Course Reading


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A HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Aaronides, Levites, and Zadokites

The problem now facing us is this: we know that before the Exile the word “priest” was the name of a function, while the word “Levite” was the name of a tribal group which had long before ceased to be independent and which had been living among the other tribes, with the status of particularly favored gérím. Deuteronomy had canonized the idea that membership in the tribal remnant of Levi gave a man a right to function as a priest if he wanted to, yet the outcome of Josiah’s reform left it impossible for anyone who was not a Zadokite to function as a sacrificing altar-priest. Deuteronomy had also insinuated unmistakably that all priests ought to be Levites, yet the only legitimate priests now, the Zadokites, were not Levites. Tensions were there to be resolved somehow or other, and resolved they were, at the end of a process in which all priests — and that means particularly the originally non-Levitical Zadokites themselves — claimed to be of a special group of Levites that was Aaronide (“the priests, the sons of Aaron”), while the Levites in the broader and authentic sense remained in a position of cultic subordination to the priestly group and were called simply “levites.” At the end of this process, in fact, all cultic personnel, priestly or not, had been made “levites” of one sort or another. Who were the Aaronides originally, how did all this come to pass, when, and where?

I. Exodus 32: Levites against Aaronides? Aaron in Early Tradition

The opposition between Aaronides and Levites is clearly present after the Exile. An earlier, pre-exilic, trace of this opposition, however, has often been seen in Exod. 32, which, in its present form, gives Aaron a leading role in the making of the golden calf at Sinai (Exod. 32:1-6), shows Moses roundly condemning the making of the golden calf as an act of infidelity to Yahweh (32:7-20,30-35), and includes a section on a violent act of fidelity to Yahweh on the part of the Levites (32:25-29), an act which is by implication in contrast with the infidelity involved in this making of the golden calf and which leads to Moses’ investing the Levites as “priests of Yahweh.” Aaron has his share of the condemnation (32:21-24,25b,35b), but it is the infidelity of the people as a whole which is contrasted with the account of an act of fidelity on the part of the Levites. The golden calf is an element of tradition which most probably has something to do with the worship in the sanctuary established by Jeroboam at Bethel in the Northern Kingdom after the political schism (1 Kgs. 12:26-32).¹ The text of Exod. 32 as we now have it does contrast the fidelity of the Levites with the infidelity of the people, and Aaron is, in the present text, associated with the wrong-doing of the people. At first sight, there does indeed appear to be an echo of some controversy between Levites and the priesthood of Bethel in all this. The priests of Bethel, then, would be the forerunners of the later Aaronide priesthood, more or less victorious over the Levites in competition for priestly rights, and this is the way the episode has usually been interpreted.²

When the episode is carefully considered, though, certain fundamental questions about this interpretation arise. The text of Exod. 32 is universally acknowledged to be not a literary unity but a composite, with traces of subsequent retouching.³ The block made up of vv. 25-29, which deals with the Levites, is secondary in its present context, although we are still faced with the question whether its insertion in its present context was determined by a polemic against the Aaronides or not. The answer to that question will depend to a large extent on the function of Aaron in the text of Exod. 32 as a whole.

A. Aaron’s Role in the Episode

1. Aaron in Exodus 32 Itself

Exod. 32 has been seen both as a narrative originally favorable to the cult at Bethel and as one originally unfavorable to that cult. In each hypothesis, what was Aaron’s original role?


² This line of interpretation began when H. Oort, “Die Äaroniden,” Theologisch Tijdschrift 18 (1884) 289-335, proposed that Aaron was considered the ancestor of all priestly groups in the Northern Kingdom. It has been continued, but with limitation to the priesthood of Bethel, by R. H. Kennett, “The Origin of the Aaronite Priesthood,” JTS 6 (1905) 161-86; F. S. North, “Aaron’s Rise in Prestige,” ZAW 66 (1954) 191-99; S. Lohringer, “Versuch zu Ex. XXXII,” VT 10 (1960) 16-50 (cf. especially pp. 46f.). M. North, Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus (ATD, V; 2nd ed., Göttingen, 1961), p. 206, does not directly consider the question of the Aaronides, but he suspects that the presence of the section on the Levites shows an opposition to more than one priesthood in the North.

Walter Beyerlin sees the original narrative of the golden calf (basically vv. 1-6) as a favorable aetiological narrative for the particular form of the worship at Bethel; the secondary material of Exod. 32 would, then, have been negative material directed against the cult which in the earlier, positive, narrative, had been legitimized. If this analysis is correct (whether it is or not it something we need not decide here), would such an early, aetiological, narrative for Bethel's cult mean to include an aetiology for Bethel's priesthood as such? And could such a priesthood be called an “Aaronide” priesthood? This would practically require Aaron's presence as a clearly priestly figure in the narrative, since neither the presence of the people alone nor the presence of Aaron as a non-priestly figure is enough to provide such an aetiology. But Aaron's figure in Exod. 32 is not that of a priest. He performs no priestly act, and his building an altar (v. 5) is not an act reserved to priests in the Old Testament: it is regularly, as here, an element in the account of the foundation of a sanctuary, by men who were not priests (Gen. 12:7f; 13:18; 26:25; 33:20; Josh. 22:10; Judg. 6:24; 2 Sam. 24:25).

Aaron's presence in Exod. 32 is determined rather by the setting of the scene (at least in the ordering of the Pentateuchal narrative) at the foot of Sinai. The Sinai-context is established by Exod. 24:12-15a — the text immediately preceding Exod. 32 when the intervening material of chapters 25-31 (belonging to P) is removed. In 24:14 Aaron and Hur are left with the people at the foot of Sinai when Moses ascends the mountain. If Aaron had been introduced in 24:14 in deliberate preparation for 32:1-6, why would Hur, who is totally absent from chapter 32, and totally unrequired either by chapter 32 or by the context of 24:14, be placed with Aaron in 24:14? The presence of Aaron and Hur in 24:14 is more likely determined by their presence together in the relatively old narrative of Exod. 17 (cf. 17:10,12), and the presence of Aaron in 24:14, consequently, has not been contrived deliberately by someone who had the golden calf narrative of chapter 32 in view. If the original nucleus of the narrative of the golden calf really was favorable to the cult at Bethel, and if at that stage Aaron was already present in the narrative, then his role was not that of a priest meant to lend luster to the priesthood of Bethel.

And what is to be said of the role of Aaron in the narrative if the narrative was meant from the very outset to discredit the cult at Bethel? The account was certainly meant to be unfavorable when the secondary material began to grow around it, and Aaron was certainly present at that stage, even if he was not present in it before. Does the narrative’s being against the cult at Bethel mean that it is aimed directly at the priesthood of Bethel? Naturally, if it was against the cult it can be said to have been implicitly and indirectly against the priests responsible for the cult’s execution, but that is not a direct opposition — and certainly not an opposition of rivalry — to the priesthood itself in Bethel: it remains an opposition to the cult. As for Aaron (who is still not a priest), the entire episode is condemning, not his sin, but the sin of the people. In vv. 7-14, Yahweh’s words to Moses mention only the people, and Moses’ prayer is for the people. At the climax of vv. 15-20 it is the people who must drink the dust of the pulverized image sprinkled on the surface of the water. 8 Significant is the question Moses puts to Aaron at the beginning of their dialogue in vv. 21-24: “What has this people done to you that you have brought them into a great sin?” (v. 21). While Aaron is an important accomplice, and Moses’ interlocutor in the encounter, the initiative and the sin are primarily the people’s, even though this is the unit in the literary complex which shows Aaron in the most unfavorable light. In the section on the Levites (vv. 25-29) it is, again, the people who have been unfaithful, and such is also the case in the last unit (vv. 30-35). Twice Aaron himself is inculed (vv. 25b,35b), but both of these phrases are insertions made even after the secondary units of the golden calf narrative — excepting, perhaps, vv. 21-24 — had already been united as we have them today. 9 The role of Aaron

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1 In this action as an ordeal, cf. R. Plass, “Das Ordal im alten Israel,” ZAW 51 (1933), pp. 125ff.
2 The guilt of the people rather than of Aaron in this text is even more strongly indicated if we take the Hiph'il ha'pb'la' as a Hiph'il used to express consent to the root idea (Juelon, Grammaire, § 54d), as T. J. MEYER has taken it in his translation, “that you have let them incur such great guilt,” in The Complete Bible: an American Translation (Chicago, 1939).
3 Exod. 32:25b is a parenthetical remark as it now stands; had it been intended by the same hand as that responsible for v. 25a, the verse would rather begin: “And when Moses saw that Aaron had broken the people loose...”. The mention of Aaron presupposes that vv. 25-29 have already been united with at least the essential part of the material which now precedes, and, as HOLZINGER, Exodus (KHC, 11), p. 109 points out, Simak in 25b is late Hebrew. V. 35b's remark that Aaron made the calf is superfluous after 35a's statement that “Yahweh struck the people because they made the calf.” For NOETH, Exodus, p. 201, vv. 21-24 and 35b are even later than 25b, as is the present text of vv. 1b-4, which would be a substitute for a primitive text in which Aaron had nothing to do with the golden calf before it was already made by the people. In this he is followed by LEMMING, op. cit., p. 47f, who, in addition, interprets vv. 21-24 as a late attempt to excise an already inculed Aaron. For an opposite view on the originality of vv. 1b-4, however, cf. BEYERLIN, op. cit., p. 24, n. 3.
in the narrative is not that of a priest but that of a leader at Sinai who serves as an interlocutor in what dialogue the narrative requires.

2. Aaron Elsewhere in Early Tradition

Nor does Aaron appear as a priest elsewhere in the earlier Pentateuchal narratives. Only in P does he clearly appear as a priest in the Pentateuch, and for a fairly long period in the elaboration of the narrative traditions he seems to have been a polyvalent figure capable of taking on a plurality of diverse aspects. Gunnegw, too, sees this diversity of aspects, but in all of them — even those in the earlier texts, including Exod. 32 — he sees some suggestion of priesthood. Is this justified? That Aaron has a priestly color accounting for some (but not all) of the late, though pre-P, additions of his person to the story of Moses in Egypt in places where he was originally not present, or not mentioned, is quite probable, thanks to Gunnegw's analysis. This probably accounts for his addition in such texts as Exod. 8:21; 10:8,10ff., which speak of sacrifice. But does the figure of Aaron really have a priestly color in passages where he was present before such late additions?

In the case of Num. 12, Gunnegw argues convincingly that Aaron's figure in the original tradition of the sin and punishment of Miriam was not negative, but is justified in taking the next step, arguing that Aaron's intercession (Num. 12:11f.) is a cultic trait, and even a priestly trait, because of the relation (found in Lev. 13-14) between cultic impurity and the leprosy with which Miriam was smitten. Aaron's intercession is not with God but with Moses. His turning and noticing that Miriam was suddenly leprous is not necessarily a symbol of priestly declaration in cases of leprosy, and the fact that the root sgr is used of shutting out lepers in both Num. 12:14f., and Lev. 13-14 does not prove that it bears a cultic connotation, for the shutting out of lepers is a natural thing, whether it is surrounded with cultic prescriptions and taboos or not. Gunnegw's interpretation of Exod. 17:8-16, a very early tradition, depends upon an understanding of Aaron's activity here (and Hur's) as helping Moses in a priestly activity of blessing. In this text, is Moses raising his arms, considered in its effects, really that of blessing, or is it not rather an act of Yahwistic "magic"? Even if it were an act of blessing, that would still not strike a particularly priestly note, for blessing in earlier texts is not reserved to priests, or even to kings: cf. Josh. 14:13; 22:6f. (Joshua); Num. 22:6, etc. (the prophet Balaam), and the texts

(some of them P) in which fathers bless their children, e.g. Gen. 27:4; 28:16; 32:1; 48:9. The texts in which Aaron appears with Moses before Pharaoh also include texts in which Aaron, with his rod, has the aspect of a magician of the true God (cf. Exod. 7:9f.,19; 8:1f.,12f.); the corresponding actions, when performed by Egyptians, are performed by magicians (the 

bartzummim of Exod. 7:22). Magical wonder-working may at some stage or other of Israelite religion have been considered the business of a priest, but we have no evidence that such was ever the case. Such acts remind us rather of the stories recounted of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who were not considered priests.

The figure of Aaron, then, is not yet a priestly one either in Exod. 32 or in other early Pentateuchal texts. The hypothesis that the "Aaronites" were originally priests of Bethel becomes dubious.

B. Exodus 32:25-29 and the Levites

The section on the Levites, vv. 25-29, as all today agree, was added to the literary complex of Exod. 32 after that complex as a whole had taken shape (with the remark on Aaron in v. 25b added still later). If we ask ourselves at what chronological point this section was added, we can answer only that it was done after the material against the golden calf had achieved its unity. If that material as an assembled literary whole belongs to a Northern E, then vv. 25-29 may not have been added much before the eighth century, for nowhere in the ninth-century stories of the combats of Elijah and Jereu against idolatry in the Northern Kingdom do we find the golden calves in the North attacked, whereas in the eighth-century Hosea was railing against them (Hos. 8:5f.; 10:5; 13:2). If the material as a whole belongs to J, the general Southern opposition to the schismatic sanctuaries of the North would make a much earlier date possible, and for that matter, an earlier date in E is not excluded, for the stories of Elijah and Jereu do not necessarily tell

16 GRESSMANN, op. cit., p. 269, holds the original figure of Aaron in both Exod. 32 and Num. 12 to have been that of a priest (and Miriam's in Num. 12 originally to have been that of a priestess!). For GRESSMANN, Aaron and Miriam were priests at an early stage, then, at a later stage of growth in tradition, they began to take on the traits of prophets. One suspects strongly that it was the other way around, as far as Aaron the prophet and Aaron the priest goes, and one wonders if Miriam is ever a priestess at all in Biblical tradition.

17 A similar condemnation is attributed to Ahijah of Shiloh in 1 Kgs. 14:9, but this text is an addition attributed to the earlier part of the story of Ahijah, while, at the same time, it is itself earlier than the Deuteronomistic redaction. Cf. NORT, US, pp. 79ff. It is, then, before the time of Jeroboam I and the origins of his schismatic cult. NORT, UP, pp. 33, n. 115, calls it a secondary element within J, except for vv. 7-14 ("Deuteronomistic": n. 113). S. LEHMER, "Versuch zu Ex. XXXII," also ascribes it to J.
all." On the other hand, a date much later than the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the end of its royal cult in the eighth century is not likely, and the disparate units had been assembled by the time J and E — whatever we understand by "J" and "E" — had taken shape. This was still the time of an Aaron who lacked priestly color in the traditions.

1. Significance of the Fragment Itself

It is very unlikely that this material on the Levites was originally composed for insertion into its present context, with which it has no intrinsic relation, once we have subtracted the still later insertion of v. 25b. On the other hand, it does not stand well by itself, and it may well have been detached from another narrative context for insertion here. 20 The element of the Levites' killing "brother, friend, and neighbor" (v. 27; cf. v. 29) is strangely reminiscent of something in the older part of the blessing for Levi in Dt. 33:

He said of his father and his mother: 'I have not seen him'; His brethren he knows no more; His children he ignores. — Dt. 33:9a

Both express a stout-hearted detachment from kith and kin which appears to have been an integral part of Levitical traditions. The section in Exod. 32, moreover, has as its conclusion the conferment of priesthood on the sons of Levi by Moses himself, the most telling aetiology we have for the priestly rights of the Levites. We have here a fragment of a classical aetiological tradition explaining the appropriateness of priestly function among Levites, torn asunder from its original context and inserted in its present context. The original context, historical or not, on which this aetiology was built is lost, but the central idea of the aetiology is that as a result of some act of vigorous and heroic fidelity on the part of the Levites, an act which required the decision of relatives of the Levites themselves, the remaining Levites acquired priestly standing, the acquisition being sealed with Mosaic approbation. The similarity of Exod. 32:27-29 to Dt. 33:9a need not show direct literary dependence of either

21 In this we disagree with Smith and Bortholet, "Levites," in Encyclopaedia Biblica, III, 2775, and Lehming, op. cit., p. 42, for whom Exod. 32:25-29 is dependent on Dt. 33:9 itself. In Dt. 33:9 the Levites ignore their kinsmen; in Exod. 32:27-29 they slay their kinsmen. In Dt. 33:9 follows an allusion to God's putting the Levites to some kind of test at Massah and Meribah, but Exod. 32:25-29 does not mention this detail which may have been found in the fragment's original context, however.

22 The Akkadian expression mutû qa'û, "to fill the hand," meaning to entrust someone with something abstract, has long been known among Biblicists as an expression to be applied to Hebrew melitû yâd. In Hebrew, it usually refers to inauguration in priestly office or function, but it refers to the fact of a man's installation in office, not to any kind of ceremony: cf. P. Dhomme, "L'emploi métaphorique des noms de parties du corps en hébreu et en akkadien," (1923), p. 194.

text on the other, and, in fact, does not seem to show such dependence. The idea is put differently in each text, and both appear to be separate expressions of a common traditional theme. The text of Deuteronomy does nothing to explain its startling remarks on Levi and his kinsmen, taking it for granted, instead, that the readers or hearers know the background-story well enough to grasp the allusion. A form of the story itself is partially preserved in the fragment in Exodus. 21

When we pause to consider the matter more closely, we notice that the story explains not only the priesthood of the Levites but also the partial disappearance of the Levites as a full tribe, for this decimation of kinsmen serves also to explain the reduction of the tribal Levites, who had survived only as gërim. The two things are explained together.

The story itself is governed by a double meaning, a sort of pun or word-play, on the ambiguous expression "to fill (the hand)," which in Classical Hebrew is often used to denote entrance upon a priestly office (Exod. 28:41; 29:9,33,35; Lev. 8:3; 16:32; 21:10; Num. 3:3; Judg. 17:5,12; 1 Kgs. 13:33), but which is also used of having one's hand filled with profit gained from another (Ps. 26:10), and even of filling one's hand with justice (cf. Ps. 48:11). 22 According to the aetiological fragment of Exod.

19 R. de Vaux, "Le schisme religieux de Jéroboam 1er," Angelicum 20 (1943), p. 82.
20 Gressmann, Mose und seine Zeit, pp. 215 f. Noah, UP, p. 160, n. 416, thanks, however, that the block of vv. 25-29 was composed specifically for insertion in its present context and that it is, accordingly, meant from the outset to be a polemic against the non-Levitical priesthood of Bethel; we have already noted that he does not hold it to be in any way anti-Aaronite. Gunneweg, Leviten und Priester, pp. 35 ff., concludes, rightly I think, that vv. 25-29 express an opposition of value between zealous Levites and sinful people, not between Levites and a rival priesthood, and that Aaron does not figure here at all before the later addition of v. 25b. Gunneweg leaves open the question whether vv. 25-29 were originally composed for insertion into the complex of Exod. 32 or had a previous separate existence.
2. The Fragment in its Present Context

Even though the insertion on the Levites in vv. 25-29, taken by itself, has nothing to do with Aaron or with Aaroneses, is its placing in its present context governed by some polemic between Levites and Aaroneses in the pre-exilic period? This is not likely. At the time of the fragment's insertion, Exod. 32 was disparaging the evil of the cult itself in Bethel rather than its priesthood. It is opposition to the cult that must have occasioned the insertion. The Levites in the period of the divided monarchy had particular reason to oppose the cult in Bethel because priests of their tribe were excluded from it, but they had more idealistic reasons for opposing it, too. Conservative, attached to the old-style Yahwism and its traditional sacrificial institutions, they were opposed to what seemed in their eyes (and the eyes of people of the same mentality) to be the idolatrous air of infidelity surrounding the worship at Bethel, and they were proud to contrast this with their own fidelity to what they thought was the purer Yahwism of olden times. It was this fidelity to Yahweh which led to their being ideal priests in the first place, according to the fragmentary account in vv. 25-29, and this fidelity is what basically is being contrasted with the infidelity of the people responsible for the type of cult at Bethel. The Deuteronomic antithesis is perceptible here: on the one hand, a single legitimate sanctuary (in Jerusalem?), Levitical priests, and fidelity to covenant law; on the other, sanctuaries like Bethel away from the "amphictyonic" sanctuary, priests who were not Levites, and infidelity to covenant law (by making images, for example).

The insertion is, neither in its original form nor as a part of the present tradition-complex or literary complex, a polemic against any "Aaroneses" or any priestly group. It is rather an apology for Levitical religious prestige, made by contrasting the Levites' own high degree of fidelity with the popular infidelity responsible for the type of cult found at Bethel, although the Levites' fidelity is presented as the grounds for their priestly prerogatives. If in its negative attitude towards the cult at Bethel it is implicitly against the non-Levitical priesthood of Bethel, it is, nevertheless, not "anti-Aaronesic," for, in Exod. 32, Aaron's role is not that of a priest. The most strongly negative phrases on Aaron in the whole complex of Exod. 32 are the latest additions, vv. 25b and 35b.

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23. In the light of the usage now known from the Mari texts, we may be quite justified in translating, "each man (filling his hands) with (Hebrew b5) his son and his brother"—all the more so because "to fill with" is the normal sense of "fill" in Hebrew. The kinship themselves, and their lives, are the spoils, the vanquished men put to death.

24. G. B. Gray, Sacrifice in the Old Testament, pp. 249f., has objected to seeing the expression "fill your hands" in Exod. 32:29 as one having to do directly with the Levites becoming priests, limiting it instead to the priestly oath of that concrete sense that "to fill the hand" has in 2 Kgs. 9:24 (Jehu "filled his hand" with a bow), but Gray would still admit some obscure allusion to priesthood. P. Heinisch, Das Buch Exodus (HS. 1/2; Bonn, 1934), pp. 234f., objects that no one fills his own hands and makes himself a priest, so that any interpretation of Exod. 32:29 in this sense must be false. Heinisch would interpret the text as meaning "fill your hands with a sacrifice," i.e., make a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Yahweh. It is true that in the late text of 1 Chr. 29:5 the expression "to fill one's (own) hand" is used in the sense of filling one's hand with a gift for cultic offering, but in the older text of Lev. 16:32, which unmistakably has a more official and enter to priests into priestly priesthood. This does not affect the question of vv. 25-29, for Lehning situates such a development of Aaron's role after the incorporation of these verses into their present context.

25. Lehning, "Versuch zu Ex. XXXII," pp. 43f., has found the felicitous expression "apology" (rather than polemic) for the primitive sense of vv. 25-29, although he believes the overall sense of Exod. 32, once Aaron has been artificially given a more active role in the episode, to be polemical and to be directed against the Northern sanctuary's priesthood. This does not affect the question of vv. 25-29, for Lehning situates such a development of Aaron's role after the incorporation of these verses into their present context.
at least one of which (v. 25b), if not both, was added after vv. 25-29. The time and source of these latest additions are difficult to determine. If what we shall propose below is valid, they probably came from sympathizers with the Levitical position, or from Levitical circles whose hopes lay in maintaining the old claims of Levi and rejecting the new ones of Aaron, when Aaron the Levite was being used as the eponymous head of a group (essentially Zadokite) seeking to establish itself as more Levitical than the Levites themselves.

At any rate, if it is granted that Exod. 32, minus the two late added phrases in vv. 25b and 35b, is not the echo of a disension between Levites and a group of priests styling themselves “sons of Aaron,” then it is no longer tenable that the Levites were struggling with Aaronides as early as the time when J and E took consistent shape; nor is it tenable that the Aaronides were originally a group of priests at Bethel in the North, or that Exod. 32 represents a polemic between Southern Zadokites and “Northern Aaronides.”

II. The Zadokite-Levite Compromise

A. Some Previous Reconstructions

A number of hypotheses have been formed to explain the appearance of the Aaronides on the post-exilic scene where the Zadokites had stood before. The three which have won the most attention are those of R. H. Kennett, F. S. North, and Adam C. Welch.

For Kennett, the original Aaronides were priests of Bethel, and Bethel continued in operation as a sanctuary after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom, so that when the impious reign of Manasseh was afflicting Judah in the first half of the seventh century pious Judeans could, and did, flee to Bethel, where they could worship as they ought. When Judah fell to the Babylonians, the Zadokite priests of Jerusalem were taken to Babylonia, and once again the pious faithful went to Bethel for their worship, perhaps even inviting the Aaronide priests of Bethel to Jerusalem to take charge of worship there. After the Exile, Kennett continues, Zerubbabel came to Jerusalem to undertake the restoration of the Temple and its cult, but the Joshua son of Jehozadak who assumed charge of the priesthood (Hag. 1:1; Ezra 3:2, etc.), and whose father, according to 1 Chr. 5:41, was of Zadokite lineage, was not really a Zadokite but an Aaronide. This at first caused difficulties with Zerubbabel, who accepted the Zadokite exclusivism known to him from his personal upbringing among the exiles in Babylonia. The prophetic party

in Palestine, however, was unwilling to allow Joshua to be deposed, and the returning Zadokite priests had to accept him as their head. The news of this state of affairs then reached Babylon, where the Zadokites there realized that they had to merge with the Aaronides or suffer the consequences of exclusion themselves from the restored priesthood in Jerusalem — now Aaronide. After a while, the Zadokites, because of their superior formation, came to dominate the priesthood of Jerusalem again. All this belongs to Kennett’s hypothesis. How may we judge it?

It is true, as Kennett says, that the sanctuary of Bethel was restored after the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs. 17:25-28), or at least that a priest was sent back there, but we are told by 2 Kgs. 23:15 that it ceased to operate after the reform of Josiah, and we have no evidence of a restoration either before, or during, or after the Exile; nor do we have evidence of any attachment of Jews in Jerusalem to Bethel during any of this period. The Zadokite lineage of Joshua son of Jehozadak can not be held as incontrovertably certain on the basis of the Chronicler’s genealogy alone, it is true, but no evidence to the contrary is forthcoming. The idea that there was a certain coolness between Zerubbabel and Joshua comes from a very dubious interpretation of those words of the oracle in Zech. 6:12-15 which say that there shall be a “counsel of peace” between the two; but there is no indication, in fact, that this peace is of the sort that comes after a dispute — quite the contrary (cf. Zech. 4:1,6,10-14). The starting-point for Kennett’s construction is an identification of Aaronides with the priesthood of Bethel, and we have already called this identification seriously into question.

A far more radical hypothesis has been proposed by North. For him, there is no problem of how the Aaronides — again, of Bethel — got the upper hand in Jerusalem, for what really happened was that during the exile Bethel supplanted Jerusalem as the religious center of the Palestinian Jews. The Zadokites, he continues, returned from exile, saw what had happened, made themselves Aaronide by a genealogical fiction, and as a result their prestige was restored and Jerusalem became again the religious center of Palestine.

North’s “key” is his interpretation of Zech. 7:1-3, which would have the authorities in Jerusalem sending a message to Bethel to ask for advice on a matter of ritual practice. His interpretation is necessarily quite hypothetical, as any interpretation of this difficult and corrupt text must be, for the textual problems are practically insoluble and the syntax depends on their solution. North’s hypothesis takes for granted that the Aaronides were the priests of Bethel, ignores the Jerusalemite ideal of Judaism at the time of the Exile along with that ideal’s roots even among the common folk of the North of Palestine (cf. Jer. 41:5), and

26 Notii, Exodus, p. 201.
fails to explain how after the Exile Zadokites could possibly have remade Jerusalem instead of Bethel the place of the national sanctuary simply by styling themselves Aaronides, if the transfer of that shrine's locality to Bethel were so popular a thing.

Welch's view is a more sober one. According to his theory, it would be an over-simplification to represent Ezra's work of restoring the Temple as the work of the returned exiles. The remnant in Palestine had renewed sacrificial worship on the site of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, and Neh. 10 would contain the dispositions on which they agreed for the maintenance of that worship. Whereas Ezekiel insisted that only Zadokites should be priests, with levites relegated to a menial position, the re-establishment after the Exile saw a compromise which would settle the problem by refusing to limit the priesthood to Zadokites and widening the circle to include all those who could claim descent from Aaron, i.e. to include the priests who had remained in Judah. The same compromise, while refusing to admit levites to a status of equality, also refused to degrade them.

Most of Welch's theory has much to be said in its favor. The only part of it to which one might really want to take exception is Welch's postulation of organized priestly activity in Palestine during the Exile. There may have been some such activity there, but it would have been of an unofficial character, if it existed at all. The document of Neh. 10, no matter what is thought about its original provenance and the circumstances of its incorporation into the present text of Nehemiah, certainly supposes a Temple that is standing and in use, not a ruined one whose rebuilding is only projected, and Welch's situation of that document in the period of the Exile has lost acceptance in subsequent studies. It may be noted that Welch does not deal with the question of the original Aaronides; he merely notes the role Aaron had in the genealogical lists which belong to the post-exilic period. A number of problems remain for us to grapple with.

B. The Original Aaronides: a Levitical Group in Judah

The popular tendency to see a close relation of early Aaronides to Bethel has had as its corollary the tendency to look upon them as a group originating in the North. In our discussion of Exod. 32 we have already loosened the hypothetical connexion with Bethel, noting at the same time that that text, before its final touches, provides no evidence

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30 Welch gives his reasons for so interpreting Neh. 10 in his Post-Exilic Judaism (Edinburgh, 1935), pp. 67ff.
32 The Work of the Chronicler, pp. 85ff.
33 NORTHE, OP. p. 198.
34 R. KNIRN, "Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung der mosaischen Gerichtsbarkeit," ZAW 73 (1961), pp. 152ff., even sees this text as a Levitical cult-aetiology, whose original purpose was that of showing Aaron, Levite and first priest of Israel, to have been properly initiated in priestly work under the tutorship of the priest Jethro. Aaron here in the company of the elders, eating bread with Jethro before God, is not at all clearly a priestly figure, but at least we do have an ancient tradition having the area in the far South, near Midian, as its Haltpunkt, and the bearers of the tradition deemed Aaron important enough to have his presence assured in the scene.
36 W. F. ALBRIGHT, "The List of Levitical Cities," in Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume, English Section (New York, 1945), pp. 49-73, has compared the texts of the lists of a quarrel between Levites and any group attaching themselves to Aaron. There are good reasons for seeking Aaronide origins not in the North at all, but rather in the South.

1. Aaron in Local Tradition; the Lists of Levitical Cities

The figure of Aaron the priest becomes clear only after the Exile, in P, but that figure was not something which P constructed without antecedents. We have observed that the early traditions preserved in the Pentateuch do not consider Aaron a priest, but the quest for the figure of Aaron, leader in the desert, leads us already to southern Judah and its traditions. In the same region we find the tradition on Aaron and the elders eating bread before God (Exod. 18:12). We do not find demonstrably Northern traditions on Aaron. Exod. 32 in its present form does have to do with the cult at a Northern sanctuary, but — apart from the doubt surrounding the precise nature of the golden calf episode in its earliest stage of tradition, and the doubt about Aaron's role in the episode at that stage — our previous discussion, with the divergent views of authorities cited, has shown at least that arguments can be given for a Southern background to Exod. 32 just as well as for a Northern background. The reference to Aaron (with Moses) among Josh. 24's old, and presumably Northern, Shechem traditions, in Josh. 24:5a (missing in the LXX), is, in all probability, a very late gloss. The figure of Aaron seems, then, to have belonged originally to the South, and if that is the case, the suspicion arises that a group of men calling themselves Aaronides or sons of Aaron also ought to be sought in the South, not in the North.

When we pursue our search further, we come to the list of Levitical cities whose more original form is given in Josh. 21:9-42, paralleled in 1 Chr. 6:39-66 (LXX 6:54-81). In the distribution of these cities through
uses material already at hand, 40 is using a fact still well known (that the Aaronides were related to the Kohathites) as the foundation for its genealogical derivation of Aaron from Kohath. The groups in the city-list more credibly show a certain regional solidarity which had gradually grown up among the Levites once they had progressed from the stage of wandering gerim to that of settled gerim scattered throughout the land — a regional solidarity expressed, in Israelite fashion, by setting up descent from a common ancestor. The arrangement is hardly a primitive one. We can not reasonably expect that the wandering individual Levites of pre-monarchical days would so consistently have assembled in previously existing clans when they were settling down. The clans of Num. 26:58a—b are probably those of a previously existing arrangement: the names of two of them (the Libnites and the Hebronites) are based on place-names in southern and southwestern Judah, and we know that what traces we have of the early Levites do lead us to the south of Palestine. Subsequently, the circumstances of Levitical settlement dissolved those ancient unities, and new ones based on the geographical areas of the settlement throughout the other tribes then arose. The Aaronide group took shape as a part of this process, and the Aaronides were in the South, precisely where the traditions on Aaron, the priest, seem to have come into being.

2. The Chronological Question

The dating of the list of Levitical cities is disputed, and the question of an original list and the list in its present form is involved in the dispute. 41 Rather than enter upon that problem in all its details, let us merely note that even according to the minimal theory, which holds the terminus a quo for the list as it stands to be no earlier than the reform of Josiah, we are still in the pre-exilic period, and still in the period when two tensions were greatest: the ideological tension between the principle that priests should be Levites and the fact that the Zadokites

40 The names Libni, Hebron, Mahil, and Mushli, all treated as personal names in Exod. 6:17f. and other genealogical constructions, are derived from the names of the Levitical clans in the ancient tradition found in Num. 26:58, on whose antiquity cf. NORT, Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels, pp. 122-32, with MÖHLENBRINK, op. cit., p. 196.

41 W. F. ALBRIGHT, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, pp. 121-25, and op. cit. (above, n. 36), argues for an original date not much after the time of David and Solomon, on the grounds that certain cities in the list were not under Israelite control very long afterwards; cf. also B. MAZAR, “The Cities of the Priests and the Levites,” VT Suppl. 7 (1960) 193-205. M. NORT, “Oberlieferungsgeschichtliche zur zweiten Hälfte des Josuabuches,” in Alteorientalische Studien Friedrich Nößchers zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet (Bonner Biblische Beiträge, I; Bonn, 1950), pp. 164-67, disagrees with Albright’s chronological conclusions, but abstains from trying himself to offer a definite solution. On Alt’s view, dating the list after Josiah’s reform, cf. above, Chapter Six, n. 23.
were not, and the sociological tension between the entrenched Zadokites and those Levites seeking to make a living as priests.

The next problem in dating is caused by the division into the three groups and the Aaronide subgroup. Hertzberg claims that this division can only lead us into the post-exilic period when, alone, it would have any significance. But its significance may quite well be just what it purports to be: a demographic subdivision within a larger tribal group. One wonders what its post-exilic significance would be if it were not originally just that, for it was not absolutely necessary for the Aaronides to be derived from the Kohathites (in Num. 7:8 they are not), and the division into Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites serves little pragmatic purpose in the post-exilic material. The three groups are mentioned in genealogical lists, but the two not used for Aaronide derivation are not continued: cf. 1 Chr. 5:27-41 (LXX 6:1-15). Some isolated confirmation of the group-locations given by the city-list is afforded by Judg. 18:30: the priest of new Dan in the extreme North was “son of Gershom,” and it is there in the far North — in Naphtali, Issachar, and Asher — that Josh. 21:27-33 puts the Gershonites. According to Num. 3:21-37; 4:2-33, the Kohathites are supposed to carry the Ark, and that does have some significance, while the functional distinction between Gershonites and Merarites has little significance: the Gershonites have charge of tent coverings, curtains, doorscreens, hangings, and their appurtenances, while the Merarites have charge of the frames, bars, columns, pedestals, columns, and their appurtenances. One has the impression that this distinction between the work of the Gershonites and that of the Merarites is made solely because the genre required something of the sort to correspond with a real division within the tribe known from tradition.

Noth presents the more specific argument that it is the derivation of the Aaronides from the Kohathites which is post-exilic. Inspection of the Old Testament material, though, reveals that as time passes the connexion between the Aaronides and the Kohathites grows not stronger but weaker. In the genealogy of early P in Exod. 6:16-23 the connexion is there. In the clan distribution worked with by Num. 3, Eleazar, son of Aaron (v. 32) presides over the Kohathites (vv. 27-31), although he is not made a part of them. In the more recent strata of P, the “sons of Aaron” are quite distinct in function from the “sons of Kohath” (cf. Num. 4:5,15). Turning to the genealogical material found in Chronicles, we find two juxtaposed genealogies of which the first, 1 Chr. 5:27-41 (LXX 6:1-15), makes Kohathite Levites of Aaron, Eleazar, Phinehas, and the chief priests of Jerusalem down to the Exile, while the second, 1 Chr. 6:1-15 (LXX 6:16-30) presents as Kohathite Levites only men who are either unimportant or otherwise unknown (but including the Korah who appears in competition with Aaron in Num. 16). Of these two lists, the first shows indications of being the earlier one: the introduction (vv. 27-29) follows the schema of Exod. 6:16-23, the list does not carry the series of names any further than the Exile, and it uses the term Gershon (v. 27) characteristic of the Pentateuch. The second, which makes no connexion of either Aaron-Eleazar-Phinehas or of the chief priests of Jerusalem with the Kohathites, uses the form Gershom (6:1) characteristic of the compilations proper to Chronicles. The first list, with Aaron as a Kohathite, then, is earlier than the second list with no such connexion. Still another text, 1 Chr. 15:4-10, makes a complete distinction between “sons of Aaron” and Levites (v. 4) and uses the Levitical triad Kohath-Gershom-Merari, without any inclusion of Aaronides; this text is even later than Chronicles as a whole, for if it were not a secondary insertion in the text the following v. 11 would be superfluous.

So, with the passage of time after the Exile the place of the Aaronides within the Kohathites seems not to have grown in tradition but rather to have been neglected — deliberately. In the original material on the Levitical cities the Aaronides are very much a part of the Kohathites, and no more than that (cf. Josh. 21:9f.); this is certainly not a creation of the time represented by the later strata of P, and it does not show traces of any construction being made by someone with clerical concerns. In material secondary to the original list in Josh. 21, Aaron does appear as a priest (Josh. 21:4,13). This secondary material (presumably of early P), with Aaron a priest but the Aaronides still Kohathite, may


[^13]: Das Buch Josua, p. 131.

[^12]: That the genealogical list of Exod. 6:14-27 is an insertion in already existing material hardly needs demonstration, and its attribution to P is not disputed. That the list itself is compounded from previously extant genealogical elements having a separate existence already before the Exile has been argued by Möllenhoff, “Die levitischen Uberlieferung,” pp. 207ff., but he would not take the attachment of Aaron to the Kohathite lineage as anything more than secondary, although early (before the Exile?): loc. cit., and pp. 187ff.}

[^46]: On the consensus of scholarly opinion that Num. 4 belongs to a more recent stage of P, cf. Eissfeldt, Introduction, pp. 204ff.

[^45]: In Chronicles, apart from 1 Chr. 5:3-7, which we have just seen, the form Gershon is found only in 1 Chr. 21:6, which is also in a section showing evidence of being pre-Chronicles. W. Rudolph, Chronikbücher (HAT, 1/21; Tübingen, 1955), p. 158, concludes that 1 Chr. 23:3-6a is pre-Chronicles, and the following vv. 6b-24 post-Chronicles. 6b, however, (“according to Gershon, Kohath, and Merari”), can be reckoned as the completion of 6a, “And David divided them into classes according to the sons of Levi,” just as easily as it can be reckoned as the introduction to the list that follows. The fact that David is the agent in 6a just as in vv. 35 assures the attachment of 6a to the preceding verses, and their existence before Chronicles can be argued for with Rudolph’s reasons, pp. 158ff.

[^44]: Rudolph, op. cit., p. 115.

[^39]: Josh. 21:13 is a secondary insertion of a city of refuge, and the doublet of v. 8a in v. 3 also speaks for the secondary nature of the intervening material, including v. 4 (North, Das Buch Josua, p. 127). Since the numbers of cities in vv. 4-7 correspond to those of vv. 9-42 after the cities of refuge have been intercalated, vv. 47 are either contemporary with that interpolation or posterior to it.
cities makes him and his sons members of the tribe of Levi, but it is only the secondary material, very easily post-exilic, which makes him a priest. Aaron's intrusion beside Moses may in some cases, like Exod. 8:21; 10:8,10f., have been determined by the original text's mention of sacrifice, which by the time of the later monarchy was a strongly priestly attribute, but the intrusions as a whole may show a Levitical influence, and the fact that certain of the intrusions may be made with a priestly prerogative in mind is not surprising, if the intrusions came from groups in which priestly prerogatives were a continuing interest. Such intrusions can show a directly Levitical concern with only an indirectly priestly concern.

In addition to the suggestion, already dealt with, that the Aaronides were originally priests of Bethel, it has been proposed that they were from the beginning Zadokites of Jerusalem seeking to legitimize themselves as Levites by appealing to a Levitical Aaron as their ancestor, and opposing him to a Levitical Moses held by the authentic Levites to be their ancestor. 59 To this, one must object that, whatever can be said about the traditions of opposition or rivalry between Aaron and Moses (Exod. 32:21-24; Num. 12:1-9,11), we have already noted that in these texts there is no allusion to priesthood involved, and it is not demonstrable that Levites appealed to Moses in opposition to another group appealing to Aaron. The text of 1 Sam. 2:27-36, which comes almost certainly from Zadokite circles in its present form, makes no appeal to Aaron (for the "faithful priest" of 1 Sam. 2:35 must be chronologically posterior to Eli), and does not mention Moses (for to see Moses as that father of the house of Eli mentioned in vv. 27f. is gratuitous). Finally: the exilic text in Ezek. 44:6-16 is overtly anti-Levitic and pro-Zadokite, but neither in this passage nor in any of the other texts found in Ezekiel is the figure of Aaron used at all.

3. Conclusion: The Original Aaronides

The general result of our inquiry indicates that the Aaronides were indeed members of the tribe of Levi, and that the members of the tribe who lived in Judah — excepting north-western Judah between the mountain country and the coastal plain — were, for some time before the Exile, those known (at least among themselves) as sons of Aaron. If this is so, then the majority of those Levites seeking admission to priestly
functions in the Temple after Josiah’s suppression of the rural sanctuaries were, in fact, Aaronides, and it would be above all against these Aaronides — especially those in cities near Jerusalem like Anathoth, Gibeon, Geba, and Almon (Josh. 21:17f.) — that the late pre-exilic Zadokites had to defend their position. The rest of the Kohathites, and certainly the Gershonites and the Merarites, were too far away from Jerusalem.

But the Levites of latest pre-exilic Judah, in pressing their claims, made no issue of their being Aaronides, a fact which had no relevance to their purposes. At this stage of development it was still enough for the Levites to be Levites, the Zadokites were not yet having recourse to a genealogical Aaron, no other group — not even in Bethel — can be shown to be in competition, and the figure of Aaron is not yet defined as that of a priest.

C. Ezekiel 40-48: the New Division is Shaped

It has been increasingly recognized in recent study that the material in chapters 40-48 of the Book of Ezekiel was not all written at the same time; Hartmut Gese’s thorough investigation of this material has shown a plurality of strata composed over a number of years. It is the latest of these strata (Ezek. 44:6-31, with the glosses in 40:46b; 43:19; 45:1-8a; 46:19-24; 48:11), called by Gese the “Zadokite stratum,” which is of principal interest for the question of clerical directions at the time of the Exile in the sixth century. Gese assigns even this late stratum to an exile date sometime prior to the governorship of Zerubbabel, and the substantially exilic character of the material in Ezek. 40-48, consequently, remains unchecked, no matter who its author is (or who its authors are). This Zadokite stratum in Ezekiel shows an important gain for the Deuteronomic code’s idea that priests are to be Levites: the Zadokites themselves are called “Levitical priests” (Ezek. 43:19; 44:15), and are included among the “sons of Levi” (40:46). We know that the Zadokites were not historically Levites at all, but these texts reveal that before the end of the Exile Zadokites circles themselves were capitulating to the pressure of current ideals or value-judgements and admitting that ideally they should be Levites.

In capitulating to the ideal, however, they will not capitulate to the real Levites themselves. Although the Zadokite stratum in Ezekiel cedes

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64 H. Gese, Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezekiel (Kap. 40-48) traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie, XXV; Tübingen, 1957).

65 Ibid., pp. 57ff.

66 Ibid., p. 122. Gese’s principal reason for holding Zerubbabel’s governorship as terminus ante quem for the Zadokite stratum is that in this stratum the institution of a high priest, known to exist with the priest Joshua, Zerubbabel’s contemporary (Hag. 1:1 etc.; Zech. 6:11; Ezra 3:2 etc.), is unknown.

to the ideal by calling the sons of Zadok “Levitical priests,” it always avoids directly calling Levites “priests”; the Levites must accept a rank of inferiority. To the Zadokites these texts reserve the service of the altar, from which the largest part of priestly revenues normally came. The Levites were allowed only the service of the Temple (44:11-15; 45:4f.; 46:20-24), and this service is not to be reckoned as a priestly service (44:13 with 44:11,14); here the distinction is more radical than that of the different and presumably somewhat earlier stratum in 40:45, which calls those serving the Temple “priests.” The situation reflected in the earlier stratum is illuminated by what we have proposed above as the late pre-exilic Levitical program reflected in certain concepts of the Deuteronomic redaction: a program in which Levites, appealing to a newly developed tradition of their being carriers and caretakers of the Ark, were asserting a right to work as priests in the Temple of the Ark even though they could not compete with the Zadokites for work as priests at the sacrificial altar in the courtyard. The Zadokite stratum narrows the concept of “priest.” Thus, with these Zadokite texts in Ezekiel, at least by the end of the Exile if not slightly before, a significant step had been taken: Zadokites were already being reckoned as Levites (in English: with a capital “L”), but a clear distinction was made between priests and levites (better written with a small “l”). Aaron and the “sons of Aaron” are not men-
tioned. Levites are simply "Levites" or "sons of Levi." The Zadokite texts in Ezekiel are rigid. The Exile still lies heavy on Israel, and that phenomenon evident among oppressed peoples throughout the sweep of human history is in evidence: in the oppressed populace a group relieves its frustration by vindictively blaming a rival group or groups for the evils which have descended on the people; thus the Zadokite mentality in the Exile accuses the Levites of being idolators and of being those who have led Israel into the sin for which it is paying so dearly (Ezek. 44:10-12). The incriminating group projects itself into a position of election and of superiority to its rival groups, and such appears to be the attitude of the Zadokite stratum in Ezekiel, incriminating its Levitical rivals, who, when the day of liberation comes, are to remain decidedly inferior to the elect Zadokites. As far as we know, there was no other group of priestly claimants cohesive enough to provide so ready a target. But in the national sense of relief to come after the advent of the Persians, the frustrated vehemence of the Zadokites toward their rivals will abate, and will even allow for a certain amount of compromise.

D. Conditions in the Return from Exile

The program of the Zadokite stratum in Ezek. 40-48 may seem at first sight to have been kept in mind when the restoration of Judah was being organized after the Exile: when the Temple is restored, the levites attached to it will be ministers rather than priests (Ezra 8:17). Yet, the program of Ezek. 40-48 was not really accomplished in all its details. The Levites had not been reduced to replacing the temple servants (the n'tinim), a number of whom were still to be found when the Jews returned from Babylon (Ezra 2:43-58 = Neh. 7:46-57; Ezra 8:20).58 The distinction between priests and levites is now firmly established (Ezra 2:36-40 = Neh. 7:39-43),59 but what is the precise sense of those terms now?

58 That these n’tinim are descendants of those before the Exile and not Levites who have actually been reduced to that state is shown by two cases in which ethnological rather than genealogical derivation is given (in Ezra 2:50 = Neh. 7:52) and by the rarity of Yahwistic theophoric names among them; on the other hand, they had been associated ethnically with the Israelites, otherwise they would hardly have been included in the lists of those returning; cf. RUDOLF, Ezra und Nehemia, p. 23.

59 The distinction is taken very much for granted in the more recent texts found in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 1:5; 3:8ff.; 12:6,16,18,20 etc.; Neh. 8:13) and in Chronicles (1 Chr. 6:33ff.; 9:2,10,14; 13:2; 15:4,14 etc.; 2 Chr. 5:12; 7:6; 8:14ff.; 11:13 etc.). Is the list in Ezra 2 = Neh. 7 one drawn up in Nehemiah's time, or is it an older list from the time of the initial return movement before the year 520? G. HÖLSCHELER, "Die Bücher Ezra und Nehemia," in HSAT, II (4th ed.; Tübingen, 1923), pp. 503ff., sees the document as a list of worshipers in the Temple made largely for reasons of taxation, after the time of Nehemiah; cf. also R. PFEFFER, Introduction to the Old Testament Canon (New York - Evanston, 1965), p. 101, n. 180. It is originally a census-list of Judah, begun at the restoration and including both the returned exiles and Jews already established in the district, with corrected numbers and additional entries to bring it up to date down to the time of Nehemiah, about a hundred years later. If, as is possible, the original structure is from the time of the first return at the end of the sixth century, whether before or after the people listed had actually arrived in Palestine, then the distinction between priests and levites in the list reflects the situation already obtaining at the beginning of the restoration. It can also, to be sure, be later.

60 F. MEYER, Die Erstbildung des Judenthums (Halle, 1896), pp. 175ff.; RUDOLF, Ezra und Nehemia, p. 22; DE VAUX, Les institutions, II, 22ff., 254. G. HÖLSCHELER's explanation ("Levi," in PAULY-WISSOWA, Real-Encyclopädie, XII/2, col. 2185) that for the priests all males of age fitting them for service are counted, while for the levites and the lesser cuharic personnel only those actually employed are counted, has little if anything to support it.
exile must have done much to assuage old antagonisms and to build up a new spirit of partnership which would make it easier for the Zadokites and their rivals to bury the proverbial axe. 63 Once the Zadokites themselves had admitted the principle that priests should be Levites, it would be somewhat awkward to bar all Levites from priesthood, and besides, the absence of sacrificial worship during the Exile meant that the question of whether one was a priest or not had little pragmatic significance for the time being. Furthermore, we know from the final chapters of the present Book of Isaiah that in the climate of early post-exilic Judaism there was a certain lack of concern for traditional rights and privileges in the matter of who might be a priest or a levi. In Isa. 61:6 the Israelites at large are told that in the coming era of greatness they will "be called 'priests of Yahweh' and 'ministers of our God'," and in the universalist text of Isa. 66:21 Yahweh even declares that he will make some of the foreigners coming to Mount Zion priests and levites. Those Levites who managed to be accepted as priests may have done so on the basis of their personal qualities. It was the better type of man who was regularly deposed in the deportations of the Ancient Near East, and a man of this type, especially if he already had some sort of priestly background, could more easily, though perhaps grudgingly, be accepted by the Zadokites who continued to form the core of the Jewish priesthood. Those exiled Levites who were unable to make such personal qualities felt remained levites (with an increasingly small i), and returned as such. The 'ntinim had no chance of any assimilation to the ranks of the priests, but, like the levites, returned anyway. Most Levites had never left Palestine.

E. The New Division is Sealed; Aaron and the Genealogies

The head of the priesthood in the restored Temple was Joshua, son of Jehozadak (Hag. 1:1 etc.; Zech. 6:11; Ezra 3:2 etc.), whose father was Seraijah, the last of the Zadokite chief priests of Jerusalem before 587 (2 Kgs. 25:18 = Jer. 52:24), according to the genealogical data proffered by 1 Chr. 5:40 (LXX 6:14). In the documents having to do with the early return to Palestine there is no mention of Aaron or of the "sons of Aaron." If the hypothesis we have evolved in the preceding paragraph carries weight, some mingling of Zadokites and priestly Levites had already been done, but Aaron was not yet used to seal the matter genealogically. This may even be the stage at which the text of David's cabinet officers was altered in 2 Sam. 8:17 to bring Zadok into the family of the Elides.

63 GUUNBEK, Leviten und Priester, p. 196, makes a good point in stressing the difference between the fanatically exclusive tone of the Zadokite stratum in Ezekiels in dealing with non-Zadokites and the calmer tone of P, which allows for a certain amount of compromise and is concerned with fixing arrangements already made.

64 References to the genealogy of Ezra and Nehemiah, p. 1735.

65 KITTEL, Geschichte des Volkes Israel, I, 264ff. The theories of BARKER, Geschichte, p. 199, SMID, Geschichte des Hexateuchs, p. 345, and GROSSMANN, Mose und seine Zeit, pp. 275, 281, that the Zadokites had already been known as descendants of Aaron in the period of the monarchy suffers from a total lack of witness from so early a time, and from the further difficulty that the tradition of Aaron, Levite and priest, developed fairly late and seems originally to have been connected with Levites rather than with Zadokites.

Somewhat later, with Ezra, there are two groups of priests returning from Babylonia: the descendants of Phinehas and the descendants of Ithamar (Ezra 8:2): the beginning has been made of the widespread genealogical construction which will make both Zadokites (through Phinehas son of Eleazar) and non-Zadokites (through Ithamar) Aaronites.64a Ezra himself is attached by the text of Ezra 7:1-5 to Aaron through the lineage of Eleazar. It has been suggested that the origins of this construction of a double priestly lineage with a common forefather, Aaron, are to be sought in Babylonia between the time of Zerubbabel and the time of Ezra. 64a From the evidence available to us, this is quite likely the case. This construction is not known in the list of Ezra 2 = Neh. 7, but it was applied in the list of those coming with Ezra from Babylonia (Ezra 8:2); yet, at that same time it was not used in Palestine (cf. Ezra 10:18-22). Nevertheless, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the same construction was developing in Palestine, where the document of Neh. 10:2-28, probably recovered from archives where it had been kept from the time of Nehemiah himself, 64a includes a list of priests (Neh. 10:3-9) whose individual names, when compared with those of other texts, suggest that the priestly groupings in Palestine were rearranging themselves and tending toward the eventual common derivation from Aaron.

Whether the Zadokites became "sons of Aaron" in Babylonia or in Palestine, or in both places more or less simultaneously (the Jews in Babylonia not lacking contact with their brethren in Judah, as we know from Ezekiel), they did this by assimilation with another group. This group, when all the evidence is in, appears to be that of the Levites who before the Exile had been living in Judah: the Kohathite group of...
Levites, most of whom — and indeed all of whom in the environs of Jerusalem — had come to be known as Aaronides. These were the Levites taken into captivity, and these were the Levites remaining in Judah. They were the ones who before the disaster of 587 had been fighting for a place in the Temple as priests.

Once the Zadokites had enhanced their own stature by making themselves "Levites," and some Levites had managed to assure standing for themselves as priests, a new nomenclature had to be found. The tribal sense of the term "Levite" was now thinned down and blurred. The remaining members who were not priests but who wished to continue work in the Temple would retain their old group name, in a sense which would henceforth be appellative rather than gentilitial. The priests, while retaining Levi as an ancestor shared with the inferior class, required another ancestor, a couple of degrees removed from Levi, to distinguish them from their inferiors. Aaron, already developed as a Levite in Levitical circles, was used. His figure had the further attraction, by this time, of association with the heroic period of Israel, with the great events of Sinai and the Exodus. Thus the mutual assimilation of Zadokites and priestly Levites was covered, as was their common distinction from the rest of the levites. There remained, however, a distinction of the Zadokites from another lineage appealing to descent from Eli through Abiathar — a lineage which presumably was that of authentically Levitical priests. This was done by using, respectively, Phinehas son of Eleazar for those Aaronides who were traditionally Zadokites, and Ithamar, Eleazar's brother, for those who were not. 66

The lesser levites functioning in Jerusalem must have remained predominantly Kohathite; the area had been Kohathite before the Exile (even where it had not been specifically Aaronide), and those Levites who had taken part in the Exile and Return were of the Kohathite group. 67 This predominance is hinted at in the artificial distribution of tasks in chapters 3, 4, and 10 of the Book of Numbers: the Kohathites carry the Ark (after it has been duly covered by the Aaronides: Num. 3:15) or the sacred objects (Num. 7:9; 10:21), while the Gershonites and the Merarites carry the various parts of the tent and its attachments — a kind of dray-labor.

Num. 16's most recent stratum, belonging to P, shows a dispute over the right to priestly function, presented as a revolt led by "Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi" (Num. 16:1a) against Moses and Aaron. 68 The Levite Korah appears here, as in the genealogical material of Exod. 6:21 (cf. Exod. 6:18) and 1 Chr. 6:7 (LXX 6:22) as a Kohathite. This later stratum of Num. 16, depicting the struggle over priestly prerogatives as the revolt of a Kohathite against a priestly Aaron, must come from a moment before the priestly Aaronides had assured their position, a period when they were still in conflict with the Levites best in a position to challenge them: those Kohathites not admitted as Aaronides. Gunnweg sees a similar situation behind an insertion of Aaron and Eleazar into the material of Num. 4 (Num. 4:5-15,16,17-20), an insertion which has the effect largely of replacing the Kohathites by Aaron and Eleazar and which, like the recent P-stratum in Num. 16, suggests strongly that at this stage of historical development the principal rivals of the Aaronides were their "next of kin," the Kohathites. 69 At this stage of development, the tension between the established priestly group and its rivals was represented as a tension between Aaron and Kohath.

The process of development in the relation between Kohathites and Aaronides can be seen by comparing three blocks of material in Chronicles. In the genealogical material of 1 Chr. 5:27-41 (LXX 6:1-15) Aaron, Eleazar, and the chief priests of Jerusalem down to the Exile are Kohathites. The somewhat later genealogy of 1 Chr. 6:1-15 (LXX 6:16-30) excludes Aaron, Eleazar, and the chief priests from the ranks of the Kohathites, but includes Korah as a Kohathite. The still later inserted material of 1 Chr. 15:4-10 makes a clear-cut distinction between "sons of Aaron" and "sons of Levi," and if, in the redactor's mind, a logical connexion exists between this inserted block and the following v. 11, which is independent of it, then the late redactor reckons the sons of Kohath among the sons of Levi, not, however, among the sons of Aaron. 70

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66 Cf. above, n. 62.

67 NÖTH, Das Buch Josua, p. 131, reasons that the division of the Levites into the three groups of Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites in the Levitical city-list of Josh. 21 cannot be earlier than the list of Ezra 2 = Neh. 7, because it seems to be unknown in Ezra 2 = Neh. 7:42. But it is absent there, not necessarily because the division did not exist at that time, but because the Levites in Babylonia were of only one of these groups — the Kohathites.

68 Although the details of this narrative's literary division differ slightly from author to author, there are few who disagree that the late stratum deals with a revolt by Aaron, Korah, and the Levites, and that this stratum belongs to a fairly late stage of development within P: cf., for example, J. Wellhausen, Die Composition des Hexateuchs (4th ed. = 3rd; Berlin, 1963), pp. 102-6 (remembering that Wellhausen's Q is practically equal to what has now come to be stylized P), with further observation (adopted from KÜNNE) on p. 342; NÖTH, Op. cit., pp. 15, 19, 138f.; S. LEMMING, "Versuch zu Num. 16," ZAW 74 (1962) 291-321 (on Korah and Aaron in later material, p. 318). J. Liver, "Korah, Dathan and Abiram," Scripta Hierosolymitana 8 (1961) 189-217, although rejecting a division of the narrative on the basis of different literary sources, sees Korah, nevertheless, as a Levite, the sons of Korah as Levites, and the story of Korah in Num. 16 as one intruded into the tradition of a revolt of Dathan and Abiram against Moses, by priests of Jerusalem seeking to defend their position against Levites. Liver would place this intrusion, however, fairly early in the monarchical period rather than after the Exile — something he can more easily do not reckoning with a post-exilic P.


70 We have seen above, p. 163, the reasons from the viewpoint of tradition-criticism for placing the genealogical arrangements of 1 Chr. 5:27-41 (LXX 6:1-15) chronologically prior to the lists of 1 Chr. 6:1-15 (LXX 6:16-30) and the reasons from the viewpoint of literary criticism for seeing 1 Chr. 15:4-10 as a block of material added after the basic text of Chronicles had already taken form.
Despite the partnership of sorts established between the Zadokites and the authentically Levitical priests, the Zadokites always retained a certain higher level in priestly aristocracy, in which they always formed the core. In the early material of P, Ithamar is on a genealogical par with Eleazar, who, however, is the prior of the two in order of mention (Exod. 6:24 and parallels of the same stage of P), but it is to Eleazar that God gave the priesthood after Aaron’s death (Num. 20:24ff.), and, interestingly and significantly, Ithamar supervises the more menial work of the Gershônites and Merarites (Num. 4:28,33; 7:8), while Eleazar is set over that of the Kohathites (Num. 4:16).

The Levites, then, had their victory of principle: all priests would henceforth be “Levites.” But the Zadokites had their victory of strategy: most Levites would no longer be priests. And beside the old gentilitic sense of the word “Levite” a new sense stood: that of a function. The gentilitic sense would be overshadowed by the name of function, and in the restored Jewish community “levite” would mean primarily a cultic functionary of subordinate rank. The core of the Levites in this new sense was certainly made up of tribal Levites, but with the passage of time groups of cultic personnel in general, the temple-singers particularly (1 Chr. 23:3-27:34), were assimilated into this generic, subordinate class.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Priesthood in the Restored Jewish Community

In the preceding chapter it was with a view toward tracing the formation and new delineation of groups among the clergy that we discussed priests and levites in the Exile, and in their gradual return to Palestine. We turn now more directly to the history of the clergy in the actually restored Jewish community in Palestine after 538.

I. A Community Headed by Priests

Independent Israelite monarchy was now a thing of the past. The restoration of the Jewish community in Palestine was conditioned by its subjection to the new empire of the Achaemenid Persians, an empire which considered it a good thing for its own interests to grant to its subject peoples what was for those times a remarkable amount of ethnic and religious autonomy. Whatever is to be said of the puzzling Sheshbazzar, “prince of Judah” (Ezra 1:8), and his work, or of the disputed question of a return beginning already under Cyrus and Cambyses (i.e., between 538 and 522), it is certain that by the second year of

1 If Sheshbazzar is identified with the Shenazzar, fourth son of King Jehoiachin, listed in 1 Chr. 3:18, as E. Meyer, Die Entstehung des Judenthalts, pp. 75ff., Albright, The Biblical Period, p. 86, and others, have done, then a member of the House of David was sent to Palestine in an official capacity already under Cyrus, not long after 538. The Chronicler has evidently seen in Sheshbazzar a descendant of David, as K. Galland, Studien zur Geschichte Israels im persischen Zeitalter (Tübingen, 1964), p. 81, has observed, although the historical accuracy of this, along with the modern identification with Shenazzar, is open to question; cf. the sceptical evaluation by Nomi, The History of Israel, pp. 309ff., who is quite ready, however, to admit the possibility that a Davidite was in fact entrusted with the execution of the royal decree. The question of returning Jews between 538 and 522 depends largely on the interpretation of the list of those returning given in Ezra 2 = Neh. 7; on this, cf. above, Chapter Seven, n. 59. The information in Ezra 2:63 = Neh. 7:65 that the tiršatta' (Zerubbabel, we may presume) forbade those priests unable to document their priestly lineage to exercise their ministry until a priest should rise “for the urim and thummim” suggests that some priests had arrived in Jerusalem before Joshua, or at least before Joshua actually became high priest, if the sense of the expression “for the urim and thummim” is to be understood in the light of P’s prescription (Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21) that only the high priest was to have the urim and thummim entrusted to him.