
The old and the new: recent discoveries in the faunal aspect of Middle Bronze Age burial customs in the Levant

Zohar Turgeman*^{1,2}

¹Israel Antiquities Authority – Israel

²Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa – Israel

Abstract

In a series of publications in the late 1980s and early 2000s Horwitz delineated the contextual, taxonomic, anatomic and age structure-related characteristics of faunal assemblages found in Middle Bronze Age (MBA) burial contexts of the southern Levant. Those seminal works shed important light on ritual practices and the belief-systems of the time, highlighting the specific choices made repeatedly by MBA communities in species selection (mainly domestic sheep, *Ovis aries*) and its mortality profile (primarily immature individuals) in the context of burial offering. It also highlights the high degree of variation of animal burial practices within and across different burial types.

One recent example of this "high degree of variation" shown by Horwitz, was found in an MBA cemetery discovered near Jerusalem in 2014 that yielded uncommon finds testifying to the reaches of burial practices of the period. A study conducted on the microfaunal assemblage from one of the tombs has revealed that toads were beheaded and placed in a vessel as part of the burial offerings given to the dead.

Here I present the zooarchaeological finds from this tomb in addition to five other new MBA burial contexts recently studied, and review other assemblages newly published, in order to examine overall trends and tendencies. The findings seem to demonstrate that Horwitz's observations are still relevant today, more than 30 years after they were first published.

Keywords: Middle Bronze Age, Levant, Burial practices, Fauna

*Speaker