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Bearsden

A Roman Fort on the Antonine Wall

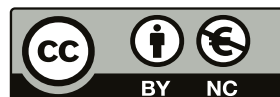
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Chapter 16

BONES

JACKALINE ROBERTSON

Factual data

A small assemblage of bone was recovered, comprising 119 small fragments that were recovered from a series of gulleys, ditches and hearths which also contained domestic debris such as wattle and daub. All but a single pig molar had been burnt and preservation of the remaining fragments was poor due to a combination of heat exposure and soil conditions. There was no evidence of any human remains within this assemblage. Instead these remains probably represent domestic cooking waste.

Methodology

The assemblage was identified to element and species with the aid of skeletal atlases (Hillson 1986; Schmid 1972) and the reference collection stored at AOC Archaeology Group (Edinburgh). Where an element could not be identified to species, it was instead described as large mammal (horse/cattle/deer/sheep/goat/pig), or indeterminate mammal (dog/cat). The results are presented in Table 1 and the following criteria were recorded: context, feature, element, species, side, fragmentation, size and any evidence of staining on the bone surface. Assessing the level of staining used the following method: no staining was rated '0'; some staining affecting less than 25% of the bone surface was designated as '1'; less than 50% surface staining was '2'; while 50–75% was described as '3' and greater than 75% was rated as '4'. A four point system was used to analysis preservation with excellent, good, adequate and poor. The assemblage was also examined for butchery marks, pathologies, bone working, burning and carnivore gnawing.

Results

The preservation of this bone assemblage was poor and only a single unburnt pig molar could be identified to both species and element. Other fragments identified were a vertebra, three vertebrae spines, a metapodial shaft and a long bone shaft. These fragments were clearly animal in origin and were possibly sheep/goat, although this could not be confirmed. The remainder of the assemblage was recorded as either large or indeterminate mammal where appropriate. None of these fragments exceeded 100mm in size and most were smaller than 50mm.

Only 18 fragments were completely calcified and this indicates that these were fully oxidised at temperatures of over 600°. The remaining 100 fragments were a mix of black, grey and blue indicating that these had been exposed to a lower temperature and probably for shorter periods of time. Butchery marks were observed on two small fragments. The first fragment had two small parallel cut marks that may be indicative of skinning; the second fragment was also found to have a shallow cut mark.

Conclusion

There is no evidence to suggest that any of these burnt remains derived from human cremations. The cremation weight of an average human adult is generally estimated at around 800g (Rachel Ives, pers comm); as the largest concentration of bone from Bearsden was 38.7g it is highly unlikely any of these remains represent either an intact or even a disturbed cremation. The evidence of butchery and the identification of pig and probably sheep/goat bone all indicate that this assemblage probably represents domestic food waste which was disposed of within gulleys and ditches or simply not removed from the hearth feature during cleaning.

BEARSDEN: A ROMAN FORT ON THE ANTONINE WALL

Table 16.1
The animal bone

<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Side</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Zone</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Stain</i>	<i>Burnt</i>	<i>Butchery</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>
NK74CM	(B1, N gully)	Molar	Pig	Indet	1	N/A	Poor	B	3	No	No	0.9
NK74CM	(burnt)	Frag	L/M	Indet	55	Indet	Poor	B	4	Mixed	No	
NK74CM	(wattle and daub)	Frag	I/M	Indet	11	Indet	Poor	A	4	Mixed	No	38.7
NK74DJ	(N granary)	Frag	I/M	Indet	6	Indet	Poor	A	4	White	No	
NK74DJ	(burnt)	Frag	L/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	B	4	White	No	
NK74DJ	(wattle and daub)	Tibia	L/M	Left	1	7	Adeq	B	4	White	No	6.1
NK77EG	(B7, S gully)	Vertebrae	L/	N/A	1	1, 2	Adeq	B	3	Mixed	No	
NK77EG	(burnt)	Vertebrae	L/M	N/A	3	4	Adeq	B	3	Mixed	No	
NK77EG	(wattle and daub)	Rib	L/M	Indet	1	2	Adeq	C	4	White	No	
NK77EG	(„)	Frag	L/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	B	3	Mixed	Yes	
NK77EG	(„)	Frag	L/M	Indet	8	Indet	Poor	B	3	Mixed	No	12.6
NK77FA	(„)	Frag	L/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	B	3	Mixed	Yes	
NK77FA	(„)	Frag	L/M	Indet	7	Indet	Poor	B	3	Mixed	No	
NK77FA	(„)	Frag	I/M	Indet	6	Indet	Poor	A	3	Mixed	No	9.2
NK78BP	gully between B1 and 2	Frag	L/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	B	4	White	No	0.8
NK79AV	B10, burning	Frag	L/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	B	4	Mixed	No	1.9
NK80DG	burning S of BH	Frag	L/M	Indet	6	Indet	Poor	B	4	White	No	6.4
NK80EH	(under)	Frag	L/M	Indet	2	Indet	Poor	B	4	Mixed	No	1.8
NK80EH	(cobbles)	Frag	L/M	Indet	3	Indet	Poor	B	3	Mixed	No	
NK80EH	(S of)	Frag	I/M	Indet	1	Indet	Poor	A	3	Mixed	No	
NK80EH	(bath-house)	Metapodial	L/M	Indet	1	Shaft	Adeq	B	4	White	No	7.0
NK80EI	(gully S of latrine)	L/B	L/M	Indet	1	Shaft	Poor	B	4	White	No	2.5

Key: 0 = no staining; 1 = <25 and staining 2 = <50%; 3 = 50–75%; 4 = 75–100% . Size given in millimetres: A <10; B = 10–50; C = 50–100; D = 100–50; E = 150–200; F = >200