

THE TEL-DAN STELE

A Roman Boundary Marker of Humiliation on the Via Dolorosa of Mattathias Antigonus II (Summer -37 BCE)

Page 0 — General Presentation

Working preprint in progress — submitted for critical review

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I. NOTE TO THE READER

This document is a working preprint submitted for critical review. It makes no claim to exhaustiveness or definitive certainty. It proposes a reasoned re-dating of the Tel Dan Stele and explicitly invites remarks, objections, and contributions from any specialist — epigraphist, archaeologist, historian of Hellenistic Judaism, or Roman studies scholar.

The central hypothesis is that the stele, traditionally dated to the 9th century BCE, is in fact a Roman-Herodian monument erected in -36 BCE to commemorate the humiliation and passage of Mattathias Antigonus II — the last Hasmonean king and last living "son of David" — on the road to his forced exile toward Antioch.

II. ABSTRACT

English

The Tel Dan Stele (discovered in 1993) is here re-dated as a Roman-Herodian boundary marker of humiliation, carved in -36 BCE by Herod and Sosius to commemorate the exact spot where Mattathias Antigonus II and his column of prisoners crossed the northern border of Judea on their way to execution in Antioch. The expression *bytdwd* ("House of David") refers to the living Hasmonean dynasty of the 1st century BCE. Deliberate archaism of the script, the morphology of a Roman *terminus*, the geography of the King's Highway, the psalmic semantics (Psalm 89) and the Galilean memory sixty years later in the Gospels all converge on this re-dating. Palaeography, taken as a criterion of last resort, can no longer serve as the sole dating argument.

中文摘要

泰勒丹碑铭新考：公元前 36 年希律与索西乌斯所立罗马—希律时代羞辱性界碑

1993 年出土的泰勒丹碑铭，本文重新断代为罗马—希律王朝时期的边界标识，其性质属羞辱性纪念物。该碑刻于公元前 36 年，由希律与索西乌斯共同设立，旨在标定马提亚·安提柯二世及其被俘队伍途经犹地亚北部边界、被解往安条克受刑的确切地点。碑文中“bytdwd”（“大卫之家”）一词所指，实为公元前一世纪尚存的哈斯蒙尼王朝。本文考证之依据涵盖多重维度：碑文字体呈现有意仿古特征；碑体形制符合罗马时代界标范式；其地理位置与王家大道走向相契；诗篇第 89 篇之语义结构可资印证；而六十年后福音书中所载加利利地区的历史记忆，亦与此断代形成互证。据此，以往将古文字学作为首要断代依据的做法，应降为最终参考标准，不再作为唯一判定依据。

关键词：泰勒丹碑铭；大卫之家；哈斯蒙尼王朝；罗马界碑；断代研究；圣经考古学

III. KEYWORDS

EN	Tel Dan Stele · re-dating · Mattathias Antigonus II · Herod the Great · Sosius · Roman boundary marker · deliberate archaism · palaeography · Psalm 89 · House of David · via dolorosa -37 · Hasmonean humiliation · 1st century BCE
个摸	泰勒丹碑铭；大卫之家；哈斯蒙尼王朝；罗马界碑；断代研究；圣经考古学

IV. METADATA SHEET — ZENODO DEPOSIT

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THE TEL DAN STELE

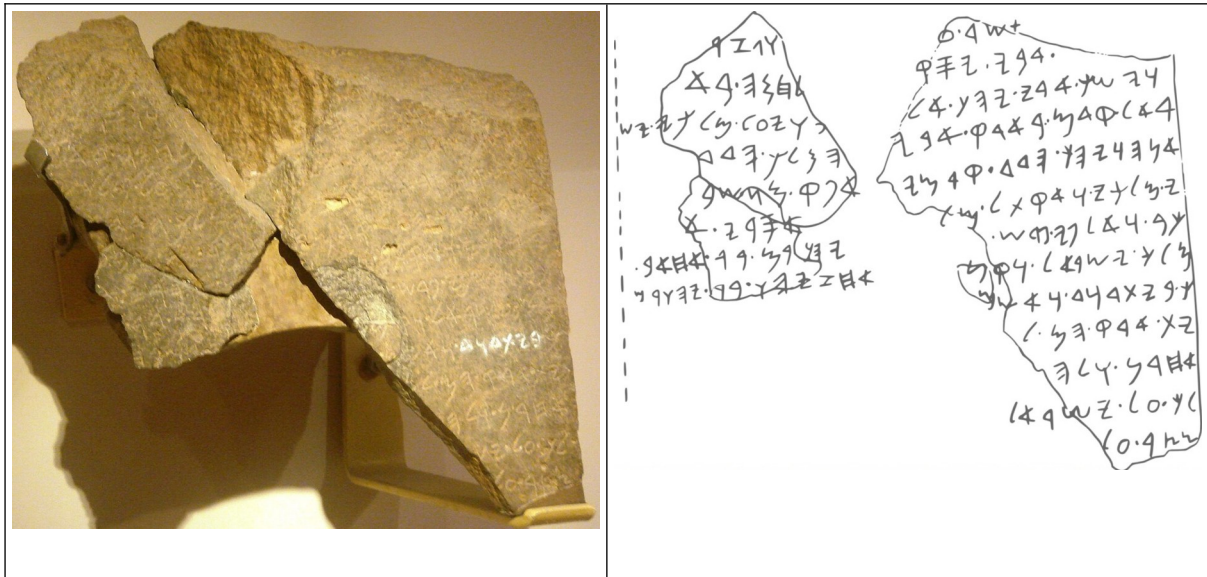


A Herodian commemorative stele on the road of humiliation of Mattathias-Antigonus II"

Summer -37 BCE

Date	Author	Version
14 Nisan 2026	Din d'Arya	preprint

I. DISCOVERY CONTEXT



The witten text :

Old Araméen

1. [א]מרע[]וגזר[]
2. [---אבי.יסק[.עלוה.בה]תלחמה.בא[]]
3. וישבב.אבי.יהר.אל[.אבהו[.ה.ויעל.מלכי[]יש]
4. ראל.קדם.בארק.אבי[.ו.יהלך.הדד[.]]א[יתי]
5. אנה.ויהר.הדד.קדמי[.ו.אפק.מן.שבע[---ת]]
6. י.מלכי.ואקתל.מל[.כן.שב[טן.אסרי.א[לפי.ר]
7. כב.ואלפי.פרש[.קתלת.אית[יהו[.רם.בר[אחאב].]
8. מלך.ישראל.וקתל[.ת.אית.אחז[יהו.בר[יהורם.מל].]
9. ך.ביתדוד.ואשם[.אית.קרית.הם.חרבת.ואהפך.א[.
10. ית.ארק.הם[לישמן[]
11. אחרן.ולה[... ויהוא.מ[]
12. לך.על.יש[ראל... ואשם[.]
13. מצרע[.ל[.]

1. ... [ר] [...]
2. ... [ב] [א] [...]
3. ... [מליכ] [.] [.]
4. ... [המלך. הדד] [.] [.]
5. ... [אפק. מ[ן]. שבע] [.] [.]
6. ... [אסרי. א] [.] [.]
7. ... [רם. רב] [.] [.]
8. ... []

Lines 1-2

[...] and he cut [...]

[...] my father went up against him when he was fighting at [...]

Lines 3-5

And my father lay down, he went to his fathers.
And the king of Israel had previously entered the land of my father. But Hadad made me king, myself.

And Hadad marched before me, and I went out from the seven [...]

Lines 6-9 (the heart of the inscription)

[...] of my reign, and I killed [six]ty kings who had harnessed thousands of chariots and thousands of horsemen. [I killed Jo]ram, son of [Ahab], king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]yahu, son of [Joram, ki]ng of the House of David.

Lines 10-13

And I made [their cities into ruins and I turned] their land into [desolation ...]

	others [...] and [Jehu reigned] over Is[rael... and I laid] a siege a[gainst ...]
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1. The Stele as Defined by the Academic Consensus

In 1993, archaeologists working at Tel Dan (northern Israel) unearthed a basalt fragment bearing an Aramaic inscription. Among its legible expressions was the term bytdwd, translated as "House of David." Stratigraphic and palaeographic analysis placed the inscription in the 9th century BCE. The scholarly tradition immediately drew a sweeping conclusion: this stele constitutes proof of the existence of the great King David of the 10th century, thereby confirming the biblical chronology.

Yet is this dating as robust as claimed? What if the stele belonged not to the 9th century, but to the 1st century BCE — specifically to the year –37, in the immediate aftermath of the decapitation of Mattathias Antigonus II, the last Hasmonean king?

2. The Fragility of the Stratigraphic Dating: A Stone out of Context

The attribution of the Tel Dan stele to the 9th century BCE rests primarily on two methodological pillars: stratigraphy and palaeography.

Stratigraphic analysis, however, encounters a major difficulty that was rarely accounted for in the initial scholarly discussions: the inscribed stone was discovered in a condition of secondary reuse — embedded in ancient masonry before being discarded into a rubble pit. Such a taphonomic sequence clearly indicates that the stratigraphic level in which the fragment was found does not correspond to its original context of deposition, but rather to a context of later destruction or reappropriation. Accordingly, stratigraphic dating can only inform us of the terminus ante quem of the object's abandonment or recycling — not the date at which the inscription itself was carved. This type of situation, common in archaeology for commemorative monuments and "defeated steles," demands extreme caution in chronological interpretation and invites a fundamental reconsideration of the probative value of the stratigraphic argument in the case of Tel Dan.

3. The Limits of Palaeography in the Face of Singular Political Intent

Palaeography is one of the privileged instruments for the relative dating of ancient inscriptions. Grounded in the comparison of graphic forms with independently dated corpora, it presupposes a linear and relatively regular evolution of scripts. However, this method encounters significant limitations whenever an inscription results from a deliberate political intention that consciously adopts an archaic style. The present article interrogates the pertinence of palaeographic dating in cases where the engraver or patron sought to inscribe a text within an ancient tradition — whether for

purposes of legitimation, propaganda, or polemical contestation.

4. The Implicit Assumptions of the Palaeographic Method

Palaeography rests upon several implicit postulates: that scripts evolve continuously and irreversibly; that stylistic variations primarily reflect chronological developments; and that reference corpora are sufficiently extensive to permit reliable comparisons. These assumptions, valid for administrative documents and ordinary inscriptions, become deeply problematic when confronted with official monuments whose graphic form may reflect an aesthetic or political choice rather than organic evolution.

5. Basalt: A Geologically Undatable Medium for the Inscription

Basalt is a volcanic rock. Its formation can be dated by radiometric methods (K/Ar, Ar/Ar, etc.) with precision sometimes reaching a decade, but such dating informs us only of the age of the volcanic flow, not of the date of the inscription itself. No method of absolute dating is currently capable of determining the moment at which an inscription was carved on a basaltic surface.

In the case of Tel Dan, no isotopic analysis has been published for the stele fragment. Were an absolute dating of the rock to be carried out, it could only provide a very broad *terminus post quem* (the age of the stone, likely several millennia prior to the inscription), of no practical utility for historical chronology. Recourse to geochronology in order to date an inscription is, therefore, inoperative.

6. The Absence of Associated Organic Material

No organic material in direct contact with the inscription — charcoal, wood, or plant remains — has been identified. Radiocarbon dating, even if technically feasible, would apply only to surrounding environmental elements, themselves subject to stratigraphic mixing phenomena. The rubble pit context is particularly unfavourable, as it aggregates reworked materials from diverse and disparate periods. This circumstance renders any C14 dating impossible, if not altogether pointless.

7. Deliberate Archaism: An Underestimated Phenomenon

The history of writing offers numerous well-documented instances of deliberate archaism: Roman imperial inscriptions imitating the script of the Republican period; Hellenistic decrees adopting ancient Attic graphic forms; late Mesopotamian monuments copying Paleo-Babylonian writing conventions. In all such cases, the graphic form informs us not of the date of carving, but of the cultural horizon the patron wished to evoke — or, in some instances, strategically to co-opt.

8. The Specific Case of Victory and Humiliation Inscriptions

Commemorative victory steles possess a distinctive feature: they are frequently designed to endure and to inscribe themselves within a monumental continuity. The choice of an archaising script may then reflect either a strategy of legitimation — presenting the patron as heir to the ancient kingship — or, conversely, a polemical intent: deploying the stylistic register of the vanquished in order to underline, with studied irony, the completeness of their defeat. In the latter case, archaism becomes a deliberate instrument of symbolic domination.

9. The Impossibility of Quantifying the Stylistic Gap

The central difficulty for the palaeographer resides in the absence of objective criteria for distinguishing natural script evolution from deliberate archaism. When an inscription exhibits archaic forms, several competing hypotheses remain equally plausible: the local survival of an earlier graphic tradition; cultural lag in a peripheral or conservative region; the deliberate choice of a traditional style; or the learned imitation by a highly literate engraver. None of these scenarios can be ruled out without prior and independent contextual analysis — precisely the kind of analysis that palaeography alone cannot supply.

10. Palaeography: A Valuable but Fragile Tool

Palaeography is frequently presented as the most robust pillar for the dating of ancient inscriptions. It relies on the systematic observation of letterforms, their *ductus*, and their supposed evolution over time. Yet this method is fundamentally *relative, comparative and subjective*. Under no circumstances can it constitute a *primary* dating criterion.

This article demonstrates, in a methodical and dispassionate manner, that palaeography must be relegated to the lowest rank in any rigorous archaeological investigation. It becomes pertinent only *after* the examination of stratigraphic, geographical, semantic, and historical context. When it enters into conflict with these more robust bodies of evidence, it is palaeography that must yield.

A Comparative Method, Relative by Nature

Palaeography does not date an inscription *per se*. It compares it to other inscriptions already dated by other means (stratigraphy, absolute dating, historical contexts), thereby assuming a linear and regular evolution of scripts — an assumption far from established. Scripts are not natural phenomena that evolve like a biological growth curve; they are cultural, political, and ideological choices. An engraver may deliberately imitate an ancient style in order to legitimise a power, humiliate an adversary, or invoke a sacred tradition. In such cases, the graphic form no longer informs us of the actual date of carving, but of the *cultural horizon* the patron wished

to evoke.

Deliberate Archaism: A Widely Documented Phenomenon

The history of scripts abounds with examples of deliberate archaism:

- **Second Temple period:** at a time when the Aramaic square script was dominant, certain inscriptions and scrolls — including some Dead Sea manuscripts — deliberately employ Paleo-Hebrew for ideological or nationalist reasons. The inscription of Abba from Giv'at ha-Mivtar (1st century BCE) is composed in Aramaic yet uses archaic Paleo-Hebrew letterforms to signal cultural resistance.
- **Hellenistic and Roman period:** Seleucid decrees and Roman boundary markers in the East occasionally imitate Attic or Republican graphic forms in order to assert continuity with a glorious past, or to symbolically dominate the vanquished.
- **Semitic world:** Nabataean and Palmyrene inscriptions display stylistic mixtures in which archaising "imperial" forms coexist with more recent local conventions, for explicitly political or religious purposes.

In every one of these cases, palaeography alone would have misled researchers had it been taken as the primary dating criterion.

The Implicit Assumptions that Undermine the Method

Palaeography rests on three postulates that are rarely made explicit:

1. Scripts evolve in a continuous and irreversible manner.
2. Stylistic variations primarily reflect chronological changes.
3. Reference corpora are sufficiently representative to permit reliable comparisons.

Yet these postulates are systematically contradicted by the historical record:

- Learned scribes — or royal patrons — may select an archaic style for propagandistic purposes: legitimation, political irony, or symbolic domination.
- Peripheral regions, or periods of acute political transition, frequently preserve archaic forms considerably longer than urban centres.
- No objective criterion permits the quantification of the gap between "natural" script evolution and deliberate archaism.

As a result, palaeography can propose a dating range, but it can never adjudicate alone. It remains one hypothesis among others — fragile and relative.

Why Palaeography Must Be the Criterion of Last Resort

In any serious archaeological study, the hierarchy of evidence must be clearly established:

1. **Stratigraphic and taphonomic context** (the most robust).
2. **Absolute dating** (C14 on associated organic material, where possible).
3. **Geography, semantics, and historical context** (converging bodies of evidence).
4. **Palaeography** (only as a last resort, and always treated as a weak argument).

When the first three bodies of evidence converge on a dating that differs from that suggested by palaeography, it is palaeography that must be set aside. The stone itself — whether basalt, limestone, or otherwise — carries no intrinsic date. Only the patron's intention gives meaning to the inscription.

An Invitation to Methodological Rigour

Palaeography remains a valuable instrument: it permits the identification of stylistic families and the recognition of scribal workshops or schools. But it cannot claim the authority of an absolute dating.

In archaeology, as in history, prudence commands that palaeography always be placed at the lowest rank of the evidential hierarchy. It is merely a baseline hypothesis useful for cross-referencing — possessing no absolute value and carrying no authority of a verdict. It is one hypothesis among others: fragile and relative, and one that must yield before higher-ranking, more concrete, and more convergent bodies of evidence.

It is by respecting this hierarchy that one avoids the most tenacious anachronisms and renders genuine justice to the past.

11. Towards a Reassessment of the Academic Dating

A critical reassessment of inscriptions traditionally dated by palaeography alone is now required — particularly for periods of political transition during which patrons had a vested interest in manipulating stylistic registers.

The 1st century BCE, marked by Roman expansion into the East and the confrontation between local traditions and the new imperial power, constitutes a

privileged terrain for observing these phenomena of political archaism — and the ironic, cynical tone so characteristic of the victors.

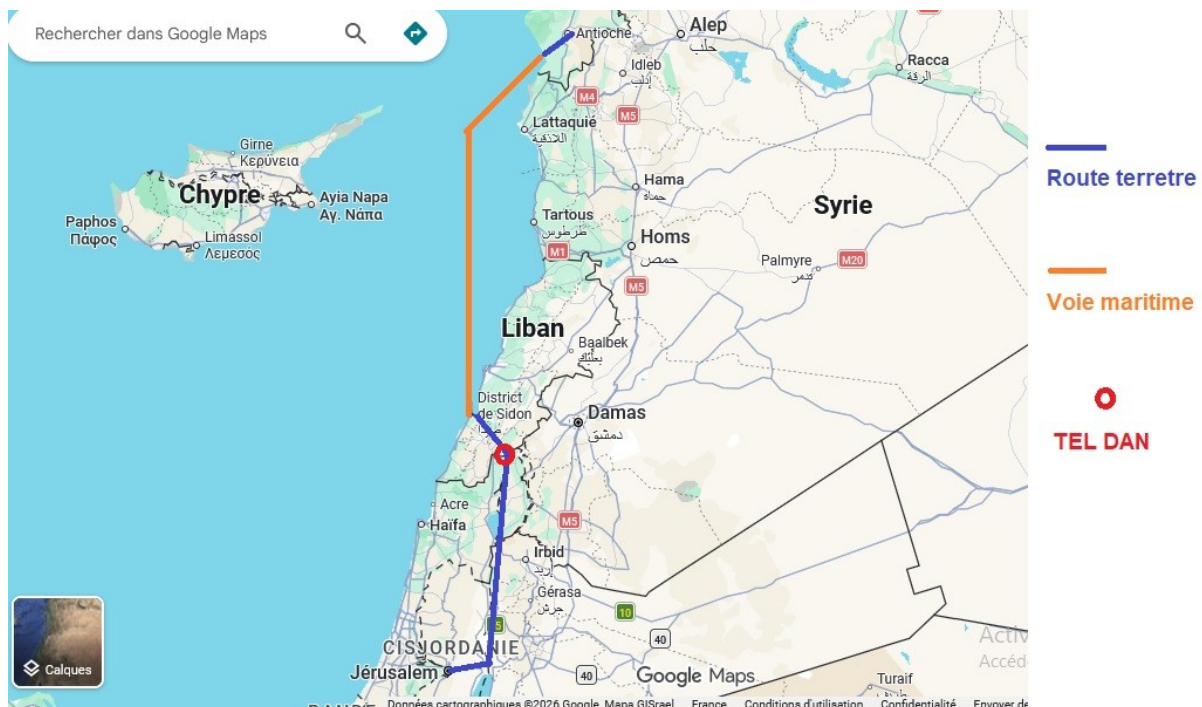
A rigorous contextualisation makes it possible to answer the fundamental questions that must precede any interpretation: who, when, how, and why.

II. CONVERGING EVIDENCE FOR RE-DATING

1. First Body of Evidence: The Geography of Tel Dan

The Tel Dan stele is situated along the ancient King's Highway. Tel Dan is, above all, the site of the principal source of the Jordan River — the sacred river of Judea — and occupies a position of singular strategic importance on the overland route connecting Jericho to the Jordan's source, then descending northward toward the Phoenician port of Sidon, from which sea passage to Antioch was possible. This was the principal Roman road in use prior to the construction of the port of Caesarea Maritima.

The port of Caesarea Maritima — named *Sebastos* (the Greek rendering of "Augustus") and constructed by Herod the Great toward the end of the 1st century BCE — did not yet exist in –36 BCE. Any sea route from Judea to Antioch at that date necessarily passed through Sidon.



Tel Dan stands at the source of the Jordan, at the border between Galilee and Lebanon. It is a stele of modest dimensions, deliberately placed at the frontier as a visible message to all who entered or departed from Galilee — a commemorative monument rather than a mere administrative marker. Its position is not incidental: it occupies the last significant water point before the territorial boundary, the obligatory stopping place for caravans and military columns alike.

2. Second Body of Evidence: The Morphology of a Roman Boundary Marker

The Tel Dan stele, considered in terms of its morphology, dimensions, and location, suggests an entirely different function from that attributed to it by the standard academic reading: that of a boundary marker (*terminus*) planted in the ground to demarcate a territorial limit. The use of inscribed boundary markers is a characteristically Roman administrative practice that became generalised in the East from the 1st century BCE onwards.

Dimensions and Morphology

The preserved fragments measure approximately 34 cm by 32 cm — a modest size consistent with a boundary marker rather than a large triumphal stele. A classical victory stele, such as the Mesha Stele, measures approximately one metre in height. The Tel Dan stele, broken in antiquity, must have been smaller still: precisely the size of a boundary marker. Moreover, basalt is a hard stone, resistant to erosion and impact — ideal for an object intended to remain fixed in the ground, permanently exposed to the elements and to foot traffic.

Location: A Natural Frontier

Tel Dan is situated at the northern extremity of Judea, at the source of the Jordan, on the inland road connecting Jerusalem to Damascus and Antioch. It constitutes a natural crossroads and a geographical frontier of the first order: beyond it, one enters Roman Syria. In antiquity, boundary markers were invariably placed at obligatory crossing points — fords, mountain passes, springs — precisely in order to be seen by all travellers. Tel Dan perfectly fulfils this function.

The Roman Practice of Inscribed Boundary Markers

The use of inscribed markers to demarcate territories is a practice characteristic of Roman administration. The *termini* were planted at the boundaries of provinces, cities, and imperial properties. They frequently bore the name of the sovereign, the boundary designation, and sometimes an explicit warning. In the eastern provinces, this practice became widespread from the 1st century BCE, particularly under Mark Antony and Augustus. The Tel Dan stele, by its size, material, location, and manifest

function as territorial demarcation, fits perfectly within this Roman tradition.

A Boundary Marker that Commemorates a Defeat

Roman boundary markers typically declare: "Here begins the territory of Rome" or "Here begins the property of the emperor." The Tel Dan stele, in the reading proposed here, says something altogether different: "This is where the House of David passed on its way to death."

It is, in essence, a negative marker. It does not celebrate a conquest; it marks a disappearance. It was not erected to announce what begins, but to proclaim what ends. It is simultaneously a funerary marker and a frontier marker — a monument of negation.

The use of inscribed markers to demarcate territorial limits is not otherwise attested in Aram or Israel during the Iron Age period to which the stele has traditionally been attributed. It is, however, entirely consistent with Roman administrative practice of the 1st century BCE, and accords perfectly with a dating of –36 BCE — the moment at which Herod and Sosius consolidated the northern border of Judea following the defeat of Mattathias Antigonus.

The Tel Dan stele is not part of a systematic network of boundary markers, but rather an isolated political act: a boundary stone of humiliation erected by a client king after the conquest of Jerusalem in 37 BCE, in the context of the civil wars.

3. Third Body of Evidence: Semantic Analysis

The Tel Dan stele employs a vocabulary strikingly similar to that of the Psalms of Solomon and of David — texts now broadly recognised as having been composed between –70 and –37 BCE. The stele reads not as a monument from another era, but as an echo of, and a deliberate response to, these very psalms.

Lexical Observation

Precise examination of the terms employed in the Tel Dan stele reveals a royal-Davidic vocabulary that corresponds closely to that of the Psalms of Solomon and of David. This is not a vague family resemblance: it is a word-for-word correspondence across a highly specific and historically bounded lexical field. The following table sets out the most salient markers:

Term in the stele	Relevant Psalms	Shared semantics
"king of the House of David" (mlk byt dwd)	Ps 89:4–5, 21–30; Ps 132:10–12; Ps 78:70–72; Pss Sol 17:21	The living Davidic dynasty — promised

		and under threat
"king of Israel"	Ps 89:27 ("the highest of the kings of the earth")	The legitimate anointed king
"I slew the king of the House of David"	Ps 89:39–40 ("You have rejected your anointed... You have profaned his crown")	Public humiliation of the anointed
"I turned their cities into heaps of ruins"	Ps 89:41 ("You have thrown down all his walls")	Physical destruction of the kingdom
"Seventy kings slain"	Ps 89:43 ("You have made his enemies triumph")	Triumph of adversaries over the anointed
Overall message of victory / humiliation	Psalms 89 in its entirety + Psalm 17	Victory of the conqueror vs. lament of the vanquished

These expressions together constitute the specific lexical field of messianic Davidic kingship — a field employed with remarkable density in the pre-Herodian Hasmonean literature of the period –70 to –37.

The Dating of the Psalms: A Scholarly Consensus for the Period –70/–37

The royal Psalms — notably Psalm 89 of Ethan and the Psalms of Solomon — are today situated by the majority of exegetes within the late Hasmonean to early Herodian period (–70 to –37):

- They reflect the traumatic shock of the end of Jewish political independence.
- The vocabulary of "House of David," "rejected anointed," and "profaned crown" is characteristic of this period of acute messianic crisis.
- The Psalms of Solomon 17, in particular, are precisely dated to around –63/–37 — encompassing the Roman conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey and the decapitation of Antigonus.

In other words: the semantics of the stele are *exactly contemporaneous* with the composition or final editing of the Psalms that employ them. The stele speaks the same theologico-political language as the Psalms composed or finalised between –70

and -37. It is therefore not merely compatible with this period — it is linguistically embedded within it.

A Decisive Chronological Marker

This semantic marker constitutes an independent and particularly powerful chronological argument:

- The stele does not require palaeography or stratigraphy in order to be dated.
- Its very language links it irrevocably to the final Hasmonean crisis of -37.
- It becomes the lapidary counterpart of Psalm 89: the victor (Herod / Rome) carves into basalt what the vanquished (Ethan) mourns in song.
- The physical fate of the stone — broken, reused, thrown into a rubble pit — corresponds precisely to that of a Roman humiliation monument deemed too inflammatory to be preserved intact.

Far from being an archaic Aramaic stele of the 9th century, the Tel Dan stele is the official monument of Roman victory over the last son of David (Antigonus II), written in the very language of the Psalms that mourn this event.

The semantic convergence between the stele and the Davidic-Solomonic Psalms is not a literary coincidence: it is a chronological marker intrinsic to the text itself. It fixes the composition of the inscription within the narrow window of -70/-37 — a period during which this royal-messianic vocabulary was not merely alive, but politically incandescent.

The stele seals, in basalt, the definitive end of the "House of David" as a living political reality.

4. Fourth Body of Evidence: Psalm 89

Psalm 89 responds in every particular as a Jewish mirror-image of the Tel Dan stele. The cynicism of the stele echoes the anguish of the Jews of Judea and Galilee. The two documents correspond with striking precision — one celebrates what the other mourns:

Psalm 89 — Lament	Tel Dan Stele — Humiliation & Victory
"You have rejected your anointed" (v.	"I have vanquished the king of the

39)	House of David"
"You have profaned his crown" (v. 40)	Decapitation — the supreme humiliation of a king
"You have thrown down his walls" (v. 41)	"I turned his cities into heaps of ruins"
"His enemies triumph over him" (v. 43)	The stele is the monument of that triumph

The symmetry is too precise to be accidental. Psalm 89 — the composition of Ethan the Ezrahite — is not an abstract liturgical meditation on the Davidic covenant. It is the documented, contemporaneous response of a witness who saw Antigonus decapitated and the Hasmonean order destroyed. The stele and the Psalm are two faces of the same historical rupture: the victor's proclamation, carved in stone; the vanquished's lamentation, preserved in song.

This mirroring between inscription and psalm further reinforces the re-dating to –36/–37 BCE. No composition of the 9th century would display this level of semantic, structural, and contextual alignment with a body of literature dated with precision to the late Hasmonean period.

5. Fifth Body of Evidence: "Seventy Kings Slain"

The stele records: *"and I slew [seventy] kings who had harnessed thousands of chariots and thousands of horsemen."*

These seventy slain kings may plausibly correspond to the forty-five officers of Mattathias Antigonus killed by Herod in Jerusalem — meticulously documented by Flavius Josephus — together with twenty-five further officers chained alongside Mattathias and dispatched to Antioch to stand before Mark Antony.

Flavius Josephus — Jewish Antiquities XV, 1, 2 (§8–10)

"Herod, having taken possession of Jerusalem, endeavoured to remove from the throne the relatives of Hyrcanus and to entrust important affairs only to his own partisans. He put to death forty-five of the principal supporters of Antigonus, who were stationed near the gates of the city as guards, and established foreign guards to protect his own interests."

The most detailed account is that of Flavius Josephus, who explicitly cites the testimony of Strabo of Cappadocia:

"Antony, who had received Antigonus as a prisoner, wished to keep him in chains until his triumph; but when he learned that the people were agitated and remained,

out of hatred for Herod, favourable to Antigonus, he decided to have his head struck off at Antioch. Strabo of Cappadocia confirms my account, expressing himself thus: 'Antony had the Jew Antigonus beheaded, who had been brought to Antioch. He appears to have been the first Roman to have had a king beheaded.'"

Josephus further specifies the political rationale behind this decision:

"Antony considered that the ignominious punishment of Antigonus would obscure the memory he had left and attenuate the hatred felt toward Herod."

Dio Cassius — Roman History XLIX, 22

The Roman historian Dio Cassius confirms the execution but describes a different form of punishment:

"These peoples [the Jews] Antony entrusted to a certain Herod to govern; as for Antigonus, he had him bound to a cross and flogged — a punishment which no king had yet suffered at the hands of the Romans — and then put him to death."

The divergence between Josephus (decapitation) and Dio Cassius (crucifixion and flogging) may be explained by a combination of both punishments administered in sequence, or by a confusion within the later historiographical tradition.

Plutarch — Life of Antony 36

"Antony had the head of Antigonus struck off — the first example of such a punishment inflicted upon a king."

Summary of Ancient Sources

Source	Punishment recorded	Location	Context
Flavius Josephus (Ant. XV, 1, 2)	Decapitation	Antioch	Citing Strabo of Cappadocia
Dio Cassius (XLIX, 22)	Crucifixion + flogging	Unspecified	Unprecedented punishment for a king
Plutarch (Life of Antony, 36)	Decapitation	Unspecified	First king executed in this manner

Proposed Explanation for the Numerical Discrepancy

The stele records seventy killed, whereas Josephus documents forty-five killed directly by Herod on site in Jerusalem. The discrepancy amounts to twenty-five. These may have been the officers of Mattathias who were chained and escorted under Roman military guard toward Antioch — and who, by all probability, were executed

alongside Mattathias upon his decapitation by order of Mark Antony.

5b. Fifth Body of Evidence (cont.): "Haddad" as the Mask of Herod

The Psalms of Solomon and the so-called "Psalms of David" are allegorical chronicles of the 1st century BCE. They deploy ancient names — David, Solomon, Asaph, the sons of Korah — to designate contemporary political realities: the Hasmoneans, Herod, the Pharisees, the Romans. It is a coded language: a literature of survival composed under occupation.

Yet within this vast system of masks, one name is conspicuously absent: Haddad (Hazael), the Aramaic king of Damascus who, according to the Bible, defeated the kings of Israel and Judah in the 9th century BCE. And yet this is precisely the name that the patron of the Tel Dan stele chose in order to present himself in the first person: "I, Haddad, have vanquished the king of Israel and the king of the House of David."

Why does this name never appear in the Psalms? The answer is straightforward, and it is decisive for the dating of the stele: Haddad is *not* a psalmic mask. It is a narrative invention of Herod, created to respond to — and subvert — the system of masks employed by the Psalms.

The stele does not commemorate a distant ancient victory. It is a counter-allegory: it tells the Judeans, in their own coded language, that their hope is extinguished and that a new master — Herod — has definitively displaced their king.

The Psalms as a System of Masks

In preceding theses, we have demonstrated that the Psalms constitute an allegorical chronicle of the 1st century BCE, composed by the school of Ethan the Ezrahite. The ancient names function therein as masks:

Mask	Contemporary political reality
David	The Hasmoneans (Antigonus II and the Hasmonean kings)
Solomon	Herod, or the legitimate dynastic pretender
Sons of Korah	The school of Ethan itself
Asaph	The Pharisaic or Sadducean scribal class

This technique — dynamic rather than fixed — makes it possible to say the unsayable, to name without naming, to survive under Roman and then Herodian censorship. Its limitation, however, is structural: it can only function insofar as the masks are shared between author and reader. Should a foreign power seize the code, it can turn it against those who created it. This is precisely what the Tel Dan stele accomplishes.

Points of Convergence between Haddad (Hazeal) and Herod

Characteristic trait	Haddad (Hazeal) in the Bible	Herod in history and Jewish tradition
Geographical origin	King of Aram-Damascus	Idumean (Edom); his family originating from Idumea — the validity of their forced conversion debated in rabbinic tradition
Status vis-à-vis Israel	Foreigner, non-Israelite	"Half-Jew" in Galilean eyes; of Babylonian cultural formation; genealogy contested
Rise to power	Kills his predecessor Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 8:15)	Eliminates the Hasmoneans to seize the throne
Foreign support	Backed by Egypt (2 Kings 9:14–16)	Backed by Mark Antony and Cleopatra of Egypt (Alexandria)
Relation to the "House of David"	Victor over Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah	Victor over Mattathias Antigonus II, last Hasmonean king of the "House of David"
Fate of the defeated king	The Bible does not specify	Decapitation at Antioch — unprecedented humiliation of a

		king
Servile status	Not mentioned	The aggadah of Bava Batra (3b–4a) presents Herod as a slave of the Hasmonean house who revolts and kills his masters

The most striking — and perhaps the most deliberate — parallel is that of geographical origin. Haddad is an Aramaic king, foreign to Israel; Herod is Idumean. In the biblical tradition, Edom and Aram are frequently associated as the archetypal enemies of Israel. Moreover, Edom is the territory south of Judea that the Hasmoneans conquered and forcibly converted to Judaism. Rabbinic tradition debates with considerable acrimony the validity of that conversion. By selecting Haddad as his mask, Herod presents himself not only as a victorious foreign king, but also — by direct analogy — as the illegitimate outsider that many Judeans experienced him to be.

In 2 Kings 9:14–16, Haddad's campaign unfolds with Egyptian support — a detail that is crucial to the allegorical reading proposed here. In –37, Herod's military support derives from Mark Antony, then stationed at Alexandria with Cleopatra, queen of Egypt. The parallel is too precise to be accidental. The stele thus mobilises the full symbolic apparatus of the biblical Haddad to address a Judean audience fluent in the allegorical code of the Psalms — and to turn that code against them.

6. Sixth Body of Evidence: The Emotional Memory in the Gospels

The Gospels report that in Galilee, during the years 26–30 CE, crowds recognised in Jesus the "son of David." This acclamation is not an abstract theological formula. It is the cry of a still-burning collective memory — the memory of a humiliation witnessed by those who had themselves seen, or whose parents had seen, the last king of the House of David led in chains to his death.

Sixty years separate the decapitation of Antigonus II Mattathias at Antioch (–37) from the first preachings of Jesus in Galilee (+26). Sixty years is two or three generations: the precise timespan of living transmission, of oral testimony, of pain that is still articulate.

The present study proposes to restore the Galilean emotional landscape at the time of Jesus by situating it within its traumatic context: the forced march of Antigonus and his seventy officers; their passage through Tel Dan; the humiliation stele erected at the precise point where they had crossed the border of Judea; and the living memory of these events in the villages of Galilee.

The Column of the Vanquished of –37: A Spectacle Not Forgotten

The route of humiliation

In -37, following the fall of Jerusalem, Antigonus II Mattathias and his principal officers were placed in chains and led on foot to Antioch, where Mark Antony had them executed. The natural route — offering water at regular intervals and the most rapid northward progression — was the inland road through the Jordan Valley.

The journey was immense: approximately 550 kilometres on foot. It traversed villages, market towns, and hamlets throughout Galilee. It followed the shores of the Sea of Galilee, ascended toward the source of the Jordan, and crossed at Tel Dan the border of Judea to enter Roman Syria. All along this road, Galileans witnessed the passing column of the vanquished. They saw their king in chains. They saw his officers, counsellors, guards, and Hasmonean notables marching in the dust under Roman military escort. They saw the last scion of the House of David leave the land of his fathers forever.

Tel Dan: The Place of the Wound

It was at Tel Dan, at the very source of the Jordan, that the column crossed the border for the last time. That is where Judea ended. That is where the prisoners saw the land of their ancestors for the final time. And it was there, at the beginning of the following year (-36), that Herod had a stele erected — proclaiming in Aramaic, the language of the land: "I have vanquished the king of Israel and the king of the House of David. I have slain seventy kings." It did not celebrate a distant battle. It marked the precise place where the House of David had departed, never to return. For decades, every Galilean who passed through Tel Dan — for commerce, pilgrimage, or seasonal festival — saw this stele. He read it. He remembered. The stone stood there, planted like a blade in collective memory.

A Living Memory Sixty Years On

Sixty years is little in collective memory. In 26 CE, men of seventy or eighty years of age had been children at the time of the events. They had witnessed the column pass, or had heard their parents describe it. The young adults of 26 CE were the grandchildren of direct witnesses. In the villages of Galilee, the memory of the humiliation was transmitted from generation to generation: how the king had been chained; how his officers had marched barefoot; how the Romans had forced them to traverse Judea as a public spectacle; how they had passed through Tel Dan never to return.

The Stele as a Place of Memory

The Tel Dan stele was not merely an ancient monument. It was a living locus of memory. Galilean pilgrims descending toward Jerusalem by the Jordan road passed before it. They read it. They remembered. They explained to their children what those words meant. For the Galileans, Tel Dan was not a place like any other: it was

where the House of David had died; it was the frontier of exile; it was the stone of humiliation.

Messianic Hope in Galilee: "Are You the Son of David?"

The humiliation of –37 had not extinguished hope — on the contrary, it had rendered it more ardent. If the last son of David had been decapitated, then another would come. If the promise had been profaned, then it would one day be restored. The Psalms of Ethan, transmitted under the name of David, were sung in the synagogues. Psalm 89 — which mourned the fall of the anointed — was now read as a promise of restoration. A son of David was awaited; it was hoped he would come from Galilee, that land which had witnessed the chained king pass through, which had remained the land of the common people, far removed from the priestly oligarchy of Jerusalem.

When Jesus began to preach in Galilee — when he healed, when he gathered crowds — the question burning on every pair of lips was not an abstract theological query. It was the question that Galileans had been asking themselves for sixty years, every time they passed before the Tel Dan stele, every time they sang Psalm 89, every time they remembered the column of the vanquished:

"Are you the son of David?"

This question is laden with emotion: the fear of hoping again; the anxiety of renewed disappointment; the memory of humiliation; the anger against Rome; the pain of those who saw their fathers in chains; and finally the hope of seeing the promise at last fulfilled.

The Words of the Stele in the Mouths of the Crowds

The terms deployed by the crowds to acclaim Jesus as "son of David" are not neutral. They resonate as a precise echo of what the Tel Dan stele had proclaimed — but inverted:

Tel Dan Stele (–36)	Acclamation of the crowds (+26/30)
"The king of the House of David has been vanquished"	"Are you the son of David who is to come?"
"I slew seventy kings"	"Here is the king who will deliver us"
"I turned his cities into heaps of ruins"	"Restore the kingdom of Israel"

"The House of David is dead"	"The kingdom of David is for ever"
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The crowds take up the words of the stele, but invert them entirely. The stele proclaimed death; the crowds hope for life. The stele proclaimed humiliation; the crowds await restoration. The stele proclaimed Herod's victory; the crowds hope for the victory of the Messiah. Sixty years after –37, the pain was still acute, the hope still ardent. The stone had spoken of death; the crowd hoped for life. And it is this hope — born of the anguish of –37 and nourished by the living memory of Tel Dan — that burned across Galilee at the time of Jesus.

New Testament Occurrences: Table of References

Gospel	Reference	Context	Citation
Matthew	1:1	Genealogy	"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham"
	1:20	Announcement to Joseph	"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife"
	9:27	Healing of the blind	"Have mercy on us, Son of David!"
	12:23	Healing of a demoniac	"Can this be the Son of David?"
	15:22	The Canaanite woman	"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!"
	20:30–31	Two blind men at Jericho	"Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"
	21:9	Entry into Jerusalem	"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
	21:15	Children in the Temple	"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Mark	10:47–48	Blind Bartimaeus	"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
Luke	1:32–33	Promise to Mary	"The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father"
	1:69	Canticle of Zechariah	"He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant"
	2:4	Birth narrative	Joseph ascends to Bethlehem, "because he was of the house and lineage of David"
	18:38–39	The blind man of Jericho	"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
John	7:42	Discussion about Jesus	"Does not Scripture say that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, from Bethlehem?"

7. Seventh Body of Evidence: The Acknowledged Fate of the Tel Dan Stele

Specialists who have studied this stele confirm that it was broken, displaced to the northern limit of Judea — precisely where it was found — then employed as secondary construction material, before ending in a rubble pit.

The fate of this stele appears to have been one of deliberate destruction and rejection: broken at the earliest opportunity, cast as far away as possible to be forgotten, then later reused as raw building material without the slightest care — quite the contrary. This is not the fate of a venerable, millennium-old boundary marker respectfully preserved within the monumental landscape. It is the expected and entirely coherent trajectory of a humiliation stele:

- Destroyed as soon as the political climate permitted.
- Discarded to the farthest accessible point, to be erased from memory.
- Ultimately reused as anonymous building rubble — the final desecration.

This trajectory corresponds precisely to what one would expect of a Roman monument of humiliation deemed too politically inflammatory to be conserved: too insulting to be tolerated once Herodian power waned; too dangerous to be publicly

visible. Its fate *confirms* rather than undermines the re-dating proposed here.

Picture as an ancient rubble pit in Judaea



8. Eighth Body of Evidence: Mattathias and the Seventy Slain

The Tel Dan Stele as Point of Departure

The Tel Dan Stele (lines 6–9) reads as follows: *“and I slew [sixty-]ty kings who had harnessed thousands of chariots and thousands of horsemen. [I slew Jo]ram, son of [Ahab], king of Israel, and [I] slew [Ahaz]jah, son of [Joram, ki]ng of the House of David.”*

In the re-dating proposed by the present thesis, these “seventy kings” are not a 9th-century hyperbole, but refer to a 1st-century BCE event: the elimination of Mattathias Antigonus II — last Hasmonean king — together with his seventy officers in –37, in the course of the capture of Jerusalem by Herod and Sosius, followed by forced exile and decapitation at Antioch. In order to validate this re-dating, it is necessary to demonstrate that other ancient sources attest to a tradition associating a figure named Mattathias/Matthias with a number of seventy slain, or with a group of seventy.

First External Source: The Gospel of Luke and the Seventy Disciples

The Gospel of Luke (10:1) records that Jesus sent out seventy disciples on mission.

Among them, early Christian tradition identifies Matthias (Ματθίας), who would become an apostle following the death of Judas (Acts 1:15–26). This source, dated to the late 1st century CE, attests that within early Christian memory a figure named Matthias — a homophone of Mattathias — was associated with the number seventy.

Second External Source: Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 CE)

Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* (I, 12), is explicit on this point: “Tradition reports that Matthias, who was numbered among the apostles in place of Judas, and Joseph Barsabbas, who was honoured alongside him in the same lot, were deemed worthy of this calling from among the seventy.” As a compiler of earlier traditions, Eusebius transmits information that reaches back at least to the 2nd century. This source confirms that the association of Matthias with the seventy is both ancient and stable.

Third External Source: Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215 CE)

Clement of Alexandria, in his *Stromata*, mentions on several occasions that Matthias was among the seventy disciples, adding that Matthias had transmitted certain secret sayings of the Lord. This late 2nd-century source attests to the same association.

Fourth External Source: Dorotheus of Tyre (3rd–4th century CE)

Dorotheus, in his *List of the Seventy Apostles*, explicitly includes Matthias among the seventy. Though late in date, this list compiles earlier traditions and testifies to the consolidation of the link between Matthias and the number seventy within ecclesiastical memory.

Fifth External Source: Cornelius a Lapide (17th century)

Though chronologically late, Cornelius a Lapide, in his commentary on Luke, notes that the seventy disciples correspond symbolically to the seventy nations of Genesis, and that Matthias was among their number. His observation synthesises a prior patristic tradition.

The Onomastic Convergence as an Index of Coherence

A remarkable feature traverses all these sources: the name Matthias (Ματθίας) is the precise Greek homophone of Mattathias (Ματταθίας), the deported and executed king in our re-dating — the last Hasmonean monarch. In the manuscript and patristic tradition, the two names are associated and at times conflated. This conflation is not a methodological obstacle but a convergence index: it reveals that the memory of the seventy disciples associated with Matthias, and the memory of the seventy slain of –37 (Mattathias), had become intertwined in early collective memory and beyond.

Table of Convergence of External Sources

Source	Date	Figure	Association with the Number 70
Luke 10	Late 1st c. CE	Matthias (Ματθίας)	One of the 70 disciples
Acts 1	Late 1st c. CE	Matthias	Elected apostle in place of Judas
Clement of Alexandria	Late 2nd c. CE	Matthias	Member of the 70
Eusebius of Caesarea	4th c. CE	Matthias	Member of the 70 (transmission of earlier tradition)
Dorotheus of Tyre	3rd–4th c. CE	Matthias	Included in the List of the 70
Cornelius a Lapide	17th c.	Matthias	Synthesis of patristic tradition

Interpretive Implications for the External Dating of the Stele

These ancient sources attest to a coherent tradition: (1) a figure named Matthias — homophone of Mattathias — is consistently associated with the number seventy; (2) this tradition is stable from the 1st to the 4th century CE; (3) it is anterior to and independent of the Tel Dan Stele (discovered in 1993).

Should the Tel Dan Stele refer to “seventy kings slain” in connection with a figure we identify as Mattathias, the convergence between the epigraphic testimony of the stele (seventy slain / Mattathias) and the textual testimony of the patristic sources (seventy disciples / Matthias) constitutes an external body of evidence for dating. Both traditions converge around the same name and the same number, within a chronological window that spans from the 1st century BCE (Mattathias Antigonus II) to the 1st century CE (Matthias the Apostle).

This convergence cannot be explained within the framework of the traditional 9th-century BCE dating of the stele. It is, by contrast, entirely coherent with the re-dating proposed here to the 1st century BCE.

Conclusion of the Eighth Body of Evidence

The external ancient sources — Luke, Acts, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Dorotheus — attest to a tradition associating a figure named Matthias (homophone of Mattathias) with the number seventy (the seventy disciples). This tradition is stable and independent of the Tel Dan Stele.

The Tel Dan Stele mentions “seventy kings slain” in connection with a Mattathias (lines 6–9). The convergence between these two bodies of evidence constitutes an argument for external dating: it places the event commemorated by the stele within a period in which the name/seventy pairing carried cultural significance — namely, the 1st century BCE (Mattathias Antigonos II) and the 1st century CE (Matthias the Apostle).

This convergence reinforces the re-dating proposed throughout the present tetralogy and establishes the Tel Dan Stele as a document of the 1st century BCE, contemporary with the last Hasmoneans and with the earliest Christian traditions.

III. PROPOSED CONTEXTUALISATION



The column of Mattathias and his followers, led by Sosius, en route to Antioch — crossing the pass at Tel Dan, summer -37 BCE.

1. Review of the Established Chronology (-40 / -36)

The established chronology of events (-40 to -37 BCE):

1. -40: Antigonus II Mattathias, with Parthian assistance, becomes king and high priest of Judea. Herod, then governor of Galilee, flees to Rome.
2. -40 (end): The Roman Senate, on Mark Antony's proposal, names Herod "king of the Jews" (rex socius et amicus populi Romani). This is an honorary title without immediate territorial substance.
3. -40 to -38: Herod attempts to establish a foothold in Judea with the support of a limited Roman contingent, but Antigonus still holds Jerusalem.
4. -38: Mark Antony, stationed at Antioch, receives delegations from Herod and commits to providing him with a full Roman army to conquer Judea.
5. -37 (spring): The Roman army commanded by Sosius, legate of Mark Antony, arrives in Judea. Herod and Sosius lay siege to Jerusalem.
6. -37 (summer): Jerusalem falls. Antigonus surrenders to Sosius.
7. -37 (end): Antigonus is brought to Antioch before Mark Antony. There, Mark Antony decides his fate and has him decapitated — the final settlement that seals the destiny of Judea.

2. -37: The Year of Total Collapse

In -40, Antigonus II, with Parthian assistance, had become king and high priest of Judea — the last resurgence of the Hasmonean dynasty. From -40 to -37, Herod, backed by Rome, fought Antigonus in a brutal siege of Jerusalem. In -37, Jerusalem fell. Antigonus was delivered to Mark Antony and subsequently decapitated at Antioch. This was the first execution of a king by decapitation in Roman history — an unprecedented humiliation, deliberate and calculated to extinguish any surviving hope of dynastic restoration.

Date	Event
-40 BCE	Antigonus II, with Parthian assistance, becomes king and high priest of Judea.
-40 to -37	Herod, backed by Rome, fights Antigonus. Siege of Jerusalem.
-37	Fall of Jerusalem to Herod and Sosius (legate of Mark Antony). Antigonus decapitated at Antioch — first execution of a king by Rome.
-36	Herod erects the Tel Dan stele at the northern frontier — a victory and humiliation monument for the new Judea, client state of Rome.

2b. Mattathias II: The Last "Son of David"

Antigonus II is no ordinary figure. He is simultaneously king (the last Jewish king before Herod), high priest (the last to hold both offices concurrently), descendant of the Maccabees, and, for the majority of the faithful people, the Lord's anointed — the possible Messiah. His defeat and decapitation constitute an absolute historical trauma: the end of hope for legitimate kingship, the death of the "House of David" as a living political reality.

It is precisely in this context that Ethan the Ezrahite composes Psalm 89 — his lamentation over the fall of the anointed king. Psalm 89 is not a timeless liturgical meditation on the Davidic covenant: it is the cry of a man who witnessed Antigonus decapitated and his officers cut down in the Judean sun.

4. The Tel Dan Stele: Monument of the Humiliation of the Condemned of -37

In the reading proposed here, the Tel Dan stele is not a 9th-century Aramaic monument. It is a stele commemorating the passage of Mattathias and the seventy prisoners who were to be brought before Mark Antony at Antioch. Each element of the inscription maps precisely onto the events of -37:

Element of the stele	Reading in the context of -37
"The king of Israel"	Herode

"The king of the House of David"	Mathathias II, heir to Davidic kingship in the eyes of the people.
"The victory"	Fall of Jerusalem in -37; decapitation of Antigonus at Antioch.
"The author ('I')"	Herod or Sosius (Roman legate) — a royal or collective first person, as Haddad
"I turned his cities into heaps of ruins"	Destruction of the Hasmonean quarters of Jerusalem prior to Herodian reconstruction.
"Seventy kings slain"	The killing of the 45 officers of Antigonus II (documented by Josephus) + 25 escorted to Antioch.

6. The Message of the Boundary Marker

"I, Herod, have vanquished the king of Israel and the king of the House of David. I have had him beheaded as a criminal. I made Jerusalem a heap of ruins before rebuilding it to my glory. Let no one forget that the House of David is dead. Let no one place hope in a Messiah any longer. Rome reigns."

7. What This Re-dating Produces

If the Tel Dan stele dates from -37, the following consequences follow necessarily:

- **The "House of David" is a living political reality of the 1st century BCE** — designating the Hasmoneans and, in particular, Antigonus II. It is not a mythical empire of the 10th century.
- **The stele is the negative counterpart of Psalm 89**: the same event rendered in two opposed voices — the victor carves his glory in stone; the vanquished mourns his loss in song.
- **The "House of David" exists as a living dynasty in -37**: its extinction is not a matter of ancient legend but of documented contemporary politics.
- **Ethan, author of Psalm 89, genuinely lived through the fall of Antigonus**. Psalm 89 is not an abstract liturgical composition: it is a direct eyewitness testimony.
- **The erasure of the lists of high priests** (Ethan and his son Azariah in particular) after +6 CE by the family of Annas is the logical continuation of the political erasure begun with the stele of -37.

Marker of -36	Then...
The "House of David" is a	It designates the Hasmoneans — not a mythical

reality of the 1st c. BCE	empire of the 10th century.
The stele is a monument of Herod/Rome's victory	It is the negative counterpart of Psalm 89 of Ethan.
The traditional dating (–1000) is superfluous	Everything becomes clear when the texts are placed in their proper historical context.
Ethan genuinely lived through this period	He witnessed the fall of Antigonus, mourned it, and wrote.

8. The Via Dolorosa of Mattathias and His Followers, Summer –37

In –37 BCE, Jerusalem possessed no harbour. To reach Antioch, the column was obliged to take the overland road — northward through the Jordan Valley to the source of the river, then across the Lebanon mountains to the Phoenician port of Sidon, from which sea passage to Seleucia Pieria (the port of Antioch) was possible. The port of Caesarea Maritima, subsequently constructed by Herod, did not yet exist.

This road was acutely dangerous for Sosius and his escort, moving through territory that had recently been loyal to Mattathias. Once the frontier was crossed at Tel Dan, the tension would ease; thereafter, the descent to Sidon and embarkation were a matter of Roman military efficiency.

One may readily imagine a strategic disagreement between the two commanders:

Actor	Logic	Objective
Herod	Symbolic	To compel Mattathias to travel by the eastern route, displaying him publicly and humiliating him before the Jews of Judea and Galilee — in order to shatter all remaining messianic hope.
Sosius	Pragmatic	To bring Mattathias swiftly to Antioch before Mark Antony, via the most efficient route — the coastal road — and embark at Sidon without delay.

The probable outcome was a compromise: the column departed by the eastern gate toward Jericho, travelled up the Jordan Valley to stage the public humiliation, and then — once Tel Dan was passed and the frontier crossed — turned toward Sidon for

embarkation to Antioch.

This forced march of 550 kilometres from Jerusalem to Antioch transformed military defeat into an orchestrated spectacle of humiliation. It was not planned at random: it responded to a dual logic — the symbolic staging demanded by Herod, and the military pragmatism imposed by Sosius.

The Stages of the Road of Humiliation

Departure from Jerusalem: Antigonus is taken prisoner by Sosius after the fall of Jerusalem, summer -37. He is chained with his principal officers — seventy, according to the stele. Forty-five are killed in Jerusalem according to Josephus; the remainder are chained alongside Mattathias. The column departs the holy city through the eastern gate, toward the Jordan Valley.

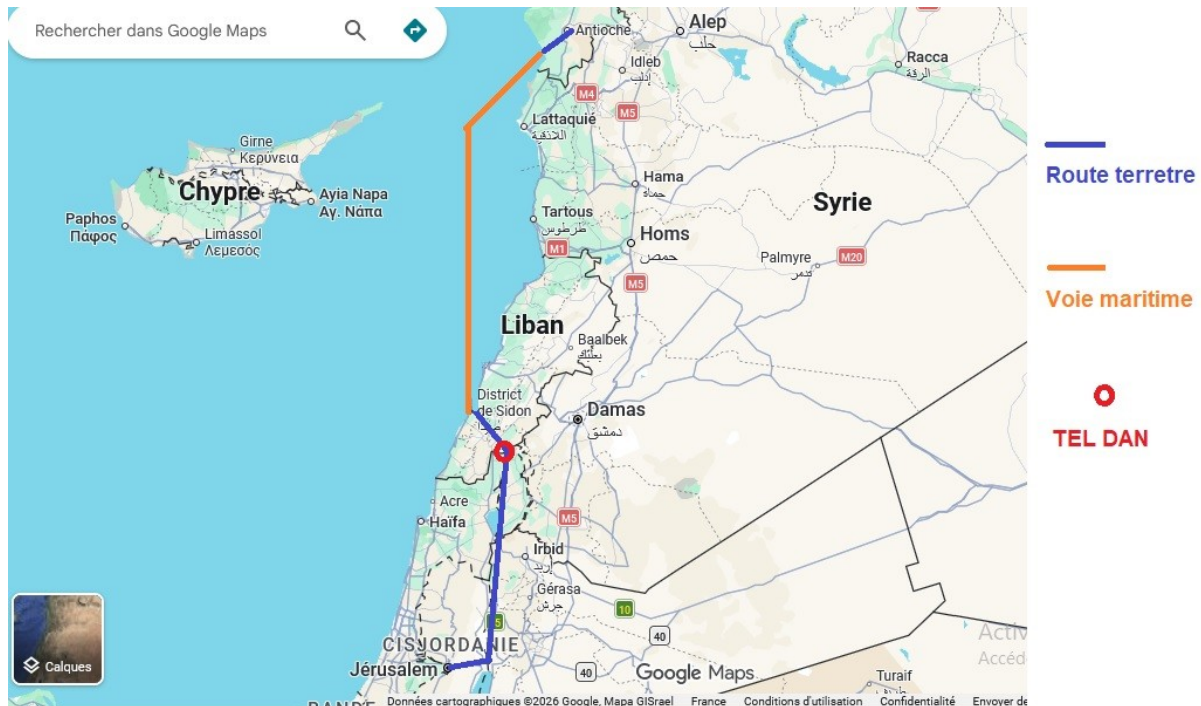
The Jordan Valley — crossing his former domains: The inland road follows the Jordan through Peraea, then Galilee. This is the land Antigonus governed; the land his Hasmonian ancestors conquered. Each village traversed is an opportunity for Herod to demonstrate to the Galileans what befalls those who resist Rome and its client king.

Tel Dan — the source of the Jordan, frontier of exile: Tel Dan is the northernmost point of the land of Israel in the biblical tradition. It is here that the column crosses the border of Judea for the last time. Herod subsequently has a stele erected at this precise place, so that none shall forget: it is here that the House of David departed, never to return.

The mountain passes toward Sidon: After Tel Dan, the column takes the passes through the Lebanon mountains toward the Phoenician coast. Sosius, eager to deliver his prisoner to Mark Antony, imposes a rapid pace; the strategic detour via Tel Dan has been conceded, but military efficiency now takes precedence.

Sidon — embarkation: At Sidon, the column boards Roman vessels. The overland journey is complete. Antigonus and his officers are transported by sea to Seleucia Pieria, the port of Antioch.

The road of humilatipon, the via dolorosa of summer -37 EC



Antioch — death: Antigonus is delivered to Mark Antony. According to Strabo, cited by Josephus, he is decapitated — the first execution of a king by Rome. According to Dio Cassius, he is first flogged then crucified. In any case, the punishment is public, humiliating, and designed to demonstrate that a king who resists Rome can hope for neither throne nor burial.

*Reconstructed image of the arrival of the column of humiliation
before Mark-Antony at Antioch, September -37 CE*



The commemorative stele, a boundary marker at the Galilee / Lebanon frontier, marking the passage of the column of humiliation of Mattathias in -37 CE , with Herod's derisive words



Would be named « the Tel Dan Stele » in 1993.

III. CONCLUSION

The present thesis invites its readers to take this contextualisation fully into account and to recognise in this boundary marker a deliberate political act — one whose primary function was to demarcate the new territory of Judea as a client state of Rome, thereby inscribing the northern frontier of Rome itself upon the landscape.

This marker and its inscription also constitute a message from Herod: an act of calculated humiliation directed at the hopes of Galilee and Judea as expressed in the Psalms of Solomon and of David — appropriating their very system of allegorical masks in order to turn that coded language against its authors.

It is an artefact in the characteristic form of a Roman boundary marker — unmistakably Antonian in its political aesthetic — bearing a cynical Herodian political message of contempt directed against Galilee, Judea, and the psalmic literature of their hope.

Mark Antony, by decapitating Mattathias at Antioch some months later, avenged Pompey — who had been mocked and reviled by the Jews in their Psalms of Solomon twenty years earlier. The cycle of humiliation was thereby closed.

The Jews of Galilee, who had watched the column of despair pass in –37 BCE with heavy hearts, and who would see this boundary marker planted at their northern frontier, wept.

But sixty years later, the coming of a son of David — the long-awaited liberator — would release an unspeakable joy across that same Galilee. The stone had proclaimed death; the crowd hoped for life. And it is this hope, born of the anguish of –37 and nourished across three generations by the living memory of Tel Dan, that burned in Galilee at the time of Jesus.

Thanking you for your attention,

Din d'Arya

École Celtique

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Cartographic Sources

Google Maps. Route Jerusalem – Tel Dan – Sidon – Antioch, layer "Historical roads and relief,"