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Ash, Paul S.
David, Solomon and Egypt: A Reassessment

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Scholars who have the ability to engage in comparative analysis and have a command of the primary and secondary sources of the diverse fields of ancient Egypt and Israel are rare indeed. Paul Ash's work, which is a revision of his doctoral dissertation, shows the ability to work with the textual and archaeological materials from both cultures, as well as to engage in historical critical analysis. He has written a very detailed and thorough analysis of the subject, which is copiously documented. His goal is to reassess the notion proposed by R. de Vaux ("Titres et fonctionnaires égyptiens à la cour de David et de Salomon," *RB* 48 [1942] 394-402), A. Cody ("Le titre égyptien et le nom propre du scribe de David," *RB* 72 [1965] 381-93), and others that David and Solomon had Egyptian officials at their court. Thus, his topic of study is the interaction (or lack thereof, according to Ash) of Egypt and Israel during the time of David and Solomon. He reassesses the traditional idea that there were significant contacts, and argues that the dearth of written sources from Egypt, the lack of Egyptian materials in the archaeological data from Palestine, and the lack of clarity in the biblical sources attest to scattered contact between Egypt and Israel. He does, however, allow for the possibility of the existence of the United Monarchy, although epigraphic evidence for this period is scanty, which Ash believes creates doubt about the degree of literacy during the period of David and Solomon.

The work is divided into three major sections--a discussion of the relevant inscriptional sources from Egypt, the archaeological evidence from Palestine, and the biblical evidence. A critical examination, according to Ash, shows that the contacts between the two areas were limited, and that the biblical traditions concerning Solomon and Egypt are not historically reliable.

Ash's pessimism concerning the historical and archaeological value of his sources is evident from the outset. He begins by showing that one cannot, with any precision,

establish a reliable chronological synchronism between Egyptian monarchs of the twenty-first Dynasty and the reigns of David and Solomon. However, he concedes that the presence of specific details in 1 Kgs. 14:25-28 show that the writer had access to historical material. In spite of this, it is impossible to conclude which Egyptian monarch ruled concurrently with David and Solomon, although Shoshenq I and Rehoboam ruled somewhat concurrently.

Just as frustrating as the lack of establishing a chronological sequence is the lack of Egyptian texts and reliefs that may illuminate contacts. The Siamun relief from Tanis has traditionally been viewed as showing his campaign in Palestine. Like others, Ash argues in a very detailed way that Siamun's "Battle Relief" has nothing to do with a campaign in Palestine. Furthermore, the text is probably a fictitious account as well, and thus has no historical value. Papyrus Moscow 127 has been seen by K. Kitchen as showing evidence for contact between Egypt and Edom during the time of David. Once again Ash dispels this by showing that the chronological context for the letter is uncertain, as well as its historicity. Thus, it should be used with caution and only in conjunction with other, better evidence.

The only clear evidence of contact from the Egyptian standpoint are the texts describing Shoshenq's campaign in Palestine. He concludes that they describe a hostile relationship, but the lacunae in the texts limit their usefulness for reconstructing the course of Shoshenq's campaign or the nature of the polities in Palestine. He also argues that Shoshenq's relations with Byblos were for trading purposes only, and thus he did not control the area.

Ash concludes that none of the texts that have been cited as evidence for close ties between Egypt and Palestine in this period indicate such, as they have been misinterpreted and overconfidently dated to this period. An overall understanding of Egypt in this period seems to suggest a lack of activity in this area.

It is well known that the archaeological evidence from Palestine makes it difficult to date precisely the time period of David and Solomon. Ash attempts to observe trends in the Egyptian related aspects of the material culture of the Early Iron Age Palestine, and discusses the Egyptian style artifacts from the area. Not only do the paucity of Egyptian architecture, pottery, and artifacts in mortuary assemblages suggest a lack of Egyptian presence in the area, but those items that do exist offer no clear conclusions as to the nature of the relationship, as many of them entered Palestine by way of Phoenicia.

The most problematic area of discussion is, of course, the age old problem of dealing with the biblical texts that are not contemporary with the subject matter they discuss. Like D. Redford (*Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992] 110), Ash sees the biblical stories of David and Solomon as

generally historically plausible, but postulates that they were designed more for midrashic or fictional purposes. He does not take at face value the biblical tradition of Solomon's extensive trade relations and his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. He sees the texts as historically problematic, full of propaganda, and exaggerated at points. There are, of course, five references to Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess, but Ash argues that little specific information in the accounts exposes their lack of historical value. Further, he argues that evidence of royal foreign marriage in Egypt does not support the biblical report of Solomon's marriage. Moreover, Ash claims that reducing Solomon's reign to historical proportions makes it questionable whether Egypt would have arranged such a marriage. Although Kitchen (*The Third Intermediate Period* [Westminster: Aris & Philips, 1995] 282) has provided evidence of Egyptian kings marrying commoners, Ash argues that it is not certain that they married foreigners. The evidence for trade contacts between Egypt and Solomonic Israel also show the product of embellishment, exaggeration, and folklore, rather than history.

Though not all will agree with his conclusions, both historical minimalists and maximalists will greatly benefit from the careful and thorough analysis done by Ash on a topic that has not previously been studied in depth.