Article

Balaam's God(s): Divine Designations in Num 22–24

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Abstract: The biblical figure of Balaam is ambivalent in many ways, including his religious affiliation. In the attestations of the Balaam tradition within the Hebrew Bible, different conceptions of this literary character are sometimes blended, sometimes unconnected. In the prose of Num 22–24, he is portrayed as a worshipper of YHWH and even confers with him nightly, albeit being a stranger from far away. In the oracles, a variety of divine designations is used without apparent reason, while the prose alternates between YHWH and Elohim only. The article focuses on the third and fourth oracles (Num 24:3–9, 15–19) and explores their use of divine designations against the backdrop of Num 22–24. The variation can be interpreted as a stylistic feature, literary conception, spoil from different religious traditions, and/or theological statement.

Keywords: Num 22–24; Balaam; oracles; YHWH; El; divine names/titles

1. Introduction

The biblical figure of Balaam is fascinating in its ambivalence. In Num 22–24, Balaam is at once the potent cursing specialist, engaged by the Moabite king as an internationally renowned expert from afar, but on their journey, his donkey sees more than he does and so saves him from running into the angel with the sword. His blessings and curses come true in the end, and he emphasises his direct relationship with YHWH, but most texts in the Hebrew Bible do not trust him, and even less so outside the core material in Num 22–24, he is mentioned in Num 31:8, 16; Deut 23:5, 6; Josh 13:22; 24:9, 10; Mic 6:5; Neh 13:2 (Rösel 1999, pp. 515–18; Gaß 2007; Bührer 2016, pp. 595–601; Robker 2019, pp. 207–70; Frevel 2020, pp. 155–68). In the New Testament, he errs for the sake of gain (2Pet 2:15–16), leads the Israelites into immoralities and teaches them to eat meat offered to idols (Rev 2:14) (Rösel 1999, pp. 521–22; Ederer 2016). It is clear that Balaam's image deteriorated with the transmission of stories about him; this led to Balaam being considered a false prophet in Qumran, as the first figure in a list of false prophets (4Q 339), while the fourth oracle in particular is cited as authoritative scripture (4Q 175, 1QM, 4Q266). Balaam developed into a false prophet whose word is true.[1] The evidence in the plaster inscriptions from Deir Alla is more in line with the positive aspects in Num 22–24. Balaam is there *blᶜ]m [brbᶜ]r. ᵓš. ḥ[z]h. ᵓlhn*, "Balaam bar Beor, a man, seeing the gods" (Combination I, 1); the text narrates how the gods reveal impending disasters to him (Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976; Caquot and Lemaire 1977; Blum 2008, 2015).

Already the Balaam of Num 22–24 is multidimensional, a mighty charismatic in direct contact with the divine realm. It is not entirely clear if he is in contact with YHWH or with YHWH only: a unique wealth of divine designations is used in the text, with characteristic differences between the prose and the oracles. The term "divine designation" is used here for all divine names/titles/epithets to avoid a priori specification as a proper name or common noun.

This paper concentrates on these divine designations and seeks to elucidate whether their variety is a stylistic feature, a literary play, or actually reflects a polytheistic background (Section 3). Before the main problem can be addressed, the position of the oracles (Num 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–19, 20, 21–22, 23–24) within Num 22–24 and, ultimately,

Numbers itself, needs to be discussed. Special attention will be given to the literary relationship between the prose and the oracles and their literary integrity (Section 2).

2. Prose and Oracles in Num 22–24

The Balaam pericope in Num 22–24 does not fit smoothly into any theory of the formation of the Pentateuch.[2] In these chapters, the whole setting of the narrative changes: the main protagonists are Balaq, the Moabite king, and Balaam, thus, foreigners, while the people of Israel are only (and literally) seen from the outside. It is, therefore, possible to treat the passage Num 22:2–24:25 as standing alone at least to some extent, a separate narrative unit within the book of Numbers.[3]

The text is structured by numerous repetitions and their variations, most of which can be understood as literary devices.[4] The episode with the donkey in Num 22:22–35 is considered by many commentators to be a secondary insertion, an addition serving to blacken Balaam's character and to slander his competence as someone in contact with the divine realm (Gross 1974, pp. 331–69; Timm 1989, pp. 148–49; Schmitt 1994, pp. 192–95; Rösel 1999, pp. 511, 513; Levine 2000, p. 139; Witte 2002, p. 206; Achenbach 2003, pp. 403–5; Bührer 2016, pp. 605–6; Robker 2019, p. 145). There are seven oracles in all, uniformly introduced by וישא משלו ויאמר ("and he began his saying and said", Num 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23). Four oracles are part of the story of the Moabite king Balaq, who engages Balaam. After the last oracle about Israel and Moab in Num 24:15–18, there follow three more oracles against "foreign nations": Amaleq (Num 24:20), the Qenites (Num 24:21–22), and a third without an addressee in the introduction (Num 24:23–24). These last three oracles have no relation to the narrative and are plausibly regarded as later additions.[5] Since the only possible evidence for a divine designation in these additional oracles is text-critically dubious (Num 24:23; אל משמו. Cf. apparatus of Elliger and Rudolph 1997), they are irrelevant for the present paper.

The first four oracles (Num 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–19) are more or less closely linked to the prose. The first three have similar introductions in the prose narrative and are parallel in their content, a praise of Israel's greatness and might. The fourth oracle is something different, the announcement of a future ruler of Israel, who is introduced as a sceptre and a star who will defeat Moab (17) and other peoples (18–19). This final oracle to Balaq comes as something of a surprise, and is less closely connected to the prose. Balaq dismisses Balaam, who then utters the oracle, for the first time without any ritual preparations. In its form it parallels the third, for both are introduced by almost identical self-presentations of Balaam naming his credentials, i.e., his direct contact with the divine realm, although when this first occurs (Num 24:3) the reader has known him already for more than two chapters (59 verses or, including the episode of the donkey in Num 22:22–35, 73 verses). The divine designations are left in Hebrew, as their interpretation is the aim of this paper. Also the term שתם which shall be explained below, is left in Hebrew.

	Third oracle		**Fourth oracle**
24:3b	נאם בלעם בנו בער	24:15b	נאם בלעם בנו בער
	ונאם הגבר שתם העין		ונאם הגבר שתם העין
24:4	נאם שמע אמרי אל	24:16	נאם שמע אמרי אל
			וידע דעת עליון
	אשר מחזה שדי יחזה		מחזה שדי יחזה
	נפל וגלוי עינים		נפל וגלוי עינים

	Third oracle		**Fourth oracle**
24:3b	Oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor, and oracle of the man whose eyes are שתם,	24:15b	Oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor, and oracle of the man whose eyes are שתם,
24:4	oracle of one who is hearing the words of אל	24:16	oracle of one who is hearing the words of אל and knowing the knowledge of עליון,
	who sees the vision of שדי falling down with eyes uncovered.		he sees the vision of שדי falling down with eyes uncovered.

In its form, this self-presentation finds its closest parallels in other sayings introduced by נאם and the name of a human, נאם דוד in 2Sam 23:1 and נאם הגבר in Prov 30:1.[6]

The relation between the prose and the oracles is controversial. All commentators see that the first three oracles are much more integrated into the prose than the fourth, while the third and fourth oracles formally belong together. As for the relationship between the prose and the first two oracles on the one hand, and the third and fourth oracle on the other, all possible solutions of literary relationship have been discussed: the third and fourth oracles could be an integral part of the prose and therefore contemporary;[7] they could be earlier[8] or later.[9] The fourth oracle in particular is controversial and often considered a later insertion, as it is not well connected to the story and is pronounced seemingly spontaneously. It could well be cut out of the prose without leaving a gap; usually, 24:14a is then interpreted as having been originally directly followed by 24:25, so that the oracle and the embedding prose are seen as secondary (Witte 2002, p. 199. Cf. Achenbach 2003, p. 421; Schöning 2013, p. 33; Bührer 2016, p. 604; Robker 2019, p. 174):

Num 24:14a, 25

	ועתה הנני הולך לעמי	14a
	ויקם בלעם וילך וישב למקמו וגם בלק הלך לדרכו	25

14a "… And now look, I am going to my people".

25 And Balaam got up and went back to his place, and also Balaq went his way.

On the other hand, since the first three oracles are more or less repetitions of the same content, namely a praise of Israel, this fourth oracle is the climax of the whole story.[10] Balaam predicts the future victory of Israel over Moab. It is only through this that the total reversal of Balaq's plan is realised: he had hired Balaam to curse Israel so that he could defeat them and drive them out. Only the fourth oracle announces the failure of Balaq's enterprise with the total reversal of his intentions. It seems impossible, therefore, to consider this oracle, or at least the content of verse 17 about the future ruler, as a secondary insertion, despite its very loose integration into the story.

If the fourth oracle is not a later insertion, it could have been composed contemporaneously with the prose and first two oracles, or even earlier. Since the third and fourth oracles have so many similarities, this is also true of the third. Neither oracle requires the narrative. They do not mention Balaq, but only presuppose the neighbourhood and enmity between Israel and Moab and possibly the exodus.[11] And there are tensions and especially overshooting elements within these two oracles in relation to the prose that make it unlikely that they are from the same hand and thus contemporary with the narrative:

- Balaam emphasises in the prose that he will only say or do what YHWH/אלהים says or lays in his mouth (Num 22:38; 23:12, 26; 24:13; cf. 22:18, 20, 35). In the narrative introduction to the first two oracles, YHWH (Num 23:5, 16) does indeed put "a word" in his mouth, which is probably the following oracle. In the narrative introduction to the third oracle in Num 24:1, these two earlier encounters with YHWH are devalued as נחשים. In the following verse, Balaam, observing Israel, receives the divine spirit and utters his third oracle. However, the oracles themselves are presented as Balaam's words and not YHWH's words. It is clear that אל/YHWH is behind the first and second oracle (Num 23:8, 19–20). But the third and fourth are the words of Balaam only: they are נאם בלעם, "uttering of Balaam" (Num 24:3, 15).

- The whole story of Balaam is linked by the subject of seeing and not seeing: the action begins when Balaq sees the people (Num 22:2); the episode with the donkey is about seeing, or not, the angel with the sword; Balaam sees the people before he utters his oracles (Num 22:41; 23:13; 24:2) and also mentions this in the first oracle (Num 23:9) with the same verbs, ראה and שור, which are used for the future ruler, the star and sceptre, in the fourth oracle (Num 24:17):

Num 23:9a

כי מראש צרים אראנו ומגבעות אשורנו

For from the top of the crags I see him, and from the hills I behold him.

Num 24:17a

אראנו ולא עתה אשורנו ולא קרוב

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but (he/it is) not near.

Balaam says that YHWH might let him see (ראה hi) something (23:3); and his insight that YHWH blesses the people (24:1) is also called ראה. In the introduction to the third and fourth oracles, Balaam introduces himself as seeing the vision of שדי with the verb חזה, which in Hebrew often has the connotation of prophetic seeing (Vetter 2004, col. 534–535) and as having uncovered eyes (גלוי עינים). His first self-qualification also has to do with his eyes: שתם העין. The explanation of the verb שתם is notoriously difficult, as it is only attested in the introductions to the third and fourth oracles and without plausible etymology. It is usually translated as "opened" (e.g., Levine 2000, pp. 192–93; Gaß 2001, pp. 154–55; Schüle 2001, pp. 33, 35; Seebass 2007, pp. 13, 22; Robker 2019, pp. 114, 336), as the verb שׁתם, "to open", attested in Middle Hebrew and in Jewish Aramaic. But the connotations do not really work: this verb is used especially for "to bore a hole through a vessel in order to get wine out" (Jastrow 1996, p. 1639). When this is used for Balaam's eyes, it does not sound very healthy. The alternative is to understand the form as derived from שׁתם, a by-form of the verb סתם ("to close, to conceal") which is attested 13 times in the Hebrew Bible (שׁתם: Lam 3:8. סתם: Gen 26:15, 18; 2Kgs 3:19, 25; Ezek 28:3; Ps 51:8; Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9; Neh 4:1; 2Chr 32:3, 4, 30). This interpretation has no philological problems and the Vulgate on its side (*homo cuius obturatus est oculus*). However, the whole story presupposes that Balaam is no "blind seer" but has healthy eyes. In the context of Num 22–24, it is impossible to translate "whose eye is closed", although philologically it is the most plausible solution. Without the narrative context, in the isolated oracles, this translation is certainly preferable. The mention of Balaam's uncovered eyes (גלוי עינים) is no argument against it, since גלה is never used for the "normal" opening of the eyes, but only for a special kind of seeing: the only parallel outside Num 22–24 is Ps 119:18 (גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך; "Open my eyes, so that I may behold wonders out of your instruction"). גלה is also used in the episode with the donkey. YHWH opens Balaam's eyes and then he sees the angel before him on the path (Num 22:31a: ויגל יהוה את עיני בלעם וירא את מלאך יהוה נצב בדרך וחרבו שלפה בידו, "And YHWH opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel of YHWH standing on the path with his drawn sword in his hand"). Again, this is a special kind of vision granted by YHWH. With the use of this expression, the episode of the donkey is linked to the last two oracles (Schöning 2013, pp. 63–64), but in neither passage is this seeing comparable to a physically functioning human visual sense. Thus, the interpretation of שתם is also an element of possible tension between the prose and oracle 1 and 2 on the one hand, and oracle 3 and 4 on the other.

These elements show differences between the third and the fourth oracle on the one hand and the prose and the first two oracles, which among themselves seem to be firmly connected, on the other. They cannot be explained if the third and fourth oracles were formulated together with or in view of the prose and the first two oracles. Therefore, the oracles in Num 24:3b-9, 15b-19 can plausibly be explained as predating the prose and the first two oracles.[12] They can be considered as the oldest layer, the core of the whole episode (Rösel 1999, pp. 510–11), which does not presuppose the prose but is integrated into the later narrative of Balaq's woes and Balaam's true adherence to YHWH's commands.

3. Divine Designations in Num 22–24

The analysis given above shall serve as a basis to interpret the striking differences between the prose and the oracles in the use of divine designations. The following table shows all the references in Num 22–24; those from the oracles are in italics. When the

textual transmission is equivocal, the reference is given in brackets. The episode with the donkey is given in square brackets.

אלהים	22:9, 10, 12, (18), 20, [(22),] 38; 23:4, 21, 27; 24:2
	with article: 22:10; 23:27
	with Suffix: (22:18, יהוה אלהי); 23:21 יהוה אלהיו
יהוה	22:8, (13), 18, 19, [22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31 (2), 32, 34, 35]; 23:(3), 5, *8*, (12), (16), 17, *21*, (26); 24:1, *6*, 11, 13 (2, second reference with text-critical variations)
אל	*23:8*, *19*, *22*, *23*; *24:4*, *8*, *16*, (23)
שדי	*24:4,16*
עליון	*24:16*

The problems of textual transmission of the divine designations from the prose narrative does not belong within the scope of this paper. It can be said, however, that the narrative usually uses אלהים in the prose parts (Num 22:9, 10, 12, 20; 23:4, 27; 24:2; the exception being Num 22:38 in Balaam's speech), but sometimes also YHWH (Num 23:5, 16; 24:1). YHWH occurs frequently in Balaam's direct speeches (Num 22:8, 13, 18, 19; 23:3, 12, 26; 24:13 (2x), with the exception of אלהים in Num 22:38). Balaq names YHWH twice in his speeches (Num 23:17; 24:11) and once אלהים with article (Num 23:27). In the episode with the donkey (Num 22:22–35), MT mostly uses מלאך יהוה.[13] The fact that Balaam once calls YHWH "my god" (Num 22:18) when speaking to Balaq's messengers about his obedience to divine commands underlines his connection to YHWH. How a person from so far away comes to know YHWH/אלהים and even confers with him nightly or meets with him seemingly as required is apparently not the focus of the text. There are very few people in biblical texts for whom YHWH/אלהים is as much available as for Balaam.

In the oracles, matters are completely different. The most frequent divine designation is אל (Num 23:8, 19, 22, 23; 24:4, 8, 16, and perhaps in Num 24:23), אלהים is attested only once, and with a suffix (יהוה אלהיו, Num 23:21), which marks the reference as an appellative. YHWH is also rather rare and is mentioned only once in the first (Num 23:8), second (Num 23:21) and third (Num 24:6) oracles, respectively. The introductions of the third and fourth oracle additionally name שדי (Num 24:4, 16), that of the fourth additionally עליון (Num 24:16). אל, שדי and עליון are all well-known as designations for the God of the Hebrew Bible. As such, they are usually considered as epithets and are translated. Balaam would thus introduce himself in Num 24:3b-4, 15b-16, the introductions to the third and fourth oracle, as (for the textual differences, see above):

> one who is hearing the words of God
> (and is knowing the knowledge of the Most High,)
> (who/he) sees the vision of the Almighty…

This is in line with the pious Balaam we see in the prose, who calls YHWH "my god" (Num 22:18). But אל, שדי, and עליון are also attested as independent deities in the first millennium BCE Levant: El is less prominent than in Ugarit,[14] but still important and widely attested in inscriptions such as the Karatepe Bilingual (KAI 26) and—notably—in the Balaam inscription from Tell Deir Alla, but also in literary texts, such as Ahiqar, and even in Neo-Punic inscriptions (Kottsieper 1997, 2013). The extra-biblical evidence for Šadday is more difficult to trace.[15] Most conspicuous for the present context is the group of *šdyn*, "šadday-deities", again from the Balaam text of Tell Deir Alla (Combination I, 6). Elyon is mentioned twice as an independent deity, once in the 8th century Sfire treaty (KAI 222), and once in the very late fragments of Philo of Byblos. These sources present a consistent conception of Elyon as ancestor of the gods, rich in knowledge but without active power (Zernecke 2022, forthcoming b). When both oracles were independent of the prose story as described above, these introductions might have been understood as meaning these Levantine deities. An originally polytheistic Balaam—such as the Balaam of the Deir Alla inscription—would name his credentials, i.e., the various deities with whom he confers in audition and vision. And only the incorporation of these texts into the prose (and ultimately into the biblical narrative) would transform the deities into names for YHWH.

The same holds true for the corpus of the third oracle (Num 24:5–9), where YHWH and אל are named:

5 How good are your tents, Jacob, your encampments, Israel:
6 like valleys stretched out, like gardens beside a river,
like ice plants that YHWH has planted,[16] like cedars beside the waters.
7 Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed (shall be) in abundant water,[17]
his king shall be mightier than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.
8 אל (who is) bringing him out of Egypt is like the horns of a wild bull for him.
He shall devour the peoples, his foes, and gnaw their bones.
He shall strike his arrows (?).
9 He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness: who will rouse him up?
Blessed (are) who bless you, and cursed (are) who curse you.

The oracle begins with a praise of Jacob's/Israel's dwelling and their abundance of water and fertility in direct address and with verbs in the afformative conjugation (5–6). In 7, the abundance of water is complimented further, then the subject shifts to the king; the verbs are now in the preformative conjugation and without direct address. In 8a, אל, who is leading the people out of Egypt, is compared to a wild bull. In 8b, he (who?) eats his enemy peoples. In 9, "he" (probably Jacob/Israel) is compared to a crouching lion. The oracle ends again with a direct address to the people, saying that being blessed or cursed depends on blessing or cursing them.

This oracle is in all probability not uniform (Witte 2002, pp. 200–1; Achenbach 2003, pp. 420–21, 424; Schmidt 2004, p. 141; Seebass 2007, pp. 42–43; Bührer 2016, p. 604; Robker 2019, pp. 162–63). In particular 8a, the reference to the exodus, shows evidence of being a secondary insertion. The possessive suffix on מלכו ("his king") in 7b refers to Jacob/Israel in 5, as do the suffixes in 8a. In 8b, however, the logical subject of the verbs would be אל (or the wild bull from the comparison) who is devouring his enemies. The act of devouring does not fit the image of the wild bull and is elsewhere unheard of for אל, but leads over to the lion in Num 24:9 (Schüle 2001, pp. 278–80), which again represents the people and/or their king. It can therefore be assumed that the reference to the Exodus in Num 24:8a is a secondary insertion, possibly originating from a closely resembling formulation in the second oracle, Num 23:22 (Schmitt 1994, p. 189; Seebass 2007, pp. 42, 96; Bickert 2009, p. 203).[18] Originally, then, the third oracle consisted of Num 24:3b-7, 8b-9a(, b). Num 24:9b connects the oracle with the prose narrative (Num 22:6).

The only divine designation in this reconstructed original body of the oracle is YHWH in Num 24:6. He is mentioned in the series of comparisons in a relative clause as either planting herbs or stretching out tents (Num 24:6), but certainly without a leading part in the action. It is in no way apparent whether he is regarded as identical with אל and שדי from the introduction to the oracle.

Such an explicit identification is not found in the two oracles discussed here, but earlier, in the first oracle, when אל is mentioned for the first time (Num 23:8), right after a recapitulation of Balaq's instructions to Balaam:

מה אקב לא קבה אל ומה אזעם לא זעם יהוה

How could I curse whom אל does not curse?
And how could I denounce whom YHWH does not denounce?

This synonymous parallelism introduces אל as a designation for YHWH. Within this verse, both obviously mean the same deity, and אל clearly functions as an appellative, the generic term "god". After this verse, it is clear that with each subsequent reference to אל, and in increasingly less Yahwistic circumstances, the reader or hearer has no problem in understanding אל as the appellative "god" meaning YHWH. But this framing happens on the level of the oracles as part of the prose narrative.

אל, שדי and עליון are mentioned in the third and fourth oracles. Only the prose and the first two oracles secure their interpretation as referring to YHWH. When reading the entire

text of Num 22–24, they form the hermeneutic lens through which oracles 3 and 4 appear completely inconspicuous.

4. Conclusions: Balaam's God(s)

In the literary analysis of the relation between prose narrative and oracles, as well as between the oracles, it was demonstrated that the third and fourth oracles of Balaam plausibly form the core of the whole passage and are not a late addition. The understanding of the divine designations in these two oracles depends on the context. Balaam speaks as a mighty charismatic with direct contact to the divine realm. While in the prose he refers to YHWH as his god and emphasises that he only says what YHWH/אלהים puts in his mouth, in the two oracles discussed here, he speaks in his own name. The rare divine designations are in no way motivated by the context. Their interpretation depends on the hermeneutical frame of the reader: for the first readers and hearers of Num 22–24 (whenever this text was written as a whole) אל, שדי, and עליון were probably well-known as epithets for YHWH. But the originally isolated oracles might have shown Balaam as a polytheist who names his pantheon. These three divine designations are plausible as divine names in a polytheistic context: for El, whose words are mentioned (as in Deir Alla), and for Elyon whose association with knowledge in Num 24:16 is consistent with the conception of him as ancestor of the ruling generation of gods in the extra-biblical evidence. Less can be said about Šadday, but there is still the reference to the *šdyn* as a group in the Deir Alla text. It is plausible that both oracles are textual spoils that are integrated into a later narrative context.

For the person who integrated them by writing the prose and the first two oracles, and for the first audience, these names also have an ironic function: Balaam proudly presents himself with his gods. But all these divine names can be understood in their new context as epithets of YHWH (Schöning 2013, p. 64). At this stage of textual development, Balaam becomes a worshipper of YHWH without knowing it—albeit under different names. This might even have been the first step towards disputing his competence as a charismatic in order to denigrate his reputation (Robker 2019, p. 357). The identification of YHWH, אל, שדי, and עליון is made explicit in the prose narrative, where Balaam pledges allegiance to YHWH and calls him his god. In the further transmission of the text, the divine designations blend together and are little more than stylistic variation. The variation of the divine designations in Num 22–24 thus served, and serves, different purposes: originally, they indicate that the third and fourth oracle are spoils from different religious traditions. When read in an Israelite context, they gain theological momentum by identifying Balaam's gods with YHWH, and at the same time serve as literary device to characterise Balaam. Integrated in the narrative in Num 22–24, they are little more than a stylistic feature. Balaam's gods were eliminated by integration and have faded into YHWH.

Notes

[1]   For an overview of the material about Balaam in the Dead Sea Scrolls: (Rösel 1999, pp. 519–20; García Martínez 2008); as false prophet whose word is true: (Bührer 2016, pp. 594–95; Zernecke, forthcoming a).

[2]   For a comprehensive overview of research, see (Robker 2019, pp. 10–68).

[3]   The beginning in Num 22:2 correlates also to paragraph markers in the Masoretic textual tradition, cf. (Elliger and Rudolph 1997). (Gross 1974, pp. 143–47; Milgrom 1990, p. 185; Rösel 1999, p. 508; Kratz 2000, pp. 291, 295–96; Levine 2000, pp. 41, 137–38; Bickert 2009, pp. 194–97; Robker 2019, pp. 5, 9, 185–86).

[4]   Schüle (2001, pp. 37–42), 38: "Symmetrien und deren gezielte Aufhebung ist das stilistische Gestaltungsmerkmal, das sich für Num 22–24 insgesamt nachweisen läßt"; a detailed and, from the outset, purely synchronic study of the symmetries and other stylistic features of Num 22:41–24, 25 is Schöning (2013).

[5]   Num 24:15–24 are often seen as uniform, or at least consistent. The interpretation of the passage as a small apocalypse from early Hellenistic times ("kleine frühhellenistische Apokalypse") by (Kaiser 1978, pp. 87–88) was formative, (cf. Schmitt 1994, pp. 184–87; Witte 2002, pp. 198–200, though not uniform; Bickert 2009, p. 204). However, there is no reason to group the oracles in these verses together, since they are structured by several introductions (Num 24:15, 20, 21, 23) and since only the first one (Num 24:15–19) has any relation to the narrative. Therefore, Num 24:15–19 can be seen as part of the story of Balaam and Balaq, without relation to the following oracles "against foreign nations" (Num 24:20–24); cf. (Robker 2019, pp. 132, 164–65, 170–71), who interprets these oracles as later than the fourth, which he sees as an earlier addition to the oracles 1–3.

[6]   This feature has been interpreted as a literary relation (e.g., Kleer 1996, p. 53; Waschke 2005, p. 135) or form-critical parallel (Vetter 1974, pp. 66–74). Since there are no other parallels in terms of content, the form-critical interpretation is preferable.

[7]   Concerning oracle 3: (Zobel 1990, pp. 146–49; Schmidt 2004, pp. 123–24); for parts of the first three oracles: (Robker 2019, pp. 156–71) (original layer: 23:7b*, 8–9, 10b, 18b-20, 21b, 24; 24:3bα, 4bα, 5*, 7–9); independently of the position concerning the unity of the prose.

[8]   (Gross 1974, pp. 145–46; Zobel 1990, pp. 145–46) (for the fourth oracle); (Rösel 1999, p. 510; Schmidt 2004, p. 127) (the narrative in one of the two supposed sources is generated out of the fourth oracle).

[9]   (Timm 1989, p. 156), n. 43: the oracles 3 and 4 are younger than 1 and 2, which are contemporary with the prose (Timm 1989, p. 150). Cf. (Schmitt 1994; Bickert 2009, pp. 203–4). Witte (2002, pp. 198–201) reconstructs a formation in three phases. The third oracle is largely part of the second layer ("Segensschicht"); the fourth oracle and an addition to the third (Num 24, 7–9) are part of the third layer.

[10]   Interestingly, Robker (2019, pp. 156–58) argues in the same way for the third oracle, but this presupposes his reconstruction of the text in Num 24:7 (Robker 2019, pp. 83–88).

[11]   The exodus is mentioned in the third oracle in Num 24:8a, which is possibly an insertion from Num 23:22; see below.

[12]   Both oracles in relation to each other are not discussed within this paper. The integrity of the third oracle will be treated below. Concerning their introductions, in Num 24:3b-4, 15b-16, the differences are the clarification of the syntax in the third colon of Num 24:3 with אשר and an additional colon in the fourth oracle in Num 24:16 (וידע דעת עליון). A study of the integrity of the fourth oracle has to take into consideration that the text in Num 24:18–19, which mentions other peoples that will eventually be vanquished, Edom and Seir, is increasingly difficult and not well preserved. Interestingly, in the instances in which this oracle is cited in Qumran without its context, it ends once with Num 24:17 (4Q 175, 12–13 = 4QTest), and in the other case, Num 24:18 and 19 are interchanged, and the text is much shorter (1QM 11, 7).

[13]   In MT, the anger of אלהים stands at the beginning of the action (22:22), then the מלאך יהוה appears, and in the end, it is YHWH who opens the donkey's mouth (22:28) and Balaam's eyes (22:31). In Num 22:22–35, the Septuagint consistently has ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ, with the exception of Num 22:31 (τὸν ἄγγελον κυρίου). In the Samaritan Pentateuch, מלאך יהוה is also used in Num 23:4, 5, 16.

[14]   אל is already in Ugaritc both the proper name of the god El/Ilu and the common noun meaning "god" (del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2015, pp. 48–52).

[15]   For an overview of the discussion concerning the biblical references to שדי/אל שדי and their ancient Levantine background, see (Knauf 1999; Witte 2017).

[16]   אהלים (*Mesembryanthemum nodiflorum*), (Koehler and Baumgartner 1967–1996, p. 19; Gesenius 2013, p. 21). Alternatively: "as tents which YHWH has spread out", vocalised differently and necessitating the reading of the following verb נטע as נטה. This is attested in 4Q27 = 4QNum[b] (the verb on a very tiny fragment with YHWH added above the line), the Septuagint, and Vulgate.

[17]   For an extensive discussion of the textual problems with a radically different solution see (Robker 2019, pp. 83–88).

[18]   (Witte 2002, p. 200) interprets Num 24:7–9a as an addition because of the change in person and topic. This does not clarify the relation of Num 24:8a to its surroundings. For (Bickert 2009, p. 203) the oracle consisted originally of Num 24:3b, 4a, 5, 6a, 7a, 9; he also interprets 8a as a repetition of Num 23:22. (Robker 2019, pp. 83–88, 114, 163) reconstructs a different textual basis for the oracle, preferring the Septuagint and presupposing several textual changes; he sees Num 24:5*, 7–9a as the original layer.

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