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## IS BALAAM ALSO AMONG THE PROPHETS?

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### I. Introduction

#### *The Puzzle of Balaam and the Context of a Newly Found Text about Him*

The title, somewhat adapted from the question of a surprised spectator when Saul starts to prophesy (1 Sam 10:12; 19:23–24), states the problem discussed in this article. Neither OT tradition nor recent biblical exegesis knows what to make of Balaam,<sup>1</sup> who has the dubious honor of being the first OT prophet to be dug up in the land of the Bible: not his tomb or his skeleton, but a text about him. A Dutch expedition under Dr. H. J. Franken discovered a wall text during excavations at Deir ‘Alla in Jordan on 17 March 1967. Among the rubble of a building destroyed by an earthquake were 119 fragments of plaster inscribed in black and red ink.<sup>2</sup> The text had probably consisted of one long column with at least fifty lines written on a plastered wall and had broken into two large blocks and many small fragments when the earthquake destroyed the house. After some provisional reports, the text was published in 1976.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. W. Coats, “Balaam: Sinner or Saint?” *BR* 18 (1973) 1–9; H. Donner, “Balaam pseudo-propheta,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift Walter Zimmerli* (ed. H. W. Wolff; Munich: Kaiser, 1977) 112–23; L. Schmidt, “Die alttestamentliche Bileamüberlieferung,” *BZ* 23 (1979) 234–61; M. S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* (SBLDS 113; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> H. J. Franken, “Texts from the Persian Period from Tell Deir ‘Alla,” *VT* 17 (1967) 480–81. On the archaeological context, see H. J. Franken in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *The Aramaic Texts from Deir ‘Alla* (Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 19; Leiden: Brill, 1976) (hereafter called *Aramaic Texts*) 12–15; G. van der Kooij and M. M. Ibrahim, *Picking Up the Threads: A Continuing Review of Excavations at Deir ‘Alla, Jordan* (Leiden: National Museum of Antiquities, 1989) 63–69; M. 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, Leiden, 21–24 August 1989* (ed. J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij; Leiden: Brill, 1991) (hereafter called *Balaam Text*) 16–29.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hoftijzer, “De ontcijfering van de Deir ‘Alla-teksten,” *Mededelingen van het Oosters Genootschap in Nederland* 5 (1973) 111–34; idem, “De Arameese teksten uit Deir ‘Alla,” *Phoenix*

Although the content of the text is remarkable, it has not received the attention it deserves in biblical scholarship.<sup>4</sup> It tells of the seer Balaam, the son of Beor, who warned his people by means of a prophecy of doom. The reticence of OT scholarship to take account of the text may be attributable to its damaged state, the difficulty of reconstructing and reading it, and the many questions it raises of script, language, literary form, and religious context.

### *Relevance for the Study of Prophecy*

Despite the reticence of scholars, it is becoming clear that the Balaam text is relevant not only for the study of the biblical traditions around this legendary seer but also for the study of prophecy in the Bible. The text is the first clear extrabiblical example of a prophet proclaiming doom to his own people. As H.-P. Müller remarked, OT scholars tended to treat proclamations of doom to one's own nation as specifically biblical, contrasting them with the Mari prophecies and the Assyrian oracles of salvation.<sup>5</sup> However, it appeared that a prophet like Balaam or like those of Mari is not by definition one of the professional prophets disclaimed in the Bible (1 Kgs 18:19; 22:5–18; Mic 3:5–7). The description of the way Balaam behaved, of his vision and of his words in this Balaam text is similar to the description of some prophets in the books of Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The relevance of the text for OT studies is heightened by such similarities and by the redating of the text to around 800 BCE, even before Amos, the earliest of the prophetic texts in the Bible, dated about 760 BCE.

### *The Aim of the Study*

Many of the available studies deal only with the first part of the text.<sup>6</sup> This paper provides a transcription and translation of the whole of it, as far as it can be reconstructed and understood. The present transcription emphasizes the

22 (1976) 84–91; idem, “The Prophet Balaam in a 6th Century Aramaic Inscription,” *BA* 39 (1976) 11–17.

<sup>4</sup> H.-P. Müller named a handful of articles (“Die aramäische Inschrift von Deir ‘Alla und die älteren Bileamsprüche,” *ZAW* 94 [1982] 214–44, esp. 215 n. 10). According to M. Weippert, the situation had improved little (“The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla and the study of the Old Testament,” in *Balaam Text*, 151–84). Recent articles include A. Zeron, “Pseudo-Philonian parallels to the inscriptions of Deir ‘Alla,” *VT* 41 (1991) 186–91; S. C. Layton, “Whence comes Balaam? Num. 22,5 Revisited,” *Bib* 73 (1992) 32–61.

<sup>5</sup> H.-P. Müller, “Die Funktion divinatorischen Redens und die Tierbezeichnungen der Inschrift von Tell Deir ‘Alla,” in *Balaam Text*, 185–205.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the translations are mentioned in subsequent notes. In the specialized literature, there are many articles—for instance, on the language and script of the inscription. They are listed in W. E. Aufrecht, *A Bibliography of the Deir ‘Alla Plaster Texts* (Lethbridge Alberta, 1986) 80–93; see also the bibliographies of P. K. McCarter, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Texts,” in *Balaam Text*, 87–99; and Weippert, “Balaam Text,” 180–84.

structure and genre of the text and points out several aspects relevant to the study of OT prophecy.<sup>7</sup>

## II. The Date of the Balaam Text

Initially Franken dated the text to the Persian period; however, archaeological and paleographic evidence soon showed that it was earlier.<sup>8</sup> The date of about 700 BCE stated with the published text is probably still too late. Study of the ceramic material and carbon-14 dating of residues of annual plants allow dating of Phase IX(M), to which the text belongs, at 770–880 BCE.<sup>9</sup> The earthquake that destroyed the building at Deir ‘Alla has been equated with the severe earthquake that affected both sides of the Jordan in the time of King Uzziah and the prophet Amos (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5), about 760 BCE.<sup>10</sup> Though it might have been that earthquake, earth tremors in that region are quite common, because the Jordan Valley is tectonically unstable. If the building was indeed destroyed about 760 BCE, the text must have been copied onto the wall at the beginning of the eighth century, since the lower part of the text shows signs of wear, indicating that it had been on the wall for some time before the earthquake. That estimate is in agreement with carbon-14 dating. If that is the date when the text was copied onto the wall, the *Sefer Balaam* itself must be

<sup>7</sup> Little has been done on this aspect since the pioneering work of Hofijzer (*Mededelingen van het Oosters Genootschap* 5 [1973] 123–30; idem, in *Aramaic Texts*, 268–82; and idem, *BA* 39 (1976) 14–16. Good starts were made by H.-P. Müller, “Einige Probleme zur aramäische Inschrift von Deir ‘Alla,” *ZDPV* 94 (1978) 56–67; J. A. Hackett, “Religious Traditions in Israelite Transjordan,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honour of F. M. Cross* [ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 125–36; Müller, “Die Funktion divinatorische Redens,” 185–205; and Weippert, “Balaam Text,” 151–84.

<sup>8</sup> Franken, “Texts from the Persian Period,” 480–81. However, J. Naveh was already thinking of a date in the middle of the eighth century, a date more in line with later research (“The Date of the Deir ‘Alla Inscription in Aramaic script,” *IEJ* 17 [1973] 256–58). See H. J. Franken and M. Ibrahim, “Two seasons of excavations at Tell Deir ‘Alla, 1976–1977,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 22 (1977/1978) 57–79, esp. 60–61; G. van der Kooij and M. M. Ibrahim, “Excavations at Deir ‘Alla, Season 1979,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 23 (1979) 41–50, esp. 48–49; Franken and van der Kooij, in *Aramaic Texts*, 12–13, 69, about 700±25 BCE; F. M. Cross, “Epigraphic Notes on the Amman Citadel Inscription,” *BASOR* 193 (1969) 13–19, esp. 14 n. 2, about 750 BCE; F. M. Cross, “Notes on the Ammonite Inscription from Tell Siran,” *BASOR* 212 (1973) 13–14, amended to about 700 BCE; J. A. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla* (HSM 31; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 19.

<sup>9</sup> M. M. Ibrahim and G. van der Kooij, “Excavations at Deir ‘Alla, Season 1984,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30 (1986) 142; Ibrahim and van der Kooij, “The Archaeology of Deir ‘Alla Phase IX,” 27–28.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., A. Lemaire, “La disposition originelle des inscriptions sur plâtre de Deir ‘Alla,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 3 (1986) 79–93, esp. 91 n. 9; E. Puech, “Le texte ‘Ammonite’ de Deir ‘Alla: Les admonitions de Balaam (première partie),” in *La vie de la Parole: De l’Ancien au Nouveau Testament. Etudes d’exégèse et d’herméneutique bibliques offert à P. Grelot* (Paris: Desclée, 1987) 13–30, esp. 14; W. G. Dever, “A Case-Study in Biblical Archaeology: The Earthquake of Ca. 760 BCE,” *ErIsr* 23 (1992) 27\*–35\*.

much older. Though we have no idea how much older, the book could be derived from oral tradition that reached back into the ninth century BCE or earlier.<sup>11</sup>

### III. Reconstruction of the Text, Transcription, and Translation

#### *Reconstruction of the Text*

The severely damaged state of the fragments has hindered reconstruction of the text and the reading of sentences, words, and letters. Anyone who works on the text must first indicate whose version forms the basis. Hoftijzer and van der Kooij reproduced the text in two large combinations and about ten groups of smaller fragments, without establishing any relationship between the combinations. However, interpretations depend on whether one assumes the text to have consisted of two columns, as does Lemaire,<sup>12</sup> or of one column. In my view, archaeological data, epigraphics, and subject matter favor a single column, though we cannot be sure.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, it is not certain whether the two combinations closely adjoined—even less so whether the last four lines of the first combination led into the first four of the second, as suggested by G. Garbini.<sup>14</sup> I have made grateful use of progress by others in piecing together the first combination (lines 1–16).<sup>15</sup>

Though the plaster of Combination II was more intact than that of Combi-

<sup>11</sup> M. Dijkstra, "The Geography of the Story of Balaam: Synchronic Reading as a Help to Date a Biblical Text," in *Synchronic or Diachronic: A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (Ninth Joint Meeting of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap and the Society for Old Testament Study 1994) forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> Lemaire, "La disposition originelle," 79–93.

<sup>13</sup> As indicated by van der Kooij and Ibrahim, *Picking Up the Threads*, fig. 81 (p. 64) and G. van der Kooij, "Book and script at Deir 'Alla," in *Balaam Text*, 239–62, esp. 241–44 and fig. 1 (p. 241).

<sup>14</sup> G. Garbini, "L'iscrizione di Balaam bar-Beor," *Henoch* 1 (1979) 189–204, esp. 171–72, 182; and the criticism by Müller, "Die aramäische Inschrift," 231. In my reconstruction, I assume minimum distance between Combination I and Combination II; after line I.16, I continue the same series and add an asterisk to the line numbers of Combination II: 17°, 18° etc.

<sup>15</sup> A. Caquot and A. Lemaire, proposed to combine I(a–b)1–3 with I(c–d)4–5 ("Les textes araméennes de Deir 'Alla," *Syria* 54 [1977] 189–208, esp. 193–94), and others then suggested putting Fragments XII(c) and VII(d) between I(a) and I(d), probably on grounds of fit and content. See Hackett, *Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla*, 7, 21; P. K. McCarter, "The Balaam Texts from Deir 'Alla: The First Combination," *BASOR* 239 (1980) 59–60; A. Lemaire, "L'inscription de Balaam trouvée à Deir 'Alla: épigraphie," in *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem 1984* (ed. J. Amitai; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985) 315–25; Puech, "Le texte 'Ammonite," 13–30; van der Kooij and Ibrahim, *Picking Up the Threads*, fig. 85 (p. 67); M. Dijkstra, *Ezechiël I* (Een praktische bijbelverklaring; Kampen: Kok, 1986) 118; van der Kooij, "Book and script at Deir 'Alla," 244–47, 245 n. 7. Finally, the large fragment VIII(b) almost certainly belongs on the left under Combination I. I have assigned it to lines 25°–28°, though the alignment is not certain.

nation I when found, it raises larger problems of interpretation than Combination I. The inscribed surface is more badly damaged, and some of the lower parts of the text had been worn away, probably already in ancient times. The report of the discovery shows that Fragments IX-XI belong in the big gap between the top and bottom of Combination II (lines 17°–53°).<sup>16</sup> Putting those fragments together does not provide a continuous text but does help to give some impression.

### Translation<sup>17</sup>

The transcription largely follows the text of Hoftijzer and van der Kooij, sometimes supplemented with suggestions from van der Kooij's paleographic commentary. Exceptions are *kmš*<sup>°</sup> (line 2), *wbk*<sup>°</sup> (3), *ʾlw(!)h*<sup>18</sup> (4), *ʾhp\*r\** (28°), *hn*<sup>°</sup> (32°), *wmlqh*<sup>°</sup> (33°), *wlnšty* (34°), *šqn*<sup>°</sup> (34°). The transcription of lines 34°–53° is derived from my own study of photographs and copies. The passages in italics are written in red ink in the original.

(1) <i>ysry</i> [.] <i>spr</i> [ <i>b</i> ] <i>l</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> [ <i>brb</i> <sup>°</sup> ] <i>r</i>	<i>Warning(s) from the Book of</i> <i>[Ba]laam [the son of Be]or.</i>
.š. <i>hzh</i> .ʾ <i>lhn</i> <sup>°</sup> [.] <i>h</i> <sup>°</sup>	<i>He was a seer of the gods.</i>
.wy <sup>°</sup> tw. <ʾ <i>lwh</i> > .ʾ <i>lhn</i> .blylh	The gods came to him one night
[.xxxxx] <i>h</i> <sup>°</sup> (2) <i>kmš</i> <sup>°</sup> .ʾ <i>l</i>	[ in a vis]ion(2) according to the
.wy <sup>°</sup> mrw.l[ <i>bl</i> <sup>°</sup> ] <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> . <i>brb</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>r</i> .kh	command of El,
.yp <i>l</i> b <i>°</i> l <sup>°</sup> ʾ <i>hr</i> { <sup>°</sup> } <i>h</i> š	and they spoke to Balaam the son of
<i>lr</i> { <sup>°</sup> } <i>t</i> . <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>h</i> .š <sup>°</sup> <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>t</i>	Beor, saying,
(3)wyqm.bl <sup>°</sup> <i>m</i> .mn.mh <i>r</i>	<i>Would that someone do something</i>
[.w] <i>h</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>n</i> <sup>°</sup> [.] <i>x</i> [xxb] <i>h</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>l</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>t</i> <sup>°</sup>	<i>without hesitation</i>
.yw <sup>°</sup> mn. <i>r</i> <sup>°</sup> [xxxxx] <sup>°</sup> <i>l</i> <sup>°</sup> wh	<i>to reveal(?) what message there is.</i>
.wyl <sup>°</sup> [ <i>h</i> .š] <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> .wbk <sup>°</sup> (4) <i>h</i> ybk <i>h</i>	(3) Balaam got up in the morning.
.wy <sup>°</sup> <i>l</i> . <i>mh</i> .ʾ <i>lwh</i> .wy <sup>°</sup> <i>m</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>rw</i> <sup>°</sup> [.] <i>l</i> <i>h</i>	Behold [it was a terrifying vis]ion.
.y <sup>°</sup> bl <sup>°</sup> <i>m</i> .br <sup>°</sup> <i>b</i> <sup>°</sup> <i>r</i>	During the day [ ] to him
	and at night he [fast]ed and kept
	cr(4)ying.
	His kinsfolk came to him and said
	[to] him,
	“O Balaam son of Beor,

<sup>16</sup> Van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts*, 156–57.

<sup>17</sup> For the language and epigraphy of the text and extensive philological comments on my translation, see the Dutch original *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 90 (1990) 162–67.

<sup>18</sup> *lwh*, formerly read as a personal name *ʾlqh*, on the parallel of Saul's uncle (1 Sam 10:14). The amendment was first proposed by McCarter (“Balaam Texts,” 51, 53). It fits in with the style of lines 20°–21° and has been agreed to on epigraphic grounds by van der Kooij (*Balaam Text*, 259) and by Hoftijzer (oral communication).

.lm.tšm[.]w°l°[m] tbkh	why are you fasting and why are you crying?"
.wy° (5)mr.lhm	And he (5) said to them,
.š[b]w°°h°wkm	"Sit down and let me tell you
.mh.šd°[ynxxxxx]	what the Shada[yin have said].
w°l°kw.r°w.p°l°t.°l[h]n	Come and see the works of the gods.
.°l[h]n.°tyh°dw	When the gods met together
(6)wnšbw.šdyn.mw°d	(6) and the Shadayin arranged a
	meeting,
.w°mrw.lš[gr]	they said to Sha[gar]:
[.°l].tpry.skrý šmyñ	'Do [not] burst open the latches of
	heaven!
.b°bky° .šm.ħšk.w°l.n(7)gh	In your clouds, darkness reigns with
	no (7)glimmer,
.°tm.w°°[l.]smr	pitch darkness with no clear night.
.ky.thby.ħt[ b]qr°b.ħšk	For you are spreading fear [in] the
	midst of darkness.
.w°l.thgy.°d.°lm	Do not growl for ever!
.ky.ss°gr.ħr(8)pt.nšr	Truly, the swallow is challenging (8)
	the eagle,
.wqn°rħm°n.y°nh	the nestlings of the vulture the
	ostrich;
.ħ°[t.°hzt.]b°ny.nš/ħ°š	terro[r is seizing] the young of the
	falcon(?)
.wšrh.°prhy.°nph	and distress the fledglings of the
	heron,
.drr.nšrt(9)y°wn	the mother dove preys on the father
	dove
.wšpr[xxxxxxx]yn	and . . . [ ] the Egyptian plover.
.x[xxxxxxxxx].mth.b°šr.rħln	The crook [produces . . .] instead of
	ewes,
.yybl.ħtr.°rnbñ	while the rod yields hares.
.°klw(10)yhd.ħpš[n.°bdn]	(10) [Slaves] are eating with the free;
[wħb]r°t.°kl[w.lh]m.štyw.ħmr	[slave-]girls(?) are eating [bread] and
	drinking wine.
wqb°n.šm°w.mwsr.	Hyenas heed admonition
gry.š(11)°l°[ ]	fox-cubs[ ]
[ ]lħkmn.yqħk	[and the fool(?)] mocks the wise.
.w°nyh.rqht.mr	The soothsayer is preparing myrrh-
	oil
.wkhn(12)[?]n°zyt.°[ ]	and the priestess (12) is sprinkling [ ]
[ ]lnš°.°zr.qrn.	[ ] for him who is wearing a loin-
	cloth of horn.'

hšb.hšb.wḥšb.h(13)[šb]

hbšn.hlkw.bt[ln ]

wšm'w.hršn.mn.rḥq

(14)[xxx]p'tḥ

.lḥly'x[ ]s/w'kl

.ḥzw.qqn.šgr.w'štr.l[ ]

(15)[ ]m'.nmr

.ḥnyš.hqrqt.bn[ ]

(16)[ ḥ]mšn.ʔ[z]r'n.w'yn

(17°)–(19°)[only traces]

(20°)ʔlmh.rwy.ddn.ky/r'°[ ]

[wy'mr 'mh.](21°)lh

.lm.nqr.wmdr.kl.rḥb[n/t]

[ ]

(22°)yrwy.ʔl.y'bd ʔl

.byt.ʔlmn.by[t. ]

[wy'mr bl'm lhm]

(23°)byt.ly'f.l.hlk

.wly'f.l.ḥtn.šm

.byt[ ]

(24°)wrmh.mn.gdš

.mn.phzy.bny.ʔš

.wmn.šqy/r'°[ ]

[wy. ʔmr](25°)n'°[.]ly

hl'šh <bk> lyt'š

ʔw lmlkh.lytmlk

.yšbr'°[.ʔlhn ]r'š(26°)n

.mš'k°bn.tksn.lbš.ḥd

.hn.tšn'°n.y'°nš.hn.t[ ]

Consider all things and again

con(13)sider! [ ]

The rich walk around in need(?) [ ].

You deaf, listen then from afar!

(14) [ May your ear be] opened.

Through sickness [ ] the foolish(?).

You blind, look on Shagar-and-

Ashtar . . .

(15) [ ] the panther;

the piglet is chasing the [lion's(?)] cub

(16)[ fif]ty(?) warriors and the

eye/spring

(17°)–(19° [ . . . ]

(20°) the maiden those who are

drunken with love . . .”

[Then his kinsfolk said] (21°) to him,

“Why will it befall us, now the soil is

all lush with crops [ ],

(22°) El is saturating (with love), El is

building

the house of the young men and the

house [of ].”

[But Balaam said to them:]

(23°) “There is a house that the trav-

eler will not enter,

that the bridegroom does not wish to

enter,

a house [full of(?) ]

(24°) and the maggot from/in the

tomb.

From the pleasures of mankind

and from the ...[one is far re-

moved(?)]

[Woe to those who s](25°)ay to me,

‘Has not anyone asked you counsel?

or, Has nobody sought advice?’

[The gods(?)] will shatter[ ]the

head(26°)s.

You will cover those who are laid in a

grave with one cloak only.

You people, whether you hate it,

whether you[ ]



tʰwh(27°)ʰšp[t.].tʰt.rʰšk

.tšk.b.mškby.ʿlmyk.lh.lq

[        ]h°.šnk

(28°)ʰp°r°.k[l].tʰrd°k°

.w°kd[.]xrs°h.blbb°.mn

.nʰnḥ.nqr.blbbh°

.nʰnḥn°[xxxxxxxx]xx

g°n(29°)bt.šmh.mlkn

.yḥz°w.b°xxm.lyš

.bm.yqh.mwt.ʿl.rḥm.w°l.x[

[    ]b/r°c[xx](30°)x°1°q°[t.ʰ]dr

.m°r[r]t°h.šmh.kbr°k°ḥ

.ykn°.lbb.nqr.šh<h>

.ky.ʰth.lq°[šh        ]

(31°)lqsh.šm°[y]n°

.hr°°w[.].zln°.gdr[.].tš[.]

[xx.]šʰt.ml.k.ssh

.wš[ʰ]l°[t.].ssh.r°[ḥ]q(?)[    ]

(32°)hn°.w/r°xxxxxxxx°ḥzn

.rḥq[.m]m°k.šʰltk

.lm.n°[xxxx n]k°šd

(33°)ldʿt.s°pr.dbr.l°nh°.ʿl.lšn

.l°k.m°špt°.wmlqh°ʰmr

[    ](34°)wlnšty.lmlk[.].x[xxx]t

.ḥysty°[.].šqn

°klh.m°h°ms.kš[py]k.d°[    ]

you will (27°) want an ash-heap for  
under your head.

You will lie in your eternal rest-place  
to decay.

[Nothing will] . . . your coldness(?)

(28°) I shall thwart all your endeavors  
and each . . . in the heart of everyone.

The blinded will bemoan in his heart  
those who bemoan [the        ]

(29° stealing thither kings away.

The . . . will see the lion,  
with which Death steals away the  
child of the slave-girl and the  
child of [    ].

[    ] . . . (30°) . . . the leech the mighty,  
sickening there even the strongest.

The heart of the blinded will be  
struck dumb,

when it appears from the en[ds of the  
earth    ]

(31°) from beyond the heavens.

Do drunkards(?) see the plastered  
wall?

The demand of a king [is met by] a  
horse,

but the demand of a horse by  
re[buff(?)]

(32°) Behold, the vision is . . . . .

Renounce [for] your good your  
demands!

Why should we [    ] be over-  
powered(?)”

(33°) *Pay heed to the Book of the Pro-  
ceedings against Wormwood on  
the Tongue.*

*Go to court* and punishment pro-  
nounce:

[    ] (34°) and I have not forgotten to  
seek counsel . . . .

I have imprisoned the oppressors.

An end has come to the violence of  
your sorcery(?) . . .

(35°)ky°.t°'br.ky.m°xxxxxxs .°br xxxnny .kl qb.nqb.kpwh.wxx[ ]	When you pass by, then . . . . . Go away you who . . . me: Everyone who pronounces a curse, will jab his own hand and . . . [ ]
(36°)h.wbn.ltz°rn° xxxxxx[xx] .qbt.°s°h.xxx.lxxr.bxx[ ] (37°)xxx[ ]h[ ] xxxxxxxx.šqr.[ ] (38°)m°lh°m°h°[xxxxxxxx] [xxx]xxxxk°.kxm/n°n.lpl[.]hn[h] (39°)kyh[.]y°l°x[ ]xm/n°xx	(36°) his [ ] and be aware that you cannot avert [ . . . ] the terrible(?) curse . . . [ ] (37°). . . . . untruth [ ] (38°) war(?) [ ] [ ] . . . . . to flee there(?). (39°)If the tyrant rush in [ ] and stretch his hand]
xxk°.lh.ydh.tšmqn.qh.bk[ ]	out to him, may his hand wither. Take with you [ ]
(40°)tr°š°w.g°h[.]š°[ ]xxxxx xxxxx.°h.wnš°.qb°l.n/m°[ ] (41°–44°) [only traces] (45°)xt.w°m°r.n°qr r[ ] (46°)y°lm[.]°l[wh ] (47°)q°m.y°klh.w°y°°m[r ]	(40°) [lest it] do harm, and thrust off the [ ] . . . . . brother and ruler against [ ] (41°–44°) [ . . . ] (45°) . . . and the blinded has said: [ ] (46°) he will not say a word to [him ] (47°) Standing up, he will eat it and he will say(?):
[ ](48°)l°h°lby.lb°ln° .wyb°t.xnxx[l]yl°hxxxxxx[ ] (49°)°w[.]y°bt[.]°°[t.]h[k]mn[ ]	[‘ . . . ](48°) for my fat/milk to Baal(?),’ and he will spend . . . the night . . . [ ]’ (49°) or he will spend it with the wise man [ ]
[ ](50°)hmt°.lšlšh.[y]m°y[n.] wdm.z°ltx[ ] (51°)tšpn.šr[.]wlš[nh.xx]y°k°.h[ ] (52°)tšpn.šl.wlšnh°[xxxxxx]k[ ] (53°)bqr[.]lhš[t.]wy°kl[xxxxxxxx] w[y]m°y[.]hy°xxx[ ]	[ ](50°) poison(?) for three days. and blood except . . . [ ] (51°) If they drip malice(?) and [his] tongue . . . [ ] (52°) If they drip dew and his tongue . . . [ ] (53°) When the incantation is chanted(?), he will eat [ ] and the days of [his] life . . . [ ]

#### IV. Structure of the Balaam Text

##### *Title*

Above the text is a title introducing the prophet Balaam. It differs from the usual types of titles at the heads of the books of the prophets and of the wisdom

literature in the Bible. The one clear parallel is in the book of Nahum apart from the reference to its content *מִשַּׁא נִינְוָה*, “an oracle about Nineveh,” its original title: *סֵפֶר חֲזוֹן נַחֻם הָאֶלְקוֹשִׁי*, Book of the Vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. The OT also refers to writings such as *סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר*, Book of the Just (Josh 10:13; 1 Sam 1:18); *סֵפֶר מִלְחֵמוֹת יְהוָה*, Book of the Wars of the LORD (Num 21:14), and *סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי שְׁלֹמֹה*, Book of the Deeds of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41), which are normally taken to be of preexilic origin, like the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kgs 14:19 onwards).<sup>19</sup>

In view of its title, the text on the wall at Deir ‘Alla must have been an existing document. This conclusion would be strengthened if the word “Warnings” could be restored with certainty at the beginning, suggesting that only part of the *Sefer Balaam* was copied. The beginning of the text has evidence of editing. Before the story as such begins, there is a short reference to Balaam’s profession. Such transitions between title and corpus of a writing occur also in biblical prophecy, for example, Hos 1:2; Amos 1:2; and Hab 3:1.

### *The Vision*

#### *The First Scene (Lines 1–4)*

The gods appear in a vision<sup>20</sup> to Balaam as messengers of El, the formal head of the Canaanite pantheon. The instruction is written in red in line 2: “Let someone do something without hesitation to reveal what message there is.” The message is not, however, immediately announced, because this would break the structure of the story. Such a device of withholding the divine message until later occurs in the biographies of other prophets, as in Jer 18:1–17 and Ezek 24:16–27. It suggests that this sort of story had originated and been transmitted orally. Balaam’s response to the vision was to fast and wail. The response may have been more than a response to the nightmare and could have had two functions. First, fasting and wailing were part of the self-humiliation intended to hold off doom (as 2 Sam 12:15–18 for David; Joel 1:13–14, Jonah 3:6–10 and Ezra 9:3–10:2). Second, wailing and sadness are a motif of the story intended to draw a response, as do the tears of Hagar (Gen 21:16–17) and others (1 Sam 1:7–11 and 11:4–5), and as does dejection after a dream (Gen 40:6–7), and as does the cry of woe from the Ugaritic heroes Keret and Danel (KTU 1.14.I:38–42; KTU 1.17.I:16–9<sup>21</sup>). So also in prophecy, tears function in drawing attention

<sup>19</sup> With *מִשַּׁא* (חוררת) *סֵפֶר* (e.g., Josh 8:31; Neh 13:1–2; 2 Chr 25:4; 35:12), matters are different but cannot be discussed here. Indication of the content of a nonadministrative book with *spr*+ content occurs also in Ugarit: *spr.n‘m.ššwm*, Book on the Health of Horses (KTU 1.71, 1.72, 1.85); the *s[p]r.hlm*, Book of Dreams (KTU 1.86); and the *spr.dbh.zlm*, Book of the Sacrificial Meal to the Spirits (KTU 1.161).

<sup>20</sup> The end of line 1 is perhaps *[bmhʔz]h*. The reconstruction suggested by G. Hamilton to Hackett (*The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 31) is not possible. See Puech, “Le texte ‘Ammonite,’” 17 n. 12; Müller, “Einige Probleme,” 57–58. An example of the same phrase is Gen 15:1. Compare the call to Balaam in Num 22:9, 20.

<sup>21</sup> M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit: Teil I, Transkription* (AOAT 24; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976).

and tend to become a symbolic action (see below under “Genres of the Wall Text”), as pointed out by Hoftijzer with the parallel of Elisha’s tears for Hazael in Damascus (2 Kgs 8:11–13).<sup>22</sup>

### *The Second Scene (Lines 4–5)*

The kinsfolk standing by indeed respond to Balaam’s extraordinary behavior and ask the reason. Such a stereotyped question allows the prophecy to come from the mouth of the prophet and not directly from the mouth of the storyteller. In the same context, it is the prophet who invites the bystanders to sit and hear the divine message. In this way, he makes them witnesses of the word and of the authority of the prophet in their midst. For similar introductions and the custom of sitting before the prophet, see 1 Kgs 14:6, 12; 2 Kgs 6:32; Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1–3; 33:30–33.

### *The Vision (Lines 5–12)*

The beginning of the announcement of the vision has a formal hymnic character and marks the transition from narrative to the hymnic epic style of the vision:

Sit down and let me tell you what the Shad[ayin have said.]  
Come and see the works of the gods.

Such an opening in hymnic poetic style occurs also in Ps 46:9–10 and 66:5.<sup>23</sup> The vision is of a meeting of the gods, who make a request in the presence of the goddess Shagar. Whether the gods are persuading her against bringing disaster on the earth or are ordered to do so is uncertain.<sup>24</sup> I follow the interpretation of Hoftijzer, Müller, and Weippert that the goddess had prepared a disaster and that the gods were persuading her to desist from it. The plea not to threaten people forever may be balanced with the opening request not to burst open the bolts of heaven. Apparently the pitch darkness is seen as a portent of a disaster such as a new flood, which must be prevented.<sup>25</sup> A series of natural phenomena are described in terms of reversal imagery<sup>26</sup> with the small against

<sup>22</sup> Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 192; McCarter, “Balaam Texts,” 53; Müller, “Die aramäische Inschrift,” 212–13.

<sup>24</sup> See Caquot and Lemaire, “Les textes araméens,” 189–208; Carhini, “L’iscrizione,” 166–88; McCarter, “Balaam Texts,” 57–58; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 41–43; B. A. Levine, “The plaster inscriptions from Deir ‘Alla: general interpretation,” in *Balaam Text*, 60; Weippert, “Balaam Text,” 157; H. Ringgren, “Balaam and the Deir ‘Alla inscription,” in *Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume: Essays on the Bible and the ancient World. Volume 3* (ed. A. Rofé, Y. Zakovitch; Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein, 1983) 93–98, esp. 94–95; V. Sasson, “The Book of the Oracular Visions of Balaam from Deir ‘Alla,” *UF* 17 (1986) 284–309, esp. 295–97.

<sup>25</sup> Gen 7:11; Job 38:8; Gilgamesh XI:96–98, 101–2.

<sup>26</sup> For this terminology, see W. Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (BZAW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972) 35–38. J. A. Hackett speaks of a series of reversals (“Some observations on the Balaam tradition at Deir ‘Alla,” *BA* 49 [1986] 216–22, esp. 217).

the great, the woman against the man, and the poor against the rich. These reversals are exemplified by the swallow challenging the eagle, the mother dove preying on the father dove, and so on. The images reinforce the message of the gods.<sup>27</sup> Strange happenings are not confined to the animal kingdom; the action of the sheep breeder yields strange results (line 9): [ ] *.mṯh.bʿšr.rḥln.yybl.ḥṭr.ʿrnbñ*, “The crook[ produces(?) . . .] instead of ewes, while the rod yields hares.”<sup>28</sup> Social and religious order is also deranged: free and slaves eat together; women responsible for the cult desecrate the sacred oil (lines 11–12).<sup>29</sup>

### *Beginning of Balaam's Speech (Lines 13–14)*

Some scholars (e.g., McCarter, Hackett, and Weippert) believe that the rest of Combination 1 to line 16 describes the vision. The choice depends on the interpretation of *šgr wʿštr* in line 14. Some interpret these words as in the expression found in Deut 7: 13; 28:4, 18, 51: שגראלפך ועשתרה צאנך, “the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.” But others prefer to see it as the double name of the goddess Shagar-and-Ashtar.<sup>30</sup>

The consequence of this line of thought is that Shagar is no longer addressed in line 14 but is spoken about. So the description of the vision must have ended, most likely before the words *ḥšb.ḥšb.wḥšb.ḥ[šb]*, “Consider all things and again consider,” which is such a remarkable formulation in the context that a switch of style at this point is probable. Balaam is speaking directly to his people with a double appeal, which occurs also among the OT prophets (Isa

<sup>27</sup> On the reversal imagery, see McCarter, “Balaam Texts,” 58; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 46–48, 75–76; idem, “Response to Baruch Levine and André Lemaire,” in *Balaam Text*, 73–84, esp. p. 77; Müller, “Die aramäische Inschrift,” 225–27; idem, “Die Funktion divinatoire Redens,” 185–205, and my “Response,” in *Balaam Text*, 206–17. Hackett cites examples from Egyptian wisdom literature and prophecies, but there are many biblical parallels to these *adynata*, as they were called by classical and medieval scholars (Isa 2:4; 3:4–7, 24; 61:3; Ezek 18:2 = Jer 31:29; Joel 3:10; Eccl 7:15; 10:5–7).

<sup>28</sup> Compare the results of Jacob's sheep breeding in Gen 30:37–43.

<sup>29</sup> *wʿnyh.rqht.mr.wknhn(12)[?]nʿzyt.ʿt[ ]*, “The soothsayer is preparing myrrh-oil and the priestess(12) is sprinkling the . . . [ ]”. Myrrh often means its essential oil, like Hebrew *šemen mōr* and Ugaritic *šmn mr*, and can be sprinkled in liquid form onto clothing and the body and worked in (Ps 45:9; Cant 5:5; Esth 2:12). For cultic use, see Exod 30:23–29; Lev 8:10–12.

<sup>30</sup> Levine and Weippert identified here with Ashtar (the wife of) Kemosh, the national god of the Moabites according to the OT and to the Meša stele (B. A. Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” *JAOS* 101 [1981] 198–99; H. Weippert and M. Weippert, “Die ‘Bileam’-Inschrift,” *ZDPV* 98 [1982] 100–101; see also J. C. de Moor, “Narrative Poetry in Canaan,” *UF* 20 [1988] 149–71, 154 n. 17; Gerald L. Mattingly, “Moabite Religion and the Meshaʿ Inscription,” in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* [ed. A. Dearman; ASOR/SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989] 211–38, esp. 219–21). There is certainly a relationship between Shagar the goddess and *šeger*, “fertility,” just as there is between Dagan or Dagon the god and *dāgān*, “cereal grain,” and between the Ugaritic deities *šgr wṯm* in the sacrificial text KTU 1.148:31 and the appearance of these nouns in the Baal-myth KTU 1.5. III:16–18, 24, though it must be admitted that the latter passage is badly broken and poorly known.

6:9–10; 8:9–10; 28:23; 55:1–4; Job 13:17; 21:2; 37:2–4).<sup>31</sup> The call is continued with two appeals to hear and to see: *wšmʿw.hršn.mn rḥq* and *ḥzw qqn.šgr wʿštr* (lines 13–14). The first one corresponds closely to Isa 42:18: החרשים שמעו העורים הכישי לראות, “You that are deaf, hear now; you that are blind, look and see.” Similar are Isa 29:18 and 33:13. The passage looks like a dispute between the prophet and his hearers, who do not trust his message.

*The Second Part of the Wall Text (Lines 33°–53°)*

To understand the second combination as the continuation of the first, one can best start with an analysis of the better-preserved part of this piece. Crucial to analysis is the rubric of line 33°, which seems to be the start of a new chapter or even a new text. Support for this hypothesis comes with fragment V(q), which in my view belongs in lines 31°–32° and shows that the end of line 32° after the word *kšd* is open.<sup>32</sup> Though I have transcribed and translated the text from line 33° onwards on the basis of fragments of Groups IX to XI, structural analysis of that text is impossible. Only the initial line is at all comprehensible:

Pay heed to the Book of the Proceedings against Wormwood on the Tongue.  
Go to court and punishment pronounce!

If it is indeed the title of a new “book” against poison or against a curse, readable fragments such as

Everyone who pronounces a curse, will jab his own hand (line 35°)  
If the tyrant rush in [. . . and his hand stretch] out against him, may his  
hand wither (line 39°)

may be curses, as presumed by Hoftijzer. They could be understood as formulas from an incantation.

Of the last nine lines (45°–53°), only the first words are reasonably preserved. Their tone seems more positive than in the previous lines.<sup>33</sup> They create, at first hearing, the impression of a vision of salvation, in which rain and fertility return. In my view, however, it is reasonably certain that the last line reads: “When the incantation is chanted, he will eat. . . .” Lines 47°–53° sound

<sup>31</sup> In Isaiah, the appeal must be intended as irony, as indicated by Müller, who pointed to the stylistic relationship of the words to the wisdom literature (“Einige Probleme,” 61–62; idem, “Die aramäische Inschrift,” 229). Whether the usage in the Balaam text is ironic is unclear. The use of *ḥāšab maḥāšābôt*, “draft or plot a plan,” often meant negatively (e.g., 2 Sam 14:14; Jer 11:19; 18:11; Ezek 38:10), is suggestive.

<sup>32</sup> Fragment V(q) is placed here, with the end of a line open, probably forming the end of the paragraph or chapter above II.17, where a new chapter begins with a red line (van der Kooij and Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 152, 259, 269). Lemaire places it at the end of his Column II (= Combination I) (“La disposition originelle,” 88). However, if there was only one column, the *petuha* (*setuma*’s do not occur in the text) must have been above II.17. See my “Response to E. Puech and G. Van der Kooij,” in *Balaam Text*, 264–65.

<sup>33</sup> Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 252; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 74, 80; Ringgren, “Balaam and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” 97.

like a series of prescriptions following the text of the charm against wormwood. Because of the introduction of the noun *lhš[t]*, “incantation,” indicating the genre at the end and occasionally readable curses in between, the second part (lines 33\*–53\*) might be taken as a specimen of an incantation and so of the tradition of Balaam’s ability to enchant (Num 22:6).

*Continuation of Balaam’s Speech (Lines 17\*–32\*)*

*Evidence That Lines 17\*–32\* Are a Continuation of Balaam’s Speech*

The assumption that lines 33\*–53\* may contain a completely separate text does not alter the assumption that the first part of Combination 2 continues Balaam’s preaching. The evidence for such a view is the interpretation of the final sentence *rhq[m]m\*k.š’ltk .lm. n\*[xx xxxn]k\*šd*, “Renounce [for] your good<sup>34</sup> your demands! Why should we[ ] be overpowered?” Caquot and Lemaire suggested that *š’lt* might here mean consultation or request for a divine oracle (as in Num 27:21; 1 Sam 2:20; 2 Sam 20:18; Isa 58:2; see also such a consultation in 1 Kgs 14:5; 22:5; 2 Kgs 8:8). If so, the speaker is declining the request for an oracle. Alternatively, Balaam’s people are awaiting the answering of a request by the gods (as Job 6:8) and the prophet rejects their demands (compare Ezek 14:1–2; 14:9; 20:3, 31). The same type of dialectic occurs in Third Isaiah (Isa 58:2; 59:9, 11). The remarkable lines *[xx.]š’lt.mlk.ssh. wš[’]l\*[t.]ssh.r\*[h]q(?)*, “. . . The demand of a king is [met by] a horse, the demand of a horse by re[buff(?)],” may here be relevant. Hoftijzer thought with good grounds that this must be a proverb, with which Balaam wanted to emphasize that what his people were requesting was not right in the eyes of the gods.<sup>35</sup>

*Balaam’s Audience and the Rhetorical Structure of Lines 25\*–32\**

If the passage is the end of Balaam’s preaching, the hearer or hearers in line 32\* are the same as in 26\*–27\*. According to Hoftijzer, Balaam is pronouncing a curse in these lines. The use of *y’nš* (singular), “You people” (line 26\*), as a vocative fits in with this idea, as does, for instance, אַדָּם in the context of Mic 6:8. The second person singular is no problem, since Semitic languages often use a singular for a group of people addressed collectively, as in Isa 26:20 and Mic 6:3–8. Most verbal forms in Combination 1 are indeed plural but not all—for instance, *wy\*’l.mh.ʾlwh*, “his kinsfolk came to him” (line 4). Such a switch between singular and plural is common in Deuteronomy and Second Isaiah and has been noted also in treaties, such as that of Sfire.<sup>36</sup> Lines 26\*–27\*

<sup>34</sup> *rhq [m]mk*. On the assimilation of *mn* in *mmk*, see Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 202. For a similar expression, see C.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l’ouest* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 279; D. Pardee and P. Bordreuil, “Le papyrus du marzeah,” *Sem* 38 (1990) 49–69, esp. 57.

<sup>35</sup> Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 244.

<sup>36</sup> See my “Response,” in *Balaam Text*, 214 n. 20, including further literature.



probably address the hearers; lines 28\*–31\* are impersonal; and line 32\*, beginning with the emphatic *hn*, “Behold,” again addresses the audience.

But who is the one addressed in line 25\*?

[wy. ʾmr]n*.ly	[Woe to those who sa]y to me:
hlʿsh<bk> lytʿš	“Has not anyone asked you counsel?
.ʾw lmlkh.lytmlk	or, Has nobody sought advice?”

Most commentators agree on the meaning, as a double question, though some have read an explanation into it.<sup>37</sup> However, the structure is clear because of the interrogative markers and the double *figura etymologica*. The questions are rhetorical and are in direct speech quoted from the mouths of Balaam’s hearers, as indicated by the word *ly*, “to me,” in the previous line.<sup>38</sup> Most probably the prophet is addressed. In my opinion this is a strong indication that Balaam was using a current prophetic form: a word of woe connected with a reaction taken from the adversaries and followed by a series of curses or announcements of doom. Good examples of the same form occur in Isaiah, Amos, and Habakkuk. In announcing doom, the prophets come up against resistance and counter criticism and objections from their hearers. The response of the audience is sometimes framed as ironic, quasi-pious reactions to their words, as in Isa 5:18–19; Jer 17:15; Ezek 12:22.<sup>39</sup> Also in biblical prophecy such a cry of woe is sometimes associated with a threat of descent into the underworld (Isa 5:14). Compare:

Sefer Balaam 25*–27*	Isaiah 5:18–19, 14
[Woe to those who s]ay to me:	Woe to those who draw sin along with
	cords of
“Has not anyone asked you counsel	deceit and wickedness as with cart
	ropes,
or, Has nobody sought advice?”	to those who say: “Let God hurry,
[The gods(?)] will shatter[ ]the	let him hasten his work so that we may
heads	see it.
You will cover those who are laid	Let it approach, let the plan of the
	Holy One of
in a grave with one cloak.	Israel come so that we may know it.”

<sup>37</sup> Hoftijzer read it as a statement (*Aramaic Texts*, 180, 229). See the criticism by Caquot and Lemaire (“Les textes araméens,” 203) and by Hackett (*The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 64).

<sup>38</sup> Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 200.

<sup>39</sup> H. W. Wolff, “Das Zitat im Prophetenspruch,” in *Evangelische Theologie Beihefte* 4 (Munich: Kaiser, 1937) = idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Theologische Bücherei 22; Munich: Kaiser, 1973) 36–129; J. L. Koole, “Zu Jesaja 45:9ff.,” in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M.A. Beek* (ed. M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss, P. H. J. Houwink ten Cate, and N. A. van Uchelen; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974) 170–72; M. Dijkstra, “Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15ff.,” *ZAW* 89 (1977) 215–17.



You people, whether you hate it	Therefore the grave enlarges its appetite
whether you[ desire it(?) ]	and opens its mouth without limit;
You will want an ash-heap for	into it will descend their nobles and
under your head	masses
You will lie in your eternal rest-	with all their brawlers and revellers.
place to decay	(NEB)

Another reason to assume that the rhetorical questions are addressed to Balaam is the use of the verb *יעץ* in this context. In the biblical tradition about Balaam, *יעץ* has an almost unique meaning, his last great oracle being introduced with the words: *ועתה הנני הולך לעמי לכה איעצך אשר יעשה העם הזה לעמך באחרית הימים*, “Now I am going to my own people; but first, let me announce to you the עצה about what this people will do to yours in the days to come” (Num 24:14). On the basis of this text, L. Ruppert took the original meaning of *יעץ* as “to announce an oracle.”<sup>40</sup> This may be an exaggeration, but there is an indisputable relationship between the announcement of YHWH’s plan and prophecy, especially in Isaiah.<sup>41</sup> The prophet could announce YHWH’s plan for the future because he had stood in God’s council (Jer 23:18, 22; 1 Kgs 22:19; Job 15:8; Amos 3:7). Such a conception of the heavenly council, in which the plan of the gods is discussed (line 5 on), must also lie behind the Balaam text.<sup>42</sup> The ironic question addressed to Balaam echoes doubt about his message of doom and not just doubt about his counsel.

Finally, a relationship between these lines and line 5 (*w<sup>l</sup>\*kw.r<sup>w</sup>.p<sup>l</sup>\*t.<sup>l</sup>[h]n*, “Come and see the works of the gods!”) may exist. This invitation not only introduces hymnic praise, as in Pss 46:9 and 66:5, but also is an announcement of God’s purpose, as in Isa 5:12, 19. By drawing attention to the works of the gods, Balaam must mean the works that the gods intend to do. So the rhetorical structure and the choice of words suggest a direct relationship between the two combinations of text fragments.

### *The Speakers and the Addressed in Lines 17°–24°*

The preceding section indicates that the voice of opponents can also be heard in line 25°. So the picture of a confrontation between Balaam and his

<sup>40</sup> L. Ruppert, *יעץ*, TWAT 3. col. 721; also W. Werner, *Studien zur alttestamentischen Vorstellung vom Plan Jahwehs* (BZAW 173; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987) 2–3.

<sup>41</sup> Though the term *יעץ* may originate in the wisdom traditions (so H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 1–12* [BKAT 10/1; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972] 188–89; H.-P. Stähli, *יעץ*, *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (ed. E. Jenni, C. Westermann; Munich: Kaiser; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976) col. 752 (= *THAT*); Ruppert, TWAT 3. cols. 720–21), the argument still holds. In the wall text, Balaam’s office of seer is connected with wisdom. The complaint that the wise are mocked (line 11) is no coincidence. If Levine is right that the wise mentioned here are trained magicians, the relationship is even stronger (“The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 199).

<sup>42</sup> M. Saebo, סדר, *THAT* 2. cols. 144–48; H.-J. Fabry, סדר, TWAT 5. col. 778; H. W. Wolff, *Joel, Amos* (BKAT 14/2; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969) 226.

kinsfolk is confirmed.<sup>43</sup> The contrast in the fragmentary lines 22\*–23\* is immediately striking:

(22*)yrwy.ʿl.yʿbd ʿl	(22*) El is saturating (with love), El is building
.byt.ʿlmn.by[t.ʿlmt]	the house of the young men and the house [of the maidens(?)].
[wyʿmr blʿm lhm]	[But Balaam said to them(?)]
(23*)byt.lyʿl.hlk	(23*) “There is a house that the traveler will not enter,
.wlyʿl.hṭn.šm	that the bridegroom does not wish to enter,
.byt[ ]	a house [ ]

Because of the break in the text, the two statements could be from one speaker. However, if lines 21\* and 24\* are also laid in place, the contrast is even greater. Line 21 says something about arable land<sup>44</sup> being soaked with water or lush with crops, whereas line 24\* speaks of vermin or maggots in the tomb.<sup>45</sup> The relationship between line 21\* with the lush crops and line 22\* with El’s “saturation” and building of the family is obvious. Since the prophet is speaking in line 25\*, the description of the underworld in lines 23\*–24\* must also be from his mouth.<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, lines 21\*–22\* may contain words of the bystanders or opponents of the prophet. A hint comes at the beginning of line 21\*: *lh.lm.nqr*, “to him, ‘Why will it befall us?’”<sup>47</sup> The pronoun suffix third person singular can be interpreted as introducing a question in direct speech to the prophet, followed by the objection that the land is lush and El is showing his special care for the families of young people. Thus lines 17\*–20\* represent fragments of the speech that Balaam began on line 12.

<sup>43</sup> Further evidence might be line 28\*: *ʿhp\*ʿr.k[l] ʿtd\*k\**, “I shall thwart all your endeavors.”

<sup>44</sup> *mdr*, perhaps related to Hebrew *meder*, “earth, loam”; *madrôn*, “slope, declivity.” Otherwise it could relate to Arabic *madar*, “clod of earth.” See Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 180: “and the whole moistened[?] soil[?]”; Caquot and Lemaire, “Les textes araméens,” 203: “et la terre entière (est?) humide”; Ringgren, “Balaam and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” 94: “and all the moist soil”; Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 201: “a slope that was damp” (which he takes as a description of the grave and underworld). Perhaps *mdr* refers to the fertile eastern slope of the Jordan Valley.

<sup>45</sup> Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 180.

<sup>46</sup> So also Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 200.

<sup>47</sup> *lm.nqr*. Options for *nqr* in lines 21\*, 28\*, and 30\* are (1) נקר G stem, “be blinded, one-eyed”; (2) קרה N stem, “meet, visit, befall”; (3) Hebrew *nešer* (3.1), “sprout, scion, shoot”; (3.2) “corpse, carrion”; see n. 56. It is attractive to relate it to the *niphal* of קרה in the story of Balaam (Num 23:3, 4, 15, 16). Probably here as in the Balaam text, the meaning of “meet, befall (an encounter)” is appropriate, as it is in 1 Sam 1:6; 20:1; see, however, also 2 Sam 18:9: ויקרא אבשלום ידו, “Absalom met with an accident in the sight of David’s servants.”

*Conclusion of the Structural Analysis*

Structural and rhetorical analysis shows that Combination 2 as far as the next chapter (line 33\*) was most probably the continuation of Combination 1. The assumption that the two combinations formed one column of text is thus justified. The story of Balaam's vision of the gods and of his announcement of the vision continues with a dispute between the prophet and his hearers. Their objections cause Balaam to continue his message of doom and perhaps even to strengthen it with an impressive description of the fate the unbelievers can expect in the underworld. The text of this dispute seems to end with a last warning (line 32\*). What follows, introduced by a new rubric, could be an independent incantation.

## V. Significance for the Study of Old Testament Prophecy

*Religious Background*

This structural analysis does not exhaust the contribution of the text for the studies on OT prophecy. It does, however, indicate how closely phraseology, structure, and form of the text approach those of OT prophecy. That is hardly surprising for a text from the immediate surroundings of the ancient kingdom of Israel. It takes some imagination to realize that this text from the Book of Balaam was inscribed on the wall by contemporaries of prophets like Elijah and Elisha, who came from the same area. Elijah came from Tishbe in Gilead, also on the eastern slope of the Jordan Valley, thirty kilometers to the north of Deir 'Alla. Elisha lived nearer but on the west bank. For the inhabitants of the Valley of Succoth (Ps 60:8), Balaam was already a figure of the past, but the legends about him still spoke so strongly to the imagination and had such authority that he was immortalized in this wall text.

The discovery of the text and the unraveling of its religious nature have not simplified the picture of Israel's religious history in the monarchic period. Despite similarities in prophetic forms of speech and religious conceptions, the text does not represent the biography of an orthodox Israelite prophet, such as that found in the Elijah-Elisha cycle, nor even an unorthodox YHWHism. In the fragments of readable text, YHWH is not mentioned at all. The head of the pantheon is El, and the gods act on his command,<sup>48</sup> and he provides fertility and builds the family.<sup>49</sup> The angry goddess is Shagar-and-Ashtar (line 14) or just

<sup>48</sup> The expression *kmš' l*, "according to the command of El" (line 2) is in my view analogous to *כדבר אלהים/יהוה*, "according to the word of God/the Lord."

<sup>49</sup> The idea may be the same as in Ps 127:1–5 and Ruth 4:11, the building of the family by the blessing of many children. Another example is the epithet of El in the Ugaritic literature as *bn̄y bn̄wt*, "creator/builder of offspring/the family"; see J. C. de Moor, "El The Creator," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (ed. G. Rendsburg et al.; New York: Ktav, 1980) 171–87, esp. 182–83.

Shagar (line 6 and perhaps line 18\*), about whom little is known. However, since she is equated with Ashtar(te)/Ishtar, she was probably a goddess of fertility with an active local cult. Further, the imagery as a lion points in that direction (line 8). Other gods mentioned in passing are Mot (line 29\*), the personification of death, and perhaps Baal (line 48\*).

Characteristic is the parallelism of *ʾlhn*//*šdyn*, which may be equal epithets for the pantheon of gods, inclusive or exclusive of the named gods. The term *šdyn* is generally accepted as identical with the biblical epithet *šadday*, which might even occur in the same plural form in Job 19:29.<sup>50</sup> Usually it has been assumed that the name or epithet *šadday* developed into a synonym for “god.”

The most conspicuous differences from preexilic YHWHism—as far as deducible from Deuteronomistic sources—can be enumerated as follows: (1) El is the chief god in the Balaam text; he commands the gods, provides fertility, and so on. (2) Shadday, an epithet of El in early Israel, later attached to YHWH, is an epithet of the lower gods in the Balaam text. (3) Shagar-and-Ashtar is a goddess in the Balaam text, but in Deut 7:13; 28:4; and 18.51 these names are no more than a fixed expression for the fertility of cattle and sheep.

Whether the group practicing the religion observable between the lines of this inscription was a non-Israelite group that had always lived there or had been deported there<sup>51</sup> or was a group of Israelites<sup>52</sup> cannot be determined. Because of the literary and cultural affinities, an Israelite origin would not be a surprise. Because of this and other texts (for instance, the inscriptions of Kuntillet Ajrud) the picture of religion in Israel before the exile is becoming so checkered with all sorts of local religious beliefs and practices ranging from orthodox YHWHism to full-blooded Canaanite worship of Baal Shamim/n that a peripheral group of Israelites could have been responsible. That could explain why the text breathes the spirit of OT prophecy, though it belongs to another religious constellation.

<sup>50</sup> Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Texts*, 275–76; Müller, “Einige Probleme,” 65–67; Weippert, “Die Bileam-Inschrift,” 88–90; Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 85–89; M. Delcor, “Des inscriptions de Deir Alla aux traditions bibliques, à propos des *šdyn*, des *šēdīm* et de *šadday*,” in *Die Väter Israels: Beiträge zur Theologie der Patriarchüberlieferungen im Alten Testament* (ed. A. Müller and M. Görg; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989) 33–40. Citing the *šdy* of Palmyrian texts, Weippert envisaged a special group of gods, who sometimes had the epithet *ʾlh’ tby’*, “the good gods.”

<sup>51</sup> A. Wolters, “The Balaamites of Deir ‘Alla as Aramean deportees,” *HUCA* 59 (1988) 101–13.

<sup>52</sup> Levine, “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 203–5; idem, “The Balaam Inscription from Deir ‘Alla: Historical Aspects,” in *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem 1984* (ed. J. Amitai; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985) 125–27. The suggestion of J. W. Wesseliuss that the text might have been used as Judean propaganda is far-fetched (“Thoughts about Balaam,” *BO* 44 [1987] 598–99). Like the Assyrian theory of Wolters (n. 51), it loses any basis if the text was written about 800 BCE.

## Genres of the Wall Text

The text of lines 1–32° consists of several genres. The frame story in this part of the wall text is the biography of a prophet, for which the best parallels are Elisha in Damascus (2 Kgs 8:6–13; see above under “The First Scene”), the story of Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22) and the confrontation between Amos and the priest Amaziah in the sanctuary at Bethel (Amos 7:10–17).

Like some of the OT prophets, Balaam attracted attention by the ritual of fasting and crying.<sup>53</sup> In some situations, prophets behave in a strange way and, when asked about it, announce the oracle. The action is often related to the prophecy and the bystanders are told that people will come to that same strange behavior (Jer 16:1–9; Ezek 12:18–20; 24:17–27). Another interesting parallel for the relationship between Balaam’s behavior and the gist of his message is Ezek 21:6–7(11–12):

Groan while they look on, O man, groan bitterly until you collapse. When they ask why you are groaning, say, “Because what I have heard is about to come. All hearts will melt, all hands will hang limp, all courage will fail, all knees will turn to water. See, it is coming; it is here!” This is the word of the LORD God.

The text demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the groaning and the announcement of doom. That is not in itself surprising, but the use of the same verb—*niphal* אָנַח as in line 28°—is. It is no coincidence either that Ezekiel (21:12) says: כִּי־בֹאֵה וְנִמְסַ כָּל־לֵב, “When it comes, every heart will melt.” Balaam says (lines 30°–31°):

.ykn°.lbb.nqr.šh<h>	The heart of the blinded will be
	struck dumb,
.ky.ʾth.lq°[šh       ]	when it <sup>54</sup> appears from the en[ds of
	the earth       ]
lqsh.šm°[y]n°	from beyond the heavens.

This passage from Ezekiel using the term *šēmû‘â*, “what is heard, revelation,” throws the calling of Balaam (line 2) into extra relief: *yp°l b°l°‘ hr{°}h ʾš lr[°]t.m°h.š°m°ct*, “Would that someone do something without hesitation to reveal[?] what message there is.” In it, Balaam himself is being called to perform a ritual act and to proclaim doom to his own people.<sup>55</sup> His ritual protest

<sup>53</sup> Often incorrectly called symbolic actions. A distinction is needed between true symbolic actions, complete with mime and prerequisites, and accepted rituals, habits, and social behavior (or their default) (Jer 16:1–9; Ezek 24:15–27; Hos 1:2–11), which are afterwards explained symbolically. See B. Lang, “Street Theater: Raising the Dead and the Zoroastrian Connection in Ezekiel’s Prophecy,” in *Ezekiel and his Book* (ed. J. Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Peeters, 1986) 297–316, with a further classification on pp. 305–7; M. Dijkstra, *Ezechiël I*, 51–52; *II*, 15–27, esp. 24.

<sup>54</sup> The antecedent is not expressed in the direct context. As in the Ezekiel text, a reference to the pending disaster in the vision seems to be inferred.

<sup>55</sup> McCarter thought correctly that the rubrics were associated with the proclamation of the inscription (“Balaam Texts,” 49); see also Hackett, “Response,” in *Balaam Text*, 80–81.

points forward to the doom predicted for the *nqr*, “the blinded one.” Whatever the exact interpretation of *nqr*, Balaam is most probably pointing out a person or people threatened by the wrath of the goddess Shagar-and-Ashtar.<sup>56</sup>

Ezekiel is certainly not dependent on Balaam, but both prophets may have used common strategies to bring across their message. Communication followed established patterns of dramatic expression and word use. If a book can be written about the common characteristics of Ezekiel and Elijah-Elisha,<sup>57</sup> it should not be impossible to draw parallels between Balaam’s prophecy and Ezekiel’s, both being called to announce a prophecy of doom in a certain historical situation. Other events in Ezekiel’s career can be compared with those described in the wall text: the refusal of an oracle (Ezek 14:3; 20:1–3, 31); the collecting of a crowd to hear the divine word (Ezek 33:30–33); the confrontation and debate about the prophecy (Ezek 12:21–25, 27–28; 18:1–4, 19–20, 25–29; 20:32–33; 33:10–11).

The further course of Balaam’s story across the break in the text suggests that Balaam’s revelation of the vision to his people ends in a dispute. The frame of the prophetic story combines the subgenres of the report of the vision and the prophetic disputation. The story of Michaiah ben Imla (1 Kings 22) and Jeremiah’s confrontation with Hananiah with a symbolic action of Jeremiah’s wooden yoke (Jeremiah 28) well illustrate how such genres can be combined. At the beginning of Balaam’s message we find repeated calls, such as his call to the deaf to listen from afar and the blind to look on Shagar-and-Ashtar; then there are the whys (lines 4 and 20) and particularly the response “Has nobody sought advice from you?” (line 25) and his reaction to it.

Disputation or the taking up of objections to the message is a characteristic form of prophetic communication, though without a clear structure or fixed pattern. Perhaps such an element should not be called a genre.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless,

<sup>56</sup> *nqr*, “blinded, a blinded one” (Hoftijzer, *Aramaic Text*, 237, 306); but Caquot and Lemaire, (“Les textes araméens,” 202, 205), McCarter (“Balaam Texts,” 51 [read, however, *niḏr* instead of *niḏr*]), and Hackett (*The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla*, 77–85; idem, “Religious Traditions,” 126), who discussed the word *nqr* extensively, opted for *nqr* = *neṣer*, “sprout, scion”; and Hackett suggested because of the context of the tomb in Combination II, that he perhaps was a victim of child sacrifice. Ringgren (“Balaam and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” 97) opted for a crown prince and relates the context to a royal marriage. Levine (“The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” 201; idem, “The plaster inscriptions,” in *Balaam Text*, 58–72) suggested “corpse” or “carriage” based on enigmatic *neṣer* in Isa 14:19, criticized again by Hackett (“Response,” in *Balaam Text*, 78–79). *neṣer* may indicate a title for an individual, perhaps of royal blood (Isa 11:1; 14:19; Dan 11:7; also the term *ṣemah*), or collectively the royal dynasty (Isa 60:21; Eccl 40:14; compare also the term *ʿezrah(i)*, “native population, native, citizen”). Etymology is here less important than evidence to establish that Balaam himself or a person/people from Balaam’s environment are indicated.

<sup>57</sup> K. W. Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets* (SBT n.s. 31; London: SCM, 1974).

<sup>58</sup> See M. Dijkstra, *Gods voorstelling: Predikatieve expressie van zelfopenbaring in oudoost-erse teksten en Deutero-Jesaja* (Dissertationes Neerlandicae. Series Theologica 2, Kampen: Kok, 1980) 376–78.



in the announcement of their message, the prophets certainly met with objections, doubt, and unbelief, which they quoted and/or utilized to elaborate their message further (e.g., Isa 5:18–19; 7:10–17; 29:9–12, 14–16; 40:27–31; 45:9–13; 49:14–21; Ezek 18:1–4; 37:1–6). Disputations are often the result of prophesying doom. The recording of such rejection of the word or sign in tradition emphasizes that the prophet was right and enhances the prophet's authority. Those who wrote (parts of) the *Sefer Balaam* on the wall at Deir 'Alla realized that and did not hesitate to do so in his honor and blessed memory.

### Conclusion

In this essay we came to the remarkable conclusion that the Balaam of the wall text is closer to the biography of OT prophets in some ways than is the Balaam depicted in Numbers 22–24!<sup>59</sup> Perhaps such a positive assessment is exaggerated.<sup>60</sup> It seems almost a positive answer to the question in the title: Is Balaam also among the prophets? However, the danger always lurks of taking a newly found text as evidence that the Bible is correct after all. It would not be fair to the authors of the scriptures or to the authors of the *Sefer Balaam* to rehabilitate the biblical Balaam on the grounds of the wall text and to bring him into the goodly fellowship of the prophets. Despite all the agreements in conception and action, differences remain between the religious beliefs of the inhabitants of the Valley of Succoth and those who transmitted the stories of Elijah and Elisha. In view of their beliefs, these worshipers of El and his family should be classed as Canaanite or, if Israelite, at the least Elistic Israelite, different from Yahwistic Israelite. That is no negative assessment as such. As is the case with the Kuntillet el-Ajrud texts, the character of this inscription can no longer be explained in terms of a simplified model: Israelite versus Canaanite religion and culture. It is hard to differentiate between Israelite and Canaanite culture in the Iron I period. Some local Israelite cults were in the Iron I and early Iron II period (eighth century BCE) still very close to the West Semitic polytheistic religions of the Levant. The Balaam text once again indicates how much Israelite belief is dependent on West Semitic religious beliefs and on the beliefs of the ancient Near East, in which environment Israel's belief originated and grew to maturity.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> As already remarked by H. O. Thompson, cited in Hackett, "Some observations," 219.

<sup>60</sup> Schmidt, "Die alttestamentliche Bileamüberlieferung," 257–79; Müller, "Einige Probleme," 58–60; idem, "Die aramäische Inschrift," 242–44.

<sup>61</sup> Originally published in Dutch in 1990 (*Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 90 [1990] 159–85); revised and augmented by the author and translated with some useful suggestions by J. G. Rigg, Bennekom, Netherlands.