Témiscouata: Traditional Maliseet Territory and Connections between the St. Lawrence Valley and the St. John River Valley

ADRIAN L. BURKE
Université de Montréal

This paper discusses the late prehistory of a part of eastern Quebec called Témiscouata, and how this prehistory informs and structures the cultural processes we see in the early historic or contact period among aboriginal groups in the area. Le Témiscouata as it is often referred to takes its name from a long narrow lake (approximately 40 km. long). It is located in the Bas-Saint-Laurent region, in the old county of Grand Portage, close to the borders of Maine and New Brunswick (see Figure 1). The region’s lakes form the headwaters of the Madawaska River which is one of the principal tributaries of the St. John River. Due to its geographic location and the ease of transportation along its waters, the Témiscouata-Madawaska corridor was of strategic importance to the French and English colonial powers (Ganong 1906, Marie-Victorin 1918). Both administrations recognized the usefulness of the portage route to communicate between their establishments in the St. Lawrence Valley and those in the St. John Valley and the Bay of Fundy.

As we will see, this portage route was also important to the aboriginal groups of the Maritime Peninsula prior to European arrival and during the early Contact period. The Maliseet First Nations or Wolastoqiyik have always been closely associated with the St. John River (Wolastqoq) and its extensive valley. They have also been identified in the historic period with the south shore of the St. Lawrence Estuary. Témiscouata falls between these two areas and historically it too has been part of traditional Maliseet territory (Erickson 1978; Johnson 1995; Wallis and Wallis 1957).

Portage routes: early maps and references

Of the historically known portage routes between the upper St. John and the St. Lawrence, there are two primary routes that pass through Témiscouata Lake (Figure 2). From the St. John River one canoes up the Madawaska River to Lake Témiscouata, halfway up the lake on the north shore one enters the Touladi River. Traveling up the Touladi through
Grand and Petit Touladi lakes, then up the des Aigles river to des Aigles Lake, and from there going up a small river called the St. Jean, one reaches a small lake by the same name. From there one can make a short portage to the Boisbouscache River which empties into the Trois Pistoles River (portage route 1, refer to Figure 2). Alternately, if one ascends the Madawaska River to Lake Témiscouata, and continues up the length of the lake to its head, one enters the Ashberish River. Going up the Ashberish one travels through a series of small lakes called Les Sept Lacs. From the last of these lakes the traveler has a short portage to the headwaters of the Trois Pistoles River (portage route 2, Figure 2).

Other important portage routes include those using the St. Francis River and those going further up the St. John and the Big Black rivers leading to portages further south along the St. Lawrence like those which descend the Ouelle and du Sud Rivers. The portage routes via the St. Francis River include several options. All start from the St. John River up the St. Francis traveling through Glasier, Beau, and Pohenegamook lakes. Continuing up the St. Francis River and then Armstrong Brook, one has a
short portage to Grand Fourche Lake which empties via the Sénéscoupe River into the Trois Pistoles River (portage route 3, Figure 2). Alternately, one can travel up the St. Francis River to its source at St. François Lake and portage to the des Roches lakes and river which empty into the Verte River (portage route 4). This route passes through the present day Maliseet Nation territory of Whitworth. One other possibility is to travel up the Boucanée River from Pohenegamook Lake and then portage to des Huards Lake. One then descends the Rocheuse River to Crescence Lake and then the Fourchue River into the du Loup River (portage route 5). None of these routes requires an overland portage of more than 2.5 kilometres, and the Ashberish-Sept Lacs route has the shortest overland haul (approximately 300 metres). We should add that there are in fact many portages or carries to be made along the routes due to falls, rapids, and low water levels in upland, rocky streams.
A brief overview of the early European documents referring to the region and the possible communication routes informs us of the evolution of knowledge on the upper St. John portage routes. In 1603, Samuel de Champlain met a group of Etchemin at Tadoussac (Biggar 1922:103). The Etchemin were identified by Champlain as the occupants of the St. John, St. Croix, and Penobscot rivers. The following year, in 1604, Ralleau described to Champlain how the Indians of the River St. John portage via said river to the St. Lawrence just opposite Tadoussac (Biggar 1922:267-8). In 1635 Nicolas Denys mentions this portage route indirectly, suggesting that the Acadian colonists and administrators were familiar with it (Denys 1908:118). Half a century later, in 1686, Mgr. de Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec, met a group of Indians at the mouth of the Madawaska River on the St. John who described to him a portage route via the Madawaska River to the St. Lawrence near Le Bic, implying a Lake Témiscouata-Trois Pistoles River route (Saint-Vallier 1856:31). Cadillac, in his memoir of Acadia of 1692, finally describes the canoe and portage route via the upper St. John in much greater detail implying that he did in fact use the Témiscouata Lake portage route (Ganong 1930:91-93).

Early maps of New France and Acadia like those by Lescarbot (dated 1609) and Champlain (dated 1612-1613) seem to indicate knowledge of a portage route indirectly, by showing a St. John River which penetrates deep into the interior of the Maritime Peninsula and almost touches the headwaters of rivers flowing north into the St. Lawrence Estuary, most likely the du Loup, Verte, or Trois Pistoles river (Lescarbot 1609: map between pages 480 & 481; all three maps are reproduced in Trudel 1968: maps 30, 33, 34, p. 77-85). Earlier maps invariably show a blank interior or a chain of mountains suggesting transportation and communication were impracticable. A 1678 map by Franquelin clearly indicates at least two portage routes in the interior of the Maritime Peninsula and shows three aboriginal people portaging their canoes overland (Trudel 1968: map 70, p.163). One of these routes is between what appears to be the St. John River and a river which discharges into the St. Lawrence River opposite Tadoussac and the mouth of the Saguenay River. The first map that indicates portage routes via the Témiscouata region in a more specific way is be by Denonville and dates to 1685 (reproduced in Laberge 1993:61). The portages via the Madawaska-Témiscouata region are only indicated in a general sense, all leading to the du Loup River (in red on the original), but the real focus of the map is to point out a new portage
route to the upper St. John via the du Sud River. A few years later, in 1699, we have a map by Guillaume de Rosier which clearly shows two portages in the region (Massachusetts Historical Society copy reproduced in Ganong 1906:60). The location of the Trois Pistoles (Riv. des Pistolles on the map) with regards to Témiscouata Lake (Lac Medgouska or Madawaska on the map) is slightly mistaken, and the portage route seems to go up the St. Francis River and then via a portage probably to the Sénescoupé River and the Trois Pistoles. The other portage route indicated may be via the Chimenticook Stream and de l’Est Lake to the headwaters of the du Loup River.

The multiplicity of portage routes from the upper St. John present some confusion, but by the end of the next century the two portage routes (1 & 2) from Lake Témiscouata to the St. Lawrence are much clearer as seen on the Sproule map of 1787 (reproduced in Ganong 1906:101). The British regime, recognizing the strategic importance of the Témiscouata portage route soon established a permanent road from Lake Témiscouata directly to the St. Lawrence, bypassing the Ashberish and Touladi river portage routes. Caron, Ganong and Marie-Victorin have documented the economic, political, and military importance to both the French and British colonial powers of this communication route between the St. Lawrence and St. John Valleys and I will not elaborate further on this fact (Caron 1980; Ganong 1906; Marie-Victorin 1918).

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

My focus in this paper is instead on the archaeology of the Témiscouata region and how it shows a connection between the St. Lawrence Valley and the St. John Valley during the Middle and Late Woodland periods (ca. 400 B.C.-A.D. 1500; I use the Woodland rather than Ceramic nomenclature here to focus on the St. Lawrence Valley sequence). This connection can be demonstrated based on stylistic attributes of ceramics and lithics, as well as the provenience of the raw materials used to make the pots and stone tools. These source identifications can be done using archaeometric techniques that analyze the chemistry of these archaeological materials and connect them to known geographic and geologic sources.
Ceramics

We can assign ceramics from a minimum of three sites on Témiscouata Lake to the St. Lawrence Valley based on stylistic and chemical grounds. Two sherds with Middle Woodland pseudo-scallop shell and dentate decoration come from the Bouchette site (CkEf-2). These decorative attributes are found in the Maine-Maritimes region, but in this case they are applied with a push-pull technique which is rare in the Maine-Maritimes region suggesting a St. Lawrence Valley origin. When three Middle Woodland sherds from three sites on Témiscouata Lake were analyzed by neutron activation analysis by Chapdelaine and Kennedy (1990), they concluded that at least one was made from clays in the Quebec City area, and none of the three were made from the clays found in the Témiscouata area.

Seven rim sherds found at the Davidson site (CkEe-2) by Charles Martijn in the 1960s exhibit typical Late Woodland St. Lawrence Iroquoian attributes such as a high collar with a complex geometric motif and circular punctates under a castellation. James Pendergast analyzed these sherds and indicated to Martijn that they were an Algonquian copy of an Iroquoian pottery style (Martijn 1969:83-4). Chapdelaine and Kennedy subsequently conducted neutron activation analyses on two rim sherds from the two Late Woodland pots, comparing their chemistry to the clays of the St. Lawrence Valley and Témiscouata. They concluded that the pots had been made by Iroquoian potters in the Quebec City region (Chapdelaine and Kennedy 1990).

There are, therefore, four Middle and Late Woodland components from three sites in the Témiscouata region with strong evidence of contacts with the St. Lawrence Valley based on stylistic and archaeometric analyses of ceramics combined. In addition, two ceramic pipe stems typical of Late Woodland Iroquoian pipes have been found in the region.

In terms of pottery moving in the other direction, that is from the St. John Valley to the St. Lawrence Valley, the pottery recovered from a Late Woodland and a Contact period component of the Pelletier site (CkEe-9) show connections to the southeast, that is to the St. John River Valley and the larger Maine-Maritimes region. This pottery is well made, with thin walls, fine shell temper, and a porous fabric due to the leaching of the shell. It strongly resembles Late Woodland or Late Ceramic period pottery from the Maine-Maritimes region (Petersen and Sanger 1991). Shell tempered pottery is virtually unknown in the St. Lawrence Valley. How-
ever, Tremblay has identified shell tempered pottery at two sites on Ile Verte and Ile aux Corneilles, both of these islands lie close to the south shore and to the portage routes from Lake Témiscouata and the upper St. John (Tremblay 1993, 1995). Tremblay proposes that these could in fact be of Maine-Maritimes manufacture or influence and thus reflect the friendly relations between groups from the Maritime Peninsula and the St. Lawrence Iroquoians who were seasonally occupying the islands of the Estuary (Tremblay 1996:83).

Lithics

Connections between the St. Lawrence Valley and the St. John Valley via Témiscouata are also evident in the lithic raw materials found on sites on Ile Verte as well as in Témiscouata. Stylistic attributes of stone tools are less reliable in this regard, but point and biface morphologies from sites in the Témiscouata region closely resemble those from the Maine-Maritimes region as opposed to those from the St. Lawrence Valley (Burke 2000; Chalifoux et al. 1998).

Macroscopically we can identify Touladi chert (Touladi Lakes, Témiscouata), Munsungun chert (Munsungun Lake, Maine), and chert from the Tobique River (New Brunswick) on a Middle Woodland and a Late Woodland site on Ile Verte in the St. Lawrence Estuary (Figure 3). Based on x-ray fluorescence and low power microscopy analyses the Munsungun chert and the Tobique chert can be confirmed, while the Témiscouata chert is only tentatively confirmed from the Ile Verte sites (Burke 2000). Neutron activation analyses carried out by Chapdelaine and Kennedy also seem to tentatively confirm the presence of Témiscouata chert on Ile Verte (Chapdelaine and Kennedy 1999:29). What is most significant here is the co-presence of lithics from Munsungun (Aroostook-Maine), Témiscouata (Quebec), and Tobique (New Brunswick), all regions that form the upper St. John Valley and are traditionally within Maliseet territory. This co-presence of the three materials is also something that is found repeatedly on sites in Témiscouata indicating exchange and social connections throughout the upper St. John during the Middle and Late Woodland, including right into the Contact period (Burke 2000; Chalifoux et al. 1998).

Going in the other direction, cherts from the Quebec City region have not been identified to date from collections in Témiscouata, but fine-grained quartzites resembling those from Mistassini and Ramah are
These materials have only been identified macroscopically and through low power microscopy, but based on an exhaustive geological survey and analysis of comparative collections there are to date no equivalent quartzites from the Maritime Peninsula region (Burke 2000).

THREE SCENARIOS TO DESCRIBE THE INTERACTION VISIBLE AT THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEVEL

We can propose three basic scenarios that might describe the interaction visible at the archaeological level.

1. **Groups from the St. Lawrence Valley frequent the Témiscouata region**

Middle Woodland populations from the St. Lawrence Valley, proto-Iroquoians, and St. Lawrence Iroquoians visited Lake Témiscouata during the Middle Woodland and Late Woodland periods. In this scenario, the St.
Lawrence Valley groups would share the use of the Témiscouata region, occasionally coming into contact with Algonquians from the St. John Valley. Those sites on Lake Témiscouata with St. Lawrence Valley pottery could reflect occupations by St. Lawrence groups. In the case of the Davidson site, for example, we might point to St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery and a pipe fragment, as well as a number of polished tools as evidence of this. There does not, however, seem to be sufficient evidence to propose that Iroquoians and Algonquians might have met and exchanged goods at the site as has been proposed by Chapdelaine for the Anse-aux-Pilotes site on the north shore of the Estuary near the mouth of the Saguenay River (Chapdelaine 1984b:32).

2. Groups from the St. John Valley frequent the St. Lawrence Estuary

In this scenario the Middle Woodland, proto-Maliseet, and Maliseet peoples of the upper St. John River Valley visited and possibly occupied on a seasonal basis the south shore of the St. Lawrence Estuary. During the Middle and Late Woodland these groups from the interior of the Maritime Peninsula came into contact with Iroquoian groups and probably other Algonquian groups along the south shore and on the islands adjacent to the south shore like Ile Verte. During the Late Woodland there was exchange of pottery and possibly corn and tobacco from St. Lawrence Iroquoians to Maliseets. In return, the Maliseet offered lithics and maybe copper, furs, caribou, or birch bark products to the St. Lawrence Iroquoians.

3. Algonquian (Montagnais?) intermediaries

We can also propose a third scenario involving an intermediary. Data for the Middle Woodland remains vague, but during the Late Woodland, the pre-contact Maliseet would have obtained St. Lawrence Iroquoian goods via an Algonquian intermediary, such as the Montagnais. This interaction and exchange could have occurred in the Estuary or in the Témiscouata region. One possible example of this connection might be the fine grained quartzites found on sites in Témiscouata indicating a connection across the Estuary towards the north. There is historic evidence of the Montagnais being familiar with the Témiscouata region in Le Jeune’s relation of 1634 where he describes spending a winter in the area with a Montagnais hunting band in 1633-34 (Thwaites 1897:Vol. 7, p.5-235).
These three scenarios cannot reflect all of the changes that occurred over time, particularly because we are discussing such a large time span (circa 1,900 years). Over time, any of these situations may have prevailed and it is entirely possible that two or all three types of interactions took place simultaneously. My goal here is simply to establish that there was a connection between populations in the upper St. John Valley and the St. Lawrence Estuary via Témiscouata during the Middle and Late Woodland. This seems to be demonstrable based on the archaeological and archaeometric data. Unfortunately the data are not sufficient at this point to establish if there are any diachronic patterns.

**CONCLUSION**

Whatever its specific nature, the pre-contact interaction between regions and groups influenced the processes we see in the historic period. Looking at the issue strictly from the perspective of the prehistory of the St. John River Valley, we see that in the Témiscouata area, evidence of a real or sustained occupation of the region seems to begin in the Middle Woodland period, and especially the latter half of the Middle Woodland (Burke 2000, Chalifoux et al. 1998). The large majority of the 50 sites studied are small, single component sites with no cultural stratigraphy. They are primarily located around the smaller lakes to the north of Lake Témiscouata and almost all of these contain an important artifact assemblage of lithic reduction and transformation of the local cherts, clearly indicating this was one of the primary attractions of the region. I have used a series of archaeometric techniques to analyze the lithics from these sites and have found that the sites often contain a small amount of lithic material from other sources in the St. John Valley (Munsungun and Tobique), and further south from the Minas Basin (Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia) (Burke 2000). This material, along with the projectile point and biface morphologies and some of the ceramic remains, tends to point to a southeast origin for these groups, indicating that over the Middle and Late Woodland the Témiscouata region became increasingly and continuously used by the people who eventually became the Maliseet of the St. John River.

It remains unresolved at this time why the Algonquian groups from coastal areas of the Gulf of Maine and the lower St. John River expanded into the interior of the Maritime Peninsula during the Woodland period, but increased population and sedentism on the coast may have been a fac-
tor. Over time, the groups inhabiting the interior appear to have become permanent inhabitants of the interior river valleys and lakes, and constituted independent communities at the time of European contact. Setting aside the various possible scenarios for the Iroquoian-Algonquian interactions in the Témiscouata and Bas-St-Laurent regions, it is clear from the archaeological and archaeometric data that there was contact and exchange between groups in the Estuary and groups in the St. John River Valley. Typically these exchanges would have entailed some kind of social obligations and established ties between the groups, possibly fictitious kin ties as in the case of Huron and Algonquian traders to the west (Trigger 1987:62-64).

The upper St. John and the Témiscouata region held a strategic and central place in this exchange. Due to its geographic location and waterways this was the principle portage and communication corridor between two of the most important rivers in all of eastern North America. Those groups who were later to become the historic Etchemin and the Maliseet we know today, were thus placed in a highly strategic position at the time of the European colonization. Prior to European contact, the geographic position of these prehistoric inhabitants of the St. John River valley and the maintenance of these connections between the Maritime Peninsula and the St. Lawrence Valley were not only of economic advantage. They also allowed a group of relatively mobile hunter-fisher-gatherers with semi-permanent villages and low population densities to maintain social ties beyond the interior of the Maritime Peninsula thus reducing certain risks to the community. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it was this long term connection with, and knowledge of, the St. Lawrence Estuary, in particular the south shore, which enabled the Maliseet to expand into the south shore region and become established there in the historic period as has been well documented (Johnson and Martijn 1994; Prins 1986; Johnson 1995). Thus the social advantages of the maintenance of these ties, reflected archaeologically in what might be interpreted at times as purely economic exchange relationships, turned out to be of paramount importance in the long term survival of the Maliseet people of the St. John River Valley.

Conversely, the maintenance of cordial relations between St. Lawrence Iroquoian and other neighboring Algonquian groups over several generations may have also benefited the Iroquoians if as Chapdelaine and Tremblay suggest some of these Iroquoians took refuge among the
Kakouchak on the Saguenay or with the eastern Abenaki of the Kennebec River in Maine (Chapdelaine 1984a, 1995; Tremblay 1996). But if the St. Lawrence Iroquoians had relations with the people of the St. John River Valley, they do not seem to have taken refuge there since the archaeological evidence does not exist for such a group movement. Rather it was the Maliseet that chose to make the south shore their second home.

REFERENCES


