



Process and Meaning in Spatial Archaeology: Investigations into Pre-Columbian Iroquoian Space and Place

Edited by Eric E. Jones and John L. Creese. 2016. [University Press of Colorado, Boulder](https://www.upcolorado.edu/). xvii+238 pp., 27 figures, 24 tables, 7 maps, contributor notes, index. \$60 (Hardcover), \$48 (E-book), \$24 (30-day rental). ISBN 978-1-60732-509-3.

Reviewed by Timothy J. Abel, Consulting Archaeologist and Adjunct Professor, SUNY Canton, SUNY Potsdam, and Jefferson Community College.

Spatial archaeology has been around for a long time. Since the 1930s, it has been a useful approach to investigating the relationships of associated social groupings based on the contextual patterns of structure and/or material culture distribution both within and between sites. In the early days of what was then called settlement archaeology, researchers were most concerned with defining concrete social structures such as community, tribe, clan, or family. In the last half-century, however, these studies have taken a more relational approach, asking “what do these spatial patterns mean to the people who left them?” It is a question that requires a much broader look at not just settlement patterns, but at the ethno-historical record and modern oral traditions of descendant populations.

In this regard, the Iroquoian societies of greater northeastern North America are an excellent application for studies in spatial archaeology. Not only have these societies left a well-preserved archaeological record, but they are also referenced in abundant ethnohistorical sources and their descendant communities continue to contribute their knowledge of rich oral traditions. Iroquoian communities themselves tended to be short-lived (on the order of 10–20 years) and they moved only short distances (usually under a few miles), making each village a snapshot of contemporary material culture and social patterns.

The book opens with an introduction by the editors, Eric E. Jones and John L. Creese, which sets the tone of the volume and brings the reader “up to speed,” so to speak, with the history and current state of northern Iroquoian culture studies. Their task is of no small measure, as the volume of research over the past 170 years is enormous. Iroquoians were among the first indigenous North American groups to capture the interest of ethnologists, archaeologists, and museum specialists due to their power and influence in the colonial history of the continent. The authors do a good job of synthesizing this information into a format useful to both the Iroquoianist and non-Iroquoianist alike.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section deals with studies of intrasite spatial patterning, its relationship to ethnohistorically-documented social groups, and the relations of power between them. In the first chapter, Erin C. Rodriguez and Kathleen M. S. Allen discuss intra-household patterning within a Cayuga longhouse at the Parker site. They use lithic and ceramic distribution to define domestic spaces associated with compartments, hearths and bench lines; and communal spaces associated with vestibules. They

note a higher concentration of lithic debitage within the domestic spaces, most notably concentrated around hearths and the adjacent benchlines. They cite use-wear analysis of flakes to document use on soft materials, perhaps indicating hide-working. Formal lithic tools, however, were most densely concentrated in the communal area. Cutting and soft-material use predominated within communal areas. Pottery was uniformly distributed across all zones.

The chapter by Creese explores changes in settlement size, spatial patterning and social organization among 43 completely-excavated Ontario Iroquoian communities from AD 900–1500. He documents evidence of local Neolithic Demographic Transition (Bocquet-Appel 2002), a worldwide phenomenon associated with intensified food production, nucleated settlements and rapid population growth. He interprets changes in Ontario Iroquoian settlements through time as attempts to mitigate social stress associated with rapid population growth, more than with a mitigation of local conflict. Ontario Iroquoians maintained egalitarian social organization through sequential hierarchy, represented by the expanding longhouse.

The second section of the book deals with natural and social ecology within Iroquoian communities. Allen and Sandra Katz use the comparison of two roughly contemporaneous Cayuga communities, Parker and Carman, to document variability in the definition of what constitutes a “village.” Jennifer Birch et al. explore changes in a well-defined and researched sequence of Wendat villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario. They specifically ask, “How and why do communities coalesce?” Using ceramic data, they suggest that inter-community relations were peaceful until c. AD 1420, when community coalescence began. Large, fortified village communities appeared in the mid-fifteenth century that signaled a shift to more unstable social relationships between neighboring communities. Along with local community coalescence, there was also an influx of populations from the St. Lawrence Valley. By the sixteenth century, large, well-defined and organized “towns” dominated the landscape along with numerous other types of settlement. Ceramic designs were standardized across a broad region signaling a return to peaceful conditions.

Jones uses a GIS approach to explore the factors that influenced sixteenth–seventeenth century Haudenosaunee settlement choices. Among the factors that led the choice for settlement location, Jones finds distance from trade routes to be the most predictive. Beyond that, well-drained soil types were also an influencing factor in settlement choices, though not particularly loamy soils, as has often been assumed. While this model is demonstrated by the western Iroquois nations (Seneca, Cayuga and Onondaga), the eastern nations (Oneida and Mohawk) had distinctly different patterns of settlement choice concerned with less visibility, less sun exposure and less loamy soil availability. Distance to trade routes also appears to be less of a concern especially for Mohawk communities. Their position in the middle of both trade and strife between the colonies and the nations, may account for these differences.

The third and final section of the book deals with relationships among space, ethnicity, and identity. Crystal Forrest examines health and mortality among Northern Iroquoian infants and children, suggesting that variability among groups may repre-

sent differences in childrearing and approaches to health and healing. She finds similarity between the Wendat and Haudenosaunee, representing similar health circumstances and decisions across greater Iroquoia. Significantly, she found that while infant and child mortality spiked in the contact period, the lives of survivors was no more or less stressful developmentally than in precontact times.

John P. Hart and William E. Engelbrecht use social network analysis to model social interaction between the northern Iroquoian groups, challenging the notion of in-situ evolution within individual nations. Using ceramic data from the Onondaga, they found that design preferences signaled interaction with different groups through time. Early on, the Onondaga were signaling with Seneca potters, while later, they were signaling with eastern Iroquois. In the mid-fifteenth century, they were predominantly signaling with groups in Jefferson County. These signaling preferences continued into the sixteenth century with a general broadening across the Haudenosaunee. Were these merely alliances between clans or are they more than that? Data suggest that what we regard as “Onondaga” may have multiple origins in groups that only later came to co-reside and identify as Onondaga.

The book concludes with Ronald F. Williamson and Dean Snow’s assessment of the state of northern Iroquoian research. Of significant note, they discuss the growing collaboration of Canadian and USA researchers on the common problems of Iroquoian research and the fruitful outcomes it has produced. This has not always been the case, due in large part to the historic preservation priorities of both nations. Only in the past few decades have these priorities more-or-less aligned and common data have been assembled. That is not to say that disparities do not linger. Specifically, data from USA is much better synthesized than in Canada, leading to much better abilities to link Haudenosaunee material culture with cosmology, for instance. Conversely, there is much more data in Canada, owing to more systematic whole village and near-whole village excavations. More importantly, however, these collaborations have challenged long-held notions of ethnicity, identity and ethnogenesis. Once viewed as discrete ethnic entities, this volume shows that northern Iroquoian societies were complex, reflecting decisions made both individually and among various social groups. Agency-centered studies are becoming more common among Iroquoian researchers, a trend they view as healthy for the discipline.

The book is a must-read for any practicing or aspiring Iroquoianist because it brings northern Iroquoian archaeology into the twenty-first century. It will set the tone for the next generation of Iroquoian researchers and no doubt become a foundation for future research. Indeed, the studies in this volume have already spawned expanded inquiries (e.g., Hart et al. 2017). Northern Iroquoia offers an ideal dataset for the study of complexity in small-scale societies on the brink of urbanization. Individual villages represent snapshots of time to view continuity and change. As this volume demonstrates, there is wide variability in why, when, and how those societies developed, even throughout northern Iroquoia. The next few decades will surely produce a wealth of new data and insights.

References

- Bocquet-Appel, J.-P. (2002) Paleoanthropological Traces of a Neolithic Demographic Transition. *Current Anthropology* 43(4):637–650.
- Hart, J. P., J. Birch and C. Gates St-Pierre (2017) Effects of Population Dispersal on Regional Signaling Networks: An Example from Northern Iroquoia. *Science Advances* 3:e1700497.