

The Inviolability of Zion - a Pre-Israelite Tradition?

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In his study *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*<sup>1</sup>, R.E. CLEMENTS presents a new view of the origin of the tradition of the inviolability of Zion. As he sees it, the tradition is not in any way a development of the cult legend, reflected in the Zion psalms, which portrays Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God and the scene of the great final conflict between Jahweh and the nations<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, CLEMENTS questions the suggestion that this tradition goes back to pre-Israelite, Canaanite-Jebusite Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>. Instead, he would see the motif of the conflict with the nations as having its roots in the Davidic royal ideology which was intimately bound up with the Jerusalem cult. The actual doctrine of the inviolability of Zion is interpreted as being a further development of the conflict motif in the Davidic royal ideology. CLEMENTS sees the motif as having been taken up by the prophet Isaiah, and then further developed by the redactors who edited and expanded the prophet's sayings during the reign of Josiah. The concept of the inviolability of Zion itself is the product of these later writers, who specifically linked the conflict motif with the events surrounding Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, when the city was miraculously spared the fate that befell the other cities of Judah. According to this theology, Zion was spared then, and will be similarly spared in the future, because it is the City of David; Yahweh guarantees its inviolability "for the sake of Yahweh's servant David"<sup>4</sup>.

In the following paper I would like to re-examine the possibility that the idea of the inviolability of Zion had antecedents in pre-Israelite times.

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- 1 R.E. CLEMENTS, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem. A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, JSOT Suppl. Series, 13 (Sheffield, 1980).
  - 2 An interpretation which was first put forward by S. MOWINCKEL, see CLEMENTS *op. cit.* p. 72ff.
  - 3 *Op. cit.* p. 75.
  - 4 CLEMENTS presents his thesis in Chapter 4 of his book.



One possible piece of evidence which points in this direction, and which, as far as I am aware has not been brought into the discussion, is the report in 2 Sam 5,6-10 of David's capture of Jerusalem. Although the passage in question is a little problematical, one possible interpretation of the response of the Jebusites is that Jerusalem is so unassailable that it can be defended by the blind and the lame<sup>5</sup>. Does this not suggest that even in Jebusite times there was some concept of Jerusalem's inviolability? However the evidence I would particularly like to draw attention to comes from an even earlier period, namely the Jerusalem of the Amarna Age.

The letters of Abdu-Heba, king of Jerusalem, to his suzerain the king of Egypt, (EA 287 and 288) have often been discussed in the context of the Deuteronomistic "name theology"<sup>6</sup>, with their reference to the king of Egypt having "set his name" in the land of Jerusalem (EA 287.60f.), and at the rising and setting of the sun (EA 288.5ff.), however the implication of these references for the concept of the inviolability of Zion has not been considered.

In EA 287.60-63, Abdu-Heba writes to the Egyptian ruler: "Behold, the king has set his name in the land of Jerusalem for ever; so he cannot abandon the land of Jerusalem!"<sup>7</sup>. To fully appreciate the import of this statement we need to bear in mind the general context in which it is made. Abdu-Heba writes to Egypt to request its assistance against the 'Apiru who are threatening him; the letter reports of the activities of the latter and the help they have been receiving from Lab'ayu of Shechem and goes on to complain of the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrison which had been stationed in Jerusalem (line 45ff.), requesting that Egyptian troops be sent again (line 51ff.). There then follows the statement, quoted above, which is obviously intended

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5 See e.g. P.K. McCARTER, II Samuel, The Anchor Bible Vol. 9 (New York, 1984) p. 138.

6 See e.g. R. de VAUX, "Le lieu que yahvé a choisi pour y établir son nom", in *Das ferne und das nahe Wort*, Festschrift L. ROST, (Berlin 1967) p. 219-228; THAT II, 907f. s.v. *škn*; id. col. 955 s.v. *šem*; M.WEINBERG, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School, Oxford 1972, p. 193. For Mesopotamian parallels to the concept of setting up one's name WEINBERG refers to the study of F.R. KRAUS, "Altmesopotamisches Lebensgefühl", in *JNES* 19 (1960), 128ff. In the examples quoted by KRAUS, however, the concept of claiming possession of something is not present, setting up one's name has only to do with establishing one's fame and reputation.

7 Translation of W.F. ALBRIGHT in *ANET* p. 488.



to reinforce the plea for Egyptian troops: the Egyptian king can not abandon Jerusalem since he has "set his name in the land of Jerusalem for ever".

In a further desperate plea for help (EA 288) Abdu-Heba again writes to the Egyptian king and gives an even more drastic picture of the situation: "Let my king take thought for his land. The land of the king is lost; in its entirety it is taken from me; there is war against me, as far as the lands of Seir (and) as far as Gath-Carmel!"<sup>8</sup>. The expression "to set ones name" also occurs in this letter, where we read "Behold, the king my lord, has set his name at the rising of the sun and at the setting of the sun!". This statement, which introduces the letter, emphasises the "universal dominion"<sup>9</sup> of the king, and is doubtless aimed at galvanising the him into action.

P. K. McCARTER discusses the significance of "setting ones name" in his commentary on II Samuel (7,13) and points out that to do this in a place indicates a claim to sovereignty over it<sup>10</sup>; the name is a "surrogate presence" which "assured (the king of) his continuing control of a dominion in his absence"<sup>11</sup>. How, precisely, will this have been done? If one adopts McCARTER's interpretation of II Sam. 8,13<sup>12</sup>, the concrete action which could lie behind "setting the name" could be illustrated by this verse, where we are told, according to McCARTER's translation, that David built a monument to commemorate his victory over the Arameans. The word used for "monument" in the Hebrew text is *šem*, "name"<sup>13</sup>, which suggests that setting ones name somewhere involved setting up a monument of some sort. However it seems more likely that one should here translate "made a name for himself", i.e. won himself a reputation, and not understand it as referring to a physical monument.

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8 EA 288.23f., transl. ANET, p. 488.

9 The expression "the rising of the sun and the setting of the sun" is found in the Phoenician inscriptions at Karatepe (I,4-5 and I,21-II,5 - H. DONNER - W. RÖLLIG, Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften, Wiesbaden 1973, Bd. II p. 36f.), and in Ps. 50, and emphasises the great extent of the area referred to. In the example from the Amarna letter and Ps. 50 it figuratively refers to universal dominion.

10 No doubt the concept of establishing ones fame and reputation also plays a role here - setting up a stele recording ones achievement was no doubt also intended to perpetuate ones renown - but the concept of possession is probably dominant.

11 The Anchor Bible Vol. 9, New York 1984, p. 206.

12 Op. cit. pp. 243 & 251.

13 For the use of "name" for "monument" see McCARTER, op. cit. p. 251.



However even if II Sam. 8,13 does not help us further, the practice of setting up a monument as a claim to sovereignty is well-documented in ancient Egyptian sources.

In the Semneh stele of Sesostriis III<sup>14</sup>, set up at his southern border, the king addresses his heirs with the following words:

"As for any son of mine who shall maintain this border which my majesty has made, he is my son, born to my majesty. The true son is he who champions his father, who guards to border of his begetter. But he who abandons it, who fails to fight for it, he is not my son, he was not born to me. Now my majesty has had an image made of my majesty, at this border which my majesty has made, in order that you maintain it, in order that you fight for it".

The text makes it clear that the setting up of a monument, here most probably a statue<sup>15</sup>, although the stele itself may be the monument in question, is a claim to sovereignty; Sesostriis' words also make it quite clear that it was expected that these claims be upheld, not only by the king who made them, but also by his heirs. For the Egyptians a statue was a bearer of the personality and very being of the person represented<sup>16</sup>, so that for one of Sesostriis' heirs to abandon his statue would be tantamount to deserting Sesostriis himself.

We know that in the New Kingdom Egyptian kings set up statues of themselves in cities in Asia. In a relief of Ramesses II. in the Ramesseum a city is represented which is labeled "The town of Kheta in which is the statue of pharaoh", located in the vicinity of Tunip<sup>17</sup>. The city was in rebellion against Egypt and the king was determined to retake it and assert his dominion over it, i.e. he was prepared to fight for his territory just as Sesostriis I urged his successors to do. The fact that the city is distinguished as one in which pharaoh had set up his statue indicates that not every city in Asia was so honoured. If this is the case, then, assuming that the reference to "setting

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14 Egyptian text conveniently published in K. SETHE, *Ägyptische Lesestücke*, (reprint Darmstadt 1959) p. 83-4; English transl. in M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol. I*, (Berkeley 1975) p. 118ff.

15 On this see P. OCKINGA, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit im Alten Ägypten und im Alten Testament* (ÄAT 7), (Wiesbaden 1984) p. 4 n. 13.

16 See OCKINGA, *op. cit.* p. 16ff.

17 K.A. KITCHEN, *Ramesseid Inscriptions, Vol. II* p. 174.13f.



the name" in EA 287 refers to the setting up of a statue or stele<sup>18</sup>, it suggests that Jerusalem belonged to a select number of cities tied to Egypt in a particularly close fashion. It seems reasonable to assume that these will have been centres of strategic and economic importance, such as Beth Shan for example, where stelae of Seti I. and a statue of Ramesses III. have been discovered<sup>19</sup>, and which is known to have been an Egyptian base<sup>20</sup>.

We need to bear in mind that claiming possession of a territory, and marking this claim by setting up some sort of (inscribed) monument, not only gave rights to its sovereign, it also laid the obligation upon him to defend and hold the territory. If we examine the appeal of Abdu-Hepa to pharaoh in this context it becomes considerably clearer. The Jerusalemite is not so much assuring the Egyptian of his fealty<sup>21</sup> as putting pressure on him to make him come to his aid. The obligation of the Egyptian ruler to fight for territory which he, or even a predecessor, had claimed as his is vividly illustrated by the words of Sesostri I. on his Semneh stele. It seems reasonable to conclude that Abdu-Hepa is appealing to the Amarna pharaoh on the basis of an established tradition of this kind. The sentiments expressed by Sesostri I. were surely alive and well in the New Kingdom, the age of the "warrior pharaohs"; even a ruler like Amenophis III., who is not particularly renowned for martial achievements, paid at least lip-service to this tradition as shown by his lion- and bull-hunt scarabs<sup>22</sup>, and by a fragmentary stele from Thebes<sup>23</sup>, which depicts the king as a triumphant warrior<sup>24</sup>. Similarly Akhenaten, who

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18 Considering the very close significance of "name" and "image" in the ancient Near East (for Egypt see H. BONNET, *RÄRG* p. 501, and W. WESSETZKY, *Königsname und Titel Ramses' II. in doppelter rundplastischer Darstellung*, in: *ZÄS* 97 (1971), 140-142), and the fact that a royal statue would have borne the name of the ruler, this assumption is quite justified.

19 *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. I, ed. M. AVI-YONAH, Oxford 1975, p. 213-215.

20 Y. AHARONI, *The Land of the Bible*, rev. ed. Philadelphia 1979, p. 151. See also his discussion on pgs. 169-76 of Canaan in the Amarna Period (with map 11) in which the relative importance of the towns mentioned in the Amarna Letters is discussed.

21 P.K. MCCARTER *II Samuel* p. 206.

22 *Text in Urkunden IV* 1738-40.

23 Published with excellent photographs in M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, *Die Hauptwerke im Ägyptischen Museum Kairo*, Mainz 1986 No. 143.

24 The scene of the king driving his chariot with captive Nubians riding on the backs of the horses is very similar to, and may well have been inspired by, a recently published relief of Amenophis II. from Karnak, where the prisoners are Asiatics rather than Nubians, (A.H. ZAYED, "Une repré-



has often been understood as being pacifist by nature, was not averse to casting himself in the traditional warrior role, as a stele from Buhen and its Amada duplicate indicate<sup>25</sup>.

There are two parallels that can be drawn between the situation we meet in the Amarna correspondence of Abdu-Hepa and the Old Testament understanding of the inviolability of Zion, and it so happens that these parallels concern the two fundamental conceptions of the Zion tradition as analysed by J.J.M. ROBERTS<sup>26</sup>.

The first of these is the concept of Jahweh as the great king<sup>27</sup>. Abdu-Hepa is at pains to point out that Jerusalem and its territory belong to the king of Egypt; he repeatedly refers to "the lands of the king, my lord", or some similar expression, (EA 286.22f., 34ff., 49, 56ff.; EA 287.13 etc.), and he stresses that he came to his throne not through any hereditary right but through appointment by pharaoh. In the letters it is only pharaoh who is called "king", Abdu-Hepa is the "servant" of the king, i.e. pharaoh is the real king of Jerusalem, Abdu-Hepa is pharaoh's vassal, just as in the Zion tradition the real king of Jerusalem is Jahweh.

The second fundamental conception of the Zion tradition, according to ROBERTS<sup>28</sup>, is that Jerusalem is the chosen dwelling place of Jahweh. Again there is a similarity with pharaoh's relationship with Jerusalem. Abdu-Hepa sees the Egyptian king as the guarantor of the security of Jerusalem and appeals to him as such. Pharaoh's obligation to Jerusalem stems from the special relationship which Jerusalem has with him, it is a city where he has "set his name", i.e. which he has claimed for himself and where his name dwells, (probably on a statue or stele), i.e. where he is present.

Could the special relationship that existed between Jerusalem and the Egyptian king have provided a model for the later Zion tradition? There was obviously no direct connection, since there was a long period between the time of Egyptian suzerainty over Jerusalem and the establishment of Zion as

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sentation inédite des campagnes d'Amenophis II", in *Mélanges G.E. MOKHTAR*, Vol. I, Cairo 1985, p. 5-17, Pl. I and II).

25 See W. HELCK, "Ein 'Feldzug' unter Amenophis IV. gegen Nubien, in *SAK* 8 (1980) p. 117-126.

26 "Zion in the Theology of the Davidic-Solomonic Empire", in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. T. ISHIDA, Winona Lake 198, p. 93ff.

27 ROBERTS, op. cit. p. 94f.

28 Op. cit. p. 99.



the dwelling-place of Jahweh, however the possibility of an indirect link can not be ruled out.

The situation would be similar to that which R. de VAUX<sup>29</sup> has suggested for the practise of anointing the king in Israel. De VAUX shows that it was the practice for Egyptian vassals in Syria-Palestine to be anointed with oil at their investiture. This was continued by the Canaanites even after Egyptian rule in the area had come to an end and was adopted from the Canaanites by the Israelites to express the Israelite king's position as vassal of Jahweh<sup>30</sup>. If it is possible that, in the ceremony of anointing, the role played by the Egyptian overlord was transferred to the deity, could something similar not have occurred in the case of his role in the context of the special relationship which existed between him and certain Canaanite cities, including Jerusalem? One would have to assume that Pharaoh's position as overlord and guarantor of security was first transferred to the chief Canaanite deity of the cities concerned, to be assumed by Jahweh, in the case of Jerusalem, when he took up abode in the city. To a certain degree this interpretation of events agrees with that posited by ROBERTS<sup>31</sup>, who suggests that after the formation of the tradition that Jahweh had chosen Jerusalem as his dwelling<sup>32</sup>, mythological traditions associated with the abode of the gods with whom Jahweh was identified (and Jerusalem's god would have been paramount amongst these) were used in the glorification of Jerusalem. The suggestion put forward here is that, in addition to these mythological traditions, the central concept of the deity having especially chosen Jerusalem was already in existence in the Canaanite city and was similarly transferred to Jahweh.

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29 In his essay, "The King of Israel, Vassal of Jahweh", in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, London 1972, 152-166. (a contribution to *Mélanges E. TISSERANT*, Vol. I (Studi e Testi, 231), Rome 1964, 119-133.

30 Although de VAUX does not specifically say so, one assumes that after the end of Egyptian domination in the area, the Canaanite kings, like later those of Israel, were considered to be the vassals of the chief god of their city. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to see why the custom of anointing should have been adopted by Israel to indicate their king's vassal status.

31 Op. cit. p. 108.

32 This would have been completed not much after David's transfer of the ark there, and at the latest by the time it was decided to build the Jerusalem temple.