

The Jehoash Inscription: it *isn't* because *it is too much* at the same time!

by Reinhard G. Lehmann

[In June 2003, the editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* asked me to write a short note on what I thought about the Jehoash Inscription. I did. But it was never printed. Now here it is. – RGL]

From the very first moment in January [2003], when I saw photographs of the Jehoash tablet, I had the feeling that something there was wrong. The inscription is not what it pretends to be, and, what is more, it is such as it could not be in *history* from a linguistic point of view, i.e. in orthography, syntax, and grammar as well as in paleography. The most important arguments have by now been uttered in several media by a lot of scholars, most of whom independently came to the same conclusion, and are those made by Cross and Greenstein in the recent issue of BAR, too. But let me emphasize another point.

After a thorough investigation of the linguistic data and as a result of a joint workshop at our Department at Mainz University in February [2003], we too came to the conclusion that the inscription must be a fake, and besides, that the crossover of different motives from various biblical passages, including 1 Reg 6 and 2 Reg 12, and the mixture of syntactical patterns, orthography, and semantics from all over a much too long span of time, reveal that the forger(s) underwrite(s) an extremely conservative biblical hermeneutics which tends to see all biblical texts as given at one single moment beyond time and history.

I'd like to illustrate this point in the case of the "Edomite copper" (line 8). As Cross has already pointed out, copper (or brass) is mentioned only in the Chronicler's report of the temple restoration (2 Chr 24:12). But in my opinion the forger did not take this detail from 2 Chr 24, as Cross concludes, because here the copper is not explicitly "Edomite". The "Edomite copper" of the Jehoash inscription is taken from another chapter of Chronicles, namely 1 Chr 18, where King David dedicates unto YHWH Aramaic "vessels of gold, silver and brass" (v. 10) together with similar booty from Edom, Moab, Ammon etc. (v. 11). The forger did not 'know' that the temple copper was Edomite because he knew of the famous mine smelters of Edom in antiquity or because he knew of the Feinan Project in modern times, but simply because he was conditioned to melt texts from different historical layers by theme and to see them as one single 'hermeneutic layer' which is established by thematic 'association' or cue-words such as the cue "dedication unto YHWH", which leads further to the Davidic temple building material stock (including copper) of 1 Chr 22:3. Thus the temple copper became "Edomite" in the mind of the forger. The copper of the temple was Edomite as a consecrated tribute and booty from 'Davidic' times (keep in mind that some of the architectural terms of the inscription are only attested in the 'Salomonic' texts of 1 Reg 6) – and it had to be Edomite, too, at its restoration.

From all this it becomes clear why the forger(s) set all his efforts, craftsmanship, and knowledge to fool the so-called 'hard sciences', but did not manage to fool philologists and paleographers: who is unable to think in categories of historicity, historical linguistics, or higher criticism, who reads his Bible with extremely conservative hermeneutics, and reads Hebrew without any linguistic stratification (which has for the case of the Jehoash Inscription already been shown by other scholars), and neither knows nor cares about, has neither the tools nor even the will to fool them.

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