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Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies

Edited by

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The House and the World
The Israelite House as a Microcosm

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Houses serve not only as shelters from the elements. Since they accommodate families of various types, sizes, and social configurations, they embody a variety of social and cognitive aspects (e.g., Oliver 1987; Waterson 1990). The built environment allows for certain types of social activities and interaction, and therefore structure the inhabitants' perceptions. As Winston Churchill once said, "we shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

This clearly seems to be the case in Iron Age Israel. In this period, a house of a very rigid plan became very dominant, and this rigidity in itself might hint at its social importance. The social significance of the house as a social unit is also exemplified by the language: the word for "house" (*bayit*) is also used to designate a "family" and even larger kinship units; at times, this word reflected the entire kingdom (for the usages of the term, see Schloen 2001; in connection with the four-room house, see Faust and Bunimovitz 2008: 161–62, and references).

In this article we intend to discuss the Iron Age dwelling—the famous four-room house—to show that it was a microcosm of the Israelite world.[1] This structure can serve, therefore, as a window into all aspects of Israelite society, from family structure, through wealth, to ethnicity, cosmology, perceptions of space, and even notions of social justice.

Background

The Four-Room House

The four-room house is a unique feature of Iron Age settlements in the land of Israel (e.g., Shiloh 1970; 1973; 1987; Wright 1978; Holladay 1992; 1997; Netzer 1992; Ji 1997; see also Bunimovitz and Faust 2002; 2003; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003). Hundreds of four-room houses are known today from Iron Age sites, mainly in the highlands—that is, the Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and the Transjordanian Plateau. In most cases, these structures dominate the built environment. Such a predominance

1. Many of the ideas discussed in this article have been published previously (see Bunimovitz and Faust 2002; 2003; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003; see also Faust 2005: 237–55; 2012b: 213–29). The present paper, however, is not only updated but is also more comprehensive and includes additional discussion.

of one house plan is unparalleled in other periods. Furthermore, at some sites, public buildings are also built along similar lines, and even the typical Judahite tomb seems to mimic the four-room plan in form (below). Chronologically, the four-room house first appears in an irregular form in the Iron Age I period and soon crystallized into the characteristic three- or four-room form that was prevalent during the Iron Age II, until its sudden and complete disappearance at the end of the Iron Age. Many studies have therefore been devoted to the structure's various aspects, such as its architectural plan and its presumed origins,[2] its functions, the relation between its various sub-types and between them and family demography in ancient Israel. Scholars also have attempted to explain its great popularity throughout the country for some six centuries and have discussed the ethnic background of its builders and inhabitants.

Description

The term "four-room house" is a convention used to designate the typical Iron Age dwelling in ancient Israel. This is a long house (and in this it deviates from the Bronze Age architectural tradition), whose ideal plan is composed of four main rooms, or, more accurately, spaces or areas. In this configuration three parallel longitudinal spaces are backed by a broad-room, with the entrance to the building located at the central space. As will be seen, while the number of these spaces (usually four or three) is part and parcel of the basic architectural configuration of the house, the number of rooms (i.e., inner division of the areas) varies greatly. There are, however, subtypes of the "ideal" form, comprising three spaces and, in exceptional cases, even five spaces.

In many instances, rows of pillars separate the longitudinal front areas from each other. It had been thought that the central space may have been an open courtyard (Shiloh 1973: 280). This space is usually wider than the building's other spaces and contained more installations, especially tabuns and ovens, than other areas (Netzer 1992: 196). Many archaeologists, however, nowadays believe that the central space was roofed. This reassessment is the outcome of a growing tendency to reconstruct the four-room house as a two-storey building with the main living level on the upper floor (e.g., Holladay 1992; 1997; Stager 1985). The presence of stone steps in a considerable number of excavated buildings also indicates the existence of a second storey. Furthermore, the buildings' thick walls and the closely spaced monoliths are too massive for a single-storey structure (e.g., Netzer 1992). Apparently, the second storey was reached by steps or a wooden ladder.

Past Trends in Explaining the Four-Room House

The Ethnic Explanation

Many studies, in the spirit of the culture-history school, have attempted to explain the great popularity of the four-room house along ethnic lines (e.g., Shiloh 1970; 1973; Wright 1978; Netzer 1992, and many others; see more below). The view

2. Some see it as a reflection of the nomad's tent (Finkelstein 1988: 257, and references). Others look for its roots in Late Bronze Age architecture, especially in the region of the Shephelah (Mazar 1985: 66–68), or in Iron Age Phoenicia (Wright 1978: 154), while Shiloh has suggested that it was an original Israelite "invention" having no antecedents (1973: 285).

that the four-room house was the Israelite house *par excellence* is summarized by Shiloh:

> In the light of the connection between the distribution of this type [of house] and the borders of Israelite settlement, and in light of its period of use and architectural characteristics, it would seem that the use of the four-room house is an original Israelite concept." (Shiloh 1970: 180)

Others have criticized the ethnic label attached to the house (e.g., Ahlström 1993: 339–40; Finkelstein 1996: 204–5; Edelman 2002: 44–45; London 2003; Bloch-Smith 2003: 406–8). In their opinion, the appearance of the four-room house in Iron Age I sites in the lowlands and in Transjordan—namely, in regions traditionally thought to be inhabited by non-Israelites—means that the exclusive affiliation of the house with Israelites is unwarranted. Thus, Finkelstein, after stating that houses do sometimes reflect ethnicity, continues:

> Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Iron Age. Y. Shiloh described the four-room house as an Israelite house type, but it has later been found also in the lowland and Transjordanian Iron I sites. Its popularity in the central hill country must be linked to environmental and social factors, rather than to the ethnic background of the communitie." (1996: 204, 205)

Since the "ethnic explanation" for the wide distribution of the four-room house has fallen into growing disfavor, scholars have looked for an alternative interpretation. Until recently, function was the key attribute embraced almost unanimously to explain the house's great popularity.

The Functional Explanation

A functional analysis of daily life within the four-room house is based primarily on ethnographic analogy and assumes that data about activities conducted in traditional houses today can shed light on the use of the various rooms of the four-room house in antiquity. In the spirit of the New (Processual) Archaeology, such ethnographic analogies have resulted in an interesting suggestion regarding its functional success:

> The pillared house takes its form not from some desert nostalgia monumentalized in stone and mudbrick, but from a living tradition. It was first and foremost a successful adaptation to farm life: the ground floor had space allocated for food processing, small craft production, stabling, and storage; the second floor was suitable for dining, sleeping, and other activities. . . . Its longevity attests to its continuing suitability not only to the environment . . . but also for the socio-economic unit housed in it—for the most part, rural families who farmed and raised livestock. (Stager 1985: 17)

Similar conclusions are reflected in the following:

> From the time of its emergence in force until its demise at the end of Iron Age II, the economic function of the "Israelite House" seems to have been centered upon requirements for storage and stabling, functions for which it was ideally suited. . . . Furthermore, its durability as preferred house type, lasting over 600 years throughout all the diverse environmental regions of Israel and Judah, even stretching down into the wilderness settlements in the central Negeb, testifies

> that it was an extremely successful design for the common—probably landowning—peasant. (Holladay 1992: 316)

Attributing the success of the four-room house to its suitability for peasant daily life is a highly compelling argument, yet it falls short of conveying the full story of the structure's exceptional dominance as an architectural form during the Iron Age, and beyond that, as a cultural phenomenon. There were houses typical of other periods that functioned well, but none of them achieved such a dominant position in the architectural landscape of their time. Moreover, none were so uniform in plan.

While the standardization of the house was a long process, beginning probably at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. and ending during the eleventh or tenth century, its disappearance from the archaeological record in the sixth century B.C.E. is quite sudden (e.g., Shiloh 1973: 281; Holladay 1997: 337; Faust 2004, and references; 2012a: 100–106). No functional explanation can account for the house's sudden loss of popularity. If the house was so suitable for "peasant life" in the Iron Age, why did the peasants living in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods stopped using it?

Morever, if the great uniformity of the plan reflects its functional quality, at least some uniformity in the use of the various spaces within the house is expected. This, however, is not the case. In some houses, the finds in the back rooms indicate daily activities (Singer-Avitz 1996), while in others, this room was used for storing a large number, sometimes even hundreds, of storage-jars (Feig 1995: 3; Herr and Clark 2001: 45).[3]

The fact that all houses, whether urban or rural, rich or poor, are built according to the same plan also argues against the functional theory. In addition, it should be recalled that the four-room plan was applied to public buildings that had nothing in common with "peasant life" (e.g., the western tower at Tell Beit Mirsim or the Fort at Hazor; see Albright 1943; Yadin 1972, respectively; see now Lehmann and Killebrew 2010) and even to the late Iron Age Judahite tombs (e.g., Mazar 1976: 4 n. 9; 1990: 521; Barkay 1994: 147–52; 1999; Faust and Bunimovitz 2008). A close scrutiny of the functional explanation, therefore, brings into relief its shortcomings and paves the way for a new perspective on the four-room house.

Social Aspects of the Four-Room House

We believe that the four-room house embodied Israelite society and values and can be seen as a mircocosm of the Israelite world. An examination of the house can bring many insights into the social and cognitive world of the Israelites. While the question of the ethnicity of the people living in the houses will be addressed in some detail later, suffice it to state that even if non-Israelites dwelt in four-room houses, it is clear that Israelites inhabited them extensively during the Iron Age. It is therefore appropriate to discuss Israelite society in connection with the four-room house.

3. One could claim that the supposed uniform pattern of use is obliterated by finds that fell from the house's second floor. Careful excavations, however, should be able to differentiate between the finds, and, moreover, if the house was used in such a uniform way as some scholars believe, this should apply also for the second floor. The finds in all houses must, therefore, exhibit a similar pattern even if some of them belonged originally to the house's second storey. Moreover, in some cases the finds were clearly in situ, and the two floors were differentiated.

The House and the Family

Before discussing the architectural qualities of the four-room house and its social significance, we would like to address the homology between the house, as a structure, and the family unit (see also Faust and Bunimovitz 2008: 161–62). In Israelite society, as in some other societies (cf. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995), the term "house" (בית) came to symbolize the kinship unit that dwelt within it (cf. Schloen 2001: 71). As Yeivin (1954: 54) wrote, the term was initially used for the dwelling structure of a family and was borrowed to denote a family living together. In Biblical Hebrew, therefore, the word "house" has two meanings. The first is "(T)he ordinary dwelling unit of the settled population," and the second "can signify a family line like the "house of Levy" (Schaub 1994: 441, 442). Examples are, of course, numerous, both in the Bible and in other sources, for example, in the famous case of the "house of David." Hence, anyone who establishes a family is building a "house" (see also Stager 1985).

The same is true for the non-verbal language. In Iron Age II, the four-room house (including its various sub-types) symbolized the family that lived in it. As we will presently see, four-room houses usually represented *extended* families, in contrast to the smaller three-room houses that usually were inhabited by smaller nuclear families. Thus, in Israelite society, the (residential) structure symbolized the concept (residing kinship group).

Family Structure and the Four-Room House

Many biblical scholars, using the biblical texts as a guide, have studied the structure and size of the Israelite family during the Iron Age. Although less often, archaeologists have examined this issue as well, mainly in relation to the four-room house. Most archaeologists who have discussed the four-room house are of the opinion that each single structure housed a nuclear family (e.g., Shiloh 1980; Broshi and Gophna 1984; Stager 1985; Hopkins 1985; Holladay 1992; 1995). These scholars relied primarily on houses excavated at urban sites such as Tel Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Farʿah (N), Tell es-Saʿidiyeh, Hazor, and others. Since the average size of the houses in these sites is 40 to 80 square meters, according to the commonly used density ratio of one person per 10 square meters (roofed area),[4] scholars assumed that they probably accommodated only a nuclear family. Several archaeologists, however, have suggested that the four-room buildings were typically inhabited by extended families (e.g., Dar 1986: 80). Those scholars, however, based their observation only on a few large houses excavated at rural sites. The size of these houses is approximately 120 to 130 square meters (ground floor only)—about twice the area of four-room houses in cities. In previous publications, we showed that a close examination of a large sample of Iron Age rural and urban houses reveals that this is a repeated pattern, and that a clear differentiation must be made between the urban and the rural sectors (Faust 1999; 2005; 2012).

4. Most studies of housing in ancient Israel use this constant, following Naroll (1962) and others. Although this figure is frequently used in Near Eastern archaeology, it is not universally accepted, and some scholars are of the opinion that other constants should be used (e.g., Brown 1987). It is also probable that the ratio between house area and the number of its inhabitants is not universal but culture dependent. Since all settlements discussed below were part of the same cultural unit, cultural variation cannot account for the differences observed.

The difference in size between urban and rural four-room houses seems to be a result neither of function—for example, the agricultural needs of the rural population—nor of circumstances—for example, more free ground for building in villages than in cities (Faust 1999). Rather, it is a faithful reflection of the different social units comprising the urban versus rural sectors of Israelite society during the Iron Age. On the one hand, the comparatively small size of the urban four-room houses supports the common view that they housed nuclear families, comprising two parents and a couple of unmarried children. On the other hand, the large size of most of the rural houses indicates that they housed extended families of at least three generations, which probably included parents, married sons and their children, unmarried daughters, unmarried aunts, additional relatives, and possibly also servants.[5] Such extended families are considered by many scholars as the biblical *Beth Av*, the ideal family type of the Iron Age (see Faust 2000 for references; for the structure of nuclear and extended families, see Yorburg 1975: 6–8). Notably, a number of large houses have occasionally been unearthed in towns, but they are usually also of a higher quality and most probably represent the urban elite (see further discussion below).

The difference in house size between urban and rural sites, along with the existence of a few large and better-built structures in cities, is in line with socio-anthropological information. Particularly relevant is Yorburg's observation that in agricultural societies "the nuclear family . . . seem[s] to be, or ha[s] been, the most prevalent form in urban fringe or urban centers," while "the extended family is most prevalent among the rich and among the land-owning peasants . . ." (1975: 9). Differences in dwelling size between towns, in which nuclear families are more characteristic, and villages, in which extended families predominate, are therefore expected. Moreover, it is also expected that rich urban families would maintain extended families, therefore explaining the existence of a few large and nicely built houses among the normally small urban houses.[6]

Iron Age urban and rural four-room houses differ not only in their size but also in their planning and internal division. Almost all the houses in the rural areas are of the classic four-room type, while the majority of the urban houses (not including those of the elite) are of the three-room subtype. In addition, while many of the rooms in rural four-room houses are further divided, the majority of urban houses have no internal division beyond the three basic rooms. Thus, the number of rooms in a typical rural house (ground floor only) is usually five to eight—more than twice the number of rooms in its urban counterpart. The large number of rooms in rural

5. In rural sites in which a relatively large number of structures were uncovered, major differences between the structures were not discerned, and most of them were of similar size and architectural characteristics (Faust 2005; 2012). This, again, stands in contrast to the reality in cities.

6. The idea that during the Iron Age II several small buildings typically comprised a compound inhabited by an extended family (e.g., Schloen 2001: 51; see already Stager 1985; Callaway 1983; Harmon 1983: 122) does not stand scrutiny, and in reality, hardly any such compound can be reconstructed. This can be seen very clearly by the various settlement plans, for example, at Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en Nasbeh, and other sites (see extensive discussion in Faust 2005; 2012, and references and plans there). In the few, relatively rare cases in which a number of buildings can be grouped together, this seems to arise from architectural limitations that forced the builders to use a shared courtyard rather than from social reasons. It is probable, however, that such compounds were prevalent in the Iron Age I—the main period discussed by Stager, Callaway, and Harmon—but this is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

houses should be attributed to the fact that the houses were inhabited by extended families. This required more options for separation, segregation, and privacy, especially between the separate nuclear families living in the house. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the internal division within rural houses varies considerably in spite of their great uniformity in overall planning. It is reasonable to assume that this variation results from the "life-cycle" of the extended family. In some stages of this cycle, more inhabitants—and nuclear units—would have lived in the house and greater division would have been required. At other times, the number of inhabitants was reduced, and spaces could be enlarged. Apparently, from an archaeological point of view, each excavated four-room house gives us only a snapshot of one stage in the complicated life-cycle of both the house and its past inhabitants.

The contrast regarding family structure (nuclear versus extended) between city and village has already been identified independently by biblical scholars unfamiliar with the disparity revealed in the archaeological data between urban and rural houses (de Vaux 1965: 22–23; Reviv 1993: 50–52). According to them, the rural sector in Israelite society was more conservative, preserving the traditional family framework, whereas families in the urban sector underwent a structural change. As de Vaux (1965: 22–23) wrote:

> Of those great patriarchal families which united several generations around one head, few, if any, remained. Living conditions in towns set a limit to the numbers who could be housed under one roof: the houses discovered by excavations are small. We rarely hear of a father surrounded by more than his unmarried children, and, when a son married and found a new family, he was said to 'build a house'.

The reasons for this change are complex but seem to be closely related to the rise of the monarchy and the resulting increase in urbanization. Gradually, many settlements became cities, the majority of which also became administrative centers. Large numbers of workers were required for the construction of the cities and a variety of monumental building projects. Apparently, the accelerated urbanization was accompanied by major population shifts from the rural areas to towns (Faust 2003). Many sociologists have detected a connection between urbanization and changes in family structure (e.g., Yorburg 1975; Wirth 1965). Some scholars are currently of the opinion that the use of hired labor rather than urbanization per se is the direct cause of changes in family structure (following Greenfield 1961). Most likely, however, there is a high correlation between the two processes, and this seems to be true for the period under discussion. Both urbanization and hired labor generated different residential patterns in towns and villages.

The Four-Room House as a Status Symbol: Rich and Poor

As shown above, variation in house sizes exists not only between towns and villages, but also within towns (see Faust 1999; 2005: 42–141; 2012, and many references). In the latter, it is usually accompanied by a disparity in quality: larger houses were also better built. This seems to be a result of socioeconomic stratification within the cities. Large and well-built houses have been discovered in practically every Iron Age II city, including Hazor (e.g., Yadin 1972; Geva 1989), Tell en-Nasbeh (e.g., Branigan 1966), Tell Beit Mirsim (the West Tower) (Albright 1943; 1993), Shiqmona

(Elgavish 1994), Tel ʾEton (Faust 2011) and Tell el-Farʿah North (de Vaux 1965: 72–73; 1992: 1301; Chambon 1984). These houses stand in sharp contrast to the common small urban houses that most probably were inhabited by nuclear families. Based on the size of the structures, the quality of their plan and building (including, at times, the use of ashlar masonry), and other features, such as their location and the fact that they usually avoided using shared (common) walls, it is clear that these houses belonged to large (extended) and wealthy families, comprising the urban elite.

Houses, like other components of material culture, participate in a society's non-verbal communication and can be used to communicate several types of messages. These messages might be canonical or indexical (Blanton 1994). A canonical message "pertains to the meaning of enduring symbols reflecting concepts held in common by the people participating in a common cultural system" (p. 10). Symbolic communication through the medium of the dwelling involves the creation of a built environment that manifests social divisions based on gender, generation, and rank. In these instances, the house as a living environment is a medium of communication primarily among the occupants of the house itself, providing a material frame that structures day-to-day interactions (pp. 9–10). In this sense, the form of the house embodies taxonomic principles specific to a cultural system; by living in the house, its occupants are constantly made aware of these principles, which are thus inculcated and reinforced.

In an indexical message, on the other hand, "information is communicated concerning the current status of a household . . . in terms . . . such as wealth" (pp. 10–11). While the canonical messages lie primarily within the inner parts of the house, the indexical communicative role of the house involves its more public areas and elements that provide information about costliness and taste to outsiders. The two kinds of messages are seemingly contradictory: "(O)ne could predict that the goals of social linkage communication (which says, 'we're part of the community') could come into conflict with the goals of indexical communication (which might contain the message: 'we're better than everybody else')" (p. 13). In reality, however, it is sometimes not easy to distinguish between the two, and it seems as if both can be transmitted from the same house at the same time. Clearly, the large and well-built four-room houses participated in non-verbal communication and transmitted messages of social difference of the "I'm better than . . ." type. Many of their special attributes were external and sent a clear message to anyone seeing them from the outside.

The Four and Three Room Houses as Representing Different Types of Social Organization

A message of difference was seemingly also expressed in the usage of different architectural models of three-, four-, and five-room houses. The four-room houses are usually larger and better constructed than the three-room houses. The size difference can of course be explained functionally: the larger the building, the more internal walls and/or pillars are required to support the ceiling, and so more interior spaces are created. However, this explanation does not apply to the quality issue. Furthermore, even the small four-room houses are usually more nicely built and of higher quality of construction (see, for example, the building in area G at Hazor; Yadin 1972; Geva 1989). This difference cannot always be explained as an economic

gap, arguing that the four-room houses were inhabited by the wealthy, while the three-room ones housed the poor. Although generally true, we cannot always assume that rich families lived in the smaller four-room houses. Moreover, almost all the rural houses are of the four-room type, even though this is not the richest sector in society. So, wealth is only a partial explanation of the differences between the four- and three-room houses and of their distribution.

Perhaps the solution to this problem lies elsewhere. Above, we analyzed family structure and presented evidence that in the rural sector there were mainly extended families, while in the urban sector there were mainly nuclear families. We also saw that among the urban rich there were extended families (compare Yorburg 1975: 8). This evidence matches the distribution of the building types. Perhaps we may conclude that the four-room houses represent extended families and the strategy of multi-generational continuity, while the three-room houses represent nuclear families. To be precise: this does not mean that each and every four-room house was inhabited only by extended families or that every three-room house was inhabited by a nuclear family, but merely that the number of spaces conveys a certain social message regarding the family structure.

This theory is confirmed by the use of the four-room plan in Judahite tombs (A. Mazar 1976: 4 n. 9; Barkay 1994: 147–52; 1999; Hopkins 1996). These late Iron Age tombs served a multi-generational family: for many generations, the deceased were placed on benches, and after a while their bones were gathered into a repository and the newly deceased were placed on the benches. Thus, the four-room, or four-spaces, tombs conveyed a social message of multi-generationalism, just like the houses (on the connection between buildings and tombs in other cultures, see, e.g., Hodder 1994). No tombs have been found carved in a three-room shape, but it appears that the majority of the population—probably the same people who lived in three-room houses—was buried in simple inhumations that did not usually survive (Barkay 1994: 148; see also Faust 2004; Faust and Bunimovitz 2008). So it is possible that the simple inhumations reflect a section of society that lived in three-room houses, as nuclear families, while the four-room houses and tombs represent the section of society that lived as extended families.

The Four-Room House and the Israelite Mind

And this leads us to additional cognitive aspects of the four-room house. The relation between a society and its architecture is reflexive: People structure their built environment, and the latter, in turn, structures people's perception of space (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979). Thus, there is a strong connection between the built environment and the human cognitive system. Through an analysis of the house's cognitive aspects, we will offer additional insights into the four-room house phenomenon.

Access Analysis

A close examination exposes some interesting qualities of the four-room house. Following the work of Hillier and Hanson (1984) concerning the social logic of space, different building plans can be analyzed and compared for their "space syntax." This term refers to spatial configuration within a built structure and the hierarchy of

accessibility or passage from one room to the other. The social meaning of space syntax is the possible contact between a building's inhabitants and strangers as well as among themselves. Different syntaxes hint, therefore, at different systems or codes of social and cultural relations. When properly analyzed, the syntax of the four-room house exhibits a very shallow "tree shape"—that is, all the inner rooms are directly accessible from the house's central space. On the other hand, other types of dwellings, for example, the Middle Bronze Age–Late Bronze Age courtyard house and the "Canaanite–Phoenician" house of the Iron Age show either a "path" or a "deep" tree shape—that is, there is a hierarchy of access within the house: some rooms can be entered only by passing through other rooms (not including the central space).

Egalitarian Ideology. An intriguing implication of access analysis of the four-room house is the correspondence between its non-hierarchical configuration—a quality that is lacking in most complex houses—and the "democratic" or egalitarian ethos of Israelite society observed by biblical scholars from diverse schools of thought (e.g., Gordis 1971: 45–60; Gottwald 1979; Berman 2008), as well as by archaeologists. Archaeologically speaking, this ethos is expressed in the lack of decoration on pottery, the avoidance of imported pottery, burial in simple inhumations rather than elaborate tombs throughout the Iron I and most of the Iron Age II, the lack of royal inscriptions in Israel and Judah (for an extended discussion, see Faust 2006), and also by the space syntax of the four-room house, to be discussed presently.

Relying on a cross-cultural sample of houses and households, Blanton demonstrated that large households display a complex and hierarchically structured arrangement of living and sleeping spaces reflecting their complex social structure (1994: 64). This is often manifested in hierarchical grading of accessibility and structural depth of spaces within the house related to generational and in some cases gender-based status distinctions, or both. These are houses in which special living/sleeping areas are frequently set aside for married children, as opposed to the ad hoc sleeping arrangements or shared sleeping spaces often seen in societies with simpler houses. Since four-room houses, especially in the rural sector as well as those of the urban elite, usually contain multiple rooms created by secondary division of the main spaces, it is clear that established arrangements for space usage were part and parcel of daily life within these houses. Yet, as mentioned above, the typical four-room plan lacks "depth" or access hierarchy, thus expressing a more egalitarian spirit than contemporaneous or previous house plans in the region.

The structure of the four-room house, with its supposedly egalitarian ethos, seems to bear a canonical message essential for the structuring of society. By living in the house, its occupants absorbed the values embodied in it, thus ensuring the continuity of the ethos itself.

Purity and Space Syntax. Another major outcome of the analysis of movement within the four-room house is that the house was most appropriate for a society that considered privacy to be of importance or when contact had to be regulated. Since each room could have been accessed directly from the central space, there was no need to pass through other rooms.

More than twenty years ago, the biblical scholar Moshe Weinfeld tentatively suggested that the four-room plan might have facilitated the separation between

purity and impurity such as men's avoidance of women during menstruation (Netzer 1992: 19 n. 24). The access analysis of the four-room house makes this suggestion possible. According to this analysis, purity could be strictly kept even if an unclean person resided in the house, because the other inhabitants could avoid the room in which he or, more often, she, stayed at this time.

Notably, most of the biblical purity laws,[7] while imposing restrictions on menstruating women, do not require them to leave the house, unlike other ancient Near Eastern societies (Milgrom 1991: 952–53) and many societies throughout the world (e.g., Gallaway 1997). These laws might, therefore, reflect a situation in which menstruating women were allowed to stay within the house, but due to the restrictions imposed on them it is reasonable that they spent some of their time in a separate room. The plan of the four-room house seems suitable for such a custom. As will be discussed later, the possible connection between the four-room plan and a specific ethnic behavior such as that related to purity/impurity laws may hint that the plan was adapted or developed to accommodate such a practice or, more likely, that the laws—conducts of behavior—were structured by the house plan (clearly there is some interrelation between the two; see, e.g., Giddens 1979).

Whether or not purity matters were involved, it is obvious that the four-room house enabled contact regulation and ensured privacy.

But why was the house so prevalent and uniform?

Order, Dominance, and Conformity

According to Mary Douglas, many of the biblical laws, mainly those related to holiness, are actually about order (1966). In an insightful analysis of the abominations of Leviticus (that is relevant also to other biblical passages), she developed the idea that holiness is exemplified by wholeness and completeness. Many of the laws—covering all aspects of life from war to sexual behavior, and from social conduct to dietary rules—are related to sets of precepts stemming from that basic principle. All of these precepts embrace the idea of holiness as order and of confusion as sin. Holiness requires completeness in a social context—an important enterprise, once begun, must not be left incomplete. Holiness requires that individuals conform to the class to which they belong and that different classes of things should not be mixed with each other. To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. Hybrids and other confusions are abominations.

In light of this ideology, the astonishing dominance of the four-room plan on almost all levels of Israelite architectural design becomes intelligible.[8] If the Israelites

7. Mainly those of P, the Priestly source of the Pentateuch. While there is almost a consensus regarding the dating of some of the laws to the late Iron Age (those of D, the Deuteronomist source), the dating of P is debated. Apparently, most scholars believe that P was written during the Persian Period. Recently, however, there is a tendency to date P to the Exilic period and to maintain that some, or even most, of its content is earlier in origin (e.g., Clines 1993: 580). This suffices to allow us to refer to P in our discussion, but it is even more important and relevant that a growing number of scholars studying the Pentateuch (and P) date P on various grounds to the Iron Age (e.g., Wenham 1979: 13; Friedman 1987: Milgrom 1991: 12–13).

8. It should be noted that a similar pattern can be seen in other facets of Israelite material culture, for example, the eastern orientation of houses and settlements (below).

were deeply engaged with unity and "order" as a negation of separateness and confusion, then these concepts must have percolated through all spheres of daily life, including material culture. Thus, it can be surmised that once the four-room house took shape and was adopted by the Israelites, for whatever reasons, it became the "right" house type and hence rose in popularity. Building according to other architectural schemes must have been considered a deviation from the norm.

Cosmology and Conformity

As we have seen, houses participate in a society's non-verbal communication. The ideological aspects of egalitarianism, purity, and order fall into the category of canonical communication. In many cases, canonical messages refer to cosmological schemes. This is best exemplified in the case of the four-room house by its orientation. An examination of four-room buildings, and even Iron Age settlements, indicates that the vast majority of them were oriented toward the east, while the west was extremely under-represented (for an extensive discussion, see Faust 2001). An examination of various climatic and functional considerations does not explain the phenomenon. Many ethnographic studies have demonstrated the strong influence cosmological principles have on the planning of buildings and settlements, and in many cases the east is regarded as the most auspicious direction (e.g., Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994; Waterson 1990, and many references). In the case of the four-room house, we have additional information that supports the latter idea. The common Biblical Hebrew word for east is *qedma* "forward," while the west is *ʾaḥora* "backward." This means, unsurprisingly, that the Israelite "ego" faced east. Additional words for these directions indicate that east had a good connotation, while the west had a bad one, expressed for example by calling it *yam*—that is, "sea," which in biblical thinking sometimes represented the forces of chaos and unknown—that is, the exact opposite of order, or God, and can therefore be seen as "anti-God."

Furthermore, it is quite clear that, in the perception of the society in which much of the Bible was authored, it is not only that the west was seen as "bad" direction, but the east was regarded as the location of God. This can be seen not only in the connotations of the various words but also in several narratives. In the Exodus story, for example, the Sea of Reeds is forced to open for the Israelites by the easterly wind—God's wind. This is also quite explicit in various passages in Ezekiel 40–48, where Ezekiel describes the temple in Jerusalem. According to Ezekiel's description, the Temple courts had three gates each, the main one in the east and two others in the south and north. It is striking that *no entrance is described in the west.* Perhaps more important is the description of the *eastern gates*. This is the *main* gate through which Ezekiel enters the temple (40:4ff.). Later, however, the eastern gate is described as being closed, *since this is the gate through which God is entering the Temple* (44:2): "The LORD said to me, "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it." The eastern gate as the entrance through which God enters the Temple is illustrated very clearly in chapter 43:1–4:

> Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Ke-

> bar River, and I fell facedown. The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east.

In chapter 46, the inner eastern gate is described as being closed except on the *Sabbath* and the beginning of the new month, and the *Nasi* (Prince) enters the court through this gate (see vv. 1, 9). It should be clear that, topographically, the easiest way to approach the Temple was from the north (or south), but because the northern edge of the Temple Mount was also the northern edge of the city, the northern approach was probably out of the question, and the best way to approach the Temple from within the city was from the south. To the east lies the Kidron Valley, which lay outside the city wall and from which it was very difficult to climb toward the Temple. This eastern direction for the main entrance in Ezekiel's vision could only have therefore been chosen only for quite specific religious or, more accurately, cosmological reasons.

It is clear that the description is not historical and, at best, contains some historical elements. Not only, however, is the question whether the description is historical or not completely irrelevant, the fact that it is, at least to a very large extent, ahistorical even reinforces its importance, because it provides an insight into what Ezekiel, and the period's society, considered appropriate.

The eastern orientation of the majority of four-room houses seems, therefore, to reflect their inhabitants' cosmology (see extended discussion in Faust 2001). The strict adherence to this cosmological scheme adds to the other cognitive aspects of the four-room house discussed above and seems also to result from the Israelite ordered world-view.

The House as a Microcosm

The above discussion leads us to the similarity between the house and the settlement, and it appears that the dwelling served also as a microcosm. Not only were both oriented to the east, but both shared a similar perception of space (on the relation between residential houses and the city in terms of the perception of space, see Rapoport 1969: 69–78). The perception of space in the Israelite city can be divided into three types: "private space," meaning the home; "communal space," encompassing the public areas of the city, including the streets and the public (communal) area near the gate; and "public space," meaning the areas outside the city where everyone could move freely. A similar perception of space existed regarding the residential house: the private space for the residents was their rooms and intimate activity spaces, such as the rooms of the nuclear families within the extended family dwelling; the central space, and perhaps also the front yard, was perceived as space common to all the house's inhabitants; while the space beyond the house was considered, in terms of the family unit, as public.

Private and Public Buildings, or Justice and Righteousness in the Israelite City

And this leads to another issue. The eastern orientation was partially at least meant to protect the entrance to the house and the city. Entrances are transitional spaces and are therefore weak and dangerous places that require special attention and protection. Elsewhere (Faust 2005: 111–22; 2012b: 100–109), we have suggested that, in the city, the gate area served various purposes, including the well-known functions of juridical procedures, cult, trade, etc., but that the term "gate," *šaʿar*,

refers to the entire public quarter that was unearthed in most cities next to the gate and which was communal to all members of the city. One function that is often mentioned in the Bible in relation to the gate is related to the poor and needy (for example, Exod 20:10; Deut 14:21; 14:28–29; 15:7; 23:15–16; 31:12; Amos 5:12; Job 5:4; Prov 22:22, and many others). It appears that fringe social elements stayed in this transitional area. But where? Elsewhere we have suggested that, when the famous pillared buildings, usually interpreted as stables or storehouses but also as barracks, markets, and custom houses (the literature is vast; see for example, Yadin 1975; Holladay 1986; Currid 1992; Herzog 1992; Fritz 1995: 142–43; Kochavi 1992; 1998; Blakely 2002), appear in the gate complex, they could not have served as stables or storehouses. The finds in these structures are domestic in nature—although the quantities are very large (e.g., Herzog 1973: 25; Fritz 1993: 200; 1995: 142; Kochavi 1992; Faust 2005: 114–15; 2012b: 101–2)—and, moreover, when "real" storehouses are found—for example, in Jerusalem, Tel Ira, Lachish and more—they were built following a completely different architectural concept (Mazar and Mazar 1989: E. Mazar 1991; Beit Arieh 1999; Zimhoni 1990; Ussishkin 2004). In our view, the pillared buildings uncovered in the gate area served various functions but also as a place where the poor, widows, orphans, strangers, etc. could stay. They were part of the "justice and righteousness" system in the ancient Israelite city (the issue cannot be dealt with in detail here; for extensive discussion, see Faust 2005: 111–22; 2012b: 100–109).

It is therefore striking that these pillared buildings are very similar in form to the four-room house and that they appear in the same time. The long pillared buildings appear from the end of the Iron Age I to the end of the Iron Age II (for literature, see Currid 1992; Herzog 1992; Blakely 2002). Like the four-room house, the pillared building is a long building, and in this respect they both deviate from the dominant architectural tradition of Israel in the Bronze Age. Both contain three internal long spaces, and both, in many cases, use stone pillars (monoliths). In this context, Herzog's description of the pillared building is remarkably similar to the front three spaces of the four-room house (ignoring the section about troughs):

> Pillared buildings are a well-defined architectural group in the framework of Iron Age construction. They are rectangular and their space is divided longitudinally by pillars into three narrow halls. The flanking halls are generally paved with flagstones, and the floor in the central hall is beaten earth. . . . The entrance to the pillared building was generally in the short side, making its plan that of a longhouse. (Herzog 1992: 223)

We already suggested that the pillared buildings served, among other things, as a refuge for society's poor and oppressed, on the one hand, and as a place of justice, on the other hand. According to this interpretation, the public pillared building expresses the ideology of "justice and righteousness" to which Israelite society felt committed (see extensive discussion in Weinfeld 2000), just as the private four-room houses expressed an ideology (or ethos) of equality. These two ideological principles are, of course, linked to one another. Thus, the ideological commitment is realized both at the individual level and at the public level.

The state's, or the king's, duty to uphold justice and care for its under-classes is equivalent to similar duties imposed upon family members in a traditional society.

The father and elders served, to a great extent, as judges for their family members, and the Bible often notes the individual's duty to care for the weaker elements of society. The similarity between the four-room house and the pillared building may also be related to the similar ideological message of mutual responsibility they both express: the residential house reflects the concern for weak members of the family, its poor and unfortunate, just as the public building reflects this attitude toward society's oppressed, the poor and unfortunate of the entire city. We should note that this does not mean that this ideology did not lose its validity over time, or that it ever dictated public behavior—only that the structures expressed an ideology.

Enhancing Identity

We must note that the great uniformity of the four-room house and its dominant position in the Iron Age architectural landscape strengthened the "we-ness" of its users and reinforced their values and ideology. It is important to bear in mind that building a house according to the traditional code of a society communicates a social message—"we are part of the community"—and enhances the coherence of that community.

The Four-Room House and Ethnicity Revisited

We associate the four-room house with Iron Age Israelite society. As already mentioned, however, some scholars reject the ethnic label attached to the house, pointing to its distribution beyond Israelite territory (above). In our opinion, this objection is unfounded, first, because most of the examples presented by these scholars do not fall within the four-room house category. The houses do have four rooms *or* pillars, yet their overall architectural configuration is completely different. This is, for example, the case at Sahab, Tel Qiri, Tel Keisan, Afula, and other structures used as examples of four-room houses outside Israelite territory (e.g., Ibrahim 1975; Gilboa 1987: 60; Ahlström 1993: 339). At Tel Keisan, for example, the houses are very different from four-room houses, and this was explicitly stated by the excavator, Humbert: "the building consisted of four units, but it cannot be defined as a 'four-room house'" (1993: 865–66). At Sahab, after excavating what he thought was a similar building, Ibrahim (1975: 72–3) wrote:

> There are just a few examples of the "pillared house" [note the terminology and its alternation—A.F. and S.B.] excavated in East Jordan. A series of pillared houses from the Iron Age II were excavated at Tell es-Saʿidiyyeh in the Jordan valley, Crystal Bennet excavated a very similar structure at Tawilan near Petra.
>
> However, this type of room were excavated in a large number of Palestinian sites, especially at Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell el-Farʿah, Tell el-Qadi (Hazor) [sic A.F.], Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Mutassallim (Megiddo), Jericho, and others. Most of these examples have been considered in various discussions, including two articles by Y. Shiloh. . . . At least one point should be mentioned, that the examples found within the Ammonite and Edomite regions do not fit with the conclusion of Shiloh.

But the house at Sahab has nothing to do with the four-room house. The mere existence of pillars seems to have misled Ibrahim, who confused four-room houses with houses with pillars. And the same is true for Afula, where a house with four rooms

was misunderstood by some scholars to mean a four-room house. We must stress, therefore, that neither the number of rooms nor the presence of pillars are sufficient indicators for a four-room house.

Second, some of the exceptional examples of four-room houses mentioned in the literature are located in Transjordan and were probably used by Israelite groups living in this region (e.g., Ji 1997; Herr and Clark 2001).

Finally, most of the few "*real*" four-room houses outside Israelite territory date to the Iron Age I (e.g., Daviau 1999: 132), prior to the final crystallization of ethnic groups in the region.

Notably, the number of Iron Age II four-room houses outside Israelite territory is minimal (e.g., Ghareh), and this stands in contrast to their dominant position within this territory.[9] It is clear, therefore, that in this period the distribution of four-room houses almost overlaps Israelite settlement.

Like the spatial distribution of the four-room house, the temporal span of its existence also associates it with the Israelites. The house crystallized in the Iron Age I, the period of the Israelite settlement, became prominent during the period of the monarchy, and disappeared with the destruction of the kingdom of Judah.

This being said, the four-room house could still have been used by non-Israelites who found it suitable for their needs. Practically, however, this occurred rather rarely, perhaps because the house gradually became "associated" with the Israelites.[10] Indeed, it is the Israelites who used the four-room house extensively because it successfully complemented their way of life, both reflecting and shaping their mindset.

Summary: The Four-Room House and Israelite Society

Four-room houses of various subtypes first appeared in Iron Age I, alongside other types of houses. It is possible that at this stage function played a major role in the development of the house, but it should be noted that the "classical" four-room plan was not yet standardized. Gradually, however, the house evolved into its well-known form. It seems that this process occurred concurrently with the ethnogenesis of the Israelites.

We are well aware today that material culture should not be simply equated with ethnicity. However, in the process of self-identification of any human group vis-à-vis other groups, certain aspects of material culture may reflect ethnic behavior or even be deliberately chosen to communicate ethnicity. The four-room house should be viewed in this light. Internally, the house successfully negotiated Israelite values and way of life. In consequence, and because of the Israelite ordered world-view, the

9. The existence of relatively large number of exceptions in Transjordan is a result of the fact that ethnic boundaries (especially in the Iron Age I) were more blurred there than in Cisjordan (Faust 2006: 221–26).

10. Not only are such houses not frequent outside the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but even within the boundaries of these polities, these houses were usually not used by non-Israelites, for example, in the northern valleys (Faust 2000; Faust 2005: 256–83; 2012b: 230–54). This also explains Mazar's (2008: 333) statement that the situation in Tel Rehov is an exception to the rule, since no four-room houses were found in this city, which is located within the Kingdom of Israel. On various grounds, it is quite clear that most of Tel Rehov's inhabitants were non-Israelites, and hence the absence of four-room houses should not be a surprise.

four-room house (and its subtypes) came to be the most popular dwelling in Iron Age II, inhabited by extended and nuclear families, rich and poor.[11] While the house was structured according to the Israelite mind, its mature form structured, in a dialectical process, Israelite codes of behavior. Ultimately, it became a mental template that also influenced the plan of public buildings and even of Judahite tombs. Thus, the four-room house that dominated the domestic architecture of the Iron Age II epitomizes Israelite society. Eventually, the destruction and exile of Israel and Judah brought an end to the house that embodied the Israelite way of life and, to a large extent, structured the Israelite mind.

11. And its association with the Israelites, in turn, diminished its use by non-Israelites.

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