Movement, Migration and Mediation: Understanding Colonisation and Social Change around the Western Seaways of Britain, 5000–3500 BC

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The delay…

c. 4050 BC

22 miles

c. 5000 BC
This session and our argument:

- Movement or exchange ...
- Colonization or indigenous adoption ...
- The historical circumstances of the process of colonization ...
- Relations to the places of real or imagined origins ...
- The advantages and challenges of the natural setting ...

The dynamics of change as process, with influence in multiple directions.

The rate and nature of change goes hand and hand with this.
"The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities"

Homi Bhabha (1994, 5) *The Location of Culture*
The historical circumstances? Real and imagined ‘origins’?

Davison et al 2005 The role of waterways in the spread of the Neolithic – *Journal of archaeological Science*
Arrows and isochrons ... the ‘natural setting and understanding process’

Fox 1932

Callaghan & Scarre 2009

Sheridan 2010
The western seaways... still key to understanding the transition???
Western seaways: implicated but not really explored...

4300-3700 BC (?)

4495-4195 cal BC (95%)

Icons of 5th M. contact: the Ferriter’s Cove cow bones and the Acnacreebeag pot
Objectives

• Achieve a greater understanding of the processes behind and chronology of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition within the western seaways zone
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- Construct a database of all known Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic settlement sites within the western seaways zone + submit NRCF bid for more C14 dates

- Excavate three key sites (Guernsey, Isles of Scilly, Outer Hebrides) to enhance record

- Model the changing nature of Holocene coastline morphology and connecting seaways
The western seaways themselves: islands
5th M. islands...

**Orkney & Outer Hebrides**
- Record patchy and only recently appreciated
- Sustained clearances (pollen)
- Sustained occupation?

**Inner Hebrides**
- Regular island hopping
- “Important highway” (Hardy & Wickham-Jones 2002)
- Possibly similar on closer inspection
Isle of Man

- Connected to Ireland (through stone tools)
- Separate from Britain?
- Or signalling difference because of contact? (McCartan 2004)
- Early (possible) cereal pollen
5th M. islands...

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Dublin coast, Bardsey, etc. (Cooney 2004, Edmonds et al. 2010)

- Closer to shore, but v. difficult waters
- Regular visits
- Middens, scatters, occupation, burials
Isles of Scilly

- Record very patchy
- But definite Mesolithic presence
- Possibly seasonal visits for hunting, fishing, etc.?
Channel Islands

- Neolithic arrives c. 4800 (?)
- Strong connections with each other, and with mainland France
- Tomb types, pottery styles, stone axes, polished stone rings, etc.
- Similar picture in 4th M.
Early 4th M. islands...

Isles of Scilly
- Ephemeral occupation (pits, etc.)
- Possibly seasonal visits for hunting, fishing, etc.?
- Hembury Ware – 3750-3500 BC

Isle of Man
- Patchy picture – post-holes, pits
- Shouldered bowl / Mull Hill pottery – 3700-3300 BC
Early 4th M. islands...

**Outer Hebrides**

- Some fairly stone substantial buildings
- Unstan Ware pottery
- 3720-3370 cal BC

**Orkney**

- Several substantial buildings now
- Stone and timber built
- Unstan Ware pottery
- c. 3700-3400 cal BC
Summary...

5th millennium archaeology

- Regular short-distance sea travel
- Definite long-distance voyages too
  - Channel Islands/France
  - Cornwall(?)/Isles of Scilly
  - Isle of Man /Scotland/Ireland
  - France/Ferriter’s Cove
  - France /Achnacreebeag (?)
- ‘Mesolithic’ and ‘Neolithic’ people involved
Summary...

Early 4th millennium archaeology
- earliest Neolithic dates – 3750-3300 BC
- material culture local not long-distance
- if we are seeing 5th M. continental mariners, they are not obviously colonising the islands
- Neolithic seems to have local and late origins

... at least as far as we can tell now

Lindsay Scott 1950
(Eilean an Tighe)
The Sea and seafaring: understanding process
Understanding process,
In conclusion...

Tacking
- the process of transition itself
- our process of understanding it
In conclusion...

Tacking across the channel
(N.B. arrows go both ways)
In conclusion...

Tacking
not a switch from black to white,
need to focus on the grey
In conclusion...

Tacking between dates and process
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