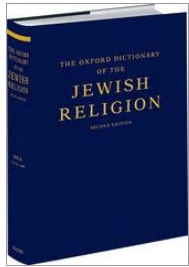


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AMMONAND MOAB,

two neighboring countries of ancient Israel, to the east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, in what is today the kingdom of Jordan. (The capital of Ammon was situated in presentday Amman.) Biblical tradition recognizes a close relationship between Israel and these two nations, as they are traced back to the incestuous union of Lot, Abraham's nephew, and his two daughters (*Gn.* 19.30–38). The cultures of Israel, Ammon, and Moab shared much in common. For example, the Ammonite, Moabite, and Hebrew languages are dialects of the Canaanite language and were mutually intelligible. Ammon (whose chief deity was Milcom) and Moab (whose patron deity was Chemosh) developed as independent kingdoms in Transjordan sometime in the Early Iron Age (c. 13th/12th cent. BCE) and often were at odds with the various tribes of Israel. The earliest Ammonite king recorded in the Bible is Nahash, who besieged the Israelite town Jabesh-gilead and was subsequently defeated by Saul (*1 Sm.* 11), who also defeated Moab (*1 Sm.* 14.47–48). Soon after Israel became a monarchy, David conquered these two countries and incorporated them into his kingdom. Probably after Solomon's death, Ammon and Moab became independent once more. Later, Omri, king of Israel, subjugated Moab, but within a few decades Moab declared its independence. This event is detailed in an important epigraphic remain, the Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone, today in the Louvre), written by the Moabite king Mesha (*2 Kgs.* 3) around 850 BCE. Both Ammon and Moab became Assyrian vassals during the time of Tiglath-pileser III (7th cent. BCE). Because of the tensions that dominated the histories of Israel and its two neighbors, the *Book of Deuteronomy* legislates that "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord" (*Dt.* 23.4). This is interpreted to mean that an Israelite woman cannot marry a man from these two countries. However, it appears that an Ammonite or Moabite woman could become an Israelite, since Ruth was a Moabite who adopted the religion of her mother-in-law Naomi (*Ru.* 1), married Boaz, and eventually became the great-grandmother of David. In postbiblical times, the Talmud relaxed the attitude toward Ammonites and Moabites, and R. Yehoshu'a ben Ḥananyah permitted the conversion of their males on the grounds that the original people could no longer be distinguished; even priests were permitted to marry the daughter of such a convert (*Yev.* 77a).

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–GARY A. RENDSBURG

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