

Lizard and snake remains in zooarchaeology: the Natufian site of el-Wad Terrace (Mount Carmel, Israel) as a case study

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Squamate remains are sometimes present at archeological sites but are rarely studied due to difficulties regarding recovery, identification and interpretation of micro-vertebrae remains. However, they may provide important information regarding ancient diet and paleo-environmental reconstructions, and thus can offer us a better understanding of past environments and cultures. The Natufian prehistoric culture in the Levant (15,000 – 11,600 years before present) has great importance as a transitional phase between the Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures. The current research focuses on the Natufian site of el-Wad Terrace, Mount Carmel, Israel, one of the first sedentary hamlets, just prior to the adoption of agriculture. El-Wad Terrace is a base-camp displaying a long occupational sequence, including stone structures, cemeteries and numerous zooarchaeological finds. We found a sharp increase in squamate (lizards and snakes) remains in the Natufian, compare to previous Paleolithic cultures, and thoroughly examined them through detailed taxonomic identification and taphonomic analysis. We hypothesize the squamate remains to be part of the expansion of diet breadth that occurred in the Natufian culture. The lizard assemblage in the site is rich and diverse and includes a variety of Mediterranean species (*Pseudopus apodus*, *Stellagama stellio* ssp., *Chamaeleo chamaeleon recticrista*, *Eumeces schneideri pavimentatus*, *Lacerta media israelica* and *Phoenicolacerta laevis*). The research compares accumulation patterns, species diversity and preservation of squamate remains in an intra-site space (the EWT architectural complex), as well through time (Early Natufian versus Late Natufian at el-Wad Terrace). Along with the reconstruction of the Natufian diet, the environment at the end of the Pleistocene in the Early and Late Natufian of Mount Carmel will be discussed.