

An Epigraphic and Historical Note on the Stela of Tel Dan

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The quick publication of the new inscription found July 21st 1993 at Tel Dan (*tell el-Qādi*)¹ was followed by even more quick reconstructions and relectures of the editio princeps. Already before its publication the inscription drew the attention of the international press. Because regrettably only a small piece of the stela was found on which only thirteen line-beginnings are readable, it is to be feared that as long as the excavators do not find other fragments, speculations about its contents will run riot for quite a while. Before even a discussion could start about the nature and historical significance of the phrase *bytdwd* "the House of David" (as it was understood by the editors and others),² this interpretation was again challenged.³ It is the old story. For lack of context every word and incomplete sentence can mean almost everything.⁴ Though the suggested alternative *BaytDōd** being either a cultic object, or the temple in Dan,⁵ is hardly convincing, it shows clearly enough what limited information can be procured from such a damaged inscription. If "House of David" proves to be correct, the stela only confirms the early existence of the dynastic name of the kingdom of Judah (1 Kgs 12, 19-20, 2 Kgs 17, 21) like *bēt h^azā²el* (Amos 1,3) = *Bīt Hazā²ili* for Aram-Damascus and *Bīt Humri* for Israel. However, the stela in its present condition hardly permits an historical conclusion about the nature of Judah's involvement in the events mentioned in the text.

The editors observed that the language of the stela-fragment belongs to the formal kind of language usually found in royal West-Semitic inscriptions. They and a number of other scholars adduced already several quotations from this corpus to restore the inscription. No one would dare to go as far as Margalit or Puech did. Both restored the incomplete inscription into an almost complete compendium of biblical history, either from 1 Kgs 25 uptill and including 2 Kgs 8,⁶ or the latter years of Jehoash⁷, but to render

¹ A. Biran & J. Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan", *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81-98; Z. Radovan, "David Found at Dan", *BAR* 20 (1994) 26-39; J.G. Van der Land, A.E.M.A. Van Veen-Vrolijk, M. Kastelein, "Belangrijke Inscripctie gevonden in Tel Dan. Historische bron vermeldt het huis van David", *Bijbel, Geschiedenis en Archeologie* 1 (1994) 3-7.

² Cf. Sh. Ahituv, "Suzerain or Vassal? Notes on the Aramaic Inscription from Tel Dan", *IEJ* 43 (1993) 246-247, Z. Kallai, "The King of Israel and the House of David", *IEJ* 43 (1993) 238.

³ Cf. E.A. Knauf, A. de Pury, Th. Römer, "BaytDawid ou *BaytDōd", *BN* 72 (1994) 60-69.

⁴ I may point here to a Palmyrenean isogloss of *bytdwd* in: *dy hw^c t bt dwd²* 'qui est chef de cuisine' (Jean/Hofijzer, *DISO*, p.56). After all *bytdwd* might mean a kitchen or a storeroom for large jars or something similar!

⁵ Knauf, de Pury, Römer, *BN* 72 (1994) 66-67, with some reservations also Ch. Uehlinger, "Eine anthropomorphe Kultstatue des Gottes von Dan?", *BN* 72 (1994) 85-99, esp.85f.

⁶ E. Puech, "La stèle arméenne de Dan: Bar Hadad II et la coalition des Omrides et de la maison de David", *RB* 101-102 (1994) 215-244.

the text at this stage useless for historical research would be another pitfall. This note only intends to pursue the historical possibilities of an in my opinion epigraphically probable rendering of line 8, which as far as I see was not tried yet. The editio princeps reads here: $w^{\text{ṣ}}qt\ l\ m^*l^*[hm]$ "And I slew of [them]...", but the rendering: $w^{\text{ṣ}}qt\ l\ m^*l^*[k]$ proposed by Ahituv and Puech is epigraphically more plausible.⁸ The top of the sign preserved behind the mutilated *mēm* is most probably the top of a *lāmed* when compared to the other places where the word or verb *mlk* occurs (lines 6,8). It might be noted however that also below the last *yōd* of line 5 a small stroke of a sign is preserved. When I substituted the cluster *mlk.yšr* from line 9 in line 6 it appeared that the small stroke almost exactly coincided with the rightside of the letter *šin* of *yšr*.⁹

What would be the consequence of such a completion $m^*l^*[k.y]š^*[r^{\text{ṣ}}]$? The minimum of information, which can be deduced from the fragmentaric lines 3 through 9,¹⁰ seems to be that the I-person of the inscription reports that his father fell ill and died. It is the kind of self-evident information which is not often found in other royal inscriptions, unless it is worth mentioning for special reasons, for instance, when it happened during a campaign (e.g. Panammu's illness and death in *KAI* 215:16ff). This may have been the case¹¹. Furthermore, that this I-person in the readable part of the inscription comes into action himself from line 6 onwards. It is most probable that he is the son of the aforementioned father. Because this I-person refers to his reign or kingship (*mlky* line 6¹²), one may suppose that he became king or ascended the throne after his father and also that during a campaign which followed in his reign, he killed another king and destroyed his army. I suggest the following slightly augmented rendering and translation:

- 1) [xxxxxxxxx]m*r.ṣ[
- 2) [xxx]h*d*[d].ṣby.yšq*[
- 3) wyškb.ṣby.yhk.ṣ[.ṣbhyh.wyšbt.ṣl.ksṣ.ṣby. wyšb.yš]
- 4) rṣl.qdm.bṣrq.ṣby*[]
- 5) ṣnh.wyhk.hdd.qdmy[bym]
- 6) y.mlky.wṣqt.l.m*l*[k.y]š^*[rṣ] ṣlp mr]
- 7) kb.wṣlp.py.prš.[]
- 8) mlk.yšrṣl.wqt*l*[
- 9) k.bytdwd.wṣš^*m*.[

⁷ B. Margalit, The OArām. Stele from t.Dan, NABU 1994 (no.1-Mars), pp.20-21, cf. the critical remark of Uehlinger, *BN* 72 (1994) 85 n.3.

⁸ Cf. Ahituv, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 246; Puech, *RB* 101-102 (1994) 218i.

⁹ On the photograph the distance between the rightside of the *mēm* and the *šin* (21 mm) is even more exact than on the drawing.

¹⁰ The few complete words in the other lines at the beginning and end cannot be used to produce any known sentence let alone sense.

¹¹ See Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 91 on line 2.

¹² Cf. Ahituv, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 246; Puech, *RB* 101-102 (1994) 215ff, esp. 230, pace Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 92-93, Knauf, de Pury, Römer, *BN* 72 (1994) 63. It is surprising to find in the latter article the remark that *mlk* = *mulki** is only found in Arabic, whereas the equivalent either as a noun or verbal noun, is clearly supposed to exist in Phoenician and Ugaritic, cf. *KAI* 1:2 (Jean/Hoftijzer, *DISO*, p.152); *KTU* 1.2.III(?) 18; 1.3.IV.2; 1.6.V.5; IV.28, 34 cf. also 2 Kgs 25, 27 *š'nat molkō*.

10) yt. ʔrq.hm.l[

11) ʔhrn.wlhx[m]

12) lk.ʕi.yš[rʔ]

13) msd.ʕi[

.....

1-2) [...] Hadad(?)¹³ my father. He went up(?)[

3) and my father died, he went to [his ancestors¹⁴ and I set myself on the throne of my father. Now Is]

4) rael had settled itself formerly in my father's land¹⁵ [

5) and Hadad went in front of me [in the da]

6) ys of my reign¹⁶ and I killed the ki[ng of I]s[rael and destroyed(?) thousand cha]

7) riots and two thousand horsemen. [

8) the king of Israel and he was killed(?)[

9) ...¹⁷David's House and I made/put [

10) their land in order to [

11) another [...] and to him [he became k]

12) ing over Is[rael

13) a siege against¹⁸ [

If my rendering of line 6 is acceptable, the killing of the king of Israel according to the present state of knowledge could refer either to the death of Achab, or, less probably, to his son Jehoram. A number of scholars however maintain that Israel was quite powerful during the reign of Omri's dynasty and that the coalition between Aram, Israel and other Levantine states as known from Shalmaneser's III inscriptions, remained healthy until the assassination of Hadad-Ezer. Several scholars therefore assume that the originally anonymous stories of 1 Kgs 20 and 22 were secondarily associated with king Achab. In reality they would

¹³ Puech, *RB* 101-102 (1994) 218,220 : Bar-Hadad = Benhadad I(?). If correctly restored it could be the name of Hadad mentioned in line 5, who blessed or made the father of the dedicator king or something similar.

¹⁴ Cf. the formula *wyškb NN ʕm-ʔbwyw wyqbr b... wymk NN bnw thyw* (1 Kgs 2, 10; 11, 21, 43; 14, 20, 31 (see *HAL*,1379 etc.). The annalistic style of the inscription leaves several possibilities open, either mentioning the burial and/or the ascension of the new king (cf. *KAI* 24:9, 26:11, 214:9 etc.).

¹⁵ Cf. *KAI* 182:10 *wʔš gd yšb bʔs ʔri mʕtm; qdm* "formerly, of old" Ps 74, 2, cf. Biran/Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 92, somewhat different Puech, *RB* 101-102 (1994) 220; Knauf/de Pury/Römer, *BN* 72 (1994) 68 "(Le roi d'Is)rael avait avancé dans le pays de mon père" taking *qdm* as a verb, see however Jean/Hoftijzer, *DISO*, p.251 for adverbial use of *qdm*.

¹⁶ Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 92,94ff; Knauf/de Pury/Römer, *BN* 72 (1994) 63 thought of "my king" referring to respectively Hadad-Ezer or Hazael as the Aramean overlord of whom the petty king of Dan or Bet Rehob, who made the stela, was a vassal. We prefer the solution of Ahituv and Puech as less complicated (see note 12).

¹⁷ The completion *[mi](9)k.bytdwd* is not plausible, cf. Knauf, de Pury, Römer, *BN* 72 (1994) 66; Uehlinger, *BN* 72 (1994) 86 n.4.

¹⁸ Cf. the Zakkur-stele *KAI* 202:9,15-16.

belong to the period of the kings of the Jehu dynasty, either to the reign of Jehoahaz, or Jehoash.¹⁹ Moreover, the annalistic remark of 1 Kgs 22, 40 creates the impression that Achab died a natural death.

It is indeed told that Jehoram of Israel was wounded in a war with Aram (2 Kgs 8, 24ff). If the killing of the king of Israel in 1 Kgs 22 actually reflects Jehoram's fate as, for instance, Lipinski suggested,²⁰ it becomes impossible to ascribe the killing of the king of Israel in the inscription to Hadad-Ezer or, eventually, his ephemeral son Ben-Hadad II.²¹ There is, in my opinion, no conclusive reason to doubt the biblical account that king Jehoram was murdered by his general Jehu in the early reign of Hazael. Moreover, Hazael is hardly a plausible candidate for the authorship of this inscription, because both biblical and extrabiblical sources know him to be an usurper, a 'son of nobody', who seized the throne of Damascus.²² A next possibility would be his son Barhadad/Benhadad III, who as a contemporary of king Jehoahaz presumably started to rule somewhere in the end of the ninth century BC, but this appears to be a too late date for the inscription from an archaeological point of view.²³ In addition nothing is known about an Israelite king from Jehu's dynasty who was killed in a war with Aram. This does not exclude the possibility that the story of 1 Kgs 20 was originally about king Jehoash. Indeed, a number of arguments, in particular, the double tradition that the battle took place at a city called Aphek (1 Kgs 20, 26-30, 2 Kgs 13, 25), the inferred period of weakness and the return of Israel's conquered cities (1 Kgs 20, 34) are strongly in favor of a later date. However, both the situation in 1 Kgs 22 and the nature of the story itself differ considerably from what is told in 1 Kgs 20. Arguments to ascribe the events told to either Jehoram or to one of the kings of Jehu's dynasty are here much less decisive,²⁴ simply because in this case the biblical tradition preserved no hints that one of the latter kings died in battle.²⁵ Moreover, king Achab does not seem to act here from a position of weakness, but he is clearly the aggressor, a picture which tallies with his military strength indicated in Shalmaneser's account.

In sum this means that the story of 1 Kgs 22 - though it was very likely handed down anonymously -, gains credibility to be a story which refers to Achab's death on the battle-field. As such it was included at the right place in the deuteronomistic history. Most probably Achab was mortally wounded in Ramoth-Gilead (*tell rāmit*), but died in Samaria. It would seem that after the battle of Qarqar, the allies resumed hostilities. It

¹⁹ Cf. A. Jepsen, "Israel und Damascus", *Afo* 14 (1941-45) 153-172; M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen 1966⁶) p.222 n.1, H. Jagersma, *Geschiedenis van Israël in het oudtestamenteisch tijdvak* (Kampen 1979) pp. 195f; J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt AD 135* (London 1984) p. 205, 207f; H. Donner, "The Separate States of Israel and Judah", in: J.H. Hayes & J.M. Miller (eds.), *Israelite & Judean History* (London/Philadelphia 1990³) p. 400; E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige I. Kön.17-2 Kön.25* (ATD 11/2; Göttingen 1984) pp.261f; W.T. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus. A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State from Earliest Times* (Winona Lake, 1987) pp.114-125; A. Lemaire, "Joas de Samarie, Bar Hadad de Damas, Zakkur de Hamathla Syrie-Palestine vers 800 av.J.-C.", *Abram Malamet Volume, Eretz Israel* 24 (1993) 148*-158*, Puech, *RB* 101-102 (1994) 237ff with references.

²⁰ E.Lipinski, "Le Ben-Hadad II de la bible et l'histoire," in: Pinchas Peli (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Volume I (Jerusalem 1969) pp.157-173.

²¹ See note 30.

²² Cf. Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 95.

²³ The fragment was reused for construction of the ninth century gate according to Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81-85.

²⁴ Cf. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus*, pp.180ff.

²⁵ For instance, J.M. Miller, "The Rest of the Acts of Jehoahaz" (1 Kings 20, 22:1-38)", *ZAW* 80 (1968) 337-342 esp.341.

may be noted that though Shalmaneser continuously refers to a coalition of twelve kings, only Hadad-Ezer/^d*Adad-idri* of Damascus and Irlulani of Hamath are repeatedly mentioned by name. On the contrary, Achab of Israel is only mentioned in Shalmaneser's sixth year and at that only once in the Monolith-inscription.²⁶ Even if the Syrian coalition remained basically intact, it neither implies as a matter of course that Israel formed all four times part of it,²⁷ nor can it be excluded that hostilities between Aram and Israel were resumed in the three years stalemate with Assyria which followed the battle of Qarqar.

The I-person of this inscription is most probably Hadad-Ezer = ^d*Adad-idri* (*Benhadad II?*),²⁸ presumably the son of Ben-Hadad I,²⁹ who was assassinated by Hazael (2 Kgs 8, 7ff and possibly also according to an undated basalt inscription of Shalmaneser III).³⁰ In this case there is no need to assume that the stela was destroyed by king Achab. The destruction of the stela may also have been the result of Hazael's campaign to obliterate the memory of Benhadad II/Hadad-Ezer and his father. Neither is it necessary to assume that Dan changed hands four times.³¹ It was presumably taken from Israel by Ben-Hadad I (1 Kgs 15, 20) and not recaptured by Israel before the time of Jehoash and Jeroboam II (2 Kgs 13, 25; 14, 25, Amos 8, 14). In any case, in my opinion the inscription infers that it was erected after Achab's death, but soon was smashed in pieces and reused in a wall bordering the eastern section of the piazza at the entrance of the outer gate of Dan. The gate system as such is dated to ninth century BC. The relationship of the newly discovered gate to the main gate system is as yet unclear,³² but it is certainly of significance that the stela fragment was reused in its construction. If the stela once was erected by the Aramean king Hadad-Ezer after Achab's death (ca 850 BC), it provides a *terminus post quem* in the second part of the ninth century BC for the reconstruction of the gate system as such, or, anyhow, the part around the piazza in front of the outer gate. This scenario casts however, doubt on the excavator's assumption that the gate-system was an Israelite construction project. Hazael would be a plausible candidate as well, unless, of course the construction of the main gate dates from the early eighth century like the upper gate.

²⁶ Cf. *ANET*³, pp.278f; *TUAT*, I/4, p.361. The parallel accounts of the sixth year on the Bull-inscription and the Black Obelisk, mention only Hadad-Ezer and Irlulani with twelve kings, or the kings of Hatti and the seashore, cf. Noth, *Geschichte*, p.225 n.1.

²⁷ In the sixth, tenth, eleventh and fourteenth year of Shalmaneser III 853-845 BC, cf. *ANET*³, 280; *TUAT*, I/4, 361ff, D.J. Wiseman, "Hadadezer", *RLA* 4, p.38, Noth, *Geschichte*, p.225 n. 1.

²⁸ In this respect I agree with Puech's identification and his dating of the stela between 852-843 BC, cf. *RB* 101-102 (1994) 241.

²⁹ I.e. Ben-Hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion (1 Kgs 15, 18ff). The Bar-Hadad, son of ..., king of Aram in the Melqart-stela (*KAI* 201) was presumably another Aramean king, cf. W.T. Pitard, "The Identity of Bir Hadad of the Melqart Stela", *BASOR* 272 (1988) 3-19; *brhdd br c'rs'm*k** (perhaps a name related to *Atar-shumki, c'rs'mk*, king of Arpad, cf. *KAI* 222.A.1,3,14; Millard, *PEQ* 111 (1978) 23).

³⁰ According to a majority of scholars Hadad-Ezer was identical to Achab's contemporary Ben-Hadad II (e.g. Noth, *Geschichte*, pp.222ff; De Vaux, *RB* 43 (1934) 512-518; Alberto Soggin, *History*, p.209, Würthwein, *ATD* 11/2, p.319, but see also E. Michel, "Die Assur-Texte Salmanassars III", *WdO* 1 (1947-52) 59), but others assume in the short interval between Shalmaneser's 14th and 18th year (845/6-841/2) the existence of an ephemeral Ben-Hadad II (e.g. Jepsen, *AFO* 14 (1941/45) 158-159; A.Jepsen, *Von Sinuhe bis Nebukadnezar. Dokumente aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* [Stuttgart/ München 1975], p.155; Pitard, *Ancient Damascus*, pp.195ff,208 [ca. 845/44-843/42?]). Albright supposed that Hadadezer = ^d*Adad-idri* was the personal name of Ben-Hadad I, who was assassinated by Hazael (W.F. Albright, "A Votive Stele Erected by Ben-Hadad of Damascus to the God Melcarth", *BASOR* 87 (1942) 28, J.Bright, *A History of Israel*, (London 1966⁴) p.224, 235), but this suggestion is very problematic.

³¹ Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 97f.

³² Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81-86.