Inscriptional Evidence and the Question of Genre

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A short description of two phenomena shall serve as the background of the following considerations: the first observation is that especially in a German perspective one has to state an ongoing decline of the usage and importance of the form-critical method. This neglect can easily be seen when looking at the latest commentaries on the psalms by Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, especially when compared to the older one by Hans-Joachim Kraus or the commentaries of Erhard Gerstenberger in the FOTL series.[1] The same is true for attempts to understand the prophetic literature; it may suffice to refer to the latest book by Uwe Becker in comparison with the commentary by Marvin Sweeney.[2]

Several reasons have led to this development.[3] One important factor has been the work of Sigmund Mowinckel and his "cult-historical method," which led older scholarship to hold confidence in the possibility for a recon-

1. F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Die Psalmen I. Psalm 1–50* (NEB 29; Würzburg: Echter, 1993); F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2000); H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BKAT XV/1-2; 6th ed., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989); ET: *Psalms* (trans. H. C. Oswald; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988-89); E. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1; with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); idem, *Psalms, Part 2; Lamentations* (FOTL 15; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

2. U. Becker, *Jesaja — Von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39; with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

3. Cf. J. Barton, "Form Criticism. OT," *ABD* 2:838-41; M. Rösel, "Formen/Gattungen II. Altes Testament," *RGG*[4] 186-200.

I would like to dedicate this article to my *Doktorvater* and friend Klaus Koch on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday for having introduced me to the field of form criticism.

struction of a cultic *Sitz im Leben* of the texts (also for prophetic texts) that can no longer be justified. Another point was that scholars often undervalued the tension between the idealized forms they established (in the German sense of *Gattung*) and the individual texts.[4] We now have to accept a broader variety within the forms and a more complex history of the forms *(Gattungsgeschichte)*. The last reason to be named in this short (and necessarily rough) survey is the shift of interest in exegetical studies from preliterary, oral stages of the texts to their literary development.

Thus one may conclude that especially in German exegesis redaction-critical studies are predominant while the form-critical method has lost its former status. This leads to the consequence that the question for an actual *Sitz im Leben* of the texts has widely been abandoned; in the commentaries of Hossfeld and Zenger most of the psalms are understood as mere literary products without a significant relationship to cultic practices or the temple. The situation in American exegesis is somewhat different. The focus of interest has shifted to the finished form of the text, but the results are comparable: the method has lost its former status.

The second observation is that this neglect of the possibilities of the form-critical method can also be seen in research concerning the inscriptions or larger texts that have been found in recent years. These documents have caused much scholarly discussion because of their historical or religious implications. One may remember the inscription from Tel Dan and the discussions between "minimalists" and "maximalists" it has caused;[5] the problem of "YHWH and his Asherah" in the findings from Kuntillet Ajrud or Khirbet el-Qom;[6] and most recently the inscriptions from Ekron.[7] But these discussions

4. See, e.g., F. -L. Hossfeld, "Hymnus II. Altes Testament," *RGG*[4] 3:1975; and the criticism of the method in Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen I,* 17-25. It should be noted that the important article by R. Knierim, "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Int* 27 (1973): 435-68, did not receive the attention it has deserved in German exegesis.

5. A translation of the text of the stele can be found in *COS* 2.39. The most convincing interpretation can be found in I. Kottsieper, "Die Inschrift vom Tell Dan und die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Aram-Damaskus und Israel in der 1. Hälfte des 1. Jahrtausends vor Christus," in *"Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf"* (Fest. O. Loretz; ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper; AOAT 250; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 475-500.

6. Cf. the most recent survey by R. K. Gnuse, "The Emergence of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Recent Scholarship," *Religion* 29 (1999): 315-36; or the important volume by W. Dietrich and M. A. Klopfenstein, eds., *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (OBO 139; Fribourg: Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

7. See V. Sasson, "The Inscription of Achish, Governor of Eqron, and Philistine Dialect, Cult and Culture," *UF* 29 (1997): 627-39; R. G. Lehmann, "Studien zur Formgeschichte

have focused primarily on the contents of the findings, very seldom on their genre.

In my view this is regrettable, because in these inscriptions one has access to genres in their primary usage, while in the Hebrew Bible we can find them inserted only in secondary contexts, which are therefore altered in different respects. Thus I try to demonstrate that working on these texts with the more traditional questions and methods of form criticism can give new insights — results that are also important for biblical exegesis. I pay special attention to texts in Hebrew or cognate languages from Israel or its closest neighbors, because parallels from Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources have already been examined by older form-critical research and are still the source of interest.[8]

Formulations of Blessings

As a starting point I choose the formulations of blessings. Most of the texts are well known because of the lively discussion on the emergence of monotheism in Israel and the question whether the God of Israel had a *parhedra* in preexilic times.[9] Despite the ongoing discussion the focus of this contribution is only on the form-critical aspects of these texts. The inscriptions on the pithoi from Kuntillet Ajrud read as follows:[10]

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der 'Eqron-Inschrift des 'kyš und den phönikischen Dedikationstexten aus Byblos," *UF* 31 (1999): 255-306.

8. For more recent studies, see W. Burkert and F. Stolz, eds., *Hymnen der Alten Welt im Kulturvergleich* (OBO 131; Fribourg: Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); M. Emmendörffer, *Der ferne Gott: Eine Untersuchung der alttestamentlichen Volksklagelieder vor dem Hintergrund der mesopotamischen Literatur* (FAT 21; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998). Still valuable is W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"* (Studia Pohl, Series Major 5; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976).

9. The scholarly literature on these texts is immense. It may suffice to refer readers to O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Götter, Göttinen und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (4th expanded ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 237-82, §§129-47.

10. The best edition of the texts is J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik,* vols. I, II/1, III (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), hereafter abbreviated *HAE.* Cf. the translation of the texts in *COS* 2.

Pithos 1: (*HAE* I:61; cf. *COS* 2.47A)

1. אמר א[. .] ה[. .]ך אמר ליהל[. .] וליועשה ו[. .] ברכת אתכם
   He has said [ ] speak to [ ] and to Yauʿāśā [ ] I bless you by
2. ליהוה שמרן ולעשרתה
   YHWH of Samaria and by his Asherah

Pithos 2: (*HAE* I:62; cf. *COS* 2.47B)

1-3. אמריו אומר ל אדני ו השלם א[ת]
   Amaryau: Speak to my lord: Are you in peace?
4-7. ברכתך לי הו[. .] ו ולאשרתה יבורך וישמרך
   I bless you by YHWH (of Teman?) and by his Asherah. May he bless you and keep you
8-9. ויהי עם אד[ו]
   and may he be with my Lord

One interesting fact is the grammatical distinction that is made in these formulas. Although the blessing that is spoken of a human being ("I bless you by YHWH") is formulated as ברכתך ל in the AK/perfect conjugation, the hope that the Lord is blessing a human ("He may bless you") is written in the PK/imperfect.

Only seldom are the wall inscriptions of Kuntillet Ajrud referred to. Here one can read at least one similar formula in inscription no. 3 (*HAE* I:59; cf. *COS* 2.47D):

1. [. .] ובזרח אל וימסן הרם [. .]
   [. .] When God is rising, the mountains are melting [. .]
2. [. .] ברך בעל בים מלח[מה. [. .]
   [. .] Blessed be Baʿal on the day of the war [. .]
3. [. .] לשם אל בים מלח[מה. [. .]
   [. .] by the name of God on the day of the war [. .]

These remains of a once longer text are a fragment of a hymnic song that can be compared to descriptions of God's theophany. The verbs used (זרח; מסס) are attested in biblical texts, such as Deut 33:2; Mal 3:20 (Eng. 4:1); or Mic 1:4.[11] Again, the interest of this investigation is in the formulation of the blessing only.

In this context, one should also mention the difficult inscription from the grave in Khirbet el-Qom. Its text is very close to those on the pithoi in Kuntillet Ajrud (*HAE* I:207-11; cf. *COS* 2.52):

11. Cf. the title in *COS* 2.47D, p. 173, "A Theophany of the Day of Battle."

1. **אריהו העשר כתבה**
   Uriyahu the rich wrote it
2. **ברך/ברכת אריהו ליהוה**
   blessed be/I bless[12] Uriyahu by YHWH
3. **ומצריה לאשרתה הושע לה**
   For from his enemies he has saved him by his Asherah
4. **לאניהו**
   by Oniyahu

One of the problems of this text is that it is very unusual for a grave inscription. Most of the other inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and from other graves follow the usual pattern "this grave belongs to X, son of Y." That is why Bill Dever has tried to reconstruct this type of inscription here too, but this theory has not been accepted.[13]

It has to be noted that there are no exact parallels to these formulations in the Hebrew Bible. Occasionally some formulas call a blessing upon YHWH himself, such as **ברוך אדני/יהוה** in doxologic formulas in Ps 68:20 (Eng. 19) (a praise spoken by the whole nation) or 72:18-19 (the conclusion of the second book of the Psalter).[14] One can also find the wishful expression "May N be blessed by/before YHWH" (**ברוך ליהוה**), for example, in Gen 14:19; Judg 17:2; feminine in Ruth 3:10.[15] All these biblical texts are formulated with the passive **בָּרוּךְ**,[16] which clearly distinguishes them from the inscriptional evidence (the wall inscription with the blessing of Baal is an exception). But they all share the strange use of the *lamed* in **ליהוה**,[17] which in the Hebrew Bible is never combined with a finite form of **ברך**.

12. Z. Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 (1984): 44, reads **ברכת** instead of **ברך**. This would fit nicely with the other examples of the formula. Nevertheless, this reading is far from certain; cf. *HAE* I:205, 208; J. M. Hadley, "The Khirbet El-Qom Inscription," *VT* 37 (1987): 54.

13. W. D. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Kôm," *HUCA* 40/41 (1969-70): 139-204. See the detailed discussion in *HAE* I:204-11; Hadley, "Khirbet el-Qom," 52ff.

14. See Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 18; C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of brk "to Bless" in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 95; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 152-53, 158-59.

15. Cf. also 1 Sam 15:13; 23:21 (pl.); 2 Sam 2:5; Ruth 2:20. See I. Lande, *Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangssprache im Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 9-11.

16. Mitchell, *Meaning*, 110-18, who came to the result that the *bārûk* formula should best be understood as an optative wish (pp. 111-12); see already GKC §116r.

17. For the use of the *lamed* in biblical texts, cf. the divergent positions of G. Wehmeier, *Der Segen im Alten Testament: Eine semasiologische Untersuchung der Wurzel brk* (diss.; Basel, 1970), 110; Mitchell, *Meaning*, 111-12. In my view it is obvious that the *lamed* should be seen as a *lamed auctoris* or *agentis;* see *IBHAS* §11.2.10g, p. 210.

Thus one should look for an even closer parallel. Because of the characteristic beginning of the texts on the pithoi, the openings or prescripts of Hebrew and Aramaic letters should be considered. As an example, the initial address and greeting of the letter on ostracon 16 from Arad reads (*HAE* I:379, 6th century):

1-3. **אחך חנניהו שלח לשלם אלישב ולשלם ביתך ברכתך ליהוה ועת**
Your brother Hananyahu sends greetings to Elyashib and your household. I bless you by YHWH. And now . . .[18]

The same blessing is found on Arad ostracon 21,[19] while the ostraca from Lachish have a different greeting, reading (ostraca 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9; see *HAE* I:411-30):

(Ostr. 1:1-3): **ישמע יהוה את אדני שמעת שלם**
may YHWH let my lord hear good news . . .[20]

Perhaps one can think of a territorial diversity in using those formulas, because all of the *bārak l^e^*-formulas come from the south. It is noteworthy that the form **ברכתך** in these ostraca appears only in a finite verbal form, "I bless you," not as a passive as in the biblical formulas.

This special initial greeting of a letter is also attested in the Phoenician language in a sixth-century papyrus from Saqqara (*KAI* 50):

1+2. **ברכתך לבעל צפן ולכל אל תחפנחס**
I bless you by Baʿal Zaphon and all Gods of Tachpanchas[21]

In Aramaic the blessing can be found in several letters from the sixth and fifth centuries from Hermopolis (Hermopolis 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 6; Lindenberger, *Letters,* 26-32): **ברכתכי לפתח**, "I bless you by Ptah"; in letter 5 even in plural formulation: **ברכנכן לפתח**, "We bless you by Ptah." Another parallel can be found on an Edomite ostracon from Horvat Uza (late 7th century, Lindenberger, *Letters,* 118). It is also possible to reconstruct this blessing in a fifth-century letter

18. Translation from J. M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (SBLWAW 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 110. Cf. pp. 6-7 on the form of the letters.

19. M. Weippert, "Zum Präskript der hebräischen Briefe von Arad," *VT* 25 (1975): 202-12, has seen this formula also in ostraca 1, 2, and 15.

20. Lindenberger, *Letters,* 110-15.

21. Ibid., 119-20.

from Elephantine (Lindenberger, *Letters,* 45: [ב]ברכתך ליהה ולחנ, "I bless you by YHH and Khnum (!)."

The evidence from these letters is unambiguous. One must therefore conclude that the blessings from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom are written in the form of the initial greeting formulas of letters.[22] In a form-critical perspective this leads to interesting results, because we can see a very important shift of the *Sitz im Leben* of such a formula from the personal, individual usage in a letter to a more public use in the Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions and another shift to the use in a grave as in the Khirbet el-Qom material. Even if we do not know exactly why the formulas were written on the pithoi, we can assume a kind of dedicatory function in a semi-official or private stratum of the Israelite religion. The shift from the use of the formula in letters to the usage on pithoi and walls is understandable if we assume that *scribes,* but not other officials such as priests, were responsible for these dedications. This consideration gains support from the fact that on pithos 2 remnants of several alphabets, which obviously were practice or exercises of a scribe, can be seen (*HAE* I:63). But that does not mean that the texts as a whole were mere exercises without a deeper meaning.[23] Perhaps we even know the name of one of these scribes, Oniyahu, who obviously wrote the inscription of Khirbet el-Qom.

The formulations taken from the prescripts of the letters invoke the blessing of YHWH onto the mentioned individuals in Kuntillet Ajrud. One can not be sure whether they were taken from real letters that were sent to the south from Samaria or Teman (as Keel and Uehlinger have proposed),[24] but the possibility remains. It is noteworthy that in any instance the formulation of the blessing refers to the name of the deity as the true source who grants the blessing. Thus the effectiveness of the blessing does not depend on the one who utters or writes the blessing, but on the power of the deity. Therefore these formulations can be compared to those biblical texts in which people invoke God's blessing on other humans (e.g., Gen 27:27-29; 28:3; 48:15-16);[25] these texts did preserve the more private formulations attested by the inscriptions.

22. Admittedly, this observation is not entirely new; cf. *HAE* II/1:11-16, 24; J. Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," *BASOR* 235 (1979): 27-30.

23. In *HAE* I:62 (obviously following A. Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* [OBO 39; Fribourg: Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981], 28) the content of the text on pithos 2 is given as *Schülerübung* (students' exercise), which is in my view not a sufficient description; cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *Götter,* 275.

24. *Götter,* 274n243.

25. According to Mitchell, *Meaning,* 79, these blessings should be named "declarative human blessings"; cf. pp. 79-131 for an exhaustive discussion of the problem and the scholarly debate.

Another problem is the function of the blessing in a grave. Here one should also consider the difficult inscriptions in the grave from Khirbet Beit Lei (Inscription B, *HAE* I:248; cf. *COS* 2.53), פקד יה אל חנן נקה יה יהוה, "Intervene, O compassionate God! Absolve, O YHWH!" and the well-known silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom (*HAE* I:447-56; *COS* 2.83). They obviously show the more official, priestly formulation of a blessing, but they share the wishful phrase יברכך וישמרך, "may he bless you and keep you," with the inscription on pithos 2 from Kuntillet Ajrud. The different texts supply evidence that already in preexilic times the power of God's blessing was not restricted to the lifetime of the faithful.[26]

One last fact is interesting to note with respect to biblical exegesis. The letters in the Hebrew Bible are never transmitted with an opening as we have seen it in Arad or Hermopolis,[27] with the possible exception of ועתה in 2 Kgs 5:6; 10:2. This can be seen as a hint that these texts were newly formulated or at least reworked when they were inserted into the current context.[28]

Royal Inscriptions and Punic Votive Inscriptions

If it is probable that the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud that we have examined were used as dedications or votive inscriptions, one should look for more texts with a comparable function. Two important inscriptions from a royal context should be mentioned. The first is the Aramaic prayer of King Zakkur from Hamat (*KAI* 202; *COS* 2.35, ca. 800 BCE).[29] In the text of the stele, the king reports the danger he experienced when ten kings were attack-

26. This is not the place to begin a discussion about the background of the idea of resurrection in the HB, but in my view there are more and more hints (including the abovementioned texts) arguing against the widely held position that this concept is a very late development. It may suffice to refer interested readers to K. Spronk, *Beatic Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986); or M. Albani, "Der Herr tötet und macht lebendig; er führt in die Unterwelt und wieder herauf. Zur Problematik der Auferstehungshoffnung im AT am Beispiel von 1 Sam 2,6," *Leqach* 1 (2001): 22-55.

27. Cf. 2 Sam 11:15; 1 Kgs 21:8-11; 2 Kgs 5:5-6; 10:1-7; etc. See Lindenberger, *Letters,* 6, for a helpful diagram of the form of the letters.

28. According to D. Pardee, "Letters (Hebrew)," *ABD* 4:285, "the brevity and sobriety [of the biblical letters] . . . bespeaks authenticity of form if not necessarily of content," but this is hardly convincing.

29. For a form-critical investigation of this text cf. H. J. Zobel, "Das Gebet um Abwendung der Not und seine Erhörung in den Klageliedern des Alten Testaments und in der Inschrift des Königs Zakir von Hamath," *VT* 21 (1971): 91-99.

ing his city. In this situation he raised his hands to Baal-Shamen, who then answered his complaint and told him that he would be saved. Thus this inscription shows the classical basic structure, complaint-petition-praise, like most of the individual biblical complaint psalms (cf. Ps 13),[30] including the acknowledgment of the divine response. Unfortunately the exact wording of the prayer is not handed down to us nor any accompanying rituals.

The same structure of praising God after the experience of salvation can be seen in the famous inscription of King Mesha from Moab (*KAI* 181; *COS* 2.23; ca. 835 BCE). The text belongs to the genre of building inscriptions; the king states that he has built this sanctuary because his god Chemosh saved him after his anger came against the land. Again, nothing is said about accompanying cultic practices, but perhaps 2 Kgs 3:27 has kept the information about the ritual the king celebrated when calling to his god — he offered his son. This brings us to the Phoenician religion.

A very interesting yet seldom studied source for dedications are the Punic votive inscriptions.[31] The motifs used in these inscriptions are stereotyped, the sequence is flexible. The texts belong to a special, heavily disputed kind of offering, the *mlk* offering.[32] Obviously these offerings have been celebrated in situations of trouble or affliction (see *COS* 1.198, 4-5, *nsb mlkt bmsrm,* "a stele of an offering in affliction"). Sometimes these offerings seem to accompany a ceremony of thanksgiving and blessing (*KAI* 98):

> לאדן לבעל חמן [נצ]ב מלך בעל אזרם
> אש נדר בעלשלך בן עזרבעל בן מתר כ שמא קל יברכא
> To the lord, to Baʿal Hammon, a stele of an offering instead of an infant, which vowed BʿLSHLK, son of ʿZRBʿL, son of MTR, because he has heard (his) call, may he bless him.

Cf. also the vow in *KAI* 97:

> אש נדר מגן בן אנתחן
> (This is) what MGN, son of ʾNTHN, has vowed.

30. Cf. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1,* 11-16, for the genre; 83-86 for Ps 13.

31. For the following cf. H.-P. Müller, "Punische Weihinschriften und alttestamentliche Psalmen im religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang," *Or* 67 (1998): 477-96.

32. H.-P. Müller. "Genesis 22 und das *mlk*-Opfer: Erinnerung an einen religionsgeschichtlichen Tatbestand," *BZ* 41 (1997): 237-46; Klaus Koch, "Molek astral," in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Fest. H.-P. Müller; BZAW 278; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1999), 19-50.

Very close to biblical pleas like Ps 27:7 ("Hear, O Lord, my voice; have mercy and answer me"; cf. *KAI* 33.3; 77.3-4) are inscriptions that explicitly state, "for he has heard his voice" (*KAI* 103; cf. also 104, 105):

> מלך אדם נדר אש נדר בעלפדא בן מגן שמא קלא ברכא
> an offering of a man, a vow that vowed B'LPD', son of MGN,
> (because) he has heard his call (and) blessed him.

The inscriptions often end with a blessing, a rare phenomenon that can be seen also in Ps 129:8. Again, these inscriptions can be compared to elements of biblical psalms, such as the songs of thanksgiving or the vows to praise God in the complaint psalms, which are often combined with the promise that an offering will be celebrated (Ps 27:6; 54:8-9 [Eng. 6-7]). The brevity of the inscriptions and the stereotyped formulations indicate that the texts stem from an originally oral use. Eventually they were written on the stelae. Perhaps, as H.-P. Müller has assumed, all these dedications and psalms were written after the one uttering the prayer had experienced God's intervention.[33] This would easily explain why the complaint is often followed by praise; it is a characteristic of the genre that refers back to an actual *Sitz im Leben,* a cultic ceremony of thanksgiving. This speaks against the widely held theory that the *Stimmungsumschwung* (transition or change of mood) in these psalms is a psychological development in the process of a prayer.[34]

The biblical psalms as we have them today show only traces of this development, and one cannot regain the once-felt confidence to reconstruct in detail the specific sociological contexts from which they came.[35] In any case, comparison with the evidence of the above-mentioned inscriptions makes clear that the original *Sitz im Leben* of these psalms cannot be described without the cultic or ritual background.

33. "Punische Weihinschriften," 487.

34. See most recently Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100,* 92, on Ps 54:8-9 (Eng. 6-7); although an offering is clearly mentioned in v. 8, Hossfeld speaks only about the prayer and the question whether it was uttered in the temple. M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 45, 48, realizes the importance of the thanksgiving ceremony and clearly distinguishes vv. 8-9 from the rest of the psalm.

35. Cf. also the reservations expressed by R. C. Van Leeuwen, pp. 72-73, 80-82 in this volume.

Larger Compositions

In the last section of this essay I turn to larger textual units. One of the most important findings is the Balaam inscription from Tell Deir Alla, because here mention is made of a seer named Balaam ben Beor (*COS* 2.27). There can be no doubt that this inscription from the ninth or eighth century refers to the same Balaam as the biblical account in Numbers 22–24.[36] What interests us here is the form-critical assessment of the text. The first line, written in red, is the highlighted heading, reading, ספר בלעם בן בער, "This is the *sefer* of Balaam, son of Beor." Then follows an account about this visionary in the third-person singular (ll. 2-17), and after that a vision can be read. Because of the damage the inscription has suffered, one can only guess whether the text once ended with this visionary experience or whether it comes back to the narration.[37]

The genre of this text has to be seen in the context of prophetic stories.[38] More specifically it can be called a "prophetic apophthegma."[39] According to the definition by Rudolf Bultmann, this is a story that ascribes a specific saying to a concrete person. In the Hebrew Bible we have one example for this genre in Amos 7:10-17, a narration centered on the prophecy against the king of Israel and the question whether Amos is a prophet.[40] One can also think of the visionary account in Isaiah 6 pointing to v. 9, "Hear, but understand not; and see, but perceive not," or of Isaiah 7, pointing to v. 9, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Another late example may be seen in the book of Jonah with its single prophecy against Nineveh in 3:4.

Even more interesting is that the text was inscribed on a wall. Although the function of the room cannot be described with certainty, one should as-

36. See the most recent studies by M. Rösel, "Wie einer vom Propheten zum Verführer wird: Tradition und Rezeption der Bileamgestalt," *Bib* 80 (1999): 506-24; and B. A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 241-75.

37. See Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 275, who states, "It is tempting to regard Combination II as a dramatic description of Balaam's own tragedy."

38. Cf. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 20-22.

39. So M. Weippert, "Der "Bileam"-Text von *Tell Dēr ʿAllā* und das Alte Testament," in *Jahwe und die anderen Götter* (FAT 18; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997), 174.

40. As for Amos 7:10-17 see most recently J. Werlitz, "Amos und sein Biograph: Zur Entstehung und Intention der Prophetenerzählung Am 7,10-17," *BZ* 44 (2000): 233-51. Although he argues that the text is a late composition, serving as "redaktionelle Bucheinschreibung" (p. 250), he concludes that the statement in v. 14, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees," should be seen as an older tradition because of its poetic style and underivable diction. This fits perfectly the definition of an apophthegma.

sume that it was a meeting place of a group of prophets, *bᵉnê nᵉbî'îm*, where the visions and deeds of that Balaam were remembered.[41] It should be noted that this relatively long text was written in comparatively early times. This could serve as an argument against the tendency to date similar biblical texts to very late times. Moreover, we have a hint to the *Sitz im Leben* of these texts. First, one can certainly assume that the wall inscription is a kind of secondary usage of the text, for it must have been composed on other material like papyrus that is now lost.[42] Second, that the writing appeared on a wall means that its content could be known by a lot of people, not only by scribes. Although it is true that illiteracy was normal at these times, one should assume that even illiterate persons would ask about this inscription and that the text had been commemorated by the *bᵉnê nᵉbî'îm*. Thus the text and the visionary became well known, even in Israel, as Numbers 22–24 proves.

One more consideration can be added. When working with biblical texts we often assume a shorter or longer history of oral transmission prior to its literary recording. The inscriptional evidence confronts us with the phenomenon of wall inscriptions in more public rooms. We have seen the phenomenon in Kuntillet Ajrud, Deir Alla, and on the stelae of Zakkur and Mesha as well. One could also recall the Tell Dan stele (*COS* 2.29), the Ekron inscription (*COS* 2.42), or the inscription from the Ophel in Jerusalem.[43] This necessarily leads to the assumption that even a written text can have an ongoing oral tradition until it is newly written down. From a methodological standpoint, this assumption makes things more complicated but historically more adequate. A second problem is that we should also consider the possibility that texts we now have in the Bible were initially composed to serve as a kind of wall inscription. There are enough indications that those

41. So convincingly R. Wenning and E. Zenger, "Heiligtum ohne Stadt — Stadt ohne Heiligtum? Anmerkungen zum archäologischen Befund des *Tell Dēr 'Allā'*," *ZAH* 4 (1991): 171-93, esp. 189-92. The problem is that there are no contemporary characteristics of sacral or cultic architecture and equipment; therefore they conclude that the building probably served as a meeting place for a group of prophets.

One should remember 2 Kgs 8:4, the retelling of the *gᵉdôlōt* that Elisha had done, or the important text Isa 8:16 concerning the sealing of the teaching among the disciples, which — interestingly enough — is embedded in a larger prophetic instruction (Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 179).

42. M. Nissinen, "Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and M. H. Floyd; SBLSymS 10; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 250.

43. M. Ben Dov, "A Fragmentary First Temple Period Hebrew Inscription from the Ophel," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed* (ed. H. Geva; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 73-75.

inscriptions were known to biblical authors; cf. the plaster inscription from Deut 27:2; Daniel 5; or Job 19:23-24, in which Job wishes that his words were recorded and graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock.[44] One can easily assume that prophetic texts such as a model of Amos 7:10-17 or his visions might once have been used in this or a similar way,[45] even after the confirmation of the prophecies following the events of 722 BCE.[46] One can also think of a *sēper milḥāmōt YHWH* (Num 21:14) or the *sēper hayyāšār* (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18). Another important candidate could be the dedication of the temple by Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:12-13, which according to the longer and probably more original LXX version is written in the "book of the song [corrected to *yāšār*]."[47] Likewise, the *sēper* of the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chr 16:11) may have originated in wall inscriptions in the palace in Jerusalem.[48] Obviously there was a pattern for those texts,[49] and since monumental inscriptions like these are well known from Israel's neighbors, it is hard to tell whether they would have been influential in Judah or Israel.[50] As a support for these considerations it should be noted that according to a recent study by Siegfried Kreuzer, even the structure of the story of King David can be explained in the light of West Semitic royal inscriptions.[51] Margaret S.

44. Cf. also 1 Sam 15:12, in which Saul set up a monument for himself (**והנה מציב לו יד**), or 2 Sam 8:13, in which David won a name (**ויעש דויד שם**). Even the Siloam Tunnel Inscription can be mentioned here; see *COS* 2.28.

45. One should remember the **לוח** from Isa 30:8; Jer 17:1; Hab 2:2. See also the **ספר הזה** in Jer 25:13 and Isa 8:16 (see above n. 41).

46. Admittedly, this is speculation only. But seen before the background of the evidence collected by Nissinen, "Spoken," 250-51, 270, this assumption is probable. The divine messages would be archived and later interpreted and applied. This does not necessarily mean that the text of those inscriptions was identical with the biblical texts as we have them today; the scribal activity surely went on in the process of tradition and reception. The question to what extent one has to assume later expansions remains disputed.

47. 1 Kgs 8:12-13, **אז אמר שלמה יהוה אמר לשכן בערפל: בנה בניתי בית זבל לך מכון לשבתך עולמים:**; LXX + οὐκ ἰδοὺ αὕτη γέγραπται ἐν βιβλίῳ τῆς ᾠδῆς [**הישר** > **השיר**?]. Cf. already M. Noth, *Könige (1,1–16)* (2d ed.; BKAT IX; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 172-73.

48. Cf. N. Na'aman, "Royal Inscriptions and the Histories of Joash and Ahaz, Kings of Judah," *VT* 48 (1998): 333-49.

49. A. S. Kapelrud, "Two Great Rulers and Their Temple Buildings," in *Text and Theology* (Fest. M. Sæbø; ed. A. Tångberg; Oslo: Verbum, 1994), 135-42.

50. See the important article by S. B. Parker, "Did the Authors of the Books of Kings Make Use of Royal Inscriptions?" *VT* 50 (2000): 357-78, who collects the evidence but comes to a negative conclusion. In his view the authors of Kings did not use royal epigraphic monuments (p. 375), although he accepts the possibility that an Israelite king list was used.

51. S. Kreuzer, "'. . . und der Herr half David in allem, was er unternahm'. Die

Odell has attempted to explain the book of Ezekiel with Assyrian building inscriptions.[52]

Only short mention can be made of Papyrus Amherst 63, which only of late has come to the attention of scholars. This is a considerably long papyrus from the fourth century written in the Aramaic language with Demotic script.[53] It should interest the scholarly community because in col. 12 one can find a clear parallel to Psalm 20, and in col. 13 to Psalm 75. Moreover, in my view, col. 8:7 mentions YHWH and Asherah as a divine couple, but whether the papyrus reads YHW is heavily disputed.[54]

In its latter parts it gives proof for a consideration that was more or less speculative until now, that is, that a monumental inscription has made its way to a completely different literary composition. Here a story about the fight between Assurbanipal and his brother Shamash-shum-Ukin (652-648 BCE) is recorded that has previously been known from monumental reliefs and inscriptions in Nineveh.[55] Moreover, this interesting papyrus shows the arrangement of individual songs (laments and hymns as well) in a larger collection that can be compared to the early stages of the formation of the Psalter, such as the songs of Asaph or Korah. But since research has just begun, nothing more can be said at this time.[56]

The results of this brief investigation can easily be summarized. It is evident that the use of form-critical questions and methods can give new insights into the inscriptional material and the biblical texts as well. It could be demonstrated that the inscriptions allow us to draw some careful conclusions

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Davidgeschichte in ihrem inneren Zusammenhang und im Licht der westsemitischen Königsinschriften," in *Verbindungslinien* (Fest. W. H. Schmidt; ed. A. Graupner, H. Delkurt, and A. B. Ernst; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 187-205.

52. Pages 162-76 in this volume.

53. The translation in *COS* 1.99 is, according to the translator R. C. Steiner, "an interim progress report" (p. 310). The text is extremely difficult.

54. As an introduction to the problems of this papyrus and the history of research, see M. Rösel, "Israels Psalmen in Ägypten? Papyrus Amherst 63 und die Psalmen XX und LXXV," *VT* 50 (2000): 81-99. Here arguments can be found that the reading/translation "YHW/YH" is the most probable.

55. See S. M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergang Niniveh's*, part 1, *Einleitung;* part 2, *Texte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1916), 260-74, 288-300; R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, "Ashurbanipal and Shamash-Shum-Ukin: A Tale of Two Brothers from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," *RB* 92 (1985): 60-81, pls. I-IV.

56. To get an impression of the problems, one could consult I. Kottsieper, "Anmerkungen zu Pap. Amherst 63, I: 12,11-19 — Eine aramäische Version von Psalm 20," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 217-44; idem, "Teil II-V," *UF* 29 (1997): 385-434.

about the *Sitz im Leben* and the use of related biblical texts. Although it is true that reconstructing the actual sociological context of the texts is hardly ever possible, we have access to a more original use of comparable texts. Thus we are able to reconstruct the development from those older, extrabiblically attested texts to the form of the texts as they now appear in the Bible. This can prevent exegetes from regarding the biblical texts too easily as mere literary constructions without a meaningful relation to a historical reality. Thus the inscriptional evidence brings us back to one of the most important insights of the form-critical method, that the texts cannot be separated from the social life of the community from which they come.