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Discovery Of Important Inscriptions

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Biblical Archeology, Volume 4

Important Inscriptions

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Discovery Of Important Inscriptions

Archeology depends upon artifacts discovered from the ancient worlds for its task of reconstruction. It must never be forgotten that “reconstruction” is needed because in the present one know either very little, or even nothing at all, about the details of the ancient civilizations that one wishes to study. This was more so in the early stages of archeology when almost nothing was known about the ancient civilization, except what was known from the Bible or from secondary sources. However, the discovery of artifacts puts some boundaries on archeologists.

Artifacts are “objects” from the ancient world, but it is not always possible to interpret the purpose and role of “objects”. These may correspond in appearance with many things in the present world, but might have totally different purpose. Other objects might totally be different from the presently used object with which it shares something in common. The big question is, once you discover an object that may or may not look familiar, how do you interpret them. For example, if you find human and animal bones mingled in a cave, how do you interpret their interrelationship. Were the humans consumed by carnivorous animals who eventually perished in that cave, or were the animals hunted and consumed by the humans who finally died in the cave?

Or suppose a graveyard is found with scores of jars each with the skeletons of a little child. How does one interpret them. Do we interpret them as burial as part of human sacrifice? What justification can we give for such a deduction. This can also be the burial site for children who fell victims of, say smallpox. Since no flesh is preserved, all traces of smallpox, or plague or any other fatal disease, would almost be non-existent. Since children are buried in many civilizations in ways different from the way adults are buried, this is a definite possibility in times of plague.

A very interesting example from India comes to my mind. As of today I am in my early sixties. I live in a large cosmopolitan town. During my social visits, I often notice highly ornamental flower-vases displayed in rich

houses, totally different from what is commonly seen. Many of them have purchased these from antique-sellers at great price, and therefore they are an object of pride as well as symbol of status in the twenty-first-century cosmopolitan families. And almost none of the children know anything about these objects of beauty other than that they are antiques. If allowed to describe, they would describe these only as antique flower-vases only. However, they would be horrified to find the truth.



A Spittoon The Looks Like A Flower-vase

These antiques were used by people in Kerala, India, up to the middle of the 1900s as spittoons. Chewing tobacco was common in this state. Further, the moist climate of this state created copious amounts of phlegm among those who did so. Since the people were very conscious of hygiene, they would not spit here and there. Rather they used these spittoons which were emptied at dump-sites in their own large fields.

Further, metal-working [or any kind of handicraft] had risen to very high levels of perfection in this state, and as a consequence even the humble spittoon was highly symmetrical and ornate. However, just five decade after their used dropped from common life, the new generation discovered them in their attics or from antique-shops and began giving them the most honored position in their living-rooms, mainly because the shape and size

corresponds today to objects used for purposes totally different from what it was originally meant for. Only a person who has seen them in use would be able to fully enlighten people as to what these are.

Thus almost all major archeological finds can be interpreted in more than one way, and there needs to be something better than mere informed conjecture to cross-check the information with. And here comes the importance of inscriptions. The only objective solution is for someone from that culture to come and explain their culture, customs, philosophies, aspirations, and artifacts to us. This looks impossible, but precisely this has happened through inscriptions, clay/stone tablets, and other kinds of written documents.

The Importance Of Written Documents: A person contemporary with a society, and an integral part of it, is the best one to tell us the story of that civilization. No amount of deduction and speculation by people removed several millennia from him can be as accurate or as authentic as his statement.

Except for the twentieth century, writing material has never been as abundant in any other time in human history. Even in the twenty-first century, paper is not easily accessible to a large segment of population. Thus thinking of “writings” and inscriptions in civilizations four to six thousand years in the past looks ridiculous. Yet man has been a compulsive writer. In spite of the difficulty in getting materials, and in spite of the difficulty in the process of writing, people of the ancient civilizations have left such a vast collection of written material that it is impossible even to read and study all of them.

Written material from the past was discovered by many even in ancient times, but none had any clue as to what it meant, so they simply ignored such material. Many of the ancient statues, temples, and other such buildings also had inscriptions, but for most people [and even for scientists] they were more of a curiosity than something of lasting value. So much so that even in 1800s and 1900s people actively working in the fields of archeology and professional archeological societies kept ignoring inscriptions. Consequently, in 1700s and 1800s many smaller inscriptions were simply thrown away by archeologists who discovered them. Larger inscriptions and

manuscripts were stored in museums as things of lesser value, and little specific attention was paid to them. One reason was that none knew how to read them, and the task of deciphering them did not look sufficiently rewarding to many. And all this set archeological progress back by centuries.

It was only in the late 1800s and early 1900s that few individuals recognized the importance of written material for archeology. However all of them were faced with the task of deciphering the unknown scripts, languages which were not spoken for 2500 to 3000 years or more from the present era. Obviously, no living or dead person for the last two to three millennia had any idea of how these languages were read. Yet, as an increasing number of scholars and amateurs realized the importance of inscriptions, they kept working on deciphering the ancient languages.

Eventually there were many breakthroughs. Painstaking work from 10 to 25 years helped them to crack one language, and then another. Eventually a good number of languages spoken in Bible lands became accessible to scholars worldwide. This resulted in a large volume of translated material that in turn helped scholars and researchers to reconstruct history, sociology, laws, customs, and numerous other things about the ancient world.

Certain key finds helped in deciphering the ancient languages of the Biblical lands. Certain other key finds helped in understanding the basic chronology, geography, and interrelationship of many of these cultures. All of these put together gave researchers the tools needed to reconstruct the past. Of such discoveries, the most important writings are briefly listed below. Detailed information about each of these discoveries is given separately.

Important Discoveries [Writings/Inscriptions]: Discoveries from around the world have helped each others to advance archeology, but certain discoveries from countries in the Middle East have contributed the most to the development of archeology that helps Bible students. These are, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine. Some of the important documents discovered in these countries are:

Writings From Egypt: These include [among others], what are known as the Rosetta Stone, the Tell el-Amarna Letters, the Stela of Merneptah, the

Elephantine Papyri, and the Sinai Inscriptions [from outside Egypt].

Writings From Mesopotamia: These include [among others], Behistun Inscription, the Creation and Deluge Tablets [Epic of Creation, Sippar Tablet, Gilgamesh Epic, Nippur Tablet, other generally unnamed but important tablets from Nineveh, Nippur, Kish, etc], the Code of Hammurabi, the Mari Tablets, the Nuzi Tablets, the Records of Shalmaneser [his Monolith, Bronz Plates, Black Obelisk, etc], Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, Cylinder of Sargon II, Cylender of Sennacherib, Archives of Ashurbanipal, Babylonian Chronicle

Records From Syria: These include [among others], the Ras Shamra Tablets, the Gebal Inscriptions, the Dog River Gallery

Records From Palestine: These include [among others], the Lachish Letters, the Siloam Inscription, the Samaria Ostraka, the Moabite Stone, the Gezer Agricultural Tablet, the Lachish Ewer.

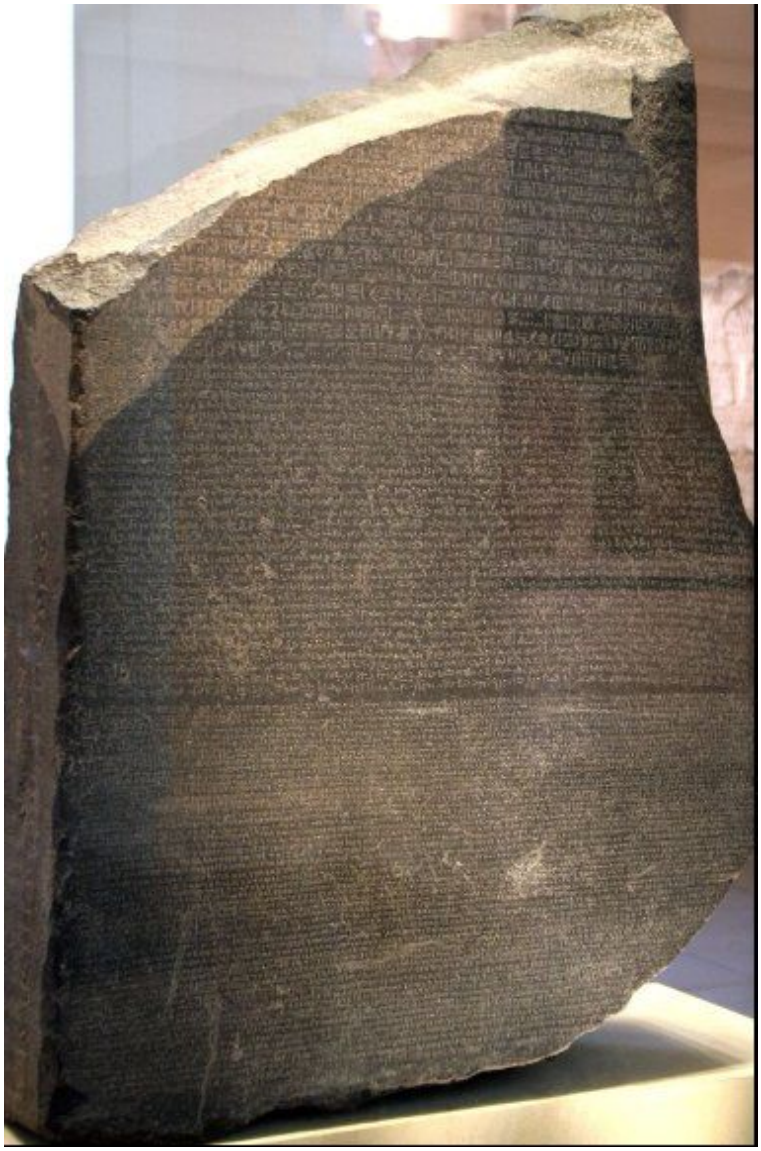
The above is only a sample list, mostly of early discoveries, and not exhaustive in any way. These and many others will be introduced in detail in other portions of this work.

The Rosetta Stone

Background, History, Deciphering, And Significance Of The Find

Of all the finds that can be called “keys” to the ancient languages, the Rosetta Stone occupies a very high position. The story is very fascinating, and is sketched below at some length along with much background information.

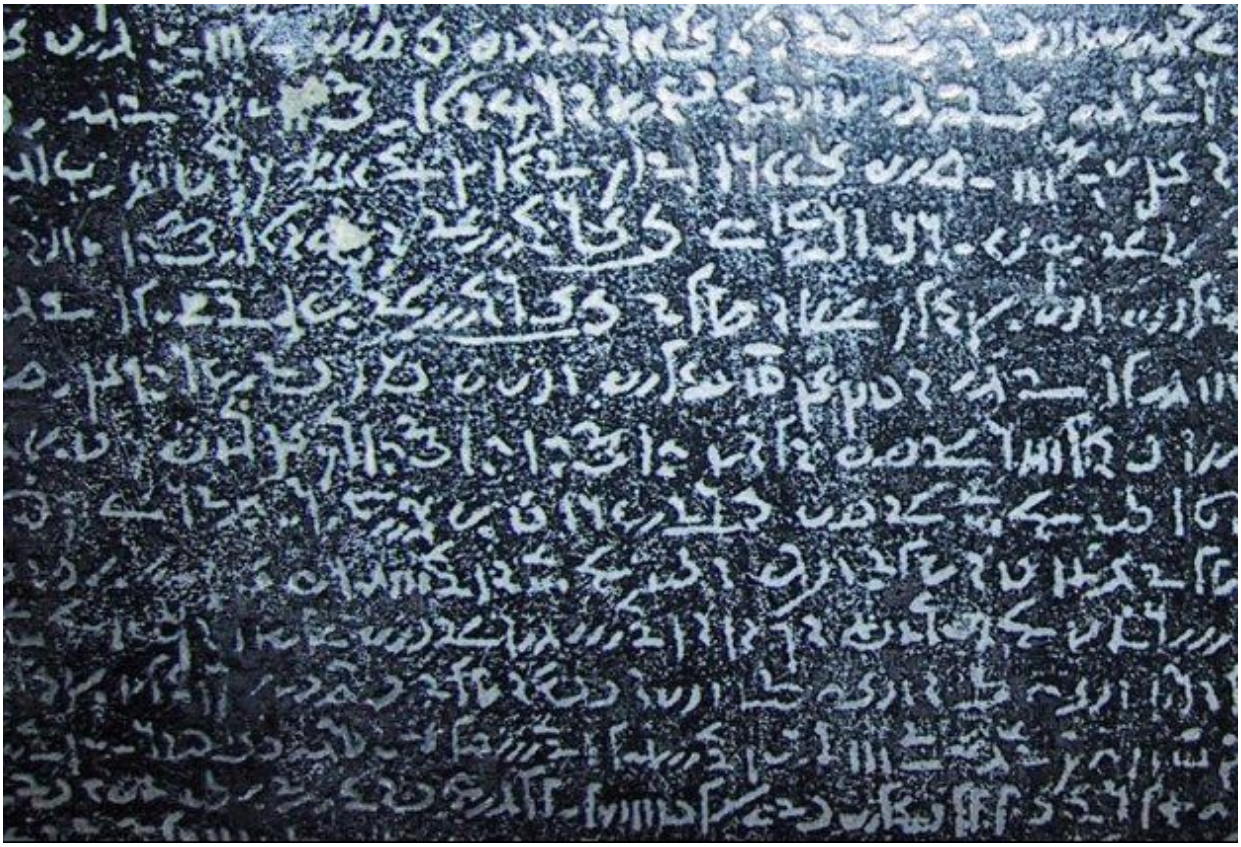
Background: Egypt was one of the most prosperous, technologically oriented, and literate countries in the ancient world. Scribes were held in very high esteem, and the people and the rulers of Egypt managed to leave copious amounts of written materials. Soft varieties of stones were available in plenty, which were hewn in geometrical shapes, with plain surfaces, and the surface was inscribed with history, stories, or any other information they cared to chisel on to it. Stone being infinitely more rugged than paper, the volume of inscriptions that became available from Egypt is more than the total output of all the contemporary nations put together.



Rosetta Stone By Nina Aldin Thune

A large number of Egyptian inscriptions in stone, practically imperishable, remained visible for thousands of years. But both the people of Egypt as well as outsiders almost completely forgot their language by the time of Christ. This happened when the Egyptians were influenced first by Persian intruders, then by Greek conquerors under Alexander, and then by the Romans. In 323 BC that the empire was divided after the death of Alexander, and Egypt fell to Ptolemy I, who was also called Pharaoh Ptolemy I. This was the last great Egyptian dynasty [32nd] and all of his male successors were called Ptolemy and all of his female succors were called Cleopatra.

The Ptolemies were Greeks who ruled Egypt for a very long time. They kept building temples in Egyptian style, but their language and lifestyle was exclusively Greek. As a consequence with the rise of Ptolemies, Greek began to dominate, with Egyptian still being used here and there but gradually falling out of use. Once the Romans conquered them, Latin became the prominent language, with an occasional Greek. Within a hundred years of Roman dominion, the Egyptian language fell dead. So much so that none was able to understand anything of the Egyptian, and some of the Roman thinkers even went so far as to claim that these inscriptions were only some kind of decoration and not in any way connected to any language. Since the pictorial language was made up of pictures resembling many real objects, it was natural for this viewpoint to go unchallenged. All was then forgotten for a long time, till the medical doctors developed a fascination for mummies.



Demotic Script From A Replica Of Rosetta Stone, By Chris 73

In the Middle Ages, bitumen with ground up mummies, was a widely used cure for many ailments. This set up a big ring of smuggling from Egypt into

Europe of excavated mummies. Obviously, the grave-robbers often came across things other than mummies. Often much more valuable than the mummies, these were also other discoveries such as artifacts made up of precious metals and stones. These artifacts found eager buyers in Europe, and with time Egyptian antiquities became a status symbol in Europe. With this there was an increased demand, now for attractive and displayable artifacts. This in truth brought a large number of artifacts with inscriptions to Europe.

With the rise of love for knowledge, many in Europe tried their hand upon discovering the Egyptian civilization. Hieroglyphics also received due attention, and unlike the Romans, many of them recognized them as picture-languages. However, the alphabet, vocabulary, and language was not so totally forgotten that only a miracle could give them a breakthrough. In 1633 a highly learned Jesuit priest named Anthanasius Kircher, who had a background in humanities, science, languages, and religion was finally able to decipher one word. The word was “autocrat” and he translated the world from Egypt by substituting ideas for the images that represented this word. This was a great beginning to decipher the Egyptian Hieroglyphics.

A vigorous debate ensued among scholars in 1600s and 1700s about the nature and purpose of Hieroglyphics. Some still maintained that they are not a language. However, most of them came to the conclusion that it is a picture-based language where the pictures represent real objects, symbols, or ideas. There was considerable debate as to whether they could also be considered as alphabets of the language.

Meanwhile, the interest in ancient civilizations was growing, and such study was becoming part of the mainstream. Some people thus began taking a deeper interest in ancient civilizations, one whom as Napoleon. And finally it was a discovery by one of his men which finally unlocked the mystery of Egyptian Hieroglyphic, and related scripts. The Rosetta Stone was the key to this breakthrough.

The Discovery Of Rosetta Stone: In 1998 he troops went to Egypt for battle with the British who then controlled Egypt. He took 1000 civilians with him, of whom 167 were scientists, technicians, mathematicians, and artists. Their job was to study the art, architecture, and culture of Egypt

during what was labeled “and extended vacation”. Napoleon reminded that several millennia of history is looking at them as they look upon the pyramids and monuments of Egypt.

The group did a thorough study, and from 1809 to 1828 published a 19-volume work called “Description of Egypt”. The books contained plenty of pictures and comments, and their circulation in Europe created a strong interest in Egypt and its antiquity. The stage was set for a new chapter in Archeology.

Back in Egypt, the soldiers paid little attentions to things related to Archeology, and indiscriminately dug up stones from pervious constructions for building/strengthening forts for their own purposes. In 1799, while working this way on the extension of a fortress near Rosetta [or Rashid, a small city near Alexandria] they stumbled upon a large stone with ancient inscriptions. It was a black basalt stone, three feet nine inches long, two feet four inches wide, and eleven inches thick. The black stone contained writing in three distinct languages, one after another. This was eventually called the Rosetta Stone. A portion of the upper section was missing, but a thorough search did not yield any result.

Providentially, the stone fell into the hands of Pierre-Francois Bouchar, a young French officer. Though he was unable to understand the writings, he felt it might be of quite some importance, the stone was sent to Cairo. There the scholars brought by Napoleon noticed that the stone contains inscriptions in Hieroglyphics, followed by Demotic [an easier script used later in Egypt, having great affinity to the Coptic language], followed by ancient Greek.

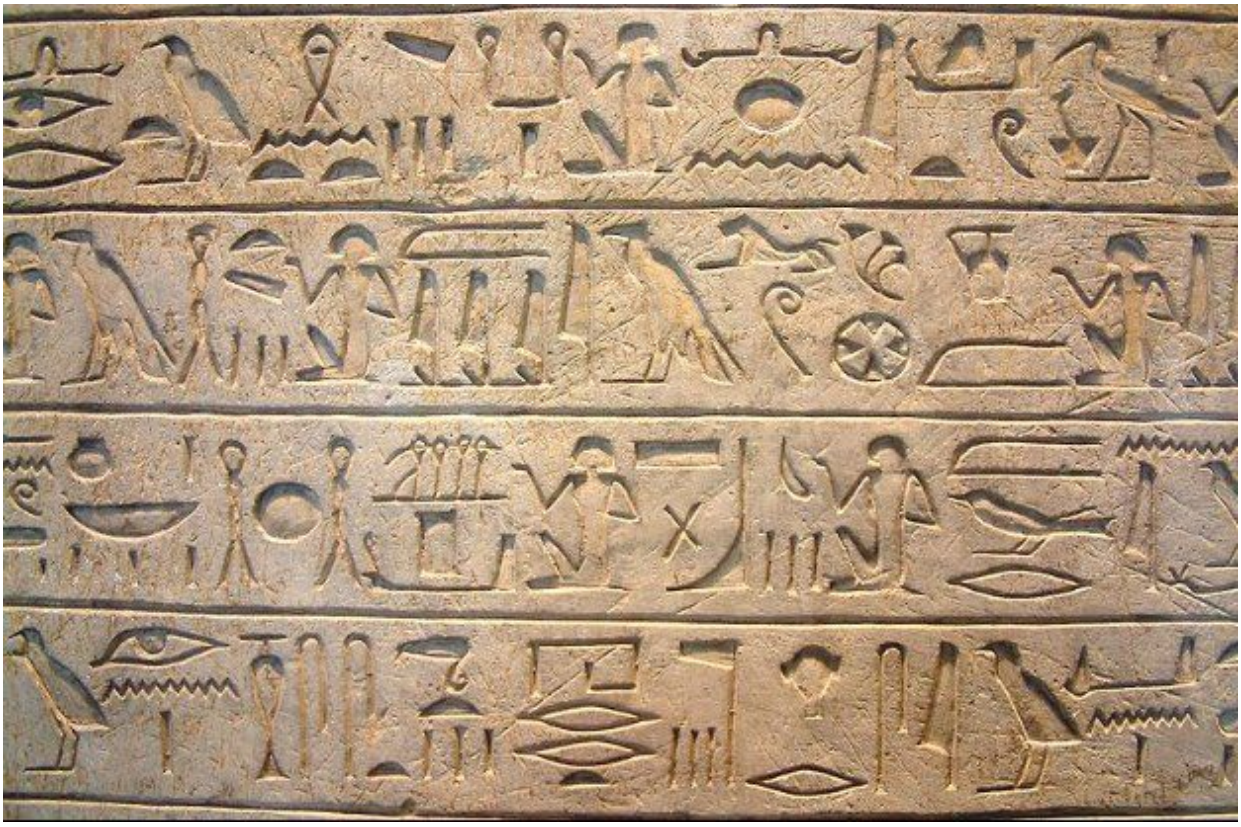
At Cairo Napoleon’s scholars were able to read the lowest, Greek, inscriptions without much difficulty. On doing so, the last statement caught their attention. It said “this decree shall be inscribed on a stela of hard stone in sacred [hieroglyphics], native [demotic], and Greek characters”. This alerted the French scholars to the possibility of some breakthrough in deciphering the dead languages. Napoleon then gave orders for copies of the trilingual inscription to be sent to Paris. Techniques of making accurate impressions of such inscriptions was were already available, so copies were sent to Paris. Scholars in many places were also able to obtain the

impressions for study. Soon the scholarly world realized that this inscription might hold the key to the lost language of the Egyptians, and work began in earnest. However, it turned out to be more difficult that anyone could have guessed, but the end result was tremendously rewarding.

Meanwhile Rosetta Stone itself went through a sojourn of itself. One of Napoleon's men acquired it as a souvenir, and it became a family property in Europe. The scholarly world had lost track of the original stone. It was passed on to several generations as a possession of one of their granddads. Eventually it was sold in a junk market, where an Oxford professor of Egyptology holidaying in France spotted it. He acquired it, brought to Oxford and showed it to to many. They were able to get some breakthrough, but none could decipher the hieroglyphics. The stone remained in the college for many years, when finally an under graduate student happened to examine it. He was stunned to notice that the stone contained the same passage inscribed in three languages, and hence possibly contained the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Today the stone rests, with proper respect, in the British Museum.

A History Of Deciphering The Rosetta Stone: After Napoleon's scholars made an informal translation of the Greek text, they sent the text as well as impressions of the stones to scholars in France, and soon it reached the scholarly community in the rest of the Europe. Reverend Stephen Weston produced the first scholarly and formal translation, and presented it in a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in London in April 1802. During the same year, the French orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy started working on the Demotic Script.



Hieroglyphic Script

The Egyptians had used hieroglyphic script for almost 3500 years, till the arrival of the Greek pharaohs. It was a tough language, with a minimum of 1000 alphabets. At the peak they had as many as 6000 symbols used as alphabet. Once Greek began to be used widely in Egypt, a simplified form of the Egyptian language evolved, often called the Demotic. It was a script using Greek alphabet, with seven additional characters derived from hieroglyphics. In this form it was known as Coptic. This had many similarities with modern Coptic, and that helped the scholars. At the same time it should not be forgotten that only the script was Greek, and the language was the unknown Egyptian. Thus a straightforward understanding was not easily possible.

The Demotic Script: Sylvestre de Sacy began his work with the assumption that the cursively written demotic script was alphabetic in nature. Alphabetic languages have a sound associated with each alphabet, while pictographic languages have a meaning associated with each symbol. Using this assumption, he tried first to identify proper names in the demotic script that corresponded to the already identified proper names in Greek.

This was easier said than done as the correspondence between the demotic and Greek was mostly in name and not in pronunciation. Further, they did not have spacing between words, or punctuation marks between sentences, leaving the scholar to decide where to break each word. The mistake of just one symbol would throw the whole study off course. Finally he was able to identify the names of Ptolemy and Alexander, but was unable to identify the pronunciation of individual letters in this name and gave up.

John Akerblad, a Swedish diplomat and a pupil of de Sacy then began working on the demotic, and made some more breakthroughs. He knew modern Coptic language, which was used by the Coptic Church of Egypt. He was able to identify all the proper names that occurred in the Greek letters used in the demotic script, and from them constructed a "demotic alphabet" of twenty-nine letters. Using this alphabet, he was able to identify some words such as him, his, temple, and love. By doing this he also demonstrated that the demotic script was was phonetic, and that it was translatable. This was a great breakthrough, and eventually half of the alphabets identified by him stood the test of time. The only serious error made him was his assumption that the entire demotic script was alphabetic, and later breakthroughs corrected this error. However, this happened only AFTER they hieroglyphic script was deciphered.

Akerblad, de Sacy, and even Jean-Francois Champollion contributed much to decipher the demotic script, but none was able to get the final and complete breakthrough. The person who made the final breakthrough was the German scholar Heinrich Karl Brugsch. After years of research, he published a complete translation of the demotic writing in 1850.

2. The Hieroglyphic Text: A copy of the Rosetta Stone came to the attention of the British physicist Dr. Thomas Young, who took deep interest in deciphering the scripts. In the light of previous work and their inability to get a complete breakthrough, he made the following assumptions:

1. At least some of the demotic signs were NOT alphabetic
2. Some of the demotic signs were simpler derivatives of hieroglyphic signs
3. The Egyptian characters for Ptolemy would have the same sound as the Greek letters

He began developing his work on the basis of the above assumptions. He was successful in determining that foreign names could not be represented by pure pictographic or idiographic symbols because symbols are based upon the regional words used in a language. Thus foreign names had to be spelled phonetically. On the basis of this he assumed that the cartouches, characters enclosed in an oval boundaries, must be proper names of foreigners, spelled phonetically. Using these assumption he was able to decipher five cartouches. Publication of this information had far-reaching results in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Meanwhile he was able to get help from an obelisk excavated at Philae in 1815. On this obelisk he was able to identify the hieroglyphic symbols for Bernice and Cleopatra. This in turn helped him to establish a partial “alphabet” for the hieroglyphic script. He could not make any more progress due to his [and the contemporary] wrong assumption that the demotic and hieroglyphic scripts were primarily symbolic languages where the picture of a hawk refers to a hawk and so on.

Finally the young French linguist Jean-Francois Champollion is the one who was able to crack the Egyptian hieroglyphics. He was 18 years old when he started his working 1808, and it took him 14 years to study to conclude his work in 1822. He based hi work on the following brilliant assumptions:

1. The later Egyptian Coptic script represented the final stage of the ancient language of the pharaohs.

2. Hieroglyphs were used both as ideograms [pictures that represent a concept or thing] and as phonograms [pictures that represent sounds].

3. Hieroglyphs enclosed in a cartouche [an oval shaped loop encircling a group of hieroglyphs] were phonetic transcriptions of the Pharaoh’s names.

Many others had come to the same or similar conclusions, but none of them had come to the complete framework laid down by Champollion. Further the erroneous assumptions of earlier researchers interfered with the correct assumptions they had made. Champollion was able to use the collective wisdom of his forerunners and hindsight to come to the best possible assumptions. He knew Coptic, so by looking at the demotic script [Old

Coptic] of the text, he was able to figure out what the seven demotic signs in coptic were. He then used these to study their corresponding symbols in hieroglyphics, and that was the first breakthrough. Each insight helped him to inch into the text, and finally he was able to read almost the whole of the hieroglyphic. In 1822 new inscriptions from a temple of Abu Simbel on the Nile came to Europe, and Champollion was able to correctly identify the name of the Pharaoh Ramses who had built the temple.

The result of the breakthrough was announced in 1822 in a letter he sent to the French Royal Academy of Inscriptions. In this letter he explained basic concepts of the hieroglyphic scripts, and the world of Egyptology has never been the same after that. Utilizing his knowledge of Coptic he continued to translate the hieroglyphics, making the art of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics ever more accurate.

The Scientific Value Of The Rosetta Stone: Studying ancient civilizations related to the Bible has become a compelling need for Christians. On the other hand, it is a compelling hobby for lovers of knowledge. But both of them need breakthroughs in critical areas if they have to objectively interpret what now remains from these objectively.

Inscriptions from a culture furnish the most objective information. Further, they preserve for us what cannot be seen in artifacts, such as history of the nation. However, the languages of almost all ancient civilizations is already dead. Even the language in which the New Testament was written is no longer spoken anywhere. Thus nobody can read the inscriptions unless one is able to decipher them.

Though a vast number of inscriptions from Egypt were available, it became possible to read them only because of the Rosetta Stone. Thus it has a very high position in the annals of archeology.

A Note On Hieroglyphic Inscriptions

Hieroglyphs are signs that indicate sound [called phonograms] or even complete words [called ideograms]. Like the ancient Hebrew, it used only consonants. Thus “in the beginning God” would look like “NTHBGNNNGGD” in these languages, making the task of reading [and deciphering] extremely difficult. The task becomes all the more difficult when only the same consonants are there for more than one word without vowels. For example in such a language GD can represent God, good, goad etc. Since the context in which a certain ancient Egyptian record was produced in not always known, it is difficult to find the right word out of the possible words. Fortunately the Egyptians did have a way indicating the difference, using symbols that are now called the determinatives.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions usually written in rows from right to left. However, some wrote from left to right, and even in vertical columns, making the task of reading difficult for modern researchers. The direction towards which animals or people faced usually told the direction of writing but it was not followed strictly. Three kinds of hieroglyphic scripts were used by the Egyptians:

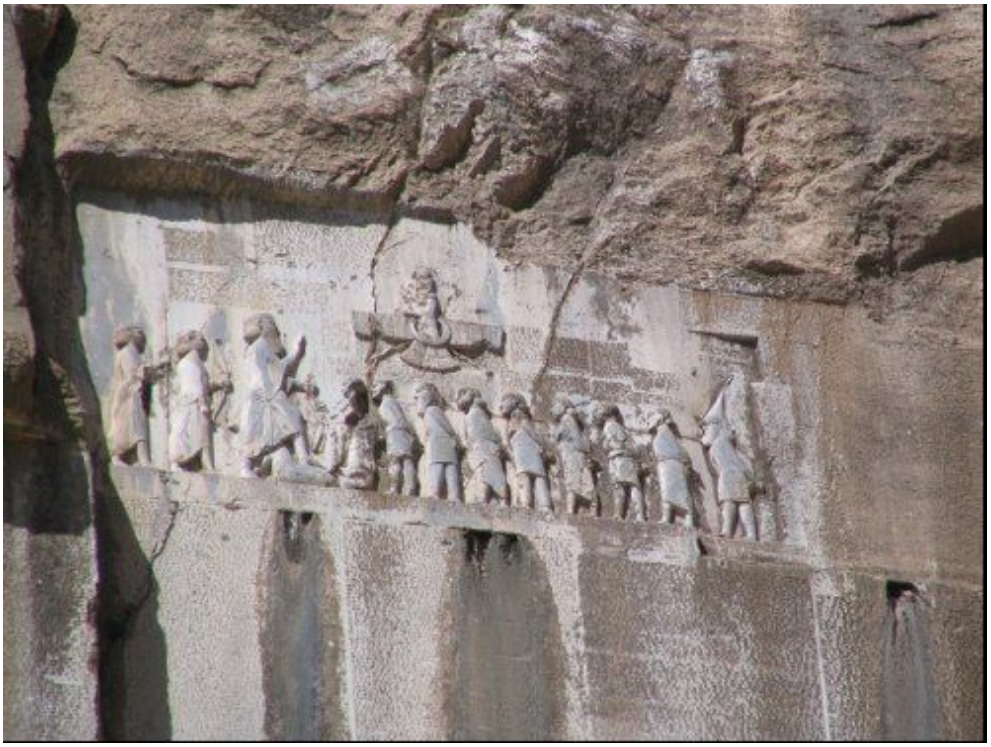
Hieroglyphs: this was a formal script, used for inscriptions on tombs, temples, commemorative stall, official or religious dedications, etc.

Hieratic: this was a simpler, cursive, form of hieroglyphs. It was easier and faster to write in this script, so it was employed liberally in everyday administrative and business writings.

Demotic: this was a popular version of the script. During the reign of the pharaoh Ptolemies, [330 BC to 20 BC], this became the most common form of Egyptian-language writing. Thus it is the second script on the Rosetta stone, immediately after the hieroglyphic writing.

The Behistun Inscription

The Behistun Inscription (also Bisitun or Bisutun, Modern Persian: بیستون ; Old Persian: Bagastana, meaning “the god’s place or land”) is a multi-lingual inscription located on Mount Behistun in the Kermanshah Province of Iran, near the town of Kermanshah.



The Behistun Inscription

The inscription includes three versions of the same text, written in three different cuneiform script languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. A British army officer, Henry Rawlinson, had the inscription transcribed in two parts, in 1835 and 1843. Rawlinson was able to translate the Old Persian cuneiform text in 1838, and the Elamite and Babylonian texts were translated by Rawlinson and others after 1843. Babylonian was a later form of Akkadian: both are Semitic languages. In effect, then, the inscription is to cuneiform what the Rosetta Stone is to Egyptian hieroglyphs: the document most crucial in the decipherment of a previously lost script.



A Closeup Drawing Of The Behistun Inscription

The inscription is approximately 15 metres high by 25 metres wide, and 100 metres up a limestone cliff from an ancient road connecting the capitals of Babylonia and Media (Babylon and Ecbatana). It is extremely inaccessible as the mountainside was removed to make the inscription more visible after its completion. The Old Persian text contains 414 lines in five columns; the Elamite text includes 593 lines in eight columns and the Babylonian text is in 112 lines. The inscription was illustrated by a life-sized bas-relief of Darius, holding a bow as a sign of kingship, with his left foot on the chest of a figure lying on his back before him. The prostrate figure is reputed to be the pretender Gaumata. Darius is attended to the left by two servants, and ten one-meter figures stand to the right, with hands tied and rope around their necks, representing conquered peoples. Faravahar floats above, giving his blessing to the king. One figure appears to have been added after the others were completed, as was (oddly enough) Darius' beard, which is a separate block of stone attached with iron pins and lead.

In Ancient History: The first historical mention of the inscription is by the Greek Ctesias of Cnidus, who noted its existence some time around 400 BC, and mentions a well and a garden beneath the inscription dedicated by Queen Semiramis of Babylon to Zeus (the Greek analogue of Ahura Mazda). Tacitus also mentions it and includes a description of some of the long-lost ancillary monuments at the base of the cliff, including an altar to Hercules. What has been recovered of them, including a statue dedicated in 148 BC, is consistent with Tacitus' description. Diodorus also writes of "Bagistanon" and claims it was inscribed by Queen Semiramis.

After the fall of the Persian Empire and its successors, and the fall of cuneiform writing into disuse, the nature of the inscription was forgotten and fanciful origins became the norm. For centuries, instead of being attributed to Darius — one of the first Persian kings — it was believed to be from the reign of Chosroes II of Persia — one of the last.

A legend arose that it had been created by Farhad, a lover of Chosroes' wife, Shirin. Exiled for his transgression, Farhad is given the task of cutting away the mountain to find water; if he succeeds, he will be given permission to marry Shirin. After many years and the removal of half the mountain, he does find water, but is informed by Chosroes that Shirin had died. He goes mad, throws his axe down the hill, kisses the ground and dies. It is told in the book of Chosroes and Shirin that his axe was made out of a Pomegranate tree, and where he threw the axe a Pomegranate tree grew with fruit that would cure the ill. Shirin is not dead, naturally, and mourns upon hearing the news.



A More Recent Picture

Translation: The inscription was noted by an Arab traveler, Ibn Hawqal, in the mid-900s, who interpreted the figures as a teacher punishing his pupils. It was not until 1598, when the Englishman Robert Sherley saw the inscription during a diplomatic mission to Persia on behalf of Austria, that the inscription first came to the attention of western European scholars. His party came to the conclusion that it was a picture of the ascension of Jesus with an inscription in Greek.

Erroneous interpretations by Europeans were rife for the next two centuries. French General Gardanne thought it showed Christ and his twelve apostles, and Sir Robert Ker Porter thought it represented the 12 tribes of Israel and Shalmaneser of Assyria. Italian explorer Pietro della Valle visited the inscription in the course of a pilgrimage in around 1621, and German surveyor Carsten Niebuhr visited in around 1764 while exploring Arabia and the middle east for Frederick V of Denmark, publishing a copy of the inscription in the account of his journeys in 1777. Niebuhr's transcriptions were used by Georg Friedrich Grotefend and others in their efforts to decipher the Old Persian cuneiform script. Grotefend had deciphered ten of the 37 symbols of Old Persian by 1802.

Eventually other scholars built their work upon it and came to a full understanding. This work helped to find the equivalence between Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian, opening up yet another chapter in reading ancient documents in these languages.

The Mesha Stele

The Mesha Stele (popularized in the 19th century as the “Moabite Stone”) is a black basalt stone, bearing an inscription by the 9th century BC Moabite King Mesha, discovered in 1868 at Dhiban (biblical “Dibon,” capital of Moab). The inscription of 34 lines is written in the Moabite language. It is the most extensive inscription ever recovered that refers to ancient Israel. It was set up by Mesha, about 850 BC, as a record and memorial of his victories in his revolt against the Kingdom of Israel, undertaken after the death of his overlord, Ahab.



Mesha Stele Or Moabite Stone

The stone is 124 cm high and 71 cm wide and deep, and rounded at the top. It was discovered at the ancient Dibon now Dhiban, Jordan, in August 1868, by Rev. F. A. Klein, a German missionary in Jerusalem. “The Arabs of the neighborhood, dreading the loss of such a talisman, broke the stone into

pieces; but a squeeze had already been obtained by Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau, and most of the fragments were recovered and pieced together by him". A squeeze is a papier-mâché impression. The squeeze (which has never been published) and the reassembled stele (which has been published in many books and encyclopedias) are now in the Louvre Museum.

Contents: The stele, which measures 44″x27″, describes the following:

1. How Moab was conquered by Omri, King of Israel, as the result of the anger of the god Chemosh. Mesha's victories over Omri's son (not mentioned by name), over the men of Gad at Ataroth, and at Nebo and Jehaz;

2. His public buildings, restoring the fortifications of his strong places and building a palace and reservoirs for water; and

3. His wars against the Horonaim.

This inscription can be interpreted as supplementing and corroborating the history of King Mesha recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27, thereby earning it a prominent place in the corpus of Biblical archaeology. However there are significant differences. In the Bible it is Ahab, Omri's son, who conquers Moab, and the rebellion is against Ahab's son Jehoram. Further, in the Bible, it is not Chemosh who gives victory to Mesha but Jahweh who gives victory to Jehoram. Israel withdraws, according to the Book of Kings, only because they are disconcerted when they see Mesha sacrifice his son.

With the exception of a very few variations, such as -in for -im in plurals, the Moabite language of the inscription shares much in common with an early form of Hebrew, known as Biblical Hebrew. The language of ninth century BC Moabite inscriptions is an offshoot of the Canaanite language commonly in use between the fourteenth to eighth centuries BC in Syria-Palestine. The form of the letters here used supplies very important and interesting information regarding the history of the formation of the alphabet, as well as, incidentally, the arts of civilized life of those times in the land of Moab. This ancient monument, recording the heroic struggles of King Mesha with Omri and Ahab, was erected about 850 BC. Here "we have the identical slab on which the workmen of the old world carved the history of their own times,

and from which the eye of their contemporaries read thousands of years ago the record of events of which they themselves had been the witnesses."

In 1994, after examining both the Mesha Stele and the paper squeeze of it in the Louvre Museum, the French scholar André Lemaire reported that line 31 of the Mesha Stele bears the phrase "the house of David". Lemaire had to supply one destroyed letter, the first "D" in "[D]avid," to decode the wording. The complete sentence in the latter part of line 31 would then read, "As for Horonen, there lived in it the house of [D]avid," וחורנן. ישב. בה. בת[ד]וד. (Note: square brackets [ ] enclose letters or words that have been supplied where letters were destroyed or were on fragments that are still missing.) Most scholars find that no other letter supplied there yields a reading that makes sense. Baruch Margalit attempted to supply a different letter there: "m," along with several other letters in places after that. The reading that resulted was "Now Horoneyn was occupied at the en[d] of [my pre]decessor['s reign] by [Edom]ites." However, Margalit's reading has failed to attract any significant support in scholarly publications.

In 2001, another French scholar, Pierre Bordreuil, reported (in an essay in French) that he and a few other scholars could not confirm Lemaire's reading of "the house of David" in line 31 of the stele

Whereas the later mention of the "House of David" on a Tel Dan stele fragment was written by an Aramaean enemy king, this inscription comes from a Moabite enemy of Israel, also boasting of a victory. If Lemaire is right, there are now two early references to David's dynasty, one in the Mesha Stele (mid-9th century) and the other in the Tel Dan Stele (mid-9th to mid-8th century).

The identifications of the biblical Mesha, king of Moab, and of the biblical Omri, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, in the Mesha stele are generally accepted by the scholarly community, especially because what is said about them in the narrative of the Mesha stele agrees well with the narrative in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles.

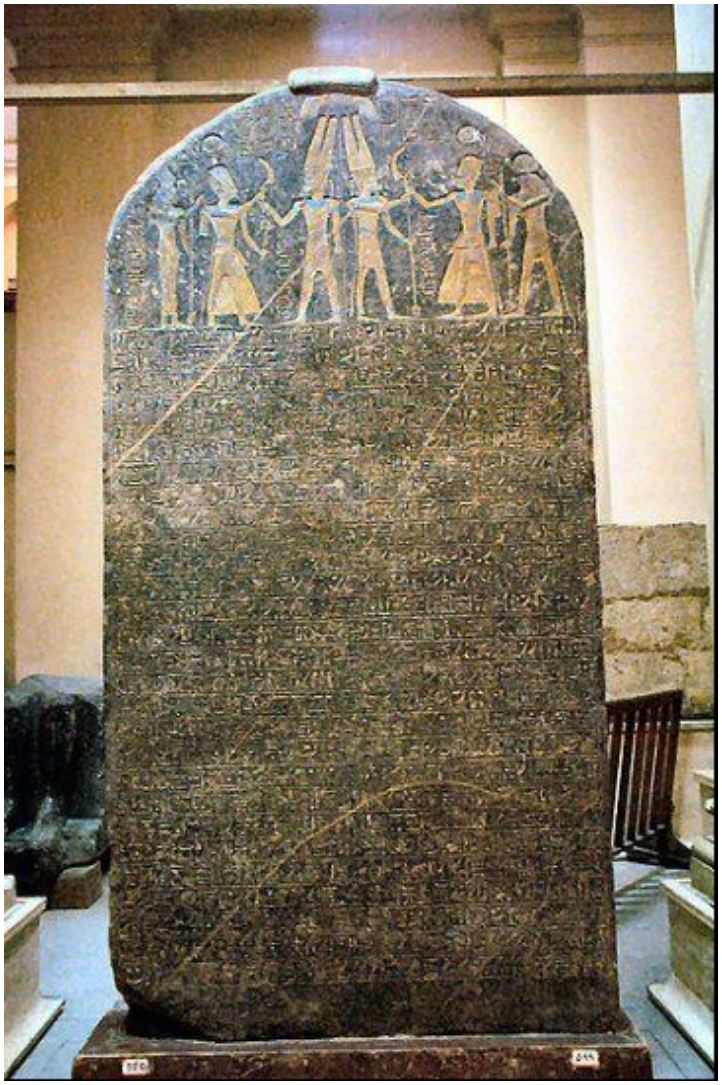
The identification of David in the Mesha stele, however, needs more investigation. This is partly from the fragmentary state of line 31 of the Mesha stele and partly from a tendency since the 1990s, largely among European scholars, to question or dismiss the historical reliability of the

Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). In Europe, P. R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson, and Niels P. Lemche show a strong tendency to reject biblical historicity and are highly prejudiced against anything that shows the reliability of the Bible, whereas André Lemaire, K. A. Kitchen, Jens Bruun Kofoed, and other European scholars are exceptions to this tendency. Many scholars lean in one direction or the other but few actually occupy the middle ground. In general, North American and Israeli scholars tend to be more willing to accept the identification of the biblical King David in the Mesha stele. The discussion over whether ancient inscriptions confirm the existence of the King David mentioned in the Bible usually focuses less on the Mesha stele and more on the Tel Dan stele.

The Stele is also significant in that it mentions the Hebrew name of God – YHWH. It is thought to be one of the earliest known reference to the sacred name in any artifact.

Merneptah Stele

Also known as the Israel Stele or Victory Stele of Merneptah, it is the reverse of a large granite stele originally erected by the Ancient Egyptian king Amenhotep III, but later inscribed by Merneptah who ruled Egypt from 1213 to 1203 BC. The black granite stela primarily commemorates a victory in a campaign against the Libu and Meshwesh Libyans and their Sea People allies, but its final two lines refer to a prior military campaign in Canaan in which Merneptah states that he defeated Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam and Israel among others. The stele was discovered in the first court of Merneptah's mortuary temple at Thebes by Flinders Petrie in 1896. Petrie remarked "This stele will be better known in the world than anything else I have found" and is now in the collection of the Egyptian Museum at Cairo; a fragmentary copy of the stele was also found at Karnak. It stands some ten feet tall, and its text is mainly a prose report with a poetic finish, mirroring other Egyptian New Kingdom stelae of the time. The stela is dated to Year 5, 3rd month of Shemu (summer), day 3 (c.1209/1208 BC), and begins with a laudatory recital of Merneptah's achievements in battle.



Merneptah Stele

The stele has gained much fame for being the only Ancient Egyptian document generally accepted as mentioning “Isrir” or “Israel”. It is also, by far, the earliest known attestation of Israel. For this reason, many scholars refer to it as the “Israel stele”. This title is somewhat misleading because the stele is clearly not concerned about Israel— in fact, it mentions Israel only in passing. There is only one line about Israel: “Israel is wasted, bare of seed” or “Israel lies waste, its seed no longer exists” and very little about the region of Canaan. Israel is simply grouped together with three other defeated states in Canaan (Gezer, Yanoam and Ashkelon) in the stele. Merneptah inserts just a single stanza to the Canaanite campaigns but multiple stanzas to his defeat of the Libyans. The line referring to Merneptah’s Canaanite

campaign reads: Canaan is captive with all woe. Ashkelon is conquered, Gezer seized, Yanoam made nonexistent; Israel is wasted, bare of seed.

Merneptah's campaign: There is disagreement among anti-Bible thinkers about the the admission that Assyria had lost in battle. The argue that, as a stela by Merneptah's predecessor Ramesses II about the Battle of Kadesh indicates firm control of the Levant, making it strange that Merneptah had to reconquer it – unless Merneptah had faced a revolt in this region that he felt compelled to crush in order to exert Egypt's authority over Canaan. In this case, Merneptah's control over Canaan was precarious at best. However, disclaiming historical documents that support the Bible has become fashionable among radical scholars, and their biased opinions should not be taken seriously.

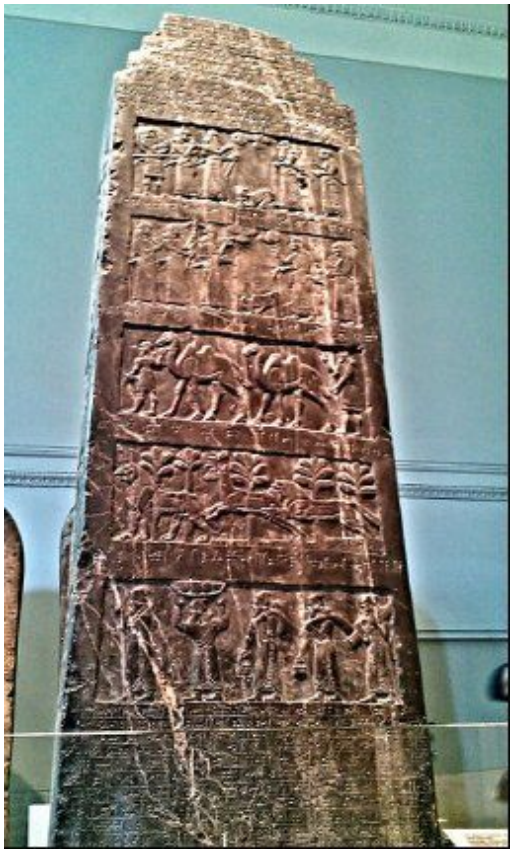
Mention of Israel: The stela does make clear that Israel, at this stage, refers to a people since a hieroglyphic determinative for "country" is absent regarding Israel. The next non-Biblical source about Israel, detailing a campaign against Moab by Omri, appears some 300 years later in the Mesha Stele. Regardless, the stele is an important source for Israelite history simply because it is the first official record in history of an "Israel", even if this record does not explain much.

An explanation offered by Michael G. Hasel, director of the Institute of Archaeology at Southern Adventist University, is that Israel was already a well established political force in Canaan in the late 13th century BCE: "Israel functioned as an agriculturally based or sedentary socio-ethnic entity in the late 13th century BCE one that is significant enough to be included in the military campaign against political powers in Canaan. While the Merneptah stela does not give any indication of the actual social structure of the people of Israel, it does indicate that Israel was a significant socio-ethnic entity that needed to be reckoned with."

The stela provides much insight into history of Bible times.

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

The “Black Obelisk” of Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 BC) is a black limestone Neo-Assyrian bas-relief sculpture from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), in northern Iraq. Height: 197.85 cm. Width: 45.08 cm. It is currently displayed in the British Museum.



Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

It is the most complete Assyrian obelisk yet discovered, and is historically significant because it displays the earliest ancient depiction of an Israelite. It was erected as a public monument in 825 BCE at a time of civil war. It was discovered by archaeologist Sir Henry Layard in 1846.

The obelisk features twenty reliefs, five on each side. They depict five different subdued kings, bringing tribute and prostrating before the Assyrian

king. From top to bottom they are: (1) Sua of Gilzanu (in north-west Iran), (2) “Jehu of Bit Omri” (Jehu of the House of Omri), (3) an unnamed ruler of Musri (probably Egypt), (4) Marduk-apil-usur of Suhi (middle Euphrates, Syria and Iraq), and (5) Qalparunda of Patin (Antakya region of Turkey). Each scene occupies four panels around the monument and is described by a cuneiform script above them.

The second register from the top includes the earliest surviving picture of an Israelite: the Biblical Jehu, king of Israel. It describes how Jehu brought or sent his tribute in or around 841 BCE.

Jehu severed Israel’s alliances with Phoenicia and Judah, and became subject to Assyria. The caption above the scene, written in Assyrian cuneiform, can be translated:

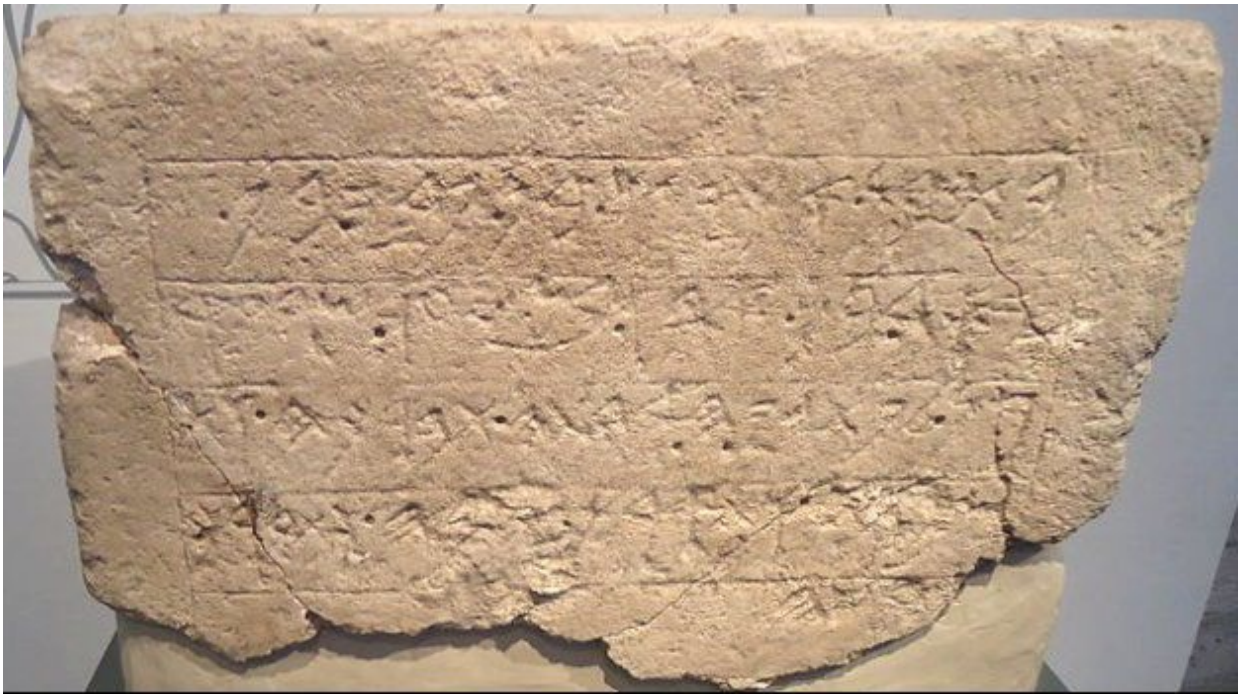
“The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.”

On the top and the bottom of the reliefs there is a long cuneiform inscription recording the annals of Shalmaneser III. It lists the military campaigns which the king and his commander-in-chief headed every year, until the thirty-first year of reign. Some features might suggest that the work had been commissioned by the commander-in-chief, Dayyan-Assur.

This inscription provides valuable historical information related to Biblical history.

Ekron Inscription

The city of Ekron (Hebrew: עֶקְרוֹן ʿeqrōn, also transliterated Accaron) was one of the five cities of the famed Philistine ‘pentapolis,’ located in southwestern Canaan.



The Ekron Inscription

During the Iron Age, Ekron was a border city on the frontier contested between Philistia and the kingdom of Judah. Located at a site now known as Tel Mikne (or Tel Miqne), its identification with the Biblical city was possible due to its presence in the small Palestinian village of Akir, whose name is thought to be derived from the ancient name. Akir was among hundreds of villages destroyed and depopulated in the 1948 Israeli-Arab War).

Ekron lies 35 kilometers west of Jerusalem, and 18 kilometers north of Gath, on the western edge of the inner coastal plain. Excavations in 1981-1996 at the low square tel have made Ekron one of the best documented Philistine sites.

Ekron was a settlement of the indigenous Canaanites. The Canaanite city had shrunk in the years before its main public building burned in the thirteenth century BCE; it was refounded by Philistines at the beginning of the Iron Age, ca 1200s BCE.

Ekron is mentioned in the Book of Joshua 13:2-3: “This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites from Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron.”

Joshua 3:13 counts it the border city of the Philistines and seat of one of the five Philistine city lords, and Joshua 15:11 mentions Ekron’s satellite towns and villages. The city was reassigned afterwards to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:43), but came again into the full possession of the Philistines. It was the last place to which the Philistines carried the ark before they sent it back to Israel (1 Samuel 5:10; 6:1-8).

There was here a noted sanctuary of Baal. The Baal who was worshipped was called Baal Zebul, which some scholars connect with Beelzebub, known from the Hebrew Bible: (2 Kings 1:2): “Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber at Samaria and was injured. So he sent messengers whom he instructed: “Go inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.” (JPS translation)

Non-Hebrew sources also refer to Ekron. The siege of Ekron in 712 BCE is depicted on one of Sargon II’s wall reliefs in his palace at Khorsabad, which names the city. Ekron revolted against Sennacherib and expelled Padi, his governor, who was sent to Hezekiah, at Jerusalem, for safe-keeping. Sennacherib marched against Ekron and the Ekronites called upon the aid of the king of Mutsri. Sennacherib turned aside to defeat this army, which he did at Eltekeh, and then returned and took the city by storm, put to death the leaders of the revolt and carried their adherents into captivity. This campaign led to the famous attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah and Jerusalem, in which Sennacherib compelled Hezekiah to restore Padi, who was reinstated as governor at Ekron.

Excavations in the temple complex at Tel Miqne in 1996 recovered a significant artifact for the corpus of Biblical archaeology, a dedicatory inscription of the seventh-century king of Ekron ‘Akish. The inscription not

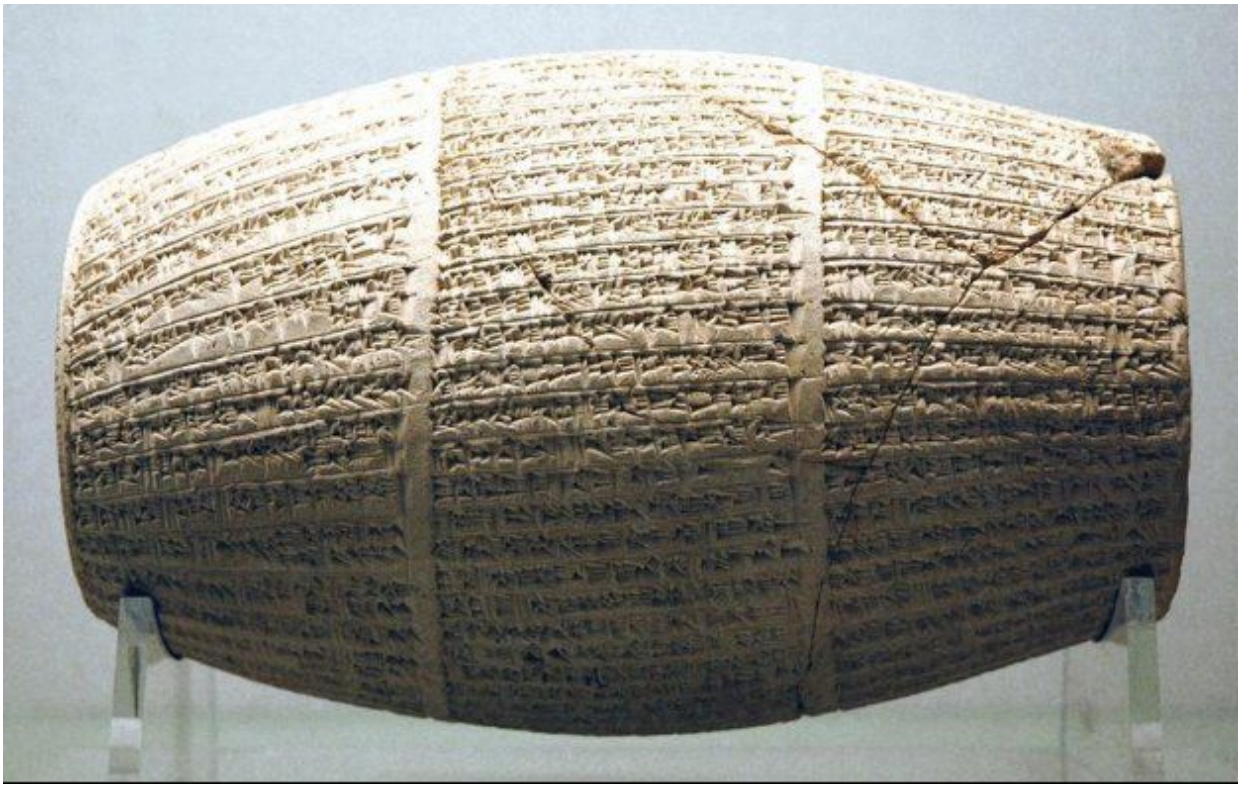
only securely identifies the site, it gives a brief king-list of rulers of Ekron, fathers to sons: Ya'ir, Ada, Yasid, Padi, 'Akish.

Of more than local interest is the recipient of the inscription, 'Akish's divine "Lady. May she bless him, and guard him, and prolong his days, and bless his land." The name or title of the Lady of Ekron is Ptgyh or Ptnyh. Aaron Demsky (Demsky 1997) reads the name asPtnyh and relates it to the title Potnia ("Mistress") that was applied to the Great Goddess of the Aegean, in her various local manifestations, which include Mycenaean sites. A much earlier representation of the Lady of Ekron, perhaps thirteenth century BCE offers her left breast.

Ashdod and Ekron survived to become powerful city-states dominated by Assyria in the seventh century BCE. The city may have been destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzer II around 603 BCE, but it is mentioned, as "Accaron", as late as 1 Maccabees 10:89.

Cylinder of Nabonidus

The Nabonidus Cylinder from Sippar is a long text in which king Nabonidus of Babylonia (556-539 BC) describes how he repaired three temples: the sanctuary of the moon god Sin in Harran, the sanctuary of the warrior goddess Anunitu in Sippar, and the temple of Šamaš in Sippar.



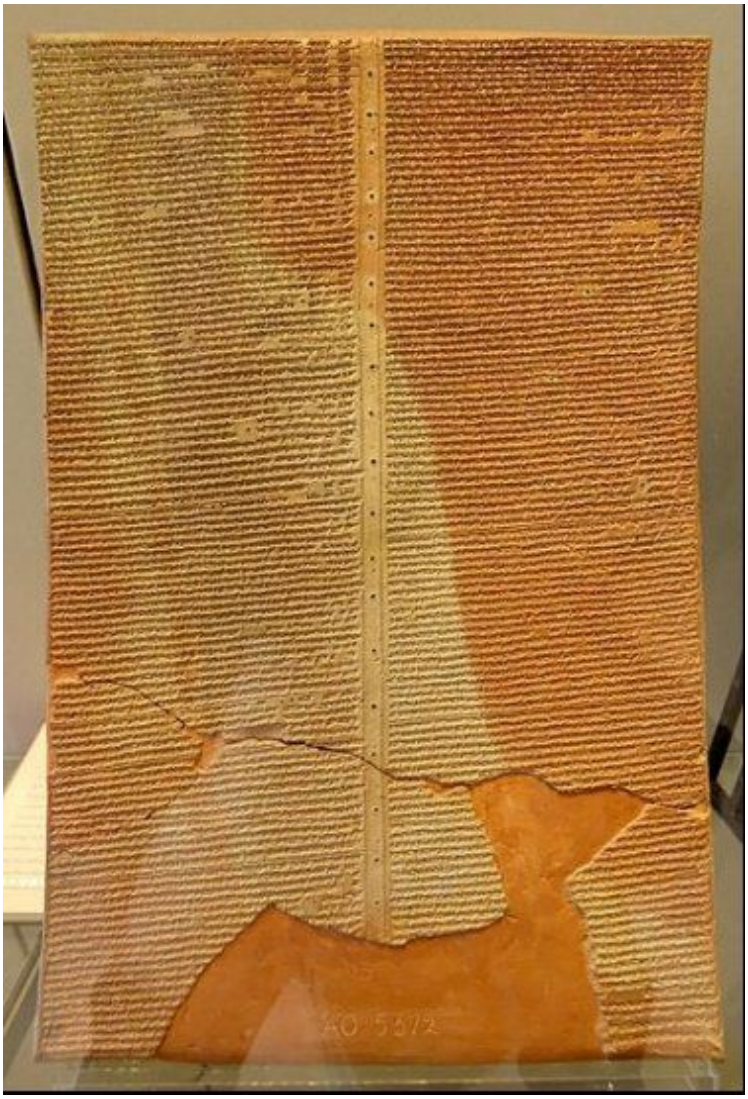
One copy was excavated in Babylon, in the royal palace, and is now in Berlin. Another copy is in the British Museum in London. The text was written after Nabonidus' return from Arabia in his thirteenth regnal year, but before war broke out with the Persian king Cyrus the Great, who is mentioned as an instrument of the gods.

The Nabonidus Cylinder contains echoes from earlier foundation texts, and develops the same themes as later ones, like the better-known Cyrus Cylinder: a lengthy titulary, a story about an angry god who has abandoned his shrine, who is reconciled with his people, orders a king to restore the

temple, and a king who piously increases the daily offerings. Prayers are also included.

Sargon II Inscriptions

Sargon II (Akkadian Šarru-kinu "legitimate king", reigned 722 BC-705 BC) was an Assyrian king. Sargon II became co-regent with Shalmaneser V in 722 BC, and became the sole ruler of the kingdom of Assyria in 709 BC after the death of Shalmaneser V. It is not clear whether he was the son of Tiglath-Pileser III or a usurper unrelated to the royal family. In his inscriptions, he styles himself as a new man, rarely referring to his predecessors; however he took the name Sharru-kinu, "true king", after Sargon of Akkad — who had founded the first Semitic Empire in the region some 16 centuries earlier. Sargon is the Biblical form of the name.



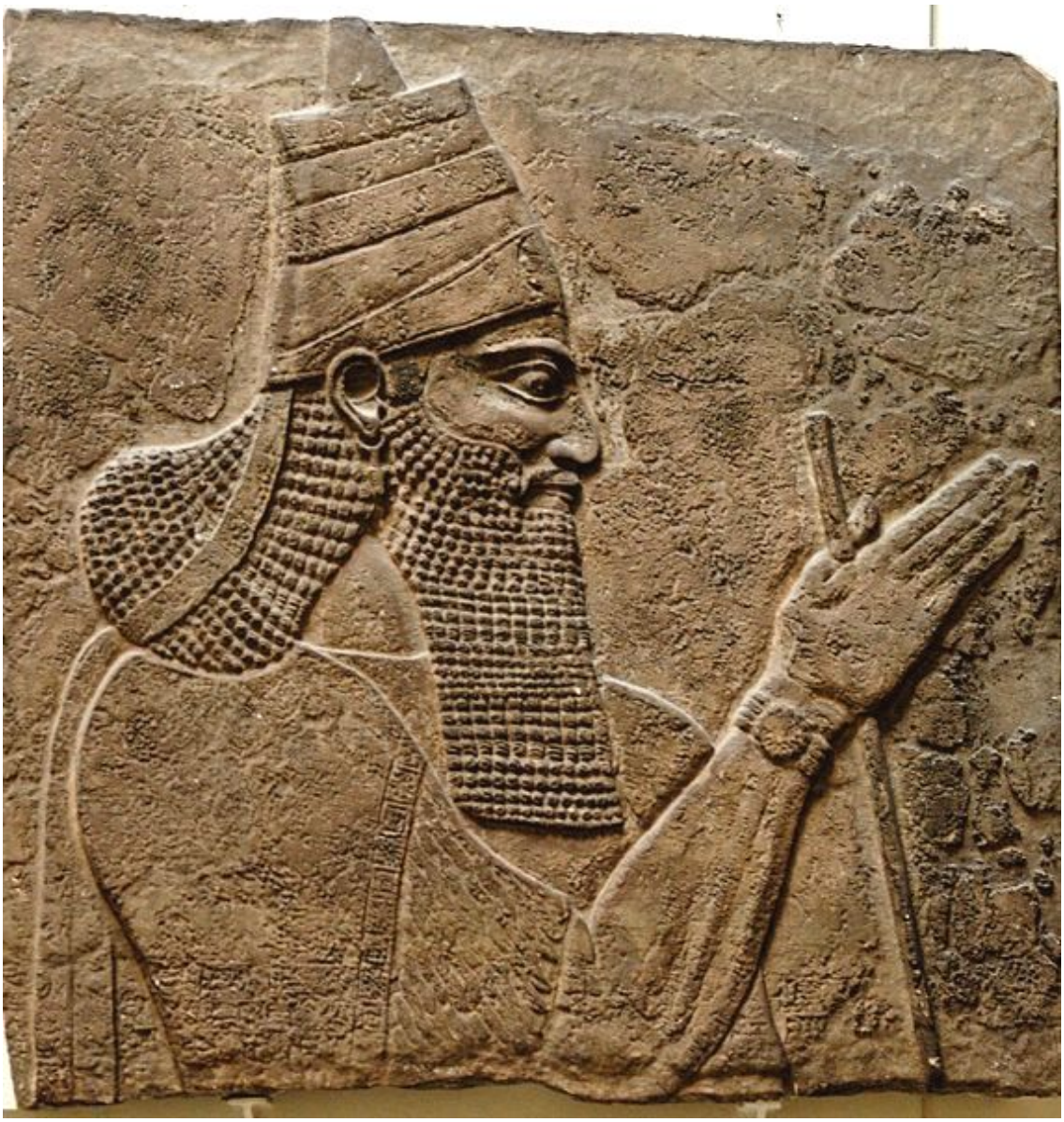
One Of The Many Sargon II Inscriptions

Under his rule, the Assyrians completed the defeat of the Kingdom of Israel, capturing Samaria after a siege of three years and exiling the inhabitants. This became the basis of the legends of the Lost Ten Tribes. According to the Bible, other people were brought to Samaria, the Samaritans, under his predecessor Shalmaneser V (2 Kings 18). Sargon's name actually appears in the Bible only once, at Isaiah 20:1, which records the Assyrian capture of Ashdod in 711 BC.

Several inscriptions from his time have been discovered and they have thrown considerable light into history of Old Testament times.

Tiglath-Pileser III’s Inscriptions at Nimrud

Tiglath-Pileser III (Akkadian: Tukultī-Apil-Ešarra) was a prominent king of Assyria in the 8th century BC (ruled 745–727 BC) and is widely regarded as the founder of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He is considered to be one of the most successful military commanders in world history, conquering most of the world known to the ancient Assyrians before his death.



Assyrian power in the Near East greatly increased as the result of Tiglath-Pileser’s military reforms (see "Reforms" below) and his campaigns of

conquest. Upon ascending the throne, he claimed (in Annal 9, which dates to 745 BC, his first regnal year (accession year) to have annexed Babylonia, from "Dur-(Kuri)galzu, Sippar of Shamash, … the cities [of Ba]bylonia up to the Uqnu river [by the shore of the Lo]wer [Sea]" (which referred to the Persian Gulf), and subsequently placed his eunuch over them as governor. Also within the first of his regnal years, he defeated Urartu (in modern Armenia), whose hegemony under the rulership of Sarduri II had extended to northern Mesopotamia and Syria. He also defeated the Medes before proceeding against the Neo-Hittites, Syria and Phoenicia. He took Arpad in 740 BC after three years of siege, annexed it as a province (over which he placed one of his eunuchs as governors), and subjected Hamath to tribute. Assyrian inscriptions record, in the fifth year of his reign 740 BC, a victory over Azariah (Uzziah), king of Judah, whose achievements are described in 2 Chronicles 26. In 733 BC his armies conquered Philistia on the Mediterranean coast, destroyed Damascus (732) and occupied most of Israel (732), with its northern regions becoming Assyrian provinces. According to the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser, many of the inhabitants were deported to other parts of the Assyrian empire, a practice that was commonly enacted by his predecessors.

In October 729 BC, Tiglath-Pileser assumed total control of Babylon, capturing the Babylonian king Nabu-mukin-zeri and having himself crowned as "King Pulu of Babylon".

Biblical records: Biblical records, corroborated by Assyrian ones, describe how Tiglath-Pileser III exacted 1000 talents of silver tribute from King Menahem of Israel (2 Kings 15:19) and defeated his successor Pekah (15:29). Pekah had allied with Rezin, king of the Arameans against Ahaz (known to the Assyrians as Yahu-khazi), king of Judah, who responded by appealing for the Assyrian monarch’s help with the Temple gold and silver. Tiglath-Pileser complied by seizing Damascus, executing Rezin, and deporting the Aramaean inhabitants to Kir (16:9). He also seized the northern half of Israel, and deported the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manasseh to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the Gozan river (1 Chron. 5:26). Despite the alliance, he apparently caused some trouble for Ahaz as well (2 Chron 28:20).

Tiglath-Pileser III’s conquests and reforms led to the establishment of the Neo-Assyrian Kingdom as a true empire. He built a royal palace in Nimrud (the so-called "central palace") later to be dismantled by Esarhaddon. On the sculptured slabs decorating his palace, across the bas-reliefs depicting his military achievements, he had engraved his royal annals.

On his death, he was succeeded by his son Ululayu, who took the name Shalmaneser V, who further campaigned in the Levant and captured Samaria.

Zayit Stone Inscription

The Zayit Stone is a 38-pound limestone boulder excavated from Tel Zayit (Zeitah) in southwest Israel (the Beth Guvrin Valley about 35 miles from Jerusalem). It carries what appears to be an inscribed abecedary (18 letters carved in the first line; at least 2 in the second line with 2 terminating symbols) and remnants of several other inscriptions (at least 3 words plus 2 other pairs of terminating symbols).



Description: One side of the stone carries the abecedary, or alphabet, extending over 2 lines:

אבגדוהחזטwילכמנספעצ

ק ש ||

The side opposite this inscription has a bowl-shaped depression. Elsewhere, the stone also bears graffiti inscriptions, "help/warrior" (עזר) and "bowl/throne" (כס).

Circumstances of the discovery: Excavations under the direction of R.E. Tappy have been conducted at Tel Zayit during 1999-2001, 2005, and 2007. A volunteer excavator, Dan Rypma, discovered the stone on July 15, 2005.

Significance: The inscription was discovered in-situ in what appears to be a secondary usage but a primary context (i.e., as a building stone rather than in a random pile of debris, or merely on the surface). It is one of the earliest

dateable examples of an alphabet (or of writing in general) from Syria-Palestine, and several inferences can be drawn from it:

Its locus was a stratum caused by a fire dated by the excavators to the 10th century BCE. Until this discovery, critics could say inhabitants of this region at this period were illiterate and could not have recorded events mentioned in the Bible, though this single instance of writing does not imply anything about the veracity of the Bible.

It not only preserves writing – simple graffiti – but an ordered list of letters (although there are 4 pairs of letters swapped from their modern alphabetic order, and possibly 2 other omitted or aborted letters; indications that reflect negatively on the scribe's skill level).

The site is located in a region not central to the government of the Israelite monarchy (Jerusalem), which suggests that if people in this agricultural community could write, certainly people in the regional governments were equally capable. This, however, does not imply that the culture at this location at this time was related to the Israelites.

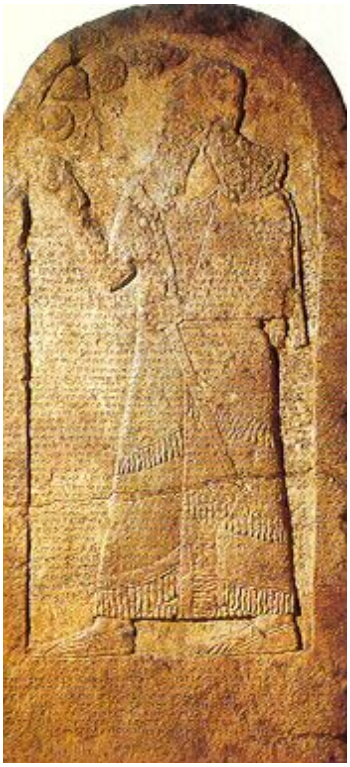
Its placement in a wall, and the context of its inscriptions ("help/warrior" and "bowl/throne") may indicate a belief that the letters possessed magical/apotropaic power to ward off evil spirits. Though it was probably plastered over in the wall where it was discovered and could not be read, it may have been ceremonially placed there during the wall's construction.

At an SBL presentation in November 2005, Ron Tappy seemed to favour the idea that the stone bowl (the reverse side of the stone block) had originally been used as a mortar for grinding herbs or equivalent usage. At the same event P. Kyle McCarter, the epigrapher attached to the Tel Zeitah excavation, characterised the inscription as an abecedary, and said that the letter forms suggest a South Canaanite development from the Phoenician base alphabet. In questioning after the presentation, McCarter added that the inscription (which he had earlier said was apparently the work of a good scribe) was a practice piece (he had earlier mentioned that it gave him the impression of carelessness). Tappy expressed his opinion that it was unlikely, for physical reasons, that the inscription was carved after the stone was placed in the wall.

The primary significance of the inscription will be for the development of early South Levant alphabets and letter-forms. It is not yet certain how old the inscription is – the destruction level indicates a date for the wall, but it is not known how much earlier than this the inscription is. McCarter has elsewhere suggested that the letter-forms are comparable to those of the Gezer calendar, and date from the early to mid-11th century.

Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III

The Kurkh Monolith is an Assyrian document that contains a description of the Battle of Qarqar at the end. The Monolith stands some 2.2 metres tall, and roughly covers years one through six of the reign of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), although the fifth year is missing. Most scholars believe that the scribe who wrote the Monolith was sloppy, and have pointed out a number of possible errors in the text, like the identification of Byblos as Que.



The Monolith mainly deals with campaigns Shalmaneser made in western Mesopotamia and Syria, fighting extensively with the countries of Bit Adini and Carchemish. At the end of the Monolith comes the account of the Battle of Qarqar, where an alliance of twelve kings fought against Shalmaneser at the Syrian city of Qarqar. This alliance, comprising eleven kings, was led by Irhuleni of Hamath and Hadadezer of Damascus, with a considerable force led by King Ahab of Israel. The Monolith is also the first time that the Arabs

make an appearance in world history, fielding a contingent containing camels led by King Gindibu.

Scribal errors and disputes: There are a number of issues surrounding the written words contained in the Monolith, mostly surrounding the text of the Battle of Qarqar. For example, the scribe lists one city as Gu-a-a, which some scholars believe refers to Que. However, H. Tadmor believes that this is actually a mistake, with Gu-a-a being an incorrect spelling for Gu-bal-a-a, that is, Byblos. Other scholars have also pointed out that it would be more logical if Shalmaneser fought Byblos instead of Que, because it would make better geographic sense – since the other kings of the area are polities to the south and west of Assyria, it might be expected that another city-state in that area – Byblos – would fight at Qarqar, rather than Que, which is in Cilicia.

Another issue with regard to spelling is the term musri, which is Akkadian for "march". Tadmor says that the actual Musri people had been conquered by the Assyrians in the 11th century BC, and thus believes that this reference to Musri must be "Egypt", although some scholars dispute this.

Another major error in the text is the assertion that Assyria fought "twelve kings". Casual readers will note that the Monolith in fact lists eleven, but some scholars have attempted to explain that there really is a missing king, stemming from the description of "Ba’sa the man of Bit-Ruhubi, the Ammonite". One scholar suggests that the two entities be split into "Bit-Ruhubi" (Beth-Rehob, a state in the Trans-Jordan) and "Ammon", one of Israel’s traditional enemies. However, "twelve kings" is a common Mesopotamian literary device for any kind of alliance, so it is entirely possible that the scribe here was using a figure of speech, rather than miscounting.

All of this is an indication that further research is needed into these historical narratives.

Siloam inscription

The Siloam (Shiloach) inscription or Silwan inscription (in reference to Jerusalem neighborhood called Silwan) is a passage of inscribed text originally found in the Hezekiah tunnel (which feeds water from the Gihon

Spring to the Pool of Siloam in East Jerusalem). Discovered in 1838, the inscription records the construction of the tunnel in the 8th century BCE. It is among the oldest extant records of its kind written in Hebrew using the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet. Traditionally identified as a "commemorative inscription", it has also been classified as a votive offering inscription.



History of the discovery: Despite Hezekiah's tunnel being examined extensively during the 19th century by such eminent archaeologists as Dr. Edward Robinson, Sir Charles Wilson, and Sir Charles Warren, they all missed discovering the inscription, probably due to the accumulated mineral deposits making it barely noticeable.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary (1897), a youth, while wading up Hezekiah's tunnel from the Siloam Pool end, discovered the inscription cut in the rock on the eastern side, about 19 feet into the tunnel.

The Siloam inscription was surreptitiously cut from the wall of the tunnel in 1891 and broken into fragments; these were, however, recovered by the efforts of the British Consul at Jerusalem, and have been placed in Istanbul Archaeology Museum. Although housed in Turkey, Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski made the request on July 12th, 2007 in a meeting with Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Namik Tan to return the tablet to Jerusalem as a "goodwill gesture" between allies. Turkey has rejected such request, stating that the Siloam inscription was Imperial Ottoman Property, and thus is the cultural property of the Turkish Republic. However, President Abdullah Gul,

stated that as a good will gesture from Turkey, they will display the inscription in Jerusalem for a short period .

The Tunnel: In 1899, another tunnel, also leading from the Gihon Spring to the Siloam Pool area, but by a more direct route, was found. This latter tunnel is now known as the Middle Bronze Age channel, on account of its estimated age; Reich determined that it was constructed around 1800 BC (in the Middle Bronze Age). It is essentially a 20 feet deep ditch in the ground, which after construction was covered over by large rock slabs (which were then hidden in the foliage). It is narrower, but can still be walked by a human for most of its length. In addition to the (3ft high) exit near the Siloam pool, the channel has several small outlets that watered the gardens facing the Kidron Valley.

History: The ancient city of Jerusalem, being on a mountain, is naturally defensible from almost all sides, but suffers from the drawback that its major source of fresh water, the Gihon spring, is on the side of the cliff overlooking the Kidron valley. This presents a major military weakness as the city walls, if high enough to be defensible, must necessarily leave the Gihon spring outside, thus leaving the city without a fresh water supply in case of siege.

The Bible records that King Hezekiah (whom Albright dates to 715-687 BC), fearful that the Assyrians would lay siege to the city, blocked the spring's water outside the city and diverted it through a channel into the Pool of Siloam.

2 Kgs 20:20 (NRSV), "The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?"

2 Chr 32:3-4 (NRSV), "he planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. 4 A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the Assyrian kings come and find water in abundance?""

Translation: The inscription was unreadable at first due to the deposits, Professor A.H. Sayce was the first to make a tentative reading, and later the text was cleaned with an acid solution making the reading more authoritative. The inscription contains 6 lines, of which the first is damaged.

The words are separated by dots. Only the word zada on the third line is of doubtful translation – perhaps a crack or a weak part.

The passage reads:

… the tunnel … and this is the story of the tunnel while … the axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to cut? … the voice of a man … called to his counterpart, (for) there was ZADA in the rock, on the right … and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowed water from the source to the pool for 1200 cubits. and 100 cubits was the height over the head of the stonecutters …

The inscription hence records the construction of the tunnel; according to the text the work began at both ends simultaneously and proceeded until the stonecutters met in the middle. However, this idealised account does not quite reflect the reality of the tunnel; where the two sides met is an abrupt right angled join, and the centres do not line up. It has been theorised by 21st century archaeologists that the stonecutters may simply have been following a natural karst.

Summary

There are numerous other inscriptions related to Biblical Archeology, but the above sample is sufficient to show the importance of inscriptions and also the abundance of such material.

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