

Hezekiah's Tunnel: Examining The Siloam Inscription

In 1880 a man in the prime of his life entered the ancient aqueduct of "Hezekiah's

debate the reasoning behind constructing the tunnel at an angle. Some say that it is built at an angle because the builders wanted to carve in the smoothest stone such as soft limestone or the layer of least hardness called “meleke” (408). Others say that building at an angle was necessary to avoid the tombs of Davidic kings, and others say that the reasoning relates more to the problem of ventilation. But at the time Hezekiah’s engineers were not judged, for the attempt to construct such a tunnel was just evidence and a great demonstration of the knowledge, energy, skill, and courage of the builders of the time.

The Siloam inscription itself possesses nothing glorifying a king; rather, the writing is simple about the construction of the tunnel and the great effort it took to make it. The inscription was found in 1880 by a 16-year-old boy named Jacob Eliahu, and there is some uncertainty regarding the intention behind the creation of the writing itself (Norin 38). We do not know who wrote the inscription, why they wrote it, or how the writing of it would benefit the project overall. All we know is that it was made “in the bottom third of a polished part of the cliff” (38). We can only guess the possible reasons for the inscription. We could be as right to say it was merely “some workmen’s foreman or official at a relatively low level who arranged the making of a memorial inscription after weeks of hard and awkward work” (38). But the truth is we really don’t know much at all about the intentions of the inscription and the purpose or reasoning “will probably never be known” (38) The inscription describes how the miners worked “the pick, one toward another” and how they heard “the voice of each calling to the other” until they met each other “pick against pick” and the “water flowed from the source to the pool” (Abrahams 407). It is a simple description of hard work paid off by the effort of a people dedicated to the rule of their king, and the reward they received was the bliss of success and overflowing water.

The Siloam inscription, though shrouded in mystery and uncertainty, is a valuable possession of Dunham Bible Museum. It is a reminder of a great historical feat of courage, skill and perseverance. One can only imagine the sense of joy the miners felt when they struck the final blow to the stone which released the waters of the Gihon Spring. Along with this joy, the Siloam inscription relays the enduring strength of a people who followed not only a great king, but an almighty and powerful Lord.

