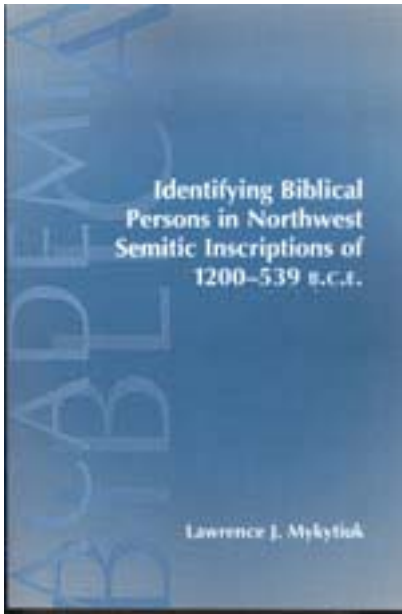


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Mykytiuk, Lawrence J.

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

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This publication is a welcomed addition to the corpus of works grappling with Semitic inscriptions. This work is a revision of Mykytiuk's University of Wisconsin-Madison dissertation, "Identifying Biblical Persons in Hebrew Inscriptions and Two Stelae from before the Persian Era." It takes its place alongside older works such as Donner and Röllig's *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* as well as newer works such as Hoftijzer and Jongeling's *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Davies's *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*, Ahituv's *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*, and Renz and Röllig's *Handbuk der althebräischen Epigraphik*. Mykytiuk's work is both similar in scope and yet different in application from these works. *Identifying Biblical Persons* is similar to the above works in that it seeks to catalogue "selected" Northwest Semitic inscriptions. Yet this catalogue is specific in that it seeks to ascertain the historical identity of personages in the inscriptions.

As the title indicates, the parameters of this investigation are prior to the Persian period (ca. before 539 B.C.E.). We should also note that inscriptions published after 1997 (in the United States) were not considered. Unreliable identifications and non-Hebrew texts (with the exception of the Mesha Inscription and the Tel Dan Stela) were not considered.

The author wisely chose these particular inscriptions in order to test his system of identification.

Mykytiuk's methodology finds its genesis in the articles of both Bordreuil ("Inscriptions sigillaires oust-sémitiques, III: Sceaux de dignitaires et de rois syro-palestiniens du VIIIe et du VIIe siècle avant J.-C.") and Avigad, ("On the Identification of Persons Mentioned in Hebrew Epigraphic Sources") yet is much more specific in scope and application. Mykytiuk rightly takes the theoretical underpinnings of these two authors and expands greatly on their methodology.

The methodology set forth in the second chapter is quite intricate but if followed is well worth the reader's time and investment. In order to gain information about the person(s) mentioned in the inscription, Mykytiuk employs three primary questions. We note that each question has multiple criteria that must be answered before continuing the identification process. The criteria are presented in a stair-stepped progression so as to arrive at either a positive or negative conclusion. In order for the author to gain a positive identification of persons mentioned in inscriptions, he employs three basic questions. First, one must determine if the inscriptional data are reliable. Second, one must ascertain the time frame or setting of both the inscriptional and biblical personage. Third, the researcher must rule out all possibilities of mixed identities between the inscriptional evidence and biblical evidence.

Mykytiuk further elucidates each of the above questions by positing telling criteria to add further specificity in his quest. The first major question has three supporting criteria that aid the interpreter in ascertaining reliability. Utilizing the first criterion, Mykytiuk seeks to determine the means of acquisition of the inscription (e.g., a controlled excavation or unprovenanced purchase from the antiquities market). The second criterion, provenance of the inscription, helps the author further qualify the preciseness of its origins (e.g., Can one point to the exact location of the find, a site or tell or only a vague region?). Authenticity, the third criterion, helps the author sort out items that may not be unprovenanced but are nonetheless inauthentic. He wisely warns that, even though an inscription may be authentic, it nonetheless can be an altered fraud.

The second major question seeks to establish or reject a relationship between the inscription and biblical personages. Three major criteria are adduced to buttress this question. The fourth criterion concerns the date of the person on the inscription (e.g., how well the date of the person mentioned can be established). In order to elucidate this correspondence further, the author examines the language of the inscription in the fifth criterion. Here Mykytiuk scrutinizes the language: its morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Once the language has been ascertained, the author then turns to a

sociopolitical classification. This sixth criterion is a unique element in Mykytiuk's classification in that it seeks to interpret relevant data based upon broad ethnic factors of persons mentioned in the inscriptions. Eight factors determine the sociopolitical classification: theophoric elements, theological references, divine names, onomastic features (disregarding theophoric elements), paleographic analysis of the script, the spatial arrangement of the text, the identity of the language, and material characteristics of the inscribed object. An epigrapher following Mykytiuk's methodology will nonetheless integrate materials from other contemporary inscriptions at this point. The nexus for this criterion is to ascertain how a particular inscription fits within the ancient historical framework.

The third question incorporates five concluding criteria that bring closure to the identification process. Criterion seven asks how the name in the inscription compares with biblical names (e.g., Can the named person in the inscription have correspondence with a biblical character or is he a biblical character?). If the epigrapher finds that there are differences between the inscription and the Bible, one must ask to what degree they are reconcilable or irreconcilable? The eighth criterion concerns interpersonal relations: Does the named person have any available family data? The epigrapher is to compare the familial data gathered in this step with that of the Bible. Criterion nine seeks to help the epigrapher compare title information with the inscribed named and biblical counterpart. The tenth criterion is a type of "catch-all" classification that allows the epigrapher to make an identification that might have possibly been left out in the previous steps. In the last step, the eleventh criterion, the epigrapher may make a positive identification. Identification for Mykytiuk is a three-tiered process; it may be made on the basis of the biblical and inscriptional data. In this case both biblical and inscriptional data support a positive identification of the individual. Yet identification may also be made from either biblical *or* inscriptional data. In this case identification is made from either the Bible or the inscription but not both. Lastly, the available data may not support or require a identification on the grounds mentioned above. This methodological process is brilliantly executed by Mykytiuk in the analysis of his chosen inscriptions.

The third and fourth chapters examine the corpus of named biblical persons for most of the pre-Persian Hebrew inscriptions published before October 1997. In chapter 3 Mykytiuk examines persons mentioned in provenanced inscriptions. As would be expected, results range from certain (on inscriptional and biblical grounds) to virtually certain/reliable. Mykytiuk tests his methodology by examining both Mesha and Omri on the Mesha Inscription. As would be expected from a linguist with Mykytiuk's background, the scholarship on the Mesha Inscription is unstintingly well done. Mesha, as a person, is first examined apart from the biblical data. In this process the author scrutinizes the Mesha Inscription within its historical framework. His conclusions are

specific and sound. Convincingly, Mykytiuk argues that when we compare the biblical and Moabite dating systems, we see two different outcomes. While recognizing difficulties with dating the inscription, Mykytiuk nonetheless argues rightly that “the time frame from the latter part of Ahab’s reign to the failed attempt by Joram’s league with Judah and Edom to crush the Moabite revolt. . . , amounting to about two decades, remains much too short to try to fit in a different Moabite king named Mesha and a completely different revolt” (108). Based upon his methodological inquiry into the Mesha Inscription a positive identification is made for Mesha and Omri. Mesha is seen as the protagonist, whereas Omri is understood to be the antagonist. Elements such as the Omride dynasty, the pair of royal names (Mesha and Omri), and the Moabite rebellion all point to a distinctive cluster of specific circumstances that allow for positive identification.

The author next turns his attention to the examination of the Tel Dan Stela. We must note that Mykytiuk’s reproduction of the Tel Dan Stela was done with exceeding taste. He reproduces the most hotly debated piece of the stela bearing the name “the house of David.” He examines the setting of the inscription apart from the biblical data by giving a short explanation of history and use. Because the Tel Dan Stela has been hotly contested in the past few years, Mykytiuk pays close attention to stratigraphy and epigraphy. Accordingly, he concludes that the stela should be date between the mid-ninth to mid-eighth century B.C.E. The sociopolitical classification for this stela is well presented by the author. In order to situate the stela in the surrounding historical framework, he gives cursory summaries of Assyrian and Aramean documents that portray Damascus as a strong military power.

A short note must be given concerning the meticulousness to which Mykytiuk goes in his examination of **דוד** in the inscription. Interpretive options that he explores include **דוד** as (1) an Aramaic common noun; (2) the title of a (military) official; (3) a GN (geographical name) rendered as Beth-david/BaytDawid; (4) a cultic object; (5) a DN (divine name) *Dōd* or *Daud*; (6) an epithet applied to a deity; and (7) a PN (personal name). Each of the above options is examined fairly and commented upon. Convincingly, Mykytiuk argues that **דוד** should be understood as a PN. In marshaling the linguistic evidence, Mykytiuk states that “In the Aramaic and Assyrian pattern *bît hu-um-ri-a*, the PN designated the founder of a dynasty and the phrase **בית** plus PN was the term for that dynasty, which by extension became the term for the realm over which the dynasty ruled” (125–26). Accordingly, Mykytiuk concludes that there was indeed a dynasty called **ביתדוד** (house of David) mentioned in both the Hebrew Bible and in the Tel Dan Stela. Investigations into the “Megiddo Seal (of Shema, the Minister of Jeroboam),” “City of David Bulla (of Gemaryahu, Son of Shaphan),” and “City of David Bulla (of Azaryahu, Son of Hilqiyahu),” are further examined in this chapter.

Briefly, the fourth chapter deals with identifications in unprovenanced inscriptions. This chapter contains fascinating information on the seals of “Abiyaw, the Minister of Uzziyaw,” “Shubnayaw, Minister of Uzziyaw,” “Ushna, the Minister of Ahaz,” the signet ring of “Hanan, Son of Hilqiyahu, the Priest,” and the bullae of “Yehozarah, Son of Hilqiyahu, the Minister of Hizqiyahu,” as well as “Yerahme’el, the King’s Son.” In each the examination of these inscriptions Mykytiuk does an outstanding job of making plausible and convincing arguments as to the veracity of his identifications or nonidentifications.

The fifth chapter is an exposition on the conclusions that Mykytiuk draws from his research. Conclusions are well presented by once again tabulating the identified individuals from the previous chapters. Research is presented from provenanced and then from unprovenanced inscriptions. The author concludes that, based upon his research, “inscriptions discovered between 1858 and 1904 refer to Mesha, Omri, Jeroboam II and in two inscriptions Uzziah. Inscriptions unearthed in 1982 and 1993 refer to Shaphan, Gemariah, Hilkiah, Azariah, and David” (200). Likewise, Mykytiuk draws conclusions of “likely” identifications based upon unprovenanced inscriptions. We should note that he does warn the reader that this information is based upon inscriptions whose “authenticity is not beyond question.” This chapter closes with a call for further investigations into inscriptional investigation.

The strength of the Mykytiuk’s research lies not only in investigative epigraphy but also in the debate over the “history of Israel.” One would hope that this work will be read with an attentive eye toward the debate over which Israel existed in the ancient Near East. Far from being a polemic in this debate, *Identifying Biblical Persons* is an investigation in its own right into historical personages of ancient Israel. Mykytiuk’s research presents historical reconstructions that must be taken into account by both maximalist and minimalist scholars.

The work has both an outstanding bibliography on inscriptions (thirty-one pages) as well as a comprehensive index of authors and editors. Readers will find the appendices the most helpful feature apart from the body of text. Mykytiuk has helpfully arranged the appendices into six sections (A–F). Appendix A is an excursus on the significance of the title ‘*ebed* in northwest Semitic seals and seal impressions. In this appendix the author gives a brief introduction to the phenomenon and cites seven examples to illustrate his point. Appendices B and C are quite helpful in that they move the investigation beyond inscriptions treated in the main body of the text and attempt to include all “relevant” published Northwest Semitic inscriptions (before the Persian era). In the interest of updating scholarship, Mykytiuk also attempts to include materials relevant to the discussion up to 2002. Appendix D is a listing of “persons” who have been profiled in

appendices B and C. The most fascinating appendix, for me, was appendix E: “Is the Biblical King David Named in the Mesha Inscription?” Mykytiuk devotes some thirteen pages to this literary investigation. This excursus is very well done, sound conclusions are drawn, and no scholarship is eschewed in favor of a particular view. Appendix F encompasses a tabulation of identifications found in appendices B and C by grade. I note that *Identifying Biblical Persons* is quite user-friendly. In the coming year it will be used as a supplementary textbook for my advanced Hebrew classes. I can enthusiastically recommend this work for all classes in epigraphy or advanced Hebrew readings.