

EXPANDING THE HORIZONS OF ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGY

Islandscapes Imaginary and Real, Ely: the case of the Dry Island

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point a definition of islands that goes beyond geographical isolation to consider islands as social constructs insofar as they reflect feelings of isolation, separateness, distinctiveness and otherness. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the ‘dry’ island, an island that although once surrounded by water has long since lost its physical isolation due to changes in sea level and drainage patterns. Taking the Isle of Ely in the fens of East Anglia in the United Kingdom between AD 1200-1600 as a case study, and utilising archaeological evidence for diet and for the local Ely ware pottery, it is possible to reconstruct a cognitive *mappa*, which describes the perception of islandness amongst the island’s medieval inhabitants.

Keywords

Island archaeology, landscape, insularity, dry island, Ely, *mappa*, cognitive map

Introduction

The focus of this article is to question how the integrity of an island study area is maintained when its inhabitants are bound into a network of social and economic relationships. Recent studies have demonstrated that, to a large extent, isolation is a cultural phenomenon related to the construction of identity as much as to insularity. What has been lacking in many previous studies of island societies is an attempt to map the worldview of the islanders themselves. It should be possible to model a mental map of the inhabitants of a specific island that will take account of both social patterns of inter-island interaction, and of the place of the island within a network involving the wider outside world. My aim is to propose such a cognitive *mappa* for the ‘dry island’ of Ely that provides archaeologists with ways of understanding islands and islanders in the deep and more recent past

Re-defining islandness

In the 1970s, after Vayda and Rappaport’s (1963) essay on island cultures and the work of John Evans (1973) on Malta, many researchers considered islands as ‘laboratories of culture change’, the nearest the archaeologist can get to putting a human community into an isolated setting to see what they do over several thousand years. Behind this lay

an assumption that islands were both insular and isolated, defined by nice sharp edges, so that it is clear to the researcher where the boundaries are. Since Evans a range of ideas and analytical techniques have coalesced around islands. Two ecologists, Robert McArthur and Edward Wilson, developed the study of island biogeography, which came to attention through their book *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (1967). They, along with other researchers in the field, aimed at explaining the biodiversity of islands and in particular how they sustained themselves. A socio-cultural form of island studies, island anthropology, also developed in the 20th Century. Studies here tended to focus on aspects of island fragility and were used as the basis for politically contentious policies of population relocation; the most famous example being that of the remote Scottish island of St Kilda, whose entire population was relocated in 1930. Yet it is becoming clearer that cultural isolation is a phenomenon that rarely occurred on islands and thinking of them as laboratories can be misleading and inaccurate.

What is an island? Most people would probably identify insularity, a watery surround, as the defining feature, and yet not all water girt landmasses are considered islands, Australia being the most obvious example. In this context Eric Clark identified three variables “as central to insularity, size, distance to a continental mainland and intensity of contact and exchange with other places” (2004: 288). As Hayward (2009) comments, Australia is surrounded on all sides by water, and thus qualifies as an island. Indeed aspects of its history, society and culture are susceptible to island studies, however its substantial landmass and population means that its ‘islandness’ is not as all-encompassing and strongly defined as it would be for a smaller island such as Malta. Australia would therefore often be excluded from consideration on the grounds that the landmass needs to be smaller than that of the continent. Researchers have tended to adopt a pragmatic approach to the question of what can and what cannot be considered appropriate sizes for a study area. At one end of the scale are micro-islands ('islets') and at the other continental Australia. The majority of island studies focus on the smaller islands that may be considered socially and culturally ‘insulated’ by their geographic isolation.

For Evans and others it was the geographical circumspection of islands, leading to a degree of physical isolation that underpinned the notion of islands as laboratories. But there are a number of complications. One relates to islands that are separated from their mainland at high tide but linked when the tide retreats by a causeway, for example the ‘Holy Island’ of Lindisfarne in Northumberland, England. Another case relates to the bridging of islands to mainlands, are such places any less islands after the construction of a bridge? Some certainly believed so in the case of the Scottish Isle of Skye where the construction of a bridge, opened in 1995, proved controversial. Religious groups in particular believed that replacing the ferry service with a bridge, open round the clock seven days a week, threatened the local culture of strict observance of the Sabbath. Whilst island studies embraces these aspects the question has been asked how it can ‘justify’ excluding other locations such as peninsulas (Hayward, 2009). Peninsulas, particularly those connected to their hinterland via narrow or mountainous strips of land, do have a number of close affinities with islands. Gibraltar would be a case in point, as would Hong Kong, both of which retain a cultural identity independent of their immediate geographic neighbours. Conversely, although island societies in general may give the illusion that they are easier to analyse, because they exist within a sea-bounded landscape as opposed to a continental one, like Australia, or peninsula, like Gibraltar, but this in no way assures islands the status of isolation. With few exceptions island societies were never truly isolated; but instead engaged with people and cultures with

varying degrees of regularity. Thus even the most apparently straightforward categories of insularity are in fact fuzzy.

More recently cultural (psychological, socio-political and economic) factors have been shown to be important in determining isolation (Broodbank, 1999, 238); with Rainbird (1999, 217) arguing that islands are social constructs insofar as they reflect feelings of isolation, separateness, distinctiveness and otherness. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the ‘dry’ island, islands that although once surrounded by water have long since lost their physical isolation due to changes in sea level and drainage patterns. Islandness is therefore open to cultural negotiation and thus variation in space and time, and it is this notion which forms the basis of this study of the Isle of Ely. Ely lies on an area of raised land, the isle, surrounded by marshes and flanked on one side by the River Great Ouse.

Dry islands are legion, although not always recognised as such, for example the isle of Flegg on the east coast of Norfolk was a Viking stronghold in the late first millennium (Chester-Kadwell, 2009: 51, figure 5.5) yet today many local inhabitants are unaware of its island status. Similarly Blackpool on the Fylde Coast of Lancashire was circumscribed by the Irish Sea during the Neolithic (Barrowclough 2008: 19-20, figure 5), yet today little remains to remind the visitor of this fact. In contrast amongst the inhabitants of the Isle of Ely in Cambridgeshire, whose geographic isolation was ended when the peat fens were drained in the post-medieval period, an island mentality is still maintained. It is a place that has a remarkably strong sense of identity. Largely based upon Saxon and medieval associations, this hinges variously upon a series of near-legends characters and the Island’s resistance to mainland authority (cf Darby, 1940: 144-6). Focusing upon the exploits of Hereward the Wake (Keynes, 2003: 29, 42-4), a legendary Saxon leader for whom the fens became the last redoubt against Norman conquest in the years following the invasion of 1066; this ethos permeates, for example, Kingsley’s *Hereward the Wake* (1866) and MacFarlane’s earlier *The Camp of Refuge* (1844).

There are therefore problems with Evans’ approach. In the light of the intellectual shift in archaeology associated with post-processualism we need to rethink island archaeology, notably in approaches to landscape and material culture. Once we discard the assumption that islands are defined purely by physical insular isolation it becomes clear that we can no longer consider a single island as the ideal spatial unit of analysis; the history of islands is bound up with the mainland (Renfrew, 2004: 277). The question becomes one of how islands are able to sustain and develop their own culture when connections to the outside world constantly threaten to progressively dilute, transform and even possibly erase their identity. Hayward (2009: online) identified eight factors that determine the ability of a residential community to maintain its identity:

- 1) *The degree of consciousness of there being a distinct local cultural heritage and contemporary cultural identity that has value to the local community*
- 2) *The scale and impact of external cultural influences (the greater these are, the greater the displacement of traditional cultures)*
- 3) *The nature of established local communities’ engagement with external influences and cultural change*

- 4) *The extent to which culture can be manipulated as an economic asset (and/or a form of 'cultural capital')*
- 5) *The nature of migrants' engagements with locality and the heritage of the areas they move into*
- 6) *The nature of diasporic communities, their various retention and/or loss of 'home' island culture and the nature of their influence on/interaction with home islands*
- 7) *The degree to which neighbouring locations and/or regional/national groupings value, validate and support local cultures and the mechanisms by which they do this*
- 8) *The degree to which local cultures can deploy the above to refresh and/or innovate local cultures*

Although Hayward clearly had in mind contemporary rather than historic island communities, a number of his factors, particularly numbers two, three and seven, can be helpful in an analysis of islands in the past. In order to understand Ely, for example, we need also to look to the Cambridgeshire Fens and the rest of East Anglia and thence to the world beyond. Thus the once defined boundary of the Isle of Ely now seems to disappear off into the horizon. It is the interplay of isolation and interrelatedness that should be the focus of archaeological investigation in the future.

In the case of Malta the island archipelago was mostly not cut off from contact with Europe. In fact its central Mediterranean location placed it at the centre of the major sea routes of the Phoenician, Roman, Arab, Crusader and British Empires. The exception was during the Neolithic Temple Period when closure, however partial or complete that was, seems to have been imposed or agreed by the island community (see various contributors to Barrowclough and Malone, 2007). John Robb (2001) has argued persuasively that it was this cultural isolation from Sicily that enabled the building of the megalithic monuments synonymous with this period. The 'temple' building was the result of both internal Maltese ritual development and a new strategy of identity, perhaps initiated by the ruling elite, which used a metaphor of insularity to differentiate the Maltese from Sicilian 'others'. In this example, island isolation was the spur for a process of cultural intensification made possible by the exclusion of external players who might otherwise compete with this development. The island became a powerful metaphor that provided for new island identity formation at the very time that there was increased contact with other places. In this case insularity is a social construction resulting from less rather than more isolation. What happened in Neolithic Malta was not because the island was intrinsically isolated, but because it was far enough from other land to make it isolated if the islanders so elected.

The problem we need to address is that of the polarity in island archaeology between isolation, 'islands as cultural laboratories' and interaction. For an islander the interactions with other members of the island community also have a quality of 'us' and 'them'. As Renfrew (Renfrew and Cherry, 1986) pointed out, the island itself may be divided into polities, communities or even ethnicities, but they are more likely to hold affinities in common with their fellow islanders than with those in the world beyond. Island people need to be studied in relation to the network of social and economic

relationships that bind them to each other and also to the outside world, moving between the local scale and the national and international (Sahlins, 1987; Kirch, 1986). As in the case of Malta the relative isolation of Ely was a key factor in its development. In both cases isolation was a cognitive phenomenon where the reinforcing actions of the ‘religious’ polities of the island were of dominating significance, to the exclusion of extraneous social models.

What has been lacking in most previous studies of island societies is an attempt to map the world view of the islanders themselves. Following Renfrew (1987; 1994, 10-11) it should be possible to model a mental map or *mappa* of the inhabitants of a specific island that will take account of both social patterns of interisland interaction and of the place of the island within a network involving the wider outside world. My aim is to propose such a *mappa* for the ‘dry island’ of Ely that provides archaeologists with ways of understanding islands and islanders in the deep and more recent past.

Cognitive Maps

People do not behave under the influences of their senses alone but also through their past experiences. These experiences contribute to each individual’s unique view of the world, a kind of cognitive map that guides them. Groups of people living together tend to develop a shared view of the world and similar cognitive maps, which in turn influence their group material culture. Cognitive archaeology offers a theoretical approach by which archaeologists can capture these mental maps and thus offers a route to understanding the ideology of the island population. The way that these abstract ideas are manifested through the material remains that past people have left can be investigated using approaches developed in the field of psychology.

Cognitive (or ‘mental’) maps were first described by the psychologist Edward Tolman (1948) and are a method used to construct and accumulate spatial knowledge, allowing the ‘mind’s eye’ to visualise the relationship between different activities and situations. Put simply, the brain is analogous to a map control room. Stimuli enter and are worked over and elaborated into a tentative, cognitive-like map of the environment. This tentative map, indicating routes and paths and environmental relationships, finally determines what responses, if any, people will release. Some of these responses will manifest themselves in material culture, which we can study in order to recreate the mental map. This type of spatial thinking allows new insights into the world-view of people in the past.

Case Study: the Isle of Ely

Life in the East Anglian Fens was dominated by the great monasteries of Crowland, Peterborough, Ramsey, Thorney and Ely (Darby, 1940: 1983). The study will explore the dynamics of the East Anglian community that inhabited the fen island of Ely between AD 1200 and 1600. Looking at Ely the need for a new interpretation is readily apparent. Despite the stream of information now emerging from the Cambridgeshire region, for example numerous excavations undertaken by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit, which successfully order new and older data into accounts that satisfy a chronological narrative, the study of Ely remains essentially local (but see Evans, 2003). What is lacking is a conceptual framework for formulating questions that need to be asked

about the perception of the landscape of Ely (Gosden and Pavlides, 1994), for which an approach that adopts a cognitive *mappa* is well suited.

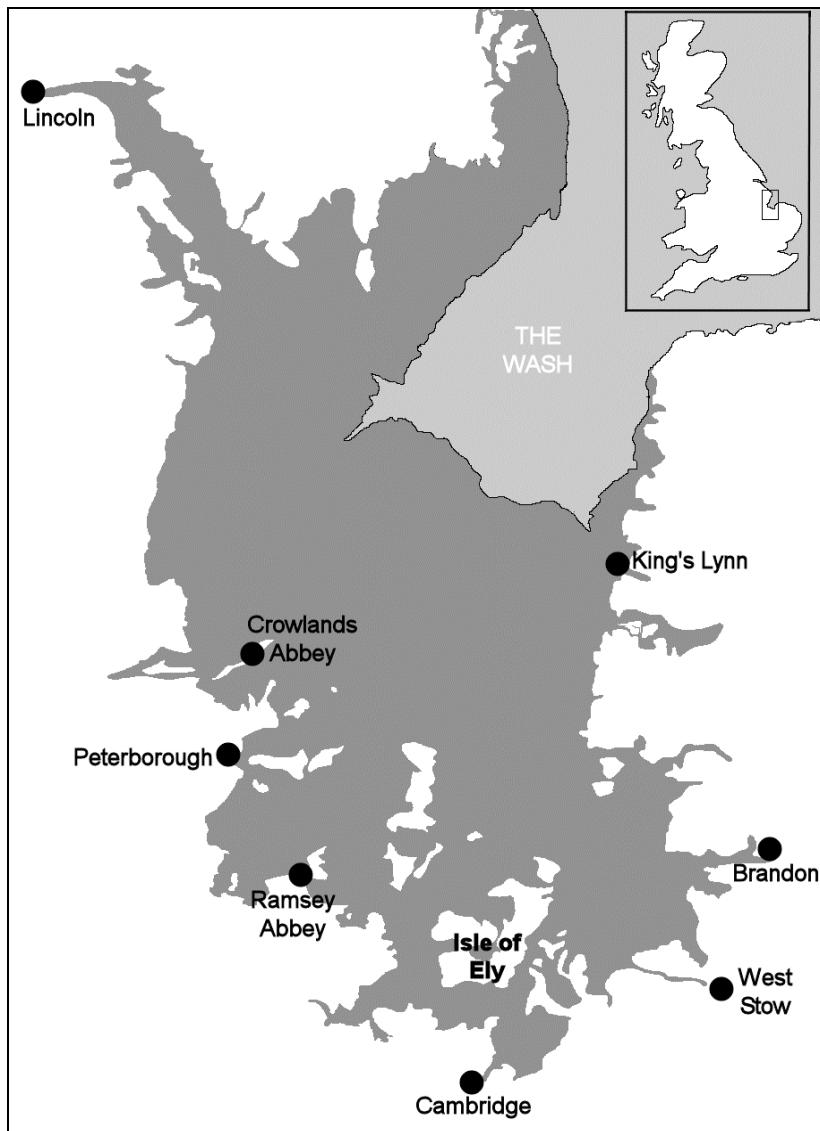


Figure 1 - The Isle of Ely and the East Anglian Fens (shaded dark grey) with key locations marked. Adapted after Hall and Coles 1994.

The approach I propose is contextual, incorporating historic accounts and archaeological investigation in an analysis of the cultural construction of an island mentality. The study will investigate this issue at two different scales, on the one hand internally, constructing a perceptual map of the isle from the point of view of its

inhabitants, and on the other the world beyond mapping the perception of the islanders' insularity with regard to the region of the Cambridgeshire fens and the world beyond.

Extending over 91km, excluding its low embayments, Ely is the largest of the land-locked islands within the Cambridgeshire Fens, rising to 30m amid the flat lowlands of the peat fens (Figure 1). Surrounded by marsh, it is isolated by 3-4km from the fen-edge villages to the south and by 5-10km from those in the east. The high land at Ely became completely surrounded by wetland in post-Roman times, and remained an island until large-scale post-medieval drainage schemes were implemented. Two major changes were made to the river, the eastern Ouse-Cam in the vicinity of Ely by the early 12th Century (Hall and Coles, 1994). Most obvious was the movement of the river from its natural course via Stuntney and Quanea, 2.5km from the monastery, to its present position at the foot of the hill upon which Ely was built. Secondly, and equally important in the success of Ely, was the cutting of the Ten Mile River, taking water from the eastern Ouse-Cam from a position close to Littleport and emptying it into the Norfolk river system that met the sea at King's Lynn. As well as being key in the rise of King's Lynn as an international port, this change provided an opportunity for the development of Ely (Spoerry, 2005, 2008).

The name Ely (*elige*) is recorded by Bede in the 8th Century referring to a religious community first founded by St Etheldreda in c673, and subsequently re-founded as a Benedictine institution; with the abbey church becoming a cathedral in 1108, resulting in the expansion of the town. The earliest standing buildings in Ely date from the second half of the 12th Century. They comprise the Norman cathedral and a number of conventional buildings including the prior's hall and infirmary (Holton-Krayenbuhl, 1997, 122-3).

Discussions of the origins of Ely have tended to focus on successive religious institutions known from documentary sources (*Domesday*, 1086; Speed, 1610; Moore, 1685) particularly Book I of *Liber Eliensis* compiled between 1131 and 1174 by a monk of Ely (Blake, 1962: 1-62) and the *Survey of 1417* (BL Harley 329, fos 10-24v). These have been supplemented in recent years by a number of large-scale excavations. Taken together these sources of evidence allow us to understand the settlement pattern of the medieval city and its relationship to the world beyond.

Material and documentary evidence suggests that the topography of medieval Ely was established by c1200 when occupation concentrated north and east of the monastic precinct, orientated towards the river (Figure 2). Within the city there were two sources of religious authority, the bishop and the monastery (Cessford and Dickens in preparation). The bishop's palace complex stood on the highest land on the island, west of the cloister and his home farm south of Barton square. The monastic enclosure stood on the east-facing slope, as did the vineyards, overlooking the river Great Ouse. Running south-east from the Market Square, adjacent to the Cathedral, down to the river runs Forehill, which evolved as the main thoroughfare between hilltop and river, with dense settlement from the 12th Century (Alexander, 2003). This was a largely mercantile area with, for example, evidence for specialist leatherworking, creating relatively high status and wealth. The river, fronted with wharves and busy with trading activity (Cessford, Alexander and Dickens, 2006), provided the main means of linking Ely with Cambridge, King's Lynn and the world beyond, creating a focus for activity in Ely. North of this busy area on the outskirts of the city centred on Potters Lane was a manufacturing area where potting and tanning activities took place away from the main

centre of population (Owen, 1993: 11). Further out still, but this time to the north, lay the early medieval agricultural settlement of West Fen Road (Mortimer et al, 2005). There a large settlement, possibly established as a food-producing site for the nearby religious community, was geared towards crop and animal husbandry (*ibid*).

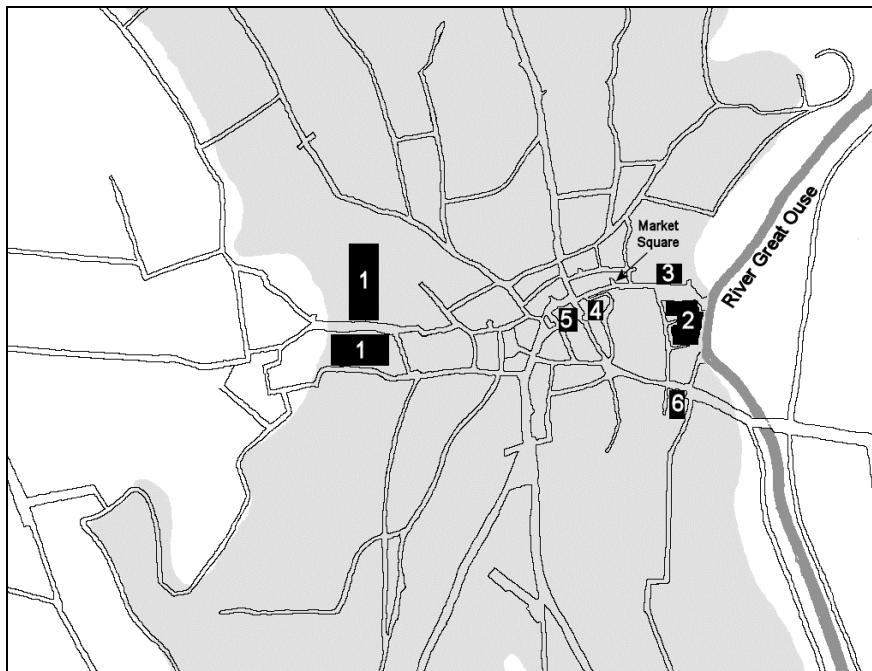


Figure 2 - The location of the main excavations in Ely. 1 West Fen Road, 2. Broad Street, 3. Forehill, 4. Lady Chapel, Ely Cathedral, 5. Bishop's palace, 6. Potters Lane. Higher ground shaded. (After Mortimer, Regan and Lucy, 2005)

From the various documentary surveys it has been suggested that in 1086 Ely was 'purely rural', in 1251 it was "largely rural, though with marked urban beginnings" and in 1416 it had assumed much of its modern form, but 'with the early possibilities of normal municipal development unfulfilled' (Hampson and Atkinson, 1953: 34). This view is supported by the excavations at Forehill, where it was argued that the 13th Century was a period of development with a network of streets and settlement in several areas and that by the end of the 14th Century it was a fully formed small town (Alexander, 2003: 173). A similar picture emerges from the archaeological investigations between Broad Street and the river. At the time of the *Domesday Book* the area was not occupied at all, with activity beginning between the second half of the 12th and the early 13th Century. Occupation was relatively dense and buildings were encountered everywhere that archaeological excavation occurred suggesting mercantile activity. Occupation on Broad Street was less intensive than on Forehill, where individual property plots were built upon at different times, rather than simultaneously (Alexander, 2003). Along Broad Street, in the 12th Century, planned development took place when the street frontage was divided into individual plots from one of which a sword cross and coins were found suggesting a high degree of wealth. Behind the Broad Street frontage was a less intensively used area extending 60 metres to the river. A warehouse and fishponds plus

evidence for the cultivation of hemp, animal grazing and butchery suggests that the land was used for the production and storage of agricultural products for use elsewhere within Ely. Along the river itself were a number of hythes or wharves. Development continued throughout the medieval period and by the 13th and 15th centuries the density of occupation along Forehill and Broad Street allows the area to be characterised as urban.

The bishop and the monastery were also the two main landlords whose holdings were unevenly distributed. For example, along Broad Street the monastery owned sixty tenements and the bishop, twenty-one, but most of the area around West Fen Road had been awarded to the bishop. The West Fen Road area was from the start a secular rural settlement contemporary with the monastic centre for which Ely was famous; it seems possible that the settlement was even founded in order to provide food and services to the monastery (Mortimer et al, 2005). It was certainly part of the monastic estate. Archaeological evidence shows wheat was being grown and that cattle and increasingly sheep were husbanded, reflecting the growing importance of the wool trade in the medieval period. As farming intensified in the West Fen Road area the population of what had been a thriving rural settlement was relocated to the area along Forehill and Broad Street. There is archaeological evidence of a major reorganisation of the bishop's holdings in the 12th and 13th centuries, with intensification of settlement between the new cathedral and the Ouse, corresponding to the decline in activity at West Fen Road where the focus was on producing surplus crops (Ballantyne, 2004), and later wool, for export. The area between Broad Street and the River Ouse can be seen as an intermediate area between agricultural production sites in the rural hinterland such as West Fen Road and the noxious industries centred on Potters Lane, and the consumption sites of urban Ely focused on the religious establishments of the bishop and abbey.

The level of detail afforded by the combined archaeological and documentary evidence allows us to begin to construct a cognitive *mappa* of Ely. This map can take two forms; on the one hand, one can construct an internal cognitive *mappa* of Ely, which will offer insights into the way that those people living on Ely thought about their island (Figure 3). A second map may also be constructed that reflects the way in which those living on Ely related to the world beyond their immediate vicinity (Figure 9).

Given the geographic configuration of Ely, the space offers a promising context in which to explore the remarkable diversity of the island's material culture. Taking the general description of the topographical relationship of different activity areas within Ely as our starting point, it is possible to construct a cognitive map that represents the way in which people perceived the different zones of activity. The representation of space in Figure 3 is therefore a 'warped' version of Figure 2 giving extra emphasis to locations that figured highly in the minds of the population. The physicality of the Cathedral and political domination of the bishop's palace loom large in the mind, as do the Market Square and Broad Street/Great Ouse waterfront areas that served as the commercial centres for trade and linked people to the world beyond the island. We may then ask:

- Why are Ely's assemblages if sometimes broadly predictable at other times variable to a degree that seems surprising?
- To what extent was this diversity a reflection of the effect of physical separation on different communities of islanders? Or conversely to what extent

was it the relatively conscious material expression of ideas and beliefs about the world that once emanated from the people?

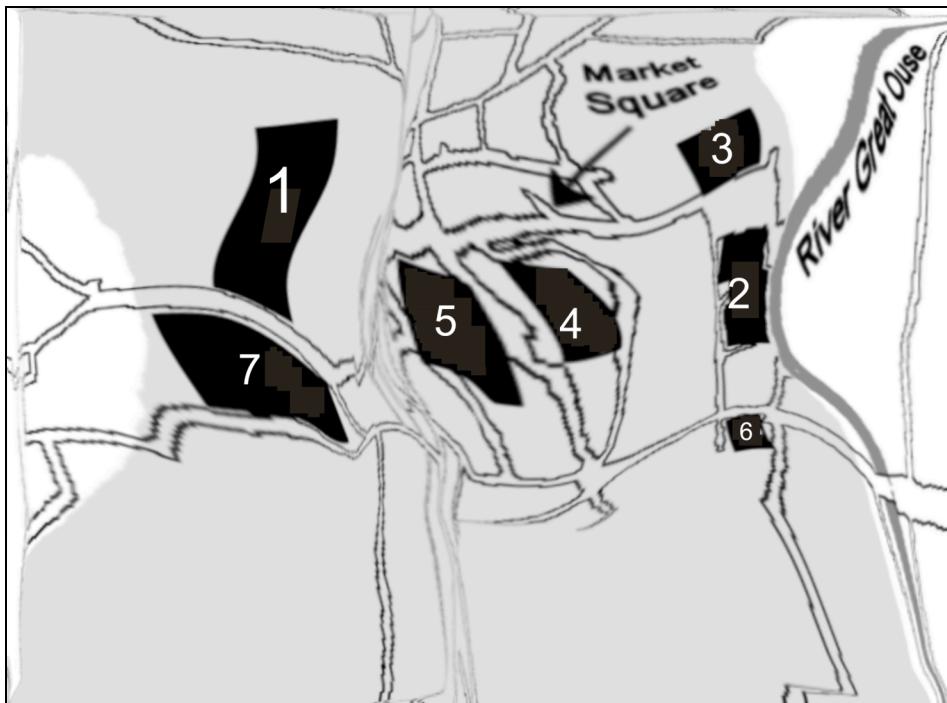


Figure 3 - A Cognitive Map of Ely.

(In this representation emphasis is given to those places that would have been of most significance to the Medieval population. Thus the bishop's palace and Cathedral figured highly in the mind of the population as did the Market Square and the Broad Street/River Great Ouse area. Less important were the farmers of West Fen Road.)

Taking the faunal remains recovered through archaeological excavation it is possible to look more closely at differences and similarities between the different zones of occupation in Ely (Figure 4). Over the period from the 12th to the 15th Century the pattern of exploitation remains similar making it possible to deal with this time span as a single unit. Generally, the evidence from the area between Broad Street and the river shows that butchery of animals was taking place for consumption elsewhere. Sheep, goats and cattle dominate the assemblage in more or less equal numbers, whilst pig is a minor element. The archaeological pattern is similar at West Fen Road and it is probable that it was from this and similar settlements on the Isle of Ely that the animals being butchered originated. Confirmation that the area backing onto the river was a butchery is provided by more detailed analysis of the bones from the site. The majority of animals were killed at prime butchering age: cattle were three to four years old, sheep/goat two to three and pigs one to two years of age. The dominant parts of the skeleton present were associated with primary and secondary butchery with very little kitchen or meal waste present. There were also very few bones of wild animals such as fallow deer and hare, suggesting that hunting was insignificant. This contrasts to other sites in Ely where

there was a greater quantity and range including roe deer and rabbit (Dickens and Whittaker in prep; Higbee in Alexander, 2003: 170). At Forehill the faunal assemblage represents remains of animals exploited for food. The skeletal element suggests that dressed carcasses or joints were purchased and that some carcass preparation was carried out on site. Among the wild fowl was a crane, a particularly expensive bird. The broad and rich meat base is indicative of increasing socio-economic status, which corresponds with other evidence showing that from the 15th Century Forehill was occupied, or owned by, a mix of traders and professionals as well as some minor gentry. The richness of the diet suggests that their social and economic status was comparable to other high status residences. Comparison with assemblage from the bishops' kitchen (Higbee, 1999) is interesting. In the later phases there was a diversity of wildfowl there including lapwing, swan, wood pigeon, snipe, golden plover, woodcock, grey heron, red grouse, godwit and whooping swan. In earlier phases pig played a greater role, an indicator of high status.

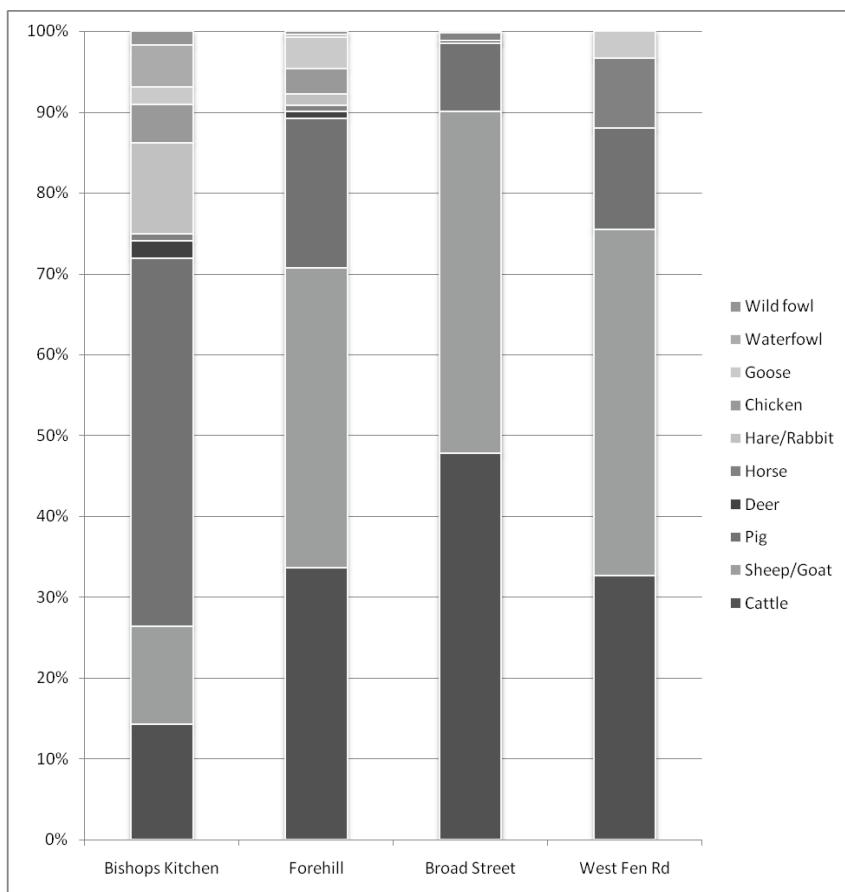


Figure 4 - Comparison of faunal assemblages (NISP) 14th-16th centuries by %

Overall, it appears that cattle, sheep and pigs were brought to the area between Broad Street and the river for slaughter and butchery but that consumption occurred elsewhere, probably in the religious communities of Ely. Excavations at the Lady Chapel of the cathedral show that prepared carcasses were imported ready for further butchery into individual joints (Regan, 2001) and at the abbey beef and mutton were arriving as dressed cuts although pig, lamb and rabbit were arriving as whole carcasses (Dickens and Whittaker in preparation). At Forehill (Higbee in Alexander, 2003) beef and mutton were probably arriving largely as dressed carcasses or joints, so there was a secular market as well. This pattern may explain the lack of rabbit and the low quantities of lamb and pig in the Broad Street area. Killing these species but exporting them as whole carcasses would leave no trace. There is little evidence for consumption of wild species at Broad Street, in contrast to Forehill and more especially the abbey and bishop's palace. Generally whilst higher in status than the agricultural site at West Fen Road, and the production site at Potters Lane, Broad Street seems to be lower in status than both Forehill and the religious communities of the abbey and cathedral. In particular, Broad Street produced little or no evidence for high status foods such as various types of fish, bird and deer or fruits such as fig and grape. This is supported by the ceramic evidence.

Within Ely, sites at Broad Street, Forehill and the religious precinct all contain a similar range of imported pottery. The site at West Fen Road has quite a different pattern, with much more local production and fewer imports (Figure 5). Within this general pattern Broad Street has a lower percentage of fine ware than Forehill and the abbey and bishop's palace, but higher than West Fen Road (Figure 6). Broad Street has a high percentage of intermediate wares when compared to Forehill and greater than West Fen Road and the abbey. Overall, the impression is that occupation at Broad Street was of lower status than Forehill and the abbey and bishop's palace, but higher than West Fen Road. In addition to confirming the spatial patterning of relative status analysis of the distribution of different types of pottery sheds light on attitudes to the outside world.

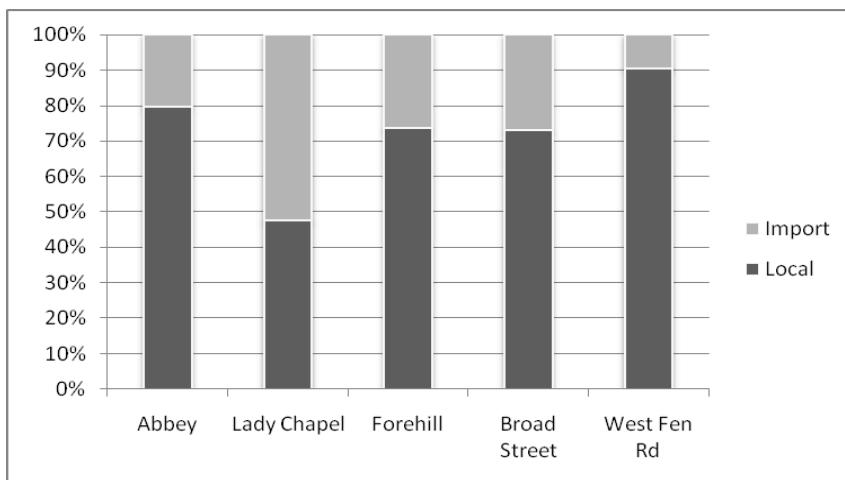


Figure 5 - Local v Imported wares by %

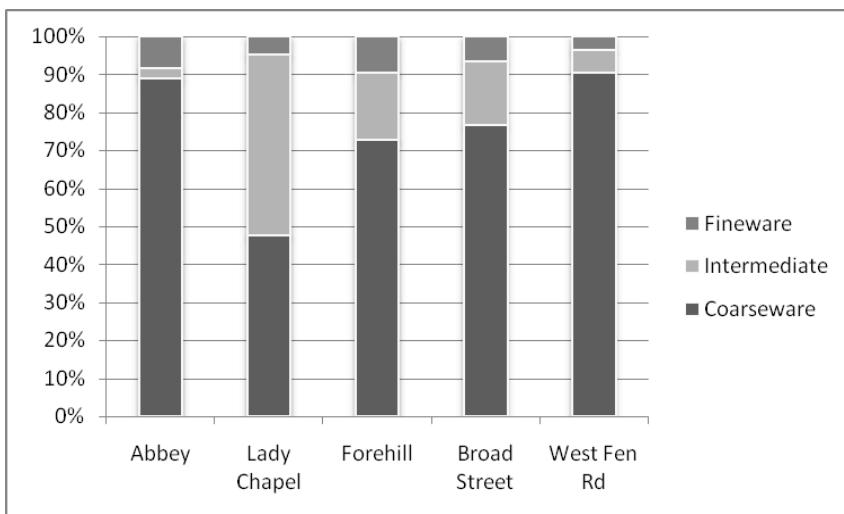


Figure 6 - Types of Medieval pottery from sites in Ely by %

The Medieval pottery industry in Ely differed from that of others in East Anglia in being urban. The urban nature of production can be traced to the influence of the Church who first provided a local market for the products and also directed the cutting of new rivers that made the ‘export’ of Ely ware beyond the boundary of the fen island possible. Medieval Ely ware was the main type of pottery in use on the island between the twelfth and early 16th Century. The date is consistent with the reference to *potterslane* in 1280, when the industry was presumably well established. The industry was very conservative and there were few changes in either fabric or forms over nearly four hundred years to the 15th Century. The only changes were in decoration. Thumbing, especially applied in strips, is early, mostly 13th Century, and on bowls, decoration is mainly a 15th Century feature. The pottery from the 12th to 15th centuries can therefore be treated as a single group.

Ely’s pottery industry had a long life, even though the pottery is not of the best quality in comparison to that available in other parts of eastern England. This longevity was owed to the political and economic dominance of the religious establishments in Ely, which owned much of the fenland and southern Cambridgeshire and was able to control what products went to its estates. The dominance of medieval Ely wares on the island therefore represents a ‘parochial cluster’ and are not what might be expected for a busy market town (Jones 1993: 132). As the Church also controlled the River Ouse, the chief southern Fenland waterway, it also had influence on what went to Cambridge from the north. Hence the distribution of Ely wares is greater than might be expected from the quality of the material (Figures 7 and 8). Pottery produced on the Isle of Ely generally did not travel far from the fen, and was probably transported exclusively within waterborne communication networks (Spoerry, 2008). It is found on all Fenland sites and at Cambridge and elsewhere in the south. North of Ely, it occurs at King’s Lynn; Ely wares have been noted in southern Lincolnshire and west Norfolk. Although we cannot be certain, evidence from other religious establishments such as Colne (Healey et al, 1998: 57) suggests that the manufacture of pottery in Ely was predominantly for the

bishop's palace, although the urban location also meant that there was a significant secular market for its wares.

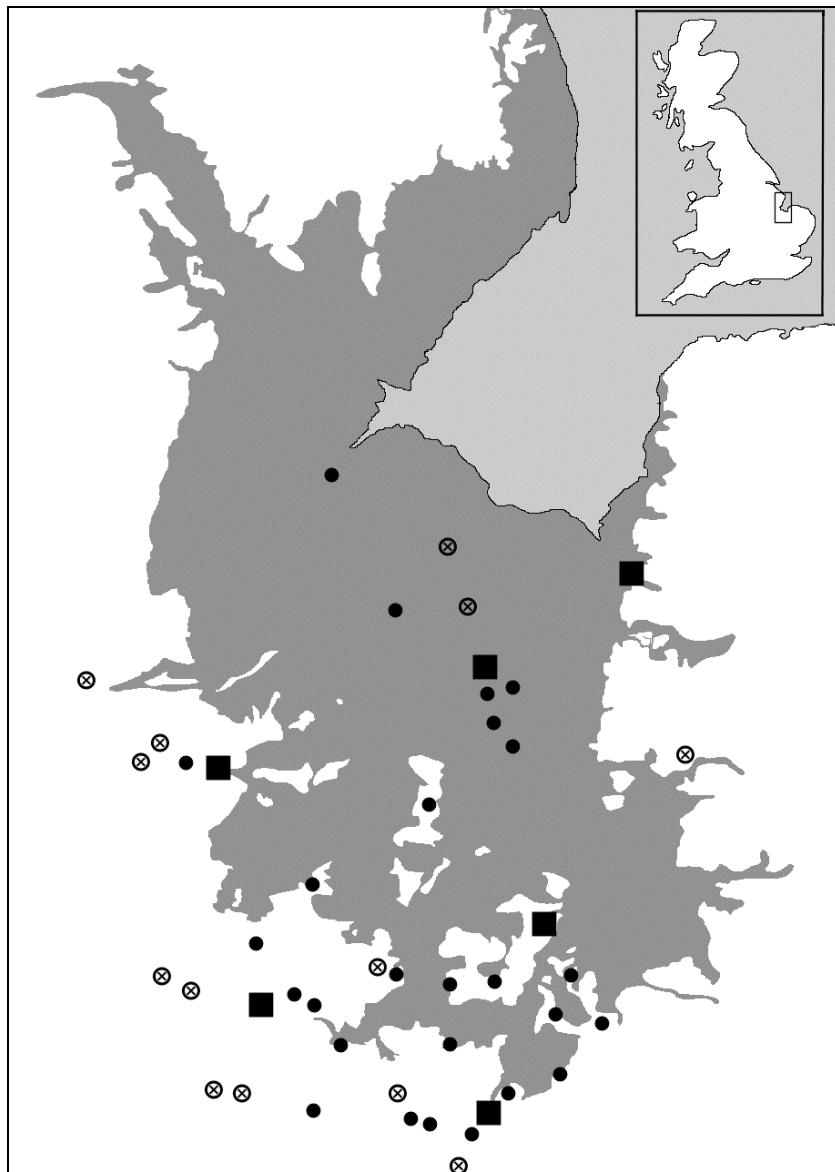


Figure - Distribution of Ely Ware in the Fens.

(n: Ely Ware find spot; g: Towns with Ely Ware; V: Towns with no Ely Ware - after Spoerry, 2008)

Whilst Ely ware dominates the local assemblage there were significant imports of pottery, mostly fine wares, from Grimston, Norfolk; Lyveden, Northamptonshire; Toynton, Lincolnshire and various sites in Essex plus a little material from Yorkshire and Surrey and a few French imports. Most of the material travelled via King's Lynn; exceptions are the Lyveden ware, and fine Essex redwares that travelled overland to Cambridge and then via the river Cam (Figure 9).

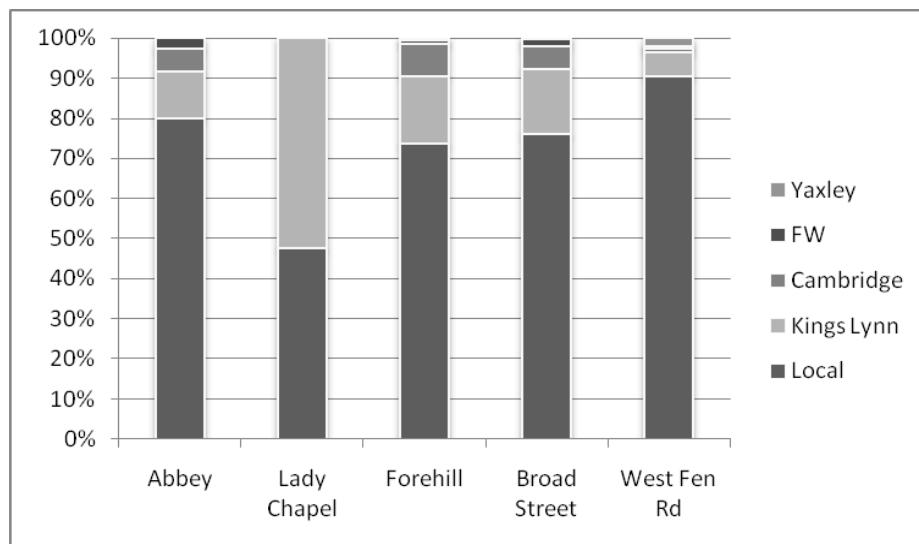


Figure 8 -Source of wares from sites in Ely

The evidence of the fine wares found in Ely can be linked with the data from Cambridge and King's Lynn to form a cognitive *mappa* of attitudes towards the outside world (Figure 9). Imports to Ely arrive via King's Lynn in the main, its importance as a port is illustrated by the occurrence of fine quality decorated jugs from Scarborough and northern Europe (Clarke and Carter, 1977: 112-18, 225-32). It is possible that fine red wares from Essex arrived at Lynn by sea via Colchester. However from the regional pattern of recovery it can be shown that the route was landward to Cambridge and then by the fenland waterways to Lynn. This is proved from the large quantities of Essex red wares that occur in Cambridge (36% at Bene't Court - Edwards and Hall, 1997: 156), with a smaller amount at Forehill in Ely (6% - *ibid*) and yet smaller quantities at Lynn (1% - Hall, 2001). The differences are striking, had the trade route been by sea and then via the fenland to Cambridge, then the amounts of sherds recovered would be the other way round, Lynn and Ely keeping more of the fine wares before the residue reached Cambridge. The reverse effect can be seen with the fine quality Scarborough wares. At Lynn they amount to 4% falling to 0.7% at Ely, with none so far identified at Cambridge.

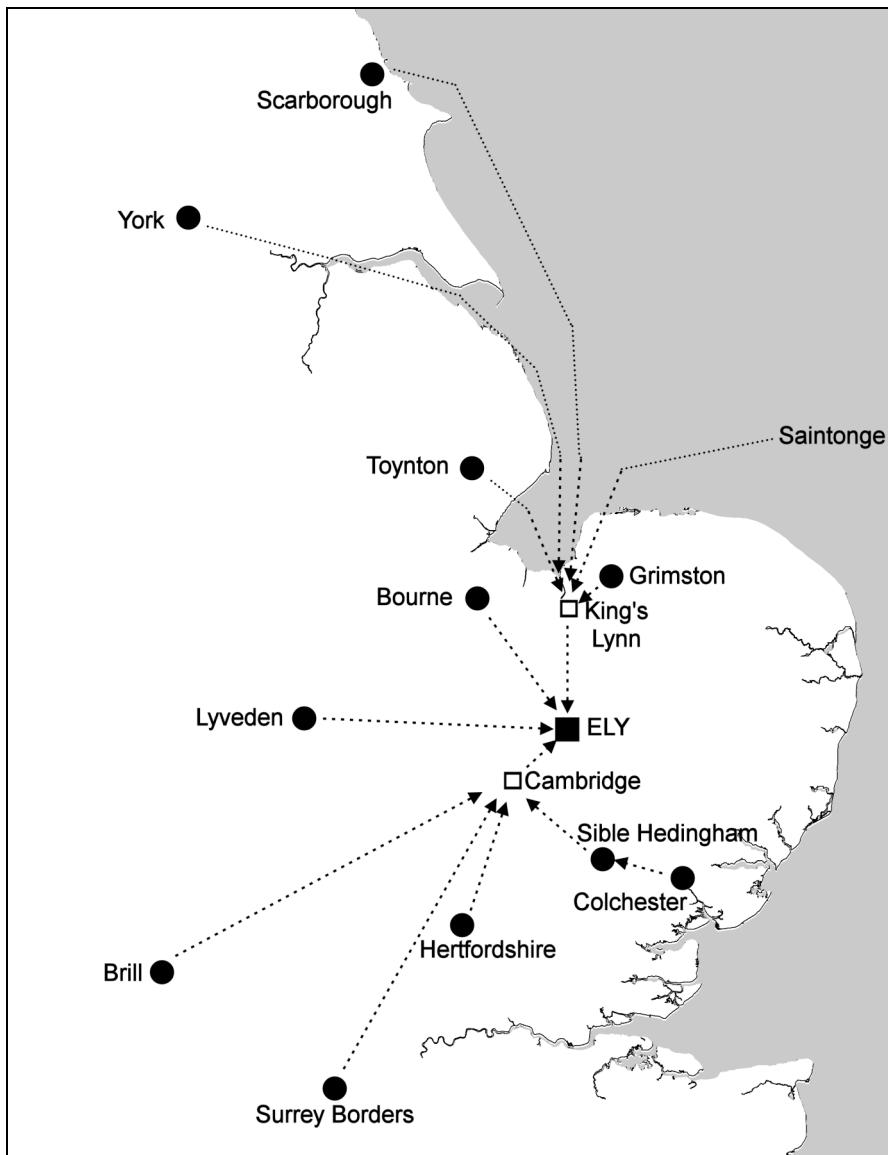


Figure 9 - Sources of 13th-15th Century pottery found at Broad Street.
(After Cessford, Alexander and Dickens, 2006.)

Conclusion

Discarding the idea of isolation simply to replace it with that of connectedness would do little to help us understand an island's past. What the case study of medieval Ely has attempted to demonstrate is the need to adopt a cognitive approach to landscape that considers how space and society are mutually constituted. The concept of the cognitive

map helps us see the geographical and social factors that created social barriers and corridors on islands. We can no longer see the boundaries of an island as its beaches; instead social boundaries are a human creation, which although influenced by environmental factors are not determined by them. These factors are coupled with technologies and social factors such as trading and cultural links to other places. It is these interacting factors that lie behind the patterns we see archaeologically and historically, including trade networks and material expressions of social identity.

More generally, this vision for dry island archaeology encourages a structure of cognitive enquiry centred around a series of key questions about people on islands that are common to island archaeology all over the world:

- How were people's lives shaped by, and how did they reshape, in physical but also cognitive terms, the islands that they inhabited?
- How did external contacts affect the cultures of islanders?
- How and why did island societies 'end' – if indeed they did?

The answer, at least in part, to these questions lays in the reconstruction of the islanders' mental maps, as within these rests information about their perceptions of the space in which they lived and the world beyond.

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