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THE DEDICATED TREASURES BUILDINGS WITHIN THE HOUSE OF YHWH
WHERE WOMEN WEAVE COVERINGS FOR ASHERAH (2 KINGS 23,7)

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The Asherah has recently been the focus of many studies which have examined all biblical references to the goddess and her cult in great detail¹. Josiah's reform and the destruction of the image of Asherah hold a central place in the discussion.

2Kgs 23,6 relates how the image was removed from the temple of Jerusalem and burnt, ground to dust and scattered. The text of verse 7 is an old crux interpretum having two ambiguous terms: *battē haq' dēšim* and *battim*. The second is translated ad sensum "hangings", "coverings", "vestments", "curtains", etc., and various explanations have been offered for the term, which normally means "houses"². The term *q' dēšim*, which is the subject of this paper, is translated variously as "male prostitutes", "cultic prostitutes" or even "unorthodox cultic officials"³. However, scholars have recently demonstrated that sacred prostitution never existed in ancient Israel and that the *q' dēšim* did not play a part in fertility rituals of any kind. The recent suggestion that they be regarded as cultic officials is also not convincing. Gen 38,13-23 and Deut 23,17-18 indicate that the *q' dēšim* engaged primarily in sexual activity⁴.

Furthermore, an unorthodox term for cultic officials, namely *k'mārim*, is mentioned in the description of Josiah's reform, and the appearance of a second term to designate the same class of priests would be redundant.

The *q' dēšim* were obviously male prostitutes whose hire was delivered to the temple. It is often suggested that they were part of the temple's personnel and served within its confines, an assumption that is entirely dependent on the text of 2Kgs 23,7. However, the reference of the *q' dēšim* in v. 7 is far from conclusive.

First, according to the Book of Kings, the *q' dēšim* were "in the land" in the days of Rehoboam, (1Kgs 14,24) and were removed by Asa (1Kgs 15,12) and Jehoshaphat (22,47). They are not included in the list of

¹For recent literature on the Asherah, see e. g., W. A. MAIER, 'Asherah: Extrabiblical Evidence, Atlanta 1986; S. M. OLYAN, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel, Atlanta 1988; R. J. PETTEY, Asherah: Goddess of Israel?, New York - Bern - Frankfurt a. M. - Paris 1990; M. DIETRICH and O. LORETZ, "Jahwe und seine Aschera". Anthropomorphes Kultbild in Mesopotamien, Ugarit und Israel. Das biblische Bildverbot, Münster 1992; J. DAY, "Asherah", ABD I (1992), 483-487, with earlier literature; S. A. WIGGINS, A Reassessment of 'Asherah', Neukirchen-Vluyn 1993.

²A. ŠANDA, Die Bücher der Könige II (EHAT 12), Münster 1912, 344; G. R. DRIVER, Supposed Arabisms in the Old Testament, JBL 55 (1936) 107; J. A. MONTGOMERY, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings (ICC), Edinburgh 1951, 539; M. DELCOR, Les cultes étrangers en Israël au moment de la réforme de Josias d'après 2 R 23. Étude de religions sémitiques comparées, in: A. CAQUOT and M. DELCOR (eds.), Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981, 117-121; M. COGAN and H. TADMOR, II Kings (AB 11), Garden City 1988, 286.

³S. E. LOEWENSTAMM, *qādeš*, Encyclopaedia Biblica 7 (1976) 35-36 (Hebrew); J. E. FISHER, Cultic Prostitution in the Ancient Near East? A Reassessment, BTB 6 (1976) 225-236; M. I. GRUBER, The *qādeš* in the Book of Kings and in Other Sources, Tarbiz 52 (1983) 167-176 (Hebrew); H. A. BARSTAD, The Religious Polemics of Amos (SVT 34), Leiden 1983, 22-33; K. van der TOORN, Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel, JBL 108 (1989) 193-205; idem, Cultic Prostitution, ABD V (1992) 510-513; E. A. GOODFRIEND, Prostitution, loc. cit., 505-510, with earlier literature.

⁴Van der TOORN, JBL 108, 200-201; idem ABD V, 511-513.

"Manasseh's sins" against which Josiah's reform was directed. Thus, anyone reading the history of the Kingdom of Judah since the time of Jehoshaphat and finding there no mention of the *q'dēšim* would have to conclude - in view of the internal sequence of events - that they were abolished and had disappeared long before the time of Josiah⁵.

Second, the long-term service of male prostitutes within the temple of Jerusalem is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. If *q'dēšim* were part of the official cultic personnel of the temple is it conceivable that they would not have been mentioned in any of the biblical sources that criticize the temple and its cult?

Third, there is no reasonable explanation for the assumed manufacture of the Asherah coverings in the houses of the *q'dēšim*. Why should the garments for the image of Asherah be woven or embroidered in such an unlikely place?

All these difficulties disappear once we make a minor change of vocalization and read the consonants *qdšym* as *qodāšim* (instead of *q'dēšim*), translating *bāutē haqqodāšim* as "buildings of the dedicated treasures". The act of donation to a temple is well known from biblical and ancient Near Eastern documents⁶ and is attributed in the Deuteronomistic History only to "righteous" kings: David (2Sam 8,11), Solomon (1Kgs 7,51), Asa (1Kgs 15,15) and Jehoash (2Kgs 12,19)⁷. Within the history of the Book of Kings it serves a definite purpose: to explain how the temple's treasures were gathered before being transferred to foreign kings (Shishak - 1Kgs 14,26; Ben Hadad - 1Kgs 15,18; Hazael - 2Kgs 12,19).

The "dedicated treasures buildings" are the stores in which the treasures of the temple were assembled. Each temple had its own stores which must have included a combination of depositories and workshops⁸. 2Kgs 23,7 indicates that the coverings of the image of Asherah were woven by expert women in such workshops and that Josiah has destroyed not only the image of Asherah but also the workshops and storerooms in which her garments were manufactured and kept.

Eliminating the *q'dēšim* from 2Kgs 23,7 may contribute to a better understanding of the term. *Qādēš* and *q'dēšā* in biblical Hebrew are designations for male and female prostitutes whose hire was delivered to the temple as against the *zōnā* who took her wages for herself. This kind of prostitution was profitable for the temple, which at times may have organized it and perhaps encouraged the prostitutes to act near the cult places. However, no evidence suggests that *q'dēšim* or *q'dēšōt* were members of the personnel of the Jerusalem temple in the monarchical period. Their participation must have taken place on a basis other than membership in the temple staff⁹.

⁵I. L. SEELIGMANN, *Tarbiz* 16 (1956), 124 = *Studies in Biblical Literature*, Jerusalem 1992, 301-302 [Hebrew], suggests that the LXX translation of 2Chr 35,19 in which the *q'dēšim* are mentioned reflects an early text of 2Kgs 23,24. This original version was later replaced by the summary phrase "all the abominations". However, P. E. DION, *CBQ* 43 (1981) 41-48, has pointed out that the Chronicler suppresses the four references to the *qādēš/q'dēšim* which he finds in the Book of Kings. The LXX version of 2Chr 35,19 must have been composed by the Greek translator. It was apparently this translator who suppressed "all the abominations", inserting instead the *q'dēšim*, possibly in order to attribute to Josiah the removal of this group which according to his understanding of 2Kgs 23,7 operated in the temple.

⁶K. GALLING, *Königliche und nichtkönigliche Stifter beim Tempel von Jerusalem*, *ZDPV* 68 (1951) 134-142; R. de VAUX, *Ancient Israel*, London 1961, 139, 320-322, 325; M. DELCOR, *Le trésor de la maison de Yahweh des origines à l'exil*, *VT* 12 (1962) 353-377; M. HARAN, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, Oxford 1978, 284-286.

⁷See E. T. MULLEN, *Crime and Punishment; The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasures*, *CBQ* 54 (1992) 231-248.

⁸For the foundry of the temple, see DELCOR (n. 6), 372-377.

⁹For details, see van der TOORN, *JBL* 108, 193-205.