Mammal & Bird Bone Assemblage from Land East of Chalgrove

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Excavations at Land East of Chalgrove recovered a small assemblage of animal bone which was recorded at a context level. A total of 1,529 specimens were recovered from the site by hand, which were assessed in line with current guidelines. Environmental samples were also taken and sieved at 10mm, 4mm, 2mm and 0.5mm fractions. This contributed a further eighteen specimens to the dataset, as the sieved material was only recorded when it could be identified to species.

The surface condition of the assemblage is generally good, with little sign of difference between phase (Figure 1) or area – almost all of the phase 2 (MIA) material came from area A, which contained no material of any other phase. There were two phase 2 (MIA) contexts from area B, along with nine of the ten phase 5 (LR) contexts. All of the other material was from area C. In spite of this good cortical surface preservation, however, the bones were highly fragmented.

By far the largest part of the assemblage is that from phase 3 (ER). This accounted for 62% of the hand collected assemblage (Table 2), with the phase 2 (MIA) accounting for a further 24.3%. The assemblage from both of these phases is dominated by domestic cattle (*Bos taurus taurus*), with caprine (sheep [*Ovis aries*] and/or goat [*Capra hircus*]), pig (*Sus scrofa domesticus*) and horse (*Equus caballus*) also present in smaller numbers. The very high numbers of domestic cattle in the phase 3 assemblage are partly accounted for by two ABGs (Associated Bone Groups), from contexts 2130 and 2114, although the number remains proportionally high. Dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) was also present in the assemblage in the earliest phase (1/M-LBA) which, like the two later phases (4/MR and 5/LR) contained no pig or horse specimens. Dogs were probably present on the site throughout its history, as evidenced by canid gnawing present in 14 contexts (Table 1).

Environmental samples from the prehistoric phases added considerably to the numbers of caprine specimens recovered (Table 2). This may be due to the fragmentary nature of the assemblage, with larger bones breaking into larger pieces than smaller bones, and so being more easily identified when collecting by hand. Perhaps due to this fragmentary nature of the assemblage, the potential for other non-taxonomic data is limited (Table 1), with few epiphyses being present aside from the ABGs.

The dominance of domestic cattle in the Roman Thames Valley region is a common feature of Early Roman rural assemblages[1] and of Iron Age assemblages[2]. As such, the evidence here, though small, would appear to support current interpretations of livestock farming in the

[1] Martyn Allen, Tom Brindle, Alex Smith, Julian D. Richards, Tim Evans, Neil Holbrook, Michael Fulford, and Nathan Blick, "The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: An Online Resource" (2015).
[2] Ellen Hambleton, *Animal Husbandry Regimes in Iron Age Britain: A comparative study of faunal assemblages from British Iron Age sites* (Oxford: Archaeopress Ltd., 1999).

area, which postulates a high degree of continuity between the late Iron Age and the Roman periods[3].

The ABGs are both domestic cattle from pits and over 3½ years of age. It has been noted that pits are the most common deposit to find ABGs in and, although the most common ABG species in Early Roman Britain is caprine, it has also been noted that this is the most common species overall in assemblages of this date [4]. If that can be a reason for explaining the prevalence of caprine ABGs nationally then the local dominance of domestic cattle in the economy should be borne in mind when interpreting the ABG species in Oxfordshire. Many ABGs of this period, as with the preceding Iron Age, are from multi-ABG deposits, which is decidedly not the case here. Without anything with which to aid interpretation – archaeological features or associated finds – it seems safest to draw on Ockham's Razor in interpreting the ABG's as being the disposal of deadstock [5].

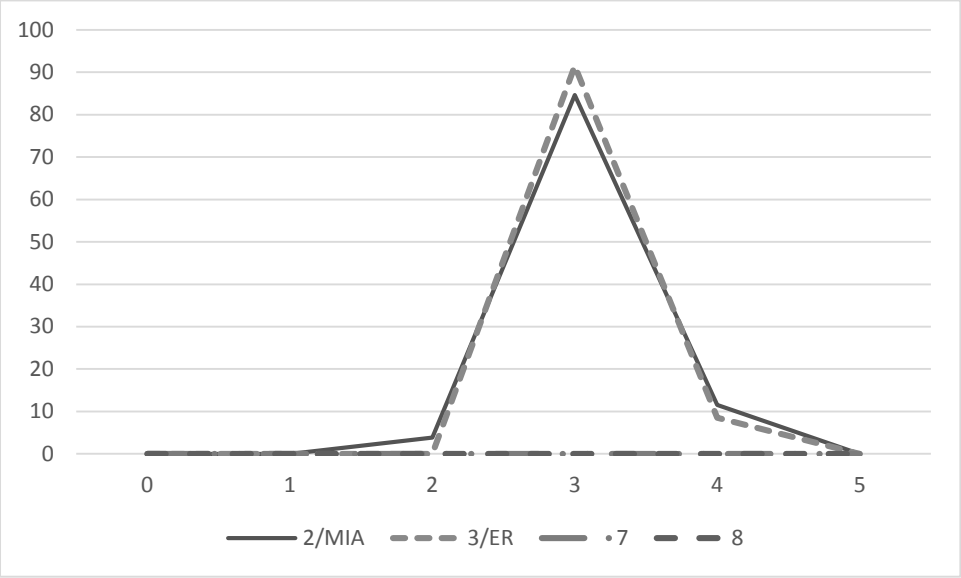

Figure 1: Condition of specimens, by phase (numbers shown are the total number of bags that account for each percentage).

Table 1: Number of contexts with potential for gnawing, pathological or burning data.

Gnawed	Pathologies	Burnt
14	2	2

[3] Gill Hey and Jill Hind, *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment Resource Assessments and Research Agendas* (Oxford, 2014).
[4] James Tristan Morris, *Investigating Animal Burials: Ritual, Mundane and Beyond (B.A.R. British Series 535)* (Oxford: Archaeopress Ltd., 2011), 94.
[5] Lee G. Broderick, "Ritualisation (or The Four Fully-Articulated Ungulates of The Apocalypse)," in *The Ritual Killing and Burial of Animals: European Perspectives*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow Books Ltd., 2012), 22–32.

*Table 2: Total number of animal bone specimens recorded, by phase (NISP – Number of Identified Specimens; NSP – Number of Specimens). *Note phase three includes the two ABGs, which are also tabulated separately in Table 3.*

	1/M-LBA	**2/MIA**	**3/ER***	**4/MR**	**5/LR**		**1/M-LBA (sieved)**	**2/MIA (sieved)**	**5/LR (sieved)**
domestic cattle	**4**	**26**	**117**	**2**	**19**				**1**
caprine	**1**	**7**	**19**	**5**	**2**		**5**	**3**	
pig		2	**8**					**1**	
horse		**3**	1						
dog	**1**						**1**		
small rodent								**1**	
Total NISP	6	38	145	7	21		6	5	1
Total NSP	30	371	948	44	137		6	11	1

Table 3:ABGs recorded from the assemblage.

Context	2130	2114
domestic cattle	12	39
NSP	216	358