

ANIMAL BONE, ST CROSS COLLEGE, OXFORD (OXSC14)

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The animal bone assemblage from St. Cross College has been firmly attributed to the Early Modern period, with almost all specimens coming from contexts dated to the Late 17th-18th century AD or else, more broadly, to the 17th century AD. This is a period which saw substantial changes in human-animal relationships and the beginnings of livestock breeds, as we understand them now. It is also a period which has been poorly studied from a zooarchaeological standpoint (Broderick 2014) and thus, although not large, this assemblage provides a valuable insight into this period in Oxford.

In all, 786 specimens were recovered from the site, mostly through hand-collection although environmental samples were taken and sieved at 10mm, 4mm and 2mm fractions. 110 specimens were recovered through sampling, all of them from a single context (1110), representing 14% of the assemblage. Most of this material was unidentifiable – with 106 unidentified specimens it accounts for 66.25% of the total number of unidentified specimens in the assemblage. It did, however, also make important contributions to the numbers of domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) specimens recovered from the site (6 in the sample) and common swift (*Apus apus*) (1 specimen in the sample) as well as containing 3 pig (*Sus ferus domesticus*) specimens. All of these numbers are included with the hand-collected material in the NISP table (Table 1).

There was a very small Medieval component to the assemblage, which included each of the principal domesticates (domestic cattle [*Bos taurus*], caprine [sheep - *Ovis aries* - and/or goats - *Capra hircus* – but definitely including sheep] and pig) as well as dog (*Canis familiaris*) (Table 1). These species were joined by cat (*Felis catus*) and Horse (*Equus caballus*) in the Early Modern period, during which the three principal domesticates continued to dominate. Domestic birds – goose (*Anser anser*), duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) were also present in this phase, with domestic fowl particularly common. If the single environmental sample is anything to go by it seems likely that birds are underrepresented in the hand-collected material from the site.

Each of the principal domesticates, as well as horse, were generally larger than is usually found on earlier sites and included specimens showing signs of butchery. There are indications that this was fairly standardised, with 50% of the 42 vertebrae recovered having been chopped through axially, indicating that the carcass was suspended and halved lengthways. Twenty-two specimens have been gnawed by dogs, suggesting that scavenging activities may have played some role in assemblage formation; more generally, a large range in the condition of the specimens suggests that a wide variety of taphonomic pathways led to the assemblage, possibly including some residuality or redeposition. No particular pattern was observed among body-part distribution of the animals represented and although a majority of the specimens of all species were fused, unfused specimens of each were also present. This diversity was also observed among the domestic fowl bones, which included both males and laying females.

Although no wild mammals were recovered, there was one species of wild bird represented in the assemblage. The common swift has only previously been identified from three Holocene archaeological sites in Britain – Winterbourne Roman Villa, Medieval Middleton Stoney and Canterbury Cathedral (Yalden and Albarella 2009). The specimens identified here thus add considerably to the record of this species in the British Isles. Given that it relies on a free fall for take-off and that it nests today principally in the eaves of

buildings it might be supposed that its numbers increased in the Modern period alongside the numbers of taller buildings. It is, thus, possible that more records would be apparent if more Modern sites were analysed.

In conclusion, the St. Cross assemblage hints at some wider changes that we might suspect were taking place in society at the time – livestock ‘improvement’, the industrialisation of butchery and the urbanisation of wild species.

Bibliography

Broderick, L G, 2014 Commercial zooarchaeology of the 'modern. era: a survey of attitudes and practices, *Anthropozoologica* **49(1)**, 19–32

Yalden, D W, and Albarella, U, 2009 *The history of British birds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Table 1: NISP (Number of Identified SPecimens) and NSP (Number of SPecimens) figures for the hand collected and sieved components of the assemblage.

	Medieval	17 th C AD	L17 th C-18 th C AD
Domestic cattle	2	27	39
Domestic cattle?		1	2
Caprine	2	32	59
Caprine?			1
Sheep	1	5	6
Pig	1	10	28
Pig?		1	1
Horse		4	2
Dog	2	4	1
Dog?			2
Cat		2	1
Micro mammal			1
Small mammal			1
Medium mammal	1	45	52
Large mammal	12	104	142
Total mammal	21	235	338
Bird		1	2
Greylag/domestic goose			1
Domestic duck/mallard		1	
Domestic fowl		1	19
Common swift			7
Total bird	0	3	29
Total NISP	21	238	367
Total NSP	21	257	508