

ECLIPSE OF THE CRESCENT BONE: ZOOARCHAEOLOGY IN EGER, HUNGARY

July 25, 2015 Emily Johnson Explore
Posts, Neolithic, Prehistory, Science Bones, dairy, Hungary, Neolithic, Neomilk Project, Zooarchaeology

THE NEOMILK PROJECT

Sorry I'm late! I wrote my day of archaeology blog post on a (blissfully air-conditioned) bus from Eger to Budapest! I am currently in Hungary for a week and a half collecting zooarchaeological data for my PhD, which looks at bone fat processing and butchery in Neolithic Europe as part of the Neomilk project. Neomilk is an ERC funded international collaboration which investigates the emergence of dairying in Neolithic Europe. Lipid residue analysis on ceramics forms the main line of evidence used, but the affectionately named Team Bone use zooarchaeological methods to look for dairying and its effect on diet. The research involves a lot of travel around Europe (mainly tracking the *Linearbandkeramik* or LBK culture) and analysing key sites, especially those sampled for lipid residue analysis by the team in Bristol. For each site I analyse I try to look at every Neolithic bone fragment, sorting them into size classes, determining species and element and analysing fracture patterns, butchery and taphonomy. This leads to some pretty big datasets!

My aim in coming to Eger was to analyse Apc, but I finished that yesterday! So at the moment I am working on a site called Füzesabony-Gubakút, a settlement which dates from the early ALP culture. I'm hoping to finish the analysis of this site, but I also have a sampling strategy in place if it looks like I won't finish. I analysed just over 1000 bones yesterday, here's what I've got so far!

ANALYSIS

Preservation of the bones of this site is amazing, with bone and fracture surfaces very well preserved, which is good for my butchery and fracture analysis. Butchery marks are thin on the ground, which I've found is typical of sites from this time period as stone tools make precious little marks on bones (as opposed to butchery with metal objects!). The fracture analysis is very interesting. To try to find out whether people were smashing long bones to get the fat-rich marrow I look for fresh, dry and mineralised fracture characteristics. Fresh fractures (in high quantities) suggest that marrow was important to diet. Dry (and mineralised) fractures can be caused by deposition/re-deposition, carnivore gnawing, burning or trampling, so are often present on sites even where marrow is highly prized. At Füzesabony, the majority of fractures are dry, or happened when the bone was drying. This suggests that people weren't that desperate for the fat inside bone shafts. My sun-addled brain however is thinking that it's so hot here that bones would dry out more quickly – the bones certainly aren't whole, so *something* is breaking them! Hopefully the rest of the assemblage will tell me what!



Fresh fracture on a cattle radius (complete with impact scar!)



Dry fracture on a mandible fragment

So, back to why I composed this on a bus to Budapest – I can't work at the place where the bones are stored (a disused mental institution, not as creepy as it sounds) on the weekend, so I'm off to Budapest to

join Team Pot member Jess to do some less dusty work and eat our weight in delicious ice cream and pöttyös, strange cheese-chocolate bars that we are a bit addicted to.



The sum of all our dreams!

You can find out more about the Neomilk project on their [website](#), read more stories from my PhD [here](#) or follow me on twitter [@zooarchaemily](#).

HAPPY DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY!