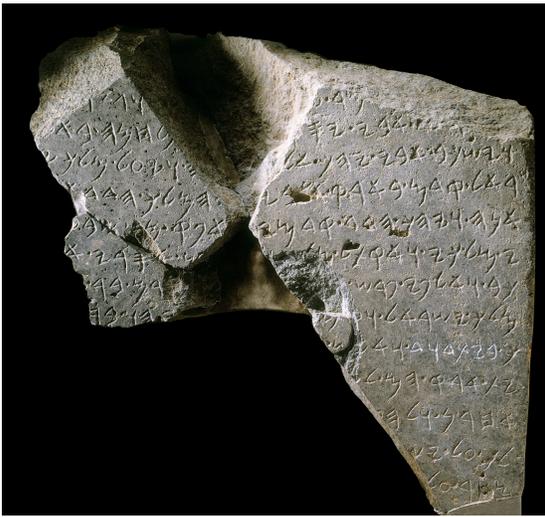


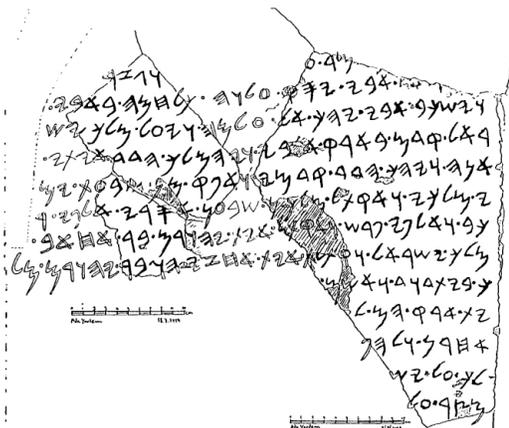
## FINDING DAVID OUTSIDE THE BIBLE: THE MOABITE STONE AND THE TEL DAN STELE



The early history of Israel's monarchy has been at the center of significant, often explosive, scholarly debates in the last few decades. Much of the controversy surrounds the figure of David, the eponymous king of the 'Davidic Dynasty'. The primary question is this: Did the biblical David and his dynasty exist? Or, was the entire story a fictional narrative composed much later? Or, is the real history somewhere between?

Two non-Hebrew inscribed texts produced by ancient Israel's close neighbors, the Moabites and the Arameans, figure prominently in this argument. Both texts appear to mention David, or least his dynasty, "house of David".

The earliest of the two texts is the so-called Tel Dan inscription (photo above, WSRP; line-drawing right, Yardeni 2002). Dating from ca. 900 B.C.E., what remains of this royal inscription are two pieces, pictured above. The text is written in the voice of an Aramean king—perhaps Haza'el of Damascus—who boasts of his victories over "[Jo]ram son of [A]hab, king of Israel," and "[A]haz]iah son of [Jehoram, ki]ng of the House of David."



It is, of course, the phrase ביתדוד "the House of David" that is crucial for the discussion of the figure of David. Some contend that the letters ביתדוד (without any division between the words) are to be read as "House of the Beloved." Most scholars, however, agree that this is a reference to the Davidic dynasty mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.

Can you identify the line in which the phrase in question is written? (Use the alphabet chart in the *Alphabet* handout as an aid.)



The Moabite stone, also called the Mesha Stele (photo at left, from the *Louvre*), is the only other, inscription to mention “the house of David.” Found in Dhiban, Jordan, in 1868, it wasn’t until 1994 that epigrapher André Lemaire proposed the presence of the phrase “house of David” in line 31 of the 34-line text.

Written as  $\text{בד}[\ ]\text{ת}$ , the first  $\text{ד}$  of David’s name is missing. Based on the phrase “king of Israel” in line 5 as well as the newly discovered Tel Dan stele, with its  $\text{ביתדוד}$ , Lemaire has proposed that the missing letter is in fact a  $\text{ד}$ .

In the line drawing to the right (Dearman 1989), can you identify the crucial phrases in lines 5 and 31? (Use the chart in the *Alphabet* handout as an aid.)

