LEVITES AND PRIESTS
IN BIBLICAL HISTORY AND TRADITION
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Edited by
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and
Jeremy M. Hutton

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Contents

Abbreviations ................................................................. ix

Introduction ................................................................. 1
Mark Leuchter and Jeremy M. Hutton

Part I
Priests and Levites in Social Context

Covenant Priesthood: Cross-cultural Legal and Religious Aspects of Biblical and Hittite Priesthood ................................................. 11
Ada Taggar-Cohen

Who Is Sacrificing at Shiloh? The Priesthoods of Ancient Israel’s Regional Sanctuaries ......................................................... 25
Susan Ackerman

The Levitical Diaspora (II): Modern Perspectives on the Levitical Cities Lists (A Review of Opinions) ................................. 45
Jeremy M. Hutton

The Social Status of Priestly and Levite Women ......................... 83
Sarah Shectman

Part II
Priests and Levites in Scriptural Context

The Violent Origins of the Levites: Text and Tradition ................ 103
Joel S. Baden

Between Shadow and Substance: The Historical Relationship of Tabernacle and Temple in Light of Architecture and Iconography .... 117
Cory D. Crawford

-v-
What Do the “Levites in Your Gates” Have to Do
with the “Levitical Priests”? An Attempt at European-North American
Dialogue on the Levites in the Deuteronomic Law Corpus . . . . . . . . . . . . . 135
Peter Altmann

Those Stubborn Levites: Overcoming Levitical Disenfranchisement . . . . . 155
Stephen L. Cook

Part III
Priests and Levites in Exegetical Context

Middle-Tier Levites and the Plenary Reception of Revelation . . . . . 173
Mark A. Christian

The Cultic Status of the Levites in the Temple Scroll:
Between History and Hermeneutics . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 199
Jeffrey Stackert

From Levite to Maškil in the Persian and Hellenistic Eras . . . . . . . . . 215
Mark Leuchter

Contributors . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 233

Index of Passages . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 235

Index of Authors . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 250
ABBREVIATIONS

AB  Anchor Bible
AnBib  Analecta biblica
AoF  Altorientalische Forschungen
AOAT  Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AS  Assyriological Studies
ATD  Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AThANT  Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA  Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR  Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBB  Bonner biblische Beiträge
BETL  Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologarum lovaniensium
BJS  Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT  Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament
BN  Biblische Notizen
BO  Bibliotheca orientalis
BWANT  Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ  Biblische Zeitschrift
BZABR  Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW  Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC  Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ  Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CC  Continental Commentaries
CHANE  Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT  Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
CTH  Catalogue des Textes Hittites
DJD  Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD  Dead Sea Discoveries
Eothen  Eothen: Collana di studi sulle civiltà dell’Oriente antico
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erlsr</td>
<td>Eretz Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAT</td>
<td>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<td>GAT</td>
<td>Grundriss zum Alten Testament</td>
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<td>HAT</td>
<td>Handbuch zum Alten Testament</td>
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<td>HBM</td>
<td>Hebrew Bible Monographs</td>
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<tr>
<td>HdO</td>
<td>Handbuch der Orientalistik</td>
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<td>HKAT</td>
<td>Handkommentar zum Alten Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSM</td>
<td>Harvard Semitic Monographs</td>
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<td>HThKAT</td>
<td>Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<td>HUCA</td>
<td>Hebrew Union College Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANER</td>
<td><em>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</em></td>
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<td>JANES</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</em></td>
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<td>JAOS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the American Oriental Society</em></td>
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<td>JB</td>
<td>Jerusalem Bible</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td><em>Journal of Biblical Literature</em></td>
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<td>JHS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JJTP</td>
<td><em>Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy</em></td>
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<td>JNES</td>
<td><em>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JSJ</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</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>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSP</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JSPSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>KHAT</td>
<td>Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>KUB</td>
<td><em>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LHBOTS</td>
<td>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
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<td>NCB</td>
<td>New Century Bible</td>
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ABBREVIATIONS

SJOT Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SOTSMS Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
StBoT Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
STDJ Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPohl Studia Pohl
SubBi Subsidia biblica
SWBA Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TA Tel Aviv
THeth Texte der Hethiter
TynBul Tyndale Bulletin
VT Vetus Testamentum
VTSup Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC Word Biblical Commentary
WC Westminster Commentaries
WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZABR Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZAH Zeitschrift für Althebräistik
ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZBK Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDPV Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina Vereins
Introduction

Mark Leuchter and Jeremy Hutton

Ancient Israel’s priestly functionaries have always occupied a paramount position in the study of the Hebrew Bible, both in antiquity and in modern scholarship. Already in Julius Wellhausen’s groundbreaking study of Israelite religion, attention was drawn to the central position of Aaronides, Zadokites, and Levites in the formation of the biblical corpus and the historical development of Israelite religious ideology and identity,¹ and countless important studies have followed in Wellhausen’s wake. The antiquity and authenticity of the textual sources concerned with priests and Levites have time and time again been subjected to detailed scrutiny, the relationship between the various priestly houses serves as a point of departure for reconstructed histories of Israel’s monarchic politics, and the distinctions between ranks and gradations of priests in a variety of compositions has fueled intense speculation regarding the various iterations of sacral activity as Israelite communities formed, dissolved, and reformed over time.² In recent decades, the study of Priestly language and ideology have further clarified the nuanced distinctions between different schools of Priestly thought;³ these forays not only have provided important entrees into the understanding of ritual and concepts of holiness in Israelite religion but have contributed to new ways of understanding the growth of the biblical literature more broadly. They have also more clearly delineated the role of Priestly ideology in the shaping of


major literary collections such as the Pentateuch, the Psalter, and the historiographic texts spanning Joshua–Kings.4

Yet despite more than a century of critical research, many problems continue to stand in the way of our understanding of the diversity, function, origins, influence, and legacy of priests and Levites as depicted in the Hebrew Bible. Virtually all scholars accept the broad division between Aaronide priests, on one hand, and Levites, on the other, with long-standing sacral and political rivalries defining the boundaries between them. Similarly, many have accepted a model seeing a relatively late, Persian-era reconciliation and orchestration of the priestly ranks, with Aaronides serving as the dominant priestly house governing temple affairs and Levites functioning as scribal and administrative mediators between the public and the ruling Aaronides.5 However, there is little agreement regarding the topography of the road leading up to this late hierarchical ordering, and questions abound regarding the social location of the various priestly groups, the discrepancies in the depictions of their origins, the inconsistencies in sources regarding their ritual functions, the relationship between prophecy and the priesthood, and of course the thorny matter of dating the texts housing these collective data.

The impasse facing scholars studying Israel’s priesthood in its manifold forms is, to some degree, rooted in the presuppositions and related limitations in defining the very terms “priest” and “Levite.” The idea of priests representing a common ancient Near Eastern social typology set apart for cultic authority, ritual and ceremonial training, intercessory responsibility, and legal expertise is generally recognized, and studies into Israelite religion commonly accept that Israel’s priestly figures should be viewed as part of the spectrum of ancient priesthood in cross-cultural perspective. However, while some scholars have worked from the position that priesthood was from the outset an exclusively hereditary status deriving primarily from Levite “tribal” ancestry,6

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5. On the long process leading up to this ostensible reconciliation, see Joachim Schaper, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda: Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte Israels in persischer Zeit* (FAT 31; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

others have pointed to permeability as a hallmark of the priesthood. The term יָלֵי ("attached [to]") is itself highly suggestive of this meaning, indicating the method whereby local priesthoods grew over time through the incorporation of new members into their ranks, as well as how these priestly clans amalgamated into larger social entities. At what point, then, does a firm distinction between "priest" and "Levite" emerge in Israelite religion? Who is responsible for creating this distinction, and what purpose does it serve? How does such a division in rank or typology reflect larger sociopolitical trends implicit in the biblical sources?

Related to these matters is the fact that priestly function is evident in one form or another among ostensibly lay figures as well throughout the Hebrew Bible, and thus a strict dichotomy between Israelite laity and Israelite priests is difficult to sustain. Recent important works on family religion in ancient Israel, for example, demonstrate the depth of cultic life within family units that complement (or in some cases, rival) the cultic authority of priests at a regional or even state sanctuary. Textual/linguistic, anthropological, and archaeological evidence points to different priestly roles not only within the more familiar typological categories ("altar priests" versus "lector priests," or the depiction of Levites as scribes/librarians on one hand, militiamen on the other, or authoritative cultic functionaries on yet another), but also among

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the elders of a village or clan and the male and female heads of individual households. Religious life in ancient Israel was not simply left in the charge of priests—Levite, Aaronide, or otherwise—but was a far more textured and complicated phenomenon in which priests played an important but by no means exclusive role. Where, in this network of cultic interaction, may one situate a dedicated priestly caste? How do the textual sources regarding this caste evidence awareness, acceptance, or repudiation of these features?

In addressing these textual sources, one encounters the persistent problem of literacy and scribal authority and the role that Aaronide priests and Levites played in the production of Israel’s literature. The last two decades of research have yielded a picture of ancient Israel as a largely pre- or nonliterate culture, with only the priestly and royal/administrative elite possessing the facilities to produce significant and complex written materials. For many scholars, even this becomes a possibility only fairly late in Israel’s history, accompanying the rise of Judah in the late eighth century into full-fledged statehood capable of supporting a scribal infrastructure that could produce the materials currently found in the Hebrew Bible. Others still place the production of these materials later, in the Persian period, when the influence of the Persian imperial system provided a suitable background for the transmission of written tradition. In either case, these studies make the case that only within a complex state-sponsored matrix could Israelite priests draw from resources that would allow for the composition of texts. However, more recent research has challenged this paradigm and has demonstrated that scribalism existed beyond the confines of the royal court, the Jerusalem temple, or the offices of imperial administrators and was present already throughout the hinterland in the late Iron I–Iron IIa period. This raises many questions regarding the role of texts in different


historical and social contexts and the purpose of literature widely regarded as possessing priestly interest (the P document, Deuteronomy, various prophetic works, etc.). Were these works composed and cultivated by priests for their own literate circles (as is often thought) or with a larger audience in mind? Are the compositional techniques and hermeneutical strategies associated with the production of these texts solely the province of the scribes of the Jerusalem temple, or did they originate and continue to develop in other social environments? How do the “official” texts of the Jerusalem priestly establishment countenance the function of texts deriving from competing scribal circles?

The present volume emerged from the papers presented at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in New Orleans (2009) and Atlanta (2010) in a newly formed program unit entitled “Priests and Levites in History and Tradition” and devoted to the aforementioned unresolved issues. The unit was formed to revisit some of the axiomatic assumptions that have led to scholarly impasses in research over the last several decades, as well as to establish new avenues of inquiry that have surfaced in recent scholarship both within and beyond the field of ancient Israelite religion and the Hebrew Bible. The papers presented at these sessions explored the place of priests and Levites in relation to the cult, kinship, literacy, sexual politics and gendered space, warfare, mythology, administration, and other components of Israelite life from a multitude of positions and perspectives, demonstrating the benefit of and indeed the need for interdisciplinary approaches to untying the knots that have hindered progress in the past. The present volume incorporates many of the papers presented at those SBL sessions as well as others traversing similar and closely related territories, with the aim of defining fruitful trajectories for further research.

Four essays under the rubric “Priests and Levites in Social Context” discuss historical and sociological aspects of Israel’s religious functionaries. Ada Taggar-Cohen provides a comparison of Israelite (derived primarily from the so-called Priestly tradition) and Hittite models of priesthood, arguing for a number of functional and ideological parallels between the two. Susan Ackerman asks, “Who is sacrificing at Shiloh?” This question prompts an investigation into the ritual dynamics of ancient Israel’s sanctuaries, with the conclusion that it was not the priests but rather the common folk (“non-elites”), who were engaged in the sacrificial acts. This conclusion indicates that there may have been more space for women in the ritual process than is often supposed.

Jeremy Hutton provides a history of scholarship on the so-called Levitical cities, arguing that, although Wellhausen anticipated (and even established)
the major foci of the study of Josh 21 and 1 Chr 6, a variety of methodologies will be needed—including social-scientific criticism—to solve the enigmatic puzzle of the cities. Sarah Shectman explores the complicated status (or, better, *statuses*) of women descended from and married to priests and other members of the tribe of Levi. She demonstrates ancient Israelite women’s complex network of social relations in both everyday and ritual contexts, including sexuality, mourning, and eating taboos.

A second group of four essays examines “Priests and Levites in Scriptural Context.” Joel Baden analyzes the pentateuchal traditions concerning the origins of the Levites’ claims to special status as devotees of Yahweh. He argues that the Yahwistic author utilized two complementary traditions of the Levites’ violent origins—in one tradition, they were landless; in the other, they were completely dedicated to the service of Yahweh—to build up the J source’s picture of that tribe. Cory Crawford probes the similarities and differences between the literary recollections of the temple in Jerusalem and the tabernacle in order to further understand the relationship between these two structures. Peter Altmann contrasts American and (Continental) European approaches to texts dealing with the Levites and priests, focusing on Deut 18:1–8. He concludes that each group has something to learn from the methodologies and conclusions of the other. In an excellent example of Altmann’s “American approach,” Stephen L. Cook combines biblical research with social-scientific investigation in order to interrogate the interaction between Deuteronomy (esp. 18:1–8) and the book of Jeremiah. He examines some of the tensions between these books’ respective attempts to deal with Levites’ disenfranchisement, discovering that Jeremiah’s denunciation of the centralized cult in Jerusalem threatened to undo the Levites’ economic and political gains that had only recently been made by the dissemination of Deuteronomy, with its pro-Levitical agenda.

Finally, the third group of essays focuses on “Priests and Levites in Exegetical Context.” These essays have in common an interest in textual appropriations of Levitical and priestly traditions during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. In an essay inspired by what Altmann has called “European approaches” to priestly and Levitical texts, Mark Christian examines three biblical pericopae (Neh 8; Lev 17–26; and Deut 16:18–18:22) in redaction-critical perspective, teasing out their respective presentations of the complicated interactions among priest, prophet, and layperson. Jeffrey Stackert compares the perquisites assigned to the Levites in a few passages from Deuteronomy (notably, e.g., Deut 18:1–8) and in those passages’ reformulation in the Temple Scroll. Stackert argues that the latter text has made several innovations, elevating the Levites’ status while at the same time maintaining the strict distinction between Levites and Aaronide priests found in other biblical traditions. Finally, Mark Leuchter’s concluding essay provides a reflection on the streams of tradition both received and augmented in the book of Daniel. He argues that the book occupies a medial position in a cultural development moving
from a more temple-based (i.e., Levitical) mode of religious engagement to one that is more scribally centered, wherein exegesis of an increasingly solidified biblical text serves as the locus of religious engagement and authority.

The contributions to the present volume demonstrate that while the foundations laid by earlier generations of scholars remain the basis for contemporary study, new avenues of inquiry are long overdue. It is essential that the methods and perspectives informing cross-disciplinary research be brought to bear on the study of the sacerdotal cultures of ancient Israel and early Judaism as advances in archaeology, the study of law, hermeneutics, sociology and anthropology, and literary criticism forge new mechanisms for exploring the record of the past refracted through the text of the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, conversations among these disparate methods and approaches are essential. The contents of the present volume offer complementary insights even as they offer challenges to the axioms and paradigms informing each investigative enterprise. In the end, it is our hope that this volume provides not only a representative look at the state of the field regarding the study of priests and Levites but also a point of departure for future research into the place of Israel's priestly caste within the miasma of ancient Near Eastern religion, the role that these figures played in their own socio-cultural universe, and the impact they had on subsequent authors and audiences.