

WHY KEEP A CROOKED SIXPENCE? RELIGION AND MAGIC AT A JESUIT PLANTATION IN ST. INIGOES, MARYLAND

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Abstract

When ordinary objects acquire new meanings as lucky talismans and protective charms, they become magical objects that are incorporated into a repertoire of actions taken to try to control the universe. This article explores the possibility that a silver sixpence recovered at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex in St. Inigoes, Maryland, may represent an everyday item that had supernatural significance to the individual(s) who once owned it. Between 1637 and 1942, the land that now comprises Webster Field had been home to a Jesuit settlement. If the sixpence recovered at Webster Field was indeed used for supernatural purposes, then the inhabitants of the St. Inigoes settlement looked beyond Church-sanctioned religious objects in pursuit of luck, safety, or immediate relief in times of crisis.

Introduction

Archeology is a discipline that is often able to provide concrete information and a tangible connection to events that took place at a particular site: what kind of house was constructed, what dishes people used, where the discard pile was, etc. In order to really understand a culture, however, the discipline has to look beyond events and consider what people thought about the sites they created. Using artifacts and features to determine how individuals perceived the world around them is much more challenging, and it is particularly difficult to interpret the meaning of material culture when everyday objects acquired significance as magical charms used to bring luck or ward off evil spirits. Archeologists are generally comfortable saying that a horseshoe was used to shoe one's horse, but an exceptional context would be needed for an analyst to argue that a horseshoe was used primarily as a lucky talisman. Even though there is plenty of documentation of "lucky horseshoes," the magical nature of the object is treated as conjectural—if mentioned at all—while the horse-related function is fact.

Many ordinary items had magical applications, though, and these charms and talismans offered emotional security to those who believed in their power. Considering such uses for every ordinary object in every archeological

interpretation may not be practical, since folk beliefs vary so much geographically and temporally that speculation can go on indefinitely, but engaging in such speculation can offer insights into important belief systems of the cultures archeologists study, and are therefore well worth the effort.

Magic, in an anthropological sense, might include any actions that people take to try to influence the supernatural (Spradley and McCurdy 2009:300). The definition of what is considered "natural" and what is "supernatural," however, changes as new discoveries replace old understandings. Physical and mental illnesses such as epilepsy and schizophrenia might once have been interpreted as spirit possession or punishments from God, and other diseases might have been attributed to malicious witchcraft as opposed to bacteria, viruses, or cancer as they are now defined by medical science. The magic performed also evolves to conform to current understandings of how the world works, often disappearing from practice altogether, or suffering demotion to a lesser status as mere "superstition." Research into magic offers insight about the ever-changing nature of spiritual practices, and it is incredibly fun to examine the human imagination's capacity for inventing methods of controlling the universe.

This article represents the result of research into the potential supernatural significance of a single silver coin to occupants of a Jesuit plantation in Maryland. The coin, a 1596 English sixpence, was recovered in 1984 during a controlled surface collection at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex in St. Mary's County, Maryland (Figure 1; Pogue and Leeper 1984). The Webster Field property had been continuously owned by Jesuits from 1637 to 1942, so it was most likely one of the Jesuits' laborers, tenants, or students who was responsible for depositing the coin at the site. Coins are well-documented magical objects and have often been examined by archeologists for their significance as charms, particularly if they are pierced. Although the Webster Field sixpence is not pierced, it may still have served as a supernatural object at some point in the 300-year occupation of the site by Jesuits. This article examines the various magical applications of silver sixpences from the 17th to 19th centuries, and considers the implications of finding a coin with possible magical powers at a Jesuit plantation.



FIGURE 1. This silver sixpence depicts a crowned Queen Elizabeth I with a Tudor Rose behind her head on the obverse and a shield with a cross through it on the reverse with the date 1596. The legends are not entirely legible because of wear; they contain Latin phrases having to do with the authority of Queen Elizabeth I (obverse), and the saying “I have made God my helper” (reverse). Differential wear, bend marks, and a small crack indicate that it was once folded into thirds over the center and retained in that condition for some time. However, the coin seems to have been flattened again prior to deposition. (Courtesy Naval Air Station Patuxent River’s Webster Field Annex, Naval District Washington. Photo by Cait Shaffer.)

The Jesuits at St. Inigoes

In order to consider what a silver sixpence might have meant to the occupants of St. Inigoes, it is necessary to understand their belief systems and motivations for being at the site. From its inception by members of the Society of Jesus in 1637, the settlement at St. Inigoes was intended to raise crops, not converts, but for the Jesuits of early Colonial Maryland it was impossible to pursue one without the other. Jesuits were involved in the Maryland Colony before Lord Baltimore’s charter was even signed, as Father Andrew White, S. J., authored literature that was designed to lure settlers into the colonial venture (Krugler 2004). White and two other Jesuits were among the initial colonists to travel to Maryland aboard the *Ark* and the *Dove* in 1633/34 (Beitzell 1976).

Maryland was a proprietary colony, and its proprietors, the Calverts, were openly practicing Catholics, so at first glance the participation of Jesuits in the Maryland adventure seems a perfect fit. Cecil Calvert, 2nd Lord Baltimore, needed volunteers for a dangerous undertaking starting a new colony, while Jesuits wanted the opportunity to do God’s work by converting Indians (Schroth 2007:23). The partnership was not to last, however. Jesuits tended to assume that the loyalty of all Catholics should be directed to Rome, and they expected the Calverts to

favor Jesuit efforts, but this was politically untenable (Krugler 2004:166). As openly Catholic politicians in Anglican England, the Calverts had to show loyalty to the King above all other masters, especially the Pope, if they wished to keep their charter. The greatest benefit Baltimore could really offer Catholics was a colony free of the long-standing uniformitarian tradition that connected church and state. He dictated that both Catholics and Protestants could worship freely in the new colony, so as to attract settlers from both faiths, and it was actually Protestants who always comprised the majority of its immigrants (Krugler 2004).

Catholic/Protestant tension was not eliminated by Baltimore’s policies, however. Rebellion erupted in 1644, and Jesuit and Proprietary holdings were ransacked as Protestants took control of Maryland for about four years (Krugler 2004; Schroth 2007:26). Even after the Calverts regained power, Catholics had lost a great deal and remained in a tenuous position. Jesuits returned with a greater focus on the spiritual needs of the colonists and less attention to Indian missions (Schroth 2007:26).

This is the backdrop in which St. Inigoes Manor was founded. Acquired by Jesuits in 1637, it was located just south of the colonial capital, St. Mary’s City (Figure 2). Throughout the 17th century, St. Mary’s City was the location of the primary Jesuit mission, including their main chapel and school (Beitzell 1976; Galke and Loney 2000). St. Inigoes, on the other hand, was a plantation founded to help feed and finance the larger mission and, like other plantations, its initial cash crop was tobacco (Galke and Loney 2000). The survival of Jesuit pursuits in Maryland depended on plantations such as these, not only for the income they provided, but also as a demonstration of Jesuits’ willing participation in the plantation system that profited England. In a sense, the plantation was a symbol of loyalty to the crown—a symbol necessarily displayed by Jesuits in a predominantly anti-papist culture.

In order to stay viable, the plantation had to conform to Maryland’s overall economic climate, but Catholicism was ever-present in plantation management decisions, and it seems that the Jesuits made an effort to ensure that the population of the plantation was comprised of practicing Catholics. In the 17th century, Jesuits specifically recruited Catholics as indentured servants, and they purchased contracts for indentured Catholics in Virginia, where they felt that these servants were living, “among persons of the worst example,” and were, “utterly deprived of any spiritual means” (Curran 1988:61). When the shift from indentured to enslaved labor took place around the beginning of the 18th century, Jesuits showed concern for the spiritual needs of these laborers as well—provided they were baptized Catholics, that is. For example, they seem to have been less likely than other planters to break up families of the enslaved, they kept elderly and disabled

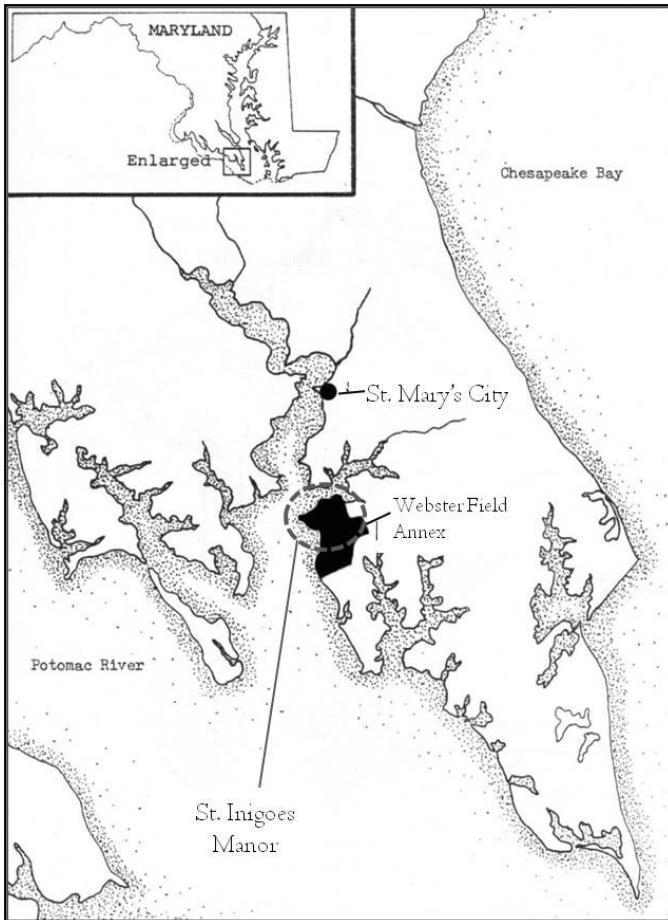


FIGURE 2. The primary 17th-century Jesuit mission and chapel were located at St. Mary's City, while St. Inigoes Manor to the south was founded in 1637 as a plantation intended to help finance the mission. The Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex is now located at the former plantation. (Map adapted from Pogue and Leeper 1984.)

slaves who were no longer able to work, and, as Murphy (2001:34) notes, "their spiritual concern to treat the slaves as equal in dignity to all other baptized Catholics restrained the Jesuits, in conscience, from material exploitation of them." This was not the most profitable way to run a plantation, however, so the Maryland holdings were never terribly lucrative, despite a relatively early move to adopt more diverse grain crops (Galke and Loney 2000:31).

While St. Inigoes was created more for economic reasons than for religious ones, it became an essential asset after another Protestant rebellion overthrew the Calvert proprietary in 1689. Over the next 15 years, anti-Catholic legislation closed the St. Mary's City chapel and pushed Catholic worship into hiding. Jesuit operations shifted to private plantations such as St. Inigoes, which served as bases for Catholic operations (Galke and Loney 2000).

Archeology and Religious Artifacts at St. Inigoes

Several archeological surveys and excavations have been conducted at St. Inigoes as a part of ongoing cultural resource management activities undertaken by the Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex, which was established when the Navy acquired the property from the Society of Jesus in 1942. No full data recoveries have taken place, but Phase I and II excavations conducted in the 1980s and 1990s have revealed the changing layout of the plantation over time. Archival documents did not identify the location of the initial 1637 plantation center, or the early 18th-century manor, but archeology located both along with an adjacent (unexcavated) cemetery (Pogue and Leeper 1984; Sperling and Galke 2001). Around 1750, the plantation center moved from one portion of the property to another, possibly because of depleted soils. An 1820 drawing of the plantation includes the newer manor house, as well as an orchard, stable, weaver's house, windmill, blacksmith, chapel, and other support buildings (Figure 3). This complex remained the center of activity throughout the 19th century (Dinnel 1984; Smolek 1983). The post-1750 plantation center was already known thanks to extant buildings and the 1820s map, so archeology in this area was limited to ground-truthing, shoreline erosion projects, and impact assessments (Dinnel 1984; Hornum 2002; Smolek 1983).

Physically, St. Inigoes is typical of a 17th- to 19th-

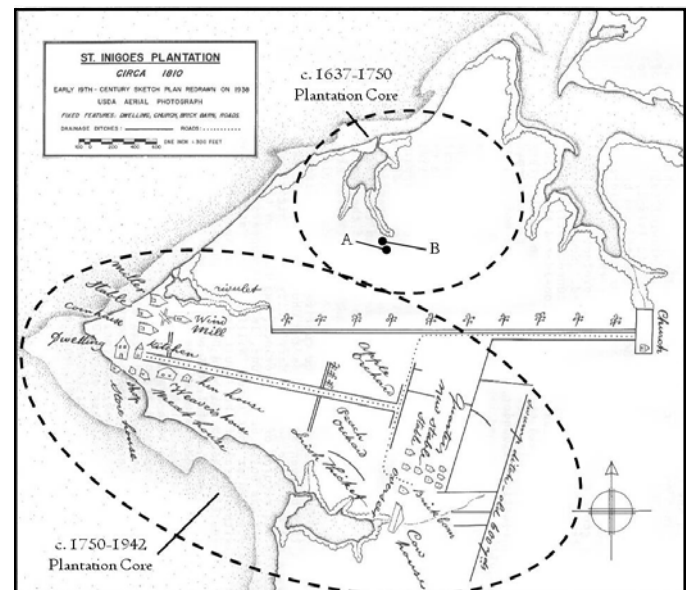


FIGURE 3. A sketch generated in the early 19th century is shown here overlain on a map of the point, with the pre-1750 and post-1750 site cores outlined. The approximate location of the sixpence (A) and a brick floor and cellar feature that may have served as a dairy (B) are also shown. (Map adapted from Beitzel 1976.)

century Maryland plantation that sought to sustain itself and raise profits through farming. While a chapel is present, that is not unusual for a large Catholic plantation, so there is nothing particularly “Jesuit” about the plantation layout. However, archeology has contributed to our understanding of the faith practiced at St. Inigoes by unearthing religious artifacts. Among the objects recovered are a brass plaque for a crucifix, a cruciform silver reliquary pendant, and two medals depicting Jesuit saints (Figure 4). These St. Inigoes artifacts illustrate a belief in sacred objects and the miracles they could perform.

The silver cross pendant, for example, is designed to hold a sacred relic such as a piece of the true cross or a bone associated with a saint. This artifact was probably



FIGURE 4. Religious artifacts from Webster Field Annex archeological projects. *Top left:* Plaque for a wooden crucifix reading “INRI” which is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase that means “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” *Bottom Left:* Silver reliquary pendant designed to hold a sacred relic. *Center:* Medal depicting St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (top), and St. Francis Xavier, one of Loyola’s followers and the patron Saint of foreign missions (bottom). *Right:* Medal depicting Saint Charles Borromeo, patron saint of catechumens, catechists, bishops, clergy, seminarians, spiritual directors, apple orchards, colic, and intestinal problems (top) and an image of the Holy Spirit over five figures with the inscription “ROMA,” which indicates that the medal was made in Rome, Italy (bottom). The latter image presumably represents the five Spanish saints canonized in 1622: St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis Xavier, St. Phillip Neri, and St. Isidore (Hurry 2009). (Courtesy Naval Air Station Patuxent River’s Webster Field Annex, Naval District Washington. Photos by Cait Shaffer.)

extremely important to its owner, as sacred objects were associated with miraculous powers. For example, the 1642 annual letter from Maryland Jesuits to Rome states that Father Andrew White, S.J., administered aid to an Indian who had been speared in an ambush by applying, “to the wound on each side the sacred relic of the Most Holy Cross, which he carried in a case around his neck” (Curran 1988:70). The treatment reportedly healed the man’s wounds by the next day, saving his life, and motivating him to convert (Curran 1988:70-71). Such artifacts therefore played an integral role in the religious rites practiced by Jesuits in early Maryland.

The saint medals also offer insight into the beliefs of the St. Inigoes inhabitants. One depicts two canonized founders of the Society of Jesus: Ignatius Loyola, patron saint of the Jesuits, and Francis Xavier, patron saint of foreign missions. Such a medal is exactly what might be expected at a Jesuit foreign mission. The other medal honors St. Charles Borromeo, who is considered the patron saint of the clergy and Catholic educators, as well as apple orchards, colic, and intestinal problems (Saint Charles Borromeo 2010). As spiritual leaders for the fledgling colony, Jesuits at St. Inigoes were heavily involved in Catholic education, and practitioners of the faith at various levels were present at different times. Additionally, an orchard was present by 1820, and no doubt intestinal problems occurred from time to time. Borromeo can therefore be seen as a highly worthwhile saint to venerate given the occupations at the plantation.

All of these artifacts represent material expressions of the faith of the inhabitants at St. Inigoes. Sacred medals and relics could offer protection and perform miracles. The venerated saints provide clues as to the prayers of those who lived there—prayers that sought protection for Jesuits, the overseas mission, those who were spiritual directors and teachers of the faith, or those who suffered poor intestinal health. The artifacts had meaning and power, and offered a sense of safety and comfort to those who wore them.

The 1596 Elizabeth I Sixpence from Webster Field

Artifacts with such obvious connections to specific Catholic practices are not the only ones that might have afforded the people of St. Inigoes such a sense of protection, however. A 1596 Elizabeth I silver sixpence from the site might also have been imbued with magical properties by the individuals who lived there, though in this case the beliefs surrounding the object were not necessarily sanctioned by the Church. The sixpence depicts a crowned Queen Elizabeth I with a Tudor Rose behind her head on the obverse and a shield with a long cross through it on the reverse. The date 1596 appears above the shield (see Figure 1). This coin was recovered during a surface sur-

vey of Webster Field in 1984 (Pogue and Leeper 1984). It was located in an area of the property that had been the c. 1637-1750s core of the plantation, but because it was a surface find, the possibility that it was lost during a later period of occupation cannot be eliminated (see Figure 3).

Archeological literature has often discussed the magical properties of pierced coins from various contexts, but even coins that are not pierced may have been employed by individuals to try to influence the supernatural. The Webster Field sixpence is not pierced, but it does have damage suggesting that it was once bent into thirds. It is unlikely that the fold lines resulted from post-depositional trauma because the lines along the folds are worn more than the rest of the coin, and none of the wear appears to be the result of trowel or plow damage. Additionally, the reverse of the coin is significantly less worn than the obverse, indicating that it was differentially protected by the coin's folded state. It was not recovered in a bent state, however, so someone must have flattened it again before it entered the archeological record (Dennis Pogue, personal communication 2010). Still, the wear pattern indicates that the coin was retained in its bent condition for some time. This begs the question, why keep a crooked sixpence?

Silver coins, and sixpences in particular, have been associated with magical protections and practices in many different contexts throughout the centuries, so the potential meanings of the sixpence from Webster Field are rich fodder for exploration. Such coins could supposedly cure illness, ward off witches, strengthen prayers, divine the future, or simply bring good luck. They have been associated with rituals such as marriage and birth, and depending upon the significance bestowed on them, they might be curated and passed down by individuals who valued their magical properties (Davidson 2004:30). Davidson (2004:27-31) outlines multiple elements that might imbue coins with supernatural properties—elements which represent the creolization of pagan and early Christian beliefs. Among the components represented in the Webster Field example are:

- 1) The silver metal itself, which could act as a protective charm, or in some cases be used as an offensive weapon against evil forces.
- 2) The cross on the shield, which is an important element of the charm.
- 3) The depiction of a monarch, which in some cases is imbued with healing powers.
- 4) The alteration of the coin by bending or perforation. In this case, the coin has evidence of having been bent.

Each element might have a particular strength in a given situation. For example, the silver metal might be more important for warding off a witch than the presence

of a cross, and the depiction of a monarch might have healing powers but not necessarily provide good luck. The combination of all four elements on the Webster Field sixpence allows for multiple uses, especially since the significance of sixpences changed a great deal over time and the discovery of the coin as a surface find fails to narrow its temporal context. The following discussion therefore includes documented uses of sixpences from throughout the 300-year span of Jesuit occupation at Webster Field.

The Many Uses for Silver Sixpences

Currency. First, the silver sixpence obviously began its life as a form of currency. While pounds of tobacco were used as the primary means of exchange in 17th-century Maryland, many coins have been recovered archeologically, as have weights that were used to verify the value of different kinds of coins. In fact, one such weight was recovered at Webster Field, indicating that there was a need to verify coin values there despite the predominance of tobacco as currency until the 18th century (Figure 5). The sixpence was recovered in an area of the site believed to be the late 17th-/early 18th-century center of plantation activity, but it is not unheard of for a coin to remain in circulation for 100 years, and if it was an incidental loss by one of the earlier settlers who colonized the area in the 1630s, it might have been only 40 years old when deposited. It is therefore possible that the Webster Field sixpence simply represents an incidental loss of cash.

Coin Bending and Prayers to Saints. The coin is well-worn, however, and the fold lines indicate that it was retained while bent for a lengthy period of time. By the time this coin was minted, bent coins had a centuries-long history of use in sacred ritual. The bending process is believed to represent the creolization of Christian worship and pagan practices that include the “killing” of an object to be devoted to a deity (McKittrick 2009; Merrifield 1987). As early as 1307, it was considered “the English custom” to bend a coin as part of a vow to a particular saint. According to Merrifield (1987:91), “The coin was bent, usually by doubling it over across the middle, in the name of the saint who was invoked, and this constituted a vow to take it on a pilgrimage to his shrine and to present it there.” The practice was employed in times of crisis, such as stormy weather while at sea. Bent coins purportedly turned back flames and cured the sick. Most often, they were bent over the affected area of an injured or sick person. However, the practice was only effective if the exact coin bent at the time of crisis was taken on the promised pilgrimage (Finucane 1995:8; Merrifield 1987:91). Since no other coin would do, the tradition called for people to retain the bent coin until they could fulfill their promise.

Love and Marriage. Merrifield (1987:92) suggests that the use of bent coins as part of a vow to saints

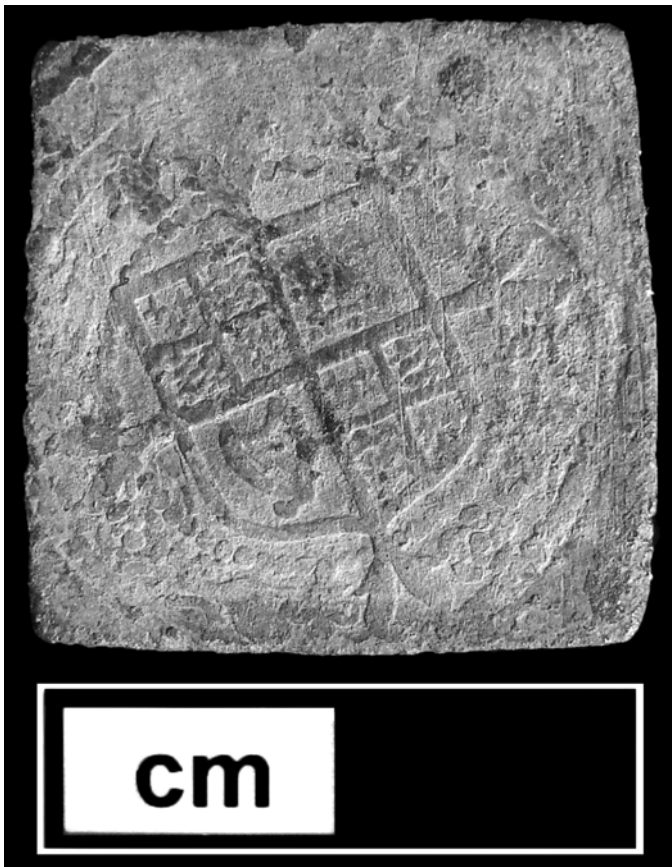


FIGURE 5. Coin weights were designed to allow people to verify the value of different types of coins by putting the coin on one side of a balance and a weight on the other. This coin weight from Webster Field represents the Rose Ryal, a 30-shilling gold piece minted in Great Britain from 1619-1625. (Courtesy Naval Air Station Patuxent River's Webster Field Annex, Naval District Washington. Photo by Cait Shaffer.)

declined after the Reformation, when the “cult of saints” was condemned as popery, but the coins took on new meaning as tokens of love. He (Merrifield 1987:115-116) argues, “Bending a coin had always been regarded as a symbol of devotion and of a vow; when the worship of saints was condemned as idolatrous, it was re-directed to a secular purpose, and bent coins came to be used as love tokens.” The practice of offering a bent coin as a vow of love emerged in the Elizabethan period and continued into the 18th century, which may explain how lucky coins came to be associated with weddings (Merrifield 1987:115-116). A very common marriage ritual in 17th- and early 18th-century England involved an exchange of significant tokens such as a ring, a bent coin, or a coin broken in two so that each party could keep half (Stone 1992:19). While the ring is the token most strongly associated with marriage today, coins remained an important part of the ritual

well into the 19th century, as indicated by the original ending of the rhyme that became popular in Victorian England:

*Something Old, Something New,
Something Borrowed, Something Blue,
and a Silver Sixpence in her Shoe.*

(Choron and Choron 2010:50)

This tradition not only incorporates a lucky coin that can double as a symbol of wished-for prosperity, but its placement in the shoe may also be reminiscent of fairy-lore's nod to good wives and housekeepers (see below). Variations of the tradition abound. One 19th-century account of folk traditions in County Leitrim, Ireland, recalled that among other rituals undertaken in the pursuit of marital blessings, “The groomsman used also to give the groom a crooked sixpence, and the latter, having killed a magpie, slit the bird's tongue with the coin, and, leaving it therein, buried the bird with a horse's shoe under the hearth iron. This was done for good luck” (Duncan 1894:187). This practice indicates that the coins might have been deliberately interred as part of a ritual, which might explain how the coin made it into the archeological record if it was not simply lost. Although sixpences are no longer minted, they are still marketed online for use in weddings (Silver Sixpence 2010).

Churn-Spells. Bent silver coins also offered protection from the effects of witchcraft (McKittrick 2009; Merrifield 1987). Among the most common manifestations was the use of coins in dairies, where, “The difficulty often encountered in butter-making was of course attributed to malevolent witchcraft, and in Yorkshire dairymaids kept a crooked sixpence handy as a ‘churn-spell’ for dropping in cream that obstinately refused to become butter” (Merrifield 1987:162). In 1880s Scotland, bent silver coins were still used for this purpose, and they were preserved with great care over long periods of time (Davidson 2003:30). As a variation on the theme, 19th-century residents of County Leitrim, Ireland, purportedly protected their butter from witches by placing a harrow pin and a crooked sixpence in the four corners of the house (Duncan 1893:180).

Witch-Bullets. For the witch that simply would not be repelled by the mere presence of a sixpence, silver coins were employed as ammunition. The most frequent appearance of this technique in folklore seems to be associated with pesky witches who disguised themselves as hares as they executed their malicious plans (Nicholson 1897). Such coins were effective when no stone or regular bullet was able to bring about the demise of a hare-witch. A Scottish folk museum featured the belief in a 1945 exhibit which included a crooked sixpence from Aberdeenshire that was intended for use as a silver bullet to kill a witch in the guise of a hare (Begg 1945:274-275). One story recorded at the Scottish Isle of Skye in 1922

reported that the method had unintended results, however:

A man made several unsuccessful attempts to shoot a hare but always failed. In his dilemma he consulted a wise man, who advised him to take a sixpence for the purpose. The man followed this advice and the next time he did not fail. But instead of a hare his own wife lay dead before him. (MacCulloch 1922:213)

Unfortunately, the story does not include an account of the man's reaction to finding out that the hare had been his wife, and presumably, his wife a witch. The Webster Field sixpence shows no sign of having been fired from a gun, but that does not mean it was not curated by an individual who believed in the importance of keeping such ammunition on hand just in case.

The King's Cure. Silver coins also carried healing properties that could be strengthened by the depiction of particular motifs. Davidson (2004:29) notes that a cross within a circle is a motif with mystical properties dating back to the pre-Christian Saxons, and the inclusion of a cross in a circle on a coin, such as that seen with the crossed shield on the Webster Field sixpence, gives it continuity with "cross charms" of the pagan tradition. The presence of a monarch also lends power to the coin, by connecting it to a tradition known as "the King's cure." Almost all English monarchs, from Edward the Confessor (d. 1066) to Queen Anne (d. 1714), offered healing by royal touch to sufferers of scrofula and other ailments (Thomas 1971:192-204). The healing touch was so popular that it was held as one of the measures by which legitimacy to the throne was determined. For example, the healing touch of Elizabeth I was "cited as proof that the Papal Bull of Excommunication had failed to take effect" (Thomas 1971:195). Early rituals surrounding this practice included the gift of a coin to the sufferer as alms, but by the time of Charles I's reign, a special touch-piece was minted for the occasion, and the sick frequently wore the blessed object around the neck. The gifted coin or touch-piece was widely considered a charm in which the curative nature of the royal touch was deposited (Thomas 1971:196). Those who believed in the healing power of the royal touch also took to, "wearing royal rings and portraits as personal talismans" (Thomas 1971:195). By extension, coins that depicted monarchs might act as substitute medicine when the actual touch of the king or queen was not readily available, such as in a colony far from the royal family.

Seventh Sons. At some point in the 16th and 17th centuries, any individual who just happened to be a seventh son also took on a reputation for healing powers, and these genealogical rarities incorporated sixpences into their curative rituals as well (Parman 1977:108; Thomas 1971:200). Variations of the practice persisted at least into the 20th century. For example, in 1902 folklore in Ross-

Shire, Scotland held that "a sixpence obtained from a seventh son is supposed to be a cure for scrofula, boils, and carbuncles. The seventh son blesses the sixpence, dips it three times in water, this water the patient must drink; this is repeated three days in succession, and the sixpence is suspended round the patient's neck" (MacDonald 1903:371). Even as late as the 1970s, similar traditions persisted in Scotland's Outer Hebrides islands, though by that time some cultures dropped the need for the seventh son altogether, and instead only required "silver water" in which certain coins had been immersed (Gregor 1888:264; Parman 1977:108-109).

Infant Gifts. By the 19th century it was also common for sixpences to be involved in certain gifting traditions surrounding the birth of a new baby (Carrick 1929; Gomme et al. 1910). Callers customarily brought a newborn infant a present of, "a new-laid hen's egg, a small packet of salt, and a sixpence when paying a visit to the newly-made mother" (Carrick 1929:279). According to Carrick (1929:279) the silver sixpence was then employed to divine the child's future personality: "The coin was placed in the infant's right hand; if it was grasped and held it was a sign of tightfistedness; if held loosely, of generosity; if it fell to the ground, of prodigality." This tradition lasted into the 20th century in some rural areas. In 1946, one Worcestershire village resident reported that after a birth in the family, a local farmer brought a sixpence to the door and offered it, saying, "A tanner for the babby [sic]," and in north Worcestershire it remained common practice until the 1940s to leave a bowl in a conspicuous place after a birth for visitors to deposit the silver coins (Brown and Jones 1957:502).

Divination. The 19th-century use of sixpences to divine the future was not limited to predicting the personality of a baby, however. The tradition of cooking a sixpence into a cake, a Christmas pudding, or even creamed potatoes, often with a thimble and a ring, could foretell the destiny of those who partook of the meal (Courtney 1886; Frazer 1888; Rose 1920). The person who found the sixpence would die rich, the one who found the ring would marry within the year, and the person who found thimble would never marry (Courtney 1886). Perhaps worse than the prediction of a lonely life, however, was to pull nothing from the cake at all, which in some areas was considered a sign of early death (Rose 1920). Similar traditions still exist today.

Discussion

So which meaning most likely explains the appearance of this 1596 silver sixpence at Webster Field? No amount of historical or archeological data is likely to offer a conclusive answer, but some practices seem more likely than others.

The veneration of saints was part of daily life at St. Inigoes, as evidenced by the medals recovered there, so the bending of a coin as part of a pilgrimage vow seems a good possibility. In a culture where divine intervention was seen as taking a hand in every matter from illness to crop success, the more weight one could put behind their appeals for prosperity, good health, and safety, the better. Although Merrifield (1987) argues that the association of bent coins with saints declined after the Reformation, the English Catholics who settled Maryland clearly chose to defy forced conversion to Anglicanism and they continued to venerate saints, so they are equally likely to have continued other practices that Protestants frowned upon. If the sixpence was used as part of a vow, then it may have been lost before the promised pilgrimage was complete, or St. Inigoes itself, as a center of Jesuit activity, may have represented a sacred site to a Maryland Catholic whose pilgrimage options were limited.

The churn-spell idea also has some contextual support thanks to the coin's proximity to a nearby structure that may have served as a dairy (Sperling and Galke 2001:88, 101). Though not found in the structure itself, a special coin kept specifically for warding off a witch's influence on butter might have been lost anywhere in the work area or living quarters of a dairy maid.

While the saint vow and churn spell ideas may have the most contextual support, the other possibilities cannot be ruled out. Weddings might well have taken place at St. Inigoes, as there were clergy there to perform the rites, and after the St. Mary's City chapel was closed in 1704, St. Inigoes often served as a *de facto* chapel and center of Catholic worship. No doubt birth, illness, suspicious rabbits, and the consumption of the occasional Christmas cake also constituted part of life at St. Inigoes, and might have given some residents cause to keep a sixpence handy.

It is also possible that the use of the sixpence is something other than the ones listed here. For instance, as these English traditions came in contact with individuals of other ethnic origins, such as enslaved African laborers, they adopted and adapted the coin symbolism into their own material expressions of magic (Davidson 2004). The cross-within-a-circle motif on the obverse of the Webster Field sixpence resembles an African Bakongo Yowa cosmogram as much as it does pagan cross-charms. Davidson argues that coins could be easily concealed from prying owners who sought to quash non-Christian beliefs among slaves, allowing for the private use of protective charms. Even if coins used by enslaved populations were not concealed, owners may have been more familiar and comfortable with coin charms than with other African-derived belief systems such as voodoo or Obeah (Davidson 2004).

All of these possibilities make it impossible to know who used the coin, or what the people who used it really

thought and felt about its magical properties. A perhaps more interesting question, however, is how the folk-practices that employed such coins fit with the Jesuit teachings that dominated there. While Catholic doctrine certainly supported the use of reliquaries, saint medals, and other blessed objects, would it draw the line at lucky coins?

Magic and the Church

Protestants certainly argued that superstitions were one of the many ways in which the Catholic Church had adopted silly notions that deviated from a true path to godliness. Puritans tried to stamp out "the superstition of being touched for the healing of the King's Evil" when they controlled England in 1647, and a Quaker whose sister had been touched by Charles II called the practice, "the remains of a popish ceremony" (Thomas 1971:197). Even the less-stringent Anglicans took issue with many folk traditions. For example, Anglicans tended to credit Catholics with the existence of fairy-lore which enjoyed widespread popularity in Medieval England, and was another mysterious belief that involved sixpences. Among other ideas, fairy-lore encouraged maids and housewives to please fairies by keeping a tidy home and leaving an offering of milk and bread before going to bed at a proper hour each night. Fairies would only come if the household was in bed, and they would only leave rewards—most commonly a sixpence in one's shoe—if the home and hearth were clean (Briggs 1959; Hand 1981). The Reformation was hostile to such fanciful beliefs, and made an effort to associate them with Catholicism (Thomas 1971:610). In the early 17th century, Anglican Bishop Richard Corbet wrote a poem called *The Fairies Farewell*, which triumphantly credited the Reformation with driving the fairies away (Percy 1765[1880]:369; Thomas 1971:610). The poem begins:

Farewell rewards and fairies!
 Good housewives now may say;
 For now foule sluts in dairies,
 Doe fare as well as they:
 And though they sweepe their hearths no less
 Than mayds were wont to doe,
 Yet who of late for cleanliness
 Finds sixe-pence in her shoe?

The association of Catholicism with fairy-lore and the use of bent coins or charms containing crosses is rather unfounded, however, since all of these beliefs had been around well before Christianity reached the British Isles. Fairies and coins were simply adapted into new traditions as Christianity spread, and the pagan aspects of the practices were by no means advocated by Catholic doctrine (Merrifield 1987; Thomas 1971:610). In fact, one 16th-century French Catholic clergyman passionately mocked the use of bent coins and other charms, even when it was

part of an appeal to a saint:

Idolatry reigns at present in so many people; some trust in wearing talismans, others in lighting candles, others in saying novenas in honor of Saint Chy or Saint La [nonsense names], and then they must eat two [of something], then one, and then put a bent coin into the water, which afterwards they must drink and then take it [the coin] to Saint-I-don't-know-who; and all these things and others are nothing but superstitions of the devil.

(Muchebled 1982:219)

Corbet's argument that the Reformation disposed of such folk practices is not entirely founded, either. Fairies may have been suppressed somewhat, but many magical practices such as astrology and wizardry actually enjoyed a boom after the Reformation. Religion offered a worldview that addressed the fundamental issues of human existence, but magic fulfilled needs that were much more specific and personal (Thomas 1971:636-639). While the church called for prayer, faith, and forbearance when one fell ill, magic provided a means to take immediate action. Thomas (1971:639) notes that, "the century after the Reformation thus constituted a transitional period, during which a variety of magical agencies continued to offer their services to those for whom the Protestant notion of self-help was too arduous." Thus magic, sorcery, and witchcraft continued to be an important part of 17th-century English belief systems.

Since most of the magical aspects of sixpences were not sanctioned by the Church, the coin from Webster Field shows that folk beliefs persisted even on settlements that purportedly adhered to strict Catholic doctrine. Jesuits may have been somewhat lax about allowing competing beliefs to coexist with their teachings, since their willingness to understand and sometimes incorporate preexisting belief systems contributed to their success as foreign missionaries, but most Protestants, including Anglicans, wanted to suppress any practice seen as superstition (Schroth 2007:18-20). However, archeological evidence suggests that Anglicans, too, may have valued the mystical properties of silver coins. For example, a pierced silver two pence from the English Commonwealth period (1649-1660) was recently recovered in a detached kitchen at the Smith St. Leonard site in St. Leonard, Maryland, which was occupied by an Anglican family and enslaved laborers from c. 1711-1750s (Glass 2010). Two other 17th-century sites in the Chesapeake, the Reverend Richard Buck site and the George Sandys site near Jamestown, Virginia, both yielded modified silver coins that have been interpreted as protective charms (Davidson 2003; McKittrick 2009). While Catholics did sometimes settle in Virginia, the populations of its early settlements were overwhelmingly Anglican, which suggests that coin-lore persisted among non-

Catholics in the early Chesapeake as well, and the perceived protection offered by silver coins was a tradition that may have crossed the Catholic-Protestant divide.

Despite the Church's efforts to stifle competing belief systems, the real decline of magic and witchcraft was not sparked by changes in organized religion, but instead resulted from intellectual shifts during the Enlightenment. By the end of the 17th century, Western cultures increasingly sought scientific answers to questions rather than turning to the supernatural (Thomas 1971). As this intellectual shift led people to believe that phenomena such as epilepsy had a basis in the natural world, rather than resulting from divine punishment or witchcraft, the cures also changed. Magical charms and talismans certainly continued in use into the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in small or isolated areas, but once the scientific revolution permeated English belief systems, the traditions were usually relegated to status as mere superstition (Thomas 1971:660-665).

Conclusion

So why keep a crooked sixpence? Throughout the 300-year Jesuit occupation of St. Inigoes there were many reasons that may have far outweighed the cash value of the coin or its silver content. The potential inclusion of this artifact in so many different rituals designed to influence the supernatural means that it might well have been curated over a long period of time, and passed on to multiple people to fulfill their most immediate needs. Since the coin was bent, and then later unbent, before it was recovered archeologically, it may well have served more than one purpose after supernatural pursuits replaced its initial value as currency. Perhaps it was used by a 17th-century dairy maid to make a vow to a saint, and as she held it awaiting her pilgrimage, she added it to the butter churn when she suspected the influence of witches. Perhaps it was given as a crooked love token, and then flattened for use as a first gift to an infant girl. Perhaps that infant lived to wear the same special coin in her matrimonial shoe. Whatever its story, this coin was probably not just cash, and it offers a clue as to the emotions of those who believed in its power.

The magical properties of the coin continue to be a target for speculation rather than fully-supported conclusions, but research into the use of this coin provides additional avenues for the archeological interpretation of the belief systems at St. Inigoes. While the Catholic teachings of the Jesuits who settled the plantation provided its inhabitants with a broad worldview and answers to the greater issues of human existence, they did not completely fulfill each person's spiritual needs, and some people took measures outside of approved church practices to try to help themselves. This offers a window into the feelings of

the St. Inigoes occupants, because any supernatural use of the coin shows a willingness to look beyond the Church for other means to avoid that sense of helplessness that plagues any human who wants to influence the future, cure an illness, or avert a crisis. The coin offered an opportunity to take action over forces that could not be controlled, and whether it worked or not, it may have at least offered a sense of comfort, and confidence that the person who used this charm tried everything they could.

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