

The fauna from a ninth century farmstead at Ribbleshead , West
Yorkshire . by D. James Rackham

A small collection of animal bones and teeth were recovered during the excavation of an early mediaeval farmstead at Ribbleshead c. 424 metres OD. 255 fragments were found of which 69% were subsequently identified . The table lists the number of fragments of bone of each species that were recovered from the site and the minimum number of individuals that these represent . The minimum number was calculated on the basis of the most numerous single element , of the left or right side where bones are paired , plus any specimens from animals identifiably different in age or size from those included in the first group . On this site the minimum number of horse , ox , pig and shepp (or goat) are based exclusively on dental remains .

Teeth are the most numerous remains on the site , constituting 49.8% of the fragments . In some places the complete tooth row or part of it remained but the bone of the mandible or maxilla had disappeared . The occurrence of preserved bones as well as teeth indicates varying local conditions in the soil of the site , and it must be assumed that a varying proportion of the material originally deposited on the different parts of the site has been destroyed . The small size of the sample and the evidence for the destruction of some of that originally deposited , precludes any intensive analysis , however some remarks may be made .

Cattle constitute the principal remains of the identified fauna (48.8%) as do the large ungulate and large animals that of the

Table - of the species and fragment numbers recovered from the site, and the estimated minimum number of individuals of each species.

Domestic animals:

	No. Fragm.	MN
Horse	13	2
Cattle	83 (4)	10
Pig	3	1
sheep/goat	44 (3)	6
Powl	2	1

Wild animals:

Red deer, <u>Cervus elaphus</u>	2	1
Fox, <u>Vulpes vulpes</u>	1	1
Rabbit, <u>Capreolus cuniculus</u>	1	1
Mole, <u>Talpa europaea</u>	6	2
Water vole, <u>Arvicola terrestris</u>	2 (1)	2
Field vole, <u>Microtus agrestis</u>	2 (2)	1
Bank vole, <u>Clethrionomys glareolus</u>	2 (3)	2
Wood mouse, <u>Apodemus sylvaticus</u>	1	1
Passerine	1	1
Partridge, <u>Perdix perdix</u>	2	1
Identified bones - Total		178

Other bones:

Large ungulate	24
Small ungulate	5
Large animal	22
Medium animal	5
Small animal	1
Small mammal indet.	7
?	13
Unidentified bones - Total	77

(1) indicates fragments 'comparable with' the species against which they are listed. I should like to thank Don Stannwell of Bakenwell for the identification of the partridge specimens.

unidentified fauna (see Table). 26.4% of the identified fauna were sheep (or goat) . Only three bones and teeth of pig were identified and it seems unlikely that this species would have formed any significant part of the economy in the face of the altitude and situation of the site (see archaeological report).

Two bones of a small fowl were recovered and thirteen bones and teeth of horse . Five teeth from one mandible of the latter species indicates a mandibular cheek tooth row in excess of 160mms long . The teeth of sheep (or goat) indicate at least six individuals , one still retaining a well worn deciduous premolar 4 , but the remainder with fully developed permanent teeth at varying stages of attrition ; five of the bones indicate a juvenile state . The cattle teeth are predominantly deciduous , although some may well be shed teeth ; thirty-five of the sixty-four cattle teeth are deciduous , eleven of which may be shed teeth . At least six of the ten individuals identified possessed deciduous teeth suggesting an age under three years (Silver , 1969). Three bones of cattle derive from juvenile animals and a fourth , an incompletely formed proximal end of a metatarsus is normally considered a prenatal condition (Silver,1969) .

It may be suggested that cattle and sheep are the main animals in the economy of the site , a large proportion of the former being slaughtered young for meat .

A number of wild species have been identified from the site (see Table) and the fox and red deer specimens on the grounds of find location and condition appear to be contemporaneous

with the domestic fauna . The remaining species may well be of more recent origin , the rabbit certainly so (Fitter , 1959), particularly since they all excepting the birds have a burrowing habit . The state of preservation of their bones varies as did the other bones from the site , and all the species may be found in the locality today as they were no doubt also present in the ninth century .

D.James Rackham 1.7.77

Fitter , R.S.R. (1959) The ark in our midst , Collins .

Silver , I.A. (1969) 'The ageing of domestic animals' in D.Brothwell and E.Higgs (Eds) , Science in Archaeology , 2nd ed. 283-302