



## The social role of food in the Natufian cemetery of Raqefet Cave, Mount Carmel, Israel



Reuven Yeshurun<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Guy Bar-Oz<sup>a</sup>, Dani Nadel<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, 31905 Haifa, Israel

<sup>b</sup> Program in Human Ecology and Archaeobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, PO Box 37012, MRC 112, Washington, DC 20013-7012, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 29 April 2013

Revision received 5 September 2013

Available online 8 October 2013

#### Keywords:

Epipaleolithic

Burial

Foodways

Mount Carmel

Zooarchaeology

Contextual taphonomy

Feasting

### ABSTRACT

The archaeology of mortuary practices and related foodways in the Late Natufian (LN; ca. 14,000/13,500–11,700 BP) sheds light on the communal activities of the last hunter–gatherers in the Mediterranean Levant. We present a detailed analysis of the fauna from the LN cemetery of Raqefet Cave (Mount Carmel, Israel). Taphonomic evidence indicates that the animal bones are butchery and consumption leftovers. While the patterns of animal exploitation are reminiscent of Natufian habitation sites, the remains do not reflect the typical recurring post-discard damage resulting from continuous or repeating habitations in those sites. Hence the fauna is interpreted as the leftovers of punctuated, short-term events, rather than ‘ordinary’ Natufian household trash. Taking into account the special depositional context and site characteristics, we interpret the fauna as the intentionally-gathered and buried remains of simple funerary feasts. Elaborate mortuary behavior and symbolic role of food refuse were recently suggested at the contemporaneous cave of Hilazon Tachtit (Israel). The new data from Raqefet Cave probably reflect a somewhat different type of communal meals, adding to the diversity and complexity of pre-agricultural life-ways in the Levant.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

The transition from mobile foragers to sedentary farmers in the Mediterranean Levant has received considerable research attention, with the Natufian Culture (ca. 15,000–11,700 cal. BP) featuring prominently in all economic and social explanations for this process (e.g. papers in Bar-Yosef and Valla, 1991; Delage, 2004; and see Bar-Yosef, 1998; Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris, 2011; Henry, 1991; Kaufman, 1992; Valla, 2012; Zeder, 2012). The Natufian is commonly considered as the time when the first sedentary hamlets appeared, displaying repeatedly-constructed stone architecture, hewn bedrock mortars, and massive buildup of habitation refuse (Garrod, 1957; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen, 2008; Hardy-Smith and Edwards, 2004; Weinstein-Evron, 2009); the economy shifts to habitual exploitation of a very broad spectrum of heavily-processed animal and plant resources (Bar-Oz, 2004; Munro, 2009a; Portillo et al., 2010; Weissbrod et al., 2012; Yeshurun et al., n.d.-a); and novel means of enhancing group cohesion, such as distinct cemeteries and art, are evident (Belfer-Cohen, 1991; Weinstein-Evron, 2009). All of these portray the Natufian

as a rather complex and sedentary forager society, chronologically positioned on the verge of agriculture.

Rich and valuable evidence for reconstructing the communal activities and social structure of Natufian communities comes from the study of their burial practices. Defined cemeteries, that are usually segregated (in space or time) from habitation deposits, are present in the Mediterranean zone of Israel (the ‘core area’ of the Natufian Culture) at the sites of el-Wad (Garrod and Bate, 1937; Weinstein-Evron, 2009; Weinstein-Evron et al., 2007), Kebara (Turville-Petre, 1932; Bar-Yosef and Sillen, 1993), ‘Eynan (Ain Mallaha; Perrot et al., 1988; Valla et al., 2007), Nahal Oren (Stekelis and Yizraely, 1963), Hayonim (Belfer-Cohen, 1988; Tchernov and Valla, 1997), Hilazon Tachtit (Grosman et al., 2008) and Raqefet (see below). Each of these burial grounds yielded several dozens of interments in diverse positions, sometimes displaying personal ornamentation, grave goods, built graves or associated stones. Throughout the Natufian, no patterns for particular age and sex groups are apparent. Early Natufian (ca. 15–14/13.5 ka) burials are more often decorated, whereas Late Natufian (LN; ca. 14/13.5–11.7 ka) burials sometimes exhibit secondary burial treatment, such as skull removal (Byrd and Monahan, 1995). Much new data was recently unearthed concerning LN burial practices, which appear more elaborate and complex than acknowledged before. Dozens of graves were discovered in Hilazon Tachtit Cave, accompanied by numerous artifacts and two small and seemingly

\* Corresponding author at: Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, 31905 Haifa, Israel.

E-mail addresses: [ryeshuru@research.haifa.ac.il](mailto:ryeshuru@research.haifa.ac.il) (R. Yeshurun), [guybar@research.haifa.ac.il](mailto:guybar@research.haifa.ac.il) (G. Bar-Oz), [dnadel@research.haifa.ac.il](mailto:dnadel@research.haifa.ac.il) (D. Nadel).

non-domestic structures (Grosman and Munro, 2007). An especially elaborate interment of an elderly and disabled woman, which was found in a hewn grave accompanied by a particularly rich suite of grave goods, most notably tortoise shells, was interpreted as the interment of a shaman (Grosman et al., 2008).

Two intriguing and intermingled aspects of Natufian mortuary behavior are the identification of grave goods and the social role of food consumption as part of the funerary rituals. The association of artifacts, including faunal items such as gazelle horn-cores or tortoise shells (e.g., Belfer-Cohen, 1988; Garrod and Bate, 1937; Neuville, 1951) and human remains furnished hypotheses on ascribed social status (Wright, 1978, countered by Belfer-Cohen, 1995; Byrd and Monahan, 1995). The ubiquity of faunal remains in and around Natufian cemeteries evoked the notions of funerary feasts being conducted, probably at a modest scale (Hayden, 2004, 2011; Twiss, 2008). These phenomena are hard to define archaeologically; dismembered faunal remains in Natufian graves often pose the problem of separating pre-existing refuse in the occupation debris into which the grave was dug and faunal material associated with the burial. Recently, the integration of stratigraphic observations and vertebrate taphonomy at Hilazon Tachtit Cave led to the identification of deliberate deposition of butchered animal remains in two graves (Structures A and B), probably as remnants of burial feasts (Munro and Grosman, 2010; see below).

This paper contributes to the discussion on the meaning of faunal items in Natufian graves by presenting a new case study, the LN of Raqefet Cave (Mount Carmel, Israel) and by offering novel ways of separating habitation refuse from that resulting from punctuated feasting events. Raqefet Cave has recently been investigated to reveal numerous individuals buried in a small area, as well as ubiquitous human-made bedrock features. Hardly any architecture or living levels were found, and all clear Natufian deposits in the cave actually contain burials. Hence, Raqefet Cave emerges as a specialized Natufian locality, a burial site that was used only during the LN for many short visits (Nadel et al., 2012, 2013). In spite of the fact that the Natufian deposits at Raqefet are essentially grave deposits, they contain a remarkable amount of artifacts and disarticulated animal bones, raising the possibility that a pre-burial LN occupation had once existed in the cave (Nadel et al., 2008). Alternatively, it can be hypothesized that some or most of these items are related to the burial activity in some way and were intentionally deposited in the graves.

In order to characterize this *a priori* food refuse and learn why it was physically associated with human interments, and

consequently to shed light on one of the first specialized burial sites in the Levant, we present a detailed zooarchaeological and taphonomic analysis of the graveyard fauna. Through comparisons with the contextual taphonomy of domestic occupations at the nearby Natufian hamlet of el-Wad Terrace we establish our interpretation of the faunal remains as connected to the burial activity, and discuss the implications for the site and for its period.

### Raqefet Cave

The cave of Raqefet is located in the southeast corner of Mount Carmel, 20 km southeast of Haifa and 16 km east of the present Mediterranean shore-line, on the eastern bank of Nahal Raqefet, ca. 200 m ASL, at the top of a steep and rocky slope (Fig. 1). The site is located 10 km east of the major Natufian site of el-Wad. Unlike el-Wad and the Natufian sites of Nahal Oren and Kebara Cave, Raqefet is situated in an inner wadi, not at the intersection of the mountain and the coastal plain. The cave is quite large (50 m long) and divided into five karstic chambers (Fig. 2A). A narrow bedrock terrace, overlooking the steep slope, is situated just outside the cave's entrance. No archaeological layers were preserved on the terrace but some 30 bedrock features, most likely Natufian, were discovered there (Nadel and Lengyel, 2009).

Raqefet cave was first surveyed by Ya'aqov Olami in 1956 (Olami, 1984). Two excavation projects took place at the site. The first, by Tamar Noy of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and Eric Higgs of the University of Cambridge, lasted three seasons (1970–1972) and exposed a long stratigraphic sequence in the first two chambers of the cave (Noy and Higgs, 1971). An area of roughly 60 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated, but in only a portion was bedrock reached in depth ranging from ca. 10 cm to ca. 2 m. Later studies of the stratigraphy and lithic remains from these excavations identified late Mousterian through Bronze Age layers (Lengyel, 2007). The Natufian layer was confined to Chamber I, west of the 16/17 grid line and north of the H/J grid line, and was quite shallow except when filling hewn bedrock features or bedrock depressions (Fig. 2A; Lengyel et al., 2005). Four Natufian burials were found, near the northern wall of the cave, in an area later to be named the burial area of Loci 1 and 3 in the renewed excavation (Fig. 2; Bocquentin, 2003; Lengyel and Bocquentin, 2005). The fauna was studied by Garrard (1980), who argued for an exploitation of adult male gazelles in the Natufian layer of the cave.

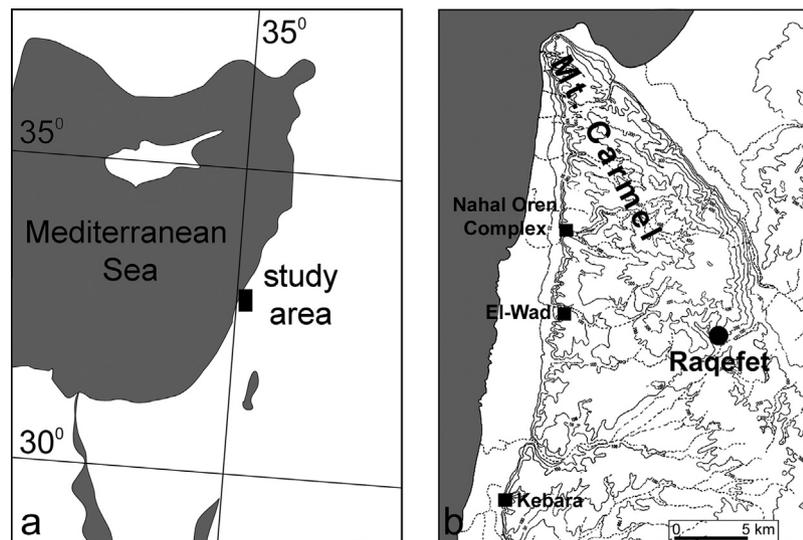


Fig. 1. Location map, showing the position of Raqefet Cave and other Natufian sites in Mount Carmel.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10498709>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10498709>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)