

IV.

THE MOABITE STONE AND THE BOOK OF KINGS.

ON the Stone, Mesha, king of Moab, gives an account of his victories and other achievements. It is easy to fix with certainty the general period of Israelite history with which Mesha was contemporary. According to 2 Kings 3^{4, 5},¹ Mesha was a contemporary of three kings of Israel, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram, and therefore also of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. This is confirmed by the Stone, in which Mesha speaks of himself as the contemporary of the son of Omri, *i.e.* of Ahab.²

Further, *Kings*³ tells us that Mesha was

¹ Cf. 1 Kings 22⁵¹, 2 Kings 1¹.

² Line 6; cf. pp. 19 f.

³ 2 Kings 3⁴.

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“ a sheepmaster,” and paid to the king of Israel tribute in the form of “ the wool of a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams,” or, according to the margin of the Revised Version, “ a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams, with the wool.” “ Sheepmaster ” in the Hebrew is a rare word, *nōkēdh*, meaning a keeper of a special breed of sheep noted for its wool ; the prophet Amos was also a *nōkēdh*.¹ The narrative on the Stone begins in the reign of the Israelite king Omri, about 887–876 B.C. The Old Testament account of the reign of Omri tells us nothing about the relations of Israel and Moab, but we gather² from the Stone that Moab was independent at the accession of Omri, and that he made it a tributary of Israel. In Num. 21^{14, 15, 27-30} we have poetical fragments which, in their present form and content, refer to a conquest of Moab by the Amorite king Sihon ; but it

¹ Amos 1¹. Cf. Century Bible on 2 Kings 3⁴. ² Cf. p. 14.

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has been suggested¹ that these poems originally referred to the subjugation of Moab by Omri.

The general statements on the Stone, that Moab was tributary, but revolted under Mesha, agree with the information to the same effect in 2 Kings 1¹ 3^{4, 5}. There are differences, however, as to the date of the revolt and the general chronology of the period. According to 2 Kings 1¹ 3⁵, Mesha rebelled after the death of Ahab; but according to the Stone, the revolt took place in the middle of Ahab's reign. The difference is more apparent than real; the revolt is only mentioned to introduce the story of the campaign of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings 3; the author of that narrative did not know the date of the revolt, but only that Moab was in a state of rebellion in the reign of Jehoram. "After the death of Ahab" is a conjecture which a scientific historian

¹ H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History*, p. 196.

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would have expressed by writing, "Some time before the accession of Jehoram, possibly at the death of Ahab."

Another discrepancy arises out of the statement of the Moabite Stone, lines 7 and 8, "Now Omri annexed all the land of Medeba, and Israel occupied it, his days and half his son's days, forty years."¹

According to 1 Kings 16²⁸⁻²⁹, Omri reigned twelve years and Ahab his son twenty-two years. So that, even if we make an improbable assumption in order to minimise the discrepancy between the two sets of figures, and assume that the subjugation of Moab was the very first act of Omri, the founder of a new dynasty, even then we get from *Kings*—

Reign of Omri	12 years
Half the reign of his son Ahab	11 ,,
	<hr/>
	23 years

instead of the forty of the Stone.

¹ This is the usual translation. There are other less probable renderings, e.g. "half his sons' days"; "during the half of the years of my reign his son (occupied it)," etc. None of these altogether do away with the discrepancy.

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Prof. E. L. Curtis¹ suggests that "his son" is not Ahab, but his grandson Jehoram, son being sometimes used in the Old Testament in the sense of descendant. But this view is improbable. It certainly removes the discrepancy, as it gives us

Reign of Omri	12 years
„ Ahab	22 „
„ Ahaziah	2 „
Half reign of Jehoram	6 „
	42 years

But as, according to the mode of reckoning, the year in which a king died was counted twice, as both his last year and his successor's first year, we should have to deduct three years, and the period would amount to thirty-nine years. This is near enough, as "forty" is no doubt a round number, as it often is in the Old Testament. But it is not natural to state a period by mentioning two parts of it; and further, according to *Kings* the supremacy of Israel

¹ Dr. Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, i. 402.

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over Moab came to an end at the death of Ahab.¹

The chronological data in *Kings* at this point are ambiguous, mutually inconsistent, and of uncertain value; and the figures in the Hebrew text differ from those in the Septuagint. It is therefore possible that Omri reigned more than twelve years, and Ahab more than twenty-two. Wellhausen² estimates that the reigns of Omri and Ahab together occupied sixty years. Prof. O. C. Whitehouse³ endorses Schrader's view that Omri's reign lasted twenty-five years; and maintains that "These dates harmonise better with the results of Assyriology, and with the deep impression which Omri had produced in Western Asia by his military prowess." For more than a hundred and fifty years Israel was known to the Assyrians as the "land of the House of Omri."

¹ Cf. p. 18.

² *Encyclopædia Biblica*, i. 729 n.

³ Dr. Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, iii. 621.

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Prof. F. Buhl¹ suggests that Mesha has expressed himself loosely in these lines of the Stone. His inscription compresses into short compass references to a number of events which must have occupied many years. Possibly, according to Buhl, although "his days and half his son's days" are connected by grammar and proximity with "forty years," they may in Mesha's mind have referred to different periods, the "forty years" covering the whole range of events from Omri's conquest of Moab to the time when the Stone was set up.

We have now to consider the relation of the statements on the Moabite Stone to the narrative in 2 Kings 3. We will begin by giving a summary of each, with a few comments, etc.

¹ *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie*, etc., "Mesainschrift."

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(i.) SUMMARY OF 2 KINGS 3⁴⁻²⁷.

(a) Mesha revolted from Israel after the death of Ahab. No steps, apparently, were taken to subdue Moab during the brief reign of his successor Ahaziah.

(b) Ahaziah's successor, Jehoram, gathered the whole force of Israel, and summoned to his assistance contingents from Judah and Edom, under the command respectively of Jehoshaphat and of the king of Edom. They made a circuit round the south of the Dead Sea, reached the border of Moab from the S.E., and defeated the Moabite army gathered to resist them. They then systematically laid waste the country, and eventually besieged Mesha in one of his cities, probably Kir-hareseth. When the Moabite king was reduced to the last extremity, he sacrificed his son and heir on the wall of the city in the presence of both armies. Whereupon the Israelites retreated.

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Nothing is said of any further attempt to subdue Moab.

(ii.) SUMMARY OF MOABITE STONE.¹

(a) *Lines 5-8.* Omri and his son, *i.e.* Ahab, "oppressed" Moab until the middle of the reign of Ahab, when Mesha revolted.

(b) *Lines 9-19, 32-34.* The Israelite king (unnamed) fortified Ataroth, *i.e.*, probably made it the headquarters of his forces engaged in attempting to reduce Moab. But Mesha captured in succession Ataroth and Nebo.

Then the Israelite king "fortified," *i.e.*, removed his headquarters to, Jahaz, but was driven out from thence by Mesha, who later on captured Horonaim.

The conclusion is wanting, but the whole may probably be summed up by the phrase in line 7, that "Israel was destroyed for ever," *i.e.* that at the time when the Stone was erected Moab had entirely recovered

¹ For full translation and notes, see pp. 48 ff.

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its independence, and Mesha was confident that the Israelite intruders were finally expelled, and that his country would never again be in subjection to Israel.

(c) *Lines 21-31*. Mesha executed numerous and important public works, constructing fortifications, roads, aqueducts, etc. ; he also settled Moabite colonies in the cities and territories recovered from Israel.

We have already dealt with (a) the circumstances of the revolt ; and (c) Mesha's Public Works, does not directly concern us here. It remains to consider how the campaigns described in (i.) (b) and (ii.) (b), were related to each other.

There are three main possibilities. The campaign of 2 Kings 3 may have been either (1) prior to, or (2) later than, those described on the Stone ; or (3) the Stone may describe a series of campaigns, including the operations referred to in 2 Kings 3.

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We must bear in mind that, in such documents as the Stone and 2 Kings 3, a writer dwells upon the successes of his own country, and says as little as possible about its reverses, or even ignores them altogether. Hence the silence of *Kings* as to Moabite victories, or the silence of the Stone as to Israelite victories, is no argument against their having been won.

Let us first consider our second alternative, that the campaign of 2 Kings 3 followed those described on the Stone. According to this view Mesha describes the original revolt; 2 Kings 3 describes a final but unsuccessful attempt to subdue Moab, of which Mesha says nothing.¹ This hardly seems likely if ² the inscription was written after the death of Jehoram, some time later than the events described in 2 Kings 3.

¹ Some such view seems to be taken by Cornill, *History of the People of Israel*, p. 107, and Wellhausen, *Hist.*, etc., Eng. tr. p. 460.

² P. 9.

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Let us turn now to our first alternative, that the campaign of 2 Kings 3 preceded those described on the Stone. According to this view, the Israelite kings, preoccupied with other matters, made no attempt to subdue Moab until the reign of Jehoram; and the futile efforts of this king were followed by successful aggressive operations by Mesha, which he recounts in his inscription. Probably this arrangement of the events, 2 Kings 3 earlier, the Stone campaigns later, is that more generally adopted.¹ This position would be more easy to hold if it were possible—as we think it is not—to place the revolt after the death of Ahab.²

But if the events in 2 Kings 3 are the earlier, they must fall within the period covered by the Stone; and there seems no reason why they should not form part of

¹ e.g., by H. P. Smith, *Old Test. Hist.* p. 196; McCurdy, *Hist., Prophecy, and the Monuments*, § 235; Jeremias, *Das A.T. im Lichte des alten Orients*, p. 318.

² Pp. 18 f.

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the struggle between Mesha and the king of Israel, described in the inscription. We cannot, indeed, identify the detailed incidents in the one document with those in the other, because the one is occupied with Israelite successes, just mentioning the bare fact of a final retreat, while the account of the revolt on the Stone is wholly taken up with Moabite successes. But Jehoram's initial victories and ultimate failure may have been the immediate prelude to the Moabite capture of Ataroth or Jahaz or Horonaim.¹

¹ Thus Winckler, *Die Keilinschriften und das A.T.*, 3rd ed., p. 253, connects Jehoram's campaign with the fall of Horonaim.