

Moab, Moabite

- I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
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I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Moab (MT *Môʾāb*; LXX *Mωαβ*) is one of the Semitic tribes in the southern Levant, located east of the Dead Sea. Moab was also a state in the Iron Age, and its capital was Dibon. Their main god was Chemosh.

1. Mythological Origins. Genesis 19:30–38 refers to Moab and Ammon as descendants of Lot's daughters by their father. The story is a mythological reference to Ammonites and Moabites as enemies of Israel and Judah, which was the case in the Iron Age II period. Another mythological remark considers the Moabites as living in the land of the Emites (Deut 2:10–11; cf. Gen 14:5).

2. Extrabiblical Sources. Moab is mentioned in the geographical list of Ramesses II (1279–1212 BCE) in Amara West, which is a copy of a list of

Amenhotep III (1388–1351 BCE) in Soleb (unfortunately the name of Moab is missing there) and in a geographical list of Ramesses II (Simons: XXIIId; for careful discussions and translations of all extrabiblical texts cf. Timm; Gaß, cf. the text numbers mentioned in the respective registers), found in Luxor. Some battle scenes at the Amun-Re temple in Luxor from the same period mention the towns *B(w)-t-r-t* (not identified) and *T-b-n* (perhaps Dibon). Moab is still considered the oldest ethnic group of the southern Levant, having become a territorial state in the Iron Age I period.

There are some settlements between Wadi el-Wale and Wadi Mojib originating in the Late Bronze Age (Ji/Lee). These seem to be the nucleus of the Moabite state which developed in the Iron Age.

3. Moab during Iron Age I. According to Judg 3:12–30 (oldest part of the text: vv. 15b–26) Israel had to pay tribute to Moab, which was already a kingdom ruled by Eglon. Since in the later history of the relationship of both states no tribute was ever paid by Israel for Cisjordanian territory, this may be an old tradition, which is not attested by any other sources.

Settlement history in the area east of the Dead Sea demonstrates four clusters of villages during the Iron Age I period (cf. Zwickel 1990):

- (1) The area around Rabbah of the Ammonites (Rabbat-Bene-Ammon), which was settled by the Ammonites.
- (2) The territory immediately north of the Dead Sea in the Jordan Valley.
- (3) The area between Wadi el-Mujib and Wadi el-Wale (the Late Bronze Age Moabite territory) and some villages north of Wadi el-Wale, but south of Wadi Zerqa Main.
- (4) The territory between Wadi el-Mujib and Wadi el-Hesa.

The area in the Jordan valley may have been Moabite meadowland during the Iron Age I, and some incursions west of the Jordan river, which was only sparsely settled in the Iron Age I, are possible.

4. Moab at the Time of David. Already in his early years David had close contact with Moab, where he left his parents during turbulent times (1 Sam 22:3–4). Although the redactional compilation of 2 Sam 8:1–14//1 Chr 18:2–13 is young, the events referred to may be much older. Verse 2 may refer to new developments in the area north of Wadi el-Wale: the tribes of the Reubenites and the Gadites, which may have been under Moabite control during parts of Iron Age I, became affiliated with the kingdom of Israel.

The Balaam story (Num 22–24; cf. also the Deir ‘Alla Inscriptions) – which concerns the area of Kiriath-huzoth (Num 22:39), Bamoth-baal (Num 22:41), und Pisgah (Num 23:14) as Moabite territory, and which was to be conquered by the Israelites (Num 24:17) – may reflect the events of this period. There

is no other time segment in the history of Israel when Israel really conquered this area from the Moabites.

5. Chemosh-yat and Mesha. While Moab was rather small in the 10th century BCE, a new revival took place during the time of Chemosh-yat and especially during his son Mesha’s reign in the 9th century BCE. Chemosh-yat is mentioned in the Mesha Inscription and in a royal inscription fragment, which was part of an elder Egyptian statue (el-Kerak fragment; cf. Parker/Arico). According to the Mesha Inscription, he ruled thirty years over Moab – probably only an approximate number for a rather long reign (ca. 895/885 to 865–855 BCE).

The most important source for the history of Moab is the Mesha Stela, which was found 1868 by the Alsatian priest F. A. Klein in Dhiban. The stela was broken several times and some pieces are missing. Nevertheless, based on a plaster squeeze that was ripped off the destruction of the stela, most parts of this inscription with 34+x lines can be reconstructed. This royal inscription refers to the deeds of King Mesha, who built up an open sanctuary in Qeriho (cultic area of Dibon), conquered the Israelite (Gadite und Reubenite) area north of Wadi el-Wale with the cities Medeba, Ataroth, and Nebo as well as east of Moab (Jahaz) and who rebuilt several towns (Baal-meon, Kirjaton, Aroer, Beth-bamoth, Bezer, Medeba, and Diblaton) including his hometown Dibon. According to a new reading of line 31 (Lemaire: 30–37), the area south of Wadi el-Mujib was controlled by the house of David (= Judah). Although the text is badly damaged in this part, evidently Mesha ejected the Judahites; he probably enlarged his territory not only in the north but also in the south down to Wadi el-Hesa.

Second Kings 3:4 mentions that Mesha had to pay wool as tribute to Israel. This was the scenario at the beginning of the military campaigns of Mesha. Second Kings 3:4–9a:21, 24–27 (the prophetic legend in vv. 9b–20, 22–23 is an addition) describe an unsuccessful military campaign of Israel and Judah against Moab. This campaign was probably a reaction to the territorial enlargement of the Moabites in the south. The sacrifice of Mesha’s son on the walls of Kir-Hareseth (2 Kgs 3:27) is probably a pious explanation for the failure of the Judahite-Israelite coalition against Moab. At the end of his reign Mesha controlled the whole area east of the Dead Sea with the Ammonites in the north and the Edomites in the south. Throughout the following centuries the Israelites and Judahites seem to have been hostile toward the Moabites. This hostility influenced many biblical texts (Gen 25:1; Num 21:11–29; Deut 23:4//Neh 13:1, 23; Judg 10:6; 1 Kgs 11:1, 7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13; Pss 60:10//108:10; 83:7) – even in times when Moab did not exist anymore.

6. Late 9th and early 8th Centuries. Apart from the Mesha Inscription, there are no extrabiblical

sources for Moab before 732 BCE. According to Amos 2:1, traditionally dated 860/850 BCE, there was a campaign against Edom, and the bones of the king of Edom were burnt – a sacrilege in the Semitic world. The Moabites would have tried to enlarge their territory further south in the early 8th century BCE, killing the king of Edom. Second Kings 13:20–21 (cf. Sir 48:13; Josephus, *Ant.* 9.182–83), which mentions Moabite raiders entering Israelite territory, may be a legendary text.

7. Late 8th and 7th Centuries. A list of countries paying tribute to Tiglath-pileser III in the year 732 BCE (Inscription K 3751), mentions Salamanu as king of Moab. Accordingly, Moab was under Assyrian control after the Assyrian campaigns in 734–732 BCE. Since no report of a conquest of Moab exists, Salamanu probably paid tribute in order not to be conquered.

The Nineveh prism of Sargon II, dated to his 11th regnal year (712/711 BCE) and Nimrud letter 16 ND 2765 from 713 BCE (cf. also K 4783 = ADD 928; K 1295 = ABL 632), mention the still existing tributes of Moab. According to the Chicago Taylor Prism, the next Moabite king Chemosh-nadbi continued to pay tribute. According to Prism A 1 from Nineveh (dated 673 BCE) and Prism C II (dated to the early years of Assurbanipal [669–627 BCE]), also his successor Musuri paid tribute.

During the reign of his successor Chemosh-halta, who still paid tribute to Assur, the Qedarites living east of Moab in the Arabian Desert, with the oasis of Adummatu (Dumat el-Jandal; 29.811417, 39.868306) as their cultural centre, tried to get control of at least the eastern Moabite territory with the desert highway (cf. Prism B, C and D of Assurbanipal; 652 BCE). If Isa 15:1–8(9) can be connected with this campaign, the Qedarites may even have entered the Moabite heartland. The Moabites fought back the Qedarites and delivered the Qedarite king to the Assyrians.

Interestingly, Isa 15 is a lament about Moab written by a Judahite writer, and not full of malice. This may demonstrate a closer affiliation between Moab and Judah in the 7th century BCE.

8. The Last Years of Moab. The oracle of Jer 48 (or at least its early core) was spoken in the fourth year of King Johoiakim (605 BCE). Doom is announced against Moab, probably in the context of Babylonian troops in Palestine after a short Egyptian dominion in that area. No Moabite guilt is mentioned in the text, and therefore the dating of the text to the year 605 BCE seems probable.

Only about four years later (601 BCE), Moabite and other raiders entered the territory of Judah supported by king Nebuchadnezzar in order to disrupt Judahite politics (2 Kgs 24:1–2).

In 594 BCE the situation seems to have changed again. Now Edomite, Moabite, Ammonite, Tyrian, and Sidonian messengers met in Jerusalem to estab-

lish an anti-Babylonian coalition. In the Lachish Letter Lak(6):1.8 from 588/587 BCE a Moabite king called Chemosh is mentioned in a positive way; evidently he supported Judah against the Babylonians (cf. also Jer 27:3). After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE the Moabites mocked the Judahites because of the destruction of Judah (Ezek 25:8–11). Apparently the Babylonian campaign did not touch Moabite territory. Therefore, Ezekiel announced an attack by “people from the east” (likely Qedarites) and Ammonites, who will conquer Moab. Nothing is known about such a military campaign.

Josephus (*Ant.* 10.181) mentions another campaign conducted by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 582 BCE. Moab appears to have been completely destroyed by the Babylonian army. Settlement history demonstrates that no settlement north of river Arnon existed in the Persian period, and also south of Arnon only a few villages survived. The biblical Book of Ruth, which was written in the postexilic period, presumes a nearly unsettled area of Moab.

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