

‘..SLAYING OXEN AND KILLING SHEEP, EATING FLESH AND DRINKING WINE ..’: FEASTING IN LATE BRONZE AGE HAZOR

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Communal feasts, events of ritual activity that involve shared food and drink consumption and display in religious and secular elite contexts, received considerable attention in anthropological and archaeological literature in recent years. In those studies, the focus was on the identification of feasting in the material record of ancient societies, and an attempt was made to decipher the complex social and political meanings inherent in such contexts. In this study, the aim is to identify and interpret traces of feasting activities in the context of Canaanite society of the 14th–13th century BCE. The site of Hazor, the largest Canaanite kingdom, serves as a case study for this discussion. Archaeological correlates of commensal feasts, uncovered in the extensive excavations of the site, are presented and discussed within the general picture of the Canaanite palatial system.

Keywords: Feasts, Conspicuous consumption, Hazor, Late Bronze Age, Canaan.

For more than a decade, the social institution of communal feasting has been the focus of anthropological and archaeological discussions. Feasts are defined as events of ritual activity that involve communal food and drink consumption and display, in contexts that are different from mundane consumption (Dietler 1996, 89). On the basis of ethnographic and comparative studies, feasts have been shown to fill a variety of social and political roles and they are an essential component of human social practice (Dietler and Hayden 2001).

‘Commensal politics’ is seen as a fundamental and universal domain of political action, and can be traced in all types of societies (Dietler 2001, 66–69). Shared consumption of food and drink is part and parcel of social life, from the simple family meal to the grand banquets of the state. The latter type of feasts were defined as ‘diacritical’ feast by Dietler (1996, 98–99; 2001, 85–88) or as ‘tribute’ feast by Hayden (2001, 58). These are competitive and exclusionary events that involve differentiated cuisine and styles of consumption, as means of symbolical reification of class differences and social status (Hamilakis 2000, 58–59). Diacritical feasts characterize chiefdoms, early states and other highly differentiated hierarchical societies, who practice commensal politics as part of their creation, negotiation and maintenance of power and identity (Bray 2003; Pollock 2003). Feasts in these societies are state or temple sponsored, and are organized and provided by the ruler and held under the auspices of the palace or the religious elites (Hayden 2001, 46). As shown in many cross-cultural case studies, such public feasts are an important part of the processes inherent in the struggle of fully fledged states and even empires, to survive and maintain their ever fragile legitimation and credibility in the eyes of their members and neighbours (Dietler 2003). In occasions of ‘formal commensality’, meanings and practices which are associated with food and drink consumption are ritualized and manipulated in the service of political, religious and social goals (Pollock 2003, 19–20). Feasts also play an important part in processes of social change, and have been shown to serve as arenas for ritual and social action that led, in some historical contexts, to significant transformations (Dietler and Hayden 2001, 16; Helwing 2003).

In this paper, I will attempt to detect traces of feasting activity in the material record of the largest Canaanite city of the Late Bronze Age, the city of Hazor. I will argue that on

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the basis of finds from Hazor and other Canaanite cities, diacritical feasts were an important part of the religious and social life in Canaan of the second millennium BCE. The spatial and temporal context of the Canaanite feasts, the key to understanding the social and political role they played in the maintenance of the competitive and fragile Canaanite city-state system, will be identified and examined.

FEASTS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Feasts, and especially diacritical feasts, can be identified in the archaeological record on the basis of several different aspects of empirical data (Hayden 2001 table 2.1).

1. *Contemporary written records* are an important source for the study of feasts. These records are often of administrative nature and, thus, provide details about the provisioning of animals and other foodstuffs, the preparations before the ceremony, the drinking and serving vessels and other paraphernalia (such as furniture and items for display) used in these occasions, the identity and social status of the main providers of goods consumed during the feasts and the temporal and spatial locations of the public gatherings.

An example of the importance of textual evidence in the reconstruction of communal feasts is the wealth of data provided by the Linear B archives found in the Mycenaean palaces (Wright 2004). These texts, despite their strict economic and administrative nature, illuminate the crucial role of royal-sponsored feasts in the palatial societies of the Aegean Bronze Age (Palaima 2004). Similar information can be gleaned from ancient Near Eastern texts of economic, mythological, religious and royal nature (Schmandt-Besserat 2001; Fleming 2000; Lev-Tov and McGeough 2006).

2. *Pictorial representations* of feasts provide a vivid description of the actual feasting behaviour and its material correlates in the society under study. Iconographic descriptions shed light on the number and status of participants, the physical environment of the feast (architectural context, furniture, items of display, serving vessels and consumables) and other activities preformed during the event (such as dancing, music playing and gift and tribute giving). Artistic representations of banquets and royal feasts were common in ancient Near Eastern art from the third millennium onwards, and provide invaluable information for the reconstruction of these religiously and/or politically charged events in Near Eastern societies (Collon 1992; Reade 1995; Pinnock 1994).

3. *Remains of foods*, of both plant and animal origin, are an important marker of feasting activities. Such remains will be considered as reflecting feasts when they are found in unusual abundance, when exotic or labour-intensive species are represented or when there is evidence of intentional waste of food items (Hayden 2001, 40). Other criteria are the emphasis on certain species or age and gender of the butchered animals, the selection of certain parts of animals and plants (anatomically selective faunal deposits), the type and context of butchery and meat preparation, the concentration of food remains in association with elite or ceremonial structures and signs of special treatment of the consumables before their consumption (Pauketat *et al.* 2002; Halstead and Isaakidou 2004).

4. *Ceramic assemblages* connected to feasts consist of food preparation vessels, serving vessels and prestige items. Unusual types and numbers of vessels, as well as their average larger size than vessels found in other contexts, hint at the vessels' connection to large-scale meals and ceremonial feasting (Blitz 1993). A model for the inference of feasting activities from their residual ceramic assemblage was recently proposed in the context of Mycenaean feasting (Dabney *et al.* 2004). This model proposes the following criteria: deviation from the norm in the amount and kind of decoration, higher than usual percentage of open serving vessels, prevalence of cooking pots and food-preparation vessels, ritual/miniature vessels, restricted range of vessels and the existence of oversized vessels for shared consumption. These criteria are especially important when dealing with assemblages comprising mundane vessels, similar in ware and form to those used in domestic context in everyday use.

A recurring feature of serving vessels used in feasts is their emphasized standardization, in terms of size, form, raw material and type of decoration (Stein and Blackman 1993, 31). This standardization is due both to their production process, usually by potters attached to the elite organization (Knappett 2001) and to their pattern of consumption in state-sponsored large-scale communal occasions and according to formalized manners and notions of etiquette. Pottery vessels used during cultic meals were sometimes intentionally broken and deposited in special containers or pits (Müller 1998).

5. Facilities for 'diacritical' or 'tribute' feasting might include *special structures* for the accommodation of the elite hosts, their guests and large numbers of participants. Monumental buildings are often used for the 'framing' of elite consumption of foodstuffs and display objects (Dietler 2001, 86). In certain contexts, the status of the participants can be shown to have been spatially reflected by their distance from the centre of the scene (Bendall 2004 for the Mycenaean palace).

6. *Prestige items and ritual paraphernalia* are an important component of public feasts. These are publicly displayed and used to exhibit the elite wealth and control of resources. In contexts of communal feasts, prestige items can be consumed and manipulated in several ways. The display of items made of exotic materials and foreign craftsmanship is a vehicle of elite empowerment, as the acquisition and possession of such items symbolize the control over geographical distance and the knowledge and participation in a cosmopolitan sphere not shared by others (Helms 1988). Another course is ritual breakage and public destruction of prestige items, symbolizing the control over the sources of these items and the ability to access them. Fragments of the broken items are sometimes distributed among the participants in the ritual destruction, as a memento and means to tie them to the ceremony and its holders (Hayden 2001, 53; for a case study see Rehak 1995). Highly decorated or imported foreign pottery can also be considered as prestige item, meant to be publicly displayed or intentionally destroyed in the course of the feasting event (Hayden 2001, 48; Day and Wilson 1997; Steel 2004). A special aspect of vessels and objects used and displayed in public ceremonies is emphasized archaism, and the use of 'old' or 'conservative' objects (Stocker and Davis 2004, 70). These serve as symbolic references to old traditions and are used to invoke a sense of a link and continuity with the past which is an essential aspect of ritual (Dietler 2001, 71; Kertzer 1988, 12–14).

All the above aspects of feasting are expected to leave recognizable traces in the archaeological record. The identification of some or all in a well documented archaeological context should provide a basis for the identification feasting activity, the type of feasts and their roles in its historical context.

Diacritical feasts are the type envisioned to have taken place in the city-states or kingdoms of the ancient Near East, from the third millennium onwards, and documented in written records and artistic representation (Pinnock 1994; Schmandt-Besserat 2001). The Mesopotamian feasts of the Early Dynastic period were argued by Pollock to be exclusionary ideological events, aimed to promote distinction between the elite and other sectors of society, as well as to maintain the coherence of the privileged group (Pollock 2003). In the second millennium, a wealth of written and material evidence attests to the existence of feasts as a major social arena in the Mycenaean palaces. Feasts were occasions of celebrations of elite status and habits, while hierarchical inequality was expressed, affirmed and maintained (Wright 2004). Interpretation of the Linear B tablets and patterns of distribution of pottery and metal vessels in and around the palace illuminate a system of differentiated participation in the palace-sponsored banquets (Bendall 2004). Banqueting and sacral feasts are also attested in Hittite documents (LeBrun 1993). The case of the kingdoms of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age will be discussed below.

The Canaanite city-states of the second millennium BCE provide an excellent potential avenue for the search for large-scale feasts in a highly differentiated and competitive society.¹ These centralized and hierarchical polities, spread in a closely knit web in the area of present day Israel and Lebanon are well-documented, both archaeologically and in contemporary written records (for an overview see Bunimovitz 1995; Herzog 1997). But despite recent interest in feasting behaviours in the context of the eastern Mediterranean and the ancient Near East, the subject of Canaanite feasting in the Bronze Age was until recently largely neglected (Steel 2002; Yasur-Landau 2005).

Written records relating to the practices and events held in the temples or the royal courts of the Canaanite city-states are absent. Indirect evidence can be found in the Amarna letters, sent from the Egyptian court to its Canaanite vassals (Moran 1992). Drinking vessels made from precious metals, as well as thrones and other prestige objects, are listed among the royal gifts sent from the Pharaoh to his peer monarchs but are seldom delivered to the lower-rank Canaanite city rulers (Cochavi-Rainey 1999). However, these references are too brief to serve as an aid in the interpretation of Canaanite feasting. The rich corpus of written sources relating to ritual and religious feasts from Emar on the Euphrates illuminates some aspects of these events in the Syro-Mesopotamian cultural sphere during the 14th century BCE (Fleming 1996; 2000). Yet it should be emphasized, that the socio-political differences between Syrian Emar under the Hittite hegemony and the Egyptian vassal-kingdoms in Canaan precludes a direct correlation between the feasting behaviours of these polities (Fleming 1992).

Invaluable sources for the study of feasts in Canaan are the few fragmentary iconographic depictions of such events. Liebowitz offered a short discussion of the theme, based on the appearance of feast scenes in two of the Megiddo Ivories and in the bone plaque from Tel el-Fara'h (South) (Liebowitz 1980). More recently, Ziffer placed these depictions within the wider framework of ancient Near Eastern banquet scenes (Ziffer 2005). The ivories, dated to the 14th–12th centuries BCE, are the only artistic description of feasting scenes in local Canaanite art and, thus, are important sources for the reconstruction of Canaanite feasting during the Middle and Late Bronze ages. These artistic depictions provide contemporaneous iconographic description of the 'framing devices' that mark the ritual event (Dietler 2001, 89), and their detailed analysis can be used as a guide to the contextual analysis of the scenes.

The ivory 'Feast Plaque' from Megiddo (Loud 1939 pl. 4; Liebowitz 1980, 165; Barnett 1982, 26–7; Ziffer 2005, 150–154) bears the description of a banquet scene and a returning army with prisoners. Material components of the feast are a throne and stool, drinking cups which are held in the participants' hands, a large two-handled krater, and two animal-headed cups carried on a flat surface by the two servants. One of the cups is lion-headed, a form known at Canaanite sites such as Hazor, Ugarit and Qatna. The other is shaped as the head of a horned animal, probably a gazelle, and a similar example in bronze was found at Qatna (Zevulun 1987, 91). The animal-headed cups were probably used for serving and drinking on occasions of ceremonial consumption and display, and had a ritual function suggested by their find-contexts (Zevulun 1987, 96–99). References in the Emar tablets and the dedicatory inscription engraved on the lion-headed example from Ugarit attest to the role of such cups in religious rituals and offerings to the gods (Zaccagnini 1990; Yadin 1985). Drinking cups made of precious metals were exchanged as gifts between palatial elites throughout the area (Wachsmann 1987, 58–59; Cochavi-Rainey 1999, EA 41, EA 25 *passim*) and, thus, can be interpreted as Canaanite royal feasting paraphernalia, expected to be found in contexts of religious and ceremonial commensal events.

The four ivory inlays from Megiddo's 'treasury' (Liebowitz 1980, 165) depict chariot battle scenes (nos. 159, 161), a procession (no. 162) and a feast scene (no. 160) (Loud 1939 Pls. 32–33). The last scene provides numerous details about the objects used by the participants: stools and a banquet table, drinking cups and a two-handled krater set on a stand. The main figure is holding a lotus flower in one part of the scene and is sitting in front of a structure in the other, hinting at the location of the scene within an urban space (Ziffer 2005, 150–154). The ivory plaques from Megiddo were originally inlaid in furniture (such as thrones or chairs) or in jewellery and gaming boxes. As such, they must have been in themselves part of feasting or ritual events paraphernalia, and the images depicted on them mirrored these actual events. It is noteworthy that almost identical parallels to the objects depicted on the inlays can be found in the local ceramic repertoire of LB Canaan (Yasur-Landau 2005, fig. 3).

These artistic depictions of Canaanite banquet scenes were found in a royal monumental structure, the 'treasury' of palace 2041 at Megiddo. Their find-context proves that the images were meant to be seen and appreciated by the same audience who was expected to participate in the actual banquets. The material representations of this exclusionary elite social practice served as self-reflection of the idealized and ritualized actions of the same elite (Pollock 2003, 25–26). In other words, the image of a king sitting on a throne and receiving tribute might have been originally inlaid in a throne or a box which were used in the same context by similar participants. It seems probable that, as in Mesopotamia, feasts were confined to a very small group of people, a religious and political elite, who used these occasions to reify and legitimize its ever fragile status in a regular manner (Dietler 2003, 271–272; Ziffer 2005).

The Megiddo and Far'ah ivories, local products of Canaanite workshops, provide the only artistic depictions of *complete* banquet scenes known in Canaan. Other objects which might represent segments of religious or secular feasting events are the stone statues and bronze figurines of seated gods and kings holding cups (Beck 1989). The cup held by a seated image, be it a god or a king, serves as an attribute and a metaphor of kingship and, as such, symbolizes and legitimates power (Winter 1986; Ziffer 2005). Banquet scenes are also a common motif on contemporary cylinder seals found in Middle and Late Bronze Age Canaan (Collon 1992), but these are usually too schematic to serve as reliable sources for a reconstruction of the Canaanite feasts.

These artistic depictions provide clear evidence for the existence of feasting events in LBA Canaan. Other archaeological criteria for such events have only recently begun to be systematically analysed. This lacuna derives mainly from the dearth of data, especially of botanical and faunal remains but also of archaeological remains of special structures and assemblages which might reflect feasting events. Another factor is the late adoption of recent developments in theoretical and anthropological research on feasting by scholars working in the region.

The site of Hazor, the largest Canaanite site in the second millennium BCE which was extensively excavated and meticulously published, thus provides an opportunity for a contextual discussion of feasts and their role in Canaanite society.

FEASTING IN LATE BRONZE AGE HAZOR

Hazor was a large and prosperous polity throughout the second millennium BCE. It rose to power in the Middle Bronze Age, in the 18th century BCE (Maier 2000; Ben-Tor 2005) and preserved its unusual size and status among its peers through the Late Bronze Age, until the final demise of the Canaanite city in the 13th century BCE.

Excavations in both the lower city and on the upper tell revealed several architectural complexes, most of which can be regarded as religious structures or as ceremonial edifices.

Some of these, especially those uncovered in the renewed excavations on the acropolis, are monumental buildings of unparalleled size in the southern Levantine sphere (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). The architectural elaboration of Hazor's fortifications and public buildings can be regarded as materialization of the royal ideology and the pronounced social hierarchy characterizing the Canaanite city-state system during the Bronze Age (Bunimovitz 1995; Demarraais *et al.* 1996). These features are reflected in the references to Hazor in the Amarna archive and the special status of the king of Hazor amongst his Canaanite peers (Bienkowski 1987).

In the following, I will discuss two possible loci of feasting activities identified at Hazor during the Late Bronze Age. The first one is the monumental temple of Area H, at the north-western corner of the lower city. The second is the newly excavated royal ceremonial complex on the acropolis of the tell (Zuckerman 2006).

The 'Orthostat Temple' (Area H)

The temple is located in the south-western corner of the lower city, at the foot of the earthen rampart (Fig. 1). The temple was originally erected in the Middle Bronze age and

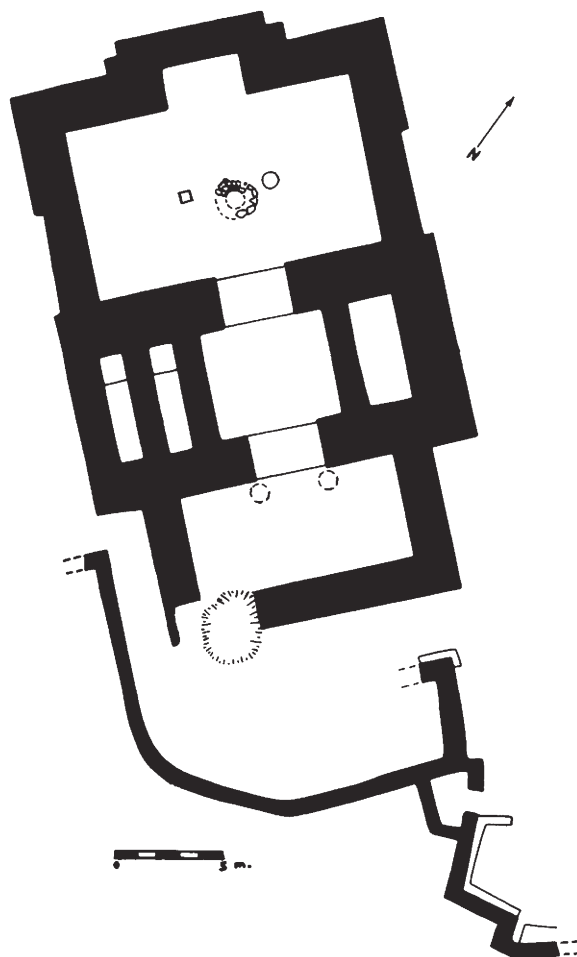


Fig. 1. Plan of the Area H 'Orthostats Temple' (Stratum 1B).

continued to exist, with changes and modifications, until the last phase of the Late Bronze Age city (Yadin 1972, 75–95; Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 212–275). Some of the finds attributed to the temple and its courtyard were interpreted as remains of ritualized slaughter held around the ‘altars’, followed by communal sacral meals (Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 229; Bergquist 1993, 35–36), and this assumption is corroborated by the analysis of the temple’s material assemblage.

Fragments of artistic depictions which might represent feasts, incised on ivory and bone plaques similar to those found at Megiddo, were found in the context of the LB temple. Three incised bone plaques, which were probably inlays of a box, were found in the last phase of the Area H temple (Stratum 1A). The plaques were found in the central hall and in the rear niche, together with several other plain plaques. One of the incised plaques (Fig. 2.1; Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. CCLXXXIII, 39; Pl. CCCXXXVI, 25) bears an incision that might be interpreted as a banquet table, similar to those depicted on the ivory box of Megiddo (cf. Yasur-Landau 2005, Fig. 3.2). A second one (Fig. 2.2; Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. CCLXXXIII, 38; Pl. CCCXXXVI, 24) should probably be viewed upside down, and might represent a building

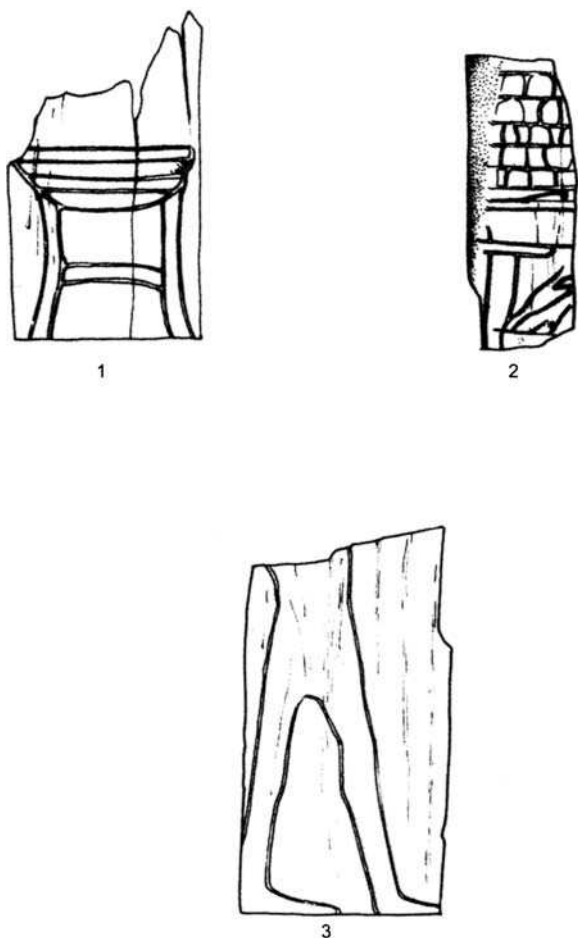


Fig. 2. Incised plaques from the Area H Temple (Redrawn after Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. CCCXXXVI, 23–25). Scale 1:1.

similar to the one depicted behind the seated ruler in the above-mentioned Megiddo ivory (cf. Loud 1939, Pls. 32–33 no. 160). The third plaque (Fig. 2.3; Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. cccxxxvi, 23) is much larger and preserves the legs of a striding figure, probably part of a procession of soldiers or tribute bearers². Several such figures incised on bone plaques were found in the destruction level of the ceremonial precinct in Area A (see below). Despite their fragmentary nature, these plaques prove that processions, a common feature in the composition of feasting scenes, were known in Canaanite art of the Late Bronze Age.

The plan of the Orthostats Temple of Area H belongs to the group of monumental symmetrical temples of Bronze Age Canaan (Mazar 1992). This plan conforms to the principles of direct axis and symmetry, and these features remain basically the same despite the additions and alterations made to the structure throughout its long existence. Various installations, such as rectangular podiums, pits, drainage channels and a pottery kiln for the manufacture of votive vessels, were found in the courtyard in front of the temple (Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 215–264, Plans xxxviii, xxxix, xl). Accumulations of broken pottery vessels, bones and ashes littered the courtyard of the temple in Stratum 2 (Yadin 1972, 81–82) and the area surrounding the inner hall of the temple in Stratum 1B (Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 264). Unfortunately, no bones or botanical remains were collected and saved during the 1950s, so the reconstruction of a faunal and botanical assemblage is impossible.

The ceramic assemblage of the temple in its various phases consists mainly of bowls of different forms, kraters, cooking pots and baking trays, and smaller numbers of juglets, storage jars and pithoi. The bulk of the assemblage is composed of open serving vessels for solid dry foods. Other functions represented are the preparation of foods and cooking, some of which could have been done in oversized vessels such as the giant kraters found in the inner room of the temple. Examples of vessels with cultic functions include miniature bowls, cultic stands, cup and saucer, kernos bowls, 'weights', 'house-model' and zoomorphic vessels (Stratum 3, Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. cclix–cclx; Stratum 2, Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. cclxi–cclxiii; Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 230–240; stratum 1B, Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. cclxxi–cclxxviii; Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 249–257; Stratum 1A, Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. cclxxix–cclxxxii). It is noteworthy that relatively few vessels connected to the consumption and storage of liquids were found and, thus, the libation rituals reconstructed by Yadin form only a small part, if at all, of the actual activities represented by the rich ceramic assemblage of the temple (Yadin 1972, 93).

Preparation and consumption of solid foods, either by the temple's divine residents or their mortal servants (Lambert 1993), must have been the main ritual practice within the Area H temple compound. The ceramic assemblage fulfils most of the criteria for the reconstruction of feasting activities: the higher than usual percentage of open serving vessels, the prevalence of cooking pots and food-preparation vessels, the existence of oversized vessels for shared consumption and the relatively restricted range of vessels. The large number of ritual/miniature vessels attests to the cultic nature of this food consumption, an observation further supported by the architectural context.

Prestige items and ritual paraphernalia form an important part of the Orthostat Temple material corpus. Several imported Cypriote and Mycenaean sherds were found in the temple, most of which are open shapes (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. cclxix, 36–45; Ben-Tor *et al.* 1989, 239–240; Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. cclxxxii, 14; cccxiv, 12). A Mycenaean figurine of a bull was found in the central hall of the temple in its last phase. The clay liver models found in the favissa of the LBI temple attest to the identity of the gods worshipped at Hazor and the nature of rituals performed in their temples (Yadin 1972, 82–83). The destruction level of the last phase of the temple was rich in cultic paraphernalia. These include bronze figurines (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. cccxxxix, 5–8; ccclxl, 5–8, 9–10; Pl. cccxli), a unique

drinking bowl made of bronze (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. CCLXXXIII, 25; CCCXXXVI, 10), basalt vessels and libation/offering tables (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. CCLXXXIV–CCLXXXV) and basalt statues of gods and kings (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pls. CCCXXVI–CCCXXVII). These statues of Canaanite gods and kings were contemporary with the earliest phase of the temple and were probably kept as heirlooms in the following phases until the destruction of the temple (Beck 1989).

The material record of the Orthostats temple thus lends support to the reconstruction of communal consumption of foods in a religious context. The monumental building, the elaborate courtyard with its various installations, the reported remains of bones and ashes, the ceramic assemblage and other finds — all can be considered as representing acts of sacrifice, food preparation and communal dining as part of religious rituals taking place in the context of the Area H monumental temple.

The ‘Ceremonial Palace’/‘Royal Sanctuary’ (Area A)

The ‘Ceremonial Palace’ or ‘Royal Sanctuary’ is a monumental structure located on the acropolis of Tel Hazor. The structure forms part of a much larger complex located in Area A, in the central part of the acropolis (Fig. 3). In the preliminary discussion, the building was interpreted as the ‘Canaanite Palace’ of Late Bronze Age Hazor and was compared with other north Syrian residential palaces like the Niqmepa Palace in Alalakh stratum IV (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). I have argued elsewhere that the residential palace of Hazor is probably located on the northern edge of the acropolis and that the structure in Area A should rather be interpreted as a ceremonial and cultic edifice, the ‘Royal Sanctuary’ of Late Bronze Age Hazor (Zuckerman 2006, but see Ben-Tor 2006 for a different interpretation). Reconstruction of the activities taking place within the building and in the complex surrounding it should be based on the context of the structure within the urban landscape



Fig. 3. Aerial view of the Area A Ceremonial Precinct at Hazor.

of Hazor, its architectural plan and the finds attributed to it. The following discussion presents and assesses the different types of archaeological evidence for feasting from the complex (henceforth termed the 'Ceremonial Precinct').

Written records

The site of Hazor provided the largest corpus of cuneiform finds in second millennium BCE Canaan, second only to that of Taanach. Fifteen fragments of clay tablets, stone and pottery vessels, were found in Middle and Late Bronze Age contexts (Horowitz and Oshima 2006, 65–87). These administrative, economic and legal documents reflect a thriving Canaanite kingdom and attest to its far-reaching commercial and political relations with its Near Eastern neighbours. Finds such as the clay liver models and the dedicatory inscription on a large stone bowl are witnesses to the religious and ritual spheres of Hazor during the second millennium BCE. Unfortunately, none of these finds shed light on the practice of feasting and large-scale communal meals at the monumental buildings in which they were found.

Artistic depictions

Several incised bone plaques, bearing depictions of dancing and striding figures, were found in the Ceremonial Precinct (Ben-Tor 1998, fig. 3; Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999, 35). These plaques, similar in technique and composition to those found in the Area H temple, were probably originally inlaid in wooden furniture and jewellery boxes. Their fragmentary nature does not allow a reconstruction of a complete feasting scene like those of the Megiddo ivories, but they undoubtedly belong to the same Canaanite tradition of ivory and bone working.

Faunal remains

A large assemblage of animal bones was recovered from the various spaces of the Ceremonial Precinct³. The richest assemblage was found in the courtyard, where almost 17,000 pieces of bones were scattered around the central podium. About two thirds of the assemblage is comprised of bones of sheep and goats, the most common elements in Near Eastern faunal contexts. Interestingly, most animals were large mature males, a possible hint to their origins as tribute levied from the livestock of the city populace rather than from specialized temple flocks (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2006, 13). Bones of cattle are unusually abundant and account for almost a third of the assemblage. The rest of the assemblage comprises of small numbers of pigs, equids, dog, fallow deer, gazelles, ducks and catfish. All in all, about a dozen species were included in the Hazor assemblage which is rather diverse compared with other contemporary contexts. The relative abundance of skulls and limbs, especially of cattle but also of sheep/goat, points to an intentional selection of body parts (ibid, 16). These attributes are closely connected to protocols of ancient Near Eastern religious festivals and ritual texts (compare Pardee 2000; Fleming 2000). Noteworthy in this respect are the polished astragali, all of them from the right side of the animal (sheep/goat and one fallow deer). These objects were used in ancient Near Eastern contexts for divination or gaming, and are usually assigned ritual function (Gilmour 1997).

In their article, Lev-Tov and McGeough utilize a combination of zooarchaeological study and information gleaned from the ritual texts at Emar, in order to reconstruct the activities taking place in the courtyard of the Late Bronze age Hazor complex. According to their analysis, the Hazor assemblage resulted from sacrifices and feasts held in the courtyard, operated by the cultic official with the king as a benefactor. The provisions for

these feasts were supplied by the city's population and the king, based on the interpretation of the Emar ceremonies and the nature of the faunal assemblage itself. They emphasize the social role of such feasts and their contribution to both community and individual identity and status reification.

The faunal assemblage of the courtyard at Hazor thus fills most of the requirements of a feast-related corpus. It is relatively large and unusually abundant, it shows clear preference for certain species and intentional selection of specific body parts of animals of certain age/gender (Halstead and Isaakidou 2004). Further support is provided by the context of the bone assemblage, which was found in a ceremonial and cultic architectural context, in close relation to special purpose installation (i.e. the central podium). A group of ceremonial sickle-blade bronze knives found in the main hall of the Ceremonial Precinct might have been used in the context of ritual butchering and cutting of meat (Fig. 4). Similar knives are represented in New Kingdom artistic depictions of slaughterhouses (Newberry 1893 Tomb 3, Pl. 35).

A final note concerns the depositional history of the courtyard's bone assemblage. At least two phases were discerned in the courtyard, contemporary with the two phases of the central podium. The bones were found on the latest floor, sealed by the thick destruction layer marking the violent end of the whole complex. It is, however, difficult to attribute the bones solely to the last activity phase and it is plausible that this large assemblage contains bones and other food residues accumulated during a longer period. This accumulation might represent several feasting cycles rather than a single final event, although the few restorable bowls found close to the structure's entrance are probably remnants of such a 'last feast'.



Fig. 4. Ceremonial knives from the Area A Ceremonial Precinct.

The ceramic assemblage

The excavation of the Ceremonial Precinct exposed, underneath the thick layer of fallen mudbricks and burnt material, a rich assemblage of restorable pottery vessels and other objects. The repertoire of complete or near complete vessels found in the various rooms of the structure is the basis for a reconstruction of the activities taking place in the structure before its destruction. The following discussion will address the vessels from a functional rather than a typological perspective, emphasizing function and use rather than form and decoration. This perspective is preferable in the analysis of past activities and practices, as in the case of feasts and rituals (Bray 2003).

The vessels found in the Ceremonial Precinct can be classified into several functional groups, on the basis of various morphological and physical parameters (after Henrickson and McDonald 1983). These functional groups can be merged into four types of activities (Fig. 6):

1. Serving and consumption of foods and liquids: open and carinated bowls, chalices, jugs, juglets and goblets (Fig. 6.1–6.5 and 6.10–6.13).
2. Cooking, food preparation and short-term storage: kraters, cooking pots, baking trays, pithoi kraters (Fig. 6.6–6.7).
3. Long term storage: storage jars, pithoi (Fig. 6.8–6.9).
4. Ritual function: miniature/votive vessels, cup and saucer, elaborate lamps, ‘weights’ and ‘house models’ (Fig. 6.14–6.17).

The main component of the assemblage (70% of the restorable vessels) is formed by dry foods serving vessels: open bowls, carinated bowls and chalices (or high-footed bowls (Fig. 5)). Noteworthy in their scarcity (6%) are serving vessels for liquids, such as jugs, juglets, cups and goblets. It seems that whatever was consumed within the structure and in its adjacent courtyard were mainly dry food-stuffs. Food preparation and cooking vessels are

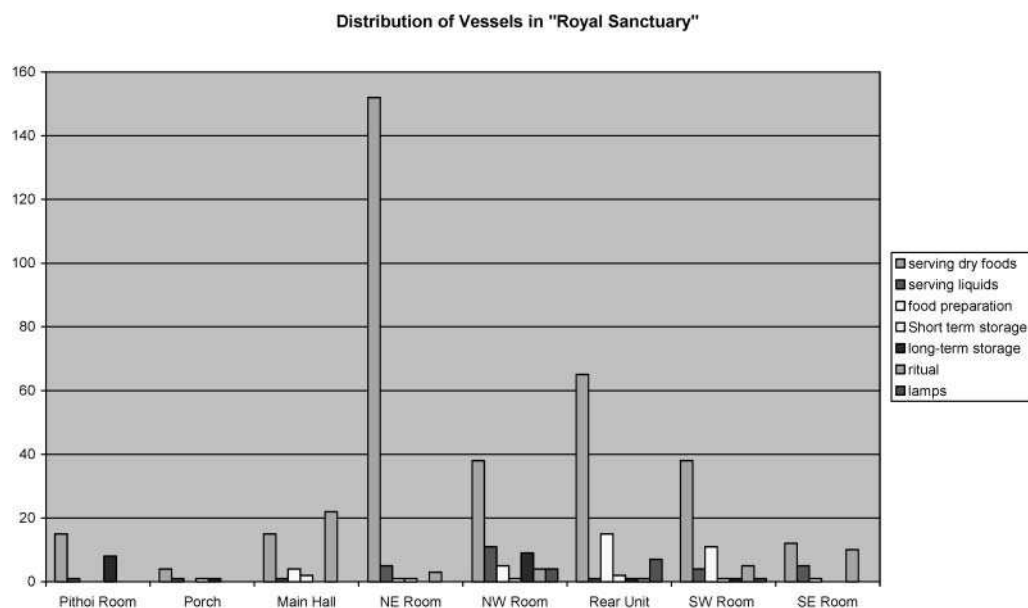


Fig. 5.

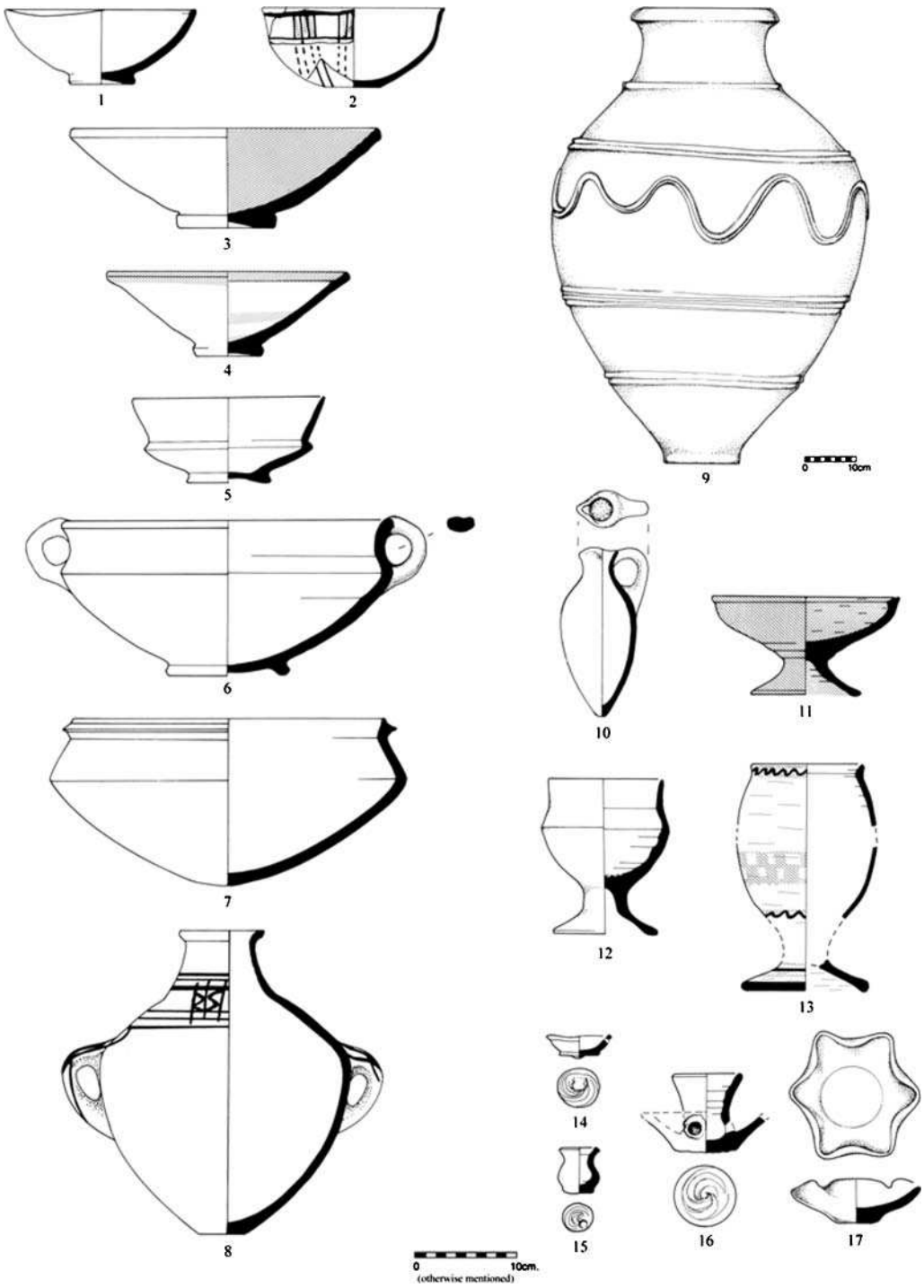


Fig. 6. Pottery vessels from the Area A Ceremonial Precinct.

uncommon in the assemblage (7%) and the few examples were found mainly in the rear unit and the main hall. Apparently, the foods consumed within the complex were not prepared inside the building, but probably brought there as ready-to-eat consumables. They might have been stored in the short-term storage vessels, which form less than one percent of the assemblage, but are nevertheless represented in most of the rooms by one or two examples each. Notable are several oversized vessels, such as the pithoi kraters from the rear unit and the large cooking pot found in the entrance to this room. Long term storage, in large immobile pithoi, was concentrated in the pithoi room, although pithoi were also found in other rooms and form 4% of the assemblage. The pithoi found in the structure could have held between 120 and 230 litres each, the average being 180 litres⁴. The larger pithoi were found in the pithoi room, while the ones found in other parts of the building are smaller. All in all, the estimated capacity of short- and long-term storage inside the building is less than 3000 litres⁵. Although no residue analysis was conducted on the pithoi, the visible traces of burnt liquid substances found on the vessels hint to their original contents, most probably olive oil.

The vessels defined as ritual or cultic in nature form the second largest group in the assemblage (almost 10%). These include mainly miniature votive vessels, but also other types such as the 'cup and saucer', 'house models' and 'weights'. Their existence in significant numbers supports a reconstruction of the activity inside the building as ritual.

Special structures and facilities for feasting activity

The spatial arrangement of the architectural context of the Ceremonial Precinct is well defined, conforms to strict regulation of access and circulation and can thus be interpreted as an appropriate locus of ritual activity. The fact that the complex has a clearly defined centre (the main hall) and that all other architectural elements are oriented in relation to this centre, is crucial in reconstructing these activities.

Another element which should be mentioned in this context is the podium in the courtyard. The location of the podium, in the centre of the courtyard and in direct axis to the entrance to the structure, and the fact that the bulk of animal bones found in the courtyard were concentrated around it, all testify to the prominent place it held in the activities taking place within the complex.

Prestige items and ritual paraphernalia

Many of the finds attributed to the destruction level of the Ceremonial Precinct can be defined as prestige items. There are two distinct groups within the assemblage. The first group consist of objects whose manufacture involves the work of skilled craftsmen and the use of rare materials. This group includes bronze figurines of gods, kings and animals, bronze weapons and special purpose tools, stone and ivory statues, faience vessels, jewellery and personal adornments. To these may be added items made of exotic materials and foreign craftsmanship, such as the Egyptian royal statues, beads of semi-precious stones and gold and silver jewellery. It should be noted that very few imported vessels of Cypriote, Mycenaean and Egyptian origin were found in the Ceremonial Precinct, and these seem to have played only a minor role in the conspicuous consumption of foreign goods at Hazor (see also Yasur-Landau 2005). This group of prestige objects were either imported or locally manufactured by attached specialists, serving the needs of the Canaanite elite of Hazor. They can thus be attributed to a context of 'conspicuous production', usually related to the work of attached specialists filling the demands of the political elites (Clark and Parry 1990; Costin 1991).

The second group consists of objects that do not fit the above definition in terms of their material, technical or artistic value. The main component of this group is the pottery vessels found in abundance in the Ceremonial Precinct. Some of these are finely executed, highly burnished and decorated, but most of them are plain and do not differ from utilitarian vessels found in other contemporary contexts. Such vessels derive their value from their *use* and consumption within a specialized elite context, and can be defined as objects of 'conspicuous consumption' (Knappet 2001). These objects have no intrinsic high value, but are 'politically charged' through the context in which they are consumed. Such vessels might have also been produced by attached specialists, and the pottery kiln found in the courtyard of the monumental temple in Area H provides evidence of such a production context.

Several objects found in the Ceremonial Precinct should be considered 'archaic', and probably represent heirlooms from earlier periods. Examples are the large sphinx of Amenmhet III (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999, 35) and its smaller counterpart, also dated to the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (Ben-Tor 1998, 462). It is noteworthy that certain types of pottery vessels found in the destruction layer, such as the shallow bowls decorated with concentric red stripes and the sharply carinated bowls (Fig. 6.4–6.5), retain earlier traditions of the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze I periods. They can be interpreted as actual heirlooms or, alternatively, as reflecting a measure of conservatism in the ceramic traditions represented in the structure, which was destroyed in the 13th century BCE.

Quite a few of the above-mentioned prestige objects were found broken and intentionally mutilated. This phenomenon was attributed to the destroyers of the structure and the city in the 13th century BCE (Ben-Tor 1998, 465). Another interpretation of such acts is a reconstruction of the ritual breakage and public destruction of prestige items in the course of public events, symbolizing the control over the sources of these items and the ability of the political and religious elites to access and (ab)use them (Hayden 2001, 53). The intentional mutilation of the Egyptian royal statues could have been done in the context of ritualised public events taking place in the Ceremonial Precinct on the tel.

To sum up the above discussion, it appears that the material corpus of the Ceremonial Precinct reflects most of the attributes of an archaeological context of feasting activity. Even in the absence of written records, the occurrence of feasts in this context, as well as the Area H temple described above, can be demonstrated on the basis of their material assemblage. The comparison between the material finds of the Orthostats temple of Area H and those in the Ceremonial Precinct in Area A proves that the ritual activities that have taken place in these contemporary contexts were different in scale, but not in essence. These activities and their archaeological remains can be framed in a summarised form (following Verehoven 2002):

Context:

Monumental symmetrical structures, attached courtyards with special installations.

Objects:

Faunal remains: Large quantities of animal bones and ashes, especially around the installations in the courtyards.

Pottery assemblage: Large quantities of serving vessels (especially open and carinated bowls). Oversized storage vessels (especially pithoi, cooking pots and kraters), special function vessels (stands, chalices, miniature/votive bowls, house models).

Prestige objects: Incised bone and ivory plaques, metal and stone statues and figurines, ceremonial weapons. Foreign and archaic elements in the material assemblage.

Act:

sacrifice (?); consumption of solid foods; offerings; display and intentional destruction (?) of prestige objects.

DISCUSSION

The role and nature of Canaanite feasts, such as those depicted on the Megiddo ivories or reflected in the Hazor material corpus, is complex and varied. The artistic depictions emphasize the role of the ruler, presiding over celebrations of victory and display of military achievements. Through such events, Canaanite kings reasserted and legitimized their status and power relations. As in other highly differentiated and segmented societies, such events provided an opportunity for conspicuous consumption and competitive display of wealth and power. Feasts were probably used as a socio-political vehicle of maintenance and manipulation of power relations within the Canaanite polities and between them, against the background of the increasing Egyptian control and socially and economically impoverished country.

A fundamental aspect of ancient Near Eastern feasts, reflected most clearly in the interpretation of the Hazor material, is their religious and sacral context. Feasting events are closely linked to the religious life and ritual calendars of the cities, and probably involved rituals honouring the main deities of each city. The political and religious elites participated and cooperated in such events, which clearly served their mutual interests. It was noted in other cases as well that the differentiation between sacral feasts consumed by living participants and sacrifices for the gods followed by a feast on the basis of their material remains is difficult (Wright 2004, 14; Blake 2005). Furthermore, there was apparently no such distinction in the eyes of the participants, and the royal and religious authorities were equally involved in feasts and festivals held in ancient Near Eastern cities (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2006, 7).

The analysis of the archaeological remains of the monumental structures at Canaanite Hazor has proved fruitful in locating possible feasting loci and the reconstruction of ritual activities taking place in these contexts. But beyond this identification, the interpretation of the nature and function of Canaanite feasts emerges as difficult to assess on the basis of its material residues alone. Feasts were undoubtedly multi-functional and each event represented in the archaeological record had a myriad of manifest and hidden (and sometimes contrasting) functions. In the absence of written records, even the declared functions remain concealed and subject to differing interpretations.

The identification and contextualization of diacritical feasts and public communal meals in monumental temples and palatial contexts within the Late Bronze Age cities sheds light on a major social institution of the Canaanite city-system of the second millennium BCE. Other types of feasts, which no doubt existed in Canaan as well as in other state societies in the eastern Mediterranean, were held in the periphery of Near Eastern cities and the surrounding villages (Bendall 2004; Pollock 2003 note 1). Recognition and analysis of the whole range of feasting activities within these different and complementary contexts is crucial for the understanding of the structure and dynamics of Canaanite society.

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NOTES

¹ 'Canaan' refers to the geo-political entity as defined by Na'aman (1994) and Rainey (1996), spreading until the Lebanon-Anti Lebanon mountain ranges in the north.

² Note that the line drawing of the plaque is inaccurate (Yadin *et al.* 1961, Pl. CCLXXXIII, 40).

³ The assemblage is currently under study by Justin Lev-Tov.

⁴ I would like to thank Avshalom Karasik for these estimates of storage capacity.

⁵ This estimate is significantly much lower than the estimated capacity of contemporary central storage facilities, such as Building X in Kalavassos- *Ayios Dhimitrios* in Cyprus with its 50 pithoi and estimated storage capacity of 50,000 litres (Keswani 1992, 141).

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