

SHORT CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONFERENCE PAPER SUMMARIES

Butchery versus biostratinomy. A short note on a perforated goat (Capra) scapula

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Perforated scapulae have been recorded from a number of mainly Roman sites in Britain and Europe. Numerous examples have been recorded from Lincoln, where some have been illustrated and described as showing 'typical damage caused by the perforation of a butcher's hook through the blade' (Dobney *et al.* 1996). At Lincoln, as elsewhere, this type of bone modification is attributed to the hanging of shoulder joints from hooks for immersion in brine, smoking or curing. Both cattle (*Bos*) and sheep (*Ovis*) scapulae have been found with similar marks.

During a search for comparative bone material on the Greek island of Corfu in the summer of 1991, I collected a goat (*Capra*) right scapula. The scapula was lying on a hillside, together

with many other mainly disarticulated but complete bones. Together they appeared to represent the greater part of an animal which had died of natural causes and had decomposed on the hillside. There was no evidence to indicate human interference. A roughly circular hole on the blade of the scapula (Figure 79) is of similar dimensions and position to some illustrated examples of Roman butchery (e.g. Denison 1995; Dobney *et al.* 1996, plates 3 and 5a). Despite the hole, and a crack and further small puncture radiating from it, the scapula was in good condition. The only signs of surface weathering were a few tiny cracks at the blade edge and a small area of erosion on the thoracic angle, exposing cancellous bone. While it is not immediately obvious how the perforation was caused, it would appear to be the product of a post-depositional process or event. The most likely explanation may be that it represents damage resulting from contact with a sharp stone.

The number of perforated scapulae occurring together, and often exhibiting other butchery marks, would suggest that in most cases archaeological reports of perforated scapulae are genuine examples of bones deliberately holed in order to suspend the joints from hooks.

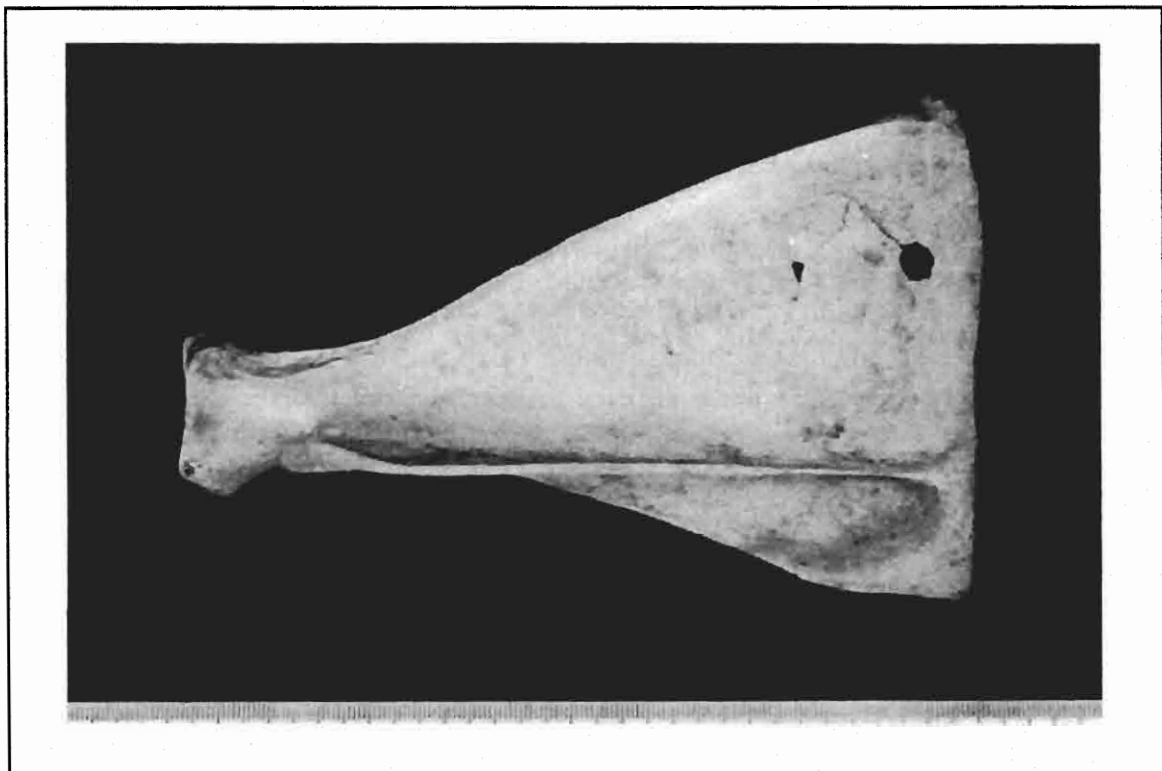


Figure 79. Modern, holed, goat (*Capra*) scapula from Corfu, Greece.

However, isolated examples should be treated with caution, particularly where perforations occur in the absence of knife or other blade marks.

References

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Dobney, K. Jaques, D. and Irving, B. (1996). Of butchers and breeds. Report on vertebrate remains from various sites in the City of Lincoln. *Lincoln Archaeological Studies* 5.

Archaeological evidence for cephalopods: taphonomic loss or unfortunate ignorance?

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It appears to be accepted by ichthyo-archaeologists (Wheeler and Jones 1989, 12) that, at least in the NE Atlantic, the geographic location and types of marine fish species have remained virtually unaltered for many millennia. Using modern comparisons, plenty of cephalopods are being caught today mixed in with general catches of mixed fish. On this basis, it seems logical to infer that there was a similar population of these animals in virtually the same areas in the past. Certainly in Roman and Greek classical antiquity, squid and octopus were well known in the Mediterranean. They are depicted on mosaics (Christies 1991) and plates and vases (Wilkins *et al.* 1995). Although no palaeolithic parietal art depicting these species has been found to date there is no reason to doubt their existence during that period either, if my argument above is accepted. If we are to enhance our understanding of the diets of coastal dwelling peoples in prehistory, we certainly need to be aware of the possible existence of any surviving body parts of cephalopods at excavations.

Several criteria need to be addressed. One concerns a knowledge of the anatomical details of the cephalopods likely to inhabit the waters of the NE Atlantic. Standard biology textbooks do not contain this detail, so the archaeologist needs to consult more specialized literature (e.g. Clarke 1977; 1980; Donovan 1977). The second criterion concerns taphonomic loss, something which is problematical to all archaeologists in the field. Archaeological reports on fish remains at coastal

sites contain no mention of cephalopods. What has happened to their hard parts? Have they completely disintegrated in the substrate? Could they have been completely missed during excavations? This leads to the third criterion: the inability of the excavator to recognize those hard parts of cephalopods that might have been present with other animal remains. The mouthparts could even have been erroneously labelled as 'parts of bird beaks', perhaps.

These problems are not difficult to remedy. I illustrate here (Fig. 80) the three basic hard parts of two common cephalopods which can be found today in the NE Atlantic: the translucent 'pen' of a 14 cm (mantle or body length) specimen of the squid (*Loligo vulgaris* Lamarck), the off-white 'bone' of an 8 cm (mantle length) cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis* Linnaeus) and the dark brown and black 'beak' of the same specimen of cuttlefish. Both species have 'beaks' as hard mouthparts. However, the octopus (*Eledone cirrhosa* (Lamarck)) has no 'bone' or 'pen' within its body. The only part that may already be recognized by archaeologists is the 'bone' of the cuttlefish. It is often washed ashore on beaches in Britain and widely used by cage birds to sharpen their beaks.

To most people, the cephalopod 'beaks' will be unfamiliar. All these parts are hard, and the beaks, in particular, have been used in the past to determine the diet of whales (Clarke 1980).

I would firstly therefore like to emphasize the importance of recognition. Familiarity with diagrams of the hard parts of these animals will help initially. Secondly, examination of these parts in a biological collection will help further with this appreciation. Thirdly one should then perhaps be aware that even if these parts are not actually found at a coastal site, there should at least be some discussion of the fact that these animals might have existed in the past, either in the sea locally or as part of the debris at an occupation site.

I hope this brief introduction to this fascinating group of animals prompts further investigations and discussion.

References

Christies (Auctioneers) (1989). *Fine Antiquities*. Sale Catalogue, 12th December 1989. London: Christie, Manson and Woods Ltd.

Clarke, M. R. (1977). Beaks, nets and numbers. *Symposia of the Zoological Society of London* No. 38, 89-126.