

## Additional Notes on "The Last Words of David" (2 Sam 23,1-7)

In a recent article in this journal I advanced the theory that the poem entitled "The Last Words of David" in 2 Sam 23,1-7 was a northern composition<sup>(1)</sup>. I based this conclusion on the fact that these seven verses include six non-normative Hebrew usages which either are paralleled in Aramaic, Phoenician, and Ugaritic, or are to be found elsewhere in the Bible only in other northern texts. Accordingly, this poem is one of the outstanding samples of Israelian Hebrew (IH)<sup>(2)</sup> preserved in the biblical corpus<sup>(3)</sup>.

In the present note I wish to put forward two additional points which bolster my hypothesis. One is another indication of IH, namely the use of the root *n'm*, and the other is a shared literary motif with the Deir 'Alla inscription.

### I. The Root *n'm*

In v. 1 of the poem we encounter the expression *n'îm z'mîrôt yiśrā'el*, traditionally rendered "the sweet singer of Israel" (thus *JPSV*)<sup>(4)</sup>. The word *n'îm* comes from the root *n'm* meaning "sweet, pleasant, good, lovely, delightful, etc."<sup>(5)</sup>. Although this root is relatively rare in Hebrew, it is the normal word for "good, sweet, pleasant, etc." in Ugaritic and Phoenician<sup>(6)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> G. A. RENDSBURG, "The Northern Origin of 'The Last Words of David' (2 Sam 23,1-7)", *Bib* 69 (1988) 113-121.

<sup>(2)</sup> I have coined this term based on H. L. GINSBERG, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (New York 1982).

<sup>(3)</sup> I have collected a large amount of material describing IH in G. A. RENDSBURG, "Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects in Ancient Hebrew", *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (W. BODINE, ed.) (Winona Lake, IN, forthcoming).

<sup>(4)</sup> Recently scholars have suggested that the second word in this phrase should not be connected with the root "sing" (PS *zmr*), rather it should be related to the root "protect, strong" (PS *dmr*). For complete discussion see P. K. MCCARTER, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, NY 1984) 480. However one sides on this issue is of no ultimate consequence for our present concern; on the other hand see below, n. 19.

<sup>(5)</sup> BDB, 653; and KB, 622.

<sup>(6)</sup> For the Ugaritic documentation and for a general statement on *n'm* in Ugaritic and Phoenician, see C. H. GORDON, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome 1967) 445. Although it is not listed as such, I would add *n'm* to the list of lexicographical

As an indication of its common usage in Phoenician, I would point out that R. S. Tombaek lists 13 occurrences of *n'm* in his lexicon<sup>(7)</sup>. By comparison, in a much larger corpus of literature, note that *n'm* occurs only 30 times in the Bible. Furthermore, *n'm* is a fairly common element in Phoenician personal names<sup>(8)</sup>. In addition, *n'mn* is the Phoenician name for Adonis<sup>(9)</sup>, and the same name is borne by one of the leading Aramean characters in the Bible, the general Naaman (2 Kgs 5). Moreover, the word *n'm* appears in Egyptian hieratic script in Papyrus Anastasi I, column 23, line 5, in the midst of a discussion concerning northern Canaan in general, with specific mention of Megiddo and Asher in the adjoining lines<sup>(10)</sup>. All of this suggests that the root *n'm* was common in areas to the north of Israel, Phoenicia in particular but perhaps Aram as well.

More importantly, of the 30 biblical occurrences of *n'm*, the vast majority occurs in texts where northern origin is likely. Nine times *n'm* occurs in Proverbs<sup>(11)</sup>, twice it appears in Song of Songs (1,16; 7,7)<sup>(12)</sup>, and once it is used in Job (36,11)<sup>(13)</sup>. It is attested to ten times in Psalms. Of these, two are in Ps 16, 6.11, one occurs in Ps 81,3, one occurs in Ps 133,1, and two are in Ps 141,4.6. These are all northern compositions, as the following details demonstrate.

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features distinguishing Phoenic from Hebraic according to the classification system of H. L. GINSBERG, "The Northwest Semitic Languages", *Patriarchs* (B. MAZAR, ed.) (The World History of the Jewish People, II; Tel-Aviv 1970) 105.

(7) R. S. TOMBACK, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (Missoula, MT 1978) 215-217. This work is only a dictionary, not a concordance of the Phoenician inscriptions. Additional instances of the root *n'm* are to be found in the corpus of Phoenician and Punic epigraphic remains.

(8) F. L. BENZ, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (Rome 1972) 102, 146-147, 176, 185, 362.

(9) See W. F. ALBRIGHT, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London 1968) 186-187.

(10) For text, translation, and notes, see A. H. GARDINER, *Egyptian Hieratic Texts* (Leipzig 1911) 25\*, 68.

(11) The northern affinities of Proverbs have been discussed by W. F. ALBRIGHT, "Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom", *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (M. NOTH and D. W. THOMAS, eds.) (VTS 3; Leiden 1960) 1-15; GINSBERG, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism*, 36; and Y. AVISHUR, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984) 440, and his reference in n. 6. See also RENDSBURG, "Northern Origin", 117.

(12) The subject of the northern origin of the Song of Songs merits further research. See, however, S. R. DRIVER, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York 1906) 448-449; M. H. POPE, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City, NY 1977) 33-34, 362; Y. AVISHUR, "Le-Ziqā ha-Signonit ben Shir ha-Shirim ve-Sifrut 'Ugarit", *Beth Mikra* 59 (1974) 508-525; and AVISHUR, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs*, 440.

(13) On Job as a northern composition see D. N. FREEDMAN, "Orthographic Peculiarities in the Book of Job", *Eretz-Israel* 9 (W. F. Albright Volume) (1969) 35-44.

Psalm 16 contains numerous features of IH<sup>(14)</sup>: four attestations of the negative particle *bal*<sup>(15)</sup>; the orthography *'mrt* for *'āmartî* "I said" (v. 2)<sup>(16)</sup>; two examples of the preservation of the feminine nominal ending *-āt* (vv. 5 and 6)<sup>(17)</sup>; the root *špr* "pleasing, beautiful" (v. 6) which is standard in Aramaic but rare in Hebrew<sup>(18)</sup>; the form *šēmāhôt* (v. 11), meaning "joy" in the singular not the plural<sup>(19)</sup>, reflecting the Phoenician shift of short *a* to *o*<sup>(20)</sup>; and the parallel word-pair *n'm* and *šb'* (v. 11) which is unique in the Bible but is well-known from the Phoenician inscription of King Azitawadda<sup>(21)</sup>.

Psalm 81 has long been recognized as a northern composition<sup>(22)</sup>. One of the key markers in this chapter is the term *bîhôsēp* "in Joseph", which has both substantive and linguistic implications. A reference to Joseph automatically flags the poem as a northern text, and the non-elision of the *he* in this form is another element of IH<sup>(23)</sup>. Furthermore, the word *keseh* (v. 4) is rare in Hebrew<sup>(24)</sup> but it has cognates in Phoenician and Ugaritic<sup>(25)</sup>; ac-

(14) M. DAHOOD, *Psalms I* (AB 16; Garden City, NY 1965) 87, noted that "the language and style are peculiarly Phoenician". AVISHUR, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs*, 461, stated that Psalm 16 "contains a large Canaanite, and especially Phoenician substrate". I would simply alter these judgments by stating that the chapter was written by a north Israelite poet whose Hebrew dialect included many isoglosses with Phoenician.

(15) See RENDSBURG, "Northern Origin", 117 and n. 31.

(16) DAHOOD, *Psalms I*, 87.

(17) See RENDSBURG, "Morphological Evidence".

(18) The other two biblical attestations are in Gen 49,21 and Job 26,13. The former appears in Jacob's blessing to Naphtali, one of the northernmost tribes, and the latter appears in a book with much Aramaic coloring. I exclude from consideration the noun *šaprîrô* "his canopy (?)" in Jer 43,10, which may or may not be related to our root.

(19) Elsewhere this form occurs only in Ps 45,16, which virtually all scholars recognize as a northern composition. Thus C. A. BRIGGS, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh 1906) 384; H. GUNKEL, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen 1926) 193; M. D. GOULDER, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield 1982); etc. For other examples of feminine singular nouns ending in *-ôt*, see RENDSBURG, "Morphological Evidence". Some scholars have understood *zēmîrôt* in 2 Sam 23,1 as singular, to be translated either "song" or "stronghold"; see MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 477, 480. I do not necessarily accept this interpretation, but if it is correct then there would be still another IH element in "The Last Words of David".

(20) J. FRIEDRICH and W. RÖLLIG, *Phönizisch-punische Grammatik* (Rome 1970) 29-30, 106-107. The length of the *o* vowel is unclear. For full discussion of all the pertinent data, notwithstanding a contrary conclusion, see A. DOTAN, "Stress Position and Vowel Shift in Phoenician and Punic", *Israel Oriental Studies* 6 (1976) 71-121.

(21) AVISHUR, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs*, 452, 461.

(22) GUNKEL, *Psalmen*, 359; GINSBERG, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism*, 31-32; S. LOEWENSTAMM, "'ēdût bîhôsēp", *Eretz-Israel* 5 (B. Mazar Volume) (1958) 80-82; and M. J. BUSS, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah", *JBL* 82 (1963) 382-392.

(23) RENDSBURG, "Northern Origin", 116.

(24) Elsewhere it occurs only in Prov 7,20 (where it is spelled *kese'*) in a section replete with northernisms; see above n. 11.

(25) See M. DAHOOD, *Psalms II* (AB 17; Garden City, NY 1968) 264.

cordingly it must have been a feature of IH but not of Judahite Hebrew in which the great majority of the Bible is composed.

Psalms 133 is another poem with northern affinities<sup>(26)</sup>. Not only does the poem mention Mt. Hermon, but it contains two important characteristics of IH. These are the relative particle *še-* (v. 3)<sup>(27)</sup>; and the reduplicatory plural *harêrê* "mountains of" (v. 3)<sup>(28)</sup>.

Psalms 141 has been thoroughly treated by R. Tournay who cited many Phoenicianisms in the poem<sup>(29)</sup>, and by M. Dahood, who specified "the Phoenician territory as the probable place of this poem's composition"<sup>(30)</sup>. These include *dal* "door" (v. 3), *'išîm* "men" (v. 4), *bal* "not" (v. 4), and *man'ammêhem* "their delicacies" (v. 4) (with our root *n'm*). To these terms add the following IH elements: the use of the root *lhm* "eat" (v. 4)<sup>(31)</sup>; and the form *yānî* "my wine" (v. 5) reflecting monophthongization of *ay* > *ā*<sup>(32)</sup>.

Other instances of *n'm* also have northern connections. Gen 49,15 is Jacob's blessing to Issachar, one of the northern tribes. Isa 17,10 appears in the address to Damascus and Ezek 32,19 appears in the address to Egypt. In these two instances it is more than probable that style-switching or code-switching is operating. This is a rhetorical device, recently studied by S. A. Kaufman, in which biblical writers (and particularly the prophets) produced "intentional stylistic representations" of the speech of Israel's neighbors<sup>(33)</sup>.

<sup>(26)</sup> GUNKEL, *Psalmen*, 571.

<sup>(27)</sup> E. Y. KUTSCHER, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem 1982) 32.

<sup>(28)</sup> E. Y. KUTSCHER, "Ha-Šafa ha-'Ivrit u-Venot Liwyata be-Meshek ha-Dorot", *Hadoar* 47 (1968-69) 507-509 [reprinted in E. Y. KUTSCHER, *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (Jerusalem 1977)]; and RENDSBURG, "Morphological Evidence".

<sup>(29)</sup> R. TOURNAY, "Le psaume cxli", *VT* 9 (1959) 63. For an earlier statement, though with no supporting evidence, see the opinion of H. L. Ginsberg cited by W. F. ALBRIGHT, "Recent Progress in North-Canaanite Research", *BASOR* 70 (1938) 23-24, n. 22.

<sup>(30)</sup> M. DAHOOD, *Psalms III* (AB 17A; Garden City, NY 1970) 309.

<sup>(31)</sup> RENDSBURG, "Northern Origin", 117 and n. 32.

<sup>(32)</sup> Note that the word *yānî* "my wine" is parallel to *šemen* "oil", as is also the case in Amos 6,6; Mic 6,15; Ps 104,15; Cant 1,2-3; 4,10 (see also Deut 28,39-40; Prov 21,17; 2 Chr 11,11; for Ugaritic examples see *UT* 126:III:15-16; 128:IV:4-5; 128:IV:15-16). See further AVISHUR, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs*, 367-368. For extended discussion of *yānî* in Ps 141,5, see G. A. RENDSBURG, "Monophthongization of *aw/ay* > *ā* in Eblaite and in Northwest Semitic", *Ebla-Itica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and the Eblaite Language*, Vol. 2 (C. H. GORDON and G. A. RENDSBURG, eds.) (Winona Lake, IN, forthcoming).

<sup>(33)</sup> S. A. KAUFMAN, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof", *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages) (Jerusalem 1988) 55. See also N. H. TUR-SINAI, "'Aramit: Hashpa'at ha-'Aramit 'al ha-'Ivrit shel ha-Miqra'", *Enšiqlopediya Miqra'it* 1 (1965) 593-594; J. C. GREENFIELD, "Aramaic Studies and the Bible", *Congress Volume Vienna 1980* (J. A. EMERTON, ed.) (VTS 32; Leiden 1981) 129-130; and G. A. RENDSBURG, "Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible", *VT* 38 (1988) 356.

Isaiah's phraseology *nit'ê na'āmānīm*, literally "plants of pleasantness" (thus *JPSV*) but more idiomatically "plant-beds of Adonis", is especially striking because a) it uses the root *n'm*; b) it demonstrates a knowledge of pagan concepts<sup>(34)</sup>; and c) it involves the syntagma of a "double plural" (both *nomen regens* and *nomen rectum* are plural) which S. Gevirtz recognized as a northern phenomenon<sup>(35)</sup>. As far as Ezekiel is concerned, it is true that Egypt (and not a northern setting) is involved. However, given the close ties between Egypt and Byblos from at least the 3rd Millennium BCE, whatever Canaanite may have been known in Egypt was probably of the Phoenician dialectal type. Thus I would suggest that the prophet tinged his Hebrew with a northern feature such as the root *n'm* in addressing Egypt.

With four usages of *n'm* the connections with northern Israel are not as evident, but even with these some ties may be possible. The two passages in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1,16.26) are admittedly from the pen of a Judahite poet, but the setting is Gilboa and the two slain heroes are Benjaminites<sup>(36)</sup>. Finally, the two cases in Zech 11,7.10, are either to be explained as northern influence over post-Exilic Hebrew<sup>(37)</sup>, or as continuations of the address to Lebanon in 11,1-3.

If we now add our example from 2 Sam 23,1, maximally 26 of 30 or minimally 22 of 30 usages of the root *n'm* in the Bible are in northern texts<sup>(38)</sup>.

<sup>(34)</sup> ALBRIGHT, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 186-187.

<sup>(35)</sup> S. GEVIRTZ, "Of Syntax and Style in the 'Late Biblical Hebrew' — 'Old Canaanite' Connection", *JANES* 18 (1986) 28-29; and S. GEVIRTZ, "Asher in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis xlix 20)", *VT* 37 (1987) 160.

<sup>(36)</sup> Benjamin is, of course, only a few miles north of Judah and Jerusalem, but as the modern study of dialect geography teaches us, this is no reason to assume that the same variety of Hebrew was spoken in the two locales. In modern Israel, for example, trained speakers of colloquial Arabic can often pinpoint the locale of a particular speaker to his village. In Great Britain this is a popular sport as well, and the Henry Higgins character of George Bernard Shaw fame is not as great an exaggeration as it may seem. See Shaw's "Preface to Pygmalion: A Professor of Phonetics" in *Pygmalion* (Baltimore 1951) 7-10. Moreover, I have detected several IH features in the stories of Saul and Samuel set in the territory of Benjamin and Ephraim; see RENDSBURG, "Morphological Evidence".

<sup>(37)</sup> On this phenomenon see C. H. GORDON, "North Israelite Influence on Postexilic Hebrew", *IEJ* 5 (1955) 85-88; and KUTSCHER, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 55.

<sup>(38)</sup> The four passages not referred to thus far are Ps 27,4; 90,17; 135,3; 147,1. There is neither a concentration of northern forms in these poems nor mention of northern geographical terms. Accordingly, these psalms probably are Judahite in origin. In all of these cases, however, I think we can understand why the particular poet chose to use the root *n'm*. In the two cases of Ps 135,3; 147,1, *nā'im* serves as the B-word for the much more common A-word *tōb*. On this phenomenon see G. R. DRIVER, "Hebrew Poetic Diction", *Congress Volume Copenhagen 1953* (VTS 1; Leiden 1953) 26-39. In Ps 90,17 *nō'am* acts to cement a most interesting inclusio with Ps 90,1. The last verse of the poem begins with the phrase *nō'am 'ādōnāy*, while the first words of the poem (following the superscription) are *'ādōnāy mā'ōn*. Note that *nō'am* and *mā'ōn* are palindromes of each other, involving both consonants and vowels. On the inclusio in general see DAHOOD, *Psalms II*, 322, 327. Finally, Ps 27,4 presumably

I consider this a significant ratio<sup>(39)</sup>. Coupled with the Phoenician and Ugaritic evidence, I conclude that *n'm* was commonly used in IH, and only very rarely employed in the dialect of Judah. Accordingly, it serves as a seventh point in favor of my earlier conclusion concerning the northern origin of "The Last Words of David".

## II. A Shared Motif with the Deir 'Alla Text

Kaufman has not only alerted scholars to the phenomenon of style-switching in his aforementioned article, he has also detected an interesting parallel between the Deir 'Alla (DA) text and our poem. I quote him in full:

But I think the visions and oracles of Balaam recorded in the DA text have another echo in the Bible, in the "last words of David" (II Sam. 23:1-7). That this cryptic oracle is introduced by the same phrase (*n'm* PN *wn'm hgr*) that begins the oracle of Balaam has always been evident. But what is the connection between the two texts? When we read in David's last words the line: *ûk'ôr bōqer yizrah šāmeš bōqer lô' 'ābôt minnōgah mimmāṭār deše' mē'āreṣ: kī lô' kēn bêtî 'îm 'ēl...* a line that sounds as if it were lifted right out of the DA text, the connection becomes clear. Note especially the phrase *lô' 'ābôt*, the emphasis on light (*ngh*!) vs. darkness (antithetic to DA) and the appearance of the divine appellation *'l*<sup>(40)</sup>.

Little needs to be added to this clear statement. It is true that the contrast between light and darkness is a universal literary motif. That is to say, not only the author of the Deir 'Alla text and the northern poet responsible for 2 Sam 23,1-7 could use this imagery, but obviously a writer in Jerusalem could do so just as easily. Thus, we should be careful not to conclude that the emphasis on light vs. darkness is automatically a non-Judahite feature. However, in so far as the two texts use *ngh* "light", *'b* "cloud", and *'l* "God/El", Kaufman is certainly correct to relate their common phraseology. In a concluding note to my earlier article on 2 Sam 23,1-7 I ventured "the possibility that the poem stems from Mahanaim in Trans-Jordan"<sup>(41)</sup>. In light of the connections made by Kaufman, the short distance between Deir 'Alla and Mahanaim (about 18 km.) may support this suggestion.

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uses *b'nō'am yhwh* as a variant to *b'ṭūb yhwh* in Ps 27,13. See further DAHOOD, *Psalms I*, 167, 170.

<sup>(39)</sup> Compare the methodology employed by M. TSEVAT, *A Study of the Language of the Biblical Psalms* (Philadelphia 1955).

<sup>(40)</sup> KAUFMAN, "Classification", 54.

<sup>(41)</sup> RENDSBURG, "Northern Origin", 121, n. 55.

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