Zimri-Lim Takes the Grand Tour

Mari Calendar
day/month
1. Leaves Mari 29/12
2. Zilkhah 30/1
3. Kirdakhat 3/2
4. Khakkulun 4/2
5. Zaipah 4/2
6. Yakulun 4/2
7. Khalab (or Aleppo) 4/2
8. Muzunnum 4/2
9. Layash 4/2
10. Ugarit 28/2 – 16/3
11. Khazazar 16/3 or 47 – 7/4
12. Khalab (or Aleppo) 7/4
13. Mari by 7/8

The locations of 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 are uncertain.
In a recent issue of *Biblical Archaeologist*, I re-created some thoughts that Zimri-Lim, the last king of Mari, may have had when he was visited by an ambassador from Ugarit (Sasson 1984). I had him express the wish that some day he would like to visit the ambassador's homeland—a Mediterranean port-city located directly across Cyprus' pinlike peninsula.

This reconstruction was not totally fictional. Almost fifty years ago Charles Jean quoted a short passage from an unpublished tablet which said that Zimri-Lim did make a trip to Ugarit and as he passed by the upper Syro-Mesopotamian region called Idamaras he picked new troops for his army. Fifty years ago we also had evidence that Zimri-Lim once visited Yamkhad, with its capital at Khalab (today's Aleppo). In fact, one of Zimri-Lim's year-formulas, used by the scribes to establish the date of various documents, commemorated this visit. But since this specific year could not be securely placed within Zimri-Lim's reign, we were not sure when this event occurred.

Even as my article in the June *BA* was at the printers, a new volume reached my desk which contained 630 previously unpublished Mari texts (Bardet and others 1984). Fifteen of these documents, edited and studied by Pierre Villard, strongly suggest that Zimri-Lim did go to Yamkhadian territory in order to meet his father-in-law Yarim-Lim, that he may have accompanied Yarim-Lim back to Khalab, and that he may even have traveled as far as Ugarit. Indeed, it appears that Zimri-Lim did make a grand tour of the northwest!

**The Departure**

Roughly speaking Zimri-Lim's journey occurred around ten years or so before Hammurabi of Babylon dismanted Mari; according to the middle chronology, this deed should have happened around 1760 B.C.E. (see Glass 1984). The trip began during the last months of a year named after a recently concluded military compact with the Elamites. In fact Zimri-Lim had just offered a handsome throne to the god Addu of the town of Makhanum, possibly to thank him for a successful enterprise in which Mari dispatched military aid to its ally to the east. He was certainly on the road at the beginning of this year's twelfth month, *Eburum*. Large outlays of food for the royal table indicate that a big banquet took place in Mari around

It should be noted that the precise location of many cities and the territorial boundaries of various kingdoms of Syro-Mesopotamia during the Middle Bronze Age cannot at present be firmly established or demarcated. Much of the information on the maps given here, therefore, is conjectural and is based on textual evidence from Mari and Alalakh.

The size of territory under Mari's immediate control and of land under its influence depended on Zimri-Lim's fortunes in battle as well as his ability to make good marriages for his many daughters (see Sasson 1984: 112-13). Although the documents unearthed at Mari may give the impression that Zimri-Lim won every battle and skirmish that he faced, the reality must have occasionally been different for we constantly read reports, sent by the king's many spies and diplomats, of former allies abandoning Mari's cause in favor of this or that enemy. This tendency was especially prevalent among the nomadic groups that moved in and out of Mari's reach.

Moreover, the notion that powers control all land that lay within clearly etched frontiers is derived from observing modern political conditions. In the ancient world the territory of a city-state may have had pockets of powers whose rulers were either independent or owed their allegiance to distant enemies. I have not tried to indicate such pockets on the map above.

If it is difficult to chart Mari's frontiers during the reign of Zimri-Lim, it is virtually impossible to do the same for the kingdom of Yamkhad, and it will remain so as long as we do not have access to its archives. These, however, probably lie below the inhabited portions of Aleppo and may, therefore, be beyond retrieve.

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the eighteenth of Kiskissum, the preceding month, and it is tempting to associate this occasion with a gala send-off for the royal party. According to my calculations, in the particular year in which Zimri-Lim began his journey, the month of Eburum fell approximately at the end of December. Anyone who has visited the Levant during the winter realizes that December, January, and February are likely to be the wettest of months, and while the daytime temperature rarely falls below 32°F Fahrenheit, the air is wet and the cold is penetrating and raw. Still it is a period in which nature is not dormant, and even the more desertine regions are covered with greens. In the region near Mari the climate is slightly different—nature is not as luxuriant, for the earth often freezes and the nights are slightly colder. We have texts from Mari that tell us about rains and mud that made some roads and passes difficult to negotiate. With this in mind, one might question why Zimri-Lim did not delay the start of his journey by a few months.

An answer is not difficult to find. Springtime in Mari, as well as in almost every other spot in the Near East, was the most charming of seasons but it was also the busiest time of the year. Canals and irrigation ditches were cleared, dikes were prepared for late spring flooding, and eventually the harvests were secured and the grains were threshed, winnowed, and deposited in the palaces and temples. There were also many festivals to celebrate. In addition, spring was the time when armies marched. Traveling in winter, therefore, allowed Zimri-Lim to find his hosts less busy and more ready to welcome him.

Spring is a brief season in the Near East—as April comes to an end the hot, dry air of summer quickly sweeps across the land, desiccating the fertile landscape. Summer is definitely not the best time to travel. Probably for all these reasons, Zimri-Lim found it useful to begin his trek in Eburum.

The king took with him large quantities of textiles, finished clothing, jewelry, weapons, haberdashery, and footwear. He could also depend upon his trusted functionaries to provide more by quick messengers should the need arise. Some of the records from the months previous to the journey's start indicate that the Mari artisans were busy preparing the necessary materials.

Traveling in Mari Territory
Zimri-Lim's first stops were likely to be in his own territory, for the route he took was not the most direct. He had palaces in Terqa on the Euphrates (to the north of Mari), in Saggara-tum on the Khabur River (slightly upstream from where the river joined the Euphrates), and in Qattun (almost at the edge of Mari's territory). Along the way, he was joined by Yatar-Aya, one of his many wives, who was probably the regnant spouse in the palace at Terqa. It is interesting to note that his wife Shiptu, the daughter of the king of Yamkhad, apparently stayed in Mari to care for the main palace in the capital.

By then the caravan must have reached impressive proportions, for it included not only the king, the many members of his family, and the staff for each individual but also mountains of gifts and personnel to care for them. The convoy also included a number of merchant-ambassadors some of whom, we now know, took occasion to make private purchases for future sales.

Journeying in Foreign Lands
As the caravan progressed northward, the voyage entered a new year, labeled by the Mari chancellery: "Year: Zimri-Lim offered a great throne to the god Addu of Makhnum." Zimri-Lim's first foreign host was the king of Ilansura, Khaya-Sumu. If you recall my earlier article, you know that this king was a twofold son-in-law, for he was married to two of Zimri-Lim's daughters, Kirum and Shimatum. Pierre Villard suggests that Zimri-Lim took this occasion to settle Kirum's divorce, since her letters suggest she had become suicidal about her unhappiness in Ilansura. At any rate, on the tenth day of the new year Khaya-Sumu received "an iron ring, gold centered, with a seal adorned with two small lapis-lazuli stones; another iron ring, and a linen 'loin-girdle.' " It is impossible that Khaya-Sumu did not respond in kind; unfortunately, we do not have an entry to tell us what Zimri-Lim received. Usually gifts exchanged among rulers—not to be confused with tributes periodically made by vassals [a form of shakedown] and by defeated enemies—tend to balance out each other, thus allowing the treasury to come out fairly even after all the transactions are completed.

But this gift to Khaya-Sumu pales beside those that Zimri-Lim began to present to the Yamkhadians when he met them in the last week of the first month, Urakhum. We know that gifts were given out to his father-in-law, Yarim-Lim, to his mother-in-law, Gasheera, as well as to members of Yarim-Lim's circle which, among others, included Yarim-Lim's personal songstress. The gift presentations were made repeatedly and at various moments—often at religious ceremonies—usually before the deities of various towns along the way. A particularly striking presentation took place in the temple of Addu of Khakkulan, a town probably in Yamkhadian control. Gasheera was presented with a very ornate item, probably a broach, made of gold almost twelve ounces in weight and encrusted with precious stones.

We cannot be sure that Zimri-Lim himself traveled to Yamkhad's capital, or that he went westward to Ugarit itself. The quotation given below in note 1 indicates that he did.
We are only certain that he did meet Khalab, and that more gifts for the king of Yamkhad accompanied Yarim-Lim as he made his way to Ugarit, apparently accompanied by Zimri-Lim's own wife, Yatar-Aya. But it would be terribly odd if Zimri-Lim merely monitored their progress, sending others to make the various presentations in his behalf. This is especially unlikely since all sorts of gifts were exchanged between Mari and allies of Yamkhad in Ugarit itself. In particular Mediterranean wines and honey, much appreciated along the Euphrates, were given to the Mari contingents. Almost two years later we find Zimri-Lim's private secretary, Shunukhrakhalu, still controlling about thirty jars of his loot from the journey [ARMT XXXIII. 217].

This leg of the journey from Khalab to Ugarit occupied almost two full months (the second, Makanum, and the third, Lakhum) in Mari's calendar. It also included two stops, at Muzunnum and Layash (or Layish). Now this Layash/Layish is the place that has been identified as Dan in northern Israel [Pardee and Glass 1984: 93]. It is clear, however, that this town is to be located between Aleppo and Ugarit, miles to the north of biblical Dan. Hence the interpretation first offered by Abraham Malamat and more recently cited by Dennis Pardee and Jonathan Glass in the article published in Biblical Archaeologist must now be amended accordingly.

Conclusion

When and how this trip came to an end is not at all clear. Surely the trajectory back included as many ceremonies and visits as did the trip toward Khalab. Perhaps Zimri-Lim returned home via the desert route, that is, by going south to Qatna first. We cannot, however, be sure of the king's presence back in his capital until the beginning of the eighth

The Calendar at Mari

The scribes at Mari dated documents by month, day, and year. As far as we can tell, the custom of dividing the month into weeks was not common outside of Israel [see Hallo 1977]. Without relying on specific names for the days of the week (for example, Sunday and Monday), the Mesopotamian simply gave ordinal numbers to the days of each month from 1 to 29 or 30, even when he was aware of the lunar month's natural division into four phases. The year itself was given not as a number but as a full-sentence name invented to commemorate some important political, martial, or cultic event that was the highlight of the preceding twelve-month period (for example, "Urakhum, 12th day, Year: Zimri-Lim presented a great throne to the god Shamash of Makanum"). At the beginning of a year when the central administration's choice for the year title had not completely circulated throughout the kingdom, scribes may have concurrently used two, perhaps even three, different formulas. Therefore, the three dozen separate formulas available to us for Zimri-Lim's reign in reality reflect no more than eighteen actual years of reign. Scholarship has not, as yet, made definite links among most of these formulas. [See the note to the table at the end of this sidebar for additional examples of year titles.]

With the exception of Egypt, all early Near Eastern civilizations had a lunisolar calendar in which the months were calculated by the cycle of the moon and the years according to the sun. Since 12 cycles of the moon (each lasting 29 1/2 days—totaling 354 days in a year) do not match the 365-day solar year, adjustments had to be made in order to bring the calendar in line with nature.

Ideally, under a lunar calendar each month begins on the day that the first slim crescent after a new moon appears. In practice it is not always possible to sight the moon during unfavorable climactic conditions, so ancient timekeepers often solved this problem by assigning 30 days to 6 months. This, however, was 3 days more than the lunar calendar permitted (1/2 day for each month). They made up for the extra half days by giving 6 months no more than 29 days.

It is still not clear how Mari assigned each month a specific length of either 29 or 30 days. Since I so far have been able to find only two occasions in which a Mari month lasted 29 days, the possibility exists that normally all Mari months were 30 days long. One thing, however, is certain—months of unequal lengths did not alternate at Mari. In fact, in different years we often find sequences of 30-day months, and in one particular year we have nine months with 30 days each. Thus even if the remaining 3 months of that year were 29 days long, we would have, in this instance, a year of 357 days—that is, one at least 3 days longer than the normal 354 days found in a lunar year.

We cannot yet determine how many of the Mari years during the time of Zimri-Lim stretched beyond the number of days within a normal lunar cycle, but since we never find a 31-day month, the Mari lunar calendar could never have stretched long enough to match the solar year of 356 1/2 days. The Mari year, therefore, was short 5 1/2 days—if all 12 months were reckoned at 30 days each—or it was 11 1/2 days short if half of the 12 months were 29 days long.

Such a discrepancy between the solar and lunar cycles can be tolerated by certain cultures. For example, in the Muslim world a month such as Ramadan will move from one season in one year to another season a few years later. At Mari, however, life was guided by agriculture which followed the sun's cycle and not the moon's. Since the solar year fits much better

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with agricultural life, every few years the Mari bureaucrats would panic at seeing their calendar falling out-of-step with the seasons. They would, therefore, ask the king to order the insertion of an intercalary month in order to catch up with nature but because the lunar year did not consistently alternate between 29- and 30-day months, this intercalation could not be precharted. Thus the Mari chancellery made decisions to expand the year on a seemingly ad hoc basis.

The table given here provides information on 12 years in the reign of Zimri-Lim that are known to be consecutive. The Mari calendar's twelve permanent months, which the scribes say began each year with Urakhum, are given on the left, and the years are listed across the top. When the number of days for a certain month is known, I have entered that number in the appropriate box; where the boxes are blank, the number of days is not yet known.

When a box is shaded, it indicates that in that year that month was followed by an intercalary month. Thus, the table shows that there were at least 5 intercalary months during this portion of Zimri-Lim's tenure: one at the end of the second year, one near the beginning of the fifth year, two in the middle of the tenth year, and one in the middle of the eleventh year. (I should mention that I have not shown an intercalary month that is known to have come after the fourth month, Abum; we do not know if it occurred during the reign of Zimri-Lim or some other Mari ruler.)

It is unknown whether an intercalated month necessarily contained 29 or 30 days. Thus the shaded areas should be understood to stand for a block of time that may have stretched as much as 60 days. It may well be that the intercalated month of Malkanum in the fifth year petered out halfway through its run.

Note that a stretch from the fifth month of the tenth year through the fifth month of the eleventh year—a period that would normally include only 13 months—ended up having 16 full months! If all these months contained a full 30 days, then this year [with its 480 days] compares well with the famous "last year of confusion" just before the Julian calendar was inaugurated on January 1, 46 B.C.E.

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**Every few years the Mari bureaucrats would panic at seeing their calendar falling out-of-step with the seasons.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months of the Mari Calendar</th>
<th>Twelve Years During Zimri-Lim's Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urakhum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malkanum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khibirtum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGLKUR</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinunum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagan</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liliatum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belet-Biri</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiskissum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eburum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
1. The prime signs (') next to the year numbers indicate that we know that these years were consecutive, we cannot yet, however, say where these years occurred within Zimri-Lim's reign.
2. The colored lines in years 8' and 9' indicate when Zimri-Lim's trip to the northwest took place.
3. The following are the titles for the years in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim put the banks of the Euphrates in good order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim won a great victory in Saggaratum against the Benyaminites and killed their kings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim captured Ashlakka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim presented a great throne to the god Shamash of Makhanum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim took a census of his land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim fortified Dur-Yakhdullim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim presented his statue to the god Khatta of Kakkulatum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim sent his soldiers to Elam's aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim presented a great throne to the god Addu of Makhanum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim went to the aid of Babylon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim offered a great throne to the god Dagan of Tenqa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>Zimri-Lim captured Ashlakka for the second time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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month, named Dagan after the god. One account (IX.46) tells us that high-ranking military officers from Babylon were given precious vessels as gifts. Brief though it may be, this document witnesses an important alliance between Mari and Babylon. In fact, Mari was soon to send a military contingent to help Hammurabi fight his enemies, and the presence of Babylonian officers was repeatedly recorded in the early months of the following year. The war must have begun soon afterwards. A text the following year.

In fact, as gifts. Brief though it may be, this account (IX.46) tells us that Liliatum, records an outlay dated to the third (?) day of the ninth month, of Babylonian officers was repeated—
tary contingent to help Hammurabi return home than the news of this illustrious predecessors, and to have done it without the shedding of blood or the enormous expenses of war must have been especially gratifying.

Notes

1"Previously, when my lord went to Ugarit, picked troops from Idamaras accompanied him" [Jean 1939a: 67]. The remaining sentences, as cited by Jean, are garbled but they indicate that troubles occurred while Zimri-Lim was away.

2The particular records will be published by J.-P. Materne. For now, see Materne 1983: 196.

3The economic document [XXIII.556] cited in Pardee and Glass 1984, page 93, should read as follows:

10 minas of tin, Sumu-erat, at Muzunnim;
8½ minas of tin, Ewri-Talma, at Layashim;
30 minas of tin, Ibni-Addu, king of Hazor, responsible: Addi-Addu, at Hazazar, on first[? ] registration;
20 minas of tin, Amud-pi-El;
20 minas of tin, Ibni-Addu, on second registration;
1½ minas of tin, to the man from Crete; ½ mina of tin to the translator, chief merchant among the men from Crete, in Ugarit.

[7 minas of tin to Ibni-Addu ] on third registration . . .

The italics indicate unclear readings. I would, furthermore, expect the name in the third line to read Ibni-Addu rather than Addi-Addu.

Among these texts are XXI.100, which names four of the Babylonian "generals". XXI.389, which mentions seven of these officers, and XXIII.564-67. Please see the remarks by Pierre Villard in Bardet 1984.

On these voyages to the Mediterranean, which may have also included one by Sargon of Agade himself, see Malamat's fine article (1965).

Bibliography


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Editor's Note

The response to our special issue on Mari (June 1984) has been very gratifying, and it has included many requests for more information. In particular, people have asked about a subject touched on in the article by André Lemaire ("Mari, the Bible, and the Northwest Semitic World," pages 101–08) and expanded on in a sidebar written in our editorial office ("The Ban in the Old Testament and at Mari," page 103). In answering such inquiries, we have been referring people to a paper by Abraham Malamat that is cited in Lemaire's article: "The Ban in Mari and in the Bible," which is found in Biblical Essays 1966, Proceedings of the 9th Meeting of "Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika" (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap, 1966), pages 40–49. This was one of the primary sources we consulted when writing our sidebar, and it is indispensable for anyone interested in the subject. Similarly, when we sought to provide our readers summary information on the Mari and Assyrian dynasties at Mari, the chart given on page 112 was adapted from one appearing in an article Dr. Malamat wrote for Encyclopaedia Judaica.

Eric M. Meyers

In the Next BA

Tell Leilan on the Habur Plains of Syria by Harvey Weiss

New From ASOR ...

Economic Development and Archaeology in the Middle East

has just been published by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, ACOR and ASOR, to inform developers of the cultural and economic significance of ancient sites throughout the Middle East. In addition, the booklet describes the experiences in Jordan that demonstrate how cooperation between developers and antiquities authorities has had results that respond to the interests and needs of everyone concerned. These experiences serve as models for similar situations in other developing countries of the Middle East.

With a preface by H.R.H. Crown Prince Hassan, and authored by David W. McCreery and James A. Sauer, the booklet was published under a contract with the Agency for International Development.

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