

29 Dibon

Names (also known as)

, Karchoh, Dibon-gad, Diban, Dimon

Etymology

Dibon - Strong's H1769 - "wasting", "pining".
Dimon – Strong's H1775 - "river bed" or "silence".

Location/Description

Dhiban is a Jordanian town located in Madaba Governorate, approximately 70 kilometers south of Amman and 20 km east of the Dead Sea. Previously nomadic, the modern community settled the town in the 1950s. Today, Dhiban has a population of approximately 15,000.



Scriptural references

Num. 21:30; 32:3,34; 33:45,46; Josh. 13:9;17; Neh. 11:25; Isa. 15:2; Jer. 48:18,22.

Notable Connections

The Mesha Stele also known as the Moabite Stone - is a stele (inscribed stone) that was discovered intact by Frederick Augustus Klein, at the site of ancient Dibon (now Dhiban in Jordan), in August 1868. The Mesha inscription from the 9th century BC provides clear information about the wars between Israel and Moab. Numerous Moabite towns are mentioned in the inscription. These same towns are described in the Bible as being

located in Moab. Several of them are mentioned by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as part of the downfall of this ancient kingdom. This inscription attests to the regional importance of Moab during Israel's monarchy and is the most significant archaeological artefact discovered to date in Moab.



It was broken up by Arabs, but the fragments were purchased by the French government for 32,000 francs, and are in the Louvre in Paris. The engraved face is about the shape of an ordinary gravestone, rounded at the top. On this stone is the record in Phoenician characters of the wars of Mesha, king of Moab, with Israel (2 Kings 3:4). It speaks of King Omri and other names of places and persons mentioned in the Bible, and belongs to this exact period of Jewish and Moabite history. The names given on the Moabite Stone, engraved by one who knew them in daily life, are, in nearly every case, identical with those found in the Bible itself, and testify to the wonderful integrity with which the Scriptures have been preserved. "The inscription reads like a leaf taken out of a lost book of Chronicles. The expressions are the same; the names of gods, kings and of towns are the same" (Rawlinson's 'Historical Illustrations').

Brief history

The ancient settlement lies adjacent to the modern town. Excavations have revealed that the site was occupied intermittently over the past 5,000 years, its earliest occupation occurring in the third millennium BC. The site's extensive settlement history is in part

due to its location on the King's Highway, a major commercial route in antiquity. The majority of evidence for this population is concentrated in a 15 hectare tell. The release of the Mesha Inscription in 1868 led to an upsurge in visitors to the town (including tourists and scholars) due to its ostensible confirmation of biblical passages.

Another name for Dibon was Karchoh, and there is the possibility that in the 9th century BC the name Dibon referred to a tribe of which Mesha was the leader, and that the name Dibon was attached to the town later (see Van der Steen and Smelik - 2007).

Archaeological evidence indicates that Dhiban became part of the Nabataean empire in the mid-1st century BC. These include Nabataean style ceramics, coins, and architecture (such as a temple with a Nabataean-like layout, masonry, and aqueduct, retaining wall, and monumental stairway).

In AD 106 the Romans incorporated Nabataean territories into their own empire, including Dhiban. The Nabataean monumental buildings were abandoned and there were indications of a population decrease at the site. Coins, a multi-generational family tomb, and an inscription do, however, indicate that the site remained inhabited and there were some building projects during this time. The inscription also suggests that the Romans maintained a road near the site, which might have been the King's Highway. Later on in the Roman period and leading into the Byzantine period Dhiban's population began gradually increasing in size. It was even mentioned in Eusebius' Onomasticon as a very large village in the 4th century. Excavations have uncovered two significant buildings from this time period—a bathhouse and two churches.

The exact date of Dhiban's early Islamic period settlement is uncertain but could be from the 7th- 8th century Umayyad period or the 8-9th century Abbasid period.

The Ottomans neglected Dhiban, which declined through the 16th century. Families of the pastoral nomadic Bani Hamida tribe established modern Dhiban in the 1950s and both built upon pre-existing structures and used them for raw materials. In the following years the land surrounding the tell were distributed to the community for private ownership and the tell itself remains Jordanian government property.

Sources:

Smiths Dictionary of the Bible
Wikipedia
Google Maps
Biblehub
Strong's Concordance
Van der Steen and Smelik 2007
Rawlinson's "Historical Illustrations," American Cyclopaedia; and Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct. 20, 1870

(Ron Leadbetter)