

*Settlement Aggregation and Geopolitical Realignment in the Northeastern Woodlands*

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Eastern North American archaeology has benefited from historicized approaches that seek to understand the relationship between the long-term emergence of social and political complexity, and the lived experiences of households and communities. This paper will draw upon archaeological and ethnohistoric datasets pertaining to Northern Iroquoian societies of the northeastern Woodlands to explore the relationship between the lived experiences of coalescence and broader shifts in the geopolitical fabric of Northern Iroquoia. Research shows that multi-linear adaptations and negotiations by local populations and newcomers occurred at various social and spatial scales.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries AD, Northern Iroquoian societies experienced simultaneous processes of endemic warfare and settlement aggregation. This was a period of significant geopolitical realignment, including the formation of nations, confederacies, and initial European contact. People came together into large, palisaded towns. In these towns, a greater degree of social complexity emerged, including “urban” planning, centralized leadership, and the intensification of long-distance exchange. While it has been known that these events occurred within roughly a century and a half (ca. AD 1450-1600) new data on community organization and Bayesian modeling of AMS dates from across southern Ontario provide a refined chronology for these events, which permit more detailed explanations of the historical trajectories of politogenesis in Iroquoia.

The picture that emerges is one of increasing political complexity, which fostered the formation of strong horizontal links in the context of a highly segmented society. At the same time, archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence points to a significant degree of asymmetry in socio-political relations, both at the community level and within the Wendat confederacy council.