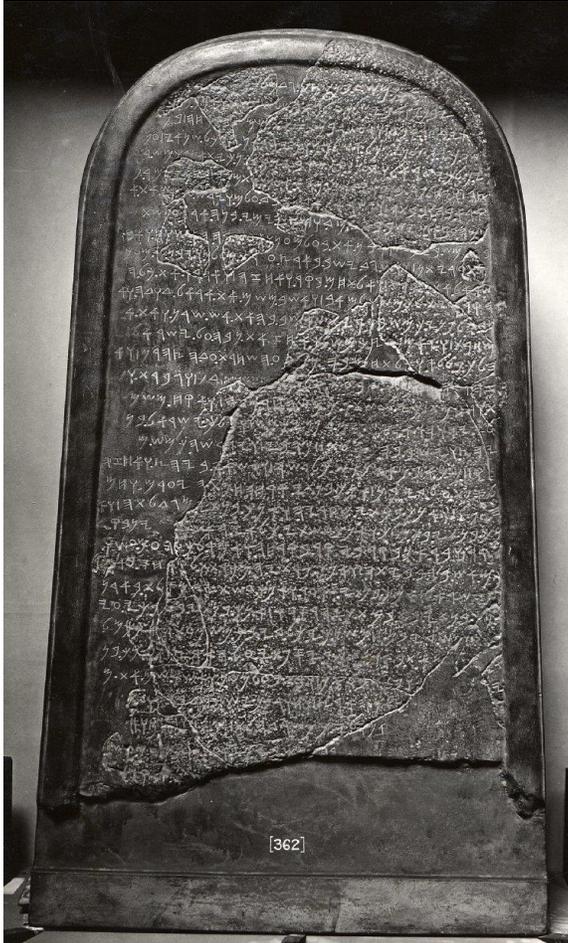


# The Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone, Mesha Inscription)

Article Taken from:

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/artifacts-and-the-bible/the-importance-of-bible-artifacts-found-outside-the-trench-the-moabite-stone/>

Biblical Archaeology Society Staff • 10/24/2013



A product of archaeological looting, the Mesha Stele, or Moabite Stone, provides yet another instance of the value of unprovenanced Biblical artifacts, that is, Bible artifacts found outside of a professional excavation. Although the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) have strict policies regarding the publication of articles and the presentation of papers about unprovenanced objects and Biblical artifacts in an attempt to curb archaeological looting and forgery of Bible artifacts found in Israel and Jordan, other scholars believe that Biblical artifacts found without a stratified context still merit scholarly study.

This 3-foot-high black basalt Moabite Stone was first brought to the attention of scholars in 1868 by Bedouin living east of the Jordan River and just north of the Arnon River. After several failed negotiations to purchase it, the Mesha Stele was broken into dozens of pieces and scattered among the Bedouin. In the 1870s several of the fragments were recovered by scholars and reconstructed—comprising only two-thirds of the original Moabite Stone. A paper imprint (called a squeeze) that had been taken of the intact inscription allowed scholars to fill in the missing text.\*

(Above image is at British Museum [HERE](#) -->

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details/collection\\_image\\_gallery.aspx?assetId=181023&objectId=1489847&partId=1#more-views](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=181023&objectId=1489847&partId=1#more-views)

Even in its fragmentary condition, the 34 lines of Phoenician script (also called paleo-Hebrew) on the Mesha Stela constituted the longest monumental inscription on a Bible artifact found in Palestine, making the Mesha Stele a key example of the value of Biblical artifacts found outside professional excavations, often via archaeological looting. The inscription, which dates to the ninth century B.C.E., is a victory stela set up to commemorate the triumph of the rebellious Moabite vassal king Mesha over the Israelite king and his armies (thus the names Mesha Stele or Moabite Stone). The Bible records a similar episode in 2 Kings 3, but not surprisingly, each account is much more flattering to its own author than the other.

The Mesha Stele, one of the most valuable Biblical artifacts found due to archaeological looting, also helped scholars clarify the tribal land allotments among the northern tribes of Israel.

The text says:

***I am Mesha, son of Chemosh-gad, king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I have reigned after my father. And I have built this sanctuary for Chemosh in Karchah, a sanctuary of salvation, for he saved me from all aggressors, and made me look upon all mine enemies with contempt. Omri was king of Israel, and oppressed Moab during many days, and Chemosh was angry with his aggressions. His son succeeded him, and he also said, I will oppress Moab. In my days he said, Let us go, and I will see my desire upon him and his house, and Israel said, I shall destroy it for ever. Now Omri took the land of Madeba, and occupied it in his day, and in the days of his son, forty years. And Chemosh had mercy on it in my time. And I built Baal-meon and made therein the ditch, and I built Kiriathaim. And the men of Gad dwelled in the country of Ataroth from ancient times, and the king of Israel fortified Ataroth. I assaulted the wall and captured it, and killed all the warriors of the city for the well-pleasing of Chemosh and Moab, and I removed from it all the spoil, and offered it before Chemosh in Kirjath; and I placed therein the men of Siran, and the men of Mochrath. And Chemosh said to me, Go take Nebo against Israel, and I went in the night and I fought against it from the break of day till noon, and I took it: and I killed in all seven thousand men, but I did not kill the women and maidens, for I devoted them to Ashtar-Chemosh; and I took from it the vessels of Jehovah, and offered them before Chemosh. And the king of Israel fortified Jahaz, and occupied it, when he made war against me, and Chemosh drove him out before me, and I took from Moab two hundred men in all, and placed them in Jahaz, and took it to annex it to Dibon. I built Karchah the wall of the forest, and the wall of the Hill. I have built its gates and I have built its towers. I have built the palace of the king, and I made the prisons for the criminals within the wall. And there were no wells in the interior of the wall in Karchah. And I said to all the people, 'Make you every man a well in his house.' And I dug the ditch for Karchah with the chosen men of Israel. I built Aroer, and I made the road across the Arnon. I took Beth-Bamoth for it was destroyed. I built Bezer for it was cut down by the armed men of Daybon, for all Daybon was now loyal; and I reigned from Bikran, which I added to my land. And I built Beth-Gamul, and Beth-Diblathaim, and Beth Baal-Meon, and I placed there the poor people of the land. And as to Horonaim, the men of Edom dwelt therein, on the descent from old. And Chemosh said to me, Go down, make war against Horonaim, and take it. And I assaulted it, And I took it, for Chemosh restored it in my days. Wherefore I made.... ..year...and I....”***

Information in the text of the Moabite Stone includes:

1. How Omri and his son, kings of Israel, oppressed Moab.
2. Moabite's King Mesha credits this oppression by the Israelites as the result of the anger of their god Chemos
3. King Mesha eventually achieved military victory over Omri's son (not named) and the men of Gad at Ataroth, Nebo and Jehaz.
4. King Mesha names his building projects, the restoration of the fortifications of his places and building a palace and reservoirs for water