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AN EARLY WOODLAND CERAMIC CHRONOLOGY FOR THE LOWER OHIO VALLEY

Spurred by the discovery of two deeply buried, stratified Early Woodland sites (12 Vg 338 and 12 Vg 339) in southwestern Indiana, research was undertaken to compare the ceramic sequence represented at these sites with previously identified sequences from the immediate region and those from the lower Ohio Valley in general. In an attempt to compile a rather complete ceramic chronology for the Early Woodland in southwestern Indiana and the adjacent areas of southeastern Illinois and northern Kentucky, materials previously collected from similar sites in these areas were examined. Once the regional sequence had been constructed, comparisons could be made with more far-flung collections and sequences to assess its validity as well as to provide relative dates and a temporal framework for the occurrence of the various ceramic types. Specific areas examined outside of the lower Ohio Valley included the central Ohio Valley, the Wabash Valley, the lower and central portions of the Tennessee and Cumberland River Valleys, the lower and central Mississippi Valley, and the lower Illinois River Valley. Ceramics from the lower Ohio Valley tend to reflect both stylistic and technological similarities with ceramic traditions from these surrounding regions.

Results of this research may indicate a fairly early presence of pottery in portions of the lower Ohio Valley, namely southwestern Indiana and the extreme portions of southeastern Illinois. These early ceramics, with their very thick vessel walls and coarse temper, closely resemble the Marion and Fayette Thick varieties. These ceramics probably can be dated within the temporal range of from 1000 to 600 B.C. and have an expected date range of from 900 to 700 B.C. It also is probable that this pottery represents the initial spread of ceramics into the lower Ohio Valley from the east and is a variant of early Fayette Thick types. Thus far no large collection of these ceramics has been made in southwest Indiana. In fact, from the data available, it seems that ceramics of this type are rare and have a very sparse and discontinuous distribution. Consequently, any understanding of this material is greatly limited.

The second stage of ceramic development in the immediate region of southwest Indiana is marked by refined grit-tempered(?) cord-marked ceramics; these ceramics are morphologically similar to the earlier types and varieties and include flat-bottom conoidal jars and some "flower pot" type vessels. Some researchers have pointed out that the tempering agent may in fact be grog with grit inclusions, which would make it difficult to differentiate the primary temper type within these ceramics. In the lower Ohio Valley these ceramics have been referred to as Sugar Hill Cord-Marked, and from various published descriptions it can be argued that this type may include both the Marion variant as well as the later refined type. Surface decorations have been reported for and do occur on sherds from the lower Ohio Valley, but these features have been ignored in most analyses and publications. Zoned punctated and pinched decorations occur as the main decorative elements on these vessels, and their occurrence is limited to narrow bands beneath the rim. Similar decorations can be seen on contemporary ceramics in adjacent areas to the east, south, west, and northwest of the lower Ohio Valley. Radiocarbon dates for these ceramics are few, ranging between 700 and 500 B.C., with most dates clustering around 600 B.C. These ceramics may persist longer in southern Indiana due to the seemingly late introduction of fabric-marked pottery into this area.

At approximately 600 B.C., fabric-marked pottery was introduced into the lower Ohio Valley via the Tennessee and Cumberland River Valleys. These ceramics seem to be contemporaneous with the Sugar Hill series for a short period of time, at least until the development of what has been referred to as Crab Orchard Cord-Marked. Informally it has been argued that this type represents a refinement in temper particle size, wall thickness, and vessel shape of the Sugar Hill type, but the existence of this later Crab Orchard Cord-Marked variety is hard to establish because of tremendous overlap and confusion between both types. The question remains whether or not these two ceramic types represent distinct types or if they represent an arbitrary division of a temporal continuum that does not comprise a major technological change. It is more than likely that these "types" represent stages in a continuum of technological refinement of the one ceramic type.

These ceramic types, however, become less common in the archaeological record after 500 B.C. due to the increased production of fabric-marked pottery. This broad ceramic type parallels the cord-marked varieties in temper as well as in its continuing refinement, but seems to replace the cord-marked varieties in increasing numbers through time. The exact nature of this replacement is not completely understood, but probably represents an advance in the method of producing the fabric-marked variety. Whatever the reason for this sudden "popularity," it is apparent that fabric-marked vessels become more common throughout the latter end of this period.

Fabric-marked ceramics do not appear in southern Indiana until very late in their development. An examination of collections from Early Woodland sites in southwestern Indiana revealed that the majority, if not all, of the fabric-marked ceramics are grog-tempered. Grog-tempering of these ceramics appears somewhat late in its sequence of development in southern Illinois, which may account for its late appearance in southwestern Indiana. It may also be the case that grog-tempering was prevalent in this area, and spread to the lower portions of the Ohio Valley from here. Dates for the occurrence of the grog-tempered, fabric-marked ceramics are virtually absent, leaving only an educated guess of about 350 to 250 B.C. for its occurrence in southwestern Indiana.

At about 200 B.C., Havana and Hopewellian decorative elements appear on the ceramics and serve to mark the beginning of the Middle Woodland period in parts of the lower Ohio Valley, including southwestern Indiana and adjacent regions. Sites within the northern periphery of the lower Ohio Valley region, including southwestern Indiana, tend to show Havana influence much earlier than sites located in the extreme portions of southern Illinois and adjacent areas in the southern periphery. After the incorporation of these groups into the Hopewellian sphere, many technological, social, and economic changes occur which serve to separate them from their Early Woodland ancestors.

The most important conclusion reached from this research is the fact that the lower Ohio Valley has a very lengthy and complex history of ceramic development. The previously accepted Crab Orchard tradition, which has incorporated both the Early and Middle Woodland periods, when examined closely, can be subdivided both temporally and spatially. Not only are various stages of the ceramic development in the lower Ohio Valley recognizable throughout time, but various regional differences are also apparent. These differences emphasized here represent only differences in ceramic assemblages and do not attempt to address the problem of regional and temporal variation in social, economic, and subsistence trends of the lower Ohio Valley Early Woodland peoples.
