Wandering Arameans:
Arameans Outside Syria

Textual and Archaeological Perspectives

Edited by Angelika Berlejung,
Aren M. Maeir and Andreas Schüle

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Cover illustration: Bronze Horse Frontlet from the Heraion of Samos, Greece, with an inscription of Hazael, from the Samos Archaeological Museum. Photograph by Aren M. Maeir.

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Abbreviations

For abbreviations see: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (RGG), 4th edition;
Theological Realenzyklopädie (TRE), abbreviations, 2nd revised and enlarged edi-
tion, compiled by Siegfried M. Schwertner; Lexicon of Assyriology and Near Eastern
Archaeology (www.rla.badw.de).

Foreword

The present volume contains the updated versions of the papers presented at the workshop "Wandering Arameans: Arameans Inside and Outside of Syria", held at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Leipzig in October 2014. The intention of the workshop was to explore Aramean cultures and their impact on their neighbors, including linguistic influence. The idea was to address some of the primary desiderata in current research on the Arameans and so to build a basis for a project proposal submitted to the Minerva Foundation on this and related topics, to be implemented at the University of Leipzig and Bar-Ilan University. The workshop brought together scholars from these two institutions, as well as from the University of Würzburg. In addition to the papers presented at the workshop, we invited four additional contributions to broaden the scope of our endeavor (Greer, Sergi, Gzella, and Younger).

The volume is divided into two sections:

I.   Syria and Palestine
II.   Mesopotamia and Egypt

This division reflects the areas in which one sees the presence of Arameans or of their language, Aramaic, in the first millennium BCE.

One of the outcomes of this workshop was that the "Aramean question" is a broad and complex field that touches on many issues (e.g., the presence of ethnical markers, the category of ethnicity in general, history, settlement patterns, archaeology, epigraphy, religion, and sociology) that calls for interdisciplinary work at a highly specialized level. In this perspective, it became clear that future research has to start from the following assumption: Arameans (including the Aramaic languages) in Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Egypt cannot be treated as a single entity but have to be carefully distinguished. The contributions of this volume show that identifying "Arameans" and defining pertinent identity markers are difficult tasks. The interactions between the Arameans, including the Aramaic languages, and their neighbors were complex and depended on the specific cultural and historical circumstances.

As a result of the 2014 workshop we decided to limit further research to the interaction between the Aramean states in Syria and the states in Palestine from the end of the 2nd to the late 1st millennium BCE. Correspondingly, we put the focus of the projected Minerva Center on the following preliminary working question: can the rise, flourishing, and decline of Aram and Israel, as independent political entities, be attributed to their autonomous decision making or to their interdependency – or to a combination of both factors? Thus, the articles of the first part of this volume became the foundation for our current research, which will be continued within the framework

of the *Minerva Center for the Relations between Israel and Aram in Biblical Times* (RIAB; aramisrael.org).

We are grateful to the authors of the papers in this volume for their contributions from their particular fields of expertise and their inspiring comments and discussions during the workshop. In addition, we want to thank Prof. Michael P. Streck as the editor-in-chief of the "Leipziger Altorientalistische Studien" for accepting our volume into this series. We want to thank Felix Hagemeyer and Philipp Roßteuscher for collecting and editing the essays. We are particularly grateful to Vivian-Sarah Klee, who took on the laborious task of putting the pieces together and of creating the indices. We wish to express our thanks to all our helping hands. Last but not least, our thanks go to the Minerva Foundation and the *Minerva Center for the Relations between Israel and Aram in Biblical Times* that supported the publication process financially.

Leipzig/Ramat-Gan, September 2016

Angelika Berlejung   Aren M. Maeir   Andreas Schüle

I. Syria and Palestine

The Cult at Tel Dan: Aramean or Israelite?[1]

Jonathan S. Greer – Grand Rapids, USA

Determining ethnicity from the archaeological record remains a difficult endeavor. While faunal and botanical analyses have expanded the discussion beyond a simplistic "pots equal peoples" paradigm, some question the very category of "ethnicity" in its narrowly conceived modern definition and have abandoned prioritizing this pursuit in research designs. For better or worse, within Levantine – or so-called "biblical" – archaeology, associating people groups with artifacts and ecofacts remains a pursuit relevant to many of the larger questions within the subfield.[2] Most researchers, however, acknowledge the limitations of what can and what cannot be said from archaeological remains and have at the same time adopted a nuanced view of "ethnicity" that recognizes the more fluid boundaries of ancient conceptions of identity that stand outside of modern categories bound by biological and genetic understanding.[3] Often at the core of this ancient conception of ethnicity – or more broadly, identity – lies religious allegiance to one deity or another and an accompanying cult or ritual duties maintained in service to that deity or deities. Religion was for many ancient peoples the defining characteristic of who was "in" and who was "out" and remains the ultimate criterion in establishing "the other" for many groups even today.[4]

Within this broader context, this essay aims to address the question of the ethnic association of the Iron Age IIB cult at Tel Dan in northern Israel. Such a pursuit, however, is clouded by the fact that our present understanding of Tel Dan is one that recognizes the multiethnic makeup of the site during this time. Due to the site's location at the important Dan spring, one of the headwaters of the Jordan, and at the crossroads of ancient routes determined by natural features of the land – the southwest-northeast route connecting the Jezreel Valley and Damascus and the north-south route running along the Beqaʿ Valley between Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountain range to the Galilee – the site has a long history of ethnic diversity clear

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1 I am grateful for the generous access David Ilan has granted to Tel Dan material discussed in Greer (2013), from which this essay draws, and to Yifat Thareani who kindly shared a draft of her forthcoming paper on the question of Arameans at Tel Dan (Thareani 2016). I also thank the editors for the invitation to contribute to this volume even though I was not part of the conference.

2 Cf., e.g., London 1989; Bunimovitz 1990; Dever 1993; Redmount 1995; Finkelstein1997; Edelman 2002; Bunimovitz/Faust 2003; Bloch-Smith 2003; Killebrew 2005; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008; Faust 2010; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011; Maeir/Hitchcock/Horwitz 2013.

3 See, in addition to those above, discussions in Barth 1969; Kamp/Yoffee 1980; Jones 1997; Sparks 1998; Brett 2002; Insoll 2007; Miller 2008; McInerney 2014.

4 Of course, the issues at play and the interrelationships among religion, ethnicity, and politics are much more complex; see, e.g., recent essays in Ruane/Todd 2011.

already in the Iron I based on evidence of Egyptian, Canaanite/Aramean, and Sea Peoples cultures (Ilan 1999; f.c.). In the Iron IIB, there is material evidence of Aramean and Israelite (and other) inhabitants (Thareani 2016), and this reality may be reflected in the Hebrew Bible in texts that speak of the changing dominance of the site by Israel (1 Kgs 12:29–32), Aram (see 1 Kgs 15:20), and, then, presumably by Israel again (cf. 2 Kgs 10:32–33; 14:25–27).[5] Indeed, across the region Aramean influence, especially in the wake of Hazael of Damascus' campaigns, is manifest.[6] For the inhabitants of Tel Dan, however, one must also consider that life very well may have continued on in similar ways regardless of which political power claimed control of the site.

In light of these realities, the scope of this essay is limited to the question of the religious orientation of the main shrine at the site, the temple complex in Area T, with recognition that other cultic activities may have persisted in other areas of the site, both in excavated and unexcavated areas, and that practice might have changed within the precinct at various periods.[7] Here, I will argue, first, that the temple structures and associated practices are archaeologically congruent with what we know about Israelite practice especially in Strata III and II (9th–8th c. BCE) and, second, that when biblical materials are critically and responsibly incorporated, we may confidently identify the cult as Yahwistic.[8]

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5   2 Kgs 10:32–33 mentions the military successes of Hazael and his annexation of the Transjordan notably saying nothing of the Upper Galilee. Still, while Jehu apparently reigned in Israel, he may very well have served as a vassal of Hazael, perhaps some indication of which may be drawn from the competing claims of the Tel Dan Stela, in which it is (apparently) Hazael who kills Jehoram and Ahaziah, and the biblical tradition, in which the assassinations are credited to Jehu (2 Kgs 9:14–18; Jehoram, in fact, was first mortally wounded by Hazael even in this tradition) – was there collusion between them, so much so that the overlord might take credit for the vassal's deeds (Schniedewind 1996; cf. Halpern 2001, 113 n. 12; see also Halpern 2010 for the larger context)? 2 Kgs 14:25–27 narrates Jeroboam II's extension of the boundaries beyond Dan, i.e., the reclamation of Damascus and Hamat, perhaps implying that territory behind those lines, such as Dan, was held up to and through that point; such may find further support in the introduction of the Mesha Stela that mentions lands previously dominated by the Omrides (see further Greer 2013, 119–120). C.f. historical outlines in Pitard 1987, 99–160 and Lipiński 2000, 347–407.

6   In addition to the Dan Stela (Schniedewind 1996; Athas 2003; Hagelia 2009), note also excavations at Aramean Geshur (Arav 2004; 2013) and the moat at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Maeir 2004; 2009; Maeir/Gur-Arie 2011). On the problem of assessing a distinctive "Aramean" material culture and the importance of regional approaches, see Thareani 2016; cf. Akkermans/Schwartz 2004, 367–368 in regard to the bias toward elite material culture and Bonatz 2014, 205–206 on the eclectic nature of Aramean art in general (so, too, Novák 2014, 271 on architecture). On the political instability of the region in general at this time, see Berlejung 2014, 351–353; and with reference to Dan, Berlejung 2009, 21 (following Arie 2008), but see below.

7   While it is only possible to speculate regarding the unexcavated areas, other Iron Age II cultic installations that have been excavated may include a collection of *massebot* in the gate complex as well as an altar in the courtyard outside the gate (see Biran 1994a, 241–245). The exact nature and precise dating of these installations remain in question.

8   Preliminary comments on this specific question may be found in Greer 2013, 119–120; see also Greer 2014.

The Area T Temple

The late Avraham Biran and his team uncovered a large platform on the northwestern edge of the site of Tel Dan (Tell el-Qadi) in northern Israel in 1968 and quickly determined that it was a religious installation of some kind (Biran 1994a, 159–165). As excavations continued over the next two and a half decades, this identification seemed to be confirmed by the discovery of artifacts typically identified with cultic activity. Such included small altars, both flat-topped and four-horned, seven-spouted oil lamps, figurines, perforated "incense" cups, and "cult" stands. Architectural features complemented the identification with what were likely the remains of a massive 4.75 x 4.75 m four-horned altar base standing before a large raised platform that Biran first identified as an open-air *bamah* ("high place")[9] but which many now recognize as a temple foundation platform.[10]

Throughout the precinct, evidence for sacrificial feasting, a central activity of a thriving cult, abounds (Greer 2013). Thousands upon thousands of animal bones have been collected and food production installations including *tabun* (or, more technically, *tannur*; Shafer-Elliot 2013) type ovens (Greer 2013, 82) and an olive press (Stager/Wolff 1981; Borowski 1982) have also been discovered. Cooking pots and small bowls were also found in particularly high numbers, adding to the reconstruction of perpetual feasting throughout the precinct (Greer 2013, 72–76).

The cumulative force of the archaeological evidence strongly supports Biran's identification of the cultic nature of the area, in general, and later arguments for a temple complex, specifically. Arguments to the contrary (cf. Barkay 1992, 312; Sharon/Zarzecki-Peleg 2006, 153–55; Zwickel 2010, 416), though hypothetically possible, seem not to consider the whole of the picture (with Davis 2013, 28–30).

Archaeological Congruence with Israelite Religious Practice

As I have argued elsewhere (Greer 2012; 2013; 2014), a number of the archaeological features of the area go beyond a general similarity with Israelite religious practice as described in the Bible and suggest a closer correspondence that deserves attention. Some of the more significant congruencies include a seal bearing a Yahwistic name, architectural details of the altar construction, an "altar kit" found in the western chamber, and several of the non-random patterns identified among the animal bone remains.

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9 On the problematic use of the term *bamah* in this case, see Davis 2013, 21 n. 19; cf. Barrick 1980; 1996.

10 See, e.g., Mazar 1992, 184–185; Herzog 1997, 222; cf. Greer 2013 and Davis 2013, throughout; even Biran suggests this possibility by the mid-90s (cf. Biran 1975, 319 [illus.], 320–321 to Biran 1994a, 188).

The 'Immadiyaw Seal

In a chamber attached to the western casemate enclosure of the precinct, a seal impression was found bearing the name 'Immadiyaw, meaning "YHWH is with me" – one of two examples of this name found in the 8th c. Iron II Stratum II at the site (Biran 1994a, 15, 199–201; Brandl 2009). The name is explicitly Yahwistic, containing the theophoric element "Yah" (/yaw/), a shortened form of the divine name YHWH spelled in its typically northern form "-yw" (cf. Hacket 2002, 142). The sealing is the only epigraphic evidence from this time period found so far in the precinct, though onomastic evidence from the site as a whole is rather limited. The only other relevant extant impressions of personal names from Stratum II found elsewhere on the site, however, also bear Yahwistic theophoric elements, in the first case explicitly so: Zakairyaw, "YHWH remembers" (Biran 1994b, 15);[11] and in the second case, implied: Amoz [Amaziah?] (Biran 1994a, 255). While two examples of a Baal theophoric name, Baalpelet, have also been discovered, they postdate the mid-8th c. BCE destruction layer that seals Stratum II, the final stratum associated with Israelite occupation in Biran's scheme (Biran 1994a, 262–264),[12] and thus stand outside this discussion. While it may be a stretch to speculate about Immadiyaw's priestly role in the precinct (Biran 1994a, 201), such a name is certainly consistent with one ministering in a Yahwistic sanctuary.

The Altar

Three architectural features of the central altar mentioned above also exhibit characteristics congruent with Israelite worship as may be deduced from biblical texts and archaeological remains from other sites. The first is the large horn typical of Israelite altars, though not exclusively so (Gitin 2002). While found in secondary use in a later wall, it is most reasonable to suggest that it may be associated with the altar structure and, if so, when reconstructed with the existing base and calculations of the proportions of similar altars, the intact altar would have been the largest altar of this "Israelite" type ever discovered standing at 3 m high (Biran 1994a, 203).

Due to its height, the top of the altar would have been accessed by two intact staircases understood by the excavators to have been added in Stratum II (Biran 1994a,

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11 See, too, Brandl 2009 for an identical seal impression found at nearby Bethsaida (both apparently impressed on clay from Samaria), which may carry significance in reshaping our current understanding of Israelite administration of the region during this time. Biran's suggestion, posed as a question (Biran 1994b, 15), that the individual mentioned may be Jeroboam II's son Zechariah who ruled for six months (see 2 Kgs 15:8) is intriguing in light of Brandl's (2009) study, but by no means certain.

12 That is, two examples of the name if reconstructing the Area T example on the basis of the Area H example (cf. Fig. 218 in Biran 1994a, 264) – of course, other names are possible as well.

205). The orientations of these staircases – one facing the entrance and the other facing the right-hand side of the precinct (see Biran 1994a, 205, Fig. 163) – illustrate a second point of correspondence between the altar and Israelite religion as represented in the priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible in that the staircases may be lined up with the directions of movement outlined for priests in their altar service of the burnt offering: priests went up on the altar from the right side to arrange and burn the carcass after slaughtering the victim (Lev 1:5.11; 4:4; 15:24), then they would descended toward the entrance to deposit the ashes (Lev 1:16; 6:3);[13] a low temenos wall built in Stratum II reemphasizes this orientation with openings that correspond to the staircases (Biran 1994a, 205, Fig. 163). What is perhaps most striking about this congruence is that later biblical and extrabiblical descriptions of the main altar of the temple in Jerusalem only mention one staircase or ramp from either the left-hand side or from the entrance, thus it would seem that our altar from Dan – one of the earliest monumental altars of the Israelite type – bears the closest affinity with biblical priestly prescriptions.[14]

Between these staircases, the base upon which the altar is built protrudes so that it forms a low bench along the sides that face the entrance and the right-hand side of the precinct. This feature serves as the third point of correspondence between the altar and Israelite religion in that it may be associated with the *yesod*, the "base" structure upon which blood from the sin offering from animals killed in these locations was poured out in priestly texts (cf. Lev 4:25–34; 8:15; 9:9).[15] While the side upon which the blood is poured out is not specified in the texts in direct association with the *yesod*, a correspondence is certainly implied (cf. Lev 1:5) and thus we would expect the *yesod*

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13 See further Greer 2013, 116–118 and Milgrom 1991, 164–165.

14 On the bearing of this datum on the date and provenance of P, see a forthcoming work by this author "The Relative Antiquity and Northern Orientation of the Priestly Altar Tradition in Light of Recent Archaeological Finds and Its Importance in the Composition of P." On the *yesod*, see Zevit 1995; 2001, 292–294. In these works, Zevit makes compelling arguments for dating the "combined" sin offering law (a law that requires both daubing blood on the horns *and* pouring blood out upon the *yesod*) extant in P to the period after Ahaz introduces the new "Damascene" altar ca. 732 BCE (2 Kgs 16:10–15). However, the fact that the Danite altar discussed here – with both horns and a *yesod* – was clearly in use prior to Ahaz (Stratum II was destroyed in the 730s, and these features were likely part of the Stratum III altar at least, if not the Stratum IVA altar), may complicate Zevit's historical reconstruction and push back the *terminus a quo* of the combined law, in his formulation, to at least the 9th c. BCE if the remains from Dan may be seen to be representative of "royal" Israelite religion as a whole.

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to run along the right-hand side and the entrance-facing side of the altar, as indeed it does on the Danite altar.[16]

The Altar Kit

Another significant example of congruence between the Dan temple complex and Israelite religion as reflected in the priestly texts is an "altar kit" found in the western chamber of the precinct. In one of the casemate rooms of the western enclosure of the precinct, a smaller altar (roughly 1 m by 1 m) was found mounted in the center of the room next to a sunken pot filled with burnt animal remains and several other artifacts. The constellation of these artifacts bears remarkable similarity to altar kits described in the priestly literature, as discussed elsewhere (Greer 2010; 2013, 106–108).

   The elements include a bronze bowl, a pair of identical shovels placed on top of one another, and a third shovel with a long, broad blade. An iron handle of similar length was also found on the northern threshold of the room, perhaps a long metal fork without its prongs. Each one of these elements may be lined up with items that together make up "altar kits" in the priestly texts, specifically in the descriptions of kits intended for service at the bronze altar of the tabernacle courtyard (see Exod 27:1–8; Num 4:13–15; cf. 1 Kgs 7:40.45). These include a bronze bowl for catching the blood of the sacrificial victim (a *mizraq*), a pair of shovels for removing the sacrificial ashes (*ya'im*), a second type of shovel for the presentation of incense (a *maḥtah*), a fork for manipulating the burning meat (a *mazleg*), and bronze pots for collecting the ash (*sirot*) – precisely the same five elements found at Tel Dan, with the one difference being that the ash pot was ceramic rather than bronze.

Animal Bone Remains

As mentioned above, thousands upon thousands of animal bone fragments were also found in the precinct. Many of these were found in concentrated deposits that allowed for a close analysis of their contents and, in turn, permitted comparisons among the deposits.[17] The analysis as a whole suggested a difference between the deposits of the western chamber (where the altar kit was found), on the one hand, and the deposits of the courtyard, on the other. The deposits of the western chamber exhibited statistically higher percentages of bones in three categories:

1. *Right-sided Portions*. Meat-bearing elements from right hindlimbs and fore-limbs of sheep and goats outnumbered those from the left side of animals in a

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16 On these locations as places of slaughter, see Milgrom 1991, 164–165.
17 For details about the analysis and the results, see the full treatment in Greer 2013, especially pp. 43–96; some of the results are summarized here in the discussion that follows.

proportion of 67% rights : 33% lefts. In the courtyard, this proportion ratio was inverted with 63 % lefts : 38% rights.

2. *"Toe Bones."* So-called "toe bones," or technically phalanges (i.e., any one of three small bones that extend into the hoof of each sheep or goat discussed here), were represented in much higher percentages in the western chamber and the combined totals comprised 33% of the assemblage compared to other meat-bearing portions. This stands in marked contrast to the courtyard deposits that contained only 12% phalanges.

3. *Sheep and Goat Bones*. The western chambers also exhibited a statistically higher percentage of sheep and goat bones (80%) compared to that of the courtyard as a whole (74%).

Each of these differences finds congruence with Israelite religion as portrayed in the biblical priestly texts, especially if the excavators' identification of the western chambers as the domain of priests is maintained. Beyond some general correspondences – the lack of pig bones, for example – each of these differences may be explained specifically by prescriptions found in the priestly texts. The higher percentage of right-sided portions may be explained by the provision of the right forelimb or hindlimb for the priests taken as due from each "fellowship offering" (cf. Exod 29:27–28; Lev 7:32–33);[18] the higher percentage of "toe bones" may be explained by the payment of the skins of the "burnt offering" to the officiating priests (Lev 7:8), in that hooves are generally left intact in animal hides and thus when the hide and hooves decompose or are processed for tanning all that would be left would be the phalanges (cf. Wapnish/Hesse 1991, 45–47); the higher percentage of sheep and goats may be explained by the receipt of whole sheep and goats for the "sin offerings" (Lev 4:22–35; 5:6–10; 6:18–20) that would skew the proportion of sheep and goats to cattle compared to the proportions of the courtyard where the common worshipers would have enjoyed their sacrificial meals (Greer 2013, 102).

Arguments for an Aramean Sanctuary

In spite of these remarkable congruencies, the Israelite affiliation of the sanctuary in Area T has been challenged and some have proposed that it was instead an Aramean sanctuary (cf. Noll 1998; Athas 2003, 255–257; Arie 2008).[19] Such proposals are related to – or in the case of Arie 2008 have led to, rather – the assumption that the site as a whole in this time period was primarily under Aramean control or influence, if not built by Hazael himself (Na'aman 2012, 95; Hasegawa 2012, 84–85, cf. 140–141;

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18 Note differences between the LXX and MT concerning the portion, as well as the differences among the traditions (multiple stages of P and D), discussed in Greer 2013, 102–104.

19 Each of these studies was published prior to Greer (2013) and would not have been aware of the faunal analysis.

Finkelstein 2013, 127–128; Noll 2013, 286–296; cf. Berlejung 2009, 21)[20] and, as such, it would be logical to posit that Hadad would have been worshiped in the precinct. Indeed, such a position may find general support in "Aramean" architectural features (cf. Thareani 2016) and specific support in the Tel Dan Stela that clearly mentions Hadad (Biran 1994a, 277; cf. Schniedewind 1996; Athas 2003; Hagelia 2009). Further support may be garnered from a number of other artifacts: a bowl inscribed *lṭb[ḥ]y'*, "for the butchers (or cooks)," clearly an Aramaic inscription (as identified by the postpositive article) and likely cultic (Avigad 1968); and two iconographic plaques found near the gate complex that may exhibit Syrian influence (see Ornan 2006).[21]

Yet, the general architectural similarities with other Aramean sites may be reflective of the multiethnic composition of the inhabitants and craftsmen of the site and exist within a broader eclectic style that incorporates Israelite and Phoenician elements as well (so Thareani 2016) and thus have little bearing on the question of political domination, let alone religious sentiments. With regard to the artifacts, the find spots of each of these must be taken into consideration when evaluating their significance for the question of the religious affiliation of the Area T sanctuary. Notably, none was found in the sanctuary itself: the stela was found at the gate and may have even been intentionally smashed and scattered (cf. Levtow 2012);[22] the bowl was found in an unauthorized excavation and its find spot and therefore its date are both uncertain; and the plaques were notably found *outside* the city walls, and as such have little bearing on the religious affiliation of the sanctuary or even the inhabitants of the city (see Thareani 2016; cf. Thareani-Sussely 2008).

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20 Notably, each of these studies follows the reconstruction proposed by Arie (2008), which is highly problematic in light of the fact that his proposal is based only on published plates (and in some places failing to include updated references that re-date loci) rather than on working with the actual material due to the fact that he was unfortunately not able to access the material remains themselves. His conclusions are not affirmed by those working directly with the material itself, primarily, Thareani but also this author (2013), let alone the Biran team (1994a) who excavated the material.

21 The scepter head found in the "altar room" of Area T and the podium structure at the gate, though at times invoked to argue for Aramean influence, are not included here as in both cases comparable examples may be found within various cultural contexts throughout the region and cannot be associated with any one people group in particular (with Thareani).

22 Thareani also alludes to its temporary nature in that no mention is made of building projects as would be typical (though, of course, the inscription is fragmentary).

Arguments for Other Non-Israelite Religious Influence

Even if each of these potential indicators of Aramean influence has been minimized in the discussion above, other iconographic material dated to the Iron IIB and found within Area T may seem to complicate the picture. These include fragments of painted cult stands with mask-styled human faces in relief that may show Phoenician influence (Biran 1994a, 172–173; Pakman 2003), the head of a so-called "Judahite Pillar Figurine" (Biran 1969, 241; Kletter 1996, 33, Fig. 7:9), and several Egyptian-styled figurine fragments (Biran 1994a, 177).

The problem here is that we are unsure as to what extent the Israelite cult was aniconic during this time period. While the topic of iconic cults and aniconism in ancient Israel remains a debated issue that is beyond the scope of this paper, many would argue that there was more anthropomorphic imagery included in Israelite worship than previously assumed.[23] To be sure, Phoenician iconographic motifs that included human-faced cherubim are described as being incorporated in Solomon's temple itself (1 Kgs 5–7) and thus the painted stands may not be so out of place in an Israelite sanctuary. Further, the Judahite pillar figurine may ironically even strengthen the case for an Israelite sanctuary as similar types are almost exclusively found in arguably Israelite contexts, the vast majority coming from Jerusalem itself (cf. Kletter 1996; Wilson 2012; Darby 2014). Even the Egyptian-styled figurine fragments are hardly out of place when interpreted in light of texts that make it clear that even if the ideal heralded by the priests and prophets was aniconism, the reality was something far different;[24] to say it another way, finding an Israelite site without some evidence of "other" religious influence would seem to be the exception. In this case, with only a handful of anomalies within the larger context of congruence, the Danite cult has the appearance of a remarkably "establishment" type of cult (cf. Holladay 1987, lack of nuance notwithstanding).

The Problem with Archaeology Alone

Still, if we retreat to an argument based on archaeology alone we are no closer to a solution to the problem of the ethnic affiliation of the cult in Area T than we were when we began. Indeed, the most that can be said from the archaeological remains alone is that there was a religious complex in Area T and that worshipers were actively involved in a number of rituals, including sacrifice and intensive feasting. The deity

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23 Cf. discussions in Mettinger 1995; van der Toorn 1997; Keel/Uehlinger 1998; Lewis 2005; and with reference to these finds at Dan, Uehlinger 1994; 1997, but see Davis 2013, 25–26 n. 21.

24 Note, too, that they were found in fragmentary states deposited in jars of the olive press as a place of discard (Biran 1994a, 177, though he does not associate these jars with an olive press but believes the installation has something to do with libation ceremonies; for arguments to the contrary, see Stager/Wolff 1981; Borowski 1982).

to whom these activities were directed cannot be identified with surety and evidence could be mounted for a number of candidates, especially if references to the priestly materials from the Hebrew Bible are jettisoned. Even if the priestly texts are seen to be reflective of early Israelite practice – and this is highly debatable[25] – there is no reason to assume that the "congruencies" mentioned above are any more "Israelite" than they are "Aramean," or representative of any other local ethnicity for that matter. In fact, when the remains are, in general, compared with contemporary cultic sites from other regions, differences may be difficult to detect. Thus, an Aramean site and Israelite site might look identical as far as cultic practices, even if the deity were different, a reality that has fed a growing consensus of viewing Israelite religion as a subset of Canaanite religion (see, e.g., Coogan 1987, 115–116; cf. Holladay 1987).[26] The seal of *Immadiyaw*, however, would be hard to imagine in a temple of Hadad, though not impossible.

The Bible and the Question of the Religious Affiliation of the Tel Dan Temple

Breaking the stalemate may be evidence from the Hebrew Bible itself, but not evidence drawn from an uncritical adoption of its portrayal of extended Israelite occupation. Rather, it is an understanding of the polemical role the histories play in the larger biblical narrative that may prove to be helpful.

As I have suggested in greater detail elsewhere along with others,[27] a case can be made that the earliest stratum of the Deuteronomistic History preserves a somewhat ambiguous portrayal of the Northern cult that simultaneously recognized the cult as "Yahwistic" and as "other," perhaps stemming from the social context out of which it was created; arguably, the 8th c. BCE reign of Hezekiah provides an appropriate political context, as it was a time of a relatively powerful monarchy with the means for scribal apparatus, and an appropriate social context, as there would have been motivation to integrate northern and southern political-religious histories for the sake of

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25 On the dating of P and current debates, see discussion and references in Greer 2013, 99 n. 8.

26 The problem here for a direct comparison is, of course, the lack of extensive excavations in Damascus, specifically of a major Hadad temple that surely existed there (see Lipiński 2000, 627-628; Sader 2014, 35–36; cf. Novák 2014, 267–270), with which to compare the Danite temple. Other Late Bronze/Iron Age temples in the region (e.g., 'Ain Dara, Tayinat, Afis) share many similarities with descriptions of Solomon's temple (Niehr 2014, 174–181; cf. Kamlah 2012, though with a rather pessimistic outlook as to their value as comparative material) and here, now, with the Danite temple (see further Greer 2013, 108–116). While comparison with the gate shrines at Bethsaida (summarized in Arav 2013, 20–25) may yield some general similarities in the animals being sacrificed and some of the ceramic material, such as perforated cups, it is far more comparable to the gate shrines at Dan and less so with the sanctuary of Area T under discussion here.

27 See Greer 2013, 7–41 and references there.

unity after the north fell to Assyria in 722 BCE and Jerusalem accommodated groups of fleeing northerners. In the subsequent Josianic and exilic/postexilic editions of the Deuteronomistic History, the "otherness" of the cult is emphasized – and seen to be the downfall of the nation especially in the exilic/postexilic edition – while acknowledgment of the Yahwistic core is maintained, specifically so at the national shrines of Dan and Bethel. In fact, these two shrines are consistently portrayed as Yahwistic sanctuaries even when they are described as incorporating foreign elements (cf. 2 Kgs 17).

Even if this model of the formation of the histories – or the entire notion of a Deuteronomistic corpus – is rejected,[28] the most remarkable feature remains: nowhere is there mention of an Aramean national cult at Dan. When the absence of reference to an Aramean cult is considered in light of the polemical intent of the histories that are shaped especially in their later forms by the underlying main point that Israel was exiled because of her unfaithfulness to YHWH, this absence is glaring. Had there been recognition or memory of a Hadad cult at Dan, it is hard to imagine that the historians would not have readily incorporated this datum as yet another example of Israel's unfaithfulness and further reason that they were expelled from the land. The prophet Amos, likewise, though mentioning the national northern cults among others (Amos 7:13; cf. 8:14), gives every indication that they were Yahwistic, even "orthodox" in practice (cf. Amos 5:21–23), and says nothing of Aramean influence or the worship of Hadad.

Conclusion

Thus to conclude, there are strong resonances between the archaeological remains from the temple complex at Tel Dan and the descriptions of Israelite religious practice contained in the priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible and these congruencies may be seen to strengthen the plausibility of envisioning a Yahwistic cult at the Danite central sanctuary. These correspondences alone, however, are not enough to make a claim of "uniquely Israelite" practice (with the possible exception of the *Immadiyaw* seal) in that the rituals and paraphernalia of the Israelite cult were likely very similar to those of Aramean, Phoenician, and other regional cults. It is the combination of these congruencies with the textual traditions contained within the Hebrew Bible that explicitly mention the foundation of a Yahwistic cult at this location and, perhaps more significantly, fail to denounce it as a shrine to any other deity – Hadad or otherwise – in any extant text. The latter point is especially salient when considered within an understanding of the polemical intent of the Deuteronomistic History, whatever its date or compositional history: if the Israelite historians could have denounced the cult at Dan as Aramean, they surely would have.

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28 For overviews of recent literature on the extent (or existence) of the Deuteronomistic History, see the annotated bibliography in Knoppers/Greer 2010.

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New Light on Linguistic Diversity in Pre-Achaemenid Aramaic:
Wandering Arameans or Language Spread?

Holger Gzella – Leiden

Introduction

New textual findings since the closing decades of the twentieth century make it increasingly clear that only complex linguistic and socio-historical models can convincingly account for the intriguing tension between unity and diversity in older Aramaic. As a result, there is now growing awareness that a simple chronological distinction between successive stages of the language obscures many important causes that have contributed to its rise as the lingua franca (to employ a conventional though in fact imprecise term) of the Near East between Darius the Great and Muhammad, one of the most remarkable socio-cultural phenomena of the Ancient Mediterranean at large.[1] Linguistic history, however, never takes place in a vacuum but within a matrix of interacting demographic, economic, political, and ideological factors. A more comprehensive study of diversity (be it orthographic, phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, or lexical) in the textual sources can therefore shed new light also on the social conditions under which Aramaic evolved.[2] At the same time, a vivid interest in the historical and cultural background of the Aramaic-speaking population of Syria and Mesopotamia and the effects of their incorporation into the Assyrian and Babylonian world empires can help produce more adequate historical frameworks that will in due course hopefully permit a truly holistic approach to Aramaic and Arameans.[3]

   Discoveries of the past few years in particular have contributed to a keener awareness of the gap between Aramaic in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE., when it grew deep roots in the administration of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires, and Achaemenid Official Aramaic, that is, the international standard language of the Persian Empire during the fifth and fourth centuries. As a matter of fact, dozens of previously unknown epistolary, administrative, and legal documents from Bactria,

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1   Hence the model proposed by Fitzmyer (1979) (its brief summary in Fitzmyer [3]2004, 30–32, is virtually unchanged), popular though it is thanks to its extreme minimalism and easy access to non-specialists, must be considered inadequate. See Gzella 2015, 45–52, for a more detailed discussion and further bibliography.

2   A repositioning of the question has been attempted by Gzella 2015.

3   An important state-of-the-art synopsis is Niehr (ed.) 2014; a number of relevant issues are also discussed in the various contributions in Berlejung/Streck (eds.) 2013.

Samaria, and Idumaea witness to the basically homogeneous character of the latter variety across the entire imperial territory.[4] By contrast, the many economic tablets and clerical notes from various Neo-Assyrian archives that have been published in the meantime, brief, dry, and formulaic though they are, add support to the impression of a certain degree of diversity also in written Aramaic between the disappearance of the independent Aramean principalities by the end of the eighth century, and the purposeful codification of the language in the context of a bureaucratic reform early under Achaemenid rule.[5] (Unfortunately, the use of Aramaic in the Neo-Babylonian Empire is still poorly documented, but the few available witnesses confirm the general heterogeneity that emerges from the Neo-Assyrian evidence.[6])

   This situation has a number of important consequences. First, it undermines the explanatory value of a convenient but imprecise classificatory scheme that subsumes the entire material from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE. under the common label "Imperial" or "Official Aramaic".[7] Second, it suggests that the much greater homogeneity of written Aramaic after about 500 BCE. was the result of conscious language planning and, given the lack of mass media, constitutes a major political and cultural achievement, which in turn enriches our knowledge of Achaemenid administrative practice and its proverbial efficiency.[8] Third, it points to the substantial difference between spoken and written Aramaic, which is generally underestimated in the study of earlier phases of the language: there is no reason to believe that Aramaic vernaculars current in Syria and in Mesopotamia were streamlined to a similar extent as the chancellery languages that surface in the written record.[9] Fourth, it raises the question why Aramaic, despite its early use in government institutions and other official contexts, was so diverse in the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian period: was

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4   See now the complete edition of the Samaria papyri (containing private documents, mostly slave sales) by Dušek (2007), the Bactrian archive (consisting of letters and administrative lists) by Naveh/Shaked (2012), and Porten/Yardeni (2014–2016) for the very recent edition of a total corpus of about 2,000 terse economic documents from Idumaea. In addition, some 300 ostraca with brief letters and lists from Achaemenid Elephantine in the Clermont-Ganneau collection, only published in its entirety by Lozachmeur (2006), enrich the Egyptian sub-corpus. For an evaluation of the linguistic profile of Achaemenid Aramaic, see Gzella 2015, 168–182.

5   References to the texts available thus far can be found in Lemaire (2008), to which Lipiński (2010) and Röllig (2014) now have to be added. The authoritative grammar is Hug (1993); see Lipiński 2010, 207–243, and Gzella 2015, 112–119, for supplementary information based on the material published in the meantime.

6   Oelsner 2006 provides a convenient survey.

7   Cf. the discussion in Gzella 2015, 104–106 and 157–162, with bibliography.

8   See Henkelman 2013, 534–535, for up-to-date information on the general standardization of bureaucratic procedures under Achaemenid rule.

9   Indeed, the new written forms of Aramaic that emerged in the post-Achaemenid period are manifestly influenced by local dialects that were distinct from the Achaemenid administrative idiom and thus presuppose an unbroken evolution of vernaculars in the latter's shadow, see Gzella 2015, 217–225. Beyer (1986) (and the German original published in 1984) was the first to fully account for the interaction between literary languages and vernaculars in the history of Aramaic.