

Paléo-Québec 35




Mailhot-Curran un village iroquoien du XVI^e siècle

Textes réunis sous la direction
de Claude Chapdelaine

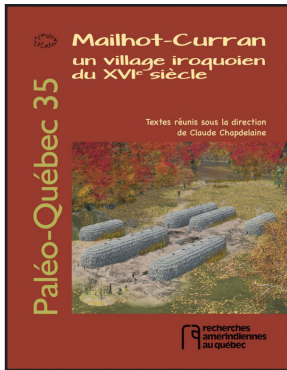


 recherches
amérindiennes
au québec



Le site Mailhot-Curran est un village iroquoien occupé durant la première moitié du XVI^e siècle. Une population estimée à 200 personnes répartie dans six maisons-longues pratiquait l'agriculture du maïs complétée par les haricots et les courges. Ce village, construit sur trois étroites terrasses du côté nord d'une crête morainique, occupe une position défensive à plus de 9 km du fleuve Saint-Laurent. Les fouilles archéologiques étalées sur 15 ans ont permis la récupération de dizaines de milliers d'objets. C'est grâce à l'étude du style et de la forme de la poterie domestique que nous avons pu confirmer l'identité culturelle des habitants. Ils étaient des Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent et ils partageaient la même trajectoire culturelle que les Iroquoiens décrits par Jacques Cartier à Québec et à Montréal. Cet ouvrage est la première publication sur un site villageois iroquoien depuis 25 ans au Québec. Le site Mailhot-Curran s'avère un établissement amérindien de grande importance qu'il faut continuer à protéger car il n'a pas livré tous ses secrets. L'enquête présentée dans ce livre est multidisciplinaire et elle implique des chercheurs de plusieurs sciences qui ont tous le même objectif, faire parler les données archéologiques pour comprendre les comportements des Iroquoiens de Mailhot-Curran.





Mailhot-Curran: un village Iroquoien du XVI^e siècle

Edited by Claude Chapdelaine. *Paleo-Quebec 35, Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*. In French, 412 pages, 110 figures, references, supplemental DVD. \$23.00 (paper), \$15.00 (digital).

Reviewed by Clare Tolmie, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

This volume presents preliminary results of the University of Montreal Department of Anthropology's investigations at the site of Mailhot-Curran, a sixteenth century Iroquoian site in the Saint Anicet region of Quebec, in uplands south of Lac St Francois on the St Lawrence River. A forthcoming publication containing the final analysis of the site and its temporal and cultural relationships with two earlier sites, McDonald (14th century) and Droulers (late fifteenth/early sixteenth century), is planned for release in 2018. Radiocarbon and OSL dates indicate an early to mid-sixteenth century occupation. An early sixteenth century date may be supported by the absence of any European trade goods via indirect trade.

Chapters include the history of previous investigations; environmental setting; cultural setting; remote sensing and systematic survey of the site; soil geochemistry (characterizing physical and chemical signatures of hearths, storage pits and middens); detailed descriptions of the six excavated longhouses and associated features; material culture (ceramics, lithics, bone tools, pipes); subsistence (faunal and floral remains); radiometric and OSL dates; and the site within the larger cultural setting. A supplemental DVD contains full artifact inventories, maps, plans, illustrations, and other material. (Given that many newer computers do not have DVD drives, a link to an online database could be useful).

The village site is in an unusual location, at some distance from the St. Lawrence and not associated with any major tributary of the river. There are no obvious remnants of defenses, unlike some other known sites of the period in the region which are surrounded by palisades. In contrast, the location is interpreted as a form of defense, chosen deliberately to serve as protection from the raiding and warfare endemic in the sixteenth century.

The six longhouses that form the site are located on three terraces, two houses per terrace. The excavations focused on longhouse interiors to elucidate social organization and longhouse-focused activities. The editor and authors are explicit that their interpretation of site organization and material culture present are to be considered in light of the absence of excavation of external areas of artifact production and the variation in the degree of excavation coverage of each longhouse. Throughout the text it is apparent that the highly effective housekeeping of the inhabitants of Mailhot Curran has obscured much of the spatial patterning; although items accidentally lost under benches or trodden into the area around hearths provide some indication of spatial patterns and social organization within and between the separate houses.

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Organization of internal and external space, and potential social relationships, was analyzed primarily via the ceramic assemblage of vessels, miniature vessels, and pipes. The vessel assemblage is highly fragmented, and analysis focused on choices by potters in decorative motifs and collar form and height. Using ethnohistorical analogy, the authors argue for a gendered production of ceramics, where women produced vessels and men produced and used pipes.

Lithics at the site follow the pattern of other later Iroquoian sites, with a lower proportion of chipped stone tools and an increased proportion of bone tools. The majority of lithic raw material is local but four exotic cherts are present: Onondaga, Kchisipi, Leray, a translucent brown chert, plus a quartzite, all in the form of finished tools rather than debitage. The groundstone assemblage is rich in mortars and grinding stones, which is argued to show a focus on agriculture over hunting, but this interpretation ignores the importance of fauna for raw materials such as hides, and not for protein alone. Bone tools present include awls, maize strippers, chisels and knives, projectile points, and a cup and ball game. Absent are needles, fishing equipment, and bone pipes. Bone tools are manufactured from faunal elements acquired as part of the general subsistence practices of the inhabitants of the site.

Mailhot Curran contains floral and faunal assemblages typical of a prehistoric agricultural settlement. Deer and beaver are the major sources of animal protein, and deer and beaver also supplied the raw material for bone tools. Very few bird or reptile species are present, which, given the location of the site, and the use of a variety of environments for subsistence, requires more explanation. Cultigens include maize, beans, sunflower, and squash. Maize dominates the assemblage and the majority of non-cultigens are succulent fruits. Tobacco is absent, probably because of destruction by combustion and limitations in recovery techniques.

Spatial analysis is used to examine social and economic organization, using differences in the distribution of ceramics and different motifs to indicate the presence of at least two clans at Mailhot-Curran—one in Longhouses 1 and 2, the other in Longhouses 3 and 4. The richest artifact assemblage is from House 2, interpreted as representing greater political influence for any chief selected by the occupants. The population was likely matrilineal and matrilocal, but the proportion of males at the site appears low, if pipes can be taken as a proxy for the presence of the male gender. This section of the report would be strengthened by a stronger discussion of taphonomic processes that resulted in the primary and secondary deposition of material. If the refitting of sherds between houses is used to indicate social relationships, a discussion of how such material was spread between the houses would be welcome.

In summary, this is a detailed report on the results of excavations at the site of Mailhot-Curran focusing on the presentation of results and artifact distribution with implications for social organization. The forthcoming study that incorporates data from Mailhot Curran with data from other sites in the region and addresses larger research questions will be of interest to those studying the development of Iroquoian societies and the pressures that led to population movement and abandonment of certain regions in the late sixteenth century.