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On Defining Israel: Or, Let's do the *Kulturkreislehre* Again!*

Most study of the definition of early Israel, from an archaeological perspective, is based on outdated views on the relationship between material culture and group identity, ignoring recent social theory on the relationship between the archaeological finds and group identity. This has led to simplistic assumptions on defining and identifying the materials correlates – and the group identities – relevant for understanding the formation and development of early Israel. While critical of much of the research, and aware of the limitations of the ability to interpret the archaeological remains, I suggest some paths how to move forward in defining – what is and what is not – early Israel, stressing the need to focus on a bottom-up approach, commencing with the study of small-scale communities of practice.

Keywords: Israel; Iron Age; identity; ethnicity; communities of practice; technology

If the scope of archaeological research is to obtain an insight into the identity constructions of Iron Age people as suggested by the material evidence, then we need not to be fixed on one particular type of identity, which may or may not be actually present in the archaeological record, but rather allow for all possible scenarios to unfold and pick the one(s) that seem(s) most plausible. This implies a 180° turn in the relationship between identity concepts and the material record. One should not categorize the material record based on some large (ethnic) identities that we assume people shared, but rather reconstruct past identities based on the material record patterns.¹

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1 N. P. Popa, *Modelling Identities: A Case Study from the Iron Age of South-East Europe* (Quantitative Archaeology and Archaeological Modelling; Cham: Springer, 2018), 191.

Introduction

While the opening quote seems to fit in perfectly with some of the conundrums of the archaeological definition of identity in the Iron Age Levant, and in particular of ancient Israel, in fact it is directed at quite a different period and cultures (early medieval Europe). Clearly, the issues discussed in this article are not only relevant to the study of ancient Israel. Rather, critical perspectives from the broader contexts of archaeological research are of importance in attempts to archaeologically define early Israel.²

But why do we need another discussion on archeologically defining early Israel? Can an archaeological perspective help discussions like those in this issue on the question of a “big” and “little” Israel?

Both questions can be answered with “Yes.” It appears that we do indeed need to bring up these issues again, though perhaps from a slightly different angle. As I will try to demonstrate below, much of the discussion, archaeological and textual, on the definition of “early Israel” in general, and of the formation and meaning of the term “Israel,” is wrought with serious theoretical and methodological problems.

To do so, I will step back and consider the question primarily from an archaeological perspective. But I will not simply reiterate well-known criteria from the material record that have been used frequently in previous studies. Rather, I will consider them through a critical theoretical lens. As such, my data set will not be limited to what is usually used for defining ancient Israel. I will also adduce relevant scholarship from the study of identity of other ancient cultures and contexts, where many of the same problems are being grappled with.

In doing so, I realize that I am entering a minefield. Archaeologists and historians who write about ancient Israel have focused on the five Ws (who, where, when, why and what). These, indeed, are the essential questions, and the axes of complex debates in the field. What I have to offer will not resolve these disagreements. Neither do I claim that the theoretical perspectives I bring here are entirely unknown to my colleagues, some of whom, indeed, refer to them in their work. But I maintain that they have insufficiently in-

2 As used in this paper, “Israel” can refer to several things. 1) Specific mentions of the name Israel in ancient sources; 2) The commonly used generic term for the population of the southern Levantine central hills region (often “Ancient Israel”); 3) “Big” and “Little” Israel, following L. Monroe and D.E. Fleming, “Earliest Israel in Highland Company,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82 (2019): 16–23, referring to the changing meaning of the term Israel during the Iron Age. As needed, the specific use will be noted.

formed work in the field; indeed, in the work of many scholars of ancient Israel they play no role at all.³ Clearly, to define (and identify) what ancient Israel is, at different stages, requires, as a precondition, some common ground in the field not only on what the term “Israel” refers to, but also on how it is manifested in the archaeological record, both at specific points in time and over extended periods.

By and large, archaeologists and historians in the field fall into the same trap. When thinking of ancient Israel, they picture it in a manner according with their intuition of what it should look like. Usually, the image comes from an Israel of a very specific socio-historical timeframe. They then project this image backwards and forwards, most often flattening the developmental processes and the temporal and situational diversity of how this Israel is manifested in the material record.

Even given the premise that there was a group (or groups) consisting of people with a common identity that they, or others, defined as “Israel” in some form or another, at different stages of history (from that term’s first appearance c. 1210 B.C.E. on the Merenptah Stele to modern times), the referent it points to was neither static nor one that underwent a simplistic, uniform and linear development. Richard Jenkins puts it in a nutshell: Identity, he writes, “is a process – *identification* – not a ‘thing.’ It is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does*.”⁴

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- 3 I am hardly the first to question the theoretical foundations of a substantial part of the discussions on the definitions of early Israel, in particular in relationship to the definition of ethnicity and its archaeological manifestations. See, e.g., R. Kletter, “Can a Proto-Israelite Please Stand up? Notes on the Ethnicity and Iron Age Israel and Judah,” in *I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times* (Ps 78:2b): *Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. A. M. Maeir and P. de Miroschedji; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 573–586; idem, “In the Footsteps of Bagira: Ethnicity, Archaeology, and ‘Iron Age I Ethnic Israel,’” *Approaching Religion* 4 (2014): 2–15; N. P. Lemche, “Avraham Faust, Israel’s Ethnogenesis, and Social Anthropology,” in *Anthropology and the Bible: Critical Perspectives* (ed. E. Pfoh; Biblical Intersections 3; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 93–104; idem, “Using the Concept of Ethnicity in Defining Philistine Identity in the Iron Age,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26 (2012): 12–29; D. A. Nestor, *Cognitive Perspectives on Israelite Identity* (LHBOTS 519; New York: T&T Clark, 2010). It is crucial to continue pointing this out due to the fact that these theoretical misconceptions can still be seen in seemingly influential publications (e.g.: W. G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017], 210–218; A. Faust, “Pigs in Space [and Time]: Pork Consumption and Identity Negotiations in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages of Ancient Israel,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 81, no. 4 [2018]: 276–299).
- 4 R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (3rd ed.; Key Ideas; London: Routledge, 2008), 5. See as well, e.g., A. Melucci, *L’invenzione del presente: movimenti, identità, bisogni individuali*

In other words, the meaning of the term “Israel,” denoting a group with a common identity, has always been in flux, taking on very different characters over time. Furthermore, the nature of its permutations is complex. That means that any presumption that the term can be simplistically defined by reference to specific definitions, characteristics, continuities, and developmental pathways is untenable. As other papers in this issue note, the entities referred to as “Little Israel” and “Big Israel” are not simply a physical development of each other, but are connected to complex ideological viewpoints, both in antiquity and in modern interpretations. Thus, from an archaeological perspective, a straightforward developmental continuity of the material correlates of various stages of Israel may be very difficult, if even impossible, to define. Indeed, there may not be any such thing.

There is an enormous volume of research and publications addressing the question of how to define “early Israel.” While I will refer to various previous studies, I cannot, within the space of an article of this sort, review all (or even most) of the relevant research. I therefore restrict my scope to some of the better-known and more recent discussions.

Studying Identity

I begin with a review of the theoretical basis for the study of archaeological correlates of identity.⁵ This is quite important, given that one of the recurring problems in the archaeology of the southern Levant in general and in the study of ancient Israel in particular is the shaky theoretical foundation on which many of these studies stand. Even when scholars engage the relevant social theory, they generally do so superficially, in ways that evince a profound lack of familiarity with the theories they adduce. Work

(Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), 68; P. Schlesinger, “On National Identity: Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized,” *Social Science Information* 26 (1987): 237. For a review of concepts of identity in connection with early Israel, see J. Töyräänvuori, “Mapping the Margins of Scrolls and Clay Tablets: The Construction of Identity in the Ancient World,” *Die Welt Des Orients* 50 (2020): 205–215.

5 I am putting aside critical discussions on the very use of the term “identity,” and its application in social research, such as, e.g., R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47; N. Yuval-Davis, “Theorizing Identity: Beyond the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ Dichotomy,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 44 (2010): 261–280; K. A. Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity: Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture* (London: Profile Books, 2018); F. Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2018).

addressing the archaeological manifestations of identity – and in particular, ethnicity – in the southern Levant is especially guilty of this shortcoming. The specific case that I address is the work that seeks to identify and define “ancient Israel” during the Iron Age (and other periods) in terms of the archaeological record. I thus begin with a brief account of the theoretical background of the relationship between the archaeological remains and ethnicity and identity in general.

In the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries C.E., the reigning paradigm in archaeology presumed that there was a direct link between discrete archaeological assemblages and distinct human groups, such as tribes and ethnicities. This was often termed the culture-historical approach.⁶ Based on the *Kulturkreislehre* (“cultural environment school”) of central European anthropology, the German archaeologist Gustav Kossinna, as part of his *Siedlungsarchäologie* method, posited what became known as the *Kossinna axiom*: “Streng umrissene, scharf sich heraushebende, geschlossene archäologische Kulturprovinzen fallen unbedingt mit bestimmten Völker- oder Stammesgebieten zusammen.”⁷ This approach was put into practice by many leading figures in the field at that time,⁸ such as V. Gordon Childe⁹ and Alfred Kroeber,¹⁰ and was widely accepted in archaeological interpretation.¹¹

The approach came under criticism in the mid-20th century C.E., particularly with the advent of the movement often labeled New Archae-

6 See, e.g., B. C. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 148–206; S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15–26.

7 Eng.: “Strictly outlined, sharply defined, bounded regions of archaeological culture necessarily coincide with certain ethnic or tribal areas.” G. Kossinna, *Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit* (Irminsul: Schriften und Blätter für deutsche Art und Kunst, Band 1; Berlin: Germanen-Verlag, 1926), 21. The English translation is my own.

8 U. Veit, “Gustaf Kossinna und V. Gordon Childe: Ansätze zu einer theoretischen Grundlegung der Vorgeschichte,” *Saeculum* 35 (1984): 326–364.

9 E.g., V. G. Childe, *Piecing Together the Past: The Interpretation of Archaeological Data* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956).

10 A. Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939).

11 I would stress that while Kossinna was justifiably vilified for his racist views, many others used his (and similar) approaches without explicit racist underpinnings, as this was the accepted *Weltanschauung* of these times. On this, see, e.g., K. C. Rebay-Salisbury, “Thoughts in Circles: *Kulturkreislehre* as a Hidden Paradigm in Past and Present Archaeological Interpretations,” in *Investigating Archaeological Cultures: Material Culture, Variability, and Transmission* (ed. B. Roberts and M. Vander Linden; New York: Springer, 2011), 41–59.

ology. Scholars such as Walter Taylor,¹² Lewis Binford,¹³ David Clarke,¹⁴ Peter Ucko¹⁵ and Ian Hodder,¹⁶ and many others,¹⁷ criticized the premises behind the axiom. They showed that particular types of material culture and assemblages cannot necessarily be equated with groups, societies, and ethnicities, and that the geographical dispersal of cultural assemblages does not point straightforwardly to human group identities. Similarly, they argued that the appearance of a new cultural assemblage should not always be interpreted as representing the appearance of a new group; other factors, whether environmental or anthropogenic, must be taken into account in determining whether the artifacts were produced by a new group or by the same group adopting different practices. They also questioned the connection between cultures and so-called primordialist understandings of ethnicity.¹⁸

Given that this so-called “pots equals peoples” assumption has been under critique for more than seventy years,¹⁹ it is astonishing that archaeology, both in the Levant and elsewhere, has yet to discard such essentialist perspectives. Time and again, almost reflexively, perhaps because it is so effortless and satisfying,²⁰ archaeologists equate material culture with identity. Indeed, some have recently defended the approach, arguing that a “sharp fall-off” in the archaeological record (that is, the fairly rapid disappearance

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- 12 W. W. Taylor, *A Study of Archaeology* (Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association 69; Menasha: American Anthropological Association, 1948).
- 13 L. H. Binford, “Archaeological Systematics and the Study of Culture Process,” *American Antiquity* 31 (1965): 203–210.
- 14 D. L. Clarke, *Analytical Archaeology* (London: Methuen, 1968).
- 15 P. J. Ucko, “Ethnography and Archaeological Interpretation of Funerary Remains,” *World Archaeology* 1 (1969): 262–280.
- 16 I. Hodder and C. Orton, *Spatial Analysis in Archaeology* (New Studies in Archaeology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- 17 For overviews, see, e. g., Trigger, *A History*, 294–303; B. Roberts and M. Vander Linden, “Investigating Archaeological Cultures: Material Culture, Variability, and Transmission,” in *Investigating Archaeological Cultures: Material Culture, Variability, and Transmission* (ed. B. Roberts and M. Vander Linden; New York: Springer, 2011), 2–3. Most recently, see Feinman and Neitzel’s plea to excise (!) cultural-historical approaches from contemporary archaeological interpretation (G. M. Feinman and J. E. Neitzel, “Excising Culture History from Contemporary Archaeology,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 60 [2020]: 101230).
- 18 S. J. Shennan (ed.), *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity* (One World Archaeology; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*.
- 19 E. g., C. Kramer, “Pots and People,” in *Mountains and Lowlands: Essays in the Archaeology of Greater Mesopotamia* (ed. L. D. Levine and C. T. Young; Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 7; Malibu: Undena, 1977), 91–112.
- 20 C. N. Popa and S. Stoddart, “Fingerprinting the European Iron Age. Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Perspectives on Identity and Ethnicity,” in *Fingerprinting the Iron Age: Approaches to Identity in the European Iron Age. Integrating South-Eastern Europe into the Debate* (ed. C. N. Popa and S. Stoddart; Oxford: Oxbow, 2014), 329–330.

of specific kinds or styles of artifacts) enables us to see a “meaningful pattern” of ethnic demarcation.²¹ The *Kulturkreislehre* approach seems to be rising like a phoenix from its own ashes.

The New Archaeologists were reluctant to address identity and ethnicity. Instead, they sought what they referred to as an overarching systemic and law-based understanding of culture.²² Nevertheless, the connection between material culture and ethnicity was very much at the center (even as a subtext) of what was called the style debate of the 1970s and 1980s. James Sackett²³ coined the term “isochrestic variation” to name stylistic variations that passively serve as ethnic markers. These could be found in all aspects of a given culture and, he believed, enabled group members to express their group identity. Polly Wiessner²⁴ used the term “emblemic styles,” which she suggested bear distinct and easily recognizable messages to mark and maintain group boundaries, particularly at times of social and economic transition. She posited that since these emblemic items were distinct, archaeologists should be able to discern them in the material record. In other words, attempts were made to decipher identity from the archaeological finds.

Just as mainstream New Archaeology (called “processual archaeology”) in the 1970s and even in the 1980s shied away from reference to ethnicity, social theory was making important advancements in the study of precisely that category. The best known of the works emerging from this field was a slim volume edited by Fredrik Barth.²⁵ Barth’s introduction to the volume in particular was a harbinger of a major shift in the understanding of ethnicity.²⁶ His succinct presentation of the ideas and concepts of writers in the field had a major impact and changed to a large extent the way the social sciences understand ethnicity. It cast off the shackles of primordialist views that, by and large, had up to that point been central in thinking about ethnicity. According to a primordialist view, there is a tangible and primordial

21 Faust, “Pigs in Space (and Time),” 277, fig. 2.

22 E.g., T. Hodos, “Local and Global Perspectives in the Study of Social and Cultural Identities,” in *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World* (ed. S. Hales and T. Hodos; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.

23 J.R. Sackett, “The Meaning of Style in Archaeology: A General Model,” *American Antiquity* 42 (1977): 369–380.

24 P. Wiessner, “Style or Isochrestic Variation? A Reply to Sackett,” *American Antiquity* 50 (1985): 253–276.

25 F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969).

26 Idem, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (ed. F. Barth; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9–38.

basis for ethnic identifications, which display long-term continuity, whether biological or social. In this view, ethnic groups retain over long periods – at times without change – a very specific identity.²⁷

Barth instead suggested that individuals and groups selectively emphasize those forms of cultural differentiation that are important to them. He contended that the maintenance of ethnic boundaries occurs through interactions between “us” and “them” across a group boundary. Moreover, the cultural features that are drawn upon in this interaction are not fixed; they are situationally defined, in other words dependent on the specific social contexts. In this way, Barth emphasized the relational, interactional and situational nature of ethnicity.

Arguing that “ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves,”²⁸ Barth maintained that it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”²⁹ He stressed the formation and maintenance processes of ethnic boundaries, largely irrespective of the cultural traits enclosed by those boundaries.³⁰

Barth’s approach has become the leading basis for understanding ethnicity and its variations, as well as for framing disagreements on the definition of manifestations of ethnicity. It is important to keep this in mind, because many archaeologists treat Barth’s views as tantamount to sacred and final, viewing him as the sole and incontrovertible authority on all aspects of ethnicity. This simply does not reflect the current state of the social sciences and social theory, where a wide range of views on ethnicity in social

27 It should be stressed that primordialist understandings of ethnicity are still espoused by some social theorists, e.g., F. J. Gil-White, “How Thick is Blood? The Plot Thickens ... If Ethnic Actors are Primordialists, what Remains of the Circumstantialist / Primordialist Controversy?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999): 789–820; M. Bayar, “Reconsidering Primordialism: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32 (2009): 1639–1657. Also worth mentioning are the common, public misperceptions (at times racist), which espouse primordialist views on ethnic groups, their past origins, and the supposed unchanging characteristics, which more recently are supposedly supported by genetic studies (e.g., R. Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015]; S. E. Hakenbeck, “Genetics, Archaeology and the Far Right: An Unholy Trinity,” *World Archaeology* 51 [2020]: 517–527).

28 Barth, “Introduction,” 10.

29 Barth, “Introduction,” 15.

30 The central role of boundaries in Barth’s original study, has since then, at times, led to an overemphasis of the importance of boundaries (e.g., A. Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks*, Oxford Studies in Culture and Politics [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013]), something that Barth himself subsequently noted. See F. Barth, “Boundaries and Connections,” in *Signifying Boundaries: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values* (ed. A. P. Cohen; London: Routledge, 2000), 17–36.

theory, some quite contradictory, are being debated in anthropological and sociological literature. In addition to Barth's "instrumentalist" approach and its variants,³¹ other views and understandings of ethnicity abound. These include constructivism, which sees ethnicity as being constantly constructed and reconstructed as individual identifications change;³² perennialism, which perceives ethnicities and nations as basically the same;³³ and modernism, which connects the appearance of ethnic groups to the emergence of modern nation-states.³⁴ There are also a number of postmodern approaches, some of which challenge the very use of the term ethnicity and even identity.³⁵

It was only in the 1980s and 1990s that these lively discussions on ethnicity in the social sciences began to make a significant mark in archaeology. Ian Hodder was a pioneering voice in his ethnoarchaeological work in Africa.³⁶ Noteworthy are studies by Stephen Shennan,³⁷ Geoff Emberling,³⁸ Jonathan Hall,³⁹ Sian Jones,⁴⁰ and Margarita Díaz-Andreu et al.,⁴¹ where the up-to-date social theory of their day was discussed in archaeological contexts. Jones,⁴² whose volume is frequently quoted in archaeological studies of ethnicity in the last two decades, understood ethnicity as but one type of iden-

31 E. g., A. Cohen (ed.), *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock, 1974).

32 E. g., K. Chandra (ed.), *Constructivist Theories on Ethnic Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

33 E. g., A. D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant and Republic* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2008).

34 E. g., A. L. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock, 1978); B. Carter and S. Fenton, "Not Thinking Ethnicity: A Critique of the Ethnicity Paradigm in an Over-Ethnicised Sociology," *Journal of the Theory of Social Behavior* 40 (2010): 1–18.

35 E. g., R. Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); idem, "Beyond Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (2014): 804–808; idem and F. Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47; M. Wettstein, "How Ethnic Identity Becomes Real: The Enactment of Identity Roles and the Material Manifestation of Shifting Identities Among the Nagas," *Asian Ethnicity* 17 (2016): 384–399.

36 I. Hodder, *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture* (New Studies in Archaeology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

37 Shennan, *Archaeological Approaches*.

38 G. Emberling, "Ethnicity in Complex Societies: Archaeological Perspectives," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5 (1997): 295–344.

39 J. M. Hall, "Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Iron Age of Greece," in *Time, Tradition and Society in Greek Archaeology* (ed. N. Spencer; London: Routledge, 1995), 6–17.

40 Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*.

41 M. Díaz-Andreu et al., *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 86–109.

42 Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*.

tity. She attempted to bridge instrumentalist approaches with Bourdieu's⁴³ theory of practice and concepts such as habitus and doxa, which stress how individual humans act in their daily lives and how they perceive the social world around them and thus manifest culture and identity. Jones used this synthesis to explain how ethnicity is perpetuated in day-to-day life, and how it can be perceived in the archaeological record.

A number of postmodern perspectives have also been highly influential in theoretically-charged archaeological studies on ethnicity. Approaches such as agency, post-colonialism, fragmentation of narratives, hybridity, trans-culturalism, and entanglement have added new, multi-faceted, and complex perspectives to the concepts of identity and ethnicity, and to a certain extent, their application (or critique), in archaeology.⁴⁴ These have resulted in a number of recent explorations of ethnic identity in the archaeological literature. Some of these studies display an acute awareness of the complexity of the definition of ethnicity in particular, and identity in general, and the intense discussions that these topics generate in contemporary social theory.⁴⁵

43 E. g., P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans. R. Nice; Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 16; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); idem, *A Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

44 E. g., Hodos, "Local and Global," 9–10; A. B. Knapp, "Mediterranean Archaeology and Ethnicity," in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (ed. J. McInerney; Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 34–49.

45 There are numerous archaeological studies with sophisticated utilization of social theory in the study of ethnicity. For a small sampling of this, see, e.g., S. Hakenbeck, "Situational Ethnicity and Nested Identities: New Approaches to an Old Problem," *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 14 (2007): 19–27; idem, "Roman or Barbarian? Shifting Identities in Early Medieval Cemeteries in Bavaria," *Post-Classical Archaeologies* 1 (2011): 37–66; A. B. Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus: Identity, Insularity and Connectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Knapp, "Mediterranean"; T. Derks and N. Roymans (ed.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); N. Mac Sweeney, "Beyond Ethnicity: The Overlooked Diversity of Group Identity," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 22 (2009): 101–126; idem, *Community Identity and Archaeology: Dynamic Communities at Aphrodisias and Beycesultan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); L. Amundsen-Meyer, N. Engel, and S. Pickering (ed.), *Identity Crisis: Archaeological Perspectives on Social Identity. Proceedings of the 42nd (2010) Annual Chacmool Archaeology Conference, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta* (Calgary: Chacmool Archaeological Association, University of Calgary, 2011); F. Curta, "Medieval Archaeology and Ethnicity: Where Are We?" *History Compass* 9 (2011): 537–548; idem, "The Elephant in the Room. A Reply to Sebastian Brather," *Epemeris Napocensis* 23 (2013): 163–174; idem, "Ethnic Identity and Archaeology," in *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* (ed. C. Smith; Berlin: Springer, 2014), 2507–2514; M. Fernández-Götz, "Revisiting Iron Age Ethnicity," *European Journal of Archae-*

These, however, remain exceptions. The greater part of archaeological discourse on ethnicity, particularly in Levantine archaeology, appears blissfully unaware of such developments in social theory on the subject. Indeed, much of it seems not only to be incognizant of this work, but also to adhere to a traditional primordialist viewpoint. Even studies that display awareness of newer directions in the study of ethnicity, such as the work of Barth and beyond, often cite Barth alone, or another more recent study. But then, having nodded in the direction of social theory, they revert to a very traditional view, most often equating ethnicity with material culture.⁴⁶ Hardly limited to Levantine archaeology, Guillermo Reher has termed this phenomenon the “Introduction of Ethnicity Syndrome.”⁴⁷

Since the definition and social significance of ethnicity is a much debated and still evolving field of research in contemporary social theory, both in relation to ancient and contemporary societies, archaeologists cannot afford to disregard it. They must engage with cutting-edge theoretical discourse. Reference to decades-old research is hardly sufficient. Barth’s volume

ology 16 (2013): 116–136; D. Hu, “Approaches to the Archaeology of Ethnogenesis: Past and Emergent Perspectives,” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 21 (2013): 371–402; C. N. Popa and S. Stoddart (ed.), *Fingerprinting the Iron Age: Approaches to Identity in the European Iron Age. Integrating South-Eastern Europe Into the Debate* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2014); R. E. Blanton, “Theories of Ethnicity and the Dynamics of Ethnic Change in Multiethnic Societies,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112 (2015): 9176–9181; G. S. Reher and M. Fernández-Götz, “Archaeological Narratives in Ethnicity Studies,” *Archeologické Rozhledy* 67 (2015): 400–416; E. Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities in Spain and Gaul, 500–700: From Romans to Goths and Franks* (Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017); Popa, *Modelling Identities*; L. Termblay Cormier, O. Nakoinz, and C. N. Popa, “Three Methods for Detecting Past Groupings: Cultural Space and Group Identity,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 25 (2018): 643–661; B. Bader, *Material Culture and Identities in Egyptology: Towards a Better Understanding of Cultural Encounters and Their Influence on Material Culture* (Archaeology of Egypt, Sudan and the Levant 3; Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences).

46 See G. S. Reher, “The ‘Introduction to Ethnicity Syndrome’ in Proto-Historical Archaeology,” in *Atlantic Europe in the First Millennium BC: Crossing the Divide* (ed. T. Moore and X.-L. Armada; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 656–667; A. P. Cohen, “Barth, Ethnicity and Culture,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (ed. T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek; Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series; Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 20–28. They both cite multiple examples of archaeological discussions on ethnicity that quote Barth, seemingly demonstrating familiarity with up-to-date social theory, but then go on to espouse views on archaeological ethnicity that are at times completely contrary to these very social theories.

47 Reher, “The ‘Introduction to Ethnicity Syndrome’”; Reher and Fernández-Götz, “Archaeological Narratives in Ethnicity Studies.”

recently turned fifty,⁴⁸ and the foundational studies on archaeological ethnicity, those most often quoted in the archaeological literature,⁴⁹ were published about twenty years ago.⁵⁰

Before proceeding, I would like to list some important points culled from a broad range of mostly recent discussions of ethnicity:

– Ethnicity and identity remain highly controversial issues.⁵¹ While Barth⁵² is rightfully seen as the starting point for modern discussions on ethnicity, his is hardly the last nor the most up-to-date view of the issue. Rogers Brubaker has gone as far as stating that “ethnicity is a chronically [*sic*] unsettled and ill-defined field of inquiry.”⁵³

– Ethnicity is an evolving and relational concept by which a group defines itself. Its definition is based on supposed common attributes and origins, in relationship to other ethnic groups, and on how other groups define it (what social theory refers to as the emic versus etic perspectives). Andreas Wimmer offers a convenient definition: “a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry.”⁵⁴ This identity can, however, be highly politicized and controlled and defined by interest groups.⁵⁵

48 T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series; Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

49 E. g., Hall, “Approaches to ethnicity”; Emberling, “Ethnicity in Complex Societies”; Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*; M. Díaz-Andreu et al., *Archaeology of Identity*.

50 Building on what Emberling stated (“Ethnicity in Complex Societies,” 300: “If we are going to use the term “ethnicity” to refer to social groups in the past, we must be prepared to accept its meanings in the present”), it is obvious that one can only deal with ethnicity in the past, if one is fully aware of up-to-date theory on ethnicity in the present.

51 E. g., Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”; Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*; Brubaker, “Beyond Ethnicity”; R. Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity* (2nd ed.; Los Angeles: Sage, 2008); Carter and Fenton, “Not Thinking Ethnicity”; S. Sokolovskii and V. Tishkov, “Ethnicity,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2nd ed.; ed. A. Barnard and J. Spencer; London: Routledge, 2010), 240–243; Hu, “Approaches to the Archaeology of Ethnogenesis”; H. P. Hahn, “Ethnicity as a Form of Social Organization: Notes on the Multiplicity of Understandings of a Contested Concept,” in *Balkan Dialogues: Negotiating Identity Between Prehistory and the Present* (ed. M. Gori and M. Ivanova; Routledge Studies in Archaeology 25; London: Routledge, 2017), 38–51.

52 Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

53 Brubaker, “Beyond Ethnicity,” 804.

54 A. Wimmer, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (2008): 973.

55 E. g., Cohen, *Urban Ethnicity*.

– Ethnicity, and identity in general, is a process, not a thing.⁵⁶ As Guy Halsall has pointed out: “Ethnicity is a state of mind, with no necessary correlation to things which are objectively measurable, whether material, biological or genetic. This will always make attempts to read off monolithic ethnic identities, or even the interplay between monolithic ethnic identities (which is what is at stake in ‘acculturation’ arguments), highly dubious. More pertinently, perhaps, ethnicity is itself a complex dimension of an individual’s identity, existing in several layers which can be adopted or highlighted, abandoned, played down or concealed.”⁵⁷

– While the boundaries, their definition, and the differences between ethnic groups are important, other factors, including ones internal to a group, affect ethnic identification.⁵⁸ Likewise, these boundaries are not closely defined physical spaces, but somewhat amorphous “social spaces.” To quote Gary Reger: “The social spaces wherein cross-group interactions take place are the effective social boundaries between groups. It is in these social borderlands that hybridities can emerge, perhaps more often than at geographical borders.”⁵⁹ Not only are boundaries in constant flux, but overlapping, and at times contradictory, boundaries are common. As Joel Migdal writes, “People thus encounter multiple sets of boundaries, which configure space differently and which have various sets of meaning as well as checkpoints with scrutinizing and enforcing devices attached to them.

56 Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 5.

57 G. Halsall, “Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries,” *Arqueología y Territoria Medieval* 18 (2011): 25.

58 E.g., B. Olsen and Z. Kobylinski, “Ethnicity in Anthropological and Archaeological Research: A Norwegian-Polish Perspective,” *Archaeologia Polona* 29 (1991): 22; Yuval-Davis, “Theorizing Identity”; I. Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Greeks Overseas; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 99; Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*; Brubaker, “Beyond Ethnicity”; Brubaker, *Grounds for Difference*; I. Vranić, “‘Hellenisation’ and Ethnicity in the Continental Balkan Iron Age,” in *Fingerprinting the Iron Age: Approaches to Identity in the European Iron Age. Integrating South-Eastern Europe into the Debate* (ed. C. N. Popa and S. Stoddart; Oxford: Oxbow, 2014), 172; T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek, “Introduction: Ethnic Groups, Boundaries and Beyond,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (ed. T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek; Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series; Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 3. Particularly noteworthy are Barth’s own reservations on the over focus on boundaries in ethnicity studies, ever since his 1969 edited volume. See Barth, “Boundaries and Connections”; F. Barth, “Overview: Sixty Years in Anthropology,” *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 36 (2007): 10.

59 G. Reger, “Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity,” in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (ed. J. McInerney; Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 116.

Individuals, in short, daily confront radically divergent mental maps of how the world is configured.⁶⁰

– Culture and ethnicity do not overlap. The dispersal of cultural artifacts does not mirror the dispersal of ethnic groups, and cultural assemblages cannot be assumed to equate ethnic groups.⁶¹ To claim that a sharp fall-off in the appearance of artifacts, interpreted as markers of a specific material culture, can indicate a borderline between cultures and populations⁶² harkens back to the Kossinna axiom cited above. The same is true for equating language and ethnicity, which time and again has been shown to be a problematic correlation at best.⁶³

- 60 J.S. Migdal, “Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints: Struggle to Construct and Maintain State and Social Boundaries,” in *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices* (ed. J.S. Migdal; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.
- 61 E.g., M. Moerman, “Who Are the Lue: Ethnic Identification in a Complex Civilization,” *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965): 1215–1229; F. Daim, “Archaeology, Ethnicity and the Structures of Identification: The Example of Avars, Carantanians and Moravians in the Eight Century,” in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz; The Transformation of the Roman World 2; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 71–93; W. Pohl, “Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity,” in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz; The Transformation of the Roman World 2 Leiden: Brill, 1998), 17–69; idem, “Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe: Problems of Interpretation,” *The Medieval History Journal* 21 (2018): 192–221; A. B. Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus*, 44–46; Knapp, “Mediterranean”; K. Strobel, “The Galatians in the Roman Empire. Historical Tradition and Ethnic Identity in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor,” in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition* (ed. T. Derks and N. Roymans; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2009), 121; J. E. Terrell, “Language and Material Culture on the Sepik Coast of Papua New Guinea: Using Social Network Analysis to Simulate, Graph, Identify, and Analyze Social and Cultural Boundaries Between Communities,” *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 5 (2010): 3–32; Curta, “Medieval Archaeology and Ethnicity”; Halsall, “Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries,” 25; Chandra, *Constructivist Theories on Ethnic Politics*, 85; U. Sommer, “Tribes, Peoples, Ethnicity: Archaeology and Changing ‘We Groups,’” in *Evolutionary and Interpretive Archaeologies: A Dialogue* (ed. E. E. Cochrane and A. Gardner; Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011), 169–198; A. P. Cohen, “Barth, Ethnicity and Culture,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (ed. T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek; Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series; Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 25; Eriksen and Jakoubek, “Introduction: Ethnic Groups, Boundaries and Beyond,” 3; J. M. Harland, “Memories of Migration? The ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Burial Costume of the Fifth Century AD,” *Antiquity* 93 (2019): 954–969.
- 62 Faust, “Pigs in Space (and Time),” 277.
- 63 E.g., T. Derks and N. Roymans, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition* (ed. T. Derks and N. Roymans; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2009), 2; Lytra, “Language and Ethnic Identity”; Mumm, *Sprachen, Völker und Phantome: Sprach- und kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zur Ethnizität*; Brubaker,

– If it works at all, ethnic and other identities might be archaeologically noticeable less on the basis of the dispersal of objects (even those that are defined as emblematic markers⁶⁴), and more so on the basis of comparing contemporary practices between groups⁶⁵ and particularly based on archaeologically identifiable differences in practices (such as technological praxis).⁶⁶

– To define ethnicity (and other identities) in the archaeological record, a much smaller scale of similarities and differences must be studied, considerably smaller than the spatial and temporal dispersal of so-called “archaeological cultures,”⁶⁷ preferably at the community level,⁶⁸ in well-defined

“The Social Organization and Political Contestation of Cultural Difference: Thinking Comparatively About Religion and Language,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (ed. T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek; Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series; Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 152–168. Similarly, linking script with identity is problematic as well. E. g., A. Berlejung, “Identity Performances in Multilingual Contexts: The Cases of Yarih‘ezer from Amman and Ikausu/Achish from Ekron,” *Die Welt des Orients* 49 (2019): 252–287.

- 64 Needless to say, the very definition of what is an emblematic object is, by and large, based on the archaeologist’s present day subjective interpretation, and its relevance for ancient societies should not be taken for granted.
- 65 E. g., M. Naum, “Multi-Ethnicity and Material Exchanges in Late Medieval Tallinn,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 17 (2014): 656–677; A. Haak, “Problems in Defining Ethnic Identity in Medieval Towns of Estonia on the Basis of Archaeological Sources,” in *Today I Am not the One I Was Yesterday: Archaeology, Identity, and Change* (ed. A. Haak, V. Lang, and M. Lavento; Tartu: Interarchaeologia, 2015), 19.
- 66 E. g., O. P. Gosselain, “Technology and Style: Potters and Pottery Among the Bafia of Cameroon,” *Man* 27 (1992): 559–586; idem, “Materializing Identities: An African Perspective,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 7 (2000): 187–217; L. Degoy, “Technical Traditions and Cultural Identity: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Andhra Pradesh Potters,” in *Cultural Transmission and Material Culture: Breaking Down the Borders* (ed. M. T. Stark, B. J. Bowser, and L. Horne; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 199–222; S. Peelo, “Pottery-Making in Spanish California: Creating Multi-Scalar Social Identity Through Daily Practice,” *American Antiquity* 76 (2011): 642–666; D. Albero Santacreu *et al.*, “Communities of Practice and Potter’s Experience: A Case Study from Southwestern Mallorca (Ca. 500–50 BC),” in *Artisans Rule: Product Standardization and Craft Specialization in Prehistoric Society* (ed. I. Miloglav and J. Vuković; Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 137–176; V. Roux, *Ceramics and Society: A Technological Approach to Archaeological Assemblages* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 5–6. On the importance of defining technological practice and “communities of practice,” see below.
- 67 E. g., Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*; S. Lucy, “Ethnic and Cultural Identities,” in *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion* (ed. M. Díaz-Andreu *et al.*; London: Routledge, 2005), 109; A. B. Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus*, 47.
- 68 E. g., J. Maran, “Lost in Translation: The Emergence of Mycenaean Culture as a Phenomenon of Globalisation,” in *Interweaving Worlds: Systemic Interactions in Eurasia, 7th to 1st Millennium BC. Papers from a Conference in Memory of Professor*

and limited time frames,⁶⁹ and preferably as manifested in communities of practice.

– Ethnicity is only one of the various identities at play, in a complex manner, at any given moment, in any group of people. There is no reason to favor ethnicity over other identities, and to see it as more indicative or salient in the archaeological record.⁷⁰

– Cultural attributes which sometimes can be associated with specific identities, ethnic and otherwise, most often do not retain their meaning or even their use over extended periods. Some can fall out of use, some can continue, while others can change their meaning.⁷¹

Andrew Sherratt – *What Would a Bronze Age World System Look Like? World System Approaches to Europe and Western Asia 4th to 1st Millennia BC* (ed. T. C. Wilkinson, S. Sherratt, and J. Bennet; Oxford: Oxbow, 2011), 282–294; B. W. Porter, *Complex Communities: The Archaeology of Early Iron Age West-Central Jordan* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2013); W. Pohl, “Comparing Communities: The Limits of Typology,” *History and Anthropology* 26 (2015): 18–35; T. Berzon, “Ethnicity and Early Christianity: New Approaches to Religious Kinship and Community,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 16 (2018): 191–227; J. L. Flexner, S. Bedford, and F. Valentin, “Who Was Polynesian? Who Was Melanesian? Hybridity and Ethnogenesis in the South Vanuatu Outliers,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 19 (2019): 403–426; L. Welton *et al.*, “Shifting Networks and Community Identity at Tell Tayinat in the Iron I (ca. 12th to Mid 10th Century B.C.E.),” *American Journal of Archaeology* 123 (2019): 291–333; C. Steidl, “Re-Thinking Communities: Collective Identity and Social Experience in Iron-Age Western Anatolia,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 20 (2020): 26–48; idem, “The Dynamics of Belonging: Comparative Community Formation in the East and West Mediterranean,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 33 (2020): 79–101.

69 Hodos, “Local and Global,” 16.

70 E.g., A. Delgado and M. Ferrer, “Cultural Contacts in Colonial Settings: The Construction of New Identities in Phoenician Settlements of the Western Mediterranean,” *Stanford Journal of Archaeology* 5 (2007): 36; N. Glick Schiller, A. Çağlar, and T. C. Guldbrandsen, “Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation,” *American Ethnologist* 33 (2006): 612–633; F. Theuvs, “Grave Goods, Ethnicity, and the Rhetoric of Burial Rites in Late Antique Northern Gaul,” in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition* (ed. T. Derks and N. Roymans; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2009), 283–320; Hodos, “Local and Global,” 27; S. Hakenbeck, “Roman or Barbarian?,” E. Hummell, *Standing the Test of Time: Barth and Ethnicity* (Coolabah 13; Barcelona: Australian Studies Centre, Universitat de Barcelona, 2014), 53; Popa, *Modelling Identities*, 52–53; L. Sagiv, *et al.*, “A Question of Identity: Introduction,” in *A Question of Identity: Social, Political, and Historical Aspects of Identity Dynamics in Jewish and Other Contexts* (ed. D. Rivlin Katz *et al.*; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 1–20.

71 E.g., Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*, 126; Daim, “Archaeology, Ethnicity and the Structures of Identification”; Hakenbeck, “Roman or Barbarian?,” 61–62; Sommer, “Tribes, Peoples, Ethnicity,” 175; Hummell, *Standing the Test of Time*, 49–50; Wettstein, “How Ethnic Identity Becomes Real,” 391.

– The identities of groups, as well as of individuals, can merge and separate in diverse manners, a concept often referred to as situational or contextual ethnicity.⁷²

These introductory points lead to a discussion of the theoretical and methodological complexities in recognizing ethnicity and other identities in the archaeological record of the Iron Age Levant, and more specifically, how this effects the various definitions of early Israel. Many studies have exercised insufficient caution and awareness of the pitfalls which I have described. All too often scholars have built their claims on simplistic assumptions regarding supposed evidence for long-lasting ethnic groups, such as Israel at various stages. They have often based their arguments on the identification of emblematic objects in the archaeological record, objects that were allegedly in use over extended periods, with a consistent symbolic meaning.

But this flaw is not confined to work in the Levant. Many of the same shortcomings can be seen elsewhere, such as in studies on early medieval ethnic identities in Europe.

Putatively relevant historical sources name ethnic groups that supposedly lived in different regions of Europe in the early medieval period. Archaeologists working on early medieval sites and finds from across Europe have attempted to tie the groups mentioned in these texts to specific archaeological remains, and thus to delineate their material culture. Recent critical scrutiny has questioned the very basis, theoretical and methodological, of these studies. Scholars such as Walter Pohl,⁷³ Sebastian Brather,⁷⁴ Florin Curta,⁷⁵

72 E.g., J.Y. Okamura, "Situational Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4 (1981): 452–465; Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*; Hakenbeck, "Situational Ethnicity and Nested Identities"; Hakenbeck, "Roman or Barbarian?"; K.A. Noels and R. Clément, "Situational Variations in Ethnic Identity Across Immigration Generations: Implications for Acculturative Change and Cross-Cultural Adaptation," *International Journal of Psychology* 50 (2015): 451–462.

73 Pohl, "Telling the Difference"; idem, "Comparing Communities"; idem, "Ethnicity in the Carolingian Empire," in *The Abbasid and Carolingian Empires: Comparative Studies in Civilizational Formation* (ed. D.G. Tor; Islamic History and Civilization 150; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 102–122; idem, "Narratives of Origin and Migration in Early Medieval Europe"; S. Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

74 Idem, "Ethnizität und Mittelalterarchäologie. Eine Antwort auf Florin Curta," *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* 39 (2011): 161–172.

75 Curta, "Medieval Archaeology and Ethnicity: Where Are We"; idem, "The Elephant in the Room"; idem, "Ethnic Identity and Archaeology"; idem, "Migrations in the Archaeology of Eastern and Southeastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages (Some Comments on the Current State of Research)," in *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone: Aspects of Mobility Between Africa, Asia and Europe, 300–1500 C.E.*

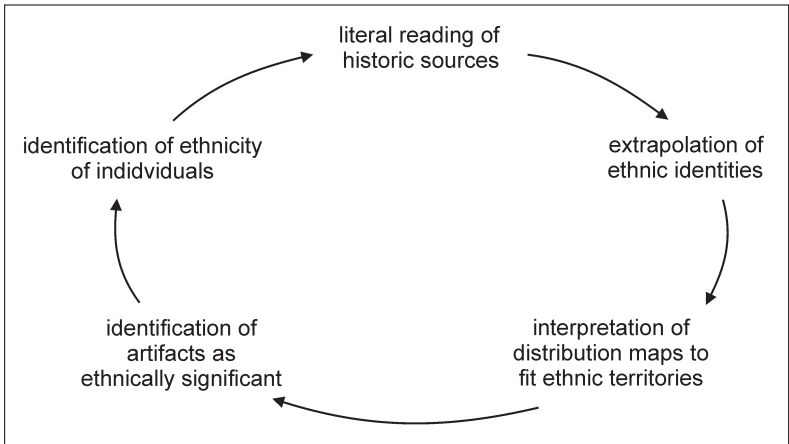


Fig. 1: The Self-Referencing Circular Argument of Identifying Ethnic Groups in the Archaeological Record. Based on Hakenbeck, "Roman or Barbarian?," 39, fig. 1.

Susanne Hakenbeck,⁷⁶ K. Patrick Fazioli,⁷⁷ Erica Buchberger⁷⁸ and James Harland⁷⁹ have shown that, in many cases, attempts to equate specific cultural assemblages with ethnic groups that are mentioned in historical sources are tenuous in the extreme and even downright mistaken. Often, the archaeological identifications of these groups, supposedly based on the archaeological remains, are in fact built on texts which allegedly describe these groups, but in fact date to much later periods in which the identification of these groups was ideologically charged. They thus do not have any connection to the objects unearthed in archaeological excavations of early medieval sites.

Addressing the pitfalls of previous scholarship on the archaeological evidence of early medieval ethnic groups in Bavaria, Susanne Hakenbeck (see Fig. 1) has offered a good summary of the accepted approach to the

(ed. J. Preiser-Kapeller, L. Reinfandt, and Y. Stouraitis; Studies in Global Social History 39/13; Leiden: Brill, 2020), 101–138.

76 Hakenbeck, "Situational Ethnicity and Nested Identities"; Hakenbeck, "Roman or Barbarian?"

77 K. P. Fazioli, "Rethinking Ethnicity in Early Medieval Archaeology: Social Identity, Technological Choice, and Communities of Practice," in *From West to East: Current Approaches to Medieval Archaeology* (ed. S. D. Stull; Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014), 20–39.

78 Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities in Spain and Gaul*.

79 D. J. M. Harland, "Deconstructing Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: A Critical Enquiry into the Study of Ethnicity in Lowland Britain in Late Antiquity (c. 350–600)" (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 2017); idem, "Rethinking Ethnicity and ›Otherness‹ in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017): 113–142; idem, "Memories of Migration?"

connection between ethnicity and archaeological evidence. Tellingly, the methodologies she critiques are pretty much the same ones used by archaeologists who work on Iron Age sites in the southern Levant:

It was assumed that in early medieval society these ethnic meanings of objects could and would have been read by all in the same way. The ethnic paradigm therefore worked with simplistic interpretations of material culture; both people and objects were considered classifiable by their external attributes, and the only difficulty lay in getting the classification right.

Furthermore, studies of ethnicity in the early medieval period have relied heavily on a literal reading of historical sources, creating a self-referencing circular argument. The sources are thought to provide a framework of facts and dates into which archaeological evidence can be fitted. Fragments of information gained from historical sources are taken out of context and used to identify the movements and settlement areas of the barbarian peoples. Distribution maps of specific artefact types then apparently identified these areas on the ground. The next step is to identify the ethnicity of individuals by making a connection between these artefacts and the identity of those that were buried with them. Once the tribal areas became populated with people, these people then turned fully-clothed into the actors mentioned in the historical sources.⁸⁰

So archaeologists working on medieval European sites look at written sources that purport to provide historical accounts of the movements and habitations of ethnic groups on the continent in this period, and then simplistically attempt to identify specific artifacts or assemblages with these groups. Often they do so without taking into account that most of the written sources on which they base their work on the early medieval period do not date to that time but were written much later, reflecting later ideological perceptions of an earlier period.

This is a textbook example of a self-referencing circular argument, in which archaeologists “read” artifacts in light of texts, and then go back and read these texts in light of their reading of the artifacts.

Similar fallacies can also be found in work on cultural contexts that are spatially and temporally closer to ancient Israel. For example, in discussing attempts to connect textual references to the Phoenicians and the archaeological record, Michael Sommer notes that “No study of the Phoenicians can ignore textual sources, but rather should take them as what they are: not ‘evidence’ in the proper sense, but ‘narratives’ created for all kinds of purposes, including handing down information.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Hakenbeck, “Roman or Barbarian?,” 38–39.

⁸¹ M. Sommer, “Shaping Mediterranean Economy and Trade: Phoenician Cultural Identities in the Iron Age,” in *Material Culture and Social Identities in the Ancient World* (ed. S. Hales and T. Hodos; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 119. For

Often then, the theoretical, methodological, and data-based approaches that are used to connect archaeological remains with specific ethnic (and other identity) groups are both outdated and faulty. This is certainly the case in much of the archeological work that seeks to identify Israel in the various stages of the Iron Age.

Israel in Extra-Biblical Iron Age Texts

The starting point in the search for ancient Israel, through its different stages, is without a doubt the appearance of the term Israel in texts, both biblical and extra-biblical. While my focus here is on the archaeological criteria for the identification, I want to stress that the identifications are all dependent on texts; indeed, they may be seen as an example of the “tyranny of the texts.”⁸² No less important is that I claim no expertise of any sort in the interpretation of the relevant biblical texts. That said, however, I’m keenly aware of the diversity of approaches, some of them mutually exclusive, in contemporary biblical historical interpretation.⁸³ Nevertheless, even if the biblical texts retain kernels of historical information, they are the end products of a long process of development, and also reflect later (late or post-Iron Age) ideologies. It should be self-evident, then, that much caution must be exercised in using biblical texts to recreate the realia of early Iron Age Israel.⁸⁴ When the term “Israel” appears in biblical texts⁸⁵ it should be

a similar view on the interface between text and archaeology in the definition of the Philistines, see Lemche, “Using the Concept of Ethnicity.”

82 E. g., T. Thurston, “Historians, Prehistorians, and the Tyranny of the Historical Record: Danish State Formation Through Documents and Archaeological Data,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 4 (1997): 239–264; P. L. Kohl, “The Materiality of History: Reflections on the Strengths of the Archaeological Record,” in *Excavating Asian History: Interdisciplinary Studies in Archaeology and History* (ed. N. Yoffee and B. L. Crowell; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 327–338.

83 As stressed, e. g., by B. D. Sommer, “Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Danger of Pseudo-Historicism”; L. L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (rev. ed.; London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 31–37.

84 E. g., M. Z. Brettler, “Historical Texts in the Hebrew Bible?” in *Thinking, Reordering, and Writing History in the Ancient World* (ed. K. A. Raaflaub; Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 213–233; A. Mazar, “Archaeology and the Bible: Reflections on Historical Memory in the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Congress Volume Munich 2013* (ed. C. M. Maier; Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 163; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 347–369; I. Finkelstein, “What the Biblical Authors Knew About Canaan Before and in the Early Days of the Hebrew Kingdoms,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 48 (2017): 173–198; Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*.

85 For an overview of “Israel” in the biblical texts, see, e. g., K. Weingart, *Stämmevolk –*

used very cautiously in illuminating what really went on in the Iron Age, especially in the early stages of the Iron Age.

While the few extra-biblical mentions of Israel should not be seen as objective and problem free sources, they nevertheless represent distinct points in time when the term “Israel” is used in reference to a group (or groups) in the southern Levant. They are thus important as corroborating evidence – beyond the mentions of Israel in biblical texts – regarding the existence of an identity group called “Israel” in specific times and contexts.

I want to state clearly that I fully accept the overall scholarly consensus⁸⁶ that a group termed “Israel” is in fact mentioned in the Merenptah Stele, which at present is the earliest known textual reference to this group.⁸⁷ What

Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk? Studien zur Verwendung des Israel-Namens im Alten Testament, Forschungen zum Alten Testament II 68 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

86 The literature on this is enormous. See for example: M. G. Hasel, “Merneptah’s Inscription and Reliefs and the Origin of Israel,” in *The Near East in the Southwest: Essays in Honor of William G. Dever* (ed. B. A. Nakhai; Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 58; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2003), 19–44; idem, “Israel in the Merneptah Stela,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 (1994): 45–61; idem, “Merenptah’s Reference to Israel: Critical Issues for the Origins of Israel,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (ed. R. S. Hess, G. A. Klingbeil, and P. J. Ray, Jr.; Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 47–60; A. F. Rainey, “Israel in Merneptah’s Inscription and Reliefs,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 57–75; K. A. Kitchen, “The Victories of Merneptah, and the Nature of Their Record,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2004): 259–272; R. D. Miller, II, “Identifying Earliest Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 333 (2004): 55–68; A. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel 1300–1100 BCE* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 154–155; L. D. Morenz, “Wortwitz – Ideologie – Geschichte: ‘Israel’ im Horizont Mer-en-ptahs,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 120 (2008): 1–13; W. G. Dever, “Merenptah’s ‘Israel,’ the Bible’s, and Ours,” in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (ed. J. David Schloen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 89–96; W. G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, 191–94; D. Nestor, “Merneptah’s ‘Israel’ and the Absence of Origins in Biblical Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13 (2015): 293–329; Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 85–86; B. U. Schipper, *A Concise History of Ancient Israel: From the Beginnings Through the Hellenistic Era* (Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible II; University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 14–18.

87 The suggestion of an earlier mention of Israel (M. Görg, “Israel in Hieroglyphen,” *Biblische Notizen* 106 [2001]: 21–27; P. van der Veen, C. Theis, and M. Görg, “Israel in Canaan [Long] Before Pharaoh Merneptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2 [2010]: 15–25; P. van der Veen, “Berlin Statue Pedestal Reliefs 21687 and 21688: Ongoing Research,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 4 [2012]: 41–42; idem and W. Zwickel, “Die neue Israel-Inschrift und ihre historischen Implikationen,” in “*Vom Leben umfassen*”: *Ägypten, das Alte Testament und das Gespräch der Religionen. Gedenkschrift für Manfred Görg* [ed. S. J. Wimmer and G. Gafus; Ägypten und Altes Testament 80; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014], 425–433; idem and P. van der Veen, “The Earliest Reference to Is-

this means is that by the late 13th century B.C.E., but probably a bit before, there was a group in Canaan known to others as Israel. Despite claims to the contrary, it is important to stress that this reference provides no other information. It does not say where in Canaan this group was located, how large a group it was, or anything about its character. Thus, all attempts to use this reference to place “Israel” within a specific region or attribute to it a specific socio-economic and geopolitical character are at best tenuous and at worst speculative in the extreme.

But this single word in a single inscription has sent legions of scholars into self-referencing circular arguments. They assert that the Israel referred to in the Merenptah Stele must name the people who lived in the settlements that appeared in the central hills of Palestine in the late 13th century B.C.E. The next step is to note that biblical traditions place the early Israelites in this region, where the kingdoms of Israel and Judah later emerged. Thus, these settlements, and the material culture found in them, represent early Israelites.

It goes further. Supposed continuities between the material culture of these Iron I settlements and later Iron Age Judah and Israel (for example, four-room houses, abstention from pork, an egalitarian ethos) have led repeatedly to claims that there is a clear cultural continuity in the group identity of “the Israelites,” linking those who lived in Iron I to those of Iron II.⁸⁸

This unequivocal interpretation has been challenged, from different perspectives.⁸⁹ Defenders such as William G. Dever⁹⁰ respond that those who

rael and Its Possible Archaeological and Historical Background,” *Vetus Testamentum* 67 [2017]: 29–140) is questionable (e.g., F. Adrom, “Israel in Berlin? Identifizierungsvorschläge zur Fremdvölkerliste Berlin 21687,” in *Geschichte und Gott. XV. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie, 14.–18. September 2014 in Berlin* [ed. M. Meyer-Blank; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016], 288–301; R. K. Ritner, “The Supposed Earliest Hieroglyphic Mention of Israel [Berlin ÄM 21687]: Refutation,” in *Semitic, Biblical, and Jewish Studies in Honor of Richard C. Steiner* [ed. A. J. Koller, M. Z. Cohen, and A. Moshavi; Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2020], 38*–53*). Even if one accepts this suggestion (and I do not), it only means that the formation of the group called “Israel” began a bit earlier.

88 Most recently, for example: Dever, *Beyond the Texts*; Faust, “Pigs in Space (and Time);” Schipper, *A Concise History of Ancient Israel*.

89 E.g., J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (The Biblical Seminar 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990); P. R. Davies, *The Search for ‘Ancient Israel’* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

90 W. G. Dever, “Ethnicity and the Archaeological Record: The Case of Early Israel,” in *Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the “Other” in Antiquity*. *Studies*

question the identification of early Israel are insufficiently familiar with the archaeological remains. But my whole point here is that familiarity, or lack thereof, with the archaeological remains is precisely not what is at issue (and I can safely say that I know these materials). The problem is a logical one, whether the premises on which these successive inferences regarding early Israel have a solid theoretical basis.

I want to make clear that I do not question that at different stages of the Iron Age and later there was a group – or groups – that identified themselves, or were identified by others, as Israel. I see a need, however, to flag what I perceive as overly simplistic interpretations and narratives that attempt to forge a straightforward and uncritical connection between manifestations of Israel, on the one hand, to specific and tightly defined relationships with archaeological remains, on the other. This, in my opinion, is unwarranted. It is supported neither by the archaeological materials nor by an up-to-date theoretical framework.

So what can we say about Merenptah's Israel? Not very much, save that there was a group, somewhere within the southern Levant, probably in peripheral regions, that was called Israel in this inscription. It may very likely be that this "Israel" was a name for some of the inhabitants of the newly founded settlements in the central hills region, or in other parts of the southern Levant (northern Galilee; Transjordan).⁹¹ Despite all that has been written about the definition of Merenptah's Israel, and the many suggestions that have been raised, the actual evidence does not permit saying much more than that.⁹²

Furthermore, many scholars claim that the unique material culture seen in the central hills and other regions in Canaan during the Late Bronze–Iron Age transition was the material culture of this same Israel. However, for a number of reasons, there can be no certainty that sites with this specific material assemblage can be securely identified as the group called Israel:

in Honor of Eric M. Meyers (ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough; *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 60–61, 2007), 49–66; Dever, *Beyond the Texts*.

91 Various suggestions (for a survey, see, e.g., Hasel, "Merenptah's Reference to Israel") regarding the geographic location of Israel, such as located the group between Gezer and Yeno'am, or more generally, in the central hills region, are a likely possibility, but cannot be seen as explicitly proven. First, it assumes that the locations in the Merenptah inscription were geographically arranged, which might not be the case due to the literary character of the inscription. In addition to this, the very vagueness of the term "Israel" does not allow us to define its size and location, unless one extrapolates from later biblical and extra-biblical sources. See, e.g., Kletter, "Can a Proto-Israelite Please Stand up?," 580–581.

92 Recently, Monroe and Fleming, "Earliest Israel," 17–18; see also Fleming's paper in this issue.

1) Even if we could be certain that there was a group called Israel in these regions, and what the exact character of this group was, the very attempt to create a parallel between material culture and group identity is fraught with problems.

2) The fact that the Merenptah Stele names a group called Israel does not have to mean that such a group actually existed. Rather, it means that Israel was perceived as a defined group in contemporaneous royal Egyptian ideology. Nor does it provide any information about who the groups' members were and what their relationship to other contemporary groups was.

3) Furthermore, the elements of the "trait list" which scholars have associated with early Israel (e.g., four-room houses, collared-rim pithoi, the absence of pig bones), on the basis of the reference in the Merenptah Stele, cannot be presumed to be unique to the group called Israel. Perhaps not all the settlements exhibiting these traits belonged to the group named in the stele. Perhaps other groups had similar material cultures.

4) There is no ground for presuming that there was a large-scale group known as Israel living in the central hills and other regions. A much more likely scenario is that there were many groups with similar characteristics, whether small and local or large and supra-regional entities. In later stages of the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms, these states were comprised of many small-scale local leaders who owed fealty to the king in a patron-client relationship.⁹³ It seems reasonable that there might have been groups of different types and sizes, interacting in a range of ways, during the early Iron

93 E.g., B. C. Benz, *The Land Before the Kingdom of Israel: A History of the Southern Levant and the People Who Populated It* (History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant 7; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016); A. M. Maeir and I. Shai, "Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Kingdom: Archaeological Evidence for Non-Centralized, Kinship-Based Components," in *From Sha'ar Hagolan to Shaaraim: Essays in Honor of Prof. Yosef Garfinkel* (ed. S. Ganor et al.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2016), 323–340; idem and A. M. Maeir, "Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Centralized Kingdom: An Updated Archaeological View," in Hebrew with English abstract, *In the Highlands Depth* 8 (2018): 29–45, 45*; E. Pfoh, "Socio-Political Changes and Continuities in the Levant (1300–900 BCE)," in *Change, Continuity and Connectivity: North-Eastern Mediterranean at the Turn of the Bronze Age and in the Early Iron Age* (ed. Ł. Niesiołowski-Spanò and M. Węcowski; Philippika 118; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 57–67; H. M. Niemann, "Judah and Jerusalem: Reflections on the Relationship between Tribe and City and the Role of Jerusalem in Judah," *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 135 (2019): 1–31; O. Sergi, "Israelite Identity and the Formation of the Israelite Polities in the Iron I–IIA Central Canaanite Highlands," *Die Welt des Orients* 49 (2019): 206–235.

Age as well. With all probability, local groups were of cardinal importance. And there is no certainty in defining these groups archaeologically.⁹⁴

The vagueness of the terms “Israel” and “Israelite” continues in later stages. As many have noted previously,⁹⁵ following the late 13th century B.C.E. mention of Israel in the Merenptah inscription, these terms are rarely used in extra-biblical texts. They appear again in the 9th century B.C.E., with the mention of “Ahab the Israelite” in the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III (853 B.C.E.), and two mentions of “king of Israel” in the Mesha Stele and the Dan Stele (both ca. 840 B.C.E.). Following this, “Israel” or “Israelite” does not appear again in any extra-biblical text up until its appearance in two inscriptions from the early 2nd century B.C.E. Samaritan synagogue in Delos.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ The biblical traditions on the tribes of which Israel was comprised (e.g., Weingart, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk?*; see Monroe’s paper in this issue), and of the many different peoples in Canaan, may very well reflect the complex and diverse groups that resided in early Iron Age Canaan, and in particular in the Central Hills. Seeing all of these as being under a general umbrella of Israel, arguably might be seen as no more than a much later ideologically charged lens. I do not think it is necessary to understand the biblical traditions of the tribes either as reflecting nomadic elements in early Israel, as reflecting the reigns of David and Solomon (e.g., Z. Kallai, “The Twelve-Tribe Systems of Israel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 47, no. 1 [1997]: 53–90; E. Blum, “The Israelite Tribal System: Literary Fiction or Social Reality?” in *Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of Monarchy in Israel: Biblical and Archaeological Perspectives* [ed. J.J. Krause, O. Sergi, and O. Weingart; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020], 201–222), or seeing the traditions of the twelve tribes as a later Iron Age tradition (e.g., E.A. Knauf and P. Guillaume, *A History of Biblical Israel: The Fate of the Tribes and Kingdoms from Merenptah to Bar Kochba*, *Worlds of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean* (London: Equinox, 2016), 46; Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*, 130–134; A. Tobolowsky, *The Sons of Jacob and the Sons of Herakles: The History of the Tribal System and the Organization of Biblical Identity* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament II/96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Monroe and Fleming, “Earliest Israel”; Monroe in this issue), without any historical basis.

⁹⁵ E.g., A. Berlejung, “General and Religious History of ‘Israel’: A Historical Survey,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* (J.C. Gertz et al.; London: T&T Clark, 2012), 66–71; Weingart, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk?*, 4–7; W. Schütte, “Were the Israelites in ‘Judean Exile?’” *Antiquo Oriente* 16 (2018): 147–180; Monroe and Fleming, “Earliest Israel”; O. Sergi, “The Formation of Israelite Identity in the Central Canaanite Highlands in the Iron Age I–IIA,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82, no. 1 (2019): 42–51.

⁹⁶ P. Bruneau, “Les Israélites des Délos’ et la juiverie délienne,” *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 106 (1982): 465–504; M. Kartveit, *The Origins of the Samaritans* (Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 128; Leiden: Brill, 2009); idem, “Samaritan Self-Consciousness in the First Half of the Second Century B.C.E. in Light of the Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim and Delos,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 45 (2014): 449–470; idem, “Theories of the Origin of the Samaritans – Then and Now,” *Religions* 10 (2019): 661; Weingart, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk?*, 329–330; Schütte, “Were the Israelites in ‘Judean Exile?’” 152. For further discussion of the few appearances of “Israel” in Antiquity, see, e.g., L. Grabbe, *The History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second*

Thus, altogether, the term Israel/Israelite appears only four times, just before and during the Iron Age. By comparison, the clan / family of Nimshi, seemingly of much less significance, appears five (and perhaps six) times in extra-biblical Iron Age inscriptions.⁹⁷ This indicates the need for caution in extrapolating meaning from the textual references of Israel.

In all other references to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, or to peoples from these kingdoms and ethnicities, other terms are used. It could be that the name Israel had emic (internal) meaning among groups identifying as Israel, and possibly this meaning is reflected in biblical texts. There is no justification for presuming that all non-biblical sources are using the term in this sense of internal self-definition; that might be a reasonable inference only during the mid-9th century B.C.E., perhaps in the very specific geopolitical contexts of that time.⁹⁸

A number of hypotheses have been offered regarding the evolution in the use of the emic / internal sense of the name "Israel" among Israelites / Judahites during the Iron Age. Some have suggested that the name was first

Temple Period, Volume 1. Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 168–169.

97 In addition to the three (perhaps four) better-known Iron IIA references to Nimshi (נַמְשִׁי), one from Tel Amal (S. Levy and Edelstein G., "Fouilles de Tel 'Amal [Nir David]," *Revue Biblique* 79 [1972]: 336, fig. 6, pl. 25:3–4) and two (and perhaps a third one) from Tel Rehov. For further discussion, see S. Ahituv and A. Mazar, "The Inscriptions from Tel Rehov and their Contribution to the Study of Script and Writing during the Iron Age IIA," in "See, I Will Bring a Scroll Recounting What Befell Me" (*Ps 40:8*): *Epigraphy and Daily Life – From the Bible to the Talmud Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Hanan Eshel* (ed. E. Eshel and Y. Levin; JAJSup 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 42–45, figs. 4–7; idem, "Chapter 29A: Inscriptions on Pottery," in *Tel Rehov, A Bronze and Iron Age City in the Beth-Shean Valley, Volume IV* (ed. A. Mazar and N. Panitz-Cohen, Qedem 59; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, in press), this name appears also on the early 8th cent. BCE Samaria Ostrakon 56. See, e.g., J. Renz and W. Rollig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik, Band I: Die althebräischen Inschriften* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 104, as well as in a possible Iron I inscription in A. Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey, Vol. 1: The Shechem Syncline* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 21:1; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 176 survey of the site of Kh. Tannin, 7 km southeast of Jenin (first published in A. Lemaire, "Tesson Inscrit du Kh. Tannin," *Semitica* 35 [1985]: 13–15; Ahituv and Mazar, "The Inscriptions from Tel Rehov," 43, n. 23, who question this reading). Note that the appearance of the name of Nimshi in the region of Samaria, both in Iron I (possibly) and Iron IIB, may require revising Sergi's ("Israelite Identity," 223) understanding of the origin and role of the Nimshi clan / family in the Beth Shean Valley (which was based on the inscriptions at Tel Amal and Tel Rehov). That said, the different character of the inscriptions in which "Israel" and "Nimshi" are mentioned should be stressed.

98 On the possible background of this, see, e.g., D.E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 243–246.

used by peoples in the northern Israelite kingdom. Following its demise, in this view, the name was adopted first by the Judahite kingdom, and/or much later by Jews in the late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods.⁹⁹ Others have suggested that the term “Israel” was of significant meaning, but perhaps used differently, in both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the Iron Age.¹⁰⁰ Both approaches have their merits, but neither can be proven indubitably.

At the end of the day, identifications of ethnic and other identity groups are almost always based on textual information.¹⁰¹ In the case of Israel, if the biblical and the handful of extra-biblical texts did not exist and all that was available was the archaeological evidence, there would be no way of attaching the label “Israel” to those remains. Given that the biblical texts may very well reflect later ideologies and seek to backdate the origin of a group identity, and the large lacunae in the mention of Israel in other texts, extreme caution is called for when offering hypotheses about who and what Israel was, and what ancient populations can be archaeologically identified with this group.

The nature of the entity called Israel most likely changed over time, both during and after the Iron Age. New groups were incorporated and others were excluded and the meaning of the term shifted, as did the geographical region to which it applied. This involved the creation of new and largely invented traditions¹⁰² and newly imagined communities¹⁰³ whose members shared, or were meant to share, a common identity at that point in time. These identities were built, exhibited, and reified in a number of ways – performatively, and by the construction of political and cultic focal centers (such as Samaria and Jerusalem) by elites.¹⁰⁴ In fact, several stages of political and cultic centralization in the Iron Age Levant can be seen, perhaps, as

99 E. g., W. Schütte, “Wie wurde Juda israelitisiert?” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 124, no. 1 (2012): 52–72; idem, “Were the Israelites in ‘Judean Exile’?” *Antiquo Oriente* 16 (2018): 147–180.

100 E. g., Weingart, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk?*; Sergi, “Israelite Identity.”

101 E. g., J. M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); N. P. Lemche, “Using the Concept of Ethnicity.”

102 E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

103 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

104 E. g., Hodos, “Local and Global,” 18–19; S. K. Pandey, “Politics of Belonging: Identity and State-Formation in Nagaland,” in *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics* (ed. J. Pfaff-Czarnecka and G. Toffin; Governance, Conflict, and Civic Action Series 4; New Delhi: Sage, 2011), 98–121; Wettstein, “How Ethnic Identity Becomes Real.”

stages in the transition between various Israels. Thus, historical kernels in the biblical texts on the centralization of cult (“reforms”) may perhaps be viewed as “performative” actions aimed at changing social/political relations in Iron II Judah,¹⁰⁵ as at Arad, Tel Sheva,¹⁰⁶ Lachish,¹⁰⁸ Moza,¹⁰⁹ and Jerusalem.¹⁰⁹ These may have changed the matrix and relationships between local groups and local elites in the direction of more centralized control emanating from Jerusalem.¹¹⁰

- 105 On performative aspects as identity markers, see, e.g., J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); J. C. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy,” in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (ed. J. C. Alexander, B. Giesen, and J. L. Mast; Cambridge Cultural Social Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90; Hodos, “Local and Global,” 18; Yuval-Davis, “Theorizing Identity: Beyond the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ Dichotomy”; Pandey, “Politics of Belonging: Identity and State-Formation in Nagaland”; R. M. K. Aly, *Becoming Arab in London: Performativity and the Undoing of Identity* (Anthropology, Culture and Society; London: Pluto Press, 2015); E. Swenson, “The Archaeological of Ritual,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44 (2015): 329–345; Wettstein, “How Ethnic Identity Becomes Real.”
- 106 Z. Herzog, “Perspectives on Southern Israel’s Cult Centralization: Arad and Beer-Sheba,” in *One God, One Cult, One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (ed. R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann; BZAW 405; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 169–199.
- 107 S. Ganor and I. Kreimerman, “An Eighth Century BCE Gate Shrine at Tel Lachish,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 381 (2018): 211–236. For different views on these remains, see: S. Kleiman, “The Iron IIB Gate Shrine at Lachish: An Alternative Interpretation,” *Tel Aviv* 7 (2020): 55–64; D. Ussishkin, “Was a ‘Gate Shrine’ Built at the Level III Inner City Gate of Lachish? A Response to Ganor and Kreimerman.” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 385 (2021): 153–170.
- 108 S. Kisilevitz, “The Iron IIA Judahite Temple at Tel Moza,” *Tel Aviv* 42 (2015): 147–164; idem and O. Lipschits, “Another Temple in Judah – The Tale of Tel Moza,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46 (2020): 40–49.
- 109 N. Szanton, “The Quarried Chamber and Cave 1: Evidence for Cult in the Iron IIB on the Eastern Slope of the City of David,” in *New Studies on Jerusalem* (ed. E. Baruch and A. Faust; Ramat-Gan: Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies, 2013), 19:1–28.
- 110 E.g., R. H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* (JSOTSup 120; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); B. Halpern, “Sybil, or the Two Nations? Archaisms, Kinship, Alienation, and the Elite Redefinition of Traditional Culture in Judah in the 8th–7th Centuries B.C.E.,” in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference* (ed. J. S. Cooper and G. M. Schwartz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 291–338; G. Lehmann, “Survival and Reconstruction of Judah in the Time of Manasseh,” in *Disaster and Relief Management – Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung* (ed. A. Berlejung; Forschungen zum Alten Testament 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 291; S. Ackerman, “Cult Centralization, the Erosion of Kin-Based Communities, and the Implications for Women’s Religious Practice,” in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. S. M. Olyan; Resources for Biblical Study 71; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 19–40; G. Lehmann

A theoretically sophisticated approach to the archaeological definition of ancient Israel does not, in my opinion, contend that there was no Israel in any given historical period. Rather, it accepts the complexity of the task. It makes explicit the problematics of assuming that overarching identities existed over long periods. It acknowledges that similarities in material culture do not prove that an identity group called Israel (by itself or by others) extended throughout the Iron Age in large parts of Canaan and remained static over extended periods. It questions whether so-called “identity markers” necessarily have *longue durée* use and relevance. It realizes that the group(s) that defined themselves as Israel may well have shifted and even drastically changed over time. Finally, it displays awareness that the social and historical processes identifiable during the Iron Age (among them small-scale regional identities and cultic reformations) may be intricately tied to processes of group identity transformation – including the definition of what was and was not Israel.

Discussion

The meaning of the term “Israel” went through substantial changes over time. There may well be aspects of continuity and overlap in how the term was used over time. For example, some of the people whom the Merenptah Stele referred to as Israel could have been ancestors of people who lived under the Israelite kingdom. But that is where it ends, particularly from an archaeological point of view. If the use of the name of this group changed drastically over time,¹¹¹ the archaeological manifestations of this group at specific times and in a *longue durée* perspective, would clearly be very different.

Simplistic interpretations of the term Israel and the presumption of a straightforward, long-term continuity of an Israelite “ethnicity” which ex-

and H. M. Niemann, “When Did the Shephelah Become Judahite?” *Tel Aviv* 41 (2014): 90; Maeir and Shai, “Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Kingdom”; Shai and Maeir, “Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Centralized Kingdom”; Niemann, “Judah and Jerusalem;” idem, “Das Jerusalemer Stadt-Königtum der Davididen und ihr Einflussgebiet im Wandel,” *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 136 (2020): 105–38.

111 See C. S. Ehrlich’s study “Biblical Gentilics and Israelite Ethnicity,” in *The Books of Samuel. Stories – History – Reception History* (ed. W. Dietrich, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 284; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 413–421, where he recently pointed out the fluidity of Israelite ethnic identity in biblical traditions as played out in the biblical depictions of Ittai the Gittite, while perhaps originally of Gittite origin, had become an Israelite according to the text.

tends from the time of Merenptah through the Iron Age and beyond are often argued based on supposed continuities in traditions. Archaeological manifestations in Iron II in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are projected backwards to the Iron I; biblical traditions and customs are identified in the archaeological record and are used for identifying and defining Israelite ethnicity; and differences in the appearance of items of material evidence are then used to demarcate the appearance of this ethnicity in history. The reasoning is circular and self-referential, and therefore faulty.

To underline this, I want to address the problematic nature of supposed continuities in Israelite ethnicity and culture, using several examples from recent work by a leading proponent of this approach, Avraham Faust.

Consumption of Pork

The absence of pig bones at a site has been suggested as a way of identifying it as Israelite/Judahite. A subject of extensive debate,¹¹² this criterion was at first proposed as a way of defining a site as Israelite, and was seen as a classical example of continuity of Israelite foodways from the early Iron Age into post-Iron Age Judaism.¹¹³ Later research has acknowledged that the issue is much more complex. At some sites identified through other evidence as Israelite and Judahite, pig bones are absent, indicating that pork was not consumed, whereas at other sites pig bones are part of the assemblage.¹¹⁴ Faust has recently argued that abstention from pig consumption can nevertheless be seen as an emblematic behavior of the Israelites/Judahites. He proposes that, when pig bones are found at sites within Israelite regions, they indicate pork consumption by non-Israelites (“Canaanites”) living at these sites.¹¹⁵ This is a blatant example of how circular reasoning can lead to an improper use of material culture for identifying groups.

112 E. g., with further literature, L. K. Horwitz *et al.*, “A Brief Contribution to the Iron Age Philistine Pig Debate,” in *The Wide Lens in Archaeology: Honoring Brian Hesse’s Contributions to Anthropological Archaeology* (ed. J. Lev-Tov, P. Wapnish, and A. Gilbert; Archaeobiology 2; Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2017), 93–116; I. Finkelstein, Y. Gadot, and L. Sapir-Hen, “Pig Frequencies in Iron Age Sites and the Biblical Pig Taboo: Once Again,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 49 (2018): 109–116; idem, “Food, Pork Consumption, and Identity in Ancient Israel,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82 (2019): 52–59.

113 E. g., I. Finkelstein, “Ethnicity and Origin of the Iron I Settlers in the Highlands of Canaan: Can the Real Israel Stand Up?” *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (December 1996): 198–212.

114 On this, see, e. g., Sapir-Hen, “Pig Frequencies.”

115 Faust, “Pigs in Space (and Time).” For evidence of pig consumption in Iron Age II Jerusalem (in the City of David), see L. Sapir-Hen, J. Uziel, and O. Chalaf, “Everything but the Oink: On the Discovery of an Articulated Pig in Iron Age Jerusalem

The Four-Room House

This well-known Iron Age building type has been extensively discussed, and for many years was seen as the emblematic building type of the Israelites/Judahites. Faust¹¹⁶ has repeatedly argued that this understanding should be retained, and that this building type can, almost without exception, be identified as Israelite. The problem is that four-room houses also appear at sites and in regions that lack other markers of Israelite culture. Faust's way around this obvious difficulty is to argue that the examples adduced are either not full-fledged four-room houses or that the regions in question (particularly in Transjordan) might actually have been Israelite.¹¹⁷ This is problematic on several levels. First, Faust's typology of what is and what is not a four-room house is subjective, to put it mildly, given that even at Israelite/Judahite sites there are many variants on this type of house (e.g. Tel Sheva).¹¹⁸ Second, and no less importantly, too many examples of this structure type have been reported from clearly non-Israelite/Judahite sites to permit a simplistic one-to-one link between this house and Israelite/Judahite culture. Examples from Iron Age Philistia, such as Qasile¹¹⁹ and Tel Sera,¹²⁰ on the one hand, and the ever-expanding number of examples from various parts of Transjordan, on the other,¹²¹ support those who question that this house type should be directly connected to Israel/Judah.¹²²

and It's Meaning to Judahite Consumption Practices," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 84/2 (2021): 110–119.

- 116 E. g., A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, "The Four Room House: Embodying the Israelite Society," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 22–33; A. Faust, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 213–229.
- 117 E. g., Ibid, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society*, 219.
- 118 For comments on the problems in the definition of this type of building, see, e.g., Y. Gadot and E. Bocher, "The Introduction of the Open-Courtyard Building to the Jerusalem Landscape and Judean-Assyrian Interaction," in *Archaeology and History of Eight-Century Judah* (ed. Z.I. Farber and J.L. Wright; Ancient Near East Monographs; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 213–214.
- 119 A. Mazar, "The Iron Age Dwellings at Tell Qasile," in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (ed. J. David Schloen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 319–336.
- 120 E. Oren, "Sera, Tel," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (2nd English ed.; ed. Ephraim Stern, Ayelet Lewinson-Gilboa, and Joseph Aviram; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 4:1332.
- 121 E. g., B.E. Routledge, "Seeing through Walls: Interpreting Iron Age I Architecture at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-'Aliya," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 319 (2000): 37–70; L.G. Herr and D.R. Clark, "From the Stone Age to the Middle Ages in Jordan: Digging up Tall al'Umayri," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 72 (2009): 69–97; I.M. Swinnen, "The Iron Age I Settlement and Its Residential House at al-Lahun in Moab, Jordan," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 354 (2009): 29–53; T.E. Levy *et al.*, "Chapter 2. Excavations at Khirbat en-Nahas 2002–

Thus, while it could be argued that such houses are more common at Israelite/Judahite sites, they can hardly be used as an ethnic marker, and more importantly, not as evidence for clear-cut continuity between Iron I Israel and Iron II Israel and Judah. Other groups might very well have resided in houses of this type throughout the Iron Age.

Biblical laws on menstruation

The identification of the four-room house as a uniquely Israelite phenomenon is closely tied to Faust's previous research, in which he repeatedly argued for a specific functional and ideological interpretation of this architectural phenomenon.¹²³ His claim is that the layout of this type of dwelling facilitates gender separation, specifically to enable menstruating women to have a defined and separate area within the home, as biblical law seems to require. I have demonstrated elsewhere¹²⁴ that other interpretations

2009: An Iron Age Copper Production Center in the Lowlands of Edom," in *Surveys, Excavations, and Research from the University of California, San Diego-Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Edom Lowlands Regional Archaeology Project (ELRAP)*, Vol. 1 of *New Insights Into the Iron Age Archaeology of Edom, Southern Jordan* (ed. T. E. Levy, M. Najjar, and E. Ben-Yosef; *Monumenta Archaeologica* 35; Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, University of California Press, 2014), 89–245; P. J. Ray, "A Series of Iron Age Domestic Buildings in Field C at Tall Jalul," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 13 (2019): 531–538.

- 122 E. g., I. Finkelstein, "Pots and People Revisited: Ethnic Boundaries in the Iron Age I," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (ed. N. A. Silberman and D. Small; JSOTSup 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 226; H. Nur ed-Din, "The Four-Room House: A Re-Examination," *Contributi e Materiali de Archeologia Orientale* 9 (2003): 503–516; A. Mazar, "From 1200 to 850 B.C.E.: Remarks on Some Selected Archaeological Issues," in *The Archaeology, Vol. 1 of Israel in Transition: From Late Bronze II to Iron IIA (c. 1250–850 B.C.E.)* (ed. L. Grabbe; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 89; A. Berlejung, "General and Religious History of 'Israel': A Historical Survey," in *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* (ed. J. C. Gertz et al.; London: T&T Clark, 2012), 104.
- 123 E. g., S. Bunimovitz and A. Faust, "Ideology in Stone: Understanding the Four Room House," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 28 (2002): 32–41, 59–60; *ibid.*, "Building Identity: The Four-Room House and the Israelite Mind," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina. Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research, May 29–31, 2000* (ed. W. G. Dever and S. Gitin; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 411–423; A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, "The Four Room House: Embodying the Israelite Society," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 22–33.
- 124 A. M. Maer, "Review of: A. Faust. 2012. *The Archaeology of Israelite Society*. Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, IN," *Review of Biblical Literature* (2013), http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/8631_9464.pdf.

of this plan are possible,¹²⁵ which call for completely different views of the function and meaning of this house type.

Faust's thesis is problematic on several counts. It is hard to imagine that the woman of the house was ever segregated for days at a time from the house courtyard, since this is the area where domestic production and food preparation happened.

But much more cardinal to the issue at hand, the alleged continuity of Israelite habitus from the early Iron Age until post-Iron Age times involves Faust's assumption that you can assume that biblical texts about menstrual impurity and purification can be linked to actual praxis and archaeological remains from Iron Age contexts. It requires positing that the biblical regulations regarding menstrual pollution, separation, and purity rituals reflect a system practiced during a certain period and not an ideological and literary creation. Furthermore, it presumes these texts (and in particular those in Leviticus) date to the Iron Age. Faust cites the texts simplistically and uncritically, disregarding recent textual scholarship that shows the complex way in which these texts reached their current form, suggesting that they may in large part date to after the Iron Age.¹²⁶ For the

125 E.g., R.S. Avissar Lewis, "A Matter of Perception: Children in Pre-Israelite and Philistine Houses during the Iron Age I," in *Tell It in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of A. M. Maier on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. I. Shai et al., Ägypten und Altes Testament; Münster: Zaphon, 2018), 242–253; idem, *Children in Antiquity: Archaeological Perspectives on Children and Childhood in the Land of Israel*, In Hebrew (Rishon Lezion: University of Haifa, 2019), 111–116.

126 E.g., D. Erbele-Küster, *Körper und Geschlecht. Studien zur Anthropologie von Lev 12 und 15* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 121; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen, 2008); idem, "Die Körperbestimmungen in Lev 11–15," in *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und im Alten Orient* (ed. A. Berlejung, J. Dietrich, and J. F. Quack; Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 209–224; idem, "Comment dire l'interdit ? Le tabou linguistique et social de la menstruation en Lévitique 11–20," in *Tabou et transgressions: Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 11–12 avril 2012* (ed. J.M. Durand, M. Guichard, and T. Römer; Orbis Biblical et Orientalis 274; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2015), 181–190; idem, *Body, Gender and Purity in Leviticus 12 and 15* (LHBOTS 539; New York: T&T Clark, 2017); C. Nihan, "Forms and Functions of Purity in Leviticus," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism* (ed. C. Frevel and C. Nihan; Dynamics in the History of Religions 3; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 311–367; T.M. Lemos, "Where There Is Dirt, Is There System? Revisiting Biblical Purity Constructions," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37 (2013): 265–294; I. Cranx, "Priests, Pollution and the Demonic: Evaluation Impurity in the Hebrew Bible in Light of Assyro-Babylonian Texts," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 14 (2014): 68–86; T. Hieke, *Levitikus 1–15* (Herders Theologischer

same reasons, Faust's recent suggestion regarding a plaster installation used in a supposed purity-related ritual in an Iron Age building at Tel Eton¹²⁷ is quite hard to accept.

Finally, Faust's association of the Four-Room House with the rules of ritual purity for women contradicts his other work on this architectural phenomenon. In other places he has argued that the disappearance of this house type at the end of the Iron Age is a clear indication that there was a change in population at the time, before the return of the Jews from exile in the early Persian period.¹²⁸ Yet unambiguous textual and archaeological evidence of menstrual-related purity customs only appear in post-Iron Age contexts, and there appears to be no architectural evidence of spatial segregation for menstruating women in post-Iron Age Judea. Thus, even if we accept that the traditions reflected in the purity-related biblical texts have Iron Age origins, and that there is continuity in these traditions between the Iron Age, Persian and Classical periods, there is no consistent architectural manifestation of the practices.

Any direct link between the biblical purity (and other) texts and the Iron Age archaeological remains should be made with utmost caution, if at all.¹²⁹ While menstrual-related practices are known in later Jewish traditions, much more definite evidence that they were observed in earlier periods is required to provide a basis for seeking a material imprint of such behavior in Iron Age Judah. Even if there is genetic and cultural continuity between

Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014), 522–566; idem, “Menstruation and Impurity: Regular Abstention from the Cult According to Leviticus 15:19–24 and Some Examples for the Reception of the Biblical Text in Early Judaism,” in *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments* (ed. G. G. Xeravtis; Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 26; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 54–70; J. Klawans, “Concepts of Purity in the Bible,” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (2nd ed.; ed. A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1998–2005.

127 A. Faust and H. Katz, “The Archaeology of Purity and Impurity: A Case-Study from Tel Eton, Israel,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27 (2017): 15–16; A. Faust, “Purity and Impurity in Iron Age Israel,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 45 (2019): 62.

128 E. g. Faust, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society*.

129 For a similar cautionary note on a suggested direct connection between Iron Age economics and the text of Deuteronomy, see now K. Berge, et al., “Are Economics a Key to Dating *Urdeuteronomium*? A Response to Sandra Lynn Richter,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (2020): 65–78. For general caution in extrapolating about “societal rules” based on the archaeological evidence, see, e. g., M. W. Risjord, “Models of Culture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science* (ed. H. Kincaid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 387–408; M. Palecek, “The Evolution of ‘Culture’: Juggling a Concept,” *Anthropological Theory* 20 (2020): 53–76.

the early Iron Age and late Iron Age, and between Iron Age Judahite populations and post-Iron Age Jews, the continuity of behaviors and their material manifestation are not simple.¹³⁰

Israel and Judah as a uniform culture

Israel and Judah are, in much work on the Iron Age, presumed to be closely related or even identical culturally. This is evident in the substantial amount of biblical and archaeological research in which the topics of study are defined as “Israelite” (Israelite History, Israelite Religion, and so on). The practice was dominant in past research and is still very common today. But the premise has recently been questioned from the perspective of both textual¹³¹ and archaeological¹³² evidence. While the two cultures are certainly very close and related, significant differences are evident. These diversities, in areas such as language, architecture, cult, social structure, economy, and diet, indicate that despite many affinities, the differences were substantial. They might best be likened to the cultural and political connections between the multiple Aramean entities in the Iron Age Levant. While clearly displaying close connections on many levels, they were independent and were not one cultural unit.¹³³

130 Similar caution regarding the identification of functions of specific architectural spaces as being related to menstruation has been noted for ancient Egypt as well. Thus, A. Koltsida, “Domestic Space and Gender Roles in Ancient Egyptian Village Households: A View from Amarna Workmen’s Village and Deir el-Medina,” in *Building Communities: House, Settlement and Society in the Aegean and Beyond. Proceedings of a Conference Held at Cardiff University, 17–21 April 2001* (ed. R. Westgate, N. R. E. Fisher, and J. Whitley; British School at Athens Studies 15; London: British School at Athens, 2007), 126–127, has questioned L. Meskell’s suggestion that the back rooms of the private houses at Deir el-Medina were used for the seclusion of menstruating women (L. Meskell, “An Archaeology of Social Relations in an Egyptian Village,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 5 [September 1998]: 238).

131 E. g., S. Gelander, *From Two Kingdoms to One Nation – Israel and Judah: Studies in Division and Unification* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 56; Leiden: Brill, 2011); Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible*; Schütte, “Wie wurde Juda israelitisiert?”

132 E. g., Maeir and Shai, “Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Kingdom”; Shai and Maeir, “Reassessing the Character of the Judahite Centralized Kingdom”; Niemann, “Judah and Jerusalem;” idem, *Das Jerusalemer Stadt*.

133 E. g., H. Niehr, “Strategies of Legitimation of the Aramaean Kings in Ancient Syria: Three Case Studies on Damascus, Hamath and Yādiya/Sam’al,” in *Tales of Royalty: Notions on Kingship in Visual and Textual Narration in the Ancient Near East* (ed. E. Wagner-Durand and J. Linke; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 165.

This complexity should be obvious, but some contemporary research ignores it. Faust,¹³⁴ while noting some differences between the material culture of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, explains them by means of what I argue is a simplistic ethnic differentiation. As with the issue of pig bones found at supposedly Israelite sites, he claims that the variation in the material culture between the two kingdoms are due to Canaanite ethnic components within specific sites and regions (in particular the northern valleys) within the borders of the Israelite monarchy, at sites such as Qiri, Rehov, Kinrot and others, rather than being indications of societal complexity and multiple identities.

It may well be that the situation was much more multifarious. Perhaps within the overall polity defined as the kingdom of Israel there were many group identities at play, identities that cannot be delineated by simplistic labels such as Israelite and Canaanite. There may well have been a broad range of classifications, with stratigraphies and overlapping identities of various kinds.

The archaeological evidence from Tel Rehov can be seen as an excellent example of this complexity and diversity.¹³⁵ Some of the material aspects at the site, such as diet, pottery, some of the cult, and inscriptions, are quite similar to what is found at a number of typical sites in the northern valleys of the Kingdom of Israel. On the other hand, some of the material assemblage, such as some of the architecture and use of honey in cult practices, is quite divergent from what is seen at other sites in the kingdom of Israel. It looks as if the population of Rehov cannot be pigeonholed as “purely” Israelite, or as “Canaanite” either. Rather, the material culture of the inhabitants of Iron Age Rehov indicates complex identity politics unfolding at this site, which was apparently a unique community (or communities) of practice and be-

134 E. g., A. Faust, “Ethnic Complexity in Northern Israel during the Iron Age II,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 132 (2000): 2–27; idem, “An All-Israelite Identity: Historical Reality or Biblical Myth?” in *The Wide Lens in Archaeology: Honoring Brian Hesse’s Contributions to Anthropological Archaeology* (ed. J. Lev-Tov, P. Wapnish, and A. Gilbert; Archaeobiology 2; Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2017), 169–190; idem, “Pigs in Space (and Time).”

135 E. g., A. Mazar, “Religious Practices and Cult Objects During the Iron Age IIA at Tel Rehov and Their Implications Regarding Religion in Northern Israel,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 4 (2015): 25–55; idem, “Discoveries from Tel Rehov: The Early Days of the Israelite Monarchy,” in *It is the Land of Honey: Discoveries from Tel Rehov, the Early Days of the Israelite Monarchy* (ed. I. Ziffer; Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2016), 9e–67e; idem, “Identity and Politics Relating to Tel Rehov in the 10th–9th Centuries BCE,” in *In Search for Aram and Israel: Politics, Culture, and Identity* (ed. O. Sergi, M. Oeming, and I. J. de-Hulster; Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 89–120.

longing. While it would be convenient to identify the occupants of the site as belonging to a single unambiguous identity, such as Israelite or Canaanite, they may very likely have belonged to other identity groups or communities, perhaps ones that were not ethnic in character.

Where do we go from here?

As I have shown, there are fundamental theoretical and methodological problems with much archaeological work touching on the origins, identity, definition, and characterization of Israel. There is no solid basis for positing a group called Israel which possessed a unique, distinct, and continuous culture and ethnic consciousness from the early Iron Age (concurrent with the appearance in the Merenptah Stele) through Iron IIA (parallel to its appearance in three extra-biblical inscriptions), and which according to biblical traditions extended from pre-monarchic through monarchic times.

Neither is there any certainty about what the term “Israel” refers to in the Merenptah inscription, save that it is a group in the southern Levant. While it is tempting to identify the settlements in the peripheral regions of the southern Levant during the early Iron Age as representing Israel, I have shown that there is no clear theoretical or methodological basis for doing so. I personally have no doubt that there was a group called Israel at the time, but where this group was located and what sites it settled is impossible to determine. Israel may name an ethnic group, but I have shown that material culture does not necessarily map onto identity, ethnic or otherwise. In short, there is no way of associating sites with early Iron Age remains in the southern Levant with the term Israel. There is no way of knowing whether they were also or instead associated with other groups from that time.

Similarly, there is no way of determining who comprises the larger group referred to as Israel in the Iron IIA inscriptions from the Kurkh Monolith, the Mesha Stele, and Tel Dan. Was it a combination of different groups that coalesced into a larger socio-political entity? And if so, where was the group located and what were its components? The term Israel can only be applied unambiguously to the Northern kingdom of Israel, and this does not provide us with significant details.

Another serious problem is that Israel is not mentioned in later Iron Age extra-biblical inscriptions, including those relating specifically to the kingdom that supposedly named itself as such. Something had clearly changed in how other groups and kingdoms understood the groups in the

southern Levant if the term “Israel” was not used when referring to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

None of this means that we simply lack adequate data to create a more robust picture of the early history, development, and metamorphosis of Israel throughout the Iron Age.

I suggest an alternative path. Instead of attempting to build grand narratives about “little Israel” and “big Israel” at the different stages of the Iron Age, based on shaky theoretical and data foundations, little textual evidence, and problematic interpretations of the archaeological evidence, I suggest the opposite trajectory. Instead of working from the top down, I suggest going from the bottom up.¹³⁶ Instead of looking for macro-groups of very tenuous identity, and from there building meta-narratives of the history of Israel and related groups, look at the micro-scale and try to identify small-scale groups in the archaeological record.¹³⁷

Can this be done? I believe so. While it is clear that material culture cannot map onto identity groups, more and more research shows that the study of practice, technological practice in particular, provides an important tool for differentiating between communities of practice, and through that, communities of meaning. As Jenkins has noted, “identity is produced and reproduced both in discourse – narrative, rhetoric and representation – and in the practical, often very material, consequences of identification.”¹³⁸ In other words, groups, or communities of practice, do exist, and at times may be archaeologically recognizable, but we must be aware of the complexities involved.

It is a methodological flaw to draw a direct link between material culture and identity. But any number of studies have shown the utility of studying communities of practice¹³⁹ and the unique technologies and *chaînes opératoires* (operational sequences) relating to them. It is a potent method for

136 E. g., Lucy, “Ethnic and Cultural Identities,” 109; K. R. Veeramah, “The Importance of Fine-Scale Studies for Integrating Paleogenomics and Archaeology,” *Current Opinion in Genetics and Development* 53 (2018): 83–89; Hakenbeck, “Genetics, Archaeology and the Far Right.”

137 Lehmann’s attempt to define kinship structure in the settlement pattern and family burials can be seen as a step in this direction. See, G. Lehmann, “Reconstructing the Social Landscape of Early Israel: Rural Marriage Alliances in the Central Hill Country,” *Tel Aviv* 31 (2004): 141–193; idem and O. Varoner, “Early Iron Age Tombs in Northern Israel Revisited,” *Tel Aviv* 45 (2018): 235–272.

138 Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 200–201.

139 E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); idem, R. McDermott, and W.M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

differentiating between groups. Its validity derives from the very specific motor skill traditions, typical of different groups, acquired in childhood, through shared learning and apprenticeship, which are cognitively retained throughout a lifetime, within the specific group in which these traditions were learned.¹⁴⁰ Close study of the technological practices/chaîne opératoire has the potential to delineate different groups and communities, based on their unique technological practices. For example, recent study of technological traditions in Iron Age Philistia highlight the complex and diverse origins and practices seen in the region.¹⁴¹ It should be stressed, however, that technological traditions are not simplistically transferred between groups; rather, when technological transfer occurs, the mechanisms of appropriation and change must be considered and taken into account.¹⁴²

- 140 For a selection of important studies on this, see: Gosselain, “Technology and Style”; idem, “Materializing Identities”; Degoy, “Technical Traditions and Cultural Identity”; Peelo, “Pottery-Making in Spanish California”; W. Wendrich (ed.), *Archaeology and Apprenticeship: Body Knowledge, Identity, and Communities of Practice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); K. P. Fazioli, “Rethinking Ethnicity in Early Medieval Archaeology”; C. Gokee and A. L. Logan, “Comparing Craft and Culinary Practice in Africa: Themes and Perspectives,” *African Archaeological Review* 31 (2014): 87–104; K. A. Antczak and M. C. Beaudry, “Assemblages of Practice. A Conceptual Framework for Exploring Human–Thing Relations in Archaeology,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 26 (2019): 87–110; D. Albero Santacreu *et al.*, “Communities of Practice and Potter’s Experience”; N. Abell, “Rethinking Household-Based Production at Ayia Irini, Kea: An Examination of Technology and Organization in a Bronze Age Community of Practice,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 124 (2020): 381–416; E. Derenne, V. Ard, and M. Besse, “Pottery Technology as a Revealer of Cultural and Symbolic Shifts: Funerary and Ritual Practices in the Sion ‘Petit-Chasseur’ Megalithic Necropolis (3100–1600 BC, Western Switzerland),” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 58 (2020): 101170; F. Fulminante and M. Unavane, “‘Community Practices’ and ‘Communities of Practice’ in Smelting Technology by XRF Analysis of Archaic Bronze Votive Figurines in Central Italy (6th–5th Centuries BC),” *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 31 (2020): 102266; R. Hensler, “Using Chaîne Opératoire and Communities of Practice to Identify Interaction in the Contact and Mission Periods in Southern Georgia, AD 1540–1715,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 39 (2020): 109–124; O. Harush *et al.*, “Social Signatures in Standardized Ceramic Production – A 3-D Approach to Ethnographic Data,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 60 (2020): 101208. For a related approach, see now C. Robin, “Archaeology of Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49 (2020): 373–390.
- 141 E.g., M. Meiri *et al.*, “Mobility and Trade in Mediterranean Antiquity: Evidence for an ‘Italian Connection’ in Mycenaean Greece Revealed by Ancient DNA of Livestock,” *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 23 (2018): 98–103; A. M. Maeir *et al.*, “Technological Insights on Philistine Culture: Perspectives from Tell es-Safi/Gath,” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 7 (2019): 76–118.
- 142 P. W. Stockhammer and J. Maran (ed.), *Appropriating Innovations: Entangled Knowledge in Eurasia, 5000–1500 BCE* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2017); J. Maran, “The Intro-

As a concept, communities of practice offer not only a way of defining groups by means of members having similar technological praxes and traditions, but also of pointing to archaeological definitions of communities of belonging.¹⁴³

I thus propose that a major focus of future studies of the various stages of Iron Age Israel and related cultures and groups, place a strong emphasis on the study of group-specific technological praxis. This includes analyses of a broad range of facets of societal technology, such as pottery production,¹⁴⁴ food preparation and consumption,¹⁴⁵ building methods,¹⁴⁶ metallurgy,¹⁴⁷

duction of the Horse-Drawn Light Chariot: Divergent Responses to a Technological Innovation in Societies between the Carpathian Basin and the East Mediterranean,” in *Objects, Ideas and Travelers: Contacts between the Balkans, the Aegean and Western Anatolia during the Bronze and Early Iron Age* (ed. J. Maran et al.; Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie aus dem Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte der Universität Heidelberg 350; Bonn: Verlag Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2020), 505–528.

- 143 E. g., Yuval-Davis, “Theorizing Identity”; J. Tomaney, “Region and Place II: Belonging,” *Progress in Human Geography* 39 (2015): 507–516; E. Youkhana, “A Conceptual Shift in Studies of Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” *Social Inclusion* 3 (2015): 10–24; T. Lähdesmäki et al., “Fluidity and Flexibility of ‘Belonging’: Uses of the Concept in Contemporary Research,” *Acta Sociologica* 59 (2016): 233–247; M. Antonsich, “Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework,” *Geography Compass* 4 (2019): 644–659.
- 144 E. g., Gosselain, “Materializing Identities”; V. Roux, “Ceramic Manufacture: The Chaîne Opératoire Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeological Ceramic Analysis* (ed. A. Hunt; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199681532.013.8; Roux, *Ceramics and Society*.
- 145 E. g., M. Jones, “Eating for Calories or for Company? Concluding Remarks on Consuming Passions,” in *Consuming Passions and Patterns of Consumption* (ed. P. Miracle and N. Milner; Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2002), 131–136; Gokee and Logan, “Comparing Craft and Culinary Practice in Africa”; S. Jones, “Eating Identity: An Exploration of Fijian Foodways in the Archaeological Past,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Archaeology* 39 (2015): 64–71; B. J. Mills, “Communities of Consumption: Cuisines as Constellated Networks of Situated Practice,” in *Knowledge in Motion : Constellations of Learning Across Time and Place* (ed. A. P. Roddick and A. B. Stahl; Amerind Series in Anthropology; Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 247–270.
- 146 E. g., G. R. H. Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine* (Handbuch der Orientalistik; Leiden: Brill, 1985).
- 147 E. g., A. Eliyahu-Behar, V. Workman, and A. Dagan, “Early Iron Production at Philistine Tell es-Safi/Gath Vs. Israelite Tel Megiddo,” in *Research on Israel and Aram: Autonomy, Independence and Related Issues. Proceedings of the First Annual RIAB Center Conference, Leipzig, June 2016* (ed. A. Berlejung and A. M. Maeir; Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 251–261; V. Workman et al., “Metalworking in the Lower City of Tell es-Safi/Gath: A Preliminary Study of an Iron IIA Iron and Bronze Workshop,” *Tel Aviv* 47 (2020): 208–236.

and coroplastic (figurine) production.¹⁴⁸ Instead of the current common mode of study of the material culture of early Israel and contemporaneous cultures, based on the presence or absence of types of objects – more or less as a trait list – I call for in-depth studies of the technological traditions and praxis by which such objects were produced.¹⁴⁹ Through such studies it may be possible to start noticing, and differentiating between, the fine web of *chaînes opératoires* that prevailed in different communities of practice in the Iron Age southern Levant, both in regions where the group Israel may have lived and in adjacent regions. It may be possible to define the evolution of such communities of practice throughout the stages of the Iron Age, and to discern how and when such communities expanded, contracted, coalesced, disappeared or changed.¹⁵⁰

A strong focus of archaeological research on Iron Age Israel should shift toward defining the communities of practice¹⁵¹ and belonging¹⁵² comprising the entity called Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. In light of Thomas Eriksen and Marek Jakoubek's suggestion that "The anthropology of ethnicity may thus be limited to studying people's *perceptions* of their own culture and their actions, instead of studying their culture,"¹⁵³ I think the closest we can get to peoples' perceptions, from an archaeological perspective (save if very specific kinds of texts are found), is how these perceptions are reflected in daily praxis – and in particular, in technological practice. For example, can subtle differences in pottery production or food preparations map different Iron Age communities in the Iron Age Levant? Such work will open a window, albeit a small one, showing how the communities that comprised Israel (and additional groups in the region) defined themselves and others.

148 E. g., D. Ben-Shlomo and E. Darby, "A Study of the Production of Iron Age Clay Figurines from Jerusalem," *Tel Aviv* 41 (2014): 180–204.

149 For an initial study in this direction, see Maeir, et al., "Technological Insights on Philistine Culture."

150 Porter (*Complex Communities*) has argued for the importance of focusing on the community level in the study of the Iron Age Levant. That said, his focus was still mainly based on various types of objects and architecture, with little emphasis on practice, and technological praxis in particular.

151 E. g., Wenger, *Communities of Practice*; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*; Wendrich, *Archaeology and Apprenticeship*; A. P. Roddick and A. B. Stahl, *Knowledge in Motion: Constellations of Learning Across Time and Place*, Amerind Series in Anthropology (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016); K. A. Spielmann, *Landscapes of Social Transformation in the Salinas Province and the Eastern Pueblo World* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017).

152 E. g., Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing Identity"; Tomaney, "Region and Place II"; Lähdesmäki, et al., "Fluidity and Flexibility of 'Belonging'"; Antonsich, "Searching for Belonging."

153 Eriksen and Jakoubek, "Introduction: Ethnic Groups, Boundaries and Beyond," 12.

It might intimate the concomitant imaginaries¹⁵⁴ of these communities at different stages of the Iron Age. It might also offer some sort of a glimpse into the fundamental underlying “biopsychosocial”¹⁵⁵ mechanisms of the peoples, groups, and even individuals, of the Iron Age southern Levant.

My hope is that such an approach will provide crucial insights into a topic that has been addressed extensively in the past, but so far has been unable to offer firm and rigorous conclusions.¹⁵⁶

Let us set aside grand narratives of large entities and instead concentrate on the lived lives of local communities of practice and belonging that comprised Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. To define what Israel was,

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- 154 E. g., C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (trans. K. Blamey; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); C. Strauss, “The Imaginary,” *Anthropological Theory* 6 (2006): 322–344; E. Stavrianopoulou (ed.), *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images*, Mnemosyne Supplements (Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature 363; Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- 155 E. g., F. Borrell-Carrió, A. L. Suchman, and R. M. Epstein, “The Biopsychosocial Model 25 Years Later: Principles, Practice, and Scientific Inquiry,” *Annals of Family Medicine* 2 (2004): 576–582.
- 156 One might add that cutting-edge bioarchaeological studies (e. g., ancient DNA, isotopic analyses, etc.) of the populations that may have comprised “Israel” during the various stages of the Iron Age, do have potential to contribute to understanding the origin, character and development of groups in the Iron Age Southern Levant. While bioarchaeology does not provide direct insights on identity per se, it can provide information on biological relatedness and origins, which, if used prudently, can shed light on the composition of populations and groups. However, a sophisticated and critical interpretive approach is needed when dealing with the interface between bioarchaeology and material culture, otherwise one wanders into a veritable interpretative minefield. See, e. g., M. Furholt, “Massive Migrations? The Impact of Recent aDNA Studies on Our View of Third Millennium Europe,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 21 (2018): 159–191; Veeramah, “The Importance of Fine-Scale Studies”; F. Curta, “Review of Giostra, C. (ed.). 2019. *Migrazioni, Clan, Culture: Archeologia, Genetica e Isotopi Stabili. III Incontro per l’Archeologia Barbarica. Milano, 18 Maggio 2018*. Mantova: SAP,” *Società Archeologia, Archaeologia Bulgarica* 24 (2020): 125–128; Hakenbeck, “Genetics, Archaeology and the Far Right”; S. Abel and H. Schroeder, “From Country Marks to DNA Markers: The Genomic Turn in the Reconstruction of African Identities,” *Current Anthropology* 61 (2020): doi: 10.1086/709550; R. J. Crellin and O. J. T. Harris, “Beyond Binaries. Interrogating Ancient DNA,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 27 (2020): 37–56; O. Gokcumen and M. Frachetti, “The Impact of Ancient Genome Studies in Archaeology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-74353>; J. K. Wagner *et al.*, “Fostering Responsible Research on Ancient DNA,” *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 107 (2020): 183–195; J. Maran, “Archaeological Cultures, Fabricated Ethnicities and DNA Research: ‘Minoans’ and ‘Mycenaeans’ as Case Examples,” in *Fs for a Colleague* (Ägypten und Altes Testament; Münster: Zaphon, 2021). Such analyses, at this point, are but a desideratum, due to lack of sufficient relevant finds. I hope that future finds – and analytic programs – will change this.

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and how it developed over time, we should focus on what people did, based on archaeologically observable evidence.

List of Figures

*Fig. 1: The Self-Referencing Circular Argument of Identifying Ethnic Groups in the Archaeological Record.*¹⁵⁷

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157 Based on Hakenbeck, "Roman or Barbarian?," 39, fig. 1.

