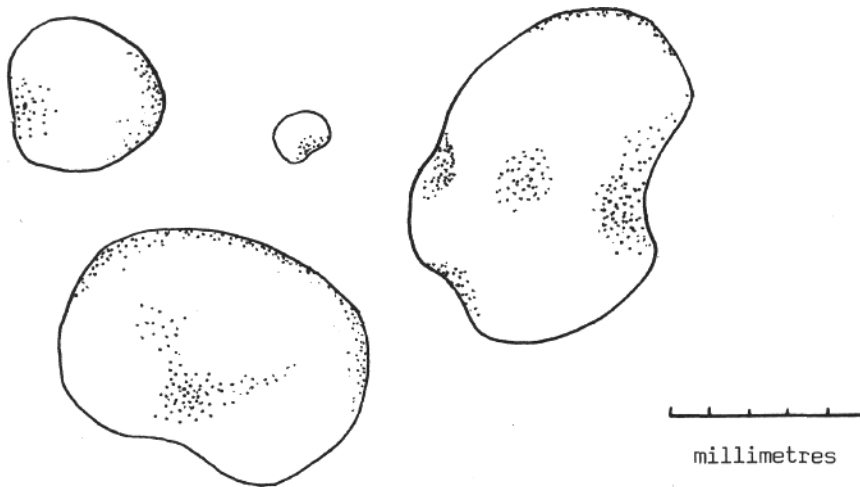


Mystery object number 2 - animal, mineral or vegetable?

Can anyone please suggest what these (see figure) mineralised objects are? I am sure anyone who has sorted sieving residues containing calcium phosphate-replaced plant remains will have seen them. They seem to occur exclusively in 'mineralised'¹ contexts, both in material of faecal origin from latrines and in non-faecal midden deposits.

The objects are quite variable in shape, but have a generally characteristic form and surface properties that make them instantly recognisable. They can be solid or hollow, and are usually pale brown to orange in colour, like the mineralised plant remains with which they occur. I have found them ranging in size from 1 to 10 mm in a single sample. They have been recorded from samples dated from the Late Bronze Age through to the medieval period.



Mystery mineralised objects

So far, the suggestion of tapeworm cysts has been discounted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Since we still know relatively little about the mechanisms of preservation by mineralisation, I thought it might be helpful to find out what these objects are, since they always seem to be present in deposits with mineralised preservation. Any suggestions will be welcomed - plentiful specimens can be supplied on request.

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