

# AT HOME IN THE ILLINOIS COUNTRY

*French Colonial Domestic Site Archaeology  
in the Midwest 1730–1800*



Robert F. Mazrim



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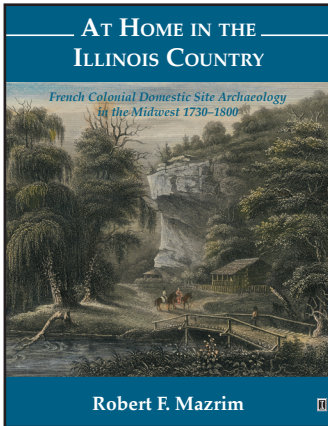
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## At Home in the Illinois Country: French Colonial Domestic Site Archaeology in the Midwest 1730–1800

Robert F. Mazrim. 2011. Studies in Archaeology No. 9, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois. xix+247 pp., 255 figures, 2 tables, references. \$37.50. (paper).

*Reviewed by Ashley A. Dumas, Black Belt Museum, University of West Alabama, Livingston.*

In this volume, Robert F. Mazrim draws from recent and previous archaeological excavations, supplemented with his thorough knowledge of history and material culture, to synthesize what is known to-date about domestic life in the eighteenth-century French colonial Illinois Country. The book contains four parts and a total of twelve chapters. Part I, “Historical Context,” is a brief but fine introduction to the history and archaeology of the Illinois Country combining prior research with Mazrim’s own analysis of historical documents. Chapter 1, “Introduction to the Illinois Country,” provides a brief history of the colonial period in the region to serve as a context for the archaeological sites. Mazrim advises that a thorough social history of the region is not the point of the book (p. 5), but this chapter provides to anyone unfamiliar with the Illinois Country a sufficient understanding of the larger political and economic forces at work and of their effects on certain towns in particular. In an overview of Cahokia, Chartres, and Prairie du Rocher, the places in which recent archaeology has occurred, we learn of the unique settlement patterns of Illinois Country towns as well as their histories and relationships with native inhabitants. Mazrim’s recent work to overlay historical town maps with modern ones proves to be a critically important tool for understanding the developmental histories of these places and for locating potentially undisturbed archaeological remains. The two location maps in this chapter—the map of colonial sites (Figure 1.2) and the map of settlement regions (Figure 1.3)—probably could have been combined into a single map, and the addition of a map showing the relationship of the Illinois Country to other French territories in Eastern North America may have better complemented the text. In Chapter 2, “Reconsidering French Peoria,” Mazrim writes the first comprehensive study of the Peoria sites, the Old and New Villages, including the results of new historical research that pieces together the chronology of settlements. The ambiguous, sometimes contradictory evidence for the location Henri de Tonti’s 1692 Fort St. Louis II and its proximity to what became known as the Old Village is an interesting puzzle examined in this chapter.

Part II, “Archaeological Synthesis,” includes a chapter on the common and most diagnostic artifacts of eighteenth-century French colonial sites—earthenwares—followed by a synthesis of all material culture from domestic contexts. Due in part to the large samples of artifacts recovered and analyzed in the last decade, Chapter 3 is “a summary and reconsideration of French pottery typologies” (p. 6), specifically tin-glazed and lead-glazed earthenwares.



Historians may find this chapter to be beyond their interests, but any French colonial archaeologist will find the information indispensable. Mazrim reviews existing studies and typologies of faience and lead-glazed pottery and assesses them in light of new data from Chartres and Cahokia collections. Among the results are his decision to dissociate plain white faience and some previously defined rim styles from specific regions of manufacture. His reasoning and close analysis are convincing in light of his knowledge of the history of faience scholarship and the centers of French pottery manufacture, which allows him to deconstruct and revise existing typologies into more conservative groupings. Accompanying this study are many color photos with informative captions, though the level of classifying detail is unfortunately inconsistent for the remainder of the book's artifact photos. Mazrim reminds us that the material goods on remote colonial sites often are more reflective of the economy and trade at the origins of manufacture than they are of cultural choices made by colonial consumers.

Chapter 4, "Archaeological Signatures of French Households in Illinois 1730–1800," is the heart of this volume. The chapter may have worked well as the final summary for the book, but by presenting it before the individual site reports, the readers, especially those who may have no interest in the following individual site reports, have a material culture context to serve as a comparative reference. Mazrim describes five well-preserved and thoroughly excavated houses that reveal common eighteenth-century French building techniques and some intriguing variations. He also assembles an inventory of the less frequently examined yards of domestic sites, which may reveal servants' houses, cisterns, privies, wells, and boundary fences. The synthesis of other material objects in this chapter provides information on their types, forms, frequencies, probable origins, and archaeological contexts. Despite their remote location, it appears that Illinois settlers' patterns of consumption were affected by world events, advances in technology, availability, and choices made by merchants many miles distant. The heterogeneous French and Native American population also affected the nature of material assemblages, though Mazrim cautions that assigning ethnicity to artifacts from French colonial contexts is difficult, if not futile. Each of the sites analyzed in this volume has a unique material emphasis reflective of its function and/or longevity. The author is able to show that there was a gradual decline in "traditional French" goods, such as faience, and in overall material diversity, in favor of mass-produced, widely available products.

It is not common that archaeologists have an opportunity, outside of gray literature, to provide detailed descriptions of multiple excavations and collections, such as we find in Part III, "New Excavation Reports," and Part IV, "Site Summaries and Special Studies." Chapters 5 through 8, respectively, report the recent excavations at the Duckhouse and Gammon sites in Cahokia, Old Peoria, and the Jarrot Nordique site in the Cahokia Wedge. Each includes an overview of excavations and a description of significant features and artifacts, arranged by material class and function, and when possible, an analysis of artifact distribution patterns. It is notable that the Peoria excavations are the first to successfully locate intact deposits at the Old and New Villages, in part due to Mazrim's study of land office records. Four additional sites in the region were located or reinterpreted because of his successful overlay of a 1766 map with modern maps of



### *Book Review*

Cahokia. The important results of this marriage of historic research and archaeology are twofold: Mazrim demonstrates that there are plenty of intact eighteenth-century French deposits, even if located in modern backyards and along rights-of-way, and these deposits often are linked to the families who built the houses and lived there. Placed in Part IV, Chapters 9 through 12 present re-analyses of previously excavated sites and results of newly analyzed collections at the Trotier (at Cahokia), Laurens and Ghost Horse (at Chartres), and Louvier (at Prairie du Rocher) sites, respectively. The report on a collection from the Laurens site may serve as a significant resource for identifying pre-1760's components in the region, while the Louvier analysis will do the same for post-1770's assemblages. Mazrim's review of a remarkably complete chain of title for a lot at Chartres makes a compelling link between the property and the Ghost Horse site, one the few still occupied during the British period.

Mazrim's original research elevates this volume from a simple overview of sites to a scholarly synthesis of the material world in French colonial homes. His scrutiny of patterns in the rich material record reveals a correlation with varied ethnic, economic, and political conditions of the region. Further, Mazrim's use of primary documents to locate and interpret archaeological remains lends this book broader significance as an example of quality historical archaeology. The value of so many large, color illustrations cannot be understated, such that a copy of this book will be well-placed in laboratories as a comparative reference for interpreting contemporaneous artifacts and features. A copy on the office shelf will be an oft-used comprehensive guide to understanding the history and nature of domestic life in eighteenth-century Illinois Country.