The Letters to Bagavahya:
An Analysis of TAD A4.7 (=C 30) and TAD A4.8 (=C 31)

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Aramaic epistolography has received considerable attention in articles and also monographs, especially in light of the Aramaic letters found in Egypt at Elephantine, Hermopolis, and other locales.[1] Still, only some letters in the corpus, such as the Aršam correspondence and the so-called Passover letter, have received particular attention. Strangely, the letters by Elephantine Jews to Bagavahya, the governor of Yehud, requesting permission and assistance to rebuild their local temple (TAD A4.7; A4.8) have not received comparable attention, though they are perhaps the most significant of the Elephantine letters for biblical studies. This essay will address this oversight with a comparative analysis of the grammatical constitution and structure of these two letters.

2. Foundational Matters

These letters belong to the Yedaniah archive, which is a corpus of letters commissioned by or addressed to Yedaniah (ben Gemariah) in Elephantine. The archive contains nine letters and one memorandum covering matters concerning the Elephantine cult. Eight of the documents, including the memorandum, relate or allude to a conflict or conflicts between the Elephantine Jews and Egyptian authorities. There are three letters addressed to Yedaniah: the so-called Passover letter that provides instructions for the observance of the Passover (TAD A4.1 =C 21), a letter reporting on an investigation of some sort (TAD A4.2 =C 37), and a recommendation letter

[1] See esp. Alexander 1978; Fitzmyer 1974; Schwiderski 2000; Whitehead 1974, 1978 and the works cited therein.

to aid two benefactors that are coming to Elephantine (TAD A4.3 =C 38). There are three letters in which the name of the addressee is lost: a letter to an unknown "son of Gaddul" reporting on the imprisonment of Jewish leaders in Elephantine as well as five Jewish leaders and six Jewish women in Thebes (TAD A4.4 =C 56 + C 34), a letter that protests the collusion of Vidranga and the priests of Khnub against the Elephantine Jews (TAD A4.5 =C 27), and a very fragmentary letter that mentions the imprisonment of some Egyptian men (TAD A4.6). The last four documents of the archive are the two draft letters concerning the temple, which are addressed to Bagavahya from Yedaniah and the priests (TAD A4.7; TAD A4.8), a memorandum preserving a reply from Bagavahya and also Delaiah, who express their support for the rebuilding of the temple of Yahu in Elephantine (TAD A4.9 =C 32), and a letter from five Elephantine community leaders, including Yedaniah, offering compensation (a bribe?) and expressing a commitment not to offer animal sacrifices if they are able to reconstruct their temple (TAD A4.10 =C 33).

These documents all securely date to the late fifth century BCE (ca. 420 – 405) as indicated by internal evidence, such as references to the regnal years of Darius II (ca. 424 – 404), and corroborated by external evidence from other Elephantine letters. Conveniently, the two draft letters are dated to the month and day, ב20 למרחשון (TAD A4.7:30; A4.8:29), and the first contains a complete year formula of שנה 17 דריהוש מלכא (TAD A4.7:30). While outside Elephantine in wider Egyptian affairs there are no substantial indications of unrest in this period,[2] the Egyptians did revolt at the end of the reign of Darius II and established a native administration under a ruler named Amyrtaeus. The change in administration is evident in a legal contract from Elephantine that dates to 400 BCE and refers to Amyrtaeus's fifth year (TAD B4.6 =C 35). Insofar as it appears the Egyptians who destroyed the Jewish temple at Elephantine circa 410 BCE acted in contravention of protections granted to the Jews there by the Persian administration, the letters may reflect tensions and instability in the Egyptian satrapy akin to that which sparked the

[2] See Briant 2002: 602-603; cf. Porten 1968: 287.

revolt and also may portend the type of controversy that resulted in the ultimate demise of the Elephantine Jewish community.[3]

Differences in the Texts

The first draft letter (TAD A4.7) is written on a papyrus sheet thirty-two centimeters wide by twenty-four point five centimeters long, which was "folded from bottom to top."[4] It is composed in thirty lines: seventeen "perpendicular to the fibers on the recto [and] parallel to the joins" and thirteen "on [the] verso parallel to the fibers."[5] The second draft letter (TAD A4.8) is written on a papyrus sheet likely of the same width and "folded from bottom to top" but almost twice as long at forty-eight point five centimeters.[6] Unfortunately, the left third of the papyrus is missing. The width of the extant fragments is twenty centimeters and so the missing left side, based on the extant portions and a comparison with the first draft letter, must have measured twelve centimeters.[7] It is composed in twenty-nine lines: twenty-six are "perpendicular to the fibers on the recto [and] parallel to the joins" and three "on [the] verso parallel to the fibers."[8]

Porten exhaustively catalogues forty-eight differences between the first and second letters in the extant text.[9] Porten observes that the second letter makes eight orthographic improvements, eight corrections to the state of a noun, nine changes to improve the precision of an expression, thirteen stylistic enhancements, and one change to replace a Persian expression with an Aramean one.[10] He also notes, however, that there are three changes without a straightforward rationale,

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[3] See Kraeling 1952: 62-64, 66-67; cf. Porten 1968: 296-298.
[4] Porten 1996: 139.
[5] Porten 1996: 139.
[6] Porten 1996: 145.
[7] Porten 1996: 145.
[8] Porten 1996: 145.
[9] Porten 1998: 232. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze each of these forty-eight differences (or the additional twenty-one changes he hypothesizes in the non-extant portions of the text) and, in any case, the matter is addressed expertly and exhaustively in Porten's article. My goal is simply to summarize Porten's analysis and consider the general nature of the differences. Obviously, some of the differences are still addressed in the course of this paper as they relate to the issues discussed.
[10] Porten 1998: 232-237.

two potential changes that are uncertain due to corruption in the text, and most significantly, four new mistakes introduced into the second draft.[11]

In addition to the changes in the extant text, Porten also identifies another twenty-one potential differences based on his reconstruction of the letters's lacunae. Assuming consistency in the second scribe's plene and defective spellings, Porten surmises three changes towards plene spelling of the third masculine plural suffix and four changes towards defective spelling of the third plural absolute in the second draft.[12] He also posits two corrections towards asyndetic rather than conjunctive constructions in keeping with the tendencies of the second scribe.[13] More tentatively, Porten hypothesizes three improvements in gender agreement, an improvement in grammatical precision, a correction based on a parallel formulation in the memorandum of reply to the petition of these letters, and three omissions and four additions primarily owing to space considerations.[14]

On the whole, the changes from the first to the second letters are improvements and, taken together with the orthographic evidence to be discussed shortly, these changes substantiate the traditional order of the letters as chronologically accurate. The first is clearly a draft to the second. Still, while the changes are significant and important for study, they are not very significant in terms of the content of the letter. There are no substantial changes in the document that effect the nature or course of the events or persons described in the letters or even shed additional light on them. The changes are almost exclusively typographical.

Orthography

Interestingly, the draft letters were composed by two scribes.[15] The first scribe wrote the opening eleven lines of the first letter while a second scribe started writing in the middle of a sentence in

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[11] Porten 1998: 232, 237-238.
[12] Porten 1998: 238-239, cf. 233-234. Note that Porten's list of defective spellings includes two that are already defective in the first draft and so he only actually posits four changes (not six).
[13] Porten 1998: 239, cf. 235-236.
[14] Porten 1998: 239-240.
[15] Folmer 1995: 22, 34; Porten 1996: 139; 1998: 231. It seems this was first noticed by Naveh 1970 on the basis of the handwriting (cited in Folmer 1995: 34, 139n685).

the twelfth line of the first letter and also wrote the second letter.[16] The most noticeable orthographic incongruity between the two scribes is the first scribe's consistent preference for the defective spelling of the third masculine plural suffix (-הם) while the second scribe consistently preferred a plene spelling (-הום) and indeed revised the defective spelling of the first scribe in the second draft letter.[17] Notably, the plene spelling of the third masculine plural suffix is quite idiosyncratic in extant Achaemenid Aramaic literature. It is only elsewhere attested in the Behistun inscription papyrus (TAD C2.1).[18]

In a similar though not as marked way, in the first draft letter, the second scribe alternates between the plene spelling of the masculine plural absolute morpheme (-ין) and the defective spelling (-ן) uniformly employed by the first scribe.[19] In the second draft letter, so far as the text is extant, the second scribe abandoned this inconsistency for consistent defective spelling with one exception.[20] As the exception, נכסין in TAD A4.8:5, is attested in an original plus, it essentially confirms a natural proclivity of the second scribe for the plene spelling.

Clearly, the second scribe attempted a more uniform and so professional orthography in the revised draft and not only with respect to plene and defective spelling. Indeed, in the first draft letter, the scribes differed in their spelling of the name of the Persian king—the first scribe wrote דריוהוש (TAD A4.7:2) while the second wrote דריהוש (TAD A4.7:19, 21, 30)—but in the second draft, the second scribe adopted the former spelling (TAD A4.8:2, 19; ll. 20, 29 are not extant).[21] The second scribe also corrected לף| (TAD A4.7:28) to אלף (TAD A4.8:27) in the second draft,

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[16] Folmer 1995: 34; Porten 1996: 139; 1998: 231. I could not detect the exact point of the switch by Yardeni's tracings, though Yardeni's tracing technique may have neutralized the differences in the handwriting or, more likely, my untrained eye is incapable of spotting the differences. In any case, as I will shortly note, Porten defends the claim on orthographic grounds, which seem to me significant enough in their own right to posit the change in scribes.

[17] Folmer 1995: 139; Porten 1998: 233. For a list of the second scribe's revisions to the defective spelling of the first scribe, see Porten 1998: 234.

[18] Folmer 1995: 139, 142n711, 145; Porten 1998: 233.

[19] Folmer 1995: 139n685; Porten 1998: 233. Interestingly, as Folmer 1995: 139n685 observes, there is only one other letter in the Yedaniah archive that features the plene spelling of the plural marker: the memorandum of reply (TAD A4.9). In observing this, Folmer 1995: 139n685 also refers to Naveh 1970, who apparently noticed strong similarities between the "extreme" cursive script of TAD A4.9 and the script of the scribe who wrote TAD A4.7:12b–A4.8:29.

[20] Noted also by Porten 1998: 233 and apparent in the list of this scribe's plene spellings in Folmer 1995: 139n685.

[21] Noted also by Porten 1998: 233.

which would seem to reflect a more professional orthography.[22] Still, contra Porten, the orthography is not necessarily or especially "conservative" and actually, as already noted, the preference for the defective spelling of the third masculine plural suffix is idiosyncratic.

Certainly, there are features of the orthography that are "conservative" and in keeping with the official style exemplified in the Aršam correspondence or other documents that are assigned to the eastern Imperial Aramaic tradition, such as the Aḥiqar framework story or the Behistun inscription papyri. For instance, like the Aršam correspondence, /ð/ is always represented by ז in pronouns;[23] the draft letters exhibit regular spellings with the etymological and non-etymological nun;[24] and, the third and second masculine plural suffixes are always spelt with a final mem and not a nun.[25] Moreover, like the Aḥiqar framework story and the Behistun inscription papyrus, the letters only attest forms without the dissimilation of emphatic consonants.[26]

Yet, on the other hand, the letters also exhibit some signs of advanced orthography, unlike the Aršam correspondence. For example, /ð/ is represented by both ז and ד in nouns as evident in זהב in TAD A4.7:12 // A4.8:11, A4.7:28, מדבחא in TAD A4.7:26 // A4.8:25, and דבחן in TAD A4.7:28 // A4.8:27;[27] /ḳ/ is represented by both ק and ע as attested by עק in TAD A4.7:11 and ארעא in TAD A4.7:9 // TAD A4.8:8;[28] and, there is evidence in TAD A4.7:11 for the disappearance of the etymological א in the word שירית.[29]

Perhaps the most striking and indicative typological feature of the letters, therefore, is the syntax. In stark contrast to other letters from Elephantine and even other letters in the Yedaniah archive, the letters to Bagavahya are marked by an overwhelming preference for the word order patterns of eastern Imperial Aramaic. According to Kutscher and more exhaustively Folmer, eastern Imperial Aramaic is characterized by a preference for verb final constructions in which

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[22] Noted also by Porten 1998: 233.
[23] Folmer 1995: 49.
[24] Folmer 1995: 89.
[25] Folmer 1995: 139.
[26] Folmer 1995: 95-97. This feature is simply unattested either way in the Aršam correspondence (Folmer 1995: 98).
[27] Folmer 1995: 56-57.
[28] Folmer 1995: 64.
[29] Folmer 1995: 111.

the object and/or the subject frequently precede the verb.[30] When the subject is explicit, the preference is not quite as marked: the S-O-V pattern, common to Akkaddian, occurs five distinct times in the letters (TAD A4.7:1-2 // A4.8:1-2; A4.7:6-7 // A4.8:6; A4.7:14; A4.7:15-16 // A4.8:13-14; A4.8:3-5) while the S-V-O pattern, standard in most Aramaic, only occurs two distinct times (TAD A4.7:13 // A4.8:12; A4.7:16 // A4.8:15).[31] But, in another tweny-four clauses without an explicit subject, twenty are O-V and only four, all in dependent clauses, are V-O.[32]

3. Structure

Recent studies in Aramaic epistolography have highlighted some of the conventions of the genre.[33] Aramaic letters typically include an address, greetings, a body with conventional transition markers, a closing, and an inscription. The draft letters to Bagavahya from Yedaniah and his colleagues at Elephantine exemplify these typical conventions with the exception of the inscription. It is the close adherence to these conventions, taken together with the syntax, that especially reflect the official character of the petitions.

Address (TAD A4.7:1 // A4.8:1)

The address is a highly conventional segment of Aramaic letters. In its most basic form, the address identifies the addressee(s); expanded forms will add the names of the sender(s) as well as terms of respect, rank or title, kinship or affection, ethnicity markers, geographical markers, and so on to further circumscribe the addressee(s) or sender(s). There are five syntactical constructions through which this information is expressed, where X is the addressee(s) and Y is

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[30] Kutscher 1970; Folmer 1995: 521-587.

[31] Folmer 1995: 524-525, esp. n964 and n964; see also Table 4.28 in Folmer 1995: 535. Folmer notes that the O-V-S pattern occurs once and the O-S-V pattern occurs twice in the parallel "well-wishing" formulas. On the latter, however, I interpret the syntax as an interjection plus an S-O-V pattern not O-S-V (see my analysis of the greeting below).

[32] Folmer 1995: 576-578, 582 (esp. 577n1149 and 582, Table 4.31). As Folmer observes on p. 577, all the cases of V-O in the main clauses listed in table 4.31 are S-V-O; four of the O-V are S-O-V. Also, note, these figures are not distinct occurrences but include parallel occurrences.

[33] Alexander 1978; Fitzmyer 1974; Schwiderski 2000; Whitehead 1974, 1978. For a comparison of Aramaic letters and Neo-Assyrian letters, see Fales 1987.

the sender(s): (1) To X, (2) To X, Y, (3) To X, from Y, (4) From Y, to X, (5) Y to X.[34] When a preposition marks the addressee(s), it is usually אל, though occasionally על and ל are attested. When a preposition marks the sender(s), it is always מן.

In keeping with these conventions, these letters follow a standard "To X, Y" form of address with the preposition אל marking the addressee, Bagavahya. Although partially corrupt in the second draft letter, it is evident that both letters apply the honorific מראן to Bagavahya, indicating his higher social rank. The first draft letter also further defines Bagavahya by his title פחת יהוד, though the second draft letter probably did not do so. This portion of the text is not extant in the second draft letter and more significantly Porten holds that there is insufficient room for the title given the spacing of the fragments and the extant letters.[35]

The sender(s) are identified in the first draft letter as עבדיך ידניה וכנותה כהניא זי ביב בירתא, that is "your servants Yedaniah and his colleagues the priests who are in Yeb Birtha□." The designation עבדיך is a customary deferential counterpoint to the honorific מראן and reinforces the superior social rank of Bagavahya vis-à-vis those עבדיך circumscribes, namely Yedaniah and his colleagues (the priests). The identification of the senders, ידניה וכנותה כהניא זי ביב בירתא, however, is more problematic than it may seem at first glance. The syntax is ambiguous and it is not clear whether כהניא stands in apposition to ידניה וכנותה or just כנותה and whether זי ביב בירתא modifies ידניה וכנותה כהניא, כנותה כהניא, or כהניא.[36] While the syntax is inconclusive, it seems preferable to read ידניה וכנותה as one segment and כהניא זי ביב בירתא as another segment in apposition to the first. In such a reading, כהניא זי ביב בירתא serves as a parallel grammatical counterpoint to פחת יהוד in the same way that עבדיך is a counterpoint to מראן. Also, Yedaniah's title is not then conspicuously absent.

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[34] This information is adapted and corrected from Fitzmyer 1974: 211; see and cf. Alexander 1978: 161-163 and the more comprehensive analysis in Schwiderski 2000: *passim*.

[35] Porten 1998: 240.

[36] Obviously, if זי ביב בירתא does not modify ידניה, it would not mean that Yedaniah is not from Elephantine as it still would be implied by the fact "his colleagues" are in Elephantine and, more to the point, the context and other letters from Elephantine make it self-evident. On this syntactical construction, see esp. Muraoka and Porten 2003: 244-246 (§68c-e).

This grammatical problem might be trivial if Yedaniah's occupation at Elephantine were otherwise known. If he were a priest, this would diminish the need to press this question. Alternatively, if he were not a priest, it would establish that כהניא can only refer to כנותה. Unfortunately, other letters at Elephantine provide no explicit evidence and any clues are inconclusive. In one letter, there is an account that Yedaniah received donations for the temple, perhaps indicative of a priestly office (TAD C3.15VII:123-124 =C 22), but in another letter his name appears to be deliberately set apart from the priests of Yahu in the address (TAD A4.3). In the present letters (TAD A4.7; A4.8), the meaning of כנותה does not resolve the question concerning Yedaniah's occupation as the term can apply to persons in the same office, subordinates, or simply persons of roughly equivalent social rank.[37] Indeed, in TAD A4.1, the letter is similarly addressed to Yedaniah and "his colleagues" (כנותה) but in this case the phrase "the Jewish garrison" (יהודיא[ילא]ח), which obviously would include persons of different offices and ranks, stands in apposition. The only unequivocal information from the Elephantine letters concerning Yedaniah's occupation is that he, as first mentioned in the letters addressed to him or coming from him (TAD A4.1, A4.2, A4.3, A4.7, A4.8, A4.10), was a prominent community leader, and according to TAD A4.10, a hereditary property owner (מהחסן).[38]

Interestingly, there is some tantalizing, but hypothetical, evidence from the corrupt second draft of the letter. The address of the second draft letter reads: אל מ[... ... ...]ה כה[. Porten observes, contra Cowley, Sachau, and Ungnad, that the lacuna between the mem and the he is insufficient to reconstruct מ[ראן בגוהי פחת יהוד עבדיך ידניה וכנות]ה כה[ניא.[39] He claims, and Yardeni's tracings seem to reflect, that there is only space for four words and so, as already mentioned, he argues that Bagavahya's title,פחת יהוד, dropped out and the visible he is the final letter of ידניה (not כנותה).[40] He also hypothesizes that the kaph-he are the formative letters of a plus, כהנא, and

[37] Porten 1968: 48n77.
[38] On מהחסן, see Porten 1996:164n5 and the works cited there.
[39] Porten 1998: 240; cf. Cowley 1923: 119.
[40] Porten 1998: 240.

so he reconstructs מ[ראן בגוהי עבדיך ידני]ה כה[נא וכנותה.[41] Still, it is perhaps possible and, if so, better to squeeze in an additional word to reconstruct מ[ראן בגוהי עבדיך ידניה וכנות]ה כה[ניא as this respects the evidence from the *Vorlage*.[42] Of course, such a reconstruction then presents the same syntactical ambiguities as the first draft letter as it pertains to Yedaniah's occupation.

Greetings (TAD A4.7:1aβ-3 / / TAD A4.8:1aβ-3a)

After the preliminary identifications, the authors of the letter typically greet the addressee, which may involve a simple greeting, e.g. שלם, and/or an expanded declaration in which the sender expresses formulaic sentiments for the perpetual welfare of the addressee(s).[43] The draft letters exhibit a greeting and a stylized fourfold blessing in honor of the addressee.

Most translators of the draft letters conflate the initial greeting and the blessing, reading שלם in construct with מראן. While a generally accepted interpretation here and for comparable expanded declarations in other letters, it is not necessarily required and some points inveigh against this conflation.[44] First, שלם can be either absolute or construct and so the form itself is not conclusive. Second, in many Aramaic letters, the greeting שלם stands alone as an independent salutation with no expanded segment. Third, in the draft letters, reading שלם in construct creates an atypical syntax of O-S-V where the typical syntax of the letters is S-O-V or S-V-O when the subject is explicit.[45] Fourth, it takes the verb שאל to denote "to seek" rather than its more usual meaning "to ask for something."

It seems preferable, therefore, to read the letter with an initial, discrete greeting. Interpreted in this way, the opening phrases translate, "Greetings! May our lord fervently beseech □elah Šemaya□ at all times." The advantages of this reading are that it preserves the integrity of the

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[41] Porten 1998: 240 (Porten omits the ayin before the bet in עבדיך but this is a typo; cf. TAD A4.8).

[42] This reading also has the advantage that it leaves more space to reconstruct the end of the line, where Porten adds ויהודיא כלא on the basis of l. 22. The exact phrase from l. 22, however, is ויהודיא כלא בעלי יב, which might even fit the lacuna as it stands in Porten's reconstruction.

[43] Some letters also contain a greeting to a god or temple. This type of greeting precedes the address. For examples, see Alexander 1978:163; Fitzmyer 1974:212.

[44] On the syntax of the "well-wishing formula" and parallels in Neo-Babylonian and Akkadian texts, see esp. Fales 1987: 457-458 (§4.1); Folmer 1995: 548-550.

[45] As Folmer 1995: 524-525 observes, this greeting formula would be the only instance of the O-S-V pattern.

conventional greeting שלם as a discrete segment of the letterform; it reforms the syntax to an interjection plus a typical S-O-V clause; and, it reads שאל more consistently with its usual semantic range.

This reading also invites a new understanding of the fourfold blessing. The pious injunction, "May our lord fervently beseech □elah Šemaya□ at all times," is an implicit precondition by which and an assumed foundation for which to expect the realization of the subsequent invocations. Assuming the faithfulness of the addressee by way of the injunction, the senders freely invoke □elah Šemaya□ to grant the addressee favour before Darius and long life. These invocations are followed by a wish expressed in the imperative: "Be happy and healthy at all times." Faithfulness to the injunction precipitates blessings and this leads to or guarantees a positive state of well-being. Notably too, the end state wish is intimately linked to the practice of the injunction by the repetition of בכל עדן ("at all times").

Body (TAD A4.7:4-29aα // A4.8:3b-27bα)

Although not nearly as formulaic as the address and the greeting, the body of Aramaic letters also exhibits certain conventions and formula; this is especially the case for official letters.[46] As observed by Alexander, official Aramaic epistolography often has a bipartite structure: first, there is a report of relevant events leading to a present situation and second, there is a petition, which, if granted, will ameliorate an aspect of that situation.[47] Transition markers typically introduce these units. The most prevalent transition markers in Aramaic epistolography are the particles כענת, כען, and כעת ("now"), which appear with or without a conjunctive (or disjunctive) vav particle. In the letters to Bagavahya, the particles כען and כעת are used to introduce two such units: TAD A4.7:4-22aα // A4.8:3b-21a (report) and A4.7:22aβ-29aα // A4.8:21b-27bα (petition).[48] The bipartite structure is especially marked in these letters as the particles are

[46] For an excellent summary of these conventions, see Alexander 1978.

[47] Alexander 1978: 164; see also Porten 1996: 139.

[48] According to the transcriptions, כען introduces TAD A4.7:4-22aα, A4.7:22aβ-29aα, and A4.8:21b-27bα while כעת introduces A4.8:3b-21a. In examining Yardeni's tracing of the second letter, however, I noticed that the break between the first two thirds of the line and the second third of the line occurs right on the last character of their transcribed כען in

immediately followed by a formulaic (re-)identification of the sender(s), and in three cases also those they represent, and the phrase "so speak" (כן אמרן), e.g. "Now your servant Yedaniah and his colleagues so speak" (TAD A4.7:4; cf. A4.8:3) and "Now your servants Yedaniah and his colleagues and the Jews, all citizens of Yeb Birtha□, so speak" (TAD A4.7:22; cf. A4.8:21).

The report itself contains a highly stylized account of the destruction of the temple of Yahu at Elephantine, a declaration concerning its unprecedent and criminal nature, a summary of its aftermath, and a threefold explanation of the causes for the present petition. The account commences with a conventional date formula, "in the month of Tammuz, year 14 of Darius the king," and then recounts in sequence the conspiracy instigated by the priests of Khnum and a Persian governor, Vidranga, to destroy the temple; Vidranga's command to his son Naphaina, a military commander, to carry out the destruction; and the demolition and pillaging of the temple by Naphaina and his soldiers. Especially noteworthy is the way in which the conspiracy and command are recorded in parallel direct speech. The priests are reported to say to Vidranga, "The temple of Yahu the god that is in Yeb Birtha□, let them remove from there," which is echoed by Vidranga to Naphaina, "The temple *of Yahu the god* that is in Yeb Birtha□, let them demolish."[49] While the direct speech ends the first two segments, the second and third segments, recounting action in immediate response to the direct speech, are introduced by the adverb אחר ("after").

The description of the demolition and the pillaging of the temple is subdivided into two parts with the second part introduced by the particle אף ("also, moreover"). The first part is a description of the demolition of the temple structure as a whole and proceeds in a rhythmic sequence of third person plural verbs: תברו ... נדשו ... עלו ... אתו. The syntax in the sequence is remarkable as the scribes abandoned their customary O-V pattern for the V-O pattern until the

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l. 21 and it seems conceivable to me then that Porten and Yardeni may not have appreciated the possibility that the preserved stroke was only the first part of a tav and not a final nun. If it were a tav, the scribe would have consistently emended כען from the first letter to כעת in the second letter whenever the former functioned as a transition marker. Still, Cowley 1923: 120 also transcribes כען.

[49] The italics mark a plus in the second draft.

last action in which the object is expressed twice, once before the verb and then again as a pronoun after the verb. The second part is a description of the demolition and theft of the temple's interior architecture and fittings and similarly proceeds in a rythmic sequence of third person plural verbs: לקח … שרפו … נדשו. In the second part, the scribes kept to the O-V pattern. The two parts of the description function as a dynamic pair. The first stresses the actions with a rapid succession of verbs relatively unencumbered by nominal forms while the second stresses the objects of destruction with its high concentration of nominal forms and construct phrases. The O-V-O pattern at the end of the first part almost acts as a pivot to the second part with the verb נדשו on either side and the verbs אתו and לקח as the outermost panels.

Undoubtedly to magnify the unprecedent and criminal nature of the destruction of the temple, the scribes juxtaposed the actions instigated by the priests of Khnum and Vidranga and undertaken by Naphaina and his soldiers with the benevolence of former kings of Egypt and the first Persian ruler of Egypt, Cambyses. The scribes note that the temple had been built in a time before Persian rule, that when Cambyses entered Egypt, he found it built, and though many Egyptian temples were destroyed at that time, the temple at Elephantine was left undamaged. The implication is clearly that the temple was legitimate under native Egyptian rule and also Persian rule. The technique of invoking this type of precedent is akin to that reflected in the Aramaic letter in Ezra 5:6-17 to justify the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, in Darius's letter to Gadatas to justify the privileges appointed to the temple of Apollo, and articulated as a legal principle in Tacitus's *Annals* III:61-63.[50]

The report ends with a summary of the aftermath of the destruction of the temple and an explanation of the causes for the present petition. The transition to this section is marked by a temporal clause that resumes the narrative thread interrupted by the digression highlighting the earlier benevolence of the Egyptian kings and Cambyses: וכזי כזנה עביד ("and when so doing"). The scribes testify that the whole community mourned, fasted, and prayed to Yahu, here

[50] See Briant 2002: 605-607. Darius's letter to Gadatas may be an ancient forgery but, even in this case, it still demonstrates the principle at work.

designated by the rare title "the Lord of Heaven."[51] In turn, Yahu gave them vengeance: Vidranga, though freed, lost all his possessions[52] and the rest of the conspirators were killed.

The three causes for the petition are each introduced by the particle אף and accompanied by temporal clauses. The scribes report that "before this, at the time of doing this evil to us," they sent a letter to Bagavahya "and to Yehohanan the High Priest and his colleagues the priests who are in Jerusalem, and to Ostanes the brother of Anani and the nobles of the Jews/Judah" but did not receive a reply;[53] that "from the month of Tammuz, year 14 of Darius the king until this day," they and their community have persisted in mourning, abstaining from sexual intercourse, anointing themselves, and drinking wine; and, that "from that time until this day, year 17 of Darius the king," they have not performed the regular offerings in the temple.

The articulation of these three causes serves as an appropriate segue to the second section of the body, the petition, which consists of a threefold request and a threefold blessing. The threefold request, expressed with a maximum of deference, is punctuated by three verbs, culminating with the request that Bagavahya send a letter recommending the rebuilding of the temple at Elephantine: ישאלת ... חזי ... אתעשת. In consequence of such actions, the scribes pledge that they will perform the offerings in his honour that they previously noted they are unable to perform; the entire community will pray for the governor; and, the governor will receive extraordinary merit before "Yahu the god of heaven." Notably, the threefold request and the first two of the three blessings, are presented as a conditional vow in the form: "If you do X then we

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[51] See Porten 1996: 142n52.

[52] The phrase כלביא הפקו כבלוהי מן רגלוהי // כלביא הפקו כבלא מן רגלוהי has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. See the translations in TAD A4.7 // A4.8; C30 // 31; Lindenberger 1994: 67; and cf. Folmer 1995: 577; Lindenberger 2001. I agree with Porten 1996: 142n57 against Lindenberger's creative translation (1994: 67) but contra Porten 1996: 142, 146, I am inclined to read כלביא as a plural form (so also TAD A4.7 // A4.8; C30 // 31) rather than an emphatic masculine singular and so not as a derogatory modifier circumscribing Vidranga, primarily because doing so would change the syntax from S-V-O to V-O. As noted above, all V-O patterns in these letters occur in dependent clauses. Moreover, a simple solution to the apparent incongruity of the first and second parts seems to have eluded scholars, namely that the vav is disjunctive. I am inclined to read, "The dogs removed *his* fetter*s* from his feet but all the riches, which he acquired, perished" (italics are additions in the second draft). Certainly, the invective would be appropriate in the eyes of the scribes for whomever it was that released Vidranga! For an historical analysis of the event, see esp. Briant 1996.

[53] This previous letter might be TAD A4.5.

will do Y." The last of the three blessings essentially recapitulates the vow and gives it a slightly different orientation: "If you do X then you will receive Y from God." Having articulated the petition and made their offers, the body of the letter concludes with a formulaic statement: "Concerning this we sent (and) informed."

Closing (TAD A4.7:29aα-30 // TAD A4.8:27bα-29)

In terms of structure, the closing is the most unremarkable part of these letters. It includes two clarifications concerning the subject of the letters and it ends with the date of the letters. The two clarifications are introduced by the conventional אף particle already seen many times in the structure of the letter. The scribes report that a copy of the letter was sent to "to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat the governor of Samaria" and they inform Bagavahya that the Persian satrap in Egypt, Aršam, shared no complicity in the crimes committed against the Elephantine Jews. The date of both letters is "the 20th of Marḥešvan, year 17 of Darius the king." Notably, neither letter bears an inscription, likely indicative of the fact that both letters are drafts of the letter that was actually sent to Bagavahya.

4. Conclusion

It is apparent from the grammatical constitution and structure of these letters that the scribes who produced them fashioned a professional appeal in keeping with the conventions of Aramaic epistolography and approximating the style of official Imperial correspondence. The letters are, as Porten argued, the work of "skilled craftsmen … [who] took great care that their language and spelling, down to the smallest detail, be deemed correct so that the reader, finding the medium in order, be moved by their rhetoric to respond to their plea."[54] Indeed, looking at the memorandum in the Yedaniah archive (TAD A4.9), they did receive a reply from Bagavahya, and also Delaiah, recommending the reconstruction of the temple. Still, it seems they may have needed to offer a bribe and also needed to make some concessions not to offer animal sacrifices

[54] Porten 1998: 241.

as suggested by TAD A4.10.[55] To their credit, however, they were able to accomplish the essential goal they had set out to accomplish with their letters to Bagavahya: the reconstruction of their temple to Yahu at Elephantine.[56]

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[55] See Porten 1968: 291-293; 1996: 150-151.

[56] See Porten 1968: 294-295

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