This volume presents a detailed diachronic study of Epipaleolithic faunal assemblages from five components of four archaeological sites in the northern coastal plain and Mount Carmel region of Israel. The material examined covers a time range of 21,000–11,500 cal. BP, a period that ends during the Younger Dryas climatic event just preceding the earliest Neolithic settlements in the southern Levant. For those who are interested in the animal protein component of the diets of Terminal Pleistocene foragers of the eastern Mediterranean or in the taphonomy of faunal assemblages, the study of Guy Bar-Oz breaks new ground. His zooarchaeological and multivariate taphonomic analysis of the faunal collections takes into account the postdepositional history of each bone assemblage and draws conclusions regarding the differences and similarities in hunting, butchering, and transport strategies of the Epipaleolithic hunters.

Even in the absence of credible numbers of radiocarbon dates, the overall archaeological evidence from the sites, including settlement size and depth of deposits, reflects the behavior of small-scale societies and their mobile hunting and gathering lifeways. The cultural sequence begins with Kebaran and Geometric Kebaran complexes and ends with the more complex communities of the Natufian, which are considered as sedentary or semi-sedentary in nature. Bar-Oz employs a comparative multivariate inter-component taphonomic approach to reveal similarities and differences between the various assemblages in terms of the exploited species and the strategies used by humans to obtain and process animal tissues. Marked differences in preservation of one of the five bone assemblages highlight the potential effects of postdepositional processes in drawing sound observations that bear on the cultural and economic significance of faunal remains.

Mountain gazelle (Gazella gazella), and to a lesser extent Persian fallow deer (Dama mesopotamica), were the major game animals exploited throughout the studied period. Remains of the latter species decrease in frequency in this region during Natufian times and procurement of small game increases, including particularly hare (Lepus capensis). While the reduction in the frequencies of fallow deer remains in the Late Natufian could be at least partially explained by climatic change, in particular...
the effects of the Younger Dryas, the same, namely, worsening conditions, could also help account for an increasing focus on small game, generally assumed to be less desirable or “lower-ranked” resources. Ungulate mortality profiles are not suggestive of hunting patterns geared toward the exploitation of specific age groups, and what evidence there is for sexual selection suggests that more males than females are represented in the case of fallow deer throughout the Epipaleolithic and in the case of gazelle during the Natufian.

This study by Guy Bar-Oz is perhaps the best-focused and most comprehensive faunal analysis for the terminal Pleistocene yet published for this part of the world. It provides a benchmark for further zooarchaeological studies in the Levant that would uncover the behavioral patterns of foragers prior to the emergence of cultivation and animal domestication. It also serves as a model taphonomic study that is a useful guide for those carrying out analyses on comparably deposited and recovered assemblages anywhere in the world.

—Richard H. Meadow