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DEIR 'ALLA: STORIES OF
THE PLASTER PROPHET

by

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Discovery:

When the major publication of the Deir 'Alla plaster texts (DAPT) appeared in 1976, the level in which the DAPT was found (Phase M or Phase IX) was not fully excavated.¹ The thoughtful survey of the archaeological context by Franken could but conclude a date roughly within the Iron Age II.² At that time, it was not a large urban center and the cultural identity of its inhabitants eluded the excavators, aside from noting a heterogeneous mix of Levantine IA, non-wheel made pottery traditions.³ Further excavation confirmed a small agricultural community that was involved, seasonally, in textiles.⁴ Destruction of this stratum is oft attributed to an earthquake.⁵ Amos' earthquake has been suggested, which is dated a little late for Deir 'Alla at 780~760 BC.⁶

The amount of activity during the first five years (1967-1972) of the DAPT's life, after lying motionless in the ground for more than two and one-half millennia, is remarkable. Franken records the costly effort of his team and the ZWO in documenting and preserving the texts,

¹J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976).

²At the time, only one radiocarbon date had come from Phase IX, showing 800 BC \pm 70 years. H. J. Franken, "Archaeological Evidence Relating to the Interpretation of the Text," in *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, vol. 19, Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 16, fn. 2.

³That is, the forms were known from various locations on either side of the Jordan.

⁴M. M. Ibrahim and G. van der Kooij, "The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX," in *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 22-23.

⁵Meindert Dijkstra, "Response to Lectures of Prof. E. Puech and Dr. G. Van Der Kooij," in *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 267.

⁶Certainty, of course, is not possible in "this earthquake-rich region." Ibrahim and Kooij, "The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX," 28.

which required transporting them two thousand miles to Leiden and back.⁷ Nowadays, from its current home in the Jordan Archaeological Museum, the DAPT is but an hour's drive to the tell at the mouth of the Jabbok, and the text rest a little easier. Meanwhile, the academy has been restless.

Epigraphy and Date:

The archaeologists involved with the excavation have since dated the stratum of the DAPT to 800 BC \pm 50 years by radiocarbon dating and by relative ceramic dating.⁸ The epigraphic dating is complicated by the dearth of ink writing on plaster, but Kooij notes the presence of the triple-barred *het*, which dies out between 750-720 BC, and the early appearance of the *zayin* and *kaph* forms in the DAPT and the Zakkur inscription, dated to opening of the eighth century.⁹ Thus, the rough dating of the script converges with the archaeological conclusions mentioned above.

Propinquitous examples of plastered writing include those from Kuntillet Ajrud, dated by Meshel to the end of the ninth century BC.¹⁰ Three points of comparison with the DAPT should be helpful. First, several of these inscriptions are certainly religious in nature (irrespective of their debated cultic usages). Second, it is noteworthy that in one we find, "Blessed be Baal on the day of war // for the name of El on the day of war," which corroborates with one of the

⁷H. J. Franken, "Deir 'Alla Revisited," in *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 7f.

⁸Ibrahim and Kooij, "The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX," 28; Monique M. E. Vilders, "The Stratigraphy and the Pottery of Phase M at Deir Alla and the Date of the Plaster Texts," *Levant* 24 (1992): 198.

⁹These are but two examples out of the handful he mentions for the *terminus post/ante quem*. G. van der Kooij, "Book and Script at Deir 'Alla," in *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 256f.

¹⁰Zeev Meshel, "Kuntillet 'Ajrud," ed. Eric M. Meyers, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 310–312; Ibrahim and Kooij, "The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX," 24. Furthering their connection, some storage jars in Kuntillet Ajrud's inscription's stratum are parallel to those in DA's Phase IX (Ibrahim and Kooij, 1991, pg. 24).

DAPT's (and the Bible's) fundamental literary devices, parallelism. Third, at Kuntillet Ajrud a Phoenician script was partly used to write the Hebrew language.¹¹

While these inscriptions do not approach the DAPT in length or in literary quality, they are, however, important to keep in mind as we note their cultural milieu. This region was learning how to flex their skills of literary presentation after the retreat of the Late Bronze Age powers and the solidification of local polities. Not surprisingly, both inscriptions address religious concerns that feature indigenous deities and customs.¹² I believe that the scholarly disagreements in the areas of language and script development in the DAPT are symptomatic of this era when Semitic national scripts were still in various, early, and complex stages of development.

The scribe of the DAPT likely used a brush pen cut from a rush (a variety of *junctus maritimus*) growing on the banks of the Jordan.¹³ The fabric of this pen and the plastered writing surface allowed for a semi-cursive stroke to be applied, holding the pen at a near-perpendicular angle. The rarity of inscriptions of this type has made the identification of the technique and typology of the DAPT ductus/epigraphy complicated but extremely informative.

The creator(s) of the DAPT affixed a tempered and brushed plaster onto a wet clay surface that may or may not have been applied directly to the western wall (B/C 5.36) of room EE335.¹⁴ We know that the scribe applied the ink upon the plaster while it was in a vertical

¹¹Although, Mastin details the on-going discussion as to exact identification of the script (Hebrew or Phoenician or ?). The tenor of his conclusions is that the plaster inscriptions were made in an age of the "emerging Hebrew alphabet," a phrase he quotes from Zevit. B. A. Mastin, "The Inscriptions Written on Plaster at Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 1 (January 2009): 100f.

¹²The familiar Levantine deities El, Baal, Yahweh, and Asherah seem to preside over the seer (DAPT) and blessing (Kuntillet Ajrud). The biblical examples of writing upon a plastered surface in Dt. 27:2-4 and Josh. 8:30ff are also relevant.

¹³G. van der Kooij, "The Writing Instrument," in *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, vol. 19, *Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 34-35.

¹⁴Kooij, "Book and Script," 241.

position, because there are a number of ink “dribbles” that fell onto the surface in a consistent, downward direction. These were made during the application of the red (iron oxide) dividing lines which appear to have been applied with a string, as was done for Egyptian ruling lines.¹⁵ Indeed, a striking parallel can be made with the Egyptian scribal traditions which produced papyri with red ink in order to introduce sections or add emphasis, as is the case in the DAPT.¹⁶ The red lines on the DAPT apportioned the space for the text in such a manner that has led Millard to write, “This text... was clearly copied from a book, and the writing on the plaster reproduces a column of a (papyrus or leather) scroll.”¹⁷

Concerning the script of the DAPT, I agree with Hackett’s analysis that the Amman Citadel Inscription (ACI) is the closest parallel we have.¹⁸ She is impressed with this “local variant” over against the Aramaic cursive series.¹⁹ In particular, the forms of the *tsade* and *tet* have forms that are peculiar to the DAPT and the ACI (see Appendix B). Since the ACI is a lapidary text, the resemblance of the texts is all the more striking. Another noteworthy feature of the DAPT (and ACI) script is the closed forms of the *bet* and *ayin*. We do find closed forms in some northern Levantine Old Aramaic inscriptions (Zakkur, Sefire, Bar-rakib, Hadad), but evaluated with other inked, cursive texts (on various ostraca), this form is not otherwise used. Hackett proposes that the archaic features point to an early date of divergence from mainline

¹⁵G. van der Kooij, “The Plaster and Other Material Used,” in *Aramaic Texts from Deir ‘Alla*, ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, vol. 19, Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 24–25.

¹⁶The Chester Beatty “Dream Book” uses red hieratic letters to preface certain dreams with the word “bad.” Perhaps, it is a bit ironic when compared with Balaam’s frightening night-time prophecy. In Appendix A I have included a clip of the concluding portion of the dream manual. Robert K. Ritner, “Dream Oracles,” in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 52.

¹⁷That is not to say it is the *only* reason. A. R. Millard, “Writing Materials (Old Testament),” ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press, 1990), 735.

¹⁸Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), chap. Script.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 13f.

Aramaic, making the DAPT “our earliest example of the same script which is used for several Ammonite inscriptions.”²⁰ Given the complexities of the script in general, it is comforting to recognize this relationship with a script tradition so close in time and space.

Deir ‘Alla, Combination I:²¹

The translation of Combination I is a balancing act. This is due to the fact that it has many lacunae and obscure lexemes. On the one hand, the translator attempts to produce a coherent and unified narrative. On the other, one attempts to refrain from conjecture. As in any hermeneutical task, a guiding principle is that the obscure sections of a text should be clarified by the clearer sections. The list of birds (I.8f) is a good example which puts the translators’ creativity *and* restraint to the test.

I have attempted to group the text below into meaningful units in order to aid the appraisal of the narrative. Let the reader be forewarned that the indented structure aims to portray subordinate clauses *and* highlight parallelistic patterns. Therefore, an element of subjectivity may be noticed in the structure.

Transliteration ²² and Translation. ²³	Conjugations:
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²⁰Ibid., 18.

²¹The assumption that Combination II follows Combination I is based largely on two observations. First, Combination I was found further from the wall/stela upon which it was applied. Whether it was during a human conflagration or earthquake that caused the toppling of this structure, this would be an expected result. Second, the plaster was applied in differently, thinner and slightly curved near the extremities. However, it is hard to discount the possibility, entirely, that the inscription had two (or more) columns of a scroll, which would create other scenarios, as Lemaire suggested: André Lemaire, “Les Inscriptions De Deir ‘Alla Et La Littérature Araméenne Antique,” *Comptes-rendus Des Séances De l’Académie Des Inscriptions Et Belles-Lettres* 129, no. 2 (1985): 274.

²²Here, I follow the transcription and “critical apparatus” of Schwiderski (2004) for the DAPT, except where indicated. I have added notices of word dividers (curiously absent from Schwiderski 2004). I defer, sometimes, to those who have had the benefit of personal inspection-by far the best arbiter of divergent readings. In a real sense, each of the characters of DAPT have been reconstructed; so the indication of reconstruction (here, a strikethrough) is reserved for more extreme cases. Weippert’s format has been followed for characters written in red and “are indicated by small capitals.” M. Weippert, “The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla and the Study of the Old Testament,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 153f; Dirk Schwiderski, *Die Alt- Und Reichsaramaischen Inschriften: Texte Und Bibliographie*, vol. 2, *Fontes Et Subsidia Ad Bibliam Pertinentes* 2 (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 187f.

Introduction/Book Title	
¹ [ZNH.] ²⁴ SPR[. B]LM. B[R B ²⁵]R. ²⁵ Š. ḤZH. ¹ LHN[.] h ²⁶ [.] ²⁶	
[This] is the Book of [Ba]laam ²⁷ so[n of B]eor, who is a divine seer.	
Vision and Warning	
wy ²⁸ tw. ¹ lwh. ²⁸ lhn. blylh[. wy ²⁹ mrw. l]h. ² kmś ²⁹ . ¹ l. wy ²⁹ mrw. ḥb[l ²⁹]m. br b ²⁹ r. kh. ²⁹ YP ²⁹ L. [?]G ²⁹ . ¹ HR ²⁹ H. ¹ Š. LRTBT ²⁹ H. YP ²⁹ T[.]	wy ²⁸ tw – (אתי) waw + G pret 3mp wy ²⁹ mrw – (אמר) waw + G pret 3mp wy ²⁹ mrw – (אמר) waw + G pret 3mp YP ²⁹ L – (פעל) G impf 3ms LRTBT ²⁹ H – (רטב) לא + G pf 3fs + PP 3ms
The gods came to him ³⁰ in the night [and spoke to] him according to the vision of El. And they spoke to Ba[la]am son of Beor like this, “? is to act after this, who has not dampened the blaze!” ³¹	

²³Some effort has been made to divide the sections of the narrative into proper literary divisions.

²⁴Otherwise substitute *ysr* for *znh*. The nature of reconstruction dictates that in various places numerous possibilities exist. The best single source for likely substitutions is the apparatus in Schwiderski, *ARIA I*, 2:187f.

²⁵This *resh* begins a collection of fragments that were initially understood to be two lines higher than major body of text in Combination I. This downshift is the most significant change agreed upon for the DAPT and was initially suggested by Caquot and Lemaire (1977). It was acknowledged by Kooij (1991), who explained that the authors of the *editio princeps* were mindful of this possibility yet were also mindful not to “impose interpretations,” unnecessarily. Such *modus operandi* is to be imitated. A. Caquot and A. Lemaire, “Les Textes Arameennes De Deir ‘Alla,” *Syria* 54 (1977): 189–208; Kooij, “Book and Script,” 245.

²⁶Hoftijzer understands this to be a *casus pendens* followed by a “*waw apodasis*.” Hackett, however, argues that the red ink should not unnecessarily break a meaningful clause (citing Hamilton and his affirmers: Cross, Fitzmeyer, Naveh, Levine, and Greenfield). I am amiable to either interpretation. J. Hoftijzer, G. van der Kooij, and J. Hoftijzer, eds., “Interpretation and Grammar,” in *Aramaic Texts from Deir ‘Alla*, vol. 19, Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1976), 185; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 30, fn 1.

²⁷HALOT - meaning “He has brought the people” (יבל + עם) or perhaps, “People of Bel/Baal” (בל + עם).

²⁸This word is written above the line, beginning at the word divider where it should be inserted. After the word, the scribe put a word divider. This is notable, since it has no function here besides adhering to convention. The same is true of a similar error in Combination II.9.

²⁹Hoftijzer notes parallel uses of *kh* in Assur Ostracon 1.8, I Sam. 25:6, and Jer. 9:2 to introduce speech. Hoftijzer, van der Kooij, and Hoftijzer, “Interpretation and Grammar,” 186.

³⁰Cf. *bʿl* in Gen. 20:3, 31:24, Ex. 19:9, 20:24, Nu. 22:20, etc. Ibid., 185.

³¹DNWSI - yp² – noun “blaze.” Perhaps, there is a play on words with Balaam’s patronymic בער, which has fiery connotations in the root (see HALOT בער). The meaning and reading of the phrase is uncertain. I have striven for an appropriately “foreboding” reading, less enigmatic than Lipinski’s “His pledger approached to pierce; the fire approached his hut,” or Schmitz’ “He who shall experience what you have heard, will be made without his excrement(!).” Edward Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 57 (Leuven/Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1994), 116; Philip C. Schmitz, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Text: Combination One, Line Two,” in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, vol. 25 (Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1994), 84.

Balaam's Response	
³ wyqm. bl'm. mn. mh̄. ʔph. yd. [--]l. ymn. w[sm. ysm.] ḥd̄h. wlyk̄l. ʔmn. wbk ⁴ h. ybkh. wy ⁴ l. ʔmh. ʔlwh. wy[⁵ mrw.] lbl'm. br b'r. lm. t̄sm[. wl]m̄[.] tbkh. wy ⁵ mr. lhm. šbw. ʔh̄wkm. mh. šd[yn.] q̄w[⁴ w.] wlkw. r̄w. p̄lt. ʔlhn. ³²	wyqm – (קום) waw + G pret 3ms wlyk̄l – (יכל) waw + לא + G impf wbk̄h – (בכי) waw + G inf abs ³³ ybkh – (בכי) G pf 3ms wy ⁴ l – (עלי) waw + G pret 3ms t̄sm – (צום) G impf 2ms tbkh – (בכי) G impf 2ms wy ⁵ mr – (אמר) waw + G pret 3ms šbw – (ישב) G imptv 3mp ʔh̄wkm – (חוי) G impf 1cs + PP 2mp wlkw – (וילך/ה) waw + G imptv 3mp r̄w – (ראי) G imptv 3mp
Balaam rose in the morning, (hand of healing?) ... for days. [He surely fasted] within his chamber and was not able (to leave?). He surely wept. and his people came up to him. They [said] to Balaam son of Beor, “Why do you fast? [And wh]y do you weep?” And he said to them, “Sit, I will recount for you what the Shadda[i-gods] ³⁴ in[voked] Come, observe the deeds of the gods. ³⁵	wy ⁵ mr – (אמר) waw + G pret 3ms šbw – (ישב) G imptv 3mp ʔh̄wkm – (חוי) G impf 1cs + PP 2mp wlkw – (וילך/ה) waw + G imptv 3mp r̄w – (ראי) G imptv 3mp
Report of Oracle and Accusation	
ʔl[h]n. ʔtyḥdw. ⁶ wnšbw. šdyn. mw ^d . ³⁶ w ⁵ mrw. lš[m]š. ³⁷ tpr ³⁸ y. skry. šmyn. b ⁴ bky.	ʔtyḥdw – (יחד) tG/'Itpe'el pf 3mp ⁴⁴ wnšbw – (נצב) waw + N pf 3mp

³²Cf. לְכֹן וְרָאוּ מַפְעֵלוֹת אֱלֹהִים in Ps. 66:5 (Nu. 23:23!), as noted in P.K. McCarter, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Texts,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 96.

³³Cognate Accusative. Note the long form with *heh* of the inf. abs., perfect, and imperfect in this line.

³⁴The ending, preserved in line 6, provides a plural gentile ending. Levine comments that the biblical title for Yahweh is also a gentile meaning, “one of the mountain.” Clearly this is a sacred mountain. See Hackett, Hoftijzer for discussion of the term “Shaddai,” Hoftijzer, van der Kooij, and Hoftijzer, “Interpretation and Grammar,” 275–277; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 85–89.

³⁵The Numbers account of Balaam is also characterized by doubled imperatives, cf. 22:11, 17, 20; 23:7, 18.

³⁶cf. Is. 14:13, Ps. 82, and for mortal conspirators in Lam. 1:15, “קרא עלי מועד.”

³⁷I cannot find a sufficient trace of Schwiderski's reconstructed *shin* (repositioned fragment?). This reading tends to make gender agreement overly problematic, so I will use “Shagar” which is attested later in the DAPT.

<p>šm. ḥšk. w^l. n⁷gh. ʿtm. w^l. škrky.³⁹ thby. ḥt- [b^c]b. ḥšk. w^l. thgy. ʿd. ʿlm. ky. ss^cgr. ḥr⁸pt. nšr.⁴⁰ wq[l/n.] rhmn. y^cnh. ḥ[s]d[h. w]bny. nḥs. wšrh.⁴¹ ʾprhy. ʾnph. drr- nšrt.⁹ ywn. wšpr[. ʿp. ḥšm]yn.⁴² w[gzl?] ʿ[p. mn?]. mṭh. b)šr. rhln. yybl. ḥtr. ʾrnb. ʾklw.¹⁰ [ʾ?]ḥb.⁴³ ḥpš. [mn.]nzyt. ʾt[rwy. ---]ḥ. štyw. ḥmr. wqb^cn.</p>	<p>w^lmrw – (אמר) waw + G pf 3mp tpry – (פרר/תפר)⁴⁵ G imptv 2fs skry – (סכר) G imptv 2fs šm – (שים) G pf 3fs thby – (יהב) G impf/juss 2fs thgy – (יגה)⁴⁶ G juss 2fs hrpt – (חרפ) D pf 3fs y^cnh – (ענה) G impf 3ms wšrh – (סרה) waw + G pf 3ms (collective/3fp?) nšrt – (נשר) G pf 3ms yybl – (ו/יבל) D impf 3ms ʾklw – (אכל) G pf 3mp štyw – (שתי) G pf 3mp⁴⁷</p>
<p>The go[d]s gathered together and the Shaddai-gods set up a council. They said to Sha[gar,] “Sew up,⁴⁸ close off the heavens with her cloud. Establish darkness and not light. ? and not your closure, Give terror [in the cl]oud of darkness, and do not speak ever again.”⁴⁹ For the swift⁵⁰ has given offense to the eagle, and the cr[y] of the vultures calls out.</p>	

³⁸A break in the plaster makes this a disputable reading (*qoph/resh*).

⁴⁴For discussion of the form see Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, 125.

³⁹The first *kaph* is reconstructed contra Schwiderski (2004), but it does preserve a stroke coming up from the left side of the main vertical stroke, not a downward stroke, which would create the second swoop of the *mem*.

⁴⁰The syntax of the following clauses breaks from the norm (for dramatic effect?) to S-V-O.

⁴¹Unless we call for a scribal error, the *resh* in this word is a secure reading (i.e. – not *dalet*, which produces the translation “owl”). McCarter suggests the root *srh* here: P.K. McCarter, “The Balaam Texts from Deir ‘Alla: The First Combination,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 239 (1980): 55.

⁴²The restoration is by Puech, quoted from Baruch A. Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 143, fn. 14. However, I have substituted the *bet* for a *heh* due to the prevalence (38 times) of the latter in BH and none of the former in this collocation. In the Bible, this phrase most commonly refers to scavengers, and thus the defilement of carrion.

⁴³The *het* in this word (otherwise read as *shin* and *aleph*) is preferable. An *aleph* would press through to the left side of the preserved diagonal stroke and a *shin* has only one thin stroke leading to the right of the preserved diagonal stroke, and yet neither of these is true of this letter. From this, “grain” is one of the possibilities, attested in Syriac. See “*ḥd” at Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon”, n.d., <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/>.

⁴⁵See discussion in DNWSI – *pr*₁ – for various roots and definitions (“cover,” “sew,” “break,” etc.).

⁴⁶DNWSI – *ygh* – various interpretations (related to *ngd*?). It was suggested to Lipiński that it be related to the Arabic root *whg*, “to glow.” Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, 130.

⁴⁷Note the preservation of the *yod*.

<p>The sto[rk and the y]oung hawks have torn up the chicks of the heron. The swallow ripped up the dove and the fowl.⁵¹ [Birds of the sk]ies and ... outspread⁵² (wings).⁵³ Instead of ewes, the staff is driven, The hares eat the grain. The seeker?⁵⁴ is dr[unken as from] a fermentation jug.⁵⁵ [?] asses and hyenas have drunk wine.”</p>	
<p>Call for Response</p>	
<p>šm^w. mwsr[.] gry. š¹¹[l. ʔlpw?]⁵⁶ ḥbšn. ⁵⁷ hlkw. bt[n. ⁵⁸ ʕl- ḥkmn. yqḥk. w^{nyh}. rqḥt. mr- wknh. ¹² [ltš]kt[.] w[t]pṭh. lhl. ḥ[ḥwmh...⁵⁹ w]lnš^j. ʔzr. qrn. ḥšb. ḥšb. wḥšb. ḥ¹³ [šb]t.</p>	<p>šm^w – (שמע) G imptv 2mp hlkw – (הלך) C imptv 2mp yqḥk – (לקח) G juss 3ms [ltš]kt – (שכת)⁶⁰ w[t]pṭh – (פתח) waw + G juss 3ms lnš^j – (נשא) G part ms ḥšb – (חשב)</p>
<p>Hear this admonition, prosecutors of Sh... Bring the crowds with[in, t]o the wise men.⁶¹ May he acquire you and the (female) oracle. The perfumer of myrrh and the priestess [will not be sil]ent.</p>	

⁴⁸Levine's fn. 12 says, "It is appropriate to speak of sewing up the heavens, since they are depicted as a tent flap (Ps 104:2). The verb *skr* "to close up, dam" is employed in Gen 8:2 to describe the shutting of the wells of the deep after the Flood." Levine, "COS 2.27," 140.

⁴⁹The direct speech to Shagar/Shamash has likely concluded here. The following section is clearly characterized by wildness and is topsy-turvy. It is unclear if that is an outcome of the foreboding oracle or if this is a prophetic *indictment* of inappropriate behavior, using a prophetic standby (graphic analogy). I suggest the latter.

⁵⁰It is tempting to read bird names, exclusively, in this section. But the verbal forms, while not problem free, are more convincing. Also, I have made use of a helpful chart to research biblical birds in Jehuda Feliks, "Animals of the Bible and Talmud," ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit, MI: Macmillan and Keter Publishing, 2007), 166.

⁵¹For discussion on the term *spr* (although as a Phoenician lexeme) see Paul G. Mosca, "For the Birds: The Terms Šsp and Hzt in the Marseilles Tarif (line 11)," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 33 (2001): 405. Further clarity eludes me.

⁵²cf. HALOT – מָטָה – In Is. 8:8 we have, "its outspread wings" = מָטָה כְּנָפָיו, a metaphor of a river flood.

⁵³Lipinski's restoration, which Schwiderski follows, gives, "the young pigeon (puts) the birds (to flight)." I follow McCarter (1980), Hackett (1984), and Weippert (1991) in leaving this one "for the birds" and untranslated.

⁵⁴DNWSI - ḥbš_{1,2} – discussion and various translations; cf. also ḥpš₁.

⁵⁵See "nzyt" in Kaufman, "CAL Online."

⁵⁶Schwiderski follows Lipinski's reconstruction using fragment vii (a) to provide the *ayin*, as far as I can tell. I have difficulty being confident with this level of conjecture.

⁵⁷DNWSI - ḥbš₃ – meaning not certain.

⁵⁸I have restored a *nun* here, in keeping with the concern for spatial relationships with the DAPT. The lexeme בִּטְן is used in the Amman Citadel Inscription in this architectural sense.

⁵⁹All text before the ellipses in lines 12 and 13 is less firm in its placement. Although it makes some sense here, 12 and 13 may need a few more characters at their start. The source is a collection from the fragment group "v", mainly v(c) and v(d). See the fifth fold-out plate in Hoftijzer and van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*.

⁶⁰Kaufman, "CAL Online." Syriac, with numerous attestations.

⁶¹Levine writes, "In Gen 41:8, *ḥakāmîm* is listed alongside *mekāššepîm* "sorcerers" and in Ex. 7:11 with *ḥarṭūmîm* "magicians." Levine, "COS 2.27," 143, n. 18.

But may [you] open as a rampart ⁶² in [the wall... and] as one bearing an offering ⁶³ in a horn. The considerer considered , then she con[sider]ed the considerer! ⁶⁴	G pf 3ms h[šb]t – (חשב) G pf 3fs
Aftermath? ⁶⁵	
tpgr[...] wšm ^w . hršn[.] mn. rḥq ¹⁴ [n. w]ṭntq. m[n... w]skl. hzw. qqn. šgr. wštr. l ¹⁵ [-----]m. ʾ [... ...]- nmr. ḥnys. hqrqt. bn ¹⁶ [y.h]mšn. ʾbdn. w ^{yn} .	tpgr – (פגר) G pf 3fs wšm ^w – (שמע) waw + G pf 3mp [w]ṭntq – (נתק) [waw +] ʾtpeʿel pf 3ms hzw – (חזי) G pf 3mp hqrqt – (קרק) C pf 3f?s w ^{yn} – (עין) waw + G pf 3ms
she will faint ... ⁶⁶ The deaf heard from af[ar. ⁶⁷ and ?] are removed fr[om...] The fools/all saw the troubles of Shagar-and-Ishtar ? ⁶⁸ ... people... ... leopard [was chased out?]. The boar/sow ⁶⁹ is chased out (by/with) the you[ng of... ... fi]fty servants. And he watched ...”	

⁶²Cf. the prophetic use of architecture in Lam. 2:8c, “וַיֹּאבֶל־חֵל וְחֻמָּה יַחַדָּו אֲמָלְלוּ: He (God) caused the rampart and wall to lament; Together, they withered away.” The restoration of “wall” here is my own and conforms with the typical manner in which it is paired with “rampart.” I have not seen this interpretation elsewhere.

⁶³Levine takes “²zr as a cognate of Ug. *uzr* “offering.” The precise sense remains uncertain.” Levine, “COS 2.27,” 143, fn. 20. It is easy to imagine various cultic rites including horns. One analogy would be a Hittite ritual aimed at containing harmful words that reads, “Then they pour it (magical ingredients) into the horn of an ox. The two sacrificers seal it up...”. Albrecht Goetze, “Hittite Rituals, Incantations, and Festivals: Ritual Against Domestic Quarrel,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 351.

⁶⁴The possibilities here are myriad. My translation aims for a more proverbial statement which serves to conclude the “Call for Response” by providing a positive motivation.

⁶⁵This section is too fragmentary for any extended functional analysis. Since I can make sense of the “considerer” phrase as an *in clusio*, paralleling “Hear this admonition,” I have separated it.

⁶⁶See discussion in HALOT – פָּגַר and פָּגַר .

⁶⁷Dijkstra noted a good parallel, Is. 42:18 (and 29:18, 33:13), “הַחֲרָשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ וְהָעֹרִים הִבִּיטוּ לְרֹאשֹׁתָּ:”. Meindert Dijkstra, “Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 55.

⁶⁸While a negated clause is possible, any reconstruction would be too conjectural.

⁶⁹Although consistently rendered “piglet,” in RS 94.2050+ we have the Ugaritic cognate (HALOT – חֲזִיר - gives *ḥnzt*) listed as a personal name. Unless it is an odd pet-name, I believe “boar” serves as a better translation. Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 274.

To what extent Combination II follows the narrative is not a primary concern in this paper, but some basic observations should be made. First, the writing material, script, and grammar indicate the same hand and language was used. From this we can at least propose that the story is within the same cultural continuum. Next, scholars, such as Dijkstra, are able to make some contiguous sense of the narratives when joined.⁷⁰ Finally, Combination II holds possible illumination of contextual religious studies regarding El, the underworld (“house of forever”), and how these might be used in the prophecy of the region (cf. Ezk. 37, Is. 38:18 (Ps. 6:5), I Sam. 28).

Dialect:

The dialect of the DAPT presents one of the more persistent questions in the academic discussion. I would agree with Hackett, “the classification of the Deir ‘Alla inscription can become a matter of definitions,” who spoke in 1980 better than she knew. Rendsberg would later write an argument that classified the DAPT as within the “IH umbrella” essentially by equating IH (Israelite Hebrew) lexemes and morphology, on many counts, with Aramaic.⁷¹

Certain Canaanite morphology has been recognized within the DAPT from the beginning. Greenfield summarizes a few as 1) the *Nifal* banyan in I.6, II.12, 2) the *waw*-consecutive in I.1, I.2, I.3, etc., 3) the use of the imperative *lkw* in I.5, II.17.⁷² Aramaic innovations include the “final *-n* on absolute masculine plural noun, *-wh* third masculine singular suffix on plural noun

⁷⁰“Sense” can be subjective for such a prophecy. Dijkstra, “Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets?” 49–51.

⁷¹He is also satisfied with Kaufman’s “Gileadite” as a peripheral Canaanite dialect. G. A. Rendsburg, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1993): (327).

⁷²He includes four others. J. C. Greenfield, “Philological Observations on the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 111f.

forms, and the *ʔtp^l* conjugation.”⁷³ And further, both pre- and postpositive definite articles are absent. Positive, negative, and neutral diagnostics can be given for any designation.⁷⁴

In the final analysis, however, dialect is not something that can be determined by counting isoglosses! Languages are in constant states of flux, altering in waves which correspond to the movement of language transmitters, people and texts. In peripheral regions, like Deir ‘Alla, the strength of this mutual influence can vary.⁷⁵ In the end, I concur with Pardee’s conclusion that we are dealing with an archaic form of Aramaic, being conscientious of the DAPT’s “regional isolation” and geographic proximity to Israel and its Balaam tradition.⁷⁶

Structure, Rhetoric, and Genre:

The clear context of Combination I is that a well-known prophet receives a direct revelation from the divine world. The revelation is given a historical frame within the life of Balaam.⁷⁷ His distress gives way to proclamation which assumes a type of oneiromancy and perhaps an admonition (“Hear!” I.10, “Consider!” I.12). The narrative is given in a poetic format utilizing parallelism, inverted word order, and, I would argue, extended analogy (see below). The command to “sew up” and/or “bolt” the heavens at least confirms the use of simple analogies for dramatic effect.

⁷³Examples found in I.1, I.5, I.9 and I.1, I.4 and I.5, respectively. McCarter, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Texts,” 97.

⁷⁴At minimum, Balaam’s character retains an Aramaic “flavor” if his patronymic *br* is accounted. Although, note Kulamuwa’s *br* in his Phoenician inscription.

⁷⁵Kottsieper goes as far as castrating Samal and Deir ‘Alla’s languages from Aramaic. Ingo Kottsieper, “Aramaic Literature,” in *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Carl Stephan Ehrlich (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 405f.

⁷⁶Dennis Pardee, “The Linguistic Classification of the Deir ‘Alla Text,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989*, ed. G. van der Kooij and J. Hoftijzer (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1991), 105; Weippert, “The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla and the Study of the Old Testament,” 180. I agree with Weippert, who asserts, “The character of their idiom as a peripheral language strongly speaks in favor of their autochthony.”

⁷⁷Hoftijzer surveys some “framed” prophetic materials in Hoftijzer, van der Kooij, and Hoftijzer, “Interpretation and Grammar,” 270, fn. 2.

One key to the message is the function of the transitional “*ky*” clause in I.7. The text following the “*ky*” clause is unanimously interpreted as chaotic.⁷⁸ More specifically, it describes a world upside down, though how it does so is debated.⁷⁹ But the preceding text describes the closing of the heavens, never a good sign, which is either the result *or* cause of the following text. The ambiguity is due to the belief that oracular judgment can decry a chaotic world as well as herald a coming chaos.

One observation that could help arbitrate between “result or cause” is that up to this point in the narrative the DAPT has not produced an indictment. The heavens are shut but we are not told why. A linear message would expect a list of grievances before penalties. Unfortunately, this is not a hard and fast rule of prophecy.⁸⁰ Violations can be assumed as in Jer. 1:11-15, Joel 1:1-12, Jonah 3:4, and Micah 1:2-4. Although, in each text the indictment is promptly clarified. So, if we consider a similar progression, a clarification is in order. This should appear either after the “*ky*” clause or somewhere in the break after Combination I. Since the text calls for consideration and admonition in I.10 and I.12 in my reconstruction, I read the chaotic account (birds, hares, and hyenas) as an accusation of inappropriate behaviour couched in an extended analogy. The unexpected relationships of the natural world can make sense if they correspond to the excesses and injustices of malevolent parties in the surrounding culture.⁸¹

⁷⁸Victor Sasson, “The Book of Oracular Visions of Balaam from Deir ‘Alla,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 17 (1986): 298; McCarter, “First Combination,” 58; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 75–76. Hackett uses Egyptian sources to compare with reversals of the natural order.

⁷⁹The underworld in Combination II may extend the WUD on a grander scale. Is. 13 and Mic. 7 are some biblical parallels. Van Leeuwen has discussed this prophetic device in greater depth here, Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 4 (December 1986): 599.

⁸⁰Unless we are looking at a lamentation, cf. Lam. 1.

⁸¹Sasson wrote (*contra* Hoftijzer’s “call to conversion”) “There is nothing in the text which tells of, or alludes to, moral corruption and religious conversion,” suggesting instead a “a prelude to a war between the *šdyn* and the *’lhn*.” This “cosmic battle” speculation is less grounded than Hoftijzer’s comparison with other prophetic material. Religious or ethical direction is at home in this genre of “oneiric” prophecy (cf. Gen. 20:3, Dt. 13:1-2, esp.

Illumination of/from the Bible:

We are examining a prophetic oracle by one Balaam son of Beor, previously known only from Numbers 22-24, 31, Josh. 13, and later commentary on these narratives.⁸² It follows that other prophets and oracles of this region and time period also provide a helpful context. The historical precedent of Levantine prophets producing a *spr* is found largely in the Hebrew Bible.⁸³ In fact, *Nahum* begins (1:1) with three words that compare with the self-identification of Combination I.1-2: *maśśāʾ*, *sēper*, and *ḥ^azôn*.⁸⁴ The audiences of the biblical prophets, like Balaam, often summon an audience from the “people” not from the palace.⁸⁵ Sanders places the DAPT in a continuum of so-called “prophetic monuments,” contrasted with royal ones.⁸⁶ Thus, the message defines its speaker as prophet and its audience as local.⁸⁷

Moreover, the prophetic address is proclaimed by an assembly of gods (lines 5-6). In West Semitic religious texts the proclamation given by or to the “divine assembly” was worthy of respect and written down.⁸⁸ Kee argues that the type-scene of the “heavenly council” in the ANE includes, “the high god at the centre of the council, surrounded by its members...

Jer. 23:26-28). Sasson, “The Book of Oracular Visions of Balaam from Deir ‘Alla,” 308; Hoftijzer, van der Kooij, and Hoftijzer, “Interpretation and Grammar,” 277–279.

⁸²Balaam inspired significant traditions at Deir ‘Alla, in the Old Testament community, and later Jewish writings. For a survey of these and later traditions, see John T. Greene, “The Balaam Figure and Type Before, During, and After the Period of the Pseudepigrapha: Hebrew Bible, Deir ‘Alla, and Qumran,” in *Probing the Frontiers of Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 193–222; C. H. Savelle, “Canonical and Extracanonical Portraits of Balaam,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166, no. 664 (2009): 387–404.

⁸³In Epigraphic Hebrew, the Lachish letter 3 has “*wspr tbyhw*” which was originally “*mʾt hnbʾ*.”

⁸⁴This was pointed out to me in James D. Moore, “Writing Religion: A Comparative Study of Ancient Israelite Scribes, Their Writing Materials and Their Methods Used in the Writing of the Hebrew Prophecies” (Master’s Thesis, Brandeis University, 2011), 91.

⁸⁵Is. 8:19, Ezk. 2:3, Joel 1:2, *passim*. Contrast with the (Aramaic?) prophets and seers consulted by King Zakkur concerning the welfare of his dynasty and kingdom in the Zakkur Inscription, lines I.11f.

⁸⁶Sanders notes that even the Siloam inscription, undoubtedly reporting a royally commissioned public work, does not mention the king. Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 140f.

⁸⁷The dialect of the DAPT, which I believe is also local, is addressed above.

⁸⁸See the councils of YHWH/El in Is. 14:13, Ps. 82:1, *passim*. For a wider survey of some ANE parallels see both Weippert, “The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla and the Study of the Old Testament,” 169–170 and fn. 68; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., “Divine Assembly,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992).

employ[ing] common phrases, such as ‘to sit down’ and ‘to stand.’”⁸⁹ In the DAPT, the divine council is cursorily assembled within a parallelism, but I should add that Balaam assembles his *own* council. “His people” are commanded to come and sit (*šbw, wlkw*) to receive his words. Balaam’s recreation of the divine council in his chamber is an amazing cultural phenomenon. Authoritative words were conveyed and distributed within a spatial and social arena which imitates the divine, not unlike the arena of royal proclamation.

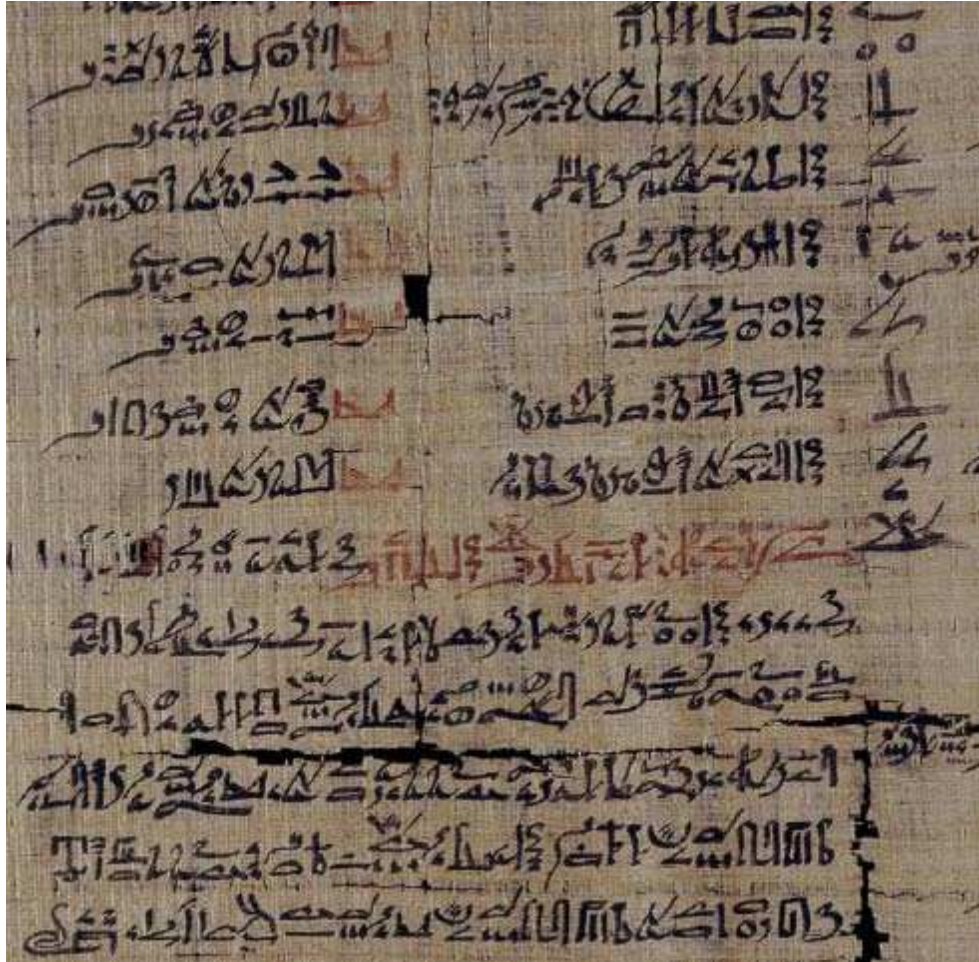
The pinnacle of this assembly (imitation?) for Israel was the tent of meeting, אהל מועד. Arrayed around their divine ruler, the tribes received moral, liturgical, and military direction. This understanding is only increased by our awareness of the parallels that can be made with the war-tents of the Pharaohs.⁹⁰ A more germane example might be II Ki. 6:32-7:2, in which Elisha is in his house and surrounded by seated elders. He prophesies Samaria’s reversal of fortune, beginning, “Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD...” (Elisha, also like Balaam, is later asked “Why do you weep?” Hazael then receives a word of prophecy.).⁹¹ The social and spatial setting in Elisha’s ministry and in the chamber of Balaam suggest an intentional arrangement of characters to highlight the authority and reception of the proclamation.

⁸⁹Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31, no. 3 (2007): 250f.

⁹⁰Cultic and military parallels have been noted by Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?,” *BR* 16, no. 6 (December 2000): 14–21.

⁹¹Dijkstra also mentions examples from Ezekiel’s ministry (8:1, etc.), who sits before the elders of Judah. Dijkstra, “Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets?,” 53.

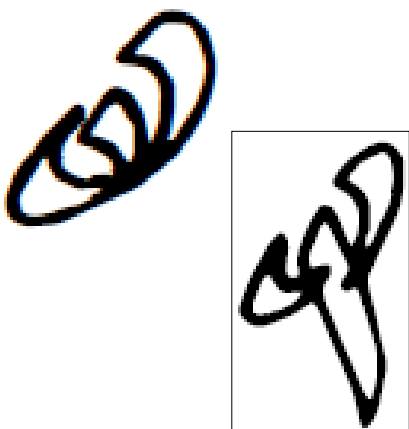







Appendix A



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I cannot read hieratic Egyptian, but Ritner's (1997) translation suggests the red words after the series of "bad" dreams reads, "Words said by a man when he awakens in his place." This is another example of ancient oneiromancy.

Appendix B

	Deir ‘Alla Plaster Text	Amman Citadel Inscription
<p><i>ṭet</i></p> <p>The form is rare since the “striketrough” is not connected to the body of the letter; also, it travels down from the upper-left, not the upper-right (typical). This trait may derive from the <i>qoph</i> form which takes an extended leg (see inset).</p>		
<p><i>tsade</i></p> <p>The unusual <i>tsade</i> from the ACI imitates the DAPT swoosh which arches to the vertical stroke, as in most cursive <i>tsades</i>.</p>		
<p><i>bet</i></p> <p>The DAPT <i>bet</i> and <i>ayin</i> are shown since they do not evince the opening at the top of their forms as in all Aramaic cursive which I have seen. The closed forms of the ACI is more typical in early lapidary scripts.</p>		
<p><i>ayin</i></p> <p>I have used the DAPT character drawings from Kooij (1991, pg. 248). I believe they are faithful representation of the actual text, with the exception of the <i>qoph</i> and <i>tsade</i> “tails,” which are typically a little longer.</p>		

Aramaic Script Chart (for ease of comparison)⁹²



Fig. 2.16. Aramaic script. From Naveh 1970, fig. 2. 1: Hamat bricks (eighth century); 2: lion weights from Nineveh (late-eighth century); 3-4: Nimrud ostrakon (late-eighth century); 5-6: Assur clay tablets (mid-seventh century); 7: Assur ostrakon (mid-seventh century).

⁹²This chart is originally from Naveh's 1970, *The Development of the Aramaic Script*. Chris A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies no. 11 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 45.

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