MKR IN 2 KINGS XII 5-17 AND DEUTERONOMY XVIII 8

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2 Kings xii 5-17 relates how temple repairs were carried out during the reign of Joash. Several possible sources of funds for this work are mentioned in vss 5-6, 8-9, and 17, and vss 10-16 report how the necessary funds were collected and distributed to those who did the repair work. The various possible sources of money can be broadly divided into two classes in terms of the narrative: money which was actually used for temple repairs and money which was not given for repair work. In regard to the latter money, this article seeks to clarify the exact nature of the term makkār in xii 6, 8.

I

Previous scholarship has generally understood makkār with reference to a particular individual. In some instances the term has been derived from the verb nkr “to be familiar, to recognize”. Accordingly, in the context of 2 Kings xii, makkār was thought to indicate a personal “acquaintance”, either a client or a friend (or both), of an officiating priest.¹

This derivation from nkr has been viewed as suspect by many,² who instead derive makkār from mkr “to sell”.³ These interpreters

¹ So BDB and most English translations (Revised Standard Version, New American Bible, Jerusalem Bible). The New English Bible is unusual in that it renders makkār as the priest’s “own funds” rather than as an individual known to the priest. This is an attractive rendering, but it lacks specificity as to the funds’ origin.


³ Cf. C. F. Burney, Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings (Oxford, 1903), p. 314, who notes the problematic nature of the derivation but does not offer an
continue to view the noun form with reference to a person. They propose a translation indicating a "merchant" or "trader" of some kind, either a "temple-teller" or a "business assessor". Support for such a derivation has been sought in Assyrian and in Ugaritic texts. Gray cites UT 82, 83, and 113 (= CTA 76, 79, 71), the last of which appears to list a group designated as mkrm alongside khnm (priests) and qdsm. He concludes that the Hebrew word makkār is a "vocational word" indicating a "Temple official of minor grade" whose primary responsibility as "business assessor" was "to fix the cost of sacrificial animals and offerings ... at their market value".

Gray and others have correctly identified the derivation of makkār from mkr. By continuing to view the noun with reference to a person or class of minor temple officials, however, they have failed to see the proper nuance of the word in the context of 2 Kings xii. Several arguments count against their specific identification.

First of all, it must be objected that this group of business assessors or temple-tellers is otherwise unknown in biblical texts. Although it is a minor objection from silence, we should be cautious about positing a whole group of officials only on the basis of practices outside Israel. Reference to the "money-changers" in Matt. xxi 12 might provide some substantiating support for a class of minor temple officials, but only in an anachronistic sense.

Secondly, one must wonder whether there was any need for such a whole class of officials. Would not the priests themselves be in the best position to determine the fair market value of any sacrifices brought to them? Of the many texts regarding sacrificial procedures, not one mentions a non-priestly assessor. Lev. xxvii, which treats the subject of desanctification of sancta, always assigns the task of assessment to the priests.

alternative. See the recent caution against assuming a derivation from mkr by Victor Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice in the Ancient Near East: 2 Kings 12: 5-17 and a Letter to Esarhaddon (LAS 277)", JNES 45 (1986), p. 289, n. 2.

4 Montgomery, p. 429.


6 Cf. the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary under makkāru ("trader"), mākiru ("trader"), and mākāru ("to do business").

7 P. 586; cf. Montgomery, p. 432, for further references.