

# Reuven and Gad, The Mesha stele and the Atarot altar: Ethnic identity and Moshe's concerns

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# Why is Moshe so upset?

רמב"ן

והנה משה חשד אותם כי יאמרו כן מפחד אנשי ארץ כנען, שאמרו בהם המרגלים, "לא נוכל לעלות אל העם כי חזק הוא ממנו" (במדבר יג, לא), ולכן אמר להם שאינם בוטחים בה' כאבותם, ויוסף עוד להענישם כהם להניחם במדבר. ולכך ענו אותו: חלילה שנירא מהם, אבל נעבור חלוצים למלחמה ונהיה מהירים וראשונים לפני העם להלחם באויבי ה' כי לחמנו הם.

Now Moses suspected that they were only suggesting this because they were afraid of the people in the land of Canaan, concerning whom the spies had said, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" — therefore he told them that they did not trust in God, just like their fathers and therefore He would again punish them like their fathers, by leaving them in the wilderness. Therefore they answered him: "Far be it from us to fear them! For we shall pass over armed for battle, and we shall be the most eager and the first amongst the people to fight against the enemies of the Eternal, for they are bread

Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), pp. 127-132; Nathaniel Helfgot, “‘Shall Your Brothers Go Into Battle While You Remain Here?’ An Analysis of Numbers 32,” *Tradition* 32.2 (Winter 1998), 119-133.

<b>Leah</b>	<b>Zilpah</b>	<b>Rachel</b>	<b>Bilhah</b>
<b>Reuven</b>	<b>Gad</b>	Joseph	Dan
Shimon	Asher	<b>Menaššeh</b>	Naphtali
<i>Levi</i>		<i>Ephraim</i>	
<i>Yehuda</i>		Benjamin	
Yissakhar			
Zevulun			
Dinah			

# Rejection of Reuven and Menaššeh

1 Divre ha-Yamim 5:1-3

וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל – כִּי הוּא הַבְּכוֹר וּבְחָלְלוּ יְצוּעֵי אָבִיו נְתָנָה בְּכֻרְתּוֹ לְבְנֵי יוֹסֵף בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְלֹא לְהַתִּיחֵשׁ לְבְכֻרָה. כִּי יְהוּדָה גָּבַר בְּאָחִיו וּלְנָגִיד מִמֶּנּוּ וְהַבְּכֻרָה לְיוֹסֵף – בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל  
חֲנוּךְ וּפְלוּא וְחֶצְרוֹן וְכַרְמִי...

The sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel – he was the first-born; but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so he is not reckoned as first-born in the genealogy; though Judah became more powerful than his brothers and a leader came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph – the sons of Reuben, the first-born of Israel: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

# Rejection of Reuven and Menaššeh

Bereshit 48:18-19

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָבִיו לֹא כֵן אָבִי כִּי זֶה הַבְּכֹר שִׁים יְמִינְךָ עַל רֵאשׁוֹ. וַיִּמָּאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר, "יִדְעֵתִי בְּנִי, יִדְעֵתִי. גַּם הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעַם וְגַם הוּא יִגְדֹּל, וְאוֹלָם אַחִיו הַקָּטָן יִגְדֹּל מִמֶּנּוּ וְזָרְעוֹ יִהְיֶה מְלֵא הַגּוֹיִם."

“Not so, Father,” Joseph said to his father, “for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head.” But his father objected, saying, “I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.”

# Where do rejected older brothers go?

Cain:

וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלְּפָנֵי ה' וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ נֹד קְדֵמַת עֵדֵן

Kayin went out from the face of YHWH and settled in the land of Nod/Wandering, east of Eden.

# Where do rejected older brothers go?

Lot:

וְגַם לְלוֹט הַהֵלֶךְ אֶת אַבְרָם הָיָה צֹאן וּבָקָר וְאֵהָלִים, וְלֹא נִשְׂא אֶתֶם הָאָרֶץ לְשֹׁבֵת  
יַחְדָּו כִּי הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשֹׁבֵת יַחְדָּו. וַיְהִי רִיב בֵּין רֵעֵי מְקַנְהַי אַבְרָם וּבֵין  
רֵעֵי מְקַנְהַי לוֹט וְהִכְנַעְנִי וְהִפְרָזִי אֲזִי יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ. ...

Now also Lot, who had gone with Avram, had sheep and oxen and tents, and the land could not support them to settle together, for their property was so great that they were not able to settle together. So there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Avram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. ...

Lot:

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל לוֹט אֵל נָא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין רְעִי וּבֵין רְעִיךָ כִּי אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים  
אֲנַחְנוּ. הֲלֹא כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֶיךָ הִפְרָד נָא מֵעָלַי אִם הַשְּׂמָאל וְאִימָנָה וְאִם הַיְמִין וְאֲשַׁמְאִלָּה.  
וַיִּשָּׂא לוֹט אֶת עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת כָּל כַּפְר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כָּלָה מִשְׁקָה לְפָנָי שַׁחַת ה' אֶת סְדֹם וְאֶת  
עֲמֹרָה כְּגֹן ה' כְּאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶכָּה צֶעֶר:

Avram said to Lot: “Pray let there be no quarreling between me and you, between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brother men! Is not all the land before you? Pray part from me! If to the left, then I to the right, if to the right, then I to the left.” Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of the Jordan—how well-watered was it all, before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Amora, like YHWH’S garden, like the land of Egypt, as you come toward Tzo‘ar.

Lot:

וַיִּבְחַר לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל כַּנָּר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִקְּדָם וַיִּפְרְדּוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחִיו. אַבְרָם  
יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשַׁב בְּעָרֵי הַכְּנָר וַיֵּאָהֵל עַד־סְדֹם

So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan. Lot moved on eastward, and they parted, each from the other. Avram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the plain, and pitched-his-tent near Sedom.

# Where do rejected older brothers go?

Ishmael:

וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַנֶּעַר וַיִּגְדֵּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר וַיְהִי רֹבֵה קֶשֶׁת. וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבָּר פָּאֲרָן וַתִּקַּח  
לוֹ אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

And God was with the lad as he grew up; he settled in the wilderness, and became an archer, a Bowman. He settled in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife from the land of Egypt.

# Where do rejected older brothers go?

Esau:

וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת נָשָׁיו וְאֶת בָּנָיו וְאֶת בָּנֹתָיו וְאֶת כָּל נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת כָּל בְּהֵמָתוֹ וְאֶת כָּל קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל אֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אָחִיו, כִּי הָיָה רִכּוּשָׁם רַב מִשָּׁבֶת יַחְדָּו וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לָשֵׂאת אֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מִקְנֵיהֶם. וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שְׁעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֲדוֹם.

Esav took his wives, his sons and his daughters, and all the persons in his household, as well as his acquired-livestock, all his animals, and all his acquisitions that he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to [another] land, away from Yaakov his brother, for their property was too much for them to settle together; the land where they lived could not support them, on account of their acquired-livestock. So Esav settled in the highlands of Se'ir—Esav, that is Edom.

# Where do rejected older brothers go?

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגֹרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

Rashbam: וישב יעקב – עשו הלך אל ארץ אחרת מפני יעקב אחיו, אבל יעקב ישב אצל אביו בארץ מגוריו כי לו משפט הבכורה.

Esau 'went to' another 'land because of his brother Jacob' (36.6). Jacob, however, settled near his father in the same land where he resided, since the birthright was his due.

(Similarly Bekhor Shor, Ibn Ezra.)

# The מרגלים

The two “good” מרגלים were

- Kalev – from Judah
- Joshua – from Ephraim

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- Kalev – from Judah
- Joshua – from Ephraim

I.e., the two younger brothers who were chosen over their elders (Reuven, Shimon, Levi; Menaššeh)

# Sequel 1: Joshua 22

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֶר הִנֵּה בָנוּ בְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וּבְנֵי גָד וַחֲצֵי שֵׁבֶט הַמְּנַשֶּׁה אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶל מוֹל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶל גְּלִילוֹת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל עֵבֶר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְהֻלוּ כָּל עֵדֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹה לַעֲלוֹת עֲלֵיהֶם לְצַבָּא. וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְאֶל בְּנֵי גָד וְאֶל חֲצֵי שֵׁבֶט מְנַשֶּׁה אֶל אֶרֶץ הַגְּלָעָד אֶת פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְעֹשֶׂרָה נְשָׂאִים עִמּוֹ...

A report reached the Israelites: “The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar opposite the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, across from the Israelites.”

When the Israelites heard this, the whole community of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh to make war on them. But the Israelites sent the priest Phinehas son of Eleazar to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, accompanied by ten chieftains ....

# Sequel 1: Joshua 22

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְאֶל בְּנֵי גַד וְאֶל חֲצִי שֵׁבֶט מְנַשֶּׁה אֶל אֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲתָם לֵאמֹר:  
"כֹּה אָמְרוּ כָּל עֵדֹת ה', 'מָה הַמַּעַל הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר מְעַלְתֶּם בַּאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָשׁוּב הַיּוֹם מֵאַחֲרַי ה'  
בְּבָנוֹתְכֶם לָכֶם מִזְבֵּחַ לְמִרְדְּכֶם הַיּוֹם בַּה'..."

...

When they came to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, they spoke to them as follows:

‘Thus said the whole community of the LORD: What is this treachery that you have committed this day against the God of Israel, turning away from the LORD, building yourselves an altar and rebelling this day against the LORD!’ ....

וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וּבְנֵי גַד וַחֲצִי שֵׁבֶט הַמְּנַשֶּׁה וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֶת רֵאשֵׁי אֲלֹפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "אֵל אֱלֹהִים! ה' אֵל אֱלֹהִים!  
... וְאִם לֹא מִדְּאָגָה מִדְּבַר עֲשִׂינוּ אֶת זֹאת לְאֹמֶר מִחֹר יֹאמְרוּ בְּנֵיכֶם לְבָנֵינוּ לְאֹמֶר מֶה לָּכֶם וְלֹה'  
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל? וּגְבוּל נָתַן ה' בֵּינֵנוּ וּבֵינֵיכֶם בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וּבְנֵי גַד אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֵין לָכֶם חֵלֶק בַּה' וְהַשְּׁבִיתוּ  
בְּנֵיכֶם אֶת בְּנֵינוּ לְבִלְתִּי יִרְא אֶת ה'. וְנֹאמֶר נַעֲשֶׂה נָא לָנוּ לְבָנוֹת אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ – לֹא לְעוֹלָה וְלֹא לְזָבַח – כִּי  
עַד הוּא בֵּינֵנוּ וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין דְּרוֹתֵינוּ אַחֲרֵינוּ לְעַבֵּד אֶת עַבְדֵּת ה' לְפָנָיו בְּעֹלוֹתֵינוּ וּבְזִבְחֵינוּ וּבְשִׁלְמֵינוּ וְלֹא  
יֹאמְרוּ בְּנֵיכֶם מִחֹר לְבָנֵינוּ אֵין לָכֶם חֵלֶק בַּה'.

The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the contingents of Israel: They said, “God, the LORD God! God, the LORD God!

We did this thing only out of our concern that, in time to come, your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between you and us, O Reubenites and Gadites; you have no share in the LORD!’ Thus your children might prevent our children from worshiping the LORD. So we decided to provide [a witness] for ourselves by building an altar—not for burnt offerings or [other] sacrifices, but as a witness between you and us, and between the generations to come.”

## Sequel 2: Mesha's war (ninth century)



4Y.7ΔYΔ.6444.X4.WWY.9

4.X4Y.Y9W.W4.X4.9.9

1649W7.60.9Y.X4.1

4Y1W99H HΔO.X4HW.9

Y.X99YI/A

# Mesha's war in Tanakh: 2 Kings 3:5, 25-27

וַיְהִי כְּמוֹת אַחָאָב וַיִּפָּשַׁע מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב בַּמֶּלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

וְהָעָרִים יִהְרָסוּ וְכָל חֻלְקָה טוֹבָה יִשְׁלִיכוּ אִישׁ אֲבָנוֹ וּמְלֵאוֹהָ וְכָל מַעֲיֵן מַיִם יִסְתְּמוּ וְכָל עֵץ טוֹב יִפִּילוּ עַד הַשָּׂאִיר אֲבָנֶיהָ בְּקִיר חֲרָשֶׁת וַיִּסְבּוּ הַקְּלָעִים וַיִּכּוּהָ. וַיֵּרָא מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב כִּי חָזַק מִמֶּנּוּ הַמְּלַחְמָה וַיִּקַּח אוֹתוֹ שֶׁבַע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ שֶׁלֶף חָרָב לְהַבְקִיעַ אֶל מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ. וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יְמֻלְךָ תַּחֲתָיו וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עָלָה עַל הַחֲמָה וַיְהִי קֶצֶף גָּדוֹל עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ מֵעָלָיו וַיָּשׁוּבוּ לָאָרֶץ.

They destroyed the towns. Every man threw a stone into each fertile field, so that it was covered over; and they stopped up every spring and felled every fruit tree. Only the walls of Kir-hareseth were left, and then the slingers surrounded it and attacked it. Seeing that the battle was going against him, the king of Moab led an attempt of seven hundred swordsmen to break a way through to the king of Edom; but they failed. So he took his first-born son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him up on the wall as a burnt offering. A great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and went back to the land

# Mesha's wars in his own words: the Mesha stele

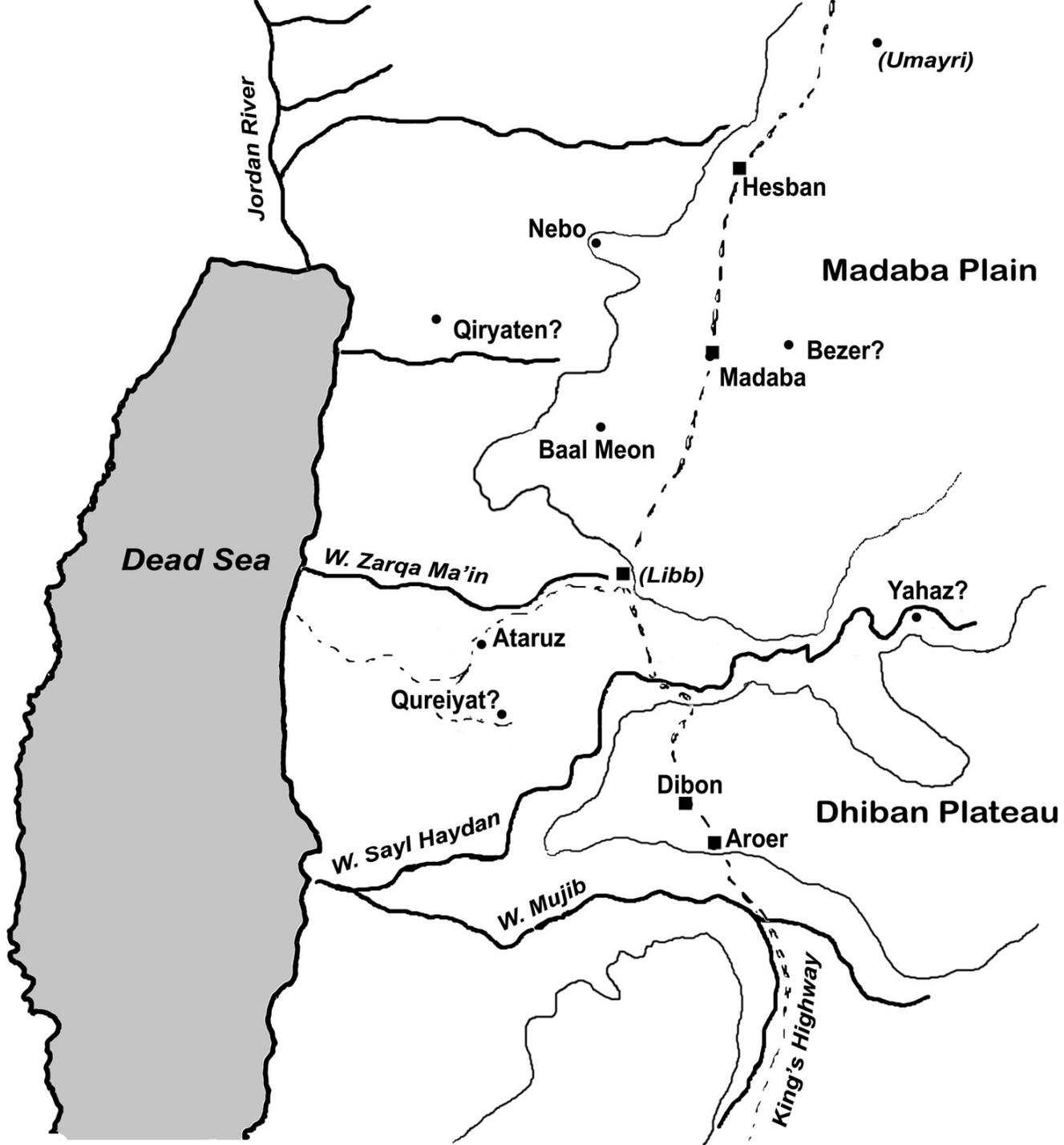
<p>I am Mesha, son of Kemoshyat, king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab thirty years, and I ruled after my father.</p>	<p>אנך משע בן כמש[ית] מלך מאב הדיבני. אבי מלך על מאב שלשן שת ואנך מלכתי אחר אבי.</p>
<p>I made this high place for Kemosh in Ẕarḥoh because he delivered me from all the kings, and because he let me prevail over all my enemies.</p>	<p>ואעש הבמת זאת לכמש בקרחה. במ] [ שע כי השעני מכל השלחן וכי הראני בכל שנאי.</p>
<p>Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days because Kemosh was angry with his country. His son succeeded him, and he also said, "I will oppress Moab." In my days he said this.</p> <p>But I prevailed over him and over his house, and Israel utterly perished. Now Omri had taken all the land of Mehadeba. He lived in it during his days and half of the days of his</p>	<p>עמרי מלך ישראל ויענו את מאב ימן רבן כי יאנף כמש בארצה. ויחלפה בנה ויאמר גם הא אענו את מאב. בימי אמר כ[ן]. וארא בה ובבתה. וישראל אבד אבד עלם וירש עמרי את כ[ל אר]ץ מהדבא. וישב בה ימה וחצי ימי בנה ארבען שת וישבה כמש בימי.</p>

The men of Gad had lived in the land of 'Atarot forever, and the king of Israel built for him 'Atarot. But I fought against the city and took it, and I killed the entire population but the city became Kemosh's and Moab's. I brought back from there the altar hearth of DWD and dragged it before Kemosh in Kiryat. I settled in it the man of Sharonites and the man of Maḥarat.

ואש גד ישב בארץ עטרת מעלם ויבן לה מלך ישראל את עטרת. ואלתחם בקר ואחזה. ואהרג את כל העם הקר הית לכמש ולמאב. ואשב משם את אראל דודה וא[ס]חבה לפני כמש בקרית. ואשב בה את אש שרן ואת אש מחרת.

Now Kemosh said to me, "Go seize Nebo from Israel." So I went at night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon. I seized it and killed everyone of it—seven thousand native men, foreign men, native women, foreign women, and slavegirls—for I devoted it to 'Ashtar-Kemosh. I took from there the vessels of YHWH and dragged them before Kemosh.

ויאמר לי כמש לך אחז את נבה על ישראל. ואהלך בללה ואלתחם בה מבקע השחרת עד צהרם. ואחזה ואהרג כל[ה] שבעת אלפן ג[ב]רן ו[ג]רן וגברת ו[גר]ת ורחמת. כי לעשתר כמש החרמתה. ואקח משם א[ת] כ[ל]י ה' ואסחב הם לפני כמש.



From <http://www.ataruz.org/maps>



4 60 מן עברון ת(?)

ו4000 גרן פשן ו יטש בגדל

מן קר הצדת ז סות

קן אדמה

4 60 from the Hebrews(?) ...

and 4000 foreign men were scattered, and  
abandoned greatly(?)

from the ruined city which [swt]

acquired land

Adam L. Bean, Christopher A. Rollston, P. Kyle McCarter, and Stefan J. Wimmer,  
"An Inscribed Altar from the Khirbat Ataruz Moabite Sanctuary," *Levant* 50  
(2018), 211-236.

**Inscribed Altar from the Moabite Shrine in Field E  
(Late 9th - Early 8th Centuries BCE; Photo by C. Ji)**

## ספרי במדבר קלג-קלד

“The daughters of Zelophehad approached”: When the daughters of Zelophehad heard that the land was being divided by tribe, but not to the females, they got together to make a plan.

They said, “The mercy of flesh and blood is not like the mercy of the Lord. Flesh and blood – they have mercy on males more than females, but the One Who Spoke and the World Was is not this way: he has mercy on all!”

... “The Lord said to Moses, ‘The daughters of Zelophehad speak correctly.’” They have litigated properly, for this is the way the passage is written before me in Heaven.

וַתִּקְרְבֵנָה בָּנוֹת צֶלְפָּחָד, כִּי־וּן שִׁשְׁמֵעוּ  
בְּנוֹת צֶלְפָּחַד שֶׁהָאָרֶץ מֵתַחֲלָקֶת  
לְשִׁבְטִים אֲבָל לֹא לְנִקְבוֹת, נִתְקַבְּצוּ  
כֹּלֶן זֶה לְזֶה לִיטוֹל עֵצָה.

אָמְרוּ, “לֹא כְרַחֲמֵי בֶשֶׂר וְדָם רַחֲמֵי  
מְקוֹם. רַחֲמֵי בֶשֶׂר וְדָם – רַחֲמֵי עַל  
הַזְּכָרִים יֵתֵר מִן הַנְּקִיבוֹת אֲבָל מִי שֶׁאָמַר  
וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם אֵינוֹ כֵּן: רַחֲמֵי עַל הַכֹּל!”

... וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: כֵּן בְּנוֹת  
צֶלְפָּחָד דִּבְרֹת. יֵאָה תִּבְעוּ בְּנוֹת צֶלְפָּחַד  
שֶׁכֵּךְ פָּרְשָׁה כְּתוּבָה לִפְנֵי בְּמִרוֹם.