

STANDARD FEATURES OF AN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SUZERAIN-VASSAL TREATY (COVENANT)

1. PREAMBLE

The sovereign power (or “suzerain”) introduces himself.

ANE: “These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favourite of the Storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant.”

TORAH: “And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery’” (Exod 20:1-2).

TORAH: “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them, after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei. Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law” (Deut 1:1-5).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The sovereign power gives a brief history prior to treaty establishment.

ANE: “Aziras was the grandfather of you, Duppi-Tessub. He rebelled against my father, but submitted again to him. When the kings of Nuhassi land and the kings of Kinza rebelled against my father, Aziras did not rebel. . . . My father was loyal to Aziras and his country. . . . To be sure, you were sick and ailing, but I, the Sun, put you in the place of your father and took your brothers and sisters and the Amurru land in oath for you. . . .”

TORAH: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. . . . After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’ . . . Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’ The LORD replied, ‘Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them” (Gen 1:1-Exod 19:3).

TORAH: “I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe. They turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol and spied it out. Then they took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought us back a report and said, ‘It is a good land which the LORD our God is about to give us.’ Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; and you grumbled in your tents . . .” (Deut 1:23-27).

3. TREATY STIPULATIONS

The sovereign power offers a definition of what loyalty to the covenant partner looks like.

a. Central or General Stipulations

ANE: “So honor the oath of loyalty to the king and the king’s kin. And I, the king, will be loyal to you, Duppi-Tessub Remain loyal toward the king of the Hatti land. . . .do not turn your eye to anyone else.”

TORAH: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. . . .” (Exod 20:3-17; i.e., the Ten Commandments; restated in Deuteronomy 5.)

b. Detailed Stipulations

ANE: “If anyone should press you hard, Duppi-Tessub, or if anyone should revolt against you, if you then write to the king of Hatti land and the king of Hatti land dispatches foot soldiers and charioteers to your aid, and (if you treat them in an unfair manner) you act in disregard to your oath. If any one of the deportees from the Nuhassi land land escapes”

TORAH: “These are the laws you are to set before them: ‘If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee, for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Exodus 21:1-Lev 25:26, i.e., “the Law”).

TORAH: “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged” (Deut 6:1-2).

4. BLESSINGS AND CURSES

The sovereign power sets forth benefits of keeping the covenant and consequences of breaking it.

ANE: “Should Duppi-Tessub not honor these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, and together with everything he owns. But if Duppi-Tessub honors these words of the treaty and the oath that are enscribed on this tablet, may these gods of the oath protect Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house, and together with everything he owns.”

ANE: “May Sin, the brightness of heaven and earth, clothe you with leprosy and forbid your entering into the presence of the gods or king. Roam the desert like the wild-ass and the gazelle. . . . May Mullissu, who dwells in Nineveh, tie a flaming sword at your side.”

TORAH: “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. . . . But if

you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. . . .” (Leviticus 26:3-12, 14-20)

TORAH: “Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God . . . But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (Deut 28:1-2, 15).

5. LIST OF WITNESSES

A catalog is presented of those who could verify the authenticity of the treaty—animate or inanimate.

ANE: “The Storm-god of Heaven, the Sun-goddess of Arinna, the Hattian Storm-god...Ishara, queen of the oath, Hebat, queen of heaven . . . the mountains, the rivers, the springs, the great Sea, heaven and earth, the winds (and) the clouds—let these be witnesses to this treaty and to the oath.”

TORAH: “Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. . . . So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites. . . . Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. . . . Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them” (Deut 31:19, 22, 26, 28; i.e., the Song of Moses; cf. Josh 24:22-27).

6. DEPOSITION OF THE TREATY

The parties deposit and preserve the written treaty for perpetuity and renewal.

ANE: “The words of the treaty and the oath are inscribed on this tablet”

ANE: “A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the Sun-goddess of Arinna, because the Sun-goddess of Arinna regulates kingship and queenship. In the Mitanni land (a duplicate) has been deposited before Tessub, the lord of the kurinnu of Kahat. At regular intervals shall they read it in the presence of the king of the Mitanni land and in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country.”

TORAH: “Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you” (Exod 25:16).

TORAH: ““So I made the ark out of acacia wood and chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. The Lord wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. And the Lord gave them to me. Then I

came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the Lord commanded me, and they are there now. . . .’ So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel” (Deut 10:3-5; 31:9).

7. OATH AND CEREMONY

The vassal swears allegiance to the suzerain, often with blood rites for emphasis.

ANE: “He takes the blood and and the straw that was left in the mug. He anoints that [-]an with the blood. Then they bring the raw liver and the heart and the master of the estate holds them out for the gods. Further he takes a bite (and) they imitate (him). He puts (his) lips on the straw and sips and says as follows: ‘Santas and Innarawant (deities), we have just taken the oath.’”

TORAH: ³“When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’ ⁴Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’ ⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’ (Exod 24:3-8).

8. TREATY MEAL

Both parties share a meal to enact and demonstrate their participation in the treaty.

ANE: “He takes the shoulder and the breast (of the sacrifice) and breaks nine loaves of bread. He scatters them on the potstand and pours wine opposite. . . . They surround the tables and devour the shoulder and breast.”

TORAH: ⁹ “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰ and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exod 24:9-11).