

DEVER, W. G.: *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology can tell us about the Reality of Ancient Israel*. 2001. Pp. xiii, 313. William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK. Price: £16.99/\$25.00.

In recent years the polemical exchanges between William Dever and the biblical 'deconstructionalists' have been steadily heating up, and the temperature throughout this curious volume is preset to boiling point. Dever positively fulminates against developments that he sees as a danger not only to Levantine archaeology and history but to humanistic scholarship generally. An attempt to debunk 'revisionism', this book is also a self-justification, giving some intimate glances into Dever's own relationship with the Bible. The son of a clergyman, Dever began by studying theology, moved into what was then 'biblical archaeology', and later flirted with the 'new archaeology'. With evident relief Dever records how, in the 1990s, 'post-processualism' rejected the sterility of the new archaeology and 'made history-writing respectable again'. And it is mainly on history-writing from the material record that Dever rests his case against the biblical minimalists.

The book opens with a useful and compact review of current trends in biblical revisionism, with character sketches of its leading lights. Centre stage is given to Thomas Thompson who, having participated in the Gezer excavations as a student, insists that Dever fudged the evidence for dating its 'Solomonic' gate and walls to the tenth century B.C. Not surprisingly the spectre of this accusation looms large in later chapters.

When arguing the contribution that archaeology can make to questions of biblical historicity Dever is at his best with wider cultural matters. For example, the distribution of both *lmlk* stamps

(p. 93) and late eighth–seventh-century ‘royal sheqel’ weights (p. 225) conforms well to the biblical boundaries of Judah; the plan, masonry style, ornament and furnishings of Solomon’s Temple are all Late Bronze to Early Iron Age in conception (pp. 144–57). Using this kind of general evidence from ‘mute’ archaeology Dever demonstrates the weakness of the minimalist position. He rightly asks how writers fabricating the history of the Israelite monarchies in Hellenistic times (as Thompson and others argue) could have had access to such accurate information. Further the minimalists have failed to show that the account in Kings contains any anachronisms, ‘which surely even the most ingenious “forger” could not have avoided’ (p. 273).

Having made a good case from aspects of ‘daily life’, Dever over-eggs the pudding by attempting to reconstruct political history from the archaeological record. Here he is at his very weakest and his discussion (pp. 134–38) of a supposed ‘Shishak destruction horizon’ at Palestinian sites, c. 930 B.C., is so full of errors that barely a single sentence stands up to scrutiny. Dever refers to ‘the battle-itinerary, list of destroyed sites, and registers of booty in the text of the Shishak stela’. No such document, of course, exists — it is a mongrel produced by Dever’s misunderstanding of the basic source material. Dissection of his words is important as it cuts to the heart of Dever’s claim that he has objective evidence for dating Iron IIA Gezer to the tenth century — the main source of the acrimony between himself and Thompson.

Unaware of (or ignoring) objections to the identifications that have been raised over the last twenty years (see, e.g., S. Manning, *A Test of Time* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), pp. 378–80, which draws on the present writer’s arguments), Dever muddles assumption with fact by using the biblical name ‘Shishak’ to refer to Shoshenq I of Egyptian records. Worse, he confuses the *stela* of Shoshenq I found at *Megiddo* with the *Karnak reliefs* of that Pharaoh — it is the latter which give the information Dever alludes to. Strictly speaking there is no ‘battle-itinerary’ or ‘list of destroyed sites’ in Shoshenq I’s records. There is simply a toponym list connected with a Palestinian campaign. Yet Dever clings to the hackneyed assumption that all entries in such inventories represent ‘battles’ or ‘destructions’. Their exact purpose is unclear, but they generally comprise countries and towns whose perceived threat to pharaonic power had been neutralized in one way or another — whether by conquest, treaty or tribute. Parts of some lists might reflect campaign itineraries or simply routes taken by Egyptian tax collectors. But it should long have been realized that there is no question of ‘lists of destroyed sites’. (See, e.g., J. K. Hoffmeier, ‘Reconsidering Egypt’s part in the termination of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine’, *Levant*, XXI (1989), 187–88 [full pages 181–93].) Shoshenq’s list includes over 150 names!

Dever goes on to list some fourteen towns (from Hazor to Tell Mazar), allegedly identified in Shoshenq’s list, which show signs of destruction in the late tenth century. As an argument against the minimalists he insists that ‘later compilers . . . could not have known about specific destructions at the sites noted above, since the ancient remains of these cities had long been buried under the sands of time’. Dever is oblivious to the fact that *none* of his fourteen destroyed sites is mentioned in the biblical account of Shishak. Rather, in marvellously circular fashion, he has actually transferred information from an Egyptian inscription into the biblical text! Revealingly, Dever describes the Shishak-destruction synchronism as one ‘so secure that most archaeologists take it for granted’ (p. 137). His faith in it, however, is not grounded in any text (biblical or otherwise) but merely in the traditional Albrightian paradigm.

On the contentious issue of Gezer Dever offers two points in his defence. First, that he could date its ‘Solomonic’ walls to the tenth century B.C. by the pottery forms, ‘which have always been dated to the late 10th century’. But pottery, of course, does not date itself. Second: ‘In addition to the ceramic evidence, we used the datum provided by the well-known campaigns of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shoshenq, ca. 925 B.C. . . ., to fix the date of the destruction. . .’ (p. 132). Three pages later Dever admits that the reading of Gezer in Shoshenq’s records is ‘now uncertain’. *Now?* It is thirty years since Kenneth Kitchen pointed out that the ‘new copy’ of the inscription ‘would rule out “Gezer”, ([g]3[d]3[r]), as overconfidently advocated by Mazar, Aharoni and others’ (*The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (1972), 435). Almost needless to say, Dever does not refer to Kitchen’s authoritative study, satisfied instead that ‘earlier scholars like William F. Albright, Benjamin Mazar, and Yohanan Aharoni worked out a map of the Shishak [*sic*] raid a generation ago’.

One would imagine that the minimalists might have a field-day with the serious lapse in critical scholarship displayed by Dever on this issue. Actually it is unlikely. As Dever observes (p. 135, n. 49), they barely comment on the Shishak-Shoshenq equation. The reason (unexplained by Dever) is that,

like him, they work within a chronological framework based on an assumed link with the Bible. As Hughes, among many others, has appreciated: 'Egyptian chronologists, without always admitting it, have commonly based their chronology of this period on the *Biblical* synchronism for Shoshenq's invasion' (*Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOT Supplement Series, 66 (1990), 110.) That is, it is the biblical date for Shishak (c. 925 B.C.) that has allowed Shoshenq I and the 22nd Dynasty to begin in 945 B.C. Given the shaky nature of 'Sothic dating' (see conveniently Manning, *op. cit.*, 368–73), it is this identification which provides the lynchpin for Egyptian Third Intermediate Period chronology and, ultimately, that of the New Kingdom.

The overall framework for dating the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages in the Levant thus hinges on a single piece of information in the Old Testament. For Dever, this might be an acceptable position. For the minimalists it clearly is not, explaining why they have yet to assess critically the biblical Shishak story. When that day comes, Thompson and co. should realize they are chiselling away the main prop supporting the consensus chronology — and any arguments they have based on mismatches between the Old Testament account and the material record will have been in vain.

The subtle mechanics of chronology are unfortunately lost on Dever, and his *idées fixes* colour his treatment of all new developments. Finkelstein's recent arguments in favour of redating 'tenth' century 'Solomonic' strata to the ninth (essentially an unacknowledged return to the Kenyon position) are given short shrift (pp. 43–44). By summarily dismissing the matter Dever attempts to cover up the fact that — within the present chronological framework — identifying the archaeology of the United Monarchy does indeed present a serious problem.

If Dever's attempts to link narrative biblical history and archaeology represent mainstream thinking (as he claims), then the field is indeed in deep trouble. It is the kind of blind acceptance of traditional (unsubstantiated) 'synchronisms' espoused by Dever that has provided the very fuel for the minimalists' criticisms. In short, Dever may prove to be his own worst enemy.

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