

AMAZING DISCOVERIES IN BIBLE LANDS

THE MOABITE STONE

(Or stone of Mesha) 2 Kings 3:4.5.

A cast of the original which lays in the Louvre, Paris. This stone which bears the inscription of Mesha, king of Moab, was erected in his city of Dibon about 850 BC.

The story of its discovery is fascinating.

In 1868, F A Klein, a French missionary of the CMS whilst visiting Dhiban (south-east of the Jordan) learned of an inscribed stone that lay in the ruins of Dhiban. He copied a few lines at random and measured the stone. Returning to Jerusalem he visited J H Petermann, consul of the North-German Federation who recognised that the inscription was written in Phoenician characters and was therefore of importance.

Whilst Petermann was negotiating on behalf of the Berlin Museum, Sheikh Findi al-Fayiz, whose authority the Bedouin of Dhiban and the Turks acknowledged, and a Frenchman Charles Clermont-Ganneau had somehow received word of Klein's discovery and interfered in the negotiations thus complicating the transaction.

Clermont-Ganneau sent a native to make a paper squeeze of the stone and to offer a purchase price higher than already offered by Petermann. Such interest in the stone made the Bedouin very suspicious and so soon after the squeeze was made and during the time of negotiation with the Turks the stone was destroyed by heating it in a fire and pouring cold water on it which broke it into small pieces. The pieces were distributed amongst the Bedouin who kept them as talismans or amulets to guarantee fertility of the soil.

However, with the squeeze and two thirds of the pieces purchased by Clermont-Ganneau the stone has been reconstructed [18 small fragments & 2 large pieces, contained 613 letters of the ca. 1000 letters of the original inscription.]

SIGNIFICANCE.

The historical/Biblical situation underlying the stone seems to be as follows: Omri had triumphed over Moab, conquering part of Moab's territory and resettling it with Israelites. Moab paid tribute to Omri (2 Kings 3:4) and Ahab. But after Ahab's death (1 Kings 3:5) he rebelled. The ensuing war is the content of the inscription.

THE MOABITE STONE

“I (am) Mesha, son of Chemosh (...) king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reign after my father. And made this high place for Chemosh in Qorchah* for he saved me from all kings and caused me to triumph over all my enemies.

Omri king of Israel, had oppressed Moab many days for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son succeeded him and he also said “I will oppress Moab.” In my days he spoke (thus), but I have triumphed over him and his house, and Israel hath perished forever! Omri had occupied the land of Moab, and (Israel) dwelt there in his days and half the days of his son (Ahab), forty years; but Chemosh dwelt there in my time... And I took from there the vessels of YHWH and dragged them before Chemosh...”

BIBLE RECORD

1. 2Kings 3:4,5 “And Mesha, king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool.”
2. 1 Kings 16:27,28 “Now the rest of the acts of Omri, which he did, and his might that he shewed, are they not written in the book of the Kings of Israel?”
“But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.”
“So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.”

This is the earliest mention of the divine tetragrammaton outside the Bible, in the same spelling as in the Hebrew Bible.

**The capital of Moab: Kir-Haraseth of the Bible (2Kings 3:25)*

The monument is of great importance for the study of the Hebrew script and alphabet used during the ninth century BC. It mentions King Omri of Israel, Mesha of Moab and the tribe of Gad and numerous Transjordan cities known also in the Bible: -

Arnon - Deut.2:24; Aroer - Joshua 13:16; Ataroth - Num.32:34; Baal-Meon or Beth-baal-meon, Beth-bahmoth - Joshua 13:17; Beth-diblathaim - Jer.48:22; Bezer - Joshua 20:8; Dibon - Isaiah 15:2; Horonaim - Isaiah 15:5; Jahaz - Isaiah 15:4; Kerioth - Jer.48:24; Kiriathaim - Jer.48:23; Medeba - Isaiah 15:2; and Nebo - Isaiah 15:2. [With variations in spelling.]