



Stone Technologies and Landscapes: Investigating the Mesolithic of the Irish Sea Region

Emmett O'Keeffe

School of Archaeology, University College Dublin

I. Introduction

Two of the key datasets for the investigation of past hunter-gatherer societies are stone technologies and landscapes. However, it is only in recent years that the potential for the integration of these datasets has begun to be realised.

This PhD project, currently in its early stages, aims to investigate the inter-relationships of stone technologies and their landscape contexts. The general case study is the Mesolithic of the Irish Sea region, with additional targeted case studies nested within this.



General Study Area: The Irish Sea Region

III. Contribution

This project will contribute to our understandings of the Mesolithic period by developing a contextualised landscape understanding of stone technologies. This will enable a more meaningful negotiation of the Mesolithic of the Irish Sea Region, which may be methodologically applicable further afield. The engagement with the landscape context of technological tradition, embodied in this project, will allow an added depth of interpretation of Mesolithic social lives.

II. Stone Technology & Landscapes

The study of stone technology has long been a central element of Mesolithic archaeology. Previous work has often focused on the construction of typological systems. Often however, such systems have remained removed from their landscape contexts, thus reducing the possibilities for our understanding of Mesolithic lifeways.

The archaeological landscape concept has recently allowed the re-appraisal of many aspects of the past. Mesolithic landscapes have enjoyed a re-invigoration through the application of phenomenological methodologies. However, these methodologies have not sought to construct robust and rigorous datasets of Mesolithic landscapes.

Approaches where technology and landscape are removed from one another have failed to examine key issues. One key problem is the failure, with a few notable exceptions, to investigate the details of both stone technologies and their landscape contexts in an integrated framework.



Ynys Enlli, NW Wales

Photo: G. Warren

IV. Methodology

Lithic analysis will inform understandings of the varying technical practices undertaken in a series of case studies around the Irish Sea. The focus will be on examining the chaîne opératoire of stone technologies. Landscape characterisation will seek to build a dataset of topographical landscape attributes for Mesolithic sites around the Irish Sea. This dataset will enable a detailed analysis of the situation of Mesolithic places in relation to the physical landscape.



Ynys Enlli chipped stone artefacts

V. Ynys Enlli, NW Wales

One confirmed case study is Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island), lying 3km off the westerly tip of the Llŷn Peninsula in NW Wales. Investigations recovered a predominantly Later Mesolithic assemblage of stone artefacts demonstrating variability in raw materials. Linking the traditions of the chipped stone assemblage with broader landscape traditions around the Irish Sea, will inform the contextualisation of forms of knowledge at Ynys Enlli, enabling an in-depth examination of these social worlds.

Author: Emmett O'Keeffe
Acknowledgements: Dr. Graeme Warren, Prof. Gabriel Cooney
Funding: UCD College of Arts & Celtic Studies Ad Astra Research Scholarship
Email: emmett.okeeffe@ucd.ie
Web: www.ucd.ie/archaeology/research/phd/okeeffeemmett