

5. Examining Feasting in Late Bronze Age Syro-Palestine Through Ancient Texts and Bones

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Abstract: Recent excavations at the ancient city of Hazor in northern Israel have uncovered an impressive palace complex and temple, linked together by a courtyard. This courtyard contained a raised structure, presumably an altar. Excavations in the courtyard produced a large faunal assemblage, found near the altar. Contemporary Near Eastern texts enable us to identify the bones as the detritus from a special event. Particularly important is a collection of religious texts excavated from the Syrian site of Emar. We argue that the faunal evidence from Hazor was produced during a religious feast; the Emar texts detail the occasions for, contents of, and participants in what may have been similar feasts. Completing this circle, the faunal remains suggest the existence of ritual activities that go beyond those described in the texts. Together, the textual and the archaeological evidence paint a picture of identities enforced and manipulated through public feasting.

The role of foodways in creating and maintaining identities in the ancient Near East has generated interest mainly among scholars struggling with the archaeological correlates of Israelite, Philistine, and Egyptian identity (Bloch-Smith 2003). The subject of food and identity has largely been limited to demonstrating the extent to which the Old Testament dietary laws of Leviticus can be validated archaeologically (cf. Finkelstein 1997; Hesse and Wapnish 1997). In the historical periods of the Near East then, archaeological remains of past meals are brought into identity discussions only when they can fuel arguments of the “pots and people” type (e.g., Dothan 1998). Therefore questions of diet and identity

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have entered into Near Eastern archaeological discourse only within (1) Iron Age temporal contexts, (2) the boundaries of the southern Levant, and (3) a research framework concentrating almost exclusively on ethnicity and not branching out into other potential realms of identity.

Here, we wish to broaden the interrogative sphere and discuss diet as a means of expressing or creating identity not in terms of ethnicity but instead in terms of how foodways may be used as a weapon of social inclusion and exclusion in feasting contexts, specifically feasts held for religious occasions. Various studies of feasting in the ancient Near East (e.g., Fleming 1996; Lambert 1993; Leichty 1993; Schmandt-Besserat 2001; Wiseman 1952) have demonstrated the close and common intertwining of religious rituals requiring animal sacrifice and celebratory feasts. Ancient texts make clear the point that feasts were not limited to the upper class but were publicly sponsored by religious officials or city nobility, or both, for the residents of an entire city (cf. Fleming 1996). Feasting thus patently involved issues of identity, where group belonging was openly displayed and social roles defined accordingly. Although textual evidence for special behavior regarding sacrifice and feasting is relatively abundant, no archaeological evidence of such events has yet been uncovered.

The following case study combines information derived from texts with archaeological evidence detailing context and menu, which together show how identity was created and manipulated during ancient Near Eastern religious feasts. Studies that truly intertwine both textual and archaeological data are surprisingly rare in the Near East (Zettler 1996). There exists a long tradition in that region of basing studies of religion and economy solely on texts, and renowned Assyriologists such as Oppenheim have commonly dismissed archaeology as unable to contribute meaningful information to such questions, since “the texts on clay tablets are far more valuable . . . than the monuments that have been discovered, although the latter, especially the countless products of glyptic art, offer welcome illustration to the wealth of factual information contained on clay tablets, stelae, and votive offerings” (Oppenheim 1977:10–11). There is clearly a role for both fields, since even the “facts” of the texts can be elusive: as Zettler (1996:97) opined, he “very quickly became aware of the enormous gaps in our knowledge of Mesopotamian material culture and technology . . . [and] stumbled over a bewildering array of foodstuffs . . . [Though it was possible to] read the documents, it was nearly impossible to translate individual terms with any precision.” It is best, therefore, to recognize the limitations of both data sets and to adopt a “holistic approach to the source materials bearing on . . . the ancient Near East” (Zettler 1996:101). We attempt to do so here, forming a working team (cf. Zettler 1996:97) of one scholar who specializes in ancient texts (McGeough) and another who works with animal bones (Lev-Tov).

Identity

Before turning to a presentation of the relevant evidence and an analysis of what it may mean in terms of Late Bronze Age identity in the Near East, we should first state what it is we mean by identity. What we aim to do here is to “decipher a meal,” to borrow Mary Douglas’s (1997) essay title. We wish to ex-

plore how it is that participants, especially the royal and priestly personnel who conducted the religious rituals, used feasts to emphasize the established social order and to affirm important social identities.

Our focus here is therefore on the social roles taken on by what Veblen (1973) termed the leisure class, the members of society exempted from labor and who instead directed it and collected its products. The feasts put on by this class during religious festivals were acts of conspicuous consumption, events sponsored by elites in order to demonstrate their power, not only via a connection with divinities but also through earthly manipulation of goods. That is, feasts were used as political power plays as well as to extract surplus (e.g., Hayden 2001). Ancient Near Eastern feasts (cf. Schmandt-Besserat 2001) were mechanisms of redistribution, in which mandated tribute from the lower echelons of society was at least partly given back to them. This practice bound commoners to elites in a power relationship while granting the upper class a special status as distributors of flesh and other foods.

Religious feasts in the ancient Near East therefore were intimately intertwined with social status, and proper conduct at feasts was determined according to participants' usual group memberships within society. Yet feasts for the elites not only confirmed and displayed their power and status; they also promulgated an ideal of cultural unity, since they were put on by a priest or king acting as "sponsor or general participant in feasting . . . [symbolizing] intent to reach the whole city" (Fleming 1996:96). In some ways feasts were about elite power over others, but in other ways, and at the same time, they promoted the concept of unity.

Hazor

One data set used in this study of feasting and identity is a faunal assemblage excavated from Late Bronze Age levels (ca. 1500–1200 B.C.) at the site of Hazor, located in the far north of Israel (Figure 5-1). The ancient city of Hazor is mentioned in a variety of ancient textual sources, including archives from the Syrian city of Mari and the Egyptian Execration texts (Ben-Tor 1997a). During the city's zenith from the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Late Bronze Age, it may be classified more easily as a south Syrian city-state rather than as one of the Levantine petty kingdoms that then existed in what are now the countries of Israel and Jordan (Ben-Tor 1998). Hazor's huge size (85 ha), the scattered finds of cuneiform texts from the site, and the plan of the palace all attest to a cultural affiliation with the north rather than the south. The palace's architectural plan parallels those of Syrian palaces, notably that found at the contemporary city of Alalakh in northwestern Syria. One particularly Syrian feature of Hazor's palace, beyond its overall layout, is the basalt slabs that lined the outer walls of the palace and the inner walls of the so-called throne room; indeed, Hazor is the southernmost site at which this architectural element has been found (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). Finally, the fact that Hazor was fortified, when almost no other city in the sphere of Egypt's empire in the Levant was, hints to an at least semiautonomous status (Bienkowski 1987) and perhaps again to a northern cultural affiliation.

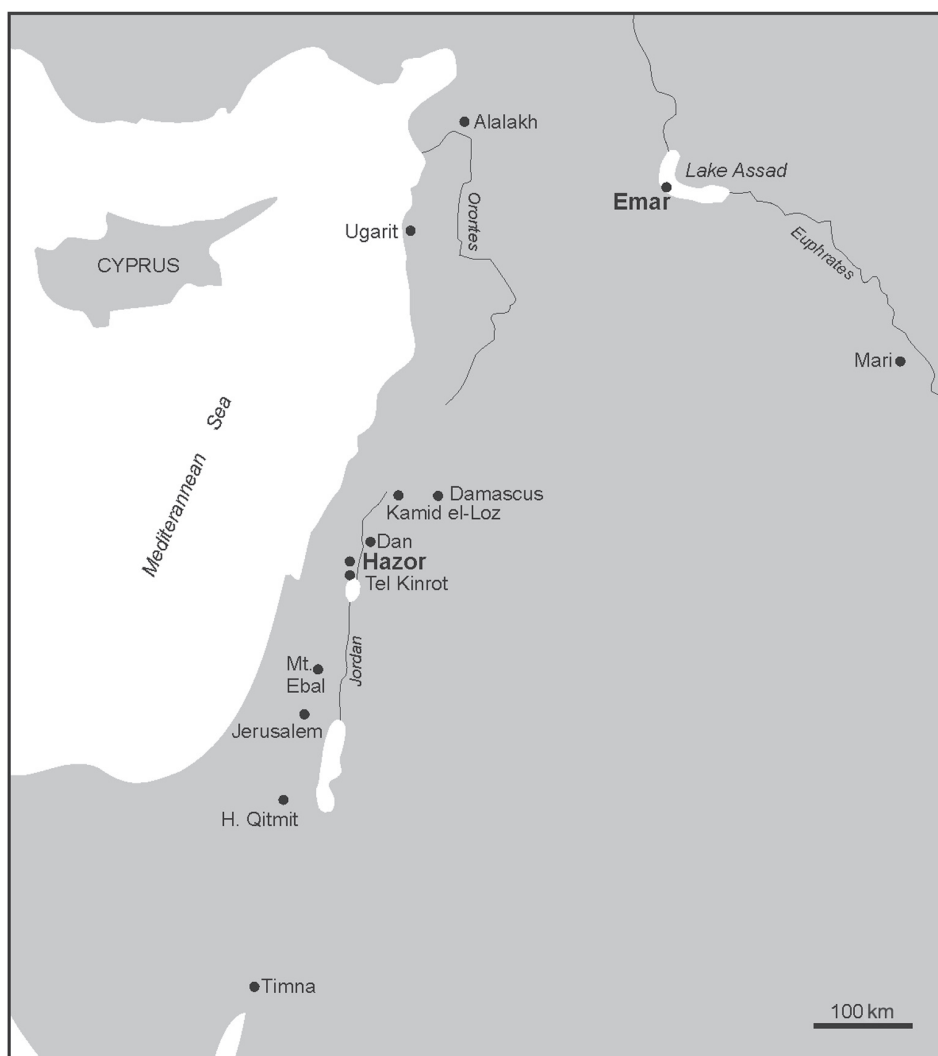


Figure 5-1. *Map of the Levant, displaying Hazor, Emar, and other sites mentioned.*

The connection between Hazor and the Syrian kingdoms to its north and northeast is important, since in addition to faunal remains this study relies on information from a Late Bronze Age cuneiform archive found during excavations at the city of Emar in northern Syria. This archive is unique in that it contains a collection of over 200 texts detailing rituals held for installations of various priestesses as well as for other religious festivals (Huehnergard 1997). These texts, which include lists of offerings, detail various religious feasts and rituals that may be similar to those that created the bone midden at Hazor. We therefore combine the textual evidence with the archaeological data from Hazor in order

to gain a clearer picture of how certain participants in ancient Near Eastern feasts broadcasted and manipulated their identities. The Hazor faunal remains testify to the foods and locations involved in feasting, while the Emar archives suggest who contributed the foods and contextualize the feast culturally.

Hazor was first systematically excavated starting in the 1950s; the current excavations began in 1990. Excavations have uncovered many features of the city, including fortifications, cult places, and much of the Late Bronze Age palace. The topography of the large tell has two main components, labeled the upper and the lower cities; we concentrate here on the former. During the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, the upper city held the city's palaces as well as some of its temples and cultic installations. The 1950s excavations here uncovered several different temples and sacrificial altars, some with incense burners, huge basalt vessels, and other seemingly cult-related vessels lying next to them (Yadin 1972). A raised platform was also found in the temple area with piles of animal bones and cooking pots sitting on it (Yadin 1972), but this platform might have been a banqueting table rather than another altar, given both its location and the items found upon it; not every raised platform need be, *per se*, an altar (cf. Zettler 1996). In recent years, excavations at Hazor have focused on uncovering the Late Bronze Age palace and its associated structures (Ben-Tor 1998).

Excavations have also revealed a large, paved courtyard leading into the palace (Ben-Tor 1997b). In the center of this courtyard is a raised stone structure, evidently the remains of an altar (Figure 5-2). On one side of the courtyard is a Late Bronze Age temple in which archaeologists found a raised stone with offering bowls still sitting in front of it (Yadin 1972). Interestingly, this temple also had attached to it a courtyard (Bonfil 1997). Thus from the architecture alone we can suggest that the courtyard served a special function, connecting the palace and the temple as well as hosting an altar itself (Figure 5-3). Finds within the courtyard further attest to the ritual nature of this space and include two bronze figurines as well as a large basalt statue of a deity (Ben-Tor 1995; Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). This courtyard-with-altar arrangement is reminiscent of similar constructions at contemporary sites to the north of Hazor, namely Kamid el-Loz in Lebanon (Metzger 1980) and Ugarit in Syria (Bergquist 1993).

Excavation of this courtyard produced a very large and spatially discontinuous faunal assemblage. Nearly 17,000 pieces of bone were found but, intriguingly, were not evenly scattered about the courtyard. The vast majority of the assemblage came from contexts abutting the altar (Figure 5-4). Two characteristics of the faunal assemblage thus immediately signal that there may be something unusual about it, namely, its context and its large size. The context of the faunal assemblage also makes it quite amenable to analysis. The assemblage came from within and beneath a thick layer of heavily burned debris. The fire that produced the debris destroyed the palace, the entire upper city, and beyond and may have occurred when the city was sacked, possibly by the Israelites (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). The contents of this destruction layer thus probably accumulated over a short span of time. Furthermore, following deposition the heavy debris layer was left virtually undisturbed across the entire tell for at least 500 years: after the city's destruction at the end of the thirteenth century, there was limited Iron Age I occu-



Figure 5-2. *Sketch of the Hazor palace courtyard with the platform/altar.*

pation on the tell, and most of that was in the form of pits 1 to 2 m in diameter and depth. No substantial rebuilding episodes occurred for several more centuries, and even these did not rebuild over the ruins of the palace and temple (Ben-Tor 1999). This sequence of destruction and limited rebuilding must have largely prevented artifacts from being disturbed after their original deposition.

Emar

Emar lies on the right bank of the Euphrates, in what is now Syria (see Figure 5-1), but is now partly submerged as a result of the creation of the Tabqa dam. A French archaeological team excavated the site from 1972 to 1978. The French-excavated portion of the site dates entirely to the Late Bronze Age (Margueron and Sigrist 1997). Numerous buildings were uncovered at the site, but most important for our study are the site's extensive archives. These archives consist of tablets written in several languages and in cuneiform script. One archive, called the Diviner's archive by modern scholars, contains well-preserved texts in a variety of genres, including texts describing ritual activities in detail

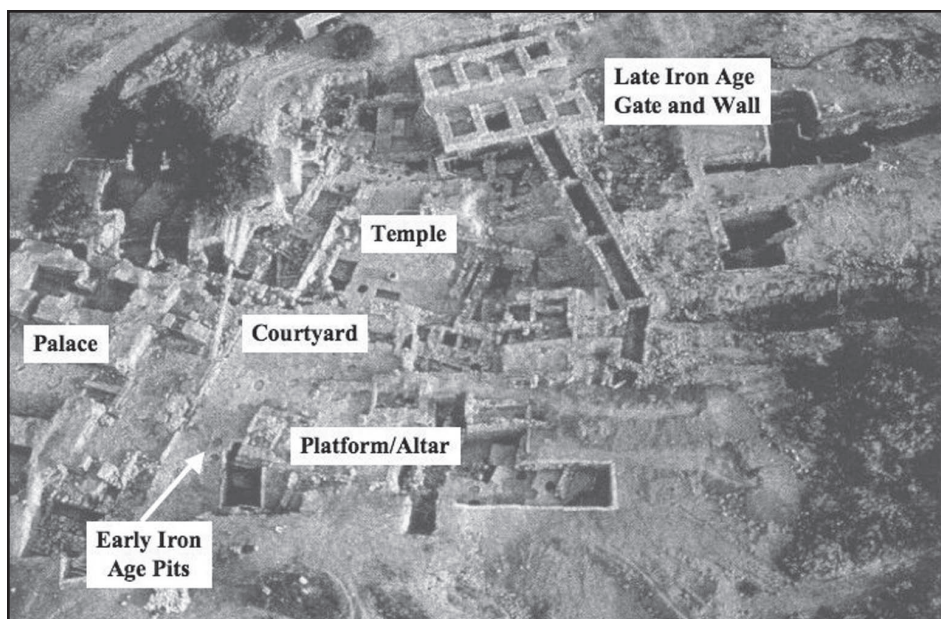


Figure 5-3. Aerial photograph showing the palace area at Hazor as exposed by the renewed excavations (permission by Amnon Ben-Tor and the Israel Exploration Society).

(Beckman 1996; Huehnergard 1997). The festival accounts preserved in the so-called Diviner's House are the subject of our discussion.

Numerous festivals are described in the cuneiform record at Emar, and much evidence is available regarding the role of feasting in identity creation and negotiation. We have chosen three Emar festivals to discuss in detail: (1) the installation of the NIN.DINGIR priestess, (2) the Mashartu Festival, and (3) the Zukru Festivals. All three festivals are called by the same name in the texts (Fleming 1992), indicating that in antiquity they were seen as related. All of these festivals are explicitly religious in that they involve the cultic personnel and the gods of the city of Emar. Nevertheless, the people of Emar probably did not distinguish between religious and secular events, so these festivals were effectively both at once (Leichty 1993): offerings were made to deities and humans enjoyed feasts. The deities received certain prescribed portions of offered animals, as did various human participants (Bergquist 1993; Fleming 1997; van Straten 1987). Offering lists show overlap in the types of foods provided for humans and for divinities, but the ratio of different goods differs between the two groups (Fleming 1992). We argue that this does not reflect the existence of two emically separate feasts, divine versus mundane; instead, it implies that different feast products were considered suitable for different consumers. We now provide a brief description of each festival before turning to how they played into the construction of social identities.

The installation of the NIN.DINGIR priestess was probably not a regularly held event, as the occasion of the festival was the death of the priestess and the

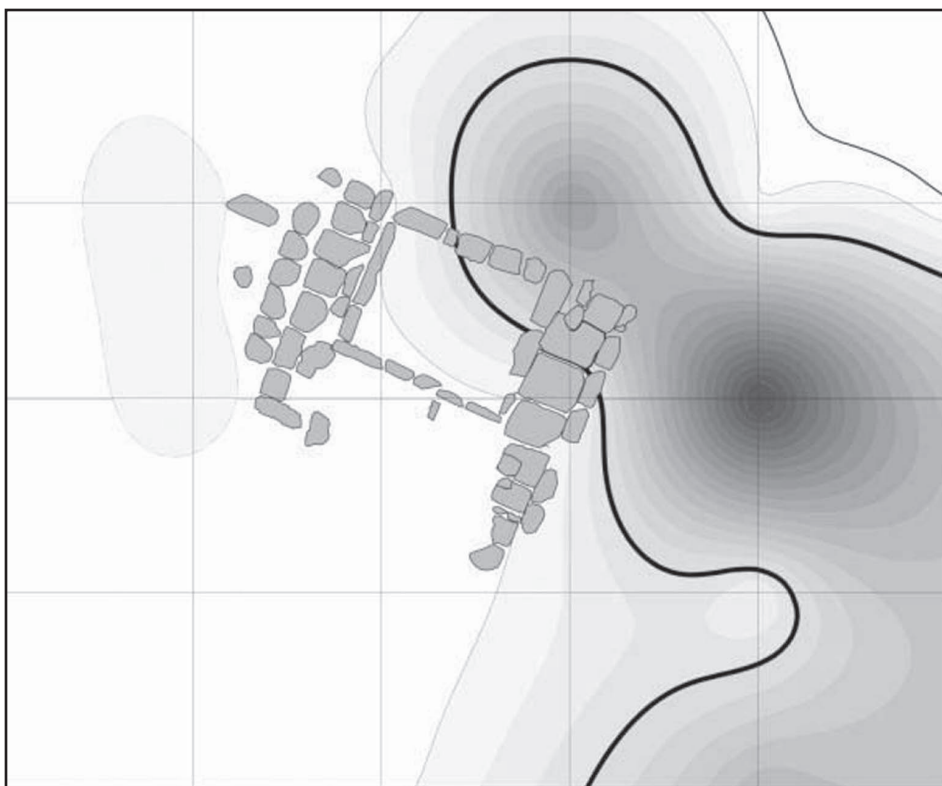


Figure 5-4. Interpolation map demonstrating the concentration of bones around the Hazor courtyard platform/altar. The thick dark line encloses loci that averaged more than 150 bones per locus, a concentration that Wapnish and Hesse (2000) have argued to be a product of ritual activities.

installation of her replacement. We are not certain what the exact role of the NIN.DINGIR priestess was at Emar, but based on comparative evidence from other sites and periods, she was probably the head priestess of the storm god IM and may have been considered the deity's wife (Fleming 1992). The festival took place over nine days; the first and last days were the primary periods of cultic drama and the middle seven days were reserved for feasting and for making offerings (Fleming 1996).

The Mashartu Festival was similarly organized around a nine-day schedule, with the middle seven days reserved for feasting (Fleming 1996). This festival also seems to have involved the installation of a priestess, presumably after the death of her predecessor. The cultic duties of this priestess are less clear than those of the NIN.DINGIR priestess. The Mashartu priestess was probably the chief priestess to Astarte, who in this ceremony was presented as a goddess with warrior qualities.

The Zukru Festivals were somewhat different in form and in nature. The most elaborate form of this festival was held every seven years and lasted seven days

(Fleming 1996), although a slightly formally different annual Zukru Festival was also held. This festival was a celebration of the god Dagan as chief deity of Emar (Fleming 1996), and in its more ornate form it included a sumptuous seven-day feast.

Identity and the Emar Festivals

The ritual texts from Emar are quite detailed in their descriptions of ceremonies and sacrifices, yet their mythical structure and nonquantitative nature leave much unexplained: this is where zooarchaeology makes its contributions. Together, these data sets allow us to investigate ritual and its socioeconomic effects in ancient cities such as Emar and Hazor. What makes the Emar festivals especially interesting for studies of food and identity is that they appear to have featured broad community participation. Most members of the community of Emar, both human and divine, participated in both the NIN.DINGIR installation and the Zukru Festival (Fleming 1996). A considerable portion of the city population must have supported these feasts through their contribution of labor and materials. Clearly they involved sizable costs, most notably in foodstuffs.

Past studies have emphasized the democratic nature of these festivals, stressing unity created through communal participation in the festivities (Fleming 1996). We suggest instead that this solidarity involved the creation and maintenance of strict hierarchies and the reification of preexisting social relationships. Nonetheless, we do not wish to downplay the religious significance of these events for the people of Emar by presenting them simply as symbolic facades masking sociopolitical realities; rather, we want to discuss social relationships as manifest in and created through genuine religious participation.

The clearest example of how these festivals shaped social identity comes from their very reason for existence. The explicit purpose of the NIN.DINGIR priestess festival was identity creation. In this ceremony, a young woman moved from a secular identity to a sacred identity, leaving the house of her father and assuming her role as a priestess (Fleming 1992). It is safe to assume that the Mashartu Festival was a similar situation. These festivals helped bridge the dangerous gap between the sacred and the profane. The Zukru Festival also helped reify social relationships by reaffirming the centrality of the worship of Dagan and unifying the town through religious feasts (Fleming 1996, 1997).

However, we wish to focus not on the festivals as a whole but on their feasting components and, specifically, on the role that feasting played with regard to identity formation. The bulk of each of these festivals was dedicated to feasting, and no major cultic activity seems to have taken place during these feasts (Fleming 2000). Nobody consciously changed his or her social status during the feasts, and no ritual dramas were enacted. During each festival, the period of feasting and offerings was liminal time; the major cultic actors had started to change status, but that shift would not be completed until the rituals of the final day were enacted. During the feasts, the clearest demonstrations of hierarchy and of social roles involved other participants.

The festival roles of the king and of the temple of the city's principal god are noteworthy. The king participated only minimally in some rituals, but he was nevertheless the major provider of fare and was granted the first portions at the feasts (Fleming 1992, 1996). The king of Emar's minor role in religious feasts may have been a reflection of his political status as a vassal of the Hittite empire; contemporary kings of greater political status, such as the ruler of Ugarit in Syria, appear to have had greater roles (Fleming 1995). While the king of Emar may not have participated very much in the festivals under discussion, he was the chief provider of resources for the feasts, and they thus helped cement his authority. It was at least in part royal wealth that enabled the festival to take place: a feast was a highly visible demonstration of royal munificence. By participating in the feast, the people of Emar actively recognized the power and generosity of the king, reifying his role as leader.

Other forms of hierarchy were also publicly enacted at the Emar feasts. The ritual texts describe a hierarchy of table settings used during the installation of the NIN.DINGIR priestess at the Temple of IM (Fleming 1992). Not only was the order of tables strictly regimented, but food portions were also laid out hierarchically (cf. Fleming 1992). Furthermore, only certain people were permitted to feast inside temple confines (Fleming 2000), which established social as well as physical boundaries between participants allowed to feast inside and those left to feast outside. Feasting was a highly structured activity, in which individual participants' locations, behavior, and even the very food they ate were determined by their social role.

This was also true for the gods who participated in these festivals. One of the longest sections of the Zukru Festival ritual tablets lists the offerings given to particular deities (Fleming 2000). Individual deities were assigned specific offerings, reflecting a divine hierarchy of importance. The city's human population also received set portions. The gods' relationships to one another and to the human community were thus demonstrated through their apportioned offerings.

The storm god, head of the city's pantheon, played an important feast role during the NIN.DINGIR priestess installation. Rituals described for that occasion make it clear that slaughter of animals and banqueting took place at the storm god IM's temple, and it was the temple's flocks that provided the livestock for the feast (Fleming 1992:156–157). The cult's wealth was literally invested in extending its influence and interests beyond the temple precinct to the entire city and region via the hosting of a feast. As with the king, outlay of food by the temple was engineered to support a central role for the cult of the storm god, having the people identify themselves with it via the parading of offered animals in the dramatic procession of IM's cult statue that came before the feast (Fleming 1992:196).

At Emar, the feast within the festival was a period of broad communal participation in public rituals. Such feasts were organized hierarchically, and while they allowed the community to participate in collective activities, they were nonetheless events at which social roles were demonstrated and reaffirmed rather than leveled.

Identity Formation at Hazor Based on Zooarchaeology

The massive bone midden in the palace courtyard of Hazor contains few inherent indications that it resulted from any special events such as feasts and sacrifices. Further, unlike the situation with texts, which often make clear the sacred or profane nature of the events they describe, archaeological deposits often do not. It is difficult for zooarchaeologists to know whether the bones they study are the remains of rituals or prosaic meals. Indeed, in and of themselves the bones from the massive midden found in Hazor's palace courtyard provide few indicators that they are the products of sacrifice and feasting. While this makes the social identities put on in ritual events difficult to tease out from bones alone, it is nonetheless possible to observe a few indications of such behavior. What links the assemblage to ritual activity is first and foremost its location, in this courtyard connecting temple and palace. A secondary source of evidence in the collection is its large size and spatial proximity to the raised platform. Another indicator may be the inclusion of six polished astragali (ankle bones) in the assemblage. Astragali, perhaps because of their natural dice-like shape, were commonly used both for games of chance as well as for divination in the ancient Near East, as they were in many other parts of the world (cf. Gilmour 1997). Five of the worked astragali are from domesticated sheep (*Ovis aries*) or goats (*Capra hircus*) and one is from a fallow deer (*Dama dama*); all are from the right sides of the animals' bodies, which may reflect deliberate selection by Bronze Age diviners.

Given the assemblage's size and inclusion of special bones, we assert that this faunal assemblage resulted from sacrifices and associated feasts. That feasting evidently took place in the courtyard is interesting in terms of identity expression. Those doing the feasting chose an exclusive area to which only temple personnel and royalty would have had access. Although there were probably separate feasts elsewhere in the town, as is hinted at from unstudied bone collections excavated in the 1950s (Yadin 1972) and via analogy with the Zukru Festival discussed in the Emar texts (Fleming 1997) as well as other ancient descriptions of such ceremonies, the feasts in the courtyard defined a separate identity based partly on their exclusivity.

Other characteristics of the courtyard faunal assemblage are also in accordance with its status as the product of one or more feasts. First, in terms of species abundance, bones of three domestic animals—sheep (*Ovis aries*), goats (*Capra hircus*), and cattle (*Bos taurus*)—dominate (Table 5-1). Aside from this trio, other domesticated species present in small numbers include pigs (*Sus scrofa*), horses or donkeys (*Equus* sp.), and a dog (*Canis familiaris*). Wild fauna are also present, namely fallow deer (*Dama dama*), mountain gazelles (*Gazella gazella*), dabbling ducks (tribe Anatini), and Nile catfish (family Clariidae). This species list is not in itself surprising since many other faunal assemblages from the region contain very similar lists and relative abundances. Horwitz and Milevski (2001) have recently observed that animal bone assemblages from Late Bronze Age cultic and noncultic contexts exhibit quite a bit of variability between geographic regions but a great deal of uniformity within them. Therefore, Late Bronze Age people “appear to have exploited for ritual purposes the species most commonly represented in their herds” (Horwitz and

Table 5-1. *Species List for Hazor*

<i>Taxon</i>	<i>Common Name</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Ovis aries</i>	Domestic sheep	176	6
<i>Capra hircus</i>	Domestic goat	244	8
<i>Ovis/Capra</i>	Sheep/goat	1,718	53
<i>Bos taurus</i>	Domestic cow	968	30
<i>Dama dama</i>	Fallow deer	40	1
<i>Gazella gazella</i>	Mountain gazelle	13	0.4
<i>Equus caballus</i>	Domestic horse	2	0.1
<i>Equus asinus</i>	Domestic ass	5	0.2
<i>Equus</i> sp.	Horse/ass	10	0.3
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Domestic pig	33	1
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	Domestic dog	3	0.1
Anatini	Dabbling ducks	4	0.1
Clariidae	Nile catfish	9	0.2
Aves	Birds	2	
Osteichthyes	Bony fish	2	
Small mammal		2	
Medium mammal		10,015	
Large mammal		3,553	
Total number of identifiable bones		3,225	
Total number of unidentifiable bones		13,574	
Total number of bones in assemblage		16,799	

Milevski 2001:298). Perhaps reflecting this situation, the Hazor midden's contents have much in common with offering lists surviving from other places and periods in the Near East (e.g., Anbar and Na'aman 1986–1987; Schmandt-Besserat 2001).

We know from a number of different ancient text sources that cattle, sheep, and to a lesser extent goats were especially important species for the feasts and offerings (Scurlock 2002). Pigs were usually not considered appropriate animals for ritual uses. Sheep and goats generally dominate Bronze Age faunal economies, and so their omnipresence in offering texts and assemblages may merely reflect their ubiquity. There may also have been some religious value to the animals unconnected to their ubiquity, given the liver models found on Bronze Age

sites, including both Hazor (Yadin 1972) and Emar (Maugeron 1995); many are apparently of sheep and goats (Pardee 2002:127). Mesopotamian divination texts tell us that seers most often derived omens from sheep and goat organs or behavioral characteristics rather than from those of other animals (Leichty 1993).

As noted previously, sheep and goats account for approximately two-thirds of the Hazor courtyard faunal assemblage. Cattle make up nearly the entire remaining third. They, like sheep and goats, were frequent sacrificial victims. However, the relative abundance of cattle at Hazor is similar to that seen at the neighboring site of Tel Kinrot (cf. Hellwing 1988–1989), which may indicate that their prominence in the assemblage does not reflect their sacrificial value; this is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Pigs are notably scarce at Late Bronze Age Hazor, accounting for only one percent of the identifiable bones in the courtyard assemblage. This pattern is characteristic of the Late Bronze Age Near East in general, where a noticeable decline in pig bone frequencies occurred from the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age (Horwitz and Milevski 2001). Redding (1991) attributes the scarcity of pig bones in New Kingdom Egypt to an Egyptian elite dislike of pork, something perhaps imitated by Egypt's vassals in the southern Levant. There may also have been a market-related factor; Egyptian tribute lists strongly favor sheep over other domestic livestock (pigs are not even mentioned), such that the demands of Egypt directed production toward sheep and away from other animals, especially pigs (Horwitz and Milevski 2001).

If avoidance of pork signaled a desire to be seen as a member of the Egyptian elite, perhaps the paucity of pig bones in the courtyard assemblage from Hazor reflects local elites imitating their Egyptian overlords. However, noncultic and apparently nonelite faunal assemblages from contemporary sites in the area, such as Tel Kinrot (Hellwing 1988–1989), also contain relatively few pig bones. In addition, contemporary myths describing divine offerings that exist from places outside the sphere of Egypt's control, that is, from the Syrian cities of Ugarit and Emar, make no mention of the animal. This is particularly intriguing because during the Late Bronze Age, the latter cities were both periodically controlled by the Hittite empire rather than Egypt (Astour 1981; Margueron and Sigrist 1997). The Hittites used pigs in religious ceremonies (Collins 2002), and we know that some Hittite religious rituals were carried out at Emar (Fleming 1995). At Hazor they did not sacrifice pigs, but neither were pigs a dietary staple elsewhere in the Late Bronze Age Levant. Pigs go unmentioned by the ritual texts from Emar and Ugarit and by period Egyptian tribute lists. One does therefore have an identity created by a lack of pigs, but this is a very general one, neither restricted to ritual space nor a small geographic area.

Despite the concordance of the Hazor courtyard assemblage with what is known of Late Bronze Age ritual, we cannot with confidence attribute its taxonomic proportions to religious requirements. As we noted previously, Late Bronze Age cultic assemblages were most likely culled from the city's general stock and simply reflect local animal husbandry practices (Horwitz and Milevski 2001). This is in a sense confirmed by Hellwing's (1988–1989) zooarchaeological study of the Late Bronze Age city at Tel Kinrot, approximately 20 km south of Hazor, which has a species range and relative abundance nearly identical to those of Hazor (Hellwing 1988–1989). Further-

more, the only Late Bronze Age area exposed at Hazor was the acropolis, which in that period contained only royal and religious buildings; we have no contemporary noncultic assemblage from the site with which to compare the courtyard collection.

While relative abundance of species may not be a useful tool by which to diagnose the Hazor assemblage as deriving from religious behavior, the distribution of butchering units may be. An Iron Age II (ninth–eighth centuries) altar complex at Tel Dan, north of Hazor, yielded a deposit of animal bones with relatively high levels of butchering refuse, mainly toes (Wapnish and Hesse 1991). The Hazor assemblage similarly contains a large number of cattle foot bones as well as cattle, sheep, and goat skull elements. Why should there have been primary waste— butchering refuse—within this sanctuary setting?

There are possibly two reasons, which are not mutually exclusive. Ancient texts tell us that sacrificial regimens often required that a priest slaughter animals on the premises of the temple. This ensured that each animal's behavior could be observed and its entrails examined for divination. Parts of the slaughtered animals were then distributed among gods, priests, and other ritual participants. In such a scenario the animals' heads and feet would have been present in the temple precinct as by-products of on-site butchering.

We should also note that period texts, such as those from Emar, discuss offerings of carcass portions that we consider offal as highly prized and reserved for religious and tribal leaders (e.g., Fleming 1997). Skeletal proportions may therefore be attributable both to the locus of activity and to their emic valuation. In other words, the skeletal element patterns in the Hazor palace courtyard may be due to a practice of slaughtering the animals within the sanctuary but also may be due to their high culinary esteem in the cultural system of this time and place, or they may be a result of both. A similar distribution of skeletal elements within the faunal assemblage from Tel Dan, that is, a considerable amount of "offal" from a cultic locus, adds weight to this point. The social rank of participants at these ritual feasts may well have been marked by meat portion rather than by the animal species chosen for slaughter and sacrifice.

At Hazor, negotiation of identity through ritual feasting was more complex than the restriction of consumption of certain types of species to certain people. Indeed, provisioning feasts involved selection of animals from a herd, balancing economically sensible culling strategies while also fulfilling the necessities demanded by cultic practice. The chosen animals were shuttled into a feasting system wherein social norms were established and reified through the selective apportionment of food and the location of its consumption.

Emar and Hazor: Comparison of Bones with Texts and Texts with Bones

The Hazor bone assemblage and the Emar archive present the opportunity to compare and contrast two very different lines of evidence about ancient Syrian religion. While the two forms of evidence cannot be compared directly—for instance, it would be naive to derive percentages of different animal species

sacrificed based on the numbers listed in the texts—the two together offer us a far more vivid and complete image of past ritual feasting than either can alone.

In the Emar archives, sheep given to festivals far outnumber cattle, sometimes by ratios of 10 to 1 or more (Fleming 1997). Although the Emar texts record contributions of animals from various corporate groups such as shepherds and townspeople, the king is the only specifically named party who must provide the feasts with particular provisions for the feasts. Shepherds supply sheep and goats; the town supplies sheep, goats, and occasionally other foods and animals as well. The king, however, is singled out and assigned specific provisioning responsibilities.

The textual evidence from Emar is mute regarding strategies that each of these groups may have used for animal selection and offering. While it is usually possible to identify the species of the animal required for offering, the textual evidence does not provide information about the age or sex of the animals, significant information for reconstructing the economic impact of the ritual activities. As we shall demonstrate below, the material evidence from Hazor can provide an important analogy for reconstructing the economic strategies that lay beneath these ritual activities.

The Emar archives recount a ceremony wherein ritual participants would bring “Shaggar down to the cattle barn, and (perform) sacrifice. . . . They slaughter one sheep at the horse stables” (Fleming 1997:437). The explanation of this line is that the cult statue of the lunar god Shaggar was brought to witness sacrifices in his honor, in this case, seemingly, at centrally located horse and cattle barns. There is some suggestion that at Emar at least some cattle and horses, but not sheep and goats, were the property of a city-state authority, either the temple or the king. It is also worth noting that the king of Emar was occasionally called upon to donate animals for sacrifice: during the Zukru Festival, he had to donate two calves and six sheep, whereas the town gave only two sheep. Not only did the king, when he provided animals for sacrifice, give far more than other corporate groups, but also throughout the many rituals of Emar he is the only official named as a donor. Therefore whenever the king donated animals, he acted as patron of the feast, which would have entailed economic loss but might also have returned great social prestige and bestowed upon him a distinctive identity as the individual able and willing to beneficently conduct such rituals (e.g., Dietler 2001; Hayden 2001). Cattle are considerably more abundant in the Hazor courtyard assemblage than they are in the ritual texts of Emar, and Yadin (1972) noted a large number of cattle bones near an apparent altar in a Late Bronze Age Hazor temple. Cattle are valuable animals, so large quantities of their remains in faunal assemblages from ritual contexts indicate a significant economic investment by either the king or the temple priesthood in ritual feasts.

A large portion of the many sheep and goats in the Hazor midden, a minimum number of individuals of nearly 100, may have come from the city’s shepherds as tithe. The rituals described in the Emar tablets contain numerous instances in which shepherds had to provide feasts and sacrifices with numerous animals (Fleming 1997). In the ritual sacrifice to Shaggar mentioned above, several sheep are slaughtered, one of which the shepherds receive. This supports the idea that

caprines were not under royal control, as cattle and horses were, but were received as tithes. Mortality profiles derived from both long-bone fusion and tooth wear patterns indicate that most of the Hazor sheep and goats were slaughtered between the ages of one and three years, which were standard market ages (Figure 5-5). Metric evidence (the greatest peripheral length of the first phalanx) indicates a bias toward large, presumably male, caprines (Figure 5-6), which again is consistent with a culling regime that followed standard economic decision-making procedures about which animals to slaughter and when.

This culling pattern is consistent with selection from herds maintained as food sources rather than selection from a temple flock dedicated to the supply of sacrificial animals. Based on analogy with the zooarchaeological data from Hazor, temple organizations at Emar did not raise herds solely for “ritual” purposes but, like other groups, kept animals as part of a general economic strategy. It is possible that sacrificial animals were selected from these herds on the basis of economically sound culling practices. Optimality-based culling scenarios viewed in an urban market economy are likely to produce a mortality profile similar to that recorded at Hazor: mostly young animals, culled when weight gain slowed and maximum meat yield was reached. Keswani (1994), however, pointed out that herders may make slaughtering decisions not on the basis of economic factors but instead on the basis of social prestige and ritual necessities; an abundance of young animals could as easily be interpreted as evidence for an intensified period or higher frequency of ritual slaughter and consumption, as opposed to market-driven culling decisions (Keswani 1994). Tithed contributions of animals for ritual events may be demographically identical to groups of animals culled according to economic considerations alone. Furthermore, it is problematic to project neo-classical market optimization strategies back into the Late Bronze Age, when there is some doubt that herd management would have been solely economic in nature. Temple flock culling strategies may parallel herd slaughtering patterns for economic, social, or ritual reasons and perhaps for all of these reasons.

It may be possible to differentiate feasting animals tithed from shepherds from those culled out of temple flocks by those same population statistics. To begin, there may be a difference according to species, at least at Emar; a central authority owned cattle and horses but not sheep and goats. Presumably though, temple flocks managed to supply the ritual system with the animals it required for sacrifices and feasts not otherwise received via tithes. Temple flock slaughter profiles might therefore emphasize young animals, whose meat was considered better. Yet the Hazor assemblage is dominated by mature animals, which also predominate in sacrificial texts from elsewhere in the Levant (e.g., Anbar and Na’aman 1986–1987; Pardee 2002). This seems to be a difference between tithed animals, which are likely to be mature, market-aged ones, and predominately young animals from temple herds that were raised specifically for sacrifice. Since the animals used for feasts and sacrifices were at least partly supplied by tithes on herders, it has to be assumed that the temple could not provide all of the ritually necessary animals if it was to retain an economically viable flock. Thus a livestock tribute was levied on the city populace with the result that feasts were

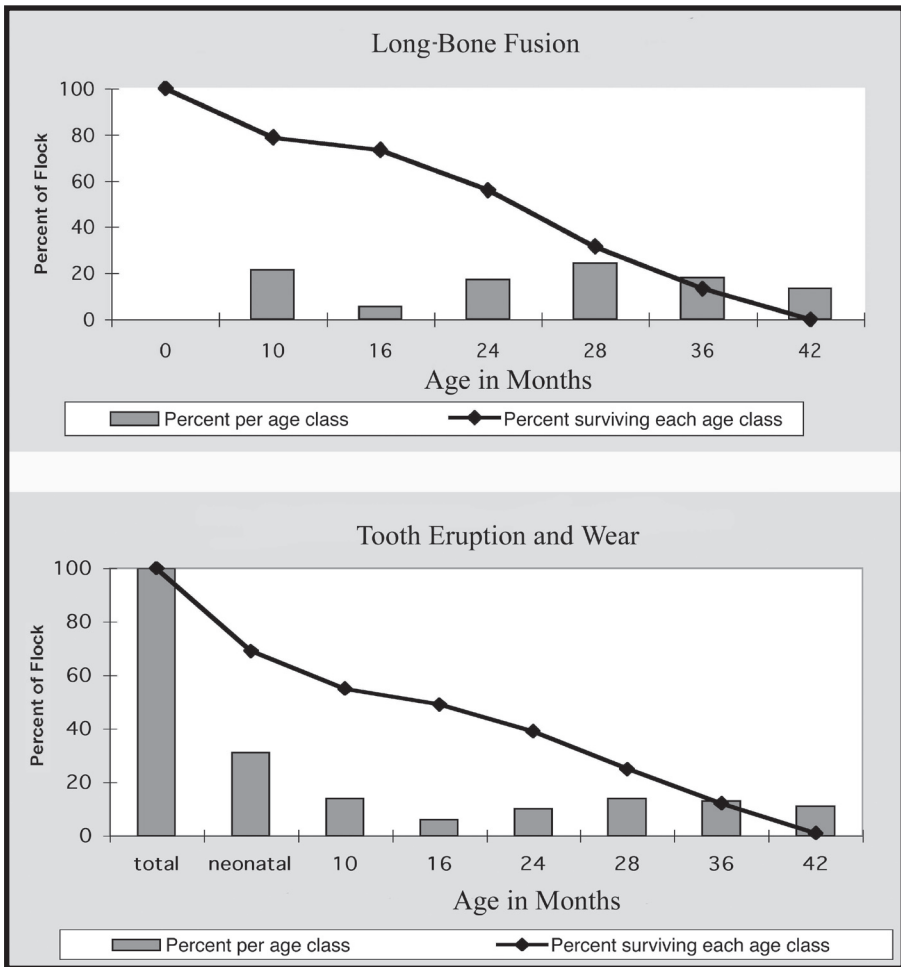
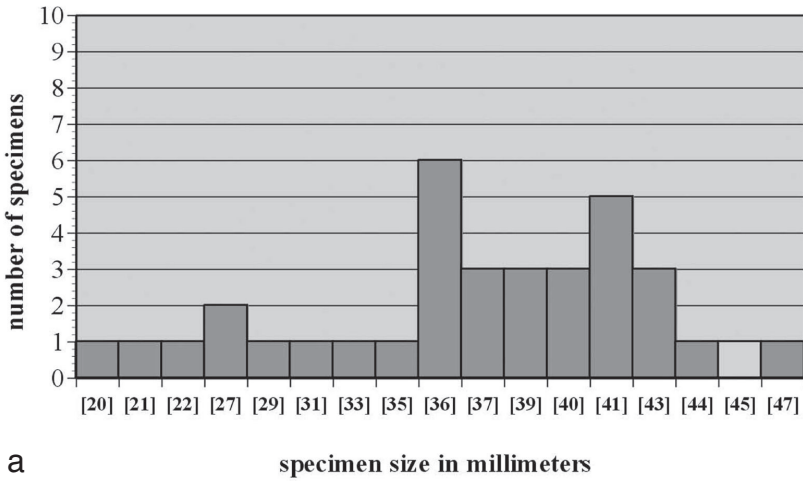


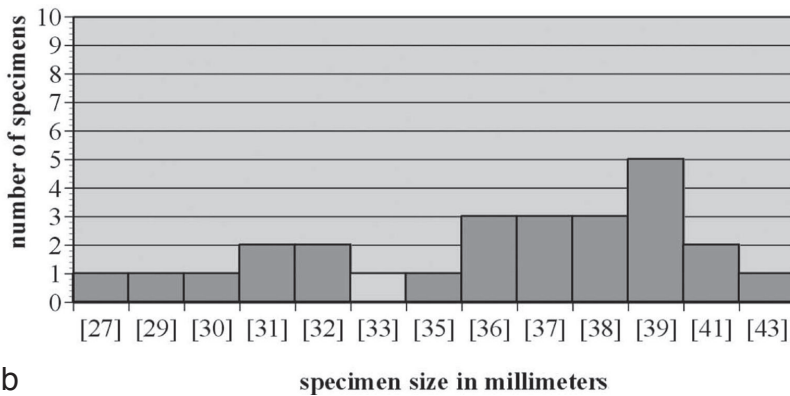
Figure 5-5. Mortality profiles for sheep and goats.

a mechanism by which elites asserted their status as arbiters of divine authority in order to amass goods for their own use as well as for redistribution, a classic leveling mechanism (Hayden 2001).

In light of the Emar texts' mention of a royal (and royally managed?) cattle enclosure, perhaps the cattle for ritual slaughter were raised specifically for that purpose and were owned by the king or the priesthood. The cattle remains from Hazor suggest a slaughter strategy similar to that used for sheep and goats. There were too few ageable bones to construct a mortality profile, but metric measurements again indicate a preponderance of large (male) animals (Figure 5-7). Cattle are very important economically as live animals, not only the females as sources of milk but also because of their ability to plow land and perform other heavy labor activities. Therefore bias toward males is highly interesting; many ancient texts specify that bulls should be sacrificed. The Emar texts discuss the



a

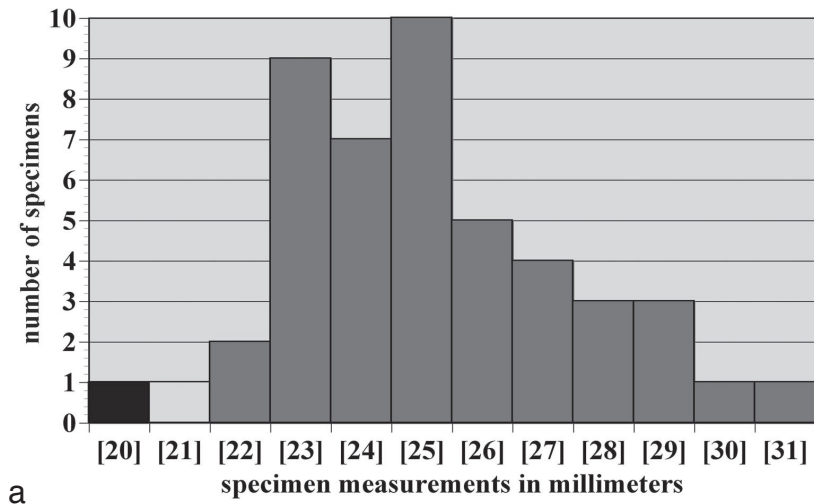


b

Figure 5-6. Measurements of sheep (a) and goat (b) first phalanges, using greatest peripheral length (mean for sheep = 36 mm; mean for goats = 35 mm).

slaughter of “GUD,” a cuneiform sign variously translated as either a bull or an ox (a castrated bull). Bulls and oxen grow larger than cows and are therefore tremendously useful for plowing, but they also may be prized for their size and/or their horns. They could grant more prestige to anyone donating them for sacrifice (Keswani 1994). Demographic profiles provided by both bones and texts provide a window into the sacrifice and feasting regimen of Late Bronze Age Hazor and Emar and demonstrate the separate roles of commoners and elites that were played out during these events.

Another issue is that of dietary diversity rather than quantity in feasting foods. Conspicuous consumption often inspires awe due to both sheer amounts and variety. Zooarchaeologically, variety can most easily be measured by using diversity analysis. Diversity is a statistic derived from ecology, where it is used to compare nominal scale data, such as the variety of species inhabiting an ecosystem (cf. Zar



(Black indicates immature specimen.)

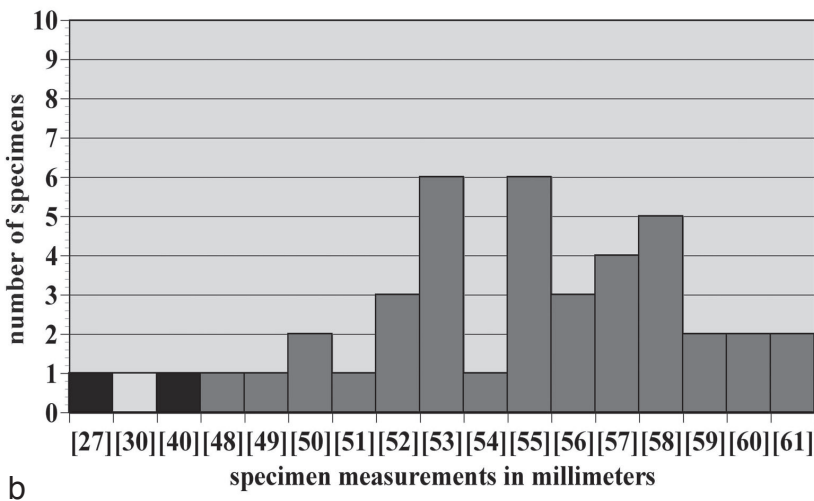


Figure 5-7. Measurements of cattle first phalanges, using proximal breadth (a) (mean = 25.2) and greatest peripheral length (b) (mean = 54.1).

1999). In zooarchaeology, diversity assesses the number and relative importance of species present in faunal assemblages (Cruz-Urbe 1988). Although diversity statistics generally produce two numerical components, richness (variety) and evenness (relative abundance; Meltzer et al. 1992), only richness was evaluated here. The richness score of the Hazor assemblage was compared with scores for other Late Bronze Age faunal assemblages deriving from the general region, era, and cultic contexts (Figure 5-8). The Hazor courtyard assemblage included only about a dozen species, but it nonetheless proved as or more diverse than the

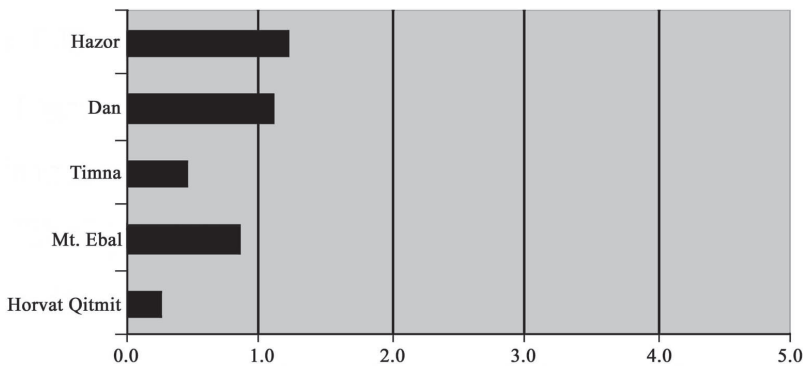


Figure 5-8. Shannon's diversity scores for Hazor and several other Levantine faunal assemblages excavated from cultic contexts. The Hazor assemblage displays no statistically significant difference in diversity ($p > .05$) from the other collections, with the exception of that from Mt. Ebal, which is more diverse than that from Hazor ($p < .05$). Data for Tel Dan from Wapnish and Hesse (1991); for Timna from Lernau (1988); for Mt. Ebal from Horwitz (1986–1987); for Horvat Qitmit from Horwitz and Raphael (1995).

others to which it was compared. The diversity is especially interesting in light of the Emar texts, which record a variety of food gifts to temple personnel and deities. Among the foods given to them are gazelles, fish, birds, and venison, in addition to domestic animals. In these texts, it is only temple personnel who receive wild fauna; the king, temple, and town receive only sheep and cattle (Fleming 1997). In parallel fashion, the Hazor assemblage contains small quantities of fallow deer, gazelles, ducks, and catfish. Dietary diversity in both the faunal remains and ancient texts may be interpreted as a means by which elites differentiated themselves from nonelites. It may have been the case, as it was in Mesopotamia earlier (Schmandt-Besserat 2001), that, like shepherds, hunters and fishermen were expected to bring to the feast foods representative of their professions. Alternatively, perhaps there was some degree of choice in what type of food individuals could provide.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Emar texts is their specificity in regard to which portions of sacrificial animals were given to various participants or groups of participants in the religious festivals. While many ancient Near Eastern accounts of ritual feasts state that both divine and human participants received meat, the Emar tablets appear unique in their precision about how to divide animal carcasses among human participants. Sometimes the distributions follow a perceptible logic: processional singers received the lungs of the sacrificed bull. At other times the relationship between role and portion received is—at least to modern eyes—incomprehensible: in the same ritual as the one for which the singers were rewarded with the lungs, the king received the kidneys and the diviner was rewarded with “the half-cut plus his share, the head, the intestines, the fat, and the hide” (Fleming 1997:431). It is clear that the same groups were consistently apportioned the same sections of the sacrificed animals. One can

therefore argue that meat allotment also contributed to the creation, or at least reinforcement, of festival participants' social identities.

In light of the knowledge that particular persons or groups received specific meat cuts at Levantine Late Bronze Age feasts, we now turn to considering relative abundances of different skeletal elements in the Hazor assemblage. However, one caveat is that many of the ritual portions mentioned in the texts are either insufficiently described for us to identify them with particular bones (e.g., the diviner's "half-cut" mentioned previously) or else come from boneless parts of the body.

If one divides sheep/goat and cattle bodies into butchering units (head, trunk, forelimbs, hindlimbs, and feet) the distribution of identifiable bones throughout the entire courtyard reveals a pattern (Figure 5-9). Skull elements dominate among both sheep/goat and cattle remains, while front and hind limb elements are also abundant. Bones of the breast, ribs, and sternum are present in the Hazor assemblage (trunk category in Figure 5-9) but only in relatively small numbers. Such bones are difficult to identify to species due to both their fragility and their lack of diagnostic landmarks. Cattle foot elements are much more common than are those of sheep and goats. These faunal data may be compared with an account found in the Emar texts of a ritual honoring the god Ninurta, during which leaders, possibly tribal chiefs from the surrounding area, ate the hocks (feet) of a sacrificed ox/bull. The diviner as usual received its head, and the rest of the population received in one instance its right breast and in another an unspecified side of breast (Fleming 1997). It may also be noteworthy that an assemblage of cooking pots as well as a bull's skull was found sitting on top of an elevated platform within a Late Bronze Age temple at Hazor (Yadin 1972). The Hazor assemblage, arguably, emphasizes the point made previously with reference to the Emar texts that animal parts we would disparage today were then thought not only edible but even worthy of important officials. This is a case in which archaeology aids texts: in most cases ritual descriptions do not specify the participants' portions, and in those cases when such sacrifices are elaborated upon, they usually describe luxurious donations of young, fat animals or hefty carcass portions. Gifts of bodily extremities to the gods and royalty have few parallels in ancient Levantine texts (but see van Straten 1987 for a review of the Greek evidence for this practice).

While at Emar important secular officials were honored with the feet and the diviner received the head (evidently a prized portion), the overall distribution of bones at Hazor indicates that those who feasted in the palace courtyard did so largely on meat from the head (possibly including the brain) and the feet. We have argued that these people were probably important officials and priestly personnel. The fact that entire cities and towns feasted during these multiday religious festivals does make them to some extent communally integrative events (e.g., Fleming 1996). Yet at the same time, these feasts made social differences obvious. Banqueters did not all eat in the same place or have access to the same quantities and varieties of food. According to the Emar texts, at each feast numerous different banquet tables were set up, and the participants assigned to them were served their portions according to a prescribed order. As well, some

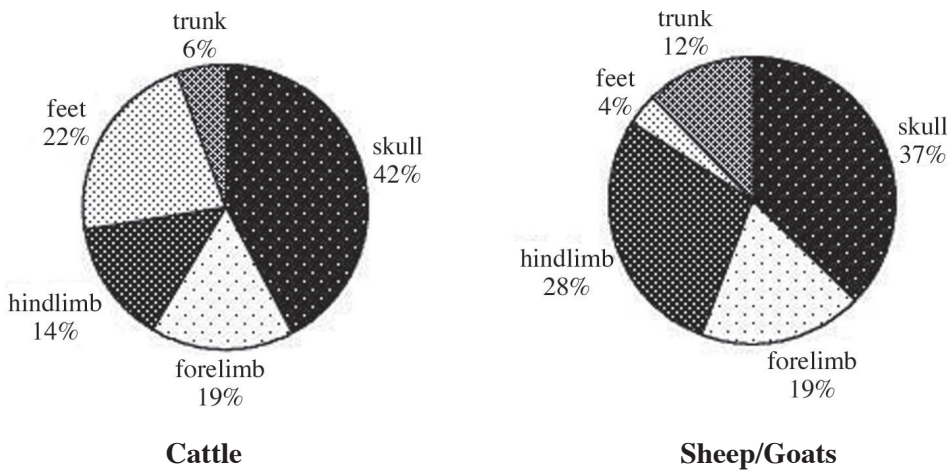


Figure 5-9. *Relative abundance of butchering units for cattle and sheep/goats.*

participants were expected to supply at least a portion of the feasting food via tithes; others had offerings supplied to them by the palace. We therefore have a situation in which the elite-sponsored events were both overtly integrative and socially divisive.

The faunal remains from Hazor reflect practices similar to those described in the Emar archives, but they expand on the textual sources by demonstrating the economic principles and decision-making processes that lay beneath the ritual behavior. More than acting as a naive confirmation of the textual data, the zoo-archaeological evidence demonstrates that the Late Bronze Age ritual calendar must have had tremendous social as well as economic impact on cities such as Hazor. Utilization of both archaeological and textual data in service of a single question provides complementary suggestions.

Discussion

We have discussed Late Bronze Age ritual feasting as known from both textual and archaeological materials. The Emar texts make explicit the connection between religion and feasting. The animal bones from Hazor indicate this connection via their context and composition. Both situations were certainly feasts, following Dietler's (2001:67) definition of feasts as "public ritual activity centered around the communal consumption of food and drink." We now turn to what this evidence tells us about the role of feasting in Late Bronze Age identity formation.

There are marked similarities between the textual and the archaeological evidence in terms of foods communally consumed. Both textual and archaeological sets of evidence demonstrate that domesticated animals were the primary source for banquet meats. Nonetheless, both the Emar and the Hazor evidence also indicate that a greater variety of animals were available to elite participants in the

feast. The Emar texts state which persons received various foods, while the faunal assemblage from Hazor contains only limited amounts of nondomestic animal remains. The elites probably consumed the latter meats. We suggest that this is an example of Dietler's (2001) "diacritical" mode of commensal politics, wherein ranked differences were reified and naturalized through publicly different menus.

Social exclusivity was manifest not only in the foods served at feasts but also in the locations of commensal activities. The courtyard midden at Hazor is in an elite area, between the palace and the temple. The feasts described in the Emar texts took place at multiple locations throughout the city, yet there is a discernable hierarchy of these locations implied in instructions for who was to eat where. At both Hazor and Emar, then, ranked differences were reinforced through spatial differentiation of feasting participants.

Feasting at Hazor and Emar was inextricably bound up in identity formation and reification. At Emar, these feasts functioned emically as parts of larger ceremonies designed to move individuals from one identity to another. The role that these feasts played is quite significant on a broader, community-wide scale: commensal events such as those that took place at Hazor and Emar reify the social identities of all the participants, collectively and as individuals. Community ties were strengthened by the undoubtedly pleasurable activity of feasting, as were the bonds between the human population and their deities. At the same time, internal societal roles and ranks, such as king and shepherd, were reinforced in an asymmetrical system of mutual obligation. Feasts were situations of conspicuous consumption in which identity was communicated and reinforced at both the symbolic and the practical levels (Dietler 2001).

Both the textual and the archaeological evidence highlight roles of particular feasters. The roles of cultic officials and of deities are explicitly described in the Emar texts, and given the context of the Hazor assemblage, we expect that deities and cultic officials played analogous roles there. In both situations, the king seems to have contributed greatly to the feast. At Hazor this is signaled in the location of the feast and the proportion of cattle bones, whereas the Emar texts credit the ruler with having provided specific portions of the feast. We have also suggested that at least at Emar the temple itself may have provided some of the sacrificial animals. The host of and main provider for the feast was the king, and as such he was the ritual's benefactor. Therefore these feasts were what Dietler (2001) termed "patron-role" events: the king laid out quite a bit for the feast but recouped that in political capital, as the others had to acknowledge their dependence on his generosity.

Feasts also emphasized occupational roles. At Emar, the location of feasts and foods involved in individuals' feasting experiences were determined by the participants' occupations. At Hazor, the range of species identified in the courtyard faunal assemblage suggests that a variety of food specialists provisioned the feasts held there, but the courtyard's exclusive location may demonstrate that these donors could not participate in the feast despite having provided some of the foods for it.

At both Emar and Hazor, we have strong evidence that nonroyal participants were compelled to provide food for the feasts, possibly through a redistributive scheme. This accords with Hayden's (2001) suggestion that feasts drive the

production of surplus, since a surplus is required for conspicuous consumption. We agree with Hayden that small-scale food producers, obliged to support cultic feasting, would have been forced to generate surpluses. This is in keeping with Chayanov's (1965 [1925]) assertion that "drudgery" prevents small-scale producers from producing beyond a mere subsistence level unless these producers are compelled to do so by outside forces.

We suggest that the role of feasting in the formation and maintenance of ancient Near Eastern identities is a highly productive avenue of inquiry. While we have focused on examples from the Late Bronze Age cities of Hazor and Emar, numerous areas for further research are readily apparent. For example, an eighth-century Assyrian text tells of an incredible feast hosted by King Assurnasirpal II to celebrate the dedication of his new palace. Nearly 70,000 partakers were supposedly presented a sumptuous meal composed of phenomenal numbers of cattle, sheep, deer, gazelles, birds, fish, eggs, and locusts; huge amounts of wine and beer; and a long list of grains, vegetables, oils, nuts, and spices (Wiseman 1952). There is explicit and detailed evidence for feasting available in ancient Near Eastern texts and probably in archaeological contexts as well. In years to come, the region will surely prove fertile ground for the study of the interrelationship of feasting and identity.

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