



***Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic
Inscriptions of 1200-539 B.C.E.***

Lawrence J. Mykytiuk

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In the last two hundred years, ancient Hebrew and other early West-Semitic inscriptions have emerged among much else from the soils and sites of the biblical world/ancient Near East, and during the latter half of the 20th century to the present in ever-increasing quantity. Prominent among these artifacts are seals and seal-impressions (sealings or ‘bullae’) made from them, both Hebrew and otherwise. The Avigad/Sass corpus of 1997 alone contains over 1200 West-Semitic seals and sealings; and many additional such objects have been successively published in the quartet of A-5 volumes by Deutsch and colleagues (1994-1999), in two larger volumes on the Moussaieff collection (1999, 2000), and one each for the Hecht Museum (2000), the Kaufman Collection (2003) and the Adoniram Collection (2003). Corpora of West-Semitic texts have been issued by Gibson (1-3), and (Hebrew) Davies (I-II) and Renz (I-III), beside an Ammonite corpus (Aufrecht 1989). It is this rich harvest, much of it unprovenanced, but in some measure controllable through comparison with those items that come from regular excavations (as at the City of David dig; see Shoham, in Ariel et al., *City of David, VI*, and references there given), that occupies Mykytiuk’s work.

Although seals and sealings are the main grist in Mykytiuk’s work, the Mesha and Tel Dan stelae also come in for parallel scrutiny. Over recent years, wherever it seemed plausible (or, even, inevitable), scholars and others have not hesitated to identify people named in these fresh, first-hand sources with individuals who feature in the books of the Hebrew Bible. But it has all been rather hit-and-miss, complicated by the fact that items from the antiquities trade have no original archaeological provenance, leaving scope for clever forgers to mislead us all. It is the merit of the work considered here to have established carefully thought out ‘ground rules’, to assist in assessing viability or otherwise.

The hard work is done, intensively, in Chapters 1 and 2. Previous attempts at setting up criteria for true (or false) identifications have been plausible but partly unreliable (Bordreuil) or good but not fully developed (Avigad). M. illustrates the use of good criteria and

inadequacy of working without them, by reference to two early failures: the so-called “Jotham” seal from Tell el-Kheleifeh (Edomite, 7th century, not Judean in the 8th), and the Eliakim seals (later 8th century, not time of Jehoiachin, 6th). Out of this come basic principles, thence three basic questions using 11 criteria to judge a given item. The principles (p.37) are (1) explicit data from original ancient sources must be preferred to modern reasoning (culture-gap); (2) a datum supported by several lines of independent evidence is more reliable than one supported by fewer such approaches. (3) Data that excel in reliability, clarity and precision. And in that order of importance. The three questions to be asked of any item, and their 11 criteria are as follows (KAK's wording in part). *Question 1* (pp. 38-39): how reliable are the inscriptional data? Crit. 1: excavated or in situ above ground - or, via the antiquities market? Crit. 2: how precise was the provenance? Crit. 3: question of authenticity - what evidence on this? *Question 2* (p.39): Does the inscription's general setting allow a match between the person in the inscription and the person in the biblical text? Crit. 4: how (and how reliably) can the person's date be established? Crit. 5: can one determine the language of the inscription (and how)? Is it relevant to identity? Crit. 6: the ‘socio-political’ (“national”) status of the person in the inscription - can it be determined, and on what grounds? Crits. 4-6 can either forbid or allow an identification. *Question 3* (p.39): how strongly do specifics in a text go for or against an identification? Result here can either determine or disqualify a proposed identification. Crit. 7: Personal name in a text, identical/fully compatible/irreconcilable? Crit. 8: relationships - any family correspondences for a person in the inscription and in the biblical text, or for other associates in the texts? Crit. 9: are there corresponding titles held in both the inscription and biblical occurrence, or possible sequences in title-holding? Crit. 10: any other (specific) data that go for or against an identification? Crit. 11: the possibility of “singularity” (also, M.'s p.54), (a) the features for a particular person (inscription) fit just one such individual, (b) likewise for the possibly matching individual in the biblical record, and (c) the match-up between markers in both the inscriptional and biblical mentions require acceptance that it is the same person in both. If the inscription is unprovenanced, then the equation is conditional upon demonstrated authenticity of the inscription. These principles and criteria are explained in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, under refinements, we are given (i) a classification (“taxonomy”) of *descending grades of reliability* for proposed identifications or non-identifications. These grades range for S (“singular”), through 3 (certain-to-reliable), 2 (not certain, but a reasonable possibility), 1 and 0 (suggested identity not reliable at all); D = disqualified (i.e., false identification). M. then helpfully illustrates these gradings by actual examples. (ii) The use of extra-biblical historical frameworks (and distinguishing between actual factual data and hypothetical explanations), to avoid circular reasoning (pp. 84-89), with example.

In the second part of the book, M. applies this generally sane and hard-won battery of principles and criteria to both major inscriptions and to seals and sealings. Chapter 3 deals with provenanced materials, Chapter 4 with unprovenanced. Thus, Chapter 3 deals with the Mesha of the Mesha stela, with the Omri in the same inscription and the king David in the Tel Dan inscription (plus David in the Mesha inscription, oddly banished to Appendix E). Not too surprisingly, the criteria bear out well the long-accepted identifications on the Mesha stela, but also the (needlessly) controverted Davids of the two stelae. They verify the occurrence of Jeroboam (II) on the famous Shema seal, and contemporaries of Jeremiah on excavated bullae (City of David), all acceptable. Then nine further identifications are treated for unprovenanced material in Chapter 4: four seals, a signet-ring and five bullae, from king Uziah down to Neriah, father of Jeremiah's secretary Baruch/Berechiah. Most of these come out well, but some are possible but not provable; all are of course conditional on their authenticity being established.

Chapter 5 brings the Conclusions. Here, 9 people are clearly identified in both external and biblical sources beyond doubt, and another 7 likewise in unprovenanced inscriptions, subject only to the issue of authenticity, total 16 (p. 205). The additional material in Appendix F brings the figure 9 up to 15 provenanced, and the figure 7 up to 9 in unprovenanced items, totalling for both, therefore, from 15 to 24 people, depending on the acceptance of the latter group or not. Including Persian-period sources and data published after M.'s thesis would doubtless raise numbers still further (he reckons up to 30 to 40).

The third part of the book (besides a full bibliography and authors/editors index) is the six Appendices, A to F. *A* defines *‘ebed* as used on seals (“servant” of kings/deities only); *B* gives a fuller systematic, updated list of seals, etc., with seemingly biblical names, grading them systematically on M.'s criteria. This invaluable list goes through 78 candidates in chronological order, whose outcomes vary all the way from rock-solid or reliable down to disqualified. *C* usefully re-orders these items in order of the grading, from impeccable down to disqualifieds (latter, 22 out of 78). *D* equally usefully provides an alphabetic index of all the people in *B* and *C*, while *F* gives identifications (and non-ids) in grade-order. Thus, Apps. *A*-to-*D*, *F*, serve as an invaluable (and updated) tool in using this book, and for its range of sensible results. Meantime, *E* tackles the probable *Bt-[D]wd* in line 31 of the Mesha Stela, and finds in favour, after a commendably thorough discussion. There is really no other letter in the Hebrew alphabet (besides a *[d]*) that would yield convincing sense (or, sense at all?) in the break to which the *d* may be restored. M. knows (p. 214, n. 3) of the probable occurrence of David's name in the Shoshenq list of c. 924 BC, only 45/50 years after David's death, as proposed by this reviewer in 1997; but admits rather hesitantly only that “David might be named” there. In almost a decade since my identification, no credible alternative has been offered (and mainly, none at all). Looking back in perspective, I think it should be taken much more seriously. Thus, on M.-type criteria, under Question 1, authenticity is guaranteed by the name being integrally part of an original standing monument for the last almost 3,000 years (Crits. 1-3). Excavated, not on a market. Question 2, setting and match, Crits. 4-6. Yes, text engraved only 45 years after D's death; language of names in the great list are all Semitic, basically West-Semitic, and probably Hebrew (cf. *Yad ha-melek*, in one case); and socio-political zone is that of Israel & Judah. On Question 3, Crit. 7, personal name: *Dwt* and biblical *Dwd* are not identical but close. Their compatibility is demonstrated by two language factors, and one of geography. Under language, (i) the name of David with Ps 65 is clearly written *Dwt* in the Ethiopic victory-text of Abreha in S. Arabia in the early 6th century AD; both Egyptian and Ethiopic are Afro-Asiatic languages, and much in Ethiopic is archaic, and comparable with much older languages; (ii) the de-voicing of a terminal voiced consonant (here, *d* > *t* in both cases) is well-attested in Egyptian reproductions of West-Semitic words as early as the 13th century BC; e.g. *h-r-p* for *h-r-b*, “sword” (*b* > *p*, just like *d* > *t*). Thus, *Dwt* would be a perfectly feasible Egyptian writing for *Dwd*, with such parallels. Under geography (also Crit. 10), the place-name *Hadabiyat-Dawit* is located in the Negev area, a theatre where the fugitive David was at one time on the run from Saul. So, a local feature there might well bear his name. (Another name in the list may reflect Abram, similarly.) Crits. 8 and 9 do not apply; the link with David's personal history (Negev) might fit with Crit. 11. As for singularity, there is only one David in 1st-millennium history (so far...), or one such king, and he in Judah. Grading would thus be likely S I+B. As for historical framework, Shoshenq I/Shushaq (Shishaq) himself is S I+B to start with (I leave aside the details here for brevity's sake); Sh. I definitely campaigned in Palestine c. 926 BC, while in the biblical record, Rehoboam of Judah suffered Shishak's invasion from Egypt at this actual date on the best chronology available. No other Shishak/Shoshenq (of seven!) did, and there was only one king Rehoboam in Judah. So the Egyptian historical background and the biblical accounts do independently correspond in time, persons, and place so far as the data go. On this basis, I

would consider that the *Dwt/Dwd* equation should be accepted as probably S I+B, and certainly not below Grade 3, whether the usual crowd of anti-biblical hypercritics like it or not. Facts are facts. I offer this as a minor supplement to M.'s book.

There are very few quibbles that I would raise; nothing fatal. Page 82, with 83 fig. 6. The strange H-shaped symbol on the Edomite seal of Yatom might be a copper ingot (so-called ox-hide type. At various locations in S. Edom, copper was worked, 12th-10th centuries and other times. Page 88 note 3; like most Americans (Tammi Schneider being a blatant example), M. falls into the trap of not knowing the significance of Bit-X, and "son" of X in Assyrian terminology. Bit-X is "House of X", naming a state after its dynastic founder, while "son" of X means merely a successor of X as its ruler, and *not* necessarily implying any physical/family relationship at all - this was all solved by E. Unger, ages ago. This affects page 122 No.3; Bit-Dawid (like Bit-Khumri [Omri]) is the name of a state, *and therefore is also a geographical entity*. Freedman and Geoghegan err here. In my JSOT 1997 paper, I listed a whole series of Bit-names all round the 1st-millennium Near East in various geographical locations; p. 195 catches up on the reality via Rendsburg. On Dod, see my 1997 paper; he's a fake! Page 164 rel. to Fig. 14. The Egyptian crown is not loaded with 3 pomegranates! The whole thing is the *hnhmt*-crown which sports three *Atef*-type crowns (M.'s pomegranates) upon horns, as here.

However, these are lesser points, and in no way affect the value and thrust of the book. It is unfortunate that some completely idiotic rule by the SBL for this series seems to disallow revision of the main text of a thesis to update it for publication, so that almost all such updates must be banished to footnotes, bibliography and appendixes - but not allowed in the main text where discussion of all the data (of the post-doctoral period) should have been placed, to unify it. The original thesis belongs in the depths of a university library; any author should have the right to update his own work organically for subsequent publication, not just sticking bits on at the back and around the edges. My criticism here is directed not at M., but at his publishers who have otherwise produced this volume well and attractively.

This book indeed provides a most useful corpus of people mentioned both in the Bible and in external inscriptional sources, or probably so, besides a penumbra of other possible candidates. It is extremely helpful to have this careful and thorough enterprise in establishing sound and sane rules by which correlations may be worked out, and found acceptable or otherwise. It should be helpful to many.

K.A. KITCHEN,
Woolton, September, 2005.