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## Epigraphic Evidence on Royal Officials in Ancient Israel and Judah

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Urzednicy krolewscy Izraela i Judy w swietle starozytnych inskrypcji

Epigraphic sources include short inscriptions indicating ownership, bills for products brought to royal storehouses, seals and bullae, weights and measures, lists of names, dedication formulae on cult objects, etc. The documents were written with no intention of presenting the reality according to some particular aims (e.g. glorification or condemnation of kings in the biblical historiography). They provide direct evidence of the activity of people at the time they come from and therefore it is a valuable source of information on different spheres of life in the ancient Israel. The publication of *Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources* by two Israeli scholars Yitzhak Avishur and Michael Heltzer from the University of Haifa (Archaeological Center Publication, Tel Aviv-Jaffa 2000, 295 pp.) marks an important progress in the use of epigraphic material for reconstruction of the administration system. The book is an expanded English version of the authors' monograph, which appeared in Hebrew in 1996 under the same title. The authors deserve much credit for having collected the epigraphic sources shedding light on royal administration in ancient Israel and Judah during the pre-exilic times, dispersed so far in many publications. Another achievement of the authors is the use of epigraphic sources from the regions neighbouring Israel and some other Near Eastern countries, sometimes also from Greece, for interpretation of certain functions of the Hebrew officials. By this comparative analysis they have shown the links between the administration system of the Israel monarchy and the systems of the surrounding countries. Particular attention deserves the model of social stratification of the officialdom in the period studied, proposed by the authors.

The introduction preceded by a foreword listing main amendments in the new edition (7-8), presents a comprehensive *status quaestionis* (9-15). The authors justly establish that biblical writers were not concerned with depicting the royal adminis-

tration. The inscriptions therefore 'add important historical material, previously unknown, about state, society, economy and religion' (9). Since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this material has been treated, mostly as an additional (beside the Bible) source of information on royal administration in ancient Israel (Mettinger 1971; Ahlström 1982; Rütterswörden 1985; Jaruzelska 1998). It is noteworthy to add to authors' list of general studies an important book of N. Fox published almost at the same date (Fox 2000). The authors pointed out some contributions brought by eminent epigraphists like N. Avigad, F.M. Cross, P. Bordreuil, A. Lemaire who dealt with partial reconstructions of the royal administration of ancient Israel and Judah (Avigad 1987, Cross 1983, 1987; Bordreuil 1992a; Lemaire 1988). Corpuses of West Semitic inscriptions of different sort, especially seals and bullae (Avigad-Sass 1997; Deutsch 1997) including volumes in print – at present already published (Deutsch-Lemaire 2000; Avigad-Heltzer-Lemaire 2000; Deutsch 2000) and in preparation, close the list (Bordreuil).

Chapter One provides a general presentation of different genres of epigraphic material shedding light on royal administration: correspondence, legal texts, tomb inscriptions, lists and administrative documents, seals, bullae, seal impressions on jar handles, miscellaneous (royal inscriptions of adjacent countries) (17-34). Each type is briefly described except the so-called 'private seals' treated at length.

The next three chapters (II-IV), being the most important part of the text, reflect the stratification within the officialdom according to the authors' system of gradation (*infra*). The chapters concentrate on presentation of biblical material related to particular titles of officials and discussion of relevant epigraphic evidence also that coming from neighbouring countries and other Near Eastern countries. A broad presentation of biblical material makes it evident that despite an increase in the number of epigraphic documents, the Bible remains the main source of information on royal administration. In other words, the Bible enables interpretation of external sources and thus makes a sort of scaffolding for the reconstruction of the system of royal administration.

Accordingly, Chapter Two concentrates on the titles appearing mostly in the lists of David's and Solomon's cabinet members (2 Sam 8,15-18; 20,23-26; 1 Chron 18,14-17; 27,32-34; 1 Kgs 4,1-6) classified by Avishur and Heltzer as 'the highest dignitaries' (87). The list is headed by the king treated as a member of the administration apparatus and holding the top position. The discoveries reading the names of some Hebrew kings are quoted in this context e.g. the Tel Dan stela which reads: [*Jeho*]ram son of [*Ahab*] king of Israel and [*Ahaz*]jahu son of Jehoram kin-]g of the House of Dawid (Biran-Naveh 1995) or the bulla which evokes: *Ahaz (son of) Jehotam king of Jehudah* (Deutsch 1997). The authors refer to the Lemaire's suggestion of reading *bt[d]wd (House of David)* on the Mesha stela (Lemaire 1994). The further sections deal with categories of functionaries mentioned in the biblical registers of royal officials (*supra*). The list opens with the title *hmzkyr* translated as 'recorder' (42). Such function has not been attested in the Hebrew epigraphy so far. The authors suggest to interpret this function in the light of some Greek ancient sources

from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which mention a certain Spensitios appointed to deal with 'the affairs of the gods and men as a skilled scribe and writer of memoirs' (45-46). However, such an explication raises a question whether such late evidence originating from ancient Greece may be pertinent to the Israelite monarchy. In the section devoted to priests (*khn*) the authors put forward a hypothesis about the title *rb khnm* ('chief priest') being the Israelite counterpart to the Judahite terms *hkhn hgdl/hkhn hr's* ('high priest'). The title in question survived, according to the authors, in the corrupted Hosea's passage *w'mk kmryby khn* ('And your people is like those who strive with the priest') (Os 4,4) and calls for a correction to *w'mk kmw rb khn* ('And the people is like the chief priest') (53-54. 159-168). The syntagme *rb khnm* is attested in the same meaning ('chief priest') in Ugaritic and Phoenician-Punic sources. Its possible occurrence in the biblical material from the Northern Kingdom may be explained by the Canaanite influence on the northern Israel administration. The title might have been forgotten by transmitters of the book of Hosea from Israel to Judah 'for the scribes and priests in Judah did not have deep interest in the developments of the Northern Kingdom' (54). The authors' hypothesis shedding light on the Israelite priesthood can be compared to the results of archaeological works in the northern Israel which also add to the biblical account. A good example is the evidence from the excavation in Jezreel (Ussishkin, Woodhead 1992) which complements the biblical historiography with the information concerning the role of the Omride dynasty who built a magnificent fortress in this city, a fact not mentioned in the Bible. The next function discussed is that of the scribe (*spr*). As the task of a secretary (recorder) is reserved by the authors to the official called *mz-kyr* (57-58), they postulate the function of a notary as a specific task of the official called *spr*. A few of the Hebrew seals and bullae as well as some pieces from adjacent countries are quoted to support this interpretation, e.g. two bullae of *lbrkyhu bn nryhu hspr* ('Belonging to Berekyahu son of Neriyahu, the scribe') dated at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., impressed by the same seal. Its owner was identified with Baruch, Jeremiah's attendant involved in the purchase of Hanamel's possession by the prophet (Jer 32,7-14). Baruch's dealing with this transaction could define his profession as that of notary. However, Baruch dealt also with copying political, religious or literary texts (Lemaire 1992, col. 256). Problems with defining Baruch's profession raise a question of many functions fulfilled by the same person and thanks to the authors, an important point concerning the stage of specialisation within the administration system is touched. The category of 'the king's son' (*bn hmlk*) has been included in the list of officials because the people referred to by this term were involved in the royal administration, although very little is known about their functions. According to Avishur and Heltzer, this term, which generated a hot debate, may designate an authentic royal son without any connection to his possible function as well as a genuine son of the reigning king (also someone from royal dynasty) fulfilling functions in the royal administration (73). This view is in contrast to the G. Brin's opinion, brought by the authors who, on the basis of some texts from the Hittite Empire, Ugarit and other countries, suggest that this title does not designate an actual king's relative (70). The authors maintain their distinction between genuine royal

sons and sons of the dynasty on the basis of Babylonian sources dating at the Persian period in which *the sons of the king* (*mārē šarri*) and *the sons of the House* (*mārē biti*) i.e. belonging to the dynasty, performed various functions (71). They also refer to a parallel of *bny hmlk* ('king's sons') and *šrym* ('officials', 'chefs' *infra*) in Zep 1,8, which suggests some involvement of the people bearing the title of king's sons (*bny hmlk*) in the royal administration. Although the Bible does not offer details as to the administration sections they might have been involved in, a significant increase in the number of glyptic finds bearing the title 'the king's son' suggests such an involvement. With regard to the discussion relating to the official appointed 'over the forced labour' (*šr 'l hms*), Avishur and Heltzer evoke the Mezaḏ Hashavyahu inscription and suggest that Hoshayahu mentioned in it was the overseer of the labour in the royal economy and belonged to the body of the *šr 'l hms* (75). Another title analysed by the authors is that of the 'friend of the king' (*ṣ hmlk*) which similarly to *mzkyr* has not been confirmed by the Hebrew epigraphy. The authors quote, among other things, epigraphic sources from Ugarit in order to enlighten this designation but without success (76). It is worth mentioning U. Rütterswörden according to whom 'Der Freund des König erscheint als eine Vertrauensperson, die den König berät und aktiv um die Sicherung seiner Herrschaft bemüht ist' (Rütterswörden 1985, 73). A commonly shared opinion about the competencies and status of the *majordomo* (*šr 'l hbyt*) appointed at the royal estate and charged also with diplomatic duties and trade matters, has been confirmed by four new bullae published by R. Deutsch (1997), added by the authors to the list of the five earlier pieces (Avishur, Heltzer 1996). The function of the commander in chief (*šr 'l hšb'*) referred to in the Solomon list is one among the rarest titles appearing in the epigraphic material attested, only on one ostrakon (Lachish 3,14).

Chapter Three deals with the titles designating officials of lower rank whose one group is defined by the authors by a general term 'other dignitaries' (*šrym*) (35). The 'governor of the city' (*šr h'r*), probably of the capital city (Jerusalem?) is discussed as the first category within this group. The two previously published pieces bearing this title (*cf.* Avishur and Heltzer 1996) have been supplemented with three other bullae (Deutsch 1997). Moreover, on the basis of the mention of Samaria in the famous inscription from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, the authors suggest that the four inscriptions *šr'r* on jars found at this site might have referred to a commander of Samaria (90). This hypothesis is attractive, especially for the search of parallel institutions in both parts of the divided monarchy (see *supra* the title of 'high priest'). However, the excavator's view that the commander of that site (Kuntillet 'Ajrud) might have been referred to is justified as an equivalent solution (Meshel 1978) (*infra*). The title *šr h'[pm]* read on the rim of a jar found in excavations at the Ophel would designate another official connected with the capital city. Subsequently the authors discuss royal officials appointed outside the capital classified as 'local officials'. A representative of this group designated with the term (*šr*) is attested at the Mezaḏ Hashavyahu inscription (*supra*) as well as at one letter from Arad (26,2). The former dealt with judicial matters. The chapter ends with a discussion of the title 'the

servant of the king' (*'bd hmlk*) broadly represented in the Hebrew glyptic (16 examples; see also WSS 411) as well as in the West Semitic material. The authors add to the list the pieces containing the title *'bd* which belonged to the servants of Israelite/Judahite kings and the names of the kings. However, the authors' attribution of pieces bearing personal names with the theophoric ending *-yw* to Judah, raises doubts. Two pieces are concerned: 1) 'Belonging to Abiyau servant of Uzziyau' (*l'byw 'bd 'zyw*); 2) 'Belonging to Shebanyau' \* 'Belonging to Shebanyau servant of Uzziyau' (*lšbnyw \* lšbnyw 'bd 'zyw*). Although the seals in question apparently belonged to a minister of Uziah king of Judah (Bordreuil 1985, 21-22), they should be included within the Israelite glyptic, at least for the *-yw* ending accepted as indicating the Israelite provenience (Sass 1993, 199; Ahituv 1992, 121-122). These endings remain a basic criterion of ethnic identity in classification of glyptic material, Israelite and Judahite respectively. It should be added that in some of the new corpuses of Hebrew inscriptions mentioned earlier and in the relevant secondary literature, the Israelite and Judahite evidences have been separated (e.g. Ahituv 1992, Jaruzelska 1996/1998, Deutsch, Lemaire 2000). The seals in question may have been produced, according to Y. Aharoni, in the workshops from the Northern Kingdom made by artisans coming from there. Such a hypothesis may be corroborated by direct links connecting the two regions in the 8th century. B.C. (Ahituv 1992, 121-122)..

Chapter Four is devoted to the category of *n'r* ('servant', 'attendant', 'youth') interpreted by the authors as a 'lowest' category of officials. The term points out, according to an accepted view, that *n'r* does not refer merely to the age but designates also 'someone connected to and dependent on a person of higher rank and social position' (107). This title designates someone who was a person in state or royal service but of lower rank (110). The authors quote examples suggesting their involvement in the military matters (108). However, the authors seem to omit some data indicating also their economic activity in which they were supported by other people under their command. It is sufficient to quote Ziba called *n'r š'wl* ('servant of Saul') (2 Sam 9,9) owner of ten servants appointed as steward over Saul's estate and supervisor of their work in the field (Jaruzelska 1998, 178-170). The list is followed by parallels to the *n'r* category appearing on Ammonite seals which leads the authors to confirm similarities in the administrative system of both Judah and Ammon (112).

Chapter Five deals with different categories of officials who are not included in the scheme of gradation assumed by the authors. The list is headed by a judge (*špł*) attested in the Hebrew epigraphy apparently on one seal (WSS 381). The authors argue, contrary to the editors of WSS who read these three letters as a personal name, that the seal in question belonged to an actual functionary (115-116). They support this opinion by pointing to a royal emblem (four winged *uraeus*) appearing on it. This seal could confirm, according to them, the reform of Jehoshaphat, which consisted in appointing official judges in the fortified cities in Judah (116). However, the authors' suggestion to interpret the seal on the basis of Jehoshaphat's reform is not satisfactory taking into account the debate on the historicity of this reform (Japhet 1993, 771-774). Subsequently the title *štr* is discussed. There is no epigraphic

Hebrew material confirming this apparently late designation. Accordingly it is attested at eleven Punic inscriptions dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. (119-120). This term cannot designate a scribe (*swpr*) in these sources as the latter is attested in several Punic inscriptions (*hswpr*, *rb hswpr*) (see *supra* authors' interpretation of *hmzkyr*). However, the analysis of these sources does not enable us to go beyond the conclusion based on the biblical sources, namely that this category of people was connected with the realm of justice. Another title treated in this section is *srs* translated as 'eunuch'. This designation belongs to the number of titles not attested in Hebrew epigraphic material. The authors try to clarify this position in the light of Ugaritic, Aramaic and neo-Assyrian sources. They quote e.g. an Aramaic bulla from Khorsabad inscribed: 'Belonging to Pan'aššur[la]mur, eunuch (*srs*) of Sargon' (WSS 755). They associate a bulla reading *lntnmlk 'bd hmlk* dated to the second half of 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. published by Deutsch (1997) with 2 Kgs 23,11 mentioning *lškt Ntnmlk hsrys*. Unfortunately, except for the involvement of the officials bearing this title in watching over the royal harem, nothing more is known about this category.

At the end of the chapter, some other officials' functions are listed, known only from Hebrew epigraphic finds, namely 'the gatekeeper of the prison' (*š'r hmšgr*), 'the manager' or 'the guide' (*nhl*) as well as 'the standard bearer' (*hnss*) the last mentioned evidenced only by one Ammonite seal. These pieces confirm the importance of the study bringing extension of our knowledge of the system of administration known from the Bible.

Chapter Six gathers epigraphic material shedding light on the system of taxation and measures during the Persian period. This section contains a lot of a new hitherto unpublished material, which enhances the worth of the publication although it goes beyond the framework of the study, which concentrates on the period of the monarchy. Excurses on biblical and epigraphic topics, bibliography and numerous illustrations, unfortunately of very poor quality, are appended.

The work of Avishur and Heltzer deserves appreciation especially for their attempt at establishing 'hierarchy' (87, 93) within the officialdom, which contains some grains of sociological theory. The division of the material presented in chapters II-IV suggests that they use, without an explicit explanation of their assumptions, a scope of political authority as a criterion of the ranking. The term 'political authority' corresponds to Max Weber's notion of legitimate domination i.e. 'the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons' which implies the belief in *legitimacy* of the authority giving orders (Weber 1978, 212-213). The scope of political authority as a criterion of officials differentiation seems to underlie the presentation, at the very beginning, of the ministers of Solomon who, as it may be assumed, ruled from the centre over respective sectors of administration all over the country. The fact that the king is mentioned as the head of the cabinet for his supreme prerogatives confirms precisely that a degree of participation in domination is taken, although implicit, as a decisive factor. Con-

forming to this scheme, officials who depended on the king and his 'central bureau' but whose power was limited to certain territorial areas in the country, are discussed at the second place, (Chapter III). The opening of the list by the office of 'the city governor' (*šr h'r*), probably of Jerusalem, attested on two bullae, results from the fact that this governor was very close to the centre of administration in the capital. The iconography of both bullae made by the same seal illustrates the governor dependence on the king. Accordingly, the motive represents a king holding bow and arrows symbolising power or rule and an official standing before him in a gesture of submission (Avigad 1986, 30). Moreover, the author's quotation of the Rüter-swörden's view on the position of the governor of the city as 'set over the city by the king' (88) and of Ugaritic sources in which an official placed over the city was 'dependent on the king', points to the subordination to higher authority as a criterion of functionaries differentiation. However, it should be recognised that it is problematic to include this category of officials appointed in the capital city in the same section with a local district commander, represented by a functionary called *šr* referred to in the ostracon from Meẓad Hashavyahu, i.e. locality distant from the centre, as we may expect that the scope of political authority of both officials might have been different. Furthermore, inclusion of the category of officials bearing the title 'the servant of the king' (*bd hmlk*) within the second section also rises some doubts. Although it is justified to put generally this category below the royal ministers, the attribution of an official defined as 'servant of the king' (*bd hmlk*) mentioned among cabinet members sent by Josiah to the prophetess Hulda (2 Kgs 22,12), which indicates that his position was similar to royal ministers, is problematic. Therefore, we would expect that this person was a member of the central cabinet. The hierarchy adopted by authors based apparently on the scope of political authority is evident from putting the *n'rm* ('servants', 'attendants') at the end of the Chapter Four, which ends the sections dealing with hierarchy within royal officials, as the lowest category of people dependent on their master. However, authors' treating of *n'r* ('servant', 'attendant') position as the 'lowest' seems problematic. It is sufficient to quote Ziba mentioned earlier called *n'r* who disposed the work of other people which points out to his different positions in comparison to those of other people bearing this title. Moreover, the expression *n'ry mlk šwr* ('servants of the Assyrian king') in 2 Kgs 19,6 designates the royal envoys (diplomats). These examples testify that the title *n'r* does not reflect a precise social position. The weakness of authors' typology evident with respect to the *n'r* is exactly the same as in the case of 'the servant of the king' and in the case of every other title (see *supra* 'scribe' *swpr*).

The authors' attempt at classification of officials is evidently influenced by a specific sociological theory of social differentiation, namely, the theory of stratification. According to this approach, the society is presented as a superposition of a few strata ordered according to one or more criteria, such as: total income, profession, official position, education, social background, type of dwelling, style of life (reflected in consumption spending) and also participation in political power. This model has been particularly popular in biblical studies. It was applied for instance in H.

Reviv's reconstruction of the differentiation of the ancient Israelite society in the period of the monarchy (Reviv 1993). This scholar used a threefold scheme with the upper, the middle and the lower strata (Reviv 1993, 9). The division of officials proposed by Avishur and Heltzer is also triple. Their first category of the cabinet members enters the Reviv's 'upper class' embracing high officials, military leaders, high priests, i.e. groups which enjoyed the 'political power' to use the terms of this scholar. The impact of the sociological theory in question on Avishur and Heltzer is evident from their classification of officials belonging to the cabinet of Solomon as 'senior ministers' (35), 'high officials' (87) or of 'high rank' (72), 'highest dignitaries' (87), 'the upper classes' (104) assuming the other categories as subalterns. That is why some of the officials discussed in the second chapter are referred to as 'other dignitaries' (*šrym*) (87).

However, the authors' approach is not free from some limitations. The shortcomings of political power as implicit criterion of officials differentiation, leave the authors with a problem of certain categories, which are not susceptible to the division according to their implicit criterion of participation in political authority and thus are suspended in the vacuum. It is not accidental that the categories of officials involved in the judicial sphere and others e.g. *šwpt* ('judge') or *šwtr* ('officials connected with the legal issues'), *srys* ('eunuch') labelled as 'other officials, ranks and others', are discussed in a separate chapter devoted to the categories of officials without taking into regard the type of subordination to those of higher rank (V). However, it is difficult to understand why the judges are included in this chapter, as the authors claim at the same time the existence of royal courts. Therefore, in some way they were depended on the king or the officials of central administration. Thus, on the basis of the authors' assumptions we would expect they should be discussed in Chapter III.

On the other hand, discussion of the officials in question in a separate chapter results perhaps from the authors' implicit assumption about social division of labour as an autonomic criterion of social differentiation. The fact they enumerate independently the officials bearing the titles *špt* ('judge') and others, means that the authors treat the domain of jurisdiction as an autonomous sphere of social life. Accordingly, the division of the officials with respect to the scope of political power indicates that they took into account governing as an autonomic sphere of social life. Such an assumption sociologically speaking is quite correct. The authors' effort throughout the book (see also enumeration of officials appointed to different sections of the royal economy, the army and administration [87]) to clarify as much as possible particular functions of the officials and their providing of a new data makes an important contribution to the knowledge on social division of labour in the ancient Israel and Judah. This observation leads me to mention another theory of social differentiation which divides society into classes and estates and which would enable an integration of categories of officials distinguished by the authors, often suspended in the vacuum, within a precise sociological model of social differentiation. This model assumes theory of society-as-a-whole. A peculiar feature of this theory is a distinction of the two main autonomous spheres within the structure of a society: the economic and



the non-economic. The separation of both domains reflects the social division of labour, i.e. different ways in which people make a living. The economic sphere comprises, among other things, all kinds of productive labour and all its objective facilities (in particular, the necessary material and intellectual means, e.g. means of production), as well as all forms of economic ownership of means of production and of labour power that puts these means in motion. Productive labour designates, generally, all human activity which results in the creation of material goods through the production process, i.e. putting the means of production in motion. By contrast, the non-economic sphere comprises, among other things, all types of non-productive labour and all its objective facilities. By this we mean the work of people who get their livelihood by serving the state apparatus – the military, the police, the judiciary, and the officials of the central and local administration – and the work of people who disseminate intellectual goods (e.g. literary men) or enable others to participate in spiritual goods (e.g. priests) (Jaruzelska 1998, 19-20, cf. Kozyr-Kowalski 1988, 298). The crucial criteria of a socio-economic position (which consists essentially in belonging together within social classes or estates) are (1) the place within the social division of labour (i.e. obtaining one's means of subsistence in either the economic or the non-economic structure) and (2) the ownership of means of production and of labour power (Kozyr-Kowalski 1997, 404).

The terms like 'high position' or 'elevated to high position' used by the authors, based on a simplified theory of social differentiation could be replaced by categories developed on the basis of analysis of actual relations between the officials and the two main spheres of social life: the economic and non-economic ones. In this way we could replace the three-stage structure with a few or a few tens positions determined on the basis of the social division of labour, e.g. officials appointed at royal storehouses in the capital and outside of it, on royal trade, on forced labour, etc. The following sections could be devoted to priests and other people connected with the temple, judges, etc. The positions determined in this way would be differentiated on the grounds of a different relation to the ownership of the means of production and to the own or someone else's labour power.

Certain categories of 'the king's son' (*bn hmlk*) or 'the king's daughter' (*bt hmlk*) discussed by the authors can be integrated into the above outlined scheme on the basis of kinship as a criterion of social differentiation indicating its specificity consisting in impact of kinship on someone's position within social structure. Such an observation enters M. Weber typology of power, namely fits in traditional officialdom in which positions in the government were held by kinsmen (Weber 1978, 228).

The work of Avishur and Heltzer in which they outlined a scheme of 'hierarchy' should be appreciated as a good starting point for a comprehensive reconstruction of social differentiation (social classes and estates) leading to elaborating a general theory of the ancient Hebrew society. Thus, their book fully deserves to be acknowledged as an important reference for a sociological study of ancient Israel.

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