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Tara M. Ruttle, Ph.D.
May, 2018

AFRICAN AMERICAN RESISTANCE, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND THE SPIRITUAL
ALTERATION OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Anthropology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

By

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ABSTRACT

Archaeologists have unearthed artifacts associated with West African-derived spiritual belief systems in many different African American locations in the New World. What can the artifacts tell us about the social control mechanisms used within enslaved plantation quarters communities to maintain internal cohesion and collective identity? In enslaved plantation quarters, where oppression and a harsh living environment were the foundation of a new collective cultural identity, the possibility of social control existed not just between the enslaved community and their oppressors, but also among their own community as a means of maintaining harmony and managing internal conflict. Ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data associated with African American praise houses and churches and the medicine of curers and conjurers are used in this study to interpret their roles in social control. The first objective of this study establishes the need for social control among the enslaved and freed African American communities through ethnographic analysis of the Gullah and Geechee cultures, who, due to their geographically isolated conditions, have maintained many West African cultural traditions. The second portion of this study uses the archaeological evidence of West African-derived ritual deposits from the Jordan Plantation slave quarters and main house yard in Brazoria County, Texas to examine how the Jordan Plantation enslaved community attempted to socially control their environment beyond the slave quarters.

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This is nearly impossible, and I'm hoping that it's obvious to those who I owe many sincere thanks to on this project, as I strive to show my constant appreciation. At the very least, I owe gratitude to Dr. Brown for teaching me to think more creatively and with greater possibilities. Thank you to Dr. Walther and Dr. Hutchinson for making this thesis a better product. To my husband, look what you've done! To our daughter, I hope I haven't scared you away from college- this isn't exactly the typical way you go about a graduate degree.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction, Theoretical Background, and Objectives	1
Theoretical Background.....	6
Objectives/Statement of the Problem.....	13
Chapter 2: An Ethnographic Model of Social Control.....	21
Community Initiation	21
The Power of Religion and the Community	27
The Power of Conjure and Healing in the Community	31
Archaeological Correlates of Social Control.....	35
Chapter 3: The Jordan Plantation Archaeological Correlates of Social Control	43
The Jordan Plantation Burial Practices	43
The Jordan Plantation Elder	47
The Jordan Plantation Slave Quarters “Crossroads” Patterns	52
The Jordan Plantation Church.....	52
The Jordan Plantation Curer’s Cabin.....	56
Chapter 4: The Jordan Main House Artifact Analysis.....	68
The Western Deposit: Bucket of Metal and Debris (Feature 21).....	71
The Eastern Deposit: U.S 1853 Gold Coin.....	76
The Southern Deposit: Metal Can with Shells (Feature 24).....	87
The Northern Deposit: An Unexplored Soil Change.....	95
The Crossroads Pattern at the Jordan Plantation House.....	100
Chapter 5: Conclusions.....	106
References Cited.....	113

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Photographs of the Jordan main house	12
Figure 1.2: Kwardata motif” on a 17th century clay pipe bowl from St. Mary’s City	17
Figure 2.1: A representation of the meaning of the BaKongo cosmogram	38
Figure 2.2: Instrumental version of the BaKongo cosmogram.....	39
Figure 3.1: Juden Cemetery entrance marker at the Jordan Plantation	44
Figure 3.2: Photo of flywhisk recovered from Jordan Elder’s Cabin	47
Figure 3.3: Photo of brick with “crossroads” markings found in the Elder’s Cabin	48
Figure 3.4: Map of Archaeological features identified in the Jordan Plantation Quarters church (I-A-1), and minister’s cabin (I-A-1a)	50
Figure 3.5: Simplified diagram of the two “cosmograms” placed below the floor of the Jordan Plantation Quarters church (cabin I-A-1)	55
Figure 3.6: A drawing of the units excavated and the features identified within the footprint of the Jordan Plantation curer’s cabin (cabin II-B-1)	57
Figure 3.7a: Cardinal Direction Crossroads Deposits Found from Praise Houses/Church Structures	64
Figure 3.7b: Cardinal Direction Crossroads Found from Curers/Conjurers/Midwives structures.....	64
Figure 4.1: PAI’s map of the excavations performed by UH, CAS, and PAI.....	69
Figure 4.2: PAI’s depiction of the Levi Jordan house plan	70
Figure 4.3: PAI’s photograph of the Feature 21 buried iron container	72
Figure 4.4: PAI’s photograph of the location of the 1853 gold coin in the southeast corner pier.....	77
Figure 4.5: PAI’s photograph of U.S 1853 gold coin.....	78
Figure 4.6: Photograph of the base of the exterior brick wall of Block I.....	86
Figure 4.7: Photograph of the base of the exterior brick wall of the sugar mill	87
Figure 4.8: PAI’s photograph of the can with shells near the west chimney	89
Figure 4.9: PAI’s photograph of the perforated white metal disc.....	93
Figure 4.10: PAI’s photographs of the bricks with unusual markings	94
Figure 4.11: CAS’s illustration of Feature 6.....	97
Figure 4.12: CAS’s photo of Feature 6, a rectangular area of soil change	98
Figure 4.13: Summary map of the crossroads deposits (in red) found around the Jordan house area	102
 Table 1: Interpretation of crossroads patterns meanings based on artifacts from enslaved healing and religious locations.....	 66

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, AND OBJECTIVES

“Africanisms” or “African retentions” are expressions of African cultural beliefs and customs that occur in non-African environments. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits coined the term “Africanisms” when he became the first anthropologist to challenge the idea of *catastrophism*: the belief that all vestiges of African culture were lost during the Middle Passage of the African slave trade and subsequent enslavement (Herskovits 1958). Social historian Orlando Patterson stated of catastrophism in black history as “simply one long disaster, a chronicle of horrors in which blacks experienced every conceivable form of exploitation, humiliation, and anguish at the hands of the white oppressors” (Patterson 1972: 29). Scholars of catastrophism assert that, given such a history of oppression and horror, endurance of African belief systems in the New World was practically impossible. However, Herskovits was a proponent of *survivalism*: the belief that there were many ways that African culture persisted through slavery (Cerroni-Long 1987). In *The Myth of The Negro Past* (1958), he described how the myth was that African culture was completely lost with the slave trade and that in fact African culture was crucial in the evolution of black life in America. With the advancements in anthropology and archaeology building on Herskovits’s support of survivalism, anthropologists such as Hurston (1990) have studied Africanisms through material objects and oral traditions in the Americas in an attempt to identify and document the persistence of African culture. As a result, archaeological evidence from several African American communities over the last few decades has now nearly overturned the idea of catastrophism, but the relationship between material culture and cultural identity is a consistent challenge in archaeological interpretations.

Archaeologists are tasked with identifying African American group identity through making artifact identifications with various African cultures. The various material objects that archaeologists have unearthed expressing Africanisms in many different African American locations in the New World have been used to study their roles as expressions of resistance (Singleton 1999); however, little exists of investigations into the role of West African-derived spiritual material culture and its use as a form of social control within enslaved plantation quarters communities in an effort to maintain internal community cohesion and behavior. Given the harsh and oppressive living and working environments that slaves encountered in the New World, their spiritual belief systems must have been important in providing a sense of justice and identity both among other enslaved residents and against their oppressors (Brown 2015; Creel 1988; Fennell 2007; Ferguson 1992; Ferguson 1999; Fett 2002; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992). How were African retentions incorporated into maintaining social control and group identity within the African and African American communities of plantations, particularly those with large enslaved labor forces? According to archeologist Kenneth Brown, over time, the local retentions that were shared by many West African cultures were developed into regular practices and ideologies and “played an active role in creating their own identities and cultures” (Brown 2015: 185).

At the height of the slave trade, Africans were abducted from a variety of regions in central and West Africa, bringing with them no material belongings, but a mix of different cultures, beliefs, and languages (Brown 2015; Creel 1988; Fennell 2007; Ferguson 1992; Ferguson 1999; Fett 2002; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992). A new slave to a plantation would have joined a community that represented a mix of African cultures with European influence as he or she settled into a new collective identity. This collective identity would

have developed social control mechanisms, including rituals, social norms, and belief systems, as ways of coping with the new environment (Brown 2015; Creel 1988; Fennell 2007; Fett 2002; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992). In an enslaved plantation quarters, the possibility of social control existed not just between the African American community and their oppressors, but among their own community as a means of maintaining harmony and managing internal conflict in an effort to avoid harsher outside punishment or risking separation of families (Brown 2015; Creel 1988; Fett 2002; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992). According to Fett, who studied African American healing practices on southeastern plantations in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, “Dissention and the ensuing need for revenge or protection emerged from constant interaction with a known group of people within a local neighborhood” (Fett 2002: 87). Furthermore, such close interaction within plantation slave communities diminished individual privacy and necessarily engaged enslaved families with one another’s matters. Close living conditions and the oppressive structure of enslavement resulted in both mutual and reciprocal animosity (Fett 2002). Inevitably, especially among large plantation quarters communities, there was a need for group regulation.

Sociologists Anyacho and Ugal (2009) have posited that African communities within Nigeria (within the Yorubaland region), “just like other societies is bound to need cohesion in order to function properly” (Anyacho and Ugal 2009: 3). Stagnet (1969, cited in Anyacho and Ugal 2009) posited that conflict and misunderstanding are inevitable components of human interaction, so peace is therefore needed for security and meaningful development to be achieved within a society. “Consequently, social control measures are established by nations and communities to prevent, manage and resolve social disorganization.

Communities, prior to the slave trade era and colonialism had well-established mechanisms for peace education, confidence building, peace-making, peace building, conflict monitoring, conflict prevention management, and resolution” (Anyacho and Ugal 2009: 3). One component of maintaining these mechanisms for cohesion and control was an emphasis on the duality of healing and harming capabilities of spiritual power to a variety of different precolonial African cosmologies (Fett 2002). Despite the great diversity among African religions, many African religions practiced dual aspects of spiritual power, directed toward both creation and ruin. In 1915, Kongo nationalist Simon Kavuna described the power of *minkisi*, sacred medicines and spiritual entities widely employed across West Africa: “These are the properties of *minkisi*, to cause sickness in a man, and also to remove it. To destroy, kill to benefit” (Nwolise 2004: 3). According to the Kongo religion, an almighty god, Nzambi, emanates power that may be used for good or evil by living human beings, called *nganga* (Ferguson 1999). A *nganga* is a possessor of *minkisi* and performs healing and conjure for others within the community (Brown 2015; Fennell 2003).

The *nganga* held high status positions and played vital roles in political rituals, public religious rituals, and invocations of spiritual aid for individuals “seekin” healing, self-protection, or retribution (Brown 2015 and Fennell 2003). Healers, diviners, priests, priestesses, and political leaders were frequently abducted into the North Atlantic slave trade, along with average members of society who bought their own specialized beliefs (Fennell 2007). On the plantations, slave healers, many of whom were women, came from the ranks of the elderly within their communities, and age contributed to their authority in their community where they were relied upon for both healing and conjure (Fett 2002). There was also a higher level of power attributed to the enslaved healers, through the interaction with

ancestors and the dynamic control over spiritual energy and how to use it such that, “persons engaging in ritual thus become agents of transformations for renewing and creating social life” (Fett 2002: 53). In the African American enslaved communities of North America, “enslaved healers practiced mundane arts laden with cosmic significance” (Fett 2002:38). Fett argued that the “African American sacred culture contains a curative as well as a transformational dimension. The ‘black American conjurer acts not only as a magician but also as a kind of doctor’” (Fett 2002: 39). In reference to slave medicine, there were healing as well as toxic sides, including conjuration, and both could be used for the broader purposes of curing (Fett 2002).

What do the West African-derived spiritual artifacts tell us about social control mechanisms used within the enslaved community (Brown 2015)? Christopher DeCorse, an Africanist archaeologist, proposes that archaeologists lack familiarity with African material culture, resulting in too many generalizations about African cultures and materials (DeCorse 1999). However, archaeologist Kenneth Brown proposes that there is “an abundance of ethnographic and historical data and interpretation pointing to at least two spiritually-based social control mechanisms operating within African American communities in the southern United States from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, if not longer: (1) the Christianity of brush arbors, praise houses, and churches, and (2) the medicine of curers and conjurers” (Brown 2015: 169). For example, for the enslaved Gullah and Geechee communities in South Carolina and Georgia, praise houses, which were often converted residences, were the center for political, social, and religious control within the community (Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996; Brown 2015). Creel defines praise houses as being a “plantation community hall where they [enslaved] related their secular experiences, directed their

religious life, openly expressed among each other their innermost frustrations, longings and expectations” (Creel 1988: 233). Curers and conjurers also were powerful members of the enslaved communities. According to Fett, “African American healing under slavery reflected a definition of power as the capacity not only to control but also to create and transform” (Fett 2002: 52). This thesis will evaluate ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data to demonstrate the role of African-derived spiritual belief systems as mechanisms for social control within the African American communities as they adapted to the New World during and following the slave trade.

Theoretical Background

The cognitive theoretical framework for this study is based on Alsworth Ross’s theory of social control and Emile Durkheim’s theory of collective consciousness as a means of coping and survival as a small, displaced community. Social control, in its classical sense, refers to “the capacity of a social group to regulate itself according to desired principles and values” (Janowitz 1975: 82). According to sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross (1901), social control within a society refers to the different ways in which behavior, thoughts, and appearance are regulated by rules, norms, beliefs, laws, and values of society. Ross asserts that a successfully-functioning society requires approved and enforced social mechanisms as part of daily life to minimize chaos and dissension. Through lifelong processes of socialization within a particular culture, members are taught from introduction the norms, rules, and behavioral and interactional expectations that are common to family, peer groups, community, and greater society. Socialization trains individuals on specific ways to think and behave in accepted ways, and in doing so, effectively controls individual participation in the society as a whole. Ross posited, “Even in peaceful communities, the greater propinquity that

comes with social growth and the greater intimacy of men in their dealings and relations subjects the natural order to a breaking strain” (Ross 1901: 50). Examples of forms of social control can be spiritually-based, legally-based, educationally-based, and politically-based. Ross argued that belief systems, such as religion, exert a greater control on human behavior than laws imposed by government, no matter what form the beliefs take (Ross 1901). Ross refers to Livingstone’s account of Africans specifically with regard to their religious practices and social control: “the belief in the power of charms for good or evil produces not only honesty, but a great amount of gentle dealing” (Ross 1901: 128). “In the long run, the domination of a system of belief in the supernatural depends less on its plausibility than on the perfection with which its control meets the needs of the social organization” (Ross 1901: 136).

Sociologist Emile Durkheim defined the term “collective consciousness” as the set of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society (Durkheim 1997). According to Durkheim, collective consciousness is of key importance to the society, because without it, the society cannot function successfully. He asserted that humans are inherently interested in best outcomes for themselves, but norms, beliefs and values form the moral basis of a society, ensuring cohesion and identity (Durkheim 1997). According to Durkheim, groups, when interacting, create their own culture and attach powerful emotions to it. Durkheim identified two kinds of social solidarity: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity (Durkheim 1997). Mechanical solidarity connects the individual to society through sharing the same beliefs, and is most prevalent in primitive societies. It goes far to describe the solidarity experienced within the enslaved communities of North America during the height of the enslaved plantation culture, because this culture

lived common experiences in an environment where cohesion and identity were critical coping mechanisms for survival. The bond that binds an individual to his or her society is this shared belief system, or collective consciousness, and the members of this society are more likely to share the same beliefs and morals. According to Durkheim, as societies become larger and more advanced, the individual members of those societies start to become unique and serve different purposes from each other. Solidarity becomes more “organic” (versus a more primitive “mechanical solidarity” in smaller societies) as these societies develop their divisions of labor (Durkheim 1997). In the case of plantation societies, larger plantations appear to have craft specialization, evidenced by the material objects found through archaeology excavation in frequency and location (Harris 1999). Therefore, with organic solidarity, society is a system of different functions that are united by definite relationships and each individual must have a distinct job or action and a personality that is his or her own.

Durkheim extensively studied the role of the collective consciousness in religion. For larger plantation communities, the unearthed material objects found by archaeologists can be used to interpret, to some extent, the role of collective consciousness in developing a common set of West-African derived spiritual practices among such oppressed populations. According to Durkheim, religion is an exemplification of social solidarity and he defined it as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., beliefs and practices which unite individuals into one single moral community (Durkheim 2008). Durkheim argued that every society needs to regularly reaffirm and uphold its collective sentiments and collective ideals through reunions, assemblies, and meetings where people gather to reaffirm their common views. Furthermore, the deities that are worshiped are projections of the power

of their own society, and when men celebrate sacred things, they also celebrate the power of their society (Durkheim 2008). Anthropologist Margaret Creel, who studied Gullah slave religious practices in the South Carolina Sea Islands wrote that "...religion cannot be viewed only or primarily as a source of visionary, spiritual fulfillment. Nor can religion mainly be viewed as manipulative. For the Gullah it offered a politics for collective consciousness and group conformity within an African-Christian synthesis" (Creel 1988:275).

Given the role of religion across many West African cultures, the use of religion in social control to promote the collective consciousness is a fitting theoretical framework when investigating the West African retentions that have been discovered at several former plantation sites in North America. Although people from the entire slave coast of West and Central Africa were brought to South Carolina, the majority of Carolina's slaves came from the northwestern Windward Coast, including Senegal, Gambia, and Sierra Leone, and the Congo-Angolan region far to the southeast (Littlefield 1981). Also included were the coasts of modern Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cabinda, and northern Angola. During the peak of the slave trade from 1735-1740, more than two-thirds of Africans arriving in South Carolina came from this southeastern area (Wood 1974). In total, around 40 percent of the slaves sold in Charleston came from the Congo-Angola region (Littlefield 1981). These new plantation communities therefore largely consisted of close-quarter kinship organizations of displaced individuals from mainly BaKongo and Yorubaland African cultures under oppressed conditions of slavery and they relied on each other for survival and coping. They represented a wide diversity of ethnic groups; however, they shared basic components of culture that included philosophical and religious beliefs portrayed by the "influential BaKongo people" (Ferguson 1999: 118). In their new

environment, African Americans likely forged new social relationships with one another by focusing on common culture and cosmologies, resulting in new forms of expression (Fennell 2007). Anthropologist Christopher Fennell proposed the concept of *ethnogenic bricolage* as a “creative process in which individuals raised in different cultures interact in new settings, often at the geographic crossroads of multiple diasporas” (Fennell 2007: 73). It can be used to explain how different cultures evolve core symbols that serve to express fundamental elements of a group’s cosmology and sense of identity in their world, and can be applied when examining the development of African American culture (Fennell 2007).

Archaeological evidence has been found at several sites throughout the Americas over the last few decades that have reflected aspects of West African-derived core symbols (Brown 1990, 2004, 2015, 1988; Bruner 1996; Ferguson 1992, 1999; Fennell 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011; Harris 1999; Leone and Fry 1999; Marshall 2015; Wilkie 1997; Young 1996). These findings have led to new research questions concerning the role of spiritual belief systems in maintaining a level of social control within enslaved plantation communities that would have been practiced both internally as a regulator of group cohesion, and externally as protection from their oppressors. Among the larger North American slave plantations, newcomers must have been formally integrated into the community, social rules must have been maintained, and justice must have been served when internal or external conflict arose within a system of ultimately shared beliefs and values (Brown 2015; Creel 1988; Fennell 2007; Fett 2002; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992).

With regard to enslaved healers on North American plantations, Fett stated that “...enslaved African Americans approached healing as a collective enterprise. The relational vision of health placed healing in the context of a broadly conceived community that

including living persons, ancestors, spirits, and God” (Fett 2002: 56). Studies of perceptions of power have provided a model for the position of power in African American healing: “The act of healing represents access to “control over people and resources” (Fett 2002: 52).

This kind of power was known to have been feared among both the masters and the slaves (Herskovits 1958). Many researchers of the period of slavery have tended to focus on African Americans’ use of conjure against slaveholders, which constitutes a form of social control by the enslaved against the slaveholders; however, antebellum evidence also shows the use of conjuration to mediate daily conflicts within the enslaved communities as well (Fett 2002). The notion of conjure reinforced internal standards of slave community behavior regarding property, sexuality, and relations among all ages. Deviation from community rules or norms was usually linked as an immediate cause of illness within African American health culture (Fett 2002). Conjure illustrated the healing and harming dynamics of the African American spiritual belief system by connecting an individual’s well-being to his or her conduct within a community (Fett 2002).

Established in 1848, the Levi Jordan Plantation in Brazoria County, Texas, was home to nearly 150 slaves pre-emancipation, and was a major producer of both sugar and cotton (Figure 1.1). Following emancipation, the former slave quarters became tenant and share cropper residences well into the 1890s. In 1986, the University of Houston began conducting archaeological excavations under the supervision of Dr. Kenneth Brown at the plantation in an effort to recover contextual material that would reveal information about the enslaved community, sharecroppers, and tenants who lived at the plantation. The archaeological excavations revealed two relevant depositional levels at the former site of the slave quarters: the sub-floor deposit with slavery and tenancy, and the more shallow “abandonment” deposit

is associated with tenancy (Brown 1990). Brown and his teams have unearthed several artifacts from the slave/tenant cabins at the Jordan Plantation that they believe exhibit West African spiritual belief retentions that has led to the identification of a church/praise house and a curer/conjurer's cabin (Brown 1994). Brown has proposed that these artifacts were intentionally placed under the curer's cabin and church/praise house by the African and African American residents, hiding them from view, making "knowledge of their existence exclusionary and a mechanism for social control" (Brown 2015: 166). In this thesis, the artifacts Brown and his team discovered at the Jordan Plantation church/praise house, with similar patterns identified at other large plantations that Brown has excavated across North America, will be used to support the idea that West African-derived systems were used to regulate social behavior within the African and African American communities and promote shared group norms.



Figure 1.1 Photograph taken around 1930 (left) and the late 1980s (right) showing the south façade of the main house (photograph on the left used courtesy of D. Cotton) - adapted from Brown 2013

Objectives/Statement of the Problem

Documents, oral history, and archaeological evidence together provide a basis for understanding culture, and are the cornerstones of historical archaeology. Historical archaeologists use ethnographies, personal narratives, and other forms of historic records to uncover meaning and provide new understanding of how certain artifacts were used within the context of slavery and tenancy during the 19th century. Specifically, the data that will be collected and analyzed to support this thesis will consist of archaeological evidence, historical documentation, and ethnographic analogy.

The focus of this study will be on artifacts recovered from the landscape of the Levi Jordan Plantation that suggest that the African and African American residents created ritual deposits derived from West African belief systems with European-Christian influences (Brown 2004, 2015 and Brown and Cooper 1990). This thesis will investigate whether these artifacts were used as methods of social control among this population. If so, then several questions are required regarding the role of shared belief systems in attempting to control the fate of residents living in such an oppressive and harsh environment. The general hypothesis behind the proposed research is that if the African American residents at the Jordan Plantation practiced methods of social control, then the data within the material culture and ethnographic and historical records will substantiate it. To support the hypothesis of this research, two objectives have been identified:

OBJECTIVE 1: Establish that there was a need for social control among the African and African American community at the Jordan Plantation.

HYPOTHESIS 1: If social control was practiced within African American community at the Jordan Plantation, then historic, ethnographic, and archaeological sources will discuss the mechanisms for this control.

For archaeologists to get at the notion of behavior, it is necessary to investigate beyond only the design of artifacts, and more closely examine the adaptation that people make to their lives in their communities (Guthrie 1996). A source for ethnographic analogy, the enslaved Gullah and Geechee communities lived in isolation on the Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands and outnumbered the European Americans significantly during the period of plantation slavery (Guthrie 1996). Scholars Phillip Morgan and Ira Berlin believe that their task system of labor and isolation enabled them to develop their own form of culture that may have been steeped in the various African cultures and belief systems and modified through Christianity to adapt to their new environment (Berlin and Morgan 1993). In this thesis, ethnographic studies of the Gullah and Geechee communities of the Sea Islands (Creel 1989; Guthrie 1996; Bailey 2000) will be used to create models for testing the signatures of spiritually-based social control mechanisms represented in the archaeological materials of the church/praise house and the conjurer's cabin at the Levi Jordan Plantation Quarters. Social control mechanisms may not have a direct archaeological signature; however, the use of ethnographic analogies can be used in understanding traditional African rituals and the meanings of relevant artifacts recovered from archaeological excavations. Awareness of the spiritual beliefs and practices of African Americans to protect themselves and their landscapes (Hyatt 1970) allows archaeologists to recognize artifacts found in subfloor deposits as intentionally placed and consequently socially significant.

Historical records are an important component in historical archaeology research. Historical documents from scholars such as Gutman (1976), Penningroth (2006) and Fett (2002) that reference accounts of discourse, resolution, and resistance, as well as methods of social control to address these conflicts, will provide evidence to support the first hypothesis, particularly within the framework of spiritual beliefs and conjure. For example, Penningroth explained that the enslaved communities had many reasons for internal discourse, with theft of property being a leading course of conflict. The community established their own means of dealing with such conflicts, out of the view of their masters, sometimes setting up “special committees that publically questioned suspects and used such divination objects as string-tied Bibles and graveyard dirt to detect thieves” (Penningroth 2006: 182). Furthermore, newcomers were not automatically guaranteed kinship or community just by being brought to the plantation: “being black and enslaved did not automatically render them anything more than strangers to one another” (Guthrie 1996: 33). Accounts of discourse and methods of resolution within the plantation communities will be investigated in this thesis research and used to support the first hypothesis.

OBJECTIVE 2: Establish the role of the Jordan Plantation artifacts as archaeological elements of social control.

HYPOTHESIS 2: If social control was practiced within the Jordan Plantation African American community, then the archaeological sources should yield African American material correlates of social control.

Clifford Geertz developed a semiotic theory of culture: the meaning of a symbol is dependent upon the social circulation and ritual performance of the symbol (Geertz 1973). Based on this notion, archaeologists can interpret the meaning of artifacts that have symbolic representation embedded within them to better understand social relations and cultural adaptations to environmental changes. Researchers have asserted that spiritually-derived African retentions carried over into material culture through symbolism within African American enslaved communities in North America, and that these symbols can be found on archaeological artifacts across North America (Deetz 1993; Yakubik 1994; McKee 1995; Wilkie, 1995; Young 1996; Wilkie 1997; Ferguson 1999; Leone and Frye 1999; Brown 2015). The incorporation of African-derived symbols in places of importance, such as churches and praise houses, and the African-originated behaviors such as “Seekin” and “Catching Sense” that were practiced among the Gullah communities of the North American Sea Islands served as forms of social control that formally inducted newcomers, taught them their place in their community, and established a set of shared belief systems that allowed the community to function in solidarity in such an oppressive environment (Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996; Mintz and Price 1992).

Fennell (2003 and 2007) explained the many ways that artifacts may have been used by their developers and users as “significant components of private religious rituals, as potential communicators of group identities, and as expressions of individual creativity in the forging of new social relationships” (Fennell 2003: 2). Fennell details how “core” symbols can be found in material culture as two different modes of symbolic expression: emblematic (complex, detailed symbols that allow full expression in an emotionally powerful way that “typically evoke a conglomerate of ideas and feelings”) and (more straight-forward,

abbreviated yet “culturally valued in that they formulate the culture’s basic means-ends relationship in acceptable forms”) (Fennell 2003: 4).

In the Chesapeake areas of the United States, terra-cotta tobacco pipes were found at the Flowerdew Hundred plantation dating between 1640 and 1720 (Deetz 1993) that were interpreted as having borne Nigerian *Kwardata* symbolism, providing compelling evidence for the persistence of African culture beyond the Middle Passage (Figure 1.2). According to Emerson, when used in certain rituals, the *Kwardata* symbol represented "the transition from youth to adulthood in contemporary Ga'anda society" (Emerson 1994: 43). Emerson identifies similar pipes of the *Kwardata* from sites in Virginia and Maryland, which may also provide material evidence of the continuity of African religious expression among the enslaved communities (Emerson 1994). Genovese (1974) has suggested that specific spirits associated with protective objects were common in African cultures but were forgotten under slavery in the New World under the influence of Christianity.

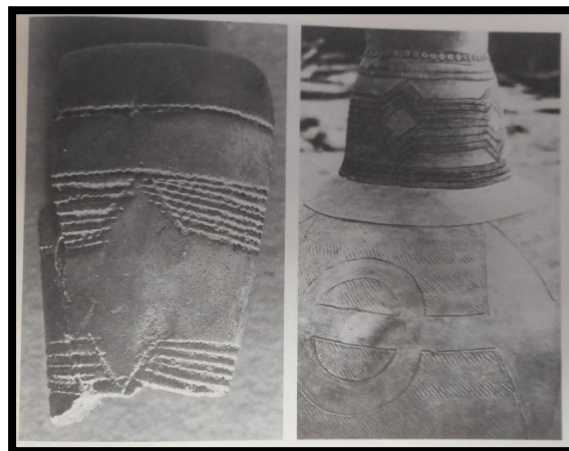


Figure 1.2 Kwardata motif” on a 17th century clay pipe bowl from St. Mary’s City, Va. (left) and 20th century beer pot from Nigeria, West Africa—adapted from Emerson 1999:73.

Among the slave structures at the Locust Grove plantation in Kentucky, (Young 1996) small pits were found in front of the hearth, and items whose functional interpretations were difficult and include: three possible amulets (of blue glass beads such as those found at African sites that hold spiritual beliefs); Chinese coins with square holes in the center (similar coins have been found in Alexandria, Virginia where slaves waited to be sold) a U.S. coin that had been modified with notches in the four corners along the edges that would allow a string to run in the shape of an “X” along the surface; chandelier prisms, spoons with “X” marks; and, clay marble with an “X” mark. Young compared these kinds of findings to other sites that have similar findings and also noted that others have argued that the “X” is probably a symbol derived from “West or Central African cosmology that was transplanted and modified through contact with Europeans” as slaves in the New World (Young 1996: 145). An example of this dual-influence of culture is provided in Fennell’s 2011 article about a literate slave named Dave, who signed his stoneware vessels as “Dave X”. Fennell evaluates whether this “X” was a way to communicate solidarity among the end users who were inevitably slaves, or whether this was simply because Dave could not write his own last name (Fennell 2011).

In Louisiana, a pierced 1793 Spanish real, associated with two black barrel glass beads, was recovered from a mid-19th-century slave cabin hearth at Ashland Belle-Helene plantation (Yakubik 1994). Scholars of Ashland Belle-Helene plantation have identified the hearth area of the slave cabins as likely having been a type of ceremonial center or altar, beyond its function in supporting everyday life activities, because beads, shells, buttons, and coins were found more frequently near the hearths than any of the other areas in or around the slave quarters. The researchers concluded that the hearth’s location within the privacy of

the home enabled ritualistic activity that could be hidden to outsiders (Yakubik and Mendez 1995: 27). Also recovered from a late 19th-century African American household was an 1855 Britannia pierced penny that has been interpreted as Silvia Freeman's birth coin which served as a magical protective mechanism (Wilkie 1995). Freeman was born in 1855 in Virginia and lived in the house, showing how this type of African spiritual tradition might have been carried on through the generations.

It was a common practice for the enslaved communities to hide personal or sacred effects in pits under the floors of their homes (and this served well as storage for food and other belongings), and archaeologists have uncovered many of these findings, including those seemingly of magical or ritualistic nature (McKee 1995). In Annapolis, Maryland at the Carroll house, deposits were found that represented the African nkisi rituals under the kitchen floor boards of the home, along with other purposely-placed items representative of significance in BaKongo tradition (Leone and Fry 1999). Brown's teams identified several crossroad deposits within the Gullah and Geechee areas in the southeastern United States, south Texas, and Louisiana that were placed purposefully along the cardinal directions, with particular ritualistic meaning, in the subfloor deposits of the churches/praise houses and conjurer/midwife/curers' cabins at plantation locations that employed different task systems (Brown et. al, 1990, 1988, 2004, 2015).

Taken together, the ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data presented in this thesis will attempt to demonstrate that there was a need for social control among the Jordan Plantation African American community to maintain collective identity and a sense of control over their lives. These social control mechanisms were used by the enslaved Jordan

Plantation community and were derived from West African-derived spiritual belief systems that were known exclusively to members of their own community.

CHAPTER 2

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC MODEL OF SOCIAL CONTROL

In West African cultures, the community was recognized as more important than the individual, and maintaining a strong sense of community meant that it must establish a common culture (Herskovits 1958; Mintz and Price 1972; DuBois 1975; Guthrie 1996).

African traditional religion accented with certain Christian beliefs was a “pristine element of sacred thought that remained with the slaves and...did not separate sacred from secular responsibility, and that placed community above individual interests...” (Creel 1988:62).

While archaeologists have identified African spiritual retentions in the material culture across North America, new research questions have arisen regarding correlation between these artifacts and social control practices. Ian Hodder, pioneer of post-processional archaeology, asserted that meaning is critical and inherent in almost every artifact to be found. By looking beyond merely the typical function of artifacts, archaeologists can better understand culture by considering meaning in otherwise unremarkable materials, such as spoons, broken egg shells, shells, and pieces of metal. Considering the location of artifacts within context of other artifacts at various sites, as well as their place in time, are critical for meaningful interpretations about a culture and culture change over time. Equally critical is the ability for archaeologists to use ethnographic comparisons as models to test their interpretations.

Community Initiation

African American culture developed under the conditions of slavery for more than 100 years prior to 1861 in the Port Royal Sound area of South Carolina (Brown 2004). The Gullah communities of this area of South Carolina have slavery origins that stem from the

African regions of the Windward Coast (today Sierra Leone and Liberia), Ivory and Gold coasts, and Kongo-Angola (Creel 1988 and Guthrie 1996). Their time in seclusion as slaves in the isolated environment of the South Carolina Sea Islands renders them a unique and important model for understanding how African social practices carried into the plantation communities of the New World (Gonzales 1923; Woofter 1930; Turner 1949; Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996; Brown 2004). For social control mechanisms to be successful, members of a particular community must have been taught about them from those more experienced in the community. Among the Gullahs and Geechees, this kind of teaching occurred through the practices of “Seekin” and “Catching Sense” (Guthrie 1996; Creel 1988; Bailey 2000). The Gullah and Geechee communities used community membership through the praise houses as a form of social control to maintain group cohesion, serve justice, and provide a sense of kinship.

Anthropologist Patricia Guthrie (1996) performed fieldwork near Beaufort, South Carolina among the Sea Island Gullah community. Her research provided evidence to support the notion that during slavery on the Sea Islands, African Americans gained their sense of identity from their own slave society, and not from their white oppressors; therefore, belonging to a cohesive community was critical (Guthrie 1996). Counting on others within their own community to provide assistance was essentially the whole point of “belonging,” and assistance came in the forms of settling disputes internally, worshipping together, and teaching of future generations, among others (Guthrie 1996).

Guthrie recalls first hearing the term “catching sense” from the locals as a process of belonging—formally becoming a permanent member of a particular plantation community after having spent the formative years in the household between the ages of two and twelve

learning right from wrong. According to Guthrie, with its roots in slavery, “catching sense” was a way of belonging for those in bondage whose families were broken up and sold to other plantations, leaving no filial kinship or place in a community. “Through ritual, the notion of “catching sense” is carried out—the rights and responsibilities of belonging solidified and repeated again and again, and the preservation of traditional knowledge is thus guaranteed” (Guthrie 1996: 37). Guthrie calls “catching sense” the “glue that holds together the community system—belonging to churches, praise houses, and claiming a plantation as one’s own” (Guthrie 1996: 9). This particular concept of belonging was not based on filial ties, nor where the person was actually born, but instead was based on the location of where a person grew up, learned right from wrong, and children began to understand social relationships beyond the immediate household (Guthrie 1996). “Catching sense” was also tied into spirituality, and gave members their guiding principles and social norms. Guthrie argued that during the time of slavery, religious services were also ways to reinforce community bonds for those who caught sense at a particular plantation (Guthrie 1996). Also critical to maintaining a cohesive community bond, “catching sense” determined “belonging, dispute settlements, adjudication, rights, and status” (Guthrie 1996: 31). Once a person formally caught sense in a particular community, they were members for life, including membership in the church and the church’s praise house. They also became accountable to church law. Even upon death, members of the plantation praise house community were buried in the cemetery of the plantation on which they caught sense: “...the rights of full personhood, that is, access to the office of praise house leader, the right to seek land use rights, and the right to burial into the plantation graveyard, come into existence when persons complete the catching-sense process” (Guthrie 1996: 106). Even “outside children, so long as

they catch sense on a plantation, are entitled to the identical cluster rights that accrue to all other plantation members” (Guthrie 1996: 107).

Historian Margaret Washington Creel performed extensive research on the Gullah community’s sociohistorical relationship between religion, community, and resistance, and suggested that it could provide “a significant model for studying African-American adaptive capacities and retentions of African provenance” (Creel 1988: 1). In particular, Creel’s research focused on aspects of spirituality and community of the Gullahs, providing a source for deriving archaeologically-testable models for the beliefs and behavioral systems developed by the enslaved peoples of African descent in North America.

“Seekin” was a period of training and self-sacrifice that allowed Gullahs to become full members of the praise houses, similar to the Poro (for males) and Sande (for females) societies that existed in many cultures of West Africa that was used to induct its community members into adulthood. Creel asserted that these secret societies in Africa were also critical for teaching its young members about the community’s laws of social behavior (Creel 1988). “While Poro and Sande represented transformation from childhood to citizenship, membership in these societies was clearly more than a puberty *rite de passage* or a course of training for various roles in community life” (Creel 1988: 47). New initiates during induction to Poro and Sande would undergo elaborate and intense secret rituals over a period of several weeks or months during their training that would shift their loyalty from solely their parents to their new secret society. “Thus all social and political functions of Poro and Sande were implemented to fulfill collective and societal goals. These regulatory processes, in the form of social control, were deterrents to deviant social behavior and arbitrary power” (Creel 1988: 48). These new societies in effect ensured collective consciousness by

intervening in village quarrels, trying and sentencing criminals, and approving declarations of war (Creel 1988). “Poro was law. Poro was order. And Poro came from God” (Creel 1988: 48). Creel identified components of Poro-Sande cults among the Gullahs and Geechees through the ways in which they became members of their community praise houses that were established on each plantation.

According to Creel, the term, “seekin” originated within the Gullah community by Methodist missionaries who preached and taught of Jesus to the slaves, then offered the opportunity to “seek Jesus,” which required an intense probationary training period that ultimately led to baptism and commitment to the plantation praise house and church. Cornelia Bailey grew up in the “Saltwater Geechee” community of Sapelo Island, Georgia in the 1940s-1950s as “one of the last generation[s] to grow up with all of the old Geechee ways” (Bailey 2000: 7), and chronicled her first-hand experience of “seekin” when she formally became a member of the church. Bailey’s mother told her that it was time to join the church on her twelfth birthday, when she was “no longer a child” (Bailey 2000: 162). Bailey recalled that there was a “whole ritual to joining the church” (Bailey 2000: 162) that took two or three months and required an elder of your choice to guide you through the process. The process began with cleansing herself through intense study and prayer morning, noon, and midnight at a location Bailey picked all on her own at a tree in the East direction of her house. Her mother would remind her: “Ok, baby, time for you to go outside and go seeking” (Bailey 2000: 164), including at midnight alone in the woods as a way to interact with the spirit ancestors and to trust God. Her training ended when she finally had a dream of angels in mostly white robes that was symbolically recognized by her elder as being ready to receive a water cleansing ceremony, or baptism, which she completed to become a fully functioning

member of the church. According to Creel, belonging as an individual to the community praise house was critical in the survival of the community: “the cult association represented an attempt to control the forces of social life...social existence was ‘life’ and its absence represented collectively unacceptable attitudes or death. To ensure a continuation of life, that is, the perpetuation of the group, ideals of social behavior within the community had to be maintained” (Creel 1988: 290).

Gullah “seekin” shared the same four common traits with Poro and Sande initiation: isolation, contact with spirits, wearing of white cloth, and water rituals (Teal 2006).

Research by Teal (2006) identified these same common traits in Natchitoches, Louisiana through the mourning bench rituals of the black Baptist communities. The mourning bench provided a public place for people to perform their religious conversion, guided by elders, and to prepare for the upcoming baptism. Before an individual could sit on the mourning bench that faced the congregation, he or she would have had to spend time alone praying waiting for a spiritual awakening or change to happen (Teal 2006). In an interview, Teal quoted Mrs. Snowden, a resident of the parish for sixty years, who actually referred to it by name as “seekin”: “My parents instilled in me that you know everybody in those days said that you had to go off quietly and seek the Lord. So you spent time not just playing and running, as you usually would do, but you spent time seekin God” (Teal 2006: 60).

According to Teal, the transformation was completed when, on the mourning bench, the candidate could describe a climactic emotional and physical feeling of having been taken over by the “Holy Spirit,” similar to that of the symbolic transformative dream experienced by the Gullah in “seekin”. Teal’s research also identified the similarity of the white robes, the training by elders, and the final water-based baptisms as common traits in the process of

becoming formal church community members, and provided references of similar traits as part of Nigerian initiation rituals (Teal 2006). The similarities of practice between the Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana Baptist mourning bench rituals and the Gullah “seekin” rituals in the Sea Islands indicate that social control mechanisms in the form of African-derived religious belief systems were maintained and expressed as critical components of reinforcing community cohesion and identity even in geographical locations so distant from each other.

The Power of Religion and the Community

Women and men from a wide variety of Western and Central African cultures came to the New World during the slave trade that also brought with them a wide variety of religious belief systems (Harvey 2011, Thornton 2002). “Some came from societies that already had been Christianized or Islamicized prior to or during the slave trade” (Harvey 2011: 9). According to Creel, “the same attachment to religion and community membership that existed among West Africans was observed among the Gullahs” (Creel 1988: 279) and served as a “significant form and more immediate expression of efforts to protect the existing social and political order through religion” (Creel 1988: 235). According to Creel, Gullah religion was not only a contract between God and the individual, but a mutual agreement among themselves which implied that they could not love God without loving each other, reflecting a community bond and identity (Creel 1988). This enabled a strong kinship between different Gullah communities over time and provided initiation for new individuals in the community. The role of the church, its associated praise houses, and the power of conjure played critical roles in maintaining social order among the enslaved communities, and many scholars have shown that these continued on well after emancipation (Mintz and

Price 1972; Woofter 1978; Creel 1988; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Guthrie 1996). The church was the community institution of political, social, and religious activities, and membership was based on the member having caught sense there. “The church served multiple purposes. Not only were religious services held in this building, but also lessons were taught to adults and children (Beeth and Wintz: 19) and disputes and community problems were settled without white intervention” (Creel 1988: 279). According to Guthrie, among the Gullah/Geechee on St. Helena still today, “church law represents the collective moral consciousness and consensus of the community” (Guthrie 1996: 116). Even today, “should a dispute or problem arise involving African American Island Baptist Church members, settlement is reached in the religious courts” (Guthrie 1996: 98). Guthrie recounts that those who took their problems to the traditional courts outside of the church community were required to “take a back seat” at church and in the praise house until settlement was reached in the religious courts; “thus, group membership is regarded as being more important than self” (Guthrie 1996: 99).

The Gullah/Geechee Praise House system was an extension of the church that provided a limited amount of political and religious power internal to the slave communities, and consisted of small, basic meetinghouses erected on plantations after 1830 (Creel 1988). Their practical purpose was for the planters to give the enslaved a place of worship in a way that also prevented interactions between members of other plantations (thus minimizing opportunities for rebellion). However practical this was for the planters, the Praise Houses also provided a place for their members to regularly express themselves spiritually and to handle their own disputes within their small community out of view of their oppressors, where punishment could be much harsher. A place where ancestors could be reached through

intense worship, the Praise House also enabled town hall-like functions for gatherings, “using prayer, song, and exhortation to comfort each other” (Creel 1988: 277). The Praise House was the center of group life, and “the source of power on the plantations” (Creel 1988: 278). Guthrie said of existing Gullah/Geechee populations, “By joining the church and praise house, Islanders formally enter both the religious and the politico/jural domains of plantation life” (Guthrie 1996: 97). Rooted in slavery, when families were broken apart as commodities, belonging to the Praise House provided a sense of belonging: it was a way that kinless individuals could have a valued place in their community (Guthrie 1996). Praise House loyalty and community membership was a social regulator, and it was the “desire for harmony and a sense of love and respect for each other that allowed Gullahs to maintain integrity in the community” (Creel 1988: 278). “The ‘leaders’ of these plantation groups were persons of considerable stature in spiritual matters...They presided over meetings, gave spiritual advice, and in some cases, officiated at weddings and funerals” (Woofter 1930: 236).

Because Gullah members of the Praise House congregation knew each other through daily interaction on the plantation, their personal lives could easily be scrutinized, and their behaviors tried and handled accordingly when moral issues or discourse arose in the quarters (Creel 1988 and Fett 2002). “Elders and members exerted great disciplinary power over plantation hands, having the right to ‘turn dem outen de Pray’s House if dey ain’t fur walk right’” (Creel 1988: 278). Cases of discourse were brought to Praise House leaders from the members themselves as well as the planters, and all members had to answer to the religious court system when disputes arose. According to Creel (1988), the two most important groups of people among the Gullah slave community were the black elders and the spiritual parents.

Black elders were chosen by whites, usually the Baptist planters, to be responsible for the “watchcare” of members of the plantation societies. “They were experienced church members in the quarters, having some knowledge of Christianity” and were responsible for “securing the trust and confidence of both the masters and slaves” (Creel 1988: 283). Black elders served several plantations, and acted as mediators between the white Baptist churches and the enslaved. They were loved and respected by their Gullah communities, and slaveholders leveraged their Christian leadership as a way to promote obedience. Because the planters knew that elders’ judgement and influence held great power over the enslaved community, the black elders played a major role in maintaining social control over the enslaved community.

“Spiritual mothers and fathers” were not chosen by the white community, but instead were recognized by the Gullahs as legitimate leaders among each plantation who “helped” the black elders (Creel 1988). They conducted Praise House religious services, and were loved and respected by their Gullah communities for their role in promoting religious welfare, but because “their influence belonged to a tradition older than the black elders’ role” (Creel 1988: 285) they held more power and had more respect than the black elders. Spiritual parents were “healers, interpreters of dreams, signs, and visions, all of which were central to Gullah conceptions of religion and infused with their impressionistic form of Christianity” (Creel 1988: 285). Creel supposed that the two religious functions probably overlapped to some degree, working together for the better of the community (Creel 1988). “They represent different aspects of the Gullah’s spiritual existence—one Christian, the other African—and an element of syncretism within slave religion” (Creel 1988: 285). As exemplifications of social control among the enslaved communities, these two significant leadership groups were

foundational in maintaining community cohesion, moral order, and spiritual fulfillment, especially for their role in formal admission to the church through the process of “seekin”. Through a tradition of strength and power in the community, these leaders were responsible for teaching new initiates about community social norms, morals, and spirituality through methods such as “seekin” that were exclusive in formally admitted new members. Creel summarizes the Gullah religious practices:

For the Gullahs, then the Christian experience was a means of communal fulfillment on the individual as well as collective level, and plantation life has aspects of an African village in microcosm. Gullahs attempted to exert control over their environment just as their African forbears had. For Africans it was a hostile natural ambiance that most threatened the group. For slaves it was an oppressive socioeconomic system that challenged their will to develop self-esteem and social cohesion. Gullahs successfully met that challenge and rose above bondage in a spiritual and communal sense. By combining the edifying features of Christianity and African culture and philosophy, they created a practical folk religion that served them well, under the travail of slavery (Creel 1988: 302).

Power of Conjure and Healing in the Community

African healing practices steeped in spiritual power persisted into New World slavery among the African and African American communities, and were demonstrated by conjure doctors, root doctors, and midwives among the enslaved communities (Fett 2002). Many kinds of religious specialists were included in slave communities, from high priests and priestesses to root doctors and village diviners (Wilmore 1973). “Some traces were retained of the former group life and the chief remaining institution was the priest or medicine man. He found his function and healer and interpreter of the unknown and at time as a supernatural avenger of wrong” (Blassingame 1972: 33). Both the conjurer and medicine man were

known for using the spirit world for assistance in worldly happenings. A conjurer could cure or heal (Brown 1994) but a conjurer could also cause harm or destroy others (Wilmore 1973).

According to several scholars (Levine 1977; Stuckey 1987; Creel 1988), enslaved African Americans merged African cultural traditions of religion with Christianity to create a worldview “imbued with sacred meaning” that provided an “ethos of resistance and inspired the expressive culture African Americans created under enslavement” (Fett 2002: 39). “Slave culture had some distinctly African features, including voodoo and conjuring. The chief remaining institution was the priest or medicine man” (Guthrie 1996: 90). African American healers spoke of their healing in a language of spiritual empowerment by describing their abilities as a gift from God (Fett 2002).

Conjurers had the ability to both heal and harm by means of spells or tricks, and having originated in Africa, this work was also called “hoodoo” or “rootwork” (Fett 2000: 85). Conjurers could heal, harm, or protect by harnessing spiritual forces through ritual, and while the enslaved community frequently used conjure as protection or retaliation against their white oppressors as a form of resistance, “conjunction also figured strongly in the internal conflicts of slave communities” (Fett 2000: 85). Believing that another in their own community had intentionally caused illness, harm or bad luck, enslaved men and women would consult the community conjurer to “trick,” “fix,” “poison,” “witch,” or “conjure” their antagonists (Fett 2000: 85). According to Fett, these kinds of “illness narratives” punctuate the “collective context for illness and healing in southern plantation communities” and reflect the power of the curer among these communities (Fett 2000: 85).

Root doctors were known for using herbs and root to cure or cause illness or effect fortune or luck (Bailey 2000). Bailey recalls the presence of root doctors growing up on

Sapelo Islands among the Saltwater Geechee. “The old people didn’t put their faith in God alone. They said, ‘I’m gonna pray to God but God takes his time to answer, so I’m also gonna consult Dr. Buzzard and use this magic potion which will bring me faster results’ ” (Bailey 2000: 189). Bailey claimed that the knowledge of root came to the Sea Islands with their African ancestors, and recalled people knowing that a root doctor “could get away with any spell because they had strange powers the rest of us don’t have” (Bailey 2000: 191).

According to Fett, Alabama midwife Lula Rousseau stated in 1938 that she could foretell the future and see spirits and that “God made me that way,” attributing this gift to a maternal lineage of healing, and being taught by her enslaved mother how to make medicines from local plants (Fett 2000: 53). An important component of their power within the community, “whether they worked as conjure doctors, midwives, herbalists, or sickbed nurses, African American healers described a universe alive with revelations for persons called to heal” (Fett 2000: 53). Their source of healing was spiritual insight, and they spoke in “a language that reflected African American Christianity’s transformation of both African religious and European Protestantism” (Fett 2000: 53).

According to Fett, much like the black elders and spiritual parents of the church, slave healers were usually elders, and their age influenced their authority in the community (Fett 2000). Also much like rituals of worship, enslaved African American healing practice was also a community collective exercise. According to Fett, “African Americans engaged power through healing rituals by defining health as a community enterprise and healing knowledge as spiritual empowerment” (Fett 2000: 58). Within the Afro-Christian spiritual realm of healing, African American healers were powerful leaders who had interactions with spirits and ancestors through ritual.

African American members relied on all aspects of their community for maintaining harmony, and church leaders and conjurers were powerful agents of social and spiritual regulation (Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996; Fett 2002). The interconnectedness of religion and conjure show how these different ways of thinking about the supernatural world collide and interact with one another, allowing them to address different spiritual needs as required (Harvey 2011). “For enslaved people, conjure supplemented Christianity. They were two ways of accessing the spirit world. Conjure provided certain pragmatic benefits that Christianity did not, while Christianity provided reassurance about the fate of human souls in a way that the pragmatic manipulations of conjure men could not,” (Harvey 2011: 55). In the early 1800s, religious leaders and conjurers worked together in instances to influence outcomes of resistance, such as in the case of the Denmark Vesey Insurrection (Herskovits 1958:138):

Gullah Jack (one of the leaders in Denmark Vesey’s Insurrection in South Carolina in 1822) was regarded as a sorcerer...He was not only considered invulnerable, but that he could make others so by his charms (consisting chiefly of a crab’s claw to be placed in the mouth) and that he could and certainly would provide all his followers with arms.” During this time, the enslaved and free African and African Americans (such as Vesey) had close community connections, especially as the slave population grew and spread among the plantations. Gullah Jack, a Methodist and African conjurer, was closely aligned and worked together with Vesey, a lay preacher and a founder of Charleston’s African Methodist Episcopal Church to plan the uprising and recruit members. Gullah Jack promised the recruits that he could keep them safe through his conjure gifts, thus managing social control through the principles of both Christianity and conjure (Starobin 1970).

According to Yvonne, “The relationship between Conjure and Christianity was fluid and constantly shifting. Supernatural practitioners often adopted symbols from Christian

traditions for use in their own practices and rituals. Protective charms, for example, were endowed by specialists with spiritual potency ‘in the name of the Lord.’ Accoutrements adopted from both Catholic and Protestant traditions were enlisted by black Conjurers for supernatural protection” (Yvonne 2003: 25). Some enslaved even served dual roles as conjurer and preacher (Yvonne 2003). Still, with the evolution of western medical practice and the growth of Christianity among African Americans, the gap between conjure and religion grew wider as “some African Americans may have conceived of conjure practitioners and Christian ministers as competing figures of spiritual authority (Yvonne 2003)”.

Archaeological Correlates of Social Control

Research performed by Teal showed that similar African-derived social control mechanisms existed in the Gullah “seekin” rituals and the Natchitoches Parish mourning bench rituals in two geographically distinct locations, providing an example of a continuum of expression through rituals (Teal 2006). Similar patterns can be applied to test for the archaeological signatures elsewhere associated with social control among the enslaved communities of North America. Clifford Geertz (1973) theorized that artifacts may have symbolic representation embedded within their existence that reflect social relationships. According to Fennell, there are many ways that artifacts may have been used by their developers and users as substantial contributions to private religious rituals as well as potential ways to communicate group identities, especially when creating new social relationships in a community (Fennell 2003, 2007). “Individual cultures may evolve core symbols that serve to express fundamental elements of a group’s cosmology and sense of identity within the world” (Fennell 2007). For the enslaved Africans and African Americans

in the Americas, the amount of change in beliefs and practices depended on how many of the enslaved were from the Kongo region versus other cultural areas of Africa, such as Yoruba, BaKongo, Fon, and Bambara (Fennell 2007). Symbols in use by enslaved Africans and African Americans could have been communicated in a number of different ways, and were especially useful as an internal communication system within their own communities (Brown 2015).

According to scholars, the BaKongo cosmogram (*tendwa kia nza-n' Kongo*) is the core West Central African symbol for the universe, and is the symbol at the center of BaKongo cosmology (Fennell 2007 and Thompson 1983). According to Fennell, “in its fullest embellishment, this symbol served as an emblematic representation of the BaKongo people, and summarized a broad array of ideas and metamorphic messages that comprised their sense of identity within the cosmos” (Fennell 2007: 31). Consisting of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines set inside a circle, the cosmogram and its many variations in Cuba, Brazil, and the United States symbolizes the relationship of the worlds of the living and the dead (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) (Fennell 2007 and Thompson 1983). At the ends of each of the four lines, small disks represent the four movements of the sun and cosmos. The top position symbolizes the north, the noon position of the sun, masculinity, the land of the living, the height of a person’s power on Earth, and the “upper realm of the Godhead” (Fennell 2007: 31). The bottom disk position symbolizes south, the position of the sun at midnight, feminism, the land of the dead, spirits, and ancestors, and the height of the living’s spiritual power, and the world of the living and the world of the spirits is separated by water (Fennell 2007). The right-hand disk position symbolizes east, the position of the sun as it rises, and of transition of the spirit upon birth into the “earthly life” (Fennell 2007:31). The

left-hand disk symbolizes west, the position of the sun as it sets, and the transition of death, from the earthly life to the world of spirits and ancestors (Fennell 2007). The movement of the disks is portrayed as rotating around the axes in a counterclockwise fashion. The larger circle set within the intersecting lines represents the “cyclical nature of earthly life and the natural world, the spiritual journey of the soul, and the reincarnative evolution of the spirits” (Fennell 2007: 32). The intersecting lines represent the connection between the living and the dead, with the northern hemisphere representing the land of the living, and the southern hemisphere representing the land of the dead, and usually associated with water. Therefore, these “crossroads” represent the continuity of human life and were considered sacred (Fennell 2007 and Thompson 1983:109). According to art historian Robert Ferris Thompson, the cosmogram signified power created through connections to one’s ancestors (Thompson 1983). A WPA interviewer stated, “if you ever see a cross mark in the road, you never walk over it. That’s real magic. You have to go around it. It’s put there by an enemy, and if you walk across it, the evil spell will cause you harm. The cross is a magic sign and has to do with the spirits” (WPA 1986: 135).

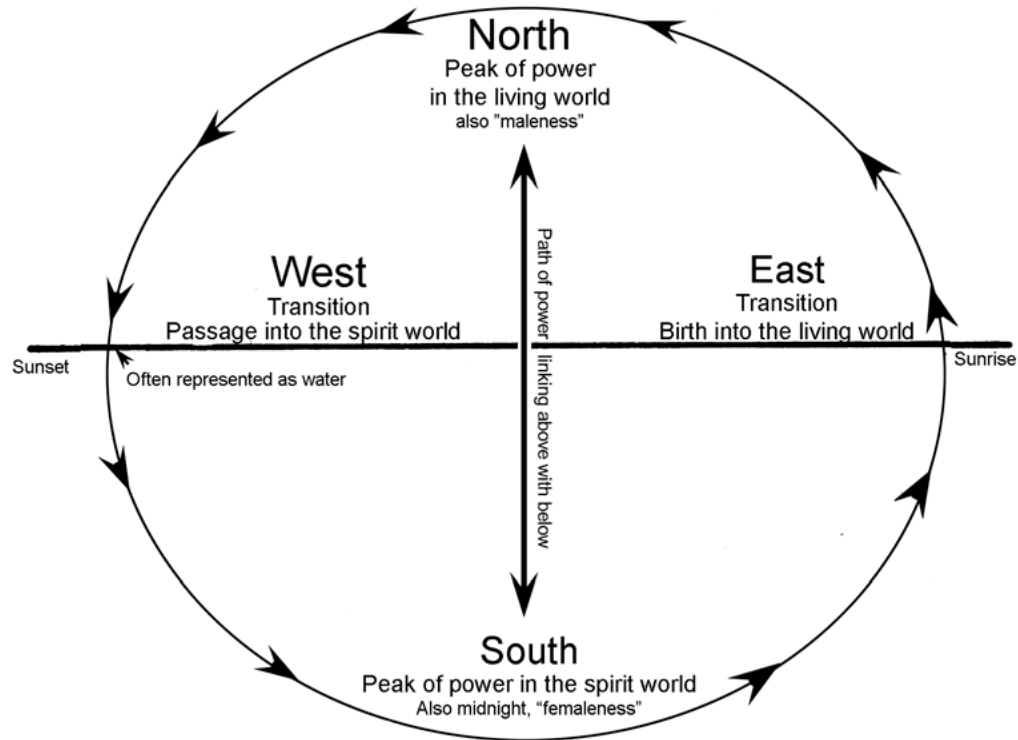


Figure 2.1 A representation of the meaning of the BaKongo cosmogram, the Kongo sign of cosmos and the continuity of human life - adapted from Brown (2013).

Though the BaKongo cosmogram is a “core symbol” of the BaKongo culture, Fennell explained that it is the instrumental form that is most commonly found in North American archaeological materials among the enslaved sites (Fennell 2003). This is because, according to Fennell, the primary use for emblematic symbols was the communication of group identities and membership, while the primary use for instrumental symbols is to individualize stylistic expressions within certain private group settings (Fennell 2003). He has argued that artifacts that are found in former slave communities in North America should be considered for their meaning based on an understanding of symbolism, and that because of integration into a new environment, its uses should consider the private and group practices among the communities. Additionally, the core symbol markings that have been found on these artifacts

are likely abbreviated core symbols that helped to form new social relationships in African American enslaved communities and represent an expression of ever-changing group identities in the New World settings (Fennell 2003).

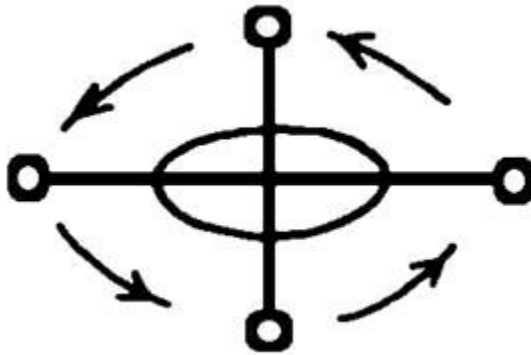


Figure 2.2 Instrumental version
BaKongo Cosmogram –adapted
from Thompson (1983).

According to Brown, Fennell’s conception of core symbols allows a closer study of the adaptive processes occurring within the African and African communities because, according to Fennell, there exists a continuum of expression of these beliefs in symbolic fashion from emblematic symbols to instrumental symbols (Brown 2017). The instrumental form of the cosmogram, an “X”, has a more practical purpose because it communicated to only those who had special knowledge of its meaning (Brown 2015; Fennell 2003). For example, at the Magnolia plantation in Louisiana, a diamond symbol on the outer wall of south room of the midwife’s cabin conveyed to those familiar with the system that there was something special about the activity associated with that specific cabin (Brown 2017). Thus, Brown has suggested that these symbols are important to those using them, and they require a special learning by the members of the community who live by the meanings that the symbol

represents (Brown 2017). But an important part of this representation is that the emblematic symbol has been modified to its instrumental version in a way that “the instrumental symbol may later become further developed and embellished so that it comes to function as a summarizing symbol for a different identity and shared meaning system in later social settings” (Fennell 2007: 29). An example of this shared meaning system that extended well through the decade was discovered by Brown in 2013 at the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. An “X” mark was found hidden away in the concrete support under a previous stairway that was likely not inscribed there until around 1950s, when the additional stories were added to the building, well after the building’s original erection in the 1890s, and subsequent reconstructions in the early 1900s. Most likely, it was made by a descendant of those in the church who were well aware of its meaning through family traditions and community teachings throughout the decades (Brown 2017).

Archaeologist Leland Ferguson described an analysis of marked clay vessels recovered by nonprofessional archaeological divers from the bottom of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers near Charleston, South Carolina (Ferguson 1992 and 1999). “X” marks had been inscribed on the bottoms of the majority of the vessels, which were bowls (as would have been used in African rituals), and seemed to be purposefully placed in a manner that Ferguson ruled out as out makers’ marks (Ferguson 1992 and 1999). Based on his research, in which he compared the frequency, type of vessel, and location of markings between these underwater and land-found vessels, he concluded that it was likely that enslaved populations created and used these bowls, and that the placement of the “X” markings likely represented an instrumental form of the BaKongo cosmogram (Ferguson 1992 and 1999). Recognizing that newly-arrived slaves came to the New World with no material belongings, they

nevertheless had roles in creation of material goods in their new enslaved communities, and as such, Ferguson drew analogies to spiritual practices found in ethnohistographies of Africa to attempt to explain the meaning of these objects (Ferguson 1992). He also referenced the fact that the bowls were found underwater, potentially representing the spiritual (watery) world of the BaKongo cosmogram.

Ritualistic items similar to what would have been used in Africa at that time also included kettles with “X” markings in white chalk or ash, as evidenced by rituals performed by African American priests in Cuba who made special charms with these markings and materials (Ferguson 1992). Ferguson claimed that the combination of marks, hand-built earthenware, circles, and underwater context suggested that African American priests performed traditional rituals passed from Africa to the South Carolina lowcountry (Ferguson 1992, 1999).

The role of archaeology is to find the material culture and its patterns within context that can help further interpret the meanings in the materials. Fennell used deposits found within the so-called Jordan Plantation Quarters curer’s cabin to test his model of ethnogenic bricolage as a process whereby instrumental expressions of the core symbol serve a purpose of communicating community cohesion by:

...play[ing] an important role in communications across cultures and in the formation of new social relationships brought together by intersecting diasporas. In time, these social relationships can solidify into new, cohesive culture groups that articulate their own shared meaning system. From the disparate elements of varied instrumental symbols, new core symbols and emblematic designs are configured to communicate the new culture’s sense of identity (Fennell 2007: 9).

Through an analysis of the core symbol of the BaKongo cosmogram, the sets of “crossroads” deposits found aligned with the cardinal directions underneath the cabins of the Jordan Plantation revealed patterns from both BaKongo and Yoruba elements of West African origin. These patterns support the interpretation of Fennell’s theory that men and women from various individual African cultures who were brought together in the Jordan Plantation slave quarters developed new social relationships that enabled the development of a new shared meaning system for the sake of creating a strong community identity (Brown 2015).

In addition to the interpretation of a conjurer’s cabin, Brown has found additional distinct patterns at the Jordan Plantation that appear to have origins in West Africa, the Caribbean, and South America (Brown 1988; Brown 2004; Brown 2015). These patterns include the determination of community membership and burial practices (Bruner 1996; Brown 1988), and craft specialization (Garcia 1988; Harris 1988).

Through the analysis of historical, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence, this chapter has provided a model that can be used to test the hypothesis that enslaved communities had a need for social control to maintain a collective identity, serve internal justice, and regulate moral behaviors. This model is based on the Gullah and Geechee historical narratives and ethnography of spiritual practices associated with social control, specifically as they relate to the roles of the church and the conjurer/healer. These social control mechanisms reflect the influences of both West African and Euro-Christian belief systems in a community struggling to survive in a new world of oppression.

CHAPTER 3

THE JORDAN PLANTATION ARCHAEOLOGICAL CORROLATES

OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Archaeological correlates of social control have been identified at the Jordan Plantation African American quarters that will be used to test the Gullah and Geechee ethnographic models of social control. These correlates include Jordan Plantation African American burial practices, the presence of an elder, and subfloor “crossroad” patterns in the church and curer’s cabins.

The Jordan Plantation Burial Practices

David Bruner’s master’s thesis discussed the burial practices of the slave and tenants in the Juden cemetery at the Jordan Plantation, and how they related to their community’s system of kinship (Bruner 1996). The Juden cemetery is located on the Jordan Plantation, and likely named for its pronunciation of “Jordan” with the “r” dropped over its lifetime (Brown 2018, personal communication). “Based on a strong set of supporting factors...the Juden cemetery is, at the very least, dominated by burials of people of African-American heritage” (Bruner 1996: 89). Bruner found both Anglo-European and African-American burial traits in the Juden cemetery, and as such, represented a “synthesis of Anglo-European and African-American burial patterns” (Bruner 1996: 90). Of the 37 cemetery artifacts identified above ground, five of them were interpreted as grave markers that had been designed to represent the symbolic BaKongo cosmogram, similar to the “symbolic structure[s] previously defined through the excavations of the slave and tenant quarters” (Bruner 1996: 95). Additionally, a marker was identified as the bottom half of the Bakongo cosmogram at the entrance of the

Juden cemetery (Figure 3.1). The bottom half of the cosmogram has been associated with the world of ancestors and spirits (Thompson 1983). A brick found by Brown from the wall of a slave cabin interpreted previously being the Jordan elder had the cosmogram inscribed on its surface (Brown 2013: 114).



Figure 3.1 Juden Cemetery entrance marker at the Jordan Plantation represents the lower half of the BaKongo cosmogram (image courtesy of Brown)

In addition to the grave marker cosmogram patterns, Bruner identified several instances of upright metal pipes at the graves in the Juden cemetery. Thompson identified the meaning of the uses of the upright pipes in African-American burial practices as “...deposits of pipes of all kinds, representing voyage, through smoke or water, from this world to the next...” (Thompson 1983: 139). Bruner also noted that the “vertical line of transportation represented by the upright pipes corresponds with the vertical line of the *Yowa* cross; symbolizing the path between the world ‘above’ of the living and the world ‘below’ of the dead (Bruner 1996: 99). Bruner’s research further identified the position of the Juden cemetery next to a waterway (a slough which runs north-south to the cemetery and is a

tributary to the San Bernard river) as being an important example of West-African spiritual practice (Bruner 1996: 106). Waterways have been interpreted to play an important role in Kongo cosmology in acting as the “...boundary between the two worlds [the living and the dead] consist[ing] of the water of pools and rivers...” (Jacobson-Widding 1991: 177).

The burial patterns of the Juden cemetery reflect patterns that indicate that individuals were returned to their “home” location of childhood for burial, similar to the Gullah/Geechee burial practices for those who “caught sense” at their home plantation. Bruner noted that “individuals are marrying outside of the Jordan community but are returning to be buried with their parents” (Bruner 1996: 109). For example, Palatine Bivens, whose some descendants claim was born in Africa, lived at the Jordan Plantation in the 1880 census. Her father is Isaac Holmes, also buried at the cemetery, but Isaac’s wife does not appear to be. Palatine’s children also appear to be buried at the Juden cemetery, based on death records, tombstones, and oral tradition, although some had departed the Jordan Plantation to establish lives elsewhere (Brown 2018, personal communication). Palatine’s husband, Sam Bivens, grew up at a different location in the northern U.S., but appears to be buried at the Juden, likely because returning home would have been nearly impossible given the distance (Brown 2018, personal communication).

In another example, Claiborn Holmes, who was said in oral tradition to have been born in South Carolina appeared in the 1870 census, and was known from historical documentation to be the Jordan community’s resident minister (Wright 1994). There are tombstones at the cemetery that show that his children (Claiborn Holmes II and Claiborn Holmes III) and grandchildren, are also buried there, where they would have “caught sense” (Brown 2018, personal communication). Claiborn Holmes II had a wife named Hester

Watson Holmes, and they had three children together. Although Hester Holmes lived at the Jordan plantation for around forty-five years, she was not born and raised on the Jordan plantation, and therefore not considered “of” the community (Brown 2018, personal communication). Although not known for certain, she does not appear to be buried in the Juden cemetery with her husband and children. Bruner also found similar patterns of spouses being buried with their own birth families (instead of with their spouses) in nearby Brazoria African American cemeteries, indicating that these practices were intentional and held meaning (Bruner 1996).

According to Bruner, census records show a “pattern of families ‘taking in’ children from other families and raising them over a period of time” (Bruner 1996: 110). Oral history has been that Claiborn Holmes was father to George Holmes and Moscow Holmes, though he was likely not their biological father (Brown 2018, personal communication). The death certificate of George Holmes lists his father as “unknown,” and George’s place of birth as Africa. This provides some evidence that Claiborn Holmes “took in” George Holmes, where George would have “caught sense” at the Jordan Plantation, and was therefore later buried there. Just as the Gullah and Geechee practice, “the solidarity of the extended family and the birth family served as mechanisms of support and protection against the persecution of the surrounding Anglo-European society...This cross-family support system is reflected in these individuals being buried in an extended family cluster of a different last name” (Bruner 1996: 110). This burial pattern is similar to those that Guthrie described of the Gullah and Geechee community who “caught sense” at a particular plantation (Guthrie 1996). Once a person formally caught sense in a particular community, upon death, members were buried in the cemetery of the plantation on which they caught sense: “...the rights of full personhood, that

is, access to the office of praise house leader, the right to seek land use rights, and the right to burial into the plantation graveyard, come into existence when persons complete the catching-sense process” (Guthrie 1996: 106). Even “outside children, so long as they catch sense on a plantation, are entitled to the identical cluster rights that accrue to all other plantation members” (Guthrie 1996: 107).

The Jordan Plantation Elder

In the ethnographic model of the Gullah and Geechee communities in “catching sense” and “seekin”, one of the important roles of an elder was to teach children the social norms and community rules as they grew in order to become formal members of the adult community and this was critical in the functioning of that community (Bailey 2000; Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996). In his research at the Jordan Plantation, Brown found several artifacts that led to the interpretation of “cabin I-A-2” as having belonged to an “elder” among the African American community (Brown 2013: 114-118). One of the artifacts discovered by Brown’s team was interpreted as a fly whisk (Figure 3.1), which, in addition to serving the practical function of brushing away insects, was identified as a piece of a leader or chief’s regalia that would have been used during his official duties within many West African communities (Brown 2013: 115; Thompson 1983).



Figure 3.2 Photograph of the “fly whisk” recovered from the southeastern corner of the elder’s cabin —adapted from Brown 2013.

Also within this cabin, Brown's team found tubular white, green, and pink glass beads that were interpreted as having been part of a necklace, and a chicken spur that had likely been worn on a string as a necklace (Brown 2013: 117). Discovered among hundreds of brick fragments within the fill of the eastern builder's trench of this cabin were two fragments of the same brick with distinct markings that were likely placed facing inside the cabin, hidden from plain view (Figure 3.3) (Brown 2013: 114). The markings on these bricks were a "raised" design that was made carefully and intentionally by smoothing of the brick, leaving only a "raised" oval design with a cross dividing it into quadrants, and its design was intentionally facing the interior of the cabin, hidden from outsiders (Brown 2013: 114). Brown interpreted this as being associated with the BaKongo Cosmogram symbol similar to those found on colonoware ceramics from South Carolina (Ferguson 1992; Brown 1994, Brown 2013: 114).



Figure 3.3 Two photographs of two adjoining fragments of a brick found in the eastern wall builder's trench near the southeastern corner. In the right image, the crossed lines in the center of the oval can be seen – adapted from Brown 2013.

Additionally, two upside down iron kettle bases—one deposited under the subfloor of the adjacent church cabin, and the other deposited under the subfloor of this cabin-- were found linked to each other by a line of ash and charcoal running along the eastern wall of the connected church cabin's (cabin I-A-1) hearth (Figure 3.4):

Upside down cast iron kettles are historically known to have been employed to deaden the noise created during religious ceremonies conducted in brush arbors and cabins (Raboteau 1978; Johnson 1996). It is possible that these upside down kettle bases were intended to symbolically recreate some of the brush arbor practices, and to demonstrate the “ownership” of the religious beliefs and practices utilized within the praise house (Brown 2013: 110).

Brown further suggests that “kettle bases were intended as both to tie to religious practices of the past and as a further way of sanctifying the interior of the church, minister’s residence, and elder’s residence” (Brown 2013: 117).

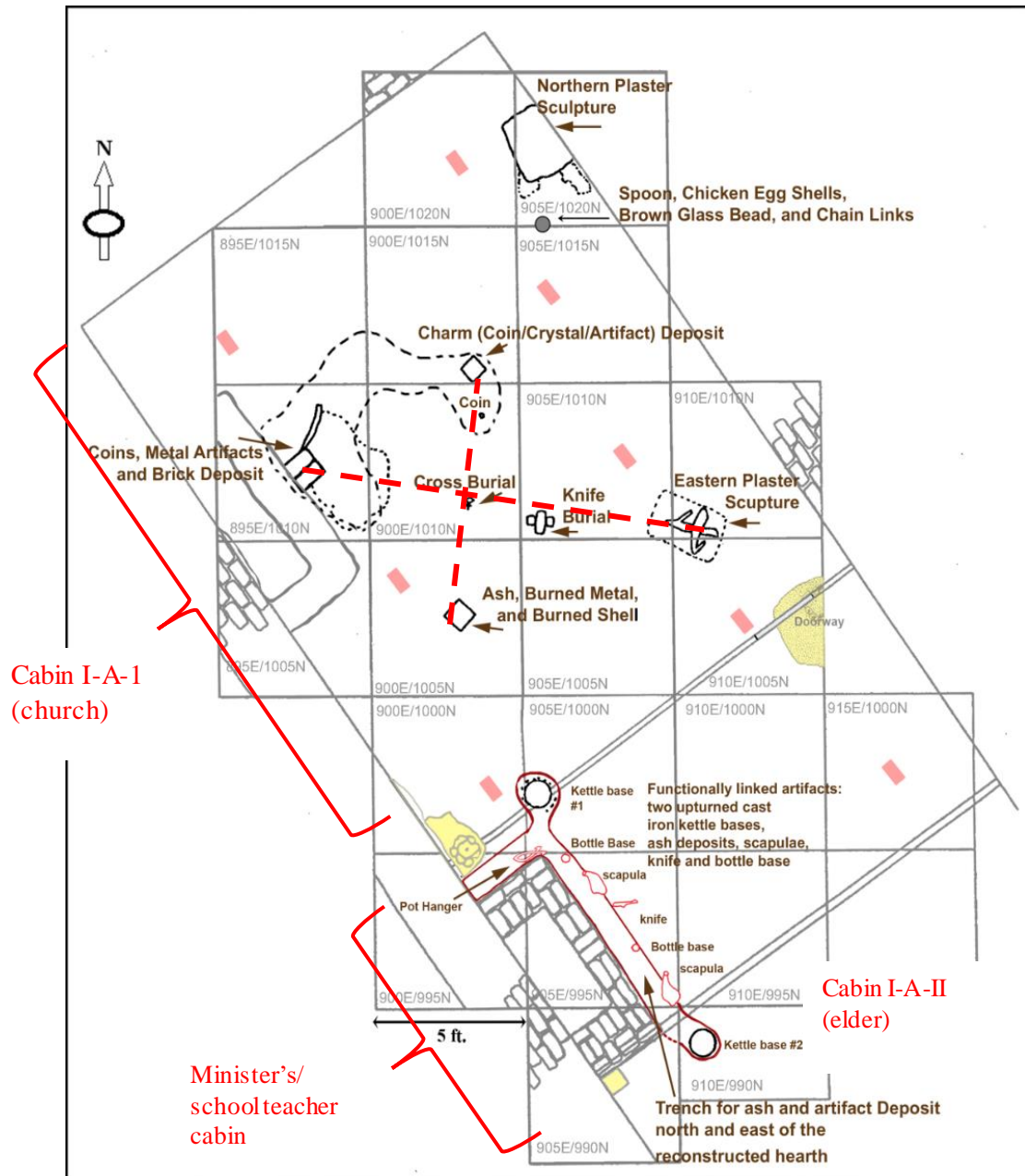


Figure 3.4 Archaeological features identified in the Jordan Plantation Quarters church (I-A-1), and minister's cabin (I-A-1a) – adapted from Brown 2013.

Brown concluded that cabin I-A-2 must have been home to an individual who was regarded as an elder among the Jordan Plantation African American community:

Thus, given the continuous nature of the artifact deposit across the three cabins, the potential symbolism of the up-turned kettle basis in the practice of religion within African American communities on plantations, and the importance of teaching and seeking prior to admission to the church, it seems reasonable to suggest that cabin I-A-2 may have been occupied by at least one person who somehow served the church and the community in this capacity. Also, given the nature of a number of the objects recovered from a small area of this cabin, that it is possible this person might have been ‘familiar’ with West African traditions (Brown 2013: 118).

In an attempt to discover who the elder was that lived in cabin I-A-2, Brown’s team evaluated oral tradition and death records in Brazoria County and found that “George Holmes, known to have been a long term member of the Jordan Quarters Community, had been born in Africa around 1835 – a claim not made on any of the Federal Census forms on which he was identified” (Brown 2013: 114). His death certificate lists “Africa” as his place of birth. In oral tradition, Brown’s team also received confirmation of Holmes’ African birthplace by several family members of his descendants (S. James, personal communication with Brown, 2009). Brown noted that during the 10-years that Texas was a republic (1836-1846), it was legal to import slaves, including from West Africa. Therefore, Brown concluded that “it is entirely possible, given George Holmes’ birth around 1835 that he might have been brought to Texas during that window. However or whenever he arrived in Texas, he appears to have been born in Africa” (Brown 2013: 118). Although Brown found no direct evidence that George Holmes served as an elder within the Jordan African American community or that he resided in cabin I-A-2, “the artifacts found in this small and partially disturbed feature, combined with their direct connections (and even George’s apparent birth)

in Africa, does lend some historical contextual support to this hypothesis” (Brown 2013: 118). Historical records have also shown that Claiborn Holmes, the minister, lived right next to George Holmes, the presumed elder in the 1800s, demonstrating a likely close association between these two influential Quarters community leaders.

The Jordan Plantation Slave Quarters “Crossroads” Patterns

The most notable and large-scale patterns of archaeological findings that show that church and curing leaders used west African-derived mechanisms of social control within the enslaved communities are those made by Brown from the church/praise houses and conjurer/midwife/curer’s cabins at the Jordan Plantation, Magnolia Plantation, Richmond Hill Plantation, and Frogmore Plantation (Brown et. al, 1990, 2004, 2015). At these locations, Brown discovered artifacts that had been placed purposefully along the cardinal directions, with particular ritualistic meaning, in the subfloor deposits of the churches/praise houses and conjurer/midwife/curers’ cabins at plantation locations that employed different task systems.

The Jordan Plantation Church

Christianity served a powerful role in the lives of many enslaved African Americans (Herskovits 1958; Johnson 1996; Brown 2011). The artifacts in cabin I-A-1 at the Jordan Plantation slave quarters led to Brown’s interpretation that this cabin likely served as the Quarters’ church (Brown 1990, 1988, 2004, 2013, 2015). The sub-floor deposits found by Brown’s team at the Jordan Plantation (Figure 3.3) “appear to form two interconnected sets of crossroads deposits: one related to Christianity, its acceptance, and practice by members of

the Quarters community; and the second demonstrating their control of this religious belief system” (Brown 2013: 338).

Brown interpreted the first set of deposits as the “so-called Christian crossroads deposits” (Brown 2013: 338). This set of deposits appeared to be centered on a deposit of a purposefully-placed piece of jewelry that was centered in the middle of the cabin: “a small brass cross set with six red pieces of cut glass and suspended on a small brass chain. The cross and chain were found to have been placed in a shallow hole approximately in the geographic center of the cabin. When discovered, the cross was oriented north to south, with the cross to the south of the closed-clasp chain” (Brown 2013: 338). To the west of the cross was a small brick “altar” with large metal objects and two coins (an 1858 half-dime, and an 1835 perforated half-dime) (Brown 2013: 174, 336, 338). “The very high frequency of artifacts, including many large and complete metal objects... suggests that it also had another function: as an altar, symbolizing the transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead” (Brown 2013: 108). The artifacts included: “a complete (and very heavy) cast iron chisel plow; three kitchen knives (two of which had been placed on the altar); square nails and spikes; a pair of scissors; a copper disk; several large fragments of the wall of a cast iron kettle; the male part of a large cast iron hinge; and several large pieces of unidentifiable metal artifacts” (Brown 2013: 108). To the east of the cross necklace, buried beneath bricks shaped in a cross pattern, a sharp hunting knife was found in a hole. Brown interpreted this as “possibly representing an individual’s rebirth into Christianity and acceptance into membership of the congregation of the praise house. For many African Americans across the South during the 18th through the mid-20th centuries, membership within the praise house/church was attained only after a process of training and evidence of their acceptance

by God” (Brown 2013: 108). This is similar to African rituals that marked the transition from a child to an adult community member, and often included scarification of the body (Creel 1988)” (Brown 2013: 108). To the north of the cross necklace was an 1858 half-dollar, and a quartz crystal interpreted as a “charm deposit” (Brown 2013: 107, 108), and in the southern deposit was a rectangular hole filled with ash, burned shells, and burned metal (Brown 2013: 106, 338).

According to Brown (Brown 2013: 108-109), the second set of crossroads deposits demonstrated the Jordan Plantation’s African and African American control of the Christian religious belief system (Brown 2013: 338). The crossroad pattern was formed starting on the west by the above-mentioned brick altar feature. Purposefully buried on the east was a two-dimensional sculpture made of burned clay and plaster (Brown 2013: 107). Brown’s team had difficulty identifying sculpture’s meaning but noted that it was “depicted as a cross... As Thompson (1983:108) states, ‘The Kongo cross refers therefore to the everlasting continuity of all righteous men and women’ (Brown 2013: 338). The location of the sculpture near the doorway into the reconfigured main room might have been important because, as Wyatt MacGaffey has stated, “the person taking the oath stands upon the cross, situating himself between life and death, and invokes the judgment of God and the dead upon himself” (cited from Thompson 1983:108)” (Brown 2013: 107)). A second plaster and burned clay sculpture was found purposefully buried on the north, eleven feet north of the cross, near the northeastern corner of the cabin, but its design was impossible to identify. Brown stated that “it may be that the importance of the feature was not the design, if any had been present. It could have, instead, been the presence of the two colors and their vertical arrangement. For example, the colors white and red have been noted as having importance in some West

African and Caribbean contexts,” (Brown 2013: 90). In this crossroad pattern, the southern deposit is shared with the first set of crossroads, which is the intentionally placed deposit of ash, charcoal, and burned bone to the south (Figure 3.5).

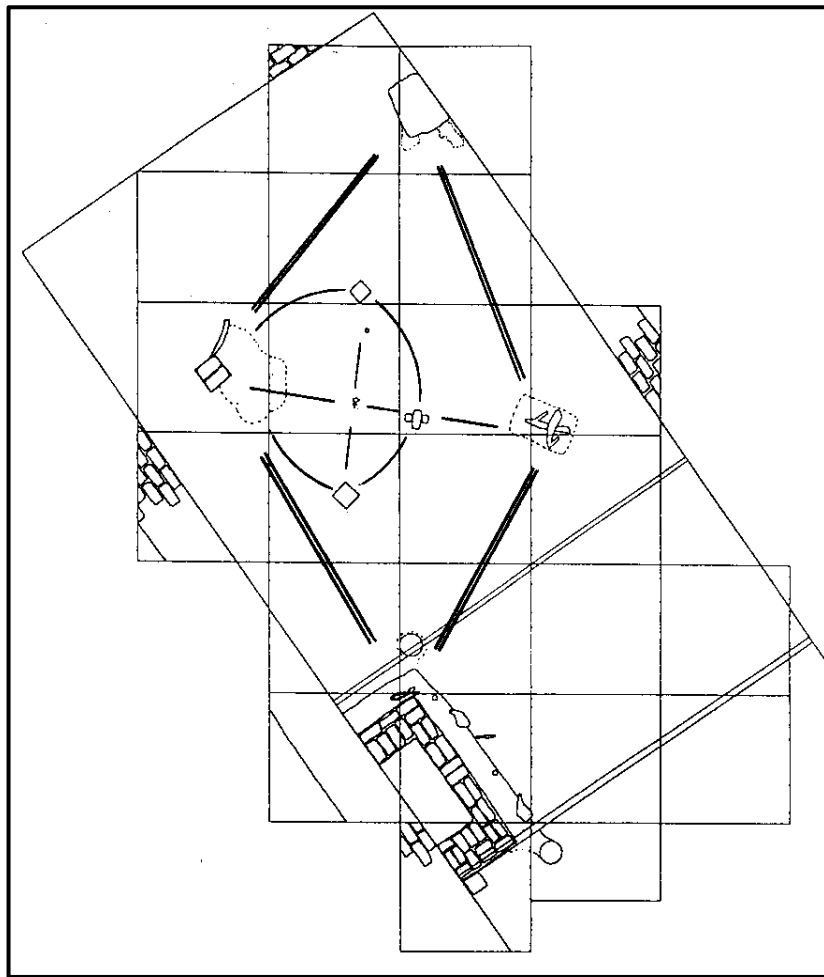


Figure 3.5 Simplified diagram of the two “cosmograms” placed below the floor of the church (cabin I-A-1) – adapted from Brown 2013.

The Jordan Plantation Curer's Cabin

Brown's team interpreted cabin II-B-1 at the Jordan Plantation Quarters as the "curer's cabin" based on the analysis of the artifacts and their patterns of placements along cardinal directions ("crossroads") beneath the footprint of the cabin. The artifacts were interpreted to have been used for "specialized ritual activities undertaken within the cabin... and included: a hole dug on the interior of the north wall of the cabin that had the still partially articulated skeletal remains of three chickens placed within it; a curer's (or healer's) kit, including the likely remains of a *nkisi*; a set of seven coins that had been placed into a shallow hole; a cluster of artifacts (including two cast iron kettles, several cast iron farm implements, Confederate military buttons, chains, and a bayonet, grouped ... as an "amula" – see glossary); and a hole placed beneath the floor of the hearth containing ash, burned ocean shells, and metal spikes" (Brown 2013: 163). The placement of these deposits along the cardinal directions are depicted in Figure 3.6.

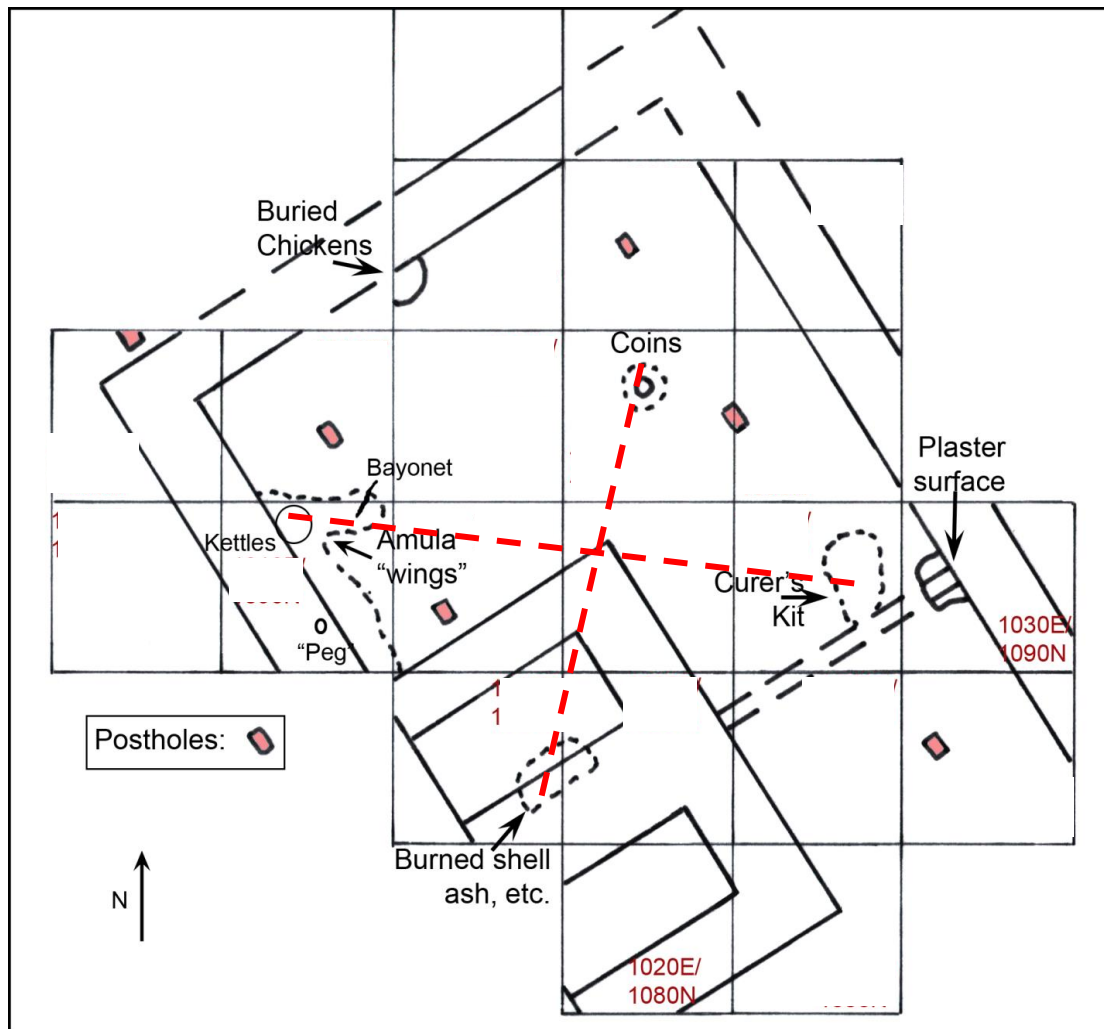


Figure 3.6 A drawing of the units excavated and the features identified within the footprint of the Jordan Plantation curer's cabin (cabin II-B-1) – adapted from Brown 2013.

The items in the curer's kit were identified by Brown as the following (Brown 2013: 171):

- at least two (and possibly all three) of cast iron kettle bases that were recovered in a neat stack;
- several cubes of white chalk (sandwiched between two of the kettle bases);
- two bird skulls;
- a small animal's paw;
- two sealed tubes made of bullet casings;
- cockleshells (both perforated and unperforated);
- a small porcelain doll;
- several fragments of mirrored glass;
- an extraordinarily high (for this site) number of nails, spikes, knife blades, and metal knife-like "shards";
- an iron ring approximately 6.0 inches in diameter and nearly 1.0 inch wide;
- a concave metal "disc" that had a small hole on the flange near the edge of the object;
- several small water rolled pebbles;
- two chipped stone scrapping tools;
- several patent medicine bottles; and
- three pieces of a thermometer.

Brown noted that, "...taken together in their depositional context, they suggest a functional group of objects that were primarily related to African and African American cultures and their beliefs and ritual connected with health care. The thermometer and the patent medicine bottles suggest at least some influence from the medical practices of European-American culture as well" (Brown 2013: 171).

A set of seven coins consisting of four quarters, two dimes, and a half-dime all made of silver were placed along magnetic north under the cabin (Brown 2013: 174). According to Brown, the coins were placed in a cluster "so that they were 'standing' nearly vertically on their sides and oriented north to south. (Brown 2013: 174). "The coins were also carefully arranged in such a way that the perforated half dime was on the outside facing south, then

came three of the quarters (two dated 1853 and one dated 1858), then the 1853 dime, the 1858 dime, and, then the other quarters (dated 1858). Unfortunately, the date on the perforated half dime could not be fully read, although it appears to have dated to the 1850s as well, possibly even 1853 or 1858” (Brown 2013: 174). Given the fact that at least six of the coins, and possibly all seven, were minted during 1853 or 1858, Brown suggested that “this was not simply a random set of coins placed within the feature. Nor do we interpret them as ‘birth coins’. Rather, the dates may have been selected for their importance to the community and/or the curer”” (Brown 2013: 174). However, it remains unclear as to what significance is held in the coins’ dates.

Two complete cast iron kettles positioned one inside the other and wrapped by a heavy chain were discovered in the west side of the cabin in the area that would have been deposited near or underneath the doorway to the cabin (Brown 2013: 176). According to Brown, “a few small pieces of metal (including spikes, nails, and at least two pieces of a chain snaffle bit), ocean shells (both drilled/perforated and undrilled), small fragments of glass (mostly green in color), and bone fragments, were placed within the upper kettle (although the smaller of these fragments might have fallen through the floorboards and ended up in the kettle)” (Brown 2013: 176). The lower kettle had 0.25 feet of ash that was purposefully placed within it. Based on Thompson’s descriptions of West African amulas (Thompson 1983, 2007), Brown interpreted that this set of artifacts could have formed something very similar to a Yoruba Amula, perhaps in reference to Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron. The deposit may have served to protect the cabin and its occupants from harm caused by the outside world, and its location by the front door was possibly an attempt to catch evil

as it tried to enter the cabin (Brown 2013: 175). Art historian Robert Ferris Thompson, an expert in African art history agreed with Brown's interpretation:

...the crossed lines of the cosmogram are viewed as God's writing, not to be drawn by any person without solemnity. This lore comes in handy when we are confronted with a cosmogram in a black dwelling in Brazoria, Texas. The cardinal points include objects which strongly suggest intra-African fusions of patterns of belief; that is, the iron emblems of the Yoruba god of iron placed within the ruling obsession of the Kongo dikenga [cosmogram]. Tentatively, the makers of this site had knowledge of *palo curazo*, such as black Cuban mixing of the Kongo spirit Sarabanda with the Yoruba lord of iron, Ogun. Brazoria is near Houston and Galveston, ports in touch with Havana (Fennell 2007: xvii-xviii).

Brown's team discovered this southern deposit within the cabin's hearth, and it is much like the southern deposit of the church. At the base of the deposit was a plaster surface, made of yellow clay/lime mortar that was covered with ash, broken up and heavily burned ocean shell (especially oyster and whelk shell), and several burned nails (Brown 2013: 179). The pit was then refilled with soil up to the level of the hearth before the brick floor of the firebox was replaced, returning the hearth to its original function of cooking and providing heat and light (Brown 2013: 178). "Due to the ash, burned metal objects, and shell, along with the location of the feature on the south, this deposit might be suggestive of death and/or the world of spirits and ancestors similar to the meaning of the south in the cosmogram and the crossroads models from West Africa (Thompson 1983; Fennell 2007; Ferguson 1992; Brown 1994, 2011, 2012a; Leone and Fry 2001)" (Brown 2013: 178)

Brown summarized the significance of the four deposits from the curer's cabin as follows:

Each of these 4 deposits of artifacts beneath the footprint of cabin II-B-1 can be employed in support of the interpretation of an

African and African-American behavioral/belief system--one that sought to provide some measure of “control” of the outside world through the manipulation of the supernatural world. Taken as a whole, the full set of artifacts and deposits supports the hypothesis that many of the basic beliefs and the associated rituals were of a ‘West African’ origin. In addition, the discovery of the patent medicine bottles, along with the thermometer, suggests strongly that a number of non-West African views were also being used. It is our interpretation that all of these elements support the hypothesis that the Curer had sanctified the floor space of the cabin for its use within the ritual performance of curing, conjuring, and, possibly assisting in the birth of children...(Brown 2013: 179).

Brown also referred to Thompson’s description of West African rituals that take place within space marked out with an “X” oriented to the cardinal directions:

The meanings noted by Thompson (1983) for each of the 4 end points of the cross within an ‘African’ cosmogram are represented by the types of artifacts found within each of the features. Thus, the intersection of these lines might have actually defined the point at which curing and conjuring rituals were accomplished: a point near the northeastern corner of the hearth. Indeed, in his introduction to Fennell’s (2007) book, Thompson notes that, taken as a whole, these features formed an interesting hybrid form of a Kongo cosmogram (a dikenga)” (Brown 2013: 180).

The sub-floor deposit of three chickens found along the northern wall appeared to have been “placed below the bed in the cabin and next to a small wooden chest that contained objects that might have been reminders of the conjurer’s husband and two children who died between 1870 and 1880. The chickens would have aided in protection from the souls of the dead and would have aided the dead as well” (Brown 2013: 180).

According to Brown, the church and the curer’s cabin represent both African and Christian belief systems being brought together into a single belief system by members of the Jordan Plantation Quarters community. While many slave narratives discuss both aspects of the spiritual nature of African American communities, Brown’s findings represent the first time they have been defined archaeologically within the same community (Brown 2013:

337). These deposits help to demonstrate the role played by African Americans in the development of Christian religious beliefs and the adaptation of those beliefs in a fashion meaningful to themselves” (Brown 2013: 337). Brown has identified similar crossroads patterns of deposits at enslaved communities across three other plantations in United States: Richmond Hill (Georgia), Frogmore Manor (South Carolina), and Magnolia (Louisiana) (Figure 3.7a and Figure 3.7b).

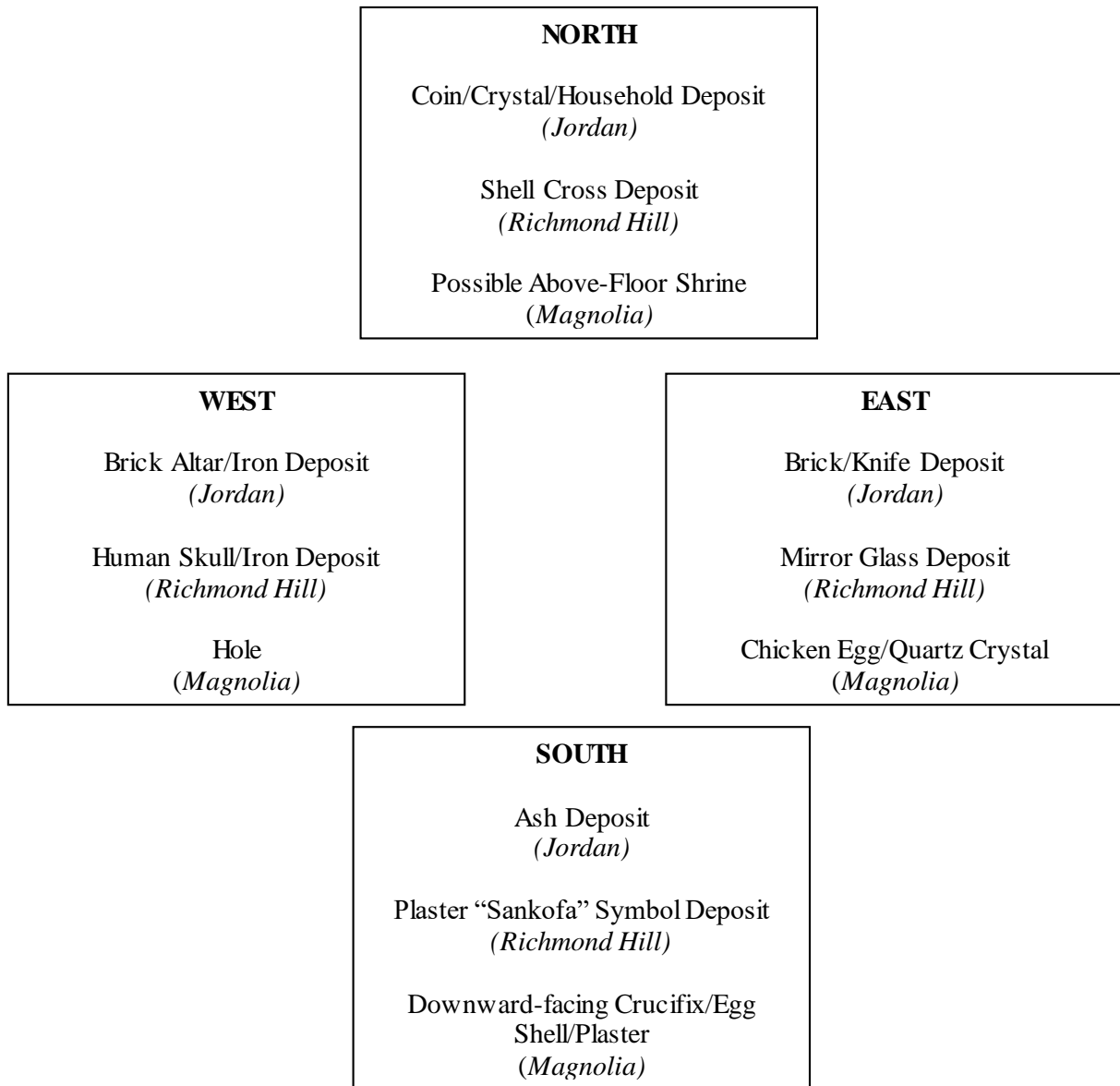


Figure 3.7a Cardinal Direction Crossroads Deposits Found from Praise Houses/Church Structures – adapted from Brown 2015.

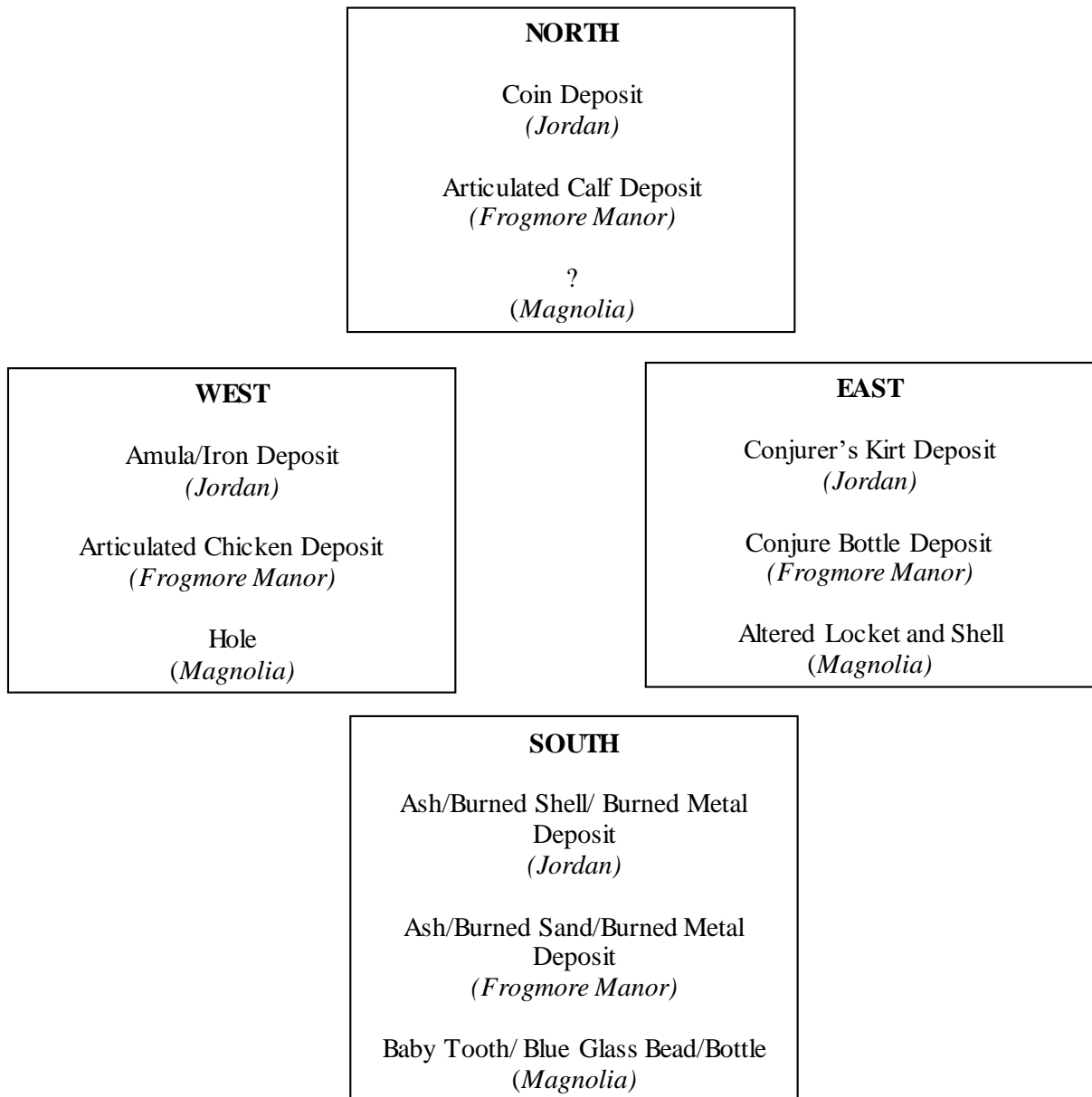


Figure 3.7b Cardinal Direction Crossroads Found from Curers/Conjurers/Midwives structures – adapted from Brown 2015.

The types of artifacts found in the eastern and western locations for the religious structures are strikingly different than those in the same locations in the curer's cabin, indicating that the likely had slightly different meanings. For example, in the curer's east location, the items were clearly associated with conjure, representing an attempt to control one's personal life. The eastern artifacts in the church, however, were items that represented aspects of African community initiation rituals and cosmology. For example, Brown interpreted the knife as a reference to scarification as was done in Poro and Sande, the mirror and glass crystal "representing the glint of the rising sun over water (or, as Thompson put it, the "flash" of the spirit; Thompson 1993)" (Brown 2013: 9). In the west, an articulated chicken in the curer's cabin was identified to Brown by members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation told Brown as traditionally an item of significance to a curer:

...[they said that chickens were] protectors of the living from the spirits of the departed and that chickens were employed in the discovery of conjure tricks. They noted that chickens had been sacrificed on the death of an individual, among the Gullah and Geechee, in part as a protection for the living.... (Brown 2004: 87).

In the church, the western items were mostly metal items likely in reference to the metal god Ogun in Yoruba religion, but also significant are the brick altars which Brown defined as, "a place, object, or structure where sacrifices may be offered, ceremonies enacted. Alternatively, they can simply be a focal point for contemplation and self-reflection. They are often dedicated to deities or ancestors" (Brown 2013: 6).

Based on the patterns across these multiple locations, Brown has interpreted that there are two distinct sets of meanings reflected through the use of the instrumental version of the cosmogram within the slave quarter communities: a specific meaning reflecting the

community's power, and a separate meaning reflecting the power of the individual. Both meanings would have been taught to the community members by its leaders, and served as social control mechanisms within the community. For example, the churches and praise houses were very public spaces. According to Brown (Brown 2017: 219), the churches consisted of artifacts that likely came from various households within the plantation's enslaved community, and they were notably different from those found under the curer/conjurer/midwife's cabins, which were more private spaces. Given the roles of the church (political space, community) and the roles of a conjurer or healer (private space, healing) Brown summarized the possible deviation in meanings based on the archaeological patterns his team has identified in Table 1.1 (Brown 2017: 219):

Direction	Cosmogram Meaning	Healing (curer/midwife/private space)	Religious (church/praise house)
East	Birth, dawn	Healer's kit, taking control of one's life	Rebirth as an adult in the community
North	Power in the world of the living, masculinity	Power in the world of the living, community	Power of the community and one's role in it
West	Power and transition of death	Protection from the actions of others both living and dead	Transition to the world of spirits and ancestors, heaven
South	Spiritual power, the world of spirits and the dead	Power in the world of spirits and ancestors	Power in the world of spirits and ancestors, memory

Table 1.1 Interpretation of crossroads patterns meanings based on artifacts from enslaved healing and religious locations – adapted from Brown 2017:219.

This chapter has presented the archaeological correlates of social control identified at the Jordan Plantation Quarters community and similar plantations in the eastern United States that have been used to test the Gullah and Geechee ethnographic models of social control. Community burial practices, the presence of an elder, and sub-floor “crossroad” patterns in the church and curer’s cabins provide the archaeological evidence that the church and the curers held central roles in using African-derived and Christianity-adapted spiritual belief systems in the enforcement of these social control mechanisms. Knowledge of these spiritual practices, including their meanings, were hidden within symbols and crossroads deposits and known exclusively to the African American communities who lived there during the time of enslavement and likely through the period of post-emancipation residency on the Jordan Plantation.

CHAPTER 4

JORDAN PLANTATION MAIN YARD ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

Brown's archaeological evidence from the Levi Jordan Plantation Quarters suggested that the African American community used spiritual belief systems as social control mechanisms to manage internal conflict and promote community cohesion. What can be said about their attempts to control their fate beyond the Quarters? This chapter will examine archaeological patterns of deposits around the Jordan Plantation main house in an attempt to determine whether or not the enslaved Jordan African American community may have practiced spiritually-based social control beyond the quarters in an attempt to control their fate at the hands of their owners. While a limited amount of the data to be presented here have been discussed elsewhere (Ericson 2015; Ruttley et. al, 2017), this chapter will discuss new details to provide a deeper analysis of the evidence.

Archaeological excavations of the Jordan Plantation house main yard were performed in various sections at different times by different teams over nearly a decade. In the late 1980s, the house owner Dorothy Cotton requested excavation by the University of Houston (UH) prior to some planned main house upgrades requested by its tenants (Brown 2013). In 2005, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department commissioned the Center for Archaeological Studies (CAS) (Leezer 2006) for yard excavations to gain more historic information about the plantation. In 2010, the Texas Historical Commission contracted to Prewitt and Associates, Inc. (PAI) to perform excavations prior to the upgrade of the house structure (McWilliams et al., 2013). PAI's excavation report provided a comprehensive map of where these teams excavated, shown in Figure 4.1. UH excavations were oriented facing magnetic north, while CAS and PAI's excavations were oriented according to the house. This thesis

will evaluate the artifact deposits based on UH's practice of magnetic north, which will be indicated on each map as a new magnetic north arrow and cardinal direction letters in red.

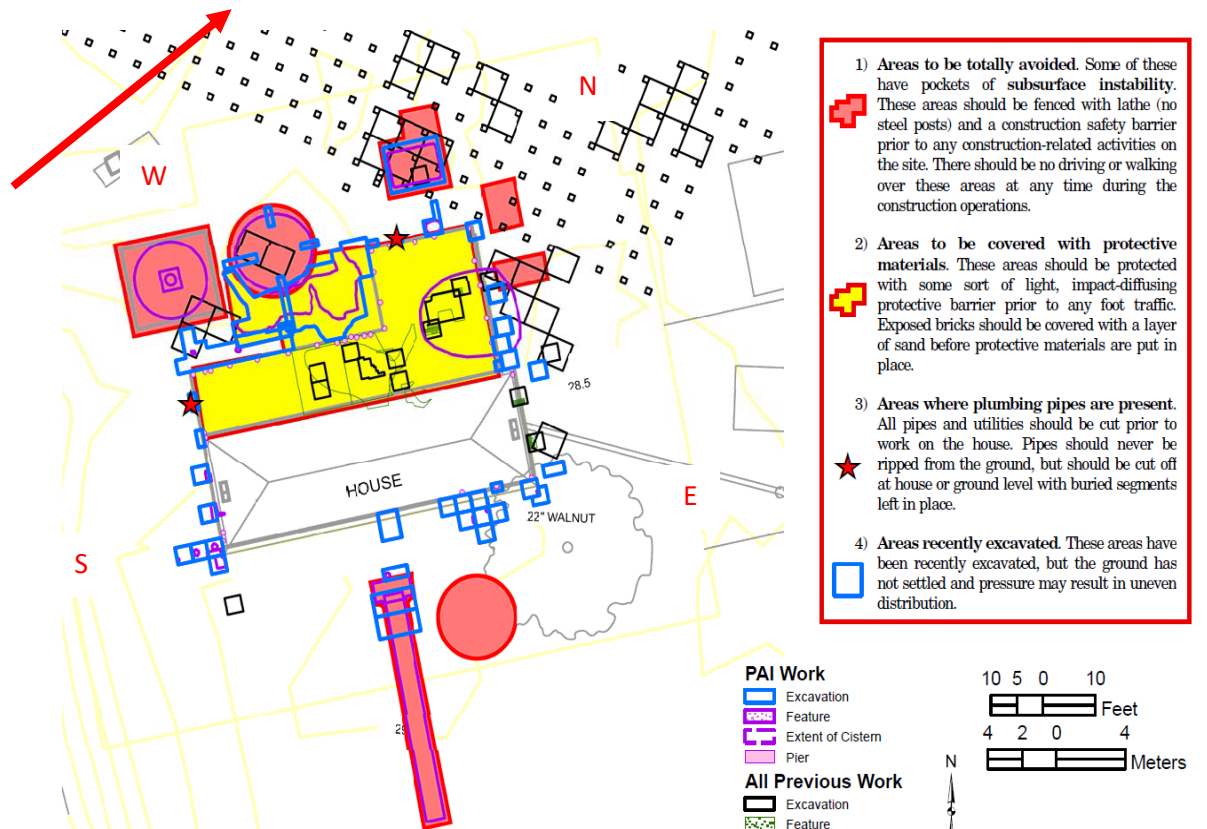


Figure 4.1 PAI's map of the excavations performed by UH, CAS, and PAI—adapted from McWilliams et. al, 2013.

The history of the architecture of the house is inconsistent, but based on historical records, interviews, and photographs, the PAI team created a map that is depicted in Figure 4.2 that attempted to delineate the original antebellum structure from the twentieth-century additions (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 42). This map will be used as the basis of reference for

identifying the location of the artifacts and features that will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter.

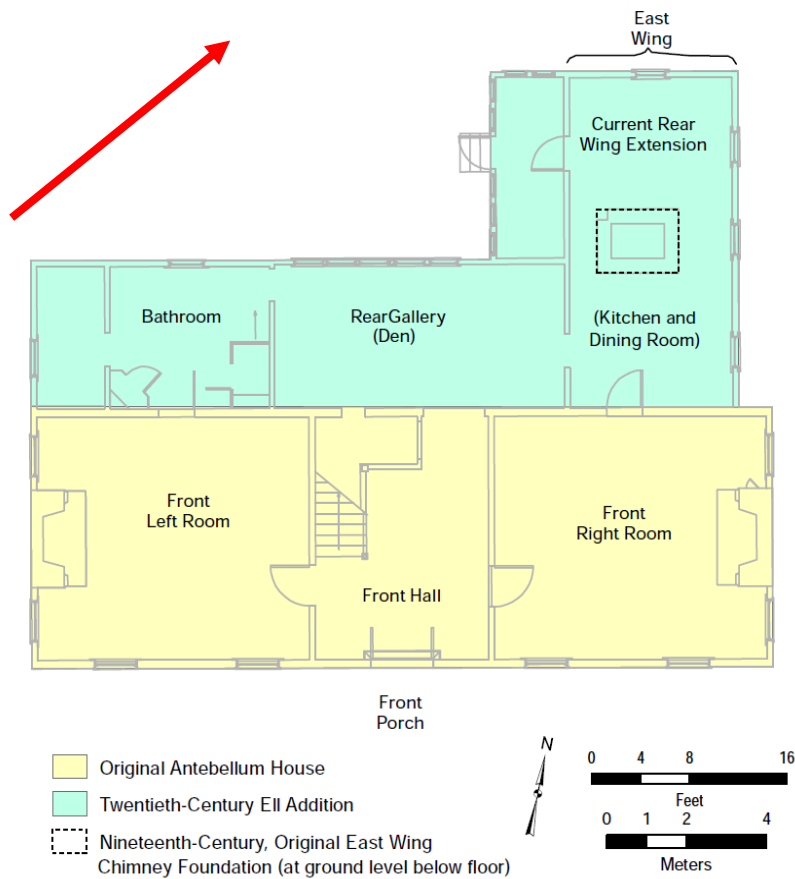


Figure 4.2 PAI's depiction of the Levi Jordan house plan
—adapted from McWilliams et. al, 2013.

The PAI excavations near and under the main house were the most extensive and revealed the majority of the set of crossroads deposits around the main house. In this thesis, these crossroads deposits were characterized based on their cardinal direction locations, their contents and orientation in the ground, their similarities to previous crossroads deposits, and their likelihood of being deposited during the period of slavery at the Jordan Plantation. These were identified as a bucket of metal and debris (Feature 21) in the western deposit, a U.S. 1853 gold coin in the eastern deposit, a can with oyster shells in Feature 24 in the southern deposit, and a small area of interesting soil change that warrants further excavation in the northern deposit.

The Western Deposit: Bucket of Metal and Debris (Feature 21)

The western deposit was located by PAI along where the northwest back side of the house where the twentieth-century addition would have been. PAI's report identified a metal container found buried in a hand-dug pit roughly 6-14 inches below the surface, under brick rubble (Figure 4.3):

The iron container appeared to be a bucket or a large thick-walled can 12 inches in diameter and 8 inches deep. It was buried upright with its open end facing upward and was filled with artifacts. The container had been placed into a hand-dug pit, and the vertical pit edge was observed ca. 3 inches west of the metal container. The top rim of the container appeared to be relatively flat, while the profile showed that it had a flat bottom. Immediately beneath the container was a small rectangular soil stain measuring about 4.5x7 inches. This thin stain appeared to be the bottom of the hole that was dug for the container to be inserted. Unfortunately, the metal container had deteriorated to such a degree that no identifying characteristics or diagnostic features remained intact (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 214).



Figure 4.3 PAI's photograph of the Feature 21 buried iron container
– adapted from McWilliams 2013

The contents of the bucket were examined in the laboratory and revealed the following items (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 214):

- unidentified metal conglomerates, 72.3 g
- unidentifiable metal, 2000 g
- 11 wire nails
- 4 square nails
- 1 copper washer
- 3 small whiteware sherds (one embossed)
- window glass fragments, 3.2 g
- 11 bottle glass fragments (9 clear, 1 thick dark brown or black, and 1 thin amber)
- 1 Prosser button fragment
- 1 bone fragment
- oyster shell fragments, 58.7 g
- 3 small handmade brick fragments

PAI's report stated, "This collection of items was tightly packed into the container. It is likely that most of the unidentifiable corroded metal represents construction materials such as nails, screws, and bolts" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 214). As a result, PAI was unable to

determine the bucket's function or meaning and why it would have been purposefully placed into the ground.

The extremely large amount of metal found in the bucket (at least 2,000 g) is especially significant, especially for its location in the west, given that the abundance of metal items were the hallmark of the western crossroads deposits identified by Brown in the Jordan Quarters curer and church cabins. The PAI archaeologists could not perform a detailed analysis of the contents due to its deteriorated condition, and the artifacts currently reside with the Texas Historical Commission. Requests for their access for the purpose of additional evaluation for this thesis were unanswered, so a re-examination of the detailed analysis of the contents was impossible. A re-examination of the provenience of the contents, such as the order in which the items were placed into the bucket, could support the possibility that the items within the bucket themselves have meaning. For example, metal conglomerates found in the bottom of the bucket would indicate that they were the placed first with primary importance to the person who placed them there. Similarly, finding the three small brick fragments at the top-most layer of artifacts in the bucket could indicate that they were likely part of the yard fill when the bucket was covered over.

It would also be intriguing to be able to discern the number of the types of components within the container to best interpret the meaning of Feature 21. For example, according to Thompson, an important number in Yoruba culture is the number sixteen because of its use in "countering uncertainty with divination" (Thompson 1983: 34). Thompson stated, "the literature of the Ifa divination divides into sixteen main parts called *odu*. Each *odu* bears the name of a royal prince. To hear the verses is to come into the presence of a royal voice imparting insight and infinite experience" (Thompson 1983: 34).

Additionally, “‘The Sixteen Sacred Palm-Nuts’ are held the most ancient and important of the instruments of divination” (Thompson 1983: 34). Given the different types of materials used in Ilfa divination rituals (Thompson 1983: 34-35), one could interpret the potential function of Feature 21 as being that which might have served as a ritualistic protection and discernment mechanism by the Jordan Plantation enslaved community.

The PAI report provided a possible interpretation of Feature 21, which was that one of the children in the home, Mike Martin, who was born in 1942 in the home and lived there until 1947, buried this bucket as part of his enjoyment for burying his father’s tools around the yard (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 79 and PAI oral history transcripts, provided by PAI). PAI did find instances of two buried wrenches- one on the southwest side of a nineteenth-century detached kitchen and one on the southeast side, but there was no mention of the depth at which these were found (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 79, 182). A comparison of the depth of the Feature 21 bucket and the wrenches would help elucidate the validity of the idea that such a child of at most five years of age could have dug a hole 18 to 26 inches deep to bury upright a 12 inch diameter by 8 inch deep cast iron container and fill it with the wide variety of heavy, mostly metal, contents that PAI identified. Unfortunately, PAI’s report did not provide the depth at which the wrenches were found. The report did provide a chronology of historic Brazoria storms and floods beginning in 1850 that can be used to help determine the rough time period the bucket might have been buried (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 14). The report cited a “devastating flood” in 1854, record 24-hour rainfall in 1899, a severe flood of December 1913, “such had not been experienced since the terrible flood of 1833,” another “major flood” in 1929, and another “major flood” in 1940 (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 14-15; Creighton 1975: 209 as cited in Freeman 2013: 13; U.S Congress 1914). Brown

estimated that about 3 to 6 inches of silt had been deposited on the Jordan property during the great flood of 1913 (Brown 2005; Brown and Cooper 1990). Thus, given the number of extreme floods, particularly the flood of 1913 that brought flood waters and silt from the Brazos, San Bernard, and Colorado rivers, the depth at which the bucket was found indicates that it was likely buried before 1913, and possibly before the first recorded flood in 1854, which would be the year after the estimated start of construction of the Jordan house. At the very least, this soil depth would have indicated that the bucket would have buried well before Mike Martin's time on the plantation from 1942-1947. There was no mention of the Feature 21 hole being seen by PAI in the alluvial deposit.

When interpreting Feature 21, it is also important to consider the context of the archaeological patterns of the Jordan Plantation Quarters. In the curer's cabin, Brown interpreted the presence of a *nkisi* (plural: *minkisi*), "... similar to those found among the BiKongo peoples of West Africa. The Nkisi was employed as an integral part of the curing ritual among some West African cultures, but this represents its first interpreted presence in North America. Taken together, this full set of materials was utilized in the manipulation of the supernatural world for the benefit of the health of members of the community" (Brown 2013: 336). Taken in context, Feature 21 can be interpreted as being a *nkisi*. According to Thompson, "minkis containers are various: leaves, shells, packets, sachets, bags, ceramic vessels, wooden images, statuettes, cloth bundles, among other objects. Each *nkisi* contains medicines (*bilongo*) and a soul (*mooyo*), combined to give it a life and power. The medicines themselves are spirit-embodying and spirit-directing" (Thompson 1983). Many scholars have reported cases in which slaves purposefully left conjure bags or diviners' bundles in particular places around the houses of their white oppressors as a means of manipulating the

spirits to help or harm others (Leone and Fry 1999 and 2001). In the case of Feature 21, this deposit held a large amount of metal, and in its location in the west is especially significant as for its identical patterns found in the western locations of the curer's cabin and the church in the Quarters. Given these accounts, the context of the container within the main house yard, and the interpretations from the Jordan Plantation Quarters, it is reasonable to conclude that Feature 21 could have played an important role as a spiritual mechanism of social control by the Jordan Plantation African American community.

When using Brown's (2017) previously-defined meanings of directionality of deposits according to the church and the curer, Feature 21's presence on the west side of the house could represent the Jordan African American community's attempt to control their fate and protect themselves from the oppression of their white owners who lived in the house. According to Brown's interpretation, this would have represented protection from the actions of others, both living and dead (Brown 2017: 219). Based on its location in the west, its notable amount of metal, and its likely time of deposit around the period of enslavement at the Jordan Plantation, Feature 21 serves as one (the western) of the sets of four crossroads deposits at the Jordan main house identified through the reinterpretation of the artifacts in this thesis.

The Eastern Deposit: U.S 1853 Gold Coin

In the east, while dismantling and excavating pier 2 in the southeast corner of the antebellum house structure, (the front right corner of the house), PAI discovered an 1853 U.S. one-dollar gold coin (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 112). PAI's report stated, "the most significant find is an 1853 gold coin found in the brick pad at the bottom of the southeast corner pier" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: xi). The coin was "recovered from on top of the third

course of bricks, sealed in a context that clearly indicates it was placed there at the time the pier pad was constructed (Figure 4.4). The face of the 1853 U.S. one-dollar coin has an image of Lady Liberty surrounded by a ring of 13 stars. On the back is printed “1 /DOLLAR /1853” encircled by a wreath and “UNITED STATES OF AMERICA” printed in an arch around the top (Figure 4.5). This Liberty Head coin is 1.00 mm thick and 13.13 mm (1/2 inch) in diameter. The coin is slightly worn and has fine scratches on its faces but would probably be considered in “fine” condition in collector’s terms.” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 112). PAI noted that this coin was placed within a pier that was in a “prominent location in the house- the front right corner when facing the house” and that it was likely “placed as a date coin in a ritual or ceremonial context by the owner or builder when the house construction began. This coin probably dates the beginning of the house construction to 1853” (McWilliams et. al, 2013:112).



Figure 4.4 PAI’s photograph of the location of the 1853 gold coin in the southeast corner pier of the house – adapted from McWilliams 2013.



Figure 4.5 PAI's photograph of U.S 1853 gold coin, front and back sides
—adapted from McWilliams 2013.

According to PAI's report, their team was aware of Brown's spiritually-based findings in the Jordan Plantation Quarters community, and they acknowledged that Brown's interpretations helped to guide the PAI excavations and the artifact interpretations (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 38). Regarding the likelihood of using slave labor to build the house, PAI's report stated:

The owner and his master builder would certainly have directed construction of the house, but slaves would have provided most of the labor. The enslaved workers would have had ample opportunity to place ritual objects in specific places during the construction if they believed that conjuring items could alter the behavior of the owners or otherwise provide some form of protection (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 83).

Despite this consideration, however, the PAI archaeologists interpreted this 1853 gold coin as more than likely "a date coin that was placed in this location by Levi Jordan or a master builder in a cornerstone foundation rite" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: xi). PAI's report described how coins were commonly used in Masonic foundation ceremonies (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 222). In PAI's analysis of coins used in foundations around the world, they noted

that it was common practice for coins to be placed between two layers of the foundation's stones in the pier that is on the right for a visitor facing the house (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 222). "Coins can have multiple and complex meanings when used in foundation ceremonies, (good luck, symbolic sacrifice, recognition of higher authority, etc.). Their original meanings probably changed through time and have become lost even to those who now perform the ceremonies" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 224). The report explained that coin dates used in masonic rituals were typically always intentionally the same date as the start of construction of the building, and in this case the 1853 date of the coin matched the "combined historical evidence" of the likely house construction start date of 1853 (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 224). PAI's final interpretation of the coin placement in the pier was as follows:

It is possible that the coin was placed in the corner pier of the Levi Jordan house by a Freemason during a Masonic cornerstone ceremony. Freemasons played a prominent role in the Republic of Texas and early statehood. The Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas was established in Houston in 1838, and by 1845 there were 25 Masonic lodges in the Republic, including one in Brazoria (Grand Lodge of Texas 2012; Vaughn 2012). Levi Jordan would not have had to look far to find a Freemason to conduct his foundation ceremony, and he might have been a Freemason himself" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 225).

PAI's report acknowledged that more research was needed to determine whether there were any clear connection between the coin placement, the Freemasons in Texas in 1853, and Levi Jordan or his friends and family members, but concluded the final conclusion was that "the coin was placed in a sacred spot in the structural foundation as part of a foundation ceremony or cornerstone rite" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 221). Indeed, perhaps the coin did represent a sacred spot as part of some important ritual, but a reinterpretation of the coin's meaning from the perspective of an enslaved Jordan laborer might suggest that this

ritual was that of its placement as the eastern part of a crossroads deposit in an effort to influence their treatment by their white owners.

Historic records of the establishment of masonic lodges in Texas are important when considering whether a mason would have actually been involved in placing the coin in the pier (Ruttley, Ericson, Brown 2017; Ericson 2015). The first Masonic lodge was formed before the arrival of Levi Jordan (1848) in Texas in December 1835 at Holland Lodge No. 36 in Brazoria (Hale 1946). It was soon destroyed in 1836 during the Texas War for Independence, and “the members of the Lodge were scattered by the havoc of war” (Hale 1946: 375). The Grand Lodge of Louisiana issued a new charter to attempt to resurrect the Holland Lodge, but by then “because of the depleted membership of the Lodge, however, no effort was made to resume labor at Brazoria, and no further meetings were held until the lodge was reopened in the Senate Chambers of the Republic of Texas at Houston in October, 1837” under the formation of a Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas (Hale 1946: 375). Other lodges were also established under the Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas in 1837 in Nacogdoches and San Augustine, with a total of twenty-four subordinate lodges having been established by 1846, none of which were in Brazoria, Texas (Hale 1946). Brazoria #327 masonic lodge was later established on June 18, 1870 (Grand Lodge of Texas 2018). Thus, Jordan would have had to look far beyond Brazoria to find a mason to place that coin into the pier at the start of the house construction.

While there was no formal lodge in Brazoria in the year 1853, in Platter’s 1961 dissertation, he did state that “the McNeills belonged to the Presbyterian Church and were active in Freemasonry,” citing an interview with L.J. McNeill, who was born in 1916 and lived until 1983 (Platter 1961: 174). L. J. McNeill was the son of James Calvin McNeill

(1844-1933), grandson of James C. McNeill (1809-1854), and great grandson of Levi Jordan (1793-1873) (McWilliams et al. 2013: 11). In the interview, L.J. McNeill could have been referring to any of his grandfather James C. McNeill's three male children who lived on the plantation between the years of 1848-1933. However, these people would have been just children at the proposed 1853 construction start date of the Jordan antebellum house, so would not have had any role in placing the coin in the pier as a masonic ritual. There were in fact two males in the McNeill/Jordan family who were alive during the 1853 proposed construction start date of the house: Levi Jordan and James C. McNeill (son-in-law of Levi Jordan). However, according to Hale's (1946) historic evidence of masonic lodge establishment in Brazoria county, no formal lodge was in existence in 1853, and no evidence has been found that links either Levi Jordan or James C. McNeill to freemasonry.

Recognizing that the Jordan house was likely built with slave labor, and given the patterns of spiritually-based artifacts Brown's team interpreted from the curer's cabin and church in the Jordan Plantation Quarters, can the meaning of the 1853 gold coin be reinterpreted within the framework of African American social control mechanisms, and their attempts to manage the severity of their oppression by their white owners? In the Jordan curer's cabin, "at least six of the coins, and possibly all seven, were minted during 1853 or 1858" (Brown 2013: 174). In the Jordan community church, a dime dated 1835 was also identified in the western deposit of the praise church, and "the majority of the coins from the features identified as another set of crossroads deposits beneath the church also bore the 1858 mint date, or the numbers 1, 8, 3, and 5. It is possible, therefore, that what was important about the dates selected was the numbers involved, rather than the actual dates" (Brown 2013: 174). Based on historical and archaeological evidence, Brown estimated that the slave

quarters were likely built first, and that the main house and remaining plantation structures likely followed between 1848-1854, but the order of construction is not clear and the construction dates, including the possible start date of 1853, of the house have been debated (Brown 2013: 43; McWilliams et. al, 2013). Brown noted that:

Historical records and archaeological evidence suggest that the Quarters were built first, followed by the various agricultural barns and storage facilities, then the sugarhouse, and finally the main house. Both the main house and sugar mill appear to have been completed by 1854, when the first cane crop was processed. It is likely that Block I of the Quarters was the last block of cabins constructed for the enslaved labor force, and it may have been completed during 1854, or shortly afterward. This hypothesis is based upon the fact that the one archaeologically defined brick kiln on the plantation was located below that block of cabins. It seems likely that the block would have been constructed shortly after the bricks needed for construction of Block I had been produced, unless the kiln was moved to some location we are not aware of (Brown 2013: 43).

The historical and archaeological evidence can support the reinterpretation that the coin was placed in its eastern location by one of the Jordan enslaved members as a ritualistic deposit in an attempt to control the actions of their oppressors and manage their own fate. The house would have been built with slave labor, offering the opportunity for enslaved Jordan members to place the coin in the pier as part of a protective or spiritual ritual. According to Brown's interpretation of crossroads deposits in curers'/healers' cabins and churches/praise houses, the eastern deposit represents "taking control of one's life" and "rebirth as an adult in the community" (Brown 2017: 219). Perhaps the enslaved members also recognized that after having moved from various plantations across Arkansas and Louisiana before moving to Brazoria, that this was the Jordan community's final, permanent placement: "Jordan is said to have remarked to his wife, Sarah, that they had finally

purchased a plantation that would outlive them all (D. Cotton, personal communication, 1986)” (Brown 2013: 40). As such, the coin placement in the east may be associated with the meaning of “rebirth” as the Jordan community began its establishment on the land.

In 2011 during an excavation of the enslaved house quarters at James Madison’s Montpelier in Orange, Virginia, archaeologists found a large crystal in what would have been the northern pier of one of the cabins (back left if facing the house) (Bronzeville Historical Society 2015). After researching similar deposits among other enslaved communities and interviewing descendants of the Madison enslaved community who explained that similar rituals are used still to this day, Montpelier archaeologists interpreted this crystal to have been placed in the pier during construction as a form of protection (Bronzeville Historical Society 2015). In this case, the northern location may have represented the “power in the world of the living” and the “power of the community and one’s role in it” (Brown 2017: 219). This is not unlike the glass “crystal” Brown’s team found in the northern deposit in the Jordan church, and interpreted as being associated with community (Brown 2013; Brown 2017).

Even more relevant are the findings by Leone and Fry (1999) in Annapolis, Maryland at a historic mansion that was the former home of George Carroll, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a slave owner. This was the first incidence where West-African derived ritualistic deposits had been found in a residence other than slave dwellings (Leone and Fry 1999). During excavation of this famous “Carroll House,” archaeologists discovered a cache of quartz crystals intentionally buried at the hearth of the fireplace (Leone and Fry 1999). Archaeologists further discovered “...pierced discs, pierced coins, beads, pins, a rounded black pebble, and a white potsherd with a blue asterisk painted

in the interior bottom” (Leone and Frye 1999: 372). These items were found in caches that were “associated with the northeast corners of the adjoining kitchen and storage room of the house, a vast mansion built in the 18th century by the Charles Carroll family of Maryland” (Leone and Fry 1999: 373). Leone and Fry’s analysis of the materials and their patterns of location in the house led them to conclude that these were items associated with West-African spiritual belief systems intended to protect and control its supplicants (Leone and Fry 1999). Their surveys of different plantation “great houses” in Annapolis showed that:

...all the environments where caches were found in Annapolis have been work spaces in the large houses, either in kitchens or laundry rooms where African Americans, slave or free, and probably women, prepared the means for masters and guests. These large houses, dating to the 18th century and in use through today, have materials forming caches in their kitchens, laundries, and pantries. Within these rooms, sacred spaces for the placement of conjuring artifacts were northeast corners, hearths, and door sills (Leone and Fry 1999: 377).

Their survey of sites in Virginia where free African Americans lived yielded no similar cache patterns. Thus, Leone and Fry concluded that the caches deposited by slaves represented that “the evil hierarchy was redesigned to be subverted even as it went up” (Leone and Fry 1999: 384).

There is no evidence that the Jordan family men during 1853 were members of a masonic lodge (nor was there a lodge established in Brazoria). In addition, the actual construction start date of the home has yet to be confirmed from the evidence compiled by CAS (Leezer 1996), PAI (McWilliams et. al, 2013), or Brown (2013). However, Dorothy Cotton, a descendant of Levi Jordan (his great, great, great, great granddaughter) has said of the construction of the house, “the house was built in 1854 from oak timber. Some of the

timber was brought down the San Bernard River by schooner. The house was unlike any in the county. It was functional and simple to the point of severity” (McDavid 1988). Given that her account of the start date of 1854 would contradict the masonic ritual theory, and that her description that Levi Jordan was financially conservative on the house construction, the idea that Jordan would have employed a mason in 1853 who would have performed an elaborate ritual commemorating the build of the house is doubtful.

A family friend, C. T. Nuckols wrote a letter to Sarah McNeill, who was away at school, dated August 4, 1857 that “the new house is almost done [...] [I]t looks magnificent” (Freeman 2004: 113). The house was a simple wooden structure with brick chimneys whose construction likely did not require the skills of a mason. If the coin was truly a time capsule that represented the construction start date of the house, why would it have taken four years to build such a simple structure? This historic letter points to the possibility that the house construction may have actually begun much later than 1853.

A final piece of consideration is comparison of the construction techniques of the Jordan slave quarters and the sugar mill that were uncovered during excavation (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Both structures were clearly built by slave labor, to construction standards that were below that which would have been required by a mason. Excavations of the slave quarters showed that the brick walls in these buildings lacked sufficient mortar to maintain brick wall integrity (Brown 2013: 57). Specifically, Brown’s team found evidence that “suggests that the exterior walls of the Quarters blocks appear to have been constructed without the use of a lime-based mortar” (Brown 2013: 74). There were some walls in the quarters that had used very limited amounts of yellow clay-lime that was so weak that it eroded over time (Brown 2013: 74). Most surprising, however, was that Brown’s team found

that the majority of the brick walls had been built with no mortar at all: “while it is difficult to understand why these cabin blocks were constructed without the use of lime-based mortar, that is exactly what the archaeological evidence from across all four of the blocks suggests. Clearly, walls made of dry laid bricks would have presented major structural problems in terms of holding together under their own weight, not to mention the weight and structural forces of a large roof.” (Brown 2013: 74).

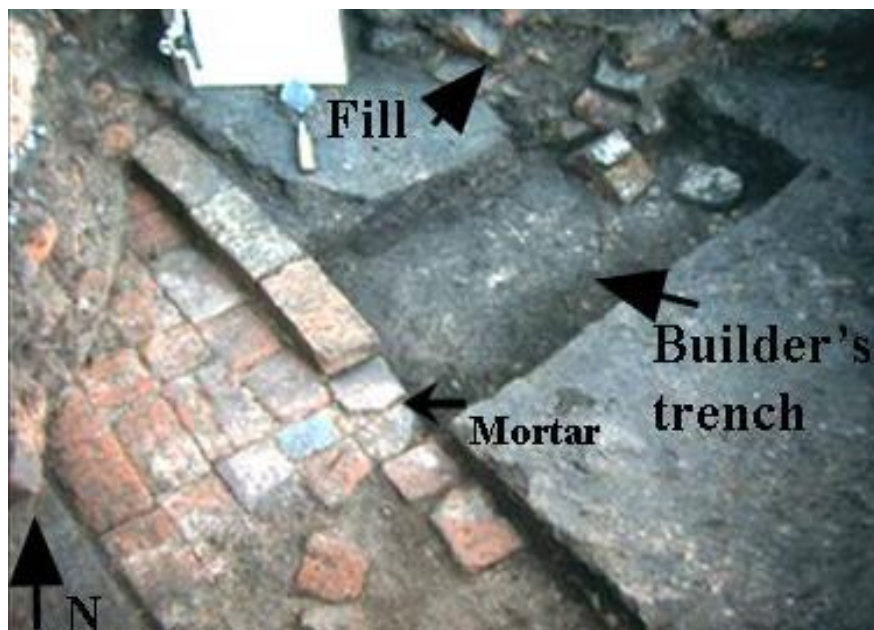


Figure 4.6 Photograph of the base of the exterior brick wall of Block I depicting the lack of mortar between or on the few bricks remaining in the base of the wall.
—adapted from Brown 2013.

Similar construction patterns were noted in Brown’s more recent UH sugar mill excavations. The construction quality of the quarters and the sugar mill indicate that these buildings were not the quality of a true mason, but instead reflected the work of slaves. If Jordan would have been the type to use a mason, then he would have likely used them in the all-brick slave quarters to protect his human capital investment and the high-value, all-brick working site of the sugar mill. The pier construction of the house does not seem the likely

place Jordan would have chosen to use a mason. The evidence suggests the slaves built the Jordan Plantation Quarters as well as the sugar mill. Therefore, the evidence supports the possibility that the house pier would have also been built by slaves, giving the opportunity to place the coin in as part of a symbolic ritual.



Figure 4.7 Photograph of the base of the exterior brick wall of the sugar mill, depicting construction techniques similar to that of the Jordan Plantation Quarters.
—adapted from Brown 2013.

The Southern Deposit: Metal Can with Shells (Feature 24)

PAI's excavation of Feature 24 identified a potential southern crossroad deposit among "a small collection of artifacts in the southeast quadrant of the west chimney

excavation” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172). Within the collection of artifacts, PAI archaeologists found the remnants of a metal can consisting of several oyster shells. They noted:

The feature was first noticed in the excavation at the level of the third course of bricks, when a clear glass fruit jar and a brick fragment were found next to the chimney foot. These were mapped, then removed, and the excavation continued. Just below the bottle, next to the second course of brick, a large iron can (similar to a coffee can) was found laid on its side (Figure 7.6). The upper half of the can was gone, essentially corroded away, but several oyster shells were found inside the remaining portion (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172).

PAI’s evaluation of the metal can was described as being “heavily corroded but appears to have been about 5 inches in diameter and at least 6 inches long” (Figure 4.8) (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172).



Figure 4.8 PAI’s photograph of the can with shells on the south side of the west chimney footing. The can had been clipped across the top by a shovel during the excavation
—adapted from McWilliams et. al, 2013.

PAI’s report noted that “its base is crimped around the edges, indicating it is a modern sanitary can, which was invented in 1897 and became popular in the early twentieth century” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172). However, the can was so heavily corroded and badly clipped with a shovel that it is possible that discerning the can’s construction and materials were probably difficult at best. A re-examination of the can and its contents would provide an opportunity to evaluate other features of the can, such as the presence of seams, solder residue, or additional markings. Canning began as far back as the 1820s, going through multiple sealing iterations before the crimped can became commercially popular in United States. Access to the original artifacts at the Texas Historical Commission would

prove an opportunity for re-examination of artifacts that could possibly support a different interpretation PAI's. Unfortunately, requests for access to the artifacts recovered by PAI were unsuccessful during this thesis work.

There was no discussion about the depth at which the metal can was found, but PAI noted that the can was found between the first and second course of bricks. PAI ascribed the presence of this can as to having been washed in with sediment in an area that was prone to flooding, based on the mottling of the west chimney footing, the "unusually organic-rich...and very moist" soil, "indicating that water pooled in this area," and the position of this end of the house being a downslope toward the slough (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172). However, according to photographs in PAI's report (Figure 4.8), the can's opening was particularly placed butted up against the fireplace hearth spanning the first through the third course of bricks, with the oyster shells found still packed inside. In the scenario of the flood, the can would have had to have been washed into its location during the time the courses of bricks were laid during construction, and either gone unnoticed or just left there as the rest of the house was completed. Furthermore, the position of the can would have had to have washed perfectly perpendicular to the hearth, with its opening facing the fireplace, and its shells remaining intact in the bucket even among the flood movement and runoff. Another explanation PAI gives for the deposit is that they "were left there by one of the many children who grew up on the property in the twentieth century" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 172). These interpretations too easily dismiss the possibility of this cache of shells having been placed by an enslaved laborer during the construction of the house. Can the presence of this deposit be reinterpreted from the framework of social control among the enslaved Jordan Plantation

community members? Could this cache of shells be the southern portion of a set of crossroads deposits around the Jordan main house?

A number of shells were recovered from archaeological deposits beneath the cabins of the Jordan Plantation Quarters: “the most common salt water varieties included oyster, whelk, cockle, a sea snail, and periwinkle. The most common fresh water variety was rangia,” (Brown 2013: 310). Many of the shells found throughout the Jordan Plantation Quarters were interpreted as having been used in a variety of ways, such as jewelry, buttons, or as carved shell fragments that “generally these took the form of handles or fragments of handles for utensils, toothbrushes, small tools such as the lace weight handle,” (Brown 2013: 312). None of the shells in Feature 24 was reported to have had drilled holes or carvings that would indicate their use as a regular utility object. The most significant findings in the Jordan Plantation Quarters are those associated with the southern crossroads deposits in the curer’s cabin and church. Brown noted that there was a “...general association of death with the color white and the underwater—particularly under the ocean—by Africans and African Americans, ... within the ritual belief system of members of the Jordan community,” (Brown 2013: 312). Brown also cited that “white and/or ash is the color and/or symbol for death in numerous West African cultures (Creel 1988), and the world of spirits and ancestors is under water, just as the sun passed into the ocean at the end of daylight and rose out of the ocean to start a new day” (Brown 2013: 181). According to Brown’s interpretation of the crossroads deposits, (Brown 2017: 219) the location in the south is associated with being under the water, representing the “power in the world of spirits and ancestors” and has been associated with its notable deposits of ash and shells (Brown 2017: 219). Considering that the Feature 24 can was found in the south, significantly filled with only ocean shells makes this a

compelling possible addition as the southern component of the Jordan house crossroads deposit.

Another interesting artifact worth mentioning that was found in the south by PAI archaeologists was a pierced metal disc (Figure 4.9) from within a post hole for a possible west porch pier that they named “Feature 13” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 149). PAI estimated that this porch extension would have been built before 1905, based on a photograph that a descendant identified as having been dated to the time of his relatives in the photo (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 84, 160). Within the posthole fill:

...an unusual artifact was recovered from the Feature 13 fill at 16-37 inches below the surface. A round disc of white metal with a central hole...was recovered in the ¼-inch screen, so its exact location within the feature is unknown.... The white metal has not been identified, but it is probably some type of alloy...This object is potentially significant because of who may have made it and how it may have gotten into this pier posthole (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 151).

Because the disc was “definitely part of the Feature 13 posthole fill,” PAI concluded that the disc must have been deposited prior to 1905 (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160). PAI archaeologists cited the previous findings of similar discs in the Jordan Plantation Quarters by Brown’s team that were “associated with the African Americans living at the plantation, probably before and after emancipation” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160). PAI found several such discs around the main house, but this one was notable because of the likely date of deposit:

PAI archeologists found at least five other similar specimens, but all of these specimens are from mixed deposits that do not provide any chronological or associational context. The specimen from Feature 13 is from a context that predates 1905 and could be much earlier (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160).

PAI's report referred to the Brown's findings of similar coins in the Jordan Plantation Quarters, and their interpretations as healing and protective charms (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160). The report further provided a brief review of the meanings associated with similar discs found among other African American sites in North America (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160-161). Perhaps the disc accidentally fell into its resting place during construction, or perhaps the disc was intentionally placed by an enslaved laborer as a ritualistic deposit. The dating of the disc to the period of pre-emancipation, the typical meaning of the disc, and its discovery in a pier post hole in the southern location of an apparent crossroads pattern provides intriguing evidence that it may have had some role in social control by the Jordan enslaved community.

Also found in the south, during contract disassembly of the chimneys during house stabilization work were several bricks with unusual markings, and most of those came from the west chimney of the Jordan house (see Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.9 PAI's photograph of the perforated white metal disc from Feature 13
—adapted from McWilliams et. al, 2013.

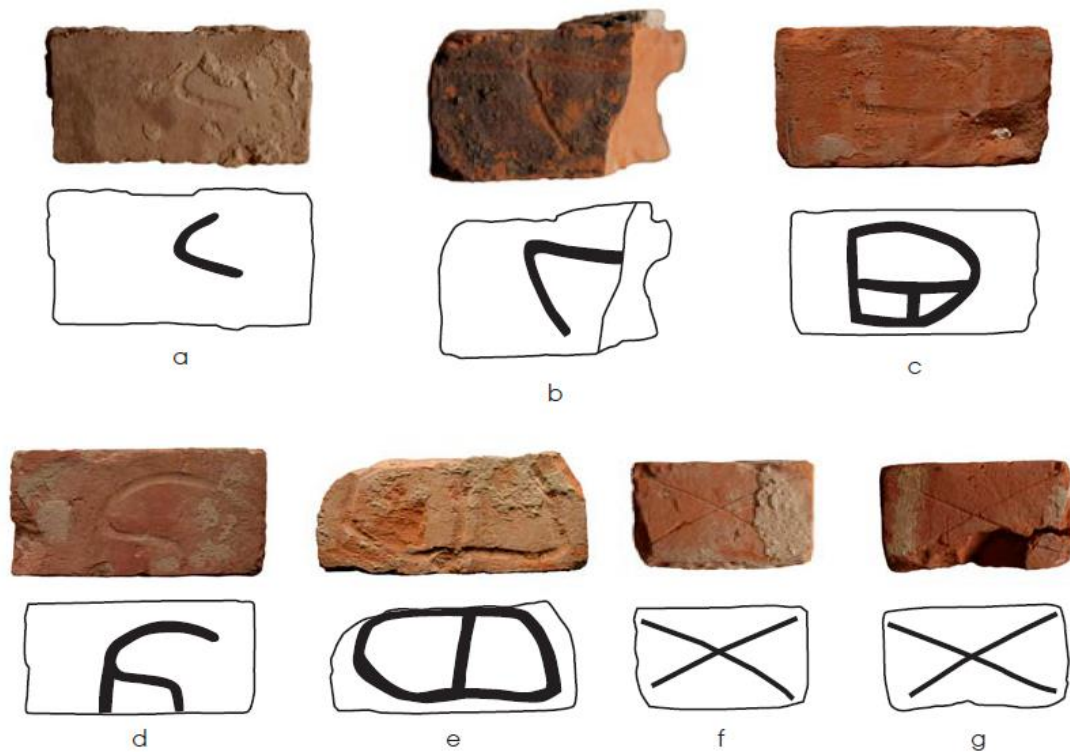


Figure 4.10 PAI’s photographs of the bricks with unusual markings found during the disassembly of the chimneys. Most of these were from the west chimney
—adapted from McWilliams et. al, 2013.

PAI’s report stated:

Of the seven illustrated bricks, the markings on five...were made by incising into clay when it was still wet and pliable. All but one have the marks on the molded face. The other two specimens...have an X engraved into the dry clay or the fired brick, both on the end of the brick (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 175).

PAI archaeologists provided some interpretations of the marks, including as a possible “brick maker’s finger test to check the plasticity of freshly molded brick” to having “a deeper meaning, perhaps even spiritual significance to the enslaved people who made them” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 176). The PAI report provided a survey of examples in the

literature where “X” symbols, representative of the BaKongo cosmogram, had been found in a variety of objects across many African American sites, and noted that “two refit brick fragments from the Elder’s Cabin have a raised oval and cross design, interpreted as a cosmogram...that is similar to the symbol etched into one of the chimney bricks” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 176). The PAI report acknowledged that “perhaps placing a marked brick in the big house chimneys was a type of ‘chimney charm’ used by African Americans” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 176). Unfortunately, because of a lack of additional data about the bricks, PAI archaeologists declined to draw a definite conclusion about the meaning of the marks: “for now, they are simply construction bricks with unusual modifications that are not easily explained and warrant consideration” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 176).

However, given that the bricks themselves were made with slave labor and the house was built with slave labor, it is reasonable to consider a “deeper meaning” of the brick placement. Because the slaves built the chimneys with the bricks that they themselves made, they likely had the opportunity to place them strategically in the southern location of an otherwise completely wooden house as an expression of their spiritual beliefs that permanently altered the landscape. As such, it is possible that these marked chimney bricks had a role in West African-derived spiritually-based mechanisms of social control in an attempt by the enslaved Jordan Plantation community to protect themselves from mistreatment by their oppressors and control their own collective destiny.

The Northern Deposit: An Unexplored Soil Change

In the north, the most relevant feature that CAS archaeologists uncovered during their 2005 excavation is not an artifact, but instead an interesting color change in the soil that was

not fully investigated. This was discovered during their excavation near the east wing of the twentieth-century addition. The CAS report designated this as “Unit E2, Feature 6” (see Figure 4.11). According to CAS’s report:

Unit E2, located next to the current rear wing extension...was excavated to a depth of 16 inbd. This unit was characterized by an overwhelming amount of brick fragments. There was indication of a previous excavation, lined with black plastic, in the northwest corner of this unit. At 16 inbd, a change in soil color was detected in the southeast corner. The soil change was labeled Feature 6, and was a well-defined square of a lighter brown soil that was very loose and soft. This 12x10-inch feature was excavated to 24 inbd. An eroded pipe was noted in the south wall profile at an approximate depth of 10–12 inbd. Window glass composed the largest majority of artifacts collected from this unit (239 shards). Unit E2 contained a large grouping of window glass dated to the late 1800s (Leezer 2006: 51).

Feature 6 was described as being 16 inches below the surface and was defined by a color and texture change in the sediment. The soil was lighter, looser, and softer, than its surrounding sediment, measuring 10x12 inches and continued into the east and west walls of Unit E2 (Figure 4.12). The “previous excavation” that CAS referred to in the northwest corner was a previous excavation unit by the University of Houston. There was no mention of significant artifacts in Feature 6 in CAS’s report and the report concluded that, “it is possible that this feature is the remnant of a post hole or support pier location” (Leezer 2006: 84).

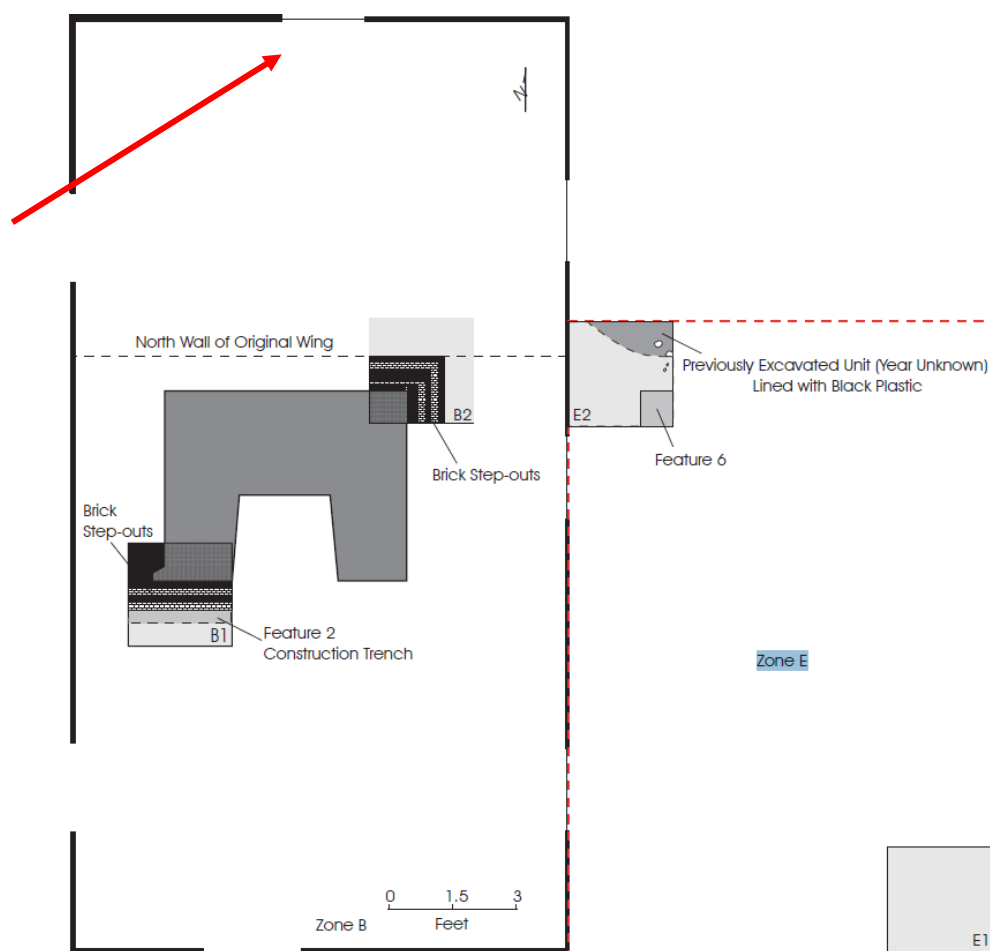


Figure 4.11 CAS's illustration of Feature 6, a rectangular area of soil change
—adapted from Leezer 2006.

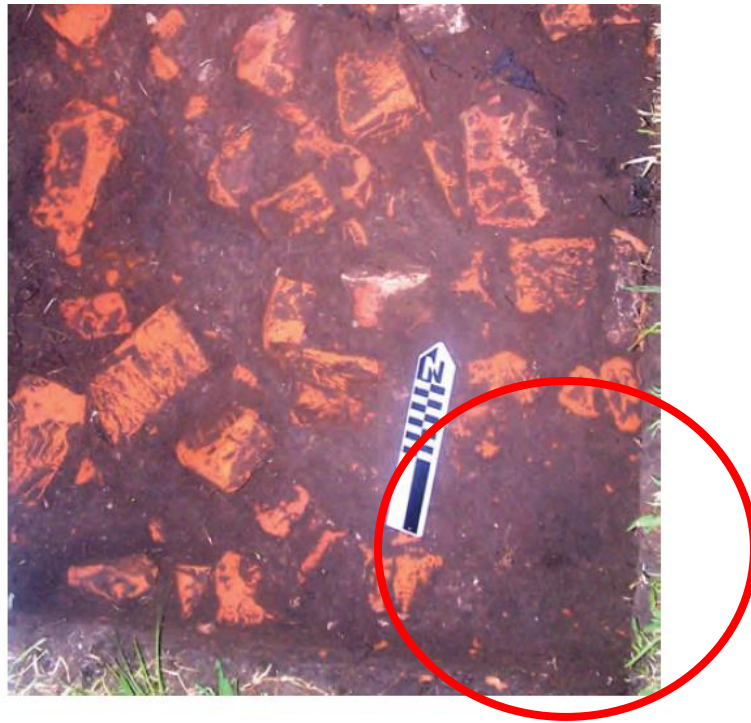


Figure 4.12 CAS’s photo of Feature 6, a rectangular area of soil change shown on the bottom right corner of the photo—adapted from Leezer 2006.

Based on CAS’s discovery of Feature 6, and interested in the possibility of evidence leading to the interpretation of a possible east wing porch, PAI archaeologists excavated just southeast of CAS’s Unit E2, naming it “Unit E6” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 146). PAI noted the edge of a previous UH excavation led by Brown in the southeast quadrant of Unit E6 (no significant artifact findings were reported by Brown’s team). Unfortunately PAI found no evidence of CAS’s Feature 6 “at 16 cm below the surface. This indicates that the Feature 6 soil stain may be confined to the small rectangular area in the southeast corner of Unit E2 (although excavations to the east would be needed to confirm this)” (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160). PAI’s report cited “16 cm”; however, since PAI’s report acknowledged that

CAS's feature was first seen at 16 inches, and the CAS report directly also noted Feature 6 at 16 inches, it is assumed that "16 cm" referenced by PAI was a typographical error, and that PAI archaeologists must have excavated to 16 inches. The error is repeated again in the report a few sentences later, "since Feature 6 was found at 16 cm below the surface and was covered by the dense layer of brick rubble, the evidence suggests that Feature 6 predates the brick rubble layer that may be associated with the collapse of the chimney" (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160). Assuming PAI archaeologists actually excavated to 16 inches in Unit E6, their excavation found no evidence of CAS's Feature 6 extending into their unit. PAI concluded that a direct excavation of Feature 6 to greater depths would be warranted to uncover what lies underneath, but discounts its likelihood as a pier post hole:

CAS's Feature 6 may well be an intrusive hole associated with a pier post that was subsequently removed, but its location is puzzling. It could be a corner pier associated with a previous east wing addition, or perhaps more likely, a pier associated with a former east porch...The idea that there was once a wooden porch on the east side of the east wing is based on circumstantial evidence (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 160).

Additionally, the 10x12-in size of this rectangular hole is much smaller than the other post holes that PAI described in their report years later during their 2010 excavations in any of the corner house piers, which typically showed evidence of modern replacement materials, crushed brick pads, or disintegrated wood, (McWilliams et. al, 2013: 158).

Feature 6 is certainly intriguing, given its important northern location and taken in context with the coin, the bucket with shells, and the bucket of metal. Its appearance also indicates that it was human-made, and assumes a diamond-shaped pattern relative to the north. Scholars have identified the diamond patterns among African American sites on

artifacts and structures in various locations, and their shape has been associated with the BaKongo cosmogram (Brown 2013; Gundaker 1988; McWillie 1987). The question remains: is there a northern deposit associated with the Jordan house that completes the pattern of crossroad deposits, and could Feature 6 be an indicator of this? The northern most deposit has been interpreted as the most meaningful of cardinal locations by Brown as “power in the world of the living” and “power of the community and one’s role in it” (Brown 2017: 219) and has typically been associated with a highly valuable cache, such as coins and crystals (Brown 2013; Bronzeville Historical Society 2015). Perhaps over the many years of residency it was discovered by one of the residents or a visitor and removed. Perhaps an enslaved laborer dug the hole, but for whatever reason was not able to complete the deposit of its cache. If Feature 6 is a post hole, it would provide interesting evidence for an eastern porch along the house, but more compelling would be the discovery of the artifacts worthy of interpretation within the framework of social control within the Jordan Plantation’s enslaved community.

The Crossroads Pattern at the Jordan Plantation House

Crossroads patterns similar to the four identified at the Jordan house have been discovered in yards and houses in previous research (Leone and Fry 1999; Ruppel et. al, 2003). At the Brice House in Annapolis, Maryland in 2000, archaeologists found “extensive materials deliberately placed beneath individual bricks in a floor, and buried next to doorways, and also buried under both hearths in the east wingWhen taken as a whole, these archaeological materials formed an oval over three yards in diameter that extended within the south room/laundry and into the north room/kitchen,” (Ruppel et. al, 2003: 326). The materials in the deposits were common household items such as bottles, shells, buttons,

bones, and coins, and the researchers supposed that these were used likely because this is what the slaves would have had access to. The researchers suggested that “the Brice House, with its markings of discrete clusters of meaningful yet everyday objects, is very similar in nature to other African-influenced ritual places that created sacred, protected and magic space” (Ruppel et. al, 2003: 327).

When evaluated individually, the artifacts found at the Jordan Plantation main house are interesting in themselves. However, when evaluated as representative arms of the crossroads patterns, it is clear that the pattern spans across the entire Jordan house (see Figure 4.13). The set offers a compelling case for the practice of spiritually-based social control by the Jordan enslaved community. Specifically notable is that the intersection of these crossroads appears to be near a doorway that would have been a communal area of the house residents. In the Jordan Quarters church, the second eastern crossroad deposit of a plaster sculpture with sword-like extensions was also found “near the likely location of the doorway into the cabin” (Brown 2013: 107). Brown also identified the presence of metal kettles buried beneath a possible doorway in the Jordan Quarters curer’s cabin (Brown 2013: 178). Artifacts associated with being near or under doorways appear to have significant meanings associated with attempts to catch bad luck, prevent harm, or taking control (Brown 2013; Thompson 1983). Gomez studied the transformation of African American identity and wrote, “the technique of burying a conjuration bag under the doorstep, in the front yard, or in some location over which the intended victim was sure to pass is a direct African tradition” (Gomez 1988: 287). Ruppel identified doorways as, “intersections between outside and inside; they were thresholds or crossroads. One former slave recommended placing a conjure bag beneath the steps to make visitors friendly. Over the door was a frequently mentioned

location. A number of informants described the practice of placing a stick near the master's door...to prevent whippings or mistreatment by exerting control over the actions of the master" (Ruppel 2003: 333).

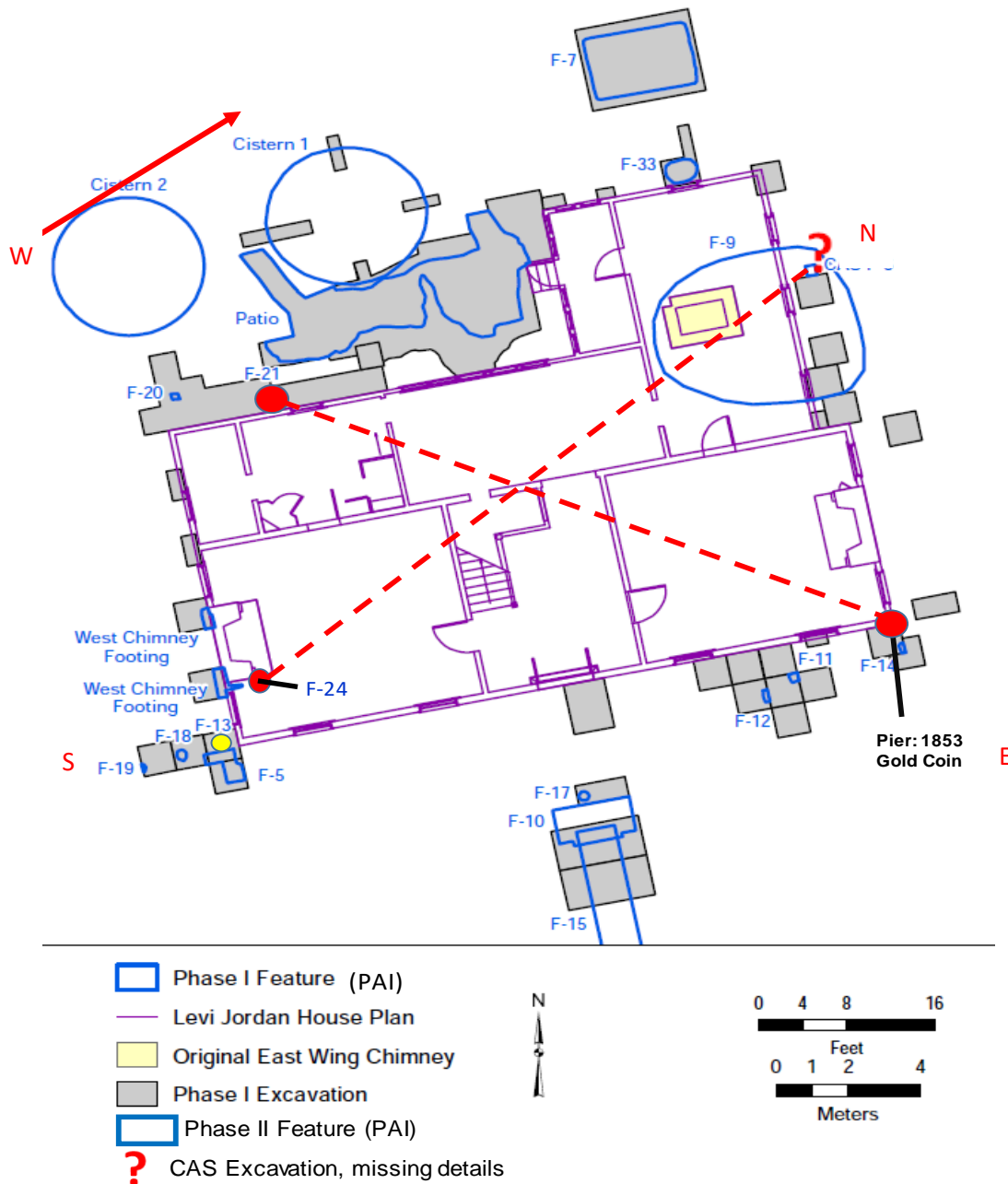


Figure 4.13 Summary map of the crossroads deposits (in red) found around the Jordan house area: gold coin in southeast pier, bucket with shells in Feature 24 (F-24), bucket of metal and debris as Feature 21 (F-21), and the unexplored rectangular soil change in the northern deposit location as Feature 6 (CAS F-6) —adapted from Leezer 2006 and McWilliams et. al. 2013.

Thompson pointed out the importance of intersecting lines for BaKongo spiritual rituals relative to the BaKongo cosmogram:

Crossroads or forks in a path are viewed in many Bantu cultures of the Kongo-Angola region as virtual cosmograms *trouves*. These points of literal intersection were where one might go to offer sacrifice or prayer to the ancestors...Written on the earth, these cosmograms reemerged precisely where persons influenced by the life and lore of Kongo lived and thought (Holloway 1990: 153).

In some BaKongo practices a *nganga* would, on behalf of a supplicant, draw crossed lines on the ground, in the orientation of cardinal directions, “to demarcate the ritual space in which the supplication would be made...The intersection of these lines represented the desired intersection and communication between the spirit world and the land of the living,” (Brown 2013: 11; Fennell, 2007; Thompson 1990). The intersecting lines of a crossroads pattern were therefore clearly important to its creators. Brown summarized the significance of the point of intersection is as follows:

In the metaphoric sense, the intersection of crossed lines, with the lines arranged in cardinal directions, has found expression in a number of different ceremonies that spring from both Yoruba and BaKongo religious traditions. The importance of the “crossroads” is an indelible, vital concept in the Black Atlantic world, because it refers to the point of intersection between the ancestors and the living. It is also the point at which the worlds of birth and death, daylight and night, and the transitions between them, intersect. It can also be used actively, to sanctify space, or to mark points which have certain forms of power, or to invoke that power ... These points are at the center of the crossroads and in the cardinal directions emanating from them... (Brown 2013: 10).

Ruppel interpreted the crossroads as a location of supernatural exchange that called upon the spirits and ancestors, and can occur over different landscapes, including houses, yards, slave quarters, and gardens:

the meeting place of heaven and earth, the living with the dead, the beginning and end of life, and a place of magic where life's problems can obtain supernatural solutions...There are many important aspects to the crossroads, but for our purposes here, the salient one is that it can occur, and be found, almost anywhere. Crossroads represent a spiritual location that occurs in many landscapes, and inside houses (Ruppel 2003: 329).

Could the enslaved members of the Jordan Plantation have been creating opportunities to enlist protection from spirits and ancestors at the Jordan main house? The location of the intersecting lines at a place that would have been shared by all of the Jordan house members may be circumstantial; however, its placement is certainly intriguing and significant enough to warrant its interpretation, along with the set of the four crossroads deposits, within the framework of social control and maintaining collective identity. Ruppel asserted that "out of a cosmological view grew ways of building yards, using crossroads, recognizing that the world was filled with 'altars' to the gods. Such beliefs nurtured and preserved a sense of identity and familial continuity. By teaching these practices and beliefs, African America was constantly created and recreated, and disparate ethnic groups became black Americans" (Ruppel 2003: 330).

This chapter has provided a reinterpretation of the individual artifacts found during previous contract excavations at the Jordan Plantation house from an alternative academic perspective. This reinterpretation considered the context of each individual deposit and further evaluated their meaning as part of a complete set within the framework of social control practiced by the enslaved community that built the house. The reinterpretation of the artifacts show a pattern of crossroads deposits similar to those found in the Jordan Plantation Quarters curer's cabin and church, and their association with each other and their potential

meanings seem to be beyond merely coincidence. These patterns have specific ritual meaning to its creators.

In the previous contract excavations, the coin, the bucket of metal (Feature 21), the bucket with shells in Feature 24, and the unexplored soil change were analyzed individually for their possible meaning and function, but had not been evaluated as having belonged to a set of deposits that clearly had many common traits. Those traits included their burial likely dating to the period of enslavement at the Jordan Plantation, their placements along the cardinal directions, the meaning of the contents within each deposit, and their placements with respect to one another resulting in the formation of intersecting crossed lines right near a main house doorway and over a family communal space.

In the Jordan Plantation Quarters, the two crossroads deposits that were identified in the praise house/church, and the single deposit in the curer's cabin were associated with ritually sanctifying space (Brown 2013). The crossroads patterns found around the Jordan main house are similar, but the artifacts and the resulting intersecting lines appear to be more associated with conjure in an effort to control behavior. These patterns demonstrate the possibility that the enslaved community took advantage of available opportunities, beginning with the house's construction, to extend the alteration of the Jordan Plantation landscape with spiritually-based social control mechanisms into the living areas of their oppressors. This extension of practice served as the ultimate form of resistance and protection.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

A successfully-functioning society requires approved and enforced social control mechanisms, including spiritually-based mechanisms, as part of daily life to minimize chaos and dissention (Ross 1901). Through lifelong processes of socialization within a particular culture, members are taught specific ways to think and behave, thus effectively managing the society's behavior as a whole. Religion is an exemplification of social solidarity defined as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., beliefs and practices which unite individuals into one single moral community (Durkheim 2008). This thesis examined the processes of spiritually-based mechanisms of social control that were practiced among the members of the Jordan Plantation African American community and identified several archaeological correlates to substantiate that the members attempted to control their fate under harsh and oppressive living conditions.

For archaeologists to get at the notion of behavior, they must investigate beyond only the design of artifacts, and more closely examine the adaptation that people make to their lives in their communities (Guthrie 1996). Documents, oral history, and archaeological evidence together provide a basis for understanding culture, and are the cornerstones of historical archaeology. The various material objects that archaeologists have unearthed expressing Africanisms in many different African American locations in the New World have been used to study their roles in expression of resistance (Singleton 1999); however, little exists of investigations into the role of West African-derived spiritual material culture and its use as a form of social control within enslaved plantation quarters communities in an effort to maintain internal community cohesion and behavior. The general hypothesis behind

the proposed research in this thesis is that if the African American residents at the Jordan Plantation practiced methods of social control, then the data within the material culture and ethnographic and historical records will substantiate it.

To support the first hypothesis a model was created that demonstrated the need for social control among the African American Jordan Plantation community. This model was based on ethnographies, history, and archaeology of the Gullah and Geechee spiritually-based social control mechanisms, particularly that of the church and the healers.

OBJECTIVE 1: Establish that there was a need for social control among the African and African American community at the Jordan plantation.

HYPOTHESIS: If social control was practiced within African American communities, then historic, ethnographic, and archaeological sources will discuss the mechanisms for this control.

Historical documents such as those by Gutman (1976), Penningroth (2006) and Fett (2002) have referenced accounts of discourse, resolution, and resistance within enslaved communities. In such tight, oppressive living conditions, there were many reasons for internal discourse, and communities such as the Gullah and Geechee established their own means of dealing with such conflicts through participation in praise houses and the community church (Guthrie 1996; Creel 1988). Community membership in these institutions was exclusive and served as a major mechanism of social control to maintain group cohesion, serve justice, and provide a sense of kinship. Much like the sacred West African initiation rituals of Poro and Sande in West Africa, Gullah and Geechee members were taught exclusively about the rules and behaviors expected of them from those more experienced in

the community, which occurred through the initiation practices of “Seekin” and “Catching Sense” (Bailey 2000; Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996). Through this initiation, community members were bonded for life and also gained the right to be buried in their home plantation’s graveyard. African American members relied on the roles of church leaders and conjurers, who were usually elders, to maintain harmony and collective identity as powerful agents of social and spiritual regulation.

Archaeological signatures of social control have been obtained from sites of former Gullah and Geechee praise houses and curer’s locations and include artifacts that use BaKongo cosmogram and Christian symbolism as ways to communicate group identities exclusively among its members (Brown 2005 and 2013; Fennell 2003 and 2007). Fennell’s concept of ethnogenic bricolage of how different cultures evolve core symbols that serve to express fundamental elements of a group’s cosmology and sense of identity in their world was applied in this thesis when examining African American archaeological correlates of social control (Fennell 2007). The BaKongo cosmogram is the core West Central African symbol for the universe, and is the symbol at the center of BaKongo cosmology (Fennell 2007; Thompson 1983). Its instrumental expression has been found on a variety of artifacts and structures at African American sites, and according to scholars, was used exclusively only by those who had special knowledge of its meaning, usually in the shape of an “X” or “crossroads” pattern (Fennell 2003 and Brown 2015). Instrumental expressions of the symbol have been found at sites of the enslaved Gullah and Geechee communities which were also heavily influenced by Christianity. They adapted many of those rituals and symbols in their praise house and church activities that are reflected in the cultural materials and structures associated with such activities (Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996).

In this thesis, the need for social control has been established and supports the first hypothesis through the ethnographic, historical, and archaeological testing of the Gullah and Geechee models of spiritually-based social control. The roles of the church and the curer/conjurer have been established as powerful agents in social control, working together to regulate behavior and spirituality. Archaeological correlates of spiritually-based social control have been identified within this model and reflect the influences of both West African and Euro-Christian belief systems in a community struggling to survive in a new world of oppression.

To support the second hypothesis, an evaluation of archaeological materials identified at the Jordan Plantation was performed to establish that spiritually-based mechanisms of social control were practiced by the African American community who lived there during the time of slavery and post-emancipation.

OBJECTIVE 2: Establish the role of the Jordan Plantation artifacts as archaeological elements of social control.

HYPOTHESIS 2: If social control was practiced within the Jordan Plantation African American community, then the archaeological sources should yield African American material correlates of social control.

Evaluation of the archaeological materials at the Jordan Plantation identified several similarities to the Gullah and Geechee practices of spiritually-based social control. These similarities included artifacts that appear to have been symbolic of the “seekin” and “catching sense” processes of initiation, burial patterns for those who may have caught sense at the Jordan Plantation, and the presence of an influential elder’s cabin that was home to their powerful political leader within the Jordan Plantation Quarters. Such materials indicate

that the Jordan African American community may well have been practicing initiation rituals similar to those that originated in West Africa as a form of initiation and membership in an effort to maintain social regulation, collective identity, and kinship in a displaced and oppressed environment.

Previous research by Brown at plantation sites in Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana demonstrated crossroads patterns under their churches/praise houses and curer's/healer's/midwives cabins that led to the development of a meaning system for the cardinal direction locations of the crossroads (Brown 2017: 219). These meanings were applied in archaeological tests of social control in this thesis to perform a reinterpretation of four main deposits at the Jordan Plantation's main house yard. Previous excavations evaluated these four deposits as individual artifacts that seemed to be randomly discovered and unrelated to each other (Leezer 2006; McWilliams et. al, 2013). However, this thesis evaluated the possibility that these deposits were linked to each other in a crossroads pattern based on their characterization of cardinal direction locations, their notable contents and orientation in the ground, their similarities to previous crossroads deposits, and their possibility of being deposited during the period of slavery at the Jordan Plantation. These crossroads patterns include the presence of large amounts of metal in the west representing protection and transition, a cache of ocean shells in the south representing the power of the ancestors below a watery divide, and a gold coin representing rebirth and new beginnings in the east. The northern deposit location, which, according to Brown (2013) typically contains highly-valued items associated with the height of the community and individual's power, remains unexplored but its rectangular soil change unlike that of any Jordan house post hole is compelling and warrants further excavation. While it can be argued that the associations of

these deposits are only circumstantial, their placements along the cardinal points of the crossroads clearly form a pattern of compelling intersecting lines right over a common room of the Jordan main house, near a doorway. Intersecting crossroads lines are critical in traditional BaKongo rituals, and associations near or under doorways appear to have significant meanings associated with good luck, preventing harm, or taking control of one's life (Brown 2013; Thompson 1983). The archaeological patterns at the Jordan main house yard demonstrate the possibility that the enslaved community took advantage of available opportunities, beginning with the house's construction, to extend the alteration of the Jordan Plantation landscape with spiritually-based social control mechanisms into the living areas of their oppressors. Thus, this extension of practice served as an ultimate form of resistance and protection.

Leone and Fry write of their crossroads deposits that "the crucial importance of our investigation is that it produces answers from formerly mute sources" (Leone and Fry 1999: 384). This is especially the case of the Jordan Plantation main house deposits. The reinterpretation of the material culture around the Jordan Plantation main house within the framework of social control enables a deeper understanding of how the enslaved community used the spiritual practices that were available to them through their membership in the church and their belief in conjure to cope with their oppressive living situation. The ethnographic, historical, and archaeological methods in this thesis provide evidence that the enslaved Jordan community altered the plantation landscape in a way that enabled participation for only those who were exclusive members of their community.

The findings in this thesis demonstrate that the Gullah and Geechee were not and are not simply an isolated group of people, but that they indeed appear to be more typical

demonstrations of African American adaptations. The fact that these traditions have persisted so long are likely due to their isolation along the Sea Islands. Consequently, the Gullah and Geechee cultures, including their belief systems surrounding religion and conjure, serve as useful ethnographic analogies when determining meaning in the cultural material found at the Jordan Plantation and others.

More excavation is warranted at the Jordan main house to search for the northern crossroads deposit surrounding CAS' Feature 6 to fully complete the reinterpretation of the Jordan main yard crossroads deposits. Further compelling research would include continued excavation of the Jordan Plantation sugar mill to determine if the enslaved community, who likely built the structure, might have taken the opportunity to deposit crossroads materials during the construction of such a place as intensely laborious and incredibly dangerous for many of the slaves who spent their lives working there.

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