

A report on the pollen content of a turd from Church Street, Oxford --- a canine coprolite ? (2 pages and 1 table).

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The turd, from Church Street Oxford, site A (site code 68 204c 116) was subjected to standard pollen analysis procedure except that the sample was divided before acetolysis so that an acetolysed and a non-acetolysed preparation resulted. Roughly 1 cc. of turd was used, and a large amount of finely comminuted bone was sieved out, so on this basis it was already considered probably of canine rather than of human origin.

The acetolysed sample alone had pollen, albeit in small quantities that necessitated scanning the slide on low power to find the grains, then switching to a high power objective to identify them. After covering about three quarters of a slide, a count of 98 pollen grains was reached which forms the basis of this report, listed in Table 1.

The main feature of interest in the list is in the section for plants of disturbed ground and crops. Cereal pollen is quite abundant, which is suggestive that part of the diet resulting in the turd was probably based on cereals, which are generally rich in Cerealia t. pollen (Greig 1982). Also interesting is the pollen of the cornflower which is a characteristic cornfield weed which appears in the medieval period for reasons which are not yet understood. No intestinal parasite ova were found.

Discussion

Several investigations have been made into the content and probable identity of turds such as those made by

Paap (1977) in the Netherlands

and by Kowalski and others (1976) in Poland. One of the conclusions of the Dutch work is that the only clues of origin of turds are the contents, and the bone in this example from Oxford therefore gives evidence that it came from a dog. The evidence of cereal as well is not at variance with this finding, since dogs do scavenge as well as accepting food from humans, and the plentiful rubbish which was a feature of medieval towns (Keene 1982) would probably have provided rich pickings from the tables of people, including remains of bread and porage.

It is also possible that some of the cereal and other pollen (which appears to be 'general background') could have been ingested with food, particularly if the bones were covered with rubbish, or had to be sought in vegetation covering floors.

It is surprising that pollen has survived at all in calcareous circumstances without waterlogging, and any parasite ova probably disappeared through partial decay.

References

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- Kowalski, K. Malinowski, T. & Wasilikowa, K. (1976) Coprolites from a castrum of Lusatian culture in Komorowo, Poznan district, Folia Quaternaria 48: 1-13.

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POLLEN SPECTRUM FROM TURD FROM OXFORD, CHURCH STREET

68 204c 116 acetolysed slide James Greig, December 1982.

TREES & SHRUBS	Nr. of grains	
<u>Quercus</u>	4	oak
cf. <u>Hedera</u>	1	? ivy
<u>Corylus</u>	4	hazel
GRASSLAND PLANTS		
cf. <u>Trifolium repens</u>	3	white clover
<u>Rumex</u> sp.	1	sorrel/dock
cf. <u>Rhinanthus</u> type.	1	e.g. yellow rattle
<u>Plantago lanceolata</u>	4	ribwort plantain
<u>Galium</u> t.	3	e.g. bedstraw
<u>Bidens</u> type	5	e.g. daisy
Gramineae	49	grasses
CULTIVATED PLANTS, WEEDS		
Cruciferae	1	crucifers
Caryophyllaceae	1	e.g. chickweed
Chenopodiaceae	1	e.g. fat hen
cf. <u>Artemisia</u>	1	? mugwort
<u>Anthemis</u> t.	3	e.g. mayweed
<u>Centaurea cyanus</u>	2	cornflower
Cerealia t. 40 um	26	cereals
WETLAND PLANTS		
<u>Filipendula</u>	4	meadowsweet
<u>Polygonum bistorta</u>	1	bistort
Cyperaceae	1	sedges
VARIOUS HABITATS		
Umbelliferae	<u>2</u>	umbellifers
total pollen sum:	98	
not identified:	2	
? modern pollen	5	(a different colour)