

HUMAN BONE, WATERMEAD COUNTRY PARK, LEICESTERSHIRE (ACCESSION NO. A57.1996)

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Introduction

The human remains from Watermead represent at least two adult individuals. As the summary in Table 1 indicates, most of the skeletal elements are missing but the surviving bones are in excellent condition. They show no signs of weathering, carnivore or rodent gnawing such as might result from pre-depositional exposure nor do they show any damage that can accrue during the burial or post-depositional phase (Andrews and Cook, 1985; Cook 1986). The slight peeling of on the left temporals of both crania, as well as some release along the squamosal suture of skull1 is probably due to environmental change since excavation.

Table 1: Summary of observed condition and alteration of the Watermead human bones.

Specimen	Condition	Fracture	Tool marks	Percussion marks	Natural marks
Individual 1 Cranium A57. 1996. SF 46	Good				
Individual 1 Mandible A57.1996.SF 54	Good				
Individual 1 Atlas vertebra A57.1996.SF 48	Good/complete		Present		
Individual 1 Axis vertebra A57.1996.SF 49	Good/complete		Present		
?Individual 1 Right fibula A57.1996.SF 51	Good/complete				
?Individual 1					

Right tibia A57.1996.SF 50	Good/complete	
Individual 2		
Cranium A57.1996. SF 47	Good. Damage in mid-facial region	Slight
Right femur A57.1996.SF 55	Good/complete	
Right radius A57.1996.SF 52	Good/complete	
Right femur A57.1996.SF 56	Good/damaged at proximal and distal ends	Scuffing and depressions
Right clavicle A57.1996.SF 53	Good/complete	

The cranial material

The cranium and mandible of Individual 1 exhibit minimal damage (Figure 1, Figure 2 & Figure 3). On the skull, the thin, fragile bone of the nasal aperture and the back of the palette are in tact suggesting that the skull was carefully buried and undisturbed. The absence of any random, superficial scuffs or scratches such as would have accrued had the skull been disposed of casually and been left to roll about (Andrews and Cook, 1985). Similarly, there is no evidence of peri-mortem trauma or tool marks on either the cranium or the mandible.



Figure 1: Cranium, Individual 1, (Bronze Age male) Small Find no. 46



Figure 2: Cranium, Individual 1, Small Find no. 46

Cranium 2 (Figure 3) lacks the middle part of the face. The maxilla, nasal bones and lower orbits are missing due to ancient damage that appears to have occurred post mortem. A light recent scratch on the frontal appears to have been caused by a metal instrument probably during excavation. There is no evidence to suggest peri-mortem interference with the skull.



Figure 3: Cranium, Individual 1, Small Find no. 46, Bronze Age male (left), Individual 2, Small Find no. 47 Neolithic male (right)

The post cranial material

With the exception of one of the femurs (SF 56), all of the post cranial remains are undamaged and in good condition. SF 56 has ancient damage at both the proximal and distal ends. The fractures are ancient but do not show the characteristics of deliberate human

actions (White 1992). Furthermore the bone shaft lacks any sign of superficial alteration or tool marks except for some recent scuffing. This is also true of the other limb bones and clavicle.

Both cervical vertebrae in the collection show clear ancient striations. On the atlas or C1 vertebra, SF 48, there are two almost parallel, horizontal marks, 16mm long, on the outer face of the left posterior arch. The upper edge of the top mark overhangs a slightly rougher lower edge of this deeper striation which is asymmetric in cross-section. The lower mark is symmetric in cross-section and more superficial. The axis or C2 vertebra has a fine striation, 8mm long, on the anterior face below the right superior articular surface, just above the position of the hyoid bone. The mark is similar to the upper example on the atlas vertebra in having an overhanging upper edge and asymmetric cross-section. All of the marks resemble slicing marks made by a fine edged tool used at a slight angle. All of the marks are clearly ancient and are in part still filled with sediment. They are not close in appearance to cut marks made by stone tools (Cook 1986; 1991) but are commensurate with descriptions of marks made by metal implements such as a sword or knife (Molleson 1991). The cuts were inflicted peri-mortem and are probably indicative of the cause of death rather than mortuary or other post mortem practices. Indeed, the latter can probably be ruled out in the absence of deliberate fracturing or cutting, scraping, chopping and percussion marks on any of the other bones. The location of the slicing marks on the vertebrae suggests that the individual was faced by another right handed person who cut the right side of the victim's throat. With the head fallen forward another two cuts were made to the back of the neck.



Figure 4: Atlas vertebra, Individual 1, (Bronze Age male), Small Find no. 46. Cut marks.

Summary

With the exception of the cervical vertebrae, the small sample of human bones found at Watermead show no evidence for cause of death or post mortem treatment of the cadaver or skeleton. However, the vertebrae carry relatively rare examples (Molleson 1991) of slicing marks made by a metal implement. No healing has occurred and it is probable that the marks account for the brutal cause of death of one of the individuals present. What happened to the rest of the bones from these individuals is unknown. Although the occurrence of odd human bones discarded amongst other material is quite common at this period the lack of random

damage on these few pieces seems to contradict casual disposal. There is insufficient evidence to suggest any other peri-mortem practices such as cannibalism or mortuary practices involving the dismemberment of the corpse.

References

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