Report 2037

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MARC 3 R4 Micheldever Wood - Human bone report

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Four cremations of early bronze age date were submitted for examination.

25

These fairly well calcined bones came from a primary cremation in a collared urn under the earth mound. The remains are those of an adult individual with most parts of the body represented. The largest fragments were only 2-3 cm. long and most far smaller. The total weight of bone was approximately 800 grams.

95

These bone fragments, probably a secondary cremation, were mainly from long bones but their small size and poor condition made it impossible to say whether they were of human or animal origin. The total weight of bone present was about 25 grams.

105

This was a primary cremation in a collared urn from under a central flint cairn. The bones were well calcined and in comparatively large pieces, some bits being up to 10 cm. long. Almost every bone in the body was represented, the relative weights are given in table 1 (below). The remains were those of a youngish adult, almost certainly female. No teeth had been lost ante mortem and no abscesses were noted. Two vertebrae had small irregular pits in their articular surfaces due to Schmorl's nodes, a normal but genetically linked degeneration leading to herniation of the intervertebral disc material.

[108]

These remains were from an unurned primary burial under the western burial mound. The bone condition was very similar to that in cremation [105], again most bones in the body were represented. This individual, who was probably male, was rather older than [105] with slight signs of osteo-arthritis visible at various joints and articulations.

Table 1 : Relative bone weights (grams)

| | [105] Weight | % | [108] Weight | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Skull | 478 | 37.5 | 140 | 16.6 |
| Vertebrae | 49 | 4.9 | 54 | 6.4 |
| Pectoral girdle | 13 | 1.0 | 9 | 1.1 |
| Ribs | 86 | 6.8 | 61 | 7.2 |
| Pelvic girdle | 76 | 6.0 | 42 | 5.0 |
| Long bones | 544 | 42.7 | 508 | 60.2 |
| Extremities | 28 | 2.2 | 30 | 3.6 |
| | 1274 | | 844 | |
| Unidentified fragments | | | | |
| > 6 mm | 750 | | 558 | |
| < 6 mm | mainly soil | | 212 | |
| Total | 2024 | | 1614 | |

The percentage figures are calculated on the total weight of identified fragments, not the total bone weight.

It can be seen from table 1 that the majority of the bone fragments identified were from the long bones and to a lesser extent from the skull. This

is true of an uncremated skeleton too, but the percentages from cremations tend to be enhanced by a recognition factor. These bones are fairly robust and hence tend to be in larger fragments and so more readily identified. On the other hand the more friable bones such as vertebrae are usually under-represented in cremations as they are found only in small fragments and are therefore often not identified.

In this case it is interesting to note the different ratios of skull to long bone fragments, perhaps reflecting some degree of selection or added care in collecting all the skull fragments from cremation [105] for deposition in the urn.