

Identification of prehistoric animal bones at Sutton Hoo

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Dr. Madeleine Hummler  
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Dear Madeleine,

Here is a list of identifications (or unidentifications in some cases!) from the "Bronze age" Sutton Hoo contexts. Let me know if you need a fuller text right now; I can discuss them with the rest of the bone when I've finished it, but I got the impression you were rather anxious for some facts as soon as possible. There are one or two things I should perhaps point out:-

The presence of all those fragments of unburnt cattle teeth, without much other cattle bone being present, is not necessarily significant. Where bone preservation is very bad (as this is) teeth, and especially cattle teeth, are amongst the most robust elements and will quite possibly be preserved where nothing else is. I saw a similar phenomenon in some of the late Neolithic assemblages at Pool, Sanday, in Orkney, where there was a large number of loose teeth, in much the same condition as these, but where very little other bone was preserved (we got better results from the earlier Neolithic layers, but that's a different story).

I'm really quite puzzled about the mixture of cremated and uncremated sheep bone, and a little worried that the uncremated sacrum from 41825 should have chop marks which are very probably made by a metal blade, if this is really Bronze age material (although of course it's possible). Also, this uncremated bone is in so much better condition than the cattle teeth, for example. Is preservation very variable over the site? Or do you think there could be a mixture of material of different ages? But if that were the case, it's perhaps too much of a coincidence that it's all sheep/goat bone? Of course even settlement debris can produce the odd fragment of bone which has been burnt severely enough to be "cremated", and if preservation were generally bad, it's possible that these would be virtually all of the bone assemblage that would survive, since burnt bone does survive better than unburnt in some circumstances.

Hope this is more help than hindrance!

Best wishes,



Julie Bond

*Identification of prehistoric animal bone from Sutton Hoo*  
**Material from (Bronze Age ?) Cremations at Sutton Hoo; analysis.**

**J M Bond**

***Samples from the British Museum;***

**F225 Int 41 41995** "Bone sorted out from clay deposit".

Fragments of the left distal tibia and shaft from a sheep/goat, distal fused. Not cremated; stained with ?vivianite or similar deposit. There is however one minute fragment of cremated bone in this sample (c. 4X4mm) which may be a fragment of sheep/goat distal metapodial.

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**F549 Int 41 42892**

Charcoal sample.

**F549 Int 41 42987** "Miniscule fragments of cremated bone"

The bone is cremated, but otherwise unidentifiable (largest fragment c. 5X3mm).

**F549 Int 41 42988** "Microscopic cremated bone grains"

The bone is cremated, but otherwise too small for identification.

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**F155 Int 41 18681**

The bone is not cremated; identifiable fragments are-

1. A fragment of cattle tooth (molar). The enamel is missing, and the tooth very degraded.
2. Five fragments of concreted sand containing minute flecks of ?uncremated tooth and bone.
3. Two more fragments of cattle tooth (maxillary molars) not cremated, with the enamel degraded and rest of tooth in similarly poor condition.
4. Another fragment of cattle-size tooth, again badly degraded; not further identifiable.

**F155 Int 41 18681** (second sample). Again, there is no cremated bone or tooth.

Identifiable fragments are;

1. Fragment of cattle tooth (mandibular molar?). Enamel degraded.
2. Seven fragments of uncremated cattle tooth (molar, mandibular?) highly degraded.
3. Nine very small fragments from cattle-size teeth (molar).
4. Three fragments of sandy concretion, no obvious bone remaining.
5. A very small fragment of calcined flint.

**F155 Int 41 18681** (third sample) More tiny fragments of cattle size tooth, uncremated and badly-degraded.

**F155 Int 41 1681** (Two bags of sand residue, one sieved to 300 and one to 500 microns) No identifiable bone, cremated or uncremated.

*Samples from the Sutton Hoo Project;*

- F225 Int 41 41819. "Fragment of cremated bone".  
Cremated, sheep/goat size vertebral fragment? Possibly a fragment of lateral process.
- F225 Int 41 41820.  
Minute fragments of cremated bone, not further identifiable.
- F225 Int 41 41823.  
One minute fragment of cremated bone, not further identifiable.
- F225 Int 41 41824.  
Tiny fragment of unburnt bone, not further identifiable.
- X  
F225 Int 41 41825.  
Sheep/goat sacral fragments, unburnt. The left lateral process has been removed by a chopping blow, and possibly also the right lateral process. There are numerous deep parallel longitudinal cutmarks on the ventral face. The nature of the chop mark, and the clean deep cutmarks, suggest that a metal knife was used. There is also a fragment of unburnt sheep/goat lumbar vertebra present.
- F225 Int 41 41827.  
Fragment of cremated bone, possibly a shaft fragment of ?radius from a medium-sized mammal.
- F225 Int 41 41828.  
Tiny fragment of cremated bone, not further identifiable.
- F225 Int 41 41829.  
Two fragments (fit) of unburnt thoracic vertebra from a sheep/goat.
- F225 Int 41 41832.  
Unburnt thoracic vertebra from a sheep/goat. Chop mark on ventral face on the left side of the vertebral body and lateral process.
- F225 Int 41 41833.  
Whole intermediate (second) phalange from a sheep or goat. Proximal epiphysis fused. Cremated.
- F225 Int 41 41839.  
Tiny fragment of unburnt bone, not further identified.
- F225 Int 41 41841.  
Tiny fragment of cremated bone; a sheep or goat cranial fragment, with the very base of the horn core visible.
- F225 Int 41 41843.  
Sheep/goat distal (third) phalange, proximal fragment, unburnt.

f225 **Int 41 41846.**  
Fragment of unburnt bone, possibly a sheep/goat size cranial fragment?

f225 **Int 41 41848.**  
Fragment of sheep/goat tooth (mandibular molar) in very poor condition, unburnt.

f225 **Int 41 41864.**  
Unburnt fragment of bone, possibly a piece of cattle frontal (cranial) bone.

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**Int 41 34419.**  
Minute crumbs of cremated bone, unidentifiable.