

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 32/88

FISH REMAINS FROM EXCAVATIONS AT
MILDENHALL, SITE 165.

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Summary

An assemblage of fish bones recovered by sieving samples of Bronze Age archaeological deposits on 1mm aperture sieves was dominated by remains of the common three-spined stickleback, Gasterosteus aculeatus. Other fishes present at the site were pike, Esox lucius, a cyprinid, ?burbot, ?Lota lota and ?herring, Clupea harengus. The remains were not typical of those recovered from human occupation sites and the majority of bones were probably not deposited as a result of human activity.

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Fish remains were recovered from the excavations at Mildenhall 165 by carefully sieving 10kg samples of feature fills on 1 mm aperture sieves. A total of 131 fish bones were identified. Of these, all but 10 were from the stickleback, Gasterosteus aculeatus.

Pike was represented by four vertebrae, one was from a large fish (80-100 mm total length) the other were from small animals. Incremental growth rings on the articulating faces of the vertebrae were examined to determine the approximate season of death of the pike. It was possible to determine that one of the fish was caught in the summer half of the year. More precise timing was not possible.

One small vertebra and two scale fragments were assigned to the family Cyprinidae, which includes roach, bream, chub and other freshwater fishes but could not be more closely identified. One vertebral fragment closely resembled part of a precaudal centrum of a herring Clupea harengus, and a second broken vertebra was tentatively assigned to the now rare freshwater gadid, the burbot, Lota lota.

An isolated tooth, identified as a shark tooth, was pitted and abraded. Its condition suggested it may be of very great antiquity, possibly a fossil which had been deposited in the natural subsoil.

The assemblage of fishes is not typical of those deposited by man, for most of the remains are from small fishes which are not often eaten today. It is most unlikely that the stickleback bones are food residues for they bore no signs of having been eaten. Almost all the stickleback remains came from wet pitfills or the lower, seasonally flooded, marginal deposits. They almost certainly

represent fishes which became stranded as seasonal flood waters receded. The distribution of stickleback help to elucidate past topography and drainage at the site, particularly when compared to the evidence provided by seeds of aquatic plants.

The fishes which are more likely to have been human food refuse, pike, ?burbot and the cyprinid, were recovered from dry pitfills or from the dry palaeosol on the higher parts of the site. Other food refuse, for example mammal bone and cereals, also occurred in these dry deposits.

The ?herring vertebra is a most interesting find as the site is so far from the sea. First, there is no doubt that this bone is from a member of the Clupeidae, a family which includes herring, Clupea harengus, sprat, Sprattus sprattus and the shads, Alosa spp. The find was the anterior portion of a precaudal centrum possessing the highly distinctive dorsal and ventral sculpturing typical of the herring and unlike other species.

The ?herring vertebral fragment was recovered from a marginal layer which was seasonally flooded. Several mechanisms may have lead to its deposition. It may have arrived in a bird pellet or in the faeces of a piscivorous animal (including man). Alternativley, it may have been inadvertently imported with lumps of Fen Clay, an estuarine or lagoonal sediment, found at the site. This clay was probably imported for pottery production an other purposes and may have included the ?herring bone as well as the thin scatter of marine molluscs and other invertebrates found at the site.

It is important to stress that the small number of bones of food fishes recovered does not provide sufficient evidence to discuss the diet or economy of the site in any detail. Suffice it to say that fish remains species were present in small numbers in the deposits.

FISH REMAINS FROM MILDENHALL, SITE 165

CATALOGUE OF FINDS (sorted according to context type)

Dry contexts, including the palaeosol

MNL	165	0238	1 vertebra (small)	Pike, <u>Esox lucius</u>
	165	0358	1 vertebra (11 mm diam.)	"
	165	0413	1 vertebra (small)	"
	165	5290	3 spines 2 vertebrae	Stickleback, <u>Gasterosteus aculeatus</u>
	165	5367	1 tooth	Shark, Selachii
	165	5407	unidentified fragment	
	165	5512	1 spine	Stickleback
	165	5524	1 vertebra (small)	Cyprinidae
	165	10373	1 precaudal vertebral centrum	Pike
	165	10526	1 precaudal vertebra	?Burbot ? <u>Lota lota</u>

Dry pit fills

	165	0938	1 pelvic bone	Stickleback
	165	4128	unidentified fragment	Small mammal sacrum
	165	4261	2 scale fragments	Cyprinidae
	165	4263	1 unidentified tooth fragment	

Wet pitfills, probably wells

	165	0927	1 pelvic bone	Stickleback
	165	4250	1 opercular	"
			1 pelvic bone	"
			1 vertebra	"
	165	4152	1 unidentified fragment	
	165	4156	1 vertebra	"
			1 spine	"
			2 unidentified fragments	
	165	4168	2 sculptured fragments	"
			1 unidentified fragment	

Wet pitfills, probably wells (cont.)

165	4230	27 vertebrae	Stickleback
		4 operculars	"
		2 basioccipitals	"
		2 left dentaries	"
		2 premaxillae (1 left, 1 right)	"
		1 preopercular	"
		7 lateral spines	"
		11 pelvic bones (6 left, 5 right)	"
		1 quadrate	"
		3 dorsal scutes	"
		unidentified fragments	
165	4256	1 opercular	"
		1 vertebra	"
		unidentified fragments	"
165	4265	3 vertebrae	"
		1 basioccipital	"
		unidentified fragment	"
165	4270	1 vertebra	"
Marginal deposits seasonally flooded			
165	5109	1 preopercular	"
		1 pelvic bone	"
		2 unidentified fragments	
165	5133	1 spine	"
		1 pelvic bone	"
		1 unidentified fragment	
165	5141	2 pelvic bones	"
		1 preopercular	"
		1 spine	"
		3 unidentified fragments	
165	5145	1 vertebral fragment	?herring, ? <u>Clupea harengus</u>
		5 spines	Stickleback
		2 operculars	"
		1 preopercular	"
		1 pelvic bone	"
		2 vertebrae	"
		2 vertebrae	Snake (species unknown)
165	5254	2 spines	"
		1 pelvic bone	"
165	5278	5 spines	"
		2 pelvic bones	"
		3 sculptured fragments	"

165	5286	2 spines	"
165	11313	1 pelvic bone	"
165	11463	3 pelvic bones	"
		1 vertebra	"