Ann Report 3578
Copy to excavator

(57)

A CREMATION FROM BOWTHORPE, NORWICH, NORFOLK

Period: Bronze Age
Ancient Monuments Lab No 800148
Burial No CST 11341 3/2

Janet D Henderson
Institute of Archaeology
January 1982

A large sample of cremated human bone was presented for examination. There was no animal bone present among the remains and all of the fragments had been burnt. Most of the bone came from Layer E but there was also a small quantity from Layer D. The material was assessed for identification of representative parts of the body, age at death, sex, stature and pathology. Details of colour, size and weight of the fragments were also taken.

Elements of skull, teeth, vertebrae, hands, ribs and long bones could be identified. Unfortunately the proportion of identifiable bone was small owing to the size and condition of the fragments. Table 1 (below) lists the individual weights and percentages of the identified parts.

Table 1 Individual Weights and Percentages for the Area of Identified Bone

Area	Weight (in gm)	%
Skull	30	2.0
Teeth	7	0.4
Vertebrae	6	0.4
Hands	10	0.6
Long Bones	384	24.0
Miscellaneous		
Layer D	27	2.0
Layer E	335	21.0

Area		Weight (in gm)	%
Miscellaneous including some residue (insignificant amount)			
Layer E		787	50.0
	Total	1586	100.0

It was suggested that the relative proportions did not reflect any variation or selection in cremation practice but rather the small size of the fragments in the sample. The average cremated skeleton weighs c.1.6kg. (Evans 1963) and the average dry, fat-free skeleton weighs c.2-4kg. (Krogman 1962). On this basis and on the identified bone it was concluded that the remains probably did not represent more than one individual.

Age at death was assessed on the teeth (roots) and the phalanges as adult. It was not possible to make a more specific estimate of age on the data available.

There was no evidence for attribution of sex or estimation of stature on this individual. The material was too fragmentary for observation of the presence of any abnormality or pathology.

Bone colour and the size of the fragments gave some evidence for cremation practice. The vast majority of the bone was white in colour with one or two fragments of blue-grey. On cremation bone gradually changes colour, eventually becoming white. The blue-grey indicates the continued presence of organic matter (Wells 1960). On this sample owing to the size of the fragments it was not possible to assess any degree of distortion or splitting in the bone so it was only feasible to suggest that most probably cremation had been fairly complete but that in the absence of further data this could not be conclusively stated.

Since on cremation bone does not burn but splits and cracks the small size of the fragments (and hence the large miscellaneous samples) probably indicated post-cremation crushing of the bone to facilitate inclusion of the bone in the urn in which it was found.

Summary

The cremated remains of a human individual from Bowthorpe, Norwich, Norfolk were examined. It was suggested that they belonged to an adult but further details were not available. The bone appeared to have come from a fairly complete cremation although the evidence for this was not conclusive and the size of the fragments was taken to reflect the practice of crushing the bones to enable their inclusion in the urn.

References Cited in the Text

Evans WED: The Chemistry of Death. Charles C Thomas, Illinois. 1963.

Krogman WM: The Human Skeleton in Forensic Medicine. Charles C Thomas, Illinois 1962.

Wells C: A study of cremation. Antiquity 34, 29-37. 1960.