

Authentic Inscriptions on Mount Gerizim vis-[^]-vis forged ones in Jerusalem

By Benyamim Tsedaka

In the past few months great commotion has been going on around the "discovery" of the Yehoash Tablet, which according to the translation from the Phoenician script tells of repairs to the First Temple in Jerusalem, made by Yehoash son of Akhazyah King of Judah [836-798 B.C.E.], i.e., in the 9th century B.C.E., as reported in 2Kings, 12. The tablet was described in Dr. David Inbar's article in the 830-832 "A.B.- The Samaritan News" issue as "authentic". This is a minority opinion since most of the researchers who deal with this tablet doubt its authenticity. The main claim is that the tablet on which the letters are inscribed may indeed be ancient, for according to laboratory tests it dates at the earliest from the third century B.C.E., but most of the decipherers of ancient Hebrew inscriptions claim that the inscription on the tablet itself seems "too good to be true".

The mystery of "discovering" the "Yehoash Tablet" is compounded by the obscurity of its owner's identity and even more by the vagueness of where it was found. This tablet was brought for examination and authentication not from the site of its discovery, but from a collection where it had been resting for years, whose owner refuses to identify himself.

The "Jehoash Tablet" joins three additional "findings" from Jerusalem that are suspect of forgery and are known within the same circle of collectors, antiquities dealers and inscription decipherers. These are: two ostracons [letters on clay plates] from the time of Assa son of Aviyam King of Judah [908-867 B.C.E.] ; a "seal of Menashe son of Hizkiah" king of Judah [698-641 B.C.E.] and a sarcophagus from the first century C.E., with an inscription associating it to

"Jaacov brother of Yeshoo" the Messiah of the Christians. The common claim as regards these three findings is that a forged inscription was added onto ancient material. A common link to the three findings is Mr. Robert Deutsch, a dealer and an antiquities collector who changed vocation into that of an antiquities researcher. Mr. Deutsch is certain beyond any doubt that the "Jehoash Tablet" is forged and even volunteered to demonstrate how professional counterfeiters of inscriptions produced such forgeries by replicating ancient Hebrew letters from authentic inscriptions whose contents is in conformity with the Bible stories. Similar claims were made concerning additional findings in Jerusalem, which were ascribed to the First Temple Period. .

No doubt this wave of "discovering" First Temple period inscriptions in Jerusalem that are suspected as counterfeits or whose forgery is beyond any doubt testifies to a growing frustration among antique seekers, researchers and decipherers as a result of the absence of archeological findings to confirm the biblical stories of the First and Second Temples. All the findings from the excavations of the temple site in Jerusalem are the remains of the Third Temple built by King Herod [37 B.C.E. - 4 A.D.], including the "Western Wall", holiest of all to Judaism, which is a section of the wall that surrounded Herod's Temple.

The determination that "we have not seen" does not constitute evidence to the non-existence of the temples of which the Bible tells us. The absence of discovering such remains strengthens the stance of a growing group of archeologist who consider most of the Bible stories to be myths, historical compositions of legendary character without a connection to the area. However, it may always be claimed that if it were possible to excavate underneath the Muslim sites on Temple Mount relics from the First and Second Temples could be unearthed. Moreover, it may be maintained that when Herod rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem he determined to leave no remains of the earlier temples. Still, the great flurry around these inscriptions is tainted with a measure of hypocrisy. There are veritably dozens (!!!) of ancient Hebrew inscriptions from the

fourth, third and second centuries B.C.E. whose authenticity is uncontested that are stashed away in the store rooms of the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, whose discovery has not raised any positive agitation. They include the tetragrammaton in ancient Hebrew script, names of High Priests and names of donors. Can the reader imagine the commotion that would take place if an inscription of the tetragrammaton in ancient Hebrew script were uncovered in the Temple Mount excavations in Jerusalem? However, to the discontent of the personalities that generate such archeological flurries those inscriptions were discovered in the sacred site on Mount Gerizim !!! ? the heart of the Israelite Samaritans' faith.