

## CHAPTER 12

# THE HUMAN REMAINS

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With the exception of fragments of skull from one adult, all the human remains from Periods 3 and 4 derived from infants. The surviving remains may represent as many as six individuals of which only one was represented by more than a single bone and was retrieved from a single burial cut. In terms of the possible number of individuals, these are equally divided between Periods 3 and 4, but all remains, irrespective of period, are clustered in the south-eastern area of the trench (Objects 700, 701) (FIG. 109).

PERIOD 3 (Object 701)

### Skull fragments (5641)

The two small finds, 3546 and 3549, comprise, respectively, left and right parietal bones of the skull. SF 3546 also includes a piece of non-human bone, possibly from a skull. All of the breaks along the skull margins are post-mortem.

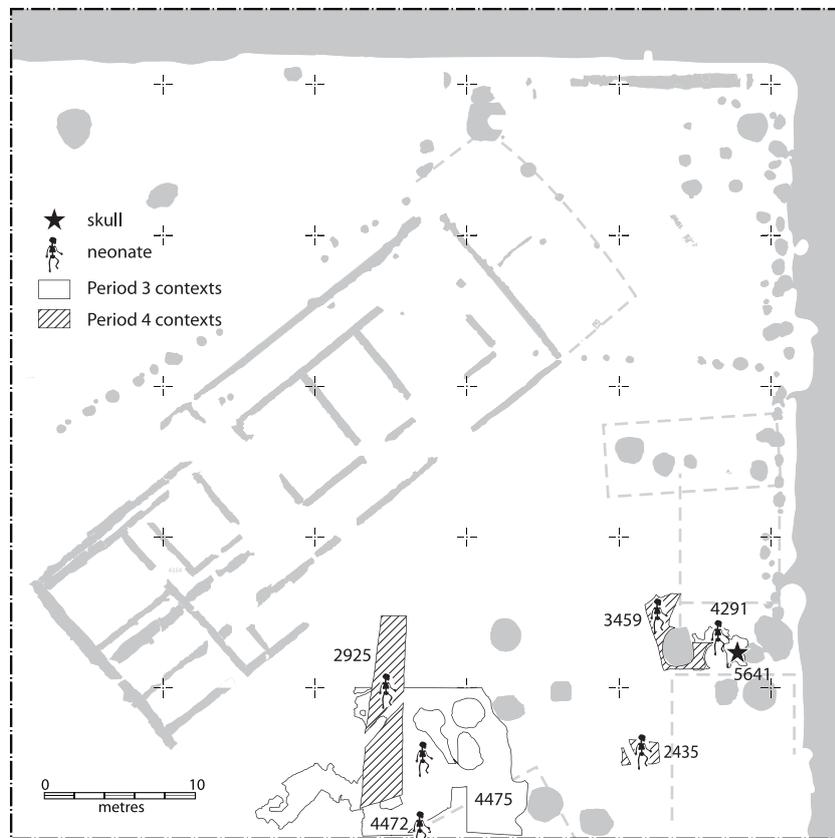


FIG. 109. Location of human remains (neonates and adult) from Period 3 and 4 contexts.

The human parietal bones can be fitted together at the sagittal suture along the centre of the skull, and therefore represent one individual. It is impossible to assess the sex of an individual from the cranial vault alone, and age at death cannot be determined, other than that this skull belongs to an adult. There is evidence of pitting on the parietals that is often interpreted as representing iron deficiency anaemia (i.e. porotic hyperostosis). However, this is a very slight change and may also be indicative of a mild scalp infection.

#### **Infant burial (4472)**

Two small finds were excavated from this context. SF 3115 comprises four left rib fragments and one shaft fragment of a right rib from a neonate. SF 3331 also contains rib fragments, one of which can be matched with a fragment from 3115. Therefore, these remains are considered to belong to one individual. Skull fragments, the left and right clavicle, and a shaft fragment of an unidentified long bone were also recovered. A tentative age assessment can be made from the intact left clavicle. The maximum length (42.93mm) indicates that the child was between 38 and 42 weeks (Scheuer and Black 2000, 250). Birth is traditionally estimated to be between the ages of 38 and 40 weeks, suggesting that the child was full-term. Such neonatal deaths are generally the result of internal (endogenous) factors caused by maternal illness, low birth weight or birth trauma, rather than being caused by the external environment into which they were born (Scott and Duncan 1999).

#### **Context 4475**

SF 3364 comprises an intact left humerus. The maximum length of the humerus (57.49mm) suggests this child was 35 weeks old (range 33–37 weeks, Scheuer and Black 2000). It is likely that this child was either born prematurely, before its lungs were developed enough for the child to breathe unaided, or was stillborn.

#### **Context 4291**

This context contained the proximal end of a right tibia. Although a precise age could not be assigned, a comparison of the bone with the tibia from 2435 (below) suggests the child was older and therefore full-term.

#### **PERIOD 4 (Object 700)**

#### **Context 2435**

This context included a complete left tibia and fibula (lower leg). The maximum length of the tibia (64.56mm) indicates that the child was between 36 and 40 weeks, with a mean age of 38.6 weeks (Scheuer and Black 2000, 415). This child was full-term at the time of death.

#### **Context 2925**

This context comprised the distal end of a left femur. It was not possible to assign a precise age to this neonate.

#### **Context 3459**

The remains comprise three fragments representing one right femur and a distal left femur. It is possible that these remains are a pair. The fragmentary nature of the bones means that a precise age could not be assigned to them. However, the size of the distal femur suggests that the neonate was slightly younger than that from 2925.

## CONCLUSION

Of the four infants who could be aged, three were full-term or probably full-term and one was about 35 weeks. Although the phasing suggests an equal division of the remains between the second and third centuries, all those from Period 3 came from later contexts in the sequence, suggesting that the majority belong to the third century. The skull fragments, however, may be reworked from late Iron Age levels from which adult inhumations have been recovered (Firth 2000).