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.\(^1\) 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.\(^2\) 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.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\)

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)\(^5\), 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

---

\(^1\) 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:


\(^3\) "Une inscription araméenne en style avulsum et quelques textes bibliques datant de l'exil", 


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 unyln unh 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. wkt z' yz slq 2. ntn ytnsg bb 3. th wbr y'h 4. d wyltnb lb 1. pqt ml 5. [kl] mr byt' zy 'l bb 6. yth wzn qryt' 'hr 7. pqt' zy hwhwl 8. 'hwhwl 'l 'lynm

"And now this: A man, in whose house or house 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

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

yz slq — Though it is certainly not impossible to assume that this "the man who" is resumed by a p'al perfect slq, "came up", it seems probable, once we have realized with Fales, a.c., 280-281 that a person designated by means of this word slq (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 ytnsg aod sensam as "he meets" and to assume that slq is the object of this verb meets with the problem that the verb ytnsg is well known in Hebrew (in the hifil, "to overcome") 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 yz slq is only referred to by the suffixes in bhy' th hbr, "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 anlhu(l) n b, "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. 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.

slq — As noted by Fales (a.e., 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 slq 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 slq could then be explained as the ordinary way to express movement upstream (as usual for the Akkadian verb dtt, "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.

7 The latest translations, accompanied by a bibliography, can be found in R. Haase, Die Keilschriftlichen Rechtsursammlungen in derischen Fassung, Wiesbaden 1979, 111-112, and in R. Borger, "Akkadische Rechtshücher", in: Texte aus der Umlauf des Allerheiligten Universitates 1, 1, Göttingen 1962, 32-97/97-98 (based on a newly constituted text, with many improvements).
Additional advantage for our interpretation of the entire text, that we need not assume that each and every one-time immigrant from Babylonia would have to be delivered to the government, which would be close to impossible indeed, but that our text only deals with people newly arrived in the north.

nt 'khi — A designation for northern Babylonia which is common in Neo-Assyrian documents and which is found once in a fragmentary context in an Aramaic letter found in Assur, KAI 233, 211 my't bmtd, "I [y, you with me in the land of Akkad... The difference in the final sign between the two attestations of this name may represent the variation between final -i and -e which is also found in the Akkadian spellings of this name, rather than a variation in the use of Aramaic vowel-letters to indicate a given vowel (against Caquot, a.c., 12).

ynsg — Probably an ittau/el (or itp/el?) of the verb nsg, which appears in Hebrew in the hifil 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 yngwyn kdbth wywyyn b'ntlyh is translated by J. M. Lindenberger as "his lies will overtake (him) and they will spit in his face".10

The sequence of events as described here, "nsg - 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 wyrdw byl kdbyn htr hmlk usysw iwysw' t sydy b bbl ylyo wkl hlyw ussh wslyw (9) wytdw' t shly b bbl t'w lsh bbl rbth b'r lsh, "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 nsg instead of, for example, the common Aramaic verb škh, "to find" (ha'tel= 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.

Nby't wgbryth — 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 qfy's damaged (Caquot read an ayin instead), and instead

1 S. Farpola, Neo-Assyrian Toponyms, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970, 7-11.
2 S. Farpola, ibid.

[Figure]

Visible on the photograph

Restoration by Fales

Proposed restoration

The two verbs 'ld, "to arrest", and nth, "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 'ld and nth are used here to express a single obligation. Finally, we would indeed find the expected nth before the suffix.
The Aramaic Decree about Fugitives

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 (Sinna) shall be put to death (mot yamot); "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, "[ Jehovah 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...[tends at interest, and takes increase; shall he then live? He shall not live (lo yihye). He does](mot yamot); 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 sorcerer to live (ve'ne'ase ya lo tshabbay), 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 l'hayyge kol n'shimah). In Biblical Hebrew, lo is always used as a negation in this expression for both cal and hitil to the exclusion of a/. 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 yamot, “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 sanctity 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 the way we know of the Old Aramaic and Official Aramaic texts.
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. Even if we leave aside somewhat problematic parallels such as the archaic inscription from Tell Fukkheriyeh, his theory seems to be confirmed by the exploration of texts such as the clay-tablet published by P. Bordreuil. 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 everyday 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 srap Arameses, which J. D. Whitehead has shown to be far more archaic than any other Official Aramaic document from Egypt, though the problem is complicated by their provenance 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'ti or i'det, "(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

---

14 R. Degen, op. cit., § 11 and § 12. The only attestation for this verb in Old Aramaic in the strict sense is wš disposition, and I took hold of it, in KAI 216, 11 (= Gibson, 15, 11), but other instances can be found in the Samaritan inscriptions and in the statue of Hulda yiti 15.
15 See, for example, ḫa, "we caught", in KAI 233, 5 and 6 (= Gibson, 20, 5 and 6).
16 There is no good list available of these forms. They are scattered throughout the paragraphs about the verb in P. Leonard, Grammatik des Ägyptisch-Aramaischen, Göttingen 1928.
17 See, for example, M. Sokoloff, The Targum to Job from Quimari Cave XI, Ramat-Gan 1974, 187.
19 E. Lipinski has published a number of preliminary observations about these texts, for example in his "Les temples énéo-assyriens et les origines du monnayage", in: State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East II, Leuven 1979, 565-588.

21 See Kaufman's observations to this effect in MAAN 3 (1982), 152.
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 Nineveh 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-

24 See, for example, the short summary of the history of this period by R. Labat in the *Fischer Weltgeschichte*, 1, Frankfurt 1967, 84-99.
NARRATIVE AND COMMENT

Contributions to Discourse Grammar
and
Biblical Hebrew

presented to
WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER

on the occasion of his retirement as a lecturer of Biblical Hebrew
at the Theologische Hochschule in Wuppertal

edited by

Eep Talstra

in cooperation with

Hanna Blok, Karel Deurloo, Piet van Midden

SOCIETAS HEBRAICA AMSTELODAMENSIS