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Steponaitis, Laurie Cameron

1986 Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Lower Patuxent Drainage, Maryland. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, The State University of New York at Binghamton.

In this widely cited dissertation, the author expands upon conclusions initially drawn for her 1983 work, "An Archaeological Study of the Patuxent River Drainage." Using the assemblage data accumulated during a regional surface collection of agricultural fields in Calvert County, Maryland, the prehistoric transition from mobile to sedentary lifeways from the Late Archaic to the Late Woodland time periods (ca. 4000 B.C. to A.D. 1600) is examined. She noted an increasing "decline in residential mobility" throughout the centuries by "analyzing diachronic change in the spatial distribution of sites and artifacts" (p. 1) recovered from multiple environmental zones (lowlands, estuarine uplands, riverine uplands).

Steponaitis noted that a significant shift in settlement organization occurred during the Middle Woodland time period (ca. A.D. 200-1000). The interior and costal zones were used increasingly for specific and differing purposes during this time, and a far greater emphasis was placed on estuarine habitation. A population increase is likely not the cause of this shift in settlement and resource use, nor is a brief period of dryer climatic conditions that occurred from about A.D. 400-500. Rather, the increased alliance and exchange networks that were likely in place by this time (marked most prominently by the strong preference for rhyolite) "created social demands that led to the intensification of production" (p. 284). This would result in the gradual settling down of local populations who needed to procure and process materials beyond the needs of their own people, thereby creating larger storage facilities that also required semi-permanent maintenance.