PRIESTHOOD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULT IN THE BOOKS OF KINGS

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1. The Early History: Places of Worship and Priests in the Time Before the United Monarchy

Knowledge about the development of the priesthood and cult in the 2nd millennium BCE is essential background for understanding priesthood in the books of Kings.¹ In the Late Bronze city states of Hazor, Lachish, Shechem, Megiddo, Succoth (Tell Deir ‘Alla), Gath-Carmel (Tell Abū Hawâm) and Beth-shean the existence of sanctuaries has been archaeologically verified.² Besides these city sanctuaries, during the Late Bronze Age, there also were minor sanctuaries in Tell Mūsā³ as well as a regional place of pilgrimage in Tell Mubārak,⁴ which was situated in a sparsely populated swampy area. During the early Iron Age the tradition of the Late Bronze city temples was maintained only in the Philistine cities,⁵ while the shape of the shrines in the hill country experienced extensive change.

For the Late Bronze Age it can be assumed that at least one priest performed cultic duties in every city state. The sheer magnitude of Late Bronze temple installations necessitated staff for the care. At Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim (Stratum VIIB), for example, the area of the temple, its affiliated annex, and courtyard covered was just under

¹ I thank Dr. Ulrike Schorn for the translation of this paper from German to English.
³ The existence of sanctuaries in smaller places is characteristic for the Middle Bronze Age; regarding the history of cult, Tell Mūsā therefore has to be assigned to the Middle Bronze Age.
⁵ Cf. Zwickel, Tempelkult, 204–239.
0.25 ha., almost 5% of the city area! Priestly duties required special knowledge of sacrifice, oracles, etc. Further, the priest approached proximity to gods which required sanctification. Texts from Ugarit furnish insight into the cultic life of a Late Bronze city-state: The term *khn(m)* – mostly used in the plural form – is found almost exclusively in administrative texts and lists.6 The high priest (*rb khnnm*) is mentioned in the colophon7 and in the rubric of other texts8 as well as in engravings on cultic axes.9 The priesthood of Ugarit was organized in a “professional organization” (*dr khnnm*), obviously presided over by the high priest. This priestly organization consisted of 25–30 people, but one has to take into consideration the existence of several temples in “metropolitan” Ugarit. However, for the average temple in the cities of Palestine one will have to postulate just a single priest.10 Finally we have to refer to Jerusalem, which had been a Canaanite city-state with Late Bronze tradition until its capture by David. According to 2 Sam 8:17, two priests were active during David’s reign. One of these probably performed his duties at the traditional city sanctuary of Jerusalem, while the other took care of the tent of Yahweh in the Kidron valley.11 When, during the reign of Solomon, there was left only one temple, the newly erected temple, in Jerusalem, accordingly there was only one priest (2 Kgs 1:26f., 35).

With the radical changes around 1200 BCE, most of the city-states declined, and along with them the city sanctuaries. In many cases regional cultic sanctuaries now took their place, whether as open shrines (hebr. *bāmâ*) or as smaller temples.

The archaeological evidence at Shechem is characteristic. While LB Shechem had a Migdal-temple, which continued into the 12th c. BCE,12 the area was used for silos during the Iron Age. Later on, a granary was built there. Obviously, the central area of the city was used

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7 KTU 1.6 VI 56.
8 KTU 2.4:1.
9 KTU 6.6:1; 6.7:1; 6.8:1; 6.9:1; 6.10:1.
12 Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult*, 83–85.