Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 121/89

ASSESSMENT OF THREE IRON AGE ASSEMBLAGES FROM GLOUCESTER.

Bruce Levitan

Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report 121/89

ASSESSMENT OF THREE IRON AGE ASSEMBLAGES FROM GLOUCESTER.

Bruce Levitan

Summary

Three sites from Gloucester, Coppice Corner housing development (9/83), Saintbridge balancing pond (3/86) and 'Roman Fields' Abbeymead (14/86), were assessed primarily for their Iron Age content. All the sites also have Roman material, but since this period has been more intensively studied, both from Gloucester and the region, only one site was assessed for the Roman bones (9/83). Apart from the relative paucity of Iron Age assemblages from the region, the other major factor is the status of early wheel-thrown pottery which is seen by some as late Iron Age and others as early Roman. It was hoped that an assessment of the putative Iron Age bones from these sites might shed light on this problem. Although the three assemblages are quite small, in fact the assessment did show both a remarkable similarity between all three Iron Age assemblages and a difference to the Roman assemblage, this pattern being in keeping with King's 1984 synthesis. On this basis it would appear that the wheel-thrown pottery can more confidently be ascribed to the late Iron Age.

Author's address :-

Bruce Levitan

University Museum
Parks Road
Oxford

OX1 3PW

Assessment of three Iron Age assemblages from Gloucester

Introduction

Three sites from Gloucester have rendered bones from the Iron Age period, and whilst only two of these sites has had any HMBC involvement to date (Saintbridge balancing pond, code 3/86; Coppice Corner housing development, code 9/83), it was felt that a comparative assessment would be the most fruitful approach since the assemblages are small. The Iron Age period is one that has been little represented from Gloucester, so even small assemblages are of potential interest. Furthermore, recent work on pottery of the late Iron Age/early Roman period in this region has thrown up new ideas about the dating of the characteristic early wheel-thrown pottery that is found at these sites, this pottery now being thought to represent the late Iron Age (eg by Timby), although some would still hold that it is early Roman influence (eg Garrod). Thus, any light that bone analysis can give to this situation would be most useful. All three sites also have Roman material, but assessment of this was not seen as a priority because work on bones from this period has been carried out relatively intensively both from Gloucester (eg Maltby 1979; 1983) and the region (see the regional survey by Noddle 1987 and the country-wide synthesis by King 1984). Therefore Roman material was assessed from only one site (9/83).

In addition to 9/83 and 3/86, the other site assessed is 'Roman Fields' Abbeymead, code 14/86. Brief reports and a location map of the two 1986 sites appear in Atkin and Garrod (1987, 237 and Figs 1, 3 and 4).

Archaeological background

Site 9/83

This site was located north of the Kingsholm Claudio-Neronian Fortress site, and finds from the 18th to 20th centuries had indicated that Roman activity had occurred here, beyond the Roman and Saxon centres at Kingsholm. Excavation consisted of a number of small excavations of the ditches in association with a watching brief in the wide, machine stripped areas of the development.

The putative late Iron Age phase is so-dated on the basis of the presence of early wheel-thrown pottery, and absence of characteristic Roman finds. Features of this phase are two linear ditches, 30m apart, both of which were cut by a number of pits which contained similar fills to the ditches. Although the pottery content is a direct parallel of the Belgic phase at Bagendon, the way in which the features have been carefully levelled argues for a concerted and organised activity which Garrod ascribes to the early Roman military occupation rather than to the Iron Age.

Later phases are definitely Roman, and there are a number of Claudio-Neronian ditches and related features as well as a Roman burial ground of 1st-4th century date.

Site 3/86

Trial excavation took place in 1981 (Darvill and Timby 1986), and were followed up by this major excavation and watching brief. Evidence was found for three Iron Age ditched enclosures and a number of pits, all of which had fallen into disuse by the Roman period.

Site 14/86

A watching brief on sewer workings was followed by an excavation of a pen-

annular drainage ditch of an Iron Age house. There was also an Iron Age stone lined pit and a ditch was recut in the Roman period.

Further details concerning 3/86 and 14/86 are to be found in Atkin and Garrod (1987).

Assessment

The assessment took the form of the examination of all the Iron Age material from 9/83 and 3/86, plus the best ditch fills (ie undisturbed fills) from 14/86. The bones were identified to taxonomic level and counted. Measurable bones were noted as were mandibles with two or more molars present. Very few measurable bones or ageable mandibles were present. Counts of measurable (M) and ageable (A) bones are as follows:

9/83 Iron Age
11 sheep/goat, 2 cattle - M
14 sheep/goat, 4 cattle - A

9/83 Roman
26 sheep/goat, 8 cattle, 3 pig, 1 horse - M
9 sheep/goat, 2 cattle, 5 pig - A

3/86
2 sheep/goat, 2 cattle - M
4 sheep/goat - A

14/86
6 sheep/goat, 5 cattle, 2 horse - M
8 sheep/goat, 3 cattle - A

It is obvious from the above that the assemblages are too small to provide useful measurement or ageing data; the same is true of other aspects of analysis such as anatomical representation. The only analysis that would appear to be useful for these sites is the simple quantification of the taxa, and this has already been carried out in the assessment. The data are given in Table 1.

The table shows a clear difference between the Iron Age and Roman bones from 9/83, the major aspect of this being the marked increase in proportions of pig. Note that the actual number of sheep/goat and cattle bones remains similar. The other two Iron Age assemblages are remarkably similar to 9/83. This result lends credence to the hypothesis that the early wheel-thrown pottery is indeed Iron Age, and that this phase can be securely dated to the late Iron Age period. A comparison of these sites with other Iron Age and Roman sites gives this further support. King (1984), in his survey of sites shows that the Roman military sites fall into two major groups: those with very high proportions of cattle (often more than 70%), and those where pig plays a major part (with proportions of 20% or more). This latter group comprises mainly legionary sites, and 9.83 would seem to fit neatly into this group.

In contrast with the above, King was able to show that late Iron Age and unromanized sites are characterised by high proportions of sheep/goat (ie over 40% sheep/goat). The Iron Age assemblages here all fit into this pattern.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, it can be seen clearly from the above assessment that there is a distinction between the Iron Age assemblages and the Roman material that fits well into the model outlined by King (1984). The assessment, therefore, gives weight to the idea that the late Iron Age features from 9/83 are indeed of this date rather than being the result of early Roman military activity. The assemblages are too small for further, more detailed analysis, but the present report does draw out the valuable evidence described.

Therefore, It is recommended that no further analysis of these sites be undertaken, but that they should be archived and curated so that they are available for future study should this become desirable.

References

Atkin, M. and Garrod, A.P. 1987. Archaeology in Gloucester 1986, Trans Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol Soc **105**, 233-242.

Darvill, T. and Timby, J. 1986. Excavations at Saintbridge, Gloucester, 1981, Trans Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol Soc **104**, 49-60.

King, A. 1984. Animal bones and the dietary identity of military and civilian groups in Roman Britain, Germany and Gaul. In (edited by T.F.C. Blagg and A.C. King) Military and civilian in Roman Britain. Cultural relationships in a frontier province Oxford: BAR (British Series **136**) 187-217.

Maltby, M. 1979. Animal bones. In (C.M. Heighway, A.P. Garrod and A.G. Vince) Excavations at 1 Westgate Street, Gloucester, 1975, Medieval Archaeol **23**, 182-185.

Maltby, M. 1983. Animal and bird bones. In (C.M. Heighway) The east and North Gates of Gloucester Bristol: Western Archaeological Trust (Excavation Monograph 4), 228-245 and microfiche.

Noddle, B.A. 1987. Mammalian remains in the Cotswold region: a survey of the literature from Palaeolithic to Roman times, and a more detailed account of the larger domestic animals from some recent Romano-British excavations. In (edited by N.D. Balaam, B. Levitan and V. Straker) Studies in palaeoeconomy and environment in South West England Oxford: BAR (British Series **181**) 31-50.

Bruce Levitan,
Environmental Archaeology Unit,
University Museum,
Parks Road,
Oxford, OX1 3PW.
Tel (0865) 272983.

Summary of bones from three sites from Gloucester

Site →	9/83				3/86		14/86	
Date →	I.A.		R-B		I.A.		I.A.	
Taxon	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cattle	102	39	100	26	11	34	49	28
Sheep/goat	138	53	129	34	19	59	105	60
Pig	16	6	119	31	2	6	7	4
Horse	5	2	18	5			14	8
Other	1	+	15	4			1	1
sub-total	262	45	381	37	32	47	176	36
Large mammal	120	38	341	54	21	58	184	58
Medium mammal	195	62	289	46	15	42	133	58
sub-total	315	55	630	61	36	53	317	64
Bird			15	1				
Fish			4	+				
Total	577		1030		68		493	

+ = less than 1%
Other mammals: 9/83 & 14/86 I.A. = human; 9/83 R-B = 5 hare, 5 human, 1 roe deer, 4 dog;
Table excludes complete dog skeleton from 9/83 R-B