

Péter Jenei (University of Pretoria)

SUBJUGATING AND EXPLOITING THE SECOND-CLASS POPULATION OF THE ANCIENT ISRAELITE STATE: THE CASE OF FORCED LABOUR (סָמַ) IN LIGHT OF THE POPULATION ECONOMY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL¹

ABSTRACT

The so-called “forced labour” or “corvée labour” (סָמַ) is a common and widespread institution of the ancient Near East. The Old Testament narratives of the early kingdom extensively refer to the same institution and describe it as a conventional tool of the king to maintain large-scale building projects by imposing forced labour on the subjects, both citizens and strangers alike. However, the biblical accounts related to forced labour witness that the nature and the amount of forced labour extremely hardens when it is imposed on the second-class population of the early Israelite monarchy: 1) second-class citizens (northern Israelites); 2) semi-assimilated residents (סָמַיִם); or 3) non-assimilated strangers (native Canaanites, i.e. סָמַיִם, זָרִים). Although there are detailed studies which treat the topic of forced labour in its ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite contexts, yet a study of סָמַ in the Old Testament concerning the above-mentioned population economy is a somewhat neglected angle of the field.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is “forced labour” or “corvée labour”? The basic characteristic of forced labour is that it is not done voluntarily but under compulsion (Wittenberg 2007:84). Soggin outlines a concise definition of forced labour:

We are dealing here with a type of work which was performed by the individual not to earn his living, nor for reasons felt to be of public service. We deal with work to which individuals and communities alike were unrelated and had to be, therefore, forced, because its aims were unimportant or even unknown to them. (Soggin 1982:259, cited by Wittenberg 2007:84)

1 The present study is an edited and reworked version of the paper presented at the 2018 annual meeting of the Old Testament Society of Southern Africa. Potchefstroom, North-West University, August 14-16, 2018.

Corvée labour is a common and widespread institution of the ancient Near East.² On the basis of biblical accounts, it is rather obvious that the early Israelite monarchy adopted the common Near Eastern custom of imposing forced labour; in fact, the Hebrew Scriptures apply independent terminology to denote corvée. The Hebrew *מַס*, meaning “compulsory labour”, “forced labour” occurs 23 times in the Old Testament.³ An alternative term for denoting forced labour is *סִבְלָה* (cf. 1 Kgs 11:28). Besides these exact references, additional biblical passages also address the issue of forced labour, although they omit the technical usage of *מַס*. Clear examples are the case of the Gibeonites in Josh 9 (only the type of work is outlined in Josh 9:27: “wood cutters” and “water carriers”, cf. Haran 1961), and the ominous narrative of 1 Kgs 12:1-20, where King Solomon’s forced labour is denoted as “heavy yoke” (*עַל כְּבֵד* cf. 1 Kgs 12:4, 9, 10, 11, 14) and “harsh service”, “cruel slavery” (*עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה* cf. 1 Kgs 12:4). It is noteworthy that the latter term is applied to the forced labour of the enslaved Hebrews in the Exodus narrative (cf. Exod 1:14; 6:9).

A synchronic survey of the Old Testament occurrences of *מַס* reveals a greater variety of the possible types of compulsory labour: a) agricultural labour around the sheepfolds, animal husbandry (Issachar, cf. Gen 49:14-15); b) stone-cutting, stone-bearing, brick-laying, and masonry upon imperial building projects (Israelites in Egypt, cf. Exod 1:11; subjects of Solomon, cf. 1 Kgs 5:27-30); c) wood-cutting and water-bearing around cultic shrines (Gibeonites, cf. Josh 9); d) military service, official service, and skilled labours of the agricultural and industrial type (subjects of the monarch – 1 Sam 8:10-18). Thus, the term, *מַס* generally denotes the institution of forced labour, rather, than the type of work itself.

2 This type of labour is attested in different periods and various sources of the regions of ancient Egypt (Kitchen 1976; Berlev 1987; Eyre 1987a, 1987b), ancient Mesopotamia (Empires: a) Sumer: Maekawa 1987; Steinkeller 1987; b) Assyria: Postgate 1987; c) Babylonia: Evans 1963a; Dandamaev 1987; Klengel 1987; d) Persia: Silverman 2015; Sources: a) Alalakh: Rainey 1970:192; Na’aman 2005:747-748; b) Mari: Evans 1963b; Rainey 1970:195-197; c) Nuzi: Dosch 1987), ancient Anatolia (Giorgadze 1987), and ancient Canaan (Mendelsohn 1942, 1962; Heltzer 1987; Becking 2009).

3 Gen 49:15; Exod 1:11; Deut 20:11; Josh 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 30, 33, 35; 2 Sam 20:24; 1 Kgs 4:6; 5:27(2x), 28; 9:15, 21; 12:18; 2 Chron 8:8; 10:18; Est 10:1; Prov 12:24; Isa 31:8; Lam 1:1. For a detailed study of the term, see Klingbeil (1997); North (1997).

A diachronic study of the Old Testament occurrences of *עָמַל* reveals that the references to forced labour remarkably culminate in the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic literary layers. The institution of forced labour in these sources is closely attached to the ruling/conquering power and to the institution of kingship. Thus, the Deuteronomistic history writing regards that the conscription of subjects for forced labour is one of the conventional privileges of the king. On the other hand, the polemic tone of the Deuteronomistic references can be understood as an explicit critique against the institution of kingship. The biblical account further attests that King David introduced forced labour in the monarchy, then under the reign of King Solomon the institution of forced labour developed and extended to a maximum (cf. Rainey 1970:199; Soggin 1982:266; Wittenberg 2007:85).⁴ The overall statement of the Deuteronomistic history writing regarding King Solomon's corvée in 1 Kgs 9:15 clearly pictures large-scale building projects:

This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD and his own house, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer. (1 Kgs 9:15 *NRSV*)

However, “the Old Testament is a theological book” (Rendtorff 2005:1, cited by Kessler 2008:24), moreover, “the biblical texts are in large part fiction” (Kessler 2008:24). Taking notice of the current trends of critical research of the early monarchical period, these statements especially apply to the biblical figures of David and Solomon, and the related narrative accounts in Samuel-Kings.⁵ Thus, the question occurs: what is the value of the accounts of forced labour under David and Solomon, if the historicity of the early monarchical period is debated altogether? “In spite of their theologically motivated and fictional character, the biblical texts do contain reliable information” (Kessler 2008:25), that which are especially “valuable for attempts at social-historical reconstruction” (Kessler 2008:25). Thus, concerning our investigation, the biblical accounts of forced labour may hold diminished value in a factual historical sense, but definitely not in a

4 However, on the basis of a 7th century BCE seal artefact, which reads: “belonging to Pala’yahu who is over the corvée/forced labor”, Ralph W Klein notes that compulsory labour supposedly continued as a state policy long after the time of Solomon. Cf. Klein (2012:39).

5 For an extensive treatment of the history of research of the early monarchical period, see Moore & Kelle (2011:145-265).

cultural and social-historical sense. From this latter point of view, the biblical accounts of forced labour function as a time-capsule: they contain the contemporary ancient Israelite understanding of the phenomenon itself; moreover, they reveal ancient conventions and customary treatments and relations closely connected to forced labour.

2. *AIM AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY*

The Old Testament narratives of the conquest (Joshua-Judges) and the early kingdom (Samuel-Kings // Chronicles) richly refer to the institution of forced labour, *מַס*, and describe it as a conventional privilege and tool of the ruling community or the royal king to maintain large-scale building projects and various agricultural labour services by imposing forced labour on the subjects of the kingdom, both citizens and strangers alike. However, the biblical accounts related to forced labour witness that the nature and the amount of forced labour extremely hardens when it is imposed on the second-class population of the early Israelite monarchy, such as: 1) second-class citizens (northern Israelites); 2) semi-assimilated protected residents (*גֵּרִים*); or 3) non-assimilated total strangers (the remnants of the native Canaanite population, i.e. *זָרִים, גְּבֻרִים*). Although there are detailed studies which treat the topic of forced labour in its ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite contexts, a study of *מַס* in the Old Testament concerning the above-mentioned population economy is a somewhat neglected angle of the field. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to investigate the institution of forced labour in conquest and early kingdom narratives of the Old Testament, especially focusing on the nature of the population as a determining element. Concerning the framework of the biblical Hebrew terminology of the different types of strangers in the Old Testament and of the complex population economy of ancient Israel, the present study is indebted to the masterful analyses of Achenbach (2011) and Pitkänen (2017). The following is the central question of the study: How does the quality and quantity of forced labour shift when it is imposed on distinct class of subjects: citizens, protected residents, or total strangers?

3. *THE INSTITUTION OF FORCED LABOUR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN LIGHT OF THE POPULATION ECONOMY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL*

On the basis of the occurrences of *מַס* in the Old Testament, the nature of forced labour is significantly influenced by the population economy of the early monarchy, thus, the texts represent that the distinct class of subjects

is a highly determining factor concerning the quality and quantity of סָמ . In other words, the סָמ of the civil population differed greatly from the סָמ of the second-class population, namely the subjugated northern Israelite citizens, the protected residents, and the non-assimilated strangers of the ancient Israelite state. In the following, the supposed population economy of the early monarchy is considered regarding the institution of סָמ in the Old Testament.

3.1. *The סָמ of the civil population*

As an integral part of the anointing narrative section of King Saul in the First Book of Samuel, the exhortation of Prophet Samuel in 1 Sam 8:11-18 is a rather detailed survey of the king's right toward his subjects.⁶ This passage is highly polemic against the institution of kingship, yet it takes it for granted that the conscription for forced labour, besides collecting tithes and taxes, is a conventional right of the king. In other words, the text declares that royal power inherently goes hand in hand with the heavy burden of the subjects, which, to a certain extent, implies exploitation, oppression, and enslavement of the powerless subjugates (cf. De Vaux 1997:80-88).

Although the Hebrew term, סָמ does not occur in the text; forced labour is implied by the detailed circumscription (Klein 2000:77). The context of the biblical passage also implies that the defined duties and labours specifically apply to the civil population only! As a matter of fact, the types of labours mentioned in the passage seem to be an honoured scope of activities and work types: a) military service; b) official, bureaucratic service; c) professional service via skilled work and craftsmanship; and d) variant services within the course of the agricultural production. סָמ in this regard can be best understood as *compulsory labour service*, thus, a special form of taxation imposed and collected by the royal court (cf. Na'aman 2005:755-756). Forced labour, therefore, is a rather harsh term to understand the compulsory labour service of the civil population, because these types of working positions fall under the categories of highly qualified skilled working positions, and mid- and chief-executing positions, which could inherently advance the subjects' overall social promotion. In accordance, the late Chronicler's account univocally declares that King Solomon did not impose forced labour on the sons of Israel, i.e. the civil population was not primarily ordered for low-class work and heavy duty:

6 For a detailed analysis of the date, purpose, and composition of the text, see Leuchter (2005).

But of the people of Israel Solomon made no slaves for his work; they were soldiers, and his officers, the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry. (2 Chron 8:9 *NRSV*)

Although, there are no clear indications in the Hebrew Bible concerning the ideal quantity and scope of the civil population's labour service, but the context of the biblical account supposes, that in an ideal case, the *צב* of the civil population was only occasional, mostly in times of the critical periods of the agricultural production, i.e. sowing and harvest seasons.

3.2. *The צב of the second-class citizens (the northern Israelites)*

Although the later Chronicler's account in 2 Chron 8:9 states that Solomon did not impose forced labour on the people of Israel, the earlier Deuteronomistic account in 1 Kgs 5:27-28 seems to contradict this statement. The text mentions 30 000 men from "all Israel" who fulfilled compulsory labour service at the Lebanon during the building process of the temple of the Lord.

It is highly relevant to discuss the supposed identity of these 30 000 men. Although the text signifies them as men from "all Israel", implying that the northern Israelites and the southern Judahites are all included; the general scope of the term is very ambiguous in the context of the Solomon-narratives (cf. 1 Kgs 12:3). Moreover, scholarly literature extensively indicates that it is not out of the way to believe that forced labour was made up of the men exclusively from the northern Israelite tribes.⁷ In addition, King Solomon's subjugating policies concerning the northern Israelites further include: 1) his taxation system – eleven of these divisions were in the northern regions while only one was in the south (1 Kgs 4:7-19; cf. Okyere 2012-3:129-130); 2) his debt paying policy – the northern Galilean cities were transferred to Hiram when he was unable to redeem his debt (1 Kgs 9:10-14, cf. Okyere 2012-3:130). In conclusion, according to Finkelstein & Silberman (2001:151; cited by Okyere 2012-3:130):

The northern tribes are depicted in 1 Kings as being treated like little more than colonial subjects by David's son Solomon.

Thus, to any cursory observation, these are obvious attempts "to demand more from a particular section of the society" (Okyere 2012-3:130). In other words, the northern Israelites were treated as second-class citizens of the early monarchy, and as such, their status was abused by *corvée* labour. It is

7 For a detailed analysis of the arguments of Marvin A Sweeney, J Alberto Soggin and Israel Finkelstein & Neil A Silberman, see Okyere (2012-3:130).

rather likely, that King Solomon's fellow countrymen, the southern Judahites were kept away from the harsher types of corvée labour.

Concerning the type and quality of their work, the text provides no further details. We only know that they worked in shifts and fulfilled compulsory labour service in every third month, i.e. each unit worked for an entire month, which was followed by a two months period of rest. Thus, the quantity and scope of their work is implied. If we consider that the building of the temple took 7 years (cf. 1 Kgs 6:38), then a quick calculation shows that every shift served 28 months (!) of forced labour, only by building up the temple. In addition, besides the temple, Solomon had other large-scale building projects; the building of his palace (according to 1 Kgs 7:1, it took 13 years), and the fortification of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer (1 Kgs 9:15). If Solomon utilized forced labour in these latter building projects too, then it is an awful lot of forced labour imposed on the northern Israelite citizens, which they had to fulfil far away from their families. It is not surprising that the ominous narrative of 1 Kgs 12:1-20 describes King Solomon's forced labour as "heavy yoke" (עַל כֶּבֶד, cf. 1 Kgs 12:4, 9, 10, 11, 14) and "harsh service", "cruel slavery" (עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה, cf. 1 Kgs 12:4).

1 Kgs 12:1-20 is, in fact, a rather valuable source concerning the exploitation of the northern Israelites. According to the text, following the death of King Solomon, the northern Israelite tribes, led by Jeroboam, appeared at Shechem, in front of Solomon's successive son, Rehoboam. It is important to note, that Jeroboam himself was a supervising officer appointed by King Solomon over all the forced labour of the house of Joseph (cf. 1 Kgs 11:28). As a representative of the northern tribes, he appealed to Rehoboam to lighten the harsh service and heavy yoke of Solomon (1 Kgs 12:4). Rehoboam disrespectfully neglected the request of the northern Israelites; as a result, the northern Israelites separated from the southern Judahites. Thus, the Deuteronomistic authors regarded the abusive expectations of forced labour imposed on the subjugated Israelites as the ultimate reason for the separation of Israel and Judah (cf. Lowery 1991:81). It is rather interesting to note, that the mentioned text generally accepts the institution of forced labour, but consistently condemns the unbalanced and abusive expectations. In fact, the text makes a suggestive connection between Solomon's cruel slavery (1 Kgs 12:4, עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה) and that of the forced labour of the enslaved Hebrews in the Exodus narrative (the same term is used, cf. Exod 1:14; 6:9). Kegler (1983:58-71) has drawn attention to the astonishing parallels between the Egyptian slavery of the Hebrews

and that of the events leading up to the separation of the early monarchy in 1 Kgs 12. Following Kegler's analysis, Wittenberg (2007:87) states that these parallels show that "the Israelite tribes understood their struggle against Rehoboam in the light of their ancient tradition of the Exodus." Thus, the Deuteronomistic narrative represents, that the monarchs "burdened Israel with the same kind of taxes, soldiers, and slavery from which its ancestors fled" (cf. Matthews & Benjamin 1993:166). As a result, "opposition to taxes and public labor led to the revolts of Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah against David, and later against Solomon and Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:4)" (cf. Matthews & Benjamin 1993:163).

3.3. *The גְּרִימ of the protected residents (גְּרִימ)*

It is somewhat shocking to recognize that the quality of forced labour significantly declines when the subjects are second-class residents, i.e. semi-assimilated protected strangers, גְּרִימ (concerning terminology, cf. Kellermann 1975, concerning their legal status, cf. Achenbach 2011:29-43; Albertz 2011).

1 Kgs 5:27-32 is the most detailed description of King Solomon's corvée. We already examined 1 Kgs 5:27-28 concerning the 30 000 men from Israel, but 1 Kgs 5:29-32 is a highly valuable source regarding the גְּרִימ of the protected residents.

First, 1 Kgs 5:29 mentions 70 000 burden-bearers (נֹשֵׂא סָבֵל) and 80 000 stone-cutters (חֹצֵב). Although the Deuteronomistic text omits any reference regarding the identity of these people, but the Chronicler addresses the issue openly. The later Chronicler's account in 1 Chron 22:2 and 2 Chron 2:16-17 briefly reports about the censuses ordered by King David and Solomon. According to these references, one of the major goals of the censuses was to gather the protected residents of the state in order that they could be conscripted for corvée. Thus, according to the Chronicler, the 70 000 burden-bearers and the 80 000 stone-cutters were protected residents, גְּרִימ of King David's and Solomon's monarchy.⁸ Concerning the quality and quantity of their work, it is clear that the actual *forced labour* was predominantly fulfilled by these burden-bearers and stone-cutters, whose work was heavy and continuous.

8 Ralph W Klein makes it clear that 1 Kgs 5:29-30 is an obvious *Vorlage* of 2 Chron 2:16-17, moreover, that the 150 000 forced labourers functioned as a work force created by Solomon, which consisted entirely of resident aliens. Cf. Klein (2012:39).

Second, 1 Kgs 5:28, 30 mentions three types of officers: 1) the 3300 overseers (רָדִים) were in charge of guarding and supervising the labour process on the fields. Thus, they obtained lower managing positions; 2) the supervising officers (שָׂרִים) were in charge of the higher administrative organization of the institution of forced labour. 1 Kgs 5:30 omits the number of these officers, yet a few chapters below their number is displayed as 550 (cf. 1 Kgs 9:23). Thus, they obtained mid-executive positions; 3) the taskmaster (עֲלֵה־מַטֵּ), Adoram/Adoniram was responsible for the forced labour in general. He obtained the highest chief-executive position.⁹ Additionally, 1 Kgs 5:32 mentions masons, who were professional skilled workers of Solomon and Hiram. Their number is uncertain.

What do we know about the identity of these latter mentioned officers and workers? Again, except Hiram's foreign professionals and the Gebalites (cf. 1 Kgs 5:32), the Deuteronomistic narrative neglects the issue of the identity of these officers. However, the later Chronicler's account is enlightening; besides the 150 000 protected residents, 2 Chron 2:16-17 mentions another 3600 of them. Thus, the Chronicler recognizes them altogether as גְּרָיִם. The latter mentioned 3600 are described as overseers above the previously mentioned 150 000 forced labourers. This is shocking in many ways: 1) It means that the highest a protected stranger could get within the system of forced labour is mostly a lower managing or a mid-executive position. 2) It also means that extremely few of them had the chance to obtain such managing positions; the vast majority of the גְּרָיִם still struggled under oppressive work-conditions. 3) And worst of all, it also means that even if some of them could get higher in the echelon, the rest could hate them for it.

If a sovereign power creates such tension within a socially vulnerable class, then it is surely oppressive. If we consider 1 Chron 22:2, it is rather possible – although indirect – that one of the federal reasons of God's punishment for David's census in 2 Sam 24 was David's intention to count the exact number of the protected residents in order to impose forced labour on them (cf. Greenwood 2010).

3.4. *The מַטֵּ of the total strangers (native Canaanites, i.e. זָרִים, נְכָרִים)*

The quality of forced labour drops again when the subjects are unwanted, non-assimilated, subjugated strangers. i.e. the remnants of the Bronze Age Canaanite population. To denote the notions of enemy, foreigner,

9 2 Sam 20:24; 1 Kgs 4:6; 5:28; 12:18. For a detailed analysis of the function, see Avigad (1980).

strangeness, otherness, the Hebrew Bible frequently uses the terms, נִכְרִי / נְכַרְיִ and זָר (cf. Snijders 1980; Lang & Ringgren 1998; Achenbach 2011:43-46). Following the analysis of Pitkänen (2017:147), in the context of Joshua-Judges, the remnants of the Bronze Age Canaanite population, the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (cf. Deut 7:1) can be regarded as the “indigenous others” of the ancient Israelite monarchy. Although the Hebrew terms denoting strangeness and otherness are seldom used concerning these Canaanites (as an exception, see Judg 19:11-12 concerning the Jebusites), but it is hardly doubtful, that the ancient Israelites reckoned the Canaanites as נְכַרְיִם and זָרִים. According to Pitkänen (2017:141), the one clear weakness that current approaches to the biblical understanding of foreigners have is “that they do not incorporate an analysis of an important social category, namely, the native Canaanites and other people indigenous to the land”.

The law codes of the Old Testament give clear indications that the indigenous Canaanites are to be destroyed, generally by expulsion or total annihilation and extermination (Exod 23:20-33; 34:11-16; Lev 18:24-30; 20:22-26; Deut 7; cf. Pitkänen 2017:141).¹⁰ However, the code of warfare in Deut 20:10-18 is particularly revealing about an alternative treatment of the total strangers:

When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labor.
(Deut 20:10-11 NRSV)

Numerous references in the Deuteronomistic conquest accounts in Joshua-Judges witness that the conventional Israelite protocol toward the remnants of the conquered native Canaanites was their subjugation into a *perpetual state of corvée labour* (Josh 9:17-27; 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 30, 33, 35). Moreover, King David and Solomon, without hesitation, subjugated the non-assimilated strangers of their monarchy and pushed them into a perpetual state of corvée labour (King David and the Ammonites, cf. 2 Sam

10 Although the Deuteronomic texts make it clear that “not the people but their habits were considered as detestable”, these stereotypes and prejudices against strangers and foreigners can be still understood as a “theology of rejection”. However, “this theology cannot overwrite the historical fact that the Israelites did not separate themselves from the Canaanites, and they coexisted for centuries, seemingly without major clashes, until the rise of the so-called YHWH alone movement in the ninth century B.C.” Cf. Hodossy-Takács (2017:349).

12:31 // 1 Chron 20:3; King Solomon and the native Canaanites, cf. 1 Kgs 9:20-21 // 2 Chron 8:7-8). Mendelsohn even argues that the Hebrew Bible denotes perpetual state of corvée labour with additional terminology (מַס־עֶבֶד), in which the idea of slavery is implied (cf. Mendelsohn 1942:16-17; for counter-arguments, see Rainey 1970:191).

Pitkänen (2017:149) explains the discrepancy of the Deuteronomistic sources regarding the two-sided treatment of the total strangers (i.e. “total annihilation” vs. “subjugation to forced labour”). According to his analysis, the practice of subjugating the indigenous others as forced labourers

would have taken place at a time when Israelite society seems to have been well established, in part by the unifying and conquering acts of David. In this case, it would seem that these peoples could be assimilated to a slave class rather than exterminated as they no longer presented a realistic threat to the existence of the Israelite society as was the case before. Conversely, their labour could also be exploited for public projects.

It must be stated that the above described conventional treatment of the conquered strangers was not a specific Israelite invention; on the contrary, it was a conventional protocol of the ancient Near Eastern world (cf. Rainey 1970:197). In fact, the biblical account itself provides further references of forced labour imposed on the people of Israel by ancient empires (Exod 1; Lam 1:1). In sum, the perpetual state of forced labour of the conquered and unwanted strangers was one of the most hopeless and cruellest statuses in the ancient Near East.¹¹ Not to mention that the biblical authors’ condemnation of the exploiting nature of forced labour is partial; although it concerns the second-class citizens (the northern Israelites) and the protected residents (גֵּרִים), but categorically excludes the non-assimilated strangers.

11 To compare the nature of this type of perpetual state of forced labour to modern historical parallels, cf. Frolov (2016). Additional modern examples could include: 1) the status of the protestant galley-slaves during the time of the counter-reformation in 17th century Europe; 2) the status of the Jews (and variant other marginalized groups: Gypsy/Roma people, handicapped people, and homosexual people) in the concentration/extermination camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau in Nazi Germany; 3) the status of the mass-deportees in the Siberian labour camps of the Soviet Union.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, despite the fact of the increasing scepticism of the Old Testament's historicity of the early monarchical period, these narratives still contain highly valuable information concerning the social history of ancient Israelite thought, relations, customs, and institutions. In this regard, the Old Testament accounts of forced labour – regardless of their later edition – can be understood as culturally adequate representations of an authentic ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite institution. Moreover, the biblical accounts represent that the distinct class of the subjects of forced labour was a crucial and determining factor concerning the quality and the quantity of the imposed work. Thus, in the world of the Old Testament, the quality of the compulsory labour service of the civil population fell under the categories of highly qualified skilled working positions, and mid- and chief-executing positions. In addition, their compulsory service was rather occasional. However, the second-class population of the ancient Israelite state, i.e. the second-class citizens, the semi-assimilated residents and the non-assimilated strangers performed heavy, low-quality work duties, such as stone-cutting and burden-bearing. A significant difference between their statuses is revealed in the fact that the total strangers were pushed into a perpetual state of forced labour. Therefore, the context of the occurrences of *סֵבִי* in the Old Testament and the careful consideration of the population element together reveal the complex nature of *סֵבִי* as an ancient Israelite institution. After all, it is not an insignificant factor whether someone performs occasional labour service, permanent but temporary corvée labour, or – in a worst-case scenario – pushed into a perpetual state of forced labour, i.e. slavery.

Theologically and ethically, it is rather interesting to note, that the biblical text generally accepts the institution of forced labour. It is represented that *סֵבִי* in itself is a necessary tool of the royal power to maintain the structure and welfare of the society. It is supposed that forced labour in the ancient world was no more than a special form of taxation (cf. Na'aman 2005:755-756), which, practiced justly, was a bearable burden imposed on the civil society. However, it is rather clear that the biblical authors were highly polemic against the institution of kingship and reflect scepticism toward the possibility of a justly practiced system of forced labour. In other words, the biblical texts declare that an inherent nature of the royal power is its tendency to enhance the burden of the subjects, which, to a certain extent, implies exploitation, oppression, and enslavement of the powerless subjugates. Therefore, the biblical texts – directly and indirectly

– condemn the practice of unbalanced, hardened forced labour and the abusive expectations imposed on the second-class population of the early Israelite monarchy. However, their condemnation is partial; it concerns the second-class citizens (the northern Israelites) and the protected residents (גֵּרִים) but excludes the non-assimilated strangers (the remnants of the native Canaanite population). Therefore, an ethical application of these texts must consider that the message of the Old Testament – compared to the contemporary ancient Near Eastern thought and mentality – is arguably progressive in the prior, but analogous (pre-progressive) in the latter case.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achenbach, R 2011. *gêr – nâkhrî – tôshav – zâr*: Legal and Sacral Distinctions regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch, in: Achenbach, R, Albertz, R & Wöhrle, J (eds). 2011, 29-51.
- Achenbach, R, Albertz, R & Wöhrle, J (eds). 2011. *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (BZAR 16). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Albertz, R 2011. From Aliens to Proselytes: Non-Priestly and Priestly Legislation Concerning Strangers, in: Achenbach, R, Albertz, R & Wöhrle, J (eds). 2011, 53-69.
- Avigad, N 1980. The Chief of the Corvée. *IEJ* 30, 170-173.
- Becking, B 2009. Exile and Forced Labour in Bêt Har'oš: Remarks on a Recently Discovered Moabite Inscription, in: Galil, G, Geller, M & Millard, A (eds). *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (VTSup 130). Leiden: Brill, 3-12.
- Berlev, O D 1987. A Social Experiment in Nubia during the Years 9-17 of Sesostri I, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 143-157.
- Dandamaev, M A 1987. Free Hired Labor in Babylonia During the Sixth through Fourth Centuries BC, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 271-279.
- De Vaux, R 1997. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Dosch, G 1987. Non-Slave Labor in Nuzi, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 223-235.
- Evans, D G 1963a. The Incidence of Labour-Service in the Old-Babylonian Period. *JAOS* 83, 20-26.
- Evans, D G 1963b. The Incidence of Labour-Service at Mari. *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 57/2, 65-78.

- Eyre, C J 1987a. Work and Organisation of Work in the Old Kingdom, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 5-47.
- Eyre, C J 1987b. Work and Organisation of Work in the New Kingdom, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 167-221.
- Finkelstein, I & Silberman, N A 2001. *The Bible Unearthed*. New York: Free Press.
- Frolov, S 2016. They will be Yours for Corvée and Serve You: Forced Labor in the Hebrew Bible, Modern America, and Twentieth-century Communist States, in: Scholz, S & Andiñach, P R (eds). *La violencia and the Hebrew Bible* (SemeiaSt 82). Atlanta: SBL Press, 163-184.
- Giorgadze, G G 1987. Two Forms of Non-Slave Labour in Hittite Society, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 251-255.
- Greenwood, K L 2010. Labor Pains: The Relationship between David's Census and Corvée Labor. *BBR* 20/4, 467-478.
- Haran, M 1961. The Gibeonites, the Nethinim and the Sons of Solomon's Servants. *VT* 11/1, 159-169.
- Heltzer, M 1987. Labour in Ugarit, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 237-250.
- Hodossy-Takács, E 2017. Clash and Coexistence in Ancient Palestine, in: Verebics, É P, Móricz, N & Kőszeghy, M (eds). *Ein pralles Leben: Alttestamentliche Studien. Für Jutta Hausmann zum 65. Geburtstag und zur Emeritierung* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 56). Leipzig: Evangelische Verlangsanstalt, 343-352.
- Kegler, J 1983. Arbeitsorganisation und Arbeitskämpfformen im Alten Testament, in: Schottroff, L & Schottroff W (eds). *Mitarbeiter der Schöpfung. Bibel und Arbeitswelt*. München: Kaiser Verlag, 51-71.
- Kellermann, D 1975. גֹּזֵר *gûr*; גֵּר *gēr*; גְּרוּת *gērûth*; מְגֹזְרִים *m^eghûrîm*, in: Botterweck, G J, Ringgren, H & Fabry, H-J (eds). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, II, 439-449.
- Kessler, R 2008. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction*. Translated by L M Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Kitchen, K A 1976. From the Brickfields of Egypt. *TynBul* 27, 137-147.
- Klein, R W 2000. *1 Samuel* (WBC 10). 2nd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Klein, R W 2012. *2 Chronicles: A Commentary* (Hermeneia). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Klengel, H 1987. Non-Slave Labour in the Old Babylonian Period: The Basic Outlines, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 159-166.

- Klingbeil, G A 1997. מַס, in: VanGemenen, W A (ed.). *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, II, 992-995.
- Lang, B & Ringgren, H 1998. נִכְרַ nkr; נֶכָר nēkār; נִכְרִי noḵrî, in: Botterweck, G J, Ringgren, H & Fabry, H-J (eds). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, IX, 423-431.
- Leuchter, M 2005. A King like All the Nations: The Composition of I Sam 8,11-18. *ZAW* 117/4, 543-558.
- Lowery, R H 1991. *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* (JSOTSup 120). Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Maekawa, K 1987. Collective Labor Service in Girsu-Lagash: The Pre-Sargonic and Ur III Periods, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 49-71.
- Matthews, V H & Benjamin, D C 1993. *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Mendelsohn, I 1942. State Slavery in Ancient Palestine. *BASOR* 85, 14-17.
- Mendelsohn, I 1962. On Corvée Labor in Ancient Canaan and Israel. *BASOR* 167, 31-35.
- Moore, M B & Kelle, B E (eds) 2011. *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Na'aman, N 2005. From Conscription of Forced Labour to a Symbol of Bondage: *Mas* in the Biblical Literature, in: Sefati, Y, Artzi, P, Cohen, C, Eichler, B L & Hurowitz, V A (eds). *An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*. Bethesda: CDL Press, 746-758.
- North, R 1997. מַס mas; סֶבֶל sēbel, in: Botterweck, G J, Ringgren, H & Fabry, H-J (eds). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, VIII, 427-430.
- NRSV = 1989. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Okyere, K 2012-3. An Empowered People: A Literary Reading of 1 Kings 12:1-20. *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 14, 124-147.
- Pitkänen, P 2017. Ancient Israelite Population Economy: *Ger, Toshav, Nakhri* and *Karat* as Settler Colonial Categories. *JSOT* 42/2, 139-153.
- Postgate, J N 1987. Employer, Employee and Employment in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 257-270.

- Powell, M A (ed.) 1987. *Labor in the Ancient Near East*. New Haven: American Oriental Society.
- Rainey, A F 1970. Compulsory Labour Gangs in Ancient Israel. *IEJ* 20/3-4, 191-202.
- Rendtorff, R 2005. *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Tools for Biblical Study 7). Translated by D E Orton. Leiden: Deo.
- Silverman, J M 2015. Judeans under Persian Forced Labor and Migration Policies. *Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia* 6, 14-34.
- Snijders, L A 1980: זָר / זָרָה *zûr/zār*, in: Botterweck, G J, Ringgren, H & Fabry, H-J (eds). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, IV, 52-58.
- Soggin, J A 1982. Compulsory Labor under David and Solomon, in: Ishida, T (ed.). *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*. Tokyo: Yamakawa-Shuppansha, 259-267.
- Steinkeller, P 1987. The Foresters of Umma: Toward a Definition of Ur III Labor, in: Powell, M A (ed.). 1987, 73-115.
- Wittenberg, G 2007. Old Testament Perspectives on Labour, in: Wittenberg, G. *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 80-95.