

Wealthy man in Roman Gloucester was migrant Goth

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British Archaeology can reveal details of research on a late Roman skeleton first announced last October. Distinctive artefacts found with a man excavated in 1972 suggested he had come from eastern Europe in the fifth century AD. Scientific analysis of his teeth has shown he was a native Goth. He had probably come to Britain having been drawn into service in the Roman empire, and died holding high office aged around 40.

Supported by the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, David Rice, archaeology curator at Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery, submitted two of the man's teeth for isotopic analysis. Oxygen isotope composition suggested he spent his early childhood in a cold region of eastern Europe (Hungary, western Romania, eastern Poland) and his early teens in a colder region further north or east.

Carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis further indicated that the man's diet was lower in animal protein than most Roman and Medieval populations in Britain and Europe and that his diet did not change during his lifetime. The study was conducted by Carolyn Chenery and Jane Evans at the NERC Isotope Geosciences Laboratory at Keyworth, Nottingham.

"Burial 1" had been excavated by Henry Hurst in 1972, in a late Roman cemetery in Kingsholm, outside the city of Glevum (Gloucester). Hurst interpreted a building as a mausoleum, in which, some time after its construction, the body of an adult male had been lain with equipment that included unusual silver fittings. He suggested the man was an early fifth century native Briton, but later agreed with Catherine Hills that comparison to metal styles found in the Crimea made it more likely he was an eastern European who had arrived with the Roman army.

Barry Ager, from the department of prehistory and Europe at the British Museum, says the buckles and strap-ends are of fifth century types made by Goths, Alans and Huns in the region of the Crimea, the northern Black Sea coast and the lower Danube. The man's apparent high status, says Ager, points to him having been a senior military officer or high-ranking civil servant. New study of the bones by Teresa Gilmore puts his age at about 40 (not 25–30 as once thought). She says his unusually large head and distinctive bones at the back of his skull may relate to his ethnic origin.

Carolyn Heighway, director of Past Historic, comments that the "Kingsholm Goth" is distinguished in being a first-generation immigrant. At the late Roman cemetery at Lankhills (Winchester, Hampshire), amongst a group of burials with Danubian grave goods, some of the people were shown to have come from the Danube region, but others came from other parts of eastern Europe or were

local. “Populations were as diverse in origin as they are today”, says Heighway. “What you wore was not [necessarily] an indication of where you were born.”

The artefacts are now on view in Gloucester Museum, and will feature in new Heritage Lottery funded displays to open in 2011. In line with curatorial policy, the human remains will be represented by photographs.



A large head and distinctive cranial anatomy and east European artefacts suggest a man excavated in Gloucester was not local. (photo by Carolyn Chenery).



A silver sword buckle found on the man’s left hip (L. 53mm). A matching silver buckle was by his feet, and he had a knife with silver inlaid handle by his thigh. (photo by Gloucester City Museum).