

ÉTUDES BIBLIQUES

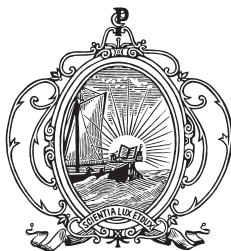
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HOKHMAT SOPHER

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édités par

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MESSAGE ON A BOTTLE: THE TELL SIRAN INSCRIPTION REVISITED

Matthieu RICHELLE

1. ONE TEXT, MANY TRANSLATIONS

While relatively brief, the Ammonite text engraved on the Tell Siran bottle, found in 1972 in Amman and dated ca. 600 B.C.E.¹, has aroused the curiosity of many scholars². In spite of all their efforts, there exists

¹ Most scholars agree that the inscription should be paleographically dated to ca. 600 B.C.E. and that the Amminadab mentioned in line 3 is probably the same person as *Am-mi-na-ad-bi šarru mat bit am-ma-na* mentioned by Assurbanipal in cylinder C ca. 667 B.C.E. Indeed, this Amminadab may also be mentioned in two seals:

L'DNPLT 'BD 'MNDB (CAI 17 = WSS 858)

L'DNNR 'BD 'MNDB (CAI 40 = WSS 859)

The paleography of these seals seems less developed than that of the Tell Siran inscription, notably because the tops of the heads of B and ' are closed, whereas they are open on the bottle, and this corresponds to a diachronic development in the Ammonite script, under the influence of the Aramaic script. This development is clearly attested in the seal script (Larry G. HERR, «Aramaic and Ammonite Seal Scripts», in Jo Ann HACKETT, Walter A. AUFRECHT [eds.], *“An Eye for Form”. Epigraphic Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 2014, 185) and in the cursive script (Christopher A. ROLLSTON, “Northwest Semitic Cursive Scripts of Iron II”, in *ibid.*, 223; Matthieu RICHELLE, “Revisiting the Ammonite Ostraca”, *MAARAV* 22.1-2 [2018] 72-73). Unfortunately, the first seal is unprovenanced, so its authenticity is uncertain, but the second was found in a tomb in Amman during excavations.

² Henri O. THOMPSON, Fawzi ZAYADINE, “The Tell Siran Inscription”, *BASOR* 212 (1973) 5-11; Frank M. CROSS, “Notes on the Ammonite Inscription from Tell Sirān”, *BASOR* 212 (1973) 12-15; Oswald LORETZ, “Die Ammonitische Inschrift von Tell Siran”, *UF* 9 (1973) 169-172; Javier TEIXIDOR, “Bulletin d'épigraphie sémitique”, *Syria* 51 (1974) 317-18; H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, “Tell Siran”, *RB* 81 (1974) 80-85; Paul-Emile DION, “Notes d'épigraphie ammonite”, *RB* 82 (1975) 24-33; J. TEIXIDOR, “Bulletin d'épigraphie sémitique”, *Syria* 52 (1975) 262-63; Charles R. KRAHMALKOV, “An Ammonite Lyric Poem”, *BASOR* 223 (1976) 55-57; William H. SHEA, “The Siran Inscription. Amminadab's Drinking Song”, *PEQ* 110 (1978) 107-12; Robert B. COOTE, “The Tell Siran Bottle Reconsidered”, *BASOR* 240 (1980) 93; Massimo BALDACCI, “The Ammonite Text from Tell Siran and North-West Semitic Philology”, *VT* 31 (1981) 363-68; Bob BECKING, “Zur Interpretation des Ammonitischen Inschrift vom Tell Sirān”, *BiOr* 38 (1981) 273-76; John A. EMERTON, “The Meaning of the Ammonite Inscription from Tell Siran”, in Wilhelmus C. DELSMAN (ed.), *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. J. P. M. van der Ploeg O. P. zur Vollendung des siebzigsten Lebensjahres am 4 Juli 1979* (AOAT, 211), Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1982, 367-77, reprinted in Graham DAVIES and Robert GORDON

no consensus as to its meaning (see a non-exhaustive list of translations in Appendix). To summarize, one may distinguish between two main interpretations:

1. A commemorative inscription

This is the interpretation offered in the *editio princeps*³. Typical is the translation in Aḥituv's handbook⁴:

(eds.), *Studies on the Languages and Literature of the Bible. Selected Works of J.A. Emerton* (VTSup, 165), Leiden, Brill, 2015, 398-409; H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, "The Tell Siran Bottle. An Additional Note", *BASOR* 249 (1982) 87-89; Kent P. JACKSON, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age* (HSM, 27), Chico, Scholars Press, 1983, 54-68; Gösta W. AHLSTRÖM, "The Tell Siran Bottle Inscription", *PEQ* 116 (1984) 12-15; Emile PUECH, "L'inscription de la statue d'Amman et la Paléographie Ammonite", *RB* 92 (1985) 12; Erasmus Johannes SMIT, "The Tell Siran Inscription. Linguistic and Historical Implications", *Journal for Semitics* 1 (1989) 108-17; H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, "The Ammonite Inscription from Tell Siran", in H. O. THOMPSON (ed.), *Archaeology in Jordan*, New York, Peter Lang, 1989, 159-93; Ulrich HÜBNER, *Die Ammoniter. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion eines Transjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (ADPV, 16), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1992, 26-30; André LEMAIRE, "Epigraphy, Transjordan", *ABD* 2, 561-68; Klaus BEYER, "The Ammonite Tell Siran Bottle Inscription Reconsidered", in Ziony ZEVIT, Seymour GITIN and Michael SOKOLOFF (eds.), *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1995, 389-91; Hans-Peter MÜLLER, "Kohelet und Amminadab", in Anja A. DIESEL, Reinhard G. LEHRMANN, Eckart OTTO, Andreas WAGNER (eds.), "Jedes Ding hat seine Ziet...". *Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit Diethelen Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW, 241), Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1996, 149-65; Walter E. AUFRECHT, "The Tell Sirān Inscription", in William HALLO, K. Lawson YOUNGER (eds.), *The Context of Scripture II. Monumental Inscriptions*, Leiden/Boston/Köln, Brill, 2000, 139-40; Joseph AZIZE, "The Ammonite Bottle and Phoenician Flasks", *ANES* 40 (2003) 62-79; Dirk KINET, "Die Bronze-Flasche aus Tell Siran", in Friedbert Ninow (ed.), *Wort und Stein. Studien zur Theologie und Archäologie. Festschrift für Udo Worschech* (Beiträge zur Erforschung der antiken Moabitis [Ard el-Kerak], 4), Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2003, 133-44; Ingo KOTTSEPER, "Zur Inschrift auf der Flasche vom Tell Sirān und ihrem historischen Hintergrund", *UF* 34 (2003) 353-62; idem, "Eine ammonitische Inschrift des 'MNDB von Ammon'", in Bernd JANOWSKI, Gernot WILHELM (eds.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge II. Staatsverträge, Herrscherinschriften und andere Dokumente zur politischen Geschichte*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005, 314; Giovanni GARBINI, *Introduzione all'epigrafia semitica* (Studi sul Vicino Oriente antico, 4), Brescia, Paideia Editrice, 2006, 105; Shmuel AḤITUV, *Echoes from the Past. Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*, Jerusalem, Carta, 2008, 363-67; Douglas J. GREEN, "I Undertook Great Works". *The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions* (FAT, II.41), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2010, 266-81; Walter E. AUFRECHT, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, Lewinston, Edwin Mellers, 2018², 356-65 [1st edition 1989].

³ H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, "The Tell Siran Inscription".

⁴ Sh. AḤITUV, *Echoes*, 363.

line	text	Ahituv's translation
1	M'BD 'MNDB MLK BN 'MN	The works of 'Ammînādāb, king of the Ammonites,
2	BN HŠL'L.MLK BN 'MN	the son of Hišsil'ēl, king of the Ammonites,
3	BN 'MNDB MLK BN 'MN	the son of 'Ammînādāb, king of the Ammonites:
4	HKRM.WH.GNT.WH'THR ⁵	the vineyard and the garden and the tunnel/channel(?)
5	W'ŠHT	and the reservoir.
6	YGL WYŠMH	May he rejoice and be happy
7	BYWMT RBM WBSNT	for many days and in years
8	RHQT	far off.

According to a variant of this translation, defended by Coote⁶ and Aufrecht⁷, the first word of the inscription is explicited in lines 4-5 and is the subject of the verbs in line 6. Here is Aufrecht's translation:

- (1) May the produce of 'Ammînadab king of the Ammonites,
- (2) the son of Hašsil'ēl king of the Ammonites,
- (3) the son of 'Ammînadab king of the Ammonites
- (4) – the vineyard and the garden(s) and the hollow (5) and cistern –
- (6) cause rejoicing and gladness (7) for many days (to come) and in years (8) far off.

2. A poem

Krahmalkov⁸ suggested translating the first word of the inscription into “poem” and that lines 4-8 constituted the poem in question:

The poem of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites,
the son of Hassel'el, king of the Ammonites,
the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites:
“To the vineyard and the orchard! Or shall I be left behind and destroyed?”
He (who says this) rejoice and be happy that life is long and there are years yet un-lived.

⁵ The reading of this letter has been debated; it appears on the base of the bottle. Most published images of the bottle only offer a front view and do not enable one to correctly see the letter. The images on Inscriptifac leave no doubt that it must be read R.

⁶ R. B. COOTE, “Tell Siran Bottle”, 93.

⁷ W. E. AUFRECHT, “Tell Sirān Inscription”, 139-40.

⁸ C. R. KRAHMALKOV, “Ammonite”, 56.

Krahmalkov commented his translation as follows: “The lyric seems to be antiphonal in character. In a feigned plaint the fear of being delayed and cut off in the pursuit of life’s pleasures and contentments is given expression; haste is urged to the vineyard and orchard⁹.” Shea¹⁰, Loretz¹¹ and Emerton¹² adopted this interpretation with a few differences. Essential to this line of interpretation is the notion that lines 4-5 should not be regarded as a list of four building works, but as two pairs of words: a reference to a vineyard and an orchard, followed by two verbs used to ask rhetorical questions. This line of interpretation has influenced even some scholars whose overall interpretation is that of a commemorative inscription but who regard the last of the four words in lines 4-5 as a verb¹³.

In the end, although most scholars follow one of the two main lines of interpretation presented above, there is a profusion of competing translations. What is frustrating is that many scholars adopt one of the two main interpretations without really discussing the philological reasons they have to reject the other. Against this background, the purpose of the following is not to add yet another interpretation of an inscription that is already subject to so many speculations, but to bring some clarity to the debate. I shall attempt to show that certain philological considerations, a neglected feature of the inscription, and some Ancient Near Eastern parallels, render the second line of interpretation unlikely. To this end, I will briefly review the analysis of the most debated parts of the text: the first word of line 1; the two last words of lines 4-5; lines 6-8.

2. THE MEANING OF THE FIRST WORD OF THE INSCRIPTION

No fewer than seven different translations of the first word have been proposed (see Table 1).

Table 1: Analyses of M^cBD

	translation	analysis	scholars
1	Works	Susbtantive masc. pl., root ^c BD Cf. מַעֲבָדִים (Job 34:25), מַעֲבָדֵי (Dan 4:34)	Thompson and Zayadine; Teixidor; Dion; Baldacci; Lemaire; Hübner; Müller; Kottsieper; Garbini

⁹ C. R. KRAHMALKOV, “Ammonite”, 56.
¹⁰ W. H. SHEA, “Siran Inscription”.
¹¹ O. LORETZ, “Die Ammonitische Inschrift von Tell Siran”.
¹² J. A. EMERTON, “Meaning”.
¹³ B. BECKING, “Interpretation”; I. KOTTSTIEPER, “Inschrift”.

	translation	analysis	scholars
2	Work	Substantive masc. sing., root ʿBD	Jackson
	Product; produce		Coote; Aufrecht
	Crop yield		Becking
3	Object		Loretz
4	Poem		Krahmalkov (1976); Emerton
5	From the cultivation of	Preposition M + (passive?) participle	Shea
6	That which... has laid out	Proclitic M + verb	Ahlström; Beyer
7	Pious	Adjective masc. sing. Cf. ʿBD “to serve, worship”	Azize

Proponents of the hypothesis of a commemorative inscription assume that the word MʿBD is a substantive, with the preformative M and the root ʿBD. The most widely accepted meaning is “work(s)” on the basis that ʿBD means “to work” in Aramaic.¹⁴ Now “work” is a very general term and a few scholars have attempted to render it more specifically in view of the context and of possible parallels in Biblical Hebrew for the root ʿBD, hence the proposals “product”, “produce” and “crop yield”. The underlying assumption is that the word refers to the contents of the bottle. Actually a botanical analysis of the contents showed that it mainly consisted of wheat and barley, but radiocarbon dating yielded a date later than that of the inscription by at least a century¹⁵, so it may be a case of secondary usage. In any case, the weakness of the “contents” approach to the term MʿBD is that it would be a surprisingly general choice of word

¹⁴ Most scholars prefer to regard the word as a plural because of their interpretation of the text (e.g. the “works” in question could be the building works mentioned in lines 4-5). Indeed, it is clear from the expression BN ʿMN, “sons of Ammon”, in line 1-3, that the masculine plural is not marked in Ammonite (cf. W. Randall GARR, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000-586 B.C.E.*, Philadelphia, University Press, 1985, 91).

¹⁵ The result was 450 or 400 +/- 50 B.C.E. depending on the calculation method (H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, “Additional Note”, 88). Since there was no king in Ammon in the 5th or 4th centuries B.C.E (it was part of the Persian empire), the appropriate conclusion is not to reject the paleographical dating in the late Iron Age, as approximate as it may be, but to admit that the contents of the bottle results from a secondary usage.

to refer to perfume or cereals. The occurrences of 'BD in the Biblical Hebrew that are alleged in order to support their cases are no solid ground. Some scholars also refer to various occurrences of עֶשֶׂה, but this seems to me a tenuous basis. It is not because 'BD is sometimes used to designate some work in an agricultural context (Gen 2:15; Deut 28:39) that we can "import" this acception into any new context, lest we commit an "illegitimate totality transfer", to borrow James Barr's expression. We would need very solid contextual reasons in the text under scrutiny to propose such a translation. "Works" would be a more appropriate designation of the realities mentioned in lines 4-5 if they were "vineyard", "garden", perhaps "canal" and "reservoir", as many scholars argue. The same objection holds true for the translation "object": why not use a word meaning "bottle"¹⁶? Moreover, it is just an *ad hoc* translation with no clear semantic basis linked to the root 'BD¹⁷.

In reality, the main alternative proposal to "work(s)" is "poem". It is based on two considerations. First, lines 4-8 constitute a poem according to these scholars, which is debatable, as we shall see. Second, מ'BD is explained by an analogy with מַעֲשֶׂה in Psalm 45:2, which Krahmalkov renders as "poem"¹⁸. However, unless we commit, again, an "illegitimate totality transfer", we cannot argue from this occurrence that the word מַעֲשֶׂה bears *in itself* the extremely rare meaning "poem", so it does not allow us to import this meaning into any other context; we would need very solid contextual reasons for that. All the more so when it comes to import this meaning for another word (M'BD) in another language (Ammonite), even if we admit that it is the Aramaic (and Ammonite) equivalent of מַעֲשֶׂה¹⁹.

¹⁶ Objection made by D. J. GREEN, "*I Undertook*", 273 fn. 27.

¹⁷ In spite of LORETZ's claims, neither Job 34:25 nor Dan 4:34 are grounds for this hypothesis.

¹⁸ C. R. KRAHMALKOV, "Ammonite", 56. Emerton also refers to דָּבָר in Prov 30:1; 31:1, which does not seem helpful: while it is unsurprising that a term that usually means "word" can sometimes mean "composition," it is a completely different matter to say that a word based on a root meaning "to make" can sometimes mean "poem."

¹⁹ In fact, what prompted Krahmalkov and Emerton to go to such lengths to find a new meaning of M'BD is some supposed problems with the translation "work(s)." Notably, there would be no connection between the building works referred to in the word M'BD, and listed in lines 4-5, on the one hand, and the bottle on which it is engraved, on the other (C. R. KRAHMALKOV, "Ammonite", 55). Yet the same problem obtains with the translation "poem," because the only possible connection between the poem (in both Krahmalkov and Emerton's translations) and the flask is that the latter is the medium on which the former is inscribed. Why did Amminadab have such a poem engraved on a bottle? Moreover, I suggest

Other analyses must be mentioned. Shea thinks that M is the preposition “from” and ʾBD a participle, and he translates the word as “from the cultivation of”²⁰. As Emerton has pointed out, Shea’s analysis is somewhat fuzzy and the resulting translation problematic since he needs to postulate that “The wine in this vessel comes” is implied before the beginning of the text. Also, it is doubtful that the quantity of wine that this bottle, be it a good bottle of *Bordeaux*, could contain would be able to make somebody drunk. More interestingly, Ahlström and Beyer²¹ regard M as a proclitic particle meaning “that which”, hence “that which he has made” or “that which he has laid out”. There are instances of a similar construction in Biblical Hebrew²² and in epigraphy²³, so this seems possible. Finally, Azize regards MʾBD as an adjective meaning “pious”, on the grounds that ʾBD often means “to serve, to worship” in Hebrew and Phoenician²⁴. Yet this semantic deduction seems a bit of a stretch, and Azize does not offer any detailed justification for the formation of the word MʾBD.

To sum up, at face value, the most plausible translations of MʾBD seem to be “work(s)” and “that which...”, while the translation “poem” would need to be supported by strong contextual reasons. This leads me to lines 4-5.

3. THE TWO LAST THE WORDS IN LINE 4-5

The two first words in line 4 are only rarely disputed as regards their meaning; what is debated is their function in the context. It really depends on the interpretation of the last word of line 4 (HʾTḤR) and the word on line 5 (ʾŠḤT).

No fewer than eight different translations of the last word of line 4 have been proposed (see Table 2), and five for the word in line 5 (see Table 3).

there may have been a connection between the bottle and the building works of lines 4-5: maybe the (original) contents of the bottle were products made thanks to these agricultural installations. This hypothesis does not depend on the notion that MʾBD refers to the bottle or its content; the very fact that this bottle contained such products was sufficient.

²⁰ W. H. SHEA, “Siran Inscription”, 108.

²¹ K. BEYER, “Ammonite”, 390.

²² *IBHS* §18.3d.

²³ *DNWSI*, 600.

²⁴ J. AZIZE, “Ammonite”, 70-71.

Table 2: analyses of H'THR

	root	grammatical details	translation	proponents
1	ḤWR	Noun with prothetic ' and infixed T	tunnel	Dion; Baldacci; Aḥituv ("tunnel/channel")
2	ḤRR	Idem; cf. South-Arabian ḤRT ("canal"), Akkadian ḥarāru and ḥerû ("to dig")	canal	Lemaire; Garbini
3		Idem; cf. חר in Num 33:32	hollow	Aufrecht
4	'ḤR	verbal adjective, Gt or Dt with a passive sense ("what was kept")	stock	Becking
5	'ḤR	Interrogative particle H + imperfect Dt, 1 st pers. sing. Cf. Arabic <i>ta'aḥḥara</i> ("to be delayed; to be left behind")	shall I be left behind? > shall I vex myself?	Krahmalkov Emerton
6		Idem but Gt	should I stay behind?	Loretz
7	ḤRH	Interrogative particle H + imperfect Dt, 1 st pers. sing.	shall I inflame myself?	Shea
8	?	Imperfect Gt, 3 rd pers. sing.	he dedicated	Azize

Table 3: analyses of ŠḤT

	root	grammatical details	translation	proponents
1	ŠWH	sing. or pl. noun with prothetic ' cf. ŠWH on the Mesha stele; שִׁיחַ ("pit" in Jer 2:6); שִׁיחַ ("pit"; Ezek 19:4); ("reservoir"); אֲשִׁיחַ Ben Sira 50:3)	cistern(s); pools; reservoir(s)	Thompson and Zayadine; Teixidor; Dion; Baldacci; Lemaire; Beyer; Aufrecht; Smit; Hübner; Müller; Kinet; Garbini; Aḥituv
2	ŠḤT	imperfect N-stem; 1 st pers. sing.	shall I be destroyed?	Krahmalkov; Shea
3		Imperfect G-stem; 1 st pers. sing.	shall I destroy?	Becking
4	ṢḤ	unclear; cf. Arabic "to be in good health"	he recovered	Azize
5	'Š + ḤT	substantive 'Š ("man") or relative pronoun + adjective cf. חָת (1 Sam 2:4)	those who are scared	Kottsieper (2003)

There are several problems with the interpretations that take these words as verb forms. First, most of these interpretations (more precisely, #5-8 in Table 2 and #4-5 in Table 3) are based on tenuous philological foundations. Regarding the last word in line 4 (^ʾṬḤR), Krahmalkov's interpretation (cf. #5 in Table 2) relies on the notion that the root ^ʾḤR is "well attested in common Semitic in the intensive stem [D] with the meaning 'to be delayed, late, to tarry; to be left behind' (intransitive) and 'to delay, postpone; to hinder; to leave back' (transitive)"²⁵. Yet for the Dt stem, which he takes on for the word under scrutiny, he is only able to mention the Arabic form 5 (= Dt) with the meaning "to be delayed" or "to be left behind". In fact, I failed to find solid evidence of the meaning "to be left behind" in any stem in West Semitic languages, and it seems precarious to argue that it would exist in Ammonite. The derived meaning "to be vexed", put forward by Emerton (see, again, #5 in Table 2), is even more conjectural. Moreover, Krahmalkov's analysis requires that a metathesis of T and the first radical (>^ʾṬḤR) occurs in the Ammonite Dt stem, but it is not very likely since among the other Semitic languages this metathesis occurs only in Akkadian²⁶. Loretz's interpretation (#6 in Table 2) postulates a Gt stem, but, even assuming that this stem existed in Ammonite²⁷, the meaning "to stay behind" corresponds to the D stem or Dt stem in other languages, as far as I can see. Shea's proposal (#7 in Table 2) presupposes an elision of the final radical H, which does not happen in Hebrew, and we have no ground to assume that it happens in Ammonite²⁸. As for Azize's proposal (#8 in Table 2), it is even more problematic since no precise root is suggested.

With regard to the word in line 5 (^ʾŠḤT), Azize's interpretation (#4 in Table 3) is based on a comparison with ṢḤ in Arabic, which is hardly convincing. As for Kottsieper's idea (#5 in Table 3) to break ^ʾŠḤT into ^ʾŠ + ḤT, it is more astute than compelling. Note in particular that the Ammonite relative pronoun is not ^ʾŠ but Š²⁹.

²⁵ C. R. KRAHMALKOV, "Ammonite", 56.

²⁶ Edward LIPÍŃSKI, *Semitic Languages. Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (OLA, 80), Leuven, Peeters, 2001², 406. The exception, of course, is when the first radical is a sibilant in Hebrew, Phoenician and Aramaic.

²⁷ There is no evidence for this; see Ill-Sung Andrew YUN, "The Transjordanian Languages during the Iron Age II", *UF* 37 (2005) 757.

²⁸ As noted by B. BECKING, "Interpretation", 274.

²⁹ Matthieu RICHELLE, Michael WEIGL, "Hisban Ostrakon A1. New Collation and New Readings", *ADAJ* 53 (2009) 133; RICHELLE, "Notes épigraphiques sur l'ostrakon n°3 de Tell el-Mazar", *Semitica* 54 (2012) 139; idem, "Revisiting", 56; *pace* W. R. GARR, "Dialect Geography", 85; I.-S. A. YUN, "Transjordanian Languages", 751.

Second, these interpretations strike me as improbable as regards the resulting meaning of the text. For instance, Krahmalkov translates: “To the vineyard and the orchard! Or shall I be left behind and destroyed?”, which I find far from poetic. The same with Loretz’s translation: “O Weinberg, o Kelter, und ich soll zurückbleiben und verderben?” As for Shea’s proposal: “Shall I inflame myself (with it) and be ruined?”, it is inspired by the idea that the king might be “inflamed” by wine as in Isaiah 5:11, but the verb used in the latter verse is *דלֵק*, whereas the metaphorical use of *קָרָה* concerns anger (e.g. Psalm 37:1), not inebriation.

Third, I would like to draw attention to a feature of the text that has been neglected by most scholars and that leads me to regard the “poem” interpretation as unlikely. What is rarely noted by commentators is that the engraver took care that the layout of the engraved text followed the inner logic of the contents. Thus each of the three first inscribed lines follows the parallel construction of the text and ends by “king of the sons of Ammon”:

- (1) M’BD of Amminadab, king of the sons of Ammon,
- (2) the son of Hišsal’el, king of the sons of Ammon,
- (3) the son of Amminadab, king of the sons of Ammon

It is not just because there was no space after the words “sons of Ammon” that the engraver started a new line: line 4 shows that he was able to go even more to the left if he wanted to do so. Similarly, the engraver started a new line after the word of line 5 and after the two words of line 6, whereas in both cases there was plenty of space left. The only possible explanation is that the layout of the inscription corresponds somewhat to its literary structure, or its syntactical components. Thus line 6 stops relatively early because of the poetical structure of the clauses in line 6 (“May he rejoice and be glad”) on the one hand, and in lines 7-8 on the other (“for many days and years far off”), both of which contain a pair of nearly synonymous expressions. Apparently, only space constraints prevented the scribe from writing the entire second clause on the same line.

- (6) May he rejoice and be glad
- (7) for many days and years
- (8) far off.

This concern for the correspondance between the layout and the structure of the contents is very unusual in North-West Semitic epigraphy as far as continuous texts are concerned; it happens with lists, but I failed

to find a parallel when it comes to royal inscriptions or letters. This is a fascinating feature of this inscription. It means either that the engraver understood what he was writing (contrary to Thompson and Zayadine's view³⁰) or that he was reproducing a layout prepared by a scribe.

In my view, this observation renders the "poetic" interpretation unlikely. If lines 4-5 really comprised two different clauses, as argued by Krahmal'kov, Shea, Loretz and Emerton (see their translations in the Appendix), then I submit that the convention followed by the engraver in the rest of the inscription would have led him to start a new line after the second word of line 4. The corresponding layout would have been the following:

HKRM.WH.GNT.
WH'THR.W'ŠHT

In my view, the layout writing of lines 4-5 encourages us to read the word in line 5 (W'ŠHT) as the direct continuation of the previous sentence³¹, so lines 4-5 constitutes one sentence (or, alternatively, the end of a longer sentence).

Fourth, the literary genre of inscriptions commemorating the building works of a king is well attested in the Ancient Near East, the only peculiarity of the present inscription being its medium, a bottle. The same cannot be said in favor of the "poem" interpretation. Moreover, many scholars³² have noted the similarity of the text with Qoheleth 2: 4-5:

I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

It is not, of course, that the Biblical passage and the inscription belong to the same literary genre, but they are based on the same royal rhetoric which exalts the building and botanical works of a king.

So I find various weaknesses in the "poem" interpretation. By contrast, the only difficulties with the "commemorative text" interpretation are the analysis of the last word in line 4 (H'THR), and the absence of a definite article before the word in line 5 (ŠHT). Yet plausible explanations have

³⁰ H. O. THOMPSON, F. ZAYADINE, "Tell Siran Inscription", 5; idem, "Ammonite", 162. This view was based on the anomalous presence of the separator in WH.GNT in line 4.

³¹ It is even tempting to hypothesize that line 6 marks the beginning of a new sentence, since it is so neatly separated from what precedes. This would rule out the translations of COOTE, AUFRECHT, KOTTSIEPER and GARBINI. However, I would refrain from reasoning in such a way because we see in lines 6-7 that the engraver started a new line in the middle of a sentence.

³² See e.g. H.-P. MÜLLER, "Kohélet und Amminadab".

been put forward for the former, based on the roots $\dot{H}WR$ or $\dot{H}RR$ with an infixed T^{33} (#1-3 in Table 2), and all of them leads to more or less the same interpretation: a tunnel, a canal or a reservoir, perhaps a hollow, that is, some water system. This fits the context very well. As for the absence of definitive article in line 5, it does not seem to me an insuperable difficulty; maybe it was just an oversight or an aural error.

4. LINES 6-8

Finally, lines 6-8 are less debated, although there exist some variations. The majority interpretation regards it as a self-contained sentence bearing a general wish: “May he [= the king Amminadab] rejoice and be happy for many years and in years far off”. But some scholars argue that the subject of the verbs in line 6 (YGL and $Y\dot{S}MH$) is no other than the works mentioned in lines 4-5³⁴ or the wine supposedly contained in the bottle³⁵. As already mentioned, Coote and Aufrecht even propose that the entire text contains only one sentence, the first word being explicited in lines 4-5:

May the produce of ϵ Amminadab (...) – the vineyard and the garden(s) and the hollow and cistern – cause rejoicing and gladness for many days (to come) and in years far off.

In my view, these proposals do not render justice to the fact that this text contains a well attested topos of Levantine inscriptions³⁶, whereby a king expresses his wish that his life (and his reign) last as long as possible. Green gathers various parallels, in Yehimilk (KAI 4), Elibaal (KAI 6), Shipitbaal (KAI 7), Kilamuwa II (KAI 25), Tell Fekherye and the royal inscription from Ekron³⁷. The typical sentence is: “May DN lengthen the days of PN [the king] and his years over his kingdom”³⁸. It strains

³³ See E. LIPÍŃSKI, *Semitic Languages*, 227.

³⁴ K. BEYER, “Ammonite”, 390-91.

³⁵ W. H. SHEA, “Siran Inscription”, 110.

³⁶ There are also good parallels for “may he rejoice and be glad”, since the pair of verbs occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 25:9; 66:10; etc.), and for “for many days and years far off” (Ezek 12:27: $\text{וְלַעֲתִים וְלַרַּבִּים יָמִים}$). Yet what we find on the bottle is a combination of both, and the best parallel for this is to be found in some royal inscriptions.

³⁷ D. J. GREEN, “*I Undertook*”, 272.

³⁸ Strictly speaking, the wish does not concern the lengthening of the king’s life, but his enjoyment during that life (line 6). Usually, one encounters some form of the verb $\dot{R}K$ (“to lengthen”); here, it is the verbs YGL and $Y\dot{S}MH$ that convey the wish. Yet this does not mean that the king takes for granted that he will have a long life; to wish that one may rejoice during numerous days is also a way of wishing that one will have numerous days in the first

credulity to believe that the resemblance between lines 6-8 and this topos is a coincidence, and this constitutes, in my view, yet another reason to regard the inscription as a commemorative text. Interestingly, the Tell Siran inscription deviates from the well-established pattern in that it does not mention any deity. While I can accept that the deity is left unmentioned (perhaps only implied) because the text is “king-centered”, as argued by Green³⁹, I find it doubtful that the deity would be replaced by building works as the source of the well-being and long reign of the king, as Coote and Aufrecht’s interpretation requires⁴⁰. In addition, the initial position of the verbs (YGL and YŠMH) is a good fit for their jussive function in a new sentence⁴¹.

CONCLUSION

The classical interpretation of the Tell Siran bottle inscription as a commemorative text has been challenged by another interpretation that reads it as a poem. While this second line of interpretation was based on astute reasoning and has appealed to various scholars, it is unlikely for several reasons: the philological basis of the corresponding translations are tenuous, it does not fit the careful layout of the text and it misses important parallels in Ancient Near Eastern documentation. The most recent interpretation of an inscription is not necessarily the best.

It is a great honor and pleasure to offer this study to Professor Emile Puech as a modest token of admiration and friendship. The work of this distinguished epigrapher has marked many areas in the field of West-Semitic epigraphy; the Ammonite corpus, to which the Tell Siran bottle belongs, is no exception and I remember how, when studying this corpus, I found myself constantly returning to Emile Puech’s article on Ammonite paleography⁴².

place. The phrasing is a subtle way to wish both a good quality (line 6) and great quantity (lines 7-8) of life (D. J. GREEN, “*I Undertook*”, 273).

³⁹ D. J. GREEN, “*I Undertook*”, 277.

⁴⁰ Note also that the identification of the topos rules out M. BALDACCI’s translation: “May he be gratified and may he be congratulated after many days and long years” (“Ammonite”, 364).

⁴¹ See, for Classical Biblical Hebrew poetry, Jan JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew. A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of Classical Prose* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies, 10), Jerusalem, Simor, 2012, 433.

⁴² É. PUECH, “L’inscription de la statue d’Amman”; see also É. PUECH and A. ROFÉ, “L’inscription de la Citadelle d’Amman”, *RB* 80 (1973) 531-546. In particular, my own direct examination of Hisban ostrakon A1 (also named Ostrakon IV) has led me to conclude that the Ammonite relative pronoun is not *Š but Š (as already noted above). I was struck by the

APPENDIX: VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS OF THE TELL SIRAN INSCRIPTION

Author	Lines 1-3	Lines 4-5	Lines 6-8
Thompson and Zayadine 1973	The works of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hišsal'el, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites,	a vineyard and the gardens and the <i>'thr</i> and cisterns.	May he rejoice and be glad for many days and long years.
Dion 1975	Travaux d'Amminadab roi des Ammonites, Fils de Hiššil'el, roi des Ammonites, Fils d'Amminadab, roi des Ammonites:	la vigne et les jardins et les tunnel (?) et citerne (?).	Qu'il se réjouisse et qu'il soit heureux en des jours nombreux et des années prolongées!
Khramalkov 1976	The poem of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hassel'el, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites:	"To the vineyard and the orchard! Or shall I be left behind and destroyed?"	He (who says this) rejoice and be happy that life is long and there are years yet unlied.
Shea 1978	(The wine in this vessel comes) From the cultivation of Amminadab, king of the sons of Ammon, the son of Hišsal'el, king of the sons of Ammon, the son of Amminadab, king of the sons of Ammon,	of the vineyard and the garden, and shall I inflame myself (with it) and be ruined? (No!)	It shall make glad and bring joy for many days and long years.
Loretz 1978	Gegenstand Amminadab, Königs der Ammoniter, Sohn des Hišsal-El, Königs der Ammoniter, Sohn des Amminadab, Königs der Ammoniter.	O Weinberg, o Kelter, und ich soll zurückbleiben und verderben?	Er möge jubeln und sich freuen viele Tage und lange Jahren!
Coote 1980	May the product of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hišsil-'el, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites	– the vineyard and the orchard and the park and <the> pools –	give pleasure for many days and for years far off.

fact that this confirmed Emile Puech's drawing of the ostrakon ("L'inscription de la statue", 17, Fig. V): before Š, he had correctly read the letter W instead of ' read by other scholars. And yet his reading was not based on the meaning of the text, only on his impressively accurate "eye".

Author	Lines 1-3	Lines 4-5	Lines 6-8
Baldacci 1981	Work of ʿmndb, king of ʿAmmon, son of ḥṣlʿl, king of ʿAmmon, son of ʿmndb, king of ʿAmmon:	the vineyards and the orchards and the tunnel and a cistern.	May he be gratified and may he be congratulated after many days and long years.
Becking 1981	Ernteertrag des Amminadab, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des Ḥiṣṣalʿel, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des Amminadab, des Königs der Ammoniter.	Den Weinberg, den Garten(/die Gärten) und den Vorrat: soll ich (diese) vernichten?	Lass ihn Freude und Fröhlichkeit verbreiten während vieler Tage und in fernen Jahren.
Emerton 1982	The poem of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hasselʿel, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites.	O Vineyard and garden: (or: in the vineyard and garden). Shall I vex myself and destroy myself?	Let a man rejoice and be glad for many days and far-off years.
Smit 1989	The works of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hissilʿel, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites,	the vineyard, and then the gardens, and the trough, and (many) cisterns.	May he rejoice and be glad for many days and years far away.
Lemaire 1991	Deeds of Amminadab king of the Ammonites, the son of Hizzilel king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab king of the Ammonites:	the vineyard and the gardens(s?) and the <i>canal</i> and the reservoir(s?).	May he rejoice and be glad for many days and long years.
Beyer 1995	That which Amminadab, the king of the Ammonites, the son of Hessilel, the king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, the king of the Ammonites, has laid out are	the vineyard, the garden, the orchard and cisterns.	May they cause joy and pleasure for many days and in far off years.
Müller 1996	Die Werke Amminadabs, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des Ḥaṣṣilʿils, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes Amminadabs, des Königs der Ammoniter:	der Weinberg und die Gärten und das Reservoir (?) und Zisternen.	Er juble und freue sich viele Tage und ferne Jahre lang.

Author	Lines 1-3	Lines 4-5	Lines 6-8
Aufrecht 1989; forthcoming	May the produce of ʿAmminadab king of the Ammonites, the son of Haṣṣilʿil king of the Ammonites, the son of ʿAmminadab king of the Ammonites	– the vineyard and the garden(s) and the hollow and cis- tern –	cause rejoicing and gladness for many days (to come) and in years far off.
Kottsieper 2003	Werke des ʿMNDB, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des HŠLʿL, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des ʿMNDB, des Königs der Ammoniter,	sind der Weinberg und der Garten und der/die/das ʿṭḥr/n. Und (so) sollen/ werden die, die ver- schreckt/entmutigt sind,	jubeln und sich freuen für viele Tage und ferne Jahre.
Azize 2003	Pious is Amminadab, king of the sons of Ammon, son of Hassalʿil king of the sons of Ammon, son of Amminadab king of the sons of Ammon,	He (dedicated?) the cultivated field and the garden, and he (recovered?)	May he rejoice and be glad for many days and in years far off.
Kinet 2003	Die Werke des Ammi- nadab, des Königs der Ammoniter, des Sohnes des Hissalʿel, des Königs der Ammoniter: des Sohnes Amminadab, des Königs der Ammoniter:	der Weinberg und die Obstgärten und die Teiche (?) und die Zisternen	Er möge jubeln und sich erfreuen während zahl- reicher Tage und Jahre langer
Garbini 2006	Le opere di Amminadab re degli Ammoniti, Figlio di Hasalel re degli Ammoniti, Figlio di Amminadab re degli Ammoniti,	(e cioè) la vigna, il giardino, il canale (?) et la cisterna	diano letizia e gioia per molti giorni e per lunghi anni.
Aḥituv 2008	The works of ʿAmminādāb, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hiṣṣilʿēl, king of the Ammonites, the son of ʿAmminādāb, king of the Ammonites:	the vineyard and the garden and the tun- nel/channel(?) and the reservoir.	May he rejoice and be happy for many days and in years far off.