

STRUCTURED DEPOSITION
OF ANIMAL REMAINS IN
THE FERTILE CRESCENT
DURING THE
BRONZE AGE

José Luis Ramos Soldado

ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 272 7

ISBN 978 1 78491 269 7 (e-Pdf)

© Archaeopress and J L Ramos Soldado 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise,
without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

Contents

Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vi
1. Introduction	1
2. Historical and archaeological context	3
3. Structured deposition of animal remains in the Fertile Crescent during the III Millennium BC	4
3. 1. Structured deposition of animal remains in Syria during the III Millennium BC	4
3. 1. 1. Tell Beydar	5
3. 1. 2. Umm el-Marra	6
Equids	6
Dogs	8
Pigs	8
Bovids	8
3. 1. 3. Tell Halawa	8
Equids	8
Ovicaprines	8
3. 1. 4. Tell Banat	8
3. 1. 5. Abu Hamad	9
3. 1. 6. Tall Bi'a	9
3. 1. 7. Nagar (Tell Brak)	10
Equids	10
Dogs	12
Fish	13
3. 2. Structured deposition of animal remains in Mesopotamia during the III Millennium BC	14
3. 2. 1. al-'Usiyah	14
3. 2. 2. Tell Madhhur	15
3. 2. 3. Uch Tepe (Tell Razuk)	15
3. 2. 4. Tell Abu Qasim	16
3. 2. 5. Kish	16
3. 2. 6. Abu Salabikh	17
Equids	17
Ovicaprines	18
3. 2. 7. Nippur	20
Equids	20
Ovicaprines	21
3. 2. 8. Lagash (Tell al-Hiba)	21
3. 2. 9. Ur	21
3. 2. 10. Additional information about other sites	25
4. Structured deposition of animal remains in the Fertile Crescent during the II Millennium BC	26
4. 1. Structured deposition of animal remains in Mesopotamia during the II Millennium BC	26
4. 1. 1. Tell Ababra	26
4. 1. 2. Isin	26
4. 2. Structured deposition of animal remains in Syria during the II Millennium BC	27
4. 2. 1. Umm el-Marra	27
4. 3. Structured deposition of animal remains in the Levant during the II Millennium BC	28
4. 3. 1. Azor	28
4. 3. 2. Sasa	29
4. 3. 3. Tell 'Akko	29
4. 3. 4. Megiddo	29
4. 3. 5. Sidon	30
4. 3. 6. Shechem	30
4. 3. 7. Jericho	32

Equids.....	32
Ovicaprines	32
4. 3. 8. Gezer	32
4. 3. 9. Tell Beth-Shemesh	33
4. 3. 10. Jebel Qa'aqir	33
4. 3. 11. Tell el-'Ajjul	33
4. 3. 12. Tell Jemmeh.....	33
4. 3. 13. Tel Haror	33
4. 3. 14. Additional information about other sites.....	34
5. Discussion.....	36
5.1. Classification of the explained evidence	36
Animal burials inside human graves.....	36
Animal burials related to human graves	37
Animal deposits unrelated to human graves	37
Animals in sacred/ritual contexts.....	38
Foundation deposits	38
Animal remains in non-ritual contexts.....	38
5. 2. Analysis and interpretation of taxa.....	38
5. 2. 1. Equids	39
Donkey	39
Mule.....	41
Onager	41
Kúnga	41
5. 2. 2. Dogs.....	42
5. 2. 3. Sheeps and goats	45
5. 2. 4. Bovids	46
5. 2. 5. Pigs	46
5. 2. 6. Birds.....	47
5. 2. 7. Fish	48
5. 3. Ritual and sacrifice in the frame of structured deposition of animal remains	48
5. 4. Conclusions	50
6. Conclusions.....	52
Bibliography.....	53
Appendix A. Number of articulated animal individuals recorded at each site classified by species, region and period.....	56
Appendix A. A. Number of articulated animal individuals recorded at each site in Syria in the third millennium BC.	56
Appendix A. B. Number of articulated animal individuals recorded at each site in Mesopotamia/Iraq in the third millennium BC.	56
Appendix A. C. Number of articulated animal individuals recorded at each site in Mesopotamia/Iraq in the second millennium BC.	56
Appendix A. D. Number of articulated animal individuals recorded at each site in the Levant in the second millennium BC.	57
Appendix B. Identification of equid species classified by site and period.....	58
Appendix B. A. Specie identification of equid individuals from sites dated to the third millennium BC.	58
Appendix B. B. Specie identification of equid individuals from sites dated to the second millennium BC.	58

List of Figures

Fig. 1. Map showing some of the sites discussed in section 3. 1. (Author)	4
Fig. 2. Illustration of demoiselle crane anthropoids virgo (after Van Neer, 2000).....	5
Fig. 3. Articulated equid skeletons found in Installation G, Upper Layer (after Weber, 2012)	7
Fig. 4. Section of three main levels of occupation in the public sector at Tell Banat that includes the location of the foundation deposit behind Building 6 (after Porter, 2002b).....	10
Fig. 5. Skeletons of donkeys 4 (up) and 5 (down) in the original situation they were found at the site (Clutton-Brock, 2001).....	11
Fig. 6. The skeleton of the dog as it was found at Tell Brak (Clutton-Brock, 2001).....	12
Fig. 7 Yellow-fin black porgy.	13
Fig. 8. The seabream skeleton from Tell Brak (Roselló Izquierdo & Morales Muñiz, 2001).....	13
Fig. 9. Location of some of the sites discussed in this section (Author)	14
Fig. 10. Tell Madhhur tomb in Trench 5G (after Killick and Roaf, 1979).....	15
Fig. 11. Burial 12 at Tell Razuk (after Zarins, 1986).....	16
Fig. 12. A reconstruction of Burial II (after Zarins 1986).....	17
Fig. 13. Articulated equid skeleton found in ash-tip at Abu Salabikh (after Postgate, 1986)	18
Fig. 14. Equids found at Grave 162 (after Postgate, 1986)	19
Fig. 15 Plan of Grave 162 showing the five equids in what have been considered their original position (after Postgate, 1983).....	19
Fig. 16. Plan of Burial 14, Level XIIIB Chamber (after McMahon, 2006).....	20
Fig. 17. Equid skeleton at Burial 14 (after McMahon, 2006).....	21
Fig. 18. Ovicaprine skeletons located next to skeleton 3 at Burial 14 (after McMahon, 2006).....	22
Fig. 19. Articulated onager skeleton found at Lagash (Area C) (after Zarins 1986)	22
Fig. 20. Plan of PG 789 (after Baadsgaard et al., 2012)	23
Fig. 21. Plan of PG 800 (after Baadsgaard et al., 2012)	24
Fig. 22. Some of the sites discussed in this section (Author)	28
Fig. 23. Bovid skeleton found in Tomb 903 at Megiddo (after Guy, 1938)	29
Fig. 24. Sheep skeleton in Burial 99, Sidon (after Doument-Serhal, 2013).....	30
Fig. 25. Ovicaprine skeleton found at Shechem in locus 6:18 in Room 8 (after Campbell, 2002) ...	31
Fig. 26. Equid skeleton found at Shechem (after Campbell, 2002).....	31
Fig. 27. Equid skeleton found at Locus 10066 (after Leger & Zeder, 1988)	32
Fig. 28. Raven skeleton found at loculi 8430/82091 at Tel Haror, associated with the mandible of a lamb (after Klenck, 2002).....	34
Fig. 29. Articulated puppy skeleton found in loculi 8430/82443 at Tel Haror (after Klenck, 2002) ..	35
Fig. 30. Articulated skeleton of a juvenile dog associated with the fragmented remains of a raven at Tel Haror (after Klenck, 2002).....	35
Fig. 31. Some kúnga pulling from battle wagons depicted in the Standard of Ur (2600 BC) (after Littauer & Crouwel, 1979).	41

List of Tables

Table 1. Chronology of the Bronze Age for the Ancient Near East.	3
Table 2. Chronology of the Bronze Age for Mesopotamia (after Cryer, 1995).....	3
Table. 3. Age, sex, position and orientation of the donkey skeletons found at Tell Brak (after Clutton-Brock, 2001).	12
Table. 4. Age ratio of animals found in Shaft 1 (after Schwartz, 2013).....	27

Abstract

Although most of the animal remains recorded throughout the archaeological excavations consist usually of large assemblages of discarded and fragmented bones, it is possible to yield articulated animal skeletons in some cases. Most of them have been usually picked up from sacred and/or funerary contexts, but not all of them might fit necessarily in ritual and symbolic interpretations, and not all of the structured deposit of animal remains may be explained due to anthropic factors. In addition, zooarchaeology has traditionally focused on animal domestication, husbandry and economy, and species identification above all, shutting out further discussion about these type of findings. Moreover, the limited condition of the data is also another issue to bear in mind. Thus, the aim of this paper has been to draw up a literature review of the structured deposits of animal remains during the third and second millennia BC in the Ancient Near East for its subsequent classification and detailed interpretation. In this survey it has been attested that not only most of the articulated animal remains have been found in ritual and/or funerary contexts but also that all species recorded—but some exceptions—are domestic. Hence, I argue in this paper that there is a broad religious attitude towards the main domesticated animals of human economy in the Ancient Near East, based on the closeness of these animals to the human sphere. Therefore, it seems that domesticated animals were powerful constituents in the cultural landscape of these regions, never simply resources.

This paper is the result of the author's own work. Material from the published and unpublished work of others, which is referred to in the paper, is credited to the author(s) in question in the text.

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to draw up this essay without the support of several persons who have given me their help and dedication with total patience. First of all, I would like to show my most honest gratitude to Dr. Penny Wilson, who has been a mentor for me since the first minute I arrived in Durham, and to Dr. Derek Kennet, since without his attention and willingness perhaps I would have never decided to come. Secondly, I need to display my everlasting thanks to two good friends of mine whose help has been crucial: María Martín Mayorga, restorer, who has helped me retouching and improving all the pictures included in this paper; as well as María Martínez Velázquez, lawyer, and Elisa Ramos Romero, English philologist, who have supervised the text, something actually important due to my struggle with the English language in this, my first year abroad. And last but definitely not least, I really want to thank those people who made this dream possible: Dr. Marta Díaz-Zorita Bonilla, archaeologist (University of Tübingen), who has been always there in every moment since I took the decision of studying at Durham and whose support and patience have been eternal. That is also the case of Dr. Graham Philip, my supervisor, who has been always there providing me all the feedback I need as well as his guidance and support even when my bad organisation made me not worth of it. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, whose backing and love made possible for me to be writing these words right now.

To all of them, thanks.

1. Introduction

The study of archaeofaunal remains has mainly contributed to unravelling the origin of food production termed in the ‘Neolithic Revolution’, as well as to chronology and domestication, tracing the origin and evolution of livestock breeds (Davis, 1987: 20-21). In general, zooarchaeology is a resourceful and key discipline in reconstructing the environment of the past human societies.

Most of the animal remains recorded throughout the archaeological excavations consist usually of large assemblages of discarded and fragmented bones yielded from middens and domestic contexts. However, sometimes it is possible to find complete articulated individuals that appear usually in sacred and/or funerary contexts. Reasons behind such findings may be numerous, and their good state of preservation may not necessarily imply anthropic factors. Nevertheless, this kind of findings is rare and noteworthy, not always easy to interpret and understand. Thus, the aim of my dissertation is to develop single and coherent framework for the analysis and research of structured deposits of animal remains in non-domestic wastes and contexts in the Fertile Crescent—with the exception of Egypt, due to the limited nature of this paper—during the Bronze Age, in order to understand the meaning and socio-ideological significance of this phenomenon.

Among the key aims of this paper lie to develop a classification of the different types of structured deposits of animal bone remains depending on their contexts and further interpretation, in order to classify the evidence for a comparative evaluation as efficient as possible. In addition, I prepare to figure out any possible belief and cultic practice—if any—behind each type of deposit and their relation to each animal species, as well as to evaluate how and in which level the socio-economic and ideological changes of these cultures within the Bronze Age may affect this phenomenon. Unlike what it may seem, for such objectives a deep literature review is needed.

Although the study of topics such as animal offerings and burial, associated in most of cases with this kind of deposits, may generally be of little interest within the academic field due to an apparent strong database, what is certain is that this subject needs a deep literature review. This is not only due to the insufficient documentation published by previous generations of archaeologist. The bibliography is overall inconsistent, as well as the archaeological record. There are some reports where the information concerning faunal remains is deeply detailed, including references even to the sex, age, position and orientation of the articulated animal individuals, distinguished from the discarded ones. However, the majority of the reports does not include such detailed information and provide only basic data about the faunal assemblages. This unequal quality within the evidence would be unavoidably perceived all over this essay since there are plenty of information about some sites while barely a couple of lines about other ones. In addition, there are sites whose reports have not been updated or where new research has not been carried out, and I was even unable to access to some of them.

The limited nature of the evidence is also related to the fact that zooarchaeological research is usually focused on economy and husbandry, specie identification and animal domestication, shutting out other topics. Indeed, few zooarchaeological publications have focused on ritual and religion. Four main reasons for this have been pointed out (O’Day et al., 2004: xiii): first, sacred sites are usually inaccessible to archaeologists; second, some zooarchaeologists have traditionally claimed that ideological issues are either unimportant or are not subjects that this kind of studies can reliably contribute to; third, zooarchaeology tends to operate autonomously from other areas of both archaeology and anthropology; and four, faunal remains are rarely collected and/or analysed, as I have previously stated. Moreover, most of the reports that include a more detailed research about such topics are usually focused on offering and sacrifice, and with the exception of donkey burial, most of the information of this kind of topics is provided by the written sources rather than through the archaeological record. Woefully, textual evidence is also limited. Due to this hard scenario I needed to complete the information from the archaeological record with the information recorded at the texts.

Moreover, issues do not lie only in the quality of the bibliography. The understanding of the taphonomic processes is a key for the interpretation of findings of these types, and they are not always easy to interpret. There are discarded and fragmented bone remains that could constitute whole articulated skeletons back in time but that have been disturbed in time for several reasons. In the same way, deliberated burials can include disarticulated as well as articulated skeletal remains. Hence, the context is often more important than the finding itself, and the structured deposition of animal remains may not be interpreted as a phenomenon by itself at first sight. For such reasons I will include or allude remains from some sites that have not been found necessarily articulated but fit the type of evidence that I aim to compile in this survey.

This dissertation is structured in several sections which cover different aspects of this research. After a brief description of the historical and archaeological context of the Bronze Age—a necessary step in every historical research—the compiled data are organised by time and space for the consideration of their features and contexts in order to develop a solid comparative evaluation. Despite a detailed discussion section is worked out in the second half of the dissertation, main details and interpretations are provided in the sections of each site, in order to acquaint the reader with the evidence by establishing the bases of the further discussion of the framework exposed on this paper. I consider this structure the most suitable for this kind of essay according to the reports of similar research that I have consulted.