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Review: The Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscriptions

Reviewed Work(s): Aramaic Texts from Deir Alla by J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE DEIR ʿALLA PLASTER INSCRIPTIONS<sup>1</sup>

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The Deir ʿAlla texts record the first attestation of Balaam's name in the pre-exilic period, outside the Bible. The two "Combinations" provided in this volume comprise a myth about a disaster that occurred in the land, and relate how in this situation Balaam, son of Beor, functioned in the role of a diviner. A new edition of both of the two "Combinations" is presented here, with translation and commentary. The study concludes with a discussion of major themes in the Deir ʿAlla texts.

THE INSCRIPTIONS DISCOVERED at Deir ʿAlla in the Jordan Valley by a Dutch expedition in 1967 have now been published in a lavish volume, consisting of three, principal sections: 1) A report on the archeological and historical background of the site by several scholars, including the excavator, H. Franken. 2) A detailed paleographic analysis by G. van der Kooij, and 3) An edition of the inscriptions, with translation, commentary, and general discussion by J. Hoftijzer.

The plaster fragments are in a poor state of preservation, and it did not help matters that the plates were done in color. Black and white would have been preferable. Precise readings are, therefore, difficult to come by. The date of the inscription remains somewhat uncertain, but a date around the end of the eighth or the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. would appear to be near the mark.

The language of the Deir ʿAlla inscriptions shows affinities to that of the Zakur, Arslan Tash and Mesha texts. There are clear affinities to biblical Hebrew as well as Aramaic. Certain conditioned sound-shifts characteristic of Aramaic occur regularly, as do words typical of Aramaic. On the other hand, the Waw-consecutive is employed with some frequency, and at points, the text reads curiously like biblical Hebrew. Whether one can call this language Aramaic is really a question of definitions.

Plaster writing is fast emerging as a significant factor in Holy Land archeology; witness the recently discovered plaster inscriptions from Kuntilet ʿAjrud, a site south of Kadesh Barnea, dating a century or more earlier than the Deir ʿAlla inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> Both discoveries lend realism to the

commandment of Deuteronomy 27:2 f., and suggest that it would be practical to look for additional plaster inscriptions in the arid climates of the Negev, Aravah, Sinai, and Dead Sea regions.

A. Caquot and A. Lemaire have restudied the inscriptions, and have provided valuable new readings.<sup>3</sup> I am also indebted to P. Kyle McCarter for providing me with a manuscript of his forthcoming study covering a part of the inscriptions, in advance of publication.<sup>4</sup> Jo Ann Carlton has afforded me the benefit of her examination of the texts, thus clarifying certain doubtful readings and interpretations.<sup>5</sup>

The editors have provided us with two major Combinations and with numerous fragments. The Combinations were pieced together from fragments that had fallen to the ground, and it seems that the fragments which have become the first Combination were found some distance from those which comprise the second. Exactly how these two Combinations relate to each other is not certain, therefore, and this question is especially important for the interpretation of the second Combination. Anticipating the commentary and discussion to follow, it might be helpful at this point to present an opening statement, conveying my basic understanding of the two Combinations.

Combination I relates that Balaam, son of Beor, is visited at night by gods, who communicate to him an ominous

<sup>1</sup> This is a review article of: *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla*, ed. by J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, with contributions by V. R. Mehra, J. Voskuil, J. A. Mosk; preface by A. A. H. de Boer, Leiden, 1976. Pp. 324 and plates.

<sup>2</sup> See Meshel, Z., Meyers, C., "The Name of God in the Wilderness of Zin," *Biblical Archeologist* 39 (1976), 6-10.

<sup>3</sup> Caquot, A., Lemaire, A., "Les Textes Arameens de Deir ʿAlla," *Syria* 44, 1977, 189-208. Also see Fitzmyer, J. A., *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 10 (1978), 93-95.

<sup>4</sup> McCarter, P. Kyle, "The Balaam Texts from Deir ʿAlla: The First Combination," to appear in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*.

<sup>5</sup> Jo Ann Carlton is completing a PhD dissertation (Harvard University), entitled: "Studies in the Plaster Texts from Tell Deir ʿAlla," and in the course of preparation, personally examined the Deir ʿAlla plaster inscriptions in Amman, Jordan.

message. Balaam gathers his comrades and informs them as follows: certain gods convened a council, and commanded a goddess, whose name is unfortunately not preserved, to cover the heavens with dense cloud, thus producing darkness. Balaam proceeds to interpret this omen by depicting the disaster which it predicts. There will be trouble and distress!

At this point, it is unclear whether the description of the disaster merely continues, or whether a new theme is being introduced. The interpretation proposed here sees an attempt on Balaam's part to free the goddess from subservience to the will of the inimical council. He does this through exorcisms and other forms of magic. It is logical to assume that Balaam succeeded, and that for this reason his exploits were preserved on the wall of a sanctuary.

As for the identity of the goddess placed under the edict, the only clue is the composite divine name *šgr w<sup>c</sup>štr*, occurring near the end of Combination I; and that name should also be restored in two places earlier on in the text. This is the goddess about whom Combination I speaks.

#### COMBINATION I - Transcription.

- 1) [zh s]p̄t [bl<sup>c</sup>]m̄ [br b<sup>c</sup>]r.
- 2) ʔš. ḫzh. ʔlhn. h<sup>ʔ</sup>
- 3) wy<sup>ʔ</sup>tw. ʔlwh. ʔlhn. blylh.
- 4) [                    l]. / [2]kmš<sup>ʔ</sup> ʔl.
- 5) wy<sup>ʔ</sup>mrw. l[bl<sup>c</sup>]m. br b<sup>c</sup>r.
- 6) kh yp̄l [                    ]<sup>ʔ</sup>. ʔhr<sup>ʔ</sup>h.
- 7) ʔš. lr[ʔh                    š]m̄<sup>c</sup>t. / [3]
- 8) wyqm. bl<sup>c</sup>m. mn. mhr<sup>7</sup>
- 9) [                    ]i. ym̄. [                    ]h.
- 10) wlym̄ [                    ]
- 11) wbk/[4]h. ybk̄h.
- 12) wy<sup>c</sup>l. ʔmh. ʔlwh.
- 13) [wy<sup>ʔ</sup>mrw] l[bl<sup>c</sup>]m br b<sup>c</sup>r
- 14) lm̄.tym. [wlm] tbkh.
- 15) wy<sup>ʔ</sup> / [5]mr. lhm.
- 16) š[b]w. ʔḫwkm. mh. šd̄[yn p<sup>c</sup>lw]
- 17) wlkw. r<sup>ʔ</sup>w. p<sup>c</sup>l̄t. ʔl[h]n.
- 18) ʔl[h]n ʔtyḥdw. / [6]
- 19) wnšbw. šdyn. mw<sup>c</sup>d.
- 20) w<sup>ʔ</sup>[m]rw. lš[gr w<sup>c</sup>štr]

<sup>6</sup> In the transcription, a slash (/), followed by a bracketed number, in the upper register [ ] indicates the line divisions, as amended by Caquot-Lemaire. (See note 7). Word-dividers will appear in the transcription only when legible, initially, and will not be inserted in restorations. Translations of biblical passages are the responsibility of this author. A dot above a transcribed letter (x̄) indicates an uncertain, or unclear reading.

The first readable passage in Combination II relates that El built an eternal home, a netherworld. In language reminiscent of the Sheol literature of the Bible and of Mesopotamian myths of the netherworld; we read of kings, of eternal repose, and of the moaning of the dead. Someone unnamed is addressed in the second person and referred to in the third person. He is told that his counsel will no longer be sought, and that his powers no longer function. It is probable that this addressee is none other than Balaam himself. This, then, would provide the link between the Combinations: for interfering in the affairs of the gods, Balaam was consigned to Sheol, and condemned.

This study will be organized in the following manner: Each Combination will be presented in transcription and translation, in a plotted format, designed to place the phrasing in clear perspective, and to position the *lacunae*.<sup>6</sup> Each combination will be followed by a running commentary. The study will then conclude with a discussion of certain major themes relevant to the interpretation of the Deir 'Alla texts.

#### COMBINATION I - Translation.

- 1) [This is the inscrip]tion of [Bala]am [son of Be]or.
- 2) He was a divine seer.
- 3) And the gods came to him at night,
- 4) [And they spoke to] him according to the vision of El,
- 5) And they said to [Bala]am, son of Beor:
- 6) "This will the [                    ] do in the future.
- 7) No man has s[een what you have he]ard,"
- 8) And Balaam arose on the morrow,
- 9) [                    ]? days [                    ].
- 10) And on the [                    ] day [                    ].
- 11) And he truly wept!
- 12) And his people came into him,
- 13) [And they said] to Balaam, son of Beor:
- 14) "Why do you fast? Why do you weep?"
- 15) And he said to them:
- 16) "Be seated, and I will show you what the Sha[dday-gods have done]
- 17) And go, behold the workings of the gods!
- 18) The gods have joined forces,
- 19) And the Shadday-gods have established a council.
- 20) And they have said to Sha[gar-We<sup>c</sup>ishtar]:

<sup>7</sup> The text of lines 8-18 (lines 3-5 in Caquot-Lemaire) have been reconstructed according to the suggestion by Caquot-Lemaire that fragments VIII:d and XII:c belong in this place. Jo Ann Carlton corroborated the location of these fragments, and McCarter also adopted this insertion. Caquot-Lemaire have also adopted a juxtaposition here which yields better sense, but which results in having a total of 17, instead of 19 lines in Combination I.



Line 4: The reading: *kmš* "according to the vision of -" resulted from a suggestion by E. Puech (by oral communication), that the reading: *kml*[y] "according to these words," was difficult. He doubted the *Lamed*, and saw no room on the plaster for an additional letter, before the final *Aleph*. If correct, our reading would eliminate the unique attestation, presumably, of the Aramaistic determined plural affix: -v, in the Deir 'Alla inscriptions.

Line 6 is difficult because of the *lacuna* after the word *yp*<sup>c</sup><sub>l</sub>. Caquot-Lemaire, followed by McCarter, did better than Hoftijzer in translating: "*postérité*" (cf. Hebrew *hāl'āh* "father"). In line 7, prefixed *Lamed* connotes negation, its frequent function in these texts. McCarter's restoration: *šm*<sup>c</sup><sub>t</sub> is persuasive. The sense is that no man has seen the like of what is to happen. This is a frequent hyperbole in biblical literature.<sup>9</sup> The characterization of Balaam as *hzh*, Hebrew *hōzeh*, is significant, since he is never explicitly given that title in the Bible.

Lines 9-17: This section relates what happened after Balaam was visited by the gods. Amid weeping and fasting, he assembles his comrades, and discloses to them what the gods had informed him. McCarter, noting that the *Qoph* of presumed *ṭlqh* (thus Hoftijzer, Caquot-Lemaire) was written oddly, wisely abandoned the idea that a personal name occurred here. Although one would expect: *wy*<sup>c</sup><sub>l</sub> *ṭlwh* *mh* instead of: *wy*<sup>c</sup><sub>l</sub> *mh* *ṭlwh*, this interpretation has the virtue of biblical associations. Num 22:5 mentions Balaam's *amm* "kinsmen."

In line 16, we are to read: *šd*[yn] (McCarter). Just as in lines 18-19 the actors are *šdyn* and *ṭln*, the same is true here. At the end of line 16, I accept McCarter's restoration: [*p*<sup>c</sup><sub>l</sub>]. This is reminiscent of Num. 23:23: *mah pā'al ṭēl* "What El (=God) plans to do."

What does consonantal *šdyn* mean? Given the orthography of the Deir 'Alla inscriptions, there are two possibilities: a) A dual of *šēd* "demon," parallel with *ṭelōhīm* in Deut. 32:17, or b) A pluralized form, previously unattested, of *šadday*, whatever that word means. A preference for the latter is indicated by references to *šadday* in the biblical oracles (Num. 24:4, 16). It is clear, in either case, that inimical beings are intended.<sup>10</sup>

Lines 18-26: This section contains the substance of the communication transmitted by Balaam. A syntactic observation is in place here: Previous treatments have consistently assumed that consonantal *ky* following the words *ḥb* (line 21) and *smr* (line 23) represents the 2nd pronominal suffix, feminine, on the Aramaic model. Hence, one would translate: "With *your* dense cloud," etc. The fact that there are no word-dividers between *ḥb* and *ky*, or *smr* and *ky* does not require us to join *ky* to the letters which precede it. The feminine suffix -*ky* is nowhere else attested in these inscriptions, as preserved. On the other hand, conjunctive *ky* is clearly attested in line 27, where it begins a clause. I prefer, therefore, to see a stylistic pattern:

Line 22: *ky šm ḥšk w<sup>c</sup>l ngh*

the first words in line 48. Because of the poor state of preservation, I doubt if one can draw precise interpretive conclusions from what remains visible of the red ink.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Isa. 64:3, 66:8, and also Deut. 4:32-33, 7:19, 10:21, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Hoftijzer's reference to a pluralized form, *šdyn* in the *Kethib* of Job 19:29 is probably incorrect. The passage is difficult, to start with. Tur-Sinai reads: *šādīn* "acts of de-

Line 24: *ky thby ḥt*

Line 27: *ky ss ḥgr ḥrpt nšr*

As will be shown, this analysis seriously affects the interpretation of line 40.

To return to the contents of this section, *nšhw* in line 19 is better taken as a Pael. There is a sequence of action and result: the gods first join forces, and then convene a council. In line 21, the verb *s-k-r* connotes the shutting off of the wells of the deep in Gen. 8:20. On the interplay of *ḥb* "dense cloud," *ḥšk* "darkness," and *ngh* "brilliance," see II Sam. 22:12-13 // Ps. 18:12-13, Isa. 60:19.

In line 23, both key words are badly preserved. McCarter ingeniously suggests rendering *smr* "bristling light." This fits the context, and the contrasting parallelism of lines 22-23, although this meaning is not actually attested. If correct, the reading *ḥm* suggests Hebrew *ḥlūm* "hidden [deeds]" in Ps. 90:3, and Niphal forms connoting concealment. In line 24, *ḥt* is best taken as "dread" (Gen. 9:2, Job 41:25).<sup>11</sup> The idiom "to instill dread," with the equivalent Hebrew verb *n-t-n* also occurs (Exod. 26:17, 32:23-32, *passim*). In line 26, consonantal *hgh* means: "to utter a sound," rather than: "to remove" (McCarter). That vocable actually means: "to extract," as in Prov. 25:4.<sup>12</sup>

The central problem in this section is identifying the goddess addressed in line 20, and later referred to in line 38. In both places, we can read the first letter of the name as *shin*. Now, the full name is legible in line 51: *šgr w<sup>c</sup>štr*. Methodologically, this should be the cue for any reconstructions in the earlier lines of the inscription. As Hoftijzer notes, this composite divine name evokes the biblical cliché: *šgar ṭālāpēykā we<sup>c</sup>āsterōt šō<sup>c</sup>nekā* "the issue of your herds and the fertility of your flocks" (Deut. 7:13, 28:4, 18, 51, and cf. Exod. 13:12). Hoftijzer calls attention to the Punic personal name: *ḥdšgr* "worshiper of Shagar".<sup>13</sup> This attests the hypostasis of *šgr*. In the

struction," which fits the immediate context. (See Tur-Sinai, N.H., *The Book of Job*, Jerusalem, 1957, 307-308). A pluralized form is possible, of course, probably on the model of plural gentilics in Aramaic. Cf. the *Qere yehūdāyīn* in Dan. 3:12. The hypostasis of *šadday*, whatever it means, is suggested by several biblical theophoric names: *ḥammīy<sup>c</sup>šadday* 1:12, etc.); *šūriy<sup>c</sup>šadday* (Num. 1:6, etc.); and *šedēy<sup>c</sup>ur* Num. 1:5, etc.).

<sup>11</sup> Both McCarter and Carlton read *ḥm*, but interpret this word as *ḥlām*/*ḥlām* "forever," or the like.

<sup>12</sup> In biblical Hebrew, the verb *hāgāh* sometimes conveys an adverse utterance (Isa. 59:3, Ps. 2:1, 38:13, Job 27:4, Prov. 24:2). If this root is related to nominal *hagīg*, a geminate form (Ps. 5:2, 39:4), then a cognate relationship with Akkadian *agāgu* "to be angry" is also possible (See CAD A 1, 139, s.v. *agāgu*).

<sup>13</sup> Hoftijzer (page 273, note 5) cites Benz, F. L. *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*, Rome, 1972, 163. I am indebted to R. Tomback for collating the relevant texts from Carthage. Hoftijzer's reference to a Ugaritic deity *šgr* is, however, uncertain. (See J.-M. de Tarragon, *Le Culte à Ugarit*, Paris, 1980, 172.)



Deuteronomic cliché we observe the de-hypostasis of ʿ*astôret* to yield the more generalized meaning: “fertility,” whereas here we see the hypostasis of ʿ*šqr*. The masculinized form ʿ*štr* is admittedly surprising in a West Semitic inscription, but it is impossible that the male aspect, Moabite ʿ*štr*, Ugaritic ʿ*štr*, etc., is intended, since the terms of reference are clearly feminine. What we have is a goddess whose composite name synthesizes an astral aspect with one of fertility on earth.

*Lines 27-37:* In this section, it is Balaam who is speaking. He now continues his oration by describing what will happen when the heavens are covered by dense clouds. In effect, he interprets the omen, projecting a scene of alarm and disruption. The overall context is established by the words *nḥš wṣrh* “distress and trouble,” in line 30. Eagles and vultures, and birds making shrill sounds, are employed as a motif for dramatizing the devastation to come.

In line 27, it is probable that two birds, *ss* (Hebrew *sūs* or *sīs*) “swift” and ʿ*gr* (Hebrew ʿ*āgūr*) “crane” are intended, despite the absence of conjunctive *waw* (cf. Ps. 38:4). This allows us to take *hrpt* as a plural participle, feminine, Hebrew: *hōrepôt*. These two birds are known for the shrill sounds they make in flight (Isa. 38:14, Jer. 8:7). The *Qal* of *h-r-p* connotes “reviling” in Ps. 119:42, Prov. 27:11, and we have the interplay of *hārap* and ʿ*ānāh* “to respond,” as we have here. The portrayal is actually realistic. Birds shriek at each other, which, in human perception, might mean defiance. The gathering of vultures signals imminent death. This is all a projection of what is to come, not a report on what had already occurred, or is occurring.

Line 29 undoubtedly contained the names of more birds. There is a certain logic in seeking the names of still more birds or animals in line 30, but the fact is that no one had identified birds named *nḥš* or *ṣrh*. The obvious meaning should not be resisted. Lines 31-34 are problematic because of the *lacuna* in line 33, where a verb, parallel in meaning to *y-b-l* occurred, along with something parallel to *rḥln* “ewes.” In any event, we have the parallelism of *mṭh* and *hṭr* “rod, staff.” The form *yḃl* would seem to be conjugated on the Phoenician model (*yiphil*, 3rd masc. sing. imperfect, with stative force).

Hoftijzer was on the right track in speaking of the rod of punishment, known from biblical imagery, but he was perhaps overly theological. Here, the text projects the beating and scattering of herds and flocks as a wrathful act of the gods, as well as the abandonment of grazing areas to wild animals. This is what the omen means.

In line 35, I restore [*y*]hd. The sense of line 36 f. is that wild animals will eat and drink freely where once there was grazing. Consonantal *hpš[y]* yields an adverbial sense, cf. Hebrew *ḥopšiy*.

*Lines 38-56:* Line 38 is best understood as introducing a new theme: Balaam begins his attempt to free Shagar-Weʿishtar from the power of the council. He calls out to the gods. They are *gry š[gr wʿštr]* “the adversaries of Shagar-Weʿishtar.” Nominal *gār*, from the root *g-r-h* is cognate to Akkadian *gērū* (or *gārū*) “enemy,”<sup>14</sup> (Hoftijzer).

In line 40, the verbal form *yghk* has been consistently understood as a reflex of *ghk* “to laugh, mock.” The idea is that a reversal, or overturning of the normal order has occurred, whereby a poor woman (ʿ*nyh*) mocks wise men, just as small birds revile ferocious vultures. I doubt, however, whether there is anything abnormal about small birds shrieking at large ones! The form *yghk* could derive from the verb *l-q-h* (see Combination II, line 31). If one accepts the analysis of the particle *ky* proposed above (see comments to lines 18-26), to the effect that it is not the feminine pronominal suffix, then there is no reason why *yghk* here cannot be rendered: “He/ One shall take you (feminine),” the object being the goddess, Shagar-Weʿishtar, herself. In the effort to free her, Balaam takes the goddess to skilled magical practitioners, a list of which immediately follows: *knhh* “priestess,” *rḥt mr* “a perfumer of myrrh,” and ʿ*nyh* “an oracle.” Here, Hoftijzer’s discussion is most informative. Referring to A. Malamat, he cites Akkadian *āpilu*, feminine *āpiltu*, from the verb *apālu* “to respond,” the semantic equivalent of Hebrew ʿ*ānāh*.<sup>15</sup>

This leaves the term *hkmn*, and further on, the term *hšb*. In Isa. 3:3, *hakam harāšim* “one skilled in incantations,” is parallel to *neḥōn laḥaš* “one expert in spells.” In Exod. 7:11, *hakāmīm* is synonymous with *mekāššepīm* “sorcerers,” and in Gen. 41:8 with *ḥartumīm* “magicians.” (Also cf. Isa. 19:11, and see comments to line 47, below). I maintain the *hšb* (= Hebrew *hōšēb*) also designates a magical practitioner. Perhaps “augurer” is appropriate. The basic connotation would be to calculate omens.<sup>16</sup> The sequence of three may have distributive force. Cf. ʿ*eben wāʿeben*, ʿ*ēypāh wāʿēpāh* “two kinds of weights; two kinds of measures.”

In summary: The goddess is taken to various magical practitioners. In line 42, *nšʿ ʿzr* is the last in the list, translated: “girded warrior.” Consonantal *qrn* is problematic. It could mean “horn,” which suggests the horned crowns in representations of divine figures. It is unlikely, however, that ʿ*zr* means crown, although a relationship to *zēr* “diadem” is possible. The alternative, adopted in the translation, is to take *qrn* as deriving from *q-r-r*, in Hebrew *q-r-r*, and in Aramaic as ʿ*q-r-r*, yielding Deir ʿAlla *q-r-r*. Thus, *qrn* would be a plural participle, masculine. The sense would be: “foes,” (cf. Dan. 4:16).

In line 47 the meaning “deaf persons” for *hršn* is rejected in favor of *harāšim* “incantations” (Isa. 3:3). In later Aramaic texts, *harš-* is a frequent term for “incantation.”<sup>17</sup> In line 50-51 f., we are told, at least implicitly, that Balaam’s efforts were effective. In line 51, prefixed *lamed*, just before the *lacuna*, connotes negation. Shagar-Weʿishtar “did not” do something. Therefore, line 49 refers to the unfortunate effects (*qqn*) of Balaam’s actions on the adversaries of the goddess, and not to anything she, herself, suffered.

As a result of victory over the council of the gods, the devastation that had come over the land was terminated, and salutary conditions restored. This is the force of what has been preserved in lines 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> It may be relevant that Akkadian *šutābulu*, a form of the verb *abālu* “to bring,” means “to think, ponder,” but also: “to mix ingredients, calculate (ominous features).” See *CAD A I* 27, s.v. *abālu* A, meaning no. 10, *šutābulu*.

<sup>17</sup> See Levy, J. *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, Darmstadt, 1963, vol. 2, 119 s.v. *hārāš*, and *haršāʿ*, and cf. Syriac *heraš* and related forms in Brockelmann, K. *Lexicon Syriacum*<sup>2</sup>, Hildesheim, 1966, 259. Possibly cf. Akkadian *harāšu* A, meaning no. 2 in *CAD H* 95.

<sup>14</sup> See *CAD G* 62 f., s.v. *gērū* (substantive).

<sup>15</sup> See Hoftijzer (page 212, and notes 79-82), and *CAD A II* 155 f., s.v. *apālu* A, especially meaning no. 2, and, *ibid.*, 170, s.v. *āpilu*, meaning no. 1. Also see Micah 3:7: *māʿanēh ʿelōhīm* “a divine response.” (Also cf. I Kings 18:24 f., Prov. 16:1).

The wild animals are driven out of the grazing areas by domesticated animals, like the piglet. This is a reversal: in the portrayal of panic and alarm, domesticated animals are scattered. Now, the wild animals are driven out. Consonantal *hqrqt* is the 3rd feminine singular, perfect, of the Haphel. Line 55 preserves only two words: *mšn* <sup>2</sup>*zrn*

## COMBINATION II - Transcription

(The transcription begins with what has been restored as the final word in line 5)

- 1) [ddn] / [6]yrwy. <sup>2</sup>*l*.
- 2) wy<sup>c</sup>bd <sup>2</sup>*l*. byt. <sup>c</sup>lmn.
- 3) by[t ]
- 4) [byt ] /
- 5) <sup>7</sup>byt. ly<sup>c</sup>*l*. hlk.
- 6) wly<sup>c</sup>*l*. htn. šm.
- 7) [byt ? ]
- 8) [ ]
- 9) [ ] / [8] rmh. mn. gđš.
- 10) mn. phzy. bny. <sup>2</sup>š.
- 11) wmn. šqy. [bny <sup>2</sup>dm?]
- 12) [ ] / [9]ly
- 13) hl<sup>c</sup>šh. bk. ly<sup>c</sup>s.
- 14) <sup>2</sup>w lmlkh. lytmlk.
- 15) yšbr [ ]
- 16) [ ] /
- 17) [10][m]n. mškb. mtksn. lbš.
- 18) hd. hn. tšn<sup>2</sup>n.
- 19) y<sup>2</sup>nš. hn. t[ ]
- 20) [ ]
- 21) [ ] / [11] <sup>2</sup>šm
- 22) [rmh] tñt. r<sup>2</sup>šk.
- 23) tškb. mškb. <sup>c</sup>lmyk.
- 24) lhlq. l[ ]
- 25) [ ] /
- 26) [12] <sup>2</sup>d[ ]k [ ]ir kl[ ]h blbbm
- 27) n<sup>2</sup>nh. nqr. blbbh.
- 28) n<sup>2</sup>nh [ ]
- 29) [ ] / [13]bt
- 30) šmh. mlkn. yhzw. [l]b[<sup>c</sup>m?]
- 31) lyš. bm yqh. mwt. <sup>c</sup>l. rhm.
- 32) w<sup>c</sup>l [ ] /
- 33) [14]c[ ] r[ ]i
- 34) šmh kb[ ]h ykñ.
- 35) lbb. nqr. šhh.
- 36) ky. <sup>2</sup>th. l[<sup>c</sup>l]
- 37) [ ] /
- 38) [15]lqsh. š[<sup>2</sup>l ]<sup>2</sup>h
- 39) wzl. mğdr. tš[ ]
- 40) š<sup>2</sup>lt. mlk. ssh.
- 41) wš[<sup>2</sup>]/[t ]
- 42) [ ] / [16] h
- 43) [ ] w [ ] hzn.

(Hebrew *mšneh* <sup>2</sup>*ēzôrîn*), "double belt, two belts," or: "two girded warriors," referring to nš<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>zr "girded warrior," in line 43, above. In line 56, the verb <sup>c</sup>y-n is a denominative from <sup>c</sup>ayin, meaning: "to see," frequent in Ugaritic. The *hapax* <sup>c</sup>ôyēn (*Qere*) in I Sam. 18:9 means: "to regard in an angry, or inimical manner."

## COMBINATION II - Translation

- 1) El [satisfies] himself with lovemaking.
- 2) And El built an eternal home.
- 3) A house [ ].
- 4) [A house ]
- 5) A house where no traveler enters,
- 6) Nor does a bridegroom enter there.
- 7) [A house ]
- 8) [ ]
- 9) [ ] as wormrot from a grassy grave.
- 10) From the reckless affairs of men,
- 11) And from the lustful desires [of people]
- 12) [ ] to me?
- 13) If it is for counsel, no one will consult you!
- 14) Or for his advice, no one will take counsel!
- 15) He breaks ?[ ]
- 16) [ ]
- 17) From the bed, they cover themselves with a wrap.
- 18) One—behold, you hate him! ?
- 19) He will become mortally ill, behold, you [ ]
- 20) [ ]
- 21) [ ] punishment.
- 22) [And wormrot] under you head.
- 23) You shall lie on your eternal bed,
- 24) To pass away to [ ]
- 25) [ ]
- 26) [ ] all [ ] in their heart.
- 27) The corpse moans in his heart!
- 28) He moans [ ]
- 29) [ ] a daughter(?)
- 30) There, kings shall behold Bal[aaam?].
- 31) There is no compassion when Death seizes an infant!
- 32) And an infant [ ]
- 33) An infant [ ]
- 34) There [ ] shall endure.
- 35) The heart of the corpse is desolate,
- 36) As he approaches [Sheol].
- 37) [ ]
- 38) To the edge of She[ol].
- 39) And the shadow of the hedge.
- 40) The quest of a king becomes his "moth,"
- 41) And the quest of [ ]
- 42) [ ]
- 43) [ ] and [ ] seers.

44) *rhq*[*t*] *mk. š<sup>2</sup>ltk.*

45) *lm* [ ]

46) [ ] /

47) [<sup>17</sup>]*ld<sup>c</sup>t. spr. dbr. l<sup>c</sup>m<sup>h</sup>.*

48) [*l. lšn. lk. nšpt.*

49) *wmlqb. ʔmr.*

(The last four lines are too fragmentary for plotting).

#### Commentary, Combination II:

The plotted transcription begins at the end of line 5, according to Hoftijzer's original delineation. There are some comments to be made about lines 3-5, which read as follows:

03) *rn. ʔkl* [

04) *ʔlmh. rwy. ddn. k* [

05) *lh. lm nqr. wmdr. kl. rṭb.* [

The parallelism of ʔ*kl* "to eat," and *rwy* "to be satiated" is attested in Jer. 46:10. The idiom *rwy ddn.* Hebrew *rāwāh dōdīm* "to satisfy one's self with lovemaking" occurs in Prov. 7:18. The first word in line 04 might be ʔ*almāh* "young woman," the object of the lovemaking. The morphology of *rwy* is Aramaic, to be vocalized *rewēy*, and represents either a 3rd perfect masculine singular, or an imperative. In line 1 of the plotted format, *yirwēy* is 3rd masculine singular, imperfect. Both forms are *Qal/Peal*.

In line 05, above, the word *nqr* means "corpse." It is a key word in Combination II, to be discussed in the comments to lines 26-39. The words: *wmdr kl rṭb*, if the reading is correct, might be rendered: "a slope that was all damp." The noun *mdr* relates to Late Aramaic *midrāʔ*, to Late Hebrew *midrōn* meaning "slope," and probably to Akkadian *midru*.<sup>18</sup> This fits in with the descriptions of the grave later on in this combination.

We can now turn to the plotted format.

*Lines 1-11:* In line 2, the term *byt ʔlmn* occurs as *bēyt ʔōlām* in Eccl. 12:5, and frequently in post-biblical Jewish literature, as noted extensively by Hoftijzer.<sup>19</sup> He need not have concluded, however, that a plural, i.e. "cemeteries," was intended. Conceptually, what is plural is ʔ*lmn*, not *byt*. Plural ʔ*lmn* projects more than one ʔōlām, or aeon of time. It spans eternity, all the aeons. This also applies to the plural ʔ*lmyk* "your eternity," in line 23. Hoftijzer notes that this may be the first occurrence on record of the term *byt ʔlmn*.

Stylistically, we have in lines 3-5, and possibly for several more lines, a series of characterizations, each beginning with the word *byt* "a house." Cf. Deut. 8:7-9, where, in a series of similar characterizations of Canaan, each clause begins with the word ʔ*ereš* "land" (also cf. Deut. 11:11-12). In lines 5-6, Hebrew *hēlek* in the sense of "traveler" is a *hapax* in I Sam. 12:4. In line 9, *rmh* "wormrot" is a word often associated with the grave. The meaning of *gdš* (Hebrew *gādīš*) as "grave" was established by Hoftijzer, who noted the parallelism of *gādīš* and *qebārôt* "graves" in Job 21:32, cf., also, Arabic *jadaṭun* "grave".

In lines 10-11 f., I must depart from previous attempts to make sense out of *phzy bny ʔš*, and the incomplete *šqy* [. This couplet describes conditions in the netherworld. Hebrew *paḥaz* means "recklessness, instability", in Gen. 49:4. (Cf. participial *pōhēz* "shiftless" in

44) Your quest has become distant from you!

45) Why [ ]

46) [ ]

47) To know how to deliver an oracle to his people.

48) You have been condemned for what you have said,

49) And banned from pronouncing words of execration.

Jud. 9:4, Zeph. 3:4, as well as abstract *paḥazūt* in Job. 23:32.) Curiously, a synonymous sense is conveyed by *šōqēy hāʔiš* "the lustful desires of men" (Ps. 147:10). Hebrew *šōq-* is to be related to the nominal form *tešūqāh* "desire" (Gen. 3:16, 4:7, Cant. 7:11), from the root *š-w-q*. In the netherworld, one is without human passions.

*Lines 12(or 13)-15:* The plotting is extremely approximate here. It seems that in line 12 or 13 a sub-theme is introduced: The one addressed is told that he has been denied his powers as an advisor (Hoftijzer). The verb *m-l-k* in the Niphal of Late Hebrew, and the Ithpeel of Aramaic means: "to take counsel."<sup>20</sup> As regards line 15, it is not certain whether the sub-theme of the preceding lines continues, or whether the text reverts to its main subject, a description of the netherworld. Consonantal *yšbr* may derive from *š-b-r* "to break, be broken," or, given the sound-shifts attested at Deir ʿAlla, it could derive from *š/s-b-r* "to examine, intend, think, etc" (Neh. 2:13, 15).<sup>21</sup> This would link up with notions of "advice" and "counsel" in the preceding lines.

In line 17, the description of Sheol continues. Here, Caquot-Lemaire elicited better readings. Consonantal *mksn* is taken as a Hithpaal. The best that could be done with Caquot-Lemaire's *mšgb* "fort" is to suggest *mškb* "bed." The *gimel*, in their reading, is uncertain, in any case, and in view of the importance of the "bed," and the verb *š-k-b* "to lie" in this text, this suggestion seemed logical. (See below, in lines 22-23).

In lines 18-19, the suggested translation is, of course, highly conjectural. Consonantal *yʔnš* is related to forms of the verb ʔ*n-š* "to be mortally ill, wounded" in II Sam. 12:5, Jer. 17:9, etc. The *taw* just before the *lacuna* probably represents the 2nd person imperfect preformative of a verbal form. In line 22, the restoration *rmh* "wormrot" is self evident. In line 24, *lhlq* is an infinitival form, with prefixed *Lamed*. It is cognate to Akkadian *ḥalāqu* "to pass away, depart." Cf. Hebrew *ḥalaq* in Hos. 10:2: *ḥālaq libbam* "their heart has departed."<sup>22</sup>

*Lines 26-39:* This section speaks primarily of the corpse, *nqr*. Line 26 is in parallelism with line 27. Caquot-Lemaire correctly relate *nqr* to Hebrew *nešer*, but they identified the wrong vocable! It is not *nēšer* "shoot" (Isa. 11:1, 60:21), but *nēšer* "corpse." Thus, we read in Isa. 14:19: *kenēšer nitʿāb* "like loathsome carrion," which is parallel to *kepeger mubbās* "like a trampled corpse." In this verse, *nēšer* is to be related to post-biblical *nēšel* "putrefying flesh, or blood."<sup>23</sup> It is, after all, the corpse that moans, and is desolate (see below, in line 35 f.).

In lines 27-28, we again have the repetition of the same word for emphasis: *nʔnh* "He moans." At the end of line 30, Caquot-Lemaire

<sup>20</sup> See Levy, J., op cit., vol. 3, 126, s.v. *mālāk*, meaning no. 2.

<sup>21</sup> See Levy, J., ibid., vol. 3, 470, s.v. *sebar*, meaning no. 2.

<sup>22</sup> See CAD H 36, s.v. *ḥalāqu*.

<sup>23</sup> See *The Prophets (Nevi'im)*, Jewish Publication Society of America Philadelphia, 1978, 382, and note *i*, to Isa. 14:19, and Levy, J. op. cit., vol. 3, 430, s.v. *nāšāl*. I am indebted to

<sup>18</sup> See Levy, J., op. cit., vol. 3, 33, s.v. *midrāʔ*, and *midrōn*, and CAD M/2, 48, s.v. *midru* C.

<sup>19</sup> See Ben-Yehudah, E., *Dictionary and Thesaurus of the Hebrew Language* (Hebrew), New York, 1960, vol. 1, 536, s.v. *bayit*.



tentatively read: *bl??*. The writing is hardly legible, and no theory of interpretation regarding Combination II should rest on such tentative, albeit tantalizing possibilities. The case for identifying Balaam as the *nqr* "corpse" can be made independently.

*Lines 31-34:* These lines probably refer to infant mortality. In line 31, the first word is analyzed as: *l + yš* "there is not," cf. Hebrew *lōʾ yēš* in Job 9:37, and Aramaic *lāʾ ʔyṯay*. "Hoftijzer's suggestion that *bm yqh* is equivalent to Hebrew *bemō yiqqah* "while he takes, seizes," is plausible. It appears that we have here a personification of *Mot*, god of death and the netherworld.

*Lines 35-39:* This section speaks of the anguish of the corpse in Sheol. The verb *š-h-y* is a variant of Hebrew *š-ʔ-h* "to lie waste, be desolate" (Isa. 6:11, Nah. 1:5, etc.).<sup>24</sup> On the strength of line 38, where we have: *lgšh š[ʔ]* "to the edge of Sheol," I have restored *l[šʔ]* in line 36, as well. In line 39, the suggestion *mgdr* pictures a fence, or hedge around Sheol. (Cf. Hebrew *gāḏēr*).

*Lines 40-49:* This section returns to the theme, introduced in lines 13-14, of the denial of powers to the one addressed. In line 40, *ssh* could mean: "his horse" (Hoftijzer), but, given the context, perhaps *ssh* can be related to the *hapax sās* "moth," in Isa. 51:8. The sense is that the desires even of kings come to naught with their death. In line 44, *mk* "from you" is a variant of *mnk > mmk*, on the model of the plural, *mikkem*, etc. in Hebrew. In line 47, we have what is the second *stiche* of a couplet. The one addressed is told that he will *not* have the skill to interpret oracles to his people. In context, *dhṛ*, Hebrew *dāḥār* is to be taken technically, as: "oracle" (Jer. 18:18, etc.). The idiom *ʿl lšn* uses the preposition *ʿl* (= *al*) to mean: "on account of" (cf. Jer. 6:19, 9:11, 12, etc. and Amos 1:3, *passim*, Ps. 5:8, 119:36, Job 16:7).

Especially suggestive in identifying the one addressed in Combination II, is line 49. The verb *q-h-h* "to curse," is associated with Balaam (Num. 23:7-8, *passim*).<sup>25</sup> He is also said to be: *šmēʿa ʔimrēy ʔēl* "The hearer of El's (=God's) words" (Num. 24:4, 16).

MAJOR THEMES IN THE DEIR ʿALLA INSCRIPTIONS. Around the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E., or slightly earlier, inhabitants of the Jordan valley knew the identity of Balaam, son of Beor, and made him the subject of preserved writings. Their language shows affinities to both Aramaic and Hebrew. For the first time, Balaam's name occurs in an extra-biblical source of the pre-exilic period of biblical history. What is more, Balaam's activities are portrayed in a style and manner

reminiscent of biblical poetry and historical narrative. Here, some central themes will be explored, in comparative perspective, as a first step toward resolving the complex cultural and historical problems evoked by the Deir ʿAlla inscriptions.

1) *Descriptions of the Netherworld.* The netherworld fashioned by El, and conditions within it, are described in Combination II. These suggest comparison with both biblical and Mesopotamian literature. At Deir ʿAlla, the netherworld is called *byt* (Combination II, line 2 f.). It seems that there were several sequential statements, each beginning with the word *byt*.

In what E. A. Speiser called the "Semitic" version of the myth known as "The Descent of Ishtar," the netherworld is also called *bītu* "house":

To the dark house, the abode of Irka[la],  
To the house which none leave who have entered it,  
To the road from which there is no way back,  
To the house wherein the entrants are bereft of li[ght].

In biblical poetry, Sheol is likewise called a house (Job 30:23):

I know that you will hand me over to death,  
To the house where all mortal men gather (*bēyt mōwʿēd lekol ḥay*).<sup>26</sup>

A similar image is evoked in Isa. 14:18:

All the kings of nations  
Were laid, every one, in honor,  
Each in his own house (*ʔiš bebēytō*)

Combination II suggests still other comparisons with biblical descriptions of Sheol. Consider line 23: *tškb mškb y ʿlmyk* "You shall lie on your eternal bed."

The Hebrew verb *š-k-b*, apart from frequently connoting burial, is especially relevant to descriptions of Sheol. Some of this material was cited by Hoftijzer. In Isa. 57:2, "the righteous dead" rest on their beds (*miškebōtām*). In a prediction of Tyre's downfall, Ezekiel (32:25) refers to the bed (*miškāb*) of the slain.

In line 22, the restoration: *[rmh] tḥt rʔšk* "Wormrot is under your head," is based on Isa. 14:11: *taḥtēykā yuṣṣaʿ rimmāh* "wormrot is to be set as your bed."

<sup>26</sup> See Speiser, E. A., "The Descent of Ishtar," in Pritchard, J. B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3rd ed., Princeton, 1969, 107, lines 3-7. Also see, *ibid.*, 509, col. 1, line 49 f., in the additions to the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, translated by Grayson, A. K., where the same passage occurs.

Prof. S. Iwry, who is currently investigating this subject, for calling my attention to the distinctive usage of *nēšer* in Isa. 14:19.

<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, the verb *š-ʔ-h* may be the derivation of *šēʔōl* "place of desolation," on the model of *karmel*, from *karm-*, and *ʿarāpel*, from the plural stem *ʿarāp-*. See Koehler L., Baumgartner, W. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Leiden, 1958, 935, s.v. *šʔh* I.

<sup>25</sup> The clustering of prepositional elements as in the construction: *w-m-l-q-h* occurs in early Phoenician, and recurs in Late Hebrew. See Levine, B. A., *Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 1962, 4, and 63, note 6.

The notion of eternal repose conveyed by the word ʿ*lm* has already been noted in the comments to line 2. In most of biblical literature, ʿ*ôlām*, plural ʿ*ôlāmîm* refer to the progression of life on earth, not to what occurs after death. And yet, this theme is not entirely absent (Ps. 49:11-12):

For one sees wise men die,  
Together the fool and boorish man perish,  
And leave their wealth to others.  
Their grave is their home forever (*leʿôlām*).<sup>27</sup>

In a mixed metaphor, predicting the sinking of Tyre into the depths of the sea, Ezekiel (26:20) utilized Sheol imagery in a similar way:

Then I will bring you down,  
With those who descend to the pit.  
To the people of time immemorial (ʿ*amm ʿôlām*).

There are further echoes of this theme in Ezek. 27:36, 28:19. In Jer. 51:39 we read of *šenat ʿôlām* "eternal sleep," and in Ps. 143:3 of *mētēy ʿôlām* "the eternal dead." (Also cf. Jonah 2:7, Lament. 3:6).

2) *The Goddess Shagar-Weʿishtar, the Council, and the Omen of Darkness.* Lines 21-36 of Combination I tell what the gods (ʿ*lhn*) revealed to Balaam at night, and then proceed to describe, in Balaam's words, the predictable consequences of the action taken by the council of gods (*mwʿd*). There are actually four "actors" in this mythological plot: a) The gods who visit Balaam, b) The council of gods, consisting of ʿ*lhn* and *šdyn*, c) The goddess Shagar-Weʿishtar, and d) Balaam, himself.

The gods who disclose to Balaam the scheme of the council are friendly, whereas the beings who comprise the council must be seen as inimical. Given what is known of the politics of pantheons and divine councils in the ancient Near East, it is entirely possible that the friendly ʿ*lhn* who forewarn Balaam were also members of the council, or had been at one time, but who, out of concern for the goddess and the land, leaked out the council's plan in advance.

The council has been amply discussed by Hoftijzer and McCarter. The precise identification of the *šdyn*, tentatively translated as: "Shadday-gods," remains elusive.<sup>28</sup> On the

other hand, the omen, itself, is clear enough, when viewed against the background of the extensive omen literature of the ancient Near East, mostly of Mesopotamian provenance. In the collection *Enūma-Anu-Enlil*, taken mostly from Neo-Bab. sources, clouds often play an ominous role, especially, though not exclusively, in the Adad omens, as is only to be expected. The obscuring of the heavens, conveyed by forms of the Akkadian verb *adāru* "to become obscured," is often involved in the calculation of omens. Such darkening, or obscurity, could occur either at night, or during the day. There were, of course, many variables to be considered, such as the position, shape, and color of clouds, as well the date of the month when they were observed. These factors, in turn, had to be correlated with the positions of relevant heavenly bodies at certain times. It is accurate to say, however, that a darkened sky qualified as an evil omen.<sup>29</sup>

The information provided in lines 21-26 of Combination I is what one would find in the protasis of an omen text, i.e., the observable celestial situation. The information provided (read: in lines 27-37) is what one would find in the apodosis, i.e., the interpretation of the omen; what could be predicted on the basis of it. In effect, Balaam interprets the omen for his listeners. The darkened skies mean that a disaster will occur.

The reference to *ngh* (Hebrew *nôgah*) "brilliance" is highly suggestive.<sup>30</sup> There will be no *ngh*! Based on biblical usage, one prefers to envisage a darkened night sky (cf. II Sam. 22:29 // Ps. 18:29, Isa. 4:5, 9:1, 13:10, etc.), and yet, *nôgah*

<sup>29</sup> I am informed that a complete edition of *Enūma-Anu-Enlil* is in preparation. Existing materials are inadequate. See Virolleaud, Ch., *L'Astrologie Chaldéenne*, Paris, 1905-1912, issued in fascicules. Clouds figure prominently in the following Adad omens: Nos. 22, 27, 30, 36, Suppl. nos. 59, 63-68. Illustrative passages are cited and referred to in *CAD A/1* 104, s.v. *adāru* A, meaning 2; *CAD A/2* 229, s.v. *arāmu* meaning 1, d: "to cover the sky, or heavenly body, said of clouds"; *CAD E* 302, s.v. *erpetu* "cloud," and, *ibid.*, 279, s.v. *erēpu* "to become dusky, dark." See the brief discussion in Oppenheim, A. L., *Ancient Mesopotamia*, Chicago, 1964, 225. See also E. Reiner and D. Pingree, *The Venus Tablet of Ammīšadupa*, Urdena Publications, Malibu, 1975.

Perhaps a single, complete omen statement will illustrate the possibilities for comparison: *šum-ma gi g a-dir gi g me u na m. ú š. me ina kur gál. me š* "If the night is obscured, there will be diseases and pestilences in the land" (Adad, no. 35, line 48).

<sup>30</sup> It should be mentioned that in post-biblical Jewish literature, (*kôkab*) *nôgah* serves as the Hebrew name of Venus. See Ginzberg, L., *Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, 1947 - vol. 5, 29, note 80.

<sup>27</sup> In Ps. 49:12 read: *qibrām* "their grave," not *qirbām*, as in the Massoretic text. Cf. the translation in the *New English Bible*.

<sup>28</sup> For some of the problems involved, see Cassuto, M. D. "ʿ*El Šadday*" (Hebrew), in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1955, 290-292.

can also refer to the light of day (Isa. 60:1-3, Amos 5:20). It would be overly pedantic to insist on one or the other interpretation, exclusively. Although the obscuring of the heavens is not an eclipse, technically speaking, there are indications, in the omen literature, that such a celestial situation was associated with eclipses. At the very least, this created anxiety as to whether an eclipse had gone unobserved. There is also the possibility, raised by Hoftijzer, that a flood or rainstorm was predicted.

Leaving open several possibilities as to the realistic import of the omen transmitted by Balaam, the real difficulty lies in the dynamics of the plot. How do we explain why Shagar-We<sup>ʿ</sup>ishtar was ordered to produce this celestial situation? Perhaps there is a clue in the composite name Shagar-We<sup>ʿ</sup>ishtar, itself. The component *šgr* expresses fertility, of the flocks and herds. The component *štr* reflects the astral synthesis of Ishtar-Venus. There surely must be some special significance to the fact that the very goddess associated with astral brilliance is commanded to produce celestial darkness! Presumably, the light of Ishtar would also be obscured by the clouds darkening the heavens.

As is often the case in myth, no reason or cause is provided for the edict of the council, or for the selection of this particular goddess. The only clue is the statement of the council: "And never raise your voice again!" (Combination I, line 26). Perhaps Shagar-We<sup>ʿ</sup>ishtar had offended the gods in some way, and this was their way of punishing her. No background on the status of this goddess at Deir ʿAlla is available. It is likely that she was revered by the inhabitants, and may have been the protectress of the land.

The Deir ʿAlla myth may be understood as a variation on the theme of the Sumero-Akkadian myth known as "The Descent of Ishtar," to which reference has already been made. Ishtar demands entry into the netherworld, for no given reason. She is allowed to enter, but is then incarcerated. Until she is freed by heavenly gods acting on her behalf, all fertility ceases on earth. This seems to be the underlying dynamic of the Deir ʿAlla myth, as well. Just as the incarceration of the fertility goddess is a way of explaining the absence of fertility, the blotting out of heavenly light is a way of explaining a natural disaster. The protective goddess of the Jordan Valley peoples, who shines in heaven and guarantees the increment of their flocks and herds, is coerced into producing a situation which bodes disaster for the land.

What is Balaam's role? He attempts to reverse the situation brought about by the council, by means of their edict. He uses his craft to extricate the goddess from her subser-

vience to the power of the council. By restoring her to her position as guardian of the land, Balaam is acting to terminate the disaster. Should he fail, suffering would continue.

The praxis seems to be of a mixed kind, combining the craft of the *āšipu*, who exorcizes demons, pronounces curses, and fortifies his clients by prophylactic and apotropaic means, with that of the *bārû*, who interprets omens, and makes divinatory predictions. In the magical literature of Mesopotamia, these two functionaries are usually considered distinct from each other, but in the variegated culture of Deir ʿAlla we should not be surprised to see them enmeshed. Thus, Balaam consults a priestess and a perfumer, as well as pronouncers of spells and powerful warriors, in his effort to save the goddess; but he also transmits omens. The functioning of the biblical Balaam is actually not too different.

The biblical traditions are, of course, the work of Israelite writers, who convey their negative view of divination. At Deir ʿAlla we perceive the arts of the diviner through the eyes of those who take omens seriously. There are still other differences. In the biblical traditions, divine power is providential toward the would-be targets of Balaam's power, the Israelites. At Deir ʿAlla, Balaam acts to protect his people against divine powers which are destructive. In the biblical tradition, Balaam is powerless to oppose Yahweh's edicts, whereas at Deir ʿAlla, he attempts to contravene the edict of the gods. All that the gods could do was to punish Balaam, after the fact. Thus, the biblical tradition epitomizes Yahweh's supremacy, and Balaam's use of divination is ineffectual (Num. 24:1). Of interest is the fact that both the early biblical traditions and the Deir ʿAlla inscriptions assume a laudatory view of Balaam.

Perhaps it is the theme of celestial darkness which links the diction of the Deir ʿAlla texts most dramatically to biblical literature, especially as it combines with descriptions of panic and desolation on earth. There are two biblical passages that so closely parallel the diction of Deir ʿAlla that they require no commentary. Hoftijzer referred to particulars expressed in them, and, in a more general way, observed that biblical predictions of divine punishment were relevant to an understanding of the Deir ʿAlla myth. Consider the following:

a) *Zeph. 1:14-17* (with deletions):

The great day of the Lord is approaching...

That day shall be a day of wrath,

A day of trouble and distress (*šārāh umešūqāh*)....

A day of darkness and deep gloom (*hōšek waʿapēlāh*),

A day of dense clouds (*ʿānān waʿarāpel*),

A day of hornblasts and alarms -

b) *Ezekiel 32:3-8* (with deletions):

Thus said the Lord, God:  
 I will cast my net over you . . .  
 I will cause all the birds of the sky to settle upon you.  
 I will cause the beasts of all the earth to batten on you.  
 I will cover the sky, and darken its stars;  
 I will cover the sun with clouds,  
 And the moon shall not give its light.  
 All the lights that shine in the sky, I will darken above you;

And I will bring darkness upon your land . . .<sup>31</sup>

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