

BOS PRIMIGENIUS FROM
CHARTERHOUSE WARREN FARM SWALLET,
BLAGDON.

COMMENT ON THE RADIOCARBON DATE
AND ARCHAEOLOGY

by
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The auroch's skeleton from Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet was provisionally dated (Everton 1975) on the evidence of the cut marks on the horn cores and the loosely associated Iron Age pottery. Now an adjusted radiocarbon date of 1620 ± 110 BC is reported in this issue. This date places the bones in the Middle Bronze Age (Burleigh and Clutton-Brock, 1977). In view of this evidence it is impossible for an iron sword to have been used to produce the cuts in the horn cores, unless they had been made about 1,000 years after the death of the animal and the subsequent decomposition of the horn sheaths in the wet environment of the swallet (Chapell, 1976, 60). On present evidence, it seems, that the cuts were made by a hard, thin-edged sword or rapier; daggers or dirks being too short to achieve the necessary momentum to penetrate the horn core, whilst axes and palstaves have blade edges too obtuse and curved to produce the cuts. Further, the cutting edges of the published examples of Middle Bronze Age weapons also appear too obtuse. However the majority of the finds of these weapons appear to be unassociated and to be dated by typology and this applies to continental and Irish parallels. So the existence of a suitably thin, hard-edged bronze weapon cannot be discounted. It is perhaps possible that the horn core, initially compressed by the passage of a thick-edged weapon, partially recovered following the removal of the blade, reducing the width of the cut. Alternatively the cuts were reduced in width by *post-mortem* shrinkage. This seems unlikely in the damp environment of the swallet.

Further excavations at the swallet have produced Middle Beaker pottery (ApSimon *et al.* 1976, p.173), unrolled flint implements and slate 'sponge fingers' also belonging to the Middle Beaker period, c. 2,000 BC. These were found at a depth of 15.6m (N. Cook *pers. comm.*), which is 4.6m below the auroch bones (Everton, 1975, 75). The occurrence of Beaker material below the auroch skeleton with the presence of I.A.

pottery 6-7m above (Everton, unpublished plans and notes: Cornwall, J. *pers. comm.*, 1972) and a R.B. burial 5-6m above the I.A. pottery (Everton 1975, 75), at about 2m from the surface, indicates that the deposits in the swallet are stratified. Some intermingling of them seems to have occurred from the Bronze Age onwards due to the action of water. This may be a reflection of the deterioration of the climate (Burgess, 1974, 195). To the present day the swallet becomes active under really wet conditions.

Neolithic and Mesolithic flint scatters in the field adjacent to the swallet (Everton collection, unpublished) and on either side of the Longwood valley nearby (ApSimon *et al.* 1976, 173; Everton and Day 1972, 13) attest the occupation of the area during these periods. It therefore seems possible that stratified deposits belonging to these periods might be found in Charterhouse Warren Swallet and the true relationship of the auroch's bones in the deposits might be established.

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