

Domestic production and the political economy in prehistory: evidence from the Burren, Co. Clare

CARLETON JONES*, OLIVE CAREY AND CLARE HENNIGAR
Department of Archaeology, NUI Galway

[Accepted 9 July 2010. Published 5 November 2010.]

Abstract

Three closely related prehistoric landscapes located in the Burren in Co. Clare are investigated with the aim of exploring the relationships between households and the wider societies within which they functioned. Particular emphasis is placed on the spatial expression of residential, economic and ritual activities across the landscapes. The changing relationship between domestic production and the developing political economy is placed in its wider Irish and British context and discussed in terms of gift exchanges and debt relationships.

Introduction

The core activities of households have been identified in both ethnographic studies of contemporary societies and archaeological studies of ancient societies as production, distribution, reproduction, co-residence and transmission (primarily of wealth and social position). Although there is often a ‘pull’ towards the pursuit of these activities at the level of the individual household, ethnographic studies have shown that even in fairly simple societies, households are frequently incorporated into larger kin groups, work parties or residential groups to form efficient production units.¹ Production concerned primarily with maintaining and perpetuating the family (domestic production) is, therefore, shaped in part by the wider relationships within which households function.

The formation and maintenance of supra-household production groups is generally brought about through economic interdependence, ideology and symbolism working together to extend the definition of kinship relationships and thereby extend the labour available for domestic production. Even in fairly simple societies, domestic production is frequently increased and a percentage diverted to fund

* Author’s e-mail: carleton.jones@nuigalway.ie
doi: 10.3318/PRIAC.2010.111.33

¹ Timothy Earle, ‘Property rights and the evolution of chiefdoms’, in Timothy Earle (ed.), *Chiefdoms: power, economy, and ideology* (Cambridge, 1991), 71–99. Andrew Fleming, ‘Land tenure, productivity, and field systems’, in G. Barker and C. Gamble (eds), *Beyond domestication in prehistoric Europe* (London, 1985), 129–46. Augustin Holl, ‘Community interaction and settlement patterning in northern Cameroon’, in Augustin Holl and Thomas Levy (eds), *Spatial boundaries and social dynamics* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1993), 39–62. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age economics* (Chicago, 1972).