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# Wild pig hunting in Mesolithic Ireland: investigating human-animal relationships

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## Abstract

This presentation will communicate the results from an investigation of Mesolithic human-animal relationships in Ireland, specifically the interactions between humans and *Sus scrofa* (wild pig). Wild pig were the dominant prey species for Irish Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, constituting 90% of mammalian bones in animal bone assemblages. Despite the prevalence of wild pig remains in the archaeological record, they have received relatively little research focus. This study implemented multi-isotope analysis on wild pig remains from five archaeological sites. Early Neolithic domestic pig remains were also analysed, in order to compare the relationship of hunter-gatherers with their prey to the relationship of farmers and domesticated species.

Multiple approaches were used to investigate this relationship: multi-isotope analysis, faunal analysis and ethology. Multi-isotope analysis methods were used to explore different areas: carbon ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) and nitrogen ( $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ ) isotopes were analysed to determine the dietary structure of wild and domestic pig, whereas oxygen ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ), strontium ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ) and sulphur ( $\delta^{34}\text{S}$ ) isotopes were analysed to assess their landscape mobility and origins. Wild pig ethology was used to provide a theoretical framework in which the isotope results could be interpreted, and traditional faunal analysis of these assemblages provided an archaeological background to the results.

This research has elucidated the dietary structure and mobility of wild pig, provided insights into Irish Mesolithic hunting strategies, and compared the patterns to early Neolithic domestic pig husbandry. Ultimately this research has moved beyond conceptualisations of wild pig as an economic resource, and considered their diets, behaviour, mobility, broader ecological niche and how this impacted hunter-gatherer communities.

**Keywords:** Mesolithic, Ireland, animals, isotope analysis, hunting

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