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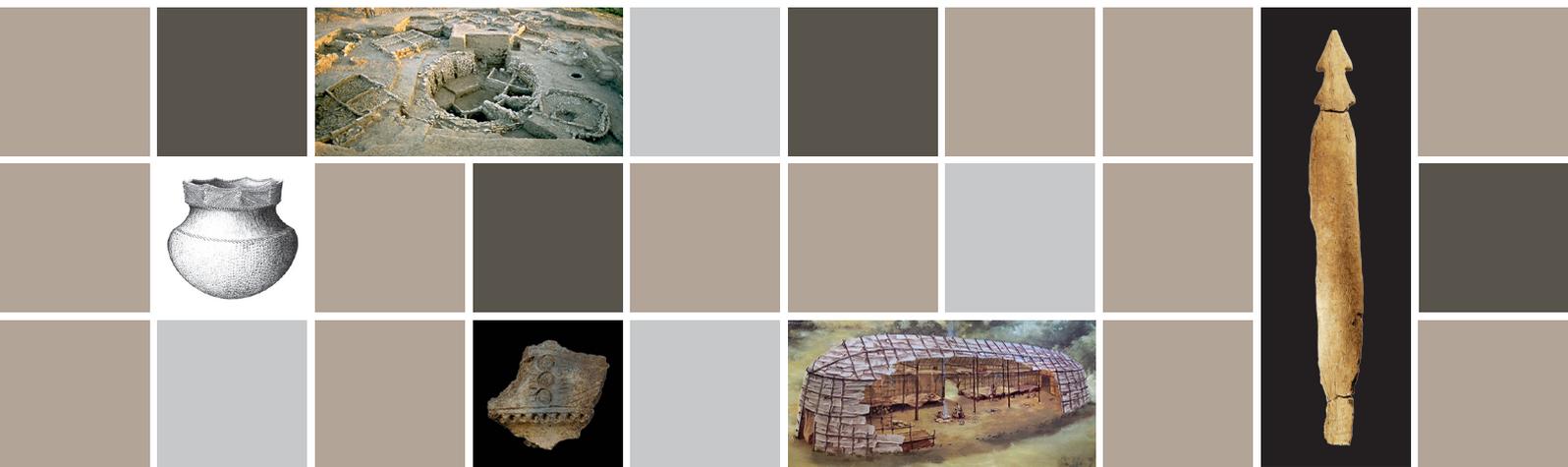
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HOUSEHOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

A Transatlantic Comparative Approach



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RELATIONS OF POWER AND PRODUCTION IN ANCESTRAL WENDAT COMMUNITIES

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RELATIONS OF POWER AND PRODUCTION IN ANCESTRAL WENDAT COMMUNITIES

Jennifer BIRCH

Abstract

During the late 15th and early 16th centuries AD, the Iroquoian societies of northeastern North America experienced widespread conflict and the coalescence of small village-communities into densely populated settlements. Regionally, these processes resulted in realignment of the geopolitical landscape and the emergence of distinct nations. To assess how coalescence unfolded at the household level, insights from one well-studied ancestral Wendat community relocation sequence will be presented. These data are interrogated within a multi-scalar analytical and theoretical framework which places the community at the center of processes of cultural change. The reconfiguration of domestic space, palisades, middens, and activity areas, together with their associated material culture suggest that coalescence resulted in the development of a significant degree of organizational complexity. This included the development of asymmetrical power relations and centralized decision-making, together with changes in the social means of production, increased demands on male and female labor, centralized management of household activities, and changes in social learning. The fine temporal resolution of these data demonstrate how these processes affected each generation as individuals and households responded to the challenges and opportunities of life in large co-residential village communities.

Keywords

Northern Iroquoian, Wendat (Huron), community, household, political organization.

Introduction

Eastern North American household archaeology has benefitted from increasingly historicized and politicized approaches which locate households within larger socio-political landscapes, rather than treating them as bounded and isomorphic entities (Pluckhahn, 2010). Examining household dynamics in terms of practice theory, “what people *do* as members of a domestic group” (Hendon 1996: 46, emphasis mine) allows us to understand how changes in the material record of households articulate with, and help to explain, the history of a people (Pauketat, 2001).

The archaeological record of Northern Iroquoian societies is ideally suited to exploring how daily practices relate to long-term processes of social and cultural change. After the transition to settled village life, ca. AD 1300, sites were occupied for approximately 15-30 years before being relocated (Heidenreich, 1971; Jones, Wood, 2012). New villages were usually constructed within 5 km of the previous site, although longer migrations also took place. Numerous site relocation sequences have been reconstructed which represent centuries of occupation by contiguous community groups. Studying site sequences allows archaeologists to observe genealogies of practice (Brumfiel, 2000; Pauketat, Alt, 2005), which can in turn be articulated with broader regional socio-cultural phenomena.

In the 15th and 16th centuries AD, settlement aggregation led to the formation of large, densely populated towns. As people came together, changes in routinized practices transformed social, political, and economic life, including the elaboration of consensual, asymmetrical power structures and the intensification and differentiation of production. These coalescent communities provide new insights about the relationship between scale, integration, and complexity (e.g., Blanton *et al.*, 1993; Feinman, 2013) that challenge the limitations of traditional conceptualizations of segmentary societies (Birch, Williamson, 2013a).

A brief discussion of Wendat households and communities is presented, including how relations of power and production have traditionally been constructed based on ethnohistory and archaeology. Data from one well-documented site sequence provides insights into how coalescence transformed socio-political and economic practices. These observations are then related back to larger-scale processes of political complexity and confederacy-building in the late prehistoric Northeast.

1 - Wendat Households and Communities

At the time of sustained European contact, Northern Iroquoian speakers inhabited southern Ontario, south-western Quebec, the Finger Lakes region of New York State, and the Susquehanna Valley (figure 1). Archaeological remains dating back to AD 900 which include Iroquoian cultural traits are thought to represent ancestral Iroquoian-speaking peoples, though the relationship between material culture, language, and ethnicity is far from clear. The Wendat (Huron) and their ancestors occupied south-central Ontario until AD 1650, when they dispersed from their homeland in the context of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) aggression, epidemic diseases, and complex colonial entanglements.

The Wendat household consisted of the members of a co-residential longhouse. Each household was occupied by a core of related females and their children, belonging to a matrilineal clan segment, together with their husbands, who claimed membership in and responsibilities to another clan. Some households may not have been strictly matrilineal, as men belonging to influential or “chiefly” lineages remained in their natal longhouses (Richards, 1967; Trigger 1978). Household composition may have also varied in the context of long-distance relocation, adoption, and extended stays by kinsmen and trading partners (Birch, 2008; Snow, 2007). Rules of clan exogamy meant that each household was enmeshed in relationships with other households through ties of marriage, kinship, and obligations to residential and natal kin and clan segments. As Carballo (2011: 149-150) has noted in the context of highland Mesoamerica, the relationship between domestic economies and household composition should be viewed as “recursively entangled”. It has generally been thought that Wendat households were discrete economic units in which related women formed corporate work-groups. Vestibules at the ends of longhouses suggest that storage took place at the household level. However, the scheduling and pooling of simultaneous productive labor (e.g., Wilk, Netting, 1984) often extended beyond the household group. As such, analysis at the single household level is of limited value for most of the questions we might ask about power and production in Wendat society.

For many Native peoples in eastern North America, the town or community was the center of social and political life, and formed a core component of personal identity. Most definitions of community are informed by the phenomena that we seek to understand. In Iroquoian archaeology, the community is generally defined in socio-spatial terms (e.g., Yaeger, Canuto, 2000) as multiple co-residential households, articulating neatly with archaeological sites. My conceptualization of Iroquoian communities sees them as both flexible residential loci and fields for the negotiation

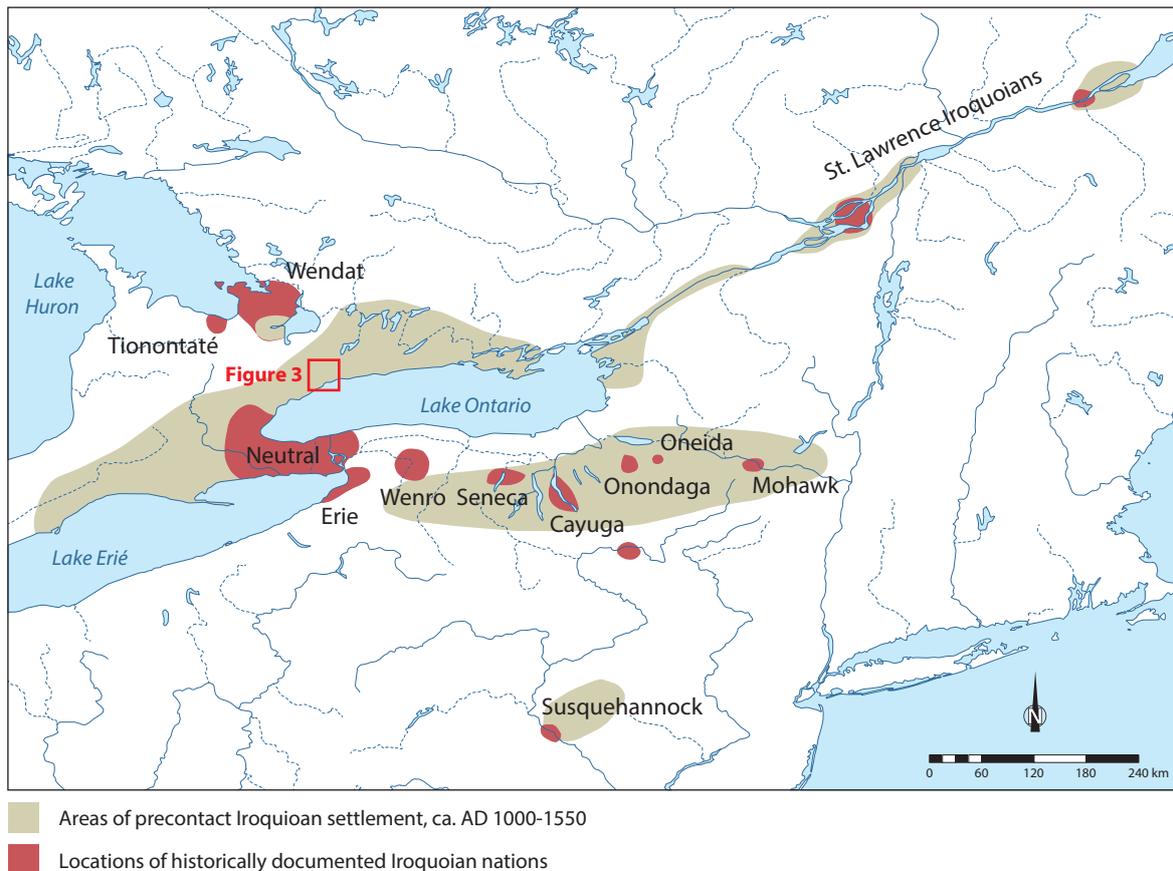


Figure 1 - Location of precontact and contact-era Northern Iroquoian societies in the Lower Great Lakes region (CAD: J. Birch).

of social identity and collective memory (Isbell, 2000; Pauketat, 2007: 107). Such an active definition injects agency and intentionality into community membership, permits the recognition of cooperating and competing interests, and helps to explain change over time, including within the occupational histories of individual settlements.

2 - Power and Production in Wendat Society

Iroquoian societies are commonly thought of as “tribal” and lacking complex forms of political and economic organization. Contemporary approaches to political organization eschew overly simple evolutionary frameworks of socio-political organization, embracing the multidimensional nature of power and authority in middle-range societies (e.g., Feinman, Neitzel, 1984; Cobb, 2003; Grinin, Korotoyev, 2011). Conceptual frameworks informed by collective action (e.g., Blanton, Fargher, 2008; Carballo, 2013) have demonstrated that ranked political structures may be generated from the bottom up, whereby power is relational, contextually specific, and negotiated in the context of fluctuating social, material, and historical conditions (Thomas, 2002; Brück, Fontijn, 2013).

Wendat culture included both influential leaders and powerful leveling mechanisms which reflected the importance of cooperative behavior (Tooker, 1964; Trigger, 1976). Ethnohistorically, representatives of each clan segment within a community were responsible for civil functions and external affairs. Ethnohistoric accounts name leaders with exceptional influence who represented their nations and, in at least one instance, the confederacy as a whole in their relations with foreigners (Trigger, 1985: 223-224). For the Wendat, power was gained by consensus-building,

rather than structural or wealth-based inequality. Some individuals who attained leadership positions possessed characteristics which met the requirements of the position or the community at particular moments in time. Certain chieftainships were also inherited, and the names, duties, and embodiment of key traits passed down within specific lineages (Thwaites, 1896-1901, 10: 235; Tooker, 1964: 43).

Archaeologists studying the Wendat have at times confused notions of hierarchy and rank (Jamieson, 2011: 1). This is particularly so when the archaeological record is interpreted in the context of Trigger's (1976, 1990) construct of Wendat society. While Trigger promoted the egalitarian ideals of Wendat society, he recognized that institutionalized and informal inequalities were also present, with Wendat chiefs and their families constituting an "economically and politically privileged group" (1990: 99).

Women wielded significant power in Wendat affairs (Lafitau, 1724: I: 66-67; Brown, 1970). Senior women of the clan selected and unseated leaders. Women also arranged marriages, binding clans, households and communities together to particular ends. Domestic structures, property, field systems, and the harvest all belonged to women; they produced the vast majority of a group's food, and were in command of the domestic economy. Women's status may have been asymmetrical in the same way that men's was. As consensus builders, mediators of conflict, transmitters of skills, and those in control of the domestic means of production, women's power was exerted in domains not always considered to be explicitly political. Discussions of Iroquoian political systems have predominantly focused on a top-down approach to classification and structure. My approach is decidedly bottom-up, focusing on how settlement aggregation, social integration, and changes in the production and consumption of the necessities of life, led to the development of new forms of organization and leadership in one Iroquoian community.

3 - Settlement Aggregation in 15th and 16th Century Iroquoia

Through six centuries of agricultural intensification and population growth, Iroquoian settlements evolved from small semi-sedentary bases where maize was grown on a small scale – to larger and more sedentary settlements where the contribution of maize to the diet reached 50-60% (Katzenberg *et al.*, 1995; Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 25-44; Pfeiffer *et al.*, 2014). A 14th-century population increase meant that by the early 15th century much of the north shore of Lake Ontario was populated by villages with populations of some 200-500 persons clustered along the major tributaries draining into Lake Ontario (Warrick, 2008).

Between 1450 and 1500, village sites became fewer in number, larger in size, and more widely spaced during a process of regional settlement aggregation. Some of the resulting settlements contained more than 1500 inhabitants (Finlayson 1985; Birch, Williamson 2013a). Connections engendered by the proximity of early fifteenth century communities – common resource extraction areas, trails, kinship, ceremony, and trade – influenced the amalgamation of groups sharing drainage-based territories. Heterogeneous ceramic assemblages suggest that aggregated villages also included people from farther afield (e.g., Ramsden, 1978, 1990; Birch *et al.*, 2017). Aggregated settlements contain abundant evidence for conflict, including defensive palisades, butchered human remains in middens, and burials exhibiting violent trauma (Engelbrecht, 2003; Williamson, 2007). Formative aggregates have palisades that were extended to accommodate new clusters of longhouses (figure 2). The extension of palisades suggests that aggregation occurred rapidly, within the average 15 to 30-year lifespan of settlements. The creation of large social aggregates generated significant organizational challenges for managing, ordering, and integrating populations (Birch, Williamson, 2013b).

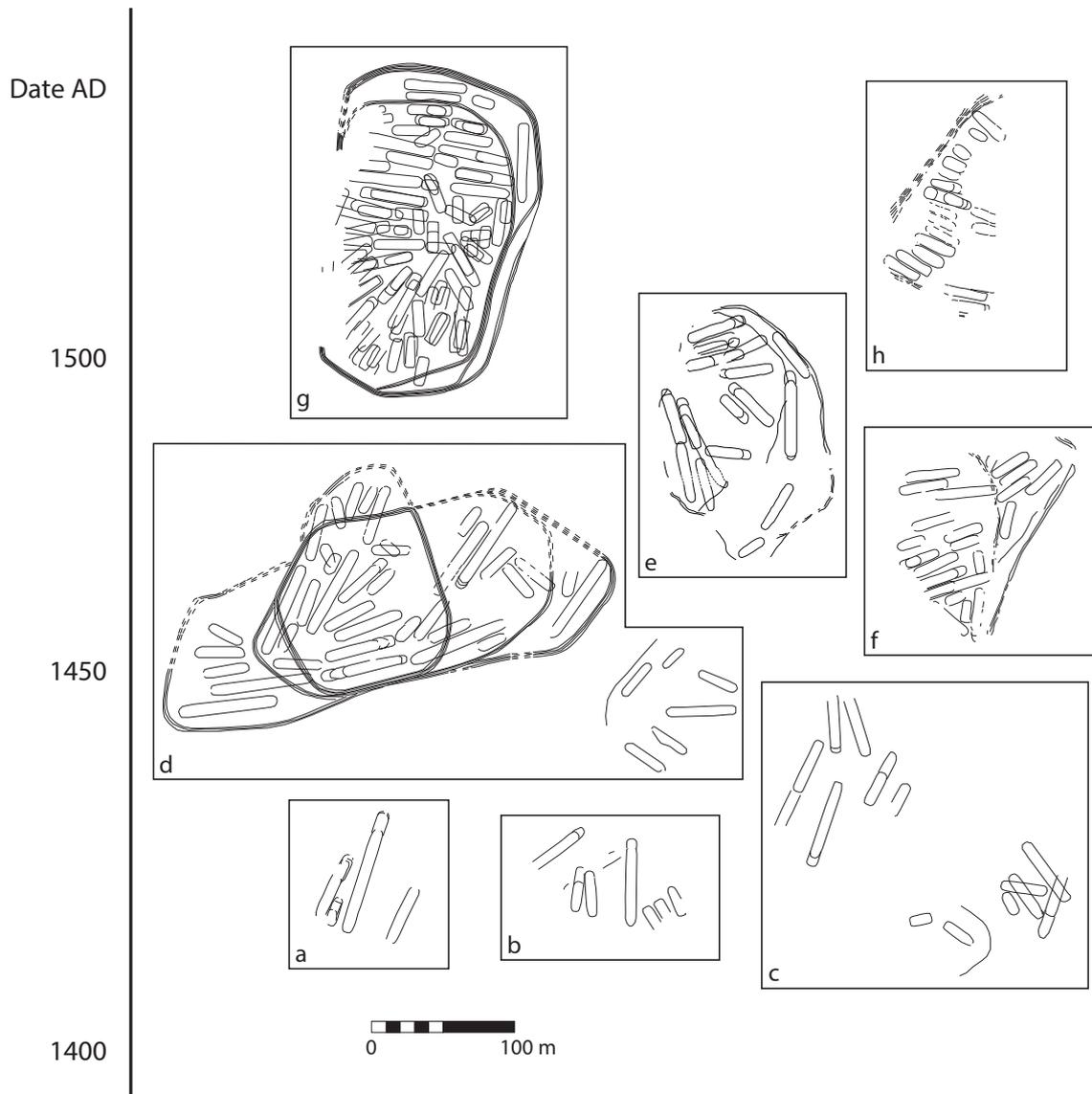


Figure 2 - Selected site plans, ca. AD 1400-1550. Pre-coalescent sites: a) Baker (ASI, 2006), b) Over (DPA, 1996); c) Hope (ASI, 2011). Formative coalescent sites: d) Draper (Finlayson, 1985); e) Keffer (Finlayson et al., 1987); f) Damiani (ASI, 2012). Consolidated coalescent sites: g) Mantle (ASI, 2014); h) Seed-Barker (Burgar, 1993).

4 - The West Duffins Creek sequence

In the mid-to-late 15th century, eight small village communities came together at the Draper site (Finlayson, 1985; Warrick, 2008: 136-137; Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 78). This community then relocated as a whole at least twice, to the Spang and Mantle sites, before continuing north to occupy later sites in the Holland River drainage (figure 3) (Birch, 2012; Birch, Williamson, 2013b). Of these, Draper and Mantle have been completely excavated and provide insights into how these communities were transformed during the process of coalescence.

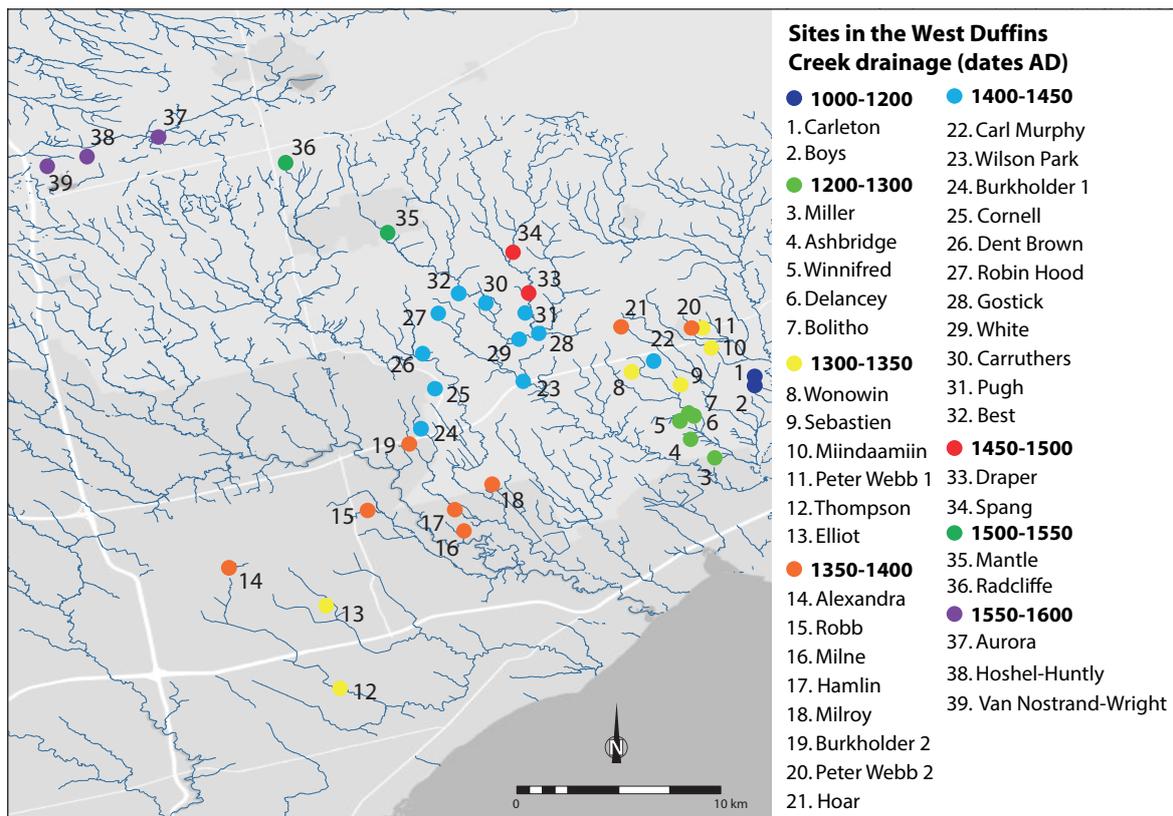


Figure 3 - West Duffins Creek site relocation sequence (CAD: J. Birch).

The Draper village began as a single cluster of aligned houses surrounded by a multi-row palisade. Over approximately twenty-five years that palisade was expanded on five separate occasions to incorporate new clusters of aligned longhouses and a maximum estimated population of some 1800 persons (Finlayson, 1985) (figure 4). Each of these longhouse groups retained a distinct spatiality, and likely a distinct identity within the village aggregate (Birch, 2012; Birch, Williamson, 2013ab). Historical documents indicate that the longest houses in a settlement belonged to community leaders and served as venues for council meetings and other gatherings (Trigger, 1976). Since each house cluster at Draper contains one such 'long' longhouse, each group may have retained distinct social and political functions. At the same time, while each longhouse cluster may have remained relatively autonomous, more formal means of social and political organization would have been required.

With aggregation, it is inferred that community segments and their representatives entered into negotiations over the configuration of infrastructure and space in densely packed enclosures, construction and maintenance of defenses, access to hunting territories, trade routes and trading partnerships, land tenure, participation in and control of feasts and ritual activities, internal ranking and selection of spokespersons, and other issues that required complex decision-making (Birch, Williamson 2013a). In pre-coalescent communities these functions were most likely managed by lineages or households (MacDonald, 1986; Warrick, 1996). At Draper, a village council would have been required to coordinate decision-making and resolve disputes between community segments.

The Spang site was occupied intermediately between the Draper and Mantle sites. It has only been subject to surface collection and limited excavations which revealed portions of five long-houses and a multi-row palisade. While the ceramic assemblage is consistent with its temporal and spatial occupation intermediately between Draper and Mantle, ca. AD 1475-1500, little is known about the spatial configuration of the settlement.

The community relocated again, as a whole, from Spang to Mantle, ca. AD 1500. While the Mantle community plan exhibits a more cohesive layout than Draper, the settlement had a dynamic occupational history. In the early phase of the site's occupation, houses were arranged in a more or less radial alignment around a single, open plaza (figure 4). Cross-culturally, plazas are socially integrative facilities and the Mantle plaza may have served both ritual and secular functions (Adler, Wilshusen, 1990).

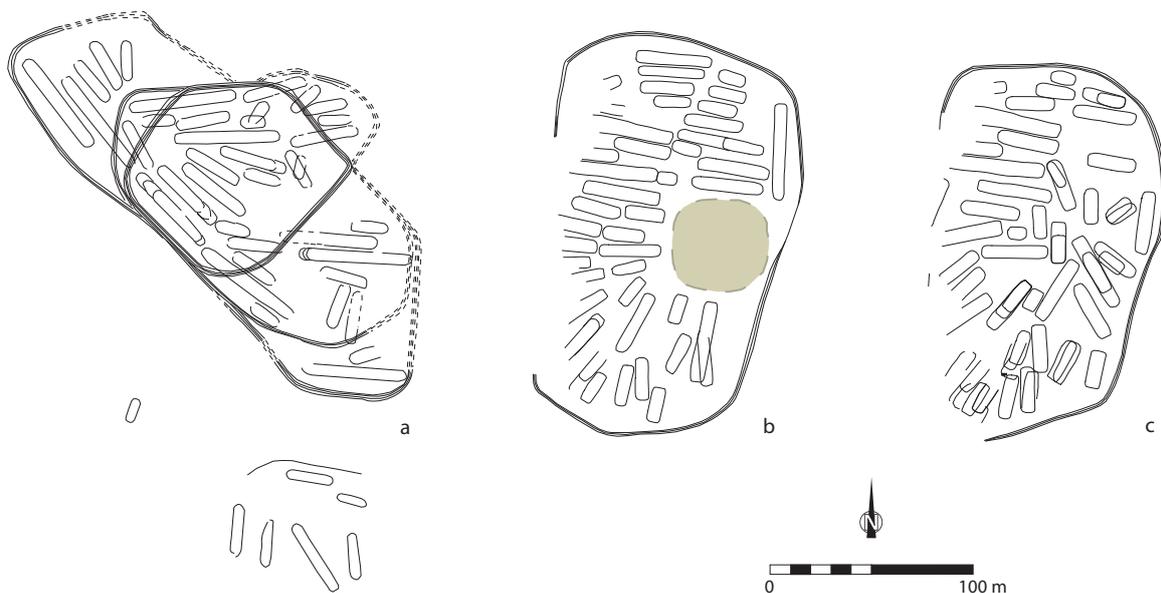


Figure 4 - Draper and Mantle site plans. a) Draper, maximal extent (after Finlayson, 1985); b) Mantle, early village; c) Mantle, late village (after Birch, 2010; ASI, 2014) (CAD: J. Birch).

At Draper, there are no material correlates that would suggest the existence of centralized political organization; however, we can infer that such practices must have existed or were developing. If we accept that the organization of space cognitively precedes its material expression (Rapoport 1994; Ingold, 2000: 186), we can infer that the negotiation of the integrated Mantle community plan was generated at Draper or at Spang. Indeed, one of the more insightful conclusions that can be drawn from this site sequence is that institution-building both preceded and continued to develop concomitantly with aggregated communities.

Houses 15 and 20 are two very long longhouses (>50 m), situated on the highest topographic portion of the site. These structures, and the smaller houses which closely flank them, have very high wall post densities compared to most other structures in the village, suggesting more frequent rebuilding or repair (figure 5). We can thus infer that they served an important and enduring function in the community (Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 72-73). It is possible that House 21, a small special-purpose structure appended to House 20 served as a storage facility. However, while Houses 15 and 20 persisted throughout the occupation of the site, the high degree of integration evident in the village plan did not. After approximately 10-15 years, the palisade was contracted and the plaza filled with structures (figure 4). This contraction occurred shortly after the abandonment of 5 to 6 houses in the northern portion of the village, thought to represent the departure of some 400 people; a group approximately the size of a pre-coalescent community



Figure 5 - Houses 15 and 20, with adjacent houses, Mantle site. Interpreted as the political center of the community (after Birch, Williamson 2013b: 70; CAD: J. Birch).

(Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 78). The palisade reconstruction also involved the creation of an earthen embankment, based on the presence of a borrow trench. While the elaboration of the palisade might suggest an increasing concern for defense, there is a dramatic decrease in human remains in non-burial contexts at Mantle compared to Draper. Evidence for an early 16th century decline in conflict is repeated across the north-west shore of Lake Ontario (Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 39).

Evidence for centralized decision making continues to be evident in the community's waste management system. At Draper, middens were deposited at the ends of houses, within the village precincts. At Mantle, an organized waste management system directed refuse out of the village. In the early phase of the site's occupation it was channeled into a large hillside midden. Later, waste was also deposited in the borrow trench. The collective adoption of this strategy implies either coordinated decision-making by the village as a whole or the imposition of the practice by those in positions of influence. Together, the central plaza, prominent residences, waste management system, and the reorganization of the community plan serve to materialize a more complex narrative of social and political relations than is apparent in earlier communities.

5 - Relations of power

Coalescence generated new political structures. While positions of leadership may have preceded coalescence, leaders who could build consensus and manage community affairs may have been especially important in larger villages. Kin groups with longer-lived ties to settlements may have achieved elevated status due to their relative emplacement within the community. In the context of population relocation in the US Southwest, Shachner (2012: 24) noted that local resources, rights, and decision-making were controlled by relatively stable individuals and groups, rather than by the community as a whole. In the case of the Draper-Mantle community, those households which formed the original core of the Draper community may have retained control of certain natural and political resources. Within the 17th-century Wendat confederacy, the founding nations of the Attignawantan and Attigneenongnahac, with the longest historical presence in Wendake, were accorded ceremonial and political seniority compared to the Arendahronon and Tahontaerenat, who were the last nations to join (Trigger, 1969: 20).

In New Guinea, Roscoe (2009) observed that in times of conflict, leaders emerged who were able to effectively organize community defenses. In both New Guinea and in Iroquoia, offensive action was generally undertaken by clans or groups of related men who sought to avenge deaths or injuries to kinsmen and achieve personal status, while defense was the concern of the entire group. While certain individuals came to the fore as leaders respected for bravery on the warpath, individuals may have emerged who were able to effectively organize and maintain village defenses.

Hastorf (1990) suggests that incipient leaders also advocated for the organization of labor and management of resources. Group members often recognize that they have a better chance of stability and increased quality of life with increased organization; granting leaders *the power to organize* as opposed to *power over the organization* (Hastorf, 1990: 149). The development and importance of male leadership did not eclipse women's power in the community.

6 - Relations of production

The production and consumption of material goods and the rearing and socialization of children are among the primary functions of the domestic group (Wilk, Netting, 1984). It would appear that the relations of production, as well as the socialization of children and the transmission of skills,

were scaled up from the household level to the community level in the Draper-Mantle community as the intensification of production placed increased demands on both men's and women's labor.

Based on carbon isotope analysis, maize constituted 60-65 % of the Mantle community's diet (Pfeiffer *et al.*, 2014). This figure is somewhat elevated compared to either earlier or later populations in the region (Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 94-95). This intensification of agricultural production may have led to changes in the social relations of production, as has been observed elsewhere in the context of coalescence (Kowalewski, 2006).

Clearing new agricultural fields was labor-intensive and may have provided a source of wood for the construction and repair of dwellings and village infrastructure. Historically, men performed these tasks. The recursive entanglement of men's responsibilities to their wife's household, their natal household, and to the community may have helped facilitate the pooling of labor at the supra-household level. Some degree of higher-level organization involving both sexes would have been required to make decisions about which fields were to be cleared, when exhausted fields should be abandoned, and who would reap the immediate benefits of new field systems. Women were responsible for the planting, tending, harvesting, and processing of maize and other cultigens, as well as gathering firewood and other resources.

The intensification of maize production may not have led to technological innovation (*sensu* Boserup, 1965), but rather, as Morrison (1994: 128) describes: "social innovation related to the organization of labor within or between social units, of scheduling, or of the social consequences of intensification such as changes in land tenure, dispute resolution, ownership, etc." The 'scaling up' of the scheduling and sequencing of labor from the household to the supra-household or community level may have been a temporary, adaptive response to aggregation in communities like Mantle. However, just as men's power may have been linked to the ability to organize for defense, women's power may have been linked to the ability to organize efficient responses to subsistence needs, as well as their role in hosting and organizing feasts and other communal activities (Bowser, Patton, 2010).

Stored food was one of the major forms of wealth for the community. Women controlled the distribution of foodstuffs which made major male activities possible, including council meetings, diplomatic travel, waging war, as well as ceremonial feasts and festivals (Brown, 1970; Hewitt, 1933). According to Brown (1970: 164), "[t]hese economic realities were institutionalized in the matrons' power to nominate Council Elders and to influence Council decisions". Wendat nations and communities also possessed public treasuries which contained furs, worked goods, and stored foods. Historically, these goods were used to develop diplomatic and trade relations and dispensed in community-wide feasts (Trigger, 1990). If these coffers started to empty, the community would be called upon to replenish them.

Estimates of deer densities and hide needs extrapolated as annual hunting territories for contemporary 15th and 16th-century communities on the northwest shore of Lake Ontario exhibit considerable overlap, which may have been one possible source of conflict (Gramly, 1977; Birch, Williamson, 2013b: 113-118). By the early 16th century, declining local availability of ungulates may have led hunters to be away from the village for extended periods of time. Relative percentages of mammal and fish bone in middens (Needs-Howarth, Williamson, 2010), together with depressed nitrogen isotope levels in the Draper-Mantle population compared to earlier villages on the north shore (Pfeiffer *et al.*, 2014) suggests that the community ceased exploiting lacustrine resources, focusing on intensification of maize and deer as primary economic activities.

If sufficient hides could not be acquired through mass-capture expeditions, they may have been acquired through trade with other Iroquoian or Algonquian populations. Evidence for increased interregional interaction and exchange comes from the diversity of non-local ceramics, pipes, and the presence of both Native and European metals at the Mantle site (Birch, Williamson,

2013a; Birch *et al.*, 2017). The increased importance of trade and the “ownership” of certain trading routes, may have generated new avenues for prestige and influence in community affairs. Redmond (1998) and Godelier (1986) have discussed how declines in warfare among horticultural societies in the Amazon and New Guinea resulted in the intensified pursuit of exchange relations, creating alternative pathways to leadership.

7 - Social learning

The intensification of production and increasing importance of long-distance trade may have placed new demands on male and female labor which required them to be outside, or away from, home for extended periods of time. In this context, there is some evidence that another key function of the household – social learning and craft production (Wilk, Netting, 1984) – may have shifted to more centralized organization at the community level.

Juvenile vessels are small or asymmetrical, poorly-formed ceramics that exhibit uneven wall thickness and drying cracks. These functionally poor vessels are thought to represent the work of novice potters and can be interpreted as evidence for both play and the transmission of technological knowledge and skill.

The 741 fragments of Juvenile ceramic vessels identified at Mantle represent less than 1% of the total ceramic assemblage (ASI 2014: 194). However, more than 50% of juvenile vessels that were not found in midden contexts came from feature fill around the east end of House 15 and from a refuse-filled depression associated with House 16 (figure 6). Similarly, the densest concentration of lithic debitage at Mantle was identified in features associated with Houses 15 and 25, within the same portion of the site (ASI 2014). Such distributions may be explained away as the result of taphonomic processes or refuse disposal. However, considered in light of the other evidence for changes in the social means of production, it is possible that these loci were venues for the transmission of knowledge about the production of ceramic and lithic technology (Crown, 2001; Smith, 2005). The role of adults as socializing agents and teachers in this process reflects the transmission of child rearing duties from the household to the community level. The fact that concentrations of these materials were found in association with what we have interpreted as the political center of the community – large, long-lived, prominently located longhouses – links leadership (or power) and production in ways that have not previously been identified in Iroquoian settlement patterns.

Conclusions

As people came together to form large, organizationally complex communities, new relations of power and production were generated. This involved significant changes in the domestic and political economy, the pooling and intensification of male and female labor, and the shifting of some domestic functions from the household to the community level.

Settlement aggregation was a catalyst in the formation of “tribal” nations. The importance of landscape features is reflected in the endonyms of seventeenth-century groups (Hart, Engelbrecht, 2012: 335), linking the crystallization of ethnic and socio-political identities to the formation of site clusters and aggregated settlements in the late fifteenth and early 16th centuries. The negotiation of community-based identities and complex organizational structures may have galvanized communities into formative nations as they met the social and political challenges of coalescence.



Figure 6 - Distribution of juvenile ceramic vessel fragments (IDW) (CAD: J. Birch, J. Fernandez).

However, the relationship between this process and the formation of the political confederacies of the seventeenth century is less clear. We are still unsure to what degree the formation of the Wendat and Haudenosaunee confederacies influenced one another and a thorough review of material evidence for interaction and patterns of political development in both regions is needed to elucidate this issue.

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