SETTLEMENT PATTERN ANALYSIS

Settlement systems refer to the patterns of landscape use by past peoples. When archaeologists analyze settlement systems or settlement patterns, they are interested in seeing how people moved around the landscape (or how they used it) and why. For example, were village sites located near water, rich soils, hunting grounds, or high, defensible cliffs? The places where people lived in the past are not the only parts of the archaeological record that interest us, though. Often when we discuss settlement patterns, we talk about residential sites (places where people actually live, such as villages or camps) and logistic sites, which are sites where only specific activities took place, such as a hunting blind or a rock quarry. All of these sites are part of the settlement pattern and they tell us about ancient population movements, activities, and subsistence. Different kinds of societies have different needs and therefore different settlement patterns.

Earlier in the semester, we had an in-class activity that looked at how and why hunting and gathering people moved around their territory on a seasonable basis. Although complex, sedentary societies do not move from place to place to exploit food resources, their villages, towns, and special-purposes sites (hunting blinds, agricultural fields, etc.) are also located in particular places on the landscape to take advantage of specific resources, such as arable land. For this exercise, you are given the results of an archaeological survey in a portion of a river valley. This includes a table listing all the sites that were found during the survey, along with their locations, sizes, and the artifacts or ecofacts that were found on the surface. No excavation was done on these sites, so the artifacts and ecofacts are quite limited. Be wary of the “absence of evidence” problem! The valley was occupied for a very long time, from the earliest hunting and gathering system in this region up to the emergence of a state-level society. Each of the sites dates either to the hunting and gathering settlement system or to the complex society settlement system. You will use the description of material found on the archaeological sites and the location of sites on the landscape to reconstruct past behaviors and to understand how people used the landscape during different time periods.

**Step 1:** Read through the information about each site. Decide which sites you think belong to the each settlement system (that is, hunter-gatherer or complex society). You may wish to mark the sites for each system/time-period with a different color, to simplify visualization.

**Step 2:** Answer the following questions for each settlement system.

1) Which sites belong to the particular settlement system? On what data are you basing this determination?

2) What are the functions of the sites that are part of the settlement system? (That is, that were the primary activities that took place there?) Can you recognize residential or logistic sites?

3) Why are these sites located where they are? Are certain types of sites usually located near particular resources or geographical features?

4) What is the relationship between the various sites? For example, where were materials extracted and where were they used? What does this suggest about how the entire system worked?
5) **For the hunting and gathering settlement system** – Can you reconstruct the seasonal mobility pattern? When were people at each of these sites? At which of these sites did people stay the longest?

6) **For the complex society settlement system** – State-level societies are often characterized by **hierarchical settlement systems**, meaning that large centers are surrounded by smaller towns that owe allegiance or are economically dependent upon the larger center. These smaller towns may have even smaller hamlets that look to the towns for leadership or as an economic center. Is this settlement system hierarchical? Where are the largest centers? How many levels of hierarchy do you recognize?

**Step 3:** Consider the following overall questions:

1) How are the settlement systems different? What resources or locations were more important for each, and why?

2) How are the settlement systems the same? Are there resources that were utilized by both? How is this reflected in the settlement patterns? Do they nonetheless embed those resources in the settlement system in different ways?

3) What do you think a non-complex-society farming (Neolithic-like) settlement system would look like in this region? Where would sites be located, what types would there be, how would they be integrated, etc.?

For your write-up, turn in your answers to both sets of questions (under Step 2 and Step 3) and your map with the sites colored. Provide a legend so I know which color is associated with the hunting and gathering system and which with the complex society system.