The volume under review is an important yet at the same time problematic and even disturbing book, one that, while all those who deal with the archaeology and history of the Iron Age Levant, as well as scholars of biblical studies (and related topics) should read closely, this should be done in a critical and careful manner. The book, which is based on Faust’s 1999 PhD dissertation written at Bar-Ilan University, is a partially updated version of the original Hebrew edition (Faust 2005). While many of the topics covered in this volume have appeared in the numerous articles that Faust has published over the years, the book represents an overarching theoretical framework that weaves together Faust’s various studies and ideas to present a comprehensive picture of his understanding of the Israelite society during the Iron Age II.

While without a doubt the book is extremely well-versed in the archaeology of the Iron Age Southern Levant and is chock-full of original and even ground-breaking ideas, at the same time there are several issues that make this volume quite problematic, even disturbing, which, as will be detailed below, include a lack of interface with substantial swaths of current biblical research (in particular European), and, while focusing on social-oriented interpretations of the archaeological remains, by and large does not relate to significant amounts of social theory of the last fifteen years or so. Noticeably, time and again the conclusions of the volume are consistently very conservative and simplistic in
character in the use and interpretation of the biblical text—so much so that an overlying tendenz is apparent.

Faust is without a doubt one of the first scholars who has attempted, in an ongoing and deliberate manner, to study the so-called “social archaeology” of Israelite (and Judahite) society. The scores of articles that he has published in the last seventeen years or so, along with his books on the formation of Israelite culture in the Iron I (Faust 2007b) and his most recent volume on the Persian Period (Faust 2012), clearly place him as one of the most prolific, original, if at times controversial, scholars of “biblical archaeology” of this generation.

Even if one does not agree with this or that part of Faust’s suggested interpretations, his seminal contribution to contemporary research through “pushing” a social-archaeology agenda in Levantine Iron Age archaeology is clear. The wide-ranging, multidisciplinary character of his approach adds an important facet to contemporary research, and anyone dealing with various related issues (archaeology, Bible, ancient Near Eastern studies, etc.) must deal with, and at times grapple with, his research.

Before I discuss and debate some of the issues raised in, and by, the volume, I wish to survey the contents of the book. Following an introduction (1–6) in which Faust sets the scene and explains the volume’s goals, the following chapters appear.

Chapter 1, “Historical Inquiry on Israelite Society: Summary of Previous Research” (7–27), is a survey of earlier “historical” (as opposed to “archaeological”) research on Israelite society. As will be noted below, quite a few studies, particularly, but not only, in languages other than Hebrew and English, are not included in this survey.

Chapter 2, “History of Archaeological Study on Israelite Society” (28–38), is once again a survey of previous research, but of archaeological studies on Israelite society. Faust critically discusses earlier research, including what he terms “General Studies,” those that deal with “Economic Specialization,” “Socioeconomic Stratification,” the “Analysis of Residential Houses and Family Structure,” “Detailed Analyses of Specific Settlements,” and the archaeological remains “Between the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.” In summary, Faust points out that, while there have been some studies on wider or narrower aspects of the social archaeology of Iron Age Israel, much was not covered in these studies.

In chapter 3, “Between Monarchy and Kinship: Urban Society” (39–127), Faust provides a fact-filled discussion of the archaeological evidence for urban planning and social structure in Israelite cities. Starting with the evidence from the northern, Israelite region,
he then describes the relevant finds from the kingdom of Judah, first in the eighth century B.C.E., then from the seventh century B.C.E. These materials are then discussed and the phenomenon of the various public architectural features is evaluated, in an attempt to assess the amount of “state involvement” at these sites and character of local community organization. Particular emphasis is placed on the pillared buildings, city gate, and general urban planning. Faust then goes on to discuss the possible implications of material culture for such issues as family structure in the urban environments, basic socioeconomic units, urban social organization and the social mechanisms that influenced society, and differences between the urban character of Israel and Judah.

Chapter 4, “Community and Family: Rural Society” (128–77), is a detailed study of the archaeological evidence of the rural components of Israelite society, which Faust (128) justifiably stresses represents the majority of the population. Following a discussion of the definition of a village, he examines the rural sites according to several defined types (small villages/hamlets [most of which he places in the northern kingdom; villages near fortresses]; large villages; farms [most of which appear in the southern kingdom in the later Iron Age]). Interpreting this data, he highlights several conclusions, such as the different family structure seen at rural sites (in comparison to urban sites), the “communal” character of many of the villages, the evidence for social hierarchy in some of the larger villages, and, finally, the apparent differences in the rural settlement types between the kingdom of Israel and Judah.

In chapter 5, “Fortified Structures in the Countryside: Between the Military and the Administration” (178–89), Faust discusses the phenomenon of fortified sites/structures in the Israelite countryside. He rightfully separates between “real” fortresses that clearly served military functions (such as Arad and Hurvat Uza) and “fortified structures” that have been identified at many sites for which there is less consensus as to their function. Opting for a combination of several views, he suggests that these sites served as fortified royal estates.

Chapter 6 (“Political Organization in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah,” 190–212) is an important part of this book, as Fausts attempts to discern and define the archaeological evidence of the existence and development of state-level institutions in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Following a review of theoretical discussions on the nature of a state, he endeavors to demonstrate that many of the defining characteristics of statehood did exist in the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms, at least from the eighth century B.C.E., such as social stratification and settlement hierarchy.

Chapter 7 (“The Four-Room House and Israelite Society,” 213–29) discusses what Faust believes to be one of the more important and telling facets of Israelite society, the so-
called four-room house. As already expressed in various articles, Faust strongly believes that this type of house essentially appears only in Israelite sites (with rare exceptions) and can be seen as embodying fundamental aspects of the Israelite ideology and mindset, therefore serving as a clear identifier of Israelite ethnicity. In addition, he argues that this commonly used plan mirrors an egalitarian ethos of the Israelites and also may reflect ritual purity laws of menstruating women, as reflected in the biblical text.

In chapter 8, “Pots and Peoples: Ethnic Groups in the Kingdom of Israel” (230–54), Faust touches on one of the most problematic yet central facets of archaeological research, the material culture correlates for the identification of ethnic groups. Following a discussion of the pros and cons of attempting to identify ethnicity in the archaeological record and the methodologies and problems of this field of research, Faust attempts to utilize these approaches in the analysis of the archaeological evidence from Iron II Israel/Judah. Focusing first on three sites in the “northern valleys” (Tel Qiri, Tel Amal, Tel Hadar) Faust identifies architectural and other characteristics that he believes designate these sites as non-Israelite sites. He then compares the characteristics of these sites to Iron Age Hazor, where he suggests that several distinct ethnic groups lived side by side but that were much harder to identify. He thus suggests that the study of rural society can be useful for the identification of various ethnic groups in Iron Age Israel.

In chapter 9 (“From Hamlets to Monarchy: Israelite Society from the Settlement Period to the End of the Period of the Monarchy,” 255–68), undoubtedly the most ambitious chapter in this volume, Faust summarizes his views on the historical and social processes through which Israelite society transformed during the Iron Age II into a complex, stratified society. Building on his research on Israelite society in the Iron Age I (e.g., Faust 2006), he relies on the interpretations presented in the earlier chapters of the book to assemble a composite vision of Israelite society in the Iron Age II. Several points are stressed in this chapter. To start with, Faust believes that a clear process of urbanization can be seen in the archaeological record from the tenth century B.C.E. onwards corresponding first with the rise of the united monarchy—and which is manifested by a process of abandonment of rural settlements in the highlands at this time. He suggests that in later stages of the Iron Age (particularly the eighth–seventh centuries B.C.E.), an ongoing process of urbanization can be seen, first evidenced in the lowland and coastal regions, later in the highlands. He sees the processes of urbanization and the evidence of social stratification as being more extensive in the lowland areas, perhaps due to the more heterogeneous populations in these regions. He concludes that by the end of the Iron Age both Israel and Judah can be defined as full-fledged states, though, in general, the kingdom of Israel was more developed (politically, economically, and otherwise) than the kingdom of Judah. Faust claims that, while processes of social change can be seen in the urban environments, this is much less the case in the rural environment in Israel and
Judah. Finally, he stresses his belief that Israelite society, both in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, was homogeneous and had a clear “ethnic consciousness”—as opposed to other ethnic groups in the Iron Age Levant.

The volume concludes with a short epilogue (269–73) in which Faust briefly summarizes what he sees as the main points raised in the volume and its contribution to contemporary research, as well as attempting to point out future directions and pathways that can be developed.

As noted above, this book is packed with detailed discussions on a wide range of issues relating to Israel and Judah during the Iron Age II. The author’s broad, and for the most part comprehensive, knowledge of the relevant archaeological remains from the Iron Age southern Levant, along with his wide-ranging attempts to view them through social-archaeological lenses, is to be commended. Many original and, in some cases, groundbreaking ideas are presented in this volume, which often stimulate a rethinking of current assessments of various topics.

This having been said, the book does have some serious drawbacks that require the reader to carefully and critically assess the theoretical background of some of the discussions—and the methodology of some of the analyses. As a result, this raises questions and problems regarding some of Faust’s basic interpretations and conclusions. While, as noted above, I strongly believe that scholars dealing with the archaeology of the Iron Age Levant, biblical studies, and related topics should be cognizant of this volume and the topics that it deals with, they should be aware of the book’s various theoretical, methodological, and interpretive weaknesses. If these are taken into account, many of the innovative research directions that are broached in this study can be expanded upon and dealt with, using more vigorous and up-to-date theoretical and methodological paradigms.

In the following paragraphs I will therefore point out what I believe to be some of the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological weaknesses in the volume, suggest how they affect the interpretive frameworks suggested by Faust, and focus on several specific problems and difficulties regarding several specific issues.

Faust has attempted both in this volume and in other studies to deal with a broad range of topics, touching on a wide gamut of archaeological, textual, and social-theory issues, and it is precisely in the extraordinary breadth and scope of research objectives that some of the weaknesses can be seen: the enormous range of topics that are brought together in his ambitious interpretive frameworks seems to have caused him to gloss over many details, or miss them altogether, in a quest for all-encompassing theoretical, conceptual, and
methodological conclusions. It can hardly be expected for someone to be an expert on such a broad range of topics.

While Faust clearly stands out among archaeologists of the Iron Age Levant for his extensive use of social theory in archaeology, and without a doubt he touches upon various facets of the interface between archaeology and social and economic anthropological perspectives, the manner in which social theory is utilized in his work is often based on models that are outdated and somewhat disconnected from many of the current trends in contemporary social theory. By and large, his “dialogue” with social theory misses much of what has been written in the last two decades, and most of the anthropologically oriented archaeological theory that serves as the platform for his studies dates to no later than the mid-to-late 1990s (see, e.g., Bintliff and Pearce 2011; Hodder 2012).

Surveying his research, a strong tendency toward a mixture of structural, symbolic, and positivist anthropological models can be seen, as well as a leaning toward formalist economic theories. While these approaches are valid, there is very little, if at all, reference, grappling, and “negotiation” with sundry contemporary social-theory perspectives, such as the wide gamut of poststructural, postmodern, and postprocessual theory (e.g., Hitchcock 2008). While this might be explained as being due to a conceptual divide with these approaches on his part, nevertheless he cannot ignore these views when they are so central in contemporary discussions on many of the topics on which he touches. For example, any current discussion of the definition of ethnic groups in ancient societies should relate, even if only to disagree, to ethnicity/identity-related perspectives emanating from “postcolonial” theory, such as the concepts of “entanglement,” “transculturalism,” “hybridization processes,” “creolization,” and “materiality.”

I could not escape the feeling that comparative social situations have been “cherry picked” from the anthropological literature without sufficiently taking into account the theoretical underpinnings of these comparisons and/or the appropriateness of the suggested model for the specific Iron Age Israelite material culture that it attempts to interpret. As pointed out by Ulf (2006) and Olyan (2012), among others, a noncritical application of analogies from the ethnographic record and anthropological theory to the study of ancient societies can result in interpretations that are skewed toward the cultural practices of the present—to the exclusion of unfamiliar behaviors in the past.

A closely related problem is that, while the book has an extensive bibliography—with hundreds upon hundreds of references—this list only includes studies in Hebrew and English (save for about ten items in other languages). Thus, by and large, in many of the
topics that Faust deals with (see examples below) he has missed important scholarly discussions in other languages (in some cases, in English as well).

This is so for some of the (mainly European) literature on the archaeology of the Levantine Iron Age but also true regarding archaeology theory in non-English European languages, which in the past few decades is much more oriented toward anthropological archaeology (e.g., Gramsch 2011).

Perhaps even more problematic is Faust’s lack of familiarity with broad swaths of biblical research (and in particular, since his discussions time and again interface with the biblical text), as he does not incorporate German and French biblical scholarship (save for some cases when such studies are translated). This is surely the case for purely textual issues (and, needless to say, the relevant research is voluminous), since any attempt to relate the archaeological remains and their interpretation to specific biblical texts must take into account current, up-to-date research on the dating and compositional history of these texts. An example of this can be seen in his use of various biblical texts to illustrate that the city gate in Israelite cities was a place where “the wretched and oppressed gathered” (103–4). A close analysis (dating, context, genre, etc.) of the biblical passages that he quotes (from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Amos, Job, and Proverbs) would raise questions as to the relevance of some of these passages for explicating the social situation in preexilic Israel. But even more disturbingly, this lack of reference to substantial scholarship is also seen regarding studies that deal specifically with social-science perspectives on the Hebrew Bible and Israeli society—including those that deal directly with the archaeological finds (see examples below).

Faust stresses (xiii–xiv, 1–2) that, opposed to most studies in the past that have combined the archaeological, textual, and biblical data in the study of ancient Israel, his objective is first to study the archaeological remains from a socioarchaeological viewpoint and reach conclusions based on this, only then to see how this matches (or does not) the textual data. While this is a valid and even commendable approach, throughout the volume the analytic conclusions that he reaches, based on supposedly “objective” analyses of the archaeological remains, fit in with a very conservative and at times literal understanding of the biblical text. This is problematic for several reasons. To start with the very perspective of the supposed “objectivity” of the archaeological remains and their understanding is wrought with problems (see, e.g., Johnson 2011), and many of Faust’s conclusions, which then fit in with a literal reading of the biblical text, can be contested from an archaeological point of view. In addition, a century and a half of biblical research cannot be brushed aside—even if a suggested archaeological interpretation raises questions about it. Clearly, a more in-depth dialogue between the interpretation of the archaeological remains and the modern, scientific interpretation of the biblical text is
required. Bluntly put, even if a sack full of Philistine foreskins were found in an early Iron Age Judahite site, this does not prove that the story of David occurred as described in the book of Samuel or that all the stories in this book are true!

To a certain extent, Faust, as many before him with a wide variety of outlooks, has manipulated an understanding of the archaeological remains to fit a specific interpretation of the biblical text and by doing so has created yet another “imagined past.” Just as Robert Carroll has cautioned about the use of social theory in the textual analysis of the biblical text, similar restraints should be exercised regarding the reading of very specific, definitive, and at times narrow social-theory interpretations into the archaeological remains of early Israel:

The reading of biblical texts from a sociological vantage point is not as simple or as straightforward as is often imagined to be the case. The Bible is like a dark glass in which we see our own reflections more often than the social reality which produced the text. (Carroll 1989, 220; quoted by Sneed 2008, 293)

In what remains of this review, and in order to concretize the general comments noted above, I will list selected points from various parts of the volume that I believe are in need of reassessment and/or are missing important facets:

In chapter 1, in which Faust surveys previous historical research that dealt with Israelite society, quite a few studies that have covered these and related topics are missing. A wide range of discussions covering a much broader range of aspects of Israelite society and theoretical and methodological approaches beyond those mentioned in the survey are missing. In fact, just about every topic relating to ancient Israel society that Faust discusses in the volume (e.g., economy, urban and rural lifestyles, family and household, political organization, ethnicity, gender, social stratification, socioeconomic ethos) has been dealt with, often extensively, by various scholars, the list of which is too long to be enumerated here.

Chapter 2, which deals with archaeologically oriented studies of the society in ancient Israel displays a much broader interface with previous studies and by and large deals with many of the relevant previous research, save for, as noted above, studies in languages other than English and Hebrew and here and there some relevant studies in English.

The rural component of ancient Israel is a major focus of Faust’s discussion (see various discussions in chs. 4–9). Not only does he attempt to define the characteristics of the rural sector, but he also compares this to the urban sector. While Faust suggests delineating a distinct difference between the urban and rural sectors of Israelite society, such a clear-cut
division between these two sectors is hardly clear. As noted by many scholars, for both ancient Israel (e.g., Brody 2011; Houston 2010) and various other cultures (e.g., Cutting 2006a; 2006b; Dohm 1990; Kamp 2000; Lehner 2010; Nevett 2005), such a well-defined division between these two sectors is not always the case. Thus, much of what is defined by Faust as “urban” in Iron Age Israel might very well be, more than anything else, within the “rural portions” of the so-called “urban-rural continuum” of society, and his suggested differences between the urban and rural might be skewed.

Related to this is the distinction that Faust suggests between rural and urban houses (e.g., 159–63). He suggests that houses in the rural sector are larger and were inhabited by an extended family unit; those in the urban settlements in Iron Age Israel and Judah are much smaller and were the abodes of a nuclear family. While this is a possible interpretation of the different houses sizes, time and again it has been demonstrated that house size does not necessarily correlate with family size (e.g., Cutting 2006a; 2006b; Dohm 1990; Kamp 2000). In fact, in dynamic socioeconomic situations family units of similar sizes and classes can live in houses very different sizes, so Faust’s largely static classifications of family types vis-à-vis house types is too rigid.

Faust’s suggestion that the large rural houses are the abodes of extended families is also something that should not be taken for granted, since cross-cultural studies demonstrate that very often extended families live in more complex buildings with more than one primary living area (e.g. Cutting 2006a). Thus, the possibility exists that each of these houses was the abode of a nuclear family, and the extended family lived in clusters of such structures; this could in theory be true both in rural and “urban” contexts, not merely in the rural sector.

It should be mentioned in this regard that caution is warranted regarding the very suggestion that specific types of families (nuclear or extended) lived in specific types of houses (small or large). As noted repeatedly in the past in numerous cultural contexts, different types of family units can live in similar houses, and different types of houses can be used by similar family units. In fact, the very attempt to equate “family” and “household” is not without problems (see, e.g., Hendon 2004).

This questionable association of house-type with kinship arrangement severely undermines confidence in Faust’s understanding of the ideological underpinnings of the so-called four-room house (ch. 7). Even more troubling is Faust’s premise that this is a building type that can almost without exceptions be identified as “Israelite.” Faust (217–19) attempts to “explain away” the presence of this building type in historically non-Israelite sites and regions by stating that the examples noted are either not full-fledged four-room houses or that the regions noted (particularly in Transjordan) might actually
have been Israelite. This is problematic, both due to the fact that even at Israelite/Judahite sites there are many variations of this type of house, and, no less important, too many examples of this structure type has been reported from clearly non-Israelite/Judahite sites to enable a simplistic connection between this house and Israelite/Judahite culture. Examples from Iron Age Philistia (Qasile—Mazar 2009 [noted by Faust]; Tel Sera—Oren 1993, 1332 [not noted]), on the one hand, and the ever-expanding number of examples from various parts of Transjordan, on the other (e.g., Herr and Clark 2009; Routledge 2000; Swinnen 2009), support those who question this connection.

Faust’s suggestion that the ideological underpinning of the four-room house is to be connected with the biblical purity laws regarding menstruating women is a highly questionable interpretive leap. As already expressed in previous studies (e.g., Bunimovitz and Faust 2003; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003), he suggests that the spatial syntax of the Israelite house would enable a menstruating woman to be in a room that would not have to be entered by other people. This suggestion is both imaginative and highly problematic. To start with (as noted by Bunimovitz and Faust 2003, 415 n. 1; see Meyers 2009, 36 n. 1), the purity laws in the Priestly source are dated by most scholars to post-Iron Age times. Moreover, any discussion of issues relating to gender, corporeality, sexuality, and ritual purity in ancient Israel should include at least some reference to the extensive literature dealing with these topics. More important, it could be argued that in order to separate ritually pure from impure house members, the plan of the four-room house is hardly ideal. The fact that all the rooms were visible from the central courtyard/room would mean that privacy, segregation, and limiting the visibility of menstruating women would be quite difficult (as noted by Avissar 2010). In fact, other house plans, in which an interior room is completely isolated from other rooms, such as in the typical house plan of New Kingdom Deir el-Medina (e.g., Meskell 1998) or the Philistine “linear access” house (recently defined by Aja 2009), are examples of spatial plans that would be more appropriate for such views of purity and/or gender-related segregation (if, in fact, these did exist). Once again, reference to other studies of the Israelite concept of space (e.g., George 2009) or the “Israelite mind” (e.g., Carasik 2006) would have been relevant here as well. It should also be noted that the “access analysis” perspective that is utilized by Faust in the study of the four-room house is based on the seminal work of Hillier and Hanson (1984); this said, more sophisticated implementations of such analyses, including aspects of “visibility” (e.g., Fisher 2009; Harvey 2010; Paliou et al. 2011; Osborne 2012) and “phenomonology” (e.g., Sandars 1990; Barrett 1994; Hitchcock 2000; Letesson and Vansteenhuyse 2006), might have improved and even altered the understanding of the function and ideology the four-room house.
Furthermore, in chapter 9 Faust presents an interpretation he has discussed in previous studies (e.g., Faust 2007a; for his continuing debate with various scholars on this issue, see the volume under review, 256–57 n. 2) in which he suggests that a pattern of abandonment of rural sites can be seen in the highlands in the transition between the Iron I and Iron II. He believes that this is an indication of the rise of the Israelite “united monarchy” in the tenth century B.C.E., in which urban sites were populated, perhaps through coercive measures, by the officials of the newly formed Israelite state. Without getting into the details of the debate on this issue between Faust and various scholars, it should be noted that the distinct pattern that Faust notes (of sudden abandonment at the end of the Iron I and lack of rural settlements throughout most of the Iron IIA; see graph 22 on p. 257) is hardly that clear—and may actually be the result of a faulty sample and analysis of data. The dating and length-of-use of many of the sites that Faust includes in this may be far less uniform than represented in his table. A number of the “settlement” sites that he places in the early Iron I may actually be dated to the thirteenth century B.C.E. (such as the initial stages of the Mount Ebal site [Hawkins 2012, 66–71]). In addition, some of these sites may have had very short lifespans, as opposed to those with a longer use-history. Finally, the debate over the dating of the material culture of the Iron I/I transition and the possibility that this phase extended well into the tenth century and that there were regional variations in the material manifestations and the dating of the transition complicates Faust’s picture of a uniform phenomenon. Even if one were to accept Faust’s proposal of a process of abandonment of rural sites (not all scholars do), it may well have been a long, drawn-out, and continuous demographic sequence in which some sites were abandoned while others were settled during a long time span (for similar situations, see, e.g., Cameron and Tomka 1993; Nelson and Hegmon 2001)—and certainly not necessarily directly related to the centralized planning of the incipient Israelite state.

A central theme in this volume that underpins Faust’s perceptions of house forms, purity practices, and rural depopulation (as well as being prominent in other studies by him) is his attempt to archaeologically identify Israelite ethnicity (and to neatly distinguish Israelites from other ethnic/cultural groups in the Iron Age Levant). I believe he has chosen all-too-simplistic criteria for defining ethnicity, which has long been a contentious and complex issue in archaeological theory. Basing his conceptions of ethnicity on studies by such scholars as Barth (1969), Emberling (1997), and Jones (1997), he neglects to recognize the contextual basis of expressions of ethnic identity, the range of variations of expression within a self-identified group, and, above all, the internal (emic) understandings of identity and their relation to highly variable modes of self-presentation, in contrast to an external (etic) view in which the group is seen as a homogeneous unit by an outside observer. As a result, Faust’s endeavors to archaeologically define the Israelite “ethnicity”
are ultimately very essentialist—contingent on his opinion of the absence/presence of a limited set of material correlates, such as the four-room house and its significance (see above), abstinence from pig eating, specific pottery traditions, and mortuary customs. Contemporary approaches to the study of ethnicity (and perhaps better defined as “identity” [Melucci 1995; Mac Sweeney 2009; 2011]) stress that a much more nuanced, multivocal, fluid, and “entangled” approach is required (e.g., Smith 1992; 2008; Malkin 2001; Hall 2002; Anfinset 2003; Burmeister and Müller-Scheeßel 2006; Rieckhoff and Sommer 2007; Yoffee 2007; Chun 2009; Derks and Roymans 2009; Hales and Hodos 2009; Eriksen 2010; Gruen 2010; Hitchcock 2011; Ross 2012; Stockhammer 2012)—even if this makes interpretation of the archaeological remains less straightforward. Thus, for example, Faust’s (2011) recent attempt to define Philistine ethnicity has been shown to be overly simplistic (Maeir et al. 2013). Similar attempts toward the study of ethnicity from a complex perspective based on biblical texts are now also emerging, as shown, for example, by Miller (2008) and Nestor (2010).

Indeed, the particular material culture markers that Faust uses to define the Israelite ethnicity are not as distinctive as he may suggest. As noted above, the four-room house appears in several “cultural” zones. Another oft-quoted marker, the presence/absence of pig, is no less culturally diverse. As pointed out by Hübner (1986; Sapir-Hen et al. 2013), while there may be pig absence at Judahite sites, this does not seem to be the case for northern, Israelite sites. Further, as recently noted regarding the Philistines (Maeir et al. 2013), the supposed clear-cut division of presence/absence of pigs between Philistines and Judahite sites is much more complex than often presented, as pig consumption is not the norm at all Philistine sites. Likewise, while Faust’s suggestion (246–48) that the lack of decorated and imported pottery might reflect a uniquely Israelite cultural mode, and might thus be seen as an ethnic identifier, other explanations (such as market choices) might be just as relevant.

Faust’s suggestion (here [103–7, 262–68] and in other studies) that the archaeological evidence from Iron Age Judah and Israel indicates an ethos of simplicity distinctive to Israelite society is highly problematic. His suggestion that the lack of substantial evidence of overt wealth, decorated pottery, extensive amounts of imported pottery, and monumental inscriptions represents a purposeful choice of the members of Israelite society, as a conscious exercise of an ethos of simplicity and righteousness, is certainly not necessitated—or even implied—by the archaeological evidence. Other interpretations of the archaeological evidence are possible. For example, the impressive public architecture in Israel and Judah (fortifications at many sites, palaces [Samaria, Jezreel, Jerusalem, Ramat Rahel, etc.], temples [at least in Jerusalem, but perhaps elsewhere, e.g., Motza, Kh. Qieyafa, Lachish, Arad, Tel Sheva, as well], and some of the monumental tombs in Jerusalem) can hardly be seen as expressing an ethos of simplicity (e.g., Trigger 1990...
[quoted by Faust on other issues]; Letesson and Vansteenhuyse 2006). In addition, while Faust suggests that the lack of imports is due to a purposeful avoidance or boycott of foreign products, this may well be due to their relative expense and to the relatively peripheral economic circumstances of the Judahite and, during large parts of the Iron Age, even the Israelite kingdoms.

A core ideological component of Faust’s argument for the existence of an advanced social ethos on the part of the Israelites is a special sensitivity to the needs of the poor within the community. He asserts that one of main functions of the city gate (103–4) was as a place where the poorest classes congregated and society cared for them. However, Na’aman (2008, 278–79) has already shown quite convincingly that there is no archaeological evidence to support this claim.

That is not to say that there is no evidence for an ethos of justice and righteousness in ancient Israel (105–7), though perhaps not quite as all-encompassing as Faust may suggest. He evinces the testimony of a late Iron Age bowl from Beth Shemesh with the chiseled inscription ‘ḥk (💐 applaud = your brother), which Barkay (1991) suggested had a charity-related meaning. Surprisingly, however, he does not mention other evidence that might more realistically contextualize Judahite social concern. These include the Mesad Hashavyahu letter (e.g., Ahitude 2008, 156–63), which clearly has social connotations (although this letter is mentioned in another context on p. 188), and the new Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription, which according to at least some of the readings (e.g., Misgav et al. 2009; Galil 2009; Puech 2010; but see Rollston 2011) has direct relevance for understanding social justice in ancient Israel. This should have been mentioned even if Faust does not accept these readings (see now Becking and Sanders 2011; Achenbach 2012; note that he does accept the Judahite affiliation of the site [262 n. 13]).

Faust believes that this ethos of simplicity can be seen clearly in the biblical text as well (e.g., 105–7; see above comments on his use of the various biblical texts that he relates to this topic). Though this is a strictly textual-hermeneutic-theological issue, not an archaeological one, the identification of a simplistic/egalitarian ethos in Israeliite society in the biblical text has been challenged by various scholars (e.g., Pleins 2001; Lemos 2010). To this one can add that the myriad scholarly discussions on the topic of the ethics and ethos of wealth and poverty in Old Testament is not reflected in Faust’s discussion. Likewise, interface with various studies that have dealt with how Israeliite law and ethics reflect rural and urban realities would have been relevant as well (see, e.g., Crüsemann 1986; Otto 1993a; 1993b).

There are several other topics that are barely touched, if at all, in this volume, and that could contribute substantially to our understanding of the fabric of Israeliite and Judahite
society. This includes discussion on the role of cult and cult personalities in Israelite society, a topic that has been dealt with by various scholars (e.g., Grabbe 1995; Olyan 2000). For example, reference to the apparent tension that existed between the traditional, local cultic personalities (such as the priests and Levites) and the burgeoning state-organized bureaucracy in late Iron Age Judah most likely had important societal ramifications (e.g., Na’aman 2008; Maeir 2010; Cook 2012).

Another topic that I believe should have been developed further is the relationship between the royal courts and the elites. Recent discussions of these complex relationships, in particular in the context of feasting and commensal politics, may very well have played a pivotal role in the fabric of Israelite and Judahite society during the Iron Age (see, e.g., Klingbeil 2006; Niemann 2008; Altmann 2011; Porter 2011; Meyers 2012; Nam 2012), and now, with the apparent evidence of feasting at the Judahite palace at Ramat Rachel (Lipschits et al. 2011, 14). For example, Faust believes that the various rural fortresses seen in late Iron Age Judah should be identified as royal estates (186) and not as private estates. If, however, the rural (and urban) elites played a more dominant social and economic role and they regularly “negotiated” with the ruling factions, whether through commensal politics or various patronage systems, these structures could perhaps be seen as relating to these elite elements. Hints to the very complex structures and tiers of taxing and tribute that may have existed in the late Iron Age Judah, most probably reflecting much more than simply a state-organized revenue system, can be seen in the now-expanding evidence of state-wide and region-specific administrative systems, whether well-known (as the lmlk and rosette stamps; for a recent summary, see Lipschits et al. 2011) or less-circulated classes that have recently been noted (e.g., Maeir 2010; Barkay 2011; Shai et al. 2012). A case in point for the need for a cautionary approach in attempts to categorize the function of the various structures that have been identified as rural fortresses is the very dating of these structures. Of the twelve sites listed by Faust (183–84), he notes that several are identified as Iron Age forts due to the similarity of their plans to other Iron Age forts but do not have Iron Age finds. So much so, even the “fort” at Khirbet er-Rasm, which was excavated by Faust himself (Faust and Ehrlich 2011) and produced only a handful of Iron Age remains (as opposed to primarily Hellenistic period finds), is nevertheless still classified by Faust (184) as a royal Judahite Iron Age fortress. A similar situation has recently been brought to light by A. Mazar at the site of Khirbet ‘Eres, located near Ma’aleh Hakhamisha, to the west of Jerusalem. Surface explorations of the site indicated the existence of an Iron Age fortress, supposedly part of a chain of fortresses surrounding late Iron Age Judah Jerusalem (Mazar 1982, 107). Recent excavations, though, have revealed that this fortress dates to the Persian and early Hellenistic period (A. Mazar, pers. comm.).
Faust ends his concluding chapter 9 (267–68) by asserting that the worldview and ethos of Israelite and Judahite society, as evidenced in the archaeological record, indicates that the affinity between these kingdoms “was real and was not invented by the biblical authors.” While this is a prime example of the circular reasoning of using a biblical passage to explain a complex of archaeological phenomena and then using the interpreted archaeological finds as proof of the text’s historicity, there is, without a doubt, much similarity between the cultures of Israel and Judah. However, as Faust himself points out throughout the volume, there are significant differences as well, even though he explains these away as being due to the more developed social and economic structure of the Israelite kingdom up to its conquest in the late eighth century.

However, the many differences between these two kingdoms cannot be dismissed quite so easily. Whether one accepts the historicity of a united kingdom as the initial stage of the development of the monarchy in Israel and Judah or not, during the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. many material and cultural indicators seem to indicate that, though closely related, these two kingdoms and cultures were also quite different (e.g., Finkelstein 1999; Gelander 2011; Fleming 2012). For example, very different concepts of kingship (e.g., Alt 1951; Wallis 1976; Fleming 2012, 25–27) and of city planning and fortifications are seen in the two kingdoms (see, e.g., Herzog 1997, passim; Garfinkel et al. 2010, 45–46). Likewise, differences in language (distinct northern and southern dialects; e.g., Rendsburg 1990; 2002; Garr 2004; Aḥituv 2008, 5), iconography (e.g., Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 277), and religious practice (e.g., Köcker 2010), not to mention different founding figures (“Beit David” versus “Beit Omri” as the founding dynastic figures in Assyrian and Aramaean royal inscriptions; “Judah” versus “House of Joseph/Ephraim” as eponymous fathers in the biblical text), all indicate major differences. Even the custom of abstinence from pork, which Faust (245–46) insists is an attribute of all Israelite and Judahite sites (and the presence of pig bones on a site is for him a clear criterion for the identification of a site as non-Israelite), may indicate the differences between the two cultures. As noted above, pig seems to have been consumed at numerous Israelite sites. Thus, while these two kingdoms/cultures should be viewed as closely related entities, it is only in the later Iron Age, with the collapse of the northern kingdom, that these two identities were, at least semantically, “combined” (Na’aman 2010; Fleming 2012; Schütte 2012). If so, many of the “worldviews” portrayed in the biblical text may in fact be that of the Judahites (or in some cases, post–Iron Age Judean culture)—much less reflecting that of a very similar northern kingdom (even if the northern origin of some parts of the preexilic biblical texts is accepted; e.g., Fleming 2012, 39–176). Perhaps it is more reasonable to suggest that the two kingdoms/cultures should be related to in a similar manner to the differences between the various Iron Age Aramaic kingdoms and cultures of Syria (Fleming 2012, 220–35).
In summary, this is a very important book in that it attempts to assess, in a concentrated manner, the archaeological correlates of Israelite/Judahite society in the Iron Age and to see how they relate to the biblical narratives’ portrayals of this society. While Faust incorporates most of the relevant archaeological evidence from the Iron Age Levant, the lack of a full-fledged interface with up-to-date social theory and its application in biblical studies and in general an insufficient familiarity with biblical studies weakens the validity of many of the analyses, arguments, and conclusions of this study. I hope that the important archaeological research themes that Faust has addressed in this volume will in the future be expanded and developed—in close conjunction with modern social theory and biblical studies—both by Faust himself and by other scholars as well. It is then, I believe, that truly groundbreaking understandings of the social structure of ancient Israel will emerge.

References Cited


