Herrschaftslegitimation in vorderorientalischen Reichen der Eisenzeit

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A Voice from Across the Jordan:
Royal Ideology as Implied in the Moabite Stela

Bob Becking

1. What is Ideology?

The concept *Herrschaftslegitimation* implies an ideology that is used – or abused – to legitimize the rule of a specific minority over a society.[1] What, however, is ideology?

I do not feel competent to give a full display of the various interpretations of the concept so I will only make a few superficial remarks. The idea has made an interesting journey through science. It was first used by the French philosopher Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) who in a pamphlet published in 1796 coined the term ideology as the 'science of ideas' attempting to create a secure foundation for all the moral and political sciences by closely examining the sensations and the ideas about those sensations which arose in human beings as they interacted with their physical environment.[2] A quite different approach can be found in the ideas on the ideological state apparatus designed by Louis Althusser. According to Althusser beliefs and ideas are the products of the social reality and certainly not the other way around. In his view the state apparatus impends an ideology on the population in order to have the people belief that the state cares for them – even in case the state exploits its subjects.[3] A sensible correction to Althusser's and other Marxists ideas has been formulated by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek construes ideology to be an unconscious fantasy. This fantasy helps us to structure and understand reality.[4]

In my view, ideology can be understood as a discourse on humans, human relations and the construction of a society. Ideology is a set of values that are imposed on a given society in order to control that society – sometimes in an aggressive sometimes in a subtle way. A 'text' does not have an ideology unless it presents itself as such. Narrative texts can be an expression – conscious or subconscious – of a specific world-view or belief system.[5] Sometimes this implied view has ideological dimensions.

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[1] See, e.g., HILDEBRAND, Augusteische Schwelle. I am indebted to BEETHAM, The Legitimation of Power.

[2] DESTUTT DE TRACY, Mémoire sur la faculté de penser; on DE Tracy see HEAD, Ideology and Social Science.

[3] See basically ALTHUSSER, Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État; on Althusser, see FERRETTER, Louis Althusser.

[4] ŽIŽEK, The Sublime Object of Ideology; on Žižek see SHEEHAN, Žižek: A Guide for the Perplexed.

[5] See most recently GEE, Social Linguistics and Literacies; SIMPSON/MAYR, Language and Power.

2. The Moabite Stone

In the Iron Age various people were living across the Jordan – 'across' is seen from an Israelite perspective and hence an expression of an ideology. Among them were the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites. These people are referred to in the Hebrew Bible and in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. They left us also with a few writings of their own.[6] The Moabite Stone, also known as the Mesha Inscription, is the most well-known text from this small corpus. Almost every visitor to the *département des antiquités orientales* of the Louvre Museum in Paris comes across the basalt stone sitting in a corner on the first floor. A majority of students in Ancient Semitics and a minority of theologians have read the text. The history of its discovery in 1869 is a bewildering and amazing story containing elements such as nationalistic competition between Prussia, Britain and France, clumsy diplomatic manoeuvres, Western misunderstanding of the subtleties of power between the Bedouin tribes, and a little bit of Arab greed. All this eventually led to the blowing up of the monument into some 40 pieces by the Arabs – who assumed that the stone kept a treasure inside – and the reconstruction of the stele based on a squeeze or papier-mâché of the inscription made by an Arab named Yacoub Caravacca serving the Frenchman Charles Clermont-Ganneau.[7]

In the years after the discovery the authenticity of the stele was questioned by a number of scholars.[8] Albert Löwy most vehemently argued against the authenticity of the inscription on the basis of both the palaeography of the inscription and on the strange coincidence that the only Moabite king referred to in the Hebrew Bible would have left a royal inscription. Next to that, Löwy did not trust the Bedouins.[9] The suspicion was fuelled by the 'Shapira affair'. Moses Wilhelm Shapira had presented in 1880 a forged Moabite version of parts of Deuteronomy.[10] The authenticity was also still challenged in detail by Abraham Yahuda in 1944.[11] Nowadays the authenticity is no longer debated. It is accepted that a nineteenth century forger could not have the knowledge of the specifics of the Transjordan branch of the Phoenician alphabet to make up the inscription.[12]

The bewildering deeds and doings in the nineteenth century lead to the conclusion that the inscription as we know have it, should be treated as a reconstructed text. Im-

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[6] For a recent introduction see BEYER, The Languages of Transjordan.

[7] See, e.g., BENNET, Moabite Stone, 6–9; HORN, The Discovery of the Moabite Stone; SILBERMAN, Digging for God and Country, 100–12; GRAHAM, The Discovery and Reconstruction of the Mesha Inscription; Routledge, Moab in the Iron Age, 133–35.

[8] E.g., GASTER, III. A Samaritan MS. of the Second or Third Century; SCHULTZ, Moab, 122–23; JAHN, Das Buch Daniel nach der Septuaginta hergestellt; STORR, Unechtheit der Mesainschrift. On the forgery of Moabite antiquities and inscriptions see HEIDE, The Moabitica and Their Aftermath.

[9] LÖWY, Die Echtheit der moabitischen Inschrift.

[10] See: RABINOWICZ, The Shapira Scroll; HEIDE, The Moabitica and their Aftermath, and the bewildering book by ALLEGRO, The Shapira Affair.

[11] YAHUDA, The Story of a Forgery and the Mēša Inscription, 139–64.

[12] Already BENNET, Moabite Stone, 37–47, argued for the authenticity; the modern acception of the genuinness of the stone starts with ALBRIGHT, Is the Mesha Inscription a Forgery?; up to GASS, Die Moabiter, 5–7.

provements in reading the inscription – as announced a few years ago by André Lemaire – are still possible.[13]

A question that is seldom put is why this text was written? Are there any reasons for the writing of the inscription and the erecting of the stone? An answer might be found within the narration of the texts or could be induced from external evidence.

3. Genre

The Moabite stone contains a royal inscription. The activities narrated are presented from a royal perspective. Although it can be doubted whether or not king Mesha wrote the text himself, the focalisation through the first person singular 'I' hints at the palace as central power controlling the contents. The genre of royal inscriptions, however, can be subdivided into a variety of text-types, such as annals, chronicles, letters to god, memorial inscriptions. The Moabite stone does not have the form of the annals or chronicles. The text is not organized on the basis of regnal years or campaigns as for instance the annals of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III or Sargon II. Different from the genre of the chronicles – well-known from Babylonia – in which a series of kings and their achievements are listed, the Mesha inscription deals only with the efforts of a single king.[14] Klaas Smelik classifies the text as a building inscription erected on the occasion of the building of a sanctuary for Chemosh in Q°riḥâh/Qarcho as narrated in line 3.[15] Interestingly the Mesha inscription does not contain the usual section of curses regarding those who would damage the inscription. Many scholars construe the monument as a Memorial stele 'retrospective of the reign of Mesha'.[16]

In this connection, I would like to refer to some Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. In texts like the display inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III,[17] or the letter to god after the successful eighth campaign of Sargon II against Urartu,[18] the scribes at the court have the ruler giving account of his responsibilities. In my view the Mesha stela is a text that vouches for the deeds and doings of the Moabite king. In a way, he is reporting to Chemosh what he has made out of his appointment as a king. In the form of a self-presentation, a letter to the deity was written.

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[13] LEMAIRE, La dynastie Davidique; LEMAIRE, 'House of David' Restored; see also NA'AMAN, King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy.

[14] See now WAERZEGGERS, The Babylonian Chronicles: Classification and Provenance.

[15] SMELIK, The Literary Structure of King Mesha's Inscription; SMELIK, Converting the Past, 59–73; VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon.

[16] DAVIS, The Moabite Stone and the Hebrew Records, 178; MILLER, The Moabite Stone as a Memorial Stela; DRINKARD, The Literary Genre of the Mesha Inscription; ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab, 226; WAGNER, Mescha / Mescha-Stele; GASS, Die Moabiter, 52–53.

[17] Texts: TADMOR, The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 117–204; TADMOR, Yamada and Novotny, Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 39–45; on this Genre see TADMOR, The Historical Inscriptions of Adad-Nirari III; NA'AMAN, The Brook of Egypt and Assyrian Policy on the Border of Egypt; YAMADA, Construction of the Assyrian Empire, 28–59.

[18] MAYER, Sargons Feldzug gegen Urartu.

This view has some implications when it comes to questions of composition, history, or historiography. The Mesha Inscription is clearly not written in a linear time line. The events are not narrated in the order in which they occurred in real life. Historiographically, a distinction must be made between the overall design of the inscription and its various propositions. The text contains a set of propositions that claim a specific event to have happened. They are memories of historical events that as such could have happened. For some features, I have my doubts. I, however, will not go as far as Thomas L. Thompson who denies the historicity of all the propositions in the inscription.[19] Many scholars have opted for a historical (re)construction ironing out the differences between the Moabite stone and the report in 2 Kgs 3.[20]

It is important to note that the stela is aniconic. With this statement it is meant that the stone only has an inscription that is not accompanied by an image. On the Phoenician inscription of Kilamuwa, for instance, the image of king Kilamuwa is accompanied by the iconic presence of four deities.[21] The Aramaic funerary stela of Si'gabbor the priest from Nerab, depicts on the one side a human figure, probably the priest and on the other side a banquet scene, probably of a meal with the dead.[22] As the other – albeit few – royal inscriptions from the Southern Levant on the Moabite Stone an image neither of the god nor of the king, is present. The stele itself is to be seen as the icon.

Although I have a great interest in historical questions and although I am tempted to construct Mesha's past, I will follow a different route here. The organisation of the various propositions within the inscription as well as the way in which they are memories of a recent past should be seen as the expression of a specific ideology. The ideology is not spelled out directly, but the character of the view on the past betrays the basic values of the one who is selecting an arranging the view on the past. Here, I am indebted especially to Douglas Green who with his 2010 monograph on the ideology of West Semitic royal inscriptions (re)opened my eyes for the ideological grid underlying the Moabite stone.[23]

Before reading the text, a few remarks are still to be made about the assumed original communication. Although the inscription presents the king as its author, it is safe to assume that the text was composed and written by scribes affiliated to the court.[24]

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[19] THOMPSON, Problems of Genre and Historicity with Palestine's Descriptions.

[20] See, e.g., LIVER, The Wars of Mesha, King of Moab; TIMM, Die Dynastie Omri, 171–80; RENDSBURG, A Reconstruction of Moabite-Israelite History; DEARMAN, Historical Reconstruction and the Mesha Inscription; SMELIK, Converting the Past, 73–92; MITTMANN, Zwei "Rätsel" der Mēšaʿ-Inschrift; NAʾAMAN, King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy; ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab; VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon; FINKELSTEIN, LIPSCHITS, Omride Architecture in Moab; SERGI, Judah's Expansion in Historical Context; HODOSSY-TAKÁCS, On the Battlefield and Beyond.

[21] KAI 24; see also GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 136–56.

[22] KAI 269.

[23] GREEN, I Undertook Great Works; see also SURIANO, The Historicality of the King; I would like to note that during a post-graduate course on Westsemitic Epigraphy at Utrecht University in 1977 Manfred Weippert already hinted me at the ideological character of the Mesha Inscription.

[24] VAN DER TOORN, Scribal Culture.

Their affiliation, however, did not allow them free speech in any form of criticism of the king and his achievements. Quite the contrary, these scribes design a portrait of the king in almost perfect colours. The readership of the inscription can be found in various circles:

– The deity probably aiming at a sanctification of the king so that Mesha would become a deified ancestor;
– The king himself and his offspring aiming at a continuation of the route taken;
– The court personal aiming at loyalty towards this line of politics;
– The population aiming at grateful loyalty and servitude.

4. Space

One way or another, texts are mapping reality. The author of the Mesha-inscription is communicating a mental map of the geo-political reality of his days. The inscription refers to about a dozen toponyms in and around Moab. It is an interesting endeavours to try to locate all these toponyms on a modern geographical map identifying them with current localities, rivers, tells etc. This research is very necessary especially in the search for a historical construction. Such maps have often been made and can easily be found.[25]

From an ideological point of view, the inscription communicates a different kind of map.[26] The various toponyms can be classified into four different groups.

1. Central to the narrative map is the town of Dibon and the area surrounding it. Mesha present himself as a Dibonite: 𐤄𐤃𐤉𐤁𐤍, הדיבני, 'the Dibonite' (line 1–2).[27] This clan or tribe had apparently reached a position of power within the greater Moabite kingdom. The town of Dibon is the centre of the royal actions. Interesting is a remark in the episode on the conquest of the Israelite stronghold Jahaz. Lines 20–21 read:

   I have taken it in order to add it to Dibon.[28]

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[25] See for instance DEARMAN (ed.), Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab, 299 Map 1.

[26] On 'symbolic space', see, e.g., LEFEBVRE, La production de l'espace; BOURDIEU, Social Space and Symbolic Power; PATTERSON, Making Sense of Culture.

[27] VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon, correctly argued that dybn, is not the name of a town, but the indicator of Mesha's tribe; their view is adopted by HODOSSY-TAKÁCS, On the Battlefield and Beyond, 169; for a territorial interpretation see, e.g., DONNER/RÖLLIG, Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschrifte II, 171 (Nisbe zum Ortsnamen); TIMM, Die Dynastie Omri, 161 (Ortsname); ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab, 231–232 (town or territory); WEIPPERT, Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament, 245 (Ortsname).

[28] The Westsemitic root ysp has as its general meaning 'to add'. In the context of military achievements the verb is used as an ideological euphemism for 'to conquer', see, e.g., Phoen. Eshmunezer Inscription KAI 14:19; Old Aram. Zakkur Inscription KAI 202B:4–5; as far as I can see this connotation is not attested in the Hebrew Bible.

Interestingly the text does not read 'to Moab' but 'to Dibon' which is indicative for the central role of Dibon in the narrative map. Next to that, the building activities narrated in lines 21–26 are concentrated to the Dibon area. These observations lead to the conclusion that the narrative map of the Mesha-inscription was structured around an inner region that was construed as the real centre of the country.[29]

2. On the narrative map the Dibonite area is seen as surrounded by the Moabite territory. This territory is ruled by the Dibonite tribe. As a sign of this rule, various building activities were undertaken in the area of Moab.

3. A third circle is formed by what Green labels as 'ambiguous land'.[30] These territories to the north and south of central Moab are construed as part of Greater Moab. Yet the ownership of these territories is disputed. Greater parts of it are under inimical rule, such as the land of Ataroth, Nebo, and Madebah:

> Now Omri took the land of Madeba, and occupied it in his day, and in the days of his son, forty years. And Chemosh had mercy on it in my time. And I built Baal-meon and made therein the ditch, and I built Kiriathaim.[31]

The narrative of the inscription hallows the *Reconquista* of this 'ambiguous land' and its incorporation into Moab.

4. The fourth and final circle on the narrative map contains the inimical lands beyond the 'ambiguous land'. Judah and Israel are mentioned as such. It should be noted that the military campaigns within the narrative do not cross the borders between circles three and four. This implies that Mesha respected the rule of his enemies over their kernel territory.

In sum: The Moabite stone reflects the view that the tribal area of the present ruler of Moab is the ideological centre to which the surrounding world needs to be subjugated, albeit to some limit. This ideological map concurs with the recent trend to encounter the areas in Transjordan no longer as 'nation states'. They should be perceived from a tribal perspective.[32]

5. Time

On this narrative map, a series of acts are carved. Throughout the inscription, Mesha is the main actor. The Moabite king is the subject of most of the acts described: He

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[29] See also GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 115–16; VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon, have argued that Dibon was the tribe of which Mesha was the leader.

[30] GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 116–18.

[31] Lines 7–10.

[32] On 'tribalism' versus the traditional 'nation-state-paradigm', see ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab; BIENKOWSKI, 'Tribalism' and 'Segmentary Society' in Iron Age Transjordan; see also VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon. For a broader anthropological view on 'tribe' see FRIED, The Notion of Tribe; MALEŠEVIĆ, Nation-States and Nationalisms.

makes, he conquers, he builds. I would like to argue – as has been done before – that the narrated order in the text does not equal a temporal order. This is one of the characteristics of the *Genre*. The narrative order in the Display Inscriptions of Tiglath Pilerser III, for instance, is not temporal, but geographical.[33] A comparable observation can be made about the report on David's conquests in 2 Sam 8:1–13.

5.1 Three Temporal Stages

The various acts described in the Mesha inscription can be allocated to three different temporal stages. The first stage describes acts that had happened before Mesha became ruler. The second stage refers to acts during the lifetime and kingship of Mesha. The third stage contains a description of the world as it was recreated by the acts of Mesha. I would like to agree, to some degree, with Douglas Green's remark that – in the Mesha inscription –:

Time before Mesha's reign is by definition disordered time: a time of enemy occupation and defilement of the land by foreign gods, a time of humiliation (lines 5 and 6), a time when Chemosh was angry with his own land (lines 5 and 6).[34]

5.2 Stage One

This can be illustrated by referring to the description of acts that took place before Mesha came to power. Of great importance is the section on the oppression by Omri, king of Israel:

Omri was king of Israel.
He oppressed Moab for many days,
for Chemosh was angry with his land.
His son replaced him.
He – too – said:
'I will oppress Moab!'.[35]

In this section, the verb ענה is used twice. Both forms are to be construed as be factitive D-forms of the verb ענה/י, 'to be humble', D 'to make humble', hence 'to humiliate'.[36] The conquest of the 'ambiguous land' by Omri is characterized as a humiliating oppression. The expression has a parallel in the Phoenician Azitawadda inscription from Karatepe:

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[33] See TADMOR, The Historical Inscriptions of Adad-Nirari III; NA'AMAN, The Brook of Egypt and Assyrian Policy on the Border of Egypt; YAMADA, Construction of the Assyrian Empire, 28–59.

[34] GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 121.

[35] Lines 5–6.

[36] See also JACKSON, Language of the Mesha Inscription, 106–108; DNWSI, 876–77; GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 101–102; on the factitive of the D-stemm see GOETZE, The So-Called Intensive of the Semitic Languages; JENNI, Das hebräische Pi'el; WALTKE/O'CONNOR, Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, § 24.2; HEIDE, The Moabitica and Their Aftermath, 223–24.

I oppressed strong countries in the west[37] which none of the kings who were before me had been able to oppress.[38]

In the Hebrew Bible, the expression occurs some 20 times. I will not discuss all the instances here, but only refer to one example from the prophecy of Nathan:

I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked humiliate them (לְעַנּוֹתוֹ) any more as formerly.[39]

The more general statement of the humiliation by the Israelites is specified in the course of the Mesha inscription, when it is narrated that 'Omri had taken possession of the whole la[n]d of Madeba',[40] 'the king of Israel built Ataroth for himself',[41] and 'the king of Israel had built Jahats and he stayed there during his raids against me'.[42] The oppression is assumed implicitly in the divine summons of Chemosh against Mesha: 'Go, take Nebo from Israel!'. The period of disaster, however, is not solely depicted as the Israelite oppression of the 'ambiguous land'. In Dibon itself, disaster existed as can be deduced from the building activities in lines 21–26. The situation of deprivation is explicitly mentioned in connection to Qarcho:

There was no cistern in the city centre of Qarcho.[43]

In sum, Green's assumption seems to be correct, although he overstates his argument by referring to a 'defilement of the land by foreign gods'.

5.3 Stage Two

The acts that were conducted during the reign of Mesha can be classified into two main categories: (1) Military achievements and (2) Building activities.

5.3.1 Military Activities

The military activities form the main part of the acts. Here, the king is depicted as a conquering hero. This is exemplary in the section on Ataroth:

I fought against the city.
I captured it.
I killed all the people [from] the city as a sacrifice[44] for Chemosh and for Moab.[45]

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[37] Literally 'in the (area of the) sunset', *bmk' šmš*.

[38] KAI 26A i:18–19; see also GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 232–65.

[39] 2 Sam 7:10.

[40] Lines 7–8.

[41] Lines 10–11.

[42] Lines 18–19.

[43] Line 24.

[44] There is an seemingly endless discussion on the reading and the translation of the noun *ryt*.; see, e.g., BEESTON, Mesha and Ataroth, 143; DONNER/RÖLLIG, Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften II, 175: 'Darbringung'; JACKSON, Language of the Mesha Inscription, 111–12: 'satiation'; SMELIK, *Converting the Past*, 64: 'sacrifice'; JAROŠ, Inschriften des Heiligen Landes aus vier Jahrtausenden, 279: compares it with Northminean *rjtm* 'peace offering'. Recently a discussion arose on the question wheth-

Siege and conquest are narrated in short reporting sentences, almost echoing military orders. It seems that the post-war ills receive more attention. The genocide of the population as a religious act receives more narrative space that siege and conquest.[46] That military activities are seen as acts of good religious behaviour becomes clear from a sub-theme in this category.

At two instances, the Mesha inscription seems to refer to the more general Ancient Near Eastern theme of the carrying away of divine images after the conquest of an inimical city. This theme is narrated quite often in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions for instance in the phrase 'the gods in whom they trusted, I carried away'. Exemplary is a passage on a campaign of Esarhaddon inscribed in a building inscription:

I carried their gods, their possessions, their properties,
and their people away to Assyria.[47]

The theme is also depicted on reliefs on the walls in their palaces, for instance the well-known scene on the sculptures of Tiglath Pileser III, where captives from Gaza carry their gods into captivity.[48] The depicted scene is also narrated in inscriptions of this Assyrian king.[49]

The Mesha inscription does not refer to the carrying away of divine images. It mentions two items that can be classified as cultic objects. In the section on the conquest of Ataroth it is related:

I brought from there the 𐤀𐤓𐤀𐤋 𐤃𐤅𐤃𐤄 (אראל דודה, *Ar'iel-Dôdō*)
I hauled it before the face of Chemosh in Qeriôth.[50]

The identity of the *Ari'el-Dôdō* is an enduring enigma for all readers of this text.[51] I assume that the Ariel is a leontomorphic representation of the divine. Dôdô should be

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er to read *ryt* or *hyt*, see SCHADE, New Photographs Supporting the Reading *ryt* in Line 12 of the Mesha Inscription (in favour of *ryt*); RAINEY, Whence Came the Israelites and Their Language?, 41–64; LE-MAIRE, New Photographs and "ryt" or "hyt" in the Mesha Inscription, Line 12, 204–207 (both in favour of *hyt*) – already supposed by LEMAIRE, La stèle de Mésha et l'histoire de l'ancien Israël, 143–144; RAINEY, Syntax, Hermeneutics and History, 245; adapted by GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 102–103; WEIPPERT, Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament, 246. *Pace* GASS, Die Moabiter, 25–26, I would prefer reading *ryt*. From the context it seems that a choice for *sacrifice* as translation of *ryt* is not without reason.

[45] Lines 11–12.

[46] On the cruelty in Ancient Near Eastern warfare see, e.g., COGAN, 'Ripping open Pregnant Women' in Light of an Assyrian Analogue; NIDITCH, War in the Hebrew Bible; KUHRT, Women and War; RICHARDSON, Death and Dismemberment in Mesopotamia; DUBOVSKÝ, Ripping Open Pregnant Arab Women: Reliefs in Room L of Ashurbanipal's North Palace (with interesting pictorial material from Ashurbanipal's North Palace); NIDITCH, A Messy Business; as well as the atrocities implied in Ps 137.

[47] Esarh. Nin. A-F Epis. 17 = BORGER, Esarhaddon, 56 A IV:71–72.

[48] LAYARD, Monuments of Nineveh, Plate 65; see UEHLINGER, Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary, 124.

[49] TP III Summ. Inscr. 4:8'–10'; 8:14'–16'; see the synopsis in TADMOR, The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 222–225. On this campaign see now DUBOVSKÝ, Tiglath-pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 BCE.

[50] Lines 12–13.

construed as an appellative for the divine: 'his beloved'.[52] Bruce Routledge correctly observed that *Ari'el-Dôdō* stands within the Mesha Inscription in parallelism to another cultic object.[53] In the section on the capture of Nebo, we read:

I took from there t[he ve]ssels of Yahweh.
I hauled them before the face of Chemosh.[54]

Reading .א]ת.כ[לי.יהוה. in the broken line 18 is generally accepted.[55] In the Ancient Near East cultic vessels could be deified. I will give a few examples. In the Ugaritic Baal Epic, it is narrated that after the construction of a palace for Baal was completed the deity offered a banquet for a variety of divine beings among whom the 'jar gods':

špq . 'ilm . rḥbt yn   He caused the divine jars to drink wine
špq . 'ilht . dkr<t yn>   He caused the divine jug<s to drink wine>[56]

Billie Jean Collins has made clear that in Hittite Anatolia cult objects could be seen as symbolic representation of the divine.[57] In Mesopotamia, two deified cultic vessels are mentioned in ritual are mentioned in ritual texts, where they play an important role as deliverers of bread-offerings at the inauguration rituals of newly established or rebuilt sanctuaries: d*Umun-mu-ta-àm-gu₇*[58] and dUmun-mu-ta-àm-nag.[59] In the stories on Ezra and Nehemiah the 'temple vessels' are seen as symbolic representations of the Israelite divine.[60] With regard to the Mesha inscription it can be argued that Mesha took the cultic vessels in the absence of a divine image.

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[51] For a description of the extensive history of research see DONNER/RÖLLIG, Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften II, 175; GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 103; STÖKL, Kings, Heroes, Gods; GASS, Die Moabiter, 27–31.

[52] For the interpretation of *'r'l* as a 'lion figure' see basically MÜNGER, Ariel. *Dwdw* does not refer to a deity 'Dod', but should be construed as an appellative noun meaning 'beloved' and not 'paternal uncle' with a suffix 3.m.s., see: BARSTAD, Dod; BARSTAD/BECKING, Does the Stele from Tel-Dan refer to a Deity Dôd?; JAROŠ, Inschriften des Heiligen Landes aus vier Jahrtausenden, 279: Liebling as appellative for a deity; NA'AMAN, King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy.

[53] ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab, 248; unconsciously taking over an idea of BENNET, Moabite Stone, 33; TIMM, Die Dynastie Omri,167.

[54] Line 17–18.

[55] See, e.g., DONNER/RÖLLIG, Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften II, 177; SMELIK, Converting the Past, 62; ROUTLEDGE, The Politics of Mesha: Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab, 248; GREEN, I Undertook Great Works, 104–105; despite a series of proposals to read otherwise, see Greens' footnote 35 to which can be added WEIPPERT, Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament, 247: *'r*[']*ly yhwh*, 'Alt[ä]re Jahwes'.

[56] KTU 1.4 vi:52–53; see DE MOOR, The Semitic Pantheon of Ugarit, 225. In this connection De Moor refers to other deified cultic vessels for instance a *qlḥ*, 'cauldron', see KTU 1.115:5.

[57] COLLINS, A Statue for the Deity: Cult Images in Hittite Anatolia.

[58] BE 1387 = AMBOS, Mesopotamische Baurituale, Text II.D.1.3:33.

[59] Rm 10 = AMBOS, Mesopotamische Baurituale, Text II.E.4:11'.

[60] See: BECKING, Silent Witness.

Twice, Mesha narrates that he 'hauled' the objects before Chemosh. The verb סחב is used only here in Moabite. Generally a meaning 'to drag; to haul' is proposed.[61] In Biblical Hebrew the cognate verb סחב is used to describe the dragging of a dead body through the streets (Jer 22:19) or the dragging of captives from a town (Jer 49:20; 50:45). It can only be concluded that Mesha's acts with the cultic vessels should be construed as an act of humiliation towards the god represented by the vessels and his adherents. In doing so, Mesha underlines the power of Chemosh not only over Dibon and Moab, but also over the 'ambiguous lands'.

Connected to this sub-theme of the taking divine representations as booty after the war is the other sub-theme of the implementation of the *ḥerem*-institution. In my opinion this institution is twice referred to in the Mesha inscription. Lines 16–17 make clear that former inhabitants of Nebo were out in the ban for Chemosh. Lines 25–26 refer to the fact that prisoners from Israel had to 'cut out the moat for Qarhô'. I construe the noun 'prisoners' to be a synonym for people in the ban.[62] Contrary to the common misunderstanding, the implementation of the *ḥerem*-institution did not lead to genocide.[63]

5.3.2 Building Activities

I will now turn to the second category of acts: The building activities. There are three types of activities narrated in the Mesha inscription: (1) The building of a sanctuary; (2) Restauration of cities, their walls and their gates; (3) Irrigation works.

The building of a sanctuary is narrated on a prominent place in the inscription. This can only be an indication that the making of the במה for Chemosh was seen as the most important act of the king. It also indicates the close connection between deity and king on which I will elaborate later. I will not dwell here on the question what kind of a sanctuary the במה for Chemosh has been.[64]

The restauration of cities, their walls and their gates is a recurring theme throughout the Mesha Inscription. These activities should be seen as acts of consolidation after the military achievements. These building activities have a double function within the narrative: reparation and preparation. On the one hand, they show Mesha's actions to repair the damage caused by the inimical acts, on the other hand they function as a sign. As a result of the restauration of cities, their walls and their gates Dibon, Moab, and the 'ambiguous lands' are now saver than before.

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[61] See also: LIPIŃSKI, Etymological and Exegetical Notes on the Mesa' Inscription, 333; BEESTON, Mesha and Ataroth, 143–48; SMELIK, Converting the Past, 65; JAROŠ, Inschriften des Heiligen Landes aus vier Jahrtausenden, 279.

[62] This assumption is corroborated by a recently found Moabite inscription, AHITUV, A New Moabite Inscription; see BECKING, Exile and Forced Labour; ROUTLEDGE, On Water Management in the Mesha Inscription and Moab; GASS, Die Moabiter, 76–83.

[63] See, e.g., STERN, The Biblical Herem; NIDITCH, War in the Hebrew Bible, 28–76; GASS, Die Moabiter, 63; GREB, Völkermord im Namen Gottes?; ROSEN-ZVI, Rereading *herem*; MONROE, Israelite, Moabite and Sabaean War-ḥerem Traditions.

[64] See, e.g., BARRICK, What Do We Really Know About 'High-places'?; GLEIS, Die Bamah; HARDY/THOMAS, Another Look at Biblical Hebrew *bāmāh* 'High Place'.

As for the irrigation works, Douglas Green has an inclination to bring them under the metaphorical umbrella of the 'king as gardener'. The pertinent passages in the Mesha inscription read:

I built Baal-Meon.
I made in it a water reservoir.
I built Kiriathaim.[65]

and:

Now, there was no cistern in the center of the city of Qarcho.
I said to all the people:
    Make each one of you a cistern in his house!
I cut the moat for Qarcho by means of prisoners from Israel.[66]

It can easily be observed that these activities are not primarily related to the agricultural sphere. They are conducted within the areal limits of the cities mentioned. I therefore assume that they were of importance for the water supply within the cities – eventually in case of a new siege – and helped to improve the life of the Dibonites and the Moabites.[67] All in all, they are a symbol of the improved circumstances in Dibon and Moab thanks do the deeds and doings of king Mesha.

5.3.3 Stage Three

There are no clauses that clearly refer to the third temporal stage. Nevertheless, I would like to discuss this stage, albeit briefly. I am of the opinion that as a result of the acts of king Mesha in stage 2 a situation has been reached in which there was no longer foreign oppression in Dibon, Moab, and the 'ambiguous lands'. Next to that, the lack of irrigation-works has been fulfilled.

I would like to add here a feature from the field of empire-studies. Michael Doyle introduced the term 'Augustine threshold'. It was this Roman emperor who took all sorts of measures that were helpful to enter a phase of consolidation after a phase of expansion.[68] I do not dare to equal Mesha with Augustus. The size of the Moabie 'kingdom' is incomparable to that of the Roman Empire. I will nevertheless interpret the building activities of the Moabite king as activities that helped to enter the phase of consolidation of the rule of Mesha's family over greater Moab and the 'ambiguous land'.

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[65] Lines 9–10.

[66] Lines 24–26.

[67] See also KAPLAN, The Mesha Inscription and Iron Age II Water Systems; ROUTLEDGE, On Water Management in the Mesha Inscription and Moab; PORTER, Complex Communities.

[68] DOYLE, Empires, 93–97; see also HILDEBRAND, Augusteische Schwelle; ZIELONKA, Empires and the Modern International System; BAGG, Palestine under Assyrian Rule: A New Look at the Assyrian Imperial Policy in the West.

6. People

The Mesha Inscription narrates a set of actions within space and time that involved a variety of persons. At this stage in the argument, a neutral term like 'persons' is to be favoured above 'tribes; people; nation'. The analysis of these 'persons' from the second and third circle might give a hint at their social status and the coherence, or absence of it, between the various groups.

It is important to note that these groups are indicated differently. Some of the groups are seen as under the rule of a מלך, 'king':

– The king of Israel (lines 5; 18).

In Moabite, מלך has the connotation of a ruler over an area that consists of more than one group, clan or tribe. This is consistent with its cognate in Hebrew, where a מלך is seen as ruling over at least two tribes.

Some of the groups are indicated with the word ארץ, 'land':

– the land of Madebah (lines 7–8);
– the land of Ataroth (line 10).

In west Semitic languages, the noun ארץ and its cognates could refer to the 'earth (in its entirety)'; to 'the ground or soil' and to a 'limited territory or region'. In Phoenician inscriptions ארץ often refers to the territory of the city-state.[69] In my opinion, ארץ in the Mesha inscription would be the indication of a geographical entity around one or more 'cities'.[70]

Some of the groups are indicated with the word אש, 'men of …':

– the men of Gad (line 10);
– the men of Sharon (line 13);
– the men of Maharith (lines 13–14);
– the men of Diban (line 28).

אש is to be construed as a plural noun in the status constructus, comparable to Hebrew *'anšê*. This noun indicates the inhabitants of a village or city.[71]

Occasionally, some are seen as an עם, 'people; inhabitants of …':

– the people of the city (= Ataroth; line 11–12).

The Moabite noun עם is as far as I can see to be construed as an indication for a coherent group of kinsmen and could be rendered with 'tribe'.

Sometimes no indicator is given:

– Nebo (14); Jahaz (18–19); Aroer (26); Beth Bamoth (27) and Bezer (27).

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[69] See, e.g., Yehaumolok = KAI 10:10; Eshmunezer = KAI 14:16,18,20
[70] See also ROUTLEDGE, Moab in the Iron Age, 139–40.
[71] Cf. for instance: 'the men of Sodom' Gen 19:4; 'the men of Ai' Josh 7–8; 'men of Gibeon' Josh 10:6.

This variety of indications of the various groups should be seen as a hint to the fact that 'greater Moab' consisted of a variety of tribes, inhabitants and territories. This observation is reinforced by the archaeological data from Iron II Moab. These data indicate that the area was inhabited by separate groups with not much interconnection.[72] Between the lines of the Mesha inscription it can be read that Mesha succeeded to bringing this patchwork of groups and territories under his rule making the area stronger for the Aramean and later the Assyrian threat.[73]

7. God and King

The narrative in the Mesha inscription contains three types of claims with regard to the connection between god and king. Firstly, it is stated in lines 5–6:

for Chemosh was angry with his land.

This clause motivates the situation of oppression in the days before Mesha's deeds and doings. The Moabite verb used here, ענף, 'to be angry', suggests a divine reaction to previous acts of the Dibonites and the Moabites. Not unlike its Hebrew cognates there is a hint to the concept of 'transgression'.[74] Implicitly, it is suggested that Chemosh's adherents did not act according to his will. This remark on divine anger indirectly colours the image of Mesha: he should be seen as the king who acted according to the divine will. This suggestion is also present in the two other types of claims.

The second type of interrelation between god and king consists of the theme of *co-operatio potestarum*. This means that acts presumably conducted by the king are presented as divine interventions in the course of history. The Mesha inscription contains three examples of this theme. In the section on the conquest of Madeba, it is said:

Chemosh [rest]ored it in my days.[75]

In the report on the campaign against Jahaz, the theme is even more clearly in the following parallel lines:

Chemosh drove him away before my face.
I took 200 men of Moab – all its division –
And I led it up to Jahaz.[76]

In these lines, Mesha is presented as instrumental in the divine act. A third example can be found in the – albeit broken – section on Horonaim:

Chemosh [restor]ed it in my days.[77]

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[72] See, e.g., HARRISON, The Land of Mēdeba.

[73] See KNAUF, The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation; ROUTLEDGE, Learning to Love the King; ROUTLEDGE, Moab in the Iron Age, 133–53; WRIGHT, David, King of Israel, 143.

[74] See, e.g., BECKING, Divine Wrath and the conceptual Coherence of the Book of Nahum; JEREMIAS, Der Zorn Gottes.

[75] Lines 8–9.

[76] Lines 19–20.

The idea that Mesha did not act on his personal initiative becomes clear from the third type of connection between god and king. Twice in the narrative the clause 'Chemosh said to me' is attested each time followed by an appeal to fight against an enemy.[78] These clauses express the claim that Mesha's campaigns were initiated by the deity. The king is acting according to the divine command. I would like to agree with the suggestion of André Lemaire that the divine appeals had been the result of divination or oracular consultation, although this is not marked as such in the inscription.[79] A comparable feature is present in the Ammonite Citadel inscription that reads:

… m]lkm.bnh.lk.mb't.sbbt[…   … said M]ilkom: build for yourself entrances around […[80]

In sum, the three types of claims with regard to the connection between god and king make clear that Mesha acted as a true venerator of Chemosh.

8. Narrative Programme

All this implies in the narrative depth structure a specific narrative programme that can be summarized in the following diagram (Fig. 1):
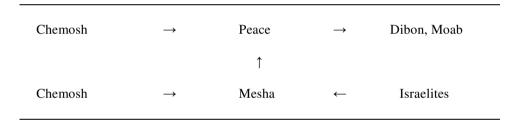
Chemosh	$\rightarrow$	Peace	$\rightarrow$	Dibon, Moab
		$\uparrow$		
Chemosh	$\rightarrow$	Mesha	$\leftarrow$	Israelites

Fig. 1: Narrative Programme in the Mesha Inscription[81]

This figure might need some explanation. The upper horizontal line represents the axis of intention. It expresses the goal that the destinator (Chemosh) wants to reach. It is the intention of the destinator (Chemosh) that the destinated (Dibon as well as Moab) becomes the owner of the object, here a situation of peace and prosperity. To reach that goal, actions need to be undertaken.

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[77] Line 33; see SMELIK, Converting the Past, 66.

[78] Lines 14 and 32; see also HODOSSY-TAKÁCS, On the Battlefield and Beyond, 170.

[79] LEMAIRE, Prophètes et rois dans les inscriptions ouest-sémitiques; GASS, Die Moabiter, 62; see also WEIPPERT, Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament, 246.

[80] On the inscription see now HÜBNER, Ammoniter, 17–21; TYSON, The Ammonites, 2014, 81–83. SASSON, The 'Ammān Citadel Inscription as an Oracle Promising Divine Protection: Philological and Literary Comments, made this proposal.

[81] For a theoretical background, see VAN WOLDE, A semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3.

The vertical axis is the axis of action. Steered by the intention of the destinator (Chemosh) the subjects (Mesha) perform acts that have as their goal that the intention of the destinator is reached. In the narrative of the Mesha Inscription these acts are mainly military achievements and building activities.

The lower line in Fig. 1 represents the axis of contrast or conflict. The helper is the one (or: the helpers are the ones) that support the subject in its deeds and doings. The opponent tries to prevent the intention of the destinator to come true.

In sum, the narrative gives words to the programme: 'from threatened existence to pax Moabitica'. It should be noted that this shift is mirrored crosswise by a change in Israel:

Israel perished an everlasting perishment.[82]

This narrative programme is the expression of the ideology of the inscription. It is king Mesha acting on behalf of the deity Chemosh who brings peace and prosperity to the country. Part of this ideology is the claim of a close connection between the divine wish and the royal acts.

9. Moabite Herrschaftslegitimation

In my view, ideology can be understood as a discourse on humans, human relations and the construction of a society. Ideology is a set of values that are imposed on a given society in order to control that society in doing so a *Herrschaftslegitimation* for the ruling elite is given. The Mesha inscription is a discourse on the Moabite society presenting the king as the ideal devotee of Chemosh and the bringer of prosperity to Dibon, Moab, and the 'ambiguous lands'. Next to that, the tribe of Dibon is presented as the real centre of the Moabite kingdom and in doing so, it legitimates the dynasty of Mesha.[83] The narrative in the Mesha inscription legitimizes the rule of the king. The implication of this 'letter to god' is to encourage the deity to bring more blessings to the Moabites. The implication for the population of Moab seems to be acceptance and gratitude. The Dibonites and the Moabites are indirectly invited to accept Mesha's rule and they should thank the king for bringing prosperity to the lands by a life of grateful loyalty and servitude towards the king and his offspring. It remains an open question whether or not the average Moabite experienced these blessings narrated in the Mesha inscription in the day to day tilling of the soil.

It is time to return to the question why the Mesha Inscription was written. Are there any reasons to inscribe a text and erect it as an icon that legitimizes (1) the rule of the house of Mesha and (2) the central position of the tribe of Diban within Greater Moab?

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[82] Line 7; the hyperbolic verb *'bd* occurs with a comparable meaning in narratives on conquest and downfall in the Hebrew Bible; see, e.g., Numb. 21:30: "We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reaches unto Medeba"; see also RIESENER, Der Stamm עבד, 142–49.

[83] See also VAN DER STEEN/SMELIK, King Mesha and the tribe of Dibon; WRIGHT, David, King of Israel, 143.

Cultural anthropology has made clear that smaller, relatively isolated communities did not feel the need to express the *Herrschaftslegitimation* of the ruling elite. Such communities are driven by consensus on the societal code and on many aspects of life.[84] Only when this consensus was challenged – by internal or external factors – the need arose to formulate a legitimation of the power structures.

It can be observed that in the middle of the 9th century Moab – like other Levantine polities – entered a new phase in its existence. A shift can be detected 'from tribal to tributary'. Two factors are to be seen as movers of this shift. On the one hand the growing economy and the need to secure trade routes on a more than local level, and on the other hand the increasing international political competition that would lead many Levantine polities into the status of tributary vassal-states or provinces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire caused all sorts of regional conflicts. Within Greater Moab the Dibonite tribe found the opportunity to stretch its rule over other tribes and localities. The rise to regional power of this tribe – which should not have been without conflicts, but these are silenced in the inscription – can be seen as the trigger in history that lead to the formulation of Mesha's meritocratic rule[85] *Herrschaftslegitimation* in the form of an iconic monument that was only rediscovered more than 2,500 years later.

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[84] See, e.g., ELIAS/SCOTSON, Cohesion, Conflict and Community Character.

[85] On meritocratic forms of *Herrschaftslegitimation* see BEETHAM, The Legitimation of Power, 64–99.

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