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**Report on two human inhumations from Sherburn-in-Elmet, North
Yorkshire (site code SH 96)**

by

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Summary

Two human skeletons found during excavations in Sherburn-in-Elmet were presented to the EAU for analysis. Both were interred in stone sarcophagi and were dated to the Roman period.

Skeleton 1006 represented a small, gracile female, between 17 and 25 years of age, showing limited signs of pathology and no evidence of the cause of death.

Skeleton 1012 represented a tall, robust male, between 25 and 35 years of age. Several pathological conditions in the upper chest and lower back more usually associated with aged individuals were noted. A well healed rib fracture and ossified areas in the lower legs indicated localised trauma. There was no evidence to suggest cause of death.

Keywords: SHERBURN-IN ELMET, N. YORKS, HUMAN REMAINS, INHUMATIONS, ROMAN, PATHOLOGY, TRAUMA

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Report on two human inhumations from Sherburn-in-Elmet, North Yorkshire (site code SH 96)

Introduction

Two human skeletons were found during a watching brief on a development site in Sherburn-in-Elmet in mid December 1996. Both skeletons were interred in stone sarcophagi and were dated to the Roman period. Details of the elements present are given in Table 1.

Results

Skeleton context 1006

This skeleton was apparently complete when discovered during mechanical excavation. However, prior to full excavation the sarcophagus was broken and removed and the skeleton disturbed and scattered. As a result many fresh breaks were present and less than half the skeleton was recovered. The skeleton was originally aligned N-S (with the head at the north) and lay in a supine position. The preservation of the surviving bone was moderate to good.

The subpubic angle and the sciatic notch were wide, the sacrum was wide and flat, the pelvic basin was oval in shape, the nuchal crest and mastoid processes were small and the zygomatic processes did not extend past the external auditory meatus, all indicating that this individual was female. All the epiphyses present were fused, indicating an adult. The left lower 3rd molar (M3) had erupted and the degree of attrition suggesting an age of between 17 and 25 years (after Brothwell 1972).

From the overall size and robustness of the bones and muscle insertions, it is suggested that this individual was probably small and gracile. Only the right tibia could be accurately measured, giving a greatest length of 310 mm (equating to an estimated height of 151 cm, after Trotter and Gleser 1952; 1958). There was very little evidence of pathology on any of the

bones, excepting that a moderate amount of calculus was noted on the teeth.

Skeleton context 1012

This was an almost complete skeleton lying in a supine position with the right hand crossed over the left wrist and the legs straight. The body appears to have been covered in a shroud coated in 'gypsum', the imprint of which could be seen in the 'gypsum'. Bone preservation was variable, the skull (in particular the facial area) being very poorly preserved, possibly because it was not originally covered by the shroud and 'gypsum'. The vertebrae were also poorly preserved, but the appendicular skeleton showed a good state of preservation.

The subpubic angle was narrow with no subpubic concavity, the sciatic notch was narrow, the sacrum was narrow and curved, the pelvic basin was heart-shaped, the mastoid processes were large, the zygomatic processes extended past the external auditory meatus, the gonial angle was near to 90°, and the linear aspera and muscle insertions were well developed, indicating that this individual was male.

All epiphyses present were fused, indicating an adult. Both lower M3s and one upper M3 had erupted, and the degree of attrition on these indicated an age of between 25 and 35 years (after Brothwell 1972). The estimated stature of this individual was 169 cm, which was calculated from the combination of femur and tibia (right femur length = 457 mm, right tibia length = 354 mm).

A range of pathology was noted on the bones of this skeleton. Slight calculus was noted on some lower molars, whilst arthropathy was noted on the thoracic vertebrae. Schmorl's nodes were noted on the cranial aspect of the 1st lumbar vertebra and the caudal aspect of a lower thoracic vertebra (which also displayed

peripheral osteophytes). Osteophyte development was also observed on the right hand side of at least four other associated lower thoracic vertebrae. In addition, the sternal ends of the first ribs exhibited ossification of the cartilage. The sternal ends of the clavicles exhibited some osteophyte growth around the articular surface. The manubrium also had associated ossified cartilage around the articulations with the first ribs and clavicles.

These arthropathies are unusual for an individual not of advanced years. The tooth wear of this individual may not accurately reflect age at death since it is possible that individuals of high status ate more refined foodstuffs (Brothwell pers. comm.). Therefore this individual may be significantly older than tooth wear indicates.

One right rib exhibited a well healed fracture with no displacement of the broken ends. The mid shaft of the left fibula showed an ossified growth on the medial surface, probably of localised traumatic origin. The distal shafts of the right tibia and fibula also showed ossified growth (joining the two), also probably the result of localised trauma.

Recommendations

The presence of two high status burials of the Roman period at the site suggests there is a high probability that further excavation may uncover more individuals. If this is the case then full provision should be made for their recovery, study and publication.

Archive

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

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Table 1. Skeletal elements present (complete and fragmented) for both skeletons.

I = indeterminate, *L* = left, *R* = right, frags = fragments, vert/s = vertebra/e,
 phal/s = phalanx/phalanges, dist. = distal, prox. = proxima.

Element	Skeleton 1006	Skeleton 1012
Cranium	occipital, parietals, temporals	frontal, parietals, temporals, sphenoid, basilar occipital, R maxilla, R zygomatic & I frags.
Mandible	mental eminence, left corpus	R & L ascending ramus, part of body
Teeth	LI ₂ , LC, LM ₂ , LM ₃ and RC	lower L I ₁ I ₂ C P ₃ P ₄ M ₂ M ₃ , R I ₁ I ₂ C P ₃ P ₄ M ₂ M ₃ , upper L C P ³ M ¹ , R M ² , I M ³
Cervical verts.	atlas, axis	atlas, axis, 3rd to 7th
Thoracic verts.	4 upper and 1 lower	1st to 9th & spine of 12th
Lumbar verts.	2 bodies	1st to 5th
Scapula	R glenoid cavity, axillary border, part of spine, 4 frags I	R almost complete, L blade more broken
Clavicle	L sternal end, R acromial end	R complete, L 2 joining frags.
Sternum	manubrium	manubrium and body
Rib	7 L frags, 9 R frags, 12 I frags	L & R 1st ribs, R 2nd. 9 left frags, 11 R frags.
Humerus	R shaft	L & R complete
Radius	L prox. end, R prox. and dist. ends.	L & R complete
Ulna	R & L dist. ends. 2 shaft frags	R complete, L dist. end & prox. end with part of shaft.
Carpals		L & R lunate, hamate, capitate, greater multangular, navicular, triquetral
Metacarpal	L 4th and R 2nd to 5th	L & R 1st to 5th
Manual phalanges	R & L 1st phalanx. thumb, 1 other 1st phalanx.	L & R 1st to 5th 1st phals, 2nd to 5th 2nd phals, L 1st to 5th, R 1st & 5th terminal phals
Pelvis	R & L ilia, R & L ischia	R & L pelves complete
Sacrum	complete, 1st coccygeal vert. fused to 5th sacral vert.	mostly complete
Femur	R prox. end, L dist. end + shaft	L & R complete
Patella		L & R complete
Tibia	R complete, L dist. end + shaft	L & R complete
Fibula	R & L dist. ends.	L & R complete
Tarsals	L & R talus, calcaneum, 1st cuneiform, R navicular.	L all present. R all present except 2nd cuneiform.
Metatarsal	L 1st to 5th, R 2nd to 5th	L & R 1st to 5th
Pedal phalanges	1 1st phalanx.	L & R 1st to 5th 1st phals, 1 2nd phal, L & R 1st terminal phals plus 2 others.