

I. INTRODUCTION

Mississippi and "Woodland": Whatever one may think of the McKern system
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of culture classification, it must be admitted that its proponents have
given us one extremely useful idea, namely, the concept of a "Mississippi
Pattern" as opposed to the more fundamental "Woodland Pattern" of culture

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(2) The method of culture classification, informally called the McKern system, or simply "The Classification" (cf. "The Church") is too well known to require extended description. Briefly put, it is a taxonomic system made up of categories of similarity determined by trait for trait comparison of archaeological manifestations. The unit of classification is the "component", which may be defined as an associated complex of traits marking a single period of occupation at a site. Most sites in the eastern United States are thus components. In a stratified site you may have two or more components. A group of components with a substantial majority of traits or "determinants", as they are called, in common constitutes a "focus". Similarly, foci are compared and grouped into an "aspect", aspects into a "phase", phases into a "pattern" ("basic culture" in the older literature). It scarcely needs to be pointed out that the determinants at each taxonomic grade become, in ascending order, less numerous and more generalized. One does not expect the same degree of specialized identity between, say, the aspects constituting a phase, as between the foci constituting an aspect. The important point is that the method (ideally) proceeds by first isolating divisions of the lowest taxonomic rank, gradually assembling them into divisions of higher order until finally the basic pattern emerges. (To what extent this canon has been actually followed we shall see presently.)

It may be seen that the system operates quite independently of geography and chronology. This is said to be its main strength. One wonders if it may not be its ultimate weakness. A discussion of this interesting point would lead us too far afield. The reader desiring a more satisfactory exposition of the method is referred to the writings of W. C. McKern as follows: "Culture-type classification for midwestern archaeology", issued as a circular from the office of the chairman, Committee on State Archaeological Surveys, National Research Council; "Certain culture classification problems in middle western archaeology", Circular Series, No. 17, August, 1934; and "The midwestern taxonomic method as an aid to archaeological culture study", Am. Ant. vol. IV, no. 4, April 1939.

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 in the eastern United States. This proposition, of such beguiling simplicity that one wonders why it was so long coming into existence, happily explains many of the anomalies that had hitherto vexed archaeologists of the northeastern area, such as the sharp contrast between Algonkin and Iroquoian remains in New York State or between Hopewell and Fort Ancient in Ohio. By recognizing Iroquois and Fort Ancient as Mississippi cultures intrusive in their respective areas upon an older Woodland stratum, the apparent anomalies disappeared at once. Stratigraphy in New York and inferential reasoning almost as conclusive as stratigraphy in Ohio

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(1) To meet the mounting criticism that what was formerly called "Basic Culture", now "Pattern", is not really basic or a pattern in the ethnographic sense, a fifth and largest division has been suggested, to be called the "Base". For example, Mississippi and Woodland are now generally accepted as Patterns, but ethnologically they both spring from substantially the same combined hunting and agricultural mode of life, hence the same "Base". The criticism of the term Pattern is unanswerable, but it seems too bad to load the system, already a trifle topheavy, with an additional term.

(2) A succinct exposition of this contrast is to be found in Wintemberg, 1931.

(3) At a fairly early stage of archaeological investigation in southern Ohio it was recognized that the works of the "Mound Builders" did not all pertain to the same peoples, and in 1903 Prof. Mills suggested and used the names "Hopewell" and "Fort Ancient" to designate the two dominant cultures in the region.

(4) Ritchie, 1932.

(5) One of the strangest things in American archaeology is the fact that Hopewell and Fort Ancient sites, occupying the same territory, in many cases lying cheek by jowl, have been dug for years without any evidence of stratigraphic relationship having been produced. The inferences, on which Fort Ancient is judged to be later, however, appear to be perfectly sound. That the two cultures are found so near together with so little evidence of contact is counted as sufficient evidence that they were not contemporaneous. If they were not contemporaneous, then Fort Ancient cannot have been the older, because the important Madisonville cemetery belonged in part to an early historic or proto-historic period.

lent ample support to the theory. It remained for archaeologists working in Central Illinois, where Mississippi and Woodland are more directly entangled, to separate the two types of culture typologically and stratigraphically. In all instances, I think it fair to say, Mississippi emerged with greater distinctness than Woodland. Of the many perplexing problems that have arisen in connection with these first essays at classification, few can be laid at the door of Mississippi. Thus at an early stage of the classificatory experiment, actually before many of the important centers of Mississippi culture had even been approached classificatorily, it was possible to define a Mississippi "Pattern" of culture in fairly precise terms.

The dissertation that follows takes off from this point. I shall take it that the concept of a Mississippi "pattern" is a safe working hypothesis. When it comes to subdividing it into "phases", I have already indicated some uncertainties in the scheme followed at Indianapolis. Feeling that it is precisely at the level of "phase" that the taxonomic system runs into serious difficulty, I shall be at pains to enlarge upon these uncertainties as they arise. To a certain extent, therefore, I shall be carrying on a running critique of the McKern classification,

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(1) Cole & Deuel, 1937.

(2) Perusal of the report of recent conference of middle western archaeologists at Indianapolis (listed in the bibliography as Indianapolis Conference, 1935) at which these problems were discussed, brings out clearly that all the major differences of opinion concerned the Woodland Pattern, and particularly the position of Hopewell in that pattern.

(3) See Deuel, 1935 and Cole & Deuel, 1937.

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so far as it relates to Mississippi cultures. At the same time I must emphatically disclaim any attempt to set up an alternative scheme. I shall endeavor to keep before me the idea of Mississippi culture as a whole, even while examining it in its parts.

At this point it may well be asked -- what then is the purpose of the present undertaking? A question not altogether easy to answer. I am interested in the Mississippi "pattern" of culture, particularly in its more highly developed manifestations. Close attention to these may result in a redefinition of the pattern, since some of them did not, I believe, enter into the original definition. To assert, however, that my purpose is a redefinition of Mississippi culture would be presumptuous and misleading. Perhaps redefinition will not be necessary -- indeed I hope not. On the other hand, it may turn out that upon further investigation the concept of a Mississippi pattern will lose rather than gain in definition. It may even disappear into thin air. In short, insofar as a purpose implies a mind fully made up, a thesis arrived at and only requiring to be demonstrated, I cannot claim to have a purpose.

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(1) "Culture" -- a forbidden word. My own feeling is that the McKern terminology, instead of outlawing the word has restored its usefulness by relieving it of any precise meaning. "Manifestation of culture" or simply "manifestation" is recommended, I believe, in referring to any unit of the classification without regard to its taxonomic rank. It seems to me that "culture" is just as good and a great deal shorter and less high-sounding.

(2) The above was written close to the beginning of the present study and reflects the "open" mind with which it was undertaken. If I were to rewrite it today I should have to disclose a far different attitude. If there is any value whatever in the work hereinafter presented, it lies, I think, in the fact that, starting with an honest (though not exactly fanatical) faith in the McKern system in general and the concept of a Mississippi "pattern" in particular, it ended in thorough skepticism concerning both.

If one may embark without a set purpose, one may not do so without a point of view. I may as well confess at the outset that what interests me chiefly about Mississippi culture are its apparent relationships with the Southwest and Middle America. I doubt if any competent student can be found to deny that there have been contacts of one sort or another between the Southeast and the centers just named. What has not generally been appreciated, I believe, is that the evidences of such contacts are not distributed at random throughout the Southeastern scene, but are heavily concentrated in the various manifestations of Mississippi culture as now defined. In other words, with the isolation and definition of a Mississippi "pattern", an archaeological setting for these supposed relationships becomes a possibility, and with increasing knowledge of the chronological position of the Mississippi "pattern" comes a corresponding possibility of fixing the time of the contacts responsible for such relationships. This, then, is the point of view of the present work -- that Mississippi culture, particularly in its central manifestations ("Middle Mississippi") however interesting in its own right, offers a fascinating field for the pursuit of such remoter influences. This somewhat romantic attitude toward the subject will doubtless color a great deal the pages to follow.

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The McKern Classification: The latest published version of the McKern classification as officially sanctified at Indianapolis in December

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(1) McKern objects strongly to the use of his name on the ground that others were equally responsible for the inception of the method upon which the classification is based. See McKern, 1939, p. 301.

1935 is given below in abridged form, the numerous foci being omitted for the sake of brevity. (Fig. 1.) I have already pointed out that the method

Fig. 1 The "McKern Classification" as drawn up at Indianapolis 1935 (abridged).

PATTERN - Mississippi

PHASE - Upper

Aspect I - Fort Ancient
Aspect II - Iroquois
Aspect III - Oneota
Aspect IV -
 "Floating" Foci

PHASE - Middle

Aspect I - Monks Mound

PATTERN - (Unknown)

PHASE - Hopewellian

Aspect I - Ohio
Aspect II - (Elemental)
Aspect III - Southern

PHASE - (Adena?)

Aspect I - Adena

PATTERN - Woodland

PHASE - Lake Michigan

Aspect I - Effigy Mound
Aspect II - Wolf River
Aspect III
 "Floating" Component -
 Stearns Creek

PHASE - Northeastern

Aspect I - Owasco
Aspect II - Vine Valley

PATTERN - (Unknown)

PHASE - Ground Slate (N.Y.)

PATTERN - Archaic

"Floating" focus - Lamoka

is purely inductive in theory. To what extent it has worked out that way in practice is not altogether clear. Whereas a good many foci, some aspects, and possibly a few phases seem to have been arrived at in the prescribed manner, there is in evidence also a good deal of what may be called "anticipatory" classification, which would seem to be purely deductive and therefore at variance with the theory on which the method is founded. For example, a single aspect, Adena, is classified as belonging to an unnamed phase of an unnamed, or rather "unknown",
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pattern. Or, without anything being said about foci and aspects the Ground Slate culture of New York State is said to constitute a phase of another "unknown" pattern. Again, the Archaic pattern consists solely of a single "floating focus", whatever that may mean. In all these instances, and there are others, there is a manifest impatience with the slow working of a rigorous inductive system. The classification, in its present form at least, conceals but illy a fundamental lack of

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(1) I think it is necessary to call attention to the fact that in postulating an "Unknown" pattern for the Hopewell and Adena phases, the conferees of Indianapolis possibly went further than they intended. According to the reports of the conference there was a great deal of discussion of the Hopewell problem, the arguments centering around the question as to whether (1) Hopewell is a phase of Woodland, or (2) a mixed Woodland-Mississippi phase, or (3) something independent of both. There were good arguments for all three alternatives and it was finally decided to leave the question open. But in drawing up the classification they seem to have begged the question by postulating an "unknown" pattern and thereby ruling out alternatives 1 and 2, which was not, as I have been told by several of those present, the sense of the meeting. Therefore, while sticking to the form of the classification I shall regard it as meaning that Hopewell and Adena are phases whose affiliation with one or more of the present patterns or with an as yet unrecognized pattern has not been ascertained.

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harmony between theory and practice.

The Mississippi Pattern: Fortunately, as I have said before, the chief difficulties in the classification are on the side of Woodland and the enigmatic Hopewell. The Mississippi pattern, relatively speaking, is clear sailing -- but, as may be seen in the table below that gives the Mississippi classification in detail (Fig. 2), we do not sail very far. The pattern has been given three phases, Upper, Middle and Lower, the last, however, omitted from the published version for reasons that will presently appear. This three-fold division has a suspicious look to readers of archaeological literature, long accustomed to the power of the mystic three. It will bear looking into. We examine again the report of the Indianapolis meeting and find that the Lower Mississippi Phase "was not discussed", notwithstanding the presence of several archaeologists whose work has identified them with the lower Mississippi region. We examine the general

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(1) There seem to be two schools of thought on this point, with McKern, Guthe and Griffin supporting the "purist" approach and Cole and Deuel leading the opposition. The unfortunate thing is that the classification as it now stands is a product of the combined efforts of both schools, so that it is pretty difficult to know where induction leaves off and deduction begins. It would seem that the purists have the right of the question and must surely prevail, but they also have to teach and the desire for a teaching framework is very strong. Consequently, a careful reading of the report of the Indianapolis conference (at which the latest version of the Classification was drawn up) reveals the fact that such a question as the position of Hopewell was discussed with equal heat by members of both parties, in spite of the fact that all agree that Hopewell has not been studied analytically and is therefore (theoretically) not yet in a position to be classified at all.

Fig. 2 The Mississippi Pattern

PATTERN - Mississippi

PHASE - Upper

Aspect I - Fort Ancient

- Focus 1 - (Baum) Gartner
- Focus 2 - Madisonville
- Focus 3 - Feurt
- Focus 4 - Anderson

Aspect II - Iroquois

Foci: the various tribes

Aspect III - Oneota

- Focus 1 - Orr (Iowa, etc.)
- Focus 2 - Blood Run (Iowa)
- Focus 3 - Correctionville (Iowa)
- Focus 4 - Grand River (Wis.)
- Focus 5 - Lake Winnebago (Wis.)
- Focus 6 - Burlington (Iowa)
- Focus 7 - Blue Earth (Minn.)
- Focus 8 - Rulo (Nebr.)
- Focus 9 - Fanning (Kans.)

Aspect IV -

"Floating" Foci

- 1 - Blue Island
- 2 - Fisher
- 3 - Big Stone Lake

PHASE - Middle

Aspect I - Monks Mound

- Focus 1 - Rock River
Component - Aztalan
- Focus 2 - Spoon River
- Focus 3 - Kingston

literature of the subject and find a great deal of material, especially pottery, described as Lower Mississippi, but entirely without classificatory implication. We get back, finally, to the source of the three-fold terminology, in the masterful pioneer work of Holmes on the

pottery of the eastern United States, in which he divides the Mississippi valley into three ceramic provinces, Upper, Middle and Lower, and supports the separation with abundant evidence of ceramic differentiation. (1) But the McKern classification does not concern itself with pottery alone; its classificatory divisions must be based on total archaeological culture. Our suspicions are confirmed. It looks very much as if the Lower Mississippi was not discussed at Indianapolis, because no one present could say for certain that such a thing as Lower Mississippi (in the McKern sense) actually existed. There is an Upper; and, as we shall see, probably a Middle; therefore there must be a Lower. This is, then, merely one of the instances to which I have referred wherein the classifiers (2) have abandoned the inductive in favor of the deductive principle.

Since publication of the classification, I am told that a fourth Mississippi phase is in process of emergence, a Plains Phase, which would include such manifestations as Nebraska, Mill Creek and Upper Republican, (3) as well as several other well-defined aspects that have not yet been named. The importance of this latest development

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(1) Holmes, 1903.

(2) It must be stated that McKern himself, and probably all other Middle Westernists, is under no illusions on this point. He argues that whether a Lower Mississippi exists or not makes no difference in the terminology. Upper and Middle are still good. Ideally, of course, he is right, but practically, so firmly entrenched is the holy trinity Upper-Middle-Lower concept, that retention of an Upper and Middle without a Lower would inevitably result in confusion. In the minds of most readers there would always be a Lower.

(3) Strong, 1935.
Bell, 1936.

of Plains archaeology from the point of view of Middle Mississippi must be emphasized, since it appears to be more closely related to that division than to the Upper Mississippi phase. Unfortunately lack of publication makes it impossible to include a discussion of this newest phase of Mississippi culture. We may console ourselves, however, with the thought that present indications are that Mississippi culture on the Plains derived from the Middle and Lower Valley, rather than the reverse, so that its inclusion is not essential to an understanding of our subject.

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(1) Bell, 1936, p. 296-297.
Wedel, 1936, p. 102.