

EDITORIAL: FOUR STUDIES IN ONTARIO IROQUOIAN PREHISTORY

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The content, length, and frequency of editorials vary considerably from one learned journal to another. Traditionally, a change in editorship is accompanied by an editorial in which the editor reviews the past and sets out directions and policy for the future (e.g., *American Antiquity* Volume 59, Number 1; *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* Volume 13, Number 1). The decision to write editorials in subsequent volumes rests with individual editors. The prestigious European journal *Antiquity* publishes elaborate, ten-page editorials in every quarterly issue. In some instances, editorials are significant contributions to the theoretical literature (e.g., Man: The *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Volume 27, Number 4). In others, they are short one-page "comments" or "notes" on technical matters (e.g., *Northeast Anthropology* Number 48; *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* Volume 17). My own preference for Ontario *Archaeology* is a format that allows for a brief introduction and discussion of the contributions appearing in the same number.

Readers will note that I have now introduced some of the changes I promised in the penultimate paragraph of my editorial essay (*Ontario Archaeology* 57:16). Professor David Smith and Robert MacDonald have kindly agreed to join me as Associate Editors. Their job is to assist me in the selection of appropriate peer reviewers, assessment of results, and decisions regarding the conditional acceptance or rejection of submitted manuscripts. The laborious task of helping authors revise their contributions, maintaining scholarly standards, and the line-by-line copy editing, remain my responsibility.

I believe the second enhancement I have introduced should make up for the greater burden it has placed on me and the delay it has caused in the publication of this number. I remain committed to the principle that criticism is absolutely essential in any discipline purporting to be a science and maintain that such criticism must be entered into a lasting, pub-

lished and archived record. A new policy now gives a peer reviewer the option of either remaining anonymous or revealing his/her identity. Should a manuscript be accepted for publication, authors are instructed to revise their original submission, and those reviewers who choose to reveal their identities are invited to prepare short comments on the final draft. In some cases, other scholars are also invited to comment. The authors then have an opportunity to prepare a short reply. Both the comments and the replies are appended to the paper and are published in the same number. Similar formats have been employed in other learned journals (e.g., *Current Anthropology*) with considerable success.

All of the papers appearing in this number deal with the Early and Middle Ontario Iroquoian periods. This concurrence is not the outcome of manuscript solicitation or other selectivity on my part. Rather, it is a happenstance resulting from the sheer number of contributors who have research interests relating to the prehistoric Iroquoians of southern Ontario and by the wealth of raw data and new opinions being rendered.

In the first paper, Mike Spence re-examines Jim Wright's suggestion that the Pickering peoples of central and eastern Ontario "conquered" their Glen Meyer contemporaries in southwestern Ontario. It will be recalled that Wright pointed to contrasting burial practices as evidence for a distinction between the two peoples. Spence summarizes the archaeological evidence for Early Ontario Iroquoian burials and suggests that Wright erred in approaching burial practices from a typological perspective, rather than as expressions of complex and dynamic mortuary programmes. He offers evidence suggesting that neither Pickering nor Glen Meyer had a uniform set of burial practices and argues that this raises doubts about their "social integrity," their ability to conquer or be conquered, and even their "reality" as sociocultural constructs.

In his comment on Spence's paper, Jim Wright defends his own hypothesis and states that "no cultural construct can be either validated or demolished by focusing upon a single cultural system such as mortuary practices." In his reply, Spence argues that "we should assign a certain degree of primacy to the mortuary data," since they indicate social networks. Meanwhile, Shelley Saunders asks for evidence to support the assertion that Ontario Iroquoians assigned burial practices a key role in sociopolitical integration. Spence responds with ethnohistoric evidence on Huron ossuary burial, although this seems to contradict his earlier caution that "we cannot simply project our understanding of Historic period practices back into the past."

I suspect that Glen Meyer and Pickering will not survive much longer as heuristic constructs and will be replaced as part of the inevitable change in nomenclature that accompanies paradigm shifts. I am not convinced, however, that enough evidence has been offered to sustain Spence's underlying assumption that a lack of cohesion in burial practices indicates an absence of social integrity. Besides, the Binfordian notion that mortuary programmes "reflect" social organization has recently been undermined by Ian Hodder and should no longer be considered axiomatic. These differences of opinion notwithstanding, all commentators agree that Spence's work is a significant contribution and, for the first time, assembles important mortuary data from a myriad of unpublished and published sources. The meaning Spence assigns to this data will undoubtedly engender more debate in the months and years to come.

The paper by Ronald Williamson and David Robertson examines the question of relationships between Iroquoian groups in the Great Lakes region and populations situated in the Mississippi River valley. The authors review and reject arguments proposed by other scholars who have attempted to link these two regions using "core and periphery" models and have attributed some of the most salient features of Iroquoian culture to diffusion from Cahokia or some other centre. Instead, Williamson and Robertson point to the scarcity of "Mississippian" artifacts and suggest that Iroquoians in southern Ontario interacted with peer polities within the Great Lakes region, and not with more highly structured societies to the south. They propose that the study of this

peer polity interaction is best accomplished if researchers abandon Jim Wright's classifications (including Glen Meyer and Pickering) and adopt a range of sophisticated approaches ranging from studies of settlement-subsistence systems to a symbolic analysis of ceramics.

In her comment on Williamson and Robertson's paper, Susan Jamieson insists that there is evidence of a diffusion of "Mississippian informational and ideological concepts" to the northern Iroquoians. In a defence of their original argument, Williamson and Robertson acknowledge the role of migration/diffusion, but add that "endogamous processes must not be overlooked in the search for the genesis of various aspects of Iroquoian culture." As with any debate on cultural diffusion, we will only begin to reach some consensus after those traits which could have arisen either through independent invention or earlier diffusion/migration have been isolated and withdrawn from the discussion. A good case in point are the black pebble pendants referred to by both sides. Although the inferential leaps in Williamson and Robertson's alternative model are not always clearly substantiated, the authors have produced an important critique of "core and periphery" models which, in their extreme forms, strike me as reminiscent of either the defunct German Kulturkreis school or the less dogmatic culture "centers" and "areas" of Clark Wissler.

The third paper reflects Ontario Archaeology's traditional commitment to publishing meticulous site reports detailing local environment, settlement patterns, artifacts, as well as faunal and floral remains. As Shaun Austin notes, the Iroquoian component of the Wilcox Lake Site has "begun to shed light on a previously unknown facet of the Early to Middle Iroquoian transition in south-central Ontario." His analysis demonstrates that it is possible to make substantive contributions to the published record even when less than two percent of a total site area has been investigated. Definite conclusions will, of course, have to wait until excavations are completed.

The final paper represents a departure from what readers of *Ontario Archaeology* have seen in the past. Colin Varley and Aubrey Cannon present data from three Middle Iroquoian villages in Simcoe County which have a longer average spacing between hearths and suggest that the same number of people

began living in larger houses. After considering a number of down-to-earth explanations which might account for this apparent phenomenon, they turn to symbolic reasons. Put simply, individual lineages built houses which were larger than necessary because the structures were symbolic expressions of social and political status and were designed to attract new members.

In her comment, Mima Kapches reminds readers that the identification of partitioned apartments is a prerequisite for any analysis of hearth spacing. Her own analysis of the same data presented by Varley and Cannon suggests that one house was a residence where familial ceremonies occurred," while another house, as well as being a residence, likely served a ceremonial purpose in the clan segment and the village." Gary Warrick admits that "Varley and Cannon have discovered something new in the archaeological record," but is not convinced by their interpretation and doubts that the prehistoric inhabitants were that bizarre in their behaviour." He suggests that the Huron may have increased the amount of floor space per person simply to overcome the chaotic effects of rapid population growth.

The fact of the matter is that Amerindians often *did* behave in what from a western vantage, might be described as a "bizarre" manner. Varley and Cannon's paper serves to remind us that human action often takes the form of symbolic expression, that materialist explanations are not always sufficient, and that a concern for the idiosyncratic is as important as the search for patterns. As such, it is the first hint of a mildly post-processual approach to appear in this journal. Varley and Cannon's interpretation is stimulated primarily by the theoretical literature. Kapches' interpretation is generated by an analogical argument in which ethnographic and ethnohistoric evidence is employed to illuminate archaeological data. Warrick's interpretation has recourse mainly to common sense. While the results appear quite different the approaches are not mutually exclusive.

I thank the six authors and five commentators who have published their data and opinions in this number. It is my hope that the precedent set here will inspire other contributors.