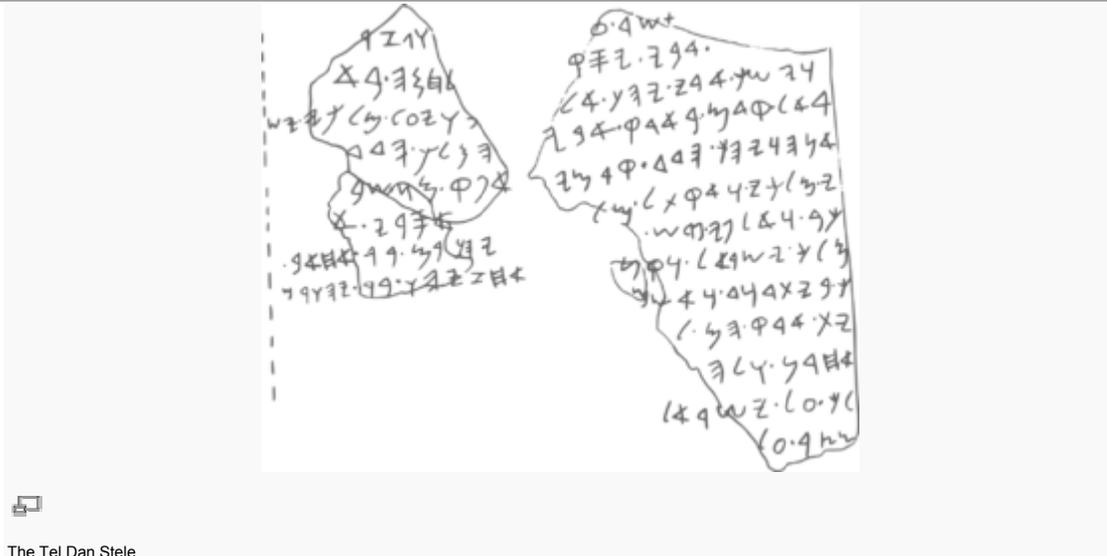


Tel Dan Stele



The Tel Dan Stele

The **Tel Dan Stele** is a black [basalt stele](#) discovered during excavations at [Tel Dan](#) in northern [Israel](#). It was erected by an [Aramaean](#) king and contains an [Aramaic](#) inscription commemorating victories over local ancient peoples including "[Israel](#)" and the "[House of David](#)." Its author is unknown, but may be a king of [Damascus](#), [Hazael](#) or one of his sons.

The inscription generated excitement among biblical scholars and [biblical archaeologists](#) because the letters 'בִּי־דָוִד' are identical to the [Hebrew](#) for "[house of David](#)." If these letters refer to the Davidic line then this is the first time the name "[David](#)" has been recognized at any archaeological site. The scholarly consensus among archaeologists and epigraphers is that the fragment is an authentic reference to the Biblical [King David](#).^[1]

Like the [Mesha stele](#), the Tel Dan Stele seems typical of a memorial intended as a sort of military propaganda, which boasts of Hazael's or his son's victories. Some epigraphers think that the phrase "[house of David](#)" also appears in a partly broken line in the [Mesha stele](#).

[\[edit\]](#)Authorship

Although the name of the author of the stele does not seem to appear on the available fragments, it is most likely a king of neighboring Damascus. Language, time, and location make it plausible that the author was Hazael or his son, Bar Hadad II/III, who were kings of Damascus and enemies of the [kingdom of Israel](#).

[\[edit\]](#)Discovery

The stele was discovered at [Tel Dan](#), previously named Tell el-Qadi, a [mound](#) where a city once stood at the northern tip of [Israel](#).

Fragment A was discovered in 1993, and fragments B1 and B2, which fit together, were discovered in 1994. In the broken part of the stone below the smooth writing surface, there is a possible "internal" fit between fragment A and the assembled fragments B1/B2, but it is uncertain and disputed. If the fit is correct, then the pieces were originally side by side.

[\[edit\]](#)Date

The inscription has been dated to the 9th or 8th centuries BCE. The 8th-century limit is determined by a destruction layer identified with a well-documented Assyrian conquest in 733/732 BCE. Because that destruction layer was above the layer in which the stele fragments were found, it is clear that it took place after the stele had been erected, then broken into pieces which were later used in a construction project at Tel Dan, presumably by Hebrew builders. It is difficult to discern how long before that Assyrian conquest these earlier events took place.

George Athas attempted to date the inscription to the 8th century, and credit it to **Bar Hadad** rather than his father **Hazael**.^[2] However, the archaeological context does not support this conclusion.^[3] The excavators dated the inscription to the mid-9th century, and the peak of Hazael's conquests, but Suriano attributed the stele to a point late in Hazael's career based on apologetic motifs that suggest the inscription was made at the time his son (Bar Hadad) was appointed heir and successor.^[4]

[\[edit\]](#) Aramaic text

1. [א]מר.ע[]וגזר[] .
2. [---אבי יסקן.עלוה.בה]תלחמה.בא[] .
3. [וישכב.אבי יהר.אלן.אבהו]ה.ויעל.מלכין יש .
4. [ראל.קדם.בארק.אבי.ו]יהלך.הדד[.]איתי .
5. [---אנה.ויהר.הדד.קדמי.ו]אפק.מן.שבעת .
6. [י.מלכי.ואקתל.מל]כן.שב[ען.אסרי.א]לפיר .
7. [כב.ואלפיר.פרש.קתלת.אית.יהו]ן.רם.בר[ן]אחאב .
8. [מלך.ישראל.וקתל]ת.אית.אחז[ו]יהו.בר[ן]יהורם.מל .
9. [ך.ביתדוד.ואשם.אית.קרית.הם.חרבת.ואהפך]א .
10. [ית.ארק.הם.ל]ישמן .
11. [אחרן.ולה]... ויהוא.מ .
12. [לך.על.יש]ראל... ואשם .
13. [מצר.ע]ל .

[\[edit\]](#) Translation

Following is a line-by-line translation that follows the *editio princeps* (Biran and Naveh). Missing text or text that is too damaged by erosion is represented by "[.....]":

- 1'. [.....].....[.....] and cut [.....]
- 2'. [.....] my father went up [against him when] he fought at[...]
- 3'. And my father lay down, he went to his [fathers]. And the king of [[s-]
- 4'. rael entered previously in my father's land. [And] Hadad made me king.
- 5'. And Hadad went in front of me, [and] I departed from [the] seven[.....]

6'. of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs], who harnessed thou[sands of cha-]
7'. riots and thousands of horsemen (or: horses). [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab]
8'. king of Israel, and I killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram kin]g
9'. of the House of David. And I set [their towns into ruins and turned]
10'. their land into [desolation.....]
11'. other ...[..... and Jehu ru-]
12'. led over Is[rael.....and I laid]
13'. siege upon [.....]