The City in Ancient Israel

Volkmar Fritz. 197 pp., 60 figures. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; US$25.00 (paper).

Fritz's The City in Ancient Israel is divided into ten chapters. Chapter 1 offers a historical preamble. Chapters 2 and 3 cover Early Bronze and Middle-Late Bronze cities. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the cities of Iron Age I-II. Chapter 6 covers capital cities and residences; chapter 7 treats city fortifications, houses, palaces, and cultic areas; chapter 8 deals with water supply systems. Chapter 9 covers "Economy and Administration." Chapter 10 discusses the daily life of the people. The strengths of the work are the judicious (though too brief) reviews of the stratigraphy and architecture of the sites discussed and the efforts made to delineate settlement types and the settlement character of each period. There are useful indexes for biblical citations, sites, and authors. Though there is no bibliography, the footnotes contain many useful citations, especially to Fritz's numerous contributions on ancient settlements. Most of the text figures are line drawings, generally of good quality, and illustrate the discussion well.

This work, however, suffers from several deficiencies. The most serious weakness is its lack of an introduction. An introduction sets out the author's purpose, methods, limits, key terms, and intended audience. The reader may then judge the success of the book on the basis of these stated goals. Since there is no introduction, aspects of Fritz's work are unclear. For example, Fritz does not define such concepts as "city" or "Israel." Is a city a settlement of a particular size; is it one which contains certain institutions which other types of settlements do not possess? If size is not the criterion, why are sites such as Kuntillet 'Ajrud left out? What are the borders of "Israel": those of the modern political state, or those of the ancient kingdom? If the focus is on the Iron Age state(s), why are there two chapters on the Early Bronze and Middle-Late Bronze Ages? Who is this book intended for: undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate students or interested lay readers?

Fritz only hints at the understanding of cities operative in this book. He suggests four reasons for the establishment of cities under the Monarchy: the new self-confidence of the state, defense against external enemies, as centers of the new administration, and as centers for the growing population (pp.13-14). "Thus the process of urbanization which had its new beginnings around the year 1000," he adds, "is the result of political change, and not the consequence of social development." The first reason, self-confidence, is an untenable hypothesis, and reason four, population growth, seems more of a social, than political, reason for cities.

The purpose for the inclusion of chapter 2 on the Early Bronze Age is unclear as Fritz sees no connection of the third-millennium cities with those of the Middle Bronze Age. Chapter 3 focuses on the development of Megiddo and the nature of Middle-Late Bronze fortifications. The discussion of Canaanite settlements that continued into Iron I and new Philistine settlements should have been placed in chapter 4 where it could have flowed into a comparison with the Iron I highland settlements.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the most successful in presenting information. The treatment of each site begins with the site's identification and its pre-Iron Age development. Then follows an evaluation of the site's architecture and a note on its function. However, it is unclear how sites were selected for discussion; for example, why Beth-Shemesh with its confused stratigraphy, and not Timnah?

Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of village types and house forms. Chapter five ends with a review of the two city types found in Iron Age II: the Residential City and the City with (at least some) Administrative or Military Function (two of Fritz's three types are only variants of the Administrative type). Lacking is a recognition that there were other types of Iron II settlements (e.g., fortresses and cult sites) and that there are regional patterns to the distribution of these sites.

The brevity of the author's treatments relegated many controversial topics to sources in his footnotes; for example, the function of the Megiddo "stables," which he asserts are barracks (p. 142, nn. 11-13). His treatment of Mizpeh is flawed because he had access only to the inadequate 1:400 plan in the site report. Even though no Iron Age potter's workshops are known, their kilns are; at Tell en-Nasbeh, a large kiln was found just outside the casemate-like wall. On the other hand, Fritz does a good job showing the Late Bronze antecedents to some Iron...

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Age architectural features and that the key is not who "invented" the four-room house type, but how it was used by the Israelites.

Chapter 6 summarizes data on the capitals of Israel and Judah, Samaria and Jerusalem, and the royal residence at Ramat Rahel. The layout of these site types could have been compared; for example, both palace complexes at Samaria and Ramat Rahel are surrounded, in part, by case-mate walls. Is this type of wall related to the function of this type of complex? Chapter 7 covers fortifications, private houses, pillar buildings, palaces, and cult places. Fritz does not believe that the functions of the individual rooms in the houses can be determined; however, enough floor-based installations, artifact assemblages, and ethnographic parallels are available to suggest the uses to which some rooms were put. Chapter 8 treats the nature of the city's water supply. The focus is on large-scale water systems. It was disappointing to see the use of cisterns and springs passed by with hardly a thought as these were the only water sources for the majority of Iron Age settlements.

Chapter 9 is not well-integrated with the rest of the work. Topics such as "Levies" and "Forced Labour" have little to do with cities, but more with general social organization. Much the same may be said for chapter 10. Since most Israelites would have lived in cities (as defined by Fritz), then a connection exists between their daily lives and their cities. More could have been done. For example, Fritz mentions olive oil production. Enough olive presses have now been excavated at sites such as Timnah and especially Tell Miqne that something could have been said about their construction, layout, and location within settlements.

There are a variety of editorial lapses. Sometimes the author's German original escaped the editor; for example, "Hiskia" for Hezekiah on pp. 106, 125, 127, while Hezekiah is used on p. 157. The caption for Figure 21 states that it is Tell es-Seba' XII, when it is really stratum VI. Instead of the site names found most commonly in the literature, Fritz tends to use the less familiar Arabic names; for example, Khirbet Salih instead of Ramat Rahel (p. 131).

Though Fritz's site summaries are useful, and his treatments of the functionality of rooms, buildings, and settlements contain useful insights, the lack of a thesis to integrate his summaries and focus his diverse insights makes the work less than the sum of its parts. A thorough and systematic study of the subject using all the site specific and regional survey data now available is needed. The character of the Israelite city will only be clarified when sites of all sizes and types are analyzed on regional, national, and hierarchical levels. Hopefully this work will serve as an encouragement for someone to undertake this analysis.

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A Handbook of Archaeology.
Culture and Sites. North Africa, Southwest Asia,
Mediterranean, Northwest Europe, Northern Europe,
Central Europe, Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe,
Western Asia.

By Homer L. Thomas. 4 Volumes.

The title of the book is ambitious but it does not relate to the contents. Far from being a real handbook, these fascicles contain only crude data brought together by region from the principal Epipaleolithic and Mesolithic sites ("The Transitional Age") of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East. The cultural limits vary according to the geographical zones, and because of the chronological framework chosen (10,000–6,500 ca. BCE), the author is forced, for example, to treat the Aceramic Neolithic of the Levant.

The material faults are numerous: lack, for example, of maps and scales for the rare illustrations where on the same page one finds both a house and a small flint blade! The description is accompanied by chronological tables and graphs of the flint industry following a simplified type-list derived from those established by D. Sonnevile-Bordes, G. L. Laplace, and J. Tixier and applied without taking into consideration all the specificity of each region.

The author, in a narrow-minded way, gives us the crude data without any critical comments or any attempt to make even a regional synthesis. The most worthwhile aspect of the work is to provide a rapid access to the bibliography which, though far from being exhaustive, gives direct way to the original data.

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