

JONATHAN MILES ROBKER

Balaam in  
Text and Tradition

*Forschungen  
zum Alten Testament*

131

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Forschungen zum Alten Testament

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131





Jonathan Miles Robker

# Balaam in Text and Tradition

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-156355-3 / eISBN 978-3-16-156356-0

DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-156356-0

ISSN 0940-4155 / eISSN 2568-8359 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen, and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

## Foreword

This monograph presents a reformatted version of my *Habilitationsschrift*, which was accepted at the University of Münster in January 2018. Prof. Dr. Reinhard Achenbach and Prof. Dr. Reinhard Müller served as reviewers for the committee. Other than formatting and some minor typographical issues, the content of this volume is identical with the manuscript submitted to the university. The initial impetus for this research stemmed from the project “Traditions- und Redaktionsprozesse im Buch Numeri und ihr Zusammenhang mit der Entstehung des Pentateuch” under the auspices of Christian Frevel (Bochum), Thomas Pola (Dortmund), and Aaron Schart (Essen) during my time as a researcher in Essen from 2011–2013.

Through the aforementioned research project, I gained substantial insight about the peculiarities of the book of Numbers and developed an interest in how the pericope about Balaam relates to these issues. Having perused a number of attempts to explain the passage in Numbers 22–24, I found myself somewhat dissatisfied with earlier theses about this story’s genesis and how it fits into its current literary context. Beyond that, the connection to other biblical and the singular relevant extrabiblical attestations of the figure Balaam, son of Beor, had not been, in my opinion, sufficiently explicated. At the root of all of this, I developed an interest in the character Balaam, both as a literary figure, but also as a potentially historical personage. Questions about this figure, whether he was historical or not, guided me through this research and motivated this study.

Along this path, a number of people instructed and aided me. To them I owe much and, for their guidance, I offer my thanks. After the completion of my dissertation, Prof. Dr. Siegfried Kreuzer (Wuppertal) and Prof. Dr. Aaron Schart (Essen) found positions for me as a researcher and instructor at their institutions. Prof. Kreuzer shared my strong interest in text-historical questions and encouraged me to continue this line of research in the Pentateuch. Prof. Schart brought me into the research project on Numbers and helped me to narrow down and focus the study on Numbers 22–24 as a specific problem in the book of Numbers. Without their initial input and support, this study would not have been possible.

After moving to Münster in 2013, I found continuing interest and vigorous discussion with Prof. Dr. Reinhard Achenbach, one of the current experts on

Numbers in particular and the Pentateuch more generally. With the addition of Prof. Reinhard Müller to the faculty in 2014, I was able to engage with another exegete of great repute. Even though I was often of an opinion distinct from theirs, these scholars served as the whetstone on which I was able to sharpen my theses. With their extremely detailed observations and poignant questions, they engaged my research critically, helping me to refine it. In this capacity, I must also thank the *Alttestamentliche Sozietät* in Münster, which provided a productive forum to proffer observations, debate their meanings and evaluations, and synthesize theses. In particular, I would like to note and thank, beyond the aforementioned professors, Lars Maskow, who took time both during and outside of the colloquium to discuss and engage with my ideas.

I would like to thank the editors of the series *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* for their willingness to accept this monograph into their series. The team at Mohr Siebeck, as well, deserves my praise for their helpful technical support and editing advice. Specifically, my thanks go to Dominika Zgolik and Katharina Gutekunst.

Outside of a professional capacity, I remain indebted to my friends and colleagues at the faculty in Münster and elsewhere in Germany, who supported me with friendly words and plenty of coffee and sweets. Noteworthy were the contributions of Patrick Bahl, Sabine Joy Ihben-Bahl, Eike Herzig, and Rudi de Lange. For time away from the office, I thank “The Holy Rollers” for affording me with the regular opportunity to clear my head by bowling down as many pins as we could. Finally, I wish to thank my family: my wife Anja for her continual support in virtually every imaginable capacity, even at the most stressful times during this project, and our daughter Miriam, who permitted Anja to stay home from work, granting her the time to read and correct my manuscript. Both Anja and Miriam taught and continue to teach me what joy truly means.

To them and all of the aforementioned, I express my deepest gratitude.

Jonathan Miles Robker  
In Münster  
February 2019

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## List of Abbreviations

Generally, the abbreviations in this volume follow the *SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition*. Abbreviations that do not follow or appear in SBL are present here.

DAPT The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Texts, specifically Combination A

G The Septuagint

HexRed The Redactor of the Hexateuch

La The Vetus Latina

M The Masoretic Text

M<sup>L</sup> Codex Leningradensis

PentRed The Redactor of the Pentateuch

Q Qumran

R1 The first redactor / redaction of a biblical text

R2 The second redactor / redaction of a biblical text

R3+ The third redactor / redaction of a biblical text

S The Peshitta

S1 The oldest source text behind Numbers 22–24 and cognate texts

S2 A second, fragmentary source text attested in Numbers 22–24

Smr The Samaritan Pentateuch

T Targum Version(s)

V The Vulgate



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 The Question

Who was Balaam, and what did he do? This curious figure is most well known from Numbers 22–24, but he appears in many other texts as well. Interested readers encounter him in Numbers 31; Deuteronomy 23; Joshua 13 and 24; and Micah 6, as well as in the New Testament. The biblical material presents a broad spectrum about this enigmatic character, who has fascinated readers since Antiquity. Philo spends time commenting on him and interpreting his undertakings.<sup>1</sup> The community at Qumran cited as messianic one of his supposed prophecies recounted in the book of Numbers,<sup>2</sup> while at the same time including him in a list of false prophets.<sup>3</sup> Josephus proffers a lengthy recounting and explication of the biblical material.<sup>4</sup> No fewer than four New Testament authors obliquely allude to or expressly refer to either him or his prophecy.<sup>5</sup> Others around the transition between the eras refer or allude to him or his prophecies, such as the community at Qumran, the author of 1 Enoch, Pseudo-Philo, and Philo.<sup>6</sup> The Targums demonstrate further analysis of this figure in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Praem.* 91–97 and 163–72; *Mos.* 1.290–1. Regarding Philo’s interpretive engagement with Balaam, cf. Herbert Donner, “Balaam pseudopropheta,” in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 118–19 and Peder Borgen, “‘There Shall Come Forth a Man’: Reflections on Messianic Ideas in Philo,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 341–61.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Florentino García Martínez, “Two Messianic Figures in the Qumran Texts,” in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 14–40.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 4Q339 and Aharon Shemesh, “A Note on ‘4Q339’ ‘List of False Prophets,’” *RevQ* 20, no. 2 (December 2001): 319–20.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ant.* 4.102–58.

<sup>5</sup> Namely, the authors of Matthew, 2 Peter, Jude, and the Revelation.

<sup>6</sup> For Qumran, cf. the discussion in Chapter Four. For 1 Enoch, cf. Eibert Tigchelaar, “Balaam and Enoch,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 87–99. For Pseudo-Philo, cf. Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, “The Rewriting of Numbers 22–24 in Pseudo-Philo, Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum 18,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten



the Aramaic-speaking Judaism of Antiquity, sometimes in common with Philo or other interpreters.<sup>7</sup> The engagement with this figure continued also in Medieval Judaism and Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even the most superficial reading of the biblical materials about Balaam demonstrates disparate images of this peculiar personality.<sup>9</sup> This confused and confusing characterization has left an impressive mark even into the twenty-first century in the form of the extensive secondary literature devoted to Balaam.

Much of the modern fascination with Balaam, particularly before the 1970s, focused on the identification of sources behind the biblical Balaam material. Exegetes sought to explain why Numbers characterizes Balaam in several different manners, why Balaam in Deuteronomy and Joshua remains distinct from Balaam in Numbers, and what Micah might have known about any literary or historical Balaam figure. For the material in the Hexateuch, such discussions made Balaam more or less a pawn in iterations of the *Urkundenhypothese* (the Documentary Hypothesis). Often this process began already with regard to the

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and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 101–30. For Philo, cf. George H. van Kooten, “Balaam as the Sophist par Excellence in Philo of Alexandria: Philo’s Projection of an Urgent Contemporary Debate Onto Moses’ Pentateuchal Narratives,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 131–61.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert Hayward, “Balaam’s Prophecies as Interpreted by Philo and the Aramaic Targums of the Pentateuch,” in *New Heaven and New Earth. Prophecy and the Millennium. Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, ed. Peter J. Harland and Robert Hayward (Leiden; Boston; Cologne: Brill, 1999), 19–36 and Alberdina Houtman and Harry Sysling, “Balaam’s Fourth Oracle (Numbers 24:15–19) According to the Aramaic Targums,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 189–211.

<sup>8</sup> For Rabbinic Judaism, cf., the overview of material and the comments in, e.g., Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies. Second, Revised Edition.*, StPB, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 127–76 and Ronit Nikolsky, “Interpret Him as Much as You Want: Balaam in the Babylonian Talmud,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 213–30, as well as the literature cited there. For an introduction to Patristic comments on Balaam, cf. Johan Leemans, “To Bless with a Mouth Bent on Cursing”: Patristic Interpretations of Balaam (Num 24:17),” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 287–99.

<sup>9</sup> Though, some have gone to remarkable lengths to conform the retelling of Balaam’s story in the Bible. Cf., e.g., Rufus Phineas Stebbins, “The Story of Balaam,” *The Old Testament Student* 4, no. 9 (May 1885): 385–95, who regarded the whole story of Numbers 22–24 as Balaam’s self-serving and deceitful autobiographical report. However, Stebbins paraphrasing the tale does not conform to the strictures of critical study. Nor does the retort of Stebbins’ report; cf. B.F. Simpson, “The Story of Balaam Reconsidered,” *The Old Testament Student* 5, no. 3 (November 1885): 125–28.

textual history of Numbers 22–24 (and other passages about Balaam), as Wevers noted:

“Most commentaries on Num concentrate on obvious inconsistencies in the text, and resort to source analysis. The Alexandrian translator of course knew nothing of Yahwists, Elohist and Priestly writers. He certainly did not distinguish between a source using יהוה and another using אלהים; he was faced with a completed text, much like a consonantal BHS text. Oddly, he seems not to have been concerned about the inconsistencies which trouble modern scholars, though some of them are obvious. Thus that for the second visit of Moabite dignitaries, divine approval for Balaam’s journey to Moab was given, though at the first visit it was not. Nor does the translator show concern at the uneasy fit of the angel’s barring the way to Balaam’s ass in spite of permission to go to Moab having been granted. He made no attempt at reconciling such difficulties, but simply translated what was before him.”<sup>10</sup>

Genreflections on the literary background of the figure of Balaam continue today, albeit often (though by no means exclusively) quite divorced from the source-critical epistemology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some more recent studies have considered the redactional characterizations of the literature and its Balaam figure. Others have sought to affirm the general unity of Numbers’ portrayal of Balaam, at least as found in Numbers 22–24. The literary issues have by no means been entirely resolved, but they are also not the only table at which Balaam is discussed.<sup>11</sup>

After the deciphering of cuneiform and the subsequent availability to modern audiences of Mesopotamian literature and the customs attested therein, interest in Balaam renewed with a new nuance. No longer could he only be compared and contrasted with biblical prophets or those known from the Hellenistic and Roman world. The opportunity arose to compare him with equivalents found in the Akkadian sources. Exegetes and students of Oriental culture could reflect on Balaam’s mantic background and practices, in what ways the biblical image of Balaam suggests or affirms his supposed Mesopotamian background.<sup>12</sup> The mysterious city of his origin – simply called “Pethor on the river” in the Hebrew Bible – could be recognized and equated with a city found in Akkadian sources, namely Pitru.<sup>13</sup> This discussion in turn left its traces on

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<sup>10</sup> John William Wevers, “The Balaam Narrative According to the Septuagint,” in *Lectures et Relectures de la Bible. Festschrift Pierre-Maurice Bogaert*, ed. Jean-Marie Auwers, André Wénin (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 136–37.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter Three will address these literary-critical and redactional-historical issues.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g., already Samuel Daiches, “Balaam – A Babylonian *Bārū*,” in *Hilprecht Anniversary Volume* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1909), 60–70, who attempted to present ten common features between Mesopotamian *bārū* and Balaam. Against this position, cf. Leonhard Rost, “Fragen um Bileam,” in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 377–87.

<sup>13</sup> This identification goes back to at least 1885; cf. the translation of Shalmaneser’s Monolith Inscription in Archibald Henry Sayce, *Assyria. Its Princes, Priests and People* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1885), 147, though George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical*

biblical exegetical discourse about Balaam, even about what this new data implied about the sources' engagement with this traditional figure. And yet, this certainly was not the final aspect of the discourse about Balaam.<sup>14</sup>

In 1967, Balaam received renewed interest with the recovery of an ancient Transjordanian inscription – found at Tell Deir 'Alla – that mentions him by name, even with the same patronymic as that of the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Now attention could turn to Balaam as a Transjordanian personage or epigraphic literary figure. Exegetes could contrast the Bible with a new source of material about this fabled figure. That the inscription also featured a vision and foretold some forthcoming destruction hardly went unnoticed. But the poorly preserved inscription required more attention simply to decipher what it said. With more time to appreciate the inscription, more can be said about it, particularly regarding the text's composition and the circumstances behind its creation. Any relationship it might have to the biblical tradition, a relationship which was expounded quite vociferously shortly after the inscription's discovery, can also be appreciated more fully.<sup>16</sup>

Each of these matters – the biblical text, the traditions behind it, their relationships to the world of the ancient Orient, the specific nature of any common background between the biblical text and the inscription from Deir 'Alla – still merits discussion. None of the problems have been resolved with anything approaching certainty or scholarly consensus. Particularly in the case of the biblical materials, continued interest and the development of fundamentally distinct literary-historical models in the past several decades mandate that a new approach to this old discussion be advanced. This work will attempt to cover the various features of the debate around Balaam, including a strong focus on the biblical materials. Methodologically, the traditional canon of historical criticism, with reference to other methods where appropriate, guides this study. The monograph will approach Balaam from several perspectives, but the primary focus remains the biblical text, particularly regarding questions of 1) its textual transmission; 2) its literary inception; 3) its literary transmission and redactional history; 4) its tradition-historical background; and 5) its theological

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*and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, Impression from 1986, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903), 325 dated it to some publication of Sayce's from 1878 that I have been unable to identify.

<sup>14</sup> The discussion of Balaam's background and any potential relationship to Mesopotamia follows in Chapter Six.

<sup>15</sup> The initial publication followed only in 1976 (Jacob Hoftijzer and Gerrit van der Kooij, eds., *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, DMOA, vol. 19 [Leiden: Brill, 1976]), though a notice about the discovery occurred already in the same year; cf. Hendricus Jacobus Franken, "Texts from the Persian Period from Tell Deir 'Allā," *VT* 17 (1967): 480–81.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter Five discusses this inscription and its implications for our understanding of Balaam. Some additional tradition-historical considerations of this inscription follow in Chapter Six.

or religious-historical impetus and development. This provides a framework for the discussion at hand.

Ultimately, this work will identify the ancient background of this historical or fictional figure as an Aramean with some metaphysical capability. Due to Aramean influence on the Cisjordan and Transjordan, Israelite familiarity with this character developed such that they incorporated him into their literary engagement with the neighboring kingdom of Moab. The historical background for this earliest literature must have been during the ninth or eighth centuries BCE, when Israel and Moab stood as opposed militant combatants and Aram-Damascus occupied the Transjordan. Both the biblical and Transjordanian epigraphical accounts of Balaam reflect this historical and cultural background. Though the historical background of the oldest literary Balaam tradition belongs to the monarchic period in Israel, even this primary version was retrojected into a narrative about Israel's origin from the time of the exodus. This created the impression that Moab and Israel had not been amenable since before Israel arrived in the land, according to one of their biblical origin stories.

This first biblical account about Balaam existed from its literary inception as a written source, which currently stands in Numbers and can be reconstructed with some reliability. This recovered source cannot be identified as one of the Pentateuch sources traditionally postulated and reconstructed in the Documentary Hypothesis (J, E, D, or P). It may have initially consisted essentially only of the Balaam narrative and oracles in an abbreviated form as found in Numbers 22–24. The oldest biblical material about Balaam viewed him unequivocally positively. Perhaps scribes at the royal court of the late ninth or first half of the eighth century BCE (the Jehu dynasty) composed this piece. The loose integration of this material suggests that its place within Numbers stems from a later editorial integration into its current context, though it could have represented a portion of a longer contiguous source from its inception.

After its initial composition, this Balaam source was edited, expanded, and combined with other materials now found in Numbers. Its incorporation into a larger Deuteronomistic/Deteronomistic exodus-eisodus narrative or even some kind of early Enneateuch present the most likely scenarios. This later composition afforded the Israelite entrance into the land from the east to accommodate the incorporation of the Balaam material. This "edition" must have contained at least portions of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.<sup>17</sup> Yet, others also continued to emend and append other material to this Balaam story now found in Numbers. At least one layer of these later redactions present part of a priestly composition that expounded on the Deuteronomistic composition including the

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<sup>17</sup> A satisfactory engagement with that material in a literary-critical and redactional-historical perspective goes generally beyond the bounds of this study. For this reason, I will only superficially address them here.

Balaam story and oracles. Other additions may have been part of larger redactional undertakings, but probably only represent specific, context-oriented *Fortschreibungen*.

At the same time, other literature about Balaam now found in the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 23; Joshua 13 and 24; Judges 11; Micah 6; and Nehemiah 13) reflected on the various versions of the story in Numbers 22–24, interpreting what they found and transforming Balaam’s image in Israelite literature. Gradually these interpretations attest the development of negative sentiment toward Balaam. Material about Balaam in the Hebrew Bible continued to adapt even into the stage of transmission attested by the manuscripts. These latest impressions of Balaam were quite influential on Jewish authors, who demonstrate some ambivalence towards Balaam, including some New Testament authors, who all view him negatively, though one – Matthew – at least appropriates one element of an oracle ascribed to Balaam in Numbers through a positive reception.<sup>18</sup> With that, we can trace an ancient Oriental figure from ninth or eighth century BCE and his development into the Roman Period and witness the transitions in attitudes toward him.<sup>19</sup>

The primary interest of this work rests in the biblical materials, particularly that found in Numbers 22–24. These chapters are the longest about Balaam and the most important in any discussion about him. For that reason, Chapters Two and Three focus on Numbers 22–24 from text-historical, literary-critical, and redactional-historical perspectives. These chapters present my reconstruction based on many impetuses found in the secondary literature published to date. In order to familiarize the reader with the various literary-critical and redaction-historical positions about Balaam proffered, a brief cross section of the history of scholarship will open this work below. Particularly those unfamiliar with the development of German literary-historical and redaction-critical models in the past few decades will find this opening section helpful. At the same time, the growing split between some North American and Israeli models with those of continental Europe will be addressed. This introductory chapter focuses primarily on the discussion surrounding Numbers, but also naturally includes some reflections on the Balaam materials in Deuteronomy and Joshua, as these texts frequently appear along with Numbers in models that reconstruct the development of the Pentateuch or Hexateuch.

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<sup>18</sup> This study only obliquely addresses the works attested at Qumran, Philo, and Josephus. The New Testament texts, which have become biblical – albeit to a particular audience – receive somewhat more attention.

<sup>19</sup> The further reception history of this character in art and literature, even Rabbinical literature, remains outside of this study’s scope. Cf., however, Stefan Beyerle, “‘A Star Shall Come Out of Jacob’: A Critical Evaluation of the Balaam Oracle in the Context of Jewish Revolts in Roman Times,” in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity, and Islam*, ed. George H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN, vol. 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 163–88 and Nikolsky, “Interpret Him”.

Following this introductory history of scholarship, Chapter Two will address a variety of text-critical issues in the primary text, Numbers 22–24, focusing on distinctions with the textual traditions and translations, such as the Masoretic textual tradition (M), the Samaritan Pentauch (Samaritanus; Smr), and the Septuagint (G). Since much of the debate about the place of Numbers 22–24 (as well as the other biblical texts discussed in this volume) in the developing literary corpus of the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch has occurred somewhat divorced from text-critical discussions, this chapter seeks to bring these two approaches closer together. The necessity of this remains conspicuous, as the text of Numbers 22–24 attests a number of significant variants in the manuscripts. From this survey, it will become apparent that variants in the Numbers text demonstrate its development even into the Roman Period, into the time from which manuscripts still exist. At the same time, the text-critical analysis demonstrates the remarkable stability of the textual tradition of Numbers over centuries of transmission.

Having plumbed the depths of the text-critical issues in the passage, Chapter Three addresses literary-critical issues in Numbers 22–24. This chapter proposes a new reconstruction of the literary development of Numbers 22–24. Several elements in the version reconstructed at the conclusion of Chapter Two demonstrate diachronic development behind even that oldest reconstructed version. That is, several hands expressed themselves in the composition now found in Numbers 22–24; we should reckon with at least four. That being said, the majority of material in Numbers 22–24 appears to have existed from its literary conception as a unity. Having identified the secondary, tertiary, and later additions to Numbers 22–24, Chapter Three then continues, briefly turning to the larger problem of the redactional development of Numbers 22–24 in the context of larger literary compositions. The focus here remains primarily on the developing literary context within the book of Numbers, but this cannot be viewed entirely divorced from the rest of the narrative literature in (Genesis or) Exodus through Kings. First and foremost, the redaction-historical study advances the thesis that the Balaam story of Numbers 22–24\* in its oldest form either existed as an independent literary composition outside of some exodus–eisodus composition, though presuming some such historical or – more accurately, narratological – context or as part of a collection of exodus material. This oldest version presumably dates back to the monarchic period in the Northern Kingdom, i.e., Israel. Later editors and scribes incorporated new elements over the course of transmission. These included additions that appear to stem from Deuteronomistic (late preexilic or exilic) and Priestly (exilic or post-exilic) backgrounds, as well as even later editorial developments that some have identified with redactions bearing monikers like “Hexateuch Redaction”, “Pentateuch Redaction”, or “Theocratic Editing”. These considerations affirm the developing negative attitude toward Balaam described in the literary-critical examination of these chapters.

Having approached those issues and hopefully having proffered some plausible new solutions, Chapter Four turns attention away from Numbers 22–24 to the other biblical texts about Balaam. These are studied in the same way as the text of Numbers 22–24, first text-critically, then literarily, and redaction-historically. Many of the same issues occur in these texts as in Numbers 22–24. Many of the proposed theses from the preceding chapters will echo here. This survey will demonstrate that some other biblical traditions demonstrate affinity with distinct phases of the development of Numbers 22–24. Others demonstrate attitudes distinct from some versions of Numbers 22–24 that might have impacted its development. This chapter concludes with an overview of Balaam's reception history at Qumran and in the New Testament. This reception again affirms Balaam's development as a literary figure, with his negative reception coming to dominate later interpretations of his activities.

Having covered the biblical material about Balaam, Chapter Five addresses the relevant epigraphic inscription from Tell Deir 'Alla. Here, the focus is first on the inscription itself. What can we read from the surface? What does it mean? How old is it? Does it demonstrate diachronic development? What does its Balaam look like and how does it express information about him? Then this chapter compares and contrasts its Balaam from the one in the Bible. While the amount of common material between the biblical and epigraphical Balaam figure remains manageable, it will become clear that they share some common elements in their historical and tradition-historical backgrounds. That informs our reconstruction of any plausible earlier or common literary or historical Balaam figure.

From here, Chapter Six addresses the tradition-historical backgrounds of the changing images of Balaam, generally appraising the terminology applied to him. The backgrounds reflected in all of the material about Balaam in the Hebrew Bible and the Tell Deir 'Alla Inscription flow into this survey. This discussion will demonstrate and elucidate the distinct and often disparate backgrounds of literary material about this figure. It will conclude with an appreciation of whether we should reckon with Balaam as a historical or literary figure and what the cultural background for such a supposed figure might be, though any conclusion achieved here must remain necessarily speculative.

Finally, Chapter Seven reviews the conclusions of each element of this study, summarizes them, and reflects on their interrelatedness. At the same time, it will present matters that remain open for future study, particularly the development of the biblical literature in the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch.

However, before diving into the examination of Numbers 22–24, I would like to reiterate my objectives and specify my theses, as well as offer an overview of developments in the history of studies about Balaam. Several theses will be proffered and defended in this study. First, an older version of the Ba-

laam story in Numbers 22–24 will be reconstructed based on manuscript evidence. This reconstructed version has been lost, but stood in some fashion behind the various biblical versions of Numbers 22–24 currently known to us (Smr, G, Q, and M). Text-historically, it will become apparent that this story about Balaam in Numbers 22–24 continued to develop and change in a limited manner well into the Roman era, as demonstrated by the manuscripts and the versions. Secondly, this final layer of adaptation will be shown to present the culmination of earlier editorial processes, here theoretically mapped and reconstructed. The tale in Numbers 22–24 began as a smaller core, consisting of both narrative and oracular material. This core, which should be dated tentatively to the ninth or – more likely – early eighth century BCE, was expanded and adapted on a number of occasions. One, the first redaction, demonstrates affinity with material and theology that can be described as Deuteronomistic. This first redaction added some narrative and oracular material, and recontextualized the whole by incorporating it into an exodus narrative, a Deuteronomistic composition, to borrow the vernacular of Blum.<sup>20</sup> At a later date, scribes inserted this expanded story into other material, commonly identified as characteristically Priestly, following in the wake of some priestly tradition. Later material can also be identified, the final elements of which appear remarkably similar to those revisions apparent in the manuscript traditions and the variants attested by the ancient translations. The other biblical texts about Balaam affirm this redaction-historical reconstruction and evince many of the same phenomena. The inscription from Tell Deir ‘Alla provides an external datum supporting the date of the oldest reconstructed Balaam material and suggests that a wider Balaam corpus was known in the southern Levant before and during the eighth century BCE. This extrabiblical tradition permits the postulation of a historical figure behind the distinct Balaam traditions, but more importantly demonstrates that Balaam was not merely a creation of the biblical authors’ imaginations, even though they certainly filled out his figure with more data than we can find outside of the Bible. Finally, the tradition-historical data demonstrate divergent attitudes towards Balaam and affirm the development in the complex literary figure we find in the biblical materials at present. Perhaps he bases on some historical figure, but little could be said about such a personage. A concluding chapter will reflect on the possibility and need for further related study based on the features identified here, particularly those dealing with the text-history and redactional development of the Enneateuch, Hexateuch, or Pentateuch. With that, we can turn to our survey of scholarly research on the figure of Balaam, beginning with modern literary and source-critical approaches.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW, vol. 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).



## 1.2 Is the Balaam Narrative in Numbers 22–24 Uniform?

For some time, some scholars have argued for the general unity of Numbers 22–24; that is, Numbers 22–24 is not the product of two or more sources. Some go so far as to suggest that it did not come about through the expansion of one (or more) primary narrative(s) with redactional material. Often, as a necessary caveat, scholars genuflect on the narrative's unity as a sign of its independence from its context. Only a few exegetes have argued that the text of Numbers 22–24 came to exist as a uniform narrative without any recourse to postulated sources in the sense of the Documentary Hypothesis or redactional embedding and/or expansion (to each of these, see below); the following discussion covers some important examples.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.2.1 Walter Gross

In 1974, Walter Gross published a dissertation describing Numbers 22–24 as consisting of several units in contrast to being the product of two sources.<sup>22</sup> In this study, he focused primarily on literary-historical and form-critical concerns, thus concentrating exclusively on the prose portions of the text. His working principle is that texts that do not mandate division, should be regarded as uniform.<sup>23</sup> The primary unit, Num 22:4b–21\* (without *בִּידֵם וְקִסְמִים מִדֵּין וְזִקְנֵי מִדֵּין* in 22:7a); 22:36–23:25\* (without 23:4b and 13agd); and 24:11 and 25 was the oldest version, a literary unit about Balaam. Later editors expanded this unit on a few occasions: the first expansion (= Unit 2, in Gross's nomenclature) added material from Num 23:26–24:10 (without 24:1ag); and 24:11–15; Unit 3 added 22:2–3a, and 4a; finally, Unit 4 added the narrative about Balaam's interaction

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<sup>21</sup> The position and reconstruction of Sutcliffe will not be addressed here, since it requires filling too many narrative gaps with mere speculation; cf. Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "De Unitate Litteraria Num XXII," *Bib* 7, no. 1 (1926): 3–39 and Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "A Note on Numbers XXII," *Bib* 18, no. 4 (1937): 439–42. Rather than recognize the tensions in the text as such, Sutcliffe goes to great lengths to explain why they are indeed not tensions, filling in substantial narrative and quasi-historical information to fulfill this need. Since Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1993), 454–55 did not really argue the model, but mostly presumed it, particularly in the case of the donkey narrative, it will also not be detailed here. László Pákozdy, "Az istennevek használata a Bileámperikópában," *Theologiai Szemle* 14 (1938): 160–65 argued for the consistency of a single source in Numbers 22–24 for theological reasons. The narrator used distinct divine names to demonstrate with certainty YHWH's superiority over the mantic practices of other peoples, as well as over oracles, magic, and prophetic undertakings.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Walter Gross, *Bileam: Literar- und formkritische Untersuchung der Prosa in Num 22–24*, SANT (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gross, *Bileam*, 16: "Textteile, die nicht zur Zertrennung zwingen, gelten als zusammengehörig".

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