

## Foreword

Looking broadly at patterns of cultural development across the ancient South, one is struck by the distinctiveness of the Lower Mississippi Valley as an archaeological region. While there were certainly commonalities with neighboring regions, there were also some major differences. For one thing, the Lower Mississippi Valley was consistently precocious in the adoption of new styles of monumental architecture—witness the great, circular Middle Archaic earthworks at Watson Brake and the early development of the rectilinear, mound-and-plaza ceremonial centers in Coles Creek times. Second, it is now quite clear that the Lower Mississippi Valley consistently lagged behind other regions in the adoption of farming. Late Archaic sites have yielded virtually no evidence of the Eastern Agricultural Complex, and intensive cultivation of maize did not become fully established until A.D. 1200, a good two centuries after this practice had taken root elsewhere. Third, and most pertinent to this volume, the Lower Mississippi Valley was unparalleled in the richness of its pottery traditions. Within any given phase of the ceramic sequence, one finds far more decorative diversity in the Lower Mississippi Valley than anywhere else. And the rate of stylistic change through time was extraordinary. The differences one sees in paste and decoration between adjacent 200-year long phases in the Lower Mississippi Valley are often greater than the changes one sees over 500 years elsewhere.

This pattern of synchronic diversity and rapid change in ceramic decoration has long presented archaeologists with a problem: How best to characterize and study this phenomenon? It is no accident that some of the first ceramic typologies and seriations in the South were developed by archaeologists working in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Nor is it any accident that the Lower Mississippi Valley was the first archaeological region in North America where type-variety nomenclature was widely adopted. This nomenclature, which continues to be used today, has the advantage of allowing archaeologists to make fine-grained distinctions among pottery varieties—a useful tool when characterizing diversity. But at the same time the proliferation of named varieties has taxed archaeologists' ability to keep up with the nomenclature itself. The number of varieties has become so great, and the distinctions among them have become so subtle, that newcomers to this region find learning and applying the nomenclature a daunting task. That's why this volume is such a welcome sight. For the first time, it systematizes a large portion of the Lower Mississippi Valley typology into a taxonomic "key," just like those commonly used by botanists to identify species of plants.

As the author himself clearly acknowledges, the ceramic types and varieties presented here are not new. They represent an accumulation of research by many scholars over at least four decades. Many of the varieties listed here have been used for years, but their formal definitions exist in written works that have been all too hard to find, such as undergraduate theses and unpublished manuscripts. Nor is this book intended to be a comprehensive bibliographic guide to the literature that underlies the classification. But by casting this long-standing typology into a consistent and eminently usable format, Ian Brown has made an important contribution to the practice of Lower Mississippi Valley archaeology.

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