

Harald Samuel, *Von Priestern zum Patriarchen*. Levi und die Leviten im Alten Testament (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 448; Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) Pp. 453 + XIV. €129,95 / \$182,00. ISBN 978-3-11-031039-9 (Hardcover).

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“Levites,” “Levites priests,” “priests and Levites,” “Levi the Patriarch,” “a son of Jacob” – these are only some of many various biblical references to the notion of “Levite” or “Levitical.” Some attempts at a chronological arrangement of biblical texts and modern theories regarding a historical origin of this notion and of the clan/tribe of Levi have been made since the early 20th century (J. Welhausen, K. Moelhenbring). Other, more extensive works dedicated to this topic appeared in the 1960s (H. Strauss, A. Gunnweg, M.D. Rehm, A. Cody). The most recent attempt has been made by Risto Nurmel in 1998. The new monograph by Harald Samuel deals with this issue using a methodological path marked by Ulrich Dahmen with his monograph *Leviten und Priester im Deuteronomium* (Bodenheim 1996). The author himself explains that his work “Die folgende Arbeit hat demgegenüber ein fast minimalistisches Ziel. Sie will zunächst die Belege für *lwj* in der Hebräischen Bibel in ihrem jeweiligen Kontext verstehen, literarhistorisch einordnen und schliesslich daraus eine Vorstellung davon gewinnen, welche Bilder die Autoren der biblischen Bücher von ‘den Leviten’ hatten bzw. transportieren wollen” (p.2). Samuel is conscious that previous monographs on the subject do not provide a full picture. The authors often present a patchwork of various stages in the development of the idea of the Levitical priesthood. The author adopts the method of the historical-literary analysis in order to give a fullest possible presentation of the idea. In doing it, he embraces the results of the current literary-critic analyses of any biblical book, whose analysis has any bearing on the investigated topic. In author’s intention, this method should allow to establish the stages of the development of the biblical notion of the “Levite” and show various, often competitive, ways of its understanding. The author also takes into consideration some non-biblical texts, e.g., the so-called Aramaic Levi’s Document and Qumran

texts (p. 3). By the use of all biblical passages, where the “Levitical” theme occurs, Samuel widened the horizon of the research significantly. Such an approach is laudable. In the next step of his analysis, Samuel deals with a question of the historical context of Levites’ ultimate position in the cult of the ancient Israel. The scholar starts his analysis with an exposition of the meaning of the notions connected with the Levitical reality. He also looks at some previously proposed non-biblical etymologies. Eventually, he does not embrace any of them and instead proposes to limit his research to the Hebrew language alone.

The structure of the next part of the Samuel’s monograph is lucid and well justified by the author. The analysis starts with the Book of Deuteronomy (pp. 16-147). Although the author is conscious of much more extensive use of the term “Levite” and its derivatives in Numbers, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, he noted that in those books the term does not have so many various uses as compared with Deuteronomy (p. 16). The result of the analysis consists in establishing several layers of tradition (*Ur- und Früdeuteronomisches, deuteronomistisches, priestliches*, which should be better called *postdeuteronomisch* or *postpriesterschriftlich*). In the oldest texts, Samuel sees a differentiation between two usages of “Levites” and “Levite priests.” Only in the central sanctuary, the Levites appear as being real priests, in other places they are just potential priests (p. 142). Thus the author talks of Deuteronomical “levitisation” of priesthood and links this process with the fact that after the establishment of one central sanctuary all previous so-called by him *Landleviten* lost their job (p. 143). A group of texts defined as deuteronomistic assigns the Levites a whole range of tasks connected with the cult (e.g., the annunciation of the covenant, the carrying of the Ark, guard / sentry and the interpreters of the Moses Torah). The youngest, post-deuteronomistic group of texts considerably lowers the rank of the Levites, even presenting them as a secular tribe.

Next book analyzed by Samuel is the Book of Numbers (pp. 148-245). As precisely counted by the author, Numbers mentions the Levites 75 times in 62 verses (p. 148). No other book, except Chronicles, contains so many such references. None is also more suitable to be called “Leviticus.” In comparison, the book actually called Leviticus in the Bible uses the term “Levite” in the very general sense. According to the author, the oldest of the texts is Num 26, which mentions three distinguished Levitical clans. Subsequently, younger texts explicitly describe the role of the Levites in a different manner (perhaps correcting older description of their role) and mention Aaron and his ancestors. The youngest fragments are clearly tougher in their tone suggesting numerous mistakes made by the Levites in the cult. They even

suggest a danger of their death because of those mistakes. In the conclusion of this section, Samuel notes that the book „zeigt einen massiven Ausbau in nachpriesterschriftlicher Zeit, und insbesondere das Verhältnis von Leviten und Priestern war einen der Motoren dieser Entwicklung” (p. 244).

The book of Exodus is the next biblical book analyzed by Samuel (pp. 246-300). According to the author, in a distinctly pre-priestly part of the book (Ex 2:1), Moses is seen as an offspring of a pair of Levites. Later in the conclusion of Samuel’s monograph, this passage is recognized, together with Gen 29 (Levi as a Jacob’s son), as being the oldest example of the usage of word “Levite” in the whole Bible (p. 401). The author recognizes Ex 4:14 (with Aaron as Moses’ “brother”) as well as a later priestly genealogy as marking the line of Aaron and being another development of the idea, aiming at legitimizing the choice of Aaron and his ancestors as the only proper priests. A reaction to these tendencies is an obviously negative image of Aaron (Ex 32:1-6) and a positive image of the Levites (Ex 32:25-29), classified by Samuels as “spätdeuteronomistische.” Also in Ex 38, the author does not see anything that can allow the classification of this text as P⁶. In fact, it is obvious that this text speaks of various tasks of the Levites. In his opinion, in the aforementioned P⁶, a differentiation between *clerus maior* and *clerus minor* is still not a topic (p. 299).

As to other biblical books (Genesis, pp. 301-307; Prophets, pp. 357-385), the author dedicated more space to the analysis of the Deuteronomical History from Joshua to Kings (pp. 308-356) and the Book of Ezekiel (pp. 364-379). The other books (Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Ben Sira) are discussed in the chapter *Ausblicke* (pp. 394-400). At the end, Samuel shortly discusses the role of the Levites in the texts of Qumran (pp. 394-400). It is worth mentioning that the book of Genesis identifies Levi as a son of Jacob. These passages are close to P or are of a later origin. According to Samuel, some of these texts are obviously anti-Levitical (e.g., Gen 34; 49:5-7). Nevertheless, in R.G. Kratz’s opinion, followed by Samuel, Gen 29, beside Ex 2:1, is the oldest text about Levi (p. 303 and 401). In Deuteronomical History, to his own surprise (p. 405), he sees not only some later additions to Levitical traditions, but also an important discrepancy. He writes: „Das Überraschende daran ist die Diskrepanz zwischen der ostentativen Berücksichtigung levitischer Interessen im deuteronomistischen Deuteronomium und dem erdrückenden Desinteresse im ‘Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk’” (p. 405). Samuel admits that he cannot explain this fact. This issue, as he suggests, must receive more scholarly attention in the future. In the Book of Ezekiel, Samuel focuses on a particular status given to a group of priests called “sons of Zadok.” He interprets this fact as „Zadoqidenprogramm

Ezechiels.” Eventually, this program failed and therefore only Zadok found his place in the genealogy of Aaron.

In last section of his book, the author presents the results of his research. First, he refers to a literary chronology (pp. 401-406). Next, he describes subsequent stages of the development of the tradition about the Levites in their historical context (pp. 406-408). There is no serious objection to the methods applied in the work and the results of the research. Samuel substantially orders and enriches previous knowledge on the Levites using the newest results of the historical-literary scholarship on the analyzed texts. He also gave a coherent picture of a development of the tradition about the Levites, pointing also some historic factors, which have influenced this development. However, it is rather difficult to consent to his opinion on Ex 2:1 and Gen 29. It is commonly recognized that the identification of Aaron (and later also Miriam) as Moses’ sibling was an idea of priestly circles (P), aimed at explaining an exclusiveness of “the sons of Aaron” as proper priests. It is unwarranted to recognize Moses as a Levite. The Levitical identity of Moses is a result, but not an aim of the whole development of Levitical traditions. The same situation is found in Gen 29. The idea of 12 tribes of Israel appears not earlier than during the 6th century B.C. The recognition of the sons of Jacob as the eponyms of the twelve tribes is nowadays seen as an effect of the conception of 12 tribes of Israel, rather than its purpose. A literary-critical rationale given by Samuel for the classification of these texts as priestly is not really convincing. The analysis itself is too general, with too little attention given to the current discussion. On the other hand, the question of a precise date for the origin of the biblical texts will probably always be a moot point. The author passes over the contemporary discussion about the potentially historical origin of Levites, as well as their role in biblical Israel formation. Theories concerning this matter are numerous. Although they are often only speculative, the theories contain some historical references. If we do not accept Samuel’s suggestions concerning the dating of Ex 2:1 and Gen 29, the question of Levites origin remains unanswered. And even though we may accept Samuel’s opinion concerning the dating of these texts, especially Ex 2:1, we still do not find in the monograph any attempt to show the potential, historical source of tradition about levitical identity of Moses.

The remarks given above do not overshadow many advantages of the work. It is a valuable contribution to the scholarly debate due to its completeness and coherence; it really gives an overall look at the development of the tradition of the Levites in the Old Testament.