

Volkmar, Fritz, — The City in Ancient Israel

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 197 pages. Price: US \$29.00

Reviewer: Prof P M Venter

In this study of urbanization in ancient Israel, Fritz uses archaeological data, because of the scarceness of information from literary sources. This book therefore falls within the field of Biblical Archaeology. Using 60 line-drawn figures, he illustrates and describes in ten chapters how cities were created in Israel not as the consequence of the continuation of an existing form of settlement, but rather as the expression of a political will during the time of the monarchy.

In chapters two through six the development of cities is described using information from the different strata at several excavation sites. Having defined a city as a structure which is of a certain size, having a ring of walls around it, with monumental buildings, and showing a certain planning in its construction, he shows how an era of Canaanite cities from the late bronze era was followed by a decline in the years around 1200 BCE, when only settlements were found in Palestine. All of these villages followed a basic pattern in their structure. In the time of the monarchy defensibility and strategic positions near roads of communication became important for the location of cities. The cities of this time show controlled planning and can be divided into either residential cities, those with a limited administrative or military function, and cities which served as administrative or military centres. Jerusalem, Samaria and Khirbet Salih are treated in more detail, each in a separate chapter of its own.

In the last four chapters the author describes several aspects of the cities during the monarchical era, like the buildings and dwellings, the water supply of the city, the economy and administration, and everyday life. In these chapters the author still uses archaeological information, but combines it with biblical data to depict the time of the monarchy as a time of technical growth, social restructuring according to the demands of the king, and enlargement of the gap between the rich and the poor, the capital cities and the residential cities in ancient Israel.

No indication is given that the book was translated from German. Many of the figures have German headings or subtitles. However, the book is filled with information and references in the notes to other English and German archaeological publications.

For those interested in Biblical Archaeology this book offers a more than worthwhile reading. Its presentation of the results of Biblical Archaeology in a diachronic way linked to a theme like urbanization, makes the results of this field of study much easier to understand for those who do not have the technical expertise to read archaeological reports. For those interested in the field of social science as part of the exegetical process, the last two chapters of this book are highly recommended.