

# 3 Future Directions in the Study of Ethnicity in Ancient Israel

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## Abstract

Ethnicity has always been a central issue in Biblical Archaeology. Still, detecting ethnic groups in the archaeological record of ancient Israel in general, and identifying the Israelites in particular, have become less fashionable recently, with many scholars avoiding this altogether. The present article will analyze the reasons for this attitude, and, in light of anthropological approaches to ethnicity, will suggest a new method for the study of ethnic groups in the archaeological record of ancient Israel.

Ethnicity has always been a major theme in Biblical Archaeology. Recently, it became a focus of a heated debate, with several schools contesting the issue of Israelite ethnicity. Some aspects of the debate have even reached the mass-media, and are of great public interest.

Until not long ago, in the spirit of the culture-history school, ‘archaeological cultures’ were simply identified with ‘peoples’. A notable example of this view is the Iron I culture of the highlands, which was identified as Israelite. Gradually, however, and mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, this view fell into disfavor. This development was due to both (1) the failure of this explanation to account for the expected archaeological patterns in the highlands, i.e., lack of Gibeonites, Jebusites, and other ethnic groups, in the archaeological record (e.g. Skjeggstand 1992), and (2) the indirect impact of the new (processual) archaeology, which viewed the study of ethnicity as a ‘virtual pariah’ (see below). These factors, combined with the more skeptical approaches to the biblical texts that became more prevalent as time progressed, all led almost to the abandonment of labels such as ‘Israelites’ from the archaeological discourse. Today, while a few scholars still speak of Israelites in discussing the Iron Age I, terms like ‘proto-Israelites’ have become more prevalent (e.g. Dever 1991: 87; 1992b; 1995a: 206-7; Williamson 1998: 147), and many prefer to avoid ‘Israelites’ altogether (e.g. Skjeggstand 1992; Lemche 1998; Thompson 1999; see also Finkelstein 1996).

The identification of ethnic groups in the archaeological record of ancient Israel in general, and the question whether we can speak of Israelites in the Iron I in particular, therefore became a highly contested issue. Today, it appears that we have almost reached a dead-end.

## Biblical Archaeology and Anthropological Archaeology: An Introductory Note

As is widely known, there is a large theoretical gap between Biblical Archaeology and ‘regular’ (anthropological) archaeology (e.g. Bunimovitz and Faust, this volume; Levy, this volume;

Bunimovitz 2001; Dever 1981, 1992a; Geva 1992; see also Moorey 1991: 139-43). The archaeology of the Land of Israel along with that of neighboring regions was developed in the shadow of the texts (e.g. Moorey 1991). While no doubt an important source, the scientific agenda and research question of the emerging Biblical Archaeology were to a large extent dictated by pre-conceived knowledge and interest. Whether this was appropriate or not is a different question, but it definitely limited the discipline's agenda. While many early studies simply aimed at illustrating the texts, and later ones to prove or disprove them, it is clear that even today, regardless of one's position on the historicity of the Bible, the *agenda* of many is still dictated by the texts (see even Finkelstein and Silberman 2001). Among the main questions are those relating to wars, kings and prophets and to the events, or at least the background of the events, depicted in the Bible, and their historicity.

Many other 'archaeologies', however, were developed as a study of prehistory or a sub-discipline of anthropology, dealing with anthropological questions concerning households, family size, community organization, socio-economic stratification, economic systems, political organization, etc. (e.g. Trigger 1989; Renfrew and Bahn 1996; Johnson 1999). While there is a growing contact between Biblical Archaeology and anthropology, it is still not a major theme, and even the impact of the new (processual) archaeology, let alone post-processual approaches, on Biblical Archaeology was limited (Bunimovitz and Faust, this volume; Bunimovitz 2001; Dever 1981, 1997; Geva 1992; Davis 2004: 150-51; the unimportance of those strands of thought can also be seen in their almost complete absence from Davis's book).

Biblical Archaeology concentrates on issues that appear to be directly connected with biblical history or related debates, whether accepting their historicity or rejecting it (see most recently Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, 2006), and is usually not immersed in approaches and advances made in anthropology/anthropological archaeology (there are exceptions to this generalization, of course). And even when the research questions seemed to converge, scholars from the various sub-disciplines would engage them in a totally different way. Indeed, as we will see below, this can be best exemplified in the study of the Israelite ethnicity.

Cautiously, I would like to claim that this is not only a somewhat narrow approach which limits the research questions of our sub-discipline, but also a major hindrance in the attempts to answer the very questions biblical archaeologists have traditionally been interested in, in general, and to decipher issues relating to ethnicity in Biblical Archaeology, in particular.

On the positive side, the archaeology of ancient Israel (and Biblical Archaeology at large) has a much richer archaeological database than the archaeology of any other region in the world. In Israel alone, hundreds of planned excavations and thousands of salvage excavations were carried out, along with detailed surveys. This makes Israel an excellent archaeological field laboratory (e.g. Faust and Safrai 2005). But due to the above mentioned theoretical gap, this huge database is not used to advance anthropological-archaeological studies. Many excellent studies, conducted in other regions, are built on a very limited datasets, while ours, which is many times larger, is hardly 'used' for anthropological purposes at all. The 'gap', therefore, has a negative impact not only on Biblical Archaeology, but also, though on a different scale, on the general, anthropological archaeology.

With respect to ethnicity I would like to claim that part of the current 'dead-end' we are facing in the study of ethnicity in ancient Israel results from this partial interaction with anthropological archaeology and that the latter has much to contribute to the study of ancient ethnicities. On the other hand, I believe that 'our' rich database can contribute to general studies of ethnicity, including to the understudied issue of ethnogenesis, i.e., how ethnic groups are created.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Due to the nature of ethnicity, such an identity (i.e. ethnic identity) was already established when Europeans documented other societies. The study of what brought it about, and how it was formed, were

## Ethnicity in Archaeology

### The Culture History School

Archaeologists have always attempted to identify ethnic groups in the archaeological record. This endeavor was more or less the main agenda of the Culture History school, the dominant archaeological paradigm during most of the 20th century. Archaeologists working in this tradition equated 'archaeological cultures', identified by their material culture, with ethnic groups (e.g. Trigger 1989; Jones 1997; McNairn 1980). Childe succinctly explains the rationale for this approach: 'We find certain types of remains—pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms—constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall term "cultural group" or just a "culture". We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a "people"' (1929: v-vi; but see also Childe 1951: 40). This approach was based on a normative understanding of culture, i.e., that norms or rules of behavior prescribe the practices and behaviors of members of any given group, as a result of shared ideas, worldviews, and beliefs (e.g. Jones 1997: 24; Johnson 1999: 16-17).

### The New (Processual) Archaeology

The New Archaeology, which evolved in the 1960s and later came to be known as Processual Archaeology, generally failed to direct much attention to the identification of ethnic groups (e.g. Jones 1997: 5, 26-27, 111; De Boer 1990: 102). This school grew out of the dissatisfaction with the 'unscientific' nature of the Culture History school, specifically its inductive approach, its lack of rigorous scientific procedures, its descriptive nature, and, most important for our purposes, its normative approach to culture (Binford 1962, 1965). Much discussion was devoted to adaptation. The new school believed that archaeological remains were the product of a range of complex processes and not 'simply a reflection of ideational norms' (Jones 1997: 26).

Moreover, adherents of the New Archaeology school were interested in generalizations and laws, and disregarded the specific and the unique. Studies of differences and uniqueness, e.g., studies of specific ethnic identities, were consequently inconsistent with their scientific agenda (Trigger 1989: 312-19). It is further likely that the disinterest in discussions of ethnicity also resulted from the horrifying outcome of the racial archaeology, which was so prevalent in Europe (e.g. Hall 1997: 1-2). This so-called 'archaeology' collaborated with the justification of the Nazi claims of racial superiority and, as a consequence, contributed to the extermination of millions. Ethnicity was relegated to a minor role as a part of discussions on style, which were in themselves not of great concern (e.g. De Boer 1990: 102).

With the advent of New (Processual) Archaeology, therefore, the methodological foundations of the Culture History school and its normative approach to culture were heavily criticized and fell into disfavor (Binford 1962, 1965; see also Jones 1997; Trigger 1989; Ryman, O'Brien, and Dunnell 1997).

### Changes in Anthropological Approaches to Ethnicity

At about the same time, however, revolutionary changes were occurring in the anthropological approach to ethnicity.

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therefore usually beyond the realm of anthropological studies (but see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Faust 2006).

The most important development in the study of ethnicity in general came with the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). In his introduction to the book, Barth (1969: 10-13) criticizes the conventional view of ethnic groups as 'culture-bearing units', by which he means groups sharing core values that find representation in cultural forms (1969: 10-11). Barth defines ethnic groups as, in essence, a form of social organization; its critical criterion is an ability to be identified and distinguished among others, or in his words, allowing 'self-ascription and ascription by others' (1969: 11, 13). Ethnic identity here is not determined by biological or genetic factors but is subject to perception and is adaptable. Barth's views had an immense impact in the social sciences, and probably even more so in archaeology, so much so that in Emberling's overview of the study of ethnicity in archaeology, works on the subject are referred to as B.B. (before Barth) or A.B. (after Barth) (1997: 295; see also Jones 1997: 60). With his work, emphasis shifted from the shared elements or characteristics of a group to the features that distinguish it from others. It was the contact between groups that was seen as essential for the formation of the self-identity of a group (see also Cohen 1985), which is thus clearly manifested in its material culture.

Following these developments in anthropology and sociology, archaeologists have also come to understand that ethnicity is too complex to be merely identified with a material or an archaeological culture (see, e.g., Hodder 1982a); it is fluid, it is merely one of several attributes of an individual's complete identity, and it is subjective (e.g. Shenan 1989, 1991; Emberling 1997; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Jones 1997, and bibliography there). This new understanding of ethnicity also seemed appropriate for several Post-Processual approaches to archaeology that were beginning to develop (e.g. Hall 1997: 142; Jones 1997: 5-6).

### Archaeology and Ethnicity: The Response

As observed in existing groups, the subjective nature of ethnicity has led some scholars to question the ability of archaeologists to identify ethnic groups in the material record of extinct societies (see Jones 1997: 109-10, 124; with regard to the Levant, see Herzog 1997).<sup>2</sup> Yet in most cases, clear relationships between material culture and ethnicity can be identified, however complicated they may be (McGuire 1982; Kamp and Yoffee 1980; Emberling 1997, and others; see also Howard 1996: 239-40), and the potential of archaeological inquiry to deal with such issues should not be underestimated.

The new anthropological approaches to ethnicity were propagated at a time of change in archaeological thinking. New/Processual Archaeology, at least in its original orthodox version, was the target of increasing criticism, primarily by what came to be known as Post-Processual archaeologists (e.g. on various grounds, Trigger 1989; Hodder 1991, 1992, and others; see even Flannery 1973). The Post-Processual approaches (some of them at least) reinstated a different, yet normative approach to culture, which did not seek to desert older approaches entirely (Hodder 1991: 1; Bunimovitz 1999: 147-48). Today archaeology is much more responsive to the study of ethnicity, acknowledging its subjective nature. Today's approaches, including both Post-Processual approaches and the new Cognitive/Processual Archaeology (Renfrew 1994), tackle problems concerning ideology and worldviews and in dealing with symbols. We shall expand on this issue below. In the meantime, however, we should turn to the study of Israelite ethnicity.

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2. Note that some claim that ethnicity is modern, and that there were no ethnicities in the past (based on works such as Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). This view, which is based on studies of modern nationalism, seems unfounded (e.g. Hall 1997; Smith 1986, 1994; Banks 1996; Atkinson 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, and many others; see also Grosby 2002), and need not be discussed here.

## History of Research of Israelite Ethnicity

### Identifying the Israelites in the Iron Age Archaeological Record

The Iron Age I settlement in the highlands is a well-known phenomenon which drew much scholarly interest and was discussed in detail by many scholars (e.g. Finkelstein 1988; Gotwald 1979; Callaway 1983; Stager 1998; Mazar 1992; Dever 2003). The following quote from Dever (1994: 215) summarizes the phenomenon:

In the late 13<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> cents. B.C. there occurred a major influx of new settlers into the hill country, especially from Jerusalem northward to Shechem. Hundreds of small villages were now established, not on the remains of destroyed or abandoned Late Bronze Age Urban Canaanite sites, but de novo. These villages are characterized chiefly by their hilltop location and lack of defensive walls...

Indeed, the locations and material remains of the Iron I agricultural villages indicate a rather different lifestyle from that of the Late Bronze Age, the settlements of which were concentrated mainly in the valleys and plains and were highly stratified. The Iron Age settlements were rural and concentrated in an area that was relatively uninhabited in the preceding centuries (e.g. Finkelstein 1988; Dever 1994; 1995a: 204). Their inhabitants lived in a new type of building called the three- or four-room house (or its proto-type). The finds from the Iron Age hill country villages were poor and rudimentary. While pottery forms had Late Bronze Age antecedents, the assemblages typically included a limited pottery repertoire, consisting of cooking pots, bowls, and storage jars, which were mainly of the collared rim type.

Until the 1990s, scholarly consensus held that these settlers constituted 'early Israel,' corresponding to the period of the Judges in the Bible (e.g. Albright 1961; Aharoni 1979: 193-94; Finkelstein 1988). This concept was based on the assumption that the settlement of the Israelite tribes as mentioned in the Bible was synonymous with the material remains uncovered by archaeologists, a seemingly secure identification in light of the mentioning of Israel as an ethnic group in the Merenptah stele, dating to the end of the 13th century BCE (Stager 1985a; Na'aman 1994: 247-49; Bloch-Smith and Alpert Nakhai 1999: 77).

The material culture of these sites was therefore seen, in the tradition of the dominant cultural history school, as representing the Israelites (e.g. Mazar 1992: 287-95). This approach can be exemplified by the various attempts made to deduce the Israelite character of Megiddo Stratum VI from the presence of several characteristics, mainly the collared rim jar (Albright 1937; Aharoni 1970; Esse 1991, 1992, and references).

### Questioning the Identification

Gradually, however, serious doubts arose on the direct equation of these material remains with the Israelites. Criticism focused on the discrepancy between the territories supposedly inhabited by Israelites, and the distribution of their assumed material markers. According to Ibrahim, for example, the presence of both four-room houses and collared rim jars in Transjordan outside of the area of the Israelite settlement is clearly problematic evidence (Ibrahim 1975, 1978, and others). He concludes: 'The presence of the collared-rim jar during the late 13th–12th centuries cannot be attributed to one single ethnic group. The origin and the long use of the type under discussion, whenever and wherever, ought to be considered in connection with a social-economic tradition' (1978: 124). And similar discrepancies were observed in the distribution of the four-room house (e.g. Ibrahim 1975; Mazar 1980: 74-75; Finkelstein 1996: 204-5), leading many scholars to conclude that the unique connection between this building type and the Israelites is incorrect, and that the four-room house, as well as collared rim jars, should be explained by their functionality and suitability for life

in highland farming communities (many of those discrepancies do not stand scrutiny, but this is beyond the scope of the present article; see Faust 2006). Notably, these explanations were in implicit accordance with the adaptation spirit of the New Archaeology.

Furthermore, various scholars have pointed to the heterogeneity of Early Iron Age society in the region, and to the fact that there is no evidence that the highland's 'material culture' was distinctively Israelite, as opposed to being Jebusite, Hivite, Moabite, etc. (Miller and Hayes 1986: 85), or of any other group which, according to the Bible, inhabited the region at the time. The texts indicated that, although the area was inhabited by Israelites during the Iron Age II, there were also other groups in the region during the Iron Age I (e.g. the Gibeonites, Josh. 9; the Jebusites, Judg. 19:10-11; 2 Sam. 5:5-7; and others). Since the attempts to identify more than one 'archaeological culture' in the highlands failed, many scholars concluded that we should not identify the highland's archaeological culture with the Israelites.

Indeed, the problems with Iron I ethnic labels initially concentrated on the question of how to distinguish an Israelite from a member of any other group inhabiting the region at the time, as mentioned in the Bible (B. Mazar 1981; Ahlstrom 1984; A. Mazar 1994: 90-91; Finkelstein 1988: 28, 65; see also Skjeggstand 1992: 165, 176, 177, 185; Stager 1998: 1367; Kempinski 1995: 60). However, not only were the basic concepts of the Culture History school never questioned, but they were directly responsible for the dissatisfaction with the identification of the Israelites with the highland material culture. The inapplicability of the term Israelites was based on our inability to differentiate between Israelite 'culture' and other 'cultures' in the archaeological record, and was therefore still in the spirit of the Culture History school.

The observation of these issues was also accompanied by a more cautious approach to the issue of identifying ethnic groups in the archaeological record—what has been called 'pots and peoples' (e.g. Parr 1978; but see already Engberg 1940). While a cautious and even negative approach was typical of the New Archaeology (e.g. Renfrew 1993; Jones 1997: 5, 26-27; see above), it had only an indirect influence on Syro-Palestinian archaeology. However, although these two lines of criticism—the problematic distribution of traits on the one hand and the indirect impact of the skepticism of the New Archaeology toward the study of ethnicity on the other—occurred together, it should be stressed that they are not complementary, if not contradictory (Faust 2006). Both, however (along with, as we shall see below, the strong influence of skeptic approaches of the minimalist school) have gradually raised doubts over the once popular identification of the Israelites with these Iron I material traits.

Ironically, although those dealing with the archaeology of ancient Israel still work to a large extent in the tradition of the Cultural History school, it seems that the evaluation of ethnicity—the center of this approach—has changed.

Thus, what might be seen as a failure of the old-fashioned culture history school to identify the Israelites, was taken as a proof that the Israelites cannot be identified archaeologically in the Iron Age, and hence (according to some) that there was no such group.

### Solutions and Problems

With these challenges, the Israelite label on the settlers in the highlands became increasingly problematic. At the time, Finkelstein suggested that we should treat all groups living in the Iron I highlands as Israelites (1988: 27-28) on the rationale that regardless of their ethnic affiliation during the Iron I, they became Israelite from the 10th century BCE onward after the formation of the monarchy (see also Mazar 1990b: 95-96).

Finkelstein's solution was a subject of criticism, particularly by Skjeggstand (1992). The critics based much of their argumentations on Finkelstein's misleading conclusion that the Iron Age I pottery forms of the highlands were very different from their Late Bronze Age predecessors

(Skjeggstand 1992: 170 n. 24; Dever 1995a; 2000: 69 n. 21). The assumption of the critics was that the similarity in pottery forms (and perhaps in other traits as well) between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I indicates continuity in population and culture, therefore invalidating the applicability of the term Israelite for these (Canaanite) Iron I settlers.<sup>3</sup> The question of how can we differentiate Israelites from Canaanites or identify the Iron I settlers came to the forefront.

In order to avoid the problem, W.G. Dever suggested calling the highland's Iron I population 'Proto-Israelite' (1991: 87; 1992b; 1995a: 206-7; see also Williamson 1998: 147). Dever's rationale seems to have been based on his awareness that this population had indeed constituted an ethnic group, and that this, together with the mentioning of Israel in the Merenptah stela and the continuity of material culture from Iron I to Iron II in the hill country (when there is no doubt about the identity of the population), is a sufficient justification to use the term. Like Finkelstein, he partially used the consensus on the Iron Age II reality as a basis for conclusions on a previous period.

At the same time, however, the minimalist school was 'established'. This school, which is also referred to as the nihilistic, deconstructionist, and Copenhagen school, and is led by figures such as Lemche, Thompson, Whitelam, and Davies (although they differ on some matters, their views are similar enough to label them a school), has attempted to undermine the relevancy of the term Israel to Iron Age society, beginning with the Iron I, but continuing well into the Iron II (see, e.g., Whitelam 1996; Thompson 2000).<sup>4</sup> Thompson's approach is representative; he claims that his study leaves no room for ethnic unity within the highland regions (2000: 156; see also Davies 1992: 69). The very existence of ancient Israel has been questioned (despite denials; for example, by Lemche 1998: 63), thus dragging the debate to other grounds. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of this school and its political-ideological views (as has been detailed by many, e.g., Dever 1998: 50; Pasto 1998; Rendsburg 1999; see also Rainey 1994 and various papers in Levine and Mazar 2001), but it should be emphasized that these scholars have usually offered no new evidence or even new insights into the discussion. Generally, their writings show inaptitude in both archaeological theory and even archaeological data (e.g. Dever 1998: 46; Faust 2006). They have, however, greatly influenced academic discourse, even if indirectly, especially in their denial of Israelite ethnicity (e.g. Thompson 2000: 165).

Within this new intellectual environment, Finkelstein re-examined the archaeological evidence for Israel's existence in the highlands during the Iron Age I and took a more critical stance. Referencing earlier papers by Dever (1995b, 1995c), whose title included the phrase, 'will the real Israel please stand up?', he wrote a paper whose title included the question 'Can the Real Israel Stand Up?' There, he claimed that since the pottery forms continue Late Bronze Age antecedents and the characteristic architectural forms of the highlands are found in the lowlands and Transjordan, these cannot be seen as Israelite (Finkelstein 1996). He concluded that the only criterion that can be used to infer the presence of Israelites at the time is the absence of pig bones (Finkelstein 1996: 206). Yet, despite this he concluded that the Israelites cannot be recognized in the Iron Age I archaeological record, but only in that of the Iron II (Finkelstein 1996: 209).

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3. Notably, the confusion between the issues of ethnic identity and 'origins', exemplified here, had enhanced the feeling of a 'dead-end'. The two issues are related, of course, but are not the same, and should be dealt with separately (see the detailed discussion in Faust 2006). Notably, the present paper deals mainly with the question of identity and does not cover the question of origins. In the past, debate over the latter relied to a large extent simply on the presence or absence of foreign items or traits. The question of Israel's origins in relation to ethnogenesis has been discussed in detail recently by Levy and Holl (2002), as part of a larger study which also considered other examples. This work can serve as an example for the great potential of anthropological approaches also to the study of the origins of ancient Israel.

4. And even later (Thompson 1999; 2000: 155-57).

### **The Current State of Research into Israelite Ethnicity: A Dead End**

Today, the prevalent attitude toward the study of ethnicity is one of skepticism (see also Edelman 2002; although this might be changing now, see recently Levy and Holl 2002; Dever 2003; Bloch-Smith 2003; Miller 2004; Killebrew 2005; Faust 2006). Due to the above, many have abandoned the term 'Israelite', with some scholars preferring the term 'proto-Israelites' while others avoiding 'Israelites' altogether (although it is not always clear what term they do prefer). Each side seems to entrench itself in its position, and the issue of Israelite ethnicity, which turned into one of the major issues in the study of ancient Israel, seems unresolved.

### **Identifying Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record**

While the problem of identifying the Israelites in the archaeological record appears almost impossible to solve, there are many instances, in other parts of the world, in which ethnic groups are identified archaeologically (despite the much smaller archaeological database, see e.g., McGuire 1982; Clark 2001; Hodder 1982; Hall 1997, and many others; for a general overview and many references, see also Emberling 1997; Faust 2006: 15-19, and references).

So what went wrong here? Clearly, the present skeptical approach regarding the ability of archaeology to tackle the question of ethnicity is unwarranted, when examined on a world-scale. It appears that the skeptical stance prevalent in the archaeology of ancient Israel is to a large extent a result of the failure of biblical archaeologists (most of whom are still working in the spirit of the culture history school) to identify the 'archaeological cultures' of the Israelites, Gibeonites, Jebusites, etc., and to distinguish between them. As we have seen above, it is the failure to distinguish between those archaeological cultures, along with the skeptical approaches in biblical studies and the indirect negative influence of the (long ago dead) new archaeology which have led to the currently held pessimistic assessment. Clearly, the skeptical stance is based on very shaky methodological foundations.

### **Identifying Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record: Some Preliminary Observations**

It is accepted today that groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups (Barth 1969; see also R. Cohen 1978a: 389; A.P. Cohen 1985: 558). The ethnic boundaries of a group are not defined by the sum of cultural traits contained by it but by the idiosyncratic use of specific material and behavioral symbols as compared with other groups (McGuire 1982: 160; see also Kamp and Yoffe 1980: 96; Emberling 1997: 299; Barth 1969: 14, 15; Hall 1997: 135). McGuire (1982: 163) points out that overt material symbols of ethnic identity (ethnic markers, e.g., yarmulke) are the clearest evidence of the maintenance of an ethnic boundary. However, such markers are scarce in the archaeological record. Furthermore, grasping the symbolic significance of artifacts can be extremely difficult. While all groups may communicate messages of identity through material culture, the vehicles used differ by group, message, and context. Which artifact can express a boundary of a group depends on the ideas people in that society have about what 'an appropriate artifact for group marking' is (Hodder 1991: 3), but the selection may seem arbitrary to outside observers. One group might choose elements of clothing, while another might choose ceramics. Pinpointing those elements of material culture that were meaningful to any particular group, and determining when to attribute significance to an observed variation in the distribution of certain artifacts is, therefore, a complicated endeavor.

Notably, in addition to ethnic markers, ethnicity can also be identified by 'ethnically specific behavior', or more accurately, by the material correlates of such behavior. Such behavioral differences might include, in McGuire's (1982: 163) words, 'variations in rubbish disposal patterns...or differences in floor plans of dwellings, which reflect differing behavioral requirements for space'.



This ethnic behavior is much easier to identify than ethnic markers, as archaeology is to a large extent a 'behavioral science'. As an instructive example, one can consider the 'Parting Ways' site in Plymouth, Massachusetts, which was inhabited by freed African slaves following the American Revolution (Deetz 1996: 187-211). Excavations at the site revealed a material culture generally similar to that of contemporary sites, but as observed by Deetz (1996: 210), there existed real differences in house construction, trash disposal, and community arrangement as compared to these sites—differences that could have been overlooked based on a 'traditional' analysis of the artifacts themselves. So it is not the artifacts themselves that necessarily carry any ethnic importance, but the use made of these artifacts that is potentially important. Another, better known, example, is the lack of pig bones in Israelite sites. This is not the place to discuss the relation between pig consumption and ethnicity (Hesse 1986, 1990; Hesse and Wapnish 1997; Faust 2006: 35-40), but it is clear that if they bear any connection, the absence of pigs is not an ethnic marker but a result of an ethnic behavior.

It should also be noted that in many cases there are elements (artifacts, decoration, etc.), that are used to convey messages to other members of the group, and are connected to intra-group communication. In many cases, however, those elements are not spread evenly across the human landscape, and are used by members of a specific group only—the group which uses it for its inter-group communication—hence, as a by-product, they 'are likely to offer not only good but the best evidence of "ethnicity" generally preserved in the archaeological record' (David *et al.* 1988: 378; see also Hodder 1982).

Notably, social dimensions such as economic status, prestige, religion, occupation, urban or rural setting, and other factors may all affect the symbolic content of artifacts (McGuire 1982: 164; see also Kamp and Yoffee 1980: 97; London 1989; Skjeggstand 1992: 179-80; Orser and Fagan 1995: 215-16; Emberling 1997: 305-6, 310-11; see also Finkelstein 1996: 204). Contradictions between different kinds of symbols may confound interpretations even further, such as when a member of an ethnic group characterized by a low economic status attains a higher status, or in elite dwellings, when the finds might include both symbols of solidarity with the local group along with symbols of solidarity with its peers. The latter message might at times contradict the former.

In order to differentiate between the various 'combinations of effects,' a full examination of the society should be undertaken to identify all the social dimensions relevant to material culture production and symbolization (see Kamp and Yoffee 1980). Only after the other elements have been identified can we attribute ethnic labels to some traits of material culture. The second step, of course, should be to find the tangible connection between those material traits and the ethnic group under discussion. The difficulties inherent in any attempt to identify symbolic traits in the archaeological record require the use of a very large database, but also that attention be given to written sources. Although sometimes quite problematic, a careful examination of these sources is needed in order to extract maximum information and gain insights into the society in question (see also Hall 1997: 142).

## The Way Forward

As we have seen, the archaeology of ancient Israel is still, to a large extent, divorced from anthropology. That poses a clear problem to any attempt to study ethnicity, which is, after all, an anthropological question.

It is insufficient, however, simply to conduct better, more anthropologically oriented studies of 'ethnicity' in the Iron Age. Ethnicity is but one aspect of social life, and probably the most illusive of them (Renfrew 1993: 20), and it cannot be studied in isolation from other aspects of society. Likewise, it should only be tackled after such issues as economic structure, inequality, class, gender,

social organization, cosmology, and worldviews have been adequately dealt with. Unfortunately, much of the study of Israelite ethnicity has been conducted only as a by-product of studies by scholars more focused on the reconstruction (or deconstruction) of political, or biblical, history. Whereas they correctly understood that the general history of ancient Israel is inseparable from the issue of ethnicity, most of these scholars did not pay attention to other aspects of Israelite society and this is a major obstacle in any attempt to gain a real insight into Israelite ethnicity. Only when combined with detailed studies of all aspects of Israelite society is there a good chance of identifying ethnicity in the period's archaeological record.

### **Archaeology of the Israelites**

Space is insufficient for a serious discussion of archaeology and Israelite ethnicity, but in the following few paragraphs I would like to hint at several promising directions (for a detailed discussion see Faust 2006).

The possible importance of food habits, and mainly the avoidance of pigs, is a well-known example of a trait that seems to have been ethnically meaningful during the Iron Age. While not without problems (e.g. Hesse and Wapnish 1997), it is commonly accepted today that the Israelites avoided the consumption of pork, and that this variable is ethnically sensitive (see even Finkelstein 1996: 206).

To this, one can now add additional variables. Following a detailed discussion of various aspects of Israelite society (e.g. Faust 2005, 2006, in press), several patterns, which are not connected with class, wealth, occupation, gender, or similar factors, can be identified and, moreover, be directly connected with ethnic behavior. Among those, one can list the tendency of the Israelites not to decorate their pottery, to avoid imported pottery, to bury their dead in simple inhumations (during most of the Iron Age), and several other traits, many of which seems to share a common denominator, and appear to result from a shared ethos: an ethos of simplicity and egalitarianism which was created as part of a boundary maintenance during Israel's ethnogenesis (Faust 2006; see also Faust 2004). Some of these traits partake in Israelite society's *internal* communications and negotiations, but as a by-product can serve as clear indications for Israel's external boundaries (for a detailed discussion, see Faust 2006, and references). Most traits, however, were chosen directly as part of negotiations (and boundary maintenance) with other groups, and are therefore in explicit contrast with traits and behaviors of those groups (Faust 2006; see also Levy and Holl 2002: 112-13).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The widespread skeptical approaches toward the ability of archaeology to identify ethnic groups in the archaeological record of ancient Israel are unwarranted. It is based on the failure of the culture-history approach to identify archaeological cultures which correspond with the groups mentioned in the Bible on the one hand, and on outdated views on the nature of the archaeology of ethnicity on the other.

The existing gap between the archaeology of ancient Israel and anthropological archaeology is damaging, and is partially responsible for the dead-end we are facing when studying ethnicity in ancient Israel. Indeed, a number of more anthropological or anthropologically oriented studies conducted recently (Levy and Holl 2002; Dever 2003; Bloch-Smith 2003; Miller 2004; Killebrew 2005; Faust 2006) identify ancient Israel archaeologically, and will, in my opinion, change what seems currently like a 'skeptical' discourse.

While better-informed studies of ethnicity will overcome what appears like a dead-end, it should be stressed that this is not sufficient. Biblical Archaeology should not only open up to more

‘theoretical’ or ‘anthropological’ studies of ethnicity, but widen its research agenda, in order to embrace the study of society in all its aspects. One cannot study ethnicity in isolation, even if it is a ‘hot’ and ‘sexy’ issue, as it is but one, very complex aspect of society.

A detailed study of the societies involved will enable us to learn about family structure, community organization, wealth, economic structures, gender relations, etc., which in turn will allow us to identify ethnic behaviors, and even ethnic symbols. Only detailed knowledge will allow us insights into the society’s cognitive world, including its identity.

The relations between Biblical Archaeology and anthropological archaeology, however, need not be one-sided, i.e., the former borrowing from the latter. Due to our extremely large database, the archaeology of ancient Israel has much to contribute to general anthropology. Due to the hundreds of planned excavations, thousands of salvage excavations, and extensive surveys, we currently possess enough data against which the conclusions of various studies can be examined and checked. In this respect, Israel is an archaeological laboratory, which was practically not used by general archaeology. The availability of many texts, as problematic as they are, is also a great advantage for the study of ethnic markers and behaviors. Texts are, after all, cultural documents of the society that produces them, regardless of their historicity (Murray 1998: xxxi; King and Stager 2001: 7). This is, therefore, another potential strength of our sub-discipline (see also Bunimovitz and Faust, this volume), and it supplements the advantages of our vast material database even further.

And this is the great promise that lies in Biblical Archaeology: Not only would a better interaction between Biblical Archaeology and anthropological archaeology help and greatly improve Biblical Archaeology in general and the study of ethnicity in ancient Israel in particular, but Biblical Archaeology has a great potential to contribute to anthropology. We should use this potential.

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