

## THE SECOND DANITE INSCRIPTION SOME REMARKS

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### 1. Introduction

Admirably quick Biran and Naveh have provided the scholarly world an adequate edition of the fragments B1 and B2 of an Iron Age inscription from Tel Dan.<sup>1</sup> In their view these two new fragments form a physical join with the earlier excavated fragment A. Based on this join they draw some extensive historical conclusions. The text would contain the names of the Israelite king [Jeho]ram and his Judaeon counterpart [Ahaz]jah. In the view of the editors the 'T'-character in the inscription should be interpreted as referring to the Damascene king Hazael, thus abandoning their earlier suggestion that Ben Hadad I could be identified as the author of the inscription.<sup>2</sup> According to the text reconstructed by Biran and Naveh, Hazael had killed the kings Jehoram and Ahazjah. This, however, is contrary to the tradition attested at 2 Kings 9:16-19 where Jehu is seen as the one who executed the end of the house of Omri proclaimed by Elijah (1 Kings 19:17) and Elisha (2 Kings 9:6-10). Biran and Naveh suggest that—on the level of historical reconstruction—Hazael would have used Jehu as an agent.<sup>3</sup> In case their interpretation is correct, unexpected light would fall on a hitherto relatively dark period in the history of Israel.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this contribution to the Tel Dan discussion is twofold. First, it will be shown that the arguments for joining the fragment A + B1 + B2 to one text are not convincing in view of the paleographic and epigraphic data. Second, the fragments B1 + B2, then labelled Dan 2, are treated as an inscription on its own, its translation with philological commentary is given. After doing that the extensive historical claims of Biran and Naveh will be reevaluated.

### 2. Criticism of the Interpretation

Cryer<sup>5</sup> and Thompson<sup>6</sup> have offered critical remarks relating to the interpretation of Biran and Naveh. This criticism is related to the archaeological context of the inscription, to paleography and to the question of filling the gaps between the fragments. I will summarize the argument and add one element of criticism to theirs.

1 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:1-18.

2 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1993:94-96.

3 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:18.

4 See e.g. AHLSTRÖM 1993:595-601.

5 CRYER, 1995:224-227.

6 THOMPSON, 1995:239.

## 2.1. Archaeological Context

The three fragments (A, B1 and B2) are excavated at various spots on the site, which do not seem to be related stratigraphically. The fragment A still has a somewhat unclear find-spot. It could either have been part of a wall<sup>1</sup> or of the pavement of a piazza.<sup>2</sup> Fragment B1 was found about 13 meter northeast of fragment A in a layer that contained the remainders of a devastation, most probably caused by the military expedition of Tiglath-Pileser III in 733/32 BCE.<sup>3</sup> Fragment B2 was excavated some 8 meters north of fragment B1. It seems to have been reused as part of the pavement of a square not far away from a wall.<sup>4</sup> Since the stratigraphic relations between the various constructions found at Tel Dan—walls, gate, pavement, destruction-layer—are not yet clear, it is impossible to date the fragments from their archaeological contexts and in relation to each other. The variety of finding spots do not provoke at forehand the hypothesis that the three fragments have been part of the same inscription.<sup>5</sup> Biran and Naveh, however, suggest that the three fragments belonged to a stone that was smitten in pieces after the Israelite reconquest of Dan and that the fragments were reused each in a different way.<sup>6</sup> The distance between the pieces seems to be rather large for such a surmise. Their hypothesis could be made more plausible by paleographic and epigraphic arguments.

## 2.2. The Script of the Fragments

The script of the three fragments is to be characterized as representative for the local variant of an Aramaic type of script which was slightly influenced by Phoenician scripts, which is known from documents dated in the ninth and the eighth centuries BCE.<sup>7</sup> At first sight, the script in the three fragments seems to be the same: there are several resemblances between them. It is a pity that Biran and Naveh did not give a paleographic analysis of all the characters in the inscription. Cryer has made a few important remarks on this point.<sup>8</sup> He has observed various small differences between the scripts in the fragments. The most clear difference is observable with regard to the *wāw*. In Dan A several *wāw*'s occur which can be compared with an open figure 4 having almost right angles. In B1 and B2 *wāw*'s are attested whose left flanks are clearly leaning to the left outside. Some *wāw*'s in A have their left flank even bowing to the inside. Comparable differences are observable for the *dālet*, the *het*, the *kāp*, the *lāmed*, the *'ayin* and the *rēš*. These differences make it very improbable that the three fragments were part of one inscription. They might have been written by the same person, though on different occasions.

1 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1993:85.

2 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1993:98. In BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995: 2, they suggest that the stone with the inscription was found 'in a wall built on the flagstone pavement of the square'.

3 See BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:1-2; on the military expeditions of Tiglath-Pileser III see now LAMPRICHS, 1995:121-126.

4 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:5.

5 See also THOMPSON 1995:237.

6 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:8-9.

7 CRYER, 1994:6-9.

8 CRYER, 1995:224-227.

### 2.3. Proposed Additions

On the basis of the assumption that the three fragments have been part of the same inscription, Biran and Naveh have filled in gaps between the fragments as becomes clear from the following rendition of their proposal:

- |     |                        |                            |                         |                   |   |        |   |
|-----|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---|--------|---|
| 1.  | [                      | ]                          | mr.                     | [                 | ] | .]wzr[ | ] |
| 2.  | [                      | ]                          | 'by.ysq[.               | 'lwnh.bh]tlhmk.b' | [ | ]      | ] |
| 3.  | wy\$kb.                | 'by.yhk.                   | 'l[.'bhw]h.wy'l.mkly[s' | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 4.  | r'l.qdm.b'rq.          | 'by[.w]yhmlk.hdd[.]'       | [ty                     | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 5.  | 'nh.wyhk.hdd.qdmy[.w]  | 'pq.mn.sb'                 | [t.                     | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 6.  | y.mkly.w'qtl.ml[km.sb] | 'n.'sry.'                  | [lpy.r                  | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 7.  | kb.w'lpy.pr\$.[qtl.    | 'yt.yhw]rm.br.[            | 'h'b.                   | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 8.  | mk.y\$sr'l.wqtl[t.     | 'yt.'h\$z]yhw.br[.yhwrm.ml | ]                       | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 9.  | k.bytdwd.w'sm.[        | 'yt.qryt.hm.hrbt.w'hpk.'   | ]                       | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 10. | yt.'rq.hm.l[y\$mn      | ]                          | ]                       | ]                 | ] | ]      | ] |
| 11. | 'hrn.wlh[              |                            |                         |                   |   | wyh'.m | ] |
| 12. | lk.'lys[r'l            |                            |                         |                   |   | w'sm   | ] |
| 13. | m\$sr.'l[              |                            |                         |                   |   | ]      | ] |

The additions form an essential part of their interpretation. Biran and Naveh are aware of the fact that such additions are of a hypothetical character.<sup>1</sup> Looked away from the question whether these additions provoke an understandable and meaningful text, it should be considered if there is an epigraphic possibility for them. Here I have my doubts. Thompson has calculated that on the basis of the join proposed by Biran and Naveh there is not enough space between the fragments for the proposed characters.<sup>2</sup> In line 2 there is space between the fragments for 5.2 characters. The proposal for reconstruction requires space for 6.9 signs: six letters and two word-dividers.<sup>3</sup> In line 6 the space between the fragments gives room for about 3.5 characters. The proposal requires space for 4.45 characters. In line 8 there is room for 5.5 characters while the proposal fills in this space with 7.9 characters. Thompson's calculations have made the reconstruction as such very improbable.

<sup>1</sup> BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:11.

<sup>2</sup> THOMPSON, 1995:239.

<sup>3</sup> THOMPSON 1995:239, requires space for 7.0 signs. This is, however, not a fair calculation since he himself states that a word-divider takes about 35 to 55 % of the space of a letter.

## 2.4. Average Interval between the Lines

To these arguments of Cryer and Thompson I would like to add the following observation. The size of the characters does not differ very much between the fragments. There is, however, a difference in the width of the interval between the lines. This is observable from the beautiful picture which Biran and Naveh have given as Fig. 9 in their edition of the fragments B1 and B2.<sup>1</sup> When the line along the average lower side of the signs in fragment A—the right part in Fig. 9—is extended to the left, where the fragments B1+B2 are placed, two observations could be made. First, the average lower side in B1 and 2 is always lower than in A, which means that the lines do not fit properly. Second, this difference is gradually decreasing when one goes from the top of the inscription to the bottom. This feature can easily be explained by a calculation of the average interval between the lines. On the picture in Fig. 9 the average interval in fragment A is 0.82 cm. In B1+2 the average is 0.77 cm. This implies that the average in A is 6.7% wider than in B1+2. In my view this can only be explained by assuming that the fragment B1 and B2 have been part of an inscription different from Dan A.

## 2.5. Conclusion: Two Inscriptions

These observations do not plead for the join proposed by Biran and Naveh. Since the difference between B1 and B2 are rather small these two fragments can be considered as the remnant of the second Danite inscription. Therefore, I take over the suggestion by Cryer and Thompson to relabel the fragments into: Dan 1 (= fragment A) and Dan 2 (= B1 + B2).<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Dan 2: Text, Notes and Translation

I will now concentrate on Dan 2. From the pictures in the edition of Biran and Naveh the following text can be read:

1' [	]	wg <sup>z</sup> r[	]
2' [	]	t  <sup>h</sup> m <sup>h</sup> .b'	]
3' [	]	h.wy' l.m <sup>l</sup> ky	]
4' [	]	hmlk.hdd[ ]	]
5' [	]	]'pq.mn.s <sup>b</sup> '	]
6' [	]	]'n.'sry.'	]
7' [	]	]rm.br.[	]
8' [	]	]yhw.br[	]

1 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:10; fig. 9.

2 CRYER 1995:223-235; THOMPSON, 1995:236-240.

Before I will present a translation the inscription will be discussed philologically. Of great interest is the question in which language the text is written. The 'House-of-David' -inscription (Dan 1) seems to have been written in a local dialect in which Aramaic elements predominate. Its language, however, cannot be characterized as Aramaic since various Canaanisms are present.<sup>1</sup> Therefore an analogy can be drawn with the linguistic situation of the plaster inscription from Tel Deir 'Allā where a mixed dialect is attested.<sup>2</sup> A comparable situation also seems to be present in Dan 2: some elements are Canaanite in character, others refer to an Aramaic background.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes it is impossible to decide which background is at stake, as will become clear from the following discussion.

1' *gʒr*. Biran and Naveh refer to a verb *gʒr*, 'to cut', which is attested in Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> The verb occurs in the vassal-treaties between Barga'yah of KTK and Matiel of Arpad.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, the editors suggest an Aramaic isogloss. In Hebrew, however, a comparable verb *gʒr*, 'to cut', is attested.<sup>6</sup>

2' *lḥmh.b'* [...]. The verb *lḥm* tD construed with the preposition *b* should be translated as 'to battle against'. This becomes even more clear from the attestation of *lḥm* Dt in Moabite as listed by Biran and Naveh.<sup>7</sup> From Dan 2 it cannot be inferred against whom there has been a battle. Biran and Naveh give two suggestions for an addition to the text: *b'*[*bl*, 'in A[bel (Beth-Maächa)]' and *b'*[*pq*, 'in A[pheq].<sup>8</sup> Although these additions are not impossible as such, the proposals are not convincing. In the proposal the construction *lḥm* tD *b* is construed as having the meaning 'to battle at', instead of 'to battle against'. It is clear that the idiom is more Canaanite than Aramaic in character.

3' *wy'l*. Biran and Naveh interpret this form as an 'imperfect' of the verb '*ll*, 'to enter', in Qal or Pe'al, 3rd person singular.<sup>9</sup> The following *mlky*[... is extended by them in relation with the beginning of line 4 in Dan 1 to: *mlky*[*s*]*r'l*, 'the king of I[s]rael', who is construed as subject to the verb: 'the king of I[s]rael entered'. I do not share this interpretation. The extension presupposes that the three inscribed fragments have been part of the same inscription. In the cluster *mlky*[*s*]*r'l* a word-divider is absent between *mlk* and *y*[*s*]*r'l*. A preposition *b* or *l* indicating which area or town is entered is lacking too. Therefore, it is probably even better to construe *wy'l* as a form of the verb '*lh*'/ly, 'to rise', which is attested in Aramaic<sup>10</sup> as well as in various Canaanite languages.

*mlky* is construed as the identical word in Dan 1:6 as 'my King' and interpreted as an

1 See e.g. LIPINSKI, 1994:83-101; BECKING, 1995:113-115; MURAOKA, 1995:19-21.

2 See e.g. HACKETT, 1984:109-124; MCCARTER, 1991:87-99; DIJKSTRA, 1991:263-272.

3 See also CRYER, 1995:227-231.

4 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:13.

5 KAI 222 A:7 en 39-40; see on these inscriptions: LEMAIRE & DURAND, 1984; ZADOK, 1984.

6 E.g. at 1 Kings 3:25.26; 2 Kings 12:13; Psalm 136:13; Job 22:28; Isa. 9:19; Hab. 3:17.

7 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:13; KAI 181:11.15.19.32.

8 BIRAN & NAVEH 1995:13-14.

9 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:14.

10 KAI 222 B:35.

epithet for Hadad.<sup>1</sup>

- 4' *hmlk*. Biran and Naveh wants to read *yhmlk*, 'he made [me] king'.<sup>2</sup> They apparently construe the form as an Aramaic Haph. 'imperfect' 3.m.s. *hdd* is interpreted by them as referring to the deity Hadad. He is seen as the subject of the clause: 'and Hadad made me king'. This clause then functions as a legitimization-formula for a king who did not receive the throne by heritage. In the Old Testament, the Hiph. of the verb *mlk* is attested more than once with an identical meaning.<sup>3</sup> This observation is used as evidence by Biran and Naveh as an argument for their supposition that Hazael, king of Damascus, should be seen as the 'I'-figure of the inscription. For Hazael was the 'son of a nobody', according to an inscription of Shalmaneser III.<sup>4</sup>

Cryer has observed that on the picture of fragment B1 no traces of a sign for the *yod* are visible. Therefore, he reads *hmlk.hdd* interpreting *hmlk* as a determined noun and seeing in Hadad an earthly king: 'king Hadad'.<sup>5</sup> In Cryer's view, *hmlk* should be construed as a Canaanite or Hebrew form in view of the article. This interpretation is not strictly necessary. *hmlk* can also be construed as a Hiph. 'perfect' 3.m.s. of the verb *mlk*: 'he made king'. For syntactical reasons it is plausible to suggest that the subject of this clause preceded the verb and that *hdd* is the object: 'X made Hadad king'.

- 5' '*pq*. Biran and Naveh construe this word as a verb-form: a Pe'al 'imperfect' 1.c.s. of the Aramaic verb *npq*: 'I departed'.<sup>6</sup> Although this interpretation makes sense, another reading should be considered too. In my view '*pq* refers to a city Apheq. In the Old Testament four different Apheq's are mentioned. Apheq<sup>7</sup> in the Sharon does not seem to be meant in Dan 2:5', since it is too far away from Dan. The other three localities could be meant. 1) A city Apheq in the territory of the tribe of Asher.<sup>8</sup> 2) A city Apheq near the Canaanite-Amorite border.<sup>9</sup> 3) A locality Apheq in the Golan is associated with the Aramaeans.<sup>10</sup>

*šb* 'most probably is the beginning of the Hebrew word for 'seven' or 'seventy'.

- 6' It is not easy to extend ...] 'n. The proposal of Biran and Naveh to read [*šb*] 'n, '[seven]-ty',<sup>11</sup> offers a possibility but remains a hypothesis.

'*sry*. The interpretation by Biran and Naveh of this word is very specific. They reconstruct the immediate context as follows: *w'qtl.ml[km.šb]'n.'sry.* '[*lpy.r*]kb, 'I slew [seve]nty kin[gs], who harnessed thou[sands of cha]riots'. The main significance of the verb '*sr*' in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic is 'to bind; to set captive'. In special constructions the verb can denote the 'preparing of a carriage that is pulled by an animal' as in

1 Compare BECKING, 1995:122. On Hadad see now GREENFIELD, 1995.

2 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:15.

3 E.g. at 1 Kings 12:1.20 and 2 Kings 17:21.

4 KAH 30:26-27; see on this text: PITARD, 1987:132-138.

5 CRYER, 1995:232-233.

6 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:15.

7 Probably Tell Rās el-'En; Josh. 12:8; 1 Sam. 4:1; 29:1.

8 Tell el-Kerdāne; Josh. 19:30; Judg. 1:31.

9 Probably Khirbet Afqā; North of Beirout; Josh. 13:4.

10 May be nowadays Fīq; East of the See of Galilee; 1 Kings 20:26.30; 2 Kings 13:17.

11 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:16.

Gen. 46:28; Exod. 14:6; 1 Kings 18:44. In the second Danite inscription the context, however, is not that specific.

7' [...]rm.br[...] The word *br* can be taken as the Aramaic word for 'son'. The inscription then would refer to '...]ram, the son of [X'. In view of the supposed connection with Dan 1, Biran and Naveh think that an Israelite king is referred to here. On the basis of that supposition Jehoram is the only candidate from the period under consideration.<sup>1</sup> This identification, however, rests on the surmise that the three inscribed fragments were part of one inscription. When interpreting Dan 2 as an inscription on its own there are many more candidates to be identified with [...]rm. To mention a few: both 'byrm and 'hrm were common Phoenician names in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. An Aramaic candidate would be Adonleram, a servant of the king mentioned in an Aramaic inscription from the ninth-eighth century BCE from Hamath.<sup>2</sup>

*br* most probably means 'son', although other interpretation cannot be excluded. Cryer has pointed at the Canaanite noun *bor*, 'cistern', and the Aramaic *bîr*, 'fortress'.<sup>3</sup>

8' ]yhw is construed by Biran and Naveh as the theophoric ending of the name of an Israelite or Judaeen king. In their view Ahazjah is the most probable candidate.<sup>4</sup> This extension too is based on the supposition that the three inscribed fragments have been part of one inscription. As an argument to their view that Ahazjah is meant here, they refer to their reading of the following words as [ml]k.bytdwd, '[k]ing of the House of David'.<sup>5</sup>

In my view a Judaeen person might be meant but his identity cannot be established. Although there is morphologically the possibility to interpret *-yhw* as a suffix 3.m.s.—as in *q̄t̄altîhû / q̄ltîyh*, 'you have killed him'—the interpretation as a theophoric element is more probable. In Iron Age epigraphic material various Hebrew personal names have been found with *-yhw* as theophoric element. In view of the geographic spread, it is a remarkable observation that names from Judah predominantly have *-yhw* as theophoric element, while names from the Northern Kingdom generally have *-yw* as ending.<sup>6</sup>

Cryer has pointed at the possibility that non-Israelites could bear a name containing *yhw* as theophoric element.<sup>7</sup> He has three arguments for this position. The first contains an argument that stands contrary to the historic method propagated by him. He interprets traditions known from the Old Testament as primary sources for religio-historical information, since he claims that features from stories on Lot, Ishmael and Ruth should be seen as historical evidence for the reverence of YHWH in Transjordan. His second argument is more convincing. In the Moabite Mesha-inscription a passage occurs in which the Moabite king considers it to be important to mention that objects for the cult of YHWH

1 BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:9.16.

2 KAI 203.

3 CRYER, 1995:234 n. 39.

4 Biran & Naveh, 1995 :9. 16-17.

5 Dan 1+2//A+B1+B2:7-8; BIRAN & NAVEH, 1995:13. Note that they do not pay attention to the scholarly discussion on the interpretation of *bytdwd*.

6 See WEIPPERT, 1980:247; NORIN, 1986:21-45.

7 CRYER, 1995:234 n. 40.

were brought to the temple of Chemosh.<sup>1</sup> Cryer interprets this passage as an indication that in Moab too there have been worshippers of YHWH. His third argument is open for debate. Here, an article of Dalley is referred to in which she would have proved that YHWH was worshipped in and around the Syrian Hamath in the eighth century BCE. In her view, this reverence should not be seen as the outcome of Israelite political domination. The worship has its roots in a not ethnically bound spread of Yahwism from the Sinai-peninsula to the North at the end of the second millennium BCE.<sup>2</sup> Her view is mainly based on the presence of two personal names in cuneiform inscriptions relating to the Hamath-area: 1) *Az-ri-a-ú* a ruler of an area in the vicinity of Hamath who is mentioned twice in inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III<sup>3</sup> and 2) *Ia-ú-bi-'i-di* the king of Hamath who was the leading force in the anti-Assyrian coalition of Western vassals and provinces against the new king Sargon II.<sup>4</sup> The mention of these names, however, is not convincing. *Az-ri-a-ú* can also be a Hittite name.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the name of the rebellious ruler of Hamath in 720 BCE, the following should be observed. Lipiński suggested that the name has been <sup>1</sup>DINGIR-*ia-ú-bi-'i-di* or is a contraction of the form <sup>1</sup>DINGIR-*bi-'i-di*. In his view the name is Aramaic in origin: *'ilu-jahū-bi-'idi*, 'God will be for me as a witness'.<sup>6</sup> This implies that it is not plausible that a personal name from the ancient Near East with *yhw* as theophoric element would refer to a person of non-Israelite or Judaeen lineage.

*br* can signify 'son', as in the preceding line. The absence of a word-divider could, however, indicate that *br* is only the beginning of a more complex word.

These considerations lead to the following, provisional translation:

1' [		] and he cut [	]
2' [		] to battle against [	]
3' [		] his ... My King rose [	]
4' [		] he made Hadad king[	]
5' [		] Apheq from seven[ty (?)	]
6' [		] ? ? prisoners of [	]
7' [		]ram, the son of [	]
8' [		]jahu, the son (?) of [	]

1 KAI 181:17-18.

2 DALLEY, 1990:21-32; see also the remarks by NIEHR, 1995:58.

3 TADMOR, 1994:Ann. 19\*:2 and 10 = Ann. 26:10.

4 For sources and historical background see BECKING, 1992:34-37; LAMPRICHS, 1995:130-133.

5 See VIEYRA, 1938/40:222-233.

6 LIPINSKI, 1971:371-373.



#### 4. Conclusion

The character of the language of Dan 2 is not easily established. As in Dan 1 a local mixed-dialect should be supposed.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to draw any historical conclusion on the basis of Dan 2. The data are too scarce. The suggestion that Dan A+B1+B2 would shed some light on the rebellion of Jehu is rather improbable. The view that Jehu has been an instrument in the politics of the Damascene ruler Hazael is an interesting suggestion. It would clarify the reference to Jehu in Hos. 1:4 where Jehu's *coup d'état* is negatively assessed.<sup>2</sup> The inscriptions from Tel Dan cannot be used in an argument on this view.

<sup>1</sup> See also CRYER, 1995:227-231.

<sup>2</sup> As has been suggested to me by C.H.J. DE GEUS, Groningen, in a private communication.

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