

LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES
IN *SEFER BIL'AM* (NUMBERS 22–24)

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This dissertation’s holistic approach to *Sefer Bilʿam*, applied in the course of its philological and literary treatments of the text, yields significant new observations that stand in dialogue with the lengthy established discourse on this pericope. In the first portion of the study, a considerable number of individual linguistic peculiarities receive close attention, and contribute collectively toward a demonstration of style-switching and setting-switching as devices operative in the text. The study’s second part moves beyond these features, first treating the minutiae of the pericope’s literary mechanics, and then turning to the larger tropes and patterns operative not only within this text, but also between it and other portions of the biblical corpus. Ultimately, this research highlights the richness, complexity, and subtlety of *Sefer Bilʿam* as a sophisticated literary unit, and demonstrates that literary and linguistic approaches are crucial for accessing the totality of such material’s intrinsic meaning. In addition, however, it re-engages prior discourse by providing a new perspective from which to evaluate longstanding questions about this pericope’s date of composition and historical context. Specifically, it points to the conclusion that this is a Judahite text from the 8th century BCE, whose content draws on Gileadite Balaam traditions that penetrated into Judah as a consequence of Assyrian incursions into the region under Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Clinton John Moyer completed his undergraduate study in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Washington in 2000. As an undergraduate, he was a Dorot Fellow and a two-time Mary Gates Fellow. An excerpt from his senior thesis, entitled “An Examination of the Ugaritic Evidence for Cultural Exchange with Egypt, with an Emphasis on the Linguistic Evidence,” was awarded Second Place (Undergraduate) in the 2001 Society of Biblical Literature Northwest Region Student Paper Competition. His graduate work in Hebrew Bible at Cornell University began in 2002. Upon achieving the degree of Master of Arts in 2005 en route to the completion of his doctorate, he relocated to Chicago to complete his dissertation. He currently works as Senior Imaging Technician for the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and he and his wife serve as Resident Heads in the university’s Undergraduate Housing System.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Frequently Used Terms

BH	Biblical Hebrew
IH	Israelian Hebrew
JH	Judahite Hebrew
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
LXX	Septuagint
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
MT	Masoretic Text
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew

Standard Reference Works

AHw	Wolfram von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> (3 vols.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981).
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic</i> , reprint of 1907 ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).
BHL	Aron Dotan, ed., <i>Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia</i> (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001).
BHS	Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967, 1977).
CAD	Martha T. Roth et al., eds., <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> (21 vols.; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–).
CAT	Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> (German title: <i>Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> , 2 nd enlarged ed. [KTU ₂]; ALASP 8; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995).
DCH	David J. A. Clines, ed., <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (6 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–).
DNWSI	J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, <i>Dictionary of the North-west Semitic Inscriptions</i> (2 vols.; HOSANE/HOSNME 21; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

<i>DULAT</i>	Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> , trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (HOSANE/HOSNME 67; Leiden: Brill, 2003).
GKC	A. E. Cowley, trans., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch</i> , 2 nd English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).
<i>HALOT</i>	Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (5 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000).
<i>HDHL</i>	Academy of the Hebrew Language, <i>The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language</i> (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1988–).
NJPS	Jewish Publication Society of America, <i>Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> . (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).
<i>NSI</i>	G. A. Cooke, <i>A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903).

Series

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	The Anchor Bible
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research Special Volume Series
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BBVO	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient
BETHL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue Biblique
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
GBSOT	Guides to Biblical Studies – Old Testament

HAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HOSANE/ HOSNME	Handbook of Oriental Studies, Part One: The Ancient Near East and Middle East
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTIBS	Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IOS	Israel Oriental Studies
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
JanL	Janua Linguarum
JDS	Judean Desert Series
JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
JSOTS	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> Supplements
KEHAT ₂	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament, 2 nd ed.
KHAT	Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
LWM	Languages of the World/Materials
MAD	Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OTL	Old Testament Library
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SB	Subsidia Biblica
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature – Archaeology and Biblical Studies
SBLAIL	Society of Biblical Literature – Ancient Israel and Its Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature – Writings from the Ancient World
SH	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SVT	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
TSJTSA	Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Journals

<i>AJS Review</i>	<i>Association of Jewish Studies Review</i>
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages</i>
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>AulOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR:BS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>

<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>Journal of Philology</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>Jrel</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>LeS</i>	<i>Lingua e Stile</i>
<i>MPAIBL</i>	<i>Mémoires présentées par divers savants à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de l'Institut de France</i>
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>SBVS</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>SEb</i>	<i>Studi Eblaiti</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WO</i>	<i>Welt des Orients</i>
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Goals

The holistic approach to *Sefer Bil'am* that I undertake in this dissertation, which incorporates underapplied linguistic and literary approaches, yields significant contributions to preexisting scholarly discourse on the pericope. On the one hand, it provides a range of new perspectives on the traditional questions of dating, provenance, redaction, and historical context, which collectively point to the pericope's identity as a single, unified, mid- to late-8th-century Judahite composition. On the other hand, it leads to a number of significant thematic observations about various aspects of the pericope, including: the gradual development of Balaam from mercenary diviner to true prophet; the condemnation of empty ritual practices; the praiseworthiness of Israel as God's chosen people; the integral contribution of the supposedly independent "jenny episode" to the literary construction of the pericope as a whole; the chronological schema of the pericope, culminating in a celebration of David's military successes; and the pericope's engagement and employment of certain important points arising elsewhere in biblical literature. Thus, while this examination provides fresh perspectives from which to approach the overarching concerns of traditional scholarship, its primary worth derives from its concern not with questions *about* the text (date, authorship, and so on), but with questions about *how* the text conveys meaning, and *what* tools are used to achieve this.

Primary Concerns of Prior Scholarship on This Pericope

Opinions on the origin, makeup, and significance of *Sefer Bil'am* vary extremely widely. At one end of the spectrum, the regimented source-critical

perspectives of Otto Eissfeldt, Martin Noth, and Sigmund Mowinckel, for instance, have been called into question in recent years, to the extent that Baruch A. Levine wrote that “any attempt to fit the Balaam narrative into a strict, source-critical structure, assigning discrete sections of the text variously to J and E, is ultimately unenlightening and counterproductive.”¹ Even so, at the opposite end of this spectrum, the traditional source-critical approach has informed many scholarly perspectives subsequent to its earliest application to this text, such as that of Angelo Tosato in his structural examination of Balaam’s first two oracles (Num 23:7–10, 18–24), traditionally ascribed to E; and, to a lesser extent, Richard Elliott Friedman’s recent presentation of the entire pericope.²

Likewise with regard to the dating of the text, scholarly efforts have produced similarly wide-ranging results. As for the pericope as a whole, some have favored “the early, pre-monarchic dating of at least the personality and oracles of Balaam,”³ while others have taken “the early post-exilic period as the time of redaction,”⁴ and still others have offered a range of more moderate views, such as Levine’s hypothesis that it dates to “the first half of the ninth century B.C.E.”⁵ Others have isolated specific elements in the pericope that they believed to be instructive in this regard, such as Balaam’s final prophetic utterance (Num 24:23–24), which J. C. de Moor took as a reference to the Sea Peoples’ activity at the end of the Bronze Age (around 1200 BCE),⁶ but which Hedwige Rouillard viewed as a reference to Alexander, deriving

¹ Levine 2000: 207.

² Tosato 1979; Friedman 2003: 280–287.

³ Dijkstra 1995: 74. See also the literature cited therein.

⁴ Douglas 1993a: 423.

⁵ Levine 2000: 232.

⁶ De Moor 1997: 248–249.

from the Seleucid era of the late 4th and 3rd centuries BCE.⁷ This indicates, moreover, that the preference for one dating scheme over another often has been intertwined with matters of interpretation.

Approaches Taken in This Study

This clear lack of consensus stands as an open invitation for the infusion of new data and perspectives into the consideration of such issues. This dissertation takes up this challenge and provide a fresh approach to these matters with specific regard to *Sefer Bil'am*. More to the point, however, I would stress that in the past several decades, the overwhelming concern of secondary discourse with questions of this type has detracted from the equally valid exploration of the mechanics of biblical literature, and of this piece of biblical literature in particular. For this reason, I embark here on a two-pronged approach to this pericope that focuses on how the text operates as a vehicle for the transmission of meaning, examining both the literary tools employed to this end and the ideas communicated through their use.

Linguistic (Dialect)

In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine a large number of Aramaic-like features in both the prose and the poetry of *Sefer Bil'am*. A careful review of the secondary literature in the field of Semitic philology provides an opportunity to highlight the distinction between features of this type and the related category of “Aramaisms,” within which they traditionally have been grouped. Whereas “Aramaisms” are to be understood as indicative of the effects of direct Aramaic influence on Biblical Hebrew (hereafter,

⁷ Rouillard 1985: 461–464.

BH), I show that Aramaic-like features represent the intentional efforts of the biblical authors to simulate dialects other than Standard Biblical Hebrew (hereafter, SBH) in order to produce certain literary effects. Of the range of possible effects achieved in this fashion, the two that are active in *Sefer Bil'am* are known as “style-switching,” that is, the use of dialectal features to reflect the foreignness of a particular character (in this case, Balaam), and “setting-switching,” that is, the use of such features to indicate the foreign setting of a particular narrative. The bulk of Chapter 3 focuses on the isolation of these features, a process that requires careful linguistic analysis, and proceeds to make a series of observations about their collective effect in the pericope. In particular, I highlight the evidence indicating that these features are both intentional and literarily motivated.

Literary

Upon completing my analysis of the literary devices of style-switching and setting-switching, I turn in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to the operation in *Sefer Bil'am* of a number of rather better-known literary elements. I begin by situating the literary study of the Bible within the larger context of biblical studies generally, emphasizing the nature of this approach as a complement to, rather than a replacement of, established methods and perspectives. Then in Chapter 5, I thoroughly examine the operation of six different literary devices within the prose and poetry of this pericope (sound echo, keywords, naming, gapping, repetition, and structure), incorporating the theoretical background for each device into my discussion at the appropriate junctures. Of particular note in this chapter is the manner in which many of these devices clearly operate across the entire pericope, with some instances even crossing the boundary between prose and poetry. This evidence speaks strongly in favor of perceiving the entire text as a unit, rather than pulling apart the various strands of its perceived

precursors or generic components, since the latter practice would disintegrate the very literary devices that hold the pericope together. Finally, in Chapter 6 I explore the large-scale themes and tropes evident in *Sefer Bil'am*, which at times rely for their deployment directly on the smaller-scale devices discussed in Chapter 5. Here I also detail the ways in which certain aspects of the pericope interact significantly with other parts of the biblical corpus, and examine what these relationships contribute to our understanding of the text.

Assumptions Underlying This Study

Any significant piece of research, including this one, brings with it a range of assumptions that inform its approach and reasoning. To be sure, the simple assumption of a common level of basic understanding must remain tacit, since it is neither possible nor productive to reinvent the wheel in every new piece of scholarship. However, in order to avoid the pitfalls of insufficiently self-reflective research, I take a moment at the outset of this study to express an awareness of certain deeper assumptions underlying my work, and, where possible, to provide some explanation for my allowing them to persist throughout what follows.

The Unity of Sefer Bil'am

I have indicated already that my intention here is to treat this pericope as a unified whole. While it is true in one sense that a tacit acceptance of this perspective is no more justified than the assumption that it is constituted of several disparate parts, on the other hand there are certain factors that point toward the legitimacy of such a view as a working principle in research. First, despite diverse scholarly attempts to extract the various textual precursors of which the present version of the pericope purportedly is a redaction, this version comes to us not as an explicitly demarcated

series of associated documents, but rather as a single continuous work. To dispense entirely with this continuity in our examination of the material would be to disregard a specific datum whose value, at the very least, must be explored before it is set aside.

Second, for a dozen decades the core traditions in biblical scholarship have been informed by a preference for atomism that, although responsible for innumerable contributions to our understanding of the biblical corpus and its development, nevertheless warrants by its very persistence the application of alternatives to this perspective in the study of the same material. Indeed, it is this infusion of new modes of thinking that provides the basis for meaningful critique and development of past approaches, which otherwise run the risk of becoming entrenched. Thus, the merit of the holistic perspective adopted in the present study lies partly in the counterpoint it provides to genetic approaches such as source criticism, whose fundamental principles undergird the bulk of past scholarly discourse on the Bible generally.

Additionally, although the insights revealed by this perspective cannot be offered as evidence of its legitimacy, it is worthwhile again to note that my observations on the literary character of *Sefer Bil'am* reveal numerous large-scale devices that operate across the entire pericope, usually in clear opposition to the traditionally proposed source-critical or other divisions in the text. This speaks to the unique fruitfulness of the holistic approach as a means of accessing certain qualities of the material that do not readily present themselves by way of other modes of examination.

The Historicity of Sefer Bil'am

This dissertation does not address directly the matter of historicity in this pericope. However, at times the language used herein to refer to “the Aramean prophet Balaam” and the like may leave unclear how, or indeed whether, I view such people

and/or things as historical entities. Thus, before moving on to the specific topics with which I am concerned in this study, a few words are in order regarding the perspective taken here on the historicity of the text. Jo Ann Hackett's comments go to the heart of this matter, since she based her observations on the only extrabiblical evidence associated with the prophet Balaam, namely, the plaster inscriptions discovered at Deir ʿAllā. Although the relationship between this epigraphic material and the biblical Balaam traditions is limited to the bare mention of the figure himself, and thus does not offer an especially specific window onto whatever factual kernels may underlie the biblical narrative, Hackett nevertheless observed the following:

This new inscription serves to authenticate the Balaam traditions in the Hebrew Bible to the extent that the bare facts of his existence are the same in each case. Balaam is included in the text with virtually no introduction. This fact implies that his name was well known to the people to whom the inscription was addressed, so we may infer that his was a tradition of long standing.⁸

General though it is, this statement encapsulates the best available link between *Sefer Bilʿam* and our knowledge of historical fact. This link is of extremely limited substance, to be sure; but this does not suggest that the biblical Balaam material warrants unilateral dismissal as pure invention, any more than the presence of these limited historical data requires us to view everything else in the pericope as similarly factual.

Rather, the perspective taken here is akin to that articulated by Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg, among others, in their approaches to the Bible as a body of literature. Sternberg carefully addressed the terms “history” and “fiction,”

⁸ Hackett 1984: 125.

emphasizing the ambiguity in modern parlance between these two concepts because of the blurred boundary “between the represented object and the discourse that represents it. On the one hand, each term indicates a different object of representation, ‘history’ denoting what really happened and ‘fiction’ the sphere of the imagined or invented. ... On the other hand, each term may point to a different mode of representation or writing—‘history’ to re-creative and fiction to creative discourse.”⁹ This ambiguity, he argued, tends to produce the common fallacious perception “whereby history-writing is wedded to and fiction-writing opposed to factual truth.”¹⁰ According to Sternberg, such a view obscures the fact that the distinction between historical and fictional writing lies not in their relationship to fact, but in the operative principles observed in the course of writing: “Both historiography and fiction are genres of writing, not bundles of fact or nonfact in verbal shape. In either case, then, it all boils down to the rules of the writing game, namely the premises, conventions, and undertakings that attach to the discourse as an affair between writer and audience.”¹¹

Herein rests the appropriate avenue of approach for both historical texts that hypothesize or even invent material to fill narrative gaps, and fictional texts that are rooted in historical fact.

If the title to history writing hinged on the correspondence to the truth—the historicity of the things written about—then a historical text would automatically forfeit or change its status on the discovery that it contained errors or imbalances or guesses and fabrications passed off as verities. ... Nor does fiction-writing turn on the fictionality of its object. Does the St. Petersburg location of a Dostoevsky novel or the

⁹ Sternberg 1985: 24.

¹⁰ Sternberg 1985: 25.

¹¹ Sternberg 1985: 26.

reference of *War and Peace* to historical personages consign them to a genre different from that of a work wholly born of fantasy?¹²

Thus, we need not approach biblical narrative with an all-or-nothing sensibility regarding its historicity. The biblical text, and *Sefer Bil'am* specifically, clearly exhibit innumerable points of intersection with the historical world. The ethnic and linguistic identities, the geographical locations, and (as we now know from the Deir 'Allā materials) at least one of the characters that have parts in this pericope may be considered “real” from a historical point of view. But this does not mean that the entire pericope as a whole must be deemed “historical” on the basis of these elements alone. By the same token, speaking of a given biblical text as “fiction” in no way undermines whatever historical underpinnings it may possess, nor does it imply frivolity or lack of depth in the composition.

As Alter put it, “[t]here is...a whole spectrum of relations to history in the sundry biblical narratives...but none of these involves the sense of being bound to documentable facts that characterizes history in its modern acceptance.”¹³ He adopted the term “historicized prose fiction” for biblical narrative generally,¹⁴ and called upon the extensive cycle of stories about David as a demonstrative example:

This narrative, though it may have certain folkloric embellishments..., is based on firm historical fact, as modern research has tended to confirm.... Nevertheless, these stories are not, strictly speaking, historiography, but rather the imaginative reenactment of history by a gifted writer who organized his materials along certain thematic biases and according to his own remarkable intuition of the psychology of the characters. He feels entirely free, one should remember, to invent interior monologue for his characters; to ascribe feeling, intention, or

¹² Sternberg 1985: 25.

¹³ Alter 1981: 24.

¹⁴ Alter 1981: 24.

motive to them when he chooses; to supply verbatim dialogue...for occasions when no one but the actors themselves could have had knowledge of exactly what was said.¹⁵

Needless to say, these qualities describe biblical narrative generally, not just that associated with David. Thus, notwithstanding several points of contact with historical fact, on the whole *Sefer Bil'am* similarly exhibits the inventive aspects that both Sternberg and Alter associated with fiction-writing. The Bible, moreover, is by no means unique in this regard:

Beowulf is a work of heroic history, i.e. a poem in which facts and chronology are subservient to the poet's interest in heroic deeds and their value in representing the ethics of an heroic civilization. A poet writing in this mode does not disregard absolute historical fact, history, that is, as we know it. He rather sees it as less important than other considerations.... His account will sometimes mesh reasonably well with history.... But more often, his work will be a freely-woven structure in which the characters and actions of the past will be part of an ethically satisfying narrative.¹⁶

As Robert T. Farrell's observation with respect to *Beowulf* demonstrates, other ancient corpora attest a similar interaction between historical fact and literary artistry—in particular, ideologically or “ethically” motivated artistry—in which the latter functions, quite simply, as the vehicle by which the former is conveyed.

As such, the literary perspective adopted throughout this dissertation neither attributes nor denies historical veracity to the content of the pericope. Rather, it aims to engage the text on its own terms, by which I mean two things: first, that the events described in this pericope are true within the world of the narrative itself; and second,

¹⁵ Alter 1981: 35.

¹⁶ Farrell 1970–1973: 229.

that this narrative world's internal mechanics and operations mirror precisely those of the "real" world. In this way I am able to proceed with my examination in a manner that upholds the integrity of the world it describes, without becoming embroiled in the question of its "truth." This is not to say that this study has nothing to contribute with respect to the matter of this pericope's relationship with history: on the contrary, my efforts yield a number of such observations. But my primary goal is to understand the story as it is told: what precisely that story is, and what tools are utilized to achieve its communication.

Transitional Remarks

Having called attention to these matters as key elements governing my perspective in what follows, we arrive in a moment at the core material of this study, in which I address linguistic and literary aspects of *Sefer Bil'am*. Large-scale literary examination of the pericope are reserved for the later chapters. Meanwhile, the first major topic to occupy our attention is the intentional employment of Aramaic-like features in the pericope, beginning in the next chapter with a review of prior scholarship that provides the groundwork for the requisite linguistic analysis of the textual evidence.

First, however, I address two minor points of interest. The attentive reader will have observed already my use of the term *Sefer Bil'am*, literally "the book of Balaam," to refer to the pericope with which I am concerned. The conception of this pericope as an independent literary unit derives from at least as early as Rabbinic times, as evident in B. Baba Batra 14b: ...משה כתב ספרו ופרשת בלעם. "Moses wrote his (own) book [i.e., the Torah], and the portion of Balaam...." The precise phrase *Sefer Bil'am* is of similar antiquity, and has been used routinely in both premodern and modern times to refer to this pericope. The traditional delimitation of the text (Num

22:2–24:25) is affirmed by the Leningrad Codex (L), which demarcates the passage with a *setuma* before Num 22:2 and a *petuḥa* after the last verse of Numbers 24.¹⁷ Obviously, we lack the explicit testimony of the Aleppo Codex (A),¹⁸ but like manuscripts reflect the same paragraphing as L.¹⁹ My employment of the phrase *Sefer Bil'am* thus accords with longstanding views on both the literary independence and the precise identity of the text in question.²⁰

Additionally, although this three-chapter span may exceed the quantity of material typically associated with the word “pericope,” from a technical standpoint my employment of this term for *Sefer Bil'am* is correct, as demonstrated by the definition provided in the *Concordia Cyclopaedia*: “A word taken from the Greek, meaning a section, and applied to the fixed portions of the Scripture read as lessons on the Sundays and festivals of the church-year. Such a division of the Scripture-text was in use even in the ancient synagog, the Law and the Prophets being divided into 54 such lessons each.”²¹ The usage employed herein is upheld by this definition’s emphasis on the division of the text for the purpose of reading, specifically by means of its reference to the *parashiyot* and *haḥḥarot* of the synagogue tradition: as it turns out, *Parashat Balaq* consists of *Sefer Bil'am* in its entirety, plus the first nine verses of the

¹⁷ This is plainly visible in the layout in *BHL*, pp. 231–235. As is often the case, the Masoretic divisions are less clearly seen in the layout of *BHS*.

¹⁸ As is well known, the vast majority of the Torah of the Aleppo Codex is no longer extant.

¹⁹ See the presentation of the text in Breuer 1989: 200–204 and Ofer 2000: 148–151, whose editions are based on A, with appropriate supplemental material from similar manuscripts.

²⁰ The approach taken here follows that of the recently developed field of delimitation criticism in biblical studies, as presented in the five volumes thus far produced in the new series entitled *Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity*. See, for example, the first volume in the series, entitled *Delimitation Criticism: A New Field in Biblical Scholarship* (Korpel–Oesch 2000). Note especially Clark 2005, which appears in the fifth volume of the series and deals with section demarcations (particularly *setumot* and *petuḥot*) in the book of Numbers, though Clark’s reliance on *BHS* rather than L stands as one of the shortcomings of his study.

²¹ Fuerbringer et al. 1927: 579.

following chapter (Numbers 25). Thus, the term “pericope” is entirely appropriate for a text of *Sefer Bil'am*’s length, and serves as a convenient appellation in the study undertaken here.

CHAPTER 2
DIALECTAL FEATURES IN THE LANGUAGE OF *SEFER BILʿAM*:
BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Introductory Remarks: Style-switching and Setting-switching

The next two chapters focus on the isolation and examination of specific philological peculiarities in *Sefer Bilʿam* that can be set apart from the surrounding SBH (= Judahite Hebrew, hereafter JH)¹ material. Most of these peculiarities occur in the poetic oracles of the prophet Balaam, and are noteworthy due to their Aramaic-like quality. These features are to be interpreted as reflective of a literary device termed “style-switching,”² whereby the direct speech of a foreign character is flavored with elements that call to mind the native speech of the character’s homeland. The remaining non-SBH features in the pericope, including those sprinkled throughout the prose surrounding Balaam’s oracles, represent a closely related but slightly different device whereby such features are employed to emphasize the foreign setting of a given text. Prior discourse has not yielded a convenient appellation for this second device, so I adopt here the term “setting-switching,” on analogy with “style-switching.”³ The distinction between the two devices lies in the fact that setting-switching can occur in

¹ The term “SBH” bears a chronological/diachronic meaning, while “JH” connotes regional/synchronic significance. I adopt Gary A. Rendsburg’s equation of these two terms, as indicated in Rendsburg 2003a: 5 and elsewhere, according to which SBH/JH is taken to be the Judahite dialect of the pre-exilic period.

² Kaufman 1988: 55.

³ The term “addressee-switching” refers to a third device in this family, whereby the use of non-SBH features in a given text approximates the dialect of the (ostensible) intended audience, as in certain prophetic addresses to nations outside Israel/Judah. The device does not occur in *Sefer Bilʿam*, however, and hence this study will not address it directly.

the narrative voice or in that of any of the characters (whether or not they are foreigners), whereas style-switching is limited to the direct speech of foreigners.

Herein, I present a thorough discussion of each piece of linguistic evidence supporting the hypothesis that dialect has been utilized intentionally in the composition of this pericope to achieve these two similar but distinct literary ends: first, to color or render distinctive the speech of the foreign prophet himself, who is an Aramean; and second, to tinge the narrative, which is set outside of *ʔEreṣ Yisraʔel* proper, with a foreign flavor. That said, it is important briefly to address the term “dialect” and to specify the fashions in which I use it in this study.

Northwest Semitic Dialects: The General Picture

The finer points of the notoriously problematic debate concerning how we delineate *dialects* as opposed to *languages* need not concern us here.⁴ For our purposes it suffices to observe the traditional model conventionally used in scholarship, whereby the Canaanite and Aramaic families represent two different languages or language spheres, each possessing a range of dialects, and each exhibiting signs of interpenetration, at various times and for various reasons. The Canaanite dialects in particular have received ample classificatory attention, notably from H. L. Ginsberg, who posited a split within this group between the coastal “Phoenic” dialects and the “Hebraic” dialects of the hinterland;⁵ and from Gary A.

⁴ Chambers and Trudgill observed that the traditional “way of looking at this [is] to say that ‘a language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects’” (Chambers–Trudgill 1980: 3). This way of differentiating between the two terms ultimately is rather rudimentary and exhibits a range of difficulties (neatly summarized in Chambers–Trudgill 1980: 4–5). Notwithstanding these challenges, however, for our purposes the test of mutual intelligibility serves as a more or less satisfactory criterion by which to draw the desired distinction, provided that we bear in mind a certain level of concomitant terminological fluidity. See also Rendsburg 1995: 180 n. 13.

⁵ Ginsberg 1970: 102–116.

Rendsburg, whose body of work has highlighted numerous isoglosses connecting Israelian⁶ and Mishnaic Hebrew (hereafter, IH and MH, respectively) with languages such as Ugaritic and Phoenician, and separating them from JH.⁷ W. Randall Garr's important exploration of the complexities of this matter led him to the important notion of a dialect continuum in the Northwest Semitic family, with Aramaic at one end of the spectrum and Canaanite at the other.⁸ The various dialects fall across this spectrum, with the dialect of Deir ʿAllā, for example, falling somewhere in the middle.

However, the idea that all members of the Northwest Semitic language family occupy a single continuous spectrum does not imply that Hebrew and Aramaic are dialects of the same language, nor that one is a dialect of the other. Likewise, recognition of the similar shift of IH away from JH and toward Aramaic does not imply that this dialect is to be isolated from the Hebrew sphere,⁹ as Rendsburg noted in his article on the morphological evidence for IH:

This article has utilized Aramaic and Phoenician parallels to a great extent. Does this mean that Israelian Hebrew more closely resembled these two varieties of Northwest Semitic speech than it did Hebrew? ... [On the contrary,] Israelian Hebrew shared many isoglosses with Phoenician and Aramaic. Nevertheless...it is clear that the language of the northern tribes is still Hebrew.¹⁰

⁶ The term “Israelian” in the phrase “Israelian Hebrew” refers to the northern kingdom of Israel, as opposed to the Israel of the united monarchy (which includes Judah), for which the usual term “Israelite” would be used. It was coined by Ginsberg in his volume *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (Ginsberg 1982; see especially pp. 1–2), and later adopted by Rendsburg (*passim*), who has employed the phrase “Israelian Hebrew,” together with his students, to great effect as a designation for the dialect of the northern kingdom.

⁷ See especially Rendsburg 2003a and Rendsburg 2003b.

⁸ Garr 2004, especially pp. 229–231, wherein he included particularly illustrative diagrams.

⁹ Although Garr treated Hebrew as a monolithic entity in his study, we may incorporate the distinction between JH and IH into his approach without significant difficulty.

¹⁰ Rendsburg 1992a: 87.

As such, since this study is rooted specifically in the language of the Bible,¹¹ I employ the term “dialect” to refer broadly to all linguistic features that deviate from SBH/JH, whether these divergences manifest connections with other Canaanite tongues or depart from that sphere entirely and are associated instead primarily with Aramaic. That is to say, herein the term stands universally for all shifts away from SBH on the Northwest Semitic spectrum, irrespective of the distance, direction, or character of those shifts.¹²

Aramaic-like Features in Sefer Bil'am as Intentional Literary Elements, Not Incidental Dialectal Vestiges

To go a step further, with specific regard to the style-switching aspects of Balaam's poetic oracles, the presence of these Aramaic-like features is not to be understood as an indication that the character is speaking some kind of amalgam between Hebrew and Aramaic. Rather, the situation is akin to what Rendsburg described in reference to the use of dialect in the book of Job: “[L]inguistic markers which identify the characters as Transjordanian were utilized to convey to the reader the foreignness of Job and his interlocutors. But they are not so prevalent as to ‘get in the way’ of the reader’s comprehension.”¹³ To draw on a particularly illustrative modern analogy often used by Rendsburg in a classroom setting, the situation here may be compared to a WWII film in which all of the German soldiers speak English—but with a German accent, even employing at times German expressions such as

¹¹ Excluding, of course, those portions of the biblical corpus composed entirely in Aramaic.

¹² Occasionally the term will have another meaning that bears no specific relationship to biblical language, as in the phrases “Canaanite dialects,” “Aramaic dialects,” etc. In these instances the meaning will be transparent from context.

¹³ Rendsburg 1995: 180.

“Achtung,” “Mach schnell,” and so on.¹⁴ Far from suggesting that these characters actually speak thickly accented English, the intent rather is to help identify these characters specifically as Germans, while retaining intelligibility for the viewer.

In the same way, the Aramaic-like features in Balaam’s speech call attention to his Aramean origin, without compromising the uptake of the Hebrew-speaking audience. Similarly with regard to the handful of philological features adduced here that occur in the prose of the pericope, all exhibit some deviation from SBH; however, they are to be understood not as evidence of the narrative’s having been composed in a distinct dialect, but rather as “seasonings” that evoke the non-Judahite settings in which the various parts of the story take place.

To be sure, it is important to emphasize the distinction between the usages of non-SBH features under scrutiny here, namely style-switching and setting-switching, and the incidental occurrence of dialectal qualities in texts originating outside of Judah. While instances of the latter occurrence are the unintentional result of a given text’s non-SBH provenance, by definition style-switching and setting-switching are intentional, literarily-motivated deviations from SBH. However, as we shall see, this is an interpretive distinction, not a linguistic one. The *identification* of both intentional and incidental qualities of biblical language requires an application of precisely the same principles of linguistic inquiry: methodologically speaking, these two types of non-SBH features are isolated in identical fashion.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Rendsburg for myriad illuminating classroom experiences, and in particular for this illustration.

Review of the Modern Study of Aramaic-like Features in the Bible, and Its Intersection with the Field of Semitic Philology in General

In order to establish the fundamental background of this study, we now must trace the development of this type of inquiry in modern biblical scholarship. To this end, I present the following review of scholarly discourse relating to dialect study in the Hebrew Bible, and of earlier perspectives that have contributed to the development of this avenue of research.¹⁵ As intimated above, at its core, dialect study in the Hebrew Bible has arisen as a response to the challenges posed by certain complexities and peculiarities in the language of the Bible for which other explanations, when they exist, have proven less than satisfactory. A retrospective look at prior scholarship reveals two avenues of approach that historically have been marshaled to address these challenges: textual criticism and comparative Semitic philology. To be sure, the modern study of dialect in the Bible builds on the work of past scholars who were engaged in these fields, and as such it is worthwhile to review their trends and vicissitudes, along with the advantages and shortcomings of such approaches.

According to Emil Kautzsch, textual criticism of the Bible in the modern era commenced in earnest toward the end of the 19th century.¹⁶ Of particular note are Julius Wellhausen's *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (1871),¹⁷ S. R. Driver's *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (1890),¹⁸ *Textus hebraici emendaciones* (1900) edited by H. Oort,¹⁹ C. F. Burney's *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of*

¹⁵ This review of the secondary literature places slight emphasis on materials concerned with the relationship of Aramaic to the language of the Bible. This is motivated partly by the present study's concern specifically with Aramaic-like features in *Sefer Bil'am*, and partly by the tremendous importance of Aramaic and Aramaic studies to the development of biblical dialectology generally.

¹⁶ GKC p. 22 § 3g.

¹⁷ Wellhausen 1871.

¹⁸ Driver 1890.

¹⁹ Oort 1900.

Kings (1903),²⁰ and aspects of the general approach taken in the International Critical Commentary series as a whole.²¹ The sixteen-volume *Sacred Books of the Old Testament* (1893–1904), edited by Paul Haupt,²² presents the Hebrew Bible “with full textual notes, and indicating the different documents by colours,”²³ and warrants special mention as a multivolume effort in which the Documentary Hypothesis and the text-critical approach appeared in tandem. Kautzsch described the impetus for this type of study as follows:

The chief requirements for one who is treating the grammar of an ancient language are—(1) that he should *observe* as fully and accurately as possible the existing linguistic phenomena and *describe* them, after showing their organic connexion (the empirical and historico-critical element); (2) that he should try to *explain* these facts, partly by comparing them with one another and by the analogy of the sister languages, partly from the general laws of philology (the logical element).

Such observation has more and more led to the belief that the original text of the O.T. has suffered to a much greater extent than former scholars were inclined to admit....

Advance in grammar is therefore closely dependent on progress in *textual criticism*.²⁴

Certainly, Kautzsch’s description of the tasks of the grammarian is apt, and may be applied to the student of any language. Moreover, when dealing with ancient languages whose extant sources are in written form only, it is beyond dispute that such philological inquiry can proceed only subsequent to a careful critical analysis of the

²⁰ Burney 1903.

²¹ These references and others are presented in GKC p. 22 § 3g.

²² Haupt 1893–1904. Friedman’s 2003 volume *The Bible with Sources Revealed* offers a recent parallel to the presentation in Haupt’s work.

²³ GKC p. 22 § 3g.

²⁴ GKC pp. 21–22 §§ 3f–g (emphases in original).

text under scrutiny. In this way one is able to assess accurately any potential breakdowns in the textual record, and thus avoid being misled in one's philological assessment by a poorly preserved or transmitted text.²⁵

The difficulty arises, however, in the sequence of scholarly progress implied by Kautzsch's statements. By his reckoning, it is the activity of the grammarian, who produces descriptions and explanations of BH by means of empirical, historico-critical, and logical approaches, that reveals the degradation of the biblical text. Only subsequently is the text critic called upon to establish a prior, and thus superior, version of the text, one in which the problems encountered by the grammarian are absent. To put it another way: any problems that the grammarian's efforts cannot eliminate are to be viewed as corruptions, and the job of the text critic is to find a way to make the text fit the system and rules established by the grammarian. This problematic perspective appears to suggest that the "original" version of a given text will be ideal, perfect in form, transparent in meaning, and devoid of inexplicable linguistic difficulties. This is an extreme scenario, to be sure; but even in its more tempered forms, the fundamental notion has led at times to a preoccupation with *Urtext*, to the extent that some scholars have devoted disproportionate effort and privilege to the reconstruction of such "precursors."

A demonstrative and somewhat more recently articulated example occurs in one scholar's treatment of a specific phrase in *Sefer Bil'am*, namely, the second colon of Num 23:10, which reads:

²⁵ Hence the inclusion of a number of text-critical notes in the appendix that accompanies this study.

מִי מִנָּה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
וּמִסְפָּר אֶת־רֵבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	<i>ûmispār</i> the dust-cloud of Israel?
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	May my soul die an upright death,
וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיָי כְּמִנָּה:	and may my posterity be like it (i.e., the dust of Jacob // the dust-cloud of Israel).

In 1944, W. F. Albright attempted, somewhat audaciously perhaps (even given the scholarly *Zeitgeist*), in an article titled “The Oracles of Balaam,” to produce the “original” textual versions of the prophet’s poetic utterances on the basis of historical grammar and cultural context.²⁶ He attributed to “practically all commentators”²⁷ the correction of *וּמִסְפָּר* in 23:10b to *וּמִי סָפַר* “and who can number,” on the basis of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX, in parallel with *מִי מִנָּה* “who can count” in the preceding colon. Angelo Tosato’s restatement of the same opinion in 1979, with additional emphasis on the parallelism, attests to its longevity.²⁸ However, Rendsburg saw the word *וּמִסְפָּר* as a form exhibiting an enclitic *mêm*, here used in combination with the conjunction, thus *וּמִ-**, on the basis of comparison with Eblaite *ù-ma*.²⁹ The implication is that because enclitic *mêm*, attested in a number of places in the biblical corpus,³⁰ already was obscured or lost in Hebrew by the time of the versions, when confronted with this challenging form as it occurs in the present verse these later textual traditions attempted to explain it by incorrectly parsing the enclitic as an interrogative *מִי*. Similarly, although the Masoretes preserved the correct consonantal text, here as elsewhere they mistakenly pointed the word in a manner that obscures the enclitic; thus *וּמִסְפָּר* “indeed, number” was vocalized *וּמִסְפָּר*. To be sure, Albright was

²⁶ Albright 1944.

²⁷ Albright 1944: 213 n. 27.

²⁸ Tosato 1979: 104–105.

²⁹ Rendsburg 1987: 36–37, 38.

³⁰ See, e.g., Andersen 1970: 48, 124 n. 13; Robertson 1972: 79–110; Gordon 1987b; Wallace 1987; and the remainder of Rendsburg 1987.

not privy to the Eblaite evidence, which was not discovered—to say nothing of its being understood—until nearly three decades later. Nevertheless, the comparative approach speaks strongly against Albright’s view, maintained later by Tosato and others, that this text-critical solution provides access to a “pristine” reading unsullied by later degradations of the text.

In the present context it is particularly worthwhile also to note Albright’s comments regarding the phrase אֶת־רִבֵּעַ in the same colon of Balaam’s oracle. He stated: “Most commentators emend MT, אֶת־רִבֵּעַ, to אֶת־רִבְבַּת, but since [Friedrich] Delitzsch compared Akkadian *turbu²u* (correctly *turbu²tu*), ‘dust,’ which is obviously related to רִבֵּעַ, there has been increasing respect for the Hebrew text.”³¹ This, while in the same breath he already had blithely suggested emending אֶת־רִבֵּעַ to תִּרְבֵּעַ!³² The issue at stake here is one of morphology, not etymology; and indeed, as above, recent decades have witnessed the persistence of Albright’s view.³³ Nevertheless, Chaim Cohen’s remark that this is “perhaps the most celebrated case of an emended biblical *hapax legomenon*”³⁴ well captures the gravity of the suggested revision. The phrase אֶת־רִבֵּעַ receives specific attention in the discussion of dialectal features undertaken in the next chapter. As we shall see, in terms of our understanding of the text the insight provided by the approach adopted here essentially overlaps with Albright’s text-critical solution, but without recourse to emendation.

By far the most significant foil to Kautzsch’s statement that “the original text of the O.T. has suffered to a much greater extent than former scholars were inclined to

³¹ Albright 1944: 213 n. 28.

³² Albright 1944: 213.

³³ See, e.g., Cohen 1978: 37–39, 60–63 nn. 65–87.

³⁴ Cohen 1978: 38.

admit”³⁵ was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. This corpus, which includes manuscripts of every biblical book except Esther, and certain books in multiple copies, dates approximately to the period between 200 BCE and 70 CE. These biblical manuscripts are the oldest witnesses to this material that we possess, and predate the next earliest versions by about a millennium. Although the scrolls manifest occasional deviations from the biblical material as it was known prior to their discovery, most of these evidently represent expansions or developments of the material, and thus do not bear on the matter of text criticism. Meanwhile, the occasional significant textual variants attested in the scrolls do not diminish the general sense that, in broad terms, the extremely close similarity between them and the next earliest manuscripts demonstrates clearly that the transmission of the written biblical text continued over the thousand-year interval between them with an extremely high degree of conservative accuracy. Regarding the great Isaiah Scroll discovered in Cave 1 (1Qisa^a), for instance, which is by far the largest and most complete biblical manuscript in the Qumran corpus, Millar Burrows wrote shortly after its discovery that “[h]erein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.”³⁶ To this, Bleddyn J. Roberts added that “[p]ractically all commentators have been amazed at the similarity between the text-form of the scroll and that of the M.T.; it is the most phenomenal aspect of the whole discovery.”³⁷ To a greater or lesser extent, one may extend more or less the same impression to the Qumran biblical manuscripts generally.

³⁵ GKC p. 21 § 3g.

³⁶ Burrows 1948: 17.

³⁷ Roberts 1949–1950: 230.

This is not to say that the Scrolls eliminate the need for textual criticism altogether; on the contrary, they provide an unprecedented tool, since important divergences from the later versions have been of vital importance in both higher and lower criticisms of the Bible. Similarly, recent efforts such as Emanuel Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*³⁸ and several studies appearing in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, edited by Jeffrey H. Tigay,³⁹ provide valuable perspectives on the current state and positive contributions of textual criticism in biblical studies generally. Such materials, ancient and modern, invite us to engage the biblical text with an openness to the linguistic challenges encountered therein, rather than with an eye toward means of explaining them away. Thus, with a careful and conservative approach to the differentiation of peculiar philological elements from true corruptions, textual criticism can inform both our grammatical and our interpretive analyses, without being overly informed by them.⁴⁰

Another means by which scholarship has addressed troublesome aspects of biblical language is that of comparative Semitic philology. In truth, the comparison of Hebrew with other Semitic languages, namely Arabic and Aramaic, begins in the Middle Ages with Saʿadia Gaʿon (10th century), Abraham ibn Ezra (12th century), David Qimḥi (13th century), and others. More recent centuries have witnessed the development of this approach into a distinct subfield. From the turn of the 19th century, many biblical scholars exhibited a deep interest in the relationship between Aramaic and BH, particularly with regard to “Aramaisms.” Early modern efforts in

³⁸ Tov 1992.

³⁹ Tigay 1985. See especially, e.g., Zakovitch 1985 and Tov 1985.

⁴⁰ Note the similar view cogently stated in Rendsburg 1992a: 65–67.

this direction are concisely summarized by Max Wagner, whose presentation amounts to an annotated bibliography of the relevant materials from the 19th century.⁴¹

In the mid-1800s, the number of available avenues for approaching the relationship between Hebrew and its sister languages experienced unprecedented proliferation. By 1857, the decipherment of the Akkadian portion of the trilingual Bisitun Inscription by Henry Rawlinson, Edward Hincks, Jules Oppert, and William Henry Fox Talbot had been completed.⁴² The significance of this newly rediscovered Semitic language had a resounding effect on the study of the Semitic languages, but in addition this achievement can be seen as a key moment ushering in a marked increase of Western interest in the ancient history, cultures, and languages of West Asia.⁴³ The decipherment of Akkadian provided access to texts whose significance previously had been obscure, such as the archive from the reign of Assurbanipal, discovered at Nineveh in 1849 by Austin Henry Layard. In addition, it helped fuel an abundance of new excavation projects across the region, which in turn led to further infusions of new material into the growing Akkadian corpus, including, for example, the thousands of tablets found at Babylon during the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft excavations beginning in 1899.

The unlocking of the Akkadian language also had far-reaching impact in the West Semitic realm. The Akkadian tablets from Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, some of which were discovered by locals in 1887 and the rest as a part of the 1891 excavations under

⁴¹ Wagner 1966: 8–9.

⁴² On the decipherment of cuneiform, see, e.g., Gordon 1982: 55–85, a chapter entitled “Reclaiming the Sumero-Akkadian Legacy.”

⁴³ Also of critical importance to the increase of interest in this region, though less directly concerned with the advent of modern comparative Semitic philology, were the important Egyptological discoveries of the 19th century, and in particular the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion in 1822.

the direction of Flinders Petrie, have proved to be an invaluable source of both historical and linguistic information on the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age. This archive is comprised primarily of diplomatic and other letters written to the Egyptian ruler by his Levantine vassals. The linguistic information they contain, and specifically the peculiarities and “Canaanisms” of the Akkadian used by Northwest Semites, has occupied the attention of recent scholars such as Anson F. Rainey,⁴⁴ Shlomo Izre’el,⁴⁵ and Daniel Sivan,⁴⁶ whose efforts in this direction have contributed significantly to the larger picture of the Semitic languages.

As such, these texts dovetail nicely with the proliferation of textual discoveries during this period in the Northwest Semitic domain, within which BH is situated. Although the Levant yielded considerably fewer substantial archives on a par with those encountered in Mesopotamia, the significance of the epigraphic materials that were brought to light should not be underestimated. Of particular note are finds contemporary with the Hebrew Bible, that is, from the first millennium BCE. For example, in the northern reaches of the Levant, the excavations at Sam’al (modern Zincirli) from 1899 to 1902, under the direction of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, revealed inscriptions in Phoenician and Sam’alian Aramaic, as well as in Luwian and Akkadian. Further south, Phoenician inscriptions such as that on the sacrophagus of Tabnit, king of Sidon, discovered in 1887 by Osman Hamdi, served collectively as the basis for a growing academic understanding of that language. The Gezer Calendar, discovered by R. A. S. Macalister during his excavations from 1902 to 1907, remains a staple component of the Hebrew branch of Northwest Semitic. And

⁴⁴ Rainey 1996.

⁴⁵ Izre’el 1998.

⁴⁶ Sivan 1984.

the stele of King Mesha of Moab, discovered by F. A. Klein in 1868, contains explicit references to figures familiar from the historical record of the Bible.

The number of important discoveries in the Levant continued to grow in the 20th century. Within the bounds of biblical Israel, the ostraca discovered at Lachish by James Leslie Starkey in 1935 and 1938, which date to the beginning of the 6th century BCE, and those found at Arad by Yohanan Aharoni in 1968, which date to the mid-7th century BCE, have provided remarkable insights into the biblical period and the people of ancient Israel. But even more significant for the study of BH from both a cultural and a linguistic perspective, despite deriving from outside the biblical world both geographically and temporally, are the two large cuneiform archives at Ugarit (modern Tell Ras Shamra) and Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh). The former, which dates to the Late Bronze Age and whose first pieces were discovered during excavations led by Claude Schaeffer beginning in 1929, includes not only Sumerian, Hurrian, and Akkadian material, but also the Northwest Semitic Ugaritic language written using a cuneiform alphabet. This generically diverse archive from an important international trading center has provided revolutionary contributions to our understanding not only of the Northwest Semitic languages, but also of the cultures present in the region at the time, and these contributions have had tremendous impact on biblical studies.

The second archive, discovered at Ebla in the 1970s by Paolo Matthiae and his team, is even older, dating to the third millennium BCE and attesting the Sumerian and Eblaite languages. The latter, which exhibits traits of both the East and the West Semitic branches of the language family, has been a particularly informative East–

West link in comparative Semitic philology, and despite its temporal remove from the Bible it also has had specific ramifications in biblical studies.⁴⁷

In addition, although it is not a substantial archive like the finds at Ugarit and Ebla, no study on the biblical Balaam narrative can afford to overlook the tremendously important discovery by H. J. Franken in 1967 of the ink-on-plaster inscriptions at Deir ʿAllā in Jordan. These inscriptions record additional traditions about a seer evidently named Balaam son of Beʿor. They represent an immensely valuable extrabiblical counterpart to *Sefer Bilʿam*, and since the discovery of these texts, several studies have appeared offering detailed explorations of both the inscriptions generally and specific aspects of the linguistic and stylistic relationships between these texts and the biblical material.⁴⁸ The character and content of the inscriptions from a literary standpoint come into play in more significant fashion in the next chapter. Meanwhile, even more than their relationship to the biblical pericope under scrutiny, their relevance to the present study lies in their contribution to the overall picture of the Northwest Semitic language family as a whole. The language of the inscriptions was identified in the *editio princeps* as Aramaic,⁴⁹ a determination that elicited strong and vocal dissent from Joseph Naveh⁵⁰ and Jonas C. Greenfield.⁵¹ In response there developed the alternative view that the inscriptions reflect a Transjordanian dialect like Moabite or Ammonite, but exhibiting certain features more

⁴⁷ See, e.g., several articles that address biblical matters in the four-volume series *Eblaitica* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987–2002), edited by Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg.

⁴⁸ See now, e.g., the wonderful collection of studies available in Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1991.

⁴⁹ Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1976, which bears the title *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla*.

⁵⁰ Naveh 1979.

⁵¹ Greenfield 1980. See also Greenfield 1981: 115.

closely akin to Aramaic.⁵² Although Stephen A. Kaufman came down more on the Aramaic than the Canaanite side with respect to the dialect of the Deir ʿAllā material, he was able as a result of the surrounding scholarly discussion to single out the discovery of these texts as a watershed moment in Northwest Semitic studies.⁵³ Below, we shall examine his perspective, and the significance he attributed to this material, in considerable detail and in a slightly different context.

Meanwhile, again, the relevance of these discoveries to the present discussion lies in the doors they opened for increased understanding of the biblical corpus, with regard to both content and language, as our understanding of the Bible's place within its cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts continued to deepen. As the scholarly world absorbed this range of new material for comparison and analysis, the philological interests of the 19th-century biblical scholars who studied "Aramaisms" converged with those interpreting the results of the new excavations, such that by the end of the 19th century the Semitic language family and its internal relationships were being mapped in great detail. The new comparative perspectives that had become available for penetrating the challenges encountered in the language of the Bible left an immediate and ever-deepening mark on biblical scholarship. Certainly by the time Kautzsch penned the remarks cited above, the perspective gained by applying the principles of comparative Semitic philology to the study of the Bible was well recognized. He himself was convinced that part of the Hebrew grammarian's task was "that he should try to *explain* these facts [i.e., phenomena attested in the Hebrew

⁵² See especially the painstaking analysis of Hackett 1984: 109–124; and also, e.g., Kaufman 1988, *passim*, who mused, "[W]hy not simply say it is Gileadite and be done with it?" (43). See also Rendsburg 1993, which offers a slightly more recent treatment.

⁵³ See Kaufman 1988.

language]...by the analogy of the sister languages....”⁵⁴ Similarly, Burney observed that some texts could “only be elucidated by recourse to the evidence supplied by the cognate languages.”⁵⁵ Note, for instance, his reliance on Akkadian and Arabic parallels as means of arriving at the correct interpretations of the expression בְּפָרֶעַת פְּרָעוֹת (Judg 5:2), which he read as “when long locks of hair were worn loose” on the basis of the cognates *pirtu* “long hair” and فَرْع “sprout.”⁵⁶ Likewise, he provided philological confirmation that the term מְלָכִים (Judg 5:3), which parallels רֹזְנִים in the preceding stich, is to be understood as “rulers” on the basis of an Arabic cognate bearing the meaning “be weighty, grave, firm in judgment” as well as Akkadian *urzunū, ruṣṣunu* “mighty, dignified.”⁵⁷

Subsequent contributions to the discourse furthered this perspective, and, unsurprisingly, became more refined as the available data increased. Perhaps the most profound demonstration of this is the abundance of biblical scholarship incorporating the Ugaritic materials, of which Albright’s *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, first published in 1940, is but one early and fairly general example.⁵⁸ There also appeared a range of studies focusing more specifically on individual biblical books, such as Patton’s 1944 work *Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms*⁵⁹ and Albright’s 1955 study of Proverbs entitled “Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in the 1950s and 1960s, Mitchell Dahood produced multiple

⁵⁴ GKC p. 21 § 3f.

⁵⁵ Burney 1920: 171; and see discussion on 171–176.

⁵⁶ Burney 1920: 103, 107–109.

⁵⁷ Burney 1920: 103, 109. Note that both of these examples derive from a text (Judges 5) of whose northern affinities Burney was cognizant.

⁵⁸ Albright 1962 is the second edition.

⁵⁹ Patton 1944.

⁶⁰ Albright 1955.

explorations of the relationship between Qohelet and the Phoenician language.⁶¹ More recently, Yitzhak Avishur's numerous publications dealing with the Northwest Semitic context of biblical literature demonstrate the growth of both the available data and the field itself, with his 1984 work *Stylistic Studies of Word-pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures* standing as a convenient and frequently consulted handbook for the use of word-pairs in the region in antiquity.⁶² As a final example I cite the publications of Moshe Held, whose comparative approach emphasizes the importance of lexical rather than etymological relationships, and thus stresses the necessity of a truly intimate familiarity with the entire breadth of the Semitic language family. In 1989, Cohen meticulously articulated his teacher's method and contributions to the field in his article "The 'Held Method' for Comparative Semitic Philology."⁶³

The past several decades have witnessed the publication of several important reference works, including John C. L. Gibson's three-volume *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*,⁶⁴ Shmuel Ahituv's monograph on Northwest Semitic inscriptions, now available in three editions (two Hebrew and one English),⁶⁵ John Andrew Dearman's volume on the language and history of Moab,⁶⁶ Garr's *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine 1000–586 B.C.E.*,⁶⁷ Kent P. Jackson's *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age*,⁶⁸ and Charles R. Krahmalkov's recent *Phoenician-Punic*

⁶¹ Dahood 1952a, 1952b, 1966.

⁶² Avishur 1984.

⁶³ Cohen 1989.

⁶⁴ Gibson 1971–1982.

⁶⁵ Ahituv 1992; Ahituv 2005; Ahituv 2008.

⁶⁶ Dearman 1989.

⁶⁷ Garr 2004 is a reprint of the original 1985 edition.

⁶⁸ Jackson 1983.

Grammar and Phoenician-Punic Dictionary.⁶⁹ With specific regard to Aramaic, we may highlight Michael Sokoloff's dictionaries of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic⁷⁰ and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,⁷¹ Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten's grammar of Egyptian Aramaic,⁷² and Stephen Fassberg's volume on the Targumim of the Cairo Geniza.⁷³ J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling's *Dictionary of the Northwest Semitic Inscriptions* provides details from both Aramaic and Canaanite branches of the Northwest Semitic family.⁷⁴ The overlap between biblical and linguistic fields is perhaps most apparent in James Barr's thorough 1968 treatment entitled *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*.⁷⁵ Additionally, although somewhat outside the linguistic sphere proper, the three-volume *Context of Scripture*, edited by William W. Hallo,⁷⁶ which replaces the significant but now outdated *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* edited by James B. Pritchard,⁷⁷ provides a valuable compendium of ancient texts bearing significant parallels to portions of the biblical corpus.

As with textual criticism, however, there have occurred certain misinterpretations of the comparative data in biblical scholarship. Already in the 19th century, there had arisen a tendency to see "Aramaisms" of all kinds in BH as more or less unilateral indicators of late date. Thus, while the penetration of Aramaic elements into the language of the post-exilic books as a result of direct influence—that is, of

⁶⁹ Krahmalkov 2001.

⁷⁰ Sokoloff 2002a.

⁷¹ Sokoloff 2002b.

⁷² Muraoka–Porten 1998.

⁷³ Fassberg 1990.

⁷⁴ *DNWSI*.

⁷⁵ Barr 1987 is an expanded and corrected edition.

⁷⁶ Hallo 1997–2002.

⁷⁷ Pritchard 1969.

true Aramaisms—legitimately stands as a hallmark of Late Biblical Hebrew (hereafter, LBH), a great many Aramaic-like features in earlier texts were themselves mislabeled as Aramaisms. By Kautzsch’s day, for example, he was comfortable identifying “certain parts of the Pentateuch” (by which he presumably meant the Priestly source, *inter alia*) as diachronically of a piece with manifestly late works such as Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Daniel.⁷⁸ Other texts of Israelian origin or otherwise exhibiting nonstandard dialect received the same treatment, as in the case of Jeremiah, whose linguistic peculiarities have received recent attention as evidence of Benjaminite dialect,⁷⁹ but were treated as Aramaisms by the likes of A. W. Knobel and Karl Zimmer.⁸⁰ The consensus, as stated by Kautzsch in 1902, ran as follows: “Abgesehen von einigen wenigen Beispielen...ist ein zweifelloser Aramaismus immer eine starke Instanz für die Ansetzung des betr. Abschnitts in exilischer oder nachexilischer Zeit.”⁸¹

Drawing a Distinction Between “Aramaisms” and Other Aramaic-like Features

The cracks in this perspective began to be revealed near the end of the 19th century. Already in 1881, Driver offered an extensive criticism of C. V. Ryssel’s efforts to late-date the Aramaic-like elements evident in E.⁸² Similarly, in a 1903 review of Kautzsch’s *Die Aramaismen im Alten Testament*, from which I have just quoted, Nöldeke offered a critique of the view presented there in which he demonstrated considerable sensitivity to the complexities of the Aramaic-like data.⁸³

⁷⁸ GKC p. 16 § 2u.

⁷⁹ Smith 2002, especially Chapter Five.

⁸⁰ Knobel 1831; Zimmer 1880. For other such examples, see the materials cited in Wagner 1966: 8–9.

⁸¹ Kautzsch 1902: 104.

⁸² Ryssel 1878; Driver 1881.

⁸³ Nöldeke 1903.

Avi Hurvitz nicely summarized Nöldeke's general statement of the two issues of central concern: "1) The very identification of various elements of BH as Aramaisms, which had penetrated into Hebrew from outside; and 2) the chronological significance that we may attach to such Aramaisms."⁸⁴ Indeed, in this way Nöldeke's response to Kautzsch's previously cited perspective helps to illuminate an earlier remark by Kautzsch, which first appeared in 1885 as part of his expansions to Gesenius's grammar: "But all of the peculiarities of these later writers are not Aramaisms. Several do not occur in Aramaic and must have belonged at an earlier period to the Hebrew vernacular, especially it would seem in northern Palestine. There certain parts of Judges, amongst others, may have originated...."⁸⁵ His observation of this kind of nuance, and his subsequent passing mention of the issue of dialect in the Bible, are noteworthy, especially given their date of publication. However, his persistence in identifying the authors of the biblical texts in question as "these later writers" is a striking testament to the tenacity of the standard view to which Nöldeke had reacted, according to which the "Aramaisms" in a given text were seen to take priority over other types of linguistic data in establishing its date.

Indeed, in certain circles this view has persisted up to the present day. In two recent articles, Rendsburg responded to a number of studies that employed linguistic data, and in particular "Aramaisms," to attribute late dates of composition to certain biblical pericopes.⁸⁶ To review these representative examples briefly, Rendsburg's 2002 article provides a counter to Alexander Rofé's effort to see Genesis 24 as a Persian period composition,⁸⁷ and responds to Marc Brettler's proposal that 1 Sam

⁸⁴ Hurvitz 1968: 237.

⁸⁵ GKC p. 17 § 2v.

⁸⁶ Rendsburg 2002b; Rendsburg 2003c.

⁸⁷ Rofé 1976 (Hebrew); Rofé 1981 (Italian); Rofé 1990 (English).

2:27–36 exhibits LBH features.⁸⁸ In 2003, Rendsburg proceeded to address in similar fashion the late-dating efforts of Michael Barré (Psalm 116),⁸⁹ Rofé (1 Kings 21),⁹⁰ and Michael Waltisberg (Judges 5—widely accepted as one of the oldest poems in the biblical corpus!).⁹¹ Rendsburg’s method, which forms a fundamental component of the present study, offers a nuanced assessment of the linguistic peculiarities attested in these pericopes, whereby they are engaged as synchronic rather than diachronic cruces. This approach is described in detail below. Here, I offer the following brief example, which represents but one datum in Rendsburg’s larger argument regarding 1 Kings 21.⁹² It deals with the word חֲרִים “nobles, freemen” in 1 Kgs 21:8, 11. As Rendsburg acknowledged, the earliest extrabiblical occurrences of the word come from the time of the Persian Empire,⁹³ a fact that led Rofé to view it as one of several indicators of the text’s authorship in that period.⁹⁴ But Rendsburg argued that the two ideas do not necessarily correlate.

...[T]here is no reason not to assume the existence of this lexeme in Aramaic centuries earlier. This is especially so given the fact that newly discovered Old Aramaic inscriptions frequently provide for us the attestation of a particular Aramaic word known previously only from later sources, whether it be Imperial Aramaic or even Middle Aramaic. And if חֲרִים existed in the Aramaic of, let us say, the ninth century BCE, there is no reason not to assume its existence in Hebrew guise during the same period in the Israelian dialect.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Brettler 1997.

⁸⁹ Barré 1990.

⁹⁰ Rofé 1988.

⁹¹ Waltisberg 1999.

⁹² This argument occupies Rendsburg 2003c: 116–122, with the discussion of the present example appearing on pp. 118–119.

⁹³ Rendsburg 2003c: 118.

⁹⁴ Rofé 1988: 98.

⁹⁵ Rendsburg 2003c: 118–119.

This type of approach, whereby later (post-exilic or even post-biblical) lexical data are utilized to inform Rendsburg's interpretation of ostensibly earlier texts, appears in various contexts across his publications on IH. To be sure, subsequent scholars have leveled criticism at such an approach for this very reason, insisting that such a method gives short shrift to the significance of the chronological span between the text under scrutiny and the linguistic information called upon to explicate it.⁹⁶ The unreliability of lexicon as a basis of comparison was expressed by Garr as follows:

Whereas phonology, morphology, and syntax are employed in [my] dialectal analysis, it is impossible to analyze the lexicon for this purpose...[since] the extant [Northwest Semitic] texts do not offer sufficient lexical material to make possible an interdialectal analysis. Lexical comparison should be based upon a standardized list of core vocabulary items.... Yet few of [these] items...appear in the preserved texts. ... Although a lexical analysis may be used in the future, with the discovery of additional texts, it is not feasible at present.⁹⁷

In response to “the general tendency of modern Semitic studies to disregard lexical evidence in genealogical classification,”⁹⁸ however, Leonid Kogan argued that the careful treatment of this evidence can be as fruitful as that of the more commonly employed types such as morphology. In his examination of the historical unity of Aramaic, he agreed with Garr regarding the importance of the basic vocabulary,⁹⁹ but

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Pardee 1992 (a review of Rendsburg 1990a), specifically p. 703. For a more general statement of the dissenting viewpoint, note the following remarks in Pardee 1991: 100: “The experience provided by attempts to classify Ugaritic should provide sufficient warning against ascribing improper attention to lexicon and literary features: those who weighted those aspects too heavily classified Ugaritic with Hebrew, while those who observed the less easily borrowable features classified it as a more archaic language.”

⁹⁷ Garr 2004: 6.

⁹⁸ Kogan 2005: 513.

⁹⁹ See Kogan 2005: 514–515.

disputed the notion that the available evidence is insufficient for meaningful study in this regard. On the contrary, he observed as follows:

...[T]he importance of lexical features for genealogical subgrouping may increase considerably if we are dealing with languages with restricted corpora or fully or largely non-vocalized texts. In many such cases morphological information relevant for the classification is scarce or insufficient whereas at least some essential elements of the basic lexicon are most often present in every document of reasonable length.¹⁰⁰

Kogan proceeded with a close examination of a range of terms in the basic Aramaic vocabulary, exploring the ways in which these terms unite Old Aramaic with later dialects of the language. His study focused on lexemes that are not used in any other Semitic language as the primary term for the notion in question (“exclusive”), or that may appear as the primary term in a few other languages but are by no means ubiquitous (“non-exclusive”) and therefore remain “potentially useful for the purposes of classification.”¹⁰¹ The conclusions that Kogan drew from this examination are remarkable, as his summary indicates:

In the course of the foregoing analysis, 47 lexical features shared by the Old Aramaic inscriptions with later Aramaic dialects and opposing them to all (or most, or many) other Semitic languages have been detected. This amount of evidence is impressive for a relatively small corpus of more or less seriously damaged inscriptions and strongly suggests that the specific nature of the Aramaic vocabulary was fully developed already by the first centuries of the first millennium BC. Moreover, such a thick net of peculiar lexical features is unlikely to develop during a relatively short time-span. Rather, it must go back to the second millennium where the beginnings of Aramaic as an

¹⁰⁰ Kogan 2005: 517.

¹⁰¹ Kogan 2005: 517. See Kogan 2005: 518–536 for the presentation and discussion of the specific lexical items in question.

independent language are to be situated. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that in the great majority of cases (40 out of 47) the pertinent lexical features survived in Neo-Aramaic (or, at least, in some of its varieties). This is a powerful demonstration of the extreme conservatism of the basic vocabulary which faithfully preserves its most pertinent traits during three millennia of the turbulent ethnic, political, religious—and linguistic!—history of the area.¹⁰²

Kogan was careful to include an examination of the various reasons for two languages or dialects to utilize related or identical terminology, and devoted special attention to this issue¹⁰³ as well as to the various discontinuities in the Aramaic dialects that were revealed in his study.¹⁰⁴ In the end, however, these matters do not detract from the overarching thrust of his work, which clearly demonstrates the instructive potential of lexical evidence, even across considerable chronological distance, as a means of addressing the history and development of Aramaic.

By extension, then, Kogan's findings likewise validate the employment of such evidence by scholars such as Rendsburg in his work on IH, not by proving such efforts automatically correct, but rather by indicating that lexical perspectives on IH that derive from other chronological periods cannot be thrown out simply on the basis of their lexical and/or temporally distant character. Bearing this in mind, it is worthwhile to highlight the observation of Kaufman, who pointed out that such evidence is all the more salient when it operates in tandem with morphological or other linguistic data:

It is true that lexical comparisons have generally been avoided in language classification work, for experience shows that the lexicon, especially...outside the realm of basic vocabulary, is much more amenable to change than is the structure of a language. Thus if lexically based conclusions contradict the evidence of grammar, the evidence of

¹⁰² Kogan 2005: 536.

¹⁰³ Kogan 2005: 537–543.

¹⁰⁴ Kogan 2005: 557–563.

grammar must prevail. If they complement each other, however, the lexical evidence has every right to be adduced as corroborative evidence.¹⁰⁵

Thus, returning to Rendsburg's perspective on the word חָרִים in 1 Kings 21, one recalls that this lexical datum is one of several points leading him to conclude that the issue with this text is not one of late-dating, as Rofé believed, but rather one of dialect—though this example constitute but a single piece of his overall argument. Rendsburg's treatment of חָרִים, accordingly, stands as a clear demonstration of the process by which problems previously understood diachronically are reevaluated as synchronic concerns. Moreover, it is striking that the criticisms leveled against his work, specifically those directed against his employment of chronologically distant lexical data, themselves reassert the decidedly diachronic viewpoint to which Rendsburg's entire perspective responds.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Rendsburg also pointed out the overlap between this tendency toward late-dating on a linguistic basis, albeit a faulty one, and the general outlook of the minimalist school. He observed that the minimalist perspectives of scholars such as Niels P. Lemche, Thomas L. Thompson, Keith W. Whitelam, and others, which have been surveyed recently by William G. Dever,¹⁰⁶ accord well with conclusions such as those reached by Rofé, Brettler, Barré, Waltisberg, and so on. However, it is exceedingly rare in minimalist approaches to the dating of biblical texts that one encounters an engagement with the linguistic evidence. This is hardly surprising, from Rendsburg's point of view: "The reasons for this are

¹⁰⁵ Kaufman 1988: 48.

¹⁰⁶ Dever 2001, especially the second chapter, entitled "The Current School of Revisionists and Their Nonhistories of Ancient Israel" (23–52); and see also Dever 1998. Dever's presentation is scathing, but it effectively captures in convenient form the fundamental components of the minimalist approach.

clear: the linguistic evidence...contradicts the effort to shift the date of clearly pre-exilic compositions to the post-exilic period. Accordingly, those involved in this movement simply ignore the evidence.”¹⁰⁷ As a demonstrative example of this shortcoming in the minimalist approach, Rendsburg noted Athalya Brenner’s attempt to date Exodus 15 (!) to the Persian period, in which the presentation of linguistic data is weak and cursory at best.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the significance of the movement is not to be overlooked, as in a broad sense it tacitly offers an ideological haven for misinterpretations of linguistic or any other evidence with respect to the issue of date.

In addition to the kinds of diachronic problems adduced above, there have arisen at times synchronic perspectives that appear similarly to miss the mark. The most illustrative example is that offered by N. H. Tur-Sinai, who in his 1954 commentary on Job¹⁰⁹ expressed a possible interpretation, ostensibly already present in scholarship but whose sources are unspecified, that apparently amounts to style-switching. He wrote as follows: “...[I]t has been suggested, *inter alia*, that the author deliberately put in the mouth of Job and his friends, natives of Aram and Edom, expressions from the language of the East—a view to which I, too, formerly adhered.”¹¹⁰ Elsewhere in his commentary, Tur-Sinai proposed his preferred alternative view, in accordance with the 700-year-old theory of Abraham ibn Ezra, that the extant Hebrew version of Job derives from an Aramaic original, from which stem the Aramaic qualities in the language of the Hebrew text.¹¹¹ Kaufman offered a

¹⁰⁷ Rendsburg 2003c: 107–108.

¹⁰⁸ Brenner 1991.

¹⁰⁹ The original is in Hebrew; the English translation, which appeared in 1957, is cited here.

¹¹⁰ Tur-Sinai 1957: 111.

¹¹¹ Tur-Sinai 1957: xxx–li. See also the statements of, e.g., F. H. Foster (1932–33) and A. Guillaume (1963), who proposed in similar fashion an Arabic precursor to the Hebrew text of Job. For recent treatments situating the Aramaic-like features in Job in a different cultural context, see Greenstein 2003 and Greenstein 2007.

response from a dialectal perspective in his examination of the style-switching phenomenon, which, he indicated, occurs in Job as well as several other biblical texts. His study, which is addressed in more detail below, led him to conclude the following:

All of these passages have in common not only that they are connected with Trans-Jordanian characters, but that they represent the speech of these characters! In all these Hebrew texts I believe that we have not to do with late language or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts.¹¹²

Thus, in response to interpretations such as that of Tur-Sinai, Kaufman indicated the importance of a text's content in evaluating this kind of linguistic data. In other words, this approach perceives a concrete relationship between the literary nature of an entire pericope and the philological nature of each individual style-switching feature. By Kaufman's reckoning, in such texts a fundamentally linguistic device evidently is employed to achieve a literary end.¹¹³ As Tur-Sinai's perspective demonstrates, failure to recognize this relationship can result in misapprehensions of the evidence that are no less problematic than those concerned with dating, as identified above.

Moreover, as with diachronic approaches, some synchronic perspectives want for evidence of a linguistic nature. For instance, Ginsberg's 1982 volume *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* is an important contribution to the scholarly understanding of both the Bible and ancient Israel.¹¹⁴ In this treatment, he examined Deuteronomy, Micah 6–7, several Psalms, and Proverbs with an eye toward

¹¹² Kaufman 1988: 55.

¹¹³ Although the device I have termed "setting-switching" is distinct on a technical level, these remarks apply equally to this device as to style-switching.

¹¹⁴ Note Rendsburg 1992a: 86, wherein he expressed the significance of Ginsberg's contributions to the study of Israelian Hebrew.

conceptual and stylistic inner-biblical comparisons with manifestly northern texts such as Hosea, ultimately concluding that these texts exhibit northern provenances.¹¹⁵ Somewhat surprisingly, however, given Ginsberg's mastery of Hebrew philology, only rarely did he consult the linguistic evidence in the course of his argument. Subsequently, Rendsburg catalogued such evidence with respect to many of these texts,¹¹⁶ but as for Deuteronomy he concluded that the available evidence is insufficient to justify the conclusion that the book as a whole is a northern composition.¹¹⁷

From this survey it is clear that, while both text-critical and comparative Semitic endeavors in biblical studies have made invaluable contributions to scholarly discourse over the last several decades, there are shortcomings and pitfalls involved in both approaches. It is precisely these gaps into which an approach from the standpoint of dialect has provided meaningful insights and advances. We have noted already the statements of Driver and Nöldeke, as well as Kautzsch's revised perspective on the matter. Similarly, Burney's early-20th-century works occasionally reveal his sensitivity to dialectal matters; for example: "Certain peculiarities of diction probably belong to the dialect of north Palestine."¹¹⁸ But if we view this period around the turn of the century as a critical point at which some awareness of dialectal issues had begun to permeate biblical scholarship, we must also recall that the available data—that is, the epigraphic materials in which comparative Semitic philology is rooted—were only beginning to accumulate, particularly with regard to the Northwest Semitic realm.

¹¹⁵ Ginsberg 1982: 19–38.

¹¹⁶ Rendsburg's body of work is cited frequently throughout this dissertation, and listed in the bibliography.

¹¹⁷ First expressed in Rendsburg 1992a: 88 n. 102, with a more recent statement appearing in Rendsburg 2000b: 35–36.

¹¹⁸ Burney 1903: 208; and see discussion on 208–209.

Along with the 20th-century growth of the relevant data set came important comparative studies, such as the aforementioned works by Albright, Dahood, and others. Alongside these works, however, as the picture of the Northwest Semitic languages and the place of Hebrew in this family were becoming ever clearer, cognizance of dialectal matters began to increase. Already in 1939, Zellig S. Harris's treatment of the development of the Canaanite dialects offered an analysis whose penetration and detail are remarkable for its day, though with only general comments about differentiations within the Hebrew language itself.¹¹⁹ In 1955, Cyrus Gordon made direct reference to the dialect of northern Israel and its impact on the Bible in his article "North Israelite Influence on Postexilic Hebrew,"¹²⁰ and in the same year, the third edition of his Ugaritic grammar, entitled *Ugaritic Manual*, incorporated similar observations.¹²¹ Likewise, Stanley Gevirtz made reference to a northern–southern distinction in Hebrew in his 1963 study of biblical poetry.¹²² Though very brief and limited in scope, Gevirtz's later article, published in 1986 and entitled "Of Syntax and Style in the 'Late Biblical Hebrew'–'Old Canaanite' Connection,"¹²³ would approach the matter in a more rigorous fashion. As yet, however, such remarks appeared to have been largely intuitive, rather than empirical.

Hurvitz

Meanwhile, it was in 1968 that Hurvitz embarked on a careful and systematic revision of the comparative approach from a synchronic perspective. While he was not

¹¹⁹ Harris 1978; see especially, e.g., 97–98.

¹²⁰ Gordon 1955a.

¹²¹ Gordon 1955b: 81 § 10.11 n. 1.

¹²² Gevirtz 1963: 57.

¹²³ Gevirtz 1986.

concerned directly with dialect in this study, his synthesis of synchronic observations into traditional diachronic perspectives on Aramaic-like features in the Bible enabled him to articulate ideas that would become the underpinnings of subsequent biblical dialect studies.¹²⁴

Acknowledging the legitimacy of the general tendency to view Aramaic influence as a defining characteristic of LBH, Hurvitz first argued that the presence of Aramaic in itself cannot be called upon to stand as proof of a given text's late date:

However, we must take into account a most important and often neglected fact, that from a linguistic point of view there is no such thing as 'Aramaic' of which one can speak generally and without further specification. There are various Aramaic dialects, differing from one another both in time and place. This...implies that even a heavy concentration of Aramaisms [*sic*] cannot automatically determine a biblical book, such as *Job*, to be late.¹²⁵

Needless to say, general cognizance of the abundance of Aramaic dialects in antiquity owes a great debt to the proliferation of epigraphic evidence that occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and thus the comparative underpinnings of Hurvitz's view are plain to see. He went on to offer Proverbs and Song of Songs as similar demonstrations of the same principle; but most salient to the present study is his subsequent observation of the potential for a literary thrust behind Aramaic-like usages in the Bible:

By the same token, one cannot automatically ascribe to the later period the Aramaisms which are connected with the description of *foreign nations and foreign peoples*. The usage of what seems to be Aramaisms

¹²⁴ The most notable example of dialectal research that is built on the foundation of Hurvitz's contributions is the accumulated work of Rendsburg, to be discussed later in this chapter.

¹²⁵ Hurvitz 1968: 235–236 (emphasis in original).

in such a context may well reflect the use of peculiar expressions characteristic of a foreign language. That is, in these cases we are not dealing with actual loan words, or forms, but rather with unique stylistic devices of a particular author or composition.¹²⁶

Hurvitz proceeded to draw up a series of guidelines and criteria, paraphrased here, by which one may assess the chronological import of possible Aramaisms in a given text. First, Hurvitz laid out the following basic assumptions that should underlie any such discussion:

1. Over time, Aramaic penetration into Hebrew increased, until at some point it eclipsed Hebrew completely.
2. At least in LBH materials, it is possible to identify Aramaisms on the combined bases of their novelty in Hebrew and their “precise...duplicat[ion]” in contemporaneous Aramaic.
3. Chronological perspectives employing linguistic data should avoid relying on textual materials whose date is disputed.
4. Cyclical reasoning, i.e. “that text *y* is late since it contains the [Aramaic-like feature] *x*; phenomenon *x* is a late [i.e., true] Aramaism since it is found in the late text *y*,” must be carefully avoided.¹²⁷

His next list identified the conditions that must be met when one offers a specific Aramaism as evidence of a text’s late date:

1. Unmistakably early texts must not exhibit the proposed Aramaism.
2. SBH generally must exhibit distinct vocabulary to express identical ideas or objects.
3. The Aramaism’s prevalence in LBH or post-biblical texts must be demonstrated, or some other convincing justification must be offered for the assumption of its lateness.

¹²⁶ Hurvitz 1968: 236–237 (emphasis in original).

¹²⁷ Adapted from Hurvitz 1968: 238.

4. The text must exhibit not just the Aramaism in question, but a concentration of late features including but not limited to other Aramaisms.¹²⁸

This synthesis, which draws heavily on the work of Nöldeke, Driver, and others, led Hurvitz to summarize this approach to “Aramaisms” by isolating the three conditions under which the presence of such features can be interpreted as an indicator of a text’s lateness:

1. For each proposed Aramaism, one must establish *both* a linguistic “opposition,” as described above, between this item and the usual SBH construction or vocabulary; *and* this item’s prevalence in LBH and/or post-biblical Hebrew.
2. There must exist a concentration of Aramaisms and/or other late elements in the text in question.
3. There must exist no other plausible circumstances under which the text might have taken on an Aramaizing character in an earlier period, such as intentional or unintentional dialectal tendency.¹²⁹

The conservatism of this approach turns on their heads the prior “blanket approaches” to the diachronic significance of “Aramaisms” in the Bible. Far from standing as relatively recognizable and straightforward hallmarks of late material in the biblical corpus, in the wake of Hurvitz’s article Aramaic-like features now must be shown to meet stringent criteria, with failure to do so rendering them inconclusive as chronological indicators. Hurvitz continued to develop this seminal approach in numerous subsequent publications, most notably two monographs entitled *בין לשון*

¹²⁸ Adapted from Hurvitz 1968: 238–239.

¹²⁹ Adapted from Hurvitz 1968: 239–240.

אֲרָמָיִת¹³⁰ and *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel*.¹³¹

Greenfield

A decade later, Greenfield made two significant contributions to the very kind of linguistic analysis Hurvitz had described, in papers entitled “Aramaic and Its Dialects”¹³² and “The Dialects of Early Aramaic.”¹³³ Since the content of these studies overlaps, I present here a review of the former only. In this piece, Greenfield discussed the history and development of the various forms of the language identifiable in antiquity, and although the paper is not expressly biblically focused, some important observations nevertheless emerged with regard to parts of the biblical corpus. Having identified northern Syria/southern Turkey as the region of origin of Aramaic, Greenfield proceeded to subdivide the language’s development chronologically.

First, he isolated what he termed “Ancient Aramaic” as the form of the language that was spoken during the second millennium BCE. Epigraphic evidence is extremely limited, but “Aramaic was surely spoken as a distinct language in the second millennium, and there is no need to have recourse to a vague and undifferentiated ‘Northwest Semitic’ for that period.”¹³⁴ Second, he addressed the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, pointing out that in this period we already can identify two distinct dialects, namely, Sam’alian and what he called “standard early Aramaic.”¹³⁵ In

¹³⁰ Hurvitz 1972a.

¹³¹ Hurvitz 1982.

¹³² Greenfield 1978a, read at the Association for Jewish Studies Regional Conference in New York in 1975; and note also Lawrence H. Schiffman’s response, appearing in the same volume (Schiffman 1978: 45–46).

¹³³ Greenfield 1978b.

¹³⁴ Greenfield 1978a: 30.

¹³⁵ Greenfield 1978a: 30.

addition to these a third dialect eventually arose in the region of the Upper Euphrates (biblical Aram-Naharaim), which long had been under the control of the Assyrians; hence he termed this dialect “Mesopotamian Aramaic.”¹³⁶ This latter dialect spread throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire and into Egypt as the *lingua franca* of the time, but was superseded by an eastern dialect of the language under the Persian Empire.¹³⁷ During and after Persian rule, many areas that had been incorporated into the empire continued to use Aramaic, and despite the scholarly tendency to use the blanket term “Official Aramaic” for the language of this period, Greenfield emphasized that dialectal distinctions are detectable.¹³⁸

Of particular note is the stratification Greenfield indicated between different forms of Aramaic in the Persian and later periods. For example, the Elephantine papyri are written in “standard” Official Aramaic, but contain features associated with a western strain of the language.¹³⁹ Similarly, Greenfield called attention to the appearance of a literary form of Aramaic, used in texts such as the Proverbs of Aḥiqar, that ultimately developed into what he calls “Standard Literary Aramaic.”¹⁴⁰ This is of particular interest for biblical studies, he pointed out, since, for example, the Aramaic portion of Ezra manifests Official Aramaic in the letters and documents incorporated into the text, but Standard Literary Aramaic in the surrounding narrative.¹⁴¹ The literary stratum, moreover, is represented by Targum Onqelos and Targum Pseudo-

¹³⁶ Greenfield 1978a: 30–31.

¹³⁷ Greenfield 1978a: 31–32.

¹³⁸ Greenfield 1978a: 32.

¹³⁹ Greenfield 1978a: 32.

¹⁴⁰ Greenfield 1978a: 33, 34.

¹⁴¹ Greenfield 1978a: 34.

Yonatan, though as Greenfield pointed out, the literary dialect's eastern origin does not necessarily imply that the Targumim were produced in the East.¹⁴²

Greenfield proceeded to discuss the further fragmentation of Aramaic in the post-biblical periods, and it is for these periods that most of his specific linguistic remarks regarding vocabulary, phonology, syntax, and morphology are directly applicable. As such, this part of his discussion departs from the purview of the present study. Nevertheless, this paper clearly emphasizes the value and significance of appreciating the range of possibilities attested in the various forms of Aramaic in antiquity, and thus it drives home Hurvitz's point that one must be attentive to such matters when utilizing Aramaic materials in the context of biblical research.

Indeed, in 1981 Greenfield turned his attention directly to such matters in his article "Aramaic Studies and the Bible."¹⁴³ Here he provided a convenient survey of then-recent Aramaic discoveries that bear relevance to biblical studies, including bibliographic references to comparative efforts employing these discoveries, and dovetailed this presentation with his earlier periodization of the development of Aramaic. Thus, distinguishing between Early and Official Aramaic discoveries, he adduced the following from the former category:¹⁴⁴

- The Sefire Treaties
- The Zakkur Inscription
- Legal documents from Assur and Tell Halaf
- Various other legal and economic texts

¹⁴² Greenfield 1978a: 35. On Standard Literary Aramaic, see Greenfield 1974.

¹⁴³ Greenfield 1981.

¹⁴⁴ Greenfield 1981: 110–115.

In addition, he discussed five groups of Official Aramaic texts, the first four of which were discovered in Egypt and the last in the Levant:¹⁴⁵

- The Hermopolis letters
- The Brooklyn Museum papyri
- The Arsham letters
- The Saqqara papyri
- The Wadi Daliya papyri

The types of comparison presented by Greenfield between these texts and various portions of the biblical corpus range in scale from minute to sweeping. For example, he singled out specific characteristics of the language, whether “verbs and nouns, idioms and expressions,”¹⁴⁶ as in the combination נגד...פקד from Sefire III 10, which also occurs (as פקיד נגיד) in Jer 20:1; or “[v]arious types of word repetition, parallelism and set forms,”¹⁴⁷ as in the following parallel couplets:

לתמשל לי בזא ולתרשה לי עליה	You shall not rule me in this, nor have authority over me regarding it. (Sefire III 9)
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המלך תמלך עלינו אם-משול תמשל בנו	Will you indeed reign over us, or indeed rule us? (Gen 37:8bc)
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In addition to these specific connections, he addressed broad relationships in style and content, such as the illumination provided in a legal context by the material in the Elephantine papyri dealing with issues such as adoption and

¹⁴⁵ Greenfield 1981: 117–128.

¹⁴⁶ Greenfield 1981: 111.

¹⁴⁷ Greenfield 1981: 111.

marriage/divorce.¹⁴⁸ For example, an Elephantine document from the British Museum Aramaic Papyri yields the statement ברי יהוה “he will be my son” (*BMAP* 8:5, 8), which suggests that the similar, slightly lengthier biblical expression אָנִי אֶהְיֶה-לּוֹ לְאָב “I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me” (2 Sam 7:14) actually represents a legally binding formula deriving from a formal context.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Hosea’s declaration that בִּי-הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אִישָׁה “for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband” (Hos 2:2) evidently is the inversion of a standard formula akin to that occurring in the Elephantine materials: הִי אֲנַתִּי וָאֲנִי בַעְלָהּ “She is my wife, and I am her husband” (*BMAP* 7:4).¹⁵⁰

Greenfield continued to apply these types of perspectives in subsequent publications. Most germane to the present study, however, are Greenfield’s concluding remarks in this article, in which he pointed out several instances of Aramaic usages in the Bible that have “enhanced our appreciation of the Aramaic *Vorlage* behind the words put into the mouths of Aramaic speakers or used in conversation with them.”¹⁵¹ I reproduce two of his examples here:

וְלֹא נָטַשְׁתִּי לְנִשְׁקִי לְבָנִי וְלִבְנֹתַי עִתָּהּ הִסְבַּלְתָּ עֲשׂוֹ:
 And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and daughters! Now, you
 have done foolishly.
 (Gen 31:28)

In this context, the use of the root נָטַשׁ, which in BH normally means “leave, abandon, forsake,” must be understood as “allow.” Greenfield indicated that this is to be seen as a calque on Aramaic שָׁבַק, which, in addition to “leave, abandon, forsake,” can also

¹⁴⁸ Greenfield 1981: 122–124.

¹⁴⁹ Greenfield 1981: 123.

¹⁵⁰ Greenfield 1981: 122.

¹⁵¹ Greenfield 1981: 129.

mean “allow;” and indeed, Targum Onqelos, Targum Neofiti, and the Peshiṭta render נטש in this verse as שבק.¹⁵² Thus, by means of a special use of a perfectly legitimate Hebrew lexeme, Laban’s speech is given an unmistakable Aramaic flair. Moreover, such features are not limited to direct speech in Genesis 31. Verse 23 reads as follows:

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אָחִיו עִמּוֹ וַיִּרְדּוּ אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וַיִּדְבֹּק אֹתוֹ בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד:
 And he took his brothers with him and chased after him for seven days,
 and overtook him at the mountain of Gilead.
 (Gen 31:23)

Here, the unique usage וַיִּדְבֹּק “and he overtook” appears, while later, in verse 25, the usual term וַיִּשֹׁג occurs with the same meaning. Targum Onqelos renders the latter term as אַדְבִּיק,¹⁵³ and so we may view the unusual locution in verse 23 as an Aramaizing feature.¹⁵⁴ Thus, a device similar to the one presented above, which occurs in the direct speech of an Aramean, appears here in the narrative voice. Thus, here Greenfield identified specific instances of the very feature Hurvitz hypothetically described as “peculiar expressions characteristic of a foreign language...[used as] unique stylistic devices of a particular author or composition.”¹⁵⁵

Kaufman

This phenomenon was elucidated further in Kaufman’s paper entitled “The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof,” first delivered in 1985 and published in 1988.¹⁵⁶ Building on

¹⁵² Greenfield 1981: 129.

¹⁵³ Niqqud adopted from Katzenelenbogen et al. 1986–1993: 2:79.

¹⁵⁴ Greenfield 1981: 130.

¹⁵⁵ Hurvitz 1968: 236–237.

¹⁵⁶ Kaufman 1988.

the works of Hackett and Garr to which I already have referred,¹⁵⁷ the paper addresses the theoretical and methodological issues of classification, by examining the dialect of the plaster texts from Deir ʿAllā specifically, with an eye toward observations germane to Northwest Semitic philology generally. He began by setting aside two methodological approaches to dialect classification that have occupied the attention of earlier scholarly efforts. First, he moved away from the “test of mutual intelligibility,” which he perceived, like Garr,¹⁵⁸ to be particularly problematic when applied to a limited data set of linguistic material that, in addition, is not spoken but only written.¹⁵⁹ Second, he pointed out the challenges in the practice of assembling a list of isoglosses as a means of defining borders between dialects, which, while potentially very instructive, is “inordinately susceptible to a profound absence of methodological rigor. Typically such an argument runs: ‘This dialect does not have features x, y, and z of language A. It does have features i, j, and k of language B. Therefore it is B.’”¹⁶⁰

He then proposed a third approach, comprised of two key components. The first, building on the efforts of Garr and Hackett, is the importance of “shared innovations” for the establishment of relationships between dialects. Building on contemporary notions from general linguistics, Garr defined this phenomenon as a development occurring in two or more distinct dialect areas, that is demonstrably neither the result of independent changes in each area nor a borrowing from one area to another. In addition, even when these criteria are met, a single shared innovation is insufficient proof of a dialectal relationship, since it might have occurred in different areas purely by coincidence. Thus it is necessary to establish a *set* of shared

¹⁵⁷ Hackett 1984; Garr 2004.

¹⁵⁸ See above, p. 37.

¹⁵⁹ Kaufman 1988: 44–45.

¹⁶⁰ Kaufman 1988: 45–46, with the statement quoted here appearing on p. 45.

innovations, since, as Garr put it, “the greater the number of shared innovations, the greater the likelihood of common linguistic development.”¹⁶¹ It is important to note that shared innovation is fundamentally a diachronic concept, since it deals with change within dialects or dialect groups over time.

Kaufman’s second component is an emphasis on “the important of fundamental and common lexical and grammatical features.”¹⁶² In other words, since it is the most frequently used elements of a language that are most susceptible to change, the more two languages share the same common, everyday, fundamental components of two languages—whether morphological or lexical—the more closely the two should be seen as related.¹⁶³ This component thereby “temper[s] our own diachronic theory of shared innovations with synchronic dialect geography.”

Kaufman proceeded to identify aspects of the dialect attested in the plaster texts from Deir ‘Allā that can be identified as either Canaanite or Aramaic. On the Canaanite side, he adduced the following:

1. The Nifal.
2. A possible indicative impf. pl. without final *-n*.
3. The IIIy inf. *ld^ct*.
4. 3 f. pl. impf. *tqtlⁿ*.
5. The imperative *lkw*, “go!”.
6. 3 m. s. accus. suffix *-n* on imperfects.
7. Imperfect cons. forms of IIIy without final vowel indicated—*wy^hz*
I:27¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Garr 2004: 215–216; the quote is from p. 216.

¹⁶² Kaufman 1988: 48.

¹⁶³ Kaufman 1988: 47–48.

¹⁶⁴ Kaufman 1988: 51.

With regard to Aramaic, he offered these items:

1. 3 m. s. suffix *-wh* on plural nouns.
2. The masc. plural ending *-n*.
3. Preformative aleph on the reflexive.
4. Third weak jussives in *-y* vs. indicatives in *-h*.
5. Infinitives with *m-* preformative.
6. The ending *-t* for the f. s. perfect.
7. The ending *-yw* on *štyw*, a form not only characteristically Aramaic in and of itself, but strongly suggestive that in the derived conjugations too, this dialect had the distinctively Aramaic *-î*.¹⁶⁵

Although this picture appears perfectly balanced, Kaufman went on to eliminate those features “of questionable merit,”¹⁶⁶ that is, where readings are uncertain or disputed, or whether the association with one language group or the other is not entirely clear. He also eliminated item 4 from the Canaanite list, since it “is the least frequent of verbal forms and thus, as comparative Semitics clearly attests, most susceptible to change, in this case a change almost certainly the result of analogy and thereby to be excluded from the category of ‘shared innovation’.”¹⁶⁷ After all of this paring down, he was left with but a single item on the Canaanite side of the balance: item 5, representing the assimilation of *hkk* to *Iy* verbs.

Kaufman’s summary of the lexical data corresponded to the Aramaic-heavy perspective, with only between five and eight words in the texts identifiable as strictly Canaanite, while between 21 and 24 are clearly Aramaic.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, only one of the

¹⁶⁵ Kaufman 1988: 51.

¹⁶⁶ Kaufman 1988: 51.

¹⁶⁷ Kaufman 1988: 52.

¹⁶⁸ Kaufman 1988: 52. Seventy-five to 80 words in the inscriptions are to be viewed, according to Kaufman, as common Northwest Semitic. The ranges given for each group of words are due to discrepancies in interpretation, etc., that give rise to disagreement about the dialectal significance of certain lexemes.

distinctly Canaanite words is common, that being *rʾh* “see,” while “the Aramaic list is replete with the most basic vocabulary items—‘son,’ ‘gods,’ ‘come,’ ‘enter,’ ‘give,’ ‘close,’ ‘wine,’ ‘flee,’ ‘one,’ ‘who,’ ‘advise’.”¹⁶⁹

Combining his morphological and lexical observations, Kaufman’s conclusions led him to term the dialect of the inscriptions “our newly discovered Southern Aramaic as reflected in Deir ‘Allā...”¹⁷⁰ In the end, however, his work in attempting to classify this dialect paid remarkable dividends with specific regard to biblical scholarship. He framed his observations by referring to the original commission of the panel session for which he had produced this paper, and in doing so, took upon his shoulders the entire weight of inquiry that bridges the gap between biblical and comparative Semitic studies: “How does the discovery of the DA [= Deir ‘Allā] plaster text in particular and our growing and changing comprehension of the nature of the Northwest Semitic linguistic continuum in general contribute to our mastery of Biblical Hebrew language and literature?”¹⁷¹ First, he noted, “linguistic continuum implies literary continuum as well.”¹⁷² Thus it is no surprise that the Deir ‘Allā texts bear a range of similarities to various biblical texts, particularly, but by no means only, Balaam’s oracles in *Sefer Bil‘am*. But he went further, specifying a distinct type of relationship suggested by certain instances where the biblical material parallels that from Deir ‘Allā. He continued as follows:

...[M]y second [observation is that] much of the Aramaic-like vocabulary of DA...occurs in BH as well. ... But where does such vocabulary typically occur? Often these terms are the B words of

¹⁶⁹ Kaufman 1988: 52.

¹⁷⁰ Kaufman 1988: 56.

¹⁷¹ Kaufman 1988: 54.

¹⁷² Kaufman 1988: 54.

parallel pairs in poetry...,¹⁷³ but usually they occur in passages long since seen to be strongly Aramaizing, such as the dialogues of Job. The usual approach to such Aramaizing texts has been to declare them post-exilic compositions. More valiant souls, such as Tur-Sinai..., have ventured to proclaim them translations from Aramaic.... But the discovery of [the Deir ‘Allā plaster texts] changes the ground rules. No longer must an “Aramaizing” text have been written after the exile, nor must it be a translation from “Aramaic”.¹⁷⁴

Thus, Kaufman offered resounding support for the developing notion, articulated already by Hurvitz and Greenfield, that Aramaic-like features could be used in biblical texts for literary effect. As the preceding quote demonstrates, his perspective offers a nuanced foil to both diachronic and synchronic misinterpretations. But he went on from here, and made a case for the specific notion of style-switching. His statement, already cited above, bears repeating here:

All of these passages have in common not only that they are connected with Trans-Jordanian characters, but that they represent the speech of these characters! In all these Hebrew texts I believe that we have not to do with late language or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts.¹⁷⁵

Rendsburg

Thus far we have seen that the combined efforts of Hurvitz, Greenfield, and Kaufman not only drew attention to the legitimacy, scope, and nuance of dialect study in the Bible generally, but also that they each independently concluded that the overall picture suggests that in certain biblical texts the occurrence of dialect was deliberate,

¹⁷³ Note that Kaufman drew here from Driver 1953.

¹⁷⁴ Kaufman 1988: 55. Note also the strikingly similar comments of Baruch Halpern, as cited in Rendsburg 1990a: 8.

¹⁷⁵ Kaufman 1988: 55.

rather than accidental. Their efforts set the stage for the development of Rendsburg's systematic approach to identifying and understanding dialect in the Bible, the method that stands at the heart of the study presented in this chapter. As we shall see, although Rendsburg's publications are concerned primarily with IH, they also attest a significant quantity of material devoted to matters such as style-switching and setting-switching. Moreover, as previously noted, with regard to individual linguistic data there is no methodological distinction between the process of identifying the "natural" IH features in the language of the Bible and that of isolating features involved in intentional devices such as style-switching. As his own work demonstrates, therefore, Rendsburg's method may be employed to equal effect in both situations.

Rendsburg's first endeavor in the realm of dialect, published in the same year as Kaufman's important study, set out the basic tenets of his method.¹⁷⁶ First, he situated his dialectal perspective in scholarship by holding it up next to the other type of linguistic variation in the Bible that had received considerable scrutiny, namely, the matter of dating.¹⁷⁷ Having thus distinguished his synchronic approach from previous diachronic approaches, he began to address the reasons why this method had only entered prior discourse sporadically and without consistency. He adduced two reasons: first, the epigraphic materials available for comparison between biblical and extrabiblical sources are limited; and second, the scholarly community has been saturated by the ill-conceived notion that linguistic variations in BH "have for the most part been obliterated by the harmonizing activity of the Masoretes."¹⁷⁸ To the first issue, he responded by saying that "each new inscription found, no matter how

¹⁷⁶ Rendsburg 1988.

¹⁷⁷ Rendsburg 1988: 113–114.

¹⁷⁸ Rendsburg 1988: 114, wherein is cited the quote from GKC p. vii. See also the comments presented in Rendsburg 1991b, especially p. 81.

small, yields important data which are constantly expanding our knowledge of dialectal differences in ancient Canaan.”¹⁷⁹ To the second, he called attention to other scholarly efforts elucidating the linguistic range of BH.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, later he would provide a convenient summary of not only diachronic and synchronic spectra, but also other types of linguistic variation in the Bible:

- Diachronic variation, as between SBH and LBH;
- Synchronic variation, as between JH and IH;
- Differences of register, as between written and spoken Hebrew; and
- “[A] different area of language variation, one based on the ‘foreign’ factor in biblical literature,” that is, style-switching, setting-switching, and addressee-switching.¹⁸¹

Thus, although at the time of the former article’s publication this summary had not yet been produced, he had developed this viewpoint to the degree necessary for him to articulate the justification for his perspective as follows: “There exists now sufficient Northwest Semitic material to act as our guide, and all we need do is reject the notion that BH itself is monolithic.”¹⁸²

Having thus justified the dialectal approach, Rendsburg concerned himself for the remainder of the article with the presentation of a case study, namely the short poem in 2 Sam 23:1–7, as a means of providing a glimpse of his perspective in action. Below, I offer a brief summary of his analysis of this pericope in the hope of achieving the same purpose, although an extended review is unnecessary since the body of this chapter takes the same approach and provides ample demonstration of it. Meanwhile, I

¹⁷⁹ Rendsburg 1988: 114.

¹⁸⁰ Rendsburg 1988: 114.

¹⁸¹ Adapted from Rendsburg 1995: 177–178; see also the earlier but more extensive discussion in Rendsburg 1991b.

¹⁸² Rendsburg 1988: 114.

turn to Rendsburg's 1990 monograph entitled *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*,¹⁸³ the introduction to which includes a specific delineation of Rendsburg's method. His approach, in turn, serves a core component of the method that forms the basis for the present study.

In addressing the question of Israelian Hebrew in the Bible, Rendsburg isolated two specific methodological questions that must be answered, namely, the identification respectively of IH features specifically and IH texts generally.¹⁸⁴ Beginning with the former issue, he observed that a comparison between BH and the dialects bordering the territory of biblical Israel—identified by him as Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite, Aramaic, and the Deir ʿAllā dialect—has demonstrated that many features occurring in the surrounding dialects appear in the biblical corpus only irregularly. He cited the following well-known examples from the Bible:

- The masculine plural ending ָ- (attested in Moabite, Deir ʿAllā, and Aramaic)
- The relative pronoun הַ/וֹ (cognates in Aramaic and Old Byblian)
- The relative pronoun -ִּי (equivalent to ַ[א] in Phoenician and Ammonite)
- The feminine singular demonstrative pronoun הַ/וֹ (cognates in Phoenician and Aramaic)

He interpreted these commonalities between peculiar Hebrew forms and the corresponding standard forms of neighboring dialects as follows:

The dictates of dialect geography teach us that it is most likely for such forms to appear in Hebrew in the regions bordering the Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite, Aramaic, and Deir ʿAllā speech communities.

¹⁸³ Rendsburg 1990a.

¹⁸⁴ The following review of Rendsburg's method presents a summary of Rendsburg 1990a: 5–13. Direct quotations will be noted.

This is not to say that a particular Aramaic form could not have wound its way into Judah.... But all things being equal, we will assume that parallels of the sort mentioned above were characteristic of a Hebrew dialect or dialects spoken and written in northern Israel.¹⁸⁵

Rendsburg's comment regarding the relationship between IH and Moabite specifically is worth noting here. He wrote: "I am well aware, naturally, that Moab lies on the same latitude as Judah. However, insofar as it borders the northern kingdom of Israel, specifically the territory of Reuben [i.e., in Transjordan], we can assume more links between Moabite and IH than between Moabite and JH [which were separated by the Dead Sea]."¹⁸⁶

Rendsburg paid special attention to the delicate issues associated with utilizing the Ugaritic materials and those from the Amarna letters in the identification of IH. He acknowledged that these languages must be approached with due caution, since, as he put it with reference to Ugaritic (although the point applies equally to the Amarna letters), "it cannot be determined with certainty whether differences between Ugaritic and BH are due to variations in space or in time." For Ugaritic, however, he noted Ginsberg's preference for seeing Ugaritic and Phoenician as a "Phoenic group" within the Canaanite dialects, as opposed to the "Hebraic group" of the hinterland areas.¹⁸⁷ Thus, he concluded that it "seems reasonable to utilize the Ugaritic material to establish connections specifically between IH and languages used to the north of Israel." With regard to the Amarna letters, he emphasized that those originating from Jerusalem would be useless in isolating IH features, for obvious reasons; but since the bulk of the archive "stems from Byblos, Tyre, and other northern sites," it falls within

¹⁸⁵ Rendsburg 1990a: 5.

¹⁸⁶ Rendsburg 1990a: 5–6 n. 23.

¹⁸⁷ Ginsberg 1970: 102–116.

the same purview as the Ugaritic material. Thus, in his subsequent research, from time to time Rendsburg would call upon these two corpora in support of his argument.

In addition, Rendsburg turned for support to considerations outside the linguistic sphere. Specifically, he noted that historical circumstances often have bearing on the issue of the relationship between IH and neighboring dialects. He specifically noted that “contacts between Israel and Aram were always strong,”¹⁸⁸ and pointed out that Aramaic inscriptions associated with simple daily functions have been discovered at northern Israelite sites, such as a 9th-century inscription bearing the single word לטבחיא “for the cooks,” discovered at Tel Dan. In addition, he pointed out that the similarly close relations between “coastal Phoenicia and inland Galilee...no doubt helped cement the relationship between Phoenician and IH.”¹⁸⁹

Having thus laid out the method and reasoning behind the identification of specific IH features, Rendsburg turned his attention to the question of Israelian texts within the biblical corpus. He began by using as his point of departure the assumption that certain biblical texts, particularly those concerned with northern characters or set in northern locations, in fact originated in the north. This is not such a drastic assumption as it may seem, for two reasons. First, in many such instances the biblical text confirms this assumption. For example, 1 Kgs 14:19 is one of numerous verses concluding an account dealing with the northern kingdom that ends with the statement הִנֵּם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל “Behold, they are written upon the scroll of the annals of the kings of Israel.” We can hardly do otherwise than to assume that statements such as this refer to texts of northern origin. Second, as Rendsburg pointed out, “[a]n examination of the language of these pericopes reveals that these stories

¹⁸⁸ Rendsburg 1990a: 6.

¹⁸⁹ Rendsburg 1990a: 6–7.

include a disproportionate number of grammatical and lexical items which are nonstandard within BH but which often have parallels in Phoenician, Moabite, Aramaic, etc.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, even if one prefers to view his initial assumption as nothing more than a working hypothesis, confirmation of his view nevertheless is plain in the linguistic data deriving from these biblical texts.

Finally, Rendsburg indicated that our knowledge of IH may be treated cumulatively. That is to say, given the proper circumstances and corroborating evidence, specific linguistic features that remain unattested in the neighboring dialects, but that arise in the biblical corpus in texts already identified as northern *on extrabiblical comparative grounds*, are fair game for isolation as IH features. In this way, inner-biblical evidence can stand as internal support for the isolation of specific items characteristic of the northern dialect. Moreover, Rendsburg indicated that it is not necessary for a feature of proposed IH character to arise *only* in IH contexts. He phrased it thus:

Even if an occasional example of a suspected IH feature appears in a patently JH text, this still will be considered sufficient distribution to qualify it as an IH feature. For example, if a proposed IH feature occurs 15 times in northern texts and 3 times in Judahite works, this will not disqualify its inclusion as a piece of evidence in favor of the northern origin of a particular [text].¹⁹¹

In order for the inner-biblical approach to be fruitful, however, we must keep careful track of the accumulation of identified northern texts in the biblical corpus. Needless to say, in Rendsburg’s earliest work on northern dialect, he was forced to

¹⁹⁰ Rendsburg 1990a: 9.

¹⁹¹ Rendsburg 1990a: 15.

rely to some extent on the indulgence of his readers, since the linguistic evidence for the IH character of certain pericopes used for comparison had not yet been collected systematically. Thus in these early endeavors he relied on *ad hoc* presentations of the evidence as it was needed.¹⁹²

Subsequently, however, his efforts and those of others have filled many of these gaps. Moreover, Rendsburg was able to utilize the insights of earlier scholars who had attempted to identify various texts in the biblical corpus as northern compositions. These prior endeavors provided him with ample material in which to begin testing his approach; and indeed, in the vast majority of such cases he concluded that sufficient linguistic evidence was present to draw an IH conclusion. Many such prior studies had not themselves utilized linguistic evidence, but had relied instead on other aspects of the text in question as support for their hypothesis. One such example is Adam C. Welch's 1929 article identifying Nehemiah 9 as a northern addition to the book, which relies primarily on elements of content and style that connect the chapter to specific historical circumstances in the northern kingdom.¹⁹³ On the other hand, others did utilize linguistic evidence, but took their observations rather too far. See, for example, the three studies by Dahood mentioned above on Qohelet, wherein the author is identified as a Phoenician;¹⁹⁴ note, however, James R. Davila's more recent approach to the book, which accounts for the issue of dialect.¹⁹⁵ All told, Rendsburg

¹⁹² See, for instance, the brief accounting of the linguistic evidence for the IH provenance of Psalm 36 that appears in Rendsburg 1988: 116. This pericope was approached in much more extensive and systematic fashion two years later, in Rendsburg 1990a: 39–43.

¹⁹³ Welch 1929.

¹⁹⁴ Dahood 1952a, 1952b, 1966.

¹⁹⁵ Davila 1990.

catalogued the following as texts that have elicited prior attempts to establish the presence therein of non-SBH features:¹⁹⁶

- Genesis 49¹⁹⁷
- *Sefer Bil'am* (Numbers 22–24)¹⁹⁸
- Deuteronomy 32–33¹⁹⁹
- 2 Sam 23:1–7²⁰⁰
- Hosea²⁰¹
- Proverbs²⁰²
- Job²⁰³
- Song of Songs²⁰⁴
- Qohelet²⁰⁵
- Nehemiah 9²⁰⁶
- Certain exilic and post-exilic texts²⁰⁷
- Prophetic speeches addressed to the foreign nations²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁶ The secondary literature I cite in association with the following two lists is by no means comprehensive, and represents only a general survey of the available bibliography. The reader is encouraged to consult the additional resources cited within the materials referenced here. See, e.g., the convenient list of additional publications presented in Rendsburg 1990a: 9–13; and the sources identified in Noegel 1994: 179 nn. 17–30.

¹⁹⁷ Rendsburg 1992c. A recent summary of the evidence appears in Rendsburg 2006a: 171–172.

¹⁹⁸ Addressed briefly by Rendsburg in numerous places, most notably Rendsburg 1991b: 93–94 and Rendsburg 1995: 183–184, with the fullest treatment appearing in Rendsburg 2006a: 169–171.

¹⁹⁹ On Deut 32, see Rendsburg 1991b: 91 n. 56; Rendsburg 1992b: 231 n. 42; Rendsburg 1993: col. 314 n. 27; and Rendsburg 2003a: 8 and *passim*. On Deuteronomy 33, see Rendsburg 2006a: 172; and Rendsburg 2009.

²⁰⁰ Rendsburg 1988; Rendsburg 1989. In a moment, I will revisit the evidence upon which Rendsburg's examinations of this text rest.

²⁰¹ To the material identified in Rabin 1981 and Rendsburg 1990a: 11, we now may add Yoo 1999.

²⁰² In addition to the works cited in Rendsburg 1990a: 10, we now may add Chen 2000.

²⁰³ See also Edward L. Greenstein's recent studies on the language of Job (Greenstein 2003 and Greenstein 2007).

²⁰⁴ Rendsburg 2006b.

²⁰⁵ The treatments in Dahood 1952a, Dahood 1952b, and Dahood 1966 have been surpassed more recently by Davila 1990.

²⁰⁶ Rendsburg 1991a offers the linguistic data corresponding to Welch's conclusions.

²⁰⁷ This on the basis of the observations presented in Gordon 1955a, discussed above.

²⁰⁸ Rendsburg 1991b: 96–97; Rendsburg 1995: 184–188.

Thanks to Rendsburg's study and to other subsequent scholarly contributions, the list has been expanded to include the following:

- Genesis 24²⁰⁹
- Genesis 30–31²¹⁰
- Sections of Judges²¹¹
- Sections of 1 Samuel²¹²
- Sections of Kings²¹³
- Isaiah 24–27²¹⁴
- Jeremiah²¹⁵
- Amos²¹⁶
- Micah 6–7²¹⁷
- Numerous psalms²¹⁸

Finally, it is important to note, as may be apparent already, that in fact Rendsburg's method is a synchronic adaptation of Hurvitz's diachronic approach, detailed above.²¹⁹ Here I review the three key points with which Hurvitz's article closed, and adjust them according to Rendsburg's perspective. Thus, in order to determine whether a particular IH feature is an indicator of a text's non-Judahite origin, we may reword as follows:

²⁰⁹ Rendsburg 2006a.

²¹⁰ Rendsburg 2006a.

²¹¹ Burney 1918: 171–176.

²¹² Thus according to Noegel 1994: 179, but the relevant bibliography is not readily apparent.

²¹³ Rendsburg 2002a.

²¹⁴ Noegel 1994.

²¹⁵ Smith 2002.

²¹⁶ Rabin 1981.

²¹⁷ Burkitt 1926; Ginsberg 1982: 25–27.

²¹⁸ Rendsburg 1990a expanded on Goulder 1982 and Buss 1963, ultimately identifying the following psalms as IH in origin: 9–10, 16, 29, 36, 42–50, 53, 58, 73–85, 87–88, 116, 132–133, 140–141, and possibly also 4, 89, and 103. In subsequent private communications, he further suggested the inclusion of Psalms 19 and 139 (see below, n. 226).

²¹⁹ See also the similar remarks in Wolfe 1997: 38–39.

1. For this point, Rendsburg's view necessitates only minor changes: For each proposed IH feature, one must establish *both* a linguistic "opposition" between this item and the usual SBH construction or vocabulary; *and* this item's prevalence in IH and/or surrounding dialects with which IH would have shared isoglosses.
2. Here, too, little must be changed: There must exist a concentration of IH features and/or content focusing on northern matters (characters, setting, etc.) in the text in question.
3. Here, in a sense Rendsburg's approach is the inversion of Hurvitz's point. Hurvitz indicated that a text should be considered late only if there exists no other explanation for its attestation of Aramaic-like features. Rendsburg's entire method, on the other hand, addresses directly the very type of alternative explanation to which Hurvitz alluded.

Thus, it is plain that Rendsburg's approach is not invented out of whole cloth, but rather is deeply embedded in and engaged with prior scholarship. Moreover, his methodological shift from a diachronic focus to a synchronic one attests to the potential benefits to be found in an open and ongoing dialogue between both approaches to Hebrew philology.

I turn now to a review of one specific example of Rendsburg's method as it is applied to a specific pericope, namely, the discrete poem known as the "last words of David" in 2 Sam 23:1–7. Rendsburg identified six linguistic peculiarities in this chapter that he attributed to Israelian dialect.²²⁰ He identified these and explained their northern character as follows.

1. The word אֱלֹהִים (2 Sam 23:1) is used regularly in SBH when God is the speaker. Here, however, it occurs in association with a human speaker (David). Such a usage appears in only three other biblical pericopes: Num 24:3–4, 24:15–16; Pr 30:1; and Ps 36:2. The first, of course, is *Sefer Bil'am*, and the use of אֱלֹהִים in this pericope is

²²⁰ The following is a summary of the evidence presented in Rendsburg 1988.

examined at length below. The second is a part of Proverbs, a text whose northern associations have been argued elsewhere, in association with Agur, king of Massa in the Syrian desert.²²¹ The third pericope is one of the Psalms whose northern character was demonstrated by Rendsburg in his 1990 monograph on the subject.²²² These pericopes each exhibit numerous affinities with Aramaic.

2. The word מָלָה (occurring in 2 Sam 23:2 with third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix: מָלָהּ) occurs elsewhere in the Bible in Ps 19:5, 139:4; Pr 23:9; and 34 times in Job. The evidence from Job, a book replete with linguistic peculiarities attributable in many cases to dialect,²²³ is supported further by that from Proverbs, a text exhibiting many IH forms, especially in chapter 23.²²⁴ The two Psalms were not included in Rendsburg's 1990 study,²²⁵ but he subsequently suggested that they are to be seen, in part at least, as northern.²²⁶ Moreover, Rendsburg pointed out that "the various Aramaic dialects"²²⁷ exhibit the only cognate (מלתא) to the Hebrew word. Likewise, the Targumim consistently render the Hebrew root דבר as מלה, in both verbal and nominal forms.

²²¹ See the literature mentioned above, especially Chen 2000: 213–214. It is worth reiterating that discrete and systematic arguments for the dialectal significance of these and other biblical pericopes utilized as evidence in Rendsburg's 1988 article did not appear until later. Thus, in this publication Rendsburg offered only cursory reviews of the available data in these pericopes, in the course of his argument regarding 2 Sam 23:1–7. Now, years later, we are fortunate to have at our disposal lengthy discussions focusing specifically on pericopes such as those already employed by Rendsburg in this earlier work. These subsequent publications will be duly noted here.

²²² Rendsburg 1990a: 39–43.

²²³ See, e.g., Greenstein 2003: 653 and Greenstein 2007: 82.

²²⁴ Chen 2000: 172–179 isolates 22 IH features in this chapter alone.

²²⁵ Rendsburg 1990a.

²²⁶ Noegel (1994: 183 n. 45) cited a private communication from Rendsburg in which he noted that Ps 19:2–7 possesses numerous IH features and should be considered a northern text. Similarly, in a subsequent private communication (April 1, 2008), Rendsburg indicated that Psalm 139 likewise may exhibit a northern provenance. In addition to the word מָלָה, "note that this poem includes the Aramaic-like feature SLQ 'go up', the only place in the Hebrew Bible where this verb occurs. And there may be other such traits in the poem."

²²⁷ Rendsburg 1988: 117.

3. The use in 2 Sam 23:6 of the pronominal suffix **הֶם** (with retention of the ה; also shifted in this instance to **הֶם**-, due to vowel harmony) even after a consonant, is paralleled in Aramaic epigraphic evidence, such as that from the Kandahar inscription and the Arsama letters. Rendsburg rejected both the various suggested emendations of consonants and/or vowels and the theories of a lingering archaic form in Hebrew. Instead, he offered several biblical passages that exhibit similar retention of the ה in the pronominal suffix: **כְּלֹהֶנָּה** in 1 Kgs 7:37 occurs in the Temple construction narrative, wherein numerous Phoenicianisms are evident; **עַד־הֶם** occurs in a northern setting in 2 Kgs 9:18; and **לִבְהֵן** (Ezek 13:17), **שְׁבִיתָהֶן** (Ezek 16:53), and **תּוֹכְהֶנָּה** (Ezek 16:53) occur in a book with “well-known Aramaic influences.”²²⁸

The final three items identified by Rendsburg stand on evidence not directly linked with Aramaic usage. Nevertheless, there is reason to perceive them as northern features:

4. The phrase **דִּבֶּר־בִּי** in 2 Sam 23:2 runs counter to SBH, in which this verb typically is governed by the preposition **לְ** or **אֶל**. This collocation does occur in SBH, but bears the specific meaning “speak about, against, through.” Elsewhere, the only places in which **דִּבֶּר** plus **בִּי** means simply “speak to” are in the mouths of northern prophets: in one instance, Micaiah is speaking in 1 Kgs 22:28; and the other instance is associated with the northern prophet Hosea (1:2). American English attests a comparable prepositional situation in the phrases “wait on him” and “wait for him.” The first phrase, as it is used in the South, is identical in meaning to the second expression as it is used elsewhere; whereas in the North, “wait on him” would refer specifically to the actions of a restaurant employee.

²²⁸ Rendsburg 1988: 118; but see also n. 39.

5. Rendsburg adduced five parallels to the divine name עֶל in 2 Sam 23:1. Two are biblical: עֶלֹ (*Ketiv*) in parallel to יְהוָה in 1 Sam 2:10; and the personal name עֶלִי , the priest who ministers at Shiloh. A third example is the parallel pair $\text{ʿly} // \text{b}^{\text{c}}\text{l}$ in *CAT* 1.16:III:6, 8. The other two attestations occur as theophoric elements in personal names: Samaritan יְהוֹעֶלִי (Samaria Ostrakon 55:2) and Ugaritic $\text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{w}^{\text{c}}\text{l}$ (*CAT* 4.338:4).

6. The word כֵּן is used in 2 Sam 23:5 neither with the usual sense “thus, so” nor as a synonym of נָכוֹן with the meaning “firm, established.” Rather, it is used with a simple existential meaning, as in Phoenician and Ugaritic, in which *kwn* is the standard verb “to be.”²²⁹

This brief summary provides a condensed glimpse of Rendsburg’s approach, and thus also of the approach to be taken in this chapter. As indicated in the lists of texts presented above, Rendsburg’s efforts, and those of the same ilk undertaken by others, now have identified numerous biblical pericopes in which the linguistic evidence points to the presence of dialect. In addition, Rendsburg’s own contributions include several important theoretical studies. These include:²³⁰ “The Strata of Biblical Hebrew” (1991),²³¹ which deals with the various spectra occurring across biblical Hebrew identified above; “Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects in Ancient Hebrew” (1992),²³² which presents a thorough morphological perspective on the matter of dialect in the Bible; “Linguistic Variation and the ‘Foreign’ Factor in the Hebrew Bible” (1995),²³³ to be discussed further below; the culmination of his work

²²⁹ See also Rendsburg’s follow-up article (1989), in which two additional items are marshaled in support of his argument regarding this pericope.

²³⁰ In addition to the studies identified here, note also his related work on Mishnaic Hebrew in two articles, Rendsburg 1992b and Rendsburg 2003b.

²³¹ Rendsburg 1991b.

²³² Rendsburg 1992a.

²³³ Rendsburg 1995.

with IH, entitled “A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon” (2003);²³⁴ and finally “Aramaic-like Features in the Pentateuch” (2006).²³⁵

In the above lists of texts, we must highlight the following items: Genesis 24; Genesis 30–31; *Sefer Bil'am*; Isaiah 24–27; Job; and the prophetic addresses to the foreign nations. All of the other texts in the list appear because they exhibit Israelian dialect. These texts, however, utilize linguistic variation for literary effect, in one (or more) of three ways, described at the outset of this chapter and identified again here: *style-switching*, whereby the speech of foreign characters is simulated by means of dialectal features (as in Balaam’s oracles, Isaiah 26, and Job); *setting-switching*, whereby the foreign setting of a story is evoked by means of linguistic cues (as in Genesis 24); or *addressee-switching*, whereby the text draws on the dialectal perspective of the audience of the text (as in the prophetic addresses to the foreign nations).²³⁶ These particular texts, therefore, are particularly noteworthy in that they provide concrete examples of the deliberate use of dialect in certain biblical texts, as described by Hurvitz, Greenfield, and Kaufman. Rendsburg went further, devoting an entire article to the examination of such phenomena in his 1995 study entitled “Linguistic Variation and the ‘Foreign’ Factor in the Hebrew Bible.”²³⁷

In addition, to reiterate what was stated at the outset of this chapter, while these texts differ from the IH texts in terms of the significance of the dialectal features they exhibit, the process of isolating such features is necessarily the same. As a result, it is critical to recognize the common element that distinguishes these texts from the others in the list. I refer specifically to the notion of intentionality, an idea that

²³⁴ Rendsburg 2003a.

²³⁵ Rendsburg 2006a.

²³⁶ Rendsburg 1990a: 13 includes a brief statement about texts that use addressee switching.

²³⁷ Rendsburg 1995.

Hurvitz, Greenfield, Kaufman, and Rendsburg each postulated as a key factor in these contexts. As a rule, of course, it is notoriously problematic to assess the intentions of authors in antiquity. And to be sure, certain trends in modern scholarship reject entirely the idea that these authors' textual production contains or reveals such intentions; or, alternatively, they repudiate our ability to identify and evaluate them, if indeed they are present. On the other hand, as noted, we have encountered in several independent contexts the suggestion that in certain specific sections of the Bible, the dialectal features exhibited are to be interpreted as purposeful, literarily-motivated devices whose incorporation into the text is a conscious part of the authorial process. Since the present chapter adopts this perspective, it is necessary here to spend a few moments making the case for such an assertion.

Aramaic-like Features and Authorial Intent

Needless to say, most of the supporting evidence in this regard is circumstantial. Simply put, while dialectal peculiarities in the biblical corpus often reflect the impact of IH, it is striking that certain passages, namely those biblical pericopes that take place in foreign settings, involve foreign characters, or address foreign audiences, have markedly greater-than-average concentrations of non-SBH features. Moreover, in these passages, the nonstandard linguistic features that occur frequently appear to bear specific dialectal affinities that accord precisely with the regional aspects of their respective pericopes. Thus, it requires no great intuitive leap to surmise that there is a connection between the content of these texts and the carefully chosen words that give form to that content. Certainly, prior scholarship evinces a range of independent voices that have expressed the willingness to take such a leap. It may be helpful here to bring together the various statements to this effect. Hurvitz wrote in 1968 that in such contexts, "[t]he usage of what seems to be

Aramaisms...may well reflect the use of peculiar expressions characteristic of a foreign language. That is, in these cases we are not dealing with actual loan words, or forms, but rather with unique stylistic devices of a particular author or composition.”²³⁸ In 1981, Greenfield adduced several examples of Aramaic-like features that have “enhanced our appreciation of the Aramaic *Vorlage* behind the words put into the mouths of Aramaic speakers or used in conversation with them.”²³⁹ In 1988, regarding such texts, Kaufman stated his belief “that we have not to do with late language or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts.”²⁴⁰ Finally, the numerous statements of Rendsburg, particularly those assembled in his 1995 article “Linguistic Variation and the ‘Foreign’ Factor in the Hebrew Bible,” echo and amplify the observations made earlier by the previous three scholars.²⁴¹

We scarcely can afford to overlook the significance of these manifold independent and informed arrivals at the same intuition with regard to the intentional use of dialect in the Bible. The weight of each individual statement by an established scholar increases dramatically when taken in combination with like statements from similarly respected voices in the discourse. In addition, however, our sensibility regarding the intentional use of dialect in the Bible may be informed more deeply if we turn once again to an analogy from a more recent literary context. In *Romeo and Juliet*, as in other dramatic works of William Shakespeare, we encounter at various points in the play rhymed couplets in perfect iambic pentameter that call attention to some particularly significant movement of plot, depth of meaning, or other important

²³⁸ Hurvitz 1968: 236–237.

²³⁹ Greenfield 1981: 129.

²⁴⁰ Kaufman 1988: 55.

²⁴¹ Rendsburg 1995: *passim*.

aspect of the story. Romeo concludes his exchange with the apothecary, for example, by saying “Come, cordial and not poison, go with me / To Juliet’s grave; for there must I use thee” (Act V, Scene I, lines 85–86). Likewise, the Prince’s remarks concluding the play, which in fact exhibit a more extended rhyming schema, conclude with the well-known couplet “For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo” (Act V, Scene II, lines 309–310). Nowhere in contemporary or subsequent literature, however, do we encounter any statement, explicit or otherwise, that might indicate that Shakespeare deliberately shaped these couplets and placed them at impactful moments in his drama. Thus, like the biblical use of dialect in the specific types of contexts noted above, the evidence for the intentional nature of such couplets is purely circumstantial. Yet, I venture to surmise, there scarcely is a reader of Shakespeare, whether scholar or amateur enthusiast, who harbors any doubt that these couplets represent a deliberate device whose usage is driven by the literary potency of a particularly poignant moment in the drama’s overall content.²⁴²

Even so, the evidence presented thus far remains entirely circumstantial. It is for this reason that a study of the use of dialect in *Sefer Bil'am* proves particularly useful. In the conclusions of the next chapter, I show that several of the non-SBH features used in this pericope are juxtaposed with their SBH equivalents in ways that contribute directly to the richness of the text itself. Such juxtapositions are attested in both the poetry and the prose portions of the pericope, and can occur in close

²⁴² In calling upon this example, I highlight the notion of literary intentionality as a significant topic in itself, independent of the matter of language. Thus, although a different Shakespearean example such as Caesar’s famous utterance “*Et tu, Bruté?*” (*Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene I, line 77) might appear more appropriate given the philological/dialectal subject matter that occupies the broader discussion presented here, I have avoided it in order to examine separately the phenomenon of intentionality, whose overlap with linguistic issues in *Sefer Bil'am* and elsewhere should not obscure its status as a fundamentally distinct concept.

proximity, as with the adjacent words **יָגֵר** **עֲצַמְתֵּיהֶם** in Num 24:8, as well as across lengthy spans, as with the word **רָגֵלִים** (Num 22:28, 32, 33) and its counterpart **פְּעָמִים** (Num 24:10). Although I am unable to establish this kind of relationship for every dialectally significant feature in the pericope, the presence of a number of such SBH–non-SBH connections nevertheless strongly supports the notion that the non-SBH usages have been incorporated into the text consciously and with specific literary intent.²⁴³ Moreover, they suggest that the pericope as a whole exhibits at least this one overarching principle guiding its construction. These observations are discussed at length at the close of the next chapter. Meanwhile, I commence with a detailed examination of each non-SBH item in the pericope, arranged according to the sequence in which these features occur in the text.

²⁴³ An examination of this type of juxtaposition across all biblical passages that utilize style-switching, setting-switching, and/or addressee-switching remains a desideratum. If the present study is any indication, such research may prove remarkably fruitful.

CHAPTER 3
DIALECTAL FEATURES IN THE LANGUAGE OF *SEFER BILʿAM*:
EVIDENCE AND IMPLICATIONS

Introductory Remarks

This chapter discusses at length those linguistic peculiarities in *Sefer Bilʿam* that are to be associated with style-switching or setting-switching. In addition to offering a detailed analysis of each individual item’s dialectal significance, this analysis will allow for a range of observations to be made with regard to the data set as a whole. First and foremost, these conclusions will address the intentionality of the nonstandard language in the text, thereby situating this series of discrete linguistic features squarely within a literary perspective on the pericope. Additionally, there will appear a few comments regarding the impact of these data on our understanding of the unity, sources, date, and provenance of *Sefer Bilʿam* as a whole.

Before proceeding with such observations, however, we must begin with a close examination of the non-SBH features in the pericope, arranged here according to the order in which they occur. This will constitute the bulk of the chapter, with a typological breakdown to follow.

Individual Dialectal Features

Num 22:12: עִמָּךְ

The standard form for the preposition עִם “with” plus third-person masculine plural pronominal suffix is עִמָּו. This form occurs 33 times in the biblical corpus, and cuts across the entire breadth of diachronic, generic, and geographic strata present in

BH,¹ as evident, for example, in Gen 18:16 (prose narrative); Lev 26:41 (legal material); Hos 5:5 (prophetic poetry); and Job 21:8 (wisdom literature).²

The non-standard form עֲמָהֶם, which we encounter in Num 22:12, appears to exhibit a relationship with the Aramaic linguistic sphere. One notes the similarity between the situation attested here and that occurring in situations such as the word וְעֲצַמְתִּיהֶם in Num 24:8, in which the ה of the 3mp pronominal suffix is retained. Although a full discussion of this latter peculiarity in *Sefer Bil'am* will appear below,³ it is worthwhile in this context to note Avi Hurvitz's proposal that the morphology of this form is due in part to its relationship to the Aramaic pronominal suffix -הֶם.⁴ It is possible that the same suggestion applies likewise to עֲמָהֶם in our present verse. Moreover, one also notes the similar form בָּלָהֶם (as against the usual בָּלֵם) in 2 Sam 23:6. This verse occurs in a pericope whose northern origin has been demonstrated by Gary A. Rendsburg, who similarly connected בָּלָהֶם to Aramaic -הֶם.⁵ Thus, by analogy, this datum likewise suggests the same possibility noted above, that עֲמָהֶם in Num 22:12 may bear some connection to Aramaic -הֶם, and hence to the Aramaic linguistic sphere generally.

Elsewhere in the biblical corpus, the unusual form עֲמָהֶם is attested in Deut 29:16; Jon 1:3; Job 1:4; Neh 9:13, 17; and 2 Chr 5:9. This distribution stands on its own as sufficient demonstration that the form bears clear dialectal significance. With

¹ The data for this examination are provided by Gary A. Rendsburg (private communication).

² In addition to the four examples cited here, the form עֲמָם also is attested in the following places: Gen 29:9; Deut 29:24; Jos 4:8, 11:4, 20:4; Judg 1:22, 8:10, 15:3; 1 Sam 10:6, 13:16, 14:21, 17:23, 25:16; 2 Sam 3:22, 6:22, 15:36; 1 Kgs 11:18; 2 Kgs 6:33; Isa 34:7; Joel 4:2; Zech 10:5; Ps 83:9; Neh 13:25.

³ See below, pp. 163–165.

⁴ Hurvitz 1982, especially p. 25.

⁵ Rendsburg 1988 and 1989, with this specific point appearing in 1988: 118.

the exception of the Deuteronomy example,⁶ all of these instances occur in contexts exhibiting manifestly nonstandard language. For example, Chronicles is one of the core diagnostic texts for LBH; Nehemiah 9 has been recognized as both northern and late;⁷ and Job exhibits a wealth of linguistic peculiarities intended to evoke the setting and speech patterns of the Syrian desert.

Even if one prefers to reject the suggestion that עֲמֹרָה bears a meaningful relationship with Aramaic, its nonstandard character still must be explained. The context, combined with the range of other setting-switching features in the pericope, indicates that this feature is to be seen here as a setting-switching element. Indeed, with the exception of a few verses at its beginning and end, the first chapter of *Sefer Bil'am* is set entirely in Balaam's homeland, or on the road from there to Moab. Given this fact, even notwithstanding the uncertainty of the connection with Aramaic, it is appropriate to view the usage of this form in Num 22:12 as an indicator of the foreignness of the setting.

That the form occurs in direct speech, even that of Elohim, also does not undermine its force as a representation of the geographical perspective that pervades the text. To demonstrate this point, I call attention to several clear examples from another pericope in which linguistic features are utilized to evoke a foreign setting, namely, the story of Jacob and Laban in Gen 30–31, which takes place in the land of Aram.⁸ Note the following occurrences of such features in the direct speech of Jacob,

⁶ I have no explanation ready to hand for this attestation. Note, however, the preference of some scholars to see Deuteronomy as a northern text, e.g., Ginsberg 1982: 19–24.

⁷ Rendsburg 1991a, especially p. 363.

⁸ See Rendsburg 1995: 182; Rendsburg 2006a: 166–169; and Greenfield 1981: 129–130.

a character whose speech elsewhere generally⁹ lies decidedly within the purview of SBH:¹⁰

Gen 31:7, 41 – הִחָלֵף “exchange” (used only here in the Bible with reference to wages, money, etc., paralleling a usage common in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic particularly)

Gen 31:7, 41 – מָנִים “times” (occurring only here in the Bible, from a root מָנָה “count” that is standard in Aramaic, and considerably more productive there than in Hebrew)

Gen 31:9 – וַיֵּצֵל “he took away” (otherwise נָצַל in the Hiph’il means “save” in Hebrew)

Gen 31:39 – גִּנְבָתִי “I was robbed” (inflected passive participle, a morphological form attested elsewhere only in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic)

Whether one prefers to interpret these examples as generalized reflections of the stylistic device at hand, like those occurring in the narrative voice, or as specifically suggestive of Jacob’s usage of language that is tailored for his audience (that is, Laban and/or his daughters), the parallel with our verse from Numbers remains in any case. Thus, the term עֲמֻקָּהּ is an element intended to reflect the foreign setting of this portion of *Sefer Bil’am*.

Num 22:28, 32, 33: רַגְלִים “times” (contrast 24:10 פְּעָמִים)

In these three places, we encounter the word רַגְלִים, which normally means “foot,” in the repeated phrase זֶה שְׁלוֹשׁ רַגְלִים “these three *ragālîm*,” where the usual meaning clearly is not possible:

⁹ Though not exclusively. The most prominent major example of non-SBH language in the mouth of Jacob is the blessing of the twelve tribes in Genesis 49. The features in question there have been adduced in Rendsburg 1992c and Rendsburg 2006a: 171–172.

¹⁰ These examples are drawn from Rendsburg 2006a: 166–168, in which appears a list of the Aramaic-like features in this pericope that have been identified by Rendsburg and other scholars.

וַיִּפְתָּח יְהוָה אֶת־פִּי הָאֲתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבַלְעָם מָה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רָגְלִים:

And Yahweh opened the jenny's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?"
(Num 22:28)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִלֵּאדָּךְ יְהוָה עַל־מָה הִכִּיתָ אֶת־אֲתָנֶךָ זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רָגְלִים הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי יֵצְאָתִי לְשֹׁטֵן כִּי־יָרַט הַדֶּרֶךְ לִנְגְדִי:

And Yahweh's messenger said to him, "Why did you beat your jenny these three times? Behold, I set out as an obstacle, for the way is *yārat* in front of me."
(Num 22:32)

וַתִּרְאֵנִי הָאֲתוֹן וַתֵּט לִפְנֵי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רָגְלִים אוֹלִי נִטְתָּה מִפְּנֵי כִי עָתָה גַם־אֲתַכֶּה הַרְגָתִי וְאוֹתָהּ הִחַיִּיתִי:

"And your jenny saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. Perhaps since she turned aside from before me, now I should kill you and let her live."
(Num 22:33)

Morphologically, this is indicated by the fact that the word occurs here in plural form, not the usual dual form that would be expected if the body part were intended. The same situation arises in one other place in the Bible, namely Exod 23:14, where we encounter the clause *שְׁלֹשׁ רָגְלִים תַּחֲג לִי בַשָּׁנָה* "three *rəgālîm* you shall celebrate for me during the year." Chaim Cohen called attention to the development in postbiblical Hebrew whereby the word *רָגַל* comes to mean "holiday," apparently based specifically on this verse from Exodus, but went on to point out that this meaning is not an appropriate rendering of the term in BH, since it does not fit the context in *Sefer Bil'am*.¹¹ Rather, it is appropriate to accept the observation, widespread in medieval

¹¹ Cohen 2008: 445.

commentaries and emphasized in modernity by N. H. Tur-Sinai,¹² that in these contexts the word attests the meaning “time, instance, iteration.”

As Cohen pointed out, this semantic development, whereby רָגַל means both “foot” and “time,” occurred in parallel fashion with the word פָּעַם, the usual word for “time” in SBH, as demonstrated by the following examples:

וְאַחֲרַיִב בְּכַף-פְּעָמַי	And I have dried up with the soles of my feet
כָּל יְאֲרֵי מִצְרָיִם:	all the streams of Egypt.
	(2 Kgs 19:24cd = Isa 37:25cd)

רַגְלֵי עֲנִי	...(by) the feet of the needy,
פְּעָמַי דְּלִים:	the feet of the poor.
	(Isa 26:6bc)

In order to rule out the hypothesis that one or both of the terms רָגַל and פָּעַם in fact attests two homophonous roots, as in רָגַל I “foot” and רָגַל II “time” or the like, Cohen argued that “[b]ecause the possibility that these two etymologically unrelated terms might have homonyms with the same meaning is statistically almost zero, the semantic development (and the resultant polysemy) may be considered to be established....”¹³

The word רָגַל is attested with the meaning “time” in Aramaic. *DNWSI* cites the first line of the Aramaic version of the Bisitun Inscription,¹⁴ the end of which reads ... אתכנש[ו] “for a second time the rebels gather[d]....”¹⁵ Likewise, it is important to note the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic verbal root רגל “be usual, frequent,”¹⁶ and the various Jewish Palestinian Aramaic nominal forms such as רגיל

¹² Tur-Sinai 1954: 363 and n. 2.

¹³ Cohen 2008: 448.

¹⁴ The papyrus in which this text is recorded was published in Cowley 1923: 248–271.

¹⁵ Text adopted from Cowley 1923: 251.

¹⁶ Sokoloff 2002b, s.v. רגל.

that mean “usual, ordinary, frequent.”¹⁷ This semantic value comports with the iterative sense apparent in the biblical instances.

As a result of this evidence, notwithstanding the instance of רָגְלִים “times” in Exodus, which may be explained as variation for the sake of variation, it is reasonable to interpret the word in these three places in *Sefer Bil'am* as a dialectal feature, especially in the light of Balaq’s choice of the usual SBH alternative פְּעָמִים “times” in Num 24:10. This variation of the repeated pattern effectively calls attention to the uses of רָגְלִים earlier in the pericope, and also reminds us of the parallel between the story of Balaam and his donkey and that of Balaq and Balaam.¹⁸

מִן-אַרְם Num 23:7

The opening phrase of Balaam’s first oracle manifests another Aramaic-like feature of the type with which this chapter is concerned. In SBH, when the preposition מִן precedes an anarthrous noun, that is, a noun without the definite article -ה, the preposition is prefixed to the noun and the *nûn* generally assimilates. This results either in doubling of the first consonant of the noun, or, if this consonant cannot be doubled, in compensatory lengthening of the vowel *i* to *ē* in the prefixed preposition.¹⁹ For example:

¹⁷ See Sokoloff 2002a, s.v. רָגַל.

¹⁸ Conversely, Scott B. Noegel (1994: 184) identified the term פְּעָם “foot” in Isa 26:6, just cited, as an IH lexeme. This suggests that the standard SBH terms פְּעָם and רָגְלִים, with the respective meanings “time” and “foot,” are inverted in non-Judahite dialects. Support for this notion is to be found in Ugaritic, where *pⁿ* is the standard term for “foot” (see *DULAT*, s.v. *pⁿ*). Similarly, Hebrew שָׂר “officer, official” corresponds to *šarru* “king” in Akkadian, while the Hebrew root מָלַךְ, whence מֶלֶךְ “king,” occurs only as a general verb for “rule, govern” in Akkadian, with minimal nominal attestations. If this indeed is a valid type of parallel, then it lends some indirect support to the interpretation of רָגְלִים as a dialectal feature in *Sefer Bil'am*.

¹⁹ For a detailed presentation of the assimilation of the *nûn* of מִן, see the standard reference grammars, e.g. Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:339–340 § 103d.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אֲרָאָךְ:

And Yahweh said to Abram, “Go away from your land and from your kindred and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you.”

(Gen 12:1)

כְּסִוְפוֹת בְּנֶגֶב לְחֹלִי	Like gales in the Negeb for (its) rushing,
מִמִּדְבַּר בָּא	from a wilderness it comes,
מֵאֶרֶץ נוֹרָאָה:	from a feared land.

(Isa 21:1bcd)

In Aramaic, however, the *nûn* in the preposition מן “did not assimilate to the following consonant....”²⁰ Note the following examples occurring in first-millennium Aramaic inscriptions:²¹

... וישלחן אלהן מן כלמה אכל בארפד ובעמה]
And may the gods send (one/some) from (among) every type of
devourer against Arpad and against its people.
(Sefire I A 30)²²

והרמו . שר . מן . שר . חזרך . והעמקו . חרץ . מן . חר[צה] .
And they raised a wall (higher) than the wall of HZRK, and dug a
trench (deeper) than [its] tren[ch.]
(Zakkur 10)²³

²⁰ Garr 2004: 42. See also Rendsburg 2002a: 132.

²¹ I reproduce here examples pointed out by Garr 2004: 42.

²² The text is taken from Dupont-Sommer 1960: 214. מן “from” is read here with a partitive sense, as per Dupont-Sommer 1960: 242. Joseph A. Fitzmyer (1961: 197) was troubled by this reading, but did not provide a satisfactory alternative.

²³ The text is taken from Gibson 1971–1982: 2:8.

This also is the case in the Transjordanian dialect of the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions—a particularly relevant parallel, since the main character in these texts is none other than the prophet Balaam—in which מן occurs before an anarthrous noun five times:²⁴

ויקם . בלעם . מן . מחר .] And Balaam arose on the morrow...
(DAPT I:5)

[. ושמעו . חרשן . מן . רחק And the deaf heard from afar...
(DAPT I:15)²⁵

...and vermin from a tomb. From the tribes of
the sons of man, and from the places(?) [of...
ורמה . מנגדש . מן . פחזי . בני . אש . ומן . שקי .]
(DAPT II:8 [3x])²⁶

Returning to the biblical corpus, one finds several examples, 91 to be exact,²⁷ in which we find the full preposition מן, with no assimilation of the *nûn*, as in Aramaic and the dialect of the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions. Among these, of course, is our phrase מן-אַרם in Num 23:7, the significance of which will be explained presently. First, however, I present a brief review of the biblical data and their dialectal implications.

Rendsburg’s examination of this phenomenon led him to conclude that “[c]ognate evidence and the distribution of this phenomenon in the Bible indicate that this feature is a trait of IH [Israelian Hebrew].”²⁸ This evidence may be summarized as

²⁴ Garr 2004: 43; Rendsburg 1993: 314–315. The text of the inscriptions is taken from the *editio princeps*, Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1976: 173–174. I also adopt the line numbering of this edition, as well as the siglum DAPT (= “Deir ʿAllā Plaster Texts”) for the inscriptions themselves.

²⁵ For the reading of ושמעו as a simple suffix-conjugation verb with conjunction, rather than as a *wâw*-conversive to be understood in the future tense, see Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1976: 180, 217, 220.

²⁶ Reading מנגדש as two words, the preposition מן plus גדש “tomb,” as per Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1976: 226–227. Note the identical orthography in Job 40:6 (*Ketiv*), cited below, p. 87. Their reading of שקי as “places” is not at all certain, but the relevant discussion would be out of place here.

²⁷ See König 1895: 2:292 for a complete list of all biblical occurrences of this phenomenon.

²⁸ Rendsburg 2002a: 132. See also Rendsburg 2003c: 105, 126.

follows. Within the biblical corpus, 51 of the 98 attestations of this feature occur in Chronicles, and a few others appear in Daniel and Nehemiah.²⁹ Robert Polzin and Rendsburg concurred that these instances are reflective of LBH, specifically, the impact of Aramaic influence on that stratum of the language.³⁰ Of the remaining biblical occurrences, notwithstanding occasional unexplained attestations in SBH texts, Rendsburg identified 21 as neither SBH nor LBH. Most of these are either in Israelian Hebrew compositions or in pericopes whose events take place in a non-Judahite locale.³¹ With regard to the former, note the following examples:³²

וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לֹא סָר מִן־חַטָּאוֹת יִרְבָּעָם בֶּן־נִבָּט אֲשֶׁר הִחָטִּיא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 And he did evil in the eyes of Yahweh: he did not turn from the sins of
 Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he made Israel commit.
 (2 Kgs 15:28)

כַּצִּפּוֹר נוֹדֶדֶת מִן־קִנָּה	As a bird wanders from its nest,
בֶּן־אִישׁ נוֹדֵד מִמְּקוֹמוֹ:	so a man wanders from his place.
	(Pr 27:8) ³³

Likewise, non-Judahite settings account for this phenomenon in instances such as the following.³⁴

²⁹ See König 1895: 2:292.

³⁰ Polzin 1976: 66; Rendsburg 1980: 72.

³¹ Rendsburg 2003a: 23.

³² In addition to these examples, the list of attestations of this feature in IH texts presented in Rendsburg 2003a: 23 includes: Judg 5:20 (מִן־שָׁמַיִם); Ps 45:9 (English: 45:8) (מִן־הַיָּדֵי שֵׁן); Ps 73:19 (מִן־בִּלְהוֹת); Ps 116:8 (מִן־דִּמְעָה); Song 4:15 (מִן־לִבְנוֹן); and six occurrences in Jeremiah, possibly due to Benjaminitic dialect, although Rendsburg acknowledged that they may be Aramaisms: 7:7 (לְמִן־עוֹלָם), 17:5 (וּמִן־יְהוָה), 25:3 (מִן־שֵׁלֶשׁ עָשָׂר שָׁנָה), 25:5 (לְמִן־עוֹלָם), 44:18 (וּמִן־אֶזָּז), and 44:28 (מִן־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם). The instances in Jeremiah are not identified individually by Rendsburg, but see König 1895: 2:292.

³³ This example was adduced first by Chen 2000: 202.

³⁴ The list in Rendsburg 2003a: 23 includes the following additional examples of this feature in texts reflecting a non-Judahite setting: Judg 7:23 (2x: וּמִן־אֶשֶׁר, וּמִן־כָּל־מְנַשֶּׁה, setting: Manasseh); and Judg 19:16 (מִן־מַעֲשֵׂהוּ, setting: Benjaminitic Gibeah).

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲלֹא מִמִּצְרַיִם וּמִן־הָאֱמֹרִי וּמִן־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וּמִן־פְּלִשְׁתִּים:
 And Yahweh said to the people of Israel, “Did (I) not (deliver you)
 from Egypt and from the Amorite(s) and from the people of Ammon
 and from (the) Philistines?”
 (Judg 10:11 [2x]; setting: Gilead)

וַיַּעַן־יְהוָה אֶת־אֵיּוֹב מִנְּסֻעָה [ק': מן | סְעָרָה] וַיֹּאמֶר:
 And Yahweh answered Job from (the) storm, and said...
 (Job 40:6; setting: Uz)³⁵

Particularly salient is the Gileadite setting of Judg 10:11, since Deir ʿAllā is located in this region. Indeed, Stephen A. Kaufman preferred to identify the dialect of the inscriptions from this site simply as “Gileadite.”³⁶

There are, however, two biblical instances of this feature³⁷ that are to be identified as reflective of style-switching, that is, the use of dialectal features to reflect in direct speech the characteristic mannerisms of non-Judahite individuals. One occurs in Job, a book replete with linguistic peculiarities including many Aramaisms, in the direct speech of the book’s main character:³⁸

³⁵ Rendsburg 2003a: 23 identified this instance as one of style-switching, but since it does not occur in direct speech, it is to be seen rather as a reflection of the setting of Job, namely, “the general region of the Syrian Desert” (Rendsburg 1995: 178). Alternatively, one might prefer to interpret this as a true Aramaism; however, it is important to note that the book of Job represents a context in which the boundary between Aramaisms and Aramaic-like features may blur somewhat, and the distinction between the two concepts can be exceedingly difficult to pin down. See also below, n. 38.

³⁶ Kaufman 1988: 43. Note also that in two of these four examples (Pr 27:8; Judg 10:11) and also in Num 23:7, the non-standard form, in which the *nûn* of מן does not assimilate, appears in close proximity to the usual form, in which assimilation (or compensatory lengthening) does occur. See also the remarks in the conclusions to this chapter, below, pp. 176–177.

³⁷ Rendsburg 2003a: 23 identified three examples; but see above, n. 35.

³⁸ Note that we are concerned in this discussion not with Aramaisms but with Aramaic-like features. Because this example occurs in direct speech, I concur with Rendsburg 2003a: 23 in identifying it as the latter, specifically, as an instance of style-switching, and not as a true Aramaism. Cf. above, n. 35.

מִן־גּוֹ יִגְרָשׁוּ	From (the) midst they are driven;
יִרְעוּ עָלָיו כְּגַנָּב:	they shout against him as the thief.
	(Job 30:5)

Our other example appears in Num 23:7, in the opening line of Balaam's first oracle, where we do not find מֵאֲרָם, as would be expected in SBH, but rather the full form of the preposition, as in Aramaic: מִן־אֲרָם.

מִן־אֲרָם יִנְחֵנִי בְלֶק	From Aram Balaq leads me,
מֶלֶךְ־מוֹאָב מֵהַרְרֵי־קֶדֶם	the king of Moab, from the mountains of the east.

Thus, the Aramaic-like quality of Balaam's poetic speech is set forth from the outset. Moreover, in chiastic parallel to our phrase מִן־אֲרָם occurs the phrase מֵהַרְרֵי־קֶדֶם. Although the final *nûn* of the preposition מִן is assimilated (by way of compensatory lengthening) in this phrase, its first word nevertheless exhibits the next Aramaic-like feature to be addressed here.

Num 23:7: הַרְרֵי

Rendsburg noted the significance of the word הַרְרֵי in its present context in numerous publications, generally in the context of a broad discussion of the pertinent philological issues.³⁹ The word is a reduplicatory plural, that is, a plural form of a geminate noun in which the gemination is evidenced by the repetition of the final consonant, rather than by doubling it as per the norm in Hebrew.

Joseph H. Greenberg provided the key evidence for determining that these forms are to be viewed as internal plural constructions, akin to those of segholate

³⁹ Rendsburg 1990a: 41; Rendsburg 1991a: 357; Rendsburg 1991b: 93–94; Rendsburg 1992a: 84; Rendsburg 1995: 183; Rendsburg 2003a: 14–15; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

nouns. He began by noting that the latter exhibit plural forms that, unlike their singular counterparts, are characterized by an *a*-vowel between the second and third root consonants. The Hebrew examples he cited are as follows:⁴⁰

Singular	Plural
מֶלֶךְ (< * <i>malk</i> -) “king”	מְלָכִים
נֶדֶר (< * <i>nidr</i> -) “vow”	נְדָרִים
קֹדֶשׁ (< * <i>qudš</i> -) “holiness”	קְדָשִׁים

Greenberg continued by recalling the generally accepted relationship between these forms and the so-called “broken plural” forms exhibited in Arabic and other Semitic languages.⁴¹ These forms are marked internally, that is, by vocalic changes within the stem itself, rather than externally, that is, by the addition of suffixes. Note the following examples, which illustrate this phenomenon:

Singular	Plural
كِتَاب “document”	كُتُب ⁴²
عَلَقَم “colocynth”	عَلَقِم ⁴³

As Greenberg pointed out, Hebrew (and Aramaic) segholate plural forms are analogous to these examples from Arabic in that their plurality is marked internally. However, since plurals in Hebrew and Aramaic generally are marked by suffixes, segholate plurals are *doubly* marked, exhibiting both internal marking in the form of

⁴⁰ Greenberg 1955: 198.

⁴¹ Greenberg 1955: 198.

⁴² Wehr 1976, s.v. كِتَاب.

⁴³ Wehr 1976, s.v. عَلَقَم.

the added *a*-vowel and, by analogy with the usual plural formation, external marking, that is, plural suffixes.⁴⁴ Note the suffix ־ים in the Hebrew examples presented above.

Greenberg proceeded to isolate several types of internal *a*-plurals across the Afroasiatic language family. He identified and described them as follows:⁴⁵

Intercalation: An *a*-vowel in the plural replaces a zero-vowel in the singular, as in Ethiopic ጆጌ “ear,” plural ጆጌጎ . The internal marking of Hebrew and Aramaic segholate plurals falls into this category.

Replacement: An *a*-vowel in the plural alternates with a non-zero-vowel in the singular, as in Berber amqərqr “frog,” plural imqərqr .⁴⁶

Dissimilatory: Replacement or intercalation occurs, in combination with an *a*-vowel in the singular alternating with some other vowel in the plural, as in Arabic عَلَقَم “colocynth,” plural عَلَقِم , adduced above, wherein two shifts occur: between */l/* and */q/*, */ā/* in the plural replaces a zero-vowel in the singular; and between */q/* and */m/*, */a/* in the singular is replaced by */i/* in the plural.

General: All vowels shift in the plural to *a*, by means of several intercalations and/or replacements, as in Gulfei gərəm “woman,” plural garam .

Reduplicatory: The final consonant of the singular is reduplicated and preceded by an *a*-vowel, as in Afar il “eye,” plural ilal .

It is with the final category that we are concerned here. Reduplicatory plural forms in the Bible, the significance of which will be discussed shortly, manifest clear similarity to segholate plurals. We may take as an illustrative example the word עַמִּים (plural of עַם “people,” whose more common Hebrew plural is עַמִּים):

⁴⁴ Max L. Margolis observed this already in 1904 (Margolis 1904).

⁴⁵ Greenberg 1955: 199.

⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the shift of the singular preformative *a*- to *i*- in the plural. Greenberg 1955: 201.

וַתֵּן לָהֶם מַמְלָכוֹת וְעַמִּים
וַתִּחְלֶקֶם לְפָאָה
(Neh 9:22ab)

And you gave to them kingdoms and peoples,
and apportioned them to (every) corner.
(Neh 9:22ab)

And you gave to them kingdoms and peoples,
and apportioned them to (every) corner.
(Neh 9:22ab)

As the plural of עַם (< *^ε*amm-*), the word עַמְמַיִם exhibits the double plural marking that occurs in segholate plurals, with both the intercalated *a*-vowel and the plural suffix יַיִם. In addition, however, we see the gemination of the letter מ preserved by means of reduplication, as in Greenberg's fifth category, not by doubling as in the usual plural form עַמִּים.

In the interest of linguistic rigor, we must recognize that Greenberg spoke of a plural formation whereby an originally *single* consonant in the singular is reduplicated in the plural, as in Akkadian *alaktu* “road,” plural *alkakātu*;⁴⁷ whereas in עֲמָמִים and similar Hebrew (and Aramaic) terms an originally *double* consonant, while attested only singly in the singular (in Aramaic, the anarthrous singular) forms, is *retained* in the plural, not added as in Greenberg’s category, and thus in these cases we see only a type of *quasi*-reduplication. Nevertheless, just as segholate plurals essentially are internal plural forms that, by *Analogiebildung*, also possess the more common suffixed plural marker, so we also may understand the reduplicatory forms in Hebrew and Aramaic as representative of a situation in which the natural underlying gemination in such terms lends itself particularly well, by similar analogy, to the reduplicatory plural construction identified by Greenberg.⁴⁸

The scholarly community recognized long ago that the reduplicatory construction is a standard means of forming the plural in Aramaic. Stanislav Segert,

⁴⁷ Greenberg 1955: 201.

⁴⁸ Cf. the comments of Rendsburg 1990a: 41 n. 11.

for example, stated: “Bei einigen Nomina wird der Plural von zweisilbiger Basis gebildet....”⁴⁹ Note the following examples:⁵⁰

Singular	Plural
דש “portal”	דששן
חן* “board (?)”	(det.) חנניא
כד “vessel”	כדדן
עם “people”	(det.) עממא, עממא

This observation has a variety of implications in BH, which exhibits an assortment of reduplicatory plural forms. E. Y. Kutscher touched on one aspect, namely, the appearance of these forms in later biblical texts as a result of direct contact with Aramaic: “אמנם מצינו מעין אלו בעברית...אולם כל הצורות הללו מופיעות בספרי המקרא”⁵¹ Additionally, Rendsburg identified this construction as a contributing factor in the identification of biblical texts that exhibit a northern provenience. Note the following examples:⁵²

בְּפִלְגֹת רְאוּבֵן...	...among the clans of Reuben,
גְּדֹלִים חֻקֵּי־לֵב:	great (the) resolutions of heart.
	(Judg 5:15cβd)

⁴⁹ Segert 1990: 198 § 5.3.3.5. Note also the chart on 211–214 (labeled § 5.3.10, “Übersicht über die Nominalklassen”), specifically subsection A.b.α (211–212), which is designated “Maskulina – mit Veränderung der Nominalbasis – mit geminierten Endkonsonanten.”

⁵⁰ These examples appear in Segert 1990 on the following pages: דש: 198 (as “Fenster”), 212, 531 (as “Tür”); חן*: 535; כד: 537; עם: 198, 211–212 (though here עממא is listed erroneously as the singular determined form: cf. 198), 546.

⁵¹ Kutscher 1968–1969: 507.

⁵² In addition to the examples presented here, the list in Rendsburg 2003a:14–15 includes: Deut 33:15 (הֲרִי); Judg 5:14 (עֲמָיִד); Ps 36:7 (הֲרִי); Ps 50:10 (הֲרִי); Ps 76:5 (הֲרִי); Ps 77:18 (חֲצִצִיד); Ps 87:1 (הֲרִי); Ps 133:3 (הֲרִי); Prov 29:13 (תִּכְכִּים); Song 4:8 (הֲרִי); Neh 9:22 (עֲמָמִים), discussed above; and Neh 9:24 (עֲמָמִי).

עד שיִפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם Until the day breathes
וְנָסוּ הַצִּלּוֹת and the shadows have fled...
(Song 2:17ab = 4:6ab)

He also isolated three cases in which “Aramaic influence may be increasingly seen and/or where IH influence had begun to show its effects due to the reunion of northerners and southerners in exile.”⁵³

אֵי לָנוּ כִּי־פָנָה הַיּוֹם Woe to us, for the day has passed,
כִּי יִנָּטוּ צִלְי־עָרָב: for the shadows of evening are stretched out.
(Jer 6:4cd)

וְעָנַת שְׁעָרִים תֹּאכְלֶנָּה וְהָיָא בְּגִלְלֵי צֹאֲת הָאָדָם תַּעֲנֶנָּה לְעֵינֵיהֶם:
And the barley cake you will eat; on clumps of human filth you will
bake it, before their eyes.
(Ezek 4:12)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי רָאָה נָתַתִּי לָךְ אֶת־צֹפּוּעֵי [ק': צִפְעִי] הַבֶּקָּר תַּחַת גִּלְלֵי הָאָדָם וְעָשִׂיתָ
אֶת־לֶחֶמְךָ עֲלֵיהֶם:
And he said to me, “See, I give to you cattle feces instead of human
clumps, and you will make your bread on them.”
(Ezek 4:15)

Unlike all of the above cases, however, the word הֶרְרִי in Num 23:7 holds a different philological significance. Rendsburg noted repeatedly that this Aramaic-like form has been used in Balaam’s oracle for the purpose of style-switching.⁵⁴ In

⁵³ Rendsburg 1990a: 41. Note also the lone reduplicatory plural form in the Bible for which Rendsburg has not produced an explanation: הֶרְרִי in Hab 3:6.

⁵⁴ See the literature cited above, n. 39.

conjunction with other such features, it infuses Balaam's poetry with an Aramean flavor, calling to mind the speech of Balaam's homeland on the upper Euphrates.⁵⁵

צָרִים: Num 23:9

The cognate relationship between Hebrew צור and Aramaic טור is well established. W. F. Albright, for example, noted this connection by drawing attention to this verse, Num 23:9, and specifically to the parallel pair formed by this term and גְּבָעוֹת “hills” in the verse's opening bicolon:

כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צָרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ	For from the top of peaks I see him,
וּמִגְּבָעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ	and from hills I apprehend him.

According to Albright, this parallelism proves that “*ṣûr* is to be taken in the same sense as Aramaic *tûr*, ‘mountain,’ especially since *ṣr*⁵⁶ and *gb^ᶜt* often stand in parallelism in the Ugaritic texts; the three forms are etymologically identical.”⁵⁷

The parallel pair צור // גְּבָעָה has additional significance. Cohen and Shelomo Morag called upon the Ugaritic usages of this word pair as evidence of the antiquity of

⁵⁵ A. Robinson (1974) argued for the emendation of all biblical attestations of הַרְרִי to הַרִי. I concur with the assessment of Rendsburg (1990a: 41 n. 13), however, who rejected Robinson's argument as altogether unsound.

⁵⁶ This reflects Albright's preference for reading Ugaritic *ṣ* as /*z*/, as presented in Albright 1932: 17.

⁵⁷ Albright 1944: 212 n. 22. For a thorough discussion of the Ugaritic shift **/z/ > /r/* and the situations in which it occurs, see Segert 1988. This shift occurred particularly in the presence of /*r*/ (Segert 1988: 295, 297). Hence, for instance, the relationship between Ugaritic *n' r* and Hebrew נצר = Aramaic נטר (Gevirtz 1963: 57 provided this and several other examples). See also Bordreuil–Pardee 2004: 1:37–38; Sivan 1997: 23–24; and Tropper 2000: 114–115 § 32.144.25. Ullendorff (1977: 134) dismissed the association of Ugaritic *ṣ r* with Hebrew צור and Aramaic טור on phonetic grounds, but his argument did not account for the **/z/ > /r/* shift.

the biblical poem.⁵⁸ The pair is attested several times in the Baᑭ Cycle, as in the example presented by Cohen (*CAT* 1.4:V:15–16 = *CAT* 1.4:V:31–33):⁵⁹

tblk . ʾrm . mīd . ksp . The mountains shall bring you much silver;
gb^cm . mhm̄d . hrs The hills, a treasure of gold.

The same parallel pair appears elsewhere, in the direct speech of ʔil (*CAT* 1.3:III:30–31):

b qdš . b ʿr . nḥlty In the sanctuary, on the mountain of my property,
b nḥm . b gbʿ . tliyt in the pleasant (place), on the hill of triumph.

We encounter this pair yet again at another point in the myth (*CAT* 1.5:VI:25–28).⁶⁰

ap / ʕnt . ttlk . w tʃd . So ʕAnat wandered and traversed
kl . ʔr / l kbd . aʀʃ . every mountain unto the midst of the earth,
kl . gbʕ / l kbd . šdm every hill unto the midst of the fields.

Returning to the biblical corpus, the pair צור // גִּבְעָה appears nowhere else besides the present verse. Instead, the equivalent pair הר // גִּבְעָה is the standard, and is used in dozens of places. I offer two representative examples:

קוֹם רִיב אֶת־הַהָרִים
וְתִשְׁמָעֵנָה הַגְּבָעוֹת קוֹלִי:
(Mic 6:1bc)

⁵⁸ Cohen 1978: 37; Morag 1995: 52.

⁵⁹ See Cohen 1978: 37. Cf. also CAT 1.4:V:38–39, which is identical except that the first word of the couplet is changed to *yblnn*. Cohen also provided a list of other attestations of this word pair in Ugaritic (59 n. 59), each of which I present here in full.

⁶⁰ Cf. also *CAT* 1.6:II:15–17, which is identical except that it is in the first person rather than the third person.

בְּטָרָם הָרִים הִטְבְּעוּ לִפְנֵי גְבָעוֹת חוֹלְלֹתַי:	Before mountains were sunk, before hills, I was born. (Pr 8:25)
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Cohen and Morag interpreted this situation as demonstrative of a development in the Hebrew language whereby the archaic pair *צור* // *גְבָעָה*, attested only once in an early poetic stratum, was replaced by the later pair *הר* // *גְבָעָה*.⁶¹ To be sure, there is real diachronic significance in this lone biblical attestation of a word pair that is well attested in Ugaritic.

However, this diachronic perspective on the term *צָרִים* in this context does not encompass the entire breadth of the situation. As Rendsburg observed, “the form *צָרִים* evokes Aramaic *טורים* ‘mountains,’ and no doubt reflects an attempt to include that Aramaic word in the poetry, using the Old Aramaic orthography still, in which the emphatic interdental /z/ is represented by *צ* (before the shift to *ט* occurred)...”⁶² Rendsburg’s mention of orthography is both justified and relevant to the present study. W. Randall Garr discussed the process by which the Proto-Semitic phoneme */z/ (thus the usual transliteration; Garr preferred */t/), still pronounced in Old Aramaic and represented orthographically by *צ*, fell together with /t/ in later stages of the language, and thus came to be represented by *ט*.⁶³ The spelling in the biblical text, which uses *צ* rather than *ט*, therefore bespeaks a date of composition prior to the phonetic–orthographic shift in the Aramaic language from which the latter spelling results. Thus, although Cohen and Morag surely were correct in seeing *צור* // *גְבָעָה* as an

⁶¹ Cohen 1978: 37; Morag 1995: 52.

⁶² Rendsburg 2006a: 170.

⁶³ Garr 2004: 27–28. In Hebrew, all evidence indicates that */z/ had completely fallen together with /s/ at a very early stage (Garr 2004: 28).

archaic pair on the basis of its connection to Ugaritic, it is the orthography, which uses צ as in Old Aramaic, that provides a more specific diachronic clue.

Moreover, from a synchronic standpoint, Rendsburg suggested that the usage of this term is not merely one half of a word pair that is reflective of Archaic Biblical Hebrew, as argued by Cohen and Morag. Rather, this usage reveals the author's intentional adoption of the pair צָרִים // גְּבָעוֹת, an archaic pair to be sure, one of whose members, the term צָרִים, recalls the Aramaic lexeme צור (later טור). Note that Aramaic טור occurs as the interdialectal equivalent of Hebrew הַר, as witnessed by the consistent use of the former in the Targumic renderings of the latter; see, for example, Gen 8:4, where the phrase הָרֵי אֲרָרָט “mountains of Ararat” is rendered טו(ו)רֵי (ד)קֶרְדּוּ(ו) in the Targumim. Thus, in addition to standing as an archaizing element, this word pair lends an Aramean cast to the couplet, and contributes to this quality in the poem as a whole. Indeed, Stanley L. Gevirtz anticipated this synchronic approach to the term צָרִים, by positing a regional significance to its attestation in the present context:

Since Balaam says he was brought by Balak from the ‘Mountains of Qedem’...the use of the Syrian(?) parallelism גבע // צר rather than the Palestinian(?) parallelism גבע // הר would appear to indicate, on the one hand, an authentic representation of the northern dialect and, on the other hand, an accurate retention of the northern poetic tradition as it differed from the southern.⁶⁴

In the present study, I adjust Gevirtz's interpretation of this term as representative of a dialectal distinction between the northern and southern poetic traditions, and prefer instead to see it as an example of stylized Hebrew intended to imitate Aramaic.

⁶⁴ Gevirtz 1963: 57.

Nevertheless, whether in regard to dialect or deliberately stylized language, in a broad sense his recognition of this term's relevance to matters of regional variation in BH, and in the Northwest Semitic linguistic domain generally, certainly is noteworthy.

In sum, it is reasonable to view the pair הָר // גִּבְעָה as the biblical standard, with this single attestation of the pair צוֹר // גִּבְעָה thereby cast in sharp relief as an alternative that is, on the one hand, similar enough to the standard pair that its sense would be transparent to any speaker of Hebrew, while on the other hand evocative enough that it provides a taste of the characteristic speech of the Aramean prophet.

Num 23:9: יִתְחַשֵּׁב

The final two cola of Num 23:9 read as follows:

הִנֵּנִי לְבַדִּד יֹשֵׁב וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:	Behold, a people (who) dwells alone, and among the nations it does not <i>yithaššāb</i> .
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The standard grammars of BH generally agree on the reflexive sense of the Hitpa^{el} stem. For example, GKC stated, “As in form, so also in meaning, *Hithpa^{el}* is primarily (a) *reflexive* of *Pi^{el}*, e.g. הִתְאַזָּר *to gird oneself*, הִתְקַדֵּשׁ *to sanctify oneself*.”⁶⁵ This suggests that the second colon should be read “and among the nations it does not *reckon itself*.” However, the content of the poem clearly indicates that this interpretation is simply untenable, since the sudden intrusion here of a glimpse into Israel’s innermost thoughts would be totally incongruous with the rest of the poem, whose perspective throughout is that of Balaam. In addition, although the textual evidence is only suggestive, this is the only biblical attestation of the verbal root חִשַּׁב

⁶⁵ GKC p. 149 § 54e (emphasis in original); see also, e.g., Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:157–160 § 53a, i.

in the Hitpa^ʿel, which leaves one with the sense that “reckoning” is not an action generally conceived as something one does to oneself.

An alternative reading for the second colon plainly provides a more suitable sense in context: “and among the nations it *is not reckoned*.” Normally, one expects the Niph^ʿal to be used to express passivity. As GKC puts it, “*Niph^ʿal* comes finally in many cases to represent the passive of *Qal*, e.g. יָלַד *to bear*, Niph. *to be born*....”⁶⁶ Indeed, the root חשב appears numerous times with passive sense using the Niph^ʿal stem. Note especially the following example, in which the Niph^ʿal occurs in conjunction with the preposition בְּ, as in our verse:

חִדְּלוּ לְכֶם מִן־הָאָדָם	Leave off from humanity
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאַפּוֹ	in whose nostrils is breath,
כִּי־בִמָּה נִחְשָׁב הוּא:	for on what is it esteemed?
	(Isa 2:22)

Also instructive is an example from Psalms, which uses a different preposition, but nevertheless provides an analogue for the use of this verb to express the place of an individual subject within a larger group, as in Balaam’s oracle, though here again it is expressed with the Niph^ʿal:

נִחְשַׁבְתִּי עִם־יֹרְדֵי בֹר	I am reckoned with those who descend to the pit;
הָיִיתִי כַגִּבֹּר אֵין־אֵיל:	I am like a man without help.
	(Ps 88:5 [English: 88:4])

On what basis, then, may we justify a passive reading of the word יִתְחַשֵּׁב in our verse from Numbers? As pointed out by Rendsburg in numerous publications, it is to

⁶⁶ GKC p. 138 § 51f (emphasis in original); see also, e.g., Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:151 § 51c.

Aramaic that we must turn for the necessary evidence.⁶⁷ In that language, which exhibits no stem involving a *n*-preformative parallel to the Niph^{al} in Hebrew, we find instead two passive forms הִתְקַטַּל and הִתְקַטַּל, corresponding to the G and D stems respectively (although they can be difficult to distinguish in consonantal orthography), that involve a *h*-preformative with infixed *t*. Segert provided examples such as גִּזַּר “zerschneiden,” התגזר “abgetrennt werden,”⁶⁸ יהב “geben,” התיהב “gegeben werden,”⁶⁹ and so on. On the basis of these Aramaic passive forms, Rendsburg identified three other instances in the Bible where the Hitpa^{el} stem must be understood with a passive sense.⁷⁰ The first is from the sixth chapter of Micah, in a portion of that book recognized as deriving from the northern kingdom of Israel:⁷¹

וְשִׁתְּמָר חֻקֹּת עֹמְרִי	And the statutes of Omri are kept,
וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂה בֵּית־אֲחָזָב	and all the doing of the house of Ahab;
וְתֵלְכוּ בְּמַעֲצוֹתָם	and you go in their counsels.
	(Mic 6:16abc)

Note the other occurrence of שָׁמַר in the Hitpa^{el}, which is reflexive, as expected:

וְאֶהְיֶה תָּמִיד עִמּוֹ	I was perfect with him,
וְאֶשְׁתַּמְּרָא מִעֲוֹנִי	and I kept myself from my guilt.
	(Ps 18:24 [English: 18:23] ≈ 2 Sam 22:24)

The root שָׁמַר in the Niph^{al} stem generally is to be taken reflexively, which itself points up this instance of passive Hitpa^{el} all the more. Note also, however, the two

⁶⁷ Rendsburg 1995: 183–184; Rendsburg 2003a: 18–19; Rendsburg 2003c: 105; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

⁶⁸ Segert 1990: 529.

⁶⁹ Segert 1990: 536.

⁷⁰ Rendsburg 2003a: 18–19.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Burkitt 1926; and Ginsberg 1982: 25–27.

biblical attestations of שמר in the Niph^{al}—not the Hitpa^{el}—that are to be read as passives:

וּבְנִיָּא הָעֵלָה יְהוָה	And by the prophet Yahweh brought
אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם	Israel up from Egypt,
וּבְנִיָּא נִשְׁמָר:	and by the prophet he is protected.
	(Hos 12:14 [English: 12:13])

לְעוֹלָם נִשְׁמָרוּ	Unto eternity they are kept,
וְזֶרַע רָשָׁעִים נִכְרֶת:	but the seed of the wicked is cut off.
	(Ps 37:28cd)

The second example of a passive Hitpa^{el} identified by Rendsburg is from Proverbs, a book whose language possesses well-established Israelian characteristics:

שָׁקֵר הַחֵן וְהַבֵּל הַיָּפִי	Deceitful is favor, and vain is beauty;
אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת־יְהוָה	a woman who fears Yahweh—
הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל:	let her be praised.
	(Pr 31:30)

The root הלל does not occur in the Niph^{al}, but the wealth of Hitpa^{el} attestations other than this one are clearly not passive. הִתְהַלֵּל is commonly reflexive, with the sense “boast” (< “praise oneself”), as in the following representative example:

וַיַּעַן מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַרְוּ אֶל־יְהוָה חָגֵר בְּמַפְתָּח:
And the king of Israel answered and said, “Say, ‘Let not he who puts
on (armor) boast as he who takes (it) off.’”
(1 Kgs 20:11)

Alternatively, the Hitpa^cel stem from this root can also mean “glory (in), make one’s boast (in),”⁷² as in the following example, which also is one of many:

בִּיהוּה תִתְהַלֵּל נַפְשִׁי	In Yahweh my soul glories;
יִשְׁמְעוּ עֲנֻיִם וְיִשְׁמְחוּ:	hear, O humble, and be glad.
	(Ps 34:3 [English: 34:2])

Finally, Rendsburg’s third example comes from Qohelet, and also constitutes an instance of Israelian dialect:

רָשָׁעִים קִבְּרִים וְבָאוּ	The wicked are buried and gone,
וּמִמָּקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ	and from the holy place they wander,
וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר	and they are forgotten in the city
אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ עָשׂוּ	that they made.
	(Qoh 8:10bcd)

Like *יִתְחַשֵּׁב* in Num 23:9, the term *יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ* is the only biblical occurrence of this verbal root in the Hitpa^cel. Here too, this is particularly striking given the frequency of *שָׁכַח* in the Niph^cal stem, as in the following examples:

וְקָמוּ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִי רָעָב אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְנִשְׁכַּח כָּל־הַשְּׂבַע בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְכָל־הָרָעָב
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:
And there will arise seven years of famine after them, and all the plenty
will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will fill the land.
(Gen 41:30)

בָּשׂוּ מְאֹד כִּי־לֹא הִשְׁכִּיחוּ	They are greatly ashamed, for they have not succeeded—
כְּלִמָּת עוֹלָם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:	an eternal dishonor; it will not be forgotten.
	(Jer 20:11cd)

⁷² Thus BDB, s.v. הלל.

Thus, not only the rarity, but also the peculiarity and significance of the passive Hitpa^ʕel are amply demonstrated. These forms are identifiable specifically because of their similarity to Aramaic *t*-infixd passive forms. But while the latter three attestations represent dialectal features associated with Israelian Hebrew, the word יתחשב in Balaam’s oracle is a *deliberate* mimicry of Aramaic, by means of the Hitpa^ʕel—a perfectly good Hebrew construction—where otherwise one would expect the Niph^ʕal. This serves to season Balaam’s speech, which is presented in Hebrew, with a taste of the Aramean figure’s native language.

It is worthwhile to take a moment to respond to the argument against Rendsburg’s position in this matter, as presented by David Talshir.⁷³ He adduced a handful of additional examples of the Hitpa^ʕel stem that purportedly exhibit a passive sense, and argued that the attestation of these examples in manifestly Judahite contexts demonstrates that this usage cannot be interpreted as representative of non-standard dialect. Here I address each example briefly. The term וְנִכְפָּר in Deut 21:8, glossed by Talshir as “and they will be absolved,” is an unusual form closer to a Nitpa^ʕel than a Hitpa^ʕel.⁷⁴ The rarity of the form, together with the fact that the passive sense is produced by the *n*-preformative rather than the *t*-infix,⁷⁵ renders it problematic as a piece of evidence in the dialectal discussion, especially in light of the conventional Hitpa^ʕel form יתכפר in 1 Sam. 3:14, which Talshir also adduced. This is the only

⁷³ The argument is presented in Talshir 2003: 275. Talshir’s excursus on pp. 270–275 is critical of Rendsburg’s identification of a number of supposedly IH features. In general, the material presented there does not bear directly on the subject matter of this study, but occasionally it will be worthwhile to note Talshir’s view in passing.

⁷⁴ Both GKC p. 153 § 55k and Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:169–170 § 59f interpreted this verb as a Nithpa^ʕel.

⁷⁵ The word וְנִסְרִי “and they will take warning/be warned” in Ezek 23:48, which exhibits the same form, might be interpreted comfortably in either the reflexive or the passive voice, and thus sheds no light on the issue.

occurrence of the root כפר in the Hitpa^ʿel, and given its relatively frequent attestation with passive sense in the Pu^ʿal, this instance is striking. One notes, however, that this verse occurs in a story set in the Ephraimite hill country. Rendsburg demonstrated that 1 Samuel 1–2 represents an IH composition;⁷⁶ and although his study did not proceed to 1 Samuel 3, the IH narrative continues here, as confirmed, in part, by the word יתכפר in 1 Sam 3:14.

Other examples offered by Talshir are still more problematic. It is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusion from the verb יתבשר in 2 Sam 18:31, the only attested Hitpa^ʿel form of the root בשר, which Talshir glossed as “be informed” but which might just as easily be interpreted as “take heed.” Not only is the term’s passive sense a matter of the translator’s preference, but in fact every other verbal attestation of the root is in a clearly active context, which leaves us with no data by which to assess the present term’s dialectal status one way or the other. If the verb is normative SBH, this may be due to the absence of a more “conventional” passive form from this root, and thus it certainly cannot stand as a general demonstration that the passive Hitpa^ʿel is standard in Judahite dialect. On the other hand, one notes that the word occurs in the mouth of a Cushite, and thus may stand as a style-switching element in the foreigner’s speech.⁷⁷ Finally, the verb ידכא “be crushed” occurs twice in Job (5:4; 34:25), a book replete with a range of linguistic peculiarities including numerous Aramaic-like features, and thus does little to counter Rendsburg’s position.

The most meaningful example offered by Talshir is the verb התענה, which he interpreted as “be oppressed.” In three cases, including the instance he cited

⁷⁶ See Rendsburg 2002b: 35–45, especially the remarks on p. 43.

⁷⁷ This is not to say that the specific dialect of Cush is represented, but rather that the figure’s foreignness is reflected in a more general way by means of non-SBH features such as this one.

specifically (וְהִתְעַנִּי, Gen 16:9; also Dan 2:12 and Ezra 8:21), the reflexive sense better fits the context: “afflict oneself, subject oneself.” In two instances, however (1 Kgs 2:26 [2x]; Ps 107:17), the passive sense appears unavoidable.⁷⁸ Be that as it may, if this is the only example cited by Talshir that stands in contrast to Rendsburg’s argument, then it does little to counteract the point. In short, the force of Rendsburg’s view lies not only in the IH contexts of the examples he adduced, but in the *demonstrable* contrast that they exhibit with normative SBH locutions. Talshir’s point is worthy of close consideration, but the balance of the evidence remains tipped in favor of Rendsburg’s perspective.

Num 23:10: רִבֵּעַ

Superficially, the *hapax legomenon* רִבֵּעַ, clearly the B-word to עֶפְרַיִם in the A-line, appears to mean something like “one-fourth,” and indeed some translations interpret the phrase רִבֵּעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל, rather awkwardly, as “the fourth-part of Israel” or the like.⁷⁹ Recently, Baruch A. Levine argued in support of this reading in the following manner. He interpreted עֶפְרַיִם in the preceding colon on the basis of MH, as follows: “Thus, *bêt kôr ʿāpār* means ‘a section of land yielding a *kôr* of grain’ (Mishnah, *Qiddûšîn* 3:3, 7:1). In such terms, *ʿapar Yiśrāʾēl* would be synonymous with *ʿadmat Yiśrāʾēl* ‘the territory of Israel’ in Ezekiel 12:22.”⁸⁰ In conjunction with this, he suggested a rendering of רִבֵּעַ that is related, in fact, to the number four, as above. However, instead of reading it simply as a numerical designator, as in “one-fourth, one

⁷⁸ One notes, however, that the addressee in the 1 Kings verse is Abiathar, a priest from Anathoth. Isoglosses between IH and the dialect of Benjamin have received extensive attention in Smith 2002.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Gevirtz 1963: 61; and numerous modern translations of the Bible, including KJV, RSV, NASV, etc.

⁸⁰ Levine 2000: 177.

quarter,” he noted that the Akkadian word “*rebītu*, from a root *rebû* means: ‘quartier’ (French), namely, a section of a city, or of some other delimited area.”⁸¹ Levine thereby presented a reading of this couplet in which both words, רִבְעַ and עֶפְרַ, relate not to Israel’s numbers but to the extent of Israel’s territory.

While Levine’s discussion is consummately informed and astute as always, there remains a persistent drawback. In terms of content, if one accepts Levine’s reading, it is the only reference in any of Balaam’s oracles that refers explicitly to Israel’s land. Elsewhere, only the several strophes following the fourth oracle (Num 24:20–24), themselves widely interpreted as late editions,⁸² mention specific lands in association with Israel. But, notably, none of them are *Israel’s* land, and in any case the idea of a fixed territory for Israel appears rather incongruous with the use here of the words עֶפְרַ and מִסְפָּר. Instead, Israel is presented as the victor, or perhaps conqueror, over other lands in the region, and is identified exclusively throughout *Sefer Bil’am* not as a land or territory, but as a “people” (עַם). Nevertheless, ultimately Levine’s position provides the strongest support yet offered for this reading.

This fact notwithstanding, however, the rendering of רִבְעַ as “one-fourth” in parallel to עֶפְרַ “dust” in the preceding colon remains unsatisfactory. The Septuagint only clouds the matter, departing entirely from עֶפְרַ // רִבְעַ to read σπέρμα // ἄνθρωπος “seed” // “peoples,” although Albright explained, rather dubiously, that the LXX reading in fact derives from the plain sense of the Hebrew: “**G** [i.e., LXX, the Greek text] obviously understood ‘quarters’ ... in the sense of ‘clans’”⁸³ He also identified

⁸¹ Levine 2000: 176; and see *AHW*, s.v. *rebītu*.

⁸² I will address this matter in detail below, pp. 471–478.

⁸³ Albright 1944: 213.

a different rendering, widely attested in his day: “Most commentators emend MT, *אֶת־רֶבֶעַ*, to *אֶת־רֶבֶבֶת*,”⁸⁴ with the meaning “the myriad (i.e., of Israel).”

Albright’s preference, however, corresponded with the suggestion first made by Friedrich Delitzsch, whereby Akkadian *turbu²u* “dust-cloud” was offered as cognate.⁸⁵ Cohen adduced several instances of this term in Akkadian, including the following examples:⁸⁶

epram pîki tarbu²am panîki sahlî daqqātim umallû īnîki
Dust in your mouth, a dust-cloud in your face, they fill your eyes with
pulverized cress.
(NBC 2, 72:16–19)⁸⁷

*šû maniyê turbû šēpē ummānātiya ēmurma ukku ā šarrūtīšu ēzibma ana
rūqêti innabit*
Then Maniye saw the dust-cloud of my armies’ feet, abandoned Ukku,
his royal city, and fled to distant (places).
(OIP 2, 37:23–25)⁸⁸

By the time Albright published his study, this alternative had already begun to circulate in scholarship, as indicated, for example, by H. L. Ginsberg’s statement more than a decade earlier that “[f]or the sake of coherence (and incidentally of parallelism)” the phrase *אֶת־רֶבֶעַ* “is now read by all scholars” in similar fashion as “dust, dust-cloud.”⁸⁹ Cognate evidence from other Semitic languages continued to

⁸⁴ Albright 1944: 213. Included among “most commentators” are Gray 1903: 347; and Binns 1927: 162.

⁸⁵ According to Cohen 1978: 38 and 61 n. 74, Delitzsch first suggested this in 1874. For a subsequent statement, see Delitzsch 1912: 177, which is cited later by Gevirtz (1963: 63 n. 38) and Samuel E. Loewenstamm (1964: 185 n. 33). More recently, Parpola glossed this term as “dust storm” (Parpola 2007, s.v. *turbu²u*).

⁸⁶ Cohen 1978: 37.

⁸⁷ The siglum NBC refers to the Nies Babylonian Collection, Yale University.

⁸⁸ The siglum OIP refers to Oriental Institute Publications, Chicago.

⁸⁹ Ginsberg 1933: 309. See also the literature cited in Gevirtz 1963: 63–64.

accumulate: Ginsberg offered “Arabic (metathesized?) رَبْعٌ by the side of the more common غَبْرَةٌ, غَبْرٌ, and غُبَارٌ”⁹⁰ to which Morag responded that the former is the likely original, while the latter terms likely are metathesized;⁹¹ and Morag also pointed out the Syriac cognate ܪܒܘܚ (rbwh) and the Samaritan Aramaic cognate רבוע.⁹² Alternatively, Chaim Rabin proposed a relationship with Arabic غفيرة “multitude,” although this connection has not been accepted into subsequent scholarship.⁹³

Content with the certainty of the reading “dust-cloud” for רַבֵּעַ, most subsequent scholarship has concerned itself with determining the appropriate emendation for the term. Cohen referred to this term as “perhaps the most celebrated case of an emended biblical *hapax legomenon*.”⁹⁴ Albright suggested that the reading מַרְבַּעַת in the Samaritan Pentateuch (the particle אַת is absent)⁹⁵ preserves a final ת- that should be retained.⁹⁶ This matches one of the many Akkadian forms of the word, which appears variously as “*tarbu²(t)u(m)*, *tur(u)bu*, *turbu²/ttu* and so on....”⁹⁷ Cohen expresses a more moderate perspective: “Since all three forms *tarbu²u*, *turbû* and *turbu²tu* are attested in Akkadian...the reconstructed biblical form could be with or without a final ת.”⁹⁸

More certain, according to scholarly consensus, is the interpretation, put forth by Albright, that the accusative marker אֶת, unusual in a poem of such antiquity, should be understood instead as a preformative -ת; thus we should read (ת)תרבע

⁹⁰ Ginsberg 1933: 309.

⁹¹ Morag 1995: 53 n. 29.

⁹² Morag 1995: 53. See Schulthess 1903: 188; and Tal 2000: 2:812.

⁹³ Rabin 1964: 114.

⁹⁴ Cohen 1978: 38.

⁹⁵ The apparatus in Tal 1980: 2:251 indicates that this reading appears also in the Samaritan Targum, manuscript N (for details on this manuscript, see Tal 1980: 1:vii).

⁹⁶ Albright 1944: 213.

⁹⁷ Morag 1995: 53 n. 27; and see *AHW*, s.v. *tarbu²(t)u(m)*, *turbu²/ttu*.

⁹⁸ Cohen 1978: 61 n. 71.

instead of אֶת־רִבֵּעַ.⁹⁹ Samuel E. Loewenstamm provided support for this viewpoint by citing the situation in the Bar Kokhba letters,¹⁰⁰ described by Jacob Milgrom as follows: “The change from projected consonantal *trb^c* to *ʔt rb^c* can be accounted for. In the Bar Kokhba letters, the particle *ʔet* is frequently found fused with the following word where the initial *alef* is dropped. This is what some Masorete thought happened to *trb^c*, and he accordingly divided it into *ʔt rb^c*....”¹⁰¹ The same phenomenon is discernible in a context temporally closer to the biblical passage, namely, the fifth line of the Amman Citadel Inscription:

[תנע]ל . תדלת . בדלת . בטן¹⁰²
[You will loc]k the door in the inner doorway¹⁰³...

Regarding the word תדלת, Shmuel Aḥituv commented, “The ת is an apocopated accusative particle. The initial א has been lost, as has the presumed definite article.”¹⁰⁴ He proceeded to identify other contexts in which this phenomenon occurs, including the Bar Kokhba letters.

Morag apparently was not troubled by the occurrence of the accusative marker in this poem, however, and found the case for emendation unconvincing: “אבל אין בכך ... שום צורך, שהרי מלים בנות אותו שורש נשקלות בשפות שמייות שונות במשקלים נבדלים.”¹⁰⁵ Rendsburg, too, tacitly concurred, preferring to deal directly with the word רִבֵּעַ as it stands in the MT.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, despite the complication of the accusative marker אֶת in a

⁹⁹ Albright 1944: 213.

¹⁰⁰ Loewenstamm 1964: 186.

¹⁰¹ Milgrom 1990: 321 n. 39.

¹⁰² Text and restoration taken from Aḥituv 2008: 357 (see also Aḥituv 1992: 219 = Aḥituv 2005: 329).

¹⁰³ I borrow this rendering of the phrase דלת בטן from Aḥituv 2008: 358.

¹⁰⁴ Aḥituv 2008: 361.

¹⁰⁵ Morag 1995: 53 n. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Rendsburg 1995: 184; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

relatively ancient poem, the MT represents *lectio difficilior*, and a certain hesitation is appropriate, therefore, in evaluating any attempt to “fix” the text.

Additionally, though it is exceedingly risky to rely on strict metrical analysis as justification for any evaluation of the text, one also notes Rendsburg’s preference for understanding the word **וּמִסְפָּר** as the “emphasizing conjunction” **וּמִ-** plus the verb **סָפַר**.¹⁰⁷ This being the case, the inclusion in Num 23:10 of the accusative marker **אֶת־** in the phrase **אֶת־רִבְעַע** creates a pattern in this couplet whereby the two cola are comprised of smooth alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables:

מִי מִנֵּה עָפָר יַעֲקֹב וּמִסְפָּר אֶת־רִבְעַע יִשְׂרָאֵל	Who can count the dust of Jacob, indeed, number the dust-cloud of Israel?
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Again, this cannot be viewed as a deciding factor in the textual criticism of the passage, especially since a reading such as **תְּרַבְעַעַת** (with the feminine ending) for the problematic phrase would create much the same metrical effect. Nevertheless, the certainty of the emendations previously proposed is slightly diminished.

More persuasive is the alliteration of the two words **עָפָר** and **רִבְעַע**. Each possesses two identical root consonants, **ר** and **ע**, and each word’s remaining root consonant is a bilabial, unvoiced and voiced respectively. These consonants resonate elsewhere in the couplet as well, in the words **יַעֲקֹב**, **וּמִסְפָּר**, and **יִשְׂרָאֵל**, but the key players are the two parallel terms under scrutiny here. While the reading **תְּרַבְעַעַת** for **אֶת־רִבְעַע** does not eliminate this alliterative scheme, it does obscure it to some degree.

In any event, the intense scrutiny of the phrase **אֶת־רִבְעַע** with an interest solely in determining whether and how to emend the text has distracted from another

¹⁰⁷ Rendsburg 1987: 38. Note also the remarks above, pp. 21–23, and the literature cited there.

perspective on this matter, namely, that of style-switching. Rendsburg approached the matter with this in mind, and focused not on how cognate languages inform our textual criticism of the passage, but rather on how they reflect a connection between the word רִבֵּעַ, a *hapax legomenon* whether or not it is emended, and a term more commonly attested in Aramaic, as well as in Akkadian and Arabic.¹⁰⁸ Thus, he saw the term in Balaam's oracle as yet another Aramaic-like feature, incorporated in order to lend a specific dialectal character to the speech of the Aramean prophet. Recognition of this layer of import in the phrase אֶת־רִבֵּעַ enables a clear and unforced reading of רִבֵּעַ as “dust-cloud,” parallel to עֶפֶר “dust” in the previous colon. The dialectal significance of the phrase remains unaffected by one's preference about how to evaluate the text itself. Consequently, this aspect can and should be incorporated comfortably into the relevant scholarship, regardless of which textual approach is adopted.

Num 23:10: מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל

This phrase occurs in the final verse of the first oracle, Num 23:10, which is comprised of two couplets:

מִי מֵנָה עֶפֶר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רִבֵּעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	indeed, number the dust-cloud of Israel? ¹⁰⁹
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	May my soul die <i>môt yəšārîm</i> ,
וַיִּתְּהִי אַחֲרָיְתִי כְמֹהוּ:	and may my <i>ʾahārît</i> be like him/it. ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Rendsburg 1991b: 93; Rendsburg 1995: 184; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

¹⁰⁹ On the word רִבֵּעַ and the textual, linguistic, and interpretive issues involved in this colon, see above; and note also the preceding chapter, pp. 21–23, and especially Rendsburg 1987: 38, wherein the reading of וּמִסָּפָר as “indeed, number” is defended persuasively.

¹¹⁰ For the preferred reading of this couplet, see the discussion to follow.

The superficial meaning of the phrase מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל appears plain enough: “death of the upright.” However, the expression has proved remarkably perplexing in its larger context, primarily due to the opacity of the connection between the final couplet of the oracle and the material that precedes it.¹¹¹ Some scholars, such as Martin Noth, have been so troubled by this apparent *non sequitur* that they felt they had no choice but to excise this bicolon from the “original” poem, identifying it as a late addition.¹¹² Noth stated that the couplet must be interpreted as a comparison between Balaam himself and Jacob/Israel, particularly on the basis of the pronominal suffix that concludes the final colon, which “can, as the text now stands, refer only to Jacob/Israel.”¹¹³ But he continued as follows:

The speaker can, it is true, speak of his own ‘death’ and ‘end’; but a comparison with Israel in this respect is completely out of place. Nor is the difficulty exactly removed by regarding these concluding lines as a later addition, a theory that is supported by the fact that they fall outside the framework of the two groups of 3:3 lines (vv. 7b, 8 and 9, 10a) and, with their personal reference, appear strange in the context of the discourse. However, it is more likely that a later hand has expanded the discourse by the addition of these unsuitable concluding lines than that the original discourse contained this strange coda.¹¹⁴

One alternative to this interpretation is the suggestion made first by Nahmanides, and adopted later by scholars such as A. Dillmann.¹¹⁵ This reading aims to ameliorate the difficulty of the final lines of the poem by seeing in the word יִשְׂרָאֵל a more direct connection to Jacob/Israel, specifically, a wordplay on Israel’s appellation

¹¹¹ Kister 2003: 323–324 provided a convenient summary of the various approaches presented here.

¹¹² Noth 1968: 184.

¹¹³ Noth 1968: 184.

¹¹⁴ Noth 1968: 184.

¹¹⁵ See Nahmanides’s commentary to this verse; and also, e.g., Dillmann 1886: 151.

יִשְׂרָאֵל, well known from Deut 32:15; Deut 33:5, 26; and Isa 44:2. More drastic is the approach of Arnold B. Ehrlich, whose reading of the entire pericope is replete with emendations, including the reading יִשְׂרָאֵל for יִשְׂרָיִם in the present verse.¹¹⁶

G. B. Gray demonstrated rather a greater sensitivity to layers of meaning in the phrase in question. Although he saw in the phrase מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל a direct reference to Jacob/Israel, thus interpreting the expression as “the death of the individual true Israelites,” he also recognized a more general level on which it may be interpreted, observing that “at the same time ‘the death of the upright’ expresses its own proper meaning, a death not premature or violent but peaceful and in good old age.”¹¹⁷ Gray’s willingness to allow for ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning in the text is to be commended. Moreover, as Menahem Kister astutely observed, Targum Onqelos beautifully captures this precise double-meaning with its translation, albeit slightly imprecise, of the entire phrase in question as מוֹתָא דְקַשְׁיָטוּהִי “the death of his [i.e., Jacob/Israel’s] upright.”¹¹⁸

Albright preferred to read this word as יִשְׂרָם, stating that the “*mem* is probably enclitic, and not the sign of the plural...”¹¹⁹ This suggestion derives from his belief that there is no reason to see in the word יִשְׂרָיִם a reference to Israel: “There is no reason to suppose that Israel is compared to the just man or men mentioned here; it seems to me that we have a misunderstood oath: Balaam declares that he is ready to die if his blessing is not fulfilled.”¹²⁰ Whether this oath was first “misunderstood” in biblical, Masoretic, or modern times, Albright did not specify.

¹¹⁶ Ehrlich 1909: 200.

¹¹⁷ Gray 1903: 347–348.

¹¹⁸ Kister 2003: 324 n. 57.

¹¹⁹ Albright 1944: 213 and n. 28a.

¹²⁰ Albright 1944: 224 n. 118.

Unsatisfied with prior attempts to reckon with the Hebrew text as it stands, Loewenstamm turned instead to the ancient versions, drawing on a parallel from Pr 14:32.¹²¹ The Hebrew text of this verse reads:

בְּרָעָתוֹ יִדְחָהּ רָשָׁע וְחָסָה בְּמוֹתוֹ צַדִּיק׃	In his wickedness the wicked (one) is thrust down, but in his death the righteous (one) seeks refuge.
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After reviewing various medieval and modern approaches to the obscure and challenging phrase וְחָסָה בְּמוֹתוֹ, Loewenstamm pointed out the LXX reading:¹²²

ἐν κακίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἀπωσθήσεται ἄσεβής,
 ὁ δὲ πεποιθὼς τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ὁσιότητι δίκαιος.

In his wickedness the impious is cast down,
 but by his self-discipline the upright is sanctified.

According to Loewenstamm, the phrase ὁ δὲ πεποιθὼς τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ὁσιότητι appears to have derived from an original Hebrew text in which the phrase in question read instead וְחָסָה בְּתָמוֹ “seeks refuge in his perfection.”¹²³ He went on to note the various places in the Bible where collocations of the roots תָּמַם and יָשָׁר occur.¹²⁴ On this basis, he read מוֹת נִפְשֵׁי מוֹת in Num 23:10 as תָּמַם נִפְשֵׁי תָּמַם, the latter having been changed “during the period of the Second Temple...perhaps by a simply mistake of the copyist, but more likely...in accordance with talmudic tradition, as a hint at the world to

¹²¹ See Loewenstamm 1965.

¹²² Loewenstamm 1965: 185.

¹²³ Loewenstamm 1965: 185.

¹²⁴ As parallel members: 1 Kgs 9:4; Ps 37:37. As a hendiadys: Ps 25:21; Job 1:8, 2:3. In “free connection:” Pr 11:5. In construct: Pr 11:3. See Loewenstamm 1965: 186.

come.”¹²⁵ Thus, he concluded that “it seems reasonable to conjecture that the original form of this passage [Num 23:10cd] is: **תתם נפשי תם ישרם ותהי אחריתי כמהו**. ‘May I attain the perfection of Yeshurun and may my future be like his’.”¹²⁶

Most recently, Levine maintained the validity of the Masoretic text, by seeking to interpret the word **יְשָׁרִים** within the context of the oracle as a whole. According to Levine, the oracle’s overall theme is militaristic: Israel is identified as a people that is “destined to conquer its land unsupported by allies” (Num 23:9);¹²⁷ we encounter a description of “the vast extent of the terrain occupied by the Israelite army, as observed by Balaam from the heights” (Num 23:9ab, 10ab);¹²⁸ and so on. With this in mind, Levine proceeded to point out the biblical passages in which **יְשָׁרִים** presents a similar connotation:

Indeed, *yešārîm* is synonymous with *gibbôr* “hero, warrior” in Psalm 112:2: “His seed shall be a warrior in the land (*gibbôr bāʾāreš*); a blessed generation of heroes” (*dôr yešārîm yebōrāk*). It is reasonable to suppose that *Sēper Hayyāšār*, a collection of heroic epics cited in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18, expresses such heroism, as does the ancient name for Israel, *Yešurûn* (Deut 33:5, 26).¹²⁹

Levine offered the English adjective “valiant” as an appropriate equivalent, in the sense that it captures the heroic aspect of the term **יֵשָׁר**, as well as the literal sense of

¹²⁵ Loewenstamm 1965: 186. Note also the observation of Joshua Blau, recorded in Loewenstamm 1965: 185 n. 6, that “**תמת**” in the Masoretic text may be a misunderstood precative *perfect* (fem.) of **תתם** in which the proto-semitic **ת** of this form has been retained. ... But he admits that the evidence for precative perfect in Hebrew is precarious” (emphasis in original).

¹²⁶ Loewenstamm 1965: 186. Note that Loewenstamm’s reading of **יְשָׁרִים** as **ישרם** concurs with Albright’s: “Furthermore, **ישרם** is only an extended form of **יֵשָׁר**” (Loewenstamm 1965: 186).

¹²⁷ Levine 2000: 175.

¹²⁸ Levine 2000: 177.

¹²⁹ Levine 2000: 177.

“uprightness.”¹³⁰ Levine saw this couplet as an expression of Balaam’s feeling of identification with the “stalwart Israelites,”¹³¹ and thus translated the couplet as “May I die the death of the valiant, and let my afterlife be as his!”¹³²

The variety of approaches to the phrase מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל attests to its interpretive difficulty. A solution has been provided, however, by Kister in his study of the curse formulae in two Aramaic tomb inscriptions from Nerab.¹³³ These 7th-century-BCE inscriptions present a clear parallel not only to the phrase in question, but to the entire couplet that closes Balaam’s first oracle.

Each of the two inscriptions possesses the obligatory curse formula directed at the would-be desecrator of the tomb. Nerab I:2–4 reads as follows:¹³⁴

... שהר ושמש ונכל ונשך	May Sahar, Shamash, Nikkal, and Nusk...
... מות לחה יכטלוך	...cause you to die an evil death,
ויהאבדו זרעך	and cause your seed to perish.

Similarly, Nerab II:2–4 says:

שהר ונכל ונשך	May Sahar, Nikkal, and Nusk
יהבאשו ממתתה	make his death evil,
ואחרתה תאבד	and may his ¹³⁵ <i>ʾahārît</i> perish.

¹³⁰ Levine 2000: 178.

¹³¹ Levine 2000: 178.

¹³² Levine 2000: 164, 177.

¹³³ Kister 2003.

¹³⁴ I adopt the reproductions of the original texts presented in Kister 2003: 313. The translations are my own, with the exception of the readings of the divine names, which I likewise borrow from Kister 2003: 313.

¹³⁵ For the appropriate reading of the word *ʾahārît*, see below.

The parallels between the two inscriptions themselves are readily apparent, and demonstrate that an established curse formula was employed in both cases. In the first component of the curse, the gods are invoked to render the desecrator's death "evil." This is expressed by means of the adjective *לחה* in the first inscription, while in the second it is embedded in the verb itself, the root of which is *ביש/בוש/באש*.

In his examination of the phrase *מות לחה* from Nerab I:3, as well as similar expressions such as *מותה בשה* and *סוף ביש* that occur across a wide array of Second Temple literature (such as Targum Psalms to Ps 34:22; compare non-Aramaic sources such as the LXX, Ben Sira, Jubilees, etc.),¹³⁶ Kister concluded that "'evil death' is the death of evil people,"¹³⁷ namely, a premature, unnatural, and/or violent death. Hence his interpretation of the opposite expression *סופיה טב*, a frequently occurring blessing for living people in the Cairo Geniza: "The most plausible sense of the blessing 'good end' for living people is the wish that death will reach them after a good and long life, having been survived by posterity (etc.); 'evil end' will be the opposite."¹³⁸

Kister proceeded to point out the striking similarity between the two Aramaic curses and the wording of Num 23:10cd:¹³⁹

תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	May my soul die <i>môt yəšārîm</i> ,
וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמֹהוּ:	and may my <i>ʾaḥārîṭ</i> be like him/it. ¹⁴⁰

Taken against the background of the Nerab inscriptions, it is plain to see that the phrase *מות ישרים* in this verse is an antithetical equivalent to *מות לחה* in Nerab I:3, in

¹³⁶ Since this study is concerned not with these expressions but rather with their opposite, I refrain from addressing these primary sources in detail. For such an examination, see Kister 2003: 318–320.

¹³⁷ Kister 2003: 318.

¹³⁸ Kister 2003: 320.

¹³⁹ Kister 2003: 323–326, especially 324–325.

¹⁴⁰ For the preferred reading of this couplet, see below, pp. 119–121.

much the same fashion as the Geniza expression סופיה טב. Indeed, as Kister pointed out,¹⁴¹ this opposition is reflected already in Targum Neofiti to this verse:

...אמר בלעם במתל נבותה אן קטלין יתיה ישראל בחרבה מבשר הוא בלעם
דלית ליה חולק לעלמא דאתי ברם אן מיית בלעם מותין קשיטין לוויי תיהוי סופיה
אלווי תיהוי אחרייתה בזעירה דבהון:¹⁴²
...Balaam said in his prophetic oracle: If Israel were to kill him with
the sword, Balaam himself proclaims that he would not have a portion
in the world to come; but if Balaam dies a virtuous death (lit. “upright
deaths”), would that his end, would that his *ʿaḥrîṭ*, were like (that of)
the small(est) that is among them.

Clearly, “death by the sword” and “upright death” are diametric opposites here. This idea is confirmed in B. Sanhedrin 69a, where *môt yašārîm* is explained by way of the statement ימותו מיתת עצמן “they shall die a death of themselves,” that is, a natural death, “in contradistinction to ‘dying by the sword’ ...”¹⁴³ In addition, such a view comports with the understanding of Gray, mentioned above, that an “upright death” is “a death not premature or violent but peaceful and in good old age.”¹⁴⁴ Note also that the phrase מותין קשיטין in this passage may present a helpful analogue for the otherwise rather inexplicable plurality of the word ישרים in Num 23:10c.

Thus, on this basis Kister argued that the MT clearly is correct and not in need of emendation.¹⁴⁵ It is this deduction that has prompted Rendsburg’s identification of the phrase מות ישרים as another Aramaic-like feature used here to indicate the Aramean origin of the prophet Balaam.¹⁴⁶ Although, as Rendsburg noted, “admittedly

¹⁴¹ Kister 2003: 326.

¹⁴² Text taken from Díez Macho 1974: 223.

¹⁴³ Kister 2003: 326.

¹⁴⁴ Gray 1903: 347–348.

¹⁴⁵ Kister 2003: 325.

¹⁴⁶ Rendsburg 2004: 269–270; Rendsburg 2006a: 171.

this expression is not found in Aramaic sources,”¹⁴⁷ it nevertheless represents a clear parallel, albeit an antonymic one, to expressions known from elsewhere, in particular the Aramaic Nerab inscriptions.

Indeed, this perspective is bolstered by the fact that the entire concluding couplet of Balaam’s first oracle has a clear relationship to the formulaic curse attested at Nerab. This relationship is solidified further by a careful examination of the second portion of the formula. In the curse from Nerab, the final component extends the curse’s effect to the desecrator’s progeny, expressed by זרע in the first inscription and, notably, by אחרת in the second. Based on these two inscriptions, Kister observed, notwithstanding the Ugaritic term *uḥryt* “destiny, final destiny,”¹⁴⁸ that these two inscriptions demonstrate that the word אחרת also can exhibit specifically the meaning “posterity.”¹⁴⁹ L. Elliott Binns already offered this perspective, stating with regard to the word אַחֲרִיתִי in Num 23:10: “I am disposed to think...that it should be taken as a reference to the prophet’s posterity, as this exact usage is found in a seventh century Aramaic inscription found at Nērab....”¹⁵⁰ His view derived from the interpretation of G. A. Cooke, who read the Nerab inscription in like fashion,¹⁵¹ particularly on the basis of several Nabataean inscriptions that use the root אחר with this sense, including the following example:

¹⁴⁷ Rendsburg 2004: 269–270.

¹⁴⁸ *DULAT*, s.v. *uḥryt*.

¹⁴⁹ Kister 2003: 317–318, 325. See also *BDB*, s.v. אַחֲרִית.

¹⁵⁰ Binns 1927: 162.

¹⁵¹ Cooke 1903: 191.

דנה קרבא די עבד עידו בר כהילו בר
אלכסי למפשו וילדה ואחרה ...¹⁵²

This is the tomb that ‘YDW son of KHYLW son of
ʿLKSY made for himself and his children and his posterity...
(*NSI* 79 1–2)

More than a simple retranslation of אַחֲרִיתִי in Num 23:10, however, this interpretation sheds light on an issue that has troubled commentators for centuries, namely, how this final couplet is connected to the immediately preceding material. The parallel structure evident in both the Nerab curse and Num 23:10cd suggests that we should understand the second colon of each respective couplet as following naturally upon the first colon. That is to say, with regard to the Nerab inscriptions, that an integral part of מות לחה is the destruction of the desecrator’s posterity—whether זרע or אחרת. Naturally, therefore, it follows that in Balaam’s oracle, concomitant with מות יִשְׂרָאֵל is that his אַחֲרִית will be כְּמֹהוּ. The final word of the oracle must be interpreted as the antithesis of the words יהאבדו (Nerab I:4) and תאבד (Nerab II:4) from the tomb inscriptions; namely, rather than Balaam’s posterity being destroyed, it will be multiplied.

This observation allows us to eliminate an unresolved grammatical issue that has persisted in prior readings of the couplet from Numbers. The colon וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרִיתִי כְּמֹהוּ universally has been glossed, with a certain unseemly elasticity, as “And may my ʿahārîṭ be like his.” The closing pronoun is seen as a reference to יִשְׂרָאֵל in the previous colon (this term’s plurality notwithstanding). Technically this is untenable, however, since the final word should be rendered not as “like *his*” but as “like *him*.” On the other hand, if we read אַחֲרִיתִי not as “my future” or “my fate,” but rather as “my

¹⁵² Cooke 1903: 217. Here and throughout, texts published in this work are identified by the siglum *NSI*, after its title, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions*.

posterity,” it becomes quite clear that the final pronominal suffix refers not to **יְשָׁרִים**, but to **עָפָר** // **רֶבֶעַ** of the previous couplet. These two parallel terms are use with the express purpose of describing the abundance of the people of Jacob/Israel, and thus represent the most natural antecedents for the pronoun in the final colon, whose general sense, as described above, is that Balaam’s *ʿahārîṭ* will be similarly numerous.¹⁵³

Thus, the final couplet expresses Balaam’s admiration for the profusion of the Israelite people, by means of a formulaic blessing invoked by the prophet upon himself. In recognizing the deliberate use of the phrase **מֹות יְשָׁרִים** as a means of recalling standardized Aramaic expressions such as those in the Nerab tomb inscriptions, we may now translate the verse from Numbers as follows:

מִי מִנָּה עָפָר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רֶבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	indeed, number ¹⁵⁴ the dust-cloud of Israel?
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מֹות יְשָׁרִים	May my soul die an upright death,
וּתְהִי אַחֲרֵיתִי כְמֹהוּ:	and may my posterity be like it (i.e., the dust of Jacob // the dust-cloud of Israel).

While most of my interpretive discussion will be undertaken elsewhere, I take this opportunity to address such a matter stemming from the present philological examination. To be sure, there is nothing in this oracle to contradict Levine’s military interpretation. Indeed, Moab and Balaq already have called attention the Israelites’ numbers as a looming threat in Num 22:4–5: **עַתָּה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת־כָּל־סְבִיבֵתֵינוּ בְּלַחֲדָה**: “Now the

¹⁵³ While it is grammatically possible that the pronominal suffix refers instead to **יִשְׂרָאֵל** // **יַעֲקֹב**, this seems less likely, since it downplays the specific connection between the sheer *numbers* of the Israelite multitude and Balaam’s wish for the proliferation of his own posterity.

¹⁵⁴ See n. 109, above.

throng will lick up everything around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field. ... Behold, a people has come out from Egypt; behold, it has covered the eye of the land,¹⁵⁵ and it sits opposite me.” But these statements are not expressly militaristic in nature, focusing instead on the sheer magnitude and consumptive force of the people.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, the plain sense of Balaam’s first poem expresses admiration, not wariness, at the multitude of Israel. Indeed, this admiration is capped by the prophet’s statement of personal identification with Israel in the final couplet. The intent of this couplet thereby becomes clear: far from a jarring and decontextualized first-person “coda,” to use Noth’s term,¹⁵⁷ this pair of cola situates Balaam, so to speak, squarely in the heart of the Israelite camp. This open statement of personal affinity contrasts directly with Balaq’s trepidatious reaction to the abundance of Israelites, and thus establishes from the first a clear opposition between his words and Balaq’s wishes. Such opposition is demonstrated all the more clearly by Balaam’s inversion of a recognizable curse formula, in direct violation of Balaq’s instructions. Note the king’s response to this oracle in Num 23:11: *מָה עָשִׂיתָ לִי לְקַבֵּ אֹיְבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָ בָּרַךְ* “What have you done to me? Behold, to curse my enemies I summoned you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly.”

Num 23:18: עָדִי

The phrase *עָדִי הָאָזִין* traditionally has been interpreted as a verb–preposition collocation meaning “give ear to me.” This particular collocation is highly unusual,

¹⁵⁵ On the phrase *עַיִן הָאָרֶץ*, see below, p. 513.

¹⁵⁶ This matter will bear more directly on the discussion in Chapter 5, pp. 377–378.

¹⁵⁷ Noth 1968: 184.

however, as the data presented below will indicate. Consequently, the word עָדִי has drawn considerable scholarly attention, frequently resulting in the suggestion that the word in question is to be read not as a preposition, but rather as a noun meaning variously “my testimonies,” “my warnings,” etc. The evidence offered in support of such a reading will be presented below. Meanwhile, however, it is pertinent for our purposes to note that one of the central components of this evidence is the Aramaic term עֲדָן (construct עָדִי; determined עֲדִיא) from the Sefire treaties, which is offered as a cognate to the term in question in our Numbers passage. Rendsburg argued that this connection to the Aramean sphere marks the term עָדִי in Num 23:18 as yet another example of the author’s deliberate use of dialect, in order to simulate the language of the Aramean prophet Balaam.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the appropriateness of the term’s inclusion in this chapter is clear.

The following statistical data illustrate the peculiarity of this preposition, as the traditional reading understands the term, in its present context.¹⁵⁹ Of all 41 biblical attestations of הִאָזִין, 15 (or 37 percent) are not followed by an object, as in אָזְנִים לָהֶם “they have ears, but they do not listen” (Ps 135:17). In 15 of the 26 cases where an object does occur (thus another 37 percent of the total), it appears without any preposition, as in אָמְרִי הִאָזִינָה יְהוָה “heed my words, Yahweh” (Ps 5:1). Thus it is only in about one quarter of the occurrences of this verb (11 of the 41 total attestations, or 27 percent) that any preposition is used. Within these cases, the usual prepositions are לְ- and אֶל (four attestations each). The preposition אֶל tends to be used when the object is represented by a suffixed pronoun (three out of four cases), as in אֲלֵיכֶם הִאָזִין “but he did not listen to you” (Deut 1:45); while לְ- tends to appear

¹⁵⁸ Rendsburg 2006a: 171.

¹⁵⁹ These data are culled from Even-Shoshan 1989, s.v. אָזִין.

with explicit nouns (also three out of four cases), as in הַאֲזִינָה לְקוֹל מִלִּי “listen to the voice of my words” (Job 34:16). The verb also appears once (Prov. 17:4) with the preposition עַל, in the phrase שֶׁקֶר מִזִּין עַל-לְשׁוֹן הָזֹת “a liar hearkens to a mischievous tongue,” probably to achieve a close parallel with the previous colon, although one also may interpret this instance as a result of the interchange between אֶל and עַל exhibited in Israelian Hebrew under the influence of Aramaic.¹⁶⁰

Aside from Num 23:18, the verb–preposition combination הַאֲזִין plus עַד occurs only once elsewhere in the Bible, in Job 32:11:

הֵן הוֹחֵלְתִּי לְדַבְּרֵיכֶם	Behold, I waited for your speeches;
אָזִין עַד-תְּבוּנֹתֶיכֶם	I gave ear to your insights,
עַד-תַּחְקִרוּן מִלִּין:	while you considered (your) words.

This verse in Job exhibits a poetic pattern into which the use of this preposition fits nicely: immediately following the colon in question appear two more cola in each of which the preposition עַד appears. Thus, one may at least partially explain the Jobian author’s use of this unusual word on formal grounds. Such an explanation is lacking in the Numbers passage. Moreover, whereas in Num 23:18 the object of the preposition is the *person speaking*, in Job 32:11 the *things spoken* occupy this grammatical position.¹⁶¹ Notwithstanding these differences between the two contexts, however, if one prefers to see the word עַד in our passage as a preposition, this parallel in Job, a book known to be replete with Aramaic-like features, is particularly significant.

With regard to the alternative reading of עָדִי, that is, as a noun (whether singular or plural) plus first-person common singular possessive suffix, the initial

¹⁶⁰ See Rendsburg 2003a: 19 and 23. Note, however, that Yiyi Chen (2000) did not isolate עַל in Prov. 17:4 as an IH feature.

¹⁶¹ Rendsburg 2006a: 171 n. 28.

impetus in modern scholarship for this interpretation derives from two ancient versions, the Septuagint and Peshiṭta, whose renderings of the colon in question diverge from the MT as follows:¹⁶²

MT:	הַאֲזִינָה עָדִי בְּנוֹ צֶפֶר
LXX:	ἐνῶσιται μάρτυς, υἱὸς Σεπφωρ
Peshiṭta:	ܐܦܫܝܬܐ ܠܫܕܘܬܝ ܒܪ ܫܦܪ (wšwt lšhdwt br spwr)

On the basis of the Greek word μάρτυς and the Syriac word *šhdwt*, Albright suggested a simple emendation of the MT vocalization from עָדִי to עֲדִי.¹⁶³ Later, Gevirtz tacitly acknowledged at least the possibility that Albright's suggestion was correct.¹⁶⁴

Upon the discovery of the Aramaic treaty inscriptions from Sefire, however, the scholars studying these texts were able to invoke a second piece of evidence in support of a nominal reading of עָדִי in our biblical passage.¹⁶⁵ Throughout these inscriptions, the term עֲדָן (in the plural; construct עֲדִי, determined עֲדִיָּא) appears repeatedly. The opening sequence of the first stele, for example, begins as follows:

¹⁶² Also note Targum Onqelos: אֲצִית לְמִימְרֵי בֶר צֶפֶר (niqqud adopted from Katzenelenbogen et al. 1986–1993: 6:215). This likely should be seen as a paraphrase of the Hebrew, rather than a close literal translation. Nevertheless, the presence and location of the noun מִימְרֵי leave open the possibility that this version aims to reproduce, if not the precise semantic sense, at least the grammatical-syntactical construction of a reading of the original in which the word עָדִי is understood nominally.

¹⁶³ Albright 1944: 214.

¹⁶⁴ Gevirtz 1963: 50.

¹⁶⁵ Dupont-Sommer 1960 is the *editio princeps* of the first two stelae from Sefire. His edition of the third stele, which was published previously in 1956, also is included as an appendix in the later publication (Dupont-Sommer 1960: 323ff).

עדי ברגאיה מלך כתך עם מתעאל בר עתרסמך מלך [ארפד וע]
 די בני ברגאיה עם בני מתעאל ועדי בני בני ברגא[יה ועקר]
 ה עם עקר מתעאל בר עתרסמך מלך ארפד ועדי כתך עם [ערי]
 ארפד ועדי בעלי כתך עם ערי בעלי ארפד ועדי ...

The treaty of Bar-Ga'ya King of KTK with MT^{CL} son of 'TRSMK
 King of [Arpad; and the tre]aty of the sons of Bar-Ga'ya with the sons
 of MT^{CL}; and the treaty of the grandsons of Bar-Ga'[ya and] his
 [posterity] with the posterity of MT^{CL} son of 'TRSMK king of Arpad;
 and the treaty of KTK with [the cities of] Arpad; and the treaty of the
 lords of KTK with the cities of the lords of Arpad; and the treaty of...
 (Sefire I A 1–4)¹⁶⁶

M. André Dupont-Sommer was the first to identify a relationship between the
 Sefire texts and Num 23:18. In the notes to his edition of Stele I, he remarked as
 follows regarding the word עדי: "...le contexte rend son sens tout à fait sûr: «pactes,
 conventions, traité». ...Peut-être est il à reconnaître dans *Nombres*, XXIII, 18, où le mot
 עדי, qui est resté jusqu'ici inexpliqué, pourrait être considéré comme un nom
 complement du verbe האזינה: «prête l'oreille à mes engagements (?)».”¹⁶⁷

More recently, Morag expanded on Dupont-Sommer's brief statement,
 devoting considerable attention to the justification of a nominal reading of our word in
 Num 23:18.¹⁶⁸ He saw in the term עדי “מן *עַד, מן *עַד, מן *עַד”¹⁶⁹ He drew this particular
 semantic sense primarily from biblical passages where related verbal forms imply it,
 as in the following:¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ The text is taken from Dupont-Sommer 1960: 213.

¹⁶⁷ Dupont-Sommer 1960: 217. Francisco O. Garcia-Treto (1967: 13) and Bruno Volkwein (1969: 36–37) recalled Dupont-Sommer's observation in passing, but contributed no additional insight.

¹⁶⁸ Morag 1995: 54–56.

¹⁶⁹ Morag 1995: 55.

¹⁷⁰ Morag 1995: 55.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוֹדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד בְּנֹו הָאִישׁ לֹא־תִרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתי אֲחֵיכֶם
אִתְּכֶם:

And Judah said to them (saying), “The man *protested* greatly to us, saying, ‘Do not look upon my face without your brother with you.’” (Gen 43:3)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רֵד הָעֵד בָּעָם פְּוִי־הֶרְסוּ אֶל־יְהוָה לְרֹאזֹת וְנִפְל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב:
And Yahweh said to Moses, “Go down (and) *testify* to the people, lest they break through to Yahweh to see, and many among them fall.” (Exod 19:21)

In order to connect such supporting evidence more closely with Balaam himself, he also cited instances where such verbs are used of prophets:¹⁷¹

וַיֵּעַד יְהוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבִיהוּדָה בְּיַד כָּל־נְבִיאָיו [ק': נְבִיאִי] כָּל־חֹזֶה לֵאמֹר שִׁבוּ
מִדְרֹכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וְשִׁמְרוּ מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי כְּכֹל־הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶת־אֲבֹתֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר
שָׁלַחְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם בְּיַד עֲבָדַי הַנְּבִיאִים:

And Yahweh *testified* in Israel and Judah by the hand of all the prophets of every seer, saying, “Return from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and laws, according to the whole Torah that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by the hand of my servants the prophets.” (2 Kgs 17:13)

וַתִּמְשֹׁךְ עֲלֵיהֶם שָׁנִים רַבּוֹת וַתֵּעַד בָּם בְּרוּחַךְ בְּיַד־נְבִיאֶיךָ וְלֹא הִשְׁמָעוּ וַתִּתֵּנָם בְּיַד
עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ:

And you bore with them for many years, and *testified* to them by your spirit by the hand of your prophets, and they did not listen, and you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the earth. (Neh 9:30)

Finally, Rendsburg provided a concise summation of the relevant biblical data, which serves as the underpinning for the argument being presented here.¹⁷² He called

¹⁷¹ Morag 1995: 56.

¹⁷² Rendsburg 2006a: 171.

specific attention to the rarity of the verb–preposition combination attested here, and pointed out the grammatical distinction between the phrase in Numbers and the lone parallel in Job 32:11, where the object of the preposition is not the speaker, but rather the object תְּבוּנוֹתֵיכֶם.¹⁷³ As a result, he recalled Morag’s earlier hypothesis: “[D]ue consideration should be given to the suggestion that עָדִי here means ‘my warnings,’ closely related to the noun עֵד ‘covenant, testimony’ in the Sefire treaties...if this interpretation is correct, then we have here another striking Aramaic-style usage in the Balaam oracles.”¹⁷⁴ This final observation, which points up the connection between the biblical expression and the inscriptions from Sefire, is the centerpiece of Rendsburg’s argument, and the most salient element in the context of the present study. The philological link between Balaam’s words and the Aramean linguistic sphere reveals the biblical author’s deliberate use of specific dialectal features to recreate the Aramean figure’s distinctive speech.

On the other hand, some scholars have rejected the notion of a nominal reading of our word in Num 23:18, and spoken in support of retaining the prepositional reading of עָדִי. Moshe Parnas expressed this preference, first by citing the one other biblical instance of הָאֶזֶן plus עֵד (Job 32:11) as corroboration of the collocation’s validity in Numbers, and then by offering a contextual argument for reading עָדִי as a preposition: “הקטע אותו פותח הפסוק הנידון עוסק בשאלת הברכה שברך בלעם את ישראל: “...ולא בעניין יחסי ברית בין בלעם לבלק.”¹⁷⁵ This statement derives from the view, expounded in Parnas’s article, that one must maintain a strict adherence to the technical usage of the Hebrew cognates to Aramaic עֵד (עדי, עדיא).

¹⁷³ Rendsburg 2006a: 171 n. 28.

¹⁷⁴ Rendsburg 2006a: 171.

¹⁷⁵ Parnas 1976: 246.

Although Cohen did not specifically address the possibility of reading עָדִי as a noun in Num 23:18, he similarly emphasized the technical definition of the term from Sefire in order to dismiss the general notion of its connection to “other similarly written Hebrew substantives (such as עֵדָה, עֵד, and עֵדוּת).”¹⁷⁶ He demonstrated the presence of the Sefire term in BH beyond any doubt, most notably in Isa 33:8, where MT עָרִים almost beyond any doubt should be replaced with עָדִים, as confirmed also by the complete Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa^a).¹⁷⁷ But by and large, his thinking ran as follows:

That Akkadian *adû* (and hence also Aramaic עֵדָן) is not a generic term for “treaty” but rather a technical term for “vassal treaty” has been noted several times.... [One] source of this misunderstanding would appear to be...the unfortunate tendency of some scholars “for convenience” to render *adû* with “treaty”.... Most of the comparisons between Akkadian *adû*, Aramaic עֵדָן and Hebrew עֵדוּת “testimony” and related terms have been based on this incorrect translation and must be abandoned.¹⁷⁸

Clearly, this view applies by extension also to our verse in Numbers, since a nominal reading of עָדִי here is predicated on the very connection regarding which Cohen cautioned his readers.

The most recent statement in support of the prepositional reading of עָדִי is that of Levine.¹⁷⁹ He explained the remarkable character of the word in Num 23:18 by arguing that this is merely an example of the interchange of the prepositions אֶל and עַד, a phenomenon attested elsewhere in the Bible. That is to say, while ...הָאֵזֶן אֶל

¹⁷⁶ Cohen 1978: 79 n. 169; see also the literature cited there.

¹⁷⁷ Cohen 1978: 42–43, with notes on 75–81. For a detailed linguistic and text-critical study of this important document, see Kutscher 1974.

¹⁷⁸ Cohen 1978: 77–78 n. 162.

¹⁷⁹ Levine 2000: 181.

might be the more readily expected expression, the perfectly legitimate alternative collocation ...הָאֵין עַד should not come as a complete surprise in this instance.

Moreover, like Parnas, Levine posited on the basis of the larger context in the Numbers passage that the sense of “sworn admonition” suggested by Morag in the latter’s nominal interpretation of the word עָדִי is inappropriate here, and thus the nominal approach is to be abandoned.¹⁸⁰

None of these arguments for retaining the traditional prepositional reading in this verse is ironclad, however. As noted above, the lone biblical parallel (Job 32:11) to the peculiar verb–preposition collocation found in Num 23:18, which Parnas offered as corroborative support for the prepositional reading, itself exhibits formal and grammatical characteristics that distinguish it from the Numbers attestation.¹⁸¹

Levine’s discussion of עַד–אֵל interchange, supported by several variant examples of a single expression involving the root שׁוּב (Joel 2:12: שׁוּבוּ עָדִי; Amos 4:8: וְלֹא־שׁוּבְתֶם עָדִי; Zech. 1:3 and Mal. 3:7: both שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי),¹⁸² highlights an important issue, but should not lead to a unilateral assumption of the same phenomenon in problematic situations such as the one encountered in Num 23:18.

Indeed, both Parnas and Levine rightly emphasized the importance of interpreting עָדִי in a fashion that is suitable in its immediate context. Levine dismissed a nominal reading on the grounds that the adjectival sense of the term, as proposed

¹⁸⁰ See Morag 1995: 54–56.

¹⁸¹ See Rendsburg 2006a: 171 n. 28.

¹⁸² In each of Levine’s examples, the alliterative quality of the preposition used may have contributed to its selection. This is particularly true in Amos 4:7–8 (where עַד is used), in which are clustered several occurrences of the consonant ע; and in Zech. 1:3 (where אֵל is used), in which the consonant א is prominently featured while ע does not appear at all. While this observation cannot circumvent the simple fact that עַד–אֵל interchange does indeed occur in these instances, it allows for the possibility that one or the other preposition may have been a less “natural” fit for the expression in question, but was selected anyway for purposes of alliteration.

specifically by Morag,¹⁸³ “would hardly suit the context of the present poem. Balaam is not threatening Balak with dire consequences, or with punishment for failure to heed his words, or do his bidding.”¹⁸⁴ To be sure, I concur with Levine that Morag’s proposed sense of “warning” or “caution” is inappropriate here. This semantic quality, which Morag extrapolated from the various Hebrew verbs derived from the denominative root *ʿwd*,¹⁸⁵ is possible but not, to my mind, explicitly required by the verbs’ context. Penetrating though it may be, however, Levine’s evaluation throws out the baby with the bathwater, by dismissing out of hand any possibility of a nominal reading on the basis of one scholar’s perceived semantic overreading.

Parnas drew on the larger context in a similar fashion, rejecting a nominal reading on the basis of his semantic understanding of the word in question. He saw in Aramaic ܐܕܢ and its Hebrew cognates a technical term whose linguistic domain is limited to the political sphere, within which the characteristic language of treaties and similar documents naturally would occur. Cohen’s view, though more general, echoes that of Parnas and succinctly emphasizes that need for care in our assessment of the Aramaic term’s Hebrew equivalents.

I believe this view is too restrictive, however, and would argue that the available philological and contextual evidence suggests rather a broader spectrum of meanings for the term(s) in question. Indeed, Cohen himself appears to have recognized this. On the one hand, he clearly stated, “[i]t is this lack of recognition that we are dealing here with a *terminus technicus* that has led many scholars to erroneously assume a connection with Hebrew עדות ‘testimony’ and related terms.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Morag 1995: 55–56.

¹⁸⁴ Levine 2000: 181.

¹⁸⁵ Morag 1995: 56.

¹⁸⁶ Cohen 1978: 76 n. 158.

But on the other hand, he also acknowledged, with specific reference to the Akkadian term, that “[t]his is not to say that *adû* always means ‘vassal treaty,’ but rather that whenever *adû* refers to a formal treaty between two parties, it is used as the *terminus technicus* for ‘vassal treaty.’”¹⁸⁷ Kaufman echoed Cohen’s view, by drawing together both the technical and the more “mundane” meanings of the term:¹⁸⁸ “[i]n *CAD*, *adû* A and *adû* B should be taken as one word, as in *AHW*.”¹⁸⁹

Moreover, we may extrapolate Cohen’s statement to the Northwest Semitic cognates as well. A given borrowed word often is incorporated into its new language for the express purpose of filling a specific perceived lexical gap in this new language, and therefore will remain confined to this gap, rather than developing a whole range of semantic possibilities unattested in its parent language. Thus, it is plausible that the range of nuances associated with *adû*, a borrowed term in Akkadian meaning “treaty, oath,” in fact is present also in Aramaic and Hebrew. In short, the opinions of Parnas and Cohen notwithstanding, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the Hebrew terms in question here occupy the same semantic continuum, at one end of which is the technical term meaning “vassal treaty,” and at other points on which lie the various terms עֲדֻת, עֲדָה, etc.

To be sure, a significant portion of the evidence marshaled here, while highly suggestive, is circumstantial. Nevertheless, the reading I propose, in the footsteps of those prior scholars who have suggested it, is entirely appropriate in context, without need of either a technical or a cautionary sense. Likewise, it appears to be the best fit for the statistical, semantic, and philological evidence, with the added advantage of

¹⁸⁷ Cohen 1978: 76 n. 158.

¹⁸⁸ *CAD* distinguishes the term’s technical and mundane aspects by means of two separate lemmas, namely *adû* A and *adû* B respectively.

¹⁸⁹ Kaufman 1974: 33 n. 11. See *AHW*, s.v. *adû*.

retaining the Masoretic vocalization. In sum, I concur with those who see in the word עֲדִי in Num 23:18 a plural noun with a suffixed first-person common singular possessive pronoun, to be interpreted as a *plurale tantum*, that is, not as “my testimonies” but simply as “my testimony.”¹⁹⁰ Both the form and the pronunciation call to mind the Aramean background of the speaker. Moreover, even if one dissents, preferring instead to read עֲדִי here as the preposition עַד plus first-person common singular pronominal suffix, the connection with the Aramean linguistic sphere still stands based on the parallel in Job 32:11, wherein Aramaic-like features are to be expected. In fact, to go a step further, it is possible that the word עֲדִי was chosen in Balaam’s second oracle specifically because it can be interpreted in two entirely different ways, *both* of which point to Balaam’s Arameanness. The very multiplicity of possible meanings for the term may serve in this way as a particularly elaborate style-switching feature.

Num 23:23: נָחַשׁ

As a verbal root, נָחַשׁ occurs in the Bible several times. “In most of its occurrences in the corpus this verb has a pejorative meaning related to magic, a practice forbidden in ancient Israel.”¹⁹¹ For example, the following verse presents a law forbidding magic:¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ The Bible attests several other *pluralia tantum*, e.g., רַחֲמִים “mercy.”

¹⁹¹ Rendsburg 2002a: 66.

¹⁹² I cite in full examples provided by Rendsburg 2002a: 66.

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל־הַדָּם לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא תַעֲוִגְנוּ:

You shall not eat of the blood; you shall not *augur*, and you shall not enchant.

(Lev 19:26)¹⁹³

Elsewhere, the term is used in 2 Kgs 17:17 to refer to the practice of magic as one of the sins of the northern kingdom:

וַיַּעֲבִירוּ אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיהֶם בָּאֵשׁ וַיִּקְסְמוּ קְסָמִים וַיִּנְחָשׁוּ וַיִּתְמַכְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְהַכְעִיסוֹ:

And passed their sons and daughters through the fire, and divined divinations, and *augured*, and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh, to provoke him.

Such practices also are associated with the sinful Judahite king Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21:6:¹⁹⁴

וְהַעֲבִיר אֶת־בְּנוֹ בָּאֵשׁ וְעוֹגֵן וְנִחָשׁ וְעָשָׂה אוֹב וַיַּדְעֻגִים הִרְבָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְהַכְעִיסוֹ:

And he passed his son through the fire, enchanted, *augured*, and dealt with ghost(s) and sorcerers; and he increased doing evil in the eyes of Yahweh, to provoke.

In certain situations, however, the term is used without this pejorative sense. In Gen 30:27, Laban uses it when addressing Jacob:¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ See also Deut 18:10.

¹⁹⁴ See also 2 Chr 33:6.

¹⁹⁵ Further examination of the Aramaic-like features in the story of Jacob and Laban is provided in Greenfield 1981: 129–130, although he does not adduce this specific term. See also Rendsburg 1995: 182–183 and Rendsburg 2006a: 166–169.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָבָן אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ נְחֹשֶׁתִי וַיְבָרַכְנִי יְהוָה בְּגִלְלָךְ:
 And Laban said to him, “Please, if I have found favor in your eyes: I
 have *augured*, and Yahweh has blessed me on your account.”

And in 1 Kgs 20:33, the story involves an Aramean king and his court:

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים יִנְחֹשׁוּ וַיַּמְהָרוּ וַיַּחֲלְטוּ הַמִּמֶּנּוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶחָיֵךְ בֶּן־הָדָד וַיֹּאמֶר בָּאוּ קָהָהוּ
 וַיֵּצֵא אֵלָיו בֶּן־הָדָד וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עַל־הַמָּרְכָבָה:
 And the men *augured*, and hastened and gathered what (came) from
 him; and they said, “Your brother Ben-Hadad.” And he said, “Come,
 bring him.” And Ben-Hadad came out to him, and he brought him up
 onto the chariot.

Both passages exhibit decidedly Aramean settings. In the first, not only is the setting Harran in the region of Aram Naharaim (the same region whence Balaam hails), but the speaker, Laban, is himself an Aramean. Similarly, the verse from Kings describes the deliberation process of the Aramean courtiers. “In both cases the verb *nḥš* is used matter-of-factly by the Aramean characters to refer to their normal course in decision-making.”¹⁹⁶ That is to say, the pejorative sense is entirely absent.¹⁹⁷

Rendsburg concluded that the operative principle in these two instances is style-switching, whereby the distinctive speech (or, in the verse from Kings, thought) of Aramean characters is simulated by means of specific features, lexical and otherwise.¹⁹⁸ To be sure, the term is used in two places, also without pejorative meaning, wherein style-switching cannot be the intent. Twice in Genesis 44, it is employed as a means of flavoring the story of Joseph’s exploits in Egypt:¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Rendsburg 2002a: 66.

¹⁹⁷ Note that *BDB*, s.v. נָחַשׁ II, and *HALOT*, s.v. נָחַשׁ I, also specifically isolate these two attestations of the verb from the others in the Bible.

¹⁹⁸ Rendsburg 2002a: 67.

¹⁹⁹ Note also the appearance in Gen 42:6 of the word שְׁלִיט “governor, counselor, sage.” As a verbal root, שִׁלַּט replaces מָשַׁל in LBH under Aramaic influence; but this does not mean that the adjectival

הֲלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה אֲדֹנִי בּוֹ וְהוּא נִחֵשׁ יִנְחֹשׁ בּוֹ הֲרַעְתֶּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם:
 “Is this not what my lord drinks, and *even augurs* by? You have
 committed evil by what you have done!”
 (Gen 44:5)

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מַה־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי־נִחֵשׁ יִנְחֹשׁ אִישׁ
 אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹנִי:
 And Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Did
 you not know that a man such as I can *indeed augur*?”
 (Gen 44:15)

However, “in this case clearly the author’s attempt was to provide additional coloration to a story set in Egypt, a country well known for the magical praxes of its priest-magicians:”²⁰⁰ Thus, these instances are the exceptions that prove the rule, namely, that the non-pejorative usage of נחש in the Bible is to be ascribed to style-switching.

In Balaam’s oracles, however, the use of this root for purposes of style-switching is taken one step further. In Num 23:23 we encounter not a verb from this root, but rather the *noun* נִחֵשׁ. This is one of only two places in the Bible where this noun occurs with the meaning “magic, divination;” the other, unsurprisingly, also is in *Sefer Bil’am*, namely the plural form נִחָשִׁים in Num 24:1 (a prose portion of the pericope). In similar fashion to the majority of the root’s other uses in the Bible, in Balaam’s oracle the magical practice specified by this term is distanced from Israel:

usage in the Joseph story is indicative of a late date of composition for the text (Hurvitz 1968: 239 n. 27). Rather, here too we encounter nonstandard dialect as a means of coloring the narrative with a sense of foreignness.

²⁰⁰ Rendsburg 2002a: 66.

כִּי לֹא-נִחֵשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב	For there is no augury in Jacob,
וְלֹא-קִסָּם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and no divination in Israel:
כַּעֲת יֵאמָר לְיַעֲקֹב	At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob
וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה־פֶּעַל אֵל:	and to Israel what God has done.
	(Num 23:23)

The best known cognate for the noun נִחֵשׁ is found in Aramaic, as indicated by Michael Sokoloff.²⁰¹ We even encounter a nominal usage in a first-millennium Aramaic inscription from Hatra:

בִּנְחֻשָּׁא ט[בא ע]ל	As a good augury for
חֵיא נִשְׂרוּ מְרִיא	the life of NŠRW, the master,
אַפְכ[ל] א רבא דאלהא	the great sage of the god.
	(Hatra 67) ²⁰²

Thus, as recognized by Rendsburg,²⁰³ the use of the term נִחֵשׁ in Num 23:23 is to be seen in similar fashion to the verbal usages of the same root in Gen 30:27 and 1 Kgs 20:33, that is, as an instance of style-switching. Its appearance here serves to infuse Balaam's poetic speech with a distinctly Aramaic-like quality.

Num 23:23: פֶּעַל

It is well known that the root פֶּעַל is unusual in the language of the Bible, equivalent to the far more common SBH root עִשָּׂה “make, do.” In numerous publications, Rendsburg provided ample demonstration of its identity as an IH feature, particularly on the basis of its standard usage in Phoenician, where the root עִשָּׂה does

²⁰¹ Sokoloff 2002a, s.v. נִחֵשׁ #3; Sokoloff 2002b, s.v. נִחֻשָּׁא #1. See also Jastrow 1903, s.v. נִחֵשׁ, נִחֻשָּׁא.

²⁰² The text is taken from Vattioni 1981: 46. *DNWSI* provides a few possible epigraphic instances of the root *nhš* with the meaning “diviner” (s.v. *nhš*₄), but the interpretation is uncertain in these cases.

²⁰³ Rendsburg 1988: 115–116; Rendsburg 1995: 184; Rendsburg 2002a: 67; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

not occur at all.²⁰⁴ For our purposes, however, the complication lies in the extremely limited usage of the root **פעל** in Aramaic, which attests a mere handful of relatively infrequent nominal forms, and in which the usual term for “make, do” is **עבד**.²⁰⁵ Consequently, it is inappropriate to interpret the occurrence of the word **פעל** in Balaam’s second oracle as a style-switching element, since it does not serve to highlight the speaker’s Aramean origin.

What, then, are we to make of the appearance in this context of a verbal derivation from the root **פעל**? I suggest that this usage of **פעל** is to be seen as a setting-switching element that calls attention to the story’s Transjordanian setting. I base this hypothesis on the remarkable parallel between the biblical expression in which this phrase occurs and a line occurring in the first Deir ‘Allā combination. The two texts read as follows:

<p>כַּעֲת יֵאמַר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה־פָּעַל אֵל:</p>	<p>At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob and to Israel what God has done. (Num 23:23cd)</p>
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<p>וּלְכוּ רְאוּ פַעֲלַת אֱלֹהִין</p>	<p>Come, see the deeds of the ²⁰⁶<i>ʿēlāhīn</i>! (DAPT I:5)</p>
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In addition to the connection between the divine terms **אֵל** and **אֱלֹהִין**, the very root under discussion here stands as another specific link between the texts, employed as a

²⁰⁴ Rendsburg 1990a: 55, 107; Rendsburg 1992b: 231–232; Rendsburg 1993: col. 314; Rendsburg 2003a: 30. See also Noegel 1994: 186; and Yoo 1999: 86–87, 186, both of whom rely on Rendsburg’s argument.

²⁰⁵ See, e.g., Sokoloff 2002a, s.v. **עבד**; and Sokoloff 2002b, s.v. **עבד**. Note also the total absence in these two lexica of verbal forms deriving from the root **פעל**.

²⁰⁶ Since the vocalization of the final word (specifically, whether it should be pronounced *ʿēlāhīn* or *ʿēlōhīn*) is part of the much larger debate regarding the dialect of the inscriptions, I simply employ here the option closest to the word’s Proto-Northwest Semitic form.

verb in the biblical verse and as the substantive **פִּעֵלָת** in the line from the plaster inscription. Moreover, a broader consideration of the sense of the respective passages reveals other suggestive aspects. Whereas the biblical couplet, spoken by Balaam, *describes* the telling of God’s deeds to Jacob // Israel, the inscription *demonstrates* it by placing the act itself directly in Balaam’s mouth: he himself is entrusted with the “telling” of the deeds of the *ʿēlāhīn*. In both cases, therefore, the statement in question occurs in Balaam’s direct speech, with a striking similarity of content between the two passages.

Although the decidedly non-Aramaic character of the dialectal feature **פִּעֵל** rules out the possibility of style-switching, the term stands as a specific lexical connection between the biblical material and the inscriptions from Deir ʿAllā, and thus works in tandem with the content conveyed in both contexts to provide a Transjordanian link emphasizing the foreign setting of the biblical text. Indeed, in addition to its relevance to the matter of setting-switching, this link warrants further consideration as a potential indicator of a direct—even overt—relationship between the biblical and extrabiblical Balaam literatures. This relationship would accord with the idea that the composition of *Sefer Bilʿam* involved the incorporation of preexisting Gileadite traditions about Balaam, a hypothesis that I will continue to elaborate as this study progresses.²⁰⁷

Num 24:1: **נְחָשִׁים**

The noun **נְחָשׁ** occurs also in Balaam’s second oracle (Num 23:23), and has been discussed in that context above. The analysis offered there applies here as well,

²⁰⁷ Talshir (2003: 273) rejected the assertion that **פִּעֵל** is to be seen as a feature of IH. However, since we are not dealing directly with IH in the present context, the argument made here stands in any case.

with the additional note that in this instance the term occurs in the narrative voice, with specific reference to the actions of Balaam himself, and thus constitutes setting-switching rather than style-switching. Indeed, we discover that Balaam has been practicing this form of divination all along (כַּפְּעִים-בְּפַעַם).

Num 24:3 (2x), 4, 15 (2x), 16: נָאֻם

The vast majority of occurrences of this term in the Bible refer to divine utterances, the phrase נָאֻם יְהוָה or some variant thereof being attested frequently in the prophetic books. Two representative examples suffice as demonstration:

וְנִשְׁאַרְבוּ עוֹלֵלָת	And grapes will be left in it,
כְּנֹקֶף זֵית	as around an olive tree;
שְׁנַיִם שְׁלֹשָׁה גִּרְגָּרִים	two or three pieces
בְּרֹאשׁ אֲמִיר	high in the treetop,
אַרְבָּעָה חֲמִשָּׁה בְּסַעְפֵּיהָ	four or five in its fruiting
פְּרִיָּה	branches:
נְאֻם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	utterance of Yahweh, god of Israel.
	(Isa 17:6)

כִּי אִם-תִּכְבֶּסִּי בַנֹּתָר	Though you wash with lye
וְתִרְבִּי-לֶךְ בְּרִית	and hoard for yourself soap,
נִכְתָּם עוֹנֶיךָ לִפְנֵי	your iniquity is noted before me:
נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה:	utterance of my lord Yahweh.
	(Jer 2:22)

In a handful of places, however, the word is not associated with divinity, instead indicating human speech or, in one instance, that of a figuratively personified subject. The instances in the opening strophes of Balaam's third and fourth oracles certainly fall into this category, as they identify the oracular recitations of the Aramean prophet. Elsewhere, the word occurs in association with a human speaker in the following places:

וְאַלֶּה דְּבַרֵּי דָּוִד הָאֲחֵרִים
נֶאֱמַר דָּוִד בֶּן־יִשִּׁי
וְנֶאֱמַר הַגִּבֹּר הַקָּם עַל

And these are the last words of David:
Utterance of David son of Jesse,
and utterance of the hero (whom) ²⁰⁸Al raised up...
(2 Sam 23:1abc)

דְּבַרֵּי אַגּוּר בֶּן־יָקֹה
הַמְּשָׁא נֶאֱמַר הַגִּבֹּר לְאִיתִיאל
לְאִיתִיאל וְאֶחָל:

Words of Agur son of Yaqeh,
the prophecy, utterance of the hero to Itiel,
to Itiel and Ukhal.
(Pr 30:1)

Note also the metaphorical usage in Ps 36:2 (English: 36:1), where the term refers to the utterance of פֶּשַׁע “iniquity” personified:

נֶאֱמַר־פֶּשַׁע לְרָשָׁע בְּקֶרֶב לִבִּי
אֵין־פֶּחַד אֱלֹהִים לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו:

Utterance of iniquity to the wicked, within my
heart:
There is no terror of Elohim before his eyes.

Kaufman noted these instances of נֶאֱמַר in the context of his discussion of the Northwest Semitic dialects, intimating that they exhibit some dialectal significance.²⁰⁹ But it was Rendsburg, followed by Yiyi Chen in the case of Pr 30:1, who specifically articulated the Israelian character of these three texts and, more specifically, of the use of נֶאֱמַר in reference to the speech of a non-divine subject.²¹⁰ The so-called “last words of David” in 2 Sam 23:1–7 exhibit six Israelian features in a relatively short poetic section, two of which parallel Aramaic linguistic norms.²¹¹ Psalm 36, another rather

²⁰⁸ On this divine name, see above, p. 71.

²⁰⁹ Kaufman 1988: 54–55.

²¹⁰ Rendsburg 1988, especially pp. 115–116; Rendsburg 1990a, especially pp. 39–40; Chen 2000, especially 213–214. Whybray noted the peculiarity of these occurrences of נֶאֱמַר in the course of his commentary to Proverbs, but merely stated that “the reason for this is unexplained” (Whybray 1994: 407). Whybray appears to have been unaware of Kaufman’s and Rendsburg’s prior forays into the matter.

²¹¹ See Rendsburg 1988: 115–119. The two usages in question are the lexeme מְלִתּוֹ (v. 2) and the pronominal suffix הֶם (< הֶם - due to vowel harmony), as opposed to SBH מְ - (v. 6). Rendsburg (1988:

brief poem, exhibits four such features, all of which bear similarities to Aramaic specifically. Proverbs 30 records the words of Agur of Massa, to be located in the Syrian desert.²¹²

The result is that inner-biblical evidence provides ample support for interpreting this use of עֲנֵה in Balaam's oracles as a feature connecting Balaam with a northern dialect-geographical domain, at least, and possibly with the Aramean sphere specifically. This more specific connection finds support in Cyrus H. Gordon's etymological approach to the word עֲנֵה. A longstanding crux of Hebrew philology, this word is either noted but left unexplained or simply ignored altogether in the standard reference works.²¹³ Gordon engaged the etymological question from the standpoint of cognate evidence, with remarkable results.²¹⁴

His approach related Hebrew עֲנֵה to Eblaite *en-ma* and Akkadian *um-ma* or *en-ma*, the words in the latter languages commonly being glossed as "So says..." or the like, as in Eblaite *en-ma Ib-ri-um sí-in en* "So says Ibrium to the ruler..."²¹⁵ and in the several Akkadian examples culled by I. J. Gelb, including the standard epistolary formula *en-ma PN₁ a-na PN₂ ki-bí-ma* "So says PN₁: Say to PN₂..."²¹⁶ Accordingly, Gordon based his hypothesis on the premise that the three terms, Hebrew, Eblaite, and Akkadian, represent orthographic realizations of an earlier Semitic vocable

115–116) similarly argued that the usage in v. 1 (2x) of עֲנֵה in reference to human speech is to be seen as linked to the Aramean sphere; thus he identified three items in this passage with specific Aramean connections, rather than just two. However, since this is the precise topic of the present discussion, I refrain from jumping ahead to the same conclusion before having set forth the available evidence.

²¹² See Eph'al 1982: 218–219.

²¹³ Observed in Gordon 1993: 109, wherein further elaboration on the usual approaches may be found. See, e.g., GKC p. 136 § 50a n. 1; and note the total absence of the word in, e.g., Joüon–Muraoka 2003.

²¹⁴ Gordon 1987a: 21; Gordon 1993. He credited Constance Wallace with the initial impetus for his inquiry, which she offered in his 1983 Ebla seminar at New York University. See Gordon 1987a: 21 n. 14 and Gordon 1993: 109.

²¹⁵ TM.75.G.1444 I:10–13. See Edzard 1981: 37.

²¹⁶ See Gelb 1957: 47.

pronounced */*ḥma*/, with vocalic /*ḥ*/ in the initial position. Vocalic consonants generally do not occupy appreciable space in discourse on the Semitic languages; but Gordon justified his approach by calling attention to the following illustrative examples of this phenomenon in English, another language with which it is not normally associated:

“Little” is pronounced [litl] where the first l is purely consonantal, whereas the second l is vocalic. ...[N]ote m in “bottom” [botm], n in “button” [butn], and r in “butter” [butr]. ... The distinction between the consonantal and vocalic values of a sound can be phonemic. There is a difference in meaning between “week-end” which terminates in [-end] and “weakened” which terminates in [-nd]. Otherwise the two words are identical in pronunciation.²¹⁷

The phenomenon thus identified, he proceeded to argue for its underappreciated, indeed altogether overlooked, relevance to the study of Semitic languages, and to defend the pursuit of this topic as a source of potential illumination in various difficult cases faced by Semitists: “When we run into a stone wall, we may speculate and draw on intuition and imagination as we grope for the solution. ... If Hindu grammarians like Pāṇini reckoned with vocalic consonants two and a half millennia ago, we have no excuse for not doing so in professional Hebrew linguistics today, especially since our Indo-Europeanist colleagues have long had no difficulty whatever in doing so.”²¹⁸

Returning to the word at hand, Gordon explained the two cuneiform orthographies as representative of vocalic *ḥ* as follows: “Since the Mesopotamian syllabary has no way of writing a vowelless consonant, the initial labial nasal *m*- is

²¹⁷ Gordon 1993: 109.

²¹⁸ Gordon 1993: 109.

written *um-* (with the labial vowel *u*), while the initial dental nasal *n-* written *en-*.”²¹⁹ Rendsburg took the next step, explicitly connecting these two terms both to each other and to Gordon’s reconstructed PS pronunciation **nma*: “Eblaite *en-ma* is derived from this very clearly; one must assume assimilation in Akkadian to produce *um-ma*.”²²⁰ Both scholars proceeded to address the Hebrew orthography, noting that final short vowels are dropped in Hebrew; thus **nma* > /*nm*/ or /*nm̥*/, “which perform could only be written as םנ̣...”²²¹ Both recognized that the term is “not to be pronounced **nəʔûm*, as the graphemes suggest:”²²² we observe that the word is never written *mālē* (מלֵ), and recall also that the *nîqqûd* of the MT is the result of the Masoretes’ efforts to augment the preexisting consonantal text such that the oral reading tradition would be preserved in writing as well. Thus Gordon explained the matter: “Pointed Hebrew orthography does not allow a word to be written with an initial vowelless consonant but requires a *šwa* to accompany it graphically. The only way to write *n-* is -נ̣, and the only way to write *-m* is םנ̣- with the short labial (̣) that must be placed graphically under a consonantal letter, the shortest of which (phonetically) is aleph (א).”²²³

To bolster the notion that his study is “only the tip of the iceberg”²²⁴ when it comes to vocalic consonants in the Semitic language family, Gordon called upon Coptic orthographic practice, which demonstrates the existence of the phonetic combination /*nm̥*/ in Egypto-Semitic.

Coptic is the one written language in that repertoire which graphically indicates vocalic consonants. It does so by placing a dash over the

²¹⁹ Gordon 1993: 109.

²²⁰ Rendsburg 1999a: 29.

²²¹ Rendsburg 1999a: 30. Rendsburg 1999a preferred /*nm̥*/, while Gordon 1993 preferred /*nm*/.

²²² Rendsburg 1999a: 30.

²²³ Gordon 1993: 109.

²²⁴ Gordon 1993: 110.

letter. For example, “of the heavens” (as in the well-attested expression TMÑTEPO ÑMΠHYE “the kingdom of the heavens”) begins ÑM- [nm̄]. The Ñ- is the preposition “of.” The -M̄- stands for another morpheme Ñ- (which indicates the plural of the definite article “the”) partially assimilated to the initial labial stop Π of the broken plural ΠHYE “heavens.” This well-attested idiom has been selected to show that the combination [nm̄] actually exists in Egypto-Semitic and is clearly recognized by the Coptic scribes.²²⁵

By establishing the legitimacy of the connection between Hebrew נָאֵם, Eblaite *en-ma*, and Akkadian *um-ma*, Gordon provided an extrabiblical philological basis for seeing the term as connected with the Syrian/Mesopotamian sphere. Indeed, one observes that the Eblaite and Akkadian attestations freely make use of the term in association with human speakers, just as the aforementioned biblical examples do.

Finally, Rendsburg observed that “[t]he correctness of this approach is bolstered by the appearance of this word in Mishnaic Hebrew,”²²⁶ in which the term occurs as a productive verbal root not as triconsonantal נָאֵם but rather as II-weak נָם. It is used almost universally in the standard phrases נָמַתִּי לוֹ “I said to him” and נָם לִי “he said to me,” each of which is attested twice in the passage from which the following excerpt is drawn, alongside the verb אָמַר.²²⁷

אמר ר' שמעון מצאתי זקן אחד מנציבין נמתי לו בקי היה לך ר' יהודה בן בתירא
אמ' לי הין ועל שלחני היה תדיר אמרתי לו ראיתו כשהוא חולץ מימך נם לי הן
נמתי לו במה ראיתו במנעל או בסנדל נם לי וכי חולצין במנעל
R. Simeon said, “I encountered a certain elder from Nisibis. I *said* to
him, ‘Was R. Judah ben-Betera an authority for you? He said to me,
‘Yes, and he was often at my table.’ I said to him, ‘Did you see him as
one who performs [the Levirate rite of shoe] removal in your days?’ He
said to me, ‘Yes.’ I *said* to him, ‘Did you see him with a shoe or with a

²²⁵ Gordon 1993: 110.

²²⁶ Rendsburg 1999a: 30.

²²⁷ See Moreshet 1980: 223–224 s.v. נָם; and especially *HDHL*, which provides a list of all attestations.

sandal?’ He *said* to me, ‘Do they perform [the rite of] removal with a shoe?’”
(T. Yebamot 12:11)

Note that once again the term is used freely in reference to a human speaker.

Rendsburg continues:

There is no other example of a root with medial *ʔaleph* being treated in this fashion. One could assume a) that the form *nm* was assimilated to that of a regular hollow verb; or b) that the form *nm* continued, though orthographic conventions changed and the resultant spelling was now נום. In either case, this piece of evidence from post-biblical Hebrew confirms Gordon’s insight in the nature of the root נאן “utter.”²²⁸

In addition to confirming Gordon’s understanding of the word נאן in the Bible, Rendsburg’s observation bears further significance for the present study in that it draws upon the now well-documented relationship between MH and IH.²²⁹ IH, the dialect of the northern kingdom of Israel, shared many isoglosses with surrounding languages such as Phoenician and Ugaritic. Rendsburg noted that scholarly consensus understands MH to be a colloquial dialect used in late antiquity in the Galilee,²³⁰ and as his research has demonstrated, the common geographical background of IH and MH is reflected in an abundance of similarities between the two dialects. Rendsburg stated his view thus: “I prefer to look at Ugaritic, Phoenician, IH, and MH as constituting a dialect bundle, stretching from the territory of Ephraim northward and attested from the Late Bronze Age through the Roman period.”²³¹

²²⁸ Rendsburg 1999a: 30.

²²⁹ For a general study of this relationship, see Rendsburg 1992b. For a lexically focused analysis, see Rendsburg 2003b, and note the position of Kogan 2005, which emphasizes the value of lexical approaches in the study of relationships between temporally disparate linguistic corpora.

²³⁰ See Rendsburg 1992b: 225, and especially the bibliography provided there in n. 1.

²³¹ Rendsburg 2003b: 107.

Herein, then, we find yet another link between the biblical usages of נֶאֱמַר and a northward-looking dialectal perspective. The evidence implies that in the SBH dialect of the southern kingdom of Judah, the “root” נֶאֱמַר was nonproductive, with the usage of נֶאֱמַר in association with Yahweh becoming frozen in a series of synonymous formulaic phrases associated primarily, if not exclusively, with prophetic revelations. Meanwhile, in regions to the north, the term continued to be used in a broader array of contexts. In Balaam’s oracles, it need not be seen as an indicator of northern authorship; rather, both the passage’s content and its accumulation of other such style-switching features indicate that it is deliberately used as an indicator of speech patterns associated with this northern sphere.²³²

Num 24:3, 15: שְׁתָּם

This word occurs in the introductory strophe that opens Balaam’s third and fourth oracles. The latter case presents an expanded version of the strophe, but since this expansion is not of direct concern here, I cite the shorter version from the third oracle:

<p>נֶאֱמַר בְּלִעְטָם בְּנֵי בְעֹר וְנֶאֱמַר הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתָּם הָעֵיִן: נֶאֱמַר שִׁמְעֵ אִמְרֵי־אֵל אֲשֶׁר מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזֶה נִפְלַ וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיִם:</p>	<p>Utterance of Balaam son of Be^cor, and utterance of the hero, <i>šatūm</i> of eye; utterance of the hearer of the sayings of El, who sees the vision of Shadday, prostrate and uncovered of eyes. (Num 24:3bc–4; cf. Num 24:15bc–16)</p>
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Before exploring the potential dialectal character of the unique term שְׁתָּם, we must take up the issue of its translation, which has posed a challenge to interpreters from

²³² For a dissenting view on the matter of נֶאֱמַר, see Talshir 2003: 274.

antiquity to modernity. Although the Masoretic pointing designates the first letter a *šîn*, thus שְׁתָּם, some have attempted to read it instead as a *śîn*, resulting in the root שְׁתָּם, assumed to be a biform or hypercorrection²³³ of סְתָם “closed,” as in the Vulgate: cuius obturatus est oculus “whose eye is closed.” On the other hand, the LXX reads ὁ ἀληθινὸς ὁρῶν “the (one) true of vision.” This rendering would appear to accord with the reading proposed by Julius Wellhausen²³⁴ and adopted later by Albright,²³⁵ whereby the definite article on הָעֵין is attached instead to the word שְׁתָּם and the Masoretic pointing is abandoned, resulting in the relative particle -שְׁ plus the phrase תְּמָה עֵין “perfect of eye.” Likewise, Targum Onqelos reads דְּשִׁפִּיר חֲזִי “who sees well.” Yet another interpretation is that of John M. Allegro, who also read שְׁתָּם here, but connected it with Arabic شَتِيم “austere, grim-faced,” rendering the Hebrew phrase accordingly as “the unrelenting, or, the grim-faced one.”²³⁶

A consultation of later rabbinic literature reveals a handful of attestations of the root שְׁתָּם. The following passage is from the Mishna:

נכרי שהיה מעביר עם ישראל כדי יין ממקום למקום אם היה בחזקת משתמר
מתר אם מודיעו שהוא מפליג כדי שישתום ויסתום ויגב
As for a foreigner that has served as a Jew’s transporter of vessels of
wine from place to place, if he has been under strict guard, it is
permitted, unless he tells him that he is setting sail [i.e., traveling far
away], such that he can *pierce* and reseal, and it can dry.
(M. Aboda Zara 5:3)

²³³ On the matter of hypercorrection, particularly with regard to ס and ש, see Blau 1970, especially pp. 114–125.

²³⁴ Wellhausen 1899: 351.

²³⁵ Albright 1944: 216.

²³⁶ Allegro 1953: 78–79. For his reading with *śîn* rather than *šîn*, see p. 79 n. 4.

As Levine explained, the matter of concern here is whether or not the Gentile might have had sufficient time to drill a hole or cut a slit in the clay sealing and siphon off some of the wine for the purpose of pagan libation, then to reseal the vessel such that the act remains undetected.²³⁷ Additional attestations of the root **שָׁתַם** with the same meaning are to be found in the Tosefta:

והלא פשתם ניכרכין מלמעלה בין מלמטה

And is not the *piercing* visible from above and from below?
(T. Aboda Zara 7:13)

יין אצל הגוי השתם אסור משם יין נסך

Wine with a gentile that is *pierced* is forbidden, on account of libation wine.
(T. Aboda Zara 7:14)

ואם היה חשוד על השתימה אף ממרתיפו אסור

And if [a Jew] were suspected of *piercing* it, even [wine] from his cellar is forbidden.
(T. Aboda Zara 7:15)

Morag's assessment of these postbiblical instances of the word led him to interpret the phrase **שָׁתַם הָעֵינַן** as referring to some sort of affliction:

אפשר, שהכינוי...מכוון לחזות-פניו של בלעם, שאחת מעיניו דמויה לנקב או לסדק דק. ...ומשום כך, מחמת מום זה, שפגם בראייתו הגופנית, מדגיש בלעם את עוצמתה של ראייתו הרוחנית....

It is possible that the term...is intended to describe Balaam's face, one of whose eyes resembled a hole or thin crack. ... Consequently, as a

²³⁷ Levine 2000: 193.

result of this blemish, which has afflicted his physical vision, Balaam emphasizes the force of his spiritual vision....²³⁸

Morag's understanding finds no corroborating textual support, however, and it seems most appropriate to accept instead the approach suggested by Levine, who translated the phrase "whose eye is opened,"²³⁹ or, as I have rendered it in this study, "pierced-open of eye." Unlike Morag's approach, this reading does find textual support, since, as Levine noted, the phrase in question parallels גְּלוּי עֵינָיִם "uncovered of eyes" in the following verse (Num 24:4, 16).²⁴⁰ Indeed, this entire colon, נִפֹּל וְגְלוּי עֵינָיִם "prostrate and uncovered of eyes," recalls the episode with the jenny, in which Balaam's eyes are opened by God, to which Balaam's immediate response upon seeing the messenger is to prostrate himself:

וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָי בִּלְעָם וַיֵּרָא אֶת־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה נֹצֵב בְּדֶרֶךְ וְחֶרֶב בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּקֹּד
וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ לְאַפָּיו:

And Yahweh *uncovered* Balaam's eyes, and he saw Yahweh's messenger stationed in the road, his sword of flame in his hand; and he *bowed and prostrated himself* on his face.
(Num 22:31)

Thus, by its relationship with the colon נִפֹּל וְגְלוּי עֵינָיִם in Num 24:4, 16, the phrase שָׂתֵם הָעֵינַי takes on an indirect connection to the events recounted earlier in the verse just cited. In fact, the specific nuance of this expression becomes clear in the light of this connection: In both the physical sense and the prophetic, Balaam did not, indeed could not, open his eyes on his own—rather, they were forced open by a power outside himself. Both Levine's translation and my own aim to preserve something of

²³⁸ Morag 1995: 57.

²³⁹ Levine 2000: 188, 190, 193.

²⁴⁰ Levine 2000: 193.

this sense; and indeed such a rendering is corroborated also by the Peshiṭta, which glosses the phrase שְׂתֵּם הָעֵינַן as ܫܬܡܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ (*dgly² cynh*) “whose eye is uncovered,” thus rendering explicit the connection between this expression and the phrase גְּלוֹי עֵינַיִם a few cola later.

Having thus established the appropriate rendering of the term שְׁתָּם, we note that our proof texts for the reading adopted here all derive not only from postbiblical Hebrew, which bears a close affinity with the comparatively Aramaic-like Israelian dialect,²⁴¹ but from the region of the Galilee: the Mishna was compiled at Sepphoris, and the Tosefta springs from the Tiberian school. This fact evidently prompted Morag to identify the term שְׁתָּם as one of noteworthy character not only from a lexical standpoint, but also from a geographic one: “לגבי ‘שתם’ נראה, שהשורש נתקיים בשימוש הלשון בתקופת המקרא, ואף לאחריה, בדורותיהם של חכמים, אלא ששימושו היה מוגבל, אם ...ללהג שתיחומו גיאוגרפי.”²⁴² To be sure, the evidence does not provide an explicit connection to Aramaic, but only to a dialect of Hebrew with marked Aramaic affinities. Nevertheless, in the context of *Sefer Bil'am*, and specifically in Balaam’s oracles, where dialectal features abound, the term as analyzed by Morag surely warrants at least provisional inclusion in the list of style-switching features accumulated here.

Num 24:6: נְחָלִים

For the purpose of this discussion, it is helpful to see the entire verse in which the term נחלים appears:

²⁴¹ See, e.g., Rendsburg 1992b; Rendsburg 2003b.

²⁴² Morag 1995: 57.

כְּנַחֲלִים נָטְיוּ	Like <i>nəḥālīm</i> they stretch out,
כְּגִנֹּת עַל־נָהָר	like gardens along a river;
כְּאַהֲלִים נָטַע יְהוָה	like aloes Yahweh has planted,
כְּאַרְזִים עַל־מַיִם:	like cedars along water.

The appropriate reading of נַחֲלִים is a longstanding crux that challenged medieval commentators no less than their modern counterparts. Menahem Moreshet conveniently summarized the possibilities inherent in “קריאה רהוטה רגילה”²⁴³ indicating that on the one hand the word can be interpreted as “זרם מים (נהר, אלא”²⁴⁴ indicating that on the one hand the word can be interpreted as “זרם מים (נהר, אלא”²⁴⁴ as in the following examples:

בִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִבְּיַאֵךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם עֵינֹת וְתַהֲמֹת יֵצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה
וּבְהָרִ:

For Yahweh your god brings you to a good land, a land of *streams* of water, of springs and abysses coming forth in valley and in mountain.
(Deut 8:7)

כָּל־הַנַּחֲלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם	All <i>the streams</i> go to the sea,
וְהַיָּם אֵינוֹ מֵלֵא	but the sea is not full;
אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנַּחֲלִים הִלְכִים	to the place (from) which <i>the streams</i> go,
שָׁם הֵם שׁוֹבִים לָלֶכֶת:	there they return to go.

(Qoh 1:7)

And on the other hand, it may be read as “הערוץ והאפיק עצמו, שבו זורמים המים” as follows:

²⁴³ Moreshet 1971: 51.

²⁴⁴ The definitions and associated examples presented here are taken from Moreshet 1971: 52.

כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה	For thus said Yahweh:
לֹא־תִרְאוּ רוּחַ	You do not see wind,
וְלֹא־תִרְאוּ גֶשֶׁם	and you do not see rain;
וְהַנַּחַל הַהוּא יִמְלֵא מַיִם	but that <i>wadi</i> will be full of water,
וְשָׁתִיתֶם אֹתָם וּמִקְנֵיכֶם	that you might drink, you and your cattle
וּבְהֶמְתְּכֶם:	and your beasts.
	(2 Kgs 3:17)

הַמְשַׁלַּח מַעְיָנִים בְּנַחְלִים	...Who send forth springs in the wadis;
בֵּין הָרִים יִהְלְכוּ:	between mountains they meander.
	(Ps 104:10)

He went on to survey the various ways in which commentators, both ancient and modern, have attempted to explain the verse with this meaning in mind.²⁴⁵ Seforno, for example, saw in this metaphor a reference to the *bāttê kənessiyyôt* and *bāttê midrāšôt* of Israel, which are “כמו הנחלים שנטו אל השדות להשקותם, וכן יושבי”²⁴⁶ Abarbanel sought to bring the *nəḥālîm* into the larger picture of fertility in the verse, and says that the community of Israel “דמה...ביופיה ושלמותה אל הנחלים ואל גן הירק השתול על פלגי מים...”²⁴⁷ With regard to modern scholarship, Tur-Sinai preferred a more literal interpretation, reading this colon in association with the preceding verse, which refers to Israel’s tents (אֶהְלִים), and saying that the phrase “נָטְיוֹ אֶהְלִים” “מתאר את מצבם הטוב של אהליו” “במקום נחלי מים נטיו אוהליהם”²⁴⁸ in other words, it is as if “במקום נחלי מים נטיו אוהליהם”²⁴⁸

Admittedly, such interpretations seem rather awkward, and as a result serious consideration must be given instead to the suggestion first put forth by Felix Perles,²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Moreshet 1971: 53.

²⁴⁶ Katzenelenbogen et al. 1986–1993: 6:221.

²⁴⁷ Taken from Moreshet 1971: 53.

²⁴⁸ Tur-Sinai 1962: 178.

²⁴⁹ Perles 1899: 688–689.

and subsequently adopted by Gray,²⁵⁰ Moreshet²⁵¹ and Morag,²⁵² that we are to see here not a cognate to Arabic نخل “wadi,” but rather a cognate to نخل “palm tree.” Morag recalled that both the guttural phoneme /ħ/ (ح) and the velar phoneme /ħ/ (خ) are represented in Hebrew by the letter ח,²⁵³ and saw in this fact the potential for wordplay between the two possible readings of this word, depending upon which phoneme is pronounced.²⁵⁴ He and Moreshet both emphasized the appropriateness of the meaning “palm tree” in the context of the verse, where each of the four cola begins with -ח plus a floral term of some kind—a clear double-parallel structure into which the meaning “wadis, streams” simply does not fit.²⁵⁵ Moreshet proceeded a step further, pointing out the chiastic structure formed by the types of vegetation presented in the verse: the first and fourth cola mention palms and cedars, tall trees, while the second and third cola refer to smaller plants (if, with Moreshet, we interpret גִּנְתַּי as “שיחי גן”).²⁵⁶

Clearly, then, the reading “palm trees” for נַחְלָיִים fits much more comfortably in this context than “wadis, streams,” although one does well to recall Morag’s suggestion of wordplay, especially given the other references to bodies of water in the verse. He also suggested another possible attestation of נַחְל “palm tree,”²⁵⁷ later

²⁵⁰ Gray 1903: 362–363.

²⁵¹ Moreshet 1971.

²⁵² Morag 1995: 58–60.

²⁵³ Morag 1995: 58.

²⁵⁴ Morag 1995: 58–60. In response to the proposal of Moreshet 1971 that we are to see here a double meaning, Morag distinguished carefully (1981: 59 n. 53) between wordplay, that is, multiple vocables represented by a single grapheme, and double meaning, that is, a single vocable that exhibits two distinct semantic senses.

²⁵⁵ Morag 1995: 59; Moreshet 1971: 53–56.

²⁵⁶ Moreshet 1971: 54.

²⁵⁷ Morag 1995: 58–59.

confirmed by Rendsburg,²⁵⁸ in Song 6:11, a context in which this reading similarly fits the parallelism far better than does “wadi, stream:”

אֶל-גִּנַּת אֶגֶז יֵרְדֵּתִי	to the garden of nut(s) I descended,
לִרְאוֹת בְּאֵבֵי הַנָּחַל	to see the shoots of <i>the palm</i> ,
לִרְאוֹת הִפְרִיחָה הַגֶּפֶן	to see whether the vine had bloomed,
הַנְּצוֹ הָרְמָנִים:	the pomegranates blossomed.
	(Song 6:11)

Unfortunately, there is no known Aramaic attestation of this lexeme, so we are limited to the Arabic materials for cognate evidence. As a result, we cannot establish with certainty that the use of the term in Balaam’s oracle is an instance of style-switching. However, the Arabic parallel, coupled with the additional biblical attestation of this term in a book whose northern dialectal affinities have been established beyond doubt,²⁵⁹ lend some validity to this hypothesis. Rendsburg’s suggestive questions sum up the situation nicely: “...was this lexeme used in Aramaic as well? Was it known in the land of Qedem, whence Balaam came, located at the northern reaches of the Syrian Desert?”²⁶⁰

Since the feature occurs in Balaam’s direct speech, I am inclined at present to accept it as an instance of style-switching, notwithstanding the absence of a concrete Aramaic or Syrian connection. In the end, however, one may prefer to reject this hypothesis and view the term instead as a setting-switching rather than a style-switching element. Nevertheless, in either case its non-SBH character must be appreciated and explained in the context of the oracle and of the pericope as a whole.

²⁵⁸ Rendsburg 2006b: 322.

²⁵⁹ See Rendsburg 2006b.

²⁶⁰ Rendsburg 2006a: 171.

Num 24:6: נָטַי

As the standard grammars confirm, the norm with III-י roots²⁶¹ in BH is for the weak third root letter to elide in one of the following manners:²⁶²

- The י is latent, as in first-person common singular suffix-conjugation נָטַיִתִּי (< **galiyitī*).
- The י drops out completely in syncopated forms, as in third-person common plural suffix-conjugation נָטְוּ (< **galayū*), and in apocopated forms, as in third-person masculine singular jussive נָטֵךְ (< **yiglay*).
- The י quiesces at the end of a word, as in third-person masculine singular suffix-conjugation נָטְוֶה (< **galay-*).

Only in very limited circumstances does the י consistently retain consonantal force, specifically, in the Qal passive participle (e.g., נָטְוִי) and in instances such as the one exhibited in our verse from Numbers, which is a Niph^{ca}l third-person common plural suffix-conjugation form. Note that the norm for such forms is for the י to disappear; thus, here one would expect נָטְוֶה*.²⁶³

Other Semitic languages attest this phenomenon on a widespread basis. In Ugaritic, verbal forms of III-w/y roots typically exhibit retention of the third root letter. The strictly consonantal orthography of that language rules out the potential complication of *matres lectionis*. The root *šty* “drink,” for instance, demonstrates the standard phenomenon in forms such as *šty* (*šatiyū*) “they drank” (third-person masculine plural suffix-conjugation) and *īštynh* (*īštayanahā*) “I drink it” (first-person

²⁶¹ Similarly for III-י roots, which have been absorbed into the III-י roots, with only a handful of exceptions, e.g. נָטְוִי “be calm.”

²⁶² The summary that follows is adapted from Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:204 § 79c.

²⁶³ Joüon–Muraoka (2003: 1:204 § 79c) pointed out that the retention of consonantal י frequently occurs in pause, and thus the *zāqēp* on our word in Num 24:6 is noteworthy. However, this scarcely can account for *all* occurrences of this phenomenon. Robertson (1972: 57–62) treated the archaic aspect of the phenomenon. As we shall see, another explanation is appropriate in the present situation as well.

singular prefix-conjugation with feminine singular pronominal suffix).²⁶⁴ The Phoenician evidence, whose orthographic conventions likewise obviate the question of possible *plene* spellings, is similarly demonstrative, as in בִּנִי “he built,” עָלִי “he ascended,” and so on.²⁶⁵ Rabin examined the relevant Arabic sources at some length,²⁶⁶ and his discussion of verbal forms and other words whose *-ā* ending is expressed by means of *ʔalif maqṣūra* (which he notated as *ā*), such as عَلِي, بَنِي, etc., led him to insist upon an underlying consonantal basis for this orthography, however obscured by other phonological developments: “It must be made quite clear that, unless we choose to consider Koranic orthography a realm of anarchy, every *-ā* in the Koran must be read *-ai*.”²⁶⁷

Most relevant to the present study is the evidence from the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions and from Aramaic sources. In the texts from Deir ʿAllā we encounter the phrase שְׁתִּי חִמְר “they drink wine” (DAPT I:10). In to the Aramaic sphere, we see that the retention of consonantal ʾ in III-ʾ verbal roots is widely attested in this language. See, for example, the word חֲצֹוִהִי “they divided it” in line 7 of a Syrian inscription published by André Caquot, who remarked, “*hṣwhy* est la 3^e personne du pluriel du parfait, conservant dans l’écriture la 3^e radicale faible vocalisée *u*, d’un verbe *hṣy* qui

²⁶⁴ These examples are drawn from Sivan 1997: 162 and 163. Note that the final root consonant is apocopated in forms where it is not followed by a vowel, e.g., *štt* (*šatītu* < **šatīytu*) “I drank” (Sivan 1997: 163; example drawn from p. 162). See also Tropper 2000: 653–671 § 75.53; and Bordreuil–Pardee 2004: 70.

²⁶⁵ See Friedrich–Röllig 1999: 34 § 64b and 113–120 §§ 174–178 (especially p. 119 §§ 176b, 177a). A discussion of the Phoenician verbal system appears in Krahmalkov 2001: 151–214, but III-weak roots are not specifically addressed.

²⁶⁶ Rabin 1951: 115–119, 160–161.

²⁶⁷ Rabin 1951: 117. He argued (160) that the evidence indicates a biliteral origin for verbal roots ending with *ʔalif maqṣūra*, and the process by which the PS **-ā* ending was replaced by consonantal *y* or *w* is to be seen as secondary. However, note the comments of Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:204 § 79a n. 1, which dismiss this notion on general Semitic grounds.

paraît nouveau en araméen, mais s’identifie aisément à l’hébreu *hâšâh*, «partager».”²⁶⁸

Note that the ם in this word cannot be considered a *mater lectionis*, as confirmed by the next verb in the inscription, אחרמה “they consecrated it” (line 8), which has the same plural subject but is written without a ם. Likewise, the biblical stratum of Aramaic similarly attests certain forms in which final ם retains consonantal force, as in בניתה “I have built it” (Dan 4:27) and אשתיו “they drank” (Dan 5:4).²⁶⁹

In the light of this evidence, Rendsburg’s examination of the feature in the Hebrew portions of the Bible led him to conclude that in the majority of cases it bears dialectal significance.²⁷⁰ He traced the history of the form as follows: “The retention of the *yôd* in IIIy is used vestigially in EBH [Early Biblical Hebrew] and perhaps in later archaizing poetry, but generally it disappears in SBH of the Judahite type. However, in IH this usage continues....”²⁷¹ Accordingly, one notes the archaic term יבסמו in Exod 15:5,²⁷² and also the following instances of this phenomenon in texts whose Israelian origin already is well established:²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Caquot 1971: 14.

²⁶⁹ For a thorough discussion of the behavior of III-ם verbs in Biblical Aramaic, see Rosenthal 1995: 54–56, 70–71.

²⁷⁰ See Rendsburg 1988: 116; Rendsburg 1990a: 42–43, 75, 95; Rendsburg 1991b: 94–95; Rendsburg 1992a: 81–82; Rendsburg 1993: col. 319; Rendsburg 1995: 182, 184, 185; Rendsburg 2003a: 16–17; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

²⁷¹ Rendsburg 1990a: 43 n. 20.

²⁷² According to Rendsburg (2003a: 17), the instances in Isa 40:18, 25; 46:5 are to be seen either as archaizing elements or as features resulting from the exilic provenance of the material, in a period of increasing Aramaic influence on Biblical Hebrew. Likewise, it is possible that the instance in Jos 14:8 is the result of Aramaic influence on the language of an exilic Deuteronomist.

²⁷³ In addition to these two examples, Rendsburg (2003a: 17) also adduced the following instances in psalms that exhibit a preponderance of IH features: Ps 32:37 (חסי); 36:8 (יחסי), 9 (יריו); 77:4 (אמה); 78:44 (ישתי); 83:3 (יהמיו); and 140:9 (מאוי, a nominal form in construct). Similarly, Noegel (1994: 185) adduced the term יחיו in Isa 26:11 as one of numerous IH elements in Isaiah 24–27. The term ירבץ occurs in Deut 8:13, in a book considered by Ginsberg and others to be northern, but such an identification is uncertain (see above, pp. 42–43, 79 n. 6; and cf. p. 43).

וַאֲמַר אֵי אֱלֹהֵימֹו
צֹר חֲסִיו בּוֹ:

And he shall say, “Where is their god,
the rock in whom they trusted?”
(Deut 32:37)

דְּלִיּוֹ שְׁקִים מִפֶּסַח
וּמִשָּׁל בִּפִּי כְּסִילִים:

Weak are the legs of the lame,
and a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
(Pr 26:7)

Additionally, certain instances of the phenomenon evince a literary significance, as in Isaiah’s oracle to Damascus, where the term יְהִמְיוֹן (Isa 17:12) represents addressee-switching.²⁷⁴ Although a few instances of this feature (Isa 31:3, 33:7; Ps 39:7, 57:2, 122:6) are not as readily explained, the preponderance of the evidence nevertheless points clearly toward an identification of this feature as representative of non-SBH dialect.

Indeed, most relevant to our examination of *Sefer Bil’am* is Rendsburg’s observation that this feature is employed at times for the purpose of style-switching. Note the following examples from the book of Job, in which this device helps to produce the characteristic quality of the main character’s speech:²⁷⁵

יְשָׁלִיו אֶהָלִים | לְשָׁדָדִים
וּבִטְחוֹת לְמַרְגְּזֵי אֵל
לְאִשֶּׁר הֵבִיא אֱלֹהֵי בִידּוֹ:

Prosperous are the tents of robbers,
and secure for those who persecute El,
into whose hand Eloah brings (much).
(Job 12:6)

²⁷⁴ Rendsburg (2003a: 17) also identified the threefold instance in Isa 21:12 as “addressee switching,” but cf. Rendsburg 1991b: 94–95 and Rendsburg 1995: 181–182.

²⁷⁵ In addition to these examples, Rendsburg (1991b: 94; see also Rendsburg 1992a: 82) identified four other instances of this phenomenon in Job, all of which, like the example cited here in full, occur in the mouth of the protagonist: Job 3:25; 16:22; 30:14; and 31:38.

עַד־אַנָּה תִּוְּגִיזֵן נַפְשִׁי How long will you torment my soul,
וְתִדְכָּאוּנִי בְּמִלִּים: and oppress me with words?
(Job 19:2)

By now it comes as no surprise that, as noted repeatedly by Rendsburg,²⁷⁶ the same purpose is achieved in our verse from Numbers, where Balaam's use of the word נָטִיז, which exhibits a morphological construction that is well attested in Aramaic, rather than the expected נָטַ*, helps to season his Hebrew poetry with a characteristically Aramaic quality.²⁷⁷

Num 24:7: מַלְכָּה

The standard word for “kingdom” in SBH is מַמְלָכָה, as demonstrated in the phrases לְהַעֲבִיר הַמַּמְלָכָה מִבֵּית שָׁאוּל “to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul” (2 Sam 3:10) and רָגַע אֲדַבֵּר עַל־גּוֹי וְעַל־מַמְלָכָה “the moment I speak about a nation and about a kingdom” (Jer 18:7, 9). The term מַלְכוּת (or מַלְכָּה) becomes the common term for “kingdom” in LBH, however, and in fact the “abstract” וֵת- ending itself is considered a late feature.²⁷⁸ Both may be attributed to Aramaic influence on the later stages of BH. Regarding the ending, GKC states the following: “In Aram. this fem. ending וֵת...is a common termination of the infinitive in the derived conjugations...; in Hebr. וֵת as a termination to express abstract ideas...becomes more common only in

²⁷⁶ See the publications identified above, n. 270, most of which make specific reference to this feature as demonstrative of style-switching in Balaam's oracles.

²⁷⁷ Contrast the view of Moreshet (1971: 55–56), who interpreted נָטִיז here as a variant form of a verb from the root נָטַע, which occurs in the parallel colon. In light of the present evidence, such a view is unnecessary. See also the discussion of the semantic development of the root נָטַע in Morag 1995: 59–60 n. 54.

²⁷⁸ See Polzin 1976: 142, 147.

the later books.²⁷⁹ As for the term מַלְכוּת, it is amply attested in epigraphic materials contemporary with the biblical period. Note the following example from Sefire:²⁸⁰

... תהוי מלכתה כמלכת חל מלכת חל מזי ימלך אשר²⁸¹
 ... May his kingdom be like a kingdom of sand, a kingdom of sand, as
 long as Asshur rules. ...
 (Sefire I A 25)

In his study of the word in question, Hurvitz extended the matter beyond the bounds of the biblical corpus, and demonstrated that in postbiblical literature the late form מַלְכוּת continues to eclipse even further the early form מַמְלָכָה.²⁸² Note, for example, the following:

וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלָכָתוֹ וְכָתַב לֹא אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר מִלְּפָנֵי
 הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:
 And it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his *kingdom*, (that) he will
 write for himself a copy of this Torah on a document, from (what is)
 before the priests and Levites.
 (Deut 17:18, MT)

וְהָיָה כְּמִתְבִּיָּה עַל כּוּרְסֵי מַלְכוּתֶיהָ וְיִכְתֹּב לִיָּה פֶּרֶשְׁנָן אוֹרִיתָא הָדָא עַל סִפְרָא מִן
 קֳדָם כְּהֵנָּא לִיּוֹאִי:²⁸³
 And it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his *kingdom*, (that) he will
 write for himself a copy of this teaching on a document, from (what is)
 before the priests (and) Levites.
 (Tg. Onqelos to Deut 17:18)

²⁷⁹ GKC p. 241 § 86k.

²⁸⁰ Cf. also the Phoenician form מַלְכִית; see Tombaek 1978: 182.

²⁸¹ Here I depart from Dupont-Sommer 1960: 213 and adopt instead the word divisions of Fitzmyer 1961: 181, which permit a smooth reading. Note, however, that the word מַלְכָּה is clear in either case.

²⁸² Hurvitz 1972a: 79–88.

²⁸³ Niqqud adopted from Katzenelenbogen et al. 1986–1993: 7:153.

Of direct concern here, however, are the occasions in which the word מְלָכוֹת appears in pre-exilic materials. In light of the Aramaic lineage of the term,²⁸⁴ several instances yield interpretations that incorporate this connection with Aramaic. One example is the following occurrence in Ps 45:7 (English: 45:6):

בְּסֵאֵךְ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד	Your throne, O Elohim, is for all time;
שִׁבְט מִיֶּשֶׁר שִׁבְט מְלָכוֹתֶיךָ:	a scepter of uprightness is your scepter.

Rendsburg clearly demonstrated the northern origin of this psalm on the basis of this and a number of other features.²⁸⁵ Thus, taken in conjunction with the other features in the poem, this pre-exilic usage of the word מְלָכוֹת is to be interpreted as an indicator of Israelian dialect. Similarly, the abundance of nouns ending in -וֹת in the book of Proverbs speak to its character as a northern text as well.²⁸⁶ Finally, we also may note the use of this term in Neh 9:35, which Rendsburg perceived as reflective of both northern origin and late date.

As noted several times by Rendsburg,²⁸⁷ the appearance of this term in our verse from Numbers is to be explained in a different way, namely, as the inclusion in an early poetic text of a feature drawn from Aramaic, with the intent of coloring Balaam's speech with the characteristic quality of his native language.

²⁸⁴ The -וֹת ending did not “originate” in Aramaic; in fact, it is Proto-Semitic, as demonstrated by its attestations in Akkadian, Eblaite, etc. See the discussion and examples in Rendsburg 1991a: 364 n. 70.

²⁸⁵ Rendsburg 1990a: 45–50.

²⁸⁶ See Chen 2000: *passim*, and note also the literature cited in Rendsburg 1991a: 354 n. 28.

²⁸⁷ Rendsburg 1990a: 47; Rendsburg 1991a: 364; Rendsburg 1995: 184; Rendsburg 2003c: 105; Rendsburg 2006a: 169.

עצמתיָהֶם: Num 24:8

When the 3mp pronominal suffix is attached to plural nouns exhibiting the *־ות* ending, the resulting form across SBH generally is *־ותם*, as in the phrases *וְתִפְאָרֶת בְּנִים* “and the glory of sons is their fathers” (Pr 17:6) and *וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹתֵם* “and these are their names” (1 Kgs 4:8). However, in some cases we encounter instead the form *־ותיהֶם*. Scholarship has established that this morpheme is later than *־ותם*, the more common form in the Torah and other early materials. Amos Cohen’s statistical breakdown led him to conclude that “אם התורה קדמה לכל יתר ספרי המקרא, הרי שיש”²⁸⁸ לשער כי הצורה הקצרה היא מקורית וקודמת לצורה הרחבה

The predominance of the shorter form in early texts caught the attention of Hurvitz as well.²⁸⁹ He approached the matter from semantic and morphological standpoints. In semantic terms, he noted the “double plurality” of these forms: in addition to the plural ending *־ות*, these words also exhibit the plural ending *־ִי*, normally associated with masculine plural nouns in construct, immediately before the pronominal suffix. According to Hurvitz, “[s]uch redundant employment of two plural morphemes usually stems from attempts, perhaps even unconscious, to emphasize the *meaning* (plural sense), which is liable to be felt insufficient on account of the *form* (plural ending).”²⁹⁰ As for the development of this particular form, he turned to morphology, explaining it as a shift resulting simultaneously from “the external influence of the corresponding Aramaic pronominal suffix *־הֶם*...as well as the internal analogy with the Hebrew masculine forms *־ִיָּהֶם* (such as *malkhēyhem*, etc.).”²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Cohen 1975: 304.

²⁸⁹ Hurvitz 1982: 24–27.

²⁹⁰ Hurvitz 1982: 25 (emphasis in original).

²⁹¹ Hurvitz 1982: 25. Note the similar situation with regard to the non-SBH form *עִמָּהֶם* “with them” (Num 22:12), which was discussed above on pp. 77–80.

Like Cohen, Hurvitz went on to demonstrate further that וְתִיָּהֶם is to be seen as later than וְתָם- on the basis of the distribution of the two forms in the Bible. He presented examples of texts occurring doubly, once in an early context and once in a late one, such as the following:²⁹²

וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁמַע הַשָּׁמַיִם וְסִלַּחְתָּ לַחַטָּאת עַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּם אֶל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
נָתַתָּ לְאֲבוֹתָם:

And you will hear, O heavens, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and restore them to the land that you gave to *their* fathers.
(1 Kgs 8:34)

וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁמַע מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְסִלַּחְתָּ לַחַטָּאת עַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּם אֶל־הָאָדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה לָהֶם וּלְאֲבֹתֵיהֶם:

And you will hear from the heavens, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and restore them to the land that you have to them and to *their* fathers.
(2 Chr 6:25)

Now that we have considered all of these factors, it remains for us to examine the significance of occurrences of the “late” form וְתִיָּהֶם in early contexts. No unilateral explanation for these occurrences is forthcoming; but the Aramaic influence perceived by Hurvitz in the form וְתִיָּהֶם-, which is bolstered by the late distribution of this form in the Bible, indicates that in certain instances in the earlier portions of the corpus, style-switching is a reasonable conclusion. Note, for example, the following usage of the form אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם (as against אֲבוֹתָם, presented in the example above), in the mouth of Ahijah of Shiloh:²⁹³

²⁹² This and other examples are presented in Hurvitz 1982: 26.

²⁹³ Adduced by Rendsburg 2006a: 171 n. 26.

וְהִכָּה יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר יִנּוּד הַקֶּנֶה בַּמַּיִם וְנִתַּשׁ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַל הָאֲדָמָה
הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְאֲבוֹתֵיהֶם וְזָרַם מֵעֵבֶר לְנָהָר יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת־אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם
מִכְעִיסִים אֶת־יְהוָה:

And Yahweh will strike Israel as the reed flutters in the water, and
uproot Israel from upon this good land that he gave to their fathers, and
scatter them beyond the river, because they made their groves,
provoking Yahweh.
(1 Kgs 14:15)

Interpreting this as an instance of style-switching is all the more appealing because of
the overwhelming pre-exilic preference for the form אֲבוֹתָם; indeed, against the 82
attestations of this form, the occurrence of אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם in the verse just cited is the *only*
example of the longer ending in the entire pre-exilic corpus.²⁹⁴

In similar fashion, particularly in light of the wealth of other style-switching
elements present in Balaam's oracles, we likewise may take עֲצַמֹתֵיהֶם in Num 24:8 as
reflective of style-switching. Rather than simply resorting to the Aramaic form itself,
the author here incorporates a morphological feature that is Aramaic-like without
straying from the Hebrew realm, and in so doing seasons Balaam's speech with yet
another linguistic pattern characteristic of Aramaic.

Num 24:8: גִּרָם

It is common knowledge that גִּרָם is the standard Aramaic word for “bone,”²⁹⁵
as exemplified in epigraphic evidence by the statement “and your bones shall not descend (to) Sheʿol” (NSI 76 B 6).²⁹⁶ The usual term in Hebrew is עֲצָם.
Note the following renderings of this term as גִּרָם in the Qumran Targum to Job, where
despite the fragmentary text, the word is recognizable:

²⁹⁴ Rendsburg 2006a: 171 n. 26.

²⁹⁵ See, e.g., DNWSI, s.v. *grm*₁; Sokoloff 2004a, s.v. גִּרָם; Sokoloff 2004b, s.v. #1. גִּרְמָא.

²⁹⁶ This text appears also in Cowley 1923: 179–182.

עֲטִינוּ מִלֵּאָו חֶלֶב
וּמֶחַ עֲצָמוֹתָיו יִשְׁקָה:
His teats are full of milk,
and the marrow of his bones is moist.
(Job 21:24, MT)

... גרמוהי °[] of his bones. ...
(11QTgJob V:5)²⁹⁷

לֵיְלָה עֲצָמֵי נִקְרָ מֵעַלִּי
וְעֵרְקֵי לֹא יִשְׁכָּבוּן:
At night my bones are pierced within me,
and my veins do not relax.
(Job 30:17, MT)

[גרמי יקדון] my bones burn,
וערק[י] and [my] veins [
(11QTgJob XVI:7)²⁹⁸

In the biblical corpus, three times we encounter denominative verbs from the root גרם, once in Qal and twice in Pi'el without evident change in meaning.

Translators gloss these verbs variously as “devour,”²⁹⁹ “crush,”³⁰⁰ “gnaw,”³⁰¹ etc.

Aside from the present verse, the other two examples are:

וְשָׁתִית אוֹתָהּ וּמָצִית וְאֶת־חֲרָשֶׁיהָ תַּגְרֵמִי וְשָׁדַיִךְ תִּנְתָּקִי בִּי אֲנִי דִבַּרְתִּי נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי
יְהוָה:

And you will drink it, and squeeze (it out), and its sherds you will
devour; and you will cut off your breasts, for I have spoken: utterance
of my lord Yahweh.
(Ezek 23:34)

²⁹⁷ Sokoloff 1974: 36.

²⁹⁸ Sokoloff 1974: 58.

²⁹⁹ Rendsburg 2006a: 170.

³⁰⁰ Levine 2000: 189.

³⁰¹ Cf. the NJPS translation of Ezek 23:34.

<p>שְׂרִיָּה בְּקִרְבָּהּ אֲרִיּוֹת שֹׁאֲגִים שֹׁפְטֵיהָ זֵאֲבֵי עָרֶב לֹא נֹרְמוּ לְבֹקֶר:</p>	<p>Her officers in her midts are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they do not <i>devour</i> until the morning. (Zeph 3:3)</p>
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Both are obscure passages, and provide little explanation as to why this peculiar verb was chosen in each instance. Not so with our verse from Numbers, however, as we shall see.

Aramaic evidence of verbal derivations from this root appears in the Targumim. The verb occurs with the meaning “strengthen,” comparable to Hebrew denominative verbs from the root עָצַם, as in the following example:³⁰²

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל־יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי־עָצַמְתָּ־מִמֶּנּוּ מְאֹד:
And Abimelek said to Isaac, “Go from among us, for you are much
stronger than we.”
(Gen 26:16, MT)

וַאֲמַר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לִיצְחָק לֵךְ מִן עִמָּנוּ הֲלֹא רַבִּית [var.: אַתְגַּרְמַתָּה] מִנִּי שְׂרִיר
And Abimelek said to Isaac, “Go from among us; are you not much
stronger than we?”
(Gen. 26:16, Samaritan Targum)

Here, an intralinear variant preserved in manuscript M of the Samaritan Targum³⁰³ employs an ʿEtpaʿal form of גָּרַם, which translates the Hebrew verb עָצַמְתָּ. In addition, note the Samaritan Targum’s rendering of the present verse, Num 24:8, particularly the preservation in some versions of the verb יָגַרַם, here with the meaning “devour” just as in the Hebrew text:

³⁰² This example is drawn from Tal 2000: 1:158.

³⁰³ See the apparatus in Tal 1980: 1:98–99. For specific details about manuscript M, see Tal 1980: 1:vii.

יֹאכֹל גּוֹיִם צָרָיו וְעַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרֹם וְחִצָּיו יִמְחֹץ:	He consumes nations, his oppressors, and their bones he devours, and (with) his arrows smites. (Num 24:8cde, MT)
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יִסִּיף גּוֹעִיָּה עֲאֻקִּי [var.: יִגְרֹם] וְגִרְמִיּוֹן יִרְסֹרֵס וְגִרְיוֹ יִמְעִי	He consumes nations, his oppressors, and their bones he destroys [var.: devours], and (with) his arrows smites. (Num 24:8cde, Samaritan Targum)
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The decision made in two Samaritan Aramaic manuscripts³⁰⁴ to retain the verb from the Hebrew text precisely as it appears, even while changing the noun עַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם to גִּרְמִיּוֹן, is striking. In fact, it emphasizes the remarkable situation present in the Hebrew verse: the collocation of עַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם and יִגְרֹם results in a pointing-up of the effect of the denominative verb, deriving as it does from the Aramaic analogue of the immediately preceding Hebrew noun. In this way, not only is an Aramaic-like flourish incorporated into Balaam's poetic utterance; in addition, this flourish calls attention to itself by playing upon the immediately surrounding context.

Num 24:15 (2x), 16: נָאֻם

See above, under Num 24:3 (2x), 4, 15 (2x), 16.

Num 24:15: שָׁתָם

See above, under Num 24:3, 15.

³⁰⁴ Manuscripts V and N, according to the apparatus in Tal 1980: 2:255. See Tal 1980: 1:vii for information on these manuscripts.

Items Not Included in This Study

The list of features examined in this chapter does not represent a comprehensive collection of all linguistic peculiarities in *Sefer Bil'am*, but rather only those for which we can establish a clear dialectal significance. This means that several tantalizing philological cruxes in the pericope have been omitted from this discussion. For instance, the enigmatic character of the unusual word יִרֵט (Num 22:32) invites close philological analysis, but the cognate evidence is far too thin to warrant a dialectal explanation for the term. The word אָנָן “misfortune” in Num 23:21 is a somewhat more promising case; but while Chen suggested it as a possible northernism,³⁰⁵ he felt that the evidence, which is entirely inner-biblical and attests Judahite as well as Israelian contexts for the term, was insufficient to make such a declaration outright.³⁰⁶

Still more significant is the unusual ending *i-* in the phrases בָּנוּ צֶפֶר (Num 23:18), בָּנוּ בְּעֵר (Num 24:3, 15), מְשֻׁמוּ אֵל (Num 24:23), most often interpreted as an anticipatory pronominal suffix,³⁰⁷ whose biblical distribution³⁰⁸ has led numerous scholars repeatedly to express the view that it is indicative of nonstandard dialect.³⁰⁹ But here too the evidence is extremely equivocal. Gregory A. Wolfe’s list of biblical attestations is far from comprehensive, citing only 23 instances, scarcely more than half of which (thirteen, by his reckoning) occur in clearly non-Judahite contexts; and

³⁰⁵ Chen 2000: 258–259.

³⁰⁶ See the preliminary remarks on Chen 2000: 252.

³⁰⁷ For בָּנוּ צֶפֶר and בָּנוּ בְּעֵר, see Sivan 1998: 104. For מְשֻׁמוּ אֵל, see Morag 1995: 65. Some maintain that this is a frozen case ending (see, e.g., Milgrom 1990: 321 n. 52; GKC p. 252 § 90k and 254 § 90o; and Joüon–Muraoka 2003: 1:284 § 93r).

³⁰⁸ For a broad examination of the occurrences of this feature in biblical Hebrew, see Robertson 1969.

³⁰⁹ Burney 1903: 209, 232; Davila 1990: 85; Wolfe 1997: 113–115. Polzin’s view (1976: 38–40) that this feature is a hallmark of LBH has been refuted by Rendsburg (1980: 67); but note the former’s passing remark that this feature was available as “a rare dialectal possibility” to the writers of SBH (Polzin 1976: 40).

his argument is fraught with problematic assumptions. C. F. Burney's observation, upon which James R. Davila later drew, compares a similar construction found in Syriac, but overlooks the wealth of additional cognate evidence indicating that this pattern is common across the Semitic languages.³¹⁰ Thus, although anticipatory suffixed pronouns are unusual, the evidence is insufficient to posit the construction's non-SBH character.³¹¹ The situation is similar with the indefinite usage of the (normally interrogative) pronoun *מה* (Num 23:3, 23, both times in the mouth of Balaam). A number of scholars have isolated this unusual feature as evidence of non-standard dialect, particularly on the basis of its attestations in both Phoenician and Aramaic.³¹² But the range of biblical occurrences, which falls across both Israelian and Judahite texts covering the breadth of the biblical period, may suggest that this locution, though infrequent in the Bible, is common to Northwest Semitic generally.

Beyond these examples, I refrain here from attempting further to produce an ostensibly comprehensive list of all items omitted from this study, since such a list ultimately would require me to render manifold arbitrary judgments about what actually constitutes a “crux” in the language of the text. Instead, it is sufficient simply to state that any other peculiarities that I have not examined here are absent due to insufficient or altogether nonexistent evidence for their non-SBH character. That said, however, we also must note that there is no reason to assume that the book on this

³¹⁰ See Brockelmann 1913: 2:225–228, which is cited in Rendsburg 1980: 67. Carl Brockelmann presented data not just from the Northwest Semitic family, but also from Ethiopic, Tigre, Akkadian, etc.

³¹¹ Note, however, that Rendsburg distinguished the similarly constructed periphrastic genitive in Song 3:7, *מִטָּהּ שֶׁל־לִמָּה* “the litter of Solomon,” as a demonstrably northern feature (Rendsburg 2003a: 24; Rendsburg 2006: 320).

³¹² Davila 1990: 85; Wolfe 1997: 112–113. See also Chen 2000: 257, and note the absence of this item from the comprehensive list of Israelian features presented in Rendsburg 2003a.

matter is now closed. Future research may yield additional items to be added to the list assembled here.

Assessment of the Available Evidence

In any case, since we are concerned here with linguistic peculiarities, it is worthwhile to organize the items discussed at length above in such a way as to delineate briefly the precise manners in which they deviate from SBH. To this end, I have arranged the evidence into the following three distinct typologies: philological, literary, and locational.

Typology #1: Philology

The first typology consists of four philological categories, within which the items constituting each group are arranged not by the order in which they occur in the pericope, as above, but rather in such a way as to facilitate the brief comments that follow the typological breakdown.

Categorical Breakdown

Phonology:

- P1. מִן־אֲרָם (Num 23:7) – Non-assimilation of *nûn* in preposition מִן before anarthrous noun (SBH equivalent: מֵאֲרָם)
- P2. נָטִי (Num 24:6) – Retention of consonantal *yôd* in IIIy 3mp Suffix Conjugation form (SBH equivalent: נָטוּ)
- P3. עִמָּהֶם (Num 22:12) – Non-elision of *hê* in 3mp suffix pronoun when attached to the preposition עִם (SBH equivalent: עִמָּם)

Morphology:

- M1. עֲצַמְתִּיהֶם (Num 24:8) – ending on fp noun with 3mp pronominal suffix (SBH equivalent: עֲצַמְתָּם)
- M2. הִרְרִי (Num 23:7) – Reduplicatory plural (i.e., internal *a*-plural) of geminate noun (SBH equivalent: הִרְרִי)

- M3. יִתְחַשֵּׁב (Num 23:9) – Root חשב in Hitpa^{el} stem with passive meaning (SBH: occurs as passive in Niph^{al}, but not Hitpa^{el})
- M4. נָחַשׁ (Num 23:23), נָחָשִׁים (Num 24:1) – Root נחש occurring in nominal form (SBH: only verbal)
- M5. פָּעַל (Num 23:23) – Root פעל occurring in verbal form (SBH: attested in nominal forms, but nonproductive as verbal root)
- M6. מְלָכָה (Num 24:7) – מלכה- morpheme not characteristic of SBH (SBH equivalent: מִמְלָכָה)

Lexicon:

- L1. רָבַע (Num 23:10) – cognate to Syriac ܪܒܘܥ (*rbwḥ*) and Samaritan Aramaic רבוע, with additional Akkadian and Arabic equivalents
- L2. עָדִי (Num 23:18) – עד cognate to Old Aramaic עדי, עדין, עדיא, attested in the Sefire treaty inscriptions
- L3. שָׁתַם (Num 24:3, 15) – The reading “pierced-open” is evident in postbiblical Galilean sources, whose Hebrew attests a range of Aramaic affinities
- L4. יָגַרַם (Num 24:8) – Denominative verbal root גרם related to Aramaic noun גָּרַם “bone”
- L5. נָחַלִים (Num 24:6) – נחל cognate to Arabic نخل “palm tree,” rather than نحل “wadi”
- L6. רָגַלִים (Num 22:28, 32, 33) – To be interpreted here as “times,” as attested in other Semitic languages; cf. JBA רגל “be usual, frequent” (contrast SBH פְּעָמִים “times” in Num 24:10)

Syntax and Style:

- S1. וְנֹאם (Num 24:3 [2x], 4, 15 [2x], 16) – Used in conjunction with a human speaker (SBH: only used in conjunction with God)
- S2. וְנִבְעוֹת // צָרִים (Num 23:9) – Less common term נִבְעוֹת appears as A-term here, thus replacing the usual SBH word pair וְהָרִים // גְּבָעוֹת
- S3. מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num 23:10) – Antithetically parallels Aramaic curse phrases such as מוֹת לַחַה and מִמַּתָּתָה

The first two features in the *Phonology* category (מִן-אֶרֶם; וְנָטִיּוֹ)

orthographically display phonological qualities that distinguish them from normative

SBH. The third item (עֲמָהֶם) bears a somewhat stronger morphological component, due to its possible connection to the Aramaic 3mp suffix -הֶם.³¹³ However, because it is plausible that Aramaic -הֶם and Hebrew ׁ - represent distinct phonological realizations of the same underlying Proto-Semitic morpheme, I tend toward characterizing this feature as a matter of non-elision (a phonological issue), rather than of the use of a truly independent morpheme. As a consequence, I include it here rather than in the morphological group.

The *Morphology* category includes dialectal features exhibiting a range of types. As noted, the first (עֲצֻמְתֵּיהֶם) bears some similarity to item P3 (עֲמָהֶם). To reiterate, Hurvitz saw עֲצֻמְתֵּיהֶם and like forms as possibly resulting equally from an external relationship with Aramaic -הֶם, on the one hand, and an analogical internal connection to the Hebrew ending -יָהֶם that occurs when a 3mp suffix is attached to a mp noun, on the other.³¹⁴ Thus, this form bears both phonological and morphological components. However, because the feature's distinctive character involves more than just the phonological issue arising in conjunction with the ending -הֶם, indicated above, and includes the intervening monophthong -יָ- as well, to my mind it is to be seen predominantly as a morphological issue. Moving on in this group, the second feature (הֶרֶרִי) involves a distinct morphological realization of a common SBH word. The third, fourth, and fifth items (פָּעַל; נָחַשׁ; יִתְחַשֵּׁב) constitute the largest subgroup in this category. These are words derived from roots that are attested in SBH, but not in the morphological forms they take here. The final item in this category (מִלְכָּת) is a word exhibiting a discrete morpheme associated specifically with Aramaic and LBH, but not with normative Hebrew.

³¹³ See Hurvitz 1982: 25 and Rendsburg 1988: 118.

³¹⁴ Hurvitz 1982: 25.

The *Lexicon* category consists primarily of words whose roots are entirely unattested in SBH. The first four items (עָדִי; רִבֵּעַ; שָׁתֵם; יִגְרֵם) fit this description. The fifth word (נָחֵלִים) is unattested in Aramaic, but other cognate evidence and the term's inner-biblical distribution combine to indicate the term's non-SBH character, and permit us at least to speculate that an Aramaic connection may have existed. The final item in this group (רִנָּה) is distinct from the others in that the lexeme itself is common SBH, but here exhibits a semantic value unattested in normative Hebrew.³¹⁵

Three items of various types are collected under the *Syntax and Style* heading. The first item (נָאֵם) is well known from SBH, but occurs in this pericope in a distinctive context characteristic both of non-normative Hebrew and of extrabiblical usages in the cognate languages. The second feature (גְּבָעוֹת // צָרִים) is peculiar not because of the individual words, but because it involves an unusually formulated word pair. The last item in the group (מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל) is an idiomatic phrase that has no parallel in the Bible, and indeed none in the Canaanite sphere prior to the Second Temple Period, but bears a clear relationship to the phraseology of some Old Aramaic tomb inscriptions such as those from Nerab.

Discussion: Juxtaposition of SBH and non-SBH Features

This linguistic typology reveals a remarkably even distribution of deviations from SBH across a range of linguistic aspects. To be sure, this does much to dispel the possibility that these individual phenomena, along with the observations of numerous scholars about their character and significance, are either accidents of discovery due to a limited (or corrupt) data set, or features deriving from the modern perspectives

³¹⁵ In my opinion, it is unfruitful to isolate this term as the sole member of a separate “semantic” or “lexicosemantic” category.

applied to the text, rather than qualities inherent in the primary material itself. Nevertheless, while we thus may feel confident in our identification of these features, it is another matter entirely to posit that they constitute an intentional facet of the text's composition. Thus, given that the perspective of this dissertation from the outset has been that these sundry dialectal usages are employed in the pericope in the service of two discrete literary devices, which we have called style-switching and setting-switching, it is important to marshal all available evidence in support of the notion that these features have been incorporated consciously into the composition of the text. Some general comments to this effect appeared at the end of the previous chapter. Now, having laid out and discussed the specific linguistic data occupying our attention, we have an opportunity to observe a more concrete manifestation of the intentionality of these devices, by examining how certain of the dialectal features isolated here interact with specific corresponding elements in the surrounding text.

In addition to the simple fact of their linguistic peculiarity, a number of non-SBH features in *Sefer Bil'am* draw further attention to themselves by means of a juxtaposition, in each case, with some kind of contrasting SBH analogue. While in some cases the nonstandard feature and its standard analogue occur in close proximity to one another, other instances of this linkage connect points separated by a considerable quantity of intervening material. In these longer cases, the uptake of such a contrasting relationship can be experienced by the audience only in the course of its apprehension of large segments of the text, or even of the pericope as a whole. Here I describe briefly each such relationship that I have identified in the pericope.

The non-SBH word גָּרַם in Num 24:8, a denominative verb from the Aramaic word גָּרַם “bone,” follows immediately on the SBH word עָצָם “bone” (the form in the verse is עֲצָמָתֵיהֶם). This is unique among the three biblical attestations of verbs deriving from the root גָּרַם. In Ezek 23:34, the object of the verb is תַּרְשִׁיָּה “its shards,”

while in Zeph 3:3 no object is specified (in addition to which the verb is in the Qal, not the Pi^lel). Only here does such a close semantic relationship exist between the verb and its object. Hence, this relationship between יָגֵרִם and the immediately preceding word lends particular emphasis to the unusual quality of the verb.

Occurring over a slightly greater distance, though still within the confines of a single verse, is the connection between the word נָחָלִים in Num 24:6 and the various terms for bodies of water in the subsequent lines. As shown above in the body of this chapter, the appropriate rendering of this word in its present context is “palm trees,” in parallel with the floral terms that begin each of the next three cola: גִּנּוֹת “gardens,” אֶהְלִים “aloes,”³¹⁶ and אֶרְזִים “cedars.” I already have detailed the likely dialectal significance of the word נָחָלִים in this context. However, as noted above, Morag pointed out the possibility that wordplay is afoot here, since the word’s alternative meaning “wadis, streams” connects it semantically to the terms נָהָר “river” and מַיִם “water,” which also occur in the immediately following cola.³¹⁷ Thus, whereas the word נָחָלִים must be understood here to mean “palm trees,” a reading in which the term’s non-SBH character resides, nevertheless the “usual” meaning “wadis, streams,” which otherwise might remain only in the very back of the audience’s mind, is brought forward by the ensuing references to water. Thus, if Morag’s suggestion is to be entertained, this hinted wordplay serves to draw further attention to the non-SBH term.

Also occurring across parallel cola is the juxtaposition evident in Num 23:7, where the non-SBH locution מִן-אֶרֶם, in which the *nûn* of the preposition מִן is retained

³¹⁶ In the context of the present discussion, one wonders what significance, other than mere soundplay, lies in the use here of the term אֶהְלִים “aloes,” in close proximity to the word אֶהְלִיךָ “your tents” (v. 5). However, neither I nor the scholars who have preceded me have detected any reason to view either term as bearing any dialectal significance. Consequently, however one interprets this situation, it appears to be outside the present scope.

³¹⁷ Morag 1995: 58–60. See also above, n. 254.

before an anarthrous noun, is paralleled in the next colon with the usual formation *מִהֶרְרִי*, where the *nûn* disappears in favor of compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel, due to the *hê* that follows. Precisely the same situation is evident elsewhere in the biblical corpus, in both prose and poetry, as demonstrated by two of the examples I have cited already with regard to this dialectal feature:³¹⁸

כְּצִפּוֹר נוֹדֶדֶת מִן־קִנָּה כְּאִישׁ נוֹדֵד מִמְּקוֹמוֹ:	As a bird wanders from (the) nest, so a man wanders from his place. (Pr 27:8)
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וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲלֹא מִמִּצְרַיִם וּמִן־הָאֱמֹרִי וּמִן־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וּמִן־פְּלִשְׁתִּים:
 And Yahweh said to the people of Israel, “Did (I) not (deliver you)
 from Egypt and from the Amorite(s) and from the people of Ammon
 and from (the) Philistines?”
 (Judg 10:11)

Note that both examples derive from contexts where non-SBH features might be expected: the first is in Proverbs, whose IH character has been established; and the example from Judges occurs in the course of a narrative set in Gilead. The first instance exhibits precisely the same juxtaposition as our verse from Numbers, with the non-SBH feature occurring first and the SBH analogue occurring second. In the prose example, the preposition *מִן* appears four times: first, assimilation occurs as expected; second, the object of the preposition is definite, so no assimilation occurs; and in the third and fourth instances the non-standard form occurs, with no assimilation despite the anarthrous object in both cases. These examples from outside of *Sefer Bil'am* drive home the impression that the juxtaposition evident in Num 23:7 is an intentional one that follows an established pattern.

³¹⁸ See above, pp. 86 and 87.

The non-SBH form **יִתְחַשֵּׁב**, in the phrase **לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב** “is not reckoned” in Num 23:9, occurs toward the end of Balaam’s first oracle. But it is not until near the end of the second oracle that we encounter its SBH counterpart, namely the word **יִתְנַשֵּׂא** “rouses itself” (NJPS prefers “leaps up,” but this obscures the potentially reflexive sense of the stem) in Num 23:24. That is to say, the word **יִתְחַשֵּׁב** is a Hitpa^ʿel that is to be understood in the passive, as argued earlier in this chapter; but it is juxtaposed with **יִתְנַשֵּׂא**, a Hitpa^ʿel with the “usual” reflexive or middle voice. While it may appear at first glance that the connection I draw between these two terms is one of superficial convenience, I hasten to point out the following other parallels between the respective couplets in which the words appear.³¹⁹ First, each of these couplets begins with the phrase **הֵן-עַם**. Second, the second word of each couplet prominently features the alliterative combination **לֵב**. Third, certain morphological features are shared by both couplets: specifically, the first colon of each ends with a Qal verb in the prefix conjugation, and the second colon of each begins with the combination *wâw*–uniconsonantal preposition–noun. Finally, the couplet in question in the first oracle is expanded into a full strophe (comprised of a pair of couplets) in the second oracle—one of a series of such expansions occurring between these two poems. Thus, the relationship between the two Hitpa^ʿel forms should not be seen as merely coincidental, but rather, in light of the additional relationships evident in the words’ respective contexts, as yet another conscious interplay between Balaam’s first and second oracles that revolves around the fronting of one of the linguistic peculiarities presented in this chapter.

³¹⁹ All of these relationships are detailed in Chapter 5, when I address the matter of structure in Balaam’s oracles.

The next juxtaposition of a dialectally significant feature with its SBH analogue occurs over a still greater distance, and even more significantly, occurs in prose rather than poetry. As discussed in this chapter, in the account of Balaam's journey from his homeland to the region of Palestine (Num 22:21–35) the term רָגְלִים occurs three times (vv. 28, 32, 33) with the meaning “times,” once in the mouth of Balaam's jenny and twice in that of the messenger of Yahweh. In contrast, Balaq uses the term פְּעָמַיִם in 24:10 with the same meaning. As noted above, the literary connection between the encounter between Balaam and Balaq and the story of Balaam and his donkey will be explored in the coming chapters. Meanwhile, one notes that this linkage in itself contributes to this overall literary picture, and it does so by realizing a philological distinction between a Syrian setting and a Palestinian one, or alternatively between characters speaking in and/or heralding from those locales. Moreover, one notes the span of material across which this device is utilized. Such a linkage reveals a broadly focused interweaving of the story of Balaam and Balaq and the prose material that precedes it, by connecting the introductory portion of *Sefer Bil'am* to a distant point near the end of the pericope.

The interaction of the words נְחָשׁ and קֶסֶם across the pericope also fits well into the present discussion. Although it probably is inappropriate to view these terms as truly discrete SBH and non-SBH analogues of one another, the dialectal significance of the term נְחָשׁ has been demonstrated above, and thus its juxtaposition with the term קֶסֶם—particularly in Num 23:23, in which the terms occur in parallel—creates much the same effect as the other relationships identified here. Indeed, as an extension of the parallelism in the poetic couplet just mentioned, the terms also create an additional link that connects two prose portions of the pericope. I refer specifically to the use of the term קֶסֶם in Num 22:7 and that of the term נְחָשִׁים in Num 24:1. In Num 22:7, Balaq's messengers, here identified as “the elders of Moab and the elders

of Midian” (וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן וְזִקְנֵי מִזְרָאֵל), are described as having “*qasāmîm* in their hands” (וְקֶסָמִים בְּיָדָם). The precise sense of this statement is debated, with some views interpreting the term קֶסָמִים as either “fees for divination” “tools for divination,” while others read the entire expression as “versed in divination,” that is, “with divination in their power (hand).”³²⁰ Victor Hurowitz suggested that the phrase be interpreted literally as “divinations in their hands,” referring to objects produced by or in association with the divinatory process, on the basis of parallels from Mari.³²¹ In any case, the expression clearly indicates the elders’ comfort with relying in some capacity, whether direct or indirect, on this magical practice. This contrasts with the statement in Num 24:1, where it is indicated—after the fact—that Balaam’s prior two oracles have relied on *nəḥāšîm*, and that at this point Balaam refrains from further employment of this practice (וְלֹא־הָלַךְ בְּפִעַם־בְּפִעַם לְקִרְאֵת נְחָשִׁים).

These two verses from the pericope’s prose material both connect to the poetic couple in 23:23, in which Balaam states that the people of Israel do not engage in these two magical practices, because the divine will is revealed directly to them without the need for such mediating activities:

כִּי לֹא־נֶחֱשׁ בְּיַעֲקֹב	For there is no augury in Jacob,
וְלֹא־קֶסֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and no divination in Israel:
בְּעֵת יֵאמָר לְיַעֲקֹב	At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob
וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה־פָּעַל אֱלֹהִים:	and to Israel what God has done.

³²⁰ For a concise summary of the range of opinions, see Hurowitz 1992: 5–7.

³²¹ Hurowitz 1992: 12–13.

The interaction between the poetic and prosaic usages of these two terms is highlighted by the chiastic structure of their arrangement, as revealed in the following table (note especially the plural endings):

Table 1: Chiasm involving נחש(ים) and קסם(ים)

	Num 22:7	Num 23:23a	Num 23:23b	Num 24:1
Prose	קְסָמִים (elders)			נְחָשִׁים (Balaam <i>no longer</i>)
Poetry		נְחָשׁ	קָסָם	

Thus, the juxtaposition of Balaam and the elders in the prose is emphasized by the parallel use of the terms נחש and קסם in the poetry. The elders are described as involving themselves with *qasāmîm* (Num 22:7); but although Balaam relies on *nəḥāšîm* initially, after pronouncing the oracle in which the above strophe appears he desists in his reliance on this practice (Num 24:1). His reasons for doing so are unclear; we do not know whether he comes to believe that the practice is taboo, futile, or simply unnecessary. In any case, with regard to such magical activity, Balaam heeds his own prophetic voice, as it were, and shifts his practical orientation from that of magical practitioners, such as the elders, to that of Israel. In addition, the narrator's withholding mention of Balaam's previous reliance on *nəḥāšîm* until Num 24:1 causes this pattern, and the chiasm that supports it, to remain completely obscure until this moment. Here the entire scheme is simultaneously revealed and undone, since in the same moment that it becomes apparent we see Balaam abandon this practice from this point forward.

It is worthwhile also to note that Albright preferred to read the preposition -כּ in the first couplet of Num 23:23 as “against” rather than “in.”³²² I disagree, and maintain that the second couplet of the strophe demonstrates that the issue at stake here is the absence of *naḥaš* and *qesem in Israel*, rather than the ineffectuality *others’* use of these practices *against* Israel. Nevertheless, the way these terms are employed in the prose suggests that a double meaning is not out of the question. The messengers in Num 22:7 bear the words and, by extension, the will of Balaq—namely, to do Israel harm by magical means; and although their possession of *qasāmîm* is never directly connected to their desire or ability to accomplish this, the reference to it here is firmly embedded in the description of their efforts to persuade Balaam to come and assist in accomplishing the desired goal. Balaam, for his part, recognizes his own limitations, and states repeatedly that he can only proceed as directed by God.³²³ Nevertheless, twice he employs *nəḥāšîm* in an attempt to achieve what Balaq has brought him to do. Thus one has the sense that both practices have been used, directly or indirectly, against Israel—futilely, one notes—in the course of the prose narrative. As a result, the alternative reading of -כּ as “against” in the poetic couplet in question may be a legitimate reading—though in my view clearly a secondary one, as noted above—that calls attention to the events recorded in the prose.

Although this pattern of relationships appears to be limited to only a handful of dialectal features and their SBH counterparts, it is a striking demonstration of the conscious and careful use of such features in the pericope as a whole. Indeed, in one particular case, namely the non-assimilation of the *nûn* in the preposition כּ before an anarthrous noun in Num 23:7, the notion of this pattern’s intentionality is bolstered

³²² Albright 1944: 215 n. 49.

³²³ On these recurring statements, see below, pp. 424–428.

still further by the supporting examples of the same phenomenon drawn from elsewhere in the Bible. In the end, this series of SBH–non-SBH juxtapositions in *Sefer Bil'am* stands as a concrete piece of evidence that accords completely with the independent observations of several scholars regarding the deliberate use of dialect as a literary tool in the Bible, as detailed in the previous chapter. Thus, while the true skeptic may equivocate on the matter of indisputable *proof* of intentionality with regard to the dialectal features that occur in the text, in my view this combination of independent scholarly perspectives and concrete evidence is sufficiently preponderant to render such a conclusion persuasive.

Typology #2: Literary Usage

As a result, we may create a second typology, in which our collected linguistic peculiarities are organized according to whether each is to be associated with style-switching or setting-switching. The result is as follows:

The literary employment of these deviations may be mapped out as follows. All items occurring in the poetic oracles are to be seen as style-switching features, with only a single exception, by the reckoning presented in the body of this chapter. Similarly, all but one of the items occurring in the prose of the pericope serve as setting-switching elements.

Categorical Breakdown

Style-switching:

- I. מִן־אֲרָם (Num 23:7)
- II. הָרָרִי (Num 23:7)
- III. צָרִים // גְּבָעוֹת (Num 23:9)
- IV. יִתְחַשֵּׁב (Num 23:9)
- V. רִבֵּעַ (Num 23:10)
- VI. מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num 23:10)
- VII. עֲדִי (Num 23:18)

- VIII. נַחֲשׁ (Num 23:23)
- IX. נֶאֱסַם (Num 24:3 [2x], 4, 15 [2x], 16)
- X. שָׁתָם (Num 24:3, 15)
- XI. נֶחָלִים (Num 24:6)
- XII. נִטְיִי (Num 24:6)
- XIII. מִלְכָּת (Num 24:7)
- XIV. עֲצֻמֹּתֵיהֶם (Num 24:8)
- XV. יִגְרָם (Num 24:8)

Setting-switching:

- i. עֲמָהֶם (Num 22:12)
- ii. רִגְלֵיהֶם (Num 22:28, 32, 33)
- iii. פָּעַל (Num 23:23)
- iv. נֶחָשִׁים (Num 24:1)

As indicated at the appropriate points earlier in this chapter, one might make the case that certain of the items in the *Style-switching* group belong with the *Setting-switching* group. In the case of the word שָׁתָם, for example, the indirect circumstantial connection with Aramaic could indicate that this non-SBH feature reflects the story's foreign setting rather than the speaker's Aramean origin. Similarly, one might prefer to see the word פָּעַל as an *unintentional* dialectal vestige, carried over from whatever Gileadite traditions likely served as the catalyst for the biblical *Sefer Bil'am*, and thereby excise it entirely from the discussion of deliberate setting-switching devices at work in the pericope. I have arranged the items here according to my own predilection, but acknowledge the possibility of this kind of fluidity in the categories. Be that as it may, however, this typology as a whole paints the overall picture of how these two devices are implemented across the pericope.

Discussion: Notes on the Pericope's Authorial Context

This being the case, assuming that one accepts the notion that dialect has been utilized intentionally in *Sefer Bil'am*, one similarly must concede that the “default”

linguistic perspective evident in the text—the standard from which these linguistic peculiarities deviate—is Judahite. This is an important observation, because it contrasts with the tantalizing first impression put forward by scholars such as Wolfe. His study, in which he acknowledged *en passant* the possibility of style-switching in this pericope but did not consider its implications, assesses *Sefer Bil'am* as follows:

It is...likely that the stories of characters such as Balaam would be preserved by those people who lived nearest to the events and people involved in the stories. ... The similarities in grammar and lexicon between the Deir Alla texts and the accounts of Balaam in Numbers 22–24³²⁴ are great enough that the latter will be considered a non-Judahite text for the purposes of this study.³²⁵

One hardly can find fault with Wolfe's perception of the Deir 'Allā material and its parallels with our biblical text as indicative of some sort of connection between the latter and the region of Gilead, where the extrabiblical Balaam traditions were recorded for posterity. But the evidence presented in this dissertation reveals that his statement is rather like a chainsaw doing the work of a scalpel. Upon close inspection of the linguistic data, we encounter a picture that by no means eradicates the ties between *Sefer Bil'am* and the Gileadite sphere, to be sure, but that situates the provenance of the biblical text, as it stands, in the Judahite sphere. In short, it *is* a Judahite text, notwithstanding either its connection to Deir 'Allā or its use of non-Judahite dialect.

How do we explain this point from a historical perspective? As noted above, a small piece of temporal evidence may reside in the Old Aramaic orthography of the

³²⁴ Wolfe's statement refers to the remarks of Kaufman (1988: 54), which he cited previously.

³²⁵ Wolfe 1997: 44–45.

word צָרִים in Num 23:9, as opposed to the later Aramaic practice of rendering /z/ as ט (thus here we would have טָרִים). Though this datum is too minute to be instructive on its own, it comports nicely with the proposed 8th-century-BCE date of the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions.³²⁶ If we take this, then, as possible approximation of the date of *Sefer Bilʿam*, we find in this precise timeframe a ready explanation for the Judahite “ground” of the pericope as a whole.

This historical context certainly would have seen a stream of refugees from Gilead and other central Levantine regions entering Judah in response to the presence in the region of the Neo-Assyrian armies of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE). Indeed, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman pointed out that the archaeological evidence reveals a dramatic increase in the population of Judah in precisely this period: “...[I]n a few decades in the late eighth century Jerusalem grew in size from c. 6 to c. 60 hectares and in population from around 1000 inhabitants to over 10,000.... The number of settlements in the hill country to the south of Jerusalem swelled from perhaps 34 in the Iron IIA to 122 in the late eighth century....”³²⁷ As for the interpretation of this evidence, they stated, “The only reasonable way to explain this sudden and unprecedented demographic growth is as a result of a flow of refugees from the North into Judah....”³²⁸ This flow would have reached its peak in 722 following the conquest of the northern kingdom,³²⁹ but should be seen as having

³²⁶ In the *editio princeps*, J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (1976: 96) proposed a late 8th-century date. More recently, Levine (2000: 209) summarized the current consensus that the inscriptions date to the first half of the 8th century.

³²⁷ Finkelstein–Silberman 2006: 265.

³²⁸ Finkelstein–Silberman 2006: 266.

³²⁹ Finkelstein–Silberman 2006: 266.

begun in earnest as early as the 730s, in association with the prosperity brought about by Judah's incorporation into the Assyrian economic sphere under Ahaz.³³⁰

Presumably, this influx of northern refugees would have brought with it stories about prominent traditional figures such as Balaam, which in turn may have provided a rich literary–folkloric tradition from which Judahite scribes could have drawn significant elements of both style and content. Indeed, as noted above, one even might posit the setting-switching feature *לַעֲרֹב* in Num 23:23 as evidence of a direct literary link between *Sefer Bil'am* and the traditions represented at Deir 'Allā, based on the link between the biblical line in question and the remarkably similar clause in DAPT I:5.³³¹ In general terms, this would accord precisely with Finkelstein and Silberman's view that the Judahite boom that took place during this period is to be seen as a time of great literary production, in association with the flourishing economy and the spread of literacy.³³² This historical context stands, therefore, as a particularly promising time for the development of *Sefer Bil'am*.

It is worthwhile also to note briefly an entirely different treatment of these historical matters offered by Al Wolters, in which he attempted to explain in one fell swoop both the distinctive language of the Deir 'Allā material and the biblical statements of Balaam's Aramean origin.³³³ He posited that the residents of Deir 'Allā actually were Aramean deportees who had been moved into the region by the Assyrians, and whose language was a kind of proto-Northwest Semitic that predated

³³⁰ Finkelstein–Silberman 2006: 264–265.

³³¹ See above, pp. 137–139.

³³² Finkelstein–Silberman 2006: 277. Although their examination is concerned primarily with showing that the Davidic history in the books of Samuel dates to this period, and not to the late 10th century as commonly believed, their argument nevertheless stands in the present context. For an extended study of the late 8th century as a literary *floruit* in Judah, see Schniedewind 2004.

³³³ Wolters 1988.

the eventual split between the Aramaic and Canaanite dialectal spheres. Wolters's approach is noteworthy for its attempt to situate the Balaam traditions in the historical stream; but unfortunately there is little to commend his argument, particularly on linguistic grounds. Thus, the historical perspective stated above stands, notwithstanding Wolters's hypothesis.

Typology #3: Location Within Sefer Bil'am

Additional observations about the origin of *Sefer Bil'am* are possible on the basis of a third typological breakdown of the features identified here. This arrangement categorized the items according to the section of the pericope into which each falls, whether prose or one of the poetic oracles.

Categorical Breakdown

Prose Sections – Num 22:2–23:7a; 23:11–18a; 23:25–24:3a; 24:10–15a, 20a, 21a, 23a, 25:

- Pa. עֲמֵהֶם (Num 22:12)
- Pb. רִגְלֵים (Num 22:28, 32, 33)
- Pc. נַחֲשִׁים (Num 24:1)

First Oracle – Num 23:7b–10:

- 1a. מִן־אֲרָם (Num 23:7)
- 1b. הֶרְרִי (Num 23:7)
- 1c. צָרִים // גְּבֻעוֹת (Num 23:9)
- 1d. יִתְחַשֵּׁב (Num 23:9)
- 1e. רִבֵּעַ (Num 23:10)
- 1f. מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num 23:10)

Second Oracle – Num 23:18b–24:

- 2a. עָדִי (Num 23:18)
- 2b. נַחֲשׁ (Num 23:23)
- 2c. פָּעֵל (Num 23:23)

Third Oracle – Num 24:3b–9:

- 3a. נָאָם (Num 24:3 [2x], 4)
- 3b. שְׁתֵּם (Num 24:3)
- 3c. נְחָלִים (Num 24:6)
- 3d. נְטִיז (Num 24:6)
- 3e. מְלָכָה (Num 24:7)
- 3f. עֲצַמְתֵּיהֶם (Num 24:8)
- 3g. יִגְרֶם (Num 24:8)

Fourth Oracle – Num 24:15b–19:

- 4a. נָאָם (Num 24:15 [2x], 16)
- 4b. שְׁתֵּם (Num 24:15)

Discussion: Cohesiveness of the Pericope

Upon examining this third typology, one is struck by the minimal use of dialectal features in the fourth oracle, and the subsequent brief poetic codas, despite an array of puzzling lexical items and toponyms therein. Indeed, the only dialectally significant items occurring in the fourth poem come as part of the introductory formula that, to all appearances, has been borrowed and expanded from the preceding oracle;³³⁴ and the brief poetic addenda at the close of the pericope do not evince any features of this kind.

On this basis, one might suggest that style-switching has not been applied in the later sections to nearly the same extent as in the previous oracles, and hence that between Balaam's third poetic speech and those that follow there exists some type of literary seam. This runs directly counter to the traditional source-critical view, which takes *both* the third and fourth oracles as representative of J, and the oldest poems in the pericope, with the subsequent brief sections having been appended at some later

³³⁴ Levine (2000: 193) interpreted this section as restored in the third oracle on the basis of the fourth; but this has minimal effect on the point being made here.

point.³³⁵ The data presented here pose a problem for such a view: if the fourth oracle and subsequent sections are noteworthy for their lack of style-switching features, then it remains to explain the totally different situation in the third oracle, wherein appear plentiful attestations of this device.

Moreover, it is important not to overstate the force of the linguistic evidence in support of the widespread view that the brief coda sections, in particular, were not originally of a piece with the rest of the pericope, but represent later additions. It is worthwhile especially to note the total absence in this supposedly late material of characteristics associated specifically with LBH. Only the anticipatory pronominal suffix in the phrase **לְאֵלֹהִים** (Num 24:23) constitutes a feature adduced by Polzin as indicative of LBH,³³⁶ and given the attestations of this construction across the Semitic languages generally,³³⁷ Polzin's argument does not stand.³³⁸ In fact, others have interpreted this feature as an "archaic-poetic construct form."³³⁹

However, even if we establish with certainty the antiquity of Balaam's fourth oracle and the brief poetic codas that follow, the question of their connection to the rest of the pericope remains somewhat open, for it still may be argued that they were appended to the preceding material at a later date. As it happens, the linguistic data are insufficient to contest such a perspective, although one notes that while the application of style-switching in these sections is reduced greatly, it does not disappear altogether. However, what such a view fails to provide is an explanation of how these sections work literarily *in conjunction* with the rest of the pericope. The text itself explicitly

³³⁵ See, e.g., Mowinckel 1930: 235; and also Campbell–O'Brien 1993: 159 n. 176, wherein Noth's view regarding the coda sections is detailed.

³³⁶ Polzin 1976: 38–40.

³³⁷ See Brockelmann 1913: 2:225–228, which is cited also in Rendsburg 1980: 67.

³³⁸ I have discussed this matter above, pp. 169–170.

³³⁹ Alter 2004: 807. See also Morag 1995: 65.

calls attention to the distinctive character of the fourth oracle, possibly including the subsequent codas: Balaam himself explains that unlike the previous three oracles, his remaining prophetic speech will be overtly predictive (Num 24:14). This statement serves to distance the fourth oracle from the third, supposedly its fellow representative of the J material in the pericope, while strengthening the perception that the fourth oracle and the subsequent sections which share this predictive quality, are to be seen

Table 2: Typological Synopsis of Dialectal Features in *Sefer Bil'am*

Verse	Feature	Philological Siglum	Literary Siglum	Locational Siglum
Num 22:12	עֲמָהֶם	P3	i	Pa
Num 22:28	רָגִלִים	L6	ii	Pb
Num 22:32	רָגִלִים	L6	ii	Pb
Num 22:33	רָגִלִים	L6	ii	Pb
Num 23:7	מִן־אֲרָם הָרָרִי	P1	I	1a
		M2	II	1b
Num 23:9	גְּבָעוֹת // צָרִים יִתְחַשֵּׁב	S2	III	1c
		M3	IV	1d
Num 23:10	רִבְעַע מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	L1	V	1e
		S3	VI	1f
Num 23:18	עָדִי	L2	VII	2a
Num 23:23	נָחַשׁ פָּעַל	M4	VIII	2b
		M5	iii	2c
Num 24:1	נָחָשִׁים	M4	iv	Pc
Num 24:3	נָאֵם	S1	IX	3a
	נָאֵם	S1	IX	3a
	שָׁתָם	L3	X	3b
Num 24:4	נָאֵם	S1	IX	3a
Num 24:6	נָחֳלִים נָטִיו	L5	XI	3c
		P2	XII	3d
Num 24:7	מַלְכָּת	M6	XIII	3e
Num 24:8	עֲצַמְתֵּיהֶם יָגֵרָם	M1	XIV	3f
		L4	XV	3g
Num 24:15	נָאֵם	S1	IX	4a
	נָאֵם	S1	IX	4a
	שָׁתָם	L3	X	4b
Num 24:16	נָאֵם	S1	IX	4a

as a group. In addition, however, it bridges the contrast between the poetic material in the earlier three oracles and that appearing at the end, such that the disruptive force of this disjunction is neutralized enough for the pericope to hold together. Consequently, I submit that an awareness of the relationship between this material and its context is at least as important as a recognition of its divergence. This and many similar issues will occupy our attention in great detail in the coming chapters, as we proceed to assess such questions from the standpoint of the literary aspects of the pericope.

In the meantime, for the sake of convenience, the three typologies presented here are summarized in Table 2, presented above, which lists all linguistic features discussed in this chapter in the order they appear, together with a synopsis of their sigla in each of the typological schemata.

The two devices examined here, style-switching and setting-switching, eminently contribute to the literary character of the text by means of perhaps the most basic element of which the text is constituted, namely, language. Thus we see in this aspect of our pericope a marvelously rich blending of facets refracting equally in lower- and higher-critical perspectives on *Sefer Bil'am*. Having thus situated the use of dialect—a fundamentally philological aspect of the text—within the overarching literary discussion, in the subsequent chapters we will delve more deeply into the full range of literary qualities that arise in the pericope.

CHAPTER 4
LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON *SEFER BILʿAM*:
BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Introductory Remarks

Having presented detailed linguistic evidence for style-switching and setting-switching in *Sefer Bilʿam* and examined the implications of these devices for our understanding of the text, in the next three chapters I offer a broader examination of the various literary components at work in this pericope. Chapter 4 undertakes a general review of the development of literary approaches in modern biblical studies, devoting special attention to their arrival as a response to established critical methods. Chapter 5 presents data from the pericope pertaining to a series of specific literary devices such as keywords, ambiguity, repetition with variation, allusion, and so on. Because of the wide range of material to be examined, in conjunction with each data type I will present the pertinent theoretical background in a brief discussion introducing the section to follow. In Chapter 6, I bring these data together in a thematic examination of the pericope, and explore how these specific elements are employed as the building blocks of the larger ideas expressed in the text. In this way, the methods and perspectives that have appeared piecemeal in prior literary scholarship on the Bible, including both general theoretical works and those in which this pericope garners specific attention, are united here in an overarching assessment of *Sefer Bilʿam* as a whole.

In addition, although the primary goal of my research is not to level an attack against source criticism, from time to time the discussion will provide occasion for a critique of this approach, and ultimately will provide an alternative way of looking at

this pericope that focuses not on its disparate precursors and editorial layers, but on the character and operation of the entire text as a unified literary whole.

Buber, Auerbach, and the Inception of Large-scale Literary Analysis of the Bible

There can be no doubt that modern literary approaches to the Bible are indebted, in broad terms if not by direct connection, to the early-20th-century contributions of Martin Buber. Critical at times of traditional source criticism, Buber believed that “the interpreter had to go beyond the fragmentation of the Bible which the documentary hypothesis caused and seek the hints of unity throughout a section or book of the Bible.”¹ To this end, he endeavored to combine the historical-critical methods of the day with his unique sensitivity to the literary aspects of the material, as exemplified specifically in his recognition of keywords (*Leitwörter*) that help convey important concepts in biblical narrative, both within passages of limited size and across lengthy stretches of text.² His initial efforts culminated in a German translation of the Torah, produced in the late 1920s by Buber and his friend, the theologian Franz Rosenzweig, with Buber alone completing the rest of the Tanakh in the subsequent decades. In association with this translation, the two men developed an extensive array of ideas about translation theory and biblical literature, which were published as a series of essays in 1936, in a volume entitled *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*.³

Buber’s work invited future generations to perceive the literature of the Bible in new ways, and to pay close attention to expressive nuances, such as keywords, that previously had gone largely unremarked. In 1946, Erich Auerbach took up this

¹ Kepnes 1996: 188 n. 12.

² On this concept and its original formulation by Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, see below, pp. 306–307.

³ Buber–Rosenzweig 1936.

challenge, and embarked on a hitherto unprecedented approach to understanding biblical narrative. The first chapter of his volume *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, entitled “Odysseus’ Scar,”⁴ presented a lengthy comparison of the book of Genesis and the *Odyssey*, two pillars of ancient literature whose respective narrative styles are, in a word, “antithetical,”⁵ juxtaposed according to their wholly “different conception[s] of the elevated style and of the sublime.”⁶ He began by recalling the scene in Book 19 of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus has finally come home, but aims to hide his identity from Penelope. Noting that every small detail of setting, action, and innermost feeling is “scrupulously externalized and narrated in leisurely fashion,”⁷ he proceeded to identify what he called “the basic impulse of the Homeric style: to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations.”⁸ His final summation of this literature stated that “the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present.”⁹

In contrast, Auerbach, pointed out, the lacunae in the story of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) are so pervasive and pronounced as to be a defining characteristic of the narrative. Addressing only the opening verse of the pericope, in which God calls to Abraham and Abraham replies “Here I am,” he catalogued a monumental series of unanswered questions:

Where are the two speakers? We are not told. ... Whence does [God] come, whence does he call to Abraham? We are not told. ... Nor are we

⁴ Auerbach 1953: 3–23.

⁵ Alter 1981: 17.

⁶ Auerbach 1953: 22.

⁷ Auerbach 1953: 3.

⁸ Auerbach 1953: 6.

⁹ Auerbach 1953: 7.

told anything of his reasons for tempting Abraham so terribly. ...[N]or have the deliberations of his own heart been presented to us; unexpected and mysterious, he enters the scene from some unknown height or depth and calls: Abraham! ...

Where is [Abraham]? We do not know. ... Where he is actually, whether in Beersheba or elsewhere, whether indoors or in the open air, is not stated; it does not interest the narrator, the reader is not informed; and what Abraham was doing when God called to him is left in the same obscurity.¹⁰

This terse style continues, Auerbach observed, through the whole of the narrative.

With regard to the depiction of Abraham's journey to the sacrificial site, he stated that "the journey is like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent, which is inserted, like a blank duration, between what has passed and what lies ahead..."¹¹ And the introduction of Isaac as a primary character in the narrative exhibits the same characteristics: "...[H]e may be handsome or ugly, intelligent or stupid, tall or short, pleasant or unpleasant—we are not told. Only what we need to know about him as a personage in the action, here and now, is illuminated..."¹² Thus, by means of "the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, [with] all else left in obscurity,"¹³ the text comes to exhibit foreground and background as clearly distinct fields: the unspecified details, the unspoken thoughts, emotions and motives, combine to form a subtext whose force both rivals and enriches that of the surface narrative.

It is in regard to the Bible's portrayal of the human characters, and specifically the understatement of their psychological inner workings, that Auerbach most clearly articulated his idea that the laconic quality of biblical narrative is a deeply complex

¹⁰ Auerbach 1953: 8.

¹¹ Auerbach 1953: 10.

¹² Auerbach 1953: 10–11.

¹³ Auerbach 1953: 11.

form of narrative art. The Homeric poems, with their perpetual foregrounding, are “comparatively simple in their picture of human beings,”¹⁴ whose emotions, “though strong, ...find expression easily.”¹⁵ In contrast, “human beings in the biblical stories have greater depths of time, fate, and consciousness....”¹⁶ To put it more broadly, there is an expansive and intricate range of possibility in the biblical depiction of the human inner life that is absent in the Greek epics: “In Homer, the complexity of the psychological life is shown only in the succession and alternation of emotions; whereas the [biblical] writers were able to express the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them.”¹⁷

Auerbach was a literary critic, not a Bible scholar, and certain aspects of his analysis reveal a somewhat rudimentary encounter with such central problems as historicity, textual authority, and the relationship between biblical narrative and religious belief. For example, his conviction of the single-minded religious intent of biblical narrative led him to a conclusion that would seem to contradict the very observations he had already articulated, namely that the biblical authors’ “freedom in creative or representative imagination was severely limited...perforce reduced to composing an effective version of the pious tradition.”¹⁸ Then too, Alter pointed out that for all their sweeping penetration, his observations did not quite achieve the subtlety demanded by the range of stylistic and generic possibilities in the biblical corpus: the satire of Esther, the set-piece of Job, and the historiographical narratives about early monarchic Israel, for example, each exhibit a unique set of nuanced

¹⁴ Auerbach 1953: 13.

¹⁵ Auerbach 1953: 12.

¹⁶ Auerbach 1953: 12.

¹⁷ Auerbach 1953: 13.

¹⁸ Auerbach 1953: 14.

sensibilities.¹⁹ Despite its flaws, however, I emphasize Auerbach's study here because I believe it is worthwhile to appreciate its groundbreaking character. The task that he undertook, that is, to come to terms with the challenges of the biblical text in a cohesive and illuminating fashion, is at the core of any critical approach to the Bible. But his application of a literary-critical consciousness to this task presaged a whole generation of Bible scholars who would begin to engage the text in the same manner on a much wider scale.

The Established Methods: Source-critical and Other "Scientific" Approaches to Understanding the Bible

Moreover, this legacy doubtless would have had considerably less resounding significance if it were not for the propensity of contemporary biblical criticism on the whole to engage many of the difficulties and questions encountered in the Bible not as matters of style, but as incongruities in need of some kind of scientific explication. Indeed, the later explosion of literary interest in the Bible in the 1970s occurred within a scholarly context predominated by source criticism, the incumbent methodology in biblical studies for decades prior. Thus, due to the import of source criticism in biblical studies generally, it is important that we review this methodology, for it largely characterizes the critical climate in which literary approaches began to proliferate. A thorough discussion of its origins and development, a task for which whole volumes have proved inadequate, is beyond the scope of this dissertation; but a brief summary of its form and mechanics in recent times is useful for our purposes.

¹⁹ Alter 1981: 17.

The scholars whose work I review here took up the legacy of biblical criticism as it stood subsequent to the efforts of a few important scholars of the pre-modern era. For instance, Thomas Hobbes devoted an entire chapter of his 17th-century work *Leviathan* to an examination of the books of the Hebrew canon, with an eye toward their compilation and integration of preexisting documents. In particular, he called into question the entire idea of Moses's authorship of the Torah, an idea championed also by Benedict Spinoza in the decades after Hobbes. Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, published in 1670, called for a renewed attention to the peculiarities of the language and world of the Bible, free of modern prejudices or interpretive filters. In this way, he set the stage for the close, detail-oriented analysis of modern scholarship. In the wake of these two figures' efforts, Jean Astruc proposed in the middle of the 18th century that the Torah represents a combination of two different sources, each of which uses a different name for God, a hypothesis that served as a central element in the later development of source criticism, as we shall see. Later, in the early 19th century, W. M. L. de Wette argued that Deuteronomy is independent of the rest of the Torah, on the basis of its distinct style, legal system, and sensibilities about the role of the Temple. He concluded that Deuteronomy could not have been written before the time of Josiah in the 7th century BCE.²⁰

Wellhausen

In the wake of the contributions of scholars such as these, it is unsurprising that the developing source-critical approach of the late 19th century was built on the

²⁰ For a convenient review of these scholars and their impact on biblical criticism, see the first chapter of Kugel 2007 (pp. 1–46), entitled “The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship,” especially pp. 29–33 and 39–40. For a more encyclopedic work, see McKim 1998, *ad loc.*

underlying premise that at myriad points, the Torah evinces disunity and inconsistency of varying types and degrees. The overarching theoretical framework that has arisen in response to this observation, known as the Documentary Hypothesis, finds its roots primarily in the late-19th-century endeavors of Julius Wellhausen, who, though not the first to consider the Torah from this perspective, was responsible to a great extent for developing what now is considered to be the classic formulation of the hypothesis. In essence, this formulation states that the various disunities and inconsistencies in the Torah are to be interpreted as vestiges of an editorial process by which four preexisting documents were redacted into a single continuous work. Each of these sources, which are designated respectively as the J or Yahwist, the E or Elohist, the D or Deuteronomist, and the P or Priestly documents, is conceived as a continuous written narrative with a distinct character and perspective.

This being the case, says the hypothesis, a careful analysis of the literary seams, unharmonized elements, and other hallmarks of editorial activity should permit a clear differentiation of the four sources, which then may be analyzed independently. The specific types of evidence traditionally marshalled in this cause may be organized under broad headings, as articulated for example by R. N. Whybray, whose examination of the underpinnings of modern source criticism distinguishes three such categories evident in prior scholarship: 1) *language and style*, including the word choices, literary conventions, and stylistic character of each source; 2) *repetitions, duplications and contradictions*, either between passages or within a single passage, that indicate the competing perspectives and content of the sources; and 3) *differences of culture, religion and theology* that reveal the characteristic attitudes of the

sources.²¹ With respect to *changes in the divine names*, according to which the sources might be distinguished based on the usage of the names יהוה and אֱלֹהִים, although scholars such as Otto Eissfeldt treated this element as a fourth independent category,²² Whybray's summary incorporates it under the rubric of word choice.²³ Additionally, Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien specified a fifth criterion, which they called "evidence of compilation and redaction of parallel accounts."²⁴ Their precise intent is unclear, since they provided no descriptive details for this category; but if I take their meaning correctly, it appears that this evidence too can be absorbed into Whybray's breakdown under the heading involving repetitions, duplications and contradictions. In the end, therefore, we may view Whybray's tripartite breakdown as a useful summary of the traditional basis for the differentiation of the sources.

Gunkel

In the early years of the 20th century, Hermann Gunkel embarked on an exploration of a related but distinct critical mode, worthy of a brief review here, called form criticism. This approach utilized an evaluative method based on the contemporary study of oral traditions in the field of European folklore.²⁵ Taking the Documentary Hypothesis as his point of departure, he viewed Genesis as a series of individual stories whose oral precursors were complete narrative units in themselves, with no connection to a continuous historical progression or to one another. All of these stories came into existence within particular socio-historical contexts, were

²¹ See the extended assessment of these criteria in Whybray 1987: 55–116.

²² Eissfeldt 1965: 182.

²³ Whybray 1987: 63–72.

²⁴ Campbell–O'Brien 1993: 6.

²⁵ The following discussion refers in particular to Gunkel 1901.

transmitted orally over several generations, and ultimately were collected into the written documents J and E.

The task that Gunkel set himself, then, was to isolate these individual stories within the book of Genesis according to a system of criteria that was assembled by Axel Olrik, the Danish folklorist.²⁶ Whybray offered a systematic catalogue of these criteria,²⁷ which we may summarize as follows.

- Each oral narrative recounts a linear plotline involving a single main character, which moves toward a decisive climactic (and thus concluding) action.
- It presents the various scenes of the plot in vivid clarity; but it never presents interactions involving more than two characters, and indeed it eschews all extraneous details, whether of setting, characters, or chronology (such as retrospection and prospection).
- It utilizes elements such as repetition, intensification, and patterning to provide certain emphases and to heighten the tension leading up to the dénouement.

One immediately notes that these laws bear no relationship to the *content* of oral narrative, but only to its *formal* qualities. This fact gave rise to the term “form criticism” as a designation for Gunkel’s application of this model in the context of biblical studies. His approach garnered great interest, and a number of scholars, such as Albrecht Alt, Gerhard von Rad, and Klaus Westermann, continued to explore and refine his approach to the pre-literary history of the material in the Torah and the rest of the biblical corpus.

²⁶ See Olrik 1909.

²⁷ Whybray 1987: 146–147. According to Whybray (1987: 145), Olrik never presented the laws that he had developed in systematic or consistent fashion, a fact that renders Whybray’s distillation a resource of considerable value.

Eissfeldt

A particularly important reverberation intertwining both Gunkel's form-critical approach and source criticism generally is the meticulous generic review of the Torah undertaken by Eissfeldt's 1934 volume *The Old Testament: An Introduction* represents a particularly important study in which Gunkel's form-critical approach and source-critical methods are intertwined.²⁸ Long viewed as a cornerstone of mid-20th-century biblical studies, Eissfeldt's work carefully revisits the origins of source criticism, tracing the idea of multiple sources back as far as the mid-1700s with Astruc's work on the book of Genesis, and then moves on to a thorough exploration of the many variant positions articulated in scholarly discourse on the Documentary Hypothesis. Prominent among these are three important nuances still exhibiting currency in source-critical circles, whose effect is evident in Eissfeldt's own reasoning. The first is that the strands of the sources proposed by the Documentary Hypothesis in fact extend beyond the Torah, and through the book of Joshua. Thus one frequently encounters references to the "Hexateuch" in source-critical literature.

Second, Eissfeldt pointed out that certain parts of the Torah, particularly but not exclusively the legal material, do not lend themselves easily to the scrutiny of the Documentary Hypothesis. In response to the inclination to apply the hypothesis to this material in the same manner as to the narrative of the Torah, Eissfeldt wrote:

Thus it is proper...to examine the application of the documentary hypothesis only in those sections where we are concerned with the analysis of larger complexes of narrative, and only to apply it with reserve to the legal corpora. ... [In] this we may be led by the character of the corpus of law itself, which defies any neat division into

²⁸ Herein, I cite from Peter R. Ackroyd's 1965 English translation of the third (1964) edition of Eissfeldt's German original.

[multiple] basic corpora, and suggests rather amplifications of one basic corpus....²⁹

Whybray neatly summed up the implication of this kind of observation in a more general way: “A few passages...are not derived from any of the main four documents but must be regarded as independent fragments.”³⁰ In other words, the import of Eissfeldt’s statement for source criticism is that, to all appearances, the basic material of the Torah drawn from the four main documents was supplemented by additional material from outside of these sources.³¹

The third important nuance incorporated into Eissfeldt’s presentation was attested in preliminary form already in the work of Wellhausen in the late 19th century, but over the course of the 20th it underwent extensive refinement. In essence, the idea is that the J, E, D, and P documents themselves went through multiple editorial phases, and thus may be broken down into various layers. Thus, for example, in the early 20th century Rudolf Smend envisioned J as actually comprised of two distinct parallel sources, J¹ and J², which later were combined into a single document.³² Later, von Rad articulated the similar view that P consists of parallel strands, which he labeled P^A and P^B,³³ and in fact the issue of redactional layers in P has received extensive attention in

²⁹ Eissfeldt 1965: 180, 181.

³⁰ Whybray 1987: 21.

³¹ There exist two alternative theories to the Documentary Hypothesis, called the “Fragment Hypothesis” and the “Supplement Hypothesis,” which approach the so-called “Pentateuchal problem” in a similar fashion but offer different views on the precise nature of the materials that underlie the final form of the Torah. A discussion of these two theories would be tangential here, but the details of both are examined by, e.g., Eissfeldt (1965: 162–163) and Whybray (1987: 17–18). Meanwhile, however, it is worthwhile to note that these alternatives and the Documentary Hypothesis are not necessarily mutually exclusive (see, e.g., Whybray 1987: 18). Indeed, note that Eissfeldt’s and Whybray’s points here resemble in broad strokes the thrust of the Supplementary Hypothesis.

³² Smend 1912.

³³ Von Rad 1934.

scholarship generally up to the present.³⁴ Indeed, Eissfeldt himself identified Smend's J¹ as an independent "lay source," thus labeled L, whose antiquity is indicated by its lack of association with liturgical and cultic matters; and, having relabeled J¹ in this fashion, he concomitantly referred to J² simply as J.³⁵ He also understood both the Holiness Code³⁶ of Leviticus (chapters 17–26), labeled H, and what he called the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 20:22–23:33), labeled B, as independent documents that should be distinguished from the core material of the four main sources.³⁷ As a result, in his volume we encounter statements such as the following, which refers to Genesis 14: "With this narrative it is quite clear that it presupposes the already complete compilation L + J + E + B + D + H + P, and that it has been inserted into it."³⁸ Thus, in Eissfeldt's view, this chapter from Genesis is one of several supplementary passages of the type described above.

Another noteworthy aspect of Eissfeldt's volume is that prior to embarking on a discussion of the Torah and its sources, it presents a highly meticulous and complex catalogue of the various genres encountered in the biblical corpus, discussing and applying a range of technical terms to the material. This examination of genre coincides closely with Gunkel's form-critical approach because of the detailed formal considerations involved in the establishment of generic distinctions. The extremely high level of detail present in Eissfeldt's breakdown is plain to see in the following table, in which the original material is somewhat condensed.

³⁴ For a convenient summary of the range of possible views, see Rendsburg 1980: 65, 73–74.

³⁵ Eissfeldt 1965: 169, 194–199.

³⁶ This term first appeared in 1877, when Erich Klostermann applied it to the section in question.

³⁷ See Eissfeldt 1965: 233–239 and 212–219, respectively.

³⁸ Eissfeldt 1965: 211.

Table 3: Summation of Eissfeldt's Generic Breakdown³⁹

I. Prose types	II. Sayings	III. Songs
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speeches, sermons, prayers 2. Records <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contracts b. Letters c. Lists d. Laws e. Cultic ordinances 3. Narratives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Poetic narratives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Myths 2. Fairy-tale, fable, tale 3. Saga 4. Legends b. Historical narratives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reports 2. Popular history 3. Autobiography 4. Accounts of dreams and visions 5. Prophetic Autobiography 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sayings of various kinds <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sayings from the life of the individual b. Sayings from the life of the community 2. Legal sayings 3. Cultic sayings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Divine sayings b. Priestly sayings c. Lay sayings 4. Prophetic sayings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ecstatic possession as the ultimate source of the prophetic saying b. Prediction and warning c. Oracular poems d. Other literary types employed by the prophets 5. Proverb, riddle, and wisdom sayings 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Songs of work and harvest, drinking songs, songs of marriage and love, watchman's songs 2. Mocking songs and funeral dirges 3. Royal songs and victory songs 4. Cultic songs <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Royal cult songs b. "Spiritual songs" c. Hymns d. Accession songs e. The "sentence of judgment" f. National laments g. Collective songs of trust h. Individual laments i. Individual songs of trust j. Collective songs of thanksgiving k. Individual songs of thanksgiving 5. Wisdom poems

It is plain that the larger categories II and III refer specifically and solely to biblical passages constituted of poetry, and that by "poetic narratives" Eissfeldt refers to narrative passages deemed not to be historical or annalistic in content—to "stories," not "histories." Also clear are that some of the sections consist of a number of parts, each of which Eissfeldt addressed in turn; but I have collapsed them here under their primary heading for reasons of space.

³⁹ In this chart I have summarized the material presented in Eissfeldt 1965: 9–127.

Noth

An equally significant contribution to biblical scholarship that owed much to the earlier form-critical efforts of Gunkel was Martin Noth's development of a traditio-historical approach (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*) to the Torah, an extensive articulation of which first appeared in his 1948 work *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*.⁴⁰ Where Noth's model deviated from Gunkel's was in its relative lack of concern with the process by which the oral precursors of the source documents were compiled in written form. This topic, Noth stated, was the purview of source criticism, which by his own time, he believed, did not warrant extensive review: "...[T]he questions of the purely literary prehistory of the Pentateuch in its final form have been for some time so exclusively the object of interest of Old Testament scholarship and have been so thoroughly treated that, even though definitive and generally accepted solutions have not been reached in every regard, they certainly do not require fresh examination...."⁴¹ In any case, he continued, the uncertainties and debates in the source-critical arena held little bearing on his efforts, "[f]or compared with oral transmission, literary fixations are secondary, and the time and circumstances of their appearance provide no direct indication of the origin and significance of the traditions absorbed in them."⁴² That said, however, he acknowledged the conceptual reliance of his own efforts on methodological notions championed in source criticism: "...[O]ur access to the beginnings of the Pentateuchal tradition does, in fact, necessarily begin with the literary end-product, and from there we work back through the still recognizable early literary stages."⁴³

⁴⁰ Herein, I cite from Bernhard W. Anderson's 1972 translation of the German original.

⁴¹ Noth 1972: 1.

⁴² Noth 1972: 5.

⁴³ Noth 1972: 5.

The chief presupposition of the traditio-historical approach as articulated by Noth was that the material constituting the Torah originally was a body of orally developed narratives, without specific “authors,” that was transmitted “within the anonymous totality of the tribes and their several clans at those times when they were gathered together, that is, preeminently on cultic occasions.”⁴⁴ The assumption of a cultic setting for these preliterate traditions derived directly from Gunkel,⁴⁵ and it led Noth to the supposition that the shift to a written mode of preservation must have occurred in tandem with the shift of the Israelite tribal confederacy to a unified state:

During the time of statehood, the saga-tradition is replaced, as a rule, by written history. This historiography, though at first quite unpretentious, is always in its own way a “scholarly” work behind which there is no longer a community which enjoys telling and hearing stories, but rather some author whose name may or may not be known to posterity. ... The beginnings of a distinct historiography appear concomitantly with the formation of Israel as a state, and indeed within the circle of the royal court.⁴⁶

It is evident from this statement that Noth’s conception of both the oral and the written stages accorded with his vision of its specific historical context. Thus, just as the source-critical delineation and evaluation of J, E, D, and P was rooted in current ideas about the reconstructed history of Israel, so too did Noth’s hypotheses correspond to his own view of Israel’s prehistory and the process by which this stage was transformed into the later historical periods. It is in this way that “tradition” and “history” were intertwined in his traditio-historical approach.

⁴⁴ Noth 1972: 44.

⁴⁵ See Noth 1972: 44 n. 151.

⁴⁶ Noth 1972: 44–45.

I raise form criticism and traditio-historical criticism as important offshoots of source criticism, but it is important to recognize the general degree to which they are rooted in the Documentary Hypothesis. To be sure, there have been occasional efforts to distance these two modes from their source-critical origin. This was undertaken with regard to form criticism, for instance, in Johannes Pedersen's 1920 study *Israel I–II: Sjæleliv og Samfundsliv* and the 1934 follow-up article “Passahfest und Passahlegende,” in which he identified Exodus 1–15 not as a compilation of various written sources, but as a continuous account that had been expanded orally over a period of centuries.⁴⁷ And with regard to the traditio-historical approach, Rolf Rendtorff's 1977 volume *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* is a useful example.⁴⁸ Here, he articulated the view that the methods of source criticism, though generally acceptable in themselves, had been misapplied in the Documentary Hypothesis, and in any case our conclusions about the Torah's precanonical sources should be accepted only if they can be corroborated by the findings of traditio-historical analysis. But these two exceptional examples tend, if anything, both to confirm and to call attention to the genetic connection between these two methodologies and their ancestor, source criticism.⁴⁹

Problems with the “Scientific” Approaches

The foregoing very brief and cursory review is far from exhaustive, but it offers a snapshot of the major trends in biblical scholarship up through the first two-

⁴⁷ Pedersen 1920; Pedersen 1934. Ultimately Pedersen's view ceased to hold much sway in critical discourse (Whybray 1987: 175).

⁴⁸ Rendtorff 1977.

⁴⁹ In this regard note especially, e.g., Campbell–O'Brien 1993: 8–10, wherein Noth's assessment of the sources (Noth 1972: 1–41) is touted as one of his most valuable—and most overlooked—contributions.

thirds of the 20th century. As important and widespread as these approaches were, however, over time they became the focus of a range of criticisms that called attention to a whole range of difficulties underlying the edifice of source criticism. In 1987, Whybray's volume *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* offered a very thorough assessment of the development, underpinnings, and current state of the Documentary Hypothesis, together with a careful critique that brought together the range of hesitant or dissenting perspectives articulated in the preceding decades.⁵⁰ He pointed out several questionable assumptions underlying the hypothesis, and also called attention to certain overzealous attempts to refine its level of detail that ultimately undermined some of its central tenets. These observations were summarized in an eleven-point list.⁵¹ Some of these points concern the minutiae of the theological and historical perspectives generated by the hypothesis, and need not concern us here; but others are instructive for our purposes, and can be condensed under two broad subject headings. Both issues relate directly to an established source-critical idea about the very nature of the source documents themselves. As Whybray put it, the source critics "assumed that the purpose of each of the authors of the documents was to write a consistent and continuous account of the origins and early history of Israel, suitably adapted to the national, religious and ethical notions prevailing in their time: they were, in other words, by intention, historians."⁵² The two points of interest for us reside in the notions of *consistency* and *continuity*.

The first matter goes back to the basic premise of the Documentary Hypothesis, that apparent disunities or inconsistencies in the Torah are to be attributed

⁵⁰ Whybray 1987.

⁵¹ Whybray 1987: 129–131.

⁵² Whybray 1987: 47 (original emphasis removed).

to the vicissitudes of the editorial process by which the source documents were combined. This premise necessarily implies that the sources themselves were completely internally consistent in all of the criteria designated above: each source exhibits no linguistic or stylistic variation outside of a certain characteristic range, particularly in its use of divine names; each source is entirely free of repetitions or contradictions of any kind; and each source is entirely homogeneous in its cultural and theological outlook. Certainly this is a problematic way to approach any body of literature, whether composite or otherwise, as Whybray observed with regard to the early adoption of this perspective in source-critical circles:

...[T]heir application of this criterion...was even more rigid than that practised by the writers of their own time, and perhaps of any other time. They assumed that a writer never makes a statement twice over, never allows himself a digression but always sticks to the point, and never contradicts himself even in the smallest matter. Any failing of this order was seized upon as evidence of a conflation of documents.⁵³

He went on to point out, further, that while such rigor perhaps may be identified as a goal of the scholar, it is not generally applicable to the endeavors of the literary artist. But even more importantly, this assumption leads to reverberations in source criticism that extend beyond the authors of the sources themselves, to those figures who in a sense are at the core of the entire Documentary Hypothesis: the redactors.

Since the development of the hypothesis did not concern itself with whether or not the practice being suggested—"the creation of new historical works by the simple conflation of older ones covering the same ground"⁵⁴—was in any way normative in

⁵³ Whybray 1987: 50.

⁵⁴ Whybray 1987: 45.

the ancient world,⁵⁵ its proponents “appear to have taken it for granted that [the redactor’s] motive was basically the same as that of the authors of the documents which they [*sic*] conflated: his intention was to produce a new ‘history of early Israel’—that is, one which was an ‘improved version’”⁵⁶ Yet, if the troublesome inconsistencies in the final version are hallmarks of the redactors’ efforts, then it is striking that despite their common purpose, the redactors often made little or no attempt to achieve the strict consistency that purportedly was so important to the authors of the sources.

If the documents postulated by the hypothesis possessed some kind of unity and consistency—and it is this which is held to give them plausibility—then the redactors were the persons who wantonly destroyed that unity and consistency—and again, the hypothesis depends on believing that they did. ... Thus the hypothesis can only be maintained on the assumption that, while consistency was the hallmark of the various documents, *inconsistency* was the hallmark of the redactors. ... [But] if the redactors were manifestly not primarily concerned with achieving consistency in their “improved” history, why should it be assumed that consistency was an overriding concern of the authors of the original documents, whose purpose was more or less the same as that of the redactors? And if after all this was *not* the overriding concern of the authors, the criteria for separating one document from another lose their force.⁵⁷

Indeed, even the redactors’ supposedly lax treatment of the source documents exhibits a range of manifestations. “[I]n some cases—in the double accounts of the same event—they preserved the two accounts separately and placed them either side by side...or at different points in the total narrative..., while in others they interwove the

⁵⁵ For a series of studies on the development of specific ancient texts and the processes by which this occurred, see Tigay 1985.

⁵⁶ Whybray 1987: 49.

⁵⁷ Whybray 1987: 19, 49–50 (emphasis in original).

two (or more) accounts to form a single composite narrative..., being apparently quite indifferent equally to the resulting incongruities of reiteration and contradiction....”⁵⁸

These two opposing editorial practices—one that preserves everything from both sources and another that incorporates material from one while omitting the parallel content from another—frequently have been employed at the whim of the source critic, without concern for the distinction between the two or the possibility of some motivation for this distinction.

To take one example relating specifically to *Sefer Bil'am*, we may consider a few comments by Noth, who stated that “the Balaam story is obviously not a unified whole. This is clear from the unmotivated change, explicable only on literary critical [that is, source-critical] grounds, in the designation of God (‘Yahweh’ and ‘God’), as well as from the existence of obvious doublets (cf. right at the beginning 22.3a//3b).”⁵⁹ But at the same time, regarding Num 22:12 in which Elohim instructs Balaam the first time, Noth expressed the belief that the single word תִּצַּו belonged not to E but to J, and went on to say that “[i]f this is correct, then J, too, contained an account of instructions given by Yahweh to Balaam, an account which has been for the most part suppressed by the E-variant.”⁶⁰ Thus, in one place the redactor felt compelled to record equivalent material from both sources in a paratactic catalogue, while in another he freely “cut” material from J in favor of E’s formulation of the same content. According to the traditional source-critical perspective, the question of why

⁵⁸ Whybray 1987: 74.

⁵⁹ Noth 1968: 171.

⁶⁰ Noth 1968: 177.

each approach was undertaken in its specific context is unimportant, as is the very fact of their difference.⁶¹

To return to Whybray's observation about the incongruity between the values guiding authorial as against editorial activities, his point strikes at the heart of the Documentary Hypothesis, because it raises the possibility that the inconsistencies in the Torah are to be understood not as the haphazard results of careless editing, but as reflective of some other component of the material itself. The problem is exacerbated, however, by the fact that, once J, E, D, and P had been isolated to the satisfaction of most scholars, upon exposure to further scrutiny the sources themselves revealed similar, if less obvious, signs of disunity and inconsistency. Thus, the core value attributed to the authors of the sources turned out, on some level, to be wholly illusory.

This brings us to the matter of *continuity*, which likewise is a central tenet of the Documentary Hypothesis. The sources themselves, we recall, were conceived originally as independent, continuous narratives. But as discussed above,⁶² at an early stage the disentanglement of multiple layers within, for instance, the J and P sources occupied the attention of scholars like Smend and, later, von Rad. The law codes in particular complicated the matter; and ultimately such a dizzying array of sources and sub-sources had found scholarly advocacy that by the time of Eissfeldt's volume, for instance, he was comfortable identifying Genesis 14 as an eighth layer piled atop his L, J, E, B, D, H, and P documents. Whybray viewed this development in source criticism as a weakening of its basic plausibility: "The postulation of additional documents, which are of limited scope, marks the breakdown of an hypothesis which

⁶¹ For a more extended examination of this kind of problem in established source-critical perspectives, see the studies of Genesis 37 presented in Greenstein 1982 and Berlin 1983: 113–121.

⁶² See above, p. 204.

is essentially one of *continuous* documents running through the Pentateuch.”⁶³ Again, this likewise leaves us with a series of discontinuities, this time within the four sources themselves, whose prior interpretations proved in the end to be problematic.

Indeed, even the form-critical and traditio-historical approaches have met with some resistance on quite fundamental grounds.⁶⁴ Neither Gunkel nor Noth, nor for that matter anyone who applied their methods, ever articulated the mechanics of the oral transmission process they envisioned. As John van Seters put it, “Gunkel, Alt, von Rad, Noth and Westermann...have not established the form of the stories, their function, the identity of the bearers of these traditions, or the process by which they might have arrived at their extant shape.”⁶⁵ That is to say, although they insisted on a cultic setting for this process, their research never turned to the important questions about what this setting was like, what specific role the transmission of narratives held within it, who was responsible for this transmission, and so on; for these questions simply cannot be answered on the basis of the formal qualities of the biblical stories with which these scholars were concerned. The result is that their fundamental notions about such matters appear decidedly more speculative than one would like, and this produces the sense that the overarching picture painted by their efforts “remains a shadowy hypothesis.”⁶⁶ Thus, these important offshoots of the source-critical approach also were subjected to criticisms akin to those being leveled against the Documentary Hypothesis.

With specific regard to *Sefer Bil'am*, it is worthwhile briefly to review the important effort of Alexander Rofé, who conducted a sustained evaluation of the

⁶³ Whybray 1987: 130.

⁶⁴ See, in particular, Whybray 1987: 176.

⁶⁵ Van Seters 1975: 148.

⁶⁶ Whybray 1987: 176.

established source-critical perspective on the pericope, pointing out numerous unresolved shortcomings. He opened his study of the pericope with a synopsis of four early source-critical breakdowns of the pericope's opening sequence (Num 22:2–21),⁶⁷ namely the approaches of A. Dillmann,⁶⁸ A. von Gall,⁶⁹ G. B. Gray,⁷⁰ and H. Holzinger.⁷¹ In addition to revealing a profusion of discrepancies between these scholar's respective divisional schemata, Rofé observed a number of unexplained theoretical inconsistencies in their methodological perspectives.

In the case of von Gall, for example, Rofé noted that the phrase הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא “Behold, a people has come out from Egypt” in Num 22:5 is attributed to E, but the nearly identical clause in Num 22:11 is associated with J.⁷² In addition, he criticized von Gall's differentiation between the various terms for the envoys sent by Balaq, according to which the expressions שָׂרִים “officers” (Num 22:15) and שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב “officers of Moab” (Num 22:8, 14, 21) are representative of J and the term מְלָאכִים “messengers” (Num 22:5) is indicative of E, because of its failure to consider the functional specificity of the latter term:⁷³ “...הרי במקום זה אין לדבר על מעמדם של... האנשים (כמו בפס' טו), אלא על תפקידם: “מלאכים” — היינו שליחים.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, he stated that the independent sources delineated by von Gall's breakdown do not exhibit significant improvements in logic or continuity over the undivided text as it stands.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, Holzinger's proposed divisions also fell under sharp criticism from Rofé.

⁶⁷ Rofé 1979: 15–21.

⁶⁸ Dillmann 1886.

⁶⁹ Von Gall 1900.

⁷⁰ Gray 1903.

⁷¹ Holzinger 1903.

⁷² Rofé 1979: 17.

⁷³ Rofé 1979: 17–18.

⁷⁴ Rofé 1979: 18.

⁷⁵ Rofé 1979: 18.

His proposed E source evinced frequent terminological inconsistency, not only in its free interchange of the divine names יהוה and אֱלֹהִים, but also in other aspects: the use of the infinitive construct with the preposition מִן, for instance, as in מֵהֵלֵךְ “from going” in Num 22:16, which Holzinger conceived specifically as a representative characteristic of E, stands in contrast to its parallel locution לְהֵלֵךְ “to go” in Num 22:13, also attributed to E.⁷⁶

Having thus demonstrated that the usual source-critical approaches are unsatisfactory with respect to this section, Rofé moved on to an examination of the traditional distinction drawn between Numbers 23, generally ascribed to E, and Numbers 24, seen as belonging to J. Rofé framed his discussion as a response to Sigmund Mowinckel’s elaboration of the source critical view, which itself is founded primarily on two key observations.⁷⁷ The first is that the two large oracles in Numbers 24 are distinct in their direct reference to the reigns of Saul and David, in the first case by mentioning the Amalekite king Agag, who was defeated by Saul, and in the second by presenting material that comports with David’s military successes against Moab and Edom.⁷⁸ This establishes the United Monarchy as a *terminus a quo* for the composition of the oracles. The second is that these two oracles, both of which are identified internally by the term נִאֻם (Num 24:3 [2x], 4, 15 [2x], 16), reflect a significant qualitative shift in the nature of Balaam’s prophetic activity.⁷⁹ Here, he receives direct inspiration from God (וַתְּהִי עִלָּיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) “and the spirit of Elohim was upon him,” Num 24:2), whereas previously he has relied on divination and theophany

⁷⁶ Rofé 1979: 18–19.

⁷⁷ See Rofé 1979: 26–30.

⁷⁸ See Mowinckel 1930: 247–248.

⁷⁹ See Mowinckel 1930: 260–261.

as the source of his prophetic insight (וַיִּקָּר אֱלֹהִים\יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלָעָם) “and Elohim/Yahweh appeared to Balaam,” Num 23:4, 16; and see Num 24:1).

In response, Rofé shifted the focus from the distinctions between chapters 23 and 24 to the similarity between them. He argued that the significance of sight as the catalyst for prophecy persists unaltered across all four of Balaam’s major oracles,⁸⁰ noting in particular the explicit references to the prophetic import of sight that occur across these two chapters, both in prose (Num 23:13; 24:2) and in poetry (Num 23:9; 24:5, 6).⁸¹ The correct view, he concluded, was that we encounter here not two chapters corresponding respectively to E and J, but rather a series of poetic sources (מקורות שיריים)⁸² around which the later narrative was constructed.⁸³ He pointed out that this situation is recognizable elsewhere in the biblical corpus, citing a handful of examples.⁸⁴

Thus, ultimately the only segment of *Sefer Bil'am* that Rofé perceived as wholly distinct is the jenny episode, which he demarcated as Num 22:22–35.⁸⁵ Because of its apparent incongruity with both the preceding and the subsequent material,⁸⁶ its proposed concern with the matter of true prophecy among the foreign nations,⁸⁷ and its accordance with the perceived development of a negative attitude toward Balaam evident in other later biblical contexts,⁸⁸ Rofé concluded that this episode was inserted long after the composition of the rest of the pericope, and

⁸⁰ Rofé 1979: 30–34.

⁸¹ Rofé 1979: 34.

⁸² Rofé 1979: 29.

⁸³ See especially Rofé 1979: 29–30.

⁸⁴ Rofé 1979: 30.

⁸⁵ Rofé 1979: 21–26 and *passim*.

⁸⁶ Rofé 1979: 26.

⁸⁷ Rofé 1979: 53.

⁸⁸ Rofé 1979: 51.

adduced supposedly late stylistic aspects of the episode in support of this interpretation.⁸⁹ For instance, he pointed out the “resumptive repetition” (חזרה מקשרת) attested in the phrase וַיֵּלֶךְ בָּלָעָם עִם־שָׂרֵי בָלָק “and Balaam went with Balaq’s officers” (Num 22:35), which reconnects with the narrative preceding the episode whose final phrase reads וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב “and he went with the officers of Moab” (Num 22:21).⁹⁰

In many ways, although Rofé rejected the source-critical approach to this pericope, even alleging at times that it has produced more problems than it has solved, on the surface his own approach looks remarkably similar. To be sure, he dispensed with the belaborment of discrete J and E documents; but his pervasive concern with isolating the disparate pieces that were assembled into the extant version of *Sefer Bil'am* reveals, perhaps, that the functional distinction between his own efforts and those of his predecessors was somewhat less pronounced than his presentation might suggest. On the other hand, however, the importance of Rofé’s study lies in its employment of a wholly different range of criteria for evaluating the material: one that approaches each individual challenge posed by the text with a fine-grained sensitivity to both content and context, and that considers the possibility that at least some of these challenges may be explained on the basis of evidence internal to the pericope itself. In this way, Rofé’s study of *Sefer Bil'am* is noteworthy for its resonance with the methodological shifts that were developing in the literary study of the Bible generally, a topic to which we now turn.

⁸⁹ Rofé 1979: 54–57.

⁹⁰ Rofé 1979: 55.

Literary Criticism as an Alternative (Not Necessarily a Counterpoint) to Source Criticism

Lest one arrive at the wrong impression, it is crucial to realize that despite serious misgivings in some circles, as detailed in the preceding section, source criticism and related approaches continued—and still continue—to be of central importance in scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. The traditio-historical efforts of Noth, for example, have served as the underpinnings for innumerable subsequent studies. Nor is my purpose in reviewing the pitfalls of such approaches to attack the source-critical method or the Documentary Hypothesis. Rather, I intend only to establish the state of scholarly discourse during the period that saw the onset of far-reaching and sustained interest in literary approaches to the challenges encountered in biblical literature. In the 1970s, the climate in biblical studies was such that some scholars actively sought alternative means of dealing with the challenges of the Torah. It is in this fact that the most profound and forward-thinking—however unwitting—implication of Auerbach's study is to be found. His analysis demonstrated that many of the same types of evidence traditionally explained by source critics as vestiges of the editorial process—lacunae, doublets, varied repetitions, linguistic peculiarities, apparent inconsistencies or contradictions, and so on—could be interpreted in an entirely different light as characteristic features of the Bible's literary style.

For this reason, the literary approaches of recent decades superficially appear, at times, to stand in diametric opposition with source criticism. This perspective is not entirely accurate, however, for the two methods actually are concerned with rather different questions: source criticism is interested in the precanonical process that led up to the production of the text in its final form, and literary criticism is interested in the artistry evident in that final form, which presumably is to be attributed partly if not mostly to the redactors who produced it. This clearly reflects another important

distinction regarding the nature of the redactors' activity, whereby the source-critical view regards them only as compilers, contributing nothing of their own to the material except for its arrangement, while the literary perspective attributes to their activity an overarching point of view and a sense of artistry that must be treated in its own right as *creative*, not merely editorial. But this distinction does not render the two approaches mutually exclusive; for both acknowledge the composite character of the extant text and the redactional process that produced it.

Meir Sternberg articulated the matter in a different way, distinguishing between an empirical model of the text's composition and an interpretive one delineating the principles operative within the text:

...[T]o turn...a genetic argument into a condition and directive of interpretation is to offend against history in the name of history. For here genesis itself has a double face: as real-life origin and as culture-bound fountainhead. The two faces can and must be differentiated, but not along historical lines, because both live in history. The only difference is that one relates to the text's historical composition, where all that matters is how it came into being, and the other relates to its historical communication, where all that matters is how it works as a system of rules.⁹¹

This represents one of the more finely nuanced articulations of the notion of a unified *poetics* of biblical narrative, according to which such narrative generally operates regardless of both the chronological point of origin and the historical identity of the person(s) responsible for its composition. Indeed, in this regard Sternberg carefully differentiated the traditional literary-critical figures of the "actual writer" and the "implied author," the latter of whom is identical to the "narrator" in biblical

⁹¹ Sternberg 1985: 80. For an extended survey of competing genetic and literary approaches and their philosophical underpinnings, with a focus on poetry in particular, see Weiss 1984: 1–27.

literature:⁹² “...[T]he more various the sources of a narrative book, the more tortuous the genesis, and the more diverse the intentions attributed to the line of contributors...the more striking the adherence to a single mode of narration.”⁹³ That is to say, though there may be many “actual writers” of a given biblical text, the “implied author,” who is a construct embedded in the narrative itself, remains uniform. No model of the historical process by which a biblical text was composed, whether simple or complex, can account for the consistency of the poetics both within the text and between this text and others in the biblical corpus. This is not a shortcoming of such models, it simply is a different line of inquiry into the literature of the Bible.

To be sure, when it comes to source-critical and literary methods, in some instances one approach can provide an answer to some problem or other in the text for which the other has been unable to offer a good explanation. But on the other hand, as we shall see, some recent literary approaches actually incorporate a given pericope’s composite character into their analysis as an important element contributing to the overall character of the text. Indeed, it is telling that both source-critical and literary-critical methods have continued to flourish since the time that the latter emerged in the scholarly discourse. But more to the point, in the eyes of those who began applying literary approaches to the Bible, their efforts were not defined by an opposition to

⁹² See especially Sternberg 1985: 74, and also 58–83, *passim*. He explained the identity of the implied author with the narrator as follows: “The biblical narrator is a plenipotentiary of the author, holding the same views, enjoying the same authority, addressing the same audience, pursuing the same strategy, self-effacement included. ...in short, no ironic distance separates these figures of maker and teller” (1986: 75).

⁹³ Sternberg 1985: 73–74. On this point Robert Alter and others criticized Sternberg’s view, perceiving it as somewhat inattentive to the range of historical and generic variety in the composition of biblical literature, and opining that he wrote “as though [the Bible] were a unitary production just like the modern novel that is entirely conceived and executed by a single independent writer...” (Alter 1981: 19). This appears slightly overstated, however, both because of Sternberg’s occasional comments on this matter (see, e.g., Sternberg 1985: 117, 126, etc.), and because the consequences of this perceived shortcoming for his point are not particularly significant in general terms.

source criticism or any other methodology. The validity and productivity of their work stands on its own merits, and the relationship of their findings to those deriving from established critical perspectives, though meaningful, ultimately is secondary.

Semeia and the 1970s

We may say, then, that literary criticism took hold in biblical studies not specifically as a method opposed to source criticism, but as an alternative to it that has enriched the analytical discussion of the various challenges encountered in the text of the Torah by providing new angles from which to approach them. By the 1970s, the climate in scholarship was ripe for this kind of development, and the establishment of the journal *Semeia* in 1974 provided the scholarly community with an innovative forum specifically designed to foster alternative and experimental approaches to the Bible in areas including literary criticism, linguistics, folklore studies, structuralism, anthropology, and so on. Robert Funk's vision for the journal was that it would operate as something like a workshop for the exchange of ideas, since the most current methods "are often not yet sufficiently refined to encourage the kind of article appropriate for example to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*."⁹⁴

In order to render the journal a useful space for cutting-edge discussion and interchange, its format was arranged such that each successive volume would address a particular topic or method, and would be released not on a regular schedule, but as soon as a critical mass of submissions was assembled, complete with notes and responses to these submissions from other contributors. In this way, within five years of the journal's inception it already had produced four volumes of collected literary

⁹⁴ Wilder 1974: 3.

studies of the Hebrew Bible: in 1975 the third volume appeared, with the heading *Classical Hebrew Narrative*; 1977 saw the publication of volumes 7 and 8, respectively titled *Studies in the Book of Job* and *Literary Critical Studies of Biblical Texts*; and volume 15 was published in 1979 with the title *Perspectives on Old Testament Narrative*. Among the list of early contributors to *Semeia* appear the names of several of the now elder statesmen in the field of biblical literature, such as Robert Polzin, David M. Gunn, and Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis.

Of particular note is the spirit of the journal, whereby the methods under discussion therein, although they represented alternatives to established approaches, were by no means presented in a confrontational fashion. As Amos Wilder put it in the opening article of the first volume, “There is no reason to disparage older methods and contributions of biblical study or to make undue claims for new strategies, least of all to set up a controversial front between different schools at work in our field. It is simply that philology and interpretation, including biblical, find themselves faced today with new considerations and tasks.”⁹⁵ With respect to literary approaches to the Bible, in retrospect it seems certain that the insistence on this point of view was one crucial step in their early development, since without it there would have been considerable risk of their being characterized primarily by a detrimentally defensive tenor that would have hindered subsequent progress greatly.

Biblical Literature in Operation

While the contributions of *Semeia* to biblical literary criticism were of enormous significance, however, these and other literary endeavors during this time

⁹⁵ Wilder 1974: 3–4.

tended to focus on relatively small, self-contained issues, whether individual texts or specific theoretical elements. A few important broader studies did appear, such as J. P. Fokkelman's 1975 volume *Narrative Art in Genesis*,⁹⁶ but this work nevertheless treated only those matters specific to the biblical book under examination. There remained a vacuum in terms of sustained attempts to map out a poetics of biblical narrative. This situation slowly began to change, however, as interest in exploring the literary techniques at play in the Bible continued to grow. Many of the resulting extended studies have come to serve as the underpinnings of biblical literary criticism, and consequently it is valuable to examine them in some detail here.

Before proceeding with this review, however, we must contend with the perceived bifurcation of this literature into two discursive modes, namely, prose and poetry. *Sefer Bil'am* itself manifests material of both types, and certainly the broader theoretical character of the question is at least as crucial as its application in a single pericope. But the issue bears immediate practical relevance as well, since my own understanding of it has had a significant effect on the organization of the present study. James Kugel's treatment⁹⁷ approaches the matter from the vantage point of an examination of parallelism, a characteristic quality generally considered to be the most significant fundamental aspect of biblical poetry. Thus, in order to engage his examination as fully as possible on its own terms, it behooves us to begin with a careful overview of this important feature.

⁹⁶ Fokkelman 1975.

⁹⁷ The second chapter of Kugel 1981 (pp. 59–95) is entitled "Poetry and Prose."

Poetry

Ever since Robert Lowth's seminal 1753 work *De sacra poesi Hebræorum*,⁹⁸ parallelism has occupied a central position in the study of biblical poetry. His tripartite delineation of synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic categories of parallelism served as the basis for innumerable subsequent analyses, including a full range of both positive and negative responses. Indeed, so voluminous is the discourse on parallelism since Lowth's time that it is most profitable in this context to refrain from toiling through a painstaking review of more than two centuries of scholarship, and instead to approach the subject by way of three recent works of note, namely, Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (1981), Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (1985), and Adele Berlin's *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (1985). Ultimately, these works are rooted in the lengthy stream of prior scholarship, and thus provide a fitting context within which to review perspectives such as Lowth's; but at the same time, they provide a range of updates and refinements that have rendered them core components in the modern discussion of biblical poetry.

It is to Kugel's volume that scholarship in recent decades owes the convenient summary expression of parallelism as a "seconding"⁹⁹ phenomenon: "A, and what's more, B."¹⁰⁰ The notion articulated in this expression is that the independent cola that constitute a single line of biblical poetry are complementary, each independently stating a single idea (or idea-fragment) but operating in conjunction to form a statement greater than the sum of its parts. In formal terms, parallelism is most simply presented in a sequence of two adjacent cola, and due to its simplicity this is the

⁹⁸ Lowth 1753. A facsimile of G. Gregory's 1787 annotated English translation (London: J. Johnson) was produced in 1971 (New York: Garland).

⁹⁹ Kugel 1981: *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ Kugel 1981: 13 and *passim*.

pattern generally abstracted for the purposes of theoretical analysis; but in fact the Bible attests other parallelistic patterns as well, to which the same principles apply: three-colon sequences, cola separated by some amount of intervening material, and so on.¹⁰¹

Although Kugel was the first to express the basic principle of parallelism as “A, and what’s more, B,” the idea that this expression encapsulates has undergirded notions of parallelism since Lowth’s time. He proposed three distinct categories of parallelism, the first of which, “synonymous” parallelism, is most clearly identifiable with Kugel’s summary articulation since it encompasses those instances where the relationship between A and B is most direct. Take, for example, Ps 135:13, in which each term in the A colon is closely paralleled in the B colon:¹⁰²

יְהוָה שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם יְהוָה זְכוֹרֶךָ לְדֹרֹדֹר׃	Yahweh, your name is for eternity; Yahweh, your remembrance is for generation and generation.
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Lowth’s second category, “antithetical” parallelism, includes those instances where A and B exhibit some sort of opposition. Pr 27:6, for example, uses antonyms as parallel terms (friend // enemy; bruises // kisses):¹⁰³

נֶאֱמָנִים פְּצָעֵי אֹהֶב וְנִעְתָּרוֹת נְשִׁיקוֹת שׂוֹנֵא׃	Trustworthy are a friend’s bruises, and deceitful are an enemy’s kisses.
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¹⁰¹ As noted by Fokkelman and others, parallelism can occur, in fact, at every level of the text, in larger poetic structures such as strophes and stanzas and even within an individual colon. See, e.g., Fokkelman 2001: 30.

¹⁰² This example is taken from Kugel 1985: 6.

¹⁰³ This example is taken from Kugel 1981: 13.

And Ps 34:23 (English: 34:22) presents an affirmative statement in A and a negative clause in B:¹⁰⁴

<p>פֹדֶה יְהוָה נַפְשׁ עֲבָדָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁמָוּ בְּלִי-חֲסִים בּוֹ:</p>	<p>Yahweh ransoms the soul of his servants, and all who seek refuge in him shall not be condemned.</p>
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The third category, “synthetic” parallelism, incorporates those instances of parallelism that do not fit comfortably into the two preceding groups either because it combines them or because it exhibits an entirely different kind of relationship between A and B.

Lowth’s synonymous and antithetical categories remain operative in some form in the modern study of biblical poetry, despite frequent and ample demonstration of their shortcomings. Kugel, for example, pointed out that the notion of synonymous A and B clauses leads to the oversimplified view that “B is essentially a restatement of A,” and thus that parallelism in this sense is merely “saying the same thing twice.”¹⁰⁵ In his view the synonymous reading was “a drastic sort of leveling,” and failed to account for the significantly freighted “fact of B’s *afterwardness*.”¹⁰⁶ The antithetical category received similar criticism from Kugel: “Indeed, it was in order to preserve the synonymy of ‘synonymous’ that antithetical was devised; it drained off a whole class of parallelism in which B’s differentness from A was all too obvious.”¹⁰⁷ He highlighted the example of Pr 27:6, cited above, in which A and B may be conceived

¹⁰⁴ This example is taken from Kugel 1981: 14. Instances where B is a negative complement to A were not included in Lowth’s original category, but have come to be associated with it subsequent to his time. See Kugel 1981: 14.

¹⁰⁵ Kugel 1985: 12–13.

¹⁰⁶ Kugel 1985: 13 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁷ Kugel 1981: 13.

as “independent (opposite) versions of ‘the same idea,’” and which thus represents simply “another way for B to pick up and complete A.”¹⁰⁸

Indeed, the abandonment long ago of Lowth’s synthetic category speaks not just to its ineffectuality as a diagnostic tool, but to the fundamental flaws in Lowth’s entire approach. Over time, the diagnostic categories that he had delineated gradually proved insufficient to capture the entire breadth of parallelistic possibility, and it began to become clear that the very process of rote categorization was too rigid and too narrow as an analytical mode. Kugel himself articulated this perspective by cautioning against the reliance on the expression “A, and what’s more, B” as a universal paradigm for parallelism. In addition to offering a number of explicit alternatives—“not only A, but B; not A, not even B; not A, and certainly not B; just as A, so B; and so forth”¹⁰⁹—Kugel effectively captured the vast range of expressive potential and versatility that parallelism possesses, by way of numerous examples: the subordination of B to A;¹¹⁰ B parallels part of A;¹¹¹ “A is statement, B is question;”¹¹² and so on.¹¹³

What, then, does parallelism achieve from the standpoint of poetic expression? On the one hand, it is *propulsive*, driving the poem ever forward from each successive A to its complementary B; and on the other hand, it is *completive*, with each successive B developing, specifying, qualifying, expanding on its complementary A.

¹⁰⁸ Kugel 1981: 13.

¹⁰⁹ Kugel 1981: 13.

¹¹⁰ Kugel 1981: 5.

¹¹¹ Kugel 1981: 6.

¹¹² Kugel 1981: 7.

¹¹³ While far from exhaustive, the number of possible A–B relationships identified by Kugel is far too great to review here in its entirety. See Kugel 1981: 1–58, a chapter entitled “The Parallelistic Line.”

Kugel's statement of the integration of A and B, as achieved through their differentiation, effectively incorporates both of these qualities:

...[S]o long as some semantic parallelism is established between A and B, there is no harm in variety, indeed, it apparently saves the verse from the potential monotony of more obvious forms of restatement. Yet such may not be the best understanding of this phenomenon, *differentiation*, for it is important to view it from the standpoint of the sentence as a whole. To the extent that B identifies itself as A's "mere parallel," it asserts A = B; while to the extent that it differentiates itself from A in meaning and morphology, it asserts A + B to be a *single statement*. B becomes A's complement or completion. Differentiation, in a word, *integrates* the sentence, asserts its unity. It may avoid repetition or monotonous restatement, but to say only this is to miss part of the point.¹¹⁴

In short, to view A and B as expressions of "the same thing" is to miss the tremendously rich expressive potential embedded in the separateness and difference of A and B.

Alter approached this issue by way of slightly different terminology, stating that "[w]hat...all the conceptions of biblical parallelism as synonymity assume is a considerable degree of *stasis* within the poetic line: an idea or image or action is evoked in the first verset; then forward movement in the poetic discourse is virtually suspended while the same idea, image, or action is rerun for the patient eye of the beholder, only tricked out in somewhat different stylistic finery."¹¹⁵ In the remainder of his opening chapter,¹¹⁶ he focused instead on the parallelistic "impulse to

¹¹⁴ Kugel 1981: 16 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁵ Alter 1985: 10. Alter's study is critical at times of Kugel's earlier work, particularly, for instance, with regard to the question of the distinction between prose and poetry; see Alter 1985: 8. It prompted Kugel to present an equally pointed defense of his own efforts in a review of Alter's volume that emphasized how similar the two scholars' views actually are (Kugel 1987). This similarity prompted Kugel to refer to Alter's work as "*Kugel Slightly Altered*" (Kugel 1987: 71).

¹¹⁶ Alter 1985: 3–26.

intensification,”¹¹⁷ and proposed that Kugel’s “A, and what’s more, B” be replaced, in effect, with his own version: “how much more so.”¹¹⁸ It is in its focus on the *non-synonymity* of parallelism, its significance-in-difference, that Alter’s discussion contributes most profitably to our conception of parallelism. Through numerous carefully worked examples, he examined how it facilitates the expansion and progression not only of content, but also of the richness of a text’s vocabulary and imagery.

Berlin took a slightly different approach to biblical parallelism, viewing it instead from a linguistic and phenomenological standpoint. Rooting her study particularly in Roman Jakobson’s several works on parallelism in the poetic traditions of many languages,¹¹⁹ Berlin provided a convenient yet thorough catalogue of the mechanics of parallelism, that is, the specific means by which it is achieved in parallel cola. She “isolated four aspects of language, the grammatical [morphology, gender, number, verbal conjugation, etc.], the lexical [word pairings such as day // night, gold // silver, etc.], the semantic [similarity in meaning], and the phonologic [alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc.],”¹²⁰ devoting a chapter (or half-chapter) to each and presenting countless examples detailing the extensive expressive range evident in the Bible across all of these aspects. Indeed, the potency of parallelism as an expressive tool, as attested by its nearly overwhelming frequency in biblical poetry, led Berlin, with Jakobson, to view parallelism as the activation of poetic language in a fundamental sense, a means of drawing attention to the message by “heightening” the language

¹¹⁷ Alter 1985: 11.

¹¹⁸ Alter 1985: 11.

¹¹⁹ See the bibliography provided in Berlin 1985: 164–165, which she cited frequently throughout her volume.

¹²⁰ Berlin 1985: 127.

used to express it: “...I have accepted that parallelism is to be equated with the poetic function, which ‘projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination’ or, in other words, that ‘similarity is superimposed on contiguity.’”¹²¹ In accord with the views of Kugel and Alter, moreover, she hastened to add that “after all, equivalent elements are not identical, and their lack of identity—i.e., their difference—shows up all the more clearly when they are placed in contiguity.”¹²²

The ubiquity and versatility of parallelism in biblical poetry render it more a distinctive feature than a discrete literary device. In some basic sense, the “seconding” impulse that it reflects can be interpreted as a hallmark of the oral background of this poetry;¹²³ but its tremendous flexibility invites the perception that it is not only representative of the material’s development in spoken form, but also a key element in considered compositional processes as well. Together with other general characteristics—in particular, the organization of material into compact lines of roughly similar length;¹²⁴ the structural arrangement of these lines into verses,¹²⁵ strophes, and stanzas;¹²⁶ the gapping of key syntactic elements (for example, verb or subject); the markedly decreased use of certain grammatical features such as the so-called “prose particles” *וְ* (accusative marker), *הַ* (definite article), and *אֲשֶׁר* (relative pronoun);¹²⁷ and a concentration of specific devices such as imagery and metaphor,

¹²¹ Berlin 1985: 140, which cites Jakobson 1960: 358 and Jakobson 1968: 602.

¹²² Berlin 1985: 140.

¹²³ See, e.g., Watson 2005: 66–86, a chapter entitled “The Hebrew Poet in Action.”

¹²⁴ See Kugel 1981: 69ff. and *passim*.

¹²⁵ A “verse” typically is a bicolon or tricolon, but no hard and fast rule is evident for verse length. Consequently, I use this general term, rather than a more specific one that would exclude a portion of the available data.

¹²⁶ Fokkelman 2001 is devoted almost exclusively to the matter of structure in biblical poetry.

¹²⁷ See especially Andersen–Forbes 1983, and also Freedman 1985, which employs the data presented in the former publication.

soundplay, keywords, and the like¹²⁸—parallelism contributes to the cumulative sense of certain biblical texts’ *poetic* quality as a verbal medium that is highly evocative and direct. This density of “heightening” devices, to use Kugel’s term,¹²⁹ “engages both our cognitive and emotional natures,” and “both the imagination and the intellect.”¹³⁰

Differentiating Poetry from Prose

Problems begin to arise, however, when one attempts to employ the presence of parallelism and other elevating features as clear-cut binary indicators of the boundaries according to which prose and poetry can be delineated as mutually exclusive categories. Whatever characteristic the critic prefers to isolate as such an indicator—of poetry, if it is present, or prose, if it is absent—invariably surfaces in situations that complicate this kind of model, necessitating such extensive qualification that the model’s practicality is profoundly undermined. In regard to parallelism, for instance, Kugel offered numerous examples of undeniably parallelistic expressions in texts traditionally considered to be prosaic in nature.¹³¹ Note the following line from Genesis:

וַיְהִי וַיִּדְרֹשׁ אֶת-סָרָה	And Yahweh directed Sarah
כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר	as he had said;
וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְסָרָה	and Yahweh did to Sarah
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר:	as he had spoken.
	(Gen 21:1) ¹³²

¹²⁸ Watson 2005 stands as a detailed catalogue of the mechanics and uses of such devices.

¹²⁹ Kugel 1981: *passim*, e.g. 85.

¹³⁰ Kuntz 1998: 34, wherein is discussed Gillingham 1994.

¹³¹ See Kugel 1981: 59–64.

¹³² This example drawn from Kugel 1981: 59.

Nor is such “prosaic” parallelism limited to narrative. The following line is from the legal material in Deuteronomy:

לֹא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבֹּר עַל־אִשָּׁה	The garment of a man shall not be on a woman,
וְלֹא־יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבֹּר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה	and a man shall not put on a woman’s dress.
	(Deut 22:5ab) ¹³³

And, in fact, we need not limit our view to the biblical corpus, as is demonstrated by the fourth line of the Mesha Stele:

כי . השעני . מכל . המלכןbecause he delivered me from all the kings,
וכי . הראני . בכל . שנאי	and because he saw me through against all
	my haters.
	(Mesha 4) ¹³⁴

Indeed, across the entire breadth of extrabiblical Canaanite textual materials, features such as word pairs are amply attested in letters, administrative documents, and the like, thus demonstrating that the issue cannot be confined merely to a discussion of literary modes in the Bible.¹³⁵

Likewise with respect to the terse compactness of poetry, for example, as reflected in its ellipses and tight structural presentation, for in this regard we encounter a similar overlap between the presupposed domains of prose and poetry.¹³⁶ A meticulous concern with structure, too, is to be found in both poetic and prosaic passages: “Many have sensed in Hebrew ‘prose’ a structuring and organization which,

¹³³ This example drawn from Kugel 1981: 61.

¹³⁴ This example drawn from Kugel 1981: 62–63. The text is taken from Ahituv 2008: 392 (= Ahituv 1992: 250 = Ahituv 2005: 360).

¹³⁵ See, e.g., Kugel 1981: 84, and the secondary literature cited there.

¹³⁶ See Kugel 1981: 87–94.

if it falls short of the strictly parallelistic and binary lines...in [poems such as] Psalm 94, is nevertheless undeniably there.”¹³⁷ Similarly, the various systems proposed for the metrical scansion of biblical poetry have proven insufficient in their efforts to demonstrate that meter is a distinctly poetic hallmark—a situation that is complicated further, of course, by the persistent lack of a consistent and compelling demonstration of the presence of meter in biblical poetry.¹³⁸ Indeed, even the immediacy of the sensory effect of poetry cannot be taken as exclusively representative of this kind of literature. Meir Weiss defined poetry as follows: “The nature of poetry is that it does not so much *represent* the real world as *reflect* it, in the mirror of the internal and external senses; its language alone is what touches the mind and emotions.”¹³⁹ This definition, however, is strikingly reminiscent of Auerbach’s observation that terseness is an important component of the mimetic quality of biblical narrative, a subject that will occupy our attention below.

In short, Kugel explained, “there are not two modes of utterance [i.e., prose and poetry], but many different elements which elevate style and provide for formality and strictness of organization.”¹⁴⁰ These elements, which include all of the features identified above—parallelism, ellipsis, alliteration, keywords, structural features, and so on—appear in a wide range of combinations and in varying degrees throughout both prose and poetry in the Bible. The natural conclusion, therefore, is that the two

¹³⁷ Kugel 1981: 63.

¹³⁸ For a discussion of metrical perspectives in biblical studies, see, e.g., Petersen–Richards 1992. Aside from certain limited aspects, such as the occasional phonetic pattern or the *qînā^h* stress sequence found in Lamentations and elsewhere, in my opinion the existence of any sort of overarching metrical system in the Bible has yet to be demonstrated without excessive recourse to contortions and emendations of the text (see, e.g., Kugel 1981: 301 and O’Connor 1980: 138).

¹³⁹ Weiss 1984: 241 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁰ Kugel 1981: 85.

terms stand not as diametric opposites defining two distinct corpora within the Bible, but rather as the two ends of a spectrum:

The extremes of heightened and unheightened speech in the Bible are visible enough. But the “middle ground” between these extremes is important, and will forever elude a biblical critic equipped only to recognize the maximum of heightening or its total absence. Moreover, such an approach appears to be unfaithful to the Bible’s own rhetorical scheme of things. Biblical authors were certainly aware of heightening features, but (judging by the text [*sic*] themselves) they did not see them as requirements to be applied in prescribed strengths for particular genres and avoided for others. The rhetoric of the Bible is far simpler. It consists of a few characteristic features that, singly or in combination, mark a sentence as special, lofty, carefully made.¹⁴¹

The “poetic” end of the continuum of which Kugel spoke, then, is characterized by a concentration or “density” of elevating features, to use Fokkelman’s term.¹⁴² To be sure, the very existence of this wide-ranging “middle ground,” to use Kugel’s expression, indicates that the presence of “poetic” elements in a text that otherwise is manifestly “prose,” for example, need not unduly occupy our attention as a qualitative indicator of some kind of “poeticized prose.” Any situation of this kind merely speaks to the importance of fluidity in our understanding of the form and function of literary devices in the Bible. Alliteration is alliteration, regardless of any preconceived ideas we may have about the literary nature of its surrounding context. Consequently, the next chapter catalogues and examines a wide range of literary devices applied across both prose and poetry in *Sefer Bil’am*, thereby facilitating a holistic view of the

¹⁴¹ Kugel 1981: 94.

¹⁴² Fokkelman 2001: 15. In calling attention to the convenient coincidence of the similarity between the words *Dichtung* “poetry” and *dicht* “dense,” Fokkelman actually called attention to poetry’s inherent density of meaning. But the point is equally applicable where the issue under discussion here is concerned.

pericope whose merit, one hopes, will be evident in the degree and character of its illumination of the text.

Prose

On the other hand, however, as Kugel emphatically pointed out,¹⁴³ his above observations by no means indicate that prose and poetry are identical or indistinguishable. Indeed, certain texts, among which I would include Balaam's poetic oracles in the pericope of interest here, are unmistakably identifiable as poetry; and others surely must be perceived as prose. Indeed, the stand-alone character of certain poetic works in the Bible, and their distillation of content with only minimal recourse to narrative elements such as plot, scene, and so on, may be seen as secondary features that tend to evince the distinction between the two ends of the poetry–prose spectrum. This being the case, we turn now to a summary introduction of these fundamental narrative aspects of biblical literature, which generally manifest in prose texts, as well as certain other qualities, such as allusion, that are equally at home in prose and poetry. In this way, we may establish a foundation upon which rest the heightening elements that occupy our attention in the next chapter.

The Intersection of Biblical Literature and History

In Chapter 1,¹⁴⁴ I addressed the issue of historicity in the biblical text and the literary perspective to be applied in this dissertation. To reiterate briefly the central point, we may say that the literature of the Bible exhibits a wide array of intersections with the historical record, but that its concern with history does not preclude the

¹⁴³ In addition to the statement just cited, see also Kugel 1987: 72.

¹⁴⁴ See above, pp. 6–11.

incorporation of creative, artistic elements. Alter emphasized that, whether we are concerned with the contact between specific points in the biblical text and what we perceive to be the “facts” of history, or hope instead to take on the challenges of other biblical material whose historical veracity is difficult or impossible to determine, there can be no disputing the range and versatility of the literary tools at the disposal of the text’s creators. In his employment of the story of the Garden of Eden as a demonstrative example, he wrote as follows:

From this distance in time, it is impossible to determine how much of this whole tale was sanctified, even verbally fixed, tradition; how much was popular lore perhaps available in different versions; how much the original invention of the writer. What a close reading of the text does suggest, however, is that the writer could manipulate his inherited materials with sufficient freedom and sufficient firmness of authorial purpose, to define motives, relations, and unfolding themes, even in a primeval history, with the kind of subtle cogency we associate with the conscious artistry of the narrative mode designated prose fiction.¹⁴⁵

The same applies to materials whose historicity, or at least whose historical foundation, is more firmly established, such as the narratives in Kings, Isaiah, and Chronicles relating to Hezekiah’s defense of Jerusalem against the Assyrians. Indeed, Alter added to his above comments the following important point: “Let me hasten to say that in giving such weight to fictionality, I do not mean to discount the historical impulse that informs the Hebrew Bible. ...[T]he working out of [God’s] purposes in history is a process that compels the attention of the Hebrew imagination.... The point is that fiction was the principal means which the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, in an effort to capture this distinctive combination of

¹⁴⁵ Alter 1981: 32.

¹⁴⁶ Alter 1981: 32.

historical drive and fictive artistry, Alter utilized the phrase “historicized prose fiction” to refer to biblical narrative generally.¹⁴⁷

Ideology of Biblical Narrative: The Omniscient (but Not Omnipotent) Narrator

There is, however, an ideological component underlying this interplay between historiography and fiction. Alter conjectured that “[t]he biblical tale might usefully be regarded as a narrative experiment in the possibilities of moral, spiritual, and historical knowledge,”¹⁴⁸ and specifically defined this knowledge along two parallel dialectical tensions: “One is a tension between the divine plane and the disorderly character of actual historical events, or, to translate this opposition into specifically biblical terms, between the divine promise and its ostensible failure to be fulfilled; the other is a tension between God’s will, His providential guidance, and human freedom, the refractory nature of man.”¹⁴⁹ I say “parallel” because the former is explained, often, in terms of the latter: witness the travails of the people of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt, and the repeated references to them as a “stiff-necked people” (עִם־קָשָׁה־עֵרָךְ, first used in Exod 32:9), the agents of their own downfall time and time again, while in each case God’s providence is the means by which the historical trajectory of the divine promise is restored.

Consequently, a view of history in which God plays an active role manifestly functions as the ideological underpinning of the Bible’s “narrative experiment.” From the standpoint of the narrator, this history stands as an immutable given, and as Sternberg observed, “[t]o deepen this sense of a given world, the Bible shows a

¹⁴⁷ Alter 1981: 24.

¹⁴⁸ Alter 1981: 157.

¹⁴⁹ Alter 1981: 33.

supreme confidence in its facts.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, the literary or “fictional” tools employed in the biblical rendering of history, such as key words, repetition, structural schemata, and so on—the very kinds of specific devices to be explored in the next chapter—do not serve to manipulate that history, but only to enhance its telling: “Such signals of artful and masterful patterning are indispensable to the control of the reading process within a reserved and often opaque narrative. But their implications never exceed the license legitimately taken by a recorder concerned to shape a given world into meaningful discourse rather than to create a world in and through the discourse.”¹⁵¹ To employ the tools of literary art in the creation rather than the recreation of this world would be hubris in the biblical mindset, for power over history rests only with the divine: “To flaunt omnipotence in the handling of plot...is to speak not for God in history, but as God in fiction, as an analogue rather than voice of divinity....”¹⁵² For this reason, the biblical narrator is at great pains to maintain “that the control he wields is artistic (over his text and reader) but not existential (over the represented world and characters).”¹⁵³

This ideological distancing between God’s influence on history and the narrator’s artistic rendering of it is a part of what Sternberg called a “rhetoric of glorification”¹⁵⁴ in which the very fabric of the text conveys the Bible’s perspective on the divine. Interestingly, the other major component of this rhetoric stands not as a gulf between God and narrator, but as a characteristic that links the two figures inasmuch as they both possess it. Alter wrote that “[t]he narrators of the biblical

¹⁵⁰ Sternberg 1985: 126.

¹⁵¹ Sternberg 1985: 126.

¹⁵² Sternberg 1985: 125.

¹⁵³ Sternberg 1985: 125.

¹⁵⁴ Sternberg 1985: 91.

stories are of course ‘omniscient,’ and that theological term transferred to narrative technique has special justification in their case, for the biblical narrator is presumed to know, quite literally, what God knows, as on occasion he may remind us by reporting God’s assessments and intentions, or even what He says to Himself.”¹⁵⁵ And if the narrator knows the mind of God, it hardly is surprising that he also would have access to conversations no one could have witnessed, as with Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3–4; private expressions of emotion, as with Joseph’s secret weeping upon meetings his brothers in Genesis 42; and even David’s innermost conviction that Saul eventually will kill him, as expressed in 1 Sam 27:1.

Indeed, it is in the sagas of everyday people, “groping, baffled, laboring under illusions, misled by fear, desire, or plain ignorance,”¹⁵⁶ that the narrator’s omniscience is perhaps most visible. For as the audience proceeds with them through their “multilevel dramas of error and discovery,”¹⁵⁷ it is, inevitably, the narrator who has patterned and directed his story such that his foreknowledge of both process and endpoint is unmistakable; and the audience, moreover, is privy to this foreknowledge only at the whim of the narrator, who is “omniscient but far from omniconnunicative.”¹⁵⁸ As I argue in Chapter 6, *Sefer Bil'am* presents a wonderful example of this process, whereby the development of Balaam’s understanding of his relationship to the divine and his function as a transmitter of divine will proceeds along a slow and methodical path whose endpoint, unknown at the beginning of the story, comes across as inescapable once reached.

¹⁵⁵ Alter 1981: 157.

¹⁵⁶ Sternberg 1985: 92.

¹⁵⁷ Sternberg 1985: 92.

¹⁵⁸ Sternberg 1985: 190.

That God is omniscient, of course, is not for the narrator to explicate directly: rather, the statements to this effect in biblical narrative (to say nothing of the amply attested poetic articulations of this principle, as in Isaiah 40, Job 38–39, or Jeremiah 1:5, for example¹⁵⁹) occur in the mouths of the characters themselves. Sternberg called attention, for instance, to 1 Kgs 8:39, a line from Solomon’s prayer of dedication: “...for you alone know the heart of all mortals” (כִּי־אַתָּה יְדַעְתָּ לְבַדְּךָ אֶת־לֵבָב כָּל־בָּנִי (הָאָדָם)).¹⁶⁰ But the objective value of this kind of statement hinges on the authority of the narrative that surrounds it:

By themselves...such utterances are as limited in their rhetorical as in their personal weight. Set into equally limited narrative, they could only express the speaker’s subjective belief, but not confer on it even a show of objective truth. ... The Bible therefore postulates a narrator with such free movement through time and space, the public and the private arena, that he invests his dramatizations with the authority of an omniscience equivalent to God’s own. ... And [interpreters]...cannot make proper sense of the narrative unless they take the narrator’s omniscience as an institutional fact and his demonstration of God’s omniscience as an informing principle.¹⁶¹

The narrator’s “free movement” across all possible domains of knowledge is demonstrated amply in the examples cited above, and indeed this is the linchpin of an objective uptake of statements like Solomon’s. For what the biblical characters say outright about God’s omniscience, the narrator reveals through demonstration, either by giving unmediated access to God’s thoughts or, somewhat less directly but more artfully, by providing clear evidence of the equivalence between God’s knowledge and

¹⁵⁹ The Isaiah and Job examples are adduced in Sternberg 1985: 89–90.

¹⁶⁰ Sternberg 1985: 90.

¹⁶¹ Sternberg 1985: 90.

his own. This latter method is exemplified beautifully in Gen 4:6, which reads as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ:
And Yahweh said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why is your face
fallen?”

Sternberg observed the masterful use of repetition here as a means of equating divine with narrative insight:

Thus, the first interpersonal crime in history is preceded by the notice, “Cain was very angry and his countenance fell” (4:6). Since this inside view conveys the truth on the highest authority, it is strange to find it repeated in the next verse: “The Lord said to Cain, Why art thou angry and why has thy countenance fallen?” For the repetition involves both extreme redundancy in meaning and, despite the change of speaker, parallelism in form. Yet the excesses combine to make rhetorical sense: the twofold equivalence demonstrates God’s knowledge—of internals (anger) as well as externals (fallen face)—by maximum reference to the narrator’s authority.¹⁶²

The omniscience of the narrator, as evinced by his intimate knowledge of every internal or otherwise secret detail, is here equated with nothing less than that of God himself, and vice versa. Indeed, to return to the matter of the biblical presentation of history, discussed above, this absolute authority is what permits the audience to trust not only that the narrator’s “supreme confidence”¹⁶³ in the veracity of his history is justified—that is, that he indeed has access to all the facts—but also that he has presented this history with no alterations beyond those demanded by his art. Thus, the

¹⁶² Sternberg 1985: 92.

¹⁶³ Sternberg 1985: 126.

narrator's omniscience also constitutes a significant part of the Bible's "rhetoric of glorification," in that it provides the narrator, in turn, with the means to demonstrate mimetically the omniscience of God.

Mimesis

In sum, then, an omniscient narrator also is to be seen as a fundamental aspect of the poetics of the biblical writers' literary endeavor. In addition, as we have explored this matter, we have had occasion to refer obliquely to another principle of biblical poetics, to which we now turn our attention. Jacob Licht opened his 1978 volume *Storytelling in the Bible* with a discussion of the Bible's mimetic quality: that is to say, it aims to recreate rather than to describe reality. The example he presented to demonstrate this point, 1 Sam 9:11–13, tells the story of Saul and his servant encountering some young women. Saul asks the women to direct him to the prophet of whom he has heard. Licht's translation of 1 Sam 9:11bβ–13 is worth quoting in full:

הִישׁ בָּזָה הָרֹאֶה: וַתַּעֲנִינָה אוֹתָם וַתֹּאמְרָנָה יֵשׁ הִנֵּה לְפָנֶיךָ מֶהֱרַר | עֲתָה כִּי הַיּוֹם בָּא
לְעִיר כִּי זָבַח הַיּוֹם לָעֵם בַּבֹּמֶה: כְּבֹאֲכֶם הָעִיר כֹּן תִּמְצְאוּן אֹתוֹ בְּטָרֶם יַעֲלֶה הַבֹּמֶתָה
לֶאֱכֹל כִּי לֹא־יֵאכֹל הָעָם עַד־בֹּאוֹ כִּי־הוּא יִבְרַךְ הַזָּבַח אַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵאכְלוּ הַקָּרָאִים
וְעֲתָה עֲלוּ כִּי־אֵתוּ כֶּהַיּוֹם תִּמְצְאוּן אֹתוֹ:

Is the seer here? And they answered them and said: He is! There before you! Quick now, because he has to come to town today, because the people have a feast today at the high-place. As you come to town you will find him straight away, before he goes up to the high-place to eat, because the people won't eat till he comes, because he will bless the meal first, then will the guests eat. And now go up, because him, today you shall find him!¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Licht 1986: 11.

This rendering wonderfully captures the verbose, rambling nature of the women's response. Herein lies the mimetic quality of the passage: "The girls are prattling—eager, excited and probably talking all at once. We are not told that they prattled; their prattling is there on the page, caught from life and reproduced for the sheer joy of it."¹⁶⁵ This single brief example is representative of the kind of mimetic presentation that occurs across the entire gamut of contextual circumstances in biblical literature, in the narrative voice as well as in direct speech, inviting the audience's participation in the story by facilitating its imaginative experience of the events described.

Similarly, this mimetic quality is readily apparent in the various shifts in points of view encountered in biblical narrative. In particular, Berlin called attention to the use of the term הִנֵּה "behold" as a marker of shifting perspective,¹⁶⁶ utilizing Gen 24:63 as a demonstrative example:

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה גַמְלִים בָּאִים:
And Isaac went out to urinate in the field in the early evening, and he
lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels (were) coming.

Her explanation of this verse calls on a convenient analogy between cinematography and the biblical use of הִנֵּה: "The narrator and the reader had been traveling along with the camels bringing Eliezer and Rebecca, when suddenly the camera gives us a shot from a different angle—that of Isaac viewing the caravan from afar. We are told Isaac looked up, and then we see what he saw."¹⁶⁷ In other words, not only is the picture of

¹⁶⁵ Licht 1986: 11. He rejected the idea that "the girls talked so much because they enjoyed the company of a handsome stranger," but this kind of interpretation of the Hebrew diction employed here has found favor with others. See, e.g., Buber 1956: 126 and Hurvitz 1983: 122. For a general study of confused language as a literary device, including an examination of this specific example, see Rendsburg 1998–1999, specifically pp. 2–3.

¹⁶⁶ Berlin 1983: 62–64, which draws here on Fokkelman 1975: 50–53.

¹⁶⁷ Berlin 1983: 62.

events presented here specific to one specific participant; but in addition, the narrator uses Isaac's perspective to show the audience what is transpiring, rather than simply telling it as narrative fact.¹⁶⁸ Other narrative features, such as the presumed relationships evident in the ways in which characters refer to one another,¹⁶⁹ achieve a similar effect, and demonstrate that point of view is one aspect of biblical literature in which its mimetic quality is prominently displayed.

Broadly speaking, one particularly important aspect of the Bible's mimetic quality is that the relative suppression of descriptive in favor of representative language yields a terse, often opaque narrative style. Auerbach was struck particularly by this characteristic of biblical literature, as detailed at the beginning of this chapter;¹⁷⁰ and indeed this is an important observation in its own right, since the Bible's compact presentation amplifies the weight of each individual word. Indeed, literary scholarship in biblical studies has continued to emphasize this laconic style as a fundamental aesthetic trait of biblical narrative. Sternberg referred to this as an occupation of the space "between the truth and the whole truth,"¹⁷¹ whereby the narrative relies on the audience to complete mentally the minimal picture explicitly articulated in the text. Building on the idea of the authority of biblical narrative, he explained the situation as follows:

On the one hand, the Bible always tells the truth in that its narrator is absolutely and straightforwardly reliable. ... On the other hand, the narrator does not tell the whole truth either. His statements about the world—character, plot, the march of history—are rarely complete, falling much short of what his elliptical text suggests between the lines.

¹⁶⁸ This discovery, first explored by Fokkelman and later elaborated by Berlin, sparked an entire "cottage industry" of studies on *הַנִּזְנָה*. See, e.g., Andersen 1974: 94–96; Kogut 1986; and Zewi 1996.

¹⁶⁹ A thorough discussion of names and epithets in *Sefer Bil'am* will appear in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁰ See above, pp. 195–197.

¹⁷¹ Thus the title of the seventh chapter of Sternberg 1985 (pp. 230–263).

... The distance between the truth and the whole truth, then, correlates with the distance between minimal and implied reading. ...[W]hat leads the implied reader...from the truth to the whole truth: from the givens to the rounded understanding that will bring one as close to the narrator's as humanly possible? To bridge the distance, we must make inferences throughout the reading.... Hence the necessity of establishing the relevance of the absent material....¹⁷²

This, indeed, is what Auerbach described when he identified the biblical text as one “fraught with background.”¹⁷³ The gaps in biblical narrative thus engage the active participation of the audience in making cognitive sense of the story as it unfolds. Some of these gaps are permanent elisions, at times highly significant, the audience's mental filling of which is required for the completion of the narrative world. Others are filled explicitly in the narrative, but only belatedly, with this delayed explication serving as a retrospective lens through which the earlier gaps it fills are to be interpreted.¹⁷⁴ In both cases, however, it is clear that the plain meaning of biblical literature, its overtly expressed content, is characteristically opaque in a way that imparts profound significance to what is *not* expressed.

Moreover, in good mimetic style, the laconic narrative voice tends to eschew overt characterization of the figures presented in biblical literature. As Alter put it, most of the time “[w]e are compelled to get at character and motive...through a process of inference from fragmentary data, often with crucial pieces of narrative exposition strategically withheld, and this leads to multiple or sometimes even wavering perspectives on the characters. There is, in other words, an abiding mystery in character as the biblical writers conceive it, which they embody in their typical

¹⁷² Sternberg 1985: 51, 235.

¹⁷³ Auerbach 1953: 12.

¹⁷⁴ On temporary and permanent gapping, see especially Sternberg 1985: 237–240. In the next chapter, we have occasion to examine some specific instances of gapping and ambiguity in *Sefer Bil'am*.

methods of presentation.”¹⁷⁵ To be sure, brief descriptive statements of the characters occur from time to time; but these generally are limited to expressions of attributes that bear some special import to the story at hand, such as Noah’s righteousness (Gen 6:9), or Jacob’s smoothness as against Esau’s hairiness (Gen 27:11).¹⁷⁶ And, indeed, the occurrence of these statements in the authoritative narrative voice renders them indisputable facts in the narrative world. Nevertheless, “[w]hereas the importance of the direct ways of shaping the characters lies in their quality (the fact that they are clear and unequivocal), that of the indirect ways lies in their quantity. This means that there is more indirect than direct shaping of characters in biblical narrative and therefore the burden of characterization falls primarily on this method.”¹⁷⁷

Specifically, both Shimon Bar-Efrat and Berlin focused on the speech and actions of the characters as the primary means of indirect characterization:¹⁷⁸

“Description and inner life...would be considered, in the English critical tradition, as forms of ‘telling’. The way a character is ‘shown’ is through his own words—speech—and his actions.... Biblical narrative makes extensive use of the speech and actions of characters to further the plot and to create characterization.”¹⁷⁹ The “showing” of a character is of course a mimetic practice, and thus we encounter a demonstrative example of biblical mimesis in Gen 25:29–34, when Esau sells Jacob his birthright for a meal:

¹⁷⁵ Alter 1981: 126.

¹⁷⁶ These examples are drawn from Bar-Efrat 2004: 53 and 48–49 respectively.

¹⁷⁷ Bar-Efrat 2004: 64.

¹⁷⁸ See Bar-Efrat 2004: 64–86 and Berlin 1983: 38–39.

¹⁷⁹ Berlin 1983: 38.

וַיֵּזֶד יַעֲקֹב גָּזִיד וַיָּבֹא עָשׂו מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עֵיִף: וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂו אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הֲלֵעִיטָנִי נָא
מִן־הָאָדָם הַזֶּה כִּי עֵיִף אָנֹכִי עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ אֱדוֹם: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכָּרָה
כִּי־זֶם אֶת־בְּכֻרְתִּי לִי: וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂו הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלִמְהֵרָה לִי בְכֻרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב הַשִּׁבְעָה לִי כִּי־זֶם וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמָּכֶר אֶת־בְּכֻרְתּוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב: וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעָשׂו לֶחֶם
וְגִזִּיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשָּׂת וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּבֹז עָשׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֻרָה:

And Jacob simmered stew; and Esau came from the field and was famished. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please gorge me from the red-stuff, this red-stuff, for famished am I!" (This is why his name is called Edom.) And Jacob said, "Sell, this day, your birthright to me." And Esau said, "Behold, I am going to die! What is a birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "Swear to me this day." And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob had given Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate, was sated, arose, went, and Esau scorned his birthright.

Berlin presented the following assessment of the characters of Jacob and Esau on the basis of the evidence in this passage:

Esau's speech and action mark him as a primitive person. He is concerned with immediate gratification of his physical needs and cannot think about abstract things like a birthright. ... Poor Esau is not very bright, and this both repels the reader and makes him feel sorry for Esau.

Jacob, on the other hand, is as shrewd as Esau is dull-witted. He understands his brother and can easily manipulate him. ... Esau was a man of the present moment; at that moment Esau needed the stew more than the birthright, so he sold it to Jacob.¹⁸⁰

The two figures' competing desires and motives are nowhere articulated explicitly in the narrative; and yet it is virtually impossible to read a passage such as this without the sense that one has obtained some special insight into the characters' innermost qualities.

We must recognize, moreover, that direct speech, which is mimetic by its very nature, also is the most significant constituent of biblical narrative generally. Calling

¹⁸⁰ Berlin 1983: 39.

attention to “the highly subsidiary role of narration in comparison to direct speech by the characters” in the Bible, Alter highlighted the role of narration as “frequently only a bridge between much larger units of direct speech.”¹⁸¹ He presented the story of David and Ahimelech at Nob (1 Sam 21:2–11) as an illustrative passage in which the primacy of dialogue is plain to see.¹⁸² The narrative voice in this passage presents significant information that sets the stage for the dialogue, in three sections, totaling 58 words, that describe David’s movement to and from Nob, as well as certain details that impel and guide the scene’s forward momentum, such as the presence of Saul’s man Doeg. The first such section appears at the outset, consisting of eleven Hebrew words; a longer section occurs in the middle, consisting of 37 words; and the third closes the passage, and consists of ten words. The remaining 113 words in the pericope, detailing the dialogue between David and Ahimelech, occur in two large chunks, which are separated by the large section of narrative in the middle of the passage. Only 17 of these 113 words are in the narrative voice, as against the remaining 96 words, which are in direct discourse; and these 17 narrative words themselves functionally are part of the dialogue, since they are concerned solely with identifying speaker and addressee. Thus, the passage attests 58 words of straight narration, versus 113 words presenting dialogue: roughly a two-to-one ratio.

The Scenic Quality of Biblical Narrative

While the statistical data may differ slightly elsewhere, this pericope’s use of direct speech as the primary storytelling vehicle is representative of the general trend across biblical literature: as Berlin put it, “it is in the nature of scenic representation

¹⁸¹ Alter 1981: 65.

¹⁸² Alter 1981: 64–65.

which typifies biblical narrative to prefer direct discourse whenever possible.”¹⁸³

Indeed, this emphasis on direct speech is more than just a highly mimetic feature, for it calls attention to the scenic quality of biblical narrative. In this mode, according to Licht, “the action is broken up into a sequence of scenes. Each scene presents the happenings of a particular place and time, concentrating the attention of the audience on the deeds and the words spoken. Conflicts, direct statements of single acts, and direct speech are preeminent.”¹⁸⁴ In order to demonstrate more clearly what is meant by “scenic narrative,” Licht offered the following helpful, albeit nonbiblical, example of a single narrative thread presented in a variety of modes:

Straight narrative: Richard rode through the woods for some hours until he reached the town. He dismounted at an inn, left his horse in charge of the ostler, and strode to the market place, where he found Sir John. They quarreled, and after a while started fighting. *Scenic narrative:* “Here you are, you dog,” cried Richard as he espied Sir John in the market place; “it took me hours of hard riding to find you!” “The honour is mine, I am sure,” replied Sir John. “How dare you mock me, take that!” exclaimed Richard, striking Sir John in the breast. *Description:* The tall houses of the old town looked down on the market place, where a merry crowd milled among the stalls. In the corner by the handsome fountain a spot had been cleared around two men engaged in a fight. They were Richard and Sir John, who etc. *Comment:* There is no greater hatred than that between those who have been friends. Thus Richard, spurred on by bitter hate, thought nothing of riding for some hours to take his revenge on Sir John, nor was he ashamed to start a fight in public.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Berlin 1983: 64.

¹⁸⁴ Licht 1986: 29. Descriptions of scenic narrative tend to highlight certain storytelling qualities similar to those pointed out by Gunkel in his examination of the folkloric origins of biblical traditions. Such similarities have not been lost on scholars like Licht, who cited Gunkel frequently in the course of his discussion.

¹⁸⁵ Licht 1986: 30.

Although biblical literature is by no means limited exclusively to the second of these four narrative types, it is dominated by this scenic mode. Direct speech clearly lies at the center of scenic narrative, which usually limits its focus “to relatively straightforward interaction between a very limited number of characters.”¹⁸⁶ In the vast majority of cases, this number is two, as is the case throughout *Sefer Bil'am*, for example, wherein the interactions presented there shift between various pairs of participants: Balaam and the messengers (who function collectively throughout); Balaam and God; Balaam and his jenny; Balaam and Balaq; and so on.¹⁸⁷

In this way, moreover, the scenic quality of biblical narrative operates on a formal level, providing a structured sequence of jumps from one dialogue, conflict, or confrontation to the next. Generally, the shifts from scene to scene are very brief, and often consist of descriptions in straight narrative of physical movement: as Jerome T. Walsh put it, “a change in...locale signals the end of one scene and the beginning of another.”¹⁸⁸ In this way, scenic narrative inherently lends increased significance to the matters of place and time. With regard to the former, since movement tends to be relegated to the transitions between scenes, each scene therefore is conceived as taking place at a particular location. This location consequently can be invested with various types of significance, to which Yairah Amit directed her attention:

...[P]lace serves the biblical author's needs. When the author seeks to illustrate the power of the deity who rules over the whole world, a remote setting is chosen. When the author wishes to give the stories an air of historical reality, familiar places are chosen as the setting. At

¹⁸⁶ Walsh 2001: 120.

¹⁸⁷ A particularly well-known analogue to this pattern appears in Genesis 27, which is segmented into a series of distinct two-person interactions: Isaac and Esau (vv. 1–5); Rebekah and Jacob (vv. 6–17); Isaac and Jacob (vv. 18–29); Isaac and Esau (vv. 30–41); Rebekah and Jacob (vv. 42–45); Rebekah and Isaac (v. 46).

¹⁸⁸ Walsh 2001: 122.

times, the place-names hint at the ahistorical character of the story or act as a direct reflection of a hero. The author may use this device to create typological routes, or the derivation of place-names can heighten the historical awareness.¹⁸⁹

Evaluating the precise significance of a spatial referent in a given biblical passage can be a complicated matter, since the issue often is clouded by our ignorance of the potential traditional, historical, or narrative import of a particular toponym or setting. However, Amit's emphasis on the importance of place—"what [place] has been mentioned, how it is mentioned, how many times, where, and to what purpose"¹⁹⁰—certainly is well founded.

Temporal Progression and (Dis-)Continuity

Time similarly attains heightened significance in biblical narrative as a result of its scenic character. On the surface, we are faced with the distinction between the passage of time being described in the world of the narrative, termed "action time"¹⁹¹ or "narrated time,"¹⁹² and the "real" time that elapses as the audience experiences the narrative, called "telling time"¹⁹³ or "narration time."¹⁹⁴ In scenic narrative, narration time typically is accelerated between scenes and slowed within them, by means of various devices catalogued by Licht and Amit.¹⁹⁵ For example, the formulaic expressions used to introduce direct speech, which constitute one such device, can be

¹⁸⁹ Amit 2001: 125. For the extended discussion, see the entire chapter (pp. 115–125).

¹⁹⁰ Amit 2001: 125.

¹⁹¹ Licht 1986: 96.

¹⁹² Bar-Efrat 2004: 143; Amit 105.

¹⁹³ Licht 1986: 96.

¹⁹⁴ Bar-Efrat 2004: 143; Amit 105 (who, to be more specific, prefers "time of narration").

¹⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of such devices, see Amit 2001: 105–110; and also Licht 1986: 103–120, although this discussion is somewhat more limited, being concerned exclusively with devices used to slow narration time, since in his view "[t]elling time is almost always shorter than action time" (1986: 96).

exceedingly brief, as in the compact uses of the single words וַיֹּאמֶר “he said” and וַתֹּאמֶר “she said” in Gen 38:16–18, or considerably more elaborate, as in the extended phrases introducing the speech of Potiphar’s wife in the following chapter: וַתִּקְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְאִמְרָא “and she called to the people of her house and said to them, saying...” (Gen 39:14); וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו בְּדִבְרֵי הָאֵלֶּה לְאִמְרָא “and she spoke to him such words as these, saying...” (Gen 39:17); אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָה אֵלָיו לְאִמְרָא “...the words of his wife that she had spoken to him, saying...” (Gen 39:19).¹⁹⁶

Another example is the employment of lists as a means of compressing the events of the narrative, as for instance in the first nine chapters of Chronicles, in which “all human history from Adam to the death of Saul” is presented in condensed form.¹⁹⁷

Among the tools available for the slowing or acceleration of narration time, perhaps the most salient for our interests here is the employment of direct speech, pervasive in scenic narrative, which serves to match the passage of narration time precisely with that of narrated time.¹⁹⁸

More significant than either the pace of narration or its relationship to the pace of the narrative world, however, is the deviation in the narrative from the *sequence* of narrated time. Amit identified two broad categories of this kind of dischronology.¹⁹⁹ The first is prolepsis, whereby an event is described before it actually is reached in the narrative sequence. Licht described this device as a situation in which “the narrator does not merely prolong his telling time, but also creates suspense by making the reader first expect some development of the plot, and then telling him something else,

¹⁹⁶ These examples are drawn from Licht 1986: 104.

¹⁹⁷ Amit 2001: 106.

¹⁹⁸ See Amit 2001: 109–110.

¹⁹⁹ I have drawn the material to follow from Amit 2001: 111–114. See also Glatt 1993, which is a useful examination of chronological displacement in Near Eastern literature generally, in which the chapter on the Bible (pp. 55–74) focuses on the synoptic material in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

before the expected event is actually reached in the story.”²⁰⁰ Thus, we know from the outset where the story leads in the account of Elijah’s assumption to heaven in 2 Kings 2, which begins וַיְהִי בַּהֶעָלֹת יְהוָה אֶת־אֱלִיָּהוּ בְּסַעֲרָה הַשָּׁמַיִם “and it was, when Yahweh brought up Elijah in the heavenly whirlwind” (2 Kgs 2:1a); but we must proceed first through the rest the narrative, before we reach the point at which this event occurs. According to Amit, prolepsis “supports an ideological principle: stating in advance what is going to happen illustrates God’s control over history.”²⁰¹ H. C. Brichto expressed the relationship between this device and the audience’s interpretation of a given scene in a somewhat more direct manner, identifying prolepsis as “the synoptic/resumptive technique” whereby the theme of a given scene is provided in advance in a concise form, and stands as an interpretive guide for the detailed account offered in the scene itself.²⁰² Accordingly, he glossed the above line from 2 Kings as follows: “The circumstances of YHWH’s carrying off of Elijah, aloft in a whirlwind, were [as follows]:....”²⁰³

The second type of dischronology is analepsis, which is one form of what Sternberg termed “gapping,”²⁰⁴ whereby a specific detail is omitted from its proper chronological place in the narrative, but provided at a later point. Amit observed that analepsis “helps the author to stress a particular situation or idea,”²⁰⁵ especially in cases where the cause of some particular event is to be traced back, literally or

²⁰⁰ Licht 1986: 105.

²⁰¹ Amit 2001: 112.

²⁰² Brichto 1992: 13–14.

²⁰³ Brichto 1992: 158.

²⁰⁴ See Sternberg 1985: 186–229 and 237–240. The relationship between gapping and the narrator’s omniscience has been discussed briefly above, p. 247. As noted there (n. 174), the next chapter will address gapping in *Sefer Bil’am*.

²⁰⁵ Amit 2001: 111.

ideologically, to a prior situation. Solomon's reign as presented in 1 Kgs 3–11 provides a good and fairly substantial demonstration of this point:

After describing Solomon's wisdom and his many achievements, the author *passes to his later years* and refers to his sins, including that he worshiped alien gods under the influence of his many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1–13). Then the author describes Solomon's punishment and how the Lord "raised up an adversary against Solomon, the Edomite Hadad" (11:14–22), followed by Rezon son of Eliada (vv. 23–25), and finally Jeroboam son of Nebat (vv. 26–40). A close reading reveals that these punishments actually had threatened Solomon *long before he was old*, but the author, wishing to illustrate the principle of retribution and the connection between sin and punishment, mentions them only after he has described Solomon's sin.²⁰⁶

In this way, the author analeptically inverts the chronological sequence of events in order to make a theological point about the consequences of Solomon's actions. Thus, due to their character as discrete points of momentary disruption in the flow of time within or between scenes, both prolepsis and analepsis effectively provide retrospective or prospective lenses that color the apparent significance of the preceding or subsequent scenic material.

In addition to its heightening of the significance of both time and space, the formal character of scenic narrative described above, whereby scenes alternate with brief transitions as the narrative proceeds, has ramifications that extend well beyond the level of the individual scenes themselves. In accordance with this formal pattern, single scenes are strung together to form complexes of scenes, across which is undertaken the construction of a given narrative's plot. Fokkelman described plot as a system of narrative organization along two axes: the horizontal, along which occur the

²⁰⁶ Amit 2001: 111 (emphasis added).

words, clauses, scenes, and groups of scenes that constitute the narrative; and the vertical, resulting “from the writer’s vision, who is on a plane above his subject matter and only includes...what contributes to his thematics and to the ideological unity of the story. The biblical narrator only uses details if they are functional to his plot.”²⁰⁷

This selectivity, which is a crucial element in any kind of storytelling, is an especially prominent aspect of scenic narrative, in which events are boiled down to relatively basic, often polarized encounters between two (or, occasionally, more) individuals: “For each [event] that has found its way into the text ten or more have been left out.”²⁰⁸ On the surface, this would appear to render the Bible’s scenic narrative patently nonmimetic, since it goes without saying that reality and human existence do not proceed in a neat sequence of one well-defined bipartisan interaction after another. In practice, however, this mode actually facilitates a particularly mimetic audience experience of biblical narrative: “[T]he scenes do not give the reader an outline of what has happened, but rather create the impression that the events are taking place before the reader’s very eyes, as if he or she is seeing and hearing what is happening at that precise instant and consequently becomes emotionally involved.”²⁰⁹ Indeed, scenic narrative’s emphasis on direct speech, for example, amply attests the mimetic versatility of this narrative mode. Herein lies the artistry of the form: the biblical authors’ careful and selective tailoring of each scene, and each series of scenes, results in the distillation of specific meanings (or ambiguities!) that are transmitted not by explicit specification, but by providing the audience with a quasi-firsthand means of experiencing the events described.

²⁰⁷ Fokkelman 1999: 78.

²⁰⁸ Fokkelman 1999: 76.

²⁰⁹ Bar-Efrat 2004: 149–150.

Type-Scenes

Another particularly remarkable aspect of the scenic quality of biblical literature generally is its encapsulation of narrative material in neatly packaged units, which facilitates the writers' employment of literary conventions with great versatility. Alter's study of the type-scene phenomenon in the Bible amply demonstrates this point. His understanding of this phenomenon, which originally was conceived in classical studies as a feature of the works of Homer,²¹⁰ adapts the notion to biblical literature specifically, and demonstrates the tremendous range of possible meanings and implications achieved there by means of the skillful manipulation of conventional forms and motifs. Briefly, a type-scene is a basic narrative framework, generally conceived as originating in the oral-folkloric sphere, that consists of "a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs."²¹¹ In biblical narrative, the best-attested type-scenes occur in several distinct permutations, within each of which these predetermined motifs are manipulated in various ways, including amplification, suppression, inversion, or even omission. By relying on the audience's familiarity with the traditional patterns constituting the underlying type-scene, the author is able to play on the audience's expectations and perceptions, by adjusting the various components of the scene to achieve effects such as suspense or humor, and also to convey the emphases and connotations peculiar to the context in which the episode takes place.

To take a closer look at one example, Alter's discussion focuses specifically on a type-scene involving the betrothal of a major character, whose basic elements are as follows:

²¹⁰ The seminal work is Arend 1933.

²¹¹ Alter 1981: 51.

The betrothal type-scene, then, must take place with the future bridegroom...having journeyed to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl...or girls at a well. ...[T]he man...then draws water from the well; afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger's arrival...; finally, a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, in the majority of instances, only after he has been invited to a meal.²¹²

Alter proceeded to identify a number of instances of this type-scene, discussing the specific characteristics of each. In Genesis 24, for instance, the replacement of Isaac with a surrogate in the encounter with Rebekah, combined with her drawing of water for the visitor rather than the other way around, speak to the passivity of Isaac across the breadth of his career as a patriarch, and to Rebekah's proactive, energetic personality—both of which will remain important aspects of these characters' personalities, particularly in the story of Jacob's deception of Isaac in Genesis 27.²¹³ Moses's meeting with Zipporah in Exodus 2 is as spare a permutation of the type-scene as Genesis 24 is long, as will be typical of the impersonal narratives about Moses as compared to those about the Patriarchs or David; and the incorporation of his confrontation with the marauders is equally appropriate for the man who will liberate his people and lead them in the military encounters of the Wandering.²¹⁴ 1 Samuel 9 presents an aborted version of the type-scene, in which Saul meets a group of women at a well, but promptly proceeds on his way, withholding completion of the trope in a way that effectively foreshadows his lifelong journey of misapprehension and ultimate failure.²¹⁵ Indeed, Alter observed that the total *absence* of the type-scene may in some cases bear special significance, as in the story of Samson (Judges 14),

²¹² Alter 1981: 52.

²¹³ Alter 1981: 52–54.

²¹⁴ Alter 1981: 56–58.

²¹⁵ Alter 1981: 60–61.

whose brusque demand for the woman he desires and tacit expectation of his wish's fulfillment are all the more effective as demonstrations of his impetuosity and impatience when contrasted with the pastoral hospitality of the well encounter, here noticeably absent.²¹⁶

*The Use of Convention: Allusion in the Bible*²¹⁷

In addition to the betrothal example, several other type-scenes have been identified in the Bible.²¹⁸ The tremendously expressive versatility of this kind of employment of traditional themes revolves around the scenic character of these episodes, which lend themselves particularly well to a multiplicity of slightly (or greatly) variant forms that are incorporated into a wide array of narrative contexts. The biblical writers' employment of convention, however, is by no means confined to the strictures of scenic narrative. Indeed, although a reliance on convention is typical of all literature to a significant degree,²¹⁹ the Bible in particular stands out as a corpus whose conventions are strikingly self-aware, in the sense that the vast majority of the antecedents from which subsequent conventional presentations have drawn are located *within* this corpus. Such allusion occurs on both large and small scales: a specific

²¹⁶ Alter 1981: 61–62.

²¹⁷ By the term “allusion,” I refer to the intentional employment in one text of elements drawn from an antecedent text. Unintentional or incidental textual relationships, specifically those that reflect multiple texts' common social, ideological, political, geographical, and/or chronological origins, fall instead under the rubric of intertextuality. See, e.g., Benjamin D. Sommer's concise encapsulation of the general consensus on the distinction between these two terms: “‘Allusion’, as used by literary critics, does posit an earlier and a later text, so that the study of allusion necessarily involves a diachronic component. ‘Intertextuality’, as most literary critics use the term, focuses on manifold linkages among texts...[that] do not arise exclusively from an intentional and signalled use of an earlier text, such as citation.... Rather, they also result from the way a text reflects its linguistic, aesthetic, or ideological contexts; other texts may share those contexts, and hence readers may notice links among many texts...” (Sommer 1996: 486–487).

²¹⁸ See, e.g., Alter 1981: 51.

²¹⁹ As argued in Alter 1981: 47–49; and see also Alter 1992: 107–108.

phraseology or an individual line of poetry might be used in one place as an evocation of the context, and thus the weight of meaning, associated with the same expression elsewhere; or an entire narrative cycle might resonate at numerous points with some other extended sequence, as with Gideon in Judges 6–8 and Moses and Aaron in the Torah.²²⁰ Having briefly discussed the type-scene phenomenon, I believe it is fruitful here likewise to consider allusion on the level of the individual scene, as a distinct manifestation of literary convention in the Bible. Alter offered a particularly illustrative example in his presentation of allusive elements in the story of Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13).²²¹

First, Amnon's order for everyone but Tamar to vacate the premises (הוֹצִיאֵהוּ) “Take everyone out from before me,” 2 Sam 13:9) is identical to that issued by Joseph in Gen 45:3, just before he reveals his identity to his brothers. As Alter put it, “the same words that were a preface to a great moment of fraternal reconciliation are now a prologue to a sexual violation of the fraternal bond.”²²² Later, his terse command to Tamar (בּוֹאִי שְׁכְבִי עִמִּי אֲחוֹתִי) “Come, lie with me, my sister,” 2 Sam 13:11) echoes that of Potiphar's wife, whose two-word directive to Joseph (שְׁכַבְהָ) “Lie with me,” Gen 39:7) is similarly straightforward. Indeed, Joseph's verbosity in contrast to the laconic speech of his master's wife is mirrored in the story from Samuel, in which Amnon, “the assailant[,] is again laconic in lust..., while the assailed one, Tamar, speaks eight words for every one of his....”²²³ Finally, at the end of the episode, after Tamar has been cast out, she is described as wearing a כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים

²²⁰ See Alter 1992: 126–128.

²²¹ I have drawn this discussion from Alter 1992: 114–117.

²²² Alter 1992: 114.

²²³ Alter 1992: 114.

kəṭōnet passîm (2 Sam 13:18), the special tunic famously associated elsewhere *only* with Joseph. Alter interpreted these data as follows:

This confluence of allusions to the Joseph story gives thematic depth to the tale of incestuous rape. The episode begins with an echo of Joseph's reconciliation scene and moves back in reverse narrative direction to the ornamental tunic, which in the Joseph story marks the initial crime of brothers against brother, when they attacked him and fabricated out of the blood-soaked garment the evidence of his death.²²⁴

Thus, here we have a single scene that draws on the entire scope of a different narrative cycle, in order "to underline a theme, define a motive or character, provide a certain orientation toward an event."²²⁵

This example is but one instance of allusion in the Bible, of which countless other instances, of greater and lesser degree, could be provided. Moreover, as demonstrated in works such as Rendsburg's study of Davidic themes in the book of Genesis, the allusive quality of biblical narrative has a bearing beyond the literary on our understanding of the biblical corpus.²²⁶ Indeed, such "elaborating, transforming, reversing, reinventing, or selectively remembering pieces of the past to fit into a new textual pattern"²²⁷ stands as the pivotal aspect of the Bible's use of convention. In order for such conventions to function narratively, the audience must be familiar with the precursors of any given allusive element, and so the self-referential character of such conventions in the Bible requires that the entire collection of literature be approached on some level as a continuous, organic whole.

²²⁴ Alter 1992: 117.

²²⁵ Alter 1992: 114.

²²⁶ Rendsburg 2001.

²²⁷ Alter 1992: 129.

This unity-in-multiplicity was expressed elegantly by Edward L. Greenstein, who remarked as follows in the course of his examination of the literary history of the biblical corpus:

I incline toward the many critics who see the final formation of the primary biblical narrative as a complicated process mixing diverse genres, many sources, oral and written, long and short. Like Job, who did not understand how Leviathan was made, I do not pretend that I can unravel or reconstruct the creation of the remarkable history of Israel's covenant up to the Babylonian exile. ... [But o]verall, I do see many sinews—conceptual, thematic, and rhetorical—holding the elephant together.²²⁸

Thus, convention in biblical literature may be conceived as the “sinews” of Greenstein’s “elephant,” and serves to link together the entire range of disparate materials in the Bible, standing as “an index of the degree to which ancient Hebrew literature was on its way from corpus to canon....”²²⁹ Consequently, we must view allusion as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, as Alter indicated by the following remark about Isaiah’s allusions to Genesis, applicable broadly to biblical literature as a whole: “The essential point...is not the prophet’s clever use of allusion, but the deep affinity of perception with his predecessors that his use of allusion reflects.”²³⁰ In other words, the continuity evident in the Bible’s uses of convention is not an illusory happenstance arising from superficial similarities, but a deep and genuine reflection of a worldview in process, any given stage of which can renew its engagement with prior established perceptions and expressions as it grapples with the tensions and challenges of its subject matter.

²²⁸ Greenstein 1990: 162–163.

²²⁹ Alter 1992: 129.

²³⁰ Alter 1990: 33.

The Bible as Simultaneously Composite and Unified

To be sure, an examination of the conventions represented in biblical literature sheds light only on those elements that we can perceive and interpret, and there doubtless remain innumerable features of this kind that are, “after three millennia, no longer recoverable.”²³¹ And, indeed, Alter repeatedly emphasized the tremendous value of the contributions made by source-critical and other historically-minded methodologies, as, for instance, in the following statement presented at the outset of one of his studies: “Let me hasten to say that if we murder to dissect, we also dissect to understand, and nothing in what follows is meant to discount the impressive advances in the understanding of the historical development of the Bible that have been achieved through the analysis of its text, whatever the margin of conjecture, into disparate components.”²³² Literary approaches cannot and should not be credited with explaining away all advances in source criticism and similar methods:

There are passages of biblical narrative that seem to resist any harmonizing interpretation, leading one to conclude either that there were certain circumstances in the transmission and editing of ancient Hebrew texts which could on occasion lead to intrinsic incoherence, or that the biblical notion of what constituted a meaningful and unified narrative continuum might at times be unfathomable from the enormous distance of intellectual and historical evolution that stands between us and these creations of the early Iron Age.²³³

In other words, despite our best literary efforts, there remain a wealth of cruxes that literarily-oriented hypotheses have proved insufficient to disentangle. This is not to say that any other method, no matter how entrenched in the traditional currents of

²³¹ Alter 1981: 49.

²³² Alter 1992: 109.

²³³ Alter 1981: 133.

biblical scholarship, should stand as the *de facto* approach of choice, either in specific cases or generally; each should be evaluated continually on its own merits. But it is important to avoid overstating the illuminatory capability of the literary viewpoint, which, though long underestimated, is far from limitless.

That said, however, in the larger context of biblical scholarship, the point made above about the continuity of the biblical literary tradition as reflected in its use of convention is particularly noteworthy, since the interconnection across and interplay between the sundry permutations of conventional forms or motifs are qualities that “strictly historical hypotheses would fail even to touch upon.”²³⁴ In general terms, such a unifying perspective is the very contribution that literary approaches can offer over and above more atomistic methodologies, since, as Alter put it, it enables us to examine in great detail “what the biblical authors and author-redactors surely aimed for—a continuous *reading* of the texts instead of a nervous hovering over its various small components.”²³⁵ He argued that in biblical studies, “the concentration on dissected elements has led to a relative neglect of the complex means used by the biblical writers to lock their texts together, to amplify their meanings by linking one text with another...into intricate, integrated structures, which are, after all, what we experience as readers and which abundantly deserve scholarly consideration.”²³⁶ To put it another way, the aim of biblical literary criticism is not to dismiss the notion of the Bible’s composite nature, which in general terms is indisputable on some level at least, but rather to examine how its various pieces are joined together and operate in concert.

²³⁴ Alter 1981: 48.

²³⁵ Alter 1990: 26 (emphasis in original).

²³⁶ Alter 1992: 109.

Herein lies the distinguishing characteristic that sets this method apart from those concerned with the study of the individual pieces themselves. Moreover, the ramifications of such a perspective are by no means limited to the mere amplification of the aesthetic sensibilities of various biblical texts, but also can bear a deeper significance, as Stanley Gevirtz observed: “To be indifferent toward their art is to risk indifference for their meaning.”²³⁷ Far from mere ornamentation, the Bible’s literary sophistication itself operates as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas, implicitly supporting and enriching a given text’s explicit content.

Alter fruitfully explored this challenging idea of the Bible as a body of literature that is both composite and unified, ultimately concluding that “the characteristic biblical method for incorporating multiple perspectives appears to have been not a fusion of views into a single utterance but a montage of viewpoints arranged in sequence.”²³⁸ Generally speaking, this perspective sheds literary light on aspects of the biblical material, such as reduplications and contradictions, that are viewed traditionally as editorial vestiges demarcating distinct sources, with minimal concern for the import of their having been allowed to persist in the final version of the text. To clarify Alter’s point, it is worthwhile to revisit briefly one of the examples he discussed, namely the end of Genesis 42, in which Joseph’s brothers, who have met him in Egypt without recognizing him, have left Simeon with him and set off to return to their father. In verse 25, we are informed that Joseph has ordered secretly that the silver that the brothers used to buy grain be returned to their sacks. During the journey home, in verse 27, one of the brothers discovers the silver, and upon his informing the

²³⁷ Gevirtz 1963: 97.

²³⁸ Alter 1981: 154. The world of visual art provides an illustrative parallel: a characteristic feature of cubist paintings is their presentation of an image from multiple conflicting perspectives, as, e.g., in a portrait the combines both frontal and profile views.

others, they collectively remark, מִה־זֹאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ “What is this that Elohim has done to us?” (Gen 42:28). Later, however, the discovery recurs in an entirely different context, when in verse 35 the brothers and their father Jacob see the silver and are afraid (וַיִּירָאוּ). In this instance it is Jacob who responds in verse 36 with an apparent *non sequitur*, expressing his agonized feeling of perpetual bereavement at having lost first Joseph, then Simeon, and now Benjamin as well.

From a strictly logical–chronological standpoint, it hardly is conceivable that the discovery of the silver could occur twice, and this has been interpreted in traditional source criticism as an indication of two contradictory traditions: the first discovery represents the version of the story attested in the J source, and the second comes from E. Indeed, Alter himself in no way sought to discredit the existence of these two sources, either generally or in this specific context. Rather, he aimed instead to reframe our perception of this apparent disagreement between the two accounts, in a way that strikingly resonates with the observations of Whybray presented above:

The contradiction between verses 27–28 and verse 35 is so evident that it seems naïve on the part of any modern reader to conclude that the ancient Hebrew writer was so inept or unperceptive that the conflict between the two versions could have somehow escaped him. Let me suggest that, quite to the contrary, the Hebrew writer was perfectly aware of the contradiction but viewed it as a superficial one. In linear logic, the same action could not have occurred twice in two different ways; but in the narrative logic with which the writer worked, it made sense to incorporate both versions available to him because together they brought forth mutually complementary implications of the narrated event, thus enabling him to give a complete imaginative account of it.²³⁹

²³⁹ Alter 1981: 138.

The first version, he went on to explain, emphasizes the brothers' wonder at what has happened, at their strange encounter with their fate as decreed by God—an encounter whose agent, unbeknownst to them, is Joseph, whom they have just unwittingly encountered.²⁴⁰ This account, then, operates on a “theological–historical” axis, in which “what is important is the mysterious workings of God, Joseph’s role as an agent of divine destiny, and the paramount theme of knowledge versus ignorance.”²⁴¹

In the second version, brothers and father initially react not with wonder but with wordless fear, plainly stated by the single Hebrew word, punctuated only by Jacob’s cryptic utterance. In Alter’s view, this fear is reflective of their feelings of guilt regarding their earlier actions toward Joseph: “The brothers sold Joseph southward into slavery for twenty pieces of silver (*kesef*); now they find at the end of their own northward journey from the place to which they sent him that the silver (*kesef*) they paid out has mysteriously reappeared in their saddle-packs, and this touches a raw nerve of guilt in them that had been laid bare by Joseph’s imprisonment of Simeon and his demand for Benjamin.”²⁴² He went on to posit that Jacob must perceive not only their fear, but this guilt as well; and so, explicitly connecting this situation with the prior loss of Joseph and Simeon and the potential loss of Benjamin, he levels an accusation against them: אֲתִי שָׁכַלְתֶּם “Me you have bereaved!” (Gen 42:36). This version, then, operates on a “moral–psychological” axis, in which “what is crucial is the painful process by which the brothers come to accept responsibility for what they have done and are led to work out their guilt.”²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Alter 1981: 138–139.

²⁴¹ Alter 1981: 140.

²⁴² Alter 1981: 139.

²⁴³ Alter 1981: 140.

In the mindset of the biblical writers, Alter proposed, these two wholly distinct but equally important aspects of the story are best laid out side by side, rather than forced into one monolithic, all-encompassing expression:

A writer in another tradition might have tried somehow to combine the different aspects of the story in a single narrative event; the biblical author, dealing as he often did in the editing and splicing and artful montage of antecedent literary materials, would appear to have reached for this effect of multifaceted truth by setting in sequence two different versions that brought into focus two different dimensions of his subject.²⁴⁴

Possibly, one might go one step further, and argue that this not a *redactional* feature but a true *compositional* one—that is, that in the light of this approach there is no need in this case to perceive disparate sources at all. But it is valuable to recognize that Alter’s restraint in this regard serves to amplify the degree to which his view is not only not necessarily opposed to, but in fact actually compatible at times with traditional methods such as source criticism. His perspective simply posits that from the standpoint of the ultimate literary creation, the redactor’s function can resemble more closely that of a true author than that of an editor.²⁴⁵

Invitation to a Holistic Perspective on Sefer Bilʿam

Needless to say, however, there remain countless places in biblical literature where literary explanations stand at odds with those provided by other longstanding critical methods. In some cases, such explanations can be evaluated only according to personal preference; in others, they provide an important counterpoint to certain

²⁴⁴ Alter 1981: 140.

²⁴⁵ Cf. the remarks of Milgrom (1989: 468) regarding *Sefer Bilʿam* specifically, cited in the next section.

problematic assumptions that persist in the non-literary sphere; and in still others, they are unable, as yet, to provide the desired illuminating or corrective insight. But on a broad scale, the considerable gains made by way of literary approaches to the Bible require that we heed Polzin's argument for "an operational priority to literary analysis at the preliminary stages of research."²⁴⁶ As Alter put it, "[B]efore you can decide whether a text is defective, composite, or redundant, you have to determine to the best of your ability the formal principles on which the text is organized."²⁴⁷ To disparage the expansive contributions of other methodologies to scholarly discourse on the Bible and its development would be the height of folly; but in order to ensure that we are not misreading the evidence, we must be willing first to entertain the possibility that its peculiarities and challenges are not signs of imperfection, but rather integral components of the distinctive character of biblical literature. Moreover, even if one prefers to attribute such data to the composite nature of a given text, this should not detract from one's consideration of the final version's literary character. Indeed, with regard to *Sefer Bil'am* itself, Jacob Milgrom observed as follows:

Of course, the possibility must be considered that the poetic oracles and the narrative were originally independent of each other, discrete epics on the same theme, which were fused at a later date by a single editorial hand. However, even if this were so, the fusion is so thoroughgoing and skillful that the original seams are no longer visible: The redaction is a new artistic creation.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Polzin 1980: 2.

²⁴⁷ Alter 1990: 26.

²⁴⁸ Milgrom 1990: 468. The same may be said of the episode involving Balaam's jenny (Num 22:22–35), notwithstanding Milgrom's view that this section is a distinctly separate component of the pericope.

With this in mind, I proceed in the next chapter to offer thorough analyses of the mechanics and communicative import of a variety of specific literary devices in *Sefer Bil'am*. Although the majority of the devices examined here are evident primarily in the prose narrative of the pericope, several important elements arise in the poetry as well, and receive attention at the appropriate junctures. Moreover, some devices evidently are operative in both realms, and thus provide further justification for perceiving the entire pericope as an integrated unit in which prose and poetry work in tandem. In some cases, the results of this discussion permit a reevaluation of traditional source-critical perspectives on the pericope; but the primary goal is to understand the inner workings of these devices, with an eye toward their collective contribution to the text's transmission of meaning.

CHAPTER 5
LITERARY DEVICES IN *SEFER BILʿAM*:
THE FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS

Introductory Remarks

The majority of the literary devices that occupy our attention in this chapter occur in the prose narrative of *Sefer Bilʿam*, though instances arising in the poetry of Balaam’s oracles receive ample attention as well. I have confined the list of devices under scrutiny here to those that operate on a relatively fine scale, that is, on the level of individual sounds, words, phrases, and concepts. At times, however, the deployment of these devices across the pericope results in a cumulative picture that is more extensive in scope, as is the case particularly with respect to repetition and structure, the final two devices to be explored here. Indeed, in certain cases, the device in question evinces tremendous range not only in terms of the breadth of textual material that it encompasses, but also with regard to its free movement along the prosaic–poetic spectrum. Regardless of the “tangible” size of such devices, however, our concern here is not with broader themes and impressions, but with the minutiae of the text, which are considered both individually and collectively. It may be helpful to conceive of this body of literary devices as the toolbox of the text’s authors, who have employed them in remarkably sophisticated ways as an aid both to the aesthetics of the text and to its success in transmitting the desired complex of meanings.

At this juncture, it is crucial to recognize that style-switching and setting-switching, whose operation in *Sefer Bilʿam* was examined in Chapter 3, constitute equal partners in the authors’ literary toolbox, on precisely the same level as the other literary devices to be explored in this chapter. Although the relative unfamiliarity of style- and setting-switching and the intensive linguistic scrutiny that they demand have

warranted their treatment in a separate chapter, from a literary standpoint this should not be interpreted as a qualitative differentiation between those devices and the one explored below. Rather, all of these should be seen collectively as the fundamental elements that constitute the literary character of the pericope.

We proceed now to an examination of the following literary devices across both the prosaic and poetic portions of the pericope: sound echo, including alliteration and assonance; keywords; naming and epithets; gapping and ambiguity; repetition and variation; and structure. I begin each respective section with a brief review of the relevant secondary literature, from which I draw the perspectives and methods applied in the subsequent analysis.

“Sound Echo:” Alliteration, Assonance, and Related Phenomena

The term “sound echo” is borrowed from an article in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, in which T. V. F. Brogan subsumed under this designation three distinct types of phonetic patterning.¹ Here I offer somewhat simplified versions of Percy G. Adams’s definitions of these types:

Alliteration: Strategic repetition of the same initial consonant or consonant cluster in multiple words and/or syllables²

Assonance: Strategic repetition of the same final or, somewhat less frequently, medial vowel sound in multiple words and/or syllables³

Consonance: Strategic repetition of the same final consonant or consonant cluster in multiple words and/or syllables; or more specifically, in some contexts, “the repetition...of two or more

¹ Brogan et al. 1993 (n.p.), § I, “Definition.”

² Adams 1993a (n.p.).

³ Adams 1993b (n.p.).

consonant sounds without the intervening vowel echo, as *live-leave*”⁴

Of particular note here are the specific references to the *location* of the repeated vocable, since in biblical literature this aspect of sound echo evidently is of less importance. Thus, Wilfred G. E. Watson’s more general remark with regard to biblical poetry may be applied likewise to prose: “Alliteration is the effect produced when the same consonant recurs within a unit of verse....Alliteration is here understood in its wider sense of consonant repetition and is *not* confined to word-initial alliteration.”⁵ He proceeded to refer to “alliterative clusters”⁶ of consonants, which can recur in strict or jumbled sequence, and also noted what he called “near-alliteration,”⁷ where similar but not identical phonemes (e.g., dentals, sibilants, etc.) are utilized to produce an effect analogous to that of true alliteration.

In sum, sound echo in biblical literature may be characterized concisely as the strategic repetition in close proximity of a sound or cluster of sounds, with the terms “alliteration” and “assonance” referring broadly to such repetition as it applies to consonants and vowels respectively. The Bible also occasionally attests rhyme, which amounts to the simultaneous use of alliteration and assonance. The significance of rhyme, or more specifically end-rhyme, as an artistic phenomenon in the Semitic languages is somewhat difficult to gauge, since the morphological constraints involved in the use of philological components such as pronominal suffixes, feminine endings, and so on frequently result in inescapable phonetic repetitions at the ends of words.

⁴ Adams 1993c (n.p.).

⁵ Watson 1984: 225.

⁶ Watson 1984: 226.

⁷ Watson 1984: 225.

Nevertheless, in certain instances it is readily apparent that such patterns occur intentionally, not incidentally.

When considered as a form of repetition, therefore, sound echo stands as an oral/auditory instance of what James Kugel termed the Bible's "seconding" impulse,⁸ even operating at times as a kind of phonetic (as opposed to semantic) parallelism. Adele Berlin, who preferred to focus solely on consonantal repetition because of the relatively minor role of vowels in Hebrew wordplay and the lingering questions about the pronunciation of the language,⁹ defined the notion of "sound pairs" as "the repetition...of the same or similar consonants in any order within close proximity,"¹⁰ which overlaps precisely with the alliterative phenomena described by Watson. Moreover, it is worthwhile to heed Berlin's reservations about assonance, which accord with the overwhelmingly consonantal focus generally attested in scholarship. Thus, although with due caution we may observe the same essential principles at work in some noteworthy cases of vowel repetition, the consonantal (hence alliterative) varieties of sound echo predominates in the present study.

Notwithstanding the remarks of Berlin, Watson, and a few others, scholarship has devoted comparatively little attention to sound echo as a prominent literary device in the Bible. Alliteration has received the vast majority of scholarly attention, but general theoretical explorations, while frequently offering important perspectives on the matter, have been particularly sporadic. Two prominent early sources, by Immanuel M. Casanowicz and Joseph Reider, confine their focus exclusively to alliterative patterns exhibited in two or more immediately adjacent words—a

⁸ See, e.g., Kugel 1981: 51–54 and *passim*.

⁹ Berlin 1985: 104.

¹⁰ Berlin 1985: 104.

phenomenon for which Reider imported the Arabic term *ʿitbāʿ* اتباع—but devote no attention to more extended, less contiguous usages of the device.¹¹

More recently, Baruch Margalit’s series of articles on alliteration in Ugaritic poetry offers a sustained foray into the subject in Northwest Semitic generally.¹² But its limitations with regard to the light it sheds on biblical literature are manifold. First, it focuses solely on poetry. Second, it invites a simple, unqualified transference of the author’s findings from Ugaritic to Hebrew.¹³ Third, in a manner akin to the efforts of Casanowicz and Reider, it treats “the verse...as the main alliterative framework,”¹⁴ thus confining its scope exclusively to alliteration occurring in close proximity. And fourth, it is somewhat overbold, perhaps, in its assertion of the ubiquity of alliteration: “A verse whose structure has been correctly established should show itself as an alliterative unit as well.”¹⁵ At times, Margalit’s body of work evinces his attempts to demonstrate this principle by emending heavy-handedly in the interest of “discovering” the true alliterative nature of a particular text; and as a result his conclusions must be treated with great caution. Nevertheless, his sustained explorations of this topic are noteworthy, and in particular his observation that “an understanding of certain grammatical forms or lexical terms in given contexts cannot be complete without recognizing the factor of alliterative exigency”¹⁶ is of critical value and resonates with those expressed subsequently by others.

¹¹ Casanowicz 1894: 8–13, 30–33; Reider 1934.

¹² Margalit 1975; Margalit 1976; Margalit 1979; Margalit 1980.

¹³ Margalit 1975: 310–311.

¹⁴ Margalit 1975: 311.

¹⁵ Margalit 1975: 311.

¹⁶ Margalit 1975: 311.

A few works address alliteration by way of a brief assessment in the context of much broader subject matter. In addition to those cited above by Berlin and Watson,¹⁷ Luis Alonso Schökel's volume on Hebrew poetics¹⁸ stands as another example.¹⁹ Elsewhere, general theoretical approaches to alliteration have tended to appear as introductory remarks in smaller-scale studies concerned with specific biblical or extrabiblical texts or, in some cases, with individual instances of the phenomenon in these corpora. Of particular note in this regard are works by Lawrence Boadt and Gary A. Rendsburg, who devote significant portions of their examinations to the task of reviewing the preliminary theory.²⁰ Most such studies, however, dispense with such background in favor of a tighter focus on the text in question. This is the case, for example, in Aloysius Fitzgerald's exploration of Psalm 29,²¹ David Noel Freedman's analysis of the structure of Psalm 137,²² Rendsburg's adducement of the alliterative term תִּלְפִּיזָה in Song 4:4,²³ and so on.²⁴

Lengthier works, such as Shalom M. Paul's commentary on Amos²⁵ or Charles Conroy's and J. P. Fokkelman's extended studies of the books of Samuel,²⁶ the latter

¹⁷ Above, pp. 274–275.

¹⁸ Alonso Schökel 1988: 31–33.

¹⁹ See also Watson 1994: 28 and *passim*, and also the brief additional bibliography in Margalit 1979: 537 n. 2 and Boadt 1983: 354–355 n. 11, the latter of which includes a single reference pertaining to assonance.

²⁰ Boadt 1983: 353–356; Rendsburg 2008: 83–85.

²¹ Fitzgerald 1974.

²² Freedman 1971. Rendsburg–Rendsburg 1993 deals with the same text, and raises the issue of sound echo on pp. 398–399.

²³ Rendsburg 1994.

²⁴ See also, e.g., Perdue 1974 (Psalm 49); Rendsburg 1999b (Ps 110:3b); Rendsburg 2002b: 28 (Gen 24:18–22), 36 (1 Sam 2:11–21); Rendsburg 2003b: 106–107 (Gen 21:4–8), 107 (Exod 2:2–6), 118 (1 Kgs 21:2); Fokkelman–Rendsburg 2003 (Ps 116:4b, 8b); etc.; and note Watson 1989: 54–56, wherein are presented an array of other biblical examples of sound echo. Rendsburg 2008 offers a rare sustained examination of alliteration in an extended prose context, namely, the Exodus narrative.

²⁵ Paul 1991: 117, 163, 220 n. 21, 257 n. 13, 276 n. 33.

²⁶ Conroy 1978: 115–116; Fokkelman 1981–1993: *passim*.

of which presents numerous examples of alliteration across its four volumes, do not devote significant attention to the broader theoretical questions about the role of alliteration in biblical literature, instead simply describing the phenomenon and pointing out its various attestations. The same is true of those studies focusing on related bodies of literature, such as Rendsburg's article on literary devices in the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,²⁷ Terence Collins's poetic breakdown of the Kilamuwa Inscription,²⁸ and Dennis Pardee's monograph on 'Anat I and Proverbs 2.²⁹

The result of such a sporadic and disparate array of secondary literature concerned with alliteration is that there remains no clear consensus on the significance of alliteration in biblical literature, and particularly in the prose material. As a result, at times such efforts have come under attack, as is evident in Michael O'Connor's 1977 response to earlier articles by Collins and Fitzgerald.³⁰ Therein, the author specifically addressed the matter of alliteration, as presented in Collins's work on the Kilamuwa inscription, as one of "several spurious and misleading phenomena which should be removed from consideration...."³¹ He proceeded to argue that it is inappropriate to make a case for alliteration in situations where the alliterating consonants are extremely common, specifically citing Fitzgerald's reading of Psalm 29 in which a replacement of all occurrences of the name יְהוָה with בָּעַל produces a series of alliterative strands running throughout the poem on the consonants *b*, *ʿ*, and *l*.³² The upshot of O'Connor's argument is that the remaining cases of alliteration in the

²⁷ Rendsburg 2000a: 17, 20–22.

²⁸ Collins 1971: 185–186.

²⁹ Pardee 1988: 133–138 and Table 1.7.1.

³⁰ O'Connor 1977, which responds to Collins 1971 and Fitzgerald 1974.

³¹ O'Connor 1977: 15.

³² O'Connor 1977: 16–17; and cf. the similar remarks offered in del Olmo Lete 1984: 428.

biblical corpus, for instance, are infrequent enough that the significance of the phenomenon as a literary device is significantly undermined.

To be sure, O'Connor's criticism of Fitzgerald's approach, extended also to the perspective of Collins, is well worth careful consideration, not least because Fitzgerald's argument revolves around a version of the text that is not actually attested. However, it is reasonable to see O'Connor's viewpoint as representative of a highly conservative approach that could easily result in the rejection of any number of examples of alliteration purely on the basis of the consonant(s) in question, while the evidence in such cases, when considered with all due caution, strongly speaks to careful craft rather than the simple happenstance of the language. To this end, it is important to consider Watson's statement that "alliteration is only significant in terms of its function...."³³ In other words, any approach to alliteration in the Bible must begin with a clear understanding of its behavior and function, aspects regarding which some of the works identified above provide useful insights. Such background material provides the necessary tools for identifying the presence and operating principles of any alliterative sequences at work in a given text.

Secondary literature that takes up the matter of alliteration, and occasionally other types of sound echo, is concerned most often with the operation of the device as it occurs in poetry. It frequently is adduced as an element working in tandem with the structural constitution of a particular poetic unit,³⁴ or more broadly as an element

³³ Watson 1984: 227.

³⁴ See, e.g., Boadt 1983: 355; Collins 1971: 185; Margalit 1975: 311. M. Salisbury (1994: 438, 440) also dealt to some extent with sound echo as a structural feature, but was concerned primarily with the ramifications of such elements on the translation process. An early attempt to treat sound echo from a structural perspective is that of Charles A. Briggs (1887: 156), in which his previously promised "examples of the use of rhyme, assonance and alliteration" (Briggs 1886: 170) are embodied in a single problematic instance of near-rhyme in Ps 2:4b–5, which itself necessitates the rejection of the *te'amim* and attachment of לָמוֹ to 5b rather than 5a in order to achieve the series אֱלִימוֹ...יְהִלְמוֹ at the ends

related to poetic rhythm.³⁵ To be sure, alliteration effectively lends itself to tandem operation with structural features such as parallelism and repetition. In addition, as Alonso Schökel and Watson have noted,³⁶ it can help to emphasize certain sections, phrases, or individual words in a given poem, highlighting them as particularly significant.

Taking these in conjunction with a handful of other alliterative functions, isolated by J. T. S. Wheelock³⁷ and applied to biblical poetry by Watson, such as its mnemonic, focusing, and intensifying aspects, one is reminded inescapably of the orality of biblical literature. The potency of alliteration lies in its being spoken, and it is to be understood in this sense as a particularly well-suited aid both to the speaker's recall and delivery and to the audience's comprehension of meaning and significance in what is spoken.

Alliteration in the Bible is by no means limited to poetry, however. For prose the same rules apply, but at times one also encounters a substantially broader scale in alliterative patterning.³⁸ That is to say, in addition to such sequences in discrete segments involving just a few words, the device can be deployed across lengthy passages, or even entire pericopes.³⁹ The result would appear to be a connective

of the three cola in question. His already questionable argument encounters additional difficulty due to its omission of the two cola just a few lines prior that similarly end in *תִּימָן* (2:3a, 3b), and the potential bearing of this pattern on his proposed strophic breakdown of the poem.

³⁵ Hauser 1980: 24.

³⁶ Alonso Schökel 1963: 80–84; Watson 1984: 228.

³⁷ Wheelock 1978: 379–396, wherein the terms used are mnemonic, energaeic, and vocative.

³⁸ Rendsburg 2008, which examines alliterative phenomena across the entire Exodus narrative, is noteworthy for its treatment of this topic in a prose context, especially one of such great length.

³⁹ Note, e.g., Rendsburg's discussion of the keyword *בַּת* in Exodus 1–2, which alliterates with various terms throughout both chapters (Rendsburg 2008: 85–86). For an extrabiblical example, we may refer to the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, in which the keyword *dpt* “ship,” attested throughout the text, finds alliterative partners at various points separated by dozens of lines (Rendsburg 2000a: 21).

quality to such extended patterns of alliteration, drawing together the various segments and ideas that arise across an extended body of text.

The presence of alliteration in prose as well as in poetry emphasizes the fact that one must reckon additionally with the ornamental function of sound echo, which overlaps to some extent with the functions already noted—highlighting important points in the text, facilitation of recitation and comprehension, etc.—but extends also to what Kugel termed the “heightening” of biblical language.⁴⁰ Apparently overlooked by Watson⁴¹ and others, this quality suggests that we see alliteration as an element that formalizes and elevates the places in a text where it occurs, increasing the significance and loftiness of the words and passages in question. Accordingly, as discussed in the previous chapter,⁴² at times it can help to shift a prosaic passage slightly closer to the poetic end of the Bible’s literary spectrum.

Finally,⁴³ it is clear that in biblical literature, unusual word choices frequently have been made for the purpose of producing alliteration or some other form of sound echo.⁴⁴ This provides a useful tool for the scholar, since even when a unusual word’s precise meaning or sense is obscure, it may be verified as correct and even potentially

⁴⁰ Kugel 1981: *passim*, e.g. 85.

⁴¹ This aspect is not mentioned in Watson 1984: 225–229, his most thorough exploration of the matter.

⁴² See above, pp. 233–237.

⁴³ In addressing the functions of sound echo, I stop short of including Freedman’s remarks regarding Psalm 137 (Freedman 1971). He stated that the device was used “to produce a mournful tone,” specifically pointing out such traits as a particular alliterative sequence that “simulates the sound of the wind in the willows, resonating over the waters,” the repeated use of “the keening note of the pronominal ending *-nū*,” etc. (Freedman 1971: 191). His attention to the relationship between the poem’s sound and its content is to be commended, but his assertions are both highly subjective and almost impossible to apply usefully to any other text.

⁴⁴ See (with all due caution) Margalit 1975: 311, cited above, and also, e.g., Fokkelman–Rendsburg 2003; Margalit 1979: 538–551; Rendsburg 1994; Rendsburg 1999b; Rendsburg 2000a: 20; Rendsburg 2008: 84.

interpreted with more accuracy if it can be associated with such a pattern in the surrounding context.

Bearing these ideas in mind, we may adduce several alliterative schemata, as well as certain other instances of sound echo, in *Sefer Bil'am*. To reiterate, however, it is not enough simply to isolate sequences of repeated sounds in the text. I aim instead to identify the contributions that such sequences make to the text as a literary work, and for this reason I offer here a presentation of the data whose focus, where possible, will lie in demonstrating such functions.

I begin by examining alliterative patterns that play on the names of the main characters in the pericope. Although the matter of naming in *Sefer Bil'am* will concern us in a subsequent section, it is appropriate here to direct attention briefly to the work of Moshe Garsiel, which underlies many of the observations to follow. In his volume *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*,⁴⁵ originally published in Hebrew in 1987, he explored a phenomenon in biblical literature that he termed “midrashic name derivation” or MND,⁴⁶ whereby the names of people and places in the Bible are imbued with significance “on the basis of sound or semantic potential.”⁴⁷ He argued that MND is to be distinguished from overt aetiological statements about characters’ names, since it is not concerned directly with the act of naming or with providing a literarily motivated etymology for a given name, but instead creates a remarkably flexible network of cognitive associations around the name in question: “Here we are dealing with a wider scope of potential derivations:

⁴⁵ Garsiel 1991.

⁴⁶ Garsiel 1991: 19.

⁴⁷ Garsiel 1991: 19.

sound effects (e.g., alliteration), word play, subtle riddles, concealed meanings, key motifs, etc.—all are derived from names *regardless of their reasonable etymology*.⁴⁸

Jacob's name stands as a particularly illustrative instance of this phenomenon. Garsiel pointed out that “[e]tymologists regard this name ($y^{\text{c}}qb$ —יעקב) as a short version of the common name $y^{\text{c}}qb^{\text{l}}$ (יעקבאל) and its like.”⁴⁹ Meanwhile, “[t]he naming explanation in Gen 25:26...links the naming [of Jacob] with the special occurrence of Jacob's birth: he was born while his hand held Esau's heel ($^{\text{c}}qb$ —יעקב).”⁵⁰ In addition to these two perspectives, however, Garsiel pointed out that “[t]he MND of this name is expressed by Esau: ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob [$y^{\text{c}}qb$ —יעקב]! For he has supplanted me [$w\text{-}y^{\text{c}}qbny$ —ויעקבני] these two times’ (Gen 27:36). In this pun, Esau exploits Jacob's name for his own purposes, and gives a derivation which differs from both etymology and the Bible's own name explanation.”⁵¹

This MND's clear reliance on the similarity between the sounds uttered in the name יעקב and those in the verb ויעקבני serves as a felicitous indicator of how we shall proceed in this discussion. As we shall see, many of the following observations regarding alliteration on the names בִּלְעָם and בִּלְק rely heavily on details adduced already by Garsiel. For this reason, as we undertake a close examination of these features, the patterns discussed here should be considered within the context of Garsiel's perspective on MNDs generally.

⁴⁸ Garsiel 1991: 20.

⁴⁹ Garsiel 1991: 21.

⁵⁰ Garsiel 1991: 21.

⁵¹ Garsiel 1991: 21 (bracketed sections in original).

Balaam

Garsiel isolated alliterative patterns involving the names of both major characters in *Sefer Bil'am*. With regard to the protagonist,⁵² the sounds of both the given name and the patronymic in the phrase *Bil'am ben-Ba'ôr* are echoed at various points in the text, and the phrase serves in various ways to amplify the significance of these points by way of this connection. The consonantal sounds in the name בלעם resonate with the following points throughout the pericope:

וַתֵּרָא הָאִתּוֹן אֶת־מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה וַתִּרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בְּלִעָם וַיַּחֲרֹאֲף בְּלִעָם וַיִּךְ אֶת־הָאִתּוֹן
בַּמֶּקֶל:

And the jenny saw the messenger of Yahweh, and it lay down beneath Balaam; and Balaam's anger flared, and he beat the jenny *with the cane*.
(Num 22:27)

וַיְהִי בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת־בְּלִעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בָּמוֹת בַּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם קֶצֶה הָעָם:
In the morning, Balaq took Balaam *and led him up Bamot-Ba'al*,
whence he saw the periphery of *the people*.
(Num 22:41)⁵³

הִנֵּה עָם לְבַדֵּד יֹשֵׁב Behold, *a people* who dwells *alone*...
(Num 23:9c)

הִנֵּה עָם כְּלִבְיָא יָקוּם Behold, *a people* who like *a lion* rises...
(Num 23:24a)

The two instances of alliteration occurring in prose highlight important junctures in the development of the story. The first involves a group of consonants that, although

⁵² What follows is drawn from Garsiel 1991: 52–53.

⁵³ This example was adduced by Garsiel (1991: 89).

not identical to those in Balaam's name, nevertheless parallel it closely, with the velar q substituted here for the pharyngeal y in the personal name. The correspondence between these two consonants lies in their similar origination deep in the throat. The verse in which this alliteration appears is the last of the three occasions on which Balaam beats his jenny, with this final iteration of the pattern leading to the donkey's speech to Balaam and, ultimately, Balaam's own encounter with Yahweh's messenger. In the previous two references to Balaam's assault on his donkey (Num 22:23, 25), the object he uses to strike the animal is not specified, and so we encounter in this verse the first explicit reference to the implement used. The inclusion here of the alliterative term thus highlights not only that this instance marks the end of the repeated sequence of beatings, but also that the climax of the entire episode with the jenny is about to commence.⁵⁴ In addition, it is noteworthy that all three consonants in the name בִּלְקָם are present in the word בִּמְקָל , here in an episode where Balaam occupies the role of one blinded by his self-serving interests, the very role occupied by Balaq throughout the rest of the story.⁵⁵

In the second alliterative instance in prose, Balaam's name is echoed in the description of his first personal encounter with Israel. Keywords relating to the sense of sight are sprinkled liberally throughout the pericope,⁵⁶ and the connection between Balaam's literal sight and his prophetic activity—his figurative “sight”—is asserted on numerous occasions. Balaq himself understands this connection, since his dissatisfaction with Balaam's utterances drives him to lead the prophet to alternative

⁵⁴ Indeed, the inclusion here of the word בִּמְקָל functions as an indicator that the repeating pattern evident in this episode is concluding. See below, p. 419. For a general examination of this phenomenon, see Mirsky 1977.

⁵⁵ The role-reversal that occurs in the episode with the jenny will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ See below, in the section on keywords.

locations from which Balaam can get a different view of Israel (Num 23:13–14a, 27–28). Indeed, even Balaam’s brief oracles to other peoples that conclude the pericope involve his physically witnessing the peoples about whom he speaks (Num 24:20, 21). From this perspective, the potency of the alliteration on Balaam’s name in Num 22:41 becomes much clearer: this marks the initial contact between the prophet and Israel, two forces pitted against each other by Balaam’s design but destined, as the process initiated here continues through the pericope, to come together in oracular alliance.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this alignment of prophet with people more evident than in the two alliterative instances in Balaam’s poetic oracles. The evident relationship between the two lines themselves, and indeed between the first and second oracles in their entirety, is a matter of particular interest in itself;⁵⁷ and indeed, the alliteration identified here serves to strengthen that connection. But in addition, the implanting of the sounds of Balaam’s name into these two expressions of the character of Israel drives home the connection between the speaker and the people of whom he speaks. We have had occasion previously to observe Balaam’s alignment with Israel in our text, and we note again here the statement to this effect that occupies the concluding strophe of the first oracle:

מִי מִנָּה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רֶבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	indeed, number the dust-cloud of Israel?
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׁרָיִם	May my soul die an upright death,
וַיִּתְּהִי אַחֲרֵיָּי כְּמֹהוּ:	and may my posterity be like it (i.e., the
	dust of Jacob // the dust-cloud of Israel).
	(Num 23:10)

⁵⁷ This will be discussed below, in the section on structure.

In short, the alliteration in the two lines indicated above (Num 23:9c, 24a) expresses phonetically a connection between Balaam and Israel that is stated explicitly in the strophe just cited, and thus contributes to this relationship's implicit permeation of the pericope generally.

Moreover, the strophe concluding the first oracle attests alliteration on Balaam's patronymic, which occurs as בן־בַּעֲוֹר in Num 22:5 and as בְּנוֹ בַּעַר in Num 24:3 and 15. In Num 23:10, the words עֶפֶר and רִבְעֵי play on the name of Balaam's father, with the unvoiced bilabial פ replacing ב in the first of these two words. This name likewise alliterates with the keyword עבר "cross, oppose, transgress, trespass" in the following two statements by Balaam that he cannot countermand the will of God.⁵⁸

וַיַּעַן בְּלָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדַי בְּלָק אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מְלֵא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכָל
לַעֲבֹל אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:

And Balaam answered, and he said to Balaq's servants, "If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to *oppose* the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) small or great."

(Num 22:18)

אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מְלֵא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכָל לַעֲבֹל אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ
רָעָה מִלְּבִי אֲשֶׁר־יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ אֲדַבֵּר:

"If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to *oppose* the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) good or ill, on my own; what Yahweh speaks—it shall I speak."

(Num 24:13)

Garsiel expressed the view that the alliteration in these two places "creates an equation between the father's name and the act of disobedience that Balaam eventually

⁵⁸ Garsiel (1991: 52) adduced these instances.

commits [namely, the Ba'al-Pe'or incident in Numbers 25, for which Balaam is held responsible in Num 31:16] despite his declaration of loyalty to the Lord.”⁵⁹ Such a view is undermined by its attribution to *Sefer Bil'am* of an antipathy toward Balaam that is not evident in the pericope itself, although it does arise elsewhere in the Bible.⁶⁰

On the other hand, however, the notion of subverting God's will to one's own does occupy a significant role in this pericope, a role that Balaam himself only comes to understand fully as the story progresses. This is a multilayered issue, but for the moment we may summarize by noting that despite God's express prohibition of cursing Israel in Num 22:12, Balaam not only seeks shortly thereafter to determine whether this instruction will change, but is content later in the story to proceed to Moab and attempt the precise act that God has already forbidden. As it turns out, his efforts are unsuccessful; but this is another matter.

The supporting alliterative play persists throughout *Sefer Bil'am*. First, although the opening verse of Numbers 22 is outside the traditional boundaries of the pericope, the consonants in the keyword עבר, which are shared precisely by Balaam's father's name, are introduced there:

וַיֵּסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּחֲנּוּ בְּעַרְבֹת מוֹאָב לִירְדֵּן יֶרִיחוֹ׃
 And the children of Israel traveled on, and camped *in the steppes of*
 Moab *opposite* the Jordan of Jericho.
 (Num 22:1)

Soon thereafter, when Balaam begins his journey to Moab, we are provided with the seemingly inconsequential detail that שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ “two of his lads (were) with him” (Num 22:22). The word נַעֲרָיו incorporates two of the three consonants in question,

⁵⁹ Garsiel 1991: 52.

⁶⁰ In the next chapter, we will have occasion to examine this matter in detail.

thereby keeping the sounds fresh in the ear and priming the audience for further play on this alliterative thread.⁶¹ Shortly thereafter, the description of the third and final time Yahweh's messenger blocks Balaam's progress incorporates our keyword, as follows:

וַיֹּסֶף מֵלֶאֲדֹ-יְהוָה עֹבֹר וַיַּעֲמֵד בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֵין-דֶּרֶךְ לְנִטּוֹת יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל:
 And Yahweh's messenger persisted in *opposing*, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn aside to the right or left.
 (Num 22:26)

We recall that this instance of the messenger's obstruction ultimately results in Balaam's eyes being opened and his absorption of the lesson imparted by the encounter.

Then later in the pericope, after attempting twice to curse Israel in accordance with Balaam's desire, Balaam recognizes that the impossibility of such action is tied explicitly to the fact that it runs counter to the will of the divine:

וַיֵּרָא בַלְעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא-הָלֵךְ בַּפֶּעַם-בַּפֶּעַם לְקַרְאֵת נְחָשִׁים וַיֵּשֶׁת אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו:
 And Balaam saw that it was good in Yahweh's eyes *to bless* Israel; and he did not proceed, as in previous instances, to consult auguries, but set his face toward *the wilderness*.
 (Num 24:1)

Thus, Balaam comes to understand that his previous attempts at cursing Israel were futile specifically because God favors blessing the people instead. This connection is strengthened further by the recurrence here of part of the alliterative connection to his

⁶¹ Balaam's two lads are reminiscent of Abraham's two lads in Genesis 22. On this and other parallels between these two figures, see below, pp. 517–520.

father's name, namely, the consonantal combination **בר** arising in the words **לְבָרֶךְ** and **הַמְדַּבֵּר**. Moreover, as Garsiel pointed out, “the sound *br*...in Aramaic and later biblical Hebrew means ‘son’....”⁶² According to Garsiel, therefore, we have here an oblique reference to the entire phrase **בְּרֵעוֹר בֶּר בְּלָעַם*** (using **בֶּר** rather than **בֶּן** as in *Sefer Bil'am*), which incidentally, he noted, is the precise formulation of Balaam's name plus patronymic in the Deir 'Allā inscriptions.⁶³ We may observe additionally that at this critical point, where Balaam falls into line with God's will for Israel, the concept of opposition embodied in the keyword **עבר** is negated here in two words that include the combination **בר**. Indeed, in the following two major oracles, the patterning on this combination persists in the opening couplet of the series of Balaam's self-applied epithets, where the word **גִּבֹּר** “hero,” in which appear the same two consonants **ב** and **ר**, occurs in close proximity to Balaam's patronymic **בְּרֵעוֹר**. The couplet runs thus:

<p>נֶאֱמַם בְּלָעַם בְּנוֹ בְּעוֹר וְנֶאֱמַם הַגִּבֹּר שֶׁתֵּם הָעֵיִן:</p>	<p>Utterance of Balaam son of Be^cor, and utterance of the hero, pierced-open of eye; (Num 24:3bc = 24:15bc)</p>
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To go a step further, we note that one of these two words is **בֵּרַךְ** “bless,” which occurs throughout the pericope in both prose (Num 22:6, 11, 12; 23:11, 25; 24:1, 10) and poetry (Num 23:10, 20; 24:9). With the exception of God's statement in Num 22:12, in every case Balaam is either the subject of this verb or the speaker of the word itself. Thus, the consonantal combination **בר** is present throughout the pericope; but it is Num 24:1 that operates as the pivotal moment for Balaam, where he finally achieves full comprehension of God's will. Indeed, moments later he expresses the

⁶² Garsiel 1991: 52 (emphasis in original).

⁶³ Garsiel 1991: 52.

true nature of Israel's status as a blessed people, in accordance with God's statement to this effect in Num 22:12:

מְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ Those who bless you are blessed,
וְאֲרֹרֶיךָ אָרוּר: and those who curse you are cursed.
(Num 24:9cd)

Having begun as one attempting, at Balaq's request, to curse (קבב/ארר) Israel, here Balaam expresses full comprehension of the futility, indeed the danger, of such an act. Thus, returning to Num 24:1, we may perceive in the opening verse of the chapter a subtle shift in the alliteration on his patronymic, which previously tied him with the notion of opposition (עבר), but which now, through the connective alliterating combination בר and his subsequent explicit statement in Num 24:9, bears at least the suggestion that Balaam is to be associated instead with blessing (ברך). The relationship is indirect, to be sure, and is not presented forcefully; but the hint of it is there, and it gains strength when juxtaposed with the alliteration between Balaq's name and the root קבב "curse," which will occupy our attention below.

Finally, there exists an additional instance of alliteration on Balaam's name that is explicable on aesthetic grounds. First, we turn to the unusual phrase כַּפְעִים-כַּפְעִים in Num 24:1. Both words in the expression end, like the name בַּלְעָם, with the consonants כפ-; and the preposition ב- attached to the second word further strengthens the connection:

וַיַּרְא בַּלְעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא-הָלַךְ כַּפְעִים-כַּפְעִים לִקְרֹאת
נְחָשִׁים וַיֵּשֶׁת אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו:
And Balaam saw that it was good in Yahweh's eyes to bless Israel; and
he did not proceed, *as in previous instances*, to consult auguries, but set
his face toward the wilderness.
(Num 24:1)

Based on the rarity of this expression, one may surmise that its selection here is predicated on its alliteration with the name of the pericope's main character. Although I can identify no underlying literary motivation for this instance of sound echo, I stress that it is important not to underestimate the aesthetic significance of such devices in biblical literature.

Stepping for a moment outside the bounds of this pericope, it is fruitful to mention here an instance of alliteration on Balaam's name plus patronymic, this one occurring in Num 31:16. Garsiel discussed the matter as follows:

The names of father and son, *bl^m bn b^cwr* [*sic*]...., are used for a play on words with the place name *b^cl p^cwr*..., mentioned immediately after the story of Balaam. This is not just an artificial link dependent on similarity of sound but an essential connection, since according to Num 31:16 it was Balaam's advice that brought about the adultery of the Israelites with the Moabite daughters at Baal-peor....⁶⁴

He proceeded to cite the latter verse, Num 31:16, occurring only a few lines after the record of the killing of Balaam (Num 31:8), in which Moses chastises the Israelites for sparing the Moabite women:

הֵן הֵנָּה הָיוּ לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדִבַּר בָּלָעַם לְמִסְר־מַעַל בִּיהוָה עַל־דִּבְר־פְּעֹזֹר וְתִהְיֶה
הַמִּגָּפָה בְּעַדְתָּ יְהוָה:

Behold, they are the ones who, by the word of Balaam, were to the children of Israel (in order) to commit trespass against Yahweh regarding the matter of Peor; and (so) there was pestilence in the congregation of Yahweh.

⁶⁴ Garsiel 1991: 52 (emphasis in original).

Here, Garsiel pointed out, in addition to the explicit mention of Balaam's name we find that it is linked directly with the phrase "trespass against" (מעל ב-) , which is simply Balaam's name spelled backwards. Furthermore, the name of his father, בע(ו)ר, although not explicitly mentioned, is "latently present in the name of the place of the transgression, **Peor** (p^{wr} – פּעור). The similarity in sound and the interchangeability of the consonants *b* and *p* bring the names very close to each other."⁶⁵ By "interchangeability," Garsiel presumably referred to the use of *b* for *p* in certain circumstances, as in the Arad Letters' use of נבש for BH נַפֶּשׁ "soul" (for example, בנבשכּם, Arad 24 rev. 7);⁶⁶ but in any case his point is pertinent, since the similarity of the two bilabials, one voiced and one unvoiced, enhances the alliteration here.

Finally, between these two links to the names בִּלְעָם and בע(ו)ר respectively, there appears the word דְּבַר "the matter of," which Garsiel also incorporated into his discussion by calling attention, as noted above, to this word's inclusion of the combination בר, the well-known Northwest Semitic term for "son."⁶⁷ Thus, he summarized his observations as follows: "The aim of the MNDs [midrashic name derivations] in this text is to create a stronger linkage between the person and his actions. His name of *bl^m* is correlated with the act of *m^l b-* (to commit trespass), and his father's name, **Beor**, indicates his responsibility for what happens at **Peor**."⁶⁸ Here, then, we encounter a clear instance of a biblical text outside of *Sefer Bil^m* in which the animus toward Balaam is unmistakably evident in the deployment of a series of alliterations on the phrase בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Garsiel 1991: 52 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁶ Ahituv 2008: 127–128 (see also Ahituv 1992: 78, 80 = Ahituv 2005: 119–120).

⁶⁷ Garsiel 1991: 52 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁸ Garsiel 1991: 52–53 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁹ The occurrence and import of biblical references to Balaam outside of *Sefer Bil^m* will occupy our attention in the next chapter.

Balaq

Our first encounter with alliteration on the name of the Moabite king occurs in Num 22:40, where the emphasis on the consonant ב in the opening clause וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק צֹאֵן וּבָקָר is increased by means of its inversion of the usual word pair בָּקָר וּצֹאֵן, thereby placing in immediate proximity three words exhibiting a hard ב sound. One notes that this precise inversion likewise appears to serve an alliterative purpose twice in Deuteronomy, where the phrases וּבְכֹרֶת בָּקָרָהּ וּצֹאֲנָהּ (Deut 14:23) and כָּל־הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד בְּבָקְרָהּ וּבְצֹאֲנָהּ (Deut 15:19) evince sound echo between the words בָּכוֹר and בָּקָר. This is not to say that the unusual order בָּקָר וּצֹאֵן only occurs in the Bible in the service of alliteration; and in fact, it is this order that become standard in the later strata of Biblical Hebrew, as in Qoh 2:7 and 1 Chr 12:40.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in Num 22:40 the phonetic pattern is noteworthy, especially since it highlights Balaq's engagement in ritual activity that is criticized implicitly elsewhere in this pericope.⁷¹

Moreover, whereas the alliteration in *Sefer Bil'am* hints at a connection between Balaam son of Be'or and the concept of blessing (בֵּרַךְ), as discussed above,⁷² Garsiel called attention to the extensive alliteration on the name בָּלָק in the pericope, by way of the verb קָבַב "curse."⁷³ The repeated selection of this particular verb for cursing, over against more common roots such as אָרַר, which is used extremely sparingly in this pericope, speaks to the intentionality of this ongoing play on Balaq's name. Moreover, its alliterative force is accentuated still further by the fact that in

⁷⁰ See Muraoka 1992: 43–44. On the matter of word pairs appearing in reverse order in late biblical texts, see Hurvitz 1972b.

⁷¹ This criticism will receive extensive attention in Chapter 6.

⁷² See above, pp. 290–291.

⁷³ Garsiel 1991: 218.

every attestation of the root קבב in the pericope, it occurs in close combination with the letter ל. This is visible in the table below, which details all occurrences of the root:

Table 4: Occurrences of the Root קבב in *Sefer Bil'am*

Num 22:11	קָבַה־לִּי
Num 22:17	קָבַה־לִּי
Num 23:8	מָה אֶקֶב לֹא קִבַּה אֵל
Num 23:11	לֶקֶב
Num 23:13	וְקִבְנו־לִּי
Num 23:25	גַּם־קֶב לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ
Num 23:27	וְקִבְתּוּ לִי
Num 24:10	לֶקֶב

Moreover, according to Garsiel, the pattern does not stop here, for in the chapter following *Sefer Bil'am* we find resonances of this same consonantal combination in Phineas's effort to stop the pestilence that has stricken the people of Israel.⁷⁴ After a man brings one of the Midianite women within sight of the Tent of Meeting, where the people are weeping because of the pestilence, Phineas's actions are recorded in Num 25:7–8, as follows:

⁷⁴ See Garsiel 1991: 217–219. Note that *Parashat Balaq*, of which *Sefer Bil'am* is a part, additionally includes Num 25:1–9, in which this alliterating pattern persists.

וַיֵּרָא פִּינְחָס בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וַיִּקֶּם מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה וַיִּקַּח לִמַּח בְּיָדוֹ: וַיָּבֹא
 אַחֲרַי אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הַקֶּבֶה וַיִּדְקֹר אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־הָאִשָּׁה
 אֶל־קִבְתָּהּ וַתַּעֲצֹר הַמִּגֵּפָה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And Phineas son of El^cazar son of Aaron, the priest, saw, and rose from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. And he followed the Israelite *into the chamber*, and stabbed both of them, the Israelite and the woman *in her stomach*; and the pestilence ceased from upon the children of Israel.

The words *הַקֶּבֶה* “the chamber” and *קִבְתָּהּ* “her stomach” continue the pattern of alliteration on Balaq’s name and the verb *קָבַע* “curse” that began in *Sefer Bil^cam*, and this pattern is strengthened further here by the profusion of the letter *ק* in these two verses. Garsiel astutely recognized that immediately following *Sefer Bil^cam*, which he described as a “narrative of the transmutation of curses into blessings,”⁷⁵ comes the account of the incident at Ba^cal-Pe^cor, the resulting pestilence, and Phineas’s response, in which the alliterative significance connected with Balaq’s name is transformed from an association with curses, in the former pericope, into “the idea of an acceptable offering.”⁷⁶ Thus, an important overarching characteristic of the narrative in which Balaq is involved is mirrored in the alliterative schema with which his name is associated. This mirrors, after a fashion, the transformation of the alliteration on Balaam’s father’s name, *בַּעֲזָר*, from one associating the name with *עָבַר* “oppose” to one connecting it with *בָּרַךְ* “bless.”

Keywords

I will undertake a thorough investigation of keywords as a literary phenomenon in the next section. Meanwhile, however, we may highlight a number of

⁷⁵ Garsiel 1991: 218.

⁷⁶ Garsiel 1991: 218.

phonetic aspects that tie certain keywords in *Sefer Bil'am* more closely into the fabric of the pericope. Already, I have had occasion to point out alliterative schemata involving the keywords עבר, ברך, and קבב. The first two, we recall, bear auditory associations with the phrase בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר, although the connection involving the second word is considerably more indirect. The third of these words is linked tightly with the name Balaq, particularly because of its invariable occurrence in close conjunction with the consonant ל.

To these we may add the root קרא, which occurs in *Sefer Bil'am* with the meaning “call, summon, consult,” and whose presence is amplified by occurrences in the Niph'al of the homophonous root קרה, with the sense “meet, encounter, appear.” The term highlights the various steps in the process by which Balaam’s flawed understanding of his own role as a transmitter of divine will, whether as seer or as prophet, is developed and corrected over the course of the text. This matter will occupy significant attention below, when we address the term in the context of our examination of keywords in the pericope. For the present, I simply point out the word’s alliterative significance in the context of the donkey episode, a vignette that describes Balaam’s inability to perceive either the messenger or the import of his donkey’s actions, and his resulting headstrong response by way of physical punishment. The episode commences as a result of Balaam’s literal (mis)understanding of God’s evidently rhetorical statement in Num 22:20: אִם-לִקְרָא לְךָ “If it is to *summon* you that the men have come, then rise, go with them....” Balaam’s actions indicate his tacit affirmative response, as he proceeds to leave for Moab with the emissaries. As the story progresses and we reach the donkey’s second encounter with the messenger, the event is described thus:

וַתֵּרֶא הַאֲתֹנָן אֶת־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה וַתִּלְחֹץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתִּלְחֹץ אֶת־רַגְלָהּ בְּלֶעָם אֶל־הַקִּיר
וַיִּסֹּף לְהַכְתֶּהּ:

And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger and crushed against the *wall*,
and crushed Balaam's foot against the *wall*; and he continued to beat
her.

(Num 22:25)

The word קיר echoes our keyword קרא, reminding us that Balaam's misguided
motives for setting out on the journey have precipitated the repeated obstructions of
Yahweh's messenger.

Balaam himself affirms this perspective at the climax of the episode, after the
messenger has spoken to him, by stating his recognition that he should have perceived
in his jenny's actions a message directed not at the jenny, but at him. Note the
occurrence of our root קרא:

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלַעַם אֶל־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה חֲטֵאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נֹצֵב לְקִרְאָתִי בַדֶּרֶךְ
וַעֲתָה אִם־רָע בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲשׁוּבָה לִי:

And Balaam said to Yahweh's messenger, "I have sinned, for I did not
know that you were stationed to *greet* me on the road. And now, if (it
is) evil in your eyes, let me return."

(Num 22:34)

Thus, the root קרא and its alliterative counterpart קיר are arranged across this episode
in the following pattern:

Num 22:18	Rhetorical impetus for jenny episode	קרא
Num 22:23	Jenny's first sighting of messenger	—
Num 22:25	Jenny's second sighting of messenger	קיר (2x)
Num 22:27	Jenny's third sighting of messenger	—
Num 22:34	Balaam's admission of shortsightedness	קרא

Finally, as a transition from this pattern into the usages of the keyword קרא that occur
in the remainder of the pericope, Num 22:36 indicates that Balaq comes out to greet

Balaam (לְקַרְאֲתוֹ); and Num 22:39 describes Balaam's arrival, together with Balaq, at קִרְיַת חֲצוֹת.

The Refrain in the Second and Third Oracles

Balaam's second and third oracles share a refrain, occurring midway through each poem, that in both cases is integrated into the surrounding poetic material by means of alliteration and assonance. In the second poem, the refrain occurs as the final line of the strophe Num 23:21–22. The final phonetic component of the refrain, the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix *-i*, links it to the preceding bicolon, both of whose members end in the identical pronominal suffix. This creates a pattern of assonance, all the stronger due to its appearance at the ends of the cola in question, that ties the refrain into the strophe and unifies the entire four-colon sequence. This connection is reinforced further by the initial words in the respective B-cola (Num 23:21d, 22b) of the strophe's two couplets. Both of these words begin and end with *ת*, and also contain the letter *ע*:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ	Yahweh his god is with him,
וְתִרְעֵת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:	and a king's acclaim is in him.
אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, their liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רְאִים לוֹ:	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
	(Num 23:21cd–22)

Additionally, in the refrain appearing in Num 23:22, we find an alliterative pattern on the consonants *מ* and *צ* in the first colon:

אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, their liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רְאִים לוֹ:	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

In the the third oracle, where a nearly identical version of this refrain appears (Num 24:8ab), two of these patterns are preserved. First, the unifying assonance produced by the repeated occurrence of the pronominal suffix *i-* is strengthened still further by the shift in the third colon (Num 24:8a) from plural **מוֹצִיאָם** to singular **מוֹצִיאֹ**, which introduces the same suffix *i-* into the only line in which it was absent in the prior oracle:

וַיִּרָם מֶאֱגַג מֶלְכּוֹ	And his king shall be exalted above Agag,
וַתִּנָּשָׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ:	and his kingdom shall be lifted up.
אֵל מוֹצִיאֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, his liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעֵפֶת רְאִים לוֹ	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
	(Num 24:7cd–8ab)

This increased emphasis on the assonating suffix *i-* compensates somewhat for the loss here of the **ת** and **ע** connections that were present in the earlier poem.

Second, this compensation is achieved still more forcefully by this oracle's expansion of the alliterative pattern involving **מ** and **צ**, which extends here into the tricolon that follows the refrain, here also prominently featuring the letters **ר** and, in the final colon of the sequence, **ח**. The result is a compact cluster of alliterating sounds:

אֵל מוֹצִיאֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, his liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעֵפֶת רְאִים לוֹ	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
יֹאכֵל גּוֹיִם צָרָיו	He consumes nations, his oppressors,
וְעַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרֹם	and their bones he devours,
וְחִצָּיו יִמְחֹץ:	and (with) his arrows smites.
	(Num 24:8)

Other Instances of Sound Echo

In addition to these instances of alliteration, another crops up in Num 22:32 and the following verses. Particularly puzzling here is the use of the unusual word יִרְט, apparently a masculine singular Qal verb in suffix conjugation, whose meaning has never been determined satisfactorily.⁷⁷ 4QNum^b replaces this word with רָעָה “evil,”⁷⁸ but it appears likely that this rendering, together with similar glosses in other ancient versions, represents an attempt to grapple with this obscure lexeme by establishing its meaning from context. Although this discussion offers no clarifying information with regard to the specific sense of this unusual word, we at least can posit a reason for its selection. As we have noted already,⁷⁹ the authors of the biblical texts frequently appear to have selected rare lexical items for the purpose of creating or enhancing some kind of alliterative or other auditory schema. An examination of the surrounding context of our word יִרְט reveals such a pattern at work here. This cluster of verses runs as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִלֵּאדָּה יְהוָה עַל־מָה הִכִּיתָ אֶת־אַתְנָחְדָּה זֶה שְׁלוֹשׁ רְגָלִים הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי יֹצֵאתִי
לְשֹׁטֶן בִּי־יִרְט הַדֶּרֶךְ לִנְגִידִי: וַתֵּרְאֵנִי הָאֲתֹן וַתֵּט לִפְנֵי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים אֹלִי נִטְתָּה
מִפְנֵי כִי עָתָה גַם־אַתְכָּה הִרְגָתִי וְאוֹתָהּ הִחַיִּיתִי: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלֹעַם אֶל־מִלֵּאדָּה יְהוָה
חֲטָאתִי כִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִי אַתָּה נֹצֵב לִקְרָאתִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְעָתָה אֶסְרֶע בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֲשׁוּבָה לִי:
And Yahweh’s messenger said to him, “Why did you beat your jenny
these three times? Behold, I set out as an obstacle, for the way is *yārat*
in front of me. And your jenny saw me, and turned aside before me
these three times. Perhaps since she turned aside from before me, now I
should kill you and let her live.” And Balaam said to Yahweh’s

⁷⁷ One is tempted to surmise a dialectal justification for this word choice, but the utter lack of cognate evidence renders the discussion moot. See above, p. 169.

⁷⁸ In the biblical corpus, the word דֶּרֶךְ is treated grammatically as masculine in some instances and feminine in others, with no clear philological explanation for the usage of one or the other in any given situation. Thus, the contradictory genders of masculine יִרְט and feminine רָעָה appear to be of no consequence.

⁷⁹ See above, pp. 281–282, and the works cited there.

messenger, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were stationed to greet me on the road. And now, if (it is) evil in your eyes, let me return.”

(Num 22:32–34)

A statistical analysis reveals that of the 304,848 letters in the Torah, the letter ט is the least common, occurring only 1,805 times.⁸⁰ This works out roughly to one ט every 169 letters. Here, however, we encounter three verses containing 211 letters, in which ט occurs five times; and, in fact, the five instances of this consonant occur within a span of only 104 letters—a ratio that is more than eight times the average for the Torah as a whole. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the word יָרַט was selected at least in part for its contribution to this accumulation of the letter ט in this group of verses. The effect is that the messenger’s chastisement of Balaam, which stands at the climax of the episode, attains heightened significance, which is bolstered further by the appearance of the same letter in the very first word of Balaam’s response: הִטָּאתִי “I have sinned” (Num 22:34).

Moreover, if we extend our perspective to the jenny episode as a whole, we observe that the word שָׁטָן “obstacle” occurs not only in Num 22:32, just cited, but also at the outset of the section, in Num 22:22. Also, the root נָטָה “turn aside” plays a significant role in the episode, being used to describe the jenny’s behavior three times, in Num 22:23 (2x), 26. Interestingly, the same verb is used in association with Israel in Balaam’s third oracle, where the following sequence of similes describes the “tents of Jacob // dwellings of Israel” (Num 24:5):

⁸⁰ I draw these figures from Weil 1981: 687. Other sources have produced slightly different numbers, on which see Anderson–Forbes 1992: 312. The discrepancies are minute, however, usually on the order of just a few letters’ difference, and thus in no way affect the point made here.

כְּנַחְלִים נָטְיוּ	Like palm trees they are stretched out,
כְּגִנֹּת עַל־נָהָר	like gardens along a river;
כְּאַהֲלִים נָטַע יְהוָה	like aloes Yahweh has planted,
כְּאַרְזִים עַל־יַמִּים:	like cedars along water.

Not only does this create a positive link between Israel and the jenny, whose repeated acts of “turning aside” (נטה) are lauded explicitly by Yahweh’s messenger in Num 22:33 as the appropriate response under the circumstances; but here in the oracle as well, the alliteration on the letter ט is extended, with reinforcement in the form of its collocation with the letter נ, in the word נטע “planted” in the next bicolon.

There remains one more significant reverberation of this alliteration on the letter ט in the pericope. It is evident in the relationship between the speech of Yahweh’s messenger in Num 22:32–33 and the following two statements by Balaam appearing elsewhere in the pericope, which were cited already above:

וַיַּעַן בְּלָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדַי בְּלָק אִם־יִתְּנוּ־לִי בְלָק מִלֵּא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכֵל לַעֲבֹד אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:
 And Balaam answered, and he said to Balaq’s servants, “If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) small or great.”
 (Num 22:18)

אִם־יִתְּנוּ־לִי בְלָק מִלֵּא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכֵל לַעֲבֹד אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה מִלְּבִי אֲשֶׁר־יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֲתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר:
 “If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) good or ill, on my own; what Yahweh speaks—it shall I speak.”
 (Num 24:13)

All three statements, that of Yahweh’s messenger and these two by Balaam, constitute those places in the pericope where we encounter explicitly articulated details about the

relationship between divine will and earthly transmitter. Balaam's two statements articulate his inability to countermand God's express instructions; and the messenger's speech explains that the jenny, in its encounter with an emissary of God, was similarly unable to proceed when obstructed by this emissary. I already have presented at length the recurrence of the letter ט in the latter statement, so I call attention here to the additional attestations of this letter in Balaam's statements: the words קטנה in Num 22:18 and טובה in Num 24:13, ordinary though both terms are generally speaking, serve here to link these two verses together with that of Yahweh's messenger, amplifying the force of all three expressions of the common idea identified here.

Sefer Bil'am manifests a few other clear instances of sound echo. For instance, in the tightly structured introductory section that begins the pericope, the chiasm that constitutes Num 22:3 is reinforced by the assonance of the hollow verbs *wayyāgor* and *wayyāqoṣ*:⁸¹

וַיִּגֹר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד	And Moab feared the people much,
כִּי רַב־הוּא	for it was great;
וַיִּקַּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	and Moab dreaded the children of Israel.

Likewise, a few instances of end-rhyme serve to contribute to the heightened poetic effect of Balaam's oracles. The first oracle attests the following couplet, in which the final word of each colon ends in *-ennû*, and also prominently features the consonant נ:

כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ	For from the top of peaks I see him,
וּמִגְבוּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ	and from hills I apprehend him.
	(Num 23:9ab)

⁸¹ The structure of this introductory material receives attention below, pp. 439–443.

Precisely the same words are used in the fourth oracle as well, although here they begin the two cola in question, rather than ending them:

אֶרְאֶנּוּ וְלֹא עַתָּה	I see it, but not now;
אֲשׁוּרֵנּוּ וְלֹא קָרֹב	I apprehend it, but not soon.
	(Num 24:17ab)

Another instance of sound echo is evident in the second oracle, this time involving a combination of assonance and end-rhyme in the words *yəqîmennā^h* and *ʾăšîbennā^h*:

הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה	Does he say but not do,
וְדַבֵּר וְלֹא יְקִימֶנָּה:	or speak but not establish it?
הִנֵּה בִרְדִּי לְקַחְתִּי	Behold, I have received (instruction to) bless;
וּבִרְדִּי וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנָּה:	and (when) he has blessed, I cannot revoke it.
	(Num 23:19cd–20)

The correspondence between these two verbs is particularly close due to their identical grammatical and morphological structure: both are II-weak Hiph^cil prefix-conjugation forms, with attached third-person feminine singular objective pronominal suffixes.

Finally, although punning is to be distinguished technically from sound echo, the superficial similarity between the two phenomena renders it worthwhile here to call attention to two instances of this phenomenon. The first is in the third oracle, in Num 24:5–6, where אֶהְלִים “aloes” in the latter verse plays on אֶהְלִיךָ “your tents” in the former. The second is in one of the three short codas at the end of the pericope, in which the word קִנְיָךְ “your nests” (Num 24:21) plays on קִיִּין (Num 24:22), the name of the people with whom this oracular coda’s content is concerned.⁸²

⁸² Jacob Milgrom (1990: 209) made the same observation.

Keywords

The presence and operation of keywords or *Leitwörter* in the Bible is a topic that scarcely needs introduction, having been well established as a fundamental component of biblical literature. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig are credited with the first explicit, sustained articulations of this device.⁸³ Buber offered a description of the keyword phenomenon that effectively captures its potential for creating nexuses of meaning above and beyond the surface level of the text's content:

A *Leitwort* is a word or a word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts: by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text, or at any rate, the meaning will be revealed more strikingly. The repetition, as we have said, need not be merely of the word itself but also of the word-root.... The measured repetition that matches the inner rhythm of the text, or rather, that wells up from it, is one of the most powerful means for conveying meaning without expressing it.⁸⁴

Shimon Bar-Efrat explained the point further, stating that the threads of relationship drawn between the various repetitions of a given keyword provide a means of “conveying the essential point directly,” and that such a keyword “reveals the meaning and the implicit message of the narrative, without adversely affecting its pure artistic form in any way. In other words, the meaning is not expressed by any supplement to the actual story, through exposition of the ideas or views, but becomes apparent from the story itself....”⁸⁵ Thus, although not to be viewed precisely as a mimetic trait, the operative principle underlying this device is similar, in that it conveys meaning without recourse to direct declaration of that meaning in the surface content of a text.

⁸³ See, e.g., Buber–Rosenzweig 1936: 211; and the remarks of Alter 1981: 92.

⁸⁴ I cite here from the translation of Buber 1964: 1131 provided in Alter 1981: 93.

⁸⁵ Bar-Efrat 2004: 213.

Keywords can be employed to great effect in both prose and poetry. Watson's review of the phenomenon focused on two primary ways in which it manifests: the simple repetition of an individual word or root, and the incorporation of a range of synonyms describing the same concept.⁸⁶ In addition, although the device need not always operate as a structural marker, Watson pointed out that in poetic contexts—and, we might add, in prose as well—it frequently does serve such a function.⁸⁷

It is striking, however, that despite widespread recognition of keywords as an important tool in the repertoire of the biblical authors, it frequently garners only minimal attention in scholarly and interpretive contexts. The reasons for this may relate to the conceptual simplicity of the device's mechanics, which can render the significance of a given text's keywords more or less transparent. But the depth of this significance often warrants a more focused analysis, as is evident particularly in *Sefer Bil'am*, a pericope whose keywords have gone largely unmentioned in prior scholarship.

Verbs and Other Expressions Involving Sight: ראה, שור, הביט, and Related Phrases

Only one complex of synonyms in this text has been identified consistently in scholarship as an instance of the keyword phenomenon, namely, verbs relating to the sense of sight. To be more specific, Robert Alter referred to the verb ראה as “[t]he thematic keyword of this entire episode...(and in the poems to follow, its poetic synonym...*shur*).”⁸⁸ In addition, we must include in this group the verb הביט, notwithstanding the fact that its occurrence in Num 23:21 is its lone attestation in the

⁸⁶ Watson 2005: 287–288.

⁸⁷ Watson 2005: 289–293.

⁸⁸ Alter 2004: 795; and see also Alter 1981: 105–107.

pericope. Also, although not all of them constitute “keywords” in the strictest sense, we must reckon here with various expressions from the titular sequence opening the third and fourth oracles, namely, *מַחֲזֶה עֵדֵי יְהוָה* (אֲשֶׁר) “he (who) sees the vision of Shadday,” *גְּלוֹי עֵינָיִם* “uncovered of eyes,” and even *שֶׁתָּם הָעֵינָן* “pierced-open of eye,” the translation of which occupied our attention in Chapter 3.⁸⁹ Similarly, another more extensive expression that likewise factors into this discussion is that occurring in Num 22:31, *וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָיו בְּלֵעָם*, “And Yahweh uncovered Balaam’s eyes,” which, one notes, is followed immediately by the root *ראה*.

The concept of sight is particularly versatile in *Sefer Bil’am*, because it can be presented with equal efficacy either in a literal, mundane sense or in a figurative, prophetic one. Already at the outset of the pericope, sight is raised as an important element:

*וַיֵּרָא בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַמֹּרִי:
And Balaq son of Šippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite(s).
(Num 22:2)*

Elsewhere in the pericope, it is clear that Balaq recognizes the importance of sight for what he is trying to achieve: on three separate occasions, he leads Balaam to a vantage point whence the prophet has direct visual access to the people of Israel. That this is a conscious move on the part of the king is stated explicitly in the following verse:

*וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לֵךְ *נָא אִתִּי אֶל־מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אֶפְסָ קִצְּהוּ תִרְאָה
וְכִלּוּ לֹא תִרְאָה וְקִבְּנוּ־לִי מִשָּׁם:
And Balaq said to him, “Please come with me to another place from
which you can see it—only the periphery of the people will you see,*

⁸⁹ See above, pp. 147–151.

and the whole of it you will not *see*—and curse it for me from there.”
(Num 23:13)

Yet, as far as Balaq himself is concerned, outside of the aforementioned verse at the opening of the story, this character’s peception is limited to a single verb that describes not sight, but hearing:

וַיִּשְׁמַע בָּלָק כִּי בָא בִלְעָם וַיֵּצֵא לִקְרֹאתוֹ אֶל-עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל-גְּבוּל אֲרָנֹן אֲשֶׁר
בְּקֶצֶה הַגְּבוּל:

And Balaq *heard* that Balaam had come, and he went out to greet him
at Ir-Moab, which is in the region of Arnon, which is at the edge of the
region.
(Num 22:36)

Indeed, Balaam’s own words pointedly emphasize the connection between Balaq and
the sense of hearing in particular, as he opens his second oracle with the following
bicolon:

קוּם בָּלָק וּשְׁמַע	Rise, Balaq, and <i>hear</i> ;
הֲאֲזִינָה עֲדֵי בְנוֹ צִפּוֹר:	<i>attend</i> my testimony, son of Šippor.
	(Num 23:18bc)

Verbs of sight also play a prominent role in the episode with the jenny, who is
able to see (ראה) Yahweh’s messenger standing in the way when Balaam cannot. The
potency of this episode’s emphasis on the concept of sight can be grasped only in the
recognition that it plays on the matter of Balaam’s sight, both literal and prophetic,
elsewhere in the pericope. Indeed, in this episode, Balaam is placed in the role held
elsewhere by Balaq: “Just as the she-ass three times sees what the ‘seer’

cannot...Balaam will three times be given a divine oracle that Balak will not accept.”⁹⁰ One observes, moreover, that the jenny’s sense of sight drives its actions in each instance, a fact for which the animal is commended by the messenger (Num 22:33). Similarly with regard to Balaam, his ultimate recognition of the import of what he sees (in the ordinary sense), as expressed in Num 24:1, enables him to harness his full range of vision (in the prophetic sense), uttering oracular poetry without the need for divination.

Also significant are the more elaborate expressions Balaam uses to describe himself in the opening strophe of the third and fourth oracles. This sequence includes three phrases that make direct reference to sight:

שֶׁתָּם הָעֵין	“pierced-open of eye” (Num 24:3, 15) ⁹¹
מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יְחֻזָּה	“seer of the vision of Shadday” (Num 24:4, 16)
גְּלוֹי עֵינָיִם	“uncovered of eyes” (Num 24:4, 16)

Although the terminology Balaam uses to refer to himself in this strophe is not limited to verbs of sight (see, for instance, the verbs שמע “hear” in Num 24:4, 16, and ידע “know” also in Num 24:16), the fact remains that fully half of this strophe, in both of its attestations, is concerned with sight. As such, these expressions further emphasize the link between Balaam and the visual mode of perception, a connection borne out in the full range of synonymous vocabulary that occurs across the pericope as a whole.

As noted above, the pericope details three separate instances (Num 22:41; 23:13–14; 23:28–24:2) in which Balaq leads him to a new location whence he can obtain a new view of the people, in the hope of causing his prophetic activity to

⁹⁰ Ackerman 1990: 86.

⁹¹ On this translation of the phrase, and specifically of the word שֶׁתָּם, see above, pp. 147–151.

produce the desired negative result. Baruch A. Levine noted that this indicates the centrality of sight in the magical practice of cursing: “It is implicit that having the target of the curse in sight is requisite to the efficacy of the pronouncement.”⁹² But Balaam himself goes further, and incorporates sight-related vocabulary into his poetic utterances. The first and fourth oracles both exhibit the word pair שׁוֹר // רָאָה:

כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ וּמִגְּבוּעֹת אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ	For from the top of peaks I <i>see</i> him, and from hills I <i>apprehend</i> him. (Num 23:9ab)
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אֶרְאֶנּוּ וְלֹא עַתָּה אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב	I <i>see</i> it, but not now, I <i>apprehend</i> it, but not soon. (Num 24:17ab)
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As Levine observed, the couplet in the first oracle describe Balaam’s literal, physical sighting of the people of Israel, while that in the fourth oracle uses the same terms to indicate prophetic sight about Israel’s future successes: “The result is an inclusio, progressing from the present to the future, from space to time.”⁹³ In addition, if we take a moment to look ahead to a subject that will occupy our attention in the following chapter, we see that this adjustment of the word pair’s significance from the first oracle to the fourth also neatly encapsulates Balaam’s transformation from diviner to prophet, as his sight transforms from mere human vision, the stuff of impotent curses, into a direct and specific link with the divinely ordained destiny of his subject.

Between the two poles of the inclusio, Balaam’s second oracle presents another pair of verbs relating to sight:

⁹² Levine 2000: 215.

⁹³ Levine 2000: 210.

לֹא־הִבִּיט אֶן בִּיעָקֹב וְלֹא־רָאָה עֲמָל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	One <i>perceives</i> no misfortune in Jacob, and <i>sees</i> no distress in Israel. (Num 23:21ab)
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The subject of the verbs in this bicolon is unclear. It may be that they should be understood in a general sense: “One does not see...,” etc. Taken this way, the implication is twofold: not only is it impossible to witness hardship of any kind being visited upon Israel; but in addition, in the magical sense, no one can “see,” that is, invoke or bring down such hardship on Israel. On the other hand, if one prefers to carry the subject of the previous lines—that is, God—through to this couplet, one encounters here a duplicity of meanings, depending on how one treats the preposition -בִּ- in each colon.⁹⁴ If this particle is understood as “in,” then the bicolon’s statement that God sees no iniquity in Israel stands as the explanation for the people’s direct connection to the divine without recourse for magical or divinatory practices, as expressed in the subsequent lines. On the other hand, if the preposition is read as “against,” then this couplet indicates that God will not “see,” that is, “countenance,”⁹⁵ any wrongdoing committed against Israel by others. This accords beautifully with the following two statements from Habakkuk, whose employment of precisely the same assortment of verbs and nouns is striking:

לָמָּה תִּרְאֵנִי אֶן וְעֲמָל תִּבִּיט וְשָׁד וְחָמָס לִנְגָדִי וַיְהִי רִיב וּמִדּוֹן יִשָּׂא:	Why do you show me misfortune, and countenance distress, and robbery and violence are before me, and there is dispute, and strife is raised? (Hab 1:3)
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⁹⁴ These remarks incorporate the observations and examples of Levine 2000: 183–184.

⁹⁵ As per Levine 2000: 165, 183, 210–211.

טְהוֹר עֵינַיִם מִרְאֹת רָע	(You are) too pure of eyes to see evil,
וְהַבֵּיט אֶל-עַמָּל לֹא תוּכֵל	and (to) countenance distress you are unable.
לָמָּה תִּבְיֵט בּוֹגְדִים	Why (do you) countenance traitors,
תַּחֲרִישׁ בְּבֹלַע רָשָׁע	(and) remain silent as (the) wicked
צֹדִיק מִמֶּנּוּ:	devours (the) more righteous than he?
	(Hab 1:13)

These biblical parallels lend considerable credibility to such an interpretation in Balaam's poem; but it is worthwhile to note that one reading here need not supersede the other, and that the double-meaning is an intentional literary flourish.

ברך *and* קבב

Already we have had occasion to discuss these two words, whose juxtaposed meanings occupy a key role in the story. On the one hand, Balaq is connected by alliteration with the word קבב "curse," indeed all the more so since the latter invariably occurs in close conjunction with the letter ל. On the other hand, Balaam's indirect alliterative link to the word ברך "bless" by way of his patronymic, בֶּן-בְּעוֹר, enables the author to employ the contrast between the two words as a means of drawing a similar contrast between the two characters. This is all the more true in view of the narrative itself, which describes Balaam's utterance of blessings in response to Balaq's request for curses.

עבר

This word, too, has occupied our attention above, in our examination of its alliterative relationship with בְּעוֹר, the name of Balaam's father. I already have observed that this word, which means "cross, oppose, trespass, transgress," calls attention to the notion of "opposing" God's will by subverting it to one's own ends, as evident, ultimately, in Balaam's journey to Moab to fulfill Balaq's request for a curse

despite God's explicit prohibition of this act in Num 22:12. As it turns out, however, this is only a part of the larger theme expressed in the pericope; for as the human actors in the story attempt to transgress (עבר) God's command not to curse Israel, in the end it is God who subverts (עבר) the actions of these very humans, by producing from their efforts not curses, but blessings. This keyword, then, forcefully draws attention to the idea of divinity and humanity at cross purposes, with divinity achieving total and decisive victory in this battle of wills.

Indeed, in addition to the manifestations of this general theme that I have raised previously, the contest between human and divine is presented in concrete form in the jenny episode. Num 22:26 reads as follows:

וַיֹּסֶף מֵלֶאֲדִי-יְהוָה עֹבֵר וַיַּעֲמֵד בַּמָּקוֹם עַר אֲשֶׁר אֵין-דֶּרֶךְ לְנִטּוֹת יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל:
 And Yahweh's messenger persisted in *opposing*, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to veer right or left.

A few verses before (Num 22:18), Balaam has made reference to the notion of human opposition (עבר) to the wishes of the divine. Here, the description of the divine messenger's third appearance describes this figure as opposing (עבר) Balaam's progress on the road to Moab. The connection between these two usages serves effectively to highlight further the human–divine contest as an important theme in the pericope.

קרא

To the above keywords we may add the root קרא, which appears in the pericope (mostly in Numbers 22) in the Qal stem, with the meaning “call, summon, consult, greet.” The word occupies a central position in the presentation of Balaam's understanding of his role as a transmitter of divine will. This understanding is flawed

at first, and betrays certain misconceptions about this role, whether regarding his status as either a diviner or a prophet. In Num 22:5, Balaq sends messengers to summon him (לְקַרְא־לּוֹ) to curse Israel, a task he is perfectly content to undertake provided that he receives permission from God. Yet Balaq's request comes as a result of the Moabite king's belief that Balaam himself possesses the power to curse, as he expresses in Num 22:6: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹאֵב "for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed." Balaam, for his part, at first does not contradict Balaq's notion that the actual potency of the curse derives from his own power, either in his response to the envoys' initial message (Num 22:8) or in his recounting of Balaq's message to God in his dream (Num 22:11), where he completely omits Balaq's statement to this effect.

It is only later, after Balaq sends his second envoy to fetch him (Num 22:18), that Balaam states to the king his inability to act in any way other than as God orders him. But it quickly becomes clear that this statement also is not to be taken as an indicator of Balaam's total grasp of the situation. Specifically, the true intent of God's instruction to Balaam in Num 22:20 hinges on the significance of the root קרא:

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים | אֶל-בָּלָעַם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-לְקַרְא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ אִתָּם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת-הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אָדָּבַר אֵלַיךְ אַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה:

And Elohim came to Balaam at night, and he said to him, "If it is to *summon* you that these men have come, then rise, go with them; but just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do."

Here we may assume that God knows perfectly well that the men indeed have come to summon Balaam, given the omniscient narrator's use of this precise phraseology

(לְקַרְא־לּוֹ, Num 22:5).⁹⁶ Yet the point seems to involve something more than the simple fact of the matter, as R. W. L. Moberly observed: “...God’s words [in Num 22:20] are not just to be taken at face value as straightforward permission to go...”⁹⁷ According to Num 22:6, Balaq’s summons as delivered by his messengers rests on the assumption that the power to bless and curse rests with Balaam himself, not with the divine forces with whom he communes. In direct opposition to this perception, God’s words in Num 22:20 conclude with the statement אַךְ אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֶדְבָּר אֵלֶיךָ אַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה “just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do,” which occurs in slightly altered form elsewhere in the pericope (Num 22:35, 38; 23:12, 26; 24:13).

Thus, since God’s response begins with the conditional אִם “if,” it falls to Balaam to decide which of the two contradictory perspectives upon which to act, whether it be the one that attributes the power of blessing and cursing to Balaam, or the one that expresses Balaam’s powerlessness to achieve such effects outside of God’s direct instruction. The rhetorical thrust of God’s statement firmly emphasizes that the correct course is to abide by the very directive that God already has issued to Balaam in Num 22:12: לֹא תִלְךָ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תָאָר אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא “You shall not go with them, and you shall not curse the people, for it is blessed.” True, the men have summoned (קרא) Balaam; but in fact what they seek is more than his mere presence—their summons prevails upon his perceived ability to produce concrete magical effects in the natural world. on one side rests the purely literal sense, while on the other, the subtler rhetorical undertone of the word קרא. Failing to perceive this complexity,

⁹⁶ On the relationship between the omniscience of the narrator and that of God, see above, pp. 239–244.

⁹⁷ Moberly 1999: 9. Moberly’s view is somewhat different from the one presented here, since he viewed Balaam’s desire to go as indicative of his motivation by greed. Accordingly, God’s words are not rhetorical, but rather stand as an invitation for Balaam to act on his greed and reap his just rewards, i.e., the humiliation to come at the hands of the divine messenger.

however, Balaam misses the rhetorical point and proceeds on the basis of a simplistically literal understanding: Since the men indeed came to summon him (לְקַרְאֵלֹו, Num 22:5), then by God’s logic it appears that he ought to go along with them; and so he proceeds, completing in the next verse the precise verbs (קום “rise” and הלך “go”) employed by God for this circumstance. Lael Caesar’s similar assessment that it is “*Balaam’s interpretation* of God’s response [in Num 22:20 that] grants him permission to go”⁹⁸ affirms this observation.

When one approaches the passage in this light, it becomes clear that the traditional modern interpretation of God’s angry reaction in Num 22:22, וַיִּחַר־אַף אֱלֹהִים “And Elohim’s anger flared because he was going,” is to be understood as a failure, much like Balaam’s own, to recognize the rhetorical thrust of God’s words in Num 22:20. God’s anger here does not constitute a self-contradictory caprice indicating an editorial seam, but rather represents a reaction to Balaam’s inability to grasp the deeper intent of God’s statement to him two verses earlier.

Balaam’s statement at the end of the jenny episode indicates his recognition of the point under discussion:

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעָם אֶל־מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה חֲטָאתִי כִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נֹצֵב לְקַרְאֵתִי בַדֶּרֶךְ
וְעַתָּה אֶסְרֶע בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֲשׁוּבָה לִי:

And Balaam said to Yahweh’s messenger, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were stationed to *greet* me on the road. And now, if (it is) evil in your eyes, let me return.”
(Num 22:34)

The use here of the same keyword employed at the beginning of the pericope in reference to the summons of the human agents suggests that Balaam perceives the

⁹⁸ Caesar 2005: 141 (emphasis added).

connection between their message and that of Yahweh's messenger. The difference, however, lies in the fact that he now recognizes that the latter message, coming as it does from God, should, indeed must, be heeded. Thus it appears that Balaam has developed an appreciation for the subtlety of the term, and understands it to involve not only a literal summons but also something deeper about the implied relationship between the summoner and the summoned. The point is driven home in Num 22:36, when Balaq comes out to greet Balaam (לְקָרְאֵתוֹ), thereby emphasizing that Balaam must choose whether to answer the divine call or the human one.

In the subsequent material, the root קרה, which occurs in the Niph^{al} form with the meaning “appear,” plays on the continuing emphasis of the root קרא. This new root is used consistently with a clear theophanic sense, to refer to God's appearing to Balaam (Num 23:3, 4, 16). Num 23:3 is particularly noteworthy, since here we encounter this use of נִקְרָה in close proximity to a usage of the same root in the Qal:

וַיֹּאמֶר בַּלְעָם לְבָלָק הִתְיַצֵּב עַל-עֹלְתֶךָ וְאַלֶּכָּה אוֹלִי יִקְרָה יְהוָה לְקָרְאֵתִי וְדַבֵּר
מֵה־יִרְאֵנִי וְהַגִּדְתִּי לָךְ וְיִלְדֶּךָ שְׂפִי:

And Balaam said to Balaq, “Station yourself near your sacrifice, that I may go (aside). Perhaps Yahweh will *appear* to *greet* me, and word of what he shows me, I will tell to you.” And he went to a bare height.

Here Balaam uses the two roots side by side, employing the Niph^{al} form of קרה just before another occurrence of קרא, in the Qal as usual. Here the latter verb bears a deeper connotation similar to that evident in the preceding narrative, since he uses it to refer not just to a simple summons or call, but to direct divine contact, a point strengthened here by the theophanic orientation of the nearby word יִקְרָה. Indeed, prior to the second oracle, his words suggest his increasing success as a conduit for divine communication:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בָּלָק הִתְיַצֵּב כָּה עַל־עֹלְתֶךָ וְאֶנֶכִּי אֶקְרָה כָּה:
 And he said to Balaq, “Station yourself by your sacrifice as before, and
 I will *appear* as before.”
 (Num 23:15)

Here we see Balaam using the Niph^{al} form נִקְרָה to describe his own appearance to Balaq that he applied to God just a few verses before. The implication is that just as Yahweh’s messenger appeared on the road “to greet [him]” (לִקְרָאתִי, Num 22:34) as a proxy for God, with whom the greeting originates as indicated in Num 22:20, here Balaam indicates that he will appear (אֶקְרָה) to greet Balaq, also as a proxy for God. Thus, the collocation of the roots קרא “call, greet” and קרה “appear” in Num 23:3 links the messenger’s intermediary function in Num 22:34 with Balaam’s similar function in Num 23:15.

יצב

It is worthwhile briefly to note that this verb, whether in the Niph^{al} or the Hitpa^{el}, is used both for Yahweh’s messenger and for Balaq. In his initial occurrence in the story, the messenger appears as the subject of the verb וַיִּתְיַצֵּב (Num 22:22), and subsequently three times as the subject of נִצָּב (Num 22:23, 31, 34), the last of which is in the mouth of Balaam. As for Balaq, before each of the first two oracles, Balaam instructs him to “station himself” (הִתְיַצֵּב) while he consults with God (Num 23:3, 15); and each time, Balaam returns to find Balaq “stationed” (נִצָּב) just as he had instructed (Num 23:6, 17). The drawing together of the Moabite king and the messenger of God is striking, and suggests that both figures represent obstacles that Balaam must overcome. Yahweh’s messenger impedes his physical journey, while Balaq disrupts his progress toward the realization of his full prophetic potential by urging him repeatedly to act counter to God’s will for Israel.

Naming, Epithets, and Descriptive Phrases

In Chapter 4, I raised the point that the terseness of biblical literature demands that each word be seen as carefully chosen and worthy of specific, focused examination.⁹⁹ Here, I build on this perspective by examining the terms used to designate the characters involved in *Sefer Bil'am*. Both personal names and descriptive expressions, whether formulaic or otherwise, occupy our attention here, since both means of designation can offer valuable literary insights.

According to Meir Sternberg, to have a name in the Bible is to be elevated from anonymity to singularity.¹⁰⁰ He noted that unnamed characters typically are flat and stand as archetypal figures, concretized plot devices, and so on. In this category are both unnamed individuals such as messengers, wise women, single-action prophets and the like, and collective groups such as “the men,” “the courtiers,” and so on. This stands in sharp contrast to explicitly named figures, whose specific identification launches them into the narrative foreground and intimates an ongoing, rather than a momentary, presence in the subsequent material: “If for a biblical agent to come on stage nameless is to be declared faceless, then to bear a name is to assume an identity: to become a singular existent, with an assured place in history and a future in the story.”¹⁰¹ In Garsiel’s thorough study of derivations and puns stemming from proper names in the Bible, he articulately encapsulated this principal as follows:

In the literary world names are even more important than they are in ordinary life—the concrete world in which people stand before us in all their solidity and can be perceived by our senses. In literature, by contrast, identifying labels—names—must serve us in place of a

⁹⁹ See above, pp. 246–247.

¹⁰⁰ The material presented here is derived from Sternberg 1985: 330–331.

¹⁰¹ Sternberg 1985: 331.

person's visible and tangible presence, and this leads to an extreme emphasis upon names as expressive substitutes for actual people.¹⁰²

Certainly, this is all the more true in a literary corpus as laconic as the Bible, in which explicitly stated realistic or illustrative details are few and far between.

More than a simple binary indicator of primary as opposed to secondary actors, however, biblical naming often exhibits a deep significance above and beyond the mere identification of the character. On the one hand, for example, a name that bears a specific weight within its narrative context can itself condemn the its referee to the role of archetype, by subsuming all other aspects of the character into the narrow demands of its loaded intent. One need only think of Nabal, the consummate boor of 1 Samuel 25, to see how a name meaning “boor” condemns this figure to an archetypal role, rendering him at once both flat and highly memorable as the antagonist of the story. On the other hand, as Garsiel's research indicates, there frequently occur aural, punning, and content-related relationships between names and the narratives in which they appear.¹⁰³ Thus, a name can convey not only identifying information about the character to whom it refers, but also can provide important points of contact between name and narrative, thereby amplifying the subtlety and significance of the character's place in that narrative. *Sefer Bil'am* itself yields examples of this phenomenon, which will occupy our attention shortly.

In this way, biblical names approach something akin to the other manner in which the Bible identifies its characters, a phenomenon that Sternberg termed the “proleptic portrait.”¹⁰⁴ He concerned himself primarily with descriptive expressions,

¹⁰² Garsiel 1991: 212.

¹⁰³ Garsiel 1991, *passim*, in particular Chapter 2, entitled “Sound Effects, Puns, and Aural Connections,” and chapter 6, entitled “Appropriateness of Names to Literary Units.”

¹⁰⁴ Sternberg 1985: 321–341.

whether individual adjectives, short phrases like “man of war,” or full clauses like “Yahweh is with him;” but as we shall see below, in certain situations we also may include items like patronymics and other more formulaic epithets. According to Sternberg, proleptic portraits are formed by means of such weighted phrases, which not only provide significant details about the characters to whom they refer, but also connect these figures to critical aspects or moments of the plots in which they participate. He described the situation as follows: “A biblical epithet serves at least two functions, one bearing directly on the character it qualifies and the other bearing indirectly on the plot where he figures as agent or patient.”¹⁰⁵ As we shall see, *Sefer Bil'am* presents a certain degree of nuanced deviation from the standard realization of this phenomenon as articulated by Sternberg. However, in principle the use of epithets in our pericope accords precisely with Sternberg’s point, and for this reason warrants detailed examination.

Moreover, Berlin called attention to the ways in which epithets and descriptive phrases are used in biblical narrative to express the points of view of the characters themselves.¹⁰⁶ Drawing special attention to situations in which a single character is indicated by a number of distinct epithets, she first drew on the work of Boris Uspensky, who addressed this kind of situation in literature generally as follows:

It seems clear that several points of view are used...—that is, the author designates the same character from several different positions. Specifically, he may be using the points of view of various characters in the work, each of whom stands in a different relationship to the character who is named.

...[I]f we know how different people habitually refer to one particular character..., then it may be possible formally to define whose

¹⁰⁵ Sternberg 1985: 337–338.

¹⁰⁶ Berlin 1983: 59–61.

viewpoint the author has assumed at any one moment in the narrative.¹⁰⁷

Berlin proceeded to demonstrate that this perspective may be applied fruitfully to biblical literature specifically, citing examples such as the uses of the terms “brother” and “sister” in the direct speech of the Amnon and Tamar episode (2 Sam 13).¹⁰⁸ In fact, this entire notion, that direct speech in the Bible reflects terminologies, locutions, and viewpoints unique to the speaker, resonates with an important quality of biblical narrative generally, namely the intensive use of direct discourse as a means of advancing the narrative.¹⁰⁹ Alter highlighted the “highly subsidiary role of narration in comparison to direct speech by the characters,”¹¹⁰ even going as far as to make the following general observation about biblical prose: “[T]he primacy of dialogue is so pronounced that many pieces of third-person narration prove on inspection to be dialogue-bound, verbally mirroring elements of dialogue which precede them or which they introduce. Narration is thus often relegated to the role of confirming assertions made in dialogue....”¹¹¹ As we shall see, direct discourse in *Sefer Bil'am*, and in particular the ways that the characters refer to one another, indeed evinces important perspectives for understanding the text.

In sum, the names and epithets used in this pericope to refer to the various characters, both in the narrative voice and in those of the characters themselves, provide important clues for the understanding of the text. In addition to offering

¹⁰⁷ Uspensky 1973: 25–26.

¹⁰⁸ Berlin 1983: 60, 64–65.

¹⁰⁹ This notion also is taken up below, in the section on repetition and variation.

¹¹⁰ Alter 1981: 65, cited also by Berlin 1983: 64. This entire chapter in Alter’s volume, entitled “Between Narration and Dialogue” (Alter 1981: 63–87), provides a wealth of examples demonstrating the phenomenon and its various forms and uses. See also Rost 1982: 16–21.

¹¹¹ Alter 1981: 65.

valuable perspectives on the characters whom they identify, they also reveal glimpses of these characters' viewpoints and personalities, as well as their roles within and relationships to the overarching thematic landscape of the pericope as a whole. The text exhibits seven primary figures, the references to each of which occupy our attention here: Balaam, Balaq, God (and/or gods), the people of Israel, Balaq's messengers, Yahweh's messenger, and Balaam's jenny. Needless to say, pronominal references to these characters are not included in the following examination, as they do not distinguish between referents—indeed, at times this results in important ambiguities in the narrative, which are examined in the next section of this chapter. Likewise, the extended descriptions in the poetic oracles that are applied to Israel and God occupy our attention when we turn to the content of the oracles, and do not appear in this section.

Balaam

Because Balaam arguably is the protagonist of the pericope, one is hardly surprised at the uniformity exhibited across the many references to him in the text. After a single introductory designation in the narrative voice as בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעֹר (Num 22:5), the remaining 47 references to this character in *Sefer Bil'am*, outside of his own oracular utterances, read simply בִּלְעָם.¹¹² In just one of these instances (Num 22:14), his name is mentioned in direct speech, as opposed to the voice of the narrator; but here as well, the *śārê Mō'āb* use his name alone, with no patronymic or other identifier.

¹¹² Postbiblical traditions attest several pseudo-etymological explanations for the name “Balaam” that uniformly reveal a marked animus toward the figure. This matter lies beyond the scope of the present study, but the various options are catalogued conveniently in Milgrom 1990: 186.

To begin, in the present context it is worthwhile briefly to reiterate the alliterative echoes of Balaam's name and/or patronymic that occur throughout the pericope and beyond, presented in detail above.¹¹³ Specifically, we recall that Num 22:27, 41; 23:9c, 24a all present consonantal patterns that invoke the sounds in the name בִּלְעָם. Also, the name of Balaam's father, בְּעֹר(ו), alliterates with the keyword עֵבֶר in Num 22:18, 26; 24:13, and also bears less forceful alliterative connections with words occurring in Num 22:1, 22; 24:1. Finally, the entire phrase בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעֹר is echoed not only in the concentration of the letter ע in the epithetical sequences of Num 24:3–4, 15–16, but also in the more elaborate alliterative schema connecting Balaam with the transgression (עֵבֶר) of Ba'al-Pe'or, as well as with the toponym itself, in Num 31:16.

Moving on to the issue of epithets, it is only in the introductory strophe to his third oracle, which also opens the fourth oracle in slightly expanded form, that Balaam himself provides a flurry of self-referential expressions that move well beyond mere identification by personal name. In a series of closely knit cola, he begins by revisiting the patronymic introduced near the outset of the pericope: בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעֹר (Num 24:3, 15). Here, the only slight variation from the earlier phrase is the use of an anticipatory possessive suffix.¹¹⁴ There follows a series of apposed epithets by which Balaam identifies himself. After this, the first epithet, הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵינַי (Num 24:3, 15), can be taken as a single phrase, with the nominal head הַגִּבֹּר modified by the adjectival phrase שְׁתֵּם הָעֵינַי: “the man pierced-open of eye.”¹¹⁵ Alternatively, it can be interpreted as a pair of appositional expressions: “the man, (the one) pierced-open of eye.” The next

¹¹³ See above, pp. 284–293.

¹¹⁴ This phenomenon was discussed above in Chapter 3, pp. 169–170 and 190.

¹¹⁵ On this translation of the phrase, and specifically of the word שְׁתֵּם, see above, pp. 147–151.

epithet, שֹׁמֵעַ אִמְרֵי־אֵל “hearer of the sayings of El” (Num 24:4, 16), is closely paralleled only in its second occurrence by the similar expression וְיָדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן “and knower of the knowledge of Elyon” (Num 24:16). Meanwhile, the subsequent relative clause אֲשֶׁר מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזֶה “who sees the vision of Shadday” in Num 24:4, which itself may be read appositively as “(he) who sees the vision of Shadday,” is elevated to full independent status in its later occurrence in 24:16: מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזֶה “*he sees* the vision of Shadday.” Finally, the sequence concludes with נָפֵל וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיִם (Num 24:4, 16), which, like the phrase הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתָּם הָעֵינָן above, may be taken in two ways: either as two distinct appositions, “(the) prostrate, and (the one) uncovered of eyes;” or as a unified expression, as in “(the) prostrate and uncovered of eyes.”

Thus, the series of expressions that Balaam uses to refer to himself consists of the following:

בִּלְעָם בֶּנוֹ בְּעוֹר	“Balaam son of Be’or”
הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתָּם הָעֵינָן	“The man(, the one) pierced-open of eye”
שֹׁמֵעַ אִמְרֵי־אֵל	“Hearer of the sayings of El”
יָדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן	“Knower of the knowledge of Elyon”
(אֲשֶׁר) מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזֶה	“He (who) sees the vision of Shadday”
נָפֵל וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיִם	“The prostrate(,) and (the one) uncovered of eyes”

The structure of the introductory strophe in which these phrases occur occupies our attention elsewhere in this study.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, It is crucial to take note of how the self-referential epithets used here by Balaam contrast with the normative pattern by which such features occur in the Bible. As noted above,¹¹⁷ in his discussion of “proleptic portraits” Sternberg made the general observation that such epithets connect

¹¹⁶ See below, pp. 460–461 and 464–465.

¹¹⁷ See above, p. 322.

both to the character they identify and to the plot in which this character participates, and thus represent a kind of verbal link between the two. But more specifically, in linking character to narrative action, as a rule these expressions are forward-looking (hence “proleptic”): “...[T]he biblical epithet is normally preliminary: it precedes rather than follows the action it doubly governs....”¹¹⁸

His point is well taken, but in our present case the situation is reversed. The key to this reversal lies in Sternberg’s astute apprehension of the significance of both aspects of a given epithet. In its capacity as a designator of the character, he noted, the epithet is essentially static, “[having] its face to a state of affairs that endures or recurs till the expositional past gives way to the narrative present;” while the narrative aspect with which the epithet is concerned is dynamic, involving “a unique *process* to be launched in the future.”¹¹⁹ In this text, it is significant that these epithets are expressed near the end of the narrative action in the pericope. To all appearances, they indeed are static in their reference to Balaam; but rather than reflecting a set of *preexisting* qualities attributed to the prophet, they indicate the *endpoint* of a process of change and development that Balaam has undergone over the course of the pericope.

Several moments in the narrative contribute to this perspective, and I will discuss these at greater length in the following chapter; but it is worthwhile here briefly to call attention to the most significant points. In particular, God’s enabling the prophet to see the messenger in Num 22:31 (וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינַי בְּלֶעָם וַיֵּרָא אֶת־מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה) “And Yahweh uncovered Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the messenger of Yahweh”), which results in Balaam’s contrite response to the messenger in Num 22:34, may be seen as a literal foreshadowing of Balaam’s becoming figuratively “pierced-open of

¹¹⁸ Sternberg 1985: 338.

¹¹⁹ Sternberg 1985: 338 (emphasis added).

eye” and “uncovered of eyes” as he comes to understand God’s intention toward Israel (Num 24:1) and conforms his prophetic activity to it. Similarly, his abandonment in this latter verse of the practice of augury follows closely on his poetic expression of Israel’s direct link with the voice and will of God (Num 23:23), in which he states that Israel eschews the very practice that he had undertaken up to this point, נחש(ים), in favor of simple and direct communications from—and instigated by—the divine. Hence, just as Israel relies on prophetic perception rather than prophetic–magical action, so Balaam, having set aside divinatory practices, now may identify himself as “hearer of the sayings of El” and “he (who) sees the vision of Shadday.”

From this perspective, it becomes apparent that the situation articulated by Sternberg is reversed here, with the “unique process” to which he referred in this case having taken place *prior* to the epithets linking this process with the character upon whom it has acted. The occurrence of the epithets in the mouth of Balaam himself, moreover, indicates his consciousness of this process, and of its reaching the point of completion. The reversal of the usual epithetical routine, then, serves in combination with other features to emphasize Balaam’s development as a character across the entire text, and to highlight especially the state in which he finds himself at the end of the narrative.

Finally, we turn briefly to Levine’s suggestion that the use of the name *Bilʿām ben-Bəʿōr* itself is predicated on literary motives. Elsewhere, I argue that a retrojection of later monarchic concerns onto the Wandering-period setting of *Sefer Bilʿām* is evident across the pericope as a whole.¹²⁰ Indeed, Levine posited that the very name of the protagonist in our text may reflect this practice, calling upon the long-recognized

¹²⁰ See below, pp. 466–468.

parallel between this name and that of Bela son of Be^cor, identified as the king of Edom in Gen 36:31–32.¹²¹

...[S]ince the literary *mise en scène* of the Balaam Pericope is the preconquest period, it is not inconceivable that the author of the narrative sections of Numbers 22–24 was actually identifying Balaam, in his literary retrojection, as [*Bela^c ben-Ba^côr*,] the first Edomite king who ruled before there was a monarchy in Israel, as reported in Genesis 36:31 [the king's name is specified in Gen 36:32].¹²²

Many scholars have commented on this connection, as exemplified by Levine. However, although the similarity between the names of the two figures is remarkable, it is somewhat difficult to perceive any literary motivation, let alone one that accords with the driving themes of the pericope, for constructing the protagonist's name specifically for the sake of this apparently obscure allusion. Moreover, one additionally must reckon with the marked increase in the plausibility of Balaam as a real historical figure that the existence of the Deir ^cAllā materials provides, which lends support to the veracity of the name as genuine rather than invented.¹²³ In the end, I must concede that although I can perceive no clear literary explanation for the similarity between these two names, this does not necessarily mean that no such explanation exists. Nevertheless, Levine himself expressed a clear awareness of the tenuousness of his suggestion,¹²⁴ so for the moment I simply follow in his footsteps by recalling it here with all due caution.

¹²¹ Levine 2000: 146–147.

¹²² Levine 2000: 147.

¹²³ It is important to note that Levine (2000: 232) expressed the view that the Deir ^cAllā inscriptions postdate the biblical Balaam material. This is convenient for his suggestion, since a name invented for the biblical text presumably could then be employed in any extrabiblical extensions of the tradition. However, although his dating schema is carefully reasoned, it is by no means firmly established.

¹²⁴ Levine 2000: 147.

Balaq

References to Balaq, Balaam's counterpart and the antagonist in the pericope, exhibit even less variation. As noted above,¹²⁵ the name בָּלָק bears an alliterative relationship with expressions throughout the pericope involving the root קבב "curse," to which, as Garsiel indicated, is added universally in some fashion the letter ל, as in קָבַה-לִי "curse for me" (Num 22:11) or לָקַב "to curse" (Num 23:11).¹²⁶ Additionally, we have recalled Garsiel's observation of the persistence of this alliterative pattern into the next chapter, with the account of Phineas's actions making use of the words הַקֶּבֶה "the chamber" and קִבְתָּהּ "her stomach" as a means of tying off this schematic thread.¹²⁷ We may turn, therefore, to other matters concerning Balaq's name in the pericope.

For Balaq there occurs no cluster of epithetic flourishes comparable to that attested for Balaam in the prophet's third and fourth oracles. Only two fairly standard expressions are applied to him in the pericope: the patronymic בֶּן-צִפּוֹר "son of Šippor," and a phrase designating him מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב "king of Moab." The first phrase usually occurs in conjunction with his given name, thus בָּלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר, and is attested twice in the narrative voice (Num 22:2, 4), once in the voice of his servants (Num 22:16), and twice in the voice of Balaam (Num 22:10; 23:18). Of these, it is the latter two that warrant the most interest. The first time Balaam uses the expression, it is as a part of the longest identifying phrase used for Balaq in the pericope: בָּלָק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב "Balaq son of Šippor, king of Moab." The implication appears to be that Balaam is unfamiliar with this figure outside of the message he has received from him, and thus

¹²⁵ See above, pp. 294–295.

¹²⁶ Garsiel 1991: 218. This alliterative pattern is discussed above, in the section on sound echo.

¹²⁷ See above, pp. 295–296.

identifies him by means of all of the information at his disposal. In effect, this renders the relationship, from Balaam's standpoint, as one in which Balaq's role is neither more nor less than that of a ruler seeking his services in a political matter. The second usage of Balaq's patronymic occurs in Balaam's second oracle, and rather than occurring in conjunction with Balaq's personal name, it stands in parallel to it: **בְּנוֹ צִפּוֹר**. We may comfortably attribute this locution to the aesthetic sensibility evident in the tight synonymous parallelism it generates with the A word **בֶּלֶק** in the previous colon, thereby following a reasonably well-attested poetic pattern (A-colon: name // B-colon: title or patronymic), as in Judg 5:12cd, in which **בָּרַק** "Baraq" in the A line is paralleled by **בֶּן-אֲבִינוֹם** "son of Abinoam" in the B-line.

Somewhat more peculiar is the incorporation of the preposition **-לְ** into an epithet for Balaq, which occurs in the latter portion of Num 22:4:

...וּבֶלֶק בֶּן-צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בְּעֵת הַהוּא:
 ...and Balaq son of Šippor was king to Moab at that time.

The expected construct phrase **מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב** "king of Moab" is modified here to read **מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב** "king to (or for) Moab." This construction is the usual way of presenting an indefinite *nomen regens* in conjunction with a definite *nomen rectum*; but the gloss "a king of Moab" is rendered inappropriate by the following phrase **בְּעֵת הַהוּא**: one hardly can suggest that Balaq was simply one of several kings of Moab "at that time." Thus, to understand the intent of this modification, we must pay close attention to what precedes this clause. In Num 22:3, Moab is the subject of both clauses bracketing the chiasmic verse structure, each of which indicates a reaction of fear or dread toward the people of Israel; and the first clause of Num 22:4 presents a statement in direct speech expressing the same information, albeit in somewhat more poetic fashion, with Moab as the speaker. These are the only places in the entire pericope where Moab itself

appears as the subject. Given the context, it is reasonable to suppose that these statements of concern regarding the people of Israel are to be taken as representative of the sentiments of the Moabites, that is, the *people* of Moab. From this perspective, it becomes apparent that the adapted form of Balaq’s epithet, מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב “king to Moab,” indicates that he ostensibly takes up the cause of his people in dispatching an embassy to request Balaam’s help, which is reported in the very next verse. In this way, a matter of popular concern—the encroachment of the people of Israel on Moabite territory—is transformed into the political and/or personal cause of Balaq. Additionally, the absorption of Moab’s active role in the narrative into Balaq’s individual activity serves after a fashion to synonymize the two: Balaq now speaks with a singular voice for all of Moab; and simultaneously, the general Moabite point of view is literarily typified or standardized in Balaq’s personal perspective.

Finally, in the interest of examining certain characters’ perspectives on certain others, it is particularly worthwhile also to note the remarks of Jacob Milgrom indicating that Balaq is successively “downgraded” across the poetic oracles spoken by Balaam.¹²⁸ He is referenced in parallel cola in the first oracle as מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב and בֶּלֶק “king of Moab;” in the second, again in parallel, as בֶּלֶק and בְּנוֹ צִפּוֹר “son of Šippor;” and not at all in the third and fourth oracles. Milgrom explained this progression as follows: “[I]n the first oracle Balaam is the passive instrument of Balak...; in the second, he gives orders to Balak...; and in the third and fourth, having [abandoned divinatory practices and] become the [direct] confidant of the Lord, he can ignore Balak altogether...”¹²⁹ This pattern reveals the developing attitude of Balaam toward his

¹²⁸ Milgrom 1990: 468. He attributed these comments to his student, H. Chapnick (Milgrom 1990: 518 Excursus 56 n. 1).

¹²⁹ Milgrom 1990: 468.

counterpart, an attitude that changes in parallel with his personal development as a character in the narrative, which I explore in the following chapter.

God

Moving on, an examination of the names used for God in *Sefer Bil'am* is of particular interest due to its import for the traditional source-critical view. It is well recognized that perhaps the best-known primary criterion for the source-critical approach, namely the uses of the divine referents יהוה and אֱלֹהִים in J and E respectively, is particularly problematic in this text: "...[I]t has been duly noted that the overall distribution [in *Sefer Bil'am*] of the divine names, *YHWH* and *ʿĒlōhîm*, is blatantly inconsistent with the usual source-critical assignments. These divine names often alternate with each other in the ongoing narrative, making it virtually impossible to identify discrete sources on the basis of such usage."¹³⁰ This being the case, there remains the question of how one explains this variation in the appellatives used for God (and/or gods; see below). Hence, it is worthwhile to examine closely the range of variation extant in the text, and to consider whether there may be some other kind of logic motivating it. Broadly speaking, we may isolate two "domains" of terminology for God, with one family of terms occurring across the prose narrative and the other existing only in the poetic diction of Balaam's oracles. For the present it is convenient to examine these two groups separately, beginning with the prose material.

First, there are two situations in which the divine name יהוה occurs as the *nomen rectum* in a construct chain. The first such phrase, מִלְאֲךָ יְהוָה, which occurs eleven times between Num 22:21 and Num 22:35, must be set aside as a formulaic

¹³⁰ Levine 2000: 137–138. See also Rofé 1979: *passim*, especially pp. 20–21.

expression that should be associated with identifying the messenger specifically, rather than with the matter that concerns us at present. The biblical corpus attests 71 instances of construct phrases consisting of מְלֶאךְ plus a term for the divine, of which only twelve read מְלֶאךְ אֱלֹהִים (ה) מְלֶאכְ (י), while 59 read מְלֶאךְ יְהוָה.¹³¹ Thus, this phrase clearly is a standard locution that does not speak to the issue of preference for one divine name over against another, but rather stands as part of the unwaveringly consistent pattern according to which the messenger is identified throughout the portion of the pericope in which he appears. This point will resurface below.

Similarly, although the phrase עֲיִי יְהוָה occurs only once in this pericope (Num 24:1), it likewise manifests telling statistical data across the biblical corpus: of the 105 attestations of עֲיִי plus divine name, only three read עֲיִי אֱלֹהִים (ה) עֲיִי, while 102 read עֲיִי יְהוָה.¹³² Hence, this too may be seen as a standard expression, whose presence in this text need not stand as an additional complication to the question of the usage of divine names. We may focus our attention, therefore, on those references to God in the narrative voice that are independent of these two stock phrases.

An examination of these remaining references yields a striking pattern. For אֱלֹהִים, the data stand as follows:

¹³¹ These figures are drawn from Even-Shoshan 1989: 658–659 s.v. מְלֶאךְ.

¹³² Drawn from Even-Shoshan 1989: 852–854 s.v. עֲיִי. One of the latter 102 attestations occurs in the singular: עֵין יְהוָה (Ps 33:18).

Table 5: Uses of אֱלֹהִים in the Narrative Voice in *Sefer Bil'am*

	<i>as explicit subject</i>	<i>as implicit subject</i>	<i>as nomen rectum</i>	<i>as indirect object</i>
Num 22:9	וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעָם “And Elohim came to Balaam”	וַיֹּאמֶר “and he said”		
Num 22:10				וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָעָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים “And Balaam said to <i>hā-Ēlōhîm</i> ” ¹³³
Num 22:12	וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעָם “And Elohim said to Balaam”			
Num 22:20	וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעָם לַיָּלָה “And Elohim came to Balaam at night”	וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ “and he said to him”		
Num 22:22			וַיִּחַר-אַף אֱלֹהִים כִּי-הוֹלֵךְ הוּא “And Elohim’s anger flared because he was going”	
Num 23:4	וַיֵּקֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעָם “And Elohim appeared to Balaam”			
Num 24:2			וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים “And upon him was the spirit of Elohim”	

Note that in all of these contexts the term אֱלֹהִים exhibits a presence that, while not wholly (nor indeed grammatically) passive *per se*, nevertheless involves no direct action on the persons or events in the narrative. Even the active verbs בּוֹא and נִקְרָה refer only to God’s manifestations to Balaam, either in the night visions of the early part of the pericope or in response to his sacrificial rituals later on; and the verb הָיָה, of which the construct phrase רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים “the spirit of Elohim” is the subject, scarcely connotes truly active involvement in the events described. Thus, the verbs connected with this designation for God are limited to the realms of speech, emotion, and

¹³³ The use of the definite article here appears to have a euphonous purpose, standing as a separating element between the preposition אֶל and the nearly identical first syllable -אֱל- of the word אֱלֹהִים.

manifestation, a point most clearly evident in the fact that all verbs associated with אֱלֹהִים are intransitive.

On the other hand, aside from the stock phrases מְלֹאךְ יְהוָה and עֵינֵי יְהוָה, discussed above, יְהוָה always stands as the grammatical subject of a clause in the narrative voice. This stands in sharp contrast to the range of grammatical roles occupied by אֱלֹהִים. The data are as follows:

Table 6: Uses of יְהוָה in the Narrative Voice in *Sefer Bil'am*

	<i>as explicit subject</i>	<i>as implicit subject</i>
Num 22:28	וַיִּפְתַּח יְהוָה אֶת־פִּי הַאֲתוֹן “And Yahweh opened the jenny’s mouth”	
Num 22:31	וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינֵי בָלָעַם “And Yahweh uncovered Balaam’s eyes”	
Num 23:5	וַיִּשֶׂם יְהוָה דְּבַר בְּפִי בָלָעַם “And Yahweh put a word in Balaam’s mouth”	וַיֹּאמֶר “and he said”
Num 23:16	וַיִּקָּר יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלָעַם “And Yahweh appeared to Balaam”	וַיִּשֶׂם דְּבַר בְּפִיו “and he put a word in his mouth” וַיֹּאמֶר “and he said”

Not only is יְהוָה the subject in every case, but it is immediately apparent that it predominantly occurs as the subject of transitive verbs—in other words, this term for God has clear associations of direct contact and interaction with the players and events in the narrative. Moreover, the only intransitive verbs of which this name is the subject may be set aside on the following grounds. The clauses in which occur the two instances of the verb וַיֹּאמֶר (Num 23:5, 16) clearly are subsidiary to the preceding clauses, serving largely to mark the conclusion of the word (דְּבַר)—in both cases unspecified—that Yahweh plants in Balaam’s mouth, and also to signal a return from private interaction between God and Balaam to the public encounter between Balaam and Balaq. This helps to preserve the forward motion of the narrative, but contributes only minimal significant content to it. Indeed, one notes that regardless of which

divine appellative is used, in all but one instance (Num 22:12)¹³⁴ the verb **אמר** occurs with God as its subject *only* as a secondary addendum to the preceding clause, rather than as a stand-alone point of narrative action. This being the case, one may prefer additionally to set aside those instances of this verb with which the word **אלהים** is associated; but doing so does nothing to change the larger picture presented by the data under examination here.

The one remaining occurrence of the name **יהוה** in association with an intransitive verb (Num 23:16) evidently is the exception that proves the rule. To demonstrate this, we must review in detail both the context of this instance and the material from earlier in the chapter that it parallels.

**וַיִּקְרַ אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּלַעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶת־שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחֹת עֲרַכְתִּי וְאָעַל פָּר וְאֵיל
בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיִּשֶׁם יְהוָה דְּבַר בְּפִי בָלַעַם וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל־בָּלַק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר:**

And Elohim appeared to Balaam, and he said to him, “The(se) seven sacrifices I have arranged; and I sent up bull and ram on the altar.” And Yahweh put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and he said, “Return to Balaq, and thus shall you speak.”

(Num 23:4–5)

וַיִּקְרַ יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלַעַם וַיִּשֶׁם דְּבַר בְּפִיו וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל־בָּלַק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר:

And Yahweh appeared to Balaam, and he put a word in his mouth, and he said, “Return to Balaq, and thus shall you speak.”

(Num 23:16)

In the first iteration of this pattern, **אלהים** is the subject of the first verb, **ויקרא**, which is intransitive; but after this comes Balaam’s interposed direct speech, which separates this initial clause from the later ones in which **יהוה** is the subject of the transitive verb **וישם** and its subsidiary **ויאמר**.

¹³⁴ Note that this single exception has **אלהים** as the subject.

The second iteration, however, which lacks any such intrusion by Balaam, simply collapses the three clauses of which God is the subject into a single expressive unit. Naturally, the subject is made explicit in the first clause, and left unspecified in the latter two. But more importantly, this divergence from the wording of the former occurrence of this sequence suggests that the choice of *יְהוָה* as the subject of the entire unit, rather than *אֱלֹהִים*, serves specifically to foreground the transitive verb *וַיִּשֶׁם*, with which *יְהוָה* is associated explicitly in the prior case, and to amplify it as the most salient action in the sequence. If *אֱלֹהִים* had been used as the subject in the first clause, as in the earlier verse, and remained the implied subject in the subsequent clauses, it would defy the transitive–intransitive pattern evident in the rest of the data presented here. Moreover, it is highly unusual anywhere in the biblical corpus, outside of synonymous parallelism in poetic cola, to encounter back-to-back clauses in which *אֱלֹהִים* is expressed as the subject of one and *יְהוָה* of the other.¹³⁵ Consequently, the text of Num 24:16 as it stands offers the only conceivable way that the pattern to which I have drawn attention could be deployed here.

Thus, to reiterate, we see a clear pattern in *Sefer Bil'am* according to which the divine name *יְהוָה* is associated specifically with transitive, participatory verbs, while *אֱלֹהִים* is associated with intransitive verbs involving emotion, speech, and manifestation. Doubtless some would take this as a demonstration of the supposed transcendent character of the Elohist's God, as against the more imminent deity of the Yahwist.¹³⁶ However, there persists beneath this source-critical solution an unfortunate

¹³⁵ See Gen 7:16 for one example.

¹³⁶ The notion that J and E are distinguished by these competing theological perspectives is widespread in modern source-critical theory. See, e.g., the blanket statement of Otto Eissfeldt (1965: 184): "...E emphasises the remoteness of God from the world and from man more strongly than does the *Yahweh* stratum" (emphasis in original).

circularity that all too frequently underlies such approaches generally, a problem concisely described by R. N. Whybray as “beginning with presuppositions about the Pentateuch as a whole and then seeking to find confirmation of what has been assumed from the start....”¹³⁷ The sources of the Documentary Hypothesis themselves, one recalls, have been assembled secondarily by modern scholars, ostensibly on the basis of the evidence in the biblical text; and the sweeping attribution of various theological traits to the E and J sources respectively in fact represents a tertiary development. Whatever general perspective may result from this sequence of constructs-built-on-constructs, it cannot stand as the impetus for a particular reading of the evidence in this specific case. Rather, it is the evidence, such as it is, that must serve as the building blocks for an understanding of the constructs, for to invert this relationship would amount to employing the working model of the sources as a self-affirming justification of the very criteria on which the model has been built. The proposed overarching characteristics of E and J, which purportedly are “revealed” by textual evidence, cannot later be used to legitimize the same interpretive approach to the evidence that itself has yielded these characteristics.

Even more to the point, I call attention again to the widespread observation, articulated by Levine as cited above,¹³⁸ that the use of divine names in this pericope does not correspond neatly with the source divisions proposed for it. If this is true, then it hardly is feasible to argue that the divine names reflect certain inherent perspectives of the very sources to which they do not correspond. As a result, any proposed relationship between the data I have adduced here and the sources E and J can and should be laid to rest once and for all. We have no alternative but to seek

¹³⁷ Whybray 1987: 120.

¹³⁸ See above, p. 333, where I quote from Levine 2000: 137–138.

some other explanation for such a systematic and sharply defined pattern of usage with respect to these names. Thus, it is appropriate to consider the pattern from a literary standpoint, whereby we observe that it dovetails to a certain extent with an important theme in the pericope, namely, the interplay and juxtaposition of speech, action, and perception. This theme, and the larger statements it makes, is explored more fully in the next chapter; but for now it suffices to note that the usage of the divine names יהוה and אלהים in *Sefer Bil'am*, when examined collectively, is a specific aspect of the text that provides particular emphasis on this matter. Hence, taken as a literary device within this thematic context, it stands as a unifying principle, evident across the entire pericope, that manifests in the very type of data traditionally used by source critics to pull it apart.

References to the divine in the mouth of Balaam present a complex picture necessitating careful consideration. Outside of the poetic oracles, Balaam refers to God almost exclusively as יהוה, with a single instance of this being expanded to the phrase יהוה אלהי “Yahweh my God,” in his statement to Balaq’s servants in the following verse:

וַיַּעַן בְּלָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדַי בְּלָק אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מָלֵא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכָל
לַעֲבֹר אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:

And Balaam answered, and he said to Balaq’s servants, “If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) small or great.”

(Num 22:18)

Setting aside for the moment the complex matter of Balaam’s association with Yahweh, and in particular his assertion here that Yahweh is “his God,” which I will address momentarily, I tentatively suggest that the use of this phrase may perhaps serve as a kind of verbal link between Balaam and Israel, by foreshadowing the similar

phrase יהוה אֱלֹהֵי “Yahweh his [i.e., Jacob // Israel’s] God” in the second oracle (Num 23:21). These are the only two instances of this expression in the pericope, and Balaam repeatedly aligns himself with Israel elsewhere. A direct statement to this effect concludes the first oracle (Num 23:10):

מִי מִנָּה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רֶבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	indeed, number the dust-cloud of Israel?
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל	May my soul die an upright death,
וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כְמֹהוּ:	and may my posterity be like it (i.e., the dust of Jacob // the dust-cloud of Israel).

Note also, for example, that Balaam dispenses with divinatory practices (Num 24:1) just after observing that Israel does not need them (Num 23:23), and the possible oblique reference to himself as one who blesses Israel in Num 24:9, as suggested by Milgrom.¹³⁹ Thus, although our present verse (Num 22:18) precedes these later statements and contexts by a considerable amount, it is plausible that a hint of their import might appear ahead of time, especially since the full forward-looking weight of such a glimpse would only come into focus as the later realizations are encountered.

The only true exception to Balaam’s exclusive use in prose of the name יהוה occurs in a statement by Balaam similar to that just cited, but this time delivered to Balaq himself:

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִעָם אֶל־בָּלָק הִנֵּה־בָאתִי אֵלֶיךָ עַתָּה הִיכֹל אוֹכַל דִּבֶּר מֵאוֹמָה הַדֹּבֵר אֲשֶׁר
יִשִּׁים אֱלֹהִים בִּפִּי אֲתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר:
And Balaam said to Balaq, “Behold, I have come to you. Now, am I
truly able to speak anything? The word that Elohim puts in my
mouth—it shall I speak.”
(Num 22:38)

¹³⁹ Milgrom 1990: 205, 467–468.

In fact, the two statements just cited (Num 22:18, 38) actually are the third and fourth instances of a series of seven such remarks made by Balaam in the prose narrative, all of which build on Balaam's initial responses to Balaq's overtures (Num 22:8, 13), that serve to punctuate the pericope at certain junctures.¹⁴⁰ These related statements, and the impact of their recurrence across the pericope, is discussed below, in the context of my examination of repetition in the text. However, it is instructive here to touch on certain aspects of my analysis in those places, so I offer the following brief summary of the relevant points.

To begin, it appears that Balaam's remarks and the changes they undergo with each iteration reveal the learning process he experiences over the course of the narrative. This instance is no exception: coming as it does directly on the heels of the incident with the jenny (Num 22:21–35), Balaam's statement here reiterates what he had previously said, but additionally demonstrates a change in the speaker's consciousness with regard to the content of the statement itself. Balaam begins the story with a rote awareness of the cardinal divinatory rule, as articulated in his statement in Num 22:18: the diviner himself is only the transmitter of the divine message, and is not responsible for its content. A few lines later comes the first positive directive from Elohim, which drives home the same notion from God's standpoint:

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים | אֶל-בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-לִקְרָא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ אֲתָם
וְאָדָּם אֶת-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אֶדְבָּר אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוּ תַעֲשֶׂה:

And Elohim came to Balaam at night, and he said to him, "If it is to summon you that these men have come, then rise, go with them; but just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do."
(Num 22:20)

¹⁴⁰ The other three instances: Num 23:12, 26; 24:12–13.

In the ensuing episode, the jenny explains its actions in accordance with this very principle—it has not acted of its own volition, but as the result of an incontrovertible divine imperative:

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאֵתוֹן אֶל־בָּלָעַם הֲלוֹא אֲנִי אֶתְנֶהָ אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מִעוֹדִי עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
הֶהָסֵכְנָה הַסִּבֵּנִתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ כֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא:

And the jenny said to Balaam, “Am I not your jenny, upon whom you have ridden from your past¹⁴¹ until this day? Have I ever made a habit of doing this to you?” And he said, “No.”
(Num 22:30)

The episode concludes with Balaam’s indication that he has learned from the experience (Num 22:34), to which Yahweh’s messenger repeats the earlier directive in nearly identical form:

וַיֹּאמֶר מִלֵּאדָה יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלָעַם לֵךְ עִם־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְאַפְסָ אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אָדְבַר אֲלֶיךָ
אֲתוּ וְתִדְבְּרִי וַיֵּלֶךְ בָּלָעַם עִם־שָׂרֵי בָלָק:

And Yahweh’s messenger said to Balaam, “Go with the men; but only the word that I say to you—it shall you speak.” And Balaam went with the officers of Balaq.
(Num 22:35)

It is soon after this that we encounter Balaam’s reiteration of his earlier statement of this principle, this time directly to Balaq (Num 22:38). Although I have already cited this verse in full, here I highlight especially Balaam’s final few words to Balaq in this chapter, which clearly echo both of the divine directives that have preceded it:

¹⁴¹ For the word מִעוֹדִי I borrow the translation of Fox 1995: 772.

וְאֵךְ אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֶדְבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה:
 “...but just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do.”
 (from Num 22:20; Elohim is speaking to Balaam)

וְאִפְסֵי אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֶדְבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוֹ תִּדְבֹּר...
 “...but only the word that I say to you—it shall you speak.” ...
 (from Num 22:35; Yahweh’s messenger is speaking to Balaam)

הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׂים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אֲתוֹ אֶדְבֹּר:
 “... The word that Elohim puts in my mouth—it shall I speak.”
 (from Num 22:38; Balaam is speaking to Balaq)

By using such similar wording to that of the directive just given by Yahweh’s messenger three verses before, Balaam indicates, in this rearticulation of the same principle that he stated earlier (Num 22:18), that his conception of that principle has grown as a result of his experience with his jenny and the divine messenger. He has moved beyond rote awareness, and internalized the lesson of the encounter to such a degree that his own understanding of his role as a transmitter of divine intent has come more closely into line with the divine expression of it.

In fact, the messenger’s reiteration of the directive spoken previously by Elohim invites Balaam to revisit it in the light of the new perspective he has gained. And it is in Balaam’s response to Balaq, a few verses later, that we find the most salient point for our present topic. By putting אֱלֹהִים in the mouth of Balaam here, the author intimates that Balaam is conscious of the link between the directive he has just received, which was spoken by Yahweh’s messenger, and the similarly worded one spoken previously by the figure identified in the narrative voice as none other than אֱלֹהִים. Thus, the use of this term for God in Balaam’s direct speech in Num 22:38 further amplifies the sense that he now sees his relationship to the divine with improved clarity, as described above, by revealing his recognition that both divine directives, while ostensibly spoken by different characters, in fact are one and the

same. This deviation from the character's usual employment of the name יְהוָה is to be interpreted, therefore, as literarily motivated and wholly in accord with the overarching themes of the pericope. This point finds further emphasis in Balaam's return to the use of יְהוָה in the subsequent versions of the same statement that occur later in the pericope (Num 23:12, 26; 24:13).

The family of terms for the divine occurring in Balaam's poetic oracles provides an exceptionally tantalizing glimpse of the connections between this biblical material and its ancient Near Eastern context. Whereas the name יְהוָה is attested only three times in all of the oracles combined (Num 23:8, 21; 24:6), the vast majority of references to the divine are represented by אֱל (Num 23:8, 19, 22, 23; 24:4, 8, 16, 23). In addition, the third and fourth oracles introduce two additional terms, שַׁדַּי (Num 24:4, 16) and עֵלְיוֹן (Num 24:16). This paints an intriguing picture, since El, Shadday, and Elyon all are common referents for the divine in extrabiblical Canaanite literature, with the latter two occurring at times as epithets of El. Indeed, the primary god in the Deir 'Allā inscriptions is El, with a group of deities called the *šaddayīn* also playing a significant role.¹⁴² This is particularly noteworthy, of course, because Balaam is the central character in these inscriptions as well; thus, just as in the biblical text, here too this figure is linked directly with the two specific divine designations El and Shadday.

Here it is worthwhile briefly to note the position of Harriet Lutzky, who proposed that Shadday originally was an epithet for Ashera, which meant “the one of the breast,” etymologically deriving from the word **šad*- “breast.”¹⁴³ Her argument is noteworthy since it bears a special relevance with regard to Balaam. She suggested

¹⁴² For a discussion of these gods in the Deir 'Allā inscriptions, see, e.g., Hoftijzer–van der Kooij 1976: 275–276 and Hackett 1984: 85–87.

¹⁴³ Lutzky 1998. On the problems involved in this etymological perspective, see below, p. 528.

that the goddess Š[xx] in DAPT I:15 is none other than Shadday, basing this conclusion in part on the fact that if the *ʿēlāhîn* in that material correspond to El, who also is attested therein, then the *šaddāyîn* of the inscriptions likewise should correspond to Sh[adday].¹⁴⁴

It is difficult, however, to accept her suggestion that the appearance of the epithet Shadday in Num 24:4, 16 should be seen as an indication that Balaam bears a special connection to Ashera.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, she herself acknowledged that “in the Hebrew Bible parallel divine names are understood as referring to the same god,” and thus “El and Shadday in parallel in the biblical Balaam texts suggests they are the same deity.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, her hypothesis involves the claim, nowhere explicitly stated or defended, that the other biblical attributions of the epithet Shadday to El (as in Exod 3:6 and elsewhere), which she associated largely with P, are somehow qualitatively distinct from the same attribution in Balaam’s titulary. It is on the basis of this claim that she was able to construct her argument regarding the Bible’s conflicting views on Balaam, according to which *Sefer Bilʿam* reflects an acceptance of his connection to Ashera, seen popularly at times as a consort to Yahweh, and the other biblical references to Balaam treat him negatively as a result of this same connection.¹⁴⁷ I address her argument and its challenges in the next chapter. Meanwhile, although I duly acknowledge Lutzky’s suggestion that Shadday originally may have referred to a goddess, the parallelism of this epithet with El and Elyon in Balaam’s oracles justifies constraining the present discussion to the treatment of this term as synonymous with those it parallels.

¹⁴⁴ Lutzky 1998: 26–27.

¹⁴⁵ Lutzky 1998: 26–30, and Lutzky 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Lutzky 1998: 31.

¹⁴⁷ Lutzky 1999.

In any event, one must consider whether the occurrence of these three Canaanite designations for deities in the biblical Balaam poems may in fact represent a rare sequence of references to gods other than the god of Israel. On the other hand, אֵל and its epithetical synonyms אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהֵי, with which אֵל sometimes is combined, are associated with the biblical patriarchs, and were termed by Freedman “basic designation[s] of the God of the fathers.”¹⁴⁸ In this pericope, then, there appear to be two possible explanations for the situation arising in Balaam’s poetic oracles. The first option is that we are to see this material as a context in which Balaam invokes one or more members of the Canaanite pantheon by means of the terms El, Shadday, and Elyon, and onto this *Grundtext* has been overlain a Yahwistic cast that includes, but is not limited to, the incorporation of the name יְהוָה itself. The second is that these poems stand as evidence of the true syncretism of Yahweh with other deities of the Canaanite sphere, and the variety of divine terminology employed by Balaam is to be taken as a series of epithets for Yahweh, used as a poetic flourish. In other words, does Balaam invoke several deities, or one deity by several names?

Though Levine is not the only scholar to have devoted attention to this complex issue, his exploration of the matter effectively sets forth and evaluates the range of possibilities. His primary method of investigation was to adduce examples from elsewhere in the biblical corpus in which we see the name יְהוָה appearing in conjunction with the names of other Canaanite deities, and to compare the situations encountered there with what we find in *Sefer Bil'am*. His first example was Deut 33:26–29,¹⁴⁹ which he perceived as comprised of two parts: a poem lauding El’s

¹⁴⁸ Freedman 1976: 67.

¹⁴⁹ Although Levine identified the passage of interest as Deut 33:25–29, the text he cited did not include v. 25, nor did his ensuing discussion address this verse. See Levine 2000: 219 and the pages following.

support in Israel's conquest of Canaan (vv. 26–28); and a brief coda revisiting some of the themes and expressions of the El poem, but with Yahweh here occupying the role held by El in the previous section.¹⁵⁰ I cite here the Hebrew text, along with the translation of Levine, who took certain liberties in his rendering that affect (and/or reflect) his interpretation:

אֵין כְּאֵל יִשְׁרָאֵל רֶכֶב שָׁמַיִם בְּעִזְרָךְ וּבִגְאוֹתָיו שְׁחָקִים: מַעֲנֶה אֱלֹהֵי קֹדֶם וּמִתַּחַת זִרְעַת עוֹלָם וַיִּגְרֹשׁ מִפְּנֶיךָ אוֹיֵב וַיֹּאמֶר הַשָּׁמַד: וַיִּשְׁכֹּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטַח בְּדָד עֵין[-] יַעֲקֹב אֵל <-> אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אֶרֶץ שָׁמִי יִעֲרֹפוּ טֶל:	There is none like El, oh Jeshurun! Riding through the heavens to fight for you, and in his majesty the highest heavens. Who makes into dwellings the tents of old, and <i>stretches the tent flaps</i> of time immemorial. He drove out the enemy before you, and commanded: “Destroy!” So that Israel is encamped securely; on his own, <i>Jacob-El inhabits</i> A land of grain and wine, whose heavens drip with dew.
אַשְׁרֵיךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל <מִי כָמוֹךְ> עַם נֹשָׁע בִּיהוָה מִגֵּן עִזְרָךְ וְאַשְׁרֵי-חֶרֶב גְּאוֹתָךְ וַיִּכְחָשׁוּ אוֹיְבֶיךָ לָךְ וְאַתָּה עַל-בְּמוֹתֵימוֹ תִּדְרֹךְ:	You are privileged Israel, a people granted victory by YHWH; A shield fighting for you and who is your majestic sword. Your enemies surrender to you, and you trod upon their backs! ¹⁵¹

Levine identified several points of overlap between the “El” portion and the “Yahweh” portion of this text, noting specifically the presentation of the deity as עִזְרָךְ “your help,” who possesses גְּאוֹה “glory;” and also the reference to the defeat of

¹⁵⁰ Levine 2000: 219–220.

¹⁵¹ Levine 2000: 219. Note the italicized portions, which represent his emendations based on a variety of scholarly proposals; and also the other minor adjustments to the Hebrew text itself: the repointing of the word כְּאֵל in v. 26, the shift of the *maqef* in v. 28, and the omission (presumably by simply oversight) of the phrase מִי כָמוֹךְ in v. 29. See the discussion in Levine 2000: 219–220 for the details.

(א(ו)יב(יד) “the enemy/your enemies.”¹⁵² In view of this evidence, his explanation of the text runs as follows: “In effect, Deuteronomy 33:29 serves as a commentary on Deuteronomy 33:25–28 [*sic*], and identifies YHWH as the redeemer of Israel in place of El.”¹⁵³ According to Levine, then, Deut 33:26–29 yields evidence of two distinct deities, El and Yahweh, in the text. From this standpoint the “Yahweh”-oriented conclusion would have been appended to the preexisting poem about El.

On the other hand, Levine presented a different biblical example evincing the synthesis of Yahweh with El, namely, God’s statement to Moses in Exod 6:2–3:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה: וַאֲרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי וְשְׁמִי
יְהוָה לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם:
...And he said to him, “I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac,
and to Jacob as El-Shadday, and my name, Yahweh, I did not make
known to them.”

As Levine pointed out, the subsequent verses detail a series of prior events in Israel’s historical memory in which Yahweh, it is now specified, was actively involved. The upshot, as Levine put it, is that according to this statement, “El and YHWH are not two different deities, but merely different manifestations of the same divine force, YHWH.”¹⁵⁴ He provided the following elaboration of what, specifically, this message would have entailed:

The patriarchs had actually worshiped the deity, El, variously known as El-Shadday and (El)-Elyon (cf. Deut 32:7–8). What their descendants were being told is that YHWH was taking over from El, and was henceforth to be worshiped as if he had always been their god. They should no longer turn to El for help, but to YHWH; and further, they

¹⁵² Levine 2000: 220.

¹⁵³ Levine 2000: 220.

¹⁵⁴ Levine 2000: 220.

should now believe that all that they had attributed to El in the past was really the work of YHWH.¹⁵⁵

This, indeed, is true syncretism; and invites us to ask whether Balaam's oracles reflect the same phenomenon. Are the references to El, Shadday, and Elyon in Numbers 23–24 simply epithets or archaizing poetic terms for Yahweh?

For his part, Levine concluded that neither Exod 6:2–3 nor Deut 33:29 is comparable to what we encounter in *Sefer Bil'am*. He preferred instead to see the El poem of Deut 33:26–28 as the most instructive parallel to the oracles presented here, calling attention to specific resonances between the two texts. In particular, he mentioned the reference to tents in Deut 33:27, if one accepts his emendations, which corresponds to the colon מִה־טֹבוֹ אֹהֶלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב “How good are your tents, O Jacob” in Num 24:5; and also the combination in Deut 33:28 of the verb שָׁכַן “dwell, reside” with the adverb בְּדָד “alone,” as in Num 23:9, where we find הֵן־עַם לְבָדָד יֹשֵׁבִין “Behold, a people that dwells alone.”¹⁵⁶ In his view, therefore, Balaam's poetry stands as “original El literature that has been adapted to include YHWH, the god of Israel, but not to reduce El, or Elyon and Shadday for that matter.”¹⁵⁷ That is to say, according to Levine, in the poetry of our pericope we find neither a syncretized portrayal of Yahweh/El nor a body of El traditions that have been subsumed under the name of Yahweh. Rather, here we have a sequence attesting true, unqualified references to a multiplicity of deities, of which Yahweh, whose incorporation was secondary to the original composition of the material, is only a fairly minor constituent.

¹⁵⁵ Levine 2000: 221.

¹⁵⁶ Levine 2000: 220.

¹⁵⁷ Levine 2000: 221.

The fallacy in this view, it seems, resides in two somewhat problematic statements on which much of Levine's argument is predicated. The first asserts that Balaam's oracles cannot represent the same type of syncretism described in Exodus 6:2–3, since "Exodus 6 is overt and explicit about changes and developments that have occurred, whereas the Balaam poems are esoteric."¹⁵⁸ However, it is risky to assume that two texts, one overt and the other esoteric, cannot exhibit the same perspective on a matter such as this. The explicitness of Exodus 6 may well stem directly from the fact that the syncretism in question in fact represents the very matter with which the passage itself is concerned, while the opacity of Balaam's oracles similarly might be attributed to the fact that this issue, though present in the poems, is not a central concern that demands clear expression. Then too, one recalls the perspective of Auerbach, articulated in the previous chapter, according to which the laconic character of biblical literature generally makes a strong argument in support of seeking meaning in what is *not* said, as well as what is explicitly articulated. Sternberg argued that such a process is vital to a complete understanding of the material, for without coming to terms with what lies behind the text, we cannot arrive at a clear contextual picture of its surface meaning; "Hence the necessity of establishing the relevance of the absent material—from abstract rule through plot-stuff to judgment...."¹⁵⁹ Thus, one should not assume that the absence of an overt statement of synthesis in *Sefer Bil'am* implies that no such synthesis is to be found there. Finally, one also might suppose that within the context—whether temporal or otherwise—that saw Balaam's oracles reach their present form, the syncretism in question was "automatic" enough that a direct statement of it, such as that found in Exodus 6, was unnecessary. Whatever the case, in

¹⁵⁸ Levine 2000: 221.

¹⁵⁹ Sternberg 1985: 235.

regard to a logical leap such as that evident in Levine's reasoning, the burden of proof lies squarely with those who insist that the qualitative difference between Balaam's oracles and Exodus 6 implies a similar distinction in content and underlying attitudes.

Levine's second problematic claim is that the poems cannot exhibit synthesis between Yahweh and El, because the uses therein of the name El do not comport with what one normally would expect of an epithet. He wrote, "If the authors of the poems held that YHWH had taken over from El, then the proper noun, ֵ֑ל , since it now referred to the God of Israel, would have lost its discreteness, and would have been reduced to a common noun, meaning 'deity, god.'"¹⁶⁰ Indeed, taking this point still further, he pointed out the rarity of direct poetic parallelism between יְהוָה and אֱלֹהִים in the Bible, and the problematic nature of such parallelism when it does occur. On the basis of this situation, he posited that such parallelism between Yahweh and an ostensibly common noun would not be appropriate under normal circumstances, and in fact that the instance in Balaam's first oracle (Num 23:8) is to be explained precisely on the grounds that in this case the term אֱלֹהִים has not experienced such reduction: "It is only the unsynthesized ֵ֑ל , when ֵ֑ל is a proper noun in the absolute state, that has the valence to serve as a synonymous parallel to YHWH, and this is what we find uniquely in the first Balaam poem."¹⁶¹ To demonstrate his assertion that אֱלֹהִים retains its force as a proper noun in *Sefer Bil'am*, he expressed the sense that a common noun would lack the necessary force in this context: "It would sound rather weak to begin a dramatic poem by saying: 'The deity is no mortal that he would

¹⁶⁰ Levine 2000: 221.

¹⁶¹ Levine 2000: 222.

renee' [Num 23:19].... Nor would we be inclined to render *mah pā^cal ʾēl* 'What the deity intends to do' in Numbers 23:23, but rather 'What El intends to do.'"¹⁶²

The source of Levine's conviction that God cannot have two proper names is unclear. Human characters with two names certainly are attested in the Bible: in addition to the patriarchs Abram/Abraham and Jacob/Israel, for example, Solomon also receives the second name Jedidiah (2 Sam 12:24–25). To be sure, these dual namings frequently are explained by way of an etiological narrative or vignette in which one designation is changed to the other. But at the same time, we may call on Jacob/Israel as a demonstrative case, in which both identifications retain currency—particularly in poetry!—even long after the name change has occurred. Insofar as God is a character in the Bible, we may view the situation in Balaam's oracles from the same standpoint: here we have a body of poetic material in which multiple proper names and epithets for God are attested.

Even if one prefers to draw a distinction in this matter between the mortal and divine realms, however, the existence of multiple names for God nevertheless accords with other literatures of the biblical world, as noted by Whybray: “...[I]t is well known that in *the religious literature of the ancient Near East* a god or goddess might be called by many names....”¹⁶³ He drew specific attention to a demonstrative example from Ugarit, namely, the alternation of the names Baʿl and Hadad in the Baʿl Cycle:

*iḇ . b^cl̄ . tīhd / y^crm . The enemies of Baʿl take to the forests,
šnu^z . hd . gpt / ġr the haters of Hadd (to) the mountain slopes.
*(CAT 1.4.VII:35–37)**

¹⁶² Levine 2000: 221.

¹⁶³ Whybray 1987: 68 (emphasis in original).

It is unclear why such a phenomenon should be seen as anathema in the Bible, especially in the face of evidence such as that provided by *Sefer Bil'am*.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, Levine's insistence on separating the various compositional layers of these poems on the basis of the names used for God comes close to the very type of inconsistency that plagues the source-critical approach generally, as discussed above in Chapter 4. If a late Yahwistic cast resulted in the insertion of the name יהוה in three places in the oracles, why was it not simply dropped in as a replacement for the name אל across the board? And if this latter name is to be taken as part of some sort of inviolable core of material that could not be altered at will, then how does one explain the intrusions of the name יהוה that do occur in the poems?

Moreover, the evidence in the prose clearly indicates the interchangeability of the terms יהוה and אלהים as distinct referents pointing to the same figure.¹⁶⁵ In fact, the latter of these two terms surely is to be taken as an abstract noun meaning "God," used appellatively here and elsewhere to be sure, but not quite a true proper name: note its occurrence in this very pericope in the definite form הַאֱלֹהִים "the God" (or "the gods;" Num 22:10; 23:27). Thus, even if one accepts Levine's point that a synthesis in the poems implies the reduction of the name אל to a common noun, there nevertheless is an established precedent in this very pericope for the alternation of two referents for God, one a proper name and one not.

Finally, although clearly a minority view, Milgrom's perspective on the poems and their place in *Sefer Bil'am* calls into question the entire premise that the present

¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Whybray (1987: 68) himself adduced a verse from the very pericope under scrutiny here (Num 23:8, to be discussed below) as a clear instance of this phenomenon in the Bible.

¹⁶⁵ See above, pp. 334–340, which examines the use of these two names in the prose, and in particular the discussion therein of two nearly identical clauses: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּלָעַם (Num 23:4) and וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶל-בָּלָעַם (Num 23:16).

form is a Yahwistic reworking of poetry originally associated with El: “The poetry was composed for the sake of the prose. Without the narrative, the poetic oracles would make no sense, and all their allusions to personalities, nations, and events would be incomprehensible.”¹⁶⁶ Or, to put his position in chronological terms, the prose predates the poetry; and since the prose itself appears decidedly Yahwistic, with Balaam repeatedly associating himself with Yahweh, Milgrom’s point therefore requires that we ask: Could a Yahwistic author actually have *composed* these poems? Near the end of Chapter 3, I pointed out that the biblical Balaam material draws from the same body of traditions out of which the Deir ‘Allā inscriptions arose.¹⁶⁷ This being the case, and in view of the argument made in that chapter with regard to dialect, one wonders whether a Yahwistic author might have employed terminology for the divine that was drawn directly from this body of traditions, in a further attempt to color Balaam’s speech—and his poetry in particular—with elements indicating his foreignness. Would repeated use of the term אֱל, as well as אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים, have invoked in a Judahite audience the same sense of non-Judahite diction that the dialectal features adduced in Chapter 3 did?

In the end, however, even if one prefers, especially in light of the Deir ‘Allā inscriptions, to see these poems as exhibiting some preexisting framework in which El is the primary deity, the fact remains that we do a disservice to the text if we insist on focusing only on this aspect. Even if a Yahwistic adaptation of this material had been necessary, it would have necessitated a reinterpretation of the sundry divine names; and as a consequence, whatever the underlying constitution of the text, it is at least as important to recognize that the literary thrust of the divine terminology in the pericope

¹⁶⁶ Milgrom 1990: 467.

¹⁶⁷ See above, pp. 185–187.

as it stands points to a single deity who is identified by multiple referents. This being the case, it is important to ask whether we can explain in literary terms the three occurrences of the name יהוה in these poetic oracles, where אל otherwise generally is preferred.

In Num 23:8 we encounter the following pair of cola, each of which ends with a different name for God:

מֶה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּה אֵל	How can I doom when El has not doomed,
וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זָעַם יְהוָה:	and how can I damn what Yahweh has not damned?

The synonymous parallelism is unmistakable, with the shorter divine name in the first colon and the longer in the second.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the same can be said for the verbs in the two lines, with the first deriving from a geminate root while the second possesses three strong consonants. With the exception of this instance of these two names occurring in parallel, Levine argued that “there is probably not a single clear case of the direct parallelism ²El//YHWH, or YHWH//²El in all of biblical literature.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, as already mentioned above, he called on this point as support for his view that the term אל had lost its status as a proper name: “Such parallelism as we have in the first Balaam poem would not be proper once ²El had been reduced to a common noun, because this divine name would have lost his individuality in the process.”¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this particular case of the parallelism אל // יהוה is clear, and remains undisputed.

¹⁶⁸ Freedman (1976: 67) believed that the LXX, which switches the two names in this couplet, “is probably original,” though he did not specify a reason for his opinion.

¹⁶⁹ Levine 2000: 222, with an examination of the evidence from the remainder of the biblical corpus occupying pp. 222–224.

¹⁷⁰ Levine 2000: 223–224.

The two names אֵל and יְהוָה occur in close proximity again in Num 23:21cd–22, as follows:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עִמּוֹ	Yahweh his god is with him,
וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:	and a king's acclaim is in him.
אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, their liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעַפַת רֶאֶם לוֹ:	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

Levine insisted that the two divine names present here cannot be interpreted as a parallel pair. First, Levine saw the bicolon constituting Num 23:22, which occurs again in Balaam's third oracle (Num 24:8ab), as a refrain that "interrupts the flow of the poem,"¹⁷¹ and therefore as necessarily unconnected to the preceding or following material. Second, he found a suggested parallelism unacceptable here on the grounds that the two halves of this strophe, Num 23:21cd and Num 23:22, "are separate stichs, not hemistichs, and each exhibits its internal parallelism...."¹⁷²

To respond to Levine's second point first, one need only recall Fokkelman's concise summation of an aspect of parallelism easily detectable in a wealth of poetic contexts from the Bible: "...[T]he 'A, what's more, B' rule is also active on the level of verses and strophes. The intensification that the poet so often achieves in consecutive cola may be achieved just as well by means of poetic lines."¹⁷³ The example adduced by Fokkelman is Deut 32:8–12, a stanza made up of three strophes that he called "the stanza of the election."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Levine 2000: 218.

¹⁷² Levine 2000: 218.

¹⁷³ Fokkelman 2001: 86.

¹⁷⁴ Fokkelman 2001: 85.

בַּהֲנִיחַל עֲלִיּוֹן גּוֹיִם
 בַּהֲפָרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם
 יִצַּב גְּבֻלַּת עַמִּים
 לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 כִּי חֶלֶק יְהוָה עַמּוֹ
 יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:

When Elyon endowed the nations,
 when he separated the children of the earth,
 he fixed the territories of the peoples
 by the number of the children of Israel;
 for Yahweh's portion is his people,
 Jacob his allotted region.

יִמְצְאוֹהוּ בְּאַרְצַן מִדְבָּר
 וּבְתֵהוּ יִלֵּל יִשְׁמֹן
 יִסְבֶּבְנֵהוּ יְבוֹנֵנְהוּ
 יִצְרְנֵהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינָיו:

He encountered him in a wild land,
 and in an emptiness, a howling waste.
 He surrounded him, he instructed him,
 he guarded him like the apple of his eye.

כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוֹ
 עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחֹף
 יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו יִקְחֵהוּ
 יִשְׁאֲהוּ עַל-אַבְרָתוֹ:
 יְהוָה בֶּדֶד יִנְחֵנוּ
 וְאֵין עִמּוֹ אֵל נָכָר:

As an eagle rouses its nest,
 gliding over its fledglings,
 he stretches out his wings, he takes him,
 he lifts him on his plumage.
 Yahweh alone leads him,
 and with him there is no foreign El.

Each strophe begins by presenting tangible actions and images: establishing boundaries; locating in the wilderness; an eagle protecting its young. The bicola that end each strophe, however, stand out from their surrounding context by providing a qualitative generalization of God's specific actions on behalf of Israel. Together they "form a series that brings out God's intervention and commitment,"¹⁷⁵ with each bicolon presenting a characteristic summation of the strophe that it concludes. This series exhibits the basic traits of parallelism not only within each bicolon, but also across line, verse, and strophe boundaries. Consequently, on the basis of Fokkelman's example it is difficult to ascertain why there cannot exist a similar parallelism between bicola in Num 23:21cd–22, as Levine believed.

¹⁷⁵ Fokkelman 2001: 85.

Levine's observation that Num 23:22, which recurs in nearly identical form in Num 24:8ab, represent a poetic refrain is well taken. However, as demonstrated above in my discussion of alliteration in the pericope, this does not necessarily imply that no connection exists between this refrain and the context in which it appears. In addition, it is worthwhile to consider whether it may have been worked into the surrounding material by means of other poetic devices, and thus whether its dual role as both a refrain and an integral member of the poem in which it appears is strengthened further. If it can be demonstrated, a parallel relationship of precisely the type disputed by Levine would serve as one such indicator that Num 23:22 occupies an important place in its poetic environment. Indeed, in my view, even if this is an adage or poetic trope held over from some pre-Yahwistic substratum, a full understanding of its role in this context must include a recognition of its being interwoven into manifestly Yahwistic poetry. In this regard, it is unclear why one should find it difficult to perceive the divine names as a parallel pair here; and indeed, Freedman's tacit acceptance of this view serves to emphasize the point.¹⁷⁶

The rest of these two bicola adds further to the lines' parallel effect. In particular, the second and fourth cola (Num 23:21d, 22b), which I cite again here for reference, are strikingly similar in outward appearance, clearly attesting a kind of sound echo, albeit in a somewhat less rigorous form than in the occurrences examined in the above section on that topic:

וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ... ...and a king's acclaim is in him.

כְּתוֹעַפַּת רְאָם לוֹ... ...is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

¹⁷⁶ Freedman 1976: 67.

Observe that each of these cola begins with a word to which a uniconsonantal prefixed particle is attached. In addition, both of these words begin with ת; both are feminine plural, thus ending in ת as well; and both exhibit the letter ץ in a medial position. As for the second words of the cola, from an etymological standpoint both are monosyllabic, with the term in one exhibiting the usual segholate form and the one in the other bearing a realization that is somewhat less common.¹⁷⁷ In fact, this very aspect—the more common form in the first line, and the less common in the second—is precisely what one would expect of the parallel members of a single bicolon, whereas here it occurs in parallel bicola. This helps to drive home the point made above that parallelism can exist on multiple structural levels, and does in this section. A third observation about these particular cola, which also lends support to that point, is the similarity between the last word in each. These two words both are comprised of a uniliteral preposition, to which is attached the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix. Thus, the second halves of these two bicola exhibit marked similarities in form, and thereby serve further to emphasize the parallel relationship between the bicola.

Between these observations and those of Freedman, we already have provided ample evidence in favor of seeing the names יהוה and אל as a parallel pair here. But it is necessary to examine further the use of the name יהוה here, particularly because its position relative to the parallel name אל is the opposite of what appears in the first oracle. We additionally may counter Levine's position, therefore, by briefly reiterating the observations made elsewhere, in the section on the structure of Balaam's oracles, that highlight the role of Num 23:22 in the context of this particular poem. This

¹⁷⁷ The unusual formation of the word רַאם may have resulted from the presence of the medial א, as in the similarly constructed words בַּאֲר “well,” וּלְב “wolf,” etc.

bicolon is the third in a strophe that occupies all of Num 23:21–22. The strophe reads as follows:

לֹא־הַבֵּיט אֶן בֵּיעָקֵב	One perceives no misfortune in Jacob,
וְלֹא־רָאָה עֲמָל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and sees no distress in Israel:
יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ	Yahweh his god is with him,
וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:	and a king's acclaim is in him.
אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, their liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעֶפֶת רָאִם לוֹ:	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

The first bicolon makes an assertion about the well-being and security of the people of Israel. This assertion is explicated in the remainder of the strophe by two bicola that serve as balanced counterparts: the first, which references יְהוָה, specifically describes an *internal* perspective on Israel's security; and the second, which references אֵל, presents a statement of the single most definitive *outside* interaction between Israel and a foreign power, namely, the Exodus. Hence, the strophe holds together purely on its own merits, and incorporates the refrain in Num 23:22 as a key component of its expressive force. In addition, we may explain the presence and position of the name יְהוָה by noting that it evidently occupies a specific place within the rhetorical structure of the strophe. To be sure, in theory the names could be switched in this instance with little lost from this standpoint; but the intrusion of the name יְהוָה would shatter the integrity of the refrain couplet. Thus, on the basis of the argument presented here, the formulation attested in the text is to be expected.

It is noteworthy that in the third oracle, as in the second, the occurrence of the name יְהוָה in Num 24:6c—the final instance in Balaam's poetry—likewise is associated with matters internal to the people of Israel, specifically, pastoral activities and images; while אֵל in Num 24:8a is associated with Israel's dominance over other nations. The couplets in which these two cola appear read as follows:

כַּאֲהֵלִים נָטַע יְהוָה	like aloes Yahweh has planted,
בְּאֲרָזִים עַל־מַיִם:	like cedars along water.
	(Num 24:6cd)

אֵל מוֹצִיאֵו מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, his liberator from Egypt,
כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רֶאֱם לוֹ	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
	(Num 24:8ab)

Although the names יְהוָה and אֵל do not appear in direct parallelism here, as they have previously, we encounter again a sequence dealing first with internal and then with external matters, wherein יְהוָה occurs in the first and אֵל in the second of these sequences. The interposed strophe, Num 24:7, serves here to bridge the gap from the pastoral imagery of the preceding verse to the imagery of power and domination in the following verse.

This pattern is strengthened by additional elements in the first of these strophes that helps knit the name יְהוָה into the poem as a whole. All of the cola in this strophe begin with the preposition כִּ-, with the first and third cola continuing with masculine plural words that exhibit noteworthy phonetic similarities. Both are segholates; both have a voiceless guttural (ח or ה) as the central consonant; and both end, with the masculine plural ending, in the syllable *-lîm*. Moreover, the second word of the first colon, נָטַע, exhibits the consonants *n-t-y* and the long vowel *u*. In the third colon, with the sole exception of an interposed ע, the final two words, נָטַע יְהוָה, exhibit precisely the same consonantal pattern. What is more, given the biforms of יְהוָה attested in biblical personal names such as זְבִרְיָהוּ = זְבִרְיָה and יְהוֹנָתָן = יוֹנָתָן, it is reasonable to perceive the full completion of the phonetic link by connecting the long vowel *u* in the first colon with its homorganic complement, the consonant *ו*, in the name יְהוָה in the third. Thus, as I have observed with regard to the previous two attestations of יְהוָה in Balaam's oracles, the third likewise is to be seen not as a random or haphazard

secondary intrusion, but rather as an element carefully integrated into the fabric of the poems as a whole.

With respect to divine names in the pericope, there remains only the matter of Balaq's three references to God. Twice (Num 23:17; 24:11) he uses the name יהוה, which appears entirely appropriate given the context in both instances. Having heard Balaam connect himself repeatedly with Yahweh, it hardly is surprising that he would use this name when asking Balaam in Num 23:17 what response he has received from his divination. Likewise in Num 24:11, after Balaam has uttered his third oracle, Balaq instructs him to go home, and spits this divine name back at the prophet in a rage:

וַעֲתָה בָּרַח-לְךָ אֶל-מְקוֹמְךָ אֲמַרְתִּי כִּבֵּד אֶכְבֹּדְךָ וְהִנֵּה מִנְעֶךָ יְהוָה מִכְבוֹד:
“And now, flee to your place! I said ‘I will honor you greatly,’ and
behold, Yahweh has refused you honor.”

Based on the tone of this statement, it does little to contradict Balaq's belief, expressed by the king at the opening of the pericope and reinforced throughout the narrative, that Balaam himself is the source of his own power. On the contrary, one is tempted to take this use of the name יהוה as a derisive response to Balaam's repeated declarations that he can do or say only what Yahweh instructs him, particularly since Balaq's words indicate his persistent inability (or refusal) to conceive of any higher motivation for Balaam's actions than the fame and riches he has offered. The sardonic undertone of Balaq's outburst is that it is Balaam's own obstinacy that has denied him the honor and wealth promised by the king.

The only peculiarity here is Balaq's use of the term האֱלֹהִים in Num 23:27, which reads as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם לְכֶ־נָּא אֶקְחֶךָ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אוֹלִי יִישָׁר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְקִבַּלְתוּ לִי מִשָּׁם:

And Balaq said to Balaam, “Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be right in the eyes of *hā-ʿĒlōhîm* (that you) curse it [i.e., Israel, in the collective sense] for me from there.”

There is nothing to differentiate this reference to divinity from either of Balaq’s uses of the name יְהוָה, except for the apparently inconsequential fact that here the divine referent occurs as a *nomen rectum*. Certainly there appears to be no reason not to interpret the term הָאֱלֹהִים here in the same manner in which it is to be read in the narrative voice in Num 22:10, as completely equivalent to the appellative term אֱלֹהִים. But one wonders whether there may be an intentional ambiguity built in here, whereby הָאֱלֹהִים, when it occurs in the mouth of the Moabite king, is to be taken in a secondary way as the simple plural, especially with the definite article -ה: “the gods.” The import of this suggestion would be that Balaq is content with divine affirmation of his wishes from any quarter: just because Balaam associates himself with Yahweh does not mean that Balaq places any such limitation on the source of the divine dispensation he seeks. The text is silent on this matter, but in part it is precisely this laconic quality that renders the ambiguity so heavy with potential double meaning. Needless to say, no such effect would be achieved if the text were to read יְהוָה here rather than הָאֱלֹהִים.

Israel

As we turn to the pericope’s references to the people of Israel, we encounter a somewhat more straightforward situation. It is most productive here to examine first the references made in direct speech, and then proceed to the narrative voice. To begin, in Num 22:4 we encounter a statement attributed to Moab itself, in which occurs the only instance of Israel being termed הַקָּהָל “the throng,” as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתָה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת־כָּל־סְבִיבֵתֵינוּ כְּלַחֵד הַשּׁוֹר אֶת
 יֶרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבִלְק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בָּעֵת הַהוּא:
 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now *the throng* will lick up
 everything around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And
 Balaq son of Šippor was king of Moab at that time.
 (Num 22:4)

As indicated in the previous verse, Moab perceives Israel’s encroachment as a threat due to their “greatness” (בִּי רַב־הוּא, Num 22:3). Here, then, we encounter Moab voicing its worst fears about where this situation may lead, and as a result it seems appropriate in this context to understand the term with a somewhat negative tone, as “the mob” or something similar.

Balaq’s references to Israel present a similar but slightly more nuanced picture. Taken collectively, these references demonstrate what can only be described as a singular lack of concern on his part with the specific identity of the people of Israel, being as he is more preoccupied with effecting curses upon this threatening new adversary, whoever they may be. Unsurprisingly, he never refers to Israel by name, but instead uses the generic term עַם “people” twice in reference to them:

וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל־בָּלָעַם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר פֶּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַנָּהָר אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹ לְקַרְאֵלּוֹ
 לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כֹסֵף אֶת־עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב מִמְּלִי: וְעַתָּה
 לְכֶ־נָּא אָרְה־לִּי אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי־עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוּלַי אוּכַל נִכְה־בּוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשְׁנוּ
 מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תִּבְרָךְ מִבְּרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר יוֹאָר:
 And he sent messengers to Balaam son of Be^cor at Pethor, which is on
 the river—the land of the children of his people—to summon him,
 saying, “Behold, a *people* has come out from Egypt; behold, it has
 covered the eye of the land, and it dwells opposite me. And now, please
 come, curse for me this *people*, for it is stronger than I; perhaps I will
 be able to strike it, that I might drive it from the land; for I know that
 whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.”
 (Num 22:5–6)

In addition, on two occasions, other characters attribute the same usage to Balaq. First, Balaam does so in repeating the king's message to God; and then Balaq's messengers do so in conveying his second message to Balaam:

הִנֵּה הָעָם הַיֵּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּכֶס אֶת-עֵין הָאָרֶץ עֲתָה לָכֶּה קְבַה־לִּי אֹתוֹ אוֹלֵי אוֹבֹל לְהִלָּחֶם בּוֹ וְגִרְשָׁתִּיו:

“Behold the *people* coming out from Egypt: it has covered the eye of the land! Now, come, damn it for me; perhaps I will be able to battle against it, and drive it out.”
(Num 22:11)

כִּי-כִבֵּד אֶכְבֹּדְךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה וּלְכֶּה-נָּא קְבַה־לִּי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה:
“For I will honor you very greatly, and all that you say to me I will do. Go, please, curse for me this *people*.”
(Num 22:17)

At two other points (Num 23:11; 24:10), Balaq uses the term *אֹיְבֵי* “my enemies,” a group into which he clearly has lumped Israel:

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם מָה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לְקֹב אֹיְבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָ בְּרַד:
And Balaq said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? Behold, to curse *my enemies* I brought you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly.”
(Num 23:11)

וַיִּחַר-אַף בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיִּסְפֹּק אֶת-כַּפָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם לְקֹב אֹיְבֵי קְרֹאתֶיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָ בְּרַד זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים:
And Balaq's anger flared toward Balaam, and he clapped his hands; and Balaq said to Balaam, “To curse *my enemies* I summoned you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly these three times.”
(Num 24:10)

This word, though itself more specific in terms of its relationship to the speaker, in fact presents Balaq's view of Israel as even less specific than before, by referring to them only as some nebulous portion of a much broader conceptual field.

Finally, the relevant pronominal data yield further evidence of Balaq’s lack of concern with the specific identity of Israel. His references to Israel by way of a discrete noun, as catalogued here, are six in number; but he refers to them fourteen times by means of a pronoun (including three times as quoted by Balaam), at times without a recently stated antecedent. In two of these references he employs the independent pronoun **הוא** (Num 22:5, 6), and in the other twelve he uses the pronominal suffix **־ו**, alternatively **וְ-** or **וּ-** (22:6 [2x], 11 [3x, as quoted by Balaam]; 23:13 [4x], 25 [2x], 27). In view of the combined evidence of these pronominal usages and the expressions detailed above, we may say that Balaq plainly views Israel as an indeterminate “it/him/them” whose specific identity is entirely unimportant to the king, except insofar as their presence on the borders of Moab has drawn his attention.

All but one of Balaam’s references to Israel occur in his poetic oracles. Here, the standard word-pair **יִשְׂרָאֵל // יַעֲקֹב** occurs eight times across the oracles: twice in the first (Num 23:7, 10); three times in the second (Num 23:21, 23 [2x]); once in the third (Num 24:5); and once in the fourth (Num 24:17).¹⁷⁸ This pattern is broken in Num 24:18–19, the final occurrence of these names in the oracles, as frequently happens in the Bible with the last of a sequence of recurring textual elements.¹⁷⁹ Here the names appear in reverse order, and evidently without any parallel relationship.

Elsewhere in the oracles, Balaam provides three epithetical designations for Israel. The first two such instances are built on the word **עַם** “people,” and then append a sequence of descriptive or identifying expressions highlighting certain qualities exhibited by Israel. The first such instance is in the first oracle, in Num 23:9cd:

¹⁷⁸ Stanley Gevirtz (1963: 52–55) argued against the hypothesis that these names bear some subtle distinction in meaning, and demonstrated that they are to be seen as a simple parallel pair.

¹⁷⁹ On this phenomenon, see Mirsky 1977.

הָעָם לְבַדֵּד יֹשֵׁב וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:	Behold, a people who dwells alone, and among the nations is not reckoned.
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Here, it is the uniqueness of Israel among the nations that is particularly emphasized. The second instance, in Num 23:24, is related loosely to the previous example, as articulated in the section on the oracles' structure; but here it is the lion-like strength and ferocity of Israel to which Balaam gives poetic expression:

הָעָם כְּלִבְיַא יָקוּם וְכֹאֲרֵי יִתְנַשֵּׂא לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֹאכַל טֶרֶף וְדָם־חַלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:	Behold, a people who like a lion rises, like a lion rouses itself: It does not rest until it devours prey and drinks the blood of the slain.
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Thus, in these two places the term **עַם** is used as a way of opening the door for a discussion of Israel's virtues and blessings, a goal that is pursued in each case according to the thematic aim of the oracle in which it appears: in the first oracle, Num 23:9cd concisely summarizes the poem's expression of the uniqueness and election of Israel; and as the second oracle's concluding strophe, Num 23:24 is to be understood as a presentation of the might of Israel as a consequence of the observations made earlier in the poem articulating its direct connection to God.

In Num 24:18c–19 we find another series of descriptors, this time expanding on the explicit name Israel:

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה חֵיל: וַיֵּרֶד מִיַּעֲקֹב וְהָאֱבִיד שָׁרִיד מֵעִיר:	And Israel does valorously, and descends from Jacob, and destroys the remnant from the city.
--	--

The word **עָשָׂה** in Num 24:18c is not in construct form, which indicates that **חֵיל** must be taken adverbially, thus ruling out options such as “doer of valor.” Consequently, it

is difficult in English translation to bring out the nominal quality of the phrase עֲשֵׂה חֵיל, which, from a strict grammatical standpoint, stands in an equational relationship with the name יִשְׂרָאֵל, and thus is to be taken epithetically, rather than as a full-fledged verbal predicate. As the final descriptive statement made by Balaam about Israel, this series of phrases serves as a summation of the cumulative force of his foregoing oracular speeches. In a sense, it returns the matter of Israel's might, expressions of which have intensified with each successive utterance, back to the thematic context of the first oracle, in which the prosperity of Israel is presented as the natural result of its elect status.¹⁸⁰

The lone instance of Balaam's referring to Israel outside his oracles comes in Num 24:14, in which he proclaims to Balaq for the final time his inability to countermand the directives of Yahweh:

וַעֲתָהּ הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי לְכָה אֵיעָצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה לְעַמְּךָ בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים:
 “And now behold, I go to my people. Come, I will counsel you
 (regarding) what this people will do to your people in the end of days.”

Here Balaam tailors his diction to the sensibility of the person to whom he is speaking, by opting here for the same referent used by Balaq himself in both direct and quoted speech: הָעָם הַזֶּה “this people.” The biblical corpus attests this practice elsewhere, as for example in Jon 1:8–9:

¹⁸⁰ Note the analogous expression יְמִין יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה חֵיל in Ps 118:15, 16, which NJPS glosses as “The right hand of the LORD is triumphant.”

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה נָא לָנוּ בְּאִשֶּׁר לְמִי־הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִהַמֶּלֶאכֶתֶדָּ וּמֵאַיִן תָּבוֹא
מֶה אֲרָצְךָ וְאִי־מִזָּה עִם אֹתָהּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵיהֶם עִבְרִי אָנֹכִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
אֲנִי יִרָא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָיָם וְאֶת־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה:

And they said to him, “Please tell us on whose account this evil (has come) to us! What is your occupation, and whence do you come? What is your land, and from which people are you?” And he said to them, “A *Hebrew* am I, and Yahweh the god of the heavens do I fear, who made the sea and the dry ground.”

The term “Hebrew” typically is used by outsiders to refer to the people of Israel. Here, then, Jonah identifies himself by means of this term in order that his speech might resonate as clearly as possible with his audience. The same is true in our text with Balaam, who clearly knows the identity of the people of Israel, having referred to them by name numerous times in his poetry, but who utilizes terminology that is specific to Balaq.

One might ask, however, whether Balaam has known the identity of Israel all along, or whether he has come to know it only over the course of the pericope. Indeed, note Elohim’s reference to Israel in Num 22:12:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֶךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָר אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בָרוּךְ הוּא:
And Elohim said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them, and you shall not curse the people, for it is blessed.”

If the above principle is to be applied here, then it can mean only that at this stage, Balaam’s cognizance of Israel can be encapsulated in the single word הָעָם “the people;” or, at the very most, in the extended phrase הָעָם הַיֵּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם “the people (that is) coming out of Egypt” that Balaam attributes to Balaq in the previous verse, for which Elohim’s הָעָם may be a simple truncated abbreviation. To be sure, it makes sense that the only information about Israel available to Balaam, who at this point is

well removed geographically from the confrontation between Israel and Moab, is the content of Balaq's message to him.

Indeed, as the narrative voice confirms, it is only subsequent to Balaam's own first-hand visual encounter with Israel that his conception of them begins to shift toward a sense of their unique identity. This initial encounter is described in Num 22:41:

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת-בִּלְעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בְּמֹת בָּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם קֵצֶה הָעָם:
In the morning, Balaq took Balaam and led him up Bamot-Ba'al,
whence he saw the periphery of the people.

Here the narrative voice indicates that Balaam's perception is incomplete, since he only sees קֵצֶה הָעָם "the edge of the people." It remains so after his first oracular utterance, notwithstanding the insights expressed therein, when Balaq takes him to a second location in the hope of better results (Num 23:13). Although not in the narrative voice, Balaq's statement describes a visual situation hardly different from Balaam's first sighting of the people:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לֵךְ *נָא אִתִּי אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אַפְסֵי קִצְּהוּ תִרְאֶה
וְכָלֹּךָ לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְּנוּ-לִי מִשָּׁם:
And Balaq said to him, "Please come with me to another place from
which you can see it—only its periphery will you see, and the whole of
it you will not see—and curse it for me from there."

But after his second oracle, Balaam's perception of Israel changes considerably. As described Num 24:1–2, also in the narrative voice, it is from a third location that Balaam finally sees the whole of the people of Israel:

וַיֵּרָא בַלְעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הָלַךְ בְּפָעַם־בְּפָעַם לְקַרְאֵת
נְחָשִׁים וַיִּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו: וַיֵּשֶׂא בַלְעָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו
וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים:

And Balaam saw that it was good in Yahweh's eyes to bless Israel; and he did not proceed, as in previous instances, to consult auguries, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted his eyes and saw Israel dwelling in its tribes, and the spirit of Elohim was upon him. (Num 24:1–2)

As discussed above in the section on keywords,¹⁸¹ the verb רָאָה “see” in this context clearly has the figurative connotation of “understand, comprehend,” as is demonstrated in the first verse of chapter 24: Balaam “sees” that it pleases Yahweh to bless Israel, and so he abandons his attempts to achieve divinatory “sight” and proceeds by relying instead on his own eyes—that is, on his literal ability to “see.” Note that in describing Balaam's new perspective, the narrative voice twice makes explicit use of the name יִשְׂרָאֵל, a point that also emphasizes the incompleteness of his previous perception: not only did he previously perceive only the edge (קֶצֶה) of the people, but he also saw them simply as “the people” (הָעָם). Thus, the new developments in the narrative rendering of Balaam's viewpoint at the beginning of chapter 24 mark a shift in his perception—both literally and figuratively—that persists throughout the remainder of the pericope. In light of this point, it is fitting that his final description of Israel is as עֹשֶׂה חֵיל “(one who) does valorously.”

The remainder of references to Israel in the narrative voice are somewhat less instructive with regard to the perspectives of the various characters in the pericope. Leaving aside the instance in Num 22:1, which falls outside of the pericope's traditional delimitation, the only two such references occur in the opening verses of *Sefer Bil'am* (Num 22:2–3), which read as follows:

¹⁸¹ See above, pp. 307–313, especially pp. 309–310.

וַיֵּרָא בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַמְרִי: וַיִּגַּר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד
כִּי רַב־הָיָה וַיִּקַּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And Balaq son of Šippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite(s).
And Moab feared the people much, for it was great; and Moab dreaded
the children of Israel.

Possibly, the three different designations for Israel attested in this passage (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָעָם) may reflect certain obscure subtleties or nuances of perspective. Without the benefit of such insights, however, it appears most appropriate to view them simply as freely varying neutral appellatives, which would suggest that at this point in the text we are still in the “narrative frame” of the material to come, and have not yet been brought into the field of narration in which the perspectives of the various characters will be revealed and engaged. This begins in short order with the very next verse (Num 22:4); but in these opening lines it appears that the terms used for Israel are best viewed as variants with no clear distinction in sense or connotation.

Balaq's Messengers

The same indifference shown by Balaq toward the identity of the people of Israel is reflected in God’s references to the emissaries the Moabite king sends to Balaam. In Num 22:9 Elohim asks Balaam, מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ “Who are these men with you?” Similarly in Num 22:20, in Elohim’s second directive to Balaam, the demonstrative pronoun is absent and the phrase is shortened to הָאֲנָשִׁים “the men,” as follows:

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים | אֶל־בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־לִקְרָא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לֵךְ אִתָּם
וְאָדָּ אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֹדְבָר אֵלֶיךָ אַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה:

And Elohim came to Balaam at night, and he said to him, “If it is to summon you that these men have come, then rise, go with them; but just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do.”

Indeed, this latter term persists in the repetition of this command by Yahweh's messenger in Num 22:35:

וַיֹּאמֶר מְלָאֲךָ יְהוָה אֶל־בָּלָעַם לֵךְ עִם־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְאַפְסָ אֶת־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אָדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ
אֲתוּ תְדַבֵּר וְיֵלֶךְ בָּלָעַם עִם־שָׂרֵי בָלָק:

And Yahweh's messenger said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but only the word that I say to you—it shall you speak." And Balaam went with the officers of Balaq.

Note that the messenger speaks in the first person here, with the implication that he is quoting God's direct speech verbatim. For this reason, we may view this as a third instance of the same phenomenon evident in direct speech explicitly attributed to God, whereby Balaq's emissaries are reduced simply to "men."

Other than these instances and one other, this group of emissaries, called מְלָאָכִים "messengers" in Num 22:5, is referenced only in the narrative voice. The only other occurrence in direct speech is in Num 24:12, where Balaam is speaking to Balaq, and simply identifies them as מְלָאָכֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתָּ אֵלַי "your messengers, whom you sent to me." Thus we must turn to the narrative voice for information about who these men are. It is in the early going that we encounter the most instructive details, in Num 22:4–7.

The references to Midianites in these verses have elicited a range of explanations. Some see this as a hallmark of editorial work expressing attitudes that would have sprung from later conflicts between Israel and Midian, and aimed here and elsewhere at retrojecting a hostile character onto the Midianites of this period.¹⁸²

Others view this as an indication that Midianites were living among the Moabites

¹⁸² See, e.g., Levine 1993: 94–95 and Levine 2000: 144–145.

during the period in which the story is set, particularly on the basis of Gen 36:35,¹⁸³ or at least that some Midianites might have answered to the Moabite king.¹⁸⁴ There even exists a tradition that Balaq himself was a Midianite, and ruled a joint Moabite–Midianite kingdom.¹⁸⁵

I would like to propose a new alternative. In his article on the economies of the Levantine states of the Iron Age, John S. Holladay assessed the contribution to the national coffers that would have derived from these states' felicitous location between the entrepreneurs and craftsmen of the Mediterranean coast, to the west, and the wealth and raw materials originating in the lands to the east. Entities such as Israel, Judah, and Aram-Damascus would have been in an ideal location to facilitate exchange across their own lands, for a price:

[These entities' location] allows them to offer a “pipeline” to South Arabian possessors of wealth that is of little earthly good to themselves, thereby allowing them safely and easily to carry their surplus high-priced goods and deliver them to commercially minded third parties (the Philistines and Phoenicians), who, for their own part, have things to offer the “easterners” that they, in turn, can make use of back home and in their own sphere of long-distance trading influence....¹⁸⁶

This pipeline naturally would have required investment on the part of the states involved, to provide protection and safe passage to the caravaneers as they transported their goods, in return for which they would have received considerable compensation:

Doing everything necessary to ensure the safety of the South Arabian camel caravans...and allowing the caravans to pass through the

¹⁸³ Milgrom 1990: 185.

¹⁸⁴ Mendenhall 1973: 108.

¹⁸⁵ Milgrom 1990: 186.

¹⁸⁶ Holladay in press: 213.

land...would have provided sufficient income—probably 20–25 percent of the value of the total cargo, each way—for the country to feed itself and care for its own territorial integrity without much taxation of its own citizens....¹⁸⁷

The protection provided by the state, together with the right to pass freely through the land, would have served as the incentive for such traders to pay the concomitant tariffs, in order to guarantee that they would be able to conduct their business safely in the most profitable areas.

To be sure, the periods, peoples, and polities with which Holladay was concerned occupy a slightly later time period than the setting, at least, of *Sefer Bil'am*. However, the general notion nevertheless fits in our context. The Moabite monarchy might reasonably be understood here as an entity controlling land through which the Midianites, whose involvement in long-distance trade is known from both biblical and extrabiblical materials¹⁸⁸—and who happen, like Holladay's traders, to come from the area well south of the Transjordan along the Gulf of Aqaba—would have desired to pass. From this perspective, it would be no surprise for a country such as Moab, which is responsible for ensuring the safety of the caravans crossing its territory, to bring a perceived substantial threat to that safety to the attention of the caravaneers. Thus, returning to the text, if we consider the reaction of Moab to the Israelites, who are moving through the surrounding territory in large numbers, it becomes apparent that from the Moabite standpoint, the primary threat posed by the people of Israel is not military, but economic: they are concerned about competition for scarce resources, control of trade routes, and the like.

¹⁸⁷ Holladay in press: 214.

¹⁸⁸ See, e.g., Gen 37:28; and Knauf 1983, esp. pp. 148–151. For an assessment of the specific nature of the Midianites as a people group and the region with which they are to be associated, see Dumbrell 1975.

This perspective invites a reevaluation of Num 22:4, in which Moab expresses its worries by way of a metaphor:

וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתָה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקָּהָל אֶת־כָּל־סְבִיבֵתֵינוּ כָּל־חֵד הַשּׂוֹר אֶת
 יֶרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבֹלֵק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בָּעֵת הַהוּא:
 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now the throng will lick up
 everything around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And
 Balaq son of Šippor was king of Moab at that time.

Careful consideration reveals that this very metaphor fits into the hypothesis presented here, since in point of fact it is concerned not with destruction, but with consumption: this is not an image of a wild beast ravaging the countryside or something similar, but rather a depiction of domesticated livestock consuming the available resources.¹⁸⁹

Given this point, it hardly is surprising that Moab addresses itself to the Midianites, who, if we accept their identification as a population directly associated with the ingress of trade-based wealth into the heartland of Moab, would be the first approached by the Moabites if an outside group were threatening to disrupt whatever preexisting economic arrangements might exist. For the same reason, it comes as no surprise that Balaq’s embassy to Balaam is constituted of זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן “elders of Moab and elders of Midian,” as indicated in Num 22:7. Indeed, Balaq’s explicit statement of his own motives in Num 22:6 fits in with this picture:

וְעַתָּה לֵכֶה־נָּא אֶרְה־לִּי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי־עָצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹכֵל נֶכֶה־בִּי
 וְאֶגְרֹשְׁנוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תִּבְרָךְ מִבְּרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּאָר יוֹאֵר:
 “And now, please come, curse for me this people, for it is stronger than
 I; perhaps I will be able to strike it, that I might drive it from the land;

¹⁸⁹ Such an observation appeared already in the writings of R. Yishaq Arama: “This is the meaning of the verse—that even if they are certain that [the Israelites] will not make war upon them, they still fear that the land about their place of settlement will share the fate of the land about the mouth of the ox” (from *Aqedat Yishaq*, as translated in Weiss 1984: 131 n. 5).

for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.”

The Moabite king does not express a desire to wipe out Israel utterly, nor to capture its people as slaves and take its possessions as booty. Rather, he hopes, **אוֹלֵי אוֹכַל נִפְה־בוּ** “perhaps I will be able to strike it, that I might drive it from the land.” To be sure, we can make no mistake that he conceives of Israel as among **אֹיְבֵי** “my enemies,” as indicated in Num 23:11 and 24:10; but we may interpret the evidence presented here as an indication that his is an enmity born out of genuine economic concern. Indeed, this also sits comfortably with Balaq’s references to the people of Israel: the specific identity of this group is unimportant to him, with only its potential economic impact registering as a meaningful piece of information for him.

From this point in the narrative until Balaam arrives in Moab in Num 22:36, the references to Balaq’s messengers in the narrative voice reveals an intriguing structural pattern. Setting aside the expression **שָׂרִים רַבִּים וְנֹכְבָּדִים מֵאלֶּה** “officers greater and more important than these” in Num 22:15, which is an intensifying phrase differentiating the first group of messengers from the second, we encounter the following series of designations for the Moabite emissaries:

Table 7: Designations for the Moabite Emissaries, Num 22:8–35

Num 22:8	שָׂרֵי־מוֹאָב	“officers of Moab”
Num 22:13	שָׂרֵי בָלָק	“officers of Balaq”
Num 22:14	שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב	“officers of Moab”
Num 22:18	עֲבָדֵי בָלָק	“servants of Balaq”
Num 22:21	שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב	“officers of Moab”
Num 22:35	שָׂרֵי בָלָק	“officers of Balaq”

This *abab'ab* pattern performs two functions: on the one hand it suggests that the second group, termed **עֲבָדֵי בָלָק**, is constituted not just of dignitaries but of Balaq’s

personal entourage; and on the other hand, it renders the names **מוֹאָב** and **בָּלָק** interchangeable here.

Once Balaam reaches Moab, however, the terms used for the messengers, or for some group surely to be taken as synonymous with them, change dramatically. First, in Num 22:40, we read as follows:

וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק בִּקְרָא וַיִּצְאֵן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבָלְעָם וְלַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ:
And Balaq sacrificed cattle and sheep, and distributed them to Balaam
and to the officers that were with him.

The ambiguous word **אִתּוֹ** “with him” leaves open the question of which figure is here associated with this group. Balaq had sent these very emissaries to fetch Balaam, and indeed they were called his servants in Num 22:18; and yet they clearly are “with” Balaam, both because they had just made the journey to Moab with him and because they stand together with him here as fellow recipients of Balaq’s sacrificial meal. This marks the first sign that a certain distance has developed between Balaq and the Moabite emissaries: no longer are the names **מוֹאָב** and **בָּלָק** so clearly interchangeable.

This sense of distance continues to increase, as we encounter in Num 23:6 the following statement:

וַיָּשָׁב אֵלָיו וְהִנֵּה נֹצֵב עַל-עֹלָתוֹ הוּא וְכָל-שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב:
And he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his
sacrifice, he and all the officers of Moab.

The carefully worded phrase **הוּא וְכָל-שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב** “he and all the officers of Moab” serves verbally to juxtapose Balaq with the officers, which, one notes, are in full attendance here: this is not the group that retrieved Balaam, but rather the entire courtly presence of Moab. In addition, this group could have been called **כָּל-שָׂרֵי בָלָק** “all the officers of

Balaq,” כָּל-שָׂרָיו “all his officers,” or even אֶת־מֹאָב “all the officers of Moab with him;” but instead, the marked absence of elements connecting the group to Balaq deepens the impression that the interests of Moab and the interests of Balaq no longer overlap so neatly.

Finally in Num 23:17, the last mention in the narrative voice of Moabite officers, we encounter a third permutation of the designation in question:

וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו וְהָנָּו נָצַב עַל-עֲלֹתָו וְשָׂרֵי מֹאָב אִתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בָּלָק מֶה-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:
 And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his sacrifice,
 and the officers of Moab with him; and Balaq said to him, “What did
 Yahweh speak?”

Here the phrase is וְשָׂרֵי מֹאָב אִתּוֹ “and the officers of Moab with him.” Although seemingly less suggestive of distance than the wording of Num 23:6, one recognizes on the other hand that this is no longer “*all* the officers of Moab,” but rather only some of them, who evidently have cast their lot with Balaq on this matter. Presumably, then, some portion of the group of Moabite dignitaries previously in attendance has left, leaving, perhaps, not “the officers of Moab with him” but merely “(some) officers of Moab with him.” Notwithstanding these remaining courtly figures who are loyal to Balaq, it is clear now that the matter of cursing Israel no longer occupies the attention of Moab as a whole: it has become Balaq’s personal obsession, which he now pursues for his own interests, and no longer for the sake of Moab itself. As noted, this point finds further emphasis in the total absence of the emissaries, by any designation, for the remainder of the story, except for Balaam’s statement in Num 24:12; and even here, he identifies them explicitly as *Balaq’s* representatives (מְלָאכִיד “your messengers”), perhaps suggesting that it is the king’s personal motives that have driven his desire to curse Israel all along.

Balaam's Jenny and Yahweh's Messenger

As a final note regarding naming in *Sefer Bil'am*, I draw attention to the absolute consistency with which two particular figures are designated, namely, Balaam's jenny and Yahweh's messenger. The former is referenced universally as a definite noun, at times with pronominal suffix: אֲתָנּוּ "his jenny" only in the opening verses of this episode (Num 22:21, 22); הָאֲתָנָּה "the jenny" elsewhere (Num 22:23 [3x], 25, 27 [2x], 28, 29, 30, 33); and, once in her own speech and once in the mouth of Yahweh's messenger, אֲתָנִי "your jenny" (Num 22:30, 32). Even more consistent are the references to the latter, who is called invariably מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה (Num 22:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 34, 35), with only one of these instances attesting a *maqfef*, thus מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה (Num 22:26), at the opening of the third and final instance of the repeating pattern in which the messenger blocks Balaam's progress.

This consistency stands in marked contrast to the alternating designations referring to Balaam's messengers. Whereas they transmit to Balaam the flawed belief held by the Moabite king that a diviner, a reader and transmitter of divine will, can invoke tangible effects in the world by means of blessings and curses, the jenny and Yahweh's messenger understand that they lack the power to exert their own will on the divine messages they are charged to transmit. Thus, the inconsistency in Balaam's understanding of the function of a messenger, or a diviner in this case, is reflected in the inconsistency with which his own messengers are identified; while the uniformity of references to the jenny and Yahweh's messenger intimates that they are perfectly in sync with their own roles as transparent conduits for divine communication. We will engage this theme further in the next chapter.

Gapping, Ambiguity, and Misdirection

An integral component of the Bible's terse literary style, to which I called attention above in Chapter 4,¹⁹⁰ is the author's selectivity in deciding what information to convey explicitly. To be sure, much of the information omitted from any literary discourse is inconsequential and would detract from the focus of the narrative. Bar-Efrat described these omissions as follows:

...[E]ven in these empty sections of time life goes on, but nothing is reported about it, since the daily routine is of no interest or significance as far as the author is concerned. Instead of weaving a continuous and extensive fabric of life in its entirety, the author prefers to select the most important points and omit whatever is trivial or commonplace. ...[T]he approach which concentrates only on the focal points of the protagonists' lives creates considerable interest and tension, giving the narratives a dimension of intensity, drama and monumentalism.¹⁹¹

In truth, these remarks might describe any body of literature, but they are particularly pertinent with regard to the Bible, where reticence is a fundamental part of its narrative style: "...[T]he sparsely sketched foreground of biblical literature somehow implies a large background dense with possibilities of interpretation...."¹⁹² Indeed, it is this range of possibilities that occupies our attention in this section; for it falls to the mind of the audience to *participate* in the text by actively filling gaps, or by willingly overlooking them because they are insignificant, both activities occurring as dictated by our need to make sense of the narrative progression. This is an integral part of the process by which we comprehend any piece of literature.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ See above, pp. 246–247.

¹⁹¹ Bar-Efrat 2004: 152–153.

¹⁹² Alter 1981: 114.

¹⁹³ Sternberg devoted considerable attention to this matter in his chapter entitled "Gaps, Ambiguity, and the Reading Process" (Sternberg 1987: 186–229).

As Sternberg noted, however, “[t]o emphasize the active role played by the reader in constructing the world of a literary work is by no means to imply that gap-filling is an arbitrary process.”¹⁹⁴ Rather, the task can be undertaken only according to the strictures imposed on it by the narrative itself. Sternberg emphasized the remarkable control exerted by literature in this regard, not only over the process of differentiating inconsequential from pertinent gaps, but also over the range of possibilities by which the latter may be filled. Any attempt to fill a significant narrative gap must find legitimation in the narrative itself, by providing insight that accords with the precedents established by the narrative through language, poetics, genre, worldview, previously introduced content, and the basic assumptions about the workings of the narrative world.¹⁹⁵

On the other hand, while the narrative provides the ground rules for the process of gap-filling, it stops there, leaving the mental act itself to the audience. Just as this process is not arbitrary, it likewise is anything but optional: “[...] Making these value-laden inferences is not just a license that the reader may take or leave at will. Given the pressures of coherence, it is a responsibility he must assume.”¹⁹⁶ Thus it necessarily falls to us to differentiate between those gaps that are inconsequential, whose filling contributes no meaningful data to our understanding of the content, and those upon which the interpretation of the narrative hinges. By the same token, from the authorial standpoint, the artful omission of key pieces of information “must not be equated with confusion, sloppiness, or vagueness.”¹⁹⁷ On the contrary, herein lies the remarkably supple artistry of this literary device: at each such juncture we are faced

¹⁹⁴ Sternberg 1987: 188.

¹⁹⁵ See especially Sternberg 188–189.

¹⁹⁶ Sternberg 1987: 201.

¹⁹⁷ Sternberg 1987: 227.

with multiple directions that the story can take, depending on how we determine the gap is to be filled. As Sternberg put it, the audience “endeavors at each stage to pattern the materials already presented as logically and completely as possible, even to anticipate what the future holds, constantly attempting to infer from the given to the hidden.”¹⁹⁸ The narrative itself, moreover, can turn our decision on its head at any moment, making it necessary for us to revisit the material already covered and reassess our working interpretation of it.

The effectiveness of gapping as a literary device derives from its intimate link with the chronological unfolding of narrative. Sternberg remarked that in the biblical context, the gapping phenomenon “exploits the fact that literature is a time-art, in which the textual continuum is apprehended in a temporal continuum and things unfold sequentially rather than simultaneously.”¹⁹⁹ Considered from this perspective, gapping exhibits three distinct operative modes. First, there are gaps opened in the narrative that create interpretive ambiguity, which subsequently are filled explicitly in the text by some clarifying piece of information that resolves the ambiguity and thus closes the gap. Second, some gaps are introduced only at the very moment of their closure, forcing the audience to reconsider previously disclosed material in a new light. Third are those gaps that are never filled, whose enigmatic persistence in a given passage necessitates the acceptance of multiple interpretive possibilities.

Further elucidation of these categories is best served by way of examples. The first type is demonstrated amply in the course of Sternberg’s remarkable examination

¹⁹⁸ Sternberg 1987: 199.

¹⁹⁹ Sternberg 1987: 198; cf. also Bar-Efrat 2004: 152–161, wherein gapping is approached from a specifically temporal perspective.

of the David and Bathsheba story (2 Sam 11).²⁰⁰ The story opens, we recall, with David sending his armies to siege Rabbah, while he himself remains in Jerusalem. At night he witnesses Bathsheba bathing, and after learning that she is the wife of one of his champions, he summons her to his bed, where she becomes pregnant. When David hears this, he sends for Uriah and summons him back from the front to Jerusalem. It is in the account of this act (2 Sam 11:6) that the gap is opened, since in good biblical style the narrative content is confined to externally visible events, with no mention of the king's motive for issuing the summons. At this point, multiple possibilities exist, some reflecting positively and others negatively on David: "Does the king wish to confess to Uriah? To ask for his forgiveness? To bully or perhaps to bribe him?"²⁰¹ A positive view, it would seem, is reinforced by the next two verses, the first of which offers a relatively verbose expression of the king's ostensible interest in obtaining Uriah's firsthand account of the war, conveyed in a tone that even comes across as friendly. The following verse adds to this sense, with David tacitly putting off the business for which he has called his hero and inviting him to go home and refresh himself after his journey, even sending a kingly gift with him.

In the next two verses (2 Sam 11:10–11), however, David's true motives are clarified, as it becomes plain that Uriah's refusal to go home is particularly troubling to David. How can the king's paternity be disguised if it is common knowledge that Uriah has not slept with his wife? Having been strung along to this point by the apparent intimation of one possible way in which the ambiguity regarding David's motives might be resolved, we now find that the gap is to be filled in an entirely

²⁰⁰ This seminal study appears in Sternberg 1987: 190–220, with the specific instance of gapping discussed here occupying pp. 199–201.

²⁰¹ Sternberg 1987: 199.

different fashion. As Sternberg put it, “[David’s] true intentions once clarified..., the positive hypotheses...boomerang; and this shift from meritorious to villainous [helps] to sustain the chapter’s overall thrust.”²⁰² The startling discovery of the king’s true intentions is reinforced further by the subsequent events (2 Sam 11:12–13), in which he plies Uriah with wine in an even more desperate attempt to bring about his scheme.

Of particular note in this case, however, is that the new perspective on David finds support not only in our large-scale uptake of the content itself, but also in our careful apprehension of the minutiae of the text. 2 Sam 11:9 begins with the words *וַיִּשְׁכַּב אוּרִיָּה* “And Uriah lay...,” which, taken by themselves, hint at the possible fulfillment of David’s scheme, especially given the euphemistic association of the root *שכב* with sex. Sternberg put it thus:

Uriah does not object to the king’s suggestion: “Uriah went out of the king’s house, and there went out after him a gift from the king. And Uriah lay...”—with Bathsheba? For a moment it looks as though the king’s plan is going to work, but the text immediately veers around: “—at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.”²⁰³

By way of this momentary but artful misdirection, in the space of a single word the presentation of David’s nefarious intentions is rendered still more unequivocal: the phrase *וַיִּשְׁכַּב אוּרִיָּה* is followed not with *אֶת-בֵּית-שֶׁבַע* “with Bathsheba,” as one might expect, but rather with *אֶת כָּל-עֲבָדֵי אֲדֹנָיו* “at the entrance to the palace, with all his lord’s servants.”

²⁰² Sternberg 1987: 199.

²⁰³ Sternberg 1987: 200.

Significantly, the narrative voice remains silent on the matter of judgment. Just as the scenario begins without any overt statement of the king's motive for calling Uriah home from the battlefield, so it persists throughout in leaving the evaluative process to the audience. "All the responsibility for condemning the king rests with the reader alone,"²⁰⁴ and, moreover, we do not have the option of remaining neutral. If we were to insist on withholding judgment, the events recounted would "appear rather strange, if not comic."²⁰⁵ The individual moments recounted—their casual chat when Uriah arrives (which appeared warm at first but which retrospectively evinces only forced politeness), his inexplicable refusal to go home, the growing tension evident in the two figures' subsequent exchange, and the escalation of David's behavior—all these data would register only as disparate facts, without any direction or deeper implication. The narrative leaves us just one possible outlook on David's motives, if we are to make any sense at all of the story.

The second type of gapping, whereby one only becomes aware of a gap in one's knowledge at the precise moment that it is closed, is particularly effective in generating surprise. A demonstrative example occurs in Judg 8:18–19, in which Gideon confronts the captured kings of Midian:²⁰⁶

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-זִבְחָ וְאֶל-צִלְמֻנֶּעַ אֵיפֹה הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הִרְגַּתֶּם בְּתַבּוֹר וַיֹּאמְרוּ כְּמוֹךָם
 כְּמוֹךָם אֶחָד כְּתָאֵר בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחֵי בְנֵי-אִמִּי הֵם חִי-יְהוָה לֹא הִחִיתִם אוֹתָם
 לֹא הִרְגָתִי אֶתְכֶם:

And [Gideon] said to Zebaḥ and Salmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" And they said, "As you are, just so were they: with the appearance of a king's sons." And he said, "My brothers they were, the sons of my mother! By the life of Yahweh, if you had spared them I would not kill you."

²⁰⁴ Sternberg 1987: 200.

²⁰⁵ Sternberg 1987: 201.

²⁰⁶ This example was adduced and discussed in Sternberg 1987: 311–312.

Sternberg observed that the impetus for Gideon's entire campaign across the Jordan, of which this confrontation is the *dénouement*, is presented as an essentially nationalistic quest. He already has defeated the Midianites, and appears to pursue the remnant of their army in an effort to bring about total victory for Israel, a goal that presumably also would quiet the jibes he receives from the people of Succoth and Penuel, who refuse him bread without first seeing the completion of his mission (Judg 8:6, 8). Indeed, at the close of the battle his vitriolic response to these cities includes displaying the two kings whom he has captured (Judg 8:15), thus deepening the sense that he is driven specifically by the national cause.

As a result of this misdirection, we are taken by surprise by the statement Gideon makes in Judg 8:18, which introduces a personal cause for his actions—vengeance for familial blood—that previously has gone without the barest mention. As in 2 Samuel 11, here too a recognition of this gap-filling piece of information is a necessity for understanding the story. Without it, both the question he asks the two kings and their response would appear utterly nonsensical; but in the light of this new information, it becomes clear that his question is emotive, not information-seeking, and the kings “show their perfect understanding of its rhetorical drift in making no attempt to meet it.”²⁰⁷ Most striking of all is the effect that the literary device has on our understanding of the foregoing material:

The switch from a national to a private motivation not only reopens and closes anew a gap that has long appeared settled. It also impels us to review the intervening developments. The disproportionate violence with which Gideon has just treated the uncooperative citizenry of Succoth and Penuel—the lashing with briars, the pulling down of the tower, the mass execution [Judg 8:16–17]—suddenly makes

²⁰⁷ Sternberg 1987: 312.

psychological as well as political sense. Whereas the relative mildness of Gideon's dealings with the real enemy, again caught off-guard, now shows itself as less accidental and less justifiable than it did before. His mind has been fixed on capturing the two kings whom he holds responsible for his bereavement..., so much so that he did not exert himself to wreak havoc on their army beyond "throwing it into a panic [וְכָל-הַמַּחֲנֶה הִתְּרִיד], Judg 8:12]." ²⁰⁸

In this way, the retrospective quality of this form of gap-filling is made clear. At precisely the moment that we become aware of the gap's existence, it is closed in a manner that requires a thorough reevaluation, from a radically new angle, of the entire sequence of events leading up to this point.

The third type of gapping involves ambiguities that never attain clear resolution in the narrative. A simple example is to be found in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, in which the governess of two young children at an English estate begins to encounter figures moving about the grounds, whom the other members of the household are unable to see or challenge:

...[T]he three hundred or so interpretations generated by this one narrative can be divided into two main camps. ... These two camps are divided over the status to be assigned to the ghosts of the servants reported by the governess. Are the apparitions real, which would make this a "ghost story," or does the governess only hallucinate them and her report makes a psychological story? ²⁰⁹

While this example illustrates the nature of the unresolved ambiguity, however, it does little to inform us as to the literary *employment* of this lack of resolution as an

²⁰⁸ Sternberg 1987: 312.

²⁰⁹ Sternberg 1987: 223.

enriching narrative feature. For this we return to the confrontation between David and Uriah in 2 Samuel 11.

In addition to the gap discussed above about David's intentions, another worth consideration in this episode is the question of whether or not Uriah is aware that his wife is pregnant with the king's baby.²¹⁰ The text itself never answers this question; nor should we necessarily expect it to, since its primary concern lies in castigating the king's actions, and our ability to follow this thread through the narrative is not affected significantly by the matter of Uriah's knowledge or ignorance. On the other hand, neither does the narrative simply present the matter as unresolvable, with no solution except "the permanent ambiguity of stalemate."²¹¹ Rather, the narrative "[a]void[s] such premature closure, [and] achieves its finest effects by drawing out the interplay of meaning through constant variations, from shift to reversal, in the balance of power."²¹² Such a narrative practice demands much of its audience, who is left to its own devices in wrestling with the range of competing possibilities.

In precisely this fashion, the extent of Uriah's understanding is in doubt from the outset. On the one hand, David's actions are explicitly called "secret" (בְּסֵתֶר, 2 Sam 12:12); Uriah is far from Jerusalem; and the very fact that David plans to involve him in the cover-up suggests that he is unaware. But on the other hand, Bathsheba's pregnancy is certain to become public knowledge soon, if it has not already—we might well imagine the messengers sent back and forth between the king and the woman to be responsible for dispersing such information—and Uriah's months-long absence renders him an unlikely father in any event.

²¹⁰ This issue is discussed in Sternberg 1987: 201–209.

²¹¹ Sternberg 1987: 203.

²¹² Sternberg 1987: 203.

These two conflicting possibilities, moreover, persist not just as the initial events unfold, but throughout the exchange between the two characters. When Uriah sleeps at the palace door rather than going home (2 Sam. 11:9), we are convinced that he must know the truth, or else he would go home as David has suggested. On the other hand, Uriah's explanation for his actions in 2 Sam 11:11 would seem to indicate that he is unaware of the true situation:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲוִרְיָה אֶל־דָּוִד הָאָרוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה יֹשְׁבִים בַּסּוּכּוֹת וְאֲדֹנָי יוֹאָב וְעַבְדָּי אֲדֹנָי
עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה חָנִים וְאֲנִי אָבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתִי לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׁכָּב עִם־אִשְׁתִּי חֵיל וְחַי
נַפְשִׁךָ אִם־אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

And Uriah said to David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah sit at Succoth, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and drink and lay with my wife? By your life and your soul's life, I will not do this thing."

Taken at face value, Uriah's statement expresses his solidarity with his comrades in the army, and his puzzlement regarding his being summoned back to the capital. To be sure, it is possible that Uriah is playing coy, disguising his awareness of the adulterous affair by providing an innocuous basis for his refusal to go home. If this is the case, then his use of the phrase לִשְׁכָּב עִם־אִשְׁתִּי "to lay with my wife" must be taken as weighted innuendo, rather than an inadvertent jab by which Uriah unwittingly cuts to the heart of David's secret tryst. But in either case, the upshot of his words here bears directly on the matter that opens the pericope: the chapter begins with David sending forth his full military might, while he himself, the great war hero, remains behind in Jerusalem (וְדָוִד יוֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלַם, 2 Sam 11:1). Uriah's statement, then, levels an attack and David's decision to remain at his ease at home, while the people of his kingdom are fighting and dying in his name.

Herein lies the full effect of this unresolved ambiguity regarding Uriah's true knowledge of David and Bathsheba's liaison. Sternberg articulated the two polarized portrayals as follows:

On the one hand, the narrator needs an agent who will show David up as an "idler" in the city, at home, while the nation is out at war. ... On the other hand, the narrator also needs an agent who will brand the king as a double-dyed deceiver, an adulterer-*cum*-schemer.

...

Uriah as an agent of the first kind is, of course, incompatible with Uriah as an agent of the second kind. ... But the narrator, who settles for nothing less than the best of these two worlds, still yokes them together for maximum effect. ... Because of the reader's inability to decide between two mutually exclusive portraits, the figure of Uriah comes to operate in both directions at once.²¹³

In other words, if Uriah is ignorant, then his actions are to be interpreted as an attack on David's sedentism; but if he is aware of the adultery, then they must be seen as a thrust against the crime itself. Uriah cannot simultaneously know and not know; and yet both possibilities are maintained, with the result that both attacks land cutting blows from two entirely different directions. In this sense, ambiguity is employed as a vehicle for "overloading" meaning into the narrative, achieving two distinct expressive goals in the course of a single episode.

Ambiguous Verb and Indirect Object in Num 23:4

We return now to *Sefer Bil'am*, which exhibits effective use of gapping at multiple points across the pericope. There appear two prominent instances of the first type of gapping, the first of which involves the employment of Hebrew grammar in

²¹³ Sternberg 1987: 208.

the interest of producing misdirection. First, on the two occasions in Numbers 22 that God appears to Balaam, he immediately speaks to Balaam, as follows:

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ:
 And Elohim came to Balaam and said, “Who are these men with you?”
 (Num 22:9)

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים | אֶל-בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-לִקְרָא לָךְ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ אִתָּם
 וְאָדָּךְ אֶת-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אֲדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה:
 And Elohim came to Balaam at night, and he said to him, “If it is to
 summon you that these men have come, then rise, go with them; but
 just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do.”
 (Num 22:20)

No subject is specified for the verb וַיֹּאמֶר in either case, but the ensuing direct speech unequivocally clarifies the identity of the speaker. This pattern allows for a surprising turn in Num 23:4, where a change is introduced:

וַיִּקָּרֶן²¹⁴ אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶת-שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחֹת עֲרַכְתִּי וְאָעַל פָּר וְאִיל
 בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ:
 And Elohim appeared to Balaam, and he said to him, “The(se) seven
 sacrifices I have arranged; and I sent up bull and ram on the altar.”

Here, the ambiguity residing in the unspecified subject of וַיֹּאמֶר and in the pronominal suffix representing the object of the preposition אֶל permit a shift in the pattern whereby the speaker in this instance is Balaam rather than God. It is not until the third word of the direct speech, עֲרַכְתִּי “I have arranged,” that one can be completely sure of the speaker’s identity. As a result of this misdirection, one has the sense that somehow

²¹⁴ It is possible that the shift from וַיָּבֹא (Num 22:9, 20) to וַיִּקָּרֶן (Num 23:4, 16) is to be explained as reflective of the change from incubated dream to waking theophany.

Balaam is speaking out of turn, emphatically asserting the importance of his own actions instead of attentively awaiting God's address. His detailing of the sacrifices he has just performed thus takes on an ironic tone, hinting both at the emptiness of the ritual acts themselves and at Balaam's misguided attachment to their practice as part of his prophetic activity.²¹⁵

Strategic Omission of God's Directions to Balaam in Num 23:5, 16

In the second instance, gapping facilitates a marked increase in the weight and significance of Balaam's oracular poetry. Before the first and second oracles, Balaam receives from God a message to deliver to Balaq. In both cases, however, the content of this message is omitted:

וַיִּשֶׂם יְהוָה דָּבָר בְּפִי בִלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל-בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר:
 And Yahweh put a word in Balaam's mouth, and he said, "Return to
 Balaq, and thus shall you speak."
 (Num 23:5)

וַיֵּקֶר יְהוָה אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיִּשֶׂם דָּבָר בְּפִיו וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל-בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר:
 And Yahweh appeared to Balaam, and he put a word in his mouth, and
 he said, "Return to Balaq, and thus shall you speak."
 (Num 23:16)

Immediately following both of these verses is a clause indicating Balaam's return to Balaq: וַיָּשָׁב אֵלָיו "and he returned to him" in Num 23:6, and וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו "and he came to him" in Num 23:17. In each case, we are left to wonder what message he has been entrusted to deliver, resulting in a climactic build in suspense until, moments later

²¹⁵ This instance of gapping relies on the established repeating pattern of appearance-plus-speech in order to achieve the desired misdirection. For this reason, it warrants mention also in the section on repetition. See below, p. 413.

(Num 23:7, 18), he begins to utter a rich and tightly constructed prophetic oracle, whose significance has been increased palpably by the brief delay.

Belated Indication of Balaam's Use of נִחְשִׁים in Num 24:1

At the opening of the last chapter of the pericope, we encounter a highly effective instance of the second type of gapping. Its success is set up by the consistent narrative pattern established in the material immediately preceding each of the first two oracles.²¹⁶ According to this pattern, once the sacrifices are performed (Num 23:2, 14), Balaam immediately instructs Balaq to stand aside (Num 23:3, 15), and this is followed directly by a theophany (Num 23:4, 16). In both cases, the sacrifices themselves reasonably may be considered to demarcate the commencement of the ritual process involved in Balaam's invocation. However, no mention whatsoever is made in either instance regarding any specific divinatory action on the part of Balaam between the sacrifices and the appearance of God. One hardly misses such information, since the story continues to plunge forward—the prompt occurrence of the two theophanies speaks to the effectiveness of the preparatory actions as they stand.

For this reason, the mention of Balaam's routine use of נִחְשִׁים “auguries” in Num 24:1, just after the sacrifices preceding the third oracle have been performed, comes as a surprise:

²¹⁶ This pattern warrants mention also in the section on repetition. See below, pp. 420–424.

וַיֵּרָא בַלְעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הָלַךְ בְּפָעַם־בְּפָעַם לְקַרְאֵת
נְחָשִׁים וַיֵּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו:

And Balaam saw that it was good in Yahweh's eyes to bless Israel; and he did not proceed, as in previous instances, to consult auguries, but set his face toward the wilderness.

Only upon receiving this piece of information do we become aware that such a gap had existed in our knowledge of the previous instances. Additionally striking is that the information is provided precisely at the moment that the action it identifies ceases to be a factor, in two ways: first, this verse describes Balaam's abandonment of augury, by direct reference to his prior employment of it; and second, the usual pattern of sacrifices—command to Balaam—theophany is disrupted here and does not resurface for the remainder of the pericope.

This gap serves two functions in the pericope. The first dovetails with the setting-switching aspect of the term נְחָשִׁים, whose dialectal peculiarity I discussed above, in Chapter 3.²¹⁷ Table 1, which appeared in the conclusion to that chapter,²¹⁸ laid out a chiasm connecting this word in Num 24:1 with the word קְסָמִים in Num 22:7 and the words נָחַשׁ and קֶסֶם in Num 23:23. If prior references to Balaam's use of augury were present in the material preceding the first and second oracles, they would render this chiasm nonexistent by scattering the involved terms across the pericope, thereby disrupting their careful positioning in the text as it stands.

The second purpose of the gapped information is somewhat more significant. The text's silence on Balaam's actions after the sacrifices have taken place effectively focuses these two pre-oracular sections on the theophany itself. In this way, Balaam's utterance of the blessings that follow is associated not with the efficaciousness of

²¹⁷ See above, pp. 139–140.

²¹⁸ See above, p. 181.

Balaam's actions as a diviner, but with God's direct communication of a divine message. The effect is heightened by the remarkable similarity of this situation to Balaam's own words in the second oracle:

כִּי לֹא-נֶחֱשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב	For there is no augury in Jacob,
וְלֹא-קֶסֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and no divination in Israel:
בְּעֵת יֵאמָר לְיַעֲקֹב	At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob
וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מֶה-פָּעַל אֱלֹהִים:	and to Israel what God has done.
	(Num 23:23)

It goes without saying that the occurrence in this very verse of the term נֶחֱשׁ, and its involvement in the chiasm just mentioned above, render even more striking the connection between Israel's situation as described by Balaam and the narrative details leading up to each of the first two oracles. When we arrive at Num 24:1, we simultaneously recognize, for the first time, both the absence of the term נֶחֱשׁ(ים) in the two prior sections, and the completion of a chiasm that links up with a verse describing the "absence" of the same term from Israel. One need not be troubled by the fact that Balaam has indeed performed augury on the two earlier occasions, since this fact simply highlights the artful delicacy with which this instance of gapping has been employed. The ideological stance against such practices, clearly evident in the poetic statement in Num 23:23 and amplified by the chiasm of which this verse is the central part, is insulated from the potentially counterproductive force of the protagonist's engagement in these activities, by the absence of any mention of them until the emphatic statement of their abandonment in Num 24:1.

Two Incompatible Ways to Interpret God's Wishes in the Jenny Episode

Instances in *Sefer Bil'am* of the third type of gapping identified by Sternberg offer some of the most complex and challenging permutations of this device. In the

jenny episode, even with a clear understanding of the rhetorical intent of God's instructions to Balaam in Num 22:20,²¹⁹ one nevertheless is faced with the challenge of explaining why God's response does not involve sending Balaam home. The question of what Balaam should do appears to have been answered already, by God's initial instructions to Balaam in Num 22:12, his follow-up statement in Num 22:20, and his anger at Balaam's leaving in Num 22:22. Yet at the end of the jenny episode, even when Balaam offers to go home in Num 22:34, he is not instructed to do so. Rather, the command to proceed under God's direction (Num 22:35) functions as more than just a reference to the earlier directive not to go, operating also as a guiding principle by which to proceed. We are faced, then, with two incompatible perspectives: on the one hand, God does not wish Balaam to go with the men to Moab; and on the other, once he has gone, God does not wish to send him home, but rather instructs him to proceed according to his instructions.

These opposed perspectives are not to be seen as a hallmark of narrative inconsistency, but rather as simultaneously revealing two distinct facets of the story as it unfolds, thereby answering the question of God's wishes in two mutually exclusive but jointly illuminating manners. The situation is akin to what Edward L. Greenstein observed in Genesis 37, when he compared "the ongoing dialectic between the machinations of the brothers and the countermeasures of Reuben"²²⁰ to the conflicting testimonies offered in Akira Kurosawa's classic film *Rashomon*,²²¹ and stated that "[i]n a faithful reading, the reader must be sensitive to both messages, leaving them

²¹⁹ On this matter, see above, pp. 315–318.

²²⁰ Greenstein 1982: 122.

²²¹ Greenstein 1982: 122. Note also the similar comparison between *Rashomon* and the creation narratives in Genesis, presented in Reis 2001.

both open.”²²² Likewise in *Sefer Bil'am*, if we take the beginning of the jenny episode as the point at which the contradiction between the two aspects under examination here comes into play, we see that the first of the two looks back across the material in the pericope that has elapsed thus far and crystallizes the issue at stake therein, namely, the conflict between divine and human will. Balaam is caught between the desires of Balaq and God’s explicit instructions, and his inability to navigate successfully between them culminates in his failure in the jenny episode. The second perspective, on the other hand, begins in the episode with the jenny to prepare Balaam for the coming encounter with Balaq, and the lesson that he absorbs from the encounter with Yahweh’s messenger (Num 22:34–35) helps to prepare him for his endeavors in Moab. Indeed, because the formal character of the jenny episode foreshadows that of the coming interaction between the two main characters, when we reach that interaction in the course of the narrative we are invited to look back and see the jenny episode as a preliminary exposition of key concepts in the encounter between Balaam and Balaq.²²³

Balaq’s Conflicting Views on the Reason for the Failed Curses

Turning to a second example of the third type of gapping, Balaq’s interactions with Balaam prior to the Aramean’s arrival in Moab reveal that the king believes Balaam to possess the power to bless or curse as he sees fit. His initial message to Balaam (Num 22:5b–6) states this belief explicitly, ending as it does with the clause כִּי יֵדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תְּבָרֵךְ מְבָרֵךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר יִאָּר “for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.” Further reinforcement comes from Balaq’s

²²² Greenstein 1982: 120.

²²³ The formal parallels will be discussed below, in the section on structure.

second message, which demonstrates the king's impression that although his first request for the diviner's aid was denied, a more lucrative offer might prove enticing enough to persuade Balaam to agree to his terms:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק בֶּן־צְפּוֹר אֶל־נָא תִמְנַע מִהָלֶךְ אֵלַי:
כִּי־כַבֵּד אֶכְבְּדֶךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה וְלִכְהֹנָא קִבְּה־לִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה:
And they came to Balaam, and they said to him, "Thus says Balaq son of Šippor: 'Please, do not refrain from going to me, for I will honor you very greatly, and all that you say to me I will do. Go, please, curse for me this people.'"
(Num 22:16–17)

Balaam's response in the following verse explicitly pushes aside the matter of monetary exchange, thus establishing a clear polarity between Balaq's human-oriented view, in which a curse is merely a service rendered, and a perspective focused more on God's will, whereby blessing and cursing are wholly divine prerogatives.

Balaq's understanding having been established in this fashion, his reaction following each of Balaam's oracles is unsurprising. Each time, he directs his anger squarely at Balaam:

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם מָה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לְקַב אֹיְבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכַת בָּרַךְ:
And Balaq said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? Behold, to curse my enemies I brought you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly."
(Num 23:11)

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם גַּם־קֵב לֹא תִקְבְּנֵנוּ גַם־בִּרְךָ לֹא תִבְרַכֵּנוּ:
And Balaq said to Balaam, "Neither curse it at all, nor bless it at all!"
(Num 23:25)

וַיַּחֲרֹאף בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיִּסְפֹּק אֶת־כַּפָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם לֵקֵב אִיבִי קְרֹאתִיךָ
וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָ בְּרִיךָ זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים: וְעַתָּה בִּרְח־לְךָ אֶל־מְקוֹמְךָ אֲמַרְתִּי כְּבֹד אֶכְבְּדֶךָ
וְהִנֵּה מְנַעַךְ יְהוָה מִכְּבֹד:

And Balaq's anger flared toward Balaam, and he clapped his hands;
and Balaq said to Balaam, "To curse my enemies I summoned you, and
behold, you have blessed them greatly these three times. And now, flee
to your place! I said 'I will honor you greatly,' and behold, Yahweh has
refused you honor."
(Num 24:10–11)

Although Balaq makes reference to Yahweh in the final instance, we have noted previously²²⁴ that it is reasonable to suppose that this last statement does not represent a significant deviation from Balaq's previous expressions of his belief that Balaam himself holds the power to bless or curse. Rather, since Balaam has made frequent verbal associations between himself and Yahweh, here Balaq simply may be incorporating that professed connection into his angry retort. This view finds support in the content of Balaq's statement, which again revolves around the proffered tangible reward for Balaam's services, albeit identified here as honor (כְּבֹד) without reference to material wealth.

On the other hand, however, Balaq simultaneously presents an entirely different but equally sustained understanding of the mechanics of Balaam's repeated failure to utter a curse. His attention to the ritual process is demonstrated clearly in the material preceding each of the first three oracles, in which he carefully proceeds to carry out Balaam's instructions with regard to building altars, performing sacrifices, and, in the first two cases, standing aside (Num 23:1–3, 14b–15, 29–30). Even more telling, however, is his attentiveness to location, since he takes great pains in each instance to ensure that Balaam is ideally situated for effective cursing:

²²⁴ Discussed above, p. 363.

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת-בִּלְעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בַמֹּת בָּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם קְצֵה הָעָם:
 In the morning, Balaq took Balaam and led him up Bamot-Ba'al,
 whence he saw the periphery of the people.
 (Num 22:41)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לֵךְ *נָא אִתִּי אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אָפֶס קְצֵהוּ תִרְאֶה
 וְכָלֹּל לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְּנוּ-לִי מִשָּׁם: וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שִׂדֵּה צַפִּים אֶל-רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה
 And Balaq said to him, “Please come with me to another place from
 which you can see it—only its periphery will you see, and the whole of
 it you will not see—and curse it for me from there.” And he took him
 (to) Sede-Šophim, to Rosh-Pisga...
 (Num 23:13–14a)

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל-בִּלְעָם לְכֵה-נָא אֶקְחֶךָ אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר אוֹלֵי יִישָׁר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
 וְקִבְּתוּ לִי מִשָּׁם: וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת-בִּלְעָם רֹאשׁ הַפְּעֹזֹר הַנִּשְׁקָף עַל-פְּנֵי הַיַּשִּׁימֹן:
 And Balaq said to Balaam, “Please come, I will take you to another
 place; perhaps it will be right in the eyes of (the) Elohim (that you)
 curse it for me from there.” And Balaq took Balaam to Rosh-Pe'or,
 which overlooks the waste.
 (Num 23:27–28)

These citations, and in particular Balaq's own statement prior to the second oracle (Num 23:13), emphasize the ritual significance of Balaam's ability to see the people of Israel.²²⁵ According to Levine's suggestion, the change of venue after the first oracle represents Balaq's attempt to confine Balaam's view to the periphery of the people (אָפֶס קְצֵהוּ, Num 23:13), in response to Balaam's explicit reference in the first oracle to the magnitude of Israel's numbers (Num 23:10), which evidently was predicated by his being overwhelmed by the size of the population.²²⁶ This perspective appears to carry through to the next change of venue as well, since aside from the oblique reference to the sense of sight in the word בְּעֵינֵי “in the eyes of” in Num 23:27, this

²²⁵ For the significance of sight in *Sefer Bil'am*, see above, pp. 307–313. Specifically, I have highlighted the relationship between ritual practices and the sense of sight on pp. 310–311.

²²⁶ Levine 2000: 162–163.

third location appears to remove Balaam from the sight of the people, and faces the wasteland instead (הַנֶּשֶׁקָה עַל-פְּנֵי הַיַּשְׁמֹן), Num 23:28).

In short, from these passages it seems that each time Balaam fails to utter a curse against Israel, Balaq interprets the failure as an indicator that their current location is not propitious for such an act. Indeed, in this regard Balaq appears clearly to understand that Balaam's power to bless or curse does not originate with him, but functions only on the basis of factors entirely outside of human control. He states this explicitly after the second oracle, when he leads Balaam to a third location in the hope that אולי יִשָּׁר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְקִבְּתוּ לִי מַשָּׁם *hā-ʿēlōhîm*²²⁷ (that you) curse it [i.e., Israel, in the collective sense] for me from there" (Num 23:27).

Thus, Balaq's perspective on Balaam's failure to curse Israel takes two simultaneous and yet wholly incongruous trajectories over the course of the pericope. The result is a dual satire, in which Balaq is presented on the one hand as materialistic to the extent that the most meaningful incentive he can provide Balaam is riches and fame, and on the other hand as pursuing a meticulous lock-step with ritual activities of the very sort condemned explicitly in Balaam's oracles (see especially Num 23:23) and implicitly in their ultimate rejection by Balaam, the professional seer. In combination, these two facets of Balaq's character speak to a deeper polemic,

²²⁷ As noted previously (pp. 363–364), this term is ambiguous in itself. Since it is tucked conveniently away inside a construct phrase as a *nomen rectum*, no verbal or adjectival complement is available to clarify whether or not the term is to be taken as a singular or a plural. On the one hand, it may be equivalent here, as in Num 22:10, to אֱלֹהִים, in which case Balaq's use of the term may suggest some kind of deference to Balaam's repeated association of himself with Yahweh, "the God." On the other hand, here it may be a plural noun ("the gods"), which would indicate Balaq's willingness to accept divine assistance from any quarter, not just that of Yahweh. Thus, in this word we encounter another example, albeit a considerably less significant one, of a gap in the pericope that results in unresolved ambiguity.

according to which abhorrent magical practices are extended the same negative valuation as material wealth. This point stands in the service of a major theme running through the entire pericope: God has blessed Israel, and his will cannot be countermanded by human agency, magical or otherwise.²²⁸

Repetition and Variation

In point of fact, repetition has manifested already in the form of literary devices already discussed above. Sound echo involves the repetition of identical or similar sounds; keywords constitute repeated roots, synonyms, or concepts; the complex of names and epithets associated with a given character generally involves the reuse of the same or similar phrases; and so on. From this standpoint, it is appropriate to understand repetition in general, like parallelism, as a manifestation of the “seconding” impulse in biblical literature.²²⁹

Having said this, however, we nevertheless are faced with a conceptual challenge as we consider this device in the context of a body of literature whose characteristic reticence might be expected to result in its avoidance of tools as boldly redundant as repetition. Sternberg’s chapter on the subject opens as follows:

The way of repetition seems to clash with one biblical principle...and to fall under another. In its aspect as superfluity, it will not easily cohere with the dominant logic of gapping. How does loquacity go with reticence, overtreatment with undertreatment? In its aspect as recurrence, on the other hand, it will no more easily escape assimilation to analogy. Still, one of the main aims of this chapter is to demonstrate

²²⁸ These remarks are corroborated by the similar observations of Alter 1981: 106–107.

²²⁹ On this notion, see, e.g., Kugel 1981: 51–54 and *passim*.

the interplay of these three structural logics: how repetition forms a whole with elision and more than a part within similitude.²³⁰

The magnitude of the task that Sternberg set himself is considerable, as demonstrated by the length and painstaking detail of his study. But the questions he raised are legitimate, and in addressing the matter of repetition in an exceptionally terse context, we encounter an explanation of how repetition functions as more than mere redundancy, and actually serves to develop meaning with each successive iteration.

Alter effectively encapsulated this point in his identification of what these issues demand of our perspective on repetition in the Bible: “When...you are confronted with an extremely spare narrative, marked by formal symmetries, which exhibit a high degree of literal repetition, what you have to look for...is the small but revealing differences in the seeming similarities, the nodes of emergent new meanings in the pattern of regular expectations created by explicit repetition.”²³¹ Indeed, this point prompted Alter to hypothesize an organic connection between narrative repetition and poetic parallelism:

[T]he parallelism of biblical verse constituted a structure in which, though the approximately synonymous hemistichs, there was constant repetition that was never really repetition. This is true not just inadvertently because there are no true synonyms, so that every restatement is a new statement, but because the conscious or intuitive art of poetic parallelism was to advance the poetic argument in seeming to repeat it—intensifying, specifying, complementing, qualifying, contrasting, expanding the semantic material of each initial hemistich in its apparent repetition. ... [I]n both [prosaic and poetic] cases, I

²³⁰ Sternberg 1985: 365. The chapter as a whole, which is entitled “The Structure of Repetition: Strategies of Informational Redundancy,” occupies pp. 365–440.

²³¹ Alter 1981: 97.

would suggest, the ideal [audience] is expected to attend closely to the constantly emerging differences....²³²

Ironically, the truth of Alter's observation suggests that our real topic of conversation here, strictly speaking, is the *variation* of repeated elements, not simply their repetition in and of itself. But the point remains: our ability to interpret biblical repetition as a device that imbues the text with deeper meaning revolves around the isolation and examination of minute shifts and developments that occur from one repeated element to the next.

Moreover, since these elements can be words, phrases, entire sentences, or less linguistically static features such as entire narrative sequences, the range of variables, both small and great, across which such variations can take place is remarkably broad. The length and detail of Sternberg's study attest to this fact, and the table he provided gives a general idea of the kinds of variables in question, according to the following categories:

- *Object of presentation*: the repeated element can be verbal (a quotation, cited again elsewhere) or nonverbal (an action or event).
- *First source of presentation*: The initial occurrence can take place in the narrator's voice, or in that of any of the characters.
- *Source of retelling*: Likewise, the repeated version(s) may occur in the narrator's voice, or in that of any of the characters.
- *Mode of retelling*: The subsequent versions can present a variation on the original, or a (near-) verbatim recreation of it, which itself is likely to bear some significance.
- *Motivation for mode of retelling*: The relationship between the original expression and its subsequent occurrence(s) can constitute

²³² Alter 1981: 97.

a deliberate linkage, or (for the characters) a nondeliberate connection illuminating a new layer of meaning.²³³

In addition to these factors, the precise fashion in which the various iterations of a repeated element are combined can vary in significant ways. For example, Sternberg noted that recurring accounts of the same event often are deployed in some combination of three aspectual phases: the chronological angles of past, present, and future are embodied respectively in narrative types that may be identified as forecast, enactment, and report.²³⁴ Various patterns employing two or three of these types are attested, as in the following examples:²³⁵

- *forecast* → *enactment* — The creation story in Genesis 1 presents God’s speech on each successive day, after which the things that he speaks come into being. This pattern also occurs frequently as the “command and fulfillment” motif, an extremely lengthy example of which is the instructions for building the tabernacle and its subsequent construction (Exodus 35–40).
- *enactment* → *report* — Israel is defeated by the Philistines and loses the Ark (1 Sam 4:10–11), after which these events are reported to Eli (1 Sam 4:17).
- *forecast* → *enactment* → *report* — Aaron’s request for gold to make the golden calf (Exod 32:2) is met by the people’s compliance (Exod 32:3), after which God presents a paraphrased account of these events to Moses (Exod 32:8).
- *forecast* → *report* → *enactment* — When the plague of locusts afflicts Egypt, the chronological progression first presents God’s words to Moses (Exod 10:1–2), followed by a lengthy dialogue in which God’s message is relayed to Pharaoh (Exod 10:3–11), and concludes with the visitation of the plague (Exod 10:12–15).

²³³ Adapted from Sternberg 1985: 432–435, on which appears “Table 1: Basic Guide to the Structure of Repetition.”

²³⁴ For the relevant discussion, see Sternberg 1985: 383.

²³⁵ This list is adapted from Sternberg 1985: 383.

Seemingly every detail of a given repetitive sequence can be employed as fodder for producing significant changes in tone or meaning, and indeed the typology of biblical repetition could be extended far beyond these examples. Moreover, the phenomenon as a whole operates as an integral component of the larger narrative canvas. For example, Licht articulated various ways in which the recurrence of the same elements at various points across a section of narrative can serve a structural function.²³⁶ At present, however, our concern is to examine the ways in which repetition moves, through variation, from iteration to iteration in a manner that enriches the meaning of the text in question.

Thus, having called attention to the practically limitless versatility of repetition, it remains to demonstrate how these factors are put into play in biblical narrative. To this end, I recall here a demonstrative example adduced by Alter, namely, the story of the meeting of Saul's commander, Abner, and the usurper David in 2 Sam 3:21–24. The repetitive element upon which Alter's analysis focused is presented here in bold type, with the corresponding words italicized in translation:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִנֶר אֶל־דָּוִד אֲקוּמָהּ | וְאֵלְכָה וְאֶקְבְּצָה אֶל־אֲדֹנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְיִכְרְתוּ אִתְּךָ בְּרִית וּמַלְכֻת בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַר נַפְשֶׁךָ וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶת־אֲבִנֶר וַיֵּלֶךְ
בְּשָׁלוֹם: וְהִנֵּה עֲבָדֵי דָוִד וַיּוֹאֲב בָּא מִהַגְדּוּד וּשְׁלָל רַב עִמָּם הֵבִיאוּ וְאֲבִנֶר אֵינְנו
עִם־דָּוִד בְּחֶבְרוֹן כִּי שָׁלְחוּ וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם: וַיּוֹאֲב וְכָל־הַצָּבָא אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ בָּאוּ וַיִּגְדּוּ
לַיּוֹאֲב לֵאמֹר בָּא־אֲבִנֶר בְּזִנְיָה אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁלַחֵהוּ וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם: וַיָּבֹא יוֹאֲב
אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ הִנֵּה־בָּא אֲבִנֶר אֵלֶיךָ לְמַהֲרָה שְׁלַחְתּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ:
And Abner said to David, "Let me rise and go and gather to my lord the
king all of Israel, that they might establish with you a covenant, and
you will rule over all that your soul desires." And David sent Abner
away, *and he went in peace*. And behold David's servants and Joab
coming from the front, and they brought much booty with them; and
Abner was not with David in Hebron, since he had sent him away and

²³⁶ See Licht 1986: 51–74. The structure of *Sefer Bil'am* will concern us below, and we will refer, where applicable, to repetition as an element that contributes to that structure.

he went in peace. And Joab and the whole host with him came, and Joab was told, “Abner son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, *and he went in peace.*” And Joab came to the king and said, “What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why then did you send him away *and he went indeed?*”

When Joab learns that his enemy counterpart, the commander of Saul’s army, has been admitted into David’s presence as freely as he himself might be, he is unable to restrain his anger. The intensity of his emotion is driven home by his departure from the repeated use of the phrase *וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּשָׁלוֹם*, which occurs both in the narrative voice and in the direct speech of an unnamed informant, by replacing the word *בְּשָׁלוֹם* with the emphatic infinitive *וַיִּלָּךְ*, which Alter described as “fall[ing] like the clatter of a dagger after the ringing of bells.”²³⁷ The upshot is twofold. On the one hand, his emphatic phraseology indicates that he is incredulous that David actually has let Abner go, without lifting a finger to stop him. On the other hand, ever the strategist with no fear of bloodying his own hands, Joab abandons the word “peace,” indicating “his own steely intention...to make sure that this going off will not be in peace”²³⁸ at all. Indeed, this foreshadowing is brought to fruition when, mere verses later, he summons Abner back to Jerusalem and kills him (2 Sam 3:27).

This small example, manifested in a single changed word, demonstrates the potency with which a relatively minute instance of variation in a repeated pattern can be charged. In this case, we see with new clarity what lies beneath Joab’s exterior; but the device might just as easily be applied to produce a change in perspective, a heightening of symbolic meaning, or some other kind of elaboration beyond the superficial content of the text. Alter proceeded to call attention to the active

²³⁷ Alter 1981: 102.

²³⁸ Alter 1981: 102.

participation in the narrative that is required of the audience, in order for this device to achieve such a profound effect so effortlessly: “Language in the biblical stories is never conceived as a transparent envelope of the narrated events or an aesthetic embellishment of them but as an integral and dynamic component—an insistent dimension—of what is being narrated.”²³⁹ Attention to even the smallest shifts in the language of biblical narrative, therefore, is a crucial part of coming to terms with the layers of meaning that it conveys. With this in mind, in a moment we will turn to instances of repetition arising in *Sefer Bil'am*, in order to glean from them whatever enrichment of the narrative they can provide.

First, however, it is important briefly to call attention to two other matters in the realm of repetition. The first involves direct speech that is quoted by a character other than the original speaker. Berlin noted that there are times when the original statement never occurs in the text, but is only cited secondarily. She highlighted the way in which this fact stands as a clear representation of the selectivity of biblical narrative: “Not every scene or event need be represented in full; some may be summarized and some may be omitted altogether.”²⁴⁰ On the other hand, in his volume *Telling and Retelling*, George W. Savran also examined quotations where the precedent is attested, exploring both their formal and functional aspects.²⁴¹ Without rehashing the minutiae of his study, we simply may note that the phenomenon of quoted direct speech provides remarkable insight into the inner workings of the characters at play, “bring[ing] one set of words into contact and/or conflict with another. The speaker of the quote engages in a temporal dialogue between past and

²³⁹ Alter 1981: 112.

²⁴⁰ Berlin 1983: 97.

²⁴¹ Savran 1988.

present, as well as in an interpersonal encounter with his fellow characters; his relationship to his audience in the story is revealed in the way he uses the quotation to evoke a response, verbal or otherwise.”²⁴² To be sure, this may well be true of other forms of repetition as well, hence the inclusion of quoted direct speech under the rubric of that larger phenomenon. But it is worthwhile to recognize the distinctive character of this kind of repetition, which does not engage the narrative voice on any level, in precedent or in subsequent reiteration. As such, we shall pay particular attention to the use of this subcategory of repetition in our pericope.

Second, it would be a mistake to overlook the possibility of repetition, or more accurately of variation, as a component motivated by a purely aesthetic sensibility. In their study on Song of Songs, Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg coined the term “polyprosopon” to refer to this device,²⁴³ and addressed it as follows:

If we can envision a group of ancient Israelites assembled to hear the Song of Songs read (sung?) aloud—in whatever setting one might envision—we may rightly ask: how does one continue to engage the attention of the gathered throng as the poetry proceeds through its eight chapters? ...[O]ne might argue that not much is needed beyond the surface reading of the text...and yet the human mind does require exercise to stay attuned at all times. It is our belief that the writers of ancient literature intentionally varied their language, where possible, specifically to engage the listener and to demand his or her absolute attention when the text was read aloud.²⁴⁴

In practical terms, then, if no clear significance can be determined for a given variation in a repeated or conventional pattern, it is better to accept it simply as an embellishment than to wrestle it into the service of some deeper meaning. For that

²⁴² Savran 1988: 109.

²⁴³ Noegel–Rendsburg 2009 (in press): 108–109.

²⁴⁴ Noegel–Rendsburg 2009 (in press): 107.

matter, even in cases where such a deeper meaning is detectable, we also may consider as a legitimate motivating factor variation purely for its own sake. Indeed, this may explain otherwise inconsequential variation throughout the biblical corpus, such as alternation between the prepositions לְ and אֶל (at the authorial level), *mālē*²⁴⁵ versus *hāsēr* spellings (presumably by the hand of a later copyist), and so on. In this way, repetition with variation represents a marriage of aesthetic and informative modes of communication, and it is important for us to be attentive to both aspects, to the extent that each example of variation addressed here should be conceived as a legitimate aesthetic observation, even outside of the associated argument regarding its deeper meaning. To this end, I make brief mention at the end of this section of a number of instances of polyprosopon in *Sefer Bil'am*.

זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים (Num 22:28, 32, 33); זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים (Num 24:10)

Previously, we have encountered two instances of repetition and variation in other parts of this study. The first arose in Chapter 3, where I identified the use of the word רְגָל with the meaning “time, instance, iteration” as a dialectal feature.²⁴⁵ In Num 24:10, where the text changes from רְגָלִים to פְּעָמִים, the success of this shift in highlighting the prior usages of the alternative lexeme, and also in linking the encounter between Balaam and Balaq with the earlier episode involving the jenny and Yahweh’s messenger, springs directly from its variation of the thrice-repeated pattern that occurred in Numbers 22.

²⁴⁵ See above, pp. 80–83.

Divine Appearance Followed by Speech (Num 22:9, 20; 23:4)

The second instance of repetition mentioned previously is the pattern according to which God's appearance to Balaam is followed immediately by speech. As noted above,²⁴⁶ the third instance of this pattern makes effective use of ambiguous subject and object pronouns to generate surprise, heightening the jarring effect of the fact that unlike the previous occasions, this time around after God appears it is Balaam, not God, who is the first to speak. Although the non-explicit subject and object momentarily constitute gaps in our knowledge, the effectuality of this instance of gapping rests on its arrival in the context of a repeated pattern. Thus, in this instance we have a remarkable case of gapping and repetition working in tandem.

Communication Between Balaq and Balaam (Num 22:5b–17)

As an aside, the early portion of *Sefer Bil'am* offers multiple examples of quoted direct speech. Of the messages sent to Balaam by Balaq, the second is an instance of what Savran called "unverifiable speech,"²⁴⁷ since the only version that exists is in the mouths of the messengers themselves (Num 22:16b–17), without any explicit precedent appearing in the direct speech of Balaq.

The first such communication, however, appears in multiple slightly different versions. When it is first spoken, its content is as follows:

²⁴⁶ See above, pp. 392–394.

²⁴⁷ Savran 1988: 19.

הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כֶּסֶה אֶת-עֵינַי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמֶּלִי: וְעַתָּה לֵכָה-נָּא
 אֶרְהֶלִי אֶת-הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי-עָצוֹם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלִי אוֹכֵל נֶפֶה-בּוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשׁנוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי
 יִדְעַתִּי אֵת אֲשֶׁר-תְּבָרֵךְ מִבְרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר יוֹאָר:

“Behold, a people has come out from Egypt; behold, it has covered the eye of the land,²⁴⁸ and it dwells opposite me. And now, please come, curse for me this people, for it is stronger than I; perhaps I will be able to strike it, that I might drive it from the land; for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.”
 (Num 22:5b–6)

The king’s envoys deliver this message verbatim, to all practical appearances: וַיְדַבְּרוּ
 בְּלִקְוֵת מֶלֶךְ בָּלָק “and they spoke to him Balaq’s words” (Num 22:7b). Where significant
 change arises, however, is in Balaam’s repetition of this message to God, when
 prompted. His version runs as follows:

הִנֵּה הָעַם הַזֶּה יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּכַּס אֶת-עֵינַי הָאָרֶץ עַתָּה לֵכָה קְבֹה-לִי אֹתוֹ אוֹלִי אוֹכֵל
 לְהִלָּחֵם בּוֹ וְגִרְשָׁתִּיו:
 “Behold the people coming out from Egypt: it has covered the eye of the land! Now, come, damn it for me; perhaps I will be able to battle against it, and drive it out.”
 (Num 22:11)

Certain minor variations occur here, such as the omission of the word הִנֵּה before the second clause, slightly different verbal forms in the words יֵצֵא (here a participle) and וַיִּכַּס, the shift in imperative from אֶרְהֶלִי to קְבֹה, the omission of the particle נָּא, and so on. In large part, these are to be regarded as inconsequential, or to be more precise, as reflective of the aesthetic of variation for its own sake, to which Savran called attention: “In terms of change in repetition, both conciseness and variation in language

²⁴⁸ On the phrase עֵינַי הָאָרֶץ, see below, p. 513.

are high priorities in quoted direct speech. Quotations rarely appear in a form identical to their source....”²⁴⁹

The one major difference between the original message and Balaam’s recitation of it is the absence in the latter version of Balaq’s entire concluding statement: וְיָדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תְּבָרֵךְ מְבָרֵךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר יִאָּר “for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.” At first glance, this omission might be perceived as pious censorship on the part of Balaam, who ought to understand that the power of blessing and cursing lies with God and not himself. On the other hand, however, in other instances Balaam is quick to correct Balaq—or his messengers—when the king misspeaks, as in Num 22:18, 38, and so on; but here he does no such thing.

Moreover, his repetition of Balaq’s message comes as a response to God’s question: מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ “Who are these men with you?” (Num 22:9). Balaam misinterprets this as a simple request for information, which it surely is not, since God certainly knows who the men are. Rather, it is a rhetorical device of a kind attested elsewhere in the Bible, as, for instance, in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). In Chapter 4, I called attention to Sternberg’s citation of two verses from this story (Gen 4:6–7) as a demonstration of God’s omniscience as a key component of the Bible’s ideology.²⁵⁰ Bearing this principle in mind, he went on to observe that as the story goes on, God’s omniscience, which “the reader now takes for granted[,] Cain has to learn the hard way in the ensuing confrontation. Playing by human rules against a divine opponent, Cain mistakes God’s rhetorical question (‘Where is Abel thy brother?’) for a demand for information, and he therefore pleads ignorance (‘I do not

²⁴⁹ Savran 1988: 36.

²⁵⁰ See above, pp. 243–244.

know; am I my brother's keeper?')."²⁵¹ This and other examples like it, such as God's inquiring after Adam's location in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:9), provide the human thus questioned an opportunity, as it were, to demonstrate his or her ignorance of God's omniscience by attempting to hide facts or color the truth in some fashion, and in so doing, inadvertently calls the audience's attention to the central concern of the story. For Cain, what is at stake is the matter of his brother's murder; and for Adam, he deflects the issue of his disobedience entirely by confining his answer to the matter of nakedness.

In regard to our present case, therefore, it is critical to pay close attention to precisely which words Balaam chooses to omit in recounting Balaq's message to God. On the basis of the precedents just cited, it would seem that the crucial issue for Balaam is that he is flattered by Balaq's words—which doubtless was their intent—and is content to allow the king's notion, that he himself wields true power, to persist. In fact, he may even aim to maintain this illusion by attempting to obtain God's permission to fulfill Balaq's request: if God will allow Balaam to do so, can he not take some responsibility for the end result, which thereby would be tantamount to his own genuine possession of the power to curse?

Despite this suggestion, however, Balaam's response to the messengers after the theophany provides an important check on the hypothesis that he is motivated by flattery alone. In the morning, the Aramean approaches the emissaries and says, לְכוּ אֶל-אֶרְצְכֶם כִּי מָאֵן יְהוָה לְתַתִּי לְהֵלֶךְ עִמָּכֶם “Go to your land, for Yahweh has refused to allow me to go with you” (Num 22:13). Thus, notwithstanding his initial willingness to explore the possibility of agreeing to Balaq's request and his implied acceptance of

²⁵¹ Sternberg 1985: 92.

the attribution of genuine cursing power, he nevertheless submits to divine direction. This important aspect of his perspective is not applied to the other parties in the arrangement. The envoys' repetition to their king of Balaam's response after the theophany further demonstrates the persistent view, which is extended here to encompass both Balaam and his messengers, that the power to bless and curse resides with Balaam himself. Although their wording is remarkably similar to Balaam's own statement, the refusal is attributed to Balaam himself: מֵאֵן בְּלָעָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּנוּ "Balaam refused to go with us" (Num 22:14). The envoys' omission of Yahweh's name indicates that they hold Balaam accountable for the decision not to accompany them, either because they do not recognize or understand Yahweh, or because they perceive Balaam as acting according to his own preference, regardless of the content of the divine order. But in the end there is little distinction between these alternatives, since the implication is the same: from their standpoint, the ultimate responsibility for the decision not to perform the requested curse rests solely on Balaam's shoulders. Here, then, the initial suggestion that Balaam's actions are predicated solely on his favorable response to Balaam's compliment is tempered by his deference to God's instructions, a deference that the king and his messengers neither share nor recognize.

Encounters with Yahweh's Messenger in the Jenny Episode

The early portion of the episode in Num 22:21–35 presents a tight threefold repeating pattern in which the jenny perceives the appearance of Yahweh's messenger, whom Balaam cannot yet see, and deviates from its course in order to avoid the messenger, thus drawing a beating from its rider. As the following table indicates, each repetition presents the same four elements:

Table 8: Repeating Pattern in the Jenny Episode

Passage	Messenger Appears	Jenny Sees	Jenny Responds	Balaam Reacts
Num 22:22b–23	וַיִּתְּנָב מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשֹׁטֵן לוֹ ... And a messenger of Yahweh stationed himself in the road, as an obstacle for him....	וַתֵּרֶא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה נֹצֵב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְחָרְבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger, his sword of flame in his hand;	וַתֵּט אֲתוֹן מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה And the jenny veered aside from the road, and went into the field;	וַיִּדֹּב בָּלַעַם אֶת־הָאֲתוֹן לְהִטָּתָהּ הַדֶּרֶךְ: And Balaam beat the jenny for its veering (from) the road.
Num 22:24–25	וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכְּרָמִים גֶּדֶר מִזָּה וְגֶדֶר מִזָּה: And Yahweh's messenger stood in a vineyard path, fences this way and that.	וַתֵּרֶא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger;	וַתִּלְחֹץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתִּלְחֹץ אֶת־רֹגְלָהּ בָּלַעַם אֶל־הַקִּיר And it pressed against the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall;	וַיִּסָּף לְהַכְתָּהּ: And he persisted in beating it.
Num 22:26–27	וַיִּוֹסֵף מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה עֹבֹר וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּמָקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין דֶּרֶךְ לְיָמִין וּלְשֵׁמֹאל: And Yahweh's messenger persisted in opposing, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to veer right or left.	וַתֵּרֶא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger;	וַתִּרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בָּלַעַם And it lay down beneath Balaam;	וַיַּחֲרֵאֵף בָּלַעַם וַיִּדֹּב אֶת־הָאֲתוֹן בַּמָּקֵל: And Balaam's anger flared, and he beat the jenny with the cane.

Overall, the first iteration is the most expansive, and provides in the first and fourth elements phrases indicating the purpose of the characters' actions: לְשֹׁטֵן לוֹ “as an obstacle for him” in the first element, and לְהִטָּתָהּ “for its veering” in the fourth. In addition, the first instance of the first element has appended to it the unrepeated clause וַיִּוֹסֵף מֵלֶאֱדָיָה הָיָה עֹבֹר “and he was riding his jenny, and two of his lads (were) with him,” which is ellipsed in the table. This element not only provides scenic detail for the encounter, but also serves to balance the first occurrence of the repeated pattern against the second and third, both of whose first elements are considerably longer. The first iteration of the sequence also expands the second element, which is otherwise identical in all three instances (notwithstanding the Masoretic accents), by

adding a description of the messenger. The unvarying repetition of this element may be seen as reflective of the steadfastness of the jenny, to which I have made reference above.²⁵²

The three versions of the fourth element in the sequence, while decidedly less verbatim than those of the second element, still attest some similarity, largely revolving around the recurring verbal root נכה, here in the Hiph'il meaning “strike,” and the explicitly indicated direct object אֶת־הַיֶּנִּי “the jenny” in the first and third occurrences. In addition, the third attestation of this concluding element resounds as a forceful climax to the pattern under scrutiny, by means of the added phrases וַיִּחַר־אַף “and Balaam’s anger flared” and בַּמֶּקֶל “with the cane.”²⁵³

With the second and (to a lesser degree) fourth elements in the sequence remaining static across all three repetitions, it falls to the first and third elements to generate an escalation of the situation that will move the plot forward to the subsequent events, in which the jenny speaks, Balaam finally sees the messenger, and so on. These two elements, the messenger’s repeated appearances and the jenny’s repeated attempts to avoid this figure, are in dialogue: the donkey responds in each case by refusing to approach the messenger unless some suitable way of getting around him presents itself; and the venues chosen by the messenger become successively narrower in response to the donkey’s repeated attempts to move around him. The core of the sequence’s humor resides in this repeated confrontation between jenny and messenger, not least because it relegates Balaam—ostensibly the main character of the episode—to a peripheral role, in which his actions do nothing to affect the story, despite his repeated attempts to assert his will on the course of events.

²⁵² See above, p. 381.

²⁵³ On alterations in the final instance of a given repeated pattern in biblical literature, see Mirsky 1977.

His impotence in this situation is amplified in two ways, both neatly encapsulated in the expansive phrase *וַיִּסָּף מִלְאֲדֵי־יְהוָה עָבוֹר* “and Yahweh’s messenger persisted in opposing,” which opens the third iteration of the repeated sequence. In the immediately preceding phrase, *וַיִּסָּף לְהַכְתֹּתָהּ* “and he persisted in beating it,” Balaam is the subject, and the use of the verb *יָסַף* creates a link between Balaam’s persistence here and Balaam’s earlier persistence in Num 22:15, such that both figures come across as intent on pushing their own agendas, irrespective of the circumstances arrayed against them. Here in Num 22:26, the association of this same verb with Yahweh’s messenger further emphasizes the futility of Balaam’s efforts, indicating his stubborn insistence on fighting a battle of wills with the divine. The use of the keyword *עָבַר* here in association with Yahweh’s messenger serves further to highlight this conflict, as noted previously.²⁵⁴ Thus, in this compact clause we encounter two words, *וַיִּסָּף* and *עָבוֹר*, that work in tandem to link this episode with other parts of the pericope, as well as calling attention to one of its overarching themes.

Ritual Preparations Preceding Oracular Speech (Num 22:41b–23:3, 6; 23:14–15, 17; 23:28–30)

Each of the first three oracles is preceded by a series of preparatory acts leading up to Balaam’s encounter with God and subsequent poetic utterance. The pattern proceeds as indicated in the table on the following page:²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ See above, p. 314.

²⁵⁵ The version of this repeated sequence that I present here is slightly more detailed and specific than that appearing in Licht 1978: 72.

Table 9: Pattern of Ritual Preparations Preceding Oracular Speech

Passage	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Num 22:41b– 23:3, 6	וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת־בָּלְעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בְּמֹזַת בָּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם קֶצֶה הָעָם: And Balaq took Balaam and brought him up Bamot-Ba'al, and he saw from there the edge of the people. (Num 22:41b)	וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלְעָם אֶל־בָּלָק בְּנֵה־לִּי בִזָּה שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֹּן לִי בִזָּה שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים: And Balaam said to Balaq, "Build for me here seven altars, and provide for me here seven bulls and seven rams." (Num 23:1)	וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בָּלְעָם וַיַּעַל בָּלָק וּבָלְעָם פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: And Balaq did as Balaam had spoken, and Balaq and Balaam offered up bull and ram on the altar. (Num 23:2)	וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלְעָם לְבָלָק הִתִּיצֵב עַל־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאַל־כָּה ... וַיֵּלֶךְ שָׁפִי: And Balaam said to Balaq, "Station yourself beside your sacrifice, that I may go...." And he went to a bare height. (Num 23:3)	וַיָּשָׁב אֵלָיו וְהִנֵּה נֹצֵב עַל־עֲלֹתוֹ הוּא וְכָל־שָׂרֵי מֹואָב: And he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his sacrifice, he and all the officers of Moab. (Num 23:6)
Num 23:14–15, 17	וַיִּקַּחְהוּ שָׂדֵה צָפִים אֶל־רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה... And he took him (to) Sede-Şophim, to Rosh- Pisga... (Num 23:14a)	∅	... וַיִּבֶן שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: ...And he built seven altars, and he offered up bull and ram on the altar. (Num 23:14b)	וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בָּלָק הִתִּיצֵב כֹּה עַל־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאַנְכִּי אֶקְרָה כֹּה: And he said to Balaq, "Station yourself as before beside your sacrifice, and I shall appear as before." (Num 23:15)	וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו וְהָנוּ נֹצֵב עַל־עֲלֹתוֹ וְשָׂרֵי מֹואָב אֵתוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ בָּלָק מַה־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: And he came to him and behold, he was standing beside his sacrifice, and the officers of Moab with him; and Balaq said to him, "What did Yahweh speak?" (Num 23:17)
Num 23:28–30	וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת־בָּלְעָם רֹאשׁ הַפְּעֹזֵר הַנִּשְׁקָף עַל־פְּנֵי הַיַּשִּׁימֹן: And Balaq took Balaam to Rosh-Pe'or, which overlooks the waste. (Num 23:28)	וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלְעָם אֶל־בָּלָק בְּנֵה־לִּי בִזָּה שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֹּן לִי בִזָּה שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים: And Balaam said to Balaq, "Build for me here seven altars, and provide for me here seven bulls and seven rams." (Num 23:29)	וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר בָּלְעָם וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: And Balaq did as Balaam had said, and he offered up bull and ram on the altar. (Num 23:30)	∅	

Each iteration takes place according to some version of the following five steps: 1) Balaq leads Balaam to a location that provides an optimal view for the task; 2) Balaam instructs Balaq to build altars and provide sacrificial animals; 3) Balaq complies, and sacrifices are performed; 4) Balaam orders Balaq to wait by the sacrifices until he returns; 5) Balaq complies. Notification of the fifth step's completion generally comes later, after Balaam has gone aside and has experienced a theophany, then returns to find Balaq where he had left him.

The changes that take place in the second iteration, as against the first, serve primarily to highlight Balaq's rebouled eagerness to achieve the desired curse, after the first attempt fails. Thus, this time he proceeds to build altars and perform sacrifices without explicit instruction from Balaam; and after the theophany, the addition of his question מַה־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה “What did Yahweh speak?” further emphasizes Balaq's renewed feeling of urgency. At the same time, however, despite the absence of step 2 in the second deployment of the pattern, its identical wording—that is, its *lack* of variation—in the first and third iterations emphasizes the prescribed formality of the ritual actions involved. Other variations here involve small changes in the language of steps 4 and 5 (Num 23:15, 17), as against their earlier counterparts (Num 23:3, 6), in ways that call attention to the repetition underway here, such as the use of the word כֵּן in Num 23:15, here translated “as before.” We need not dwell on the omission in Num 23:15 of Balaam's lengthy explanation of the reasoning behind his instruction to Balaq in the first occurrence of step 4 (Num 23:3, partially ellipsed in the table): Balaam need not repeat it here, since he has given it already in the prior iteration of the pattern.

Most significant in the development between the first two iterations is that Balaam himself no longer participates in sacrificing the animals provided. This persists through the third iteration (Num 23:28–30) as well, which presents a version of steps 1 through 3 that otherwise is remarkably similar to that appearing in the first

iteration (Num 22:41–23:2): step 1 bears the identical phrase **וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת־בָּלָעַם** “And Balaq took Balaam,” step 2 is an exact replication of the original, and aside from the omission of Balaam’s name, step 3 attests only the change of the word **דָּבָר** to **אָמַר**. This leaves the initial presentation of this pattern as the only one in which he is involved directly in the sacrificial part of the process.

It is in the third iteration, which at first meticulously produces a near-perfect duplicate of the original pattern, that the most significant change occurs. After steps 1 through 3, the pattern aborts, and the following two verses introduce the third oracle in a drastically different fashion than the previous two:

וַיֵּרָא בָלָעַם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הָלַךְ בְּפָעַם־בְּפָעַם לְקַרְאֵת
נְחָשִׁים וַיָּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו: וַיֵּשָׂא בָלָעַם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו
וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים:

And Balaam saw that it was good in Yahweh’s eyes to bless Israel; and he did not proceed, as in previous instances, to consult auguries, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted his eyes and saw Israel dwelling in its tribes, and the spirit of Elohim was upon him. (Num 24:1–2)

In addition to constituting a dramatic break from the established pre-oracular pattern, these verses describe a radical shift in Balaam’s perspective on Israel and on his own task. Here, the insight that compels Balaam to speak the third oracle derives not from his divinatory “sight”—note the unexpected mention of his abandonment of *nəḥāṣîm*, which I addressed in the section on gapping²⁵⁶—but from his literal, physical sight of the people of Israel. It is significant that this occurs here, despite Balaq’s repeated attempts in step 1 to pick ritual venues according to his desire to optimize Balaam’s physical view of Israel, as expressed in Num 22:41; 23:13, 27, which were discussed

²⁵⁶ See above, pp. 395–397.

previously.²⁵⁷ This implicitly drives home the point that no human attempt at controlling the relationship between divinatory and literal sight will have any effect on the end result, whose nature is determined solely by God. Thus, the break in the repeated pattern of ritual preparation coincides precisely with a new paradigm for the employment of Balaam's talents and the subject of his poetic speech.

Finally, it is worthwhile to note Balaq's response to Balaam's third oracular blessing of Israel, which begins with the phrase וַיַּחֲרֶ-אֶף בְּלֶק (Num 24:10). This is identical to the phrase used to describe Balaam's own reaction to the behavior of his jenny, who already has been beaten twice but still insists on laying down when Yahweh's messenger appears for the third time: וַיַּחֲרֶ-אֶף בְּלֶעָם (Num 22:27). This simple verbal link stands as one of many parallels between the account of Balaam and his jenny and the subsequent confrontation between Balaam and Balaq, a relationship whose significance will undergo examination in the following chapter.²⁵⁸

Recurring Expressions of Balaam's Connection to the Divine

The tightest and most extensive pattern of repetitions that runs through the pericope involves a series of statements expressing the specific nature of Balaam's relationship to the divine.²⁵⁹ Two statements to this effect occur in the pericope, both in multiple attestations. Most often, they occur in the mouth of Balaam, although God is the speaker in two places (the second and third rows in the table below), with the

²⁵⁷ See above, pp. 401–403.

²⁵⁸ See below, pp. 492–503.

²⁵⁹ The discussion of this series of repeated statements that appears in Licht 1978: 73 is informative, but does not move beyond a brief and rather rudimentary analysis. On the other hand, although Meshullam Margalio's presentation is similarly brief, he appreciated the significance of this pattern, referring to it as a sequence of "leading sentences ('Leitsätze') which clearly indicate [the Balaam Narrative's] main theme..." (Margalio 1990: 81).

second of these two instances occurring by way of Yahweh's messenger. These data are arranged according to the schema A, B, B, A'+B, B, B, A+B:

Table 10: Statements Expressing Balaam's Connection to the Divine

Verse	Type A	Type B
Num 22:18	<p>אִם־יִתְּנֶנִּי בָלַק מְלֵא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לְעִבֹר אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה</p> <p>If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) small or great.</p>	
Num 22:20		<p>וְאֵךְ אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֹדֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ אַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה</p> <p>But just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do.</p>
Num 22:35		<p>וְאִפְסֵי אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֹדֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ אַתָּה תִּדְבֹר</p> <p>But only the word that I say to you—it shall you speak.</p>
Num 22:38	<p>הֲיָכוֹל אוּכַל דִּבֹּר מֵאוֹמָה</p> <p>Am I truly able to speak anything?</p>	<p>הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׁים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אַתָּה אֹדֹבֵר</p> <p>The word that Elohim puts in my mouth—it shall I speak.</p>
Num 23:12		<p>הֲלֹא אַתָּה אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׁים יְהוָה בְּפִי אַתָּה אֲשָׁמֵר לְדִבֹּר</p> <p>Is it not whatever Yahweh puts in my mouth (that) I should take care to speak?</p>
Num 23:26		<p>כָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אַתָּה אֵעָשֶׂה</p> <p>All that Yahweh speaks—it shall I do.</p>
Num 24:13	<p>אִם־יִתְּנֶנִּי בָלַק מְלֵא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לְעִבֹר אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה מִלְּבִי</p> <p>If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) good or ill, on my own.</p>	<p>אֲשֶׁר־יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אַתָּה אֹדֹבֵר</p> <p>What Yahweh speaks—it shall I speak.</p>

The extended statements of type A bracket the entire sequence, which is made up, significantly, of seven segments. The final segment attests not only the bracketing A component, but also a final instance of the B type, thus concluding the pattern with a collocation of both statements. In the precise midpoint of the sequence we encounter a similar collocation, but here we find the drastically shortened A' statement rather than its lengthier A counterpart.

Within the bracketed structure formed by the opening and closing occurrences of the A type, there occurs an internal bracket formed by the first and last of the central five segments (Num 22:20; 23:26), which attest as their final word the verb עשה “do,” rather than דבר “speak” as in the other instances. Indeed, this is a trait shared by the larger A brackets as well, and so the following verbal pattern is evident across the overall sequence:

do
do
 speak
 speak + speak
 speak
do
do + speak

The effect is that the concepts of action and speech are drawn into a relationship that stands in pronounced juxtaposition to the connection between ritual action and divinatory speech, with which Balaq is so deeply concerned. Whereas the above discussion of that pattern ultimately revealed the futility of ritual as a means of exerting control over the divinatory process,²⁶⁰ we encounter in the present sequence a series of expressions that address Balaam’s fulfillment of God’s will in both action and speech.

The pattern begins with verbal confirmation from both Balaam and God that Balaam must act in accordance with God’s instruction (Num 22:18, 20). Yet despite the fact that Balaam is able to articulate this principle in his own words, he fails to abide by it, instead heading off to Moab on his donkey. The episode precipitated by

²⁶⁰ See the previous subsection, pp. 420–424.

this misstep concludes in Num 22:35 not by correcting his actions—he has freely offered to return home, after all—but by focusing on a different aspect of Balaam’s relationship to the divine, namely, speech. This is entirely appropriate given the content of the subsequent section, in which Balaam speaks his poetic oracles; and in fact this is reflected in the B-type statements that occur in this later part of the pericope. Prior to the first and second oracles, in Num 22:38 and 23:12, Balaam says that he must speak *אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׁים אֱלֹהִים\יְהוָה בִּפִּי* (אֵת) “whatever Elohim/Yahweh puts in my mouth;” and in the theophany that occurs shortly after each of these verses (Num 23:5, 16), this is precisely what occurs, as expressed in the repeated clause *וַיִּשֶׂם (יְהוָה) בִּלְעָם* (in the latter verse, *בִּלְעָם* is replaced with *בִּפִּי*). Then, following the second oracle, the verbal pattern shifts back from speech to action in the sixth portion of the repeating sequence (Num 23:26). This occurs almost precisely at the moment that Balaam adjusts his own actions by abandoning *naḥāšîm*, a practice that evidently was a part of the ritual preparations leading up to the previous oracles. As a result, he is able to speak additional oracular material without recourse to divination, and so the pattern comes full circle: by conforming his actions to the will of God, as he himself explained he must at the beginning of this pattern, he attains full status as a conduit of divine will, transmitting it through speech in the third, fourth, and subsequent oracles. This marks the completion of the process by which Balaam is transformed from diviner to prophet, the end result of which is highlighted by his reiteration of the earlier type A statement, this time in combination with one of type B as well (Num 24:13).

The wording of this reiteration is almost identical to the original in Num 22:18. It is possible that this might inspire some skepticism about my proposal that Balaam actually has changed over the course of the pericope, since his statements at the beginning and end of the repeated sequence under examination here are near-perfect

copies. I suggest, however, that the situation here is similar to that in Genesis 37, where the words *חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּ* “a wicked beast has devoured him!” in verses 20 and 33 occur with vastly different connotations, first in the mouths of the brothers as they plot, and later in the mouth of Jacob when he is informed of Joseph’s disappearance. Although that context involves two different speakers, Fokkelman’s comments nevertheless are applicable to the situation in *Sefer Bil’am* as well: “Whereas the choice of words and their meaning remain unchanged, the sense and value of the utterance have been changed and expanded in an intriguing way: the context has been drastically altered....”²⁶¹ Indeed, although Fokkelman’s statement that “it is a different character speaking the clause”²⁶² is intended literally in the context of his discussion, it may be transferred with a figurative sense to our examination of Balaam, whose development as a character has rendered him quite distinct at the end of the pericope from what he was at its beginning.

The important shift thus reflected in this near-copy of the previous statement is amplified by the significant change in wording at its end, where the phrase *קָטָן אוֹ גָדוֹל* “small or great” in Num 22:18 is changed to *טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה* “good or ill” in Num 24:13. This change reflects Balaam’s revised thinking, whereby a new, value-laden merism replaces the earlier magnitude-oriented one. In addition, his dependence on God’s direction is emphasized by the addition of the word *מִלִּבִּי*, literally “from my heart,” which I have rendered “on my own.” Finally, the addition of the type B statement as the final portion of this concluding expression of Balaam’s relationship to the divine brings the entire repeating sequence to a forceful and momentous close.

²⁶¹ Fokkelman 1999: 81.

²⁶² Fokkelman 1999: 81.

Polyprosopon: Variation for the Sake of Variation

To conclude our examination of repetition with variation in *Sefer Bil'am*, I offer here an assortment of examples of polyprosopon in the pericope. With the exception of a few items that I have addressed above in other contexts, the constituents of the following list may be conceived as representative of the range and variety of aesthetically-motivated variation present in the text. These items do not constitute a comprehensive list, but nevertheless convey a sense of the ubiquity of this feature:

- Three different neutral terms are used for Israel in Num 22:2–3: בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “the children of Israel,” הָעָם “the people,” יִשְׂרָאֵל “Israel”
- Verb אָמַר “say” takes the preposition אֶל in some places (Num 22:4, 8, 10, etc.), but לִּי in others (Num 22:16, 20, 29, etc.)
- The Moabite emissaries are called שָׂרִים “officers” throughout (Num 22:8, 13, 14, 18, 35), except in Num 22:18, where they are called עֲבָדֵי בָלָק “servants of Balaq”
- Varying forms of the root קָבַח “curse,” such as קָבַח (Num 22:11, 17); קָבַח (Num 23:8); קָבַחוּ (Num 23:13), etc.²⁶³
- God “comes” (וַיָּבֹא) to Balaam in Num 22:9, 20, but “appears” (וַיֵּקָר) to him in Num 23:4, 16
- Free interchange of אֱלֹהִים and יְהוָה, as in Num 23:4, 16
- Before the first oracle, the group accompanying Balaq is called כָּל־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב “all the officers of Moab” (Num 23:6); but before the second oracle, they are שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב אִתּוֹ “the officers of Moab with him” (Num 23:17)
- לָקַח אֹיְבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ “to curse my enemies I brought you” (Num 23:11); but לָקַח אֹיְבֵי קָרָאתִיךָ “to curse my enemies I summoned you” (Num 24:10)
- The titular opening the third oracle includes אֲשֶׁר “who” (Num 24:4b); but the fourth oracle omits this word in the same colon (Num 24:16c), while adding before it the colon עֲלֵיוֹן “and knower of the knowledge of Elyon” (Num 24:16b)

²⁶³ See Table 4, above, p. 295.

To be sure, I have incorporated some of these items into my discussions of other literary devices and themes in the pericope. Nevertheless, they function also on the level of polyprosopon, just as effectively as the items in this list that I have not previously adduced. Thus, these instances of repetition with variation demonstrate the degree to which such literature invited a high level of active involvement and close attention to detail on the part of the audience, and likewise calls for careful examination and appreciation of the minutiae of the text in modern study.

Structure – Prose

Earlier, I observed that most of the literary features here might be considered in some sense to be manifestations of the phenomenon of repetition. By the same token, the same features, and especially repetition itself, often operate on a structural level in biblical literature. Repetition in particular provides a remarkably versatile tool that can serve multiple purposes, simultaneously reinforcing important themes in a given pericope, demarcating its various pieces or stages, drawing those stages together, and/or indicating the new developments that have taken place at the point of each stage's arrival. With regard to prose, then, it is no surprise that both Fokkelman and Jerome T. Walsh presented extended treatments of repetition in their studies of narrative structure in the Bible.²⁶⁴

Walsh's volume amounts to a meticulous typology of the various types of structural symmetry in biblical narrative. The level of detail in the study is evident in the range of subdivisions applied therein to symmetrical phenomena: the work begins by examining "reverse symmetry,"²⁶⁵ which includes both chiasmic (ABxB'A') and

²⁶⁴ See Fokkelman 1999: 112–122 and Walsh 2001: 145–153.

²⁶⁵ See Walsh 2001: 13–34.

concentric (ABB'A') patterns, and in his estimation is the most common form of symmetry in the Bible.²⁶⁶ From there, Walsh proceeded to explore “forward symmetry”²⁶⁷ (ABCA'B'C' or AA'BB'CC'), “alternating repetition”²⁶⁸ (ABA'B'A" B"), “partial symmetry”²⁶⁹ such as inclusio, complex overlays of symmetrical structures that he termed “multiple symmetry,”²⁷⁰ and asymmetry.²⁷¹ The remainder of the volume is concerned with the ways in which literary units, which themselves usually evince some form of symmetry, relate to one another, either disjunctively or conjunctively.²⁷² Copious examples serve to flesh out each section.

The range of perspectives offered by Walsh on the variety and significance of the various patterns is indeed a useful reference tool, and it also led him to some valuable general observations.²⁷³ Of particular note in the present context are two of these remarks. First, “[s]ymmetry can occur on any linguistic level from small-scale phonetic patterns in phrases and sentences to large-scale verbal and thematic patterns comprising narrative complexes of many chapters.”²⁷⁴ This accords with my above observation that the full range of literary devices already examined here, from alliteration upward, can serve a structural or demarcating function in a given text. Second, the structural qualities of biblical narrative argue insistently that “[i]nterpretation should not limit itself to a linear reading of the text. Intratextual comparisons of corresponding elements and sequences can offer fruitful additional

²⁶⁶ Walsh 2001: 13.

²⁶⁷ See Walsh 2001: 35–45.

²⁶⁸ See Walsh 2001: 47–56.

²⁶⁹ See Walsh 2001: 57–79.

²⁷⁰ See Walsh 2001: 81–99.

²⁷¹ See Walsh 2001: 101–114.

²⁷² See Walsh 2001: 117–190.

²⁷³ See Walsh 2001: 191–193, the “Conclusion” section.

²⁷⁴ Walsh 2001: 191.

avenues for discovering deeper or more complex levels of meaning.”²⁷⁵ This already has begun to become apparent with regard to *Sefer Bil’am*, particularly on the level of the elements that constitute the various repeating patterns in the pericope. We have an opportunity to explore this principle further in this section, particularly in our synoptic examination of these repetitive sequences, and also in the next section, as we map the structure of the poetic oracles.

Walsh’s typology is a highly useful tool, and encourages careful consideration of the full range of structural nuances of whatever piece of biblical narrative one might wish to study. It offers a multitude of demonstrative examples whose analyses, though cursory at times, reckon effectively with the unique challenges of each of the texts discussed. A shortcoming of Walsh’s study, however, is that it lacks a clear synthetic extrapolation of a set of principles characterizing the contributions of structural devices to the overall effect of biblical narrative generally. In this regard, Fokkelman’s volume meets with somewhat more success because of its organization not according to structural types, but according to the most basic elements of storytelling: action, plot, quest, and hero;²⁷⁶ space and time;²⁷⁷ points of view, knowledge, and values;²⁷⁸ and so on. By approaching the text in this fashion, Fokkelman was able to integrate his structural observations in such a way as to indicate their augmentation of the text’s narrative fundamentals and their potency.

Given Fokkelman’s approach, a review of only two of his examples is insufficient to demonstrate the entire range of possibilities in this regard. But at the least, it provides a sense of the versatility and expressive potential of the structural

²⁷⁵ Walsh 2001: 192.

²⁷⁶ See Fokkelman 1999: 73–96.

²⁷⁷ See Fokkelman 1999: 97–111.

²⁷⁸ See Fokkelman 1999: 123–155.

arrangement of a given narrative, and of some of the ways in which this aspect can work in tandem with other literary features as a tool for the communication of meaning. For this reason, I intend for the demonstrations I present here to stand not as representative of the entire breadth of the Bible's structural artistry, but rather as a concise yet suggestive sampling of some of the ways that structure is utilized in biblical narrative, in the hope that increased sensitivity to its employment in these instances will increase appreciation of it more generally. The first example speaks to the intentionality of narrative structure in the Bible, and also reveal how a structural pattern can facilitate the presentation of multiple layers of significance in a single narrative. The second example shows how structure can serve as a support for the deployment of a story's spatial aspect.

I have had occasion previously to refer to Genesis 37:18–33,²⁷⁹ which deals with Joseph's brothers, their plot to rid themselves of Joseph, and their deception of Jacob regarding his fate. The chapter opens, we recall, with Joseph recounting to his brothers two dreams whose symbolism suggests their subservience to him. In this latter portion of the chapter, the brothers are shepherding in Dothan, where Joseph comes to find them. The brothers, still smarting from his recounted dreams, plot to kill him and deceive their father by telling him *חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּ* “A wicked beast has devoured him!” (Gen 37:20). Reuben has compassion on his brother, however, and proposes simply throwing him in a pit and abandoning him, a plan to which the brothers acquiesce. When a caravan happens by, however, Judah suggests that even this may be too strong an action against their own flesh and blood, and that they should sell him into slavery instead. After the transaction is completed, Reuben, who

²⁷⁹ See above, p. 428.

apparently has been absent, returns to the pit and is horrified to discover that Joseph is gone. The brothers dip Joseph's coat in blood and, upon returning home, present it to their father, who in his devastation proclaims that חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּוּ "A wicked beast has devoured him!" (Gen 37:33).

After drawing attention to certain enigmatic features in the story, such as Reuben's twofold appearance and the repetition of the key phrase חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּוּ, Fokkelman pointed out that such features fall into place when considered as parts of the following concentric structure:²⁸⁰

A	18–20	Brothers plot to kill Joseph (חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּוּ)
B	21–22	Reuben speaks: "Throw him in this pit."
C	23–24	Brothers throw Joseph in a pit
D	25	Caravan passes
X	26–27	Judah suggests selling Joseph
D'	28	Joseph sold to caravan
C'	29	Reuben discovers that Joseph is missing from pit
B'	30	Reuben speaks: "What am I to do?"
A'	31–33	Brothers return to Jacob with coat (חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּוּ)

This formation stands as a clear indicator of authorial forethought in the construction of the tale, as Fokkelman indicated: "There is not only linear progress, but circular coherence, which has been made possible by the narrator's grip on his material."²⁸¹

This is not to say, however, that the story's structure represents nothing more than a mere aesthetic flourish. On the contrary, as I have noted previously, there is extraordinary richness in the juxtaposition of the brothers' and Jacob's identical exclamations, which move from one party's hypothetical plan to another party's aggrieved misperception. Indeed, it is striking that the brother's intention to deceive

²⁸⁰ Adapted from Fokkelman 1999: 80.

²⁸¹ Fokkelman 1999: 80.

their father with this statement actually is never carried out: they mislead him, to be sure, but they never speak the words themselves, and Jacob unwittingly plays into their plan by reaching the desired conclusion on his own. This richness is amplified by the cyclical plotline that runs between these two critical endpoints of the episode, since it maps out the sequence by which we gradually experience the shift in significance from the key phrase's first utterance to its second.

We may go a step further, however, and note that this episode's structural characteristics also fall into line with an ongoing goal in this portion of Genesis, whereby the narrative importance of Reuben, the firstborn, is diminished gradually in favor of Judah's ascendancy as the brothers' leader. In this story there already is an unmistakable juxtaposition between the two figures.²⁸² Each suggests a unique course of action to the brothers, and ultimately it is Judah's proposal that wins out, leading to Reuben's dismay in Gen 37:29–30. Several chapters later, Judah's prominence comes to eclipse fully that of Reuben during the brothers' dealings with their as-yet-unrecognized brother Joseph in Egypt. In Genesis 42–45, his involvement in the story suggests that he is experiencing a gradual process of growth, which culminates in a lengthy speech of great sensitivity and eloquence. His words lead to the momentous resolution of this major story arc, with Joseph revealing his identity and the family reuniting in Egypt.²⁸³

²⁸² The traditional source-critical reading of this episode distinguishes between portions of the text in which Reuben is the prominent figure and those in which this position is held by Judah. The former are assigned to E, and the latter to J. See Greenstein 1982 and Berlin 1983: 113–116, wherein the concomitant difficulties are assessed.

²⁸³ Alter (1981: 155–177) insightfully discussed the culmination of this extended narrative cycle, and also emphasized Genesis 37 as a crucial point that sets up the effectiveness of the subsequent stories leading up to the climax in Genesis 45.

Needless to say, we encounter in Genesis 37 an early stage in Judah's rise. But even though there is much more still to be revealed in this regard, the structure of our story renders undeniable the fact that the process already is underway. First and foremost, the placement of Judah at the center of the concentric structure, in a structural element that is not repeated elsewhere in the episode, draws attention to his leadership and to the fact that his brothers respond to his direction. Fokkelman's observation regarding Genesis 38, the story of Judah and Tamar, is equally applicable here: "This extra attention for Judah...sets him up for his major role as the brothers' spokesman in Genesis 44, and prepares us for Judah's crucial speech (44:18–34) at the Egyptian court."²⁸⁴ Moreover, Reuben's appearances are set at some distance from this pivotal central point in the story, confined almost entirely to the B–B' "ring" of the concentric pattern. In this way, the story's structure works in tandem with its content to deepen the significance of the events recounted, to link this story into a much larger narrative theme in this portion of the book, and to presage a final outcome that remains several chapters in the future.²⁸⁵

A second example drawn from Fokkelman's volume is the story of Saul's anointing in 1 Samuel 9–10, in which the structure of the episode facilitates and heightens its spatial aspect. Chapter 9 begins with Saul setting out from his home in Benjamin to seek his father's donkeys, which have gone astray. After a lengthy journey with no success, Saul reaches the area around Zuph, and his servant suggests that they consult a seer who happens to be there. As they are climbing the ascent, they

²⁸⁴ Fokkelman 1999: 81.

²⁸⁵ Berlin 1983: 113–121 interpreted the juxtaposition of Reuben and Judah from a slightly different perspective, according to which their unique traits jointly contribute to the overall picture of the familial complexities at work among Jacob and his sons. Although her view exhibits a focus distinct from that of the approach detailed here, the two treatments are in no way incompatible.

come across a group of girls, who inform them that the seer has just arrived and can be found in town. A portentous meeting between Saul and Samuel ensues, after which Samuel honors Saul at the head of the town's sacrificial meal. Their conversation following the meal ultimately leads to the prophet's secret anointing of Saul at the beginning of chapter 10, and then his delivery to the new king of a lengthy series of instructions and foretellings, including word of the lost donkeys. Saul's journey home involves a brief stint as a participant in a band of ecstatic prophets, which results in the proverbial saying *הֲגַם שְׂאוֹל בְּנָבִי(י)אִים* "Is Saul too among the prophets?" (1 Sam 10:11, 12), and concludes when he arrives home and converses with his uncle, telling him that the donkeys have been found but not revealing anything about the anointing.

Fokkelman observed the neat segmentation of the story into the following series of distinct pieces:²⁸⁶

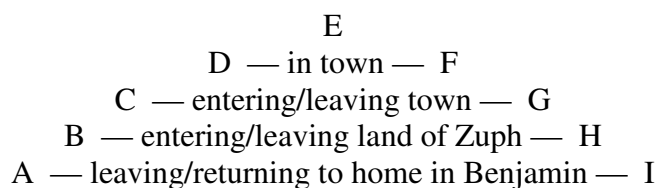
- | | | |
|---|-----------|---|
| A | 9:1–4 | Introduction of Saul; search for donkeys unsuccessful |
| B | 9:5–10 | Servant proposes new quest; they set out to find the seer |
| | | |
| C | 9:11–14 | Girls provide word that seer is in town |
| D | 9:15–21 | First conversation between Samuel and Saul |
| E | 9:22–24 | Samuel honors Saul at sacrificial meal |
| F | 9:25–26 | Second conversation between Samuel and Saul |
| G | 9:27–10:8 | Private anointing of Saul and instructions from Samuel |
| | | |
| H | 10:9–13 | Journey home; Saul's ecstatic experience |
| I | 10:14–16 | Conversation with uncle |

I preserve here an important element of Fokkelman's layout, namely, the blank spaces between the opening and closing sections, AB and HI, and the lengthy central portion C through G. Accordingly, Fokkelman viewed the story as viewed into three distinct

²⁸⁶ Adapted from Fokkelman 1999: 103.

parts, “journey there—reception—journey back.”²⁸⁷ Although the story focuses on Saul, it is Samuel who drives the central “reception” portion of the tale.

Several of Fokkelman’s segments are demarcated by explicit spatial referents, such as הָמָּהּ בָּאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ צוּף “(When) they had come into the land of Zuph...” (1 Sam 9:5) or הָמָּהּ יוֹרְדִים בְּקִצָּה הָעִיר “(When) they had descended to the edge of the city...” (1 Sam 9:27). These markers sprinkled throughout the narrative provide the key to Fokkelman’s mapping of the episode’s nine scenes onto a concise structural pattern: “When we take a closer look at the space, the nine scenes prove to have been arranged in a compelling order. We find an underlying structure of concentric symmetry, which shows that this long story is based on an *itinerary* of the hero’s: the route of his journey.”²⁸⁸ It is particularly important to recognize that the concentric arrangement to which he referred is not one of narrative content, as in the above example from Genesis 37. Rather, it is an arrangement of the various spaces in which the nine segments occur, with the spatial culmination occurring at the highest point both geographically and symbolically, that is, the site of the sacrificial meal.²⁸⁹



Laying out the locations of the various scenes in this fashion reveals the remarkably elegant relationship between the construction of the various pieces of the story and the physical travels undertaken by its hero as the narrative proceeds. This relationship is

²⁸⁷ Fokkelman 1999: 103.

²⁸⁸ Fokkelman 1999: 104 (emphasis in original).

²⁸⁹ The following is adapted from Fokkelman 1999: 104.

housed in a specific textual element—the phrases indicating the location of each successive scene—that represents the total merging of the structural and spatial aspects of this story.

Again, it is impossible in two examples to encompass the entire range of biblical narrative's structural potential. However, these two examples from Fokkelman's study provide a sense of the device's versatility, and also call attention to the degree to which the stories in the Bible are arranged carefully and deliberately, both internally and in relation to each other. With this in mind, we turn now to *Sefer Bil'am*, where we begin at the opening of the pericope and discuss certain structural aspects in the prose that accentuate the richness of the text as a literary composition. In doing so, however, it is important to recall that as with the other literary devices explored in this chapter, although biblical poetry characteristically evinces a tight and orderly construction, this does not mean that prose never exhibits similar patterns of formal order. Indeed, the careful arrangement of the prose examples cited above attests this fact; and as a consequence, we should resist the urge to label as poetry every passage exhibiting some kind of meticulously organized structural aspect.

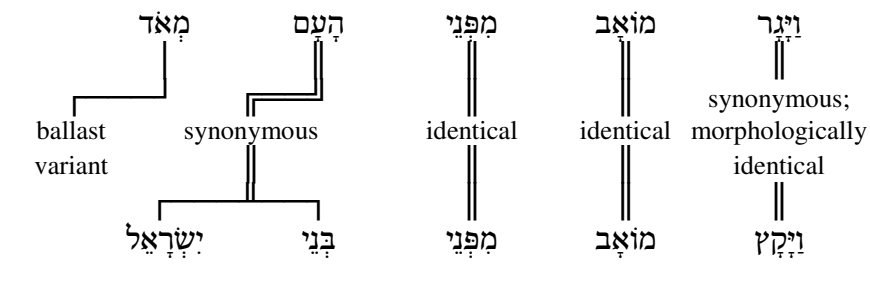
The Concentric Pattern in the Opening Verses of Sefer Bil'am

A case in point presents itself at the very beginning of the pericope. For our purposes here, it is helpful to break down Num 22:2–4 into individual clauses, as follows:

2a	וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר	And Balaq son of Šippor saw
b	אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמְרִי:	all that Israel had done to the Amorite(s).
3a	וַיִּגַּר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד	And Moab feared the people much,
b	כִּי רַב־הוּא	for it was great;
c	וַיִּקֶּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	And Moab dreaded the children of Israel.
4a	וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן	And Moab said to the elders of Midian,
b	עַתָּה יִלְחֲכוּ הַקְּהָלִי	“Now the throng will lick up
	אֶת־כָּל־סְבִיבֹתֵינוּ	everything around us,
c	כְּלֹחֵץ הַשּׁוֹר אֶת יֵרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה	as the ox licks up the grass of the field.”
d	וּבָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב	And Balaq son of Šippor was king of Moab
	בְּעֵת הַהוּא:	at that time.

As the indentations demonstrate, this portion of the pericope’s prose introduction exhibits an extensive complex of significant structural features. Perhaps most obvious is the bracketing of the section, at beginning and end, with clauses whose subject is “Balaq son of Šippor” (Num 22:2, 4d), while statements of which “Moab” is the subject occupy the central portion (Num 22:3–4abc). Turning to this central section first, we note that it may be divided into two blocks of three lines each (Num 22:3abc, 4abc).

The first of these triads is regularly invoked as evidence of the composite nature of the text, based on the assumption that the synonymous statements in 3a and 3c cannot have come from the same source.²⁹⁰ This view is undercut, however, by the remarkably close parallelism of the two clauses in question, as follows:



²⁹⁰ See, e.g., Noth 1968: 171.

I made reference to the phonetic relationship between the first words of the two clauses in my discussion of sound echo, above.²⁹¹ This and the other relationships indicated here draw the two clauses together, forming the outer “ring” of a concentric structure that foregrounds the intervening clause **כִּי רַב־הוּא** “for it was great,” which refers to Israel.

In the second triad (Num 22:4abc) as well, a statement of Israel’s greatness occupies the most prominent position (Num 22:4b). Here, it is set off not by flanking parallel clauses, but by two other factors: its occurrence in direct speech, and the supporting simile immediately following it in Num 22:4c. These six lines, then, follow the pattern ABAABC, where the A lines (Num 22:3ac, 4a) are those of which Moab is the subject, the B lines (Num 22:3b, 4b) are foregrounded statements of Israel’s greatness, and the C line (Num 22:4c) provides metaphorical support for the second of the two B lines.

The central “Moab section” (Num 22:3–4abc) is flanked by clauses of which Balaq is the subject (Num 22:2a, 4d), the first of which is followed, once again, by an embedded statement of the preeminence of Israel (Num 22:2b). It is noteworthy that although Balaq is the grammatical subject in these places, he is not presented as an active figure: in Num 22:2a he is the subject of the verb **ראה** “see,” and Num 22:4d is merely a copulative clause with no verb expressed at all. Against this, we encounter the statement in 2b, in which occurs the only active verb appearing in either of the two bracketing sections Num 22:2 and Num 22:4d, namely **עשה** “do,” of which, one notes, Israel is the subject. Thus, the content of the section Num 22:2–4 is laid out according to the following schematic:

²⁹¹ See above, p. 304.

Table 11: Structural Schematic of Num 22:2–4

	Background	Foreground
Num 22:2a	Balaq	
Num 22:2b		Israel is great
Num 22:3ac	Moab (chiasm)	
Num 22:3b		Israel is great
Num 22:4a	Moab	
Num 22:4bc		Israel is great (+ simile)
Num 22:4d	Balaq	

The clear symmetry of this concentric pattern is remarkable, especially with regard to the prominent central location of the already tersely forceful proclamation **כִּי רַב־הוּא** “for it was great” that occurs in Num 22:3b. We see also that the three statements of Israel’s greatness are arranged in a chronological progression: Num 22:2b describes Israel’s past action; Num 22:3b indicates the present state of Israel, as perceived by Moab; and Num 22:4b specifies Moab’s fear of Israel’s future activity. Moreover, Moab’s fear of Israel’s effect on “all that surrounds [them]” (**אֶת־כָּל־סָבִיבֵיהֶמוֹ**, Num 22:4) is amplified by the text’s formal quality: the references to Moab, which occur in Num 22:3–4a, are “surrounded” by references to Israel in Num 22:2b and 4bc.

These types of structural features, especially the parallelism evident in Num 22:3ac and the pastoral metaphor in Num 22:4c, led Milgrom to suggest a possible “original poetic substratum” underlying the text here.²⁹² Against this hypothesis, however, stands Kugel’s erudite suggestion that prose and poetry are not diametric opposites, but rather the two ends of a spectrum along whose length fall the sundry biblical texts. In other words, his view allows for prose texts to exhibit characteristics traditionally associated with poetry. Consequently, it is inappropriate to apply the

²⁹² See Milgrom 1990: 185 and 186. I cite specifically from p. 186.

poetic label liberally to all texts that manifest some kind of formalized literary character such as parallelism:

...[T]here is little doubt that Israel did have some [poetic] saga texts that have not survived. But to see in every instance of parallelism...another fragment of some “long-lost original” seems all too convenient. ... Furthermore, one wonders why an ancient, sacred, “poetic” text would be abandoned and recast as “prose”—and this at a time when reading and writing were still relatively rare commodities! Certainly literary history of later periods abounds in examples of the precise opposite.²⁹³

Instead, then, it is appropriate to recognize the structural qualities identified here as heightening elements in a highly formalized introduction that sets the pericope off as a new direction in the narrative progression of the book of Numbers, and to set in motion the key factors around which the story of Balaam will unfold.

Two Structural Patterns Presaging Balaam’s Encounter with Balaq

Licht pointed out that Numbers 22 exhibits two overlapping or “nested” structural patterns.²⁹⁴ The first is evident in the sequence of Balaam’s encounters with the divine, and the second appears in the similar sequence of the jenny’s sightings of Yahweh’s messenger on the road to Moab. Since the second of these sequences occurs in a more compact form and exhibits the clear repetition discussed previously,²⁹⁵ I simply recall its three elements, as described respectively in Num 22:23, 25, 27, in each of which the jenny sees Yahweh’s messenger and responds in systematically

²⁹³ Kugel 1981: 77.

²⁹⁴ Licht 1978: 71–72.

²⁹⁵ See above, pp. 417–420.

escalating fashion, until it simply refuses to proceed in the climactic final instance. This ultimately results in Balaam's encounter with the messenger in Num 22:28–35.

This encounter, as it happens, is the third component of the other sequence of interest here. Its first two components appear respectively in Num 22:9–12, 20, both of which are descriptions of incubated nighttime theophanies in which God instructs Balaam. This third instance, then, is of a considerably different character: it occurs during the day, and it involves not God directly, but a divine messenger. Nevertheless, the instruction given to Balaam by the messenger in Num 22:35 is so similar to that given by Elohim in Num 22:20 (the only difference being the shift of the final word תַּעֲשֶׂה “you shall do” to תִּדְבֹּר “you shall speak”) that one encounters no intuitive difficulty in seeing it as part of the same complex of theophanic encounters experienced by Balaam. These two sequences, then, are overlain in Numbers 22:²⁹⁶

- A1 Balaam's first revelation
- A2 Balaam's second revelation
 - B1 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the first time
 - B2 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the second time
 - B3 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the third time
- A3 Balaam sees Yahweh's messenger (thus third revelation)

As is clear in this layout, the entire pattern involving the jenny is nested between the second and third components of that involving Balaam.

Both of these sequences are of limited significance, however, if they are not understood in conjunction with what follows in Balaam's encounter with Balaq.²⁹⁷ This encounter likewise involves theophanic experiences as part of the material

²⁹⁶ This breakdown is adapted from Licht 1978: 71–72.

²⁹⁷ Licht 1978: 72 noted this connection.

leading up to each of Balaam's poetic oracles (Num 22:41–23:6; 23:14–17; 23:28–24:2). Here, however, whereas the first two iterations of the pattern fall into line with one's expectations, in the third instance the pattern is broken: the preparatory activity prior to the third oracle is aborted, as Balaam turns from divinatory practices to prophetic inspiration. Thus, we may expand the above layout to include this additional sequence:²⁹⁸

- A1 Balaam's first revelation
- A2 Balaam's second revelation
 - B1 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the first time
 - B2 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the second time
 - B3 Jenny sees Yahweh's messenger for the third time
- A3 Balaam sees Yahweh's messenger (thus third revelation)
 - C1 Balaam receives first oracle
 - C2 Balaam receives second oracle
 - C3 Balaam abandons *nəḥāšîm*, speaks third and subsequent oracles without theophany

In sum, each of these gradually climaxing tripartite sequences is to be seen not as an isolated pattern, but as part of a larger three-times-three structure whose final element attains dramatically increased significance by breaking from the expectation established by its predecessors. By this point it hardly is surprising that we encounter here, therefore, yet another piece of evidence pointing to the dramatic shift at the opening of Numbers 24 as a key turning point both in the narrative and in Balaam's career.

²⁹⁸ This pattern comprises a combination of Walsh's "complex symmetry" (Walsh 2001: 81, 88–93), where one series of elements is followed by a subsequent analogous series, just as both the A and B sequences here prefigure the C sequence; and "compound symmetry" (Walsh 2001: 81, 94–99), where a single section of text, in this case Numbers 22, exhibits multiple distinct patterns of repetition, i.e., both A and B sequences here, although admittedly they cover different portions of the chapter.

Structure – Poetry

Needless to say, the close attention to structural arrangement exhibited in biblical prose is even more readily apparent in poetry, whose tightly figured concision may be its most immediately perceptible feature. Fitzgerald, for instance, asserted that “[t]his consistent use of measured building blocks, short sentences [i.e., cola], is the criterion by which OT verse is distinguished from OT prose.”²⁹⁹ This assessment would appear to be somewhat of an oversimplification,³⁰⁰ but it does highlight a frequently debated question with regard to the structure of Hebrew poetry, namely, the identity and nature of the fundamental units out of which it is built. Fitzgerald’s statement that the basic unit is the colon is met, for instance, by the view of Berlin, who characterized parallelism as “the constructive principle on which a poem is built,”³⁰¹ thereby intimating that the colon actually is a sub-unit of which the true building blocks, parallel complexes of cola, are comprised.

Despite formal differences of opinion on this matter, however, there is general consensus regarding how biblical poetry operates on a structural level, particularly with respect to the larger complexes comprised of whole sequences of lines and couplets. James Muilenberg effectively expressed a view now widely accepted, arguing in defense of the term “strophe” for blocks of bicola and/or tricola,³⁰² and effectively making the case for viewing these strophes as an integral part of the compositional system of Hebrew poetry.³⁰³ Specifically, he called attention to the simultaneously conjunctive and disjunctive operation of strophic construction, which

²⁹⁹ Fitzgerald 1990: 203.

³⁰⁰ See the discussion on this matter in the previous chapter, pp. 233–237, and the references cited there.

³⁰¹ Berlin 1985: 6.

³⁰² Muilenberg 1969: 12.

³⁰³ See especially Muilenberg 1969: 11–18.

marks, “on the one hand, the sequence and movement of the pericope, and on the other, the shifts or breaks in the development of the writer’s thought.”³⁰⁴ His argument proceeded to call attention to both the more obvious strophic delineations, such as refrains, and the subtler divisions recognizable in a given poem’s various shifts in content or sense. Subsequent to articulations such as Muilenberg’s, Fokkelman developed this kind of structural perspective still further, and pointed out that extended poems comprising several strophes can exhibit an even higher level of segmentation according to which strophes are assembled in groups that he termed stanzas.³⁰⁵

The range and inconsistency of the terminology employed in scholarly discourse on the structure of biblical poetry have the potential to produce significant confusion. The following table demonstrates this, and also details the terms that I employ as consistently as possible in this dissertation:

Table 12: Structural Terms Applied to Biblical Poetry

Terms commonly employed in scholarship	Terms used in the present study
colon line verset stich hemistich	colon
bicolon/tricolon couplet/triplet distich/tristich line stich verse	bicolon/tricolon couplet/triplet (less frequently: line)
strophe stanza	strophe
strophe stanza	stanza

³⁰⁴ Muilenberg 1969: 10.

³⁰⁵ See Fokkelman 2001: 117–140.

Most commonly, these units are grouped into twos and threes: lines typically are constructed of two or three cola (hence my preference here for terms like “bicolon/tricolon” and “couplet/triplet” in lieu of the less specific “line”); strophes typically consist of two or three lines; and stanzas generally contain two or three strophes.

Having addressed these fundamental aspects of biblical poetry in general terms, we turn now to a close analysis of Balaam’s oracles. The first portion of this analysis identifies elements linking the poems to the prose narrative in which they are set. The second portion deals at length with the formal concepts just discussed, as it examines a series of specific relationships between the oracles themselves.

Connections Between Balaam’s Poetic Oracles and the Surrounding Prose

Although the links between the prose and poetry of *Sefer Bil’am* do not fall neatly into a clear structural pattern, it is worthwhile here to observe briefly a number of interlocking cross-references that demonstrate the unified thrust of the pericope as a whole. As Milgrom noted, the poems not only refer back to the preceding narrative in Numbers 22, but also interact directly with their immediate prose context.³⁰⁶ The following important points in the prose are engaged in Balaam’s oracular speech:

1. Balaq summons Balaam from Aram (Num 22:5–20, 36–40)
2. God alone determines blessing or cursing (Num 22:18, 20, 35, 38; 23:12, 26; 24:13)
3. Balaam does not share his donkey’s ability to see Yahweh’s messenger, until God uncovers his eyes (Num 22:22–31)
4. Balaam sees some or all of the people of Israel from a high vantage point (Num 22:41; 23:14; 24:2)

³⁰⁶ Milgrom 1990: 467. Much of the present discussion is drawn from the data assembled here by Milgrom.

5. Balaq seeks to elicit a different response from God, either directly (Num 23:27) or by directing Balaam toward a new course of action (Num 22:16–17; 23:13)
6. Balaq eagerly requests word of God’s response to Balaam (Num 23:17)
7. Yahweh puts words in Balaam’s mouth (Num 23:5, 16)
8. Balaam sees the orderly arrangement of Israel’s multitude (Num 24:2)

Some of these points find emphasis in Balaam’s oracular speech, while others are developed or even reversed in some fashion. I proceed here through each oracle, identifying the key points of contact with these matters expressed in the prose of the pericope.

The first oracle begins with explicit reference to point 1, Balaq’s summons and request that Balaam perform a curse on Israel (Num 23:7). In response, Balaam reiterates point 2, a key theme in the overall narrative, here expressed in tight poetic diction (Num 23:8). Point 4 finds similar oracular expression in the subsequent verse (Num 23:9), as Balaam describes his position at an elevated viewpoint overlooking Israel.

Milgrom interpreted Balaam’s direct address of Balaq in the opening verse of the second oracle (Num 23:18) as a response to the king’s eager question מַה־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה “What did Yahweh speak?” moments before, identified here as point 6.³⁰⁷ Moreover, the immediately following statements in this poem (Num 23:19–20) emphasize the fact that God does not change his mind as man does, a notion that Balaq appears to have some difficulty grasping, since as point 5 indicates, even after this oracle he again seeks to elicit a different divine reaction to his request for a curse. Point 2

³⁰⁷ Milgrom 1990: 467.

likewise finds emphasis in Num 23:20, where Balaam indicates that he is powerless to circumvent the directive to bless Israel.

In the third oracle, Balaam's comparison of Israel's dwellings (Num 24:5cd) to the serene and orderly floral imagery presented in the subsequent verse is predicated on Balaam's visual encounter with the Israelite camp according to point 8, where its regimented organization is described as שֶׁבֶן לְשִׁבְטָיו "residing according to its tribes" (Num 24:2). Both this oracle and the subsequent one begin (Num 24:3–4, 15–16) with explicit responses to point 7 on the above list, since Balaam's inspiration in these latter poems comes not from God's direct implantation of words in his mouth, but from true prophetic insight: as the phrase נֹאֵם בְּלִעָם בֶּן־בְּעֹר "Utterance of Balaam son of Be'or" and the subsequent lines indicate, these are Balaam's own words. This introductory sequence opening the third and fourth poems also refers directly to God's opening of Balaam's eyes, by means of the phrase גִּלְיָ עֵינָיו "uncovered of eyes" (Num 24:4, 16) and other expressions, thus recalling Balaam's inability to see in point 3, which is remedied directly by God in Num 22:31, using precisely the same terminology: וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָיו בְּלִעָם "And Yahweh uncovered Balaam's eyes."

In addition to these poetic echoes of the surrounding prose material, the dialogue goes the other direction as well. Indeed, Milgrom called attention to the degree to which Balaam's "step-by-step development from seer to prophet,"³⁰⁸ which we already have traced by examining the recurring statements of Balaam's role as a transmitter of divine will that appear in the pericope's prose,³⁰⁹ can be traced also in the development of his oracles' content.³¹⁰ Most notably, Balaam closes the first

³⁰⁸ Milgrom 1990: 468.

³⁰⁹ See above, pp. 426–427.

³¹⁰ The evidence presented in Milgrom 1990: 468 is slightly different than that which I adduce here, but both bodies of data stand in service of the same overall argument.

oracle with a statement of admiration toward Israel, and expresses his own desire to identify with them (Num 23:10). Thus, upon recognizing in the second oracle that God's will is imparted to Israel without recourse to divination (Num 23:23), he brings to fruition his alignment with Israel by similarly abandoning such practices in favor of direct inspiration (Num 24:1). Thus, we may trace the development of his understanding across the first two oracles, and then see him act on it in the subsequent prose material. Moreover, the process continues in the third oracle, as he recognizes that "blessing or curse is empowered to redound to its author"³¹¹ (Num 24:9), an observation that reasonably may be conceived as springing from Balaam's own experience as one who has acquiesced fully to God's decision to bless Israel. Finally, the predictions in the fourth oracle detailing Israel's conquest of Moab return "measure for measure"³¹² Balaam's desire for a curse against Israel: "Balak of Moab who hired Balaam to enable to him to conquer Israel [Num 22:5 and 12, both in prose] is now informed by Balaam that Israel will conquer Moab."³¹³

These interconnections between the poetry and the prose in *Sefer Bil'am* speak to the unified quality of the pericope as it stands. This is not to say that the entire Balaam narrative sprang full-fledged from the mind of the author or authors, since in all likelihood it incorporates various older materials. But it is one thing to suggest vestiges of pronounced antiquity in the pericope, and another thing entirely to jump from this suggestion to the assumption that the work of crafting the present version of the text involved little or no *authorial* activity. As Milgrom stated, "the fusion is so thoroughgoing and skillful that the original seams are no longer visible: The redaction

³¹¹ Milgrom 1990: 468.

³¹² Milgrom 1990: 468.

³¹³ Milgrom 1990: 468.

is a new artistic creation.”³¹⁴ The ongoing interaction between the overarching prose narrative and Balaam’s poetic insets, which supports and propels the major themes in the text, provides ample demonstration of the success of the pericope in its entirety as an expressive endeavor.

Balaam’s Oracles: A Series of Progressive Expansions

The poetic portions of *Sefer Bil’am* themselves warrant close structural attention. Traditionally, Balaam’s first two oracles have been associated with E, the third and fourth poems are viewed as “obvious doublets” of the first two poems and thus are connected with J, and the subsequent short sections are seen as “obvious additions.”³¹⁵ My aim here is to set these assertions aside and to examine the poems as a complete assemblage, an endeavor that will demonstrate a variety of systematic continuities and developments linking oracle to oracle. In other words, I address the unifying aspects in the collection of poetry presented here, rather than the various oracles’ disjunctive qualities. For this reason, prior source-critical suppositions in this regard are rather superfluous for our purposes here; but in addition, I believe that the evidence reveals the degree to which such notions actually detract from a full appreciation of the connective artistry at work in the poetic portions of *Sefer Bil’am*.

As part of this discussion, it is useful briefly to consider the overall construction of each poem. With this in mind, we turn to the first oracle, which begins with an introductory couplet (Num 23:7ab) that establishes the context for the utterance of the poem.³¹⁶ It is intimately linked with the first full strophe (Num

³¹⁴ Milgrom 1990: 468.

³¹⁵ This view is a commonplace. The representative statement cited here appears in Noth 1968: 171.

³¹⁶ The breakdown presented here was adopted also by Angelo Tosato (1979: 99, 100), following R. Tournay (1964: 284).

23:7cd–8), which opens with the direct speech of Balaq in a manner that would be unintelligible if not for the preparatory information in the opening couplet.³¹⁷ This first strophe, like the two that follow it (Num 23:9; Num 23:10), consists of two couplets, and thus after the introductory bicolon the poem as a whole is neatly segmented into three balanced strophes of equal length. After recounting Balaq’s commands to Balaam in its initial couplet, the first strophe concludes with a pair of parallel rhetorical questions indicating Balaam’s inability to defy God’s wishes by cursing Israel. The second strophe expands on this idea, providing a verbal description of visual details that demonstrate the people’s manifestly blessed status. This strophe is flanked by bicola consisting of rhetorical questions: the third strophe begins as the first ended, with a pair of such questions, which are expanded by an expression of Balaam’s aspiration to share the fate of Israel. The breakdown runs thus:

7a	מִן־אַרָם יַנְחֵנִי בָלָק	From Aram Balaq leads me,
b	מִלְדֵּי־מוֹאָב מֵהַרְרֵי־קָדֶם	the king of Moab, from the mountains of the east:
c	לָכֵה אָרֶה־לִּי יַעֲקֹב	“Come, curse for me Jacob,
d	וּלְכֵה זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:	and come, damn Israel.”
8a	מִה אֶקְבֹּל לֹא קִבְּהָ אֵל	How can I doom when El has not doomed,
b	וּמִה אֶזְעַם לֹא זָעַם יְהוָה:	and how can I damn what Yahweh has not damned?
9a	כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צֻרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ	For from the top of peaks I see him,
b	וּמִגְבְּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרָנּוּ	and from hills I apprehend him:
c	הִנֵּנּוּ לְבֶדֶד יֹשֵׁב	Behold, a people who dwells alone,
d	וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:	and among the nations is not reckoned.

³¹⁷ For this reason, one might prefer to see Num 23:7–8 as a single strophe consisting of three bicola, rather than as a single introductory bicolon followed by a two-line strophe. For our purposes, the question is moot.

10a	מִי מִנָּה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב	Who can count the dust of Jacob,
b	וּמִסָּפָר אֶת־רֶבֶעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל	indeed, number the dust-cloud of Israel?
c	תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׁרָאִים	May my soul die an upright death,
d	וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כָמֹהוּ:	and may my posterity be like it.

Balaam's second oracle exhibits a remarkable series of expansions on the first, which is evident only on the basis of a clear understanding of the poem's strophic construction.³¹⁸ Rather than restating the background information expressed at the outset of the first poem, here the introductory couplet (Num 23:18) defines the entire oracle as Balaam's response to Balaq.³¹⁹ The content of this response begins with the subsequent three-line strophe (Num 23:19–20), which exhibits a concentric ABA' formation in which the foregrounded central element is a couplet consisting of parallel rhetorical questions. This strophe emphasizes the powerlessness of human efforts to alter God's course once it is determined. There follows another three-line strophe (Num 23:21–22) that articulates what that immovable course is in this case, namely, God's unwavering favor toward Israel. The next two-line strophe returns to the theme of the first strophe, developing the idea of the ineffectuality of human action into an expression of its superfluity, by indicating that Israel's direct contact with the divine eliminates their need resort to divination. Likewise, the two-line strophe concluding the poem develops the animal imagery and royal tone of the second strophe into a full-fledged simile detailing the leonine might of Israel. According to this ABA'B' scheme, the second oracle reads as follows:

³¹⁸ For this poem, I diverge considerably from the breakdown offered in Tosato 1979: 101–102 and Tournay 1964: 284. Fokkelman (2001: 211) likewise expressed a preference for an entirely different scheme, but provided no discussion of this view.

³¹⁹ See the observation to this effect in Milgrom 1990: 467.

18a	קוֹם בָּלַק וּשְׁמָע	Rise, Balaq, and hear;
b	הִאֲזִינָה עָדִי בְּנוֹ צֶפֶר:	attend my testimony, son of Šippor:
19a	לֹא אִישׁ אֶל וְיִכְזֹב	El is neither a man to deceive,
b	וּבֶן־אָדָם וְיִתְנַחֵם	nor a mortal to regret.
c	הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה	Does he say but not do,
d	וְדִבֵּר וְלֹא יְקִימֶנָה:	or speak but not establish it?
20a	הִנֵּה בִרְדִּי לְקַחְתִּי	Behold, I have received (instruction to) bless;
b	וּבִרְדִּי וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנָה:	and (when) he has blessed, I cannot revoke it.
21a	לֹא־הִבִּיט אֶן בִּיעָקֵב	One perceives no misfortune in Jacob,
b	וְלֹא־רָאָה עֲמַל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and sees no distress in Israel:
c	יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ	Yahweh his god is with him,
d	וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:	and a king's acclaim is in him.
22a	אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, their liberator from Egypt,
b	כְּתוֹעַפֶת רָאֵם לוֹ:	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
23a	כִּי לֹא־נִחַשׁ בִּיעָקֵב	For there is no augury in Jacob,
b	וְלֹא־קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and no divination in Israel:
c	בְּעֵת יֵאֱמָר לְיַעֲקֹב	At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob
d	וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה־פָּעַל אֵל:	and to Israel what God has done.
24a	הִנֵּה־עַם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם	Behold, a people who like a lion rises,
b	וּכְאֲרֵי יִתְנַשֵּׂא	like a lion ³²⁰ rouses itself:
c	לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֹאכַל טֶרֶף	It does not rest until it devours prey
d	וְדָם־חַלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:	and drinks the blood of the slain.

A synoptic examination of these first two poems reveals a careful system of expansion whereby each line of the first two strophes in the initial oracle (Num 23:7cd–8; Num 23:9) is expanded into a full strophe (or, in one case, two strophes) in

³²⁰ Here I translate both לָבִיא and אֲרִי as “lion,” since the usual means of distinguishing the two terms, e.g. “lion–young lion” and “lioness–lion,” are unsatisfactory.

the second oracle. Laying out the Hebrew text of the two poems side by side aids in the recognition of this pattern:

<u>First Oracle</u>		<u>Second Oracle</u>	
23:7a	מִן־אֶרֶס יִנְחֲנִי בְּלֶקֶת		
b	מִלֶּד־מִוֶּאֱב מֵהִרְרִי־קֶדֶם		
c	לִכְתּוּב אֶרֶץ־לִי יַעֲקֹב	23:18a	קוֹם בְּלֶקֶת וּשְׁמַע
d	וּלְכֹתָ זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:	b	הָאֲזִינָה עֲדִי בְּנוֹ צִפּוֹר:
		19a	לֹא אִישׁ אֶל וַיִּכְזֹּב
		b	וּבֶן־אָדָם וַיִּתְּנָחֵם
8a	מָה אֶקֶב לֹא קֶבֶה אֶל	c	הֵהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה
b	וּמָה אֲזַעֵם לֹא זַעַם יְהוָה:	d	וּדְבַר וְלֹא יִקְיַמְנָה:
		20a	הִנֵּה בִרְךְ לִקְחָתִי
		b	וּבִרְךְ וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבְנָה:
		21a	לֹא־הִבִּיט אֹן בִּיעֲקֹב
		b	וּלֹא־רָאָה עֲמַל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
		c	יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיו עֲמֹ
		d	וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:
		22a	אֶל מוֹצִיאָם מִמִּצְרַיִם
9a	כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צָרִים אֲרָאֲנוּ	b	כְּתוּעַפַּת רֹאשׁ לּוֹ:
b	וּמִגְבָּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרָנוּ	23a	כִּי־לֹא־נָחַשׁ בִּיעֲקֹב
		b	וּלֹא־קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
		c	כַּעַת יֹאמַר לִיעֲקֹב
		d	וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִה־פֶּעַל אֵל:
c	הִרְעָם לְבַדֵּד יֹשֵׁב	24a	הִרְעָם כְּלִבֵּיא יְקוֹם
d	וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:	b	וּכְאֲרִי יִתְנַשֵּׂא
		c	לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֵאכֹל טָרֶף
		d	וְדָם חֲלָלִים יִשְׁתֶּה:
10a	מִי מִנֵּה עֹפֶר יַעֲקֹב		
b	וּמִסֵּפֶר אֶת־רִבְעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל		
c	תִּמַּת נַפְשֵׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל		
d	וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרִיתִי כִּמְהוּ		

This synoptic layout amply demonstrates the range of connections between the two oracles, each of which warrants specific comment here. As an introductory line, the second oracle's opening couplet (Num 23:18) bears a functional correspondence to the opening bicolon of the first poem (Num 23:7ab), which is strengthened somewhat by the similar use in both lines of parallel referents for Balaq. These two couplets attest wholly unrelated content, however; and an examination of the bicolon opening the initial oracle's first full strophe (Num 23:7cd) demonstrates that this, in fact, is the true analogue for the second oracle's introductory line. On the one hand, the earlier line presents Balaq's direct speech to Balaam, replete with imperative forms bearing final *hê*: "Come, curse for me Jacob, / and come, damn Israel." On the other hand, the line from the second poem stands as a direct counterpoint, with speaker and addressee reversed, and similarly attests several imperatives including another with final *hê*: "Rise, Balaq, and hear; / attend my testimony, son of Šippor."

The remainder of the first oracle's initial strophe (Num 23:8) presents a response to Balaq's commands in the previous couplet in the form of two parallel rhetorical questions. In effect, this couplet expresses the key point in this poem, which is expanded in the strophe to follow. Likewise, the first full strophe in the second oracle (Num 23:19–20) offers an extended version of much the same statement, foregrounding in its central line another set of parallel rhetorical questions. Moreover, like Num 23:8, the couplet concluding this strophe (Num 23:20) is in the first person, and describes Balaam's personal inability to countermand God's will with regard to blessing and cursing.³²¹

³²¹ An alternative interpretation might be to see this as a two-line strophe, with the first line (Num 23:19ab) associated instead with the preceding couplet to form a full two-line introductory strophe. This would yield a full-strophe expansion in this poem of each of the four lines in question from the first

Upon reaching the initial couplet of the first oracle's second full strophe (Num 23:9ab), first we encounter the particle כִּי "for," which serves to mark a shift in the poem whereby the thrust of the preceding material is explained by way of the evidence presented in what follows; thus, Balaam's inability to obey Balaq by acting against God's wishes, expressed in the previous strophe, is explained here by way of his visual witnessing of Israel's unique character in this strophe. Turning to the second oracle, however, we discover that the couplet marking this shift in the first poem, Num 23:9ab, is expanded here into *two* strophes. First, there appears a three-line strophe (Num 23:21–22) that opens with a line attesting two verbs referring to sight, הִבִּיט "perceive" and רָאָה "see," just as Num 23:9ab exhibits the roots רָאָה "see" and שׁוּר "apprehend." Following this, there appears a two-line strophe (Num 23:23) similarly demarcated by the particle כִּי, which undertakes a similar shift from the statements in the two preceding strophes—no human, not even Balaam, is capable of changing the course that God has set (Num 23:19–20); Israel is secure in their connection with their God (Num 23:21–22)—to elaborate on these respective points in this strophe and the one that follows (Num 23:24).³²² In addition to recasting features from the single bicolon Num 23:9ab, these two strophes in the second oracle (Num 23:21–22; Num 23:23) share another highly suggestive connection in the similar wording of their opening couplets: לֹא בְיִשְׂרָאֵל / לֹא בְיַעֲקֹב "No ____ in Jacob; no ____ in Israel." Moreover, it is noteworthy that in the exact center of the five lines comprising these

oracle, including Num 23:7cd. However, in my view the content of Num 23:19ab fits better with the two couplets that follow it, hence my inclusion of it in the three-line strophe Num 23:19–20.

³²² In both of these poems, Tosato 1979: 100–101 and 103–104 recognized כִּי as demarcating the beginning of a new strophe, but failed to observe its function as an indicator of the shift between each respective poem's two rhetorical "halves." This is of particular concern in the second poem, which Tosato divided into five strophes, not four, attributing to them a rather forced concentric ABCB'A' structure on the basis of tenuous and ultimately unpersuasive evidence. Thus, his analysis likely would have benefited from closer attention to this particular detail.

two strophes, we encounter the refrain *לוֹ מוֹצִיאָם מִמִּצְרַיִם \ כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רְאָם* “El, their liberator from Egypt, / is like the horns of a wild ox for him” (Num 23:22), which is repeated again in the third oracle.

The first oracle’s second strophe ends with a couplet (Num 23:9cd) that calls attention to the distinctive quality of the people of Israel, by way of the opening expression *הִנֵּה עָם* “Behold, a people....” The couplet concludes with the passive Hitpa^ʿel *יִתְחַשֵּׁב* “is (not) reckoned,” which was discussed in Chapter 3.³²³ Turning to the second oracle, we encounter a two-line strophe (Num 23:24) whose first line parallels Num 23:9cd in both of these aspects: it begins with the identical phrase *הִנֵּה עָם* “Behold, a people....,” and it concludes with the Hitpa^ʿel *יִתְנַשֵּׂא* “rouses itself.” The remainder of the strophe expands the lion metaphor by graphically describing its killing and consuming of prey (Num 23:24cd).

Thus, the first two strophes of Balaam’s initial poetic utterance are adapted and expanded, line by line, to form the entire content of the second oracle. This remarkably systematic series of connections stands as compelling evidence of a single unifying compositional impetus. The only significant section in the first oracle that lacks an analogue in the second is the concluding strophe (Num 23:10), in which Balaam responds to the clear prosperity of Israel by wishing the same fate upon himself. As it turns out, however, the analogue is to be found not in Balaam’s poetic utterance, but in the action following the second oracle: having declaimed within the oracle itself the absence of divinatory practices in Israel, he proceeds in Num 24:1 to reaffirm his alignment with Israel by himself abandoning these very practices. Thus, the connection that Balaam draws between himself and Israel is expressed first

³²³ See above, pp. 98–105.

through speech, and then through action—a dichotomy whose significance in this pericope I have examined elsewhere.³²⁴

A shift occurs in the third and fourth oracles, whereby the introductory couplet of the previous two poems becomes a full strophe in which Balaam ascribes to himself a range of prophetic titles. In the third oracle, this strophe consists of a bicolon and a tricolon (Num 24:3–4). The remainder of the poem consists of a series of three-line strophes.³²⁵ In the first (Num 24:5–6), Israel’s dwellings are described by means of a series of lush floral similes. The next strophe (Num 24:7–8ab) picks up on this series and on the concurrent references to water, replacing simile with metaphor in stating the bounty experienced by Israel. Beginning with this opening bicolon (Num 24:7ab), the strophe presents an escalating series of couplets that move from Israel’s internal prosperity to its success over and above other nations (Num 24:7cd), and thence to a slightly altered repetition of the refrain introduced in the second oracle (Num 24:8ab). The final strophe (Num 24:8cde–9), whose opening colon is loosely linked to that of the preceding strophe by means of some phonetic similarities, returns to an expression of domination by force, again employing lion imagery in its second line, and concludes with a recasting of the well-known formula from Gen 12:3: מְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ \ “Those who bless you are blessed, / and those who curse you are cursed” (Num 24:9cd). Thus, the poem breaks down as follows:

³²⁴ See above, p. 426.

³²⁵ As with the second oracle, Fokkerman 2001: 211 presented a different poetic breakdown for this text, but did not discuss his preference.

3a	נֹאֵם בִּלְעָם בֶּנוֹ בְּעֹר	Utterance of Balaam son of Be ^c or,
b	וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵיִן:	and utterance of the hero, pierced-open of eye;
4a	נֹאֵם שֹׁמֵעַ אִמְרֵי־אֵל	utterance of the hearer of the sayings of El,
b	אֲשֶׁר מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יְיָ	who sees the vision of Shadday,
c	נָפֹל וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיו:	prostrate and uncovered of eyes.
5a	מִה־טֹּבוֹ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב	How good are your tents, O Jacob,
b	מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:	your dwellings, O Israel!
6a	כַּנְּחָלִים נָטְיוּ	Like palm trees they are stretched out,
b	כַּגִּנֹּת עַל־נָהָר	like gardens along a river;
c	כַּאֲהָלִים נָטַע יְהוָה	like aloes Yahweh has planted,
d	כַּאֲרָזִים עַל־מַיִם:	like cedars along water.
7a	יִזְלֹ-מַיִם מִדָּלְיוֹ	Water drips from his boughs,
b	וְזֶרְעוֹ בַּמַּיִם רַבִּים	and his seed is in many waters.
c	וְיָרֵם מֵאַגַּג מֶלֶכּוֹ	And his king shall be exalted above Agag,
d	וְתִנָּשָׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ:	and his kingdom shall be lifted up.
8a	אֵל מוֹצִיאֲוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם	El, his liberator from Egypt,
b	כְּתוֹעֶפֶת רֶאֱם לּוֹ	is like the horns of a wild ox for him.
c	יֹאכֹל גּוֹיִם צִרְיוֹ	He consumes nations, his oppressors,
d	וְעֲצָמֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרֹם	and their bones he devours,
e	וְחִצָּיו יִמְחֹץ:	and (with) his arrows smites.
9a	כָּרַע שֹׁכֵב כַּאֲרִי	He crouches, laying in wait like a lion;
b	וְכֹלְבִיָּא מִי יִקְיָמנוּ	and like a lion, who will rouse him?
c	מְבָרְכֶיךָ בְּרוּךְ	Those who bless you are blessed,
d	וְאֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר:	and those who curse you are cursed.

Although the connections between this oracle and the prior one are less systematic than those between the first and second oracles, nevertheless we find here a number of important formal developments that draw on the material presented in the preceding poem. Specifically, in view of the second poem's ABA'B' structure, it is the B and B' strophes (Num 23:21–22, 24) that provide the basis for the third oracle's expansions. Again, a synoptic layout of the two poems is helpful:

Second Oracle		Third Oracle	
23:18a	קום בלק ושמע	נאם בלעם בנו בער	24:3a
b	האזינה עדי בנו צפר:	ונאם הגבר שתם העין:	b
		נאם שמע אמרי־אל	4a
		אשר מחזה שדי יחזה	b
		נפל וגלוי עינים:	c
<hr/>			
19a	לא איש אל ויכזב	מה־טבו אהליך יעקב	5a
b	ובן־אדם ויתנחם	משכנת־ך ישראל:	b
c	ההוא אמר ולא יעשה	כנחלים נטיו	6a
d	ודבר ולא יקימנה:	כגנת עלי נהר	b
20a	הנה ברך לקחתי	כאהלים נטע יהוה	c
b	וברך ולא אשיבנה:	כארזים עלי־מים:	d
<hr/>			
21a	לא־הביט און ביעקב	יזל מים מדליו	7a
b	ולא־ראה עמל בישראל	וזרעו במים רבים	b
c	יהוה אלהיו עמו	וירם מאגג מלכו	c
d	ותרועת מלך בו:	ותנשא מלכתו:	d
22a	אל מוציאם ממצרים	אל מוציאו ממצרים	8a
b	כתועפת ראם לו:	כתועפת ראם לו	b
<hr/>			
23a	כי לא־נחש בי		
b	ולא־קסם בישראל		
c	כעת יאמר ליעקב		
d	ולישראל מה־פעל אל:		
<hr/>			
24a	הק־עם כלביא יקום	יאכל גוים צריו	c
b	וכארי יתנשא	ועצמתיהם יגרם	d
		וחציו ימחץ:	e
c	לא ישכב עדי־אכל טרף	כרע שכב כארי	9a
d	ודם חללים ישתה:	וכלביא מי יקימנו	b
		מברכיד ברוך	c
		וארריך ארור:	d

In terms of content, the link between these two poems is considerably less direct than that between the first and second oracles. Nevertheless, a variety of significant connections present themselves. As shown here, the second full strophe of the second oracle (Num 23:21–22) is expanded in the third oracle into two strophes

(Num 24:5–6, 7–8ab) by way of the recurrence of a series of four elements in precisely the same order that they occur in the earlier poem: first, the parallel pair יַעֲקֹב // יִשְׂרָאֵל “Jacob // Israel;” second, the divine name Yahweh; third, a reference to kingship by way of the root מָלַךְ; and fourth, the refrain, which constitutes the concluding line of a three-line strophe in both poems.

Likewise, the final strophes of both poems exhibit a number of similarities. In the second oracle, this strophe (Num 23:24) consists of a couplet in which parallel lion similes appear, and a second couplet expressing overwhelming destructive might, partially by means of the word אָכַל “devour.” The third oracle’s reworking of this material inverts this order, beginning with a tricolon (Num 24:8cde) detailing the destruction of enemies that similarly utilizes the root אָכַל, and then proceeding with a bicolon employing additional lion imagery in which the two words used for “lion” (לָבִיא and אֶרֶי) are reversed,³²⁶ but as before, לָבִיא is associated closely with the root קוּם. Note also that both strophes prominently attest the root שָׁכַב in their figurative speech.

Above, I noted that the B' strophe in the second oracle (Num 23:24) develops the theme expressed in the B strophe (Num 23:21–22), namely that Israel’s connection with Yahweh provides them with inviolable security. In that poem, the B' strophe’s development consists of an extension of internal security to external dominance. The theme explored in these two strophes is expanded in the third oracle into three strophes: in addition to presentations of Israel’s serene and luxurious existence (internal) and its formidable might (external) in the first and third strophes, the

³²⁶ This may be considered an instance of Seidel’s Law, whereby an earlier passage is cited at a later point with certain aspects presented in reverse. See Seidel 1978, which is a reprint of the original 1955–1956 publication in which Moshe Seidel first described the device. His approach has undergone refinement in subsequent scholarship. See, e.g., the literature cited in Levinson 2002: 18–19 n. 51.

intervening strophe creates a bridge between the two, indicating both Israel's prosperity and its supremacy over other nations.

Aside from its introductory strophe, which expands that of the previous poem by adding a single colon, the fourth oracle deviates entirely from the connective pattern established in Balaam's earlier utterances. It is important to recall that the surrounding narrative calls explicit attention to this, by way of Balaam's statement that unlike his prior poems, this prophetic speech as a whole will be devoted to the prediction of future events:

וְעַתָּה הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי לְכָה אֵיעָצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה לְעַמְּךָ בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים:
“And now, behold, I go to my people. Come, I will counsel you
(regarding) what this people will do to your people in the end of days.”
(Num 24:14)

From this perspective it is unsurprising that the poem bears a less clear connection to the other oracles, since the only statement in the preceding three poems that appears to refer to future events is the couplet Num 24:7cd in the third oracle. That said, however, there remain in this poem a few noteworthy links to the prior ones.

The oracle as a whole breaks down into three strophes, the first of which (Num 24:15–16) is the aforementioned expansion on the introductory sequence attested previously in the third oracle. Here, the addition of the colon וְיֵדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן “and knower of the knowledge of Elyon” (Num 24:16b) results in a series of three bicola, rather than the bicolon–tricolon combination attested in the earlier attestation. This is facilitated further by the omission of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר in Num 24:16c, which renders this colon more suitable as the A-component of the final couplet. Following this strophe appears another of two lines (Num 24:17abcd) that explicates the future-oriented temporal character of the poem, and then declares the theme of the oracle by describing a ruler who will arise from Jacob/Israel. The translation of the phrase דָּרָךְ

בוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב as “A sprout from Jacob shall rule” is based on the two-part interpretation of Shelomo Morag.³²⁷ First, he suggested that the root דָּרַךְ exhibits a semantic development from “trample, tread” to “rule,” as in Ugaritic; and second, he highlighted a semantic relationship across the Semitic languages between the realms of light and flora, comparing the word בוֹכֵב to Arabic نَجْم, which means both “star” and “grass, low herb,” and also pointing out that נִבֵּט “bud” corresponds etymologically to Akkadian *nabāṭu* “be(come) bright, shine.” This enabled him to propose the meaning “sprout” for בוֹכֵב, which stands as a better parallel for שִׁבֵּט “staff.” In any case, however one interprets the implications of the parallel metaphors in this couplet, the poem’s concluding three-line strophe (Num 24:17ef–19) clarifies the intent of the image by presenting a series of exploits involving forcible conquest and destruction. According to this scheme, the poem reads as follows:

15a	נֹאֵם בִּלְעָם בְּנוֹ בְּעֹר	Utterance of Balaam son of Be ^o r,
b	וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵיִן:	and utterance of the hero, pierced-open of eye;
16a	נֹאֵם שִׁמְעַת אֶמְרֵי־אֵל	utterance of the hearer of the sayings of El,
b	וְיָדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן	and knower of the knowledge of Elyon;
c	מִחֲזֵה שְׂדֵי יְחִיזָה	seer of the vision of Shadday,
d	נִפְלַל וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיו:	prostrate and uncovered of eyes.
17a	אֶרְאֶנּוּ וְלֹא עַתָּה	I see it, but not now,
b	אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב	I apprehend it, but not soon:
c	דָּרַךְ בּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב	A sprout from Jacob will rule,
d	וְקֵם שִׁבֵּט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל	and a staff from Israel will rise.

³²⁷ This interpretation is presented in Morag 1995: 60–62.

e	וּמַחֵץ פְּאַתֵי מוֹאָב	And he will smite the corners of Moab
f	וּמִקְרָקֶר כָּל־בְּנֵי־שֵׁט:	and the region of all the children of Seth;
18a	וְהָיָה אֲדוֹם יְרֵשָׁה	and Edom shall be an inheritance,
b	וְהָיָה יְרֵשָׁה שְׂעִיר אִיבָיו	and an inheritance shall be Se'ir—his enemies.
c	וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה חֵיל:	And Israel does valorously,
19a	וְיֵרֵד מִיַּעֲקֹב	and descends from Jacob,
b	וְהָאֵבִיד שְׂרִיד מְעִיר:	and destroys the remnant from the city.

In addition to the expanded version of the previous oracle's introductory strophe, this poem proceeds to open the next strophe with a couplet (Num 24:17ab) that employs precisely the same word pair attested in the first oracle (Num 23:9ab), namely *ראה // שור* "see // apprehend." The subsequent strophe brings to a climax the descriptions of destructive might that occur in the prior two poems, even reusing the word *מחץ* "smite" (Num 24:17e) from the third oracle (Num 24:8e); but here, the lion imagery is abandoned in favor of a specification of the targets of Israel's domination by force.

Although the oracles' historical implications occupy our attention elsewhere,³²⁸ it is worthwhile as we examine the schematic layout of these four major poems to consider a set of potential chronological referents within this material that appears to constitute a significant organizational principle. I refer specifically to the various references to kingship that occur across Balaam's poetic utterances. In the first oracle, no such reference exists; rather, Israel is praised instead for its sheer numbers. The second oracle refers to kingship only obliquely, with the word *מלך* occurring only as a *nomen rectum*: *וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ* "and the acclaim of a king is in him" (Num 23:21d). This suggests that, as a consequence of Yahweh's support as indicated in the preceding colon, there is something kingly or regal in Israel's character, perhaps even

³²⁸ The most direct examination of this matter will appear in Chapter 7.

the propensity to be a successful monarchy. In the third oracle, direct statements appear in parallel cola (Num 24:7cd) that speak of the success of Israel's king and kingdom, specifically referring to the king's exaltation over the Amaleqite king Agag, who was defeated by Saul. Finally, the references to **בֹּקֶב** "sprout" and **שֵׁבֶט** "staff" in the fourth oracle (Num 24:17cd) were interpreted by Rashi and Ibn Ezra as referring to David, partially on the basis of the immediately following references to "smiting the corners of Moab" (**וּמָחַץ פְּאַתֵי מוֹאָב**, Num 24:17e) and to the conquest of Edom/Se'ir (both are called a **יְרֵשָׁה** "inheritance" in Num 24:18ab).³²⁹ Indeed, David's subjugation of the two regions identified explicitly here is recorded in 2 Sam 8:2, 12, 14. Moreover, Morag called attention to the idiomatic possibilities in the word **בֹּקֶב** "sprout," which, he proposed, could bear the figurative meaning "offspring" or even "successor."³³⁰ This latter rendering accords beautifully with an interpretation of the fourth oracle as referring to David, and all the more so in light of the prior oracle's implicit reference to Saul.³³¹

To be sure, this evidence likely should be viewed not as representative of the poems' major thrust, whether individually or collectively, except perhaps in the case of the fourth oracle, whose content is dominated by references to the conquest of specific nations adjacent to Israel. Rather, it is to be seen as a series of subtler points that provide touchstones according to which the oracles' thematic development can be traced. For this reason, it is important to exercise caution as we evaluate the significance of this pattern.

³²⁹ Katzenelenbogen et al. 1986–1993: 6:225. See also Milgrom 1990: 207 and 322 n. 51.

³³⁰ Morag 1995: 62.

³³¹ In many ways, these observations accord quite closely with those presented in Mowinckel 1930: 247–248, and also to a somewhat lesser extent with those in Albright 1944: 227. See also Rofé 1979: 28.

Nevertheless, it is striking that this aspect of Balaam's four oracles, when taken in this way, presents in perfect sequence a chronological schema of Israel's pre-monarchic and early monarchic history as envisioned in the narratives of the Bible. Accordingly, the first oracle may be seen as representative of the Wandering Period, during which Israel was a numerous people without an established system of rule. The second oracle could represent the period of Israel's incursions into the Promised Land, with the lion imagery of Num 23:24 standing as an indication of their ferocity as a conquering force, and the statement in Num 23:21d referring to their first steps along the path toward monarchy. The third oracle's implicit reference to the reign of Saul would represent Israel's initial proto-monarchy, together with both the concomitant establishment of internal security as expressed in the figurative language of Num 24:6, and the still greater force of Israel's might reflected in the expansion of the lion imagery in Num 24:9. Finally, the fourth oracle would appear to focus on the arrival of the great King David, whose firmly established kingdom permits the concern of the poem to rest solely on the conquest of neighboring nations, in the most aggressive formulations of Israel's might presented anywhere in the pericope (Num 24:17ef–19).

With this in mind, it is worthwhile to take a moment to consider the floral imagery that occurs in the third oracle, which would refer to the first inception of a true monarchy for Israel according to the above scheme. Each of the four forms of plant life mentioned in Num 24:6, palms–gardens–aloes–cedars, contributes a unique angle to the verse's overall picture of lush serenity. Palm groves typically grow in arid regions where groundwater or surface water is present, such as wadis and desert oases.³³² According to Michael Zohary, a date palm "[b]egin[s] to bear fruit at the age

³³² King–Stager 2001: 103.

of five years,”³³³ and Christopher J. Eyre indicated that the tree takes “about twenty years to reach full productivity.”³³⁴ From this standpoint, the palms of Num 24:6a suggest not only fertility and abundance, but also the stability and longevity that a people would look to its king to provide and maintain. The gardens of the next colon (Num 24:6b), whose location עַל־נָהָר “along a river” represents a different type of terrain, call to mind a significant investment of resources purely for the sake of luxury: this is not a crop to be harvested, but a carefully cultivated landscape intended for human enjoyment. Likewise, the aloes in Num 24:6c would have been prized for their aromatic resin, and hence would constitute a luxury item. Moreover, Israel’s primary access to the succulent plant and products made from it would have been via trade, since it is “an exotic plant not found in Israel”³³⁵ growing instead in the dry, rocky terrain of Yemen and Soqatra. Finally, the cedars in the verse’s final colon grow at elevations above 5000 feet³³⁶ and did not lend themselves to intensive agricultural production per se, but still were in extremely high demand, for resin and oil as well as timber.³³⁷

This particular array of plant life, then, felicitously suggests a carefully selected and uniquely balanced combination of fertility, security, longevity, and luxury. In addition, the range of terrain types to which this sequence alludes—oasis, flood plain, desert, and mountain—appears thoughtfully calculated to depict a large and diverse geographical area, which works together with this verse’s sense of stable security to suggest the domain of a firmly established monarchy. The couplet that

³³³ Zohary 1982: 61.

³³⁴ Eyre 1995: 183.

³³⁵ Milgrom 1990: 204.

³³⁶ Gilbert 1995: 156.

³³⁷ King–Stager 2001: 110.

follows (Num 24:7ab) presents further statements of water in excess, thereby reinforcing the notion of abundance and prosperity. But in addition, the second colon of this pair, which reads וְזָרְעוֹ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים “and his seed is in many waters,” and which normally is understood as a simple indicator of abundance,³³⁸ might be taken with a slightly different nuance. Specifically, in line with the range of different kinds of terrain implied in the previous verse, one might interpret “many waters” here as a reference to a similar range of water “types,” such as groundwater, river water, irrigation, dew, rainwater, and so on. In this way, the couplet in Num 24:17ab would express neatly parallel expressions of prosperity, with the first clause, יִזְלֹ-מַיִם מִדָּלְיוֹ “Water drips from his boughs,” indicating an excess of water (quantitative), while the second suggests unrestricted access to a variety of different water sources (qualitative).

In sum, the floral imagery in the third oracle is not a simple assortment of ornamental references to plant life, but rather a carefully constructed sequence that transmits a rich and multilayered network of meanings. This sequence serves effectively in the employ of the staged chronological trajectory that I am proposing for the oracles, by simultaneously presenting in the third oracle a reference to Israel’s first monarchy (Num 24:17cd) and a series of expressions pointing to the internal peace and prosperity associated with that development (Num 24:16, extended in 17ab). Again, this inward focus is replaced in the fourth poem, where the perspective shifts outward to conquest beyond the bounds of Israel. If indeed the fourth oracle refers to David, this shift in focus may imply that according to the perspective suggested here, by the time of David’s reign the kingdom experienced such internal success that it

³³⁸ NJPS, for instance, translates מַיִם רַבִּים as “much water” rather than “many waters.”

does not warrant additional mention in the fourth oracle, in which Israel's attention is directed, therefore, entirely to external matters.

The three brief codas concluding Balaam's series of prophetic utterances are not long enough to exhibit significant poetic structure in themselves. However, if we continue with the hypothesis I have just described regarding the longer poems, according to which they proceed to a climax in the fourth oracle's references to David's exploits in the vicinity of Israel, we see that these brief sections pick up on the chronological theme in a particularly meaningful way. For the sake of reference, I present here these three brief poetic statements:

<p>רִאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עַמְלֵק וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ עַדִּי אֲבָד׃</p>	<p>First of the nations is Amaleq, but its fate (goes) to destruction. (Num 24:20)</p>
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<p>אֵיתָן מוֹשְׁבֶיךָ וְשֵׁים בְּסֻלַּע קִנְדָּה׃ כִּי אִם־יְהִיָּה לְבַעַר קִיִּין עַד־מָה אֲשׁוּר תִּשְׁבֶּד׃</p>	<p>Permanent are your dwellings, and your nest is placed in the crevice. Nevertheless, Qayin will be for a conflagration, when Assyria captures you. (Num 24:21–22)</p>
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<p>אֹי מִי יִחִיָּה מִשְׁמֹו אֵל׃ וְצִיִּים מִיַּד כִּתִּיִּים וְעֲנוּ אֲשׁוּר וְעֲנוּ־עֵבֶר וְגַם־הוּא עַדִּי אֲבָד׃</p>	<p>Alas, who can live apart from El's determination? Though boats (come) from the direction of Kittim, and afflict Assyria, and afflict Eber, even he (goes) to destruction. (Num 24:23–24)</p>
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These three short oracles are notoriously challenging, even termed by Milgrom “among the most difficult in all Scripture.”³³⁹ Their inherent obscurity

³³⁹ Milgrom 1990: 209.

notwithstanding, I submit the following suggestion as a basis for their interpretation. In Chapter 3, I proposed a date for this pericope somewhere in the latter half of the 8th century BCE.³⁴⁰ If we take up this hypothesis once again and apply it to this material, we find that like the four longer poems, the utterances concluding *Sefer Bil'am* exhibit a chronological scheme. Here, however, the three sections correspond respectively to past, present and future. The prophecy against Amaleq takes up the theme of David's conquests introduced in the immediately preceding oracle, and looks back to his reign by referring to his success against yet another people, as documented in 1 Samuel 30, and later in 2 Sam 8:12.

In the Samuel account of Israel's defeat of the Amaleqites, the Kenites are among those allowed to share in the spoils (1 Sam 30:29), which may help explain Balaam's concern with them in his next utterance. Here, the Kenites are described positively, but also warned of their destruction and captivity at the hands of Assyria. In Judg 4:11 we are informed of a group of Kenites living north of the Galilee, who certainly would have been under threat from the Assyrians around the time of Tiglath-Pileser III's annexation of Damascus in 732. Given our working hypothesis for the dating of *Sefer Bil'am*, this utterance is eminently suitable as a reference to present time, regardless of whether or not one believes the content of the utterance, Assyria's capture of the Kenites, to have happened already at the time of composition.

This perspective is strengthened still further by the final utterance. Here, the reference to צִים מִיַּד כִּתִּים “ships from the direction of Kittim” likely should be interpreted not as a literal reference to residents of the island of Cyprus itself, but rather as a more general idiom broadly designating Mediterranean peoples, as in the

³⁴⁰ See above, pp. 185–187.

Arad letters³⁴¹ and also in later biblical³⁴² and postbiblical literature.³⁴³ One notes in particular that the ships are not identified as coming from Cyprus *specifically*, but rather מִיַּד כְּתִים “from the *direction* of Kittim.” The thrust of the utterance seems to be that even if a future conqueror is able to overcome the greatest known military power, that is, Assyria, he still will be subject to the will of El. The nonspecific character of this statement, combined with the implied heralding of Assyria as a consummate destructive force, suggests that we see here the limit of the author’s historical knowledge, and that the utterance presents a theologicized outlook on whatever future events may transpire.³⁴⁴

Thus, according to the interpretive hypotheses I have offered, all of Balaam’s oracles, which significantly number seven in all,³⁴⁵ are mapped along a chronological pattern that moves stage by stage through time, as follows:

First oracle: Wandering	
Second oracle: Pre-monarchy	
Third oracle: Early Monarchy	
Fourth oracle: David’s Reign	Fifth oracle: Past (David’s reign)
	Sixth oracle: Present (Assyrian threat)
	Seventh oracle: Future (unspecified events)

³⁴¹ See Aharoni 1986: 12–13.

³⁴² See Dan 11:30, where the phrase צִיִּים כְּתִים refers to Roman galleys.

³⁴³ Most notably, the Dead Sea Scrolls, wherein כְּתִים likewise refers to Rome. See Vermes 1997: 17.

³⁴⁴ J. C. de Moor and others have interpreted this oracle as a reference to the Sea Peoples, whose destructive activities along the Levantine coast are considered commonly to have been the impetus for the end of the Late Bronze Age (12th century BCE; see de Moor 1997: 248–249). Although this does not comport with my hypothesis in a literal sense, it is possible that some sort of historical memory of this group’s incursions in the Levant could stand as the impetus for such an expression in this context, as a means of describing unspecified yet unimaginable destruction. Alternatively, Hedwige Rouillard (1985: 461–464) interpreted this as a reference to Alexander dating from the Seleucid period.

³⁴⁵ This observation appears to have gone unremarked in prior scholarship, a fact that may reflect the prevalence of interpretations that view the oracles as a haphazard collection deriving from disparate sources.

In addition, it is worthwhile to consider the geographical implications of the peoples referenced in the oracles, and specifically those who are presented as enemies of Israel. These are:

- Moab
- the “children of Seth”
- Edom/Se^cir
- Amaleq (and their king Agag)
- the Kenites
- Assyria
- the “ships from the direction of Kittim”
- Eber

Of this group, three may be set aside immediately. The phrase כָּל-בְּנֵי-שֵׁט “all the children of Seth” in Num 24:17 comes across as a collective term for many peoples. Milgrom described it as “a general designation for all the nomadic groups descended from Abraham,”³⁴⁶ and as such it contributes little to an examination of the specific peoples in question here. The Kenites are presented in a positive light, and the identity of Eber, though somewhat obscure, may refer to the area west of the Euphrates, that is, (הַנְּהָר) עֵבֶר “(the land) across the river (from Assyria),” and accordingly would designate the area occupied by the westward-expanding Assyrian empire.³⁴⁷ Thus we are left with Moab, Edom/Se^cir, Amaleq, Assyria, and the ships from the West.

The use of style-switching and setting-switching in *Sefer Bil^cam* led me to propose in Chapter 3 that the pericope is of Judahite origin.³⁴⁸ Balaam’s fourth oracle may provide additional support for this notion in its reference only to Moab and Edom/Se^cir, since the account of David’s victories over these peoples in 2 Samuel 8

³⁴⁶ Milgrom 1990: 208.

³⁴⁷ See, e.g., Levine 2000: 206.

³⁴⁸ See above, pp. 184–187.

also refers to other groups, notably including the Arameans of Syria and the Ammonites. Consequently, it is striking that Balaam's fourth oracle refers only to peoples neighboring Judah, and makes no mention of those who are more distant and share borders with the northern kingdom.³⁴⁹ If we take Judah as the center of the pericope's perspective on this basis, the groups specifically identified as enemies of Israel present a remarkable geographical picture: Moab is to the east of Judah; Edom/Se'ir is to the south; Assyria's activities in the region would have begun in the north; Amaleq was a group residing primarily in areas internal to Judah; and the ships represent a general reference to peoples to the west across the Mediterranean. Thus, the oracular material concluding the pericope, beginning with the fourth of the longer poems, presents a holistic geographical schema by making explicit mention of Israel's adversaries in all directions, including internally. Assuming this suggestion is correct, this feature would stand side-by-side with the proposed chronological arrangement discussed above as yet another striking organizational principle in *Sefer Bil'am*.

At this point it is important to highlight an entirely different perspective on these brief poetic sections. Milgrom presented all of the relevant data, although he stopped short of a firm statement of the view in question.³⁵⁰ This interpretation revolves around a different identification of two of the peoples named in the fourth and subsequent oracles, namely, כְּלִבְנֵי־שֵׁט (Num 24:17) and אֲשֹׁר (Num 24:22, 24). In the first case, Milgrom indicated that the "children of Seth" are "[p]robably [to be] identified with the tribal Shutu mentioned in the Egyptian execration texts of the early

³⁴⁹ The Ammonites are mentioned in only two verses in the entire Torah, suggesting that they were not a group of great prominence at the time of the material's composition. Their absence here may reflect the same situation.

³⁵⁰ See Milgrom 1990: 207–210. Rendsburg (private communication) expressed a preference for the understanding toward which Milgrom's comments point.

second millennium B.C.E. as a nomadic group somewhere in Canaan.”³⁵¹ This group also may receive indirect mention in the Ugaritic epic of ʿAqhat (see *CAT* 1.18:IV:6 [partially broken], 27; 1.19:IV:53, 57). In all but the last of these places, the word *št* appears as part of the title *mhr . št*, applied appositively to Yaṭpan. According to Margalit, the phrase is to be translated “warrior of Shutu,”³⁵² a reading accepted by Simon Parker, who glossed the title “the Sutean warrior.”³⁵³ As for the term אֲשֻׁר, Milgrom suggested that this name refers to a nomadic group called the Asshurim, mentioned elsewhere only in Gen 25:3, 18 and Ps 83:9.³⁵⁴

If these suggestions are correct, then all of the peoples named by Balaam in these sections would be desert peoples in the vicinity of Judah. Such an interpretation would suggest that this material points not to the historical circumstances of the 8th century BCE, but rather to encounters between the Israelites and other peoples in the region before the establishment of the United Monarchy. This would permit the entire pericope to be dated as early as the 10th century BCE; and it also would appear to comport with J. C. de Moor’s contention that the צִים מִיַּד כְּתִים “ships from the direction of Kittim” (Num 24:24) refers to the activities of the Sea Peoples at the end of the Late Bronze Age (12th century BCE).³⁵⁵ This assessment stands as an elegant means of understanding the obscure material in Balaam’s final oracles, without recourse to the literary explanations articulated at length above.

However, there remain several troubling aspects of such a hypothesis. The Ugaritic references to the Shutu are not at all certain, as demonstrated in *DULAT*,

³⁵¹ Milgrom 1990: 208.

³⁵² Margalit 1983: 96–99.

³⁵³ Parker 1997: 65, 66, 78. The term may appear again in *CAT* 1.19:IV:59, but the context is damaged, and Parker’s rendering (1997: 78) argues against this possibility.

³⁵⁴ Milgrom 1990: 209, 210.

³⁵⁵ See above, pp. 2 and 473 n. 344.

where the word *št* is understood as “tearing apart, separation, desolation,” and the phrase *mhr . št* is glossed accordingly as “the destructive warrior.”³⁵⁶ Aside from these uncertain references, which themselves predate the biblical material by centuries, the only other mentions of the group derive from as much as a millennium prior to the text from Numbers. That a textual witness from the Bible—even one as early as the 10th century—exists for this group represents an assumption of considerable magnitude. In addition, this is the only people identified in Balaam’s oracles by means of a phrase, *בְּנֵי-שֵׁט* “children of Seth,” rather than the gentonym alone. This suggests that a more general reading of the term as a broad reference to the inhabitants of the region may be appropriate. Indeed, as noted above, Milgrom himself appears to have concurred with this assessment. After his identification of this term with the Shutu, he continued, “Hence, this is a general designation for all the nomadic groups descended from Abraham....”³⁵⁷

As for the Asshurim, whose identity in the Bible is an enigma and who are unattested outside of this corpus, the evidence suggesting that the term *אֲשּׁוּר* refers to this group in the present context, rather than to Assyria, is entirely circumstantial and relies on one’s acceptance of the other elements of the larger hypothesis in question. With respect to both *אֲשּׁוּר* and *בְּנֵי-שֵׁט*, then, this alternative interpretation necessitates overlooking the plain surface meaning of these terms—the *peshat*, as it were—in favor of tenuous connections with obscure groups about which nothing substantial is known.

Moreover, the incompatibility between this hypothesis and the geographical and chronological schemata evident in the poems’ structure and organization, as

³⁵⁶ *DULAT*, s.v. *št* III.

³⁵⁷ Milgrom 1990: 208.

articulated above, reveals that such an interpretation is more impressionistic than the position I have espoused in this study, since it does not account for the presentation of the text as it stands in as detailed or systematic a fashion. Nor does the alternative view address the fact that the historical circumstances of the 8th century, to which the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions have been dated, represent a felicitous context for the permeation of traditions about Balaam into the Judahite sphere. Consequently, although the elegant simplicity of this hypothesis is noteworthy, I maintain that the interpretation of Balaam's final oracles that I have expressed above stands as the best fit between the text and the relevant historical data.

Individual Literary Devices as Building Blocks for the Deployment of Major Themes

The challenges of *Sefer Bil'am*, which increase as the pericope proceeds, will not be solved in the space of a single study. Nevertheless, this sustained examination of a variety of literary devices evident in the text has yielded a number of unique interpretive hypotheses that speak to the fruitfulness of a literarily attuned approach to this material. Although these hypotheses range in generic context from prose to poetry, in scope from minute to sweeping, and in certainty from undeniable to purely conjectural, their strength lies in their apprehension of the text as a unified work. Specifically, I have approached the many cruxes, difficulties, and enigmas in the pericope from the standpoint that they are not "problems" to be attributed to editorial work or textual corruption, a view that ultimately can amount, at its worst, to the simple avoidance of the task of finding solutions for such challenges. Rather, I have attempted to remain open to the possibility that while the material in this pericope evinces numerous obscurities, the way to their clarification may lie in the discovery of an overarching system of internal logic, a poetics that has guided the development of

the text as it stands. To be sure, irrefutable proof of this kind of guiding principle remains elusive; but the degree to which the approach undertaken here has facilitated new perspectives that differ, quite drastically at times, from those offered in prior discourse indicates that there remains a wealth of untapped interpretive possibilities that are yet to be explored, in this specific pericope and, by extension, in biblical literature more generally. The justification for such an approach, therefore, lies in its provision of access to precisely these kinds of new perspectives.

CHAPTER 6
LITERARY THEMES AND CONTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS
IN *SEFER BIL^cAM*

Introductory Remarks

Having considered the nature and mechanics of the various literary devices discussed in the previous chapter, we turn now to an examination of literary aspects of *Sefer Bil^cam* that operate on a larger scale. The first part of this chapter explores tropes and themes internal to the pericope itself, which frequently build directly upon the perspectives and concepts intimated by the smaller-scale literary devices discussed above. The second part of the chapter examines the interaction between this pericope and its broader biblical context, considering its connections both with the immediately surrounding material and with passages situated at some distance from Numbers 22–24.

Themes in Sefer Bil^cam

Already, we have encountered important thematic expressions in this text that are asserted cumulatively by means of numerous literary details, and that extend in some cases across most or all of the pericope, including both prose and poetry, along arcs whose contours are defined by extensive patterns of recurring and/or rigorously organized indicators. It is worthwhile here to consolidate and reiterate the broader synthetic observations resulting from the above examination of these features, in the form of a concise array of themes attributable to *Sefer Bil^cam* on the basis of this concrete textual and literary evidence. This discussion, however, is not limited solely to themes that I have identified previously. Rather, these are incorporated into a

broader list that includes other important themes, as well as certain additional tropes recognizable from their attestations elsewhere in biblical literature.

The Greatness of Israel as Indicative of a Unique Connection to the Divine

The affirmation of Israel's greatness probably is the most immediate theme one encounters in the pericope as a whole, in large part because it stands as the primary subject of Balaam's oracles. In addition, however, I detailed above how the tightly structured prose introduction to the pericope (Num 22:2–5) pushes this very point to the foreground.¹ Other indicators in the prose guide us in this direction as well, such as God's initial response to Balaam in Num 22:12, where he instructs Balaam not to curse Israel "because it is blessed" (כִּי בֵרֻךְ הוּא). But the most pointed and specific elaborations of Israel's greatness arise later, in the poetic oracles spoken by Balaam. There, Israel is identified as enviably numerous (Num 23:10); privy to direct communications of divine will (Num 23:23); secure and fertile (Num 24:6–7); and possessed of ferocious military prowess (Num 23:24; 24:8–9, 17–19). All of these traits are presented as signs confirming Israel's unique status (Num 23:9) as a people bearing a special connection to God, which is expressed most directly in the refrain appearing in the second and third oracles (Num 23:22; 24:8ab), and also in the brief but explicit statement to this effect in Num 23:21cd. Additional reinforcement is to be found in Balaam's oracular statements that Yahweh has blessed Israel, and hence has no intention of cursing them (Num 23:7–8, 19–20), and in the fourth oracle's expression of their overwhelming defeat of their enemies (Num 24:17–19).

¹ See above, pp. 439–443.

Because the theme of Israel's greatness is so overt, my isolation of it here may come across as a statement of the obvious. However, as we proceed through some of the deeper themes in the text, it will become clear that Israel's unique connection to the divine, as evident in these numerous attestations of their success and prosperity, actually operates as one of the most pertinent underpinnings of the pericope's message.

Lampooning the King of Moab

Against Israel's greatness as expressed in the pericope, there exists an equally overt balancing element in the satirical portrayal of Balaq, king of Moab. The combination of his importunate overestimation of the value of wealth and fame (Num 22:16–17; 24:11), his insistence on the meticulous repetition of empty ritual (Num 23:2, 14, 30), and his conviction that all of these things can provide him, or anyone, with the ability to bend the divine will to his own (Num 22:6, 17; 23:13, 27) result in an impression of Balaq as a man of exceedingly narrow vision. Despite an endless stream of divinely originating indicators that his desire to curse Israel will not be fulfilled, he unwaveringly belabors the same materialistic and worldly practices, evidently certain in each instance that the denial of his wishes is merely the result, alternately, of Balaam's refusal to cooperate or of some minute deficiency in his preparatory efforts.² Indeed, by the end of the pericope, all appearances indicate that Balaq has never moved any closer to an understanding of what has transpired.

As Jacob Milgrom pointed out, Balaq's status as the story's antagonist, as against the protagonist Balaam, provides additional means of lampooning the king.

² These competing alternatives are addressed above, pp. 399–404.

Specifically, as the succession of oracles proceeds from one to the next, Balaq is progressively downgraded in power and significance: “In the first oracle Balak is king of Moab (23:7); in the second, the son of Zippor (23:18), that is, an ordinary mortal; and in the third and fourth oracles he disappears entirely.”³ Moreover, the pericope ends with a final punctuation of this systematic denigration of the king. The encounter between Balaq and Balaam has transpired in Balaq’s homeland, thus requiring an extended journey on the part of the Aramean to reach the scene of the action. But in Num 24:25, we encounter the following statement:

וַיָּקָם בַּלְעָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לְמִקְוֵמוֹ וְגַם-בָּלָק הָלַךְ לְדֶרְכּוֹ:
 And Balaam rose and went and returned to his place, and Balaq also
 went on his way.

Robert Alter recalled that the statement “so-and-so returned to his place” is a formulaic way of indicating a character’s departure from the narrative, and indeed it serves here to demarcate the conclusion of *Sefer Bil'am*.⁴ But it is striking that Balaam, who has traveled so far to reach the present location, is described quite simply as returning to his *place*, while it is Balaq, in whose homeland the bulk of the story has unfolded, who goes on his *way*. Thus, the denigration of Balaq concludes with his being deprived, literally speaking, of a place to which to return, while the man he had hoped to hire to do his bidding, who has come from a distant land, is elevated above the king and awarded the final destination that the king is denied.

³ Milgrom 1990: 468.

⁴ Alter 2004: 816.

Negative Assessment of Divination and Empty Ritual Practices

Obsession with correct ritual procedure is criticized forcefully in *Sefer Bil'am*. In the previous chapter, I closely examined the sequence of formalized activities preceding the first two oracles, and also the third in truncated form.⁵ This pattern is presented as utterly ineffectual in producing the desired effect, or indeed any effect, on the divine message to follow. This is the case despite Balaq's repeated attempts to find a propitious location at which to follow the prescribed series of protocols. The pattern is so unproductive that Balaam abandons it mid-stream after the second oracle, setting aside divination in favor of direct prophetic inspiration (Num 24:1).

It is no coincidence that this verse intimately links divination with empty ritual. While it is never explicitly condemned, such human-initiated contact with the divine is presented as inferior to true prophecy, which is initiated by God. Nor can the expression of this view with respect to Israel in Num 23:23 be taken as an indicator that true prophecy is unique to Israel, since Balaam's abandonment of divination is followed shortly thereafter by the statement that וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים "upon him was the spirit of Elohim" (Num 24:2), and his subsequent oracles are voiced as genuine prophetic revelations.

The overall force of the pericope's perspectives on these matters is not that not that ritual practices are worthless and divination ineffectual, but rather that neither constitutes a means by which a human can evoke change in the world. Balaq's initial summons of Balaam is predicated on his belief that as a diviner, Balaam wields the power to bless and curse as he sees fit (Num 22:6). Likewise, his careful attention to ritual detail before each of the first three oracles betrays his similar belief that if he

⁵ See above, pp. 420–424.

performs the prescribed actions correctly, the divine message will shift to conform with his will. It is striking that as his repeated efforts in this regard are systematically thwarted, he only grows more frustrated, while Balaam, in contrast, learns from the process and adjusts his own actions to accord more closely with those of a true prophet.

Balaam's Transformative Journey from Mercenary Diviner to True Prophet

In the previous chapter I called attention to a sequence of repeated statements extending across the entire pericope that speaks to Balaam's relationship to the divine, and traced Balaam's gradually developing understanding of this relationship as the story proceeds.⁶ Recognition of this pattern is essential to an understanding of the full picture painted by the pericope, not only because it renders Balaam a marvelously rich and complex character, but because it is the only means for us to understand his otherwise obscure "vacillations between [the] apparently...diametrically opposed positions" of mantic and prophet.⁷ Here I offer a re-examination of this process of development, incorporating both my analysis of the previously identified pattern and my earlier discussion of the keyword קרא.⁸ I present the result as a series of stages, demarcated to an extent by these two features and further defined by the surrounding narrative content.

Balaam begins as *a mercenary diviner, content to take Balaq on as a business client, who does not correct misconceptions about his power over reality*. In his first encounter with Balaq's messengers, whom Balaq has sent to summon (לְקַרְא) him, he

⁶ See above, pp. 426–427.

⁷ Margalio 1990: 77.

⁸ The relevant sections are to be found above, pp. 314–319 and 424–428.

has an opportunity to contradict the king's belief, stated in Num 22:6, that אֲשֶׁר־תְּבָרֵךְ “whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.” He does not do so in Num 22:8, however, nor does he recount Balaq's statement to God in Num 22:10. Even after his first dialogue with God, he informs the emissaries (Num 22:13) that God will not allow him to go with them, but says nothing about God's instruction not to curse Israel. Whether Balaam himself agrees with Balaq's assessment remains at this point an open question.

Soon after, Balaq sends a second group of messengers who apparently offer Balaam an increased payment. Balaam responds by clarifying that the issue is not the fee, but rather his own obligation to abide by God's instructions. Thus, although he remains content to proceed if God allows him to do so, here he admits that his *actions* (לַעֲשׂוֹת, Num 22:18), at least, must conform to God's will. We may describe Balaam here as *a diviner, somewhat less mercenary since the fee is a non-issue, but still content to offer his services provided he receives divine permission to do so.*

In the theophany to follow, however, Balaam reveals a shortcoming in his understanding by failing to recognize the rhetorical thrust of God's communication to him. Balaam misreads God's statement (Num 22:20), which says that he may proceed if the men have come to summon (לְקַרְא) him, as permission to go along, since, after all, the men did summon (לְקַרְא) him (Num 22:5) in a purely literal sense. But the weight of the term קרא here implies something more, since it is not his mere presence that the men seek on behalf of their king, but the employment of Balaam's (ostensible) power to bless and curse. Thus, here Balaam is invited to recognize that since he himself is not the true source of this power, the messengers' summons is misdirected and he should not proceed with them. His failure to grasp this nuance suggests that on some level he, like Balaq, believes himself to be the object of this request, and thus to possess within himself some real power over the natural world. This is in spite of the

additional clue provided by God in the second half of the verse, where he clarifies that Balaam's actions (from עשה, Num 22:20) must accord precisely with God's instructions, which happen to have been provided previously (Num 22:12), and which have expressly forbidden Balaam not just from going to Moab, but also from cursing Israel. Here, too, Balaam misses the point, and this failure, together with his simplistic understanding of the weighted term קרא, suggests that although he understands that his travel to Moab—his *action*—is contingent on God's permission, he shares Balaq's mistaken belief that his *speech*, and the power associated with it, are his to control. Believing that God has changed his mind, Balaam saddles his donkey and sets off to Moab. He may be described here as *a diviner who recognizes that his actions are subject to God's direction, but does not understand that this applies also to his speech*.

Balaam's confrontation with Yahweh's messenger at the end of the jenny episode demonstrates a breakthrough in his understanding about these issues. Upon seeing the messenger in the road and hearing what this figure has to say, he states that הִטָּאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נֹצֵב לְקִרְאָתִי בַדֶּרֶךְ “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were stationed to greet me on the road” (Num 22:34). Thus, Balaam finally perceives the connotative potential of the root קרא, since the messenger has not appeared merely to greet Balaam in the literal sense, but to obstruct (לְשַׁטֵּן, Num 22:32) his forward progress. Moreover, Balaam understands that although the messenger interacted directly only with his jenny, the call (קרא) was directed at him; and, indeed, the call does not originate with the messenger himself, but with God, and only passes through the messenger on its way to Balaam. This cluster of relationships is analogous to that involving himself, God, and Balaq's messengers: although they interact directly with him, their summons (קרא) seeks a response that only God can provide. Although Balaam understands his previous error, however, he still fixates on God's relationship to his actions alone, as expressed by his willingness to return if told to do so (Num

22:34). At this stage, then, Balaam is presented as *a diviner who recognizes his earlier misinterpretation of God's instructions, but who has not yet grasped that this applies to speech as well as actions.*

Yahweh's messenger therefore introduces a verbal shift in his repetition of God's earlier message, whereby the word תַּעֲשֶׂה "you shall do" in Num 22:20 is replaced in Num 22:35 by תִּדְבֹּר "you shall speak." The new insight that Balaam has just acquired renders him more attentive to this new permutation of God's directive, and leads to his statement to Balaq in Num 22:38 that he is unable to speak (דִּבֹּר) anything other than the precise message that God entrusts to him. In addition, Balaq's arrival to greet him (לְקָרְאֵתוֹ) in Num 22:36 emphasizes again the tension between the two forces, human and divine, whose competition for Balaam's loyalty is encapsulated in the word קרא. Nevertheless, as the narrative proceeds, Balaam's insistence on performing a series of preparatory rituals (Num 23:1–2) indicates that he still labors under the assumption that his role as a diviner, that is, a human specifically empowered to initiate contact with the divine, renders his mediation essential to the divine–human communication process. This is demonstrated by his statement in Num 23:3, where the root קרא again bears a deeper connotation, referring not merely to a call but to a theophany. In this verse, Balaam says that when God appears (expressed using the root קרה in the Niph^cal, playing on the root קרא), it will be to call to *him* (לְקָרְאֵתִי), despite his status as the mere conduit for God's communication with Balaq. Just as Balaq's summons (קרא, Num 22:5) should have been directed *through* Balaam to God, and just as God's call (קרא, Num 22:34), transmitted *through* Yahweh's messenger, was directed *through* the jenny to Balaam, so here Balaam should understand that God's call (קרא, Num 23:3) is directed *through* him to Balaq. Since he fails to appreciate this point, however, Balaam appears here as *a diviner who*

mistakenly believes that his procedural role as mediator is essential to divine–human communication.

After delivering his first oracle, in which he describes his inability to curse anyone whom God has not cursed, Balaam responds to Balaq’s disappointment by reiterating the now oft-repeated statement that he can say only what God directs him to say (Num 23:12). We are provided here with a subtle clue to the continued growth of his understanding of God’s ultimate control over this entire process, in Num 23:13, where he indicates that he will appear (אָקָרָה) to Balaq using precisely the same term employed when God appears to him (יִקָּרָה, Num 23:3; וַיִּקָּר, Num 23:4 and, later, 16). This reflects his recognition that he serves, in fact, as a proxy for God, just as Yahweh’s messenger did in the jenny episode, calling to Balaam (לְקָרָאתִי, Num 22:34) with a version (Num 22:35) of the same message that God himself delivered in Num 22:20. Balaam thus may be seen in this section as *a diviner who is coming to terms with the true passivity of his role as a conduit for divine communication.*

Balaam achieves full awareness of this point after the second oracle. Having just uttered a message that includes direct reference to the superfluity of divinatory practice (Num 23:23), it dawns on him that if he truly is merely a passive conduit, then neither the amount nor the type of preparatory activity has any bearing on the process whatsoever. Having thus recognized how extraneous his divinatory activity has been, he understands that his divinatory speech truly is under God’s control, since no human action can produce the slightest alteration in it. Thus, his response to Balaq’s ever-growing frustration turns once again to the matter of action, by returning the word אֶדְבָּר “I will speak” to its original אֶעֱשֶׂה “I will do” (Num 23:26), as in the original form of the message spoken by God in Num 22:20. Moreover, he goes a step further by implementing this realization in his subsequent action. He leaves the usual ritual preparations only partially finished (Num 24:1), and is rewarded with genuine

prophetic inspiration (Num 24:2), which serves as the impetus for his third oracle.

Thus, Balaam here appears as *a former diviner, who undergoes his first true prophetic experience*.

Balaam's gradual process of growth reaches its climax after the third oracle. Having learned not to rely on his own efforts to control or even to detect the will of the divine, he has set aside the practice of divination, and consequently discovered that in doing so he is open to genuine prophetic revelation. In this way, he comes to understand that as a transmitter of divine will, he is fully beholden, both in action and in speech, to the instructions of God. Thus, he utters his final grand summation to Balaq in Num 24:13:

אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלַק מְלֵא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ
רָעָה מִלְּבִי אֲשֶׁר־יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ אֲדַבֵּר:

“If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) good or ill, on my own; what Yahweh speaks—it shall I speak.”

This represents the completion of Balaam's long transformative journey from mercenary diviner to true prophet. Having reached the end of this process, Balaam proceeds to speak his final oracles with all the authority and inspiration of his new prophetic status, and thus we recognize here that he is *a true prophet, fully cognizant of his relationship to the divine and of the nature and responsibilities of his role as a facilitator of divine–human communication*.

Having laid out this extended theme, I must point out that my perspective on this matter stands in direct opposition to some views expressed in prior scholarship. Meshullam Margalit, for instance, recognized Balaam's “dilemma between acting as a qōsēm and his vocation as a prophet [as] the main theme of the B[alaam]

N[arrative];”⁹ but he saw Balaam as “the great antagonist of Moses: what Moses tried to do—and largely achieved—Balaam tried to undo.”¹⁰ In addition, he interpreted the subsequent negative references to Balaam, particularly that in Jos 13:22 which refers to him as מְקִינֵה “the diviner,” as indicators that after the story detailed in *Sefer Bil’am*, “[h]e in fact reverts to mantic practices of a gosem, extreme in his reactions against the LORD and his people Israel. The reason of this fundamental change must have been the very large amount of money and the honour which eluded him [see Num 24:11].”¹¹

R. W. L. Moberly’s position is a rare exception to this pattern of generally negative interpretation. He saw in the entirety of Numbers 22 “a story of a prophet who succumbs to temptation by corrupting his prophetic vocation through ambitious greed.”¹² This view derives from his reading of Balaam’s two responses to Balaq’s envoys, the first of which he saw as “a negotiating ploy” aimed at eliciting Balaq’s second offer of a more exorbitant fee.¹³ The jenny episode, then, marks God’s response to Balaam’s greed, where the sword-wielding messenger personifies the dire nature of his self-interested course of action. “On the other hand,” Moberly continued, “there is a possibility of repentance and a transformation of Balaam’s mission, a possibility initiated by actions of divine mercy (opening the ass’s mouth, opening Balaam’s eyes). ...[T]his mercy...teaches him the necessary lesson when he acknowledges his sin, and so enables him to go and speak as a prophet should speak.”¹⁴

⁹ Margaliot 1990: 81–82.

¹⁰ Margaliot 1990: 82. This view follows that of the rabbis, on which see below, pp. 521–522.

¹¹ Margaliot 1990: 78.

¹² Moberly 1999: 16.

¹³ Moberly 1999: 7 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Moberly 1999: 17.

Clearly, Moberly's interpretation of the entire pericope differs from mine in some significant ways. But his willingness to see Balaam on a trajectory of personal growth, rather than personal degradation, accords in a general sense with the perspective I have presented here. In this sense, I stand with Moberly against the frequently articulated negative view of Balaam.

The Jenny Episode (Num 22:21–35) and Its Function as a Role-reversing Interlude

Most prior scholarship addressing the jenny episode has interpreted it as an interpolation that was inserted into the narrative at a late date.¹⁵ This perspective derives not only from the content of the episode, which has been perceived as distinct from the material with which the rest of the pericope is concerned, but also from the challenging sequence in Num 22:20–22 in which God seemingly grants Balaam permission to go to Moab, and then is angry at his doing so. This point in the narrative is perceived, therefore, as an editorial vestige indicative of a seam between different sources.

In this study, however, I already have pointed out numerous alliterative, keyword, repetitive, and structural patterns that run the length of the pericope, whose force would be deeply undermined by the removal of the jenny episode from the narrative as a whole. To recap briefly, in the previous chapter I highlighted the following devices, operative across the entire pericope, that manifest also in this episode:

¹⁵ This perspective is expressed in, e.g., Rofé 1979: 54–57; Milgrom 1990: 468–469; Levine 2000: 155; etc. Martin Noth (1968: 178), on the other hand, believed that this episode predated the rest of the J material.

- Alliterative pattern on Balaam's name, including the word בַּמִּקֵּל in Num 22:27¹⁶
- Alliterative pattern built around the letter ט, of which the highest concentration occurs in the messenger's address to Balaam (Num 22:32–33)¹⁷
- Emphasis on keyword עבר “oppose, transgress,” including its appearance in Num 22:26¹⁸
- Process of gradually developing expressions of Balaam's relationship to the divine, one step of which is presented in Balaam's exchange with the messenger (Num 22:32–35)¹⁹
- Two tripartite patterns in Numbers 22 that foreshadow Balaam's encounter with Balaq in the subsequent material, of which the jenny episode is one,²⁰ as demonstrated particularly by the repeated phrase זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רַגְלִים (Num 22:28, 32, 33) ≈ זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים (Num 24:10)²¹

In addition, I have offered a perspective on the notorious crux of God's apparently contradictory views as expressed in Num 22:20 and 22, according to which God's statement אִם-לִקְרָא לָךְ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לָךְ אִתָּם “If it is to summon you that the men have come, then rise, go with them” in v. 20 is to be viewed not as a literal command, but as a rhetorical expression that Balaam is invited to interpret. The correct answer, as it were, is made clear by the second half of the verse, and so God's anger in Num 22:22 is to be attributed not to divine caprice, but to Balaam's failure to recognize the correct course of action.²²

Margaliot offered an additional series of points that confirm this episode's unity with the rest of the pericope.²³ He framed these points as responses to some of

¹⁶ See above, pp. 284–285.

¹⁷ See above, pp. 301–304.

¹⁸ See above, p. 314.

¹⁹ See above, pp. 424–428.

²⁰ See above, pp. 443–445.

²¹ On this phrase, see above, p. 412.

²² On this matter, see above, pp. 316–318.

²³ This material is drawn from Margaliot 1990: 79–80.

the usual arguments leveled against this view, as follows. First, some have observed that the episode “does not advance the action of the narrative.”²⁴ Margaliot responded by stating simply that “[t]his argument could only arise because the main theme of the BN, namely the attitude of the prophet to the LORD and the relationship between them, was not properly understood.”²⁵ On this point Margaliot and I are in complete agreement, as is clear from the examination I have presented above detailing this very theme and its development across the pericope.²⁶ Without the jenny episode, the staged development of this theme would have a gaping hole in its center. I might add also that since the rhetorical thrust of Num 22:20 has gone almost entirely unrecognized, modern scholarship has remained largely blind to one of the most rich and subtle clues to this theme.

Second, Margaliot noted that some have raised the issue of the total absence of Yahweh’s messenger in any other portion of the narrative. His response revolves around the equation of *מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה* and *אַלֹהִים*, according to which God (Elohim), who has appeared already in Num 22:9, 10, 12 and 20, actually *manifests* as the “Angel” (*מַלְאָךְ*) who obstructs Balaam on the road, and thus this figure does in fact appear elsewhere in the pericope.²⁷ On this point I disagree with Margaliot, since I am unconvinced that the two figures should be equated. However, it is unclear to me why the messenger’s absence elsewhere indicates a compositional seam between this material and the rest of the pericope. Rather, I would submit that the jenny episode is intentionally set apart as an interlude in the larger narrative, and as such it serves the overarching aims of the whole pericope, while simultaneously presenting an additional

²⁴ Margaliot 1990: 79.

²⁵ Margaliot 1990: 79.

²⁶ See above, pp. 485–492.

²⁷ Margaliot 1990: 79.

perspective, unique to this section, that informs our uptake of the surrounding material. I will explore this matter at length in a moment.

Third, Margalioṭ called attention to the supposed “folkloristic, rather primitive level of the Speaking Ass as opposed to the high, almost prophetic level of the BN.”²⁸ Margalioṭ’s view was that this is not to be taken literally at all, but actually represents a literary device by which the dialogue between jenny and rider actually is “a monologue of Balaam who talks with himself.”²⁹ Here, too, I find Margalioṭ’s response entirely unsatisfactory, since its suggestion that in this situation Balaam is equivocating, even conflicted, drastically diminishes the force of his encounter with the messenger and his consequent admission of wrongdoing. Where I agree with him, however, is in his rejection of the “folkloristic, rather primitive” argument, since it plainly reveals more about its modern claimants and their perception of this literature than it does about the literature itself. However, if one insists on perceiving a distinct narrative tone in this section, I repeat that I view this episode as an interlude, set apart from the surrounding text. It is to this interlude that we now direct our attention.

In his volume on anti-prophetic satire, David Marcus adduced a wide array of elements in this episode that point to its satirical status.³⁰ He pointed out the following types of features:

- Fantastic situations, such as:
 - The appearance of a messenger who is visible to the jenny but not to Balaam
 - The jenny’s ability to talk

²⁸ Margalioṭ 1990: 79.

²⁹ Margalioṭ 1990: 80.

³⁰ See Marcus 1995: 29–41.

- Irony, such as:
 - The inability of Balaam, the professional seer, to see what is obvious to his jenny
 - “[T]he man of words is reduced to using brute force, whereas the brute (his donkey), teaches him with words.”³¹
- Ridicule of Balaam, such as:
 - His placement in “undignified situations”³² involving his foot being crushed and his donkey laying down underneath him
 - His apparent obliviousness to the extraordinary fact that he is having a conversation with his donkey³³
- Parody, such as:
 - Balaam’s failure to live up to his status of a professional seer, instead being reduced to a passive observer

The data accumulated by Marcus form a concise and informative list of elements that collectively reveal much about the literary tenor of the story. In his view, “[t]he purpose of the satire is to belittle Balaam and expose him to ridicule.”³⁴ As noted above, this kind of negative perspective on Balaam is well attested in modern scholarship. Alexander Rofé, for example, interpreted the jenny episode in a similar fashion:

סיפור האתון...דן בשאלה עקרונית משאלות הנבואה: האם תיתכן נבואה אצל עמים זרים? המסורת הישראלית העתיקה לא ראתה בכך קושי. לעומת זאת, בשלבי אמונה מאוחרים יותר נחשבה הנבואה לחסד מיוחד של ה' שניתן רק לישראל, ונשללה ממילא כל אפשרות של התגלות לבני עמים זרים. הבורלסקה על בלעם נועדה אפוא לבטל את ההשקפה שהוא נביא, כפי שהובעה מכללא ב"ספר בלעם"; הביטול הובע על-ידי הדגמה, כיצד נעדרו מבלעם כל תכונות נבואיות בשעה שנתקל במלאך בדרך. כך ביקשה ההגות הנבואית להיפטר מזכרו המעיק של נביא עכו"ם!

The tale of the jenny...discusses a fundamental question in prophetic matters: Is prophecy possible among foreign peoples? Ancient Israelite tradition did not see any difficulty in this. By contrast, in later religious

³¹ Marcus 1995: 33.

³² Marcus 1995: 34.

³³ On this point, see also Alter 2004: 800.

³⁴ Marcus 1995: 41.

stages prophecy was conceived as a unique favor of God given only to Israel, and in any case all possibility of revelation was revoked from the descendants of foreign peoples. The burlesque on Balaam [that is, the jenny episode] was intended therefore to invalidate the view that he was a prophet, as expressed generally in “*Sefer Bil'am*,” the invalidation is expressed by means of a demonstration (of) how all prophetic qualities were absent from Balaam at the time of his encounter with the messenger on the road. Thus the prophetic meditation [presented in this episode] sought to purge the troublesome memory of him as a pagan prophet!³⁵

Thus, in Rofé's view, this episode is a later interpolation, inserted into *Sefer Bil'am* long after the rest of the pericope had been composed, that derives from the same negative views of Balaam that are expressed elsewhere in the Bible and in postbiblical traditions.

In response to a perspective such as Rofé's, I reiterate my belief, based on a wealth of evidence already presented in this study, that the jenny episode is an integral part of the whole pericope, without which numerous literary devices would be incomplete and ineffective. Here, I would like to go a step further, and offer a dissenting hypothesis that contrasts directly with the interpretations of Marcus, Rofé, and others. In my view, the lampooning of Balaam in this episode is not intended to denigrate him, but rather to highlight his humanness in a way that emphasizes the complex and compelling qualities of this character, the hero of the pericope, who gradually develops as the story proceeds. This is achieved by means of a role-reversal whereby the role occupied elsewhere in the pericope by Balaam, as one who is privy to divine contact, is occupied by the jenny; and that occupied by Balaq, who resists the transmitted divine message, is occupied by Balaam. In short, the relationship between Balaq and Balaam in the surrounding material, namely the beginning of Numbers 22

³⁵ Rofé 1979: 53.

and Numbers 23–24, is superimposed on Balaam and his donkey in this episode.³⁶

James S. Ackerman put it thus: “Just as the she-ass three times sees what the ‘seer’ cannot...Balaam will three times be given a divine oracle that Balak will not accept.”³⁷

This kind of role-reversing interlude is attested elsewhere in the Bible.³⁸ Here I draw attention to two major examples. The first is the incident involving Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.³⁹ In the previous chapter, I called attention to an important subplot in the latter chapters of Genesis whereby Judah is elevated gradually to a position of leadership over the rest of the brothers, especially including Reuben, the firstborn.⁴⁰ This process already is underway in Genesis 37, and so Judah’s status as a main character in the following chapter corroborates his more general status as the hero among the brothers in this portion of the book. Here, however, he is shown to be so lustful that he is happy to divulge his symbols of authority rather than miss a chance to sleep with Tamar (Gen 38:16–18); concerned more about his reputation than about making good on his debt (Gen 38:23); and brutally uncompassionate in his order to have Tamar, his daughter-in-law and a widow, burned for her harlotry (Gen 38:24). In the end, Tamar reveals her deception by showing him his staff, seal, and cord and saying *הִכְרִיזָנָא* “Recognize, please” (Gen 38:25). Judah immediately recognizes (*וַיִּכְרֶה*) them, and admits his wrongdoing, stating that *צָדִיקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עָלֵיכֶן לֹא־נִתְּתִיָּה לְשָׁלָה בְּנִי*

³⁶ See, e.g., Alter 1981: 106 and Ackerman 1990: 86. Although they did not voice the entire extent of this role reversal, Marcus (1995: 34) and Michael L. Barré (1997: 261) raised similar observations.

³⁷ Ackerman 1990: 86.

³⁸ For a prior consideration of the narrative interlude as a literary device in the Bible, see Gordon 1978: 60–62. In addition to Genesis 38, he also cited the episode of the golden calf in Exod 32:1–14.

³⁹ See the meticulous examination of this passage in Alter 1981: 5–12; and also the brief remarks in Gordon 1978: 60–61.

⁴⁰ See above, pp. 435–436.

“She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shela, my son” (Gen 38:26).

Thus, in this story Judah, arguably the hero of this section of Genesis, is portrayed as villainous in the extreme. When his wrongdoing is brought to his attention, however, he acknowledges it and learns from the experience. But the function of this episode is not limited to this chapter in itself, since the text here attests certain key elements connecting it to the surrounding group of chapters. I draw attention to two particularly significant examples. The first is that the animal he offers in pledge to Tamar (Gen 38:17) is a kid (גְּדִי־עִזִּים), which immediately calls to mind the animal that the brother slaughtered in the previous chapter (שְׁעִיר עִזִּים, Gen 37:31) in order to dip Joseph’s tunic in the blood and deceive Jacob. The second is the recurrence in Genesis 38 of the phrase הִכְרִינָא “Recognize, please,” which, as noted previously, is an important theme across this entire story arc in Genesis: Just as Tamar says הִכְרִינָא “Recognize, please” to Judah in Gen 38:25 and he recognizes (וַיִּכֶּר) in the following verse, the brothers have already said הִכְרִינָא “Recognize, please” to Jacob in Gen 37:32, when they show him Joseph’s bloody tunic, and he recognized (וַיִּכֶּר) that it belonged to his son in the following verse. Similarly, this keyword plays out later in Genesis, when the brothers encounter Joseph in Egypt and fail to recognize him, though he recognizes them (Genesis 42–45). In Genesis 38, the interplay of these two themes serves to place Judah, the “chief brother” in this portion of Genesis, in the role of Jacob, the one who is duped. Thus, at the moment of recognition (הִכְרִיר), “[i]n the most artful of contrivances, the narrator shows [Judah] exposed through the symbol of his legal self given in pledge for a kid (*gedi ʿizim*), as before Jacob had been tricked

by the garment emblematic of his love for Joseph which had been dipped in the blood of a goat (*se^cir ʿizim*).”⁴¹

A second example of this type of role-reversing interlude is that presented in 1 Samuel 25. This chapter, in which David winds up at odds with the landowner Nabal and ultimately marries his widow Abigail, is sandwiched between two chapters whose numerous similarities have elicited the opinion in scholarship that they actually are two different versions of the same story. In the first version (1 Samuel 24), Saul pursues the fugitive David to En Gedi. David has an opportunity to kill Saul, but does not do so, and ultimately the two men have an extended conversation in which David professes his innocence, urging Saul to stop pursuing him, and Saul admits his wrongdoing (צָדִיק אַתָּה מִמֶּנִּי “You are more righteous than I,” 1 Sam 24:17 [English: 18]). In the second version (1 Samuel 26), Saul pursues David into the wilderness. David sneaks into Saul’s camp at night and again forgoes an opportunity to kill the king, instead retreating to a distant hill, from which he again has an extended conversation with Saul, who again acknowledges his wrongdoing (אֲנִי חָטָאתִי “I have sinned,” 1 Sam 26:21).

Between these two stories stands that of David, Nabal, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. In his analysis of all three chapters as a coherent narrative triad, Moshe Garsiel examined how this chapter places David, the innocent fugitive, in the role of Saul, the impetuous figure who must struggle constantly to keep his vengeful impulses in check.⁴² While in the wilderness, David and his men have been protecting the estate of Nabal, who is very wealthy (1 Sam 25:7, 15–16, 21). When David hears that Nabal is nearby shearing sheep, he approaches him and asks Nabal to give his men whatever he

⁴¹ Alter 1981: 10.

⁴² Garsiel 1983: 122–133.

can provide, in honor of the festive occasion (1 Sam 25:8). Nabal is tight-fisted with his provisions, however, and further insults David, possibly but necessarily unwittingly, by saying that *הַיּוֹם רַבּוֹ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו* “Nowadays there are many servants who run away, each from before his lord” (1 Sam 25:10). In a rage, David swears that he will annihilate Nabal’s entire household (1 Sam 25:22). Before he can enact his plan, however, Nabal’s wife Abigail intercedes, fervently beseeching David to abandon his destructive course in a lengthy speech (1 Sam 25:24–31). David hears her entreaty, and blesses her for being the one who *כָּלַתְנִי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מִבּוֹא בְדָמִים וְהִשְׁעָה יָדִי לִי* “restrained me this day from coing in blood, and my hand (from) avenging me” (1 Sam 25:33).

David’s situation in this chapter accords remarkably closely to that of Saul in the surrounding chapters. Throughout 1 Samuel, Saul pursues David relentlessly, so much so that his fervor seems to have little to do with whatever original cause sparked it. In 1 Samuel 24 and 26, he actually comes close enough to catch and kill David, but at the last minute he is persuaded to let him go in peace. Thus, Garsiel’s assessment is entirely appropriate: “Chapter 25 relates how David vows to destroy Nabal’s house and everything he has, and actually sets out to do so. Were it not for Abigail, who comes to meet him with a gift and a persuasive speech, he would certainly leave no one alive—and would thereby fail in a most serious matter, qualitatively similar to that by which Saul is tested.”⁴³ In sum, David’s confrontation with Nabal puts him in the position that Saul occupies in the surrounding narratives; and like Saul, he turns aside from vengeance in response to a last-minute entreaty.

⁴³ Garsiel 1983: 123.

Are these two stories about Judah and David aimed at “belittling” these figures and “exposing them to ridicule?”⁴⁴ In a sense, the answer is yes, since in these narratives the emotions, impulses, and actions of the two Israelite heroes are presented as deeply problematic, on both social and theological grounds. Indeed, Gary A. Rendsburg argued in his study of Genesis 38 that this story not only revolves around Judah’s questionable behavior, but in fact lampoons David himself: “...[A]t the same time, there is an undeniable attempt to portray the characters, Judah especially, in a comical way. According to my analysis, this can be translated as mocking the king [i.e., David] and his court.”⁴⁵ On the other hand, however, I believe we go too far if we perceive these stories as unqualified denigrations of these renowned figures. Rather, the narrative interludes in Genesis 38 and 1 Samuel 25 serve to complicate and layer the personalities of Judah and David, working in tandem with the surrounding narratives—with which they share profoundly intimate links—to present multifaceted perspectives on the two characters. The overall effect is that their humanity is displayed poignantly in the tension between their heroic qualities and their flawed human nature—that “moral stature is not a fixen ‘given’ but is something that a person must fight for repeatedly, struggling against his emotions and passions.”⁴⁶

Given these precedents, it is remarkable that the role-reversing interlude has gone largely unrecognized as a standard trope in biblical literature. Certainly, the evidence requires us to reevaluate the episode involving Balaam and his jenny, and to see it, like Genesis 38 and 1 Samuel 25, as a scenario that exposes his human frailty but ultimately ends with the protagonist’s realization of his own shortcomings. In this

⁴⁴ Here I borrow the words of Marcus 1995: 41.

⁴⁵ Rendsburg 1986: 445.

⁴⁶ Garsiel 1983: 123.

sense, Moberly's assessment of the conclusion of the episode is entirely correct: Balaam is faced with his failings, but given an opportunity to learn from the experience and set them right.⁴⁷ Moreover, the fact that this episode, placed precisely where it is in the middle of *Sefer Bil'am*, operates on a clearly defined literary level stands together with the many features already adduced in this dissertation as a demonstration that it is an integral part of the pericope as a whole.

Numbers 22 as a Call Narrative

It is useful to examine *Sefer Bil'am*, specifically in Numbers 22, from the perspective that it represents what Norman C. Habel termed a "call narrative."⁴⁸ Instances of this trope exist in biblical literature for many prophetic figures, such as Moses (Exodus 3–4), Gideon (Judg 6:11–22), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1). In its basic form, it attests the following stages, as delineated by Yairah Amit:⁴⁹

- A. Encounter
- B. Appointment
- C. Refusal
- D. Encouragement (possibly more than once)
- E. Request for signs or proof
- F. Fear

As a brief example, we turn to the instance of this pattern that involves Gideon in Judges 6. Gideon encounters a divine messenger near his father's home (A, Judg 6:11–13), who tells him to lead the Israelites against the Midianites (B, Judg 6:14). When

⁴⁷ Moberly 1999: 17.

⁴⁸ Habel 1965.

⁴⁹ Amit 2001: 65.

Gideon objects that he is of too humble an origin to be a leader (C, Judg 6:15), the figure encourages him with an assurance of victory (D, Judg 6:16). As proof of the message's veracity, Gideon asks the figure to stay until Gideon returns with a meal, to which the figure agrees (E, Judg 6:17–20). When Gideon brings the food, the figure consumes it with fire from his staff, and Gideon realizes that he has been interacting with a divine being (F, Judg 6:21–22).

The sequence of the six elements that make up the call narrative can change, as in Exod 3:6, where Moses's fear (element F) occurs at the very beginning of his encounter with God (element A). In addition, certain elements or sequences of elements can be repeated. Moses, for example, asks for and receives signs (element E, Exod 4:1–9) prior to expressing reluctance to go and receiving encouragement (elements C and D, Exod 4:10–17). But the general pattern remains visible.

In the case of Balaam, I would argue, two forms of this pattern arise in Numbers 22. Both are unusual, as we shall see, but both unmistakably exhibit the same narrative components just discussed. The first is a sort of anti-prophetic calling, in which Balaam is not commissioned by God, but by Balaq. Balaam's encounter with the king's messengers (A, Num 22:7–8) incorporates their delivery of Balaq's request for his services (B, Num 22:7b, in which they express the message detailed in Num 22:5–6). After consulting with God, Balaam informs the emissaries that he will not be going with them (C, Num 22:13), to which Balaq reacts by sending an even richer embassy with the offer of a greater reward (D, Num 22:15–17). In this version of the pattern, elements E and F do not appear, an alteration that may speak to the assiduousness with which Balaam packs up and heads off to Moab (Num 22:21), as well as foreshadowing the fact that Balaq will never get what he desires out of Balaam.

Against this striking anti-commission, an altogether different inversion of the usual pattern is superimposed on the same narrative material. Whereas in this instance Balaam's calling does originate from God, it nevertheless is striking in that it is not a narrative detailing a call to *go* and do something, but rather one in which Balaam is instructed *not* to go. Thus, in addition to the switching of the middle two elements, each of the six components of the pattern need to be redefined individually, as follows:

- A'. Encounter
- B'. Prohibition
- D'. Repeated prohibition
- C'. Refusal to abide by prohibition
- E'. Receipt of signs
- F'. Insight

Accordingly, Balaam's initial encounter with God (A', Num 22:9–12) concludes with God's prohibition of his participation in cursing Israel (B', Num 22:12). This prohibition is reiterated in his second theophany (D', Num 22:20), but Balaam heeds neither of God's statements and heads off to Moab with the emissaries anyway (C', Num 22:21). His repeated encounters with Yahweh's messenger on the road (E', Num 22:22–35) culminate in his acknowledgement of his wrongdoing and his attainment of a deeper understanding of his relationship to the divine (F', Num 22:34).

This double inversion of the usual call-narrative pattern presents a remarkable perspective from which to view the competing human and divine forces vying for Balaam's cooperation. When seen in this way, the manner in which the narrative proceeds comes across almost as a foregone conclusion. Thus, Balaam's "anti-call" surely must be doomed to fail, since no human can subjugate the work of a prophet to his own desires; and conversely, even though Balaam acts in direct opposition to God's directives throughout the chapter, the second inverted instance of the pattern

nevertheless moves inexorably toward a conclusion defined by a markedly stronger accord between Balaam's understanding and God's will. This stands, therefore, as a sophisticated dual-employment of a standard narrative trope, in a remarkably inventive form, that ultimately bolsters the central themes of the pericope.

Balaam as a Foreign Prophet of Yahweh

Finally, it is important to consider Balaam's status as a foreigner who bears a connection with the God of the Israelites. In reality this amounts to two separate issues, namely, the fact of Balaam's foreignness and the fact that this non-Israelite receives inspiration from Yahweh, which I will address in turn.

First, great emphasis is placed in the pericope on Balaam's foreignness, as attested by the extensive array of style-switching and setting-switching elements present in the text, to which I devoted the entire first half of this dissertation.⁵⁰ Thus, it is worth considering what is so important about this aspect of the story's main character. Whatever one believes about the precise location of Balaam's homeland, the biblical account is clear on the matter of his non-Israelite identity; and while the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions do not explicitly confirm this, neither do they contradict it. Unfortunately, however, beyond this fact the question of this individual's historical origin is exceedingly murky.⁵¹ The texts from Deir ʿAllā identify him as a prophet active in the Transjordan, but neither confirm nor deny that he himself comes from the region in which those narratives take place. All things being equal, the absence of any

⁵⁰ See above, Chapters 2 and 3.

⁵¹ Secondary literature on this question abounds. See, e.g., Yehuda 1945; Görg 1976; and the bibliography provided in these studies.

mention of his homeland would seem to suggest that he is as much a resident of that region as the other people with whom he interacts in the inscriptions.

The Bible, on the other hand, designates Balaam as an Aramean (Num 22:5; 23:7).⁵² This being the case, we still are left with the complexities involved in comparing the biblical Balaam, an Aramean, with the Balaam attested at Deir ʿAllā. It seems that two possibilities present themselves. Either Balaam was indeed from Aram, but at some point shifted his sphere of influence to the Transjordan; or he was associated with the Transjordan, and the authors of the biblical *Sefer Bilʿam* felt driven to recast him as an Aramean. In either case, it is noteworthy that the biblical text calls special attention to this fact, both by mentioning it twice, once in prose and once in poetry, and by appending the phrase אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ in Num 22:5: the messengers seeking Balaam are not described as going merely to “Pethor, which is on the river (Euphrates),” but to “the land of [Balaam’s] kinsfolk.”⁵³ This extra emphasis suggests that Balaam’s Aramean origin is especially significant.

As it turns out, the reason for this may lie in the hypothesis I have detailed elsewhere, according to which this pericope was crafted during the mid- to late 8th century BCE, a period marked by intermittent but increasing Assyrian aggression into the central and southern Levant. If I am correct in this suggestion, then it would seem

⁵² Even before the discovery of the Deir ʿAllā texts, this designation was called into question. W. F. Albright’s suggestion (1915) that אֶרֶם “Aram” in Num 23:7 be emended to אֶדֶם “Edom,” partly due to Balaam’s enigmatic connection with Bela son of Beʿor (Gen 36:31–32), was later retracted (Albright 1944: 211–212 n. 15), but nevertheless was echoed subsequently by others. A second proposed emendation involves the correction of the phrase אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ “land of the children of his people” in Num 22:5 to אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ <ן> “land of the children of Ammon,” a reading attested already in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Samaritan Targum, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate, and popular in modernity because of its geographical harmony with the Deir ʿAllā texts. Neither solution is satisfactory, however, and in fact both create further complications. In particular, the second suggestion is suspect due to the extreme rarity of the Ammonites in the Torah as a whole. See above, p. 475 n. 349.

⁵³ On this rendering, see, e.g., Milgrom 1990: 186, and cf. also Levine 2000: 147. Scholarly consensus places Pethor on the Upper Euphrates, some distance south of Carchemish. See, e.g., Levine 2000: 147.

reasonable to suppose that a prophetic voice deriving from the Assyrian heartland that speaks in unqualified praise of Israel would bear a particularly strong and meaningful weight for its Israelite (or, as I have suggested, Judahite) audience. The elegance of this observation lies in the fact that it is not contingent on whether Balaam's Aramean origin is factual or merely literary. In either case it would hold true, and thus the text's emphasis of this point ultimately would serve the thematic agenda of the pericope, assuming that the proposed 8th-century date is to be accepted. In sum, regardless of how one attempts to solve the historical dilemma, from a literary standpoint the emphasis on Balaam's foreignness—specifically, on his “Arameanness”—can be seen as fulfilling a special supporting function in the context of *Sefer Bil'am*.

This is all the more true given Israelite–Aramean relations in the 8th century, when Aram stood as the archrival of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The antagonism had reached a peak in the late 9th century during the reign of Hazael of Aram-Damascus, who repeatedly engaged in military confrontations with Israel and Judah,⁵⁴ and lingering animosity persisted well after his reign.⁵⁵ In addition, figures such as Ahiqar, an Aramean who served as counselor to Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, and the Rabshakeh, who served as Sennacherib's messenger to Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:17–37, exemplify the degree to which Arameans had integrated into the Assyrian Empire, even to the point of holding important court positions.⁵⁶ No doubt some would argue, therefore, that it is not possible for a biblical text whose hero is an Aramean to derive from this period. As a counter to this, however, one need only

⁵⁴ Hazael's aggressive acts are detailed at various points in 2 Kings 8–12.

⁵⁵ As is well known, for example, Amos 9:7 presents the Philistines and Aram as the two great enemies of Israel. For a historical assessment of these matters, see Pitard 1987, especially pp. 145–189, which examines the history of Damascus from the time of Hazael to the Assyrian conquest of the city.

⁵⁶ On the “Aramaization” of the Assyrian Empire, see Tadmor 1982.

recall the story of Naaman, the Aramean general who is cured of leprosy by the prophet Elisha and transports loads of Israelite soil back to his home in Assyria in order properly to worship the God of Israel (2 Kings 5). And, in any case, this only drives home the point that Balaam's favorable oracles toward Israel are all the more potent because they are spoken by one who is supposed to be an enemy, but who instead identifies himself with Israel repeatedly throughout his prophetic speeches.

Second, we turn to the matter of a foreigner dispensing upon Israel the blessings of their own god. Under normal circumstances, of course, one would expect a figure such as Balaam to profess contact with one or more deities from his or her homeland. For this reason, as I discussed in the previous chapter when I dealt with the issue of naming, some scholars justifiably have asked whether the core material in this pericope originally was something other than Yahwistic. Baruch Levine, for example, devoted special attention to two important questions in this regard. First, he asked, "To which divine power or powers was Balaam subservient?"⁵⁷ And second, "By whom was Israel blessed?"⁵⁸ Similarly, Harriet Lutzky proposed that she had discovered evidence of Balaam's connection with Ashera, both in the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions and in the biblical account.⁵⁹ In my earlier examination,⁶⁰ I posited that the evidence in favor of seeing *Sefer Bilʿam* as a Yahwistic reworking of preexisting Canaanite literature is by no means unequivocal, and that the text instead may evince genuine syncretism between Yahweh and El. Moreover, I argued that even if one prefers, on the basis of evidence such as the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions, to see various underlying

⁵⁷ Levine 2000: 217–224.

⁵⁸ Levine 2000: 224–225.

⁵⁹ I have addressed Lutzky's view in the previous chapter, pp. 345–346. I revisit it below (pp. 527–528), when I examine the biblical references to Balaam outside of *Sefer Bilʿam*.

⁶⁰ See above, pp. 347–356.

strands or elements in the biblical material as relating to different deities, one sells the text short by focusing solely on pulling apart these strands and ignoring the total effect of the text as a whole.

In other words, ultimately we must reckon with the fact that in its present form, this pericope presents Balaam, a foreigner, as an individual who explicitly professes a connection to Yahweh (see, for example, his use of phrases such as *יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי* “Yahweh my god” in Num 22:18), who communes with the Israelite god on multiple occasions, and who transmits blessings on Israel that derive from this god. To be sure, Balaam is not the only non-Israelite character in the Bible to be associated with Yahweh, and future research that considers this array of figures collectively, including not only Balaam but also Jethro, Naaman, Ruth, and so on, may yield meaningful conclusions about Yahweh’s relationship to foreigners. In the absence of such a study, however, we must consider what purpose or advantage might be achieved by rendering Balaam a Yahwist.

Balaam aside, the text itself presents an unmistakably Yahwistic perspective. Thus, Michael L. Barré provided a cogent assessment of one possibility: “One reason the author ‘Yahwehized’ Balaam may have been to solve a dilemma he faced in his portrayal of him. If the seer’s positive oracles concerning Israel are true divine revelations, how could they not come from Yahweh? Conversely, if Balaam divines by a god other than Yahweh, how could his oracles about Israel be true?”⁶¹ In other words, what is at stake here is the veracity of one of the pericope’s primary assertions, namely that Yahweh alone possesses the power to bless and curse. If this is the case, then Balaam’s oracles derive from Yahweh and hence are inherently true. If it is not,

⁶¹ Barré 1997: 262.

then not only does the truth of Balaam's oracles break down, but a central premise of the pericope is rendered untenable. From this point of view, Yahweh in fact is the *only* god that can work in *Sefer Bil'am*.

In the end, moreover, the perceived incongruity between Balaam's foreignness and his Yahwism may be more troubling to us than it would have been to ancient authors and/or audiences. What might seem to some modern readers to be a rather forced attempt to render the story essentially self-fulfilling may have come across to the contemporary biblical audience quite differently: regardless of the fact that Balaam is a foreigner, Yahweh is our god, so Balaam must be associated with Yahweh. Far from reflecting a poorly developed system of internal logic in the story, the aspect in question should be seen instead as a demonstration of the audience's comfort with setting aside perceived factual contradictions, in the name of an appreciation of the story for its own sake, on both aesthetic and didactic levels.

Allusion in Sefer Bil'am

At this point we turn from matters internal to this pericope to an examination of its relationships with numerous other texts in the biblical corpus. In some cases, this relationship is allusive in the basic sense, by which I mean that *Sefer Bil'am* calls upon formulaic expressions, connotations, themes, and other elements of its precursor, without affecting the way one understands the earlier material. In other cases, however, the relationship is more complicated, in that the allusion evident in this pericope actually affects the reading of the antecedent on which it draws, and thus one's reading of both *Sefer Bil'am* and the parallel text in question is affected by the relationship between the two.

In a general sense, the connections that I adduce here indicate the degree to which this pericope is intertwined with the rest of biblical literature. In addition,

however, many of them provide further support for the various thematic elements of *Sefer Bil'am* that I have presented. In this way, these parallels are revealed to be significant compositional elements that facilitate the text's transmission of meaning, rather than rote borrowings intended to invest the Balaam material with a sense of venerated authority. To put it differently, *Sefer Bil'am*'s interaction with other points in the biblical corpus is as much a function of the pericope's literary character as any of the other devices or tropes I have presented in this study.

Sefer Bil'am and the Exodus Narrative

The opening of *Sefer Bil'am* attests a number of parallels with the Exodus story.⁶² Specifically, Exodus 1 presents the perspective of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in terms remarkably similar to those used in reference to Balaq and his people. For example, we encounter there the statement וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “and they dreaded the children of Israel” (Exod 1:12), a precise analogue to Num 22:3c: וַיִּקֶּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “and Moab dreaded the children of Israel.” Likewise, Pharaoh voices this fear as follows: הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ “Behold, the people of the children of Israel is great, and stronger than us” (Exod 1:9). Likewise, Num 22:3b states simply כִּי רַב-הוּא “for it [i.e., Israel] was great,” and Balaq's message to Balaam in Num 22:5–6 is built around the following clauses: הִנֵּה עַם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם...עָצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי “Behold, a people (has) come out of Egypt...it is stronger than I.” In addition to these parallels in the first chapter of Exodus, moreover, an additional parallel occurs in Exodus 10, where the plague of locusts is described using terminology that also is applied to the people of Israel by Balaq: וְכִסָּה אֶת-עֵין הָאֲרֶץ “it will cover the eye of the land” (Exod

⁶² As observed, e.g., in Alter 2004: 795.

10:5 ≈ 10:15; compare Num 22:5, 11). The phrase עֵין הָאֶזְרָאִי plays on the Egyptian idiom *ir.t rꜥ* “eye of Ra,” which refers to the sun and, by extension, also to the whole land of Egypt.⁶³

Ackerman offered an astute assessment of this series of similarities connecting *Sefer Bil'am* with Exodus:

When the Israelites had celebrated their escape from Egypt at the Sea of Reeds, they had anticipated the trembling of those peoples who would be their neighbors in the Promised Land (Exod. 15:14–16). Now that the people are encamped at the Jordan, ready to begin the assault, the Balak-Balaam story in [Numbers] 22–24 introduces us to a trembling Moabite king who appears as Pharaoh *redivivus*. Like Pharaoh and the Egyptians, Balak and the Moabites dread Israel as numerically superior....⁶⁴

In other words, the Exodus narrative commences a period whose significance in the Israelite self-imagination cannot be overstated. The Balaam narrative, which stands at the end of the Israelites’ journey to the Promised Land, reconnects with the material in Exodus in a way that emphasizes the process involved in getting from there to here. It invites the retrospective consideration of Israel’s growing pains in the wilderness, and calls attention to the fact that after all the travails of the journey, Israel’s success and greatness remain undiminished from their initial state. Indeed, as the pericope continues, Balaam’s oracles punctuate this fact in rich poetic form.

⁶³ See Rendsburg 1990c.

⁶⁴ Ackerman 1990: 86.

Balaam's Oracles and Jacob's Blessing of Judah

On the basis of linguistic and other evidence presented elsewhere, I have introduced the working hypothesis that *Sefer Bil'am* is a Judahite text. As it turns out, the lion imagery presented in Balaam's second and third oracles is reminiscent of Jacob's blessing of Judah in Gen 49:8–10, specifically the middle verse (Gen 49:9).⁶⁵ This verse reads as follows:

גֹּר אֲרִיָּה יְהוּדָה	A lion's cub is Judah:
מִטָּרֶף בְּנֵי עֲלִיָּת	On prey, my son, you have grown up.
כָּרַע רֹבֵץ כְּאֲרִיָּה	He crouches, laying in wait ⁶⁶ like a lion;
וּכְלָבִיא מִי יִקְיֶמְנוּ	and like a lion, who will rouse him?

As in this sequence, Balaam's second oracle incorporates a reference to devouring prey (טָרֶף, Num 23:24). But a far more pronounced parallel occurs in the third oracle, which presents a nearly identical version of the second couplet from Genesis:

כָּרַע שֹׁכֵב כְּאֲרִי	He crouches, laying in wait like a lion;
וּכְלָבִיא מִי יִקְיֶמְנוּ	and like a lion, who will rouse him?
	(Num 24:9ab)

The connection is unmistakable, and presents a new lens through which we see the lion imagery used by Balaam, whereby it stands not just as a general reference to the might of Israel but as an allusion to Judah's blessing in particular. This imagery stands, therefore, as a sequence of additional clues pointing toward this text's

⁶⁵ Adduced by Mary Douglas (1993a: 421 ≈ Douglas 1993b: 222). She also presented a variety of other connections between Balaam's poems and material found elsewhere in the Torah, but these parallels tend to be general and impressionistic, in addition to their apparent derivation from English translations of the original texts in question.

⁶⁶ In order to emphasize the similarity between this verse and its parallel in Balaam's third oracle, I have translated רֹבֵץ here in the same way that I read שֹׁכֵב elsewhere.

specifically Judahite orientation. Moreover, one notes that the closest parallel, the couplet in the third oracle, occurs in the final verse of a poem that has alluded several lines earlier to the reign of Saul, by referring to the Amaleqite king Agag. From the standpoint of the chronological progression along which Balaam's four major oracles are arranged, which I presented in the last chapter,⁶⁷ the placement of this poem's lion couplet may suggest a perspective that looks forward to the next poem, as if to imply that although the third oracle indeed refers to the achievement of monarchy, the true climax is yet to come in the fourth oracle's allusions to David's reign.

Balaam and Bela, King of Edom

The uncanny similarity between Balaam's name plus patronymic and that of the Edomite king mentioned in Gen 36:32 remains one of the most peculiar and challenging cruces in *Sefer Bil'am*. In the last chapter, I recounted Levine's suggestion that the employment in here of the name בְּלָעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר "Balaam son of Be'or" may have represented an attempt to cast the prophet as none other than בְּלָעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר "Bela son of Be'or," the first king of Edom.⁶⁸ As Levine put it, Balaq's summons of Balaam would mean that "one king would have called on another, who possessed special gifts, to assist him in defeating an enemy."⁶⁹ Levine offered this suggestion only in the most cautious and speculative manner,⁷⁰ and as I noted above, the evidence from Deir 'Allā corroborating Balaam's name and patronymic appears to render it highly unlikely that they are fabrications intended to establish some kind of literary connection with the verse from Genesis.

⁶⁷ See above, pp. 466–468.

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 328–329.

⁶⁹ Levine 2000: 147.

⁷⁰ Levine 2000: 147.

Unfortunately, however, no other explanation readily presents itself. The genealogical context in Genesis 36 renders it similarly unlikely that Levine's hypothesis should be reversed, that is, that the figure identified there was named in order to connect him to the Balaam of our text. Even if one accepts the apparent suggestion of the Deir 'Allā texts that Balaam's homeland is the Transjordan, not Aram, the geography still does not quite work out, since the region of Gilead in which Deir 'Allā is located is situated well apart from the land of Edom, and Moab lies between the two. Moreover, if Balaam were a king, it would be most surprising to encounter two full-blown textual traditions about him, one biblical and one extrabiblical, neither of which attests a single intimation of Balaam's royal status. This is especially true in the case of the biblical material, which evinces a concern with matters of monarchic interest.⁷¹

André Lemaire upheld a slightly different perspective, according to which the entire section Gen 36:31–39, within which the reference to Bela son of Be'or occurs, actually is a “primitive list of Aramean kings identifying Dinhaba [Bela's city] with *Danabu/Dhouneibe* in the Aramean kingdom of Hazael.”⁷² This would permit the figure named in Genesis to be identified with Balaam without denying his Aramean origin in a general sense. However, this hypothesis not only fails to address the question of Balaam's kingship, but also fails to address the geographic problem, since Hazael's kingdom in southeastern Syria is still a considerable distance from the region of the Upper Euphrates. As a result, Lemaire's hypothesis avails no more clarity on this issue than those it replaces.

⁷¹ See above, pp. 466–468.

⁷² Dijkstra 1995: 74 n. 8. See Lemaire 1990.

Ultimately, I am at a loss for new insights into this tantalizing problem. It is possible that a clearer understanding of the dating of the two texts at least would provide a means of establishing which, if either, is the precedent for the other. I have proposed a mid- to late-8th-century date for *Sefer Bil'am*, and all things being equal I would presume an earlier date for the passage in Genesis; but this view reveals nothing verifiable or particularly revealing about the relationship between the two names in question. As a result, this remains one of the challenges of *Sefer Bil'am* that this study remains insufficient to address. On the other hand, however, in this regard my examination differs very little from prior scholarly discourse in general.

Balaam and Abraham

Jonathan D. Safren adduced a lengthy series of similarities between the story of the Aqeda in Genesis 22 and the episode involving Balaam's jenny in Num 22:21–35.⁷³ Although some of his statements appear to derive more from his impressions of the two narratives, and thus at times want for concrete demonstration,⁷⁴ I cite here those connections that are observable in the form of concrete textual data:

- “Setting, Characters and Plot”⁷⁵
 - The setting of both stories is a journey taken by ass.
 - In both stories an “angel” reveals himself to the protagonist (Gen 22:11; Num 22:31).

⁷³ The following material is drawn from Safren 1988.

⁷⁴ For example, Safren's statement that “[b]oth Abraham and Balaam are ‘prophets’” (Safren 1988: 107) is uncorroborated by either text, and even Abraham is called a נָבִיא only in Gen 20:7 and Ps 105:15. This perspective appears to spring from Safren's view that the episode involving Balaam is “aimed at negating the existence of heathen prophecy” (Safren 1988: 107). As I have indicated above, pp. 489–490, the evidence in the pericope suggests that Balaam does not complete the shift from diviner to prophet until after he delivers his second poetic oracle. See Num 24:1–2.

⁷⁵ Adapted from Safren 1988: 106–108.

- The donkey in Genesis 22, a “dumb beast” who is dropped from the story when Abraham and Isaac ascend Mt. Moriah, contrasts with Balaam’s jenny, who speaks intelligently in contrast to its brutish rider.
- “Stylistic Devices”⁷⁶
 - Parallel introductory expressions:
 וַיִּשָּׂם אַבְרָהָם בִּבְקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרֹו וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אִתּוֹ “And Abraham got up in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his lads with him...” (Gen 22:3abc)
 וַיָּקָם בָּלָעָם בִּבְקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־אֲתָנֹו...וּשְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ “And Balaam rose in the morning, and he saddled his jenny...and two of his lads were with him.” (Num 22:21a, 22b)
- “Words Reminiscent of the Akedah”⁷⁷
 - רָאָה “see” – 5x in Genesis 22 (note especially Gen 22:14); also 5x in Num 22:21–35 (see the discussion of keywords in the previous chapter).
 - Words for “sword” – Abraham takes up his sword (מֶאֱכָלֶת) to complete his grim task (Gen 22:6, 10), which he ultimately is not required to complete; Balaam wishes for a sword (חֶרֶב) to kill his ass (Num 22:29), while the unseen messenger stands nearby with drawn sword, and eventually appears (Num 22:23, 31).

In Safren’s view, these elements reveal an allusive relationship between the two stories whereby “[t]he contrast between the arrogant, godless heathen and the humble, godly Abraham is...heightened.”⁷⁸ He elaborated this point as follows:

For the purpose of heaping scorn and ridicule on the figure of Balaam, and of denigrating his vaunted mantic prowess, what better foil could be found than the revered ancestor Abraham...? And how Abraham appears all the more worthy of divine election and of Israelite...veneration when compared to the arrogant but blind and foolish heathen seer Balaam!⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Adapted from Safren 1988: 108–111.

⁷⁷ Adapted from Safren 1988: 112.

⁷⁸ Safren 1988: 112.

⁷⁹ Safren 1988: 113.

The foregoing examination of the jenny episode indicates that Safren's negative description of Balaam is altogether too strong. To be sure, the episode is intended to complicate Balaam, to humanize the protagonist of the pericope; but to view him so harshly in light of this section is to overlook the larger picture of his steady movement toward true, even prophetic insight and understanding.

Indeed, there remains a piece of textual evidence that argues strongly in favor of seeing the parallels between Abraham and Balaam as reflecting positively on the Aramean prophet. I refer to the blessing given to Abraham by Yahweh in Gen 12:3ab:

וְאֶבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאֵר	And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who damns you I will curse.
--	--

Later, Isaac passes a version of this blessing on to Jacob, disguised as Esau, in Gen 27:29ef:

אֲרִיךְ אָרוֹר וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ:	Those who curse you are cursed, and those who bless you are blessed.
---	---

On the other hand, Balaq, in his misattribution of divine power to a human agent, inverts this blessing in Num 22:6, as part of his initial message to Balaam:

אֲשֶׁר־תְּבָרֵךְ מְבֹרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תִּאָּר יֵאָר:	Whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.
--	--

Balaam, however, returns to the original formulation in the final couplet of his third oracle (Num 24:9):

מְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ וְאֲרִיךְ אָרוֹר:	Those who bless you are blessed, and those who curse you are cursed.
---	---

Thus, in one stroke, Balaam's prophetic utterance rejects Balaq's distorted misconception, while simultaneously reaffirming the great divine promise given to the patriarchs. In this way Balaam is portrayed as both reverent of the patriarchal tradition and actively involved in promulgating it.

Consequently, rather than seeing the above connections with the Aqeda story as an invitation to a two-way reading of both narratives whereby both the increased praise of Abraham and the denigration of Balaam are achieved simultaneously, instead I would submit that they stand simply as demonstrations of the allusion of the jenny episode to the earlier text involving Abraham. Thematically, this comports well with what I already have observed about *Sefer Bil'am*, as follows. The Aqeda account begins with the establishment of distance between God's perspective and that of Abraham. God sets out to test Abraham, but the man himself is unaware, and simply acts as he is directed. The weight of this distancing between human and divine perspectives carries through the entire story until its climactic moment, at which point it is eradicated by the revelation to Abraham of the true nature of things. Likewise in the jenny episode, Balaam's perspective stands well removed from that of God, since his misinterpretation of God's statement in Num 22:20 has led to his departure for Moab. His unawareness is emphasized repeatedly each time the donkey reacts to the messenger's presence. This continues until the episode reaches its climax, where God uncovers Balaam's eyes, he sees the messenger, and their ensuing dialogue results in Balaam's growth and deepened understanding. Thus, an audience familiar with the story from Genesis would encounter in the jenny episode certain clues—a fair number of which, one notes, are clustered at the beginning of the episode—that prepare the reader for a story in which the obliviousness of the human protagonist will be corrected in the end by a revelation of divine truth.

Balaam and Moses

In the words of Margalio, “[t]he comparison between Balaam and Moses almost forces itself on the reader....”⁸⁰ Already in midrashic tradition, this relationship was couched in a deeply negative view of Balaam as a sort of anti-Moses:

לא הניח הקדוש ברוך הוא לאמות העולם פתחון פה לעתיד לבוא לומר שאתה
רחקתנו מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא כשם שהעמיד מלכים וחכמים ונביאים
לישראל כך העמיד לאמות העולם ... כיוצא בה העמיד משה לישראל ובלעם
לאמות העולם ראה מה בין נביאי ישראל לנביאי אמות העולם נביאי ישראל
מזהירין את ישראל מן העברות ... ונביא שעמד מן הגוים העמיד פרצה לאבד את
הבריות מן העולם ... לכך נכתבה פרשת בלעם להודיע למה סלק הקדוש ברוך
הוא רוח הקדש מאמות העולם שזה מהם וראה מה עשה.

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, did not permit the communities of the world (to) open their mouth in times to come, to say that “(It is) you (who) have estranged us!” What did the Holy One, Blessed Be He, do? In the same way that he raised up kings, sages, and prophets for Israel, thus did he raise (them) up for the communities of the world. ... Accordingly, he raised up Moses for Israel and Balaam for the communities of the world. See the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the communities of the world: the prophets of Israel warn Israel against transgressions, ... but the prophet that arose from the nations established a breach to destroy the covenants from the world.⁸¹ ... For this (reason), the *parasha* of Balaam was written: to teach why the Holy One, Blessed Be He, removed the holy spirit from the communities of the world; for this one arose from them, and see what he did!⁸²

The inherently condemnatory attitude toward Balaam that is plainly visible in this text has persisted as the standard view of this figure through the Middle Ages⁸³ and up to

⁸⁰ Margalio 1995: 82.

⁸¹ This refers to the apostasy of Israel at Ba'al-Pe'or, as detailed in Numbers 25.

⁸² Bemidbar Rabba 20:1 (the translation is my own). Judith R. Baskin (1983) examined rabbinic and patristic traditions that cast Job, Jethro, and Balaam as counselors to Pharaoh, and thus nemeses of Moses.

⁸³ Rashi's commentary to Numbers provides a representative example of medieval attitudes toward Balaam. See, e.g., his remarks on Num 22:5, 11, 29; 23:16; 24:6.

the present day, as exemplified in the work of scholars such as Margalio⁸⁴. Normally, this perception derives primarily from Balaam's being held responsible for the incident at Ba'al-Pe'or, as stated explicitly in Num 31:16. Garsiel, for example, asserted that the similarity between Balaam's patronymic בעור and the toponym בעל פעור "indicates his responsibility for what happens at Peor."⁸⁵ The tenacity and force of this view have led to its retrojection onto *Sefer Bil'am* itself, such that even before one reaches the narrative detailing the events at Ba'al-Pe'or—in which, incidentally, Balaam is never mentioned—one already perceives Balaam as consummately wicked, rushing off to Moab in the malicious hope of cursing God's chosen people. It is in precisely this context that the comparison of Balaam to Moses has tended to take place. Indeed, this is the basis for the midrashic juxtaposition of Moses, the super-prophet, and Balaam, the villain-prophet, a contrast that has no meaning outside of Balaam's prophetic activities in *Sefer Bil'am*. Likewise, Margalio wrote that "Balaam appears as the great antagonist of Moses: what Moses tried to do—and largely achieved—Balaam tried to undo."⁸⁶

Again, however, I reiterate my view, stated frequently in this study, that *Sefer Bil'am* does not depict Balaam as a villain. He is flawed, to be sure, in the same way that any human is; but the pericope's overall force points to his growth, and to his willingness to grow, in a way that ultimately comes across as complimentary. Moreover, across the book of Numbers, Moses exhibits a similarly flawed nature, except that his actually worsens as the book proceeds, rather than improving.

⁸⁴ Margalio (1995: 82) concurred that this was "one of the original reasons for the composition of the BN and its inclusion into the Pentateuch." Rofé, on the other hand, saw evidence of this motivation only in the jenny episode (see above, pp. 496–497).

⁸⁵ Garsiel 1991: 53.

⁸⁶ Margalio 1995: 82.

Ackerman provided a number of touchstones along the path of Moses's decaying authority, of which I highlight only a few. In Num 10:29–32, the Israelites have been promised guidance by the pillar of cloud. Here, however, Moses asks Hobab for guidance in the wilderness. Ackerman observed that “[t]he context here stresses absolute divine control and guidance...and forces us to see Moses’ request as a breach of faith rather than as an act of prudence. Who needs Hobab when Israel can follow the pillar of cloud?”⁸⁷ This stands as one of multiple demonstrations of Moses’s desire to share the burden of leadership embodied in his unique connection with God, such that when the people complain that they want meat in addition to manna in Num 11:4, their grumbling stands as a symbolic parallel of Moses’s own failing: “Just as the people have wrongly requested a diverse diet, Moses has wrongly requested to diversify the responsibility of leadership...”⁸⁸

Other challenges to Moses’s leadership similarly arise (see, for instance, the episode involving Eldad and Medad in Num 11:26–32, or Korah’s rebellion in Numbers 16), and the underlying tone of the narrative produces the progressively increasing sense that “challenging Moses’ unique authority, even his own desire to lighten his burden by broadening that authority, prevents progress toward Canaan and masks a yearning for Egypt.”⁸⁹ Finally, “[i]n chapter 20 Moses is tested: in the pre-Sinai wilderness he had brought forth water from the rock with his staff. Has he grown sufficiently to believe that the words he speaks through YHWH’s command have more power than the staff?”⁹⁰ The answer, of course, is “no.” Moses strikes the rock at

⁸⁷ Ackerman 1990: 80.

⁸⁸ Ackerman 1990: 81.

⁸⁹ Ackerman 1990: 82.

⁹⁰ Ackerman 1990: 85.

Meribah with his staff, waters come forth, and as a consequence he is denied entry into the Promised Land.

In broad terms, then, Moses is portrayed as a figure who is endowed by God with prophetic authority, but grows increasingly weary of this burden, and ultimately is denied the prize toward which he has led his people for so long. Balaam, on the other hand, is a divinatory specialist who begins with no special qualifications except for his professional reputation, who makes mistakes but is receptive to divine correction at every stage, who even acts of his own accord to bring his behavior into line with God's will, and who ultimately receives true prophetic inspiration (וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים "and upon him was the spirit of Elohim," Num 24:2).⁹¹ As a result, despite the tremendous fame of Moses, Israel's preeminent lawgiver and the one human whom God has entrusted with the Sinai covenant, somehow one is peculiarly unsurprised that in *Sefer Bil'am* we encounter "[a]n extraordinary twist in the plot [that] assigns the most far-reaching and positive visions of Israel's future found in the entire Pentateuch to a Near Eastern diviner rather than to Moses."⁹² Thus, the juxtaposition of these two figures aims at nothing so facile as the elevation of one and the denigration of the other, but rather invites the reassessment of both men, both positively and negatively, in the light of one another.

⁹¹ The arrival of the spirit of God (whether Yahweh or Elohim) frequently often occurs in reference to heroic figures such as the judges (Judg 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19). Note especially its association with prophetic experiences, as in 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; Ezek 11:24; 2 Chr 15:1; 24:20.

⁹² Ackerman 1990: 87.

Other Biblical References to Balaam

Although Balaam is mentioned on his own only once in the Bible outside of *Sefer Bil'am*, in Judg 11:25 where he is identified simply as an enemy of Israel, Balaam's name arises in no less than nine places, as follows:

וְאֶת־מַלְכֵי מִדְיָן הָרְגוּ עַל־חַלְלֵיהֶם אֶת־אֹיֵי וְאֶת־רָקֵם וְאֶת־חֹור וְאֶת־רֵבֶעַ
חֲמִשָּׁת מַלְכֵי מִדְיָן וְאֵת בִּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעֹר הָרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב:
And the kings of Midian they killed, along with their slain: Evi,
Rekem, Sur, Hur, and Reva: the five kings of Midian; and Balaam son
of Be'or they slew with the sword.
(Num 31:8)

הֵן הִנֵּה הָיוּ לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּדְבַר בִּלְעָם לְמַסֵּר־מַעַל בִּיהוָה עַל־דְּבַר־פְּעֹר וַתְּהִי
הַמִּגָּפָה בַּעֲדַת יְהוָה:
Behold, [the women] caused the children of Israel, by the word of
Balaam, to commit treachery against Yahweh in the matter of Pe'or,
and the plague came among the congregation of Yahweh.
(Num 31:16)

עַל־דִּבְרֵי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קִדְּמוּ אֶתְכֶם בַּלָּחֶם וּבַמַּיִם בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁר שָׂכַר
עָלֶיךָ אֶת־בִּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעֹר מִפְתּוֹר אֲרָם נְהַרִים לְקַלֵּלְךָ: וְלֹא־אָבָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְשָׁמַע אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיַּהֲפֹךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָךְ אֶת־הַקְלָלָה לְבִרְכָּה כִּי אָהֲבָךְ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
...due to the fact that [the Ammonites and Moabites] did not welcome
you with bread and water on the road as you came out from Egypt, and
that Balaam son of Be'or was hired against you from Pethor of Aram-
Naharaim, to curse you. But Yahweh your god did not deign to hear
Balaam, and Yahweh your god changed the curse into a blessing for
you, because Yahweh your god loves you.
(Deut 23:5–6 [English: 4–5] [2x])

וְאֶת־בִּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעֹר הַקּוֹסֵם הָרְגוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּחֶרֶב אֶל־חַלְלֵיהֶם:
And Balaam son of Be'or, the diviner, the children of Israel killed with
the sword, along with their slain.
(Jos 13:22)

וַיָּקָם בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְרָא לְבָלָעַם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר
 לְקַלֵּל אֶתְכֶם: וְלֹא אָבִיתִי לְשִׁמְעַת לְבָלָעַם וַיְבָרֶךְ בְּרוּךְ אַתְּכֶם וְאַצֵּל אֶתְכֶם מִיָּדוֹ:
 And Balaq son of Sippor, king of Moab, rose and attacked Israel, and
 sent and summoned Balaam son of Be'or to curse you. But I did not
 deign to hear Balaam, and indeed he blessed you, and I delivered you
 from his hand.
 (Jos 24:9–10 [2x])

עַמִּי זְכַרְנָא	My people, please recall
מַה־יַּעַן בָּלָק מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב	what Balaq king of Moab counseled,
וּמַה־עָנָה אֹתוֹ	and what Balaam son of Be'or
בָּלָעַם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר	answered him;
מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים עַד־הַגִּלְגָּל	from Shittim to Gilgal,
לְמַעַן דַּעַת צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה:	for the sake of knowledge of the righteous
	deeds of Yahweh.
	(Mic 6:5)

כִּי לֹא קִדְּמוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּלָּחֶם וּבַמֵּים וַיִּשְׁכֹּר עָלָיו אֶת־בָּלָעַם לְקַלְלוֹ וַיְהִפֹּךְ
 אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַקְלָלָה לְבִרְכָּה:

For [the Ammonites and Moabites] did not welcome the children of
 Israel with bread and water, and Balaam was hired against him [i.e.,
 Israel] to curse him, and our god changed the curse into a blessing.
 (Neh 13:2)

Of these attestations of Balaam's name, only Mic 6:5 refers to him in a positive light. The rest portray him in decidedly negative fashion, in one case (Num 31:16) blaming him directly for Israel's apostasy at Ba'al-Pe'or, and in the others at least for his complicity in Balaq's attempt to curse Israel. In modernity, the traditional explanation for this range of viewpoints on Balaam has been that the negative views represent a much later body of traditions, to be associated with the activities of a late monarchic and/or exilic Deuteronomist.⁹³ At its core, this view strikes to the heart of the matter,

⁹³ For a presentation of the standard view together with some finer nuances, see, e.g., Frankel 1996. Note that it is irrelevant whether there was a single Deuteronomistic redaction, or multiple ones as proposed, e.g., in Friedman 1981 and Cross 1983.

since on some level one must grapple with the preservation side by side of diametrically opposed traditions about this figure. Moreover, it is true that these citations appear to represent direct responses to the material narrated in *Sefer Bil'am*, particularly the reference in Deuteronomy that identifies Balaam's place of origin as Pethor in Aram-Naharaim. However, one is somewhat puzzled by the tacit assumption that these traditions could not have existed more or less simultaneously.

One also encounters alternative perspectives such as that of Lutzky,⁹⁴ who interpreted the biblical ambivalence toward Balaam as indicative of a parallel ambivalence toward Asherah, a deity to whom she proposed Balaam possessed a special connection. Taking the epithet שַׁדַּי "Shadday" as a reference to Asherah,⁹⁵ rather than to El as is generally assumed,⁹⁶ and restoring this epithet in the Deir 'Allā inscriptions (I:15, which ends with š[xx]),⁹⁷ she interpreted both this datum and the appearance of the name Shadday in Balaam's titulary opening the third and fourth oracles (Num 24:4, 16) as indicative of Balaam's link to this goddess.⁹⁸ She went on to conclude that Israel's vacillating attitudes toward Asherah resulted in concomitant shifts in the biblical perspective on Balaam:

Balaam's...apostasy from Yahwism may have been more apparent than real, reflecting, not inconsistency on his part, but inconsistent attitudes toward Asherah. When the worship of Asherah was tolerated (during much of the pre-exilic period), the goddess...is thought to have been popularly worshipped as the consort of Yahweh.... If Balaam was a diviner/prophet of Asherah, he may then have been seen as coming over to Yahweh's camp (with Asherah). But when worship of Asherah was repudiated (e.g., during the reigns of Hezekiah, Asa, Josiah, or by

⁹⁴ See my earlier comments on Lutzky's hypothesis in the previous chapter, pp. 345–346.

⁹⁵ See Lutzky 1998.

⁹⁶ Lutzky 1999: 31–36.

⁹⁷ Lutzky 1998: 27–28, 29.

⁹⁸ Lutzky 1999: *passim*.

groups with conflicting interests), he may then have been seen as alien to Yahweh's camp, the unreconstructed diviner/prophet of a pagan deity.⁹⁹

In assessing Lutzky's arguments, we must recognize four specific points of concern. First, her acceptance of a connection between the name Shadday and the term שֵׁד "breast"¹⁰⁰ cannot stand on philological grounds, since the name clearly derives from a root שֵׁד or שֵׁדָה, while the term for "breast" is a simple biliteral, as are many body parts, for example, יָד "hand," פָּנִים "face," אֶפֶס "nose," and so on. Second, her restoration of Š[dy] in DA I:15, which is based in part on the attestation of the epithet in the biblical Balaam material, is far from universally accepted. Third, without any additional trace of Ashera elsewhere in *Sefer Bil'am*, it is difficult to dismiss the possibility that the name Shadday in Balaam's third and fourth oracles is in fact an epithet for El, as the parallel structure of Balaam's titulary, and also the other biblical collocations of אֱלֹהִים and שֵׁדָה, would appear to suggest. And fourth, like the diachronic perspective identified above, Lutzky's view treats the competing biblical accounts as unilaterally representative of the monolithic viewpoint of Israel at different times in its history. Thus, despite Lutzky's thorough and provocative analysis, in the light of these problematic aspects her position ultimately must be set aside.

To be sure, some of these references to Balaam are later derivatives of the earlier members of this group. The instance from Nehemiah, for example, clearly is patterned on Deut 23:5–6, and comes from a book whose late date is well established. Despite this fact, however, we need not assume that the negative perspective on Balaam reflected in these various texts is a late development. Rather, I would argue

⁹⁹ Lutzky 1999: 424.

¹⁰⁰ Lutzky 1998: *passim*.

that a synchronic perspective offers a new way of looking at this problem. On a few occasions in this study, I have suggested that *Sefer Bil'am* as it stands derives from the mid- to late 8th century BCE, and represents the culmination of Judahite efforts to standardize and incorporate into their religious literature a collection of Transjordanian Balaam traditions. The large-scale penetration of these traditions into Judah would have taken place under the impetus of ongoing Assyrian incursion into the southern Levant during this period, in which Judah experienced both an influx of northerners and an increase in literary production, according to perspectives such as that offered in Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's recent study.¹⁰¹

If this assessment is correct, however, it is important also to realize that the positive Judahite response to these traditions, as attested in *Sefer Bil'am*, most likely was not unilateral. Whether because of his foreignness, or because he professed a non-Yahwistic (or not exclusively Yahwistic) religious identity, or for some other reason, it is possible that there may have existed in Judah a competing view, whereby this was not a prophet whose fame warranted reworking and inclusion in the sacred history, but rather an idolater whose infamy rendered him a target for scorn and vilification. Thus, while one tradition, that of *Sefer Bil'am*, rendered him a true Yahwist who pronounced remarkable blessings on the wandering people of Israel, the other may have responded to this interpretation by defaming him, most notably in Num 31:16, where he is held responsible for the great sin of Israel at Ba'al-Pe'or. Naturally, it is this condemnatory stance that would have thrived in later periods, when xenophobic and anti-divinatory sentiments were more widespread and pronounced.

¹⁰¹ Finkelstein–Silberman 2006. See also Schniedewind 2004; and above, pp. 185–187.

Conversely, the positive reference to Balaam in Mic 6:5, which would be roughly contemporary with *Sefer Bil'am* according to the dating that I have proposed, would indicate that the prophet is familiar either with *Sefer Bil'am* itself or with the body of traditions from which it was constituted. This portion of Micah is directed at Samaria, and has been identified as an Israelian text.¹⁰² Thus, one might speculate that it reflects some familiarity with the Balaam traditions in the Israelian sphere, which would be unsurprising given that the one extrabiblically known locus for such traditions, namely Deir 'Allā, was within the domain of the kingdom of Israel.

An Application of Polak's Statistical Approaches to the Prose Narrative of Sefer Bil'am

I conclude this chapter by turning briefly to a relatively new analytical method developed by Frank H. Polak. This method is articulated in a series of four articles,¹⁰³ including a 1998 study entitled "The Oral and the Written." In this work, he explained the theoretical underpinning of his approach by observing, first, a qualitative distinction between oral and written language, namely that oral language exhibits a marked increase in "(a) the use of subordinate clauses (hypotaxis), (b) the length of the noun string [that is, construct phrases, adjectival chains, appositives, and the like], [and] (c) the number of explicit syntactic constituents in the clause;" and a marked decrease in "(d) the frequency of reference by means of pronouns and deictic particles."¹⁰⁴ He related this observation to biblical narrative by noting that the earliest material is understood to have originated as a body of oral traditions, while late

¹⁰² See Burkitt 1926; and Ginsberg 1982: 25–27.

¹⁰³ Polak 1995; Polak 1997; Polak 1998a; Polak 1998b.

¹⁰⁴ Polak 1998a: 59.

biblical material such as that from the Persian period “likely...emerged in the scribal chancellery.”¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, he hypothesized, one should be able to measure the difference between the various chronological strata of biblical narrative by collecting data on clause length and complexity, hypotaxis, deixis, nominalization of verbal roots, and so on.

Polak began by gathering data from a substantial series of diagnostic texts from all periods, from early to late. Specifically, he calculated two ratios,¹⁰⁶ one that measures the balance of nouns and verbs in each text (the NV ratio) and another that measures the balance of nominalized verbal forms (participles, infinitives, etc.) and finite verbs in each text (the NF ratio).¹⁰⁷ Having collected the data from his diagnostic texts and arranged it into a convenient chart,¹⁰⁸ in which he delineated four distinct chronological strata: the classical stratum, which includes narratives relating to the Patriarchs, the Exodus, David, and so on; a transitional subclass whose prose he described as “intricate classical narrative,” which includes the Joseph story, portions of Judges, and so on; the late pre-exilic/exilic period, including later portions of Kings, Jeremiah, and so on; and the Persian era, including Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Chronicles, and so on. This breakdown enabled him to calculate the following baseline figures for each category:

¹⁰⁵ Polak 1998a: 59.

¹⁰⁶ Although Polak’s figures technically are percentages, he identified them by the term “ratio.” In the present study, following his lead, I too am content to be somewhat fluid in my terminology, and thus maintain his designation for these figures.

¹⁰⁷ See Polak 1998a: 63–64.

¹⁰⁸ Polak 1998a: 70.

Table 13: Polak's Statistical Averages by Chronological Stratum

	Nouns	Verbs	NV ratio	Nominal	Finite	NF ratio
Classical	15,523	9631	.612	1521	7974	.154
Intricate classical	6532	3362	.656	559	2698	.175
(Late pre-)exilic	6707	2457	.724	564	1995	.207
Persian	5629	2062	.739	671	1350	.326

These data reveal a clear increase in both NV ratio and NF ratio over time, with the lowest figures appearing in the earliest material, and the highest figures in the latest material. Although the data for the individual texts in each stratum vary, in some cases quite widely,¹⁰⁹ overall Polak's original hypothesis is borne out by the figures presented in his chart. Consequently, Polak characterized the classical material, with its relatively low number of nouns and nominalized verbal forms, as "rhythmic-verbal," and the late material, which exhibits high figures in these categories, as "complex-nominal."¹¹⁰

In the second portion of this study, Polak proceeded to track the narrative complexity of the four strata in different ways. Specifically, he counted the number of "arguments" in each clause, by which he apparently meant explicitly stated syntactical components other than the governing verb, such as subject, object, and so on (excluding pronouns); the number of "embedded" or subordinate clauses, and the number of extended noun phrases such as construct chains and series of adjectival descriptors.¹¹¹ Although he did not produce a series of averages for the four periods, as he had for the figures presented in the previous portion of the study, his results

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed interpretation of the data and the range of possible variation in each category, see Polak 1998a: 70–71.

¹¹⁰ Polak 1998a: 75.

¹¹¹ See Polak 1998a: 76 for a breakdown of the categories, and the subsequent pages for his examination of the data in individual texts.

nevertheless were demonstrative: clause complexity, hypotaxis, and the frequency of nominal strings all increase considerably over time, with the lowest figures in the classical stratum and the highest figures associated with the Persian era. I offer the following averages based on the data he provided. The first two columns represent the percentage of total clauses that are either simple or embedded, respectively; and the third column represents a ratio of expanded noun strings to total clauses.

Table 14: Narrative Complexity by Stratum, Based on Polak's Data¹¹²

	Simple clauses (0–1 arguments)	Embedded clauses	Extended noun strings / clauses
Classical	56.86 %	11.24 %	0.3148
Intricate classical	41.77 %	19.24 %	0.4635
(Late pre-)exilic	35.59 %	21.67 %	0.7849
Persian	24.63 %	33.55 %	1.0404

As Polak noted, his approach to broad strata of biblical narrative is not designed as a tool for dating individual texts, but rather is intended to provide an “overview of the entire corpus.”¹¹³ In applying his method to an isolated pericope such as *Sefer Bil'am*, therefore, it is important not to attempt to draw firm conclusions on the basis of the resulting figures. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to employ this innovative approach to the text at hand, to see whether it yields any meaningful observations. Thus, I present the following assessment based on my own collection of the relevant data in *Sefer Bil'am*.

By my count, this pericope exhibits 415 nouns and 310 verbs, for a NV ratio of .572; and 54 nominalized and 256 finite verbal forms, for a NF ratio of .174. These

¹¹² The data from which these averages are calculated are presented in Polak 1998a: 78–100.

¹¹³ Polak 1998a: 61.

numbers are quite low, and situate the text squarely within the classical stratum identified by Polak. However, the complexity of language in the pericope profoundly conflicts with this assessment. Clauses with one or zero arguments account for only 36.56 percent of the total number of clauses in the text, a number far lower than the average for the classical-stratum texts examined in Polak's study. In fact, this number for *Sefer Bil'am* appears to accord best with figures from the late pre-exilic/exilic period. Likewise, the number of embedded clauses in this pericope, which account for 23.81 percent of all clauses, far outstrips the classical average. Here too, the figure for our text is closest to that of the late pre-exilic/exilic stratum. Only the quantity of extended noun strings, which occur 0.1781 times per clause in the pericope, is shifted toward the classical end of the spectrum, and in fact is lower than the figure for that period.

These conflicting data amply demonstrate that an individual text can deviate widely from the averages established for the various strata, and also that it can be difficult to refine the distinctions between adjacent strata on the basis of limited quantitative evidence. Moreover, Polak's method requires the acceptance of both his dating and his delimitation of the various diagnostic texts he used to calculate his averages; and although there is general consensus on these matters for the vast majority of these texts, this issue nevertheless drives home the general and impressionistic nature of his conclusions. Ultimately, therefore, when approaching a single text like *Sefer Bil'am* using this method, the most profitable approach surely is to find the most suitable middle ground for this text on the spectrum of Polak's statistical data. In other words, based on the data I have presented for this pericope, it seems appropriate to evaluate the text neither as a highly complex classical narrative, nor as an unusually rhythmic-verbal late pre-exilic/exilic one, but rather as situated somewhere in between, namely, in the intricate classical stratum. In support of this

evaluation, I note that it accords with the late-8th-century date I have proposed for *Sefer Bil'am* based on the evidence presented in this dissertation.

To go a step further, I turn to another method articulated by Polak for evaluating biblical narrative on a statistical basis.¹¹⁴ Again, the notion underlying this second approach is that the language of the Bible changed over time, with later material evincing clear distinctions from earlier texts. In this article, Polak suggested a series of changes in verbal usages based on gradual shifts in the contexts out of which the literary production of the various biblical periods came. Working in three distinct semantic fields (verbs of movement; verbs of perception; and a third, unnamed category that one might term “verbs of transference:” giving, taking, and so on),¹¹⁵ he collected data from a series of pericopes in each of his four chronological strata, by counting the occurrences of three different verbs in each semantic category: in the category of movement he counted the verbs הֵלֵךְ, בּוֹא, and the control verb יָצָא; in the perception category he counted the verbs רָאָה, שָׁמַע, and the control verb יָדַע; and in the transference category he counted the verbs לָקַח, הֵבִיא, and the control verb נָשָׂא.¹¹⁶

The results of Polak’s statistical analysis appeared to indicate that the changes in verbal usages over time “point to differences in mentality rather than in language usage as such.”¹¹⁷ In an effort to bring together his findings and the established historical picture, Polak formulated the hypothesis that the composers of the earlier narratives, which were primarily oral in nature, had more immediate contact with the events that inspired their stories: they *went* (הֵלֵךְ) about the land, *saw* (רָאָה) what took

¹¹⁴ See Polak 1995 and Polak 1998b.

¹¹⁵ Polak’s initial delineation of these categories appears in Polak 1995: 296–298, 299–302, and 302 respectively, along with some sample data.

¹¹⁶ These data, along with averages for each of the four strata, are presented in Polak 1998b: 158–160.

¹¹⁷ Polak 1995: 301.

place, and *took* (לקח) this information for use in their compositions. By contrast, the scribal contexts out of which the Persian-era material arose would have been attached to a central locus, namely the Jerusalem court, in which others *came* (בוא) to them *bringing* (הביא) reports of important events, which they *heard* (שמע). Thus, the experiences of those who produced the literature of the Bible's various chronological periods informed the worldview evident in their work. The table below shows average percentages for each verb within their respective semantic categories, as detailed by Polak.

Table 15: Verbal Usage Averages in Polak's Three Categories

Verbs of Movement ¹¹⁸			
	הלך	בוא	יצא
Classical	42.67 %	42.46 %	14.87 %
Intricate classical	38.08 %	42.68 %	19.25 %
(Late pre-)exilic	33.85 %	49.61 %	16.54 %
Persian	24.46 %	64.13 %	11.41 %
Verbs of Perception ¹¹⁹			
	ראה	שמע	ידע
Classical	52.78 %	23.48 %	23.74 %
Intricate classical	47.66 %	27.10 %	25.23 %
(Late pre-)exilic	37.93 %	42.76 %	19.31 %
Persian	18.18 %	18.18 %	63.64 %
Verbs of Transference ¹²⁰			
	לקח	הביא	נשא
Classical	63.24 %	18.92 %	17.84 %
Intricate classical	58.33 %	21.88 %	19.79 %
(Late pre-)exilic	63.24 %	19.85 %	16.91 %
Persian	23.86 %	48.86 %	27.27 %

¹¹⁸ See Polak 1998b: 159.

¹¹⁹ See Polak 1998b: 160.

¹²⁰ See Polak 1998b: 158.

As the averages in the table demonstrate, this means of mapping the diachronic development of biblical narrative is even more impressionistic than the method discussed above. In a very broad sense, one has the impression that Polak's hypothesis is generally correct, as evident, for example, in the general decrease over time of the verbs הלך, ראה, and לקח; but these data do not reveal as clear a process of chronological change as do the figures relating to the nominal-verbal balance and clause complexity of biblical prose texts.

Consequently, it is even more challenging to make sense of the data from a single text such as *Sefer Bil'am*. In this pericope, the 23 instances (thus, 63.89 percent) of the verb הלך outnumber the ten attestations (27.78 percent) of בוא by a margin of more than two to one, with three occurrences (8.33 percent) of יצא. The verb ראה appears ten times (71.43 percent) to one instance (7.14 percent) of שמע, with three attestations (21.43 percent) of ידע. And there are five instances (38.46 percent) of לקח, none of הביא, and eight (61.54 percent) of נשא, with most of the instances of this verb occurring in the formulaic statement וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר “and he took up his theme and said,” which precedes each of Balaam's oracular speeches. If Polak's hypothesis is taken very generally, these data would seem to push our text to the earlier end of the spectrum, in which the verbs הלך, ראה, and לקח predominate. However, a closer look at Polak's specific data for individual texts reveals that in two of the three categories, the closest statistical analogue to *Sefer Bil'am* is a split pericope constituted of Judges 4 and 9. In this text, הלך is used 22 times and בוא 12 times, for a similar ratio of about two to one;¹²¹ and לקח is used four times while הביא does not appear at all, a situation nearly identical to that in our text.¹²² These numbers are closer than those of any other

¹²¹ Polak 1998b: 159.

¹²² Polak 1998b: 158.

individual pericope to those of *Sefer Bil'am*; and this text is situated not in the classical stratum, but in the slightly later intricate classical phase. Only with respect to verbs of perception does *Sefer Bil'am* deviate from the figures for Judges 4 and 9; but in this category, numbers comparable to those from our pericope are in evidence for as many texts from the intricate classical stratum as from the earliest material in Polak's analysis.¹²³

In addition, it is worthwhile to consider the degree to which data such as these may be skewed by the specific content of the text in question. In *Sefer Bil'am*, for example, I already have called attention to the significance of sight as a central concept in the pericope.¹²⁴ Consequently, it is somewhat unsurprising that the verb **ראה** is more common than some other verb of perception relating to a different sense, such as **שמע**. Indeed, it would be a grievous abuse of Polak's method to suggest that it is impossible for a late text to focus primarily on sight, or for an early text to focus primarily on hearing!

Polak's approaches provide a unique means of accessing significant information about the process of development that biblical literature underwent over the course of the first millennium BCE. To reiterate, however, it must be stressed that both of these approaches are most informative when engaged with an eye toward broad spans in the diachronic development of biblical narrative, rather than toward relatively short individual texts. The data from *Sefer Bil'am* amply demonstrate the potential for wide variation between individual texts within a single chronological stratum, and also for considerable overlap between adjacent strata that renders it

¹²³ Polak 1998b: 160. Note especially the data in this category for Judges 17–18 (listed as **בני דן**) and Judges 19–20 (listed as **פילגש**), both in the intricate classical stratum.

¹²⁴ See above, pp. 307–313.

difficult to draw sharp divisions between them. Having said this, however, in applying both of Polak's methods to the pericope with which we are concerned, it remains apparent that the most natural conclusion is indeed that *Sefer Bil'am* belongs to the intricate classical stratum. Although these approaches are not well-suited to establishing the date of this or any other individual section of biblical narrative, when their results correspond satisfactorily to conclusions drawn on the basis of other types of evidence, they may provide at least some impressionistic support for those conclusions. Thus, as noted above, the statistical data presented here appear to support the hypothesis I have articulated elsewhere that places this text in the late 8th century.

The Literature of Sefer Bil'am: An Overview

As the last two chapters have shown, *Sefer Bil'am* evinces an enormous range of rich, highly expressive literary figuration that extends in scope from the smallest phoneme to the most sweeping thematic gesture. Careful attention to detail is evident on oral–aural, compositional, high-literary, and didactic levels, with the sundry devices employed by the authors frequently working in tandem to produce the desired effect. The pericope's tightly wrought construction renders it profoundly difficult to accept the hypothesis that it represents an unharmonized patchwork of preexisting documents, particularly with regard to the central jenny episode, which is routinely perceived as an interpolation. Rather, the text's unity is evident in the gradual buildup of its central ideas, which occurs in stages from the narrative's start to its conclusion.

The main assertions of the pericope are twofold: first, Israel's greatness and success are outward signs of its status as God's chosen people; and second, no human desire or action is sufficient to countermand the will of God. The first assertion is expressed primarily (but not exclusively) in Balaam's poetic oracles, which stand in dialogue with the poetic highlights of the patriarchal tradition, and which also present

a subtly worked account of Israelite history from the Wandering Period to the time of the pericope's ultimate composition. The second assertion is expressed primarily (but not exclusively) in the prose, and is embodied, as the story progresses, in the steady growth of Balaam, who gradually comes to understand for himself this very point. These two assertions are mutually supportive, and intertwine in the relationship between the poetic and prosaic sections, while simultaneously achieving a cutting satire of Balaam, the story's villain, by way of elements reminiscent of the Exodus story that invite his comparison with Pharaoh.

As the main character in the pericope, Balaam, unsurprisingly, is depicted in a particularly rich and layered fashion. Beginning as a businessman, with the concomitant willingness to entertain the possibility of a new client, Balaam embarks on a transformative journey in which he makes mistakes, acts wilfully, beats an animal, speaks out-of-turn, and performs useless rituals; and yet he also admits his faults, learns from his experiences, carefully relays the messages with which God has entrusted him, and ultimately achieves both unsolicited prophetic inspiration and true understanding of his role as a transmitter of divine will. All too often, this positive presentation of Balaam goes unappreciated in both scholarship and exegesis.

Many of the observations yielded by the literary perspectives applied in this study are perceptible on some level by their very nature, even without the benefit of close literary analysis. Indeed, it is with precisely such observations that literary study is concerned, since it aims not to reveal hidden truths, but to examine the tools by which the text's myriad meanings are conveyed to its audience. At the same time, however, close scrutiny of the type that I have undertaken can yield—has yielded—layers of sophistication that are not readily apparent in even the most insightful reader's casual encounter with the text. This, too, is a primary concern of the literary approach, namely, to attune the audience's literary "palette" to the minute traces of

expressive potential that reveal themselves only under the microscope of careful examination. Having successfully pursued both of these goals by synthesizing numerous perspectives on *Sefer Bil'am* with current methodological approaches in the study of biblical literature generally, I turn now to the final task of reintegrating my observations into the broader body of discourse on the pericope in question.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS:
RE-ENGAGING THE ESTABLISHED DISCOURSE
ON *SEFER BILʿAM*

A Return to the Primary Interests of Prior Scholarship

Part of the relevance of any new piece of scholarship lies in its ability to engage in dialogue with prior efforts to come to terms with the material under study. For this reason, the first task I undertake here is to present the perspectives developed in my research that relate to the central concerns of the last several decades of biblical studies, namely, those of dating, provenance, redaction, and historical context. In order to address these issues, I offer a concise rendering of my view of the *Sitz im Leben* of *Sefer Bilʿam*, which I have formulated on the basis of the cumulative body of analysis undertaken in the previous chapters.

The Sitz im Leben of Sefer Bilʿam

Balaq’s Moabite monarchy as depicted in *Sefer Bilʿam* produces some complications when taken in combination with the pericope’s Wandering-Period setting. Archaeological efforts have “yielded only meager remains from Iron Age I,” resulting in a general picture that “does not confirm the biblical traditions concerning...Moab...during the time of the Exodus...”¹ In his publication of the third archaeological campaign at the important Moabite city of Dibon, A. D. Tushingham observed that “the earliest occupation of the mound coincides almost exactly with the

¹ Mazar 1990: 358–359.

flourish of Mesha,” the 9th-century king who credits himself in the Mesha Stele with breaking the yoke of Israelian domination.² There is some question, therefore, about the existence of a true Moabite kingdom significantly earlier than the Israel’s United Monarchy, which has led to the widespread view that this pericope represents a retrojection of dealings between the Israelite and Moabite monarchies onto the premonarchic period.³

We may never know whether *Sefer Bil’am* was built around some kernel of historical truth. We can be certain, however, that in its present form the pericope exhibits decidedly monarchic concerns. The four major oracles, which bear intimate links with the prose material, are deployed along a staged historical timeline running from the Wandering Period through the pre-monarchy to the reigns of Saul and David. The third oracle in particular devotes special attention to the stability and prosperity associated with monarchy, and the fourth poem celebrates the military exploits of Israel’s most venerated king. Having been placed in the mouth of a figure speaking ostensibly during the Wandering Period, these statements come across as prophetic precedents for the successes of Israel. In turn, the realization of these successes during the period between the narrative’s temporal setting and its time of authorship would have “proven” the truth of the oracles, further validating their praise of Israel’s greatness and unique connection to God.

We may be still more specific. The deliberate, literarily motivated employment of numerous non-SBH linguistic features in the pericope speaks to its SBH (read: Judahite) dialectal “center,” particularly in light of the handful of these features that

² Tushingham 1972: 24.

³ See, e.g., Levine 2000: 40.

are juxtaposed directly with their SBH equivalents.⁴ In addition, these data accord perfectly with the emphasis in the second and third oracles of imagery—even of precise phraseology—that is associated specifically with Judah in Genesis 49.⁵ This evidence is supported by the decidedly Judahite geographical perspective of the oracular material, particularly the fourth poem, which mentions only polities that border Judah. Thus, although David's victories over Moab and Edom, to which the oracle refers, are presented elsewhere side by side with his successes against northern neighbors such as the Ammonites and the Arameans (see 2 Samuel 8), these other peoples do not appear in this pericope at all.⁶ Moreover, this picture is completed by the three short oracular codas, which provide additional details pointing to Judah as the geographical center of the pericope's worldview.

Given that the inscriptions from Deir ʿAllā implicate Gilead as a region in which traditions about Balaam thrived, we must explain how such traditions, situated within the purview of the northern kingdom of Israel, wound up incorporated into the sacred literary tradition of Judah. I have suggested that the middle of the 8th century BCE is a likely timeframe in which this may have occurred, during the extended period of increasing Assyrian incursion into the northern parts of the southern Levant, most likely in association with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727). As this process wore on, at least some part of the populations in these areas likely would have moved southward to escape the Assyrian threat, and in doing so, they may have been responsible for importing into Judah a rich body of Balaam traditions, which then

⁴ See above, pp. 175–183.

⁵ See above, pp. 514–515.

⁶ The Ammonites are mentioned in only two verses in the entire Torah. See above, p. 475 n. 349.

were consolidated, adapted, and incorporated into the Yahwistic literature of that kingdom.

This hypothesis comports well with the date of the Deir ‘Allā inscriptions, whose archaeological context places them in “about the first half of the 8th century BC,”⁷ and also fits comfortably with the only other positive reference to Balaam in the Bible, which appears in Mic 6:5. Since the prophecy within which this reference occurs is directed at Samaria, it presumably must have been composed prior to the fall of the northern kingdom in 722. Moreover, the surrounding context in Micah strikes a tone that is remarkably similar to that evident in *Sefer Bil’am*, especially with regard to the inefficacy of empty ritual, particularly of the sacrificial kind (Mic 6:6–7). These statements, which occur in the Israelian portion of the book of Micah (chapters 6–7), resonate with similar condemnations of sorcery and idolatry that appear in the book’s earlier chapters (see, for example, Mic 5:11–14 [English: 5:12–15]). Notwithstanding the disparate provenances of Micah 1–5 and Micah 6–7, the ideas expressed in these specific places bear a similar resemblance to the religious reforms undertaken by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1–6), who took the throne in 728. Given that the superscription to the book of Micah connects it with the same period, this observation suggests that the prophetic material in question may well have been produced during or slightly before the early part of this king’s reign.

One may prefer to see Micah’s reference to Balaam as an indicator that *Sefer Bil’am* already had achieved some sort of official status in the Judahite tradition, or instead to believe that this reference simply reflects Micah’s awareness of the same body of traditions that gave rise to the pericope in Numbers. In either case, there is

⁷ Franken 1999: 183.

some appeal in conceiving of the two texts as separate attestations of a broader religious sensibility, perhaps even the very movement whose ideals Hezekiah upheld with his reforms. Moreover, it is within this same context—that of calls for reform in Judahite Yahwism—that the negative views of Balaam attested elsewhere may have gained a foothold. If indeed the historical Balaam bore no connection, or at least no special connection, to Yahweh, as the Deir ‘Allā materials may suggest, then some may have found the idea of his incorporation into the Yahwistic tradition anathema.

Returning again to *Sefer Bil'am* itself, the chronological schema of the last three short oracles fits nicely into this timeframe. Taking up the temporal context of the fourth major oracle, the short coda referring to Amaleq (Num 24:20) looks back on David's resounding defeat of this people (1 Samuel 30). The next oracular coda (Num 24:21–22) describes the impending Assyrian destruction of the Kenite strongholds. According to Judg 4:11, some Kenites were living in the area north of the Galilee, and so a confrontation between this group and Assyria would fit comfortably into the temporal context of the text's composition; and it is striking, moreover, that the Kenites' impending doom is not presented as a completed event—it is impending, but it has not yet happened. Finally, the last coda (Num 24:23–24), which is not directed at a specific people, reinforces the perspective according to which Assyrian represents the pinnacle of destructive force, and looks ahead to threats as yet unknown, who may eclipse even the might of the Assyrian armies. In sum, the temporal perspective evident in these oracles situates them comfortably in the “present” of the Assyrian threat in the mid- to late 8th century.

Thus, this pericope presents a Wandering-Period story of a confrontation between Israel and Moab, that celebrates monarchic traditions culminating in the military achievements of David, that is presented as a story of hope and a reminder of Israel's unique status as God's chosen people at a time when the seemingly

insurmountable threat of Assyrian domination loomed on the horizon. Moreover, the power of the pro-Israelite sentiments expressed in Balaam's oracles is heightened dramatically by their placement in the mouth of an Aramean—an archenemy of Israel who hails from the heartland of the threatening Assyrian Empire.⁸

In addition, if one accepts this hypothesis for the date of *Sefer Bil'am*, one notes that there is no clear reference to the ongoing conflict between Moab and the northern kingdom of Israel, a relationship that occupied much of the 9th century. Rather, the victories over Moab that are celebrated appear to be those of David, whose tribe came to dominate the southern kingdom under the rule of his bloodline. This, too, lends support to the suggestion that *Sefer Bil'am*, as we know it, is to be identified as a Judahite text, concerned with Judahite interests and extolling Judahite heritage.

This being the case, it is possible that one might prefer to see the bulk of *Sefer Bil'am*, up to the end of the fourth oracle, as earlier material dating from during or just after David's reign.⁹ It is possible, moreover, to interpret the archaic features that Shelomo Morag adduced in the pericope's poetic sections as further indication that this may be a more appropriate way to date the pericope, or at least most of it.¹⁰ This perspective cannot be rejected out of hand, but I maintain that the most likely period for the absorption of Gileadite traditions about Balaam into the narratives of Judah would have been in the period I have indicated. This is especially so given the possibility that Balaam himself is to be associated with a larger body of prophetic traditions deriving from 9th-century Gilead, after David's reign, of which both Elijah

⁸ See my earlier remarks on this matter in the previous chapter, pp. 508–509.

⁹ This is akin to the view presented in Schmidt 1979: 253–254.

¹⁰ See Morag 1995.

and Elisha were a part.¹¹ Whether or not Balaam himself came from Gilead, his activity in that region, as indicated by the Deir ʿAllā inscriptions, may have rendered him an appealing figure to the Judahite religious establishment, who may have hoped to lay claim to the same prophetic heritage in which Elijah and Elisha were situated.

In any case, moreover, the extant form of *Sefer Bilʿam* evinces a wide array of characteristics that speak to the 8th-century date I have proposed. The emphasis on Balaam’s Arameanness, whether literary liberty or historical fact, finds voice in both the poetry and the prose. Indeed, the poems themselves stand in direct and frequent dialogue with their narrative context, to the extent that a significant quantity of Balaam’s oracular material would be unintelligible if extracted from the surrounding prose. Other literary devices, some quite extensive, speak to an overarching compositional integrity extending across the entire pericope, including the jenny episode, which is viewed frequently as a separate unit. In short, even if one accepts my suggested dating, one may prefer to cling to the notion that certain limited elements in the pericope must have predated the 8th-century composition, in either oral or written form. But when one considers this view against the tightly cohesive character of *Sefer Bilʿam* as a unified text, Jacob Milgrom’s observation ultimately rings true: “[E]ven were this so, the fusion is so thoroughgoing and skillful that the original seams are no longer visible: The redaction is a new artistic creation.”¹²

¹¹ Elijah is identified as Gileadite in 1 Kgs 17:1. Gary A. Rendsburg (1981: 71) pointed out that Elisha, too, hailed from Gilead. Additionally, one notes certain other similarities, albeit relatively superficial ones, between the literature about these prophets and that concerned with Balaam. For instance, in 2 Kings 1, Elijah refuses Ahaziah’s first summons, but responds to his second; and in 2 Kgs 3:18–19, Elisha speaks a prophetic utterance foretelling the joint victory of Israel and Judah over Moab.

¹² Milgrom 1990: 468.

What Else Have We Gained Here? Fresh Perspectives on Sefer Bil'am and Biblical Studies

It is important to point out here that the research I have undertaken in this dissertation was never aimed specifically at answering the perennial questions with which prior scholarship has been concerned. As such, the reader must recognize the limitations of this research in addressing questions for which other methodologies are better suited. By taking up the concerns of dating, provenance, redaction, and historical context in the preceding section, I have attempted only to demonstrate that my conclusions bear on those of other methodologies, and indeed have provided new angles from which to consider how we answer questions relating to these topics.

I would posit, however, that the contributions of this study have outreached these traditional scholarly concerns, and engaged this particular pericope in a manner that previously had not been undertaken in any systematic fashion. I believe that the synthesis of prior treatments of this material that I have presented here, together with my own observations, has produced not only an effective argument for the wider scholarly application of linguistic and literary methods to the biblical corpus in general, but also an invitation for the scholarly community to reinvest some of its energies in the pursuit of questions other than those that have driven modern discourse for the last several decades.

In a nutshell, I have attempted to examine how the text of *Sefer Bil'am* works. Specifically, I have explored the complex inner mechanics of the text and language of *Sefer Bil'am*, considered the tools employed by its authors to convey the desired meanings, and assessed the collective effect that their efforts produce as one proceeds through this piece of literature. The results amply reveal the ingenuity and sophistication of the authors, and remind us why biblical literature has so captivated audiences for millennia. Indeed, this last aspect is far from a mere pietistic truism; nor

is it an appeal to the vagaries of aesthetics. Rather, I suggest that it is precisely this fascination that has acted as a central stimulus of the profound modern interest in how to date, divide, and attribute these materials—not the other way around! Thus, my efforts here, taken as a whole, simply represent an attempt to ask *why* the text is so compelling as a piece of literature, *what* makes it so, and *how* the authors shaped words and ideas to achieve this in their art. My hope, therefore, is that my work not only illuminate the pericope with which it is directly concerned, but also invite further analysis and appreciation of these matters in the literary study of the Bible.

APPENDIX
TRANSLATION OF *SEFER BIL^cAM*,
WITH TEXT-CRITICAL NOTES

There appear in the course of this translation a number of notes detailing textual differences between the MT and the versions. On the one hand, some of these differences are of negligible consequence from a text-critical perspective, as is the case, for example, with the tendency in the DSS for *mālē*⁷ spellings to appear in places where the MT exhibits *hāsēr* orthography. On the other hand, at times the differences clearly stem from the incorporation—often on a large scale—of interpretive elements into the text. One illustrative example is Num 24:7:

יֵלֶם מִיָּם מִדְּלִי וְזָרְעוֹ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים וְיָרֵם מֶמֶלֶךְ מִלְּפֹ וְתִשָּׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ׃	Water drips from his boughs, and his seed is in many waters. And his king shall be exalted above Agag, and his kingdom shall be lifted up. (MT)
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ἐξελεύσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ
 καὶ κυριεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν,
 καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ἡ Γωγ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ,
 καὶ αὐξηθήσεται βασιλεία αὐτοῦ.

A man shall emerge from his seed
 and be lord of many nations,
 and his kingdom shall be exalted over Gog,
 and his kingdom shall be increased.
 (LXX)

For these reasons, I do not attempt here to produce a comprehensive account of all variant readings. Rather, I focus instead on highlighting those places where the

versions may provide insight of a text-critical and/or interpretive nature. Where relevant, these matters have been discussed in the foregoing study.

וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה^{22:2}
 יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמְרִי: ³וַיִּגֹּר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד
 כִּי רַב־הוּא וַיִּקְץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
⁴וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עֲתָה יִלְחָכוּ
 הַקְהָל אֶת־כָּל־סִבְיָתָם כְּלַחֵד הַשּׂוֹר אֶת יֶרֶק
 הַשָּׂדֶה וּבָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בָּעֵת
 הַהוּא: ⁵וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל־בָּלָעַם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר
 פְּתוּרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַנָּהָר^a אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹנִי^b
 לִקְרֹא־לּוֹ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עָם יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה
 כֹּסֶה אֶת־עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב מִמְּלִי: ⁶וַעֲתָה
 לְכֶ־נָּא אֲרֹה־לִי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי־עָצוּם הוּא
 מִמֶּנִּי אוֹלִי אוֹכַל נֶכֶד־כּוֹ וְאֶגְרֹשְׁנוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ
 כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תְּבָרֵךְ מִבְּרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאָר
 יוֹאָר: ⁷וַיֵּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן^c וַיִּקְסְמוּ
 בְּיָדָם^c וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶל־בָּלָעַם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו דְּבָרֵי
 בָּלָק: ⁸וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לֵינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי
 אֶתְכֶם דָּבָר כְּאֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּשְׁבוּ

^{22:2} And Balaq son of Šippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite(s).
³ And Moab feared the people much, for it was great; and Moab dreaded the children of Israel. ⁴ And Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now the throng will lick up everything around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And Balaq son of Šippor was king of Moab at that time. ⁵ And he sent messengers to Balaam son of Be^cor at Pethor, ^awhich is on the river^a—^bthe land of the children of his people^b—to summon him, saying, “Behold, a people has come out from Egypt; behold, it has covered the eye of the land, and it dwells opposite me. ⁶ And now, please come, curse for me this people, for it is stronger than I; perhaps I will be able to strike it, that I might drive it from the land; for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse will be cursed.” ⁷ And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian went, ^cdivinations in their hands,^c and they came to Balaam, and they spoke to him Balaq’s words. ⁸ And he said to them, “Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back to you the word that Yahweh speaks to me.” And the

^{a—a} Tg. Onqelos, Tg. Pseudo-Yonatan: דַּעַל פֶּרַת “which is on the Euphrates.”

^{b—b} Samaritan Targum: ארע בני עמון “land of the children of Ammon.” Peshitta: لا ارحل ولا حب حصص (L^{ca}) dbny mwn “to the land of the children of Ammon.”

^{c—c} Targum Pseudo-Yonatan: וגדין דקיסמין חתימן בידיהון “(with) sealed divinatory fortunes in their hands.” Vulgate: habentes divinationis pretium in manibus “bearing the divinatory price in their hands.”

שְׂרֵי־מוֹאָב עִם־בָּלְעָם: ⁹וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים
 אֶל־בָּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה עִמָּךְ:
¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלְעָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים בָּלֶךְ בֶּן־צֶפֶר
 מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב שָׁלַח אֵלַי: ¹¹הִנֵּה הָעַם הַזֶּה הֵצִיא
 מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹס אֶת־עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ עִתָּהּ לָכֶה
 קִבְּהָ־לִי אֲתוֹ אוֹלִי אוֹכֵל לֶחֶם בּוֹ וְגִרְשָׁתִּיו:
¹²וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא
 תֵאָר אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא: ¹³וַיֵּקָם בָּלְעָם
 בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שְׂרֵי בָלֶךְ לָכוּ אֶל־אַרְצְכֶם
 כִּי מֵאֵן יְהוָה לִתְתִּי לְהֵלֵךְ עִמָּכֶם: ¹⁴וַיָּקֻמוּ
 שְׂרֵי מוֹאָב וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בָּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֵן בָּלְעָם
 הֵלֵךְ עִמָּנוּ: ¹⁵וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד בָּלֶךְ שְׁלַח שָׂרִים רַבִּים
 וַיִּכְבְּדִים מֵאֵלֶּה: ¹⁶וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בָּלְעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
 כֹּה אָמַר בָּלֶךְ בֶּן־צֶפֶר אֶל־גֵּא תִמְנַע מֵהֵלֵךְ
 אֵלַי: ¹⁷כִּי־כִבֵּד אֶכְבְּדְּךָ מְאֹד וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמַר
 אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה וְלִכְה־נָּא קִבְּהָ־לִי אֵת הָעָם הַזֶּה:
¹⁸וַיַּעַן בָּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדֵי בָלֶךְ אִם־יִתֵּן־לִי
 בָלֶךְ מְלֵא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכֵל לִעְבֹר
 אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה:
¹⁹וַעֲתָה שִׁבּוּ גֵא בְּזֶה גִם־אַתֶּם הַלֵּילָה וְאִדְעָה
 מִה־יֹּסֵף יְהוָה דְּבַר עַמִּי: ²⁰וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים
 אֶל־בָּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־לִקְרֹא לְךָ בָּאוּ
 הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם הַיּוֹם וְאֵד אֶת־הַדָּבָר
 אֲשֶׁר־אָדַבְּרָ אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה: ²¹וַיֵּקָם בָּלְעָם
 בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־אַתְנָהּ וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם־שְׂרֵי מוֹאָב:

officers of Moab stayed with Balaam.
⁹And Elohim came to Balaam, and he said, "Who are these men with you?"
¹⁰And Balaam said to (the) Elohim, "Balaq son of Sippor, the king of Moab, sent to me: ¹¹'Behold the people coming out from Egypt: it has covered the eye of the land! Now, come, damn it for me; perhaps I will be able to battle against it, and drive it out.'"
¹²And Elohim said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them, and you shall not curse the people, for it is blessed."
¹³And Balaam rose in the morning, and he said to the officers of Balaq, "Go to your land, for Yahweh has refused to allow me to go with you."
¹⁴And the officers of Moab rose, and they came to Balaq, and they said, "Balaam refused to come with us."
¹⁵And Balaq persisted further, sending officers greater and more important than these.
¹⁶And they came to Balaam, and they said to him, "Thus says Balaq son of Sippor: 'Please, do not refrain from going to me, ¹⁷for I will honor you very greatly, and all that you say to me I will do. Go, please, curse for me this people.'"
¹⁸And Balaam answered, and he said to Balaq's servants, "If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) small or great.
¹⁹And now, please stay in this (place) tonight, you also, that I may know how Yahweh will continue to speak with me."
²⁰And Elohim came to Balaam at night, and he said to him, "If it is to summon you that these men have come, then rise, go with them; but just the word that I speak to you—it shall you do."
²¹And Balaam rose in the morning, and he saddled his jenny, and he went with the officers of Moab.

²²וַיַּחַר־אַף אֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוֹלֵךְ הוּא וַיִּתְיַעֵב
^aמִלֶּאֲדָי יְהוָה בְּדֶרֶךְ לְשָׁטָן לוֹ וְהוּא רֹכֵב
עַל־אֲתָנּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ: ²³וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתָנָה
אֶת־מִלֶּאֲדָי יְהוָה נָצַב בְּדֶרֶךְ וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה
בְּיָדוֹ וַתֵּט הָאֲתָנָה מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּד
בְּלִעַם אֶת־הָאֲתָנָה לְהִטָּתָה הַדֶּרֶךְ: ²⁴וַיַּעֲמֵד
מִלֶּאֲדָי יְהוָה בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכְּרָמִים גֹּדֵר מִזֶּה וּגְדֵר
מִזֶּה: ²⁵וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתָנָה אֶת־מִלֶּאֲדָי יְהוָה וַתִּלְחָץ
אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתִּלְחָץ אֶת־רַגְלָהּ בְּלִעַם אֶל־הַקִּיר
וַיִּסֹּף לְהַכָּתָהּ: ²⁶וַיִּוֹסֶף מִלֶּאֲדָי־יְהוָה עָבוֹר
וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּמָקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין־דֶּרֶךְ לְנָטוֹת יָמִין
וּשְׂמֹאל: ²⁷וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתָנָה אֶת־מִלֶּאֲדָי יְהוָה
וַתִּרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בְּלִעַם וַיַּחַר־אַף בְּלִעַם וַיִּד
אֶת־הָאֲתָנָה בַּמֶּקֶל: ²⁸וַיִּפְתַּח יְהוָה אֶת־פִּי
הָאֲתָנָה וַתֹּאמֶר לְבָלִעַם מִה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי
הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רָגָלִים: ²⁹וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִעַם
לְאֲתָנָה כִּי הִתְעַלְלָתְ בִּי לוֹ יִשְׁתַּחֲרֵב בְּיָדִי כִי
עָתָה הִרְגֵּיתִיךְ: ³⁰וַתֹּאמֶר הָאֲתָנָה אֶל־בְּלִעַם
הֲלוֹא אָנֹכִי אֲתָנָה אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעוֹדְךָ
עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הֲהִסָּכֵן הִסְכַּנְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָךְ כֹּה
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא: ³¹וַיִּגַּל יְהוָה אֶת־עֵינָיו בְּלִעַם וַיֵּרָא

²²And Elohim's anger flared because he was going, and ^aa messenger of Yahweh^a stationed himself in the road as an obstacle to him; and he was riding on his jenny, and two of his lads were with him. ²³And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger, his sword of flame in his hand, and the jenny veered from the road, and went into the field; and Balaam beat the jenny for its veering (from) the road. ²⁴And Yahweh's messenger stood in a vineyard path, fences this way and that. ²⁵And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger, and it crushed against the wall, and it crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and Balaam persisted in beating her. ²⁶And Yahweh's messenger persisted in opposing, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to veer right or left. ²⁷And the jenny saw Yahweh's messenger, and it lay down beneath Balaam; and Balaam's anger flared, and he beat the jenny with the cane. ²⁸And Yahweh opened the jenny's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?" ²⁹And Balaam said to the jenny, "Because you have mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you." ³⁰And the jenny said to Balaam, "Am I not your jenny, upon whom you have ridden from your past until this day? Have I ever made a habit of doing this to you?" And he said, "No." ³¹And Yahweh uncovered

^{a—a} LXX (here and throughout): ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ "the messenger (or: angel) of the god (= אֱלֹהִים)." Vulgate: angelus Domini "an angel of the Lord."

אֶת־מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה נֶצַב בְּדֶרֶךְ וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלָפָה בִּידוֹ
 וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאַפָּיו:³² וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִלְאָךְ
 יְהוָה עַל־מָה הִכִּיתָ אֶת־אַתְנָךְ זֶה שְׁלוֹשׁ רָגְלִים
 הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי יֵצְאָתִי לְשָׁטֹן^a כִּי־יֵרֶט הַדֶּרֶךְ לִנְגְדִי:^a
³³וַתֵּרָאֵנִי הָאֲתוֹן וַתֵּט לִפְנֵי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רָגְלִים
 אוֹלִי נִטְתָּה מִפְּנֵי כִי עָתָה גַם־אֶתְּכָה הָרָגְתִּי
 וְאוֹתָהּ הִחַיִּיתִי:³⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם אֶל־מִלְאָךְ
 יְהוָה חָטָאתִי כִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִי אַתָּה נֶצַב
 לְקִרְאָתִי בְּדֶרֶךְ וַעֲתָה אֶם־רָע בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֲשׁוּבָה
 לִי:³⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֶל־בְּלָעַם לֵךְ
 עִם־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְאַפֶּס אֶת־הַדֶּבֶר אֲשֶׁר־אָדְבָר
 אֵלֶיךָ אֲתוֹ תִּדְבָּר וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּלָעַם עִם־שְׂרֵי בָלָק:
³⁶וַיִּשְׁמַע בָּלָק כִּי בָא בְלָעַם וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאָתוֹ
 אֶל־עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל־גְּבוּל אַרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר
 בְּקֶצֶה הַגְּבוּל:³⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בְּלָעַם הֲלֹא
 שָׁלַח שְׁלֹחָתִי אֵלֶיךָ לְקִרְאָתְךָ לָמָּה לֹא־הִלַּכְתָּ
 אֵלַי הֲאִמְנָם לֹא אוֹכַל כְּבֹדְךָ:³⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלָעַם
 אֶל־בָּלָק הִנֵּה־בָאתִי אֵלֶיךָ עַתָּה הֲיָכוֹל אוֹכַל

Balaam's eyes, and he saw Yahweh's messenger stationed in the road, his sword of flame in his hand; and he bowed and prostrated himself on his face.³² And Yahweh's messenger said to him, "Why did you beat your jenny these three times? Behold, I set out as an obstacle,^a for the way is *yārat* in front of me."^{a 33} And your jenny saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. Perhaps since she turned aside from before me, now I should kill you and let her live."³⁴ And Balaam said to Yahweh's messenger, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were stationed to greet me on the road. And now, if (it is) evil in your eyes, let me return."³⁵ And Yahweh's messenger said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but only the word that I say to you—it shall you speak." And Balaam went with the officers of Balaq.³⁶ And Balaq heard that Balaam had come, and he went out to greet him at Ir-Moab, which is in the region of Arnon, which is at the edge of the region.³⁷ And Balaq said to Balaam, "Did I indeed not send to you, to call to you? Why did you not come to me? Am I truly unable to honor you?"³⁸ And Balaam said to Balaq, "Behold, I have come to you. Now, am I indeed able to say

^{a—a} 4QNum^b: "for the way is evil before me." Tg. Onqelos: אַרִי גְלִי קִדְמִי דָאֵת רַעִי "for this appears evil before me, to proceed on the way against me." Tg. Pseudo-Yonatan: "and it appears to me that you seek to proceed, to curse the people; and the matter is not proper before me." Tg. Neofiti: אַרוֹם סַטָּת הֲלֹא בִישׁוֹ שְׁבִילְךָ "for the way turns from all (that is) against me." Samaritan Targum: ὅτι οὐκ ἄστυα ἡ ὁδός σου ἐναντίον μου "indeed, evil is your path before you." LXX: ὅτι οὐκ ἄστυα ἡ ὁδός σου ἐναντίον μου "for your way is not seemly before me." Vulgate: quia perversa est via tua mihique contraria "for perverse is your way against me." Peshitta: (l dtrṣ² wrh² lwqblly) "because you desire the way against me."

דְּבַר מְאוּמָה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׁים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי
אֹתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר: ³⁹וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם-בָּלָק וַיָּבֹאוּ
קִרְיַת חֻצוֹת: ⁴⁰וַיַּזְבֵּחַ בָּלָק בָּקָר וְצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח
לְבִלְעָם וּלְשָׂרָיו אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: ⁴¹וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח
בָּלָק אֶת-בִּלְעָם וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בָמֹת בָּעַל וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁם
קֶצֶה הָעָם: ^{23:1}וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל-בָּלָק בְּנֵה-לִּי
זֶבֶחַ שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֵּן לִי זֶבֶחַ שִׁבְעָה פָּרִים
וּשְׁבָעָה אֵילִים: ²וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בִּלְעָם
וַיַּעַל בָּלָק וּבִלְעָם פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: ³וַיֹּאמֶר
בִּלְעָם לְבָלָק הֲתִיצֵב עַל-עֹלֶתֶךָ וְאֵלֶכָה אוֹלִי
יִקְרָה יְהוָה לְקִרְאָתִי וְדִבֶּר מִה־יִּרְאָנִי וְהִגִּדְתִּי
לְךָ וַיֵּלֶךְ שָׁפִי: ⁴וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו אֶת-שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת עָרַכְתִּי וְאָעַל פָּר
וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: ⁵וַיֵּשֶׁם יְהוָה דְּבַר בְּפִי בִלְעָם
וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל-בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר: ⁶וַיָּשָׁב אֵלָיו
וְהִנֵּה נָצַב עַל-עֹלֹתָו הוּא וְכָל-שָׂרָיו מִזֹּאֵב: ⁷וַיֵּשָׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

anything? The word that Elohim puts in my mouth—it shall I speak.” ³⁹And Balaam went with Balaq, and they came to Qiryat-Huṣṣot. ⁴⁰And Balaq sacrificed cattle and sheep, and distributed them to Balaam and to the officers that were with him. ⁴¹In the morning, Balaq took Balaam and led him up Bamot-Ba‘al, whence he saw the periphery of the people. ^{23:1}And Balaam said to Balaq, “Build for me here seven altars, and provide for me here seven bulls and seven rams.” ²And Balaq did as Balaam had spoken, and Balaq and Balaam offered up bull and ram on the altar. ³And Balaam said to Balaq, “Station yourself beside your sacrifice, that I may go. Perhaps Yahweh will appear to greet me, and word of what he shows me I will tell to you.” And he went to a bare height. ^aAnd Elohim appeared to Balaam, and he said to him, “The(se) seven sacrifices I have arranged; and I sent up bull and ram on the altar.” ⁵And Yahweh put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and he said, “Return to Balaq, and thus shall you speak.” ⁶And he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his sacrifice, he and all the officers of Moab. ⁷And he took up his theme and said:

^a Thus *HALOT*, as per Elliger 1971. Levine 2000: 163, 166–167: “silently.” Tg. Onqelos: יְחִידִי “alone.” Tg. Neofiti: בלב יחידי שפי למילוט ית ישראל “with a solitary, quiet heart, to curse Israel.” LXX: εὐθελαν “to a level place.” Vulgate: velociter “quickly.”

מִן־אַרַם יִנְחֵנִי בָלָק
מִלֶּדְמוֹאָב מֵהַרְרֵי־קֶדֶם

From Aram Balaq leads me,
the king of Moab, from the mountains of the east:

לָכֶה אֶרְהֶ־לִּי יַעֲקֹב
וְלָכֶה זַעֲמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל:
מָה אֶקְבֹּל לֹא קִבֵּה אֵל⁸
וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זַעַם יְהוָה:

“Come, curse for me Jacob,
and come, damn Israel.”
⁸How can I doom when El has not doomed,
and how can I damn what Yahweh has not damned?

כִּי־מֵרָאשׁ צִרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ⁹
וּמִגְּבֻעֹת אֲשׁוּרָנּוּ
הֶזְעַם לְבַדָּד יִשְׁכֹּן
וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:

⁹For from the top of peaks I see him,
and from hills I apprehend him:
Behold, a people who dwells alone,
and among the nations is not reckoned.

מִי מִנֵּה עֹפֵר יַעֲקֹב¹⁰
וּמִסָּפֶר^a אֶת־רֶבֶעַ^b יִשְׂרָאֵל^a
תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמֹהוּ:

¹⁰Who can count the dust of Jacob,
indeed, number^a the dust-cloud^b of Israel?
May my soul die an upright death,
and may my posterity be like it.

וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם מַה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָקֹב
אֵיבִי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָךְ בְּרֹד:¹² וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲלֹא אֵת אֲשֶׁר יֵשִׁים יְהוָה בְּפִי אֵתוּ אֲשַׁמֵּר
לְדַבֵּר:¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בָּלָק לֵךְ־נָא אִתִּי
אֶל־מְקוֹם אֲחֵר אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אֶפְסָ קֶצְהוּ

¹¹And Balaq said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? Behold, to curse my enemies I brought you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly.” ¹²And he replied and said, “Is it not whatever Yahweh puts in my mouth (that) I should take care to speak?” ¹³And Balaq said to him, “Please come with me to another place from which you can see it—only its periphery will you see, and the whole of it you will not

^{a—a} Samaritan Targum (manuscripts E and C, on which see Tal 1980: 1:vii): “and who can count” (and who appears in the preceding colon). LXX: καὶ τίς ἐξαριθμησέταῖ “and who can count.”

Accordingly, see Albright 1944: 213 n. 27: “and who can number.”

^{b—b} Based on Akkadian *turbu²u* “dust-cloud.” See, e.g., Cohen 1978: 37–39, 60–63 nn. 65–87. LXX: δῆμος “peoples.” Gray 1903: 347, Binns 1927: 162: “the myriad (of).” Gevirtz 1963: 61, Levine 2000: 176–177: “one-fourth.” Albright 1944: 213, Loewenstamm 1964: 186, Milgrom 1990: 321 n. 39: “dust-cloud.”

* *Qeri*: לָכֶה.

תִּרְאֶה וְכָלוּ לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְּנוּ־לִי מַשֶּׁם:
¹⁴וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׂדֵה צִפִּים אֶל־רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וַיִּבֶן
 שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאַיִל בְּמִזְבְּחָם:
¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בָּלָק הִתִּיצֵב כֹּה עַל־עֹלְתֶךָ וְאֲנִי
 אֶקְרָא כֹּה: ¹⁶וַיִּקֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיִּשֶׁם דָּבָר
 בְּפִיו וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֶל־בָּלָק וְכֹה תִדְבֹּר: ¹⁷וַיָּבֹא
 אֵלָיו וְהִנֵּה נָעֵב עַל־עֹלְתּוֹ וְיִשְׂרָיִם מֵאֵב אֹתוֹ
 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בָּלָק מַה־דִּבַּר יְהוָה: ¹⁸וַיֵּשָׂא מִשְׁלוֹ
 וַיֹּאמֶר

see—and curse it for me from there.”

¹⁴And he took him (to) Sede-Şophim, to Rosh-Pisga, and he built seven altars, and he offered up bull and ram on the altar. ¹⁵And he said to Balaq, “Station yourself as before beside your sacrifice, and I shall appear as before.” ¹⁶And Yahweh appeared to Balaam, and he put a word in his mouth, and he said, “Return to Balaq, and thus shall you speak.” ¹⁷And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his sacrifice, and the officers of Moab with him; and Balaq said to him, “What did Yahweh speak?” ¹⁸And he took up his theme and said:

קוּם בָּלָק וּשְׁמָע
 הֲאִזְיִנָה עֲדִי^a בְּנֹו צִפּוֹר:

Rise, Balaq, and hear;
 attend my testimony,^a son of Şippor:

¹⁹לֹא אִישׁ אֶל וַיִּכְזֹּב
 וּבֶן־אָדָם וַיִּתְּנָחַם
 הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה
 וְדִבֶּר וְלֹא יִקְיֶמֶנָה:
²⁰הִנֵּה בִרְדִּי לִקְחֹתִי
 וּבִרְדִּי וְלֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנָה:

¹⁹El is neither a man to deceive,
 nor a mortal to regret.
 Does he say but not do,
 or speak but not establish it?

²⁰Behold, I have received (instruction to) bless;
 and (when) he has blessed, I cannot revoke it.

²¹לֹא־הִבִּיט אָנוּ בִיעֲקֹב
 וְלֹא־רָאָה עָמַל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ
 וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:
²²אֶל מוֹצִיאָם מִמִּצְרַיִם
 כְּתוֹעַפֶת רֶאֶם לוֹ:

²¹One perceives no misfortune in Jacob,
 and sees no distress in Israel:
 Yahweh his god is with him,
 and a king's acclaim is in him.

²²El, their liberator from Egypt,
 is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

^a LXX: μάρτυς “witness.” Peshitta: ܠܫܕܘܬܝ (*lšhdwty*) “to my testimony.”

²³כִּי לֹא־נִחֹשׁ בִּיעֹקֵב
וְלֹא־קֶסֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּעֵת יֹאמַר לִיעֹקֵב
וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה־פָּעַל אֵל:

²³For there is no augury in Jacob,
and no divination in Israel:
At the (appointed) time, it is told to Jacob
and to Israel what God has done.

²⁴הֵן־עַם כְּלִבְיָא יָקוּם
וְכֹאֲרִי יִתְנַשֵּׂא
לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד־יֹאכַל טֶרֶף
וְדַם־חַלְלִים יִשְׁתָּה:

²⁴Behold, a people who like a lion rises,
like a lion rouses itself:
It does not rest until it devours prey
and drinks the blood of the slain.

²⁵וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם גַּם־קֹב לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ
גַּם־בִּרְדָּךְ לֹא תִבְרַכְנוּ: ²⁶וַיַּעַן בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־בָּלָק הֲלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר כֹּל
אֲשֶׁר־יְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֲתוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה: ²⁷וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק
אֶל־בִּלְעָם לְכֵה־נָא אֶקְחֶךָ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֲחֵר
אוּלִי יִישַׁר בְּעֵינֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְקִבַּתוּ לִי מַשָּׁם:
²⁸וַיִּקַּח בָּלָק אֶת־בִּלְעָם רֹאשׁ הַפְּעֹזֹר הַנִּשְׁקָף
עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְּשִׁימֹן: ²⁹וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל־בָּלָק
בְּנֵה־לִי בָזָה שְׁבַעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֵּן לִי בָזָה
שְׁבַעָה פָּרִים וְשְׁבַעָה אֵילִים: ³⁰וַיַּעַשׂ בָּלָק
כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר בִּלְעָם וַיַּעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ:
^{24:1}וַיֵּרָא בִלְעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְבָרֶךְ
אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הָלַךְ כְּפַעַם־בְּפַעַם לְקִרְיַת
נַחֲשִׁים וַיִּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו: ²וַיֵּשֶׂא בִלְעָם
אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו וְתֵהָי
עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים: ³וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

²⁵And Balaq said to Balaam, “Neither
curse it at all, nor bless it at all!” ²⁶And
Balaam replied and said to Balaq, “Did
I not speak to you saying, ‘All that
Yahweh speaks—it shall I do?’” ²⁷And
Balaq said to Balaam, “Please come, I
will take you to another place; perhaps
it will be right in the eyes of (the)
Elohim (that you) curse it for me from
there.” ²⁸And Balaq took Balaam to
Rosh-Pe^oor, which overlooks the
waste. ²⁹And Balaam said to Balaq,
“Build for me here seven altars, and
provide for me here seven bulls and
seven rams.” ³⁰And Balaq did as
Balaam had said, and he offered up
bull and ram on the altar. ^{24:1}And
Balaam saw that it was good in
Yahweh’s eyes to bless Israel; and he
did not proceed, as in previous
instances, to consult auguries, but set
his face toward the wilderness. ²And
Balaam lifted his eyes, and he saw
Israel residing according to its tribes;
and upon him was the spirit of Elohim.
³And he took up his theme and said:

נֹאֵם בִּלְעָם בֶּנֹּן בְּעֹר
וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבֹּר ^aשֶׁתָּם הָעֵינַי:
נֹאֵם שִׁמְעַת אֶמְרֵי־אֵל
אֲשֶׁר מַחֲזֶה שֵׁדִי יַחֲזֶה
נִפְלָל וְגִלּוֹי עֵינָיו:

Utterance of Balaam son of Be^cor,
and utterance of the hero, ^apierced-open of eye;^a
⁴utterance of the hearer of the sayings of El,
who sees the vision of Šadday,
prostrate and uncovered of eyes.

⁵מֵה־טֹבֹו אֶהְיֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב
מִשְׁכְּנֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:
⁶כְּנִחְלִים נָטְיוּ
כְּגִנֹּת עַל־יְנֵהוּ
כַּאֲהֲלִים נָטַע יְהוָה
כַּאֲרָזִים עַל־יְמִים:

⁵How good are your tents, O Jacob,
your dwellings, O Israel!
⁶Like palm trees they are stretched out,
like gardens along a river;
like aloes Yahweh has planted,
like cedars along water.

⁷יֵזֶל־מַיִם מִדִּלְיוֹ
וְזָרְעוֹ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים
וְיָרֵם מֵאַגַּג מֶלֶכּוֹ
וְתִנָּשָׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ:
⁸אֵל מוֹצִיאֹו מִמִּצְרַיִם
כְּתוֹעֶפֶת רֶאֱם לוֹ

⁷Water drips from his boughs,
and his seed is in many waters.
And his king shall be exalted above Agag,
and his kingdom shall be lifted up.
⁸El, his liberator from Egypt,
is like the horns of a wild ox for him.

יֹאכֵל גּוֹיִם צִרְיוֹ
וְעַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרֵם
וְחִצָּיו יִמְחֹץ:
⁹כָּרַע שֹׁכֵב כְּאַרְיֵה
וְכִלְבִּיא מִי יְקִימֶנּוּ
מְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ
וְאֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר:

He consumes nations, his oppressors,
and their bones he devours,
and (with) his arrows smites.
⁹He crouches, laying in wait like a lion;
and like a lion, who will rouse him?
Those who bless you are blessed,
and those who curse you are cursed.

^{a-a} Wellhausen, Albright: שֶׁתָּמָה עֵינַי “who is perfect of eye.” Tg. Onqelos: דְּשִׁפִּיר חָזִי “who sees well.”
LXX: ὁ ἀληθινῶς ὁρῶν “the (one) true of vision.” Vulgate: cuius obturatus est oculus “whose
eye is closed.”

¹⁰וַיַּחַר־אַף בָּלָק אֶל־בָּלְעָם וַיִּסְפֹּק אֶת־כַּפָּיו
וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בָּלְעָם לִקְבֹּב אֵיבֵי קְרָאתֶיךָ
וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכָתָךְ בְּרֹדֶף זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים: ¹¹וַעֲתָה
בָּרַח־לְךָ אֶל־מְקוֹמְךָ אֲמַרְתִּי כְּבֹד אֲכַבְּדֶךָ
וְהִנֵּה מְנַעַךְ יְהוָה מִכְּבוֹד: ¹²וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלְעָם
אֶל־בָּלָק הֲלֹא גַם אֶל־מְלָאכֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְתָּ
אֵלַי דִּבַּרְתִּי לֵאמֹר: ¹³אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מָלֵא
בֵּיתִי בַסֶּף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹל אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה
לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה אוֹ רָעָה מִלְּבִי אֲשֶׁר־יִדְבֹּר יְהוָה
אֹתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר: ¹⁴וַעֲתָה הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי לָכֵה
אֵיעָצֶךָ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה לְעַמְּךָ בְּאַחֲרִית
הַיָּמִים: ¹⁵וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

¹⁰And Balaq's anger flared toward Balaam, and he clapped his hands; and Balaq said to Balaam, "To curse my enemies I summoned you, and behold, you have blessed them greatly these three times. ¹¹And now, flee to your place! I said 'I will honor you greatly,' and behold, Yahweh has refused you honor." ¹²And Balaam said to Balaq, "Was it not also to your messengers, whom you sent to me, that I spoke, saying, ¹³'If Balaq were to give me the fullness of his house, silver and gold, I would be unable to oppose the mouth of Yahweh my God to do (anything,) good or ill, on my own; what Yahweh speaks—it shall I speak?' ¹⁴And now, behold, I go to my people. Come, I will counsel you (regarding) what this people will do to your people in the end of days." ¹⁵And he took up his theme and said:

נֹאֵם בָּלְעָם בֶּנוֹ בְּעֹר
וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵין:
¹⁶נֹאֵם שְׁמִיעַ אֲמָר־אֵל
וַיֵּדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן
מַחֲזֶה שְׂדֵי יַחֲזָה
נִפְל וְגָלוּי עֵינָיו:

Utterance of Balaam son of Be^cor,
and utterance of the hero, pierced-open of eye;
¹⁶utterance of the hearer of the sayings of El,
and knower of the knowledge of Elyon;
seer of the vision of Šadday,
prostrate and uncovered of eyes.

¹⁷אֶרְאֶנּוּ וְלֹא עֲתָה
אֲשׁוּרְנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב
דֶּרֶךְ כּוֹכַב^a מֵיַעֲקֹב
וְקֶם שִׁבְט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

¹⁷I see it, but not now,
I apprehend it, but not soon:
A sprout^a from Jacob will rule,
and a staff from Israel will rise.

^a Thus Morag 1995: 61–62. Tg. Onqelos, Tg. Pseudo-Yonatan: כֹּד “leader.” Tg. Neofiti: מֶלֶךְ “king.” LXX: ἀστρον “star.” Vulgate: stella “star.”

וּמַחֲלַץ פְּאַתֵי מוֹאָב
 וְקִרְקַר^a כָּל־בְּנֵי־שֵׁת:
 וְהָיָה אֶדוֹם יְרֵשָׁה¹⁸
 וְהָיָה יְרֵשָׁה שְׂעִיר אֹיְבָיו
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה חֵיל:¹⁹
 וַיֵּרֶד מִיַּעֲקֹב
 וְהָאֵבִיד שָׁרִיד מֵעִיר:
 And he will smite the corners of Moab
 and the region^a of all the children of Seth;
¹⁸and Edom shall be an inheritance,
 and an inheritance shall be Se'ir—his enemies.
 And Israel does valorously,
¹⁹and descends from Jacob,
 and destroys the remnant from the city.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־עַמְלֵק וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר²⁰
²⁰And he saw Amaleq, and he took up
 his theme and said:

רִאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עַמְלֵק
 וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ עַד־אֵבֶד:
 First of the nations is Amaleq,
 but its fate (goes) to destruction.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הַקֵּינִי וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר²¹
²¹And he saw the Qenite(s), and he
 took up his theme and said:

אֵיתָן מוֹשְׁבָד
 וְשֵׁים בְּסַלְעַ קַנְדָּ:
 כִּי אִם־יִהְיֶה לְבַעַר קִין²²
 עַד־מָה אֲשׁוּר תִּשְׁבֶּד:
 Permanent are your dwellings,
 and your nest is placed in the crevice.
²²Nevertheless, Qayin will be for a conflagration,
 when Assyria captures you.

וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר²³
²³And he took up his theme and said:

אֹי מִי יִחִיהַ מִשְׁמֹן אֵל:
 וְצִיִּם מִיַּד כִּתִּים²⁴
 וְעִנּוּ אֲשׁוּר וְעִנּוּ־עֵבֶר
 וְגַם־הוּא עַד־אֵבֶד:
 Alas, who can live apart from El's determination?
²⁴Though boats (come) from the direction of Kittim,
 and afflict Assyria, and afflict Eber,
 even he (goes) to destruction.

וַיָּקָם בַּלְעָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְמִקְוָמוֹ וְגַם־בַּלָּק²⁵
 הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ:
²⁵And Balaam rose and went and
 returned to his place, and Balaq also
 went on his way.

^a Based on Akkadian *qaqqaru* “ground, territory.” See Milgrom 1990: 323 n. 66.

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
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