

# The Vow of Mutiya, King of Shekhna\*<sup>1</sup>

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Vows to the gods and the grief they create when they are neglected (or tardily fulfilled) have generated a literary theme that was well-cultivated in antiquity and is nicely studied in our time. In honoring my beloved teacher Michael Astour, I want to launch into this topic by focusing on an Old Babylonian letter found at Tell-Leilan by a Yale expedition.

The letter (L87-1317) is edited in an article by Jesper Eidem who kindly placed page-proofs at my disposal.<sup>2</sup> It was sent to Til-Abnu (also known as Tillaya) who ruled Apum, a region in the eastern portion of the Khabur triangle, from his capital Shekhna, now Tell-Leilan. A number of eponymal dates plus a synchronism with Babylon allow us to slot our letter around 1745 B.C.E., so within a few years after the death of Hammurabi of Babylon.

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\* Abbreviations list: A: Siglum for tablets from Mari; AbB: Altbabylonische Briefe. See Frankena (1966); ARM: Archives royales de Mari; FM2: Charpin and Durand (1994); KTU: *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*; L: Siglum for tablets from Tell-Leilan, (see Eidem [1991], Ismail [1991], and Vincente [1991]); MARI: *Mari. Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires*; NABU: *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*; OB: Old Babylonian; SI: Samsu-iluna; ZL: Zimri-Lim.

<sup>1</sup> This is a lightly revised version of a presentation given at one of the sessions of the Middle West Branch of the American Oriental Society honoring Professor Michael C. Astour (February 11, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Edition and brief discussion in Eidem Forthcoming. Eidem has translated the text in his (1991) 125, and in Matthews and Eidem (1993) 204.

The writer of the letter is Ea-Malik, about whom more will be said below. The burden of his message does not come until line 14 of the letter. So I skip the opening paragraph to read what Ea-malik is counseling Til-Abnu:

Now it is you [Til-Abnu] whom the goddess has touched with her finger, and you have ascended the throne of your father's house. Within 14 days, the goddess plans to leave her temple so that boundary markers could be set in place. (*They should be set as the goddess heads to Alā.*) You must grant, and not withhold, whatever is the need of the goddess. You may wish to offer an excuse such as, "Troops are badgering us!" or "We are destitute!"; but you must not think it! Satisfy the goddess with what is at your disposal, and this goddess will keep you healthy.

Ea-Malik is writing just before a festival in which the great goddess Bēlet-Nagar leaves her temple, presumably in Nagar (a town at or near Tell Brak), and heads toward a shrine at a nearby town. Her trip may have had to do with setting up boundary markers for estates or villages. Although by the Old Babylonian period Nagar's prestige was no longer what it was half a millennium earlier, its goddess Bēlet-Nagar continued to be widely venerated and her frequent peregrinations drew many regional rulers who paid her homage at her many stops.<sup>3</sup> Thus, about twenty years earlier, a local ruler wrote to Zimri-Lim of Mari,

I have heard the tablet my lord sent me. My lord wrote to me about a festival, saying, "Come here!" However, from this region Bēlet-Nagar...will be taken on a tour. I must welcome her in the town of Iluna-akhi itself while Khaya-sumu (king of Ilanšura) must welcome her in Mishkilum. As for me, I must also welcome her on behalf of Khaya-abum [of Shekhna], and make sacrifices to her in Khazakkanum itself. For this reason I have not come to meet my lord, but I have just dispatched to him Ewri, who knows what is going on.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know what else beyond sacrifices a full homage to Bēlet-Nagar entailed; but in our particular case, Ea-Malik who had obviously

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<sup>3</sup> See Matthews and Eidem (1993), but especially Guichard (1994) 269-72.

<sup>4</sup> See Guichard (1994) 238, #122.

heard enough excuses in his lifetime, did not leave the choice up to Til-Abnu: he must give whatever the goddess says she needs, he tells Til-Abnu, nor must he reduce or delay his gifts.<sup>5</sup> The specifics about this gift are not spelled out; but to prepare Til-Abnu for the proper decision, Ea-Malik tells him,

Now then, I am (also) sending to you the priest of Bēlet-Nagar, your lady. Send him back to me after you have advised him of your full intent, whatever it is.

I wish I could be precise about the identity of this Ea-Malik. Jesper Eidem has told me of an unpublished treaty in which the king of Kakhat (Yamši-Khatnu) is joined by Ea-Malik when exchanging oaths with Til-Abnu of Shekhna. Ea-Malik, then, would have been in line to become king of Kakhat and may have written his letter while honing his skills at Nagar, a town downstream of Kakhat, as was the common practice of the time.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever his true affiliation, Ea-Malik could demand fealty to the goddess not because in the past Til-Abnu had also made a vow, but because, as Ea-Malik claims, the latter owes his throne to Bēlet-Nagar. He writes that the goddess touched Til-Abnu—metaphorically, but likely also physically—and thus made it possible for him to ascend his father’s throne.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> In his edition of the text, Eidem speculates that Bēlet-Nagar expects to receive a town.

<sup>6</sup> The only published text known to me that could link Ea-Malik to Kakhat is L87-710 (=Ismail [1991], #115), a record of disbursement of gifts to many dignitaries, “when the king (=Til-Abnu) met with the ‘man’ of Kakhat.” Recorded first is “a silver vessel, weighing 10 shekels, a Babylonian-style uṭ.ba (*tuttubatum*) garment to Ea-Malik.” An Ea-Malik, messenger from Karkamish, is mentioned in Vincente (1991) 222 #85. Mari records know of a number of Ea-Maliks, none of whom seems a candidate for equation with our letter-writer.

<sup>7</sup> *Lapātum*, “to touch,” could be made into a metaphor for selection. For example, in FM2: 50: 5-9, Akshak-magir writes the king, “Ever since my lord selected me in Samanum, I have remained observant of my lord’s utterances and have indulged neither in the commission nor omission of a crime. In fact, my lord has rewarded me freely.”

To connote an intimate involvement in the selection, *lapātum* could be construed with *suq̄tum*, “chin,” as in A.450: 5ff. (cited Durand, [1988] 378; see comments in Veenhof [1989]/40: 27), “My lord has given me a very large responsibility, but I am not up to it. Just as it is God who ‘calls’ human beings, now me—a mere worm at the

idiom Ea-Malik uses in line 16, *ana kussi bit abika tērub*, literally meaning “you have come into your ancestor’s throne,” evokes a rather precise climb to power. However, despite our rather limited knowledge of the period, the idiom cannot be taken literally, for on his cylinder seal Til-Abnu gives Dari-Epukh as his father’s name. Had this Dari-Epukh ruled in the Khabur area or elsewhere, he would have had to be a contemporary of Zimri-Lim. Yet despite their loquacity about political matters in the Khabur Triangle, the Mari records have so far nothing to say about him. In fact, we have a pretty extensive list of people who ruled Shekhna since the days of Shamshi-Addu, and none of them is called Dari-Epukh.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, we know that Til-Abnu succeeded not his father, but a Muti-Abikh, also called Mutiya.<sup>9</sup> As this Mutiya was the subject of the object lesson Ea-Malik wished to draw, we should get back to Ea-Malik’s opening paragraph and read what it says,

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base of a wall—my lord majestically (lit. “in accordance with his divinity”) ‘touched my chin,’ to send me out toward (important) men.”

The intimacy conveyed by the idiom as used in Mari is not easily paralleled in another OB text, AbB2: 154: 14-17 (= Frankena [1966]), where it occurs third in the sequence “going to someone’s aid,” “giving him encouragement,” and “touching his chin”; the whole is contrasted to restraining his slave.

<sup>8</sup> Here is a tentative list:

From texts found in Mari

<i>Samiya</i>	Sumu-Yamam—Zimri-Lim (at transition)
<i>Turum-nadki</i>	barely a couple of years
<i>Susu</i>	after viii.ZL3'
<i>Khaya-abum</i>	ZL4'-9'
<i>Kunnam</i>	an Elamite, is “lord of Shubat-Enlil” ZL9'
<i>Qarni-Lim</i>	of Andariq, via Shamash-Dayyan his aide, had a household there [information from Leilan documents]
<i>Atamrum</i>	ZL9'-11'
<i>Khimdiya</i>	ZL11'-12'+ ; includes Azamkhul (= ? Mohammed Diyab?, see FM2, 242)

From texts found at Leilan

<i>Mutu-Abikh</i>	(Mutiya) son of Halumpimu
<i>Til-Abnu</i>	(Tillaya), son of Dari-Epukh (once ruled Shurnat)
<i>Yakun-Ashar</i>	his brother, briefly also ruling at Ilanšura; defeated by Samsu-Iluna (SI23).

<sup>9</sup> Eidem speculates that Til-Abnu was a nephew of Mutiya. See lastly, Eidem forthcoming: ms 5.

In the past, before he could ascend his throne, Mutiya kept on making the following vow, “If I were to ascend my throne, I shall donate silver, gold, cups of silver, cups of gold, and skillful maids to Bēlet-Nagar, my Lady!” This is what he kept on vowing. (Yet) when this man did ascend his throne, he totally ignored the goddess and did not even visit her once!

While we cannot evaluate Ea-Malik’s full intent when he crafted this passage, we nevertheless can observe that he used language that was far from pedestrian. We notice first that since he was addressing Mutiya’s immediate successor, it was hardly necessary for him to open on *pānānum*, “in the past.” Yet, it is this adverb that draws Til-Abnu from immediate events and thus invites him to reflect on lessons taught by history. We further notice that because the entire clause in lines 3-4, “before he could ascend his throne” (*lāma ana kussīšu irrubu*), depends on a durative construction, it sharpens the futurity of a past declaration and thus effectively invites Til-Abnu to observe Mutiya as he ponders his avenues for kingship.<sup>10</sup>

Three times in this passage, Mutiya is said to be after a “throne,” *kussūm*, (*kussīšu*, lines 3 and 10; *kussīya*, line 5), but not after a “dynastic throne,” *kussi bit abim*, as when said about Til-Abnu in line 16. Although the distinction between phraseologies remains to be fully grasped, it may not have been an inconsistency on Ea-Malik’s part when, in speaking of Til-Abnu’s own rise to power in the middle paragraph of his letter, he chose the more complete idiom.<sup>11</sup> He may well have sought to flatter Til-Abnu by giving him a ruling ancestry. But, again, from what we now know about the succession at Shekhna, it looks like we should have doubts about the legitimacy of Mutiya no less than that of Til-Abnu. In fact, Mutiya’s own father was called Halumpimu, and this Halumpimu hardly makes an appearance

<sup>10</sup> Another reference to the formula is in M.11072, Durand [CEO8] 1995: 441. Interestingly, it is not attached to a royal figure!, “I have written to my lord, ‘Ever since Yakbar-Lim has taken his throne (*ana* <sup>Ḫ</sup><sub>GU.ZA-šu</sub> *irub*), this man does not harbor goodwill toward me’.”

<sup>11</sup> The formula *ana bit abišu irub* occurs at Leilan in an *inūma* clause (Vincente [1991] #63 [L 87-761]; see p. 184), “A half mina of silver, delivery of [x], from Yatti[m<sup>2</sup>], when Lawila-Addu, from Shuppa, came to power.”

in the Mari records even when he must have been an exact contemporary of Zimri-Lim and Shamshi-Addu.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Akkadian word for a vow-containing appeal, *ikribum*, does not occur in Ea-Malik's letter, we find in lines 4 and 9 two iterative forms of a cognate verb *karābum* encasing Mutiya's pledge. In choosing iteratives, Ea-Malik intimates that Mutiya has had to repeat his pledge many times before the goddess was convinced of his sincerity. But by using these forms, Ea-Malik may also be justifying how knowledge of the vow reached him: Mutiya repeated his pledge, probably as the goddess was making her rounds. If so, it must have occurred within hearing of a priesthood which, as observed above, was beholden to Ea-malik.<sup>13</sup>

The vow itself turns out to be direct and fairly standard. As expected, the condition (protasis) of lines 6-7, "If I were to ascend my throne" (*šumma ana kussiya ēterub*), includes a verb in the perfect. However, the promise (apodosis) in lines 7 to 8, "I shall donate silver and gold, silver and gold cups, and skillful maids to Bēlet-Nagar, my Lady!," which is unexceptionally controlled by a precative, has a rather curious content: it is specific in pledging silver, gold, precious vessels, and pretty maidens; yet it fails to set limits on the amount to deliver. This comment requires a brief excursus.

A painstaking, though probably not complete, review of pre-Roman near eastern vows (but not oaths) allows me to distinguish between those

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<sup>12</sup> The information comes from the inscription of a cylinder seal cited in Vincente (1991) 8: "Mutu-Abikh, son of Halupimu, beloved of Addu and of the Bēlet-Apim."

A Mutu-Abikh is mentioned in ARM 5: 2 (collated by Durand [1987] 212) as a brother of a ruler who joined a coalition that threatened Mari, then governed by Yas-makh-Addu. We learn practically nothing about Mutu-Abikh's background, whether or not we equate the two references. As to his father Halupimu, most of the names from Mari documents that are of similar coinage, belong to menials. Moreover, none of the kings of Shekhna and the land of Apum known to us from the Mari texts had a name that is anything like it. Although warned not to make too much from the absence of evidence, we may nevertheless be justified to assume that Mutiya was not to the manor born. Rather, like many leaders in the Khabur region of the Mari age, he rose to the throne on the corpses of previous holders.

<sup>13</sup> This observation is consistent with the fact that in the ancient Near East, vows were most often formulated in proximity of a deity; Cartledge (1991) 134.

that were originally composed in first person mode (singular or plural) and those that were attributed to petitioners even when the vow they utter is quoted as if delivered in first person mode. The first category includes many formulaic and rhetorical sentiments that easily transport from one psalm, one petitionary prayer, to another.<sup>14</sup> Once such declarations are set aside, there remains in this category a few votive expressions that are carved on monuments and (letter-)prayers crafted under extraordinary circumstances. In such formulations, pledges, even when modest in amount, tend to be itemized and are often tailored to suit the occasion.<sup>15</sup> Two examples will suffice: If Nintinugga would restore Inannakam to full health, Inannakam would serve the goddess forever; if Lelwanis revitalizes her husband Khattushili III, Pudu-Khepa, queen of the Hittites, would donate a life-size statue of the king in silver and gold.<sup>16</sup>

Vows that are attributed to petitioners, however, are almost uniformly set in literary texts or in texts that partake of literary. To this second category belongs the handful of vows embedded in biblical narratives and, for that matter, in classical literature, although I do not report on them here. What makes these vows differ from those of the preceding category is not that they diverge in vocabulary or structure—in fact, there is much that they do share—but that the discharge or neglect of a vow itself becomes a plot element for new moves in a larger narrative. This is obvious when Jacob vows allegiance to the god who would protect his sojourn in Aram Naharaim (Genesis 28: 20-22), when Jephtha makes an unnecessary and seemingly irrevocable pledge (Judges 11: 30-40), when Hannah promises her son

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<sup>14</sup> On the issues, see Cartledge (1991) 150-61.

<sup>15</sup> Compare with the many Roman inscriptions with the formulaic VSLM (*votum solvit libens merito*, “he gladly and duly paid his vow.”)

<sup>16</sup> For bibliography, see Cartledge (1991) 75, 105-7. Pudu-Khepa has left us many vows, some of which are cited in texts translated in Goetze (1969). Whether they are culled from dreams and whether they follow Kizzuwatna practices are not of immediate concern here. Fuller studies are in Otten (1975) and Otten and Souček (1965). See also de Roos (1987).

Beckman (1996) 12 reports the presence of an as yet unpublished “vow” among documents from Emar.

to God (1 Samuel 1: 11), and when Absalom invokes a vow as reason for setting off for Hebron (2 Samuel 15: 7-8).<sup>17</sup>

Plot design, however, is not at stake when, to quote Numbers 21: 1-3, "Israel made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If you deliver [the Canaanites of Arad] into our hand, we will proscribe their towns'." Beyond providing us with one of two etymologies for the place name Hormah (see also Judges 1: 17), this particular episode hardly advances the story line, which remains jagged and episodic in these chapters. Rather, the incident becomes emblematic and foretelling of what could be achieved when the Hebrews, acting as the corporate unit "Israel," commit themselves to God and thereby earn his favor. In this sense, it matches the moralistic and pedagogic goals of Ea-Malik's letter. Not surprisingly, the two share a directness in framing the protasis (condition). It might be said also that both contain rather "generic" formulations in the apodosis (promise) for, its generosity notwithstanding, Mutiya's pledge nevertheless lacks the enumerative realism or contextual particularism that we find, for example, in the many vows of Pudu-Khepa's. Whether we should ascribe this stereotyping to Mutiya himself or to Ea-Malik's willful reshaping of the original pledge cannot be easily solved; but the linkage among Mutiya, the neglect of his vow, and an implied sordid fate, will permit me to revisit one of the more famous extra-biblical vows that archeologists have recovered from the ancient Near East.

Ugarit was a great Mediterranean seaport, lying right across the sea from Cyprus's jutting accusing finger. Until its destruction around 1200 B.C.E., Ugarit hosted an international community of merchants. Its bards used alphabetic cuneiform to write a number of imaginative poems in a language closer to Hebrew than to any of the other living semitic languages. One of them features King Keret who, when his story opens, is bereft of family and therefore of hope for the future. The god El instructs him on

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<sup>17</sup> Classical texts are also full of narratives in which vows and their (non-)fulfillment were featured in narrative. Spectacular is the devotion of Publius Decius Meus who, in 340 B.C.E., paid the ultimate sacrifice as consequence of a vow (Livy 8.9.9). A similar story is told about his son, of the same name (Livy 10.28). For a fine introduction to the topic, see the fourth chapter of Hickson (1993).



mounting a military expedition to another kingdom from which to secure the bride with whom he will rebuild his dynasty. But on his way there, Keret meets Asherah as she makes her rounds and he delivers before her a most gratuitous pledge: “If I take Hurraya into my home, bring the maid into my court,” he promises her, “I will give her double in silver, her triple in gold.” A memory slip, a forgotten vow, almost brings Keret and his dynasty to a precarious end.

Over 20 years ago, Michael Astour examined the personal, place and ethnic names that are mentioned in the Keret Epic (*hbr, udm, šrm, šdyn, dtn, and ilhu*). He found parallels for them not in the documents of Late Bronze Age Ugarit, but in the Middle Bronze archives of Mari, especially those concerned with Northern Mesopotamia. He therefore proposed that, whatever modern scholars may think of the story’s historical roots, the poets of Ugarit themselves set their tale in the Khabur triangle rather than nearer the Mediterranean coastline.<sup>18</sup> Working in 1972, Astour could cite well-known Mari texts that demonstrated strong ties between Mari, Halab and Ugarit. But now, thanks to the Leilan archives, which had not been excavated when Astour wrote, we have come to realize how tight were these bonds; for these archives show that during the century-and-a-half interval between the collapse of Mari and the Hittite raid on Babylon (that is between 1760 and 1600 B.C.E.) Halab dominated the politics, if not also the intellectual life, of a vast area, from the Mediterranean coast to the Upper Khabur valley. Even more relevant is the recovery of the moral or ethical temper of the Middle Bronze Age, delivered to us in letters exchanged among the leaders of the time. Thus, from these letters,

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<sup>18</sup> Astour (1993). In that study, Astour also directed our attention to lines 197-99 [=KTU 1.14 IV.34-36] of Keret which tell us how Keret delivered his vow: *ym[gy.] lqdš at[r]t[.]šrm wilit šd[y]nm*. Because of the preposition *l* attached to *qdš*, Astour did not agree with the usual translations that would have Keret reach a shrine of Asherah before making his pledge. Rather, he proposed that *lqdš at[r]t* was but another way of saying *lilt* and suggested a parallelism between “her holiness Asherah,” and “goddess.” Keret uttered his fateful vow, therefore, when Asherah met him as he made his way to Udm. At most, recent translations simply footnote Astour’s suggestion; but in light of the letters I have cited above, with their information about access to peripatetic divinities, I think that Astour is surely correct here.

- we read about a king who openly admits that arrogance and repudiation of solemn oaths led to his own father’s early demise;<sup>19</sup>
- we recover a prophet’s admonition that God prefers the love of justice over the fulfillment of pious deeds;<sup>20</sup>
- we follow inspiring anecdotes about the miserable fate awaiting evildoers;<sup>21</sup>
- we are made privy to a nomadic chieftain’s meditations on the futility of war and the allure of peace.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The quotation is from A.4251, a text from which fragments have been cited in the literature. I have pieced it together from the following: [α] lines 3-23 (Durand [1993] 55); [β] lines 25-29 [*ibid.*, 60n93]; [γ] lines 36-46 (*sub* Sasson [1985] 254. Darish-Libur writes Zimri-Lim,

[α] I have heard the tablet meant for Yarim-Lim that my lord sent me. I gave precise account of what my lord’s position, as was written on the tablet, before Yarim-Lim and Aplakhandu [of Carkemish]. My lord should listen ... to his reactions. Once I gave Yarim-Lim a detailed account, he answered me,

Zimri-Lim has ousted his enemy, but now his requests are hard. Sumu-Epukh, my father, respected Shamshi-Addu but reached [his goals?]. [But when he came close] to the kingdom that Addu had given Shamshi-Addu, Sumu-Epukh, my father, did not live until old age: because [he attacked] the land that Addu had given Shamshi-Addu, Addu killed him. Until now, Addu has had no cause to be angry with me... .

[β] Zimri-Lim has forgotten the matter of Addu (*tēm* ʿlm, Durand: “la volonté d’Addu”). It is evident that in Addu’s territory, escapees must not be handed over (to anyone). Does Zimri-Lim not know (this)?...

[γ] Had these men been in my land and I denied them to Zimri-Lim, Zimri-Lim should be immediately resentful. From now on—be it one, two or, even ten years—should these men plan to enter my land and my kingdom, I shall bind them and have them brought to Zimri-Lim. Should I not fulfill this promise to Zimri-Lim, may Addu of Halab bring Yarim-Lim to account.

<sup>20</sup> For discussion (and previous bibliography), see Sasson (1994) 314-16.

<sup>21</sup> See my forthcoming comments to A.350+A.616, in which are reported three versions of the death of Susu (Zuzu), king of Apum. The original text is published in Durand (1992).

<sup>22</sup> The following passage (ARM 26: 39: 32-42) is extracted from a letter Nakhimum, an Ubrabu leader, sent to Asqudum, one of the king’s closest advisors,

Is it normal/just, that all of you have set your mind to make trouble? that upon news of peace you plan to despoil your colleagues, (thinking) “Peace is distant,

Of course, I cannot claim that Mutiya's egregious lapse directly influenced what was told about Keret. I could, however, suggest that these two accounts of misbegotten vows, one embedded in an epic and the other conveyed in a letter, are exploiting two themes that readily combine in popular belief: the first develops from the commonplace that achievers too often neglect benefactors who had once boosted their rise; the second depends on the conventional crediting to wrathful gods any exceptional or precipitous collapse of power. To the pious, therefore, neglected vows give fine opportunity not only to reflect on the fall of the mighty, but also to delve into some of the less mysterious facets of theodicy.

Still, Ea-Malik's letter notwithstanding, we do not know what really happened to Mutiya. That he ruled but briefly there is no doubt, given the time brackets we have for him: a couple of years on either side of 1750, just when in Babylon Samsu-iluna was succeeding his father Hammurabi. That in his days, Mutiya was a significant, albeit regional, power-player is also beyond doubt thanks to the letters Eidem has cited in diverse publications, but especially in light of the administrative archives C. Vincente published in a Yale Dissertation (Vincente [1991]). Although datable to the better portion of just one eponymal year, these archives tell how Mutiya and Ashtamar-Addu [II] of Kurda formed an alliance to attack Khazip-Teshub of Razama and Buriya of Andarig. Naturally the victims counter-attacked, and they had success because Hammurabi of Halab dispatched *ḥabbātū*-mercenaries to their aid. Mutiya eventually sued for a separate peace with

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and we must constantly be concerned about war." Don't you know that when disturbances break out, they will never go away, and the future becomes worse than the past? Indeed, because of these conditions, will the bad—never the good—not triumph?

Mari documents occasionally deliver gnomic statements. I cite only two rather pungent examples. In ARM 26: 392: 45-48, Hammurabi of Babylon is quoted to say, "If a house has solid foundations while its upper storey has collapsed [...] of the house [...] remains solid. But if its foundations have collapsed, even when its upper storey is solid there is nothing its builder can do: it will fall." In ARM 26: 171: 14-15, tribal leaders embed the following rhetorical verity, "Does a man who dies of thirst come back to life when thrown in a river? Once (the gods) set up his score card, a dead man can never come back to life."

each of his adversaries, a solution brokered by Ben-Dammu, Hammurabi of Halab's own marshall. So much for what we more or less know.

The documents do not tell us how the change on the throne of Shekhna took place. But for the Ea-Malik lesson to work, Mutiya could not have ended his reign normally. Of course, he could have been unseated by Til-Abnu, who until then had been in charge of a minor locale in the region, and it would not have been the first time in those brutal days that such "not-so-musical chairs" were being played. If that is what happened, I fail to see the logic in Ea-Malik rehearsing Mutiya's fall to someone in a better position to know it. I rather think, therefore, that Mutiya died suddenly and unexpectedly, perhaps from a stroke or a heart attack, and the rumor mills quickly gave his inconstancy toward the goddess as reason for his fate.

What about Til-Abnu? Did he learn anything from Ea-Malik's letter? Did he load the priest up with gifts for Bēlet-Nagar? I have no answers here either; but I rather doubt it, for Til-Abnu's successor to the throne of Shekhna was his own brother, Yakun-Ashar and the transition seems to have been peaceful. Yet, Yakun-Ashar ruled that city but briefly. Within a couple of years of Yakun-Ashar's own rise to power, Samsu-Iluna of Babylon raided Shekhna and forced it into his own empire. Afterwards, we never hear anything more of either of Dari-Epukh's two sons. The moral to draw should be evident to any scholar, such as Michael C. Astour, whose command of near eastern lore includes that in biblical literature: As is told in Exodus 34: 7, some gods may skip a generation or two before exacting their full revenge.

TABLE 1: Tell Leilan L87-1317

obv.	[a]-na ti-la-ab-nu-ú qí-bi-ma um-ma <sup>d</sup> é-a-ma-lik-ma pa-na-nu-um <sup>1</sup> mu-ti-ia la-ma a-na <sup>g</sup> išgu-za-šu i-ir-ru-bu ki-a-am ik-ta-ar-ra-ab
5	um-ma šu-ma šum-ma a-na <sup>g</sup> išgu-za-ia e-te-ru-ub kù-babbar kù-gi ka-sa-at kù-babbar ka-sa-at kù-gi ù mí-tur-meš it-p[u-ša-tim] a-na <sup>d</sup> nin-na-ga-ar be-el-ti-ia l[u-ud-di-in] an-ni-tam ik-ta-ar-ra-ab
10	ki-ma lú šu-ú a-na <sup>g</sup> išgu-za-šu i-ru-b[u] da-ḥa-at <sup>d</sup> il-tim ú-ul i-ša-al ù pa-an <sup>d</sup> il-tim a-ma-ru-um-ma ú-ul i-mu-ur
l.e.	i-na-an-na ka-ta <sup>d</sup> i[l]/-t[um]
15	[i]-na ú-ba-nim il-pu-ut-ma
rev.	a-na <sup>g</sup> išgu-za é a-bi-ka te-ru-ub iš-tu u <sub>4</sub> -mi-im an-ni-im a-na u <sub>4</sub> -14-kam <sup>d</sup> il-tum iš-tu é-ša uš-še-em-ma pu-ul-lu-uk-ka-tum iš-ša-ak-ka-na
20	ù pa-an <sup>d</sup> il-tim a-na uru a-la-a <sup>ki</sup> iš-ša-ak-ka-na ḥi-še-eḥ-ti <sup>d</sup> i[l]-tim i-di-in la ta-ka-al-la as-sú-ur-ri te-qí-tam ta-ra-[aš-ši] um-ma-a-mi ša-bu-um ú-ba-az-z[i]/-ḥa-an-né-t[i]
25	šu-ul-pu-ta-nu an-ni-tam la ta-[qa-ab]-bi i-na ša i-ba-aš-šu-ma <sup>d</sup> il-tam šu-ul-li-im-ma <sup>d</sup> il-tum ši-i li-ba-al-li-iṭ-ka
u.e.	a-nu-um-ma lú ša-an-ga
30	[š]a <sup>d</sup> nin-na-ga-ar be-el-ti-ka
l.e.	[a]ṭ-ṭar-da-ak-kum an-ni-tam la an-ni-tam [ṭ]e <sub>4</sub> -em-ka ga-am-ra-am šu-uk-na-aš-šu-ma ṭúr-da-aš-šu

## TRANSLATION

In the past, before he could ascend his throne, Mutiya kept on making the following vow, "If I were to ascend my throne, I shall donate silver, gold, cups of silver, cups of gold, and skillful maids to Bēlet-Nagar, my Lady!" This is what he kept on vowing. (Yet) when this man did ascend his throne, he totally ignored the goddess and did not even visit her once!

Now it is you whom the goddess has touched with her finger, and you have ascended the throne of your father's house. Within 14 days, the goddess plans to leave her temple so that boundary markers could be set in place. (*They should be set as the goddess heads to Alā.*) You must grant, and not withhold, whatever is the need of the goddess. You may wish to offer an excuse such as, "Troops are badgering us!" or "We are destitute!" But you must not think it! Satisfy the goddess with what is at your disposal, and this goddess will keep you healthy.

Now then, I am (also) sending to you the priest of Bēlet-Nagar, your lady. Send him back to me after you have advised him of your full intent, whatever it is.

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