

Diverse Domesticates?: An Investigation of the Animal Bone Assemblage Recovered from Common Barn Farm, Southoe Joshua Toulson Ba MSc¹

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BACKGROUND

- CFA Archaeology undertook archaeological excavations at Common Barn Farm near the village of Southoe, Cambridgeshire between February and September 2018.
- Excavations uncovered primarily Roman rural activity spanning from the 1st to 4th centuries.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of identifiable animal bone by species (NISP)



Significant assemblages of pottery, animal bone, and archaeobotanical material were retrieved and identified by specialists as contributions to the overall site report.

PROJECT AIMS

- To analyse the breakdown of identified material by species and period in relation to known archaeological trends.
- To establish the viability of material for biometric analysis and undertake measurements where applicable.
- To investigate the evolving humananimal relationship occurring on site, based on available information.



Animal Bone identification

Preliminary bone identification was undertaken by Jennifer Thoms.

NISP distribution by period

Dog Galliforme Goose Horse ■ Pig Red deer Sheep/Goat С Β Α 4th Century + 2nd-3rd Centuries Late Iron Age- 1st Century N=40 N=40 N=117

Fig 3. Pie charts representing the breakdown of identified animal bone (NISP) by species, subsequently further subdivided by period.

Cattle are the main species identified from the archaeological record, increasing in prevalence over time. This is in line with current understanding of animal husbandry between the Late Iron Age and Romano-British period.³ • Deer remains, of which a high percentage were worked, are restricted to the 2nd-3rd centuries only.

Material was identified to as low a taxonomic bracket as possible using suitable reference guides noting pathology, age fusion data, and butchery, where applicable.

Identifiable material with associated dating evidence was predominantly recovered from the Late Iron Age–1st Century transitional period.

Material which could not be identified has been excluded from this study to better represent the proportions of species relative to one another. Postcranial viability for biometric analysis at Common Barn Farm





Fig 1. Bar chart presenting the distribution of identifiable, datable animal bone material via the Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) per period recovered from Common Barn Farm.

Biometric analysis

The material was assessed to identify viable elements for biometric analysis. Damaged, unfused, or burnt bones were removed. Based on this information, cattle astragali were selected for further study.

Cattle astragali biometry



Fig 4. Scatterplot of astragali measurements from Elms Farm and Common Barn Farm.

The results suggest the animals were significantly smaller at death than those at Elms Farm. This likely represents a younger kill off age, rather than a distinctly smaller stature herd.

Of particular interest, the datable astragali derive from both 1st and 2nd century deposits. The relatively grouped sizes suggests cattle were slaughtered at a similar age over the centuries.

CONCLUSIONS



Fig 2. Pie chart of the proportion of identified postcranial bones that were deemed viable for biometric analysis.

Measurements were taken using a vernier calliper to the nearest 0.1mm in accordance with guidelines set out by Driesch.¹ Each measurement was taken three times and the mean calculated as the result.

Measurements were then graphed against a selection of Roman cattle astragali recovered from Elms Farm, Heybridge as a reference.²

The quantity of animals kept on site seems to decrease following the transitional Late Iron Age- Romano-British period. This could represent a reduction in populace beyond the 1st Century AD,



Cattle increasingly became the most dominant animal kept on site during the Romano-British period, particularly at the expense of sheep/goat and pig.



There was a limited, but not insignificant, quantity of material viable for biometric analysis. Biometric data suggests that the kill off age for cattle on-site seems consistently young across the Romano–British period. Perhaps reflecting an inability to sustain animals to the age for prime meat production.

References

1 Driesch, A. 1976. A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites. Peabody Museum Bulletin: Harvard University.

2 Johnstone, C. & Albarella, U. 2002. The Late Iron Age and Romano-British Mammal and Bird Bone Assemblage from Elms Farm, Heybridge, Essex.

3 Rizzetto, M. & Crabtree, P. J. & Albarella, U. 2017. Livestock Changes at the beginning and End of the Roman Period in Britain: Issues of Acculturation, Adaptation and 'Improvement'. European Journal of Archaeology, 20 (3). Pp. 535–556.



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