

WEST SAQQARA ANIMAL BONE REPORT, 2003

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Not all the animal bones excavated in the 2003 season were studied. This preliminary report merely provides some information on the 52 bones that were examined in the course of two days. As usual, the method of collection was by hand, followed by a basic identification and analysis that includes: taxon, element, age, portion, work/butchery, gnawing, burning, and erosion pattern.

Most of the bones came from the entrance to Chapel 15 (18 bones), followed by 10 bones from sector 1906, and another six from 1907. Seven bones from pottery bag K03-27 constituted the remainder of the sample.

Of all the identifiable taxa, the animal that was represented most extensively was surprisingly the pig (*Sus scrofa* – 19), followed by cattle (*Bos taurus* – 7), with one dog (*Canis familiaris*) and one fish (*Lates niloticus*) making up the rest of the identifiable sample. The remaining bones belonged to large (1), medium-to-large (2) and medium-sized mammals, the latter being in the majority (21); these were presumably sheep or goats, as pig bones are relatively easy to distinguish.

Although the largest number of bones came from pigs, the minimum number of individuals is only 10, as many of the elements identified came from mandibles and maxillae. It is interesting to note that the majority of pig remains were from the head. The cattle bones represented a more

diverse spread of elements, including phalanges, mandible, horn cores, pelvis, and scapula. It is surprising, however, that no sizable limb-bones were recovered. The greatest variety, although it, too, was limited, came from the medium-sized mammals. These elements included pelvic fragments, vertebrae, long bones, ribs and scapulae.

The ages of the few identified animals tended toward the juvenile. Cattle seemed to be under three years of age, and pigs varied from eight months (perhaps even younger?) to a year. Clearly young flesh was prized.

The distribution of animals through the areas was fairly even, save for the dog, the large mammal (both from the entrance to Chapel 16) and the fish (entrance to Chapel 15). The only area in which, to date, pig bones have not appeared is the area from which the pottery bag K03-27 originated.

This exceedingly preliminary report has produced some interesting results with regard to the activities carried out at this site. Generally, offerings are thought of as being from cattle, with sheep and goat providing a secondary source of food offering. In this group of tombs, this does not necessarily seem to be true. Cattle certainly play a part in the offerings, but not necessarily a major one, as heads and feet provide little food although they are immediately recognizable, and the former

are often shown as part of the offerings. The ovicaprids might indeed have provided the 'meat' of the offerings as the remains from what seems to be that type of animal would provide some of the cuts that are associated with offerings. Pigs, the animals that although consumed in domestic contexts, but thought to be taboo in the funerary realm, are present nonetheless. Strangely, the remains seem to consist primarily of heads, as was the case with the cattle. Was it that the animals were killed and beheaded, the heads constituting the main offerings, while the

remainder was consumed elsewhere? This would certainly be in keeping with the ancient Egyptians' views that the head could be used to represent the whole creature, and, in a redistributive economy, the remainder of the flesh would pass to the funerary priests, or be consumed by those bringing the offering. Pig remains have been found in closed funerary contexts both at West Saqqara¹⁾ and at South Abusir.²⁾ Perhaps it is time to reconsider the evidence and ideas concerning the role of the pig in Egyptian society, and to rehabilitate that much maligned animal.

1) Cf. S. Ikram, "Preliminary zooarchaeological Report, 2000", *PAM XIII, Reports 2000* (2001), 127-132, esp. 130.

1) *Id.*, in press.