

וּאִשַּׁב IN MESHA STELE, LINE 12

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Line 12 of the Mesha Stele (MS) is notoriously difficult, due to the presence of the enigmatic word רִיַּת and the obscure phrase אִרְאֵל דְּוִרָה.¹ The present note, however, will largely sidestep these matters, and instead will consider yet another word in the same line, namely, וּאִשַּׁב. Perhaps because of the persistent attention paid to the aforementioned difficulties, scholars have been too quick to assume that they know the meaning of this latter word.

With great regularity, translators have rendered וּאִשַּׁב in line 12 of the Mesha Stele as “and I brought back,” thereby understanding the word as the *Hip* ‘il of the root שׁוּב ‘return’. In so doing, they ignore, typically without comment, the possibility that וּאִשַּׁב derives from the root שָׁבַח (more properly שָׁבַי) ‘capture’. Clearly the former root is far more common, as the distribution of the two roots in the Bible underscores: שׁוּב is attested 685 times in the *Qal* and 357 times in the *Hip* ‘il,² while שָׁבַח occurs only 39 times in the *Qal* and 8 times in the *Nip* ‘al.³ In light of these data, I suspect that interpreters of the Mesha Stele have derived וּאִשַּׁב from שׁוּב without much thought or further consideration. As I

¹ The reading of the former has been the subject of recent debate; see now A. Schade, “New Photographs Supporting the Reading *ryt* in Line 12 of the Mesha Inscription,” *IEJ* 55 (2005): 205–208. If the alternative reading רִיַּת is accepted, as per A. Lemaire (“Notes d’épigraphie nord-ouest sémitique,” *Syria* 64 [1987]: 205–216, esp. 205–207), then the difficulty disappears.

² In addition, there are five instances of the *Hop* ‘al and eleven cases of the *Polel*. I derive my figures from Avraham Even-Shoshan, *Qoṇqordansya Ḥadasha* (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1993): 1118–1123.

³ Even-Shoshan (N 2): 1103.

hope to demonstrate in this article, however, this is too hasty a conclusion; derivation from שבה is clearly the preferred interpretation.

We begin with a presentation of the relevant text, which is set off by vertical lines in the stele, thereby demarcating it as a sentence unto itself (bridging lines 12 and 13). Then follows a thorough survey of the standard translations of these words,⁴ each of which uses the “brought back” option (or something very similar).⁵

MS 12–13:

ואשב משם את אראל דודה ואן[חבה לפני כמש בקרית

Nöldeke: “Und ich führte von dort zurück . . . sie vor Kamos in Kerioth.”⁶

Smend-Socin: “Und ich brachte zurück von dort den Altaraufsatz DWDH’s und schleppte ihn vor K^emôš in K^erîjôt.”⁷

Cooke: “And I brought thence the altar-hearth of Daudoh (?), and I dr[ag]ged it before Kemosh in Qeriyioth.”⁸

⁴ For the sake of bibliographic completeness, I mention here several studies on the MS that do not include a translation of the relevant lines: E. Lipiński, “Etymological and Exegetical Notes on the Meša‘ Inscription,” *Or* 40 (1971): 325–340; M. Miller, “The Moabite Stone as a Memorial Stela,” *PEQ* 106 (1974): 9–18; P. Auffret, “Essai sur la structure littéraire de la stèle de Mésha,” *UF* 12 (1980): 109–24; G. A. Rendsburg, “A Reconstruction of Moabite-Israelite History,” *JANES* 13 (1981): 67–73; and A. Lemaire, “La stèle de Mésha et l’histoire de l’ancien Israël,” in *Storia e tradizioni di Israele: Scritti in onore di J. Alberto Soggin* (D. Garrone and F. Israel, eds.; Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1991): 143–169.

⁵ Note that I have standardized the beginning and the end of the translations that follow, by capitalizing the first word (usually “And”), whether or not it is so spelled in the individual renderings, and by placing a period at the end, regardless of which punctuation mark actually appears in the individual translations.

⁶ Theodor Nöldeke, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab* (Kiel: Schwes, 1870): 6, with a comment on p. 12: “Das folgende Verbum spricht וָאָשֵׁב.” The ellipsis indicates that Nöldeke (or the source on whom he relied, most likely C. Clermont-Ganneau) could not read the end of line 12 and the beginning of line 13, that is, the letters at the edges of the inscription, presumably after its destruction. The letters presumably were also unclear on the squeeze.

⁷ Rudolf Smend and Albert Socin, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1886): 13.

⁸ G. A. Cooke, *A Text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903): 3. To be fair, though, Cooke added a note as follows: “Prob. וָאָשֵׁב from שָׁוֵב, Josh 14 7; or וָאָשֵׁב, from שָׁבָה” (p. 11), in which case one could justify treating his translation below, when I discuss S. R. Driver.

Gressman: “Ich brachte von dort den Altar ihres Dod und schleppete ich vor Kemoš in Kerijjóth.”⁹

Van Zyl: “And I brought back from there the altar-hearth of his god and I dragged it before Chemosh in Kerijoth.”¹⁰

Ullendorff: “And I brought back from there the altar-hearth of David and I dragged it before Chemosh at Qeriyoth.”¹¹

Segert: “. . . ich brachte zurück . . .”¹²

Donner-Röllig: “Und ich brachte von dort den *Altar* ihres DWD und ich schleppete ihn vor Kamoš in Qerejoth.”¹³

Andersen: “And I brought back from there Arel its chieftain, and I dragged them before Chemosh into Qiryath.”¹⁴

Galling: “Ich brachte von dort den Altar ihres Dwd und schleifte ihn vor Kamoš in Qerejoth.”¹⁵

Albright: “And I brought back from there Arel (or Oriel), its chieftain, dragging him before Chemosh in Kerioth.”¹⁶

⁹ Hugo Gressman, *Altorientalische Texte zum Alten Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1926): 441.

¹⁰ A. H. van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Leiden: Brill, 1960): 190. See also p. 166 for the grammatical analysis of the verb as “1st pers. impf. of the causative of the mediae Waw verb רַשָּׁאִי.”

¹¹ E. Ullendorff, “The Moabite Stone,” in *Documents from Old Testament Times* (D. W. Thomas, ed.; Edinburgh: Nelson, 1958; New York: Harper & Row, 1961): 196–197.

¹² S. Segert, “Die Sprache der moabitischen Königsinschrift,” *ArOr* 29 (1961): 197–267, in particular p. 226 (and see also the grammatical analysis on pp. 261, 267). Segert’s classic article does not provide a full translation of the Mesha Stele, but rather glosses of individual words—and thus I am able to include here only his rendering of the single word רַשָּׁאִי.

¹³ *KAI* 2.169. A detailed philological commentary accompanies the translation, but no comment appears regarding the word רַשָּׁאִי (see p. 175).

¹⁴ F. I. Andersen, “Moabite Syntax,” *Or* 35 (1966): 81–120. Note that Andersen did not include a running translation of the Mesha Stele. Instead, I have included here his renderings of the two parts of this sentence (found on pp. 101 and 104, respectively) and have pieced them together into a coherent whole. I do so with some hesitation, but regardless, the point is clear that Andersen considered רַשָּׁאִי to mean “and I brought back.”

¹⁵ Kurt Galling, *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1968): 52.

¹⁶ W. F. Albright, “Palestinian Inscriptions,” in *ANET* 320. This translation is repeated, either verbatim or with slight variation, by other scholars; see below N 28 and N 35.

Gibson: "I brought back from there the lion figure of David, and dragged it before Chemosh at Kerioth."¹⁷

Lipiński: "Und ich brachte von dort Uriel, ihren David, und ich schleppte ihn vor Kamosch in Karjoth."¹⁸

Lipiński: "And I brought from there Uriel, their David, and I dragged him before Chemosh in Karyoth."¹⁹

Jaroš: "Und ich brachte von dort den Altar ihres Dod und ich schleppte ihn vor Kamosch in Qarjot."²⁰

Smelik: "en ik deed terugkeren vandaar de vuurhaard van zijn oom, en ik [sl]eepte die voor het aangezicht van Kemos in Keri-ot"²¹

Beeston: "And I brought thence *ʾr ʾl dwdh* and dragged it/him before the face of Chemosh in Qryt."²²

de Moor: "And I brought from there the fire-hearth of his Beloved and dragged it before Chemosh in Qiriath."²³

Jackson: "I brought back from there the altar hearth of its DWD and [dr]agged it before Kemosh in Qiryat."²⁴

¹⁷ J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 1: *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971): 76. See also the comment that follows on p. 80: "מִשְׁבֵּחַ = [wāʾašēb]; Hiph. from ŠWB." Gibson's translation is used, in turn, by B. T. Arnold and B. E. Beyer; see below, n 33.

¹⁸ E. Lipiński, "Nordsemitische Texte," in *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (W. Beyerlin, ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975): 256 (see the next entry for the English translation).

¹⁹ E. Lipiński, "North Semitic Texts," in *Near Eastern Religious Texts relating to the Old Testament* (W. Beyerlin, ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978): 239 (English translation of the preceding entry).

²⁰ Karl Jaroš, *Hundert Inschriften aus Kanaan und Israel* (Fribourg: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982): 46.

²¹ K. A. D. Smelik, *Behouden schrift: historische documenten uit het oude Israël* (Ten Have: Baarn, 1984): 39. See also Smelik's English rendering below.

²² A. F. L. Beeston, "Mesha and Ataroth," *JRAS* (1985): 143, though see further below (n 55), for Beeston's remarks on the verb in question.

²³ J. C. de Moor, "Narrative Poetry in Canaan," *UF* 20 (1988): 153.

²⁴ K. P. Jackson, "The Language of the Mesha' Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (A. Dearman, ed.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989): 98. See also the comment that follows on p. 112: "מִשְׁבֵּחַ, w ʾšb: hiphil consecutive imperfect 1cs from šwb."

Matthews-Benjamin: "I brought back from there Arel, its chieftain [or perhaps a royal altar?] dragging him [it] before the god Chemosh in the city of Keriioth."²⁵

Stern: "And I dra(gg)ed back from there the chief of the (clan of) Areli. And I dragged him before Kemosh at Keriioth."²⁶

Niccacci: "I brought Ari'el his leader back from there, and I dragged him before Kemosh in Keriioth."²⁷

Blenkinsopp: "And I brought back from there Arel (or Oriël), its chieftain, dragging him before Chemosh in Keriioth."²⁸

Parker: "And I brought back from there *ṛ'l dwdh*, and dragged it/him before Chemosh in Keriioth."²⁹

Na'aman: "And I restored thence מֶשָׁאֵל דְּנִדָּה, and I dragged it before Chemosh at (my) town (קְרִיּוֹת)."³⁰

²⁵ Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels* (New York: Paulist, 1991): 113. Note the rather loose rendering, including the words "god" before Chemosh and "city" before Keriioth.

²⁶ P. D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991): 55. Stern seems truly to have erred in translating the first verb as "dra(gg)ed"; he must have confused the verb מֶשָׁאֵל with the second verb in this passage מֶשָׁאֵל[חָבַה], for only in the latter does a letter need to be restored, as indicated by his parentheses in "dra(gg)ed." Accordingly, Stern's mistaken rendering is less relevant to our discussion, but I include it here nonetheless.

²⁷ A. Niccacci, "The Stele of Mesha and the Bible: Verbal System and Narrativity," *Or* 63 (1994): 229.

²⁸ J. Blenkinsopp, "Ahab of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah: The Syro-Palestinian Corridor in the Ninth Century," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (4 vols.; J. M. Sasson, ed.; New York: Scribners, 1995): 2.1316. This translation is simply a literal acceptance of Albright's (see above N 16).

²⁹ Simon B. Parker, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions: Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1997): 45 (see also p. 50).

³⁰ N. Na'aman, "King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 88. He then added the following: "The selection of the verbal form מֶשָׁאֵל is deliberate: Mesha relates that following the restoration of Ataroth to Moab, he brought back (a *Hip'il* form of the verb מֶשָׁאֵל) an object that had apparently been captured by the king of Israel." In a footnote (p. 88, n. 18), he wrote, "A derivation from the verb *šbh* ('to take captive') is unlikely, since the object of this verb is always human." As we will see below, however, this statement is incorrect.

Rainey: "And I brought back from there its Davidic altar hearth and I dragged it before Chemosh in Qeriot."³¹

Smelik: "And I brought back the fire-hearth of his Uncle(?) from there, and I hauled it before the face of Kemosh in Keriioth."³²

Arnold-Beyer: "I brought back from there the lion figure of David, and dragged it before Chemosh at Keriioth."³³

Schmidt: "And I brought back from there 'the lion statue of its Beloved (i.e., the city god?)' and I hauled it before Kemosh in Qiryat."³⁴

Hanson: "And I brought back the fire-hearth of his uncle from there; and I brought it before the face of Kemosh in Qerioit [*sic*]."³⁵

Only rarely does one find a scholarly source offering a more balanced approach. Here one may cite the great master S. R. Driver, who rendered the passage as follows:

Driver: "And I brought back (*or*, took captive) thence the altar-hearth of Davdoh (?), and I dragged it before Chemosh in Qeriyoth."³⁶

³¹ A. F. Rainey, "Syntax, Hermeneutics and History," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 244—though see below for a more recent translation offered by Rainey.

³² K. A. D. Smelik, "Moabite Inscriptions," in *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, eds.; Leiden: Brill, 2000): 2.137–138. For slightly different earlier versions, see K. A. D. Smelik, "The Literary Structure of King Mesha's Inscription," *JSOT* 46 (1990): 27; and K. A. D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (OTS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992): 65. For Smelik's Dutch rendering, see above (N 21).

³³ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002): 162, with a nod to Gibson (see above, N 17).

³⁴ B. B. Schmidt, "Moabite Stone," in *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation* (M. W. Chavalas, ed.; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006): 313.

³⁵ K. C. Hanson, on the web, at <http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/westsem/mesha.html>. Hanson states that his rendering is "Adapted from Albright 1969:320–21," with reference to the translation above (see N 16). This same translation appears at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesha_Stele.

³⁶ S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890): lxxxvii (within the Appendix entitled "The Inscription of Mesha", commonly known as the 'Moabite Stone'").

In the philological notes that follow, Driver wrote, “Either מִשָּׁה (Jos. 14, 7), or (Clermont-Ganneau, Renan) מִשָּׁה.”³⁷ As the mention of two other nineteenth century scholars indicates,³⁸ clearly the latter reading, meaning “and I captured,” was very much “in the air” in the years immediately following the discovery of the Mesha Stele. Throughout the twentieth century, however, this alternative for the understanding of MS 12 is rarely countenanced.

An exception is the treatment by J. Blau, who rendered the verse as follows:

Blau: “And I brought back/took captive from them [*sic*] ר'ל DWDH and [dra]gged it/him before Chemosh.”³⁹

Happily, both options are presented in the standard dictionary of Northwest Semitic inscriptions, that of J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. True, one finds the word listed under the root *šwb*, but one also reads there, “or = QAL Impf. 1 p.s. of *šby*.”⁴⁰

And most prominently one finds the “captured” alternative as the only one presented by S. Ahituv and A. Rainey (in the latter case, in an article updating and greatly expanding his earlier study [“Syntax,” cited above, N 31]). The former provided the vocalization מִשָּׁה, indicating that he derives the form from the root שָׁבָה, with further information supplied in the accompanying notes (more on which below).⁴¹ The lat-

³⁷ Driver (N 36): xci. See N 8, above, re Cooke, and recall that Cooke was (to the best of my knowledge) a student of Driver's (in fact, see the dedication page of Cooke's volume).

³⁸ Driver ([N 36]: lxxxv) provided the following references: C. Clermont-Ganneau, “La Stèle de Méša: Observations et lectures nouvelles,” *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature*, vol. 9, no. 37 (Septembre 1875): 168–174; C. Clermont-Ganneau, “La Stèle de Méša: Examen Critique du Texte,” *Journal Asiatique* (Janvier 1887): 72–112; and E. Renan, “Review of Smend-Socin, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab*,” *Journal des Savants* (Mars 1887): 158–164. The two essays by Clermont-Ganneau do not speak to the point, however. Clearly he must have opined such in some other publication (which I have not been able to locate) or in public lectures, for Renan cited him as follows: “M. Clermont-Ganneau conjecture avec plus de justesse que מִשָּׁה doit être lu מִשָּׁה, de la racine שָׁבָה, et non מִשָּׁה, de la racine שָׁבָה” (p. 162), the improper vocalizations notwithstanding (see Driver for the correct ones).

³⁹ J. Blau, “Short Philological Notes on the Inscription of Meša’,” *Maarav* 2 (1979–1980): 154 (with the final word in the sentence, the place name קִרְיָה, not included). I hasten to add, however, that on p. 156, Blau opted for derivation from שָׁבָה ‘take captive’: “and I took captive from there ר'ל DWDH.”

⁴⁰ *DNWSI* 2.1114.

⁴¹ Shmuel Ahituv, *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Mikhtav* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2005): 361. See also the earlier edition: Shmuel Ahituv, *ʿAsufat Ketubbot ʿIvriyyot* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1992): 251.

ter, meanwhile, in a thorough study of the MS, offered the following translation, changing the crucial verb used in his earlier rendering (see above) from “brought back” to “captured (confiscated?)”:

Rainey: “And I captured (confiscated?) from there its Davidic altar hearth and I dragged it before Chemosh in Kerioth.”⁴²

More importantly, Rainey recognized the point that I shall argue below (and which I actually discussed some years ago in a previous publication [see below N 61]), namely, that the parallel wording of **וַאֲשֶׁב מִשָּׁם** (line 12) and **וַאֲקַח מִשָּׁם** (line 17) indicates that the former “means ‘I captured’, not ‘I retrieved (something formerly ours)’”. In both cases war booty is being discussed: trophies presented to the conquering Chemosh.”⁴³

To conclude this section of the article, I also include here the renderings of R. Dussaud and H.-P. Müller, both of whom used verbs that are too general in their meaning to determine whether they derived **וַאֲשֶׁב** from **שָׁב** or from **שָׁבַח**.

Dussaud: “J’emportai de là l’autel de Dodoh et je le traînai devant la face de Kamosch à Qeriyot”⁴⁴

Müller: “Und ich holte von dort den *Altarherd* ihres (Gottes) Dod und schleppte ihn hin vor Kamosch nach Qerijoth.”⁴⁵

Notwithstanding the turn in a new direction by Ahituv and Rainey (or perhaps, better, a *return* to the original position advocated by Clermont-Ganneau and Renan, and still recognized by Driver and more recently by Blau), I suspect that future translations of the MS will continue to use the verb ‘bring back’, if for no other reason than a century of scholarship has ingrained this rendering in the minds of scholars. Indeed see K. A. D. Smelik in *COS* (the new standard in the field; see above, N 32) published eight years after the first edition of Ahituv’s

⁴² A. F. Rainey, “*Mesha^c and Syntax*,” in *The Land that I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup 343; J. A. Dearman and M. P. Graham, eds.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001): 296, 300, 306.

⁴³ Ibid., 304.

⁴⁴ René Dussaud, *Les monuments palestiniens et judaïques* (Musée du Louvre) (Paris: E. Leroux, 1912): 7.

⁴⁵ H.-P. Müller, “Moabitische historische Inschriften,” in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, I/6 (R. Borger et al., eds.; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1985): 648.

book (see above, N 41), along with other recent efforts (S. B. Parker, B. T. Arnold-B. E. Beyer, and B. B. Schmidt, for example; see above, N 29, N 33, and N 34, respectively), as well as J. Blenkinsopp's and K. C. Hanson's use of W. F. Albright (whether verbatim or with slight variation; see above, N 28 and N 35, respectively).⁴⁶ To my mind, accordingly, there remains the need to demonstrate the point more thoroughly than Ahituv and Rainey have done—though naturally I understand that they could not present the totality of the argument given both the limits and/or greater designs of their projects (in Rainey's case his study focused on syntactic and narratological concerns; in Ahituv's case there is only so much that one can include in a handbook covering hundreds of inscriptions).

In order to accomplish the above goal, I believe it is first necessary to build the case against deriving וָשַׁבּ from the root וָשַׁב. As noted above, the *Hip ʿil* of this root (henceforth הָשִׁיב) occurs 357 times in the Bible. I cannot claim to have studied each and every passage, but a survey of the dictionaries, concordances, etc., reveals that when an item serves as the direct object of this verb, that item is something that (or someone who) is being returned to its (or his) original place.⁴⁷ Among non-human objects, we may note the following: a lost or stray animal returned to its owner (Exod 23:4; Deut 22:1–2; Ezek 34:4,16); a pledge returned to the debtor (Deut 24:13; Ezek 18:7,12; 33:15); a garment taken in pledge (Exod 22:25); stolen property (Lev 5:23; 1 Sam 12:3); a bribe (1 Sam 12:3); possessions belonging to Lot and others (Gen 14:16); booty taken by the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:19); silver, either returned by Joseph to the brothers (42:25) or returned by the brothers to Joseph (Gen 43:12,21; 44:8); 1100 shekels of silver taken by Micaiah from his mother (Judg 17:3–4); an overpayment (presumably in silver) returned to an individual (Lev 25:27); the ark returned by the Philistines to Israel (1 Sam 6:21); the ark, which had been taken from Jerusalem, returned to Jerusalem by Zadok and Abiathar (2 Sam 15:25,29); the vessels of the Temple taken by the Babylonians, to be returned to Jerusalem (Jer 28:6); vessels of the Temple temporarily removed during a purification ritual and then put back in place (Neh 13:9); a chest used to collect money for the Temple, returned to the Temple gate after being emptied (2 Chr 24:11); a stone covering a well, put back in place (Gen 29:3); calves following their mothers, brought back to the house

⁴⁶ I intend no criticism towards these scholars. I cite them here simply as the most recent followers of the century-long trend.

⁴⁷ I omit from this survey a series of words that refer to intangible items, including דָּבָר, לֵב, רֹחַ, נֶפֶשׁ, אֵף, חֶמָּה, חֶרֶן, גְּמוּלָה, etc. For these expressions, see Even-Shoshan (N 2): 1118.

(1 Sam 6:7); a series of commodities (Neh 5:10-11); a sword to its sheath (Ezek 21:35; 1 Chr 21:27); shields returned to storage in the guardhouse (1 Kgs 14:28 = 1 Chr 12:11); the corpse of the man of God brought back to town (1 Kgs 13:29); Jeroboam's arm to its normal place (1 Kgs 13:4); Moses' hand back into his bosom (Exod 4:7); Moses' veil to cover his face once again (Exod 34:35); Aaron's staff to the ark (Num 17:25); Dagon placed upright after having fallen over (1 Sam 5:3); and so on.

Among human objects of the verb הָשִׁיב, we may note these examples: Lot and his family (Gen 14:16); Sarah returned by Abimelech to Abraham (Gen 20:7,14); Jacob to the land of Canaan (Gen 28:15); Joseph to his father, thus Reuben's plan (Gen 37:22); the cupbearer to his former position (Gen 40:13; 41:13); Benjamin to Jacob, as promised by Reuben (Gen 42:37); the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (Gen 48:21); a manslayer returned to the city of refuge, apparently after the trial, which was held elsewhere (Num 35:25),⁴⁸ the people of Israel back to Egypt (Deut 17:16; 28:68); Jephthah from exile in Tob to his homeland of Gilead (Judg 11:9); Naomi from Moab to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:21); David back to Judah, thus the desire of the Philistines (1 Sam 29:4); people captured by the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:19); Abner from the pit back to Hebron (2 Sam 3:26); Absalom, the banished son, allowed to return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 14:13); the Gittites back to Jerusalem after they left the city as part of David's entourage (2 Sam 15:20); Jeremiah back to the house of Jonathan (Jer 37:20); people taken by Ishmael and now restored to Johanan (Jer 41:16); individuals forced into slavery again, after having gained their freedom (Jer 34:11,16); Ezekiel returned to places already visited (presumably) on his tour of the Temple (Ezek 44:1; 47:1,6); and of course numerous instances of the people of Israel restored from exile in Babylon to their ancestral homeland (Jer 12:15; 16:15; 23:3; 24:6; 27:22; 28:3-4; 28:6; 29:10,14; 30:3; 32:37; 32:44; 33:7,11,26; 34:22; 42:12; Ezek 39:25; Joel 4:1; Zech 10:10; see also more generally 2 Kgs 8:34 = 2 Chr 6:25).

In all these cases, I submit, the object of the verb הָשִׁיב is an item or person restored or returned to its proper or former place. We also should mention here a number of instances in which land is restored to its rightful owner. In these cases, the land does not actually move, of course, but a 'return' is present nonetheless. See, for example, 2 Sam 9:7, with the transfer of the fields of the deceased Saul to his grandson Mephibosheth; 2 Kgs 8:6, where the Shunammite woman's house and

⁴⁸ See Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990): 294; and Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21-36* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000): 557, 569.

fields are restored to her; and Neh 5:11–12, where the wealthy return fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses to the poor. In addition, we may refer to several transfers of land or cities on the political plane: Judg 11:43, where the king of Ammon seeks the return of land taken (in his mind) by the Israelites; 1 Kgs 20:34, where Ben-hadad of Aram offers to return cities taken from the Israelites by his father; 2 Kgs 13:25, where Jehoash recovers cities captured previously by the Arameans; 2 Kgs 14:22 = 2 Chr 26:2, where Azariah rebuilds and restores Elath to Judah (no doubt control of the city shifted between Judah and Edom during the centuries). Two other relevant passages are difficult, but also may be explained according to the accepted usage of the verb הָשִׁיב. In 2 Kgs 14:28, regardless of how one explains the prepositional phrases לַיהוּדָה and בִּישְׂרָאֵל,⁴⁹ it is clear that Jeroboam II regained control over Damascus and Hamath, something not accomplished since the days of David and Solomon; and thus in the eyes of the author of Kings, the verb הָשִׁיב was appropriate in this context. In 2 Kgs 16:6, one will accept the widely proposed emendation of לְאַרְם to לְאֶדֶם, and perhaps also the more drastic alteration of מֶלֶךְ אֶרֶם to מֶלֶךְ אֶדֶם,⁵⁰ and thereby explain the passage as referring to Edom regaining control over Elath, as clearly indicated by the second half of the verse.

There are only a few potential counter examples in the Bible, though each one is readily explicable, with one possible exception. In Exod 21:34, silver is “returned,” that is, “paid,” to an individual as restitution for a loss. In like fashion, tribute is “returned,” that is, “paid” from the vassal to the overlord, for which see 2 Kgs 3:4; 17:3; Ezek 27:15 (the first of these [coincidentally, I assume] with reference to Mesha’s tribute paid to Israel). The same usage occurs in Num 18:9, where the offerings presented to God apparently are seen as tribute; though a second possibility arises from the fact that God has given the offerings to the priests in the previous verse, in which case a true returning of an item is present here. In Gen 24:5–8 (4x), Abraham’s servant is not to bring Isaac back to Aram, but the verb הָשִׁיב here implies the vantage point of the servant, who, were this need to have arisen, would have just returned from Aram without a bride in hand; in addition to which, the servant’s words אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאת מִשָּׁם “to the land from which you went out” (v. 5) might suggest that he also has in mind the vantage

⁴⁹ For an explanation that is faithful to the Masoretic Text, see Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997): 241–242. For an alternative reading, see Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988): 160–162.

⁵⁰ For discussion, see Cogan and Tadmor (n 49): 184, 186–187.

point of Abraham. Similarly, in 1 Kgs 13:18–26 (4x), the verb **השיב** suggests the vantage point of the prophet, who heads back to his own home, with the man of God accompanying him; in addition to which we should note that the man of God had been to Bethel, was now on his return journey to Judah, and thus in that sense he was being brought back to Bethel, which he had just visited.

The only possible exception to the dozens of examples discussed above is the case of Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22:26. The king of Israel says **קח את מיכיהו והשיביו אל אמן שר העיר ואל יואש בן המלך** “take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the son of the king.” As far as the reader can tell, Micaiah has not previously been in prison (see the next verse), under the guard of Amon and Joash apparently, and thus this passage would be the sole instance in the Bible where the verb **השיב** bears a different connotation.⁵¹ On the other hand, given what the king says about Micaiah earlier in v. 8—“I hate him, for he does not prophesy about me good, but rather only bad, Micaiah the son of Imlah”—it is not unreasonable to assume that at some earlier juncture, if not on this particular occasion, Micaiah had been under house arrest. Indeed, the ever attentive David Qimhi opined exactly thus: **נראה שהיה שם פעם אחרת תפוס** “apparently he had been apprehended there another time” (comment to **אל אמן**).⁵²

In short, with one possible exception, never in the Bible is the verb **השיב** used in connection with taking an item (or person) from one location and transferring it (or him) to a new place altogether. Presumably the same obtains in Moabite. Accordingly, for **ואשב** to mean “and I brought back” in Moabite, one must assume either: a) that the presumption above is incorrect, that is to say, that in Moabite the *Hip'il* of **שב** could bear a meaning not present in Hebrew; or b) that the item or person “brought back” by Mesha, the **אראל דודה** (whether human or non-human, animate or inanimate), originally resided in the temple of Kemosh in Qeriyot.

Given that Moabite resembles Hebrew very closely, even with our limited knowledge of the former, we must reject option a) above. In-

⁵¹ Interestingly, the Vulgate rendered the verb *maneat* as if from the root **שב**, perhaps because of no earlier reference to Micaiah under Amon’s and Joash’s watchful guard; see James A. Montgomery and Henry S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951): 345, who also noted, “The Heb. verb corresponds to the Engl. legal term, ‘to remit.’”

⁵² See also Ralbag on this phrase: **רוצה לומר: השיביו אל העיר, וחביאיו שם אל אמן שר העיר** “it wishes to say: return him to the city, and bring him there to Amon the governor of the city.” I cite both Qimhi and Ralbag from M. Cohen, ed., *Miqra’ot Gedolot ha-Keter: Sefer Melakhim* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ., 1995): 153.

stead, we should proceed on the basis that Moabite and Hebrew semantics correspond, unless the opposite can be demonstrated—and with the verbal inventory of both languages there is a perfect correlation.⁵³ Option b) above is also very unlikely. One could hardly imagine Mesha dragging (as per the continuation of lines 12–13) the **נִשְׁבַּח**, however one defines this term, before Kemosh, if this item belonged previously to the Moabites and/or was resident in the Kemosh temple.

It is for this main reason (among others) that one must reject the interpretation of N. Na'aman that the phrase **נִשְׁבַּח** refers to a Moabite object. Na'aman holds that the former term means “probably a statue, a cult stand, or an altar hearth,” while the latter term Daudoh refers either to “a local Moabite deity” or “was the name of the founder of the dynasty in Hauronen.”⁵⁴ Quite remarkably, Na'aman did not address the matter under discussion here, as he offered no explanation as to why or how Mesha could have dragged a Moabite sacred object before Kemosh. By contrast, A. F. L. Beeston understood this point implicitly, for while he rendered **נִשְׁבַּח** “and I brought thence” (see above), he also added the following comment: “here also a faint uncertainty attaches to this idea, since the very common verb *hšyb* nearly always has the implication of bringing *back* s.o./s.y. to a state/place where he/it had been previously; which seems inappropriate in the context, but makes a derivation from *šbh* ‘take prisoner’ . . . attractive.”⁵⁵

Indeed, as our ancient sources attest, it was common practice to bring enemy objects captured in battle and place them before one's god. Note, most prominently, the ark of Israel captured by the Philistines and placed before Dagon in the temple at Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1–2).⁵⁶ And indeed—with some exceptions, such as Na'aman—almost every scholar who has dealt with MS 12 has understood the **נִשְׁבַּח** “brought back” to Kemosh to have been an Israelite object captured during the battle of Ataroth, as the translations above clearly imply, whether “fire-hearth,” “altar-hearth,” “lion figure,” or whatever. The same holds true if the term **נִשְׁבַּח** connotes a human being—note

⁵³ See the convenient list of verbs presented by Jackson (N 24): 122–123.

⁵⁴ Na'aman (N 30): 88–89.

⁵⁵ Beeston (N 22): 144. As the gloss ‘take prisoner’ implies, Beeston considered the word **נִשְׁבַּח** to refer to a human being, in particular a religious figure, in this case, an Israelite priest or prophet (see pp. 145, 147). While this remains a possibility (see the example of Agag, noted below, even though he is a royal figure)—and in fact his approach is supported by Blau's grammatical observation to be discussed below (N 57)—to my mind, a non-human object is more likely.

⁵⁶ For numerous other examples, both biblical and extra-biblical, see M. Delcor, “Jahweh et Dagon ou le Jahwisme face à la religion des Philistins, d'après 1 Sam. V,” *VT* 14 (1964): 138–140.

the renderings ‘leader’, ‘chieftain’ above. Here we may point to the story of Agag in 1 Samuel 15 for an analogy. Regardless of where the battle occurred and where Agag was captured (see the summary statement in v. 7), at some point he must have been transferred to Gilgal (presumably in v. 12), where an Israelite shrine existed, for later we read **וַיִּשְׁכַּף שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת אֲגַג לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּגִלְגָל** “and Samuel butchered Agag before Yahweh in Gilgal” (v. 33)—and note the parallel between **לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּגִלְגָל** in this passage and **כִּמֹּשׁ בְּקִרְיָת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּגִלְגָל** in MS 13.⁵⁷

The parallel scene narrated in MS lines 17–18, with reference to items taken from Nebo, supports the view taken here that the verb **וַאֲשַׁב** derives from the root **שָׁבַה** ‘capture’. This second passage from the Me-sha Stele reads: **וַאֲקַח מִשֵּׁם אֲנִי כִלְי יְהוָה וַאֲסַחֲבֵם הֵם לִפְנֵי כִמֹּשׁ** “and I took from there the vessels of Yahweh, and I dragged them before Kemosh.” In this instance, the objects captured from Nebo (note that the reading **כלי** “vessels of” is restored, but almost all scholars agree on this reading⁵⁸) are clearly Israelite items, taken during the conquest of the city and dragged before Kemosh once more.

If we compare these two passages, lines 12–13 and lines 17–18, we note that the verbs **וַאֲשַׁב** and **וַאֲסַחֲבֵם** occur in the first, while **וַאֲקַח** and **וַאֲסַחֲבֵם** occur in the second. These collocations serve as another proof towards the identification of the first verb as derived from the root **שָׁבַה** ‘capture’. Here we introduce into the equation the key passage from Ps 68:19: **לָקַחְתָּ מִתְּנוּחַת שָׁבִי לָקַחְתָּ מִתְּנוּחַת** “you captured a captivity, you took gifts,” in which the two items are parallel and virtually identical. True, one also can find biblical passages that collocate **וַאֲשַׁב** and **לָקַח**, but typically the two verbs refer to opposite actions, namely, the returning of what was previously taken (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 20:34; 2 Kgs 13:25; Jer 28:3), and not in parallel fashion implying the same action or course of events, as per Ps 68:19 and the MS passages.

As a final verification of the position advanced here, we call atten-

⁵⁷ Incidentally, if Blau ([N 39]: 150–157) is correct regarding the use of **אֶל** in Moabite, which “is only utilized preceding persons as direct objects” (p. 152), and not before other direct objects, of the two options—cultic (?) object or human leader—the latter is the more likely. Since the phrase **אֶל דֹּדֵהוּ אֶל** is preceded by **אֶל** in line 12, the argument for **אֶל** as a leader or chieftain of some sort is strengthened. On the other hand, there is a bit of circular reasoning here, since Blau’s observation holds only if **אֶל** refers to a human being. In addition, the usual restoration of lines 17–18 (see below) reads **וַאֲקַח מִשֵּׁם אֲנִי כִלְי יְהוָה** “and I took from there the vessels of YHWH,” which would serve as a counter example to Blau’s interpretation. Not that Blau ignored this; see his comment on p. 154. In addition, see also the next footnote. Regardless, this is only tangential to the main point treated herein.

⁵⁸ An alternative suggestion is to read **אֶל** “rams of,” with “rams” meaning “leaders” (cf. Exod 15:15); see Lipiński, “Etymological and Exegetical Notes” (N 4): 335.

tion to another crucial passage, Ps 137:3: כִּי שֵׁם שְׂאִלָּנוּ שׁוּבֵינוּ “for there our captors asked us for words of song, and our yankers (words of) joy: ‘sing for us a song of Zion.’” I have chosen the rather odd phrase “our yankers” here to render a unique word in ancient Hebrew, וַתִּלְלֵנוּ, from the root תִּלַּל, cognate to Arabic *tll*, which in the fourth conjugation means ‘bind and drag away’, as noted already by A. Guillaume,⁵⁹ and to Jibbali *tll* ‘drag a train behind one’.⁶⁰ The two passages, MS 12–13 and Ps 137:3, mutually elucidate one another. In both cases, an object or people is/are captured and is/are dragged away into captivity.⁶¹

Finally, we return to Ahituv’s contribution to the discussion. It is possible that scholars have retreated from the ‘capture’ option because of the dominant view that אֶרְאֵל דְּוִדָּה refers to a non-human object (see the majority of the translations above), with a concomitant underlying assumption that the root שָׁבַח is used with humans only.⁶² Ahituv has short-circuited this approach, however, by noting, correctly so, that the verb שָׁבַח is used with both animals and general property as well. His examples are Exod 22:9; 1 Chr 5:21; 2 Chr 14:14 (domesticated animals of various sorts); and 2 Chr 21:17 (property in general).⁶³ The last verse is worth citing: וַיִּשְׁבּוּ אֹתָם כָּל הָרְכוּשׁ הַנִּמְצָא לְבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְגַם בָּנָיו וְנָשָׁיו “and they [i.e., the Philistines and Arabs] captured all the property that was found belonging to the house of the king [i.e., Jehoram], and also his sons and his wives.” Clearly the רְכוּשׁ taken during this raid on Jerusalem included household valuables belonging to the royal palace. In short, there can be no objection to understanding אֶרְאֵל דְּוִדָּה as a non-human (and non-animal) item,⁶⁴ serving as the direct object of the verb שָׁבַח.

The cumulative effect of the various pieces of evidence presented in

⁵⁹ A. Guillaume, “The Meaning of תִּלְלֵנוּ in Psalm 137:3,” *JBL* 75 (1956): 143–144.

⁶⁰ See T. M. Johnstone, *Jibbālī Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1981): 270.

⁶¹ The comparison between MS 12 and Ps 137:3 was made already in G. A. Rendsburg and S. L. Rendsburg, “Physiological and Philological Notes to Psalm 137,” *JQR* 83 (1993): 396–399, but apparently that article has had little effect on MS studies since its publication (it appears that Ahituv and Rainey cited above reached the same conclusion independently). It is for this reason that the present author has made the effort to expand the earlier discussion and to devote a single, extended article to the problem.

⁶² Indeed, as we saw above, Na’aman (N 30) stated this explicitly.

⁶³ Ahituv, *Ha-Ketav* (N 41): 365–366.

⁶⁴ This would be my preference (see already above, N 55), though the ultimate solution to this problem does not bear on the present issue, as Ahituv demonstrated. For summaries of the various proposals regarding אֶרְאֵל דְּוִדָּה, see G. L. Mattingly, “Moabite Religion and the Mesha’ Inscription,” in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (N 24): 236–237; and Ahituv, *Ha-Ketav* (N 41): 366.

this study yields the conclusion that וָאֶשֶׁב in MS 12 is to be translated as “and I captured,” and not, as is widely done, “and I brought back.”

A FURTHER NOTE ON רִית

Alliteration is a feature of ancient literature that is under-appreciated. In several recent studies,⁶⁵ I have demonstrated that rare lexical items often are employed in order to create or enhance alliteration with more common words in close proximity. At other times, even relatively common words are collocated so that the aural effect is augmented during the oral presentation of a given text. The Mesha Stele provides an example of each.

If the reading רִית is indeed correct (see above, N 1), then line 12 of the MS includes the following two words juxtaposed: הִקֵּר רִית, though a pause would be present between them, with a rendering such as “(from) the city, an offering (for Kemosh and for Moab).” Note that in the next line, at the end of the next clause, we encounter the city-name קִרִית. I would suggest, accordingly, that whatever רִית may mean—and my rendering “offering” is but one of several options—this (presumably rare) noun was employed here to create the alliteration present in these lines.

In like fashion, P. Stern already noted the juxtaposition of the two words רַחֲמַת “maidens” and הִחֲרַמְתָּה “I proscribed it” in line 17.⁶⁶ Not only are the roots of the two forms anagrams of each other, but the addition of the *taw* to each word for morphological reasons increases the aural effect.

We may wish to go further and return to the main point of this article, by noting the number of *shin-bet* combinations in MS lines 8–13. In line 8 we encounter וַיֵּשֶׁב “and he dwelt,” in lines 8–9 we read וַיֵּשְׁבֵה “and (Kemosh) returned it,” in line 10 we have יָשַׁב “dwelt,” in line 12 we note the subject of our inquiry, namely וָאֶשֶׁב “and I captured,” and in line 13 we read וָאֶשְׁב “and I settled.” True literary brilliance would

⁶⁵ See, for example, J. P. Fokkelman and G. A. Rendsburg, “נָגַדָה נָא לְכָל עַמּוֹ” (Psalm cxvi 14b, 18b),” *VT* 53 (2003): 328–336; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” in *Shalom Paul Festschrift* (C. Cohen et al., eds.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

⁶⁶ Stern (N 26): 34, n. 37. Note further that both roots include the pharyngeal fricative /ħ/, as can be determined by cognates in Ugaritic (for the former) and Arabic (for the latter), and not the velar fricative /ħ/. Thus, assuming that Moabite (like Hebrew) distinguished the pronunciations of these two phonemes during the Iron Age, the three sounds produced by the root letters of these two lexemes would be identical.

call for utilizing all three—and not just two—weak roots that share the letters *shin* and *bet* (namely, יָשַׁב ‘sit, dwell’, שָׁב ‘return’, and שָׁבַח ‘capture’) in order to produce the oral effect of these lines. While this approach should not be used to argue for the derivation of וַאֲשַׁבּ in MS 12 from שָׁבַח ‘capture’ independently of the evidence presented in the main portion of this article, we may nonetheless observe this point here as additional support for our understanding of the verb in question. And while it is true that all three of these roots, including שָׁבַח ‘capture’, are part of the common lexis of Hebrew (and thus presumably Moabite as well), the experience of reading biblical texts informs us that even ordinary lexical items could serve the authors in their desire to produce alliterative language.⁶⁷

While a royal display inscription such as the Mesha Stele may not contain the full range of literary devices present in narrative prose texts such as those found in the Bible, scholars nevertheless should be on the lookout for such techniques.

Finally, I take this opportunity to refer to my previous short note on the question of רִיית or הִיית in line 12, in which I accepted A. Lemaire’s reading as the latter, thereby obviating any discussion as to the etymology of the former.⁶⁸ In light of A. Schade’s new reading of this word as רִיית (see N 1 above), in line with what all earlier scholars read, the derivation and meaning of this word is once again an open question. As noted directly above, while several options are possible, most likely the word means ‘offering’, with a cognate in North Arabian *ḡl*.⁶⁹ Within the geographical continuum of the Semitic languages, one will assume here a lexical link shared by two languages within relatively close proximity of each other.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See, for example, most of the verses adduced by J. S. Kselman, “Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus in Biblical Poetry,” *Biblica* 58 (1977): 219–223.

⁶⁸ G. A. Rendsburg, “Hebrew Philological Notes (III),” *HS* 43 (2002): 30. See also idem, “Hebrew Philological Notes (I),” *HS* 40 (1999): 27–28.

⁶⁹ See Ahituv, *Ha-Ketav* (N 41): 365.

⁷⁰ For an isogloss linking North Arabian and Ammonite, which provides a nice parallel to the present case, see G. A. Rendsburg, “The Ammonite Phoneme /T/,” *BASOR* 269 (1988): 73–79, esp. p. 74.