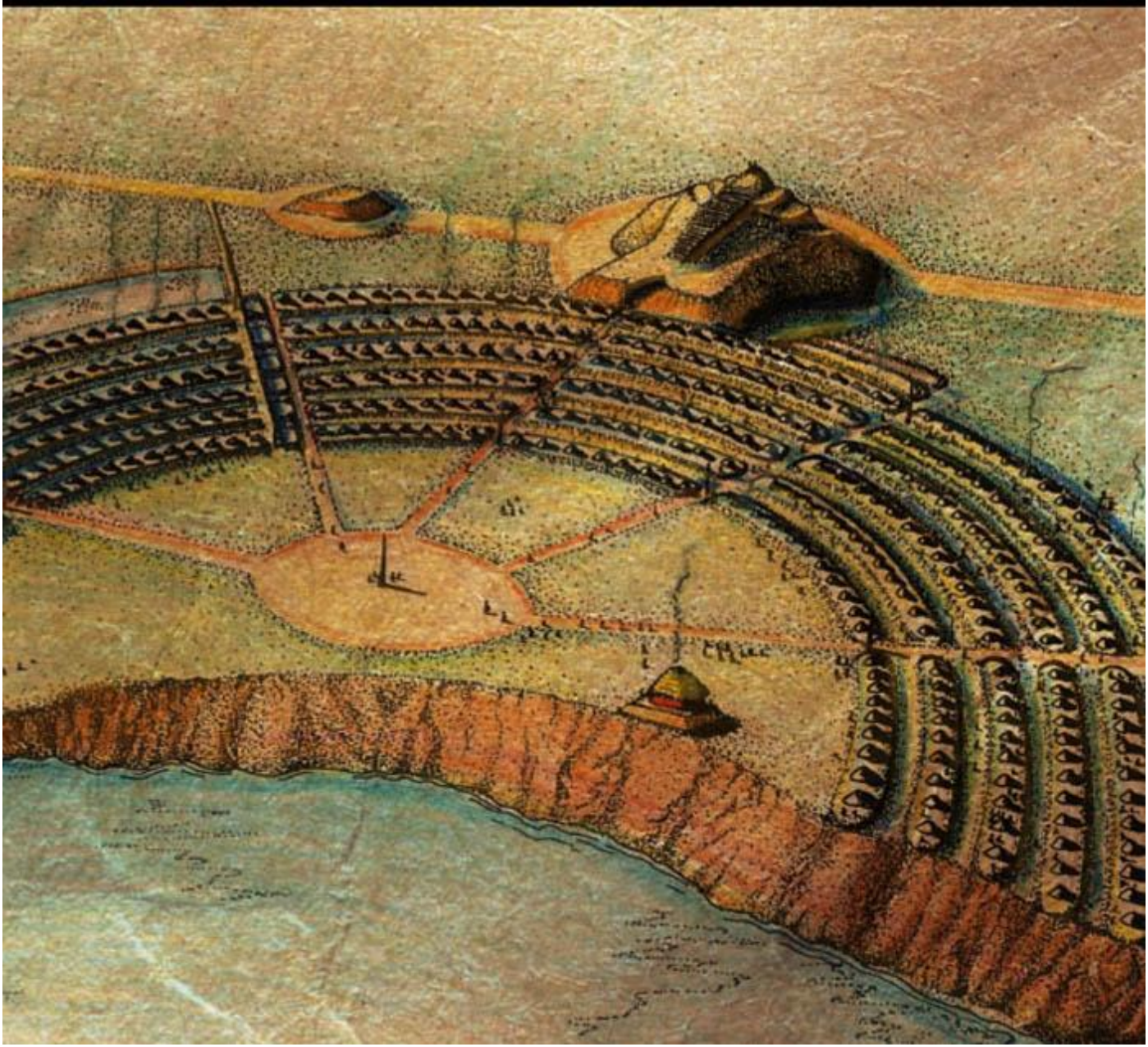
Archaeology of Louisiana

Edited by Mark A. Rees



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With a Foreword by Ian W. Brown

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Marksville and Middle Woodland

CHARLES R. MCGIMSEY

Marksville. In Louisiana archaeology, the word has many meanings. The three most important are a place (the Marksville site), a time period (the Middle Woodland, Marksville period), and an archaeological culture (Marksville). Archaeologists have long assumed these concepts are all part of the same cultural expression (Neuman 1984; Toth 1979a, 1988), but as new information accumulates, the relationship between the site, the time period, and the culture is becoming more complex.

The term Marksville comes from the town of that name in Avoyelles Parish (Figure 1.2). In 1926, Gerard Fowke (1928) explored a set of mounds and earthworks just east of town. The ceramic vessels he found there were immediately recognized as stylistically similar to those found in mounds in Ohio and identified as part of the Hopewell culture (Setzler 1933a, 1933b). Thus the Marksville site, and by extension the Marksville time period and culture, became associated with the Hopewell culture of the Midwestern United States (Ford 1936).

Hopewell is a remarkable cultural expression, archaeologically recognizable for its elaborate earthworks, raw material exchange, distinctive artifact styles, and burial of honored dead within discrete tombs. Variations of these material traits can be found from Florida to Kansas City and from New York to Louisiana. Extensive investigations in the Midwest place Hopewell within the interval of A.D. 1–350 or 400. Several sites in Louisiana, including Marksville, exhibit some of these Hopewellian traits. Consequently, these traits have been used to define Marksville culture as the local version of a broader Hopewell expression that is contemporary with Hopewellian sites in the Midwest (Kidder 2002b:72–79; Toth 1974, 1979a, 1988). Over the last thirty years, however, excavations at numerous sites indicate some of these defining traits are either rare or persist well beyond the presumed end of the period at ca. A.D. 400. In this sense, the archaeological definitions of the Marksville period and Marksville culture are

open to interpretation. For this book, the Marksville period is arbitrarily defined as the period between A.D. 1 and 400 (Figure 1.3). An examination of selected sites dating to this interval illustrates what is known and not known about the people who lived in Louisiana during this period, and also illuminates important yet unresolved issues about how and when the Marksville culture is defined.

Key Sites

Archaeologists recognize Marksville period sites in Louisiana almost entirely on the basis of the distinctive ceramic decorative styles, including incised geometric and zoned rocker-stamped designs. Sherds with these designs can be found across the state, although their frequency varies considerably. Sites with the greatest concentration of Marksville sherds tend to lie within the Mississippi Valley and adjoining uplands, while sites across the southwestern part of the state and in the Florida Parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain yield only a very few sherds. Marksville sherds are rare in the Kisatchie Hills and the piney hills north of Alexandria. Some sites are known along the Red River, but north of Shreveport they are generally included within the Fourche Maline culture of southwestern Arkansas (Schambach 1982a, 1998). Before further discussion of Marksville artifacts, it is worthwhile to consider what is known about some of the key sites.

MARKSVILLE (16AV1)

The Marksville site is the most important site of this period. Its core consists of a C-shaped earthen embankment enclosing forty acres and six earthen mounds (Figure 7.1). The site lies on a high bluff overlooking an abandoned channel of the Mississippi River, with the river forming the eastern margin of the site. The site plan was based on a geometric grid, with alignments to the sun, certain stars, and constellations (Davis 2005), indicating that at minimum the core or central area was a carefully planned construction.

The 950-meter-long (3,117 ft) C-shaped embankment encircling the site core is open to the east, with both ends of the embankment reaching the bluff edge. It is constructed of earth borrowed from the immediately adjacent area along the exterior edge of the embankment. The borrow area forms a shallow ditch paralleling the embankment along most of its length. The embankment presently varies in height from 0.5 to 2.5 meters (1.6 to 8.2 ft). It is lowest at the north

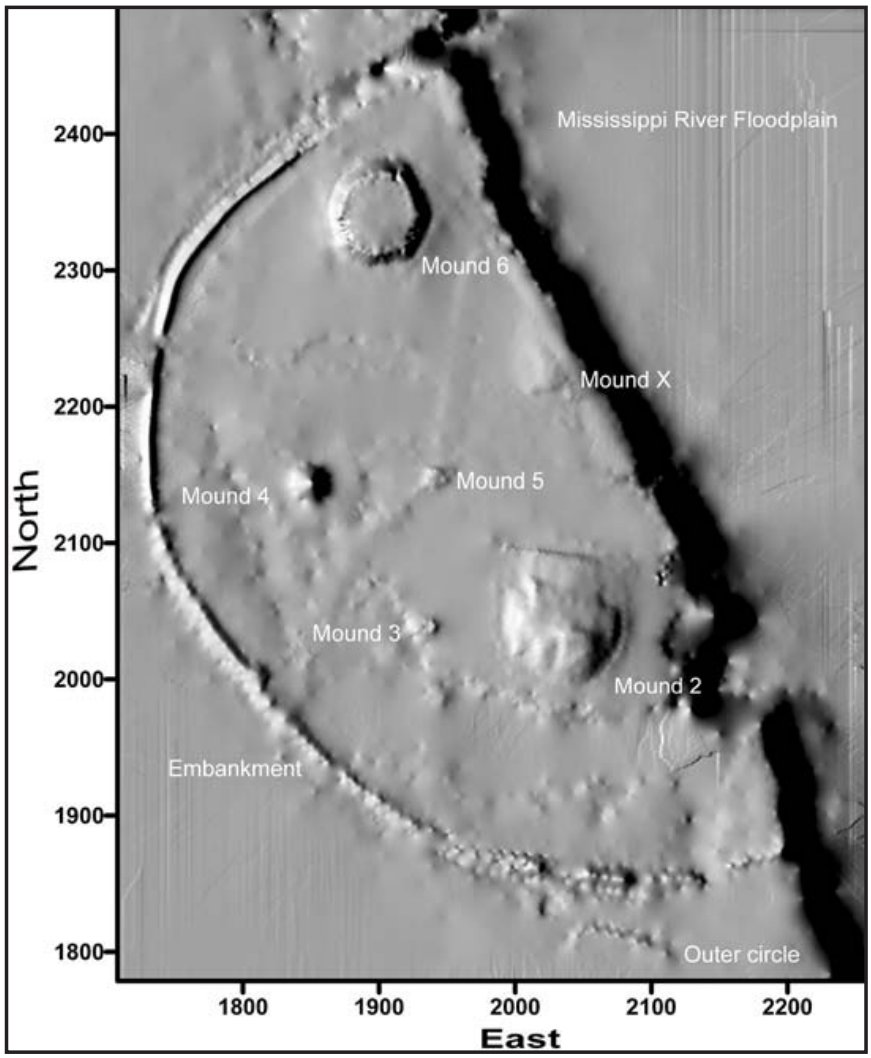

Fig. 7.1. Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) image of the Marksville site (16AV1).

end and slowly rises in height moving southward. This change in height compensates for the land surface slope across the site, with the absolute elevation of the embankment crest being nearly level (± 25 cm or 10 in) across its entire length. The nearly level embankment may have been constructed in this fashion to create an artificial western horizon for astronomical observations. There is no evidence that the embankment and ditch is a fortification. Rather, it defines a sacred space within.

On the south side of the embankment lies a relatively small, circular earthwork. This earthwork is approximately 100 meters (328 ft) in diameter, with walls 1 meter (3.3 ft) or less in height. It is connected to the main site area by a 2-meter-wide (6.6 ft) raised causeway built across the ditch. The causeway meets the main embankment at a double gateway, with an entrance to the main site

area passing through the embankment around either side of a low mound. The purpose and function of this circular earthwork are unknown.

The six mounds within the C-shaped embankment at Marksville are variable in shape and size. The two smallest mounds, Mounds 3 and 5, are low domes 20 meters (66 ft) in diameter and approximately 1 meter (3.3 ft) high (Figure 7.1). Each is constructed entirely of white-colored earth. Mound 4 is a large conical mound 30 meters (98 ft) in diameter and 7 meters (23 ft) high. It was initially constructed as a 1.5-meter-high (5 ft) rectangular platform, upon which a series of tombs were constructed. Then the conical mound was built up over the platform, with additional burials placed in the fill as it was constructed. This is the only cemetery mound at the site. Mound 6 is a two-stage, circular platform mound approximately 95 meters (312 ft) in diameter and 4 meters (13 ft) high. Mound 2 is an irregular shaped mound, perhaps substantially altered by historic activities. It is presently 90 meters by 80 meters (295 by 263 ft) at its base and 4 meters (13 ft) tall. It is the only mound with black-colored earth included in its fill. Mound X has been significantly modified by historic activities and its original size and shape are unknown. Today it is roughly triangular in shape and 1 meter (3.3 ft) high. Other than the cemetery in Mound 4, the purpose and function of the remaining mounds are unknown. Nor is it known what the inclusion of specific colors of earth may have meant to the builders of Marksville.

The Marksville site also includes a series of small circular earthworks that vary in size from 10 to 30 meters (33 to 98 ft) in diameter. Only one was situated inside the C-shaped embankment, while at least seven others lie outside the embankment. Each has a low earthen wall, less than 1 meter (3.3 ft) high, with a shallow ditch paralleling the exterior of the wall. The interior is occupied by a semi-subterranean basin up to 1 meter (3.3 ft) deep below the ground surface. In the center of the basin is a deep pit, as much as 3 meters (9.8 ft) in diameter and 2 meters (6.6 ft) deep. Excavations have revealed that fires were repeatedly ignited within these deep pits, which were cleaned out after each use. After the last use, the pits were intentionally filled with earth, but the embankment and ditch were left to mark the location of the basin and pit. The purpose and function of these ring earthworks is unknown (McGimsey 2003b).

The Marksville site originally may have been much larger than the central, core area. Several hundred meters to the north, a second small embankment closes off a finger-like protrusion in the bluff and encloses one mound. Aerial photographs from the 1930s suggest that three other semi-circular embankments may have been present, two to the south of the main site area and one to the north, before being plowed down in the nineteenth and early twentieth centu-

ries. These same aerial photographs also indicate that several dozen of the small ring earthworks were at one time located around and among all of these other embankments. If all of these features of the landscape were part of the Marksville site, it would have covered nearly 162 hectares (400 acres) and included up to five semi-circular embankments, seven mounds, and dozens of the smaller, circular ring earthworks.

Major excavations were undertaken at the Marksville site in 1926, 1933, 1939, and 1993, with numerous smaller projects over the last thirty years (Fowke 1928; Jones and Kuttruff 1998; Kuttruff et al. 1997; McGimsey et al. 1999, 2000, 2005; McGimsey 2001; Ryan 1975; Toth 1974; Vescelius 1957). These efforts have explored Mounds 3, 4, 5, and 6, with extensive investigations of non-mound areas around Mound 2 and along the bluff edge. Mound 4 was completely excavated in 1926 and 1933. It is consequently known to have served as a cemetery that contained the remains of at least thirty-six individuals and two dogs, buried in a series of Hopewell-like tombs. Ceramic vessels in these tombs are stylistically identical to vessels found in Hopewell tombs in Illinois and Ohio. Excavations into the other mounds at Marksville have produced no evidence of their purpose, although they were clearly not cemeteries. Beyond the mounds, artifacts and features are concentrated along the bluff edge, with material concentrated in occasional refuse piles that spill over the bluff edge. No evidence of domestic structures has been found, although two non-domestic structures have been exposed (Toth 1974). There is little evidence people lived inside the embankment. Much of the refuse may be from ceremonial activities and feasts. Radiocarbon dates indicate construction of the core site area began sometime between 50 B.C. and A.D. 1. The Marksville site was abandoned sometime after A.D. 350.

VEAZEY (16VM7/8)

Located on the Gulf Coast in Vermilion Parish (Figure 1.2), the Veazey site originally included at least fourteen mounds, but only one has produced Marksville artifacts (McGimsey 2005). Many of the other mounds may date to a subsequent Plaquemine occupation of the site (Brown 1999a). Limited test excavations by Henry Collins, Jr., into one of the mounds produced numerous human skeletal remains and several Hopewell-style artifacts; these included propeller-shaped ear spools (worn in the earlobes), bear canines with drilled holes, copper, and galena (Collins 1927a; McGimsey 2005). Test excavations in the adjoining village site produced Marksville sherds, although the associated radiocarbon date of A.D. 625 is too late for the Marksville period (Brown 1999a). The nature and extent of

the Marksville presence at this site are uncertain, although the Hopewell-style artifacts found in the mound indicate that it dates to the Marksville period. Perhaps the mound explored by Collins was a Marksville period cemetery, similar to the mound at the Crooks site.

CROOKS (16LA3)

The Crooks site in LaSalle Parish was excavated by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1938–1939 (Ford and Willey 1940). The larger of the two mounds at the site incorporated an earthen platform on which 382 individuals had been placed. As the mound was built up over this platform, an additional 773 people were placed in the mound. A few individuals were buried with classic Marksville or Hopewell-style artifacts, including decorated ceramic vessels, effigy and platform pipes, galena beads, and copper ear spools and beads. The smaller mound contained only fourteen individuals and no artifacts indicating the age of the mound burials. There are no radiocarbon dates from this site to further define its chronological position within the Marksville period. Nevertheless, the mounds at the Crooks site were a Marksville period ossuary (a collection of skeletal remains) where a large number of individuals were buried together, rather than in individual tombs or pits, as in Mound 4 at the Marksville site.

CORAL SNAKE MOUND (16SA48)

Coral Snake Mound lies on the western border of Louisiana in Sabine Parish and consists of a single mound excavated in 1966–1967 (Jensen 1968b). The mound has two stages overlying an initial basin. This is the only known Marksville cemetery to have included cremated burials along with bundle burials, which were placed in shallow pits. Due to poor preservation, the exact number of individuals interred in the mound is uncertain. Among the diagnostic Marksville or Hopewell-style artifacts that appear to have been placed as caches within the mound were ceramic vessels, copper ear spools, beads, a pendant, and non-local chert points. Three of the five radiocarbon dates from this site place the mound within the early to middle part of the Marksville period.

BIG OAK ISLAND (16OR6)

Lying on the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Orleans Parish, this site is an arcuate-shaped shell midden constructed primarily during the Tchula pe-

riod (Shenkel 1984a). A low-lying knoll, or what might be an earthen mound, is located on the crest of the midden at the north end of the arc. The shell midden served as a cemetery or ossuary, which contained at least fifty individuals interred as bundle burials in a dense scatter within the knoll. Diagnostic artifacts include ceramic vessels, shell cups, one copper bead, and one tubular pipe. The ceramic vessels exhibit Marksville designs on ceramic pastes more typical of earlier, Tchula period ceramic technology (see Hays and Weinstein, Chapter 6 in this volume). Radiocarbon dates and grave goods place this ossuary in the early part of the Marksville period.

ASSESSMENT AND OTHER SITES

All but one of the sites described thus far are mound sites, and most of them are cemetery mounds. At Marksville, only one of the mounds inside the embankment served as a cemetery. The remaining mounds had different, presently unknown functions. The McGuffee site (16CT17) in Catahoula Parish has multiple mounds and an earthen embankment similar to Marksville, although McGuffee appears to be a multi-component site and the age of earthwork construction is presently uncertain (see Lee, Chapter 8 in this volume). If it is Middle Woodland in age, McGuffee would be the only other Marksville period site in Louisiana with an earthen embankment and multiple mounds.

The remaining sites described above are single or double-mound sites, or, in the case of Big Oak Island, a raised knoll on a midden, where each mound (or midden knoll) functioned as a cemetery. In addition to these sites, additional mounds for which we have limited information probably date to the Marksville period (Gibson and Shenkel 1988; Weinstein et al., ed. 2003). These investigations indicate the potential for other mounded cemeteries similar to Crooks. Most of these sites lie in the eastern part of the state within the Mississippi River Valley.

Outside of the Mississippi and Red River valleys, mounds dating to the Marksville period are extremely rare (Coral Snake Mound in the Sabine River Valley being an obvious exception). Across the southwestern one-third of the state, the northern piney hills and Florida Parishes, Marksville mounds are absent or were destroyed by modern activities before any could be recorded. Within known Marksville cemeteries, there is considerable variation in burial practices, from mass ossuaries (Big Oak Island), to single interments (Marksville Mound 4), to cremations (Coral Snake Mound, some mounds in northeastern Louisiana [Weinstein et al., ed. 2003], and Mound 8 just north of the Marksville site core [Fowke 1928]). From the perspective of the entire state, there is considerable

variability in Marksville period burial traditions. This suggests similar variability in other, less well-known social patterns and cultural traditions.

The list of key sites discussed above is notable for its absence of village sites, although there were many. To date, only limited test excavations have been conducted at the numerous Marksville period village sites located across the state (Beavers 1979; Brown 1999a; Girard 1994b; Kidder 1986; Lamb 1983; McGimsey et al. 2000; Ring 1986). While these efforts have provided information on artifact assemblages and some data on subsistence, there is almost no information on structures or buildings, site organization, or the length of time villages were inhabited.

Diagnostic Artifacts and Material Exchange

Marksville sites are identified almost exclusively by the presence of incised and zoned rocker-stamped ceramics. These styles are distinctive for this period, although all of them persist well beyond the arbitrary end of the period as defined here. Complete vessels showing the entire design layout have only been recovered from burial contexts, and these vessels may reflect only a portion of the overall stylistic range. The burial vessels are notably smaller than those recovered from domestic contexts and clearly reflect a distinctive mortuary assemblage (Gibson et al. 2003). Zoned rocker-stamped vessels from mounds often exhibit one of two bird zoomorphic designs (Figure 7.2): a raptor or vulture, or a roseate spoonbill (more likely) or shoveler duck (less likely). These two birds are the only two animals found on vessels across the Hopewellian world and must represent important spirit beings within the Hopewellian cosmology. It is possible that these two bird-motif designs were produced only during the interval of exchange between Hopewell centers, and they do not appear on vessels later in the Marksville period (Gibson 1970). There is presently insufficient data on vessel design and not enough site chronology to adequately assess this inference.

The Marksville period does not have a distinctive lithic assemblage. Among the common projectile points are the Kent and Gary styles or types. Both were made well before the Marksville period and continued to be made for some time afterwards. Stone tool production emphasizes the use of local gravel cherts for points and bifaces, with very few other tool types present. There is virtually no evidence for a systematic flake-tool industry, although some larger flakes exhibit minor use-wear, reflecting opportunistic use of available pieces.

Other than the few non-local exotic materials (copper, galena) found in burial contexts, there is very little evidence that Marksville people participated in the Hopewell exchange system that was so prevalent in the Midwest. Long-distance

Fig. 7.2. Bird motif design on a Marksville period vessel from the Crooks site (16LA3). Photograph by Kevin Duffy.

exchange of some materials, especially chert, occurred occasionally in Louisiana since at least Middle Archaic times. The small amounts of materials appearing at Marksville sites may be a continuation of these long-established networks. The relatively small quantities of foreign materials indicate that long-distance trade was an uncommon, ephemeral event. It may have been limited to the onset of the Marksville period, when some communities initially adopted Hopewellian customs (Gibson 1970).

Social Organization

The great majority of Marksville period habitation sites are small artifact scatters of less than one acre in size. The few sites investigated so far do not provide any evidence of hierarchical structure between them, based on differences in site size, complexity, or proximity to mounds. Similarly, several of the known cemeteries (Big Oak Island, Crooks, and perhaps Veazey) represent mass interments, where everyone received more or less the same level of ceremony in mortuary treatment. Even those few individuals accompanied by grave goods were buried in the same manner as everyone else. The cemetery at the Morton Shell Mound site (16IB3) is of uncertain age but may represent a late Marksville or early Baytown period ossuary, since it exhibits the same burial treatment for several hundred individuals (McGimsey 2003a). These sites and cemeteries sug-

gest Marksville society was largely egalitarian, with little class differentiation between individuals. This certainly seems to be the case for the many villages scattered across southwestern Louisiana, the piney hills, and the Florida Parishes, where there is very little evidence for mound burial or other means of distinguishing individuals or communities.

For the Crooks cemetery, however, Jon Gibson (1969, 1970) has suggested that an individual's burial treatment and position within a given mound strata may have reflected their social rank. This is not applicable to the other three sites discussed here, as those mounds lacked evidence of strata relating to their construction or the interment of remains.

The cemeteries at Marksville and Coral Snake Mound, however, do clearly indicate social segregation within those communities. At both sites, only a small number of individuals were placed within the mound. At Marksville, the thirty-six individuals present in Mound 4 represent only a small proportion of the community that built and used the site over a span of 300 to 400 years. Mound 4 included the burials of numerous children and infants. This indicates that burial within the mound and inside the embankment was restricted to members of a specific social group, such as a clan or family, within the larger Marksville site community. There appears to be a clear social difference between those members of the community buried inside the sacred precinct at Marksville and those not buried there. Perhaps the people not buried within the Marksville enclosure were interred in a mass ossuary, as at Crooks or Big Oak Island.

Most of the individuals buried at Marksville were not accompanied by artifacts or preserved burial goods. Interestingly, two dogs were also interred in Mound 4, one of which was accompanied by two ceramic vessels. This only serves to emphasize how poorly we understand the rules or customs that governed who got buried in this mound. Nor is it clear to what degree the role that time might have played in these different burial traditions. Perhaps Mound 4 represents an extended family or lineage that first introduced Hopewellian concepts to the local Marksville community, and, with the passing of its members, the larger community returned to the more egalitarian social relations evident in the preceding Tchula period (see Hays and Weinstein, Chapter 6 in this volume). At present, we do not have sufficient dates from the various Marksville cemeteries to assess the role that time and space may have played in determining a particular community's burial practices. Similarly, the available data indicate considerable variability in local community and regional social organization across the state during this period. Understanding that variability will require analysis of numerous well-dated collections from all parts of the state.

Subsistence

Long-term subsistence patterns, dating from at least the Middle Archaic period, reflect the hunting and gathering of locally available foods. This trend continued through the Marksville period and until at least the Coles Creek period. From the perspective of available subsistence data, the Marksville period cannot be distinguished from earlier or later periods, reflecting the continuation of long-standing food-gathering patterns across the state. In the Midwest, contemporaneous Hopewell communities used several domesticated native seed plants. There is no evidence that domesticated versions of these same varieties were used by people living in Louisiana (Jackson and Scott 2002; Kidder and Fritz 1993; McGimsey and Roberts 2000; Roberts 1999, 2006).

There are few Marksville period sites with subsistence data from Louisiana (Jackson 1999; Jackson and Scott 2000, 2002; Lamb 1983; McGimsey and Roberts 2000; Mariaca 1988; Roberts 1999, 2000). Even so, differential preservation of animal remains may provide a limited view of the actual procurement strategies. The faunal data exhibit considerable variability between sites, indicating that food collection was dependent on the local environment around each site. Interesting, the available data indicate a relatively lower frequency of fish in Marksville assemblages compared with earlier or later sites (McGimsey et al. 2005; Jackson and Scott 2002). It is not known whether this represents relatively less consumption of fish, differential preservation, or sampling differences. At the Marksville site, the meatier elements of deer are overrepresented in the assemblage. This suggests that feasting or other related community events and ceremonies were held at the site.

Subsistence practices remain one of the least-documented aspects of the archaeological record of the Marksville period. This reflects, in part, a lack of emphasis on subsistence data during earlier excavations, but it also indicates the paucity of sites excavated in recent years with unmixed Marksville components and good faunal or botanical preservation. The available data indicate that people throughout the Marksville period were hunters and gatherers, as their ancestors had been for generations.

Discussion

Beginning with the discovery of the Marksville site in the 1920s, the term "Marksville" has meant a number of things in Louisiana archaeology: a time period (Middle Woodland), a phase within that time period (early Middle Woodland and/or the interval of Hopewell interaction), an archaeological culture, a

mortuary tradition, a series of ceramic styles, and a particular site. All of these meanings overlap to a large degree and refer to elements of the same cultural expression, yet each also represents a different aspect of the archaeological record. Disentangling all of these meanings is difficult and does not necessarily lead to greater understanding.

For this book, Marksville has been defined as a somewhat arbitrary time period: the interval between A.D. 1 and 400, give or take fifty to a hundred years earlier or later. Across the state during this interval, people were living in a wide variety of environments. Most of these communities were small villages, usually near a bayou or stream, lacking thick deposits of refuse. These data suggest to archaeologists that people did not stay in a given village for more than a few years before moving to another location. In some areas, or at some times of the year, some groups may have moved more frequently to take advantage of seasonally available resources (such as nuts, spawning fish, or clams). The people in these communities lived by hunting and gathering wild plants and animals, and they shared a common set of stone tools and ceramics. These include Gary and Kent projectile points, stone knives and scrapers, and ceramic vessels, including small cups, bowls, and larger storage jars. If one were to look only at the archaeological evidence of people's daily lives across the state during the A.D. 1–400 interval, it would be easy to conclude that everyone in Louisiana shared the same basic culture. Given that many cultural traditions have very old roots in the state, it might also be argued that this same basic cultural pattern had persisted since at least the Middle Archaic period, with a few exceptions such as the Poverty Point site (16WC5) during the Late Archaic period (Gibson, Chapter 5 in this volume). Looking at the settlement and subsistence data, there is little to distinguish the Marksville period from earlier periods, or even from the immediately succeeding periods (Baytown and Coles Creek).

Many sites lack radiocarbon dates to place them in time, so archaeologists use the presence of distinctive ceramic vessel designs (including broad-line incising and zoned rocker-stamping) to identify Marksville period sites. Since their first recognition at the Marksville site, these ceramic styles have become the defining criteria for the period. Sites with these distinctive sherds can be found all across the state, suggesting at least some sense of a shared identity between these widespread communities. What is still not clear is whether the use of common ceramic vessel designs and projectile point forms means that everyone thought of themselves as part of the same social group, such as a tribe or similar organization. The similarity in designs across the state may reflect the degree and frequency of exchange between various groups, as ideas were spread

by traders, travelers, or explorers. Perhaps these designs were not actually markers of social identity, such as membership in a common tribe, but rather reflect the functional or aesthetic popularity of certain designs. The same might be said for Americans' present-day enjoyment of many artistic designs from around the world, without being part of Japanese, German, or Chinese culture.

An additional problem with the use of ceramic designs to define the Marksville period is their persistence through time. The initial definitions of the Marksville period laid out a chronology whereby certain designs—such as the bird motifs, the finer examples of rocker-stamping, and certain versions of the broad-line incising—were thought to characterize the early part of the Marksville period (i.e., A.D. 1–200; Phillips 1970; Ford 1936; Toth 1974, 1979a, 1988). Other variants of these same designs were thought to characterize the later part of the period (A.D. 200–400). Subsequent research and numerous radiocarbon dates now demonstrate very little support for this design chronology (Lee, Chapter 8 in this volume; McGimsey 2004; McGimsey et al. 2005). Ceramic sherds exhibiting the classic "early" Marksville designs have been found in contexts dating well into the A.D. 600–700 range and may even persist as late as A.D. 800 in some areas. The present evidence suggests that some communities continued to make pots with "early" and "late" Marksville-style designs well beyond the arbitrary end of this period. It is equally clear that many other communities had adopted new ceramic styles by A.D. 400. The areas where these changes occurred, or did not occur, may be a more accurate reflection of social group boundaries. But this differential persistence of ceramic styles across the state makes it difficult to use ceramic designs alone as the defining criteria for sites belonging to the Marksville period. Radiocarbon dates, or other independent dating results, may be the only reliable way of assigning a site to the Marksville period. In addition, attribute level analyses of design elements, as well as ceramic pastes, may identify chronological variation in these aspects of ceramic technology.

Overlying the basic Marksville period settlement and subsistence patterns are the Hopewell-influenced mortuary and exchange traditions. As evident in the previous discussion, sites with Hopewell-related earthworks, burial mounds, and foreign materials are few in number and widely dispersed across the state. Most communities, particularly those outside the Mississippi River Valley, appear to have been aware of the Hopewell tradition, but there is little archaeological evidence they chose to participate in the new cultural processes and beliefs. Only a few communities accepted the Hopewell expression as their own and participated in it to a significant degree. These communities include those at Marksville and Crooks, as well as smaller communities around the sites of Coral

Snake, Veazey, and Big Oak Island. At these sites, local communities chose which Hopewell ideas to accept and interpreted them in the context of their own experiences, resulting in locally distinct versions of a Louisiana-Hopewellian expression. The dispersed and locally variable appearance of Hopewell traits across the state suggests that it may be a mistake to try and define a statewide Hopewell or Marksville culture (Gibson 1969).

Some archaeologists have suggested that the ceramic designs present on vessels at Marksville and other Hopewell sites are markers of Hopewell influence on that particular group (Toth 1979a, 1988). The bird motifs on small mortuary vessels may be one example of a Hopewellian pottery assemblage. But given the widespread distribution of the incised and zoned rocker-stamped decorations at sites with no other evidence of Hopewell influence, it is more likely that these were simply the popular styles during this period. They were probably influenced by the Hopewell mortuary wares, but they are not by themselves markers of participation in the Hopewell system.

If Marksville is defined as the time of interaction with northern-Midwestern Hopewellian cultures, it is limited to a small number of communities that may have participated in it for only a generation or two. After that, Louisiana Marksville went its own way, with little influence from cultural developments outside of the state.

So in the end, what is Marksville? At least three different definitions can be offered, none of which is completely satisfactory. First, it can be defined as an arbitrary interval of time, with the beginning of this interval marked by the appearance of a distinctive set of ceramic designs. But these designs persist well beyond the defined end of the period, and they do not serve as a reliable marker for the latter half of the period. Similarly, other artifactual, settlement, and subsistence patterns reflect long-standing trends across the state and do not serve to identify a uniquely Marksville system. Second, Marksville can be defined as a distinctive set of artifact styles, primarily ceramic designs, which first appeared at approximately A.D. 1. In this definition, Marksville persisted for different lengths of time in different parts of the state and in some areas may have lasted as long as 700 to 800 years. In this sense, some communities continued to make Marksville-style ceramics long after their neighbors had adopted newer styles. And third, if Marksville is defined by participation in the Hopewell system, then it was present in only a few areas of the state and may have lasted for only a generation or two in those areas.

At the Marksville site itself, the available radiocarbon dates suggest occupation continued throughout nearly the entire A.D. 1–400 interval. At this one

site, at least, some elements of a Hopewellian ceremonial system appear to have persisted as long as it did in the Midwestern United States. But, like Poverty Point, the Marksville site is an isolated example of this trend, and interest in things Hopewellian is not so evident across a majority of the state. These three definitions provide contrasting views of what Marksville culture was and what the Marksville period means today in Louisiana history. Each is probably correct, but to an unknown degree, and it will require more excavation and analysis before a more comprehensive understanding of Marksville can be developed.