AML Report

2420

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 31/88

MISCELLANEOUS SAMPLES FROM CONTEXTS AT THE BUTT ROAD CEMETERY AND THE GILBERD SCHOOL SITE, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

Peter Murphy BSc MPhil

Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report 31/88

MISCELLANEOUS SAMPLES FROM CONTEXTS AT THE BUTT ROAD CEMETERY AND THE GILBERD SCHOOL SITE, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

Peter Murphy BSc MPhil

Summary

Sand samples from the abdominal region of five Late Roman inhumations were examined. The presence of intrusive roots etc. was thought to indicate the likelihood of recent contamination and detailed examination for gut parasites and food residues was therefore not thought to be appropriate.
A sample from a medieval lime kiln showed that shells of cockle, oyster and mussel- possibly collected 'dead' from estuarine shell-banks- were used as the raw material for lime production.

Author's address :-

Centre of East Anglian Studies
University of East Anglia
Norwich
Norfolk

Butt Road Cemetery J (66.86)

Samples from the abdominal region of five Roman inhumations were received for assessment: G472 (0.8kg), G701 (0.5kg), G731 (3.6kg), G734 (1.3kg), G735 (4.2kg). The samples consisted of dry, slightly stony sand. Macrofossils were extracted using manual flotation/washover and wet-sieving with 0.5mm meshes. All five samples contained intrusive modern roots and G731 also contained intrusive grass fruits. Small charcoal fragments and small indeterminate fragments of mammal bone (perhaps dispersed from elsewhere on the skeleton) were present. G472 produced a fragment of small mammal bone.

None of these macrofossils can be considered to have been derived from the stomach contents with any confidence. Modern roots have probably introduced various contaminants. Sub-samples were not examined for parasite ova since, again, contamination might have occurred, either via root channels or by infiltration through the coarse matrix of the deposit. Further work on samples from other inhumations is unlikely to be profitable if they are similar in character.

Gilberd School

A sample from a medieval lime kiln (Site A F11) was received for examination. It consisted of whole and fragmentary marine mollusc shells in a red sand matrix. A 1kg sample was wet-sieved in a 0.5mm mesh. The predominant species was Cerastoderma edule (L) (cockle), but a few shells of Ostrea edulis L. (oyster) and Mytilus edulis L. (mussel) were also present, together with some non-hinge fragments of indeterminate bivalves. The shells were mainly fragmentary and some were fused together in a ground-mass of amorphous calcite as a result of burning. 16 intact cockle shells were fairly small (18-30mm; mean 23mm) and some were abraded and perforated by boring organisms.

Clearly shell was being used as the raw material for lime burning. These shells may represent food waste or alternatively could have been collected from estuarine shell banks as 'dead', disarticulated valves specifically for lime production. The relatively small shell size and rather abraded state of some valves tend to support the latter alternative, though shells from both sources may have been used.