

APPENDIX 1 - HUMAN REMAINS

1.1 Assessment of the Human Remains

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Introduction

- 1.1.1 A small quantity of human bone from three burials was recovered during excavation works at Thurnham Roman Villa (ARC THM 98).
- 1.1.2 The skeletons were hand excavated. In excavation cremation contexts were subject to 100% recovery as whole-earth samples and subsequently wet-sieved. Material from the >2 mm fraction was retained en masse.
- 1.1.3 The recovery and study of human remains was undertaken in accordance with the Fieldwork Event Aims for the site, which are set out in section 2 of the main report, above. This material has particular relevance for the study of ritual and ceremonial use of the landscape, in accordance with the Landscape Zone Priorities identified for the CTRL project.

Methodology

- 1.1.4 Cremated material was quantified by weight and scanned in order to determine age, sex, and potential for further analysis. Given the small size of the assemblage a decision was made to scan all of it. The cremation deposit was recorded on a pro forma record sheet which includes context, context type, period, weight, identifiable fragments, colour and minimum number of individuals. The > 2 mm fraction was scanned with a view to determining whether or not it should be sorted for small fragments of human bone. Inhumations and fragments of disarticulated material were examined to determine preservation, completeness, age and sex where possible.

Quantification

- 1.1.5 The assemblage comprises the partial remains of two infant skeletons and a single deposit of cremated human bone. Tables 8.1 and 8.2 set out the quantities of material surviving from these burials.

Provenance

- 1.1.6 The cremation deposit was located in a pit close to the Bronze Age waterhole and it may be of similar date. Skeleton 20431 was found in the top fill of ditch 20428 which predated the villa construction. Skeleton 10633 was buried in a stone-lined grave cut and was accompanied by two pots, a fragment of animal rib and a flint flake. The pottery has been dated to the late 2nd century.

Conservation

- 1.1.7 The material does not require any conservation for the purposes of long-term storage. Under the terms of the CTRL act, however, all human remains are to be reburied.

Comparative material

- 1.1.8 The cremation may be of broadly similar date to the small Bronze Age assemblage from Tutt Hill. The skeletons could be compared with the small assemblage from excavations at Springhead (Boyle nd, 33-34) where it was concluded that a normal

pattern of infant mortality was represented, that is, there was an absence of clustering around 38-40 weeks. The burial of an infant in a stone cist can be paralleled at a small number of sites in south-east England, at Springhead, Snodland, St Michael's and St Alban's (Philpott 1991, 64).

Potential for further work

CTRL Landscape Zone Priorities and Fieldwork Event Aims

- 1.1.9 The following section discusses potential for further work in the light of the Landscape Zone Priorities and Fieldwork Event Aims.
- 1.1.10 The cremation has the potential to provide evidence relating to ritual and ceremonial activity. An average adult cremation can weigh between 1000-2400g if complete (McKinley 1997, 68; observations at modern crematoria). Clearly, then this deposit does not represent the entire remains of one individual. However, the burial of token deposits of cremated material may have been deliberate. Unburnt animal bone has been identified in the assessment of this deposit. The fact that it is unburnt may indicate that it was an accidental inclusion. However, it would be useful to examine all of the bone in detail to determine the quantity of animal bone present (burnt or unburnt) and to identify it to species if possible. The identification of animal bone within human cremations has implications for the study of burial practice of the period. Sheep/goat was present within a proportion of the Iron Age cremation burials at Westhampnett (McKinley *et al* 1997, 73).

New research aims and objectives for the CTRL archaeology project

- 1.1.11 The inhumations are reasonably well preserved. It is recommended that both skeletons be examined in detail in order to provide a more precise age estimate. It is possible to determine neonatal age to within a couple of weeks using long bone lengths. Detailed analysis of the likely age may shed some light on the question of infanticide. An age of *c* 40 weeks is taken to be representative of a full-term infant. In modern populations perinatal deaths (that is, stillbirths and natural deaths in the immediate post-natal period) have a fairly flat age distribution with no marked peak at full term. In contrast most Roman groups do have a very marked peak in deaths at around full term and this is believed to be indicative of infanticide because it does not reflect a 'normal' pattern of neonate mortality. It has been argued elsewhere that a pattern of clustering around 38-40 is suggestive of infanticide as it was generally carried out immediately after birth (Smith and Kahila 1992; Mays 1993).

Bibliography

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Table 8.1: Cremations

Context	Context type	Period	Weight	Identifiable fragments	Colour	Minimum number of individuals
10097	Fill of pit 10096	BA	658 g	Skull, upper limb, unburnt animal bone	white	?adult female

Table 8.2: Unburnt bone

Context	Context type	Period	Date Range	Preservation	Completeness	Age
10633	Skeleton	RO	c. AD 120-250	high	50%	neonate
20431	Top fill of ditch 20428	RO	c. AD 50-120	medium	65%	neonate