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Gizzard Stones or Game Pieces?

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Abstract

During excavations at Site 44LD538 and 44LD539, two sites located in Loudoun County, Virginia occupied by African-American field slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many small smoothly worn ceramic, stone, and glass items were recovered from various contexts. Similar items have also been recovered from a number of sites throughout the Southeast, Midwest, and Middle Atlantic States. At the majority of these sites, these items are interpreted as gaming pieces used by African Americans in playing a form of board game that is typically referred to as Mankala. Other researchers who have recovered these items at sites in Tennessee and Louisiana believe that they are likely gizzard stones that were worn smooth by grinding actions in the gizzards of chickens, turkeys, and other birds. This paper will investigate the various contexts in which these items were recovered at the sites where they have been reported and will discuss why the gizzard stone interpretation is the more likely and how this does not detract from the information they provide about African-American culture and traditions, but instead enriches our understanding of African-American foodways, as well as late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century foodways in general.

Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539 are two sites located in Loudoun County, Virginia occupied by African-American Field Slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. During Phase III excavations, 70 small smoothly worn ceramic, stone, and glass items were recovered from both sites and from various contexts.

The items recovered and recognized from Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539 are small fragments of ceramic, glass, and stone with rounded edges and sides (Figure 1). Because both of these sites are located on ridge tops in upland settings some distance from any springhead or stream, natural on-site formation processes cannot account for the water-worn appearance of these items. Seventy items were recovered: 38 ceramic; 24 stone; and 8 glass. They range in size from 6 mm to 25 mm but 69% are between 11 and 15 mm. They are typically triangular in shape, though shape varies and round, square, and irregular shaped items were identified. The ceramic



Figure 1. Items recovered from Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539.

items consist of white-bodied earthenware and porcelain with many retaining small amounts of glaze. Some of the ceramic items have also retained their original recognizable shape, such as a porcelain doll's hand and a fragment from the handle of a vessel. The glass items consist of aqua, amber, clear, and possibly milk glass and are all triangular. Glass items were recovered only from Site 44LD538. The stone items vary the most in size and shape. Most are quartz, and many stand out because they appear to be quartz flakes with some flake scars still visible but with rounded edges. Several other of the stone items are more rounded and resemble jelly beans. Because of this variation and the ubiquity of rock in the piedmont, many different processes could be responsible for their rounded appearance.

At Site 44LD538, a farmstead occupied from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth century containing the remains of a late nineteenth-century log cabin, most items were recovered from the front yard which contained 56% of the items recovered. This was followed by the side yard which contained 25%. The rear yard and the area inside the foundation each contained 6 items. None of the items were recovered from feature contexts, and none were found in direct association with another.

At Site 44LD539, occupied from the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century and then abandoned and used as an agricultural field so that the exact location and orientation of structures is unknown, four items were recovered from the plow zone in four test units. Items recovered from features included one stone item from the feature fill within a fire pit, and a

ceramic item was recovered from the fill within a trash pit. One ceramic item was also recovered in feature fill from a large trash-filled borrow pit. Another ceramic item was also recovered from the interface of the plow zone and the top of the borrow pit.



Figure 2a. The location of sites where the recovery of small smoothly worn ceramic, glass, and stone items have been reported. See Figure 2b for “Detail map.”

Similar items have also been recovered from a number of sites throughout the Southeast, Midwest, and Middle Atlantic States (Figures 2a, 2b and Table 1). At the majority of these sites, these items are interpreted as gaming pieces used by African Americans in playing a form of board game that is typically referred to as Mankala.

Other researchers who have recovered these items at sites in Tennessee and Louisiana believe that they are likely gizzard stones that were worn smooth by grinding actions in the gizzards of chickens, turkeys, and other birds. Wilkie reports that 26 “water-ground ceramic

sherds" were recovered from various assemblages at the Oakley Plantation in Southern Louisiana (Figure 3) (1995:140). A single sherd was found at the ca. 1845 slave cabin (Wilkie 1995:140). Eight sherds were present in the Silvia Freeman assemblage dating from 1880 to 1910, 9 sherds

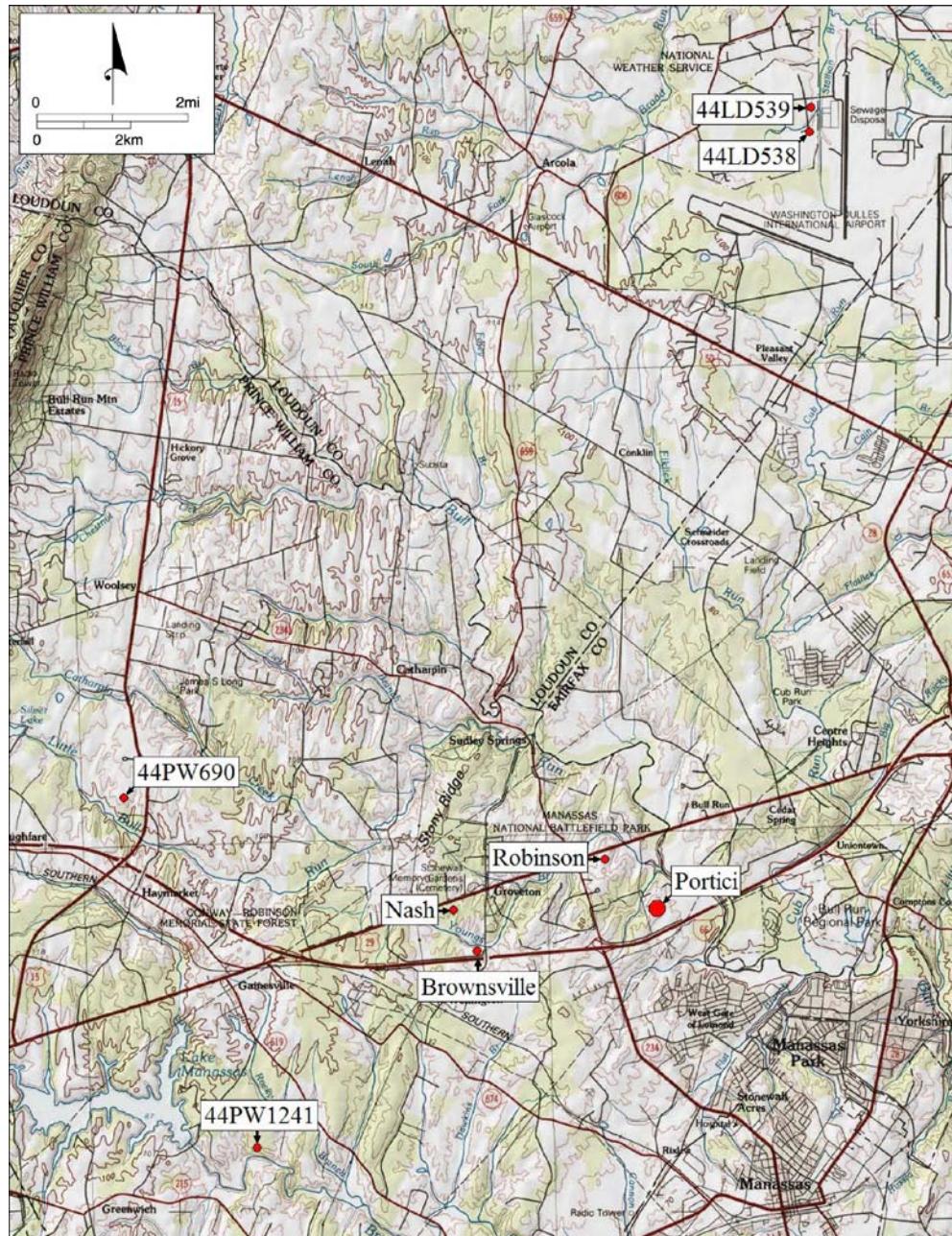


Figure 2b. Detail map of location of sites in Virginia where the recovery of small smoothly worn ceramic, glass, and stone items have been reported.

were present in the Delphine and Eliza Freeman assemblage dating from 1910 to 1930, and 1 sherd was present in the Scott assemblage dating from 1920 to 1940 (Wilkie 1995:140). These assemblages are associated with three different African-American households. Seven additional sherds were recovered from disturbed contexts at the Freeman house (Wilkie 1995:140). Russell reports that a number of small, smoothly worn ceramic sherds were recovered at the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's plantation located near Nashville, Tennessee. Russell states "these artifacts, while relatively few in number, were recovered from all contexts examined for this paper" (1997:75), which included the mansion garden, a domestic slave cabin, a domestic slave quarters, a field slave log structure, and two field slave cabins.

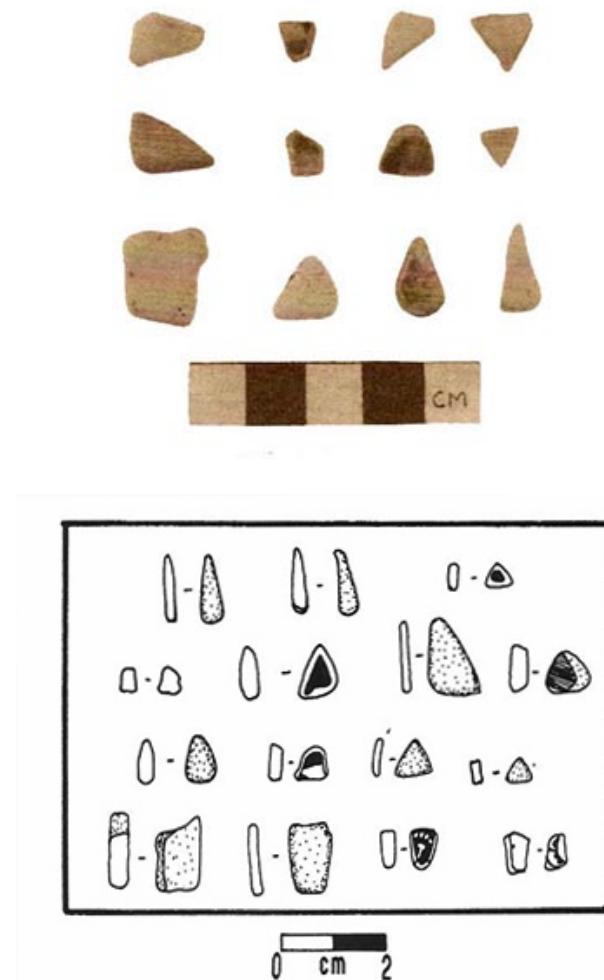


Figure 3. Items recovered from the Oakley Plantation Site (from Wilkie 1995:145; 2000:192).

Sites reviewed for this discussion where artifacts identified as mankala gaming pieces were recovered include an overseer and tenant site, a site occupied by field slaves or an impoverished tenant, two middling plantations, two African-American farmsteads, and a small multi-racial frontier community (Table 1).

Table 1. Archeological Sites Where Similar Ceramic, Glass, and Stone Items Have Been Recovered.

Site Name	Site Type	Structure Type(s)	Dates of Occupation
44PW690	Overseer/Tenant	Overseer/Tenant Dwelling	1777/87-1820s
		Kitchen/Slave Quarter	1777/87-1820s
		Slave Quarters	1777/87-1820s
		Slave Quarters	1777/87-1820s
44PW1241	Tenant or Field Slave	Dwelling	Late 18th-Early 19th Century
Brownsville (44PW479)	Middling Plantation	Original Farmhouse	Late 18th-Mid 19th Century
		Unknown Structure	Mid 19th Century
Portici (44PW335 and 44PW348)	Middling Plantation	Possible Slave Quarters	Mid 19th Century
		Mansion (44PW348)	1822-1864
		Field Slave Cabin (44PW335)	1822-1864
		Refuse Pit/Cellar Hole of Pohoke Structure (44PW335)	1822-1864
Oakley (16WF34)	Large Southern Plantation	Slave Cabin	ca. 1845
		African-American Dwelling	1880-1910
		African-American Dwelling	1910-1930
		African-American Dwelling	1920-1940
Hermitage (40DV?)	Large Southern Plantation	Mansion Garden	1821-1858
		Domestic Slave Cabin	1821-1858
		Domestic Slave Quarters	1821-1858
		Field Slave Cabin	1821-1858
		Field Slave Log Structure	Early 19th Century
		Field Slave Cabin	1821-1858
		Dwelling and Outbuildings	1840s-1936
Robinson (44PW288)	Free African-American Farmstead		
Nash (44PW581)	African-American Farmstead	Dwelling	1878-1902?
New Philadelphia (11PK455)	Multi-racial Frontier Community	All Contexts Including House Lots and Blacksmith Shop	1836-Early 20th Century

At Site 44PW690 near Haymarket, Virginia, 26 possible ceramic gaming pieces were recovered, including 1 from the overseer/tenant dwelling, 1 from a slave quarters, 4 from the detached kitchen/slave quarters, and 20 from another slave quarters (Gardner et al. 1999:65). At Site 44PW1241 near Gainesville, Virginia, 4 possible gaming pieces were recovered including a white earthenware gaming piece found within Feature 1, a truncated trash pit, and a refined white

earthenware gaming piece from the plow zone in T.U. 1, both of which were recovered during Phase II evaluations (Jorgensen 2005:53). A third gaming piece was also recovered during the Phase II evaluation (Jorgensen 2005:84), and a fourth was found during the Phase III investigation (Jorgensen 2005:80), but no provenience information for these items is listed in the text of the report.

At the Brownsville site on the Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia, 6 possible gaming pieces were recovered within the foundation remains of all three structures (Figure 4) (Galke 1992a:79). A circular gaming piece recovered from the site was thought to be unfinished

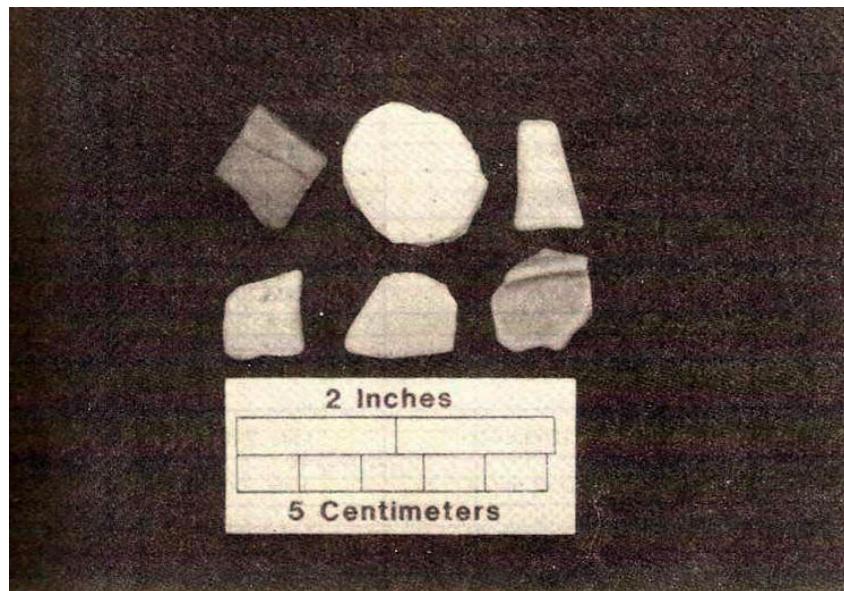


Figure 4. Items recovered from the Brownsville Site (from Galke 1992a:79).

and was believed to “represent an early stage in the production process” (Galke 2000:264). This item is very similar to purposefully worked, small, circular ceramic sherds recovered from the Hermitage Plantation in Tennessee (Russell 1997:75-76) and at late eighteenth-century slave house areas at Drax Hall Plantation in Jamaica (Armstrong 1990:137-138) (Figure 5). In the case of the gaming pieces found at Drax Hall, soft delftware sherds were the preferred material from which “disks” were carved (Armstrong 1990:137). These were likely not used for playing mankala, but perhaps a game similar to checkers. The circular ceramic sherd from the Brownsville site, which appears to have been purposefully worked, may have been used similarly as a gaming piece or counter.

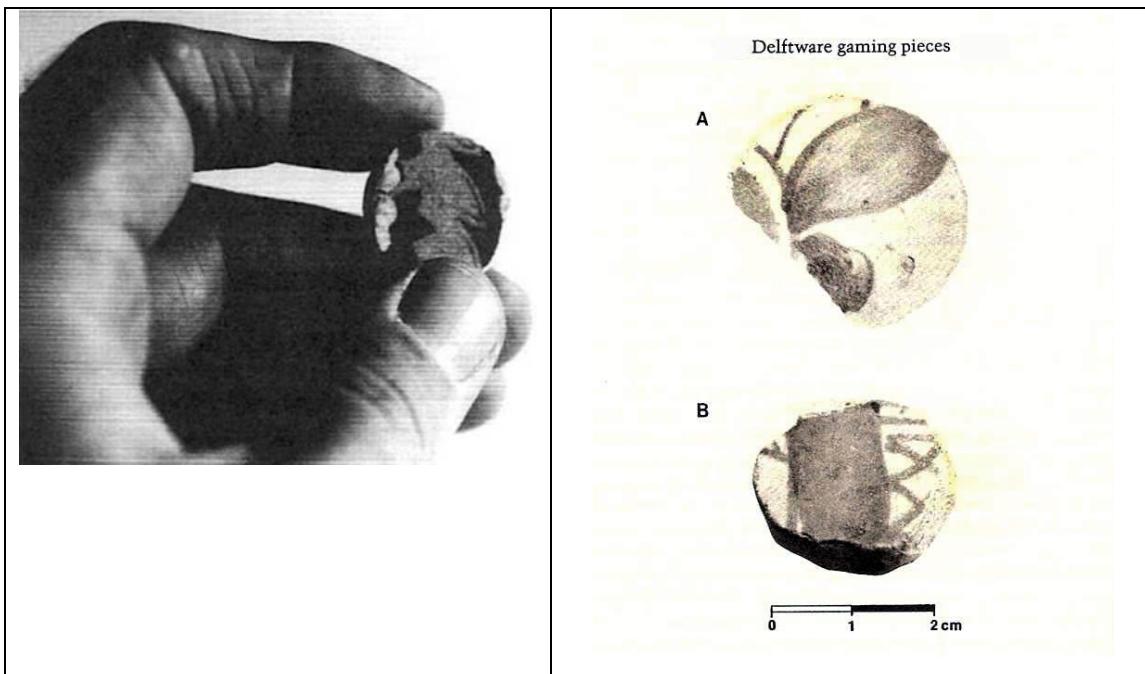


Figure 5. Items identified as possible circular gaming pieces recovered from the Hermitage and Drax Hall Plantation Sites: (A) item recovered from the Hermitage Plantation Site (from Russell 1997:76) (B) item recovered from the Drax Hall Plantation Site (from Armstrong 1990:138).

At Portici also on the Manassas National Battlefield Park, 3 possible ceramic gaming pieces were found in and around the Portici mansion's structural remains, including 1 from the cellar where the domestic slaves at the middling plantation were thought to have resided (Figure 6) (Galke 2000:261). Three gaming pieces were also recovered from the field slave cabin, including a notched and polished bone fragment (Galke 2000:261). A photograph (Galke 2000:262) of the worked bone fragment shows little likeness to any of the gaming pieces or smoothly worn items identified at other sites (Galke 1992a:79, 2000:262; NPS 1998; Wilkie 1995:145, 2000:192; (Shackel 2006:3A:16) and at Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539. Five additional gaming pieces were recovered from the refuse pit/cellar hole of the eighteenth-century Pohoke structure, which was reportedly used for trash disposal by the Portici field slaves occupying the nearby cabin (Galke 2000:261-262).

At the Robinson site, a farmstead occupied by James Robinson a free African American located on the Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia, approximately 24 possible gaming pieces were found in areas around the house ruins and in the backyard (Figure 6) (Parsons

n.d.:5). “In several areas of excavation two or four gaming pieces were deposited together” (Parsons n.d.:5). At the Nash site, a late nineteenth-century African-American farmstead also located on the Manassas National Battlefield Park, three gaming pieces of ceramic and stone were recovered from different excavation units surrounding the house (Figure 6) (Galke 2000:265).

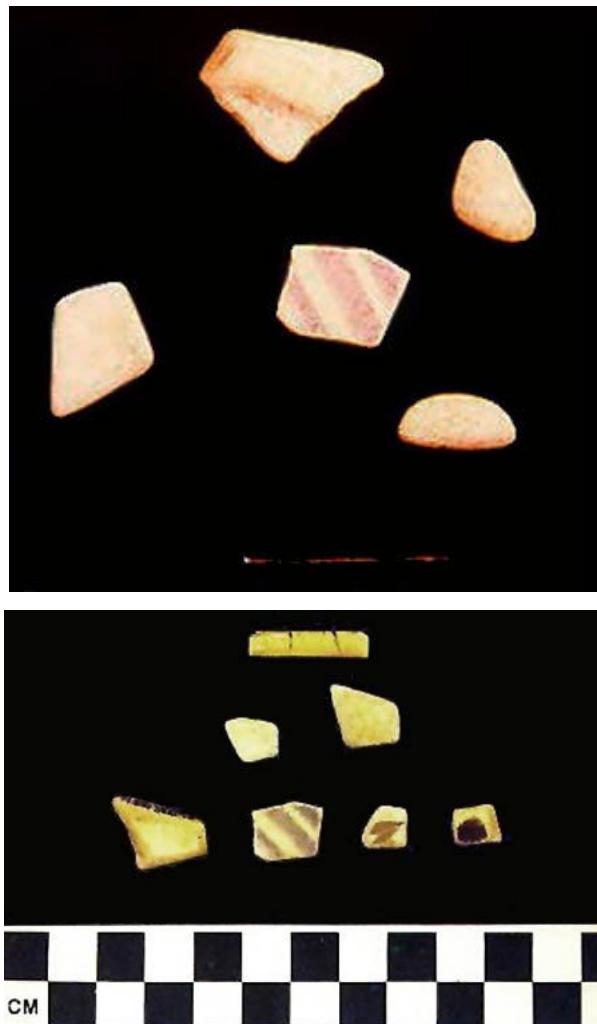


Figure 6. Items recovered from the Portici, Robinson, and Nash Sites interpreted as gaming pieces (from NPS 1998).

Shackel reports that stone, glass, and ceramic “gaming pieces have been found in almost every area excavated at New Philadelphia,” a multi-racial frontier community located in Pike County, Illinois (Figure 7) (2006:3A:16). New Philadelphia was the first known town established and platted by an African American, Frank McWorter, in 1836. Town lots were owned and

occupied by both white and black citizens through the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century.



Figure 7. Items recovered from the New Philadelphia Site interpreted as gaming pieces (from Shackel 2006:3A:17).

Mankala, derived from the Arabic word *manqala* meaning “to move” is a family of board games that includes *Adi*, *Adjı*, *Awale*, *Awele*, *Awari*, *Ayo*, *Ayo-ayo*, *Gepeta*, *Ourin*, *Oware*, *Warra*, or *Warri* (Figure 8) (Shackel 2006:3A:17). These games are sometimes called sowing games or count and capture games because of the way the game is played. Origins of the game have been traced to Ethiopia, and it may be as old as 3,000 years (Townshend 1979:794). Many variations of the game exist and are played around the world. It is played by two persons or teams who move gaming pieces, consisting of seeds, beans, nuts, stones, shells, or other similar items across rows of holes dug in the ground or scooped out of a block of wood. There is no distinction between the gaming pieces; all are moved by both players who attempt to redistribute the gaming pieces according to established rules and capture as many pieces as possible. All the gaming pieces used in any one game, such as seeds or stones, are identical (Townshend 1979:794).

Enslaved Africans transported to the New World brought the game with them and it has a long history of play from the Caribbean islands south to Brazil, but its presence in the United States is not as well documented. However, there is a single report in 1919 by an Austrian ethnographer, Felix von Luschan, that mankala was referred to as *warra* in the “Negro-States of

the Union” and that he “saw the game numerous times in Mississippi, and learned in New Orleans that it was brought to San Francisco under the same name by the colored [people]” (Luschan 1919:52). He then goes on to state that his review of mankala was “written without preparation” and with no “exhaustive philosophy” and that a comprehensive study of the game “would be worthwhile to show an exact knowledge of its origin and its migration” (Luschan 1919:55). Some speculate the apparent absence of the game in the United States was because American slave-owners discouraged slaves from maintaining African traditions, so the game was concealed (Parsons n.d.:5).

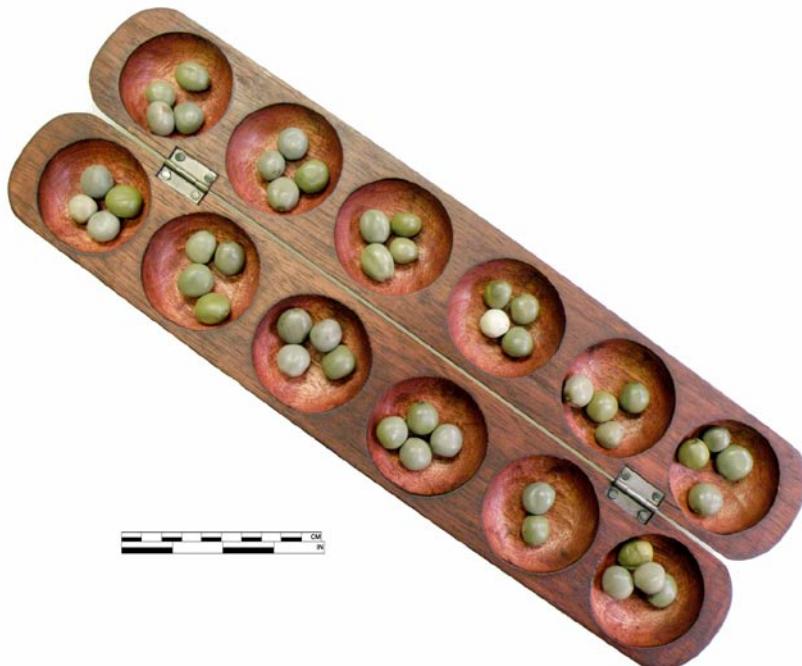


Figure 8. A Mankala Board.

Supporters of the mankala gaming piece interpretation differ on the manner in which the game pieces were made and how they acquired their smoothly worn surface. Some believe they may have been intentionally polished before their use as gaming pieces (Gardner et al. 1999:65; Jorgensen 2005:80), while others attribute their smoothly worn surface to the repeated actions of the players scooping the pieces from one hole of the board to another (Shackel 2006:3A:17).

Based on the analysis of the items recovered from Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539 and the review of sites where possible gaming pieces and water-ground or smoothly worn ceramic sherds have been recovered, it is apparent that these objects represent a distinct group of items that repeatedly shows up at domestic sites. Most of these items that are identified are ceramic and a

smaller amount are glass, indicating that they are directly associated with human activities at a site. Because stone is a natural material and not manufactured by humans, it is more difficult to directly associate the smoothly worn stone items with the occupation of the site by humans. An effort can be made to recognize that on-site formation processes do not clearly account for the worn appearance of a stone found during excavation, but the stone may not in any way be directly associated with the human occupation of the site. Any stone items included in this group should be considered with some skepticism.



Figure 9. Grit and small stones extracted from a free-range chicken gizzard.

Another possible explanation for the water-worn appearance of these items is that they served as gizzard stones in chickens, turkeys, or other birds (Figure 9). The gizzard is a powerful organ for crushing (Schorger 1966:95) present in a group of birds known as ratites which include ostriches, emus, and cassowaries, and in songbirds and galliform birds such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, and guinea fowl. Food enters the mouth, passes through the esophagus and crop and then enters the proventriculus, where it is soaked with digestive enzymes but spends little time there before moving on to the gizzard (Sturkie 1965:291). The gizzard, which contains grit and

small stones swallowed previously by the bird, then helps to break down food by rhythmic contractions that crush seeds, nuts, and other hard food items. In a way gizzard stones perform the functional role of teeth for many birds.

Gizzard stones are essential for optimum digestion because they increase the motility and grinding action of the gizzard and the digestibility of coarse feed by as much as 10% (Sturkie 1965:292), and some have reported an increase of 25-30% in domesticated chickens (Wings 2004:30-31). Without gizzard stones, the gizzard of the bird will retain fibrous material which can cause partial or complete constipation (Wings 2004:30). Birds will swallow grit and small stones when they have access to them and modern chicken farmers can purchase feed already mixed with grit (Bill Goode 2006, pers. comm.). The material remains in the gizzard for a considerable time and is not ordinarily passed with the feed (Sturkie 1965:282-283). A certain quota of grit and/or small stones is kept even when the stomach is completely free of food (Wings 2004:53). An experiment where four small pebbles were fed to a bird that had been denied access to grit showed that three of the pebbles still remained in the gizzard three weeks later (Sturkie 1965:283). The exit from the gizzard, the pyloric orifice, is guarded by the pyloric valve (Wings 2004:52), which traps larger items in the gizzard, including gizzard stones, until the material is broken down to a passable size. This means large gizzard stones are not excreted and indicates that if the smoothly worn items recovered from these sites are gizzard stones, they more than likely were released from a bird after its death.

Small ceramic and glass sherds, as well as stones, could be ingested by birds and used to crush food in the gizzard. Wilkie (2000:192) mentions at least one informant who remembered finding such sherds in a chicken gizzard, and Russell (1997:76) mentions having received reports of an intentional turkey burial containing whiteware sherds in the gizzard area, as well as old blue dishes being broken up and fed to hens. I have received a report of glass gizzard stones found during slaughter of domestic free-range chickens (Bill Goode 2006, pers. comm.). Movement within the gizzard appears to be rotary (Sturkie 1965:282), which may account for the typically rounded appearance of gizzard stones. The physical characteristics of gizzard stones, especially the roundness and surface texture, are strongly dependent on such factors as material type, retention time, or abrasion rate in the stomach (Wings 2004:27). This may account for the variation in shape seen in the items recovered from Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539, especially the stone items.

It is more likely that the smoothly worn items recovered from the sites reviewed above are gizzard stones and not mankala gaming pieces. The paucity of historic documentation of the game being played in the United States makes the mankala interpretation tenuous. Supporters make the argument that documentation is rare because enslaved African Americans concealed the game and played it in hiding for fear of punishment by slave owners and overseers. However, it seems surprising that free African Americans before and after emancipation would continue to conceal the game. The recovery of these items in the backyard near the porch and various outbuildings at the Robinson site was interpreted as an indication that the game was “played with discretion, away from the watchful eyes of other members of the community, even at the home of this successful free African-American family” (Parsons n.d.:5) (Figure 10). A simpler



Figure 10. The first Robinson House constructed in the 1840s (from NPS 1998).

interpretation is that these items are gizzard stones and were recovered from the backyard near the porch and outbuildings because this is where the domesticated fowl resided and were slaughtered. During interviews Romaine Lewis, James Robinson’s great-great-grandchild, stated that one of the outbuildings was a hen house and remembered “chickens, turkeys, geese, guineas, and ducks” that roamed around the yard (NPS 2006). One might question why the game was reportedly revealed to an Austrian ethnographer in Mississippi and Louisiana in 1919 but remained concealed by free African Americans in Virginia, Tennessee, Illinois, and Louisiana throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Another argument used by supporters of the mankala interpretation is that these items are found regularly at sites associated with African Americans, but not in European-American contexts (Galke 1992a:139, 2000:269; Kim Snyder 2006, pers. comm.; Wilkie 2000:193). The Brownsville and Portici sites, the Oakley and Hermitage Plantations, New Philadelphia, and Site 44PW690 were sites that European- and African-Americans occupied together. At the Brownsville and Portici sites, Site 44PW690, and New Philadelphia, these items were recovered from European-American contexts as well as African-American contexts. These items were recovered from European-American contexts in the mansion garden at the Hermitage Plantation (Russell 1997:75). It is not clear who occupied Site 44PW1241. Even though the artifact assemblage is sparse and contained colonoware, “it is more substantial and diverse than what would be expected at the dwelling of a field slave household,” and was more likely occupied by an impoverished tenant (Jorgensen 2005:84-85).

Another explanation for why these items are not regularly found at sites associated solely with European-Americans is that they may be overlooked by investigators not familiar with these items. Investigators working at a site that is known not to be associated with African Americans may not identify such an obscure category of item or may recognize them as gizzard stones or just pebbles and consider them unimportant.

A third explanation for why these items are regularly found at sites associated with African Americans is the importance domesticated and wild fowl played in the diet and economy of African Americans during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. “European travelers consistently wrote that Guinea fowl, turkeys, and a variety of birds were the basic source of meat in West African cuisine,” especially chickens which were raised in small areas beside domestic buildings (Yentsch 1994:203). It appears this tradition was carried over to the New World where fowl were equally important to African Americans because they were inexpensive and easy to tend with the added benefit of egg production. Enslaved African Americans received meat rations of salted fish, pork, and beef, as well as receiving the less meaty portions of slaughtered domesticated animals such as innards, heads, snouts, backbones, feet or trotters, and also gizzards (Heath 1999:60; Yentsch 1994:212). These meat rations were often supplemented by domesticated animals, including poultry that slaves were permitted to raise themselves, as well as hunting and fishing. It has been widely reported that slave diets included many wild fowl, including mourning dove, passenger pigeon, goose, duck, and turkey (Ferguson 1992:96; Heath

1999:60-61; Yentsch 1994:Tbl. 11.1, 236). Books from the Frederick Hall Plantation in Piedmont Virginia kept in the 1740s and 1750s by a Louisa County proprietor record small payments or sales of cloth in exchange for the slaves' chickens (Morgan 1988:468). The late colonial accounts of Dr. Edmund Wilcox, an Amherst County, Virginia resident, reveal remittances to slaves for their ducks and chickens, and in 1779, James Mercer proposed exchanging bacon for "chickens and other fresh meat" obtained from the "Negroes who are general chicken merchants" (Morgan 1988:468). It is also apparent that domesticated fowl played an important role at the Robinson site, as indicated by Romaine Lewis's reference to the many different species that roamed the farmyard, including guinea hens (NPS 2006), originally a wild species indigenous to Africa and introduced to Jamaica by the early eighteenth century. Guinea hens also appear on an inventory of a Virginia plantation by the mid nineteenth century (Yentsch 1994:214, 236).

Analysis of faunal remains recovered from Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539 indicate the consumption of chickens, domestic geese, turkeys, and pheasant (Goode et al. 2008:330-331,341). At Site 44LD538, the faunal analysis also indicated the consumption of many wild animals including fish from the nearby Stallion Branch as well as fox, rabbit, squirrel, groundhog, muskrat, and opossum. The majority of remains from domestic species consisted of pork where trotter bones were the most frequent in the assemblage, followed by jowl and shank portions. Only one loin chop cut was identified.

An analysis conducted by Miller of faunal remains from a number of European-American Colonial Chesapeake Tidewater sites consisting of plantations and one ordinary, show that domestic fowl occur in low but persistent frequencies at all sites (Miller 1988:187). One tenant site included in the study showed low percentages of beef and pork but high percentages of chicken. This faunal pattern was attributed to the occupant's limited economic means and that during the early eighteenth century tenancy was no longer a temporary stop for planters on the road to economic advancement, instead for many it was becoming a permanent status, especially in long settled areas (Miller 1988:191-193).

As population density rose, grazing and pasture land became less available, and landowners probably utilized much of the pasture-land for their own herds. Tenants were most likely restricted in the number of cattle they could keep and thus focused more upon

swine and chickens, which required less land (Miller 1988:192-193).

Whether considering an overseer site, a site occupied by field slaves or an impoverished tenant, a middling plantation, a large southern plantation, an African-American farmstead, or a small multi-racial frontier community, one would expect to find chickens or other domestic fowl. These are common farmyard animals in any rural setting. Therefore, gizzard stones should be present at sites where chickens and/or other domestic fowl were present and had access to larger stones and sherds of broken ceramic and glass, regardless of the race or background of the occupants. Increased awareness on the part of excavators in identifying these items at all sites would aid in determining the origin of these smoothly worn items.

Wilkie believes these items are gizzard stones, but she suggests another explanation for why they are regularly found at sites associated with African Americans. She believes they were purposefully curated by African Americans, possibly for use in charm bags, a tradition derived from *minkisi wambi*, or danger charms, used by the Bakongo in Africa, as well as for other spiritual and magical purposes (Wilkie 2000:193). Her review of ethnographic and oral history literature has demonstrated “that any odd or unusual object has potential magical uses” (Wilkie 2000:193). The smooth appearance of the items may be equated with polished rocks or river rocks, which are common charm elements and may be associated with the Bakongo water spirits (Wilkie 2000:193). Polished stones have been reported by Klingelhofer (1987) at the Garrison Plantation slave quarters (Figure 11), by Russell (1997) at the Hermitage Plantation, and by Jones (1999) at the Charles Carroll House. Chickens are also important in African-American

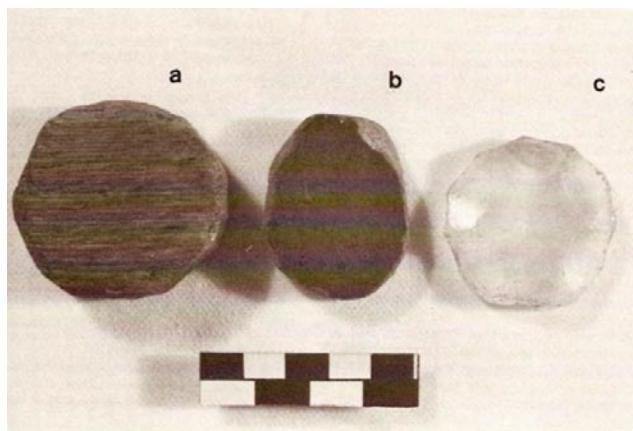


Figure 11. “Polygonal objects of possible ritual use”: (A) wood item (B) black-glazed earthenware item (C) glass decanter stopper top (from Klingelhofer 1987:117).

spiritual practices linked with hoodoo. “*Hoodoo* is used in ex-slave narratives to describe attempts to control the actions and health of other people (or prevent control by others) through the use of potions, charms, and incantations” (Wilkie 2000:182). Keeping a chicken in one’s yard prevents conjuring by finding buried hoodoos; chicken feathers and eggs can be used in spells and charms; and witches have even been reported as looking like fowl (Wilkie 2000:185).

If these items are mankala gaming pieces, gizzard stones, or gizzard stones intentionally curated for use in spiritual or magical practices, they should be recovered from contexts that suggest that role. At the Charles Carroll house in Annapolis and at the Nash Site located on the Manassas National Battlefield Park, a cache of artifacts was recovered that is thought to have magical or spiritual importance to the African Americans living at those sites. At the Charles Carroll house, a group of items including 12 quartz crystals were recovered together covered by a pearlware bowl (Jones 1999:2). This group of items was found in the extreme northeast corner of a ground floor room from a layer that would have been below a wood floor that existed in the eighteenth century (Jones 1999:2). Found with the quartz crystals was a tiny faceted glass bead and a smooth black stone. The pearlware bowl that covered the crystals and other items was decorated with a large asterisk or sunburst (Jones 1999:2) that is similar to the Bakongo cosmogram *Yowa*, which represents the general conception of life, death, and the structure of the cosmos (Russell 1997:64). At the Nash site, a cache of 6 quartz crystals, a fragment of galena, and a quartz projectile point was recovered from a thin layer of soil in close proximity to the chimney footing (Figure 12) (Galke 1992a:137). Both of these caches were interpreted as



Figure 12. The cache of six quartz crystals, a fragment of galena, and a quartz projectile point recovered from the Nash Site (from NPS 1998).

spiritual or magical items, possibly used in African *minkisi* or charm bags (Galke 2000:266; Jones 1999:6).

If the items were used as game pieces, one might expect them to have been deposited together in a cache at a site. None of the smoothly worn items recovered from Site 44LD538 and 44LD539 or from the other sites reviewed above was recovered from an obvious cache associated with other items of spiritual or magical significance. Most of the items appear to have been found in yard contexts or in and around foundation remains. At the Robinson site it was reported that two or four gaming pieces were deposited together in several areas of excavation (Parsons n.d.:5), but whether these items were actually found in direct association or were simply recovered from the same soil horizon within a test unit is not specified. At the Hermitage Russell reports that the items “were recovered from all contexts examined for this paper” (1997:75), while at New Philadelphia Shackel reports that the items “have been found in almost every area excavated at New Philadelphia” (2006:3A:16). It is puzzling that items invested with spiritual or magical powers or game pieces used in a game hidden away from others would be so widely distributed at these sites. On the other hand, it is not that difficult to imagine chickens, turkeys, and other fowl present at these sites expiring in various circumstances so that their gizzard stones then enter the archaeological record. Whether these circumstances also involved the intentional curation of the gizzard stones by humans cannot be ruled out, but this interpretation requires contextual evidence that indicates such behavior.

Evidence reviewed in this discussion suggests the items recovered at Sites 44LD538 and 44LD539 are not game pieces but are more likely gizzard stones. This includes a near lack of documentation of the game being played in North America, even after emancipation. They do not appear like other noticeably carved ceramic items that are thought to be game pieces, such as the items recovered at Drax Hall Plantation in Jamaica (Armstrong 1990), and they have not been identified in artifact caches thought to have magical or spiritual importance (Galke 2000; Jones 1999). Instead, they are overwhelmingly recovered from yard contexts and near outbuildings where the domesticated fowl resided and were slaughtered. They do appear to be consistently recovered from African-American contexts, but this could be for several reasons. One is because that is where they are expected to be found by researchers familiar with these items, many of who interpret their recovery at a site as confirmation that African Americans

were present. This becomes a self-fulfilling cycle that first ignores that these items have already been identified in Euro-American contexts at many sites and secondly fails to recognize that gizzard stones will be found at sites where occupants kept domestic fowl regardless of race. This brings us to the most consequential reason that these items show up in African-American sites, which is the importance wild and domestic fowl had in African-American diets, economy, and culture before and after emancipation. The recovery of gizzard stones at known African-American sites is evidence of this importance and demonstrates that African-American culture is a combination of traditional aspects of African culture and adaptation to life in North America and the system of slavery. That it is more likely these items are gizzard stones does not detract from the information they provide about African-American culture and traditions, but instead enriches our understanding of African-American foodways and possibly spiritual practices, as well as late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century foodways in general.

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