Suggested project
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On the resonance of cult sites in Ancient Israel: From the takeover of Canaanite sanctuaries by the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the centralisation of cults by Josiah to the construction of biblical memorials in Christian late antiquity

Ever since the mid-20th century, when Kathleen Kenyon (Kenyon 1957) excavated Jericho and discovered a hiatus in its settlements for the time the Israelites were supposed to have conquered the city according to the bible (cf. Joshua 6), fundamentalist interpretations of the bible (‘The bible is always right!’) experienced a profound crisis. Approximately half a century later, the academic bible-studies community is now but faintly unsettled by comparable archaeological results, e.g. those of Finkelstein/Silberman (2002) proving the non-existence of the Davidic-Solomonic epoch in archaeological terms. If anything, such developments lead to new theses concerning the creation and growth of a certain text (cf. the ongoing project by the SNF: The History of the Pentateuch: Combining Literary and Archaeological Approaches). Archaeology and exegesis complement each other perfectly well where the bible acts as a theological, not a historical, book and is therefore understood as a ‘world-making narrative’ (Goodman 1978/92; Nünning 2009).

This project analyses the biblical phenomenon of continuation of sites, especially those of cultic places, under the category of resonance, thus addressing the question of the importance of self—world relations established by socio-religious practices related to specific spaces. More specifically, these are Israeliite cult sites which have either been proven to have been built on top of Canaanite precursors by historical facts or are said to have taken over pre-Israelite holy places in the bible itself. For instance, the founding of the cult in Bet-El is affiliated with the ancestor Jacob/Israel (Gen 28:35), but Abraham had already built, according to Gen 12:6-9, an altar there, not to sacrifice, but to pray to his God. In addition, the narrated re-naming of the site (Bet-El – Luz) also proves the resonance of the cult place, which was, according to tales, to become one of the religious centres of the Northern Kingdom. There one of the (typical for Canaanite iconography) bull-statues was erected, which was then defamed as the ‘Golden Calf’ in the late regal period under the reign of king Josiah, which was dominated by monolatrism.

At places with cult continuity such as Bet-El or of course Jerusalem it is possible to trace in biblical texts the reflection and literary evocation of world-relations of all cultural relationships of value: sanctuaries offer a structured cultic encounter with transcendence and evoke, due to the shared sacrificial meal, connections between all the members of the
cult. Furthermore, they also establish diagonal relationships to the specific cult facility and its items and promote the development of individual spirituality. Cult sites that are, according to the bible, founded by women or based on female traditions (e.g. on Hagar’s, Rachel’s or Miriam’s) are of special interest to this project, since it may be possible to trace axes of resonance here that are normally not readily apparent.

A workload adequate for a dissertation might for instance be obtained by choosing Beersheba as a case study. The site is prominent in the ancestor narratives of Genesis, which tell of the origins of the South Kingdom, but has the Iron Age archaeological characteristics of a city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. New Israeli archaeological and historical research (Finkelstein; Lipschits 2011) considers Beersheba a border-city (see also Spickermann’s project) in the Negev, a district not originally part of the Southern Kingdom of Juda.

The dissertation project will analyse the function of Beersheba as a border site in the ancestor narratives with historical-critical methodology and confront the archaeological features with the new Pentateuchal concepts (Fischer, in preparation) that understand the Genesis texts as world-making narratives presenting a double origin of ‘the South’ (of the land of Israel): the Kingdom of Judah via the genealogy of Lea, Jacobs first wife (Gen 29), and the Negev via Abraham and Sarah and their son Isaac (Gen 12-26).

The project will trace the tradition of select cult sites into late antiquity when ‘biblical places’ were turned into memorial sites by Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land in order to lay claim to the land itself (at least) in a religious sense. The resonance of those ‘biblical places’ is evident even today in the renewal of ancient pilgrimage traditions and the commercialising trend in Israeliite archaeology aimed at creating a booming Holy Land-tourism with all the repercussions of an archaeology guided by (geo)political interests. Within the IGDK and in collaboration with its sociological faculty it will hence be possible to reflect also on the changes such place-related resonances undergo in modern societies like Israel.

Collaborations: The project will achieve its aims by cooperating with Wolfgang Spickermann, Christoph Heil, Stephan Moebius and Katharina Waldner regarding the gendering of resonance. A cooperation concerning cult sites in Ancient Israel is intended with Peter Scherrer and Jörg Rülpke.

Literature

- **FINKELSTEIN, ISRAEL. „The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel“.** [http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/9781589839106dwl_ttext](http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/9781589839106dwl_ttext)


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