

An Introduction to the Archaeology of Francophone Communities in the Americas

ELIZABETH M. SCOTT

For many who live in the United States, the importance of the French colonial past to their sense of cultural identity goes largely unacknowledged and certainly unappreciated. Anglo-centric histories pervade the national consciousness, incorporating other Euro-American, Native American, and African pasts only as exotic sidebars. Even for Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, where language, food, music, religion, and kinship make visible the cultural traditions of a vibrant French heritage, what predominates in the national narrative are the myths and stereotypes (Dawdy and Weyhing 2008; Rees 2008).

In Canada and the circum-Caribbean, with large, recognizable communities of ethnic French, African-French, and Métis (Native American and French heritage) descendants, that colonial past is well known and very much alive in the present. Since the end of the Seven Years War, the Anglo-dominated Canadian government has attempted to incorporate Québécois and Anglo-Canadian concerns, sometimes more and sometimes less successfully. However, in Canada's national narrative, an idealized Old World French colonial past essentially ignores the importance of the post-Conquest French population to Canada's history (Auger and Moss 2001). French Guiana and the French West Indies have remained part of France, first as colonies and then as overseas departments. However, in the French circum-Caribbean, the traumatic histories of Native depopulation and plantation slavery have hindered the expression of more truthful and inclusive national narratives (see Kelly, this volume). Both Canada and the French circum-Caribbean are dealing today with divisions and conflicts that have their roots in the French colonial past.

Perhaps surprisingly, so is the United States. In addition to initial French conquest and displacement of Native peoples, the French enslavement of both Native Americans and Africans began a process that continued for more than 200 years. After the Seven Years War, what had been French colonial communities in North America underwent colonization by Spain and Britain and later by the early American republic. Multiple waves of invasion, resistance, and accommodation occurred in a large swath of the interior United States, creating increasingly heterogeneous societies and class, ethnic, and racial tensions with which the United States still grapples today.

The authors in this volume are concerned with French-speaking communities in the New World past, whether they existed under French, British, Spanish, or American political regimes. Some authors focus more on ethnic French members of the community, others on African Americans, and still others on Native Americans. Even after they no longer had access to goods made in France, heterogeneous communities existed in these places for generations, were culturally French and French American, and clearly distinguished themselves from other communities that followed different cultural traditions.

This collection reveals new understandings of communities of French heritage in the New World, drawing on archaeological and historical evidence from both colonial and post-Conquest settings. Prior to the individual chapters, this introduction provides historical and geographical background and situates the volume's contributions in the context of previous archaeological research into the French in the New World (see overviews and collections by Kelly and Hardy 2011; Moss 2009; Moussette and Waselkov 2014; Scott 2008a; Walthall 1991; Walthall and Emerson 1992; Waselkov 1997, 2002).

PLACE AND SPACE

The New World colonies established by the French comprised a far-flung arc of settlement, from the northeastern tip of Labrador, to the Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley, to the Caribbean and the north coast of South America. With the exception of the Caribbean plantation islands, the wide geographic breadth of French America was only thinly populated by Europeans, and yet that population enjoyed a remarkable degree

of cohesion, arguably more than did British America. The component that held this largely interior French colonial world together was river travel. French colonists on the mainland of North and South America settled nearly exclusively along waterways, maintaining frequent interaction between people in widely dispersed towns, villages, missions, and trading posts. Rivers and the Great Lakes were crucially important lines of communication, supply, and transportation, for people and for goods. Fur traders and voyageurs spent most of their lives moving along these waterways; settled farmers, plantation owners, and merchants depended on them to move goods and produce (Vidal 2005); families relied on them to bring letters, relatives, and any number of imported goods. While fewer in number than the British colonists, French settlers nonetheless made their presence felt on the landscape and on Native groups through a wide range of settlement types, economic and social networks, and successive generations of habitation.

Settlement on the Landscape

The French placed many of their settlements near those of Native groups, for many of the same reasons (arable land, proximity to water, key intersections of roads or paths), but also so that they might have easier access to furs, hides, and souls to convert, as well as easier control over colonized subjects (Zitomersky 1994). Archaeologists have investigated a variety of Native settlements occupied during the French colonial period, primarily towns and villages (Guevin 1984; Lennox and Fitzgerald 1990; Morse 1992; Pastore 1994; Trubowitz 1992) but also hunting camps (Walthall et al. 1992) and settlements near missions (Branstner 1992).

Archaeologists and historians have revealed ethnic French settlement types that run the gamut from dispersed to highly concentrated, depending on the local economy and topography. Colonial towns and villages often had a grid pattern of streets, with houses fronting the streets and fenced or walled residential lots stretching behind them, reflecting town plans from France (Moussette and Waselkov 2014:270). The cities of Québec and Montréal saw the densest concentrations of people in French North America, and archaeologists have revealed a diverse set of contexts in which they lived: government officials' residences (Auger et al. 2009; Goyette 2009), religious properties (Lalande 1998; Pothier and Simpson

2001; Simoneau 2008a), and neighborhoods full of businesses and residences (Bain et al. 2009; Cloutier 1997, 2009; Desjardins and Duguay 1992; Ethnoscop 2003; L'Anglais 1994, 1998; Moss 1998).

Agriculturally based settlements sometimes concentrated dwellings and public buildings in a village, with agricultural land divided into traditional French long lots outside or surrounding the village (Ekberg 1998; Mazrim 2011; Norris 1991). Individuals also established single-family farms, primarily along the St. Lawrence River, such as at Cap Tourmente (Guimont 1996) and Île aux Oies (Coté 2005; Moussette 2008, 2009a). In addition, farmsteads and plantations were established on long lots fronting rivers, with property stretching from the riverbank to the blufftop or interior forests. These ribbonlike or “strip” farms were frequently found in rural areas along the St. Lawrence and Detroit Rivers and in the western Great Lakes (Heldman 1991, 1999:306–307). In the lower Mississippi Valley, larger plantations, still linear in orientation, extended from the river's edge to interior forests or swamps (Mann 2008a; Markell et al. 1999; Waselkov and Gums 2000:63–90). In both regions, the main residential dwelling was located near the river, the primary thoroughfare for goods, communication, and people. On the Gulf Coast, Caribbean islands, and the north coast of French Guiana, plantations were self-contained economic and residential systems, including a main house, slave quarters, agricultural outbuildings, fields, and often industrial buildings such as sugar refineries, cotton gins, and indigo processing facilities (Bain et al. 2011; Kelly 2008, 2011; Waselkov and Silvia 1995). Plantation economies also saw towns and cities develop, revealed in the neighborhoods and businesses excavated in New Orleans (Dawdy et al. 2002), in Mobile (Waselkov 2002), and in Basse-Terre on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe (Arcangeli 2015).

Fur-trading posts and military forts, at times one and the same, were established at locations most conducive to trade with Native groups, for example, at the junction of water or land transportation routes or where Native groups were settled or traditionally gathered. Archaeologists have explored variation among household contexts within these trading posts and found evidence for socioeconomic, occupational, and ethnic differences (Heldman 1973; Heldman and Grange 1981; Lapointe 1985; Nassaney 2015; Nassaney et al. 2007; Scott 2001a; Somcynsky 1982; Waselkov 1984). The French constructed other forts primarily for military purposes,

and strategically located them to usurp and defend what they claimed as French colonial holdings, vis-à-vis other European and Native American groups. Examples include Fort Pentagoet (Faulkner and Faulkner 1987), Fortress Louisbourg (Fry 1984), Saint-Louis at Québec (Cloutier and L'Anglais 2009), Fort Chambly (Beaudet and Cloutier 1989), Fort Niagara (Dunnigan and Scott 1991), and Fort de Chartres (Brown and Mazrim 2010; Jelks et al. 1989; Keene 1991).

Colonists built other kinds of settlements for extracting resources, usually clustered near the resource itself and therefore somewhat removed from heavily populated areas. Individuals or small groups of voyageurs built single cabins in the forests for the winter, to trap animals themselves or obtain furs from Native groups (Birk 1991). An industrial village was established at Forges du Sainte-Maurice, outside of Trois-Rivières, to mine and process iron ore (Beaudet 1979; Samson 1998). In the middle Mississippi Valley, a village grew up south of Ste. Genevieve along the banks of the Saline Creek, to extract salt from the springs there (Trimble et al. 1991). Hundreds of French colonists fished and processed cod, working year-round on seigneuries along Grand Pabos Bay on the Gaspé Peninsula (Nadon 2004) or on the coasts of Labrador (Auger et al. 1993) and Newfoundland (Turgeon 1998). French colonists and enslaved Native Americans and Africans extracted lead ore, often in shallow deposits, in a mining district in eastern Missouri, settling near the mines or along the water and wagon trails used to transport the lead (Schroeder 2002). Coarse earthenware pottery workshops were concentrated in the St. Lawrence River valley of southern Québec, tied to the location of suitable clay deposits (Monette et al. 2007).

Mission settlements, present in all parts of the French colonial empire, were located near existing Native towns and villages and often preceded the forts and towns of ethnic French colonists (Zitomersky 1994). Frequently, these missions were well delineated spatially so that clergy, soldiers, Native residents, and enslaved Africans lived and worked in separate, controlled spaces (Brown 1978; Kidd 1949; Le Roux et al. 2009; Walthall and Benchley 1987). In French towns and villages, church property was clearly demarcated, and parish priests usually lived in households within that property (Gums and Witty 2000).

Economic and Social Ties

Economic and social networks also varied considerably throughout the French colonies. From the beginning, ethnic French colonists depended on Native peoples for furs and hides, and archaeologists have long been interested in the trade and interdependency that developed (Brown 1992; Martin 1991; Moussette 2009b; Nassaney 2008; Trigger 1986). Often economic and social networks were one and the same, such as the kinship networks established by marriages between Native women and French traders and voyageurs, through which both societies participated in the fur trade (Brown 1980; Peterson 1985; Van Kirk 1983). Besides agricultural work on plantations (e.g., Mann 2008a; Markell et al. 1999), enslaved Africans and Native Americans labored in many different contexts, such as shipbuilding and shipping, mining, salt production, fur trading and trapping, construction and carpentry, craft production, and service in household, office, and religious settings. Throughout Canada and Upper and Lower Louisiana, merchants and traders depended on French, Métis, and Native men to provide the water transportation and communication that supported the entire economic system, via canoes, pirogues, and other watercraft (St-Onge 2013). Such intensive interaction between ethnic French, Native Americans, and African Americans fostered exchange of information, customs, and ideas (Silvia 2002; Turgeon 1996; Waselkov 1992), seen archaeologically, for example, in foodways (Carlson 2012; Dawdy 2010; Martin 2008; Pavao-Zuckerman 2007; Reitz and Waselkov 2015; Scott and Dawdy 2011) and technology (Anderson 1994; Ehrhardt 2005; Fitzgerald 1988; Galloway 1984; Mann 2015; Morgan and MacDonald 2011).

French settlers also depended on other ethnic French men and women of different economic classes for labor and employment. Even in small villages, where it could be argued that most settlers enjoyed a middling degree of wealth, people made distinctions among themselves in house construction, material possessions, and food and drink, borne out in numerous excavations of French households (e.g., Archéotec 2003; Cloutier 2004; Crépeau and Christianson 1995; Evans 2001; Gums 2002; Mann 2010; Mazrim 2011). Social networks among urban, military, and plantation elites, especially networks maintained through marriage, functioned to keep wealth and power segregated from the majority of colonists, even as colonial regimes ended or changed (Gitlin 2010; Reda 2013).

Heterogeneity and Interdependence

Although relatively homogeneous in terms of religion (dominated by Catholicism), as revealed in the many missions and churches that have been excavated, as well as the numerous religious medals, rosaries, and crucifixes that have been recovered (e.g., Gums et al. 1991; Rinehart 1990), French colonial communities were heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, class, and gender. Different regions of the New World were colonized by ethnic French settlers through a variety of means: private individuals or companies, religious orders, royal colonial administrators, and military installations. Each of these encouraged or required settlers to emigrate from France; settlers came from different regions in France and different economic classes, with different reasons for leaving France (Brasseaux 2005:1–84).

While official French colonies in the New World were Catholic, groups of French Protestants, or Huguenots, also settled throughout the Americas. Fleeing religious persecution in France, especially after the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, they established small communities in British (Protestant) colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America and in the Caribbean. Archaeological excavations show that Huguenots built their houses in traditional French *poteaux-en-terre* (posts-in-ground) style; indeed, this was one of the few material indicators of an ethnic French household in a British colony (Steen 2002).

The ethnic heterogeneity of French colonial society is often emphasized by scholars, especially when contrasting French and Anglo-American colonies, and this is usually attributed to a greater willingness by the French to marry or form lasting unions with Native Americans and with free and enslaved Africans. However, this was not the case throughout the French colonies, and where it was the case, economic and other factors often had much to do with intermarriage as well.

To a certain degree, the willingness to mix with those who were not French resulted from the importance the French government initially placed on religious and civil *francisation* (Frenchification) of Native Americans as a necessary part of the colonization process (Belmessous 2005). After learning how to become culturally “French,” Native people could be converted to Christian souls. Once Native people had become French and Catholic, they were acceptable as marriage partners and godparents for ethnic French settlers, and indeed, early in the colonization process,