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## **Animal Biographies in the Iron Age of Wessex: Winnall Down, UK, Revisited**

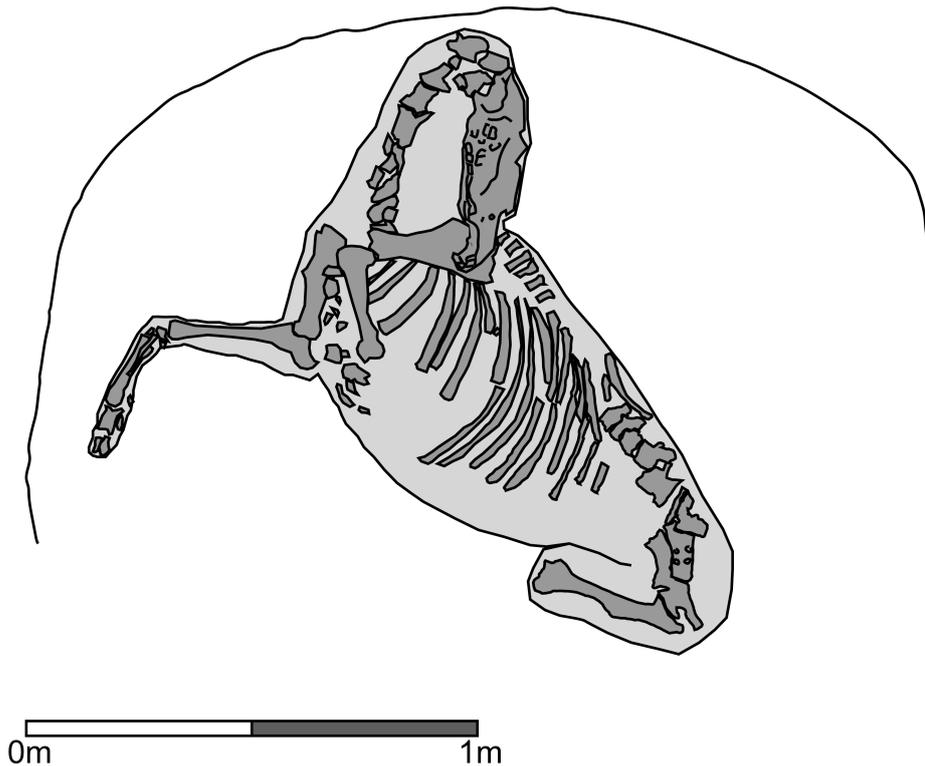
James Morris

*During the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC on a small settlement consisting of a handful of roundhouses set in an area of open-country close to arable land, a six-year-old male horse was killed. Following its death the horse was partially dismembered; its lower jaw was removed, its tail and parts of its skin were cut from it, as were its hind legs and left forelimb, all below the knee. The now bloodied horse carcass was dragged, pulled and handled until it lay centrally within a pit on the outskirts of the settlement. The horse carcass was placed on its right-hand side, the remains of its head resting on its chest, its one remaining complete leg extended out away from the body. Once in position, soil was thrown into the pit, until the horse carcass was no longer visible. There the horse lay, the remaining soft tissue being slowly consumed by bacteria from the horses' own gut and the soil which now enclosed it, until only the bones survived. What remains of the horse was next seen over two millennia later in 1977, when a team of archaeologists led by Peter Fasham excavated the site of Winnall Down, Winchester, ahead of the construction of the M3 motorway. The pit in which the articulated horse remains were discovered was labeled as pit 10161 and the horse bones, excavated from layer 10164, were duly bagged, cleaned, boxed and sent to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory at the University of Southampton. There they were subsequently examined and reported on by Mark Maltby, before finally being archived with Hampshire Museum service, where they remain to this day.*

### **Introduction**

The horse from pit 10161 (Fig. 1) is part of a trend of Iron Age animal burials, with complete and partial deposits present on many British and European sites. Animal burials are recovered from archaeological sites dating to all time periods; however, they appear to be particularly ubiquitous in the Iron Age (Morris 2010a). The above-suggested transformations that the horse from pit 10161 underwent are only possible because of the wealth of information available to archaeologists examining such phenomena. However, it also highlights the difficulty in interpreting and understanding actions often seen as 'strange' to our modern day mindsets. Indeed the above description represents a parsimonious explanation of the activities leading to the creation of deposits. Other equally valid explanations are possible including exposure before the missing elements are removed and redeposition. The equifinality of animal burials is evident in the multitude of offered interpretations, ranging from natural deaths (Bourdillon 1990), to population control (Maltby 1988), to the result of rituals linked to the agricultural cycle (Cunliffe 1992). Yet previous approaches to animal burials often, intentionally or unintentionally, resulted in a single common explanation for the majority of deposits for a site or period. For example Buckland-Wright (1987) suggested the sheep burials from Poundbury died from disease. This is possibly related to how zooarchaeologists consider 'normal' assemblages, often looking for long-term trends and patterns rather

than considering individual animals and events. A biographical approach has proven useful when examining individual archaeological artefacts and deposits (see below), but is not commonly used, often because of the need for zooarchaeologists to examine multi-period large-scale assemblages. This chapter explores how a biographical approach can be used to inform on multiple animal burials from a site, using the early and middle Iron Age case study of Winnall Down settlement (Fasham 1985). The biographies of the individual animal burials have been constructed using the available published data (Fasham 1985; Maltby 1985, nd).



*Figure 1 Plan of the partial horse burial from pit 10161, Winnall Down. The possible outline of the remaining body has been added in grey. Altered from Hill 1995, figure 7.1*

To continue the narrative of the horse from pit 10161, we can consider how it has been subsequently interpreted. Maltby (1985) goes into detail, describing the different partial and complete animal skeletons recovered from the Winnall Down excavations, placing the skeletons into three different categories; complete or substantial parts of the carcasses with little evidence of skinning or butchery, bones of neonatal or foetal skeletons, and dumping of parts of the carcass after skinning and dismemberment. However, individual interpretations for remains, such as the horse from 10161, are not discussed. Maltby (1985, 105) points out that the pits with partial and complete skeletons tend to be found on the outskirts of the settlement and it is possible they represent noxious waste. Such interpretations, generally viewing animal skeletons as a product of practical decisions, associated with animal husbandry or settlement organisation were commonly held at the time Winnall Down was published (Morris 2011, 7–9). It should be noted that Maltby would not interpret

the animal burials in the same way now, the original faunal report (Maltby nd) was written in 1981 and the publication in 1985 went to press in 1984, before information on the Danebury 'special deposits' (see below) was available (M, Maltby *pers comm*).

In the 1980's one of the few zooarchaeological researchers suggesting an alternative interpretation was Annie Grant with her work at Danebury Iron Age hillfort (Grant 1984, 1989). Grant suggested articulated animal remains from Danebury represented 'special animal deposits', proposing that the majority, with some notable exceptions (see below) represented ritual/religious sacrifices. It appears that the zooarchaeological community remained skeptical, a viewpoint best summarised by Wilson (1992). However, ideas that these deposits represent ritual activity were taken forward, with Cunliffe (1992) suggesting an Iron Age 'pit belief system', whereby human and animal remains along with other material were deposited in pits. One of the most influential works on Iron Age pits is JD Hill's (1995) consideration of not just the animal remains, but all material deposited within them. Hill (1995, 100) viewed the similarity between the deposition of human and animal remains as key, suggesting that archaeologists who accept the ritual treatment of human remains must extend such interpretations to animal remains, pottery and small finds treated in similar ways. Included in his analysis is the horse skeleton from Winnall Down pit 10161. Hill (1995, 73) suggests that a deliberate choice had been made to exclude large fragments of pottery and bone from the fill of the pit – linked to the presence of the horse skeleton and a hare skeleton in an upper fill.

Hill's work marks a turning point on how complete and partial animal skeletons are interpreted, and by the turn of the millennium most Iron Age deposits were now seen as the result of ritual activity (Morris 2010b, 2011). Such influence also extended beyond the Iron Age with similar Romano-British (Fulford 2001; Maltby 2012) and Anglo-Saxon (Hamerow 2006; Morris and Jervis 2011) remains also viewed as the results of ritualised activity. Although the subtlety of Hill's arguments is often skimmed over, he does suggest that the deposits are of a ritualised nature. However, he mainly argues that the animal remains have been structured by human action – a human action in which a ritual/functional divide was not present. Rather the ritualised events were part of people's everyday lives, a way of expressing cosmological, social and practical concerns into a specific action.

Despite the considered nature of Hill's arguments there remained a ritual/functional dichotomy in animal burial studies. This is emphasised in the terminology used for such deposits, for example Grant's 'special animal deposits', placing the emphasis on special or 'chosen' for a ritual. Hill suggested using the term Associated Bone Group (ABG), a rather unwieldy term which has also been used in my own previous studies (Morris 2008, 2011), and is now part of Historic England guidance (Baker and Worley 2014). Throughout this chapter the terms ABG and animal burial are used. Regardless of the terminology, however, the important aspect is the separation of a description of a deposit from its interpretation.

### **Breaking free - animal biographies**

The next stage in the biography of the horse from pit 10161 is my own re-examination of ABGs from the Neolithic to late medieval periods (Morris 2008,

2011). In these circumstances the horse represents one of 746 Iron Age ABGs recorded from 50 archaeological sites from southern England (Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire). To break the data down further, 57 horse ABGs were recorded from middle Iron Age sites, more than cattle (42) and pig (40), but swamped by the number of sheep/goat deposits (150) (for further information see Morris 2011, 41). The horse from pit 10161, therefore, became part of a large dataset concerned with patterns in species composition and deposition over a five and half thousand year time span. The disadvantage of such an approach is that individual deposits become lost in what is effectively a cloud of data. The advantage is that such an approach allows the multitude of deposit types to become apparent, highlighting their inconsistent interpretation at a single site level, let alone a single time period. For example, in Grant's (1984) approach to 'special animal deposits' three types were classified: fully or partially complete animal burials, skulls and horse mandibles, and articulated limbs. The interpretation of the complete and partial animal burials depended upon the age of the animal. When it was possible to calculate a mandible wear stage (MWS, Grant 1982), animals with a MWS of five or less were considered to be natural deaths while those with a MWS of six and over were considered to be 'special animal deposits'. The need to include 'natural deaths' possibly reflected the general undercurrent of economic/environmental determinist explanations zooarchaeologists were using at the time. This also highlights the arbitrary nature behind some interpretations, often driven by a desire to create a limited number of all encompassing explanations, rather than considering the context and actions behind each deposit.

I argue that the variability in the character of the deposits (see below), combined with the perceived nature of certain time periods – if it is prehistoric and 'weird' it must be ritual – results in *meta-level* descriptions and explanations (Morris 2012). In other words, it results in large-scale categories, such as ritual, being used as description and interpretation, the equivalent of a zooarchaeologist suggesting that mammals were present on the site and given no further information. Despite arguments from authors such as Brück (1999) that we should jettison the term 'ritual', a heavily loaded term to archaeologists, we know that ritual activities do occur in everyday life. These can be for instance secular, religious, class-related, sex-related and personal (Bell 1997; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Kreinath *et al.* 2006). A classic example are the multitude of different feasting events which occur throughout a calendar year in the United Kingdom – birthdays, weddings, funerals, Easter, Christmas, academic conferences and so on. All of these events are ritual activities but as participants we understand their structure, the differences in each, the often unspoken social rules and the meaning behind them – hence, rather than 'ritual feasts', we refer to them by name. It is useful at this point to define what I mean by ritual as one of the common problems with archaeologists using the term is a lack of clear definition. It has been proposed, for example by Bell (2007), that rituals are exclusively religious, however as suggested above, I see rituals present in both religious and secular activities. Indeed it has long been argued that to separate the sacred and profane in prehistory is to imply a false Cartesian dualism. The characteristic that most rituals share is that the actions behind them are formulaic (Snoek 2006); there is in effect a script. I would also argue another feature of ritual is that there is a specific intended consequence of the formulaic

action which most of the participants would understand. Therefore, not all participants in a ritual would know the full script of the event, but they would understand the need for the ritual. The problem we have with the archaeological record is moving beyond the simple meta-level category of 'ritual' or indeed 'functional' towards the specific. For ritual, how do we identify the different scripts or their intended consequences?

I have suggested that a biographical approach towards partial and complete animal burials can help (Morris 2011, 2012). The key consideration in this is human action; in respect of human remains archaeologists have repeatedly emphasised that 'the dead do not bury themselves', and the same is true for animals. When considering animal burials we, therefore, firstly have to consider the human actions that created them, and indeed the wider contexts which created the need for the human actions. This changes the emphasis for these deposits. It is the final act of deposition, the placement within the pit and any associations that archaeologists often try to interpret, at the expense of the above ground transformations animals undergo before deposition.

The most common 'ritual' interpretation of animal burials is that they represent sacrifices (Morris 2011). Yet as archaeologists we are very bad at explaining what we mean by a sacrifice. Ethnographically animal sacrifice appears to be widespread. Animal sacrifices, for instance, are still an important part of modern day Hinduism (Smith 2015); the festival of Dussehra involves the ritual killing of thousands of animals to the goddess Durga, mother of the universe, in celebration of her victory over evil, for example (DeMello 2012, 317). Animal sacrifice was also an important part of ancient Greek and Roman religious practices (see also Veropoulidou and Nikolaidou this volume). Ogilvie (1986, 41) suggests that traditional Greco-Roman sacrifices consisted of four phases of activity; preparation, immolation, the slaughter and the final sacred meal, with specific rituals linked to each phase. In principle all consumed meat in ancient Greece came from sacrificed animals, with the same vocabulary encompassing both sacrifice and butchery (Gilhus 2006). A modern day analogy would be the use of *dhabihah*, the prescribed method of ritually slaughtering animals in Islamic law (Wheeler 2016). Pointedly these forms of sacrifice would leave no animal burial behind, as the animal is further processed, sold at market and consumed. Although there are numerous archaeological and anthropological definitions of sacrifice (Russell 2012, 89), the killing of the animal is often an important part of a wider ritual. For example, in discussing chicken sacrifice in Africa, Davidson (2015) highlights at least 18 different reasons a person could have for the sacrifice. In many rituals, sacrificed animals are viewed as intermediaries to the gods, able to pass on messages. In the television program 'Around the World in 80 Faiths', broadcast in the United Kingdom on the BBC in 2009, the Anglican vicar Pete Owen-Jones visited the vodun church of Thron in Cotonou, Benin, Africa (Sheahan 2009). The service in the church was a mixture of vodun and Christian practices but primarily involved animal sacrifice to a deity. Domestic animals including cattle, goats, chickens, dogs and cats were all sacrificed and the moment before the animals were killed a message for the deity was whispered into its ear. After the ceremony the congregation consumes the cow, goat and chicken in a feast, but the dog and cat are discarded in a nearby gutter. The deposition of the animals is not the important part of the ceremony; it is the transition of the animal into a messenger that is of primary importance.

Archaeologically the different treatment of the animals post-sacrifice would be identifiable, but the detail of the animals being messengers would certainly be lost. To understand the creation of animal burials/ABGs it is, therefore, important to consider the above ground events behind their creation. It may be the above ground event that was ritualised, not the deposition of the animal's remains.

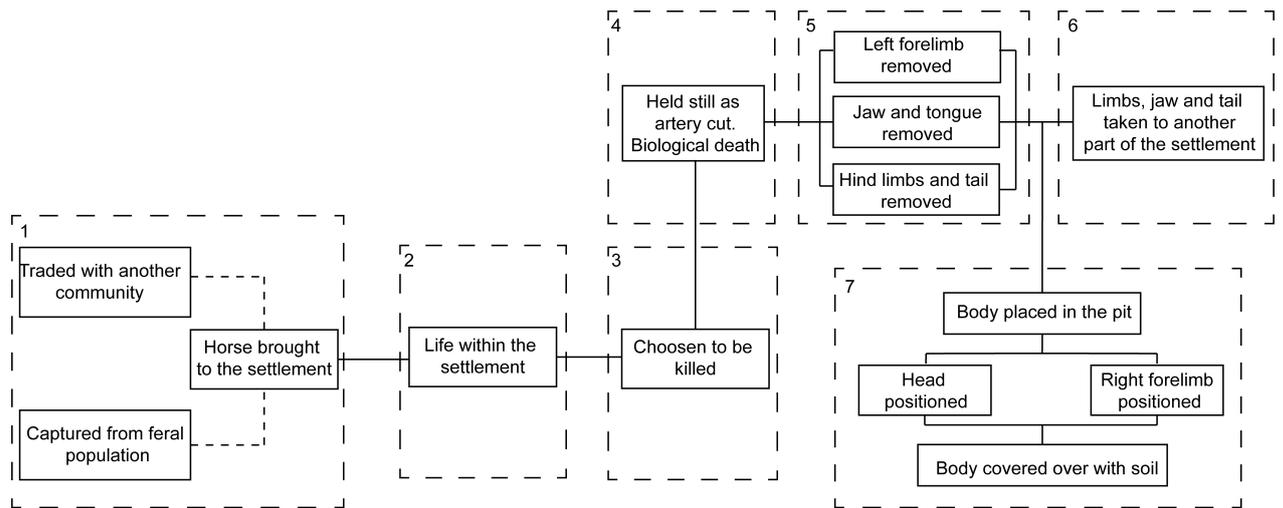
By considering the biographies of these deposits we can try to ascertain what these above ground events were. Normally, archaeologists look at material culture in what Gell (1998, 11) would describe as *supra-biographical* manner, looking beyond the 'life cycle' at longer chronological trends. To explore the life histories of animal burials, however, we need to consider the individual deposits. The majority of archaeological studies employing a biographical approach has been concerned with pottery, metalwork and personal objects (for example Blanco-González 2014; Joy 2009; Kopytoff 1986; Swift 2012). In general, the biographical approach allows artefacts to become 'networks of significance' (Thomas 1996, 159), with artefacts given 'secondary agency'; they do not have the power to initiate happenings, but are objective embodiments of the power society or individuals have given them (Gell 1998, 20–21). The study of the biography of an object, animal or archaeological feature is also the study of moments of transition, be they physical, social or often both. In the aforementioned vodun ceremony the killing of the dog and cat transforms their spirits into messengers, but their physical bodies then become waste. The process of transformation can also result in the production of new objects with completely different social meanings. For example the removal of wool from a sheep and its transformation into cloth and clothing, or the working of a cattle horn into a drinking vessel, both examples starting with the transformation of the living animal.

I have argued that zooarchaeology is well placed to adopt a biographical approach to faunal material (Morris 2011, 2012), in part because such a method draws upon an understanding of taphonomic formation processes and transformations. Taphonomic studies have expanded beyond merely considering the biasing effects on an assemblage, and can now be seen as pivotal in understanding faunal assemblages and archaeological formation processes (Madgwick and Broderick in press; Marín-Arroyo *et al.* 2011). A biographical approach uses taphonomic information to consider the full life history of a deposit. Previous taphonomic work, in particular on the natural disarticulation of animal carcasses (Behrensmeyer and Dechant Boaz 1980; Hill 1979) and butchery (Binford 1978, 386; Lyman 1987; Rixson 1988), can help in considering the above ground actions behind animal burials. The nature of most animal burials recovered from settlement sites suggest they are subjected to human butchery practices rather than natural disarticulation processes. It is, therefore, possible to consider partial animal burials against Rixson's (1988) five stages of butchery; skinning and evisceration, main dismemberment, processing into small portions, utilisation for marrow, and finally bone working. It may also be possible to identify an animal burial that has only undergone the skinning stage but none of the others. Common practices in dismembering animals were also suggested by Binford (1978), drawing on his study of the Nunamiut and other ethnographic works. First, disarticulation of the head from the neck and neck from the rest of the vertebral column, then separation of the front and back legs

from the axial skeleton and separation of the lower feet from the legs. Although Binford (1978) was drawing on studies of hunter-gather communities, the butchery tool of choice was the knife. This is also the main tool used throughout most of the later prehistory, with cleavers and saws not in common use until the Roman period in Britain (Maltby 2007). We can, therefore, consider whether an animal burial has undergone some, if not all, of the common butchery processes.

How then does a biographical approach to animal burials work in practice? The account of the horse burial 10161 at Winnall Down, although using deliberately evocative language to paint a picture, is based on a consideration of the deposit's biography (Fig. 2). The biography contains a number of assumptions, the first being that the animal was already a part of the community at Winnall Down. Horses, although occasionally eaten, do not appear to be a major contributor to the Iron Age diet (Maltby 1996). It has been suggested that horses in the Iron Age were not bred but rounded up from the wild (Harcourt 1979) or managed feral populations (Hamilton 2000). Alternatively, horses may have only been raised at certain sites and traded, with recent isotopic analysis showing that Iron Age horses from Rooksdown, Hampshire, came to the site from as far away as Wales, Scotland or the continent (Bendrey *et al.* 2009). We, therefore, cannot be certain how the horse reached Winnall Down and indeed it is an assumption that the horse lived around the settlement and was not brought to the site specifically to be killed. In using a biographical approach we are attempting to map out the life history of a specific animal, however, it is never possible to create a complete picture and instead we are examining the animal's life at specific points in its existence. Certain points will be poorly focused, such as its life within the settlement. We can theorise that as a male horse of six years old at time of death it may have been ridden, and may have sired young, but our biography has to rely on wider background knowledge of the time period, rather than specifics. This biography is being constructed from the available records alone and re-examination of the bones might reveal further information. For example Maltby (nd) does not mention the presence of bit wear on the horses' teeth, which if present would suggest it was ridden. Re-examination would confirm the presence or absence of bit wear, adding to the biography. Additionally if isotopic analysis were conducted this would help identify whether the horse was raised in the local environment.

When it comes to the animal's death further assumptions are required, for example that it was chosen to be killed, rather than died of natural causes, and in making such assumptions we can use the age of the animal. We also do not know how the animal was killed. I have suggested that an artery was cut, so the horse bled to death, a common way of killing animals, and there is no evidence of poleaxing on the skull. We then know for certain that parts of the horse were removed, as they were not present with the rest of the skeleton within the pit. There is also no sign of weathering or gnawing on the remains, which would be possibly present if the missing elements were removed during a period of exposure. At this point, with detailed zooarchaeological and contextual information we can form a more tightly focused picture of the likely activities.



*Figure 2 A simplified schematic biography of the partial horse burial from pit 10161, Winnall Down. The dashed numbered boxes represent theorized movements of physical and social transition.*

A biographical approach allows us to consider different points in the animal's life, death, and beyond, but with variable focus and chronological resolution. We know little of the horse's life on the settlement but we know some details of its manipulation after death. For other animal burials the situation may well be reversed. By considering the horse's biography we can also group events into moments of physical and social transition and I would suggest the horse went through at least seven major transformations or actions; the first of these is the horse being brought to or raised on the settlement and the last being its placement within the pit (Fig. 2). Some may be instantaneous and not involve a physical transformation, such as the choosing of the animal to be killed. At this point a conscious human choice occurred, possibly changing the way the horse was viewed and certainly its role within the society. Other transformations, such as the removal of the limbs and jaw, may result in both physical and social transformations. What we can be certain of is that such actions were guided by human thought and may represent an event of as much, or perhaps greater, significance than the deposition of the horse's remaining body in the pit. What is also important to bear in mind is that with the exception of the final transformation, all consisted of 'above ground' pre-depositional events.

The described biography may add further detail to the horse burial, in particular highlighting the above ground events behind the deposits, but does it help us interpret it? The original interpretation is not clear but the horse appears to be seen as an unwanted carcass (Maltby 1985). Hill (1995) suggests the horse is a structured deposit and as such can be viewed as a ritual action, along with the choice to place less pottery in the pit's fill and a hare skeleton in a further fill. The biographical approach highlights that the deposition of the horse was not a stand alone event but part of a series of actions. It is possible that each one of these actions represented a distinct ritualised activity, and indeed the proposed

partial dismemberment of the horse may have had particular significance (see below).

### Biographies in action –Winnall Down

So far only one animal burial has been discussed in detail, and a biographical approach would seem to lend itself to detailed narratives of individual deposits. However, the approach can be expanded to consider the animal burials from a site, or indeed region. Ideally for such an approach the biography of each animal burial would be considered, but the key is to look for difference and similarity – not just in species, composition, context and association, but more importantly in the type of transformations the animals had undergone. What this allows us to do is look for patterns in the multiple events leading to the creation of the deposit, rather than just its final resting place. As an example of this approach the ABGs from the early (6th to 3rd century BC) and middle (3rd to 1st century BC) Iron Age settlement of Winnall Down (Fasham 1985) will be considered.

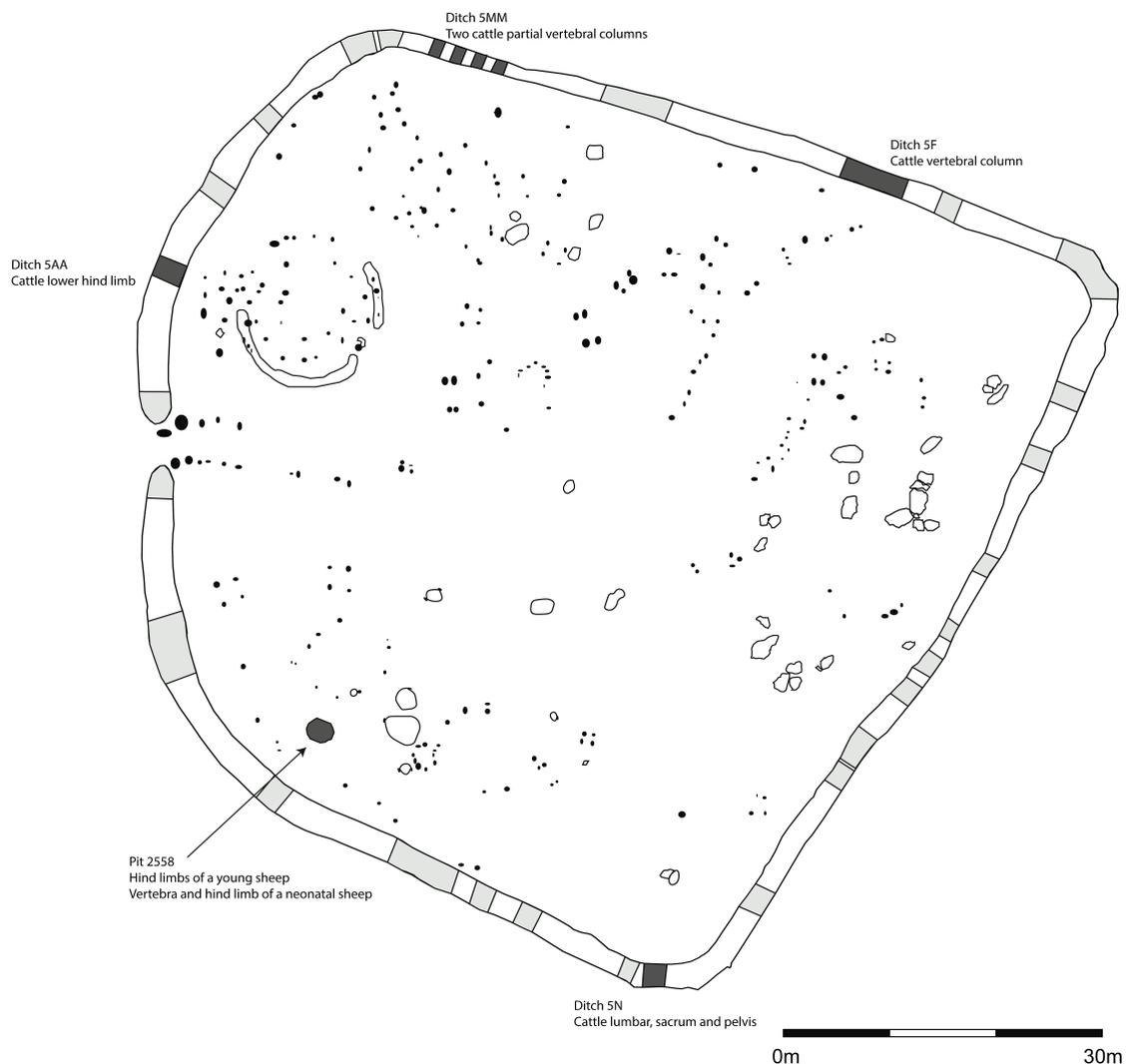


Figure 3 Plan of early Iron Age Winnall Down. The darkly shaded ditch sections and pit 2558 contain an ABG. The lightly shaded areas show the location of excavated ditch sections. Altered from Fasham 1985, fig 9

Maltby (1985) identified 55 ABG deposits from these phases, seven from the early Iron Age and 48 from the middle Iron Age. The majority of the early Iron Age ABGs were recovered from sections through the settlement's ditch (Fig. 3). One of the notable aspects is the concentration of cattle ABGs from the boundary ditch in comparison to the sheep ABGs, which were all recovered from pit 2558. Maltby (1985) suggested this corresponded with the general trend of large mammal remains being more common at the outskirts of the settlement in both the early and middle Iron Age, perhaps to keep the larger quantities of waste produced away from the settlement. The ditch would offer an ideal depository for large amounts of butchery waste generated by cattle, although the taphonomic conditions may have differentially affected sheep remains. A high proportion of loose sheep teeth were present in the ditch as teeth are the elements most likely to survive in poor taphonomic conditions. This may suggest that the lack of sheep bones is due to preservation factors, which have not substantially affected the larger cattle bones. In the ditch however, it is notable that the articulated cattle remains from sections 5AA, 5MM and 5F are all close to possibly contemporary buildings, and if the aim was to keep waste away from the settlement, as suggested by Maltby (1985), then the southern part of the ditch may have been better suited.

Considering the biographies of all the ABGs from the early Iron Age, the consistency of the cattle ABG assemblage is surprising. With the exception of the lower hind limbs from ditch section 5AA, all consist of articulated vertebral columns, interestingly without articulating ribs present. This suggests a large degree of conformity in the above ground actions immediately prior to their creation, all the cattle ABGs being processed, transformed into small groups of bones, probably with a limited amount of soft tissue present, no longer bearing any resemblance to the living animal.

In comparison the two sheep ABGs from pit 2558, consist of limb bones as well as vertebrae and come from a neonate, and an immature animal with butchery marks present. Although butchery marks are not present on the neonate it is possible modified elements did not survive the burial process. However, the presence of the lumbar vertebrae and pelvis bones, both of which are highly porous, and thus do not normally preserve well, suggests the elements are missing due to human action. The different species, age and location of these remains suggest different actions and possibly different associated meanings behind the creation of these ABGs compared to the cattle. Given that this is just one deposit, it also suggests a much less common action compared to the processes behind the cattle ABGs, although the possible vulnerability of sheep taphonomic destruction could be a factor.

The middle Iron Age ABG data are much more variable in terms of species, assemblage composition and transformations. Six different species are deposited, with dog ABGs making up 35% (17) of the assemblage, followed by sheep/goat 29% (14) and horse 16% (8). One of the most dramatic changes between the early and middle Iron Age is the drop in the proportion of cattle ABGs, making up only 12% (6) of the assemblage. This does fit a trend in southern England, with cattle making up an even smaller percentage of the Balksbury Camp and Danebury middle Iron Age assemblages, corresponding with a general increase in sheep/goat ABGs. Where Winnall Down does differ from contemporary sites is

the high proportion of dog ABGs, although there is great variety on middle Iron Age sites with dogs making up 2% of the Suddern Farm assemblage compared to 28% from Old Down Farm (Morris 2011, 43–45).

Another difference is the presence of complete, or nearly complete animal burials. Pit 1490 contained a complete female dog, with no evidence of butchery. Another complete female dog was also present in pit 6595, this time also with a complete pig that may have been partially skinned. The pig was a little over two years old, whereas the female dog had lived well into adulthood. The left femur of the dog had a misaligned healed fracture, which would have given it a limp for the remainder of its adult life. The dog is positioned tucked under the overhang of the beehive pit, over a meter deep, its back against the pit wall and legs close to its body. The pig is positioned in the middle of the pit, its legs splayed outwards. It is notable that both these deposits, 1490 and 6595 are in pits very close to contemporary buildings.

Neonatal dog skeletons were present in pits 4006, 6038 and 7257, the latter two pits also being close to contemporary buildings and in the case of 6038, within a roundhouse (Fig. 4). These deposits together with the partial horse and complete hare from pit 10161 represent very different above ground events and human choices compared to the remains from the early Iron Age contexts. This is not to say that all dog remains were treated this way, a skull and mandible from an adult dog and articulated thoracic vertebrae were also recovered from pit 7257, hind limbs of dogs were present in pits 7372 and 1055, with 7372 also containing caudal vertebrae (tailbones). It is unknown if the tailbones were still in articulation when discovered. However, this shows that dogs were not subject to just one type of transformation resulting in an ABG, but there appears to be at least three different activities. These comprise the burial of complete adult animals, the deposition of neonatal dogs, sometimes in groups, and then the dismemberment of adult dogs and the deposition of small articulated parts. Given that both complete dogs are female it is unfortunate that sexing information is not available for the dismembered adult dogs. Each activity represented very different above ground activities and choices.

In the early Iron Age all the sheep ABGs were from the same pit and the trend of multiple deposits of the same species does continue in the middle Iron Age. Pit 1941 contains four sheep/goat ABGs, two hind limbs, one forelimb and one vertebral column. Interestingly this was almost mirrored by Pit 8630 that contained two hind limbs, one forelimb, a vertebral column (although made up of just thoracic vertebrae this time) and a skull and mandible. Many of the remains have butchery marks present associated with dismemberment, and for both pits some of the ABGs may be from the same sheep/goat. It is therefore possible that both pits represent very similar transformation events, with the purposeful dismemberment of two or more sheep and the deposition of small partially articulated parts of the animal within a specific pit. However, there is an age difference in the selected sheep; the early Iron Age pit contained immature and neonate remains, whereas the elements from the middle Iron Age pit 1941 are from adult animals. There would be practical differences in the deposition of adult compared to neonate remains and if the animals were processed for meat, than less people would be fed by the neonate remains. Therefore this could represent two similar events, but perhaps at different scales.

Other pits contain multiple ABGs from different species. As already mentioned, pit 7257 contains a number of dog remains. Also present are cattle lower hind feet from the same animal, the rear end of a sheep/goat consisting of the hind limbs, pelvis, sacrum and lumbar vertebrae and the left upper forelimb of a sheep/goat, possibly from the same animal. The nine ABGs recovered from this pit can be seen as the result of a number of different human actions: the deposition of dog neonatal remains; the dismemberment of an adult dog and deposition of a recognisable skull and largely defleshed thoracic vertebra; the dismemberment of a cow/bull (the sex is unknown) and deposition of fleshed lower hind feet; the dismemberment of a sheep and deposition of a partially fleshed back end and a partially fleshed upper forelimb.



Figure 5 Plan of pit 4006. The shading highlights possible ABG groupings, human neonatal bones within the dashed circle. Altered from Hill 1995, figure 7.1

Pit 4006 also contains a mix of species, but this time mainly large mammals, with the exception of a foetal dog. Four cattle ABGs all consisting of forelimbs were present along with four horse deposits, an upper forelimb, a lower hind limb, a sacrum with lumbar vertebrae and an ABG consisting of both femora, pelvis, sacrum, lumbar and thoracic vertebrae and ribs. Again the

composition suggests a number of different above ground events. For the horses, one animal appears to have been highly processed and the forelimb and hind limb deposits may have had little flesh present on them. By contrast, the ABG consisting of the back half of an animal may well have still been recognisable as a horse, with the vertebrae, ribs and upper legs still present. It is notable that of the ABGs consisting of vertebral remains, this and the horse from 10161 are the only ones with the ribs still present, suggesting the animals may have been eviscerated but not fully dismembered. It is difficult to identify the specific ABGs on the plan of the pit, but different groupings of bones can be clearly seen, suggesting that these remains were all deposited at the same time (Fig. 5). It is interesting that neonatal human remains are also present within the same fill of the pit. Unfortunately, the detailed stratigraphic information for this pit is not published, so it is only possible to ascertain whether the deposit was quickly infilled or covered gradually by naturally silting. Again a number of different transformations can be noted on the ABGs, and like pit 7257, if all these remains were deposited at the same time they did not only represent different above ground actions but may also suggest they involved a large part of the community to supply the animals and take part in the event.

### **Conclusion: from human action to human motives**

The aim of this chapter was to apply a biographical approach, using published data to the case study site of Winnall Down. Given the constraints of space and data availability, it has not been possible to discuss the biography of each ABG at Winnall Down in detail. It has also not been possible to complete comprehensive linear biographies from birth to reanalysis, in part due to lack of data, but also as Joy (2009) has argued, partly because object biographies consist of connected jumps as objects become active and inactive in clusters of social relationships. Therefore, we are able to focus on certain clusters, points of activity and transition with variable resolution. This also means that although this approach lends itself to thick narrative descriptions, key biographical information can be acquired without long-winded narratives, as it is the differences in the points of activity and transition which help us consider the different human actions.

What a biographical approach brings to the study of ABGs and animals is an emphasis on the different pathways of treatment, and thus, highlights the variation in human actions. This approach also enables us to investigate why the composition of ABGs may change between time periods. The general uniformity of ABGs from the early Iron Age suggests that the majority and particularly the cattle remains were created by very similar events. What we see in the middle Iron Age is reduction in uniformity. Remains similar to those from the early Iron Age are still being deposited, although often now as sheep/goat, and with variable biographies, suggested by age differences. The drop in cattle ABGs and the increase in those of sheep/goat mirrors a change in the 'normal' faunal assemblage from the site, although the change for the ABG proportions is dramatic (Fig. 6). As discussed above the general increase in the number of sheep/goat ABGs is seen on other sites in southern England, although it is not present on sites in other parts of the country, such as Yorkshire (Morris 2010a). The decrease in cattle ABGs could be linked to a general change in animal husbandry, with more sheep being present on later? Iron Age sites. However, the

decrease is also part of a pattern where more species are now deposited as ABGs. This suggests that either the animals being used changed but the practices/events behind the creation of the ABGs remained the same, or that there was an expansion in the type of practices/events creating ABGs, or indeed both.

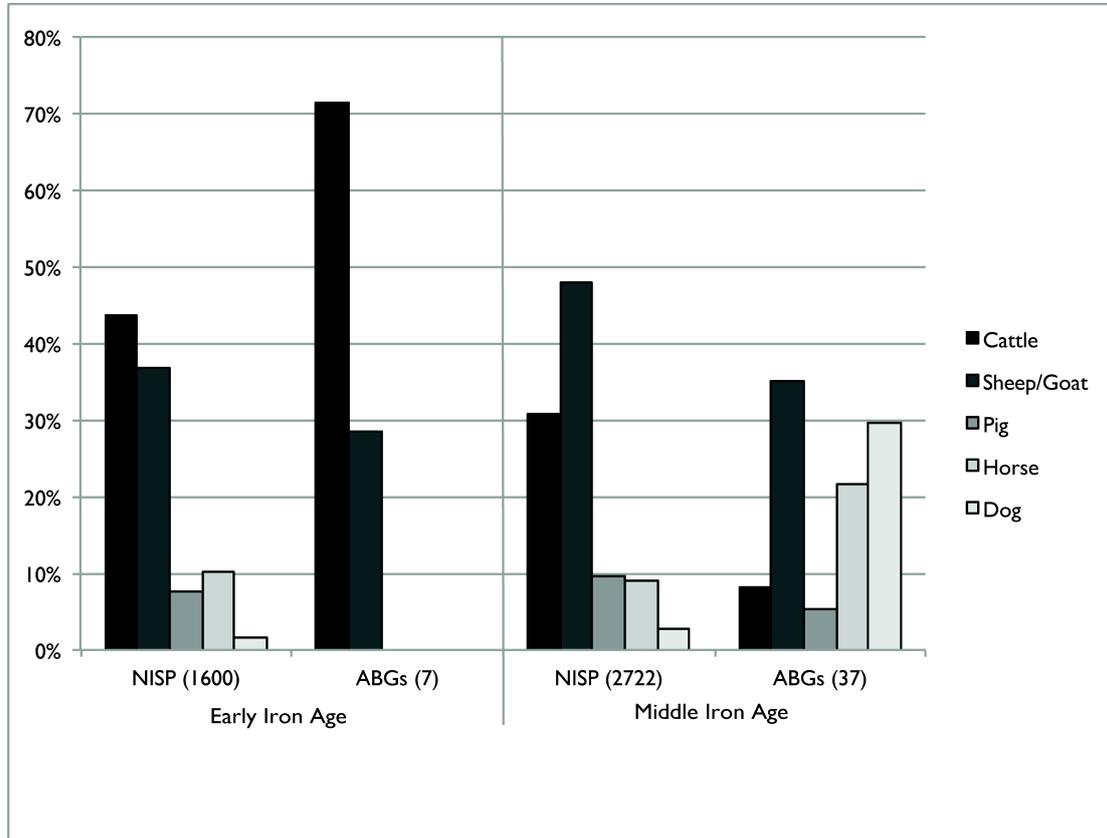


Figure 6 Bar chart showing the proportion of cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog from the disarticulated assemblage NISP (Number of Identified Specimens Present) counts and the ABGs for early and middle Iron Age Winnall Down. Data from Maltby 1985

Given the variability in the composition of the ABGs, I would suggest at Winnall Down there was an expansion in the number of pathways to deposition and thus a broadening in the type of above ground events. It is possible that what this represents is an expanding plurality in Iron Age cultural practices. In the middle Iron Age at Winnall Down at least five different actions appear to exist:

- The deposition of complete animals. This appears to be rare and is limited to adult female dogs and a pig deposit. Both deposits are next to houses and no other ABGs are present in the pits.
- The deposition of neonatal dogs, often in groups and with some dismemberment, although the lack of certain elements could be a taphonomic issue. Most of these deposits also contain ABGs from other species that have undergone intensive dismemberment.
- The intensive dismemberment of mainly adult sheep/goat, dog, horse and cattle and their deposition often as a single ABG within a pit.

- The deposition of a number of highly dismembered ABGs together, such as pit 8630 (Fig. 4).
- The semi-dismemberment of an animal, for example, horses deposited with a large proportion of the flesh still attached and possibly still in a recognisable form.

In most cases these treatments appear to represent individual events, although occasionally deposits, such as pit 4006 (Fig. 4), show a combination. The suggested pathways mainly focus on differences at the end of the animals' lives, but aspects of the whole life cycle are important. For example, in the case of the neonatal dogs, it may be that their lack of an established life history within the community was important, assuming of course they do not represent neonatal natural mortalities. However, one of the biggest issues with a biographical approach is that authors, myself included, are naturally drawn to the data rich clusters of the animals' life histories. For this case study the use of only published records may be part of the problem. A re-examination of the faunal material using the multitude of technical advances since the 1980's may help to add missing parts to these biographies. However, the approach has been successful in moving the focus to the human acts before deposition, although deposition still remains a key part of the biography.

The biographical approach can help us examine human actions, but can it help us elucidate the meaning behind those actions? The first aspect it highlights is the plurality in human actions. The presence of complete animals, purposely placed, close to houses, is intriguing and I have previously suggested pit 6595 (see above) may represent a deliberate, emotive burial with associated offering (Morris 2016). The biography of the dog suggested it had a long life on the settlement, in all likelihood it raised numerous litters and may have received care for its broken leg. It is the only ABG to have pathological evidence and the only ABG to be deposited complete without any alteration (the pig in the same pit has butchery marks on the lower feet). Its position under the overhang of the beehive pit and over a meter down, suggested human action was involved in its placement. Given the location and space available this would have involved perhaps just two people. I have suggested that such intimate, small-scale contact may be the result of an emotional response to an animal's death (Morris 2016). The dog may not have been a pet in the modern sense, but perhaps was an important part of the community and peoples' lives. It is interesting to note that the dog burial mirrors the treatment of some complete adult human burials at Winnall Down, placed in a crouched position against the edge of a pit.

It is also tempting to see horse burial 10161 (Figs. 1 and 4) in an emotive light, considering its deliberate manipulation and placement. If it does represent a sacrifice, and given the age of the animal this is a possibility, then the removal of certain body parts may have been a key part of a ritualised act. Its deliberate placement with the head clearly visible suggests in this case the act of deposition also had importance. In contrast, the highly dismembered material from pits 1941, 4006 and 8630 (Fig. 4) involves a number of different animals and species. Such deposits are not just limited to Winnall Down; pit 197 from Suddern Farm represents a similar deposit. I have suggested that the Suddern Farm pit 197 ABGs represent the 'waste' from a large-scale feasting event (Morris 2011, 174–176). This is due to the level of butchery processing required to create the ABGs, the majority of which consists of vertebral columns with evidence of the meat

being stripped from them and perhaps represents uncommon cooking practices. Therefore, they may represent the processing, cooking and consumption of a large amount of meat in a single event, likely to be a feast. In this respect, the deposition of the ABG material may be unimportant and unrelated to the above ground rituals taking place at the feast. It is, therefore, intriguing that human neonatal material is also present in pit 4006. Could this be related to a ritualised feasting event and does its treatment perhaps mirror that of the neonatal dog remains? It is also tempting to see the smaller scale, highly dismembered ABG deposits as the result of smaller scale feasting events requiring just one animal – although Maltby's original argument that they represent 'normal' butchery waste could be just as valid. What is important about this interpretation is that the feasting event may be ritualised, but this does not necessarily mean the deposition of the ABGs was.

A biographical approach does not offer a magic bullet that will explain the human motives behind these deposits. What it does offer is a way to consider the multi-temporal dimensions of animal burials, rather than concentrating on just the final act of deposition. If, as argued, some of these deposits represent an emotive burial, sacrifice or feasting waste at different scales then perhaps it is the animal's deposition, the moment of sacrifice or the human connections and bonds strengthened during the event which were the important aspects behind the ABGs' creation. This case study has used a biographical approach to try and move away from a ritual/functional dichotomy, and although the term ritual has still been used, a ritual involving a horse sacrifice would be very different to the rituals behind a large feast, or the more personal rituals behind a dog burial. However, we must return to the point of equifinality, in that the interpretations I have placed on the deposits are just one possible explanation out of many. The pathways, nevertheless, the biographical approach highlights do help to narrow down our options. It also highlights the futility of suggesting that these deposits can be explained with a single interpretation.

The biographies constructed for the animal burials from Winnall Down were purposely descriptive and separated from the integration of why the human driven transformations were enacted on the animals. However, it is perhaps fitting to return to the biography of the horse from pit 10161 at the end of this chapter, and give just one of its possible full biographies from life to concealment. Some of the following is evidence-based, some conjecture, but what they highlight are the possibilities an animal biographical approach offers for a deposit which in the past was described and interpreted simply as 'waste' and 'ritual'.

*During the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC a group set out from a small settlement into the surrounding open-country. Riding horses and accompanied by their choice dogs they headed to an area frequented by a herd of wild horses. Carefully they approached the herd and noticed a young stallion they could separate from the rest of the herd. They knew of the dangers involved, not just to themselves but their animals as well, on the last trip a dog had broken its hind leg. Once captured, the young stallion was taken back to the village, where it was gradually broken and trained to accept a rider. Over the coming years the horse proved useful, carrying members of the community as they visited other settlements and traded items. It was also used on trips back to the place of its birth to collect other young horses for the community. At the age of six, at the height of its powers, something happened in*

*the settlement – a rare event that required an unusual act. The stallion was separated from the other horses it was corralled with and taken to the edge of the settlement. There, a group had gathered, the man who had led the horse now took out a knife that was plunged into the horse's neck, it screamed from the sudden pain, kicking and bucking, before finally collapsing in a pool of its own blood. A group gathered around the horse. The sacrifice had been made but the ritual was not over. Other members of the community gathered around the horse, for it needed to supply important parts for the further rituals to come. Its tail and skin were cut away allowing its hind legs to be removed; its left forelimb was taken off at the elbow, and its jaw and tongue cut away. These parts were carried elsewhere in the settlement, important tokens from the horse's sacrifice. A pit had been prepared and a small group dragged the remaining carcass of the horse to the pit where it was rolled in. People climbed down into the pit and struggled with the weight of the carcass as they positioned it in the center. All who gathered around the edge of the pit could see the horse, now on its right-hand side, the remains of its head resting on its chest, its one remaining complete leg extended out away from the body as though in midstride. The soil and rock from the excavation of the pit was close at hand, this was now thrown into the pit using wicker baskets, until the horse was concealed. But the pit was not completely filled, other deposits would be later placed in it, but that is another story.*

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