

Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel
and Beyond

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Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond

Edited by

Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling and Laura B. Mazow



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AY-L, JRE and LBM

INTRODUCTION: THE PAST AND PRESENT OF HOUSEHOLD ARCHAEOLOGY IN ISRAEL

Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling and Laura B. Mazow

Households are the “most common social component of subsistence, the smallest and most abundant activity group” (Wilk and Rathje 1982: 618). The household, along with its archaeological manifestation in domestic assemblages, merits research in its own right not only because it is the social group best represented in the archaeological record, but also because its practices within the domestic sphere directly relate to the economy, political organization, and social structure (Tringham 1991: 101). The domestic arena, inseparable from family and kinship, is where socialization starts. Here, by participating in behavioral patterns and observing the behavior of others, one acquires some of the most important elements of one’s identity, among them kinship and language (Bourdieu 1990).

Despite the impressive number of well-excavated domestic contexts in Bronze and Iron Age levels at sites in Israel, studies relating to household behavioral patterns, kinship groups, and manifestations of status and gender within the house were uncommon in the archaeology of the 1980s and early 1990s (with the notable exceptions of Stager 1985a; Geva 1989; Daviau 1993; and Singer-Avitz 1996). Several articles that are mostly descriptive catalogues appeared during this time in edited volumes (e.g., Kempinski and Reich 1992). A significant departure from this is Holladay’s entry “House, Israelite” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, which used ethnoarchaeological data to investigate demographics, activity areas, and socioeconomic aspects of Iron II houses (1992). In the present volume, Hardin takes up the task of reviewing the history of household archaeology in the southern Levant in the 1980s and 1990s.

For the most part, the power of the text in “biblical archaeology” dictated an extremely narrow set of research questions. The study of household assemblages was one-dimensional and selective in scope, ignoring aspects of gender, household production, and status in the houses of the early Israelites and Philistines. Researchers instead asked “macro” questions relating to group identity and ethnicity

(Yasur-Landau 2010). The most notable cases are the numerous studies devoted to the so-called four-room house and its role as an ethnic marker of ancient Israelites (e.g., Shiloh 1970; Fritz 1977; Herzog 1984; see Bunimovitz and Faust 2003a for further references) and the debate over the interpretation of the absence of pig remains from Iron I Israelite settlements as an indicator of an early taboo against pork consumption (e.g., Dever 1995; Finkelstein 1996; Hesse and Wapnish 1997). Additionally, several studies published in the 1990s used material culture remains from domestic contexts to demonstrate distinct ethnic boundaries between Israelites and Philistines and between Canaanites and Philistines in the formative period of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996; Finkelstein 1996, 1997; Killebrew 1998).

From the mid 1990s to more recently, new areas have been investigated in the archaeology of the Philistines that have gone beyond a simple focus on ethnicity and into the realm of household archaeology; these include technological aspects of pottery production (e.g., Killebrew 1996, 1998; Ben-Shlomo 2006a), ancient foodways (e.g., Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008), and the study of aspects of gender in the Philistine migration (e.g., Yasur-Landau 1999; Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 2002). The meticulous recording system of finds at Tel Mique-Ekron has enabled Mazow (2005) to conduct the first full quantitative spatial analysis of multiple household assemblages in Philistia. There is no doubt that the similarly detailed record of excavations at Ashkelon (Stager et al. 2008) will inspire similar studies. At the same time, however, study of the early Israelites through household remains continued to be characterized by a strong component of ethnic studies (Killebrew 2005; Faust 2006), while it also developed new approaches to the archaeology of the family, including ideological aspects of the four-room house (Bunimovitz and Faust 2003a), gender and household production (Meyers 2003a), household cult (Ackerman 2003), and even narrative reconstructions of life among the Iron I highland peasants (van der Toorn 2003; Ebeling 2010).

The renewed interest in household archaeology in recent years has yielded a growing corpus of articles dealing with a wide range of topics, from spatial analyses of activity areas to family structure and kinship ideology (e.g., Faust 1999a, 2001; Schloen 2001; Bunimovitz and Faust 2003a; Ebeling and Rowan 2004; Hardin 2004; and Gadot and Yasur-Landau 2006, to name a few). In addition, a volume of *Near Eastern Archaeology* (Herr 2003) was devoted to the theme “House

and Home in the Southern Levant,” presenting five papers centering on houses from the Neolithic through the Byzantine period. One can note, however, the continued focus on the four-room house (see above) with two articles devoted to that subject (e.g., Faust and Bunimovitz 2003b; Clark 2003).

Despite the growing contributions to this developing field, however, recent general publications on the archaeology of the Levant (e.g., Richard 2003) have not included articles on houses or household archaeology, revealing the lack of integration of these topics into larger accessible treatments. To date, there has not been a single conference dedicated to household archaeology in Israel and not a single edited volume has appeared.

The present volume, which grew out of a successful round-table session on household archaeology in the Bronze and Iron Age Levant, held at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Boston, Massachusetts, is therefore the first volume to be published on household archaeology in this region. The majority of the seventeen papers included in this volume reflect innovative points of view on various aspects of theory and praxis of household archaeology during the Bronze and Iron Ages (ca. 3000–586 BCE) in the Levant and surrounding regions (Anatolia and the Aegean). Many of the papers show the great advantage of taking a holistic approach to the study of household assemblages. Combining the study of architecture with a spatial and functional analysis of artifacts and ecofacts often results in a more comprehensive reconstruction of the activities carried out in each domestic unit. At the same time, the studies included in this volume frequently employ explicit archaeological methodologies for the analysis of household remains that are inspired by theoretical advances in world archaeology. The next step in household archaeology research in Israel is presented here, with the use of tailor-made data collection strategies designed to answer questions posed by household archaeology.

Along with these innovations come challenges that are apparent in the papers in this volume. The complexity of site formation processes, for example, is not adequately addressed by some authors. In addition, some authors shy away from using ethnicity or do so rather simplistically. Sometimes the data themselves make analyses a challenge, as in cases where researchers have admirably attempted to reanalyze material excavated long ago. Challenges related to artifact collection and curation simply do not permit the types of statistical analyses that are possible using material from recent excavation projects.

The first section of this book includes three papers that use very different research methodologies. *Hardin's* paper places the study of household archaeology in the Levant within the very rich theoretical background of household archaeology practiced in world archaeology. He reviews the development of household archaeology in the New World and in the Levant before turning to the archaeological and other evidence available in the southern Levant—including texts and ethnographic, ethnohistoric, and ethnoarchaeological data—to identify households and reconstruct past domestic behavior. Hardin examines the important contribution of Schloen (2001), which highlights the various data sources available for household research in the Levant, as a case study. He concludes his review on a positive note, suggesting that household archaeology is beginning to impact the archaeology of the Levant in much the same way that it impacted New World archaeology in recent decades.

While household archaeology studies can be conducted on any excavation data, an emerging trend in the archaeology of the Southern Levant is to excavate areas with specific questions in mind relating to household activities and using multidisciplinary approaches for data retrieval.

Marom and *Zuckerman's* work at Tel Hazor is an example of such a project. In their paper, the authors describe the tailor-made recovery procedure for zooarchaeological remains created for the study of Area S, a domestic area within the lower city. In a climate of “biblical archaeology,” in which archaeological theory, if used at all, was most often applied in hindsight, we cannot overestimate the importance of this effort to present an explicit methodological framework for the retrieval of data relevant to the study of Bronze Age households.

The advantages of multidisciplinary methodologies are clearly demonstrated in the paper by *Shahack-Gross*, who stresses the importance of geoarchaeological, and especially micromorphological, approaches to studying archaeological contexts. The case study of the Iron I monumental building from Tel Dor is an important cautionary tale, warning against an intuitive interpretation of archaeological deposits. Deposits first interpreted as floors were reanalyzed using micromorphological analyses and determined to be accumulations of dung on top of the actual floor. A second case study complements the work of Gadot and Yasur-Landau (2006) on the burned late Iron I house at Tel Megiddo, a complex excavated with the clear intention of reconstructing the

lives of household groups. Shahack-Gross's work also exposes intriguing details on trash disposal practices at the site that have added to the understanding of activities practiced outside the house itself.

The second section of the book includes case studies in household archaeology in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and in the Iron Age. Interest in Israelite and Philistine ethnicity, with its current focus on the study of Iron I domestic contexts, has left Canaanite households of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages largely ignored in recent research. Three articles in this volume demonstrate how little we know about the Canaanites and, at the same time, the great potential of household archaeology to address fundamental questions about Canaanite society, including status differentiation, gender relations, and intragroup tensions.

Yasur-Landau's work touches on the tense interactions between domestic groups and the emerging rulership at the dawn of urbanization in the MB I, and the conflicts that resulted when areas in which houses once stood were built over with fortification walls and palaces. At Tel Dan such conflicts may have led to political instability, while at Tel Megiddo household groups resisted the restrictions imposed by the construction of fortifications for generations. In the late MBI and early MBII, several mechanisms were implemented for minimizing conflicts; the most important among them was the massive enlargement of the areas of sites to allow natural growth of domestic areas as well as sufficient space for monumental structures.

Panitz-Cohen's paper clearly demonstrates the great value of well-excavated contexts for the reconstruction of past behavioral patterns. Her meticulous analysis of the pottery from two household assemblages at Tel Batash offers important insights on questions of household wealth, status, and composition during the era of Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty control over Canaan.

The contribution of *Shai, Maeir, Gadot, and Uziel* deals with the important theme of identifying the purpose of architectural units, and specifically differentiating between private and public architecture using a LBII structure from Tell es-Şafi/Gath as a case study. Such differentiation is more easily made in the case of either a humble domestic structure or a palatial building, but is harder in less easily defined cases, such as the "patrician houses" in Levantine archaeology. The presentation of a systematic, multivariable analysis of this structure and its contents provides a very useful tool for the study of such structures in the future.

The study of ancient Israelite and Philistine ethnicity, as noted above, has led to the investigation of questions of domestic behavioral patterns. Four papers in this volume show the further development of this trend, reflecting a focus on domestic activities not only as ethnic markers but as a means of understanding past societies. Thus, *Ilan's* chapter goes beyond the popular interest in identifying archaeological evidence for the settlement of the tribe of Dan as described in Judges 18. Instead, Ilan carefully examines the architecture, tools, vessels, and zooarchaeological finds to reconstruct an intriguing process of transformation from corporate group village organization to a town fabric dominated by nuclear families.

The search for an explicit household methodology is evident also in *Gadot's* work on Iron I houses along the Yarkon River in four different twelfth–eleventh century BCE communities: Aphek, 'Izbet Šartah, Tell Qasile, and Tel Gerisa. His list of variables developed for comparing houses and their location within sites enables a richer understanding of settlement patterns in this region during the Iron I. The results go far beyond demarcating ethnicity and reveal a marked variability in rural settlement structures within the same small region in the form of a village, a compound community, a town community, and a farmstead.

While *koiné* is a term commonly associated with the spread of artistic styles and related elite behavioral patterns, *Ben-Shlomo's* study argues for the existence of an eastern Mediterranean *koiné* of twelfth-century-BCE Aegean domestic behavioral patterns. He argues that similar behavioral patterns seen in domestic activities, such as cooking and serving food, and textile manufacture, and in cultic paraphernalia, reflect shared conceptions of house and household that were created through multilateral transmissions (both east and west) of peoples (immigrants) and ideas.

A complementary picture of Aegean households on the Greek mainland in the twelfth century is presented by *Stockhammer*, who explores the change in feasting activities between the Palatial and Post-Palatial periods in the town of Tiryns. The feast in the Post-Palatial period is characterized as an event in which the memory of the Palatial past is narrated and manipulated, and an ethos of international contacts with other parts of the Aegean is presented.

Four papers focus on Iron II houses in the Kingdoms of Judah, Israel, Sam'al, and Gath. However, in contrast to past tendencies in biblical archaeology, in these papers the house is presented as much

more than a mere locus in which ancient Israelite identity resided and the biblical habitus was created and maintained.

Faust presents a compelling case for patterns of household economy in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In the rural areas, extended families were the common economic unit, and the lineage economy mediated between the households and the royal economy. The situation in the towns was more complex: most families functioned as nuclear families, directly interacting with the royal economy, while the rich and upper classes were able to maintain their extended family networks.

The great value found in the reinterpretation of existing excavation data is shown in *Brody's* meticulous spatial analysis of pottery and other finds from the Iron II houses at Tell en-Naṣbeh, biblical Mizpah. Brody's conclusion differs from Faust's by arguing for the important role of extended families and urban household compounds shared by several nuclear families in this Iron II city.

Singer-Avitz's article is the first English-language presentation of the author's important work at Beersheba, which was one of the first studies to implement a spatial analysis of an Iron II domestic context. In contrast to the situation of organic growth at Tell en-Naṣbeh, Beersheba was a planned site. The predominant architecture of three- and four-room houses, without compounds or clusters of buildings, suggests that most units on the site were occupied by nuclear families. However, two structures located by the city gate (Buildings 1228 and 1229), which did not contain ovens, grinding stones or loom weights, are interpreted as nondomestic units, perhaps guest houses or spaces for official use.

The later part of the Iron Age was an era in which political pressure, taxation, and conquest by the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires had a profound impact on all strata of society in the Levant. *Herrmann* puts forward an implicit methodological framework aimed at understanding the impact of empires on daily life through a study of continuity and change in the domestic economies and social organization of domestic structures in an Assyrian imperial province, using a case study of the Zincirli, ancient Sam'al, households.

The third part of this volume deals with the identification of household cult and its role as an important domestic activity. Israelite household cult is discussed by *Nakhai* in an article that exposes the important role of domestic cult practices in two separate realms. In the first, subsistence and the domestic economy were attended to at

the household shrine, which was located in the home of the familial elders within the multiroom residential compound. In the second, Nakhai discusses the importance of women's cult practices, which were primarily concerned with matters relating to reproduction. These rituals were conducted in almost every home using special religious ephemera, and not limited to the shrines.

The role of the cult within Philistine households is examined by *Press*, who puts forward various methodological difficulties in identifying household cults and differentiating between popular and official cultic practices. His two case studies—Tel Miqne-Ekron Room 16, which was interpreted by the excavators as a cultic room, and Ashdod Room 5032, which was interpreted as a domestic space even though it yielded a major cultic find (a complete “Ashdoda” figurine)—show the interconnectedness between the domestic and the cultic, the official and the private. The positivistic methodological approach presented in this paper is innovative not only in its refusal to offer a definite solution, but also in its articulation of the basic questions and definitions. It thus creates a solid foundation for future contextual study of figurines and other cultic objects in Philistia.

Hitchcock exposes lines of similarity and aspects of difference between household cultic practices in the Aegean, Cyprus, and the Levant in her study on the form and function of cult corners. According to the author, the use of the term “cult corners,” which derives from the archaeology of the Levant, is also useful for the study of non-domestic cults in the Aegean and may facilitate further comparative studies of religious practices in the Aegean and the Levant.

We hope that the diverse collection of papers in this volume provides much food for thought and inspires archaeologists working in the southern Levant and beyond to develop research projects in the area of household archaeology.

A TALE OF TWO HOUSES: THE ROLE OF POTTERY IN RECONSTRUCTING HOUSEHOLD WEALTH AND COMPOSITION

Nava Panitz-Cohen

The opportunity to examine the complete contents of a building, preserved as is on the day of its sudden and violent destruction, is not particularly common in archaeological excavations, where successive occupation is generally uneventful and entails the periodic partial or complete depletion of the contents (La Motta and Schiffer 1999: 20–21). Such an opportunity arose at Tel Batash (biblical Timnah) in the Shephelah region of Israel, where excavations revealed a succession of four superimposed dwellings dated to the Late Bronze Age (henceforth LB), all of which met a violent end (Mazar 1997b: 41–69). The two earlier structures, dated to LBIA and early LBIB, respectively, were not entirely excavated. The two later houses (Figs. 1 and 2)—Building 475 of late LBIB (Stratum VIII) and Building 315 of LBIIA (Stratum VII)—were found complete with rich assemblages of restorable pottery and other finds. No subsequent house was built above the ruins of the later building and, for the most part, the buildings remained intact. These two later houses were subjected to a distributional analysis (Panitz-Cohen 2006a), which has provided a productive database with which various topics can be examined, including how the quantity and quality of the pottery can inform us about household wealth and composition.

A caveat to our ability to use this rich database to arrive at entirely accurate conclusions is related to the complex physical and cultural formation processes of the archaeological record (Schiffer 1996; David and Kramer 2001: 100). While the comprehensive ceramic data set afforded by these two buildings conforms to the description of “primary deposition” (LaMotta and Schiffer 1999: 21), for this study we kept in mind that the amount, distribution, and types of finds do not necessarily reflect a direct, one-to-one correlation with actual household activities or other characteristics, such as gender roles or economic status. What is represented is only a snapshot of the location of the contents of the houses at the time of their violent destruction.

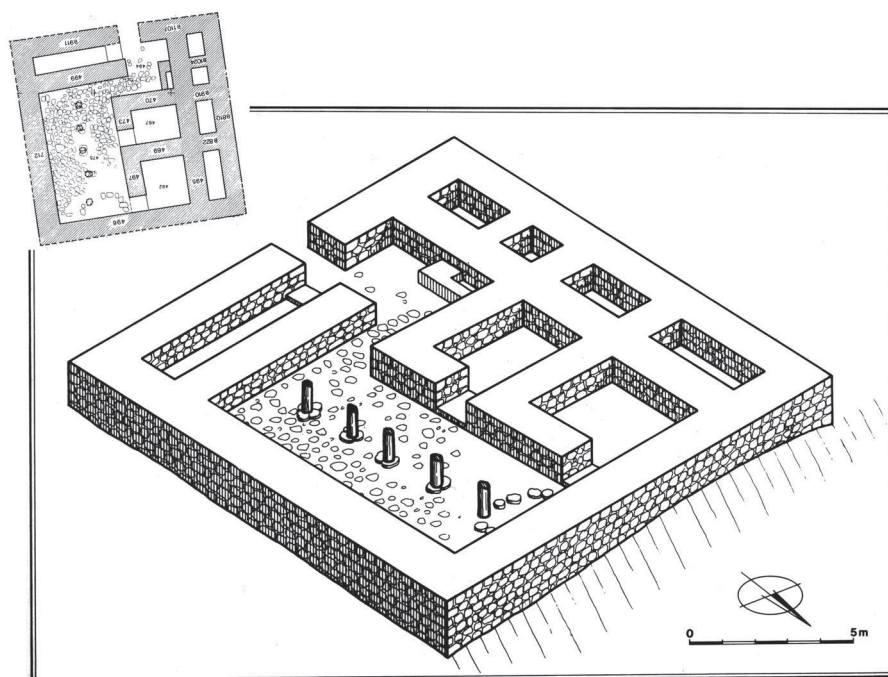


Figure 1. Building 475.

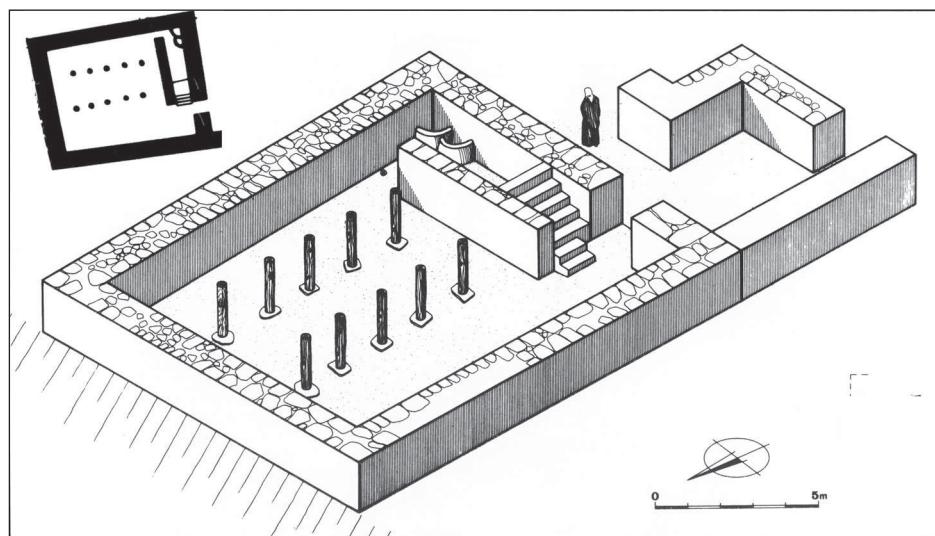


Figure 2. Building 315.

The Ceramic Contents and Distribution in Buildings 475 and 315

A fair number of vessels in each building were discovered *in situ*,¹ while the scattering of sherds from a number of restorable vessels² seemed to be an indication of the violent nature of the destruction and/or of the various post-depositional processes.

The distribution of vessel classes in each house is presented in Table 1; the data are based on a count of complete or almost complete vessels and on some sherds published in Plates 21–46 in Panitz-Cohen and Mazar 2006.³ Table 2 shows the number of types per vessel class per building, reflecting the extent of typological variety in each household assemblage.

Building 475

The following is a summary of the distribution of the 170 vessels found in the destruction debris in the earlier house, Building 475 (Fig. 1).

A concentration of 42 vessels was found in the large eastern room, which was divided by a north–south row of pillars; most of the vessels were found *in situ* on the western side of this room, while the eastern side contained a more dispersed scattering of restorable sherds. This assemblage included five storage jars, eight cooking pots, eight bowls, seven jugs, one chalice, one krater, two juglets, and nine Cypriot imports, as well as a funnel. Despite the large number of cooking pots, no facilities for cooking or baking were detected here. In fact, no installations of any sort were identified in this large space, suggesting that it served mainly for storage, food preparation, and craft activity, and/or possibly animal pens.⁴

¹ The term “*in situ*” can be ambiguous and has alternative meanings (Hodder and Orton 1976: 32). Here the term means “the find-spot of an artifact—its original position of discovery” (Schiffer 1996: 17).

² The assumption was that the larger and denser the concentration of restorable sherds in one area is, the more likely it is that this area is where the vessel was broken (Daviau 1993: 29); it is less certain whether it follows that this is also where the vessel was regularly used.

³ A detailed discussion of the methodology of this study and complete details of the contents of both houses and the distribution of finds are presented in Panitz-Cohen 2006a.

⁴ In her analysis of this house, Daviau (1993: 318) contended that this area functioned as a “primary food preparation area,” also noting that it probably served as the main living room. Her conclusions, however, were based on limited preliminary publication of the finds in Building 475, as she aptly notes.

Table 1. Comparative distribution of pottery vessels in Buildings 475 and 315 (percentages rounded off)

	Building 475	Building 315
<i>Outer dimensions</i>	<i>179.5 sq m</i>	<i>149.8 sq m</i>
<i>Net floor space</i>	<i>77 sq m</i>	<i>95.6 sq m</i>
Class	N %	N %
Bowls	39	26
	23	27
Chalices	2	2
	1	2
Goblets	–	1
	–	1
Kraters	3	6
	2	6
Cooking pots	28	12
	16	12
Storage jars	40	15
	23	15
Biconical vessels	4	3
	2	3
Jugs	25	13
	14	13
Juglets	4	3
	2	3
Lamps	3	1
	2	1
Stands	–	1
	–	1
Funnels	4	2
	2	2
Imports	18	12
	12	12
Total in building	170	97

Table 2. Typological variability per building: number of types per class

Class	Building 475 No. of types	Building 315 No. of types
Bowls	5	7
Chalices/Goblets	1	2
Kraters	2	1
Cooking pots	1	1
Storage jars	1	1
Biconical vessels	3	3
Jugs	3	3
Juglets	2	2
Lamps	2	2

Fourteen vessels were found *in situ* in the entrance space, including five storage jars, two bowls, one krater, two jugs, and two lamps, as well as two imported Base Ring juglets. In addition, this area contained four non-pottery objects, including the only scarab found in this building, a spindle whorl, and a bronze arrowhead.

By far the largest concentration of vessels was found in the southernmost of the two small rooms in the northwest of the building, with 63 vessels in an area of only 6.6 m². The corner containing most of the vessels had a thick layer of black organic burnt material, suggesting that there might have been shelves and/or mats here. This large assemblage contained nineteen storage jars, thirteen cooking pots, twelve bowls, and eight jugs, as well as a few lamps, funnels, juglets, biconical vessels, and Cypriot imports. Several of the storage jars were painted, including a small jar with a unique processional scene (Panitz-Cohen and Mazar 2006: 395, Pl. 31: 1). The small objects found here included several pestles, hammerstones, and a weight. The contents of the room do not shed light on any particular function; perhaps it served as a kind of pantry.

The northernmost of the two small rooms contained 35 vessels in a somewhat larger space (8.9 m²), including twelve storage jars, ten bowls, seven jugs, four cooking pots, a chalice, and a biconical amphora. The finds from this room do not suggest a specific function, although the relatively large number of storage jars might imply that it was used for storage.

While ethnographic studies show that closed-off rooms such as these two found in the west of the building often serve as dwellings

for nuclear families within the wider extended clan (Kramer 1979),⁵ the very large number of vessels found in these rooms seems to preclude such a use, at least at the time of the house's destruction. A couple with two or three small children inhabiting a room of some 6.6 m² that contains 63 vessels including storage jars would seem to be too crowded for comfort. However, the possibility does exist that the presence of so many vessels in this room was the result of some contingency, emergency, or temporary situation and that in routine times, this room did serve as a dwelling unit for a nuclear family.

The western part of Building 475 had a narrow row of small chambers that had no entrances and were possibly accessed from an upper floor. Fourteen vessels were recovered from the northernmost chamber, which measured only 3.4 m², including six bowls and two of each of the following: cooking pots, storage jars, Cypriot imports, and funnels. The finds from the middle chamber included one bowl, one cooking pot, three storage jars, and four Cypriot imports; however, as opposed to the northern room where complete restorable vessels were recovered, the latter contained mainly sherds. The two southernmost cells were found empty. Thus, the assumption that these were storage cells (Mazar 1997b: 57) is not supported by the recovered contents. However, it may be that these small spaces contained seasonal deposits of grain, but were not in use at the time of destruction; we might then be able to infer the season in which the house was destroyed.

Although the building had a stairway, the depth of accumulation and dispersion of the finds did not clearly indicate the existence of two stories. Perhaps the staircase accessed the roof, which might have been used for various purposes, such as storage, seasonal entertaining or sleeping (Daviau 1993: 39). It is possible that the second story was only partial or the construction of another house on top of this one removed any remains. It seems that the entire house was roofed based on the small adjoining rooms in the west and the column bases running through the larger hall to the east.

The assemblage recovered from this house reflects a functional household repertory, with bowls (23%) and storage jars (23%) being the most plentiful, followed by cooking pots (16%) and jugs (14%). All

⁵ Alongside the purely functional aspect of such subdivisions, the social significance of how the house plan shaped interaction and the distribution of power is discussed in various studies (i.e., Nielsen 1995; Faust 1999, 2003).

the vessels from this building were locally made (Panitz-Cohen 2006b: 12–26), aside from the Cypriot imports. The latter could have fulfilled the role of fine tableware or might have been containers for some precious commodity. No luxury items such as jewelry were found in this building; it is possible that the inhabitants were able to flee with their portable possessions before the destruction. Indeed, no skeletons were found in this house as in the subsequent dwelling. Alternatively, small luxury items could have been looted in antiquity after the destruction. The small number of kraters (3) suggests that food preparation was carried out in different vessels, possibly in large bowls or in the cooking pots themselves, in jugs, or in other vessels of various materials (Meadows 1997: 24). Cooking was not conducted indoors, although the cooking pots were kept inside.

Building 315

Building 315 was apparently constructed very soon after the destruction of the previous house, as three of the outer walls were rebuilt and several elements continued to be used (Mazar 1997b: 58–65). This new house was smaller, as the western wing of the earlier house was demolished and a street was built on top of it. It should be noted, however, that Building 315 had more floor space than the earlier Building 475 due to the lack of any interior division of rooms (Fig. 2).

Of the 97 vessels found in the destruction debris of this building, more than half were discovered *in situ*. The over one meter of debris contained two distinct layers of finds: an upper layer, which had most likely fallen from an upper story, and a lower layer, which was found on or near the floor. Although the distinction between the two was not always entirely clear, the division can still inform of the building's use, as well as its destruction. A relatively large number of small objects and luxury items (see below), such as a Base Ring bull rhyton, a unique Cypriot White Shaved spindle bottle, cylinder seals, scarabs, beads, and a pair of bronze cymbals (all published in Panitz-Cohen and Mazar 2006) were found in the upper layer and had perhaps been in use in the private quarters that might have occupied the top story. Small artifacts, especially those of some value, are often considered good indicators of the main living rooms of a house (Daviau 1993: 53).

The building was divided into three long spaces by two rows of north–south pillars. Finds in the eastern space came mainly from its

southern half, while the stone-paved northern half was almost empty of finds and might have served as an animal pen or for household tasks that did not require the use of vessels. Four bowls, two cooking pots, three jugs, one painted storage jar, and one Cypriot juglet were found in the southeastern part of the main hall.

The major concentration of vessels and other finds was in the western space. The northern end of this space contained nine bowls, one goblet, five kraters, five cooking pots, one storage jar, two jugs and two juglets, a stand, and two funnels, as well as two Cypriot imports. A semi-circular bin in the northwestern corner was found empty. The other major concentration of finds was in the southern part of this western space, and it included bowls, kraters, cooking pots, a storage jar, a biconical vessel, and an imported Cypriot juglet. The position and association of these vessels have no particular pattern and it is difficult to know if their find spot reflects their original placement or was the result of the destruction or other post-depositional factors.

The central space contained no pottery. A skeleton and three bronze arrowheads found here, as well as a second skeleton found near the entrance to the building, might be evidence of a battle waged during the destruction.

It is assumed that the entire lower story had been roofed (Mazar 1997b: 59) and could have been used for storage and animal pens, as well as for household tasks, such as food preparation, and small crafts, such as spinning or dyeing.⁶ As no cooking installations were found indoors, it seems that, as in the earlier house, all cooking was conducted in the front courtyard. Since there was no subdivision of the inner space into rooms (aside from a small cell that was formed by a secondary partitioning), it seems that the private living/sleeping quarters were most likely on the upper story.

The space below the stairwell contained 26 vessels that could be identified *in situ*. The double bin in the southeastern corner of this space contained a storage jar, a Cypriot Base Ring jug, and a White Shaved juglet. A northern row of vessels included two storage jars, as well as bowls, jugs, and a cooking pot, while the southern row had seven storage jars (two of which were nicely painted) and one jug that

⁶ No loom weights were found in any of the LB houses and, in fact, loom weights are generally rare at other contemporary sites as well. Yasur-Landau (2007) suggested that this may have been due to different weaving technologies practiced at this time.

contained a cluster of bronze arrowheads, as well as a spearhead fused with charred almonds (see color photo in Kelm and Mazar 1995: 78, Fig. C9). It is difficult to know if these contents reflect the routine use of this vessel as storage or a ritual cache (Schiffer 1996: 79–80), or if this was a hoard in response to an impending emergency. Wheat was found in one of the storage jars (Kislev et al. 2006); thus, the space below the stairs was probably used as a pantry. Daviau noted that a dark space such as this would be suitable for the storage of oil, wine, and possibly beer (Daviau 1993: 40, 321).

The assemblage in this building, like its predecessor, was mostly utilitarian or domestic in nature. The most frequent class of vessels is bowls (27%), followed by an almost equal proportion of storage jars (15%), jugs (13%), and cooking pots (12%). The imported vessels constitute the same ratio as in the dwelling from the previous stratum (12%). However, the imports in Building 315 included at least one Mycenaean vessel, as well as several special Cypriot imports, such as a Base Ring bull rhyton and a unique White Shaved spindle bottle (Steel 2006). The latter two items are usually found in tombs, with the White Shaved bottle being extremely rare even in mortuary contexts; their presence in this house, then, is quite unusual. Based on a survey of Levantine sites in which Mycenaean pottery has been found, van Wijngaarden (2002: 116) suggested that Mycenaean wares were common among all social strata in the main urban centers and coastal emporia, such as Ugarit, Tell Abu Hawam, and Megiddo, but were limited to the “local ruling elite” or a “specific, wealthy social group” in the smaller regional centers such as Tel Batash. On the other hand, most types of Cypriot imports are well known in LBIIA Levantine contexts, and they may not represent wealth or privilege as they do in earlier strata, when importation had only just begun (Oren 2001: 140).

Judging by the large number of small objects and the skeletons, it seems that the destruction took the inhabitants by surprise more so than the destruction of the earlier house.

Definition of a Patrician House: Does Size Count?

Since the architecture of both buildings does not follow any particular blueprint and does not provide clear information on function, the conclusion that these were dwellings is based on the typical household

ceramic repertoire, which primarily includes vessels for food preparation, serving, consumption, and storage. Additional household objects include those related to small crafts production, such as spinning, small-scale economic transactions (cylinder seals, weights), domestic cult (figurines, cymbals), personal adornment (beads), and a limited sample of what might be considered prestige or luxury items, including several rare imports; most of these were found in the later house (Daviau 1993: 47–48, 446).

The identification of a dwelling as a “patrician house” (Oren 1992) belonging to a family of wealth is most often based on the overall dimensions of the building and the quality of its construction, as well as the large number and variety of vessels and other items found in it (Smith 1987: 237; Ilan 2001: 322–323). The question of what, in fact, constitutes valid criteria by which one can infer the status and wealth of a household is open to discussion. One such criterion is indeed house size.⁷ Some ethnographic studies indicate a correlation between family wealth and house size, but also caution as to the complexity of the relationship. Kramer (1979) points out that when determining wealth, it is not overall house size alone that needs to be considered, but rather how many dwelling units and service rooms there are (excluding the courtyard) and the quality of the building materials, such as an extensive use of wood in a deforested area or labor-intensive stone floors. In rural societies, wealth and status are usually measured by ownership of land and animals more so than by house size (Kramer 1979: 152–153). However, there is often a correlation between house size and wealth, since landowning families tend to reside in the village for several generations, as opposed to landless newcomers (for whom land is no longer available for purchase), and thus the former would have larger houses, since they were able to build at a time when the village was less densely inhabited (Kramer 1979: 149–152; also Mills 1999). Chesson (2003: 87) cites reasons other than wealth that explain large house size, such as population shifts, marriage and residence patterns, and other economic, social, and political issues related to the local

⁷ House size is also related to methods of construction: a large edifice requires more input and resources during construction than a smaller building. While not monumental, the large-sized and well-constructed walls of the Batash houses would have “demanded the coordinated action of a considerable number of people in one construction event [and]...the capacity to mobilize labor beyond the household level” (Nielsen 1995: 63–64).

Table 3. Comparison of house sizes in the LB Shephelah

Site	Building, stratum/ period	Outer dimensions in meters	Source
Tel Batash	Building 475, Stratum VIII	13.7 × 13.1	Mazar 1997
Tel Batash	Building 315, Stratum VII	13.5 × 11.1	Mazar 1997
Tell Beit Mirsim	Stratum C	15.2 × 13.3	Albright 1938: 63–64; Pl. 56
Beth-Shemesh	Herrenhaus, Stratum Iva	15 × 12.5	Daviau 1993: 325, Fig. 61
Tel Harassim	Three-room House, LBIIA	10.5 × 11.5(?)	Givon 1999: 175; Fig. 2[i]
Tel Halif	MBII/LBI transition	16 × 16	Daviau 1993: 393

[i] Givon (1999: 174) suggested that the pillared building that was incompletely uncovered in Areas S at Larchish belongs to this group as well, but this is far from certain due to its partial exposure.

community and its history. Sometimes, the size of the house reflects past wealth and not the present status of the inhabitants (Nielsen 1995: 56; David and Kramer 2001: 296).

Ultimately, using house size as a criterion for estimating wealth or status must be evaluated in comparison to contemporary dwellings at the same site and in the proximate region. When comparing the size of Buildings 475 and 315 at Tel Batash to others, both contemporary and otherwise, Daviau (1993: 319–20) noted that while they were certainly large and imposing, the Tel Batash houses were “well within the size range of typical LB Age houses.” Table 3 shows that, indeed, their sizes are not extraordinary and they are comparable to a number of LB houses found in the Shephelah region.⁸ Unfortunately, in most cases, excavation data are insufficient to determine whether these houses were exceptional in their towns and represent the homes of the wealthiest and/or highest status family, or whether there were more such dwellings next door. For example, although the plan is quite incoherent, it seems that dense building remains surrounding the

⁸ Several houses in MBII B Tell Beit Mirsim—the South House and North House of Stratum E (Albright 1938: Pl. 50) and the “Patrician House” of Stratum D (ibid.: Pl. 51)—are of similar dimensions to the LBII house.

Herrenhaus of Beth-Shemesh Stratum IVa (plan reprinted in Daviau 1993: 325, Fig. 61) and in the Western Section (ibid.: Fig. 65) might include other such houses. This lack of a comparable data set is also true of Tel Batash, where only one complete (or almost complete) house was excavated in each of the LB strata.

Pottery as a Criterion for Assessing Household Wealth

Additional criteria for assessing household wealth are the number of vessels, and, less so, their quality. Variety is also an issue to consider (Rice 1989: 115; Arnold 1991: 73–76), as is vessel volume (Trostel 1994). Ethnographic analogies are ambivalent (i.e., Graves 1991: 127–128; Longacre 1991) and, in fact, while in some cases a large number of vessels might indicate household wealth, there are alternative explanations for such a situation. A large number of vessels (particularly when crowded into small spaces like in Building 475) could represent “stockpiling” (DeBoer and Lathrap 1979), perhaps during a siege, or in preparation for the impending emergency that resulted in the destruction of the house (Geva 1989: 6–7; Schiffer 1996: 281). Other possible reasons for very large quantities of vessels in houses include surplus for taxes and tribute, gift-giving customs, feasting paraphernalia, dowry accumulation, and ritual requirements, among others (DeBoer and Lathrap 1979; Rice 1987: 295; Arnold 1991; Kramer 1997: 35–36; Deal 1998). It has also been suggested that such concentrations of vessels might indicate a potting household (Daviau 1993: 41, 46–47). Stockpiling can also be the result of differential access to vessel sources, or varying distance to markets and available cash to purchase vessels. A large number of serving vessels and very large cooking pots might point to social obligations, such as festivals or rituals that require a large number of vessels, or to duties that the household head is expected to perform, such as hosting feasts or political rallies to enhance social and political status, as well as feeding seasonal workers. Other things to consider include the relationship to other household activities, such as dairy or oil production, as part of the general household subsistence strategy; food-processing technologies; vessel use-life or longevity and breakage rates; how multifunctional the vessels are; the presence of nonceramic vessels, and “dead storage” of broken vessels for future secondary use (Nicklin 1971; Kramer 1979; DeBoer and Lathrap 1979: 123–124; Miller 1985; Rice 1987: 295; Kamp 1987; Geva

1989; Arnold 1991: 61–72; Graves 1991: 129; Nelson 1991; Tani 1994: 56–57; Deal 1998; Potter 2000).⁹

The age/gender composition of the household also plays a role in the quantity of vessels in a house at any given time. For example, in some ethnoarchaeological studies, the number of married women in a household was found to be a significant factor influencing vessel quantity (i.e., Kamp 1987) and the presence of many children can affect both the amount and size range of vessels, as well as the breakage rate (Schiffer 1996).

Ethnographic pottery counts made in various pottery-producing village societies in Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, the Philippines, and Cameroon (i.e., Rice 1987: 296–297; Arnold 1991: 66; Nelson 1991: 167; Sinopoli 1991: 88; Deal 1998; David and Kramer 2001: 100) have, for the most part, failed to identify a significant correlation between household wealth and vessel quantity (although there is such a correlation between vessel quantity and household size—see further below). In fact, the results of these counts are extremely disparate, ranging from as little as eight to as many as eighty-five vessels; most of these amounts are considerably lower than the Batash assemblages. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether the large number of vessels in both houses at Tel Batash, particularly in Building 475, indicates wealth and/or any of the many factors just mentioned.

Vessel quality, too, is an equivocal index of wealth. As noted above, most of the vessels in both houses were quite plain and utilitarian, with only the imports, which reached no more than *ca.* 12% of the entire household repertoire in each house, providing a finer ware. Even the somewhat more elaborate local vessels, such as goblets, painted storage jars and biconical jugs, seem to have been quotidian household vessels and not luxury wares. Some evidence for vessel repair and secondary-use/recycling was found in both houses, although somewhat more so in the Stratum VII Building 315. Two factors, however, should be considered when attempting to evaluate the role of vessel quality as a reflection of household wealth: the general quality of LB ceramics,

⁹ Very little ethnographic or ancient textual and archaeological evidence exists to indicate that domestic pottery vessels were required for taxes or tribute; see, for example, Linné 1965: 26–27, where lists of the Aztec state archives included special pottery vessels for chocolate drinking. Generally, it seems that if pottery was used as tribute, it was mostly prestige vessels that would be in demand for their contents (i.e., Cochavi-Rainey 1999; Earle 2002: 197).

which on the whole is a rather utilitarian grade, and the fact that a vessel's worth can not necessarily be measured by contemporary aesthetic principles; what may seem to us to be quite plain and even careless could have been valued for different contextual and symbolic reasons (Hodder 1991; Senior 1995; Meadows 1997: 24). Furthermore, secondary use and recycling are not necessarily the outcome of poverty, but rather can be "an adaptive economic strategy" (Deal and Hagstrum 1995: 112) or simply the way things are done in households of all levels. Thus, it is hard to say if the quality and kinds of vessels found in these houses are merely utilitarian and mundane, or if they reflect some level of affluence as it was contextualized at that time.

Discussion

In light of the above, it is clearly a complex matter to use the pottery assemblage and house size to conclude definitively that wealthy families of high status lived in patrician houses.¹⁰ It seems that, while none of the parameters discussed above are an unassailable indication of wealth in and of themselves, when taken together a picture emerges at Tel Batash of people of ample means who were able to fill all of their daily household needs while also possibly accumulating surplus, and who possessed the capability to maintain a household of such vitality that it could be immediately renovated after suffering a destruction.

The question may be asked as to whether this was the norm or whether a particularly privileged or wealthy family lived in these houses. As noted above, a crucial piece of information is missing at Tel Batash: were there other similar-sized houses in the town and were their contents similar? Comparison with other sites shows that such domiciles were not out of the ordinary in the Shephelah region. If indeed this is the case, this phenomenon should be examined in light of the socioeconomic and political conditions of these towns under

¹⁰ While the present discussion focuses on the role of pottery in the assessment of household wealth and status, certainly other objects must be considered, and in fact, these items might be the prime indicators of wealth and status in light of the multifarious uses and lifecycle of pottery. Indeed, the large number of small luxury items and special imports in Stratum VII Building 315 seem to reflect this wealth, although, as stated, the lack of such items in the previous house may be due to looting or their deliberate removal by the residents.

Egyptian hegemony, particularly in Stratum VII, the Amarna period. How do such houses and the apparently comfortable means of their inhabitants fit into the pattern of social hierarchy (*hazannu*, *maryannu*, landlords, elders, merchants, artisans, peasants; see Heltzer 1976) of the Canaanite city-state system of the time? How can we understand what appears to be a well-supplied household with the ambivalent duality of poverty and riches that characterizes much of the Late Bronze Age? Scholars have deliberated as to the meaning of this apparent disparity between certain aspects of the LB material culture, which demonstrate great wealth and artistic ability, and others that show decline (see, for example, Ahituv 1981; Na'aman 1981; Knapp 1989; Leibowitz 1987, 1989; Bienkowski 1989; Bunimovitz 1994: 9–10).

Can it be assumed that the inhabitants of such houses were more vulnerable to the vagaries of Egyptian administrative policies, particularly property confiscation, taxes, and mobilization? Or were they in fact the local agents of the Egyptian administration who enjoyed attendant privileges? Can we suggest a special function or social position for those households whose outer walls were also the town's defense line (i.e., Nielsen 1995: 58) and did this higher status express itself in greater wealth or additional social or political obligations, such as tax collecting, judicial tasks, or cultic responsibilities? Did the fact that a private wing of the Stratum VIII house was turned into public domain (a street) in Stratum VII mean a concurrent change in the social and economic status of this household? Did such status affect the quantity and quality of ceramics in the house, and did any change in this status accordingly express itself in the pottery? The well-built house and abundant household pottery, as well as other items, seem to indicate the existence of what we might today term an "upper-middle class," able to navigate the often hazardous economic, social, and political waters of the Canaanite city-state system under Egyptian jurisdiction during New Kingdom reign. It is interesting that, following the destruction of the Stratum VII house of the Amarna period, no new dwelling was erected on this spot, terminating the sequence that began in LBIA. This might be related to the inception of the Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty and a tightened control of Canaan (Weinstein 1981: 17–22), as opposed to the assumed lesser intervention of the Egyptians during the Amarna interlude.

Household Population Continuity and Change—All in the Family

Another question that emerges from the data presented above—both the material culture and the architectural plans—pertains to the degree of population continuity between the two houses. Did the descendants of the same family continue to inhabit this house, despite the severe destruction and concurrent architectural changes, or did new occupants move in? Were there differences in status, wealth, and/or composition of the households?

Comparison of the proportion of vessel classes between the two buildings, as well as the degree of typological variety (Tables 1 and 2 above), shows an overall similarity; this might be the result of family continuity, although it could also simply be due to their both being domiciles, regardless of the inhabitants' age, gender, wealth, or status. It was noted in most vessel classes (i.e., cooking pots, jugs, imports) that, although the absolute number of vessels declines in Stratum VII, the percentage of the class in the entire assemblage remains similar, implying a continuity of function of the basic household routine.¹¹ For example, the 25 jugs found in Stratum VIII constituted 14% of the assemblage, while half that amount—13 jugs in Stratum VII—constituted 13% of that house's assemblage. One change that did occur in vessel proportions was the kraters, which increased in Building 315 (6%) as opposed to Building 475 (2%). Assuming that kraters were used in food preparation, this might be related to different culinary practices between the two households.¹² Another vessel class whose proportions changed was the storage jars: 23% in Building 475 declined to 15% in Building 315; this affected the storage capacity of each house, which decreased from 964 liters in Building 475 to only

¹¹ An analysis of similar data used to estimate duration of occupation at archaeological sites (based on ethnographic data) suggests that such stabilization in vessel class proportions will take place only at a site that is occupied for more than ten years, "whether for 20 or 100 years...long occupied sites should display high variety in the number of different classes and relatively stable proportions of each class" (Mills 1999: 142–143).

¹² It has been suggested that households with a higher ratio of serving vessels to food preparation vessels are usually of elite status (Turkon 2004: 227). Could the plethora of bowls and biconical vessels, as opposed to the small number of kraters, be considered such an index in both our houses?

229 liters in Building 315 (Panitz-Cohen 2006a: 182, 190).¹³ Significant differences in proportions of vessel types between Arad and 'Ai in EBII were understood to reflect not only different ecologies, but also cultural distinctions (Ilan 2001: 350). If indeed this is so, we may perhaps assume the opposite: that the similar proportions of most vessel types in both our houses imply cultural homogeneity and continuity.

Another element that may be considered when investigating continuity between the houses is household size. Although there are various indices for estimating population size, one proposed by Naroll (1962) and used here allots 10 m² of floor area per person, which would yield eight people (adults?) in Stratum VIII and ten in Stratum VII (based on net floor space, see Table 1). If we assume a second story that covered part of or the entire lower floor, then this figure could potentially be doubled.¹⁴ Ethnographic examples are ambivalent as to whether or not there is a correlation between vessel quantity and household size (Longacre 1991: 109; Nelson 1991: 169–170). If indeed the above population estimate is valid, we have a situation in which there are many more vessels in the smaller, Stratum VIII household than in the larger, Stratum VII one, although the difference in the estimated number of inhabitants between the two houses is not that large. Based on the argument and data presented above concerning indices of household wealth, we can thus assume that it is not necessarily a decrease in wealth that is reflected in this discrepancy (i.e., more people in Stratum VII using fewer vessels), especially in light of the large amount of unique, and high status objects in the house, but rather a change in internal household composition and status. This implies that consumption needs changed in Stratum VII, possibly due to an internal change in household composition (gender, age, status)¹⁵ or to external conditions that impacted social roles and economic and political status.

¹³ These measurements are based on the extant restored jars so that they represent a minimum capacity; not only could there be other ceramic jars that were used for storage, but other nonceramic containers were most likely used as well.

¹⁴ However, some ethnographic cases indicate that in dwellings with more than one story, the second story is not relevant for calculating population size (Kramer 1979: 159).

¹⁵ It can also be speculated if the relatively good curation and low breakage of the delicate Cypriot and Mycenaean imported closed vessels in Building 315, as opposed to their more fragmentary recovery in Building 475 (Steel 2006), is the result of fewer children and animals in this household (Schiffer 1996).

Household composition is affected by the existence of nuclear family units that could have coexisted within extended households, both on a temporal and spatial basis. Schloen (2001: 135–136) contended that while the basic unit occupying the houses in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in the ancient Near East was indeed the extended family or the “patriarchal joint household,” this unit was not monolithic and was affected by numerous factors in the “household life cycle” (i.e., mortality and fertility rates, marriage patterns, servants, industry, etc.), that in turn affected the space requirements and size of the household as well as its pottery repertoire. As noted above, it is possible that during the course of its existence, the Stratum VIII household was that of an extended family comprising a number of nuclear family units, while the Stratum VII household, which contained only one large space, did not have such units.¹⁶ The possibility of multiple nuclear families living together in the Stratum VIII building might also explain the larger number of vessels in Stratum VIII, wherein each smaller family unit might have required a “set” of its own and communal eating was somewhat less common. Could the relatively larger number of kraters and large-sized bowls in Stratum VII be related to an increase in communal dining by the inhabitants?

Another possible explanation for the differences between the ceramic assemblages of the two houses is a change in the social role or political status of the inhabitants. Mills (1999) points out that wealth and status are not automatically interrelated in some societies and it is possible that the status or socioeconomic role of the Stratum VII household head differed from that of his predecessor, regardless of wealth. Along these lines, the disappearance of very large cooking pots in Stratum VII that might have been used for feasting in Stratum VIII should be noted (Panitz-Cohen 2006a: 191–192). Ethnographic data show that landowners and/or political or religious functionaries have a series of social, political, and economic obligations that go with this status (i.e., Graves 1991; Deal 1998; Potter 2000; Turkon 2004: 226); such obligations often include the hosting of feasts (Mills 1999). Sometimes, these obligations can be co-opted from local elites in order to invest more

¹⁶ However, since we do not know if the assumed upper story in Building 315 contained individual living rooms, we cannot definitely suggest a change from extended to nuclear family between the two houses.

power in centralized authority (Earle 2002: 244). Could this lack imply that hosting feasts (intra- or suprahousehold) was no longer a part of the Stratum VII household's social requirements?¹⁷ Possibly, the difference in vessel amount and storage jar capacity reflects this change in social position or status, which might have been the result of macroeconomic conditions possibly related to changes in land appropriations and/or tax obligations. These changes might have been related, as noted above, to the nature of the Egyptian reign during the Amarna period, our Stratum VII.

Thus, while the same family or kinship group most likely occupied both houses in Strata VIII and VII, changing internal (familial) and external (social, political, and economic) conditions impacted the house plan and size, as well as the nature and size of the household ceramic inventory. This proposed continuity is most likely the result of a kinship relationship that remained among the houses' occupants, as well as the cultural continuity that characterized the LB Canaanite material culture in general. The changes that did take place could have been the result of external conditions, such as new technology (alternate storage practices, changes in craft production, etc.), economy, and politics (shift in status or role of the household in the larger community, change in administrative control by external factors such as Egyptian governors, easier access to consumer goods such as imports, change in taxes, and land confiscation policies leading to alternative subsistence strategies, etc.), or stylistic influence (regional or foreign architectural styles). The smaller outer dimensions of the house in Stratum VII might be related to increased occupational density in the town on the whole that required the demolishing of the western wing and turning it from private property into a public street; such alterations are a concern in towns located on space-limited *tells* (Steadman 2000: 165; Ilan 2001: 323).

¹⁷ An example from the time of the Inca takeover of the Mantaro Valley shows that decorated storage jars and serving bowls were considered evidence of the importance of ceremonial feasting in expressing and maintaining elite status in the Wanka II occupation, but following the takeover of the Inca in Wanka III, these vessels disappeared from elite houses. At this time, all surplus was commandeered by the Inca rulers and while the local elite did not entirely lose their status as feast givers, their position now depended on the economic and ideological support of the Inca rulers. This was expressed through new high status vessels made in the Inca imperial style that were doled out to the local elites (Sinopoli 1991: 158; Costin 1996).

Influence from contemporary architectural styles cannot be ruled out as an explanation for the change in plan, such as the *Herrenhaus* at Beth-Shemesh, the pillared house at Tel Harassim, and the houses at Tell Beit Mirsim (Table 3). Do such similarities imply shared regional kinship relations, or was there perhaps an itinerant builders' guild responsible for the erection of such houses for families of some means in the Shephelah?

Chesson (2003) discusses the role that the physical house structure (as well as its material contents) plays in establishing and maintaining family status and authority within the town. The very link to ancestors and the ancestral household is a source of status and authority and was a desirable asset to be upheld; this had economic implications for the family as well (ibid.: 83–84). Thus, the rebuilding of the house on the same spot, although with changes in certain aspects of the plan, might, on the one hand, reflect maintenance and legitimization of the family status and identity, while on the other hand, change aspects and relationships within the family itself (ibid.: 91), as well as its relationship to external social, economic, and political organization and demands. Nielsen (1995: 55) emphasized the social and symbolic message inherent in the choice of building material and the architectural plan. Another factor to consider is that house ownership was often part of existing kinship relationships and it would have been near impossible for an outsider seeking to live in the town to obtain property or a house (Schloen 2001: 328; Kramer 1979; although, see Heltzer 1976: 84). Taken together with the relative homogeneity of the ceramic tradition during this period (the late fifteenth–fourteenth centuries BCE), it seems reasonable to assume that the houses remained “all in the family” and that while the overall wealth of this family did not change, there were shifts in the social and political positions they held, possibly relating to the changes in the nature of Egyptian rule at this time.

Summary

Even when dealing with a well-preserved, comprehensive data set such as the ceramic assemblages found in the Tel Batash houses, using pottery to assess household wealth, status, and composition is a complex matter and no direct or simple correlation can be assumed between quantity and quality of vessels and social and economic conditions.

Because households may have a variety of economic pursuits and social personnel, the concept of status, as often applied, should consider that status is not a set rank, but is susceptible to contextual variation. A more realistic concept of wealth should distinguish social groups by the activities in which they are involved, rather than linking them by access to wealth and prestige items. (Turkon 2004: 245)

Household pottery as a material correlate of these activities can thus reflect social and economic conditions when analyzed on the dynamic level of the constant negotiation of status, both within the house and without.

