

Katie Portman's Summer 2016 Fieldwork

In June 2016, I worked on an archaeological excavation on the island of Inishark, off the west coast of Ireland. As a member of the Cultural Landscapes of the Irish Coast (CLIC) project, I lived and worked alongside Profs. Ian Kuijt and Meredith Chesson, as well as several graduate students. We opened up a medieval Christian pilgrimage site, full of thousands of quartz cobbles that people most likely brought up from the beach as an offering of sorts. The site was beautiful, the people were brilliant, and I learned much about both archaeological technique and my own work style.

For the rest of the summer, I did research on campus on one of the University's skeletal collections, from the Byzantine period monastery of St. Stephen in Jerusalem. With Prof. Susan Sheridan and two other students, I sought to expand our knowledge of the monks' daily lives. We looked specifically at the sites where muscles attached to the bones. Muscle attachments stressed to an unusually high degree in life may demonstrate bony growth or porous degradation in death. Assessing these features gives bioarchaeologists an idea of a collection's daily activities, such as kayaking or repetitive kneeling.

After spending countless hours in the lab, the four of us traveled to Moscow for the 21st European Meeting of the Paleopathology Association. Presenting our research was almost as exciting as getting to interact with some of the biggest names in this niche of anthropology. I talked statistics with Dr. Megan Brickley, complimented Dr. Charlotte Roberts, and had dinner with Dr. Jane Buikstra – all three of whom are leaders in bioarchaeology and personal heroes of mine. I was able to hear about some of the newest developments in the field, all against the unforgettable backdrop of post-Soviet Russia.

