There has not yet been an individual study of officialdom in the Book of Kings, nor has officialdom been discussed in relation to society using evidence derived from the Book of Kings. Where officialdom has been examined it is primarily in studies devoted to the identification of functions implied in specific officials’ titles. The purpose of such studies, often conducted with the help of materials from Near Eastern countries, is to clarify the origins of the Israelite administration. In
this study I will inquire into the spheres of social life in which these officials were involved to gain insight into their impact on Israelite society. Consequently, this discussion does not begin with a clarification of the significance of particular officials’ functions but rather, using the results of previous studies on the identification of officials’ functions, I trace the domains, such as the economy and religion, etc., in which the officials were involved; insofar as the data on officials’ activities in the Book of Kings is available. I discuss only the officials’ responsibilities about which there are details because they cast light on their role in society much more than information of officials mentioned only by their title.

It should be emphasized that the main point of interest of this study lies in the biblical reflection and depiction of the officials’ responsibilities in the Book of Kings, scarce as the data may be, and not in the historical reconstruction. The main reason for this limitation is the distance that separates the biblical accounts from the historical reality, although the historicity of some data cannot be excluded. However, the framework of this article does not allow the historical appreciation of the material in the Book of Kings although some external sources, such as epigraphy2 and archaeology, that I reference shed light on its historicity. Therefore I am aware of the fact that I am dealing for the most part rather with the vision of the topic under question by the Deuteronomistic historian.3

Since the Kingdom of Israel and Judah formed two different socio-political organisms, after a discussion of the United Monarchy, I will examine the officials’ activities in both parts of the Kingdom separately.

For the officials’ titles attested in epigraphic sources and some new ones, which do not appear in the Bible see Y. Avishur and M. Heltzer, Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Centre Publication, 2000). For officials’ titles on West Semitic seals and bullae see N. Avigad revised and completed by B. Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, The Israel Exploration Society, The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997).

2 As for the epigraphic material, only items with provenience are considered.

3 I am following N. Na’aman and others in dating the Deuteronomistic history to the 7th century BCE, N. Na’am an, The Past that Shapes the Present. The Creation of Biblical Historiography in the Late First Temple Period and After the Downfall (Yeriot 3; Jerusalem: Hess, 2002) (Hebrew) 55–60 with the literature therein.