

In 1971 A. Caquot published an Aramaic inscription of unknown provenance, the script of which proved it to date from the 7th century BC, and which appeared to exhibit some very exceptional grammatical phenomena besides having fascinating contents.<sup>1</sup> Caquot supposed this text to be concerned with sanctions against those who did not give certain dues to government officials. Its study was pursued by E. Lipinski, who, partly on suggestions by S. A. Kaufman, proposed new readings for a number of the letters in the inscription.<sup>2</sup> A short article by P.-E. Dion stated some biblical and cuneiform parallels for the legal terminology employed in the text; his interpretation followed Caquot's.<sup>3</sup> Further improvements in the study of this document were proposed by F. M. Fales, who suggested additional new readings and recognized that it was concerned with the duty of certain private persons and officials to deliver someone to the authorities.<sup>4</sup>

As this text has become known to the scholarly world only through a photograph (the present location of the text seems to be the French Institute of Archeology in Beirut, but none of the commentators have studied it first-hand)<sup>5</sup>, it is hardly surprising that establishing the correct text of this inscription has occupied a major part of the effort which was spent on it. For practical reasons I shall mention earlier readings and the attempts to explain these only briefly. Let it suffice to note that of the ca. 120 preserved letters in this short text, six (most of them in vital places) are now read differently as a result of Kaufman's, Lipinski's and Fales' work on it, to which number I shall add a modest one or two below.

In this article I shall try to provide a brief synthesis of the relevant results of the previous commentaries on the text, while proposing a few small amendments, taking Fales' text as my point of departure. A new proposal for a possible

<sup>1</sup> A. Caquot, "Une inscription araméenne d'époque assyrienne", in: *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer*, Paris 1971, 9-16 (henceforth: Caquot). Other abbreviations used in this article: Gibson = J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions II: Aramaic Inscriptions*, Oxford 1975; KAI = H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 volumes, Wiesbaden 1962-64.

<sup>2</sup> E. Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics I*, Leuven 1975, 77-82.

<sup>3</sup> "Une inscription araméenne en style *awilum* sa et quelques textes bibliques datant de l'exil", *Biblica* 55 (1974), 399-403.

<sup>4</sup> "Una diffida relativa a fuorusciti mesopotamici in aramaico", *AION* 28 (1978), 273-282.

<sup>5</sup> In J. A. Fitzmyer, S. J., and S. A. Kaufman, *An Aramaic Bibliography. Part I: Old, Official, and Biblical Aramaic*, Baltimore and London 1992, 25 (text B.1.23) it is described as "Inscribed stone (28.5 x 28.5 cm)", and its present location is given.

provenance of this document will be made. The orthography and grammar of this text, which were once thought to be extremely unusual, will be shown to fit our present knowledge of the Aramaic of the period concerned rather well. Finally I shall make a few short remarks about the reason why it may have been written.

The transliteration provided here is based upon Fales' proposals for changes in Lipinski's transliteration as provided in his article. The only deviation is the reading *wl[yn]tnnhy* in line 4, which will be discussed in the commentary. For practical reasons no indication of the beginnings of lines will be given in the translation.

#### Text and translation

1. wk't z' 'yš zy s[l]lq
2. mn mt 'kdh ytnšg bby
3. th wbrqyth wl' y'h
4. d w[yn]tnnhy lb l pqt ml
5. [k]' mr' byt' zy 'l bb
6. yth whzn qryt' wbl
7. pqt' zy hzwhy wl'
8. 'hwhy l' yhywn

"And now this: A man, in whose house or town someone from the land of Akkad is found, who does not arrest (him) and surrender him to the officer of the king — the head of the household in whose house he entered and the mayor of the town or officer who saw him but did not arrest him shall not live".

#### Commentary

wk't z' — This expression is unfortunately without an exact parallel. The use of *wk't*, "and now", may point to a letter as the origin of this decree, as this word frequently serves to introduce a subject there.<sup>6</sup> The use of the (feminine singular) demonstrative pronoun *z'* directly after *k* *t* is not found elsewhere.

'yš zy — Though it is certainly not impossible to assume that this "the man who" is resumed by a p'al perfect *s[l]lq*, "came up", it seems preferable, once we have realized with Fales, a.c., 280-281 that a person designated by means of this word *s[l]lq* (p'al active participle) is the object of the subsequent acts, to suppose that it is referred to by a different word in the following sentence. Fales' solution, namely to translate the verbal form *ytnšg* *ad sensum* as "he meets" and to assume that *s[l]lq* is the object of this verb meets with the problem that the verb *nšg* is well known in Hebrew (in the *hif'il*: "to overtake") and is attested once in Aramaic (though its meaning may be slightly different from the Hebrew), so that it is

really unnecessary to assume an entirely unattested and inexplicable sense for it. It may be a better solution to assume that this 'yš zy is only referred to by the suffixes in *bby'th wbrqyth*, "in his house or in his town". With Fales we have to assume that the subject of the entire introductory part of this edict (lines 1-5) is the person who commits the crime of not delivering a certain person to the authorities.

Laws or paragraphs of laws beginning with the expression *awilu(m) ša*, "the man who", are not at all uncommon in Akkadian juridical literature, but the Neo-Babylonian laws are the only text in which this idiom is used exclusively to introduce legal regulations.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that we have no material for comparison from Neo-Assyrian times, as hitherto no collections of laws from that period have come to light.

*s[l]lq* — As noted by Fales (a.c., 281) this characterization of the person involved must be self-explanatory, as no further comment upon his misdemeanor seems to be required here. One may wonder, however, if his interpretation as "fugitive" really meets this requirement. Why would fugitives from the land of Akkad be singled out for special regulations? A meaning "to flee" can, besides, only be assumed for *s[l]lq* in very special circumstances. There may be another solution available for this problem. As the only other attestation for the expression "the land of Akkad" in an Aramaic document derives from the Assyrian administration (see below) one wonders if maybe the situation is more or less the same here. The "land of Akkad" may serve here to designate northern Babylonia from a point of view which is upstream the two rivers, perhaps somewhere in Assyria itself or in the region around Haran. The verb *s[l]lq* could then be explained as the ordinary way to express movement upstream (as usual for the Akkadian verb *clū*, "to go up") without any further semantic nuance being expressed by the use of this verb, so that we can translate simply: "someone who comes/came from the land of Akkad". The only thing we must suppose is that for some reason — which we would not expect to be explained in a short edict such as this one — immigration from part of the south to the north of Mesopotamia was strictly forbidden. A possible reason for such a regulation will be discussed below.

A possible objection to the proposition of a provenance from northern Mesopotamia could be that the anonymous owner, according to Caquot on page 9 of his article, seems to have declared in 1950 that the piece came from Northern Lebanon. It is difficult, however, to give full weight to such a second-hand statement and I think that we should not be influenced too much by it in our discussion, unless of course firm evidence for this provenance would eventually come forth.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, J. A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography", in his *A Wandering Aramean*, Missoula 1979, 183-204 and especially page 193. This was already noted by Caquot on page 12 of his article.

<sup>7</sup> The latest translations, accompanied by a bibliography, can be found in R. Haase, *Die Keilschriftlichen Rechtsurkunden in deutscher Fassung*, Wiesbaden 1979, 110-112, and in R. Borger, "Akkadische Rechtsbücher", in: *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* 1/1, Gütersloh 1982, 32-95: 92-95 (based on a newly constituted text, with many improvements).

error (the only difference is a small extra stroke in the *sac* which was first proposed by Fales (p. 279-280).

*mt 'kdh* — A designation for northern Babylonia which is common in Neo-Assyrian documents<sup>8</sup> and which is found once in a fragmentary context in an Aramaic letter found in Assur, KAI 233, 2 [ ] *my' t bmtkdy*, "[ ] you with me in the land of Akkad....". The difference in the final sign between the two attestations of this name may represent the vacillation between final -i and -ē which is also found in the Akkadian spellings of this name<sup>9</sup>, rather than a variation in the use of Aramaic vowel-letters to indicate a given vowel (against Caquot, a.c., 12).

*ytšg* — Probably an ittaf'al (or itp"el?) of the verb *nšg*, which appears in Hebrew in the hif'il with the meaning "to reach, to overtake", and the haf'el of which is attested once in Aramaic, in a somewhat obscure context in Ahiqar 133, where [y]hšgwn kdbth wyrawqn b'npwly is translated by J. M. Lindenberg as "his lies will overtake (him) and they will spit in his face".<sup>10</sup>

The sequence of events as described here, "*nšg* - to arrest - to surrender" has an interesting parallel in the story about the way in which king Zedekiah of Judah is captured by the Babylonians in Jeremiah 52:8-9 *wyrdpw hyl kšdym 'hry hmlk wyšygw 't šdqylw b'rbt yrhw wkl hylw npsw m'lyw* (9) *wytpsw 't hmlk wyflw 'tw 'l mlk bbl rblth b'rs hmt*, "But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. (9) Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath" (=2 Kings 25:5-6, compare also Jeremiah 39:5). It cannot be excluded that a further semantic nuance may have been expressed by the use of this verb *nšg* instead of, for example, the common Aramaic verb *škh*, "to find" (haf'el= active, 'itp"el= passive), but for the moment, as long as we cannot compare other attestations, the translation "he will be found" serves our needs well enough.

*by' th wbyryth* — Thus two types of misdemeanor are already distinguished, dependent upon the status of the person involved as a private person or as a municipal official. The last word at first posed enormous problems to students of this text, because the *qof* is damaged (Caquot read an *ayin* instead), and instead

*wl' y'h'd wlyn tlnhy* — This verb was read and translated as *wlytlnhy*, "and/or he will hide", by Fales (p. 278-279). This interpretation, while superior to former proposals, meets with a number of objections. The verb *ttnn* is attested in Hebrew, but in Aramaic the apparently related root *tnr* is used for "to hide". I further wonder if the lacuna offers enough space for a large sign such as *tet* and would be surprised if the suffix at the end would not be preceded by the *nun* which always accompanies pronominal suffixes to an imperfect with indicative meaning. The solution to this problem may be fairly simple. What remains of the sign read as *mem* by Fales (and by his predecessors) really consists of two oblique strokes, which could represent a part of *mem*, but which can equally well be the tails of a *taw* and a *nun* which were written rather closely together, as will be apparent from a drawing of the traces and the proposed restorations. It seems rather likely, by the way, that the yod and the nun supposed to be in the lacuna can still be read on the original; the evidence of the published photograph is inconclusive.

[Figure]



Visible on the photograph



Restoration by Fales



Proposed restoration

The two verbs '*hd*, "to arrest", and *ntn*, "to give, to surrender", would admirably complement one another. The suffix at the end of this word would also serve for the first verb, something which is quite ordinary in Aramaic grammar when two verbs belong closely together. Note also that, when this act of arresting and surrendering is mentioned again with a negation in line 8, the first verb seems to suffice. This makes it even more likely that the verbs '*hd* and *ntn* are used here to express a single obligation. Finally, we would indeed find the expected *nun* before the suffix.

<sup>8</sup> S. Parpola, *Neco-Assyrian Toponyms*, Neukirchen/Vluyn 1970, 7-11.

<sup>9</sup> S. Parpola, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> J. M. Lindenberg, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*, Baltimore 1983, 127; see also I. Kottsieper, *Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche*, Berlin & New York 1990, 147.

*b'l pqt ml'k'* — As *bel piqitti* a well-known title of various officials in both Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times.<sup>11</sup>

*zy 'l bb'yth* — The head of a household apparently takes full responsibility for everything going on in it, as there is no provision for the possibility that he may simply have been ignorant of the presence of a Babylonian in his household. Note that both this sentence and the sentence *zy hzwhly wl' 'hduhy* serve to express a condition.

*wb 'l' pqt'* — It has generally been assumed that this man must be the same as the *b' l pqt mlk'* of lines 4-5. This assumption, however, would disturb the formal structure of this document. In the first part of the text we noted the mention of two types of misdemeanor, depending upon the question whether the person who fails to surrender the illegal immigrant to the officer of the king is the head of a household or an employee of the municipality. The officer would suddenly have shifted to the class of possible suspects, whereas he was not so described in the first part of the document. The parallelism with *hzn qryt'* and the considerations set forth above make one suspect, that instead an official of the municipality, distinct from the "*bel piqitti*" of the king", may have been designated by this apparently fairly generally applicable title here. Such a *bel piqitti* may even appear once in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 37:13, where Jeremiah is arrested at one of the gates of Jerusalem by a certain *ba'al p'qidut us'mo yir' iyya ben šelemiya ben h'nanya*, translated in the RSV as "a sentry named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah". It is not impossible that Irijah's title *ba'al p'qidut* is a full calque from Akkadian *bel piqitti*, whereas the title which we find here is half calque (*b'l* for *bel*), half loanword (*pqt'* from *piqitti*).<sup>12</sup> It may be not entirely coincidental that both in this document and in the Jeremiah passage the *b'l pqt' /ba'al p'qidut* is said to (have to) arrest someone, but it is difficult to attain definite conclusions in the absence of a comprehensive view of the Akkadian material. Note that the relation between the Akkadian and West-Semitic words is obscured by the (partly accidental) formal resemblance between them.

*zy hzwhly wl' 'hduhy* — Unlike the situation with regard to the head of the household, the responsibility of these officials is limited by the rule that they must at least have been aware of the presence of and subsequently have shown negligence in the apprehension of the illegal immigrant.

*l' ghytyn* — The use of the expression "he will not live" and the like is a well-known way to express a death-sentence in the Hebrew Bible, e.g. in Genesis

31:32, "[Jacob says to Laban:] Any one with whom you find your gods shall not live (*lo yihye*)", Exodus 19:12-13, "whoever touches the mountain [Sinai] shall be put to death (*mot yumat*);<sup>13</sup> no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live (*lo yihye*)", 2 Kings 10:19, "[Jehu says:] Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his priests; let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal; whoever is missing shall not live (*lo yihye*)", Ezekiel 18:11-13, "who does none of these duties, but...<sup>13</sup> lends at interest, and takes increase; shall he then live? He shall not live (*lo yihye*). He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die (*mot yumat*); his blood shall be upon himself", Zechariah 13:3, "And if any one again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live (*lo yihye*), for you speak lies in the name of the Lord'; and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies".

With causative verbal forms we find it, beside other instances, in Exodus 22:17, "You shall not permit a sorceress to live (*m'kasše ga lo t'hayye*)", and Deuteronomy 20:16, "But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes (*lo t'hayye kol n'sāma*)". In Biblical Hebrew, *lo* is always used as a negation in this expression for both *qal* and *hif'* il to the exclusion of *'al*. It should be noted that none of these instances is used in a law properly speaking, but only in texts which threaten or announce the death punishment for some offence. Twice it is used parallel to the common legal expression *mot yumat*, "he will (certainly) be put to death", which is often found in biblical laws. Though it would be hazardous to transfer this directly to our text, the idea that it is not a law in the proper sense is supported by its wording and certain literary aspects (see also below).

The actual expression "he shall not live" is apparently not found independently at all in Mesopotamian laws, but it should be noted that the death-penalty is never mentioned in the Neo-Babylonian laws (see note 7), where we would first expect this expression. The rather remote parallels which Dion in his article adduced from cuneiform literature are thus not nearly as close to the wording of this inscription as the Old Testament passages, but in view of the scantiness of the legal material from Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times it is not possible to draw conclusions concerning the original language of this text from this fact.

### Orthography and grammar

Most of the larger published Aramaic texts from the older periods date from either the 8th or the 5th century BC, usually designated as Old Aramaic and Official or Imperial Aramaic, respectively. This leaves two centuries in which the material is comparatively scarce, and even short inscriptions therefore assume an importance which is not in proportion to their size. It may be useful to attempt to relate the grammatical information gained from this short text to what we know of the Old Aramaic and Official Aramaic texts.

<sup>11</sup> Of the two modern Akkadian dictionaries only the *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* offers a brief review of this word and its meaning (I, 120); CAD volume P has not yet appeared.

<sup>12</sup> Compare the implicit suggestion to this effect in W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, III, Leiden 1983, 903.



It appears that the orthography of this text is surprisingly close to that of Official Aramaic as it is found in the documents from Egypt. The indication by means of matres lectionis of internal *-i-* (in 'yš, 'iš), of internal *-u-* (in 'hduhy, 'ahdūhū), and of final *-i* (in the suffix *-ly*, *-lū*) are found in the same way in Egyptian Aramaic, our main source of information for Official Aramaic, but usually not in Old Aramaic.<sup>13</sup> Not unexpectedly, the original consonant *d* is still spelled with *[z]* in the pronouns *z'* and *zy*, but it is already written with *[d]* (with which it had coalesced by this time) in the verb 'hd, as in Egyptian Aramaic, but unlike the situation in Old Aramaic<sup>14</sup> or even in the Assur letter<sup>15</sup>, which is usually dated to the middle of the 7th century.

Even in this short text there are a number of instances of the suffix 3 m.sg. *-ly* (*-li*). The opposition to the alternative form of this suffix, *-li* (*-eh*), seems to be governed by the same rules as in Egyptian Aramaic. Usually *-eh* is found after a nominal or verbal form ending in a consonant (*byth* 2x, *qryth*), whereas *-li* is found after a vowel (*lyzwyh*, 'hduhy). The only form which could cause difficulties is *wlymlyh*. In this respect, our text agrees with the usage in the Egyptian Aramaic texts<sup>16</sup>, against the use in Qumran Aramaic<sup>17</sup> and Biblical Aramaic<sup>18</sup>, in using the suffix *-li* after the *mun* which was inserted between an indicative imperfect and the suffix, instead of its alternative *-eh*.

As a result of our short survey it can be said that there are indeed no orthographical or grammatical characteristics which can distinguish this text, clearly to be dated in the seventh century (the paleography leaves no room for doubt), from documents in Official Aramaic two centuries younger. If this text may indeed be dated to the latter days of the Assyrian empire (see below), we must assume that the roots of Official Aramaic orthography are earlier than we hitherto suspected. We therefore eagerly await the publication of the Brussels Aramaic clay-tablets<sup>19</sup>, which were written in Northern Mesopotamia as well; they may possibly throw further light on the emergence of Official Aramaic orthography.

<sup>13</sup> R. Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, Wiesbaden 1969, § 6.

<sup>14</sup> R. Degen, o.c., § 11 and § 12. The only attestation for this verb in Old Aramaic in the strict sense is *w'lyt*, "and I took hold of", in KAI 216, 11 (= Gibson, 15, 11), but other instances can be found in the Samalian inscriptions and in the statue of Hadda-yit i.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, 'hzu, "we caught", in KAI 233, 5 and 6 (= Gibson, 20, 5 and 6).

<sup>16</sup> There is no good list available of these forms. They are scattered throughout the paragraphs about the verb in P. Leander, *Grammatik des Ägyptisch-Aramäischen*, Göteborg 1928.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, M. Sokoloff, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI*, Ramat-Gan 1974, 187.

<sup>18</sup> H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Grammatik des biblisch-aramäischen*, Halle 1927 (reprint Hildesheim 1969), 177.

<sup>19</sup> E. Lipinski has published a number of preliminary observations about these texts, for example in his "Les temples néo-assyriens et les origines du monnayage". in: *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East II*, Leuven 1979, 565-588.

The observations set forth above may also be relevant to Kaufman's theory that Official Aramaic originated somewhere in or near the Balih and Habur river valleys in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>20</sup> Even if we leave aside somewhat problematic parallels such as the archaic inscription from Tell Fekherye<sup>21</sup>, his theory seems to be confirmed by the exploration of texts such as the clay-tablet published by P. Bordreuil.<sup>22</sup> We must be careful, however, not too draw our conclusions too quickly. A comparison with our only longer Aramaic document from Assyria in this period, the Assur letter referred to above (KAI 233) indeed shows great differences between the two categories, but we must realize that we can hardly exclude the possibility that the language of this letter, which had its origin in the higher circles of the Assyrian administration, may have been considered very formal and archaic in its own days already. Assyrian Aramaic as used in every-day legal and commercial documents may have been much more like Official Aramaic as we know it from the fifth-century documents from Egypt. A comparable case within the period of Official Aramaic may be constituted by the letters of the satrap Arsames, which J. D. Whitehead has shown to be far more archaic than any other Official Aramaic document from Egypt<sup>23</sup>, though the problem is complicated by their provenience from the eastern part of the Persian empire.

### The literary background

It is a fairly rare occurrence that the literary genre of a text which has been completely preserved is not clear, but this has evidently been the case for the text which we are considering here. Caquot already pointed out its epistolary character, and subsequent commentators followed suit, though without a clear statement on the practical use of the text. I would say that we must simply take the wording of the text seriously: as the only type of text which makes frequent use of the word *k't* or *uk't*, "(and) now", is a letter, we should start with assuming that the text at least originated as (part of a) letter. That it cannot be a letter or part of it as we now have it, is fairly obvious in view of the form and size of the tablet and of the neat beginning and end. In an ordinary letter we would expect the sender or addressee to be mentioned, and even if it would be divided

<sup>20</sup> S. A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, Chicago 1974, 160.

<sup>21</sup> See Kaufman's observations to this effect in *Maarav* 3 (1982), 152.

<sup>22</sup> P. Bordreuil, "Une tablette araméenne inédite de 635 av. J.-C.", *Semitica* 23 (1973), 95-102. See S. A. Kaufman, "An Assyro-Aramaic *qārta* ša šalmā", in: M. de Jong Ellis, ed., *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein*, Hamden, Conn. 1977, 119-127, J. W. Wesseliuss, "A Document Concerning the Sustainance of a Mother by her Sons", *AION* 45 (1985), 506-508.

<sup>23</sup> J. D. Whitehead, "Some Distinctive Features of the Language of the Aramaic Arsames Correspondence", *JNES* 37 (1978), 119-140.

over several tablets of such an unusual size we would expect its sections to run from one tablet onto another, rather than coincide exactly with the boundaries between them. We are apparently dealing with the secondary use of a letter.

We must assume that for some reason part of a letter, probably one written by a king or one of his officials, was copied onto a stone tablet, which must have been intended to be put up at some place where it would be visible for those people potentially affected by the decree. Perhaps the entrance of a town or city would be the most appropriate place for such an announcement. The very place would probably make a note on the author of the text unnecessary, though it may, of course, have been provided on the wall next to the tablet. Compare for the idea of a public announcement through a text on a wall from more or less the same time the Deir Alla inscription about Balaam, or the assignment to the prophet Habakkuk in Habakkuk 2:2, where he is ordered to write the divine utterance, possibly on planks of wood, "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it". In later times the phenomenon is very common, famous examples being the legal texts from Hatra, which were put up at the entrances to the city and its temple-area, and in the non-legal area the supposed promise which Jesus gave to the city of Edessa, that it would never be taken by the enemy, which was put up at its gates. It seems very likely that our text was also affixed to the wall at the entrance of a town or city.

### The historical background

The edict which underlies our text imposes the extreme penalty on those who do not deliver persons who came to Assyria or some other region in northern Mesopotamia from Babylonia to the authorities in charge. We can hardly expect this radical sanction in a situation in which emigration to the North of Mesopotamia would be forbidden for, for example, purely economic reasons. It is clear that there must be a compelling reason for forbidding such immigration, most probably of a political nature. It is not very likely that such a reason can be found for the time after the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which is marked by the fall of Niniveh in 612 BC and by the disappearance of the last vestiges of Assyrian power in 605, as there is no prolonged period of political antagonism between North and South of Mesopotamia known from the subsequent period. Within the period of the late Neo-Assyrian empire there is, for example, the well-known revolt of Shamash-shum-ukin against his brother Ashurbanipal (652-648), which put Babylonia in a state of unrest for some time. It seems, however, that the actual area in revolt was rather small, after 650 comprising little more than the city of Babylon. A date in this period is therefore not very probable. The only other likely candidate as a date for this document is the period after Nabopolassar threw off the Assyrian yoke in 626. Though it must be said that documentation for this period is extremely scarce, it would seem that the Neo-

Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires existed side by side until the fall of Niniveh in 612. After that ominous event Assyrian power, now limited to the region around Haran in northern Mesopotamia, further dwindled, finally coming to an end before or a short time after the battle of Carchemish in 605.<sup>24</sup> Though it is not possible to establish complete certainty about it and we must reckon with the possibility of short-lived circumstances which this text may reflect, it seems quite acceptable to suppose that this document was written in northern Mesopotamia and dates from the relatively obscure final period of the Neo-Assyrian empire from 626 to 605 BC, probably from before the fall of Niniveh in 612, but possibly between 612 and 605, if its provenance would be the Haran region. The text may then reflect the urgent need to put a check on the influx of people from Babylonia, who might have political loyalties which were considered highly undesirable by the government of the doomed Assyrian empire.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the short summary of the history of this period by R. Labat in the *Fischer Weltgeschichte*, 4, Frankfurt 1967, 84-99.

**NARRATIVE AND COMMENT**

Contributions to Discourse Grammar  
and  
Biblical Hebrew

presented to

**WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER**

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edited by

**Eep Talstra**

in cooperation with

**Hanna Blok, Karel Deurloo, Piet van Midden**