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**An evaluation of two samples for biological analysis
and some bone from excavations at All Saints School, Nunnery Lane
York (YAT/Yorkshire Museum site code 1993.15)**

by

John Carrott, Keith Dobney, Allan Hall, Deborah Jaques,
Steven Lancaster and Harry Kenward

Summary

Two samples of the fills of two adjacent Roman slots or ditches were examined for their content of biological remains. They were barren, apart from traces of small, unidentifiable, charcoal, a single elderberry seed fragment, undiagnostic invertebrate remains, and one small bone.

The small assemblage of bone, which included a few human skull fragments, was of little value.

Authors' address

Environmental Archaeology Unit
University of York
Heslington
York YO1 5DD

Tel. (0904) 433851
Fax. (0904) 433850

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York Archaeological Trust
1 Pavement
York YO1 2NA

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**An evaluation of two samples for biological analysis
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Two samples of slot/ditch fill (from contexts 1012 and 1013, which were probably Roman in date) were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential. The sediments were described in the laboratory using a standard *pro forma* and 1 kg 'test' subsamples processed following the methods of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986). Parasite 'squashes' were made following methods of Dainton (1992).

The results obtained were as follows.

Context 1012, sample 1

Mid/dark brown, crumbly (working plastic), slightly humic, slightly sandy silty clay with traces of stones 6-60 mm and patches of light grey clay.

The test subsample gave a tiny 'flot' with a few sand grains, a trace of charcoal less than 1 mm and a single modern collembolan. The residue was of sand and gravel to 25 mm, with traces of brick/tile to 10 mm and a little charcoal to 5 mm; there were also some fragments of modern tree leaves. The parasite egg 'squash' was barren.

Context 1013, sample 2

Mid/dark grey-brown, crumbly (working slightly plastic and soft), ?slightly humic, slightly sandy clay silt with traces of charcoal and eggshell.

The tiny 'flot' contained a trace of charcoal to 2 mm, one ?*Heterodera* cyst and a scrap of elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) seed. There were also traces of poorly preserved unidentifiable invertebrate remains and some modern tree leaf fragments. The residue was of sand and gravel to 20 mm, with a trace of bone to 25 mm, and of brick/tile to 10 mm. With this were traces of charcoal to 20 mm, of mussel shell to 10 mm and two artefacts: a potsherd to 25 mm and a ?nail. The parasite egg 'squash' was barren.

Bone

The animal bone assemblage recovered from these excavations was very small. It comprised a single standard-sized box of hand-collected material from ten contexts representing each of the three phases of occupation represented - probable Roman, probable medieval and post-medieval/modern.

From the entire assemblage, a total of 181 fragments (weighing 2406 g) was recorded, of which only 70 were identified to species. The material which was probably of medieval date was the largest of the three groups defined according to the archaeological dating available, but this only amounted to 126 fragments (1219 g), of which 41 (502 g) were identifiable to species.

Preservation overall was fair, with most of the fragments being brown or fawn in colour. Fresh breakage was noted throughout, but dog gnawing was almost completely absent. Evidence of butchery was noted for most contexts, but was restricted to cow-sized fragments.

The range of species present included cow (38 fragments), sheep/goat (eight fragments), and pig and horse (both single fragments). Also recovered were one fragment of a dog radius, a complete hare femur and several bird bones. There was also a femur fragment from context 1002 (post-medieval/modern in date), which was tentatively identified as red deer. Finally, several contexts from the ?medieval group (1004, 1005, 1006) produced a number of human skull fragments.

A total of four measurable bones, one mandible with teeth and eight isolated teeth were recorded from the entire assemblage.

Implications

The lack of preservation of biological remains by anoxic waterlogging or charring in the two samples examined indicates that there is very little potential for further work on this aspect of the bioarchaeology of this site.

The very small size of the hand-collected bone assemblage and the limited numbers of fragments providing biometrical and age-at-death information mean that little zooarchaeological information can be obtained from a study of this material. Further excavation would only provide useful bone assemblages if larger samples were obtained by sieving more tightly dated deposits.

Retention and disposal of material

There can be no justification for retaining either the two sediment samples or the bone.

References

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