



BROWSE



 **From Sikwa to Swine: The Hog in Cherokee Culture and Society, 1750-1840**

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Native South

University of Nebraska Press

Volume 4, 2011

pp. 105-120

10.1353/nso.2011.0002

ARTICLE

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**From Sikwa to Swine:  
The Hog in Cherokee Culture and Society, 1750-1840**

*Ethan Moore (bio)*

According to Luys Hernandez de Biedma, one of the chronicler's of Hernando de Soto's sixteenth-century expedition to Florida, the explorers "took with them a large drove of pigs which had been brought over in the fleet to meet any emergency."<sup>1</sup> The prodigious descendants of those pigs, for better or worse, were to become one of the most ubiquitous denizens of the Southern landscape. Until the late eighteenth century, many American Indians, including the Cherokees, largely ignored them, with the exception of possible use as ancillary meat.

This paper asserts that the adoption of the hog as a faunal subsistence resource and as a trade commodity was due to a variety of variables, including the depopulation of white-tailed deer, the significant loss of Cherokee lands and resources following the conflicts with the British and Americans, the relative ease with which the Cherokee Indians found the implementation of hog-raising schemes, and the considerable pressure impressed on them by the American government to engage in state-sponsored "civilization" programs.

In the years before extensive contact with Europeans, the lands of the Cherokees had been immense, comprising much of what is now Alabama, South Carolina, northern sections of Georgia, southwestern Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and portions of Tennessee east of the Tennessee River.<sup>2</sup> The heartland of the Cherokees, where most of the settlements existed as well as being the center for most agricultural and social activities (aside from hunting), was made up of an area that included most of eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northeastern South Carolina.<sup>3</sup> Naturalist William Bartram, in his 1776 survey of Indian Country, described the Cherokee lands at that time as follows: **[End Page 105]**

We . . . continued through part of this high forest skirting on the meadows; began to ascent the hills of a ridge which we were under the necessity of crossing, and having gained its summit,

enjoyed a most enchanting view, a vast expanse of green meadows and strawberry fields; a meandering river gliding through, saluting in its various turns the swelling, green, turfy knolls, embellished with parterres of flowers and fruitful strawberry beds; flocks of turkeys strolling about them; herds of deer prancing in the meads or bounding over the hills. <sup>4</sup>

The idyllic scene described by Bartram, though somewhat Elysian in tone, was likely correct in its depiction of the fertile grounds and abundant resources within the eighteenth-century Cherokee heartland. Archaeological evidence describes a profuse ecosystem that offered, prior to large-scale Euro-American settlement, "in any given 10 square miles of deciduous forest . . . 750,000 trees . . . 786,000 tree seedlings; abundant herbs and shrubs" as well as a prodigious amount of animal species, including "200 turkeys; 400 deer; some elk and bison; 3 wolves; 2 pumas; 5 bears; and 30 foxes . . . [with other vertebrates] present in varying numbers." <sup>5</sup>

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, the Cherokees, in settling the lush and fruitful terrain, typically made every effort to arrange their settlements near water. Water, in addition to its symbolic and ritualistic importance coupled with its crucial value for human consumption, was essential in the management of the Cherokee economy. For example: rivers and lakes supported various game, fowl, and aquatic life, all of which were vital portions of the Cherokee diet. Also, lands in the river valleys offered a rich source of alluvial soil that allowed for bountiful cultivation of crops. <sup>6</sup>

Additionally, occupied sites benefited from proximity to thriving woodlands that the Cherokees were able to exploit for wild fruits and vegetables as well as numerous herbs, seeds, and nuts. The forests also provided ample game for hunting and wood for construction and kindling. <sup>7</sup> In short, prior to 1750 the Cherokees made their living by harvesting native crops such as corn, beans, and squash; gathering numerous berries, nuts, and fruits; hunting local fauna, especially deer and bear; and making use of the natural resources (such as wood and cane) for fuel and

structural materials. <sup>8</sup> **[End Page 106]**

The environment also exhibited considerable influence on housing and settlement patterns. As mentioned previously, settlements were usually near...

## FIELD NOTES

### From Sikwa to Swine

*The Hog in Cherokee Culture and Society, 1750–1840*

ETHAN MOORE

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This paper asserts that the adoption of the hog as a faunal subsistence resource and as a trade commodity was due to a variety of variables, including the depopulation of white-tailed deer, the significant loss of Cherokee lands and resources following the conflicts with the British and Americans, the relative ease with which the Cherokee Indians found the implementation of hog-raising schemes, and the considerable pressure impressed on them by the American government to engage in state-sponsored "civilization" programs.

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