appear to be the same size as sleeve buttons. Linked buttons could also be used in lieu of laces on waistcoats, since any waistcoat with buttonholes on both sides of the front closure were not committed to sew-on buttons and could be accessorized with links, laces, ribbons, or studs as long as the fit permitted them (Baumgarten 2002).

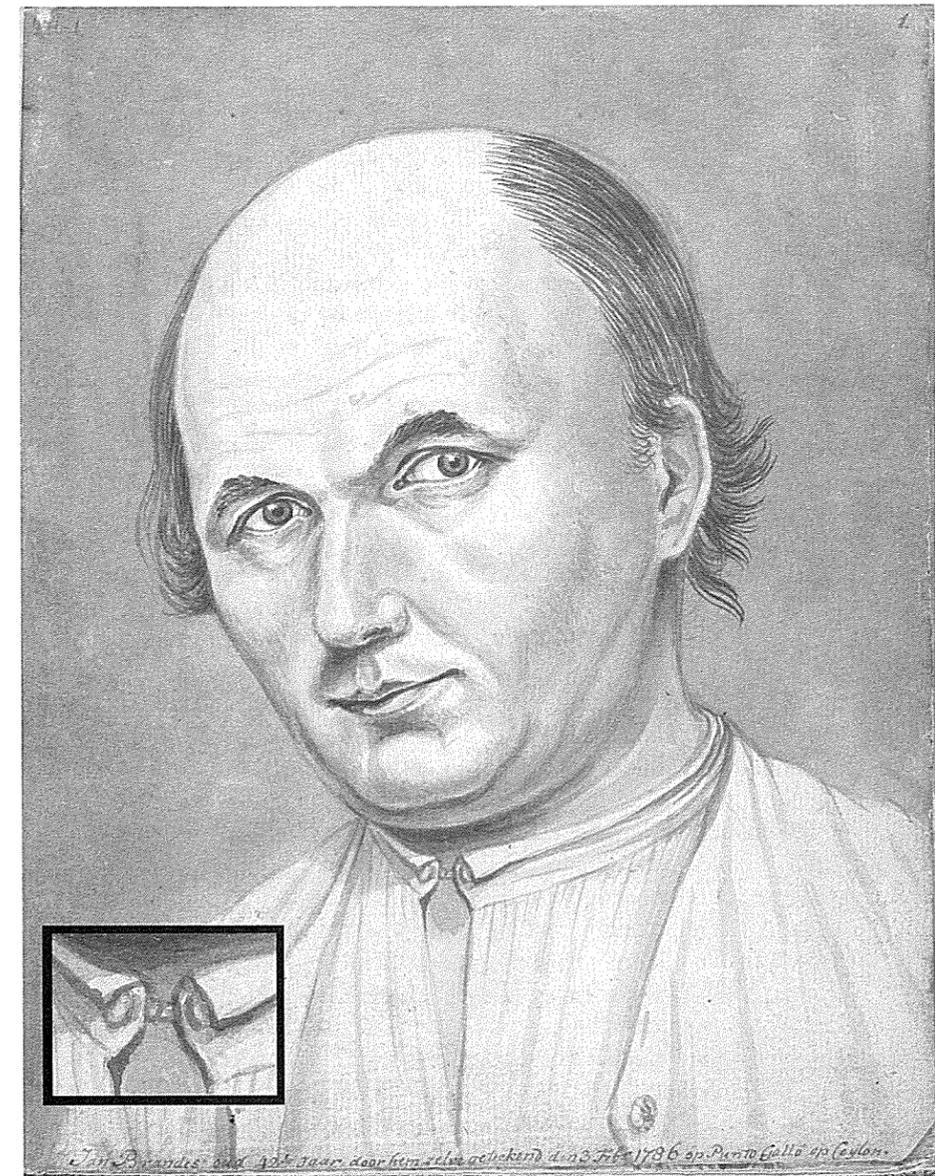


Figure 2. Self portrait of Jan Brandes, 1786, with a detail of the linked buttons he wears at the neck of his shirt. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

A perusal of the 1733-1748 account books of silversmith Joseph Richardson of Philadelphia offers hints as to how these different items were used. Studs and links of buttons ordered one-at-a-time might have been intended for use at the neck, while an order for 24 “links of buttons” could have been a wholesale purchase, or used by an individual as a substitute for laces. Although these purchases are interesting, orders for “pairs” of buttons and studs are more numerous in the account book, and these orders most likely represent use on sleeves (Richardson 1733-1748).

Who wore linked buttons?

Further evidence of the versatility of these accessories is their documented use by men and women, adults and children, and individuals of all social classes. Although some archaeological literature states that sleeve buttons were primarily an item of male dress, this assertion is not supported by historical evidence (see Baumgarten 2002; Haidt 2011; Rumford 1981). Like men, women wore shirts with sleeves, and like men, they required a closure. Drawstrings and pins might be used, but linked buttons were another option. Women’s sleeves portrayed in art frequently have lacy cuffs obscuring the area where a sleeve button would be, but there are exceptions. The ca. 1739 portrait of Deborah Glen shows off her stylish links (Figure 3), and a mid-eighteenth-century Moravian woman, whose dress does not include fancy lace cuffs, also illustrates their use by women (Haidt 2011; Rumford 1981:Figure 180).

Archaeological evidence also connects women to linked buttons. For example, a pair of linked buttons was found under the left humerus of a female buried at the African Burial Ground in New York City (Bianchi and Bianco 2006; Bianco *et al.* 2006; Loren 2010). Because past interpretations of sleeve buttons state that they were only for men’s wrists, Loren (2010:53) suggests that these buttons, along with linked buttons found at the neck in a male burial at the site, were interpreted as reuse for adornment purposes rather than typical clothing fasteners. Adaptive reuse by enslaved individuals cannot be ruled out, but it was not necessarily abnormal to use linked buttons at the neck or on women’s attire. Furthermore, women’s garments often had shorter sleeves, so the presence of a button near the upper arm does not exclude its interpretation as a sleeve fastener.

The presence of linked buttons at the African Burial Ground is an indicator that these accessories were not just for the upper classes. Run-away ads that mention sleeve buttons indicate that laborers, indentured servants, and slaves also wore them. For example, a 1747 run-away ad describes an enslaved Mulatto carpenter who wore gold sleeve buttons that he had received from his master in Bermuda (Readex 2011:q). Linked buttons from Maryland archaeological sites include slave quarters, tenant occupations, and areas of heavy labor such as the Antietam iron works and Birley’s tannery, which were primarily staffed by both enslaved and free unskilled workers (Figure 4:A-F; Table 2; Frye 1984; Thomas 1991).

Additionally, the Benjamin Banneker homestead, a farm owned and operated by a free black family, yielded a small silver octagonal button front and two glass insets (Figure 4:G-I). Although Benjamin Banneker received an education and eventually did well for himself, the sleeve button fragments were associated with a part of the site where he lived as a child before his financial successes (see Hurry 2002). At 0.4 inches, the small size of the octagonal button from the Banneker site may indicate that it belonged to a child, such as a young Benjamin Banneker or one of his siblings.

Children, too, wore sleeve buttons, and it is likely that the size of the buttons varied with the size of the person wearing them. A late eighteenth century infant’s shirt in the Colonial Williamsburg costume collection has its own gold sleeve buttons measuring only 0.3 inches (Baumgarten 2002:159). The use of these buttons on children is perhaps further evidence that linked buttons were not always carefully curated. Eighteenth-century newspapers offer evidence that children were vulnerable to theft and generally unpredictable. One ad indicates that gold sleeve buttons and silver knee buckles were stolen off of a child in Boston in 1741 (Readex 2011:d), and a 1742 newspaper announced a “A new Cure for Worms in Children” with a story about a 3-year-old boy who swallowed a pair of Sleeve Buttons. It reads, “when he voided them, there was a large Worm 10 Inches long had his Head so far in the Chain, as to be forced to come away with them” (Readex 2011:g).



Figure 3. Portrait of Deborah Glen, ca. 1739, with detail of her sleeve buttons and cuff. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

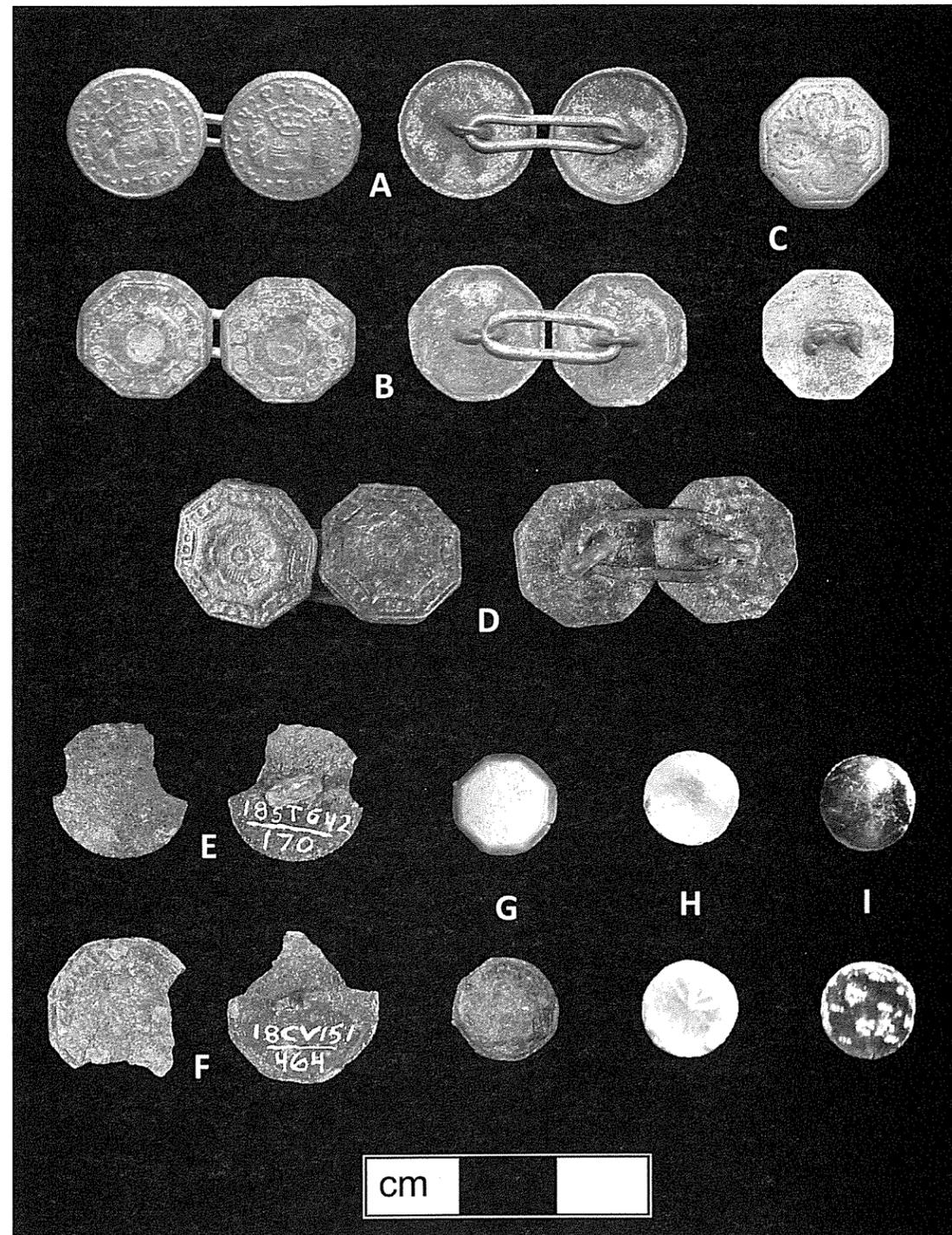


Figure 4. Sleeve buttons from a tannery (A-C), an iron furnace (D), two slave quarter sites (E-F), and the home of a free-black family of modest means (G-I). See Table 2 for dating and provenience information. Photo by Caitlin Shaffer and Sara Rivers Cofield.

TABLE 2: SITE AND PROVENIENCE INFORMATION FOR SLEEVE BUTTONS SHOWN IN FIGURE 4

Letter	Site	Lot	Context	Site/Context Date†	Artifact Description
A	18FR575	60	S 150, E 155, L. 2, Sampling below 19th-century deposits	c. 1750-1780	Copper alloy Mexican Pillar dollar coin-style, dated "1769"
B	18FR575	73	S 150, E 175, L. 3, Sampling below 19th-century deposits	c. 1750-1780	Copper alloy octagons with dots surrounding a circle motif
C	18FR575	60	S 150, E 155, L. 2, Sampling below 19th-century deposits	c. 1750-1780	Copper alloy octagon with quatrefoil clover-like motif
D	18WA288	143	492N 499E, Strat. 9, 18th-century fill	c. 1775-1790	Copper alloy octagons with dots around a Tudor rose motif
E	18ST642	170	F. 16, L. 8, Bottommost level of a subfloor pit	c. 1780-1800	Copper alloy with no discernible decoration
F	18CV151	464	N 480.9 E 404.42, F.20, Drainage ditch	c. 1760-1780	Copper alloy octagon with no discernible decoration
G	18BA282	850	N 255 W 445, Area IA, Plowzone	c. 1737-1780	Silver octagonal button front
H	18BA282	1145	N 250 W 440, L. 1, Plowzone over F.10 (Cellar)	c. 1737-1780	Clear glass inset, plain
I	18BA282	1145	N 250 W 440, L. 1, Plowzone over F.10 (Cellar)	c. 1737-1780	Green glass inset with molded basket-weave pattern on back

† 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.

CHRONOLOGY

In terms of chronology, preliminary analysis indicates that as new styles arose and became popular, the old styles often continued to be manufactured, resulting in an ever-increasing variety of linked buttons for people to choose from. The RIS assemblage illustrates that eighteenth-century newspaper ads citing the importation of "sleeve buttons of sundry sorts" were not exaggerating (Readex 2011:h). The RIS sleeve buttons are circular, oval, flower-shaped, heart-shaped, and octagonal. Some have ovals inset in circles, or circles inset in ovals. They have conical faceted insets that mimic cut jewels, molded glass insets in a variety of styles, or no insets whatsoever. The linked buttons are made of pewter or copper alloy, and some have evidence of tinning or gilding. Shanks are cast round, cast in a flattened u-shape, or applied as wire loops set in pewter-filled button backs. Links are made of thick wire (see Figure 5:A-D, G, H), thin wire (see Figure 5:E), s-shapes (see Figure 5:F, I, N), and quatrefoil patterns (see Figure 5:Q; Table 3). In terms of decoration, no one style or motif appears on more than four buttons, meaning that each style recovered might represent one unique pair of linked buttons.

In short, the shipment of linked buttons from the RIS indicates that no size, shank style, overall shape, inset type, or link shape seems to have become unavailable to the consumer by the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Two of the hypotheses proposed by Noël Hume (1961), therefore, appear to be contradicted by this assemblage. First, the availability of many sizes of sleeve buttons in one shipment implies that size is not a reliable chronological indicator. For both the RIS assemblage, which represents one moment in time, and the terrestrial assemblage, which represents over a century, size varied from about 10 mm to 16 mm. There did seem to be a slight increase in size over time in that larger buttons were somewhat more likely to have later dates than smaller buttons, but there were many significant

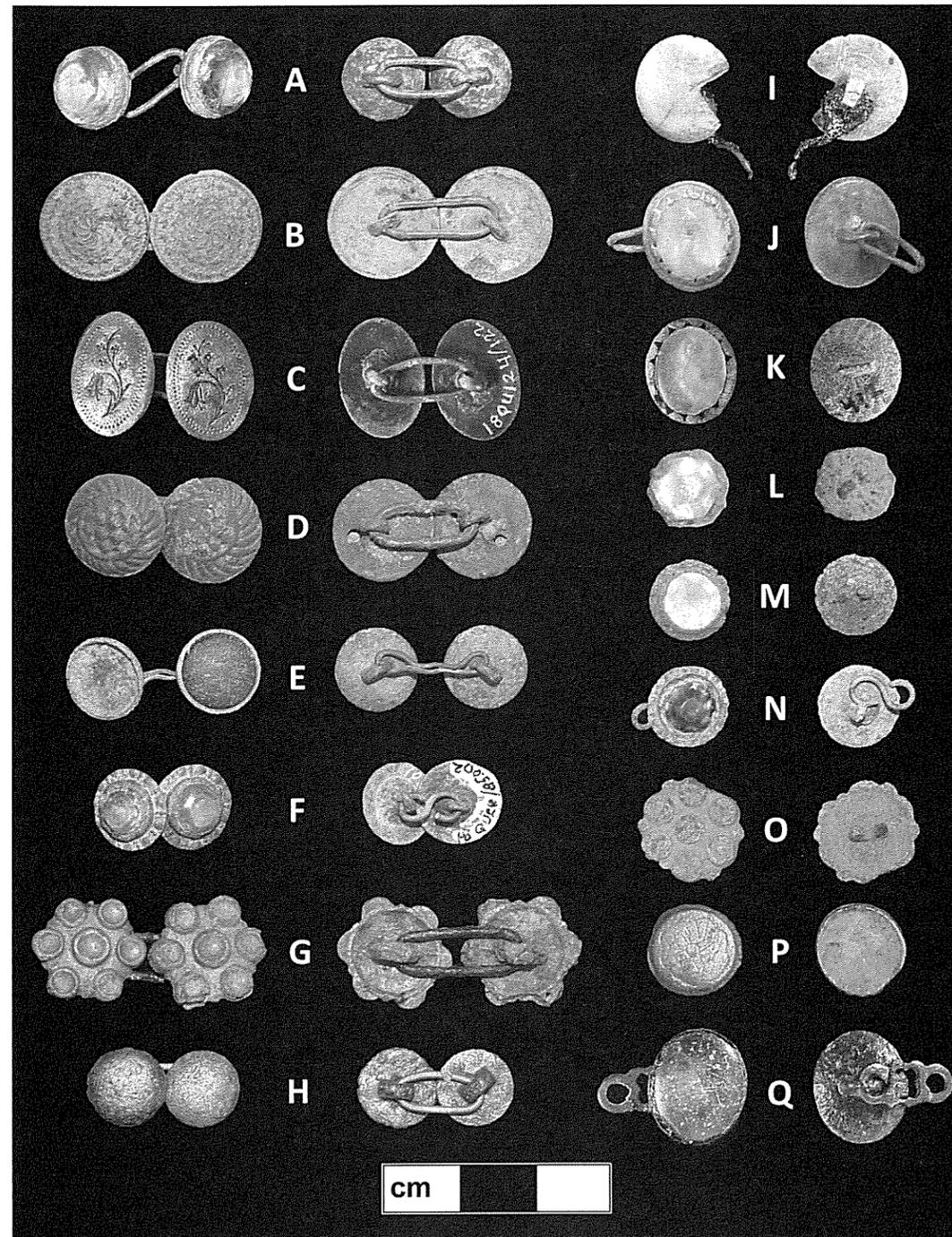


Figure 5. A selection of sleeve buttons in the assemblage showing the wide variety of shapes and styles. See Table 3 for dating and provenience information. Photo by Caitlin Shaffer and Sara Rivers Cofield.

outliers (Figure 6). For example, a pair of pewter sleeve buttons from the Patuxent Point site have the earliest dated context, but they are among the largest buttons in the assemblage (Figure 5:G). The overall shape must be considered as well, as evidenced by the few square and hexagonal buttons in the assemblage which were all relatively small, and the dotted hexagonal buttons (Figure 5:G) which were

both relatively large (Figure 6). Again, sample sizes are small, but they suggest that size alone should not be used by archaeologists to estimate the date.

TABLE 3: SITE AND PROVENIENCE INFORMATION FOR SLEEVE BUTTONS SHOWN IN FIGURE 5

Letter	Site	Lot	Context	Site/Context Date†	Artifact Description
A	18AN39	165	Unprovenienced, Cellar fill	c. 1700-1790	Copper alloy settings for faceted green glass insets
B	18AN39	165	Unprovenienced, Cellar fill	c. 1700-1790	Copper alloy with floral pinwheel motif
C	18QU124	122	Unit 36, L.2, Area 5, Pit	c. 1708-1977	Copper alloy ovals with asymmetric floral motif
D	18PR175	7911	Area VA, S 216 E 282, F. 6, L. O, Cellar North Trench, Destruction Fill	c. 1690-1730	Copper alloy domes with rays around a basket-weave motif
E	18WA20	164	Unit N 5 E 6, L. 4a (in unit), L. 6 (Harris matrix), Southwest bastion of the fort	c. 1756-1758	Copper alloy with flat green glass insets, one inset missing
F	18QU28	85	Unit 1B-10b, ER#50D, Southwest corner of the main dwelling foundation	c. 1675-1765	Copper alloy with faceted green glass insets and scalloped edge
G	18CV271	82	Unit 1610, Strat. K, Oyster Shell Layer in Borrow Pit	c. 1660-1690	Pewter sexfoil pattern with raised dots, iron link
H	18CV83	337	Unit 198, L. D, Plowzone	c. 1689-1711	Copper alloy solid plain domes
I	18CV354	321	Square 2, F.2, L.12b, Transition from shell midden to domestic fill	c. 1730-1770	Ivory plain dome with iron link
J	18CV354	552	Bulk J, L.5, Oyster midden	c. 1730-1770	Copper alloy oval setting with faceted blue glass inset
K	18FR134	412	Shovel Test 127, 0-11", House yard	c. 1756-1974	Copper alloy oval setting, decorated on back, with clear glass inset molded with a stemmed rose
L	18AN871	349	F. 44, Strat C, Fill, brick-lined storage pit in the wash house	c. 1740-1770	Copper alloy hexagon setting decorated on back with clear faceted glass inset
M	18CV91	173	Unit 5441A, Plowzone over possible slave quarter	c. 1711-1754	Copper alloy with faceted clear glass inset and scalloped edge
N	18PR175	2305	F. 1002, L. 51, Well	c. 1720-1750	Copper alloy with faceted blue glass inset and scalloped edge
O	18CV91	145	Unit 5343A, Plowzone over possible slave quarter	c. 1711-1754	Copper alloy sexfoil pattern with raised dots
P	18AN871	302	F. 35, Strat P, Cellar in 18 th century main house	c. 1740-1770	Silver button front with engraved floral pattern
Q	7SD91	2006.33 [†] .162	N50, E80, NW Quad, 0-12", Mid-ship	c. 1770-1785	Pewter button with clear oval inset and quatrefoil link

† 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.

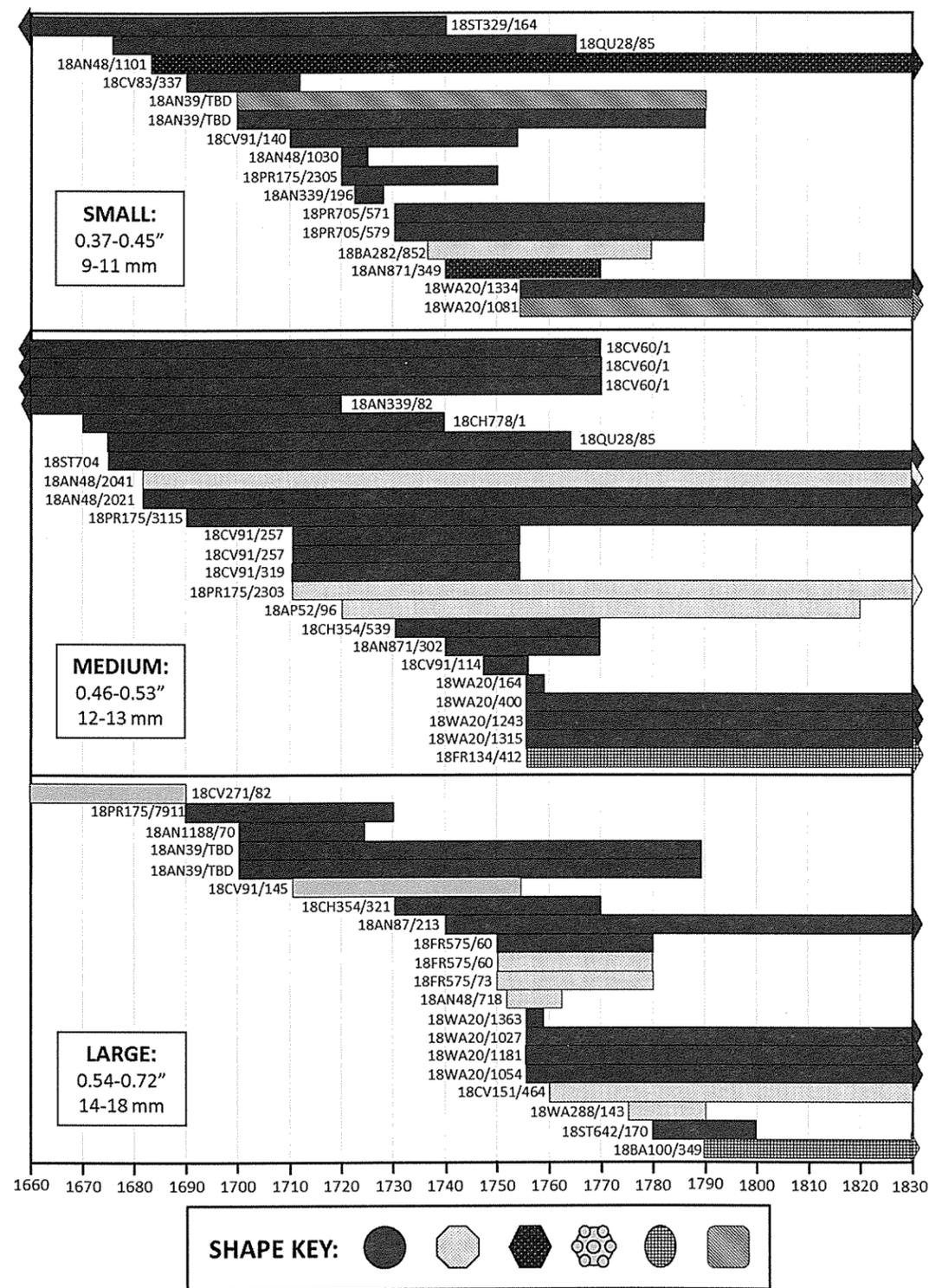


Figure 6. This seriation chart plots the sleeve buttons from terrestrial assemblages by size, shape, and date range. Date ranges represent specific contexts where possible, or overall site date ranges if the context is plowed or otherwise disturbed. Examples with ranges that post-date 1830 usually come from disturbed contexts. Note that small, medium, and large buttons are found throughout the period shown.

Second, Noël Hume's assemblage indicated that octagonal shapes were generally encountered prior to 1760. The octagonal buttons in the assemblage studied here (n =10) come from sites with a mean beginning date of 1748 and a mean end date of 1782, suggesting a peak in popularity in the 1760s rather than a decline (Figure 6). The sample size is still too small to support any conclusions about end dates for octagonal buttons, but they do seem to have declined in popularity by the time the RIS shipwreck sank ca. 1770-1785, since only three examples were included in that assemblage. Most of the buttons in the RIS assemblage were circular (63%) or oval (25%), though with only one shipment represented it is not possible to rule out a sample bias based on manufacturer or merchant preference.

This study suggests that the best indicator for dating sleeve buttons is the introduction of new forms. For example, molded insets do not seem to appear until the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and oval-shaped buttons do not seem to appear until after 1750. With regard to the introduction of new forms, this assemblage is consistent with Noël Hume (1961). As the data set continues to grow, it should be possible to establish rough *terminus post quem* (TPQ) designations for sleeve buttons using the introduction of new forms, but it seems unlikely that most styles will have well-established end dates. There may have been a decline in the popularity of linked buttons after 1800, but they never left the marketplace entirely. For example, jumping fox buttons were still available for sale at least through the late Victorian period (Hinks 1991). Additionally, the introduction of new link mechanisms in the 19th century, such as stationary bars and folding backs, did not completely replace traditional wire loops as seen in the colonial period (Hinks 1991: 66-68, 114, 182-183, 248-250).

PERSONALIZATION

Although the time-telling potential of linked buttons is compromised by the small sample size of recovered artifacts and the variety of designs available to seventeenth and eighteenth-century consumers, the possibilities for considering personal taste are as varied as the styles recovered. Buttons that are sewn onto coats, waistcoats, and breeches represent a commitment to non-detachable accessories, but the relatively cheap and removable linked buttons offered less permanent options for self-expression. Linked buttons with geometric patterns, floral designs, or cut glass insets of various colors boast pretty, if somewhat generic, looks that could go with any outfit. Most of the assemblage is comprised of such pieces (Figure 5). However, there are many buttons that offer more specific glimpses into the lives of those who wore them (Figure 1).

Some buttons are black and therefore suitable for mourning, while heart motifs might indicate romantic involvement or the commemoration of weddings. Others are personalized with initials, offering not only a custom look, but also a means of identification if lost or stolen. Religion appears as a theme in an example from the RIS that depicts the crucifixion, and one's occupation might even be indicated by sleeve buttons, as is the case for the ship and fouled anchor motifs on linked buttons from the *H.M.S. Debraak*.

Popular hobbies, such as fox hunting, are also themes on linked buttons. "Tallio" buttons with a jumping fox were found on the *Debraak*, and have also been located on several other sites in the U.S. It has been suggested that these buttons were politically charged during the American Revolution, because British soldiers reputedly sounded a fox horn prior to a battle, equating the search for American troops with a fox hunt. The existence of this motif before the Revolution, however, and its continued popularity after the war, indicates that its fox-hunting theme was probably its primary appeal (Galke 2012).

Other styles do have unmistakable political associations, however. For example, busts of famous persons, such as monarchs, were popular. A notable example is a linked button from the RIS that depicts Louis XVI. If the RIS was a trading vessel that came from Europe during the Revolutionary era, it is certainly appropriate that exporters offered buttons honoring the French King who helped finance the American soldiers. Other politically motivated buttons in the assemblage include a mid-eighteenth-century set from London Town showing a ship and the motto "Success to the British Fleet," and a late eighteenth-century oval inset found in Annapolis that simply says, "Liberty."

This level of personalization is not often found on other kinds of clothing-related artifacts, but the widespread use of linked buttons as closures, particularly in the eighteenth century, allowed them to double as convenient and subtle forms of self-expression. The challenge for archaeology then is to look at who might have been expressing themselves through this aspect of material culture, and what insight linked buttons can provide about identity and one's role in society.

CONCLUSION

The historical and archaeological evidence for widespread use of linked buttons by individuals of different classes, races, genders, and ages is strong. Linked buttons were a relatively cheap and versatile accessory for enhancing one's wardrobe without making too much of a commitment. Consumers had a diverse array of materials, shapes, and decorations to choose from. As a result, one's wealth, political sympathies, occupation, hobbies, and personal tastes might be expressed through the medium of the linked button. The phrase "wearing your heart on your sleeve" can be applied to this particular category of small finds both literally and figuratively, making sleeve buttons an excellent source of material for understanding how personal accessories contributed to the construction of identity.

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