

The Huron-Wendat and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians: New Findings of a Close Relationship

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This paper summarizes the archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence for relationships between the Huron-Wendat and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. There is overwhelming archaeological and oral history evidence that Iroquoian groups living in the St. Lawrence River valley allied themselves with and were politically incorporated peacefully, in large numbers and over a long period of time, into the Huron-Wendat Confederacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, effectively making them Huron-Wendat and giving weight to the Huron-Wendat knowledge that the St. Lawrence River valley is ancestral Huron-Wendat territory.

Introduction

The Ontario Archaeological Society held its annual symposium in October 2015, in Midland, Ontario, the heart of Wendake in the early seventeenth century. It was a memorable conference because most of the presented papers answered some aspect of Huron-Wendat questions related to archaeology, linguistics, and history. Furthermore, dozens of members of the Huron-Wendat attended.

One of the symposium sessions, “The Huron-Wendat Nation and St. Lawrence Iroquoians: Their Origins and Relations,” was organized in collaboration with the Huron-Wendat Nation to investigate the archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence for the relationship between the Huron-Wendat and St. Lawrence Iroquoians. To most participants in the session, and certainly to the Huron-Wendat in attendance, the implied question was: Should St. Lawrence Iroquoians be considered ancestral Huron-Wendat? More than three centuries worth of Huron-Wendat oral history consistently identifies the St. Lawrence River valley as ancestral Huron-Wendat territory (Gaudreau and Lesage, this volume; Lainey 2006; Richard, this volume;

Sioui 1999; Sutton 2015). Archaeologists, however, have consistently identified the archaeological remains left behind by Iroquoian peoples in the St. Lawrence River valley as “St. Lawrence Iroquoian,” implying that these people were culturally and politically distinct from the Huron-Wendat (e.g., Birch 2015; Chapdelaine 2004; Pendergast 1985, 1993; Tremblay 2006; Warrick 2008).

A key paper in the session, by Mariane Gaudreau and Louis Lesage, questioned the very ability of archaeologists to identify ethnic and political groups or nations of Iroquoian peoples in northeastern North America. And archaeologists were reminded by the words of Louis Lesage,

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Michel Gros-Louis (2015), and other Huron-Wendat attendees that St. Lawrence Iroquoians are their ancestors and have never resigned their ancestral territory. This discussion paper will summarize the archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence for Huron-Wendat and St. Lawrence Iroquoian relationships, and it will argue that there is overwhelming evidence that Iroquoian groups living in the St. Lawrence River valley allied themselves with and were politically incorporated peacefully, in large numbers and over a long period of time, into the Huron-Wendat Confederacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, effectively making them Huron-Wendat and giving weight to the Huron-Wendat knowledge that the St. Lawrence River valley is ancestral Huron-Wendat territory.

The St. Lawrence Iroquoians Never “Disappeared”

Iroquoian people living in longhouse villages were observed by the first French explorers of the St. Lawrence River valley in the early sixteenth century. Archaeologists named these people St. Lawrence Iroquoians, based on their distinctive pottery, pipe, and other artifact types and their geographical location beyond the seventeenth-century “homelands” of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee (Pendergast and Trigger 1972). Archaeological evidence demonstrates a 2,000-year record of continuous Iroquoian settlement of the St. Lawrence River valley, ending c. A.D. 1580 (Gates St-Pierre 2015). The “disappearance” in the late sixteenth century of the people who later became referred to as St. Lawrence Iroquoians is said to be one of the “archaeological mysteries” of northeastern North America. However, these Iroquoian-speaking people never actually disappeared; they simply shifted the location of their communities throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, ultimately joining the Huron-Wendat and other Iroquoian and Algonquian groups (Tremblay et al. 2015). Recent archaeological discoveries demonstrate that, beginning in the fifteenth century, segments of St. Lawrence Iroquoian communities, perhaps families or clan segments, moved to ancestral Huron-Wendat communities and that such long-

distance movement of community segments to join with others should be regarded as a standard decision by Iroquoian planners (Williamson, this volume). In other words, many of the Iroquoians of the St. Lawrence River valley are ancestral Huron-Wendat.

The first documented face-to-face encounter between Europeans and Iroquoian-speaking peoples occurred on the Gaspé coast in late July 1534. On various voyages between 1534 and 1542, Jacques Cartier encountered Iroquoian-speaking peoples living in longhouse villages on the St. Lawrence River. Jacques Noel reported no Iroquoian-speaking people living on the banks of the St. Lawrence River in 1585 (Tremblay 2006). Samuel de Champlain did not mention any Iroquoian villages along the river during his first voyage in 1603, but as early as 1609, Champlain described—as Sagard and Le Jeune did in 1624 and 1634, respectively—annual encounters for commercial, diplomatic, and customs purposes of Huron-Wendat groups in the St. Lawrence River valley, notably in the Québec and Saguenay regions (Biggar 1922-1936; Champlain 1973; Le Jeune 1897; Sagard 1998). Archaeological work on St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in Jefferson County, New York State, eastern Ontario, and Quebec has recovered few artifacts of European origin, and none dating after 1580 (Chapdelaine 2004). Oral history from the Huron-Wendat in the early seventeenth century reports warfare between various ambiguously identified Indigenous nations on the St. Lawrence River in the time before 1603. This information has led historians and archaeologists to conclude that the St. Lawrence Iroquoians “disappeared” or that they “abandoned” the St. Lawrence River valley and their ancestral homelands in which, as noted by Gates St-Pierre (2004, 2015, this volume), they had lived since at least Middle Woodland times (c. 500 B.C.).

Various scenarios have been proposed for how and why these people moved from the St. Lawrence River valley in the sixteenth century. They include climate change and famine, warfare (as the result of either traditional blood feud or access to European trade), and epidemics of European diseases. These scenarios have been

summarized by Chapdelaine (2004) and Tremblay (2006) and recently re-evaluated by Birch (2015) and Tremblay et al. (2015). The current consensus of archaeological opinion seems to be that the long-distance relocation of St. Lawrence Iroquoian communities in the sixteenth century occurred because of warfare, possibly with other St. Lawrence Iroquoians (Chapdelaine 2004) and/or with the Mohawk, Oneida, and Onondaga (Engelbrecht and Jamieson, this volume; Kuhn 2004). Between 1540 and 1580, St. Lawrence Iroquoians appear to have relocated their communities over time, moving gradually from the west to the east down the St. Lawrence River, with the final St. Lawrence Iroquoian settlement being Stadacona (Chapdelaine 2004; Dermarker et al., this volume; Engelbrecht 2004; Jamieson 1990; Tremblay et al. 2015). St. Lawrence Iroquoians joined Huron-Wendat communities in the Toronto and Trent River valley regions of Ontario (as allies); Algonquian communities in the Ottawa River valley; Abenaki communities (as allies or refugees) in Vermont; and Oneida, Onondaga, and Mohawk communities of eastern New York State (as refugees or captives) (Abel, this volume; Engelbrecht 2003; Kuhn 2004; Pendergast 1999; Tremblay 2006; Wonderley 2005).

While there is no archaeological evidence for village settlements of Huron-Wendat (i.e., St. Lawrence Iroquoians) in the St. Lawrence River valley between 1580 and the beginning of the seventeenth century, this does not mean that the Huron-Wendat were not hunting, fishing, and trading in the St. Lawrence River valley. Small hunting and fishing camps are notoriously difficult for archaeologists to find and identify, especially in the historic period (Warrick 2005). In other words, there is no definitive archaeological proof that the Huron-Wendat (i.e., St. Lawrence Iroquoians) ever fully “abandoned” the St. Lawrence River valley. Certainly historical accounts place the Huron-Wendat on the St. Lawrence River valley in 1609. As for settlement, as early as 1637, some Huron-Wendat families established their new home at the newly founded Sillery Mission near Québec City (Delaporte 1769; de Villeneuve 1762). From the 1650s

onward, successive contingents of Huron-Wendat established villages in the Quebec region, representing a “re-establishment” of Huron-Wendat settlement in their ancestral lands (Gaudreau and Lesage, this volume; Labelle 2013; Tremblay et al. 2015). In 1654, the missionary François Le Mercier estimated that the population of Huron-Wendat in Quebec was between 500 and 600 persons (Le Mercier 1899). The village of Wendake was finally established in 1697. In addition to the Huron-Wendat resettlement of Quebec, the Mohawk established the Kahnawake and Kahnésatake villages in the Montreal area, in 1667 and 1675 respectively, perhaps partially motivated by Huron-Wendat who were living amongst the Mohawk and who could trace ancestry to the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and wished to return to their ancestral homeland (Lozier 2014).

Oral histories of both the Huron-Wendat (Richard, this volume) and Mohawk identify ancestral homelands in the St. Lawrence River valley, and today both the Huron-Wendat and Mohawk consider the St. Lawrence River valley as ancestral territory (Gaudreau and Lesage, this volume; Lainey 2006). When we take into consideration all of this information, it is clear to us that the Iroquoians of the St. Lawrence River valley never disappeared.

Archaeology of Huron-Wendat and St. Lawrence Iroquoians

In addition to Huron-Wendat oral history recognizing pre-European, ancestral ties to the St. Lawrence River valley, there is abundant archaeological evidence that St. Lawrence Iroquoian communities joined Huron-Wendat communities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Considerable quantities of distinctive St. Lawrence Iroquoian pots and pipes have been excavated from some mid-fifteenth-century village sites in the Toronto region (Warrick 2008; Williamson, this volume). Large amounts of St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery and pipes have also been found on several sixteenth-century Huron-Wendat villages in Ontario (Warrick 2008:196-198). Research in the Balsam Lake area

of south-central Ontario by Peter Ramsden (1990, 2009, this volume) has revealed that the nation of the Arendarhonon, a recognized Huron-Wendat nation, was created in the sixteenth century from four diverse groups – Huron-Wendat from the lower Trent River valley and north shore of Lake Ontario (the latter argued to be from the Oshawa area by Williamson, this volume), Algonquians from Haliburton or the Ottawa River valley, and St. Lawrence Iroquoians. In sixteenth-century villages, European trade goods associated with St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery suggest strong trade connections to the St. Lawrence River valley (Ramsden 2009). By combining the percentages of St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery and pipes from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Huron-Wendat sites, it has been estimated that at least 1,000 St. Lawrence Iroquoians, from an estimated total population of 8,000–10,000 (Tremblay 2006; Warrick 2008:194-198), joined the Huron-Wendat between 1450 and 1580, comprising as much as 30 percent of the population of the Arendarhonon (Warrick 2008:196-198). Algonquian peoples from the Ottawa River valley, such as the Onontcharonon, overwintered with the Arendarhonon in the seventeenth century, occupying a twinned village with the latter at Cahigué in 1615. Oral history and archaeological evidence suggest that some St. Lawrence Iroquoians also became Onontcharonon, which helps to explain the close relationship of this group with the Arendarhonon, who also included St. Lawrence Iroquoian descendants (Fox 2016; Pendergast 1999).

Considering that archaeological studies in Attigéneongnahac territories are less extensive than for other Nations of the Huron-Wendat Confederacy, one should expect that the presence of St. Lawrence Iroquoians in these sites may be more important as such studies will be carried out in the future.

Huron-Wendat Ethnogenesis, Identity, and Archaeology

The formation of the Huron-Wendat confederacy took place over two centuries and involved the political union of four distinct nations of Iroquoian people (Birch 2015, 2016; Williamson

2014) and members of some Algonquian nations through intermarriage (Fox 2016; Pendergast 1999; Ramsden, this volume). Archaeological work in Ontario, Quebec, and New York State has documented discrete clusters, sometimes termed “homelands” of Iroquoian settlements, typically depicted as “islands” separated from other clusters by dozens of kilometres on maps of northeastern North America. Working on the assumption that these settlement clusters represent the homelands of nascent Iroquoian nations, archaeological sequences of villages have been traced, documenting centuries of settled occupation of relatively small areas (Birch 2015; Birch and Williamson 2015; MacDonald 2015; Williamson 2014, this volume).

Pottery, pipes, and other artifacts are used by archaeologists as ethnic markers of Iroquoian nations, following the concept of V.G. Childe’s (1929) archaeological cultures. The presence of “foreign-looking artifacts” in an Iroquoian site is commonly interpreted as the product of trade, warfare (captives), refugees, alliance formation, or copying. Independent evidence can sometimes help to identify the precise process that contributed foreign artifacts to a site’s deposits. In the Trent valley Huron-Wendat village sites, for example, detailed analyses of the intra-site distribution of St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery and pipes has been interpreted as the presence of political allies or refugees (Ramsden 2009, this volume).

Ethnic linguistic markers are commonly used to distinguish the complex diversity of Iroquoian language spoken around the Great Lakes and along the St-Lawrence River. For linguists, there are several sound sequences that differentiate Huron-Wendat from St. Lawrence Iroquoian, and recent studies corroborate these distinctions by suggesting that each group spoke a different Iroquoian language or dialect (Steckley 2009, 2012, this volume). Between 1623 and 1624, the Recollect Brother Gabriel Sagard spent long days observing and describing the life and times of the Huron-Wendat in the region of Georgian Bay (Sagard 1998), and he notably wrote a Huron-Wendat-French dictionary. Linguistic analyses of his dictionary entries clearly demonstrate that at

least one of Sagard's linguistic informants was speaking words that came from a dialect spoken by the St. Lawrence Iroquoians (Steckley 2012, this volume). The person (or persons) who presented these words to Sagard was St. Lawrence Iroquoian, living at significant distance from their related territory and describing how they saw the political landscape (Steckley, this volume). This person was living peacefully in these villages and had acquired a respected social ranking, considering this person's role of privileged informant to an honoured guest such as Sagard.

Identity and ethnicity are very difficult, if not impossible, to determine from archaeological remains (Chrisomalis and Trigger 2004; Gaudreau and Lesage, this volume). Ethnicity, politics, class, religion, genealogy, race, gender, and history can form the basis of a person or group's identity, but there may be minimal material signifiers of this identity. Nonetheless, ethnogenesis, that is, tracing the history of formation of contemporary ethnic and Indigenous groups, has become an area of intense research interest for archaeologists (Hu 2013; Voss 2015; Weik 2014). Archaeologists have attempted to trace the ethnogenesis of Northern Iroquoian nations, based on chronological change and continuity in pottery and settlement patterns, but results have been disappointing (Birch 2012, 2015, this volume; Dermarker et al., this volume; Engelbrecht 1999, 2003; Hart and Engelbrecht 2012). The Iroquoian nations encountered and identified by European visitors in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, which we now refer to as Northern Iroquoians, seem to have emerged from a complex and organic socio-political landscape, characterized by a rhizomatic pattern of coalescence, disappearance, creation, and long-distance movement of diverse language and ethnic groups for more than 2,000 years (Fiedel 1999; Hart and Engelbrecht 2012).

Most recently, both the Huron-Wendat Confederacy and Haudenosaunee Confederacy were created by the merger of diverse groups of people from a number of Algonquian and Iroquoian nations, primarily but not exclusively during the geopolitical upheaval that happened in the mid-seventeenth-century Northeast in response to extreme depopulation from European

disease and intensified warfare to secure captives to replenish numbers (Brandao 1997; Heidenreich 1990). In fact, it is fair to say that modern Iroquoian nations are an amalgamation of a number of different Indigenous groups and subject to continual redefinition and changed continuity of national and ethnic identity (Ferris 2014). Indigenous peoples resist definitions of indigeneity. Instead they use self-identification as the main criterion for who they are as First Peoples of the land.

The Huron-Wendat and the Wyandot are viewed by most archaeologists and historians, provincial and federal governments, and some Indigenous neighbours as "diasporic people" who "abandoned" their southern Ontario "homeland" in the 1650s, "dispersing" to Quebec, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Michigan (Anderdon). The words "diaspora," "dispersal," and "abandonment" are inaccurate and harmful misinterpretations of Huron-Wendat concepts of geopolitics and ancestral territory, and the use of these words could lead to governments dispossessing Iroquoian peoples of their land. For the Huron-Wendat, their ancestral territory comprises lands in south-central Ontario, upper New York State, the St. Lawrence River valley, and the nearby regions. Villages were established and moved within territories for ecological, economic, and political reasons (Birch 2015; MacDonald 2015). From the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, the size and location of communities were relatively stable and tethered to certain watersheds (Birch and Williamson 2015), but between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, communities fissioned and fused with others, sometimes moving large distances (Birch 2015; Warrick 2008; Williamson 2014). The nations of the Huron-Wendat that were encountered by the French in what is now Simcoe County, Ontario, were descended from diverse peoples who formerly lived in villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario and along the St. Lawrence River (Ramsden, this volume). The seventeenth-century French observation of a lack of villages in large parts of ancestral Huron-Wendat territory does not mean that Huron-Wendat had relinquished those territories beyond the densely settled northern Simcoe

County. Quite to the contrary, the seventeenth-century Huron-Wendat utilized ancient village and field areas as hunting and resource harvesting zones (MacDonald 2015), and travel corridors and trade routes were maintained and protected throughout the larger territory (Trigger 1990). In fact, Huron-Wendat traders welcomed the French on the St. Lawrence River in the early seventeenth century. New historical analysis has revealed that the so-called geographical “dispersal” of Huron-Wendat in the seventeenth century was not the “destruction” of the Huron-Wendat, but a planned strategy by the Huron-Wendat to maintain geopolitical influence, notably with their French allies (Labelle 2013). Today, the Huron-Wendat state that re-establishment of a village near Quebec in 1651 was simply a long-distance move from one place to another in their ancestral territory, effectively a return “home” to one of their ancestral village sites (Stadacona, of 100 years previous) (Gaudreau and Lesage, this volume; Lainey 2006). Furthermore, the contemporary absence of a Huron-Wendat settlement in Ontario has not prevented the government of Ontario from recognizing Huron-Wendat rights, interests, and cultural heritage to ancestral sites in Ontario (*Hiawatha First Nation et al. v. Ontario* 2007; Kapches 2010; Pfeiffer and Lesage 2014; Williamson 2010).

Archaeologists and the Huron-Wendat

Over the past two decades, archaeologists in Canada have been collaborating more and more with Indigenous communities (Nicholas et al. 2011). As a result of conversations with their Indigenous partners, archaeologists are increasingly coming to view archaeology as a colonial discipline, serving the hegemonic goals of the nation states in which they work and sometimes unintentionally causing harm to Indigenous communities (Hutchings and La Salle 2015; Supernant and Warrick 2014). While decolonization of archaeology is the new “call to arms” (Atalay 2012; Nicholas 2006), most archaeologists work for private land developers under government legislation – a rather difficult position from which to decolonize the system

(Hutchings and La Salle 2015; cf. Williamson 2010 for exceptions in southern Ontario).

In fact, archaeologists work in the same system that continually denies Indigenous peoples rights to land and traditional resources and encourages contested claims amongst Indigenous nations to lands that have centuries-old historical and archaeological evidence of use by different Indigenous peoples (Williamson and MacDonald 2015). Sometimes archaeologists find themselves as expert witnesses in legal battles between provincial and federal governments and Indigenous peoples over rights to lands and resources and cultural heritage (Martindale 2014). Archaeological evidence is seen by judges and lawyers as scientific, objective, and independent of the potential bias of colonial documents or Indigenous oral history.

However, archaeologists must be careful to stay within the bounds of their data. Archaeologists are very good at mapping, measuring, analyzing, and dating the material remains of the past. And in agreement with Christopher Hawkes’s (1954) “ladder of inference,” archaeologists are quite good at reconstructing aspects of past technology, economy, and settlement patterns, but less able to reconstruct aspects of past socio-political life and, in the absence of text-aided direct historic analogues, generally poor at reconstructing aspects of past mindsets, such as religion and ethnic identity. Archaeologists must resist making pronouncements on the ethnic identity of contemporary Indigenous peoples because they are not qualified to do so (Chrisomalis and Trigger 2004).

Indigenous people know best who they are and where they came from. Increased involvement of the Huron-Wendat in the archaeology of their ancestors, in the planning and shaping of archaeological projects, in orienting future research, and in the writing and publishing of revisions of previous histories based on misinterpretations of archaeological data is an encouraging trend in the Huron-Wendat reclamation of their past.

Conclusions

The session entitled “The Huron-Wendat Nation and St. Lawrence Iroquoians: Their Origins and Relations”, held in Midland, Ontario, which was part of the traditional Huron-Wendat territory in the early seventeenth century, was designed to investigate the archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence (oral and text) for the relationship between the Huron-Wendat and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. To most participants in the session, the implied question was: What is the evidence for the St. Lawrence Iroquoians being ancestors of the Huron-Wendat? In paper after paper, the evidence documented close connections between the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and Huron-Wendat from the early fifteenth century to the late sixteenth century. Based on archaeological evidence, the relationship between St. Lawrence Iroquoians and Huron-Wendat appears to have been peaceful. By the late sixteenth century, it is estimated based on artifactual evidence that at least 1,000 St. Lawrence Iroquoians had joined Huron-Wendat communities (Warrick 2008:195-197), likely as allies who refused to merge politically with the Haudenosaunee (Five Nations Iroquois). By the early seventeenth century, St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery and pipe designs had been transformed into Huron-Wendat styles, but St. Lawrence Iroquoian linguistic elements persisted until at least the 1620s in Wendake (Steckley, this volume). By 1650, St. Lawrence Iroquoian descendants apparently no longer needed to signal their ethnic identity and had become Huron-Wendat, yet Huron-Wendat oral history preserves the memory of St. Lawrence Iroquoian ancestors as well as the utilization of the St. Lawrence River valley, a traditional territory vastly larger than the seventeenth-century historic Wendake of Simcoe County, Ontario, where their ancestors welcomed French explorers, traders, and missionaries into their homes.

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Cet article résume les preuves archéologiques, historiques et linguistiques des relations entre les Hurons-Wendats et les Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent. Il existe d'abondantes preuves archéologiques et d'histoire orale démontrant que les groupes iroquoiens vivant dans la vallée du fleuve Saint-Laurent, en grand nombre et pendant une longue période, se sont alliés et se sont intégrés politiquement et pacifiquement à la Confédération des Hurons-Wendats aux quinzième et seizième siècles, faisant ainsi d'eux des Hurons-Wendats et appuyant la connaissance huronne-wendate que la vallée du fleuve Saint-Laurent est un territoire ancestral huron-wendat.

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