

Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters

Bezalel Porten

Two family archives of Jewish soldiers who had settled at Elephantine on Egypt's southern border during the Persian Empire (fifth century B. C. E.) came to light at the turn of this century. The archive of Temple official Ananiah son of Azariah was acquired by the American Egyptologist Charles Edwin Wilbour in early 1893 but not published until 1953 by Emil G. Kraeling (=K).¹ The archive of the wealthy woman Mibtahiah daughter of Mahseiah was acquired by Robert Mond and Lady William Cecil in 1904 and published in 1906 by Archibald H. Sayce and Arthur E. Cowley. They were republished in a larger collection by Cowley (=C) in 1923.² We shall be concerned with 16 of the 21 documents from these two archives which may be classified as follows:

1. Wall-building document (C 5)
2. Slave-division document (C 28)
3. House-sale document (K 3, 12)
4. House (-gift) document (C 8, 13; K 4, 9, 10)
5. Withdrawal document (C 6, 20, 25; K 5)

The endorsement of two documents (K 6, 8) is missing; one was most likely a house (-gift) document (K 6; C 9); one may have been designated a sonship document (K 8); and one document (C 9) lacked an endorsement. Thirteen documents deal with realty (C 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 25; K 3, 4, 6, 10, 12) or moveables (C 20) while three deal with slaves (28; K 5, 8). The terminology and formulae in both groups are very similar.

With one or two exceptions (C 2, 9), the Aramaic contract was written only on the recto and was folded up from bottom to top. A single or double line endorsement defining the transaction and recording the names of the parties was then written on the final or penultimate flap. This flap was folded horizontally into thirds, tied and sealed. Despite the varying classification, the recto text of most of the conveyance documents follows a common sevenfold structure:

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Double Date | – Objective | 2. Parties (and place: optional) | |
| – Objective | 3. Transaction: Past | – Subjective | 4. Investiture: Present and Future |
| – Subjective | 5. Guarantees: Future | – Subjective | |
| 6. Dictation (and place: optional) | – Objective | | |
| 7. Witnesses | – Objective | | |

In four texts, the Transaction and Investiture sections intermingle (C 13; K 4, 6, 9). In two of the documents dealing with slaves, the Investiture section is actually Disinvestiture (K 5 [emancipation], 8 [sonship]); in one the section is replaced by Withdrawal (C 20) and in one it is absent (C 6 [withdrawal document]). The opening and closing pair of sections are objective statements. The second and penultimate correspond with their reference to the parties and occasional mention of place of composition (either Elephantine or Syene). The middle three sections are subjective narrative formulations; they tell a story. The Transaction section relates acts that have already taken place. The Investiture addresses itself to the immediate present and looks to the future. The Guarantees are all future-oriented. The verbs in the three sections accord with the tale: past -- present + future --future. The center of the document is the purpose of the contract -- affirmation of the recipient's right to an object.

Specific stylistic features characterize each one of the three subjective sections. The central section is the simplest and is characterized by a threefold formula. The Transaction section is characterized by key word repetition, inclusion and chiasm. The Guarantees section is noted for key word repetition and balance. Nine realty documents

which display each of these features to the fullest and with ample variation have been selected for treatment (C 8, 13, 25, 28; K 3, 4, 9, 10, 12). Following a sectional analysis, we shall deal with each of the documents separately.

As a model for the Transaction section we may select K 4 which contains five clauses (lines 2 – 4, 5 – 12), albeit intermingled with the Investiture section:

1. *I gave you PART of a house.*
GRATIS.
you:
GRATIS.
- (a) 2. *I gave it to you*
(b) 3. *Behold the measurements of that house which I gave you:*
(c) 4. *Behold the boundaries of that house which I gave you:*
(d) 5. *This PORTION of the house whose measurements and boundaries are written (above) I gave you*
(*acdb*)

The single Aramaic word „I gave” (*yhbt*) runs through each of the five clauses even though it is not necessary in the third and fourth clauses and is often missing from these (C 8:3 – 5, 13:13, 25:4f; K 10:3). The fifth clause summarizes the first four in reverse order (*abcd* -- *acdb*). Most of the other contracts are variations on this pattern. One sale contract omits the third clause (K 3:3 – 11):

1. *We sold and gave you a house.* 2. *We sold it and you gave us its price and we are satisfied therewith.*
4. *Behold the boundaries of that house which we sold you.* 5. *We sold and gave it to you and withdrew from it.*

Besides repeating the key words „sold” and „gave,” clauses 2 and 5 add further elements to the transaction -- satisfaction with the price and withdrawal from the house. A second sale contract condenses clauses 1 and 2 and omits clause 5 (K 12:12 – 22):

- 1 & 2. *We sold and gave you a house; you gave us its price and we are satisfied therewith.* 3. *Behold the measurements of that house which we sold and gave you:* 4. *Behold the boundaries of that house which we sold and gave you:*

The expected summary clause 5 has been deftly incorporated by the scribe into the beginning of the Investiture section; in this sense the clause serves as transition and does double duty:

This house whose measurements and boundaries are written herein you control forever.

A gift document omits clause 2 but contains a reverse inclusion in the last clause (C 8:3 – 8):

1. *I gave you -- during my lifetime and at my death -- one house-plot of mine.*
house-plot of yours -- I gave you -- during my life- time and at my death.
- (*abc*) 3. *Its measurements:* 4. *Its boundaries:* 5. *That*
(*cab*)

One contract omits clauses 2 and 3 and adds a unique addition to clause 5 (K 10:2 – 8):

1. *I gave you a house.*
4. *These are its boundaries:*

5. This house whose boundaries are written herein *I gave* you as additional portion to your marriage contract.

A withdrawal document is extremely terse (C 25:4 – 8):

1. I withdrew from you from that house. 4. These are its boundaries:

Two documents are extremely expansive and unique in their respective structures. One combines clauses 2 and 3 and expands clause 5 threefold (K 9:2 – 11, 11 – 13, 15 – 18); the unique structure here is partly due to the document's intermingling of the Transaction and Investiture sections.

—→ 1. *I* thought of you during MY LIFETIME and *gave* you a house. (a) | 2. & 3. Behold the measurements of the house which *I gave* | you GRATIS: (bc) | 4. Behold the boundaries of the house which *I gave* you: (d) | 5. This house whose measurements and boundaries are written | herein *I gave* you GRATIS. (acdb) | [Three Investiture clauses granting specific rights.] |—→ 6. This house whose boundaries and measurements and provisions | are written herein *I gave* you at MY DEATH GRATIS. —→ 7. Because you supported me when I was old, *I gave* it to you at MY DEATH.

Clause 6 is resumptive and is needed to frame the Investiture rights; it reverses the words „measurements and boundaries” and adds the correlative „at my death” to the „during my lifetime” of clause 1. Clause 7 explains the motivation for the grant and explicates the term „thought” in clause 1. The last three clauses are thus all summary in nature -- clause 5 reverses clauses 1 – 4 (abcd -- acdb); clause 6 is resumptive, chiasitic, additive and correlative; clause 7, explicative.

The second unique structure is likewise sevenfold and is perfectly chiasitic (C 13:2 – 7):

A 1. *I gave* you the house

B 2. which *Meshullam gave* me and about which he wrote a document.

C 3. *I gave* it to Miptahiah in exchange for her GOODS D 4. which *she gave* me when I was on duty.

C' 5. *I gave* you this house in exchange for GOODS worth 5 karsh B' 6. and *I gave* you the document which *Meshullam* wrote for me.

A' 7. *I gave* you that house and withdrew from it.

A relates the gift of the house and A' withdrawal from it; BB' – the document given by Meshullam; CC' – the goods of Miptahiah which she gave (D). The central item is unmatched; it is the reason for the present gift.

The model Investiture paragraph is tripartite; its three clauses are progressively arranged. The section comes in two versions:

1. You control it 2. and your children after you 3. and the one to whom you give it (or: and give it to whomever you wish) (C 8:9 – 11, 28:6 – 7; K 3:11 – 12, 12:22 – 24).

alternately:

1. It is yours
2. and your children's
3. and belongs to the one to whom you give it (or: and give it to whom- ever you wish) (C 13:7 – 8, 25:8 – 9).

In three contracts the section is abridged and it may be thought that the omission implies a limitation on the right of alienation; K 4:4 – 5 and 10: 8 – 9 omit the third clause, while K 9:11 omits the second and third but combines both versions in the first clause -- „It is yours; you control it”.

All of the Guarantees sections contain two clauses (promise and penalty) occurring in a variety of combinations.

Four of the contracts add a set of clauses known as the „diagnosis pattern”.³ The various promise-penalty combinations may be diagrammed as follows:

1. ab -- single promise and single penalty (C 13:8 – 12; 28:7 – 12; K 9:18 – 22): I/My people will not be able to sue you/your people. (a)

Should I/we/they sue you/your people -- penalty. (b) 2. a_1a_2b or $a_1a_2a_3b$ -- multiple promise and single penalty (C 25: 9 – 17; K 12:24 – 31):

I/we will not be able to sue you. (a₁) We will not be able to sue your

people. (a₂) Should we sue you/your people -- penalty. (b)

* * * We shall not be able to sue you. (a₁) We shall not be

able to sue your people. (a₂) Our people shall not be able (to sue [NB the clause is elliptical here]). (a₃) Whoever sues -- penalty. (b) 3. $a_1a_2b_1b_2$

-- double promise and double penalty (K 4:12 – 18): I shall not be able to sue you.

(a₁) My people shall not be able to sue you. (a₂) Should I sue you --

penalty. (b₁) Should my people sue you -- penalty. (b₂)

4. $a_1b_1a_2b_2$ -- alternating promise and penalty (K 10:9 – 15): I shall not be able to retract

gift. (a₁) Should I retract gift -- penalty. (b₁) My people shall not

be able (to sue [NB ellipsis]) (a₂) Whoever sues -- penalty. (b₂)

5. $a_1b_1a_2b_2a_3a_4$ -- alternation and multiple promise (K 3:12 – 23): We shall not be able to sue you/your

people. (a₁) Should we sue you/your people -- penalty (b₁) Our people shall

not be able to sue you. (a₂) Should they sue you/your people -- penalty. (b₂)

Should someone else sue -- we shall restore. (a₃) Should we not restore -- we shall

replace. (a₄) 6. $b_1a_2b_2$ -- elliptical alternation (first promise missing) (C 8: 11 – 15, 18 –

22):

Whoever sues you/your people -- penalty. (b₁) I shall not be able to retract

gift. (a₂) Should I retract gift -- penalty. (b₂)

While each scribe expanded or contracted the two basic clauses to taste or need, the principle of balance is preserved with high consistency; only in example 6 does a penalty appear without prior promise (but see below).

Either added to or interwoven with the promise-penalty clause is a quaternary incorporating the diagnosis pattern (C 8:15 – 18, 13:11 – 12; K 9:21 – 22, 10:15 – 17):

1. No one shall be able to produce against you another document beside this document. (Prohibition)
2. That document which they do produce (Act)
3. is false. (Definition)
4. It will not be accepted in suit/Only the document which I wrote is valid. (Consequence)

This pattern may be abridged and one document (K 9) omits clauses 2 and 3 while another (C 13) omits clause 3. Three of the documents including the diagnosis pattern place it after the promise and penalty clauses. The one document which omitted an initial promise clause (C 8; #6 above) placed the pattern after the isolated penalty clause, thereby creating a new and unexpected balance -- penalty-diagnosis pattern. The scribe then proceeded to take up the document theme from the diagnosis pattern and interweave it twice more with the subsequent promise-penalty clauses. This intricately devised Guarantees section (C 8:11 – 27) may be diagrammed as follows:

1. Third party -- no other document a. Whoever sues you -- penalty. b. No one can produce against you another DOCUMENT. c. That DOCUMENT which they produce d. is false. e. It shall not be accepted in *suit* while this DOCUMENT is in your hand.
2. I -- this document a. I shall not be able to retract gift. b. Should I retract gift -- penalty. c. Should I initiate *suit*, I shall not win while this DOCUMENT is in your hand.
3. Former claimant -- his document a. There is a withdrawal DOCUMENT which Dargamana wrote for me. b. I gave you that DOCUMENT. c. Should Dargamana sue you, produce that DOCUMENT and undertake *suit* with him.

By combining customary clauses in an unusual manner and repeating the key words „document” and „suit”, the scribe achieved a threefold sequence (anyone -- I -- Dargamana) and preserved balance.

In most of the contracts the three sections are linked together by the devices of key word repetition, symmetry, and chiasm. Occasionally the link is only between the two sections:

Investiture: It is *yours*. Guarantees: If anyone sues you -- penalty and the house is still *yours* (K 4:4 – 5, 16)

* * * * *

Investiture: It is yours; you *control* it Guarantees: Whoever sues you -- penalty and you still *control* it and your children *control* it and you may give it to whomever you wish (K 9:11, 19 – 21).

In this contract, the scribe omitted references to control by the children and by a third party in the Investiture section. That this omission was elliptical and not substantive is seen from its inclusion in the penalty clause. In the other contracts balance is between the Transaction and Investiture sections on the one hand and the Guarantees section on the other. The links between the sections may be diagrammed as follows:

1. *ab-ab* (C 13, 8): Transaction: I gave you a house. (a) Investiture: It is YOURS. (b) Guarantees: Promise: I shall not be able to sue you for that house which I gave you. (a) Penalty: Should I sue you -- penalty and the house is still YOURS. (b)

Transaction: I gave you a house. (a) Investiture: You control it and your CHILDREN after you. (b) Guarantees: Promise: I shall not be able to sue you for that house which I gave you. (a) Penalty: Should I sue you -- penalty and that house is still yours and your CHILDRENS' after you. (b) 2. *aab-aab* (C 28): Transaction: The slave COMES TO YOU AS YOUR PORTION. (a) Investiture: You control the slave who COMES TO YOU AS YOUR PORTION, and your *children* after you and you may give it to *whom you wish* (b) Guarantees: Promise: I shall not be able to sue you about that slave who COMES TO YOU AS A PORTION. (a) Penalty: Should I sue you about that slave who COMES TO YOU AS A PORTION -- penalty and he is yours and your *children's* and you may give it to *whom you wish* (ab) 3. *ab-baba* (K 10):

Transaction: I gave you a house. These are its BOUNDARIES: (a) Investiture: You control it. (b) Guarantees: Penalty: Should I retract gift -- penalty and you still control the house whose BOUNDARIES are written herein. (ba) Whoever sues you -- penalty and you still control the house whose BOUNDARIES are

written herein. (ba) 4. *abc-abc* (K 12): Transaction: We SOLD and GAVE you a house and you GAVE us its price. (a) Behold the *measurements* of the house: (b) Investiture: You control it and your CHILDREN after you and ANYONE to whom you give it. (c) Guarantees: Promise: We shall not be able to sue for the house which we SOLD and GAVE you and for which you GAVE us its price. (a) Penalty: Should we sue you for the house whose measurements are written above -- penalty and it is yours and your CHILDREN'S and belongs to ANYONE to whom you give it. (bc) 5. *abcd-cdba* (K 3): Transaction: We sold and gave you a house and you gave us 14 SHEKELS. (a) Behold the *boundaries* of that house: (b) We SOLD and GAVE it to you and WITHDREW from it. (c) Investiture: You control that house and your CHILDREN after you and ANYONE to whom you give it. (d) Guarantees: Promise: We shall not be able to sue you for that house which we SOLD and GAVE you and from which (c) we WITHDREW . your CHILDREN (d) or ANYONE to whom you gave it. We shall not be able to sue you for that house whose *boundaries* are written herein. (b) If we are unable to restore the challenged house, we shall give you your 14 SHEKELS. (a)

It is thus clear that while similar stylistic features characterize the links between the three operative sections, the balance between the sections varies from contract to contract. It is almost as if each contract had its own pattern and six different patterns were discerned -- *a-a*, *ab-ab*, *aab-aab*, *ab-baba*, *abc-abc*, *abce-cdba*.

Two contracts deal with slaves not as property but as persons, yet the document's structure is similar to that just investigated. In other words, the same type instrument was drawn up to emancipate a slave or adopt a son as to convey a house or withdraw from a claim. Instead of investing ownership, the middle section in effect divests. The emancipation document (K 5) is called a „withdrawal document” and its three operative sections are bound together by a sevenfold repetition of two alternating key words (*aabb-aba*) :

Transaction: I RELEASED you and I RELEASED your daughter (aa)
 Disinvestiture: No one can control you, can control you to mark you or transfer you.

(bb) Guarantees: Penalty: Whoever rises against you – penalty and you are RELEASED and no one controls you and you are RELEASED. (aba)

The adoption document (K 8) contains a threefold recurrence of the expression „he is my son” and „enslave and mark” (twice reversed to „mark and enslave”). The three operative sections are bound together in an *ab-aba* pattern.

Transaction: I shall not be able to subdue him as a slave. He is my SON.

(a) Disinvestiture: We have no *power* to mark him. (b) Guarantees: Promise:
We shall not be able to enslave and mark him. Penalty: Whoever rises to mark and enslave him -- penalty and he is still my SON. And no one has *power* to mark and enslave him and he is still my SON. (aba)

In conclusion it may be said that the Aramaic contracts are not only highly developed from a legal point of view but quite sophisticated as literary documents. Each contract is drawn up by a professional scribe steeped in a legal-literary tradition, dated according to both the international Babylonian and local Egyptian calendars, at the behest of one of the parties on behalf of the other, and witnessed by a battery of either four or eight males who usually sign their own names. The document is a brief tale -- it records a past transaction, bestows a right, and guarantees its permanent maintenance. All this is done with a keen eye to elementary stylistic features. The three operative sections are like three literary units of a first-person narrative. The plot is stereotypic -- „I gave it -- it is yours -- I cannot take it back”. The variations on the theme are abundant.

* * * * *

The Aramaic letters have recently been catalogued by Joseph A. Fitzmyer.⁴ Selected for discussion here are four letters from three different sources: (1) the Bagohi letter first edited by Ed. Sachau in 1911 and included in Cowley’s collection (C 30, 31); (2) one of the Arsham letters edited by Godfrey R. Driver in 1954 and again in 1957⁵ (D 7); (3) and the correspondence between Tattenai and Darius I recorded in the Biblical book of Ezra (5:3 – 6:12). A detailed examination of these and other administrative letters reveals that the official Aramaic epistolary style prevailed from Elephantine to Susa.⁶ Here we shall only concern ourselves with such stylistic features as triads, heptads, key word repetition, balance, inclusion, and chiasm.

Unlike the Aramaic contracts, the papyrus letters were usually written on both the recto and the verso. The scribe estimated the number of lines he had to write, halved that amount and cut his papyrus scroll accordingly. He began his letter on the recto, turned the papyrus up from the bottom and concluded the text on the verso. He turned his papyrus again to the recto and folded it from the bottom to the top. A single line of address was then written on the final or penultimate flap. This flap was folded horizontally in half (occasionally in quarters), tied and sealed. The letter written by Jedaniah to Bagohi was discovered in two preliminary drafts and lacks an external address. The text may be outlined as follows:

1. Internal address (30:1, 31:1) 2. Blessings (30:1 – 3, 31:1 – 2)
3. Report (30:4 – 22, 31:3 – 21) 4. Petition (30:22 – 29, 31:21 – 27) 5. Addenda (30:29 – 30, 31:27 – 29) 6. Date (30:30, 31:29).

The main sections are the two middle ones. The Report is a mixed third- and first-person narrative divided into three parts or nine units, each unit beginning with a temporal designation. The subject of the Report is the destruction of the Jewish Temple at Elephantine and the three parts follow the sequence Destruction (third-person) -- Before the Destruction (third-person) -- After the Destruction (first- and third-person).

The nine-unit Report may be outlined as follows:

A. Destruction 1. In Tammuz, 14 Darius II (410 B.C.E.), the Egyptian Khnum priests conspired with the Persian governor Vidranga to destroy the Jewish Temple (30:4-6). 2. Then, Viridanga instructed his son Naphaina, garrison commander at Syene, to destroy that Temple (30:6 - 8). 3. Then, Naphaina led Egyptian and other troops in the destruction of that Temple (30:8 - 13). B. Before the Destruction -- precedent 4. During the days of the native Egyptian kings, our fathers built that Temple (30:13). 5. When Cambyses conquered Egypt, they overturned the Egyptian temples but did not damage that Temple (30:13 - 14). C. After the Destruction 6. When this happened to us, we prayed to YHW that we behold the down- fall of that Vidranga. Granted (30:15 - 17). 7. Moreover, when this evil befell us, we wrote you a letter in appeal. No response (30:17 - 19). 8. Moreover, from Tammuz, 14 Darius II until now, we have been fasting and abstaining from intercourse (30:19 - 21). 9. Moreover, from then until now, 17 Darius II, sacrifices are not being offered in that Temple (30:21 - 22).

The Petition is made up of two balanced triads, the first a polite series of requests for a document of intercession and the second a series of proffered rewards. The key words „Temple” and „YHWH” are each repeated three times, while the third and sixth clauses refer back to the first. The middle clauses in both triads mention all those „here” (in Egypt). The section opens with the well-known conditional formula. This sevenfold section may be diagrammed as follows (30: 23 - 28):

1. If it please our Lord, 2. take thought of that TEMPLE to *build* it, since they do not let us *build* it. 3. Look after your friends HERE in Egypt. 4. Let a letter be sent to *build* the TEMPLE of YHW as formerly *built*. 5. And we will offer sacrifices on the altar of YHW in your name. 6. And all of us HERE shall pray for you at all times. 7. And if you act so that that TEMPLE be *built*, you will have great merit before YHW.

The presence of balance and chiasm in formal petitional style is evident from the roughly contemporaneous Book of Esther. Ahasuerus asks Esther (5:3),

„What is it, Queen Esther?	(x)
What is your request?	(c)
Up to half the kingdom,	(k)
It shall be granted you.”	(b)

or again (5:6):

„What is your petition?	(a)
It shall be granted you.	(b)
And what is your request?	(c)
Up to half the kingdom -- it shall be fulfilled.”	(kd)

The queen replies (5:8),

„If I found favor in the eyes of the king and if it please the king
to grant my petition (ba)
and fulfill my request” (dc)

At the second feast the king repeats his question (7:2),

„What is your petition, Queen Esther? (a)
It shall be granted you. (b)
What is your request? (c)
Up to half the kingdom – – it shall be fulfilled.” (kd)

The queen replies (7:3),

„If I found favor in your eyes, O King and if it please the king,
let my life be granted me as my petition (ba)
and my people as my request.” (c)

Three times the king posed his question. The first time he was startled by Esther’s appearance and so the structure of the question differs from the regular form it takes at the two feasts -- *xc-kb* rather than *ab-ckd*. Esther’s replies to the king’s questions at the two feasts reverse the order of the question -- *ba-dc* and *ba-c* with *d* elliptically omitted. When she makes her final request, the opening statements consist of four clauses chiastically arranged (8:5):

A „If it *please* the king B and if I found favor BEFORE him B’ and the matter is right BEFORE the king,
A’ and I am *pleasing* in his eyes . . .”

The first two clauses chiastically reverse the order of Esther’s prior request:

A „If I found *favor* in your eyes, O king B and if it PLEASE the king . . .” (7:3) B’ „If it PLEASE the king
A’ and if I found *favor* before him . . .” (8:5)

The reversal here probably bears the same explanation as the reversal in Ahasuerus’ initial question -- there, an unexpected appearance of the queen; here, an unexpected question of the queen. The initial and final appearance of Esther are linked by the motif of the king extending his scepter (5:2, 8:4).

In our Aramaic letter, the structural balance lies not in the opening conditional sentence, as in Esther, but in the following request. Here there is a direct parallel in the conclusion of Esther’s final petition. After requesting revocation of the letters sent out by Haman for the destruction of the Jews, she exclaims (8:6, NJPS translation):

„For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!”

By definition, a petition sought the favor of a superior and had to be worded so as to please the ear. The petitioner might curry favor by overloading the opening conditional clause of grace or concluding his petition with a couplet

of lament at the dire consequences of non-fulfillment (Esther); or he might accompany his petition with a *quid pro quo* -- „You do three things for us and we will do three things for you” (letter to Bagohi).

The letter of the Persian satrap of Egypt, Arsham (Arsames) to his official Nakhthur was written on parchment and on one side only. Like the papyrus letters, it too was rolled up from bottom to top, inscribed with an address on the penultimate flap, folded horizontally in quarters, tied, and sealed.⁷ The text itself may be outlined as follows (D 7):

1. Address (7:1)
2. Background (7:1 – 8)
3. Threat (7:8 – 10)
4. Issuing authorities (7:10).

The two operative sections may be further subdivided into two; three of the four subsections begin, like the Report in the Bagohi letter, with a temporal designation. The order of the four units is Formerly -- Now -- Formerly -- Now:

1. Formerly, when the Egyptians rebelled, Psamshek, the former officer, protected our property and even added thereto (7:1 – 3).
2. Now, I hear that other officials are protecting their masters’ property and even adding thereto (7:3 – 5).
3. Formerly, I wrote to you to protect my property and add thereto (7:5 – 8).
4. Be informed that if there is any reduction of my property and no addition thereto, you will be called to account (7:8 – 10).

Units 1, 3, and 4 concern the addressee; unit 2, other officials. The scribe emphasizes the contrast through the stylistic device of reversal in repetitive clauses:

1. Moreover, from another place -- -- other property -- -- he sought out.
from another place. (abc)
2. Moreover, other (property) -- -- they seek out -- --
property -- -- seek out. (bca)
3. Moreover, from another place -- -- other
-- you do not seek out . . . (abc)
4. If, from another place -- --
(ac)

As often, one element (*b*) is elliptically omitted from the final clause. The three statements describing Arsham’s own officials follow the order *abc* or *ac*; the one statement describing the other officials has the reverse order *bca*.

Almost all the stylistic features mentioned above come to play in the correspondence between Tattenai and Darius about the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:3 – 6:12). A half dozen key words or their synonyms recur in such a way as to delineate the theme of the letters: „I issue an order (*sym t ‘m*) that the Temple (*byt*) be rebuilt (*bnh*) on its sacred place (*‘tr*) and financed from the taxes of Transeuphrates (*‘br nhr*). The letter from Tattenai may be outlined as follows:

1. Address (5:7)
2. Greetings (5:7)
3. Report (5:7 – 16) a. Notice (5:8) b. Investigation (5:9 – 16)
4. Request (5:17) a. Recommendation (5:17a) b. Instructions requested (5:17b).

The response of Darius has been partly preempted by the narrative framework; as the text stands, his letter may be outlined as follows:

1. Investigation (6:1 – 5) a. Cyrus’ authorization (6:3 – 5)
2. Authorization (6:6 – 12) a. Permit (6:6 – 7) b. Subsidy (6:8 – 10) c. Threat (6:11 – 12)

14 (1978), 165 – 66; „The Archive of Jedaniah son of Gemariah of Elephantine -- The Structure and Style of the Letters (II)”, *Irano-Judaica*, ed. S. Shaked; „The Documents in the Book of Ezra and the Mission of Ezra”, *Shenaton -- An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, ed. M. Weinfeld, 3 (1978–79), 174–96.

7. Cf. Whitehead, *op. cit.*, 183 – 86.