

Interwoven Traditions: Archaeology of the Conjuror's Cabins and the African American Cemetery at the Jordan and Frogmore Manor Plantations

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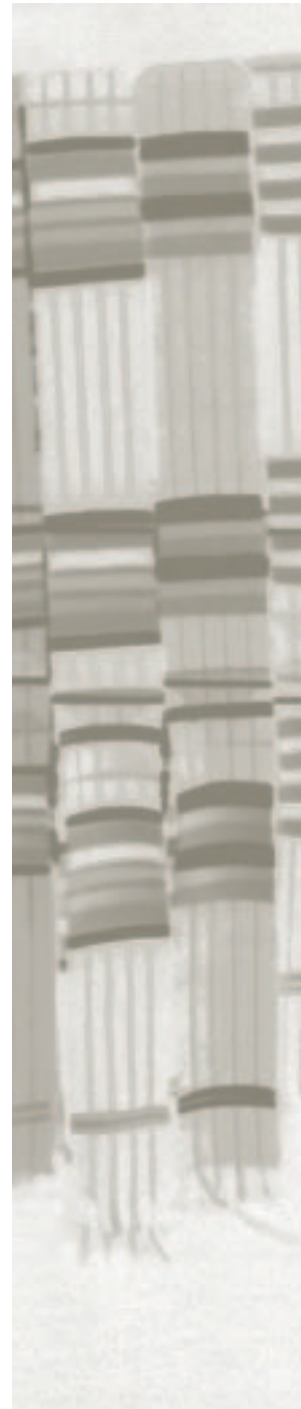
Within the past two decades a major focus of historical archaeology in North America has become the study of “people without history.”(1) That is, historical archaeologists have begun to systematically investigate the lives, beliefs, and behaviors of people who left relatively few primary, readable written accounts despite their living within a “literate society.” Thus, a written record of these “people without history” may exist. However, what is significant is that authors outside of the actual community under study produced that written record. For example, many written records describing the beliefs and behaviors, e.g., the culture, of enslaved Africans and African Americans exist, some even written and/or transcribed from the testimony of enslaved persons. However, the extant records discuss little to nothing concerning the details of the use and meaning conferred on the material culture or the landscape by enslaved and/or emancipated people of African descent. While oral testimony may add to our knowledge of this aspect of African American culture, detailed social archaeological investigation also has the potential to expand our knowledge well beyond the confines of people’s inherited memories.

Unfortunately, much of the historical archaeological investigation of people of African descent in the New World has focused on questions related to the material items utilized by the enslaved. Included within these studies, one finds research focused upon the African origins of individual items from houses, tobacco pipes, the production of low-fired earthenware ceramics, the meaning of blue glass beads, and even the symbols placed on a number of these items.(2) Many of these studies were conducted with the explicit attempt to link African cultures with enslaved peoples in North America and/or the Caribbean. However, in a majority of these studies the actual meaning of these items and the symbols for peoples of African descent in the New World has been directly inferred from the Old World.(3) Only in very rare instances have the archaeological contexts for these objects been as systematically investigated. That is, what use and/or meaning did such objects have for people of African descent in North America, and this determination must be based upon the other directly associated artifacts. The question that needs to be addressed here relates to the construction of the culture of African Americans within the systems of enslavement and, later, freedom.

This paper represents an attempt to demonstrate the utility of archaeological research in defining use and meaning of objects recovered from sites occupied by both enslaved and free African Americans. This will also begin to define some of the use of space in, and, importantly, under the landscape of the sites. Within this paper, aspects of the archaeological record from two Quarters sites will be examined: The Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas; and the Frogmore Manor Plantation, St. Helena Island, Beaufort County, South Carolina.

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History and Archaeology of the Levi Jordan Plantation Quarters

Archaeological excavations, directed by the author, have been conducted within the slave and tenant quarters of the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas.(4) The Jordan Plantation Quarters Community was founded in this location in 1848. During the period from 1848 through the early 1870s, the plantation produced sugar and cotton as cash crops, along with wheat, corn, potatoes, and other subsistence foods. The work of the plantation was organized through the use of the gang labor regime. Jordan purchased the Texas land as the last in a series of plantations he bought, occupied, and sold stretching across the South, beginning in western South Carolina and continuing through Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. At its pre-1865 height, the Jordan plantation had a resident enslaved population exceeding 140. After emancipation until the late 1880s, approximately 100 people resided within the tenant community occupying the old slave quarters. All of these individuals participated in agricultural activities as wage laborers, renters, and/or sharecroppers. A number of the members of the community practiced specialized occupations in addition to their farming activities, e.g., conjurer/mid-wife, carver, hunter, seamstress, blacksmith, and carpenter.

By the mid-1870s, sugar had been abandoned as a cash crop. However, cotton continued to be raised by tenants, sharecroppers, and wage laborers residing on, and around, the plantation through the late 1880s. Historical archaeological investigation of the plantation has focused on the recovery of detailed contextual information to permit the interpretation of the life of the

enslaved people as well as the tenants who resided within the community. Historical research has demonstrated that the vast majority of the residents of the community during the post-emancipation period had previously been enslaved on the plantation.(5)

The Jordan Plantation investigation has been referred to as “the best known example” of an archaeological approach that has “...attempted to identify archaeological contexts and assemblages that represent religious behavior on the part of enslaved African Americans.”(6) However, this research has developed evidence related to a much wider variety of behavioral patterns than is implied by the quote above. Economic, political, and social behaviors have been defined from the archaeological and historical research thus far conducted. The historical data concerning the continuity of population when combined with the archaeological evidence strongly supports the pre-emancipation nature of the behavioral patterns defined. Thus, this data, and its interpretation, has been employed to define a number of the adaptive responses made by members of the community to the conditions of both enslavement and freedom. While a number of historical archaeological studies have included the interpretation of African American ritual activities, the Jordan Community investigations (and recently concluded research at the Frogmore Manor Plantation on St. Helena Island, South Carolina) have identified a variety of archaeological contexts that aid in the definition of ritual activities and symbols for African American populations.(7) Several of these contexts at Jordan demonstrate the community-based nature of these religious, social, and economic behavioral patterns.

The research design for the Jordan Plantation slave and tenant quarters

included a variety of activities. The standard excavation unit measured five feet by five feet. The stratigraphy of the site demonstrates that three broad levels were present within the artifact bearing deposit, each with its own depositional history and formation processes. The upper level included the modern topsoil and the brick rubble from the collapse of the walls of the structures over the past 110 years. The second level included a wide variety of artifacts, some whole, or that had entered the archaeological record whole and been broken after they were deposited. Further, within this level, a number of artifact types that would normally be employed together in an activity were found together in the ground. The third level contained small artifacts distributed in a somewhat more random fashion.

The artifacts contained in level two suggested that an intentional abandonment of the quarters had taken place at some point in the past. This abandonment was not known from any historical records we were (and are) aware of, nor did any members of the descendant families (black or white) have any information concerning such an event. However, the discovery of this artifact and context-rich zone forced an alteration of the excavation strategy.

Continuing with units that disturbed 25 square feet in this artifact and context rich zone did not appear to be an appropriate methodology. As the excavation grid had been imposed over the site, and several excavation units completed, the standard excavation unit remained five-feet by five-feet. However, immediately before excavating through the brick rubble layer, each of these units was divided into 25 one-foot by one-foot subunits. Further, unless the stratigraphy noted within a unit dictated otherwise, the standard level depth was 1/10th of a foot once the unit was placed into

subunits. The subunits and the level depth were maintained throughout the excavation of both the second and third artifact bearing zones. This methodology permitted the recording of highly specific provenience information, including actual maps, of the distribution of artifacts within zone two (the so-called “abandonment zone”) and zone three (the so-called “sub-floor zone”).

Archaeological investigation also included research within the African American cemetery on the original Jordan Plantation.(8) This research included the mapping and recording of surface features along with limited, though systematic, excavation. Initial surface survey involved establishing a grid over the cemetery area and mapping in the location of all apparent cultural features. The cultural features included on the map consisted of graves and other depressions, tomb markings, and plant types. This mapping project provided information on approximately 140 graves. The excavation was limited to testing ten percent of the unmarked grave shafts to determine if we were correct in our definition of these depressions as grave shafts. This investigation consisted of the excavation of one foot wide by five feet long units across the short axis of the depression. These units were excavated only as deep as was necessary to determine the presence or absence of a grave shaft. Any artifacts encountered in these excavation units were noted and left in place. No artifacts were collected or moved during this research. In all approximately 140 graves were recorded and mapped during this investigation. The data collected from the tombstones, oral history, and historic documents has permitted the identification of forty-eight of the individuals buried within this cemetery.

Throughout this project, historical and oral historical information has been

collected related to the occupants of the plantation.(9) Black and white descendants have visited the site, viewed the data, were presented interpretation of structures and activities, and had their information recorded and incorporated into the interpretations. Federal census, county tax, and genealogical records have been investigated and analyzed in order to determine the families who occupied the plantation, and their roles within the community. The purpose of this portion of the investigation was to provide an active data source that could be employed to test, as well as interpret, the archaeological record. This active use of a number of legal records and family oral histories provided the apparent cause for the abandonment of the quarters between 1886 and 1888.(10)

Finally, the project's research design included the continual collection of ethnographic data from among the black and white descendants.(11) Additional ethnographic data has been obtained from reports of investigations conducted in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and North America.(12) The ethnographic information has been utilized along with the historical data to interpret and test the artifacts and contexts recorded within the archaeological record of the Jordan Plantation's African American community.

The result of this approach has been data that can be utilized to define behavior and beliefs practiced and maintained by members of the Jordan Plantation community. Only those interpretations dealing with one occupational specialization, e.g., the Conjuror/Midwife, the determination of community membership, and spirituality practiced within the slave/tenant community will be summarized and discussed within this paper. However, a very brief description of some of the physical aspects of the Quarters area will be presented prior to

this discussion. This description will provide some of the spatial organization of the residential portion of the community.

A Description of the Jordan Quarters

The Jordan Community was physically located approximately 350 feet north of the “Main House” area of the plantation. The area of the Jordan Plantation occupied by the community's cabins measures approximately 300 feet by 150 feet. The community members were housed in four blocks of paired “barracks-like” buildings. That is, each block consisted of two brick buildings set facing one another along a central hallway, with an in-ground cistern at the northern end of this hallway. Three (Blocks I, III, and IV) to four (Block II) individual cabins were contained in each of the buildings within the blocks. Thus, Blocks III, IV each contained six actual cabins, and I while Block II consisted of eight cabins. The exterior of the walls of each building was made of dry-laid bricks, while the interior divisions within and between the cabins were made of wood. Evidence suggests that a single, continuous roof covered each block. During the pre-1865 period, an additional “block” of three cabins was built near the Main House. The enslaved household staff occupied this set of cabins. After 1865, the occupants of this block who remained on the plantation took up residence within the 26 cabins of the Quarters.

Archaeology within the Quarters has suggested that within I, III, IV, and the Main House Block each cabin appears to have consisted of two rooms. The main room's floor space measured approximately 15 feet by 16 feet, and contained the hearth. The second room measured approximately six feet by 16 feet, and, in at least two cases these rooms function for both sleeping and

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craft activities. Each hearth had its own chimney. In Block II, each of the eight cabins consisted of a single room measuring approximately 16 feet by 16 feet. While each cabin had its own hearth, the hearths in adjacent cabins in the same building shared a single chimney. The only “cabin” to vary from this pattern was cabin I-A-1, the Praise House discussed below. The reason for the different architecture of Block II may be that it was the first to be constructed, and may have been built prior to the Jordan’s actually taking up residence on the plantation.

The Conjuror/ Midwife’s Cabin (Cabin II-B-1)

The Conjuror/Midwife’s residence is the northeast cabin in Block II of the slave and tenant quarters. This residence has been discussed in two previous publications, and appears to be best known as a result of the discovery of the so-called “Conjuror’s Kit” located in the southeastern corner of the cabin.⁽¹³⁾ The contents of this kit included a wide variety of artifacts including among other items five cast iron kettle bases, chalk, at least one sealed tube made of brass bullet casings, medicine bottles, and a thermometer. Adjacent to this deposit were water worn pebbles, mirror fragments, many square nails and spikes, several fake metal knife blades, a small doll, a concave metal disc, several ocean shells, and a number of blue glass beads. These artifacts have been interpreted as representing both the actual curing kit as well as the remains of an Nkisi similar to those found among the BiKongo peoples of West Africa. The Nkisi was employed as an integral part of the curing ritual among West African groups, 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.

However, within this cabin there are at least four other ritual deposits, three of which, when combined with the conjurer’s kit, form a cosmogram. The northern most of the three deposits consists of a set of seven silver coins. This set includes four quarters, two dimes, and a perforated half-dime. The coins had been deposited tightly wrapped together by cloth. Little of the cloth remained, but what was left appears to be coarsely woven cotton. The coins may have been ordered in a particular way within the cloth before being placed into a small hole, dug into the soil below the floor of the cabin. The set of coins was placed into the ground so that the coins were “standing” nearly vertically on their sides. They were oriented on a north-south axis. The perforated half-dime (dated 1853) was on the outside facing south, then came three quarters (two dated 1853 and one dated 1858), then the two dimes (one dated 1853 and the other 1858), followed by the last quarter (dated 1858). Thus, only two years were represented among the dates of these seven coins.

On the west side of the cabin was another interesting type of Nkisi deposit. The artifacts of this feature had been intentionally placed in a small pit dug into the soil adjacent to the brick foundation and under what appears to have been the doorway into the cabin. This set of materials included a wide variety of artifacts, nearly all of which were made of cast iron. The primary focus of this feature was two cast iron kettles placed upright, one inside the other. A third, smaller kettle had been broken and the pieces of the walls had been placed on top of the other two kettles. The bottom of this kettle was found approximately five feet to the northeast.

Before the two kettles were placed one inside the other, the bottom kettle had ash placed into it. This ash lens was the sealed by the upper kettle. The upper kettle contained a few objects of metal, ocean shells, glass, small bone fragments, and soil. Indeed, the kettle may have been filled simply by the accumulation of items falling through cracks in the floorboards. These kettles were wrapped around their circumference by a heavy chain.

Two “lines” of artifacts radiated out from these kettles. Toward the northeast were Confederate military buttons, large bone fragments, unperforated cockleshells, more chain, and a complete bayonet. Toward the southeast a number of large metal objects were placed along with two additional Confederate military buttons, a quartz crystal, perforated cockleshells. The large metal objects included a hinge, several spikes, a bolt, and a fragment of a plow. This feature likely formed a Nkisi that aided in ritually securing the protection of the cabin, its occupants, and the activities conducted inside from harm that might be caused by powerful elements from the outside world. However, this set of artifacts may not solely symbolize this transition. These artifacts may also represent an *amula* to Ogun, a Yoruba deity, similar to those noted from Cuba.

Another deposit was discovered after the previous three, and as a direct result of an archaeological test to discover a possible meaning for the others. That is, taken together, the previous three deposits could be interpreted as having represented the eastern, northern, and western points of a cosmogram, the BiKongo symbol for the cycle of life as well as an important curing symbol. The eastern point of the cosmogram is represented by the Conjuror’s kit, which would be employed in helping to give and maintain life. The northern point on

a cosmogram represents the height of one's power in this world, and maleness. To the north the set of coins was located. The western point on the cosmogram represents the point of passage from this world to the next—the process of moving from life to death. The presence of the ash and the distribution of perforated and unperforated shells may support a symbolic view of this transition. Thus, it was felt that one possible test of the cosmogram hypothesis would be the discovery of an artifact feature forming the southern point which, on the cosmogram, represents the height of one's power in the spirit world, and one's femaleness.

During the excavation of the living area of the cabin around the hearth, no such feature was encountered. However, excavation within the hearth area did produce a deposit of artifacts that forms the southern point as predicted by the cosmogram model. Based upon the presence of a lens of soil and brick over this feature, this deposit was placed into the hearth sometime after completion of the fireplace. The feature itself consisted of a hole dug into the soil supporting the base of the hearth and chimney. Ash, burned ocean shell, and burned square nails and spikes were placed on the floor of this hole. The hole was then filled with soil and brick rubble and the hearth floor reconstructed. This represents the only feature placed into a hearth yet discovered within the Quarters area of the plantation. At the risk of being considered "politically incorrect," in light of the traditional female association for the southern point on the cosmogram, it is interesting that it was placed within the hearth of the cabin. Certainly, however, placement within the hearth may have been the result of the shape of the cabin and the need to maintain cardinal directions while

placing the points of the cosmogram. The importance of hearth and household will be noted later in yet another context.

Each of these four features within the Conjuror/Midwife's Cabin support the interpretation of an African American behavioral and belief system—one that serves to control the outside world through the manipulation of the supernatural world. The full set of artifacts and contexts suggest that many of the basic ideas and rituals were of African origins. Very importantly, however, they show an interesting mix of materials from at least two West African cultural groups—BiKongo and Yoruba. However, the patent medicine bottles and the thermometer demonstrate some adaptation of non-African ideas as well. That is, all of these elements support the hypothesis that the conjurer/midwife had sanctified the floor space of the cabin for its use within the ritual performance of curing, conjuring, and, possibly giving birth. In the truest sense of the word, these features, along with the artifacts present, represent an example of the creolization process in operation.

Praise House/Prays House (Cabin I-A-1)

Cabin I-A-1, the northwest "cabin" within Block I has been identified as a "Community Building."⁽¹⁴⁾ Given the artifacts excavated from this cabin, and Barnes' analysis of this material, it is likely that the model of a "Praise House/Prays House" more clearly defines its uses.⁽¹⁵⁾ Excavations were begun here as the final test for the arrangement of the Quarters area at the time of its abandonment. At the time, it was decided that the testing of this cabin would provide information on the apparent "two-room" nature the tenant/sharecropper cabins. Further, the excavation of this cabin had the potential to provide

information on the earliest slave quarters on the plantation along with the brick manufacturing area that had been located below this Block of cabins. The first two units excavated into the cabin yielded a surprisingly low frequency of artifacts. However, not only was the amount of material lower than expected, even in so-called "non-abandoned cabins," but there was less variability in the artifact types present. Therefore, additional units were excavated in an attempt to more completely determine the nature of the deposits within this cabin.

These units revealed additional differences between the sub-floor deposits in this cabin and all of the other 16 cabins tested. These differences include: the reduction in artifact frequency and variability, the movement of the hearth, an increase in the size of the cabin, and several sub-floor features not previously observed in other cabins. As a result of the continued excavation of this cabin, artifact counts and distributions have not been completed. However, a few tentative and general comments can be made. First, total artifact counts per unit within this cabin appear to be from one-quarter to one-third of the counts for other cabins. Second, this represents the only cabin in which the building material artifact class is, by far, the largest. Indeed, one artifact type—square nails—makes up close to 25% of the artifacts recovered. Third, artifact types that generally appear in high frequencies in other cabins, such as ceramics, cooking, and eating utensils, bottle glass, bone, buttons, various personal items, and shell, are in very low frequency within this cabin. Thus, the artifact classes indicative of residential activities are the ones that exhibit the low frequency of occurrence. Other than a badly broken pocketknife, no tools were found within this cabin. Again, this is atypical of the artifact inventories of

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the other 16 cabins tested, in that it is the only cabin that lacked tools. On this evidence, it is possible to conclude that this cabin, unlike all of the others tested, may not have served as a residence. Although, it may have had a residential function for only a short period of time.

On the other hand, certain artifact types appear at a somewhat higher frequency in this cabin than in others. This "higher frequency" is likely the result of the low overall artifact density, thus making rare artifact types appear in higher frequency. However, the types of artifacts involved are interesting. The artifact types noted in higher than normal frequencies include: buttons, coins/metal tokens, fragments of slate boards, and slate pencils. The frequency of jewelry is approximately the same, or very slightly higher, in I-A-1 than for the other cabins tested.

One item of jewelry appears to be extremely significant in the determination of the function and meaning of this "cabin." This item is a small brass cross set with five cut red glass pieces and suspended on a small brass chain. The cross and chain were found to have been placed approximately in the geographic center of the cabin. When discovered, the cross was oriented north to south, with the actual cross located to the south of the closed-clasp chain. The chain and cross appear to have been deliberately placed below the floor, rather than having been "dropped." Indeed, the appearance was almost as if it was "on display" in a very shallow hole scooped out of the soil below the floor. Equally important, in terms of its deposition, the clasp on the chain was closed. This last point may represent a further indication that the cross and its chain may not have simply become lost below the floorboards. Certainly it could have been lost after being removed by the person wearing it, and then dropped

through the floor boards of the cabin before it was known to have been lost, the closed clasp and the slight depression in the ground surface, at least supports the possibility of its having been intentionally placed. This positioning within the cabin, the location of the cross, vis-à-vis the chain, and the closed clasp all aid in making this item potentially very important in the determination of the function and meaning of the cabin. That is, the cross might support the hypothesis that the meaning and function of the cabin was within the Christian religious views held by members of the community: the "cabin" was the location of the "Prays House."

This hypothesis is further supported by the presence of two coins located near the cross. One of these coins, an 1858 half-dollar piece, was found two feet north of the cross. The second coin is an 1858 half dime found 3.5 feet west of the cross. The coins appeared to be located roughly on the lines that would be created if one were to continue outward from the cross along two of its axis's (e.g., north and west from the cross). Also, it should be noted that both of these silver coins date to the same year as at least six of the seven coins in the cosmogram placed beneath the floor of the Conjuror/Midwife's Cabin. Again, both the location of the coins, and their date, supports the hypothesis that they are related to the cross, and functioned within the same sub-system as the cross and chain. While more excavation is required to determine if coins, or other items, radiate out from the cross on the east and south, the cross/chain and coins may represent a cosmogram with the cross in the center. This might suggest either another example of the creolization process, or a statement of completing views of the organization of the way the world operates.

Another point of support for the Prays House function of the "cabin" is that at some point early in the history of its use, the hearth was moved outside of the main room, and its size was slightly increased. Early Prays Houses in the Gullah area of the Lowcountry were built without hearths. Excavation along the west wall demonstrated that the original hearth was located near the northwest corner of the cabin, as defined by the presence of the wall trench for a hearth in this area. At some point this hearth was moved approximately 12 to 13 feet southward along the west wall. It is here that the remains of the brick walls of the hearth were found. Excavation of the west side of the rebuilt hearth walls demonstrated that they met, but were not integrated into, the western brick wall of the cabin block. This is the only set of hearth walls not integrated into a cabin block wall in the ten cabins excavated where this could be investigated.

Further, no other hearth was found within the main room of the cabin. Thus, the movement of the hearth also had the impact of increasing the size of the "cabin" nearly seven feet toward the south. That is, the newly reconfigured "cabin" would have measured 16 feet by 28-29 feet. Robert Harris's analysis of cabin I-B-3, the "Carver's Cabin," the standard cabin size in Block I was 16 feet by 22 feet, and cabins appeared to have had two rooms within this space. Thus, the extension of cabin I-A-1 would have increased its size; while at the same time reduced the size of cabin I-A-2 by almost exactly the amount of the narrow interior room defined by Harris.

The heaviest distribution of artifacts that appear to be indicative of residential-type activities was located within this extended area of the cabin. In general, the dating of the bulk of the materials deposited here, supports the view that

this extension to the cabin was utilized very late in the use-history of the cabin (post 1880). Thus, it is likely that this material was deposited sometime after the extension of the cabin and the movement of the hearth, but exactly when cannot be determined. However, cabin I-A-1 was reconfigured into a larger two-room cabin (with one of the rooms measuring 16 feet by 22 feet and the second measuring 16 feet by 6 feet) much earlier during its use. This would have made it the largest cabin in the quarters. In this light, the lack of artifacts indicative of a domestic function is all the more interesting and important.

In this context, two unique sub-floor deposits were discovered within this cabin. The first extended around the eastern and northern sides of the reconstructed hearth. This was a thick intentionally placed deposit of ash and charcoal. Mixed into the ashy matrix of this feature were bones (some very large), small ceramic shards, small glass shards, broken buttons, burned shell, and square nails. This material was placed into a shallow hole, approximately four to six inches in depth, dug out to a distance of approximately one foot out from the eastern and northern walls of the hearth. Clearly, ash and charcoal tend to increase in frequency on the surface of the ground as one approaches the hearth walls in each of the cabins thus far investigated. However, the situation in the so-called Prays House represents the only time that a special hole was dug around the hearth to hold this material. Further, this is the only time that charcoal, ash, and small household artifacts appear to have been deposited, as opposed to their having accumulated, around the hearth.

The second deposit was found along the eastern wall of the cabin. The feature consists of a shallow pit dug into the soil likely near the area of the

entrance to the cabin. Lime-based plaster was employed to produce a raised design on the floor of the hole. The matrix filling the hole and surrounding the "sculpture" consisted soil containing many tiny pieces of the same white, lime-based plaster and very few brick fragments. The soil matrix into which the hole was dug contained a very high density of brick fragments, thus suggesting the hole was not refilled with the soil originally dug out of it. The hole had been capped by two layers of firmly packed, finely crushed brick separated by a thin lens of tightly packed soil. Unfortunately, we have not been able to fully determine what the intended design might originally have been. Tree roots and ground water have destroyed a large portion of the design that was originally present. As with the feature connected with the hearth, this is the only sealed deposit of plaster yet discovered on the site.

Initially, this cabin appears typical of the others in Block I in terms of size and function—it was a residence. However, early in its use, the cabin was physically altered and its function changed. In attempting to interpret the reconstructed cabin's function, the archaeological deposit was tested against Margaret Creels' ethnographic description of a Gullah Praise House (or Prays House).(16) Unfortunately, she does not include any discussion of the material items and artifact contexts associated with such a structure. However, a number of test implications that might be developed from her model are met by this structure. For example, she states that the Praise House was the first cabin in the quarters, often originally the residence of an important person within the enslaved community. This is confirmed by the data from cabin I-A-1.

The presence of the cross, the coins, and the ash feature around the hearth

all suggest a community ritual nature for the reconstructed cabin. Both Creel(17) and Patricia Guthrie(18) have demonstrated that, among the Gullah, the Praise House functioned as the center of community religious and political activities. In their data, households and residences on a plantation define communities, and households are defined by the presence of hearths. Thus, it is not a great leap to attempt to interpret the ash, charcoal, and burned household artifact deposit around the reconstructed hearth as having been intentionally placed to demonstrate community membership, and helping to secure Praise House membership. Limited historical information further suggests the presence of a religious structure for the black community on the Jordan Plantation prior to 1870.

The African American Cemetery

David Bruner conducted research within the plantation's African American cemetery during 1994-96.(19) This investigation was primarily oriented toward the mapping of the cultural features within the cemetery. Initially, the cemetery was located and its boundaries defined by oral testimony. That is, the current landowner, a descendant of Levi and Sarah Jordan, as well as an individual with several ancestors buried within the cemetery, provided information on its location and extent. In order to insure that the complete cemetery was included within our research, the initial mapping project extended outside the "traditionally" defined boundaries. A grid was superimposed over the area, and all mapping was done from the grid points. A total of 140 probable graves were recorded in this mapping operation. Of these potential grave shafts, 37 were marked in some fashion at the surface.

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However, only twelve were marked in the traditional European American fashion with head- and/or foot-stones. The others were marked with a variety of forms of markers—e.g., pipes, railroad rails driven into the ground, and other forms of metal “objects.” No signs of wooden markers remained on the surface at the time of the investigation. The vast majority of potential graves, therefore, lacked surface monuments. In order to determine the actual number of graves present, it was decided that two additional operations would be undertaken to aid in the definition of graves: the use of a metal detector, and highly controlled and limited excavation.

A metal detector was employed in an effort to determine whether or not a pattern of metal artifacts was present within the area of an unmarked potential grave depression that might indicate the presence of a coffin within the depression. This operation was successful in determining the apparent location of coffins below the surface of the ground within the several of the depressions defined. Also significant was the observation that no “coffin [p]atterns” were defined unless there was a depression present. However, not all depressions revealed the presence of a coffin through this operation. The metal detector also discovered a number of objects that appear to mark graves, in an African American fashion—e.g., metal “pipes.” A number of these pipes were no longer observable from the surface. However, based upon the information from marked graves, pipes had been placed standing upright near the western end of graves within this cemetery. Therefore, the information from the metal detector portion of the survey suggested that such pipes could be employed as grave markers, even if the original intent was not for this

purpose. Metal pipes were employed to “connect” many of the dead buried within the cemetery with the surface.

Further, shallow excavation units were placed within the cemetery focusing solely on the confirmation of grave shafts and, in a very limited fashion, to aid in the illustration of the surface treatment of the graves. That is, units one foot wide and up to five feet long were excavated across a randomly selected ten percent sample of the unmarked, potential grave depressions. Excavation in these units was continued until it was determined whether or not an actual grave shaft was present. No bodies were disturbed, and no artifacts were collected during this operation. When artifacts were discovered in these units, they were left in place, and excavation continued down around them. Bottles, ceramics, knives, plow parts, car parts, and tractor parts were identified as having been placed on top of or within the graves. All of the depressions tested were determined to have straight-walled shafts that were interpreted as graves.

Based upon this archaeological investigation, the cemetery appears to be the resting place for the physical remains of approximately 140 individuals. Research into a variety of records (both written and oral) was employed in an effort to determine the names of the actual individuals present. Study of the information derived from the head stones, combined with genealogical data, death certificates, oral historical knowledge, and other information, has revealed the identities of approximately one-third of the individuals believed to have been interred within the cemetery. In turn, this evidence has led to an interesting hypothesis concerning the decision-making pattern for burial within this cemetery. With one exception, only people known to have spent their childhood on the plantation were buried in this

cemetery during the 125 years of its active use. Spouses of those buried in the cemetery and who did not grow up on the plantation are buried elsewhere.

The single known exception is that of a week old child who died in 1973. This child was, however, born into a family that had continued to live on land that was part of the original Jordan Plantation. Indeed, the child was buried in the portion of the cemetery employed by the family through the 1970s. The scope of this project did not include the investigation of other plantation cemeteries in an attempt to determine if it was possible to identify whether or not they also demonstrate this pattern. However, this pattern appears to be similar to that defined for the Gullah by Guthrie.(20)

Another of the important discoveries made during this survey was the presence of a metal object placed in the ground between the edge of the slough and a set of ten graves. For a variety of reasons, it appears likely that these graves were the earliest ones placed within the cemetery, and may represent the graves of enslaved individuals. This object consisted of a metal half-circle welded onto a railroad rail. Bruner noted that this marker resembles the lower half of a cosmogram—the half which signifies that portion of the life cycle related to death and one’s life in the spirit world.(21) This marker does not appear to have been placed on or near a grave. It is, on the other hand, likely that this marker (along with the yucca plants that flank it on either side) identifies the entrance to the cemetery from the slough. If this was, indeed, the case, then a link can be made between the symbolism employed within the community’s cemetery and beliefs expressed in a number of contexts within the community itself.

Excavations at Frogmore Manor Plantation

Historical archaeological investigation at the Frogmore Manor Plantation Quarters was begun during March, 1998, under the direction of the author. At the request of the landowner, excavations had to be concluded in August, 2000. In this case, excavation was undertaken solely within the area of the Quarters, although the main house and at least one of the eighteenth century plantation buildings are still in use. Historical records indicate that the Quarters were first built and occupied by enslaved Africans and African Americans owned by William Bull sometime after 1770. By the time of his death in 1791, William Bull operated a sea island cotton plantation covering over 3,300 acres with at least two Quarters areas: the one excavated during our project, and a second one inhabited by enslaved people owned by Bull's overseer, a Mr. Robertson, and located on the northern end of the original plantation, near the modern town of Frogmore.

The earliest written documentation related to the Frogmore Manor Quarters consists of a 1791 map showing the location of the Quarters and several of the plantations other structures. At that time, the Quarters consisted of 18 houses with an enslaved population of less than 100 people. Under the ownership of Colonel John Stapleton and, later, William Grayson, the enslaved population had increased to over 170. Not including the Federal Census lists, a series of four "slave lists" exist for the plantation spanning the period from 1791 (Bull's probate record) through 1852 (Grayson's sale of enslaved people). Each of these lists is in family groups and includes such information as gender, age, occupation, and, in three

cases, continent of origin. Thus, the actual written documentation for the enslaved population that occupied the Frogmore Manor Quarters is much more complete than that for Jordan. However, for the purposes of this paper, two aspects of the record are critical: one, that the populations of enslaved people were relatively "the same," and two, that one of the occupations listed at Frogmore Manor was that of "midwife."

The excavation methodology followed at Frogmore Manor was essentially identical to that employed at Levi Jordan. The major exception being that the size of the unit was changed from five by five to three by three. This alteration of the initial unit size was deemed necessary as a result of the sand soil matrix encountered on St. Helena Island. However, these units were also divided into subunits after the first level removed the forest leaf litter. The continuation of the use of subunits throughout this excavation was maintained for two reasons: one, the aid in recording detailed archaeological context, and two, to aid in identifying the two primary house types (based upon their foundation) for enslaved people known from the Carolina Lowcountry, if the types existed within this community.

Prior to discussing the results of our excavation into one of the Frogmore Manor Quarters residences, it is necessary to point out that our investigations at Frogmore Manor, while terminated, are not complete. Therefore, some of the results are tentative at this time. After originally agreeing to four field seasons of excavation, during the third field season it was requested that we not return. The current landowners were receiving a great deal of pressure from other members of their large extended family to have the excavations halted. According to the owners, the rest of the family is certain that we could somehow

steal their land as a result of the presence of an important archaeological site. While the owners were assured that such an event could not happen, and were given copies of existing South Carolina and Federal Laws to that effect, nothing would alter their opinion. Thus, excavations were terminated before the planned completion date, leaving important information unavailable.

That having been said, we were able to recover information on at least eleven cabins (five from the early Quarters and six from the later Quarters) and a possible lime and/or ceramic kiln. Of these cabins, two were extensively excavated, both from the later Quarters. The results of one of the excavations of one of these cabins will be presented here as they relate to the Conjuror/Midwife's cabin at Jordan.

The Possible Conjuror/Midwife's House

The house was located in the eastern portion of the Quarters as defined by our testing. Approximately 50% of the original cabins floor area was investigated during our excavations. Of importance here was the discovery of four sub-floor features centered on each of the four walls of the cabin. Two of these deposits consisted of the intentional burial of articulated animals, one a storage pit, and the other a deposit of ash and burned shell and metal. These four deposits appear to form a cosmogram below the floor of the cabin. Unlike the Jordan cosmogram, however, this cosmogram was oriented to the walls of the cabin, and not to cardinal directions.

The first deposit was discovered during the Summer 1999 field season. The deposit consists of a fully articulated chicken placed in a small hole facing east with its wings slightly extended to

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either side. The chicken had been placed below a broken base of a green glass wine bottle. As yet, we have been unable to determine how the bird was killed. It was the discovery of this deposit that led to the decision to excavate a number of additional units in the area in an attempt to determine the reason for the burial of this animal. This later excavation has demonstrated that the chicken had been placed along the western wall of the cabin.

The second deposit was discovered during the Summer 2000 field season. The deposit consisted of an almost fully articulated young cow. Upon complete excavation, it was determined that the cow was missing its tail. Like the chicken, the cow had been placed into a hole with its legs and head facing to the east. One major difference between the positioning of the cow and the chicken was that the cow was placed lying on its side and the chicken had been placed standing up. The cow was placed below both a green glass wine bottle base and a complete wine bottle. As with the chicken these glass objects had been placed upside down. A large portion of a colonoware vessel was also recovered from above the cow in the fill of the pit. The cow was placed to the northeast of the chicken, and along the northern wall of the cabin.

The third deposit was also discovered during the Summer 2000 field season. Indeed, both the third and fourth deposits were found as a direct result of a test that the cow and chicken formed two of the four deposits of a cosmogram. The third deposit consisted of a shallow, rectangular pit placed below the ground surface immediately in front of the cabin's fireplace. At the time of its excavation, the pit contained a great deal of shell (possibly from the disintegration of the fireplace base), a complete green glass wine bottle, the

fragments of another wine bottle missing its base, a long cast iron "needle," a large blue glass bead, several mirror fragments, a number of smoothed bone fragments, and several colonoware sherds. Samples of the soil were collected for possible botanical analysis. This deposit may have been a "hidey-hole," and unrelated to the other deposits, except for three factors: the wine bottles, the association of artifacts the help to comprise the conjurer's kit at Jordan and in the ethnographic examples recorded by Bascom, and the fact that no other houses for which hearths have been identified (four) had these pits.(22) This deposit was located northeast of the cow, but it would have been placed alone the eastern wall of the cabin.

The fourth deposit was also discovered during the Summer 2000 field season. This deposit was the most ephemeral of the four. It consisted of a fine, lime ash, with very small fragments of burned shell and metal (including a number of small nails). This deposit was placed in a very shallow hole scooped into the sand. The texture of the sand lined the bottom of the pit suggested that the materials might have been burned *in situ*. However, later depositional factors have had the effect of softening this burned lens, and making it difficult to determine if the materials were actually burned there. The artifacts recovered from within this deposit are identical to those of the southern deposit in the cosmogram interpreted from the Jordan Quarters, and like that one, the one at Frogmore was located on the southern wall of the cabin.

Taken together, these four deposits directly mirror the cosmogram deposits recovered from the Jordan Quarters, and the ethnographically defined meanings of the four points of a cosmogram found in West African contexts. The only major difference between the two

cosmograms is the use of animals at Frogmore Manor, rather than the European American technology employed in the Jordan cosmogram. However, the meanings of the deposits appear to have been identical. Indeed, the Frogmore Manor deposits have a much more "African" appearance. Cattle often symbolize wealth in many West African cultures, while protection from spirits can be obtained from chickens. In both Frogmore Manor and Jordan, chickens were sacrificed and then buried fully articulated, though in the case of Jordan this may have been done at the death of the Conjurer/Midwife's two children and husband during the 1870s.

Summary and Conclusions

There can be no question that African cultural traditions became actively incorporated into African American culture through the interactions and adaptations made by Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans who operated within the system of enslavement practiced in the American South. For Africans and African Americans, however, a number of these traditions had to be maintained through their being hidden from the wider, dominant society. Thus, the traditions had to continue but in an "underground" and/or altered expression from those originally practiced in Africa. Some could be hidden within the traditions and beliefs of the dominant culture, as in the Christianity of the Prays House.(23) Sometimes they were hidden, as Bruner stated, in "plain view" within the landscape they created.(24) In other cases, the symbolic representatives of the beliefs and behaviors had to literally be hidden from the view of individuals both within and outside the community. Thus, for African Americans the placement of objects below ground was far more

important than had been the case in Africa. Given the power of the inhabitants of the spirit world, placement out of view, below cabin floors or other locations below ground, even on their bodies, had no impact on the efficacy of the deposits thus “hidden”/placed out of view.

The detailed contextual historical archaeological research of the African American communities of the Jordan and Frogmore Manor Plantations have revealed a number of patterns of behavior along with symbolic representations that appear to have antecedents in Africa: the conjurer, the cosmograms, and other symbolically charged objects, along with a number of beliefs and rituals connected with the burial of the dead. Further, the information discovered during both the Jordan and Frogmore Manor Quarters excavations have also revealed another pattern found within the African American expression of this symbolic culture. That is, for the most part, these displays are hidden from the view of individuals within this world, especially those of the dominant culture, unlike in West Africa where they could be placed into the above ground landscape defined by the inhabitants.

However, what is important in this transition from plain view to hidden is that the elements were still “visible” to inhabitants of the supernatural world. These elements still functioned to aid in the manipulation and maintenance of the supernatural world—a world still heavily defined by the beliefs of peoples of African descent. Such patterns appear similar to historically and ethnographically defined practices from the Caribbean, South America, North America, and, most importantly, the Gullah of the Sea Islands where Frogmore Manor is located.(25)

Clearly, over time the material objects that have symbolic importance within African American systems of belief and behavior were changed from their African counterparts. As people of African descent became increasingly confronted with European American technology they gave it meaning and value within their own cultural contexts. In this they had little choice. Stores and merchants in the New World spent little effort importing the goods from Africa necessary for African belief and behavioral practices to continue with the same materials that might have been employed in Africa. Further, the pattern of cultural repression practiced by European Americans noted above, literally drove people of African descent to a redefinition of meaning and beliefs connected with European American technology and definition of the landscape around them. Thus some of the behavioral and belief patterns noted by historians and historical archaeologists appear to represent adaptations to life under the conditions of enslavement.(26) These patterns would include: determination of community membership, treatment after death, Prays House, and internal community craft production.

The two cosmograms defined from Frogmore Manor and Jordan represent this change from more “African” material culture to European American items being assigned identical meanings. Unfortunately, it is this change toward European American material culture that has caused historical archaeologists “trouble” in defining African and African American impacts on the landscape of American culture. We have spent too much time looking for African material culture, rather than African meaning and value assigned to European American material items. Historians and historical archaeologists have conceived of African practices/material expressions

as “retentions” rather than as what they are—elements of a new culture constructed to permit survival within the oppressive systems of enslavement and tenancy/sharecropping. We have taken the view that the dominant culture “provided” the beliefs and behaviors that African and people of African descent had to follow. Phillip Morgan even assigns the role of the labor system as the determining character for “African American cultural retentions.”(27) In this view, people of African descent are merely vessels that slowly are filled with European American culture. Clearly, the material presented above suggests this view is totally inadequate. Peoples of African descent played the major role in their cultural development. They simply placed it in contexts “hidden from view.”

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