

CORPORATE GROUPS AND THE LATE ONTARIO IROQUOIAN LONGHOUSE

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ABSTRACT

Excavations at the Draper site, an undisturbed Late Ontario Iroquois village, indicate that contrary to the more traditional view of trade as a relatively ancillary activity of the Huron, external trade was actually a major determinant of social structure. It is argued that trade was responsible for the development of longhouse residential units, that these units were corporate groups held together by the benefits of trade, and that the archaeological records demonstrates a degree of economic orchestration and specialization within the longhouses previously unsuspected. It is also suggested that endemic warfare among the Iroquoian groups, as among other groups with similar types of corporate structures, is a logical outcome of competition for trade and personnel.

Almost since the inception of Iroquois archaeology, it has largely been assumed that Iroquois longhouses represented some sort of matrilineal (and largely matrilocal) corporate groups with specific clan identifications. Some authors have expressed caution in assuming unilocal residence behavior although they do assume that longhouse residents formed lineages (e.g., Noble, 1966). Slight inconsistencies between the matrilineal/matrilocal model and occasional ethnographic statements (often obscure or ambiguous) have usually been ignored or dismissed on other grounds. However, recently data compiled by Richards (1967:51) showing that only about half of the residence locations of married couples in the 17th century, were actually matrilocal, has cast considerable doubt on any assumption regarding the matrilocal nature of longhouse units. More importantly, the question of the corporate functions and ties of residents of each longhouse as a group have rarely been dealt with by Ontario archaeologists. Little archaeological data has been presented to substantiate interpretations of lineage membership of longhouse residents, of longhouse corporate functions, or even the assumptions that longhouse residents formed some sort of corporate group. It is the purpose of this paper to relate inferences derived from the Late Ontario Iroquoian period to this question of the composition and corporate nature of longhouse residents. The focal point will be the Draper site just outside of Toronto in southern Ontario. "Corporation" will be used in the following sense:

A corporate group can be defined as one which has a body of collective rights and duties, and "estate," vested in all members and "activated in diverse situations," so that it can be said to be a "multipurpose" group (Fortes 1953; Nadel 1951, p. 160).

(Freeman, 1968:266)

A lineage is defined as: "all the unilateral descendants of a known common ancestor or ancestors" (Schusky, 1965:77).

THE SITE

The Draper Site is about 25 miles northeast of the center of Toronto, and 10 miles north of the shore of Lake Ontario. It is situated on top of the steep banks of a stream terrace along West Duffin Creek, and the site appears to have been palisaded (Fig. 1). Areal extent is 8-10 acres, making it relatively large. The site is virtually unique in published Ontario Iroquoian sites, in that over 50 percent of the site is undisturbed, establishing ideal conditions for the recovery of intra-structure settlement pattern data. The site is unfortunately centered in the new Pickering Airport site, now under construction, and destruction of the site is assured within 2-3 years.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because the site is so unique, excavations during 1973, which I directed, proceeded along cautious, and by some traditional standards, slow lines. However, this is not a plowed site, and should not be treated as such. With 5 field members, we managed to excavate nearly a complete longhouse in 50 cm. squares, and 3 cm. levels. One other structure was excavated at the site in 1972 under other direction. The problem orientation of the previous excavations was different and spatial controls were not as rigid, thereby rendering the data insufficient for the research aims presented here. Many of the analyses from the 1973 excavations are still tentative; however, I think the major inferences being drawn from them have good chances of standing up to further tests.

What is of particular importance in the 1973 excavations is the intrastructure settlement pattern data. The structure excavated was over 50 m. (150 feet) long (one end was not reached); and the structure excavated in the previous season was over 53 m. (160 feet) long (one end of this structure still remains to be located as well). Although this is a very small sample, these are unusual lengths for longhouses in southern Ontario. They are not the longest recorded structures but it should be remembered that they are incompletely excavated structures. Although a very small sample, if these two longhouses are at all indicative of the structure sizes at Draper, we have good grounds for assuming that whatever the motivating force behind the formation of large continuous residential units was, whether of a corporate nature or not, such force was achieving maximum expression and exerting maximum influence during this time period. Thus, if we are going to look for archaeological indications of the nature of these structuring forces, they ought to be especially visible in this period.

CORPORATENESS

One of the fundamental questions which must be resolved is whether the residents of longhouses in fact constituted corporate groups, or whether they were merely residing in given longhouses because of associational preferences, or/and inherent advantages to living in large structures (warmth, economy, etc.), with no corporate responsibilities within the house other than the maintenance of the structure—much as a small commune. Here, traditional interpretation tends to assume that residents of each longhouse did form a corporate group. Considering the organization, time and energy which were involved in the construction of longhouses, as well as the internal organization of hearths along a central axis, one might certainly expect some sort of organizing principle.

However, the alternate assumption—that the residents of each longhouse simply formed an associational group—cannot be dismissed without consideration. On one hand, as already noted, the ethnographic evidence from the 17th century indicates that membership in these residential units was not strictly on a unilineal/unilocal basis; in fact residence locality seems to have been almost random in regard to husband's vs. wife's kin relations. On the other hand, growth of longhouse structures was sometimes capricious. For groups which moved relatively often, structural expansions of up to 4 successive additions onto longhouses (e.g., the Bates site; Noble, 1966:302), show an amazing lack of foresight, or extremely flexible and variable membership in these residential units. Residence does not seem fixed or stable. Additions onto longhouses are by no means rare in the Iroquoian tradition. We can also probably assume that portions of longhouses sometimes fell into disuse as well may be the case in structure 2 at Draper.

Although these factual considerations tend to point to a comparatively loose associational residential framework, I do not believe they conflict with the assumption of longhouse residents forming corporate groups. As will be seen shortly, such observations do have important implications regarding the *nature* of corporate groups.

I would adhere to the traditional interpretation that it is unrealistic for loose associations to remain coherent enough to periodically, and with any degree of organizational success construct large residential structures, simply for some attributed convenience of large longhouse living. Moreover, if these were in fact significant considerations one is at a loss to explain why such "desirable" conveniences were not implemented much earlier in Iroquois prehistory.

There is additional inferential evidence from structure 2 at Draper that the residents of longhouses did constitute corporate groups. If longhouses did not constitute corporations, and were merely associational residential units, one would expect the social structure inside each longhouse to be relatively egalitarian, each family free to join or leave as they wished, again, much as a commune. On the other hand, if the social structure inside the longhouses was not egalitarian, one could expect the group under the influence of the dominant person(s) to rapidly evolve into some form of corporately directed effort. This seems likely since persons in dominant positions can be expected to attempt to surround themselves by others who will bolster their position, rather than neutral agents. Furthermore, if longhouses are comprised of corporation member residents, one tends to expect status differences within the house, or some specialization, in order to fulfill administrative and organizational functions of the corporation. Thus, with associational groups we tend to expect egalitarian material remains, while with corporate groups we tend to expect evidence of some differential status. This is a probabilistic statement, *not* an absolute one. In examining the floor plan of structure 2 (Fig. 2) it should be immediately obvious that there is an exceptionally intense concentration of post holes, pits, and fire reddened sand. If we make the reasonable assumption that the density of small post holes, pits, and fire reddened earth, are positively correlated to the intensity and size of meal preparation, it is possible to argue that these concentrated features represent a residential locus of unusually intense feasting activity which in turn one finds associated with big or head men and chiefs throughout the world. If this line of inference is essentially accurate, one should also expect to find a concentration of material remains associated with this locus, of a feast-ritual nature, and perhaps indicative of unusual wealth status. In fact, pipe fragments, used by men on ceremonial occasions according to ethnographic evidence, were concentrated in a broad arc centered on the south wall across from the large hearth complex (Fig. 3); and workshop

debris resulting from the last stages of ground stone adze manufacture occurs at the eastern end of this arc, adjacent to the hearth complex. M. Latta (personal communication) has previously postulated that ground stone adzes may have been an important economic item manufactured at and traded out of Draper. These observations form a nice, internally consistent framework.

In sum, I see the data recovered from structure 2 as being additionally supportive of the assumption that residents of longhouses constituted corporate groups. It might also be mentioned that the change from randomly arranged to central aligned hearth in Ontario (ca. 1200 A.D.) is most intelligible as the result of the initiation of corporate conditions.

THE NATURE OF CORPORATE GROUPS

Given this assumption, what in fact was the nature and function of these groups? Important factors have already been introduced which will lead answers to this question in directions not usually considered.

At the outset, one can envisage corporate groups of many types, with membership being attained by recruitment, birth or both. The functions of these corporate groups can be equally diverse, being simply land holding units, redistribution and trading units, holders of rights to religiously important functions, or groups constituted for other purposes. What are the indications of the nature of these corporate groups?

In the first place, both because of the flexibility of structure size after initial construction, and because of the residential indications of the 17th century ethnographic data, it seems very improbable that membership in these residential units was based on a unilineal/unilocal basis, although it is claimed that matrilineal residence was the preferred rule (Noble, 1968:301). It is probable that individual choice of membership in specific corporate groups played an important role in determining longhouse compositions, since only about 50 percent of the ethnographic sample (or about what one would expect without any rules) actually followed the preferred residence rules. This choice may have been limited to corporate groups led or dominated by either the husband's or spouse's kin, which is a usual precondition for group affiliation among most primitive cultures (e.g., the !Kung, Lee 1972:350-51), but one can still probably assume a relatively wide degree of latitude in choice. It is clear that the resultant longhouse compositions need not be lineages at all, although they might appear as "families" to 17th century European explorers.

If this does, in fact, approximate the situation in Late Ontario Iroquois times, what would make people ignore their stated preferred residence rules? The most common answer to this question is: economics. A similar residential ideal vs. behavior situation has been described for Taiwan, where previously prevalent residence was matrilineal. This dominant behavior pattern rapidly broke down under economic pressure, while the ideal remained to reside with the husband's mother long after the feasibility became impractical (Anderson, 1970). It is precisely this type of situation which leads to disconformity between expressed values (which some anthropologists in the past were wont to take at face value) and actual behavior—a data distinction which Levi-Strauss and others emphasize (Levi-Strauss, 1962).

Although economic considerations do not exhaust the possible determinants of corporate groups, they do seem to be potentially the most powerful initial vectors which could describe the peculiarities of the system at hand. I will therefore begin by examining this aspect of longhouse patterning to see if data can be found to confirm the role of economics in residence considerations and the role of corporate groups.

Important supporting data for this position has already been mentioned in the form of a localized concentration of small post holes, pits and fire reddened earth. Assuming this does represent a feasting complex, some means must exist for amassing the food and other material consumed or given away, which implies in the present theoretical context economic liens on a supporting population. In comparative ethnographies such feasts usually have striking overtones of redistributive systems, if not overt direct redistributive functions, in which the supporting corporate members as well as the administrating members obtain benefits in terms of needed or desired items. What support is there for this construction? In the first place, the historic Iroquois in southern Ontario are known to have been strong traders even before the arrival of Europeans (Tooker, 1967a:25). Individuals owned trade routes (Tooker, 1967a:25; Trigger, 1969:38) and had privileged access to goods acquired via trade. This type of situation of differential access to needed or desired materials is probably a prerequisite, if not sufficient condition, for the establishment of institutionalized influence over others. Access to items such as furs, ground edge adzes, tobacco, additional food staples (especially in times of famine), occasional status pieces such as copper beads, may have supplied the driving motivation for adherence to a corporate residence group, and the original incentive for forming such groups. It should be kept in mind that significant divisive social forces (such as increased potential conflict) must be overcome in maintaining any large group permanently, and that the larger a group is, the more unwieldy and unstable it is, and the more difficult to maintain. Traditionally, trade has been considered unimportant among the Ontario Iroquois (Heidenreich, 1972:84-85), however, we may discover that this is a distortion of ethnographic accounts and material preservation.

In addition to these data, Ferguson (n.d.) has provisionally been able to isolate activity kits within structure 2 at Draper. This was done simply by comparing the expected occurrence of artifact types for the entire structure to observed occurrences within areas suspected of activity of a specific nature. As longhouses go, debris in structure 2 was very rich, a seemingly common situation at Draper. A relatively large difference between expected and observed data was required of the material before activity areas were singled out. This technique may be statistically simple, however, I feel confident that the results of this activity kit/area analysis are good approximations, and are probably minimal discriminations, i.e., more areas or kits may be discernable given more sophisticated types of analysis. The results were unexpected and surprising. I expected that small activity areas, repeated at each residence location would be evident or that activity areas of much larger dimensions representing daytime congregations of males vs. females and associated work/leisure areas would emerge. Instead of these types of patterning, a high degree of what can only be called specialization appears to dominate the artifact universe in structure 2 at what most closely approximates the residential area size and location of nuclear (or slightly extended) families (Fig. 4).

This activity nucleation pattern was much different from what I ever expected to appear. It is very compelling to see in this patterning, an economic orchestration of the production of goods and services on a nuclear family basis to a degree undreamed of heretofore among the Iroquoians. If ground stone adzes were important economic items as Latta has suggested, it is singularly striking that the adze workshop area is immediately adjacent to the concentration of post holes, pits and fire reddened earth. Due to the unique undisturbed status of Draper, this is the first evidence of such patterning from Ontario, and is representative of only one structure. Under these circumstances, little of a definitive nature can be said; however, given the data now available, I think the

implications are clear: considerably more economic orchestration was going on in the longhouse corporate structures than has been assumed, and the dominant—as well as developmental impetus—of these residential groups was very plausibly an economic, productive and redistributive one.

CORPORATION PERSPECTIVES

Production/redistributive corporate groups form a very broad category in cultural organization, and cover a very wide range of administrative institutional complexes: from the nearly impotent head men of Amazon villages, to the near absolute rulers of Polynesian chiefdoms. Where do the Late Ontario Iroquois fit into this continuum? Clearly, I think, at neither extreme. A much closer comparison can be drawn between this type of system as it existed on the Northwest Coast, and the Ontario Iroquoians. Obviously, the Northwest Coast complex was more highly developed; redistribution was more important and there was much more material to be redistributed (possibly because of higher resource differentiation in the area), with correspondingly greater dominance control and power of corporate groups as well as higher incidence of status and rare items. In comparison, the Iroquois were impoverished (with a more homogeneous economic landscape) and were amateurs in economic exchange and playing power/status roles. Nevertheless, many of the organizational structures and structuring principles of respective systems appear strikingly similar according to the reconstruction proposed here. Of greatest importance is the structuring of trade. Among the Northwest Coast groups, "... chiefs (lineage heads?) held monopolies over trade in their territories. It seems possible that such monopolies may have had their origins in exchanges between affines in areas of different resources" (Suttles, 1968:67); while for the Huron "control over trade routes was an important means by which a man could acquire wealth and validate high status within his tribe. It is unclear to what degree lucrative new trade routes fell under the control of hereditary chiefs, thereby enhancing their power" (Trigger, 1969:38). Huron chiefs had to be wealthy, and were high in social status (Trigger, 1969:69). Since trade was by far the primary source of wealth (and status) (Tooker, 1967a:25), it seems logical to conclude that chiefs had to be quite important traders, and that the status derived from trading activities contributed directly to the assumption of the civil chieftain position. This appears to have been the case (Trigger, 1969:69).

Also important is the ability to shift membership in corporate groups (Suttles, 1968:66-7; Harris, 1971:250, 324) which has been proposed as having clear adaptive advantages under conditions of periodic resource shortages—conditions documented for both groups. Essentially, the corporate head who was most effective in providing for his supporters (either in normal times and/or times of duress) could attract the greatest number of adherents to his corporate group. This may explain the, at times, phenomenal growth of Iroquois longhouses. The more people (or the more people with good production abilities) that an administrator could attract, the greater was his support base, wealth, and status. People could be recruited most readily from a rather extended kinship network, and kinship ties also tended to increase reliability of individuals in economic responsibilities and general support. There were obviously other considerations regarding affiliation, including personalities, etc.; and affiliation may not have been changed for light and transient matters, however, according to this model, the flexibility was there when strongly enough desired. Suttles (1968:66) emphasizes this organizational principle for the Northwest Coast and there is now good reason to believe it was

characteristic of Late Ontario Iroquoian groups as well. It is perhaps coincidence, but it is a striking coincidence that in both groups large residence structures were used, and that these large residence structures carried crests or other painted designations on their exteriors, indicating the identity of the postulated resident corporate group, and that these identifying insignia most often took the form of totemic animals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Fundamentally what I am arguing is that the existing data, including data derived from the Draper site, is partially inconsistent with traditional assumptions, or the lack thereof, and that there is an alternate model which is equally, if not more viable, in terms of accounting for the data with the greatest economy of assumptions. I would like to suggest that the longhouses were organized around one or two titular heads who control-led trade routes, activities, and directed to some degree longhouse economic activities; that members of the longhouse were recruited from as many kinship connections as possible, whether lineal or affinal; that these members worked fields and engaged in economic production as a corporate unit which provided the basic materials of trade and subsistence; that the titular head would attempt to attract as many kinship related persons to his longhouse as possible to enhance his trading ability and status; and that families would join or abandon a given longhouse depending on a number of factors, but especially the ability of the head and membership to provide benefits, whether in the realm of trade, ritual feasts, wealth, leisure, or other commodities. This would be a scaled down variation of the type of system suggested for the Northwest Coast settlements (see Harris, 1971:250, 324; Suttles, 1968:66-7); it is also consistent with observations on the mixed residence patterning at contact; and since everyone in such a long-house would be related, even if distantly, it would be consistent with early descriptions of the members of longhouses as "families." This construction is consistent with the archaeological evidence in structure 2. If this model is accurate, trade must be seen as a significant factor in social organization, and by implication the economics of the every-day man. Should this be established, it may be necessary to reorganize thinking on the causes of increases in village sizes occurring during this period as well (Hayden, n.d.).

One other important implication of the model for the nature of Iroquoian corporate groups is the presence of outright competition—a cultural principle strongly suppressed in simpler cultural systems, such as generalized hunter/gatherers. Competition among the Northwest Coast groups and as postulated for the Iroquois, was very pronounced: not only competition in recruiting members, but also competition over trade rights and goods. As noted, this competitive aspect differentiates, in general, the redistributive genre of social system from that of generalized hunter/gatherers. As such, it has important consequences for cultural evolution (Cowgill, 1974), and may largely explain why warfare was endemic and severe in these areas, as it well tends to be among most redistributive types of societies.

This is far afield of the original topic, however, even given the limited data which have been derived from the one carefully excavated structure at Draper, it should be clear that the potential for reassessing and reforming models of Iroquois prehistory, as well as for formulating and testing models of general cultural import, are very great. What I presented are only provisional constructions. To derive a clear picture of what was going on at Draper, will require much more extensive and detailed excavation, hopefully to be forthcoming.

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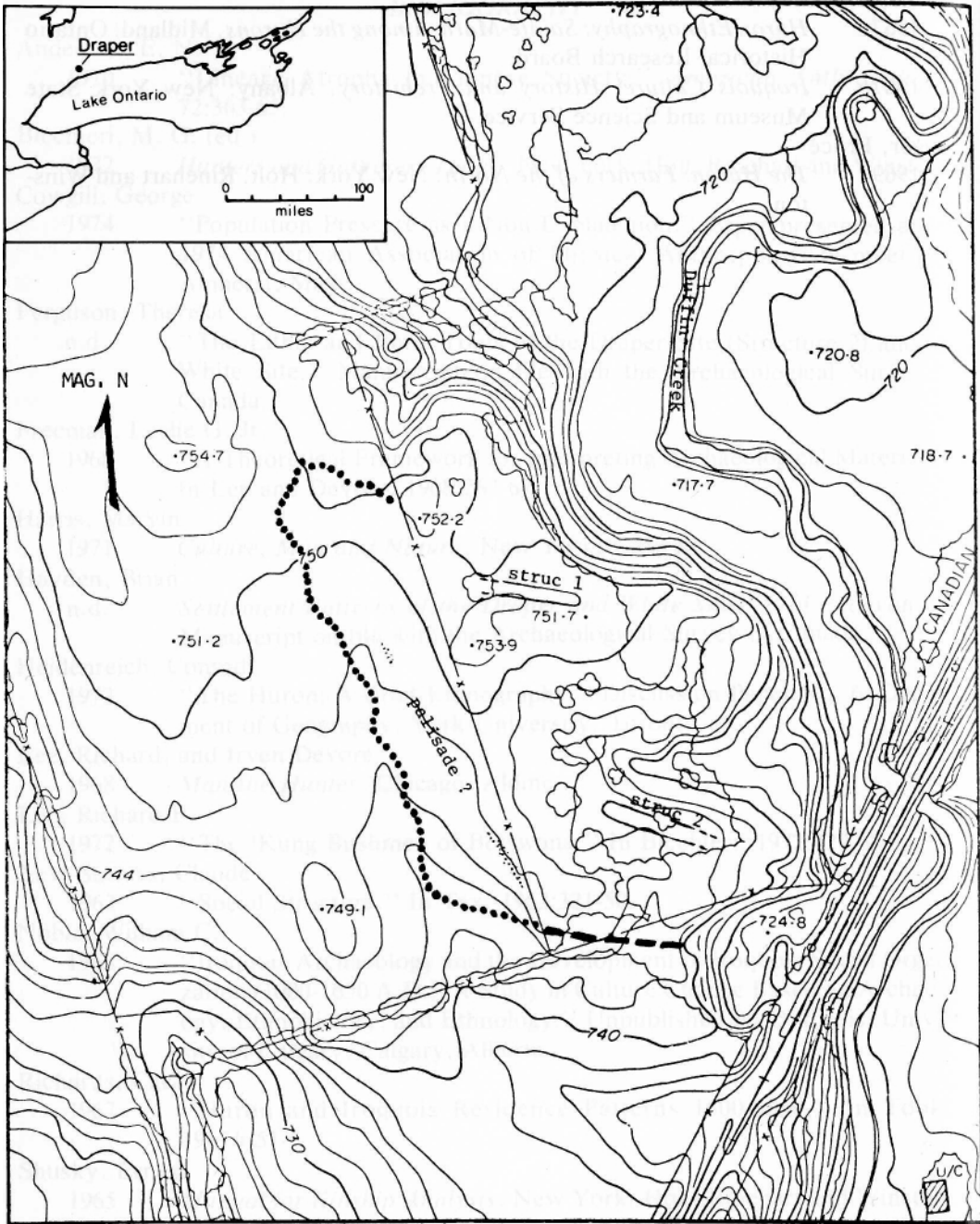


FIGURE 1
THE DRAPER SITE

Dotted line indicates maximum extent of surface artifact occurrence in the plowed field (west of fence line). The area east of the fence line is undisturbed. Contour interval = 2 feet; scale is 200 feet per inch.

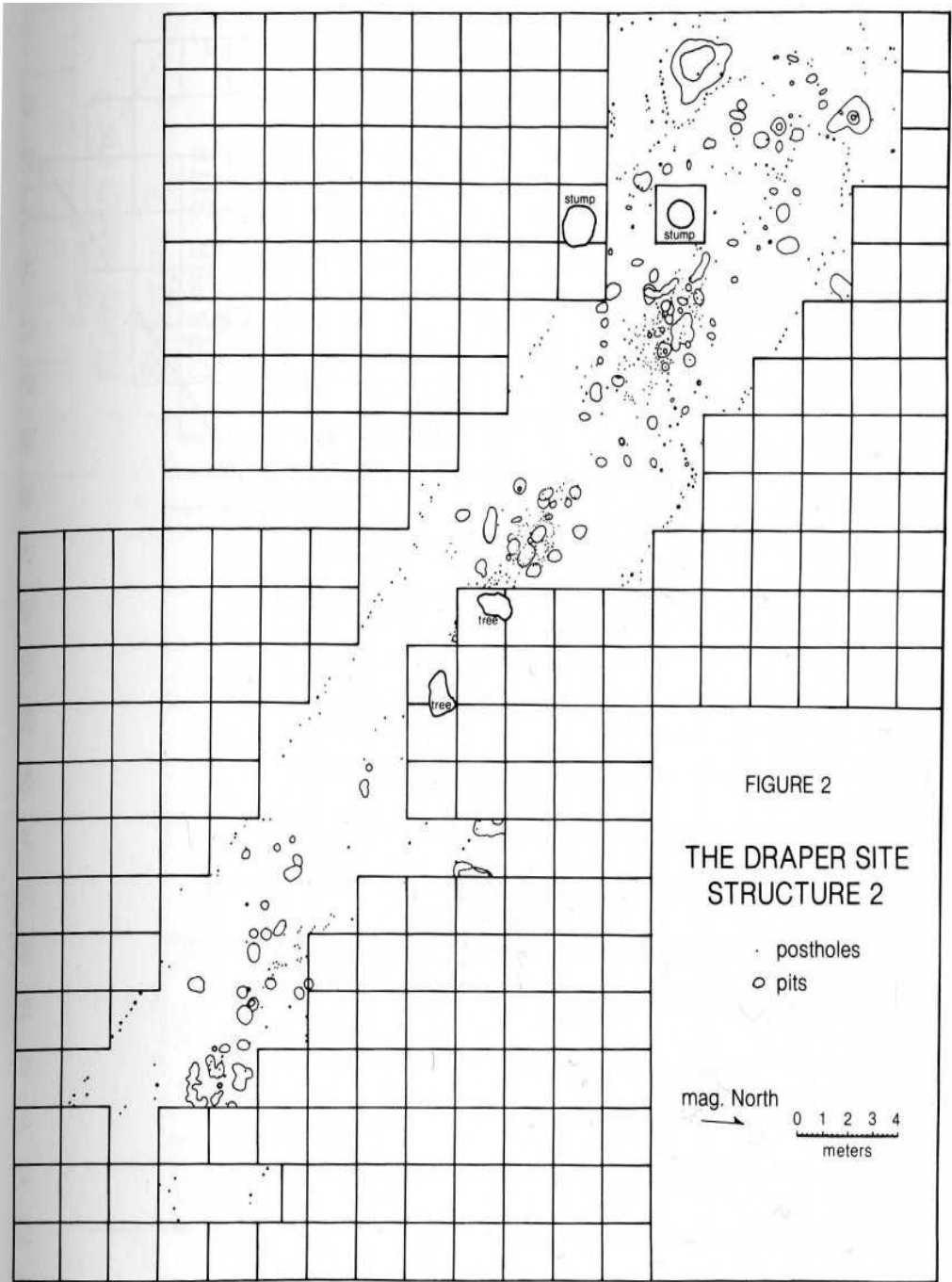
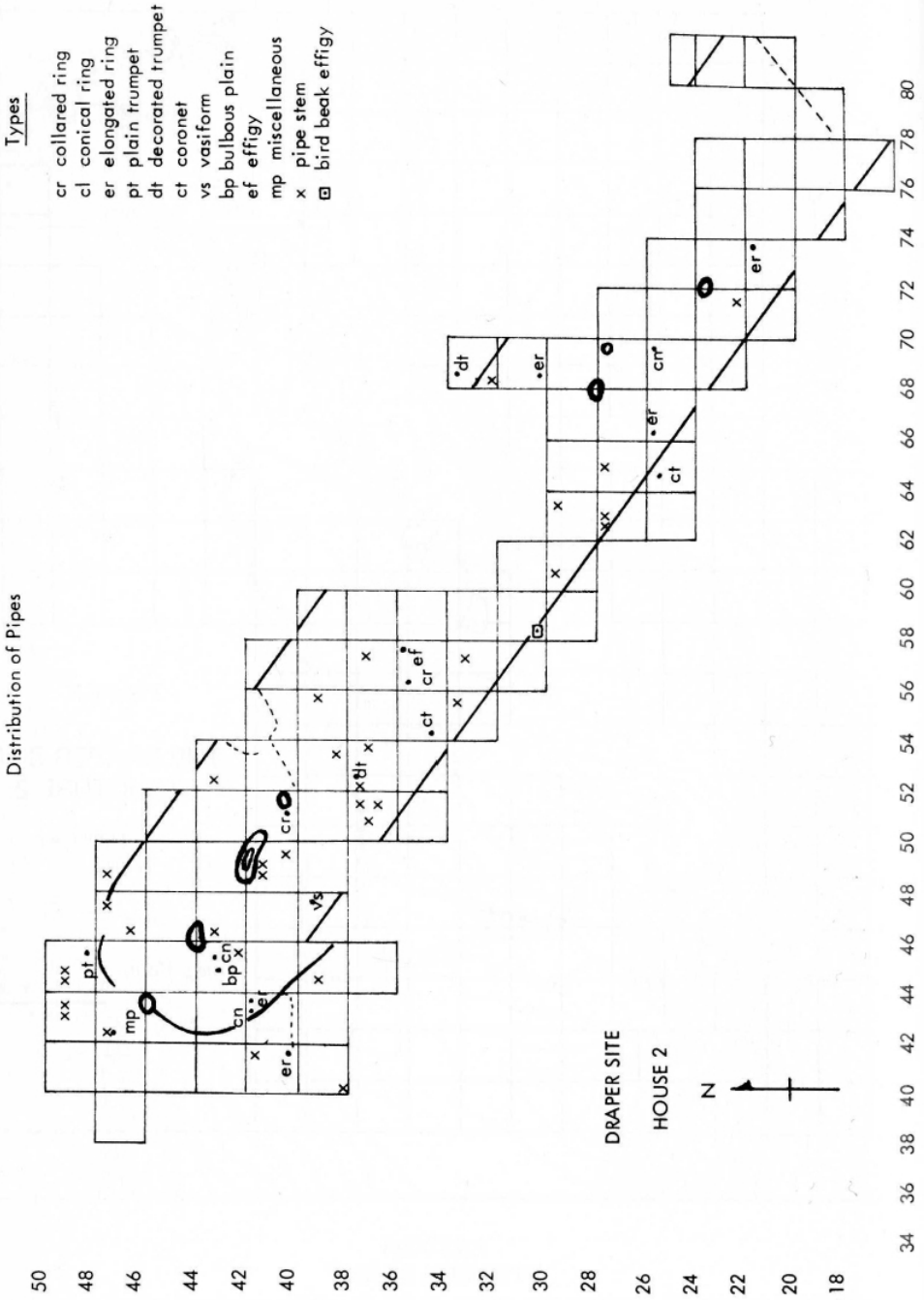


Figure 3

Distribution of Pipes



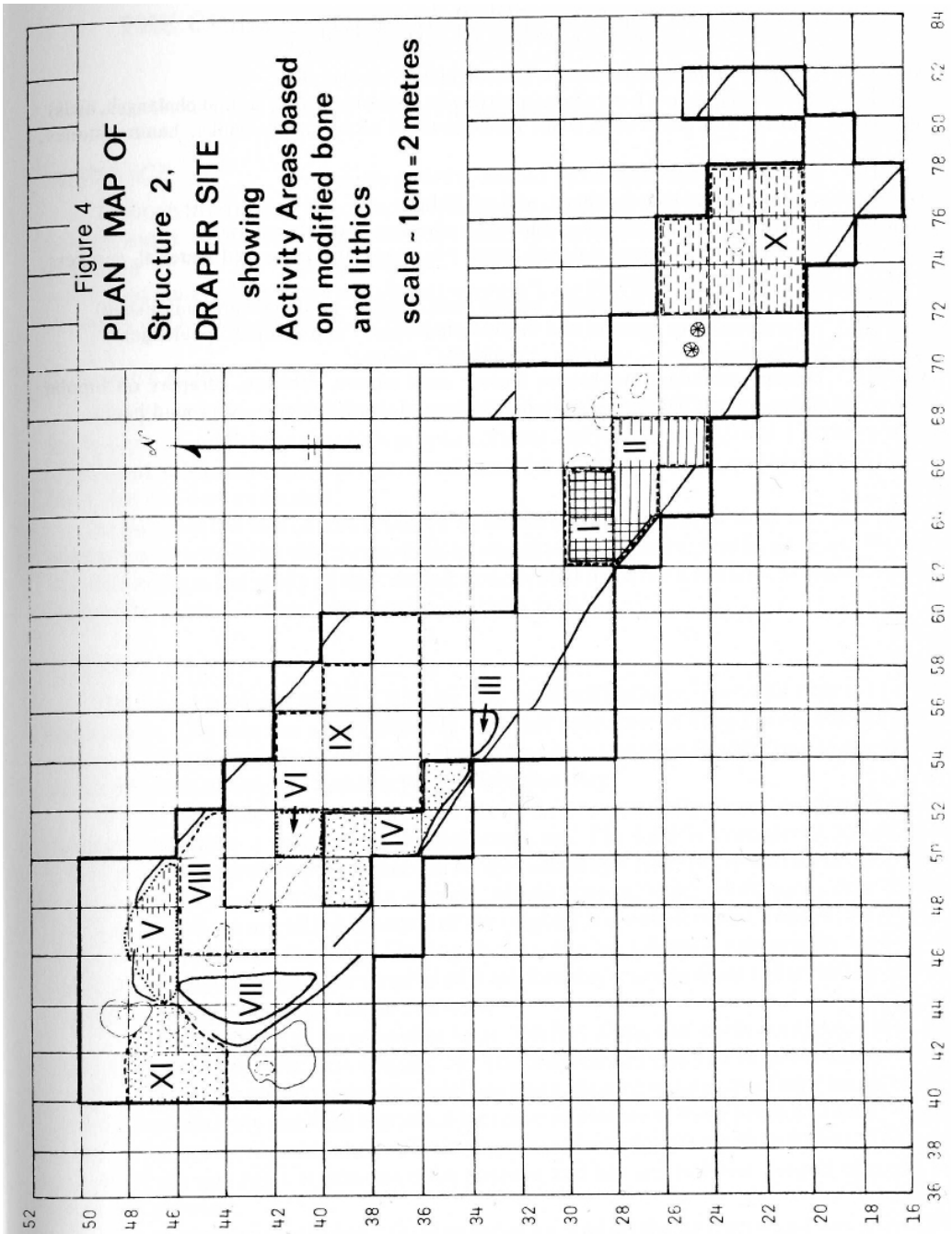


FIGURE 4
ACTIVITY AREAS OF STRUCTURE 2

- Area I: chipped stone manufacture: (cores, debitage, scrapers)
Area II: bone manufacture: (scored material, beads, ground material, ground phalanges, awls)
Area III: pecking and preforming (with hammerstone) adzes (adze blanks, hammerstones, adzes)
Area IV: grinding and finishing adzes: (adzes, grinding stones)
Area V: woodworking: (adzes, biface, utilized flakes)
Area VI: floral processing: (Manos, scrapers, & absence of other materials)
Area VII: boneworking: (ground material, grand phalanges, beads, scored material, scrapers, ground stone, debitage)
Area VII: bead manufacture: (scrapers, scored bone, beads—predominantly unfinished)
Area IX: recreational area (ground and faceted phalanges, "cup-and-pin" phalange)
Area X: hideworking: (awls, scrapers, "projectile" points)
Area XI: bipolar technology workshop: (cores, anvil stones, debitage, scrapers on bipolar flakes, punch/flaker, lack of schist or ground stone debitage, or ground bone)