

BALA'AM AND DEIR 'ALLA¹

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The inscriptions on plaster were discovered in March 1967 by a Dutch expedition directed by H.J. Franken digging at Tell Deir 'Alla.² The site is located about eight kilometers east of the Jordan river, not far from the northern bank of the Yabbok/Zerka river. It has been first identified with Sukkot³ and late preferably with Penuel.⁴

The *loci* 34 and 35 where the fragments were discovered, belong to stratum IX/M dated to the late ninth to the first half of the eighth

¹ I dedicate this study to the memory of H.J. Franken who passed away on 18 January 2005, and I am very grateful to Murray Watson for correcting and improving my English.

² H.J. Franken, 'Archaeological Evidence Relating to the Interpretation of the Text', in: J. Hofijzer & G. van der Kooij (eds), *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, Leiden 1976, 3–16, and H.J. Franken, 'Deir 'Alla re-visited', in: J. Hofijzer & G. van der Kooij (eds), *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden 21–24 August 1989 (Ancient Near East)*, Leiden 1991, 3–15, esp. 7–8n9.

³ See for example the survey of S. Mittmann, 'Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Territorialgeschichte des nördlichen Ostjordanlands' *Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina Vereins*, Wiesbaden 1970, who identified the site with Deir 'Alla. This identification is refused by Franken, 'Deir 'Alla re-visited', 11–13. R. de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne d'Israël, II. La période des Juges*, Paris 1973, 122–123, also seriously doubts this identification: '3° Il est presque sûr que Deir 'Alla n'est pas Sukkot: c'était un sanctuaire fréquenté par des semi-nomades, puis entouré d'un village, mais Deir 'Alla n'a jamais été une ville', but he contradicts himself somewhat in these pages when he goes on '...De Sukkot (Deir 'Alla ou à côté)...et arrivant aux abords de Deir 'Alla (Sukkot)'. And he refutes maybe too quickly the arguments of H. Reviv, 'Two Notes on Judges VIII, 4–17', *Tarbiz* 38 (1968–1969) 309–317: 'H. Reviv a essayé de montrer que la constitution de ces deux villes, les «hommes de Sukkot» et les «hommes de Penuel», se rapproche de celle des cités cananéennes plus que des villes israélites: on a ensuite ajouté les «princes» de Sukkot aux v. 6 et 14. Cela n'est pas convaincant, et je préfère penser que Sukkot et Penuel étaient alors occupés par des Gadites' (122). The plaster inscription could provide some arguments in favour of such a view when it says: 'He summoned the h[eads of the] assembly [un]to him' and 'and his people went up to him', lines I 3–4. H.J. Franken, 'Balaam at Deir 'Alla and the Cult of Baal', in: A.E. Glock & T. Kapitán (eds), *Archaeology, History and Culture in Palestine and the Near East: Essays in Memory of Albert E. Glock*, Atlanta 1999, 182–202 at 189, seems now to be more nuanced on the identification, quoting his previous study *Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla. The Late Bronze Age Sanctuary*, Louvain, 1992, 165–71.

⁴ See A. Lemaire, 'Galaad et Makir': Remarques sur la tribu de Manassé à l'est du Jourdain', *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981) 39–61 at 51–2, by its situation in the Ghor, Sukkot fits better at Tell Aḥṣaṣ ('branches huts') in Arabic.

century BC according to the last results of archaeological work done since then in this area.⁵ Carbon 14 tests point also to a date around the end of the ninth century BC for level IX,⁶ and the palaeographic analysis of this inscription agrees with such a conclusion about the turn of the century, *circa* 800 or a bit later.⁷ Finally, the discovery of two short Aramaic inscriptions, **י שרעא** 'Belonging to PN' on a jug and **אבן שרעא** on a flint stone (perhaps a stone weight), in a locus *circa* 10 m north of locus 35 in stratum IX,⁸ could suggest a trade connection or influence of the Arameans of Damascus on the Gilead region and on the site in particular, as it is well known between *circa* 835 to *circa* the middle of the eighth century BC. But this says nothing about the dialect or the origin of the plaster inscription which is specifically directed to the local population. Although the plaster was much broken and dispersed in two main clusters, at some distance one from the other, in the destruction level, most probably due to a violent earthquake—a famous earthquake is known during the days of Uzziah, king of Juda, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, (Am 1:1; Zach 14:4–5) to be dated most probably around 760—, and although the written surface was poorly preserved in most of the places, the still very incomplete inscription became a famous and important one, as soon as the name of a well known diviner was read, Balaam, the son of Beor.

The marvelous *editio princeps* was published in 1976, less than ten years after the discovery, by J. Hoftijzer with a long and detailed palaeographic analysis by G. van der Kooij, under the title *Aramaic Texts from*

⁵ See M.M. Ibrahim & G. van der Kooij, 'The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX', in: Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 16–29.

⁶ See W.G. Mook, 'Carbon 14 dating', in: M.M. Ibrahim & G. van der Kooij (eds), *Picking up the Threads: A Continuing Review of Excavations at Deir 'Alla, Jordan*, Leiden 1989, 71–73, and Ibrahim & Van der Kooij, 'The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX', 27–28: 'some time between 770 and 880 BC, with a high probability of a date being at the end of the 9th century BC'.

⁷ See É. Puech, 'Approches paléographiques de l'inscription sur plâtre de Deir 'Alla', in: Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 221–238 ('around the first half of the eighth century'), and G. van der Kooij, 'Book and Script at Deir 'Alla', in: Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 239–262 ('between 800 and 720 BC').

⁸ See Franken, 'Archaeological Evidence', 15; but Franken, 'Balaam at Deir 'Alla', 196–200, analyses **י שרעא** as a local numen or deity related to a 'drinking place' and understand these objects associated with a libation goblet and a loom weight as 'symbolic' in the cultic area of a sanctuary. See already Franken, *Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla*, 175: 'One name... still used today by the Bedawi: *esch-Scheri'a*, drinking place or watering place, and the Jordan is also referred to as *Scheri'at el-Kebir*, the great drinking place'.

Deir 'Alla.⁹ This was a masterpiece of research and scholarship on a very difficult text, as the following years proved. Since then, an impressive number of studies has appeared on this fragmentary text. A special conference was even held at Leiden in 1989 along with a nice exhibition of the fragments and other objects of this layer, and the papers are printed in a book *The Balaam Texts from Deir 'Alla Re-evaluated*.¹⁰

The editors succeeded in presenting two main groups of text, combinations I and II, among a dozen other smaller groups. Later on, it became possible to reorganise the fragments of the first combination into part of a column, as the scribe seemed to have prepared columns on the plastered wall surface with red ink or paint, tracing perpendicular line(s) to a horizontal one, like the preparation of columns of a scroll. Above the horizontal line, he drew a winged sphinx walking leftward, in an Egyptianising style, which is to be situated to the left of the (first) column of the text. What is characteristic here is a quite well preserved white margin to the right of this first column of text and a vertical red line just to its left. Since no inscribed fragment has been found with remains of a red line on the right margin, this suggests to me that all the fragments with ink must belong to a single long column of text, around 33 cm wide with a right white margin of minimum 9 cm (around a third of the column!), rather than being some remains of a second column, as some scholars have thought.¹¹ For sure, it is hard to imagine only the combination II as the first column of the text, because it belongs most probably to the bottom part of that same first column, since it fell upside down near wall 36 on which it was inscribed, whereas the upper part of it was found at a greater distance in the opposite direction when the wall split in two parts.¹²

⁹ Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, with contributions by H.J. Franken, V.R. Mehra, J. Voskuil, J.A. Mosk, and prefaced by P.A.H. de Boer.

¹⁰ Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, Leiden 1991.

¹¹ See already Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, 26, and still for example A. Lemaire, 'Les inscriptions sur plâtre de Deir 'Alla et leur signification historique et culturelle', in: Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 33–57, esp. 42–44, who suggested that combination II has to be placed as the first column and combination I as column two on its left. Van der Kooij, 'Book and Script', 239–62, esp. 241–4, shows now the most probable place of the fragments in a single column on the wall. Lately, B. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, New York 2000, 242, states: 'There are also indications that additional columns may have been inscribed'. But he did not give more information about them.

¹² Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, 26–27.

By chance, the upper part of this first column has been pretty well preserved, after some realignments of the presentation of the *editio princeps*, some new joins, some insertions of new fragments and restorations of some lines, thus reducing the groups 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d into a single text of 16 more or less complete lines. This was made possible, first, because the editors did a very valuable description of the fragments, and, secondly, because the scribe used a peculiar technique in writing the first two lines just below the red horizontal line: the first half of the first line and the second half of the second line are in red ink and of equal length. This seems to suggest that the first sentence in red ink should be interpreted as a title of the whole composition, or at least of the text presented here, and that the second sentence in red ink should underline the main topic of the first part of it, since there is also another first half line in red ink in the second combination (II 17) which could underline the content of the second part of the text. In fact, this second half red line isolates and gives the core of the content of the message which the gods delivered to the diviner or seer.

The practice of red ink is not well attested in Palestinian inscriptions. It is known on some plaster fragments discovered at Kuntillat 'Ajrud and dated also around 800 BC.¹³ But since the Old Kingdom the Egyptian scribes used red ink or rubrics, first to indicate the passages to be studied daily by the students, but also to correct letters or mistaken words; and in Demotic texts, red ink was used only in the magical and religious papyri. However, at all periods, red ink was used to highlight, divide, isolate or distinguish words or sentences. Thus at the beginning of a manuscript, it underlines the date or the title, and in the course of a text it underlines an important passage or a secondary addition. Even in the *incipit* it is not rare that the red ink stops before the end of a sentence or that the title is only partly rubricised.¹⁴ Sometimes the red ink can have a disparaging meaning or can signify a bad augur

¹³ See Z. Meshel, *Kuntillat 'Ajrud: A Religious Centre from the Time of the Judaean Monarchy on the Border of Sinai*, Jerusalem 1978, 14–16. Other inscriptions are written in red ink on *pithoi* with vertical and horizontal margins as on papyrus scrolls, and the drawings are also in red paint. The inscriptions on the *pithoi* have an apotropaic signification, as I have shown elsewhere.

¹⁴ See B. Van de Walle, 'La division matérielle des textes classiques égyptiens et son importance pour l'étude des ostraca scolaires', *Le Muséon* 59 (1946) 223–32, and G. Posener, 'Sur l'emploi de l'encre rouge dans les manuscrits égyptiens', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 37 (1951) 75–80.

What is also striking is that, in the present state of the research on all these fragments, the name of Bala'am is found only in the first combination, otherwise it must be restored with no certainty on small fragments. But such a presentation does not surprise us too much. It is certainly necessary that mention of him occurs more than once in the first lines to present Bala'am, his identification and his title: he is the divine seer, a central figure of the composition from the beginning, because he has to deliver to his people the message of the gods, what he does in his 'book'. This does not mean that he is not acting or is not present in the second part of the column or combination II, the state of preservation is too bad to say too much on that in the present state of my research.

First group of fragments¹⁸

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | יִסְרִי סִפְרִי בִלְעָם בִּן בְּעֹרָה (רַ' אֲשִׁי הוּדָה אֱלֹהֵי הָאָדָם) וַיֵּאָתֶר אֱלֹהֵי בְלִיַּלְתָּ [י'] יִחוּ
[י'] מִהוּזָה? |
| 2 | כִּמְשֵׁאֵל וַיֵּאמְרוּ לְ[בִלְעָם בֶּרֶךְ] בְּעֹרָה יִפְעַל כִּלְאֵי אַחֲרָאָה אֲשֶׁלֶּר [א'] תִּן מֵה
שְׁמַעַת |
| 3 | וַיִּקֶּם בִּלְעָם מִן־מַחֲרָ [י'] הָיָה [קִרְיָה] גִּלְתֵּי יוֹמָר [אֲשִׁי] קֹהֵל [א'] לֹוֹה וְלִים [י'] הִי [צ] ס
וְיִבֵּן |

¹⁶ Some Qumran scrolls use red ink on one line, or a little more for a complete verse of a biblical text, but the usage does not seem to be the same as here, see É. Puech, 'Les langues et les écritures dans les manuscrits de la mer Morte', in: R. Viers (ed.), *Des signes pictographiques à l'alphabet: La communication écrite en Méditerranée. Actes du colloque, 14 et 15 mai 1996. Villa grecque Kérylos, Fondation Théodore Reinach (Beaulieu-sur-Mer)*, Paris 2000, 175–211, esp. 191–2.

¹⁸ See photograph in Figure 1.

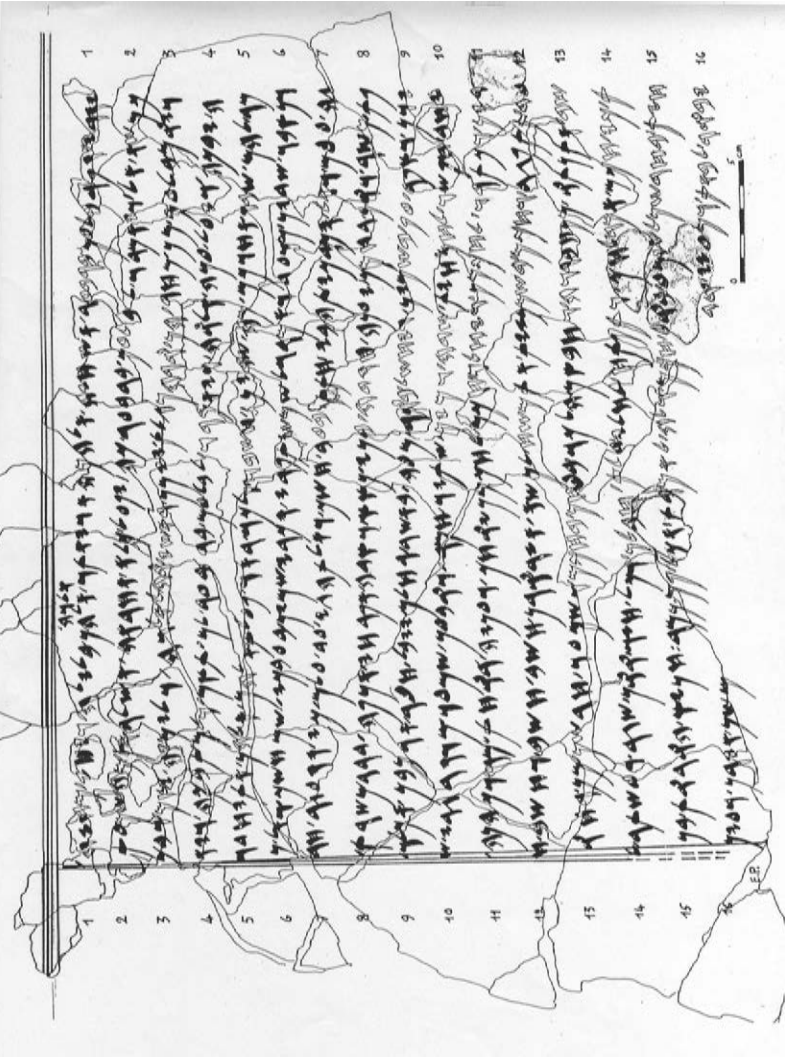


Figure 1. The Deir 'Alla plaster inscription, first combination.

- 4 ה'יבכה ויעל עמה אלוהי'אמריו לבלעם בר) בער'לם תצם'ולם תבכה ויא
5 מר'לחם שבו אחוכם מה'שדי'ח[שבו] ולכו ראו'פעלת אלה'אלה'איתיחרו'
6 ונצבו שדי'ן מועד'יואמריו לש[מ]ש(') תפרי'סכרי'שמי'ן בעב) כי'שם חשך ואל'נ
7 נה'עשם ואל'סמר) כי'תחבי'חתת[בע] ב'חשך ואל(תחני'עד'יעלם כי'ססענר'חר
8 פח'נשריו קל/ן רחמ'ן יענה'ח[סדה] בני'נח'וצדה'אפרח'אנפה'דרר'נשרת'
9 יו'וצפר[כל'בש] מ'יו' יחשל[ב] קר'משה'באשר'רחל'ייכל'חפר'ארנב'אכלו'
10 יחד'חפש[ולחם] חית[שדה'ומי/דמ]ן שתי'חמר'וקבע'ן שמעו'מוסר'נרי'ש
11 ד[יו'ן] כתר[וילחם] מן[ויהל]ו[ן] חכם[ן] לחכמ'ן יקח'ך ועניה'ה רקחת'מר[ן] וכנה'ה
12 ע[ד] תתפנר[וכה/חכם'בש] מן[זית'את] משה[ן] לנשא'אור'קר'ן חשב'חשב
'וחשב'ח
13 [שב] אתנתק'מן[ן] חבר[וה'ן] חבצ'ן הלכו'בטח[ן] י'חכם[ן] ושמעו'חרש[ן] מ'ן רחק
14 [ת'כ'יה] כס'א[מר]ן קח'ך י[ת]פתח[ן] לחלי'ד[לת'ח] ב[ל]ם[ן] וכל'חור'ן קק'ן שגר'
ועשת'ריל
15 [חזת'בחרש'ן] שמע[ן] בקל[י'חם]ם[ן] יולה'לאמ[רת'אכל]ן[פ]ם'נמר'תני'צ'הקרקת'בנ
16 [י'בקר'לבאת'ומ] עז'ק[דש]ם [חכם/כה'נשא] מ'שן'אור'ן ועינ
17 [ישגר'ועשת'ר'לחור']

Translation in stychometry (red ink in small capitals>

¹THE CHASTISEMENTS OF THE BOOK OF BALA'AM, THE SON OF BE'OR,
THE MAN WHO SEES THE GODS.

As for him, the gods came <to him> at night,
[And] he beheld a vision ²like an utterance of El.

And they said to Ba[la'a]m, the son of Be'or:

'HE WILL DO THE ANNIHILATION(/DECREASE) OF HIS POSTERITY
THE MAN WHO WILL HAVE TO S[E]E WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD!'

³And Bala'am arose on the morrow.

Behold the e[vent of] the revelations.

He summoned the h[eads of the] assembly [un]to him

and for [*that* (?)] day[he fas]ted,

and he wept ⁴bitterly.

And his people went up to him

and [they] sai[d] to Bala'am, the son of Be'or:

'Why do you fast,

and why do you weep?'

And he ⁵said to them:

'Be seated.

I will show you what the Shadday (gods) have p[lanned,]

and go, see the acts of the gods!

The go[d]s have banded together,

⁶and the Shadday (gods) have held a council,

and they have said to Sha[mas]h:

"Sew up, close up the heavens with a cloud,

so that it brings/will be there darkness and not bri-⁷ghtness,

obscurity and no[t] *radiance*!

so that you give dread [with a clo]ud of darkness,

and do not *plot*(/remove?) for ever!
 For the swift *revi*-⁸led the eagle,
 and the *cry*/nest of vultures answered it,
 the st[ork (*reviled*)]the young of the falcon,
 and the owl (*answered to*) the chicks of the heron,
 the swallow frightened ⁹the pigeon,
 and the sparrow [*all* (*that is?*) *in* the s]ky.
 And the rod [*flayed the ca*]ttle,
 where a staff should tend ewes,
 hares ate ¹⁰altogether,
 the beast of[*the fields*] looked[*for fee*]d (?),
 [and]ass(es) and hyenas drank [*bloo*]d/[*wate*]r (?).
 Hear the admonition, clients(/adversaries?) of the Sha-¹¹dday (gods)
 and]surround[*the sag*]es/[*divine*]rs[*and wait* (?).]
 A *sage*/diviner (?) will mock the sages/diviners.
 And an oracle had prepared myrrh,
 and a priestess ¹²got tired additi[onally]/*rubbed herself* (?) additi[onally],
 [*and a priest/the sage*] has [*anointed*] himself [*with*] olive [oi],
 to bear the offering of the horn.
 One augurer had augured,
 and another one had au-¹³[gured,]
 he broke away *from* [*his*] colleagues.
 [And] crowds departed [*confident in the diviner* (?)]
 and they heard incantations from afar.
¹⁴[*For the di*]viner spo[ke a mockery/laughing (?),]
 the *do*[or of] *their* [*terri*]to[ry (?)] became open to disease,
 and all beheld (acts of) distress.
 Shagar-and-‘Ashtar did not ¹⁵[*look at the incantations* (?),
 to]listen to the voice[*of the diviner*
and to him] she[*did not spo*]ke/[com]mand (?).
 The [mou]th of the leopard *devoured* the piglet,
 [*the lioness* (?)] drove out the young of ¹⁶[*the flock* (?),
 and the re]fuges of *ho*[liness/ *Qe*]dem (?) -,
 - - -
 The *diviner* offered (?) double libations,
 but the eye- ¹⁷[s of *Shagar-and-‘Ashtar* did not look at (?)
’

Notes on the text

Line 1: It is certain that all the small fragments with red ink must belong to these two half lines. Thus I place at the beginning and in this sequence fragments m f, b, h, a, e and d, but h, a and d connect somewhat with 1c, which begins with line 2 of the column and with some remains of red ink. In this way, the first half red line is fully readable and gives the title of the text: ‘The chastisements of the book of Bala’am...’, to be compared to Jer 17:13:... יסורי בארץ יכתבו כי (‘my chastisements

against the land are written, for...').¹⁹ This title could limit the column to being only an excerpt of the whole 'book' of Bala'am. In the lacuna at the end, I insert fragments ivc and xvc for the last half line in black ink; the sentence seems to begin with אה, which can be interpreted as the anaphoric personal pronoun or *casus pendens* followed by a *waw apodosis*, or less probably as an interjection 'behold' and a *wayyiqtol*.

Line 2: I insert here first frag. xvd in black ink, and then iuc, xva and xvb in the second red half, xvb has preserved some black ink of line 1. The reading of אלה כמשא is certain, excluding here any form of an Aramaic *status emphaticus* as some scholars have asserted. The red sentence is difficult to read but after יפעל the word כלה seems certain: most part of the dowstroke and of the head of *kaf* is visible on the color pictures.²⁰ The word כלה in a *status constructus* can mean 'decrease' or 'destruction/annihilation of' depending on the root considered. The sequence יפעל כלה has parallels in the prophetic oracles where God or the prophet uses almost always כלה along the synonym עשה: Isa 10:23; Jer 4:27; 5:10, 18; 10:24–25; 30:11 = 46:28; Ezek 11:13; 20:17, Nah 1:8, 9, Soph 1:18; Neh 9:31. This same root is used also in Num 25:11 ואלה כליתי. Among the many proposals for this end of line, the sequence אלה כלה and אלה כלה is certain, and the restoration אלה כלה with the small red fragments which can belong only here, seems most probable, and to be understood as an infinitive similar to אלה כלה in combination ו and meaning 'of his posterity the one who will have to see what you have heard'. This sentence in red ink is a concise statement of the utterance from the gods, an explicit announcement of the chastisements in the title of the book. Note that Jer 30:11 = 46:28 (and 10:24–25) use the root יסר and עשה כלה in the same sentence, like here in the two red ink phrases. Thus the biblical parallels give the preference to the root כלה.

¹⁹ A beginning with an Aramaic word (*znh*) (M. Weippert, 'The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla and the Study of the Old Testament', in: Hofijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 151–184, esp. 153, 165), or by an indentation (A. Lemaire, 'L'inscription de Balaam trouvée à Deir 'Alla: épigraphie', in: J. Amitai [ed.], *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, Jerusalem 1985, 313–325, esp. 317), are totally excluded. Van der Kooij, 'Book and Script', 247, does not accept the join of fragment IIIa to Ic to read אלה כלה, but this could be debated as the head of a *qof* instead of a *waw*, see line 4: אלה כלה > אלה כלה.

²⁰ See Hofijzer & Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, Plate 1, or Ibrahim & Van der Kooij, *Picking up the Threads*, cover page, certainly excluding *bet*.

Line 3: The reading נגלה [ק]רה] הן (better than ללה [ק]) tries to make the best of the remains of ink with fragment vif in order to understand the sentence; א קרה/ means first ‘encounter, chance, accident, occasion, event’ and is a homophone to ‘tale, story’. Then the fragments viid, xiiC below ia and ib allow us to read the proposals given here. The *pi’el* of verb יזמן means ‘to summon, invite’ and אלה [א]לה is a logical guess given the remains in the line, followed by ולימ[ן י]צ[ם]ם, a dual due to the distance to be restored, or better ולימ[ן י]צ[ם]ם if the insertion of fragment vg is possible and accepted,²¹ and the end is in agreement with the next line.

Line 4: The translation of ויעל is more conjectural: if one prefers to stay in a West-Semitic dialect, the meaning is ‘to ascend’, if one chooses the Aramaic background it is possible to understand ‘to enter’, as Levine did recently.²² But since עלה is normally constructed with אל, and עלל with ל-, it is better to stay with a West-Semitic dialect. The reading אלה is secured, instead of אלקה of the editors. ‘To ascend’ to the diviner is quite acceptable as the movement of the heads of the people who want to meet him at the high place or *bamah*.²³ Such a reading gives priority to a Canaanism opposed to an Aramaism. Then the fragments vif, viid and xiiC allow us to read perfectly the line, עמה being a collective parallel to ראשי קהל, and alluded to by the plurals להם שבו אחוכם, line 5.

Line 5: With fragments vif and xiiC, the reading of the line is certain, even the restoration of ה[שבו]. The difficulty is the meaning of שדין, a dual or better a gentilic for a theophoric hypostatic name, ‘the ones of the mountains’? In Job 5:17 and Deut 32:17, שד is parallel to אלהים אל -, with the meaning of ‘Mighty’ or ‘demons’. And the council of gods is well known on the mountains, see for instance Isa 14:13 הר לכי וראו מפע לכי וראו מפע ולכו ראו פעלת אלהן מועד. Then compare לכות אלהים נורא עלילה על בני אדם and 46:9 יהוה אשר לבו חזו מפעלות יהוה אשר שם שמות בארץ, which all announce destructions.

²¹ A reading of a demonstrative (ליס'זה/ו) is equally possible for the space. But an already proposed reading וליכ[ן]ל אכל is much too long for the space.

²² Levine, *Numbers* 21–36, 248.

²³ Franken, ‘Balaam at Deir ‘Alla’, 193–5, interprets this area of level IX as a sanctuary or a high place: ‘the remains of a Baal height’. Is it not striking that Bala‘am in Num 22:41 and 23:3; 23:14 and 23:28 is always on a *bamah* or a high place to look for omens or the revelations of YHWH? And the people *ascend* to the *bamot*.

Line 6: Compare Ps 82:1: אֱלֹהִים נֹצַב בְּעֶדְתָּ אֵל בִּקְרֹב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט. The debated and crucial point here is the reading of the divinity at the junction of the two parts, ic and id. The distance is known and the remains of ink are said to be those of a stroke to the right which I take to be the left stroke of a ש, not of a ה; thus the reading לש[מ]ש seems quite possible,²⁴ instead of לש[נ]ר generally accepted, and שִׁנְר is associated with עֲשֻׁתָּר, line 14, as fertility divinities (see line 14). As the following verbs סִכְרִי סִכְרִי are feminine imperatives, שִׁמְשִׁי has to be feminine. If this divinity is masculine in Phoenician, Aramaic, Akkadian, and generally in Hebrew—but it can also be feminine—, she is feminine in Ugaritic (špš) and at el-Amarna. If accepted, this can be an important clue for the linguistic background of the composition. The verb סִכְרִי is best taken as imperative of סִכַּר 'to sew' rather than an imperfect of פָּרַר 'to break' and סִכְרִי as an imperative of סִכַּר rather than the substantive 'the bolts of'. Another difficulty is in the reading בְּעִבְכִּי without a word divider: is it to be understood as a single word with an Aramaic feminine suffix 'with your cloud', or as two words 'with a cloud, so that'? The same difficulty is found with סִמְרִכִּי, line 7. The scribe is usually consistent in the use of word dividers, but sometimes he puts two (line 5) and sometimes none (end of line 2 and in line 1 it is impossible to be sure), thus apparently this criterion is not absolute. And since there is no clear Aramaic linguistic characteristic in this text, this dubious suffix can be analysed in a different way, and taken as a conjunction.²⁵ Thus Shamash has certainly something to do with brightness and darkness, and the verb אִמְרִי can also have the meaning of an order. Finally, שִׁם can be a perfect שִׁם with עֵב as subject as well as the adverb 'there'.

Line 7: The second hemistich וְאֵל סִמְרִי עֵשֶׁם which also expresses opposites is not easy to explain: I have taken עֵשֶׁם as the metathesis of עִשְׁמִי with the meaning 'obscurity, darkness' parallel to חֹשֶׁךְ above, an explanation accepted by some scholars, and relating סִמְרִי to Arabic *smr* which refers to the brightness of the moon or the bristling of stars, and thus can be a good parallel to נֹגַהּ, a metaphoric use of סִמְרִי for the rays of the sun/

²⁴ A. Caquot & A. Lemaire, 'Les textes araméens de Deir 'Alla', *Syria* 54 (1977) 189–208, were the first to propose this reading.

²⁵ J. Hofstijzer, 'What did the gods say? Remarks on the first combination of the Deir 'Alla-Plaster Texts', in: Hofstijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 121–42, esp. 121–5, still maintains his first Aramaic reading and interpretation of these lines.

Shamash, i.e. her radiance.²⁶ Then to the left of ic fragment ivi joins perfectly for the reading ב'השך [בע] כ'יהביההה' 'so that you give dread [with a clo]ud of darkness'. Compare the parallel נתן התיח(-) ב- in Ez 26:17; 32:23, 24, 25, 26, 32. The meaning of ואל תהני עד עלם can be 'and do not plot for ever' (from הנה I 'moan, utter, muse', see Ps 2:1–2), or 'and do not be angry for ever' (from הנה 'murmur, muse', see Akkadian *agagu*), or 'and do not remove (it) for ever' (from הנה II).²⁷

Line 8: Because of a break, it is possible to read וקן רהמן 'the nest of vultures' as well as וקל רהמן 'the cry of vultures', in one case the cry of the swift would be opposed to that of the vultures as the swift is opposed to the eagle, otherwise the nest would correspond to the young of the falcon or the chicks of the heron. In the verb יענה ה-, the ה- could also be analysed as a suffix: 'will answer it', for the interplay of הרף and ענה, see Ps 119:42. At the break the reading הן[סדה] בנינצץ seems to be accepted instead of נהץ, as well as צדה further.²⁸ Then the meaning of נשרת is not clear, unless we look at an Arabic root *naṭara* 'to disperse, scatter' which seems to me acceptable here.²⁹

Line 9: The restoration of the small lacuna could be something like וצפרן כל בשמ' or וצפרן עף בשמן. At the main break, I would suggest inserting fragment ixk without a direct join and to restore ון(י)השל בן using the same sequence as in II 37: בקר להשל ויאכלן as an

²⁶ See É. Puech, 'Le texte "ammonite" de Deir 'Alla: Les admonitions de Balaam (première partie)', *La vie de la Parole: De l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament. Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes à Pierre Grelot professeur à l'Institut Catholique de Paris*, Paris 1987, 13–30, at 22 and note 39.

²⁷ This meaning fits also the context, but it misses a suffix. See P.K. McCarter, 'The Balaam Texts from Deir 'Alla: The First Combination', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980) 49–60, esp. 51, 54; J.A. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla*, Chico 1984, 29, 46. A *hif'il* הנהי of the root נהה would fit perfectly 'do not shine', if one could accept an archaic form based on the Ugaritic *šgy* paradigm, but it is difficult to accept a metathesis or a scribal error, as is proposed by B. Margalit 'Ugaritic *štr*. *šz*. and DAPT (I 14) *šgr. w'str*', in: N. Wyatt, W.G.E. Watson & J.B. Lloyd (eds), *Ugarit, Religion and Culture: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Ugarit, Religion and Culture Edinburgh, July 1994. Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John C.L. Gibson*, Münster 1996, 179–203, esp. 192.

²⁸ Van der Kooij, 'Book and Script', 260, categorically excludes this reading, but the pictures are less clear than he says. The copy I have does not support it. On the contrary it favors נצץ and the name of a bird, but Van der Kooij accepts the reading וצדה, 258 and 260.

²⁹ The word נשרת should be a verb perfect 3rd person feminine with נשר as subject, not a substantive as Levine (*Numbers* 21–36, 246 and 252) translating 'and cluster of eagles', but there is no conjunction here.

Line 10: With this line the conjectures begin. I propose inserting first fragment vii and in the lacuna fragment ivf but without any direct join, only for a possible context, and to restore: יֶחֶד הַפֶּשֶׁן לַחַם חַיִּית [שֶׁדָּה] and to restore: וּמִי(?) אֵין שְׁתֵּי הַמֶּר וְקִבְעֵן. If a new sentence begins with שָׁמְעוּ, then וְקִבְעֵן must belong to the previous one as a coordinate subject with הַמֶּר which cannot mean ‘silt’ or ‘wine’ (Aramaism); consequently the object of שָׁמְעוּ should be read in אֵין[-, for instance וְדָמָן ‘and blood’ or וּמִיָּין ‘and water’ but וּמִיָּין ‘and win’ is excluded for the space, compare Num 23:24 where אָכַל טָרֵף and שִׁתְּהָ דָם are used for wild animals. Thus the restored sentence would be parallel to the preserved one. For שָׁמְעוּ מוֹסֵר, see Prov 1:8; 4:1; 8:33; 19:20, 27; Job 20:3.

³² Franken, 'Balaam at Deir 'Alla', 198–9, describes a terra-cotta figurine which 'has a tambourine indicating her involvement in some festival and she has a drop of menstruation blood. She represented probably a "vestal virgin", permanently or temporarily dedicated to a goddess as priestess' (198).

ן]ב[ל]ת['flowing stream' but this meaning is less probable here). The next sentence וכל חזו קקן 'and all beheld (acts of) distress' which implies that the magical practices were unsuccessful, explains somewhat the preceding one. They seem in agreement with the second red half line in the beginning which announced the destruction of the posterity or the decrease of the fertility among the living. The mention of the goddess(es) שגד ועשתד, as deity/ies of the full moon and of the morning star whose functional activities are the increase of cattle and the fecundity of the flocks,³⁵ followed by a negative particle, suggests that she/they did not pay attention to the cultic practices or offerings to her/them, and that she/they was/were insensible to the prayers in order to increase the fertility of the flocks or/and of the human beings.

Line 15: Only the last third of the line is preserved. I suggest reading טרף/אכל פם נמר חניצ, ³⁶ following the curses of the Aramaic treaties of Sefire I A 30–31 which use אכל and פם נמרה in its list, or טרף with the Hebrew Bible. If the fragment vb 2 is inserted here, it will be possible to read קת אכל פם נמר חניצ, 'the [mou]th (Aramaism?) of the leopard devoured the piglet'. The first broken word may be a form of קתר as the verb near the end of this line. This verb is a perfect form 3rd person feminine with a feminine subject in the next line, for instance לביא or לבאה (like on the arrows' heads) 'lioness' as a parallel, see also Num 23:24: כלביא עד יאכל טרף. The insertion of fragment vf in the right part allows us to propose a restoration of the main part of the line:]חות[בחרשן(?) ל]שמע בקל[חכ]ם[ולהלאמן]רת, see line 2: the gods speak or command to the seer.

Line 16: As a proposal to understand the ink remains on fragment vf 3]עזיק[³⁷ I suggest tentatively ק]דש/ם עזי[את ומ]בקר לביא/את. At Deir 'Alla there was a central sanctuary and in the list of Shishak I, Penuel is quoted with Qadesh: Adam, Sukkot, Qadesh, Penuel, Maḥanayim; another possibility could be a mention of Qedem 'aforetime' or (Benē] Qedem on the east, and Jeroboam I once fortified Penuel as a refuge

³⁵ See K. van der Toorn, 'Sheger', in: K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [rev. edn.], Leiden 1999, 760–2.

³⁶ Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, 118, wrote that *mem* is excluded, but this is not so clear, because there are remains of the word divider and of the head of the *mem* on its right. This cannot be read as *lamed*.

³⁷ There is no Aramaic relative pronoun י here, as it is suggested by the editors, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, 259 and 15; the group V was found together with Ic, position: to the left of or below Ic (149).

place (1 Kgs 12:25). A reading מִשְׁן אֶזְרָן would mean 'double offerings' and could be restored something like מִשְׁן אֶזְרָן [(וְנִשָּׂא חֶכֶם/כֹּהֵן], see line 12 for a first ritual service, which seems repeated and doubled after the failure and inefficiency of the first attempt, as lines 14–15 try to make explicit. The last preserved word וְעֵינִי can with difficulty be singular 'and the eye', a plural וְעֵינַי and the *nomen rectum* should be restored because there is no word divider at the end of the line, for instance שְׂרִיף, אֱלֹהֵן or שֶׁנֶּר וְעִשְׂתָּר which is pretty well attested. The sentence would apparently say that again this time the libations did not work successfully as expected, the gods or the goddess did not pay attention to them and something else must be done to assure the wellbeing of the people.

Bala'am at Deir 'Alla

These lines give us the first part of an excerpt of the book of a diviner or seer of the gods, whose name Bala'am son of Be'or is already well famous in the biblical traditions and later on. The Aramaic filiation term בַּר could only suggest that Bala'am is not at home there and that he is of Eastern origin, an Aramean from birth,³⁸ as it is also known from Num 22:5; 23:7; Deut 23:5, where he is presented as a prophet or seer of Aram from Pethor on the river, or from the east (*Qedem*).³⁹ Although this simple word בַּר, which is part of the name (without a word divider), indicates his ethnic background or origin, nothing about the language of the text can be learned from it. The editor, J. Hoftijzer, understood the inscription throughout as an Aramaic composition because of many Aramaic elements in the vocabulary, phonetic and syntax. But he added 'an Aramaic language hitherto unknown', because the demarcation between Aramaic and Canaanite isoglosses

³⁸ This point is disputed by scholars who think that this occurrence does not make this text Aramaic nor Bala'am an Aramean. The name Kilamuwa bar Hayya does not render a Phoenician inscription from Sam'al an Aramaic text and Kilamuwa an Aramean, either. See Levine, *Numbers* 21–36, 247. But there is perhaps a little more here in the Deir 'Alla text.

³⁹ Much has been written on this subject. J.C. Greenfield, 'Philological Observations on the Deir 'Alla Inscription', in: Hoftijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 109–120 at 119, doubts if Pethor is a geographic direction, as it is usually interpreted, and not an occupational designation from which we would learn that he was also an interpreter of dreams, engaged in oneiromancy, a widespread practice in the ancient world. See also M. Delcor, 'Le texte de Deir 'Alla et les oracles bibliques de Bala'am', *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1981) 52–73, esp. 64–5.

does not correspond completely with what is known about these two linguistic areas.⁴⁰

The scholarly debate had focused a lot on this point and shown that the Aramaic features are not so evident in this text, but there is still no agreement. What is clear, at least in this first group, is the following:

- There is no *status emphaticus* in א- as it was thought in the reading א כמלי line 2, no relative ו except in the short inscription ו שרעא of this level, and the proposed feminine suffix -כי (lines 6–7) could be understood as well as a conjunction.
- In addition, the following are used: a *nif'al* נצבו (l. 6), the *waw* consecutive (e.g., ויאהו, ויהו), the *qal* infinitive ending with ת- and not with the preformative ב- which is already well known at *Tell Fekheriyeh*.
- Almost all of the supposed Aramaisms are easily disposed of, like (1) the plural ending ך- as in Moabite and some Hebrew examples; (2) the plural suffix וה- to be compared to the ה- in Moabite; (3) the plural ending י- for the perfect of some verbs (שתיו) is known in Hebrew; (4) the ה- as 3rd person feminine singular perfect (הקרקת), usual in Ugaritic and rare in Hebrew; (5) the preformative א- in the אפעל forms, which is used in Ugaritic also, could be here an innovation, but the Canaanisms in the morphology are not refutable.⁴¹
- Truly there is the egregious phonetic problem of primitive *dad* as *qof* here rather than *sade* in Canaanite, קבען line 10 and יקהך line 11, but this peculiar orthography of a phoneme, which is anyway problematic in all Semitic languages, cannot determine the Aramaic status of the language.⁴²

Concerning the vocabulary, only הך in combination ן 10 and פ[ם (but this is a restored form, I 15) would be innovations that this text shares with Aramaic, בר indicating as stated above the ethnic origin of Bala'am. The verbs אהה, חוה, חקה, חרף, תפר also are known in Hebrew, חוה and אהה in Ugaritic. In this text שמש is a goddess, not a god as he is always in Aramaic.

It is the point to underline here the numerous parallels between Deir 'Alla and Biblical Hebrew, compare:

⁴⁰ Hoftijzer, 'Interpretation and Grammar', 300–2.

⁴¹ See Greenfield, 'Philological Observations', 109–12.

⁴² See Greenfield, 'Philological Observations', 112–4.

- (ll. 1–2) and Num 22:20: ויבא אלהים אל בלעם לילה ויאמר לו בלעם... ויאמרו לבלעם בר בער ויבא אלהים; אל בלעם ויאמר;
- (ll. 1–2) and Num 24:4, 16: מחזה שדי יחזה, and Isa 1:1: אשר חזה... חזון, Isa 13:1: אשר חזה, and Hab 1:1: אשר חזה which combine both;
- (l. 2) could be compared to יעשה כה which both refer to divine action;
- (ll. 1–2) and Jer 46:28 (cf. Jer 30:11) כי אעשה כי כה אמר יהוה שממה, and Jer 4:27: ולא אעשה כלה ויסרתך; תהיה כל הארץ וכלה לא אעשה;
- (l. 3) and Num 22:13: ויקם בלעם מן מחר;
- (l. 3) could find some parallels in the use of קרה in Num 23:3–4, 16: ויקר... והגדתי לך, and of נלה in Num 22:31: את יהוה את נלה, and of עיני בלעם וירא; and 24:4, 16: ונפלי עיני;
- (ll. 3–4), see Jdg 8:14: ואת שרי סכות ואת ויצעק שמואל את העם; and 1 Sam 10:17: וזקניה;
- (ll. 3–4) ויבכה... ויאמרו לבלעם בר בער לם תצם ולם תבכה and 1 Sam 1:7–8: חנה אשה חנה למה לא תאכל ולא תאכלי; תבכי ולמה לא תאכלי;
- (l. 5) and 1 Sam 15:16: ויאמר להם שבו אחוכם מה שדין חשבו. האספו ואניידה לכם, Gen 49:1: לך את אשר דבר יהוה אלי הלילה. The verb חזה is found three times in similar constructions in Job 15:17: ואחוך שמע לי וזה חזיתי ואספרה; and Job 32:10; 36:2.
- (l. 5) and Ps 46:9: חזו מפעלות יהוה ולכו ראו פעלות אלהן to relate divine deeds, Ps 66:5: וראו מפעלות אלהים נורא;
- (ll. 5–6) with a *nif'al*, and Ps 82:1: אלהים מועד (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19). The word מועד as divine assembly is known in Ugaritic, Canaanite and Hebrew but so far not in Aramaic. The deities אל, אלהן, שדי (ll. 1–2, 5–6) can find a similar religious context in the book of Job with אל and שדי, and in Numbers 23–24 with אלהים, יהוה and שדי;
- (ll. 6–7), although שם could be analysed as an adverb 'here', the use of שם חשך is well known in Biblical Hebrew, Isa 5:20: חשך לאור ואור לחשך, Ps 104:20: חשך ויהי לילה, and it would make the verb preferable here; the pair נה-חשך is very common (Isa 9:1; 50:10, Am 5:20, 2 Sam 22:29 = Ps 18:29), and the next pair must function in the same way although with unique words;

- כִּי נָתַן הַחַיִּים בְּאֶרֶץ חִיִּים or אֲשֶׁר נָתַן (l. 7) and Ez 32:24–25; see Gen 9:2; 35:5;
- שִׁמְעוּ מוֹסֵר (l. 10) is a combination well attested in the sapiential books, in Proverbs particularly,
- וְהִכֵּם חֲרָשִׁים (l. 13), see Isa 3:3;
- בְּאֲשֶׁר (l. 9), lexeme of a form non-Aramaic, but frequent in Hebrew

Despite all these comparisons with Biblical Hebrew, the language of Deir 'Alla which is not Aramaic,⁴³ is clearly not Hebrew,⁴⁴ nor a product of one or more members of the Israelite community of a Transjordanian tribe.⁴⁵ It is a local dialect close to the Canaanite of its time, as many morphological, syntactic, phonological and lexical features show; this dialect can be called Gileadite or 'Ammonite', giving a territorial meaning to it, as the palaeography of the copy also supports.⁴⁶

⁴³ Despite all these kind of observations, D. Pardee, 'The Linguistic Classification of the Deir 'Alla Text Written on Plaster', in: Hofstijzer & Van der Kooij, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*, 100–105, concludes that 'an ascription to the Aramaic group is unavoidable... that the isoglosses favoring an Aramaic affiliation outnumber those favoring a Canaanite affiliation and that their prioritized value is significantly greater... The language of the Deir 'Alla plaster inscription is typologically a very archaic form of Aramaic, the archaism probably being due to regional isolation'. This can be highly doubted and can work better in the opposite direction in favor of a Canaanite affiliation. Weippert, 'The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla', 159–64, is still convinced of the Aramaic character of the text, specially from the points of orthography and morphology compared to syntax and lexicography which are nearer to Canaanite: 'a peripheral language which is not yet Aramaic but is about to become Aramaic' (163).

⁴⁴ Contrary to the opinion of J.W. Wesseliuss, 'Thoughts about Balaam: The Historical Background of the Deir Alla Inscription on Plaster', *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 44 (1987) 589–99, who thinks that the text is in Hebrew.

⁴⁵ As Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 264–75, who tries to propose on demographic grounds (Israelite occupation in that period), on the basis of linguistic criteria (mostly the syntax) for a Northwest-Semitic language of a regional character (because of its limited Aramaic characteristics), on the literary character of the text (the Biblical poem of Bala'am), adding that even the content with a pagan spirit cannot be an objection. Weippert, 'The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla', 179–80, arrives at the conclusion of 'a (Proto-)Aramaic language, and not Hebrew', used by indigenous in a territory claimed by the Bible as Israelite territory.

⁴⁶ See Puech, 'Approches paléographiques', 221–38. Many typical peculiarities of the Ammonite scribal school are present there that cannot come from an Aramaic tradition, but they are already known in the Ammonite territory. I cannot accept the conclusions of J. Naveh, 'The Date of the Deir 'Alla Inscription in Aramaic Script', *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967) 256–8, because the writing cannot be situated in the development of the Aramaic cursive; nor for example that of A. Lemaire, 'Les inscriptions sur plâtre', 46–9, who classifies this text as Aramaic, the original of the copy being even

The Biblical authors certainly considered Bala'am as an Aramean, but this is of no significance for the classification of this text, since it was first to be read and understood by some local people (sages, seers, diviners) in the local sanctuary,⁴⁷ not a school,⁴⁸ and secondly, nothing proves that the copy on the wall is the original composition, or a copy contemporaneous with the seer Bala'am. The absence of any form of article, be it Aramaic or Northwest-Semitic, would by itself argue against such a conclusion in the 8th century BC, and would suppose a much earlier date for its composition, certainly in the second millennium.⁴⁹ That means

Proto-Aramaic. His criticism against my proposal did not distinguish the territory of the Ammonites occupied by local people from the occupying powers between the 10th, 9th and 8th century who have nothing to do with such a text. Van der Kooij, 'Book and Script', 249–55, accepts now the existence of a 'national' script in Amman, which developed in close contact with Aramaic writing. Such Aramaic influences are expected.

⁴⁷ Franken, 'Balaam at Deir 'Alla', 193–7, interprets the room where the inscription stood, as a cave for a seer and his night visions seeing the divine assembly. The room was entered through a hole from above like a grotto as two other adjacent rooms on the south without a normal door, only by a small elevated entrance. 'The grotto is a place of mystery, and where the mysteries of the gods of the underworld are revealed'. 'Thus it is the seat of the oracle' (194). 'It was the place of revelation where the seer "saw" the meetings of the gods... The seer gave oracles, had dreams, interpreted dreams and was a healer. But the place of the oracle was indicated and fixed by divine revelation (Gen 18:16–17). Where the oracle is, is the sanctuary, and when the sanctuary has such inaccessible rooms as is the case here, they share in the holiness of the place and the building takes the nature of a maze or labyrinth... In the light of what was said above about the meaning of the Semitic sanctuary and its symbolism and in the light of the meaning of the plaster texts, no matter variant readings and interpretations are given, the archaeological evidence suggests a large religious building with many rooms' (195). 'As far as any connection can be postulated between Balaam, his sanctuary, and Baal, we are dealing with a Near Eastern Iron Age religion with all the characteristic general features of a religion concerned with the mystery that life comes out of death' (197). The area could well have been the living quarters of the priests (194) in which were found several antlers of fallow deer which are usually used in apotropaic rites, a terra-cotta of a stag. Finally the weaving rooms have parallels in the Jerusalem temple, 2 Kgs 23:7.

⁴⁸ Contrary to Lemaire, 'Les inscriptions sur plâtre', 53–5, who proposed to understand this room as a school with benches, 'un lieu d'enseignement': the teacher wrote on the wall to teach these texts. This is impossible as many will agree, firstly because it was not the way to teach in the ancient world, and secondly the room has no window or door for any sufficient light for such a purpose. The 'primary function of the writing is not educational but magical', according to Franken, 'Balaam at Deir 'Alla', 190. This is at least partly true and its religious purpose is certain.

⁴⁹ The earliest example of the article in the Northwest-Semitic is found on a arrow-head dated *circa* eleven hundred or even the end of 12th century BC, see É. Puech, 'Les pointes de flèches inscrites de la fin du II^e millénaire en Phénicie et Canaan', in: M.^a E. Aubet & M. Barthélemy (eds), *Actas del IV congreso internacional de estudios Fenicios y Púnicos, Cádiz, 2 al 6 de Octubre de 1995*, Cádiz 2000, 251–69 at 254: no. 18 חֵץ אֲדֹן זַל הַסֶּפֶר 'Arrow of Adon (son of) Silli, the scribe', and a little later on one dated in the 11th century no. 26 חֵץ שְׁמִידָה בֶּן יִשְׁבָּל אִשׁ שֶׁפֶט הַצֶּדֶק 'Arrow of Šemida' son of Yišbal, man

that only parts of an excerpt of the book of Bala'am have been recovered there. And it is quite possible that the biblical tradition knew something else or other parts of such a 'book',⁵⁰ or that both adopted and adapted the ways of this famous diviner to their own narratives. Further, both traditions have in common the presentation of this figure as a *hozeh*, a seer like the *ro'eh* in 1 Sam 9:9 which is said to be the previous denomination of a *nabi*⁵¹—a prophet, a witness of divine visions and auditions.

After a night vision of the gods in the sanctuary the seer awoke, fasted and wept, thus performing a prophetic gesture in order to deliver to the people the decision of the world of the gods: an impending doom. The message is an utterance of El, the chief of the Canaanite pantheon after a meeting of the heavenly council. Gods and Shadday (gods) or Demons(?) altogether have decided and said (or ordered) to Shamash to bring dread by a cloud which shall shut up the heavens. Shamash is asked 'to stop plotting' or 'not to remove (it) forever'. That means that she shall not lighten anymore. The cries of different species of birds, from the smallest ones frightening the biggest, the birds of night those of day, the birds of prey the others,⁵¹ the natural order had changed and it is the same situation with the animals, ewes and cattle, hares and hyenas,⁵² domesticated and wild animals; all are looking and fighting for food and drink, grass, grain or meat and water (or blood, l. 10?), but they did not find, because Shamash apparently had been too powerful, and had brought dearth by a severe drought in the country.⁵³

of Šaphat, the Tyrian'. Later on the accusative particle appears also in Phoenician, see É. Puech, 'Note sur la particule accusative en Phénicien', *Semitica* 32 (1982) 51–5. In Aramaic the *status emphaticus* and the relative *ʾi* are well known in the third quarter of the 9th century BC on the Tell Fekheriyeh statue, see A. Abou Assaf, P. Bordreuil & A. R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekheriyeh et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne*, Paris 1982. An inscribed sherd from 'Ein Gev could also be dated in the middle of the 9th century BC: לשקיא (B. Mazar, A. Biran, M. Dothan & I. Dunayevsky, 'Ein Gev', *Israel Exploration Journal* 14 [1964] 1–49, esp. 27) and another from Tel Dan: פב[ח]א (N. Avigad, 'An Inscribed Bowl from Dan', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 100 [1968] 42–4).

⁵⁰ The word ספר 'book' could refer to oral traditions attributed to the famous seer, like the Pentateuch or *Torah* is attributed to Moses, a famous Hebrew lawgiver.

⁵¹ Lev 11:13–19 and Deut 14:12–20 give lists of birds as prohibited food, among them are found נשר, רהם, גיז, and חסדה parallels to the Deir 'Alla list.

⁵² 'Hyena break bones for marrow, eat carcasses of wild and domesticated animals, ..., kill or injure larger animals, particularly the young of domestic stock, ... They may cause damage to crops and flocks around villages where they live', *Encyclopedia Iranica* 12 (2004) 600–3.

⁵³ Hofstijzer, 'What Did the gods Say?', 137, would agree with this proposal that the gods seek to restrain the goddess from punishing, but he understands 'Sha[gar] l. 6. Yet

This situation was probably understood as a punishment because of the sinfulness of the people.

Shamash as the messenger of El seems to be opposed to other gods or Shaddays, and first to Shagar-and-‘Ashtar. She is asked to act in the opposite way, to hide herself forever in order to restore order through the last decision of the council of gods, but nothing is said here about a sudden rain or deluge.⁵⁴ Only darkness is clearly meant bringing dread and death, as it is the case with Shapash in Ugaritic myths. This can be compared to biblical predictions of disaster, see especially Ez 32:3–8 mentioning birds, beasts and dense darkness, and Zeph 1:14–17; see also Deut 11:17 and 1 Kgs 8:35 where ‘God shut up the heavens, so that there be no rain and the land yield no fruit and you perish quickly’. The seer Bala‘am asks people to listen to the admonition and to look for a sage or diviner, but the people heard only from afar and went confidently because all sorts of cultic practises have supposedly been properly done. But disease entered the region and apparently Shagar-and-Ashtar, the fecundity deity, did not answer favourably to the magicians’ diversions. It was like before, leopards devoured piglets, and so on. Then comes a second series of cultic practices, double libations, but apparently without much success in changing the decision of the gods. Shagar-and-‘Ashtar did not answer. One can only expect that more cultic exercises and interventions of the diviners took place in order to counter these calamitous acts of some gods against their people and that finally Bala‘am succeeded in gaining the benediction of El or of the gods, when these were satisfied.⁵⁵ Then the natural course of life is supposed to work again in order. This seems to be the main conclusion reached at the end of combination II 37, but this will be the subject of another paper.

In short, the first part of the Deir ‘Alla text is an excerpt of the book of a seer, Bala‘am from an Aramaic origin, but whose mantic influence

it is not certain that these lists of birds serve as ‘auguries portending calamity’ (138) or for ornitomanancy. The calamity is already there even if the animal symbols receive a metaphoric signification of the changes of the established social order and in the service of the gods.

⁵⁴ Weippert, ‘The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla’, 171, who read the text in Aramaic ‘you may break the bolts of heaven...’, interprets these phenomena as signs of chaos, heavy rain and floods, see Am 5:18–20.

⁵⁵ In the biblical Bala‘am pericope, Bala‘am offered sacrifices on seven altars in three different places, but could only say what God YHWH told him in the visions: benedictions instead of curses.

reached as far as Deir 'Alla–Penuel in Gile'ad, a well-known sacred place where an eponym whose name was changed into **יֵשׁ-אֵל**, met, fought and saw El face to face (Gen 32:23–32). And the divine power the gods gave to Bala'am was transmitted by his magic book and was still in use in a writing adapted to the local dialect by the servants of the sanctuary or sacred place in the first part of the 8th century as an effective means for the religious needs of and divine favours destined for the local population. The same seems to be the case for the Israelites with the Bala'am story in the book of Numbers.