ARCHAEOLOGY ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT

Time allowed: one hour

Please choose ONE of the two texts below and answer two related questions from the four provided.

Answers should be typed, preferably in a format readable in MS Word, and the use of word-processing apps is permitted. There is no word limit but markers will reward quality over quantity.

While no restriction is placed upon you as to the resources you may use, it is important to note that we are not looking for prior or acquired knowledge in your answer. The task is designed to assess comprehension and the ability to read closely, deploy arguments effectively, and write clearly – all skills which archaeologists will need to use continuously throughout their undergraduate studies. You should remember that the more time you spend using other resources will mean less time for planning and writing your answer.

We will be looking in answers for

- the ability to think analytically
- the ability to produce a coherent argument
- the ability to select and use evidence appropriately
- the ability to address the question directly and clearly
- precision, clarity and facility of writing under time pressure

Not all answers will demonstrate these qualities equally but the best answers will show signs of all, or nearly all, of them.

The assessment does not presume that you have encountered this material or these topics before; it is simply a self-contained exercise in reading comprehension, thinking and writing.

The answer you provide must be your own. Papers may be checked using anti-plagiarism software, and you should not discuss your answers or the paper with anyone else.

From Brück, J. (2004). 'Material metaphors: The relational construction of identity in Early Bronze Age burials in Ireland and Britain'. Journal of Social Archaeology, 4/3: 307-33.

Grave 4969 at Barrow Hills [in Oxfordshire and dating from the Early Bronze Age] contained the inhumation of a child lying in an alder coffin (Fig. 1). Six red deer antlers had been carefully placed along the sides of the coffin, four on one side and two on the other. Only one showed evidence of use as a pick, so we are not simply seeing the discarding of the tools used to dig the grave. Moreover, a cattle skull and a fragment of pig calcaneum had been placed directly opposite one another on either side of the coffin. These may have derived from animals eaten during the mortuary feast, or might have been placed as food offerings into the grave.

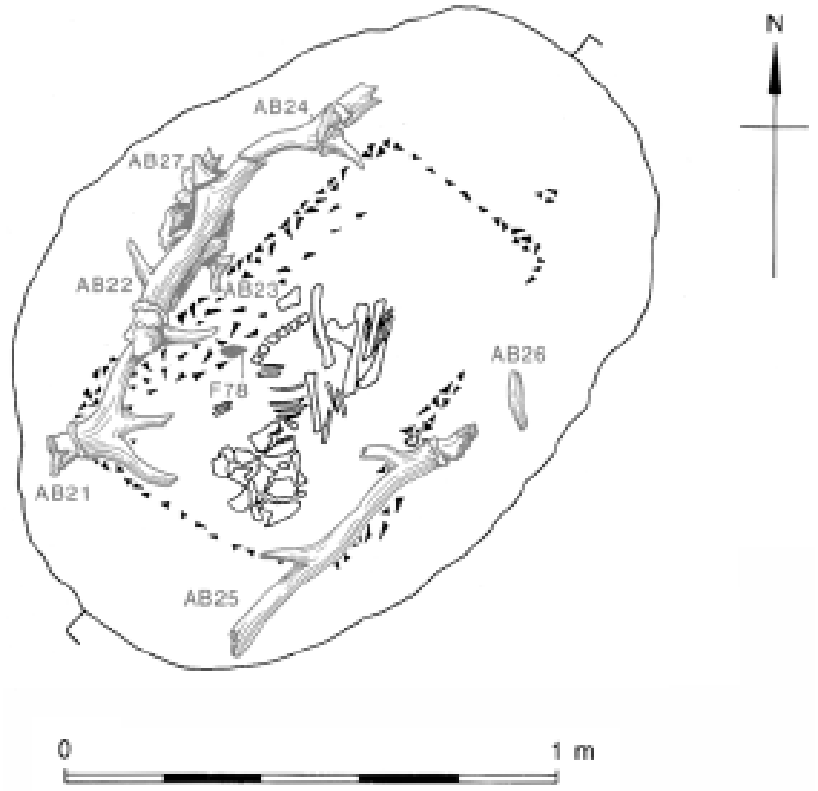

Figure 1: Grave 4969, Barrow Hills, Oxfordshire: AB21–25, red deer antlers; AB26, base and posterior of cattle skull; AB27, fragment of pig calcaneum; F78, flint piercer

The careful placement of animal remains in relation to the burial, as well as the choice of particular skeletal elements (from the head and from the feet), suggests that they were used to define some aspect of that person's identity and it is worth briefly considering what these might have been.

In many societies, clans or families may be closely identified with particular animals considered to be the founding ancestors of the group in the mythical past (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). The animal in question acts as a totem or symbol of clan or family identity. The occasional recovery of unusual animal remains from Early Bronze Age burials, for example birds of prey, beavers, foxes, and in this case deer, could well be explained in this way.

Alternatively, it is possible that the antlers were employed to comment metaphorically on the character or identity of the deceased individual and his/her descent group. The metaphoric value of animals means that in our own society, people's personal characteristics are often described using animal analogies. We may say that someone is 'as stubborn as a mule', for example, or we might describe someone as 'a wily old fox'.

Whatever the case, it seems likely that the categorical distinction maintained between people and animals in our own society was not articulated so strongly in the Early Bronze Age. The strict conceptual divide between culture and nature in post-Enlightenment thought is one of the tools used to constitute the modern Western self as an autonomous, rational subject.

In the Early Bronze Age, on the other hand, humans and animals were treated in similar ways in the mortuary context. We might argue that humans and animals were considered to share particular characteristics, so much so that they may not have been thought of as intrinsically different types of being. Just as the boundary between people and objects was blurred, relationships with animals appear to have constituted an important element of the self. Animal metaphors may also have been used to describe the links between people.

This article has argued that we need to consider the items deposited with the Early Bronze Age dead not as a reflection of intrinsic attributes of the self, but as an expression of the relational character of identity – it was relationships with friends, kinsfolk and neighbours, and with significant places, that made Early Bronze Age people who they were. Gifts from the mourners constructed the identity of the deceased in terms of interpersonal links – links that stretched across both time and space.

For the Early Bronze Age, thinking about identity in the ways outlined here allows us to move beyond the uncritical reproduction in the past of modern Western models of personhood. It suggests that arguments for the existence of an 'ideology of the individual' during this period are, at the very least, all too simplistic.

Answer TWO questions:

1. Discuss how the objects in this Early Bronze Age grave may have been used to make statements about identity.
2. Discuss and evaluate how this text uses ideas from social anthropological studies (such as those by Levi-Strauss) to interpret an Early Bronze Age grave.
3. The text argues that objects were used in this Early Bronze Age grave to say something about identity. If you were to explore the same idea in a study of modern society, what might you focus on and why?
4. This text suggests that the 'categorical distinction maintained between people and animals in our own society was not articulated so strongly in the Early Bronze Age'. What is meant by this and do you agree that this can be 'read' from this grave?

Adapted from Ian Tattersall. (2012). *Masters of the Planet: the search for our human origins*. Macmillan.

It is a minor inconvenience that the Turkana Boy [right][1] died before achieving maturity, complicating the task of reconstructing just what an adult *Homo ergaster*[2] would have looked like in life. Modern human children grow and mature very slowly compared to young apes, and they undergo an adolescent growth spurt beginning around the developmental stage at which the Turkana Boy died. It is reckoned that the Boy had stood about 160 cm (5'3") tall when he perished, and that if he had been poised to develop on a modern human schedule he would have stood about 185 cm (6'1") tall on achieving maturity. Tall, slim, and weighing maybe 68 kg (150 lb), in life he would have been a far cry from his small bodied and stocky bipedal[3] ape predecessors.

But there is also a major scientific advantage to his immaturity; we are able to see that the boy had not developed as we do. Although his teeth had erupted and his bones had knit to about the degree you see in a modern 12-year-old, the painstaking process of counting the growth increments in his teeth, and the powerful microscopy, indicated that he had actually lived for only about 8 years. Evidently, his developmental schedule had been fast; and, although it was already modified in our direction, it would resemble that of apes more closely than it did that of modern humans. This in turn implies that, when he died, the boy had already completed most of his growth. As a result, it is looking improbable that even if he had lived he would ever have come close to hitting the 6 foot (183 cm) mark.

The Turkana boy died at the stage of maturity when his 880-gram brain[4] will already have been very close to adult size, so its fossil remains cannot tell us much about his early brain development. But other evidence confirms that individuals of the *Homo ergaster* grade conformed much more closely to the ape pattern than to the human one in brain development, as well as in other aspects of growth. This accelerated schedule of brain development has implications both for the mental complexity of those ancient members of our evolutionary family tree and for the kinds of lives they lived.

Answer TWO questions:

[1] The Turkana Boy is the name for a very complete fossil human-like creature found in East Africa, and dated to about 1.7 million years ago.
[2] *Homo ergaster* is the name given to this species, showing that it is different from our own, *Homo sapiens.*
[3] Bipedal means they usually walk on two legs
[4] The average human brain is about 1400 grams, that of an ape not more than 400 g.

1. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of growing up more slowly?

2. What do you think is meant by “mental complexity” and why is this important in human evolution?

3. How could we reconstruct the “kinds of lives” extinct species like *Homo ergaster* lived?

4. Why do you think anthropologists and archaeologists should be interested in how individuals grow?

1.