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Pit-typology at Ramat Raḥel: On Favissae, Foundation Deposits, and Royal Feasts

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Introduction

Refuse pits and silos are regularly encountered in Bronze and Iron Age excavations in the Levant, and the discovery of one does not cause much excitement. Sometimes dozens of such pits are found together, for example, at Iron I Tel Beit-Mirsim, Iron I Ḥaẓor, and Iron II Tel Moẓa.[1]

The Wheeler-Kenyon ('stratigraphic') method of excavation was accepted in Israel gradually, starting with the 1970s.[2] Earlier, pits were often missed. When a pit is not noticed, it is not documented: one may suspect it existed, but there is no way to reconstruct it (that is, 'separate' its finds from the surroundings).

Recently, Fulton, Gadot, Kleiman, Freud, Lernau and Lipschits[3] interpreted two assemblages (L477, L14109) from Ramat Raḥel as pits, and suggested that they were foundation deposits *cum* favissae *cum* remains of elite feasting in the Ramat Raḥel palace.

One of the two assemblages (Locus 477, Level Va) was excavated by Aharoni 60 years ago in a method leaving something to be desired.[4] Unfortunately, the Level Va palace was almost completely exposed by Aharoni, leaving few areas for re-examination.[5] Aharoni believed that the pottery of L477 originated from a pile of finds on the floor of the palace. Fulton-Lipschits suggested that L477 was a pit under the floor, based on comparison to the later found pit L14109.

The final report on Aharoni's excavations does not solve the problems: nothing certain can be said about the stratigraphy of L477, which is presented in a contradictory manner. According to the pottery report by Freud, L477 is "a *favissa* that was dug into the courtyard floor" – hence later than the floor.[6] However, the summary by Gadot and Lipschits says that the vessels of L477 "were buried in a *favissa* under the floor"[7] – hence earlier than the floor.[8]

Aharoni could well miss a pit, but hardly the distinctive, thick white chalk floor of the Ramat Raḥel palace. It is not clear if this floor existed above the assumed pit. Locus 477 is a room, and we do not know if (or to what extent) the white floor was preserved in it. There is no photo or section that shows the floor in L477. The Locus included finds that are both above and below the level of the floor (as measured elsewhere, not in L477). Mistakes in registered heights are not uncommon, and heights measured in other Loci say little about the stratigraphy of L477. There is no way to reconstruct the assumed pit with certainty: the suggested separation between finds from the assumed pit and its surroundings is a guess,

[1] Greenberg 1987; Ben-Ami 2001; Greenhut/De-Groot 2009, 219.
[2] Kletter 2015.
[3] Henceforward, Fulton-Lipschits 2015.
[4] Kletter 2006: Fig. 32; Kletter 2015.
[5] See Sulimany 2016.
[6] In Lipschits et al 2016, 263.
[7] Lipschits et al 2016, 720.
[8] Apparently, the summary was updated to accommodate the views expressed in Fulton-Lipschits 2015.

based mainly on absolute heights.[9] Since nothing is certain about L477, we will focus in this article on the more recently excavated pit L14109.

Stratigraphy

The data published for Pit L14109 is preliminary, but it indicates that during the excavation it was not considered a special discovery, which merits close attention.

Fulton-Lipschits offer only one photo of the pit taken from above, similar to that of Aharoni's L477.[10] Nothing is said about stratigraphy inside the pit and the nature of its fill (other than finds). Was the pit noticed immediately under the white floor, or is there is a separating layer? What are the degrees and patterns of breakage/completeness of the pottery? Did fragments from the bottom of the pit joined fragments from the top? Were the animal bones dispersed randomly or concentrated in some areas? The lack of any photo, drawing or mention of a section inside the pit, as a check on its stratigraphy, suggests that it was excavated in one go – as one Locus. Without a section the ability to study the pit's stratigraphy is limited. Salvage excavations are often carried out under pressure, even when important finds are excavated. This, however, was not a salvage excavation, and the excavators enjoyed the freedom to choose the mode and pace of excavation.

The interpretation of the pit as a royal feast/favissa/foundation deposit was reached at a later stage. In the first preliminary reports Locus 14109 (excavated in 2008) appears only as a "pit".[11] In the final report on Aharoni's excavations, L477 is called a pit or a *favissa*, but foundation deposits and royal feasts are not mentioned.[12] The "killing of three birds with one stone" (*favissa*/foundation pit/feast) appeared around 2011.[13] It is not based on observations made in the field during the excavation.

Fulton-Lipschits stress that the pit's stratigraphy is "crucial for dating it to a specific building phase and for understanding the behavioral pattern it represents".[14] However, they cannot determine the exact stratigraphy. In their view the pit was excavated into a fill, which served as a foundation for the crushed limestone floor of the palace. This thick white floor was intact above the pit, and "no earlier occupational horizon ... was distinguished under the floor". They offer two "stratigraphic alternatives" for the pit:

1. It was "dug down from the floor (Locus 14109) and then [the floor] was sealed again".
2. It was "placed as a foundation deposit while [read: before] the floor was installed."

They conclude:

> "In both cases, we can conclude that the two features (floor and pit) are contemporaneous".[15]

This conclusion is incorrect. The two options are contradictory, not complementary. They cannot be both true and they do not reflect the same time.

According to option 1, the white floor was first placed, then the pit cut it, and finally the floor was re-made above the pit. The pit is therefore *later* than the white floor, and hence, later than the establishment of the palace. To claim that the pit belongs to the time of use of the palace one must assume two phases in the palace: an original phase with the white floor and a second phase with the pit and the re-made floor. However, there is no corroborative evidence for two phases in the Ramat Raḥel palace. Everything suggests one, probably short-lived phase: there are no changes in the architecture, raising of floors, etc. Furthermore, could the thick white floor be cut open and re-made without leaving traces, such as changes in

[9] Lipschits et al 2016.
[10] Compare Fulton-Lipschits 2015, Figs. 2 and 16.
[11] E.g., Lipschits et al 2009, 62.
[12] Lipschits et al 2016, 139-140, 156-157, 263, 720.
[13] Lipschits et al 2011, 14.
[14] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 31.
[15] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 31.

texture or thickness, or some mixing of the crushed white limestone with the fill/pit below? Common sense also indicates that people living in a building would hardly tear the floor under their feet. They would throw or bury remnants of food and broken vessels outside, avoiding unnecessary work and interrupted elite lifestyle.

With option 2, the pit is *earlier* than the white floor, and hence earlier than the establishment of the palace. Fifty years ago, while debating dates of levels at Samaria, Kenyon has claimed that builders drop objects under floors, so the latest object in a fill under a floor represents the establishment of the building.[16] While this may be occasionally true, it is not always true. The accepted rule is that objects sealed under floors are earlier than the floors.[17] They can be one day or three hundred years earlier, but they do not reflect the time of use of the floor.

The consequences of option 2 seem to escape Fulton-Lipschits. Following this option, the objects in pit 14109 were deposited *before* life began in the palace, and have no relation to the period of use of the palace. According to this option the palace is later than *the latest find* from the pit. If the pit dates indeed to the "late 7th – early 6th centuries BC"[18], the palace is *later*. It is therefore later than the Neo-Assyrian period in Palestine, which ended ca. 625 BC at the latest.[19] Therefore, Lipschits and his colleagues should cease relating the Ramat Raḥel palace with the Neo-Assyrian rule, as they do time and again, including in the 2015 paper:

> "The construction of the palatial center at Ramat Raḥel, which occurred when Judah came under the joke of the Assyrian Empire, is no coincidence".[20]

Option 2 was suggested earlier by Freud: "since the floor clearly sealed the pit, one could assume that the pit is earlier to it."[21] Hence, the inevitable conclusion is that the pit is earlier than the period of use of the palace, and cannot relate to elite feasts in the palace.

Desperately trying to connect the pit and the palace, Fulton-Lipschits write:

> "The pottery from the pit is typical of the very late Iron Age (late seventh–early sixth centuries b.c.e.) (Freud 2011a:13) and so corresponds well with the date of establishment and use of Building Phase 2" [=Level Va = the palace].[22]

To what finds from the palace do Fulton-Lipschits compare the pottery from the pit, in order to reach this conclusion? Freud explicitly points out that there are no secure finds from the period of use of the palace. It was not destroyed and there was almost no pottery on its floors; what remains is mixed – Iron Age, Persian Period, even later.[23] Dating by typology is approximated. One cannot separate between, say, pottery of 630 BC and of 600 BC. The pit and the palace can be in the same typological range, but still the stratigraphy dictates that the first is earlier (option 1) or later (option 2) than the other. Typology is not a magical tool for cutting stratigraphic corners.

Whether we chose option 1 or 2, there is no proof that the pit relates to those who dwelled in the palace. The doubts about the stratigraphy should have led to a cautious interpretation of pit 14109. However, Fulton-Lipschits interpret it – simultaneously – as three different rare discoveries: a *favissae*, a foundation deposit, and remains of a royal feast:

> *Royal feast:* "The pit's contents and architectural context contribute to the reconstruction of elite gatherings and conspicuous consumption of food".[24]

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[16] Kenyon 1964.
[17] Aharoni/Amiran 1958.
[18] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 31; this dating, based on the pottery from the pit, is reasonable.
[19] Na'aman 1991.
[20] Fulton-Lipschits 2015:43.
[21] Freud 2011b, 27.
[22] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 32-34. While interpretations may vary, Strata labels of former excavators (Aharoni's Vb and Va) should be maintained to avoid confusion. New labels are given to new areas/Strata, but older labels should be maintained and compared with the new ones (compare Mazar 2011, 184).
[23] Freud 2011a; 2011b, 38, 82.
[24] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 30.

"These events of elite peer consumption of food took place under the empire's patronage and were probably aimed at winning the elite's loyalty".[25]

Favissa: "in offering assemblages from the Iron Age period, we would expect to have a higher percentage of meatier portions such as long bones. We therefore interpret the pit as a favissa".[26]

Foundation deposit: "the vessels and other remains were placed as a foundation deposit while the floor [of the palace] was installed".[27]

Foundation Deposit?

Not every object found under a floor is a foundation deposit. It seems that Fulton-Lipschits did not read carefully literature on foundation deposits.

Mesopotamian foundation deposits were usually related with temples. They included specialized objects – copper peg figurines, stone 'bricks' carrying building inscriptions, beads, wooden items, etc. The objects were carefully placed, often inside boxes, in significant points of temples, such as doorways.[28] Nothing here resembles the Ramat Raḥel pit.

In Egypt, foundation deposits are best known from temples, though they appear also elsewhere. They are highly symbolic and relate to royal rituals. The deposits were usually placed in pits or trenches at the four corners of the building, surrounded by clean sand. They included unique items like inscribed objects, miniatures of tools and vessels, and 'samples' or plaques of various materials.[29] Before the Middle Kingdom, foundation deposits were simpler and included sacrificed offerings (chiefly of bovines), grindstones, and pottery. The pottery is typically found intact and includes miniatures.[30] The Ramat Raḥel pit bears no similarity to Egyptian foundation deposits.

Establishment of temples in the Hittite Empire involved rituals of placing bronze pegs, silver hammers, and copper sheets to symbolically anchor the temple to earth.[31] There is no relation between such deposits and pit 14109.

When texts are lacking, identification of deposits is often doubtful. In the Greek World one type of foundation deposits includes mainly valuables – coins, jewelry, and other luxury goods. Another type shows figurines, ceramics and remnants of animal and vegetable sacrifices. Both types relate mostly to temples. Often they show peculiar features, like layers of ash, charcoal, or sand. They include complete, not just broken vessels.[32] The pottery may include miniatures and vessels with remains of burning, and the animals were not cooked, but – at least partially – burnt as sacrifices.[33] Foundation deposits in palatial contexts in Crete can perhaps be remains of foundation banquets; but they too contain intact vessels.[34]

Clear evidence for foundation deposits in Iron Age Palestine is wanting. Three plaques from foundation deposits of Thutmosis III (Late Bronze Age) were found *out of situ* in a silo at Aphek.[35] Late Bronze Age deposits of complete lamps and upturned bowls have been interpreted as foundation deposits.[36] There are no lamps covered by bowls in pit 14109.

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[25] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 44.
[26] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 41.
[27] Fulton-Lipschits 2015:31; notice the confusion concerning the terms, for example: "it is often difficult to distinguish between different types of *favissae* such as foundation deposits or the burial of broken objects" (Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 41).
[28] Ellis 1978; De Pietro 2012, 111-113; Tsouparopoulou 2015.
[29] Weinstein 1973; 2001; Sakr 2005; Masson 2015; Forstner-Müller 2015; Karkowski 2016.
[30] Marchand/Baud 1996; Marchand 2004; Sakr 2005; Allen 2006; Forstner-Müller 2015, 533; on miniatures in votive and religious contexts see Gimatzidis 2011; Naeh 2012; Barfoed 2015.
[31] De Pietro 2012, 116-117.
[32] Hunt 2006, 5-6, 95.
[33] Hunt 2006, 66-107; Ekroth 2014.
[34] Wagner 2014, 4, 49.
[35] Weinstein 2001, 561.
[36] Bunimovitch/Zimhoni 1993, but see De Pietro 2012, 99-124.

Fulton-Lipschits assume that the vessels were "placed whole" inside pit 14109. However, as Freud notes, the vessels in the pit were not found complete, but fragmented.[37] They have been restored, but many vessels still miss parts, including large parts (it is clear from the published photos). The restoration was thorough and the pit was sifted. Therefore, such parts would have been found and restored if present in the pit. The conclusion is that the vessels were not placed whole in the pit, or even thrown whole into it. Rather, at the time of deposition they were already incomplete. They were broken earlier (whether near the pit or elsewhere). Consequently, there is no proof that they were all broken in one event. They can represent an accumulation of accidentally broken vessels over some time.

Pit 14109 is not a foundation deposit, and a foundation deposit is not a *favissa*.

***Favissa*?**

The Latin term *favissa* refers to hewn subterranean chambers near the Capitol Hill in Rome, used to store temple objects – statues of gods and votive objects that became obsolete.[38] The Hebrew term *genizah* (Ezra 1, 7-8; Esther 3, 9; Ezekiel 27, 24; etc.) derives from the Persian-Elamite term *ganzabara*, meaning roughly "treasurer". In Mandaic texts, *ganzibara* means priests who also serve as guardians of ritual texts. In medieval times, a *genizah* was used for deposition of sacred texts.[39] However, burial of religious objects is an ancient custom.[40]

Archaeologists often call all sorts of things *favissae* for no good reason.[41] Unless we want to encourage bad habits, we should not call pit 14109 *"favissa"*, since:

1. Favissae relate to cult places. Often they are found immediately near temples, for example, at Ebla and Lachish.[42] There is no temple at Ramat Raḥel and there is nothing cultic in the Level Va palace.

2. Favissae include votive objects and/or temple paraphernalia.[43] Pit 14109 includes common domestic finds. The two chalices from it prove nothing, since similar chalices are found in both cultic and non-cultic contexts.[44]

3. Favissae may include bones of sacrificed animals. Various animals could be sacrificed in Judah.[45] As far as we know, fish were not sacrificial animals in Judah.[46] Fish were imported and consumed all over Palestine during the entire Iron Age.[47] Partridges and geese (identified in the pit) have no cultic associations in Judah either; as opposed to doves/pigeons,[48] which were not found in the pit.

4. Refuse is considered worthless, so people waste as little time and effort as possible on its disposal.[49] *Favissae* concern religious items, imbued with holiness and deposited for eternity. The objects are not treated like rubbish. Hence *favissae* often show a different stratigraphy than domestic refuse pits.[50] Is there anything in the stratigraphy of pit 14109 that sets it apart from domestic refuse pits?

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[37] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 34; Freud 2011b, 26-27.
[38] Fiedler 2005, 96; Turfa 2006, 91; Strassburger 2015, 200.
[39] evenshtam 1954; Lemaire 2007, 55-56; Bowman 1970, 25-31; McEwan 1981, 35; Goitein 1967-1993; Sadan 1997; Gil 2004.
[40] Garfinkel 1994.
[41] Kletter 2010a, 199-204; Strassburger 2015.
[42] Strassburger 2015; Marchetti/Nigro 1997; Tufnell/Inge/Harding 1940, 43-45.
[43] Kletter 2010a, 200, 205; Strassburger 2015, 201; Ekroth 2003; Weinblatt-Krauz 2012.
[44] Fassbeck 2008; Panitz-Cohen 2010, 120.
[45] Leviticus 1-10; Numbers 15; Anderson 1987; Levine 2002.
[46] Fish were reported from religious LB contexts, Strassburger 2015, 202; Lev-Tov/McGeough 2007, 95, but not from Judah.
[47] Routledge 2014; Lernau 2015.
[48] Ziffer 1998.
[49] Thompson 1979; Carmen 2010.
[50] Kletter 2010a, 194; Strassburger 2015, 201.

5. Objects in *favissae* are usually broken on purpose to prevent further use.[51] Archaeologically, it is not always easy to determine if objects are broken by accident or on purpose.[52] Discovery of ca. 1400 fragmented chalices in the same pit, with not even one complete, suggests deliberate breaking.[53] With the exception of a few bowl bases (chipped off *before* disposal, see further below), nothing in the contents of pit 14109 indicates deliberate breakage.

6. Many cultic objects in ancient *favissae* exhibit traces of burning, likely related with offering of incense.[54] Daily vessels in other contexts may show burning too, but the patterns of burning differ. In pit 14109, only one cooking pot is darkened on the outside, as cooking pots commonly are.[55] Fulton-Lipschits claim that two chalices from the pit were used for incense burning, despite the fact that they do not show any burning marks:

> "The chalices were well burnished, [so] it is unlikely that the soot marks would have survived".[56]

Thermal shock penetrates inside pottery vessels and does not leave only superficial soot marks. Slip, burnish, or paint are no protection against it.[57] If there is intact burnish on the two chalices from pit 14109, it proves that that they have never been used for incense burning.

Pit 14109 is not a *favissa*, and a *favissa* is not the remains of a royal feast.

Remains of a Royal Feast?

Feasting can be identified through large-scale/unusual remains and/or vessels of food storage, cooking, or consumption, and special features of faunal assemblages.[58] Such criteria are relative and fluid, and similar vessels and foods can be used in different contexts.[59]

Pit 14109 hardly meets Hayden's criteria for feasts, let alone royal feasts. Dragging the Neo-Assyrian Empire to the table[60] is ridiculous, because the scale, splendor, and exotic nature of Neo-Assyrian royal banquets are incomparable with such a humble pit.[61]

A modest total of 210 bones was identified in the pit, representing (MNI) one cattle, two sheep, nine birds (mostly partridges), and maybe a dozen fish. The species are not unusual. Bones outside the pit include similar species – a majority of sheep/goes, fewer cattle, some birds and fish. Percentages vary and the two sheep/goat in the pit are immature;[62] but such small samples are not statistically reliable. That more fish bones are found in the pit may result from better preservation under the white floor, or the sifting of this particular Locus.

Large animals (cattle) in the pit are represented by a tiny number of bones.[63] The 11 cattle bones represent perhaps 5% of one whole skeleton; but if each fragment is even half the size of the entire bone, it translates to only 2.5%. It is unclear if these bones come from one or more animals, and how the carcass was butchered. Just to give an idea, if the meat surrounding these 11 bones weighed 2.5% of the entire carcass, and the animal was large, we

[51] Lipiński 2003, 301.
[52] Kletter 2010b, 54.
[53] Panitz-Cohen 2010, 120-121, 128; Panitz-Cohen 2015, 99, 105.
[54] Ben-Arieh 2011; Weinblatt-Krauz 2012; Panitz-Cohen 2015, 102-103; Namdar et al. 2015.
[55] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, Fig 3, left.
[56] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 34.
[57] Kletter and Ziffer 2015, 1, 15.
[58] Hayden 2001; cf. Hitchcock et al. 2015, 12.
[59] Dietler 2011. Akin-Amar, who drank from the royal cup of Zimrilim and later used it as a chamber pot, gives a bad example. However, this is a story told by his enemies (Wright 2010, 337).
[60] "These events of elite peer consumption of food took place under the empire's patronage" (Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 44).
[61] Ermidoro 2015.
[62] Fulton-Lipschits 2015:38-39.
[63] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 35, Table 1.

have here maybe 5 kilo meat. Is this evidence of "conspicuous consumption"?[64] Surely, the rest of the animal was not wasted, but there is no evidence that it was consumed by the same people responsible for pit 14109. Why imagine the royal few gorging on meat, rather than (say) a marriage party of a 'middle-class' family? Consider also the possibility that the refuse pit was shared, but not the consumption of food; so the meat could be consumed by different people in separate places.

Fulton-Lipschits admit at one place that the bones do not indicate large amounts of meat:

> "Most [of the bones] are the leftover portions … that are usually discarded after the animal has been butchered. The few bones from the meatier portions (femur, tibia, and radius) are in poor condition. In offering assemblages from the Iron Age period, we would expect to have a higher percentage of meatier portions such as long bones".[65]

Shouldn't we expect the same from remains of royal feasts? In jumping from few fragmentary bones to "conspicuous consumption", Fulton-Lipschits create a misleading picture.[66]

In discussing food consumption, one may differentiate between affluence and luxury. Affluence means consumption beyond what is – or is considered – basic needs. Luxury is consumption of "special, limited in supply, difficult to procure or very expensive" foods.[67] It means "refinement in texture, taste, fat content, or other quality".[68] Affluence is a quantitative aspect, while luxury concerns quality. While many feasts exhibit affluence, surely royal palace feasts exhibit luxury too.

Whether meat was a luxury item in Judah is a separate debate.[69] Magness suggested that narrow-rim cooking pots from Iron II Judah indicate scarcity of meat, since meat was boiled with the bones. However, meat was often stripped off bones and the marrow extracted by breaking.[70] Complete long bones of cattle don't fit many cooking pots, not just from Judah. Narrower rims/smaller pots can relate to various other factors, such as changes in family size, different cooking habits, or stylistic changes.

The bones in pit 14109 show nothing luxurious – expensive rarities, preference of "prime meat" parts, etc.[71] Fulton-Lipschits stress only affluence, for example in quoting Meyers:

> "Generally, the biblical examples do not focus on rare or exotic foods or dishes; instead, the mark of an elite feast is the amount of meat consumed".[72]

Yet, the biblical sources hardly describe royal feasts! They describe religious feasts that promote a sense of community.[73] Royal feasts may do that too, but their context is also political and relates to social boundaries.[74] The King's table is mentioned only seven times in the Old Testament, mostly very briefly.[75] Beside lavish quantities of food there is also

[64] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 30.
[65] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 41.
[66] To be fair, the carefully written section on the bones from Pit 14109 (Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 34-39) does not mention the word "feast" at all. It also defines the bones as a "small assemblage" (Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 34).
[67] Ervynck et al 2003, 429-30.
[68] Van der Veen 2003, 405.
[69] Altmann 2011, 103-107; Macdonald 2008, 61-76.
[70] Magness 2014; but see De Cupere et al. 2015.
[71] Ervynck et al 2003, 432-3; Grimstead/Bayham 2010, 860.
[72] Meyers 2014, 146.
[73] Altmann 2011.
[74] Wright 2010.
[75] Malamat 2003, 174.

evidence of luxury: choice meat and game, or choice sheep, fowl, and wine of every kind.[76] Hierarchy is also reflected in reserving a certain portion for Saul.[77]

ANE sources prove that royal feasts expressed not just quantity (affluence), but also quality (luxury). List of offerings in Eanna Temple expresses different-quality meat portions: the King comes first (shoulder, rump [?] and rib-roast), followed by various priests, the cook (the penis?), the brewer, and the baker (the head).[78] The legend of Sargon's dinner mentions how different ranks receive different-quality meats.[79] Receipts c. 1700 BC involve elaborate dishes of the elite, not available to the masses.[80] Neo-Assyrian royal banquets included exotic and rare food items.[81] Many "prestige foods" were available to the elite in Iron Age Babylonia.[82] Expression of hierarchy and luxury in food consumption are known from all over the world in every historical period.[83]

Remove the palace from the pit (i.e., analyze the pit without prior assumptions), and the glamorous elite consumption evaporates. Not just the bones lack luxury, but also the pottery. Words like "prestige items such as incense vessels and figurines"[84] are empty. The two chalices from the pit were never used for incense burning (as explained above). If two broken clay figurines mean prestige, every site in Judah and roughly every second house was "prestigious".

The vessels from the pit are plain, daily vessels. The elite of ANE society – especially royalty – used expensive and exquisite metal, ivory, alabaster, and even amber vessels in their feasts. Such elaborate and elegant vessels are sometimes found in excavations and depicted in ancient art.[85] Some of these vessels are inscribed, proving that they belonged to Royalty. See for example the archaic silver-gilt bowl inscribed "I am [the bowl] of Akestor, king of Paphos"; and the Assyrian golden bowls with names of Queens from the tomb of Yaba.[86] Compare the gold drinking vessels ascribed to Solomon and the gold/silver vessels he received as gifts (I Kings 10, 21, 25). The plain pottery of pit 14109 does not suit the privileged few.

Fulton-Lipschits interpret the pit as a "frozen" image of a royal feast. They boast that they have discovered "a rare snapshot of the actual feast".[87] Allegedly the meat (represented by the bones) was consumed in one event with the help of the pottery vessels from the pit. The vessels formed a complete "drinking and dining set": deep bowls for drinking and shallow bowls for eating, while "the decanter, jugs, and juglets were probably used for serving liquids".[88]

Following the famous "Pompeii Premise" debate,[89] archaeologists reject the notion that assemblages are frozen moments of time.[90] They are derivatives, never direct matches. Indeed, the data from pit 14109 does not fit the pompous "snapshot" interpretation. The 42 deep drinking bowls ill-match the 18 shallow eating bowls. 'Common' people share vessels; but not royals in a palace feast. The decanter, jug, two jugs and two juglets are a peculiar assortment. Surely a magnificent palace had a set of adequate vessels for serving the elite, not such a motley collection?

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[76] 1 Kings 5, 3 [KJ 4, 23]; Neh. 5, 17-18; Wright 2010, 218-222.
[77] 1 Sam 9, 22-24; Altmann 2011, 75, n. 8.
[78] McEwan 1983, 191.
[79] Alster/Oshima 2007, 2-3.
[80] Bottéro 1985.
[81] Altmann 2011, 94-97; Emidoro 2015.
[82] Jursa 2016, 182.
[83] Batten 2017; Gumerman 1997; Van der Veen 2003.
[84] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 43.
[85] Ziffer 2003; Onnis 2009; Busch/Fischer 2010; Maran 2012; Pfälzner et al 2014; Ávila 2015; Hunt 2015.
[86] Respectively, Metropolitan Museum 74.51.4554, http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/243823; Hussein 2016.
[87] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 43.
[88] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 34.
[89] Schiffer 1976, 1-14; Binford 1981; Schiffer 1985.
[90] Lucas 2012, 102-104; Kadrow 1998, 287.

The pottery from the pit has a more complex life-history than that assumed by Fulton-Lipschits. The base of some bowls had been chipped off, rending them useless as eating/drinking vessels. The missing bases were *not* found in the pit, and the edges were polished.[91] Hence, the removal preceded the disposal, contradicting the "snapshot" picture of immediate feast-to-pit transfer. In addition, at least one cooking pot was found in the pit.[92] What is it doing in an assumed royal service set? This is not discussed, perhaps because it does not fit the "snapshot" theory.

The vessels in the pit could originate from various unrelated events, not necessarily feasts. We should be wary of estimating that "too many" vessels do not fit one household, and therefore represent an exceptional event, as Whitelaw observes. He adds:

> "Identifying feasting has been pursued enthusiastically in Aegean prehistory, but by and large, we have not developed convincing methods for recognising such behaviours archaeologically, nor distinguishing the many different forms they may take, with their distinct social implications. In many cases, our data do not have the chronological or depositional resolution necessary to identify such behaviours or events securely".[93]

A well-known jar fragment with a painted figure was found in L477.[94] Fulton-Lipschits treat it as an integral part of the assumed *favissa*/feast/foundation deposit, stressing its "presence within the *favissa*". Allegedly, it shows the host of the feast.[95] Why would participants in a royal feast break a vessel that shows their honorable host? Why would they take the pains to collect for disposal most of the fragments of every plain vessel, but not those of this unique jar?

Regardless of such questions, Fulton-Lipschits pass in complete silence the presence of pottery fragments found in Pit 14109, which are not at all 'festive': jars, cooking pots, and a basin. We know they exist from the work of Freud, who assumes that such fragments do not belong to the pit, but to the fills outside.[96] This is possible, but if pit L14109 is comparable to L477, the same assumption should be employed for pit L477 too, and the painted fragment should also be excluded from discussion. Or can one select the finds that fit one's theory, and ignore those that do not?

Conclusion

Locus 14109 is not a *favissa*, since it lacks all the telltale features of *favissae*. The vessels are not cultic or votive and lack marks of burning and evidence of deliberate breaking. There is no temple or shrine at Ramat Raḥel and the bird and fish bones from the pit are not of sacrificial animals.

Locus 14109 is not a foundation deposit either. Foundation deposits are found mainly in specific points (corners) of temples. They show a specific pattern of layers/fills and include specialized, unique objects (not daily vessels). Foundation deposits are placed with care and therefore their finds are discovered complete (when well-preserved).

Locus 14109 is also not the "frozen" remains of a royal feast in the Ramat Raḥel palace. This Locus is either earlier or later than the time of use of the palace and lacks any sign of luxury (it also hardly shows "conspicuous consumption", or affluence). People do not smash their feasting sets (and a cooking pot), mix them with food refuse, and then bury the whole lot under their floor, as if it is a treasure.

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[91] Freud 2011b, 43. The polishing shows that the breaking of the base was performed for some intentional function, for example, secondary use as fennels. Somehow, Fulton-Lipschits (2015:34) manage to read this as "deliberate damaging of ritual objects and their ceremonial burial".

[92] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, Fig. 3, left.

[93] Whitelaw 2014, 256.

[94] Aharoni 1962, 43; Cornelius 2015; Ziffer 2013; 2014.

[95] Fulton-Lipschits 2015, 41, Fig. 18.

[96] Freud 2011b, 27, 30.

Locus 14109 seems to be a domestic refuse pit, and this is probably what the excavators thought when excavating it. Broken pottery and fragments of animal bones are typical of such pits.[97] The pottery in the pit was broken before disposal. There is no evidence for deliberate breaking (excluding the bowl bases, probably broken for some functional reason *before* and without relation to the disposal in the pit). The pottery from the pit can represent an accumulation of accidentally broken vessels from unrelated events. Could the pit include remains from feast/s? Yes, but only because every refuse pit can in theory represent remains of feasts. Since most human garbage does not come from feasts, not every refuse pit should be related with feasts. Making such a claim without evidence in support is not a contribution to science.

With limited data about the deposition process and doubts about the stratigraphy, various reconstructions are possible. It is not difficult to offer one, but this is not the goal of this paper. Pit 14109 cannot belong both to a time before the establishment of the palace and to the time of its use. It cannot generate a triple impact in the scientific world, first as a foundation deposit, then as a *favissa*, and finally as a rare snapshot of a royal feast. It seems that solid reports on bones and pottery were combined by empty words about elite peer consumption, *favissae*, foundation deposits, diacritical feasting, and so on. A poor combination of ingredients can turn a feast into failure.[98]

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