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CHAPTER 2

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MESHA INSCRIPTION

The origins of the Moabites are mysterious, but the Bible clearly linked Moab’s earliest beginnings to those of Israel, as Moab was derived incestuously from Lot. The Mesha stele dramatizes this connection in its language, for with some editing it would fit well into the MT (a translation of the inscription is found at the end of the chapter). The theology of warfare reflected in it is akin to that of Deuteronomy. In short, the Moabite and Israelite cultures seem to have shared similar world views.

The immediate reason for devoting a chapter to the Mesha Inscription (=MI) is that it is the one text found on Canaanite soil which explicitly mentions the גֶּדֶנ. The 34 line inscription gives an account in miniature of the conflict between Moab and Israel in the ninth century B.C., using many key terms which are also found in the biblical Exodus-and-conquest narratives (see below). In this chapter I will examine the MI linearly and in comparison to the Bible and explore various topics it raises. The inscription’s usefulness for understanding the Weltanschauung which underlay the practice of the גֶּדֶנ will be shown in detail. The geographical and linguistic proximity of Moab and Moabite, respectively, to Israel and Hebrew, laid the ground for similarity of culture and practice. The MI provides us with an extra-biblical historical source; yet like the Bible, it requires critical handling.

King Mesha’s narrative reveals that the Moabites practiced the גֶּדֶנ against Israel and raises the question as to why no one in the biblical narratives ever called for the use of the גֶּדֶנ in Israel’s handling of the conflicts with Moab from Moses to Jereboam II. The Bible supplies us with more than one answer. Deut 20:16-17 preach the גֶּדֶנ against the autochthonous peoples of the Promised Land—the land to the west of the Jordan alone. The Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites would fall under the rules defined for those whom it was necessary to embark on a journey to fight; where the גֶּדֶנ need not apply (see ch. 4). Deut 2:9 records a tradition that Israel was not to disturb Moab because the Lord had given it land as a legacy from Lot. Both explanations dovetail: the גֶּדֶנ as a form of consecration was reserved by Israel for the land to be settled; and the feeling of kinship with Moab may have also been a restraint. Another consideration is the specific nature of the גֶּדֶנ, which was not a discretionary act in its pristine form. It was an extreme act done only by divine command (e.g. I Samuel 15), or by virtue of a vow, if accepted by the deity (Num 21:1-3). Such a vow was the product of dire circumstances. Mesha’s גֶּדֶנ was not likely to have resulted from a vow, since he does not mention it, unlike Numbers 21. The fact that the Moabites seem never to have tried to settle the western side of the Jordan was probably a major factor as well. It was in the context of Edomite encroachment on the land of Judah that the prophet of Isaiah 34 raged.

The Moabites, the MI informs us, worshipped Kemosh as their national god. This is evident both from the role Kemosh plays in the inscription, which is analogous to the role of YHWH in the Bible (which calls Moab "the people of Kemosh"), and from the personal names recovered from other sources (as well as Kemosh's role in the Bible). L.12, might imply a second national deity named Moab (cf. Assur), but no source outside the MI uses Moab as a DN, so the line is best understood as referring to the people (cf. Num 21:29; 무바/ כַּמֶּשׁ). This has important implications for the meaning of ḫr (see below).

It is obvious that Mesh'a's account does not square well with 2 Kings 3, the historicity of which has recently been denied from several perspectives. The question as to whether Mesh'a rebelled against Israel sometime during the reign of Ahab (as a literal understanding of MI would imply), or closely following his death as 2 Kgs 1:1 suggests, is an important one. It must take into account the element of legend in Kings. The aftermath of the Naboth episode brought about Ahab's sincere repentance. As a result, an oracle deferred Ahab's punishment to his 'house' (1 Kgs 21:28-9), i.e. his heirs (cp. the judgement on Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:11-13, where for David's sake it was said that the rebellion was delayed). This supplied a redactor with a motive to date the rebellion after Ahab, validating Elijah's prediction. Note that the next chapter, 1 Kings 22, raises the question of true vs. false prophets. This consideration of prophetic 'legend' as a chronological factor has been overlooked by historians in their attempts to reconstruct the chronology of Mesh'a's revolt. On the other hand, it could work the other way; the sudden twist to the Naboth story which saves retribution for his heirs may be a way of adjusting the Naboth story and Elijah's role in it with the well-known fact that Mesh'a rebelled against Israel upon the death of Ahab (2 Kgs 1:1, 3:5). The question will be dealt with again below.

It is important to view Mesh'a's charting of his accomplishments with a skeptical eye. To read his inscription one could think that his campaign(s) had more of the nature of a royal processional than a serious military undertaking. He, too, had obvious motives of self-glorification as well as a strong religious impulse to boost Kemosh over the enemy god, YHWH.

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2 For the latest treatment of Moabite religion see G. L., Mattingly, "Moabite Religion and the 'Mesha' Inscription," SMIM, 211-38. Moabite's closeness to Hebrew is attributed to Israel's dominion over Moab during the United Monarchy by R. Garr, Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine (Phila., 1985), 234-5.


4 E.g., the most recent, very sold work of J. A. Dearman, "Historical Reconstruction and the Mesha' Inscription," SMIM, 155-210.
Hayim Tadmor has demonstrated, in his treatment of mainly neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, how far these kings could go in straying from the exact order of events for apologetic, pietistic, or other purposes. Some Assyrian documents are in several versions, allowing the scholar to practice textual criticism. Obviously, in the case of the MI there is far less evidence. Moab was a society of a different geopolitical background with a lower level of material culture, about which there is consequently far less information available than is the case with Assyria. However, Meshā does participate in the general tradition of first millennium Near Eastern royalty (e.g. the Zakur Inscription, KAI 202), and though royal Israelite inscriptions are lacking, the MI reflects a cultural similarity to the Hebrew Bible that partly compensates for that lack.

In terms of genre, the MI seems to compress all genres into one omnibus; it is a victory stele glorifying the king's prowess, a sanctuary dedication, and finally, a memorial inscription. It seeks to list all of Meshā's accomplishments, among which are civic projects like the construction of a highway by the Arnon and the building of temples at major sites. The inscription refers specifically to the building of the ṣēm of Kemosh, but in the latter part of the MI several sites whose names begin with ṣēm are in Meshā's construction program. It is almost certain that some of these had Moabite sanctuaries which needed to be reconstructed or (at the least) restored and rededicated. Jezebel built a temple to Baal outside Samaria, at a place which the Bible calls פיר ירavidטญ (2 Kgs 10:25), a similar type of name to those in Moab, such as פיר חביתיא (MI 30). It was, of course, the task of the Near Eastern king to rebuild and restore the temples of the local gods from time immemorial (KAI 202 again). Aside from Kemosh, there were other Moabite gods, such as Baal. The biblical evidence matches Baal's frequency in Moabite toponyms.

6 M. Miller, "The Meshā Stone as a Memorial Stela," PEQ 106 (1974), 9-18. Miller also compares the MI with Aramaic inscriptions profitably. See now also ch.5 of SMIM.
7 A. H. van Zyl, The Moabites, POS III (1960), Baal; 193f., goddess; 195f. L. G.Herr, "Formal Scripts of Iron Age Transjordan," BASOR 249 (1980), 26, lists 8 Moabite seals from 700-550 B.C., in which 6 Kemosh-names are listed, and one Baal-name. Kemosh was the national (or dynastic) deity of Moab at least from Meshā’s day onward (his grandfather gave his father a Kemosh-name—we have a variety of royal Kemosh-names); Baal had the same role in Tyre. The Bible’s distinction between the two seems to be accurate; Kemosh is a major deity at Ebla, Baal is not, and at Ugarit the name Kemosh (Kmt) occurs separately from Baal. Kemosh had a long history distinct from Baal, and the Bible keeps them distinct—Ahab worships Baal with no suggestion that he worshipped thereby Kemosh, "the abomination of Moab" in 1 Kgs 11:7. There is no evidence which suggests that it is mistaken. It may be that at this period of resurgent Moabite nationalism, Baal was identified with Phoenician nationalism and took a back seat to Kemosh, but aside from the king we know little about exactly who in Moab
It is clear that the building activities celebrated here were on a large, even vast scale for the region, comparable perhaps to Solomon's large building operations. It is thus hard to understand how these peacetime operations could have been completed shortly after the fighting. Undoubtedly, those, like Albright, who date the stele to c.830, are correct. In our view, it is also certain from other, none too subtle indications. In 1.4 Mesha praises Kemosh for saving him from his enemies, but significantly he mentions only Israel, not Judah or Edom (cf. n. 2, appendix). He saw (1.7) the demise of the Omrides (841), which alone puts the earlier dating some have suggested for the MI (c.850) out of court.

Incidentally, one may infer that among the enemies that Mesha triumphed over in his career were most likely internal opponents. Mesha personally was an ardent Dibonite (11.1,21), and his policies, e.g. his building policy, must have favored Dibon and some localities at the expense of others. Moab was also exposed to bedouin marauders from its eastern flank.

The reason the late dating is important is that, for those who believe, as J. Liver did, that the stele was erected early in Mesha's tenure, before the mythical events of 2 Kings 3 (see appendix), the stele assumes a character close to a press dispatch. This position seemingly enables one to harmonize the Bible with the MI; but as noted above, the MI was written from a perspective of decades. Mesha's scribes had leisure to write and redact their Heilsgeschichte in a way analogous to the Assyrian manner documented by Tadmor.

In Assyria, the first regnal year was considered the time for the monarch to begin his military conquests. There are examples of monarchs who in their annals appropriated achievements of their more militant immediate predecessor for their regnal year. There are also examples of kings who were in fact the model of a šarru dannu ("mighty king," but whose timetable did not agree with the dictates of convention, so that a campaign involving years and great distances could be represented as having been completed in the course of the regnal year. The annalistic account of the campaign would be replete with vague indicators of time like ina uméšuma (an equivalent to "then") or round numbers such as were used in the Bible. Although the MI employs the cognate word, יִמְעֵשָׁה, "day, period of time," (cf. II.6,9,33, and

worshipped whom. For the complexities of evaluating onomastic evidence, see J. Tigay, You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions HSS 31 (Atlanta, 1986), ch. 1. Baal was Hadad at Ugarit, another reason not to identify Baal with Kemosh, a different kind of god, especially since the MI would have used the title if it applied, instead of the epithet **aštar.

8 W. F. Albright, ANET, 320.
10 See articles cited in note 4. In addition see W. von Soden, "Die Assyrer und der Krieg," Iraq 25 (1963), 131-43, which gives a more general overview as well as some observations in the same vein as Tadmor's.
see II.5.8 as well)\textsuperscript{11} as a vague indicator of time, there is no reason to think that Moab shared directly in Assyrian imperialistic conventions. This inscription follows such a mode probably because of a similar local tradition and also because it made sense from what today is known as the public relations or propaganda point of view. Falling into one of these categories was Mesha's boast of I.29, that he had added hundreds of towns to Moab, a boast with an ancient pedigree. It was a staple of Assyrians inscriptions to boast of extending the imperium's territory, but other kings bragged of extending their domains as well. An example is found in a text of the Old Babylonian period, the "short inscription" of Yahdun-Lim, King of Mari, which has many features which can be profitably compared with the MI.\textsuperscript{12} In addition to more local traditions there were broader traditions that preceded the Assyrian empire and in which it and other, smaller entities later participated.

The indications of time in the Mesha stele are mostly vague or stereotyped with the possible exception of the thirty year rule attributed to Mesha's father. On the other hand, E. Lipinski has proposed another view.\textsuperscript{13} Proceeding from the thirty year figure, he assumes the forty years were from Omri's day (c.881) to the end of the Omrides (c.841). This is logical, and may be correct, if Mesha was indirectly or directly responsible for the end of the Omrides, as he seems to claim (I.7). In that case he also helped undermine the anti-Assyrian coalition. On the other hand, the thirty year figure may be a calculated one on the basis of the round number forty, (i.e. 3/4) and be some years off. As F. Cross has seen, the 7000 figure for Israelite casualties in I.16 is a round number, and the likelihood of the antecedently suspect '40' being round is thus greatly enhanced.\textsuperscript{14} The number 7000 appears in the Bible a number of times, often in military contexts (cf. 1 Kgs 19:18, 20:15, and 2 Kgs 24:16, warriors deported to Babylon, 1 Chr 18:4, David's captured Aramean horse, 1 Chr 19:18, David's slain Aramean charioteers. This (round) number lends itself to statements of triumph or defeat, Together with the list of kinds of people slaughtered at Nebo, the addition of the number 7000 (which is lacking in the Ataroth and other accounts) in the light of these biblical citations, comes to express Mesha's triumph over YHWH and his shrine. Given the roundness of the numbers of the MI, they do not very much help us fathom the murky chronology of the MI.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} S. Segert, "Die Sprache der moabitischen Königsinschrift," \textit{ArOr} 29 (1961), 241.
\textsuperscript{12} Published by Thureau-Dangin, "Iaḥdun-Lim, roi de Ḫana," \textit{RA} 33 (1936) 49ff.. The present writer hopes to write such a study at a future date.
That murkiness is in part due to the fact that we have not learned the lesson of the Assyrian annals and ina ūmešuma. The crucial lines, II.7-8, have been dealt with from the point of view of the numbers, while the operative word, א, has not been scrutinized to the same degree. The biblical chronology and the MI’s schedule of events have generally been believed to be in conflict, or capable of being reconciled only by ingenious manipulation of figures. It may be that a study of the Moabite word ‘day’ resolves the problem.

Here are the lines where the word appears:

Omri was king of Israel for twelve years according to the account of his reign in 1 Kgs 16:23-28. According to that account, it was a reign evenly divided between the old capital of Tirzah and Omri’s new capital of Samaria. As Tadmor points out, common sense dictates that if Omri moved to Samaria in the middle of the reign, he must have begun the construction of the new city near the beginning of his reign. Yet the corvee was part of the downfall of Jereboam I, who had in the succession from his father a more solid base on which to build than Omri. It is hard to see how Omri could have consolidated his rule, built Samaria, and only then invaded Moab after he had completed the new capital, because according to II.4-5, Omri oppressed Israel for א, “a long time.” This seems to indicate a longer period than five or six years that would have remained to Omri at the most. A more plausible scenario is that the general-king was able to consolidate early in his reign by his uniting Israel with an attack on the ancient enemy, Moab. He then built Samaria afterwards, most likely using Moabite labor as Mesha later used Israelite workers, and in something of the manner of a conquering Sargon of Assyria building his new capital of Dur-Sharrukin. This would minimize the political cost of constructing a new capital (i.e. the corvee). It was an enormous task to build a capital at such an undeveloped site, and it reflects the confidence of a conquerer who had access to an enormous labor pool. If Moab fell quickly to Omri, as, given the length of his reign, א implies, construction of Samaria with forced labor could have proceeded apace.

Next we turn to I.6, “He [Ahab] said also he, ‘I will oppress Moab ב.’” Here, it is clear that “in my days” is an inadequate translation. It really means, “in the days of my reign,” or just “during my reign,” to which Omri’s

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(Göttingen, 1982), 163-5. On 165 n.31 he sees agreement between the chronology of the MI and 2 Kgs 1:1, and 2 Kgs 3:5.

son had just “succeeded.” The very locution, “his son succeeded him” may, by the way, be an (ironic) allusion to the dynastic instability of the Northern Kingdom, since it was by no means normal for a son to succeed his father in Ephraim (a normal succession notice would also give the name of the heir). If we look at II.9,33, “Kemosh...in my days,” we see that the meaning “during my reign” obtains. For example, I.33, in speaking of the capture of Horonaim, says, “Kemosh dwelt there during my reign,” perhaps meaning on one level that a statue of Kemosh was brought to the city to dwell in a sanctuary following its liberation (ancient parlance did not require the word ‘statue,’ cf. KAR 154, where Adad is borne by hierodules, cp. Isa 46:1-2, esp. 1a). The introduction or reintroduction of Kemosh to Horonaim was a measure of Mesha’s triumph, hence its place near the MI’s end.

This brings us to the difficult sentence, II.7-8, “Omri took possession of the land of Medeba, he occupied it יִסְטָפְּךָ and half the ‘days’ of his son--forty years”\(^{17}\) The statement thus indicates that Omri held on to his conquest until he died, for a period of half of Ahab’s “days.” The statement has only one subject, Omri: the second part restates the first part in terms of Ahab’s life, but is still grammatically governed by Omri. According to 1 Kgs 16:29, Ahab reigned for 22 years. If he took the throne at the midpoint of his life, then Ahab was about 22 years old when he took the throne, and died at the age of forty-four or so, which is rounded off to the conventional forty, meaning one generation (the forty is the “total” column), although actually it was a maximum of Omri-11 + Ahab-22 = 33 years. On the other hand, if, as seems most likely, Omri ruled Moab 11 years, then “half the ‘days’ of his son” refers to the length of Omri’s reign in which time he dominated Moab, put in terms of the length of Ahab’s reign. The use of ד for reign would be consistent with the meaning of ד in all but one of its occurrences and the 11 year figure is supported by the earlier “many years”-ד. The unusual wording of II.7-8 is due to the coincidence that Ahab reigned over Moab twice as long as Omri, but it also reflects the fact that Mesha felt such resentment that he did not want to mention Ahab’s unspeakable name. At the end of the line, Mesha gives a rounded total of forty, for the generation of Israelite oppression. The fact that the line ends in a total of 40, means that in a backhanded way it is indicating that not only did Omri occupy Medeba for half his son’s reign, but that the occupation continued for the length of Ahab’s reign. Then comes the ‘total’ column. Therefore one must translate: “he occupied it during his reign and [it was occupied] half the reign of his son--forty years.” This interpretation fits neatly together. The sentence is written on two levels to deal with both Omri and Ahab. The generation of Moabite oppression measured by the sum of the two reigns over Moab ran close enough to the round number of 40 years. The use of 40 years in cycles of oppression and liberation is, of course, familiar from the Book of Judges.

\(^{17}\) Although the orthography permits the reading ‘(grand)sons,’ it seems more probable in terms of literary continuity that the identical orthography in I.6 reflects the same word, and that Mesha is continuing to speak of Ahab.
From the examination of the MI's use of יָמָן, "day," an interpretation along these lines seems warranted, and if so, the conflict between the MI and the MT version, which twice states that the Moabite revolt came upon the death of Ahab (2 Kgs 1:1, 3:5), evaporates. Given the military strength attributed to Ahab by the Assyrians, it would not be surprising if Mesha waited until the day of Ahab's death, when he might hope for a chaotic succession, and in which he seems to have seen the hand of Kemosh. Thus MI II.7-8, which scholars have read as indicating a revolt at a time other than that of 2 Kgs 1:1, Ahab’s death, actually agrees with it, should this historical reconstruction stand. The death of a monarch was a customary time for vassals to revolt, as the histories of Assyria and Babylon, Israel and Judea illustrate.

The overwhelming importance of the conquering founder of the dynasty, Omri, is emphasized repeatedly in the MI. As stated above, the writing of the MI postdated the house of Omri. The text poetically identifies the defunct dynasty with Israel (1.7). The Assyrian inscriptions which refer to Israel as בִּית הָעָמְרִי, also identify it with the Omride dynasty, a practice which continued after its fall.18 To Mesha, Omri clearly dwarfed his nameless successors. It seems clear that Mesha has compressed all the action into an indefinite but extremely short period of time; for his perspective obviously includes the revolt and at the same time the life of the entire Omride dynastic line! Additional tendentious symptoms appear in Mesha’s boast of the rapidity with which he took Nebo (II.14ff.), surely a fortified city—in the space of a few hours. A similar boast was common in Assyria, too. If the traditional interpretations are correct, the capture of an originally Israelite city, Jahaz, with two hundred men מֵאָדָם (1.20),19 is another boast. It is not clear what these last two words refer to. Assuming that Moabite שֵׁם equals Hebrew שם, as is generally accepted, the lack of the aleph which accompanies the "o" in I.3 מָדָם, “his”20 or I.31 מְדָם “small cattle,” is probably due to an ‘aramaizing’ pronunciation, found also in Akkadian and Ugaritic. J. C. L. Gibson’s translation of שֵׁם as “division” is good (he cites 1 Sam 11:11, 13:17), but his rendering of the line is not as felicitous (viz. "I took from Moab two hundred men, his whole division, and I led it up against Jahaz and captured it"—the “his” hangs in the air).21 I would construe שֵׁם as plural: “I took from Moab two hundred men, all of its divisions, and led it (Moab) against Jahaz.” That is, Mesha led an army in which all of the units

18 Written בֵּית הָעָמְרִי in the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (ANET 283) and simply מֵאָדָם in the annals of Adad-Nirari III (ANET 281).
19 A. Demsky in his treatment, “The Military Count of Mesha, King of Moab (Mesha Stone Line 20),” (Heb.) Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical Studies VII-VIII (1983-84), 255-57, sees the idiom מָדָם מְדָם ‘to muster, count.’ The two words belong to different clauses, as the divider indicates.
had 200 men. The Israelite king fled before the army of Mesha, which comprised all of Moab. This could overstate Moabite strength and unity.

In contrast, a historical element in both the MI and 2 Kings 3 is found in the emphasis placed on assuring or destroying the Moabite water supply: 2 Kings 3 deals with the problem of obtaining water in Moab; in 2 Kgs 3:19 YHWH orders the stopping up of Moabite wells. Ll.24-5 of the MI deal with the digging of cisterns in a Moabite town, as well as forced labor of prisoners doing something, perhaps also connected with assuring a supply of water. Thus the MI includes not only various elements of conventional Near Eastern royal and religious propaganda but also details the verisimilitude of which is hardly to be doubted.

Let us now proceed to examine further some of the specifics of the MI. There exists a linguistic consonance between Hebrew and Moabite that often extends even to prepositions. The latter particles are crucial in any language, and native speakers rarely fail to notice the use of an incorrect preposition, although the speaker sometimes has a choice of more than one. It is indicative of close kinship between languages when cognate verbs employ the identical preposition as well. Thus in l.2 of MI one finds that Mesha מלך על מוָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָָֹֹֹּ
First, let us consider “people of Kemosh” (שעם-כמש). Its counterpart, “people of YHWH,” appears early on, in the Song of Deborah (Jud 5:11). No other people is called “people of DN” in the Bible. I mentioned above the analogous role of Kemosh to YHWH in the MI. Num 21:29 offers tangible evidence that biblical writers saw in Kemosh a god who played a uniquely comparable role to Israel’s YHWH in the life of Moab. There is a similar equating of the two gods in Israel’s YHWH in the life of Moab. There is a similar equating of the two gods in Israel’s YHWH in the life of Moab. There is a similar equating of the two gods in Israel’s YHWH in the life of Moab.

Next, a most fortuitous and interesting comparison arises between Num 21:29 and 1.7’s. The verb אבר is the key to these passages. MI 1.7. has been uniformly translated, “Israel has perished completely forever,” which would be bombast. The phrase has nothing structurally in common with what precedes it. We do not have a parallel stick but a new sentence with a new verb. It is increasingly clear that Heb. אבר can mean “to flee.”

Num 21:29 is a good example. In it, Moab did not perish; it lived to be taunted. Num 21:29 should be translated (as above) “Woe to you, Moab. You have fled, people of Kemosh. He has made his sons fugitives, and his daughters captive....” Kemosh made the sons fugitives, he did not slay them. In 1.7, we have the reverse; Mesha boasts that Israel has fled his domain forever. There is no logic to following the triumphal boast, “Israel has perished,” with “Omr took possession of the land of Mhdb.” The logic of the MI is that Mesha was seeking to expel Israel from Moabite land, so he followed the announcement of rout with the story of how the flight came about. The ב of 1.30, אבר(ב,ב), is not required by the syntax, but preceding Mhdb’, emphasizes Mesha’s success in reversing the settlement policy of Omri (1.7). Incidentally, the MI emphasizes the activity of Omri in Moab, but never mentions Ahab. The king of Israel was occupied at home with his major building projects, and abroad with the Assyrians and the Arameans, and must have ruled through a governor (see below). Mesha’s use of the אבר, &c., must have panicked many Israelites into fleeing to the safe side of the Jordan (or to the north). Num 21:29 thus throws much light on the meaning of MI 1.7; and the two constitute mirror images of each other. The biblical phrases שעם-כמש and יררה וורת are a tacit acknowledgement of the religious kinship of Moab and Israel, to which the astonishing appearance of the הרם in the MI also testifies. These ties are likely to have been far deeper and broader than it is possible to document today. So, too, the idea of war that emerges from the MI is almost identical to that of the Bible. The war of

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23 Some may argue that the Moabites borrowed the אבר from Israel. This is an argument belied by the way the אבר is embedded in the religious terminology and the vital role it plays in the sacred war. They would be unlikely to choose for this the language borrowed from the oppressor, and unlikely to need to. As we shall see, the idea of אבר originated in a polytheistic milieu,
liberation sponsored by a deity I have alluded to; but there is also a similar siege mentality in the MI and in the Bible. Mesha saw himself as surrounded (1.4); intervention by a friendly power was never a possibility.

Equally, the biblical attitude towards Moab was one of alienation and this is evident even in the Book of Ruth. The biblical writers maintain a truculent attitude towards virtually every foreign people, large or small, with few exceptions. Moab and Israel must have lived in peace some of the time, living as they did cheek by jowl. The law of Deut 23:4 could not have come about unless Moabites (and Ammonites) were ‘fraternizing’ with their Israelite neighbors. Still, the biblical polemics--almost always couched in religious terms--do not reveal the level of naked competition for land and its associated resources in the Transjordan which the MI highlights in regard to Gad.

According to the MI, Gad had resided in the area north of the Arnon from days of yore. Many years ago, W. F. Albright proposed a solution to the crux of MI 1.12. He interpreted the latter word as *dawidum, a Mari-Akkadian term for “tribal chieftain,” but this proved to be an incorrect reading of Akk. da-Wl-du-um, now read dabdum, meaning “defeat.” Albright identified האר with the clan of Gad mentioned in Gen 46:16 and Num 26:15 האר, Eng. Areli, an identification which still has much to commend it, given the context. Seeing that the MI deals with the Gadite (Land of) Ataroth, the orthographic distinction האר and האר is negligible. Further, it vanishes altogether in the problematic 2 Sam 23:20a-b:

\[\text{Benayahu son of Yehoyada, a valiant warrior and greater in deeds than Qabzael,}
\text{he slew the two האר of Moab.}\]

This text is hard to translate as it stands. Yet it clearly refers to האר in a context of war with Moab. Its orthography is the same as that of the MI—the only time in the Bible that this is the case. It is not surprising that an archaic chapter like 2 Samuel 23 would preserve the ancient spelling. This האר can have nothing to do with Ariel of Isaianic fame (e.g. Isa 29:1, where, as is well known, it is used as a name for Jerusalem, a meaning that could not apply to 2 Sam 23:20). The LXX has preserved a better text:

\[\text{καὶ Βαναιας ὕδως ἰωδας, ἀνήρ αὐτὸς πολλαστὸς ἐργοῖς ἀπὸ Καβεσελ. καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπάταξεν τοὺς δύο ὕδως ἀριηλ ὑπὸ Μωάβ.}\]

\[24\text{ W. F. Albright, “Two Little Understood Amarna Letters from the Middle Jordan Valley,” BASOR 89 (1943), 16 n. 55.}\]
\[26\text{The LXX follows the late vocalization, like the Qere of Ezek 14:14, which reads ‘Daniel’ instead of ‘Danel,’ found in the Ugaritic Aqhat Epic, a version of which was}\]
This gives us, “he slew the two sons of Arel = בן אראל of Moab.” There is an extremely high probability that this is the correct reading. A better translation would be “he smote the two Arelites of Moab.” The Septuagint’s reading is almost certainly correct because in the Hebrew version, the scribe would have had to write the letters בּ four times to write the sentence correctly, while at the end the similarity of יָשָׁל and יָשָׁב made it still more difficult to get it all right. A Greek scribe would have had no particular reason to insert the word “sons” there, and had a much easier sentence to copy, with no two words of substance exactly alike. Hence it has come down to us without the omission of the word “sons of.”

Putting this all together, it would seem that the biblical verse recounts how a Davidic hero, Benayahu, fought and killed two powerful warriors of the Gadite clan of Arel(i) (which from Mesh'a’s perspective had been in the land for generations). It is understandable that some Transjordanian Israelites in that formative period would have cast their lot with Moab and fought with it, just as the list of Davidic heroes which concludes 2 Samuel 23 includes an Ammonite (David’s basic constituency was in Judah, anyway). Albright’s interpretation of the Moabite word יָשָׁל meshes perfectly with the LXX-corrected version of 2 Sam 23:20.

It is worth adding that 2 Samuel 23, which I have labeled an ancient chapter, has a parallel to MI 1.28: יָשָׁל. יָהִיב. מַשְׁמָת, “For all Dibonites are my personal vassals.” in 2 Sam 23:23, where King David puts Benayahu, the greatest of the heroes, into his personal entourage, יָשָׁל יָשָׁל איִגֶּיהִים. In 2 Sam 23:9, the word איש, normally “man,” is used as a body of fighting men, just as in the MI and in certain biblical passages as well. These are additional indications that יָשָׁל is a word for Gadites, members of the clan known from a few places in the Bible, who in the context of the MI are caught up in war. The word is not to be taken as a cult object. This brings us to the following word, יָשָׁל, הדיר, 27

I have found an explanation of יָשָׁל, which, oddly enough, produces the same meaning for the word as did Albright’s translation. There is an Akkadian word for (wild) ram which is cited in the CAD with עֲיֵדֻע, namely דָּדְעֻ (found as of the A2 volume, only in lexical texts). One may draw the analogy of מַלְאֵךְ יָדְעַת אִילִי מְאָשַׁב (Exod 15:15) and other biblical examples. Considering that Moab had conditions necessitating pastoralism, such a word as Akk. דָּדְעֻ (which with עֲיֵדֻ is probably a West Semitic loanword) might well appear in Moabite as יָשָׁל, meaning in context, “chief.” The use of internal matres lectionis for diphthongs or possibly vowels is found in the MI (e.g., the yod of in Dibon, and if the scholarly vocalization is correct, the first he in YHWH). There is no certain example with waw, but יָשָׁל seems a likely case. B. A. Levine has drawn my attention to Ben Sira 50:3 יָשָׁל, כָּפָה יִבָּא, known in Israel. So ‘Arel’ is an older form than ‘Ariel,’ and lions come in though the similarity in sound, occasioning the play on the hero’s name and the killing of a lion.

27 K. P. Jackson notes this as well, “Language,” SMIM, J. C. L. Gibson, Textbook 1, 84 suggests that דָּדְעֻ is King David but grammar and context make this an unlikely suggestion. Even if Mesha wished to preserve the memory of Moab’s old trouble, his scribes, who could spell YHWH, spelled David’s name wrongly, as never in the MT.
which supports a vowel letter here. This proposal would restore Albright's apt rendering. It would also add another parallel between the MI and MT, in equating a foreign ruler with a wild ram.

To A. F. L. Beeston, the phrase "most likely means 'the Prophet of its city-god.'" He does not, however, explain the basis from which he deduced 'prophet'; nor does he supply evidence for 'city-god.' However, at one point he adduces another etymology for the meaning 'leader,' starting from 'friend, protector (hence uncle) and leading to 'governor,' as "Latin comes has evolved from 'friend (of the ruler) to 'governor (count) of a province.'" Language need not work linearly; possibly the two may have reinforced one another. However, my proposal arises out of a well-attested phenomenon in Semitic.

It thus seems best to translate לאר as "(the clan of) Areli/Arel, its chief." This leads to a deeper understanding of the historical significance of the MI. The MI credits Gad with having dwelt in the area of Ataroth for an indefinite, but lengthy amount of time. This fits in with biblical tradition. From Moab's point of view, then, Gad was long a thorn in its side. The task of dealing with deeply-rooted Israelite Transjordan was magnified by an Israelite king's building of the fortified city of Ataroth. לאר thus refers to the clan of Gad whose chief (perhaps the leader of Gad at large) was taken by the Moabites. Thus, according to our interpretation, the Moabites dragged the major leader of Gad before Kemosh, just as, for example, Assyrian texts reflect the idea of dragging the enemy before the victor, the king (CAD MI mašāru I/3 360a). Josh 8:23,28 speak of the people handing over the enemy king alive to Joshua, who then hangs the king of Ai, this following the נמצא of a city (cf. Josh 10:30-42). This interpretation is more consistent with the evidence and much more probable than a hypothetical cult object, for there is no known Israelite cult object corresponding to the combination of לאר--neither from the Bible nor from elsewhere (especially the Ugaritic ritual texts, which bear such resemblance to the later biblical cultic texts in such things as sacrificial terminology nor from the large Phoenician-Punic corpus, which also includes cult terms).

The writer(s) of the passage had it in mind to emphasize the gravity of the situation that Meshā faced, thus underlining the glory of Meshā's deeds as aided by Kemosh--but the data given are unlikely to be untrue.

The Moabites felt that the Gadites had usurped the 'land that Kemosh had sworn unto their forefathers.' Therefore, Meshā says, "I slaughtered לאר all of the people of the city (לאר) (II.11-12)." He uses a strikingly different terminology than later (I.17.), when the לאר makes its appearance. The presumption is that Meshā's intent is to describe actions

29 For other suggestions, cf. S. Segert, "Die Sprache," 204. "altar hearth," but as E. Lipinski, "Notes," 333, observed, "one does not drag altar hearths." Suggestions that dwdh is a deity or cult object make the phrase "r'l dwdh" even more obscure, since Meshā would not "drag" a Moabite deity and there is no evidence that the word--or rather phrase--corresponds to any Israelite cultic usage.
which differ in kind at Ataroth and Nebo. Without even investigating the term הָרֵם, the inclusion of Moab following Kemosh, unlike 1.17, indicates that the Moabite people shared in the הָרֵם after the slaughter, an inclusion which could hardly be further from the intent of the הָרֵם in 1.17 (cp. Joshua 6-7, 1 Samuel 15). On the contrary, as the lack of mention of Moab indicates, the הָרֵם is an act of separation reflecting the profound distinction between human and divine in the religions of Israel and Moab.

It is now time to look at the question of the meaning of the old crux, הָרֵם. This, too, has been given more than one explanation. However, Albright’s explanation is by far the most convincing. He translated as “satiation,” from והשלמה, which not only fits the context, but is strongly supported by biblical usage, as Brekelman was the first to note. The use of the verb והשלמה in contexts parallel to the MI of bloodshed and divine vengeance (Jer 46:10, Isa 34:5,7) is striking. In Isaiah 34, where YHWH lusts for Edom’s gore, both והשלמה and כֹּהֵן are in the same text, as in the MI. The והשלמה is the satiation of Kemosh’s lust for blood on a “day of vengeance to avenge himself on his foes (Jer 46:10)” (this [non-cultic] explanation also makes it the more unlikely that הָרֵם is to be understood as coming from a cultic context. Moreover, one can assume from the use of this term and the way it is used (including the people of Moab in the “satiation”), that after the massacre the Moabites took spoil in the normal fashion which needed no further notation.

There is a certain parallel, long since noted by scholars, between the lines that describe the attack on Ataroth (II.11-13) and the הָרֵם at Nebo (II.14-18). In both cases, cities were taken and the population slaughtered without quarter. But such similarities need not mean identity. The MI states clearly that the reason why Ataroth was subject to such treatment was because it was a colony (perhaps similar in function to the colonies of Alexander the Great in a later period), built by an Israelite king. “For Gadites had lived in the district (lit. land) of Ataroth from time immemorial, but the king of Israel [relatively recently] built for it [the city of] Ataroth, and I attacked the city” (II.10-12). It was this Israelite policy of building on Moabite soil which especially outraged the Moabites, and led to the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants. The use of the word “to drag,” במקום, in the case of both Ataroth and Nebo, was undoubtedly purposeful, because it

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30 Contra G. L. Mattingly, “Moabite Religion,” 235. He (and his colleague J. A. Dearman) seems to see a כֹּהֵן at Ataroth, as well as at Nebo.
31 See KAI II 175 supporting an explanation based on OSA ryt. Against: J. C. L. Gibson, Textbook, I 79, C. H. W. Brekelmans, De herem, 29-31. It would mean a sacrifice to both god and people. The old explanation that כֹּהֵן comes from כֹּהֵן is antecedently improbable, but has also been superseded by Albright’s theory.
32 G. L. Mattingly, “Moabite Religion,” 235-6 states the case for Albright’s hypothesis well, but it should be noted that C. H. W. Brekelmans, De herem, 31, was the first to observe the connection between Moabite כֹּהֵן and Isa 34:5ff.
33 Ibid.
34 Most recently, G. L. Mattingly in “Moabite Religion, 235. In construing כֹּהֵן as a cult object, he does not explain the meaning of the term with which it is in construct.
conveyed a certain contempt for the defeated foe. It cannot mean that because in the second instance, the objects of the verb (as restored) are cult objects, that one may infer that the first case, מָלַא, is a cult object. This amounts to the classic fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc. Look at the differences! One cannot but notice the totally different terminology associated with זָרָה, which unlike the hiphil of בָּשָׂר is a) not even a verb and does not describe an action but rather an emotion b) is etymologically distant from consecration through destruction c) is given a special explanation for the emotion involved, unlike the בָּשָׂר d) the זָרָה was shared by deity and people, while the whole point of the בָּשָׂר is that some things are set aside for the divine sphere alone, which is separated from that of mortals, in a way that often defies human understanding (Joshua 7, 1 Samuel 15).

The passage (II.14-17) which follows up the Ataroth episode does not start with the kind of explanation provided for Ataroth. Instead, Kemosh orders Mesha to advance on Nebo. This is surely a response to an inquiry of an oracle, a standard ancient practice. Yet whereas Mesha was content formerly with the formulation, “I slaughtered all the people of the city,” here he says,

Instead of repeating זָרָה &c. he now says מָלַא נָרָה. "For to consecrate I consecrated it (the city of Nebo) to destruction."

Turning to the untranslated line (II.16-17a), which presents us with something of a lexical problem, the general meaning is clear: all men, women and children (נה=BH, “whelp”: possibly not the word the Moabites used for their own children). It is puzzling that some translators have seen fit to translate מָלַא נָרָה as handmaidens or the like. Never do the biblical descriptions of מָלַא, which often depict the dead as men, women, and children, mention slaves. Nor is there any mention of מָלַא, “aliens,” “clients,” a frequent translation that flies in the teeth of the biblical evidence. BH has no feminine form, and there would be little reason to list clients by sex or to give them equal prominence with the Israelites with whom they were fighting. The rendering “child” is closer to passages like Deut 3:6. ARM IV 33, Ishme-Dagan’s victory message to his brother, mentions slaves (wardum) and clients (šabum), but does not give masculine and feminine forms, as here. מָלַא (Heb. for “womb”), was a metonym for young women, as Jud 5:30 indicates. There was no reason to prefer slave girls over free. No one called רַמְי וּנְת, “girl Anat,” a slave! The Ugaritic female DN ṭhmy (UT 483f.), can be linked to aṯr (Asherah) in combination; a likely numen of fertility, not enslavement. By devoting

35 Following A. L. Oppenheim, Letters from Mesopotamia (Chicago, 1967), 106. This translation, which is not found in his dictionary, flows from the context.
captured nubile women—the most desirable booty of all (cf. Deut 21:10-14, II. 1,Od IX:40)—Mesha earned maximum credit from his god. That is the point of placing הֶרֶם at the end of the list.\textsuperscript{37} In Jud 5:30 “a woman, two women per capita” is the first item of plunder mentioned, indicating the most desirable. In the MI, the word is singled out for mention by being put at the end of the line, indicating the same thing; a male counterpart is lacking. The line means then, “people of all ages, even nubile women.” The foregoing of spoil (in contrast to 11.11-12, where material booty was taken), especially the choicest spoil of all, in the Moabitic practice of the הֶרֶם, reflected the unique nature of the practice as well as Mesha’s devotion to Kemosh.

It is doubtless no coincidence that the unique use of קְמֶשׁוֹנָנָה occurs in conjunction with the sole use in the MI of קְמֶשׁוֹּבָה. This unique form or expression coincides with the physical center of the inscription as well as the high point, from Mesha’s perspective, of the devotional or religious aspect of the description of events (notice that the section consisting of 1.8 [end] to 1.10 [start] contains building notices which belong more logically with the latter part of the MI; these have been inserted at least partly in order to place 1.17’s קְמֶשׁוֹּבָה in the center).\textsuperscript{38} The next step is to try to find the most plausible theory to explain this unique concatenation. The conventional assumption is that the first part represents the widely-attested Semitic deity, Ashtar.

Actually, this assumption is not made by everyone. For, according to some scholars, Ashtar-Kemosh is Kemosh’s consort.\textsuperscript{39} However, this idea is unacceptable as Ashtar is too strongly attested as a masculine (though by one theory androgynous)\textsuperscript{40} god, and replacing Kemosh with a consort (with such an unlikely name!)\textsuperscript{41} at the climax of an inscription dedicated to him is unlikely and unparalleled in the Near East. At Ugarit, there was, of course, the female counterpart of Ashtar (*ṣēt), viz. *ṣēt. Ironically, it would seem from one Ugaritic text (UT 129), which is unfortunately damaged, and which breaks off (hence the outcome is obscure), that Ashtar wants his own palace but is denied it because he lacks a wife. In 129:20, Ashtar descends like a lion: ...לימע ani bpsny trh$n krm..., and is possibly likened to a bull or bulls as well—*krm (the condition of the line has made the correct translation of

\textsuperscript{37} It seems also to reflect paranomasia, since הֶרֶם and קְמֶשׁוֹנָנָה share the same root letters.

\textsuperscript{38} The premature introduction of Moabite building puts an affirmation of the Moabite Weltordnung before an allusion to Moab’s blackest hour. Cf. 1. 8, тэш. дев. followed by 11.8-9 тэш. дев. There is a clever play on the two similarly written verbs, with Omri’s occupation anticipating Kemosh’s restoration of Moabitic world order. The little discourse on world order both centered the line with the тэш and foreshadowed it


\textsuperscript{40} W. F. Albright, Archeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore, 1968), 83-84. Further, see T. Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion (New Haven, 1976), 140.

\textsuperscript{41} We have a number of names formed from Kemosh, but it is hard to imagine forming a sentence name from *Ashtar-Kemosh.
what remains impossible, esp. given the enigmatic *bnpsny). Given his masculine status in the texts, the view of W. Kaiser that the Ugaritic names *ṭr-ab and *ṭr-um indicate androgyny, is not likely, since just such an attribute would be seized on for the myth of his rivalry with Baal (whose absence from the MI is conspicuous, and will be considered shortly). However, Kaiser wrote before Jacobsen’s analysis, which accounts for the Ashtar/Baal rivalry, too:

Ishtar—her name goes back through the form *Eshtar to *Attar—corresponds to the West Semitic god of the morning star, *Attar, who was also a rain deity but of semiarid regions where agriculture was possible only with the use of irrigation. ...when *Attar tried to take the place of the dead Ba’al, the rain god of the regions of rain agriculture, he did not prove big enough to fill Ba’al’s throne. His female counterpart...goddess of the evening star, was a war goddess and also goddess of sexual love.

A Ugaritic polyglot deity-list equates Ashtar with the Sumerian god dLUGALMARDĀ (if correctly restored) and the Hurrian Ashtabi, both war gods (as is Arabian *’Attar). A war goddess, like Ishtar, might understandably take on male characteristics (e.g. her beard). A male war god would not need feminine traits. Thus *ṭr-um may be better explained as the Akkadian name Ishtar-ummi. Ishtar was, naturally, known at Ugarit. The um told the reader to read not ‘Ashtar’ but ‘Ishtar.’

In the light of the above, ‘Ashtar-Kemosh’ is unlikely to add up to a female deity; and we must consider the other possibilities. The most obvious is that it is a combination, e.g. UT gloss.# 1941 *ṭtr w *ṭṭr). Another is that it is an epithet, not unlike the biblical epithet translated as “Lord of hosts.”

According to this view, Ashtar is added to enhance the depiction of Kemosh as the war god who enabled Mesha to apply the *ḥn in part to display his power in war.

It is necessary to make an attempt, at least, at understanding something of the thought of the author(s) of the stele insofar as it may reveal itself, as part of the larger enterprise of seeking to comprehend the mode of thought which moved the ancients to the *ḥn out of many possible choices. The MI is a portrait in miniature of a mentality which was certainly present elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

The biblical account of Moab’s origin (Gen 19:29-38) is mythic, and has its psychological raison d’être. It accounts for the kinship, which was too obvious to escape notice, between Moab and Ammon on the one hand (which was so close as to be incestuous from Israel’s point of view), and between

43 T. Jacobsen, Treasures, 140.
44 J. Huehnergard, Ugaritic Vocabulary, 164.
those nations and Israel. Yet by assigning Moab and Ammon to Lot, the creator of the myth put them at a comfortable distance “genetically,” since the place of Lot in the Abraham saga was morally and religiously inferior. At the same time Mesha’s point of view was precisely reversed; cf. II. 8-9, וַיֶּלֶל מַלְכֵי דָּגָן וַיַּכְוָשׁ, “Kemosh restored it (the land of Moab) in my time (as king).” Like Hebrew, the verb יָלָל, “dwell” takes the preposition “b” in IIs. 10,13,19,31; the verb יָשָׂב (in hiphil), the direct object suffix or the marker on as in 1.12. The same word on 1.13 with “b” is the hiphil of יִשָּׁב; 1.13b I settled there men of Sharon(?) and Maharit(?). Thus, Albright’s translation (ANET 320), “Kemosh dwelt there,” followed by many, is questionable, and is unlikely on contextual grounds as well. Mesha was upholding the claim in this inscription that it was not YHWH who exercised the power over the land of Moab, but Kemosh. In his anger (1.5), he gave it over to Israelite rule, but after his servant Mesha assumed the throne, he restored Moab. Hence in the Moabite דָּרִי, Mesha slaughtered the people of Nebo, but the city, the place, he consecrated through destruction, and the two acts together sanctified the city defiled by an enemy people and its god, and helped restore the Moabite world order.

It is clear from the MI as a whole, and especially from II.12-13 and the continuation of 1.17 יִשָּׁב וַיָּלֶל, wherein booty is dragged to Kemosh alone, that Kemosh was the entity to whom Mesha was devoting Nebo. Here Kemosh has that role, not Mesha, not *Ashtar-Kemosh! One does not dedicate a city to one god and give the spoils to another god, even if the two are husband and wife. It is possible to take this further in the light of Deut 13:13-19, in which the דָּרִי is prescribed in order that YHWH’s wrath will turn away and his equanimity will return (Deut 13:18). In the MI we have in 1.5, Kemosh’s wrath, followed by 1.17-18, the דָּרִי, and in 1.19, Kemosh’s redemptive action on behalf of Moab, followed by the speedy end of the war. It would seem that the proper execution of the דָּרִי then acted for Mesha and Moab in a similar way as its proper execution was prescribed in Deut 13:13-19. Therefore the god to which Nebo was devoted was Kemosh, and *Ashtar is a mere epithet. The combinatorial explanation therefore fails. One may further extrapolate that the temple of YHWH that seems to have existed on Moabite soil at Nebo, which possibly attracted some Moabite worshippers (collaborators) was an abomination to Kemosh, and that the דָּרִי of Nebo was carried out in something of the same spirit as animated the writing of Deut 13:13-19.

46 W. H. Shea, “The Melqart of Stela,” MAARAV 1/2 (1978-79), 165, argues, following J. Friedrich, that the “b” is written once but is meant to be read twice. While this is ingenious, it does not take into account the two similar widespread roots with overlapping orthographies, but forces all instances into one mold. Here Mesha speaks of a whole territory vs. 1.33, where (an image of) Kemosh enters a city. Just as one never sees “YHWH dwells in the Land of the Negev,” so one should not see same of Kemosh in Medeba.

47 The text speaks of not touching the spoil so that YHWH’s wrath יָשָׂב (will return), meaning that God was already angry.
Anyway, the combinations found at Ugarit (and also at Ebla),\textsuperscript{48} e.g. Koṭhār-wa-Hasīs, use the \textit{waw} to effect the juncture, as does the Deir Allah inscription. In the light of all these considerations, the combination idea should be dropped. Before dropping it, however, let us consider it in one more form, suggested long ago, out of the onomasticon of the Elephantine papyri, which included divine names composed of two deities, such as ḫāṣēḏū, or Anat–Yāhu.\textsuperscript{49} The conception that underlies this syncretism is also uncertain in this instance. The colony at Elephantine was a special case occurring much later time in a highly unusual setting and among an atypical population. If it reflects the influence of Egyptian practice in its combination of names, a practice best known in the example of Amon-Re, it would be better to start from the Egyptian practice, which is better understood. Also, the idea that *Ashtar-Kemosh reflects Egyptian influence is a possibility worth exploring.

In the time of Rameses III’s expansion into Canaan, Amon-Re was featured prominently in Rameses’s inscriptions as a war god. By this theory, the Moabites adapted the Egyptian form, which E. Hornung has interpreted in an excellent fashion. He terms the Amon-Re phenomenon ‘syncretism’ which, in speaking of the numerous deities paired with Re, he says, “may be interpreted as meaning that Egyptians recognize Re in all these very different gods....”\textsuperscript{50} However, unsatisfied with this formulation he adds other considerations, of which I shall cite two. Firstly, he notes that syncretism “does not imply identity or fusion of the gods involved, it can combine deities who have different forms, and even...ones of the opposite sex.”\textsuperscript{51} This observation could fit such names as Anat–Yāhu, on the one hand, and *Ashtar-Kemosh, on the other. Yet whatever the relation between the god Ashtar and Kemosh, it was assuredly not that of Amon and Re. The Egyptian practice of syncretism, according to Hornung was flexible, allowing many combinations. But Hornung continues, saying that, “Amon-Re is not the synthesis of Amon and Re but a new form that exists along with the two other gods.”\textsuperscript{52} This is possibly true for Elephantine names such as Anat–Yāhu, but is unlikely to be the case in the MI, where the name would undoubtedly be written in the same way as in the Elephantine papyri (without a space). This caveat is not a mere technicality; NW Semitic names follow clearly defined patterns, and in this case, the separation of the two elements in *Ashtar-Kemosh is purposeful, as the first-rate scribe(s) of the MI could hardly have erred in writing divine names.

One must conclude that the combination theory of *Ashtar-Kemosh (especially as Kemosh’s consort) does not stand up well under scrutiny. S.

\textsuperscript{49} A. Cowley, \textit{Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century}, (Oxford, 1923), 147.
\textsuperscript{50} E. Hornung, \textit{Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many} (Ethaca, 1982), 92.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. 96-97.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 96.
Segert was thus right to use the term 'epithet,' and one may understand this by reading the name Ashtar as 'Astar, viz. as a generalized form of the deity, meaning, "the warrior," or the like: one may compare the Akkadian Ishtar-derived noun cstaru, "goddess," and, closer to Moab, the use in Deut 7:13 and elsewhere of הער with the meaning of "fertility, increase." Thus the god Ashtar disappears.

The distinction between people and place existed also in the minds of some biblical writers. Joshua 6:17 introduces the אשת using the nominal form (quite unlike the usage prominent in other passages, which use the hiphil). "The city shall be אשת and everyone in it to YHWH." The passage goes on to sharpen the distinction by declaring the city's spoil off limits. The question of spoil raises the question of what we may call the economics of אשת. The MI informs that after the wholesale slaughter at Atarot and Nebo, Mesha moved on to use Israelites as slaves. Similarly, in the time of Solomon it was also found expedient to use the ideology of אשת to justify the impressment of non-Israelites into the king's corvee (1 Kgs 9:20-1), though a later editor felt this as a failure to apply the full rigor of the אשת. In this, if Mesha's behavior is a guide, the zealous editor was wrong. I. J. Gelb, in his "Prisoners of War in Ancient Mesopotamia" (JNES 32, [1973], 71-2) pointed out that societies with an inadequate level of economic organization to utilize POWs as labor would kill them. This was true of Mesha at first, but he later achieved a sufficient level of organization to employ them, while Solomon's realm may have reached the peak of Israel's economic development. Religion and economics went hand in hand.

The scant use of deities in the MI (e.g. the absence of Baal), is presumably due to a desire to render Kemosh his due. It was Kemosh who was the national deity, i.e. the god of the ruling house, as Baal was the god of Jezebel's house. Also, many polytheists' texts are so centered around one deity that one would hardly believe that the author acknowledged the remaining deities of the pantheon. Another possibility, given the equivalent status of YHWH and Kemosh visible from the MI and conceded, as we saw, in the Bible, is that Mesha's royal religion was significantly more centered around one god than the popular religion(s) of Moab.

Scholars have long searched for equivalents to the Moabite-Hebrew בִּיר. Parallels have been adduced from the ancient Celts to Mari and

\[53\textit{CAD I} 271b. S. Segert, "Die Sprache," 232, speaks of a weakening of the name to an epithet; this is an extension of his argument. S H. Donner-W. Rollig in \textit{KAI} III 196-7, begin their discussion of the problem with the assertion that the two must be seen as one despite the word dividers, yet they do not give this any support. In addition to the Ug. epithets, 'ר and 'lu, Ashtar of Arabia also has warlike attributes, as attested by the epithets 'bšn, 'brššŠm, and 'zzm, meaning 'the Bellicose,' 'Lord of Strength,' and 'the Mighty One,' respectively (W. Kaiser, \textit{Ugaritic Pantheon}, 161).\]

\[54\textit{See, e.g.,} an Enil hymn, \textit{ANET} 576 (esp. ii.16-17), and an Inanna hymn, ibid. 578 (trans. S. Kramer).\]

\[55\textit{N. Lohfink, "Haram," TDOT 5}, (Grand Rapids, 1986), 191.\]

elsewhere. Yet while there were evident similarities in practice—hardly surprising considering the nature of ancient war and religion—good parallels other than the MI are hard to find, especially from the ancient Near East.

An inscription of dIškun of Simurrum,57 dated now conclusively to the early Old Babylonian period,58 is obviously well removed in time and space from the period and place of the MI (and the Hebrew Bible). Yet it is easily more relevant to understanding the מזח than parallels drawn from the Celtic sphere. I excerpt starting from 1.13, where the text, referring to a prince who was called either dZabazuna, or Anzabazuna, reads as follows:

awassu dAdad dIštar dNisīma ālam uhalliqma ana ili sunūti uqaddissu gīšBANSUR-am=passuram) ša dIštar bēlīṣu iskun

Adad, Ištar and Nīšma lent an ear to his word. He destroyed the city and dedicated it to those gods. He set up an offering table of Ištar, his mistress.

It is suggestive that, as in the MI, it is the city itself which is dedicated to the deity. In the dIškun inscription, also, there is discrimination among the gods. The later section, devoted to curses, invokes, as is normal, many gods, including gods of the inscription proper. The dedication is restricted to two war deities and Nīšma, a personal god. However, there exist three versions of the text, each of which relates an act of cultic dedication to one of the three gods (I shall return to this point shortly).

We may see then evidence of a common mentality at work. The dIškun text proves that the idea of consecration to destruction is very old. The inscription differs in some ways from the Bible and it reflects a reverse situation to that of the MI, that of an empire suppressing a revolt. It includes the setting up of a cult table to individual gods, an act that is different from the dedication of the city to the gods, ending with a section cursing any defacer of the text, using the first-person (the account of the war was told entirely in the third-person, since the king speaks of his son's exploits). Nothing is expressly said of the human lives involved in the attack on the city, which is not named in the crucial section just presented but earlier (1.6)—the city Kulunnun. There is nothing but the word uhalliqma, "destroy," "annihilate," to go on, but it is not a word that bodes well for the population, especially since there is no account of spoils and captive-taking (as in the MI, which refers to Israelite labor, and which is typical in ancient inscriptions early on). Since the city was utterly destroyed, and dedicated to the gods Adad,

58 A. al-Fouadi, "Inscriptions and Reliefs from Bitwata," Sumer 34 (1978), 122-129. A brief discussion of dating comes on 124. However, Dr. D. Frayne (University of Toronto) has informed me that the dIškun texts may be definitely located in the Early Old Babylonian Period (as M. F. Walker also believes).
Ishtar, and Nishba (with their prior approval awasser....ismu), the parallel is an intriguing addition to those adduced by scholars previously.

The verb, uqaddissu, is of especial lexical interest since it serves here (augmented by uhalligma) as an Akkadian equivalent to Moabite/Heb. הָרָמַץ. Akkadian haramu "to separate" has a different domain than the root סְכִפ in Hebrew and Akkadian (cf. qadatsu in its metathesized forms), with two possible exceptions: hamru and harimtu (see ch. 1).\(^{59}\) Whatever one make of these possibilities, the main point is that the verb haramu is hardly attested in Akkadian. When we recall an admittedly far later Hebrew text, Lev 27:28, in which the roots סְכִפ and סְכִת are explicitly equated, it is not surprising that in Akkadian the verb quddusu could be used to help express a concept similar to the סְכִת.

Consecration to/through destruction is the basic description of the סְכִת, and it is clearly attested in this relatively ancient inscription of 4Idi-Sin. I have introduced it here because it is relevant to the MI as well as to the biblical סְכִת. The way in which the deities are treated contrasts markedly in the two inscriptions. The latter half of the 4Idi-Sin inscription curses anyone who would deface it, invoking a total of nine gods. Three of these--Adad, Ishtar, and Nishba--are the divine actors of the first half. In the MI, however, the only divine actor is Kemosh. Yet this is not the whole picture. The same impulse to glorify one god above others comes to light in the publication of the 4Idi-Sin text, which has three editions. Each of the three primary gods is given special and separate consideration in the three; Adad and Ishtar are given a cult table in texts A and B, while Nishba is given a throne in text C.\(^{60}\) Mesha has taken this even further. None of the other gods worshipped in Moab according to the various sources (Baal, Mother Goddess, perhaps Ashtar, etc.)\(^{61}\) are seen in this text. Like YHWH in Israel, Kemosh is the one who listens (cp. ismu "they heard") and speaks, the one who feels for Moab or grows angry at it. The religion of Simurrum, a millennium earlier, shows such a tendency but in a less developed form. In relation to the vexed question of monotheism, Mesha's religion seems closer to biblical religion than that of Simurrum.

C. H. W. Brekelmans has suggested that the bloodthirsty character of the deity in the MI is a projection of the blood lust of the human beings who desire revenge on their enemies.\(^{62}\) There is ample evidence that such a process occurred, although it comes not primarily through the 4Idi-Sin inscription, but through the Bible, in which such projections of human traits onto the deity, i.e. anthropomorphisms, are the norm. It should be noted in this connection that ritualized blood acts abounded in ancient religion and in ancient Israelite religion (in which the official cult, at least, seems to have drawn

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59 CAD H 89a-90b. Cp. CAD Q 46-50, with 146-47, 320.
60 A. al-Fouadi, "Inscriptions and Reliefs," 124.
the line at human sacrifice). To devote the enemy, by definition not of God's servants (hence the provisions of כַּרְבָּא for idolators in e.g. Exod 22:19, Deut 13:13-19), is to help maintain or restore the moral as well as physical order of the universe. Brekelmans' point applies especially to the term חֲרָב (see above). The theological impetus behind practice of כַּרְבָּא cuts deeper; the paradoxical idea of the bloodsome כַּרְבָּא—which involves the realm of the sacred—having an important ethical element helps explain its presence among more appreciated ethical texts like the decalogue.

One may rephrase this point by referring to the ancient theme of the deity slaying the monster of chaos. The ancients, whether Babylonians, Moabites, Egyptians, or anyone else, had good reason to fear disorder, which renders human calculation futile and life itself insecure. The hegemony of Israel over Moab conflicted with Mesha's sense that the Moabite gods, Kemosh above all, ultimately intended that Moab not be ruled by chaos. By defeating YHWH, Kemosh slew the chaos monster and restored the Moabite world order; which seems to be why the city of YHWH's shrine had to be put to the Dnn. As O. Goelot pointed out to me, the Egyptian view of foreigners as the forces of chaos fits in well here. In wartime, this is especially natural, and of course Moab may have absorbed the notion while under Egyptian domination or through Egypt's influence after the retreat of the empire. In any event, the path from the thought to concrete action may be short, and the כַּרְבָּא is a practice which began in a mythic, polytheistic setting, as the "Idi-Sin inscription strongly indicates.

Much of the inscription is taken up with the rebuilding that followed the victories of Mesha over the enemy. The primary verb used is כַּרְבָּא, "build," although the verb חֲשָׁב, "do, make" occurs (and other incidental verbs referring to construction). The verb כַּרְבָּא, "to build," occurs more often than any other verb in the MI. It is a verb of creation. It is used in Enuma Elish for the creation of the "black-headed ones." Ugaritic bny is used in an epithet for the god Il, bny bnwt, "Creator of creatures." Also from Ugarit is the cosmogonic story of the building of Baal's house; at the end of the six days of fiery creation of his house, Baal exults, saying "I have built--bni." The Hebrew verb כַּרְבָּא is also used in Genesis 2:22, for the creation of woman--named "life"--out of Adam's rib (while חֲשָׁב describes the whole work of creation in Gen 2:2-4). The emphasis on these verbs may therefore be due to the cosmogonic overtones which the root conveyed as Mesha worked hard to recreate the Moabite world order. The second Ugaritic example, assuming something like the Baal myth survived into the Iron Age (as a version of Aqht did, Ezek 14:14,20), was a good prototype for Mesha's building of shrines and his palace in particular (imitatio dei). In any case, the point is that the MI depicts the successful battle of Moab to overcome the forces of chaos such as Israel, Gad, and YHWH, and to restore order, re-creating a

63 VII.32 sāmāt qaqqadi ša ib-na-a qaṭāṣu CAD B 87a; the entry supplies many other examples.
64 C. H. Gordon, "Glossary," UT, 373 cites 2 Aqht:1:25, etc..
65 Ibid., Text 51, VI, II.1-34, 172b. Translated in ANET 134.
Moabite Weltordnung. The inscription pictures the restoration as a process first requiring the דָּנִי, the defeat of the chaotic forces. Then came the process of restoration presided over by Kemosh (cf. II.8-9, and I.33—in the latter line, if correctly restored, Kemosh is now dwelling in Horonaim), and put into practice by Mesha with his building program. All this positive activity, creative activity as it were, was made possible through the victory over YHWH and Israel (in the light of context and other ancient royal inscriptions of the area, the use of יהו at Ataroth and especially at Jahaz, which was close to Dibon, as Mesha annexed to its territory, must have been significant building activity, not just fortification, as is lexically possible).

R. Labat, in a penetrating chapter on “La Guerre Sainte,” remarked that for the Assyrians every war was “sainte.” An apt illustration of this and the idea of the fight against chaos is provided by J. J. Glassner in a recent essay entitled “Sargon, ‘roi du combat.’”

“...cette campagne est la dernière, l’ultime combat qui permet à Sargon de chasser de la surface de la terre le dernier représentant du désordre et du chaos. (Cités éloignées...) symbolisent l’extrême de la terre, les conquêtes de Sargon ayant atteint à ses confins. Le commentaire néo-babylonien va plus loin encore, il donne à Sargon l’image d’un roi qui serait allé jusqu’à franchir l’Océan amer entourant la terre et...conquérir...les limites du monde....”

The Moabites were acting out of a general concept of holy war that was part and parcel of the heritage of many ancient peoples of the area, though expressed in their own way. In the act of devotion of human spoils, i.e. the act of דָּנִי as presented in the MI, the Moabites could take the step of foregoing plunder because of the deeper need to bring an end to the threat of continuing chaos, just as a late text depicted Sargon seeking to bring order to the earth’s end.

The question must immediately be posed as to the place of the simple declaration (II.5-6) that Kemosh was angry at his people (expressed here by יָרַע; cp. Deut 11:17, Josh 23:16) when he allowed the Omrides sway over Moab. The specific cause of anger is left unstated; an important void. It raises the question, however, of whether the element of atonement is present in the MI. This element may have played a role in the devotion of Nebo and the קַשָּׁת of Astaroth. It is not clear whether this role is etymological or merely logical. B. A. Levine has posited an analogy between the דָּנִי and the BH cult term קַשָּׁת, defined as “what the deity expected to be devoted to him if and when he was seriously offended,” as Kemosh evidently was. Unfortunately, one can only assume from the MI that the Moabites had in some way not given the god his just due as incumbent on the people Kemosh had chosen (another ‘biblical’ concept clearly operational here as

67 The Assyrians, for instance, an obvious example to focus on, behaved differently than kings of the dynasty of Akkad, for whom war was also ‘holy.’
elsewhere in the ancient world and later). There is no knowing whether the infraction was in the moral realm or in the more strictly ritual realm (although such distinctions were not always made). All one can say, then, is that the situation as given does not rule out the applicability of the idea of מזון. But as we shall see, it is only the concept that would apply, not the element of sacrifice. The idea of מזון might have played a role as a restorative element in the religious scheme of מזון as a way of restoring moral order. This scheme also applied, as with Sargon, to the world.

Atonement is not a discernable element in דֵּדֵי-סִין’s terse inscription. Although the destruction-dedication of Kulunnun was followed by the erection of an offering-table to the gods, this was probably to thank, not to atone. Since the situation facing דֵּדֵי-סִין of Simurrum (and his son, the war leader) was the opposite of the MI, involving suppression of a revolt, the lack of contrition may be natural. If the revolt was seen as a penalty for sin, the inscription does not mention it. Mesha, too, never described himself as the object of Kemosh’s anger; rather, his references to Kemosh are triumphant. Yet one may infer from Kemosh’s wrath (1.5) that Mesha viewed his actions as atoning for the sins of Moab against Kemosh. In any case, the MI well suits the conception of the war-שַׁחַר as a weapon against physical and moral chaos.

The fact that the crucial line containing the שַׁחַר is in the exact center of the MI indicates how carefully the Moabite scribes planned the text. The exaltation of Kemosh is contrasted immediately after with the humiliation of the Israelite god YHWH. The furnishings of his shrine were looted and brought to Kemosh (even if the word ילך is wrong, the chances are good that a cult object was meant). E. Lipinski opposes the idea that an Israelite shrine existed in the Transjordan, basing it on the proposal that the lacuna usually restored as (II.17-8).אָמַּנְיָה should be read as (אָמַּנְיָה אֱלֹהִים), a reading which would change the import of the passage drastically. Lipinski cites Jer 49:20 and 50:45 to show that מזון may be employed with a flock, while claiming that vessels could not be dragged. As the NJV translators have seen, מזון refers to shepherd boys (cf. Zech 13:7), not to young sheep, who are routinely designated by one of several words for ‘lamb’ (תָּנִיס is used only for humans in the other biblical occurrences). It is also clear that objects could be dragged about; cf. הדבש = “rag, i.e. stuff dragged about” (BDB 695a). There is no reason to prefer “rams” to “utensils.” In contrast to the dragged utensils of YHWH of the MI stand the proud “bearers of the vessels of YHWH,” דֶּבֶשׁ, שֶׁמֶן, of Isa 52:11.

69 I owe my information of the situation to Dr. D. Frayne of Toronto.
70 See P. Auffret, “Essai sur la structure littéraire de la stèle de Mesha,” UF 12 (1980), 109-124, who shows just how carefully the text was structured. Also cf. J. C. de Moor, “Narrative Poetry in Canaan,” UF 20 (1988), 160. Speaking of the MI, he says, “It might therefore well be that the structure of the complete text was much more systematic than many modern scholars tended to believe.”
J. Blau’s opposition to the conventional restoration stems from his analysis of the use of the direct object marker, ד, in the MI. He theorizes that it is only used with persons (places he explains as extensions of people, viz. concentrations of people). Since ד followed by יִלָּל would violate this rule, he rejects it without giving a plausible alternative. The rule cannot be proved from the MI alone; and surely יִלָּל could also be viewed as an extension of the deity, as items intimately connected with the service of YHWH (such items often acquire sanctity, from the ‘holy scepter of דוֹסָר’ of Tiglat-Pileser I to the ‘holy grail’). One wonders where the sheep of 1.31 fit in Blau’s scheme, assuming that the line is correctly restored. It would be surprising if at a time in Israel in which there was no bar to the multiplication of sanctuaries (to YHWH), that the whole of Israelite Transjordan held not a single temple to the god of Israel. Moreover, the Moabites plainly rejoiced in the victory of Kemosh over YHWH, and the sack of a YHWH-temple on Moabite soil was a fit topic for the MI. We know that David took implements of gold, silver, and bronze (2 Sam 8:10-11), which he dedicated to YHWH—some part of which came from enemy temples. This is clearly what is involved in the ‘dragging’ (perhaps implying that spoils were taken against the will of YHWH) of the temple vessels to the house of Kemosh.

These facts seem to warrant another attempt at a theory of the direct object in Moabite. L.18.בְּהַרְסָא, an anomaly, has led to the assumption that the usage results from a lack of an attached 3 m. pl. suffix, necessitating a detached ד. This is hard to accept. Every other NW Semitic language has a full system of verbal pronominal suffixes. Linguistically, the MI does not provide proof that Moabite is an exception, especially as a system of such suffixes is plainly in use. In the MI and other Moabite fragmentary inscriptions, the direct object marker appears frequently, yet it is never inflected. Perhaps it cannot be, and in place of inflected ד Moabite uses pronouns (possibly with different vocalizations) as objects as well as subjects, as in I.18 (cf. Akkadian, also Ugaritic). Then the use of the pronoun—object would not come because דבְּהַרְסָא did not exist in Moabite, but in order to place emphasis on the dragging of the vessels (or other property) of the enemy god, YHWH!73

A final point on the putative temple at Nebo: it is conceivable that Nebo was considered a good site for a sanctuary because of the tradition linking the last moments of Moses with Mt. Nebo, a tradition that probably existed by that time. This is speculative, since there is no means of verifying it, but it is nevertheless a point that should be borne in mind in assessing the likelihood of the existence of a Nebo sanctuary.

73 K. P. Jackson, “The Language of the Mesha Inscription,” SMIM 116, points to Biblical Aramaic יִלָּל. It is used only once as subject but regularly as direct object. Difficult to explain is the absence of יִלָּל in the building phase of the inscription (ll.21-29). Given the fact that Ammonite seems to lack יִלָּל, perhaps this reflects a certain Ammonite linguistic influence on its next door neighbor. A regular feature of Ammonite became an option in Moabite. Even in Hebrew, the particle is usually omitted in poetry.
The question arises as to whether there was another shrine of YHWH besides Nebo. There is no ground to suppose so from the MI. Were there a temple at Ataroth, the most obvious choice, the lack of mention of YHWH is conspicuous—why would Mesha, in destroying a shrine of YHWH, have waited to mention YHWH until the second shrine, instead of exulting over YHWH's downfall (cf. Dagon's defeat in 1 Sam 5:1-5) at the first opportunity? As mentioned above, although the phrase רַבָּא דֶדֶד הָעֵדֶד is difficult, it does not fit into any known cultic terminology and is susceptible to another explanation. A. Dearman raises and scants the possibility of the "levitical city" of Jahaz having a shrine.74 A priori one may say that the idea of the Israelites calmly casting lots and distributing dozens of cities on both sides of the Jordan for settlement, as we find in Joshua 21, is unlikely to have occurred in Joshua's time, early in the history of Israel in Canaan. The chapter is clearly a projection backward, for whatever purpose (political, priestly, etc.). If the levitical city had any reality, it was that of a much later period. 74

Since most probably the MI refers to the despoiling of an Israelite temple at Nebo, we must ask if the action that Mesha took with regard to the enemy's temple fits in with what is known of such behavior from the neighboring powers of the ancient Near East. This is potentially a vast subject, but for our purposes we do not have to go very far. Evidence comes from the Bible itself. The political dimension strongly obtrudes in the fascinating story of 1 Samuel 21-22. There an entire priestly house and town is depicted as having been caught up in the developing struggle between Saul and David. In the end, the king sacked the town (1 Sam 22:19). The text does not give the details of what happened to the temple, but it was plainly destroyed along with the priests.75 It is intriguing that little or no censure of Saul is found in this account. Yet regardless of the theme of church-state relations in Israel which this narrative throws light upon, it is important to note here that if an Israelite king could war on a YHWH-temple and its city (Nob), so much the more so could a Moabite king. Nor is there much doubt that in his theological perception of Kemosh, which has great similarity to the theology of YHWH known from the Bible, he had a positive inducement to destroy the Israelite cult site. YHWH held no place in the Moabite pantheon. It is interesting that in this Moabite liberation account, YHWH is directly named. In contrast, the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt does not ever mention the Egyptian gods directly or portray a triumph over Egyptian gods, except obliquely in Exod 15:11.


75 Such is the plain meaning. Cf. J. Bright, in A History of Israel (2nd ed., Phila.,1975), 188.
We are brought now full circle, as it were, to the comparison of the MI and the MT. It is remarkable, though fairly unremarked upon, that this small stone should contain, besides the key word נֵבֶר, other key roots long familiar from their distribution in the Pentateuch and elsewhere, which serve as the linguistic matrix into which the word נֵבֶר fits. It is an axiom of modern linguistics that one cannot deal with a word in isolation. Each word is part of a semantic field. Such a field cannot be delineated with absolute precision, at least not in the case, as here, of a language that is both dead and almost entirely lost (Moabite). I will start with four important representative verbs, found both in the MI and in the Exodus-Conquest cycle, each with a claim to belonging to the semantic field of נֵבֶר: נַבֶּה, "capture," נָה, "expel," רָז, "kill," and רוּחַ, "take possession, dispossess." All of these have some bearing on the נֵבֶר (note that רָז, "murder," is definitely outside the semantic field of נֵבֶר).

The first, נַבֶּה, is not used in describing the capture of cities in BH. The verb is used, int. al., for attacks of fear, disease, and for taking up arms. BH uses a nominal form, נָבָה, which reflects its etymology as testified to in the MI. The noun is used differently in the main, but traces of the MI’s usage remain. In Num 32:22,29 and Deut 32:49, the נָבָה or “possession,” the land, is acquired by military force applied according to the will of YHWH.

The verb רוּחַ is one of the major indicators of battlefield killing in the MI. It is not often associated with the נֵבֶר in BH, but a comparison of Josh 8:24 and 8:26, verses which occur in the Ai narrative, is helpful:

Josh 8:24:

As Israel was coming to the end of killing all the inhabitants of Ai...

Josh 8:26:

Joshua did not withdraw his hand...until he had made the dwellers of Ai נֵבֶר (devoted to destruction).

Although the battle at Ai is described in an unusually lengthy and convoluted manner, the two verses do show a kind of organic relationship existing between the two verbs רוּחַ and נֵבֶר in similar contexts, though the text is more straightforward in the MI. In contrast to רוּחַ, there is no reason to see נֵבֶר as a religious term. In BH, it is one of the important ways the action of killing, so prominent a feature of the נֵבֶר, may be verbalized. The conjunction of the root רוּחַ with the נֵבֶר in the MI thus speaks for itself. The MI uses רוּחַ but twice (II.11,16), although in significant places. It might have been

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76 On this verb, see B. A. Levine, "Late Language in the Priestly Source: Some Literary and Historical Observations," WJCS 8 (1983), 72-81.
77 J. C. de Moor pointed to this in "An Incantation against Infertility (KTU 1.13)," UF 12 (1980), 306; the Ugaritic text in (see ch. 1) also associates Ug. hrg with נֵבֶר.
chosen an economical means of expression given the limited space on the stone (vs. such longwinded biblical expressions as 'smiting with a sword so as not to leave a survivor'). However that might be, it remains as a witness to the consonance of Moabite and Hebrew conceptions of the theory and the practice of הָרָא.

Of the four roots, the remaining two verbs, שֵׁר and יָרָה, are of vastly more importance in the biblical (historical and religious) scheme than the first two, although it would be harder to assign relative values for the MI. The former of these verbs, שֵׁר, is of especially interest in the context of הָרָא.

The situation in the Torah is quite interesting. The passages in Exodus which deal with the handling of the peoples of the land use the verb שֵׁר. Corresponding passages in Deuteronomy do not, and the verb יָרָה, if it is not used immediately in relation to the peoples, soon follows. In fact, the verb יָרָה only appears once in Exodus, in another context (Exod 22:19, dealing with individual idolatry). Similarly, in Deuteronomy, שֵׁר is only found in 33:27 (Blessing of Moses), well outside the main body of prose. This is not the product of chance. In three out of four passages from Exodus dealing with the disposal of the peoples of the land, the important verb is שֵׁר. In the fourth, יָרָה appears, a rather different word which is not used in the qal-stem, but in the hiphil may mean “efface, annihilate” (BDB 470b, cf. II.2-3 of the Ammonite Citadel Inscription, Zech 11:9). Parenthetically I may note that in the first three Exodus passages YHWH sends an emissary or agent for the task of dealing with the peoples; but that in all four it is understood that YHWH is the true actor, which is how Mesha evidently regarded Kemosh in the events recorded on the MI. In the corresponding deuteronomic passages יָרָה is altogether absent.

The Exodus statements reflect an earlier stratum which as in other cases presumably provided prototypes for the deuteronomic equivalents. These verses reflect a concept that the creating of a ordered world is not to be left solely in the hands of the deity. Human action with the aid of the divine is the deuteronomic formula, and the יָרָה is the most dramatic example of it. Yet while שֵׁר is absent from these passages, a close equivalent is found in Deut 7:1. YHWH promises to bring the people to the land to possess it; he will clear the nations away (Heb. יָשָׁר). The next verse says that this is to be achieved by striking the enemy with the יָרָה. One may justly conclude that the concepts of שֵׁר and יָרָה are not seen as contradictory in Deuteronomy, but complementary. The יָרָה is a way to realize the general goal of expelling the enemy nations.

The MI, too, combines the concepts and roots of שֵׁר and יָרָה. I have argued that in 1.7 the verb יָרָה means “to flee,” as Mesha strove to drive

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78 Exod 23:23,28; 33:2; 34:11.
81 This is only one level of meaning of the Deuteronomic passages. An exposition of the role of the יָרָה in Deuteronomy will be found in ch. 5.
away the Israelites. One is struck by 1.19: "Kemosh drove him out (the king of Israel) from before me" (enabling Mesha to attack Jahaz). This is directly comparable to the Exodus passages using שָׁפַי with YHWH (or his agent) as the subject. Deut 7:1-2.'s combination of the concept of שָׁפַי with the מַעָּל is also present in the MI, though not in one formula. It seems a safe conclusion that the Deuteronomy passages represent only a shift in emphasis from their Exodus predecessors and not a radical innovation. However, later the argument will be made that the change in terminology is (at least in part) a response to the historical circumstance of the Moabite מַעָּל.

The last root, מַעָּל, is of exceptional importance in BH. It is well known and no comprehensive overview need be undertaken here.\(^82\) Ll.7-8 of the MI read in part: "ומרי מַעָּל עֲבֹדָה נָא וּמַעָּל נָא," "Omri took possession of the (land) of Mhdb.'" The important thing about this verb's appearance on the MI is that it affirms the presence of a certain concept at work in Moab and Israel. It is all the more interesting because in the biblical literature it is seen in the context of the Exodus and Conquest, whereas Moab presumably lacked at least the Exodus tradition. Deut 7:1-2, which I have just commented on, has מַעָּל in addition to the important מָלָא and מַעָּל. It is no accident that these roots cluster in both the Deuteronomy pericope and in the brief span of the MI. This parallel clustering suggests that the terminology relating to the Exodus-related Conquest found in the passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy, cited above, is rooted in the struggle of Israel to survive the encroachments of her neighbors--as opposed to their ostensible context of the Exodus or its aftermath.\(^83\)

Another relevant passage is Jud 11:12-27, a pericope which has been judged harshly by modern scholarship. However, Jephthah's longwinded message to the Ammonites, while it may be an interpolation or a message originally addressed to Moab, is certainly relevant to the study of the MI, particularly with regard to this root. Jud 11:21-24 include eight uses of it, divided 5/3 qal/hiphil. In Jud 11:24, Kemosh appears in the role of the deity responsible for giving land to the Ammonites (and Moabites--much of the pericope deals with the Moabites), i.e. the same role he plays for the Moabites in the MI. This seems untenable to some, but Kemosh was worshipped widely in Syria--from 3rd millennium Ebla to LBA Ugarit, and Ammon could have shared in the worship of its neighbor's major deity, Kemosh. The state of our knowledge of ancient Ammonite religion is hardly so perfected as to allow us to draw the negative conclusions which some have drawn.\(^84\) Although

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83 S.M. Kang, Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East, BZAW 177 (Berlin.1989), 164, concludes ch.V with a similar conclusion from different evidence and another viewpoint, "the war descriptions in the Exodus-Conquest traditions are cases of theoretical holy war which grew in the light of the traditions of YHWH war."
Ammonite PN’s do not feature Kemosh, as J. H. Tigay has pointed out, the “onomastic evidence does not always give a complete picture of the gods worshipped in a society,”\(^\text{85}\) and other types of evidence should also be employed. On the other hand, 1 Kgs 11:5,7 distinguish between Milcom, the “Ammonite abomination” and Kemosh, “the Moabite abomination” (another Ammonite “abomination” is mlk, which may appear in the Ammonite PN mlk’).\(^\text{86}\) Alternatively, it is possible that in his recounting of Israel’s Transjordanian adventures, Jephthah, by lumping together the Moabites and the Ammonites (as he does in his speech), lumped together their gods under Kemosh, and botched his diplomacy. The Ammonite king was not impressed at hearing Kemosh referred to as his god, but pressed on with the war. The narrator wanted to make the point that these alien gods were interchangeable. Then when Jephthah had to fight, he straightaway vowed a vow worthy of the abominations of Ammon, not YHWH.

Regardless of whether this interpretation of the passage is correct, the Jephthah passage dealing with Kemosh exists in its own right as a witness to the existence of competing gods in their attempts to give their worshippers the land they crave. In Jud 11:24, just interpreted above, Jephthah appeals to Ammon. “Do you not possess what Kemosh, your god, has given you to possess? All that YHWH, our God, has given to us to possess, I shall take possession of.” This is an interesting argument, and not one that Mesh a would have accepted, any more than the Ammonite king did. It is a pacific theology, implying that one should accept the will of both one’s god and the god of one’s foe (and that their wills are reconcilable). According to MI II.7-8, Omri took possession of ( SetValue:1) Medeba until after a generation, Kemosh returned it to Moab. Mesh a thought that Kemosh—not YHWH—was the one who decided on who would dispose of land in Moab (and beyond, as Mesh a expanded his domain, 1.29, cp. Deut 12:20), just as the Bible depicts YHWH as the one with the power to determine possession of the land.

The cumulative effect of the use of these four roots, as well as others (SetValue:1, SetValue:2, SetValue:3, and more) is impressive. It fixes the מלח more precisely in a matrix of terms having to do with the struggle for land and an ordered existence. Also, the term “YHWH-war” used by some is clearly of limited value when so much of the mentality of war was shared regionally, most of all by Moab and Israel.\(^\text{87}\) This is what the common terminology teaches, and the most dramatic element held in common was the מלח.

The main object of this chapter has been to achieve an understanding of the mentality which produced the MI. It is not enough to say that it is part and parcel of a larger Weltanschauung known and analyzed for many years now in the framework of ‘holy war.’ Here I have attempted to apply the evidence garnered by close inspection of the Moabite Inscription, trying to go

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\(^{87}\) Contra Gw. Jones, "'Holy War' or 'Yahweh War?'" *VT* XXV (1975), 642-658.
beyond the philological minutiae and the historical details to arrive at a
deeper understanding of the world view of the Moabites as reflected in par-
ticular by the הֶרֶם. The similarities between the MI and the MT, which I
have tried to stress throughout this chapter, demonstrate the close linguistic
and ideological ties of the two. The remarkable resemblance between the Is-
raeelite Exodus and Conquest ethos and the ethos of the MI has been given
far too little attention, and its implications could and should be probed more
deeply than possible here.

The Moabite הֶרֶם, involving as it seemingly did the slaughter of thou-
sands, must be understood as an intensely moral-religious act, reasserting
the rule of the god(s) and reflecting the victory of Kemosh and Meshah over
the ‘monsters of chaos,’ i.e. YHWH and Israel. Moab was able to slaughter
the Israelites without a qualm with the aid of this mythopoeic conception.
The devotion of the city of Nebo to Kemosh seems uneconomical in secular
terms but it probably went together with an inadequate degree of socio-eco-
nomic organization to use POW labor (a lack which Meshah was able to
remedy). It was seen by the Moabites as a cosmic act, designed to win the
god’s aid in the battle against the encroachment of chaos. On the positive
side this involved the reestablishment of the land as a “sacred space” where
the Moabite world order could rise again from the ashes. As Sargon’s mili-
tary career was thought of in these terms, so was Meshah’s. In fact, the im-
mediate economic equation was relatively trivial. It was vital to align one-
self with Kemosh, the arbiter of destinies, who alone could guarantee eco-
nomic prosperity, and the political independence which was a prerequisite
for prosperity. Only independence could put an end to tribute paid to Israel.,
give Moabite towns the liberty to build their vital water facilities, build
roads and ply trade and farm for the benefit of the Moabites themselves.
Failure to carry out the dictates of the הֶרֶם was therefore penny-wise and
pound-foolish (cp. Joshua 6-7). Yet there was more to it than material or
secular political considerations. The הֶרֶם was the centerpiece of the
campaign to restore not only Moab’s freedom and prosperity but the ruptured
moral order of the universe. Mesha and Moab wanted harmony to reign
throughout the realm of the crucial triangle of relationships of
people/land/god which constituted Weltordnung.

Appendix: The Question of 2 Kings 3

I alluded above to the dubious nature of 2 Kings 3 (see n. 2). In view of
the fact that, at present, the nature of the chapter is still a matter of lively
debate, and some scholars stand on the historicity of the 2 Kings 3 account,
I have chosen to state my own opposing view. Even without the evidence of
the MI, the chapter poses obvious problems. One example is the appearance
and role of Jehosaphat. According to the chronology of the Old Greek,
Jehosaphat and Jehoram were not contemporaries. This cannot be easily
waved aside, for as R. Klein pointed out, the OG is buttressed by 2 Chron
21:12ff. which presents a letter written by Elijah after the death of
Jehosaphat. In 2 Kings 3, Jehosaphat is supposed to be alive while Elijah is dead (2 Kings 3:11). Then again, the chapter is said to be literally dependent on 1 Kings 20; which has close similarities even without examination. Some scholars have made a case for the events of 2 Kings 3 occurring at a later time. I wish, however, to focus here mainly on the primary texts in question.

2 Kings 3:4 tells of Mesha as tribute-payer and herdsman. There is no reason to doubt its accuracy. Yet the Mesha of the MI never even begins to emerge in 2 Kings 3. 2 Kgs 3:21 portrays the panic-stricken Moabites massing at the border; the contrast with the normal language of the muster is starkly illustrated by 2 Kgs 3:6, in which Jehoram musters ‘all Israel’ (always a suspicious phrase). Mesha, on the other hand, is not even mentioned in connection with the muster of Moab. The king of Moab appears only at the end, 2 Kgs 3:26-7, first leading a vain charge (in an attempt to break through the weak point, the presumably reluctant Edomite contingent), and then (like Jephthah) sacrificing his offspring on the walls of Kir-Haresheh, the last remaining stronghold. Yet the Mesha of the inscription would have been in charge, and would have disposed of his men more ably. Why would Mesha stand on the border and wait for the enemy when Moab had advance notice (2 Kgs 3:21) and could easily have attacked when the allies were still organizing and thus vulnerable, in Edom? Or on the way, when Israel’s line of supply was nonexistent? Nothing in the incompetent and passive behavior of the “king of Moab” fits Mesha, who was indubitably made of more enterprising stuff.

The magnitude of the disaster as portrayed by the biblical account is such that it is impossible to reconcile it with the MI. Mesha could not have left such an account of his accomplishments if he were the Moabite equivalent of Hezekiah after Sennacherib (the survival of his stele is a mute witness to this). Moab continued independent in Mesha’s time and after. Furthermore, if victory was so complete that only one city was left resisting, a large part of the land of Moab would have passed automatically into Israelite control, since the Gadites were there. Yet 2 Kings 3 takes no account of the Gadites. The wholesale destruction in 2 Kgs 3:25 of cities, trees, fields, and water sources was in fact as inimical to their interests as to those of Moab. The strategy of coming by the south makes sense from neither Jehoram’s point of view nor especially from that of the Gadites, who were the ones most in distress due to Mesha’s rebellion. The Kings text portrays no knowledge of nor concern for their plight; it reflects instead an apology for the failure of Israel in the large sense to master the revolt. The MI in 1.19 is

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88 R. Klein, Textual Criticism, 39.
more realistic than 2 Kings 3 when it mentions Jahaz as the Israelite king's base for his failed counterattack, not a circuit to the south through Edom.

I have spoken of tendentiousness in the MI. The biblical text is full of tendencies. Its final form reflects a Judean point of view. The Judean king is a picture of piety, especially compared to Jehoram; in fact, as soon as Elisha has finished praising him (2 Kgs 3:14), Jehosaphat vanishes. Since Mesha's portrait of triumph over the entire house of Omri is accurate, the Israelites could not in the end win, despite the fact that Elisha had supposedly joined the army uninvited. Instead of the usual practice of consulting with God (or gods) prior to the battle, the three kings had to look about them for a diviner once they had already got into difficulties. The success which they enjoyed followed the mechanical pattern of the Book of Kings: what the prophet forecasts, must materialize, preferably sooner rather than later. The whole expedition would have failed were it not for Elisha's miracle. This alone indicates the unhistorical nature of the account. The figure of the prophet is far more important here than the real events, none of which are found in the chapter except the bare fact of a revolt. On the one hand, this fits into the pattern of mythicization of history pointed to by Eliade. Whole epic accounts spring up from a historical core while the historical events leave little or no trace, even when the epic is contemporary with the event. On the other hand, what it adds up to then, besides the boosting of Jehosaphat and Elisha (the latter believed by some to be wholly secondary to the account, as he certainly was to the events), is an apology for the failure of Israel (in the large sense) to suppress the Mesha revolt.

Another important point was made by J. Bartlett, who observed that the geography of 2 Kings 3 is "quite unreal," and that the wandering in the desert of Edom and the need for a prophet to miraculously supply water are remarkably like Num 20:3-20, the story of which may have served as a model. In contrast, the MI exudes familiarity with the Transjordan.

The final verses of 2 Kings 3 illustrate a known custom from the Canaanite world, that of sacrificing a child or children during a siege. The author(s) have rounded out their tale with this particular custom, which

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91 M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York, 1959), 38-48. He uses modern examples where the history is known and the myth reflects next to nothing of the history. He also gives the example of the Iliad.
93 M. Cogan & H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 47, cite classical sources on the Punic/Phoenician practice. They do not take into account all the evidence in A. Spalinger's article (which they also cite): "A Canaanite Ritual Found in Egyptian Reliefs," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 8 (1978), 50, gives an example of a relief of Rameses II before Ashkelon where "the child is definitely being sacrificed." More examples follow. The Ugaritic text 24.266, was dismissed by Cogan and Tadmor as "disputed." A. Caquot & M. Szynger, *Ugaritic Religion, Iconography of Religions* XV, 8 (Leiden, 1980), support the sacrificial interpretation without a shade of doubt. The reliefs prove the antiquity of the practice in any case.
serves to bring an unspecified wrath down upon the besiegers, who otherwise would have subdued the last Moabite resistance. This does not explain, of course, why the Israelites never enjoyed the fruit of their victories but simply retreated, granted Mesha a total reprieve, and never regrouped and retook Moab. In other words, the custom is used here as the basis of a literary construct. This construct, and the wrath of God, seem to be best explained as an application of the deuteronomic mandate not to dispossess the Moabites (Deut 2:9), since the desperate straits of the Moabite king in 2 Kings 3 and the devastation of the land wrought by the allies made that mandate relevant. The sacrifice of Moab’s heir symbolized the destruction of Moab’s inheritance, as portrayed in 2 Kgs 3. The situation naturally evoked the wrath of the God of Israel whose will it was that Israel should respect Moab’s right to its inheritance. The use of הָרָע, “wrath,” here without a subject is frequently held to be so unprecedented as to warrant the interpretation that the wrath was that of Kemosh (an interpretation which would have appalled the deuteronomists!). Yet this was around the time that Ahab was leading a large army against a far greater god than Kemosh, namely Assur, without fleeing in terror. In fact, as Y. Elitsur has seen, there are similarly constructed verses in the Bible (referring to YHWH), such as Num 1:33,18:5, the latter of which ends in the same language as that of 2 Kgs 3:27: לא ידוהי ינighet ינighet ינחלת ינחלת עמלכ. The correct answer is as mentioned above, that it was YHWH who was angry, and it was Israel’s threat to blot out Moab’s inheritance, which was God-given (Deut 2:9), that precipitated the wrath. Not only is the part played by the miracle-making prophet a literary ‘embroidering’ of events, but the more military aspects of the chapter have been given an extensive literary-theological treatment as well.

Both the revolt itself, the MI, and 2 Kgs 3:4 indicate that Israel had followed a policy towards Moab similar in conception to that of ninth-century Assyria towards its provinces; one of harshness and unrelenting economic exploitation. The numbers of 2 Kgs 3:4 indicate the latter, and the virtual beggaring of a tributary was not unknown elsewhere in the ancient Near East. S. Dalley, for instance, cites an example from the Old Babylonian period where the tributary literally did not have enough shirts to give his overlord. Such extreme exploitation was hardly calculated to foster a stable vassal-master relationship. I have already touched on the fact that one of the few things that the MI and 2 Kings 3 have in common is the water supply si-

94 B. Margalit, in “Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son,” BAR 12/6 (1986), 62-3, notes the Ugaritic text’s relevance, but sees the “wrath” as Kemosh’s “bitter indignation.”
tuation. Mesha (II.24-5) had to address the lack of cisterns in at least one town. In 2 Kings 3 it was Israelite policy to block up Moabite wells and waterholes. One can infer, therefore, that both texts reflect an Israelite policy of restricting Moabite access to water before the revolt; which was evidently a precaution to prevent Moabite cities from having the capacity to withstand siege. Such limiting of the most vital resource, even more than the exploitation of Moab's pastoral economy, must have engendered the kind of hatred of Israel reflected in the MI. The fantasy of Israel's near destruction of Moab, on the whole, is a reflection of Israel's frustration at the loss of dominion, and a response to the devastating success of Mesha, including the worship of Kemosh, a theological challenge which resulted in 2 Kings 3.

Finally, K.-H. Bernhardt argues that Elisha's chronology has been tampered with to allow him a long enough life to participate in the campaign of 2 Kings 3, and that Jehosaphat of Judah was already dead according to 2 Kgs 1:17. Therefore he feels that the story has a much later provenance. It is probable that this is true for the final form of the story. Originally, this story, which is patterned in some ways after 1 Kings 20, may have likewise featured an anonymous prophet. Also, it appears from the biblical and MI reference's to Omri that he probably encountered feeble resistance in what was surely a swift conquest. If so, 2 Kings 3 may preserve some elements from the campaign of Omri's conquest, such as possibly the alliance with Edom and Judah, the lack of an urgent need to help the tribe of Gad, and the inability of the Moabites to organize effective resistance. There is another point that is of some interest for the provenance of the chapter. I have touched on the anonymity of the kings of Moab and Edom in 2 Kings 3. This has its counterpart in the MI, where no king of Israel after Omri—a king Mesha did not fight—is mentioned by name. This more than any other indication suggests that at least the nucleus of the traditions which crystallized in 2 Kings 3 was contemporary with the aftermath of the Moabite war, the time when the need to invent apologies for the disaster was most acute. This may be true of other chapters in Kings which follow such a pattern.

In sum, the MI and 2 Kings 3 do not exist in the same plane. The MI (and archeology) proves that Mesha's revolt was not only successful, but that his reign was, too. His inscription, whatever its tendencies, is deeply rooted in the reality of Moab and shows a deep awareness of Transjordanian geography and history (e.g. Gad's being there from of old). The biblical account portrays a king of Moab who is a failure. Its disregard for the Gadites (who were a potential strategic asset, never utilized or mentioned in the biblical account) is damning; its dependence on legendary elements and miracles also contrasts badly with the MI.

THE MESHA INSCRIPTION IN TRANSLATION

1. I am Mesha, son of Kemosh-yatti, the king of Moab, the
2. Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I succeeded
3. my father. I erected this high place to Kemosh at QRHH, high pla(ce
4. of sal)vation. For he saved me from all kings, he showed me (the defeat)
of all my enemies (especially) Omri,
5. king of Israel. For he oppressed Moab for many years, because Kemosh
was angry at his people.
6. His son took his place and he, too, said "I will oppress Moab." In my time
he said s(o),
7. but I have seen (the passing) of him and his house; and Israel has surely
fled* for eternity. Omri had taken possession of the l(an)d
8. of Mhd'b and he occupied it during his reign and [it was occupied] half the
reign* of his son--forty years,*
9. but Kemosh restored* it in my reign. So I rebuilt Baal-meon, constructed a
reservoir in it, and I rebu(ilt)
10. Kiriathiam. The men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth from days
of yore.
10-11. A king of Israel had built Ataroth for himself. I attacked the city and I
seized it and I slaughtered all the peo(ple
12. of the city--satiation* for Kemosh and for Moab, and I dra(gg)ed back
from there the chief* of the (clan of) Areli.*
13. And I dragged him before Kemosh at Kerioth, and I settled i n it men of
SRN and me(n) of
14. MHRT. And Kemosh said to me, "Go, seize Nebo from Israel,"
15. So I went at night and I attacked it from the break of dawn until noon
when
16. I seized it and I slew everybody (in it)--seven thousand m(e)n, b(o)ys,*
ladies, gi(rl)s,*
17. and maidens*--for to the warrior* Kemosh I devoted them. I took from
there
18. t(he vessel)s* of YHWH and I dragged* them before Kemosh. Now the
king of Israel had built
19. Jahaz and he lodged there in his warring against me, but Kemosh drove
him out before me.
20. I took from Moab 200 men (in) all its divisions* (and) I led them against
Jahaz and I seized it
21. to add to Dibon. I rebuilt QRHH, the walls of the park, the walls( ) of
22. the acropolis(?). I rebuilt its gates, and I rebuilt its tower,
23. and I built a palace and I built the retaining walls(?) of the resevoi(r at
the spri)ng in the middle of
24. the city. There was no cistern in the middle of the city, in QRHH, so I
said to all the people, "Make
25. for yourselves each one a cistern in his house." And I dug pits(?) for
QRHH with
26. Israelite prisoners. I rebuilt (or fortified) Aroer and I constructed the highway by the Arnon.
27. and I rebuilt Beth-bamoth because it was destroyed. I rebuilt Bezer because it was in ruins.
28. (he) with 50 men of Dibon because every Dibonite is (my personal) vassal.* I rule
29. (over the) hundreds of cities that I added to the land. And I rebuilt
30. even Mhdb', and Beth-diblathaim and Beth-baal-meon and I brought there (my
31. shepherds to pasture) the sheep of the land. And there had settled at Horonaim (Kemosh (or)dered me, “Go down, fight at Horonaim.” So I went
down (and
33. I fought against the city and I took it and) Kemosh (dwelt) in it in my
time (remainder unintelligible; it ended originally at 34).

* I.e. someone over whom the king exercises his own immediate personal authority.