

## The "Naar" in Israelite Society

One of the significant contributions of archeology has been that, through the discovery of ancient documents from Bible lands, we have a better understanding of the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the Old and New Testaments. One scholar, John MacDonald from the University of Glasgow, recently published a study on the Hebrew word *naar*, which appears frequently in the Old Testament, and found that the term is pregnant with meaning hitherto unsuspected.

*Naar* is translated in our Bibles as "child", "young man", or "servant". In studying the use of this word in the Ugaritic texts,<sup>1</sup> however, MacDonald found that the term was used to designate a male of high birth. The *naar* was in an upper stratum of society, a person associated with a professional guild or class, or a superior military figure.

MacDonald analyzed the use of *naar* in the Bible and concluded that the status of the *naar* in Israelite society could be divided into two main categories: civilian and military. In the non-military realm, the *naar* was one of high birth who could be in charge of household servants, or be a member of a particular professional guild. The term is used without regard to age, but when the *naar* was old enough, he assumed responsible duties. In the royal court, he was a noble whose advice was acceptable to kings. The *naar* was the member of a hierarchy, whether in the royal palace or in the household of wealthy aristocracy. If he was the son of a king or noble, he was himself in the ranks of nobility. The *naar* could hold property, be wealthy, receive gifts from famous persons or, in certain cases, be salaried. But the best known role of the *naar* in Israelite society was that of

an elite military officer.

In the elite corps of the army, the *naar* was of full warrior status; he could serve as a scout or the armor-bearer of a senior military man. A *naar's* success as a military leader could lead to his elevation in rank and the captaincy of soldiers. A very high-ranking *naar* could have a place at court and eat at the royal table. MacDonald concluded that the best term for the Hebrew military *naar* is "squire", a well-known figure in the military organization of the later middle ages. A squire was a young man of good birth attendant upon a knight, one ranking next to a knight under the feudal system of military service and tenure, or a personal attendant for a sovereign or nobleman. A *naar* in Israelite military service was, according to MacDonald, a member of the aristocracy, a young knight.

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