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Rituals Captured in Context and Time: Charm Use in North Dallas Freedman's Town (1869–1907), Dallas, Texas

ABSTRACT

Freedman's Cemetery was the primary burial ground for virtually all of the African American community of Dallas, Texas, between 1869 and 1907. From 1991 through 1994, the Texas Department of Transportation sponsored archaeological investigations exhuming 1,150 in situ burials (containing a total of 1,157 individuals) from the path of highway construction. Fifteen burials were found with pierced coins, interpreted here as charms. The origins of coins modified as charms are first traced to the British Isles and the Middle Ages, and then an explanatory model for their adoption by enslaved (and later freed) African Americans is presented. Turning to the Freedman's Cemetery burial data, a detailed appraisal of the demographics of charm utilization within a late-19th-century urban African American community is given. Comparisons of the cemetery charm sample are made to the demographic profile of charm use compiled from the Works Progress Administration ex-slave narratives. The manner of coin alteration (and thus charm creation) is also documented. Important differences between the historical documentary data and the archaeological evidence reveal the strengths and weaknesses inherent within each kind of data.

Introduction

Recent research has focused on gaining a greater understanding of African American magico-religious beliefs by identifying specific artifact types derived from archaeological contexts. To aid in this recognition, as well as the interpretation of the possible belief systems inherent in their use, appropriate historical and ethnographic sources have been sought (Brown and Cooper 1990; Wilkie 1995; Young 1996; Russell 1997). One of the more common artifact types encountered archaeologically, directly linked in historical accounts to spiritual beliefs, is the perforated or pierced coin, usually made of silver. The use of this artifact type to protect the wearer by warding off illness and witchcraft is well established in numerous ethnographies

and treatises on folk belief (Puckett 1926; Rawick 1972–79), though as detailed below, the assumption that these charms are entirely African-derived is erroneous.

Freedman's Cemetery (41DL316), located just north of downtown Dallas, Texas, is an historic African American cemetery originally founded in 1869 within the fledgling settlement of Freedman's Town, a community created by formerly enslaved people. Freedman's Cemetery saw continuous use as the primary burial ground for virtually all of black Dallas from 1869 until its forced closure in 1907. Due to expansion of North Central Expressway (U.S. Hwy 75), beginning in 1990 the Texas Department of Transportation sponsored intensive archaeological investigations at Freedman's Cemetery. In all, 1,150 burials containing the remains of 1,157 individuals were exhumed archaeologically. Both the skeletal remains as well as the associated artifacts were subjected to detailed analyses (Condon et al. 1998; Davidson 1999; Peter et al. 2000).

Although all of the graves at Freedman's Cemetery were unmarked and undated, it was possible to assign relatively precise and narrow date ranges to virtually all of the recovered burials using land deeds, death records, associated temporal diagnostics, seriation of mortuary hardware, and a correlation of archaeological data with archival records. This chronological reconstruction resulted in the designation of three major (and one minor) time periods. The Early period spans 16 years, from the cemetery's founding in 1869 until 1884 (n=64 burials containing 64 individuals, 5.5%); the Middle period lasts for 15 years (1885–1899) (n=170 burials containing 171 individuals, 14.8%); while the Late period, which spans only an eight-year interval (1900–1907), contains the bulk of the exhumed graves (n=878 burials containing 884 individuals, 76.4%). For 801 burials of the Late period, even more refined dating was achieved, reducing the eight-year Late period interval to a single estimated year of interment (e.g., Burial 32=ca. 1900). This refined chronology, termed the Late Sequence, is based on a highly elaborate seriation and subsequent correlation of the com-

plex artifactual patterning to the local archival record (Davidson 1999, 2000).

Although Freedman's three major temporal periods account for 1,119 (or 96.7%) of excavated individuals, there is an additional time period designation, termed simply "Pre-1900," into which were placed 37 burials (3.2%) that date before 1900, but the period could not be further subdivided into either Early or Middle periods. Finally, there is a single burial (1127) that could not be dated by any means and so could conceivably have occurred any time during the 39-year span of the cemetery (Davidson 1999, 2000).

Coins were recovered from 29 interments, spanning all time periods. All coins were American currency (in denominations ranging from pennies to quarters) and could be interpreted in various ways, largely dependent upon their placement relative to the body and their physical condition. Some likely were inadvertent inclusions (e.g., left undiscovered within a pants pocket). Others, such as unmodified quarters found in pairs, probably were associated with specific mortuary rituals, as "grave money," or perhaps used to cover the eyes of the deceased (Puckle 1926:50–52).

Of particular interest here, however, are the perforated coins associated with 15 burials (Table 1; Figure 1). Recovered in association with the neck or ankle, these perforated coins are strongly reminiscent of charms known from folk belief accounts and indicative of everyday objects charged and imbued with attributes for supernatural control. While the vast majority of artifacts recovered from Freedman's Cemetery were purposefully used within the realm of mortuary-specific rituals, such as the coffin and associated hardware, the perforated coins were not. Instead, their presence relates to a folk belief practiced in life, one that called upon physical objects to protect the wearer from harm and, in essence, prevent death.

Although perforated coins, interpreted as charms, have been recovered from occupation sites in fair numbers, the ability to associate isolated coins with specific individuals or ritualistic behaviors has been general in nature and, therefore, limited in extent (Wilkie 1995). Additionally, while perforated coins have been reported from other historic cemeteries (Rose 1985; Braley and Moffat 1995), the actual

number of graves associated with such charms has been very small.

At Freedman's Cemetery, the recovery of pierced coins from 15 burials presents a previously unavailable opportunity to better explore the parameters of charm use in the 19th- and early-20th-century South. While the reasons for the use of charms are well established historically, written accounts provide only a general and at times imperfect picture about specific modes of alteration and use beyond their placement on the body. Moreover, in written accounts the identity of charm wearers often is skewed towards older informants, and an accurate assessment of the demography or extent of charm use within a community whole is unclear.

Of the many people living in black Dallas who once wore coin charms, it is possible that only a handful were interred with the charms still in place, so the Freedman's Cemetery data may not *necessarily* represent a statistically valid sample. While these 15 individuals (out of the 1,157 recovered) may not accurately reflect the extent of charm use within this late-19th and early-20th-century African American community, it must be noted that it took the massive excavation of an entire acre of graves (or a quarter of the Freedman's Cemetery), over a continuous three-year interval, to garner even this dataset. The resulting sample probably does approximate the demography of charm use with respect to age and sex parameters. Additionally, the physical attributes of charms—the manner in which the coins were modified, their placement on the body, whether or not the dates hold any significance, and the age, gender, and some measure of the socioeconomic status of the individuals wearing them—all can be studied from the archaeological record of Freedman's Cemetery.

Ethnographic/Folklore Sources Regarding Coin Charm Use in the United States

A number of pertinent sources were examined to document the common use of charms in the United States, identify the ethnicity or "race" of those who used them, as well as establish the physical form charms could typically take. Research included a systematic survey of regional folklore collections from the United States for references to charms generally and perforated coins specifically used in the context

TABLE 1
 FREEDMAN'S CEMETERY PIERCED COIN CHARM BURIALS (N=15)

Time Period	Burial No.	Age Category	Sex	Age	Coin type	Art. No.	Date	Location	Associated Artifacts, Notes
Early (1869-1884)	1177	Subadult	F	0.58	Liberty Seated Dime	U-39	1842	cranium	150 glass beads
Early (1869-1884)	1226	Subadult	F	1.18	Liberty Seated Dime	U-5	1853	at neck	1 tubular glass bead
Pre-1900 (1869-1899)	1340	Subadult	Unkn	1.46	Liberty Seated Half Dime	U-6A	1853	at neck	
					Liberty Seated Dime	U-6B	1855	at neck	
Middle (1885-1899)	549	Subadult	F	0.7	Liberty Seated Half Dime	U-12	1857	at neck	41 glass seed beads
					Liberty Seated Dime	U-17	1877	at neck	
Middle (1885-1899)	608	Subadult	Unkn	1.83	Liberty Seated Dime	U-18	1857	at neck	
Late (1900)	32	Adult	F	41.5	Liberty Seated Dime	H-19	1857	cranium	plain cotton string frag
					unknown cuprous coin	H-20	?	cranium	
Late (1900)	123	Subadult	Unkn	2.15	Liberty Seated Dime	U-18	1853	cranium	
Late (1902)	327	Adult	M	38.9	Liberty Seated Half Dime	LR-17	1860	left ankle	
					Liberty Seated Half Dime	L-24	1857	feet	not perforated
Late (1901)	347	Subadult	F	1.95	Liberty Seated Dime	U-12	1853	at neck	14 brown glass beads
Late (1907)	383	Adult	F	34.5	Liberty Seated Half Dime	H-38A	1856	at neck	
					Liberty Seated Half Dime	H-38B	1856	at neck	
					Liberty Seated Half Dime	H-38C	?	at neck	
Late (1903)	881	Subadult	Unkn	0.3	Capped Bust Half Dime	U-3	1829	at neck	
Late (1901)	913	Subadult	Unkn	0.87	Liberty Seated Dime	U-15	1878	upper thorax	
Late (1906)	1114	Adult	F	30.6	Liberty Seated Dime	H-17	1840	cranium	
Late (1901)	1337	Subadult	Unkn	0.53	Liberty Seated Dime	U-21	1876	upper thorax	
Late (1902)	1507	Adult	F?	20-60	Liberty Seated Dime	LL-13	1889	left ankle	
					Liberty Seated Half Dime	L-18	1856	feet	

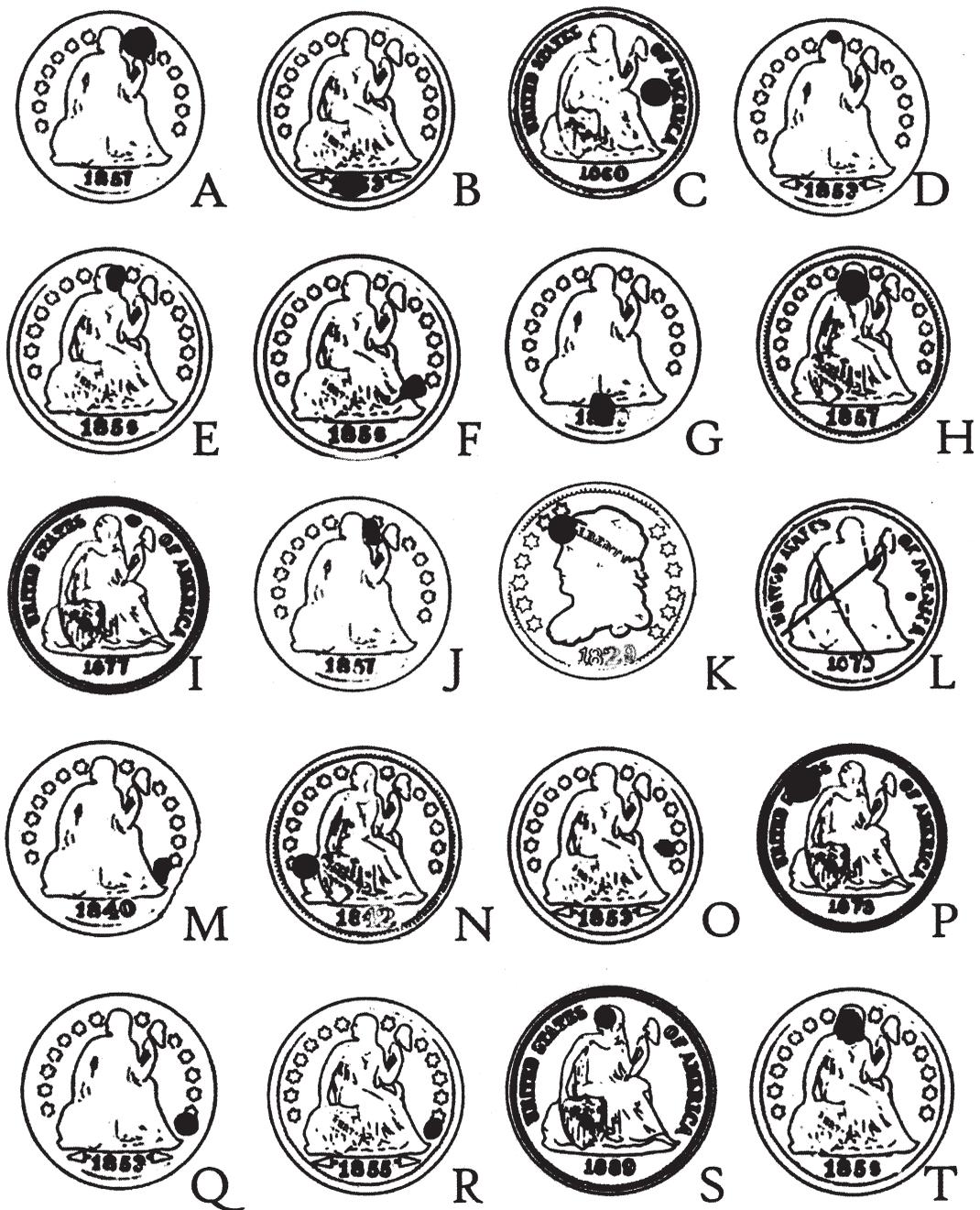


FIGURE 1. All Perforated Coins recovered from burials at Freedman's Cemetery, Dallas, Texas, illustrated with perforation loci and other modifications*: (A) Burial 32 (art. no. H-19) 1857 Liberty Seated dime; (B) Burial 123 (art. no. U-18) 1853 Liberty Seated dime; (C) Burial 327 (art. no. LR-17) 1860 Liberty Seated half dime; (D) Burial 347 (art. no. U-12) 1853 Liberty Seated dime; (E) Burial 383 (art. no. H-38A) 1856 Liberty Seated half dime; (F) Burial 383 (art. no. H-38B) 1856 Liberty Seated half dime; (G) Burial 383 (art. no. H-38C) [unk. date] Liberty Seated half dime; (H) Burial 549 (art. no. U-12) 1857 Liberty Seated half dime; (I) Burial 549 (art. no. U-17) 1877 Liberty Seated dime; (J) Burial 608 (art. no. U-18) 1857 Liberty Seated dime; (K) Burial 881 (art. no. U-3) 1829 Capped Bust half dime; (L) Burial 913 (art. no. U-15) 1878 Liberty Seated dime; (M) Burial 1114 (art. no. H-17) 1840 Liberty Seated dime; (N) Burial 1177 (art. no. U-39) 1842 Liberty Seated dime; (O) Burial 1226 (art. no. U-5) 1853 Liberty Seated dime; (P) Burial 1337 (art. no. U-21) 1876 Liberty Seated dime; (Q) Burial 1340 (art. no. U-6A) 1853 Liberty Seated half dime; (R) Burial 1340 (art. no. U-6B) 1855 Liberty Seated dime; (S) Burial 1507 (art. no. LL-13) 1889 Liberty Seated dime; (T) Burial 1507 (art. no. L-18) 1856 Liberty Seated half dime. *(Note: unmodified half dime associated with Burial 123 and the cuprous coin of unknown type associated with Burial 32 are not shown.)

of providing protection against harm, whether from natural illness or by supernatural means. Regions included the South, an area within which African American culture was primarily forged, as well as areas for which there has historically been little or no black influence or population base. Several of these folklore collections were collected during the 1920s and 1930s, from the states of Georgia (Johnson 1940), Idaho (Fisher 1939), Illinois (Hyatt 1935), Iowa (Stout 1936), Kansas (Sackett and Koch 1961), Louisiana (Saxon et al. 1945), Nebraska (Welsch 1966), North Carolina (Puckett 1926; Hand 1964), Oklahoma (Botkin 1930), Tennessee (Lett 1970), and Utah (Cheney et al. 1971).

In the extensive folklore treatise published by Harry Hyatt (1935) and collected from Adams County, Illinois, the "race" of each informant (whether white or black) and ethnicity (applied in cases of Euramericans to specify country of origin) is given. Of the informants specified as white Euramericans, there were several references to coins and especially perforated coins worn on the body. None of these specified that the object, or the wearer, was invoking "supernatural" control but merely "good luck." Specifically, a perforated coin worn at the neck, a dime placed in a shoe, or a coin minted in the year of one's birth and carried on one's person were all regarded as good luck charms (Hyatt 1935:426–427). Additionally, the use of unmodified dimes was noted for the treatment of nosebleed and poison detection (Hyatt 1935: 272, 276).

From this Illinois folk collection, the only cited use of dimes that specifically entailed supernatural means of clear European derivation was from an Irish informant who stated that the placement of a dime under a fireplace could prevent witches from entering a house. As a rule, in early-20th-century Illinois, supernatural controls assigned to the wearing of coins were all attributed to black informants and are typical for charm use as known through Southern sources (Hyatt 1935: 522–523).

In a collection of folk beliefs collected during the early 1930s in Nebraska, a perforated dime worn around an ankle provided protection against all illness (Welsch 1966:370). The race or ethnic background of this informant is unknown, but due to the state's overwhelming Euramerican population, it seems likely that the informant

(or informants) was white. The sole coin reference included in the Kansas source noted the use of an unmodified coin in the prevention of nosebleeds (Sackett and Koch 1961:86). Again, the race of the informant in this instance is unknown. As for the other folklore sources outside of the American South reviewed for this study, no references to coins used as charms appear in the Utah folklore source (Cheney et al. 1971) nor do any occur in the volumes from Idaho (Fisher 1939), Iowa (Stout 1936), or Oklahoma (Botkin 1930). Of all the folklore collections reviewed, the greatest number of references to coins used in the prevention of conjuration, especially in the form of perforated dimes worn on the body, appear in Southern compendia and, at least in the case of Newbell Puckett and Guy Johnson, are clearly derived from African American informants (Puckett 1926:288, 362; Johnson 1940:136; Saxon et al. 1945:536; Hand 1964:113; Lett 1970:38–39).

European Origin of Pierced Coins As Charms

Likely due in large part to these folk-belief collections, previous researchers have always assumed, *a priori*, that pierced coins recovered from archaeological sites are associated exclusively with African Americans, and that as both material object and as a part of a belief system, such charms were entirely African derived (Orser 1994:41; Young 1996; Russell 1997:68; Leone and Fry 1999). But as Christopher Fennell (2000) points out, this assumption ignores the fact that European colonists arriving in America brought with them a fully functioning system of magico-religious practices that had hundreds of years of tradition prior to Christianity and that had not been eradicated by either the Catholic Church or the English Reformation (Merrifield 1988). The assumption that artifacts from archaeological sites, presumed to have once served as elements of conjure, must therefore be associated exclusively with Africans or their descendants indirectly serves to reinforce negative stereotypes (e.g., primitive, backward) on the past, with implications for the present (Fennell 2000). What previous researchers have failed to grasp is that coin charms, in one form or another, were in use in western Europe and especially the British Isles as early as the pre-Christian era.

While the use of charms (i.e., talismans, amulets) was once widespread in both Europe and Africa, unmodified as well as altered (e.g., bent, perforated) coins as charms seem to be primarily European in form and origin. Silver, especially coin silver, once saw common usage in Europe as protection against witchcraft and the supernatural. For example, in the English treatise *Shropshire Folk-Lore* that covers elements of folklore for the British Isles, Charlotte Burne (1883:165) states that “the best known metal charm ... is silver.” More specifically on the European continent, children in the Elvas district of Portugal were traditionally protected from “the malefices of witchcraft by ... a perforated coin ...” (Gallop 1961:61), while in the 19th-century Yorkshire countryside of England, a silver coin taken from a communion plate, perforated for suspension, and worn around the neck by a ribbon was believed to be a cure for fits or epilepsy (Gutch 1901:172). This identical practice is also recorded in Wiltshire, England, in 1874 (Dyer 1878:146). In the Western Highlands of Scotland during the 1870s, a perforated silver sixpence, worn on a string around the neck, was believed a cure for epilepsy and other maladies (Henderson 1866:306). Even into the 1950s, a piece of silver worn around the neck was believed to be a certain charm against witchcraft in Scotland (Opie and Tatum 1989:357).

Elaborating on charm types in England, Burne (1883) speaks of charms and rituals for which the specific and original purpose of protection has been lost. She believes that the perforated silver coin falls into that category. The original rationale for protection has been forgotten, but the practice continued in use, subsumed into a class of general charm providing blanket protection against evil: “the well-known luckiness of a sixpence with a hole in it may be classed with this” (Burne 1883:272). This statement is echoed in a journal of British folk beliefs published in 1851: “a crooked sixpence, or a copper coin *with a hole through*, are accounted lucky coins” [emphasis added] (Wilkinson 1851:55; also Henderson 1866:112; Nicholson 1890:45, as quoted in Gutch 1912:80).

What was the original rationale for the perforating of sixpences (and other minor coinage) and then wearing them on the body? A glimpse of it may be seen by the mention of a “crooked sixpence” in the same breath as a perforated coin

(Wilkinson 1851:55). Within the British Isles, the two types of coin modification share broadly similar intents and expected outcomes, though the bending of coins is likely an even earlier tradition. Indeed, the practice of altering silver coins by bending them (sometimes by completely doubling the coin over) has a great antiquity in the British Isles, with written references to this “English custom” dating back to 1307. Dated examples of bent coins recovered archaeologically extend back as early as the pre-Christian Saxon period. The bending of metal objects in general (e.g., daggers, lead tokens) and then casting them into water as part of a votive act was practiced as early as the Bronze Age (Merrifield 1988:25–26, 91).

Originally, the bending of a silver coin was to ritually kill it as a symbol of devotion in the attempt to derive some end goal through supernatural means. In this earlier Celtic and Saxon period, charms produced of bent coins would not be carried on one’s person indefinitely but, rather, would be modified for a specific intention or desire—the sacrifice dedicated to a specific spirit (and in later times, a saint) and then discarded on a pilgrimage to a particular sacred shrine or within a body of water (e.g., wells, rivers). One documented example, dated to 1499, even has the bending of a coin over a drowned child’s head miraculously bringing the child back to life (Merrifield 1988:22–27, 90–92, 115–116). By at least the 16th century, these “crooked” silver coins were not commonly discarded but, instead, were retained on one’s person as a protective talisman or given as a love charm/token (Merrifield 1988: 115–116, 162).

While the total ritual employed in the production of a crooked coin as charm could be (at times) a very public act, an increasingly dogmatic and unyielding Christian church began to look upon any acts that suggested paganism with growing disfavor. As the custom of coin bending, as votive offering, began to wane with the coming of Christianity and, later, through maniacal efforts of the English Reformation (Merrifield 1988:92), another means to alter a coin and imbue it with magical properties, namely perforation, was apparently becoming more common in England. Indeed, many surviving examples of 14th- through 17th-century English silver coins display deliberate perforations, as if for suspension. Apparently perforation of gold

coins was relatively rare, while minor silver coinage (especially the shilling, sixpence, and three-pence minted during the late-16th century) is commonly found with deliberate (though often irregular) perforations that show considerable wear through the perforation point (Lobel et al. 1998:237–238, 274) (Figure 2).

The modification of a coin by perforating it for suspension may well be an echo of an earlier pagan tradition of charm use, living on into Christian times, with the holing of a silver coin combining several charm elements and belief systems into a single object. First, to alter or modify a coin (i.e., make your mark upon it) is to imbue it with powers (hence the crooked sixpence). Second, in the British Isles, holed objects were considered magically charged. Rocks with holes in them, called Hag Stones, were commonly suspended from strings and used to protect homes, cattle, etc., against witchcraft. The antiquity of this belief is likely great, though known references to their use date at least as early as 1696 (Balfour and Thomas 1904:51; Merrifield 1988:162). Third, the silver content of the charm itself is a passive protective element and, at times, may even be used as an offensive weapon. For example, one certain way to kill a witch, or to make her reveal herself if she is disguised as an animal, is to shoot her with a silver coin but specifically with

one that is crooked, holed or crossed (Balfour and Thomas 1904:54; Gutch and Peacock 1908: 75–76). The “crossed” silver coin, i.e., a coin with a heraldic cross in its design, is a fourth element of critical importance in coin charms and one with apparent connections to a pre-Christian, Celtic tradition.

During the English Reformation the many amulets and charms commonly in use by the Catholic faithful were actively being stamped out by Protestant clergy, and their importation and use was made a serious offense by Queen Elizabeth (Thomas 1971:53). With the eradication of Catholic charms, perforated coin charms likely increased in popularity since the symbol of the cross on a metal medallion (the cross being a major element on early British coinage) was considered a valid charm form by the Reformation clergy, which simultaneously condemned other types of charms and votive acts (Thomas 1971: 30). As will be discussed below, coins displaying crosses have an even greater antiquity than the English Reformation and a greater spiritual significance than as merely a simple Christian symbol.

Although Queen Elizabeth forbade Catholic charms, she herself still employed the use of coin charms. Elizabeth I gave a noble from the reign of Edward III (gold coin valued at 80 pence) to the Earl of Essex to serve him as a charm to ward off harm on the occasion of his expedition to the Azores in 1597. By the 16th century, an Edward III noble (minted from 1346 to 1377) was considered a powerful protective amulet, bearing a distinctive cross motif on its reverse, but was also held in reverence due to its unique inscription referring to Jesus Christ (Thomas 1971:232; Lobel et al. 1998:123–125).

The use of coins as charms was also fostered by the belief of the curing power of the king’s touch, a tradition recorded as early as 1066 (Opie and Tatem 1989:216). The touch of a king was most commonly sought for the cure of a condition known as the King’s Evil or scrofula, once a very common malady in England, which is a swelling of the neck brought about by inflammation of the lymph glands, likely due to infected milk. Traditionally, after the king would touch the subject, a gold coin and in later times a specially minted medallion would be placed around the neck of the sufferer. By the 16th and 17th centuries, literally tens of thousands of people



FIGURE 2. 1569 English three-pence, minted during reign of Queen Elizabeth I, with old perforation point worn completely through. (Photo by author, from private coin collection.)

were “healed” in this manner. When the practice ended in the late-17th century, ordinary coins as amulets were again employed, this time without direct intervention of the king, though with each conveniently bearing the likeness of the sovereign. Not only was the king’s touch considered magical, but the gold coin bestowed around the neck was also believed to have been magically charged (Thomas 1971:192–193, 196–197).

The act of attributing supernatural status to modified silver coinage in the British Isles is, in and of itself, a creolization of pagan and early Christian belief systems. Christianity was relatively late in establishing more than a foothold in England, Scotland, and Wales, with early efforts bearing some fruit only by the 7th century A.D. A second wave of invasion by Viking groups further delayed the conversion of the island to Christianity until the A.D. 900–1050 period (Jolly 1996:38). As described by Karen Jolly (1996), Christianity in this latter period was a curious mixture of pagan and Christian rituals, beliefs, and artifacts. In England, the primary spiritual tradition supplanted by Christianity was Druidism, and a major symbol of this earlier Celtic belief system was simple discs of wood or metal, often worn on the body as amulets (McNeill 1957:74). More specifically, gold discs decorated only with “... a cruciform ornament in the center ...” have been recovered archaeologically in Celtic-period burials and have been interpreted as having served “magical purposes” (Hull 1928:182).

Eleanor Hull (1928:174), speaking of the blending of Druid, Saxon, and later Christian beliefs and symbols, offers that to the Celtic Druids and the pre-Christian Saxons, “*the cross within the circle* had in it something of a mystical quality” [emphasis added]. Elaborating on this, Hull (1928:181) further states,

The cross within the circle enters into very early magic, both Gaelic and English; it may have entered Anglo-Saxon folklore from the Gaelic. It is very closely connected with solar beliefs [and] ... the Circle of Columcille, used in divination, a round circle with crossed bars, has found its way into Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of the eleventh century.

Further, there is unambiguous evidence that such obviously pagan “ornaments” would not have been abolished by the early Christian church. Aelfric (the Abbot of Eynsham), as one of the principal architects of the early-Christian church

in pre-Conquest England, allowed the validity of pagan spoken charms, as well as other forms of charm curing, as long as they involved the “symbol of the cross” (Jolly 1996:92–93).

The tradition of the pagan “cross charms” of Celtic and Saxon England did not die out as the Christian faith transformed English culture. The cross, as a prominent symbol on silver coins in England, appears on the reverse of some of the earliest Anglo-Saxon mintings (or ca. A.D. 575) (Seaby 1962:30–37). The cross also appears on the very first mintings after the Norman Conquest on a silver penny in 1068 (Lobel et al. 1998:305–307).

An even larger cross, termed a “Long Cross” (Lobel et al. 1998:319–321), began to appear on pennies in 1247. This cross motif consists of two simple but bold intersecting lines with slightly flared ends. The long cross also appears on a groat (or fourpence), first minted in 1279 by Edward I. Groats carry this identical cross motif until the reign of Charles I, beginning in 1625. Identical long crosses began to appear on silver shillings in 1502 during the reign of Henry VII, though the large cross form does not appear again on the shilling until the reign of Queen Elizabeth in 1559 (Lobel et al. 1998:213, 217–219). For other small silver coins, the sixpence first displays a large heraldic cross in 1547, is used intermittently, and is last seen in a modified form in 1632; while the threepence displays the identical cross on its first minting in 1547, ending during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (Lobel et al. 1998:237–240, 273–274). The last use of this cross form on any British coinage is in 1644 on the shilling (Lobel et al. 1998:225).

Of later British currency, a modified and much more abstract cross-like motif is seen in the form of heraldic shields laid out in an intersecting pattern, forming a cruciform. This later, abstract cruciform pattern began with the reign of Charles II (or in 1662), and even this abstraction was last used on any British coinage in 1787, during the reign of George III (Lobel et al. 1998:527).

Particular examples of “crossed” coins have been highly prized as supernatural objects (Thomas 1971:232). One unique example is the “Lee Penny,” a curing charm in use during the 14th through 19th centuries in England. This coin integrates a carnelian stone within the center of a groat (or four pence) minted during the reign of Edward III (1327–1377). This silver

coin is minted with a clear cross motif on its reverse (Seaby 1962:76; Hazlitt 1905:362). Other noted examples of ancient coins long venerated as healing objects include the Lockerby Penny (a silver coin) and the Black Penny, both in northern England (Henderson 1866:163).

Even as late as 1881, the Reverend Walter Gregor in his study *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the North-East of Scotland* makes an important distinction; in performing certain rituals with a silver coin (e.g., to ward off witches' spells while churning butter), while a generic crooked silver coin would do (Balfour and Thomas 1904:54), there was clear preference for a crossed shilling. Specifically, "... An old shilling, called a 'cross't shillan,' or a 'crossie croon shillan,' was in the possession of some families, and was preserved with great care. Those who had not the good fortune to possess such a treasure made use of a coin current at the time" (Gregor 1881:190).

In his glossary of terms, Walter Gregor (1881:219) defines a "cross't shilling" simply as "a shilling having on it the figure of a cross," and it is likely that his use of the term *shilling* is simply a generic phrase or shorthand for a silver coin of any denomination that bore an identical cross motif (as will be seen in the half-dime and dime references discussed below). The interchangeability of coin types and specific modifications necessary to render them into supernatural objects should be recognized, such as in the previously cited examples demonstrating the equivalency of crooked, crossed, or holed silver coins (Balfour and Thomas 1904:54; Gutch and Peacock 1908:75–76). There appears to be a real connection between the Celtic (and pre-Christian) magical symbol (of a cross within a circle), the initial mintings of silver crossed coins during the Anglo-Saxon period, continued by William I after the Conquest (with the crossed form continuing up to 1644), and the attribution of supernatural status to such coins. Such was the continuity of tradition that in the late-19th century English countryside, crossed coins were still held in special reverence and believed imbued with supernatural powers, despite the fact that their last mintings occurred some 250 years prior to Gregor's observation of this belief (Gregor 1881:219; Lobel et al. 1998:225). In 1883, Burne (1883:164) noted that in England, four primary charms were used in the

past to prevent witchcraft, "... Horseshoes, Silver, Spittle, and the Sign of the Cross." The crossed coin combines two potent protective elements into a single charm form.

Albert Raboteau (1980:33) states, "Because magical beliefs tend to be similar worldwide, ... it is rarely possible to speak with certainty about the origins of particular magical practices." Silver coins, modified as amulets to work magic and prevent harm, however, are clearly European and more specifically an English-derived belief. The practice can be traced in the British Isles back at least to the 16th century (and as modified coins, as early as the 6th century) and forward in a continuous practice to the 20th century. This tradition can also be traced to the United States, where Euramerican informants in early-20th-century folklore collections (and from areas outside the South) speak of coins perforated and used as charms (Hyatt 1935:426–427).

While mentioned in early-20th-century folklore collections, a cursory examination of 19th-century popular literature (*Harpers Weekly*, *The Century Magazine*, *The Living Age*, *North American Review*, etc.) as well as early volumes of the *Journal of American Folklore*, which began publication in 1888 (Jackson et al. 1984), has as yet uncovered only a single reference to Euramericans using coin charms in 19th-century America. In an 1894 article on the folklore of "Mountain Whites of the Alleghenies," it was noted that to prevent the effects of The Evil Eye, silver was worn in the shoes (Porter 1894:114), a belief clearly evoking continuity with earlier British practices, recorded in England in 1744, in which unmodified silver coins were placed in the toe of one's shoe (Opie and Tatem 1989:357).

As a caveat to this relative absence of references, it should be noted that there are only a tiny handful of contemporary 19th-century references to African American coin charm use, and these date to the late-19th century (Bacon 1967:292). The only principal references to 19th-century coin charm use among African Americans are contained within the 1930s Works Progress Administration (WPA) ex-slave narratives, as will be discussed in some detail below (Rawick 1972–79). Some 2,000-odd narratives were collected using a set of guidelines and steering questions that specifically included

queries regarding medicine, root work, and charm use; one of the questions asked was, “What charms did they wear and to keep off what disease” (Rawick 1972[1]:175). Out of these 2,000 narratives, only 31 informants (or approximately 1.5%) noted the use of perforated coins as charms (Table 2). While some of the American folklore collections examined for this study were also produced under the auspices of the WPA, no database of elderly *white* informants that is any way comparable to the ex-slave narratives, either in size or scope, was collected in the 1930s.

Although there is clearly inadequate documentation for 19th-century Euramerican coin charm use, the English folklore collections and other sources dating from the 11th through 19th centuries are full of such instances, and it seems very unlikely that people from the British Isles would take off such charms, or lose all knowledge of them, as they neared the American coastline. Some English and people of English descent within the American colonies (and later the United States) must have known of and at times wore coin charms. Clear evidence of this was uncovered at a site associated with Jamestown, the first English colony in North America. The Reverend Richard Buck site (44JC568), dating to ca. 1630–1650, contained a burial of a young woman (aged 18–24 years at death). At her left elbow was an Elizabethan sixpence, minted between 1582 and 1584. This coin, a crossed variety, had been bent and broken in half with each coin half further folded (likely around a ribbon or similar organic cordage), forming a bracelet (Mallios and Fessler 1999:35). Similarly modified crossed sixpences have been recovered at other sites dating to the early-17th century and associated with the Jamestown colony (Mallios 2000:42–43).

The lack of common documentation of coin charms among people of European descent is likely owing to the failure of folklorists and others to conduct detailed studies or even cursory documentation of “white” folk beliefs in this country during the 19th century. This is easily contrasted with a fascination for Native American and African American cultural practices, which have been commonly documented since at least the early-19th century (Jackson 1967; Bronner 1986). The motivation to do so is likely attributable to the desire to

“exoticize” black culture and society and the need to “other” them in white society (Zumwalt 1988:100).

African Origin of Pierced Coins As Charms

What of the enslaved Africans and later African Americans who used coin charms to such an extent that by the early-20th century, these elements were considered a wholly black (read African) tradition? There were certainly objects used in analogous ways to coin charms within the numerous cultures of 16th- through early-19th-century Western Africa, a vast area from which the majority of enslaved peoples transported to the Americas were derived (Holloway 1990). What forms did these charms take?

Prior to sustained European contact, metal coinage did not exist in Western and Central Africa. At the time of contact with the Portuguese in 1483, varieties of seashells were the standard economic unit of exchange within the Kongo Kingdom as were standardized sizes of woven cloth (Wolf 1982:222). The trading that occurred between the Portuguese and the West African kingdoms was entirely based on barter, with textiles, wheat, brass and copper utensils, glass beads, and tobacco from Europe traded for African gold, spices, ivory, and slaves (Wolf 1982:196–197). Whatever European coins that entered Africa through these repeated trading episodes in these early years would have been very small in number and likely had little effect on the indigenous cultures.

One element of European trade that did cross over and enter into use in West African spiritual practices were glass beads, acting as charms in concert with other forms of indigenous beads. Beads are certainly one of the most commonly documented charms in use throughout Central and Western Africa. Linda Stine and colleagues (1996:54–55) give numerous ethnographic examples from Africa of beads imbued with supernatural power and control (in use primarily with infants and small children to provide protection from harm), though only one example predates the late-19th and 20th centuries.

Dated to 1602, this very early reference is a Dutch account of the “Gold Kingdom of Guinea” (De Marees 1987, as cited in Stine et al. 1996); in it, De Marees describes several

TABLE 2
WPA EX-SLAVE NARRATIVES: INFORMANT INFORMATION REGARDING COIN CHARM USE
(derived from Rawick 1972-79)

Informant	Age (1937)	Birth Year	Vol./No. Page	Residence (Interview)	Residence (Slavery)	Charm Type	Position on Body	Past Use	Present Use (1937)	Power of Charm
Sylvia Durant	72	1865	2.1:346	Marion, SC	unkn	"silver dime...on a string of beads"	ankle	unkn	yes	"luck; keep people from hurting them"
Sallie Paul	79	1858	3.3:246	Marion, SC	unkn	"dime... twenty-five cents piece"	ankle	unkn	yes	"rheumatism"
William Adams	93	1844	4.1:7	Texas	unkn	"silver coin"	neck	unkn	yes	"keep away the effect of the evil power"
Harriet Collins	67	1870	4.1:245	Waco, TX	Houston, TX	"dime on the string"	ankle	yes	yes	"keeps cramps out (of) my leg"
Willis Easter	85	1852	4.2:3	Waco, TX	Bosqueville, TX	"dime on a string"	neck, ankle, shoe	unkn	yes	"to keep any conjureman from sotfin' de trick on me"
Peter Rvas	77	1860	5.3:276	Port Arthur, TX	St. Martinville, LA	"silver money on a string"	neck, ankle	yes?	unkn	"keep off the bad mouth"
Abram Sells	85*	1857*	5.4:13	Jamestown, TX	Newton, TX	"punch hole in a penny or dime"	ankle	yes?	yes	"keep off sickness"
Aleck Trimble	76	1861	5.4:112	Veth, TX	Texas?	"dime...with a hole in it"	leg	unkn	yes	"rheumatism"
Tildy Collins	84	1853	6.1:86	Uniontown, AL	unkn	"coin with a hole...usually a dime"	ankle	unkn	yes	"from getting poison; warns against... getting conjured"
Comelia Robinson	76*	1861*	6.1:332	Alabama	unkn	"us wore...pennies..."	neck	yes	unkn	"to help us not to get sick"
Silvia Witherspoon	90*	1847	6.1:429	Alabama	Jackson, MS	"dime with a hole in it"	ankle	unkn	yes	"to keep off the conjure"
Stephen McCray	88	1850	7.1:208	Oklahoma City, OK	Huntsville city, AL	"a dime"	neck	yes	unkn	"put around a teething baby's neck to make it tooth easy"
Doc Quinn	92	1844	10.6:7	Texasiana, AR	unkn	"punch a hole through a dime"	left ankle	yes?	unkn	"as a preventative against being tricked or hoo-dooed"
Harriet Miller	100	1837	13.3:129	Toccoa, GA	South Carolina?	"...a dime in the shoe"	in shoe	unkn	yes	"to keep the voo-doo away"
Julia Rush	72+	1865*	13.4:264	Georgia	unkn	"silver money"	leg	unkn	unkn	"ward off the effects of conjure"
"Mrs. Heyburn"	unkn	unkn	16.2:35	Union city, KY	unkn	"silver dime on a string"	leg	yes	yes	"to keep off the witches spell"
Willis Williams	81	1856	17.1:353	Jacksonville, FL	Tallahassee, FL	"made holes in the silver coin"	ankle, in shoe	yes	unkn	"so that no one could conjure them"
Emma Coker	unkn	unkn	S1-3.1:205	Augusta, GA	unkn	"a penny"	ankle	unkn	yes	"rheumatism"
William Mead	74	1864	S1-4.2:429	Rome, GA	Cartersville, GA	"dime"	leg	unkn	yes	"conjuring..."
"Mrs. Rusli"	unkn	unkn	S1-4.2:652	Georgia	unkn	"a silver coin"	leg	yes?	yes	"to keep from being fixed or conjured"
"Mrs. Womble"	unkn	unkn	S1-4.2:655	Georgia	unkn	"a silver dime or a copper..."	ankle	unkn	yes?	"not allow the conjure to have any effect on the wearer"
Jerry Eubanks	91	1846*	S1-7.2:697	Clay city, MS	Mississippi	"dimes with a hole in it"	not given	yes	yes?	"to keep off evil spirits"
Adam Smith	98*	1839	S1-10.5:1974	Coldwater, MS	Georgia	"wore dimes..."	ankle	yes	unkn	"to keep off evil spirits"
Callie Washington	78*	1859*	S1-10.5:2193	Coahoma city, MS	Arkansas	"piece of lead and a penny"	(neck?)	unkn	yes	"heart trouble"
Sam Jordan	unkn	pre-1865	S1-12:200	Oklahoma City, OK	Crenshaw city, AL	"silver dime on a raw cotton thread"	ankle	yes?	unkn	"keep from being voodooed"
Lorenzo Ezell	unkn	unkn	S2-4.3:1329	Beaumont, TX	Spartanburg city, SC	"silver five cents or dime"	unkn	yes?	yes	"to keep off the witches"
Janey Landrum	87	1851	S2-6.5:2266	Waco, TX	Gonzales, TX	"that penny on a string"	neck	unkn	yes	"indigestion"
Hiram Mayes	unkn	unkn	S2-7.6:2637	Beaumont, TX	Wallisville, ?	"dimes with holes in them"	unkn	unkn	unkn	Good luck???
Patsy Moses	74	1863	S2-7.6:2786	Mart, TX	Ft. Bend city, TX	"penny"	neck	yes	unkn	"indigestion"
Kitty Reese	83	1854	S2-8.7:3282	Beaumont, TX	Missouri	"a dime with a hole in it"	ankle	yes	unkn	"to keep the ghosts away"
Penny Thompson	81*	1856*	S2-9.8:3869	Ft. Worth, TX	unkn	"a dime coin"	leg	unkn	yes	"keep the evil power away"

*(year of birth or age is estimated)

kinds of charm elements placed on infants and small children, including beads and “little golden crosses.” While these crosses may represent European trade goods depicting the most prominent symbol of Christianity, it is difficult to discern this with certainty from the account; they may be entirely indigenous in both belief and manufacture. If European in derivation, this originally Christian symbol likely integrated itself entirely into their cosmology, where the cross or X symbol was also of supreme importance. Significantly, no metal discs (coins or otherwise) were mentioned (Thompson 1984:108–114).

Despite a handful of similar early references, no archaeologist (including myself) who has previously explored the linkage of perforated coins with African-derived belief systems has met with any success in discovering a clear precedent for coin charm forms on the African continent, especially for the 16th through 18th centuries when slavery took root in the Americas (Wilkie 1995:144; Stine et al. 1996). In fact, in Brian Thomas’s critique (1995:153) of the ways historical archaeologists commonly misinterpret African American sites, he points out that 17th- through 19th-century archaeological sites are almost inevitably compared only to terminal 19th- or even 20th-century West African examples, apparently because earlier ethnographic accounts are lacking altogether or are sufficiently vague. As to archaeologically derived data, very few excavations have occurred in Africa on sites dating to post-European contact (Shaw et al. 1993), and researchers (DeCorse 1992, 1993; Holl 1994, Bredwa-Mensah 1999) have not reported recovering any modified coinage or even objects similar in form and material.

Despite this failure to find *early* African accounts of “coin-charm like” use, contemporary with or prior to large-scale European contact, it is evident that at least one metal type, copper, was viewed as a primary protective element as early as the 15th century. Copper was very highly prized throughout most of the continent of Africa, where it was considered a symbol of high status and used in the manufacture of religious objects. Native copper working and an extensive trade network existed on the African continent prior to European contact, and beginning in the 16th century Portuguese

traders traded copper and brass bracelets to an eager West African population, with later European interests following suit (Handler and Lange 1978:156). One important account by an English ship’s captain in 1694 remarked that the best goods (second only to cowrie shells) for trading purposes were various forms of brass kettles, from which the Africans would make bracelets, anklets, and neck bands (Phillips 1746:243, as cited in Handler and Lange 1978:156).

Certainly bracelets and armbands composed of copper and worn as protective elements are known in late-19th-century accounts of West Africa (Nassau 1904). Further, these same copper elements are found in enslaved contexts in the New World. In 1972, Jerome Handler and Frederick Lange (1978) conducted an excavation of 92 slave burials at Newton Plantation in Barbados. These graves spanned the late-17th through early-19th centuries, with the associated metal grave goods consisting of copper earrings, coiled copper wire bracelets, and copper and white metal finger rings. No silver objects were recovered from these early graves, and while these ornaments are circular in form, that shared attribute with coin charms seems slight (Handler and Lange 1978).

In rural America of the 1930s, copper jewelry was believed to be imbued with supernatural power; George Boddison, a former slave in Georgia, wore circles of copper wire around the wrists, in addition to a copper wire headband augmented with broken bits of mirrors, and several “plain rings” (of unknown metal content) on his fingers. He indicated that all of these objects helped protect him from conjuration (Johnson 1940:20–21). Twentieth-century practitioners of Obeah in Jamaica wore numerous silver rings on their fingers as protective elements (Barrett 1976:75–76), while in the 1920s and 1930s several black informants in the United States described brass rings and copper wire bracelets worn “to keep off” the rheumatism, heart pains, or the croup (Puckett 1926:361; Rawick 1972[5] pt 4:13; [7] pt. 2: 7). Clearly, then, the attribution of supernatural status to metal amulets (in these cases largely copper based) is an African tradition, but the basic form of the coin charm as an amulet does not appear (at the present time) to have African roots.

Adoption (or Adaptation) of a European Practice

From the evidence presented above, it seems inarguable that the use of coin charms was a practice that enslaved Africans and their descendants adopted into their own belief systems through exposure to Europeans and Euramericans in the New World. As Lawrence Levine (1977: 60) so succinctly puts it:

... slaves in North America came into contact with people, from other European countries as well as England, who held beliefs that the slaves could adopt or adapt without doing essential violence to their own world view. Here was a universe populated by spirits and witches, by supernatural omens and signs, by charms and magic, by conjuration and healing, that the slaves could understand and operate within. ... The African practices and beliefs which had the best chance for survival in the New World were those that had European analogues as so many of the folk beliefs did. It is within this context that one should understand the point made by Newbell Niles Puckett and other folklorists that Afro-American folk beliefs often were more specifically European in form than African.

Beginning in America in the 17th century and continuing through the early-19th century, enslaved Africans (and later in time, African Americans) readily adopted silver coin charms as part of their cultural belief systems for several possible reasons.

First, charms made of silver coins were highly reflective (i.e., “shiny”) and, as such, contained the “flash.” According to Robert Farris Thompson (1984:117, 130), a leading authority on African art and spirituality, the “flash of the spirit” is a Kongo (i.e., West African derived) term used by religious practitioners to describe inanimate objects that are naturally reflective. This reflective quality, this flash, is indicative of a benevolent spirit attracted to and captured within the object itself. Such spirits could do the bidding of the charm owner and, in the case of a perforated coin worn on the body, help protect the wearer from harm (Thompson 1984:117–118).

The second reason why enslaved Africans likely adopted coin charms is that their circular form, as simple flat discs, evoked the basic form of the Bakongo cosmogram (Figure 3). In its most elaborate configuration, the cosmogram appears as two intersecting lines, forming a cross, with a large circle at its center and four smaller circles at the ends of the lines. Finally, arcs or

an even larger circle lies over the cross, intersecting it at its four points. The cosmogram signifies the continuity of human life, and the four moments of the sun (Thompson 1984:109).

The third reason why enslaved Africans so readily adopted coin charms may also relate directly to the Bakongo cosmogram. Crosses that appear on English minor silver coinage dating from the 8th through 18th centuries strongly resemble the Bakongo cosmogram in form (Figures 2 and 3), and it was these “cross’t shillings” that were also most preferred by British citizens for use as charms (Gregor 1881:190). A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 shows just how similar these forms—one a 16th-century English coin, the other a West African sacred sign—really are. Similar cross markings are reported on such diverse objects as other coins, silver spoons, marbles, bricks (Brown and Cooper 1990; Wilkie 1995; Young 1996; Russell 1997), and colonoware ceramic vessels (Ferguson 1992) from historic sites throughout the South. These particular artifacts were recovered from slave cabins or other locales clearly associated with African Americans. Researchers have made the association of these symbols to the Bakongo cosmogram, strong evidence that elements of the Bakongo belief system were retained through enslavement and into the 20th century.

Two additional reasons why coin charms would have been adopted by enslaved peoples of African descent is that minor silver coinage would have been readily accessible, even during

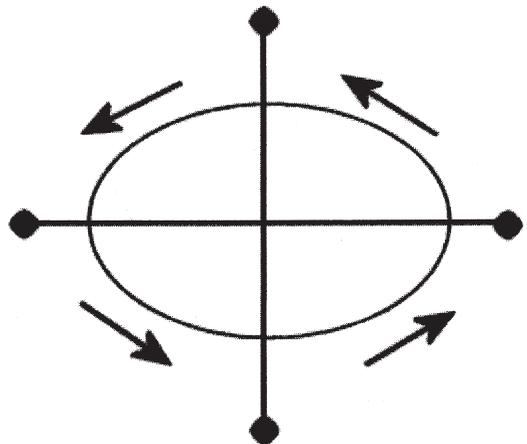


FIGURE 3. Bakongo Yowa cosmogram (after Thompson [1984:109]).

enslavement, and due to its small size was easily concealable if necessary. Yet another reason why coin charms appear to have been embraced by African Americans so completely is that, prior to Emancipation, such charm elements likely would not have been prohibited by Euramericans, simply because whites understood them, and some even used them.

This is not a small point, for throughout the United States and the Caribbean, white enslavers attempted early on to suppress the practice of magico-religious beliefs among the enslaved African population, such as the religion of voodoo (Metraux 1959:32–35). This suppression likely occurred because the practice of such beliefs marked an act of defiance by blacks (by attempting to retain elements of their culture) and perhaps for fears that such strange magical practices (i.e., strange from a white's point of view) just might have a certain efficacy. The suppression of private spiritual practices, such as charm creation and maintenance, largely met with failure (Genovese 1976:221; Mulira 1990:36–37).

Specifically banning the use of certain objects commonly employed in supernatural rituals was not unheard of. In 1760 Jamaica, a ban was placed on all ingredients utilized in the practice of Obeah, which is the Jamaican form of an African-derived magico-religious belief system. As quoted in Leonard Barrett's (1976:74) work, *The Sun and the Drum, African Roots in Jamaican Folk Tradition*, this 1760 ban read as follows:

... after the first Day of January which will be the year of our Lord One thousand Seven hundred and Sixty one, Any Negro or other Slave who shall pretend to any Supernatural Power and be detected in making the use of any Blood, Feathers, Parrots' Beaks, Dogs' Teeth, Alligators' Teeth, Broken Bottles, Grave Dirt, Rum, Eggshells, or any other materials related to the practice of Obeah or Witchcraft in Order to delude or impose on the Minds of others shall upon conviction thereof before two magistrates and three freeholders suffer Death or Transportation ...

Note that in the list of banned objects, silver coins (or silver objects in any form) were not mentioned. During the time this ban was written, it was common knowledge among Europeans that pierced silver coins had the potential for use as supernatural objects. Possibly because Euramericans believed that enslaved Africans, by using their charm forms, were operating within

an analogous if not identical belief system, many likely allowed such actions to continue. Certainly isolated accounts of white slaveholders knowingly sanctioning the use of European forms of charms by enslaved African Americans have been documented (Rawick 1972[13] pt. 3: 12–13), and in some instances other European charm types (e.g., *asafetida*) were simultaneously worn by blacks and whites on the same plantation in the antebellum period (Rawick 1972[12] pt. 1:261).

The final reason why enslaved African Americans might have adopted a European charm form was for its presumed efficacy; it was commonly believed that conjuration, as practiced by enslaved African Americans, could not affect whites (Raboteau 1980:283). In two WPA ex-slave narratives quoted by Eugene Genovese (1976:222), two formerly enslaved African Americans agreed that while the conjuration of slaves may have worked on one another, it was ineffective against their white enslavers. This belief is repeated in an ex-slave narrative from Missouri (Rawick 1972[11] Missouri:250). Following this reasoning to its fullest implications, if elements of African conjuration were ineffective against whites, then perhaps a white-derived charm would provide enslaved peoples some protection against any harm done to them by their oppressors.

Early interpretations of black Southern folk beliefs relied almost exclusively upon the one-way model of acculturation, arguing that slaves had arrived stripped of any culture, only to embrace both European charms and the belief systems inherent within them (Puckett 1926). This overly simplistic and ultimately false view first changed with the work of Melville Herskovitz (1958), who proved conclusively that major elements of African cultures had survived the Middle Passage, only to take root in the Americas.

Herskovitz (1966) formulated the theory of *syncretism* to explain the phenomena of cultural retention and transformation. Especially within oppressive systems such as enslavement, the African cultural elements with the best chance of survival were, according to Herskovitz, those essential core beliefs and their accompanying symbology that were broadly similar or at least analogous to those practiced by their white oppressors.

As Deborah Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong (1999:240) point out, syncretism ultimately emphasizes adaptation and a one-sided assimilation, not a dualistic interplay of two cultures. This theoretical construct of culture retention and transformation has largely been supplanted by more sophisticated theories of creolization and hybridity (Edwards-Ingram and Brown 1998; Kapchan and Strong 1999) that recognize the dualistic nature of culture contact, acknowledging that everyone is affected and changed by these moments. Yvone Edwards-Ingram and Marley Brown (1998) state that there are really two views of creolization: the “common ground” or elements that both cultures come to share, as defined in the work of James Deetz (1996), and the “uncommon ground” of Leland Ferguson (1992), which emphasizes a cultural core created outside of and resistant to the dominant culture.

Certainly the invoking of European charm forms with primarily African-derived belief systems suggests a creolization of beliefs. Just as the tradition of using modified silver coinage in the British Isles seems a creolization of Celtic pagan and early Christian belief systems, so too was the adoption of these same charm forms by enslaved Africans and, later, African Americans; both examples of creolization allowed the retention of a core belief, hidden under a dual symbol.

Perforated silver coinage worn on the body has been attributed to the prevention of specific illnesses as well as general protection against conjuration. Sickness, as interpreted by traditional West African belief systems, can trace its etiology through either the natural world, supernatural agents such as ghosts, or by the hand of man through the use of conjuration (Wilkie 1995:140). Hence, the protective aura provided by wearing silver likely was seen as safeguarding against sickness (theoretically rendered at times by means of a human agency). In sum, the European charm form and the predominately West African derived belief systems, in the case of perforated coins, combined to form a seamless whole.

Charm Utilization within the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives

Of the Southern folklore collections surveyed for this study, one of the more useful for

determining the motivations behind charm use was Puckett's (1926) *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*. Using black informants, Puckett identified numerous beliefs regarding witchcraft, conjuration, and other elements of the supernatural. Puckett (1926:288) states that among Southern blacks of the early-20th century, “silver is the most universal preventive of conjuration. A silver dime worn about the ankle or neck or placed in the shoe will prevent any trick from exerting its influence against you ... Some Negroes openly say that such a coin keeps off evil spirits, showing the close association of conjuration with former fetishism.” Puckett (1926:362) also reports the use of silver coins as being “effective in bringing good luck” and, more specifically, as a preventive for rheumatism; a penny also could be used as an effective treatment for this malady.

Southern black folk beliefs recorded by Puckett have a broad utility, especially in assigning possible belief systems to specific elements of the material culture record. There are problems, however, in applying Puckett's collected folklore to the interpretation of specific archaeological data. Although his collection is a veritable cornucopia of folk beliefs, in another sense it is also a jumbled “grab bag” of all beliefs encountered by Puckett at the time of his writing. It is difficult to judge the extent to which the recorded beliefs actually were practiced, the specifics of such practices, and which beliefs held precedence over others. To better quantify the use of charms in the form of perforated coins, another pertinent folk belief source was reviewed—the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives.

Published collectively in 41 volumes as *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, these narratives consist of interviews of elderly African Americans, nearly all of them former slaves (Rawick 1972–79). The context and circumstances for each source is known, greatly adding to the value of the narratives. Direct and detailed background data for each informant is available, and the dual use of charms, both in slavery times and in 1937, at times is derived from a single source. To obtain every reference on the use and form of charms within the narratives, all entries listed under the keyword subject heading “Myth and Superstition” were examined.

From these 41 volumes, 31 informants, nearly all ex-slaves, spoke directly to the use

of perforated coins as charms or talismans (Table 2). At the time of their interviews (ca. 1937), the age of the informants ranged between 67 and 100 years. They resided in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas. Most were residents of these states before Emancipation, though some also experienced slavery in Louisiana and Missouri.

Coin Types and Types of Protection Derived

In the ex-slave narratives, the terms “silver coin,” “silver money,” and “copper” are general descriptive terms used in reference to material type for charms created from coins. Specific denominations identified are the penny, dime, half dime, and quarter.

References to wearing non-silver coins, i.e., a penny, clearly are in the minority, with a total of only seven. Of these, two accounts also describe dimes used in conjunction with the copper cents. The beneficial protection afforded wearers of pennies was, for four of the cases, focused on specific ailments seemingly of a natural (or nonsupernaturally derived) origin, including rheumatism, indigestion (two references), and heart trouble. Additionally, two informants stated that a penny was used to keep away sickness in a general sense. Only one informant specifically noted the use of a penny for protection against conjuration. The curative power of pennies probably is derived from the copper used to produce them, as there are several references to wearing bracelets of copper or brass wire as a cure for rheumatism in the United States (Puckett 1926: 361; Fisher 1939:214; Welsch 1966:342–343), and the use of copper as charm material is well documented for portions of Africa (Phillips 1746: 243, as quoted in Handler and Lange 1978:156; Nassau 1904).

As reflected in the narratives, silver was by far the most popular material type for coin charms, with either the generic terms “silver money” and “silver coin,” or, more specifically, dimes, half dimes, and quarters used; the latter two denominations were each referred to only once. As with the use of pennies, five informants also suggested that silver coins were worn for ailments not of supernatural origin, at least involving conjuration by name. These include rheumatism (two

references), cramps, teething, and general good luck. Silver coins were predominately worn for protection against conjuration or other supernatural elements (19 out of 26 or 73%), referred to in various ways dependent upon the informant (Table 2).

As noted earlier, of the 1,157 individuals recovered during excavations at Freedman’s Cemetery, 15 exhibited evidence for belief in conjuration by the presence of a perforated coin or coins, interpreted here as charms (Table 1). Six individuals possessed more than one coin, for a total of 22 coin charms recovered archaeologically. These pierced coins clearly are reminiscent of charms detailed within the ex-slave narratives (and other sources) and strikingly uniform in both coin type and corresponding silver content. Of the 22 charms, 21 were silver dimes or half dimes. Only one burial (Burial 32) had both a silver dime and an additional coin type (a pierced, heavily worn 19th-century copper alloyed coin of unknown type or date, probably either a nickel or possibly a large copper cent).

It seems reasonable to infer that the charms recovered archaeologically reflect a perception within the black community of Dallas similar to the views expressed in the ex-slave narratives. Through the wearing of pierced coins, or placing coins on children, some community members were making an earnest attempt to gain some measure of control over their own lives as well as the lives of their children, control over that which was otherwise largely uncontrollable in the 19th century—illness, and with it the possibility of death.

Demography of Charm Use

From the ex-slave narratives, it is impossible to gain an accurate demographic profile of charm use, since the responses are general by their very nature. What is clear from the narratives is that charm use spanned all age groups, from the youngest of children to the oldest of adults. For children, two narratives in particular stressed charm use. One informant, Mrs. Heyburn, of Union County, Kentucky, detailed a story of her daughter being conjured while walking down a road and having to wear “a silver dime” to prevent further harm. After this event, Mrs. Heyburn saw to it that all of her family wore dimes around their ankles. Unfortunately, the

age of Mrs. Heyburn's daughter when she was conjured is not known, and in fact she may have been grown (Rawick 1972[16] Kentucky: 35). Stephen McCray, of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, offered that in the past a "dime was put around a teething baby's neck to make it tooth easy" (Rawick 1972[7] pt. 1:208). This is the only direct evidence from the narratives for very young children wearing charms in the form of pierced coins.

Several characteristics of charm use as evidenced from the Freedman's Cemetery data are apparent at first glance (Table 3). Perhaps most interesting, and a detail that could not have been predicted from the cited historical sources, is that a clear majority of those wearing charms at Freedman's Cemetery were young children (10 of the 15 individuals or 67%). Importantly, all were between the ages of 0.3 years (Bur 881) and 2.15 years (Bur 123) at the time of death. Even allowing for small sample size, this restricted range of ages is an impressive demographic trend and corresponds with typical deciduous tooth eruption (as discussed below).

Adult use of pierced coin charms was much more rare and confined almost exclusively to women (4 out of 5 or 80%). Ages of adult charm wearers were also rather uniform; all were "middle aged" (approximately 31 to 42 years). Although within the 1,157 burials recovered archaeologically, 80 individuals were between the ages of 46 and 55 years, and an additional 12 individuals were 56 years of age or older at the time of death, none of these older individuals were found wearing charms. This *apparent* lack of coin charm use among the elderly is an unexpected and somewhat puzzling aspect of the data. Intuitively, older individuals in Dallas's African American community would seem more likely

to have used charms since the belief systems inherent in conjuration and charm use, it could be argued, would have been the most ingrained within their worldview. At least on its surface, however, the Freedman's Cemetery data seems to indicate this was not the case. One possible explanation for this lack of charm association with older adults will be addressed below.

Location of Charms on Body

Of the 31 informants in the ex-slave narratives, 28 provided locational information for charm use, though most describe more than a single location on the body (32 total). Cited locations include at the ankle, sometimes described as "leg" (21 occurrences or 66%); the neck (8 occurrences or 25%); or rarely, in a shoe (3 occurrences or 9%).

Although 66% of the WPA informants reported charm use at the ankle, at Freedman's Cemetery 87% of the coin charms were found around the neck (13 of 15 burials) (Table 3). Of the charms recovered with children, all were positioned at the neck or upper thorax. With the five adults, three had perforated coins at the neck, while two wore charms at their left ankle. Of these latter two adults, Burial 327 (male) had a pierced half dime in situ at the left ankle and an unmodified half dime recovered with only general provenience at the feet. As no shoes were present, the unmodified dime originally may have been contained within a charm bag, tied around either ankle.

While only the general locus of ankle or leg is usually given in the narratives, one informant, Doc Quinn (Texarkana, Arkansas), specifically noted the "left ankle" as the preferred location for coin charms (Rawick 1972[10] pt. 6:7). Preference for the left side of the body has

TABLE 3
NUMBER AND LOCATION OF COIN CHARMS AT FREEDMAN'S CEMETERY

Time Period	Date Range	Total No. of Burials with Charms	Subadult Location of Charm		Adult Location of Charm	
			at Neck	at Ankle	at Neck	at L. Ankle
Early	1869–1884	2	2	0		
Pre-1900	1869–1899	1	1	0		
Middle	1885–1899	2	2	0		
Late	1900–1907	10	5	0	3	2
Total	1869–1907	15	10	0	3	2

clear antecedents. In a burial recovered at the Reverend Buck Richards site (44JC568) in James County, Virginia, dating to ca. 1630–1650, a crooked sixpence (with cross motif) bent to form a bracelet was found in situ at the left elbow of a young woman (Mallios and Fessler 1999:35–36). In an 1854 English account, it was recorded that “a crooked sixpence worn ... in the left side pocket is indicative of good luck to the wearer” (Opie and Tatum 1989:105). This also is echoed in a Louisiana collection of folk beliefs, in which the left ankle is the preferred side for the placement of a perforated dime on a newborn (Saxon et al. 1945:536). Tellingly, even the gentleman illustrated in Puckett (1926: plate facing 314) can be found wearing a pierced dime around his left ankle. Of all of the folk belief references reviewed for this study, the right ankle was indicated in only two, from North Carolina (Hand 1964:106) and Tennessee (Lett 1970:39). It does not seem accidental that both of the pierced coin charms found at the feet of the two adults were in association solely with the left ankle.

The fact that all charms worn by the children at Freedman’s Cemetery were located at the neck seems to make sense, especially in light of the harm from which these children were likely being protected. Probably chief among the maladies were conditions associated with the highly stressful periods of teething and weaning, both associated with the mouth—thus a charm at the neck, nearest to the source of greatest danger.

On average, the earliest deciduous dentition (central mandibular incisors) begins to erupt at 6-1/2 months after birth, while the last deciduous teeth to erupt, the second molars, usually occurs at between 1.6 years and 2.5 years of age (Wheeler 1965:30). The typical age span for the beginning and completion of tooth eruption is virtually identical to the ages of the children in the Freedman’s coin charm sample (i.e., 0.3 years to 2.15 years) (Table 1).

In a more general sense, the ages also show a correlation with weaning ages. Typical of many nonindustrial societies, in West Africa breast-feeding of infants continued for approximately two years after the birth of a child. In the United States, this lengthy two-year period was often shortened during slavery to only six to nine months duration, at which time the mothers were forced back into the fields and food sub-

stitutes were given to the infant, robbing it of immunity protection derived from antibodies in the mother’s milk and exposing it to sometimes lethal doses of bacteria found in unsanitary food preparation and unrefrigerated food and liquids (Steckel 1988:216–221).

In part due to forced early weaning and unsanitary breast milk substitutes, African Americans experienced extremely high infant mortality rates during slavery and the immediate Reconstruction era, with typically half of all pregnancies to enslaved women ending in the death of the child by the age of four years (Steckel 1988:195–196, 220). Moreover, this high rate of infant mortality did not immediately subside with emancipation. Specifically for Dallas, infant mortality (for babies aged one year or less) accounted for as high as a third of all deaths in Freedman’s Early period (34.4%), showed no change in the Middle period (with infants less than one year totaling 33.9% of all deaths), and only dropped to 23.6% by the turn-of-the-century Late period (Davidson et al. 2002). In addition to the often-lethal effects that could occur during weaning, there were ever-present dangers of respiratory infection, a malady from which children were especially susceptible due to their immature immune systems. With such an alarmingly high infant mortality rate, a means to provide protection for infants would have seemed paramount, alleviated in part by the placement of a charm at the throat.

The practice of immediately placing charms on a newborn is documented for both Africa and the United States. In the late-19th-century French Congo, immediately after the birth of an infant, women would place “charm after charm” on the child (Dennett 1898:20). Within one of the WPA ex-slave narratives, an elderly woman remarked, “the first thing when a baby is born ... she would bathe and dress him and then tie a mole’s right foot around his neck. This was to keep him in good health and to bring him good luck” (Rawick 1977[4]:409).

Number and Denominations of Coins Worn

From the ex-slave narratives it is sometimes difficult to determine if a single coin or multiple coins were employed as charms, though when emphatically stated, charms are more often

referred to in the singular. This is especially true when the informants are speaking of themselves. Occasionally for some, such as Willis Easter of Waco, Texas, two coins were worn simultaneously—one at the neck, the other at the ankle (Rawick 1972[4] pt. 2:3). In the Freedman's Cemetery sample, 6 of the 15 charm burials (40%) had more than one pierced coin in association with the body (the greatest number was three), and four of these six multiple charm burials were adults. In each case, the coins were recovered from only one region of the body. No individuals wore charms at both the neck and ankle; in all instances, it was one or the other.

In the ex-slave narratives, the most common type of coin named was the dime, a silver 10-cent piece. Half dimes, also composed of silver, were mentioned specifically by name only once. In the United States, half dimes were ubiquitous, having been minted annually between 1794 and 1873 (Alexander 1990:140–144). While half dimes are barely mentioned in the narratives, they represent 9 of the 22 charms recovered from the cemetery (41%). Perhaps the term “dime” as used by the 31 informants was more euphemism or shorthand (employed either by the informant or the interviewer/transcriber), rather than a literal preference for a 10-cent piece.

As suggested earlier, the primary factor in choosing a coin for a potential charm was material type, and many accounts state that silver was particularly effective in warding off the effects of conjuration. The denomination of the coin (half dime or dime) probably was not of critical concern. Although not discussed in the ex-slave narratives, it might be assumed that greater amounts of silver afford the wearer greater protection. The smaller amount of silver present in half dimes could have been offset, by inference, if they were used in conjunction with other coins. In fact, this seems borne out by the data from Freedman's. Half dimes were employed in conjunction with a dime in three burials (549, 1340, 1507). Additionally, two burials contained two or more half dimes (383, 327). Only one burial (881) contained a single half dime; this was a child less than one year old.

Associated Objects, Other Charm Forms

Of the 31 informants in the WPA ex-slave narratives, only two speak of other objects worn in

association with pierced coins. Sylvia Durant, of Marion, South Carolina, once wore both a silver dime and beads strung together around her ankle (Rawick 1972[2] pt. 1:346). Callie Washington, living in Coahoma County, Mississippi, at the time of her interview in 1937, wore a piece of lead and a perforated penny around her neck to help her heart trouble (Rawick 1977[10]:2193).

At Freedman's Cemetery, essentially the only artifacts recovered in direct association with pierced coins were beads of various colors, shapes, and sizes; these were exclusively found with children. Of the 10 children with perforated coins, four also had in situ beads (Burials 1177, 1226, 549, 347). With Burial 1177 were 148 tubular seed beads of clear glass and 2 larger, hexagonal black glass beads. Burial 1226 included only a single tubular glass bead, the color of which unfortunately was not recorded; additional beads may have been present but either were not preserved or were not recovered. Forty-one tubular seed beads were found with Burial 549; colors included black (n=15), white (n=16), red (n=2), yellow (n=2), and light blue (n=6). Finally, Burial 347 had 26 faceted brown-glass beads. None of the pierced coin charms found with adults were directly associated with beads or any other artifact types.

It is not known if the beads themselves were viewed as supernaturally charged objects, working in concert with the pierced coins, as mere decoration, or both. As stated earlier, beads were very common elements of charms in West Africa. In the United States, use of beads in the curing or prevention of certain ills is also documented, and particular colors for beads have been recorded as indicative of specific curative properties. In the Nebraska folklore collection, “a necklace of amber beads” is noted “to cure or ward off sore throat” (Welsch 1966:334), a belief that is duplicated as “gold beads” in the Oklahoma source, which also records that red beads are useful in curing nosebleeds (Botkin 1930:161). In Tennessee, amber beads were thought to prevent or even cure asthma (Wilson 1966:194).

An additional element of the total charm, potentially of great significance, though easily forgotten and difficult to evaluate archaeologically due to its usual lack of preservation, is the string upon which the coin was strung and worn on the body. In fact, complete charms

have historically been made entirely of string or thread and worn about the neck, waist, wrist, or ankle. Such string charms are known historically for both Africa and Europe and have a great antiquity (Rattray et al. 1927:9–24; Opie and Tatum 1989:223–224).

In Europe, string charms were in use at least by the 7th century and were commonly of great benefit in protecting the wearer from the “Evil Eye.” One source states that in the Highlands of Scotland, the charm string was historically the most commonly used control against witchcraft, even into the 20th century. The color of the strings used in these charms (typically red), the forms and manner of construction, as well as the words spoken over their manufacture were varied and significant (Maclagan 1902: 141–150).

Charms composed entirely of string tied around the waists of small children were documented in turn-of-the-century West Africa (Milligan 1912: 220). More specifically, among the early-20th-century Ashanti, knotted strings could be either complete charms or elements of more elaborate talismans (Rattray et al. 1927:9–24). String charms are also known among the modern Bambara of Mali, Africa. These charms are similar to those worn in Scotland, inasmuch as the string is only a material element or artifact of an entire ritual act, with the spoken incantation of principal importance. The charms, as spoken formulas or incantations, are known as *tafo*, as are the strings produced under their power (Imperato 1977:63–64).

While perforated coins are one of the most common charm types encountered archaeologically (due to preservation factors), they are not the most common encountered ethnographically or in folklore collections. By examining every reference to charm forms within the WPA ex-slave narratives, it became clear that the most commonly mentioned charms would rarely preserve archaeologically due to their perishable nature. The narratives record some charms as nothing more than leather bands or strings composed of raw cotton threads knotted in various ways to ward off a myriad of diseases, to aid in teething, as well as offering protection against witchcraft. Charms composed of other diverse elements were as a rule contained within a cloth bag worn on the body by aid of a string—a string conceivably an integral element of the charm itself.

Presumably, all the pierced coins recovered from Freedman’s Cemetery were worn on a perishable thread, since no other means of attachment were recovered. In fact, copper salts from one of the coins worn by Burial 32 helped preserve a fragment of a plain white cotton string that adhered to the coin itself. At Freedman’s Cemetery, many more people may have been laid to rest wearing perishable charms such as a knotted string. In short, it seems likely the 15 pierced coin charm burials provide only a minimal estimate for the pervasiveness of charm use within Dallas’s late-19th-century African American community.

Diachronic Use of Charms

In the ex-slave narratives, 16 informants (52%) speak of charm use in the past, though only six (William Mead, Sam Jordon, Adam Smith, Willis Williams, Kitty Reese, and Patsy Moses) specifically state that slaves wore pierced coins as charms (Table 2). In fact, most charm use recorded within the WPA narratives is only nebulously tethered in time, referred to either in the past or present tense with little else to distinguish the actual period of practice. What is more firmly established from the narratives is the contemporary use of pierced coins, when the informants themselves were seen wearing charms in the course of their interviews. Four informants were wearing coins at the ankle, neck, or both in 1937 or 1938.

There is a late account, contemporary with the WPA ex-slave narratives, of a coin charm being used in Dallas, Texas. This account is recorded in a 1937 article, consisting of an interview with an elderly black domestic who employed several charms, including “a buck-eye around her neck ... (and) a pierced dime was tied around her bulky ankle with a pink ribbon, to break the charm of stepping in devil dust” (Royal 1937:138). From this it can be established that at least isolated charm use in Dallas extended to 1937 or some 30 years after the last of the Freedman’s burials were interred.

At Freedman’s Cemetery, child burials associated with charms were recovered from all four time intervals defined for the site, though all five adults with charms were interred only during the Late period (1900 and later) (Table 3). Given the small sample size, it is perhaps

unwise to attribute undue significance to this. Despite this problem, a possible temporal trend in charm utilization does seem worth noting. While burials containing charms spanned the entire history of the site as an active cemetery, there was an apparent decline in charm use (or at least charm recovery) through time (Table 4). For the Early period, 3.20% of all burials had associated charms; this percentage declines continually to the Late period, where charm use was associated with only 1.10% of all individuals (n=884) recovered for this eight-year time interval (1900–1907).

For burials recovered with beads in association with pierced coins, their decline mirrors the use of coin charms generally (Table 4). Of the two charm burials dating to the Early period (1869–1884), both were associated with beads (100%). During the Middle period (1885–1899) one of two burials with pierced coins also had beads in association (50%). Finally for the Late period (1900–1907), only one (Burial 347) also had beads (10%).

Importance of Coin Dates

The 31 informants in the WPA narratives do not mention the dates of coins utilized as charms, suggesting that a coin's minting date was not of particular importance. Likewise, Puckett (1926) says nothing about a coin's date contributing to its value as charm. Other sources, however, suggest that the dates of the coins worn as charms may have held some significance to the wearer, at least in respect to the wearer's birth year (Wilkie 1995:144).

To investigate if this was the case with the Freedman's burials, the dates of the coins were compared to the estimated year of birth for each individual. Dates were observable on 20 of the 22 coin charms: 1829, 1840, 1842, 1853 (4 occurrences), 1855, 1856 (3 occurrences), 1857 (4 occurrences), 1860, 1876, 1877, 1878, and 1889. The date of any coin recovered at the cemetery had the potential for significance, especially those transformed from an everyday object into one charged with supernatural control. At least with respect to the year of the wearer's birth, however, it appears that for nearly all of the burials (and especially children), this simply was not the case.

Of the 10 children, all died at two years of age or younger. All associated coin charms showed surface wear, some to a very great extent, much more than would have been present if the coins were only two years old when interred. Additionally, minor silver coinage was relatively scarce in Dallas, especially during the town's formative years when some of the charm burials undoubtedly were interred. In fact, new mintings might have taken some time to reach Dallas in sufficient quantities, at least to allow easy accessibility to a freshly minted coin for a newborn to wear. Illustrating this lack of minor silver coinage in the city, an 1870s newspaper editorial states, "No dimes and quarters shining around Dallas yet. The silver tidal wave has not yet struck our banks generally" (*Dallas Daily Herald* 1876).

It should be noted that the availability and use of specific forms of currency in the past often cannot be viewed as analogous to present

TABLE 4
DIACHRONIC TRENDS IN CHARM USE AT FREEDMAN'S CEMETERY

Time Period	No. of Individuals per Period	No. of Individuals with Charms	% of Individuals with Charms	No. of Charm Burials with Beads	% of Charm Burials with Beads
Early (1869–1884)	64	2	3.10	2	100
Pre-1900 (1869–1899)	37	1	2.70	0	0
Middle (1885–1899)	171	2	1.20	1	50
Late (1900–1907)	884	10	1.10	1	10
Total (1869–1907)	1,156*	15	1.30	4	27

*Note: although 1,157 individuals were actually exhumed, one burial containing a single individual (Bur 1127) could not be more finely dated.

day patterns of use. For example, the copper penny, a base metal coin regarded with disdain by many in the 18th and 19th centuries, was rarely used in Dallas (or in many Western states) prior to the turn of the 20th century, as a one-page news article detailing the recent advent of penny use in the city makes apparent (*Dallas Times Herald* 1901).

It seemed obvious even during excavation that none of the coin charms recovered with the children reflected the year of their birth, as each of the estimated dates of interment, themselves based on other temporal diagnostics in association with the grave, always postdated the dates of the coins recovered (Table 5). In fact, the coins used as charms were always several years older than the burials themselves. For example, six children had coins whose minting dates, even added to their age at death, still produced a sum that predated the founding of Freedman’s Cemetery (or 1869), with two even predating the establishment of the settlement of Dallas in 1841 (Holmes and Saxon 1992:38).

The burials from which two coins were recovered, each of differing minting dates, also argues against the date’s significance in regard to the year of birth. This was certainly true for the two children recovered with two pierced coins per burial: Burial 1340 (date=1853, 1855),

Burial 549 (date=1857, 1877). It also is true for at least one of the adults recovered with more than one charm: Burial 1507 (date=1856, 1889). Of all the burials recovered with more than one coin, only one, Burial 383, had two of the same date (both 1856); unfortunately, the date of the third associated half dime was totally obliterated by perforation and wear.

While it is certain that the charm coin dates do not reflect the birth years of the children, they may have held some significance for one, and possibly two, of the five adults (Table 5). Burial 32, buried with an 1857 dime, had an assigned interment date during the Late period (1900–1907), estimated to be ca. 1900. Her age at death was about 42 years, so the estimated year of birth is 1858, closely matching the dime’s minting year. Burial 327, an adult male interred with two half dimes may have been wearing a coin minted in the year of his birth; although two coins of differing dates were associated, only one was perforated. The 1860 date of the perforated coin corresponds favorably to the year 1863, his estimated year of birth. For the remaining adults, the coins are all too old, though with the wide ranging age-at-death estimate determined for Burial 1507 (due to poor bone preservation), the coin worn by this individual conceivably could have been minted in the year of her birth.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF ESTIMATED YEAR OF BIRTH TO CHARM COIN MINTING YEAR

Burial Number	Age at Death (yrs)	Estimated Year of Death	Estimated Year of Birth	Charm Date	
				1st coin	2nd coin
Subadults					
123	2.15	1900	1898	1853	
347	1.95	1901	1899	1853	
549	0.70	circa 1885–99	circa 1891	1857	1877
608	1.83	circa 1885–99	circa 1890	1857	
881	0.30	1903	1902	1829	
913	0.87	1901	1900	1878	
1,177	0.58	circa 1869–84	circa 1877	1842	
1,226	1.18	circa 1869–84	circa 1878	1853	
1,337	0.53	1901	1900	1876	
1,340	1.46	circa 1869–99	circa 1882	1853	1855
Adults					
32	41.50	1900	1858	1857	
327	38.90	1902	1863	1860	1857
383	34.50	1907	1872	1856	1856
1,114	30.60	1906	1875	1840	
1,507	20–60	1902	1842–1882	1856	1889

A number of the pierced coins recovered from the Freedman's Cemetery excavations were minted in the same year, which does not seem mere coincidence. Years represented by multiple coins are 1853 and 1857 (dime and half dime) and 1856 (half dime). Are these dates indicative of some important event or otherwise numerically significant?

A review of the maximum number of coins minted by the United States Treasury for each year indicates that the years for which more than one coin was recovered at Freedman's Cemetery (1853, 1856, and 1857) were all extremely high minting years. Simply put, there were many more coins from these years in general circulation than were typically available for most other years. For example, only approximately two million dimes were minted in 1852, a year for which none of the recovered charms were minted, but in 1853 (represented by three dime charms), more than 13 million dimes were struck (Alexander 1990). It would seem that the date of a coin was not of undue importance in the Freedman's Cemetery charm sample, with the range of dates for the recovered coins largely reflecting only those from the average or high minting years, making it statistically more likely that by their sheer numbers these coins would have been available for charm creation.

Economic Levels of the Charm Burials

Wide variations of grave wealth were observed during excavations at Freedman's Cemetery, both through time as well as synchronically. Pauper burials, consisting of a single and unadorned pine box, were often placed alongside the wealthiest of graves (Davidson 1999). While there is a great disparity of wealth expenditure among graves as a whole, there is a rather consistent

pattern among the socioeconomic levels of the 15 charm burials.

Most charm burials were outfitted with what would have been considered normative coffin hardware for the time. The two burials dating to the Early period (1177, 1226), interred without handles, were typical of interments dating from the 1870s and early 1880s at the site, where handles occurred with only 4 of the 64 Early period burials (6.25%). The two Middle period charm burials (549 and 608) were well furnished for the late 1880s and 1890s; in fact the viewing window recovered with Burial 549 was a somewhat unusual element for children during this period.

For the Late period burials, 9 of the 10 were found with handles as well as other trimmings. The single burial without handles (Burial 32) was the poorest of the Late period charm burials, interred in a single hexagonal coffin with mismatched lid closures in the form of thumbscrews and white metal coffin screws; the latter closure was anachronistic by the turn of the century.

At first glance, pierced coin charms recovered from the Late period seem to have been associated with burials that generally were of a relatively high socioeconomic level (at least as measured by wealth expended on mortuary display), though when these burials are compared to others from the Late period, this wealth expenditure is seen to be actually about average or even slightly less. Table 6 compares the frequency of specific mortuary traits associated with the 10 Late period charm burials to all Late period burials; i.e., the number of burial containers (coffins or caskets; n=878). While 112 (or 13%) of the burials dating between 1900 and 1907 were recovered with short bar handles (representing the most expensive form of handle present at the cemetery), none of the

TABLE 6
COFFIN HARDWARE ASSOCIATED WITH LATE PERIOD BURIALS

	Charm Burials No.	(n=10) %	All Late Period Burials No.	(n=878) %
Interments with short bar handles	0	0	112	13
Interments with viewing windows	2	20	341	39
Interments with swingbail handles	9	90	579	66
Interments with six swingbail handles	1	10	333	38

burials with pierced coins were associated with them. Additionally, 39% of all Late period burials were recovered with viewing windows, though only half those numbers (20%) of the charm burials were so equipped.

Coin charm burials dating to the Late period were associated with handles in 90% of the cases; while for all Late period interments, handles were recovered with 79%. Although this might suggest that Late period charm graves on the whole possess mortuary wealth displays slightly above the average, only one Late period charm burial (10%) had six handles, a number that was considered the funeral industry standard for the time (Hohenschuh 1900:122). In contrast, for all Late period burials, 38% of those fitted with swingbail handles employed six of them. These comparisons clearly show that while the Late period charm burials were not paupers, neither were they the most elaborate of graves.

None of the wealthiest graves recovered from Freedman's Cemetery were associated with coin charms. Perhaps economic success in black Dallas came largely through the advent of education, which may have precipitated a rejection of folk belief in conjuration and charm utilization. Charms also were not found with any of the indigent dead. During Freedman's 39 years as an active burial ground, the black pauper dead were interred by a series of Euramerican undertakers under contract variously to either the city or county (Davidson 1999:124–130). It is possible that any charms once present on an unclaimed pauper body were removed by white undertakers, if for nothing else, than the silver content of the coin. This is highly speculative and of course impossible to prove, but with the general lack of respect shown to the indigent dead as observed during excavations (e.g., multiple bodies in a single burial container), it is a possibility to consider.

Charm Coin Perforations

The WPA ex-slave narratives speak of alterations to the coins only in the most basic and obvious way, consisting exclusively of various descriptives for perforation (e.g., drilling, punching, etc.) (Table 2). The same dearth of information is also evident for the other folk belief references cited above. While examples of pierced coins recovered archaeologically are available for comparison

(Wilkie 1995:144), the ritual (or rituals) behind their creation remains unknown.

On coins from Freedman's Cemetery, the most significant physical alteration performed upon a coin was the perforation, presumably for the purpose of suspension. The act of perforation was a deliberate and conscious one, so the form of perforation in addition to its position upon the face of the coin itself may have held some significance. Twenty of the 22 coin charms were Liberty Seated half dimes or dimes, two coin types that share an identical design (Alexander 1990:148–153). As a blank or potential charm, the Liberty Seated design has the form of a seated woman (Liberty) in a long flowing gown, steadying a shield with her right hand while holding a spear or standard in her left. The reverse of the coin has an embossed "half dime" or "one dime" designation flanked by a wreath. If the specific placement of perforations was constrained by the design elements on individual coins, this should be obvious in the Freedman's Cemetery sample.

To compare the point at which each coin was pierced, perforations were scored with an ordinal number ranging between 1 and 12, as though the face of the coin was a clock, with the head of Liberty at 12 o'clock, the base of the coin (at the year) at 6 o'clock, and so forth. Since the cuprous coin recovered with Burial 32 is featureless, and one of the coins recovered with Burial 327 (1857 half dime) was not perforated, the total number of coins in this sample is 20. Table 7 lists the results.

Half of the pierced coins are perforated through or immediately beside the head of Liberty, scored as either 11 (n=2), 12 (n=7), or 1 (n=1). Two coins were perforated at the base of the coin, or at 6 o'clock (10%), while seven were perforated at either 3 (n=3) or 4 (n=4), accounting for 35% of the total sample. A single coin was perforated at 9 o'clock (5%).

Viewed temporally, while the placement of the perforation in the Early and "Pre-1900" coins was at either side of the Liberty figure, the trend in the Middle and Late period coins is one where perforations were made directly through (n=7) or immediately beside (n=3) the head of Liberty. Of course, the total Freedman's Cemetery charm sample size is quite small, especially for burials dating prior to 1900, so any apparent trends must be viewed with caution.

TABLE 7
COIN PERFORATION LOCI

No.	Time Period	Burial No.	Coin type	Year	Loci*	
1	Early	1226	Dime	1853	3	
2	Late (1902)	327	Half Dime	1860	3	
3	Late (1901)	913	Dime	1878	3	
4	Pre-1900	1340	Half Dime	1853	4	
5	Pre-1900	1340	Dime	1855	4	
6	Late (1907)	383	Half Dime	1856	4	
7	Late (1906)	1114	Dime	1840	4	
Number of perforations to right of Liberty					7	35% of all charms
1	Late (1900)	123	Dime	1853	6	
2	Late (1907)	383	Half Dime	?	6	
Number of perforations at base of Liberty					2	10% of all charms
1	Early	1177	Dime	1842	9	
Number of perforations to left of Liberty					1	5% of all charms
1	Late (1903)	881	Half Dime	1829	11	
2	Late (1901)	1337	Dime	1876	11	
3	Middle	549	Half Dime	1857	12	
4	Middle	549	Dime	1877	12	
5	Late (1901)	347	Dime	1853	12	
6	Late (1907)	383	Half Dime	1856	12	
7	Late (1902)	1507	Dime	1889	12	
8	Late (1902)	1507	Half Dime	1856	12	
9	Late (1900)	32	Dime	1857	12	
10	Middle	608	Dime	1857	1	
Number of perforations at head of Liberty					10	50% of all charms

*(numbers refer to a clock face; see text)

Further complicating the issue of perforation loci, while the interment dates of the burials have been calculated with relative assurance, the pierced coins themselves may have been heirlooms. That is, these charms may have been worn by parents or other family members and placed on the children only after years of use by others. This is almost certainly the case, as many of the perforations are worn to the extent that the hole has been enlarged through wear, and the scar created by the act of perforation rendered quite smooth over time. So with most, if not all of the children, coin charms were perforated not during the short interval of the child's life but, rather, some years earlier. If the coin charms are ranked in ascending order by minting year, however, the results are similar to the ranking of the charms by interment date (i.e., temporal period), displaying a rough correlation between minting date and the temporal span one could expect a coin charm to remain in circulation prior to interment.

To assess if coins recovered with children were perforated in a different manner than those worn by adults, the charms were next examined by age at death. It seems clear that the overall pattern of charm perforation for both children and adults is quite similar. In fact, for both groups, the rate of coins perforated through or immediately beside the head of Liberty was 50%, matching perfectly the rate seen for coins in the combined sample (Table 7).

Perhaps the best perspective on the issue of preferred location for coin perforation may be gained by examining those burials recovered with more than one coin. Of the four burials (383, 549, 1340, 1507) for which these data are available, the perforation point is identical within each of the four sets of coins, save for Burial 383. Of the three coins interred with Burial 383, each was, instead, perforated at a different location (4, 6, and 12 o'clock). Except for this curious inconsistency, the pattern

observed with the paired charms suggests that there were favored locations for perforations, though the rationale behind these preferences remains unknown.

The manner and form of the perforations in at least two instances clearly display additional alterations not made for the sole purpose of suspending the coin. Rather, upon closer inspection, some coins show that not one but actually two perforations were made, the second perforation partially overlapping the original perforation point, obscuring it. While possibly present in other coins, the least ambiguous examples of this is present with two of the three coins recovered with Burial 383 (Artifact nos. 383-H-38B, 383-H-38C).

Both of these coins have irregularly shaped, overlapping perforations, and in fact one (Artifact no. 383-H-38B) still has a jagged flange of metal where the second perforation was made. It would seem that its second perforation received essentially little or no wear, suggesting the coin was altered immediately prior to the death of the woman interred in Burial 383.

Since perforating a coin was at least one step required in its transformation into a magical object, it may be that the act of piercing the coin was in and of itself an integral part of a total ritual. Perhaps perforating the coin was a way to charge it or imbue it with certain properties. A previously perforated coin, obtained for use as a potential charm, might have to be re-perforated for the charm to have any power. Alternatively, a charm worn by an individual that had proved itself ineffective through the appearance of initial signs of illness might also have to be re-perforated, in an attempt to re-charge the charm.

Other Coin Alterations

Except for perforation, the WPA informants do not address other aspects, ways, or means of altering a coin to create a charm. Doubtless some of the informants possessed such knowledge, but the format of the narratives precluded detailed description. While many of the coin charms recovered at Freedman's Cemetery display small dents, nicks, and warping, nearly all of these alterations can be interpreted as incidental or the result of unconscious actions, probably from the combined elements of use wear from circulation, the initial act of perforation, or the

action of the string abrading the coin through wear on the body.

Only one coin, the 1878 dime recovered with Burial 913 (subadult, 0.87 years), displays a very clear and deliberate alteration not associated with perforation or wear. This Liberty Seated dime was incised with a crude X on both of its sides, a symbol reminiscent of both the crossed coinage of England and the Bakongo cosmogram.

Discarding of Charms

The WPA narratives are silent on the point at which charms, proven utterly ineffective at the death of an individual, could or should be discarded and the method employed. Neither the author nor Laurie Wilkie (1995:145) could find any reference to the method or means of discarding charms in the folk literature.

A silver coin charm, as the first defense against conjuration or other supernatural harm, was noted to warn the wearer of such evils by turning instantly from silver to black (Puckett 1926:289). Following this line of logic, one might conclude a coin charm worn by an individual at the point of death was tainted by having metaphorically absorbed the evil it was employed to safeguard against. As such, it may have been rendered essentially toxic and, hence, dangerous to the living. Perhaps the coin charms recovered at Freedman's Cemetery were left in place on the dead if for no other reason than very real fears of removal.

The lack of children older than two years of age wearing coin charms in the Freedman's Cemetery sample is likely due to the motivations of the individuals who placed the charms on these small children (i.e., the charms' supposed protective result). One ex-slave informant, Aleck Trimble, who mentioned the use of perforated dimes, also refers to his grandchild who was present during the interview. He draws the interviewer's attention to the charm she was wearing around her neck (in this case, horse hair rolled up in a cloth bag) and states that he would remove the charm when she "... finish cutting' her teef" (Rawick 1972[5] pt. 4:112). Infants and small children who wore coin charms as protective elements, and who survived the dangerous time of teething and weaning, likely had these same charms removed after the danger had passed or around two years of age.

As to the complete lack of perforated coins associated with the elderly at Freedman's Cemetery, a partial explanation may be the passing down of such charms to their children or grandchildren, possibly at the occasion of the child's birth. The advantages of guarding an infant with a previously worn charm was that such charms, as worn by older members of the community, would have a proven track record of efficacy, since the older individuals were still living. Certainly the early dates displayed by many of the children's coin charms are consistent with this scenario as are the wear patterns of the perforations (i.e., smooth and not jagged). If a coin had been perforated (and thus a charm newly created) only at the birth of the child, by the time of the infant's death (at the most some 24 months later), the wear and tear on the perforation hole by the movement of a baby would have been very slight and likely could not account for the extreme smoothing of the scars rendered upon the coin by perforation.

Conclusions

From the data presented above, it is evident that the 15 charm burials from Freedman's Cemetery provide a unique opportunity for the examination of the demographics of charm utilization in a late-19th and early-20th-century urban African American community. In part, the true strength of the Freedman's data is that it represents actual, quantifiable use of charms, something that nearly all folk-belief sources do not provide. Quantifiable documentary data on coin charm utilization are quite rare, the only in-depth source being the WPA ex-slave narratives. The disparity between the Freedman's Cemetery data and the ex-slave narratives on a few basic points was a surprising result of this analysis. If nothing else, perhaps it calls for some caution in an over-reliance upon folklore literature, especially given the methods employed in collecting such beliefs.

As discussed above, although African Americans apparently derived the basic idea of coin charms from Euramericans, their application seems very different. In the British Isles, the coin charm seems to have been simultaneously employed through the centuries as a cure for very specific ailments and as a general protective

element against witchcraft; while at least within the Freedman's Cemetery burial sample, these same coin charms were used primarily with teething infants, aged between birth and two years, and less commonly among adult women. But are the Freedman's Cemetery burials truly representative of 19th- and early-20th century American coin-charm use? Comparisons of the Freedman's charm sample with those recovered from other historic burials would certainly suggest this to be the case. As a comparative, perforated coins have been recovered from the Cedar Grove Cemetery in southwest Arkansas (Rose 1985) and the Redfield Cemetery in Georgia (Braley and Moffat 1995). Both sites are African American graveyards and broadly contemporaneous with Freedman's Cemetery.

The two burials from Cedar Grove have been dated to two temporal periods: 1906–1910 (Burial 43) and 1911–1915 (Burial 95) in a revised burial chronology (Davidson 1996). Burial 43 contained the remains of a woman whose estimated age at death was 45–49 years. She was interred wearing an 1854 Liberty Seated half dollar that had been perforated towards the center of the coin, though roughly scorable as “3 o'clock.” Cedar Grove's Burial 95 was a woman aged 30–39 years at the time of her death, associated with a perforated 1902 dime. This dime's perforation locus is unknown; an examination of both the field notes and extant photo-documentation archived at the Arkansas Archeological Survey failed to uncover any sketch, description, or photograph of the artifact. Both women were wearing these perforated silver coins around their necks (Rose 1985).

For the Redfield Cemetery, two burials were also associated with perforated coins. Burial 16 was an infant less than two years of age, interred wearing a perforated Lincoln head penny around its neck on a cotton thread. Although the date was illegible; because it was a Lincoln penny, this burial necessarily has to date after 1909 (Alexander 1990:116). Burial 65 at Redfield Cemetery was also younger than two years and associated with an 1842 Liberty Seated dime, perforated at “4 o'clock.” This interment has been dated to the late-19th century (Braley and Moffat 1995:33–34, 52).

For both sites, the demographics and other variables of the coin charm burials match that found at Freedman's Cemetery; the charm burial

demography consists of infants, aged 0 to 2 years, and women who would have been termed “middle aged” in their own time. There is also a clear preference for silver coins, and the preferred location of coin charms on the body matches the Freedman’s sample, as does the preferred locus for placement of the perforation on the coin (for the known instances). For example, the “4 o’clock” perforation point on the 1842 Liberty Seated dime (Redfield Cemetery Burial 65) matches the preferences seen in other early dated coins at Freedman’s Cemetery.

Finally, the Redfield Cemetery’s Burial 65, an infant aged less than two years old at death was interred during the late-19th century; but instead of a coin contemporary to its own time, this burial was associated with a coin (1842 dime) whose minting date was decades older than the interment date. Its perforation point was well worn, certainly suggesting that a coin charm, previously worn for many years by another person, had been placed on the child, likely soon after its birth. This phenomenon was the same pattern observed at Freedman’s Cemetery; the interpretation being that an older family member, possibly a grandparent, had placed their own charm on the child, since it had a proven efficacy.

Intriguingly, the basic demography of coin charm usage in the combined burial samples of the three cemeteries (Freedman’s, Cedar Grove, Redfield) also matches the distribution of beads recovered from graves at the African Burial Ground in New York City; that is, beads were associated almost exclusively with women and infants (Stine et al. 1996:62).

As a system to explain evil, and a means to protect against it, conjuration fit well within a Christian framework that pitted good against evil. Believing in conjure did not run counter to Christian beliefs, but, rather, elements of conjuration dovetailed nicely into the Christian belief system (Raboteau 1980:276–288). Certainly the 31 informants from the ex-slave narratives (Table 2) who spoke of and even wore coin charms believed themselves to be Christian.

The men, women, and children comprising the African American communities of greater Dallas were certainly neither more nor less “superstitious” than any other group residing within the city, the South, nor even the United States. The utilization of charms was only one aspect in their total worldview—a material remnant,

and as such a mere fragment of a once-unified and diverse belief system. The people interred within the bounds of Freedman’s Cemetery were simply human beings exposed to extreme dangers in life, due in large part to the effects of open racism—limited economic circumstances, high risk of disease, and lack of proper health care. It was this loss of control, over one’s life and family that fostered an environment conducive to creating a need for an amulet (to serve as a weapon of psychological defense) in an earnest attempt to control the invisible harms that lay all around them (Mulira 1990:36).

In America, coin charms may well be more commonly associated with African Americans, but the charm form originated in the British Isles, and Euramericans created and used them in the past. Why, then, are coin charms not associated in modern minds with Euramericans? Simply put, virtually no studies focusing on white “folk superstitions” were conducted in the 19th and early-20th centuries, and those few researchers that chose to interview white informants did, in fact, document the use of coin charms among them (Porter 1894; Hyatt 1935:522–523; Welsch 1966:370). Believed motivations behind their use were clearly often skewed by a racist undertone, depending upon the ethnic background of the informant. Virtually no “supernatural” rationale was assigned to the use of such charms by people of European descent, with these same occurrences described as good-luck tokens. In the case of African Americans, the motivation was always described as magical or supernatural in its basis.

While the establishment of much baseline data was made possible by the recovery of 22 coin charms from 15 burials at Freedman’s Cemetery, these data are only the smallest window into the past. Although they can never be considered an ethnic marker for any single group, charms created from pierced coins are one of the most easily recognizable, ubiquitous, and least susceptible to problems of interpretation of any artifact type currently available for the study of magico-religious belief systems. Even with the caveat that in the past some perforated coins may have been pierced for jewelry and viewed only as decorative elements (Ripley 1912: 28–29), comparisons of variables such as coin type, corresponding metal content, perforation loci, and other alterations over broad temporal

and geographic boundaries might reveal consistent patterns of charm creation and use. Such patterns might then allow better interpretations of spiritual belief systems and the many strategies employed in the past to provide protection from harm.

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