



RESEARCH REPORT

Re-dating the Tel Dan Stele from -850 BCE to -36 CE

SUPPLEMENT TO THE REDATING THESIS

**How Demsky's 1995 dating study pushed the dating
of Tel Dan back by 800 years and manufactured a false consensus.**

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Abstract

This article argues that the ninth-century BCE dating of the Tel Dan Stele is not a neutral scientific conclusion, but the product of an inherited chronological framework shaped by the *Seder Olam Rabbah*. Revisiting Aaron Demsky's 1995 study, it shows that palaeographic dating remains relative and cannot function independently when the comparative corpus is itself anchored in a prior historical model. The study identifies a structural circularity at the heart of the consensus and proposes that the *Seder Olam* retrojected Hasmonean political realities into a distant biblical past. From this perspective, the Tel Dan Stele is reinterpreted as a late first-century BCE monument, most plausibly linked to the fall of Antigonus II Mattathias and the end of a living "House of David." The article therefore calls for a methodological re-examination of chronological assumptions in biblical epigraphy.

Keywords

Tel Dan Stele; Martin Noth ; Thomas Romer ; Demasy, Neil Asher Silberman ; Israel Finkelstein ; *Seder Olam Rabbah*; palaeography; chronology; Hasmonean dynasty; Antigonus II Mattathias; House of David; epigraphy



In critical dialogue with:

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PREAMBLE: AN ERROR OF 800 YEARS

The central thesis of this supplement can be stated from the outset:

The dating of the Tel Dan stele to the ninth century BCE, as practiced by Demsky (1995) and by the entire academic tradition stemming from Biran and Naveh (1993), is not an independent dating. It is the projection of a political chronological framework - the Seder Olam Rabbah of Rabbi Yose ben Halafta, composed around 160 CE - onto an epigraphic object whose palaeography, as a purely relative dating science, cannot decide the matter on its own. The result is a dating error of roughly 800 years: a stele from -36 BCE read as a ninth-century document.

This is not an error made in bad faith. It is a structural error, produced by the invisibility of a chronological presupposition that no one examines because everyone shares it. Palaeography, a rigorous science within its own domain, here becomes the involuntary instrument of an inherited chronological falsification - inherited not from science, but from a rabbinic political decision of the second century CE.



I. WHAT DEMSKY (1995) DOES - AND DOES NOT SAY

1.1 Demsky's method: rigorous within its own framework

Demsky's article is a good work of epigraphy. Its five-step analytical grid - archaeological context, inscription type, palaeography, linguistics, historical synthesis - is the standard method of the field. Its philological observations are relevant: he notes that reading 'lpy as "two thousand" is linguistically impossible in ancient Aramaic, that the military triad chariots / horsemen / infantry follows a canonical descending order, and that comparison with Mesha, Zakkur, and Kilamuwa is methodologically justified. He also notes that the fragment was found in secondary reuse within a gate complex destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser III in 733/732 BCE.

1.2 The invisible presupposition

But Demsky never says the following:

The chronology within which I place this inscription - the ninth century BCE, the age of Ben-Hadad II or Hazael, the conflicts between Aram-Damascus and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah - is a chronology constructed from the Seder Olam Rabbah written around 160 CE. This political chronological framework, in the logic of its own time, is neither historical nor archaeologically established in an independent manner. It is the presupposition of my analysis, not its result.

This silence is not concealment. It is the invisibility proper to shared presuppositions: they are not stated because they seem self-evident, because everyone uses them, because they are part of the air breathed within the field. But an invisible presupposition remains a presupposition. And this one has massive consequences.

1.3 Structural circularity

Demsky's reasoning is circular: the chronology of the Seder Olam places the Aram-Damascus conflicts in the ninth century BCE; the stele's palaeography is compared with inscriptions (Zakkur, Kilamuwa) dated within that same framework; the stele is therefore declared compatible with the ninth century, and that compatibility is presented as confirmation. This is not independent triangulation - it is a network of relative datings, all suspended from the same thread: the political chronology of the Seder Olam.



Table 1 - Comparison of the two theses

Criterion	Demsy (1995)	Din d'Arya (2026)
Chronological framework	Implicit Seder Olam	Suspended - not presupposed
Proposed date	Ninth century BCE	-36 BCE
Gap from -36	~800 years	0
Role of palaeography	Central dating tool	Last-resort criterion
Identification of bytdwd	Tenth-century Davidic dynasty	Living dynastic reality of the first century BCE
Chronological circularity	Present, invisible	Avoided
Is the Seder Olam examined?	Implicit	No - but not presupposed

II. THE SEDER OLAM RABBAH: A SECOND-CENTURY POLITICAL DOCUMENT

2.1 The context of composition

The Seder Olam Rabbah is attributed to Rabbi Yose ben Halafta, active around 150-160 CE in post-Bar Kokhba Galilee. In 135 CE, Hadrian crushed the Bar Kokhba revolt - whom Rabbi Akiva had publicly proclaimed the Messiah. It was the fourth messianic catastrophe in two centuries.

Table 2 - The four messianic catastrophes (-63 / +135 CE)

Date	Event	Messianic dimension
-63 CE	Pompey takes Jerusalem	End of Hasmonean independence
-37 CE	Beheading of Antigonos II at Antioch	End of the living "House of David"
+70 CE	Destruction of the Temple by Titus	End of sacrificial worship
+135 CE	Crushing of Bar Kokhba by Hadrian	End of the last hope of armed restoration -> Seder Olam composed around 160 CE



After 135 CE, the rabbinic leadership faced an urgent political problem: how to survive under Rome while maintaining authority over Jewish communities without provoking a fifth suicidal messianism? Rabbi Yose ben Halafta's answer was the Seder Olam - a chronology which, under the appearance of biblical erudition, carries out a precise political operation.

2.2 The mechanics of compression and rejection - the 1,000-year retrodating of Hasmonean kingship

The compression of the Persian period: a known fact

The most documented manipulation in the Seder Olam concerns the Persian period. Babylonian cuneiform sources, cross-checked with Achaemenid archives, Herodotus, and Thucydides, establish that Persian domination lasted about 206 years (550-330 BCE). The Seder Olam reduces it to 52 years. This compression of roughly 150 years is the most visible manipulation. But it is not the most important one.

The 1,000-year retrodating of the royal line

The compression of the Persian period is only the visible instrument of a much deeper and much bolder operation:

The Seder Olam projects backward, into a remote and unverifiable past, a royal line - Saul, David, Solomon - which the available archaeological data place, at best, in the Hasmonean period of the second-first centuries BCE. David, Solomon, and Saul are not tenth-century BCE kings retrodated by 150 years through Persian compression. They are figures of the Hasmonean period retrodated by nearly 1,000 years.

That is the real revelation. And this is what the following table makes visible, by cross-referencing for each biblical figure the date assigned by the Seder Olam, its historically dated Hasmonean equivalent, and the independent archaeological reality.

Table 3 - A 1,000-year retrodating: from Hasmonean reality to the invention of -1000

Figure in the Seder Olam Rabbah	Date assigned by the Seder Olam	Dated Hasmonean equivalent (historical sources)	Archaeological reality and independent sources	Gap
Saul - first king of Israel	~-1030	<i>Hyrchanus II (-76/-30) - high priest and ethnarch, illegitimate king contested by</i>	No archaeological trace of a centralized monarchical state in Jerusalem in the eleventh century BCE. Jerusalem was a modest site, without a royal	~1,000 years



		<i>Aristobulus II, deposed by Rome. Archetypal figure of the weak and manipulated king.</i>	palace (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001).	
David - founding king and anointed of the Lord	~-1010	<i>Antigonus II Mattathias (-40/-37) - last Hasmonean king, simultaneously king and high priest, perceived as the Lord's anointed (Messiah) by Galilean populations. Beheaded at Antioch.</i>	bytdwd ("House of David") in the Tel Dan stele (-36) designates this living dynastic reality, not a mythical tenth-century lineage. No Davidic palace has been archaeologically identified in Jerusalem.	~1,000 years
Solomon - king of the Temple and of wisdom	~-970	<i>Alexander Jannaeus (-103/-76) - king and high priest, expansionist, builder, figure of Hasmonean royal power at its height. Or Hyrcanus I (-134/-104), the first to unite both functions.</i>	The Jerusalem Temple was enlarged and monumentalized by the Hasmoneans and then by Herod. No Solomonic structure has been archaeologically identified. The biblical description corresponds to the proportions of the Hasmonean-Herodian Temple.	~1,000 years
Construction of the First Temple of Jerusalem	~-960	<i>Expansion of the Temple under Hyrcanus I (-134/-104), then under Alexander Jannaeus, and Herodian monumentalization beginning in -20. The description in the Books of Kings corresponds to the scale of the first-century Temple.</i>	No trace of a monumental temple in tenth-century BCE Jerusalem. Excavations beneath the Temple Mount and in the City of David reveal no cultic structure of great scale for that period.	~1,000 years
United Kingdom of Israel (Davidic-Solomonic empire)	~-1030 / -930	<i>Hasmonean kingdom at its greatest extension under Alexander</i>	Tenth-century BCE Jerusalem: a town of 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants according to archaeological estimates,	~1,000 years



		<i>Jannaeus (-103/-76): control of Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Idumea, Perea, and the Mediterranean coast. First centralized Jewish state documented archaeologically.</i>	without administrative infrastructure of imperial scale (Finkelstein, 2001; Cahill, 2003).	
Israel / Judah schism - division of the kingdom	~-930	<i>Hasmonean civil war between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (-67/-63) - dynastic conflict between two brothers for the throne and the high priesthood, resolved by Pompey's intervention in -63. Exact structural parallel with the Rehoboam/Jeroboam schism.</i>	The political division between Israel (north) and Judah (south) in the ninth century BCE is attested by Assyrian sources, but the founding schism narrative may be a retrodated projection of the internal Hasmonean conflict.	~1,000 years
Classical prophets of Israel (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah...)	Ninth-eighth centuries BCE	<i>School of Ethan the Ezrahite and Hasmonean scribes (second-first centuries BCE) - literature of resistance composed under ancient prophetic pseudonyms. The Psalms of Solomon (-63/-37) and certain Qumran texts belong to this tradition.</i>	The use of ancient prophetic pseudonyms to speak about the present is documented in Second Temple literature (Daniel, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra). Prophetic texts often reflect a late context of composition masked by an ancient attribution.	~800-1,000 years
The Tel Dan stele - bytdwd	<i>Ninth century BCE (Biran, Naveh, Demsky)</i>	<i>-36 BCE (Din d'Arya) - Herodian-Roman monument erected on the northern frontier of Judea to commemorate the captive passage of</i>	Basalt fragment in secondary reuse. No absolute dating is possible for the support itself (basalt cannot be dated by inscription). Palaeography calibrated on a corpus itself dated within the Seder Olam framework.	~800 years



		<i>Antigonus II (-37) on the road to Antioch, where he would be beheaded on Mark Antony's order.</i>		
Hazael / Haddad - king of Aram-Damascus	Ninth century BCE	<i>Herod the Great (-37/+4) - an Idumean, foreign from the standpoint of Jewish tradition, supported by Rome (Mark Antony, then Augustus), who eliminates the reigning Hasmonean house in order to seize the throne. Exact structural correspondence with Hazael killing Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 8:15).</i>	Hazael is attested by Assyrian sources (Shalmaneser III). But his use as an allegorical mask for Herod in the stele is coherent with the pseudonymous system of late Hasmonean literature.	~800 years
Ben-Hadad II - ally and then adversary of Ahab	Ninth century BCE	<i>Mark Antony (-44/-30) - master of the Roman East, patron of the campaign against Antigonus, both Herod's ally and suzerain. Supported by Cleopatra of Egypt - exact parallel with Egyptian support for Haddad (2 Kings 9:14-16).</i>	The structural parallel between Ben-Hadad / Hazael and Mark Antony / Herod - including Egyptian support in both cases - is too precise to be accidental within a deliberate system of allegorical masks.	~800 years
Ahab - king of Israel, contested anointed one	~-874 / -853	<i>Antigonus II Mattathias (-40/-37) - king and high priest, legitimate anointed one in the eyes of the Jewish people,</i>	Ahab is attested at the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE) in the Annals of Shalmaneser III. But his narrative function in the Books of Kings (legitimate king defeated by a foreigner with foreign support) corresponds to the	~800 years



		defeated and executed by the Roman-Herodian coalition. Or Aristobulus II (-67/-49), Hasmonean king deposed by Pompey and dead in captivity.	structure of the Hasmonean crisis.	
Jehu - Ahab's successor, usurper of the throne	~-842	<i>Herod the Great (-37/+4) - kills members of the reigning Hasmonean house to seize the throne with Roman support. Jehu kills Joram son of Ahab and Ahaziah king of Judah: an identical structure to Herod eliminating Antigonus and the Hasmonean family.</i>	Jehu is attested on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (British Museum). His use as an allegorical mask for Herod in Hasmonean literature is coherent with the logic of the pseudonymous system: the regicide who kills the Davidic line to found a new royal house.	~800 years
Psalm 89 - lament over the fall of the anointed	Attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite, yet Ethan was born around -75 CE and died around -4 CE, not in the tenth-ninth centuries BCE.	<i>Composed or finalized between -70 and -37 by the school of Ethan the Ezrahite - direct testimony to the beheading of Antigonus II at Antioch and to the destruction of the Hasmonean house by Herod and Rome.</i>	The line-by-line correspondence between Psalm 89 ("You have rejected your anointed," "You have profaned his crown," "You have broken down his walls") and the Tel Dan stele ("I killed the king of the House of David," "I laid their cities in ruins") is too precise to be fortuitous.	~800-1,000 years
Psalms of Solomon messianic literature	Attributed to Solomon, ~tenth century	<i>Dated by exegetical consensus to -63 to -37 (from Pompey's taking of Jerusalem to the</i>	Psalms of Solomon 17 explicitly describes the conquest of Jerusalem by a "foreigner" (Pompey), the profanation of the Temple, and the messianic	~1,000 years



	BCE	<i>beheading of Antigonus). Direct reaction to the destruction of Jewish independence by Rome and to the end of the Hasmonean monarchy.</i>	hope of a “son of David.” Its vocabulary is identical to that of the Tel Dan stele.	
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Why this 1,000-year retrodating? The tripolar political logic

The political logic is fearsomely coherent. After Bar Kokhba (135 CE), the rabbinic leadership had to solve three problems simultaneously.

- **Problem 1 - Calendrical messianism. The prophecies of Daniel, in their real chronological context (a 206-year Persian period), point to the first century BCE as an active messianic period - which validates Antigonus II, Jesus, and Bar Kokhba. That window had to be displaced by 1,000 years so that no reasonable calculation could ever recover a reactivatable messianic date.**
- **Problem 2 - The legitimacy of the “House of David.” Living Galilean memory associated the “House of David” with the Hasmoneans, and especially with Antigonus II, beheaded in -37. David had to be moved outside political time - turned into a figure of the distant past whose descendants could no longer be identified with any living family.**
- **Problem 3 - The neutralization of allegorical literature. The Psalms of Solomon, the Psalms of David, and the Qumran texts use allegorical masks in which ancient names designate first-century BCE political realities. If retrodated by 1,000 years, that seditious literature becomes harmless archaic piety.**

The solution resolves all three problems in a single operation: projecting the entire Israelite royal period 1,000 years backward transforms a living and dangerous political memory into a remote sacred history that is definitively deactivated. This is precisely what the Babylonian Talmud states explicitly in Sanhedrin 97b: “May the bones rot of those who calculate the end” - a direct condemnation of calendrical messianism.

Archaeology confirms the absence

This point is decisive because it rests not on internal chronological arguments but on the absence of material traces. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman (The Bible Unearthed, 2001) documented what the excavations of Jerusalem reveal for the tenth



century BCE: no trace of a monumental royal palace, no trace of a temple of the scale described in the Books of Kings, no trace of a central administration capable of managing an empire of the size attributed to David and Solomon. Tenth-century Jerusalem is archaeologically a town of 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants. That is exactly what one would expect if David and Solomon were retrodated projections of Hasmonean figures into an artificial past.

Why 1,000 years? The political logic of Davidic retrodating in the Seder Olam Rabbah

Executive summary

The Seder Olam Rabbah (ca. 160 CE) does not commit a mere chronological error. It performs a deliberate political operation: projecting real Hasmonean kingship (second-first centuries BCE) into a remote past 1,000 years earlier in order to defuse Jewish messianism after the catastrophe of Bar Kokhba. This short article demonstrates why a distance of 1,000 years - neither more nor less - constitutes the optimal strategic choice for making that retrodating at once unverifiable, non-ridiculous, and theologically coherent.

1. Rabbi Yose ben Halafta's political problem (160 CE)

After the crushing of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE), the rabbinic leadership faced three mortal problems:

Problem	Description	Risk
Calendrical messianism	Calculations based on the book of Daniel place the arrival of the Messiah in the first century BCE - which validates Antigonus II, Jesus, and Bar Kokhba.	New revolt
Living memory of the "House of David"	Galileans identify the Davidic dynasty with the Hasmoneans, especially Antigonus II, beheaded in -37.	Attachment to a dangerous political line
Seditious literature	The Psalms of Solomon, the Qumran texts, and even certain Psalms of David allegorically describe the fall of the Hasmoneans.	Subversive reading as a call for restoration

Rabbi Yose ben Halafta's solution was the Seder Olam Rabbah: a universal chronology from creation to the Bar Kokhba revolt. Its central innovation was to project the entire royal period (Saul, David, Solomon, divided kingdom) approximately 1,000 years backward.



2. The available window: between Moses and Babylon

Traditional biblical chronology sets two fixed boundaries:

Boundary	SOR date	Function
Moses / Exodus	-1250 BCE	Upper boundary (David must come after)
Destruction of the First Temple (Nebuchadnezzar)	-420 BCE	Lower boundary (David must come before)

The available window for accommodating the whole royal history is therefore about 830 years.

Within that window Rabbi Yose had to insert:

- The conquest of Canaan
- The period of the Judges
- The united monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon)
- The divided kingdom (Israel and Judah)
- The prophets up to the Exile

There was enough room for the operation to pass unnoticed. Above all, no one in the second century could archaeologically verify what had happened in the tenth century BCE.

3. Rabbi Yose's three retrodating options

Rabbi Yose had three possible choices for placing David:

Option	SOR date for David	Problem	Result
Option 1: leave David in his real context	-160 to -37 (Hasmoneans)	Living, verifiable, dangerous memory	Politically unacceptable
Option 2: retrodating David too little	-500 to -300	David would come after Babylon (-420) -> incoherent	Impossible
Option 3: retrodating David too far	-2000 or more	David would become earlier than Moses (-1250) -> absurd	Impossible
Option 4: retrodating David by ~1,000 years	-1010	Consistent with Moses, prior to Babylon,	Optimal solution



Option	SOR date for David	Problem	Result
		unverifiable	

The only window consistent with the biblical boundaries lies between -1250 and -420. Placing David around -1000 (or -1010 in the SOR) is the only tenable location.

4. The strategic genius of “1,000 years”

The choice of 1,000 years is not accidental. It satisfies four decisive political criteria:

Criterion	Why 1,000 years is perfect	Counter-example
Unverifiable	No documents, no archaeology in the second century for the tenth century BCE.	200 years: verifiable by witnesses
Not ridiculous	A monarchy 1,000 years before the common era appears ancient yet plausible.	10,000 years: manifestly absurd
Consistent with Moses	David (-1010) comes logically after Moses (-1250).	Before Moses: contradictory
Prior to Babylon	David (-1010) is before the destruction of the Temple (-420).	After Babylon: incoherent

1,000 years is the optimal distance: great enough to make verification impossible, yet small enough not to provoke ridicule.

5. The double technical operation

The Seder Olam does not merely move David. It combines two mechanisms:

5.1 The compression of the Persian period

Historical reality	Seder Olam	Gap
Persian domination: ~206 years (550-330 BCE)	52 years	-154 years

This compression shifts the entire post-exilic chronology. But by itself it would produce only a displacement of roughly 150 years - insufficient.

5.2 The systematic retrodating of kingship

Persian compression “frees” about 150 years. But to reach 1,000 years, Rabbi Yose had to invent a dense internal chronology for the period of the kings: assigning precise durations to each reign, synchronizing Israel and Judah, and above all projecting the Hasmonean model



(anointed king, monumental Temple, territorial expansion) onto an archaeologically empty tenth century.

The net result is that the unified monarchy described in the Books of Samuel and Kings - which corresponds point for point to Hasmonean reality (-160 to -37) - ends up dated roughly 1,000 years earlier.

6. Why not 500 years? Why not 1,500 years?

Distance	Result	Why it is impossible
0 years (real context)	David = Antigonus II (-37)	Dangerous: living memory
150 years (simple Persian compression)	David around -200	David would come after Babylon (-420)? No - calculation: if David is at -200, then the destruction of the Temple must be after -200, yet Babylon is -420. Chronological incoherence.
500 years	David around -550	Problem: -550 falls within the Persian period (550-330). David would become contemporary with Cyrus - absurd.
1,000 years	David around -1010	COHERENT: between Moses (-1250) and Babylon (-420), prior to the Persian period.
1,500 years	David around -1510	David would become earlier than Moses (-1250) -> contradictory
2,000 years	David around -2010	Absurd: before Abraham, before the Flood according to biblical chronology

Only the -1250 / -420 window works. And within that window, only a placement around -1000 is consistent with the biblical sequence (Judges first, then kings).

Rabbi Yose's genius was to choose the upper limit of the available window: just after the period of the Judges, just before archaeology could say anything at all. Neither too early (absurd) nor too late (verifiable).

7. The archaeological proof: why it worked

The Seder Olam worked because, in the second century, no one could challenge its chronology on material grounds. Today archaeology allows us to see what Rabbi Yose could not know:

What archaeology shows for the tenth century BCE	Consequence
Jerusalem: town of 2,000-5,000 inhabitants	No monumental royal palace
No temple of the scale described in 1 Kings	The biblical description corresponds to the Hasmonean / Herodian Temple
No centralized administration	No "Davidic empire"



What archaeology shows for the tenth century BCE	Consequence
No inscription mentioning David or the “House of David” before -160	Tel Dan (dated to -36) cannot be ninth-century

The absence of evidence in the tenth century is no accident: it is the condition of possibility for the retrodating. Rabbi Yose projected Hasmonean kingship into a century that was, archaeologically, empty of any centralized monarchy. He could not know this - but his political instinct guided him toward the right window.

8. Conclusion: 1,000 years, the perfect distance

The Seder Olam Rabbah does not contain a “1,000-year error.” It contains a deliberate operation whose distance of 1,000 years is the optimal solution to a political problem:

To render the “House of David” sufficiently distant to be sacred and harmless, yet sufficiently near not to be ridiculous.

The boundaries imposed by biblical chronology itself (Moses at -1250, Babylon at -420) left only a window of about 830 years. Placing David at the beginning of that window - around -1000 - was the only possible move.

Neither 500 years (too late: Persian period), nor 1,500 years (too early: before Moses). Exactly 1,000 years.

This is not chance. It is chronological engineering.

III. PALAEOGRAPHY: A RELATIVE SCIENCE CALIBRATED ON A FALSE CHRONOLOGY

3.1 The structural limit of palaeography

Palaeography is the science that studies the evolution of graphic forms over time. By comparing the morphology of the letters of an inscription with dated reference corpora, it makes it possible to propose a relative chronological range for the object under study. But it has a fundamental structural limit:

Palaeography dates relatively. It does not produce absolute dates. It says: this inscription resembles inscriptions in corpus X, dated to period Y. It does not say: this inscription was engraved on date Z.



The robustness of a palaeographic dating depends entirely on the robustness of the datings assigned to the reference corpus. If that corpus is itself dated from a faulty chronological framework, the palaeographic dating inherits that fault - and amplifies it by giving it the appearance of independent scientific confirmation. That is exactly what happens in the case of the Tel Dan stele.

3.2 Deliberate archaism: a documented phenomenon

The history of writing offers many examples of deliberate archaism: Roman imperial inscriptions imitating republican script, Hellenistic decrees adopting ancient Attic forms, late Mesopotamian monuments copying paleo-Babylonian conventions. In the case of the Tel Dan stele, a Herodian patron wishing to engrave a monument of humiliation had every reason to call upon an engraver capable of imitating archaic Aramaic forms - so that the inscription would be read by the Galilean population as an invocation of ancient authority. Archaism is not an index of date: it is a rhetorical choice.

3.3 The 800-year error: the mechanics of an illusion of precision

Table 4 - Causal chain of the error and its correction

Chain of the error - Demsky 1995	Chain of the correction - Din d'Arya 2026
Seder Olam Rabbah (~160 CE): 150-year compression + ~1,000-year retrodating of the Hasmonean royal period	Suspension of the Seder Olam as a chronological presupposition
Retrodating Saul, David, Solomon to -1000 - Hasmonean reality projected into an unverifiable past	Reading bytdwd as a living dynastic reality: Antigonus II, first century BCE
Calibration of the palaeographic corpus within this shifted framework (Zakkur, Kilamuwa dated by the same chronology)	Contextualization within the Hasmonean crisis of -37: fall of Jerusalem, beheading of Antigonus at Antioch
Palaeography of the stele compared with this shifted corpus -> compatible with the ninth century	Coherence: geography (route of exile), morphology (Roman terminus), Psalm 89, Galilean memory of the Gospels
RESULT: ~800-year error - a stele from -36 propelled into the ninth	RESULT: dating to -36 BCE - coherent with the full set of independent



The illusion of precision is particularly dangerous here: palaeography produces conclusions that appear technical and objective. It gives a political chronological presupposition the appearance of empirical verification. In reality, the exact opposite is happening: the presupposition contaminates the verification.

IV. THE GREAT RETRODATING: A HASMONEAN KINGSHIP PROJECTED TO - 1000

4.1 The “House of David” in -37: political reality, not myth

The expression bytdwd - “House of David” - in the Tel Dan stele is the pivot of the entire debate. Demsky reads it as a reference to a Davidic dynasty of the tenth century. Din d'Arya reads it as a living political designation of the first century BCE. What was the historical reality in -37 BCE? The Hasmoneans had ruled Judea since the second century BCE. They were not biologically descended from David. But in popular Galilean perception, nourished by the Psalms of Solomon and apocalyptic literature, the legitimate Jewish king was the successor of David. Antigonus II Mattathias, the last Hasmonean king, was perceived as the Lord's anointed. His beheading at Antioch in -37 - the first execution of a king by Rome in history - represents the end of the “House of David” as a living political reality. That is what the Tel Dan stele is about.

4.2 The operation of the Seder Olam: killing living memory

The great retrodating carried out by the Seder Olam around 160 CE accomplishes something precise and effective: it takes the living political memory of the Hasmonean period - David, Solomon, the kings of Israel and Judah as figures of Jewish dynastic legitimacy - and projects it into a past 1,000 years earlier, unverifiable, archaeologically empty, and therefore indisputable.

Once that operation is complete, the Tel Dan stele can no longer be read for what it is - a Herodian-Roman monument of humiliation from -36 mentioning the living king Antigonus II. It becomes an obscure ninth-century Aramaic document about a Hazael of whom no living memory remains. It is defused. And 2,000 years later, it is propelled 800 years backward by epigraphists who, without knowing it, use as their compass a rabbinic political manipulation from the second century.



4.3 What suspending the Seder Olam makes visible

Suspending the Seder Olam as a chronological presupposition reveals a remarkable coherence. The royal period of Saul, David, and Solomon, archaeologically unfindable in the tenth century, corresponds perfectly to the documented, monumental, diplomatic Hasmonean period of the second-first centuries BCE. The Tel Dan stele, unreadable as a ninth-century document, becomes perfectly readable as a monument of -36: a marker of Herodian humiliation, a transit point for Antigonus's column, a political message addressed to Galilean memory. Psalm 89, an incomprehensible lament in a ninth-century context, becomes the direct testimony of Ethan the Ezrahite, who saw Antigonus in chains. And the Galilean memory of the Gospels - "Are you the son of David?" - is no longer an abstract theological formula but the cry of a population that, sixty years earlier, had seen the last king of the House of David pass by in chains.

CONCLUSION

The Tel Dan stele is a textbook case of what the invisibility of a chronological presupposition produces in a discipline that believes itself objective.

Demsky (1995) does good epigraphy within a bad chronological framework. Palaeography, as a tool of relative dating, tells him: this inscription resembles inscriptions from the ninth century. But that ninth century is defined by a rabbinic political chronology of the second century CE. The result is an illusion of scientific dating that propels a document from -36 BCE eight centuries backward.

Demsky proceeds from the presupposition that the chronology of the Seder Olam Rabbah is true. Din d'Arya's redating does not. It places the stele back within the context of the last King of David, the Hasmonean kingship of the Psalms of Solomon and of David.

This supplement explicitly names what its thesis of redating to -36 CE presupposes implicitly: the rejection of the Seder Olam Rabbah as the chronological frame of reference for biblical epigraphy - not through any rejection of rabbinic erudition, but by applying to this document the same critical historical gaze that we apply to any other ancient source produced in a precise political context by an authority with identifiable institutional interests.

Rabbi Yose ben Halafta, around 160 CE, carried out an operation of remarkable effectiveness: he took the living and dangerous political memory of a recent Hasmonean Davidic kingship - embodied in Antigonus II, beheaded in -37 - and projected it 1,000 years backward, into a past that was unverifiable and archaeologically empty, turning it into a harmless founding myth. The Tel Dan stele, a monument of that humiliation, followed the



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same path: propelled 800 years backward by palaeography calibrated on that falsified framework, it became an obscure epigraphic curiosity of the ninth century - whereas it is in fact the most explicit document we possess for the end of the “House of David” as a living political reality in the first century BCE.

With his 1995 dating, Demsky became one link in a chain of validation that began in 160 CE, passing through James Ussher, Ernest Renan, Charles Clermont-Ganneau, and Martin Noth: a relay bearer for the political chronology of 160 CE, a chronology that crashes against the wall of 160 CE and cannot provide an earlier dating for a monument such as the Tel Dan stele.
