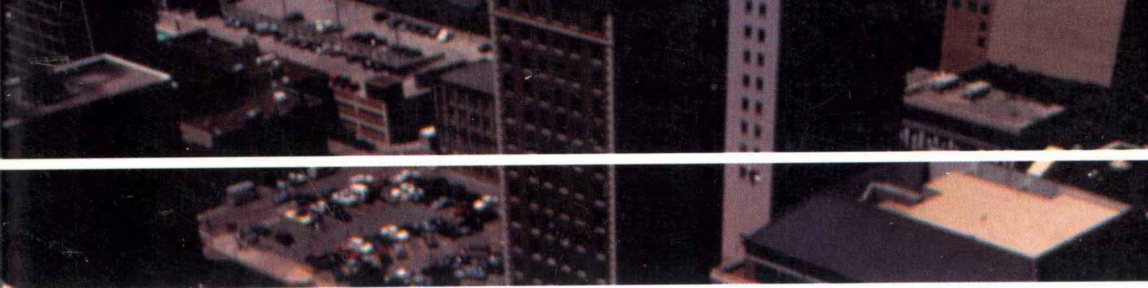

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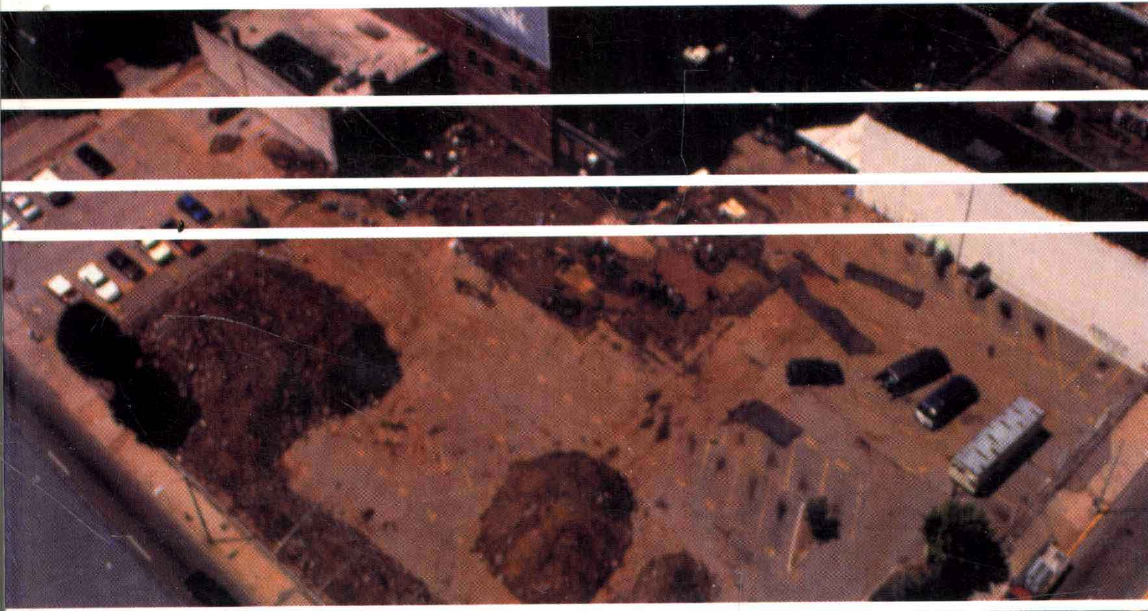

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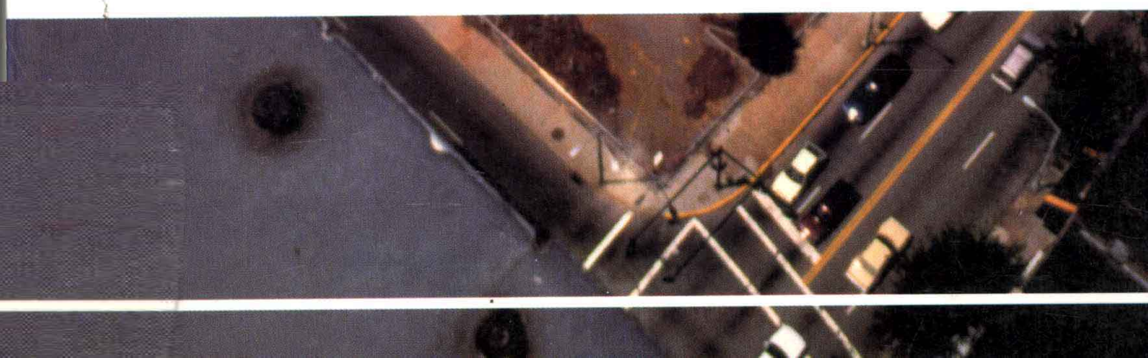

ARCHAEOLOGY *of* SOUTHERN URBAN LANDSCAPES

Edited by Amy L. Young

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CONTENTS

List of Figures and Tables
vii

Acknowledgments
xi

Introduction: Urban Archaeology in the South
Amy L. Young
1

1 Southern Town Plans, Storytelling, and Historical Archaeology
Linda Derry
14

2 Mobile's Waterfront: The Development of a Port City
Bonnie L. Gums and George W. Shorter, Jr.
30

3 Urbanism in the Colonial South: The Development of Seventeenth-Century Jamestown
Audrey J. Horning
52

4 Archaeology at Covington, Kentucky: A Particularly "Northern-looking" Southern City
Robert A. Genheimer
69

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5 Charleston's Powder Magazine and the Development of a Southern City
Martha A. Zierden
92

6 Archaeology and the African-American Experience in the Urban South
J. W. Joseph
109

7 Ethnicity in the Urban Landscape: The Archaeology of Creole New Orleans
Shannon Lee Dawdy
127

8 Developing Town Life in the South: Archaeological Investigations at Blount Mansion
Amy L. Young
150

9 The Making of the Ancient City: Annapolis in the Antebellum Era
Christopher N. Matthews
170

10 Urban Archaeology in Tennessee: Exploring the Cities of the Old South
Patrick H. Garrow
192

11 Archaeological Views of Southern Culture and Urban Life
Paul R. Mullins and Terry H. Klein
217

References
241

Index
285

Contributors
291

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

I.1 Southern towns and cities in this volume
8

1.1 North profile of a 55-ft. segmented trench excavated by the Alabama Historical Commission
20

1.2 A reproduction of the "Original map of Cahawba"
22

2.1 An 1815 map of Mobile
32

2.2 Archaeological site map of 1MB189 showing location of excavations
37

2.3 Workers at Magnolia Compress and Warehouse in the 1890s
45

2.4 Brick wall and wood timbers interpreted as part of a cotton warehouse found beneath the Sloan Building
46

2.5 Early-20th-century photograph of Hitchcock's Row on Government Street
48

3.1 Archaeological base map of Jamestown
55

3.2 Manufacturing enclave in the northwest portion of New Towne
61

3.3 Structures 44, 53, and 138 in the east-central area of the site near the Ambler House
63

3.4 Structures 17 and 105 south of the Ambler House
65

4.1 Location of archaeological sites in Covington and Cincinnati
72

4.2 Origin of U.S. artifacts in Covington data set
77

4.3 Distribution of all products in Covington data set by non-local, Cincinnati, and Covington subsets
88

5.1 Aerial view of the powder magazine, exterior excavations in progress
98

5.2 Composite site map, powder magazine excavations
99

5.3 Composite map of features, magazine interior
100

7.1 Rionda-Nelson house at 1218–1220 Burgundy Street, New Orleans
131

7.2 Site map of 1996 excavations
134

7.3 New Orleans courtyard garden in a Creole neighborhood, 1844
140

8.1 Blount Mansion, downtown Knoxville
151

8.2 Layout of Blount Mansion lot today
153

8.3 Frontier-era features and layout of lot
165

8.4 Commercial-era features and layout of lot
167

9.1 Plan of the Bordley-Randall house
180

9.2 Faunal and architectural material found in excavation to the east of the kitchen wing
181

9.3 Gardener behind the Paca house
184

9.4 Facade of Acton House, built ca. 1770
189

Tables

I.1 Number of urban centers in the United States and the South from 1790 until 1900
4

4.1 Non-local products (foreign included) recovered at Covington excavations
76

4.2 Origin of Covington artifacts by city and state
78

4.3 Staffordshire manufacturers represented at Covington excavations
84

4.4 Cincinnati products recovered at Covington excavations
86

4.5 Covington and Newport products recovered at Covington excavations
87

7.1 Stratigraphy of Rionda-Nelson site
135

8.1 Occupations of Knoxvillians in 1850
161

9.1 Populations of Annapolis and Baltimore, 1790–1880
173

9.2 Occupational distribution of Annapolis population, 1850–1860
191

10.1 Urban archaeological projects undertaken in Knoxville 196
10.2 Functional categories of the pre- and post-1910 bottles 199
10.3 Urban archaeological projects undertaken in Memphis 206

Introduction: Urban Archaeology in the South

AMY L. YOUNG

Today, many historical archaeologists work in urban contexts in the South. While some of these investigations are published in edited volumes and journals, many are buried in cultural resource management (CRM) reports and are relatively inaccessible, especially to students and to professionals in related disciplines. The primary goal of this volume is to present a collection of current contributions to urban archaeology in the southern United States to other historical archaeologists and professionals in history, geography, and other related fields. The second goal is to explore the development of urban centers in the South. The final goal is to present an assessment of our progress in urban archaeology in this region and to explore future directions.

This volume is a collection of case studies concerning archaeological research in the urban or urbanizing South. The case studies cover a variety of subregions and temporal periods within the South. Data for these chapters were derived both from large-scale CRM undertakings, which often involve using heavy equipment and moving a great deal of earth, and from modest, slower-paced academic studies where only small, hand-excavated units are utilized.

Landscape archaeology is one of the dominant themes of this volume. This is a relatively new area of emphasis within historical archaeology (Yentsch 1996:xxiii), where the focus is "on reading the historical landscape as if it were a book, finding the plots and subplots that have been written on the land by both the conscious and unconscious acts of the people who lived there" (Yamin and Metheny 1996a:xiii). The Southern urban context seems ideal for landscape archaeology.

Not all archaeologists agree on a single definition of the term *landscape.*

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For this volume, a landscape includes "all of the natural and cultural features that exist both inside and outside human settlement" (Orser 1996:368). Archaeologists are most interested in the terrain that has been "modified according to a set of cultural plans" and therefore reflects the values and ideals of the individual(s) who constructed it (Deetz 1990:2). Historical archaeologists have used a variety of field and analytical techniques or approaches for unraveling the meaning of the landscape (Yentsch 1996), and this variety is illustrated within this volume. For instance, one approach involves focusing on the creation of the urban landscape from wilderness or rural contexts. Another, similar landscape approach is to examine how that landscape, once built, was altered to accommodate modernization and changing urban needs. Several case studies herein take this perspective. Landscape can also be approached from a single site, from a neighborhood, or from the perspective of the entire town or city. Various scales are represented in this volume. Further, landscape can have various components and meanings, including symbolic, political, and economic, and in this collection authors break apart the various components of urban landscape to come to terms with the relationships among Southern towns, Southern identity, and the conduct of archaeology.

Southern Character and Southern Cities

Just as there are many definitions of "culture," there seem to be nearly as many definitions of "the South" as there are social scientists who study it. Scholars and the lay public generally associate the South with racial slavery, especially plantation slavery. Therefore many consider the South to be the former Confederate states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (Wilson and Ferris 1989:xv). This definition omits the states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri, where slavery was legal at the outbreak of the Civil War. Still others find this geographical definition too limiting and use "statistical data covering the 'census South' which also includes . . . West Virginia, Oklahoma, and the District of Columbia" (Wilson and Ferris 1989:xv). Finally, still other social scientists define the South as wherever Southern culture is found, including southern portions of Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, and where black Alabamians and Mississippians resettled in Detroit and Chicago. Truly, as Wilson and Ferris (1989:xv) state, "the South exists as a state of mind both within and beyond its geographical boundaries." For the purposes of this volume, broad and inclusive geographical boundaries are used because Southern ideals, attitudes, customs, beliefs, habits, and behaviors are found in many places.

Most people do not normally associate the South and Southern culture with cities. Instead, we usually think somewhat stereotypically of farms and plantations, slaves and masters, or white columned mansions and log cabins. People in cities are typically viewed as being more likely to embrace change and innovations, while Southerners are perceived as holding onto old cultural traditions and being fiercely independent (Brownell and Goldfield 1977:33). This oversimplified and stereotypical image of the Old South masks some important data concerning the development of the region. Although the South has relatively few very large metropolitan centers like those found in the Northeast and Midwest, urban life and urbanization are critical in the history and culture of the South from colonial times until the present. Although it is true that Southern urban centers comprised only 12 to 20 percent of the total number of cities in the United States from 1790 until 1900, as shown in the Table I.1, the existence of these few cities illustrates that the South was urbanizing during the 19th century. Furthermore, these statistics are incapable of revealing the significance of a community that is ubiquitous in the South: the county seat with its courthouse and often a town square. Historical archaeologists in this region recognize that urban and community life were integral parts of the development of Southern culture and that there was a very close relationship between town and farm, since the largely agrarian Southern economy provided commercial opportunities. For instance, isolated Southern trans-Appalachian trading posts of the 18th and 19th centuries were closely tied to the national and international economy and usually preceded farms (Perkins 1991). Towns and communities that many geographers would hesitate to classify as urban often appeared on the Southern frontiers before farms, and became necessary links in the regional trade systems. Some of these early communities, like Mobile, Alabama, and Knoxville, Tennessee, developed into towns and cities. Others, including Jamestown, Virginia, and Old Cahawba, Alabama, were ultimately abandoned.

The processes of urban development in the South are complex, and for many years historians and other social scientists overlooked Southern cities in their research of Southern culture (Brownell and Goldfield 1977:5). It is not surprising that archaeologists in the South have only recently turned their attention to cities. Even so, some important work has been accomplished. Today we are in a much better position to understand Southern communities than ever before, and undoubtedly we will continue to advance our knowledge in this vital area. Furthermore, though the concept of urban development seems at first glance to be antithetical to Southern culture, some scholars have suggested that urban studies may be the ideal perspective for understanding "the South's multifaceted character" (Earle and Hoffman 1977:23).

Table I.1. Number of urban centers in the United States and the South from 1700 until 1900

Year	Number of Cities in the United States	Number of Cities in the South	Percent of Cities in the South
1790	24	5	20.8
1800	33	5	15.2
1810	46	7	15.2
1820	61	12	19.7
1830	90	18	20.0
1840	131	25	19.1
1850	236	41	17.4
1860	392	62	15.8
1870	663	80	12.1
1880	939	119	12.7
1890	1348	222	16.5
1900	1737	320	18.4

Adapted from Smith 1954:28.

Any archaeologist interested in the investigation of urban life in the South must recognize the intraregional diversity that exists there. The South is composed of a variety of ethnic groups, landscapes, climates, and soils that "defy homogenization" (Brownell and Goldfield 1977:6). A number of culture areas have been defined for this region: the South Atlantic Lowland associated primarily with English colonists; the Gulf Coastal Lowland associated with French and Spanish colonists and later Scotch-Irish immigrants; and the Upland South associated with migrations in the late 18th and early 19th century from the South Atlantic Lowland and German and Scotch-Irish immigrants. Each culture area has its unique history, ethnic composition, and set of Southern characteristics that distinguishes it from other areas in the South. This scheme of dividing the South into subregions is only one of many, but it allows researchers to provide more specific cultural and historical context to their individual case studies. At this point it is better to specify rather than generalize for the entire South.

Brownell and Goldfield (1977:6–7) suggest that although Southern cities reflected this intraregional diversity, there were important similarities with their counterparts in the North and Midwest. The similarities are based on

the fact that all urban centers have common roles and common problems. Nevertheless, Brownell and Goldfield (1977:7) believe that Southern cities retain a flavor or quality of life that distinguishes them from cities in other regions. In other words, Southern communities and Northern cities had the same basic urban functions, but these were manifested or infused with Southern characteristics, such as individualistic attitudes; vernacular architectural forms; the preponderance of Southern Baptist and Methodist churches; dietary preferences (pork, chicken, corn products, and fried foods); strong kinship systems; hospitality; conservatism; and, prior to the Civil War, the ever-present institution of racial slavery.

Archaeologists and historians have identified a number of important urban functions that apply to all communities, Southern and others. One such function is the maintenance of urban populations. People in densely settled urban and urbanizing communities must find special ways to provide shelter, food, and other commodities for everyday life. They must also develop means of disposing of waste and of transporting people and goods (Zierden and Calhoun 1986). Historian Robert Dorfman (1970:33–34) likened the city to "a complicated machine" accomplishing these functions, but unlike a machine, a "city comes into being by growth rather than by design," making these basic functions part of an ever-changing, and sometimes adaptive, process. Much of urban archaeologists' work relates to these maintenance functions. Diet and the sources of food comprise a number of important studies in urban archaeology (e.g., Davidson 1982; Reitz 1986, 1987; Stewart-Abernathy 1986; Zierden and Calhoun 1986; Cheek and Friedlander 1990; Rothschild and Balkwill 1993; Landon 1996; Lev-Tov 1998). For instance, Reitz (1986, 1987) suggested that the proximity of markets made domestic meat (beef and pork) more readily available, and that wild game would have been more difficult for most urban residents to obtain (Reitz 1987). This line of reasoning, although sound, deserves further study to elaborate the changes over time as small communities grew into metropolitan centers, and to understand the complex and flexible nature of diet and food preferences among diverse groups in urban settings.

The spatial design of urban houselots has been another significant avenue of research and relates to the role of urban centers in maintaining their populations (Stewart-Abernathy 1986; Lewis 1989; Brown and Samford 1994; Faulkner 1994). Stewart-Abernathy (1986) describes how urban lots and different buildings on the lot were utilized to meet the basic needs of city dwellers. Zierden and Herman (1996) demonstrate how buildings and activity areas on residential Charleston lots changed as community standards for fire prevention and household sanitation were imposed on residents and as urban

dwellers interpreted their own needs for sanitation. Other historical archaeologists have also addressed issues of sanitation and the disposal of wastes (Lewis 1989; Geismar 1993; Stottman 1996). Such studies can provide insight into the character of urbanization of the South.

Another function is that cities are political or governmental entities. In the South, county seats and state or territorial capitals were essential in everyday life. Most major transactions (sale of land or slaves, estate settlements) utilized the court system. Also, disputes were settled within the court system. Archaeology at urban institutions like courthouses, jails, and churches is a relevant avenue of research (DeCunzo 1995; Zierden 1997a, this volume). However, these functions have not been examined to the extent necessary to provide information concerning Southern urban processes.

In their third function, cities must also provide loci for the markets that are essential in a capitalist (or emerging capitalist) economy. Consumer choice studies in urban environments are a quite prevalent and fruitful area of study in the discipline (e.g., Henry 1987; LeeDecker et al. 1987; Spencer-Wood and Heberling 1987). For example, excavations and architectural studies at the John Brush house and lot in colonial Williamsburg have demonstrated that this home was furnished more lavishly than those of his middle-class peers (Brown and Samford 1994). The gunsmith Brush had expensive teawares (decorated delft and porcelain), and the pollen/seed samples indicated the presence of herbs and vegetables usually associated with the elite. Documentary evidence suggests that this elite lifestyle was made possible by the patronage of Governor Spotswood (Brown and Samford 1994:240). These sorts of relationships between classes are precisely those that deserve further study (Shackel 1994), and are likely more common in urban environments than rural ones.

The fourth function of a city discussed here is that of a social unit. This may occur at the level of neighborhoods or communities within towns and cities. According to Dorfman (1970:35), "The most superficial glance at an American city will disclose that it includes a wide variety of people who sort themselves out into neighborhoods largely on the basis of ethnic affinity and socioeconomic similarity. These neighborhoods have neither economic nor administrative nor legal significance. They are social entities purely, and they discharge most of the social functions of the city insofar as they are discharged at all." Dorfman's statement that neighborhoods have no economic, administrative, or legal significance does not seem entirely accurate, since members of neighborhoods do often cooperate in business and politics. However, this cooperation is often informal rather than legally sanctioned. Further, neighborhoods have many functions. For example, clustering based on

similar backgrounds, tastes, values, ethnicity, and economic status is especially important in the socialization of the young (Dorfman 1970:37).

A number of seminal studies have focused on neighborhoods and their formation (e.g., Rothschild 1987, 1992; Cheek and Friedlander 1990). For example, Rothschild's (1992) study of 18th-century New York showed that kinship was an important factor in spatial clustering of residents. Ethnicity and occupation (socioeconomic status) were less important but still influential factors in this early period of New York history. Later, however, as real estate values escalated and people had fewer choices of where to live, these factors were less significant. This seems a particularly fruitful avenue of research for archaeologists working in cities, although the full potential has yet to be realized.

Another aspect of urban studies in historical archaeology involves gender and the roles of men and women. Gender roles and identity intersect with socioeconomic class, as many studies have indicated (e.g., Ryan 1981; Clark 1987; Kasson 1987). The urban social environment offers a unique opportunity to explore the diversity and flexibility of gender roles and ideologies. The most notable example is Wall's (1991, 1994) study of two middle-class households in New York and how women's roles were interpreted differently by women of slightly different economic means. Similarly, Klein's (1991) research suggests that there were differences between economic classes and between urban and rural women in their choices of ceramics.

Each of the articles in this volume examines issues of urban functions and processes and how these mesh with Southern characteristics. A large spectrum of the history of the South is explored, from colonial times through the early 20th century. Cities and other urbanizing centers examined in this volume also extend over a significant portion of the South, from Jamestown and Charleston on the Atlantic, to Mobile and New Orleans on the Gulf, and to interior sites of Augusta, Georgia, Knoxville, Tennessee, Covington, Kentucky, and Cahawba, Alabama (Figure I.1). The fact that most communities in the South are small, coupled with the intraregional diversity and the subtle expression of Southern culture, makes the investigation of Southern urban development particularly challenging for archaeologists. The articles in this volume are meeting these challenges, and a number of approaches are used to begin to address this critical research area.

Attempts to define the characteristics of Southern culture often result in nothing more than a list of stereotypical traits that reinforces the erroneous notion that the South is monolithic. It is true that there has been a general emphasis in the South on agricultural (rural) over industrial (urban) pursuits. And it is true that some Southerners can be very traditional and conservative

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