

Ortiz on David

On April 7, 2003 Steven M. Ortiz, Professor of Archaeology at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Director of the Tel Gezer Excavation, presented a lecture for the Horn Museum Lecture Series entitled *House of David or the Tent of David? Current Issues and Trends in Biblical Archaeology*.

Recent archaeology has tended to look negatively on David and Solomon. The Davidic dynasty is mentioned in only a couple of extrabiblical texts and there are no state documents from Jerusalem in the 10th century BC. David is now seen as more of a bedouin chief than a king. Along with this trend there has been a move by Israel Finkelstein and others to the so-called low chronology. This view is essentially the revival of older arguments bolstered by evidence from more recent excavations at Jezreel and is an attempt to close the so-called 9th century BC gap in archaeological knowledge of ceramic development. This position shifts ceramics and their associated material culture 100 years later, into the 9th century BC, creating a domino effect on the chronology of the rest of the Iron Age.

It is further assumed that two cultures living side-by-side must have the

same pottery, hence because Iron Age I Philistine wares do not appear at Lachish VI, these wares must have been introduced later. However, ethnographical studies have shown that contemporary cultures in close proximity do have distinct material cultures. Applying a simple trait-list approach that assumes that if David lived in the 10th century BC there should be empirical evidence, then the lack of such evidence would seem to indicate that the associated biblical stories are either fabrications or embellishments. However, other factors such as 1) the small percentage of Jerusalem that has actually been excavated; 2) that most places where evidence might be found are inhabited by modern residences; 3) that what little evidence there is must be interpreted; and 4) the bent of those who control that interpretation, also play a role.

The alternative standard (high) chronology views the 10th and 9th century BC ceramic forms to be similar, developing slowly from the 10th to the 8th centuries BC when they became standardized. They were further affected by regional variation. It has been noted that the surfaces at Jezreel are disturbed and the pottery actually reflects earlier 10th century BC occupation, as at Samaria. The so-called 9th century BC gap reflects a lack of data due to the fact that few sites with ceramic material from this century have been excavated. There is also a need for the development of statistical models which target information on regional variation. Emphasis should be placed on processes rather than on a simple trait-list approach. Finally, one should not dismiss the few extrabiblical texts that are available such as the house of David and the Mesha



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Inscription. These texts, in fact, support a kingship rather than a bedouin view of David. (Paul J. Ray, Jr.)

