THE INSCRIBED TABLETS FROM TELL DEIR ʿALLA

PART I*

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During the 1964 season of excavations at Tell Deir ʿAlla on the eastern side of the mid-Jordan Valley, the Dutch expedition led by H. J. Franken recovered eleven clay tablets from the floors of two storerooms, Rooms IX and X, located across a courtyard from the Late-Bronze-Age temple at the site.[1] Three of the tablets were inscribed with texts written in a previously unknown script, seven of the tablets were incised only with dots, and one tablet appeared to be merely a lump of clay squeezed by hand. Franken is to be complimented and thanked for his prompt publication of the find. His manuscript announcing the discovery of the tablets was completed but two weeks after the end of the excavations.[2] All three of his articles which dealt with the tablets in one way or another appeared in journals dated to 1964.[3]

In the present study, the inscribed tablets are designated by Roman numerals, as follows:

> **Tablet I (or Text I)** = **Deir ʿAlla No. 1449**
> **Tablet II (or Text II)** = **Deir ʿAlla No. 1441**
> **Tablet III (or Text III)** = **Deir ʿAlla No. 1440**

The reason for this particular sequence will be made clear in my treatment of the decipherment of the texts and the historical implications involved. Franken has provided line drawings and some

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Editor's Note: The continuation and conclusion of this study, in "Part II," is currently planned for the Summer 1989 issue of *AUSS*.

[1]H. J. Franken, "Excavations at Deir ʿAllā, Season 1964," *VT* 14 (1964): 417-422.

[2]H. J. Franken, "Clay Tablets from Deir ʿAlla, Jordan," *VT* 14 (1964): 377-379.

[3]H. J. Franken, "The Stratigraphic Context of the Clay Tablets Found at Deir ʿAlla," *PEQ* 96 (1964): 73-78, plus the articles mentioned in nn. 1 and 2, above. For the excavations at the site in general, see idem, *Excavations at Tell Deir ʿAllā I* (Leiden, 1969).

photographs of these three inscribed tablets and line drawings of all eight unwritten tablets, plus photographs of six of the latter.[4] My own line drawings given herein are based on those of Franken. The line drawings for the first two inscribed tablets appear below, and those for the third inscribed tablet will be set forth in the subsequent installment (Part II) of this article, in conjunction with the discussion of the dotted tablets that will be given there.

1. *Studies of the Tablets*

Unfortunately, relatively little has been done in studies of these tablets since they were published. In a passing remark, W. F. Albright suggested that they might have originated with the Philistines because of "their similarity to Minoan tablets."[5] As Trude Dotan noted, however, "this extremely attractive proposal is difficult to substantiate because the derived Philistine pottery at Deir ʿAlla was found in the Iron-Age-I levels following the destruction of the temple complex."[6]

The first two studies of the Deir ʿAlla tablets appeared the year after they were discovered. In the first study of them, A. van den Branden concluded that their script was most directly related to early Arabic scripts.[7] While van den Branden made a useful beginning in the study of these tablets, his special reliance upon Arabic scripts has not produced an overall solution to their texts. H. Cazelles followed up van den Branden's study by agreeing that some of the letters in this script were related to early Arabic forms, but he also noted that other letters resembled those in the Phoeni-

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[4]For his line drawings of all eleven tablets, see "Stratigraphic Context," p. 73, Fig. 1. A further line drawing, in larger size, of text I appears in "Clay Tablets," p. 380; and such a drawing of text III appears in the same article on p. 378. Photographs of six of the eight dotted texts appear in "Excavations," Plate Va. Franken has also published photographs of inscribed texts II and III in "Excavations," Plate Vb, and "Clay Tablets," Plate 1, respectively.

[5]W. F. Albright, "Syria, the Philistines, and Phoenicia," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., vol. 2, part 2, p. 510.

[6]T. Dotan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 84.

[7]A. van den Branden, "Déchiffrement des inscriptions de Deir ʿAlla," *VT* 15 (1965): 129-149.

cian alphabet. He suggested that attention should be given to their relations in that direction.[8]

Almost a decade passed before the Deir ʿAlla tablets were treated again. Following up the idea that the script of these tablets might have come from the Aegean world, Z. Mayani attempted to decipher the tablets on the basis of Etruscan.[9] His results are so exceptional that they are not dealt with further here.

The most recent study of one of these tablets was published more than a decade ago. In 1975, G. E. Mendenhall transcribed and translated one of the three written tablets, but this was only as a passing comment in a study on another subject.[10] As a result, Mendenhall's cursory treatment provides no detailed interpretation of the palaeography or linguistics involved. Mendenhall sees the text as written in a script related to hieroglyphic Luwian but conveying a message in a Semitic language. The message is the record of a delivery of some donkeys. Because of its linguistic consistency, Mendenhall's is probably the best of the previous studies of these tablets.

My own interest in these tablets dates to a seminar I taught at Andrews University in the Spring term of 1985. A graduate student in that seminar, Aecio Cairus from Argentina, undertook a study of the Deir ʿAlla tablets for his research project. I did not encourage him in this undertaking because at the time I considered the tablets undecipherable. Cairus persevered, however, and eventually convinced me that he had indeed identified seven more letters of this script beyond those identified by earlier researchers (see Section 3 below). Because of the difficulty of the script, this was a remarkable achievement.

On various occasions during the course of that seminar, Cairus and I discussed the identification of individual signs, the meaning of different words, and the overall significance of the texts. In spite of the progress made, the texts remained difficult. In the final written report of his research, Cairus presented three different ways in which the two tablets with which he dealt (texts I and III) could

[8]H. Cazelles, "Deir-Alla et ses tablettes," *Semitica* 15 (1965): 5-21.

[9]Z. Mayani, "Un apport à la discussion du texte Deir ʿAllah," *VT* 24 (1974): 318-323.

[10]G. E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore, MD, 1975), pp. 160-161.

be translated. He has subsequently presented the results of his work on this subject to the Midwestern sectional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature that met at Andrews University in February 1986.

While I am deeply indebted to Cairus for his identification of the letters which I accepted from him, plus some of the words in my translations which were first proposed by him, other lexical items and the overall translation and interpretation of the tablets proposed below are my own responsibility and the result of my continuing work on this subject. I have also added here my translation of the third and more badly damaged tablet (text II) and my interpretation of the dotted tablets with which Cairus did not deal.

2. *The Archaeological Context*

These tablets were found on the floors of two storerooms that were located immediately adjacent to the sanctuary at the site. Since the pottery in the final phase of the sanctuary and in the storerooms was essentially the same, it is evident that all of the buildings in the complex were destroyed at approximately the same time. A faience vase bearing the cartouche of Queen Taousert, who reigned in Egypt at the beginning of the twelfth century, was found in the final destruction level of the sanctuary; hence a date for this destruction just after 1200 B.C. is appropriate from the archaeological evidence.

This date of just after 1200 B.C. for the final destruction of the sanctuary complex, however, does not necessarily provide a specific date for the writing of the tablets. The archaeological evidence indicates only that they could not have been written any later than ca. 1200; it does not tell us how long before that final destruction they were written. Several objects found in the sanctuary complex antedated its final phase by rather long periods of time. A Hyksos scarab was found in the storerooms with the tablets, and it must have been more than three centuries old by the time of that destruction.[11] Two large painted LB-I vessels were found in the cella of the temple, and they came from an earlier phase of that structure.[12] It is possible, therefore, that these tablets could have originated from a time considerably earlier than the destruction of the final

[11]Franken, "Excavations," Plate VIII, no. 3.
[12]Ibid., Plate I.

phase of the sanctuary. The archaic nature of their script suggests that they probably did.

3. *Analysis and Decipherment of the Script*

The process of deciphering the script used on these tablets has been a slow one, to which each of the studies cited above has made a contribution. For reasons of space, identifications for signs in previous studies which have been rejected are not here discussed.

The first of the letters in this script, which van den Branden correctly identified, was the *gimmel*. It consists of a vertical stroke which curves to the right at its head. The form is similar in later West-Semitic scripts, but the head became more angular.

Van den Branden's second correct letter was the *pe*. This he identified on the basis of parallels with the bow-shaped *pe* of Thamudic and Safaitic scripts. In Canaanite writing the *pe* was written with more of a curve, and it does not straighten out as much at the ends of the stroke.

Van den Branden was also the first to identify the *samek* in these texts. It is a typical West-Semitic *samek*, which consists of three horizontal strokes on a vertical stem.

The final letter, utilizable from van den Branden's identifications, is the *taw*. It, too, is typical of West-Semitic *taw*s in that it was written with two crossed strokes.

The *kaph*, which was first identified by Cazelles, has a trefoil head and a vertical tail like the later forms of the West-Semitic *kaph*. The use and length of the tail of the *kaph* seem to vary among the Deir ʿAlla tablets.

The *yod*, which Cazelles identified, lacks the forked head of the later West-Semitic *yod*s. It was written here with just a dot, or not even that, at the head of the vertical stroke.

The *reš* that Mendenhall recognized has a direct parallel with the head-shaped sign with which the *reš* was written in the Proto-Sinaitic script.

The first of the letters which Cairus identified is the *beth*. Later West-Semitic *beth*s have triangular heads and angular tails. What Cairus noted here was that there is a letter with a triangular head, but it is represented only by three corner dots. The tail of this letter consists only of a straight downstroke without any bend in it.

The circular infolded *lamed*, which Cairus recognized, comes fairly close to the *lamed* in the abcedary of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Ostracon.[13]

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[13]The *lamed* occurs as the 10th letter in the second line; the 12th, 26th, and 29th letters of the fourth line; and the 12th letter of the fifth or alphabetic line of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Ostracon. See M. Kochavi, "An Ostracon of the Period of the Judges from ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah," *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 1-13.

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

	Text I	Text II	Text III
ʾAleph	–	–	–
Beth	–	–	
Gimmel	–		
Dalet	–	–	
He			–
Waw			
Zayin	–		
Heth	–	–	
Ṭeth	–		
Yod			
Kaph			
Lamed			
Mem			
Nun	–	–	
Samek	–	–	
ᶜAyin	–		
Pe			–
Ṣade	–	–	–
Qoph	–	–	–
Res̆		–	
S̆in	–	–	
Taw			

Cairus's distinction between the *mem* and the *nun* is especially important for understanding these Deir ʿAlla texts. In later scripts, both of these letters had wavy-lined heads extending to the left from the head of their downstrokes. The *mem*, however, has multiple notches, while the *nun* has only one. In these texts Cairus has identified the wavy vertical line as the *nun* and the broad vertical V as the *mem*. This seems to run in the opposite direction from the parallels. Cairus adopted this position on the basis of the sense that they brought to their respective words. When he showed me these identifications, I checked some of the early alphabets for parallels and found one for the *mem* in the abcedary of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Ostracon.[14] Thus the *mem* that we find here has a parallel in at least one other early alphabet. That leaves the alternate letter as a *nun*.

ʿAyin was originally written in the form of a horizontal oval or circle with a dot in it, representing the eye with a pupil. What Cairus recognized here is that we have half of this sign—one curved line with a dot in it, but lacking the lower curved line and being turned 90° to stand vertically.

Cairus's bow-shaped *šin* is relatively close in form to the later West-Semitic *šin*s, except that it has been rotated 90° to stand vertically like the *ʿayin*.

The vertical box-shaped sign at the beginning of the one word on the side of text III has been difficult to identify. It looks most like *ḥeth*, but it does not function like *ḥeth* because it is followed by a clear example of an *ʿayin*. The combination of *ḥeth* followed by *ʿayin* does not occur in West-Semitic languages. In his search for another letter with which to identify this sign, Cairus settled upon the *zayin*. If this sign is rotated 90°, like the two previous letters discussed, and its excess of crossbars is removed, this sign would resemble the later *zayin*. The key to this identification may lie in the fact that the letter's top horizontal crossbar extends between the two vertical strokes at an angle, as does the vertical connector between the horizontal strokes of the later *zayin*.

There are some additional signs which should now be added to the foregoing list. The first of these proposed here is *he*. One example of a vertical box-shaped sign with one central crossbar appears in text II, and

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[14]The alphabet of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Ostracon has been misinterpreted with regard to *mem* and *nun*. It has been thought that the last letter in the alphabet before the break in the middle of the sherd was the *nun* and that the *mem* was missing. Actually, the last letter before the break is the *mem* and the *nun* was written back in the sixth position of the letters in the alphabet. It is the standard notched form of the *nun* that was written there in error, and to compensate for this error the scribe wrote the *waw*, the correct letter of that position, underneath the *nun*. That makes the broad letter like the v-shaped letter of the Tell Deir ʿAlla tablets' *mem*. For details, see the line drawing of the ostracon which accompanies Kochavi's article referred to in n. 13.

another occurs in text I. While this sign looks something like *ḥeth*, *ḥeth* does not make sense in these contexts while *he* does, and *he* is the letter that looks most like *ḥeth*. The clue to identifying *he* here may lie in the facts that only one central crossbar extends between the vertical strokes and that the vertical stroke on the left appears to be less deeply incised than the one on the right.

Both Cazelles and Cairus considered identifying the letter with the semicircle atop the vertical stroke as a *waw*, but in the end they rejected that identification. That original identification is retained here. This letter looks very much like the *waws* in other West-Semitic alphabets, and it functions well in these texts as a *waw*.

The triangular letter which consists of only three dots has a head which is similar to the head of the *beth*, but it does not have a tail, as does the *beth*. The letter in later alphabets which has a triangular head but only a rudimentary tail is the *dalet*; hence this letter has been identified as a *dalet* here.

There appears to be another example of the *zayin* present here, this one in text II. It is also a vertical box-shaped sign, but it has no central crossbar, only top and bottom crossbars, and the top crossbar is incised at an angle like that of the *zayin* on the side of text III. If this sign is rotated 90° and its bottom crossbar is removed, it also looks like the later *zayin*.

Together, these letter identifications yield the alphabet that is outlined in Figure 1. While the forms of some of these letters are unusual and quite archaic, most of them can still be related to forms known from other early West-Semitic alphabets. From the standpoint of these relations, there is no need to identify this script as non-Canaanite. It should rather be thought of as compatible with other early Canaanite scripts.

Before proceeding to the transliteration and a translation of the texts of the three tablets, the long slash marks inscribed in these texts should be mentioned. The slash marks are clearly word dividers. They make, in fact, much better word dividers than the short vertical strokes or dots that were used in later texts.

4. *Text I: Pethor Smitten*
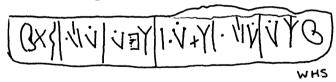### *(Deir ʿAlla No. 1449)*

General Introduction

In connection with text I and also the further two written tablets, the pattern of treatment is as follows (indicated by side subheads): First the transliteration and translation are given; next

my line drawing of the particular tablet is presented (as given in line drawing below); then general introductory comments are made (whenever there are such); following those comes the analysis of the text upon which my transliteration and translation are based; and finally, attention is given to the historical and geographical implications of the information elicited from the text. In tablet I, which is inscribed with only one line, the final two items require but one side heading each, whereas in tablets II and III, each of which contains more than one line, the headings for these two final areas of treatment will be on a line-by-line basis.

Transliteration and Translation of Text I:

lkm / mk. / wtm.y / whm / mk. / ptr

(1a) "To you (have come) a smiter and a finisher,
(1b) and they (are) the smiters of Pethor."

The Line Drawing:

WHS

Analysis of the Text

This text was written all on one line located along the edge of the tablet, and all six boxes for the words of this text were marked off on this line. The superior and inferior flat surfaces of the tablet were not incised.

The first letter of the first word can be identified as a circular infolded *lamed*, comparable to that of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Ostracon. This is followed by a standard form of the *kaph* with a trefoil head and vertical tail. The large V of the *mem* concludes this word. *Lkm* divides nicely into the prefixed preposition *l* and the suffixed pronoun *km*, second person plural. It translates as, "To you...." The position of this prepositional phrase suggests that a form of the verb "to be" should be understood with it, here translated freely as "have come."

The first noun which tells what came to the people was written with a large notched *mem*, a trefoil *kaph*, and a dot following the *kaph*. This fits either one of two words in Biblical Hebrew—*makkâ* as the noun for "blow, stroke, wound, defeat"; or the Hiphil participle *makkê* from the derivative root *nkh*, "to beat, strike, smite, defeat." Either the noun or the

verb would bring satisfactory meaning to this passage, but the verbal form has been preferred for its emphasis on agency over result: thus, "smiter." No indicator of the final vowel was written, but a dot does follow the *kaph* both here and in the same word in the fifth box. In Biblical Hebrew the *kaph* in these forms was doubled by using a *dagesh forte*. It looks very much as if that was the scribe's intent here by use of this dot.

The third word is introduced by a *waw* with a forked head, which should serve as a conjunction. Therefore a form and a function similar to those of the preceding word are thus expected. The *taw* and *mem* from this word's root occur next, and they are clear. They are followed by a dot and a plain vertical stroke of the *yod*. The most direct relationship is to the root *tmm*, "to finish, complete." If the dot doubles the letter that it follows, as it appears to do elsewhere in this text, the *yod* following could provide the reason why it should function in this way. When endings were added to this Hebrew verb, its doubled forms appeared. This final *yod* probably is not a pronominal suffix. More likely, it represents the *i*-vowel of the old genitive case ending, a case ending which would be appropriate here with a word that ends a prepositional phrase. My translation of this word is "finisher."

The next word begins with a standard form of the *waw* with a forked head. This should serve as a conjunction that introduces the other major statement of the text. This is followed by the vertical box-shaped sign, which has been identified as the *he* rather than *ḥeth*. *He* also makes better sense here. The last sign of this word is the large V-shaped *mem* that has already been seen three times in this text. The word present here is *w + hm*, or the conjunction followed by the third person masculine plural independent pronoun, "they." The natural plural antecedent of this pronoun should be the two objects mentioned together immediately before it, the "smiter" and the "finisher."

The fifth word in this line is the same as the second. It consists of a *mem* followed by a *kaph* and a dot. As in the previous case, this should be taken as a Hiphil participle from *nkh*, "to smite." For the third time in this line a dot appears to function as doubling the consonant that it follows. Since the subject of this participle is in the plural, the participle should be plural too. But it lacks the *mem* of the plural ending, so it probably should be taken as in construct with the following word. The final vowel of the plural construct was not written out here. With the verb "to be" understood, this second statement should thus far be translated as, "and they (are) the smiters of. . . ."

The object which was smitten by these two "smiters" (i.e., by the "smiter" and "finisher" in the first statement) was named at the end of the line, and that name reads quite clearly. Its first two letters are the *pe* and *taw*, which van den Branden identified, and its final sign is the head-shaped letter, which Mendenhall recognized as the *reš*. The name of the

object which received these two blows or attacks is, therefore, *ptr*. These consonants can be vocalized quite readily to yield the name "Pethor."

Historical and Geographical Implications

Pethor is identified in Num 22:5 as the home of Balaam the prophet. This text thus provides us with an identification for that site, which previously was in dispute. Both the location of Pethor and the ancient name of Tell Deir ᶜAlla have been uncertain, but thanks to this text, those two puzzle pieces can now be put together by identifying Tell Deir ᶜAlla as Pethor. Further discussion of this identification follows later in this study, in Part II of this article.
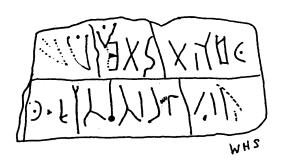
The translation developed here for this six-word line thus not only identifies as Pethor the site at which the tablet was found, but also indicates that Pethor had been attacked by two successive waves of attackers. Although this text does not identify those attackers, it appears that the related tablet written in the same scribal hand (II) does do so.

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

Transliteration and Translation:

    (1) ᶜ*zwᵓt / pthm / m*[*k.*]
    (2) [*wᵓdr*]ᶜ.*y / wywᶜgg / mk*[.]

    (1) "The mighty ones of Pithom (are) a sm[iter],
    (2) [and Edre]ᶜi and Yog (are) a smiter."

The Line Drawing:

WHS

Introduction

Text II was inscribed upon the top surface of its tablet in a boustrophedon order, as Franken originally noted. This is clear from the fact that the letters face in one direction in one line and in the other direction in the other line. Both lines read from right to left, as the preceding text did, but the lines are upside down in relation to each other. Some of the letters of the text have been broken away at its right end. The written surface of the tablet has been damaged and contains many horizontal cracks. These make the text difficult to read.

Since the script of this tablet especially resembles that of tablet I, it is reasonable to suggest that it was written by the same scribe and at the same time as that tablet. If this was the case, then it is natural to anticipate that the contents of this text may be related to the contents of text I. Tablet I left off with the two attackers who smote Pethor still unidentified. It appears that this text provides those identifications.

Analysis of the Text of Line 1:

The first word of this text begins with a clear-cut case of the vertical half-eye sign of an *ᶜayin*. This is followed by a vertical box with its upper horizontal bar crossing at an angle. Rotating this sign 90° suggests its similarity to the later *zayin*, with which it should be identified. Next comes a *waw*, with the forked head that is common to these two texts. The last letter of this word is a *taw*, written here with its customarily crossed strokes.

Between the *waw* and *taw* of this word there is a vertical stroke that would ordinarily be identified as a *yod*. Here, however, I would suggest a different function for that stroke. The first two letters of *ᶜzw 't* make up the word *ᶜuz*, which is used in Biblical Hebrew either as a noun or as an adjective meaning "strong, mighty, powerful." To this the feminine plural ending *-ôt* has been added, but that ending contains this intrusive *yod*. Rather than serving as a true *yod* here, this stroke appears to have been used as a vowel marker for the *waw* which precedes it, indicating that it should be taken as vocalic *ô* rather than as consonantal *w*. The *waw* conjunctions of these texts are not followed by such a marker. I have indicated this proposed function with a *v* above the line after the *waw* with which it was used. The identity of the *ᶜuzôt* or "mighty ones" mentioned here is addressed further below.

The first two signs of the next word were accurately copied by Cazelles from Franken's photograph, and they can be identified with the *pe* and *taw* that van den Branden recognized. The *pe* is more damaged than the

taw. The next letter begins with a vertical stroke, as Cazelles copied. A short horizontal stroke extends to the left from the middle of this stroke, as Cazelles also copied. While they are more difficult to see in the photograph, two other horizontal strokes appear to project to the left from the top and bottom of the vertical stroke. There may possibly be another vertical stroke on the left, but this is uncertain. This box-shaped sign matches the form of the *he* that is found in the fourth word of the preceding inscription. The final sign of this word is located in the left upper corner of the word-box. It has been obscured in part by abrasion to the tablet, but it can still be read. It consists of a large V with a dot between the heads of its limbs. This is the form consistently used by these texts for *mem*.

On the basis of the foregoing identification of the letters in this word, the word can now be read as *pthm*. This word occurs as a place name, Pithom (consonantal *ptm*), in Exod 1:11. It was one of the two major store cities that the Israelites built for Pharaoh in Egypt. These two names, Deir ʿAlla *pthm* and biblical *ptm*, are essentially the same except for the way in which they treat the spirantization of the *taw*. In Biblical Hebrew this was accomplished by the absence of a *dagesh lene*. Lacking such an indicator, the Deir ʿAlla scribe appears to have compensated by following the *taw* with *he*. Because of their close written and phonological relationships, the two names can be taken as referring to one and the same place, the significance of whose presence in this text is discussed further below and in Part II of this article.

The last word in this first line is badly damaged and difficult to read. It can be reconstructed, however, from the traces that remain and by parallelism with other parts of this text and with text I. Three dots cross the right upper part of this box in a horizontal line. These remain from the first letter of this word, and the traces of a large V extend down from the outer two of them. This is sufficient evidence upon which to reconstruct another *mem* here. Only faint traces of the next letter are still present. To anticipate a reading from the next line of this text, we may note that the word in the parallel position there, in the third box, reads more clearly as *mk*. The same word occurs twice in text I. On the basis of these parallels and the faint traces present, it seems reasonable to reconstruct a *kaph* here. In its preceding occurrences, *mk* has been treated as a Hiphil participle from the verb *nkh*, "to smite," and so it should be treated here too: thus, "a smiter."

Historical and Geographical
Implications of Line 1

With these three words read and reconstructed, the larger significance of this line can be considered. *ʿUzôt* refers to the "mighty," with a plural ending. *Pthm* is the name of the place Pithom in Egypt. These two words can be taken as related to each other in a

construct chain. The verb "to be" is understood here again, just as it was in the two statements of text I. The last word of this line indicates that the "mighty ones of Pithom" were identified as a "smiter" or attacker. If this text is to be connected with the previous one, as seems reasonable, the place smitten or attacked was Pethor. Thus, one of the two groups that attacked Pethor was some of the "mighty ones" from Pithom in Egypt.

While one might think at first of Pharaoh and his army in this connection, there was a more direct way in which Canaanites could have referred to him in person at the head of his forces. Therefore another, more homogenous, group appears to be in view here. Since the Israelites built Pithom during their stay in Egypt and left it when they exited from Egypt, they make good candidates for this description. The proposal here, then, is that the "mighty ones" from Pithom in Egypt were none other than the Biblical Israelites, and that at some time during their travels in Transjordan they attacked Pethor. The feminine ending on the word for "mighty" is curious. Perhaps it is modeled upon the feminine plural ending that accompanies *ṣābā* (*ṣ^ebā^ɔôt*), "hosts, army, warriors."

Since the name for the other store city built by the Israelites in Egypt was Ramesses (Exod 1:11), the question arises why Pithom was referred to here instead of Ramesses. The availability of the latter name for inclusion here depends upon when this text was written. If it was written before the accession of Ramesses II, ca. 1290, it could not have mentioned the city of Ramesses, because that city was only renamed for him after he came to the throne. This text could still have referred to Pithom earlier than 1300, however, for the name of that city was not coupled chronologically to a particular Pharaoh's name. Although a precise date for these texts has not been established as yet, several of their linguistic and palaeographic features point to a rather lengthy interval between their writing and the ca. 1200 destruction of the temple complex in which they were found.

Analysis of the Text of Line 2

Most of the first word in the second line of this text has been broken away. Traces of the vertical half-eye sign identify an *ʿayin* as the first legible letter after the break. A vertical stroke, possibly a *yod*, follows this, and there may be a dot between them. There is a longer stroke to the left of the first vertical stroke. Even though it is damaged, it probably should be taken as the line which delimits the end of this word box. It is difficult to

reconstruct a word here on the basis of just two letters. By parallel with the presence of a place name in the first line, a place name might also be expected here. Connecting that expectation with what follows suggests the name of the Bashanite city Edreᶜi for restoration here (consonantal ᵓdrᶜy, Num 21:33-35). This proposal is, of course, quite tentative.

The word in the next box begins with a standard form of the *waw* with a forked head. This should serve as a conjunction to connect this word with the preceding one. The vertical stroke of a *yod* then follows, and its head has been dotted. Another good example of the *waw* comes after this *yod*. A vertical stroke without a dotted head follows this second *waw*. The difference between the dotted stroke which follows the first *waw* and the plain stroke which follows the second may be functional. It was suggested above that in the preceding line of this text the vertical stroke which follows the *waw* of the plural ending on *ᶜuzôt* (*ᶜuzw't*) may have acted as a marker for the vocalic function of the *waw* which it followed. The same suggestion may be offered here. In this case, the dotted stroke before the second *waw* should be taken as a consonantal *yod*, and the stroke after it should be taken as a vocalic indicator for it. A vertical stroke with a head that curves to the right comes next and is readily identifiable as a *gimmel*. The final letter in this word-box is difficult, but I take it to be another example of the *gimmel* which has been turned upside down. The rotation of the second letter in a pair can also be seen in the case of *mkk* in text III.

The word in this box should thus be read as *wyw'gg*. The first *waw* has been taken as a conjunction and the second as a vowel letter accompanied by its marker, i.e., *w + yôgg*. *Yogg* is not analyzed well either as a verb or as a noun, and parallelism with the first line suggests taking it as a personal or place name. While *yôgg* does not correspond to the name of any place known in this region of Transjordan, it does bear a certain resemblance to the personal name of Og. Og was the king of Bashan when the Israelites arrived in Transjordan after the Exodus (Num 21:33). The central portions of these two names, consisting of a vocalic *waw* followed by a *gimmel*, correspond directly. The additional *gimmel* at the end of the inscriptional name is not an important difference, as it may not have been doubled by the biblical writer. Only the initial letters, *ᶜayin* and *yod*, respectively, differ significantly between these two names. This difference is not due to a known phonetic shift. It could have resulted from a scribal error during the course of the transmission of the biblical text. On the other hand, it could also have come about through different ways in which the original scribes heard this man's name, inasmuch as it probably came to them through oral rather than written communication. Since the similarities between these two names still appear to outweigh this one main difference, it is proposed here to identify Deir ᶜAlla's (*y*)*ôg*(*g*) with the biblical (ᶜ)*ôg*.

The two letters of the word in the next box are partially damaged but still legible. Both of them consist of large V-shaped signs. The point of the first is missing, and the left limb of the second is faint. They both appear to have dots between the heads of their upper limbs. By parallelism with the word used twice in the first text, a stroke rather than a dot can be reconstructed between the limbs of the second sign. That makes the first letter a *mem* and the second a *kaph*. Thus we have here another occurrence of the Hiphil participle *mk* from *nkh* (referring to a "smiter") that we have already seen three times previously in these texts. A form of the verb "to be" can also be understood here, between the word pair earlier in this line and *mk*.

Historical and Geographical Implications of Line 2

The three words in this line transcribe [ʾdr]ʿ.y / wyw ʿgg / mk, and they translate as "[Edre]ʿi and Yogg (are) a smiter." This line of text identifies another party that attacked Pethor—Og and his forces from Bashan. Og had two main residences in his territory, one at Ashtaroth and the other at Edreʿi (Deut 1:4, Josh 12:4, 13:12). It would have been more logical for him to launch a campaign into the Jordan Valley from the latter (at Derʿa), because it was farther south than the former (at Tell ʿAshtarah). Thus, if Edreʿi is the name that was broken away in part from the beginning of the second line, there would have been good reason to mention it here.

The Song of Heshbon (Num 21:26-30) describes Og's fellow Transjordanian king Sihon as an aggressor who campaigned victoriously into Moabite territory to the south. It would have been natural for Og to act in a similar fashion, but he was not able to campaign very far to the south because by crossing the Jabbok River he would have penetrated into Sihon's territory and come into conflict with him. The best direction for Og to expand his territory was to the west, down to the river in the Jordan Valley. Located just north of the confluence between the Jabbok and the Jordan, Pethor at Tell Deir ʿAlla probably was one of the last sites that Og conquered in filling out the territory of his kingdom.

The presence of the memory of Sihon's attack upon Moab in the Biblical text suggests that it was a relatively recent occurrence when the Israelites arrived in the area. Mention in this inscription of Og's attack upon Pethor, along with reference to the subsequent Israelite attack upon the same site, suggests that it too was a relatively recent event by the time the Israelites arrived there.

The Chronology of Events and the
Textual Order in Tablet II

A question of chronology and textual order arises from the identification of both the Israelites and Bashanites as conquerors of Pethor. Which came first? Num 21:33-35 tells of the Israelite defeat of Og, the conquest of Bashan, and the annihilation of Og's forces and families. Historically, therefore, the Bashanite conquest of Pethor had to occur before the Israelite conquest of the same site, for the Bashanites were not around any longer after the Israelites came through this area. The translation of this text, as given above, presents the Israelites as a smiter of Pethor in the first line and Og and his forces as a smiter in the second line. Because this text was written boustrophedon, however, this order could just as well have been reversed. I have translated the text in this order because it seemed easier to go from one to the other linguistically and epigraphically, and I have also retained it for reasons of literary relations that are described later, in the forthcoming Part II.

(To be continued)