

“House of David” Restored in Moabite Inscription

A new restoration of a famous inscription reveals another mention of the “House of David” in the ninth century B.C.E.

By André Lemaire



Louvre Museum

THE MESHA STELA claims a ninth-century B.C.E. victory for the Moabite king Mesha over the Israelites. Mesha says he conquered Israelite territory east of the Jordan and humiliated the tribe of Gad. Among the mentioned towns was the place where the stela was found in 1868, the city of Dibon. 2 Kings 3:4 tells of a ninth-century Moabite rebellion, but it may not be the same as the fighting recorded on the Mesha stela.

Made of black basalt, the Mesha stela stood about 3 feet high. The 34 lines of Moabite script in the Moabite language (very close to Hebrew) make the Mesha stela the longest monumental inscription ever found in Palestine. Shortly after its discovery, the stela was smashed. A young French diplomat and amateur archaeologist, Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1846–1923) tracked down and acquired the pieces and attempted to reconstruct the stela. In the photo, the smooth areas of the stela mark Clermont-Ganneau’s reconstructions based on a paper impression made before the stela was smashed.

The recent discovery at Tel Dan of a fragment of a stela containing a reference to the “House of David” (that is, the dynasty of David) is indeed sensational and deserves all the publicity it has received.* The Aramaic inscription, dated to the ninth century B.C.E., was originally part of a victory monument erected at Dan, apparently by an enemy of both the “King of Israel” (also referred to in the fragment) and the “[King of the] House of David.” The inscription easily establishes the importance of Israel and Judah on the

* “‘David’ Found at Dan,” **BAR** 20:02.

international scene at this time—no doubt to the chagrin of those modern scholars who maintain that nothing in the Bible before the Babylonian exile can lay claim to any historical accuracy.

This fragment from the Tel Dan stela has been hailed because it contains the name “David,” supposedly for the first time in ancient Semitic epigraphy. But this claim is not true—or at least not quite true. I believe these same words—the “House of David”—appear(ed) on the famous Moabite inscription known as the Mesha stela, also from the ninth century B.C.E. While for most scholars the reference to the “House of David” on the Tel Dan fragment was quite unexpected, I must confess I was not surprised at all. I have been working on the Mesha stela for the past seven years, and I am now preparing a detailed edition of the text. Nearly two years before the discovery of the Tel Dan fragment, I concluded that the Mesha stela contains a reference to the “House of David.” Now the Tel Dan fragment tends to support this conclusion.

Discovered in 1868, the Mesha stela has been studied for a long time. Since 1875, it has been displayed in the Louvre (now called the Grand Louvre and completely refurbished and beautified). I realize the burden is on me to establish the appearance of the “House of David” on the Mesha stela, because, despite the extensive commentary this inscription has received for more than a century, until now no one has suggested that it contains a reference to the “House of David.”

Even today, the Mesha stela remains the longest monumental inscription discovered anywhere in Palestine—east or west of the Jordan. In many ways the Mesha stela is similar to the stela from which the Tel Dan fragment came. Both stelae are made of black basalt. Both are (or were) approximately three feet high and two feet wide. Both are written in an almost identical Semitic script—close to the script used by the contemporaneous Israelites. Both date to the ninth century B.C.E. Both were erected by enemies of Israel to commemorate their victory. Even the languages are connected—both are Northwest Semitic, Moabite in the case of the Mesha stela (it is often called the Moabite stela or Moabite stone) and Early Aramaic in the case of the Tel Dan stela. Both also contain specific references to the “King of Israel” (*melech yisrael*). And, as I shall show, both also contain a specific reference to the “House of David.”

The reason this reference to the “House of David” has never been noted before may well be due to the fact that the Mesha stela has never had a proper *editio princeps*. That is what I am preparing, 125 years after the discovery of the Mesha stela. The reason it has never had this kind of publication is due to a series of misfortunes that have befallen it since its discovery.

The first westerner to see the Mesha stela was a medical missionary named F. A. Klein, who lived in Jerusalem but who travelled widely on both sides of the Jordan, relieving pain and winning converts. In 1868, on one of Klein’s trips east of the Jordan, in ancient Moab, his Bedouin hosts showed him an inscribed stone among the ruins of Dhiban, Biblical Dibon. Lying face up, the monumental tablet, rounded at the top and with a flat base and a raised frame on the top and sides, contained 34 lines of script. Klein agreed to buy the stone for a hundred napoleons (about \$400 at that time). However, the deal soon became enmeshed in the rivalries among Prussia (North Germany), France and England in the territories of the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century. †

† See M. Patrick Graham, “The Discovery and Reconstruction of the Mesha Inscription,” in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. J.A. Dearman, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 02 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 41–92; compare also Siegfried Horn, “The Discovery of the Moabite Stone,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth, Essays in Honor of D. N. Freedman*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 497–505.



Discovery sites: "House of David" inscriptions from the ninth century B.C.E. have been found on stelae at Dhiban and Dan



Hershel Shanks

The ruins of Dhiban (Biblical Dibon), in Jordan, where the Mesha stela was found in 1868.

Although Klein was a French citizen—he was born in Strasbourg (Alsace)—he worked with German colleagues in the Anglican Christian Missionary Society. When he returned to Jerusalem, he reported the find to the North German consul Heinrich Petermann, who then sought money from Berlin to acquire the stela for the Germans. Although the Germans tried to keep secret the discovery of the stone and their negotiations to acquire it, news inevitably leaked out. Both the British Captain Charles Warren, working for the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), and the Frenchman Charles Clermont-Ganneau, a young translator (dragoman) for the French consul of Jerusalem and amateur archaeologist, soon learned of the sensational discovery. Warren decided to do nothing, so as not to interfere with the German negotiations. Not so Clermont-Ganneau. He first sent an Arab to look at the inscription, who came back with a crude drawing of some of the letters, enough to assure Clermont-Ganneau of the inscription's importance. Clermont-Ganneau next dispatched a man named Ya'qub Karavaca to Dhiban to take a paper squeeze of the inscription.



Rescuer of the stela. Charles Clermont-Ganneau located and purchased 38 fragments bearing 613 of the inscription's approximately 1,000 letters. In 1873, he presented the fragments to the Louvre. Clermont-Ganneau's fragments and 19 additional pieces donated by others together constitute about two-thirds of the original stela. Although he reconstructed the stela for the Louvre, Clermont-Ganneau never published the inscription in a definitive edition. He later became a renowned Near Eastern scholar. His other accomplishments include the discovery of the Royal Steward inscription and the identification of the site of Biblical Gezer.

Despite what might be considered Clermont-Ganneau's indiscretion, in the end he provided a unique and invaluable aid to uncovering the stela's contents. The Bedouin allowed Karavaca to take a squeeze of the stone.

A squeeze is made by placing a sheet of soft, wet paper on the inscription and pressing the paper into the incisions. After the paper dries, it is peeled off and contains a reverse replica of the inscription with the letters in a raised form.

While Karavaca was waiting for his squeeze of the inscription to dry, a fight erupted among the Bedouin, and Karavaca with his two horsemen were forced to flee for their lives. One horseman was wounded in the leg by a spear. The second horseman, Sheikh Jamil, succeeded in snatching the still-wet paper from the stone, stuffing the seven ripped pieces into his robe pocket. In this condition, the seven pieces of the squeeze were presented to Clermont-Ganneau, who put them in front of a candle and sometimes the sun in an effort to decipher the letters.



Louvre Museum

The squeeze, published here for the first time since it was made in 1868/69, consists of seven ripped pieces of paper, which once formed a single sheet. Produced by placing wet paper over the inscription and pressing it into the grooves of writing, the squeeze bears a high-relief, reversed replica of the inscription. (The photo is printed in reverse so as to read correctly.) The damage occurred as Ya'qub Karavaca, who made the squeeze on Clermont-Ganneau's behalf, fled for his life from a fight among the Bedouin who claimed to own the stela. A man accompanying Karavaca, Sheikh Jamil, saved the squeeze by snatching it off the stone while still wet, but ripped it in the process. Because the Bedouin subsequently smashed the stela, this squeeze provides the only record of the full inscription in its original form.

One of the damaged lines has long posed an intriguing challenge to scholars. Line 31 on the stela begins by saying, "And as for Horonen, dwelt there ... ," but a break has partially obliterated the subject of the sentence. With the help of the squeeze, scholars had previously restored the broken subject of the sentence as bt[-]wd . Now, for the first time, Professor Lemaire proposes to reconstruct the missing letter as d, yielding bt[d]wd, "House of David," referring to the king of Judah. This not only fits the context of the inscription, but the sentence structure parallels an earlier reference in the inscription to the "king of Israel." In the Bible, "House of David" often refers to the king of Judah (2 Samuel 7:26 ; 1 Kings 2:24 , etc.).

Lemaire's restoration gives us another mention of the "House of David" in a ninth-century B.C.E. Semitic inscription (the first, from Dan, appeared in the March/April 1994 BAR). Moreover, it improves our understanding of the Mesha stela. Apparently, the latter portion of the inscription, now largely missing, described Mesha's victory over Judahite forces occupying sites southeast of the Dead Sea, just as the early parts of the inscription describe his victory over Israelite forces in the north.

This squeeze remains the only evidence of the inscription in its original condition. The German consul Petermann meanwhile continued negotiations in an effort to purchase the stone. Unable to conclude a bargain, he turned for help to the Ottoman authorities, the nominal rulers of what was essentially a no-man's land. In late 1869, Frederick III, Crown Prince of Prussia, paid an official visit to Jerusalem and in the political context of this visit, the Turks were pleased to lend their assistance to the Germans trying to buy the stone. This proved more of a hindrance than a help. The Bedouin hated the Ottoman pasha of Nablus and preferred to destroy the stone rather than comply with his wishes. This they did forthwith by heating the stone and then pouring cold water on it. They then distributed the pieces among various Bedouin families. (The story that the Bedouin broke the stone because they thought it might contain treasure inside is apocryphal. Likewise the story that they broke it because they thought the individual pieces could be sold for more than the intact stone.)

At this point, Clermont-Ganneau published the first announcement of the existence of the stela, in the February 17, 1870, edition of the *Revue de l'Instruction Publique*. Petermann had left Jerusalem by then and the Prussian consulate gave up the matter. Clermont-Ganneau vigorously attempted to recover pieces of the stone and was soon helped by Warren. In the end, Clermont-Ganneau managed to acquire three large fragments and numerous smaller ones containing 613 letters out of a total of about a thousand. Warren and the PEF acquired 18 fragments with a total of 56 characters. In 1873, Clermont-Ganneau gave his fragments to the Louvre, and, the following year, the PEF also gave the Louvre Warren's 18 fragments.

Using all these fragments as well as the squeeze, Clermont-Ganneau was able to restore the Mesha stela to the condition in which it is now on exhibit. About two-thirds consists of original fragments. The other third is plaster and has been restored based primarily on the squeeze.

The publication of the stela was not as successful as its restoration, however. True, in 1870 Clermont-Ganneau published a facsimile with a translation and commentary[†] and then, in 1875, some revised readings and improvements.[†] But neither publication contained a photograph of the stela itself or of the squeeze, so there was no way to check Clermont-Ganneau's readings.

Ten years later, two other scholars (R. Smend and A. Socin) published a detailed study of the inscription, based on their examination of the stone and the squeeze in the Louvre.[†] (For years, the squeeze hung in a glass case beside the reconstructed stela.) Because Clermont-Ganneau had not yet published his *editio princeps*, the study by Smend and Socin was considered a "pirate edition." It was not very good anyway.

In response to this "pirate edition," Clermont-Ganneau announced that his own "definitive edition ... so long deferred ... with reproductions meeting the legitimate scientific requirements"[†] would soon be forthcoming. But he never produced it, although he spent years thereafter as a professor at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France.

The reason for Clermont-Ganneau's failure to publish this edition remains obscure. Probably he hoped to return to Dhiban and collect other fragments of the stela.[†] In any event, this famous stela has never received a proper *editio princeps*. And the squeeze has never been published, although a number of studies based on an examination of the stone and squeeze have appeared.[†]

That the squeeze has never been published probably accounts for the fact that it is still possible to obtain, here and there, a better reading (as well as an improved historical interpretation of the text).

[†] Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *La stèle de Dhiban ou stèle de Mesa roi de Moab 896 av. J.-C., Lettres à M. le Cte de Vogue* (Paris, 1870), also in *Revue Archéologique* (1870), pp. 184–207, 357–386.

[†] Clermont-Ganneau, "La Stèle de Méša," *Revue critique* (Sept. 11, 1875), pp. 166–174.

[†] *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab für akademische Vorlesungen Herausgegeben* (Freiburg im Brisgau, 1886).

[†] Clermont-Ganneau, "La Stèle de Méša, examen critique du texte," *Journal Asiatique* 9 (8th series, 1887), p. 72.

[†] Clermont-Ganneau, "La Stèle de Méša, examen critique du texte," pp. 110–111.

[†] See, for instance, K. G. A. Nordlander, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab* (Leipzig, 1896); R. Dussaud, *Les monuments palestiniens et judaïques (Musée du Louvre)* (Paris, 1912), pp. 4–20; D. Sidersky, *La stèle de Méša, index bibliographique* (Paris, 1920); H. Michaud, "Sur la pierre et l'argile," *Cahiers d'archéologie biblique* 10 (1958), pp. 29–45.

That is what I propose for one of the most difficult lines in the text, line 31. This line is badly broken; part of it is still on the stone and part has been reconstructed from the squeeze.

After a careful study of the squeeze, Clermont-Ganneau proposed the following uncertain reading at the end of the line: *bt[-]wd* ($\text{בְּת} \text{--} \text{וֹד}$).[†] This tentative reading was confirmed by a German scholar, Mark Lidzbarski, who tentatively identified traces after *b* as part of a *t* (ת).[†] After checking the original and the squeeze in the Louvre, still another scholar, R. Dussaud,[†] proposed to read *bt[-]wd* .

My own examination of the stone and the squeeze, which is now being restored and cleaned of accumulated dust, confirms that *t* follows the *b* . I would now, for the first time, reconstruct the missing letter as a *d* (ד).

The result: *bt[d]wd* ($\text{בְּת} \text{ [ד] } \text{וֹד}$), the “House of [D]avid!”

The attentive reader will immediately notice that “House” is spelled *bt* , rather than *byt* , as in the Tel Dan inscription. But this is in fact no problem. In Moabite (the language of this inscription) it was apparently spelled both ways at this time. Indeed, in this very inscription it is spelled *bt* five times (in lines 7, 23, 27 and 30 [twice]) and only once (in line 25) *byt* . The *y* may have been an archaic spelling or an optional consonant-used-as-a-vowel in an essentially consonantal script; this is what scholars call *plene* orthography (spelling) as opposed to defective orthography. Rudimentary vowels like these (*w* and *h* are other examples) are referred to as *matres lectionis* , the mothers of reading.

The term *bt[d]wd* is the subject of the sentence that begins earlier in line 31. Unlike English, the subject is not necessarily at the beginning. The sentence begins, “And as for Horonen [a place], dwelt there ... ” Then comes the subject. That what follows identifies who lives in Horonen is clear from parallel passages elsewhere in the inscription involving Israel, the northern kingdom, rather than Judah, the southern kingdom that was ruled by the House of David. For example, in lines 7–8, we read, “Omri [previously identified in lines 4–5 as the king of Israel] had taken possession of the land of Medeba, and he dwelt there ... ” It is clear that *bt[-]wd* is probably a designation for a king. It appears that the only possible restoration is *bt[d]wd* , the “House of David,” just as the “king of Israel” (*mlk ysrl*) is mentioned three times earlier. Moreover, referring to the king of Judah by reference to the “House” of David has several parallels in the Bible (2 Samuel 7:26 ; 1 Kings 2:24 , etc.).

This new reading not only establishes another appearance of the House of David in an ancient Semitic inscription, it also helps us to understand better the historical context of the Mesha stela.

The text of the stela is written in the first person by the king of Moab, Mesha, son of the Moabite god Kemosh. After the introduction (lines 1–4), Mesha describes how Moab had been oppressed first by “Omri, king of Israel” and then by Omri’s son (which could mean his grandson or any descendant). But, in a series of military confrontations, Mesha is successful in throwing off Israelite domination, even conquering parts of Israelite territory in Transjordan: “Israel has perished forever,” he claims.

In the principal part of the inscription (lines 5–31a), Mesha recounts the battles he has won—led by the Moabite god Kemosh, Mesha is always victorious—and the cities he has built. All of the identifiable sites are north of the Arnon River, the area east of the Jordan that was apparently controlled by the northern kingdom of Israel. In Biblical terms, this was the territory of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. The Mesha stela confirms (line 10) that “the men of Gad had dwelt [there] from of old.” According to the Mesha stela, Mesha was even successful in capturing the vessels of the Israelite God Yahweh (spelled just as it is in the Hebrew Bible)—this is the earliest mention of Yahweh in any known text or inscription.

A quite different account of the “Moabite rebellion” is given in the Bible (2 Kings 3:4–27). There Mesha’s rebellion is successfully repressed, although in a heart-rending episode Mesha sacrifices his own son on the wall of his capital to implore Kemosh for aid; following this, the Israelites withdraw (2 Kings 3:26–27). Mesha,

[†] Clermont-Ganneau, “La Stèle de Méša,” p. 173; and “La Stèle de Méša, examen critique du texte,” p. 107.

[†] Mark Lidzbarski, “Eine Nachprüfung der Mesainschrift,” in *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik I* (Giessen, 1900), pp. 1–10.

[†] Dussaud, *Les monuments palestiniens et judaïques* p. 5 ; compare also D. Sidersky, La stèle de Méša, p. 11; A.H. Van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), Addendum I.

although badly beaten, is thus able to maintain his independence. The relation between the Biblical account mentioning Mesha (2 Kings 3) and the conquests of Mesha in his stela (lines 7–21) is not evident. Most commentators think they are two different ways of describing the same military campaign soon after the death of Ahab, king of Israel (c. 853 B.C.E.). It is more likely, however, that Mesha's conquests over Israel date later, during the reign of King Jehoahaz (c. 819–803 B.C.E.).

Beginning in line 31b of the stela, a new subject is introduced, as Clermont-Ganneau already guessed long ago.

† The language follows the same pattern as was used in the description of Moab's military confrontations with Israel: "And as for Horonen, dwelt there [xxxxxx]" This is followed, as above, by Kemosh's instruction to Mesha to go and fight against Horonen. Horonen, however, is the first site south of the Arnon; it is located southeast of the Dead Sea. Again Mesha takes up arms and is again victorious. Then the inscription breaks off; the rest is missing. As much as half of the inscription may have been destroyed.

Enough has been preserved at the end of line 31, however, to identify the new enemy of Moab against whom Mesha fought in the last half of the inscription: *bt[d]wd*, the House of David. Having described how he was victorious against Israel in the area controlled by it north of the Arnon, Mesha now turns to part of the area south of the Arnon which had been occupied by Judah, the House of David.* In the tenth and first half of the ninth centuries B.C.E., the kingdom of Edom did not yet exist. The area southeast of the Dead Sea was apparently controlled by Judah. Thus, during Mesha's rebellion against the king of Israel (2 Kings 3:5), the king of Israel asks for assistance from the king of Judah, who agrees to provide the aid. The king of Israel instructs the king of Judah to attack the king of Moab by going through the "wilderness of Edom" (2 Kings 3:8) because apparently it was an area controlled by the kingdom of Judah. No doubt the missing part of the inscription described how Mesha also threw off the yoke of Judah and conquered the territory southeast of the Dead Sea controlled by the House of David.

In its way, the new fragmentary stela from Tel Dan helps to confirm this reading of the Mesha stela. At Tel Dan, as in the Mesha stela, an adversary of the king of Israel and of the House of David describes on a stone monument his victories over Israel and the House of David, Judah.

Indeed, both inscriptions may reflect more or less the same historical context. While the excavator of the Tel Dan inscription, Avraham Biran, dates it to the first half of the ninth century B.C.E., I would date it, on both paleographical and historical grounds, to the last quarter of the ninth century B.C.E., the same as the date of the Mesha stela. But that is another story ... †

† Clermont-Ganneau, "La Stèle de Méša, examen critique du texte," p. 112.

* Incidentally, this supports a conclusion I reached several years ago that the territory of Edom was organized as a kingdom only in about 846 B.C.E., as indicated by 1 Kings 22:48 ("There was no king in Edom") and 2 Kings 8:20 ("Edom revolted against Judah and set up its own king") ("Hadad l'Edomite ou Hadad l'Araméen?" *Biblische Notizen* 43 (1988), pp. 14–18; "Les territoires d'Ammon, Moab et Edom dans la deuxième moitié du IXe s. av. n. è.," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan IV*, ed. S. Tell (Amman, Jordan, 1992), pp. 209–214).

† André Lemaire, "Épigraphie palestinienne: nouveaux documents I. Fragment de stèle araméenne de Tell Dan (IXe s. av. J.-C.)," forthcoming in *Henoch* 16 (1994).

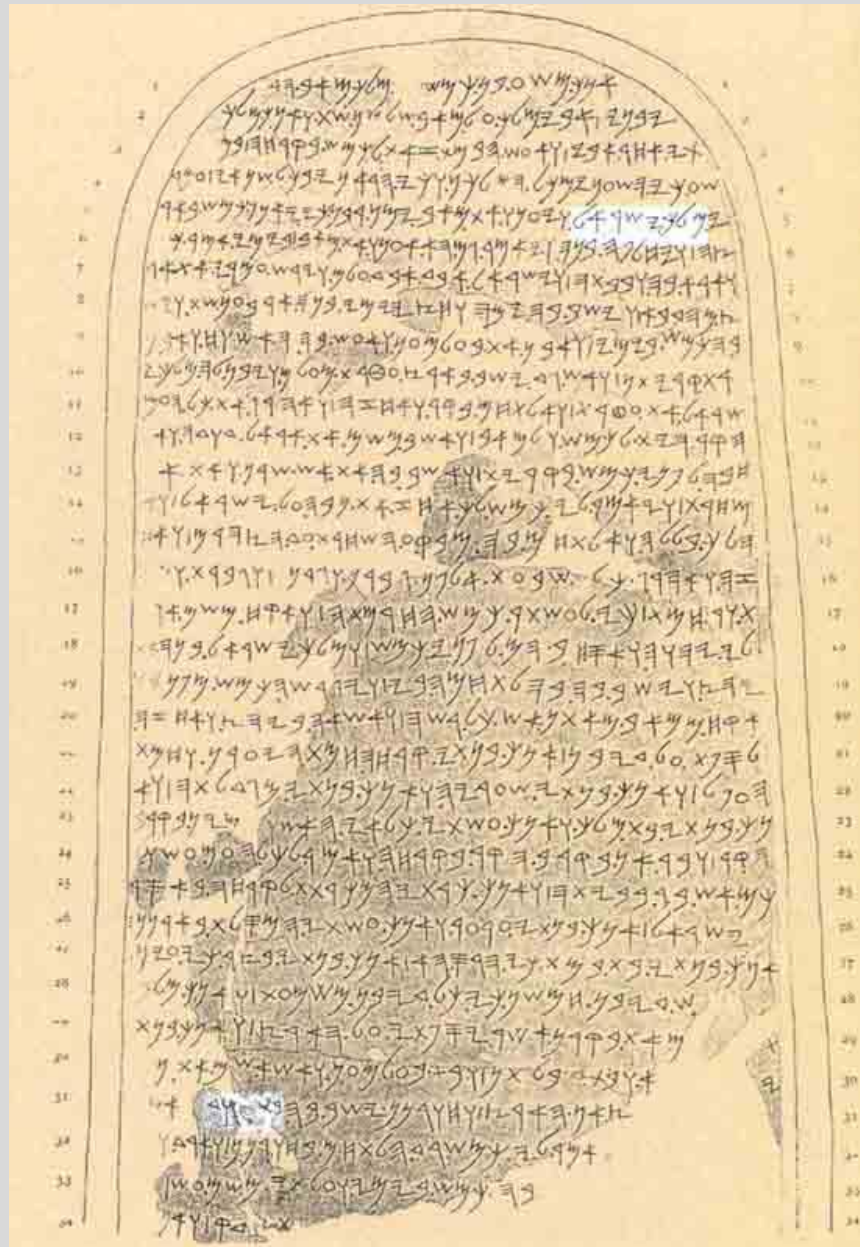
A New Reading: Translation of the Mesha Stela

The 34 lines of the text have been numbered for convenience in the following translation by André Lemaire. Bracketed words and letters represent restorations of the text. Italicized words are uncertain. The dots between brackets indicate places where text is missing. The parenthetical word has been added for clarity but does not appear in the original text.

1. I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[ît], king of Mesha, the
2. Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab for 30 years, and I ruled
3. after my father. I made this high place for Kamosh in Qerihô, high *pla[ce of the Sa]*
4. vior, for he saved me from all the kings and let me enjoy the sight of all my enemies. Omri
5. (was) king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days, for Kamosh was angry with his
6. land. And his son succeeded him, and he too said: "I will oppress Moab." In my days, he said so,
7. but I enjoyed his sight and that of his house. And Israel perished utterly forever. And Omri had taken possession of the land of
8. Medeba. And he dwelt in it in his days and the *sum* of the days of his sons: 40 years; but Kamosh
9. restored it in my days. And I built Baal-meon, and I made a reservoir in it; and I built
10. Qiryatên. And the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Atarot from of old, and the king of Israel built
11. Atarot for himself; but I fought against the town and took it, and I slew all the people:
12. the town belonged to Kamosh and to Moab. And I brought *thence the altar-hearth of his Beloved* , and I dragged
13. it before Kamosh in *Qirat/my town* . And I settled in it the men of Sharon and the men of
14. Maharat. And Kamosh said to me: "Go! Take Nebo against Israel." And I
15. went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon. And I
16. took it and slew all: 7,000 men, boys, women, girls,
17. and pregnant women, because I had devoted it to Ashtar-Kamosh. And I took thence the *altar-*
18. *hearths* of YHWH, and I dragged them before Kamosh. And the King of Israel had built
19. Yahaz, and dwelt therein while he fought against me; but Kamosh drove him out before me, and
20. I took from Moab two hundred men, all the *chiefs* thereof, and I *established* them in Yahaz; and I took it
21. to add it to Dîbon. I built Qerihô: the wall of the parkland and the wall
22. of the acropolis; and I built its gates, and I built its towers; and
23. I built the king's house; and I made banks for the water reservoir inside
24. the town; and there was no cistern inside the town, in Qerihô, and I said to all the people: "Make yourself
25. each a cistern in his house"; and I dug the *ditches* for Qerihô with prisoners
26. of Israel. I built Aroer, and I made the highway through the Arnon.
27. I built Bet-bamot, for it was destroyed; and I built Bezer, for it was in ruins.
28. [*And*] the men of Dîbon were *fitted out for war* because all Dîbon was obedient. And I ruled
29. [*over a*] hundred of towns that I added to the land. And I built
30. [the temple of Made]ba and the temple of Diblaten and the temple of Baal-meon; and I *established* there
31. [.....] the sheep of the land. And *the house [of Da]vid* dwelt in Horonên
32. [.....] and Kamosh said to me: "Go down! Fight against Horonen." And I went down, and [I
33. [*I fought against the town, and I took it; and*] Kamosh [resto]red it in my days. And *I took up thence ten*
34. [.....]..... And I[.....

The Key Phrases: Can You See the Letters?

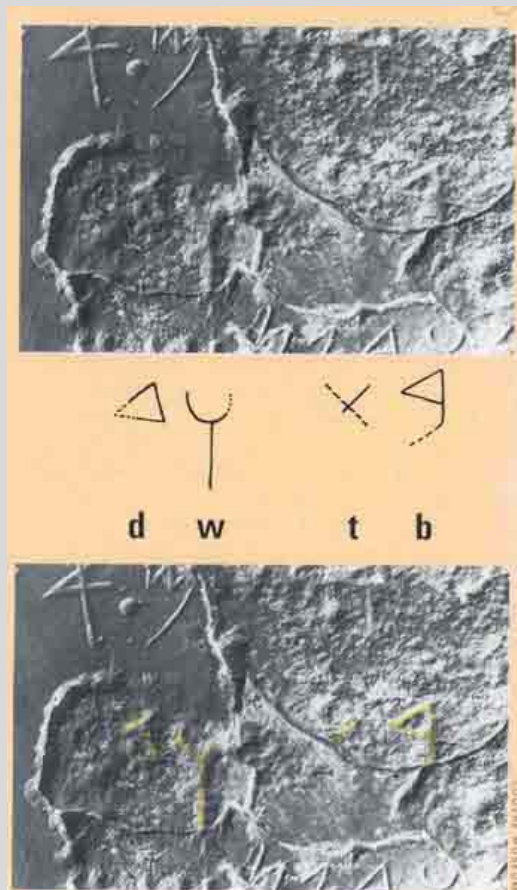
The key phrases on the Mesha stela are highlighted in these photographic details and on the drawing of the text (above). “King of Israel” (*mlk ysr’l*) appears in line 5 and in two other places on the stela. “House of David” (*bt[d]wd*) appears in line 31 (photos below). The top photo focuses on the critical letters of line 31. The small drawing shows the reading, from right to left, of the letters *bt wd* (the dotted lines represent restorations of damaged areas). In the bottom photo, a tint highlights the letters as they appear on the stela. The *t* eluded scholars until the German scholar Mark Lidzbarski tentatively identified it in 1900. Professor Lemaire has confirmed the reading of the *t* and has restored the missing *d* on the basis of the squeeze and the sense of the text. (The drawing at top, produced by Lidzbarski, has been corrected by Professor Lemaire.)



Lidzbarski, corrected by André Lemaire
Drawing of the Mesha stela. The critical letters in lines 5 and 31 are highlighted in white.



Detail of the Mesha stela. The critical letters in line 5 are highlighted.



Photos: Louvre Museum

The top photo focuses on the critical letters of line 31. The small drawing shows the reading, from right to left, of the letters *bt wd* (the dotted lines represent restorations of damaged areas). In the bottom photo, a tint highlights the letters as they appear on the stela.