HOOFDARTIKELEN

The Dialect of the Deir 'Alla Inscription

The genetic classification of the dialect of the Deir 'Alla inscription continues to be the center of debate among scholars of Northwest Semitic (2). Prior to the discovery of this inscription (3), it was a commonplace among Semitists to divide the Northwest Semitic dialects of the 1st millennium B.C.E. into two groups: Aramaic and Canaanite (4). Accordingly, when the Deir 'Alla inscription was discovered, the question arose: into which of these two groups does the new dialect fit? The original editors of the text, as is well known, classified the dialect as Aramaic (5), and their position has gained a good number of adherents. Others saw little or no Aramaic in the inscription; they, of course, concluded that the text was Canaanite (6).

I will argue for the latter identification, i.e., that the dialect of Deir 'Alla inscription is a dialect of Canaanite. But first I need to say a word about the approach of the first school of thought which classifies the text as Aramaic. In aligning this text with the Aramaic group, my sense is that J. Hoefijzer and his followers have done so because it does not fit well into the largest corpus of 1st Millennium Canaanite material available to us. That corpus, of course, is the Hebrew Bible, in particular those portions of the Bible which are written in standard Biblical Hebrew (BH), more accurately to be called Judahite Hebrew (JH). But the Bible includes many sections not written in Judah or Jerusalem; these emanate from northern Israel or Transjordan and are written in a dialect best called Israelite Hebrew (IH). Advances in the regional dialectology of ancient Canaan have permitted us to identify Israelite texts with greater confidence in recent years). Of greatest importance for our current enterprise is the finding that in dozens of instances the dialect of the Deir 'Alla inscription aligns itself both grammatically and lexically with IH.

In making this claim, I recognize that I am not wholly original. In fact, B. Halpern wrote an extremely important article on this subject, so important that I find it necessary to state his conclusion here in extenso:

"DAPT [Deir 'Alla plaster texts] have altered the face of Hebrew language history. They remind us not to make of Judahite Hebrew a monolith, an unproved norm for the north and east. They caution us to sensitivity to geography — dare one add, to topography and sociology as well — in assessing provisionally the dialectology of Canaan. To my mind, the inscriptions establish that Canaan was linguistically cuneiformed even in the latest Israelite periods")

I accept these conclusions wholeheartedly. Indeed, my studies cited above on Israelite texts in the Bible provide the raw data necessary to confirm Halpern's suspicion that Judahite Hebrew (JH) is not to be extended to regions north and east of Jerusalem. Furthermore, while Halpern pointed to some connections between the Deir 'Alla dialect and IH (though he did not use this term), he left unmentioned numerous other links. Accordingly, the chief goal of the present study is a systematic treatment of all the evidence linking the Deir 'Alla text to IH.

I am quick to add that my approach is wholly synchronic. I am well aware of the current method which utilizes a diachronic approach for linguistic taxonomy, emphasizing most of all shared innovations. But as we shall see at the end of our study, the results of the diachronic approach are far from conclusive in regard to the Deir 'Alla dialect (9).

In light of the lack of a clear picture emerging from the diachronic approach, I find it perfectly acceptable to utilize the synchronic method in the present enterprise (especially once it is realized how a clear picture emerges from this methodology) (10).

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1) An oral version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, April 1, 1992, in Cambridge, Massachusetts (U.S.A.) (at the joint session with the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics). I am grateful to both Jonas C. Greenfield and Stephen A. Kaufman for their oral comments at that occasion, and for their critical reading of an earlier version of this article. They do not necessarily agree, however, with all of the conclusions of this paper, for which I alone remain responsible.

2) This issue was one of the main foci of the International Symposium held at Leiden, August 21-24, 1989. The proceedings appear in J. Hoefijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-evaluated (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991) (hereafter BTDAR). In the 1970s and 1980s, there were many excellent studies on the Deir 'Alla inscription and its dialect. The bibliography is well known and does not need to be repeated here. In the present study, I cite mainly the discussions in BTDAR; only rarely do I cite earlier works on the subject.

3) Still another issue is whether to refer to the two large combinations as one "inscription" (in the singular) or two "inscriptions" (in the plural). While I am inclined to view the two combinations as two parts of a single text, I do not enter into this issue here. Rather, I use the term "inscription" (in the singular) merely for the sake of convenience. Regardless of whether or not the two parts are related literally, they clearly are written in the same dialect; thus the issue is of little consequence for the present undertaking.


9) The ground work (and much more) already has been laid by W.R. GARR, Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000-386 B.C.E. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); below we shall return to his material on the Deir 'Alla dialect (see especially pp. 224, 229) and demonstrate why the evidence is ambiguous.

10) Furthermore, if we understand the value of the diachronic approach, it is especially beneficial when considering languages attested at disparate times, e.g., 1st Millennium B.C.E. Hebrew and 1st Millennium C.E. Arabic. But in the present enterprise that is not a factor. Instead, we are weighing Deir 'Alla against the contemporaneously attested material from Canaanite (BH, Moabite, etc.) and Aramaic (Old Aramaic especially).
We turn now to the specific evidence, proceeding through the text point by point, for a total of twenty-six grammatical and lexical items shared by Deir 'Alla and IH.13

1. Masculine plural nominal ending תי, e.g., ישומاء (1.1), etc.: In standard BH, standard Phoenician, and Ammonite, the masculine plural nominal ending is תי (טי). The Deir ‘Alla usage is shared by Moabite (as by the Phoenician inscriptions from Arslan Tash).12 In addition, the ending תי is attested in Mishnaic Hebrew (MH), at least in the best manuscripts; my study of MH reveals it to represent the vernacular speech of northern Israel.14 Less widely recognized is the fact that this usage occurs in the Bible in about two dozen instances.

The most prominent place where masculine plural תי occurs is the book of Job, where it occurs fifteen times. As S.A. Kaufmann demonstrated, Job is a prime example of style-switching. The setting is the desert fringe in Trans-Jordan; thus all the characters speak the local dialect of that region. We continue to classify this dialect as Canaanite, for regardless of how “Aramaic” the language of Job may look, in the long run it is still Canaanite (not IH) to be sure, but within the umbrella of IH and thus within the Canaanite grouping). As we shall see, this is but the first of many examples of features shared by the Deir ‘Alla dialect and the language of the book Job.

If we turn to the few examples of תי in pre-exilic biblical texts, we see additional evidence for the identification of this usage as a regional dialectal feature in ancient Hebrew. Most important are Judg 5:10 וollen ‘saddle-cloths’ (7), which occurs in the Song of Deborah; 1 Kgs 11:33 ודן ‘Sidonians’, which occurs in the mouth of the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh in territory of Ephraim; and Prov 31:3 ומל ‘kings’, in a section of the Bible stemming from Massa, and thus not written in IH, but as another example of style-switching. Also of relevance may be 2 Kgs 11:13 וגן ‘outrunners’, where the perspective of Athaliah may be represented (if so, this would be a very subtle rhetorical device, a rare form of code-switching or style-switching). In a later Hebrew text, mention should be made of Ezek 26:18 וים ‘islands’, in connection with Tyre; although standard Phoenician used טים, at least one dialect of Phoenician (Arslan Tash) used תי, so here too style-switching probably is at work. To be sure, not all examples of this usage in the Bible can be explained as northernersm or as instances of style-switching. But the general impression one gathers from the distribution of this feature in the Bible is clear: masculine תי was an IH trait (probably not of all IH sub-dialects, but of some).

Naturally, the ending תי (or תי) immediately calls to mind Aramaic, but as the above survey indicates, regional forms of Canaanite used this morpheme as well.18

2. Root רננ ‘come’ (I.1, 11.14): This root is common in Aramaic, but it is attested in Hebrew as well. Moreover, the distribution of this verb in the Bible points to its home in IH. Most of the uses of רננ (רננ) in the Bible occur in Job, Jeremiah, and Second Isaiah. Job has been discussed above; the two prophetic works require comment.

Notwithstanding the locale of the book of Jeremiah in Jerusalem, the prophet hailed from Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Research into regional dialects of ancient Hebrew reveals that Jeremiah includes a high frequency of IH elements; the same is true of stories about Saul of Benjamin in 1 Samuel. The conclusion to be reached is that the Benjamite dialect of Hebrew shared much with IH (standard BH), but a significant number of isoglosses with IH as well. Second Isaiah is a book where true Aramaisms will begin to appear; thus the prominent use of רננ ‘come’ by this prophet is due to the workings of Aramaic influence in the Neo-Babylonian empire.

In earlier biblical texts, the root appears in Deut 33:2, 33:21, Isa 21:12 (2x), 21:14, Mic 4:8, Ps 68:32, Prov 1:27. As most commentators have noted, Ps 68:32 is extremely ancient, in which case רננ would simply be an old poetic usage; the archaic aspect of this word is indicated also by the retention of the yod in this IIy verb. Deut 33:2 and Mic 4:8 should be excluded from our discussion because in these cases the root רננ is used as the B-word for the A-word רנה in poetic parallelism; in the latter case there is also an attempt at anarcaic usage of the word רנה at the beginning of the same hemistich.

This leaves us Deut 33:21, Isa 21:12 (2x), 21:14, Prov 1:27, to consider. Another of Kaufman’s examples of style-switching is the pericope of Isa 21:11-15, in which the language

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12 The readings I utilize are those of Hackett, Balaam Text. I do so not because readings proposed by others are impossible, but because, as far as I am able to determine, her study of the inscription has been the most detailed (including a visit to Amman to personally inspect the text). In the discussion which follows, items are cited by the order in which they occur in the text, without attempting to judge their individual values. The cumulative force of the argument will become evident. Forms are cited by combination and line, e.g., “I.1.” refers to combination I, line 1.


16) It is not clear to me how some scholars can use the masculine plural ending תי to argue on behalf of the Aramaic identification of the Deir ‘Alla dialect; thus P.K. McCarter, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Texts”, in BTDR, 88, the Moabite evidence alone would mitigate against this view. For a more balanced approach, including the citation of the above example of Judges 5:10, see E.A. Knau, “War ‘Biblisch-Hebräisch’ eine Sprache?” ZAH 3 (1990): 16.

17) Much of the evidence is presented in Rendsburg, “ Morphological Evidence”, though a systematic treatment remains a desideratum. See also A.D. Goldberg, Northern-Type Names in the Post-Exilic Jewish Onomasticon (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1972), especially pp. 90-104.
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of Dumah and environs is portrayed (again, like Job, as part of the greater Transjordanian dialect). Prov 1:27 is an excellent example of an Israeli text. And most telling of all is Deut 33:21, which is in the poem about Gad, the very territory of Israel in which lies Tell Deir 'Alla. Undoubtedly, the individual poems about the tribes in Deuteronomy 33, as well as in Genesis 49, originate among the tribes themselves. Thus, the local dialects are reflected. I already have demonstrated this for the poems in Genesis 49.5, and in a future study I will treat Deuteronomy 33. In the meantime, this example from Deut 33:21 concerning Gad, will serve as an excellent illustration of the method and the overall picture.

In short, at first glance the root רָאָשָׁה (רָאָשָׁה) is associated more readily with Aramaic, but it also was a feature of certain dialects of Canaanite. In particular, we may assume it was used regularly in Transjordanian Canaanite (as indicated by Job, Deut 33:21, Isa 21:12-14, and the Deir 'Alla text) and in other local varieties of IH too (as indicated by Prov 1:27).

3. **3mpl pronominal suffix רָאָשָׁה, as in רָאָשָׁה to him** (I.1; I.4): Virtually all scholars who have dealt with the Deir 'Alla text have pointed to the Aramaic form of the ending רָאָשָׁה. This includes even those scholars who have argued strongly for the Canaanite identification of the dialect. Emblematic is Hackett’s statement that the suffix “is as yet unknown in a Canaanite inscription ... so that the appearance of the -wh suffix in this text is actually the strongest argument for the Aramaic classification of the text” (21). But as J.C. Greenfield and J. Naveh both pointed out, the reading רָאָשָׁה ‘his days’ in Mesha Stele line 8, presumably contains the same morpheme. Moreover, one example of this suffix is retained in the Hebrew Bible, specifically in the word רָאָשָׁה ‘his high deeds’ in Ps 116:12. In a detailed study of this psalm, I identified various IH features in the poem, and further suggested that we can pinpoint its geographical origin to Transjordan (24). In sum, the 3mpl pronominal suffix רָאָשָׁה (רָאָשָׁה) was used in certain Canaanite dialects, especially in Transjordan.

4. רָא (I.2): This lexeme naturally suggests Aramaic. Defenders of the Canaanite school are quick to point out that this noun appears only in Balaam’s prophetic, which naturally would be Aramaic, given the tradition (cf. Numb 22:5, Deut 23:5) that the prophet hailed from Aram. In like manner, the word also occurs in the Phoenician inscription of Kilamuwa, in the personal name אֵלֶּם רָא, which is patently Aramaic. Accordingly, say the proponents of the Canaanite school, the presence of רָא in our text should not be used to evaluate the dialect.

On the other side, in arguing for an Aramaic identification of the dialect, D. Pardee retorts as follows: “The word רָא cannot be totally ignored ... It is neither a proper name, nor part of a proper name. It is a common noun serving to indicate the patronymic” (25). But even if we grant Pardee his claim, the counter-argument is Prov 31:2, where the form רָא appears three times, and not in a patronymic, but rather as a true common noun. As part of the Massa material, again it is the speech of Israel’s neighbors to the east which is being portrayed. Most likely, some Transjordanian dialects (even ones classified as Canaanite, and not Aramaic) used the form רָא and not רָא. Thus either the lexeme רָא should be ignored (because it appears only in Balaam’s name), or it should be accepted that רָא could be used by an author writing in a Canaanite dialect, in particular a Transjordanian one.

5. **Root רָא, ‘do, make’** (I.2): This is a classic instance of an IH feature. Before turning to the biblical evidence, note as well that רָא is standard in Phoenician, that Ugaritic uses the by-form בַּי, and that רָא רָא is very common in MH. The distribution of רָא in the Bible is telling: a disproportionate number of its attestations occur in Israeli texts: Hosea (7:10), Proverbs (16:4, 30:20), Deuteronomy 32 (v. 27(26)) and northern Psalms (44:2, 58:3) (27). In addition, stylistic switching is at work in the cases of Job (34:32, 36:23) and the Balaam oracles (Numb 23:23(28)) the presence of רָא in the Deir ‘Alla text, in conjunction with the above evidence, allows us to answer the question posed by Kutscher: “Is it possible that here, too, we should look for its origin in Canaanite where it is employed as a standard root?” (29) The answer, of course, is yes, with the qualification that more specifically it is a trait of Canaanite dialects north of Judah.

6. **ינָה before an anarthrous noun**, as in יְנָה יְנָה ‘on the morrow’ (I.3), etc.: The norm in Hebrew calls for the nun of the preposition יְנָה to assimilate before a noun without the definite article: in Aramaic the norm is the retention of the full form יְנָה (especially since the definite article is postpositive, not prepositive). Accordingly, the usage represented by יְנָה יְנָה (and the four other examples in the inscription) appears to form a bridge with Aramaic (30). However, the use of יְנָה before an anarthrous noun is attested in BH as well, to be exact, 98 times. Now of these 98 occurrences, 51 are in Chronicles, and a few additional ones appear in Daniel and Nehemiah (31). There can be little doubt that the widespread appearance of this usage in Chronicles and the

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(26) See Kaufman, “Classification”, 35.
(28) Rendsburg, Psalms, 55, 63.
(29) Again, see Kaufman, “Classification”, 55-56.
(30) Kutscher, History, 135.
(31) This point has been emphasized most of all by Pardee, “Linguistic Classification”, 102.

other late books is due to Aramaic influence over Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) 23).

But what of the earlier attestations of נֶרֶף before an anarthrous noun? Although I readily admit to not being able to account for every instance of this usage in earlier parts of the Bible, a pattern is discernible. As the following listing of examples indicates, נֶרֶף before an anarthrous noun must have been a feature of IH 24). Numb 23:7 places us, most importantly for our present concern, in the Balaam oracles. Judg 5:20, 7:23 (2x), 10:11 (2x), 19:16 are all in northern settings. 2 Kgs 15:28 is part of the history of the northern kingdom of Israel, composed in IH 25). Jer 7:7, 17:5, 25:3, 25:5, 44:18, 44:28 aid us in aligning the Benjaminite dialect with IH. Ps 45:9, 73:19, 116:8 are all in northern poems 26). Prov 27:8 occurs in a northern book, as noted earlier. Song 4:15 appears in still another example of a northern composition 27). Finally, Job 30:5, 40:6 is again part of the Transjordanian dialect.

In sum, the usage under discussion is a trait of both IH and Aramaic. Under the influence of the latter, it became more common in LBH as well. As far as the Deir 'Alla text is concerned, the five-fold use of נֶרֶף before an anarthrous noun in the inscription links the dialect with IH.

7. Root נֵר תֶלֶל (1.5): This root is relatively common in Aramaic, and it is less common in BH. But a quick glance at the distribution of this root in the Bible reveals something quite striking. The root נֵר תֶלֶל occurs in the Bible in Ps 19:3, Job 13:17, 15:17, 32:6, 32:10, 32:17, 36:2. I have no explanation for the first of these attestations (Psalm 19 is not among the northern psalms I have isolated); but what needs to be stressed is the six-fold usage of this verb in Job. Above I discussed the case of Job as a classic example of style-switching, representing the dialect of Transjordan. As we shall see in numerous instances below, there are many nexuses between Job and the Deir 'Alla text. This is only to be expected, given the close geographical proximity of both settings 28).

8. נֶרֶף הָעַמִּים 'they gathered together' (5.5): Because the נֶרֶף preformative for the reflexive conjugation is common in later Aramaic, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that the use of the 'Neralf form in the Deir 'Alla text creates a bridge with Aramaic. However, as J.C. Greenfield pointed out, in Early Aramaic, the only known example of a T-stem perfect bears the נֶרֶף preformative (Bar Rakib 1:14 [KAI 216:14] 19). Not until later texts in Imperial Aramaic do we find examples of the נֶרֶף preformative.

In fact, the only other early occurrence of the 'Neralf conjugation comes from Canaanite 29), specifically the long instance of an 'Neralf (or more accurately *Etpal = Etpaľ 'Ilpaľ of a gerundive verb) in the Bible, יִלְלָה (Ps 76:6 30). As part of the Asaph collection, Psalm 76 is to be considered a northern composition. Thus, the Deir 'Alla usage and the Psalm 76 passage allow us to conclude that in certain regional dialects of ancient Canaanite the 'Neralf conjugation was employed.

9. 3sg pronominal suffix נָרַךְ, as in נָרַךְ 'your cloud' (1.6): This morpheme again looks to be pure Aramaic, but once more closer inspection reveals it to be a characteristic of IH as well. Before proceeding to the biblical evidence, note that it is attested in Phoenician, specifically in a Punic source with the orthography נָרַךְ 42). In the Bible, the נָרַךְ occurs predominantly in Israelite compositions: 2 Kgs 4:2K, 4:3K, 4:7K (2x), Ps 116:7 (2x), 116:19, Song 2:13 K. A four occurrences in 2 Kings 4 are in the Elisha cycle, a set of stories clearly composed in IH 43); Psalm 116 already has been mentioned as a northern poem; and likewise the northern provenance of Song of Songs was noted above. The first two of these literary works probably are Transjordanian: Elisha likely hailed from Gilead 44), and Psalm 116's use of the 3msg pronominal suffix נָרַךְ (discussed above) points to Transjordan.

Two other examples of נָרַךְ, in Jer 11:15 and Ps 137:6, may reflect northern dialect. Jeremiah has been discussed above.

24) I omit from consideration Deut 33:11, where נֶרֶף must be something else. Also, נֶרֶף in Isa 18:2, 18:7 is not to be considered in this regard, though clearly it represents a dialectal feature of some sort (my hunch is that addresser-switching is at work here, since Ethiopia is addressed in this pericope).
26) Rendsburg, Psalms, 45-50, 73-81, 83-86 (though in my treatment of these Psalms, I did not include the present point as evidence for their northern provenance). On the Asaph collection in general, of which Psalm 73 is a member, see also M.J. Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah," JBL 82 (1963): 382-92.
28) McCarter, "Dialect", 89, states that נֶרֶף occurs "only in later Biblical Hebrew", with no further comment. By this statement, I assume he is suggesting that its presence in BH is due to Aramaic influence. But of course there is much at fault with this approach. First of all, even though I am setting aside Psalm 19, it is not clear to me that this composition is late. Secondly, while I agree that Job is late (early post-Exilic period, in my mind), the presence of "Aramaisms" in the book are due to a conscious representation of the Transjordanian speech of the characters, not because Imperial Aramaic was influencing Hebrew at this time.
30) But not from Ugaritic, as claimed by Hackett, Balaam Text, p. 119 and n. 24, where her references to C.H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (Rome: Pontificio Biblical Institute, 1967), p. 81 (§ 9.33), is a discussion of the Gt from of the verb.
31) The form נָרַךְ in 2 Chr 20:35 is no longer early; here Aramaic influence may be the cause (by this time the נָרַךְ preformative had begun to shift to נא). Also germane may be the 'Apel form נָרַךְ in Jer 25:3, instead of the usual Hipil. Is this due to the Benjamite dialect of Jeremiah? These forms were cited by Halpern, "Dialect Distribution", 128 (though the other forms mentioned are less pertinent), but he did not cite Ps 76:6.
32) I hesitate to offer an English translation of this difficult word; for brief discussion see F. Zorell, "Za Ps 12:9. 76:6", Biblica 10 (1929): 100.
34) For a partial list of IH features in these chapters, consult the references in the index of Rendsburg, Psalms, 142.
The example from Psalm 137:45), a poem from the Babylonian Exile, may be explained according to the hypothesis that during the 6th Century B.C.E. exiles from Judah were reunited with the earlier exiles of the kingdom of Israel, and that IH forms began to mingle with IH forms at this time 46). The other attestations of יִהְבֵּשׁ, Ps 103:3 (2x), 103:4 (2x), 103:5, 135:9, are in post-exilic compositions 47), and may be due to Aramaic influence, or once more the above theory of the reunion of exiles may be invoked.

The net result of this survey is the conclusion that the 2fsb pronominal suffix יִהְבֵּשׁ was a feature of certain Canaanite dialects during the Iron Age, especially in Transjordan, as reflected in the Deir 'Alla text, the Elisha Cycle, and Psalm 116 48).

10. Negative particle יֵאָל before a noun, as in יֵאָל רא (I,6-7): In standard BH the negative particle יֵאָל is used most widely to negate the jussive 49). In a rare number of instances it occurs before a noun with a negating force 50): 2 Sam 1:21 (2x), Amos 5:14; Joel 2:13; Ps 141:5; Prov 8:10; 12:28; 17:12, 27:2. A study of these passages reveals this syntagma to be a trait of IH. The dirge in 2 Samuel 1 purports to be from the pen of David, but the setting is Mount Gilboa, so a northern background is present; Amos is Judaite, but he prophesied to the north (or perhaps, with David Qimhi, we should assume that he was Israelian in origin) 51); Psalm 141 is a clear case of a northern composition 52); and the northern provenance of Proverbs has been noted above. This leaves only Joel 2:13 (which, potentially at least, could be explained by the theory of IH influence on post-exilic Hebrew; alternatively the prophet may have utilized a dialectal form to heighten the assonance between יֵאָל התומ תומב). In sum, the use of יֵאָל to negate a following noun is a feature of both Deir 'Alla and IH.

11. Root יֵאָל ‘give, put’ (I,7): This verb is very common in Aramaic. Elsewhere in Canaanite it is attested only in the Bible, and even there only in the imperative. Indeed, because the masculine singular imperative is virtually always the long imperative form יֵאָל, one is led to conclude that we are dealing here with a fossilized form, i.e., a form which has ceased to be productive in the language. The only exception to this rule is Prov 30:15 where twice we have the regular form יֵאָל. The entire book of Proverbs, as noted on several occasions above, reflects IH, but the section which commences with Prov 30:1 is Massaite material and thus may reflect Transjordanian usage in particular. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find a productive derivative of the root יֵאָל in Proverbs 30, thus forming a lexical link with the Deir 'Alla inscription 53).

12. 3sfg perfect יִאָל in יִאָל as in יִאָל ‘reproaches’ (I,7-8), יֵאָל רְשֵׁי ‘chases’ (I,15): Some interpreters of the text consider this first example to be a noun (namely, a kind of bird); I prefer to see יִאָל as a verb, meaning ‘reproaches’. Regardless of this example, however, we have a second, sure instance with יֵאָל רְשֵׁי ‘chases’ later in the inscription. The 3sfg perfect ending in יִאָל is attested throughout Aramaic (including Samalian), but nowhere else in Northwest Semitic inscriptions 54). However, this usage is attested in the Bible in several instances, the distribution of which suggests it to be a northern dialectal feature.

The three cases in the Bible are Deut 32:36, Isa 23:15, Ezek 46:17 55). The first of these is most instructive, since above we commented on the northern origin of Deuteronomy 32 56). Isaiah 23 is part of the oracle against Tyre. Here, even though Phoenician attests the shift of -at > -a (perhaps to -a) 57), I would propose that an attempt has been made to produce northern usage 58). Only the last example, from Ezekiel, can be considered a true Aramaism 59).

Also germane may be the fact that with יֵאָל verbs, northern Hebrew appears to have retained the יֵאָל ending more widely. The evidence for this comes mainly from MH, in which this is the regular usage 60). In the Bible, we can point to slender evidence. The form יֵאָל occurs in 2 Kgs 9:37, with reference to Jezebel, thus in a text emanating from the northern kingdom. The form יֵאָל in Jer 13:19 may represent a feature of the Benjaminites dialect discussed above. Other examples, however, either cannot be so easily explained (Lev 25:21, 26:34), or are to be considered true Aramaisms (Ezek 24:12).

The final conclusion of this entire discussion is as follows: in certain Canaanite dialects, the 3sfg perfect ending יִאָל was retained. Its presence in Deir 'Alla, therefore, need not automatically be taken as a sign of the Aramaic classification of the dialect.

45) For detailed treatment of this and other issues in this poem, see G.A. Rendsburg and S.L. Rendsburg, "Physiologic and Philological Notes to Psalm 137", JQR (forthcoming).
48) See the balanced statement of F. Israel, "Reflexions méthodologiques sur le classement linguistique de 'DAAT'", in BYTDAR, 30:7. "On peut différencier certains des formes comme des aramaïsme".
50) Hoffzijer, ATDA, 196; J. Hoffzijer, "What Did the Gods Say? Remarks on the First Combination of the Deir 'Alla-Plaster Texts", in BYTDAR, 129; and G.I. Davies, "Response to J. Greenfield and J. Hoffzijer", in BYTDAR, 148, refer only to יֵאָל יִהְבֵּשׁ in 12:28. This example may have closer connections to יֵאָל יִהְבֵּשׁ in the Deir 'Alla text, but there are other instances of this usage in the Bible, as my list indicates.
52) See the detailed treatment in Rendsburg, Psalms, 99-102 (where, however, the syntaxa under discussion here was not treated). For other issues concerning around Ps 141:5, see G.A. Rendsburg, "Monophthongization of awar > ā in Elahite and in Northwest Semitic", in C.H. Gordon and G.A. Rendsburg, eds., Elathica: Essays on the Elath Archives and Elahite Language, vol. 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 91-126.
53) H.M. Dahood, "Review of ATDA", Biblica 62 (1981): 127, is correct that יֵאָל in Num 21:14 reflects the root יֵאָל, then we have still another non-Judahite passage in which this verb occurs. Note that this statement, from the Book of the Wars of Yahweh, deals with Transjordan.
54) Garr, Dialect Geography, 125-126.
55) I do not include here examples with יֵאָל verbs, but see the discussion below.
56) This example was noted by Israel, "Reflexions méthodologiques", 311. As an aside, note that the root יֵאָל is an example of a lexical trait of IH. This is established from its attestations in the Bible (Deut 32:36, 1 Sam 9:7, Jer 2:36, Ezek 27:19, Prov 20:14, Job 14:11) and from its more common use in Aramaic.
58) I call this phenomenon "addressee-switching", on which see G.A. Rendsburg, "The Strata of Biblical Hebrew", JNSL (forthcoming); and Rendsburg, "Kabbir in Biblical Hebrew".
60) See Kutscher, History, 128.
13. The vocable בָּרָה 'rod' is common in Aramaic (later בָּרָה). But it appears in Canaanite in a few instances as well, in particular in Phoenician [KAI I:2] [Bybllos] and in Prov 14:3, an Israelite text. The fact that this usage is unknown from JH (I exclude Is 11:1 where it means something else, namely, 'shoot') should not lead scholars to conclude that it automatically is Aramaic and not Canaanite. It is spread over three dialects (Phoenician, IH, and Deir 'Alla) and must have been characteristic of Canaanite dialects to the north of Judah.

14. Retention of yod in perfect of IIIy verbs, as in רְמָח (I:10): Notwithstanding the fact that הָיְתָ ‘they see’ in I:14 (with syncope of intervocalic yod [unless this verb is an IIIw verb]61 apparently is a 3mpl perfect, I am inclined to view רְמָח ‘they drink’ in I:10 as a 3mpl perfect as well. The alternative, to view רְמָח as a masculine plural imperative62, flies in the face of another form in the same inscription, namely, לֵא ‘see’ in I:563.

Retention of the yod in the perfect of IIIy verbs occurs in the Bible sporadically: Numb 24:6, Deut 32:27, Isa 21:12 (2x), Ps 57:2, Prov 26:7. With the exception of Ps 57:2 — for which I have no explanation — the list demonstrates the IH nature of this usage. The remaining texts all have been discussed above. Numbers 24 is in the Balaam oracles, which naturally is significant for our present investigation of the Deir 'Alla inscription. Deuteronomy 32 and Proverbs are Israelite compositions, and Isaiah 21:11-15 places us in the Transjordanian desert fringe.

Thus, the retention of the yod in the perfect of at least one IIIy verb in the Deir 'Alla inscription fits into the picture of regional dialects of ancient Canaanite. It was not a feature of JH, but it was present elsewhere64.

15. רָמָח 'wine' (I:10): This noun often is considered a characteristic of Aramaic, especially when contrasted with the usual Hebrew form יִנָּא 'wine'. But this is too hasty a conclusion, because the vocable רָמָח occurs in Canaanite texts as well. It is attested in Ugaritic65, Phoenician (two attestations from Shiqmona), and three times in the Bible: Deut 32:14, Ps 75:9, Isa 27:2. Two of these three occurrences are in Israelite compositions: Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 75 (part of the Asaph collection). Isaiah 27 is presumably Judahite, but according to some scholars it is exilic or post-exilic, in which case IH influence could have exerted itself over JH writers. Regardless of how one explains the presence of רָמָח in Isa 27:2, the overall picture is clear: רָמָח was at home in regional dialects of Canaanite north of Judah66.

16. PS /d/ > q, as in יָשָׁב 'heenas' (I:10); יָהָה 'laughs' (I:11); נָשָׁם 'troubles' (I:14); נָשַׁפֶּט 'shoot' (II:5, II:12, II:14). Although there have been attempts to read every instance of

131. See Hackett, Balaam Text, 54, n. 47.
132. Hofijzer, ATDA, 292; and Gatt, Dialect Geography, 136-37.
133. As noted by Gatt, Dialect Geography, 162, n. 382.
134. I have not treated the imperfect in the Deir 'Alla text. Probably the yod was elided in the 3mpl imperfect (see Hackett, Balaam Text, 98), but the two instances do not lead us to a firm conclusion. The reading בָּרֵךְ in II:13 is not certain; and the form בָּרְכֵךְ in L:1 is a waw consecutive which, because it employs the jussive and not the indicative, may undergo a different phonetic development. In the Bible, the distribution of IIIy imperfactive with the yod retained is also a feature of IH; see Rendsburg, Psalms, 42-43.
135. I accept the classification system of Ginsberg, "The Northwest Semitic Languages", which places Phoenician and Ugaritic together in the Phoenic group of Canaanite.
136. See further Rendsburg, Psalms, 76-77.

In short, although the shift of /d/ > q’ is a characteristic feature of Aramaic, there were also Canaanite dialects
which underwent the same process. The presence of this shift in Deir ‘Alla, in light of all the other connections with Canaanite in the inscription, is not necessarily a point in favor of the Aramaic classification of the dialect.

17. Root קָרֵך ‘laugh’ (I,11): In the preceding point I discussed the specific graphemic/phonemic issue of the use of ק to represent /d/. Here I devote a special section to the root קָרֵך ‘laugh’. As is well known, there is a great diversity among the Semitic languages regarding the various etyma of this word. The closest cognate is Syriac ghk and thus this point has been raised in favor of the Aramaic classification of the Deir ‘Alla dialect. However, there is great likelihood that the root קָרֵך appears in the Bible, in Job 15:12. The full passage reads לֶחָרֵך עַעֵכִי כַּהֹן ‘will he not take counsel with you, will he not ask advice of you’? In the Bible this usage is attested only in northern settings. Job 18:19, 2 Kgs 4:13, 6:27, Job 16:3, 38:28, 38:31, Qoh 2:19, 11:6. Job and Qohelet require no comment by this point; the Judges passage occurs in the story of the Danites’ finding their new home in the north; the two passages from 2 Kings occur within the history of the northern kingdom of Israel (the former in the mouth of Elisha, the latter in the mouth of the Israelite king). It is clear that the use of קָרֵך in an extended question is a feature shared by the Deir ‘Alla dialect and IH.

22. Interrogative הִגְגָנָה תַּדּוּל הָכֹל מִלְּכָּא הָיָה תַּדְּוָל תַּדְּוָל ‘your bed of eternity’ (II,11). In the expression מָשְׂכַל הָלָכַי, both the nomen regens and the nomen rectum of a construct chain are in the plural; thus we have what may be called a “double plural”. S. Gevitz noted that this formation is characteristic of northern texts such as Judges 5, Phoenician, and the Amarna letters from Byblos. In a separate article he noted Gen 49:23 לַכָּא הָלָכַי ‘masters of arrows’, in the poem about the northern tribes of Joseph, as another example of this usage. My own investigations have confirmed this view with other examples (I translate literally, to highlight the syntax): Gen 49:24 מִלְּכָא הַר ‘arms of his hands’, also in the poem about Joseph; Ps 29:1 דִּי אלֶימ ‘sons of the gods’, Ps 45:6 דִּי נְוָי הָלוֹא הָלָכַי ‘daughters of the kings’, Ps 47:10 מִלְּכָא הָלָכַי ‘princes of peoples’, Ps 74:13 מִלְּכָא הָלָכַי ‘heads of the sea monsters’, all in northern psalms; etc. Furthermore, this construction is common in MH, e.g., Rosh Hashanah 1:1 מִלְּכָא הָלָכַי ‘heads of years’. While it is true that double plurals also occur where northern provenance is not indicated, e.g., Chronicles, the overall picture favors the conclusion that this usage is an element of IH. Its presence in Deir ‘Alla

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80) In the former passage, wordplay is present, and כָּא carries both of its connotations.

81) For further discussion, see Greenfield, “Philological Observations”, 116, where, however, only 2 Kgs 6:27 is cited.

82) The examples in Gen 44:19, Deut 4:32, represent different syntagmas.


87) Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 42.
is thus another link between the dialect of our inscription and IH.

As to the specific interpretation of מַסְכֵּב תעִלָּרָךְ, it should be noted that only one bed need be referred to here (see my translation above). The double plural has different semantic sub-categories. In cases such as מַסְכֵּב תעִלָּרָךְ and בְּנֵי הָגוֹי, there could be many masters of multiple arrows, or many daughters of multiple kings, so that both nomen regens and nomen rectum are in the plural (though מַסְכֵּב is not the Hebrew מַסְכֵּב). Respectively, would be the standard expressions for ‘archers’ and ‘princesses’). In a case such as מֶלֶךְ עֶשֶׂרוֹ הַרְבָּה, probably there is only one great sea monster (= Lotan of Ugaritic mythology), but since he is multi-headed, the nomen regens needs to be in the plural, and then by extension the nomen rectum is pluralized as well. In the example from the Deir ‘Alla text, we have the opposite: the nomen rectum is pluralized to create the term ‘eternities’ (poetic usage, presumably), and thus by extension the nomen regens is pluralized as well. But the overall meaning of מַסְכֵּב תעִלָּרָךְ would still be ‘your eternal bed’.

24. Negative particle ‘sprinkle’ (II,13): There is still some uncertainty as to the exact reading of the string of letters in this difficult line. I follow van der Kooij, who reads סיל as an independent word here. If this reading is correct, probably it is the negative particle, a usage which is paralleled elsewhere in Northwest Semitic only in Job 9:33 הָא אֲנָה (though the Aramaic equivalent וַיֶּאֲנָה also occurs). Again, we notice a striking similarity between the Deir ‘Alla text and the book of Job.

25. מַסְכֵּב (II,15): Although the context is not clear, the reading מַסְכֵּב is reasonably certain. This verb, meaning ‘sprinkle’, appears in MH and Aramaic. Its presence in the former need not be due to Aramaic influence. Instead, more than likely the root was characteristic of Canaanite dialects north of Judah, including Deir ‘Alla and MH.

26. מַסְכֵּב (II,17): This noun derives from the root מַסְכֵּב (םָסְכָּל), whose causative derivations mean ‘strike, administer corporal punishment, etc.’. Verbal and nominal forms from this root appear in MH and Aramaic. As we have seen on several occasions above (including the immediately preceding example), we again witness a distribution of Deir ‘Alla, MH, and Aramaic. There is no a priori reason why this term should be considered more Aramaic than Canaanite. It is not attested in JH, our largest corpus of Iron Age Canaanite, but it did exist in other regional varieties of Canaanite.

In sum, then, there are twenty-six items which link the Deir ‘Alla dialect to a type of Canaanite very close to IH.

Several scholars recently have stated that our knowledge of IH unfortunately is insufficient, with the suggestion that, if we knew more of this dialect (or dialect bundle), we would be in a better position to judge the Deir ‘Alla dialect. Greenfield, for example, wrote: ‘If we had a better idea of Israelite [= Israeli] Hebrew in its varied aspects, it might be possible to assess the role of this dialect in the transmission of Aramaic’. Weippl wrote in a similar vein: ‘The position of Israelite [= Israeli] among the Canaanite languages is not well known as no texts have survived from which we could glean sufficient information regarding its phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicom’. But in my own recent studies into the regional dialectology of ancient Hebrew, I believe I have begun to fill exactly what these two scholars see as a gap in our knowledge. Contra Weippl, Israelite texts have survived; and, as I have demonstrated in the detailed treatment of the twenty-six grammatical and lexical points above, the dialect of these texts coheres to a great extent with the dialect of Deir ‘Alla.

Can we be even more specific? As I have noted several times above, there is a tremendous amount shared by Job and Deir ‘Alla. I am not the first to point this out; both M. Dahood and Greenfield called attention to this fact. The eleven points noted above (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24), in which Deir ‘Alla grammatical and lexical features appear in the book of Job as well, demonstrate the validity of this approach. In both cases we are dealing with a

[1980]: 53. The verb מַסְכֵּב, in turn, is usually considered Aramaic, but note that it appears in Job 16:15 (its only occurrence in the Bible).

If we accept Hackett’s view (Balām Text, 31) that סיל in I,1 is the relative pronoun, this too would form a bridge with IH. Cognates occur in Aramaic and Phoenician, and the Hebrew relative pronoun סיל (this shorter form clearly is related) occurs predominantly in IH texts (see Rendsburg, Psalms, 91-92).

Somewhat speculative, but perhaps germane, is the attempt by H.-P. Mollier, ‘Einmalitatesmenchliches Problem zur aramäischen Inschrift von Deir ‘Alla’, ZDPV 94 (1978): 57, to see the root סיל ‘curse’ in two of the very fragmentary combinations: IXa.3 סיל בְּיָסִל, and Xa.3 סיל. If he is correct, note that this root is also a trait of IH. It occurs only in the Balām story (10x), Prov 1:26, Job 3:8, 53.


See also Knauf, ‘War “Biblisch-Hebräisch” eine Sprache’? 11-23, especially pp. 18-19.

Dahood, ‘Review of ATDA’, 126: ‘the language of Deir ‘Allah (sic) and that of Job have many elements in common’. But he went too far with the following statement: ‘Some of the most striking grammatical and lexical isoglosses are with the Book of Job which is classical Hebrew without any significant Aramaic features’ (p. 125). Obviously, the book of Job, set in the desert fringe in Transjordan, has strong links with Aramaic.

Greenfield, ‘Philological Observations’, 120: ‘A fruitful area of comparison with the Deir ‘Alla inscription which has not been given the attention that it deserves is the Book of Job’. There is also an important religious context for the book of Job is dominated by El and Shaddai, divine names also present in the DAPT’. Davies, ‘Response’, 144, n. 3, was impressed with this observation: ‘I find his [Greenfield’s] suggestion of literary, linguistic and even religious parallels with the book of Job particularly inviting, in view of its likely Transjordanian setting’. On the issue of סיל, see further the next footnote.

An additional point, not treated in the present study, is the extremely common use of סיל in Job and the presence of סיל in the Deir ‘Alla text (1:5 [restored], 1:6). Incidentally, this also reopens the question of סיל in Job 19:29.

Is the two-fold use of סיל in Ruth 1:20-21 to be understood in like regard? That is, Naomi, the returning woman from Moab in Transjordan, invokes this particular divine name.
The dialect of the Deir 'Alla inscription

Transjordanian dialect\(^9\), one which falls within my definition of IH (see below).

In arguing for the inclusion of the Deir ‘Alla dialect into the Canaanite group, still more can be said\(^9\). There are other grammatical and lexical features in the inscription which are not specific to IH, but which belong to Canaanite (including JH) in general. Since all of these have been treated before, I present them here in summary fashion, with only a few additional comments in the notes\(^100\):

1) use of the waw consecutive (I,1, etc.)\(^101\)
2) the imperative forms of ري (‘go, come’, specifically ריב (I,5) and ריב (I,11,7)
3) the root רָע (‘see’) (I,5)
4) the root רָע (‘unite, gather together’) (I,5)\(^102\)
5) the word רָע (‘assembly’) (I,6)
6) the word רָע (‘chastisement’) (I,10)
7) the use of the Niph'al, specifically, רַעֲנֵב (‘standing’) (I,6) and רַעֲנֵב (‘sighing’) (II,12 [2x])
8) the infinitive construct רַעֲנ (‘to know’) (II,17)\(^103\)
9) the root רָע (‘speak’) (I,17)

To be sure, there are items in the Deir ‘Alla inscription which connect with Aramaic\(^104\). Since they too have been noted by previous scholars, only a quick summary is necessary here\(^105\):

1) רַע (‘dove’) (I,9)
2) רַע (‘soil, earth’) (II,5)\(^106\)
3) רָע (‘one’) (II,10)
4) רָע (‘little pig’) (II,15)

Now even a quick glance at this list shows that the only “pure” Aramaic connections in the Deir ‘Alla inscription are lexical items. Since I have used quite a few lexical items in the above twenty-six (plus nine) points, I do not mean to disparage the use of lexical items for linguistic taxonomy. Nevertheless, it is striking that not a single grammatical item in the Deir ‘Alla texts forms an isogloss with Aramaic to the complete exclusion of Canaanite. The proponents of the Aramaic school have argued in this manner, but in all instances, as detailed above, parallels may be found in Canaanite as well, especially in IH (nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16).

Furthermore, the following needs to be stated. In my research into the regional dialects of ancient Hebrew, I have noted that specifically in IH texts there are numerous instances of rare or unique Hebrew words that possess Aramaic cognates. A few of these have been noted above, e.g. רָע (‘give’, ‘put’, רָע (‘rode’, ‘wine’, etc. But there are many others as well which we have not had occasion to mention in this article (because they do not appear at Deir ‘Alla). Examples are רָע (‘bone’, רָע (‘carry off’, pursue’, רָע (‘dwell’, רָע (‘grievous’, רָע (‘stem, stalk, root’, רָע (‘cut down’, רָע (‘hatchet’, רָע (‘mock’, רָע (‘astir’, רָע (‘good, pleasing, beautiful’, and רָע (‘grieve’). In short, the teachings of dialect geography inform us that we can expect to find many lexical links between IH and Aramaic, which are not shared by IH.

Accordingly, at least one item in the above list of four words could very reasonably have existed in IH. I have in mind רָע (‘soil, earth’ (assuming that this is what the word means). The IH corpus is limited to a small portion of the Bible and a few inscriptions. At the very least, since this

\(^{104}\) Similarly, there are several items which go both ways. They are the least instructive for our purposes. Here I have in mind 1) the root רָע (‘see’) (I,1, I,14, II,13); and 2) the use of the H-stem causative in רָע (‘chase’) (I,15) (on which see Pardee, ‘Aramaic Beholds’, 122). In the same vein, the lack of a definite article cannot be used as a factor in determining whether the Deir ‘Alla dialect is more closely related to Canaanite or to Aramaic. In either case, we would expect a definite article in a text from this period. The absence of the definite article in the Deir ‘Alla inscription remains, then, a curiosity, but this fact cannot help us in the present enterprise.

\(^{105}\) The attempt to understand רָע in I,1 as Aramaic ‘beholds’ is difficult. See Weippert, ‘Kalam Text’, 167, n. 1. In like manner, little should be made of רָע in II,15 (thus Pardee, ‘Aramaic Classification, 102, albeit with qualification). As many have recognized, the word could be simply feminine (‘mater’) or it might include the 3msg pronominal suffix (‘his horse’); see, e.g., M. Dijkstra, ‘Response to E. Puech and G. van der Kooij’, in BTDAR, p. 265 and n. 11.

\(^{106}\) Similarly, רָע in II,8 may be related to Syriac șāqā ‘mound of earth, sarcophagus’; thus Hackett, Balaam Text, 63. But the line is broken at this point and the context is difficult. For an alternative understanding, see Greenfield, ‘Review of ATTD’, 252, where רָע = ‘thighs of’ is suggested, parallel to אַש (‘testicles/thighs of men’).

\(^{107}\) I include this entry in the list, even though the context is not clear and other possibilities exist.

\(^{108}\) For רָע, see Rendsburg, ‘Genesis 49’; for the other lexemes, consult the references in Rendsburg, Psalms, 106–07.
word was in use at Deir ‘Alla (which, we must remember, is on territory traditionally considered Israelite), it is possible that it was used in IH as well.

About the other words in the above list, the same cannot be said. Since פ 'dove', ר 'one', and ימי 'little pig' stand in contrast to what we have in Hebrew (respectively וֹ, וֹ, and וֹ), these items are probably the only "pure" links with Aramaic which can be considered. Even here, in one instance, namely וֹ, it should be noted that this form too appears in the Bible, in Ezek 33:30, though undoubtedly this is due to Aramaic influence.

Before concluding, more must be said (as promised above) about the diachronic approach to our dilemma. In his meticulous study of the 1st Millennium Northwest Semitic dialects, Garr isolated ten innovations in the Deir ‘Alla dialect. Of these, three are shared by both Aramaic and Hebrew (1:26b, 3:23d, 3:25a); three are shared by Aramaic only (2:1, 2:14, 3:10b); three are shared by Hebrew only (2:16, 3:21b, 3:24b); and one (4:11, which is only a possible point) is independent of either Aramaic or Hebrew. Thus, I repeat what I stated at the outset: a clear picture of the linguistic taxonomy of the Deir ‘Alla dialect does not emerge from this methodology. Moreover, of the three innovations shared by Aramaic and Deir ‘Alla, two of these are attested in Hebrew as well, albeit not in epigraphic Hebrew (the corpus utilized by Garr), but in IH texts in the Bible (namely, 2:1 and 3:10b). Thus, we are left with only 2:14, specifically, the use of ימי 'one' (and even here Garr left the door open for the possibility that this usage may be borrowed [presumably from Aramaic], just as it was in Ezek 33:30).

Kaufman pointed out that another innovation in the Deir ‘Alla dialect is ר 'son'. Of course he is correct, but as discussed above a) the word may be part of the protagonist’s patronymic and thus may be of little or no value for our concern, and b) it is in any case attested in IH as well. But let us not enter these quibbles here; instead let us be maximalist and state categorically that yes, the use of ר represents an innovation in Deir ‘Alla shared with Aramaic. We still are left with more innovations shared with Hebrew (2:16, 3:21b, 3:24b) than with Aramaic only (2:14, and use of ר). But obviously no major argument should be entered on the basis of three innovations shared in one direction versus two innovations shared in another direction. The quantity of discriminants is too small, and the scales are too closely balanced (even though they tip in the direction of Hebrew/Canaanite). Thus we return to my claim that the diachronic approach yields inconclusive results when applied to the case of the Deir ‘Alla dialect. By contrast, its was made clear above, the synchronic approach yields very conclusive results.

Our study has shown that, with the exception of a few lexical items, nothing in the Deir ‘Alla inscription is exclusively Aramaic. On the other hand, there are some important grammatical points, e.g., the use of the Niphal, that point heavily toward Canaanite. More importantly, there are more than two dozen isoglosses created between Deir ‘Alla and IH. This last finding, the most crucial result of our undertaking, demonstrates beyond doubt that the Northwest Semitic dialect most closely related to the Deir ‘Alla dialect is IH. For lack of a better term, I am contact to accept the term "Gileadite", which I would reckon within the IH umbrella. Our study strongly supports Halpern’s view that Canaan was linguistically cantonized in the 1st Millennium; the Deir ‘Alla dialect fits into this picture perfectly.

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1109 On the historical issue, as to whether Deir ‘Alla was Israelite or non-Israelite at the time of the writing or use of this inscription, see, among others, Halpern, “Dialect Distribution”; 121; and Weippert, "Balaam Text", 179-80 J.W. Weisselius, "Thoughts about Balaam: The Historical Background of the Deir Alla Inscription on Plaster", BIT 44 (1987): 889-99). Went too far in arguing that the text is Israelite. In theory, he could be correct (that is, the inscription could reflect popular [not official] Israelite religion), but there is no proof for the text being Israelite and thus methodologically it is sounder to consider the material non-Israelite.

1109 See the summary list in Garr, Dialect Geography, 224.

1110 I include only Hebrew here among the Canaanite dialects (leaving Phoenician, etc., aside). The sigla refer to Garr’s numeration system; the reader is invited to consult Garr’s monograph for the details.

1112 For a contrary view, see Kaufman, "Classification", 52-53.

1113 See similarly Garr, Dialect Geography, 216.

1114 Virtually stated by Garr, Dialect Geography, 229.

1115 I very much like the statement of Kaufman, "Classification", 43: "If a new language appears in Gilead in the 8th century or so, looks somewhat like Aramaic to its North, Ammonite to Moabite to the South, and Hebrew to its West (that is to say: it looks exactly like any rational person would expect it to look like) ... why not simply say it is Gileadite and be done with it?" Regardless of this comment, however, in the long run Kaufman may have gotten a better identification with Aramaic than with Canaanite. Greenfield, "Philological Observations", 118, recently employed the term "Gileadite" too, though earlier he used the term "Ammonite" (see Greenfield, "Review of ATDA", 251). See also, Naveh, "Review of ATDA", 136. There must have been much shared by Gileadite and Ammonite, though our sparse records prevent us from producing a clear picture of all the connections. For one isogloss, however, see G.A. Rendsburg, "The Ammonite Phoneme [t]", BASOR 269 (1988): 73-79; and G.A. Rendsburg, "More on Hebrew Biblote", JJS 33 (1988): 255-58.

1116 See Rendsburg, Psalms, 8, 108.

1117 The evidence presented in this article also will serve to counter the proposal of J. Hueneberg, "Remarks on the Classification of the Northwest Semitic Languages", in BTDRAR, 282-93, that the Deir ‘Alla dialect "need not be classified as a form or sub-branch of either Aramaic or Canaanite, but rather as a representative, thus far unique, of another independent branch of the larger Northwest Semitic family" (p. 293). (See similarly Davies, "Response", 144, n. 3). This is an ingenious solution to the problem, but I am unwilling to postulate a third branch of 1st Millennium B.C.E. Northwest Semitic (alongside Canaanite and Aramaic) on the basis of several dozen fragmented lines of one inscription. Furthermore, as I have indicated, with very few exceptions, there is nothing in the text that does not point to Canaanite.

Moreover, I do not follow Hueneberg’s reasoning. His three markers of the Canaanite dialect group are "the change of *qattila and *huqaita to *qattila and *huqlita, the change of *anakwa to *anakwi and the concomitant change of the first person singular suffix *-a to *-t, and the generalization of the suffix *-mī for the first person plural" (p. 286); he then goes on to state: "When we turn to examine the dialect of the plaster inscription found at Deir ‘Allā we find no evidence for any of the features I have just cited as characteristic of Proto-Canaanite" (pp. 286-87). There is also no evidence to the contrary. Hueneberg’s first item would not be differentiated in the Deir ‘Alla orthography; his second point is most since the 1scg independent pronoun and 1scg perfect verbs are lacking in the inscription; and his third point is also moot because 1clp perfect verbs likewise are wanting.

It is also worth noting that my approach is the inverse of that of S.A. Kaufman, "The Aramaic Texts from Deir ‘Alla", BASOR 239 (1980): 73 (see also Kaufman, "Classification"). Kaufman considers the Deir ‘Alla dialect to be peripheral Aramaic, with the following clarification: "And, surrounded on three sides by Canaanite speakers, it is hardly surprising that this dialect lies on the Canaanite side of many isoglosses". I prefer to classify the dialect as Canaanite, with its closest cousin being IH, and to
consider the links between IH and the Deir 'Alla, on the one hand, and Aramaic, on the other, as due to the dialect continuum now well established for this period (see most importantly Gurr, Dialect Geography).