

Reconstruyendo el Pasado Remoto

Estudios sobre el Próximo Oriente Antiguo en homenaje a Jorge R. Silva Castillo

Reconstructing a Distant Past

Ancient Near Eastern Essays in Tribute to Jorge R. Silva Castillo

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Director: G. del Olmo Lete

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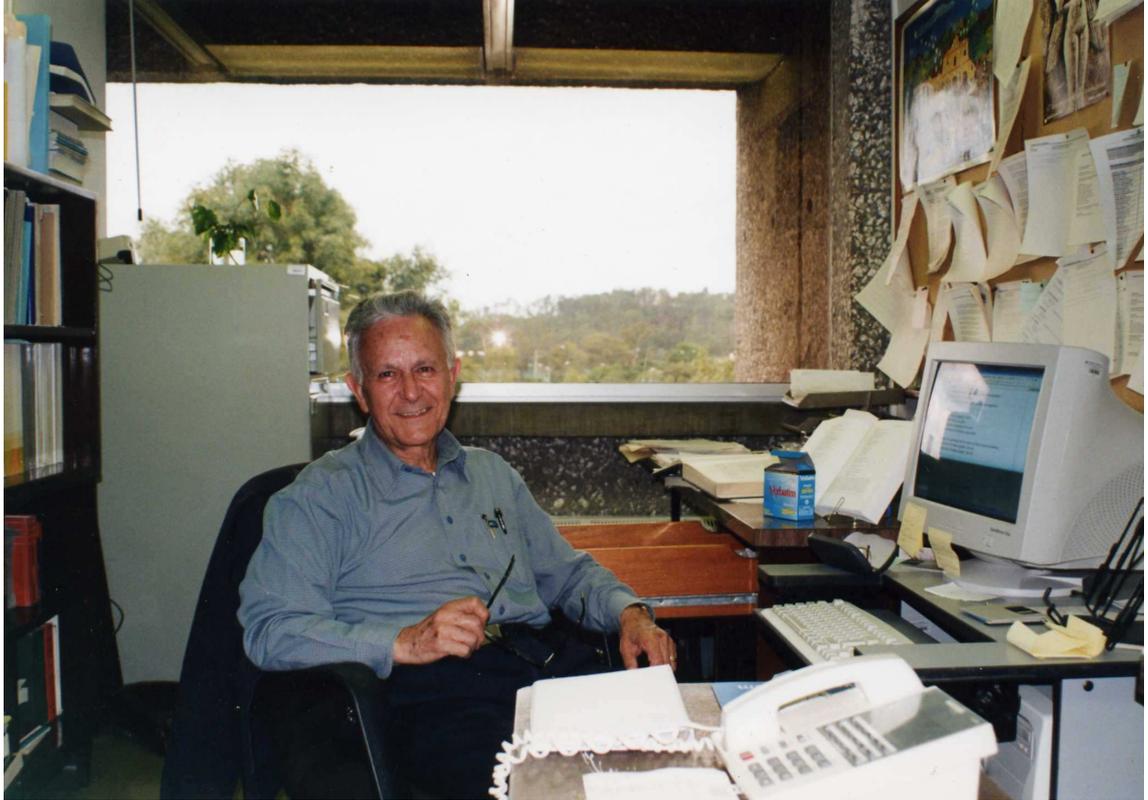
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Jorge Rolando Silva Castillo (México, D.F., 6-VII-1934)

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The Trouble with Nūr-Sin. Zimri-Lim's Purchase of Alaḥtum¹

Jack M. Sasson - Vanderbilt University

King Solomon gave Hiram twenty towns in the Galilee region. But when Hiram journeyed from Tyre to inspect the towns that Solomon gave him, they did not please him. "My brother, said he, what sort of towns are these you have given me?" So he named them (as they still are called) "Cabul Region." Hiram sent the king 120 gold talents (1 Kings 9:11-14).

About ten years into his reign at Mari, as he faced regional upheavals that included the defeat of an aggressive Elam and the fall of powerful Ešnunna, King Zimri-Lim decided to acquire Alaḥtum. This town, which lay hundreds of miles from his seat of power, was then controlled by Yamḥad, a dominant state with its capital at Ḥalab, present day Aleppo. The dossier for this undertaking was handsomely published in 2002 by Durand in *Florilegium marianum* 7.² There, Durand painstakingly assembled the relevant documents, about two dozens in all, almost exclusively letters penned by Mari diplomats. Durand added an excellent introduction and many comments in which he made the case that Alaḥtum is the Old Babylonian name of Alalaḥ and offered perceptive remarks on the when, why, and how of the negotiations. Among them, he speculated that Alaḥtum was one of a number of hamlets in the region that appealed to Zimri-Lim because he hoped it would reverse faulty supplies in grain, wine, oil, and timber (pp. 59-60, 66, 86) that Mari periodically experienced. He also wondered whether the choice was emotionally linked to an area where Zimri-Lim spent his years of exile (pp. 66-67, 69, 136). In truth, however, we have only fidgety notions about Zimri-Lim's whereabouts before his occupation of Mari: Perhaps at Carchemish, because a nervous ally of his tried once to invoke solidarity by recalling how, in a garden in Carchemish, he and Zimri-Lim plotted a return to the throne of their respective fathers.³ Perhaps in Ḥalab, because Zimri-Lim is quoted to say he "was raised at the thigh of Addu [of Ḥalab]," and hoped his own statue would be placed there. Of course, there are always difficulties in sorting out realism from the metaphor in such expressions.⁴

The negotiations for the land Zimri-Lim wished to acquire were complicated by several issues of control, such as how much of Alaḥtum was to be turned over, how to deal with its inhabitants, including personnel exempted from military duty, and how to undertake reconstructing or refurbishing the town. Let it be said at the outset that while the equation between Alaḥtum and Alalaḥ is not fully clinched, the area in question cannot be far from Tell Atchana on the Orontes.

1. It is a great pleasure to offer this study to Jorge Silva, a colleague who has been a brother ever since our families shared wonderful moments in Chapel Hill, NC, during his 1992-1993 sabbatical leave. I am hoping we will continue to be brothers until we each reach the 120 years the Bible allots to mortals.

2. *Le Culte d'Addu d'Alep et l'affaire d'Alaḥtum* (Florilegium marianum 7; Mémoires de N.A.B.U 8; Paris: SEPOA, 2002).

3. J-R. Kupper, "Dans les jardins de Carkémish," *FM* 6 (2002), 195-200.

4. It is difficult to know how metaphorical was Zimri-Lim's statement that he grew up in the *paḥallu* (near the groins) of Addu of Ḥalab *FM* 7 17:9-10 (*ina pānītim ina paḥal Addu anāku arbi*), vocabulary repeated by differing manifestations of the same god in *FM* 7 39 (*ša ina bīrit paḥallīya urabbušu*, 15-16; *ša ina suhātīya* [embrace] *urabbuka*, 50).

Still, this strange story has many details to absorb us. Beyond potentially introducing Alalah earlier than its own archives have so far permitted, the Alahum dossier demonstrates that topography alone does not dictate the shape of ancient kingdoms or establishes the limits on land holdings of rulers; more or less, corroborating Alfred Korzybski's semantic principle, that maps and territories need not corroborate each other.⁵ Zimri-Lim's Mari hugged the shores of the Middle Euphrates River, from Tuttul in the north to the limits of the Suḥûm toward the South. (See ARM 28 84:9.) As well, it stretched a few miles up north of the mouth of the Ḥabur River. Tribal and ethnic allegiances, however, played accordion with these borders. Commitments to allies as well as rapid turnover among vassals added and subtracted territory almost constantly. We know too that land was readily transferred, along with princesses, as part of painstakingly negotiated dynastic marriages. In fact, less than a decade before the Alahum story unfolded, Zimri-Lim had sent to Yamḥad his brother-in-law, Asqudum, and a *Kapellmeister*, Rišiya, to fetch for him as bride Princess Šiptu, likely the daughter of a concubine. So, I might speculate that some of the towns mentioned in our dossier may already have been committed as part of Šiptu's dowry.⁶ Too, garrisons in foreign territory (in Ilaṣura for example) amounted to extra-territorial expansions, and we know that some vassals found such intrusions of suzerain presence difficult to reverse without a radical and dangerous shift of allegiance. This was especially true when princesses became brides of vassals who supplied them with private homes of their own, in effect creating foreign territory for their fathers within their husbands' own land.

Most interesting for us is to observe a tactic for personal survival that blossomed in the Mari age: rulers would staff households in foreign cities where they stashed away luxury items, possibly hedging against politically troubled times. Yasmaḥ-Addu, that much maligned son of the redoubtable Samsi-Addu, may have disappeared into one these private spaces if Bannum, the rough Sim'al *merḥûm*, did not get to him first as he was vacating Mari. In a similar vein, we read about two of Hammurabi of Babylon's sons, Samsu-ditana and Mutu-Numaḥa, who learned their craft by apprenticing in Mari, Yamḥad, and Qatna; together with their households, they likely lived there in extraterritorial security.⁷ It is possible, therefore, that in trying to secure distant Alahum and its environs, Zimri-Lim was investing in a potential haven,

5. "Two important characteristics of maps should be noticed. A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness," *Science and Sanity* (3d ed.; Lakeville, Conn: International Non-Aristotelian Library, 1948). But see also B. Lafont, "Relations internationales, alliances et diplomatie au temps des royaumes amorrites. Essai de synthèse," *Amurru* 2 (2001), 226-229.

6. See Durand's list and his speculation about them in FM 7, pp. 60-64. When Asqudum and his party came to Halab to collect the destined bride, Queen-mother Sumunna-Abi dies and for the duration of the obsequies, Yarim-Lim sends them to inspect "his towns," possibly the very towns that were soon to be added as dowry for the Šiptu. The giving of towns as part of a dowry is nicely illustrated by a tablet from Shemshara, around 1800 BCE (SH 891 = SA1 71). A powerful king writes a potential vassal, *You and me, our coming together is overdue. Let me order the making of golden statues of you and me, one of us set to embrace the other. I shall give you my own daughter, and I shall give you Šuṣarra and the land of [...] as bridal gift for my daughter (ana šarrak[ūt] mārtiya; perhaps read ana šarratūt mārtiya, "for my daughter's queenship"; see Jesper Eidem, The Shemshāra Archives, 1. The Letters (Historisk filsofiske Skrifter, 23; Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2001), pp. 147-148.*

In a bizarre affair reported in an Emar text, a king of Emar gives four of his daughters as well as much precious metal to a Hurrian king threatening his capital. Luckily a merchant manages to retrieve this wealth (not clear how), thus earning a temple sinecure for himself and his descendants; see text no. 6 in M. Sigrist, "Seven Emar Tablets, pp. 165-184 in A. F. Rainey (et al., eds), *kinattūtu ša dārāti: Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume* (Occasional Publications No. 1: Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1993). For the first millennium, we know of Sargon attaching the province of Ḥilakku (Cilicia) to the dowry his daughter Aḥat-abiša when she was married Ambaris of Tabal. (The transaction as well as the good-will did not last long; reference is courtesy Sarah Melville.) From the Biblical world, we may note that Pharaoh gave Gaza to his daughter as her dowry (1 Kings 9:16) and Caleb gives oases to his daughter Achsah (Judges 1:15).

7. Ironically, Mari gave them a life they had lost in other archives; see B. Lion, "Des princes de Babylone à Mari," pp. 221-234 in D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand, *Florilegium marianum, 2. Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot* (Mémoires de N.A.B.U., 3, 1994; Paris: SEPOA). More examples are cited by Durand, FM 7, p. 87.

come the apocalypse.⁸ He was wise to do so, for the Mari archives give evidence of a very low survival rate for Old Babylonian rulers of the Middle Euphrates valley.

But let us concentrate on our story, itself worthy of an Almodovar staging, with enough twists to satisfy a pretzel addict. The choice cast included, on the Ḥalab side, an untested young king, also named Hammurabi, just months after supplanting his father Yarim-Lim. There was a resolute queen-mother Gašera, with property in Alaḥtum to protect; and there was also a bevy of advisors, each and all determined to influence a new king. On Zimri-Lim's side, there was Warad-ilišu, officially his *Kapellmeister*, adept at more than music making. With his fine knack for diplomacy he may have been the first to broach the subject of Alaḥtum.⁹ There was his private secretary, Šunuḥraḥalu, who found a way to conclude the deal. Alas for Zimri-Lim, however, during the bulk of the negotiation, there was also his agent, Nūr-Sin. A brief detour is necessary to sketch his character.

We have known Nūr-Sin for over half a century now as the dispatcher of one of the more complex of prophetic documents in the Mari archives (FM 7 39 = A.1121+A.2731 = LAPO 18 984, pp. 130-133), because it piggy-backs two separate divine revelations.¹⁰ More recently, however, Durand published a letter of his containing a startling oracle and I cite it first (FM 7 38 = A.1968 = MARI 7, pp. 53-54):

Abiya, āpilum of Addu of Ḥalab came by to tell me: Addu says, I had given all the land to Yaḥdun-Lim and by means of my weapons, he had no opponent. But when he abandoned me, I gave to Samsi-Addu the land I had given him. Then when Samsi-Addu [...] I wanted to bring you back. I brought you back to your father's throne and I handed you the weapons with which I battled against Sea. I rubbed on you oil from my numinous glow so that no one could stand up to you.

8. Zimri-Lim may have had a place in Halab itself; see FM 7 16: 9-14, in which Warad-ilišu speaks of giving instruction to "couriers, my lord's servants, who are in Halab." He also had a home in Ilaṣura, a vassal state, ARM 10 31 = LAPO 18 1223. The practice was widespread in the OB period of the Mari era: Qarni-Lim of Andariq owned a household in Šeḥna = Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan); see M. van der Mierop, "The Tell Leilan Tablets 1991. A Preliminary Report," *Orientalia* 63 (1994), 342-343; Talpuš-šarri, an officer of Pišente of Itapalḥim owned property in Šušarra; see SH 819 (Eidem and Læssøe, *The Shemshāra Archives*, 1, no. 53, pp. 122-124). For more examples, see Jean-Robert Kupper, *Lettres royales du temps de Zimri-Lim* (ARM 28); Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1998, note "a" to ARM 28 71, p. 102).

Worth quoting is a letter from (post Zimri-Lim) Tell Leilan (L87-939; J. Eidem "The Northern Jezira in the 18th Century B.C. Aspects of Geo-Political Patterns," pp. 258-259 in O. Rouault and M. Wäfler (eds), *La Djéziré et l'Euphrate syriens. Tendances dans l'interprétation historiques des données nouvelles de la protohistoire à la fin du second millénaire av. J. C.* (Subartu 7 = Actes du colloque international: Paris, 21-24 juin 1993; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). Šukrum-Teššup of Eluḥut writes Til-Abnu of Apum:

The house of Eluḥut is your house and the house of Šubat-Enlil is indeed my house. Now about the men you have sent me, I have not yet released them. They had said, 'Til-abnu (says), I want to come to Eluḥut.' So I will not release them until you come up here. You and I can meet and mutually invoke the gods in an oath, so blood ties are created. You must not give to anyone the home I desire in Šubat-Enlil for I am ready to give you a home in Eluḥut, and I will give you as well the town that you desire. Do ask me for a house in Eluḥut and I shall ask you for a house [in Šubat-Enlil]....

For further notices on this subject, see P. Villard's nice overview, "Shamshi-Adad and Sons: The Rise and Fall of an Upper Mesopotamian Empire," p. 878 in J.M. Sasson (et. al., eds), *Civilizations in the Ancient Near East* (New York, Scribners, 1995), and the useful footnote (p. 303 n. 324) devoted to this subject in B. Lafont, "Relations internationales, alliances et diplomatie au temps des royaumes amorrites. Essai de synthèse," *Amurru* 2 (2001), 213-328.

9. The passage (FM 7 21: 10-11) is heavily restored. The post of *nargallum* is hardly limited to music-making. See also the diplomatic role of Eteya, *nargallum* of Asqur-Addu of Karana, ARM 26 404:3-18. In fact, it can be said that those with technical skills (especially diviners and musicians) seem to get the ear of the king.

10. The letters are featured in a number of publications that collect "Mari" prophecies, among which is Martti Nissinen's *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series; Atlanta: SBL, 2003). See numbers 1 and 2, pp. 17-22.

Now listen to my only wish: Whenever anyone appeals to you for judgment, saying, "I am aggrieved," be there to decide his case and to give him satisfaction. This is what I desire of you: When you go out (to war), don't do so without consulting the omens. When it is I who stands at my omens, then proceed. If otherwise, don't come out of your door.

This letter contains the text of an original prophecy; we know that to be the case because Nūr-Sin sent along clippings from the hair and clothing of the *āpilum*, with them a diviner could validate that the message was indeed divinely guided.

Some times later, Nūr-Sin crafted another letter (FM 7 39), including in it the two divine messages mentioned above. The first of the revelations is attributed to the god Addu of Kallassu, a locality in the vicinity of Ḥalab. We pick up on what it says as Nūr-Sin records the oracles given when the god stood upright to say,

*Am I not Addu, Lord of Kallassu, who has raised [Zimri-Lim] between my thighs and have restored him to his ancestral throne? Having restored him to his ancestral throne, I decided also to give him a dwelling place. Now since I restored him to his ancestral throne, I shall take from his household a property in perpetuity. If he does not hand (it) over, I--the lord of throne, land, and cities--, can take away what I have given. But if it is otherwise, and he does hand over what I am requesting, I shall give him throne upon throne, household upon household, land upon land, city over city; I shall give him a territory, from its eastern to its western (corners).
This is what the *āpilū* said, with (Addu) remaining continuously there during the taking of omens. Now, moreover, an *āpilum* of Addu, Lord of Kallassu, is demanding the shrine at Alaḥtum as property in perpetuity. My lord should know this.*

The second revelation is not one delivered by representatives of diverse avatars of Addu, but one Nūr-Sin created by drawing on sentiments the oracle from Addu of Kallassu (in italics) and those recalled from the prophecy of Addu of Ḥalab (in bold italics):¹¹

Another matter; *the **āpilum of Addu, Lord of Ḥalab, came here along with Abu-ḥalim and told me the following:***

*"Write to your lord, "Am I not Addu, Lord of Ḥalab, who has raised you in my thigh/arm-pit and has restored you to your ancestral throne? Ought I not request something from you? **When a wronged person, male or female, appeals to you, be there to decide their case.** This is what I want from you. If you do what I have just written to you, paying heed to my word, I shall give you a country, from its eastern to its western (corners), as well as the land of [...]."*

This is what the *āpilum* of Addu, Lord of Ḥalab, told me in the presence of Abu-ḥalim.
My lord should know this.

So on the basis of his readiness to attribute to the Addu an oracle the god never made, we must grant Nūr-Sin inventiveness if not alsochutzpah. If it were obvious to me that he could multiply and dilate on truths from heaven, how much more evident was it to his contemporaries that he could do the same when communicating earthly information? In fact, among his colleagues, Nūr-Sin had the reputation of an

11. See my comments in "The posting of letters with Divine Messages," *Florilegium marianum* 2 (1994), 314-316.

eager-beaver, quick to the trigger and not beyond taking action before consulting others.¹² This is very lucky for us, for had Nūr-Sin been more discreet, this material might hardly have been as rich.

Actually, Nūr-Sin needed all the pluck and imagination he could muster, for although we have a seal declaring him a “servant of Zimri-Lim,” Nūr-Sin may, in fact, have had to satisfy two masters, for I speculate that he was also a Yamḥad native; which might explain why we hardly have record of him in the Mari palace administration as well as why we find him repeatedly embroiled in close-quarter combat with other Ḥalab courtiers.¹³ This double allegiance is known in the Mari records. Šidqum-lanasi, for example, represented Zimri-Lim’s interests so well at Carchemish that it surprised us to learn that he was a high potentate in Carchemish itself.¹⁴

With this notice on Nūr-Sin, we may get back to the Alaḥtum matter. Most of the major documents on this episode are full of gaps or breaks, made less obvious by the acres of seductive restorations Durand has supplied. As it happens, however, one fairly well-preserved text, FM 7 36, gives us a broad version of the story as detailed in a letter Nūr-Sin sent to Zimri-Lim. But here we must be careful because like all other texts in the dossier it is undated, and so compromises the reconstruction we might make had it been slotted chronologically. There is also the hesitation about this particular version of Nūr-Sin’s testimony, for in diverse texts and fragments, he does not always replay the same episodes consistently. That is understandable, for then as now, obfuscation and accommodating slants on truths come naturally to administrators and diplomats. The first lines (3-19) of text 36 set the scene. Nūr-Sin writes,

Donating Alaḥtum

3] *Hammurabi gave the town Alaḥtum to my lord. When he gave this town to my lord, Hammurabi’s servant Yasmaḥ-Addu, who is frequently on message service to my lord, Lord Hammurabi sent him along with the Kapellmeister [^{lu}nar.gal, Warad-ilišu] to Alaḥtum. He gathered the citizens of Alaḥtum and Yasmaḥ-Addu reiterated the orders of his lord (Hammurabi), telling them, “My lord Hammurabi has given to Lord Zimri-Lim the town Alaḥtum, its field and its vineyard, and the olive groves stretching from Alaḥtum’s limits. From Alaḥtum must leave the elite (wedūtum), the home-owners (maskanū), the replacements (^{lu}dirig.ga), and whoever holds or works land in Alaḥtum. On your part, get in touch with kin of yours who have gone to another town*

12. Šidqi-epuh, himself not beyond collegial reproach, writes to Zimri-Lim (FM 7 43), “Ikšud-ayyabišu has just left Saggartum for my lord. Previously, when Yasim-sumu was alive, Nūr-Sin kept on doing this: before he would consult with Yasim-sumu, he would write my lord. Now that I am aware of this, certainly (I write it) to my lord. My lord now knows.” Nūr-Sin found time for bitter disputes with Samsiyaddu, Hammurabi’s general (FM 7 34:2’-7’; 35:24ff, albeit partially restored).

13. In some of his letters, Nūr-Sin refers to both Hammurabi and Zimri Lim as *bēlum*, “lord,” leaving it to us to untangle which of his masters is at stake. This task is more onerous, ironically enough, when he mentions just one *bēlum*.

Nūr-Sin’s lack of footprint in the palace bureaucracy has led Durand to wonder whether he may have changed his name (p. 95). It is true that, according to his own testimony (FM 7 39:34-45), Nūr-Sin did spend some time in Mari; but so did many others, including foreign princes. The most personal passages (FM 7 35:5-23), where Nūr-Sin talks about being away from home, are heavily damaged. For his seal, see D.R Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods, 4; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 649, # E4.6.12.2041.

14. B. Lafont, “La correspondance de Šidqum-Lanasi,” pp. 509-541 in D. Charpin (et al., eds) *Archives épistolaire de Mari I/2* (ARM 26/2; Paris: ERC, 1988). In turn, Šidqum-lanasi himself kept a depot in Emar; see Lafont, “Un homme d’affaires à Karkemiš,” pp. 275-86 in D. Charpin and F. Joannès, *Marchands, Diplomates et Empereurs. Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991). See also “Nouvelles lettres de Šidqum-Lanasi, vizir du royaume de Karkémish,” *MARI* 8 (1997), 781-784. ARM 26 531:19-28 delivers nicely on Šidqum-lanasi’s devotion, “Another matter; you wrote me, ‘Be good for all matters at your palace gate!’ Well, you know that you are my lord. It is my pleasure to care for all matters. I act to safeguard myself; but you, my lord, do lay your hand over me.”

The military leaders known as *merhūm* led tribal units for the king and occupy a special category of leaders with multiple allegiances.

and bring back to Alaḥtum those who have settled elsewhere.” This is what Yasmaḥ-Addu told the citizens in the Kapellmeister’s presence.

The vocabulary for the transfer is mundane enough, depending on the verb *nadānum*, which when not construed with *ana kaspim*, “for cash” (or the like) means simply “to give” and not “to sell.” This is repeated later on when Nūr-Sin attributes to Hammurabi a more precise formulation. When addressing the *Kapellmeister* on his return from inspecting Alaḥtum, Hammurabi is quoted to say (lines 35-36), “I have now given you the town Alaḥtum that Zimri-Lim has requested of me. This town is dilapidated (*ḥuppû*), so he must renovate it (*likašširšū*) ... As I have left this town, so must everyone (else) leave it.” The impression we have from both these passages is Alaḥtum had known better days but that, in any case, it was being handed over as a ghost-town.¹⁵ Nūr-Sin next dwells on the survey of the town jointly by officers of Hammurabi and of Zimri-Lim; the notion being that the deal was struck and the matter was resolving nicely. We might recall that in such narratives as Genesis 23, in which Abraham bought land in Hebron, detailed description of the purchase area follows completion of the sale. We continue:

Appraising Alaḥtum

[20] *The Kapellmeister and Yasmaḥ-Addu remained 10 days in Alaḥtum. They measured the fields, ailed description of the purchase area follows completion of the sale. We continue: they checked the boundaries of the meadows, tallied the olive-trees, recorded the vineyards, and assessed the households. Once Yasmaḥ-Addu handed over to the Kapellmeister town, fields, vineyards, and olive groves, he said the following, “From now on, no one will have claim over the fields of Alaḥtum.”*

But while Nūr-Sin is keen to quote Hammurabi⁽¹⁶⁾ and to describe the surveying, he is most eager to demonstrate that over the course of a few months, while Alaḥtum was being surveyed and transferred to Zimri-Lim, Nothing was heard from the Queen-mother Gašera. Write Nūr-Sin (28-29), “At that time, (Queen) Gašera did not write the *Kapellmeister* about the field of her *sāmihū*-peasants, about her vineyards, or about her honey-(brushes).”

The last observation, that Gašera had ample time to object, is so crucial to Nūr-Sin that he repeats it three times within a few lines, obviously wanting to make of it the focus of the major squabble that it has come to be. The narrative proceeds:

Taking control

[39] *[Ever since Lord Hammurabi told this to the Kapellmeister], the Kapellmeister stayed in Ḥalab daily for 4 months. I worked the lands of Gašera, home-owners, and replacements, with*

15. Normally, when cities are being transferred from one power or another, its population and their property are part of the deal. When it is not, there is a sense of betrayal; see *ARM* 26 410. Kurda is to return Harbe to Andarig as part of a peace settlement; but it empties the town of all its possession before doing so.

16. In fact, we have a slightly different version of what Hammurabi is supposed to have said to the *Kapellmeister* “I have herewith given this town to my brother. Home owners (*maskanū*), replacements, and any elite who held land there are now moved out (*duppurū*). I have released to my brother all existing citizens. Let Nūr-Sin through cajoling bring back to reinforce the town as many citizens living elsewhere and no one will criticize him (*FM* 7 26:5-12).” These words are much more reminiscent of Yasmaḥ-Addu’s speech in Alaḥtum.

Gašera never contacting the Kapellmeister. Of the 200 (acres) of land belonging to Gašera, I covered 60 (acres) of land with seed, she never once contacted the Kapellmeister.

Gašera's bid

[46] *But once the Kapellmeister moved on, Gašera badgered me that I had covered her land with seed. Gašera went before the king. Thereupon the land of hers I had seeded was released to her.*

Nūr-Sin is not one to conserve clay, and these lines renew information presented earlier. But they have a purpose. The main protagonist here is the *Kapellmeister*, Warad-ilišu, a man whose judgment Zimri-Lim trusts highly. For over four months (claims Nūr-Sin), Warad-ilišu was all over Alaḥtum, and if Nūr-Sin began to work some of the land there, Gašera did nothing to challenge his rights to do so. Only when Warad-ilišu had left, did Gašera complain. Here was a cabal that included the Queen-mother and her son the king; and all there was left in Ḥalab to protect Zimri-Lim's claims was Nūr-Sin. Gašera complains and Hammurabi releases that land back to her. Whatever Hammurabi meant when he urged Alaḥtum citizen to leave town, this restoration of property to his mother implies that land given to another is not necessary land lost either to the giver or to the previous owner. From Nūr-Sin's perspective, this struggle was unbecoming, if also uneven; so he tries to turn it into a moral struggle as well.

I cannot judge whether Zimri-Lim had formally accepted Alaḥtum as a gift before the obvious difficulties began to develop, the troubles with Gašera being just one of many complications the Ḥalab elite were hurling on hapless Nūr-Sin. In fact, Nūr-Sin may have realized that his own action contributed to the mushrooming difficulty. The charge that Nūr-Sin was sustaining by his premature occupation of Alaḥtum was that he had (to put it diplomatically) overstated the hold that Zimri-Lim had over this town, and so was depriving some very important persons, among them the Queen-mother, their rights over land they owned there. These actions may have obligated Zimri-Lim toward ownership before he had a chance to establish an affordable price for it. There were other complications, too, such as the status of Alaḥtum's citizens, especially those with military obligations, and the pace with which Zimri-Lim was to rebuild the town. One text makes it obvious that Ḥalab contractors were expected to reap the benefit of this urban renewal: Nūr-Sin reports that one mason working for Hammurabi requested 100 shekels to hire the menials for brick-making (FM 7 34: 3-16). There are also other statements in which Hammurabi was pressuring Zimri-Lim into purchasing supplies for the rebuilding.¹⁷

The crisis was quickly crystallizing around the nature of the transfer of Alaḥtum and this becomes obvious from Nūr-Sin's next statement as recorded in FM 7 36,

50] *Ever since they took the land, I was made the target of the following accusation, "You have assembled the citizens and told them, 'My lord has paid the price and bought Alaḥtum.' This is what you told the citizens of the town."*

¹⁷ FM 7 32:5-22: *Hammurabi is in constant discussion about building up the town Alaḥtum saying, "Write your lord, for him to give you either money or personnel and build the town Alaḥtum." This is what he told me. I answered him, "Release the troops that were taken for spear (obligation; (šābam ša ana giš.šukur [zabar] ilqū), so they can transport timber from Mount Lebanon so that I can build the town." But he said, "I will not release them."*

Shocked, shocked!

84] *Once I was told this, I dumped ashes on my skull (saying), “Those citizens to whom I said these words, may they charge me [before] God. May Lord Hammurabi, even without my lord’s (permission), dock me (iḫruṣanni) up to double (the damage). Someone else should inspect my holdings; indeed take the land fully! Why would you slander me?” This is what I told the king.*

Dismissal of protest

60] *One day was let pass, but the next day, when Ṭāb-balāṭī approached, I said, “A major matter has befallen me and I must be charged!” But he said, “The king had a laugh. Why are you troubled by this matter? Half the town could be given to Lord [Zimri-Lim]. Just write your lord.” This is what Ṭāb-balāṭī told me.*

Still protesting

68] *On the morrow, I put myself again to (assemble) witnesses and to draw (them) near Ṭāb-balāṭī. But when he again said the same, I put myself to (assemble more) witnesses. My lord should strive and make happen the pulling away of people from the midst of this town. On this day, I am badgered about the town my lord wishes to buy (iṣammu).*

This volcanic eruption of Nūr-Sin is remarkable, especially for diplomats who have better sense than setting up conditions that could easily be deemed a *casus belli*. (Remember that David went to war against Ammon under such circumstances, 2 Sam 10.) True, Nūr-Sin’s tactic had the advantage of personalizing the matter as the story slips focus: from being about land prematurely transferred or not it now becomes one about honor and the humiliation of a diplomat, not least by mocking him.¹⁸ But we notice that Nūr-Sin also manages to propose a solution for the impasse: Zimri-Lim should buy the town. Here, Nūr-Sin is being disingenuous, because he is proposing as solution the very avenue that he had compromised in his zeal to prove himself an assiduous servant. In fact, the reason of the cruel laughter he attributes to Ṭāb-balāṭī and to Hammurabi was not so much Nūr-Sin’s discomfiture but that matters were turning to Ḥalab’s favor, likely because of Nūr-Sin’s missteps. This statement needs an explanation and it will be the focus of my remaining remarks.

How Zimri-Lim had hoped the transfer of Alaḫtum would happen is mentioned in another Nūr-Sin *apologia*, published as FM 7 28. Nūr-Sin opens by quoting Zimri-Lim’s instruction to Dadi-hadun, a Benjaminite leader who made fitful peace with Mari. Zimri-Lim had commissioned him to locate a decaying town near the river, presumably the Euphrates, to purchase it, empty it of its farmers, and in it set up a house for the king.¹⁹ Nūr-Sin uses this request as a template for wishing the same done within Yamḥadian territory.²⁰ Zimri-Lim needs to pay the Yamḥadians, but as they are not likely to agree without official permission, the king is urged to contact Hammurabi who in turn would give his general, Samsiyaddu, or one of his vassals, Sumu-baraḫ of Muzunnum, permission to proceed with the transaction;

18. We might recall what happened to David’s ambassadors to Ammon and how such treatment becomes a *casus belli* (2 Sam 10).

19. I read lines 4-20+ as quoted from a letter Zimri-Lim send Nūr-Sin. See Durand’s comments, FM 7. p. 110 sub b), opting for another attribution of the same lines. In fact, following the many plots in this letter is not easy and Durand has offered an alternative scenario that is plausible.

20. Durand does not think that this portion of the letter applies to Alaḫtum.

the argument being that a town bought will not be returned to its original owners. Another fragment of a statement in Text 26 (lines 42-48) tells us that the protocol was complicated: Zimri-Lim could only offer the funds to Hammurabi who will himself purchase the town, presumably before handing it over to Zimri-Lim.²¹

My sense about the troubles in Alaḥtum is that Hammurabi wanted to give Alaḥtum to Zimri-Lim and that the latter would rather pay for it. Aside from the Marcel Maussian obligations it would impose on Zimri-Lim, this particular gift came with a curse: Zimri-Lim was expected to improve a dilapidated town without the assurance of long term control that purchase would have given him. In documents from Old Babylonian Alalah, there is care to secure towns by purchase from the crown, as well as exempting them from their tax obligation.²² In fact, we have something similar occurring in a Hebrew narrative recorded in 1 Kgs 9:11-14, and I have cited it as heading to this paper. From it we learn that Solomon wanted to give Hiram the miserable hovels; but the latter insisted on paying for them, rather handsomely too, the only sure way to keep them after investing in their resurrection. The transaction was so misunderstood that in antiquity the Chronicler (2 Chr 8:1-2) simply switched the transfer, with Hiram selling land to Solomon, and scholars have tried to harmonize the difference ever since.²³

Once launched on the wrong path, the complications and confrontations involving Alaḥtum multiplied, not the least among them a dispute about the effect of an *andurārum* Hammurabi issued on occupying the throne. As we know, both East and West an *andurārum* forced the reversal to the *status ante quem*, whatever or whenever the *qui* in question.²⁴ We hear about the effect of this “reversal” in ownership because it is discussed in the next phase of the negotiations, but the proper lesson to draw from it still escapes me. What is clear, however, is that the whole matter of paying for Alaḥtum had become

21. “Whether for you or your lord, purchase will not be allowed. Let your lord offer a price to Hammurabi; Hammurabi himself will buy. At the purchase of this town, he [Zimri-Lim?] should convey to Hammurabi a report.”

22. See AT *1 and AT *456; see, conveniently W.W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds *Contexts for Scripture* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997-), 2.127 (p. 329) and 2.137 (pp. 369-370); see also 3.99B; purchase of a town, with its tax exempt status.

23. 1 Kings 9:10–14. Commentators have diverse interpretations for the why, where, of the transactions; see H. Donner, “The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy during the Davidic-Solomonic Period (with Special Reference to the Phoenician Coast),” pp. 205–14 in T. Ishida (ed.) *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and other Essays* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982). In his commentary to *1 Kings* (Anchor Bible, 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001, p. 300), M. Cogan recovers an “editorial practice” through which to deny that the payment was for the land transfer. Worth noting is the Chronicler’s (pious) replay of the story in 2 Chron 8:1-2 in which it is Hiram who gives Solomon land, “*Toward the end of the 20 years in which Solomon built the Lord’s House and his palace, the cities Hiram [sic] had given to him, Solomon also built, settling Israelites there.*” Needless to say some scholars harmonize the two passages, via imaginative recreation of contexts; see Cogan, p. 307. Achish of Gath gives Ziklag to David (1 Sam 27:6) without exchange of money, on accepting him as a vassal (actually as his buccaneer).

The drive to establish a *quid pro quo* relationship based on exchanges of gifts rather than sale is reflected in ARM 26 541. Šidqum-lanasi acts deeply insulted when Zimri-Lim offers money with which to ship logs from the Carchemish region. Why would Zimri-Lim imagine him to be poor, he ask? For his part, Šidqum-lanasi rarely failed to include a gift when sending a letter to Mari: jewelry and wine (ARM 26 535, 542); wine (536). In turn, he frequently asked for gifts, including an apprentice scribe (ARM 26 541); see Lafont, *ARMT* 26, p. 521). M.9157 (Lafont, *Mélanges Garelli*, pp. 283-284 = *LAPPO* 18 924, pp. 59-60) is a fine illustration of this form of exchange. Šidqum-lanasi writes Zimri-Lim:

My lord wrote to me about wooden boards, “I want many boards.” My lord knows how matters [...] I shall amass many boards—as many boards as my lord desires—and convey them. On another matter: In a raid the other day, my sheep were carried off. My lord should assign me as many sheep as possible. Should he not assign me these sheep, I will certainly die. My lord knows that I will not manage to prosper without sheep.” [For uššām in l. 12’, see ARM 26 212:4’].

24. The most recent study of the phenomenon as it applies to Mari is D. Charpin’s “L’*andurārum* à Mari,” *MARI* 6 (1990), 253-270. The institution is placed in wider context in S. Lafont’s, “Les actes législatifs des rois mésopotamiens,” pp. 3-27 in S. Dauchy, J. Montballyu and A. Wyffels (eds.), *Auctoritates. Xenia R.C. Van Caenegem oblata. Law Making and its Authors* (Iuris Scripta Historica, 13; Brussels: Royal Academy of Science, Letters, and Art), pp. 5-7.

hopelessly entangled, with Hammurabi eventually declaring himself mortally offended to accept a price for it. Durand himself is puzzled by the paradox of Ḥalab refusing Mari's payment (p. 73), and appeals to an alleged *hipšum*, a blood covenant that tied the two dynasties (p. 69, 74) and that obligated them into potlatch-type exchanges of belongings.²⁵ But the term *hipšum* is absent from our dossier, with only a possible verbal form occurring in a murky context (FM 7 46:8'). In any case we know that Zimri-Lim does not seem aware of its stipulations since he insisted on paying for Alaḥtum.

In my opinion, because of Nūr-Sin's bungling, Zimri-Lim could no longer turn back from owning Alaḥtum; but whatever the price he had set to pay for this town, it was rising with every complication, and I am reminded of the farcical story about Abraham, a foreigner in Canaan, needing badly to purchase Machpelah, a cave near Hebron, in which to bury his decomposing wife. Twice, the cave's owner, Ephron, slyly offers to give it to him; until it dawned on Abraham that he better agree to the outrageous price being tossed around.²⁶

So Nūr-Sin himself was becoming the problem, and we have a juicy quote from Hammurabi openly fearing that his meddling in some sensitive matters, among them the status of Alaḥtum citizens with military obligation, will sharpen tension between the two kings.²⁷ At what point Zimri-Lim took the next step is still not clear; but he had to act. He dispatched Šunuḥraḥalu to find a way out of the muddle. Šunuḥraḥalu was his confident and, because he could read if not also write, he was also the king's private secretary. For Šunuḥraḥalu, this was by no means his first dispatch on a troubleshooting mission, not even to Yamḥad.²⁸

Three of Šunuḥraḥalu's letters are specific to the Alaḥtum negotiations and although they are not well preserved, we do learn that at first matters did not go well at all. Hammurabi simply refused to talk about payment and worried much about the fate of Alaḥtum's citizens (FM 7 46). Yet, we also learn from another fragment of a document likely attributable to Šunuḥraḥalu (FM 7 48) that Hammurabi had managed to resolve the problem, for after meeting with his mother, Hammurabi is reported to say, "*About land and buildings that Gašera controls in Alaḥtum for which you argued; the land and buildings are now released to my brother.*" Subsequently, Gašera herself seems to confirm the decision. Unfortunately, what happened between the two opposite postures reported in these texts, rejection and then acceptance, is told in a long and difficult rehearsal of meetings (FM 7 47) that Šunuḥraḥalu had, first with Hammurabi and then with Gašera.

It might (or might not) be relevant to note here that between Gašera and her son-in-law Zimri-Lim there is an old record of discord. Gašera had once begged Zimri-Lim not to give a songstress Duššuba to

25. See his Collège de France « résumé des cours » for 2000-2001, pp. 702-703 (internet : <<http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/assyrio/p1000998225304.htm>>). The classic reference comes from ARM 28 36, in a letter Yarkab-Addu, king of Ḥazat, writes to Zimri-Lim, "*The wife of Ḥali-ḥadnû – This woman is a Yamutbal woman. Find out about her and release her. This woman is no slave as she was married (lit.: "taken") through a bride-price (terḥatum). As Bedouins, the Sim'al and Yamutbal are hipšum, one can ally with the other. So do find out about her and release her. People (lit.: "land") ought not to grumble.*" G. Rubio suggests several etymologies for the term, *Aula Orientalia* 20(2002), 241-242.

26. Gen 23. For a quarter of the sum Abraham paid for Machpelah, Jacob bought some good land near Schechem, Gen 33: 18-20. David paid one-eighth that amount to the Jebusite Araunah when purchasing the future site of Solomon Temple. (1 Chron 21:14 gives the price as 600 shekels, likely its true worth in the Chronicler's time.) Araunah also offered to give his land away, but this was more out of fear than to drive up the price. R. Westbrook, "Purchase of the Cave of Machpelah," *Israel Law Review* 6(1971), 29-38, gives a complicated explanation for the Machpelah purchase, involving a double transfer: the land is first transferred from one party to another followed by the king giving the land to the new owner.

27. FM 7 33: 19-25: "*Another matter; Hammurabi told Zuḥa(t)nim the following, 'It is not usual that Nūr-Sin wrote to my brother about the spears (aššum giš.šukur zabar.ḥá... išpur); Nūr-Sin will certainly foment hostility between my brother and me.' This is what he told Zuḥa(t)nim.*"

28. See J.-M. Durand's chapter, "Les missions diplomatiques de Mariotes," pp. 533-541 in *Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, 1 (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient, 16. Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 1997).

her husband Yarim-Lim, and somewhat threateningly, Zimri-Lim promised not to reveal her request should Yarim-Lim inquire.²⁹ Be that as it may, the difficult missive of Šunuḫraḫalu that might give us the key to the solution, FM 7 47, seems to tread heavily on the issue of the *andurārum* I mentioned earlier. Hammurabi seems to defend his right to launch this reversal, but urges Gašera and Zimri-Lim to resolve their problem. Gašera complains bitterly about losing her home but then, like Ephron the Hittite, drops a hint about her price, “Come now,” says she, “if I just set forth for Mari, will [Zimri-Lim] not give me the land and property for me to exist (lit: eat bread)” (40-42)? In fact, Šunuḫraḫalu seems to pick up on the offer, as he answers, flatteringly but also concretely, “Now, as to Nūr-Sin bothering you, my lord will write you. Alaḫtum town, Narazzik, Tawarambi, and the land of Mari belong to whom if not to you? If you say so, write to my lord and let him give you a town in Mari” (53-58).

So the Alaḫtum predicament apparently ended tolerably well all around. I imagine that to keep the city of Alaḫtum, to which he had become committed, Zimri-Lim had to give up land in Mari rather than weigh out shekels for it. This solution may explain why there are no records of payments for Alaḫtum in the Mari archives. (Admittedly, the absence of evidence is no evidence of absence.) But if he did, I feel confident that the transfer of land cost him more dearly than payment of money. Because we have records of gifts Gašera sent to Mari from years on either side of these events, we must presume that outwardly at least everyone was inclined to bury the hatchet.³⁰

We now know that after the fall of Mari, the prestige of Ḫalab’s Hammurabi expanded and deepened such that years later he was still playing a major political role in the Upper Ḫabur. We know too that his successor, Abban, gave Alalaḫ to Yarim-Lim, another son of Hammurabi. So if Alaḫtum was Alalaḫ, it had reverted to Ḫalab. What happened to Nūr-Sin after this debacle naturally should also interest us; but just now the needed information is likely hidden under the soil of Ḫalab until *inshallah* one day we will recover its archives. I do recognize that my particular reading of a difficult dossier may have unduly maligned him, belittling his diplomatic gifts. I say to myself: What if Nūr-Sin were a mole, working for Hammurabi and in collusion with Gašera, his main mission being to deepen the crisis and so elevate the price that Zimri-Lim needed to offer? If so, he served well his Ḫalab masters for, as we all know, something happened to Zimri-Lim a few months after the conclusion of the affair to make him disappear from the scene. Responsible scholars think he was done in by another Hammurabi, this time of Babylon; but there are other scenarios.³¹ There is little likelihood, therefore, that Zimri-Lim got either to benefit long from his possession or to find the peace he may have sought when—alas foolishly— he had Nūr-Sin help him control a nice property in distant Alaḫtum.

29. ARM 10 139 (= LAPO 18 1191). See also the comment of N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lim. La population féminine des palais d’après les archives royales de Mari* (*Florilegium marianum* 4; *Mémoires de N.A.B.U.*, 5; Paris: SEPOA, 1999), pp. 69-70.

30. M.10903 (= ARM 25 94 = ARM 31 195), cited by Durand FM 7, p. 80 n.198, dating to 12.xi.ZL10’; See also M.7141 (FM 4 26:15-17), dating to ?xi.ZL11’.

31. See D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient à l’époque amorrite. Essai d’histoire politique* (*Florilegium marianum* 5, *Mémoires de N.A.B.U.*, 6; Paris: SEPOA, 2003), pp. 242-245. I have suggested that he died a natural death, see “The King and I: A Mari King in Changing Perceptions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998), 460-462.