

בן איזה לאום היה בלעם?

אבנר רמו

In the Book of Numbers we hear Balaam saying:

וישא משלו ויאמר: מן-ארם ינחני בלק מלך-מואב, מהררי-קדם-לכה ארה-לי יעקב, ולכה זעמה ישראל.

“And he took up his parable, and said: From Aram Balak brings me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the East: Come, curse me Jacob, and come, execrate Israel” (Num 23:7).

The Greek translator wrote here: “from Mesopotamia” but it is not clear how he determined that here **ארם** (*aram*) is not Syria, or a letter-substitution error of Edom.

In the Book of Deuteronomy which was composed many years later we read:

**לא-יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל יהוה: גם דור עשירי לא-יבא להם בקהל יהוה עד-עולם.
על-דבר אשר לא-קדמו אתכם, בלחם ובמים בדרך, בצאתכם ממצרים; ואשר שכר עליך את-בלעם בן-בעור, מפתור ארם נהרים-לקללך.**

**“An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of *YHWH*; even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter into the assembly of *YHWH* forever;
Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you” (Deu 23:4-5).**

It appears that the writer (or a late scribe) of the Book of Deuteronomy believed (like the Greek translator of the Book of Numbers) that Balaam was a Mesopotamian. We should also notice that in the Book of Deuteronomy we hear for the first time that in the hiring of Balaam the Ammonites were also involved.

In the next chapter of the Book of Numbers we read that after Balaam failed to curse Israel:

ויקם בלעם וילך וישב למקומו; וגם-בלק הלך לדרכו.

“And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place; and Balak also went his way” (Num 24:25).

Yet we also find in this book:

**ואת-מלכי מדין הרגו על-חלליהם, את-אוי ואת-רקם ואת-צור ואת-חור ואת-רבע-חמשת,
מלכי מדין; ואת בלעם בן-בעור הרגו בחרב.**

“And they slew the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain: Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian; Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword” (Num 31:8).

Similarly, we read in the Book of Joshua:

**הכה משה אתו ואת-נשיאי מדין, את-אוי ואת-רקם ואת-צור ואת-חור ואת-רבע, נסיכי
סיחון יושבי הארץ.
ואת-בלעם בן-בעור, הקוסם-הרגו בני-ישראל בחרב, אל-חלליהם.**

“Whom Moses smote with the chiefs of Midian, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, the princes of Sihon, that dwelt in the land.

Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among the rest of their slain” (Jos 13:21-22).

However, if Balaam had returned to Aram (or Mesopotamia) how could the Israelites slay him in the war that they carried out against the Midianites?

In the Book of Numbers we are also told that Balak:

וַיִּשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל-בָּלַעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר, פֶּתוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַנָּהָר אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ

“And he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people” (Num 22:5).

The Latin translator of the Bible wrote here: “the land of the Children of Ammon” which suggests that he believed that **אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹ** (*erets benei-a'mo*) is a letter-deletion error of **אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹן** (*erets benei-a'mon*) - “the Land of the Ammonites.”

Five miles east of the Jordan River, a large sanctuary was excavated in 1967 in Deir 'Alla, a town located north of Zarka - a Jordan's tributary. An inscription which has been dated to 880 - 770 BC was found on one of its walls. It was painted in red and black ink on a plastered wall.



Deir 'Alla Inscription

- (1) [VACAT] The sa]ying[s of Bala]am, [son of Be]or, the man who was a seer of the gods. Lo! Gods came to him in the night [and spoke to] him (2) according to these w[ord]s. Then they said to [Bala]am, son of Beor, thus: Let someone make a [] hereafter, so that [what] you have hea[r]d may be se]en!" (3) And Balaam rose in the morning [] right hand

[] and could not [eat] and wept (4) aloud. Then his people came in to him [and said] to Balaam, son of Beor, "Do you fast? [] Do you weep?" And he (5) said to them, "Si[t] do]wn! I shall inform you what the Shad[dayin have done]. Now come, see the deeds of the g[o]ds!. The g[o]ds have gathered (6) and the Shaddayin have taken their places in the assembly and said to Sh[, thus:] 'Sew the skies shut with your thick cloud! There let there be darkness and no (7) perpetual shining and n[o] radiance! For you will put a sea[l upon the thick] cloud of darkness and you will not remove it forever! For the swift has (8) reproached the eagle, the voice of vultures resounds. The st[ork has] the young of the NHS-bird and ripped up the chicks of the heron. The swallow has belittled (9) the dove, and the sparrow [] and [] the staff. Instead of ewes the stick is driven along. Hares have eaten (10) []. Freeman [] have drunk wine, and hyenas have listened to instruction. The whelps of the (11) f[ox] laughs at wise men, and the poor woman has mixed myrhh, and the priestess (12) [] to the one who wears a girdle of threads. The esteemed esteems and the esteemer is es[teemed.] and everyone has seen those things that decree offspring and young. (15) [] to the leopard. The piglet has chased the young (16) [of] those who are girded and the eye"

The location of Deir 'Alla, is in the land of the biblical Ammonites. If Balaam was indeed an Ammonite, then his association with the rulers of Midian appears much more probable.