

ON READING THE DIPLOMATIC LETTERS IN THE MARI ARCHIVES*

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Doubt truth to be a liar
Hamlet, II/2

I had proposed to speak on the topic, « The Style and Content of Diplomatic Dispatches in the Mari Archives. » Since then, Durand and Lafont have published excellent articles that describe the experience of ambassadors and messengers and evaluate the vocabulary associated with their trade.¹ Thanks to studies such as theirs, we know a lot about who participated in such missions, how they operated, the hazards they faced, and the rewards they reaped. It is now possible to draw profiles for such individuals, on occasions even to catalogue their idiosyncracies as well as their eccentricities. Among the excellent observations of Durand and Lafont is that, with the probable exception of heads of garrisons stationed in vassals states, diplomacy in the Mari age commonly depended on itinerant, rather than resident missions. In fact, our usage of the terms messengers, diplomats, consuls, emissaries, representatives, and ambassadors is much too precise to suit the Mari experience, and words such as *mār šiprim*, *wardum*, *awīlum*, *mubassirum*, *našrum* and so forth, readily shift in the way they are applied, depending on the differences in social rank or political perspective of the people involved when the terms were being used. (This is almost like what happens with terms such as *wardum*, *amtum*, *abum* and *ahum* when used in political contexts). For us to discriminate among those transmitting messages, we should depend not on the titles they hold in a particular text, but on the access of such individuals to the seats of power. What determines this seniority is not always obvious. Loyalty and discretion to the king no doubt enhanced personal prestige ; but kinship to a king, either by blood or marriage, must certainly have increased self-confidence. Thus, Asqudum, a son-in-law of Yakhdun-Lim, could take it on himself to mislead Yarim-Lim about where Princess Shiptu will live once she reaches Mari — yet, he still had the audacity to write Zimri-Lim about what he had done!

For us, the information these travellers transmit is basic for reconstructing history. One way to do so is to confront testimony on the same event. In this respect we are fortunate that ambassadors and messengers tend to leave a trail of their activities : when they send copies or versions of their messages to different people ; when their travelling companions feel the urge to write ; when they are debriefed by officials at a series of local stops, often willingly, but sometimes when plied with wine.

Yet there will be many times when we do not have the necessary multiple evidence for one event, and must rely on information lacking demonstrated reliability or historicity, written by personalities with untested credibility. Therefore, today I want to show that, when backed by a reasonable familiarity with the Mari archives, internal inspection of messages could sensibly test their usefulness for reconstructing history. I will focus on two documents published by our host team. I have selected them

*This is the text of the address as given at the colloquium. The footnotes were added later.

¹Durand, 1987 ; 1991 ; Lafont, 1992.

because they are short ; but frankly also because of their sensational contents. (See reproduction of texts below.)

I begin with a letter that has haunted me ever since Jean-Marie Durand published it in the *Mélanges Fleury*. In it, Yatar-Addu writes Zimri-Lim as follows :

As Hammurabi issued orders, he could not shed enough tears and he kept on begging God to despise my lord. This is what he also said, « 2 months is long enough for me to turn back the favor and force him squat to the ground. *Messengers from the Elamite ruler have come here for peacemaking and I intend to accept the offer.* »

Now messengers of the Elamite ruler keep coming to Babylon one after the other, each lingering no more than a day — one mission running into the next.

From my sources I also heard it said, « Because this man has seized the hem of Eshnunna's ruler, I will myself take up action against him. » My lord should know this.

When I first read this letter, I thought myself a *voyeur*. I was persuaded by Durand's reconstruction of the context and therefore felt dread for Zimri-Lim, a soon-to-be victim of Hammurabi. I was also anxious about Yatar-Addu. What if Hammurabi's scribes had found this letter when rummaging through the archives after their victory over Mari? I tried to imagine Yatar-Addu in Babylon : how did he stand so close to Hammurabi as to see tears and hear shouts? Once the drama ended, whom did he trust when he dictated his letter? Did he hesitate to record words that could cost him his life? Was there in Babylon a Mari *lāsimum*, (« courier ») with whom to entrust the transportation of such a sensitive document? Was it duty to his king, to his city, or to himself that drove him to skirt danger?

I paused from worrying about Yatar-Addu's fate and began to wonder how he managed to imbue his letter with so much immediacy. He is very economical in setting up the stage in which endless tears and vengeful cries epitomize Hammurabi's frustration. The shedding of tears is couched in the preterit and the malediction in the imperfect ; yet Hammurabi's emotion seems endless and seamless, especially because Yatar-Addu draws on a literary commonplace in Akkadian, where tears and appeals to God often combine.²

Hammurabi's initial words are vivid and spicy ; they should absorb us. However, if Yatar-Addu was there to hear them, he could have done so only as a spy — a « mole » in our current lingo of diplomatic snooping ; for it makes little sense that a ruler would communicate his military intents to an enemy he is determined to attack. But we should not fail to notice that in the first of his two diatribes, Hammurabi never reveals what had angered him so much against Zimri-Lim. To find that out, we must wait until Yatar-Addu's final lines. There, once more returning to quotation mode, Yatar-Addu quotes Hammurabi as censuring Zimri-Lim's reliance on Eshnunna, a relationship that, as Durand himself admits, would severely test our historical knowledge about the power game in the region after the collapse of Eshnunna's Ibalpiel II.

We focus on Hammurabi's second speech : *kīma šū qaran šubat awīl Ešnunna iṣbatu anāku šibit ʔēmim luršīšu*. Here, as before, a literary flair is in evidence, for Yatar-Addu assigns to Hammurabi the three references to the root *šbt*, each with a meaning distinct from the other, all embedded in less than the 10 words. Whether we should credit this particular paronomasia to Hammurabi, to Yatar-Addu, or to one of their scribes, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the play on words relies on vocabulary and idioms that are mostly internal to Akkadian, which would bolster Durand's observation (in *MARI 7*) that during the Old Babylonian period, the ruling class was bilingual (Akkadian/Amorite), if not trilingual (Akkadian/Amorite/Hurrian).

Yatar-Addu attributes the second of Hammurabi's brief speeches to his « sources » (*ina ahītya*). This is unlike the stark opening where Yatar-Addu seems a personal witness to Hammurabi's tirade. Naturally, my curiosity was peeked about such informed and accommodating sources. I therefore followed up on Durand's good notes on Yatar-Addu and learned that he was a merchant who travelled the tin route among the great capitals. And although the datable attestations I know of him place his activities between ZL 7' and 9', he likely plied his trade during Zimri-Lim's entire reign. Because of his

²See *CAD B 37*, citing such examples as *šumma amēlu ibtanakki u ana ilim amahharka*, « if a man keeps crying while saying to God, "I beseech you"... »

métier, Yatar-Addu is often linked with Elamite merchants, and it takes very little insight on my part to suggest that his sources were his fellow travellers who, according to Yatar-Addu's own testimony, had access either directly to Hammurabi or through compatriots running feverish missions to and from Hammurabi. It also requires little genius to propose that everything Yatar-Addu says about Hammurabi in this letter, he drew it not on personal knowledge but second-hand.

Now comes the twist: If Yatar-Addu was not there to witness Hammurabi's outbursts, but had in fact relied on Elamites who did, we are left with a number of potential explanations. Hammurabi could be feeding false information to the Elamites about attacking an erstwhile ally, Zimri-Lim. Linking Zimri-Lim to Eshnunna would ice the cake in lulling the Elamites into dropping their guard, believing that Babylon would be much too busy to move against them. In this case, Yatar-Addu is nothing but a dupe, fooled by Elamites who are fooled by Hammurabi, so that when Zimri-Lim reads Yatar-Addu's note, he would know that the Elamites have fallen for the trick he had concocted with Babylon. This interpretation is suitable to the period just before Mari and Babylon successfully waged against Elam.

Here is another possible scenario: The Elamites in fact are wholly responsible for the tone of the letter. Even Hammurabi's anger rings true whether observed by them or by Yatar-Addu; for, among their many contributions, the Mari archives have also fleshed out the personalities of major Mesopotamian figures heretofore stiffly molded by formal or legalistic jargon. In them, Hammurabi is revealed as a man of many moods, with a mercurial disposition that mutated during the course of a single interview.³ To locate Yatar-Addu's letter historically, we may have to be concerned less with Hammurabi's threats than by the gains for Elam once Zimri-Lim falls for the bait and, falsely imagining himself threatened by Hammurabi, attacks Babylon. We could still be working with Durand's proposed historical setting, but must consider Hammurabi's allusion to Mari's dependence on Eshnunna as a particularly gratuitous and nasty insult, probably of Elamite concoction, but also possibly originating with Babylon since, as we know it from Yarim-Addu's letters (26: 372), Hammurabi himself was not beyond making a treaty with Šilli-Sin of Eshnunna. If in fact this insult provoked the war that destroyed Zimri-Lim, then the Elamites should be applauded for so nicely using Yatar-Addu, if only to avenge themselves against these erstwhile allies.

But there could also be other explanations as well. Thanks to the effort of the Mari *équipe*, we know much about Elam's energetic incursion into Syro-Mesopotamian affairs, about the seesawing fortunes of Eshnunna, and about Mari's strategy in playing big power politics. Yet, while our information increases every time a fat volume is created at Rue de la Perle, truth to tell, it is not always easy to sort out; it is certainly the case for me. With so much jockeying among ex-allies, former enemies, and ambitious vassals, the ingredients in Yatar-Addu's letter – a threatened entente between Babylon and Elam and a condemned connection between Mari and Eshnunna – are plausible also during the half a dozen years or so Hammurabi and Zimri-Lim jostled each other over the town of Hit. Such a conjunction of events was feasible, in fact, around ZL 4', when Zimri-Lim made his peace with Eshnunna even if Elam was still hidden from our documentation.

Have I needlessly complicated the interpretation of this text? I certainly hope so. Because one of my main points today is that when we read a document with political information we cannot afford to « let it speak for itself, » but must prod it to betray the motivation behind its writing. We should keep in mind that the transfer of information during the Mari age was so rampant that these peripatetic Amorites could be rated among the most garrulous people of antiquity. Kings, their commanders, their entourage, their kith and kin, their vassals, their allies and their enemies travelled near, far and surprisingly often. Since their security, welfare, and authority depended on their kings, officials were determined not to be

³In the letters, Hammurabi could be cajoling and solicitous, but he could also be hot-tempered, authoritarian (2: 76), sarcastic, peevish, curt, petty and vengeful (26: 368: 4; 384: 39; Thureau-Dangin, 1936: 171-176). He was fearful of the gods and rather superstitious; he prudently consulted omens and did not rush into oath-taking (Charpin, 1991).

Of course, we cannot be certain whether any of these characteristics were genuine with the Hammurabi or postured for foreign eyes. Moreover, these traits could well have been imposed on him by the Mari ambassadors who were eager to justify (or excuse) the results of their mission.

forgotten, whether they themselves or their kings were on the road. They therefore delivered to their rulers the tidbits and gossips they picked up, thus demonstrating their loyalty and usefulness.

I would therefore place people like Yatar-Addu of the Mari correspondence among those who sent the king political tidbits, even if, from our perspective, it may not have been their official duty to do so. Such letters, therefore, teem with news that they pick up here and there, some of which could have major consequence on our reconstruction of the past. We should by no means automatically question their integrity or accuracy ; but if we lack corroborative evidence, we should resort to the same analytic tools that serve us to penetrate Old Babylonian monumental inscriptions or Neo-Assyrian royal annals – if not also the Gilgamesh Epic or Enuma Elish.

Brief though it may be, Yatar-Addu's letter readily yields crucial information when inspected literarily. Thus, the way it opens directly on Hammurabi's speech is not very conventional in Mari diplomatic epistolary, where it is more common for diplomats to record how they are summoned, by whom, with whom, and where. These details are not there for a *verismo* effect, but for practical reasons : on the one hand by the writing diplomats eager to chronicle each step in their access to a king (eg. *ARM* 2 : 31 ; 26 : 381), on the other by the reading chancelleries needing to confirm what was communicated or to follow on what was promised.

That Yatar-Addu attributes his information to *ina ahītiya*, « among my colleagues, » is another clue. Both Durand (1991 : 61-62) and Lafont (1992 : 176n56) have pointed out that in using this language, authors leave themselves room for denial. In fact, this locution is one of many that warn the authors' own readers against indiscriminate reliance on their own written word. Here are three more clues :

1. They could admit that they are sending evidently uncorroborated news lest they are later accused of minimizing or concealing information that turns out to be critical ;

2. They could use the third person plural as an indefinite subject of verbs germane to the transmission of information.⁴

3. They could end their report with gratuitous or unnecessary phrases such as « my lord should act as he please » or « my lord should act according to his majesty. »

You may be thinking : « OK, Sasson, Yatar-Addu may have been a merchant with little knowledge of what was really going on ; but what about all those *bona fide* Mari representatives who ran all over Mesopotamia, meeting with important leaders and writing incredibly detailed reports of interviews, discussions, debates, and so forth? » I would then respond that there will always be wonderful nuggets in every diplomatic letter transmitted.⁵ What I am simply urging, however, is not to read any of the letters « flat, » extracting choice morsels from within, because in some cases diplomats will themselves subtly undermine the truth of the information they are sending.

This is precisely what happens in the Ibal-El letter I will shortly discuss. In other cases, a decidedly personal agenda or a desire to skirt an embarrassing situation will govern the delivery and shape of communicated information. Most difficult of all for us to assess are the occasions when entire

⁴This is not a serious problem when translating Akkadian into French. It is a real obstacle for English translators, however, for they must strive to avoid being too literal, lest they invest their document with a quaintness not in the original, yet must also avoid resorting to passive constructions, lest they suppress intended ambiguity.

⁵Here is a particularly striking illustration. Hammurabi's 11th year-date says that he conquered Rapiqum, a town under Eshnunna's control but at the frontier of Mari during the reign of Yasmakh-Addu. Striking so close to land controlled by the redoubtable Samsi-Addu does indeed seem to be a particularly venturesome act for a junior ruler.

We now know that Hammurabi was, to adapt Emily Dickinson's verse, « telling all the truth, but telling it slant. » Samsi-Addu, in fact, had captured Rapiqum and invited Hammurabi to share dominion over it. This information comes from a report on what Hammurabi told Zimri-Lim's ambassadors when they asked him to give the city of Hit back to Mari (26 : 449 : 60-68) :

« You must not mention Hit! » he said, « The situation is similar to what happened when Samsi-Addu forced Rapiqum out of the king of Eshnunna's control and gave it to me. Since then my garrison stayed there. Zimri-Lim's garrison can stay also. Just as my garrison and his have jointly there, these garrisons (of ours) should be merged as one, and peace eternal would be between us. »

dialogues reported in letters could be scripted according to conventions that are difficult for us to identify, and thus be armed against.

An anecdote will clarify my last point. When Israeli forces surrounded Beirut a decade ago, Yassir Arafat was quoted widely that he received notes, first from Ariel Sharon then from Menahem Begin asking him, « Where are your forces? Give up ; we have you surrounded, » to which he allegedly replied (something like), « You may have me encircled in Beirut, but I have you encircled by world opinion. Moreover I have ordered my lieutenants to kill me if I ever give up. » Arafat, of course, is trading on the « taunt, » a convention as old as Gilgamesh and Agga. Believe it or not, Israel found it necessary to officially deny sending such notes, and I am sure that a Western scholar is somewhere examining the story's historicity.⁶

To illustrate my observation on diplomats undermining the reliability of information, I turn to a letter Charpin published in the first *Cahiers de NABU* (1990), a document that should inaugurate any course on the promise (and pitfall) of historical analysis. In it, the *merhûm* Ibal-El tells Zimri-Lim about the death of Zuzu, evidently the king of Apum.⁷

The way Ibal-El opens his letter is not very conventional in Mari diplomatic epistolary, where writers either launch directly into their message or, before doing so, cite the royal commission that sets them on errands. While Ibal-El's equation between the gossipy nomads and travelling merchants should please the anthropologist in us, it nevertheless could not come as news to Zimri-Lim, and we must wonder about its inclusion. It will soon become evident that this tidbit serves as prologue to a rare example of a diplomat who acknowledges doubts about his tidings without having been forced to do so. This is what he says :

A Khana man told me upon arriving here, « Zuzu was covered in "God's water" and he died. »⁸ These were his words.

The Khanean having brought me the news of his death, I told Qarni-Lim [king of Andariq], « Zuzu is dead. » But Qarni-Lim did not believe it and he sent his servant to confirm Zuzu's death. His servant brought back this news,

Zuzu was not covered with « God's water »! He fell from the top of a city wall and a stone crushed his face. He was being moved *at night*, but he died in transit.⁹

This is what I heard from my sources.

Please notice how the contrasting news of Zuzu's demise reaches Ibal-El. Both the peripatetic Khanean and the servant of Qarni-Lim are nameless ; but whereas the Khanean relays directly to Ibal-El the gossip about Zuzu's death, apparently from some disease or possibly by drowning, Qarni-Lim's servant returns with information which he shares only with Qarni-Lim. For his own knowledge of the servant's report on the death of Zuzu, Ibal-El credits neither the servant nor Qarni-Lim, but attributes it

⁶I read about the exchange and the Israeli denials in the *Jerusalem Post* of early 1983, but cannot now easily cite the exact date.

⁷Here is a brief diplomatic background. The regional center of the land of Apum was called Shekhna (Tell Leilan). Samsi-Addu took over the region and renamed the town Shubat-Enlil. From the death of Samsi-Addu until well into Zimri-Lim's reign, however, Apum and Shubat-Enlil were controlled by opposing forces. During the first half dozen years of Zimri-Lim's reign, Apum was ruled by three kings, the earliest of whom was King Turum-nadki. But we hardly meet this Turum-nadki before reading about his brutal end. (Kupper, *Mélanges P. Garelli*, 1991, p. 180, 183, cites a letter in which Zimri-Lim complains of Turum-nadki's inconstancy.) Qarni-Lim of Andarig, himself an unreliable vassal of Mari, gives Turum-nadki an impressive funeral and places the son of the deceased on the throne of Apum (but not at Shekhna/Shubat-Enlil). This is the Zuzu of this contribution. We are in the 8th month of Zimri-Lim ZL 3'. Within 12 months, Qarni-Lim once more installs another king at Apum, this time, Haya-abum, possibly Zuzu's brother. (ARM 25 : 625 [15.vii.ZL4'], on which see Charpin, 1990, 122 ; note a to 26 : 304).

⁸Possibly dropsy, see Talmudic *hidrôqân*, Jastrow, 1950 : I : 335. (Reference is courtesy Jonas Greenfield.) See also 26 : 279, a woman is covered by « God's curse. »

⁹In line 20 Charpin reads, [*i-na*] *na-ah-ši-im našûšuma* and follows Durand's suggestion to connect the second word with *naššātu*, a feminine plural adjectival noun, said about hemorrhaging women. Other possibility is to translate, « they carried while healthy (i.e. alive), but ... » (se CAD qv *naššum*) ; « they carried him in a bind? » (an *n* formative from *hašû?*) ; « at night » ([*i-jna mu*]¹*ši-im* ; an emendation of the text). I have opted for the last possibility.

to what he calls «my sources», *ina ahītya*. What is striking is the fact that the servant found it necessary to replay the Khanean's account of Zuzu's death before he launched into what he must have known to be the correct version of events. Since it is doubtful, though not impossible, that Qarni-Lim's servant would replay Ibal-El's false version when Ibal-El was not there to hear it, as we continue reading the letter let us keep this disjunction between the precision of the servant's formulation as quoted by Ibal-El and the vagueness with which Ibal-El's attributes his own knowledge of events.

However, after [the report] of Qarni-Lim's servant, someone to whom was entrusted 100 of Zuzu's donkeys with which to haul grain from Azamkhul to Sapkhum escaped and brought the following news of Zuzu's death to Qarni-Lim,

Zuzu was not covered with «God's water»; he did not fall from the city wall – he just died a natural death. People trusted by Bunu-Ishtar [king of Kurda] came here, sealed Zuzu's house, and impounded the donkeys that were hauling grain from Azamkhul.

Here again, Ibal-El calls on the same resources to give yet a third account for Zuzu's death. However, unlike the previous occasion where Qarni-Lim's servant could have learned the Khanean version from Qarni-Lim or from Ibal-El himself, this time Zuzu's donkey driver could not, since apparently there were no previous contacts among donkey driver, Ibal-El, Qarni-Lim, or the servant of Qarni-Lim. Ibal-El attributes this third version once more to his «sources,» that is not to direct knowledge. Therefore, when Ibal-El has the donkey driver review *two* previous theories on Zuzu's death just before telling his own account, we should realize that we are no longer dealing with an accurate quotation, but with the manifestation of a literary stratagem common to the ancient world where *an oral statement* is rarely just duplicated when quoted, but gets reshaped at each stop during the transmission process. In our case, this means that everything the donkey driver is quoted as saying, including his own version of Zuzu's death as well as the expansion on Bunu-Eshtar's activity, was formulated to accord with Ibal-El's perspective or vision of events.

Naturally we need a reason why Ibal-El goes to such lengths, recording in a relatively brief letter the Khanean version of Zuzu's death three times, the servant's twice, and the donkey driver's once. I believe we can find it in the final lines of his letter where Ibal-El attributes the death of the brutish Zuzu to Zimri-Lim's own «Great God,» «Now then, this man who is fomenting trouble against my lord and has given comfort to my lord's enemy by threatening the fringes of my lord's encampment, the Great God of my lord...»¹⁰ [The rest is damaged.]

¹⁰Joannès has collected attestations of the expression *itāt* [someone or something] *sahārum* to which he attributes a moral as well as a physical dimension, 1988 : 300 (comments on 26 : 416 : 34-36). Except when construed with *raṭābum*, *sahārum* seems to occur only in the imperfect, even after a series of preterit construction, as kindly confirmed by Durand after reviewing unpublished examples, conveying a hypothetical situation that, luckily, does not get fulfilled. I review here some published attestations.

Against kings

26 : 317 : 23-, Yamšû to ZL

šanītam itāt Zu-hatni [u? Tur]um-nadki Hammurabi lú Kurdayu [isahhur], «another matter; Hammurabi, a Kurda man, is plotting against Zu-hatni and Turum-nadki.»

26 : 371 : 8, Yarim-Addu to ZL

(construed with *raṭābum*)

(Ishme-Dagan did not move toward Ekallatum) *awātušu ittabšēma itātišu irtubū sahāram*, «there were rumors that a plot was hatching against him.»

26 : 412 : 11-13, Yasim-El to ZL

ana mīnim itāt bēlika (GN1 and GN2) *ana qāt PN [nadānim] tasahhur*, «Why do you plot so evil an act against your lord as to give Ishme-Dagan GN1 and GN2.»

26 : 204 [=10 : 81] : 6-9, Inib-shina to ZL

(ZL) *adi šarrāqīšu u ayyābīšu u ša itātišu isahhurū...*, «Zimri-Lim--until his robbers, his enemies, and those intending evil against him, ([are not caught,] he/you should not leave his surroundings)...»

Against individuals

26 : 412 : 15, Yasim-El to ZL

(with infinitive of intent)

itāt dākīya isahhur, «he is plotting to kill me.»

Florilegium Marianum 85 : 23, Altiš-ḡalu to Yasmakh-Addu

Once alert to this observation, we could understand why Ibal-El is inserting his original phraseology about Zuzu dying from « God's water » in the other two formulations. Ibal-El is not just sustaining his original explanation about Zuzu's death despite radically different proposals, but he also is forcing into the words of both the servants of Qarni-Lim and of Zuzu an acknowledgment that Zimri-Lim's own God may have been responsible for Zuzu's death, whether through a divinely generated illness, through drowning, by falling from a fortification, or even through natural causes.¹¹

In a note, Charpin plausibly suggests that, on the basis of other parallels, the broken ending could be restored as follows : « When I receive confirmation, I will write a full report to my lord. » However, I have my doubts about such an ending because, whatever else it is, Ibal-El's letter is also a fine contribution on Amorite theology. Specifically, it explores one concept of theodicy according to a Khanean leader of the early eighteenth century BC. Simply stated, the claim is that Zuzu deserved to die for his offense against Zimri-Lim, a threefold crime that consists of raising the banner of revolt, giving comfort to the enemy, and plotting against his lord's flocks. One way or another, Zuzu did die. Given the genre of speculation in which he was working, Ibal-El is hardly likely to seek or expect reversal of an event controlled by heaven.

At this juncture you might say, « So what, Sasson! Do these versions not agree on the fact that Zuzu did die? » I would have to admit that they indeed do. But I would quickly point out that this death of Zuzu, in each of its formulation, accords solely with Ibal-El's exposition of events, an exposition that Ibal-El in any case himself subverts when unable to be more concrete about his information.

I am not in the resurrection business and I would normally not propose to resuscitate Zuzu from any of his many deaths. Yet to tell us the rest of the story, we have a new version of ARM X : 122 now that Durand has found its missing portion.¹² In it, Zimri-Lim writes his wife Shiṭtu,

I have won a victory over the enemy that blocked me from the gate of Ashnakkum to Sabbanum... I have captured Zuzu, king of Apum, Shawalish, an army marshal, and all the servants of Elukhtum who opposed me. Rejoice, and give the good news to your palace.¹³

Charpin, who has worked on all the evidence we have about Apum, makes a good case that Zuzu hardly ruled for more than a couple of years (Charpin, 1987 : 135-36). Since it is unreasonable to pack into one year major changes in the fortunes of Zuzu – installation as king, hostility to an overlord, capture in battle, release from captivity, restoration to power, resumption of hostility, and death – let me instead urge you to consider the possibility that Ibal-El and all the sources he cites were simply too hasty in sending the king of Apum to his death. This would not be the first time at Mari where important personalities were declared dead when really they were not. In one such a case, the diplomat responsible

ištu pānānumma Mubalsaga itātiša isahhur, « For a long time now Mubalsaga has been plotting against her. »

Against a place

2 : 137 : 27-28, Lanasum to ZL

(All of the Benjaminites...) *u itāt ālim Tuttul isahhur*, « and he plots against the city Tuttul. »

26 : 416 : 35-6, Yašim-El to ZL (difficult, see Joannès, 26/2, 300)

mimmā attā itāt-šū haššu Andarig isahhur, « C'est toi qui dois patrouiller aux frontières (de) ce qui constitue le district d'Andarig! » A desperate measure : perhaps emend to *i-ta-ti!-šu* [ie : *haššu* Andarig], thus possibly render, « Are you somehow plotting against it--namely, the district of Andarig? ... »

A.933 [sub 26 : 416, 26/2 p. 300]

(construed with *raṭābum*)

lugal.meš Zalmaqim itāt Ahunā irṭubū saḥāram... « The kings of Zalmaqum keep on plotting against Ahunā, (saying...) »

Tell Mohammed Diyab, 121 : 36-37, Ibal-El to ZL

(our context).

¹¹Ibal-El manages to reinforce his notion by placing in the mouth of Zuzu's own donkey driver a formulation that impressively binds « God » and « death », *immūt mūt ilišuma imūt*, literally, « he died from his god's death. »

¹²Durand, 1987.

¹³Because Shawalish is elsewhere known as an ally of Zimrilim, Durand's translates differently from how I have it.

for the error tucked away his retraction at the edge of a long, long letter. (See 26 : 384 : 2'') As to Zimri-Lim, eventually he found out what really happened to Zuzu either when he met his nemesis in battle or from a later diplomatic dispatch. I am willing to bet that Ibal-El would not have been the diplomat to write that particular letter.

I want to conclude by saying that my main goal is to establish neither the specific source for Yatar-Addu's knowledge of Hammurabi's convictions nor the fate of Zuzu. Instead, I want to suggest that when we read Mari letters, especially those with political contents, we should resist « letting the text speak for itself » ; rather, we should prod it to betray the motivation behind its writing. A literary inspection is one avenue by which to do so, and our gain could be a better realization of what took place in Syro-Mesopotamia around the time of Hammurabi.

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On Reading the diplomatic Letters

Yatar-Addu's letter to ZL, J.-M. Durand, *Mélanges Fleury* (Mémoires de NABU 1)

As Hammurabi issued orders, he could not shed enough tears and he kept on begging God to despise my lord. This is what he also said :

2 months is long enough for me to turn back the favor and force him squat to the ground. *Messengers from the Elamite ruler have come here for peacemaking and I intend to accept the offer.*

Now messengers of the Elamite ruler keep coming to Babylon one after the other each lingering no more than a day - one mission running into the next.

From my sources I also heard it said,

Because this man has seized the hem of Eshnunna's ruler I will myself take up action against him.

My lord should know this.

inūma Hammurabi wūrtam iddinu māli bakīm imši u ilam ana zēr bēliya imtanahhar u kīam iqbi umma šūma

ūmū rūqā ana šinā warhī u gimillašu utār ina eperim ušpalassahšu mārū šipri awil Elamū ana salīmim ikšudūnim u ana awil sukkallim annam anāku lūpul

inanna mārū šipri awil Elamū kayāntam ana Bābilim sadrū ištēn ūmim ul uššabū harrānum harrānam kašid

u ina ahītiya kīam ešme ummāmi

kīma šū qaran šubāt awil Ešnunna išbatu anāku šibit tēmim luršišu

annitam bēli lū ide

Ibal-El's letter to ZL, D. Charpin, in *Tell Mohammed Diyab* (Cahiers de NABU 1)

My lord knows that I am commanding Khaneans and that, much as merchants who travel through warring and peaceful territory, Khaneans range *by foot* through warring and peaceful territory, picking up local gossip as they roam.

A Khanean told me upon arriving here,

Zuzu was covered in « God's water » and died.

These were his words.

The Khanean having brought me the news of his death, I told Qarni-Lim,

Zuzu is dead.

But Qarni-Lim did not believe it and he sent his servant to confirm Zuzu's death. This servant brought back this news,

Zuzu was not covered with « God's water »! He fell from the top of a city wall and a stone crushed his face. He was being moved *at night*, but he died in transit.

This is what I heard from my sources.

However, after [the report] of Qarni-Lim's servant, someone to whom was entrusted 100 of Zuzu's donkeys with which to haul grain from Azamkhul to Sapkhul escaped and brought the following news of Zuzu's death to Qarni-Lim,

Zuzu was not covered with « God's water »; he did not fall from the city wall – he just died a natural death. People trusted by Bunu-Ishtar came here, sealed Zuzu's house, and impounded the donkeys that were hauling grain from Azamkhul.

This is what I heard from my sources and have communicated to my lord.

Now then, this man who is fomenting trouble against my lord, who has given comfort to my lord's enemy, and who would plot against my lord's encampment, the Great God of my lord...

...I will write.

bēli ide kīma HANA^{MES} šaprāku u kīma tamkarim ša birit nukurtim u salī[mim] illakūma HANA^{MES} ina šepātim birit nukurtim u salīmim illakū lišān mātīm ina atallukišunu išemmū

I awil hanūm ikšudamma ummāmi

Zuzu mē ilim imlama imūt

annētīm iqbi

tēm mūtsu' awil hanūm ublamma ana Qarnilim aqbima umma anākuma

Zuzu imūt

mūt Zuzu Qarnilim ul iqīmma 1 šuhāršu ana kunni mūt Zuzu išpurma šuhāršu kīam awātam utēr ummāmi

Zuzu ul mē ilim imla ištu muhhi dūrim imqutma abnum ša appi išbir ina 'mūšim našūšuma ina birītīmma imūt

annitam ina ahītiya ešme

u warki šuhār Qarnilim 1 awilu ša 1 meat imēri ša Zuzu nadnūšumma šēm ištu Azamhul ana Saphim ušazbalū innabitamma tēm mūt Zuzu ana Qarnilim ublam umma šūma

Zuzu ul mē ilim imla ul ištu dūrim imqutma immūt mūt ilišuma imūtma ebbū ša Bunu-Ištar illikūnimma bit Zuzu ukannikū u imērū ša šēm ušazbalū ina Azamhul iklū

annitam ina ahītiya ešmema ana šēr bēliya ašpuram

inanna awilum šū ša šakurram ana pān bēliya našū u LÚ.KÚR bēliya ušallimu itāt nawēm ša bēliya [isahhuru] ilum ša bēliya rabūm [...]

...] ašapparam

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