

King David evidence unearthed in Israel

By John Noble Wilford
The New York Times

An Israeli archaeologist has discovered a fragment of a stone monument with inscriptions bearing the first known reference outside the Bible to King David and the ruling dynasty he founded, the House of David.

Scholars of biblical history said this was strong corroborating evidence for the existence and influence of the House of David in early Jewish history and in the traditions of both Judaism and Christianity. In their excitement, they used words like "phenomenal," "stunning" and "sensational" to emphasize the importance of the discovery in biblical archaeology.

The broken monument, or stele, was found in the ruins of a wall at Tel Dan, the site of an ancient city in northern Israel near the Syrian border and at one of the sources of the Jordan River. The discovery was made this summer by Dr. Avraham Biran, an archaeologist at Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and director of excavations at Tel Dan since 1966.

Biran said the stele was inscribed with 13 truncated lines of Aramaic text referring to the "House of David." From the style of the script and its references to a "king of Israel" and a king of the House of David, the archaeologist surmised that this probably was a victory stele erected in the first quarter of the ninth century B.C. by the king of Damascus after he "smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maachah," in the words from I Kings 15:20.

In that case, according to Biran's interpretation, the "king of Israel" of the inscription may be identified with Baasha and the king of the "House of David" with Asa, a descendant of David who ruled as king of Judah. A split among the Israelites after the death of Solomon in the 10th century B.C. had led to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, centered at Jerusalem. As related in I Kings, when war broke out between the two kingdoms, Asa secured an alliance with Ben-Hadad, king of Aram at Damascus in Syria, who defeated the forces of Baasha.

In an interview by telephone from Jerusalem, Biran said, "There has never before been found a reference to the House of David other than in the Bible."

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