

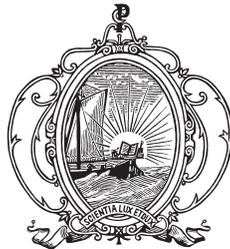
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THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST,
A LIFE!

Festschrift Karel Van Lerberghe

edited by

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‘NOTHING SO SWIFT AS CALUMNY’:
SLANDER AND JUSTIFICATION AT THE MARI COURT

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*Slander boldly, something always sticks¹
The eyes of the slanderer always move around as shiftily as a spindle.²*

Karel will surely know that the title of this paper comes from Cicero, who goes on to say, “Nothing is so swift as *maledictum*; nothing is more easily uttered; nothing more readily received; nothing more widely dispersed”.³ *Maledictum* is calumny. At its lightest it can be a taunt, an insult, meant to belittle; but as it takes on wings and achieves permanence, it slanders and defames. In English there is a large repertoire for this category of words, including defamation, calumny, libel, smear, slur, vilification, maligning, and disparagement. Each term has its own range of meanings, affected by whether it is oral or written, literary or legal. Intent also matters in differentiating between the propagation of malicious untruth and the dissemination of mischievous gossip.

No ancient or modern culture actively advocates defaming and slandering, even if, perniciously enough, the goddess Inanna was said entitled to dispense them.⁴ Rather, in ancient records we have repeated remonstrance against practicing it, most often in Wisdom literature, but also in narratives, legal lore, royal edicts, prayers, and penitential or graveyard

¹ “*Audacter calumniare, semper aliquid haeret*”; Francis Bacon, *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* (1623), VIII/2. The French proverb, “Calomnions, calomnions, il en restera toujours quelque chose” is often wrongly assigned to a scene in Beaumarchais’s *Barbier de Seville*.

² The instructions of Šuruppag (c.5.6.1: 65); accessed on January 12, 2012, at <http://tinyurl.com/8a5358r>.

³ “*Nihil est autem tam voluere, quam maledictum; nihil facilius emittitur; nihil citius excipitur, latius dissipatur*”; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Oratio Pro Cnoeo Plancio* (XXIII). The apothegm is widely cited in compilations of quotations and online.

⁴ A hymn to Inana (Inana C): c.4.07.3, “To bestow the divine and royal rites, to carry out the appropriate instructions, slander, untruthful words, abuse, to speak inimically and to overstate are yours, Inana”; accessed on June 15, 2011, at <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4073.htm>.

confessions.⁵ There is also advice not to leave it unchallenged, as well as prayers petitioning for the death of slanderers. One Neo-Assyrian parent, obviously fearing ridicule, names a child Nabu-karšīya-ubāš, “May Nabu shame my slanderer’ (ADD 912 I 3). Something similar may be behind the circumstances that earned a name for the patriarch Isaac (Gen 21:6-7).⁶

If we stay with Mesopotamia, we may notice that its documents provide us with an impressive vocabulary for this sort of tort. The evidence cuts across epochs and dialects, for scorn, slander, mortification, justification, and retaliations are impulses that are much too human to confine to any single period. But they are revealed thicker and juicier when they come from palace archives, especially when time restricted as are those from Mari on the Euphrates. There, many individuals, from kings to lowly administrators, are featured across a number of documents, allowing us a fuller portrayal of personalities and events as well as a rare entry into the emotional state of individuals four millennia removed from us.

In the Mari records, the vocabulary for scorn and slander includes a number of derivatives of *ṭapālum* (*ṭapultum*; *ṭuppulum*, *muṭappiltum*)

⁵ Lore on slander is nicely attested in ancient Near Eastern literature. Sumerian wisdom (Šuruppag and Proverb collections) alerts against slanderers and exposure to potential slander; compiled at <http://tinyurl.com/7ojkqhh>. We are told that slander finds its way in the holiest places (B. Alster, cited from Hallo and Younger 1997, 564). The same can be said about Akkadian literature. The “Righteous Sufferer” (*ludlul bēl nēmeqī*), finding conspiracy everywhere even in heaven, defends himself against courtiers out to demean him, (B. Foster, cited from Hallo and Younger 1997, 487). In the collections of fables, it is told that “in the presence of a ruler, the maligner (*šaḥṣaḥū*) speaks hostility, spins cleverly, and avows libel” (Lambert 1960, 218 iv:11-12). In a hymn to Ninurta (Lambert 1960, 119), slanderers are set between adulterers and abusers of the poor.

The vice is fairly represented in Egyptian literature. It is featured categorically among the negative confessions in the *Book of the Dead* (R. Ritner, cited from Hallo and Younger 2000, 60); but denial is normally limited to specific targets, such as when a courtier of Osorkon II claims, “I never slandered anyone to the captain of the land” (B. Porten, cited from Hallo and Younger 2000, 189-190 n. 8.) In his Testament, the Hittite king Ḫattusilis I repeatedly denounces slander and gossip-mongering (G. Beckman, cited from Hallo and Younger 2000, 79-81).

In Hebraic lore, slander (*rēkīlūt*, among other terms) is attributed to the dullard (Prov 10:18). The offense is set within other immoral acts (Lev 19:16) and is condemned by the prophets (Jer 6:28, 9:3, Ezek 22:9) as well as by sages (Prov 11:13, 20:19, Ps 34:4). The Aramaic Carpentras stela praises a woman for not uttering disparaging words against anyone (Porten, cited from Hallo and Younger 2000, 189). The idiom used there, *kršn ’mr*, seems to be a calque of Akkadian *karšam akālum*, on which see below. See also Dan 3:8, 6:25.

⁶ The playful Hebrew is often translated coyly. More likely the aged Sarah is saying, “The Lord has made laughter on me. Anyone hearing about it will laugh at me”.

and *nuggurum*, verbs that have to do with insulting an individual.⁷ We have the nouns *pištum*, “insult” and *erratum*, a “curse”. When used in tandem (as in Gilgamesh, SB vi: 73, 85f) they express a slander that sticks. We frequently meet with *lā šāti lla šināti* (CAD Š/3, 40), literally, “not this/these”, a phrase trimmed from a fuller expression that applies to pronouncements so vile as to be unworthy of repetition (Durand 1998, 452; note g. to # 704). But most often we meet with the noun *karšum*, something “pinched or broken off” (*karāšum*). With the verb *akālum*, “to eat or partake”, *karšum* creates an idiom (*karšam akālum*) that approximate our notion of “slandering” and “defaming”. (Admittedly, it is difficult to account how “eating something that is pinched off” could become “to slander”.) As occurs often in Semitics, however, the phrase easily shades its meanings, and it applies also to scorning or ridiculing. In this paper, I group relevant attestations anecdotally rather than exhaustively under the rubrics: **Gifts, Kinship, Rivalry, Loyalty, and Envy.**

Gifts

The exchange of gifts among rulers, their families and administrators is a fairly attractive entry to our topic. In those days, the shuttle of gifts was regulated and formalized. The thought behind a gift mattered much less than a prompt and commensurate response. Gift-giving was a highly staged function, in which diplomats delivered presents worthy of their senders and returned with gifts worthy of their receivers, with some of them meant for themselves to keep. The value of such gifts is calculated by its contents in precious objects rather than by any artistic merit. Heaven forbid should the barter prove to be unequal: Too little would mean scorn;

⁷ Note the contrast between *muštāltum* (“thoughtful”) and *muṭappiltum* (“contemptuous”) in ARM 26 380: 9-10, said of words attributed to Zimri-Addu and Ibal-pi-El; see CAD T, 48 and below. The noun *ṭapultum* occurs several times (see CAD T, 50), none as dramatic as when a daughter of Zimri-Lim was said to wield it against her father (ARM 26 312; see below). The fear is that an overlord may give credence to slander, as expressed by Arriyuk (ARM 28 155:10), “Look here, I have been slandered many [text: five] times before my lord. My father believes even when without confirmation (5-šu ṭaplātiya maḥar abiya iškunūma abī išemme u šutakūnum ul ibašši)”. Ibal-Addu of Ašlakka openly worries that his own suzerain may be spreading the slander (ARM 28 60:37-38), “In the future, my lord must not spread rumor about me (*ana urram šeram bēli ṭapultī la iqabbi*)”. The idiom must not be confused with *awātum lā damiqtum* (hostile words) as in, e.g., LAPO 16 297 (M. 6060):21’; text published by Durand 1991, 50-53.

too much might open a bidding war that can bankrupt. A well-known document will illustrate my observations.

When the great Samsi-Addu of Šubat-Enlil arranged for his son ruling Mari to wed the daughter of Išḫi-Addu of Qatna, he sought to unite two great “Houses”. Shortly afterwards, another of his sons, Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum, requested two horses from Qatna.⁸ Special breeds of horses were still a rarity, then, fetching about five pounds of silver each. Imagine the shock of Išḫi-Addu when he received just twenty pounds of tin in return. Worth just about two pounds of silver, the yield was one fifth of Išḫi-Addu’s investment.⁹ Išḫi-Addu first met insult for insult, “How could you be a great king?” he asks. “Without doubt, when you sent this paltry amount of tin, you had no desire to have honorable discourse with me”.

The offense was personal; but with ambassadors floating in and out of capitals, its sting will be carried far and wide. “What will anyone hearing this think?” continues Išḫi-Addu, “Will he not disdain us (*ul iṭappalannēti*)?” Išḫi-Addu might have inflated the worth of his beasts; but he felt blameless. “Had you sent me nothing, at all” he lectures, “I would have kept quiet”. My notion is that Išme-Dagan did not have the wherewithal to respond in kind; yet he added injury to insult by making exactly the wrong move. However, the state of Išme-Dagan’s treasury could not be of concern to Išḫi-Addu: You simply must not run with the pack unless you can maintain full wind. In fact, one of the saddest episodes in the Mari archives has a king (Ibal-Addu of Ašlakka, ARM 28 49) begging his suzerain (Zimri-Lim) to stop offering him presents because shame — and likely also dethronement — await his

⁸ Letter King Išḫi-Addu of Qatna to the brother of his son-in-law, then ruling in Mari (ARM 5 20 = Durand LAPO 16 256):

This matter ought not be discussed; yet I must say it now and vent my feelings. You are the great king. When you placed a request with me for two horses, I indeed had them conveyed to you. But you, you sent me (just) twenty pounds of tin. Without doubt, when you sent this paltry amount of tin, you had no desire to have honorable discourse with me. Had you planned sending nothing at all — By the god of my father! — I would be angry! Among us in Qatna, the value of such horses is six hundred shekels [= ten pounds] of silver. But you sent me just twenty pounds of tin! What would anyone hearing this say? Would he not mock us?

This house is your house. What is lacking in your house that a brother cannot fulfill the need of his equal? Had you not planned to send me any tin, I should not have been in the least upset over it. Are you not the great king? Why have you done this? This house is your house!

⁹ For the value of tin, which fluctuated according to relationship with Elam, see most recently Lacambre 2003; Joannès 1993, 99-100.

inability to respond in kind. Even messengers, he whines, are dismissing his gifts as too paltry for honorable acceptance. What is curious about the horse and tin correspondence, too, is that Išḫi-Addu's letter never reached its destination, as it was found in Mari. We can only guess on how well Išḫi-Addu endured the salt of an unanswered letter on an oozing wound.

This anecdote exposes the sensibility that prevailed in Old Babylonian palaces: the world was all ears and eyes, waiting for someone to be slighted, the better to relish the disgrace. A princess sent to Sippar as a *nadītu* is traumatized when her step-mother returns her gift?¹⁰ A diplomat cannot endure the humiliation of not receiving the proper garment when visiting a foreign court.¹¹ We know of a sad sack (Yašub-El) who felt maligned by a superior (Sin-tiri, a general). His fear is that calumny would stick (verb: *maḥārum*) leading to a loss of face and a loss of

¹⁰ Erišti-Aya, daughter of Zimri-Lim, writes ARM 10 43 = LAPO 18 1202 to her "mother" the queen. She is a *nadītu* in Sippar and feels deeply wounded, "Why did you not wear my garment but returned it, thus heaping on me insult (*pištum*) and injury (*erretum*)?" The paired words also occur in a famous Gilgamesh pun (at VI:73) about eating bread of insult (*pišātu*) and injury (*errētu*).

¹¹ Feeling insulted and slightest for not getting proper clothing is fairly well represented in the archives. The affront is made personal when the dispatch is done via improper channels. Ibbi-Ilabrat, who writes fawningly to Samsi-Addu in Šubat-Enlil (FM 9 35), is less respectful when addressing Yasmaḥ-Addu (FM 9 33 = ARM 5 76 = LAPO 16 10). He lectures him on for keeping two music specialists when his father has none and then demands worthy garments.

A whole nation may feel insulted when its diplomats are humiliated in foreign courts. A sharp example is in a letter La'um writes to Zimri-Lim (ARM 2 76 = LAPO 16 404). A "scribe of Amurru" (dub.sar mar.tu; ARM 27 151:9-10), and once a governor at Qattunan (FM 2 55-61), La'um headed a diplomatic mission to Babylon during ZL9'. There, he experienced the following (ARM 2 76 = LAPO 16 404):

We entered to take a meal in Hammurabi's presence, having come into the Palace Court. Just the three of us — Zimri-Addu, I, and Yarim-Addu — were outfitted with garments, but members of the Yamḥad (delegation) that entered with us were all outfitted. As all the Yamḥadians were outfitted, but they did not outfit my lord's servants, the attachés (*ša sikkim*), I told Sin-bēl-aplim (Hammurabi's chief-of-staff) on their behalf, "why do you discriminate among us, as if we were the brood of a sow? Whose servants are we? And whose servants are these attachés? We are the servants of [a leading king], so why would you make right and left hostile (to each other)?" This is what I stressed to Sin-bēl-aplim.

While I was arguing with Sin-bēl-aplim, my lord's servants, the attachés, got angry and stormed out of the Palace Court. Hammurabi was told of the matter and subsequently, (the attachés) were outfitted. Once they were outfitted, Ṭāb-eli-mētim and Sin-bēl-aplim [summoned me] and told me (what) Hammurabi said, "Since early morning, you ceaselessly launch provocative words toward me. Do you imagine now that you can dictate to my palace about garment (distribution)? Who pleases me, I outfit; who does not, I don't. I won't come back (on this): I will not outfit (mere) messengers at banquets!" This is what Hammurabi told me; my lord should know this.

favor (*ina libbim šūšûm*). He took his case before Samsi-Addu himself (ARM 5 75 = LAPO 16 18), and while he found justification (ARM I 47 = LAPO 16 19), he nevertheless had to leave his post in Harran.¹²

Kinship

In addressing the boorish Išme-Dagan as his “brother”, Išḫi-Addu was certainly not trying to mollify him. In our period, kinship contributed key metaphors for diplomacy. Kings are brothers to equals, fathers to vassals, and sons to suzerains. Slipping down the rung any further and they become “servants” (Lafont 2001, 232-238). Usurpers marry the daughters of suzerains, and thus become sons no less than sons-in-law. “The seat of the father” they claim to occupy, therefore, could be that of a sponsor as often as that of flesh and blood. It is all in the family, and we can chart the political fortunes of some rulers by the labels they use when corresponding with their contemporaries. Thus, two decades after insulting Išḫi-Addu with his paltry gifts, we find an Išme-Dagan so weakened that he is forced to address as “father” a ruler he once called his “servant” (compare ARM 26 384:53’-54’; ARM 2 119 = LAPO 16 351). In contrast, when Zimri-Lim of Mari moved up the influence ladder, Hammurabi of Babylon came to be his “brother” rather than “father”. On the other hand, Hammurabi of Yamḥad addressed his father’s vassal as “father”; but only temporarily, when he succeeded to the throne. From then on, they were “brothers” to each other. The protocol was highly formalized, with harsh retaliation for infraction; for in a world in which thrones are gained by a shrewd selection of sponsor, they can also be lost by impetuously inflating one’s status. So when a king of Kurda dares to call Zimri-Lim “brother” rather than “father”, the affront could not be left unanswered (Lafont 1994).

Diplomats too had to be sensitive to this finely calibrated protocol. Because they represented kings, diplomats share in the gift-giving and, presumably, the gift-returning, thus becoming wealthier than many local rulers. Before he was eventually proved venal, Sammetar, a *šukkallum* (a counselor) of Zimri-Lim, was highly favored. We have this delicious letter from him begging his lord to take away the palanquin he gave him because all but two kings he was visiting (those of Kurda and Razama) had to make do by travelling on chariots; some, even second quality

¹² On this episode, see Villard 1991, 83-84. Yašub-El found employment in Tuttul, Villard 1991, 87 and 89.

chariots at that. “Now I fear”, he writes, “that were I to ride a palanquin, and these kings see (it), they will make a big fuss, saying, ‘(Is he) like us?’”¹³ Sammetar is being modest; he knows he is better than these kinglets; in fact, one convention in the Mari age is that diplomats are but avatars for their kings and so must be treated as representing him bodily.¹⁴ Still, it would not help his mission if blue blood watched him ambulating on the backs of slaves. In fact, it was dangerous. A diplomat (Yaduratum) was reported killed, together with his porters (ARM 26 512), no doubt for parading with *chutzpah*.

Rivalry

In a palace setting, thin skin was the disease of courtiers. It should not surprise us, therefore, that hardly any of its elite were immune from its ravages. Jean-Marie Durand may be right that scandalmongering was practiced by the state as a stimulus for information.¹⁵ I rather think of it, however, as an investment against uncertainty, especially when bureaucrats forced to work together (say a provincial governor and a palace majordomo) reached their posts by different nominating processes, and so held divided allegiances; see Charpin 2010, 51 §1.

Officials and vassals write to seek assurance that the slander has not deceived the king (ARM 2 66 = LAPO 18 1251).¹⁶ They may write

¹³ A.868 cited from Arkhipov 2010. Sammetar writes Zimri-Lim,

About the palanquin that my lord sent me; this palanquin has reached me. My lord has certainly granted me great prestige; the whole land has heard (about it). Yet my lord knows that that the kings of this land where I am about to go — aside from Buna-Ištar (of Kurda) and Šarraya (of Razama) who use a palanquin — they all ride a quality chariot. There are some who even ride an ordinary chariot.

Now I fear that were I to ride a palanquin, and these kings see (it), they will make a big fuss saying, “(Is he) like us? — yet he sent his servant here by having him ride a palanquin!” They will make a big fuss here. Now if it suits my lord, since all the messengers no less than the whole land, have seen this palanquin, I plan to set the palanquin either in Qattunan or Saggartum. If otherwise, my lord should write me whatever he wishes done.

On Sammetar, see van Koppen (2002). For more on palanquins and their constructions, see Arkhipov 2012, 147-149 and 2009.

¹⁴ On this point, Charpin (2008, 161) cites a text in which the king of Aleppo expects his envoys to be treated as his clones (*kīma pagriya*) and so must not kowtow to Zimri-Lim.

¹⁵ Durand 2010a, 656, “La ‘calomnie’ (mais peut-être vaudrait-il mieux parler de ‘médiance’, puisqu’elle doit s’en tenir au ‘vrai’) est un trait fondamental de la société amorrite, encouragé par l’État et l’on pourrait parler de ‘l’art de la délation comme pratique de gouvernement’”.

¹⁶ Nighatum writes to Zimri-Lim, her ‘brother’, “I know that you are angry with me. Yatarum has slandered me and you have heeded his words. I have therefore discussed it

protectively, anticipating the slurs that will soon reach the king.¹⁷ If desperate, they might offer bribes to the king's private secretary to rid themselves of a tormentor (ARM 27 36). Habitually, they expect to be slandered by people under their command.¹⁸ So when they write, they expose souls on fire. Kibri-Dagan, governor of Terqa, reports on a crude exposition by a tribal chieftain (Şura-ḥammu, a Yaminite) before confessing, "I was ready either to *truss* this man or to pitch him into a ditch. But respect for my lord made me resist touching this man or answer him crudely (*awātum masiktum*). Just the same, this man has offended me, saying vile things to my face" (ARM 3 36 = LAPO 17 704).¹⁹

Even kings can be caught in this maelstrom. The same Yasmaḥ-Addu who did not appreciate Iṣḥi-Addu's daughter found himself unfavorably compared to Iṣme-Dagan, the older brother who had sent tin for Iṣḥi-Addu's horses. Why is he cavorting with harem women, his father had scolded, when his brother is out conquering cities? In truth, Yasmaḥ-Addu was the sensitive sort. He spoke a cultured Akkadian rather than a commoner's Amorite and had the most wonderful rapport with musicians, who happen to operate in the harems.²⁰ Naturally, Yasmaḥ-Addu

with Yawi-ila; he may or may not have reported (it) to you. Another matter; I have told my wish to Yawi-ila. In Qatna my sheep are depleted. If it is your pleasure, please assign me as many sheep as you could".

¹⁷ I draw this example from the correspondence of Yamsum, Zimri-Lim's diplomat at the court of Ḥaya-Sumu of Ilaṣūra (ARM 26 325):

Kunnaman took along Elamites but did not retain Simat-ḥuluriš. He set him up in Šehna. So the entire area was agitated. All the kings provided their own troops. When troops under my command seized two Elamite informers at the border region, I said "they must make them reach my lord". Whether foe or friend, they must be sent away.

Ḥaya-sumu sent (troops), and when they were brought back from two miles away, he told (me), "Why do you keep acting terribly against the city where I live?" I answered "soldiers on patrol seized the men. Now you can do whatever you want". I had answered him frankly; but right away he deprecated me to my lord when there is absolutely no fault my part. He told me just now, "Go, depart!" But I (said), "I can't leave until my lord writes me". This man is simply not forthright with my lord. My lord should know this. Just now, he has dispatched his troops and a general".

¹⁸ Yakun-urubam, an official in Qattunan, writes Zimri-Lim (FM 2 54), "The town and district are safe. Since the 8th of the month, my lord had charged me to work on the fortification. I began to move earth since the 10th of the month. The work-team, the job having fallen to its members, has complained. Should they slander me, I hope that my lord will not listen. [Remaining lines not clear.]"

¹⁹ See the collations and comments of Durand in his LAPO edition.

²⁰ The dossier on Yasmaḥ-Addu's attachment to music is published in Ziegler's wonderful 2007 volume. The letter that reveals this king's language limitation is A.3823, published in Ziegler and Charpin 2007, 60-62. The gist is in a quote Yasmaḥ-Addu attributes to his father, Samsi-Addu, "Within three days, I will get busy with taking the census. I will take their census and then come to my lord. My lord had written as follows, 'You will not be able

felt slandered by his palace officials, most of them reporting directly to his father who accused him of extravagance. Besieged, Yasmaḥ-Addu lashes back. To his father, he complains about defamation; to his brother, he warns against a denouncer (Abum-waqar) with an acid (*pariš* — but see CAD P, 180) and cursing tongue (ARM 5 4 = LAPO 16 20). Yasmaḥ-Addu takes his revenge on the informers by making their life miserable. He keeps some in limbo, while others (Mubalsaga) had to sustain his insults for three years running (ARM 1 61 = LAPO 16 35).²¹ For good measure, he questions their competence. By doing so, however, he risks provoking defamation against his own protégés.

We have remarkable letters from officials who got caught on opposite ends of this war of nerves.²² Yasmaḥ-Addu brings to Mari a *Kapellmeister* named Rišiya. Samsi-Addu hears about it and berates his son for appointing someone so unskilled as to result “in the death of music at Mari” (*nārūtum ina Mari uḫtalliq*). Better that another musician (FM 9 13), a native of Mari, be installed there. Smarting from a slur that originated on High, Rišiya wants to argue his competence before the great king himself. Yasmaḥ-Addu fears expansion of feuds and extracts from Rišiya this oath, (FM 9 16), “Even if they bring me out as a clown (*ana ḫup-pimma ušeššūninni*)” — he pledges — he will not reveal what he really feels”.

But, as they say, “throw enough mud and some will stick”, for we have a letter (Ziegler 2007, 17), in which (likely) the same Rišiya is forced to defend his expertise. “...My lord has written me, ‘A lion does not plow; he hinders plowmen.’” In answer, Rišiya massages the aphorism, “As for me, have I not done good work in your House? (Therefore), the person who has slandered me is indeed the plowman and the lion who hinders plowmen is me! While I have done well by your House (the slanderer) has ruined the good in your House ever since he came here. When my lord enters Mari in good health, let him test my work and that of the person slandering me; he will promptly realize the good” (ll. 22’-41’).

Tarim-šakim is another official who feels “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (*Hamlet*, 3/1) in the war between father and son.

to speak Amorite with them. You ought not to go yourself; but do send La’um, Mut-bisir and Mašum to take census of them’. Is it not enough that I plan to learn to speak Amorite? ... Within days of sending this letter of mine, I shall take the census of the nomads”.

²¹ On Mubalsaga, majordomo of Yasmaḥ-Addu’s estate in Ekallatum, see Villard 2001, 101-107.

²² The rivalry among musicians is now nicely highlighted in Ziegler 2011, 290-294.

Seeking counsel from a colleague who has not yet been tainted by slurs (Ikun-pi-Sin), Tarim-šakim confides that Yasmaḥ-Addu no longer cites himself as “your lord” when writing, so withholding from him protection and confidence. Rather, he finds himself labeled a *munaggirum*, “a snitch”. “Have I snitched on my lord Yasmaḥ-Addu?” he asks. “Have I snitched on a servant of my own class? Is this not a reprehensible accusation? You must know who is slandering me; so do please look into the matter” (ARM 5 34 = LAPO 16 21).²³ Here, we must keep in mind that in a society that depends on scribes for communication, nothing is private and palaces are echo chambers. So to have logged his misery on clay, Tarim-šakim must have been at wits’ end. In fact, we know that he gets reassigned, but also that he dies soon afterwards; I expect from wounded pride.

In those circles, we are realizing, there is much investment in exporting malice and good certainty that it will reach its goal. We should likely discriminate between the gossip that titillates the hearers and the slander that destroys careers. Of the former, we have this juicy tidbit, extracted from a diplomat’s otherwise sober reports on troop movements, “The wife of Sin-iddinam”, he writes to Zimri-Lim, “has made the following attestation, ‘Before Sin-iddinam could marry me, I agreed with father and son, so that whenever Sin-iddinam left his home, the son of Asqudum would notify me, ‘I want to have you!’ He kissed my lips and touched my vagina; but his penis did not penetrate it, for I thought, I will not sin so contemptibly against Sin-iddinam...’” (ARM 26 488:29-41).²⁴

Loyalty

We have many notices about feeling insulted and slandered, unfortunately not always with the needed details.²⁵ They tend to feature rivals, whether

²³ On Tarim-šakim see Villard 2001, 22-23. Tarim-šakim dies suddenly, who knows if not from a broken heart? The same letter also question Yasmaḥ-Addu’s judgment about another official, Sin-ili.

²⁴ On this passage, see S. Lafont 1999, 56-59, 248, 268-69, 284-86, 498-99 [text citation], and Sasson 2003, 337-338.

²⁵ Queen Šiptu feels herself slandered before her brother and had Dadi-ḥadun, a Yaminite king of Abatum and a kin of her husband, defend her. Or so he tells her (ARM 10 156 = LAPO 18 1134):

I have listened to the message you conveyed to me. I set before Hammurabi (of Yamḥad) a complete account of what you sent me and he seems satisfied. Here is more: I broached the matter by saying, “By Addu, the lord of Halab and (by) the god of your father: a year ago Ḥammi-dadum has ... as follows, saying, ‘My lord Hammurabi has written that Šiptu cares little about him.’ So I got very angry. On this matter, it is possible that she was slandered in your presence and embittered you

among vassals or within the palace, and since their clashes reach us through correspondence, they invariably involve the king, who is dragged into their wars willingly or otherwise. They couch their diatribes as tests of their loyalty; implying that slander weakens their effectiveness as vassals, advisors, or administrators. So, we must often read their protests of fidelity as a deflection of their true targets. The same Ibal-Addu I have just cited as falling into penury, once tried to control damage in this way (ARM 28 63).²⁶ He writes to Zimri-Lim:

How much longer will Šubram keep on sending me such vile notes, ascribing to me unbelievable acts? While I give him advice to improve his lot, he only plots vile action. Just now by his deeds he has encouraged Išme-Addu (of Ašnakkum) to act. He has not yet given up his plans. Instead of collecting soldiers or moving out as a unit when the enemy of our lord (Zimri-Lim) remains whole, he spews insults. Because of his activity, the judgment of the land is hesitant and proceeds without resolution. Once I observed his deed, I decided not to go out of Ašlakka.

Now then, my lord ought to hear his messages before trusting the words he keeps sending me. How much longer will I not be believed in the House of my lord? They certainly have reached me, all those slanders of the past year that have gone to my lord, claiming that ‘Ibal-Addu is forcing the country out his control!’... Yet it is I who readily goes to his help. My lord can verify all these statements.

I have cited a good chunk of the letter, because it has all the elements in a classic justification. Ibal-Addu cast himself as a *juste souffrant*. His virtues are sterling: He is loyal, not just to his suzerain, but also to those who do not deserve it. His enemy is the opposite: He lacks civility, is ungrateful, and is a devoted *spinmeister*. He is also devious, using third parties to stir up hostility. Although, the adversary has the gall to boldly promote his lies, Ibal-Addu’s faith is in his lord, for that lord cannot be fooled once alerted to injustice and deceit.

Envy

Such appeals to the king to arbitrate parochial disputes occur readily in our archives, with enough variations to keep us interested. I will share

so”. Said Hammurabi, “This is true: She was slandered in my presence and I got angry with her”. So I have now appeased him and there is now no offence whatsoever. As I have taken up your cause, may Šamaš take up mine.

On this passage, see Wasserman 2012, 23-24.

²⁶ The apothegmatic nature of the final lines (36-37) is highlighted in Durand 2006, 12, 17.

two of them. They both feature magnates with impressive influence and showcase classic issues: Envy, self-promotion, quarrels over trivia, obsessive self-justification, and never ending quests for rewards. Let me focus first on the clash between Bannum and Asqudum.

Bannum and Asqudum

No tribal leader was more influential than Bannum, a Sim'alite *merḥum* — a tribal chieftain. There is reason to give him credit for capturing Mari before handing it to Zimri-Lim, who was then still in the Balikh area.²⁷ If so, it explains why Bannum writes bracing, even offensive, letters to Zimri-Lim. His vitriol targets many, but his chief nemesis is Asqudum, a diviner imported from Ekallatum in the days of Yasmaḥ-Addu.²⁸ For an outsider, Asqudum had prospered nicely, even marrying a daughter of a preceding king, Yaḥdun-Lim. Such unions with ex-nobility allowed reigning monarchs — often usurpers with minimal deference to the fallen dynasty — to reward mid-level careerists without bringing them too close to the ruling family. Nevertheless, his presence rankled the natives, among them elite administrators (La'um, Sin-iddinam, Šamaš-tillassu), who protested that no one was safe from his slander (ARM 26 4; ARM 2 28 = LAPO 17 830). It was a defensive tactic on their parts, for diviners were instrumental in consulting the gods on crucial affairs of state, including personnel decisions (Durand 2010a). True, most kings had a stable of diviners for such enterprises, and there were always ways to restructure questions and answers so that they end up matching preferred responses; but a clever and persuasive diviner can go far at court, especially when willing to rise on the corpses of rivals.

Asqudum was a survivalist and his fortunes soared on accession of Zimri-Lim, for he was now married to a sister (full or otherwise) of the new king. In those days of revolving thrones, mid-rank administrators generally retained their posts even as their patrons lost their heads. Outraged at the honors heaped at Asqudum, Bannum minces no words, “Can it be good that Asqudum keeps setting before you vile things and that you keep listening to him?” he asks the king. Bannum resents Asqudum's ability to charm the king into trusting him to rule a major town (Ḫiṣamta)

²⁷ On Bannum, see Villard 1994, 291-297 and Heimpel 1997, 68-70. Bannum's boldness is obvious from his cylinder seal where he is “Baninum [a variant of Bannum] of Mulḥan, servant of Yaḥdun-lim, who reinstated Yaḥdun-Lim's line”.

²⁸ On Asqudum, fundamental is the dossier gathered by Durand in ARM 26/1. There is also now the nice study of Charpin 2011, where is reviewed the previous literature.

and into placing his buddy as its manager. “Asqudum”, continues Bannum, “(was once) my own prisoner; but (now) he plots evil in his heart”. Bannum’s advice is blunt: Asqudum heads a fifth column, ready to surrender Mari to Zimri-Lim’s enemy, Išme-Dagan (our tin man). At the very least, the king must select a diviner from the king’s own tribe (Sim’al) in whom to confide (ARM 26 5).

Asqudum’s response to Bannum’s charges has not survived. But he was known to wield an acid tongue when defending his own turf (ARM 26 74).²⁹ In one developed case (A.337+M.8290, Durand 2010b), a merchant reports on Asqudum’s uncouth behavior: He accepts gifts greedily but does not return them and his trading practices are judged so lamentable that they must be appealed before the emblems of the gods. Still, for the duration, Asqudum’s life was charmed, for his nemesis Bannum died soon after posting his charges. Yet, even as Zimri-Lim was reading Bannum’s indictment, he was entrusting Asqudum with some very delicate negotiations, among them brokering his marriage with Princess Šiptu, the daughter of the area’s most powerful ruler, King Yarim-Lim of Aleppo. Asqudum continued to prosper before he drowned in a boating incident midway in Zimri-Lim’s reign (ARM 14 4 = LAPO 18 1019).³⁰ We might imagine that by his brutal end the gods were signaling major disappointment with him; but when the palace acted on his vast estate, there is no hint that his misfortune was read as an infraction against king or god.

Zimri-Addu and Ibalpiel

The other cosmic rivalry pitted two old hands in Zimri-Lim’s court. One was Zimri-Addu, a high official at Qatṭunan by the Ḥabur River, a man with proven administrative skills, but also with a history of contentiousness. He was believed to snitch on colleagues (ARM 27 117), to

²⁹ Writes Asqudum to Yassi-Dagan:

I have heard the tablet you have sent to me. You said, “People from Mišlan approached the king with the complaint, Asqudum is holding (our land)”’. Much as a dog does not covet gold, I myself do not covet their field or (anything belonging) to them. As to you, why are you making problems before the king? You know well how unruly are their people. Now then, about the fields in Zarri on which you wrote me. Šuraḥammu is now with the king and speaks (to him) whatever is on his mind. He has now accepted half of what is in the storeroom of the Multicolor Court just for the asking!

³⁰ Charpin (2011, 264), follows Durand in allotting his death to another Asqudum; yet Durand himself seems to have fudged his position in LAPO 18, pp. 190 and 239. Lion (2001, 148-149 n. 38) recognizes the existence of just one major player named Asqudum.

undercut trusted officers (ARM 27,108–109; 137–138), and to act impetuously (ARM 27: 116).³¹ Not surprisingly, Zimri-Addu feels himself despised: “No one wants to approach me”, he writes to his king, “and when I go out, no one joins me. Destitute, I move about like a cursed man” (ARM 27 151:100-102). So, with an ego to compensate for perceived snubs, Zimri-Addu was not a man to dodge a fight or to avoid the gutter.

Unfortunately for him, his chosen nemesis was one of Zimri-Lim’s most trusted lieutenants, the *merḥum* Ibalpiel. Ibalpiel has left many letters written in an engaging prose, at once chatty and precise, with fine humor and irony. Ibalpiel was competent, a take-charge person who, like Karel, was also a fine reader of history; in fact, he was the first to describe the domino effect in regional politics.³² Yet he was also stubborn and vainglorious, and the object of numerous complaints by diviners (ARM 26 101), commanders (ARM 26 380), and diplomats (ARM 26 126), who resented the way he clogged access to the king (ARM 27 137).

Zimri-Addu and Ibalpiel clashed when Zimri-Lim inexplicably assigned them both to lead one of four major contingents assisting Hammurabi in his war against Larsa. Zimri-Addu was to lead troops recruited from the main urban centers and Ibalpiel those of nomadic background. We have a nice comment (ARM 26 380) about their dispute by third party. Himself a lieutenant of Ibalpiel, Šarrum-šulūī felt the need to alert the king about their conflict, allegedly because it displayed Mari negatively but likely also to broadcast his own good sense.³³ The two men exchanged

³¹ See my portrait of Zimri-Addu in Sasson 2010.

³² A.2119 = LAPO 17 442 is published in Charpin 1992. Writes Ibal-pi-el to Zimri-Lim,

I have heard about the release of Yariḥa-abum from the (control of the) ruler of Ešnunna. My lord knows how full of deceit that House is. I fear that until it captures Andariq, it will keep my lord completely duped (*ruttumma uratta*). But as soon as it seizes Andariq, it will aim for Kurda. Subsequently, it will cross Mount Saggār [Šinjar], and all of Šubartum will shout ‘Hail, my Lord’ to it. This House is beginning to behave as did Samsi-Addu in progressively resetting his frontier. Seizing Ekallatum, it will [*move*] toward Qaṭṭara and Allāḥad. Once it seizes a town, it forces it under its control. This House is indeed full of deceit. Now before the burden becomes too heavy to bear, time is near when we must move against him. The Ḥana-nomads are eager for battle; the rulers of Idamarāṣ are gathered, together with their armies, and look only toward my lord for help. The royal agents (*sugāgū*) are gathered and have sent Anniti-El and Ḥanzan to my lord. My lord should consult with his servants and decide on heading here.

³³ His name is usually read Šarrum-andulli, but see Stol 1991, 193. Šarrum-šulūī prided himself for knowing all that happens in Hammurabi’s palace; see ARM 26 381:9.

charges (*muštālātum*) and insults (*muṭappilātum*) publically, endangering the mission. According to Šarrum-šulūlī, Ibalpiel browbeats officers and threatens to cut off their rations. In turn, these officers give distorted grievances to Zimri-Addu, who eagerly endorses their complaints.

That Šarrum-šulūlī was not exaggerating is confirmed by a long, incendiary letter Zimri-Addu wrote to catalogue his peeves against his rival (ARM 27: 151). The litany of grievance is long, mingling Ibalpiel's crimes against Zimri-Addu and against the palace. These include his illegitimate control (placing his seal) of the roster of recruits (ll. 5-17); his humiliation of Zimri-Addu (ll.18-23); his concealment of a report on missing soldiers (ll. 23-31); his launching of insults (32-41); his defiance of the king's military orders (42-68); his charging Zimri-Addu with theft (69-81), and his humiliation of nomadic troops (82-95). All these charges are distilled in a repeat at the tail end of the letter. If this were not enough, Zimri-Addu posted another letter (ARM 27 152), this time citing his humiliation at receiving lesser allocations than others. Incredibly, he reveals that he vented his frustration first to Ibalpiel. Either we are missing something, or Zimri-Addu is missing it all.

Ibalpiel, too, has left us his opinion (ARM 2 31 = LAPO 17 591). He opens on how Hammurabi consults with him on all matters, underscoring how other kings also esteem his judgment. Zimri-Addu, he claims, has no courage to discipline armies bent on looting, yet he still plots to subvert Ibalpiel's authority. "My lord should write to Zimri-Addu", he advises. "He may set (him) or remove him. As for me, I need for palace matters to be resettled, so that I could be ready at the time of the battle and assign the troops as best I know. Otherwise, this man will turn against me the army's opinion and I will not manage to have full security. I am now writing my lord for him to be fully aware. This man is turning the army's opinion against me, causing me much trouble. As far as I can observe, the army's opinion has already turned against me. My lord's army is safe".

Unlike the animosity between Bannum and Asqudum that ended with heaven giving it a merciful conclusion, recovering how matters turned out for Zimri-Addu and Ibal-pi-El is not yet within our grasp. Their dispute played out at the tail end of Zimri-Lim reign; but as far as I know they both outlasted their king, disappearing from our view. We do not read in the archives about any disciplinary measure taken against either of them. Perhaps Zimri-Lim had read them both correctly as overblown egos; yet he knew them to do his bidding just the same.

A Final notice

In this article, I have proposed that slander and scorn were deemed fair weapons by partisans and grave ethical lapses by victims. They must be deflected if not fought, confronted early rather than late, and tackled directly or through third party. Yet we have indications that they were also judged immoral if not sinful, with heaven as their arbitrator. A recently published protocol of oaths taken by Zimri-Lim's court officials opens on a pledge not to speak slander (*tapulī*), before moving to such mundane infractions as spying, subverting, betraying, looting, and stealing.³⁴ Bizarre for us to consider is the ordeal reported by a governor (A.1890) involving Aštābi-El, a deity treated as a venerated ancestor. An accusation was made and, to arrive at the truth, Aštābi-El's statue is laid out prone, with two experts conducting the interrogation.³⁵ How to explain the proceedings escapes me; luckily the denunciation proved false. Nonetheless, the god opted to let the slanderer go unpunished, vexing the governor who took matters in his own hands.

The clearest testimony for divine displeasure, however, is reported by a diplomat (Yamsum) at the court of vassal. Ḫaya-sumu of Ilanšura had married Šimatum, one of Zimri-Lim's daughters. In their controlled world and far from Mari, the couple was acting beyond the pale, tormenting a loyal supporter of the king. The diplomat discloses the outrage, then adds (ARM 26 312:36'-39'; see CAD T, 50), "Another matter; about Šimatum who so slanders my lord (*taplāt bēliya idabbubu*) that my lord faced God on her account, the god of my lord mutilated her fingers and epilepsy is plaguing her"). Here we reconstruct a series of allegations: a daughter who spread lies against a father, a father who makes divine inquiry to locate the source and dimension of the slander, and the proof of her guilt. Yet, because we also know about the circumstances, which involved the rejection of a sister of Šimatum married to the same vassal (Kirum), we might wonder whether the judgment of this diplomat was swayed by sympathy for the other princess no less than by indignation at the mistreatment of a colleague.

This little episode from the domestic life of Mari elite, with slander, accusation, and punishment as main ingredients, is a good place on which to end this paper. I have not sought to spice it by parallels with what might occur in own world, the academia and professional societies we

³⁴ Charpin 2010, 51 (§1). The clause is clear despite heavy damage.

³⁵ Text cited in Durand 2008, 456.

all know and love. Yet I dare hope that envy, malice, calumny, and distortions have never entered the universe of Karel, an old friend to whom I offer this study.

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