

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

REPORT

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TITLE . Report on bone spot-findings from
16-22 Coppergate, York

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During the excavations at 16-22 Coppergate, over 2500 numbered samples were collected. Most of these were soil samples taken for biological analysis: other categories included pieces of timber, fruit-stones, egg-shell, molluscs, and bone specimens thought to be of particular interest. This report deals with this last category, and is in two parts. The first part is a catalogue arranged in context number order; the second part a discussion of some of the more informative specimens.

Catalogue

Format:

<context> <sample> <description>

6347	1375	cat skeleton, sheep caudal vertebra, fragment of salmonid centrum.
6473	1112	cat skull, mandibles, atlas and axis.
6798	1136	23 vertebrae of herring, possibly all from one fish.
6947	1297	cat partial skeleton.
7954	672	numerous soft fin rays and radials of unidentified gadid species.
8802	1850	four bird tracheal rings.
12759	690	crushed vertebra and numerous soft fin rays

		indeterminate fish species.
12762	744	1 herring vertebra and a number of unidentified fin rays.
16605	803	distal 50% left radius and ulna pig.
17184	946	numerous fin rays of roach and eel.
17275	970	numerous soft fin rays unidentified fish.
18602	1054	domestic fowl adult, partial skeleton.
21433	1690	6 precaudal vertebrae cod, probably from one fish.
21460	1702	chaffinch adult, almost complete skeleton.
21490	1767	domestic fowl, 8 phalanges pes.
22259	1482	19 bird tracheal rings.
22962	1590	28 bird tracheal rings.
25125	1593	28 bird tracheal rings.
25172	1596	calf aged 1-2 months, skull, mandible and atlas.
25350	1664	brown bear, four phalanges tertiae.
26064	1671	bird tracheal ring.
26147	1672	bird tracheal ring.
26610	1765	numerous soft fin rays unidentified fish species.
26900	2105	domestic fowl, complete immature skeleton.
28904	2273	jackdaw adult, complete skeleton.
28967	2264	common frog, complete skeleton.
31734	2160	common frog, complete skeleton.

Discussion

The cats from contexts 6347, 6473 and 6947 had all been skinned. On all three, repeated transverse knife-cut marks could be seen on the anterior part of the frontal bones, a few millimetres aboral to nasion. These contexts were located close together and produced pottery dated to the 10th century A.D.

The bird tracheal rings could mostly be attributed on grounds of size to domestic or grey-lag goose, with some smaller specimens in 22962 which could have been from domestic fowl or one of the larger corvids. Given the improbability of these delicate objects surviving processing and storage with other bones, their recovery as discrete samples is particularly fortunate. The same applies to the chaffinch skeleton from 21460 and the frogs from 28967 and 31734.

The numerous recoveries of fish fin-rays should be seen in the context of a site which produced numerous specimens of bone and antler combs, the broken-off teeth of which closely resemble fin-rays. The fin-rays from 17184 were identifiable as deriving from at least two roach and two eels. Comparison with reference specimens indicates one of the roach to have been very small, and one of the eels very large indeed. Otherwise, the fin-rays were mainly unidentifiable.

Different groups of bones were sampled according to different criteria. The various assemblages of tracheal rings and fin-rays were obviously recognised as something which should be kept separate from

other bones, and presumably the same thought prompted the bagging of the various whole or partial skeletons. The pig bones from 16605 (which were submitted labelled as sheep bones) can only be seen as a consequence of over-zealousness. As a general rule, however, there would seem to be a place for this kind of sampling, as it preserves and brings to the attention groups of bones which could otherwise be damaged or overlooked if not so treated.

Acknowledgement

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