

## Notes on the Gabriel Inscription

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**Résumé.** Sur la base du nouveau déchiffrement de l'inscription de Gabriel par Qimron et Yuditsky, la présente contribution propose plusieurs lectures nouvelles, et s'achève par une traduction anglaise structurée de l'ensemble du texte. Des images numériques ont été consultées, ainsi que le facsimilé réalisé en 2007 par Yardeni ; la formule par laquelle l'ange se présente est par exemple lue : « Je suis Gabriel, le Roi des rois, le Prince des princes ». Plusieurs aspects phénoménologiques de ce texte prophétique sont en outre étudiés ; l'auteur est simultanément prophète et exégète, réinterprétant les prophéties bibliques de guerre eschatologique contre Jérusalem et les promesses de rédemption. On peut déceler des signes d'usage liturgique en milieu communautaire. Les trois bergers envoyés par Dieu puis rappelés sont perçus comme des messagers angéliques, tout comme au chapitre 11 de l'Apocalypse selon Jean, mais aussi dans l'Oracle d'Hystaspe et l'Apocalypse d'Élie. La promesse réitérée d'un signe de la rédemption messianique « le troisième jour » est comparée à ces sources et aux textes néotestamentaires.

The Gabriel Inscription was published in March 2007 (Yardeni/Elizur 2007). Two months later I headed a symposium on this text in Oslo and suggested a tentative English translation of it (Elgvin 2007). Important contributions on this enigmatic text were published by Matthias Henze last summer (Henze 2011). In the following I present for consideration some notes and observations on the Gabriel text, and conclude with a structured English translation of it.<sup>1</sup> Photographs made by Bruce Zuckerman and his team in 2009, available on InscriptiFact (ISF), have been consulted.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to readers from *Semitica*'s editorial board for helpful suggestions.

## Textual Notes

L. 12. The beginning of this line is read by Yardeni/Elizur as  $\text{ני} \circ \circ [ ]$  מביתִי ישראל. Qimron/Yuditsky correctly observe that there are two words before “house of Israel” and render  $\text{טו} \circ \circ \circ \circ$  בית ישראל. According to ISF 11423 the first word ends  $\text{תני}$  or  $\text{תנו}$ : the left leg and horizontal upper part of the first stroke of *taw* is clear. Based on Yardeni’s full-sized drawing of the text (Yardeni/Elizur 2007) one could read this first word as  $[ ]$ קנתי or  $[ר]$ חמתי. On her drawing one sees the right edge and lower corner of a square letter, possibly *mem*, and before this two or three strokes which may be interpreted as the left leg and top of *het*, enabling the reading  $[ר]$ חמתי. The next word perhaps opens with *bet*, *kap*, or *ayin* (cf. ISF 11423). Above the first two letters of this word a supralinear *lamed* can be discerned. The two opening words of line 12 would contain a verb and a reference to God’s action for or in relation to the house of Israel. I tentatively suggest to read  $[ר]$ חמתי על־כֶּה בית ישראל. “I will have pity on you, house of Israel.” While *רחם* takes a direct object or an object introduced by *על*,  $\text{בכם}$  or  $\text{בכה}$  may be the easiest material reading of the word before “house of Israel.”

L. 12. גדלות ירושלם may be interpreted not as “the greatness of Jerusalem,” but as “great deeds (to be) done for Jerusalem,” referring to God’s deeds in the past or the close future, cf. 1 Chr 17:19.21.

Ll. 16-17. עבדי דוד בקש מן לפני, אמרים [הש]יבני, האות אני מבקש מן לפני. The last word of line 16 can materially be read אפרים “Ephraim” or אַמְרִים “words,” as the second letter of this word can be read as *pe* or *mem*.<sup>2</sup> Qimron/Yuditsky argue for the reading אַמְרִים [הש]יבני “Give me words [in re]sponse,” referring to this expression in Prov 22:21.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Yardeni/Elizur 2011: 13. “one can perhaps restore the name Ephraim[?]” (ibid.: 19). Hendel (2009: 8) and Qimron/Yuditsky read אמרים. On ISF 11424 one can discern a tiny vertical stroke topping the upper left corner of the disputed letter, pointing to *mem*, not *pe*.

Since his first publication in 2007 the reading “Ephraim” has been essential for Knohl’s interpretations. Based on the physical evidence he argues that the first word of line 17 cannot be [הש]יבני, but a word ending with final *mem* (2011: 42, note 11). With Yardeni/Elizur he restores [וי]שים and interprets the crucial words: “My servant David, ask of Ephraim [that he] place the sign; (this) I ask of you.” Such a reading represents a stretched interpretation of these two lines. In this text it would be artificial to bring in a dialogue between two messiahs, one of David’s seed and one of Ephraim’s. All through the text the speakers of the dialogue are the anonymous prophet and Gabriel. And it is God or the angel who brings forward the sign (line 80), not a human agent (cf. Kim 2011: 167). The close context supports the interpretation of Qimron/Yuditsky, in lines 10-11 the prophet asks the angel for a word from the Lord, and lines 17-21 provide the response to this request. David’s request is phrased as a synthetic parallelism, “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you.” In ISF 11425 the last letters of the first word of line 17 are clearly ני. The third last letter looks more like a *pe*, but *bet* is possible, so one should read [יבני] or [פני]. So far [הש]יבני is the best suggested restoration, which also points to אמרים and not אפרים at the end of line 16.

What is the relation between “my servant David” and the prophet behind this revelatory text? Kim (2011: 158) sees this “David” as the recipient of the revelation. He argues that the text was addressed to the leader of a militant group in a time of crisis for Jerusalem, a group who had the warrior-king David as their hero. Kim does not specify if this “David” was the one who actually had this prophetic audition and vision, or if another prophet was mediating to him. Since the text includes different scenes and visions (lines 25-26, 31-35, 38, 41, 83) and David is referred to in the third person in line 72 (cf. Collins 2011: 111), a more probable scenario would be the prophet listening to a dialogue between Gabriel and the Davidic messiah.

L. 18-19. ברית־הַדֵּשָׁה. Qimron/Yuditsky notes that the reading is doubtful, and annotates the first word ברית־. However, on ISF 11424 the first three letters are clearly drawn, although the first

letter can equally be read as *bet* or *kap*. The final *taw* is materially more doubtful, but it is difficult to come up with a better reading that fits with the next word, חֲדִשָּׁה. I concur with Qimron/Yudit-sky that the digital photo favours the reading חֲדִשָּׁה for קדשה (thus Yardeni/Elizur).

L. 22. Read לו בִּסְדֹּאתָ עומד “You do not stand on firm ground.”

LL. 24-25. In the beginning of line 25 there is space for a short word before השמים. I suggest to restore חל[השמים]: I will shake [the powers] of heaven and the earth. This quotation of Hag 2:6 is also found in Hebr 12:26.

Ll. 31-32. With ISF 11432 read וישאל הַמַּלְאָךְ דְרִיתָהּ מֵהוּ “The angel asked, ‘The thing you saw, what was it?’—I answered: ‘A [mighty] tree.’” Our author is influenced by Aramaic, and could use both ש (lines 36, 67, 71) and ד as relative pronoun (דַּמֶּן, line 81). An irregular defective spelling of ראיתה should not be ruled out (cf. the spelling תירה for תירא in line 23), even if שראיתה occurs in line 71. The first word of line 32 described the tree seen in this vision.

Ll. 35-36. With Qimron/Yuditsky read עומד and not עובר. Line 36 contains the verb סמן. A man communicating a sign may have been envisioned standing on the city wall, cf. Amos 7:7.

Ll. 37-38. Read with Qimron/Yuditsky: זאות גלות ... ז[א]ות גלות. They interpret it as “the first exile” and “the second exile,” referring to Jer 24:1-10. Alternatively one could interpret גלות as a *qal* or *pi‘el* infinitive with the meaning “revelation.” Based on ISF 11426 one may possibly read זאות גלות שְׁנִיָּהּ [ז]אות גלות. “this is the first revelation ... this is the second revelation.”

L. 41. With Qimron/Yuditski the penultimate word should be read ואראה. With ISF 11427 one may read the end of the line הדרו “... His glory, and I shall see wonders.” The letter here suggested as *samek* could equally be read *bet* or *kap*.

L. 43. The penultimate word seems to be קירוֹת, cf. ISF 11427. Only a trace is visible of the penultimate letter, but both legs of *taw* can be discerned. Alternatively one could read קיר[ or קור[ followed by a word space and *taw*.

L. 54. “it is said” should be understood as “it is written,” referring to a biblical text.

Ll. 59-60. The letters of line 60 are difficult to read. In the beginning of line 60 Qimron/Yuditsky restore ירוֹן[שֶׁלֶם. The next word is read by Yardeni/Elizur as רוּח “spirit.” Since Zech 1-6 and 11 have coloured this text, a reference to Zech 12:10 would make sense. This verse is quoted also in the opening of the Revelation of John, the closest New Testament relative of the Gabriel text. I therefore suggest the tentative restoration אֲשַׁפּוֹד עַל יְרוֹן[שֶׁלֶם רוּחַ “[I will pour out over Jeru]salem a spirit of grace and supplication.”

L. 71. Yardeni/Elizur read שְׂרַאִיתִי בְרַכֹּי. Read שְׂרַאִיתִי בְדַרְכֵי, cf. ISF 11433. בְדַרְכֵי: the second letter is materially more easily read as *resh*, but *dalet* is possible. The third letter is unclear, but *kap* and *yod* can be discerned.

L. 81. The third, fourth and fifth words of this line were read by Yardeni/Elizur דִּסְנֵן אֲרוֹזְבוֹתַי צְרִיִם “narrow holes(?)” Knohl then connected this line with the slaughter of the zealot leader Simon in rocky crevices in Transjordan in 4 BC (2011: 47). *taw* may equally be read as *het*, as no extending base line of this letter can be discerned. I tentatively suggest as an alternative reading of this line שֶׁר הַשְּׂרִיף דַּמֵּן קְרוֹבֵי הַצְּרִיִם “the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts”—referring to the angels approaching God in the courts of the heavenly sanctuary. *qop* for *alep* is only a tentative option, as no descender is visible. But the letters of the line below are worn, and the same could be the case for the descender of a *qop*.

Ll. 80, 82. Yardeni’s 2007 drawing of the text may suggest to read at the end of lines 80 and 82 respectively אֲנִי גַבְרִיאֵל מַלְאָךְ מַלְכֵינְךָ and

הנה אהֲבִי מֶלֶךְ (for the latter, cf. ISF 1143), leading to the following self-presentation of Gabriel: “I am Gabriel, the king of kings, the prince of princes, of those who are close to the courts.” מֶלֶךְ מַלְכִים could alternatively be interpreted “the (first) angel of the angels,” cf. the defective spelling of מֶלֶךְ (= מֶלֶאךְ) in line 77. If this reading of line 80 is correct, the title שֵׁר הַשְּׂרָיִן (line 81), used more probably of Michael than God in Dan 8:25 (cf. 8:11), is here applied to Gabriel. Elizur lists later Jewish usage of the term “prince of princes” (Yardeni/Elizur 2011: 20-21): in hekhalot literature it designates Metatron or the angelic Youth alongside the Lord, and Gabriel is positioned as the head of the princes (בְּרֵאשׁ הַשְּׂרָיִם). The last reference would support my reading of lines 80-81. In *piyyutim* “prince of princes” is a designation for Michael. A Babylonian incantation text names the two angels who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Gabriel and Michael (Hamidović 2009: 157).

### Thematic Observations

Jewish prophecy had not ceased to function in the late Second Temple period (Gray 1993). The Gabriel text opens a window into the actual sayings of such prophets a century before this phenomenon would unfold in (Jewish) Christian contexts, as evidenced in New Testament texts, *Didache*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

In this text the mediating angel adopts the genre of a human prophet, frequently repeating the formula “thus says the Lord” (cf. Kim 2011: 155). This is different from the interpreting angels we encounter in Daniel 10–12, *Jubilees* or *1 Enoch*, but similar to Zech 1–3. This feature may reflect the theology and angelology of our author, who perhaps needed a mediator less awesome than God himself.

The text includes liturgical responses (lines 23-25, 72-74, cf. Ezek 3:12). This element may reflect the background of the

prophet (Levitic?) or demonstrate a secondary use of this text in a community setting.<sup>3</sup>

In lines 70-72, 75-76, 79 we encounter three divine envoys, designated as prophets and shepherds, sent by God and then recalled. The image of three shepherds is found in Zech 11, where they designate human rulers with poor conduct. Elizur lists a number of rabbinic references to “three prophets,” identified as biblical prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Kohelet, Elijah, Micah, Moses, Zephaniah and Hulda (Yardeni/Elizur 2011: 18-19).

In lines 75-76 the shepherds are sent to scrutinize the people of Israel to see if there are faithful ones among them. Rather than pointing to human rulers or prophets this job description brings to mind angelic envoys with similar tasks, cf. Gen 18-19; Ezek 9; Zech 1:10-11; Rev 7:1-4. The three shepherds should be interpreted as angelic shepherds commissioned by God to test the ways of men, and may be identical with the three holy ones of line 65.<sup>4</sup> A reference to three biblical prophets would not easily fit the setting of the Gabriel text, which either points to a historical situation of crisis in the first century BC or an eschatological war.

These divine envoys should be compared with the two witnesses of Rev 11, who testify to the truth before they are killed by the beast, and after *three days* and a half resurrected and taken to heaven. Flusser and Werman have argued persuasively that Rev 11-13 reinterprets the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, an anti-Roman Jewish apocalyptic text from the first century.<sup>5</sup> In the *Oracle* (known

<sup>3</sup> According to Hamidović, the repetitions in lines 57-59 show that the inscription is no autograph, but copied from a *Vorlage*. He suggests that the stone could have been used as a liturgical object (2009: 149, 151-2). For Yardeni/Elizur the “scroll style” with two columns suggests that the inscription was copied from a scroll (2011: 12).

<sup>4</sup> In the HB “holy ones” refer to angels (Collins 1993: 313-17; idem 2011: 105). In literature from Qumran and later periods this designation may be extended to human servants of God, as in line 76.

<sup>5</sup> Flusser 1988. According to Werman (2009) also the motif of the woman giving birth to the Messiah (Rev 11) was present in the *Oracle*. Flusser’s hypothesis was accepted by Aune (1998: 588-93, 726-8, 771). Schäfer has recently discussed the Jewish traditions about the mother giving birth to the messiah, who is taken

through Lactantius, a third-century Christian writer) there is *one* prophet who is sent by God to preach and bring the people to repentance. He is subsequently killed by the antichrist, and then called back to heaven *on the third day*. The Gabriel text reflects an earlier version of traditions later incorporated into the *Oracle* and Rev 11–13. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 4 reflects the same tradition, with three witnesses who preach against the antichrist. All three, the virgin Tabitha, Elijah and Enoch, are killed and resurrected. *Apoc. Elijah* contains both Jewish and Christian layers. The evidence of the Gabriel inscription suggests that the core of *Apoc. Elijah* 4 is Jewish in origin (*pace* Wintermute, *OTP* 1: 724-5, 746-9).

Is there a specific historical situation of crisis behind this revelatory text, as argued by Knohl and Kim? Knohl has suggested the upheavals after the death of Herod. Other options would be Pompey's invasion of Jerusalem 63 BC, the Parsian incursions in Judea 40-39 BC, or the civil war between Herod and the Hasmoneans 39-37 BC that culminated in the siege and conquest of Jerusalem. But the prophet behind the Gabriel text could engage in prophetic dialogue with biblical texts on the end-time fate of Jerusalem without an acute situation of military crisis, similar to the setting of the Revelation of John. Our author is simultaneously prophet and exegete, as Fletcher-Louis has argued about John of Patmos.<sup>6</sup>

The Gabriel text repeatedly promises a sign of redemption on the third day (lines 17-19, 54, 80). Thus, a messianic hope could be connected with "the third day" already before Jesus. With this evidence it becomes more plausible that the sayings of Matt 12:40, Luke 24:46, and John 2:19 (cf. 1 Cor 15:4) can be traced back

to heaven as a baby (*y.Berakhot* 2,4/12-14; *Lam Rabba* 1,16 § 51; cf. also *Sefer Serub-abel*), and concluded that they represent post-Christian polemic: Schäfer 2010: 1-31.

<sup>6</sup> "what John encounters in his visionary experience is made sense of through the framework of understanding already present in his cognition. The interpretation of Ezek 1 ... involved seeing again what Ezekiel had seen. It may well have involved the resort to cross-referencing, but this contributed to a dynamic imaginative activity in which the details of Ezekiel's vision were understood by a complex interweaving of vision and textual networking": Fletcher-Louis 2006: 45, 48; cf. *idem* 2008.

to the historical Jesus. The hope for redemption with dawn or on the third day would find support in scriptures such as Hos 6:3; Ps 46:6; Exod 8:19; 19:11,15; Gen 22:4 (on the third day Abraham sees the place of offering and symbolically receives “his son back from the dead,” cf. Hebr 11:17-19).

### **The Gabriel Inscription — A Structured Translation<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> ]the sons of Israel[ <sup>9</sup> ]word of the Lor[d <sup>10</sup> ]you asked [me ..., for a word from] <sup>11</sup> the Lord you asked me. — Thus says the Lord of Hosts: <sup>12</sup> I will *have pity on you*, house of Israel. I will shout about great deeds to be done for Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> [Thus] says the Lord, the God of Israel: See, all peoples <sup>14</sup> will make war against Jerusalem, and deport from it <sup>15</sup> one, two, three, four of the prophets and the elders <sup>16</sup> [and] the pious men.

My servant David, ask me: <sup>17</sup> “Give me words [in re]sponse, the sign I ask from you!” Thus says <sup>18</sup> the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: My son, in my hands I have <sup>19</sup> a new covenant for Israel, on the third day you will know it. Thus says <sup>20</sup> the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel: Evil will be broken before <sup>21</sup> righteousness. Ask me, and I will tell you what this <sup>22</sup> evil plant is. You do not stand on firm ground, but the angel <sup>23</sup> is your support, do not fear!

— Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his <sup>24</sup> dwelling! — In a little while I will shake <sup>25</sup> [*the powers of*] heaven and the earth.

— See the glory of the Lord God <sup>26</sup> of Hosts, the God of Israel! The God of the chariots will listen to <sup>27</sup> the cry of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and bring consolation for the sake of <sup>28</sup> the hosts of the angel Michael, and for the sake of those who have loved <sup>29</sup> and asked him.

Thus says the Lord God of Hosts, the God of <sup>30</sup> Israel: One, two, three, four, five, six, <sup>31</sup> [seven.] ... And the angel asked: “The thing you saw, what was it?” — I answered: “A [mighty] tree.” <sup>32</sup> — “Yes, Jerusalem shall be as in former days.” — And I saw a second one

<sup>7</sup> The translation is particularly indebted to Qimron and Yuditsky 2011. Italic font indicates tentative/uncertain readings and interpretations.

<sup>33</sup> guarding you, Jerusalem, and three, yes three who perform mighty deeds. <sup>34</sup> ... three ... <sup>35</sup> ... See: a man standing and ... [on the wall] <sup>36</sup> and he ... who will give a signal from Jerusalem. <sup>37</sup> And I stand over ... and he said: This is the first revelation, <sup>38</sup> and this is the second revelation, ... and these are the poor ones. And I saw <sup>39</sup> [...

*I will take pity on*] Jerusalem, says the Lord of <sup>40</sup> Hosts ... <sup>41</sup> ... His glory, and I shall see wonders <sup>43</sup> ... walls ... <sup>50</sup> [The Lord your God] <sup>51</sup> is with you, your Shepherd [is with you ... providing help] <sup>52</sup> from the angels and from *on high*.

[The enemy shall make war] <sup>53</sup> against his people, and the next day ... [a sign will be given to them,] <sup>54</sup> on the third day, as it is said. ... he ... <sup>56</sup> Yea, see ... [it shall be] <sup>57</sup> an end to the blood of the slaughtering in Jerusalem.

For thus says the Lord of Hosts, <sup>58</sup> the God of Israel. Yes, thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of <sup>59</sup> Israel, thus says the Lord: [I will pour out <sup>60</sup> over Jeru]salem a spirit of *grace and supplication*. <sup>61</sup> ... Blessed are those ... <sup>64</sup> ...

[These are the] <sup>65</sup> three holy ones from days of old, from the beg[inning ... ] <sup>66</sup> Jerusalem, say: "We trust in you, [not in] <sup>67</sup> flesh and blood." This is the chariot of [your guardian angel.] <sup>68</sup> There are many who love the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel.

<sup>69</sup> Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: [Three] <sup>70</sup> prophets I sent to my people, three shepherds. But when <sup>71</sup> I pondered on the ways [of my people] I called them back to <sup>72</sup> the place for the sake of David, the servant of the Lord.

— Y[ou created <sup>73</sup> the heavens and the earth by your [great] power and by your outstretched <sup>74</sup> [arm]. You show mercy towards a thousand generations ...

<sup>75</sup> Three shepherds came to Israel ... [to see] <sup>76</sup> if there were [pious ones] among them, if there were holy ones among them ...

<sup>77</sup> "Who are you?" — "I am Gabriel, the angel of [the Lord.] ... <sup>78</sup> you shall rescue them. A prophe[t and a shep]herd shall rescue you. — [I p]ray <sup>79</sup> you for three shepherds, for three [pro]phets.

<sup>80</sup> On the third day: the sign! I am Gabriel, *the king of kings*, <sup>81</sup> the prince of princes, of *those who are close to the courts* ... <sup>82</sup> The sign is for him ... [thus they a]sk you. See those who love *the king!* <sup>83</sup> On

the third day, the small one that I took, I Gabriel. <sup>84</sup> The Lord of Hosts, the God of I[srael] ... <sup>85</sup> Then you will stand *firm* <sup>87</sup> ... for ever

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