



Turkdean Roman Villa, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Investigations 1997-1998

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THE ANIMAL BONE *By* Jane Sidell

Some 406 fragments of animal bone were recovered by hand-excavation from the area of the villa and associated buildings. No sieved samples were examined. The bone assemblages were not submitted to a detailed analysis, but they have been scanned and identified to species and anatomical element where possible (full details are contained in the archive). No measurements or tooth-wear coding have been carried out at this stage. This report serves as a general description and interpretation (where possible) of the faunal assemblage from the villa.

The majority of the bone fragments formed extremely small assemblages and could be considered as 'background noise' — general debris which becomes scattered over an occupation site which is in use for some time. Many of these were collected from topsoil or subsoil layers and were highly eroded and are presumed to be re-worked from the uppermost Roman deposits. Differential erosion was observed within some of the assemblages, lending weight to the suggestion that a number of the bones were residual. Furthermore, a number of the context types from which bone was recovered, for instance the fillings of the robbing hollow in Trench 1 and the plunge pool in Trench 4, suggest that the bones were redeposited. Otherwise the bones were well preserved, even the juvenile fragments showing little evidence of damage.

In all, although a large number of bone assemblages were recovered, for the reasons set out above they only shed very limited light on the occupation of what was, after all, a substantial villa. The species list is restricted to the major domesticates of cattle, sheep/goat, and pig, with isolated examples of horse, deer, dog, and chicken/pheasant, and no wild species. This is surprisingly restricted and it is only the juvenile pig bones that make any concession to the presumed high status of the site and its occupants. Recovery is thought to have been good, on the basis of the many small bone chips found, yet this is a restricted diet for what was obviously a reasonably high-status site.

The assemblages were found in secondary contexts and so it is not possible to link the activities which generated the bone groups to specific areas of the site. Almost all the groups appear to be mixed, although it is not possible to ascertain whether mixing took place before or after the bones reached their final location. All that may be suggested is that animals were slaughtered, dismembered, and eaten — a not unexpected conclusion given the nature of the site.

The excavations did not recover any large groups of material in primary contexts; on a villa that was occupied for at least two hundred years, a lot of waste will have been generated and required disposal. The situation is different to that of an urban site where rubbish would often be carted away. On a rural site, it is more likely to be buried in pits, but their identification must await future

excavations. It is to be expected that somewhere on the Turkdean site primary bone assemblages which will shed light on the villa economy await excavation.

³⁰ RCHME 1976.

³¹ Hodder and Millett 1980.

³² RCHME 1976, 55–6; Rawes and Wills 1998, 201.

³³ RCHME 1976, plan facing p. xl; for the villa plan generally, see Smith 1997, 162–5.

³⁴ Chedworth: Goodburn 1983, 13; North Leigh: Ellis 1999; Spoonley Wood: RCHME 1976, 113–14; Smith 1997, 162.

³⁵ Smith 1997, 163.

³⁶ Where the bath measured 4.8 m by 3.5 m, with two steps leading down (Middleton 1890, 653).

³⁷ Bath 1.1 m by 1.3 m by 0.7 m deep, also with steps (Gascoigne 1969, 46–7).

³⁸ Ellis 1999, fig. 2; Smith 1997, 151–65.