

Abstract

Settlement pattern studies are concerned with relics of human occupation in the past. In an archaeological record, these relics either appear in clusters or individually in the form of pestholes, house floors, house foundations or as middens. On aerial photographs and topographic maps relics of past human occupation can be identified by the presence of circular or rectangular depressional features and stunted vegetation cover in the midst of a flourishing vegetation community. Past human settlements can also be identified in actual field observation as ruins: building structures, walled fortresses, moats, monuments and mounds.

Irrespective of their nature and conditions of preservation, past settlements are a reflection of human behaviour through time and space. The archaeological evidence that is found preserved in them can shed much light on our knowledge of past culture. The essential archaeological problem in the analysis and interpretation of settlement, however, is that architectural remains and other settlement data cannot be understood simply by their description, distribution, cultural attribution and chronology - as they have been from the early anthropological work of Morgan (1881) and Mindeleff (1890) through the first large-scale regional archaeological syntheses, such as Childe's (e.g. 1934) in Europe and Willey (1953) in South America up to the common archaeological survey work of today.

With the influence of modern cultural ecology, geography and sociobiology, settlement analysis has been transformed into a concern with environmental and ecological processes. Settlements are part of a complex integration of culture and ecology within a regional environment. As a result, settlement analysis in archaeology must attend not only to the physical layout of the environment, but also to the social and historical aspects of environmental interaction.