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Poverty Point as Structure, Event, Process

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A multiscalar analysis of the Poverty Point mound and ridge complex of northeast Louisiana illustrates the value of agency and practice theories to historical interpretations of monumental architecture. The architects of Poverty Point included both ancient mounds in their design and, arguably, symbolic representations of the far-flung places and peoples from which Poverty Point residents acquired raw materials for tools and ornaments. The conjunction of the past with the present, and the local with the nonlocal was the logic of a new social order that was both corporate and pluralistic. Extrapolation of the geometry of Poverty Point earthworks at increasingly larger scales encompasses the places and histories of communities whose migrations, shifting alliances, and transformations contributed to the genesis of Poverty Point culture.

KEY WORDS: Monumentality; social memory; multiscalar analysis; Poverty Point.

INTRODUCTION

My intent in this paper is to provide an example of how agency and practice theories lend themselves to historical interpretation through multiscalar analytical methods. By multiscalar I mean both a sense of varying temporality, as in the contrast between structure (i.e., tradition) and event (e.g., encounters), as well as the multiple spatial scales and places that are connected through human practice in dynamic regional landscapes (e.g., Heckenberger, 2005; Marquardt and Crumley, 1987). Explicitly multiscalar analyses have seen widespread, if only infrequent application in archaeology (e.g., Ames, 1991; Bintliff, 1991; Cobb, 1991; Knapp, 1992; Lightfoot, 1995; Marquardt, 1985; Nassaney and Sassaman, 1995) and common to these efforts is the understanding that interpretations change with scale of observation. What appears homogeneous and unranked at one scale of

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time and space, for example, becomes heterogeneous and ranked at another scale (Crumley, 1979, pp. 143–145). It follows that archaeologists, like other observers of culture, predetermine the recognition and interpretation of pattern when they decide on appropriate scales of analysis.

The 3500-year-old Poverty Point mound and ridge complex of northeast Louisiana provides a good example of how different scales of analysis shade interpretation. Duplicated in form nowhere else, the monumental architecture of Poverty Point was a singular sensation. In its uniqueness, Poverty Point appears quirky, even parochial. To the contrary, its large inventory of nonlocal raw materials is testimony to a cosmopolitan society, a people of vast cultural connection. Similarly, the earthworks of Poverty Point were a purposeful, planned construction that was erected in relatively short order. However, its mounds and ridges were sited using a measurement system that was established at least 2000 years before (Clark, 2004), and its architects deliberately incorporated into their design the works of earlier people, apparently appropriating the past to assert a new social order.

The construction of Poverty Point indeed was eventful, but in its larger historical context it arguably was the materialization or interpretation of ancient experiences, the invention of tradition. Similarly, the event was perhaps local and corporate, the work of a collective body, but in its larger geographical context I suggest it was an act of plurality, the confluence of multiple streams of history. Moreover, the reproduction of Poverty Point as a sociohistorical structure was an ongoing process, a multifaceted and ever-changing course of becoming (e.g., Barth, 1987; Pauketat, 2001). At a community level, earthwork construction and associated ritual may have recapitulated the founding event and genesis of its people, as in the earth-renewal qualities of staged mound construction among Mississippian chiefdoms (Knight, 1989). At a higher level, the reproduction of Poverty Point society and culture must have depended on the making of persons with lived experiences far away. This can be inferred from the assemblages of nonlocal materials and objects at sites in the greater Poverty Point region, many of which were not necessary for sustaining the local economy. In drawing from such vast places and personnel to obtain and utilize nonlocal materials, Poverty Point "citizens" crossed routinely into the domain of "other people." Encounters between people of distinctive cultural identity may have been as eventful as the construction of mounds, and just as integral to the making of tradition. A large literature exists on the historical processes of colonial encounters (e.g., Deagan, 1996; Gosden, 2004; Lightfoot, 1995; Sahlins, 1985; Silliman, 2001; Stein, 2005) but not since the heyday of the culture-historical paradigm have interactions between foreign and indigenous peoples been central to the explanation of culture change in the pre-Columbian Americas (e.g., Ford, 1969; Clark and Knoll, 2005). Although an Olmec origin for Poverty Point, as proposed by Ford (1969, p. 180), enjoys no empirical support today, its genesis and reproduction, I suggest, owe as much to distant events and peoples as it does to the corporate group who

made and lived in what Clark *et al*. (in press) call one of the America's first towns.

In its unique monumental architecture, Poverty Point culture was unlike other cultural traditions. Monumental or ritual centers worldwide were duplicated in form across the landscapes of their respective cultural milieus, reflecting literally the histories of migration, diffusion, and colonization that linked communities of people across regions and generations. These centers of religious and political authority often followed certain grammatical principles of spatiality, apparently reflecting shared cultural dispositions about cosmology and sociality (e.g., Bradley, 1998; Clay, 1998; DeBoer, 1997; Knight, 1998; Skibo *et al*., 2002). Centers were often linked in constellations of geometric integration (e.g., DeBoer, in press; Lekson, 1999, 2005), occasionally with fractal qualities that rendered persons, places, and the region inseparable (Heckenberger, 2005).

Poverty Point, on the other hand, was not replicated elsewhere—at least not in its totality. Nonetheless, I suggest that the design and use of its earthworks transcended its seemingly singular and synchronic existence to symbolically incorporate other times (events) and broad-scale social geographies. Poverty Point's reach was thus centered on the materialization of symbolic power among regions (sensu Gosden, 2004), not on the expansion of its economic or political power.[3] The symbolic time–space dimensions of Poverty Point are revealed in a multiscalar analytical approach that is itself inspired by the geometry of these ancient earthworks. When extrapolated over increasingly larger spatial scales, the nested ridges comprising the core of Poverty Point encapsulate increasingly wider spheres of cultural affiliation. Time expands with space as we incorporate the histories of distant peoples whose connection to Poverty Point is obscured by local, synchronic, and corporate analytical perspectives. I propose that a multiscalar analysis is consonant with the root metaphors of Poverty Pointy culture, namely, that its earthworks were something of an historical atlas, symbolic of the places, events, and forces of its genesis. I further propose that the reproduction and transformation of Poverty Point culture was centered on the making of cosmopolitan persons, a process involving the acquisition of nonlocal materials and knowledge.

To illustrate the forgoing points, I take into consideration three interrelated dimensions to the construction and use of Poverty Point. First I examine the local, ancient earthworks that were incorporated into the design of Poverty Point.

[3]Debate over the relative sociopolitical complexity of Poverty Point is ongoing. Paralleling discourse over complexity in the American Southwest (Lekson, 2005, p. 264), it is difficult to support the argument that Poverty Point was the center of a regional hierarchy, something akin to a complex chiefdom (cf. Gibson, 1973). However, most would agree that the construction of its earthworks required leadership and authority, and the engineering knowledge to succeed in this effort was likely privileged. How such specialized knowledge and the leadership necessary to erect the earthworks affected everyday living is unknown to us. Nonetheless, Poverty Point was clearly an important and unique place, a theater of symbolic power, if not political and economic power (cf. Kehoe, 2002). It was also clearly a place of residence for at least a portion of the population who built the earthworks (Clark *et al*., in press; Gibson, 2000).

Once thought to be without precedent in northeast Louisiana, Poverty Point was preceded by a tradition of mound building nearly 2000 years older. The architects of Poverty Point apparently co-opted elements of the ancient built environment in designing their monument, and I suggest this invoking of social memory was integral in promoting a new social order. Second, I consider how the new social order was reproduced (and transformed) as a multicultural structure through the symbolic transposition of the monument over regional and supraregional scales to incorporate people of diverse experiences. Third, I briefly examine possible microscalar practices that reproduced Poverty Point society. To anticipate the outcome, I suggest that Poverty Point was reproduced as a macroscalar and multicultural structure through ritual practices that rendered biological reproduction possible only through the social production of "worldly" individuals. Contradictions between local and extralocal social obligations, between stipulated and real ancestry, and between the past and the present supplied the raw materials for change in the ongoing historical process of making Poverty Point culture through practice (sensu Pauketat, 2001). In this sense, Poverty Point was many things to many people, just as it is today among the archaeologists who ponder its significance and find little room for agreement.

ANCESTRAL ROOTS OF POVERTY POINT

Poverty Point is impressive by any standard as it involved the movement of 750,000 cubic meters of earth (Gibson, 2000) to form a complex of integrated architectural elements covering five square kilometers (Fig. 1).[4] Construction of this complex elapsed over an uncertain length of time in the span of 1600–1300 cal B.C. Incorporated into the plan were one and possibly three earthen mounds whose construction predated Poverty Point by nearly two millennia (Saunders *et al.*, 2001). Other clues to an ancestry for Poverty Point are found in the measurement system used to site mounds (Clark, 2004). Both elements of the Poverty Point complex are evidence of underlying structural continuities otherwise obscured by the long hiatus in mound-building events between those of Middle Archaic and Poverty Point age. A brief review of the earliest mound sites in northeast Louisiana reveals a few of the more likely threads of continuity.

Middle Archaic Precedents

Some 30 mound sites in the Lower Mississippi River Valley are known or suspected to date to the Middle Archaic period (ca. 6950–3750 cal B.C.) (Russo,

[4]The configuration of Poverty Point earthworks shown in Figs.1, 2 and 7 is adapted from Clark (2004, Fig. 10.7), which was derived from the detailed topographic map issued recently by Kidder (2002).

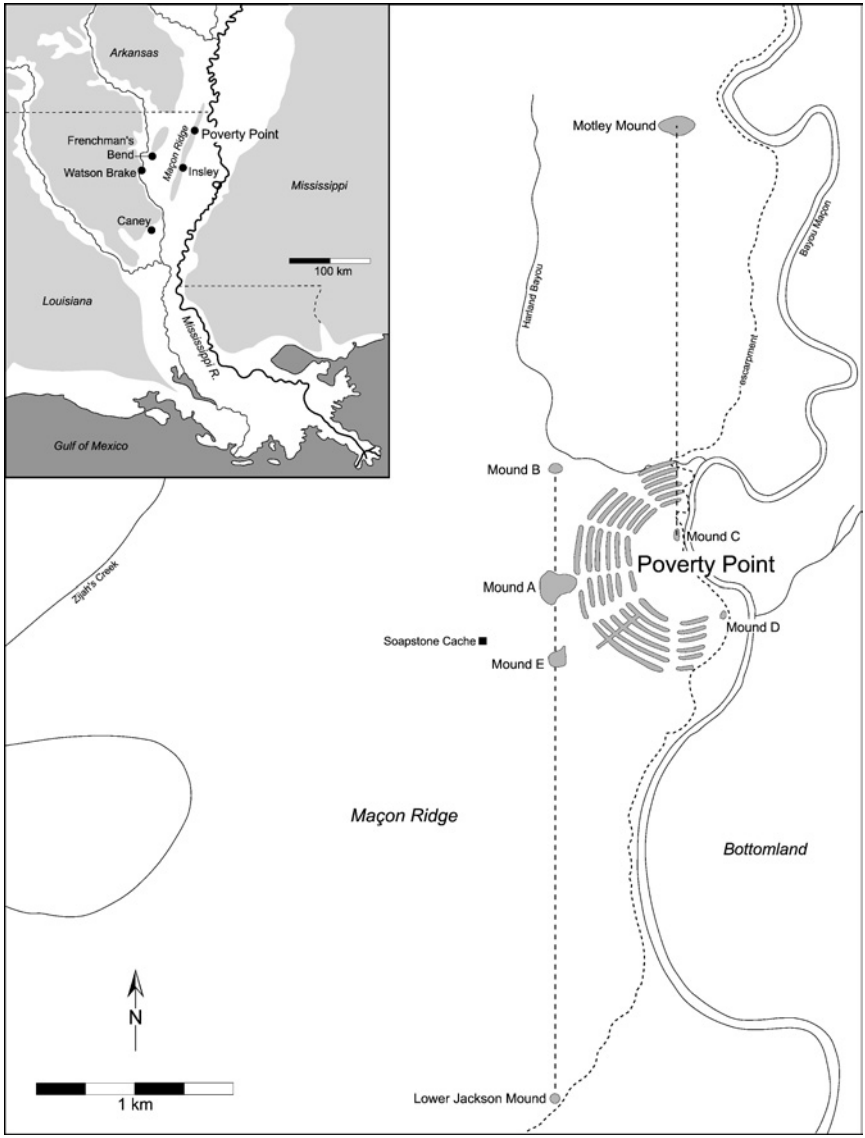

Fig. 1. Map of the Poverty Point enclosure and associated mounds, with inset map of the Lower Mississippi Valley showing locations of Poverty Point and Middle Archaic mound complexes discussed in text.

1996). Among the better documented are three complexes in northeast Louisiana that are securely dated to 4275–3750 cal B.C. Located south and west of Poverty Point (Fig. 1), each of these three complexes—Watson Brake (Saunders *et al*., 1997), Caney (Saunders *et al*., 2000), and Frenchman's Bend (Saunders *et al*., 1994)—and a fourth that has not been dated, Insley (Kidder, 1991), was erected according to a similar plan.[5] The size and number of mounds at each complex vary, as does of the areal extent of earthworks. Nonetheless, each complex subscribes to the same geometric and proportional regularities (Sassaman and Heckenberger, 2004a,b) and to a common Archaic measurement system (Clark, 2004).

The major commonalties among these complexes can be summarized as follows. Each complex has a line of three or more mounds arrayed adjacent and parallel to a terrace escarpment. Watson and Caney are identical in this respect, with the largest of three terrace-edge mounds positioned in the middle. Insley has a similar arrangement but with two additional mounds on the terrace edge, one of which is aligned with the central three. The four mounds along the terrace edge at Frenchman's Bend deviate somewhat from a straight line as they follow an irregular escarpment.

Terrace edges clearly figured prominently in the siting of mounds, but not all mounds were sited on edges. Each of the four complexes has at least one mound set back from the edge at a distance that is roughly 40% greater than the spread of the terrace-edge mounds. This "backset" mound tends to be the second largest mound in complexes and it tends to be sited on a line that is almost, but not quite perpendicular to the largest mound of the terrace group. The deviation of this line from the true perpendicular is about 10°.

Differences in the size and orientation of these four mound complexes may hold clues about possible relationships among them. Compared by the distance between terrace-edge and backset mounds, the four complexes involve three scales, with Watson Brake and Frenchmens Bend the same, Caney 20% larger, and Insley exactly twice the size of the first two. These proportional regularities bespeak of a shared standard of measurement, as demonstrated by Clark (2004). The ranked size of these complexes may likewise signify something about hierarchical social principles, as discussed below.

A second dimension of possible integration is found in the orientation of mound complexes. Using, for example, a line of sight from the largest mound of the terrace line and its respective backset mound for azimuth of orientation,

[5]Middle Archaic artifacts have not been recovered from Insley. Available artifactual evidence suggest the mounds at Insley were built during Poverty Point times and later (Jon Gibson, personal communication, 2005). I include Insley in my sample of Middle Archaic mounds based primarily on its geometric and scalar relationships to mound complexes of known Middle Archaic age (see Sassaman and Heckenberger, 2004a,b), but also on the growing recognition that mounds of presumed late age in Louisiana and elsewhere were established as monuments much earlier, and that evidence for this is usually obscured by later mounding events and occupation.

the complexes vary across a range of 200°. This observation alone lessens the likelihood that these complexes served as astronomical observatories, at least not in any duplicative or redundant fashion. However, the variation in orientation among them hardly seems random, as each comes very close to occupying a 60° increment of a radial array (like slices of a pie) when georeferenced to the largest mound (Sassaman and Heckenberger, 2004a, p. 227). Insley and Caney are redundant in this respect, both oriented lengthwise on a north–south axis, like Poverty Point.

In sum, the Middle Archaic complexes reviewed here all have orientation along terrace edges with at least one mound set back from the terrace edge at a fixed proportional distance. They also conform to a standard of measurement but exhibit multiscalar qualities and a possible radial relationship that suggests that individual complexes were integrated in a regional system. The manner by which some of these principles were incorporated into the planning of Poverty Point requires a bit more discussion on the standards of measurement and use of triangular geometry.

Clark (2004) and I infer underlying patterning in the siting of Middle Archaic mounds in related but different and independent ways. Whereas I use the line connecting the largest terrace mound and its backset counterpart to establish a base line for an equilateral triangle, Clark (2004) sets his base on the terrace line of mounds with the vertex of an equilateral triangle referenced to the backset mound. He also shows how paired equilateral triangles sharing my base line can be inscribed in a vesica to delineate the mounds arrayed in semielliptical fashion at Caney and Watson Brake.

Clark was interested in finding the standards of measurement that enabled Middle Archaic surveyors to site mounds with such regularity and was able to infer from Caney a unit of measurement he calls the Standard Macro-Unit (SMU). This interval of 86.63 m is 52 times the standard unit of 1.666 m (i.e., a fathom), which Clark suggests is a widespread unit of measurement in the Americas. Clark's Caney triangle, what he calls the Principle Triangle, is four SMUs on a side.

Clark also found a plausible explanation for the deviation from perpendicular noted above in the line joining terrace and backset mounds. Because the central mounds in the terrace lines at both Watson Brake and Caney are not quite equidistant between the two end members, a line joining this central mound and the backset mound is not aligned with the median of the Principle Triangle, but is instead 10° askew. Because this deviation recurs at all four Middle Archaic mound complexes, as well as Poverty Point (see below), it is not likely to be random or incidental. Although the precise use of the deviation in siting mounds escapes us for now, I suggest it has significance for understanding the recurrence of the number six at Poverty Point for it is one sixth of any angle in an equilateral triangle, which, in turn, is one-sixth the array of a complete circle.

Ancestral Elements of Poverty Point Earthworks

Having established some of the common geometric features of Middle Archaic mounds, let us now consider the extent to which this ancient knowledge figured into the design of Poverty Point. Consisting of six concentric embankments with a maximum diameter of ca. 1.1 km and an inner, plaza-like space 600 m wide, Poverty Point is a massive earthen enclosure (Fig. 1). Once believed to have been fully enclosed (Ford and Webb, 1956), the concentric embankments were actually deliberately open to the east, fronting the Mississippi River floodplain on the eastern escarpment of Maçon Ridge (Gibson, 1996a, p. 3). Coursing near the escarpment during the period of mound construction were channels of the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers.

Three mounds lie on a north–south axis to the immediate west of the enclosure. The largest, Mound A, stands 21 m high and has a base measuring 195 × 216 m. Likened to a flying bird (Ford and Webb, 1956), Mound A is oriented with its longest axis toward the center of the enclosure. Just over 600 m north of Mound A is a dome-shaped mound, Mound B, estimated at 55 m in diameter and 6 m high. Due south at a distance of 183 m from Mound A is Mound E, the so-called Ballcourt Mound. This flat-topped, somewhat square construction measures approximately 100 m on a side and 2.5 m tall. These three mounds—A, B, and E—frame the north–south extent of the enclosure to the east, with Mound A offset about 125 m to the south of an imaginary midpoint between the end members.

A fourth mound to the south of Mound E extends the north–south axis another 2.4 km. Long suspected to predate Poverty Point, Lower Jackson Mound has recently been dated to ca. 3900 cal B.C. (Saunders *et al*., 2001) A second, parallel north–south line is formed by the line joining Motley Mound—a smaller, possible bird effigy mound (Ford and Webb, 1956) some 1.7 km north of the enclosure—with Mound C in the north end of the plaza. These parallel lines are a little over 600 m apart, the sum of two medians of the SMU. A third parallel line 600 m west of the line passing through Mounds A, B, and E provides the basis for triangulating the locations of all mounds at Poverty Point. As Clark (2004, p. 175) demonstrates, an equilateral triangle with one vertex centered on Lower Jackson mound and its base on the central line can be extended by triangulation to intercept the midpoints of mounds A, B, C, and Motley mound. The total length of this triangulation line is 60 SMUs, or 5.2 km.

Two aspects of this surveying plan have clear ancestral roots. Most obviously, Poverty Point engineers incorporated at least one Middle Archaic mound, Lower Jackson, into the plan. Recent coring in mounds E and A suggest that these constructions were also initiated during the Middle Archaic period (T. R. Kidder, personal communication, 2004). Thus, the principal north-south line of orientation at Poverty Point is ancient. Second, the measurement system used to site other mounds in the Poverty Point complex was the same as that used over 15 centuries earlier.

A third possible ancestral trait is the siting of the enclosure's midpoint (i.e., the center of the plaza) relative to the largest mound, in this case Mound A, and the north-south axis it occupies. Both Middle Archaic complexes with a straight line of terrace-edged mounds (Watson Brake and Caney), as well as the third suspected Middle Archaic complex (Insley), have the same 10° deviation as Poverty Point. Clark (2004) experimented with alternative alignments to account for this deviation and shows how orientations 10° either west or east of north intercept most of the mounds, while the former captures the entire enclosure with the perpendicular emanating from mound A to the very center of the plaza.

The nested arcs of the enclosure are original to Poverty Point, something without parallel among Middle Archaic complexes. The intended or actual configuration of the enclosure is a bit uncertain because the site has suffered from decades of agriculture and some deliberate land modifications. A new and complete topographic map of the site was recently issued (Kidder, 2002), and this map differs in several ways from earlier representations. It may be unwise to continue describing the enclosure as six rings divided into six sectors by five aisles emanating in radial fashion from the center of a semicircular plaza. Whereas this is generally true, the overall shape of the enclosure is not actually symmetrical, nor are the aisles evenly divided and oriented toward the midpoint of the plaza (Gibson, 1973), and a northern aisle cannot be substantiated (Kidder, 2002, pp. 98–99). There appears to be much more complexity to the layout of Poverty Point than illustrated in earlier plans. Some of this may be a function of fitting the complex to the landform, especially considering the precedents for siting set by the Middle Archaic mounds. Most notably, Harland Bayou at the north end of the enclosure posed a considerable challenge to Poverty Point engineers aiming to site nested arcs 1.2 km wide. That they took the effort to fill in gullies in various places (Gibson, 2000, pp. 96–97) to accommodate rings argues strongly for a proscriptive design.

Problems in the graphic representation of Poverty Point aside, Clark's (2004, p. 179) Archaic measurement system nicely accounts for the dimensions of the enclosure and their intended spatial and organizational redundancy. Centered on the midpoint of the plaza, the Caney Principal Triangle has a median matching the radius of the plaza. Doubling this length marks the outer edge of the nested rings and the eastern edge of Mound A. In Fig. 2 these two triangles are enclosed with circles whose radii are equal to the respective medians of the triangles. These circles are not intended as literal representations of the enclosure, for indeed it is actually somewhat elliptical in outline (Gibson, 2000, p. 97). My use of circles here is merely to show that the plaza is half the radius of the enclosure. We can extrapolate one more unit to encompass Mounds A, B, and E, another five to capture Motley Mound, and another two to intercept Lower Jackson mound. Distances within nested circles recapitulate the triangulation method Clark describes but relate all measurements relative to the central plaza. This sort of logic can be further advanced to suggest that significant lines of sight are marked by the apex of each mound and the central plaza, which, as it turns out, do not

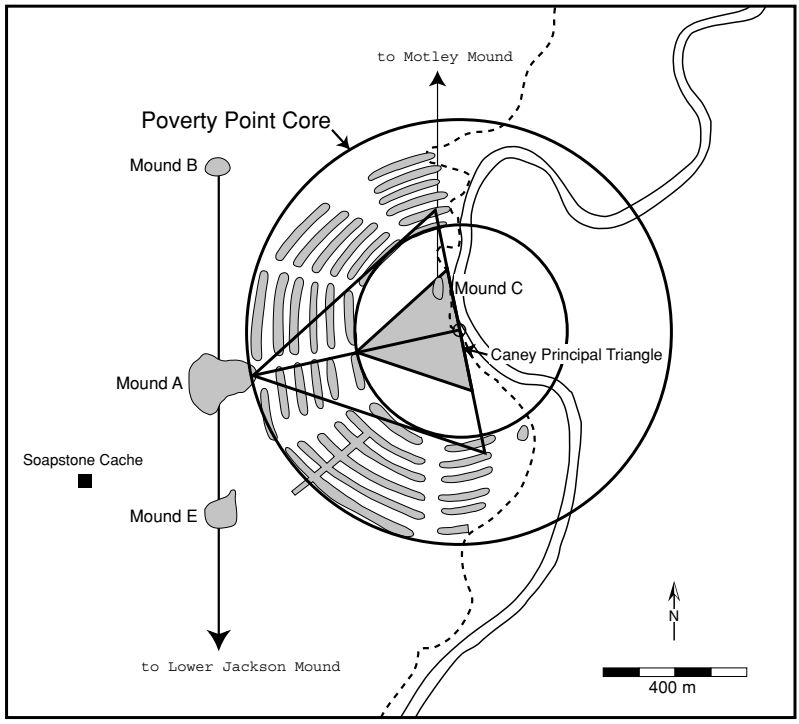

Fig. 2. Plan map of Poverty Point enclosure and associated mounds with Caney Principal Triangle and circles superimposed at 1× and 2× scales (after Clark, 2004).

consistently match the so-called aisles that crosscut nested embankments (see Kidder [2002, pp. 95–99] for critical discussion of aisle architecture). The line of sight between Mound A and the center of the plaza is the basis for orientation of the Caney Triangles whose medians form the inner and outer edges of the nested embankment.

One last similarity with Middle Archaic complexes is worth mentioning before moving on to those aspects of Poverty Point with no known precedent. Referring to the manner by which Heckenberger and I calculated the size of Middle Archaic mound complexes, Watson Brake at twice its scale would be commensurate with the inner embankment at Poverty Point and Insley at twice its scale would be equivalent to the outer embankment. Being 20% larger than Watson Brake, Caney would be the ranked equivalent of the second innermost embankment. This raises the distinct possibility that the nested embankment at Poverty Point embodied the ranked qualities of ancestral architecture, but in this case by ranking them in one place.

BUILDING A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

By now it should be clear that Poverty Point architects knew about and followed longstanding measurement principles and that existing mounds factored prominently in their siting of the largest and most complex monument constructed to date. They thus incorporated history into their design, but did they also incorporate space, and with it other histories beyond those enacted literally in the 5.2 km of expanse between Motley and Lower Jackson mounds?

One possible answer to this question may be found in those elements of Poverty Point that are apparently novel, namely the nested embankments. These features have a ranked quality to them, with distance from center signifying either lesser or greater rank. Plausibly significant, too, are features that mediate rank by crosscutting nested embankments, such as lines of sight from outlier mounds to the center. This internal, differentiated configuration to Poverty Point has inspired analysts to infer social organization (Gibson, 1973; Lévi Strauss, 1963a, pp. 142–143), astronomical alignments (Brecher and Haag, 1983), and economic specialization (Webb, 1982). Implicit in such interpretations is the assumption that the construction and use of this mound complex was the work of an integrated and unified body of individuals, presumably a large, resident population that included both immediate occupants and their neighbors (kin) in nearby communities. Suspending this assumption opens up an entirely new line of inquiry that requires scales of analysis beyond the absolute spatial extent of Poverty Point "culture." How might the configuration of Poverty Point embrace not only the histories of its indigenous people (i.e., the direct descendants of Middle Archaic mound builders of the Lower Mississippi Valley), but also the histories of people elsewhere and, most important, the processes that brought multiple cultures together in acts of monumentality without erasing differences among them?

A Pluralistic Social Order

Efforts to understand Poverty Point as an instrument of social (corporate) reproduction have failed to consider scales of analysis that are commensurate with the scale of social interactions evident in its inventory of nonlocal materials. Perhaps the greatest inherent contradiction to Poverty Point is that it is at once a highly localized monumental act, duplicated in form nowhere else, and the locus for the delivery of craft items and raw materials, and most likely personnel, from places hundreds of kilometers away. This alone should warn us that Poverty Point will not be explicable as an instrument of social reproduction at the local scale, nor in the usual sense of a corporate structure. Let us consider, instead, that the construction and use of Poverty Point recursively reproduced not only its local populations—with stipulated or real ancestral ties to Middle Archaic forebears, and the engineering skills to prove it—but also the

supraregional peoples on which they clearly depended for acquiring socially valued goods.

To investigate this question I draw again on the model developed in Fig. 2 to illustrate the measurement standards of Poverty Point. To reiterate, a circle whose radius is equal to the median of the Caney Principal Triangle represents the spatial extent of the plaza. Doubling the radius gives us the full extent of the enclosure, a unit I refer to here as the Poverty Point Core, or Core for short. We can add to this model the five lines that join outlier mounds to the center of the plaza. I hypothesize that these lines, radiating outward from the core in the fashion of avenues, have spatial significance beyond the siting of Poverty Point mounds.

This model of spatiality, constructed so deliberately by Poverty Point people, can be transposed over a number of scales to explore its significance at increasingly greater scales of landscape, both historical, as in the wider distribution of Middle Archaic mounds, and contemporaneous, in the sense of local and regional affiliates of Poverty Point culture. In transposing the Poverty Point model across spatial scales I take a cue from the enclosure itself. The nested ridges that comprise the enclosure suggest that meaningful comparisons of increasingly greater scale might be found in multiples of six. That is, a circle six times the core unit might represent the totality of certain social space, a circle six times again greater the totality of a higher order, and so on.

Independent data for assessing the relevance of increasing greater social scales comes from the accumulated body of regional investigations, summarized recently by Gibson (1998, 2000). In his reconstruction of Poverty Point's community organization, Gibson recognizes a "core" of encampments (both residences and field camps, to use Gibson's terms) within about 4 km of the enclosure. Beyond this core zone to a distance of 33 km from the enclosure lie encampments Gibson calls the "community periphery." A zone extending out another 200+ km encompasses a series of communities with varying degrees of similarity to Poverty Point, and beyond that, well over 600 km in some directions, lie communities with ambiguous affiliation to Poverty Point but that likely supplied much of the exotic material found in the enclosure.[6]

[6]Criteria for including particular sites or localities within the realm of "Poverty Point culture" have changed as archaeologists refine knowledge of diagnostic material culture, its chronology, and the provenance of raw materials of nonlocal origin. Diagnostic artifacts include a variety of projectile points, microlithic perforators, plummets, gorgets, celts, hoes, stone beads and pendants, baked-clay objects, clay figurines, soapstone vessels, and a variety of pottery wares. Some of these traits have parallels elsewhere in the Archaic Southeast, making it difficult to draw tight boundaries around Poverty Point culture on the basis of one or a few traits. Detailed comparative analyses of site assemblages in the greater Poverty Point area reported by Gibson (1998) formed the basis for his community core-periphery model (Gibson, 2000, pp. 194–206). Claims for Poverty Point affiliations farther afield, many discussed in various chapters of Byrd (1991), find varying degrees of acceptance by specialists (see Gibson, 1996b) because they are based primarily on a limited subset of diagnostic material culture. More sourcing studies are needed to provide a firm empirical basis for implicating nonlocal populations in Poverty Point exchange. Even without more sourcing data, we can be certain that much of the material culture from sites in the greater Poverty Point area was made from raw materials from sources hundreds of kilometers distant.

Figure 3 shows the extrapolation of the Core model six times for a radius of 3.56 km. The 16 local encampments noted by Gibson (2000, p. 197) are captured entirely by this circle. All but one are located on Maçon Ridge, and several cluster near outlier mounds. Those farthest removed include encampments at the northern and southern outlier mounds, but also a cluster of three encampments to the west, on a trajectory anticipated by the line joining Mound A to the central plaza. The other two radiating lines have no obvious connection to local encampments.

Sites classified by Gibson (2000, p. 201) as peripheral to Poverty Point begin to appear beyond about a 5-km radius around the enclosure (Fig. 4). The 6× extrapolation of the maximum extent of core communities captures all these peripheral sites with the exception of those north and south along the eastern edge of Maçon Ridge, and a single site (Stockland Plantation) in the bottoms to the southeast, well beyond the sixth circle. Peripheral sites include a sizeable number of locations in the bottoms east of Maçon Ridge, as well as clusters to the west of the enclosure in an area known as West Swamp. The Caney triangle and lines of sight between mounds and the plaza do not anticipate peripheral camp locations, although it may be noteworthy that a 10 degree shift of the baseline eastward, correcting for the declination of the original plan and bringing the Caney baseline to a north–south axis, intersects many of the peripheral elements. Once again, displacement from the largest circle (21.37 km radius) is along the north and south lines. These lines, as well as the terminuses of those oriented westward, begin to mirror the breadth and orientation of Maçon Ridge, lending some credence to the idea that the Poverty Point complex modeled regional geography. It is also noteworthy that the maximum circle terminates at the western edge of Maçon Ridge, the acknowledged boundary between the Poverty Point community centered on the enclosure and its immediate counterpart to the west, that of Bonne Idee-Bartholomew (Kidder, 1991, pp. 32–33).

Distant communities with varying levels of similarity to core Poverty Point culture are distributed throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley. Eight of the ten known communities fall within space encompassed by a circle six times the maximum extent of the peripheral community model (radius of 128.26 km; Fig. 5). All but one of these eight distant communities is on the western side of the Mississippi River; the exception, the Yazoo community, was actually on the east bank of the East Fork of the Mississippi at the time of occupation. Some of these distant communities have Poverty Point-age mounds, while others are located near Middle Archaic mounds. Particularly noteworthy is the Catahoula community to the south (Gibson, 1991), which includes the Caney complex and occupies a location on the sixth circle at the point marked by the line of sight between Lower Jackson and the enclosure. This same line intercepts two other communities along the eastern edge of Maçon Ridge, Turkey Creek, which incorporates Insley at nearly twice the core radius distance, and Big Creek at three times that distance. As shown earlier at lesser scale, the line extended from the Lower Jackson line of sight, along with its northern counterpart, nicely models the regional geography in its

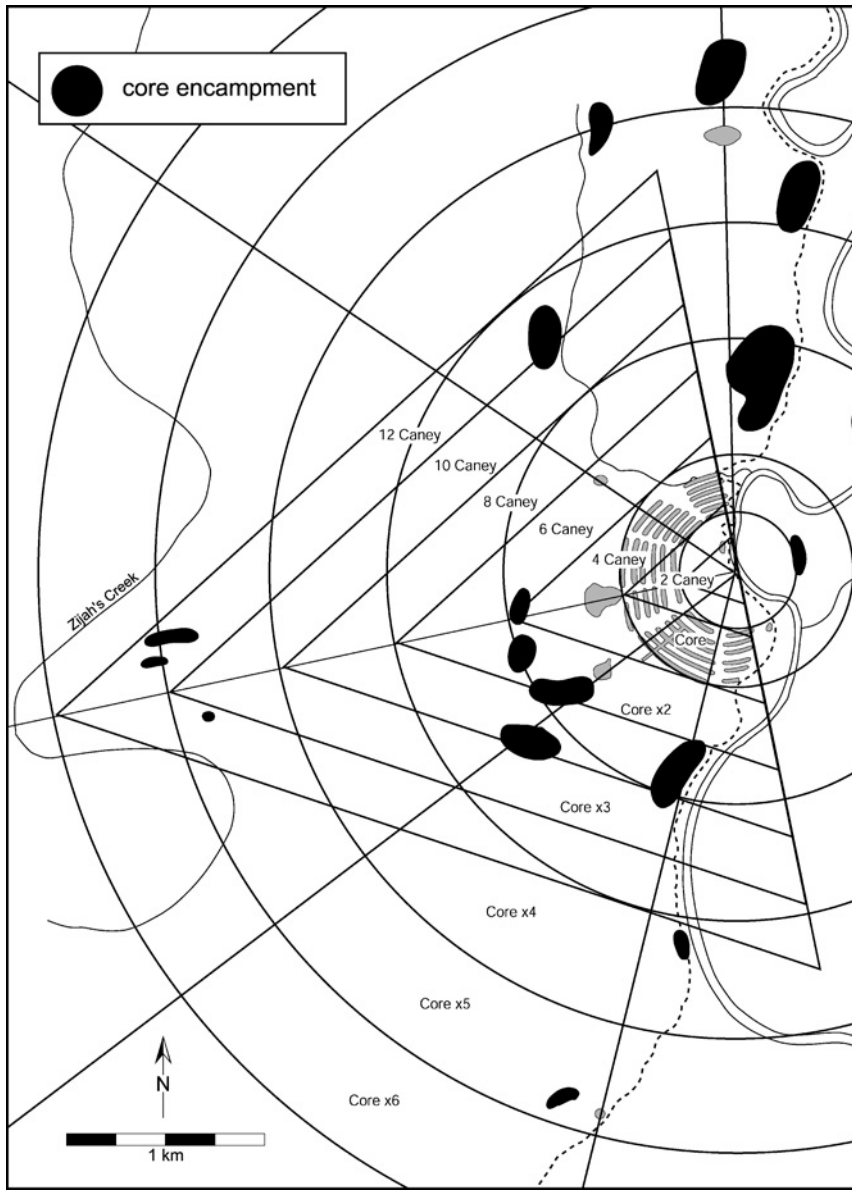

Fig. 3. Map of encampments designated by Gibson (2000, p. 197) as core communities of Poverty Point affiliation, superimposed with enclosure core model at 6× scale.

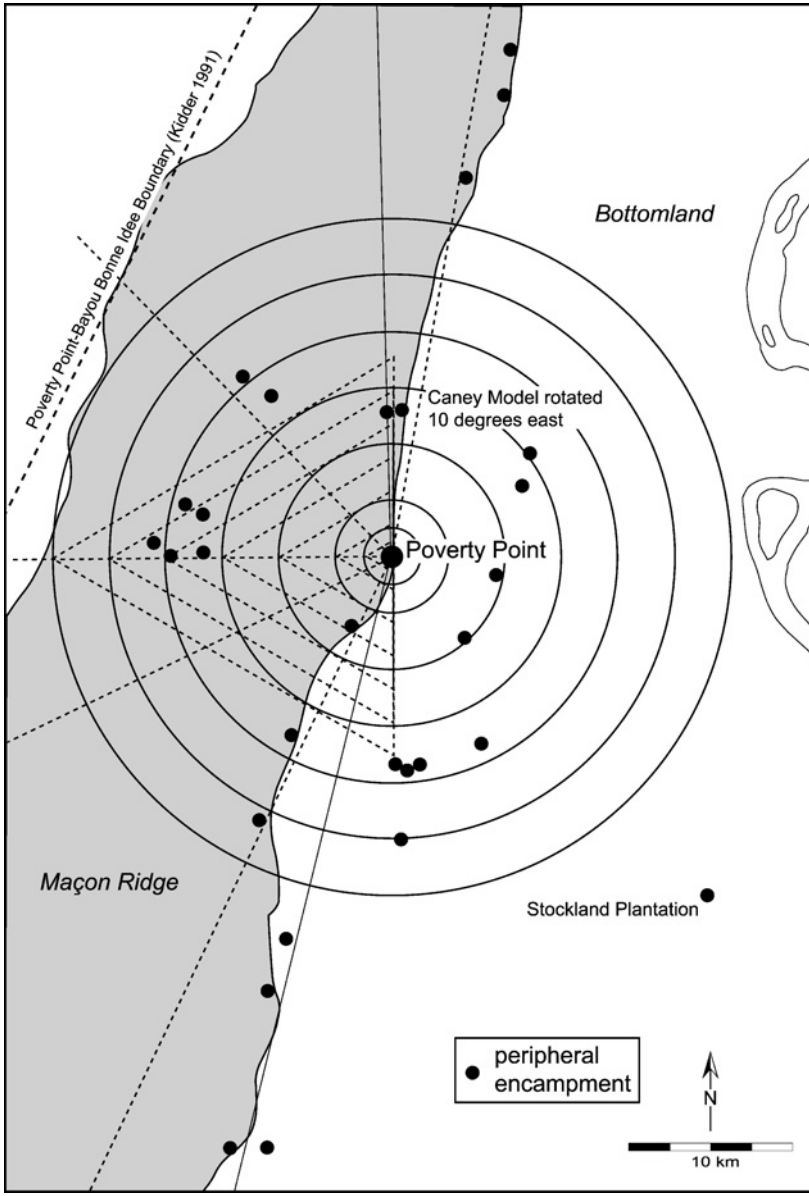

Fig. 4. Map of encampments designated by Gibson (2000, p. 201) as peripheral communities of Poverty Point affiliation, superimposed with core community model at 6× scale.

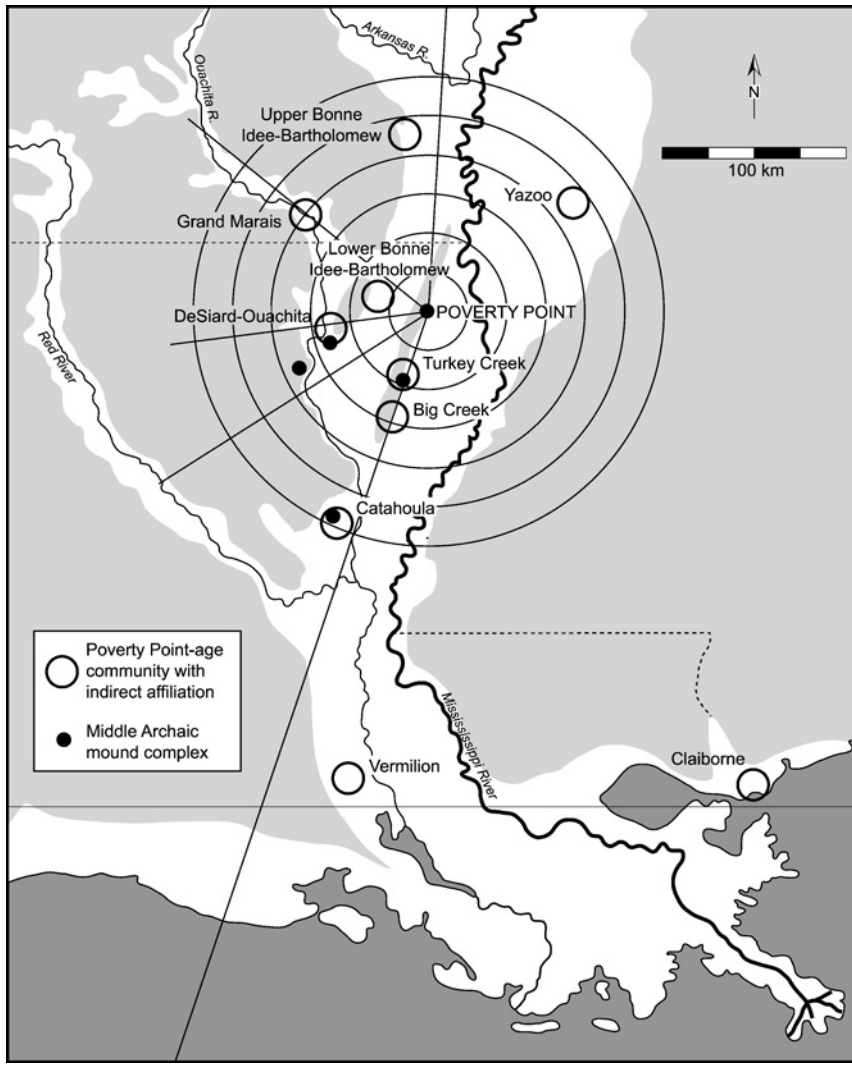

Fig. 5. Map of encampments designated by Gibson (2000, p. 236) as communities of Poverty Point age but with no direct affiliation, superimposed with peripheral community model at 6× scale.

parallelism to Maçon Ridge, but even more so in its conformity to the Mississippi River. Lines radiating out to the west intercept or come close to intercepting additional distant communities, including ones that incorporate Middle Archaic mounds.

The two distant communities not encompassed by the largest circle of Fig. 5 are Vermilion and Claiborne, acknowledged Poverty Point affiliates. They occupy near-coastal positions on opposite sides of the Mississippi River, each at least twice the maximum distance of the largest circle, Claiborne a bit farther. When viewed from the next highest scale of extrapolation (Fig. 6), these distant communities and a third centered on Choctawhatchee Bay in panhandle Florida (Elliott's Point) form a chain of gulf coastal communities whose combined actual distance from Poverty Point, by water, is equivalent to the radius of a circle six times the largest circle of the distant community model (769.56 km). The O'Bryan Ridge complex north of Poverty Point, at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, is now known to predate Poverty Point by several centuries (Thomas *et al*., 2004) but is acknowledged as having a role in the inception of Poverty Point exchange, if not mound construction. Occupations at both Elliott's Point and Claiborne are contemporaneous with mound construction at Poverty Point (Gibson, 2000) but also likely predated this event by a few centuries (Bruseth, 1991; Thomas and Campbell, 1991). Notably, the distant-most locations of apparent Poverty Point affiliation/ancestry (O'Bryan Ridge and Elliott's Point) lie at overland distances that are proportional to the distances of Motley and Lower Jackson mounds north and south, respectively, of the enclosure, and on lines that mimic the Mississippi River and its gulf coastal extension to the east.

The spatial extrapolation shown in Fig. 6 has a variety of associations with Poverty Point's expansive sphere of long-distance exchange, as well as the limits of its distant affiliations. As already noted, O'Bryan Ridge and Elliott's Point are the distant-most communities with sufficient similarities to Poverty Point to signify more than a passing relationship, but different enough to not be uniformly regarded as truly Poverty Point (cf. Gibson, 2000; Thomas and Campbell, 1991; Thomas *et al*., 2004; Webb, 1977, 1982).

All of the well documented Late Archaic communities dating to Poverty Point times but beyond the extent of the largest circle in Fig. 6 bear no material evidences of a Poverty Point connection, although each is proximate to sources of raw materials imported by Poverty Point residents. These include Nebo Hill in western Missouri (Reid, 1983), Labras Lake in the American Bottom (McElrath *et al*., 1984), Riverton in the Wabash River valley (Winters, 1969), the Green River Archaic (e.g., Webb, 1974), Iddins in eastern Tennessee (Chapman, 1981), and, a bit farther afield, the Stallings and Orange traditions of the South Atlantic Slope (Sassaman, 1993). In addition, the vast area of the Midsouth centered on the middle Tennessee River valley—with its coeval populations of shell-midden occupants whose earlier histories involved far-flung exchange networks (e.g., Johnson and Brookes, 1989)—was apparently apart from the goings on at Poverty Point, despite geographic proximity. The greatest geographic reach of Poverty Point traders, to be sure, was up and down the Mississippi Valley, and, by extension eastward, across the Gulf Coast.

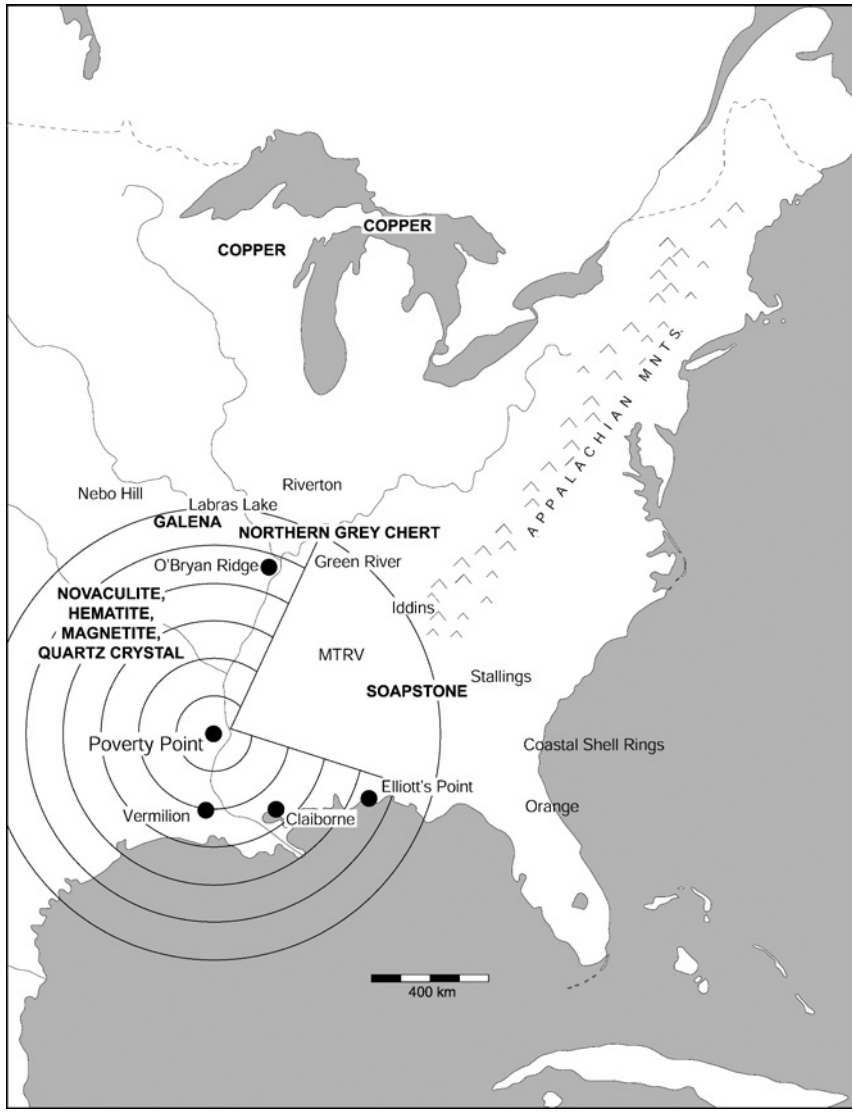

Fig. 6. Map of eastern North America with locations of sources of raw material imported to Poverty Point and distant, outlier communities with no direct affiliation to Poverty Point, superimposed with regional model 6×.

Relocations and Realignments

Poverty Point from a continental view was shaped as much by the existing contours of cultural diversity as it was by the flow of the Mississippi River. Without going into detail here, suffice to say that the cultural landscape across the eastern North America at 1500 cal B.C. was a patchwork of social formations whose differences stemmed not only from assertions of identity through interactions with neighbors, or the long-term consequences of divergent ecological circumstances, but also by fundamental cultural differences traceable to distinct ancestral lines, or what Emerson and McElrath (2001) call "ethnic cores." Distant populations to the north, south, and east of Poverty Point included at least three ethnic cores. Their interactions with the people of Poverty Point do not explain these differences, for indeed, they can be traced to much-more ancient events and processes (K. E. Sassaman, in preparation, *Archaic Societies of Eastern North America*). However, the cultural diversity of eastern North America ultimately explains why particular communities may or may not have been predisposed to interact with "foreigners" or to seek esoteric objects and knowledge from places far afield.

Despite their remoteness culturally and geographically from Poverty Point, distant communities appear to have had indirect effects on the genesis and history of Poverty Point through small-scale population movements and alliance formation. The best examples are communities of the South Atlantic Slope who extracted and shaped soapstone for their own culinary needs. Among the more commonly made cooking tools were soapstone vessels, an item of voluminous importation into the Poverty Point region. Soapstone used to make the vessels of Poverty Point came primarily from the southern Piedmont of west Georgia and east Alabama, over 600 km away. The direct route between soapstone sources and Poverty Point was not used, or, if it was, it did not result in archaeologically measurable traces. Rather, a more circuitous route developed through particular historical circumstances to deliver soapstone via the Gulf coast and Mississippi River.

Soapstone was used in cooking technology (as stones for indirect-heat cooking) for millennia in the Savannah River valley of Georgia, even after the inception in that area of pottery ca. 3000 cal B.C. (Sassaman, 1993). After a long period of co-existence and interaction between coastal pottery-making peoples and soapstone users of the Piedmont, an enclave of the latter relocated westward in close proximity to the largest sources of soapstone in the Southeast. At about 2200 cal. B.C., they began to make the first soapstone vessels in west Georgia and some of these products made their way down the Chattahoochee and/or Flint River system to the Gulf Coast. The desire to establish new alliances after relocating may have prompted this "traditional" action; trading in soapstone was, after all, in the history of alliance-making with people downriver, and the new form (i.e., vessels) was no doubt inspired by prior interactions with pottery makers in the abandoned homeland (Sassaman, 2000, 2001).

Occupants of Elliott's Point sites around Choctawhatchee Bay received soapstone vessels at about this time or shortly thereafter, as did the denizens of Claiborne. The latter's involvement in soapstone vessel acquisition was great enough to suggest it developed as a gateway for soapstone up the Mississippi River to Poverty Point. Of particular note at this 250-m-wide crescent-shaped shell midden is a cache of 12 whole soapstone vessels (Bruseth, 1991, pp. 17–18). These were placed in sterile sand near the midpoint of the crescent. Accompanying the vessels were two copper sheet bracelets, a copper pendant, and a piece of galena, all evidence of connections far up the Mississippi River, well past Poverty Point. A low conical mound about 23 m in diameter was located 170 m east of the cache. A line extending from the mound through the cache and further westward bisects the crescent-shaped midden symmetrically.

The role of Claiborne residents in the development of Poverty Point most likely extended beyond suppliers of soapstone. As Clark (2004) notes, the dimensions of Claiborne conform to the Archaic measurement system, and the position of its soapstone cache anticipates a similar, albeit much larger cache of soapstone vessel sherds at Poverty Point (Webb, 1944). Claiborne is, in some respects, a one-sixth model of Poverty Point in reverse. Shown in Fig. 7 is the superposition of Claiborne six times actual scale over Poverty Point, showing the location of the soapstone cache, the low mound to its east, and the 2× Caney Primary Triangle as applied by Clark (2004). The two plans are georeferenced to the centers of their respective plazas.

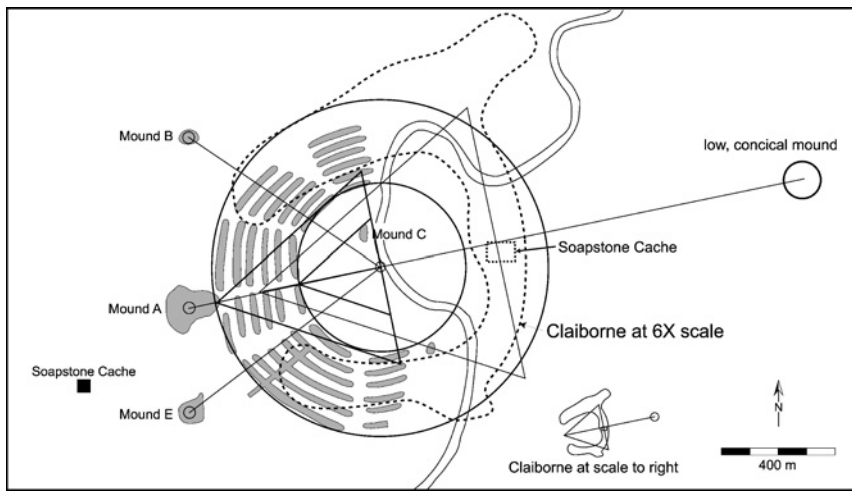

Fig. 7. Plan map of Poverty Point enclosure superimposed with 6× scale map of Claiborne (after Clark 2004, p. 170).

The reciprocal fit between Poverty Point and Claiborne is not likely coincidental. Besides their geometric conformity, the line of sight between the low mound and soapstone cache at Claiborne is nearly conformant to the reciprocal line connecting Mound A to the central plaza at Poverty Point. What is more, the cache is positioned equidistant between Mound A and the low, conical mound at Claiborne.

Soapstone vessels and many of the other classic Poverty Point items made from nonlocal materials predated the construction of the enclosure at Poverty Point. The timing of Claiborne is a bit uncertain, but the inception of soapstone commerce along the Gulf coast is no later than 1800 cal B.C. Given the structural parallels between Claiborne and Poverty Point, it stands to reason that members of the Claiborne community had a hand in the design of the enclosure after ca. 1600 cal B.C. More broadly, the Claiborne connection clarifies one of the conundrums of Poverty Point's construction, namely that it was over 1500 years since anyone in the region constructed a mound. Claiborne is but one example of a suite of coastal shell rings and arcuate constructions that date to as much as 3000 cal B.C. on the Atlantic Coast and at least 2200 cal B.C. on the Gulf coast (Russo and Heide, 2001). Thus, by way of a coastal tradition many centuries in the making, residents of Claiborne delivered to Poverty Point not only soapstone, but also the idea of arcuate compounds, residence on ridges, and mounds placed to the backside of the arc. Stemming ultimately from ancient practices of the Lower Mississippi Valley, the indigenous populations of Maçon Ridge and vicinity brought to the construction of Poverty Point their extant mounds and knowledge of how to survey them, base-line orientation with terrace edges, and a sense of ranking whose ancient manifestation was regional and sequential, but whose reappearance 1500 years later was local and simultaneous.

A third stream of history likely flowed, literally, down river with interactions of communities to the north. The Lower Ohio River region and the American Bottom south to the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers was a hotbed of ethnic diversity throughout the Late Archaic period (e.g., Emerson and McElrath, 2001). Ethnogenetic events and population realignments like those of the middle Savannah region were rife in the northern reaches of the Poverty Point exchange sphere, and, as in the case of soapstone, changing alliances may have redirected flows of material such as northern gray chert, galena, or copper, that quickly became items of value to the residents of Poverty Point.

POVERTY POINT PERSONHOOD

Let us now consider finally how the particular configuration of Poverty Point embodied both the local history of mound building and the regional history of alliance formation. Central to this discussion is the relationship between processes of social reproduction that gave coherence and momentum to a new social order

and the monument itself as an instrument of socialization. If Poverty Point, as a new social order, involved the syncretism of two or more distinct ethnic groups, how were persons of diverse cultures brought together to build something that appears as the work of a collective, fractal mind?

A partial answer to this question lies in the role of exchange in creating persons. Poverty Point exchange has been largely conceived as an economic imperative for people who occupied a land bereft of stone (Gibson, 2000; Webb, 1982). Whereas life in the Lower Mississippi Valley was no doubt rendered more comfortable with reliable supplies of rock, the particular sources imported from distant lands were hardly necessary given less distant alternatives. The northern gray cherts of the Lower Ohio Valley region, for instance, did not have to be imported for everyday edged-tool uses when supplies of novaculite and other closer sources of toolstone were available and, indeed, were used for millennia before Poverty Point times. Soapstone vessels were likewise extraneous. Once thought to be the solution to cooking for a pottery-less people, soapstone vessels actually postdated the introduction of pottery to Poverty Point (Gibson, 1996b; Gibson and Melancon, 2004).

How nonlocal materials were delivered to Poverty Point is uncertain, although a few scenarios can be justifiably eliminated (Carr and Stewart, 2004). Mechanisms did not include any sort of prestige-goods economy whereby elites controlled the acquisition and use of exotic materials for their own political purposes. Nonlocal objects arrived in a partially finished (blank) condition, ruling out the possibility of on-site craft specialization. There is also little to recommend that nonlocal items were involved in rites that removed them from circulation among the living, as in the mortuary cults of Adena or Hopewell. Casual, down-the-line exchange among social equals is also unlikely because the distribution of nonlocal materials across Poverty Point encampments and peripheral settlements is uneven and punctuated (Gibson, 2000).

So far as we know, exotic goods and raw materials at Poverty Point were not limited to an elite class or any other observable subset of the population, so they were probably widely acquired, circulated, and consumed. And yet, some differentiation in access at the scale of peripheral communities suggest seams of social variation in collectives beyond those that deposited such goods at the enclosure (cf. Gibson, 1998; Gibson and Griffing, 1994). That no peripheral communities were entirely bereft of nonlocal goods implies that intercommunity variations were based on equivalencies in making and signaling particular personas, not particular individuals. Within the community, meaningful differences among personas probably followed from differences in age, gender, and, through exogamous marriage, kinship/ethnicity. With no specific knowledge about the number of genders, age grades, or kin groups recognized by Poverty Point people, I cannot specify the types of persons involved but can assume that distinctions were recognized minimally between the young and the old on the basis of sexual maturity and/or

marriageability; between men and women based on ascribed roles; and between persons who traced ancestry to different apical ancestors, stipulated or real.

The ethnographic and ethnohistoric records offer myraid examples of practices involving the acquisition of nonlocal goods and/or knowledge in the making of persons of distinction (e.g., Helms, 1988), as well as everyman (e.g., Myers, 1986). Generic analogs to the making of Poverty Point persons may be found in pilgrimages, vision quests, and ritual journeys worldwide, although, admittedly, none may be entirely appropriate to this particular case. Nonetheless, any ritual process requiring travel would have reproduced a translocal quality to Poverty Point personhood. Furthermore, if such a process was integral to initiation rites, traveling may have been necessary to become an "adult" and thus a reproductive member of society. In this sense, biological reproduction may have been subordinated to a ritual process of becoming socially connected through travel to "other" persons and places.

Traveling among places of ritual significance during the Middle Archaic era was apparently a subregional, corporate affair because little material of nonlocal origin has been recovered from Middle Archaic mound complexes of northeast Louisiana. During the earliest era of mound building, monuments and their use may very well have been the work of a single "people" divided into descent groups who moved in ritual sequence from complex to complex, with age grades or some other crosscutting social groups "owning" parts of an integrated ritual assemblage. Coupled with the limited of evidence for permanent occupation at these complexes, the dearth of nonlocal goods suggests these were the facilities of a mobile, subregional population.

The architects of Poverty Point, nearly two millennia later, transformed this subregional model into a continental scale model by siting in one place the entire time and space continuum of its constituent people. The ancestral basis for this worldliness resided not in the tradition of mound building per se, for indeed the Middle Archaic populations of the lower Mississippi valley appear to have been rather parochial. Instead, ancestral populations distributed throughout land east of the Mississippi, such as those of the Shell Mound Archaic, Benton, and Mount Taylor, were among regional alliances involving the production and exchange of nonsubsistence items such as beads, oversized bifaces, and bannerstones. These specific alliances, like the earlier mound-building events, do not provide a clear, unbroken chain of practice leading up to Poverty Point, for they disintegrated long before Poverty Point times. However, discontinuities in alliances in the intervening centuries were requisite to Poverty Point's emergence as a new social order because they entailed significant realignments. That is, as in the example of soapstone trade discussed earlier, the breakdown of earlier alliances east of the Mississippi led to or was caused by multiple, relatively small-scale population movements, such as the northward relocation of bearers of Riverton Culture into the Wabash drainage of Illinois, as well as multiple incursions of southern groups into the

American Bottom (Emerson and McElrath, 2001). An equally dynamic history of realignments unfolded along the Gulf Coast with the establishment of communities at Claiborne and at sites around Choctawhatchee Bay.

I suggest that Poverty Point was the ultimate ethnogenetic event of ancient Native America as various populations converged in northeast Louisiana from points north and south. The process began long before new mounds were erected as local populations either hosted "foreign" travelers in new alliances (as in the "trade fair" model proffered by Jackson [1991]) and/or integrated immigrants into an emergent collective. Monument construction followed directly from the established spatiality of practice, both in the incorporation of ancestral mounds into the complex, and in the marking with earth of the arrangement of a multicultural aggregate in exchange alliances (note that under each of the ridges at Poverty Point is the same sort of nonlocal items found within the middens of ridges). With this event Poverty Point became the instantiation of a structure rife with cultural diversity. Making men or other personages at this point likely involved journeys by individuals to locations of real or stipulated ancestry to acquire objects necessary for initiation or other life-stage ceremonies. That at least three distinct directions of long-distance travel (northwest, northeast, south) are implicated in its assemblage of nonlocal goods suggests strongly that the peoples of Poverty Point traced ancestry to at least three distinct regions, most likely more. The peripheral communities that sprang up in the 200-km radius around Poverty Point were oriented in these three directions and likely housed residents who traced ancestry to lands in these directions, and acted as brokers for the delivery of ritual objects to the enclosure. Intermarriage among members of these communities ensured that each was also multicultural in co-resident composition.

How the making of persons of Poverty Point affiliation related to the reproduction of social collectives is a subject that will require lengthy discussion elsewhere, but a few points are worth mentioning here. First, if the structure of collectivity is totemic in the sense described by Lévi-Strauss (1963b), then the Poverty Point construction may have mirrored the differentiation of mythological events into components of a shared, synthesizing complex, with each of several social units "owning" particular components. This would not require permanent residency at the enclosure, but it does imply patterned uses of various parts of the enclosure (e.g., ridges or segments of the arc) during ceremonial events.

A second issue for further consideration is the overriding sociological structures that organized Poverty Point collectives into functional (or at least idealized) units of kinship and marriage. Given the historical reality of kinship systems among varied peoples of the western hemisphere, including Mississippian chiefdoms, some form of dual organization might be expected. This indeed was Gibson's (1973, 1974) logic when Poverty Point was considered to be a classical chiefdom, and even Lévi-Strauss (1963a, pp. 142–143) invoked Poverty Point as an example of dual organization, although he misrepresented its geometry as fully enclosed and octagonal. For future deliberation I suggest we seriously consider the

possibility that dual organization at Poverty Point, if it existed at all, resulted from the fusion of two or more distinct groups (e.g., Blitz, 1999). Existing institutions akin to totemism would have predisposed the fusion of different ethnic groups into one, at least ritually, and, so long as each of the various factions continued to "own" components of integrated sacra, their alliance was perpetuated through shared ritual practice.

Finally, all this begs deeper consideration of the cosmological nature of Poverty Point. As Gibson (2000, pp. 185–193) notes, the opening of the complex to the east and its closure to the west, accompanied by the largest mounds, invokes a model that structurally opposes the forces of life and death. Movement of the sun across the sky unites these forces in a daily cycle, and perhaps its seasonal migrations across the horizon adds another dimension of cyclical movement, while the southwardly flow of the river to the east of the complex may signify yet a third dimension. The human manifestation of this symbolism may be found in ritual involving age grades or some sort of life-cycle structures such that the nested ridges were ranked from inner to outer, or vice versa.[7] This may very well have been symbolically transposed across (1) the largest sociological structures (such as clans, with primary ["original people"] ancestry to outside [and affiliated with Middle Archaic mounds], and progressively "younger" ancestry to the inside); (2) translocal organizations like age grades (elder households to outside, initiates to inside); and (3) the body (head to outside, feet to inside, with head symbolic of maturity, feet symbolic of immaturity). Again, the crosscutting north-south dimension symbolized by the river had the potential to mediate contradictions inherent in social relations symbolic of age and perhaps also gender. Such mediating qualities are consistent with the geographic reality of the river as the major conduit of interregional alliances, and one can imagine that the fractal quality of symbolic representation has its geographic equivalency in the wider distribution of peoples involved in Poverty Point ritual, contemporary as well as historical.

CONCLUSION

Belying their vast geographic scale of interactions, Poverty Point denizens appear merely regional in scope because so little of their making, mounds included, ventured far from northeast Louisiana. This is true from the synchronic perspective of their heyday, when the impressive monument was built and utilized intensively. The longer view exposes a deep and varied history of acquiring and

[7]Gibson (2001) has determined that the nested embankments were built in sequence from the inside out, and from the center to the north and south. If social ranking was consonant with the sequence of construction, then the highest rank would be to the inside and the lowest rank to the outside. Confounding this is the placement of ancient mounds to the outside of the enclosure and the fact that outer rings were capable of housing larger groups of people. If Poverty Point indeed was the ethnogenetic event I envision, its design may have been an amalgam or reconciliation of contradictory worldviews. Thus, I do not presume that the construction sequence of the nested embankments was consonant with any social ranking their routine occupation and ritual uses may have entailed.

using nonlocal materials for everyday and perhaps ritual purposes among those east of the Mississippi, and, quite distinctly on the west side, those who built mounds at multiple locations, some potentially integrated at the subregional scale. The broad brush strokes of this history provide the inductive basis for postulating (1) how Poverty Point architects incorporated ancient mounds and monument-making logic into their own constructions, and (2) how the symbolic transposition of the Poverty Point earthworks embraced communities of increasingly greater social distance at proportionately increasing spatial distance. I further propose that ritual institutions for integrating diversity were reproduced through the regular acquisition of nonlocal materials (knowledge) and with the contacts with "foreigners" such acquisition most likely entail. Finally, I suggest that Poverty Point was ultimately an ethnogenetic consequence of established interregional alliances whose role in making persons continued to be relevant as a collective model of cultural diversity and ritual differentiation.

Virtually all that I propose here was hypothesized from the archaeological record of Poverty Point and its wider temporal–spatial contexts, but ultimately these propositions need to be tested with independent data. Fortunately, most of the propositions about social reproduction and structure have implications for spatial associations between objects and components of the built environment that have yet to be examined. Previous efforts to find spatial patterning in the distribution of nonlocal items at Poverty Point have met with limited success, partly because they were predicted on a synchronic model of social inequality, as in the craft specialization of state-level societies. Diachronic spatial patterning implicated in a historical perspective on Poverty Point offers new opportunities for testing. For instance, if the construction of the enclosure was concurrent with the actual relocation of "foreign" allies to Poverty Point, then the nonlocal goods below each of the ridges the mound may differ from those within and on top of ridges, not so much in form but in condition, particularly if such a shift changed the mechanisms which such objects were acquired (e.g., direct vs. indirect). Likewise, the implied multiscalar quality to spatiality at Poverty Point has a time dimension that implicates changes in the wider distribution of goods and personnel. It will be especially relevant to test the concordance between intrasite assemblages at Poverty Point itself with the corresponding peripheral communities to see whether the structure indeed had a fractal quality (sensu Heckenberger, 2005).

The methods employed here are largely comparative and historical, and expressly multiscalar. Specifically, I was able to make inferences about the processual qualities of Poverty Point as a sociohistorical structure by considering how its architects constructed social memory with ancient elements and how its personages were reproduced through spatiality at multiple scales of human experience. None of this could be inferred from the earthworks as a synchronic and localized human construction, and thus archaeology has a distinctive role in providing these sorts of long-term, broad-scale perspectives for social science in general. Archaeology has long been accused of simply co-opting the abstract concepts of other professions,

but in its adaptation of agency and practice theory to long-term and broad-scale cultural phenomena, archaeology has the potential take such theory well beyond the domain of its architects in sociology and ethnology.

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