

AVERAGE FAMILIES? HOUSE SIZE VARIABILITY IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANTINE IRON AGE

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Syro-Palestinian archaeologists and biblical scholars have a certain advantage when it comes to thinking about families, households, and houses. While it is well-known that from a cross-cultural perspective one cannot presume that these three categories necessarily correspond to one another,¹ in the specific case of the Iron Age Southern Levant the close correspondence between families, households, and houses seems to have been a principal clause in the social contract. Few words in Hebrew and its cognates carry more resonance than *בית* and few structures are more repetitious and recognizable than the Iron Age "four-room" house. This means that using houses as evidence for the nature of the Iron Age family is effective, rather than naive, and a number of important studies have been able to offer convincing reconstructions of the demographic, sociological, and economic characteristics of the "Israelite" family on just such an archaeological basis.²

Where, however, can we go from here? Research thus far has tended to stress the typical and the average as a means of representing what might be called the central tendencies of Iron Age social life. Such an approach has numerous attractions in that it allows for generalizations and quantification, as well as facilitating the use of ethnographic analogy and sociological models. It may also have a certain appeal to the biblical scholar, in that a singular and relatively changeless picture of Iron

Age housing avoids the thorny textual problem of placing biblical representations of families in time. Yet, a focus on the typical and the average is also relatively static, leaving us with few tools by which to analyze social difference and social change. The problem is that in focusing on the central tendencies of the "four-room" house, archaeologists have paid insufficient attention to the companion measure of variability.

Thinking about variability in Iron Age housing, either over time or across space, offers us the opportunity to inject a dynamic element into our understanding of the Iron Age family. In what follows, I will offer a preliminary exploration of variability in relation to the single attribute of house size. With a few notable exceptions, differences in house size have been downplayed by scholars. The "four-room" house, in its consistent layout and lack of individual elaboration, seems to signify communities in which social and economic differences were either minimal, or minimally expressed. Corresponding as this does with our own biblically derived expectations of an egalitarian ethos in Israelite and Judean villages,³ the standard view is a comfortable one. Carol Meyers represents this position with precision and clarity when she writes with regards to the Iron I period:

Even in the larger villages, household buildings were strikingly uniform in size. There may well have been wealth differentials, expressed in greater access to luxury goods rather than in increased house size, but differences in wealth are not the same as a class system.⁴

Meyers states, rather than demonstrates, her point, hence the empirical question remains: Were Iron Age houses in the Southern Levant strikingly uniform in size? As Meyers is concerned specifically with the Iron I period, might differences in house size increase over the course of the Iron Age, perhaps under the influence of state-formation or urbanism? John S. Holladay, for one, acknowledges some variability in Iron II house size but sees it as insignificant since "no residence from Iron II Palestine outstrips the average 'four-room' house by much more than a factor of two, or three at the outside."⁵ So, house size variability may

1. See Sylvia Yanagisako, "Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1979): 161–205.

2. See, e.g., John S. Holladay, Jr., "House, Israelite," *ABD* 3:308–13; idem, "Four-Room House," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (ed. Eric M. Meyers; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2:337–42; Lawrence Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35.

3. See Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Equinox, 2006), 79–80, 92–107, for an extended argument that this "egalitarian ethos" is reflected in Iron Age material culture, including the "four-room" house.

4. Carol Meyers, "Kinship and Kingship: The Early Monarchy," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 202.

5. John S. Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA–B (ca. 1000–750 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of*

occur, but on what grounds are we to see this variability as significant in relation to the lives of Iron Age families? It seems that we have already raised at least three distinct questions: Were Iron Age houses uniform in size? Did this relationship change over time? And was the variability that did occur socially or economically significant? It is to these questions that we will now turn.

House Size Variability

No systematic attempt has been made to calculate ground-floor areas for the known corpus of Iron Age houses from the Southern Levant. Impressionistic accounts of "average" house sizes usually fall in the range of 50–80 m², with the largest houses said to measure in the region of 100 m². These averages are based largely on a limited number of "classic" sites (especially Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell el-Farah North, and Tell en-Nasbeh) and are, as I hope to show, somewhat deceptive.

Meaningful calculations of average house size are difficult when working with partially preserved and partially excavated sites, and when using foundations or ground-floor plans to measure the area of potentially multi-storied houses. To standardize measures across sites I have decided to limit myself to measuring complete ground plans inclusive of walls, without extrapolating to include upper stories or to account for courtyard space. I also make no presumptions regarding the amount of living space required per person, and hence provide no estimates of household size. I do, however, presume that whatever the situation regarding upper stories, courtyards, and floor space per person, these factors would have been more or less constant across the Southern Levantine Iron Age making the comparison of total house area a meaningful exercise. I have also shifted my focus from average house size to the range of sizes attested at any given site. Being a measure of variance, the range of house sizes is more sensitive than the mean to those extremely large and small examples that effectively define the limits of difference to be found within Iron Age communities. The range of house sizes is also an innately conservative measure when we are concerned with testing the assertion of limited variability in Iron Age house size, as new discoveries or excluded examples will only increase and never decrease this range.

My interest in house size originates in my own excavations at the late Iron I site of Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya in south-central Jordan. Here,

Society in the Holy Land (ed. Thomas E. Levy; New York: Facts on File, 1995), 368–98 (392).

our excavations have revealed a number of pillared houses laid out as either "four-room" houses or in clearly related plans.⁶ The two largest of these houses, numbers 100 and 500, measure 178 m² and 238 m² in area respectively, in contrast to the smallest recorded house, which measures ca. 71.5 m² in area.⁷ The two largest houses were also the most prominently located, being positioned at opposite ends of the site, adjacent to both the main and postern gates of the settlement. A considerable proportion of both of these houses appear to have been given over to storage, particularly of barley. If our analytical models are correct,⁸ then the stored grain assemblages were processed with the goal of supplementing the feed of village-based herds, allowing the year-round presence of larger herds than could be sustained on free-range grazing alone.

Interestingly, of the five partially excavated houses at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, none have revealed any *in situ* domestic installations, except building 500, the largest house on the site. Here the central room contained well-built and spatially segregated features including a row of three *tabun*-style ovens, a large basalt saddle quern, a large mortar carved from a limestone boulder, several prepared work areas, and benches lining two sides of the room.⁹ Elsewhere, I have argued that differences in the preservation, distribution of artefacts, and internal stratigraphic sequences, between the houses at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya suggests differential abandonment, with House 100 and 500 likely to be amongst the last to be abandoned.¹⁰

At Kh. al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, therefore, it seemed that house size was correlated with storage facilities, prominence of location, elaboration of features, and strength of attachment to the site. In looking at Iron Age I domestic architecture elsewhere in south-central Jordan, I noted numerous pillared or "four-room" houses that would qualify as very large according to the standard view, and which also seemed to be prominently located next to gateways or in elevated positions. For example, the Field

6. Bruce Routledge, "Seeing Through Walls: Interpreting Iron I Architecture at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya," *BASOR* 319 (2000): 49–54.

7. For these figures see Bruce Routledge et al., "Excavations at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, 2000 and 2004," *ADAJ* (forthcoming).

8. See Ellen Simmons, "Subsistence in Transition: Analysis of an Archaeobotanical Assemblage from Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya" (M.Sc. diss., University of Sheffield, 2000), summarized in Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 103.

9. Routledge et al., "Excavations at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya."

10. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 106–8.

"A" "four-room" house at Tall al-ʿUmayri measures 140 m² in area,¹¹ while the Area "C" irregular "Three Room" house located adjacent to the gateway at Khirbat al-Mudaynat Muʿarradja measured 155 m².¹² Perhaps the most striking of these is the so-called "citadel" recorded by Friedbert Ninow at Khirbat al-Muʿammariyya. This pillared house is identical in plan to building 100 from Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, but measures ca. 24–25 × 17–18 m, that is to say an astounding 408–450 m², according to a preliminary report.¹³ Besides Khirbat al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, Lahun is the only site with enough houses published to consider size range. Excluding free-standing casemate rooms that appear to have been used as dwellings, the eight houses complete enough to be measured range from 52.0 to 160.0 m² in area.¹⁴ This does not include a number of unattached casemate rooms that contained clear evidence for domestic activities. While not the largest house at Lahun, Denyse Homès-Fredericq has designated house 1 as the "Shaykh's house" on the basis of its size, finer construction, and materials.¹⁵

Of course, this evidence for both large houses and internal differentiation comes from the Iron I period in central Transjordan, and hence one might question its relevance for houses and families in Israel and Judah. Perhaps, one might argue, settlements in Ammon and Moab exhibited more internal differentiation than did those in Israel and Judah. Once one begins to look, however, it soon becomes evident that similar patterns can be found in Palestine as well as Transjordan. Consider, for example, the case of ʿIzbet Sartah Stratum II where an irregular circle of small and mid-sized houses ranging from 41–67 m² in area enclosed a central space that contained one extremely large "four-room" house (109b) of ca. 195

m² in area and 43 stone-lined pits.¹⁶ Interestingly, in Stratum I, the outer ring of small houses is abandoned while the centrally located house 109 continues to be occupied. These correlated distinctions in house size, locational prominence, continuity of occupation, and control of storage led Holladay to describe ʿIzbet Sartah Str. II as "a rural hamlet dominated by one household."¹⁷

This pattern is also not limited to the Iron I or early Iron II periods. The eighth-century B.C.E. village of Khirbet Hadash (Beit Aryeh) contains ten complete houses that range in area from ca. 55–247 m².¹⁸ While this range is heavily influenced by what is essentially two houses (890/900) fused into one, this single monumental structure is clearly of some importance to understanding this small village of approximately 6 dunams (ca. 1.5 acres) and hence cannot be discounted as an outlier.

Going further, the class of extremely large "four-room" houses in Iron II towns that Shiloh designated as "citadels," have usually been excluded from generalizations regarding housing as they are thought to be connected to government officials.¹⁹ Some of these houses no longer seem quite so large, given the data reviewed in the present study. Note, for

16. Israel Finkelstein, *ʿIzbet Sartah: An Early Iron Age Site Near Rosh Haʿayin, Israel* (BAR International Series 299; Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1986), 12–23.

17. Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah," 392.

18. Avraham Faust ("Differences in Family Structure between Cities and Villages in Iron Age II," *Tel Aviv* 26 [1999]: 233–52 [242]) gives the range of house sizes at Kh. Hadash/Beit Aryeh as 105–120 m². These figures appear to bear little resemblance to those derivable by measuring from the plan published by the excavator (see Shmuel Riklin, "Bet Aryeh," *Atiqot* 32 [1997]: 7–20, Fig. 2). My own measurements, inclusive of walls and exclusive of external forecourts, are: house 590, 55 m²; house 570, 60 m²; house 450, 74 m²; house 340, 96 m²; house 420, 99 m²; house 190, 100 m²; house 540, 104 m²; house 410, 110 m²; house 195, 127 m²; house 890/900, 247 m². The gate complex 210 and the incomplete House 235 were not measured. These measurements were taken from a scan of Riklin's published plan using software (NIH Image) that measures the area of irregular shapes. Avraham Faust ("Differences in Family Structure," 240 n. 7) states that there is a discrepancy between the figures for house sizes given by Riklin in the text of his 1997 article, and those derivable from the plan and from an earlier publication of the site (Shmuel Riklin, "Bet Aryeh," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 12 [1994]: 39), which Faust deems to be correct. This does not explain the divergence between Faust's figures and those measurable directly from Riklin's published plan. Note also that Faust himself reproduces Riklin's plan in his own articles, inserting his own scale that suggests the same absolute dimensions for houses as those I derived above, again making it unclear exactly how his divergent figures were calculated.

19. Yigal Shiloh, "The Four-Room House: Its Situation and Function in the Israelite City," *IEJ* 20 (1970): 180–90.

11. Douglas Clark, "Bricks, Sweat and Tears: The Human Investment in Constructing a 'Four-Room' House," *NEA* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 34–43.

12. Emmanuel Olàvarri, "La campagne de fouilles 1982 à Khirbet al-Muʿarradje près de Smakieh," *ADAJ* 27 (1983): 165–78, Fig. 5.

13. Friedbert Ninow, "First Soundings at Khirbat al-Muʿammariyya in the Greater Wadi al-Mujib Area," *ADAJ* 48 (2004): 257–60 (259). For pottery dating this site to (late) Iron I, see idem, "The 2005 Soundings at Khirbat al-Muʿammariyya in the Greater Wadi al-Mujib Area," *ADAJ* 50 (2006): 147–55 (150–51).

14. I have calculated these figures from the complete house plans published in Werner Van Hoof, "Die private architectuur in het Moab-gebied (Jordanië) tijdens de Late Bronstijd en Vroege IJzertijd (ca. 1550–1000 v. Chr.)" (Licentiaat diss., Free University of Brussels, 1997), Figs 16–47.

15. Denyse Homès-Fredericq, "Excavating the First Pillar House at Lehun (Jordan)," in *The Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A. Sauer* (ed. Lawrence Stager et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 180–95.

example, that the large "four-room" houses at Tell en-Nasbeh range in area from ca. 106 to ca. 150 m².²⁰

The "West Tower and Gate" of Tell Beit Mirsim Stratum A is clearly neither a tower nor a gate, but rather a building in the "four-room" plan with solid walls instead of pillars, and a non-communicating long-room to one side, as is found in numerous other houses from Stratum A.²¹ Measuring ca. 243 m², the "West Tower" was very prominently located in that the line of the city wall was modified to incorporate this structure. The finds from this building are selectively published, with almost all of the published pottery coming from a cache of serving vessels found in a sealed pit. Hence the absence of published cooking pots and storage jars is not necessarily indicative of an absence of domestic activities. The small finds—which include uninscribed weights and seal impressions, fragments of Judean Pillared-Base figurines, and at least one imported vessel—indicate the building was somewhat unusual, but do not clearly indicate a specialized administrative function. If we treat the "West Tower" as a large "four-room" house, the Stratum A houses at Tell Beit Mirsim range from 35–243 m² in area. Even without the "West Tower" the range is from 35–120 m².^f

Building 416, the so-called "governor's residency" from Beer-Sheba Stratum II, is an irregular structure measuring ca. 270 m² in area and is adjacent to the open courtyard in front of the city gate.²² It appears to be an amalgam of a "Three-Room" pillared house and clusters of small rectangular rooms. One of its interior walls is built of ashlar masonry, indicating the house is specially constructed as well as large. Very few finds are published from this building; specifically an ostrakon fragment, two bowls and a pithoi, as well as a Judean Pillared-base figurine from what may be an adjoining street. Again, if building 416 is taken as a house, then Beer-Sheba Stratum II dwellings range from ca. 55 to ca. 270 m² in area.

Finally, in Niveau VIId and VIIe at Tell el-Farah North, generally dated to the eighth century B.C.E., the so-called "palais 148" existed adjacent to the courtyard in front of the west gate.²³ This structure measured

20. Jeffrey Zorn, "Tell en-Nasbeh: A Re-evaluation of the Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Later Periods" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 172–73.

21. William F. Albright, *The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim*. Vol. 3, *The Iron Age* (AASOR 21–22; New Haven: ASOR, 1943), 41–47 Pl. 6, 8.

22. Yohanan Aharoni, *Beer-Sheba I* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology, 1973), 14 Pl. 83–84.

23. Alain Chambon, *Tell el-Farah 1: L'Age du Fer* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984), 44–46.

440 m² and was laid-out as a "four-room" house with solid walls, a large forecourt, and connected side-rooms. Again, while the finds from this structure show evidence for wealth and external connections, especially the concentration of Neo-Assyrian pottery from VIIe, there is no indication of a specialized administrative function for the building.

Table

Site	Houses (N=)	Range (m ²)	Variance
Tell Beit Mirsim Str. A ²⁴	32	ca. 35.0–243.0 (35.0–120.0 [no West Tower])	694% (343% [no West Tower])
Tell en-Nasbeh ²⁵ III + Str. II Houses	28	ca. 28.0–130.0 ca. 28.0–150.0	464% 535%
Tell el-Farah VIIb ²⁶	13	ca. 52.0–121.0	233%
Hazor Str. VI ²⁷	11	ca. 40.0–160.0	400%
Kh. Haddash/Beit Arye ²⁸	10	ca. 55.0–247.0	449%
Tell es-Sa'idiyeh V ²⁹	10	ca. 49.0–52.0	11%
Kh. al-Mudayna al- ^c Aliya ³⁰	8	ca. 71.5–239.0	334%
Lahun ³¹	8	ca. 52.0–160.0	308%
Kh. Raddanna ³²	6	ca. 50.0–165.0	330%
Beer-Sheba VII	5	ca. 95.0–153.0	161%
Tawilan ³³	5	ca. 31.0–140.0+	452%
Izbit Sartah II ³⁴	4	ca. 41.0–195.0	476%

24. Albright, *The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim*.

25. Zorn, "Tell en-Nasbeh," and "Estimating the Population Size of Ancient Settlements: Methods, Problems, Solutions, and a Case Study," *BASOR* 295 (1994): 31–48.

26. Chambon, *Tell el-Farah*.

27. Avraham Faust, "Socioeconomic Stratification in an Israelite City: Hazor VI as a Test Case," *Levant* 31 (1999): 179–90.

28. Riklin, "Bet Arye."

29. James B. Pritchard, *Tell es-Sa'idiyeh: Excavations on the Tell, 1964–1966* (Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

30. Routledge, "Seeing Through Walls," and Routledge et al., "Excavations at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-^cAliya."

31. Van Hoof, "Die private architectuur."

32. Zvi Lederman, "An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana: The Excavations of Joseph Callaway" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999).

33. Ze'ev Herzog, *Beer-Sheba II: The Early Iron Age Settlement* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology, 1984).

34. Finkelstein, *Izbit Sartah*.

The table appearing on the preceding page summarizes the range of house sizes found at selected Iron Age sites from Palestine and Transjordan. Quite a number of these sites witness house size variability that exceeds 300 percent, a figure that we should remember is conservative and would only increase if more houses were known from each site. Indeed, the site that demands explanation in the table is not one of those with a very large range in house sizes, but rather it is Tell es-Sa'idiyeh Str. V, whose unusually uniform insulae of small houses marks it off as something quite different from any other known Iron Age settlement. In short, the evidence in the table would seem to contradict Meyer's statement that Iron Age "household buildings were strikingly uniform in size." Indeed, even if we limit ourselves to Meyer's primary concern, the central highlands in the Iron I period, we still encounter cases such as the classic "Early Israelite" site of Kh. Raddana, which shows a range of 50–165 m² in the area of the houses excavated by Joseph Callaway.³⁵ Furthermore, other attributes of the largest houses in the table, such as proximity to a gateway, control of storage facilities, or relative wealth of portable finds, suggest that these differences in house size were socially significant. It would appear that within Southern Levantine communities of both the Iron I and Iron II periods, variation in house size was not merely random but was linked in some way to the structure of these communities and their constituent households. But how and to what effect?

Explaining Variation

Avraham Faust is one of the few Syro-Palestinian archaeologists who has recognized and sought to explain variability in Iron Age house sizes.³⁶ Faust has noted that until quite recently most of our evidence for the "four-room" house came from fortified towns of the Iron II period. While not constituting cities in anything but a relative sense, these sites were nodal concentrations of population and administrative *apparati* within a regional state. Hence, one might expect such sites to be quite distinct from rural settlements of primary agro-pastoral producers.

Limiting himself to the Iron II period, Faust argues that "four-room" houses from rural sites are considerably larger than those from these

35. See Lederman, "An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana."

36. Faust, "Differences in Family Structure"; idem, "The Rural Sector," 19–22; idem, "The Farmstead in the Highlands of Iron Age II Israel," in *The Rural Landscape of Ancient Israel* (ed. Aren Maeir, Shimon Dar, and Ze'ev Safrai; BAR International Series 1121; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), 91–103 (95–96).

town sites, providing a list of recently discovered examples that average ca. 120 m² in total area.³⁷ Faust concludes that this difference in house size is due to differences in family structure between the urban and rural sectors of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.³⁸ In particular, Faust argues that the larger average house size in rural communities is accounted for by the continued importance of the extended family, while under the economic conditions of urban communities (e.g. dependence on a labor market or non-agricultural trades) nuclear families became the primary residential group.³⁹

A careful consideration of the table presented above reveals a central problem with Faust's argument. The most striking feature of Iron Age house size is not variability between sites, but rather variability within sites. Note that this is not because our table is dominated by so-called "urban" settlements of the Iron II period where, as Faust has already argued, distinctions in wealth are attested by house size and quality of construction.⁴⁰ Indeed, Iron I sites, which appear for the most part to be settlements of non-specialized agro-pastoral producers, show the same range in house sizes as is found in most of the well-fortified Iron II towns. Furthermore, if we look at Khirbet Hadash (Beit Aryeh), which Faust himself uses as one of his exemplary Iron II rural settlements, we can note that its average house size of 110 m² disguises the fact that the smallest and largest recorded houses differ in area by 450 percent.⁴¹ Interestingly, for two of his other exemplary Iron II rural sites (Kh. Jemein and Kh. Jarish) Faust discounts the excavators' own conclusions that at least one house on the site was significantly larger than the others.⁴² For the later Iron II period, Faust has gathered together evidence relating to isolated farmsteads from the highlands of Palestine, showing that again many of these rural houses are extremely large.⁴³ At the same time, Faust notes that late Iron II farmsteads from western Samaria contain houses that are notably smaller in area. Faust credits these differences to political or ethnic differences,⁴⁴ but then goes on to show that

37. Faust, "Differences in Family Structure," 242; idem, "The Rural Sector," Table I.

38. Faust, "Differences in Family Structure"; idem, "The Rural Sector," 19–22; idem, "The Farmstead," 95–97.

39. Faust, "Differences in Family Structure," 243–45; idem, "The Farmstead," 97.

40. Faust, "Socioeconomic Stratification," 185–86.

41. According to my measurements from the published plans, see above.

42. Faust, "The Rural Sector," 28, 34 n. 9.

43. Faust, "The Farmstead," 92–93.

44. Ibid., 96.

farmsteads in the southern highlands and those in western Samaria were likely embedded in distinct systems of production, namely, wine production for exchange in the former case, and mixed, perhaps subsistence-oriented, agro-pastoral production in the latter.⁴⁵ This suggests a rather more complex role for economic factors than is accounted for in Faust's urban/rural distinction.

In contrast to Faust, David Schloen argues that family forms were relatively constant across the spectrum of Iron Age communities, indeed across all ancient Near Eastern communities.⁴⁶ In particular, he argues that Iron Age families uniformly strove to realize the ideal of complex co-resident patrilineal households within the severe demographic constraints imposed by high mortality rates.⁴⁷ Schloen argues that both "urban" and "rural" communities were composed of self-sustaining agrarian households, and hence there was no economic or sociological reason to posit distinct family forms in the fortified towns and rural villages of Iron Age Israel or Judah.⁴⁸ Differences in house sizes between these communities are explained by Schloen as a product of the higher density of houses found in walled towns where, he argues, one still finds houses large enough to contain complex families given presiding demographic constraints.⁴⁹ Within communities, Schloen suggests that variation in house size can be accounted for by differences between households in their life-cycle stage and demographic success.⁵⁰

One problem with Schloen's position is that, as durable structures, houses generally outlast the life-cycle of any one family. Hence, archaeological studies attempting to trace shifts in family composition over time have focused on the internal modification of houses (blocking of doorways, addition of rooms, etc.), rather than their construction.⁵¹ One might credit such modifications for the expansion of irregular houses, such as 890/900 at Kh. Hadash or building 416 at Beer-Sheba. However, such complexes are very rare, despite the wide dissemination of Stager's

45. Ibid., 97.

46. David Schloen, *House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 50–53.

47. Ibid., 135–83.

48. Ibid., 136–47.

49. Ibid., 141.

50. Ibid., 148, 171–75, 181–83; cf. Jack Goody, ed., *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

51. E.g. Edward Banning and Brian Byrd, "Houses and the Changing Residential Unit Domestic Architecture at PPNB 'A in Ghazal," *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 53 (1987): 309–25; Elizabeth Stone, "Texts, Architecture and Ethnographic Analogy: Patterns of Residence in Old Babylonian Nippur," *Iraq* 43 (1981): 19–33.

argument that they would be the normal locale of the biblical בית אב.⁵² Furthermore, the life-cycle argument does not account for singular "four-room" houses, such as house 109 at 'Izbit Sartah, that were built large and demonstrate no significant expansion or contraction in the course of their occupation. Given that this singular, unmodified, form is the most common one taken by the largest Iron Age houses, one must wonder at the apparent absence of the sort of regular expansion and contraction of living space implied by Schloen's explanation. Even those irregular houses that may show signs of expansion frequently stand out within their own settlements (e.g. Kh. Hadash, Beer-Sheba II), suggesting that such episodes of expansion were not experienced by all households in these communities.

Household Size and Wealth

Both Schloen and Faust offer, but do not explore, an interesting alternative explanation for house-size variability by noting the link between household size and wealth found in many studies of agrarian communities where labor is the primary input in the expansion or intensification of production.⁵³ Our interest lies not so much in the fact that "where resources gather, so do people,"⁵⁴ as this varies between specific configurations of inheritance, land-tenure, mode of production, and preferred residency patterns.⁵⁵ Furthermore, wealth as a singular category is a rather blunt tool for understanding Iron Age social life, as it can encompass a wide range of distinct materials and relations, including such things as direct consumables (plants and animals), portable assets (e.g. luxury goods), fixed assets (e.g. houses and fields), human resources (e.g. labor power), exchange media (e.g. silver), credit and debt relations, as well as social capital (e.g. alliances, obligations, status, reputation). All of these are resources that enable people to act in the world and ensure both social and biological reproduction. At the same time, each of

52. Stager, "Archaeology of the Israelite Family"; cf. Schloen, *House of the Father*, 150–51.

53. Schloen, *House of the Father*, 117–20, 181–83. Faust (Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimovitz, "The Four-Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society," *NEA* 66 [2003]: 22–31 [26–27]) acknowledges the relationship between house size, household size, and wealth, but only for the walled towns of the Iron II period.

54. Robert McC. Netting, "Some Home Truths on Household Size and Wealth," *American Behavioral Scientist* 25, no. 6 (1982): 641–62 (642).

55. See Donald Kertzer, "Household History and Sociological Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 155–79.

these categories will have different meanings, relevance, and implications depending upon the given social-historical context that potential for, and modes of, accumulation, exchange, and consumption. What is interesting is thinking about the possible processes by which some households expand through the acquisition of labor power (e.g. taking on servants or laborers, adoption, marriage, attaching peripheral kin) and some households remain static, shrink, or cease to be viable (hence becoming a source of servants, adoptees, or peripheral kin).

Of course, we do not know for certain that variation in house size in the Southern Levantine Iron Age directly reflects variation in the size of domestic groups (e.g. number of people under one roof). When both mode of production and cultural values are relatively constant, as seems to be the case within most Iron Age communities, this equation seems reasonable, but one must consider other sources of variability, such as storage space, work areas, or simple ostentation (public display).⁵⁶ There is, however, a happy coincidence in our particular case in that most of the factors that might reasonably account for systematic differences in house size can also be correlated with one or more aspect of wealth, as defined above. Indeed, going further, when one begins to think about the relationship between factors such as storage facilities, work or sleeping space, and issues such as the number of dependants supported, the amount of land worked, or the ability to carry out key social activities such as contracting marriages or hosting communal or religious celebrations, one can begin to see these various categories of wealth linking up in complex ways that could revolve around house size.

An Ethnographic Example

Our interpretative imagination can be helped along on this point by reference to Martha Mundy's ethnographic study of domestic groups in al-Wadi, North Yemen.⁵⁷ Mundy focuses on the historical, economic, and strategic aspects of patronymic groups, households, property, and marriage in this pseudonymic settlement of tribally organized irrigation agriculturists. Census data from al-Wadi identifies 324 households (defined as commensal units) spread across 237 domestic structures,⁵⁸ of

56. Cf. Richard Wilk, "Little House in the Jungle: The Causes of Variation in House Size among Modern Kekchi Maya," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 2 (1983): 99–116.

57. Martha Mundy, *Domestic Government: Kinship, Community and Polity in North Yemen* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1995).

58. *Ibid.*, 96.

which 316 households can be identified according to 127 patronymics, in the pattern "House (*bayt*) of PN."⁵⁹

If organized by land-holdings, one finds that the patronymic groups with the most land also tend to have the most constituent households.⁶⁰ Indeed, these differences are quite striking, ranging from landless families that are virtually nuclear to large land-holding "houses" that contain over 100 individuals spread between 13 different households. The largest patronymic group (*bayt Akish*) is primarily concentrated in the one ward of the settlement bearing its name, but the second largest group is spread between four different wards,⁶¹ showing that these patronymic groups are not simply kin-based neighborhood associations. More interestingly, despite the differences in size, these various "houses" cannot be said to be operating at different levels in society (as a lineage, patronymic association, a complex family, a nuclear family etc.), since the largest groups are not composed of the smallest but are separated from them by wealth, personal history and structural complexity.⁶² In other words, these patronymic groups were not balanced segments incorporating all households as the next structural level in a kinship system. For those with little or no land their patronymic "house" was often little different in size and structure from their household. As Mundy notes, "for some people a *bait* is just a house. But not for all..."⁶³

This same pattern was replicated on a smaller scale for individual households. Neither of the two shaykhs of al-Wadi at the time of Mundy's field study was from the largest patronymic groups, but both were the heads of individually large and wealthy households. Mundy shows that differences in household composition at al-Wadi cannot be explained by life-cycle differences alone.⁶⁴ Indeed, in comparing the size of each household with the age of its head, consistent patterns only emerged when she controlled for differences in wealth and occupation.⁶⁵

Overall, Mundy argues that wealth, status, and "house" size were not accidents of demographic success, but closely interwoven features of marriage alliances in this settlement. Large, wealthy patronymic groups could work through marriage to consolidate or expand their land-holdings and retain conjugal couples from one generation to the next. As

59. *Ibid.*, 93.

60. *Ibid.*, Table 5.1.

61. *Ibid.*, 93.

62. *Ibid.*, 95, 223 n. 27.

63. *Ibid.*, 93.

64. *Ibid.*, 97–101.

65. *Ibid.*, 99.

one female informant commented, "they don't marry girls, they marry fields."⁶⁶ Not all households outside of the largest patronymic groups were poor by any stretch, but individually well-to-do households were uniformly large, with correspondingly large land-holdings. By contrast, many landless craftsmen and agricultural workers had to practice neo-local residency, often at some distance from their fathers, simply to maintain a viable household. As Mundy notes, "we should not hope romantically that among the poor it is simply their mobility which hides their cousins from our tabular representations...the links of the poor with distant kin are often anything but intense."⁶⁷

From the perspective of the Iron Age, one of the more interesting aspects of Mundy's work is not simply the correlation between household size and wealth, but also the dynamic interaction between households, property, marriage, and groups which, in genealogical terms, might be construed as structurally "higher" than the household, such as the biblical *משפחה*. In al-Wadi at least, this interaction would appear rather different depending upon the household and patronymic group to which one belonged.

Wealth, Class, and Iron Age Families

One might object to this ethnographic analogy, due not only to the rather obvious differences in history, culture, and mode of production (irrigation versus dry-farming), but also due to the clear presence of class relations⁶⁸ in al-Wadi in the form of landed tribesman versus landless craftsmen and agricultural laborers. If we return to Carol Meyers's quote we see that she was careful to distinguish between wealth and class in relation to house size, denying the existence of the latter in Iron I highland Palestine. Holladay presents a more nuanced perspective, recognizing the significance of the differential accumulation of wealth during the Iron I period as a possible pre-cursor of state-formation,⁶⁹ and noting the class relations implicit in the very existence of kingship.⁷⁰ In addition, Holladay stresses the continued autonomy of the household as a unit of production and consumption under the monarchy and hence the limited nature of centralized surplus extraction and relations of direct dependency even

66. Ibid., 178.

67. Ibid., 95.

68. Here meaning ones relation to the means of production.

69. Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah," 376–79.

70. Ibid., 376.

under Iron II monarchies.⁷¹ On current evidence it is hard not to agree with the broad outlines of Holladay's reconstruction. Certainly, evidence for labor service (e.g. the Mesad Hashavyahu ostrakon) or full-time craft specialization, not to mention kingship itself (e.g. 1 Sam 8) would suggest class relations in the strictly descriptive sense⁷² in the later Iron Age. At the same time, it seems true that class relations were "underdeveloped" in the small-scale kingdoms of the Levant, relative to either Egypt or Mesopotamia, and that they were shot through by a complex network of both dyadic relations and intense ideological conflict as indicated by biblical evidence. It is important to remember that the relationships noted by Mundy between property, marriage, and household composition applied within landholding households as well as between the landed and the landless. Hence, it might be interesting to link up Holladay's stress on wealth accumulation with house and household size, but not limit ourselves to the Iron I period.

First, we need to recognize that, contrary to many characterizations of the Iron I period, towards the end of this period, if not earlier, many settlements in the highlands and desert margins of Palestine and Transjordan exhibited marked differences in the control of grain, and that this correlated with the size and prominence of the houses involved. As is well known, a number of biblical place names contain lineage or family names in combination with some form of site descriptor (e.g. *Hazar-addar*, "enclosure of Addar"; *Abel Bêt-Ma'akah*, "meadow of the house of Ma'akah"), and the suggestion that this relates to the lineage or family who founded the settlement, has been made on many occasions.⁷³ It is, therefore, not much of a stretch to see in the prominence of certain houses within village contexts the material realization of something like a "founder's privilege," whereby priority for land, labor, and leadership fell upon a limited number of households within the community. The relationship between individual households, as represented for us by

71. Ibid., 386–93.

72. That is, without necessarily implying the existence of class consciousness or solidarity. Pierre Bourdieu ("Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7 [1989]: 14–25 [17]) distinguishes between classes as specific groups of people, and classes "on paper" as structural positions implied in given social relationships. It is to this latter sense that I am referring here.

73. E.g. Faust, "The Rural Sector," 31; Lawrence Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90–131 (101–2); cf. Shunia Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 98–107.

excavated domestic dwellings (e.g. individual “four-room” houses), and larger patronymic groups, such as the biblical *משפחה*, is an interesting question. On analogy with Mundy’s ethnographic work, it is likely that this relationship was much more complex and dynamically related to demography, property, and marriage alliance than current models of Iron Age society allow, although how this might be investigated archaeologically remains unclear.

It seems evident that the basic pattern of differentiation between house sizes within the same community, and especially the existence of a limited number of houses marked by size, prominence, and storage facilities, is already established in the Iron I period. The palaces and larger settlements of the Iron II period are built on this social foundation, incorporating rather than replacing pre-existing relations between households. This continuity in Iron Age settlement structure has been recognized by numerous scholars, yet it has seldom been pushed far enough. In particular, the tendency of scholars to bracket off the large urban “four-room” buildings of Iron II as a special case of government, or public, architecture—without attempting to explain how such special institutions worked or why they looked so much like houses—seems rather problematic. Indeed, the fact that we find a similar pattern in both small Iron II villages such as Kh. Hadash and in larger Iron II settlements such as Tell Beit Mirsim makes it difficult to justify the special treatment given to the large urban “four-room” houses.⁷⁴ Calling these structures houses does not mean that their inhabitants were uninvolved in governing, nor that the buildings themselves were not the loci of administrative activities. What it does suggest is that such activities were channelled along the same pathways as wealth, property, and status, attaching themselves to particular households—and perhaps also particular patronymic groups—in the course of Iron II state formation. In this sense, we may find many parallels with what Levi-Strauss termed “house societies,” that is, societies in which the language of kinship (e.g. the “house”) serves as a vehicle for the accumulation and reproduction of wealth, status, and privilege across generations, rather than as a means of collective integration.⁷⁵ According to Levi-Strauss, such societies are characterized by

74. Note that house 890/900 at Kh. Hadash is slightly larger than the West Tower at Tell Beit Mirsim.

75. E.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks* (trans. S. Modelski; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 170–87; see also Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie, eds., *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

the strategic nature of marriage, inheritance, and property exchanges, in which the perpetuation of the “house” and its material and social wealth takes precedence over the idealized “rules” of kinship. Hence, wealthy “houses” could expand through the inclusion of servants, various adoption arrangements, and the retention, rather than marrying-out, of daughters. While this last option may seem contrary to the patrilocal ideals we usually associate with the Hebrew Bible, one needs only to think of Jacob in the house of Laban, or David in the house of Saul, to realize that wealthy and powerful houses could seek to acquire son-in-laws against convention. The tensions in each of these stories also reveals something of the small-scale politics and internal dynamics associated with alliances between families of unequal wealth or power.

All of this is not to imply that wealth differences between households were unusually, or even particularly, pronounced in the Iron Age of the Southern Levant. Rather, my point has been to show that, contrary to some characterizations of Iron Age communal life, these differences both existed and were likely to have been of some social-historical significance even without reference to class relations. More unexpectedly, it now seems evident that the most significant shifts in household and community organization began to occur not in the transition from the Iron I to the Iron II periods, but rather towards the end of the Iron Age with the dispersal of settlement to single-farmsteads under conditions of intensive agricultural production. This settlement pattern distinguishes the landscape of the Hellenistic and Roman periods from the Bronze and Iron Ages, and has been noted in both the Southern and Northern Levant.⁷⁶ Interestingly, the 600-year history of the “four-room” house ends soon thereafter. Perhaps the consistent reproduction of the standard “four-room” house plan was dependent on the kind of relations between households that encouraged the wealthiest residents to represent their houses as not terribly different from their poorer neighbors. If this was the case, then the dissolution of this communal life, through imperialism, exile, dispersal, and agricultural intensification, may provide a context for understanding the end of the “four-room” house in terms that avoid the circular “black box” of ethnicity.

76. Tony Wilkinson, *Archaeological Landscapes of the Near East* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 128–50; Jesse Casana, “Structural Transformations in Settlement Systems of the Northern Levant,” *AJA* 111 (2007): 195–221; Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 192–201; Faust, “The Farmstead.”

In Conclusion

By emphasizing averages over variability, and typical examples over extremes, many Syro-Palestinian archaeologists seem to have missed the fact that large houses are neither unusual nor unimportant in Iron Age communities. In this study I have attempted to explore what we can learn by taking seriously the variability evident in Iron Age house sizes. I willingly admit that much of the interpretative portion of this essay is open to serious debate, but I would suggest that minimally the terms of this debate must now change and include both the reality and social implications of variability in that most repetitious of artifacts, the "four-room" house.

"HOME ECONOMICS 1407"
AND THE ISRAELITE FAMILY AND THEIR NEIGHBORS:
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

John S. Holladay, Jr.

*You can tell a lot about someone by visiting their house.
But what if it's just a 3,000 year old robbed-out
six-inch high ground plan?*

Houses are the commonest architectural form typically encountered, and at the same time one of the most neglected, whether in terms of field-work, reporting, or interpretation. There are many points at issue. Particularly since archaeologists seldom recover more than the ground floor plan of any building, despite frequent indications of a second story, it becomes important for model-building (below), to explore other avenues of knowledge in order to discover the spatial and functional characteristics and potentials (including "second stories") of any "typical" house, or, to put it another way, of any particular "house type." Both theoretically and predictably, these "types" may vary depending upon the household's economic pursuits: for example, full-time traders, weavers, or members of the ruling elite would all have differing access to resources and requirements, and all would differ from those of a farmer, or full-time herder.¹ But this is often a matter of degree or nuance. During the Syro-Palestinian Iron Ages most settled people in Israel and Judah were farmers living in fortified settlements. Therefore, most

1. For examples of long-distance foreign traders' "non-local" residences and/or "quarters" throughout Anatolia and the Levant during the Middle Bronze IIA–Iron I Periods, see my contribution to the second volume of the Paul Dion Festschrift ("Toward a New Paradigmatic Understanding of Long-Distance Trade in the Ancient Near East: From the Middle Bronze II to Early Iron II—A Sketch," in *The World of the Aramaeans II: Studies in History and Archaeology in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion* [ed. P. M. M. Daviau, J. W. Wevers, and M. Weigl; JSOTSup 325; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001], 136–98), together with anthropological/social-historical and bibliographical references throughout.