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## **A Medieval Grange of Abingdon Abbey at Dean Court Farm, Cumnor, Oxon.**

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### SUMMARY

*Excavations carried out in 1975-6 and in 1984-7 in advance of housing development investigated fourteen buildings belonging to a medieval settlement interpreted as a grange of Abingdon Abbey. The settlement originated in the late 12th century, and substantial stone buildings were put up close to a natural spring line in the first half of the 13th century, with flimsier peasant structures in the valley bottom adjacent. At the end of the 13th century the grange centre was moved to a new site in the valley bottom, and this later grange was surrounded with a moat.*

*The 14th century saw the maximum expansion of the settlement, with stone buildings replacing the earlier peasant structures and encroachment by new tofts onto the open fields. Considerable investment went into the later grange, which included fishponds, a fish-kitchen and a dovecote, the moated site being surrounded by a stone boundary wall. Documentary evidence suggests that the grange also contained a church, but this was not located.*

*After the mid-14th century parts of the settlement were abandoned, but new buildings were erected on the main peasant holding in the 15th century. This was abandoned in the 16th century, when the moat was also allowed to silt up. The kitchen and hall of the later grange were demolished early in the 17th century, when the existing farmhouse was built on the site of the hall incorporating the still standing medieval solar as its south wing.*

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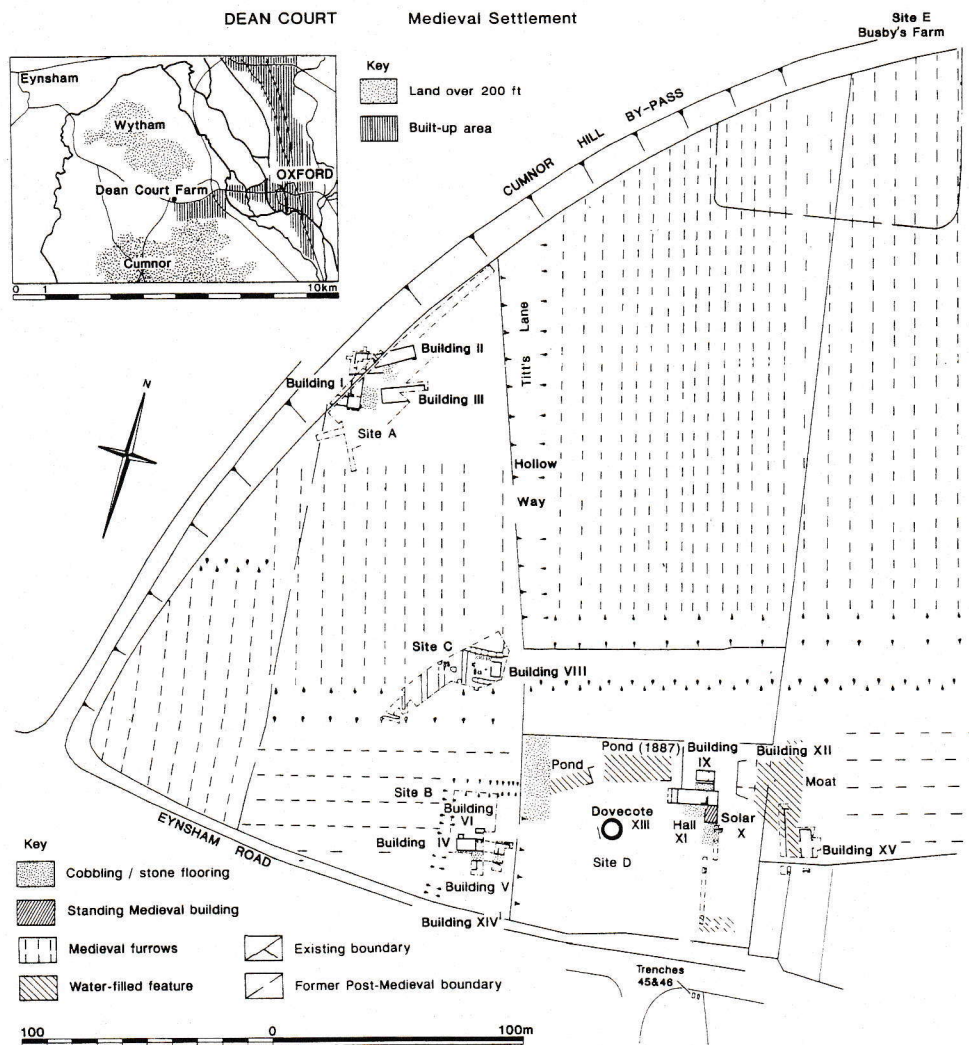


Fig. 1. Overall site plan and location plan. For details of the excavated areas in Site D see Fig. 37.

Shortly after this the University Estates Department decided to sell the farm and surrounding land for redevelopment as a housing estate, and as a result of Dr Blair's interest the O.A.U. was invited to carry out an archaeological investigation. A further investigation of Site A had already been begun by the O.U.A.S at the prompting of the author, and this was enlarged, revealing two substantial stone buildings of the 13th century (Buildings I and II).<sup>5</sup> In the SE. corner of the same field a ditched enclosure containing house platforms was

<sup>5</sup> T.G. Allen, 'Cumnor: Dean Court Farm', *South Midlands Archaeology*, xv (1985), 94-7; T.G. Allen, 'Oxfordshire, Cumnor', *Medieval Village Research Group annual report*, xxxii (1984), 16-19.



### *Catalogue*

1. Window spandrel from unglazed cinquefoil-headed window having a two-centred arch, with plain triangular spandrel on one side and flat recess on the other (also with outer frame).
2. Window spandrels with central mullion, of similar dimensions and character to last.
3. Window spandrel as No. 1, but with no outer frame.
- 4, 5 and 6. Window lintel, square-headed with external double chamfer and hollow-chamfered mullion, and glazing groove.
7. Door or window casement moulding with hollow-chamfer.
8. Chamfered fragment with fleck of red paint.
9. Plinth or cornice hollow moulding (a horizontal, not vertical member).
10. Intersecting arch mouldings with undercut hollows and frontal fillet (from a large arch since the curvature is very slight).
11. Column cluster of roll mouldings, symmetrical arrangement of two larger and four smaller rolls. Possibly from free-standing pier in centre of window.
12. Shaft with roll mouldings, partially undercut, and mason's mark (a cross); probably from wall-shaft if not part of a pier or a vault rib.
13. Bell-shaped capital with mouldings to one side, possibly from centre of window or side of door.
14. Pair of bell-shaped capitals on each side of a rectangular block, with roll-moulded shaft between them on the corner.
15. Sunken panel with chamfered surround.

## 4 ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

### INTRODUCTION

During the excavation as wide a range of environmental evidence as possible was recovered, but no systematic policy for retrieval could be adopted, particularly on Site D. The limited scope of the report upon the fish bones, for instance, is a reflection of the lack of access for fuller excavation of the deposits on the hall floor. Even on the other sites the piecemeal excavation as opportunities arose did not allow an overall design for sampling.

Limited funding was available for analysis of the animal bones. The principal aims of this were to establish the range and proportions of species present on each site, to make comparisons between the sites and to compare the assemblage overall with urban and rural sites nearby. Sample sizes were small, and as a result of this, combined with the limited excavation of some sites (Sites D and B in particular), distributional analyses were not undertaken.

Samples for charred plant remains were taken from all likely-looking deposits. The aims were generally similar to those for the animal bones, but also addressed questions relating to specific structures such as ovens and two possible malting kilns.

A variety of waterlogged deposits were sampled, but few were well-preserved enough to be informative. Useful information on the moat and ponds was obtained from mollusc samples, and the unusual occurrence of tufa in ditches on Site A was also investigated.

### ANIMAL BONES, by GILLIAN JONES

#### *Introduction*

Groups of bones were studied from all four sites. They are summarised on Table 2. The late 12th- to 13th-century groups were from the early grange (Site A) and from early layers at Site B (plus a very few bones from the earliest layers at Site D). The 14th- to 16th-century groups were from the farmstead at Site B, the cottage and related features of Site C; and from the kitchen, other

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF ANIMAL BONES FROM DIFFERENT SITES BELONGING TO DIFFERENT PERIODS

Date: Site:	late 12th to 13th century		14th to 16th century								B+C+D		post-1620	
	A BN	%	B BN	B BN	%	C BN	%	D BN	%		BN	%	D BN	%
Cattle	187	33%	4	99	24%	57	36%	74	59%		230	33%	177	47%
Sheep (goat)	278	49%	1	209	51%	72	44%	15	12%		296	43%	128	34%
Pig	43	8%		74	18%	18	11%	17	14%		109	16%	52	14%
Horse	38	7%		7	2%	5	3%	3	2%		15	2%	7	2%
Other mammals		1%			1%		3%		4%			2%		1%
Fallow deer						2					2			
Dog	1			1		1		1			3		1	
Cat	2			1		1					2			
Mole	1s		8+10s											
Pygmy shrew			1s											
Rabbit													1	
Hare				2		1		2			5			
Hare\Rabbit													1	
Cf. Field vole			1s											
Water vole				1							1			
House mouse	2+18s		4s											
Black rat	1													
Bird		4%			3%		4%		10%			4%		3%
Fowl	15			5		1		4			10		6	
Goose	6			7		4		7			18		2	
Duck													3	
Rock/Stock dove	1					2		2			4		1	
Frog/Toad	29+105s													
Total identified	574		13	406		164		125			695		379	
Total bone	1092		15	721		305		285			1311		593	

BN – number of identified bones; s – sieved; sieved bone and frog/toad bones (169 bones) not included in totals. Total identified bone 1661, total bone recovered 3011.

buildings and the moat comprising the later grange at Site D. These groups are mostly of 14th- and early 15th-century date with little 16th-century material. The post-1620 groups were from destruction layers of the later grange and originate from the adjacent 17th- and 18th-century farmhouse.

The bones from each site and from each phase within the sites generally consisted of small numbers of bones from numerous contexts, few contexts containing large assemblages. The small sample sizes need to be borne in mind when drawing conclusions from the bones; some aspects of analysis, e.g. study of sexual dimorphism, could not be attempted because the numbers of diagnostic bones and measurements were too few. Nevertheless the assemblage overall was large enough for some useful comments to be made.

### Method

The bones were first physically sorted into their appropriate archaeological context and phase. Identifications were made using reference collections belonging to the author and Oxford University Museum (small mammal and bird). Bones were recorded onto two lists, separating the more complete bones from the fragments and both are presented in Tables 3–7. On the 'zone' list were recorded: substantial pieces of skull; jaw bones with at least one tooth; plus the following bones or parts of bones when more than half complete: the proximal end, shaft or distal end of long bones, tooth, vertebra, distal scapula, acetabulum of the pelvis, calcaneum, astragalus and phalanx. Mandibles were recorded using the method of Grant for cattle and pigs, and of Payne for sheep. Measurements

were taken following von den Driesch and, for pig teeth, Payne and Bull.<sup>87</sup> The bones and archive are stored by the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; a copy of the archive, including tables of the measurements, is held by the Unit and the author.

This report was written in 1988 and amended in 1993.

### Site A

All the material from the early grange, Site A, was of late 12th- to 13th-century date. The site was extensively excavated, including ditches adjacent to buildings, and the bone assemblage is therefore thought to be representative of the site as a whole. About half the bones were from sheep (or goat) and about a third were from cattle (Table 3). The highest value for sheep was in the late 13th century (Phase 4), where they formed 60% of the sample. Pig bones were rather few. The sample sizes are small, but suggest a small increase in the amount of pork or bacon eaten during the 13th century. Horse bones were nearly as numerous as pig, which is unusual, and was not the case at Sites B, C or D.

There was no evidence for any of the beef eaten being from young animals. Three mandibles were from adult or elderly animals, and all epiphyses were fused except for one proximal tibia (which fuses between 3½ and 4 years in modern cattle) (Table 8). With sheep, most were, again, adult or old (stages F to I), with a few immature and one lamb (a very immature metacarpal) (Table 9). Beef, when eaten, would have been from adult animals (presumably culled plough beasts and breeding cows), and mutton from ewes and wethers kept into adulthood but with some (probably males) being slaughtered at two to three years old. There was no definite evidence for goat. Gnawing on bones (probably from dogs) was common.

Complete horse bones give height estimates of 12½ to 13 hands (see below). As usual with horse bones, they were less fragmented than the bone of the other main species. All bones and teeth indicate adults, other than a single unworn cheek tooth. One lower cheek tooth was worn to below the crown. No butchery marks were observed.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF ANIMAL BONES FROM THE EARLY GRANGE, SITE A (LATE 12TH TO 13TH CENTURY)

Phase	Cattle z	BN	Sheep (goat) z	BN	Pig z	BN	Horse BN	Other mammal	Fowl	Goose	Rock/Stock dove	frog/toad	Ident	Total
1 pre-building	17	33	16	22	4	4	9	house mouse 1	1				69	122
		48%		32%		6%	13%							
2	12	20	12	25	—	1	5	mole 1s	1	1		3+1s	53	82
		38%		47%		2%	9%							
3	36	71	57	94	10	12	17	dog 1, house mouse 2+17s, rat 1s	7	3		26+104s	208	408
		35%		46%		6%	8%							
4	24	36	53	84	7	14	3		3		1		141	252
		26%		60%		10%	2%							
5	13	27	33	53	7	12	4	cat 2	3	2			103	228
		26%		51%		4%	4%							
Total	102	187	171	278	28	43	38	(see above)	15	6	1	29+105s	518	1092
		33%		49%		8%	7%	1.2%	bird 4.2%					

z - more complete bones; BN - number of bones; s - sieved; sieved and frog/toad excluded from totals.

<sup>87</sup> A. Grant, 'The Use of Tooth Wear as a Guide to the Age of Domestic Ungulates', in R. Wilson, C. Grigson, and S. Payne (eds.), *Ageing and Sexing Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites* (BAR British Series cix, Oxford) (1982), 91-108; S. Payne, 'Kill off patterns in sheep and goats: the mandibles from Asvan Kale', *Anatolian Studies* xxiii (1973), 281-303; A. von den Driesch, *A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites* (Peabody Museum Bulletin i, Harvard, 1976); S. Payne and G. Bull, 'Components of variation in measurements of pig bones and teeth, and the use of measurements to distinguish wild from domestic pig remains', *Archaeozoologia* ii (1988), 27-66.



TABLE 4. ANIMAL BONES FOUND AT SITE B (LATE 12TH TO POST-MEDIEVAL)

Phase	Cattle		Sheep (goat)		Pig		Horse	Other mammal	Fowl	Goose	Ident.	Total
	z	BN	z	BN	z	BN						
1 early occupation late 12-13th century	1	4	1	1				mole 8+10s, pygmy shrew 1s, vole 1s, house mouse 4s			13	15
2 Building VI	2	4	7	11	2	5	1				22	30
Build up	2	6	10	12	2	2					21	34
Total 14th century	4	10	17	23	4	7	1	dog 1			43	64
3 Building IV	1	1	2	3							5	5
Building V	1	2	0	1							4	11
misc.	16	21	18	19	10	13	2				56	119
4 Building IV	5	5	14	16	3	4	1				26	35
Building V	1	2	18	23	6	7	1	water vole 1			36	66
Building VI	2	4	5	5	3	5					14	18
misc.	16	23	20	29	7	10					62	120
5 Building IV	9	10	32	46	6	10		cat 1			72	120
Building V											0	2
misc.	12	21	26	44	13	18	2	hare 2			88	161
3,4,5 Total	62	89	135	186	48	67	6	cat 1, hare 2			363	657
15th-16th century		25%		51%		18%	2%	water vole 1				
6 post-1620	p		p		p		p	1%		bird 3%		
								fallow deer 1				
								(human 1)				

z - more complete bones; BN - number of bones; s - sieved; sieved excluded from totals; p - present

TABLE 5. ANIMAL BONES FOUND IN SITE C (14TH CENTURY)

Phase	Cattle		Sheep (goat)		Pig		Horse	Other mammal	Fowl	Goose	Rock/ Stock dove	Ident	Total
	z	BN	z	BN	z	BN							
1 pre-building	2	2		3			1					6	15
2 ditch 1	9	15	6	9	2	2	2					28	43
ditch 2	4	5	1	1								6	15
misc.	2	8	6	10	1	3	1					24	50
3 Building VII												1	3
misc.	18	29	37	52	9	13	2	fallow 2, dog 1, cat 1, hare 1	1	1	2	105	194
2 + 3 Total	33	57	49	72	12	18	5	(see above)	1	4	2	164	305
		35%		44%		11%	3%			bird 5%			

z - more complete bones; BN - number of bones.

House mouse was present in the pre-building phase (context 1736/4), and both house mouse (*Mus musculus*) and rat (*Rattus rattus*) were found in Phase 3 (c. 1250). Building II is interpreted as a barn, and the finds of house mouse and rat would fit well with use as a granary. Fowl was present in all Phases, goose in most, rock/stock dove (*Columba livia/oenas*) in Phase 4 and eggshell in Phases 1, 2 and 3. Frog/toad bones were numerous from sieved drain fill 211/2, Phase 3.

### Site B

The range of buildings and associated layers at Site B produced a few bones of 13th-century date, including mole (*Talpa europaea*), pygmy shrew (*Sorex minutus*), vole (*Microtus* cf. *agrestis* - bank vole), and house mouse from sieved samples. The mole may be intrusive.

Bones of 14th- to 16th-century date were mostly from sheep, cattle and pig (see Tables 2 and 4). They were found as scattered fragments within the buildings and associated yard. The surrounding enclosure ditch, which was probably contemporary, was not excavated.

By Phases 3 to 5 (15th to 16th century) Building VI had gone out of use, and few bones were associated with it. In Buildings IV and V sheep bones greatly outnumbered cattle – perhaps partly as a result of the smaller size of sheep bones, and hence their greater chance of inclusion in floor deposits. The miscellaneous contexts (yards, etc) showed less difference but did also produce more sheep than cattle bones. Pig bones were common, forming nearly a fifth of the 15th- to 16th-century samples. In general, all parts of the carcase were found, with the exception of horncores, which may have been removed elsewhere (Fig. 97). Remains from the skulls of cattle were relatively few, although pieces of lower jaw and loose teeth were present. Bones from the skull were commonest for sheep, and these included one from a hornless type (Phase 5, and complete enough to be identified as sheep, not goat). One bone (a femur) was tentatively identified as goat. Bones were in general scattered and unrelated, although a probable partial sheep skeleton was recovered from Building IV, Phase 5 (context 911/2, right scapula, humerus, radius, femur and tibia). The sheep sample included four very immature bones, but most were adult (Table 9); two were elderly (with the anterior infundibulum of M<sub>3</sub> eroded). Ageable cattle bones were few. Most of the fowl and goose bones were found within the buildings.

The post-abandonment Phase 6 bone included a fallow deer astragalus and a carious human tooth.

### Site C

Site C was a cottage with a yard and flanking ditches, all of 14th-century date. It was very fully excavated and there were large quantities of pottery in the ditches, much of it of high quality. The animal bone was notable mainly for its small quantity (see Table 5). It occurred as scattered fragments, for example from thin yard layers where the bone may have been broken up, but also from the ditches where, also, there were few bones. There seems to be evidence, then, that meat was not eaten often, or bones were disposed of separately from the pottery, perhaps on the fields. 'White meat' – milk, eggs and cheese – was more important in the peasant diet than meat proper.<sup>88</sup>

As at Site B, horncores were absent. For sheep and pig, vertebrae and scapulae were absent, and unidentified large and medium vertebral and rib fragments were much fewer than long-bone fragments, perhaps indicating lower consumption of better quality cuts.

Other species included dog, cat, hare and also fallow deer (two proximal right metacarpals) – possibly poached from Wytham, or perhaps evidence that the people at Dean Court were involved in the handling of the hunted carcase. Goose was found in more contexts than fowl. Eggshell from Phase 2 (context 764/2) was probably of fowl. One of the two rock/stock dove bones was a broken femur, filled with medullary bone and indicating a breeding bird.<sup>89</sup>

### Site D

The bone assemblage from the later grange, Site D, is summarised on Tables 2, 6 and 7. A very few bones were from pre-1300 layers (shown on Table 6 but not Table 2). The 14th- to 16th-century groups cover the period from the construction of the later grange until its decline in the 16th century. Numbers of bones found were few but some general comments can be made. The larger quantity of bone was from destruction layers, after the demolition of the Hall and Kitchen and the building of a farmhouse in c. 1620.

The Kitchen was the most fully excavated part of Site D. The bones from all phases (see Table 7) were predominantly from cattle, occurring, as at the other sites, mainly as scattered fragments. In the 14th- to 16th-century groups, pig bones were as frequent, or more so, than sheep. A preference for beef and pork/bacon indicates a higher status diet than that found on Sites C and B where sheep were the commonest bones found (see Discussion). Presence of hare, fowl, goose and dove are typical of occupation deposits.

The west part of the Hall (Building XI Trenches 7–12), the Solar (Building X) and Building XII, small parts of

<sup>88</sup> C. Dyer, 'English Diet in the Later Middle Ages', in T.H. Aston, P.R. Coss, C. Dyer, and J. Thirsk, *Social Relations and Ideas; Essays in Honour of R.H. Hilton* (1983), 207.

<sup>89</sup> J.C. Driver, 'Medullary bone as an indicator of sex in bird remains', in Wilson, Grigson and Payne, *Ageing and Sexing Animal Bones* (BAR British Series cix, 1982), 251–254.

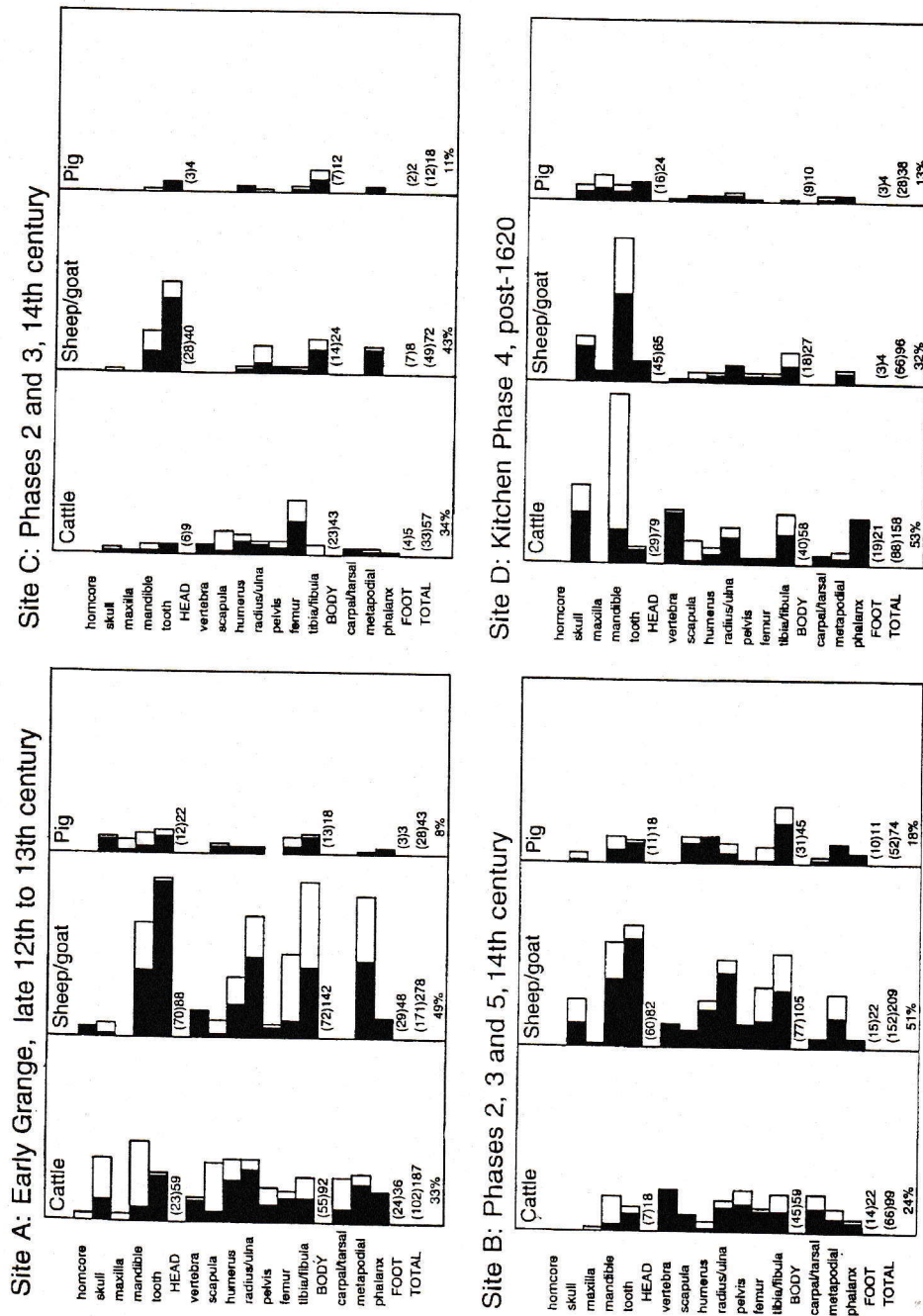


Fig. 97. Bone distribution for Sites A, B, C, and D. The solid bars represent more complete bones, the open bars additional identified bones.