On the Writing ביתדוד
in the Aramaic Inscription from Tel Dan

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IN their edition of the large fragment of the Aramaic stele from Tel Dan, Biran and Naveh noted that word dividers, in the form of dots, are used in the inscription (p. 87).[1] There is one place, however, where the word divider is not used, namely in the expression ביתדוד 'house of David' in line 9.[2] How does one explain this exception? The answer is clear: the scribe viewed ביתדוד as one entity not requiring a word divider. It is not just a case of the words standing as a construct phrase, for other construct phrases contain the word divider between the two elements, e.g. מלך.ישראל 'king of Israel' in line 8.[3] Rather, it is important to note that בית־X constructions are more characteristic of Aramaic usage than they are of other Semitic language usages. This holds true for both proper and common nouns. In keeping with this phenomenon, the scribe of the Dan text saw in the phrase ביתדוד a single entity not requiring a word divider.

We begin the discussion with the more relevant material, that of proper names. Examples of בית־X, where X can stand either for a royal name or for a simple place name, but in most cases refers in some way to an independent political entity, are forthcoming from a variety of sources (see the brief comment of Biran and Naveh on p. 93): the Aramaic inscriptions themselves, biblical references to Aramean matters and cuneiform sources.

Examples from Aramaic texts are the following: Tell Fekheriye בת הדד (l. 17); Sfire בית אל (KAI 222:A:34), בית צלל (KAI 222:B:3, 223:B:10) and בית גש (KAI 222:B:11, 223:B:10); and Ashur ostracon בית אוכן (KAI 233:4, 5, 9, 13, 15), בית עדן (KAI 233:14,

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1 A. Biran and J. Naveh: An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan, *IEJ* 43 (1993), pp. 81–98. Parenthetical page references within the body of the present paper refer to the article by Biran and Naveh.

2 Biran and Naveh did not note this exception in their article (one would have expected a statement to this effect on p. 93), although they clearly are aware of it (oral communication).

3 Line 3 of the second fragment contains the string מלכי, which Naveh proposes to restore as מלכישראל, i.e. without word divider (information courtesy of J.C. Greenfield). While this is quite plausible, obviously one should be careful about restorations. Accordingly, I proceed in the present article on the basis of what is known with certainty.

15) and בית דבלא (*KAI* 233:21).[4] No other corpus of ancient Northwest Semitic texts has such a concentration of X-בית examples.[5]

It is interesting to note that in the Bible the two instances of X-בית referring to kingdoms are Aramean entities: בית עדן (Amos 1:5) and בית רחוב (Judg. 18:28, 2 Sam. 10:6).[6] One should also note אבל בית מעכה (2 Sam. 20:14–15, 1 Kings 15:20, 2 Kings 15:29), which from the contexts is an Israelite site, but which must have belonged at one time to the Aramean entity called simply מעכה in 2 Sam. 10:6. Similarly, when Amos reproaches Israel's neighbours, it is not coincidental that only in his words to Damascus does he elect to use the X-בית formula, in the aforementioned בית עדן (Amos 1:5) and in the expression בית חזאל (Amos 1:4).[7] Obviously, the Bible uses the X-בית formula in contexts related solely to Israel and Judah, without any connection to Aramean matters, including the expression בית דוד 'house of David'. Nevertheless, from the above survey it is clear that the Bible reflects Aramean terminology in references to Aram.

Also noteworthy are the unique formulae בית אפרים 'house of Ephraim' in Judg. 10:9 and בית יששכר 'house of Issachar' in 1 Kings 15:27, instead of the expected 'tribe

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4 I have written all these examples as if they were two words, although in reality some of these are written as one word due to the lack of word dividers. The Tell Fekheriye text uses word dividers (in the form of a modern colon, consisting of two dots) and marks בת:הדד as two separate words. The Sfire texts use neither dots nor spaces to separate words, so nothing can be stated about these X-בית examples. The Ashur ostracon, however, does use spaces between words, so it is of interest to note that in three cases, twice with ביתאוכן and once with ביתדבלא, the scribe created single words for these entities. On the other hand, these examples occur in lines 13, 15 and 21, a fact that is important because towards the end of the Ashur ostracon it appears that the scribe utilized the word dividers less consistently. Moreover, in general, ostraca and other minor texts do not follow scribal conventions consistently. In any case, each inscription must be treated individually, so these data are not necessarily relevant for the Dan inscription. What remains true, regardless of the use of word dividers with X-בית formulae in other texts, is that the scribe of the Dan inscription understood ביתדוד as a single entity.

5 I exclude from consideration בת.במת (line 27), בת.דבלתן (line 30) and בת.בעלמען (line 30) in the Mesha stele. These refer to local cities within the Moabite realm. See also n. 6.

6 I exclude from the discussion the numerous Israelite cities of this construction, of which there are many examples, of course: בית שמש, בית אל, בית לחם, etc. In most of these cases the X element is a divine name, and these toponyms derive from the local cult centred at these sites. Is this also the explanation for the Moabite place names referred to in n. 5? It certainly would explain בת.בעלמען.

7 This usage in Amos is part of a larger phenomenon which I call 'addressee-switching', that is, the employment of words and forms characteristic of the foreign people being addressed in the prophetic oracle. See G.A. Rendsburg: The Strata of Biblical Hebrew, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17 (1991), pp. 81–99; *idem*, *Kabbîr* in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992), pp. 649–651. See also S.M. Paul: *Amos*, Minneapolis, 1991, p. 52, where another example of this device in Amos' words to Damascus is pointed out (see also pp. 52–53, n. 94, for general discussion).

of Ephraim/Issachar' or simply 'Ephraim/Issachar'.[8] These usages are the products of scribal schools with close ties to Aramaic practice. The sections of the Books of Judges and Kings which relate the history of northern Israel (in the former cases that of the local heroes or judges, in the latter case that of the northern kingdom) are replete with Israelian Hebrew usages.[9] Many of these features have parallels in Aramaic usage, either through natural linguistic development or because northern Israel looked to Aram as a cultural centre.

Another body of material which sheds light on the Aramaic nature of the בית-X is the corpus of cuneiform sources. In Assyrian and Babylonian records Aramean states are repeatedly referred to as *Bit-X*.[10] Examples are *Bit-Adini* (see בית עדן above), *Bit-Amukkani* (see בית אוכן above), *Bit-Bahyani, Bit-Dakkuri, Bit-Garbaia, Bit-Halupe, Bit-Sa'alla, Bit-Sillani, Bit-Sin, Bit-Yahiri, Bit-Yakini* and *Bit-Zamani*,[11] again in a disproportionate manner compared to other ethnic or linguistic groups.[12] One might even venture that the Assyrian designation *Bit-Humri* 'house of Omri' for the kingdom of Israel reached Assyrian scribes through Aramean mediation.[13] It may also be suggested that the Assyrian manner of referring to Ammon as *Bit-Ammana* (nine of 12 references to Ammon in Assyrian texts are of this form), in contrast to the usual Hebrew, and presumably native Ammonite, form בני עמון, also

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8   The uniqueness of the latter usage was noted by J.A. Montgomery and H.S. Gehman: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (*International Critical Commentary*), Edinburgh, 1951, p. 281; and J. Gray: *I & II Kings*, London, 1970, p. 357, n.b. There are other places in the Bible where the phrase בית-X occurs (with X = the name of an Israelite tribe), but they are not used in this manner. For example, the expression בית יוסף 'house of Joseph' is used in Josh. 17:17, 2 Sam. 19:21, 1 Kings 11:28, etc., as a special designation because this 'house' is comprised of two tribes (see, especially, Josh. 17:17).

9   C.F. Burney: *The Book of Judges*, London, 1918, pp. 171–176; *idem, Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings*, Oxford, 1903, pp. 208–209; and M. Cogan and H. Tadmor: *II Kings* (*Anchor Bible*), Garden City, NY, 1988, p. 9. I am preparing a full-scale study of northern Hebrew in the sections of the Books of Kings devoted to the northern kingdom and the prophets Elijah and Elisha; in the meantime, see the index of biblical references in G.A. Rendsburg: *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, Atlanta, GA, 1990, pp. 128–129.

10   See, briefly, J.A. Brinkman: Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria (747–626 B.C.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., III/2 (1991), p. 9. I thank Hayim Tadmor for this reference, and the one in n. 12.

11   On the most important of these groups, see A. Malamat: The Aramaeans, in D.J. Wiseman (ed.): *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, Oxford, 1973, p. 138.

12   The other ethnic group known by *Bit-X* terms in Akkadian records is the Kassites. The reason is the same as the case of the Arameans: 'they retained their traditional clan and tribal structure, in contrast to the smaller family unit of the Babylonians', a largely urban people; see J.A. Brinkman: Babylonia *c*. 1000–748 B.C., *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., III/1 (1982), p. 289.

13   Thanks are due to Avraham Malamat and Hayim Tadmor for discussing this point with me. Both agree with the suggestion; both, in fact, believed it to be *communis opinio*. Nevertheless, we were unable to find even one statement to this effect in print.

reached Assyrian scribes through Aramean mediation.[14] Also of interest is the fact that in general *Bit-X* names become more and more popular in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times as designations for cities and regions, both foreign and domestic. A quick glance at a basic reference work, such as the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, reveals about 120 entries for *Bit-X* sites attested only in the later periods of Mesopotamian history.[15] In light of the increased Aramaicization of Mesopotamia during this period, this phenomenon may be explained as another feature of Aramaic influence.[16]

Beyond the world of proper names, it may be noted that common nouns of the בית-X type also are more characteristic of Aramaic than they are of other Semitic languages. This claim cannot be defended with statistical data, but it should be apparent to anyone with a broad-based familiarity with ancient Semitic languages. In addition, the influence of Aramaic on languages to its west and east is evident. Two recent studies by A. Hurvitz were devoted to בית-X formulae in Late Biblical Hebrew and in post-Biblical Hebrew, with numerous examples. His assumption, correct in my opinion, is that Aramaic influence is at work.[17] A quick survey of *bīt-X* terms conveniently listed in the two major dictionaries of Akkadian shows that their frequency increased greatly in the later stages of the language. The *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* lists 36 *bīt-X* terms, 25 of which are attested only from the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian period onward.[18] The *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* lists 39 *bīt-X* terms, 25 of which are attested only from the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian period onward (actually, a few of these terms are attested in Middle Assyrian or Middle Babylonian texts rarely, and their usage becomes frequent or common in texts of the later periods).[19] Again, as with the increased use of *Bit-X* proper names in later Mesopotamian sources, the introduction of many *bīt-X* common nouns in first-millennium Akkadian is the result of Aramaic influence. In sum, בית-X common nouns are typical of Aramaic, and during the years in which Aramaic began to exert its influence to the west and east, nouns of this type entered the lexica of Hebrew and Akkadian freely.

The totality of the evidence demonstrates that בית-X was a strong characteristic of Aramaic phraseology. This fact explains why an Aramean scribe would use the expression ביתדוד for Judah, writing it as one lexeme not requiring a word divider.

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14 S. Parpola: *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970, pp. 16, 76.

15 E. Ebeling and B. Meissner (eds.): *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 2, Berlin, 1938, pp. 33–54. See also Parpola (above, n. 14), pp. 75–92.

16 See, most recently, H. Tadmor: On the Use of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire: Three Observations on a Relief of Sargon II, *EI* 20 (1989), pp. 249–252 (Hebrew).

17 A. Hurvitz: בית-קברות and בית-עולם: Two Funerary Terms in Biblical Literature and their Linguistic Background, *MA'ARAV* 8 (1992), pp. 59–68; *idem*, בית-(ה)אוצר — The History of a Biblical Administrative-Economic Term, *EI* 24 (1993), pp. 78–82 (Hebrew).

18 *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 1, pp. 133–134, *s.v. bītu(m)*.

19 *CAD*, B II, pp. 273–274, *s.v. bīt*.