



The structure of the Aramaic treaties of Sefire

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Abstract

The problem of the structure of the Aramaic treaties of Sefire remains unanswered in existing studies dealing with these treaties. This paper submits a hypothesis constructed on especially the content and placement of I Sefire C and II Sefire C and the design of III Sefire. The probable structure of these treaties is: introduction, list of gods, curses, document clause and stipulations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Aramaic treaties of Sefire form part of the rather extensive corpus of treaties between different states in the Ancient Near East. As regards the structure of these treaties, the books of Korošec (1931) and McCarthy (1978) remain the standard treatments of the subject. McCarthy dealt with the whole corpus and Korošec treated the Hittite treaties. Thus the subject of the structure of the ancient treaties was dealt with fairly exhaustively, but a generally accepted solution to the problem of the structure of the Sefire-treaties was not offered. There are differences of opinion regarding the question whether I Sefire A or B must be regarded as the beginning of the text, regarding the same question about II Sefire and regarding the relationship of IC and IIC to the rest of the respective steles. Different solutions have been advanced, but McCarthy (1978:100) still states in the second edition of his book on the treaties of the Ancient Near East that the question regarding the structure of these texts can not be satisfactorily answered. The aim of this paper is to put forward a possible solution that takes all the relevant information into consideration.

To formulate a hypothesis in this regard, the sequence of the different elements in the three texts must be established. It is clear from the contents of I and II Sefire that there is a close relation between these two texts. Fitzmyer (1967:79) states that II Sefire can not be regarded as a copy of I Sefire, or vice versa. The one could, however, be a re-edition of the other. There is in any case a close relation between the two. McCarthy (1978:99-100) is of the opinion that the two texts agree to such an extent with regard to the broad outline of the texts that the one can be read in

the light of the other. Dupont-Sommer (1960:39-40) regards the three texts as three recensions of the same treaty. The contents of IA and IIA and IB and IIB correspond to such an extent that it is evident that the two sets contained similar parts of the treaty structure.

2. A SURVEY OF THE CONTENTS OF THE TEXTS

One of the most important questions for determining the sequence of the elements is the question whether sides A or B must be regarded as the obverse of the first two steles. The matter is complicated by the fact that both IA and IB have an introduction at the beginning that contains the names of the parties involved in the treaty. For the sake of the discussion a brief survey is given of the contents of the three texts.

2.1 I Sefire

- A 1-7 Introduction
- A 4-14 List of gods
- A 14-42 Treaty curses
- B 1-6 Introduction
- B 7-45 Although this section is partly damaged, it is evident that it contained the stipulations of the treaty.
- C Stipulations regarding the protection of the treaty text (with Mati^{el} as author and not Birga'yah as in the remainder of the text).

2.2 II Sefire

The text is damaged in many parts, with the result that the interpretation is often difficult and uncertain. What remained of IIA is part of the treaty curses. The part whose interpretation is fairly certain, corresponds to IA 21-31. The part of IIB that can be deciphered, forms part of the stipulations and corresponds to IB 21-28. IIC is in a good condition and demonstrates similarities to IC although there are a number of important differences. Both these sections are related to the protection of the treaty text. IC was, however, an addendum to the treaty text and had Mati^{el} as author, while IIC was an integral part of the treaty text with Birga'yah as author. This is important for deciding the treaty structure, because it means that a document clause was part of the treaty proper.

2.3 III Sefire

III Sefire consists of nine fragments of the reverse of a broad slab. The fragments that survived are all part of the stipulations of the treaty.

3. THE OBVERSE OF I AND II SEFIRE

The first important question that must be answered is the question whether IA or IB (and also IIA or IIB) must be regarded as the obverse of the stele. There are two aspects of the texts that can help to solve the problem, namely the contents and relative position of IC and IIC and the design of II Sefire.

IC must be regarded as the final side of I Sefire, as it contains an addendum, composed by Mati^oel, to the treaty. If the side that was damaged beyond repair is called ID, the possible sequences of the sides of I Sefire are ADBC or BDAC, if one accepts that the sides followed on one another clockwise or anti-clockwise. While this is a hypothesis (cf. McCarthy 1978:100), it is very probable given the dimensions of the steles. As far as the steles can be reconstructed, the obverse and reverse of I and II Sefire were almost twice the size of the two smaller sides (C and D). The smaller sides are respectively 0,34 and 0,37 meter wide. The height of I Sefire was 1,31 meter (cf. Donner & Röllig 1962-4.2:238). This meant that the steles were very heavy, with the implication that it was much easier to inscribe the different sides clockwise or anti-clockwise, rather than writing first on the front and then on the back before utilising the sides.

As regards II Sefire, it is important to note that IIC was part of the treaty text proper, contra IC. IC was also the right hand side of I Sefire when viewed from IA, while IIC was the left hand side. Therefore the relative position of IIC agrees with ID and IC with IID. The possible sequences of II Sefire are ACBD and BCAD. If the sequence of the sides followed the more natural clockwise sequence, the most probable sequences are IADBC and IIACBD.

If this is the case, I Sefire commences with an introduction to the treaty, followed by a list of the gods that were witnesses to the treaty, and a list of curses. According to the appearance of I Sefire (cf. e.g. the photograph in Fitzmyer 1967: plate XIV) there is insufficient space for another line at the end of I Sefire. According to the hypothesis submitted here the curses could have continued on ID. If ID corresponded to IIC, as is quite probable, it could also have contained a document clause. IB contains the stipulations of the treaty. As stated earlier, IB commences with another introduction, but this introduction starts in the middle of a sentence, and indeed in the middle of a personal name (cf. Fitzmyer 1967:58-59 and Dupont-Sommer 1960:28). According to the proposal submitted here the beginning of that

introduction could also have been on ID. The generally accepted proposal for the restoration of the introduction consists of 26 consonants. That would have taken about two lines on ID. The average number of consonants on IC is about 14 per line. The fact that one treaty element runs over from one face to the following is not strange at all. On IA it happens twice that a new element starts in the middle of a line (IA 6 and 14), while at the end of IA a curse runs over on to the next side. No distinction was made in the text between different treaty elements, nor between sentences or words. There was therefore no reason for the scribe to omit two lines at the bottom of a face to start a new element on a new face of the stele.

II Sefire offers no evidence to contradict this sequence, while the position and contents of IIC support this hypothesis, as indicated above.

This discussion demonstrates that the stipulations constituted the last element of the treaty structure of these texts. The design of III Sefire supports this. This is the case even though a number of stipulations are all that remain of this text. As can be clearly seen from a photograph of this text (cf. e.g. Fitzmyer 1967: plate XVII), this text was inscribed on the reverse of a slab, and not on one of the sides of a rectangular monument, as was the case with I and II Sefire. It is also clear from the photograph that the top of the monument was not damaged and that the first line starts in the middle of a sentence. The other elements of the treaty structure must therefore have been on the other side of the slab, which must have been the obverse. This monument is also broader than I and II Sefire. Their width was between 60 and 70 centimetres, while III Sefire is 1,25 metres wide (cf. Donner & Röllig 1962: 4.2:238). The obverse side of III Sefire was therefore large enough for the other elements of the treaty structure, for example all the elements appearing on IA and ID.

4. THE VIEWS OF McCARTHY AND NOTH

McCarthy (1978:100) and Noth (1961:123-124) both argue in favour of the possibility that face B was the obverse of I Sefire. McCarthy does not state this categorically, but regards it as quite probable. He states that there is an important formal consideration that makes this probable, namely that if IA were the obverse, one would obtain a more satisfactory treaty structure. This would have the result that the introduction would be followed by the stipulations, followed by the list of gods and the curses. It must, however, be taken into account that the treaty structure on which this formal consideration depends is not the (or a) structure of the Assyrian treaties from the first millennium B.C., but of the Hittite treaties from the second millennium. If face B is regarded as the obverse, the structure of I and II Sefire would be as follows:

Introduction
 Stipulations
 List of gods
 Curses

The document clause would then be either at the end of the document or between the stipulations and the list of gods, depending on the placement of ID in the sequence of the sides.

The classical analysis of the structure of the Hittite treaties is that of Korošec (1931:12-14) and is as follows:

Introduction
 Historical prologue
 Stipulations
 Document clause
 List of gods
 Curses and blessings

It is clear that this pattern forms the basis of McCarthy's formal consideration, although he does not regard the document clause as part of the basic pattern (McCarthy 1978:63). When one looks, however, at the structure of these Assyrian treaties from the first millennium whose structure can be determined with a fair degree of certainty, it becomes clear that not one of these treaties demonstrates a structure corresponding to this basic pattern, even if one discounts the fact that a historical prologue is lacking in these Assyrian treaties. The treaties that are relevant for this discussion are the treaty of Ashurnirari V with Mati'ilu of bit-Agusi (Weidner 1932/3:17-27), the treaty of Esarhadon with Baal of Tyre (Weidner 1932/3:29-34) and the vassal-treaties of Esarhadon (Wiseman 1958). In these treaties the following structures occur:

Esarhadon	Ashurnirari	Baal
Introduction	(Introduction)	Introduction
God list	Curses	Stipulations
Stipulations	Stipulations	Curses
Document clause	God list	God list
Curses		

It is quite clear from this summary that these treaties correspond to a very large extent with regard to the elements of the structure, the only exception being the document clause in the vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon. The most important differences with the Hittite treaties are that these treaties do not have a historical prologue or blessings in addition to the curses. While they share a set of common

elements, there is no common structure according to which the elements are structured. Taking this divergence into consideration, it can not be sound practice to take the structure of the Hittite treaties from the previous millennium as a formal consideration for the structure of the treaties of Sefire of more than 500 years later. This is even more the case when it is taken into consideration that not one of the Assyrian treaties from the first millennium has the same sequence of the corresponding elements as the basic pattern of the Hittite treaties. McCarthy therefore offers no convincing arguments for his view that IB could have been the obverse of I Sefire.

Noth also regards IB as the obverse. He does not want to accept the possibility that the first words of the introduction to IB could have been written on ID (Noth 1961:123). He states that it could only have been a few words. It has already been demonstrated that these words would have extended over two lines on ID. To call it just a few words is therefore not correct. Noth is of the opinion that the monument was the pedestal for a relief or the like and that the beginning of the introduction was engraved on that relief. The same objection can be raised against this possibility as the objection raised by Noth against the possibility that these words were written on ID. Noth did not pay enough attention to the two matters that throw light on the structure of these treaties, as demonstrated above. He did not realise that IC was an addendum to the treaty text, composed by Mati^{el} and added to the text composed by Birga'yah. He states that it contained blessings and curses for the descendants of the author of the text (Noth 1961:124). He did not ascertain, by a comparison with IIC, what the contents of ID could have been. He states - correctly - that III Sefire is the reverse of that monument (Noth 1961:125), but did not realise the implications of that statement for the structure of I and II Sefire.

5. CONCLUSION

It is therefore quite probable that the sequence of the sides of I Sefire was ADBC and that of II Sefire ACBD. The structure of the treaties was:

- Introduction
- List of gods
- Curses
- Document clause
- Stipulations

I Sefire, at least, contained in addition to this an addendum, composed by Mati^{el}, and dealing with the preservation of the monument and the keeping of the treaty. With this set of elements these treaties fit in with the Assyrian treaties of the first

millennium B.C.. The sequence of these elements, however, exhibits a fourth pattern in addition to the three discerned in the Assyrian treaties.

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