By the Rivers of Babylon:
The Near Eastern Background and Influence on the Power
Structures Ancient Israel and Judah

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ABSTRACT:

Due to the way in which the history of Israel is presented in the Hebrew Bible, it is easily forgotten that the people of Israel and Judah did not exist in a vacuum. This paper offers a broad history of the power structures of ancient Israel and Judah, namely the monarchy and the priesthood, providing the ancient Near Eastern background and influence on the development of these institutions. Significantly more time is spent on the discussion and history of the priesthood, due to the fact that the efforts of the priesthood around the time of the Exile and after, fundamentally reformulated Israelite society, replacing the king with the high priest and the priesthood as the administrators of Israelite society.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AJSL</td>
<td><em>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</em></td>
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<td>ANET</td>
<td><em>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</em></td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td><em>The Biblical Archaeologist</em></td>
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<td>BAR</td>
<td><em>Biblical Archaeology Review</em></td>
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<td>BASOR</td>
<td><em>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</em></td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td><em>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</em></td>
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<td>DN</td>
<td>Divine name</td>
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<td>JAOS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the American Oriental Society</em></td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td><em>Journal of Biblical Literature</em></td>
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<td>JNES</td>
<td><em>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</em></td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td><em>The Journal of Theological Studies</em></td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
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<td>Or</td>
<td><em>Orientalia</em></td>
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<td>PN</td>
<td>Place name</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td><em>Vetus Testamentum</em></td>
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<td>ZAW</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
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Due to the way in which the history of Israel is presented in the Hebrew Bible, it is often forgotten that the people of Israel and Judah did not exist in a vacuum. Their contemporary cultures occupy a place in the background of the narrative of the Hebrew Bible and only surface when it serves the theological purpose of the editor of the section of the Hebrew Bible in question. The truth of the matter is vastly different. The ancient Israelite and Judean societies mixed, mingled and conflicted with each other, with the many minor kingdoms of the Levant and, more significantly, with the major imperial powers of the ancient Near East: Assyria, Babylon, and finally Persia.

This paper offers a broad history of the power structures of ancient Israel and Judah. This is essentially limited to the monarchy and the priesthood as these two institutions were the major governing forces of ancient Israel and Judah. The monarchy was only able to emerge at a time when the major imperial powers were temporarily declining. The vicissitudes of Assyrian and Babylonian hegemony coincide with the major episodes of Israelite and Judean history. This includes the rise of the monarchy, the rebellion of Hoshea and the fall of the kingdom of Israel, the reforms of Hezekiah, the emergence of the kingdom of Judah on the international stage, the reforms of Josiah and eventually, the fall of Judah.

Between the two, significantly more time is spent on the discussion and history of the priesthood. This is due to the fact that the efforts of the priesthood around the time of the Exile and especially after, reformulated Israelite society. The pinnacle of their efforts was the invention of the position of “high priest,” thereby replacing the king with a priest.
This was motivated by centuries of imperial domination, but specifically the Babylonian Exile and the commission of the Persians to return to Judah. Cyrus the Great allowed the Judeans to return, even funding their efforts to rebuild the temple and Judean society. It was Persian imperial policy to allow subject peoples to practice their local religion freely, though still under the authority of imperial Persia.

In presenting a history of ancient Israelite power structures, it may seem natural to start with king David, or even Saul. This paper will begin the discussion of the monarchy with king Hezekiah and the fall of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. This is due in part to the nature of the history contained in the Hebrew Bible. It is not history as we think of it today but rather a theological reconstruction of the Israel’s past. Rainer Albertz states that Israelite religion, “maintained the priority of the historical experience of God,” emphasizing the historical over the cultic.\(^1\) In the effort to compose a narrative of the “historical experience of God,” the Israelite and Judean scribes embellished and invented events of their past. This was a common method of propaganda in the ancient Near East.\(^2\) In this light, I have found it best to begin the discussion of the monarchy at the reign of the Judean king Hezekiah. It is during his reign, and after, that much of the history of ancient Israel as we know it was composed, especially the notion of the united kingdom of Israel and the kingship of David.

The paper is organized thematically and as such, it does not always move in a chronological direction. The reigns and reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah will be discussed first, establishing the conditions for the creation of elements of Israelite history.

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\(^2\) Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 413
following section, moving backwards chronologically, will be a more in depth discussion of the “united monarchy.” Finally, the history and nature of ancient Israelite priesthood will be discussed in the last section. Throughout each section the context of the monarchy and the priesthood will be established, providing parallels to the ancient Near Eastern world of ancient Israel and demonstrating areas of influence.
1. Monarchy (725 – 587 BCE)

The metanarrative of the history of the monarchy of Israel began to be compiled and composed during the reign of Hezekiah of Judah. The political goals for which this action was undertaken were the same goals that led to centralization of the religion and worship of Yahweh by Hezekiah at some point after 722 BCE. The primary impetus for this action was the influx of immigrants following the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian king Sargon II in 722 BCE. The newly diversified and increased population of the Judahite kingdom following the destruction of Israel necessitated a political strategy to unify the heterogeneous population. Hezekiah found a means in the centralization of the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem and supported this measure through an appeal to utopian past which he and his scribes greatly constructed. The scribal activity that took place during the reign of Hezekiah laid the foundations for what would later become the Deuteronomistic school. All of this is traditionally viewed through a theological lens which is natural given the way it is presented in the Hebrew Bible. When the events of the last twenty years of the eighth century are viewed in their proper context a different picture emerges. The actions of Hezekiah are adept and strategic. The religious reforms seem to have been a natural option in an attempt to control his population and have a Neo-Babylonian parallel. The scribal construction under Hezekiah was also a political strategy capitalizing on the wave of Neo-Classicalism that was occurring in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE in Mesopotamia and Egypt.
1.1 Prelude to Reform

From 734-731 BCE the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BCE) campaigning in the Levant and along the Mediterranean coast, even into Egypt. On his return to Assyrian in 732 BCE, Tiglath-Pileser III conquered the kingdom of Damascus which, at that point controlled the “Galilee and all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria” (2 Kings 15:29b), territory that had previously been controlled by Israel. Tiglath-Pileser III’s successor, Shalmaneser V (726-722 BCE), left no known inscriptions. The only record of his reign comes from a mention in the Babylonian Chronicle stating simply, “On 27th Tebet Shalmaneser (V) ascended the throne in Assyria and Babylonia. He shattered Samaria.” Though it is not completely clear what this is in reference to, 2 Kings 17:3-6 tells of king Hoshea of Israel (730-722 BCE), who had previously paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III as a vassal, ceased these payments to Shalmaneser and attempted to form an alliance with “So king of Egypt.” Shalmaneser responded by imprisoning Hoshea and laying “siege to [Israel] for three years.” Shalmaneser’s abbreviated reign and the civil strife that occurred at the accession of his successor, Sargon II, led the Israelites again to rebel as part of a coalition that included Hanunu, king of Gaza, Re’e, the commander-in-chief of Egypt, and Yau-bi’di, the Hamathite who, “caused Arpad, Simirra, Damascus and Samaria to rebel.” It was under Sargon II, in 722 BCE, that the kingdom of Israel was ceased to exist, the land was incorporated into the Assyrian Empire as the province of Samerina. And, as was typically the case with Assyrian conquests, the Israelites were deported and the land was resettled

3 COS 1:467
4 COS 2:296
by Assyrians as well as captives from other regions of the Assyrian Empire.\textsuperscript{5} Some of the Israelites stayed in Samerina but many fled to Judah, the ramifications of which will be discussed below.

Judah was spared from this Assyrian domination for two reasons. First, there was nothing in Judah that could be gained by the Assyrians in conquering them. William Schniedewind, addressing the ceramic evidence for Judah’s lack of production, notes that, “the uniformity of the earlier pottery indicates the isolation of Judah until the eighth century BCE,”\textsuperscript{6} demonstrating the lack of any economic interests for the Assyrians at that time. Second, king Ahaz of Judah (743-728 BCE) took diplomatic measures in order to ensure the survival of his minor kingdom. Early in his reign, Northern groups were encroaching on his territory (see 2 Kings 15:37; 16:5-6), the same groups who were rebelling against Assyria. For this reason, and to keep from being conquered by the Assyrians, Ahaz swore fealty and paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III thus establishing the kingdom of Judah as a vassal of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7).

This very brief background to the reign of Hezekiah (727-699 BCE), son of Ahaz, provides important context for the religious reforms undertaken by him during the latter part of his reign. Judah’s vassal status in the Assyrian Empire enabled the displaced Israelites to immigrate south into Judah. This immigration was the primary stimulus for Hezekiah’s reforms.

\textsuperscript{5} Miller and Hayes, \textit{A History of Ancient Israel and Judah}, 388-389.
1.2 Immigration of the Israelites

The numbers of deportees and émigrés is difficult to ascertain. True, Sargon II lists the number of Israelites that he deported as 200,150 people, though that number is without a doubt hyperbolic.\(^7\) It is also difficult to tell with certainty the number of deportees given that the Assyrians replaced the deported with a certain number of foreign peoples. Because of this population replacement, archaeological information on population from the immediately after 722 BCE is to be used with caution. That being said, according to Finkelstein and Silberman, the population of Jerusalem ballooned from roughly 1,000 to around 12,000. Which, as they note, “made it a significant urban population by the standards of the ancient Near East.”\(^8\) The territory of Judah expanded as well. The number of settlements in the southern hill country increasing from approximately 30 at the beginning of the eighth century BCE to over 120 at the end of the century and the Shephelah grew from twenty-one settlements to 276.\(^9\)

The effects of this population explosion are numerous. In the city of Jerusalem a new and enormous wall was built to defend the settlement of its inhabitants which had now expanded onto the Western Hill. Remnants of this “broad wall” were discovered by Nahman Avigad during the 1969 and 1970 seasons of his excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.\(^10\) Hezekiah also commissioned the rerouting of the Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley, creating a tunnel that led to the water into the newly constructed Siloam Pool. This tunnel was discovered in 1838 by archaeologist Edward Robinson, but

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\(^7\) *ANET* 287-288
\(^8\) Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 129.
it was not until 1880 that the inscription on the wall inside the tunnel was discovered, detailing how, “the quarrymen hewed (the rock), each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir.”\textsuperscript{11} The tunnel and the pool brought the water of the Gihon spring, the source of life for the city of Jerusalem, to the western slope of the City of David. This made it significantly easier for the new population to access the waters of the Gihon, while staying protected, as the water system was within the recently constructed walls. A new administrative center, Ramat Rahel, was constructed two miles south of Jerusalem. It is possible that these constructions served to accommodate the new population in the facilitation of their livelihood but also as a relief work type program.

The Israelite population infusion is evident outside of Jerusalem as well. Prior to the fall of Israel the southern kingdom of Judah was little more than a minor, outlying kingdom. It had no industrial production, no international trade, and was primarily an agriculturist society. The kingdom of Israel, on the other hand, had been involved in international commerce for two centuries. Israelite society was vastly more cosmopolitan and wealthy. The economic experience that the Israelites brought to Judah resulted in an economic expansion previously unseen in the history of Judah. The eighth century saw the advent of an olive oil industry in Judah. Excavations have found olive oil pressing complexes in Tell Beit Mirsim and Beth-Shemesh.\textsuperscript{12} Judah also participated in the Arabian spice trade. The eighth century saw the “construction of fortresses and storehouses in the Beer-Sheba Valley [which were] undoubtedly connected with the

\textsuperscript{11} ANET, 321.
\textsuperscript{12} Finkelstein and Silberman, David and Solomon, 131.
Arabian spice trade, now conducted under Assyrian auspices.” Both of these ventures were part of an expanded international commerce that was made possible by the massive population increase and the vassal status of Judah which enabled trade with Assyria.

This marked increase in the diversity of Judahite society was not without its problems. The Israelites who were now settling in the various regions of Judah came with their own ideas and traditions, however similar they may have been to those of Judah. In the Document Hypothesis, broadly speaking, the text of the Israelite traditions is labeled E (standing for Elohim, the name often used for the name of God in their stories) and the text of the Judahite traditions in labeled J (for Jehovah, that is, Yahweh). It was during the reign of Hezekiah, when the Israelites came en masse to Judah, bringing with them their own myths and histories, that the two texts were fused together. Though not exactly what we have today, the new document, JE, became the foundation of the books of Genesis and Exodus. Richard Elliott Friedman notes that, “The uniting of the two works reflected the uniting…of the two communities” into the heterogeneous state of Judah at the end of the eighth century BCE. This fusion was part of the efforts of Hezekiah for unification and consolidation of power after 722 BCE which will be discussed more fully below.

The Israelites’ and Judahites’ many similarities allowed them to be bonded together in a relatively short period of time. They shared a common tongue, Hebrew, allowing integration to begin immediately upon arrival of the émigrés. Though it can be difficult to tell for sure due to the complex nature of the Hebrew Bible as we have it now, it also seems that both Israel and Judah shared a belief in Yahweh as chief god. An eighth

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century inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud in Northeast Sinai testifies to the worship of Yahweh in both Israel (yhw smrn = Yahweh of Samaria) and more southern (yhw htmn = Yahweh of Teman).

Theologically, this inscription demonstrates the nature of religion in Judah at this point was, if not polytheistic, poly-Yahwistic. The references to Yahweh in the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription are of the DN of PN (Divine Name of Place Name) variety. This is not exactly polytheism as the god mentioned is Yahweh in both cases. Instead it is a poly-Yahwism, described by P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. as, “the local form, or manifestation, of Yahweh as he was worshipped” in the place in the latter part of the reference.

McCarter sees it as a primitive form of polytheism with parallels in Assyria and examples in the Hebrew Bible. Assyrian kings were known to appeal to gods in their vassal treaties. Assurbanipal calls upon both the Ishtar of Nineveh and the Ishtar of Arbela, not as separate gods but the local manifestations of Ishtar. A biblical example occurs in 2 Samuel 15:7-8 when Absalom asks permission to return to Hebron from Jerusalem since he made a vow to “Yahweh in Hebron (בברון).” McCarter proposes that the preposition ב to be read as “of” rather than “in.” This interpretation allows the reading to fall in line with the poly-Yahwism behind Hezekiah’s reforms and also explains why Absalom’s entreaty to go to Hebron would make sense and be granted.

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15 COS 2.47A and 2.47B:171-172.
1.3 Religious Reforms

The circumstances of Hezekiah’s reign—the demographic changes to Judah, its emergence on the international political stage, and the unrest in the Assyrian Empire—required that he deal with them creatively. Hezekiah addressed the problem of the diversification and multiplication of his population through several measures which were intended to unify the divergent groups. Included in his solution was the building projects discussed above, serving as employment projects as well as improving the living situation of the population of Jerusalem. These projects would also serve as preparations for Hezekiah’s rebellion against his Assyrian overlords.

Foremost of the projects of Hezekiah, especially from the theological perspective of the compilers of the Hebrew Bible, were his religious reforms, centered around the centralization of the cult of Yahweh at Jerusalem. This centralization included the removal of the *bamot* (תִּמְרוֹת), cult sites, that were extant throughout the Judean countryside and in its cities.\(^\text{18}\) According to Iain Provan, this is the primary concern of the Deuteronomists working at the time of Hezekiah.\(^\text{19}\) In order to fully understand the implications of this reform, we must discuss the role of temples in the ancient Near East.

In the ancient Near East, the temple was not merely a religious center. Temples were usually connected to or closely associated with the palace complex and thus the monarchy. Karel van der Toorn avers, “The biblical evidence intimates that the scribes behind the Hebrew Bible were attached to the temple as an institutional and intellectual

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though there was less separation between temple and palace than is usually assumed. The temple acted as much more than a religious center. It was the “central, organizing, unifying institution in ancient Near Eastern society” and was a, “bond holding the community together, a source of wealth and goods, a center of law and a focal point for all communal activities.” The temple was the location of public gatherings and religious festivals, naturally unifying events. By eradicating the temples and cult places throughout Judah and by targeting the Bethel shrine, Hezekiah forced the entire population of Judah, “to come to Jerusalem several times a year and thus to strengthen the unity of the nation.” By targeting the Bethel shrine, he further consolidated his population around the Jerusalem temple by destroying one of the Israelites main shrines. This action kept the Northerners from making pilgrimage to their old shrine.

In an attempt to capitalize of the cultural and ethnic similarities of the Israelites and the Judahites, Hezekiah destroyed the Néhushtan, “the bronze serpent that Moses had made,” coalescing the two groups around their worship of Yahweh and attempting to distinguish themselves from the ‘Canaanite’ groups around them. Anson Rainey agrees that this attempt at constructing a ‘pan-Yahwism’ was “to attract northerners to

20 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 82.
23 Some also believe that the Bethel cult was administered by priests claiming descent from Aaron. It is then possible that Hezekiah’s polemic against Bethel was also an attempt at minimizing the Aaronite priests. See Kennett, “The Origins of Aaronite Priesthood,” 166ff.
24 2 Kings 18:4.
25 The Israelites and Judahites were themselves Canaanites.
Jerusalem’s cause.” Nehushtan was possibly an icon of Jebusite origin which remained after David conquered the city and left Zadok, the local priest, in charge of the sanctuary. Similar actions were undertaken by Josiah during his religious reforms. He attempted to root out ‘foreign’ elements from the Yahwist cult. Albertz describes his reform as, “a broad national, social and religious renewal movement which sought to use the historical opportunity offered by the withdrawal of Assyria to reconstitute the Israelite state fully.” Josiah, like Hezekiah before, used religious reform to instigate propagate social cohesion when the political climate presented him with the opportunity for heightened autonomy.

Archaeology has been able to corroborate the dismantling of several of the shrines attested to in the Hebrew Bible. Some of the evidence has not been thoroughly convincing leading some scholars to reject the historicity of the Hezekiah’s reforms. The fortress at Arad in the Beer-Sheba Valley contained an open-air sanctuary to Yahweh. Excavations at this site have shown that the sanctuary was carefully dismantled at the end of the eighth century BCE. Finkelstein and Silberman report that in the process of closing the shrine, the “small altars used for burning incense within the sanctuary were laid on

29 Fried sees no archaeological evidence for the reforms and claims, “Neither the reforms of Josiah nor those of Hezekiah against the bamot should be considered historical,” 465. Included in this skepticism that the archaeological record cannot support the works of Hezekiah as presented in the Hebrew Bible are those who reject the Siloam Tunnel as a project of Hezekiah (see Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book, 72; Davies, “Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?” BA 59 (1996): 138-149.
their sides and carefully buried in the place where the sanctuary once stood.” At Beer-Sheba itself, excavators found the remains of a large four-horned altar in secondary use in the walls of storehouses and within the earthen ramparts of the city. Lastly, at Lachish, the cultic center was disassembled, buried, and then a courtyard was built overtop of the burial site. For the most part, this evidence supports the biblical picture of Hezekiah’s reforms.

It is clear that Hezekiah’s attempts at unification had gained traction by 712 BCE because it was at this point that he began his rebellion against his Assyrian superiors. In that year he took part in military actions with Ashdod against Sargon II. This military foray was unsuccessful and Hezekiah was forced into paying tribute again. Upon Sargon II’s death, the succession of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) was contested. This intrigue gave Hezekiah the opportunity to organize another rebellion along with other minor kingdoms of the region. In light of these military actions, the reforms of Hezekiah can also be seen as preparations for revolt against the Assyrians.

Moshe Weinfeld finds parallels with Hezekiah’s reforms in the actions of the Babylonian king Nabonidus (555-539 BCE) prior to the invasion of the Persians under Cyrus the Great (559-529 BCE). Prior to the invasion of Babylon Nabonidus transferred the gods of the outlying areas into the city of Babylon. Weinfeld claims, “Nabonidus was well aware of the fact that by doing so he will have made these cities religiously dependent upon the capital and thus bring the people to closer political identification with the ruling

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30 Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 139.
31 Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 139-140.
city and thereby strengthen their determination to defend it.”

A further point of comparison in the actions of these two kings can be found in the reaction to their cult centralization. Both were accused of sacrilege. It is obvious from the dates of the two monarchs that there is no direct influence in either direction. What these two parallel episodes demonstrate is the awareness of the political powers of how such a centralization of cult would effect the population of their respective states and how it could be used to the benefit of the defense of that state.

2.4 Promulgation of Reform

That the reforms of Hezekiah succeeded was in part due to the role played by the prophets as propagandists for the royal court. It was during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE that prophecy as a function of the royal court emerged. Whether or not the prophets were acting as propaganda in vivo, their writings were compiled by Judahite scribes following the destruction of Israel by Sargon II. Prophetic oracles were originally written anonymously and kept in the temple. In the ancient Near East prophecies were generally collected by date and topic. In contrast, the Hebrew Bible organizes the prophetic literature as if it were written by a single person, suggesting that the

34 Weinfeld, “Cult Centralization in Israel in the Light of a Neo-Babylonian Analogy,” 206; Hezekiah’s criticism comes in 2 Kings 18, from the mouth of Rabshakeh.
35 ABD, “Prophecy (Preexilic Hebrew),” 486; Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, 285. Here he is speaking of Mesopotamian messianic prophecies. They are widely viewed as scribal productions created after the fact in order to legitimize the king. The principle is obviously applicable here as well.
36 Rainer Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, 151; Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book, 84.
37 Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book, 64.
compilation was done by “followers and sympathizers.” These sympathizers may well have been the king as van der Toorn relates, “In Assyria, the scribes made a selection of those oracles in favor of the king and arranged them by theme and date of delivery.” So the propagandistic use of the prophets was likely in their selection process of the oracles and their narrative presentation. Schniedewind corroborates this use of the prophetic literature stating, “[Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Hosea] were preserved only if they served the interests of the royal library.”

Central to Hezekiah’s efforts at unification was his invention of the united monarchies of David and Solomon. The particular details of the invention of the united monarchy will be discussed in greater length below. For now we will be focusing on the wave of Neo-Classicalism that was passing through Mesopotamia and Egypt region during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE which facilitated this construction of Israel and Judah’s utopian past.

In Egypt, Pharaoh Shabaka (716–695 BCE) of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty is said to have “discovered a stone with text copied from an ancient papyrus manuscript.” This text harkened back to theological and cosmological ideals of an ostensibly forgotten past. This Neo-Classical spirit is evident in Assyria as well. A. Leo Oppenheim declares that Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) “succeeded in assembling in Nineveh what has every right to be called the first systematically collected library in the ancient Near East.” In

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populating his library, Assurbanipal attempted to collect every text known in Assyria and even texts from his conquered regions. Excavations of his library have uncovered more than 30,000 cuneiform tablets of all types of literature including omen texts, lexical lists, theogonies and cosmogonies, and the classics of epic literature such as *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis*.\(^{33}\)

This Neo-Classicalist movement manifested itself in Judah through the reforms of Hezekiah. His reforms were backed by a heavily reconstructed and utopian past which legitimated his new reforms. As discussed above, though the reforms were primarily politically motivated, they were merely legitimated through the temple cultus. The discovery of the Shabaka stone has more obvious parallels to the discovery of Deuteronomy by Josiah (2 Kings 22:8) but this discussion will remain focused on the reforms of Hezekiah.

The scribal production associated with the reforms of Hezekiah are the most enduring aspect of Hezekiah’s unification program. These works would lay the foundations of what would become the Deuteronomistic school. His work was a compilation of Judean and Israelite texts which included the fusion of the J and E documents discussed above and the creation of the united monarchy which will be developed below. The latter included the compilation of extant wisdom literature and its attribution to David and Solomon. Karel van der Toorn, in his study of ancient Near Eastern scribal practices, has noted that often for the scribes, “compilation triggered

invention.”44 This ideologically based “invention” would turn into the Deuteronomistic school and lead to the “discovery” of the book of Deuteronomy under king Josiah.

It is possible that part of the scribal activity under Hezekiah was the promulgation of a proto-Deuteronomic law code. This may be the earliest layer of the law that scholars see in Deuteronomistic literature. Albertz finds this law code in Exodus 20:23-23:19 and proposes it as, “the legal basis of Hezekiah’s reform.45 The presentation of this law surely would have been framed as passed down from god to king, that is, Yahweh to Hezekiah, in the vein of standard ancient Near Eastern form.46 This can be seen by the way in which the law code is formulated. The casuistic laws are framed in a way that parallels the ancient Near Eastern oracles. In the law code list, the oracular event is replaced with the legal protasis. The consequence of the oracular event becomes the apodosis in the law. Van der Toorn gives this example of an Akkadian omen:

If white fungi fill a man’s house:
   The owner of that house will become poor.
If fungus is seen on a south wall:
   The mistress of the house will die.

He then parallels that text with Exodus 21:26-28:

If a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it:
   he shall let him go free on account of his eye.
If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female:
   he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.
If an ox gores a man or a woman to death:

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44 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 121. Though he is specifically referring to lists, e.g. omen lists, the principle that the process of compilation facilitates fabrication holds in the case of Hezekiah’s scribes who used the opportunity, probably under mandate, to add to the text that they were compiling.
the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten.\textsuperscript{47}

On this point he notes, “The casuistic laws of the Bible have a similar structure [to the omen texts]; after the definition of the legal case in the protasis, the apodosis gives the pertinent verdict.”\textsuperscript{48} This comparison is simply to show the way in which this biblical text fits within the corpus of ancient Near Eastern literature. As such, the likelihood that the law was formulated in any way other than the standard format of the ancient Near East, that is from god to king, is unlikely.

Part of the Deuteronomistic ideology that was, in my view, likely established during the reign of Hezekiah is the notion of the perpetual kingship of the house of David. In the Deuteronomistic History only Hezekiah and Josiah are compared to David. 2 Kings 18:3 says of Hezekiah, “He did what was pleasing to the \textsc{Lord}, just as his father David had done.” Verse 5 adds, “He trusted only in the \textsc{Lord} the God of Israel; there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him.” This approbation is not extended to any other king, even Josiah!\textsuperscript{49} In this way, Hezekiah was presented as a ‘new David.’ This was, of course, a scribal construction, done in tandem with the construction of the united monarchy in order to legitimate the policies of Hezekiah.

Legitimating Hezekiah’s reforms and the line of kings from whom he claimed descent was the concept of the perpetual kingship of the House of David. This was sanctioned by Yahweh and anchored to the city of Jerusalem. This concept also finds an


\textsuperscript{48} Van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible}, 122

\textsuperscript{49} Cf. Schniedewind, \textit{How the Bible Became a Book}, 80; Römer, \textit{The So-Called Deuteronomistic History}, 103.
agreeable location during the reign of Hezekiah. Some scholars have placed the promise of eternal Davidic kingship to the reign of Josiah or even later into the Babylonian Exile. In my opinion, the miraculous repelling of Sennacherib at Jerusalem in 701 BCE provides a perfect situation for the biblical proponents to defend their belief in the election of the House of David by Yahweh. The miraculous event is recorded in 2 Kings 18:13-19:36 with the author of the section claiming that Yahweh has saved the city, “For the sake of my servant, David.” Baruch Levine finds confirmation of this is the prophecies of First Isaiah, an employee of the king. Levine notes that prophecies of First Isaiah such as those found in chapters one and ten, “would have enjoyed very little credibility in the years preceding the Assyrian blockade of 701 by Sennacherib's forces, but it might have had dramatic impact after the sparing of Jerusalem, which was a powerful sign of divine providence.”

1.5 Josiah and Deuteronomy

In 641 BCE the Judean king Amon was assassinated and his eight-year-old son Josiah was placed on the throne by the am haaretz (X®rDaDh_MAo), the “people of the land.” This likely would have given the royal court considerable sway over the king and the administration of Judah. At the same time, the Assyrian empire was in decline. The Babylonian Nabopolassar (625-605 BCE) rebelled against the Assyrian would lead to the fall of the Assyrian Empire during the reign of Josiah. As mentioned above, this

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50 Römer, The So-Called Deuteronomistic History, 146.
51 2 Kings 19:34; a second version of this story is told in 2 Chronicles 32 with variations in detail.
52 Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book, 86.
political climate afforded Josiah the opportunity to increase Judean autonomy and possibly their territory as well. Though Miller and Hayes remark, “All this takes for granted that Judah was subservient to Egypt, even during Josiah’s reign, and that no ruler could hold the Judean throne without Egyptian approval.” Under the Egyptian, the reigns were undoubtedly held more loosely than under the Assyrians, which created a political climate that still offered Josiah something to gain politically. That being said, Josiah was suddenly murdered by Pharaoh Neco II at Megiddo in 610 BCE. Due to his untimely death, the reforms of Josiah seem to have been disregarded after his reign.

Like Hezekiah before him, Josiah was a religious reformer. The most glowing praise of the kings of the Hebrew Bible is reserved for Josiah and Hezekiah. The way in which both of those men are treated in the Hebrew Bible has led scholars to place major editions of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History to their reigns. 2 Kings 22 relates that in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, the priest Hilkiah found a scroll of the torah in the temple. This scroll was ostensibly lost in the temple from the time of David. The finding of this lost scroll became the impetus for the reforms of Josiah. 2 Kings 23:4-15 reports:

[He gathered] all the objects made for Baal and Asherah and all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and he removed the ashes to Bethel. He suppressed the idolatrous priests…who made offerings to Baal, to the sun and moon and constellations—all the host of heaven. He brought out the image of Asherah…and burned it in the Kidron Valley…The king also defiled the shrines…which King Solomon of Israel had built for Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom, the detestable thing of the Ammonites. He shattered their pillars and cut down their sacred posts and covered their sites with human bones.

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As for the altar in Bethel and the shrine made by Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin—that altar, too, and the shrine as well, he tore down. He burned down the shrine and beat it to dust, and he burned the sacred post. All of this, like Hezekiah, was done to unify the people of Judah in an attempt to consolidate the power of the king and his court.

The discovery of a “lost book” is a common trope in the ancient Near East. This strategy was occasionally invoked in order to promulgate the agenda of the monarch. Römer believes “The origin of the –book-finding motif is probably to be situated in the deposit of foundation tablets in Mesopotamian sanctuaries, which are often ‘rediscovered’ by later kings undertaking restoration works.” This strategy was also used in Egypt. Pharaoh Shabaka (716–695 BCE) claimed to have discovered a text form the time of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479–1425 BCE) and used it to promote his own agenda.

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57 Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 51-52

2. “United Monarchy” (c. 1000 – 925 BCE)

It is important to remember that the Hebrew Bible is not history per se. It is theology as history. In ancient Israel, history was an expression of relationship with the divine. In constructing the narrative of Israel, the Deuteronomistic reformers did not simply reshape their future, they redefined their past as well. This meant, among other things, retelling the stories of the early monarchs of the “united kingdom” of Israel. The revisions to the history of the monarchy are most noticeable in the stories about Solomon’s reign. The depiction of Solomon—his buildings activities, territorial expansion, trade empire and massive wealth, and his wisdom—is reminiscent of the great Assyrian kings. It was in this mold that the scribes who worked on the Solomon story cast the Israelite king.

A united kingdom of Israel most likely did not exist until after 722 BCE, after the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the influx of Israeliite refugees south to the kingdom of Judah. But this “united kingdom” was simply a product of the destruction of the kingdom of Israel and immigration of many Israeliites south to Judah. It is due to this diversification and rapid growth of population in Judah that the scribes of Jerusalem invented the notion of a previously united Israel under David and Solomon. This “golden age” only lasted for the reigns of these two kings, as the once united kingdoms


“split” into two separate polities of a homogenous people. Of the two kings of the united Israel, Solomon is the most embellished, possibly due to the simple fact that there were fewer extant traditions about him, making him a more malleable subject.61 As such, I will focus on the literary revision and expansion of the story of his reign.

2.1 The Solomonic Buildings

Over the last century, scholars have claimed that the kingdom of Solomon was in fact historical. This claimed rested on several archaeological discoveries: copper mines in the Negev, the stables of Megiddo, and most significantly, the gate complexes at Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer. Various archaeologists since the 1920’s have argued for the historicity of Solomon based on these building projects which are attested to in the Hebrew Bible. Because his building projects were corroborated through archaeology, the rest of the details in the account of his reign must also be accurate. Over the last twenty years, the picture has changed drastically which has reduced the kingdom of Solomon to the realm of scribal invention.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, archaeology has provided a check on the history of Israel as it is told in the Hebrew Bible. It has especially invalidated many elements of the conquest narratives of Joshua and Judges and, more pertinent to the discussion at hand, it has exposed the picture of the early monarchy as presented in the books of Samuel and Kings to be scribal fabrications. The city of Jerusalem, and the area

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of Judah as a whole, did not develop significantly until the eighth century BCE.\textsuperscript{62} This fact complicates the picture of an established united monarchy since such a kingdom would require, “an advanced administration and a sophisticated system of management of manpower.”\textsuperscript{63}

During the 1950’s Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin conducted excavations at Hazor in northern Galilee. During these excavations he discovered a six-chambered gate complex. This gate matched the six-chambered gate complex that was discovered in the 1920’s by a University of Chicago excavation at Megiddo. Earlier excavations at Gezer discovered a six-chambered gate as well. Because of this, Yadin saw a confirmation of the verse in 1 Kings 9:15 which reports of the construction of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer by Solomon and developed a theory that Solomon had commissioned a master plan to build the city walls of these cities. Unfortunately, the walls that were attached to the gates were not the same. Hazor and Megiddo used a header and stretcher method whereas the wall at Gezer was constructed with a casemate design. Further evidence emerged against Yadin’s theory when similarly designed gates were discovered outside of Solomon’s territory in Ashdod, Lachish, which date, “no earlier than the tenth century,” as well as the late tenth century gates at Tel Ira.\textsuperscript{64}

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Recent excavations in all three of those cities have altered the dating of the city walls. During the original excavations, the pottery that was found in the same level as the gates were dated to the tenth century on the grounds that they were contemporaneous with the gates that were built by Solomon. This information was later used to defend the Solomonic construction of the gates by appealing to the tenth century dating of the pottery. David Ussishkin has demonstrated that the gate complex at Megiddo was built later than those at Hazor and Gezer. Norma Franklin discovered that the ashlar blocks used in the construction of one of the palaces at Megiddo, located in a stratum below the “Solomonic” gate, bore uniquely similar mason’s marks to ones found on stones used in the construction of the palace in Samaria in the ninth century BCE. These marks are not known elsewhere in Israel and lead to the conclusion that the six chambered gate at Megiddo was built later than the ninth century and thus at least 100 years after Solomon.

Likewise, the stables at Megiddo, which have traditionally been assigned to Solomon, were also in a stratum above the palace. These stables were another pillar in the argument for the historicity of the Solomonic kingdom. Several passages in 1 Kings attribute huge stables to Solomon. 1 Kings 5:6 claims that Solomon had, “40,000 stalls of horses for his chariotry and 12,000 horsemen.” The stables were also part of an international horse-trading venture, an aspect of Solomon’s economic empire which will be discussed further below. This horse trade is also dubious on more practical grounds. 1 Kings 10:28 claims that Solomon traded horses from Kue, which is on the Cilician coast in Asia Minor, to the kings of Arameans and Hittites. This is an odd arrangement since

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65 Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 279.
66 Ibid, 280.
67 Ibid, 280.
the source of the horses in Kue is much closer to the Hittites and Arameans than the Israelites.\textsuperscript{68} The horses and stables were all part of the “golden age” presentation of Solomon as a man of great wealth.

The question of the historicity of the most important of Solomon’s building projects is a much more difficult to answer. Currently, the area where the Temple of Jerusalem was built is under the Haram al-Sharif. This “Noble Sanctuary” is the location of two of the most holy sites in Islam. For this reason, excavations are not possible. Finkelstein and Silberman believe that even if excavations were possible, very little material remains from the Iron Age would be discovered. This is due to the massive construction efforts of King Herod in order to build his temple in the first century BCE.\textsuperscript{69}

For the most part, Solomon’s building activities seem to have been a literary mirage.

\textit{2.2 Solomon’s Wealth}

Another major aspect of the kingdom of Solomon is his vast trading empire, international commerce and wealth. As mentioned above, the archaeology of Judah in the tenth century argues against the type of bureaucracy required to support such a vast trade network. There is dearth of evidence for international trade during the period of Solomon with the near complete lack of foreign material culture. As stated by Miller and Hayes, “The Solomonic Empire with its extravagant and splendid court as envisioned by the compilers of Genesis-2 Kings would have been a dramatic aberration for the international situation of his age.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{69} Finkelstein and Silberman, \textit{David and Solomon}, 172.
\textsuperscript{70} Miller and Hayes, \textit{A History of Ancient Israel and Judah}, 186.
The archaeological evidence related above undermines the historicity of the stories regarding Solomon’s building projects and his trade networks. Finkelstein and Silberman, in reassessing the archaeology of these sites and the historical background, place their construction in eighth century under the Omride kings (886-842 BCE) and Jeroboam II (784-744 BCE). This is Corroborated by Miller and Hayes who note that, “It seems clear that Israel’s Omride dynasty (Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram) have a much better claim than Solomon to a ‘golden age’ of royal wealth and building accomplishments,” even adding that without the Hebrew Bible, “there would be no reason to suppose that an entity known as Israel, and certainly not a kingdom by that name, existed before Omri.” Finkelstein and Silberman, on the hand, places the historical events of stories about Solomon’s trade and wealth under the seventh century king Manasseh whose embrace of the Assyrian empire led to a long and peaceful 55 year reign which enabled him to expand Israel’s trade connections and reach a level economic prosperity previously unknown in Judah. Though not wholly in agreement, the archaeology suggests that an empire like the one ascribed to Solomon in the Hebrew Bible is not possible during the 10th century BCE when he would have reigned.

2.3 A Typical Ancient Near Eastern King

Without the archaeological evidence to anchor Solomon to the real world of ancient Israel, we are left only with the literary evidence for his kingdom. This evidence,

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71 Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 161-162.
73 Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 253. They also remind us that the reference to Israel in the Merneptah Stele would be unrecognizable without the Hebrew Bible; likewise, the *byt dšd* תֵּית דֶּשֶׁד; Tel Dan inscription.
74 Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 155-156.
in light of the archaeological evidence, is very problematic. It presents Solomon as an ideal Assyrian monarch, a wise and powerful ruler who expands his kingdom and builds a temple. All this while he issues just verdicts and looks after the widows, orphans, and the poor. In what follows I will address these aspects of the biblical depiction of Solomon and how they are scribal embellishments of Solomon in order to place him in the realm of the ideal Assyrian monarch.

The concept of the divine appointment of kings was central to the monarchy in the ancient Near East. This was not lost on the Israelites whose kings were anointed as kings chosen by Yahweh, though interestingly it is only Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu and Josiah who were said to have been anointed. Though not an aspect of Assyrian kings in general, I will begin with a similarity in Solomon’s accession to the throne with that of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) and Assurbanipal (669-627 BCE). 1 Kings 1 relates the actions of Adonijah, the older half-brother of Solomon and oldest living son of David, who set himself up as king instead of Solomon. In the following chapter Solomon kills his brother, as well as Joab and excommunicates the priest Abiathar who had sided with Adonijah, in order to solidify his rule. Likewise, both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal had to fight with their brothers to gain the throne. Like Solomon, Esarhaddon was designated as successor to the throne by his father Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) even though Esarhaddon was his youngest son. Esarhaddon was the governor of Babylonia when his father was murdered in 681 BCE. Esarhaddon had to kill one of his older brothers who had placed himself on the throne. Even more striking is the fact that the accession to the throne of

Esarhaddon was aided by his mother.\textsuperscript{76} In the same way, Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, played an important role in Solomon’s rise to the throne. In wresting control from Saul, David’s rise to power was even more bloody, including filicide! It was typical for monarchs to kill members of the previous royal house in order that no rebellion would emerge. As David had previously married one of Saul’s daughters Michal, this process required the killing of his own sons. This is recorded in 2 Samuel 21: 8-9 which tells us that David took the five sons of Michal, daughter of Saul, i.e. his wife, and had them killed by the Gibeonites.\textsuperscript{77} The kind of court intrigue present in the accounts of the rise of David and Solomon would not have been a surprise to those hearing his story after hearing the accounts of the rise of several of the Assyrian monarchs. This type of conflict over succession also served to confirm the person who came out on top as the divinely chosen successor.

Territorial expansion was one of the hallmarks of the Assyrian monarchs. They are known primarily for their military exploits which are boldly described on reliefs and inscriptions. Shalmaneser III boast of his exploits and how far he had expanded the borders of Assyria in an inscription saying:

\begin{quote}
In the eighteenth year of my rule I crossed the Euphrates for the sixteenth time. Hazael of Damascus put his trust upon his numerous army and called up his troops in great number...I fought with him and inflicted a defeat upon him, killing with the sword 16,000 of his experienced soldiers. I took away from him 1,121 chariots, 470 riding horses as wells as his camp. [He fled and] I followed him and besieged him in Damascus, his royal residence. I marched as far as the mountains of Hauran, destroying, tearing down and burning innumerable towns,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76} Römer, \textit{The So-Called Deuteronomistic History}, 95.
\textsuperscript{77} MT reads Michal though most English translations, following two Hebrew MSS and the Syriac read Merab. See, Miller and Hayes, \textit{A History of Ancient Israel and Judah}, 172; and the note in NRSV for 2 Samuel 21:8.
carrying away booty from them which was beyond counting…I received the tribute of the inhabitants of Tyre, Sidon, and of Jehu, son of Omri.\textsuperscript{78}

Adad-Nirari III (810-783 BCE) boasts that his kingdom covers the land, “as far as the Great Sea of the Rising Sun (and) from the banks from the Euphrates…as far as the Great Sea of the Setting Sun.”\textsuperscript{79} An inscription of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) simply proclaims, “I added land to the land of Assyria, many people to its people.”\textsuperscript{80} In the same manner, the Hebrew Bible describes Solomon’s vast dominion, declaring, “Solomon’s rule extended over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, and the boundary of Egypt. They brought Solomon tribute, and were subject to him all his life.”\textsuperscript{81}

Strangely, for all of the claims regarding Solomon’s territorial expansions over the kingdom of his father, there are no accounts of Solomon’s military exploits. This is related to his role as temple builder and will be discussed below. David, on the other hand, is defined as a military conqueror. In fact, the Hebrew Bible states that it is for this reason that David could not build a temple for Yahweh. But upon close examinations, many of David’s conquests seem to be similarly constructed to raise his status as a typical Near Eastern Monarch. 2 Samuel 8:2-6 some of the nations he conquered including Edom, and Moab. Problematically for the traditional view of David’s kingdom, both of these nations were nascent or non-existent during the time of David. It is very unlikely that Edom was a kingdom during the tenth century BCE, as, according to Miller and Hayes, “There is very little archaeological evidence of sedentary occupation in southern

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{ANET}, 280.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{ANET}, 281.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{ANET}, 560.
\textsuperscript{81} 1 Kings 5:1
Transjordan during Iron I.” Similar difficulties exist in regards to the nature of the political entity of Moab during the time of David. Conquest accounts were fundamental to the propaganda of ancient Near Eastern monarchs, though as Thomas Römer states, “It is clear that these accounts are not ‘realistic’ or objective descriptions of historical events.”

Concomitant with the declarations of the vast borders of Assyria, the king would also boast his riches and the exotic goods he has obtained. In an inscription, Ashurnasirpal II describes a lavish banquet he hosted. He received such extravagant gifts as, “Five live elephants…from the governor of Suhu (the Middle Euphrates region) and the governor of Lubda (SE Assyria toward Babylonia)...I organized a herb of wild bulls, lions, ostriches and male and female monkeys and had them breed like flocks (of domestic animals).” He continues by detailing the vast number of sheep, goats, wheat, fruits and vegetables, and every food item he has prepared for the banquet. The numbers reach into the tens of thousands. Solomon is also presented as receiving a similarly large list of food items as tribute: “Solomon’s daily provisions consisted of 30 kors of semolina, and 60 kors of [ordinary] flour, 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture fed-oxen, and 100 sheep and goats, besides deer and gazelles, roebucks and fatted geese.” And He possessed, “40,000 stalls of horses for his chariotry and 12,000 horsemen.”

To further his credentials as Assyrian monarch, Ashurnasirpal II proudly presents the international guest list he has prepared for his banquet:

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82 Miller and Hayes, A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, 183.
83 Finkelstein and Silberman, David and Solomon, 111-112.
84 Römer, The So-Called Deuteronomistic History, 83-84.
85 ANET, 559-560.
86 1 Kings 5:2-4, 5b.
When I inaugurated the palace at Calah I treated for ten days with food and drink 47,074 persons, men and women, who were bid to come from across my entire country, (also) 5,000 important delegates from the country of Suhu, from Hindana, Hattinam Hatti, Tyre, Sidon, Gurguma, Malida, Hubushka, Gilzana, Kuma (and) Musairst, (also) 16,000 inhabitants of Calah from all ways of life; 1,500 officials of all my palaces, altogether 67,574 invited guests from all the mentioned countries including the people of Calah.\(^87\)

It is this image of a cosmopolitan and international court that the scribes of the Solomon story were intending to reproduce when they wrote of the visits Solomon received from King Hiram of Tyre\(^88\) and the Queen of Sheba\(^89\) and that he was married to a Pharaoh’s daughter, as well as women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Phoenicia, and Hatti.\(^90\) Adding to this depiction were the goods he received for his construction projects: cedar from Lebanon, camels, spices and gold from the Queen of Sheba, precious stones and almug wood from Ophir, gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks from his Tarshish fleet, and horses from Mizraim and Kue.\(^91\) In light of the archaeological evidence discussed above, the sheer quantity and geographical diversity of the tribute brought to Solomon puts a serious strain on the credulity of the reader.

In the ancient Near East, the men who were to become kings had a different origin than ordinary men. The *Sumerian King List* begins with the statement, “When kingship descended from heaven…”\(^92\) This divine connection of the kingship led them to

\(^{87}\) *ANET*, 560.

\(^{88}\) 1 Kings 5:15, through representatives of Hiram’s court.

\(^{89}\) 1 Kings 10:1; according to Finkelstein and Silberman (*David and Solomon*, 170-171), the kingdom of Sheba did not flourish until the eighth century BCE, when it became famous for its trade in aromatic spices via camel.

\(^{90}\) 1 Kings 11:1. It is also worth noting that kingdoms like Moab and Edom.

\(^{91}\) 1 Kings 10:2-28.

be perceived as especially wise men who “derived [their] political and sacral functions…directly from his exceptional relationship with God.”

According to the Hebrew Bible, Solomon’s wisdom brought the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem to test him, he issued sagacious judgments and wrote a book of wise proverbs.

Rainer Albertz believes Psalm 2 preserves an Israelite belief in the divine wisdom embodied in the kings when it declares:

> Let me tell of the decree:
> the LORD said to me,
> “You are my son,
> I have fathered you to this day.
> Ask it of me,
> And I will make the nations your domain;
> Your estate, the limits of your earth…
> So now, O kings, be prudent;
> Accept discipline, you rulers of the earth!

This Psalm, he says, “probably derives from a ritual to commemorate the enthronement [of the king].”

In the process of the construction of the kingship of Solomon as an ideal Near Eastern king the wisdom literature was attributed to him. This probably occurred under Hezekiah, as discussed above. Proverbs 25:1 declares, “These too are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of King Hezekiah of Judah copied.” It is possible that the scribes working during Hezekiah’s reign were instructed to compile a collection of already extant proverbs into one scroll and ascribed to it Solomonic authorship for political

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reasons.\textsuperscript{95} It is during this period that Finkelstein and Silberman believe the construction of the united monarchy of Israel began.\textsuperscript{96}

The scribal expansion of the Solomon story, adding the element of his great wisdom had a precedent and a parallel in the expansion of the \textit{Gilgamesh Epic}. This text was edited in several editions over the centuries of its existence. One of the expansions to \textit{Gilgamesh} was undertaken by the scribes of the Standard Babylonian edition at some point around the thirteenth century BCE. These scribes added a prologue that emphasized the wisdom of Gilgamesh.\textsuperscript{97} The scribe says of him, “This is the man to whom all things were known; this was the king who knew the countries of the world. He was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things.”\textsuperscript{98}

One of the most important outlets of the monarch’s wisdom is his provision and protection of justice in his kingdom. In the prologue to his code of laws, Hammurabi declares, “When (my god) Marduk had given me the mission to keep my people in order and make my country take the right road, I installed in this country justice and fairness in order to bring wellbeing to my people.” And in the epilogue, “By my wisdom I have harbored [my subjects]. In order to prevent the powerful from oppressing the weak, in order to give justice to the orphans and the widows...I have inscribed on the stele my precious words.”\textsuperscript{99} There are law codes promulgated by many other ancient Near Eastern monarchs, such as Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, and Eshnunna, but all Near Eastern

\textsuperscript{96} Finkelstein and Silberman, \textit{David and Solomon}, 142-143.
\textsuperscript{97} Van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible}, 127.
monarchs were responsible for upholding justice. Solomon, in his role, was not the presenter of a law code. That would not have fit into the Deuteronomistic presentation of Yahweh as giving the law/Torah directly to the people of Israel. Instead, Solomon was responsible for upholding the law. This aspect, according to Albertz, “is a firm ingredient of the repertory of the kingship theology of the Near East.”

A secondary aspect of the king as keeper of the law was his role as a judge. Ancient Near Eastern kings were expected to issue exemplary rulings that would be used as legal precedent in future cases. This was a manifestation of their superb wisdom. Evidence of this the story of Solomon can be found in 1 Kings 3:16-28. In this episode, two prostitutes have a dispute about whose baby had died over the night. In order to discover the true mother of the living baby Solomon declares that he will have it cut in half, one half for each mother. In this way he is able to discern the true mother of the living baby. Verse 28 declares, “When all Israel heard the decision that the kings had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice.” This case is alluded to even to this day, when someone calls a solution “Solomonic.”

102 This is an adroit scribal use of an existing story as the king who issues the judgment is never named as Solomon. Rather, this was likely an extant story at the time of the creation of the Solomon narratives and was tacked onto the end of the story of the divine endowment of wisdom to demonstrate, in the fashion of a Near Eastern king, the wisdom of Solomon; cf. Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History’s Transformation of the Torah,” 515.
2.5 Solomon’s Temple

As can be gathered from the material above politics and religion were not so easily separated as they are today. The kingship was endowed with divine authority and divine mandate. This involved the protection of justice and issuing judgments, as discussed above, but it also included acting as a priest. The Hebrew Bible records Solomon acting in this capacity on several occasions. After the completion of the temple, “Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as sacrifices of well being to the Lord…For it was there he presented the burnt offerings, the meal offerings, and the fat parts of the offerings of well-being.”103 Earlier in the chapter, like a priest, Solomon issued a blessing to the people.104 The sacral function of the monarch in the ancient Near East was central to his role as the king. This function will be discussed at greater length below.

The most important of these religious roles, especially as far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, is the king’s role in the building, or often rebuilding, of a temple for the gods. This is the aspect of Solomon’s reign for which he is most remembered. It is likely that the historical king Solomon was associated with some construction work done on the temple in the collective memory of Judah and is why he is assigned this role. This is echoed by Römer, addressing why it is Solomon and not David who is the temple builder in the Deuteronomist’s account, stating, “Apparently, there were more existing traditions about David in the seventh century than about Solomon, who could manifestly be much more easily constructed on the Neo-Assyrian model.”105 Thus Solomon provided a more malleable figure for the Deuteronomistic authors to employ in the construction of a...

103 1 Kings 8:63-64
104 1 Kings 8:14ff.
utopian “united monarchy.” The traditions of David, on the other hand, were firmly embedded in the popular memory that kept him from being as easily manipulated in the hands of the Deuteronomistic scribes.

The construction and renovation temples by the monarchs of the ancient Near East was not simply an act of arrogation, showing their wealth and power. Rather it was, “to minister to the needs and comfort of the city’s patron god or goddesses, for his or her numinous presence therein was believed to be the fundamental prerequisite for success in all human endeavors.” The scribes describing the temple likely embellished its magnificence in an attempt to rival the splendor of ancient Near Eastern temples. Albertz believes, “the report of the building of a ‘Solomonic Temple’ in 1 Kings 6 suggest more a rebuilding than a complete new building.”

This flexible and propagandistic use of history is not unique to Israel. This scribal device was used by under the Neo-Assyrian kings as a form of propaganda; a means of legitimating the current monarch. It is to this end that the reconstruction of Israelite history and the invention of the “united monarchy” were carried out. That is not to say that David and Solomon were figments of the scribal imagination. Rather, due to the reworking of the historical David and Solomon by the scribes of Hezekiah and later kings, the actual deeds of these two men are lost or, in the case of the historical material

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109 Miller and Hayes, A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, 413.
remaining in the Hebrew Bible, is often indistinguishable from the mythical David and Solomon.
3. The Priesthood of Ancient Israel

The priesthood of ancient Israel is an extraordinarily complicated issue. Several different factions arose at different times and claimed different prerogatives, sometimes overlapping, at various points in the history of Israel and Judah. That the sections of the Hebrew Bible that record the actions of the priesthood through Israel’s history were written at different times and by different groups only serves to complicate the matter further. The following material will discuss the origins of the various priestly groups and their changing roles in Israelite society. Most importantly will be the discussion of the priestly role in reformulating post-exilic Israelite society into an essentially theocratic society with the priesthood at its head.

3.1 The Priesthood in Pre-Monarchic Israel

Prior to the establishment of the monarchy, Israelite society was organized in some form of amphictyony. This form of society functioned in a very decentralized manner that did not lend itself to superfluous bureaucratic institutions such as a standing army or an organized priesthood. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 demonstrates the way in which the call to arms worked in the amphictyonic society of ancient Israel and several passages throughout the historical books of the Hebrew Bible attest to the way in which cultic activities were undertaken.

In tribal societies like that of early Israel, the primary cultic functions were the responsibility of the patriarch of the family.\footnote{Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, 30.} Genesis 13:18 finds Abraham building an altar at the terebinths of Mamre in Hebron. Two generations later, in Genesis 35:7, Jacob
builds an altar in Bethel. In both of these cases the patriarch is acting in a way we would assume a priest would act. The cultic functions were not limited to the patriarch in the early period of Israel, though they did remain within the family. Judges 17 records an episode with a man named Micah. This man had a “house of God,” which included a “sculpted image and a molten image.” Micah made an ephod and terephim and, giving these vestments to his sons, made them priests of his house of God. The following verse states, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did as he pleased,” an obvious marker that the preceding story was laid down at a much later date and exposes the theological (and monarchical) prejudices of the writer. Nevertheless, it testifies to a time when it was natural to designate one’s own sons as priests. To emphasize this point, we need only to look at 2 Samuel 8:18. This verse records the court officials of king David (1000-960 BCE), listing generals, scribes and priests. The very last line reads, “and David’s sons were priests.” Even until the time of David there was no official priesthood and a man take the cultic activities upon himself or he could appoint his own sons. David’s reign, at least in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible as it now stands, is a turning point in the nature of Israelite priesthood.

The functions of a priest in the early days of Israel, from its amphictyonic stages until the beginning of the monarchy, were primarily divination and obtaining oracles. This primary function of priests was held in common through the ancient Near East. Divination was particularly important in the Mesopotamian civilizations where it reached

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111 Judges 17:5
a higher level of sophistication than it ever did in Israel.\textsuperscript{112} The Akkadian men who worked in divination and oracles were called \textit{baru} and their texts, \textit{barutu}. Summarizing the role of the \textit{baru}, Aelred Cody states, “Of the Mesopotamian diviners, the most important, the \textit{baru} accomplished his work by observing the states, behavior, acts, of living creatures, or of their organs like the liver.”\textsuperscript{113} The various results of this extispicy were explicated and then dutifully and extensively catalogued in the \textit{barutu} texts.\textsuperscript{114} This was not the only means of divination in the ancient Near East, nor was it very often used in ancient Israel.

The primary means of divination used by the priests of early Israel was a binary method, issuing either a “Yes” or a “No” answer. Though this method was popular in the Israelite cultic milieu, A. Leo Oppenheim reports that it “had no cultic status in Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{115} In Israel, the devices used receive the divine message were the Urîm and Thumîm. Very little is known about these oracular objects. Roland de Vaux believes that they, “must have been borrowed…from the pre-Israelite civilization of Canaan, and the plural form is just a singular which has retained its primitive mimation,” but that this can not really be know with any certainty, “Nor have we any idea what they looked like.”\textsuperscript{116}

Due to the binary nature of these objects, receiving a specific answer from them could be very time consuming. The method is displayed succinctly in 1 Samuel (1 Reigns

\textsuperscript{114} Van der Toorn, \textit{Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible}, 120-121.
\textsuperscript{115} Oppenheim, \textit{Ancient Mesopotamia}, 208.
in the LXX). In this passage Saul is attempting to determine who is guilty, he and Jonathan or the men of Israel. Saul designated the groups and declared, “If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim.” The lots fell on Saul and Jonathan so again Saul designated the lots, directing the priest, “Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.” This time the lot fell on Jonathan.117 Earlier in the same chapter, this method seems to have taken too long for Saul who, after asking for the ephod, implying the Urim and Thummim, and deliberating with the priest Ahijah, ordered the priest to “Withdraw [his] hand,” as their was a tumult in the Philistine camp and he could not wait for the oracle.118

The word for priest in the Hebrew Bible is kohen (NEhOk), a word whose etymology is uncertain. Some have claimed the word kohen derives from the root kwn (כון), meaning, “to be firm.”119 This is then connected to the Akkadian kana, which has as one of its meanings, “to incline before.”120 Others have suggested kohen is etymologically related to the Syriac kahhen, meaning, to be (or function as) a priest.”121 Still others note the cognates of kohen in the Ugaritic and Phoenician khn.122 Despite all these cognates Aelred Cody concedes that, “For the moment we have to be content with the word’s

117 LXX, I Reigns 14:41-42
118 LXX, I Reigns 14:18-19
119 BDB, 465.
122 Cody, A History of the Old Testament Priesthood, 18-23. Though he mentions that the parallels to Ugaritic and Phoenician khanm is more pronounced with the state-sponsored kohanim under the Israelite monarchy.
meaning as it appears in usage already fixed, hoping for more clarification from future
discoveries of epigraphic material.”123

One striking parallel, especially for the discussion of the priesthood prior to the
rise of the monarchy, is between the Hebrew kohen and its cognate from pre-Islamic
Arabic kāhin. Joseph Blenkinsopp describes the kāhin as a combination of”the functions of
kohen and nābi in ancient Israel, perhaps suggesting a stage at which the functions of these
two classes were undifferentiated.”124 Though Cody finds the connection between kohen
and kāhin to be a false one, he does note their role as, “seer or soothsayer.”125 The parallel
to kāhin, from a analogous, semi-nomadic society, seems to confirm and highlight the
giving of oracles as “one of the most basic tasks of priests in antiquity.”126

At the end of the Iron Age I (1150-900 BCE)127 Saul and David laid the
groundwork for what would become the institution of monarchy in Israel and Judah.
Their efforts were enabled by the, “persistent military threat from the Philistines,”128 as
well as the power vacuum left by the decline of the Egyptian influence and Assyrian
influence after Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077 BCE).129 The developing bureaucracy of the
monarchy had a profound effect on the priesthood in ancient Israel and continued to do
so until the eradication of the monarchy by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The priesthood
became a state sponsored role, with prominent priests acting on behalf of the king and

124 Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 73.
125 Cody, A History of the Old Testament Priesthood, 16. His objections seem partially to
conflate the early, pre-monarchic priesthood with the later, more bureaucratic priesthood.
126 Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 73.
127 Finkelstein and Silberman, The Bible Unearthed, 20.
(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 54.
being a part of his ‘cabinet’ of court officials. The priesthood under the monarchy will be discussed in more detail below, but here it should be noted that the rise of the monarchy essentially ended the oracular role of the priest. De Vaux notes that, “After the reign of David, there is no evidence that the ephod, with Urim and Thummim was ever used for oracles.”

3.2 The Origins of the Levites and the Zadokites

Throughout the history of the priesthood of ancient Israel two groups dominate the narrative: the Levites and the Zadokites. There has been considerable debate as to the origin and function of these two groups which is in part caused by the conflicting accounts of the origin and make-up of these two groups. At some point during the Exile, these two groups were consolidated into one genealogical line under Aaron. This genealogical restructuring, while important to the history of the priesthood in ancient Israel, is outside the scope of this paper and will not be discussed below.

3.2.1 The Levites

Traditionally, the Levites were descendants of Jacob through his son Levi. During the desert wanderings these descendants were not given any portion in the Promised Land but instead were endowed with a special blessing and ordained by Yahweh as priests. Deuteronomy 18: 1-2 states that “the whole tribe of Levi shall have no territorial portion with Israel. They shall live only off the LORD’s offerings by fire as their portion, and shall have no portion among their brother tribes: the LORD is their portion, as He

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promised them.” In Numbers 8:18, the Levites are described as a replacement for “every first-born of the Israelites.” Throughout the desert wandering, the Levites carried the Ark of the Covenant and tended to the Tabernacle. Upon the construction of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon, they became the keepers of the Temple of Yahweh.

There are several problems with the traditional view of the role of the Levites. The most foundational premise to this construction of the Levites is their origins as a secular tribe in early Israel. It is generally agreed that the Twelve Tribe amphictyony of ancient Israel is a later construction. That the society of Israel in the Late Bronze Age (1500 BCE-1200 BCE) was tribal is not contested but that there existed a group of tribes descended from the twelve sons of Jacob is a fabrication of a later date.

A comparison of the lists of the tribal groups demonstrates the ideological nature in which they were composed; the members are often varied and the orders of patriarchs different. Zecharia Kallai sees four different ways in which the list of tribes are organized: 1) a genealogical list based on birth-sequence; 2) a genealogical list related to the settlement in the country, with Levi removed and a transposition of tribes that enables Judah to be placed in a pre-eminent position; 3) a territorial sequence based on the narrative of the primary allotment (with Dan in the South); and 3) the final territorial distribution (with Dan in the North).\(^{132}\) On top of that, both of the first two categories have variations in person and order.\(^{133}\) Albertz, arguing against the genealogical associations of the tribes, notes that many of the tribal names were in fact place names.\(^{134}\)


\(^{133}\) For example, cp. Num 1:5-15 and Num 13:4-15; see also the list in Kallai, “The Twelve Tribe System of Israel, 90.

\(^{134}\) Albertz, A History of Old Testament Religion, 73.
only later assigned to a person for etiological reasons. These sorts of complications cast
doubt on the veracity and historicity of such lists.

The term amphictyony comes from the association of twelve tribes in ancient
Greece, united around the temple of Delphi and was first applied to the ancient Israelites
by Martin Noth. It may have been with this concept in mind that the later scribes
working on the Hebrew Bible constructed the Twelve Tribe amphictyony of ancient
Israel. This Hellenic concept does not fit squarely with the biblical portrayal of the
ancient Israelites though. The Israelites lacked a singular place of worship until,
traditionally David and Solomon, but likely the days of Hezekiah. Though the stories of
eponymous tribal patriarchs are supposed to have taken place in the Late Bronze Age,
details of the stories militate against this. Again, Albertz notes, “It can now be said with
some certainty on the basis of our archaeological knowledge that the cultural milieu of
Palestine presupposed by the patriarchal narratives of Gen. 12-50 does not go back
beyond the conditions of Iron Age I (from 1200 BCE).” Addressing the textual evidence,
Miller and Hayes claim, “Neither [the] stories at the end of the book of Judges, nor the
Eli, Samuel, and Saul stories that they anticipate, seem aware of a united twelve-tribe
Israel ruled by divinely authorized judges and guided by Levitical priests.”

It is these ‘Levitical priests’ that concern us most in this discussion of the tribes of
Israel. We have noted above that the tribal rosters as recorded in the Hebrew Bible are
inconsistent and contrived. Even within the Twelve Tribe constructions, in the words of

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contact with the Philistine Avimelech. The Philistine’s were not present, let alone
established in Palestine until c. 1200 BCE.
A. D. H. Mayes, “Levi is a late-comer.”\textsuperscript{138} The Song of Deborah in Judges 5, considered one of the oldest portions of the Hebrew Bible, does not include Levi in her list of tribes. In his comparison of the tribal rosters thought the Hebrew Bible, Kallai noticed the rearrangement of patriarchal order, grouping Judah and Levi closer together. This grouping no doubt accentuates the political positions of Judah (the Southern Monarchy) and Levi (the levitical priests) in the late monarchy.\textsuperscript{139} It is typically held that the Hebrew Bible attests to a pre-monarchic tribe of Levi but as we have seen, and as Miller and Hayes aver, “Traditions embedded in the Genesis-2 Kings History strongly suggest otherwise.”\textsuperscript{140}

We must now turn to evidence outside of the genealogical lists of the Hebrew Bible in search of the origins of the Levites. The name Levi is attested outside the Hebrew Bible. It has been found in the Mari letters as Levi-El and in Egypt as Levi-AN,\textsuperscript{141} meaning “attached to God, a client of God, or something similar.”\textsuperscript{142} Thus the name Levi in Israel may have been a hypocoristic, that is shortened, form of Levi-El. What then did it mean to be, “attached to God?”

In 1884 excavations were conducted by Julius Euting at the Minaean trading oasis of Dedan (modern Al-Ula) in northern Arabia and again from 1907-1910 by A. Jaussen and R. Savignac. During the course of these excavations were discovered several inscriptions with the word \textit{lw’} and its feminine, \textit{lw’t}. Originally the words were translated

\textsuperscript{138} A. D. H. Mayes, “Israel in the Pre-Monarchy Period,” \textit{VT} 23 (1973), 151.
\textsuperscript{139} Kallai, “The Twelve Tribe Systems of Israel,” 71, 85.
\textsuperscript{140} Miller and Hayes, \textit{A History of Ancient Israel and Judah}, 179; Cody adds to this assessment that “it would have been a practical impossibility for an entire tribe to have been functioning as priests,” \textit{A History of Old Testament Priesthood}, 35.
\textsuperscript{141} Cody, \textit{A History of Old Testament Priesthood}, 32;
\textsuperscript{142} De Vaux, \textit{Ancient Israel}, 359.
as “priest,” but after further study, H. Grimme redefined the ḫw’ of the Dedan inscriptions as, “ordinary people presented as votaries to the Minaeans’ god.”143 The date for these inscriptions is given by Cody as somewhere in “the last half of the first millennium BC.”144 Given that the inscriptions from Dedan date to a centuries after the institution of monarchy and post-date the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, a direct correlation may be a bit tenuous. That being said, the northern Arabian ḫw’ may be related to the Hebrew lewi (yIwEl) in its preservation of a more ancient understanding of the notion of Levite.

A peculiar story involving a Levite is found in Judges 17. In this story a northern Ephraimite named Micah made a “sculptured image and a molten image” and kept them in his house.145 The story then states that Micah had a “house of God; he had made an ephod and terephim and he inducted one of his sons to be his priest.”146 His appointment of his sons has priest makes clear that the story took place at a time when it was still accepted practice to appoint ones own sons as priest of a house shrine.147 A wandering

144 Cody, A History of Old Testament Priesthood, 31. Cody uses this date as an argument against the connection between the Dedan ḫw’ and the Hebrew lewi. This is because he (or others he is referring to) want to see the Hebrew lewi as derived from the Arabian ḫw’ when in fact, its more likely that the Arabian ḫw’, when separated from, what Cody himself calls “the vicissitudes of Israelite social structures [which] entailed a continual modification of the organization and function of the cultic persons who found their place within it,” was unaffected by the vicissitude that profoundly affected the Hebrew levīm (Mˆ¥yˆwVl). Thus, the Arabian ḫw’ may preserve a tradition about a class of people that was changed and erased in the course of Israelite and Judean history.
145 Judges 17:4
146 Judges 17:5
147 This, of course, continued at least until the time of David, who is also recorded as appointing his sons as priests.
Levite passed by, a ger (rEg) from Bethlehem in Judah, which prompted Micah to induce the Levite to serve at his shrine.\textsuperscript{148} It is evident from the text that having a Levite serve in one’s shrine was preferable to one’s own sons by Micah’s statement, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, since the Levite has become my priest.”\textsuperscript{149}

What is most important in this story is the description of the Levite as a ger, a sojourner. As the text says, he does not become a priest until he is hired by Micah. Cody sees in this reference to the Levite as a ger the origins of the Levites. This is an important point in the history of the Levites and so I will quote Cody at some length:

A Judaean, or Ephraimite, Levite would be a man who for some reason or other had broken his ties of Judaean or Ephraimite tribal membership to live in the status of a ger; the Levites, in other words, would be gerim not because their tribe failed to find a place among the land-holding tribes tribes in the process of sedentarization but because certain members of various tribes broke their normal tribal relationships to become a group of gerim known as Levites.\textsuperscript{150}

To this I would add that, not only did they throw off tribal affiliations, they dedicated themselves to cultic responsibilities. It is at this point that we can see the significance of Grimme’s view that the lw’ of Dedan were “ordinary people presented as votaries.” This would be possible due to the abundance of bamot in ancient Israel and where Albertz notes that they “predominantly served.”\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{148} It is interesting that the phrase, MDv_rDg a…whw ylwEl a…whw hød…why tAjAÚpVvl;mlm hød…why MRjRI tyE;blm, could easily be read as giving the Levites tribal affiliation as from Judah, his social position was Levite.

\textsuperscript{149} Judges 17:13


\textsuperscript{151} Albertz, \textit{A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period}, 59.
A parallel to the Levitical vow would be that of the Nazirite (רַלִּזְנָה). The most famous Nazirite is of course, Samson. Samson’s mother, a barren woman, is promised a son by God (רַמְלָה) on the condition that she dedicate him to God as a Nazirite.

This meant, “he shall not drink vinegar of wine or of any other intoxicant…no razor shall touch his head…he shall not go in where there is a dead person. Even if his father or mother, or his brother or sister should die, he must not defile himself for them.”

Though speculative, the vow of the Nazirite may be analogous to what was once a Levitical vow.

There is also the possibility that the Hebrew Bible has preserved an example of this Levitical vow. 1 Samuel 1 and 2 presents the story of the birth of Samuel. As is common in the Hebrew Bible, the story involves a barren but favored wife imploring God to provide her a son. In 1 Samuel the woman is Hannah. She weeps and prays to Yahweh “year after year.” Finally, she makes a vow to Yahweh saying, “O LORD of Hosts [תְּלוֹאָדְבּוֹקע יְהוֹה], if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life.”

She then became pregnant and bore a son, Samuel (שְׁמוֹא, which according to the text means “I asked the LORD for him.” Samuel is thus dedicated to

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152 Numbers 6:3-7
153 1 Samuel 1:11
154 1 Samuel 1:20; it is interesting that the theophoric element of Samuel is “El” and not a form of YHWH. It is also noted by Miller and Hayes that the traditions of Samuel and Saul seem to have been conflated. Hannah’s explanation for the name Samuel better “fits
the temple and, “was engaged in the service of the LORD as an attendant,” working for Eli, the priest of the temple at Shiloh.\(^\text{155}\) Cody sees the use of *na‘ar* (רAoA...n) to describe Samuel as designating his secondary status, a *na‘ar kohen*—servant of the priest. Adding to this, he notes that, It would be somewhat presumptive for [Hannah] to vow her son to a position as a priest in a sanctuary” where there already existed a priestly family but it would be “natural enough for her to vow her son to Yahweh’s service as a servant.”\(^\text{156}\)

It is possible that this episode captures in some fashion the Levitical vow and the role a Levite would play in a sanctuary after he had found work. Sacrifice was the prerogative of any man so such a function would not be the responsibility of the Levite. Instead he would be charged with maintain the building, the shrine, the idols, and acting generally as the servant of the deity,\(^\text{157}\) and is what was likely meant by, “Samuel was in the service of the LORD.”\(^\text{158}\) In summarizing, the origins of the Levites are to be found in the general populace, from the tribes of pre-Israelite Palestine, in men who dedicated themselves to the service of the gods and rejected their previous tribal affiliations.

\textit{3.2.2 The Zadokites}

the name Saul (sha’ul [l...waDv], which sounds like the verb *sha’al* [שאול] that means ‘to ask’) rather than Samuel (shemu’el [lEa...wmVv], which suggests the verb *shama’* [שמע], ‘to hear’),” \textit{A History of Ancient Israel and Judah}, 78; cf. Romer, \textit{The So Called Deuteronomistic History}, 98.

\(^{155}\) 1 Samuel 2:18

\(^{156}\) Cody, \textit{A History of Old Testament Priesthood}, 74-75.


\(^{158}\) 1 Samuel 3:1
The origins of the Zadok and the Zadokites are equally as puzzling as that of the Levites. Zadok appears out of the blue in the Hebrew Bible and is not given a genealogy until much later. This sudden appearance has led to the proposal of many theories about where Zadok came from ranging from Canaanite origins to origins within the Levites. Consensus sides with the former though there have been consistent challenges to this consensus. The evidence for such a theory is not the most unequivocal. Cody, subscribing to the theory of the Canaanite origins of Zadok notes that, “although [it is] without direct evidence, [it] has a certain number of indirect indications that would support it.”

Complicating the origins of Zadok are the fabricated genealogies given for him the Hebrew Bible. The most striking genealogical problem is discovered by comparing 2 Samuel 8:17 with 1 Samuel 22:20. The passage from 1 Samuel tells us that Abiathar, the priest of David who escaped the wrath of Saul, was the “son Ahimelech son of Ahitub.” This simple genealogy becomes suspect when in 2 Samuel 8:17 the priests of David are introduced it is said that they are, “Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar.” Given this contradiction, several scholars have reconstructed the text to read, “Zadok and Abiathar son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub.” The genealogical problems of Zadok

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161 The MT reads, “rEpwøs hDydrVc...w MylnShO;k rDt lýVbRa_NR;b JKIRymiJsSaÅw b…wfyljSa_NR;b qwødDxøw,” see de Vaux, Ancient Israel: religious Institutions, 373; H. H. Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” JBL 58 (1939), 114; Cody, A History of Old Testament Priesthood, 89. Cody also cites Wellhausen as proposing this reconstruction.
continue in Chronicles. Here the situation is distorted by layers of ideological material. Historians are well aware of the ideological slant in Chronicles and therefore the genealogies in the books of Chronicles are widely regarded as fabrications leaving them historically unreliable. Though the scribes working on the Hebrew Bible tried, later genealogies could not “disguise the fact that he was probably the former Jebusite priest of Jerusalem.”

There are several factors that have led to the conclusion that Zadok was originally a Jebusite priest of Jerusalem. The foremost of these is his sudden appearance of Zadok in David’s retinue only after David had conquered the city of Jerusalem, taking from the Jebusites. David has two priests who are mentioned as part of his enclave in 2 Samuel 8:17. The first is Zadok, and this is the first mention of him the Hebrew Bible. The second priest is Abiathar. Abiatar was the son of Ahimelech, the priest of Nob. In the process of avoiding Saul, David came to Nob where Ahimelech reluctantly provided David with food and the sword of Goliath. Upon hearing this, Saul went to Nob and slaughtered the priest there including Ahimelech. One of Ahimelech’s son’s was able to escape and fled to David. That son was Abiathar, who stayed with David throughout his rise to become the leader of Israel. It is understandable then that Abiathar would be David’s priest in Jerusalem. It is also understandable that David’s sons would be priests, since at that time there was not yet an established priestly bureaucracy. But it is curious that someone would emerge, previously unmentioned in the David story, and be appointed priest in David’s capitol.

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162 Albertz, A History of Israelite religion in the Old Testament Period, 129.
163 1 Samuel 21:2-9
The second major argument for the Jebusite origins of Zadok is the name itself. The element zedek, from the same letters, יֶדֶק, is found in names of people associated with Jerusalem in pre-Davidic days.\textsuperscript{164} The first example is in Genesis 14. Here Abraham is blessed by king Melchizedek of Salem (that is, Jerusalem) and Abraham offers Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of battle.\textsuperscript{165} Joshua 10 records a battle between the Israelites and coalition of five Canaanite kings led by Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem. The similarities in name are striking and coupled with their association with the city of Jerusalem in the text, lend support to the Jebusite hypothesis of the origins of Zadok.

H. H. Rowley sees even more in the story of Melchizedek from Genesis. Rowley claims that such a story testifies to the continuity of the Jebusite shrine under the time of David. Such a story, with Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek, would not have been invented, “would hardly have been created or preserved by a people that destroyed the shrine on their entry into the city.”\textsuperscript{166} Rowley also posits that the etiological nature of Genesis 14 is further confirming the Jebusite pedigree of Zadok. The story is used for legitimation, though not of the Jebusite shrine since Abraham is not said to have visited it. “It may, however, be taken to legitimate the priesthood of that shrine.”\textsuperscript{167} The names of kings of Jerusalem with the zedek element and the nature of the stories in which they are found seem to preserve the association of Zadok with a Jebusite shrine in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{164} De Vaux, \textit{Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions}, 374.
\textsuperscript{165} At this point in the narrative, Abraham’s name is still Abram.
\textsuperscript{166} Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” 124.
\textsuperscript{167} Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” 124. Rowley also finds pro-Jebusite etiological material in Psalm 110.
\textsuperscript{168} Further support for the adoption of Jebusite shrine in Jerusalem in the attempt by the Chronicler (1 Chronicles 21:18-30) to gloss over this origin by rewriting its history as
All of this begs the question. Why would David retain the priest of a city he conquered? Several reasons have been suggested, though due to the relative silence on the matter in the Hebrew Bible, all solutions are quite speculative. Rowley believes it was due to Zadok’s caring for the Ark. Others, including Christian E. Hauer, Jr. believe it was because of “a favor rendered David in the course of his climb to dominion over Palestine.” Hauer’s appealing suggestion is, in light of the way in which David infiltrated Jerusalem, Zadok may have been, “a valuable source of data concerning the weaknesses of a city’s defenses.” That is to say, possibly Zadok earned David’s favor by exposing to him the watercourse by which David was able to conquer the city. No matter how Zadok attained the favor of David, his retention was a politically expedient attempt to, win over those Jebusite who remained in the town.

That Zadok was retained as priest in Jerusalem after its fall to David is not without precedent in the ancient Near East. A parallel can be found in the pre-Islamic Arabic sadin. The sadin was the caretaker or guardian of a shrine. He was so closely bound to that shrine that “when a tribe emigrated, the sadin stayed behind and continued to exercise his office among strangers.” The new comers were willing to have an outsider serve as priest due to his established association with the shrine. Such retention is also likely connected to the ancient Near Eastern notion of the numinous quality of a

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Araunah’s threshing floor which was purchased by David who then built an altar on the spot, making David the founder of the shrine in Jerusalem.

170 Hauer, Jr., “Who Was Zadok?” 93.
171 De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions, 374.
172 De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions, 348.
specific location.\(^{173}\) This is belief is evident in the Hebrew Bible in the many stories where the patriarchs build shrines at locations where they meet with God. Abraham builds an altar at Shechem and Jacob builds one at Luz, which he renamed Bethel after experiencing Yahweh in that place.\(^{174}\) The priesthood would then have a special relationship with the *numina* of that location.

It seems that upon conquering Jerusalem, possibly with help of insider information provided by Zadok, David retained the priestly services of the native Jebusite Zadok. He then incorporated Yahweh worship into the Jebusite shrine and installed his priest, Abiathar, alongside Zadok in Jerusalem. Purpose of such a move would have been to unite a now mixed population. De Vaux argues for this stating, “David would have placed the Ark in the old [Jebusite] sanctuary, and retained the services of its priest in order to win over those Jebusites who remained in the town.”\(^{175}\) It is possible that the Ark was placed alongside the Jebusite symbol of the snaked called Nehushtan, which was destroyed by Hezekiah during his religious reforms.\(^{176}\) Such politically motivated religious syncretism was quite common in the ancient Near East. In fact, the type of religious and cultural syncretism that took place during David’s inchoate monarchy was necessitated by the shift from amphictyony to monarchy.\(^{177}\)

Interestingly, during Solomon’s reign, the Levitical priest Abiathar was deposed after he had sided with Adonijah’s attempt to usurp the throne. After the rebellion was

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\(^{174}\) Gen. 12:7, Gen. 28:19, and Gen. 35:7 In a similar instance, Hagar renaming the well between Kedesh and Bered Beer-lahai-roi after Yahweh appears to her in Genesis 16.


\(^{176}\) Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” 140.

put down and Solomon was reconfirmed as king, Adonijah was put to death and Abiathar was banished to Anathoth.\textsuperscript{178} This left Zadok in sole guardianship of the Jerusalem shrine. Cody makes an interesting case for Zadok’s support of Solomon in the succession controversy. Solomon is famously the son of Bathsheba, the woman whom David saw bathing on her roof in Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 5:14 lists Bathsheba as one of the “wives [he took] in Jerusalem” and Solomon one of the children born to him there. Bathsheba was the son of the presumably Canaanite Eliam and she was married to Uriah the Hittite.\textsuperscript{179} Solomon was then half Jebusite and for Zadok there existed a more natural allegiance to this king.\textsuperscript{180}

\textit{3.3 The Priesthood under the Monarchy}

The emergence of monarchy in Israel and Judah fundamentally altered the nature of priesthood in ancient Israel. The state cult of Yahweh was initiated along with the monarchy. J. Blenkinsopp succinctly describes the relationship of the priesthood to the burgeoning monarchy, stating, “It is obvious that the level of complexity at which a cult and priesthood operate is correlative and coextensive with the stage of development of the society in general.”\textsuperscript{181} Under the monarchy the role of priest in Jerusalem became, to use an anachronism, a cabinet position in the court of the king.

It took some time for the priesthood to develop into something we may recognize and could only become such after the “social organization of the community had

\begin{enumerate}
\item[178] 1 Kings 1:1-2:27.
\item[179] 2 Samuel 11:3
\item[180] Cody, \textit{A History of Israelite Priesthood}, 91.
\item[181] Blenkinsopp, \textit{Sage, Priest, Prophet}, 72.
\end{enumerate}
developed considerably.”\textsuperscript{182} That is to say, as the incipient monarchy and concomitant bureaucracies developed over the decades, so did the priesthood. This included the cessation of oracles by Urim and Thummim. The use of these oracular devices seems to have ceased following the reign of David with only passing references to them after his death.\textsuperscript{183} The consultation of Yahweh continued but through the medium of prophesy. Hosea even seems to condemn divination by Umim and Thumim by comparing the ephod (carrying the Urim and Thumim) to cult pillars ($h$\textsubscript{DB}E…$x$\textsubscript{Am}) and terephim.\textsuperscript{184} The prophets were upper class individuals and often came from within the priestly circles, making them part of the court of the king. Albertz describes the place and role of prophecy under the monarchy as, “largely institutionalized in state and cult and as such had the primary function of stabilizing society.”\textsuperscript{185} In this way the king was able to have more control over the oracles of Yahweh through the words of the prophets, which were often only recorded because they “served the interests of the royal library.”\textsuperscript{186} It has also been recorded that ancient Near Eastern monarchs would repeat the divination

\textsuperscript{182} De Vaux, \textit{Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions}, 345.
\textsuperscript{183} De Vaux, \textit{Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions}, 352-353; cf. Cody, \textit{A History of Old Testament Priesthood}, 114. De Vaux also notes that the post-David references to the Urim and Thumim were probably to give and “archaic touch” and the “writer himself probably did not know what exactly what they were.”
\textsuperscript{184} Hosea 3:4
\textsuperscript{185} Albertz, \textit{A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period}, 151. He also notes that in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century BCE prophecy emerged that was disconnected from the state and probably arose out of the growing disparity between the poor and the wealthy in an increasingly impoverished society
\textsuperscript{186} Schniedewind, \textit{How the Bible Became a Book}, 89.
process until they achieved an oracle that was acceptable to them, thus demonstrating the political nature of prophecy under Near Eastern monarchy, including Israel.\textsuperscript{187}

The reforms of Hezekiah led to integration of Levites into the Jerusalem cult led by Zadokites. The Levites retained their secondary status which became more pronounced in Jerusalem. Prior to the reforms of Hezekiah, any secondary status of the Levites was more of an implied secondary status as they served in the rural \textit{bamot} whereas the Zadokites were in charge of the imperial sanctuary. Levites took on the role of the \textit{nethinim}, meaning, ‘given ones,’ who were previously temple servants.\textsuperscript{188}

The most noticeable change to the priesthood under the monarchy is probably their incorporation of sacrificial role. This addition to the function of the priests was an exceedingly important one and one which would have dire consequences of the temple priesthood after its destruction in 70 CE. Under the monarchy, priests “inherited those religious prerogatives which, in the patriarchal period, had belonged to the head of the family.”\textsuperscript{189} This would have been a drastic adjustment to the relationship between the people and the cult in ancient Israel, as sacrifice was normally the prerogative of the head of the family, and it is possible that this division of cultic functions would have only obtained during major pilgrimage festivals at the Jerusalem temple. The reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah would have made such a division a permanent fixture of Israelite priesthood.

\textsuperscript{188} See Ezekiel, Num 3:9, 8:19; 18:2, 4; de Vaux, 364, 390; Cody, 75; Haran, 60.
\textsuperscript{189} De Vaux, \textit{Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions}, 348.
The establishment of monarchy in a society that was previously tribal would have required the adoption of precedents from nearby cultures. As has been discussed above, it is likely that David retained the services of Zadok, the Jebusite priest in Jerusalem. Cody emphasizes the Canaanite basis of Israelite monarchy stating, “There can be no doubt that it was psychologically easier for the Israelites to assimilate ideas and usages from the ethnically and culturally related populations of Canaan.” Many of the functions of the nascent Israelite monarchy were drawn from notions of kingship in the surrounding cultures and will be discussed below.

The adoption of kingship in ancient Israel brought with it the concept of a special relationship between the divinity and the king. This can been seen in the previously mentioned Psalm 2. It will be remembered that Albertz believes this Psalm to be part of an ancient enthronement ceremony. In it, the LORD says of the king, “You are my son, I have fathered you to this day.” The king is even called god (MyhlOTA) in Psalm 45:7. David is famously known as a man after God’s own heart, emphasizing his close relationship with Yahweh. This special relationship between deity and the king in the ancient Near East endowed the king with certain privileges as well as responsibilities.

Kings in the ancient Near East were responsible for building and maintaining the temples. Since this material has been partially covered above, the discussion here will concentrate on the king’s relationship to the temple and its effects on the priesthood. In

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190 Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, 95. G. W. Ahlström reminds us that, “‘Canaanite’ is not an ethnic term; it simply refers to the many groups of people who lived in the country,” in “Administration of the State in Canaan and Ancient Israel,” *CANE*, 587.

191 G. W. Ahlström “Administration of the State in Canaan and Ancient Israel,” *CANE*, 591.
taking on the trappings of ancient Near Eastern monarchy the king became a member and the patron of the cult. Albertz describes the king as, “responsible for maintaining the temple buildings and supporting sacrificial worship, and...Like the Babylonian kings, the descendants of David, too, were ‘keepers of the sanctuary.’”\(^{192}\) Under the monarchy, “the temple was a state sanctuary, and its priests were civil servant appointed by the king.”\(^{193}\) As public employees the priests were “responsible for the oversight and administration and repairs of the temple, and for the maintenance of the daily cult,”\(^ {194}\) though the king still directed the use of the temple treasury.\(^ {195}\)

The temple and the palace, both situated near the apex of Mount Zion (now the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif) were likely part of one complex. There are numerous examples of the integrated palace-temples in the ancient Near East such as the Temple of Shu-Sin and the Palace of the Governors at Eshnunna and the palace-temple complex at Dur-Sharrukin.\(^ {196}\) 1 Kings 6 and 7 describe some of the rooms that Solomon built when he constructed “the House of the LORD” (hDwhyAl t˚ yA;bAh). The buildings include not only “the Shrine,” (rylb˚;dAl˚w lDkyEhAl) but also “the Great Hall” (yDnVpII lDkyEhAh a...wh t˚ yD;bAh),\(^ {197}\) “the Lebanon Forest House”

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\(^{194}\) Bartlett, “Zadok and His Successors in Jerusalem,” 11.

\(^{195}\) See 2 Kings 12:5-6 and 2 Kings 22:4-6.


\(^{197}\) A more literal translation of the Hebrew that *JPS* translates “Great House,” is “The House in front of the Temple,” and serves to buttress the view of a singular temple-palace complex.
The suggestion in 1 Kings 7:8 regarding, “The house that he used as a residence,” is that the palace and the temple were all part of one complex. As discussed above, the details of the temple construction, and much of Solomon’s reign, are scribal fabrications. If I am correct to assign them to the time of Hezekiah, it suggests that at least at the time of Hezekiah, such a joint palace-temple complex existed, though it would seem that the shrine existed prior to David and that upon his capture of the city of Jerusalem he built an accompanying palace.

The combined palace-temple complex highlights the fact that in the ancient Near East, religion and state were inseparable. Because of this, one of the functions of the king was often the foundation of the state cult or the rededication of the nation to a previously established cult. Patrick Miller calls the “frequent building of sanctuaries and setting up the cultic apparatus in these temples…a visible way of identifying the king with the divinely sanctioned order.” In ancient Israel, this can be seen in the actions of both David and Jeroboam I (932-911 BCE). According to Paul Ash, in the ancient Near East, “the king was held responsible for the success or failure of a nation, and he was the executor of the gods' will.” Miller and Hayes confirm, “that the security and prosperity of the kingdoms at any given time depended upon the religious fidelity of the current king.” Jeroboam I, though heavily criticized within the Deuteronomistic History of the Hebrew Bible, is credited as founder of the cult of the Northern kingdom of Israel.

Throughout his reign he, “did not turn back from his evil way.”201 Though he is condemned by the Deuteronomistic scribes, he is carrying out a function of Near Eastern monarchs and displaying the close relationship between the king and the cult. Likewise, David established the state cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem. After conquering the city he brought the Ark of the LORD there and had it housed in the cultic area on Mount Zion, which was previously administered by Zadok the Jebusite, now jointly administered by both Zadok and Abiathar. Solomon, as well as subsequent kings, made additions and repairs to the temple.202

Many Near Eastern monarchs also fulfill this role, in fact, set the precedent for this role. The king of Mari, Yahdun-Lim (c. 1810-1795 BCE), built a temple for the sun god Shamash and dedicated it saying, “He [Yahdun-Lim] built up the embankment of the Euphrates (in Mari) and erected (there) the temple of his lord Shamash for his (own) well-being; he made for him (Shamash) a temple of perfect construction in every aspect of craftsmanship, befitting his godhead, and installed him in this magnificent abode.”203 Tiglath-Pileser I, “cut timbers of [the] cedars [of Lebanon] for the temple of Anu and Adad.”204 Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) used “cedar beams from the Amanus mountain...for (the construction of) an iasmaku-sanctuary as a building for festivals serving

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201 1 Kings 13:33  
202 Ahaz built a new altar (2 Kings 16:10-11), Jehoash (836-797 BCE) commissions repairs on the temple (2 Kings 12:5-6) as does Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-7). Albertz even claims that Solomon’s work on the temple in 1 Kings 6, “suggests more a rebuilding than a complete new building; it was a former Jebusite sanctuary which Solomon had renovated and splendidly adorned for the cult of Yahweh in the imperial sanctuary,” A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, 130.  
203 ANET, 556.  
204 ANET, 275.
the temple of Sin and Shamash.”205 The Assyrians even had a ritual for the repair of their temples that opened with the statement, “When the wall of the temple falls into ruin—for the purpose of demolishing and founding anew the temple in question…”206 followed by the various rituals to be performed by the king and the different branches of the priesthood. The inscriptions quoted above and this Akkadian temple repair ritual demonstrate the frequency with which temple repairs and construction took place in the ancient Near East as well as the importance it held for their society. This seems to have been the case in Israel to a much lesser extent and, as noted above, played itself more in relation to cultic practice than temple repair. A parallel to the establishment of the cult of Yahweh, on a state level, by David and Jeroboam I (whether his was Yahwistic, Baalistic, or to any other god is unimportant on this point) is the promotion of Marduk to the position of head god at some point after Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE) and later Sin by Babylonian king Nabonidus (555-539 BCE).

During the monarchy, the special relationship of the king was emphasized by his function as chief priest. As noted above, the priests were the caretakers of the sanctuary. They were responsible for the day-to-day functions of the temple, though animal sacrifice was reserved for the king. In practice it is likely the king only performed sacrifices during important festivals, the priest assuming this function on all other occasions. Bartlett confirms this relationship between the king and priest, stating, “The king, in fact, was the chief cultic person, and the priest was his deputy, taking the ordinary serves but deferring

205 ANET, 276.
206 ANET, 340.
to the king on great occasions.”\textsuperscript{207} The sacral function of the king was “an aspect of
kingship drawn from royal practice farther afield in the Ancient Near East.”\textsuperscript{208} The king
takes this role in several episodes in the Hebrew Bible. Saul offers sacrifices at Gilgal,\textsuperscript{209}
When the Ark was brought to Jerusalem, David led the procession and offered sacrifices
to Yahweh upon the occasion.\textsuperscript{210} Later in his reign he buys the threshing floor of Aruarah,
builds an altar to the Yahweh and offers sacrifices on it.\textsuperscript{211} At Gibeon, Solomon sacrificed
one thousand burnt offerings, an undoubtedly exaggerated number, and upon dedication
of the temple Solomon offered a blessing followed by the sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and
120,000 sheep, an even more incredulous number.\textsuperscript{212} The later kings are not afforded this
privilege by the scribes of the Hebrew Bible but Cody avers that it continued in spite of
the lack of references to it, stating, “We may presume that kings in both Israel and Judah
long continued to sacrifices on great occasions, but the editor of the Book of Kings chose
not to report such sacrifices, except in a negative light.”\textsuperscript{213} He believes that sacrifices
offered by king Ahaz of Judah (741-726 BCE) in 2 Kings 16:12-13 are such a case.

By and large the priest was a political office and worked for the king in the same
way the prophets worked for the king. As such, the priests were appointed and deposed
by the king. (De Vaux, 377). The term used in the Hebrew Bible for the appointment of a
priest was “filling the hand.” In Judges 17, when Micah, as the JPS translates it, “had

\textsuperscript{207} Bartlett, “Zadok and His Successors in Jerusalem,” 9.
\textsuperscript{208} Cody, A History of Old Testament Priesthood, 107; cf. Cody, 8 and Albertz, A History of
Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, 129.
\textsuperscript{209} 1 Samuel 13:9-10
\textsuperscript{210} 2 Samuel 6:13-18
\textsuperscript{211} 2 Samuel 24:24-25
\textsuperscript{212} 1 Kings 3:4 and 1 Kings 8
inducted one of his sons to be his priest,” the Hebrew reads “and he filled the hand of one
of his son’s and he was for [Micah] a priest. (NEhOkVI wØl_ylhøyÅw
wyÎnD;blm dAjAa dAy_tRa aE;!AmøyÅw)’”214 Many other passages use
this phrase to denote the appointment of a priest, most of which come from the Priestly
source.215 Since the origin of the phrase was not known, even to the scribes of the Hebrew
Bible, an etiological story was given. The story, found in Exodus 32:25-29, tells of the
aftermath of the Golden Calf incident at Mount Sinai where the Levites took their swords
and killed their kinsmen. Cody explains that, “The Levites, as a result of their ‘filling their
hands’ in the slaying of their kinsmen, have ‘filled their hands’ in the sense of becoming
priests.”216 This is analogous to the way in which the Assyrian and Babylonian kings
confirmed their kingship; during the Akitu festival they would “take the hand of Bel
[Marduk].”217 This was the crux of the Assyrian enthronement ceremony which was also
used in Babylon. It has an even more obvious connection to the Akkadian phrase “to fill
someone’s hand” which was used when putting a person in charge of a task.218 Though it
is unlikely that the ancient Israelites assimilated the Akkadian phrase into their lexicon, it
is testimony to the shared conceptual world of the ancient Near East.

In general the priests and the king existed symbiotically in ancient Israel. That is
until one of the two encroached too significantly upon the territory of the other. An

214 Judges 17:5b, translation mine.
Institutions, 346.
217 J. N. Postgate, “Royal Ideology and the State in Sumer and Akkad,” in Vol. 1, CANE,
399.
218 De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions, 347.
example of the priesthood overstepping its bounds was cited above in the succession of Solomon. This led to the deposition of Abiathar and his exile to Anathoth. The friction could go in both directions. The priest Jehoiada led a revolt against the Queen Athaliah (842-837 BCE) as she attempted to gain the throne after the death of her son.\footnote{1 Kings 11} For the most part the priests dutifully served under the king, even when the actions were, in the revisionist view of the later editors of the Hebrew Bible, heretical. Such is the case of the priest Uriah who raised no objections to king Ahaz when he was ordered to construct an altar on the Damascus model in the temple of Yahweh, and even offered sacrifices on it, presumably to Yahweh.\footnote{Morton Cogan, Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C., 75.} Instead, “Uriah did just as King Ahaz commanded.”\footnote{1 Kings 16:10-16} Outside of the king, the priest was the most revered figure in ancient Israel. This would lead to significant changes upon the loss of the kingship in Judah.

\section*{3.4 Post-Exilic Priesthood}

The Exile of the Judean population to Babylon had profound effects on the life of the Israelites, both in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century BCE and for the rest of the history of the Jewish religion. The priesthood was not immune to these effects and during the period of Exile, and possibly slightly prior, the priesthood went through significant changes. Though the details are beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that it is only at this point that the priests of ancient Israel were brought under the genealogy of Aaron.\footnote{See R. H. Kennett, “The Origin of the Aaronite Priesthood.” JTS 6 (1905), 161-186; Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 93-94; Bartlett, “Zadok and His Successors in Jerusalem,” 15-18; Cody, A History of Old Testament Priesthood, 158-166; Theophile James Meek,}
Priestly document, to be discussed below, declared that it was “Aaron and his sons [who] constitute a single and singular family within the tribe of Levi,” and only they are entitled to the priesthood.\footnote{Menahem Haran, \textit{Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel}, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 58-59.}

In 597 BCE the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE) invaded and conquered the kingdom of Judah, devastating much of the countryside. The Judeans did not readily submit to the Babylonian yoke and so in 587 BCE Nebuchadnezzar II launched another campaign into Judah, capturing Jerusalem, razing the temple, as well as the whole city, and carted off the vessels of the temple. According to the Hebrew Bible, many of the royal officials and elites of Judah were executed.\footnote{2 Kings 25:18-21 and Jeremiah 52:24-27.} Nebuchadnezzar II also deported the aristocratic population of Judah, bringing them to Babylon. Though many argue for the almost universal depletion of the population of Judah during the Babylonian period, Blenkinsopp, noting the ideological nature of such a claim state, “The myth of the empty land is therefore the creation of the Judaeo-Babylonian immigrant community which achieved social, economic and religious dominance in Judah” upon return from exile.\footnote{Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Bible, Archaeology and Politics; or The Empty Land Revisited,” \textit{JSOT} 27 (2002), 177. For the empty land view see, Ephraim Stern, “The Babylonian Gap,” \textit{BAR} 26 (2000), 45-51.}

Both the separation from and destruction of the temple necessitated adjustments to the religious practices of the exiled community of Judeans. Miller and Hayes note that, Jews in Mesopotamia probably worshipped in a nonsacrificial cult characterized by

\begin{quote}  
\footnote{223 Menahem Haran, \textit{Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel}, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 58-59.} 
\end{quote}
prayer, praise, and the reading and exposition of traditional texts.”226 This adjustment to the expression of the religion of the exiled community had significant consequences for the history of Jewish religion. This increase of written texts in the corpus of the religion of Judah since the 7th century BCE enabled this transition to the “reading and exposition of traditional text.”227

The Edict of Cyrus (538 BCE) allowed the Judeans to return to their homeland and rebuild their society. This was backed by the Persian government who financially supported the rebuilding of temples in many of the people of their empire who had previously been denied this freedom. The return was not sanctioned in order for the Judeans to build a politically autonomous society, as the Judeans were still subject to the Persians. What had formerly been the kingdom of Judah was now the Persian province of Yehud. Instead, the Persians had commissioned the construction of a theocratic society under the authority of Persia. The Persian rulers funded the construction of the temple and its accouterment.228 It is even suggested by Miller and Hayes that the Persian authorities commission the compilation and construction of the Hebrew Bible, adding that, “Such a theory would help to explain the diverse components that go to make up the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy.”229 During the Persian period, the

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226 Miller and Hayes, A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, 495.
227 Writing was only necessitated by “the need of bureaucracies in societies with a developed division of labor,” [van der Toorn, Scribal Cultural and the Making of the Hebrew Bible, 52.] which was not present in Judah until the 7th century BCE.
228 De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Religious Institutions, 403.
priesthood reached the height of its power due to the fact that “[Persian] imperial policy favored local priesthoods as compliment instruments of control and pacification.”

It is during this period that the Priestly document, (abbreviated P) was created and added. Since P does not contain its own narratives but is instead a, “well though out conceptual system that required historiographical expression,” the Persian period is the natural place to locate its construction, especially if the Persian authority truly commissioned the Torah. P inserted its ideology into the extant historical narratives of ancient Israel stressing Covenant Theology. This was done through expanding stories like the Flood and the Abraham narrative. In doing so, they also adapted the narrative to fit their ideology. They removed the privilege of sacrifice from the patriarchs, as that was reserved the temple priests. More subtly, they inserted the notion of clean and unclean, as, for example the animals Noah was directed to bring onto the ark. The scribes who added the P material also composed a cosmogony, Genesis 1. This account of creation contains numerous allusions to elements of ancient Near Eastern religion and creation myths. Blenkinsopp describes the style of Genesis 1-11, after priestly additions, as, “Somewhere between Atrahasis [the Babylonian Flood story] and Babyloniaka.”

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230 Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 80.
232 Genesis 9; Genesis 17.
233 The P account of the Flood does not include a sacrifice. Cf. Richard Elliott Friedman, The Bible with Sources Revealed, 46; Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 69.
234 Genesis 7:2.
236 Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 110. The Babyloniaka was a work of Babylonian history completed by the Chaldean priest Berossus and commissioned by the Seleucid Antiochus I.
All priests would have been trained in scribal arts and thus capable of the creation of a work like P. Though not all scribes became priests, scribal training was a part of the priesthood.237 This also meant that the priests would have likely been caretakers of the scrolls salvaged from the temple. Van der Toorn believes the scribal priest were none other than the Levites.238 This is echoed by Blenkinsopp who points out their role in “interpretation, administration, and teaching of the law.”239 Further corroboration can be found in Cody. He agrees to the scribal function of the Levites, their keeping of the torah, and believes it to be, “an extension and refinement of their earlier function as consulters of oracles.”240 This put them in a significant position after the loss of the temple and the transition to a more text based religion in exile.

This naturally led to compromises between the Levites and Zadokites, the latter without the temple, from which they derived their prestige. Römer sees what became the Torah as a compromise between these two groups.241 The Levites may have been able to expand the requirements of the Holiness Code, creating an essentially temple-less religion based on alimentary and purity laws and the exposition of extant texts.242 The status of the Levites during the exile may also explain why they were hesitant to return from Exile. Though the numbers are surely exaggerated, Ezra reports that only seventy-four Levites returned from exile as opposed to 4,289 Zadokites.243 The position of the Zadokites

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239 Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, 94.
243 Ezra 2.
necessitated compromise in order to obviate extinction,\textsuperscript{244} as would be the fate of their brethren, the Sadducees, after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

Some view the exilic adjustments to Yawhistic theology as a well-intentioned attempt at understanding the position the Judean community found itself in. I have my doubts about this, doubts which are shared by others. Blenkinsopp points out that, “No great acquaintance with the sociology of knowledge [is] needed to detect the self-interested nature of many priestly regulations, for example those concerning tithes and the allocation of cuts from sacrificed livestock,”\textsuperscript{245} later noting that, “In this kind of society the allocation of cuts of sacrificial meat is one way of denoting and confirming social status.”\textsuperscript{246} The exploitation of religion for political purposes was not foreign to the ancient Near East and is not beyond the priesthood of Israel and Judah.\textsuperscript{247} On several occasions Römer notes the intellectual superiority that priest were liable to feel.\textsuperscript{248}

The reformulation of Israelite society involved two major shifts. The first was theological as well as political. Yawheh was recast as a monarch.\textsuperscript{249} Though not simply a monarch like any the Israelites or Judeans had had but an imperial monarch in the style of Assyria or Babylon. It has already been noted that the scribes of P created a covenant theology. In this same way they created monarchy of Yawheh by appropriating the language of Near Eastern vassal treaties. A striking example of this the comparison of a

\textsuperscript{244} Cody, \textit{A History of Old Testament Priesthood}, 170, note 61.
\textsuperscript{245} Blenkinsopp, \textit{Sage, Priest, Prophet}, 67.
\textsuperscript{246} Blenkinsopp, \textit{Sage, Priest, Prophet}, 81.
\textsuperscript{247} Cogan, \textit{Imperialism and Religion}, 14,
\textsuperscript{248} Römer, \textit{The So-Called Deuteronomist History}, 47, 79, 167.
\textsuperscript{249} It is likely that this was a return to the understanding of Yawheh from pre-monarchic times, that he served a similar function for amphicyonic Israel.
loyalty treaty of Esarhaddon, (being used here to confirm the treaty now that
Assurbanipal has come to the throne) with Deuteronomy 6:4-7. The treaty reads:

(266-68) You shall love Assurbanipal…king of Assyria, your lord, as yourself.
(195-97) You shall hearken to whatever he says and do whatever he commands,
and you shall not seek any other king or lord against him.
(283-91) This treaty…you shall speak to your sons and grandsons, your seed and
your seed’s seed which shall be born in the future. 250

Deuteronomy 6:5-7:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and
with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this
day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and
when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.

This similarity is surely not coincidental. It was with this type of language that the exilic
editors of the Hebrew Bible used place Yahweh into the seat of imperial monarch of the
Israelite people. This adept reformulation had the added subversive element of subtly
undermining the imperial authority over the Israelites. It was not he who was over the
nation, but Yahweh. 251 In a similar manner, Yahweh took on the traditionally Near
Eastern imperial titles of “creator of the heavens and the earth.” As stated by Albertz,
“The extension of creative power to heaven can best be described in terms of Babylonian
influence.” 252

The second major shift in the reformulation of Israelite society was the promotion
of the priesthood. This was done by the creation of the position of High Priest. The title
hakohen hagadol (lOdÎ…gAh NEhO;kAh), was an invention of the post-exilic

250 Römer, The So-Called Deuteronomistic History, 75. See pp 75-77 for further comparisons.
in the Old Testament Period, 229; van der Toorn, Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew
Bible, 155.
priesthood and “was not used to indicate the head of the priesthood before the Exile.”

Prior to this, as was noted above, the title could not have been taken by a priest since the king was in fact the head of the cult. The high priest became the leading figure in Israelite society, tantamount to the king. The high priest even began to take on some of the trappings of kings. The high priest was anointed to recognize assumption of the role, something that was previously reserved for kings. De Vauz calls it, “the transference of royal a prerogative to the high priest insomuch as he was head of the new community.”

They even wore regal vestments, including a headdress reminiscent of the monarchy!

The term *nagid* (*dylgîn*) began to be used for the priesthood, a novel used for the word.

Bartlett explains that, “the use of the word *dylgîn* in the Old Testament shows that it was not primarily a priestly title but was used of the [one] anointed, appointed, chosen, made, taken, given or declared king.”

Probably the most striking feature adopted by the priesthood from the monarchy is the covenant of dynastic promise. Phinehas son of Eleazar is promised that, “he should be leader of the sanctuary and of his people, that he and his descendants should have the dignity of the priesthood forever.” A promise of a dynasty in perpetuity is reminiscent of David, as is stated in the following verse of Sirach.

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257 Sirach 45:25 (NRSV)
4. Conclusion

In the long view of Israelite history the priesthood was by far the most important power group in ancient Israel. The monarchy developed at a time when autonomy was attainable but failed to realize autonomy for very long. The imperial powers of the ancient Near East—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and finally, Greece—kept the Israelites and the Judahites under their thumb for the better part of the existence of both kingdoms.

This aim of this paper was to provide a brief and summary history of the power structures of ancient Israel and Judah, namely, the institutions of monarchy and the
priesthood. It can be seen that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were not insulated and *sui generis* entities. Rather they were a part of the ecosystem of variageted cultures in the ancient Near East. The influence of these cultures on Israel and Judah was profound. The greatest influence upon these two nations was simply the interaction, sometimes violent, between Israel and Judah and its neighbors. This interaction is occasionally attested in the Hebrew Bible but much of the text is “fraught with background,” to use the words of Erich Auerbach.258 That is to say, the reader can read of an event in the Hebrew Bible but its cause remains unmentioned, hidden in the background.

The major movements in the history of Israel and Judah are all instigated by some event in their cultural climate. The formation of the monarchy is facilitated by the erosion of imperial power during the Iron Age I, and coalesced around charismatic military leader in the face of the “persistent military threat from the Philistines.” The kingdom of Israel flourished due to its location on the *via maris* and other important Near Eastern trade routes, only to be destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. This destruction brought a population explosion to the kingdom of Judah fostering their florescence and arrogation. Hezekiah capitalized on his new position of prominence and rebelled against Assyrian imperial powers, only to be miraculously saved. The waning of the Neo-Assyrian Empire invited reforms by Josiah in attempts to consolidate his power, only to be killed by the temporarily revived Egyptian power. The final rebellion of biblical Israel took place under the puppet king Zedekiah and led to the complete destruction of Judah, Jerusalem and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BCE. The subsequent exile led to axiomatic

changes in the religion of Israel—brilliant adaptations that would allow the religion to survive for millennia while every one of its contemporaries faded into history.

It is important for the study of ancient Israel to be cognizant of the background of the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Without such knowledge the stories fall flat. Without the knowledge of the language of Assyrian vassal treaties, it is impossible to see the way in which the leaders of Israel appropriated that language to their own end; to replace the imperial authority which had ruled them, essentially for centuries, with Yahweh their god. Without the ability to recognize how similar the ancient Israelites were to their Semitic kinsmen, both ethnically and culturally, throughout the ancient Near East, it is impossible to discover what makes them truly unique.

**Bibliography**


