Mortuary Customs: the Huron-Wendat Approach to Death

Victoria Jackson

ABSTRACT The Huron-Wendat people of the Great Lakes region were a powerful and complex nation with a significant population and a rich history and culture when the Europeans arrived in the early seventeenth century. In early studies of Amerindian-European contact, historians argued that French Europeans radically transformed various aspects of a static Huron-Wendat culture, including in economics, religion, and material culture. In more recent studies, contemporary historians correctly question this view, as it gives little attention to Amerindian agency. This essay is intended to contribute to the discourse concerning Amerindian agency, specifically as relates to the transformation of Huron-Wendat ‘deathways’ in the seventeenth century.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Victoria Jackson

Victoria Jackson is completing her final year of studies at UTM with a double major in History and Anthropology. This paper was written for a 400-level independent study course on the interactions between Europeans and Amerindians in 17th Century New France.
Telling the Huron-Wendat tale at Mantle wasn’t simple. They had no written history, only oral tradition. The 20,000 artifacts unearthed in 2003 at the site (named after the farmer who owned the field) have helped shape a better understanding of the sophisticated, complex society. As skilled farmers, the Huron-Wendat cultivated 80 square kilometres of cornfields, an area larger than downtown Toronto. The corn provided a food source year-round (ground corn flour was stored for consumption and trade). That tooth sent to South Africa? Wendat is genealogical approach to the creation and re-creation of social translated as meaning “dwellers on a peninsula” (Hodge, 1971 memory. [1913], p. 24) or people of a drifting or floating island (Steckley, A framework which contrasts experiential versus referential 2007, pp. 26–28). The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead: Indian-European Isbell, William H., 2000. What we should be studying: the “imagined community” Encounters in Early North America. The Johns Hopkins University Press, and the “natural community”.