

WHAT'S COOKING IN ST KEVIN'S KITCHEN?



INVESTIGATING FOODWAYS AT THE ECCLESIASTICAL SITE OF GLENDALOUGH, IRELAND, AD 600-1500

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OVERVIEW

From the first Roman missionaries to the arrival of St Patrick and beyond, the early medieval and medieval periods in Ireland (AD 400-1150 and AD 1150-1550, respectively) have long been associated with the spread and influence of Christianity and the development of the institution of the Church as an epicentre of worship, economy and settlement.

Many large monastic, or episcopal-monastic, centres, such as that of **Glendalough**, began to emerge, bringing with them a wealth of clerics, scholars, penitents, monastics and tenants.

As food consumption, alongside production, culinary practices and eating habits, can provide a lens through which to understand social identities, what could we learn about these newly formed religious communities, through an archaeobotanical analysis of Glendalough?



Figure 1: charred hulled barley grains²

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Some of the key research questions would include:

- What can we gather from archaeobotanical analysis about **what people were eating** at this ecclesiastical settlement?
- How did this **change** through time?
- How does this **compare** to other ecclesiastical sites and secular (or non-church) settlements?
- To what extent did the people at Glendalough follow a **specialised diet**?
- How were they **processing their food**, and **where** was this taking place, i.e. onsite vs. offsite?
- What **new insights** into broader societal practices can be inferred from this study overall?

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Despite its acclaim as one of Ireland's most iconic religious landscapes, there is very little understanding of the way people interacted with food at Glendalough.

The main objective of this study is to characterise the diet, culinary practices, processes and food-related behaviours taking place in this context.

Through a new analysis of **archaeobotanical remains**, alongside a review of textual sources and related archaeological evidence, this project aims to explore this ecclesiastical community's engagement with food and provide new insights into the food production and consumption practices of religious communities in eastern Ireland.

A large number of soil samples from excavations carried out since 2009 at Glendalough as part of a UCD School of Archaeology teaching and research project are available for analysis. These deposits are mainly medieval in date, with some early medieval deposits also, allowing for any changes or shifts in foodways to be tracked and characterised, over this period of time.

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Acknowledgements/References
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Figure 2: Glendalough round tower³