

Why Bishlam (Ezra 4:7) Cannot Rest “In Peace”: On the Aramaic and Hebrew Sound Changes That Conspired to Blot Out the Remembrance of Bel-Shalam the Archivist

In Ezra 4:7, we read: **וּבִימֵי אֲרִתְחִשְׁשָׁתָא כְּתַב בְּשָׁלַם מִתְרַדְתָּ טַבְאָל וְשֶׁאֵר כְּנֻתוֹ עַל- אֲרַמִּית וּמְתַרְגָּם אֲרַמִּית וּכְתַב הַנְּשִׁתָּן כְּתוּב אֲרַמִּית וּמְתַרְגָּם אֲרַמִּית**. In a previous article, I attributed considerable importance to the officials named in this verse.¹ I argued that they were the keepers of a major archive who had been asked by Artaxerxes, prior to Nehemiah’s mission, to search for records relating to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. I concluded that they found four relevant letters, which they copied onto a scroll and sent to the king, and that copies of those copied letters found their way into Nehemiah’s archive and, subsequently, into the book of Ezra (chs. 4–6). I would now like to return to a related question that I treated only cursorily in my previous article.

How many officials are named in the verse? The answer to that question depends, in large part, on the meaning of **בְּשָׁלַם**, which was controversial already in antiquity.² According to 2 Esdras and the Peshitta, the form is a preposition plus a noun (“in peace” or the like); according to 1 Esdras and the Vulgate, it is a personal name. I shall argue that the latter interpretation is correct, for **בְּשָׁלַם** has an excellent etymology as a theophoric name but is highly problematic when construed as a preposition plus a noun. I shall identify three phonological developments that conspired³ to disguise the theophoric element of the name (**בְּל**), making it homonymous with a preposition (**בְּ**). In the process, I hope to shed light on an Aramaic sound change and on several other obscure and/or controversial names.

I. **בְּשָׁלַם** AS PREPOSITION + NOUN

According to 2 Esdras, “Tabeel wrote in peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ) to Mithradates.” Similarly, the Peshitta “took [**בְּשָׁלַם**] as the noun **שָׁלַם** with the preposition **בְּ** standing preg-

¹ Richard C. Steiner, “Bishlam’s Archival Search Report in Nehemiah’s Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4–6,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 641–85.

² For ancient and modern views, see the survey of Rodney H. Shearer, “Bishlam,” *ABD* 1:750 (to which I am particularly indebted) and that of S. E. Loewenstamm, **בְּשָׁלַם**, in *מקראית* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1955–88), 2:366.

³ “Conspire” is a term from generative phonology, used here and in the title in a loose, diachronic sense.

nantly for *שאל בשלם* = *he saluted*.⁴ A new version of this reading was offered in the nineteenth century by A. Klostermann: Tabeel wrote “with the approval of . . . Mithradates,” that is, “with the authorization of Mithradates.”⁵ In his view, the singular verb *כתב* and the singular suffixed pronoun of *כנותיו* exclude readings with multiple writers (e.g., “Bishlam, Mithradates and Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote”). Other interpretations of *בשלם* as a preposition plus a noun take it as part of the salutation⁶ or connect it with phrases meaning “about/against Jerusalem” (*בירושלם*, *בשם ירושלם*, or *בדבר ירושלם*)⁷ or even “on the envelope” (*בשֶׁלֶם*).⁸

Klostermann’s interpretation has been accepted by a number of scholars.⁹ Nevertheless, it is highly problematic. Two of the problems are noted by H. G. M. Williamson: “it is . . . difficult to accept, because an intrusive Aram. form of so common a word is inexplicable and because the word order is unusual: in Heb. we should expect such a phrase to follow the word it qualifies.”¹⁰

Williamson’s first objection is well taken. We may restate it in terms of the vocalization of the adjacent words *כְּתַב בְּשֶׁלֶם*: Why is *בשלם* vocalized as Aram. *בְּשֶׁלֶם* (rather than Heb. *בְּשֶׁלֶם*) when the preceding word is vocalized as Heb. *כְּתַב* (rather than Aram. *כְּתַב*)?

Williamson is also right in seeing a problem with the word order, but his formulation of it is puzzling. He assumes that, in Klostermann’s reading, *בשלם מתרדת* modifies a single word (rather than the entire clause)¹¹ and that “we should expect such a phrase to follow the word it qualifies,” but if that is the case, it is difficult to see what the problem is: we expect the adverbial *בשלם מתרדת* to follow the verb *כתב*, and it does. The real problem with the word order is that prepositional phrases do not normally come between a verb and its subject.¹² Nontemporal prepositional phrases normally come at the end of the clause, after the verb, subject, and direct object. That is, in fact, the case with the other prepositional phrase in the verse, *על ארתחששתא מלך פרס*. It is also the case with the two

⁴ Charles Arthur Hawley, *A Critical Examination of the Peshitta Version of the Book of Ezra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 36.

⁵ A. Klostermann, “Esra und Nehemia,” *RE*, 516.

⁶ M. Newman, “Bishlam,” *IDB* 1:441.

⁷ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (HAT 20; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1949), 34 (*בירושלם*); Kurt Galling, *Die Bücher der Chronik, Esra, Nehemia* (ATD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), 194, 197–98 (*בשם ירושלם*); L. H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1969), 74 (*בדבר ירושלם*).

⁸ Giovanni Garbini, “La lettera di Ṭab’el (*Ezra* IV,7),” *Henoah* 7 (1985): 161–63.

⁹ See below.

¹⁰ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 54. Cf. Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia*, 34: “even if v. 7a is translated from Aramaic, it is difficult to believe that *שֶׁלֶם*, which would have been so easy to change into *שָׁלוֹם*, was simply allowed to remain by the translator.”

¹¹ For a discussion of sentence adverbials, see Joshua Blau, *An Adverbial Construction in Hebrew and Arabic: Sentence Adverbials in Frontal Position Separated from the Rest of the Sentence* (Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities vol. 6, no. 1; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1977).

¹² We are speaking of prepositional phrases containing nouns rather than pronouns.

prepositional phrases in the subsequent verse (4:8): רחום בעל טעם ושמי טפרא כתבו: אגרה חדה על ירושלם לארתחששתא מלכא.¹³ Thus, if בשלם מתרדת were such a phrase, the normal order would be: על בשלם מתרדת על: ארתחששתא מלך פרס.

A third problem is Klostermann's rendering of בשלם, viz., "with the approval/authorization of" (mit *Genehmigung/Erlaubnis des*). H. H. Rowley endorsed this interpretation: "This again is a perfectly legitimate rendering, and the verse then states that Tabeel and his associates wrote with the approval of Mithridates."¹⁴ No evidence for this rendering is presented by Klostermann or Rowley. This is a serious omission, for one need go back only a single chapter, to the phrase כרשיון כורש מלך פרס עליהם in Ezra 3:7, to see how the biblical author-historian expresses "in accord with the authorization of." The term רשיון, related to later Hebrew רשות, is rendered "Erlaubniss" by Gesenius, "permission" by BDB, and "authorization" by NJPS.¹⁵ Klostermann's rendering of בשלם is sometimes modified to "with the agreement of" or "in accord with."¹⁶ These renderings are a bit more defensible,¹⁷ but, even so, the assessment of D. J. A. Clines is essentially correct: "NEB's translation 'with the agreement of' . . . cannot be paralleled."¹⁸

It should also be noted that Klostermann's arguments do not hold water. Take, for example, the argument from the singular verb כתב, accepted by Rudolph Kittel and Hans Heinrich Schaefer.¹⁹ This argument is refuted by Williamson, who points out that "a sg verb before a multiple subject is common in these books."²⁰ This is actually an understatement, since it is true not only in these books but throughout the Hebrew Bible.²¹ In Ezra itself, we find:

22. . . . ויקם ישוע בן יוצדק ואחיו הכהנים וזרבלל בן שאלתיאל ואחיו ויבנו. . . . 3:2

¹³ This parallel is particularly relevant to interpretations that connect בשלם with phrases meaning "about/against Jerusalem"; see above.

¹⁴ H. H. Rowley, *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: Nelson, 1963), 224.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1823), 713 s.v.

¹⁶ NEB; Hans Heinrich Schaefer, *Iranische Beiträge I* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1930), 16–17; A. Noordtjij, *De boeken Ezra en Nehemia* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1951), 77, 80; J. J. Koopmans, "Het eerste Aramese gedeelte in Ezra (4:7–6:19)," *GTT* 55 (1955): 148; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 109, 110. In his translation, Blenkinsopp has "in accord with," but in his commentary (p. 111) he writes that "Tabeel wrote to Artaxerxes . . . with the approval of Mithredath."

¹⁷ See Loewenstamm, בשלם, 366.

¹⁸ D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 77.

¹⁹ Rudolph Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929), 3/2:602; Schaefer, *Beiträge*, 16.

²⁰ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 54.

²¹ See Richard C. Steiner, "Ancient Hebrew," in *The Semitic Languages* (ed. Robert Hetzron; Routledge Language Family Descriptions; London: Routledge, 1997), 167.

²² Here we have a singular verb preceding a compound subject and a plural verb following it

ויעמד ישוע בניו ואחיו. . . .	3:9
והתנבי חגי נביאה וזכריה בר עדוא נביאיא. . . .	5:1
בה זמנא אַתא עליהן תתני פחת עבר נהרה ושתר בוזני וכנותהון. . . .	5:3
פרשגן אגרתא די שלח תתני פחת עבר נהרה ושתר בוזני וכנותה. . . .	5:6
וביום הרביעי נשקל הכסף והזהב והכלים. . . .	8:33

Klostermann's argument from the singular suffixed pronoun of כנותיו overlooks the force of the word שאר, "the rest of." It is true that the singular pronoun makes no sense in "Bishlam, Mithradates and Tabeel and his colleagues," but it makes perfect sense in "Bishlam, Mithradates and Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues"—assuming that Bishlam is *primus inter pares*, the leader of a group of colleagues that includes Mithradates, Tabeel, and others. We may add that the word שאר is evidence against Klostermann's interpretation, for "Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues" makes no sense if the pronoun "his" refers to Tabeel.²³ Put differently, the phrase כנותיו ושאר must logically be preceded by the name of some person plus the name of at least one of his colleagues, which is not the case in Klostermann's reading.²⁴

II. בשלם AS PERSONAL NAME

Despite all of these considerations, it is clear that scholars are not going to allow interpretation I (ב+שלם) to die in peace until a persuasive etymology is found for בשלם as a name. There is no shortage of theories. Eduard Meyer, Isidor Scheftelowitz, and Joachim Becker suppose that the name is Persian.²⁵ BDB offers a Hebrew etymology, בן שלם, with a question mark.²⁶ Other scholars, citing the Greek rendering of the name in 1 Esdr 2:15 (BA Βηλεμοϛ, L Βεελσιμοϛ), suggest Akkadian names beginning with *Bēl*, e.g., *Bēl-ebuš*, *Bēl-šum-iddin*, *Bēl-šum-iškun*/*Bēl-šum-šukun*, *Bēlšunu*.²⁷ Many of these scholars assume that the name was בלשם rather than בשלם. Not so Charles C. Torrey: "בשלם is apparently the Babylonian name *Bēl-šallim*; cf. *Nabū-šallim* (Stevenson, *Assyr. and Bab.*

in a subsequent clause; cf. Gen 9:23; 14:8; 21:32; 24:50, 61; 31:14; 33:7 [bis]; 34:20; 44:14; Exod 4:29; 7:10; 10:3; Lev 9:23; Num 12:1–2; Deut 31:14; Judg 9:26; 14:5; 1 Sam 27:8; 2 Kgs 3:9; 12:11.

²³ That is what the formula seems to require. It seems unlikely that the pronoun refers to Mithradates, both for that reason and because Klostermann's interpretation takes Mithradates as Tabeel's superior rather than his colleague.

²⁴ See the preceding footnote. In Ezra 4:9, we find "X and Y and the rest of *their* colleagues." This formulation seems to imply that X and Y were of roughly equal rank, each being counted as a colleague of the other; cf. Ezra 3:8.

²⁵ Eduard Meyer, *Die Entstehung des Judentums: Eine historische Untersuchung* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1896), 33; Isidor Scheftelowitz, *Arisches im Alten Testament* (Königsberg i. Pr.: Hartung, 1901), 1:81; Joachim Becker, *Ezra/Nehemiah* (NEchtB 25; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1990), 30.

²⁶ BDB, 143 s.v.

²⁷ J. Marquart, *Fundamente israelitischer und jüdischer Geschichte* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1896), 63 n. 1; Eberhard Nestle, *Marginalien und Materialien* (Tübingen: J. J. Heckenhauer, 1893), 29–30; Anson F. Rainey, "The Satrapy 'Beyond the River,'" *AJBA* 1 (1968–73): 58.

Contracts, p. 148), *Sin-šallimani* (Muss-Arnolt, p. 1042), etc.” In a footnote, he adds: “By supposing an Aramaic name *Bēl-šalām*, “Bēl is peace,” we could retain the massoretic pointing בְּשָׁלָם. But we have thus far no entirely satisfactory analogies for such a name.”²⁸

Most of these suggestions have been ignored. In 1949, Wilhelm Rudolph wrote that “the personal name Bishlam still defies explanation.”²⁹ So too J. J. Koopmans in 1955: “The name Bishlam cannot be explained etymologically either from Semitic or from Persian and so, at least here, is very suspect.”³⁰ I have found only one unconditional endorsement of Torrey’s etymology during the century since it was published.³¹

Torrey weakened his case by conceding that “we have thus far no entirely satisfactory analogies” for an Aramaic בְּלִשְׁלָם*. In fact, this concession was unnecessary, for one good parallel was already published in his time: the name נְבוּשָׁלָם. A man with that name, mentioned in an Aramaic epigraph from Nineveh, was one of Esarhaddon’s divination experts.³² The same individual appears in Akkadian texts as *Nabū-(u)šallim* (a name that Torrey did cite), but in Aramaic the second component of his name may well have been שְׁלָם* > שָׁלָם rather than שָׁלָם, for נְבוּשָׁלָם is a translation (a kind of calque) rather than a transcription.³³ This is clear from the Aramaic š: transcription of Assyrian *Nabū-(u)šallim* would have yielded נְבוּשָׁלָם* with Aramaic s.³⁴ The same treatment of *šallim* is known from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad, ancient Dūr-Katlimmu, where a bilingual inscription equates Assyrian *Mannu-šallim* with Aramaic מְנִישָׁלָם.³⁵ Here too the rendering of the sibilant

²⁸ Charles C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 172.

²⁹ Rudolph, *Ezra und Nehemia*, 34.

³⁰ Koopmans, “Ezra,” 148.

³¹ Henry S. Gehman, *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 119. Cf. also Antonius H. J. Gunneweg, *Ezra* (KAT 19/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1985), 88: “Perhaps Bishlam corresponds to a Babylonian name Bel-šallim.”

³² J. A. Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an den Sonnengott für Staat und königliches Haus aus der Zeit Asarhaddons und Asurbanipals* (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1893), 2:245 no. 120; Frederick Mario Fales, *Aramaic Epigraphs on Clay Tablets of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Rome: Università degli studi “La Sapienza,” 1986), 149–50. Cf. also שלמאסר = *Silim-Aššur*, the eponym (Fales, *Aramaic Epigraphs*, 230), and שלמהדד from Tell Sheikh Ḥamad (André Lemaire, *Nouvelles tablettes araméennes* [Paris: Droz, 2001], 148–49).

³³ The case of הָלִי (Ezra 4:13, etc.) is similar. Because it is derived from Akkadian *ilku*, some emend the vocalization to הָלִי. If this were really a loanword, the expected vocalization would more likely be הָלִי (cf. סָפַר < **sipár* < **sīpar* < Akk. *šipru*). However, the initial *h* (הָלִי instead of אָלִי) shows that this is a calque (loan translation) rather than a loanword. Thus, there is no reason to expect its vocalization to mimic that of the Akkadian etymon. The relationship of Aramaic הָלִי to Akkadian *ilku* is not all that different from the relationship of Aramaic הָלִי to Hebrew הָלִי. Cf. the discussion of “transcriptions modified by West Semitic interference” in Fales, *Aramaic Epigraphs*, 66–68.

³⁴ It is well known from loanwords and transcriptions that, in Assyria, Akkadian *š* was realized [s], e.g., *Šarru-kīn* > סַרְגִּין and *šaknu* > סַגְנִי; see Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 140–41; A. R. Millard, “Assyrian Royal Names in Biblical Hebrew,” *JSS* 21 (1976): 4; Fales, *Aramaic Epigraphs*, 61–63.

³⁵ Karen Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Texte aus Tall Šēḥ Ḥamad* (Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḥ Ḥamad/Dūr-Katlimmu [BATSH] 6, Texte 2; Berlin: D. Reimer, 2002), no. 54a.

shows that the name is a translation rather than a transcription.³⁶ Other names in the Tell Sheikh Ḥamad inscriptions exhibit the normal rendering of Assyrian *š* with Aramaic *s*, for example, *Bel-šumu-iškun* > בלסמוסכנ, *Bel-šarru-ušur* > בלסרצור, *Šamaš-aḥu-ušur* > ססחצר, and even [DN] *-šallim-aḥhe* > סלמה[...].³⁷

Aramaic נבושלם, translated from *Nabū-(u)šallim*, gives added weight to a parallel published after Torrey's time. The name *Bēl-šallim*, hypothesized by Torrey on the basis of *Nabū-šallim* and *Sin-šallimani*, is now attested as the name of Esarhaddon's chief of trade.³⁸ The parallel of *Nabū-(u)šallim* > נבושלם shows that Neo-Assyrian *Bēl-šallim* could well have been translated into Aramaic as *בְּלִשְׁלָם* > *בְּלִשְׁלָם*.³⁹ The same goes for the Neo-Babylonian name *Bēl-silim/Bēl-silmu*.⁴⁰ Of course, the closest Akkadian parallel to *בְּלִשְׁלָם* would be **Bēl-šalāmu*. To the best of my knowledge, the latter name is thus far unattested; nevertheless, it probably existed, since *šalāmu* is a good Akkadian word attested already in the Old Babylonian period, and *Nabū-šalāmu* is attested in an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar.⁴¹

III. ASSIMILATION OF WORD-FINAL *LAMED* IN ARAMAIC

One of the reasons for the unenthusiastic reaction to Torrey's equation of בשלם (Vulgate *Beselam*) with *בלשלם* is, no doubt, the absence of the first *lamed*. I submit that that is no problem at all. The total assimilation of word-final *l* (to word-initial *š* and other consonants) is well attested in Aramaic, even though it has received little attention⁴² and has often been mistaken for a scribal omission. I dealt briefly with this phenomenon some years ago in commenting on a passage from the Aramaic text in Demotic Script (papyrus Amherst 63 VI/14):

³⁶ For another Aramaic name translated from Akkadian, see the discussion of כלבידאל < Akk. *Gabbu-ina-qāt-ili* in Richard C. Steiner, "On the Dating of Hebrew Sound Changes (**Ḥ* > *H* and **Ĝ* > *), and Greek Translations (2 Esdras and Judith)," *JBL* 124 (2005) 260–61 n. 196 and the literature cited there.

³⁷ Radner, *Šēḥ Ḥamad*, 260–61.

³⁸ Mikko Luukko and Greta van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 16; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), 14 (no. 20, line 6).

³⁹ It is not easy to distinguish translation from transcription in theophoric elements such as *Nabū* and *Bēl*. (I am indebted to A. Koller for raising this issue.) Contrast the common noun *bēl*, which is translated בעל in a number of Aramaic expressions borrowed from Akkadian; see Kaufman, *Akkadian Influences*, 42–43.

⁴⁰ Knut L. Tallqvist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch* (Helsingfors, 1905), 42. Cf. also *Bēl-šulum-šukun* (ibid.) and the very common *Šulmu-Bēl* (Knut L. Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names* [Helsingfors, 1914], 224).

⁴¹ CAD, s.v. *šalāmu*, pp. 206–8; Tallqvist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch*, 143.

⁴² It is mentioned briefly, together with the assimilation of medial *l* (the imperfect and infinitive of לקח and סלק), in Stanislav Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1975), 113; Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984–94), 1:94 n. 1; and Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 12–13.

$\bar{w} \cdot \acute{s} \cdot n \cdot \tau \cdot k \cdot m = w \cdot \acute{s} n t k$ “and during your years.” This \acute{c} is in all likelihood $\acute{c}l$ with its final consonant assimilated to the \acute{s} of $\acute{s}ntk$; cf. Cowley 45:3 $\acute{c}dbr < \acute{c}l dbr$ “concerning” and BJA prefixed $\acute{c} < \acute{c}l$ “on. . . .” For the assimilation of word-final l to word-initial \acute{s} , cf. XVI/17 $b \cdot \acute{s} m y n$ ⁸ = Hat. and Nab. $b \cdot \acute{s} m y n$ “Baal of Heaven” (Punic $b \cdot \acute{s} m m$). . . .⁴³ For $\acute{c}l$ meaning “during,” cf. Nab. $\acute{c}l \acute{s} n y h r t t m l k n b \acute{t} w$ “during the years of H̄aretat, king of Nabatea,” $\acute{c}l h y y$ “during the lifetime of,” etc.⁴⁴

The form $\acute{c} < \acute{c}l$ is important for our purposes, since it is the West-Semitic cognate of Akkadian $B\acute{e}l$.⁴⁵ To the examples cited above, we may add (1) the divine/personal name $\acute{c}l$ in Palmyrene and Hatran Aramaic and in ancient North Arabian (Lihyanite),⁴⁶ (2) the personal name $\acute{c}l$ in Syriac, also attested as $\acute{c}l$ and $\acute{c}l$ and $\acute{c}l$ *Barbaessamen* at Dura-Europos,⁴⁷ (3) the personal name $\acute{c}l$ in Palmyrene,⁴⁸ and (4) the clan name $\acute{c}l$ (alongside $\acute{c}l$) in Idumean Aramaic (fourth century B.C.E.).⁴⁹

At Palmyra, we find several other relevant personal names. Jürgen K. Stark notes that we have assimilation of l in $\acute{c}l$, “Böl is (my) light,”⁵⁰ $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$ (alongside $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$) and in $\acute{c}l$, “Böl has healed,” $\acute{c}l$, $\acute{c}l$.⁵¹ In some of these, the theophoric element is clearly $B\acute{o}l$; in others, according to Stark, it is $B\acute{e}l$.

⁴³ I have deleted a second example from Amherst 63 because it is based on a reading that has since been improved.

⁴⁴ Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims, “You Can’t Offer Your Sacrifice and Eat It Too: A Polemical Poem from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” *JNES* 43 (1984): 108. For references and acknowledgments, see the footnotes in the original. Another phrase often cited in this connection is Biblical Aramaic $\acute{c}l$ (Dan 4:14), alongside $\acute{c}l$ (Dan 2:30) and $\acute{c}l$ (Cowley 45:3), but see Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Prepositions ‘ad/’al in Aramaic and Hebrew,” *BSOAS* 40 (1977): 371–72.

⁴⁵ As is well known, Proto-Semitic \acute{c} is lost in Akkadian.

⁴⁶ Jürgen K. Stark, *Personal Names in the Palmyrene Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 78; Delbert R. Hilliers and Eleonora Cussini, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 195 (Inv 8 162); Francesco Vattioni, *Le iscrizioni di Ḥatra* (Naples: Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1981), 32 (no. 24, line 1), 41 (no. 49, line 3); A. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1909–20), 2:484 (no. 194).

⁴⁷ For the Syriac name, see J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen* (Paris: Leroux, 1930–32), 2:211 (cf. 1:45); and Stark, *Personal Names*, 78 s.v. $B \cdot \acute{s} m n$. It is attested three times in a pagan Edessan inscription of the third century C.E.; see J. B. Segal, “New Syriac Inscriptions from Edessa,” *BSOAS* 22 (1959): 37–39 and the literature cited there. For the Greek transcription, see Franz Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1926), 403 (no. 48). For the Latin transcription *Barbaessamen*, appearing several times in army rosters from 219 and 222 C.E., see C. B. Welles et al., *The Parchments and Papyri* (= *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report 5/1*) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 308–64 (nos. 100 and 101). The best preserved example appears on p. 338 (col. xliii, line 23). An example of *Barbaesamen* (with one s) appears on p. 357 (col. xxxiv, line 28).

⁴⁸ Michel Gawlikowski, *Recueil d’inscriptions palmyréniennes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1974), 34 (no. 71). For the second element of the name, cf. $\acute{c}l$ in TAD C4.2 line 5.

⁴⁹ André Lemaire, *Nouvelles inscriptions araméennes d’Idumée* (Paris: Gabalda, 2002), 210.

⁵⁰ The rendering of nwr with “light” (as in Arabic) rather than “fire” (as elsewhere in Aramaic) is found also in Harald Ingholt, “Five Dated Tombs from Palmyra,” *Berytus* 2 (1935): 115.

⁵¹ Stark, *Personal Names*, 75, 77, 79 s.v. The Greek forms are from bilinguals.

A name like **בנור** is difficult to separate from the name **במלך**, which occurs in an Egyptian Aramaic list of names from the middle of the fifth century B.C.E.—around the time of the biblical **בשלם**.⁵² I therefore suggest that **במלך** derives from **בלמלך***. Although the latter is apparently unattested, the names **אלמלך** (*Il-malaku*, *Ελμαλαχος*) and **קוסמלך** (*Qaus-malaka*, *Κοσμαλαχος*) are well known.⁵³

The assimilation of word-final Aramaic *l* is not restricted to **-בל**-, **-בעל**-, and **-על**-. In Galilean Aramaic, we find the form **קלי < קליל**, “a little,” **קלי מלח**, “a little salt,” and **קלי מיא**, “a little water”; the rabbis even use this form in a midrashic play on **קלי**, “roasted grain,” in Ruth 2:14.⁵⁴

We may also mention the Palmyrene and Syriac personal name **עבשלמא** alongside **עבדשלמא**.⁵⁵ The second component of this name is, in our opinion, virtually the same as the second component of **בשלם**. In both cases, the initial *š* of the second component assimilates the final consonant of the first component.

IV. GEMINATION AND DEGEMINATION

J. B. Segal speaks of the “elision of *l*” (instead of the “assimilation of *l*”) in **בעשמין** and **בעשמ**,⁵⁶ but this formulation must be taken with a grain of salt. Gemination resulting from assimilation is seen clearly in the transcriptions *Barbaessamen* and *Bownvouros*, the latter equated with **בנור** in a bilingual text of 186 C.E.⁵⁷ It is also reflected in the vocalization **ארישא** (with *dagesh in resh*) < **על-רישא**, “on the beginning,” attested in a Geniza fragment of *Halakhot Gedolot*.⁵⁸

Masoretic **בשלם** does not exhibit gemination, but that is not surprising. Loss of gemination in consonants preceding a reduced vowel is well attested in the Tiberian reading tradition. Among the examples of **ש < שש**, we note **ואמשו** (Gen 27:21; contrast v. 12 **משני**) and v. 22 **ומשהו**,⁵⁹ **השפתים** (Ezek 40:43), **לשפנים** (Ps 104:18), and probably also **הדשנה** (Isa 34:6). From a phonetic point of view, the closest parallel to **בשלם** is **השלבים** (3x; 1 Kgs 7:28–29), with **של** instead of an expected **שלל**.

⁵² TAD C4.2 line 1.

⁵³ Mohammed Maraqtan, *Die semitischen Personennamen in den alt- und reichsaramäischen Inschriften aus Vorderasien* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1988), 69, 128, 209.

⁵⁴ *מדרש בראשית רבא* (ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965), 521 note on lines 5–6; E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic* (trans. M. Sokoloff; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1976), 88–89.

⁵⁵ Segal, “Syriac Inscriptions,” 30. Cf. also **עבדשמיא** = *Αβισσαμια* in Ingholt, “Five Dated Tombs,” 110–11, 112–13.

⁵⁶ Segal, “Syriac Inscriptions,” 39.

⁵⁷ Ingholt, “Five Dated Tombs,” 115. For *Barbaessamen*, see Richard C. Steiner, “*Bittē-Yā*, Daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chr 4,18), and *Bint(i)-‘Anat*, Daughter of Ramesses II,” *Bib* 79 (1998): 399 n. 50.

⁵⁸ Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 72, citing Shelomo Morag, *Vocalised Talmudic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 20 no. 68, line 6.

⁵⁹ The contrast was noted already by David Qimḥi in his commentary on Gen 27:21.

V. VOWEL SHORTENING

The first vowel of בְּשֵׁלָם (*hireq* rather than *šere*) is not an obstacle to derivation from **Bēl-šalāmu* or the like. We find the same vowel in בְּלִשְׁן (Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7)⁶⁰ < *Bēlšunu*. It is likely that בְּלִדָד and בְּלִעָם have a similar derivation,⁶¹ although one would hardly know it from some modern reference works. In 1885, A. Neubauer wrote: “Analogous are two names compounded with that of the Syrian god Dad (דַּד and דַּדא), viz. that of Bil-dad the Shuhite, which means Bel-dad, and Eldad which is = El-dad. If the latter is rightly rendered in the dictionaries by ‘God loves (him),’ the former cannot be anything else but a compound of Bel and Dad.”⁶² Not long afterwards, Theodor Nöldeke argued that בְּלִעָם too has *Bēl* as its first component.⁶³ More recently, Akkadian evidence has been cited in support of this etymology of בְּלִעָם: the personal name *Bēl-ammu* (Neo-Babylonian), *Bēl-amma* (Neo-Assyrian).⁶⁴

In all of these cases, the long vowel of בֵּל (Isa 46:1; Jer 50:2; 51:44) has been shortened in a closed unstressed syllable.⁶⁵ The *quality* of the shortened vowel (*hireq* rather than *segol*) may well have been dictated by analogy, for the alternation *bēl* ~ *bil-* is identical to the alternation *’ēl* ~ **’il-*. The form **’il-* is preserved in the Babylonian tradition, in names such as אֱלִיָּקִים, אֱלִישֵׁב, אֱלִיעֶזֶר, אֱלִיעֶשָׁה, אֱלִיעֶפֶן, and אֱלִיקִנָּה.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ For the occurrence of this name in an Aramaic epigraph on a clay tablet from Nineveh, see Maraqtēn, *Personennamen*, 237.

⁶¹ Although the Septuagint has *Bal-* for both of these (Βαλδαδ and Βαλασαμ), it is unlikely that the Tiberian *hireq* in both is a product of attenuation, since the Babylonian tradition, too, has *hireq* in both; see Israel Yeivin, *The Hebrew Language Tradition as Reflected in the Babylonian Vocalization* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1985), 1081, 1082. The Septuagint has *Bal-* for בְּלִשְׁן (*Balassan*) as well.

⁶² Adolf Neubauer, “On Some Newly-discovered Temanite and Nabataean Inscriptions,” in *Studia Biblica: Essays in Biblical Archaeology and Criticism and Kindred Subjects by Members of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885–1903), 1:226. Cf. BDB, s.v. בְּלִדָד. For the divine name *Dad(i)*, see Israel Eph’al, *The Ancient Arabs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 114; and Frederick Mario Fales, “West Semitic Names in the Šēh Ḥamad Texts,” *SAAB* 7 (1993): 144. Another possibility is that the second component of בְּלִדָד is a cognate of Hebrew דָּוִד, but the *pataḥ* of בְּלִדָד makes this less attractive.

⁶³ Theodor Nöldeke, review of Friedrich Baethgen, *Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte, der Gott Israel’s und die Götter der Heiden*, *ZDMG* 42 (1888): 479. Cf. BDB, s.v. בְּלִעָם.

⁶⁴ Maraqtēn, *Personennamen*, 139–40, s.v. *bl’m*; HALAT, s.v. בְּלִעָם.

⁶⁵ Hebrew does not allow long vowels in closed unstressed syllables, but Aramaic seems to lack this constraint, judging from מְרִדְנָתָה (Ezra 4:12), מְרִדְנָתָה (Ezra 6:2), etc. Thus, the first vowel of Aramaic בְּלִשְׁנָא and בְּלִשְׁנָאֵר may well be long, even though Aramaic also possesses a short *šere*. The name בְּלִשְׁנָאֵר retains its Aramaic form in Hebrew passages as well.

⁶⁶ Yeivin, *Babylonian Vocalization*, 1078–80. In the Tiberian tradition, the similarity between *bil-* and **’il-* has been obscured by a subsequent sound change; cf. the correspondence between Bab. אֱלִיקִים, אֱלִיעֶזֶר, etc. and Tib. אֱלִיקִים, אֱלִיעֶזֶר, etc. (Yeivin, *Babylonian Vocalization*, 373).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that בְּשֵׁלֶם in Ezra 4:7 can be derived very plausibly from Aramaic בְּלִשְׁלֵם^* via בְּשֵׁלֵם^* . Although בְּלִשְׁלֵם^* is, as yet, unattested, its existence can be inferred from parallels in Aramaic (נְבוּשֵׁלֶם) and Akkadian (NA *Bēl-šallim*, LB *Nabū-šalāmu*, etc.). Three phonological developments (one Aramaic and two Hebrew) conspired to disguise the theophoric element -בֵּל- , making it homonymous with the preposition -בְּ- : (1) assimilation of final *l*, (2) degemination preceding a reduced vowel, and (3) vowel shortening in a closed unstressed syllable. All of them are well attested, and two of them occur in other Bēlistic names. Thus, בְּשֵׁלֵם is a theophoric name like the two names that follow, מְתַרְדָּת and טְבַאֵל .

Bishlam wrote to the king in concert with Mithradates and Tabeel “and the rest of *his* colleagues.” The singular pronoun “his” refers to Bishlam and implies that he was the leader of the group—the group of archivists whose report is the source of the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4:8–6:12. There is no longer any reason to cling to interpretations that assign unattested meanings to בְּשֵׁלֵם and take it as being doubly out of place: an Aramaic phrase in a Hebrew verse and a prepositional phrase (or part of one) separating a verb from its subject.

Richard C. Steiner
rsteiner@yu.edu

Yeshiva University, New York, NY 10033

Copyright of Journal of Biblical Literature is the property of Society of Biblical Literature and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.