

Edited by Douglas Bamforth

James River Chiefdoms: The Rise of Social Inequality in the Chesapeake. MARTIN D. GALLIVAN, 2003. The University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. xvii + 295 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-8032-2186-X.

Reviewed by Christopher B. Rodning, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

This book describes the formation of sedentary villages in the James River Valley of Virginia and reconstructs the landscape that was present when Europeans and native peoples first encountered each other during the 1500s and 1600s. Documentary sources suggest that many seventeenth-century native societies of the Coastal Plain near the Chesapeake Bay were chiefdoms, but traditional archaeological indicators of chiefdoms (such as settlement hierarchies and monumental architecture) have been difficult to identify. Gallivan develops creative approaches to this problem, and his study of the long-term evolution of villages in the James River Valley adds much to knowledge about chiefdom development during the century before and after European contact.

The James River runs through several environmental zones, including the Ridge and Valley, the Blue Ridge, the Piedmont, and the Coastal Plain. Chapter 2 describes the environment and summarizes the archaeology and ethnohistory of each province. Chapter 3 outlines an approach to domestic life and social dynamics in aboriginal villages that focuses on subsurface pits (storage pits, roasting pits, hearths, burials), and on the designs and arrangements of houses (represented by elliptical or circular posthole patterns).

Chapter 4 differentiates short-term, seasonal encampments (most of which predate A.D. 1200) from long-term, permanent villages (which generally post-date A.D. 1200) based on the characteristics of structures and subsurface pits. Structures and pits at the several dozen sites included in this study are assigned to specific periods—including Middle Woodland (500 B.C.–A.D. 900), Late Woodland (A.D. 900–1500), Protohistoric (1500–1607), and Contact (1607–1646)—with reference to radiocarbon dates and an absolute ceramic seriation. Gallivan then estimates the numbers

of potsherds that a household would have generated in a year, with reference to examples of village and household assemblages from excavated sites in the North Carolina and Virginia Piedmont. These cases enable him to estimate the numbers of households present at sites from the numbers of sherds found in subsurface pits. Before A.D. 1200, settlements comprised one to six households. After A.D. 1200, both sedentary villages (with 10 to 14 households) and lesser settlements (with four to eight households) were present. These changes in the James River Valley landscape shaped native responses to European contact.

The emergence of sedentary farming villages during the thirteenth century altered the practice of domestic life, and Chapter 5 describes evidence of these changes. Domestic structures are larger and more diverse after A.D. 1200, and there is an apparent shift from outdoor to indoor storage pits. Some large houses are associated with high storage pit volumes relative to house size. These trends indicate that some distinctions in wealth and status did develop within Late Woodland villages along the James River, setting the stage for more pronounced differences among households after A.D. 1500. Chapter 6 shows that villages dating from 1200 to 1500 are more compact than those of earlier and later periods, as reflected in spacing between houses, and in the presence of stockades. Chapter 6 also describes variation in domestic architecture that may reflect differences between chiefs' and commoners' houses.

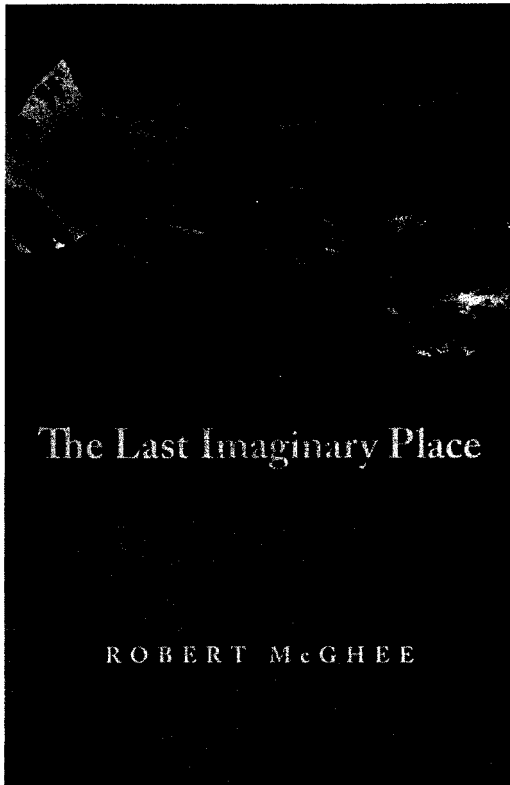
Architecture and other forms of material culture vary only gradually from one part of the James River Valley to another during the Middle and early Late Woodland periods, but Chapter 7 demonstrates discrete differences from the 1200s to 1600s in ceramics, lithic raw materials, and houses at sites in coastal areas, on one hand, and in the Piedmont and Ridge and Valley, on the other. This border between Late Woodland material culture areas corresponds to the social boundary between Algonkian groups of the Coastal Plain and Monacan villages in the Piedmont during the seventeenth century.

Chapter 8 situates the short-term effects of interactions between native societies of the James River Val-

ley and European colonists in the context of long-term village history. By the 1500s, dozens of villages dotted the James River Valley, and social boundaries had developed between coastal and inland areas. By the early 1600s, the leader known to English colonists at Jamestown as Powhatan had risen to the status of paramount chief, with authority over many villages, through his successes as a war leader, spiritual leader, and diplomat. Local village chiefs had developed strategies for acquiring and displaying power and wealth before European contact. Aspiring native leaders in the James River Valley and elsewhere in the greater Chesapeake area

also advanced claims to wealth, status, and power through trade, diplomacy, and warfare with English colonists.

Gallivan adeptly describes and displays patterns in several kinds of data in this stimulating study of native villages in the James River Valley. The book nicely illustrates his point that archaeologists enrich knowledge of contact-period history by reconstructing long-term trends in regional settlement patterns. These broader patterns often are not captured in snapshots of places and moments in the past that are recorded in documentary sources.



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