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## ARAMAIC AND THE BIBLE

The Value of Egyptian Aramaic  
for Biblical Studies

*by Collin Cornell*

# The Value of Egyptian Aramaic for Biblical Studies

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**Abstract:** Biblical Aramaic accounts for a small fraction within the two-testament Christian Bible. Studying it would seem therefore to present a modest value for biblical studies, and Egyptian Aramaic, a nonbiblical counterpart from the same historical era, even more so. The present article argues, however, that comparing Egyptian Aramaic with biblical texts sharpens understanding of the Bible’s distinctive theological profile. It demonstrates the value of Egyptian Aramaic through two comparative case studies: the first is lexically-focused and traces the contrast between “former” (as in, “former times”; Hebrew ראשון//Aramaic √קדם) and “latter” in Haggai and in several Aramaic letters from the Egyptian island of Elephantine. The second is more genre-focused and engages with the transmission of royal traditions, especially promissory oracles to the king, in post-monarchic texts: namely, biblical royal psalms and the Egyptian Aramaic Papyrus Amherst 63.

**Keywords:** Egyptian Aramaic; early Judaism; Persian Period; Achaemenid; Elephantine; Haggai; royal psalms; Papyrus Amherst 63

## Introduction

For many seminarians, students, and researchers, Aramaic is the “other” biblical language. Within the two-testament Christian Bible, the first testament accounts for roughly two-thirds of the whole; it is written almost entirely in Hebrew. The remaining third, the New Testament, is written in Greek. Only a handful of letters in the book of Ezra (4:8–6:18; 7:12–26) and some stories in Daniel (albeit well-known stories: 2:4b–7:28) are written in Aramaic. Together with one zestful sentence in Jeremiah—“The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish!” (10:11)—these passages amount to a tiny fraction of the Bible. Given this distribution, it is already question enough why students would benefit from adding biblical Aramaic to their repertoire. Gaining some knowledge of *Egyptian* Aramaic—a subspecies? a cousin?

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to biblical Aramaic—would seem to present an even more marginal value. And yet, as the present article will argue, Aramaic texts from Egypt have much to offer biblical studies. Comparing Egyptian Aramaic with biblical texts sharpens understanding of the Bible’s profile; looking synoptically at features shared across these corpora deepens appreciation for the Bible’s distinctive offer.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of arguing this proposition at forty-thousand feet, the present article pursues two more detailed demonstrations or case studies. Both juxtapose a biblical text (or texts) with an Egyptian Aramaic comparand. Both examples also focus on key differences that the biblical materials show relative to their Aramaic counterparts, and, as space allows, they interrogate the reasons for such divergence. The first study examines the programmatic uses of the concept “former” (as in, “former times”; Hebrew ראשון//Aramaic √קדם), as it appears in Haggai and in several Aramaic documents from the Egyptian island of Elephantine.<sup>2</sup> The second study below engages with the reception of royal traditions, especially promissory oracles to the king, in post-monarchic texts: namely, biblical royal psalms and the Egyptian Aramaic Papyrus Amherst 63. The first case study is more lexically-focused, though it opens onto historical and theological considerations of *apocalypse*; the second is more genre-focused and tradition-historical.

## Egyptian Aramaic

Before delving into these case studies, a brief introduction is in order. “Egyptian Aramaic” is, as a designation, geographical, referring to the Aramaic data in terms of their *provenance*. In terms of their *chronological* location, however, the relevant

1. On the comparative enterprise, see Brent A. Strawn, “Comparative Approaches: History, Theory, and the Image of God,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Peterson*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 56 (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 117–42; also Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative’ Method in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 381–419. Compare Jon D. Levenson’s insightful comments on searching for uniqueness: “There is no logical necessity that something be unprecedented or unparalleled when it is revealed; God can work through history as well as in spite of it.” Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*, New Voices in Biblical Studies (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 11.

2. These are, of course, different lemmata. Egyptian Aramaic does use the cognate of Biblical Hebrew, ראשון: Bezael Porten and Jerome A. Lund’s *Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance* lists twelve occurrences of ראש under the heading “head, capital, principal” ([Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002], 280); also compare *Lexicon Syriacum*, 729–30. However, the far commoner Aramaic translation of BH ראשון is formed from the root meaning “east” or “before” (√קדם); see Porten and Lund, *Concordance*, 274. Footnotes below provide more detailed examples showing that where Biblical Hebrew has ראשון, Syriac and Targumic Aramaic use √קדם, but overall, I cannot find an instance within the 182 occurrences of ראשון in the Hebrew Bible that is translated by something other than √קדם in these later, Aramaic versions.

Aramaic texts belong to a larger category: they are Achaemenid. They date, that is, to the period when the Persian Empire, ruled over by a dynasty supposedly tracing back to the eponymous Achaemenes, dominated the Near East (538–333 BCE), including, for much of that time, Egypt. Because Aramaic was the official administrative language of this empire, scholars also call the Aramaic language of this period “Imperial Aramaic” (in German, *Reichsaramäisch*), “Official Aramaic,” or “Standard Aramaic.”<sup>3</sup>

“Egyptian Aramaic” is thus a geographical subset of the Aramaic spoken chronologically during the Achaemenid period, and which enjoyed official status. It deserves saying that “biblical Aramaic” is also, in large part at least, a subset of this same Achaemenid Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> Differences notwithstanding, the jump for students from Ezra and Daniel to the Aramaic literature and letters of the Achaemenid Period is a manageable one. Finally, too, documents from Egypt account for the majority of Aramaic material from the Achaemenid period.<sup>5</sup> As often as not, therefore, when scholars refer to Official or Standard Aramaic, they have Egyptian texts in mind.<sup>6</sup>

The first European discovery, not to mention theft, of an Egyptian Aramaic text occurred in 1704: a French marine commissioner named Jean-Pierre Rigord published an Aramaic funerary inscription that he had apparently found nearby to a mummy; dating to the third or fourth century BCE, the bas-relief depicts a judgment scene before the god Osiris, to whom the deceased had been a devotee (TAD D20.5).<sup>7</sup> Other Egyptian Aramaic texts were published only a few years ago,<sup>8</sup> and a number of

3. For a judicious discussion of these terms and their relative merits, see Margaretha L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 68 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 9–13; also the handy introduction by Takamitsu Muraoka, *An Introduction to Egyptian Aramaic*, *Lehrbücher orientalischer Sprachen* 3.1 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 15–18.

4. In Folmer’s considered judgment, the Aramaic of Daniel shares some features with Hellenistic Aramaic, whereas Ezra’s accords more fully with Persian-period exemplars (*Aramaic Language*, 753–55). For one recent affirmation of the authenticity of the official documents embedded within Ezra, see H. G. M. Williamson, “The Aramaic Documents in Ezra Revisited,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 59 (2008): 41–62; but compare Dirk Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches*, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 295 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000).

5. Folmer, *Aramaic Language*, 13.

6. On non-Egyptian Aramaic texts from the Persian period, see Folmer, *Aramaic Language*, 21. Note that “the provinces more to the East have not yielded Aramaic texts from the Achaemenid period” (*ibid.*).

7. Rudolf Jaggi, “Der ‘Stein von Carpentras,’” *Kemet* 1 (2012): 58–60. References to TAD throughout the present article abbreviate Bezael Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Department of the History of the Jewish People, 1986–1999). For an account of “discoveries” in Egypt in the context of European colonial rivalries, see Neil A. Silberman, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt, 1989); on Elephantine, “Egypt: Whose Elephantine?” in Silberman, *Between Past and Present*, 169–85.

8. Jan Dušek and Jana Mynářová, “Phoenician and Aramaic Inscriptions from Abusir,” in *In the Shadow of Bezael: Aramaic, Biblical, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Bezael*

volumes of previously unpublished material are still forthcoming.<sup>9</sup> In spite of these developments, the edition by Bezelel Porten and Ada Yardeni remains indispensable to the field; one scholar, Gard Granerød, called it his “Bible” for studying Persian-Period Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Porten and Yardeni classify the Egyptian Aramaic documents into several genres.<sup>11</sup>

- volume 1: Letters (numbering 50, with an appendix containing eight Aramaic letters excerpted from the Bible)
- volume 2: Contracts (numbering 57)
- volume 3: Literature, Accounts, Lists (numbering 41)
- volume 4: Ostraca and Assorted Inscriptions (numbering 478)

The first case study of the present article will consider several letters from the Yedoniah archive, which Porten and Yardeni published in their first volume (TAD A4.7/8); the second will refer to an unprovenanced papyrus, which they did not include.

### **Mobilizing “Former” Times**

A number of passages in Hebrew Scripture mobilize a contrast between “former” and “latter” times. Always this contrast reflects a rupture between the two. A decisive event separates them; so, for example, the programmatic juxtaposition in Psalm 89. This psalm is the theological perigee of the canonical Psalter. Psalm 88, its immediate literary antecedent, ends with the claim that “darkness is my only companion” (v. 18, CEV)—but Psalm 89 is yet worse. Whereas the first part of Psalm 89 praises God’s primordial action of establishing the cosmos and the Davidic dynasty, the second part accuses God of reversing course and overthrowing his anointed. It says to God: “you have renounced the covenant with your servant” (MT v. 40, ET v. 39). A harsher breakage could hardly be articulated; the language is so stark that one medieval Spanish rabbi considered it blasphemous.<sup>12</sup> MT v. 50 (ET v. 49) then plaintively asks:

*Porten*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta, *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 53–69.

9. The “Studies on Elephantine” series is an open-source series designed in conjunction with the Berlin Egyptian Museum’s papyrus collection with Brill as the publisher. It will host the findings of the European Research Council’s grant for Verena Lepper entitled “Localizing 4000 Years of Cultural History: Texts and Scripts from Elephantine Island in Egypt.”

10. Gard Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period: Studies in the Religion and Society of the Judaean Community at Elephantine*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 488 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), vii.

11. An excellent overview of Aramaic literature at large, and the Egyptian data within it, is Ingo Kottsieper, “Aramaic Literature,” in *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 393–444.

12. Hayyim Angel, “Biblical Prayers and Rabbinic Responses: Balancing Truthfulness and Respect before God,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38 (2010): 3–9, here 7.

Lord, where is your steadfast love of old [חסדיך הרשנים],  
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?<sup>13</sup>

The rhetorical effect of the contrast is to spur the Lord to *remember* (זכר; MT v. 51, ET v. 50), to give over attention to the era prior to this new moment of divine disruption in hope of bringing back that former time.

Another well-developed biblical example of the contrast between “former” and “latter” occurs in Isaiah. Sometimes in the canonical book of Isaiah, YHWH directs attention to the former things, since, like “what is to come hereafter” (41:23), these constitute an enigmatic domain into which YHWH has unique divine insight. He alone can “tell of them” (42:9; see also 43:9; 46:8–9; 48:3).<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere in Isaiah, however, YHWH urges *forgetfulness* of this beforetime, and this in order to exalt the new and discontinuous divine work he will accomplish. So, for example, Isa 43:18–19:

Do not remember the former things [ראשנות],  
or consider the things of old [קדמניות].<sup>15</sup>  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

Isaiah 65:17b takes up this theme of forgetfulness: “the former things [הראשנות] shall not be remembered.”<sup>16</sup> In this case, the novel event that separates the past from the time that follows is scaled immensely: new heavens and new earth. In so many words, the contrast points up *apocalypse*: divine action that radically interrupts the course of known and familiar world history.<sup>17</sup>

The same contrast, employing the same Hebrew lemma for “former” (ראשן) also appears in the book of the prophet Haggai. The book initially identifies a historical and this-worldly rupture: the destruction of the first temple in 587 BCE. In Haggai’s first chapter, dated to the second year of Darius the king (520 BCE), YHWH commands the people to rebuild his house (1:8).<sup>18</sup> As motivation, YHWH appeals to the recent,

13. The Peshitta—the Bible in Syriac translation, itself a form of Aramaic—reads here *qdm̄yt'* (√*qdm*).

14. Katie M. Heffelfinger lists “Memory/Former Things” as a rhetorical resource of Second Isaiah that includes “dissonant” occurrences. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*, Biblical Interpretation Series 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 286n18.

15. Peshitta translates with cognates, but in reverse order: *qdm̄yt'* // *ryšyt'*; Targum Isaiah: אולא // דמן קדמיותא (“from of old”).

16. Peshitta: *qdm̄yt'*; TgIsa: קדמיותא.

17. The secondary literature seeking to define “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” and to trace their historical lineage is oceanic; for one influential account, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature, Third Edition*, Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

18. For this dating of Haggai, see Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, Library of Second Temple Studies 47 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 87.

negative consequences of their neglect (vv. 9–11). When the leaders and the remnant respond and begin rebuilding (v. 12), YHWH then adds a positive impetus, assuring them through the prophet that “I am with you” (v. 13). The second chapter of Haggai expands on that promise of divine presence. The contrast between “former” and “now” amplifies the effect. YHWH asks (2:3–4, NRSV):

Who is left among you that saw this house in its *former* glory? [בכבודו הראשון]

How does it look to you now [עתה]?

Is it not in your sight as nothing?

Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you.<sup>19</sup>

But then in v. 6, YHWH announces a further reassurance: he will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, as well as all the nations. YHWH will prosecute an event of destruction that will undo all human power (compare with v. 22: “overthrow the throne of kingdoms”). The wealth of the whole world, which belongs primordially to YHWH, will be loosed from human arrogation and returned to YHWH’s direct proprietorship, transferring to YHWH’s house in Jerusalem. After this shaking of all creation, YHWH pledges in closing that “the latter [האחרון] splendor of this house shall be greater than the former [הראשון]” (v. 9). Here at the end of the second chapter, the contrast of “former” and “latter” alludes, as in Isaiah 65, to *apocalypse*. Haggai fitly anticipates the apocalyptic themes of world-destruction and re-creation that Zechariah develops more fully (see esp. Zech 14).

The scope and radicality of Haggai’s apocalyptic contrast can be illuminated through comparison with another project of Judean temple rebuilding attested in several Egyptian Aramaic letters and memoranda.<sup>20</sup> Where Haggai emphasizes the difference and superiority of the latter temple relative to the former, the rhetoric of these documents upholds *continuity*: the latter temple will operate just as its predecessor did formerly. And where Haggai mediates divine promise, assuring a human audience of YHWH’s power and initiative, these documents exclusively target

19. Peshitta translates בכבודו הראשון in Haggai 2:3 with *qdm*’, using the Aramaic adjective derived from  $\sqrt{qdm}$ , the same in v. 9; also compare Targum Haggai: ביקרייה קדמאה in v. 3, same adjective in v. 9.

20. For a comparison of the Yedoniah correspondence from Elephantine with biblical writing about temple destruction, especially Lamentations, see Gard Granerød, “Temple Destruction, Mourning, and Curse in Elephantine, with a View to Lamentations,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 132 (2020): 84–107. For another comparison of the temple rebuilding projects in Elephantine and in Jerusalem, see Reinhard G. Kratz, “The Second Temple of Jeb and of Jerusalem,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschitz and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 247–64; Kratz, “Judean Ambassadors and the Making of Jewish Identity: The Case of Hananiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period*, ed. Oded Lipschitz, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 421–44.

human and mundane agency. As will be seen, YHWH is not the *addressee* but the *guarantor*—of reward to human actors, should they comply with the letter’s request.

In the late fifth century BCE, little more than a century after Haggai, another Judean community faced the challenge of trying to rebuild their destroyed temple. These Judeans were members of a military garrison; stationed at the very southernmost border of Egypt, they guarded the Nile River as it flowed northwards down from Nubia. Their outpost was dyadic: a town called Syene (modern Aswan) occupied the eastern bank of the river, and a fortress sat across from it on a river island called Elephantine. The Judeans lived in the island fortress (though some owned property across the river in the town), and they worshipped the god Yhw in their own temple there.<sup>21</sup> The date of their arrival is unknown: they claim that their ancestors had built the temple “during the days of the king(s) of Egypt,” which is to say, in the Saite Period (664–525 BC), such that when the Persian Cambyses conquered Egypt in 525 BCE, “he found that temple built” (TAD A4.7/8, ll. 14/13). Together with the Arameans who populated the town of Syene, the Judeans appear to have acted as *cleruchs*: the men were not all or only soldiers earning a wage for mercenary service, but rather, standing reservists who leased land in usufruct.<sup>22</sup> Though they had served the native Egyptian Pharaohs, when the Persians overtook Egypt, they switched lienholders and loyalties.<sup>23</sup>

This political turnover meant that the Judeans’ relationship to the local Egyptians changed as well. The Judeans and Arameans had been cleruchs subject to the Egyptian ruler, foreign, but playing for the “home team,” as it were. Tensions may already have arisen: as Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley reminds, “where land usufruct was granted to foreign soldiers, this land must have been confiscated from the local populations.”<sup>24</sup> But once the Persians assumed control of Egypt, tensions dramatically escalated: the

21. The divine name YHWH, the Tetragrammaton, was a “Tritogram” at Elephantine, spelled either Yhw or, in ostraca, Yhh. See Bob Becking, “Die Gottheiten der Juden in Elephantine,” in *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel*, ed. Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid, *Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 82 (Zürich: TVZ, 2003), 203–26, here 209; also Martin Rose, *Jahwe: zum Streit um den alttestamentlichen Gottesnamen*, *Theologische Studien* 122 (Zürich: TVZ, 1978), 16–22.

22. Karel van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews: Behind the Story of Elephantine*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 90–95; contra Gard Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism*, 74–75. See also Christopher Tuplin, “Persian Garrisons in Xenophon and Other Sources,” in *Method and Theory: Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop*, ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Achaemenid History* 3 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1988), 67–70; and Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, “Preserving the Cult of Yhw in Judean Garrisons: Continuity from Pharaonic to Ptolemaic Times,” in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert Tigchelaar, *Supplements to Journal for the Study of Judaism* 175 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 375–408, here 377–82.

23. Fitzpatrick-McKinley suggests that perhaps the reason the Egyptians had stationed expatriate cleruchs at Elephantine was the desertion of an original Egyptian unit (“Preserving the Cult,” 399, also n106).

24. Fitzpatrick-McKinley, “Preserving the Cult,” 402.

expatriate Judeans and Arameans had become deputies of the occupying force, ready not only to ward off incursion from Nubia but to put down native uprisings against the new Persian overlords.

And it seems that just such uprisings did take place. In the fourteenth year of Darius (the second of that name; so: 410 BCE), the satrap tasked with oversight of Egypt, a Persian prince named Arsames, departed from Egypt to return to the royal court in Susa. In Arsames's absence, there were "riots and disorders."<sup>25</sup> (When the cat's away, the mice will play!) Two Egyptian Aramaic letters written from the satrap back to his stand-in in Egypt mention revolts in the Nile Delta.<sup>26</sup> A draft letter from the Judean community at Elephantine also identifies an act of destruction undertaken by native Egyptians while the satrap was absent. The Egyptians of Elephantine did not directly attack the Persians. Instead they directed their aggression towards their proxies, the Judean cleruchs. And they did not assault the military men. Rather, they stopped up the Judeans' well, damaged their granary, and, perhaps as a coup de grâce, arranged for their temple to be razed to the ground.

The draft letter in question dates to 407 BCE, three years after the destruction of the Yhw temple on Elephantine. Its addressee is Bagohi, the governor of the Persian province of Yehud, and its sender is Yedoniah and his colleagues the priests (TAD A4.7/8, ll. 1/1).<sup>27</sup> Yedoniah narrates in detail the temple's destruction at the hands of the regional Persian commander—whom the local Egyptians had suborned. He also tells of the Judeans' grief and self-denial in the wake of losing their temple (ll. 20/19): "From [that time] until today, we have been wearing sackcloth and fasting, making our wives as widows, not anointing ourselves with oil or drinking wine." In addition to these appeals to Bagohi's sympathy, Yedoniah also gives a positive reason for Bagohi to act: the Judeans will make offerings in Bagohi's name and "pray for [him] continuously," so that he will "have honor before Yhw more than a man who offers him burnt-offerings and sacrifices worth a thousand talents of silver and gold" (ll. 27–28/26–27). What all these ploys seek to persuade Bagohi to do is this: to send a letter to his clients and friends in Egypt in support of rebuilding (ll. 24/23).

Let a letter be sent from you to them about the Temple of Yhw the God to (re)  
build it in Elephantine the fortress *just as it was formerly* [יךדמך] built.

25. G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 9–10; Edda Bresciani, "The Persian Occupation of Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ilya Gershovitch, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2:502–28, here 512; more recently, see van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 136–42.

26. Driver, *Aramaic Documents*, 26 and 28, letters V.6 and VI.1 (see also 9n8). See van der Toorn's account, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 136–142.

27. In point of fact, it is *two* editions of the draft letter. For an early tabulation of the differences between the two drafts, see Marie-Joseph Lagrange, "Les nouveaux papyrus d'Eléphantine," *Revue Biblique* 17 (1908): 330–33; also Bezalel Porten, "The Revised Draft of the Letter of Jedaniah to Bagavahya (TAD A4. 8= Cowley 31)," in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. Meir Lubetski, Claire Gottlieb, Sharon Keller, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 273 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 230–42.

The petition from Yedoniah to Bagohi seems to have worked, because the archives from Elephantine also contained a short memorandum from Bagohi (TAD A4.9). It authorizes the recipient, presumably Yedoniah, to “say before Arsames” concerning the house of Yhw the God of Heaven (ll. 8–10):

(re)build it on its site as it was *formerly* [לְקִדְמִין] and they shall offer the meal-offering and the incense upon that altar just as *formerly* [לְקִדְמִין] was done.

Gard Granerød has written in depth about the force of this descriptor קִדְמִין in the Egyptian Aramaic materials from Elephantine. The repeated emphasis on restoring the temple to its “former” status reflects an ambient esteem for antiquity; Granerød cites a number of near-contemporary Persian documents, including some from Egypt (Udjahorresnet), which leverage comparable concepts of restoration and antiquarianism.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere Granerød writes of the Aramaic root קִדְמ that “the Elephantine Judean rhetoric spun around [this word] says something about the Judeans’ concept of time.” Like other ancient Near Eastern peoples,

the default perspective of the Elephantine Judeans was oriented towards the past. The chronological past was at the same time that which was in front of the spectators...in order to find templates for their future, one looked to the past, to the things of old, which conceptually and terminologically was that which was in one’s front.<sup>29</sup>

Granerød draws out the theological dimension of this orientation: “continuity must probably [sic] have been an ideal and a characteristic of the conception of YHW in Elephantine.”<sup>30</sup>

The divergence of this theological outlook from that of Haggai is stark. The Judeans of Elephantine sought and, rhetorically at any rate, received a total restoration. If the crisis of temple destruction interrupted their worship for a time, they continued to face wholly towards that past regimen. The past was their template for future hope; it remained fundamentally recuperable. Over against that, Haggai prophesies that the past is, or will be, *lost*: the earth and heavens will be shaken, and hope lies on the far side of a cosmic caesura. Haggai layers the second temple, not onto the primordial past, but onto this novel, divinely-wrought future. Theologically, God is for him not at all the upholder of continuity but the instigator of upheaval and disruption. YHWH does a new thing (compare, again, Isa 43:19). The difference is, in

28. Gard Granerød, “The Former and Future Temple of YHW in Elephantine: A Tradition-Historical Case Study of Ancient Near Eastern Antiquarianism,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127 (2015): 63–77, here 73–76; also Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism*, 214–27.

29. Gard Granerød, “What Were the Elephantine Judaeans’ Conceptions of YHW? Aspects of the Elephantine Judaean Temple Theology” (paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, August 2017), 15. I thank Gard for sending me a copy.

30. Granerød, “Conceptions of YHW?” 15.

a word, *apocalypse*. Comparison with the Egyptian Aramaic documents underlines and emboldens this distinctive offer of the biblical texts.<sup>31</sup>

The first case study of the present article shows the value of Egyptian Aramaic for biblical studies in a lexical key: by tracking the terminological contrast between “former” and “latter” in certain biblical texts and then comparing it with the same contrast in some Egyptian Aramaic letters, it silhouettes a historical and theological particularity of Hebrew Scripture. In Haggai, Isaiah, and elsewhere, defeat and loss, including even of the most valued and divinely-given institutions like temple worship, have developed a far more radical and encompassing significance. Though grievous, the loss of temple worship to the Judeans of Elephantine was an event whose redress was quite imaginable, and in fact their draft letter does exactly that imagining.<sup>32</sup> By comparison, the loss in Haggai is total, and because of that, his vision of restoration also utterly sets aside and transcends the usual mundane and historically-traceable coordinates of divine blessing and favor. Certainly there had been no historical precedent for all nations streaming to Jerusalem to cede their wealth to Israel’s God, just as little as there had been precedent for Y<sub>HWH</sub>’s own luminescence replacing the light of sun and moon (Isa 60:19).

### **Transmitting Royal Traditions**

The biblical Psalter features a number of “royal psalms,” so called because of their shared thematic focus on the king. Formally, these psalms are quite dissimilar from one another. Some are hymns, others are prayers. One is, apparently, a royal wedding song—a שיר ידדת or “song of loves” (Ps 45:1). With a few exceptions that speak of “David” (Pss 18, 132), these biblical royal psalms do not name the king whom they celebrate or address. So, for example, Psalm 2 lacks a superscription connecting it to David, and yet it appears to contain an oracle addressing a single individual. In the face of a coalition of enemy kings, vv. 7b–8 record a voice speaking in first person and remembering the reassuring word that Y<sub>HWH</sub> said “to me.”

31. Not all biblical texts exemplify this strong difference; Malachi 3:4, for example, prophesies a return to the past: the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be כימי עולם וכשנים קדמנית, “as in days of old and as in former years.” The Peshitta here uses the same Aramaic (Syriac) word as in the Elephantine texts. Compare Targum Malachi: וכשנין דמלקדמין.

32. Even and perhaps also imagining the downfall of the earthly actors responsible for the temple’s destruction! See James M. Lindenberger, “What Ever Happened to Vidranga? A Jewish Liturgy of Cursing from Elephantine,” in *World of the Aramaeans III: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John William Wever, and Michael Weigl, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 326 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 134–57.

Y<sup>HWH</sup> said to me,<sup>33</sup> “You are my son / today I have begotten you.  
Ask of me, and I will give nations as your inheritance / and as your possession,  
ends of the earth.”

Unless one takes this oracular utterance as a literary artifice, it would first have targeted a real, individual king. But the king’s identity is now excised. Psalm 110 is similar: its v. 1b reflects the voice of a third party, neither Y<sup>HWH</sup> nor the king, but subordinate to the latter since it calls the king “my lord.” This voice reports a promissory word from the deity to the king concerning the king’s enemies.

The oracle of Y<sup>HWH</sup> [נאם יהוה] to my lord [לֵאדֹנָי]:

“Sit at my right hand

Until I make your enemies a stool for your feet.”

The imperative (שב, “sit!”) is masculine singular. It has one individual in view, as do the 2ms suffixes on “enemies” and “feet.” But the king’s name is now missing (unless one reads the superscription rather more strongly than many scholars feel is warranted). This same phenomenon of namelessness applies to Psalm 45. If it once celebrated the wedding of a specific king, the text has been loosened from this initial scenario to serve a wider readership.

The anonymity of these biblical royal psalms distinguishes them rather sharply from other royal texts of the Iron Age Levant, whose very point is to identify a particular, named king and to commemorate his legacy. A case in point is the Zakkur Inscription.<sup>34</sup> Written in Old Aramaic, this text presents the first-person voice of Zakkur, king of Hamath and Lu’ash. The first line on the stele indicates that the king set it up for the deity Iluwer, apparently in the town of Aphis. But the second line then goes on to narrate an episode of divine deliverance effected by a different god, Baalšamen, and in a different town, Hadrach. A coalition of enemy kings besieged king Zakkur in Hadrach. In lines 11–15 he recalls:

I lifted up my hands to Baalšamen: and Baalšamen answered me, and Baalšamen spoke to me by means of seers and by means of messengers, and Baalšamen said to me, “Fear not [’l tzh], for I have made you king [ky ’nh hmlktk] and I will stand with you [w’nh ’qm] and I will save you [w’nh ḥslk] from all these kings who have laid siege to you.”<sup>35</sup>

33. The ancient versions (Old Greek, Vulgate, Peshitta) unanimously take Y<sup>HWH</sup> as the subject of אמר rather than as the complement of אל or קה.

34. On the discovery of Zakkur by Henri Pognon, see René Dussaud, “La stèle araméenne de Zakir au Musée du Louvre,” *Syria* 3 (1922): 175–76; Stefania Mazzoni, “TELL AFIS: History and Excavations,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 76 (2013): 204–12.

35. The translation is mine; a complete translation can be found in Collin Cornell, *Divine Aggression in Psalms and Inscriptions: Vengeful Gods and Loyal Kings*, Society for Old Testament Study Monographs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 57–67.)

The king's purpose in dedicating this stele and remembering this past event is to demonstrate his piety to the god(s)—and so to ensure continued divine favor towards him, especially to guard this physical record of his reign from vandalism. To be sure, an interesting transference has occurred: an oracle addressed to a king in one, specific circumstance has been judged as having a more lasting application, even in a different place, and perhaps to a different god. But the principal point of continuity between the first use of the oracle and its subsequent reuse is exactly the king's name. Zakkur is the link between the siege in Hadrach and the monument in Aphis. His identity is integral to the inscription's rhetorical purpose.

The namelessness of most biblical royal psalms raises intriguing questions about their transmission. How did oracles that once mediated a divine message to an individual royal person become community texts as we find them in the biblical canon? In a 2004 festschrift chapter, Scott Starbuck proposed a three-stage movement from the first use to the last: "a strategic hermeneutical shift...from [the royal psalms'] (postulated) functions in specific historical royal courts of Israel to their theologically nuance-rich claims in the Hebrew Psalter." In stage 1, the psalm was composed "for a court-sponsored event. At this stage the Royal Psalm was historically and verbally anchored to a specific king."<sup>36</sup> In stage 2, "editorial processes...excised specific references to monarchical protagonists within the Royal Psalms." Although the names of individual kings dropped out, "monarchic imagery and metaphor within the Royal Psalms were preserved in order to be reappropriated by the general populace for worship and study."<sup>37</sup> Stage 3 refers to the programmatic placement of royal psalms within the Hebrew Psalter.

Starbuck's account is helpful—but still shows some gaps. The process by which compositions crafted for specific court events were preserved for later occasions remains mysterious, as does the group who would have taken responsibility, early on, for their transmission and transformation. Starbuck admits that "there are no 'fingerprints' to be found among the Royal Psalms that point definitively to Stage 2 redaction."<sup>38</sup> But it may be that one Egyptian Aramaic document provides a "missing link" of sorts: a snapshot, as of a bird in flight, of a royal tradition in transformation; an exemplar of an intermediate stage between a one-time oracle addressed to a single, named king and a community text like the biblical psalms. That document is Papyrus Amherst 63.

This twelve-foot long papyrus, allegedly found in a jar in Thebes, was purchased in Egypt during the 1890s by Lord Amherst of Hackney.<sup>39</sup> Until 1947, the text

36. Scott R. A. Starbuck, "Theological Anthropology at a Fulcrum: Isaiah 55:1–5, Psalm 89, and Second Stage *Traditio* in the Royal Psalms," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 247–65, here 254.

37. Starbuck, "Theological Anthropology," 254.

38. Starbuck, "Theological Anthropology," 255.

39. P. E. Newberry, *The Amherst Papyri, being an account of the Egyptian Papyri in the*

languished in storage in the British Museum. In addition to its physical inaccessibility to scholars, the text itself resisted access: though clearly written in Demotic (Egyptian) script, its content appeared to be gibberish. In the early 1940s, two Egyptologists at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago were looking at photographs of the papyrus that had been taken in 1901. They consulted their colleague, the Semitist Raymond Bowman, who first identified the papyrus's language as Aramaic.<sup>40</sup> Because of the difficulties posed by this anomalous orthographic situation, further sections of the papyrus were not edited or translated until the 1980s. Two teams working independently discovered that column xii of the papyrus contained a version of the royal biblical Psalm 20.<sup>41</sup> This finding generated massive interest in the text among biblical scholars.

As intriguing as column xii is, however, another, less-explored column is more useful to the present article's section on the transmission of royal psalms. This is column vi. The latter begins with a protestation of innocence addressed to "Mar," the "god of Rash": "no evil is in my hands...no slander in my mouth" (l. 3; repeated again in l. 9).<sup>42</sup> It continues with a complaint about enemy conspirators, who say, "let us eat his flesh and become fat; let us drink his blood and become sated" (l. 6).<sup>43</sup> After these appeals from the speaker to the god Mar, the god answers. The translator Richard Steiner labels what follows "The Heilsorakel: a reassuring reply."<sup>44</sup>

*Collection of the Right Hon. Lord Amherst of Hackney F.S.A., at Didlington Hall, Norfolk* (London, 1899), 55; also van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 63–64; van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 448 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018), 3–5.

40. The Egyptologists were George R. Hughes and Charles F. Nims. Bowman published an article translating a small section in 1944: "An Aramaic Religious Text in Demotic Script," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3 (1944): 219–31.

41. The teams were: Sven P. Vleeming and Jan W. Wesselijs in the Netherlands and Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims in the United States. See Vleeming and Wesselijs, "An Aramaic Hymn from the Fourth Century B.C.," *Bibliotheca Orientalia* 39 (1982): 501–9; Vleeming and Wesselijs, "Betel the Saviour," *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux* 28 (1983–1984): 110–40; Vleeming and Wesselijs, *Studies in Papyrus Amherst 63*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Juda Palache Instituut, 1985). For Nims and Steiner, see their "A Paganized Version of Ps 20:2–6 from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," *Journal of the Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 261–74. See also Mathias Delcor, "Remarques sur la datation du Ps 20 comparée à celle du psaume araméen apparenté dans le papyrus Amherst 63," in *Mesopotamica, Ugaritica, Biblica: Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 7. Mai 1992*, ed. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 323 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 25–43.

42. This translation is from Richard C. Steiner, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: Text, Translation, and Notes," [https://www.academia.edu/31662776/The\\_Aramaic\\_Text\\_in\\_Demotic\\_Script\\_Text\\_Translation\\_and\\_Notes](https://www.academia.edu/31662776/The_Aramaic_Text_in_Demotic_Script_Text_Translation_and_Notes), 19; also Steiner, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," in *Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*: 309–27, here 313. I will refer to the latter as *COS* to avoid confusion with the aforementioned, nearly-identical title.

43. Steiner, "Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," 20; Steiner, *COS*, 1:313.

44. Steiner, "Aramaic Text in Demotic Script," 21; compare van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 158; van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63*, 121. This is a substantial revision from the earlier interpretation given by Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims, in which there is no oracle of reassurance and instead the god Mar instructs that "Food for me should be burned in fire." Steiner

Mar speaks up and says to me:  
Be strong, my servant, fear not [*ʿl t dhl*]

I will save you [*w'nh 'syl tk*]; if you will bow down to Marah;  
to Mar, from your shrine and Rash.

I shall destroy your enemy in your days,  
and during your years, your foe will be smitten.

I shall bring an end to your adversaries in front of you;  
You will place your foot on their necks.

I shall support your right hand;  
I shall crown you with peace.<sup>45</sup>  
[...] Your house

The papyrus does not overtly indicate whose voice issues the initial complaint, or who the personage is that receives this divine reassurance.<sup>46</sup> But the few scholars who have commented on this passage are united in the view that it is a king, probably the king of Rash, the same place-name associated with the god Mar.<sup>47</sup> The first line of column vi in Steiner's edition—though not in van der Toorn's, nor in Steiner's earlier translation for *COS*—reads out the command: “proclaim [*tybwhy*] the king's good deeds among your people.” But even apart from this introductory line, numerous features of the oracle from Mar suggest a kingly recipient. Grammatically, the verbs are all 2ms; the god's words have an individual target. There is also the noun “your house” (*bytk*) at the end of the oracle in l. 16; its context is disrupted, but the word betokens a royal household, a dynasty. Other details are not unique to royal texts, but taken together, they support a royal addressee: the destruction of enemies, the foot on their neck, the reference to the right hand (*ymynk*, l. 16; compare with Ps 110:5), the peace that ensues from the god's intervention. All these are stock pieces from royal inscriptions.<sup>48</sup>

and Nims, “You Can't Offer Your Sacrifice and Eat it Too: A Polemical Poem from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43 (1984): 89–114; translation of l.12 at 95–96, outline of the column with headings at 112.

45. Steiner, “Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” 21; Van der Toorn reads, though questioningly: “[You shall rule (?)] your house in peace.” van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 158; van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63*, 121).

46. This is to follow Steiner's judgment, who reads an injunction “be strong,” whereas van der Toorn reconstructs a personal name, “Rakib-Bol!!” (*Papyrus Amherst 63*, 123). Also compare Vleeming and Wesselius, “Betel the Saviour,” 116–117: “People of Tabil!”

47. Jan Wesselius's chapter, “Gebete aus dem demotisch-aramäischen Papyrus Amherst 63,” in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* 2.6: 930–35, was regrettably unavailable to me at the time of writing.

48. Douglas J. Green, “*I Undertook Great Works*: The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions,” *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2.41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Matthew J. Suriano, “The Apology of Hazeal: A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Tel Dan Inscription,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66 (2007): 163–76; Thomas L. Thompson, “A Testimony of the Good King: Reading the Mesha Stele,” in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 421/European Seminar in Historical Studies 6 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 236–92. See also the first chapter of

As Karel van der Toorn observes, “both the structure of [column vi] and the content of the oracle are strongly reminiscent of the Zakkur inscription.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed the same negative prohibition—“fear not!”—using the same verb ( $\sqrt{dhl/zhl}$ ), in an identical conjugation, centers both oracles. Different verbs ( $\sqrt{hsl}$  versus  $\sqrt{syl}$ ) communicating the action of divine saving then follow in both messages. But the most significant difference between the Zakkur inscription and column vi of the papyrus consists in the namelessness of the king.

For pap Amh 63, Starbuck’s stage 2 has taken place: the oracle that once braced a real king has been scrubbed of his name; a group or community of aftercomers has reappropriated the Heilsorakel, because they saw themselves as somehow participating in the god’s word to the king. As van der Toorn writes, the papyrus has turned the past oracle “into a promise for the future. What the god said in the past is still valid.”<sup>50</sup> But who were these tradents who clung to Mar’s promise made to their king?

The circumstances of pap Amh 63’s production and the identity of the community that used it remain disputed. But clues internal to the text itself help to establish their profile. Column v presents a lament: after addressing the god Mar at the start—“you, Mar”—it describes in some detail the destruction of a city, presumably Rash. Line 3 of the composition evokes the suffering of the whole community: “the entire assembly [*kl ‘dt*]”—perhaps, if van der Toorn is correct, “of your consecrated ones,” which is to say, temple personnel.<sup>51</sup> The text proceeds to enumerate the afflictions of cooks and bakers, butchers and priests, musicians and butlers, all offices belonging to the royal household or, maybe moreso, to the royal temple. Some among these staff people would have been involved in any original, Stage 1 event of reciting an oracle from the god to the king. And, as dependents of the royal house, they might also then have seen themselves as beneficiaries, at second hand, of the god’s patronage of the king.

Or again: column xvi 2 refers to a “troop” (*gēs*, also compare xxi 17), “people of a band of Samaritans,” who approached “my lord the king.” After the spokesman of this troop indicates their places of origin—Samaria, Judea, and Jerusalem—the king invites them inside the city and offers them provisions. The king here could be either the king of Egypt or of Rash.<sup>52</sup> On the latter interpretation, some contributors to the

Cornell, *Divine Aggression in Psalms and Inscriptions*.

49. van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 67; van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63*, 123. Vleeming and Wesseliuss first drew this comparison: “Betel the Saviour,” 131.

50. van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews*, 67.

51. van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63*, 53; commentary on 1.16. Van der Toorn’s reading, *nsyky*, “anointed ones,” might have an intriguing connection to an abiding crux in Psalm 2: the interpretation of נסכת in v. 6, alternately translated “I set,” (NRSV), “I anointed” (Symmachus), “I have woven” (Aquila, Quinta), “I poured out” (Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Divine Creation in Psalms 2:6,” *Eretz Israel* 27 [2003]: 246–51; also and quite differently, Gard Granerød, “A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation? Psalm 2:6 in Light of Egyptian Royal Ideology,” *Vetus Testamentum* 60 [2010]: 323–36, here 336).

52. Richard C. Steiner’s brief note allows both possibilities: the “second historical dialogue

papyrus's hymns would have been wards and protégés of the king. These refugees, too, as dependents of the king, would have stood to benefit from divine promises made to him. Even after the downfall of the king, such persons could well have held onto those oracles, since they had formerly received blessing through them. Indeed the promise of the god to the king proved more lasting than the king's own identity: the former is what made it into both pap Amh 63 and the royal biblical psalms, even when the king's name had ceased to be remembered.

The comparison that this second case study stages does not explain everything. But it does suggest that pap Amh 63 provides data for understanding the transmission of royal oracles that biblical psalms do not. The psalms are entirely opaque about the persons responsible for preserving divine oracles made to a specific king. Because this information would inhibit their usage as a community prayer text, it has been removed. Pap Amh 63, on the other hand, though it does not directly state the identity of its tradents, does feature several passages that reflect special interest in officials and clients of the royal household. A reasonable inference is that these persons, whose fate was tied so closely with the king's, would have heard divine promises made to the king as affecting, and even including, them also. On account of their indirect participation in the king's own relationship to the patron god, they would have "overheard" and passed on royal oracles. That a similar process occurred with the royal biblical psalms is an attractive, even a likely, scenario. If so, it would contain the seed of the later "collectivization" of the royal persona that the biblical Psalter effects: of divine promises undergoing an expansion of their addressee to include not just the king, and not just his literal retinue, but a whole people, considered as his (virtual) subjects.

The second case study demonstrates the value of Egyptian Aramaic to biblical studies in a tradition-historical mode. A similar genre appears in biblical texts and their nonbiblical, Egyptian Aramaic counterpart: oracles made from a patron god to an anonymous client king. The anonymity of both stands out when set against the background of emphatically named royal memorial inscriptions of the ancient Levant. By then comparing the anonymous and communalized royal psalms with an anonymous royal column of pap Amh 63, the study identified one characteristic of the papyrus that the biblical materials lack: an interest in the royal entourage, who seem like prime candidates to have transmitted oracles spoken originally to their king.

[in xvi 1–6] purports to be a conversation between the (Egyptian or Rashan) king and the young spokesman of a newly arrived troop ... of Samaritans" ("The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year's Festival Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 [1991]: 362–63, here 63). Van der Toorn argues that an Egyptian location of the city "is unlikely. Elsewhere in the papyrus, there is not a single reference to an Egyptian context" (*Papyrus Amherst 63*, 205). Time will tell if his observation holds up. Tawny Holm is preparing an edition in *Aramaic Literary Texts*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings of the Ancient World (Atlanta: SBL, forthcoming).

## Conclusions

Aramaic represents but a sliver within the two-testament Christian Bible, but the present article began by pointing out that biblical Aramaic is a subset within a larger species of Aramaic whose natural habitat was the Achaemenid or Persian Period. As it happens, the majority of Aramaic documents that have survived from this era originated in Egypt, meaning that Egyptian Aramaic is, by reason of propinquity, a fitting comparand with biblical passages written in Aramaic—and not only with those but also with other biblical text-units to which Egyptian Aramaic documents bear a close resemblance. The article singled out two of these: first, biblical passages that appeal to a strong difference between “former” and “latter” in connection with the temple of YHWH, and second, biblical psalms in which YHWH makes promises to a nameless king. The two comparisons that it pursued above help to reveal distinctive theological features of biblical literature: in the first case, that some portions of the Bible develop a vision, not of divine restoration but of divine destruction and re-creation that is truly apocalyptic in scale; and in the second, that biblical psalms “corporatize” the king, leaving behind no trace of the actual, historical community that would have seen themselves as “extended members” of the king’s own person and as inheritors of the divine promises given to him. Notwithstanding that (self-)erasure, pap Amh 63 seems to supply a “missing link” for understanding the transmission of royal biblical psalms. In these ways among others, the study of Egyptian Aramaic demonstrates its value to biblical studies.

