THE INSCRIBED TABLETS FROM TELL DEIR ᶜALLA PART II.

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Part I of this article furnished an introduction to the discovery, context, and general nature of the eleven Deir ᶜAlla Tablets; gave attention to the matter of decipherment of the script of the three tablets that were inscribed with texts; and discussed in some detail the text of the first two written tablets. This leaves for the present study the discussion of the text of tablet III and the integration of the information obtainable from all three of the inscribed tablets.

Before proceeding further, however, we first repeat here the transliteration and translation of tablet I as a basis for relations with the other two texts that follow. The transcription and linguistic comments given on the text of tablet I stand as they were presented in Part I of this article. Also, a new "Table of the Letters of the Script of Deir ᶜAlla" appears on the next page, updating the listing given in Part I.

Text I: Pethor Smitten
(Deir ᶜAlla No. 1449)

Transliteration and Translation

lkm / mk. / wtm.y / whm / mk. /ptr
(1a) "To you (have come) a smiter and a finisher,
(1b) and they (are) the smiters of Pethor."

Text II was also transliterated and translated in Part I of this article. It is the most difficult of the three written tablets from Deir

*Editor's Note: Part I of this article appeared in AUSS 27 (1989): 21-37. Part II continues the sequential numbering of footnotes and sections given in that earlier portion of the study. The figure depicting the script of Deir ᶜAlla is, however, renumbered as "I" inasmuch as it represents simply a revision of Figure I in Part I.

Figure 1. Revised Table of Letters of the Script of Deir ᶜAlla

	Text I	Text II	Text III
'Aleph	-		-
Beth	-		
Gimmel	-		
Dalet	-		
He			-
Waw			
Zayin	-		
Heth	-	-	-
Teth	-	-	-
Yod			
Kaph			
Lamed			-
Mem			
Nun	-	-	
Samek	-	-	
ᶜAyin	-		
Pe			-
Sade	-		-
Qoph	-		-
Reš			
Sin	-	-	
Taw			

ᶜAlla to work with because it has suffered the most damage, having many cracks on its written surface. These cracks confuse the identification of the letters that were originally written because, in some instances, they appear to provide additional strokes with those letters. Since Part I of this article was finished, further progress has been made in distinguishing the original letters from extraneous marks due to damage.

While much of the epigraphic and linguistic discussion of this text given previously still applies, some corrections need to be made to it. The results of these improved readings have been incorporated into the transliteration and translation of text II presented here. These new readings also affect, the historical application of this text. As a basis for this new treatment of text II, a new and more accurate line drawing of it is provided here.

5. Text II: Pethor's Smiters
(Deir ᶜAlla No. 1441)

Transliteration and Translation

(1) ᶜsr / wywbbq / mk
(2) ᶜzwᵛt /pt.'m / mk

(1) "There was a damming up and the Jabbok (became) a smiter.
(2) Mighty (shocks) suddenly (became) a smiter."

The Line Drawing:
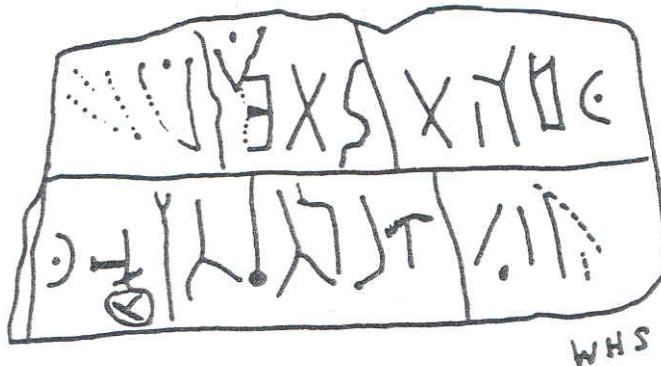
Introduction

Since text II was written in boustrophedon order, it is difficult to determine which of its two lines should be read first. The order of the lines in this text have been reversed here in comparison to

my previous treatment of them. The reasons for this are developed
after text III has been translated and interpreted.

Analysis of the Text
of Line 1

The first word of the first line begins with a clear occurrence of a
half-moon shaped ^{c}*ayin*. A *yod* was previously read following this ^{c}*ayin*.
This *yod* should be rejected now. There is a vertical stroke here, but
further examination of the photographs indicates that a triangular wedge-
shaped stroke extends to the right from its mid-shaft. In addition, a
horizontal stroke of short length was incised across the top of the vertical
stroke. This form resembles that of the dog-legged-shape *sade* in other
early alphabets, and as utilized here that letter contributes to the identifica-
tion of an intelligible word.

Further examination of the photographs also indicates that a circular
letter was incised above the head of the *sade*. This circle is faint in the
published photograph, but a copy of that photograph with its lines dark-
ened brings this circle out more clearly. This circle is rather flat across the
bottom, it is pointed in its right lower quadrant, and it contains a t-shaped
incision angling down towards the left within its circle. All of this gives
this sign a head-shaped appearance, which identifies it as a *res*. This *res* is
comparable to those that have been identified in text III below.

In conjunction with the previously recognized ^{c}*ayin*, these two new
letters make up the word ^{c}*sr*. In Hebrew this verb means "to restrain,
retain, shut up, stop." It may function here either as a Qal perfect or a
participle. Its subject should be taken as an indefinite third person, for the
next word is separated off from it by a *waw* which serves as a conjunction.
The word that is connected in this way is the name of a river (see below).
Since a river is restrained, retained, or shut up when it is dammed up, such
a damming up appears, therefore, to be that to which reference is made
here.

This type of event is known to have happened in this region when the
Jordan River was temporarily dammed up by earthquakes that knocked
in its west bank near Damiyeh, biblical Adam, in 1267, 1546, 1906, and
1927 A.D. If a damming up of the Jordan was located below its confluence
with the Jabbok, then such an obstruction would naturally have had a
similar effect upon the Jabbok River too.

The first three letters which follow the word divider have been read
correctly previously as *w-y-w*. This combination may be taken as a con-
junction followed by a consonantal *yod* and a vocalic *waw*. Thus this
word begins with *w + yo-*. Two vertical strokes were written following the
second *waw*. The first one curves downwards to the right and the second
one curves upwards to the right, but they both look like the same letter,
which has simply been oriented differently in the two positions. At one

time these two letters were read as *gimmels*, but the *gimmel* in text III has a head that makes a 100° bend to the right, whereas these two letters angle only slightly at their upper and lower ends. This suggests that these letters differ from that *gimmel*. If the curved ends of these letters were expanded into triangular heads, as has been done with dots for the *beth* in *btym* of text III, these 1etters could easily be read as *beths*. My suggestion is that the scribe of this text, working with a somewhat different orthography than the scribe of text III, wrote these two *beths* here with this form.

At first glance, the last letter in this word-box looks like a trefoil sign pointing upwards. This was previously identified as a *kaph*, but closer inspection reveals that the part of the stroke that extends upwards to the right also curves around and bends back towards the left upstroke. That makes this letter one which consists of a quasi-circular head with a short tail extending to the left. There are four main letters with closed heads and tails in the early alphabets: *beth*, *dalet*, *qoph*, and *res*. *Beth*, *dalet*, and *res* have been identified elsewhere in these texts and this letter does not look like them; therefore, by a process of elimination this letter should be identified as a *qoph*, its first occurrence in these texts.

From these letter identifications the word written after the conjunction in this word-box can be identified as *ywbbq*. This corresponds rather directly with the way in which the name of the Jabbok River was written in the biblical text, with only two minor variations. In the MT the *beth* of this name was doubled with a *dagesh*, but here it appears to have been doubled by writing out the two letters. This was an irregular practice not continued in later inscriptions. Given the early date of the alphabetic writing of these tablets, however, experimental irregularities like this are only to be expected. The second variation is that this word was written with an *o*-vowel in first position while the Massoretes pointed it with an *a*-vowel. Since this text is two millennia older than the Massoretic pointing, however, the o-vowel should be taken as more original.

The final word of this line, *mk*, refers to a "smiter," and should be identified linguistically as it was in Part I. The proper name which precedes it identifies that "smiter," i.e., the Jabbok River after it was dammed up and overflowed this area. Text I mentions, but does not identify, "smiters" of the region. Text II reveals that the river which overflowed after it was dammed up was one of these smiters.

Analysis of the Text
of Line 2

The first word of the second line remains the same linguistically, ᶜ*zwᵛt*. This is the word for "strong, mighty," with a feminine plural ending. Previously I interpreted this word as referring to human forces or, more specifically, Israelite troops that came from Pithom in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Since the next word can no longer be read as Pithom,

however, this interpretation must be abandoned. My new reading of the next word now indicates that these "mighty" ones, whatever they were, came upon Pethor "suddenly." Text III, discussed below, indicates that when these mighty ones came upon Pethor so suddenly, they caused the collapse of houses there. Since human attackers could be fended off for a time at least, they do not fit this description very well. The suddenness of the disaster and its effects suggest rather that the mighty ones that affected the town in this way were shock waves of an earthquake. Given the location of this site in the earthquake-prone area of the Jordan Valley and given also the archaeological evidence for earthquakes found in the excavations, such an occurrence here seems quite reasonable.

Three of the four letters in the next word stand as they were read previously. The problematic letter is the third one. The clear portion of this letter consists of a vertical stroke with a triangular wedge extending to the left from its mid-shaft. In Part I of this article two horizontal strokes extending to the left were also read as connected to the superior and inferior poles of the vertical stroke of this letter. These additional horizontal strokes should now be discarded as not connected with this letter for they appear to be cracks in the tablet due to damage.

An epigraphic indicator for this revision comes from the *mem* incised above and to the left of this letter. If a horizontal stroke extended to the left from the superior pole of this vertical stroke, the right-hand downstroke of the *mem* would have crossed it. This is unlikely, for this crossing could easily have been avoided and does not occur anywhere else in the three tablets. Thus the faint line here is more likely a crack due to damage and should not be taken as a part of the letter. The same can be said for the crack extending to the left from the inferior pole of the vertical stroke.

Without these horizontal strokes, this letter cannot be a *he* or *heth*. It still remains, however, to establish the real identity of this letter. If its horizontal wedge were extended across the vertical stroke, and the superior and inferior margins of that wedge were separated, it would resemble the form of the '*aleph* in other early alphabets. In view of that resemblance this letter should be taken as an '*aleph* here, the first occurrence of the 'aleph to be recognized in these texts. The third word in this line can be read as *pt'm*, "sudden, suddenly." Whatever occurred by means of the actions of the "mighty ones" should have taken place "suddenly." This suddenness strongly suggests that the "mighty ones" are to be identified as the shock waves of an earthquake. The description of the disaster which follows in text III fits well with a disaster of this nature.

The word, *mk*, which means "smiter," stands at the end of this line as it was previously read. Thus these strong shocks which suddenly struck Pethor constituted the second of the two smiters mentioned in text I, the "finisher" referred to there. The reason for this ordering of the statements in text II is discussed further below.

The revisions I have proposed for the statements in text II might be summarized here as a complement to my previous study of this text. Six letters have now been identified more accurately: the *sade* and *res* in the first word of what is now the first line, two *beths* and a *qoph* in the second word of that line, and an '*aleph* in the second word of the second line. In addition, these two lines have been reversed in order from the way in which they were presented previously.

The revisions now set forth provide a transliteration and translation indicating that the smiters which struck Pethor were not human forces like the troops of Israel or King Og of Bashan. Rather, they were the forces of nature that were unleashed against this site, first by the nearby river and subsequently by an earthquake. These were the two "smiters" of text I, the first identified there as a "smiter" and the second as a "finisher."

6. Text III: Pethor's State
(Deir ᶜAlla No. 1440)

Transliteration and Translation

(1) *mkk / btym / dry / ᶜᶜym*
(2) *wᶜyn / ngr / mksmy / wysym*
(3) *zᶜm*

(1) "The houses have fallen in heaps of ruins,
(2) and the spring has poured out covering them,
(3) and a curse has been placed."

The Line Drawing:
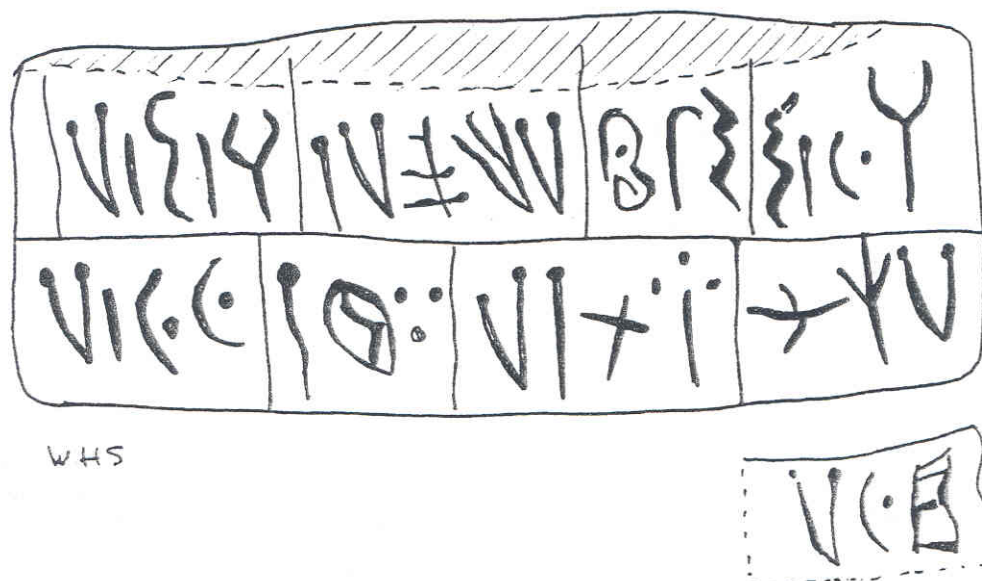
Introduction
          This final written tablet is in mint condition. Its writing is
very clear. The third line consists of one word written along the
bottom edge of the tablet. Line 1 is the bottom line on the face of
the tablet, and line 2 is the top line on the face of the tablet. The
reason for following this order rather than the reverse is syntactical.
The bottom line begins without a *waw*, whereas the two statements
in the top line both begin with a *waw*. These *waws* should serve as
conjunctions to join their statements to those that have gone pre-
viously. It seems likely, therefore, that this tablet was meant to be
read from bottom to top rather than the reverse.

Analysis of the Text
of Line 1 (Bottom Line)
          The first word of the bottom line begins with a broad v-shaped *mem*
and two trefoil-headed *kaphs*. These two *kaphs* have tails, whereas the
kaph in the top line of this text does not, an irregularity in this scribe's
writing. The second *kaph* is rotated 90º in comparison to the first, another
irregularity in this text, but there are parallels to this type of irregularity in
text II. In spite of this rotation, both of these letters are readily recognizable
as *kaphs*. The Hebrew word *mkk* means "to fall down, sink down, settle
in." It is used in Eccl 10:18 to refer to houses that fall into ruins due to
neglect. But the houses here were hit suddenly according to the second
text, so their collapse into ruins must have been more abrupt than in the
biblical case.
          The subject of this verb follows as the second word in this line, and it
is the plural noun *btym*, "houses." The *beth* consists of a three-point
triangular head atop a vertical unbent tail. The *taw* is standard in form for
this text. The *yod* has a dotted head. The *yod* is used four other times in
this text, and the *mem* of the plural ending is only one of five examples of
that letter in this text. An interesting feature of the *btym* here is the
presence of the *yod*, representing the *i*-vowel of the plural ending -*im*.
          The third word of this line begins with a dotted triangular head that
has no tail. This is similar to the *dalet* of the later scripts, with which it
should be identified. The second letter is taken as representing another
occurrence of the head-shaped *res*. It can be compared to the *res* with
which ngr ends in the top line, even though slightly different in shape.
The most common use of *dr* or *dor* in Biblical Hebrew is as a reference to a
"generation." This idea is derived from the root idea of a "cycle" or
"circuit." As a verb, *dor* means "to pile up," and the noun "dwelling
place" is also derived from this root. Anyone of the foregoing meanings
could make sense here, but the idea of a "circle" or "heap, pile," of ruins
fits best. The final letter of this word is a *yod*, which serves as an indicator

for a construct relationship of a masculine plural noun. This word should thus be taken as in a construct or genitival relationship with the word that follows it. It is striking to see the *yod* of this relationship written out here, in contrast to the practice of scribes who wrote later inscriptions.

The final word of this line begins with two vertical half-moon shaped ᶜayins. These are followed by another *yod* and another *mem*. This form corresponds well to the biblical word for "ruins" in the masculine plural. In Biblical Hebrew this word was written with one *ᶜayin* and two *yods*, while here it was written with two *ᶜayins* and one *yod*. Presumably, these *ᶜayins* were intended to be read or pronounced with *i*-vowels, and the *yod* here represents the *i*-vowel of the plural ending.

Analysis of the Text of
Line 2 (Top Line)

The first word of the top line begins with what is, for this text, a normally shaped *waw* with a semicircular head. This should serve as a conjunction connecting the second thought in the text with the first thought written in the line below. The *waw* is followed by the vertical half-eye *ᶜayin*. Next come the dotted vertical stroke of the *yod* and the wavy vertical line of the *nun*. Thus we have here the word *ᶜyn*. In Biblical Hebrew this word can mean either an "eye" or a "spring." The latter meaning makes better sense in the context here, especially in conjunction with the verbs that follow it.

The *nun* which begins the second word is virtually identical to the *nun* with which the first word ends. This is followed by a *gimmel* with a curved head, and then a head-shaped *res*. The Hebrew word *ngr* means "to flow, pour, gush forth." In 2 Sam 14:14 it is used of water being poured out, and it is used for wine in Ps 75:9. As a feminine singular perfect (or participle) in the Niphal, it probably was pronounced with a final *a*-vowel, but that vowel was not written out here.

The broad v-shaped sign of the *mem* occurs twice in the next word, and its first occurrence is followed by standard forms of the *kaph* and samek. The word ends with the vertical stroke topped by a dot to make it a *yod*. The *kaph-samek* combination at the heart of this word provides the root *ksh*, which in Biblical Hebrew commonly means "to cover." With a *mem* preformative, this form looks like a participle in the Piel, the conjugation in which this root commonly occurs. The second *mem* of this word should be taken as a masculine plural pronominal suffix inasmuch as a plural ending on the participle would not fit with the gender or number of either the preceding subject or verb. The antecedent of this plural pronominal suffix would most logically be the "ruins" of the "houses" mentioned in the preceding line.

The *yod* written after the pronominal suffix may represent an old case ending. An archaic survival of a similar old case ending appears with the

same suffix on the same verb in the old poem of Exod 15 (v. 5; cf. v. 7).
There this verb was used for the action of the waters that covered the
chariots of Pharaoh and his men. Here it was used for a similar action
of a covering by waters, but in this case it was waters from a spring
that covered ruins of the houses of a town. Evidently the earthquake
which struck this area and toppled houses also fractured the water table
that supplied the spring of the town, thus causing it to pour forth in
abundance.

The initial letter of the next word is a *waw*, which should be taken as
a conjunction. This is followed by a word containing two *yods* and ending
with a *mem*. The vertical strokes of the *yods* are undotted. Between them is
a vertical bow-shaped sign of the *sin/sin*, which Cairus distinguished from
the *nun*. In Biblical Hebrew *ysym* parses readily as a third person mascu-
line singular Qal imperfect of *sym*, "to put, set, place." It is interesting to
note that the central *yod* of this middle weak verb is written out here.

This verb cannot stand alone. It needs something to go with it--a
subject, an object, or more. The search for such a complement leads to the
word on the edge of the tablet, its third line. Presumably this word was
written there because there was not enough space left on the second line of
the text written on the face of the tablet. According to Franken's study of
the scribal methods employed in writing this text, this was the last word
written on the tablet. It should, therefore, complete the statement that
began with *ysym*.

The word written along the edge of the tablet was $z^c m$. The $^c ayin$ and
the *mem* have been seen previously in the body of the text. The sign that
precedes them is a vertical box-shaped letter with a number of crossbars.
This looks most like a *heth*, but that letter does not fit well here preceding
an $^c ayin$. Cairus has suggested that this sign should be identified as a *zayin*.
In favor of that identification is the fact that some of the crossbars incline
downwards at an angle to the left, as does the crossbar of the later *zayin*.

In Biblical Hebrew $z^c m$ means "to curse." This word appears, for
example, in a speech made by Balaam of Pethor in which he described
Balak's instructions to him (Num 23:7). Thus it seems quite appropriate to
find the same word in this text from Balaam's home town. As a noun, this
word on the side of the tablet serves well as the subject of the verb at the
end of the second (upper) line on the face of the tablet. The whole phrase
wysym $z^c m$ thus translates, "and a curse has been placed." Either the scribe
who wrote this text saw the events that had taken place as the result of a
curse, or a curse was placed upon the site after it was affected in this way.

Summary of Text III

The falling down of houses referred to in the first line of this
text is interpreted here as being caused by an earthquake, presuma-
bly the same earthquake mentioned at the end of text II. Knocking

down the houses was the first destructive action of this quake, hence it was mentioned first on the tablet. The quake also fractured the water table of the spring at the site causing it to overflow upon the ruins of the fallen houses. This was the "covering" of "them," i.e., the ruined houses mentioned in the second line of this text. The final line of this text refers to the curse, either that from which these effects resulted, or that which was pronounced upon the site after its destruction.

7. *The Language of the Texts*

With the script of these texts deciphered and their contents translated, the language of the texts can now be analyzed in some detail. Even though we have only three short texts with which to deal, they provide a surprisingly large amount of linguistic data, some of it quite extraordinary for texts from so early a date.

Six verbs occur in these three texts-two in tablet I (*nkh* and *tmm*), and one of these (*nkh*) is used over again in tablet II. Tablet III adds four more verbs (*mkk, ngr, ksh* and *sym*). Perfects and participles occur, but only one example of an imperfect (*ysym*) and no infinitives or imperatives appear to be present. Four different conjugations are represented: the Qal, Piel, Niphal, and Hiphil. All of these roots and forms are readily recognizable from Biblical Hebrew.

Five nouns are present in these texts-the words for "curse," "strong (ones)," "houses," "heaps," and "ruins." The first of these is in the singular, the rest are in the plural. One of the plurals is feminine, and the others are masculine. One of the masculine plural nouns appears in a construct form. There are no recognizable occurrences of the article with the nouns in these texts, a fact consistent with the early date of writing. All five of these nouns are well known in the vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew. Two toponyms occur, the place name of Pethor in text I and the river name of the Jabbok in text II.

Three pronouns occur in these texts, two of them independent and one of them suffixed. The second person and third person plural are represented. The pronouns correspond in form with the forms used for similar functions in Biblical Hebrew. The *waw* used as a conjunction appears in all three of the texts--twice in text I, once in text II, and twice in text III.

One of the more remarkable linguistic features of these texts is that they appear to be vocalized in part. The main letter or sign

that was used for this function was the vertical stroke of the *yod*, either dotted or undotted. This appears to have represented mainly the i-vowel, but in one case of a masculine plural noun in construct it may stand for e. The most obvious vocalic use of the *yod* is in the plural masculine ending on nouns, *-ym* or *-im*, which occurs with three words in text III. In one instance--ysym of text III--the second yod appears to represent the middle weak radical of the verbal root. In one instance, in *mksmy* of text III, the *yod* following the pronominal suffix may represent an old case ending that may be compared with the related archaic forms in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:5, 7).

In two instances in text II the *waw* appears to have been used to represent *o*-vowels. The more obvious case of this is with the feminine plural ending *-ot*. There it is accompanied by an un-dotted vertical stroke. This appears to be an indicator for the use of a vowel letter rather than representing a vowel or consonant itself. The other use of the *waw* as a vowel letter appears in the name of the Jabbok River. No cases have been recognized in these texts in which representation of an *a*-vowel or *u*-vowel was attempted.

The conclusion from these linguistic data is that either these tablets were written by Hebrews, or they were written in a Trans-jordanian dialect of Canaanite that was very close to Biblical He-brew. These two possibilities are examined further, following a discussion of the potential historical connections of these tablets.

8. Historical Geography

The major contribution which the Deir ᶜAlla Tablets make to historical geography is to locate Pethor of Num 22:5 at Tell Deir ᶜAlla. The reading of this name on tablet I is reasonably clear and direct. Locating this text as part of a series of tablets that were found at that site makes it more likely that this text was written there rather than brought from elsewhere.

In another direction, this discovery provides an explanation for another major find at the same site, the eighth-century-B.C. plaster texts from the walls of a later building. These texts, written in red and black ink on the plaster walls, were discovered in 1967,[15]

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[15] See H. J. Franken, "Archaeological Evidence Relating to the Interpretation of the Text," in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir ᶜAlla* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 3-4, for the circumstances of the discovery.

and they were published in 1976.[16] They were found in a very fragmentary condition, and much scholarly ingenuity has gone into their reconstruction and study.[17]

The central character in combination I, a narrative dramatic text, is Balaam the son of Beor. His name and patronym appear in broken or complete form in at least four places in the first six lines of this text. His title is given with his name in the first instance-i.e., "the man who was a seer of the gods." There can be no mistaking that the individual named and described here is the same person as the Balaam whose actions are set forth in Num 22-24. The rest of combination I relates Balaam's experience. The gods revealed themselves to him in a night dream or vision, and informed him about a coming disaster involving both a "fire of chastisement" and a convulsion of nature. Combination II is even more fragmentary and the nature of its contents is obscure.

A. Lemaire has asked the question, "Why were these literary, probably religious, texts copied on the plaster wall of a room at Deir ᶜAlla?"[18] His answer is that there probably was a sanctuary nearby. This appears to be correct, but is only part of the answer. Now, thanks to the Deir ᶜAlla Tablets, we can recognize that this locale was where Balaam's home sanctuary of Pethor was located. Of all the places in the entire Near East where his memory might have been preserved, this location is obviously the most likely because of its being the very spot where he lived and exercised his

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[16] See the entire report of Hoftijzer and van der Kooij mentioned in the preceding note.

[17] One Ph.D. dissertation has been written on these texts, that of Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ᶜAlla* (Chico, CA, 1984). Other studies include A. Caquot and A. Lemaire, "Les textes aram'eens de Deir ᶜAlla," *Syria* 54 (1977): 189-208; B. A. Levine, "The Deir ᶜAlla Plaster Inscriptions," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 195-205; P. K. McCarter, "The Balaam Texts from Deir CAlla: The First Combination, BASOR 239 (1981): 49-60; Victor Sasson, "The Book of Oracular Visions of Balaam from Deir ᶜAlla," *UF* 17 (1985): 284-309; idem, "The Language of Rebellion in Psalm 2 and in the Plaster Texts from Deir ᶜAlla," *AUSS* 24 (1986): 147-154; J. A. Hackett, "The Dialect of the Plaster Text from Tell Deir ᶜAlla," *Or* 53 (1984): 57-65; A. Lemaire, "Fragments from the Book of Balaam Found at Deir ᶜAlla," *BARev* 11 (1985): 26-39; J. Naveh, "The Date of the Deir ᶜAlla Inscription in Aramaic Script," *IEJ* 17 (1967): 256-258. On Balaam in general, see Jo Ann Hackett, "Religious Traditions in Israelite Transjordan," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 125-128.

[18] Lemaire, "Fragments," p. 38.

prophetic ministry. How appropriate, then, that a narrative text from him or about him should have been preserved at this site.

The identification of Tell Deir ᶜAlla with Pethor also aids in clarifying a problem in biblical geography. In Num 23:7 Balaam introduces his first oracle of blessing upon Israel with the remark that "from Aram Balak brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains." This statement is commonly assumed to be a reference to northeastern Syria or Mesopotamia. Support for such an impression has been found from a remark in Num 22:5, which says that Balak called Balaam from "the river." Since the unmodified term "the river" is commonly used in the Bible to refer to the Euphrates River, this reference in Num 22:5 has been considered as referring to that river valley and that Balaam was called from that regIon.

In light of the new information available from the Deir ᶜAlla tablets, however, the foregoing proposal deserves reexamination. Both "the river" and "eastern mountains" (Num 23:7) could fit just as well for Pethor at Tell Deir ᶜAlla. In this case, the river would be the Jordan River and the eastern mountains would be those of the eastern Jordan Valley leading up to the plateau.

The major obstacle to making such an identification is the reference to Aram, which should be Syria to the north, not Canaan to the south. A rather direct solution to this problem lies in positing a very small and simple, but significant, scribal error in the transmission of the biblical text. Two out of three of the letters in the names of Adam and Aram are the same. They differ only in the-*dalet* and *res*. These two letters were written in a very similar fashion in the pre-exilic Hebrew script. *Dalet* had a large triangular head and a short vertical tail, while *res* had a smaller triangular head but a longer vertical tail. In Iron-Age Hebrew, Phoenician, and Aramaic inscriptions these two letters are commonly very difficult to distinguish.

My proposal for resolving this problem is that while the original author wrote "Adam," a scribe later in the course of textual transmission miscopied it as "Aram," either through misunderstanding the reference or through an inability to distinguish the correct letter in an earlier manuscript. The scribe who copied Deut 23:4 went even further to gloss in "Naharaim," i.e., "of the two rivers," to go along with the already miscopied "Aram." In this

way Pethor came to be located in Mesopotamia when in actuality it was located near Adam by the Jordan River and by the mountains of the eastern Jordan Valley.

Balaam could be called from both Adam and Pethor, according to the text, because Adam was the residential town in the area and Pethor was the specific site of the sanctuary there, where Balaam carried out his prophetic ministry. Excavations at the latter site have demonstrated its religio-sanctuary nature.

9. History

Interconnections between the Tablets

Before potential relations between these texts and external sources can be explored, their own internal relations need to be established as firmly as possible. The translations developed above indicate an interconnection of all three texts in that they all dealt with the same theme, a disaster of natural origin which overcame Pethor.

Within that framework these texts can be set in order quite readily. Text I provides a general introductory statement about the disaster, text II identifies the factors or "smiters" which brought about this destruction, and text III concludes the series with a brief description of the state of the site after these "smiters" struck. The lexical and thematic relations among the three texts have established this as the proper order, and it would be difficult to alter it.

Tablet II has been the most difficult to read, translate, and understand. It is also the one most difficult in regard to determining the internal order of its own statements. Because it was written in boustrophedon order, the tablet can be turned in one way and read in that order, or it can be turned upside down and read in the alternate order. The question here is, Which should come first, the line with the flood or the line with the earthquake? The tablet itself does not appear to give a clear-cut indication of which direction of reading was intended, so one must go to its connections with the other tablets to establish the order of its statements.

While one might suspect that the earthquake of tablet II should have preceded and caused the river flooding mentioned in this text, that order cannot be established directly from the text. Text I refers to two "smiters," an initial "smiter" and a "finisher." Tablet II

identifies two "smiters," each connected with that specific word in the singular. It is logical, therefore, to take the two smiters identified in tablet II as the two smiters mentioned by tablet I. Thus the flood and earthquake of tablet II should be taken as separate and distinct "smiters," they were not seen as two phases of the same event. In other words, the earthquake was not mentioned here as an indication as to why the river flooded, but was mentioned to point out that it too was a smiter of Pethor.

The question of sequence remains, therefore, and it still needs to be determined whether the flood was the initial smiter and the earthquake the finisher or vice versa. Tablet III appears to provide the best answer to this question by describing the final events at the site. Its description of the final destruction there is one of an earthquake, not a river flood. This was the occasion upon which the houses fell in ruins and the spring at the site poured out over these ruins. The finality of this sequence of events is emphasized in tablet III by the mention of the curse at the end of this tablet's recital. Regardless of whether this curse was a reflection back upon the course of these destructive events or an active imprecation at their conclusion, this act of cursing surely was the last event in the sequence narrated by all three of the tablets.

Applying this information to the question with which we are dealing indicates that the earthquake was the "finisher" as a smiter, and therefore the flood of the river should be taken as the initial smiter of the two. Thus the first tablet mentions the two smiters of Pethor, the second tablet identifies them by their nature, and the third tablet sets them in order by indicating which of them finished the site off. It also describes the state of the site after that finisher got through with it.

The conclusion here, then, is that the first statement on the second tablet should be identified as the one that deals with the flooding by the Jabbok and that its second statement should be taken as the reference to the mighty shock waves which struck suddenly. Thus tablet II does not say that the river was dammed up as a result of an earthquake, nor does it say that it was not dammed up by an earthquake. It simply does not address that point. If it was dammed up by an earthquake--something which one might suspect on other grounds--then that shock wave was an earlier one of less intensity than the final one that finished off the destruction of the site.

By way of conclusion to this point, these tablets may now be translated together and in order:

Text I   To you have come a smiter and a finisher,
              and they are the smiters of Pethor.
Text II   There was a damming up and the Jabbok became a smiter.
              Strong and sudden (shocks) became a smiter.
Text III   The houses fell in heaps of ruins,
              and the spring poured out covering them,
              and a curse was placed.

A Potential Connection to Biblical History

In Part I of this article a connection with biblical history was proposed, mainly on the basis of a misreading of two words in the difficult text of tablet II. It is now evident from improved readings for the letters in these words that the biblical connection pro-posed--with the Israelite conquest of Transjordan--cannot be sus-tained. That conclusion does not mean, however, that no potential connection between these tablets and the Bible is available. It simply means that to address that issue one must look elsewhere to determine whether such a connection is possible or not.

The nature of the events described by these tablets leads rather directly to another series of events described in the Bible. This series, recorded in the book of Joshua, begins with the crossing of the Jordan River by the Israelites and ends with their conquest of Jericho. Jericho was in the southern Jordan Valley and Pethor in the mid-Jordan Valley, both of them thus being located near the geological fault that runs north and south through that valley. It is natural, therefore, to expect that they would also share somewhat similar fates whenever earthquakes struck the region. If the epi-center of such an earthquake was near enough to Jericho to knock down its thick and heavily supported and defended walls, it could easily have had sufficient force to knock down the thinner walls of houses at Tell Deir ᶜAlla in the mid-Jordan Valley.

Josh 6:20 describes the way in which the Israelites gained entrance into the city of Jericho. The walls of the city fell down on that occasion. Even though the Hebrew text does not use the specific word for earthquake here, the net effect of what is described can be referred to as an earthquake. Regardless of whether this was naturally or supernaturally induced, some sort of quaking of the

earth is the best mechanism through which to understand how these walls fell. And this quake must have been one of considerable magnitude in order to accomplish the extent of the destruction at Jericho. As such, it should also have had sufficient force to damage Pethor farther north in the Jordan Valley. This would fit well with the quake mentioned in the second line of the second Deir °Alla tablet, the effects of which are more fully described in tablet III.

Another event took place near Jericho prior to that final destruction, however, and it too could be expected to have had direct effects upon the region of the mid-Jordan Valley. Josh 3:13 specifically states that this particular region was affected by a damming up of the Jordan River at the time the Israelites crossed over the river from their camp at Shittim. The waters of the Jordan were cut off at ancient Adam, modern Damiyeh, in order to make it possible for the Israelites to cross over. The biblical text conveys the Israelite's viewpoint and participation in these events. Their interest was in being able to cross over the river, something they normally would not have been able to do at this time. But we must also take into account the view of the Canaanites who lived on the other side of this blockage, north and east of Adam. It is reasonable to assume that conditions were not very congenial for them at that time in that they most likely experienced a considerable amount of flooding in their settlements. That is what text II says happened at Pethor.

The river most important to the Israelites in their quest to cross from one side of the valley to the other was the Jordan, hence that is the river referred to in their description of these events. As the river nearest to Pethor at Tell Deir °Alla, on the other hand, the Jabbok was of more concern to the residents there. Any damming up of the Jordan should have affected the Jabbok in a similar way, so long as the blockage was located south of the point of their confluence. Text II does not specifically state that the Jabbok was the only river dammed up at this time. It simply says that there was a damming up and that the Jabbok became a smiter of Pethor as a result. The actual point of the blockage could just as easily have been on the Jordan, and the course of events in more recent occurrences of this type suggests that it probably was so in this case too.

The relations proposed above can now be outlined by citing from both sources in parallel:

Deir ᶜAlla Tablets	Joshua.

I. To you have come a smiter and a finisher,
   and they are the smiters of Pethor.

II. There was a damming up and the Jabbok struck,	= Josh 3:13
(then) strong and sudden (shocks) struck.	= Josh 6:20
III. The houses fell in heaps of ruins,	" " "
the spring poured forth covering-them,	" " "
and a curse was placed.	= Josh 6:26
	(at Jericho)

Chronology

It should be noted here that the biblical text puts a minimum of two weeks, and probably more time than that, between the crossing of the Jordan in Josh 3:13 and the conquest of Jericho in 6:20. These brief statements on these tablets do not address that issue directly, they only indicate that the events occurred in succession without indicating how long an interval elapsed between them.

Another aspect of the chronology involved here is the question of how long a period elapsed from the time these tablets were written when Jericho and Pethor were destroyed to the time the tablets were sealed in the later destruction of the sanctuary at Pethor. Two main dates have been proposed for the conquest of Jericho by those who hold a historical view of the events narrated in the book of Joshua. One view dates this conquest to the end of Late Bronze Age I, ca. 1400 B.C., while the other dates it to the end of Late Bronze Age II ca. 1230 B.C. My personal preference favors the Late Bronze Age I date,[19] but the difference between these two dates is not a major consideration here. The date selected simply

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[19] A date of 971 B.C. for the accession of Solomon, as established by E. R. Thiele in *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 55, by fixing Solomon's death in 931 B.C., dates the commencement of the construction of the temple to Solomon's fourth year, 967. I Kgs 6:1 extends 480 years back to the time of the Exodus, and 40 years should be subtracted from this figure to allow for the wandering in the wilderness. These figures date the conquest under Joshua to late in the fifteenth century B.C. Judg 11:26 supports such a date by indicating that the conquest took place some 300 years before the time of Jephthah. If Jephthah is dated to about 1100 B.C., the conquest would be dated to approximately 1400 B.C., or essentially the same time that I Kgs 6:1 would date it.

determines the length of time these tablets would have been pre-
served in the sanctuary at Deir ᶜAlla. If the earlier date is correct,
then those tablets would have been preserved there for approxi-
mately two centuries. For a thirteenth-century conquest date, the
tablets would have been preserved there less than a century.

A distinction between earthquakes is important here. From his
excavations at the site, Franken determined that the Late Bronze
Age II sanctuary was destroyed by an earthquake.[20] The inscribed
tablets were found in this destruction level. Obviously, the earth-
quake referred to by the tablets could not be the earthquake that
caused the destruction in which they were sealed, or they would
have had to be written and stored in the sanctuary simultaneously
with that earthquake. The earthquake to which the tablets refer
must therefore be one which hit this site sometime earlier in the
Late Bronze Age.

Specificity

With these tablets pointing to an earthquake antedating the
one which finally destroyed the site, the question arises as to how
specific one can be in connecting that first earthquake and sur-
rounding events with those that are mentioned in the Bible in
connection with the fall of Jericho. Since there were other earth-
quakes in this area at this and other times, perhaps these tablets
refer to an earthquake and related events other than those which
took place in the time of Joshua.

The reference to the damming up of the river makes the course
of events much more unique and specific, however. While there
have been many earthquakes in the Jordan Valley throughout
history, only a few of them have been of sufficient strength or

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The most recent work on the pottery of Jericho is that of Bryant Wood
presented to the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in
Boston in December of 1987. In his as-yet-unpublished paper the author demon-
strates that the excavator, Kathleen Kenyon, has missed indigenous Late Bronze I
pottery mixed in with the Middle Bronze IIC pottery from the last strata of Middle
Bronze- Late Bronze Age Jericho. This discovery has the effect of bringing the time
of the destruction of the last of those strata down from Kenyon's date of 1550 B.C. to
Wood's date of ca. 1400 B.C.

[20] H. J. Franken, "The Stratigraphic Context of the Clay Tablets Found at Deir
ᶜAlla," *PEQ* 96 (1964): 73-78.

proximity to dam up the Jordan River near Adam/Damiyeh. In recorded historical times this has only happened on four occasions since the thirteenth century A.D. It also occurred in the time of Joshua, according to Josh 3:13, and now these tablets give us a reference to such an occurrence prior to the end of the Late Bronze Age, i.e. in the same era in which Joshua lived and fought. That connection brings these two sources close together in time.

It should also be stressed that these tablets take our knowledge of this kind of phenomenon two millennia farther back in time than was previously the case from extra-biblical sources. From the damming up of the Jordan by the earthquake of 1267 A.D. these tablets take our knowledge of this kind of occurrence all the way back to the Late Bronze Age. It appears that an event of this sort-or in any case our knowledge of such events-is a rarity.

There is the matter, as well, of the distinctive nature of the sequence of the events recited by these tablets, as translated and interpreted above. The earthquake which caused the destruction of the site was not the shock wave that caused the damming up of the river, if it was dammed up by an earthquake at all. Tablet I separates those two events, and tablet III indicates that the more destructive quake came later. So we have here a damming up of the river first, and then of the more destructive quake that damaged the site so badly. This unique order of events is all the more unlikely at other times, but it just happens to fit precisely the order of events in the biblical record.

Thus there are four major factors which point to a connection between the events narrated by these tablets and those described in Joshua. First, the damming up of the river along with an earth-quake emphasizes the rarity of the events described by the tablets. Second, the archaeology of the site places the events of these tablets prior to the end of the Late Bronze Age, the same age in which Joshua was active. Third, the contrast with later historical records adds further emphasis to the rarity of these events. And fourth, the sequence of the events described in these tablets is the same as the sequence in the book of Joshua, a factor making them even less likely to have been replicated at some other time. The conclusion here, then, is that there is sufficient specificity in the narration of the events in these texts to connect them with those described in Joshua.

Authorship

A final question remains: Who was at the site of Deir ᶜAlla when the tablets were written? There are two possibilities, and they have already been raised at the end of the discussion of the linguistic data from the tablets. Either these tablets were written in Hebrew by Israelites or they were written by some non-Hebrew residents of Transjordan who spoke and wrote a dialect of Canaanite that was very close in form and content to Biblical Hebrew. Historical contexts can be suggested for either of these possibilities.

An Israelite authorship could be posited from the following circumstances: The portion of Transjordan settled by the Israelite tribes was conquered and distributed before Joshua led all Israel across the Jordan River (Num 32). Pethor at Deir ᶜAlla could have been part of this conquest and temporary settlement. The Transjordanian tribes promised Moses, however, that they would not permanently settle upon the lands distributed to them until the Cis-Jordan tribes had inherited their lands too (Num 32:18-20). In fact, they were supposed to cross the Jordan and accompany the Cis-Jordan tribes in the latter's battles of conquest. They might very well, however, have left a small garrison behind at this strategic site, and one of the soldiers stationed there might have written up this account after the fall of Jericho.

A non-Israelite authorship can be suggested from another set of circumstances: This place was Balaam's headquarters, and he may not only have composed his prophetic oracles in poetry (Num 22-24) but may also have written them down. We cannot attribute the writing of these tablets to Balaam himself, however, for he was killed before the Israelites crossed the Jordan (Num 31:8); but the nature of the Deir ᶜAlla site as a religious center would imply the existence there of other literate persons or prophets. Most likely there was something resembling a non-Israelite school of the prophets, the staff of which included Balaam for a time; and someone among the other literate persons could have been responsible for the writing of these tablets.

Even though no final conclusion has been reached in this matter of authorship, it still is evident that the texts were written in Hebrew or in a dialect very close to Hebrew: As translated and interpreted above, they also indicate that their writer had a knowledge of events in the mid-Jordan Valley contemporary with the

Israelite crossing of the Jordan River and the conquest of Jericho under Joshua. They simply reflect a perspective of someone located elsewhere in the valley concerning the way in which the people there were directly affected by those same events.

I had originally intended to discuss in this second installment of my article the dotted, unwritten tablets, as mentioned in Part I. But the study of these tablets is still in a very preliminary state, and therefore my comments on them will be reserved for another occasion.