APPLYING ON-SITE ANALYSIS OF FAUNAL ASSEMBLAGES FROM DOMESTIC CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY FROM THE LOWER CITY OF HAZOR

Nimrod Marom and Sharon Zuckerman

House, n. A hollow edifice erected for the habitation of man, rat, mouse, beetle, cockroach, fly, mosquito, flea, bacillus and microbe. 

Introduction

The investigation of ancient households is a common archaeological theme in recent decades (e.g., Stevenson 1982; Wilk and Rathje 1982; Wilk 1983; Stager 1985a; Smith 1987; Blanton 1994; Coupland and Banning 1996; Allison 1999b). The various aspects of daily life are explored under the broad aegis of what is often dubbed “household archaeology” (Wilk and Rathje 1982), which includes the study of material assemblages from domestic contexts. Finds’ composition, variability, and spatial patterning are seen as means to reconstruct household activities, and the socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the population that inhabited the house (for examples relevant to faunal remains, see Hesse and Wapnish 1985, 1997; Crabtree 1990; Finkelstein 1996; O’Day et al. 2004; Twiss 2006). The investigation of cultural formation processes (Schiffer 1976, 1987) can also yield relevant information on past human garbage management behavior and disposal practices (Meadow 1978; Hayden and Cannon 1983; Kroll and Price 1991; Falconer 1995; Martin and Russel 2000).

The study of faunal remains presents household archaeologists with an important toolkit. Animal bones, which are usually deposited as food refuse, are abundant in many ancient habitation sites and can be used to investigate society and economy—both of which manifest in foodways (Hesse and Wapnish 1985; Smith 1987; Ijzereef 1989; Zeder 1988, 1991; O’Connor 1989, 2003; Veen 2003; Rossel 2004; van Neer et al. 2004; Twiss 2006)—as well as to reconstruct the use of space (Schiffer 1987; Gregg et al. 1991; O’Connell et al. 1991; Horwitz et al. 2007).
The following paper presents the rationale and the procedures of a faunal analysis meant to explore the foodways practiced in domestic quarters in a complex stratigraphic setting, tuned to address questions of household archaeology—including diachronic and spatial socio-economic differences between domestic units and differential use of space. The contribution addresses a general audience of field archaeologists, and is meant to elucidate some of the considerations involved in the faunal investigation of complex domestic sites. Details of the field sampling procedures, and the assumptions and research questions at their root are explained here at the conceptual level, setting aside many technical details of the faunal analysis itself. The following sections present a bone recovery and analysis protocol and how it relates to various depositionary scenarios expected to have occurred at a complex site. The various questions pertaining to economy and taphonomy are presented in brief, along with the zooarchaeological means to approach them. The focus is on general research questions that touch the lives and livelihoods of household residents, and do not include methodology for analyzing deposits from special contexts (e.g., workshops, etc.). Description of the zooarchaeological field protocol applied at the Lower City of Hazor follows as a case study, and illustrates how samples relevant to detailed zooarchaeological work may be collected and analyzed in a cost-efficient way. This protocol was applied during the 2008 field season in the Lower City of Hazor, which was directed by S. Zuckerman, and resulted in the complete analysis of all the faunal remains recovered that season in the field, including the complete sampling and analysis of 1,000 liters of sediments from wet sieving, as well as numerous bones collected by the excavators. We hope that the application of a high-resolution faunal investigation protocol that is feasible within the given financial and time constraints imposed on archaeological projects may prove useful to other scholars interested in such analyses.

Site and Setting

Tell el-Waqas (Tell el-Qedah), the site of the ancient Canaanite and Israelite city of Hazor, is one of the largest and most intensively investigated tells in the southern Levant. Since its first identification in 1875 by Porter, the site was excavated by Garstang (1928), Yadin (1956–1960, 1968), and Ben-Tor (1990 to the present). Garstang and Yadin