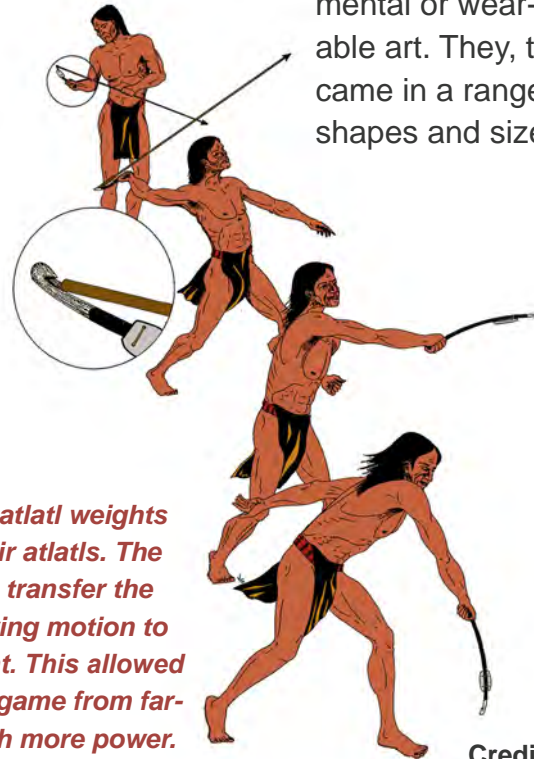


Artifacts

Archaeologists have an interesting way of looking at the world. When they see a bowl, bead or stone spear point they do not just see an object, they see a piece of a story and the choices people made. The things archaeologists find are the data they work with to learn about people in the past. Take a look at some of the things found at Poverty Point — things made with purpose, skill, and maybe even affection.



Hunters attached atlatl weights to the shaft of their atlatls. The weights helped to transfer the force of the throwing motion to the spears in flight. This allowed hunters to attack game from farther away and with more power.



Atlatl Weights and Gorgets

The atlatl, or spearthrower, is an ancient tool that gave thrown spears extra power and speed. A hunter held an atlatl shaped like an oversized crochet needle in his throwing hand. He inserted the hooked end into a shallow socket in the end of the spear. He cast the spear at the target with a smooth, gliding motion, while the atlatl remained in his hand. Attaching weight to the atlatl helped make it an effective tool. American Indians made atlatl weights in many shapes and sizes.

Archaeologists have also found many flat, oblong stone artifacts at Poverty Point that they call gorgets. Gorgets are ornamental or wearable art. They, too, came in a range of shapes and sizes.



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Sometimes it is hard to tell whether an object is an atlatl weight or a gorget. Both may be plain or decorated and nicely finished. They both may have holes drilled into them for attachment or repair, to bind damaged ones together and keep them intact.

Credit: Jon Gibson

Beads and Pendants

Archaeologists have found many different kinds of beads and pendants at the site. Some are made of clay and some are of rock or copper that came from far away. Similar kinds of beads have been found at other sites in Louisiana, suggesting, if not contact with the people at Poverty Point, at least a strong cultural influence from the site.



The beads found at Poverty Point may have been decorative, but few have actual decorations on them. The bead seen here has a small bird etched onto it. Bird forms appear on several artifacts from Poverty Point. Given the great number of different kinds of birds that call Louisiana home, seasonally and year-round, this is perhaps not surprising. Even today, people from around the world visit the state for its unparalleled bird watching!

Beads and clay objects are not to scale.

Decorative Clay Objects

These clay objects (below) come in many sizes and shapes, including cube, barrel and globular designs. While similar to PPOs, they are smaller, decorated and not typically found in cooking pits. People often impressed or cut rings or grooves into them. They are some of the most unusual and beautiful artifacts found at the site and may have been made as objects of art!



Figurines

Archaeologists have found more than 100 small, clay figurines at Poverty Point. Most resemble women, and some were made to look pregnant. Some have very fine details, like hair styles, head bands or belts. Some of the faces even look like they are smiling. Often the figurines are missing their heads, but it is unclear if they were made without heads, if the heads were snapped off on purpose, or if they just broke off.



Most of the figurines have been found on the site's ridges. This is the area where people probably lived. Around the world, female figurines are common. While some think they may have been symbols of fertility or used for ritual healing, the figurines could also be meant to look like ancestors or loved ones, or could even be children's toys.

Fired Earth Objects

Archaeologists sometimes find lumps of fired earth, called daub (left half of image to the right), that reveal how people made their houses. Daub is mud that people packed against a framework of woven sticks to make the walls of a house. Packing the weave with mud gave it more support and insulation. If the structure caught fire, the daub was burnt but retained the impression of the weave — and sometimes even human palm prints!

Other bits of fired earth bear the marks of the baskets they were hauled in (right half of the image below). If clay that had been pressed against a basket was fired, the mark of the basket would be preserved. Looking at the pattern left behind, it is easy to see that people wove cane strips together to make strong baskets. On average, the baskets held about 50 pounds of dirt.



Microliths

Many of the rocks close to Poverty Point are small cobbles. These stones were used to make microliths, which are tiny stone tools. With the right technique, people could get a lot of these tools out of a single small cobble.

Archaeologists refer to some microliths by more specific names, like perforators or blades, based on the shapes of the tools or how people used them. Blades are long, thin microliths that people used for cutting, drilling and scraping. Some of the blades became tiny key-shaped tools called perforators, but whether they were purposely shaped or worn into that shape through use is not known.

American Indians probably used microliths for preparing food, making other tools from bone or wood, and engraving decorated objects. If people were actually making textiles at Poverty Point, then microliths would have also been good tools for stripping fibers from plants. Microliths were the Swiss Army knives of their day!



Owl Pendants

One of the most unusual artifact types researchers have found at the site is the red jasper "pot-bellied" owl pendant. These ground stone pendants are very rare. In fact, fewer than 30 have been found, mostly at other sites and some as far away as eastern Florida. Yet, archaeologists consider these pendants to be a classic Poverty Point artifact type.



Pipes

Archaeologists have found tubular pipes made of clay and stone at the site. Pipes like these may have been smoked for special events, like rituals or ceremonies. Or, shamans or priests may have used them as "sucking tubes" to suck illness, objects or bad spirits from people. Long after Poverty Point, American Indians sometimes smoked pipes to declare peace or war and to honor other tribal leaders. Just how far into the past these practices extend is unclear.



Plummets

These teardrop-shaped weights (right) varied in size with some over 4 inches long. People often made them out of iron-rich stones found in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. There is a good chance that people used plummets as fishing net weights. Net fishing would have provided them with a lot of food in exchange for very little time and effort.

People may have also used plummets as loom weights for making textiles. These textiles would have been woven from wild plant fibers. Archaeologists have found rare **Late Archaic period** textiles at Avery Island in southern Louisiana. However, they have not yet found any at Poverty Point. This may be due to the fact that textiles simply do not preserve well.



Pottery

The people at Poverty Point were among the first in Louisiana to use pottery. Some of the pieces, or sherds, of pots and bowls found at the site are similar to ones archaeologists have found on the Gulf Coast of Florida and in the Tennessee River Valley. The people at Poverty Point probably traded for those ceramics.

American Indians also made pottery at Poverty Point. This pottery was the earliest ever made in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Poverty Point pottery was simple in design and often had no material mixed in with the clay. Some pottery had plant fibers mixed in with the clay to prevent cracking during firing. Spanish moss, which grows on some of the trees around the site, was used in this way. Firing is the process of placing the pots in or near a fire to harden them.

Even though people at Poverty Point made pottery, they tended to use stone containers more than ones made of fired clay.



Poverty Point Objects (PPOs)

Poverty Point Objects (or PPOs) are fired ceramics that were used in place of cooking stones. People made them from the fine soil found at the site and most were small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. There is evidence suggesting that the number, size and shape of PPOs determined how hot an earth oven (seen below) would get and how long it could stay hot.

More PPOs have been found at the site than any other kind of cultural artifact. The large number of PPOs suggests that people did a lot of cooking. If people did a lot of cooking, it was probably because they had access to a lot of food. The resource-rich environments nearby would have made it easy for them to find food. People probably did not go hungry. Then again, maybe they were also being good hosts. After all, the site probably had a lot of visitors over the centuries.



People molded PPOs by hand and heated them until they became ceramic. The hardened PPOs worked a little like charcoal briquettes. Someone dug a fire pit, placed the PPOs in the bottom, and built a fire on top of them. After the fire died down, the food could be wrapped in leaves, put on the heated PPOs, covered with dirt, and left to roast or steam. That is called an earth oven, and the heat of the oven could be controlled by varying the number and placement of PPOs. Hot PPOs also could have been used as "boiling stones" to heat food in containers.



The image to the right shows the four main varieties of PPOs archaeologists have found at Poverty Point. Clockwise from the top: biconical, cylindrical grooved, cross grooved, and melon shaped.



Projectile Points

Projectile points are the chipped stone spear, dart or arrow tips that ancient peoples made. Researchers have found over 8,000 intact projectile points at Poverty Point. Most of these were made from rock brought from afar. The imported rock came in many colors and textures (see the **Trade and Travel** section).



These are the sorts of stone points hunters used with light-weight spears and atlatls (spearthrowers). Arrow points are much smaller and lighter.

When archaeologists study stone tools, they often look for wear patterns. These are small scratches, tiny chips, or smooth spots on the tools that form from repeated use. If stone points were used only for hunting, they should show the same kinds of wear patterns, mainly broken tips from when they struck bone. Yet, points from the site have different kinds of wear patterns. This is probably because people used these points as multi-purpose tools, rather than just for hunting.

Researchers have found only a few points at Poverty Point that predate the **Late Archaic period**. Likewise, they have found far fewer arrowheads than spear points. This is because American Indians did not adopt the bow and arrow in this area until around A.D. 700.



- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Motley Point | 5. Gary Point | 9. Epps Point | 13. Marcos Point |
| 2. Motley Point | 6. Kent Point | 10. Motley Point | |
| 3. Gary Point | 7. Motley Point | 11. Motley Point | |
| 4. Delhi Point | 8. Delhi Point | 12. Gary Point | |



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Credit: Louisiana State Exhibit Museum

Soapstone Bowls

The people who lived at Poverty Point cooked and stored food and other things in soapstone vessels like the one seen to the left. The stone for these bowls came from quarries in what is today Georgia and Alabama. Craftspeople sculpted the bowls at these quarries and sent them out for trade only after they had been carved. It is much more efficient to transport a hollowed-out bowl than a block of stone.

People tried to get as much use out of their bowls as they could. Many of the bowls found by archaeologists at Poverty Point have repair holes for lacing cracked bowls together.