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FIBER-TEMPERED POTTERY IN SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES AND
NORTHERN COLOMBIA: ITS ORIGINS, CONTEXT, AND SIGNIFICANCE

Edited by

Ripley P. Bullen and James B. Stoltman

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PREFACE
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These papers represent revised versions of four contributions to a seven paper symposium held at the 68th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans, Louisiana, November 20-23, 1969. The intent was to bring together scholars who had first-hand knowledge of fiber-tempered pottery-producing cultures in the Southeastern and Caribbean areas to discuss the "Context, Origins, and Significance" of these distinctive ceramics. Participants were asked not to concentrate attention too much upon fiber-tempered pottery itself, which is well described in the literature, but to focus more upon the total context--temporal, spatial, ecological, and cultural--in which this pottery is found in their respective regions: north coastal Colombia (Reichel-Dolmatoff), Florida (Bullen), northern Alabama (Griffin), and the Georgia-South Carolina coast (Stolman).

I shall attempt in this preface to anticipate some of the significant and broader issues raised by the various occurrences of fiber-tempered pottery in the greater Circum-Caribbean area. The following papers present a great deal of data concerning these broader issues, and it is hoped that by broaching these subjects here, the reader will be able to follow for himself the threads of continuity that run through these papers even in the absence of a summary discussion.

From the time of its earliest recognition in the middle of the nineteenth century (Wyman 1875), fiber-tempered pottery has held a special interest for archaeologists in southeastern United States. It was at the shell heaps of the St. Johns valley in northeast Florida, where fiber-tempered pottery was abundant, that C. B. Moore (1892-94), building upon the pioneering work of Jeffries Wyman, defined the first prehistoric ceramic sequence in North America on the basis of careful excavation. At the base of this sequence was fiber-tempered pottery in an archaeological context that indicated the manufacturers were hunter-gatherers who had relied heavily upon aquatic resources, especially shellfish, for their subsistence.

During the latter half of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, the prevailing way that archaeologists conceptualized the past was in terms of what Stuart Pigot (1960:88-90) has termed the "technological model". Under this model various ages in prehistory were distinguished by diagnostic technological criteria, the Neolithic being characterized by polished stone tools and other traits including, especially, pottery. Due in large measure to the writings of V. Gordon Childe beginning in the late 1920's, the technological model was replaced by an economic-subsistence model in which the main criteria for the Neolithic shifted from polished stone, pottery and other such technological traits to food production. Nevertheless, the tendency persisted, even in Childe's own writings (1951:75-86), to regard pottery as a characteristic Neolithic trait--an invention of food-producers.

Under such a view, whenever pottery was found in archaeological contexts that did not suggest food-production, as for example in the Ertebølle shell middens of Denmark, "neolithic" sites of Siberia, or Early Woodland sites of New York state, it was attributed to diffusion from true Neolithic food-producing cultures. It is not surprising, then, to see Southeastern fiber-tempered pottery once interpreted as the product of stimulus diffusion from the northeastern United States, which in turn had received this trait from Asiatic food-producing cultures via the Siberia Neolithic (Sears and Griffin 1950:2).

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