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Justin Lev-Tov

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE, BRONZE AND IRON AGE

Houses serve not only as shelters from the elements but also as important components of culture. Houses embody norms and values and enable social relations and interactions to take place. Since houses accommodate social groups and families of various types, sizes, and social configurations, they embody a variety of social and cognitive aspects. The built environment, while reflecting social norms, also allows for certain types of social activities and interaction and, therefore, structures the inhabitants' activities and perceptions.

Houses and Society. Houses participate in a society's nonverbal communication and transmit various messages, canonical or indexical. A canonical message "pertains to the meaning of enduring symbols reflecting concepts held in common by the people participating in a common cultural system" (Blanton, 1994, p. 10). The house as a living environment is a medium of communication among the occupants, providing a material frame that structures day-to-day interactions. In this sense, the form of the house embodies taxonomic principles specific to a cultural system; by living in the house, its occupants are constantly made aware of these principles, which are thus inculcated and reinforced. In an indexical message, on the other hand, "information is communicated concerning the current status of a household . . . in terms . . . such as wealth" (Blanton, 1994, pp. 10-11). The indexical communicative role of the house usually involves its more public areas and elements that provide information about costliness and taste to outsiders. The two kinds of messages are seemingly contradictory; but in reality it is sometimes not easy to distinguish between the two, and it seems as if both can be transmitted from the same house at the same time.

Notably, houses are the best vehicles to study socioeconomic stratification. Class and even wealth differences can be identified, for example, through structures' size, the quality of building (material and plan), the usage of common walls, and their location within the settlement matrix.

Construction. Houses in the biblical period were built mainly using stones, mud bricks, or a combination of the two. The foundations were usually built of stones. Sometimes, bricks were used in the construction of inner walls, while the outer walls were built of stone. During the Bronze and Iron Ages, the stones used in the construction of dwellings were unworked or very partly worked; only on rare occasions were nicely worked masonry stones used for private houses, and even when such stones were used, this was usually only for corners and doorways. This changed gradually, and in later periods it was more common to find nicely worked stones in dwellings. The quality of the stone used in the construction of houses was usually also an indication of wealth. The walls were usually plastered. The ceiling was built of various materials, mainly wood/timber. The wood was usually local, and the limited length of the local woods limited the width of the rooms. Still, in some cases imported woods were also used, and this also can serve as an indication of wealth. The roof was also covered with plaster. The floors were usually made of earth, although plaster was sometimes used; and in some cases the floors were paved with stones.

Beginnings. Two of the common types of structures during the Bronze and Iron Ages appear already in the Chalcolithic or even Prehistoric era (this article will not discuss simple huts). Most of the early houses were quite simple, composed mainly of broad rooms, sometimes arranged in rows. These seem to be early appearances of a house type called the row (or path) house. The term refers to a house with a number of rooms (usually one to four) arranged in a row. Early appearances of such structures can be found, for example, at Beidha and Jericho. At times, a house could contain two separate rows of such rooms. The row house is a simple arrangement of rooms, and while the usage of the same type of structure might

sometimes indicate cultural continuity through time, this is not always the case.

Early forms of the courtyard house, which later became a dominant type, also appear from the Neolithic or Chalcolithic (e.g., at Basta and Sha'ar Hagolan). The term "courtyard house" refers, in very general terms, to a house with a courtyard and a number of adjacent rooms; usually, the yard is surrounded by rooms, but the term is often applied also to houses in which the yard is not completely encircled by rooms. The term "courtyard house" is very loosely defined and includes many structures which differ greatly from one another in relation to location of the yard, number of rooms, and size and quality of construction. The construction of such houses was simply a suitable solution to the climatic, environmental, and mainly social conditions in the Near East; and there is no necessary connection between the users of those houses through time.

Early Bronze Age. A unique type of house that appears in the Early Bronze Age is the Arad house, which is composed of a broad room with benches along some of the walls. In most cases the room was part of a complex around a yard (e.g., at Arad), and the complex can be viewed as a form of the courtyard house.

Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age. The best-known house form during the Middle and Late Bronze Age was the courtyard house, which was found in various settings, urban and rural alike, for example, in Megiddo, Beth-Shemesh, and Nahal Rephaim during the Middle Bronze and in Megiddo during the Late Bronze Age. The row house was also quite widespread, and such houses were found, for example, at the Middle Bronze-Age sites of Tell el-Hayyat and Kfar Rupin. The courtyard structures, which were usually much larger, may have been more typical of large and rich households, while the row houses may have been more typical of poorer families. Differences between the courtyard houses themselves can also be attributed to the number of inhabitants and wealth.

Iron Age. Both the courtyard house and the row house continued to exist during the Iron Age; but their popularity declined, and they were found in

more restricted areas. Their distribution, mainly in the northern valleys whose population was to a large extent non-Israelite even in the Iron Age II, seems to indicate that they served mainly Canaanite–Phoenician populations. Such houses are found within cities, along with the four-room house type, and in non-Israelite villages.

The decline of the former types of houses accompanied the social and ethnic changes which took place in the land of Israel during the Iron Age I, namely, the arrival of the Philistines and the emergence of the Israelites. The Philistines settled in the southern coastal plain, but despite a number of excavations, it is still difficult to generalize about their architecture. One can mainly refer to some foreign elements in the architecture of Philistia, like the usage of hearths. There also have been a few attempts to identify the use of space, especially regarding public structures; but only little is known of Philistine dwellings. Not much is currently known about the architecture of other Sea Peoples. Zertal suggested that El Ahwat, on the slopes of northwestern Samaria, may have been a settlement of the shardana; the settlers built corridor houses, similar to those unearthed in Sardinia (the Nuraghe sites). This, however, is not accepted by all scholars. Notably, a much more significant change is the emergence of a new type of house in the Iron Age, the four-room house, which is usually associated with the Israelites.

The Four-Room House. The term “four-room house” is a convention used to designate the most dominant Iron-Age dwelling in ancient Israel. This is a long house (deviating from the Bronze-Age architectural tradition), whose ideal plan is composed of four main “spaces” or “areas.” In this configuration three parallel longitudinal “spaces” (sometimes separated by pillars) are backed by a broad room, with the entrance to the building located at the central space. There are subtypes of the “ideal” form, comprising three and, in exceptional cases, even five “spaces.” Variation also existed in the form of the inner division(s) of the various spaces; in many cases some of the spaces were further subdivided into smaller rooms, and the actual number of rooms varies greatly. This is

probably a result of the changing needs of the family during its life cycle. The basic plan of a long house, with a number of longitudinal spaces in the front and a broad room in the back, however, is quite rigid and easy to identify.

In the past it was thought that the central space may have been an open courtyard. This space was usually wider than the building’s other spaces and contained more installations. Many archaeologists, however, now believe that the central space was roofed; and there is a tendency to reconstruct the four-room house as a two-story building. The presence of stone steps in a considerable number of excavated buildings also indicates the existence of a second story. Furthermore, the buildings’ thick walls and the closely spaced monoliths seem too massive for a single-story structure. Apparently, the second story was reached by steps or by a wooden ladder.

The house crystallized during the Iron Age I, reaching its final form during the Iron Age II. Notably, unlike the Bronze-Age types of house, the four-room house was more rigid in plan, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, had a much more restricted distribution in time and space.

Past trends in explaining the four-room house. Many studies have attempted to explain the great popularity of the four-room house along ethnic lines, that is, that it was an Israelite house. Some scholars have even attributed the form of the house to its origins in the nomadic tent. Others have criticized the ethnic label that was attached to the house, mainly because of its wide distribution, including the lowlands and Transjordan.

Since the “ethnic explanation” for the wide distribution of the four-room house has fallen into disfavor, scholars have looked for an alternative interpretation; and, on the basis of ethnographic analogies, function is the key attribute embraced by many to explain the house’s great popularity.

The pillared house takes its form not from some desert nostalgia monumentalized in stone and mud-brick, but from a living tradition. It was first and foremost a successful adaptation to farm life: the

ground floor had space allocated for food processing, small craft production, stabling, and storage; the second floor was suitable for dining, sleeping, and other activities. . . . Its longevity attests to its continuing suitability not only to the environment . . . but also for the socioeconomic unit housed in it—for the most part, rural families who farmed and raised livestock. (Stager, 1985, p. 17)

Attributing the success of the four-room house to its suitability to peasant daily life, while a compelling argument, falls short of conveying the full story of the structure's exceptional dominance as an architectural form and as a cultural phenomenon. There were houses typical of other periods that functioned well, but none of them achieved such a dominant position in the architectural landscape or were so uniform in plan. Moreover, while the standardization of the house was a long process, covering the entire Iron I, its disappearance in the sixth century B.C.E. is quite sudden. No functional explanation can account for the house's sudden loss of popularity.

Moreover, if the great uniformity of the plan reflects its functional quality, at least some uniformity in the use of the various spaces within the house is expected. This, however, is not the case. In some houses the finds in the back room indicate daily activities, while in others this room was used for storing a large number, sometimes even hundreds, of storage jars.

The fact that all houses, whether urban or rural, rich or poor, are built according to the same plan also argues against the functional theory. In addition, the four-room plan was applied to residences and public buildings that had nothing in common with "peasant life" (e.g., the western tower at Tell Beit Mirsim, the governor's residency at Tel'Eton, and the Fort of Hazor) and even to the late Iron-Age Judahite tombs.

Social aspects of the four-room house. Clearly, one must look at society when attempting to understand this phenomenon, and it appears that the four-room house embodied Israelite society and values and can be seen as a microcosmos of the Israelite world. Even if non-Israelites dwelt in four-

room houses, it is clear that Israelites used them extensively; and it is therefore appropriate to discuss these structures in connection with Israelite society.

In Israelite society, like in some other societies, the term "house" (בית) came to symbolize the kinship unit that dwelt within it. The term was initially used for a dwelling structure of a family and was borrowed to denote a family living together. In biblical Hebrew, therefore, the word "house" has two meanings. The first is "(T)he ordinary dwelling unit of the settled population" and the second "can signify a family line like the 'house of Levy'" (Schaub, 1994, pp. 441, 442). Examples are numerous, both in the Bible and elsewhere, such as the famous case of the "house of David." Hence, anyone who establishes a family is building a "house."

The same is true for the nonverbal language—the four-room house symbolized the family that dwelt in it.

Family structure. Most archaeologists who have discussed the four-room house have been of the opinion that each single structure housed a nuclear family. These scholars relied primarily on houses excavated in urban sites such as Tel Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en-Naṣbeh, Tell el-Far'ah (N), Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, and Hazor. Since the common size of the houses in these sites is 430 to 860 ft² (40–80 m²), according to the commonly used density ratio, they probably accommodated only a nuclear family. Others, however, have suggested that the four-room buildings were typically inhabited by extended families. These scholars base this suggestion on a few large houses excavated at rural sites. The size of these houses is approximately 1,292 to 1,399 ft² (120–130 m², ground floor only), about twice the area of four-room houses in cities. A close examination of a large sample of Iron-Age rural and urban houses reveals that this is a repeated pattern.

The difference in size between urban and rural four-room houses seems to be a result neither of function (e.g., the agricultural needs of the rural population) nor of circumstances (e.g., more free ground for building in villages than in cities). Rather, it is a reflection of the different social units

comprising the urban versus rural sectors of Israelite society. The comparatively small size of the urban four-room houses supports the common view that they were occupied by nuclear families, while the large size of most of the rural houses indicates that they were occupied by extended families of at least three generations. Such extended families are considered by many scholars as the biblical *Beth Av*, the ideal family type of the Iron Age. Notably, a number of large houses have typically been unearthed in towns, but they are usually also of a higher quality and most probably represent the urban elite. Some scholars have suggested that extended families dwelt in Iron-Age cities in compounds. While this is a possible explanation for the finds in many Iron Age-I sites, the evidence regarding Iron-II cities does not seem to support such an interpretation.

Notably, the differences in house size between urban and rural sites along with the existence of a few large and better-built structures in cities is in line with socioanthropological information. It is also expected that rich urban families would maintain extended families, therefore explaining the existence of a few large and nicely built houses among the normally small urban houses.

Urban and rural four-room houses differ not only in their size but also in their planning and internal division. Almost all the houses in the rural areas are of the classic four-room type, while the majority of the urban houses (not including those of the elite) are of the three-room subtype. In addition, while many of the rooms in rural four-room houses are further divided, the majority of urban houses have only limited internal division beyond the three basic rooms. Thus, the number of rooms in a typical rural house (ground floor only) is usually five to eight, more than twice the number of rooms in its urban counterpart. The large number of rooms in rural houses should be attributed to the fact that the houses were inhabited by extended families, which needed more options for separation, segregation, and privacy, especially between the separate nuclear families. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the internal division within rural houses

varies considerably in spite of the great uniformity in their overall planning. It is reasonable to assume that this variation results from the “life cycle” of the extended family.

Contrast between family structure in cities and villages (nuclear versus extended) has already been identified independently by biblical scholars unfamiliar with the archaeological data. According to them, the rural sector in Israelite society was more conservative, preserving the traditional family framework, whereas families in the urban sector underwent a structural change. The reasons for this change are complex but seem to be closely related to the rise of the monarchy and the resulting increase in urbanization and hired labor.

Rich and poor. Variation in house sizes exists not only between towns and villages but also within towns, where it is usually accompanied by a disparity in quality—larger houses were also better built. This was a result of socioeconomic stratification within the cities (the differences within villages were minimal). Large and well-built houses were discovered in practically every Iron Age-II city, including Hazor, Tell en-Naṣbeh, Tell Beit Mirsim (the West Tower), Shiqmona, Tell el-Far‘ah (N), and Tel ‘Eton. These houses stand in sharp contrast to the common small urban houses that most probably were inhabited by nuclear families. Based on the size of the structures, the quality of their plan and building, and other features, such as their location and the fact that they usually avoided using shared (common) walls, it is clear that these houses belonged to large (extended) and wealthy families, comprising the urban elite. Clearly, the large and well-built four-room houses participated in nonverbal communication and transmitted messages of social difference.

A message of difference was seemingly also expressed in the usage of different architectural models of three-, four-, and five-room houses. The four-room houses are usually larger and better constructed than the three-room houses. While the size difference can be explained functionally—the larger the building, the more internal walls and/or pillars are required to support the ceiling, so more interior spaces are created—this explanation does

not apply to the quality issue. Furthermore, even the small four-room houses are usually more nicely built and of higher-quality construction (e.g., the building at Area G at Hazor). This difference cannot always be explained as an economic gap, arguing that the four-room houses were inhabited by the wealthy, while the three-room ones were inhabited by the poor. Moreover, almost all the rural houses are of the four-room type, even though this is not the richest sector in society.

As noted, in the rural sector there were mainly extended families, while in the urban sector there were mainly nuclear families (though the urban rich maintained the extended family structure). Perhaps four-room houses represent extended families and the strategy of multigenerational continuity, while three-room houses represent nuclear families. This does not mean that each and every four-room house was inhabited only by extended families but merely that the number of spaces conveyed a social message regarding family structure.

This theory is supported by the use of the four-room plan in Judahite tombs. These late Iron-Age tombs served multigenerational families: for many generations the deceased were placed on benches; after a while their bones were gathered into a repository, and the newly deceased were placed on the benches. Thus, the four-room, or four-space, tombs conveyed a social message of multigenerationalism, just like the similar houses. No tombs have been found carved in a three-room shape, but it appears that the majority of the population—probably the same people who lived in three-room houses—was buried in simple inhumations that did not usually survive. Thus, it is possible that the simple inhumations reflect a section of society that lived in three-room houses, as nuclear families, while the four-room houses and tombs represent the section of society that lived as extended families.

The house and the Israelite mind. Different building plans can be analyzed and compared for their “space syntax,” that is, the spatial configuration within structures and the hierarchy of accessibility or passage from one room to the other. The social meaning of space syntax is the possible contact

between a building’s inhabitants and strangers as well as among the inhabitants themselves. The syntax of the four-room house exhibits a very shallow “tree shape,” that is, all the inner rooms were usually directly accessible from the central space. On the other hand, other types of dwellings, for example, the Bronze-Age courtyard house and even the row house of the Iron Age, exhibit a hierarchy of access within them: some rooms can be entered only by passing through other rooms.

An intriguing implication of access analysis of the four-room house is the correspondence between its nonhierarchical configuration and the “democratic” or egalitarian ethos of Israelite society. This ethos is expressed, materially, also by the lack of decoration on pottery, the avoidance of imported pottery, burial in simple inhumations rather than elaborate tombs throughout the Iron I and most of the Iron Age II, and the lack of royal inscriptions in Israel and Judah. Large households display a complex and hierarchically structured arrangement of living and sleeping spaces that reflects their complex social structure, which is often manifested in hierarchical grading of accessibility and structural depth within the house related to generational and gender-based status distinctions. Since four-room houses, especially in the rural sector as well as those of the urban elite, usually contain multiple rooms created by secondary division of the main spaces, it is clear that established arrangements for space usage were part and parcel of daily life within these houses. Yet, the typical four-room plan lacks access hierarchy, expressing a more egalitarian spirit than other house plans in the region.

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

Moshe Weinfeld tentatively suggested that the four-room plan might have facilitated the separation between purity and impurity, such as men’s avoidance of women during menstruation. The access

analysis of the four-room house makes this suggestion possible as purity could be strictly kept even if an unclean person resided in the house because the other inhabitants could avoid the room in which that person stayed at this time. Notably, most of the biblical purity laws, while imposing restrictions on menstruating women, do not require them to leave the house, unlike other ancient Near Eastern societies and many societies throughout the world. These laws might, therefore, reflect a situation in which menstruating women were allowed to stay within the house but, because of the restrictions imposed on them, spent some of their time in a separate room.

Order and conformity. According to Mary Douglas, many of the biblical laws, mainly those related to holiness, are actually about order. Douglas developed the idea that holiness was exemplified by wholeness and completeness. Many of the laws—covering all aspects of life from war to sexual behavior and from social conduct to dietary rules—are related to sets of precepts stemming from that basic principle and embrace the idea of holiness as order and of confusion as sin. Holiness requires that individuals conform to the class to which they belong and that different classes of things should not be mixed with each other. Hybrids and other confusions are abominations.

In light of this ideology, the astonishing dominance of the four-room plan on almost all levels of Israelite architectural design becomes intelligible. If the Israelites were deeply engaged with unity and “order” as a negation of separateness and confusion, then these concepts must have percolated through all spheres of daily life, including material culture. Thus, it can be surmised that once the four-room house took shape and was adopted by the Israelites, for whatever reasons, it became the “right” house type and, hence, greatly popular. The same can be seen in the strong tendency to direct houses to the east.

The house as a microcosmos. There is great similarity between the house and the settlement, and it appears that the dwelling served also as a microcosmos. Both were oriented to the east, and both shared a similar perception of space. The perception of space

in the Israelite city can be divided into three types: “private space,” meaning the home; “communal space,” encompassing the public areas of the city, including the streets and the public (communal) area near the gate; and “public space,” meaning the areas outside the city where everyone could move freely. A similar perception existed in the residential house: the private spaces for the residents were their rooms and intimate activity spaces, such as the rooms of the nuclear families within the extended family dwelling; the central space, and perhaps the front yard, was perceived as space common for all the house’s inhabitants; and the space beyond the house was considered, in terms of the family unit, as public.

Enhancing identity. The great uniformity of the four-room house and its dominant position in the Iron-Age architectural landscape strengthened the “we-ness” of its users and reinforced their values and ideology—building a house according to the traditional code of a society communicates a social message, “we are part of the community,” and enhances the coherence of that community.

The four-room house and ethnicity revisited. This clearly shows that the four-room house was closely associated with Israelite society. As mentioned, some scholars rejected the ethnic label attached to the house, pointing to its distribution beyond Israelite territory. This objection is unfounded, first because most of the examples presented by these scholars do not fall within the four-room house category. The houses do have four rooms or pillars, yet their overall architectural configuration is completely different. This is, for example, the case at Sahab, Tel Qiri, Tel Keisan, and Afula, which were used as examples of four-room houses outside Israelite territory. Second, some of the exceptional examples of four-room houses mentioned in the literature are located in Transjordan and were probably used by Israelite groups living in this region. Finally, most of the few “real” four-room houses outside Israelite territory date to the Iron Age I (mainly in Transjordan), prior to the final crystallization of ethnic groups in the region.

Notably, the number of Iron Age-II four-room houses outside Israelite territory is minimal (e.g.,

Ghareh), and while the four-room house could still have been used by non-Israelites who found it suitable for their needs, this occurred rather rarely, perhaps because the house gradually became “associated” with the Israelites. It is clear, therefore, that in this period the distribution of four-room houses almost overlaps Israelite settlement.

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

Later Periods. The Persian period is one of settlement decline when compared with the Iron Age, and the available information on dwellings is limited. While the four-room house almost disappeared at this time, courtyard houses were prevalent (e.g., at Megiddo and Tel Jemmeh) and row houses were also built (e.g., at Acco and Shiqmona).

During the Hellenistic period courtyard houses (despite the great variation in their construction) were common (e.g., at Samaria, Har Gerizim, and Marisa), and row houses are also found; the same is true for the Roman period. The most common type was the courtyard house. Jewish houses usually had a *mikvah* inside them, while non-Jewish houses did not have this ritual bath. Common courtyard houses were found, for example, at Gamla, Meiron, Khirbet Burnat, and Horvat ‘Etri.

[See also Beersheba; Beth-Shemesh; Gamla; Hazor; Jericho; Megiddo; Tell el-Far’ah (N); and Tell en-Naşbeh.]

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Avraham Faust

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE, HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIOD

In one of the fullest depictions of an ancient domestic interior, Xenophon's *Ischomachos* shows his new wife around his house.

[our house] is not decorated with many ornaments . . . the rooms are built to house the things we want to put in them, and so each room is suited to its purpose. So the *thalamos* [inner chamber] is in a secure place and calls for the most valuable blankets and equipment, the dry rooms of the building are for the corn, the cool ones for the wine, those that are well lit are for the work and equipment that need light. I showed her decorated *diatiteria* [living rooms] for people, which are cool in the summer but warm in winter. I showed her how the whole house extends southwards, so that it was clear that in the winter it is sunny, but shady in summer. I also showed her the *gunaikonitis* [women's apartments], divided from the *andronitis* [men's apartments] by a bolted door, so that nothing can be taken from inside which should

not be, and the inhabitants cannot have children without us knowing. (Xenophon, *Oec.* 9.2–5)

The most striking point is the provision of certain parts of the house for women and certain parts for men. Xenophon was writing in Greece, just before the beginning of the Hellenistic period. However, his picture of gender differentiation within the house, together with those of Vitruvius (*De Architectura* 6.7.4) and Lysias (*Speeches* 1.9–10), which puts the women's quarters upstairs and the men's on the ground floor, have cast a long shadow over the archaeology of housing around the Mediterranean. The question that Xenophon poses for archaeology is a key one for biblical scholars: In what ways (and to what extent) do archaeological remains of domestic buildings encode social structures? This involves questions of spatial social differentiation within a housing unit, as instanced by Xenophon in gender terms. There are also questions of comparison between housing units. How do variations in size, structure, and style between dwellings encode social relationships such as patronage?

A second sense in which Xenophon casts a long shadow over archaeology is that archaeologists have traditionally "dug to the text." That is, they have looked for structural elements described in the classical texts such as Xenophon or Vitruvius (mainly for Roman architecture) or for points related to biblical or rabbinic texts. Interpretation of remains has often been reliant on the texts. Elements have been named on the basis of the texts. Reports have often focused on similarity to, difference from, or typological variants within the texts. This focus has come under mounting criticism. A particular issue has been the ascribing of function to various rooms. Scholars have argued that identification of function should begin from study of the detailed layout of the remains, their decoration, and the loose finds within them, rather than from the functions as described in the classical texts.

The settings of the biblical texts range from rural villages to major cities, and there are many varieties of housing in each setting. This article considers general issues that relate to a range of sites and