The first article by Israel Finkelstein I had the pleasure of reading was *The Iron Age “Fortresses” of the Negev* (Finkelstein 1984). As a young student I was impressed by such a well-articulated paper and during the following year I enrolled in all courses taught by Professor Finkelstein. Since then I have been fortunate to have him as my mentor while writing papers submitted in the course of undergraduate (B.A.) and graduate studies (M.A. and Ph.D.). Before becoming the chief architect of the current chronological debate, Finkelstein was already motivating students like myself to investigate socioeconomic processes utilizing an anthropological approach. His skillful scholarship, his integrity, and his love of Israel remain sources of inspiration.

**Introduction**

Caprine (sheep and goats) have predominated livestock herds in most sites in the Levant from the time of their domestication until premodern times (Sasson 1998: 3–51; Buitenhuis 1990: 198–199; O’Connor 2000: 151). The aim of this paper is to reassess economic strategies practiced in Bronze and Iron Age sites as revealed by zooarchaeological finds of sheep and goats. Animal bones are, in most cases, the second most common find in archaeological sites. Relative frequency of species and their mortality profile reflect the economy of ancient sites and, furthermore, point to the subsistence strategy of their inhabitants (Hesse 2003; Crabtree 1990).

Many scholars have discussed the economy of the Bronze and Iron Ages in the southern Levant. It is frequently argued by archaeologists and zooarchaeologists that caprine and their products were traded as part of the prevalent market economy of the Bronze and Iron Ages...
Aharon Sasson

(Wapnish and Hesse 1991: 34; Dever 1992: 89; Holladay 1995: 392; Hesse and Wapnish 2001: 253–258; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 115–118). This implies that sheep and goats were bred for self-consumption and as market-oriented products. Grigson, for instance, in her review of the early economy, proclaims that “the extent to which animals are used for the direct subsistence of the communities which own them or as segments of exchange systems with other communities, particularly urban ones, is likely to be of increasing relevance within the context of the proto-urban and early urban societies that characterize the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age periods” (Grigson 1995: 248).

Fall et al. in their discussion of the economy of two Bronze Age sites in the Jordan Valley state that “several clear trends of enhanced production of marketable commodities (especially olive oil, bread wheat, and sheep wool) suggest that the farmers of Tell el-Hayyat increasingly adapted their crop cultivation and animal management to meet the demands of emerging mercantile exchange and consumption in Middle Bronze Age towns and cities” (Fall et al. 1998: 120).

Herzog advocated the idea that when farmers produced more than they consumed, creating surplus, they directed it to the improvement of standards of life (i.e. prosperity): “It would be more realistic to assume that such farmers, when blessed with plentiful harvests, would like to improve their own standard of living and therefore invest in more comfortable housing, better working tools, new clothing, rare prestige items or simply consume more food” (Herzog 1997: 9).

The subject of surplus in ancient economies should be elucidated. Surplus need not necessarily be associated with market economy, trade, or wealth. The immediate goal of an ordinary household for accumulating stock could have been providing security and coping with environmental fluctuations and other unexpected hazards (Ingold 1980: 134; Halstead 1993: 63–64). In other words, surplus of animals and animal products was produced not necessarily as a commodity designated for “export” to the market or for gaining wealth. Sometimes the surplus was banked and at other times it was exchanged to maintain the limited demands of the domestic group. Polanyi referred to non-profit exchange meaning that people did not make a living from profit derived from buying and selling; namely “risk-free trading” or “nonmarket trade” (Polanyi 1957a: 19; see also 1957b: 250–255).

A different point of view of the ancient economy, based on the zoo-archaeological record, will consequently be presented. The term economic strategy rather than merely economy will be applied to describe