

**GOODMAN FUND
COVER SHEET**

Name Ryan Matthew Murphy Student Faculty

Advisor Deborah Nichols Academic Year 2009

Project Title The Social Significance of Bronze Age Roundhouses in Ireland

Start Date July 7, 2008 Completion date August 29, 2008

Abstract

The proposed research seeks to explain the significance of a particular Irish roundhouse in the context of Bronze Age society in Ireland. The roundhouse in question is one of only ten Bronze Age stone-built roundhouses that have been discovered in Ireland and is located in an archaeological dig site near a field school in western Ireland. By enrolling in the Achill Field School in the summer of 2008, I will be given six weeks of instruction in archaeological theory and techniques while at the same time becoming familiar with the roundhouse site itself. Following the instruction, I will have two weeks of site access to complete my own research project. As undergraduates are not allowed to complete unsupervised fieldwork, this is a unique opportunity to engage in real archaeology and research. I further intend to use this research as the basis of a senior honors thesis. The ultimate purpose is to get a better understanding of how this Bronze Age roundhouse was used and what it can say about the influences on Bronze Age Irish people from other parts of Europe including Britain, France, and Iberia.

A complete proposal must also include:

Bibliography Budget Personal Résumé or CV Transcript (student only)

Does this project involve human subjects? Yes No

Proposals missing one or more items will be returned to the applicant.

For office use only

Approved Not Approved Date _____

Honors Thesis _____ Final Report _____ Grant Award \$ _____

Award Letter _____

Advance \$ _____ Financial Accounting Due _____

Social Significance of Bronze Age Roundhouses in Ireland **Ryan Murphy '09**

Project Summary

The proposed research seeks to explain the significance of a particular Irish roundhouse in the context of Bronze Age society in Ireland. The uniqueness of the Bronze Age roundhouse is such that many things may be learned from studying it. The roundhouse in question is one of only ten Bronze Age stone-built roundhouses that have been discovered in Ireland. It is located in an archaeological excavation site called the Deserted Village of Slievemore near the Achill Field School in western Ireland. In conjunction with the Achill Field School, I will investigate the Bronze Age roundhouse to complete my own research project. As undergraduates are not allowed to complete unsupervised fieldwork, this is a unique opportunity to engage in real archaeology and research. I further intend to use this research as the basis of a senior honors thesis in the Fall 2008. The Deserted Village site has been partially surveyed in the last few years and there is a new project being conducted this summer. I will work in conjunction with project leader Stuart Rathbone to assist in the project while at the same time answering my own research questions. I intend to explore the form and function of the roundhouse, focusing on what can be learned from it about Bronze Age society. This is a problem of household archaeology that will be answered with analysis of artifacts, their location and distribution in the site, and the structure of the house itself. Additionally, the geographic location, both coastal and extreme-west, will allow for an interesting and potentially enlightening comparison of this roundhouse to sites closer to Britain. When I get to the actual site, I can specify exactly what I intend to investigate, but the ultimate purpose is to get a better understanding of how this Bronze Age roundhouse was used and what it

can say about the influences on Bronze Age Irish people from other parts of Europe including Britain, France, and Iberia.

The Bronze Age in Western Europe

The Bronze Age is so named because great advances in metallurgy were made in this period of time from 2000 to 500 B.C. Ireland is known to have had extensive trading relations with other parts of Europe during this time as well as for skilled artisans of gold and bronze. This period is also marked with advances in pottery, architecture, and agriculture. Pottery is often quite useful in identifying sites because it is so long-lasting and ubiquitous. The earlier and late Bronze Ages are marked with differences in pottery styles. They are also different in the architecture and agriculture used. The Bronze Age architecture is thought to progress from rectangular buildings to roundhouses. (Bradley 2007 - 94). The roundhouses were constructed of stone or wood. Of the 60-70 Bronze Age roundhouses discovered in Ireland, only 10 were stone-built. This imbalance is interesting because wooden materials are usually less-likely to survive the course of time than stone-built structures. It will be important to consider this phenomenon in this research. The roundhouse at the Deserted Village is the only stone-built roundhouse that has been dated. Therefore, studying the roundhouse at the Deserted Village site could offer useful information that can be placed in a historical context.

It is also interesting to consider the importance of henges in early prehistoric Irish culture. The circular symbolism of the henges is seen in many elements of Irish architecture including houses, forts, towns, and burial chambers. The circular nature of the roundhouse may have something important to do with the inhabitants or its role in the

rest of the village. Perhaps the roundhouse was used by a high social class, or for non-residual purposes. (Burl 1981). Bronze Age society in Western Europe is thought to be comprised of chiefdoms with varying levels of social hierarchy and centralization. The importance of stone monuments and metal trade is evidence that there was some degree of social ranking in Bronze Age Irish society. (Champion 1984 - 154-177). I will set to out to discover what the Deserted Village roundhouse may tell me about the social status of the house's inhabitants.

The roundhouse has been given a middle Bronze Age date. This would have been an interesting transition period from the early to late Bronze Age. The early Bronze Age is characterized by bronze working, pottery, land use, and settlement patterns. Settlements were generally inhabited by 2 to 15 families. (Coles 1979 – 210-276). The late Bronze Age is characterized by more rain, lower summer temperatures, and flooding. This resulted in the abandonment of many early Bronze Age settlements in favor of more suitable farming areas.

Settlements generally had one major roundhouse, several subsidiary huts (which may have been seasonal), storage buildings, pits for cooking or the preservation of produce, thorn fencing on low earth banks, and paths and roads to fields and pastures. There is no evidence of larger buildings that would indicate high social status. Some settlements were constructed on artificial islands known as crannogs. Despite the existence of these and some hill-forts, there is no evidence of defensive fortifications between 1000 and 0 BC. (Coles 1979 – 459-490).

By 1000 BC, population pressures forced people to begin permanent farms as well as repairing and rebuilding old houses. Farming systems included ditches, banks,

and manure. Farms were sometimes pastoral and were sometimes left fallow. In addition to farming, people herded cattle, cultivated cereal, collected shellfish, and went deep-sea fishing. The scarce supply of wood led to the use of peat for fires. Coastal settlements had several roundhouses with a central hearth and small cubicles. This is what can be expected from the Deserted Village site as it lies on Achill Island on the western coast of Ireland. (Coles 1979 – 459-490).

The settlements were largely self-sufficient and had local pottery (evidenced by sherds), textiles (evidenced by looms), and stone equipment. However, inhabitants are believed to have been involved with trade and barter for there is evidence of metal trade with Britain, northern France, and Iberia. The Irish specialized in sheet metal that could be used for jewelry, shields, cauldrons, buckets, metal rattles, and horns. Copper and bronze are rarely discovered at late Bronze Age sites, gold is almost never found, and it is believed that people recycled metal. There are often metal workshops for bronze weapons and tools found at Bronze Age sites. Tools that have been discovered include slate clubs, stone querns, and bone tools. (Coles 1979 – 459-490).

The Deserted Village Site

The Achill Archaeological Field School was started in 1991. The school has explored the Deserted Village of Slievemore since its founding. The Deserted Village site is actually a composition of three separate “villages” that are all located on the mountainside of Slievemore. While the villages are given a post-medieval date of the late 18th century, the landscape represents activity extending from the Neolithic to the 20th century. The aim of the field school is to record and document the entire Slievemore

site across each historical time period. The school is linked to the National University of Ireland at Galway. Focus is generally on the dwellings and surrounding area of the village, and this season the school will focus on a village house, a megalith, and the Bronze Age roundhouse. Essentially, the goal is to have a complete archaeological map and history of the Slievemore site, along with analysis of the relationships between historical time periods. Archaeological formations include tombs, field systems, field walls, and roundhouses. (<http://www.achill-fieldschool.com/>).

The Achill Field School is located on Achill Island in County Mayo, Ireland. The school was recommended to me by Bettina Arnold of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. I have been in contact with the managing director, Theresa McDonald, and the project director, Stuart Rathbone, who have assisted me in designing this project. I will spend the first six weeks of this project learning archaeological procedures. This time will also be used to become familiar with the Slievemore site. I will spend the next two weeks at the roundhouse site conducting my own research. I will participate in all of the archaeological procedures and analysis. I will have access to all existing data the school has for the Slievemore site. I will use the information gained from my analysis of the site's artifacts and architecture as well as the data the school has collected over the years as the basis for my research project.

Methods

This research project will be treated as a problem of household archaeology. Household archaeology is the study of artifact assemblages and architecture of houses which aims to discover what activities took place within it. Such activities include

production and consumption of material goods. In addition to finding these activities, household archaeology seeks to find who was involved, what their social lives were like, and how they used the physical space of the house. (Allison 1999 – 2-18). The artifacts expected from this project are potsherds, worked stone, and stone tools. The scarcity of metal limits the likelihood of its discovery because it was very valuable and often recycled. By identifying the type of pottery predominating in the site, we can postulate the habitation period as well as the trade of goods and pottery design technology. Great focus will also be put on the location of artifacts in the site in terms of the greater architectural structure. This will enable us to get an idea of the importance of different areas of the house and how many people could live in it. This information will lead to postulation on the everyday activities of the people inhabiting the house.

The architectural structure itself will be carefully examined as well. We will search for the original floor surface and the internal features of the house. There will also be test trenches to examine the wall and entrance structure. By examining the construction design and building materials of the wall, we can get a good idea of what technology was available and appropriate for the inhabitants of the roundhouse. We can also compare our finding in this particular house to other houses of similar dating to consider differences in social and economic status. It will also give us an idea of what structure was best suited for the climate during that time period.

We will also be using a GIS program to prepare a map of all the roundhouses at the site. We will test trench a field wall to get environmental data and dating material.

Research Question

This field school offers a unique opportunity for me to conduct research on a site as an undergraduate student while first learning the archaeological methods necessary to complete the project. I am not taking the course for transfer credit, but I must still pay the tuition to attend the school. This research will be centered on the household archaeology of this Bronze Age roundhouse. I will look at the position of the roundhouse in relation to the surrounding geography and in relation to the other houses at the Slievemore site using the GIS mapping technology employed in the project. I will examine the physical structure of the roundhouse and the floor plan as we unearth it. Additionally, I will identify artifacts as they are unearthed that may include pottery and tools. I will use these identifications and the context in which they are found, including location and relation to other artifacts, to get an idea of how different spaces in the house were used as well as the purpose of the house itself. I will also have access to all of the data and analysis found by the Slievemore Project. I will use this information as well as my own findings and journal to construct a comprehensive picture of the function and people that this particular roundhouse served in the Bronze Age. This picture will be the base of my senior thesis which will attempt to answer the question: "How does this Bronze Age roundhouse on the western coast of Ireland compare with other Bronze Age roundhouse in different areas of Ireland?" In this question I may consider trade and travel relations between Ireland and other parts of Western Europe, climate, and sea access. I am confident that my research at the Slievemore site will be successful and I will discover some interesting similarities and differences between Bronze Age roundhouses in Ireland.

Budget

Plane Tickets – From Boston to Dublin – Roundtrip	\$1,000
Field School Tuition	€3,825
Food per day	\$20
Train Ticket – Dublin to Westport – Roundtrip	€50
Total (approximate)	\$8,000

The field school tuition covers all materials, laundry, internet, room, utilities, but it does not cover food. The dorms are self-catering and there is a nearby grocery store where I can purchase food.

Bibliography

2007 Project Summary

2008 Field Proposal (still waiting for this)

<http://excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Mayo&id=12079>

<http://www.achill-fieldschool.com/>

Allison, Penelope M.

1999 *The Archaeology of Household Activities*. New York: Routledge.

Barry, T. F.

1987 *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*. London: Methuen.

Bradley, Richard.

2007 *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Burl, Aubrey.

1981 *Rites of the Gods*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

Champion, Timothy, Clive Gamble, Stephen Shennan, and Alasdair Whittle.

1984 *Prehistoric Europe*. London: Academic Press.

Coles, J. M. and A. F. Harding.

1979 *The Bronze Age in Europe – An Introduction to the Prehistory of Europe c.2000-700 BC*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

Cunliffe, Barry.

1994 *The Oxford Illustrated Prehistory of Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gilman, Patricia A.

1987 Architecture as Artifact: Pit Structures and Pueblos in the American Southwest. *American Antiquity* 52: 538-564.

Lady Wilde.

1887 *Legends, Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*. London: Ward and Downey.

Macalister, R. A. S.

1949 *The Archaeology of Ireland*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

Orme, A. R.

1970 *Ireland*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Price, T. Douglas.

2007 *Principles of Archaeology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn.

2007 *Archaeology Essentials: Theories, Methods, and Practice*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Richter, Michael.

1988 *Medieval Ireland – The Enduring Tradition*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Sherratt, Andrew.

1997 *Economy and Society in Prehistoric Europe – Changing Perspectives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.