Livestock and landscape: exploring animal exploitation in later prehistory in the South West of Britain

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Abstract

The animal remains from British later prehistory have frequently been treated as generally only able to inform us about economy, and occasionally about symbolic behaviour. On the other hand, the use and division of landscape has been largely discussed in terms of social organisation. There has been a failure to appreciate that there is a reflexive relationship between pastoral farming and the utilisation and inhabiting of landscapes.

The nature and needs of livestock and detailed consideration of husbandry methods have informed identification of the types of archaeological data we can use to discuss husbandry practices. This thesis integrates faunal, field and environmental data to achieve a holistic understanding. Husbandry practices and animal consumption and deposition identified from analysis of over 130,000 fragments of animal bone from Cadbury Castle, Somerset, and sites in its environs, have been considered in the light of successive arrangements of fields in the area. The relationship between changes in landscape organisation and in animal exploitation has been established and can also be detected across the south west. The fields of the earlier Bronze Age apparently relate to continuation of extensive husbandry regimes, whilst fixing the activity within the landscape. Small scale arable farming was integrated during the Middle Bronze Age. Subsequently there was a return to extensive grazing and mobility. An approach dominated by sheep farming began in the Early Iron Age. This gained ascendency in the Middle Iron Age, with new, small, fields that are indicative of a highly integrated arable and pastoral system and which were both intensive, localised, and reflect the technical, social and ideological complexity surrounding animals.

This thesis has found that the form of landscape division and organisation was intimately bound up with the practicalities of livestock management. It has identified a variety of features and arrangements that can assist in understanding livestock management elsewhere in Britain and beyond. At different times and places this involved different social and technological choice, but was founded in the needs of managed animals. This study has shown the benefits of integrating archaeological, faunal and landscape data, together with a strong understanding of the practicalities of animal husbandry. This approach not only enables better understanding of arable and pastoral systems, it allows us to better recognise and understand the social and ideological choices expressed in the farming landscape.

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It seems appropriate here to admit to some of the influences which I may have brought consciously and unconsciously to this work. In a previous incarnation, I worked for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, later the Rural Payments Agency. Probably more important is the influence of 'the ancestors': my father Bill Randall (1933-2000), blacksmith and farrier; grandparents, George Randall, farrier and Nancy Peach, dairymaid; great-grandfathers Richard Randall, hurdlemaker, and Joseph Peach, stockman; and their fathers who were shepherds and stockmen in south and west Dorset. I still live within the landscape where they lived alongside livestock and I cannot deny that it has probably shaped my thinking.

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