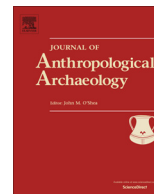


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Anthropological Archaeology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jaa

Navigating ancestral landscapes in the Northern Iroquoian world

Jennifer Birch^{a,*}, Ronald F. Williamson^b^a University of Georgia, United States^b Archaeological Services Inc., Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 January 2015

Revision received 17 March 2015

Available online 11 April 2015

Keywords:

Iroquoian
Settlement patterns
Mortuary practices
Landscape

ABSTRACT

After the transition to settled village life ca. AD 1300, the Northern Iroquoian peoples of northeastern North America relocated their settlements every few decades or less. Frequent village location meant that, after less than 100 years, the landscape they inhabited would have contained more abandoned than occupied village sites. We draw upon ancestral Wendat site relocation sequences on the north shore of Lake Ontario, Ontario, Canada to explore factors influencing village relocation and how the continued abandonment of village sites created ancestral landscapes that included sites of pilgrimage, resource extraction, and ceremony. As communities of the dead, abandoned villages and associated ossuaries were part of a larger set of spiritual responsibilities to meaningful places in the landscape. As ancestral sites, these places were part of ongoing processes of emplacement through which Wendat communities laid claim to politically-defined territories.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

As anthropologists, we are primarily concerned with the social dynamics of living human communities. Archaeologists likewise tend to concern themselves primarily with the creation of historical narratives in which the main agents are living peoples. In our reconstructions of settlement dynamics, we acknowledge the temporality of settlement patterns, including processes of construction, occupation, aggregation, or migration. Less often do we explicitly consider how actively occupied settlements relate to abandoned settlements and associated mortuary populations. How might we seek to understand the relationships between communities of the living and communities of the dead? In this paper, we wish to explore how processes of village construction, inhabitation, and abandonment created ancestral landscapes in which emergent Northern Iroquoian tribal nations and confederacies were culturally emplaced.

We begin with a consideration of how concepts of community and landscape may be mutually constitutive. We then provide a brief introduction to the archaeology of the ancestral Wendat, a field in which these ideas resonate. Processes of village relocation are explored, together with a consideration of how the formation of ancestral landscapes became settings for ceremony and resource

acquisition, and how communities of the living were recursively entangled with communities of the dead.

2. Communities and landscapes

In archaeology, most understandings of community have a socio-spatial basis (e.g., Flannery, 1976; Yaeger and Canuto, 2000). As an anthropological construct, the concept of the community has changed little since the time of Lewis Henry Morgan. It is generally taken to mean a group comprised of multiple nuclear families that forms a basic unit of production characterized by cohesiveness, solidarity, and self-identification (Bohannon, 2003 [1965]: xi; Morgan, 1965 [1881]). Positioned between domestic households and societies writ large, the village community is often the largest socio-political unit in non-state societies (Gerritsen, 2004; Williamson and Robertson, 1994).

Kolb and Snead (1997: 611) redefined the community as an archaeologically definable spatial setting for “human activity that incorporates social reproduction, subsistence production, and self-identification.” Other perspectives on archaeological communities acknowledge that they do not necessarily articulate neatly with the boundaries of archaeological sites (Isbell, 2000). Rather than reify communities as building blocks or scalar units in larger social systems, contemporary scholars have redefined the community concept in the context of the phenomena they seek to understand (e.g., Birch, 2013: 6; Boulware, 2011; Mac Sweeney, 2011). Acknowledging flexibility in the community concept permits the interrogation of multiple types of data and theory to

* Corresponding author at: Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia, 250A Baldwin Hall, Jackson Street, Athens, GA 30602-1619, United States.

E-mail address: jabirch@uga.edu (J. Birch).

explore relationships between settlement patterns, sociopolitical and economic practices, cooperation and competition, cultural production, and social reproduction.

In this paper, our conceptualization of Iroquoian communities sees them as dynamic loci for habitation and associated activities *and* active fields for the negotiation of social identity and collective memory (see also [Blitz, 2012](#); [Pauketat, 2007: 107](#)). This definition is flexible enough to include groups inhabiting individual settlements, clusters of affiliated settlements, as well as the living and deceased members of those groups. An active definition of community recognizes that individuals and groups negotiate community membership and community-based identities through both routinized and ritual practice. As discussed below, for the Wendat, burial in communal ossuaries with comingled remains was a practice which materialized and reinforced community membership and linked those communities to particular loci in the landscape.

The landscape in which a community is situated is an important component of cultural identity. Spiritual and cultural values link people to particular ancestral landscapes and associative cultural landscapes ([UNESCO, 2005](#)). Ancestral landscapes are not mutually exclusive of cultural landscapes, though the term more specifically links people and place through intangible ties established by genealogy, heritage, and history ([Kawharu, 2009](#)). Associative cultural landscapes are defined as large or small contiguous or non-contiguous areas, routes, or other linear landscapes embedded in a people's spirituality, cultural tradition and practice ([Australia ICOMOS, 1995](#)). The immediate as well as the distant past is often invoked and referenced in the interest of legitimating or reinforcing group membership. Throughout pre-contact North America, communities and their leaders used monumental forms of architecture such as Chacoan great houses ([Van Dyke, 2004](#)) or Woodland and Mississippian earthen mounds ([Milner, 2012](#)) to reinforce or legitimize community authority and group identity through processes of emplacement ([Cobb, 2005](#); [Rodning, 2009](#)). Monuments are frequently mobilized in archaeological narratives that link people to meaningful places in the landscape (e.g., [Thompson and Pluckhahn, 2012](#)). Yet, the materiality of the landscape includes also settlements (both occupied and abandoned), plants, animals, rivers, springs, and people (both living and dead) that are entangled ([Hodder, 2011](#)) or bundled ([Pauketat, 2012](#)) together in meaningful ways. Senses of belonging are linked to routinized passage through material settings, including buildings, palisades, fields, trails, and landscapes ([Bourdieu, 1977](#); [Joyce and Hendon, 2000](#); [Tilley, 1994](#)). These articulations serve to create new contexts in which social relations and cultural schemas ([Beck et al., 2007](#); [Sewell, 2005](#)) play out in meaningful ways. [Snead \(2008: 18, 85\)](#) argues that culturally constructed perceptions of the landscape combine complex arrays of natural and cultural features into landscapes of "contextual experience," where history and action are tied to cultural concepts of identity, legitimacy, and a sense of place. As archaeologists, we can fruitfully approach landscapes as meaningfully constituted phenomena that help us to explain the relationships between people and place. Ideas about the mutually constitutive relationships between people and landscapes have been most fully explored in phenomenological scholarship ([Gosden, 1994](#); [Thomas, 2008](#); [Tilley, 1994, 2010](#)). Though we do not take an explicitly phenomenological approach here, we recognize that, following [Tilley \(2010: 31\)](#), landscapes are not just passive stages for human action, "they also *do* things and have experiential effects in relations to persons." At the same time, non-phenomenological approaches to landscape have also been highly influential in conceptualizing the relationship between people and place. A number of landscape-oriented approaches to Northern Iroquoian archaeology have been rooted in Geographic Information Systems, cultural ecology, and how climatic, environmental, and social factors impact distributions of

settlement patterns over time ([Allen, 1996](#); [Hasenstab, 1996](#); [MacDonald, 2002](#)) and influence choices about site relocation ([Jones and Wood, 2012](#)). We acknowledge the value of this approach and do not view ecological and environmental variables as mutually exclusive of the symbolic, ritual, or ideological factors based further up [Hawkes' \(1954\)](#) ladder of inference, which are the focus of this paper.

3. Northern Iroquoian peoples

At the time of sustained European contact in the early 1600s, Northern Iroquoian speakers inhabited southern Ontario, southwestern Quebec, New York State, and the Susquehanna Valley ([Fig. 1](#)). They include the five nations of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois; Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk) in the Finger Lakes region and Hudson River Valley, the Neutral Confederacy, who formed a broad band of villages spanning the north shore of Lake Erie and west end of Lake Ontario, the Erie, occupying territory near the southeastern shore of Lake Erie, and the Wendat (Huron) and Tionontaté (Petun), who lived in settlements clustered below Georgian Bay on Lake Huron.

Northern Iroquoian economies involved a primary reliance on horticulture with settlements often surrounded by hundreds of acres of maize fields, beyond which were expansive watershed-based hunting territories necessary to secure necessary hides, fish, plants, and other natural resources ([Trigger, 1969](#)). Anthropological constructions of Northern Iroquoian societies include villages composed of matrilineal extended families inhabiting bark-covered longhouses, often surrounded by defensive palisades. Archaeological remains dating back to AD 900 which include Iroquoian cultural traits are thought to represent Iroquoian-speaking peoples—though the relationship between material culture, language, and ethnicity is far from clear, as is what constitutes early forms of longhouses, horticulture, or demonstrably Iroquoian socio-political organization (e.g., [Hart and Brumbach, 2003](#); [Engelbrecht, 2003](#); [Warrick, 2000](#)). Differential historical trajectories defined the development of various Northern Iroquoian communities and societies ([Birch, 2015](#); [Birch and Williamson, 2013a](#)) and their relationships to adjacent peoples (e.g., [Bradley, 2007](#); [Fox and Garrad, 2004](#)), with whom they shared certain cultural practices. The variable environmental context and physiography of each sub-region would have also resulted in different relationships to the landscape.

This paper focuses on the Wendat, the northernmost of the Iroquoians. Between ca. AD 1300 and 1600, the ancestors of the contemporary Huron-Wendat Nation inhabited the north shore of Lake Ontario, the Trent Valley and the peninsula between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay known as Wendake. Historically, their settlements clustered in the latter area having formed a political alliance known to historians as the Huron Confederacy. It consisted of four allied nations: the Attignawantan (Bear), Attigeneongnahac (Cord), Arendarhonon (Rock), and Tahontaenrat (Deer). The ethnohistoric record of Wendake suggests that initial Wendat alliance-building and confederacy formation occurred during the mid-fifteenth century between the Attignawantan and Attigeneongnahac, some 200 years before the arrival of Europeans; both groups had been resident in Wendake for at least 200 years ([Thwaites, 1896–1901 16: 227–229](#)). Later in-migrations to the confederacy were the Arendarhonon, who moved into Wendake ca. 1590 from the Trent Valley, and the Tahontaenrat, who joined ca. 1610 from the north shore of Lake Ontario region.

There is a rich seventeenth century documentary record of the lives of the Wendat, the three principal sources of which are the accounts of Samuel de Champlain, an experienced soldier and explorer who recorded his observations of a winter spent with the Wendat in 1615–16 ([Biggar, 1929](#)); the account of Gabriel

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7440583>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7440583>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)