

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF FOOD!

June 29, 2012 nikolah Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Environmental Archaeology, Excavation, Medieval archaeologist, Archaeology, Assemblage, Australia, Bishop, Bishop's Palace, commercial archaeologist, County Kilkenny, Dublin, Economics, Environmental Archaeology, food, Fulacht fiadh, Greece, http, Ireland, Kilkenny, steel-toe capped boots, Syria, Trowel, University College Dublin

I've been a commercial archaeologist for 13 years and have worked in Ireland, Greece and Australia. My days once consisted of jumping into a muddy hole in the depths of winter to shovel out the sticky and waterlogged fills within and then trudge to the spoil-heap with heavy boots. My days also consisted of excavating beautiful wooden troughs in fulachta fiadh (burnt mounds) or excavating postholes of Bronze Age structures in the balmy summer sun. However, the recession in Ireland has led to a decline in commercial archaeological work and the absence of muddy viz-vest clad hordes of trowel-grasping excavators is the most visible proof of this!

Although I miss those days and would drop my pen for a trowel at the drop of a hard-hat, I decided to specialise in environmental archaeology. My dissertation was based upon a seed assemblage from Syria (<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~nmiller0/syria.html>), which I never had the chance to visit before the war broke out. The study entailed hours of back-breaking and eye-straining microscope work, but it was worth it in the end! The seed assemblage from this amazing site (<http://www.unipa.it/falson/en/introduction.html>) has added to the knowledge we have already of Bronze Age economics in this part of the world. Highly structured societies saw economic collapse and regeneration similar to the worldwide recession (sssh don't mention the war!) that we are currently experiencing. These stages can be identified through a multi-disciplinary approach to the excavation and research and seeds play an important role in this approach. For example, the appearance of nutritionally demanding cash-crops, such as wine and figs, and the greater role played by stored grain in the tells and towns for trade and export, indicate how well-structured or wealthy a tell was. The analysis of the rest of the assemblage to augment this picture is one of my day jobs!

I also work with material from home (http://www.ipean.ie/profile_Nikolah.html) and recent and interesting jobs include assemblages from medieval Kilkenny (*Cill Chainnigh*), a city located to

the southwest of Dublin. This was an important settlement in the early medieval period and the recent discovery of the earliest identified grape (11th/12th century) in Ireland from the Robing Room in Bishop's Palace (<http://www.kkap.ie/assets/bishops-palace-plant-remains.pdf>) highlighted the status of *Cill Chainnigh* in this period. The analysis of assemblages from sites around Ireland is another one of my day jobs!

Occasionally, I get to throw on my steel-toe-capped boots and visit a site where works are taking place. More often than not, as is typical for an archaeologist, most of the days which consist of office work are warm and pleasant and the sun's rays taunt through the window, while those days on-site are spent standing in the rain watching track machines and bulldozers! But, I'm fairly certain that there are no archaeologists out there who say they don't love their job. I love mine!