

THE LATE BRONZE DEIR 'ALLA TABLETS: A RENEWED ATTEMPT TOWARDS THEIR TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

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INTRODUCTION

Deir ‘Alla is a relatively small multi-period site of approximately 5 hectares in size, located in the Jordan Valley on the east side of the Jordan river.¹ It is best known for the Balaam inscription from the Phase IX occupation. However, it has also offered unique clay tablets from its latest phase of the Bronze Age occupation, known as the Late Bronze III period (ca. 1185–1140 B.C.E.). These form an exceptional corpus of written texts on intentionally formed rectangular clay tablets. Unfortunately, the tablets have been left outside of more recent considerations on the development of the alphabet and (Proto-)Canaanite writing in the region, which has skewed the debate on literacy and the spread of the alphabet in the Levant. This has largely been due to the lack of a satisfying widely accepted identification of its signs and the language used in the Deir ‘Alla tablets. The present article is a first attempt to reset the balance by offering a suggested decipherment of the tablets using clearly set-out premises.

¹ G. van der Kooij, “Tell Deir ‘Alla: The Middle and Late Bronze Age Chronology,” in *The Chronology of the Jordan Valley during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages: Pella, Tell Abu-Kharaz, and Tell Deir ‘Alla* (Peter M. Fisher, ed.; Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006): 199–226.