

# The Burden of Scribes

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In memory of Thorkild Jacobsen, I dedicate this study of a “Mari” letter (A.427 + M.8431) that Ibalpi-El, one of Zimri-Lim of Mari’s most trusted officers, sent to the king. In it, Ibalpi-El corrects information he had previously dispatched on the identity of a city captured by Bunuma-Addu, king of Nihriya, a principal locality in a confraternity of Benyaminite villages in the Balih region. My speculations on the source of the error that was made during transmission will also permit me to raise some issues about the way scribes handled correspondence and about the behavior of royal agents monitoring provincial regions.

The relevant contents of the letter read as follows:

Previously, when a tablet from Hamman was sent to me, I had its information copied on a tablet that I sent to my lord. Having reached Dēr, I looked into this matter: Bunuma-Addu did not capture Aparhā; it is Hādurahā that Bunuma-Addu captured. But the scribe who wrote Hamman’s tablet made a mistake. He wrote “Aparhā” on a tablet and, without getting (it) heard, encased it in a clay envelope. In no way was Aparhā captured; Hādurahā he did indeed capture.<sup>1</sup>

The background of this letter is not of immediate relevance; suffice it to say that during Zimri-Lim’s reign, Bunuma-Addu repeatedly tried to break out from

1. A.427 + M.8431: 5–16

5] [i-n]a [pa]-ni-tim tu<sub>p</sub>-pi ha-am-ma-an ša a-na (še)-ri-ya [ú-ša]-bi-lu-[nim<sup>1</sup>]-ma a-wa-at tu<sub>p</sub>-pi-im ša-a-tu i-na tu<sub>p</sub>-pi-im ú-ša-áš-<sub>te</sub><sub>4</sub>-er-ma a-na še-er be-lí-ya ú-ša-bi-il de<sub>4</sub>-er<sup>ki</sup> ak-šu-ud-ma wa-ar-ka-at <sub>te</sub><sub>4</sub>-[mi]-im ša-a-tu ap-ru-ús-ma 10] <sup>1</sup>bu-nu-ma-<sup>d</sup><sub>IM</sub> a-pa-ar-<sub>ha</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup> ú-ul i<sub>š</sub>-ba-at a-lam<sup>ki</sup> ha-du-ra-<sub>ha</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup> bu-nu-ma-<sup>d</sup><sub>IM</sub> i<sub>š</sub>-ba-at ù dumu É tu<sub>p</sub>-pi-im ša tu<sub>p</sub>-pi ha-am-ma-an i<sub>š</sub><sub>7</sub>-tú-ru ir-su-ub-ma a-pa-ar-<sub>ha</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup> i-na tu<sub>p</sub>-pi-im i<sub>š</sub><sub>7</sub>-tú-ur ù tu<sub>p</sub>-pa-am ba-lum šu-ús-me-e-em 15] i<sub>h</sub>-ri-im mi-im-ma a-pa-ar-<sub>ha</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup> ú-ul ša-bi-it ha-du-ra-<sub>ha</sub>-a<sup>ki</sup> i<sub>š</sub>-ba-at . . .

This text is edited by D. Charpin in “‘Lies natürlich . . .’: à propos des erreurs de scribes dans les lettres de Mari,” in *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag am 19. Juni 1993*, ed. M. Dietrich and D. Loretz (AOAT 240; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995), 43–47.

the control that Mari had over the Balih region south of Harran.<sup>2</sup> Hamman was Zimri-Lim's *suqāqum* at Dēr on the Balih and therefore was one of a handful of royal officers expected to keep a watch over developments in the Tuttul region. Ibalpi-El, a *merhūm*, roamed the region, troubleshooting for the king among notoriously volatile tribes. The two towns mentioned in the letter, Aparhā and Hadurahā, must be located in the same territories; but we know something only about the former. Once the seat of an independent kingdom ruled by Larim-Numaha, Aparhā seems to have bordered on Yamhadian territory. With Yamhad's blessing, the town was brought under Šamši-Addu's control.<sup>3</sup> We presume that it remained under Zimri-Lim's protection, as that would explain his interest in its welfare.

Of Hadurahā, so far there is no other mention; but this should not make it a town of lesser magnitude, whether or not Mari would have greeted its fall with less alarm than that of Aparhā.

Let us first reconstruct Ibalpi-El's own narrative of events. According to him, Hamman, having learned of Bunuma-Addu's conquest, relayed to Ibalpi-El news about a defeated city. Ibalpi-El had his scribe include this information in a letter that he ordered dispatched to Zimri-Lim. A curiosity is Ibalpi-El's decision not to forward the original letter that he received from Hamman, as was normal in such circumstances.

In telling about his next activity, Ibalpi-El did not dwell on how much time elapsed between the posting of his letter and his arrival at Dēr; nor did he justify

2. For background, see M. Ghouti, "Témoins derrière la porte," in *Florilegium marianum: Recueil d'études en l'honneur de Michel Fleury*, ed. J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 1; Paris, 1992). Regarding the Upper Balih region, see F. Joannès, "Routes et voies de communication dans les archives de Mari," *Amurru* 1 (1996): 337, 342. On Zalmaqum and some of its kings around ZL9', see M. Birot, *Correspondance des gouverneurs de Qaṭṭunân* (ARMT 27; Paris, 1993), 25. See also S. Maul, "Die Korrespondenz des Isim-Sūmū. Ein Nachtrag zu ARMT XIII 25–57," in *Florilegium marianum 2: Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot*, ed. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 3; Paris, 1994), 27 and note (b) to text #6.

The speech quoted in a fragmentary letter sent to Zimri-Lim may well be Bunuma-Addu's, evidently in happier days, "Since time immemorial, the house of Nihriya and the house of Mari are but one; . . . blood (kinship) and solemn oaths obtain between us." This passage is cited from J.-M. Durand, "Unité et diversités au Proche-Orient à l'époque amorrite," in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien*, ed. D. Charpin and F. Joannès (Actes de la XXXVIII<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Paris, 8–10 juillet 1991; Paris, 1992), 116 n. 152.

3. ARM 5:21 (LAPO 17: 488), reedited by J.-M. Durand in "Documents pour l'histoire du royaume de Haute-Mésopotamie I," *MARI* 5 (1987): 189–90. See also the improved readings by W. Yuhong, *A Political History of Eshnunna, Mari and Assyria During the Early Old Babylonian Period (From the End of Ur III to the Death of Šamši-Adad)* (Changchun [China], 1994), 112. This victory was recalled also in ARM 5:72, a text that has been reedited by Durand, *Mitología y Religión del Oriente Antiguo*, II/1: *Semitas Occidentales* (Ebla, Mari) (Colección: Estudio Orientales 8; Sabadell, 1995), 496–97. ARM 10:178 and 26:266 give account of the hostilities that preceded. Note that LAPO 16–18 = Jean-Marie Durand, *Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 16–18; Paris, 1997–2000) appeared after this paper was completed.

Aparhā may be the same town as Amarhi, which in *Florilegium marianum* 2, 107 (Yahdun-Lim era) seems to lie not too far from Tuttul on the Balih: D. Charpin, "Une campagne de Yahdun-Lim en Haute-Mésopotamie," *Florilegium marianum* 2, 196–97.

what made him go to Hamman's home town. This is worth observing because, ordinarily, Mari officials and diplomats did not shy away from elaborate narrative rationalization. By cluttering letters with news of interim activities, they kept the king focused on their own alacrity and zeal. Ibalpi-El's abrupt change of locus, therefore, deserves notice, for it gives the impression that a gnawing suspicion about the accuracy of Hamman's tidings was at the root of his travel to Dēr.

Once there, Ibalpi-El promptly carried out an investigation that brought to light the true state of events. The error, he discovered, originated with a scribe who, in fact, stood accused of two lapses: First, that he wrote "Aparhā" when he should have written "Hadurahā"; second, that he sealed the tablet without checking its contents. After a brief excursus, I will take up seriatim each of these missteps.

In the Mari archives as elsewhere, *dub.sar* (*tupšarrum*) is the normal term for "scribe," although it is frequently bound to another noun when the context requires the mention of a specialist.<sup>4</sup> To a lesser extent, *dumu é dub.ba* (*mār bīt tuppim*) is also used, and the two designations can even be found in the same context (as in ARM 1, 7:32–43). If a distinction is to be made between the two designations, however, it should not be on the basis of maturity or experience, for the two terms attract a similar range of adjectives such as *taklum*, "reliable," *nawrum* "outstanding," *našrum* "discreet," and *ummenûm* "masterly"; rather, at Mari *dub.sar* seems to be the more inclusive term, while *dumu é dub.ba* seems more appropriate to administrative contexts. In the CAD, "accountant" was used when translating *dumu é dub.ba* in one Mari passage, and, in a broad sense, this meaning should do.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the highly literate scribe who composed bilingually a

4. For example, *tupšar amurrîm*, *tupšar sakakkim*, see the comments of D. Charpin, "Les représentants de Mari à Babylone," in *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1/2 (ARM 26/2, ed. D. Charpin et al.; Paris, 1988), 140–41; M. Birot, ARMT 27, 252–53.

5. See CAD A/1, 135 (sub *adû* C), in connection with ARM 6, 7:5–12. See also *AHw*, 616, sub *mārum*. Here is a selection of passages:

- ARM 1, 7:37ff. (= LAPO 16: 187, Šamši-Addu to Yasmah-Addu)

Another matter; there is to be a *tēbibtum*-census: soldiers are to be cleared (of claims), fields surveyed, and once more fields distributed among the people of the land. Since there are enough expert *dumu é dub.ba* (copyists?) at hand (with you), send to me, at Šubat-Enlil, Ursamanum together with skillful(?) scribes (*dub.sar*) (to apportion the fields).

- ARM 6, 7:5–16 (= LAPO 17: 796, Bahdi-Lim to Zimri-Lim)

Concerning the wadi at Dēr, we got ready for previous work and for work on the *takkirum* canal. The accountants (*dumu é dub.ba*) calculated the work-load required: together with the previous work, a 2000-man workforce for the *takkirum* canal would be too small. We therefore deliberated (about it) and decided to go ahead with work (just) on the *takkirum* canal. The work undertaken is coming along fine.

- ARM 6, 65:15', 18' (= LAPO 17: 850, Bahdi-Lim to Zimri-Lim); broken, refers to the lack of *dumu é dub.ba*.
- ARM 13, 35:32–37 (= LAPO 18: 858, Yasim-Sumu to Zimri-Lim; see A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Babylonia* [Chicago, 1967], 98–99)

[Arranging for boat shipment of barley from Emar to Mari.] If this money is to come here, 2 accountants (*dumu é dub.ba*) and 10 inspectors ought to accompany it. May my lord

self-deprecating but torrid appeal to Zimri-Lim calls himself a “*dumu é.dub.ba*,” and so was termed a man called upon to record an oracle from Šamaš. Mukan-*nišum*, so well known to us as a factotum at the Mari palace, is given that designation, although he is also called a *šatammum*.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, with the Mari testimony about the relevant terminology being decidedly equivocal, it is difficult to resolve whether or not Ibalpi-El was intentionally slighting the culprit when he labeled him a “*dumu é.dub.ba*”; but it is worth noticing that even after personally making inquiry in Dēr, Ibalpi-El refrains from naming the scribe about whom he complains.

There are some fine studies in Assyriology that reconstruct the training of scribes, recreate the scribal school curriculum, and even debate the technology of cuneiform script.<sup>7</sup> But the routine of chancellery scribes—how they took dictation, how they prepared their letters, and how they verified their contents—remains

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send me an answer to this letter.

- ARM 26, 251:11 (Yasim-Dagan and Meptum to Zimri-Lim)

Qišti-Mamma, Yarim-Dagan, and Sumna-Addu arrived here. Conforming to what our lord wrote, we dispatched with them Šidqi-etar, leader of a division from Suhum, Simhi-Erah, son of Abu[ . . . ] from Abattum along with 2 recording secretaries (*dumu é.dub.ba*), so that they were with them during the plunge. The servant was then able to certify, “My mistress told me the following, ‘Ever since my lord Zimri-Lim spread the border of his garment over me, an *ušmu* . . .’” [On this idiom, a symbol of protection, see S. Lafont, *NABU* 1989/45.]

- ARM 26, 414:29–42 (Yasim-El to Zimri-Lim)

Another matter; Atamrum the *āpilum* of Šamaš came here to tell me, “Send me a discreet scribe so that I can dictate the message that Šamaš has sent me for the king.” This is what he told me. I dispatched Utukam and he wrote this tablet. This man then had witnesses stand by and then told me, “Promptly send this tablet so that he can act according to what it says.” This is what he said to me.

Utukam is here expressly given the title *dumu é.dub.ba*. An Utukam occurs in *Florilegium marianum* 2, 72–73 as overseer of slave women taken prisoner in Idamarāš (ZL12’), P. Marelli, “Esclaves et reines,” in *Florilegium marianum* 2. J.-M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I/1*, ARM 26/1 (Paris, 1988), 391, says that an Utukam occurs also in M.12704+.

- A.1258+ is a bilingual “letter” to Zimri-Lim (= LAPO 16: 22). In line 16’ a scribe, who labels himself a “*dumu é.dub.ba*,” nevertheless writes a highly literary letter to Zimri-Lim. The label is very likely self-deprecating hyperbole. See D. Charpin, “Les malheurs d’un scribe ou de l’inutile du Sumérien loin de Nippur,” in *Nippur at the Centennial: Papers Read at the 35<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. M. deJ. Ellis (Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 14; Philadelphia, 1992), 7–27.
- A.2671+. In a passage Durand has excerpted, Yassi-Dagan tells Išū-našir, “Now you are a scribe who is intelligent and, since your youth, have grown up at the palace-gate” (*inanna atta mār bīt šuppī ša inka nawrat u ištu šeḫrēta ina bāb ekallim tarbū*), “Administrateurs de Qattunân,” in *Florilegium marianum* 2, 91 n. 21.

6. Cited by Durand in *Mitología y Religión del Oriente Antiguo*, 409.

7. On the training of scribes and on the scribal curriculum, see Å. Sjöberg, “The Old Babylonian Eubba,” in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday, June 7, 1974*, ed. S. Lieberman (Assyriological Studies 20; Chicago, 1976), 159–79. Regarding the study of

hazy. It is unlikely that, over the many centuries of cuneiform history, scribes followed a single *modus operandi* in handling correspondence, and it would not do to corset Mari scribes into one. Still, there is a corpus of small Mari tablets which suggests that, despite the Sumerian quip about scribes who were so talented that their “hand matches the [ir] mouth,”<sup>8</sup> palace scribes did not take dictation in our sense of the word. That is, they did not transform, verbatim and instantaneously, sound into signs; nor apparently did they convert what they heard into shorthand.<sup>9</sup>

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mathematics, see K. Nemet-Nejat, “Systems for Learning Mathematics in Mesopotamian Scribal Schools,” *JNES* 54 (1995): 241–60. On the technology of cuneiform script, see the contributions that Marvin Powell collected in a special issue of *Visible Language* 15/4 (1981): 319–440, entitled “Aspects of Cuneiform Writing.” (Generous bibliographies are appended to each article.)

On scribes and their social contexts, consult the bibliography in L. E. Pearce, “The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson et al. (New York, 1995), 2265–2278. On the diversity of scribal stylistic practices at Mari, from Yahdun-Lim to Zimri-Lim, see J. M. Durand, “Unité et diversités . . .,” 121–23. Durand’s seminal work on scribal stylistic changes toward the end of the *šakkanakku* period, “La situation historique des *šakkanakku*: nouvelle approche,” *MARI* 4 (1985): 147–72, deserves special mention. The stimulating work of M. de Odorico, *Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Inscriptions* (State Archives of Assyria Studies 3; Helsinki, 1995), contains much information on scribal tactics in reshaping documents.

On the scribal disciplines in Neo-Assyrian times, see S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (State Archives of Assyria 10; Helsinki, 1993), xiii–xxvii. On the diverse purposes Neo-Babylonian scribes assigned their documents, see L. E. Pearce, “Statement of Purpose: Why the Scribes Wrote,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. M. Cohen et al. (Bethesda, Md., 1993).

On literacy in Mesopotamia, there is a good introduction to the issues as well as a useful bibliography in H. Vanstiphout, “Memory and Literacy in Ancient Western Asia,” *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 2181–2196.

8. More correctly, the aphorism goes, “The scribe whose hand matches the mouth, he is indeed a scribe”; see Sjöberg, “The Old Babylonian Edubba.”

9. *šupam šutawūm* seems to be the idiom for an official giving dictation. (But see now W. Heimpel, “*šutawūm* und *šutaptūm*,” *ZA* 86 [1996]: 164–69.) See *Florilegium marianum* 2, 9:9, 57:12, 116:5, 123:6′; Birot, *ARM* 27, 36:6–7 (see p. 94—following *ARM* 6, 18:8), renders “to have a tablet written.” The verb itself refers to the act of repeating something to someone else, whether heard or read, as in *ARM* 26, 298:13–18: “There are no high-born elderly women in the palace (one of whom) could serve as mentors to [Queen] Beltum so that, as it suits the occasion, they could tell her or repeat to her what is appropriate (*awātum ālikat iqabbēššim u uštawwāši*).” See also the excellent usage in the oath protocol between Ešnunna and Mari (lines iii:2′–9′; cited from D. Charpin, “Un traité entre Zimri-Lim de Mari et Ibāl-pi-El II d’Ešnunna,” in *Marchands, Diplomates et Empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli*, ed. D. Charpin and F. Joannès [Paris, 1991], 142–44 = *LAPO* 16: 292):

[If a vassal] of my father goes forth [to battle] and if he writes for marshalling his armies and his support troops; if Duhšum, [son] of Ibalpi-El, son of Daduša, king of Ešnunna, my father, or [if] his notables who have come here debate the task of marshalling troops or present (their plan) to me—this advice or discussion, good or bad, I shall not write it to any of the kings or leaders that exist in the entire land, whether he is an enemy or ally of Ibalpi-El, son of Daduša, king of Ešnunna, my father, nor shall I broadcast it [*mimma ša iqabbūnim ana šarri šumšu u rabbēni . . . la ašapparū la uštawwu*]. I will not even reveal to my servants such a secret matter.

Rather, they outlined what they heard in the form of very compressed entries, each of which began with the preposition *aššum*.<sup>10</sup> To illustrate, here is a brief extract from A.3625, a memorandum Joannès published in the *Mélanges Birot*.<sup>11</sup> As other texts of the same genre, the document begins as if *in medias res*,

- 1] —About not meeting each other
  - About [not?] conferring with Hammurabi and Qarni-Lim
  - About not sending a messenger
  - About the topic (with) the following, “I will write wherever I want to; but you need not write where you do not want to write”
  - About the topic not to write Hammurabi and Qarni-Lim during troubles
- 10] —About the topic regarding the Hana chiefs (*abbé hana*)
  - About not keeping with you what is valuable
  - About not restoring sons of notables to the throne of their fathers’ house
  - About not writing to Hammurabi and Qarni-Lim.

Armed with such outlines, the scribe would later reconstruct the commissioned letter. Such a hypothesis would elucidate how the scribe knew (more or less anyway) what size tablet would be needed to cover the relevant topics.<sup>12</sup> It could also clarify how previously received letters were quoted with significant, but rarely complete,

10. Two studies by F. Joannès are the fundamental collections for memoranda, “Textes N° 91 à 245,” in *Archives administratives de Mari 1; Archives royales de Mari XXIII*, ed. G. Bardet et al. (Paris, 1983), 85–226; “Nouveaux Mémoires,” in *Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot*, ed. J.-M. Durand and J.-R. Kupper (Paris, 1985), 97–113.

Additional examples may also be published as ARM 23, 592 and ARM 26, 406. Durand, “Administrateurs de Qatunân” (full reference above, n. 5), 95–96, refers to a number of thick, inelegantly written tablets from the Yasmah-Addu period that likewise begin with *aššum* but end with formulas regarding Mari’s safety. Badly preserved, these documents probably had a very brief shelf-life.

A number of Mari administrative documents display aide-memoire characteristics; these include ARM 25, 785–86 (*aššum*, in *medias res*), ARM 23, 83 (*aššum*, at end), ARM 21, 386, ARM 23, 561, 562, 593; ARM 24, 220 (no *aššum*); ARM 7, 260 (using *ša*); ARM 8, 92.

For Rimah examples of the same (*OBTR* 326–28, where scribes used the sumerogram mu for *aššum*), see P. Abrahami, “Memorandum à Tell al-Rimah,” *NABU* 1988/37, 26. On the proposition that Neo-Assyrian scribes may have kept “war diaries” from which they created annals and monumental inscriptions, see, lastly, De Odorico, *Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Inscriptions*, 117–20.

11. Joannès, “Nouveaux Mémoires,” 105–6. Remarkably enough, a (near) duplicate of this text is extant (M.13705), F. Joannès, “Un nouveau mémorandum de Mari,” *NABU* 1987/29, 15–16. I have no clear notion of what it means to have a duplicate of a draft document.

12. Even when exchanged between the same correspondents, “Mari” letters can differ appreciably in size, shape, and thickness, see D. Charpin, “Corrections, ratures, et annulation: la pratique des scribes mésopotamiens,” in *Le texte et son inscription*, ed. R. Laufer (Paris, 1989), 58–59. This is unlike the court letters of the Neo-Assyrian period, on which see the useful remarks of K. Radner, “The Relation between Format and Content of Neo-Assyrian Texts,” in *Nineveh, 612 BC: The Glory and Fall of the Assyrian Empire*, ed. R. Mattila (Helsinki, 1995), 71–72.

correspondence in contents and orthography (choice of signs as well as Sumero-grams), albeit with less attachment to the layout of words.

The topic is complicated by the need to discriminate among potential sources for discrepancies found in transmitted texts. They could be generated by the authors of letters rather than by their scribe. Thus, when a bureaucrat writes on the same topic to people of authority over him, the formulation may differ appreciably, even if the contents generally remain the same. The same can be said when an administrator, finding himself on the defensive, takes up a topic about which he had previously written, but alters its contents significantly when quoting his earlier formulation.<sup>13</sup>

More difficult to evaluate are stylistic idiosyncracies that occur in the correspondence of bureaucrats. Thus, N. Wasserman has noticed that in using the particle *assuri*, Bahdi-Lim consistently gives *asurri . . . -ma*, his colleagues Kibri-Dagan, Ibalpi-El, Yamsum, and Sammetar almost never do so, while Yaqqim-Addu and Yasim-El use either form. As long as the assignment of palace scribes (whether to specific individuals—bureaucrats, diplomats, royal family—or to specific tasks) remains poorly understood, such a stylistic discrepancy could be cogently assigned to scribes or to administrators. Similarly ambiguous in their origin are the conventions (if that is the correct term) that control how different topics were sequenced in the same letter or how lists of personal and place names were arranged.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding scribe-generated discrepancies in recopying documents, the evidence is much more forthcoming when assessed from administrative archives.<sup>15</sup> As far as epistolary texts are concerned, any conclusion will have to await careful comparison between a quoted passage and the original from which the quotation is presumably derived. Two letters that Durand recently edited as *FM 2*, 55 (A.682) and 56 (A.856) may be lightly treated here to contrast the types of discrepancies that occur when generated, respectively, by authors of letters and by scribes.<sup>16</sup>

**FM 2 55**

To "my lord," from La<sup>2</sup>um, "your servant"

5] Qattunan, city and district, is safe.

**FM 2 56**

To "my lord," from La<sup>2</sup>um, "your servant"

13. I give illustrations for these phenomena in "Shunukhra-Khalu," in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Honor of Abraham Sachs*, ed. E. Leichty et al. (Philadelphia, 1988), 329–51.

14. See his "The Particle *assurelē* in the Mari Letters," in *Florilegium marianum* 2, 328 n. 52. Regarding a possible "convention" controlling the sequencing of place names, see D. Charpin, "Centre et périphérie," *NABU* 1995/86, 77.

15. See for now, J. M. Sasson, "Accounting Discrepancies in the Mari NÌ.GUB [NÍG.DU] Texts," in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. van Driel et al. (Leiden, 1982), 326–41.

16. The letters are edited by Durand in "Administrateurs de Qaṭṭunân," 96–97. Passages from these letters are treated by W. Heimpel, "The infinitive of *išū*," *NABU* 1996/16, 11, and by J.-R. Kupper, "Le rituel *elánum*," *NABU* 1996/32, 22–23.

6] Yesterday, my lord's tablet reached me saying,

I have now conveyed a tablet to Ibalpi-El. If messengers from Hammurabi, king of Kurda—that is “donkey-riders” [i.e., dignitaries]—have reached Qattunan, the bearer of my tablet together with the tablet that he is carrying should make his way toward Kurda, to Ibalpi-El. But if the messengers of the Kurda king have not arrived, detain with you until the *pagrā'û*-festival the bearer of my tablet, together with the tablet he is carrying.

20] This is what my lord wrote to me. **Perhaps my lord has had a lapse in memory: Ka'ala-El has already made his way to Kurda.** With Ibalpi-El **staying** at Ṭabatūm, my lord's tablet **that he has sent to Ibalpi-El** has made its way (there) in the usual way.

27] Now, however, **Sin-išmenni, Yakun-ašar, and Yašub-rabi**, Kurda messengers, **have come here with Ka'ala-El. Ka'ala-El, having taken their lead, has made his way** to my lord. **They are also bearing for my lord his (sacrifice) share from the Elūnum festival.**

5] Previously, my lord wrote to me stating,

I have now conveyed a tablet to Ibalpi-El. If Kurda messengers—that is “donkey-riders” [i.e., dignitaries]—have reached Qattunan, the bearer of my tablet together with his tablet should make his way toward Kurda, to Ibalpi-El. But if the messengers of the Kurda king have not arrived, the bearer of my tablet, together with the tablet he is carrying, should be detained with you until the *pagrā'û*-festival.

20] This is what my lord wrote to me. Because Ibalpi-El (is) in Ṭabatūm, my lord's tablet has made its way (there) in the usual way.

23] Now then, the Kurda messengers have made their way to my lord *and I have sent a notice about them to my lord. As to the bearer of the tablet that my lord has sent to Ibalpi-El, I had detained him; but he has already set out to my lord.*

In the earlier letter, La'um, who at that time was apparently deputy governor at Qattunan, gives a rather impudent response to a directive from the king. Soon afterwards, La'um realizes that he misunderstood the king's message and naturally worries about his witticism (jest?). He therefore writes again (*FM* 2, 56), quoting the king's original message, but this time giving it a straightforward answer. As it happens, the letter Zimri-Lim sent La'um is available to us (*FM* 3, 138), and its contents sharpen the magnitude of La'um's offense:<sup>17</sup>

I am just now conveying a tablet to Ibalpi-El. The bearer of the tablet, together with the tablet that he is carrying, (should . . .) with you (*about x lines missing*) and make his way toward Ibalpi-El. Otherwise, if messengers of Hammurabi do not seem to be coming at all, then this man should stay with you until the *pagrā'û*-festival and then return to me, together with the tablet that he is carrying.

17. For *Florilegium marianum* 3, 138 (M.7592), see Isabelle Guillot, “Les gouverneurs de Qattūnân: nouveaux textes,” in *Florilegium marianum* 3: *Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Marie-Thérèse Barrelet*, ed. D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 4; Paris, 1997), 288–90.



Despite the missing lines, Zimri-Lim's directive is clear. He had already sent orders to Ibalpi-El directly, and he wants La'um to dispatch an amendment to that earlier letter that depended on whether or not a delegation from Hammurabi (of Kurda) reaches Qattunan. (We are dealing therefore with two letters addressed to Ibalpi-El.) If the ambassadors arrived, the courier was to take the king's (amended) message to Ibalpi-El. Otherwise, the courier was to wait until the *pagrā'ú* were complete before returning with the tablet to the king, presumably because this festival, itself linked to celebrations honoring Ištar, took the king elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Again despite the missing lines, we notice that the king is not placing Ibalpi-El at Kurda; in fact, Zimri-Lim's words imply that (new?) instructions were to reach Ibalpi-El only if Kurda sent a delegation to Zimri-Lim, and we might imagine that, given the volatile conditions of the time, Zimri-Lim was orchestrating counter-actions to Hammurabi's political maneuvers.

La'um's trespasses were therefore many. He presumed that his king had a faulty memory of Ibalpi-El's whereabouts and that he no longer recalled who accompanied Kurda's delegation; so he took it upon himself to correct the king's plan. *FM* 2, 55 implies that although a delegation came from Kurda, La'um sat on the tablet brought by the courier rather than sending it to Ibalpi-El.

It is not necessary to quote the original Akkadian to note how La'um reshuffled his thoughts.<sup>19</sup> Presumably, La'um wrote his letter after the *pagrā'ú* festival, but it is equally possible that he wrote it sooner, when he caught his gaffe. *FM* 2, 56 lacks the opening reassurance that everything is well in Qattunan: perhaps he was in a hurry to enter the topic at hand; perhaps he was no longer in Qattunan when he caught his error. In the quotations of *FM* 2, 56–57 given above, I highlight in **bold** the passages in *FM* 2, 55:21–34 that were not repeated in *FM* 2, 56:21–30. Noteworthy are the absence of the witticism, the lack of details on the members of the Kurda delegation, the suppression of any reference to Ka'ala-El, whom the king is (falsely) accused of confusing with Ibalpi-El, and to the gift that Kurda was bringing to Zimri-Lim.

In *italics*, however, are portions that are new to *FM* 2, 56. In them, La'um underplays his notice in *FM* 2, 55 about the Kurda messengers, and he alerts the king about sending back the courier and his message as though nothing were untoward. He offers no apologies for his failure to dispatch them both to Ibalpi-El upon the arrival of the Kurda delegation.

The above episode illustrates the errors of administrators who have not sufficiently reflected on orders sent to them in written form. The differences between the message Zimri-Lim sent (*FM* 3, 138) and La'um's citation of it in *FM* 2, 55 and

18. On this linkage, see J.-M. Durand and M. Guichard, "Les rituels de Mari," *Florilegium marianum* 3, 35–36.

19. *Florilegium marianum* 3, 138:4–9': a-nu-um-ma *ṭup-pa-am a-na ṣe-er* <sup>m</sup>[i-ba-a]l-pi-AN uš-ta-bi-lam [lú wa-bi-]il *ṭup-pí-im qa-du-um ṭup-pí-im* [ša na-šu-ú] ma-aḫ-ri-k[a-ma] [several lines missing] R' a-na [ṣe-er i-ba-al-pí-]AN li-ti-[iq] ú-la-šu-ma mi-im-ma dumu.meš šī-īp-ri ša ḫa-am-mu-ra-bi ú-ul i-il-la-kunim lú šu-u a-di pa-ag-ra-i [m]a-aḫ-ri-ka li-šī-ib-ma qa-du-um *ṭup-pí-im* ša na-šu-ú a-na ṣe-ri-ya li-tu-ra-am.

56 are of such magnitude that we should presume that La'um was quoting it from memory. Because La'um was literate, we may presume that he no longer had the king's original message at his disposal when acting on it.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the letter was found in Mari, presumably brought back to the capital upon the king's return.

In contrast, the types of discrepancies that are *scribally generated* can be assessed by paralleling the two versions of La'um's (faulty) recollection of the king's original message as embedded in his two letters:

## FM 2, 55:7–20

- . . . a-nu-um-ma  
 10] *ṭup-pa-am a-na ʒe-er* <sup>m</sup>i-ba-al-pí-AN  
*ú-ša-bi-lam ʒum-ma dumu.meš ʒi-ip-ri*  
*ša ha-am-mu-ú-ra-bi lú Kur-da-a-ik<sup>ki</sup>*  
*ra-ak-bu-ut an ʒe.ħá a-na qa-aṭ-ṭú-na-an<sup>ki</sup>*  
  
*ik-ʒu-du-nim lú wa-bi-il ṭup-pí-ya*  
*qa-du-um ṭup-pí-im ʒa na-š[u]*  
*a-na ʒe-er i-ba-al-pí-AN*  
 15] *a-na Kur-da<sup>ki</sup> li-ti-iq*  
*ʒum-ma dumu.meš ʒi-ip-ri lú kur-da-a-yu<sup>ki</sup>*  
*la ik-ʒu-du-nim-ma wa-bi-il ṭup-pí-ya*  
*qa-du-um ṭup-pí-im ʒa na-ʒu*  
*a-di pa-aq-ra-a-i ma-aḥ-ri-ka-ma*  
 20] *ki-la-ʒu . . .*

## FM 2, 56:7–20

- a-nu-um-ma ṭup-pa-am a-n[a ʒe-e]r*  
<sup>m</sup>i-ba-al-pí-AN *ú-ša-bi-lam*  
*ʒum-ma dumu.meš ʒi-ip-ri kur-da-y[u<sup>ki</sup>]*  
 10] *ra-ak-bu-ut an ʒe.ħá*  
*a-na qa-aṭ-ṭú-na-an<sup>ki</sup>*  
*ik-ʒu-du-nim lú wa-bi-il*  
*ṭup-pí-ya qa-du-[um ṭup-pí-ʒu]*  
*a-na ʒe-er i-ba-al-pí-AN*  
 15] *a-na Kur-da<sup>ki</sup> li-[ti-iq]*  
*ʒum-ma dumu.meš ʒi-ip-r[i lú kur-da-a]-yu<sup>ki</sup>*  
*la ik-ʒu-du-nim lú wa-bi-il*  
*ṭup-pí-ya qa-du-um ṭup-pí-im ʒa na-[ʒu]*  
*a-di pa-aq-ra-i ma-aḥ-ri-ka*  
 20] *li-ka-l[i . . .*

Unlike the discrepancy created by La'um's recollection of FM 3, 138 (the king's original message), the differences in the above passages can be attributed to the scribe whose job it was to give context to La'um's two replies. FM 2, 55 was undoubtedly sent out earlier than FM 2, 56, but given how widely the formulations differ from Zimri-Lim's letter, we can suggest that the scribe relied on La'um's memory of FM 2, 138 when composing the first letter but that he had a draft of FM 2, 55 when composing FM 2, 56.

To explain differences between their citations of the king's order, I had thought that FM 2, 56 was narrower than FM 2, 55. But photos kindly placed at my disposal (courtesy J. M. Durand and B. Lafont) do not support the notion. For reasons that are difficult to untangle, the scribe framed the quotations within the same number of lines (perhaps he was emulating the original format); yet he tightened them in FM 2, 56 by removing words or signs that do not affect contents or comprehension (in **bold** above, at FM 2, 55:10, 13, 17, 19). In only one case did the scribe include a sign that was not in FM 2, 55 (at FM 2, 56:17). One discrepancy

20. In ARM 27, 151:8–10 (probably ZL8'), the governor of Qattunan, Zimri-Addu, complains that La'um, a scribe for army personnel (dub.sar mar.tu), is given more authority than he is.

was the scribe's: in *FM* 2, 55:20 the verbal form is *kilašu* (G imperative + accusative suffix) where *FM* 2, 56:20 has *likkali* (N precative).<sup>21</sup>

We can conjecture, therefore, that most of the work of administration scribes took place in their own quarters. Thus, when Ašmad, Ibalpi-El's assistant, needed to broadcast essentially the same document to seventeen regional leaders, his scribe must have slaved late into the day working out the necessary adaptations and interpolations.<sup>22</sup> And if their work included copying from another text, they relied on a colleague to read aloud from one text while they checked the other. This, apparently, is the meaning of the term *muštassûm*, which is applied to one of the two partners in the enterprise.<sup>23</sup>

21. These verbal forms are additional evidence that La'um was quoting his king's instruction from memory, for Zimri-Lim himself had written *awilum šû adi pagrā'i lišib*.

22. See A.3591, datable to just before ZL3' and edited in M. Guichard, "Au pays de la Dame de Nagar," 256–57. Ašmad writes to the king:

I have listened to the tablet my lord conveyed to me. My lord wrote to me the following, "The ruler of Ešnunna has just left on his campaign." As soon as I listened to my lord's tablet, I conveyed tablets to all the kings, to:

Bunu-Ištar	[king of Kurda]
Hatnu-rabi	[king of Qatara]
Šarriya	[king of Eluhut]
Šarrum-ki[ma]-kalima	[king of Razama (in Yamutbal)]
Turum-nakte [sic]	[King of Šehna/Šubat-Enlil]
Haya-Sum[u]	[King of Ilašura]
Huziran	[= Huziri, king of Hazzikkannum]
Kabiya	[king of Kahat]
Hatni-turuk	[king of ?]
Mariya . . .	[King of ?]
Hammurabi	[King of Kurda]
Sibkuna-Addu	[King of Šadu]
Asdi-takim	[king of Harran]
Bunuma-Addu	[King of Nihriya]
Yarkab-Addu	[King of Talhayum]
Abi-etar	[King of ?]
and Asqur-Addu	[King of Karana],

saying, "The ruler of Ešnunna is coming up, thinking, 'I shall stabilize my frontier' and 'I am heading for Šubat-Enlil.'"

16] This is what the ruler of [Ešnunna] wrote to [my lord] . . . [The remaining lines of this text are not given in Guichard's treatment; but the few lines cited seem to deal with Benyaminite leaders in revolt against Zimri-Lim.]

Guichard (236 n. 2) terms such letters "circulaires." They are not to be confused with many examples of letters copied, allegedly in toto, within other letters. See, for example, ARM 26, 129 and *Florilegium marianum* 2, 116. I would love to have the "originals" of such copied letters for comparison, for I suspect that the copies would not prove particularly faithful.

23. I cite two passages in which this term occurs. The first is in a colophon to a Šamši-Addu "Chronicle," reading "ŠU Habdu-Malik *muštassû* Limi-Dagan"; M. Birot, "Les chroniques «assyrienne» de Mari," *MARI* 4 (1985): 232. Here the choices are either that Limi-Dagan dictated the text (so Durand, apud Birot, 232 n. 9) or that he helped Habdu-Malik confirm it as a correct copy. I found the first notion less plausible, if only because chronicles are not likely to be created but are compiled

With this in mind, we can get back to Hamman's scribe and his alleged lapses. The claim is that he heard Aparhā but wrote "Hadurahā."<sup>24</sup> While in documents

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from a number of documents. I would therefore translate the colophon, "Work of Habdu-Malik; Limi-Dagan (being) the reciter." Habdu-Malik may well be the same as the scribe who operated during Zimri-Lim's reign (8, 33:23). None of the published references to a Limi-Dagan (menials or tribesmen) is likely to correspond to Habdu-Malik's colleague.

The word *mušassūm* makes a more ambiguous appearance in M.7481 (= *Florilegium marianum* 2, 17, Maul, "Die Korrespondenz des Iasim-Sūmū," 48–50), a letter Yasim-sumu sent to the king:

5] I am herewith sending to my lord an inscription (*narūm*) for the chariot of Nergal and an inscription for the palanquin of Itur-Mer.

11] The inscription for the chariot of Nergal, should it be written on the chariot's face ("breast") or the rear ("tail")? My lord should consider the matter; yet this inscription should be written on the rear ("tail"), where the weapon is set, so that reader and reciter could read it ([*šāsūm u mušassūm ištānassū*]).

22] As to the inscription for the palanquin that god [Itur-mer] rides, it could be written (either) on the face ("breast") or back. Whatever his decision, my lord should write me so that before my lord sets forth toward here, these inscriptions can be written.

In this document, both palanquins and chariots have a "breast" (*irtum*); but palanquins have backs (*warkatum*) and chariots have a "tail" (*zibbatum*) on which the divine weapon is secured. *narūm* seems to refer to some sort of (wooden or stone) inscription that could be fixed on chariots and palanquins, rather than to a clay tablet, with a draft of the text to be copied on the vehicles. In this case, *šātārum* [N] should be taken metonymically: once the inscriptions are fixed, chariot/palanquin will have been written. That a *narūm* could be comparatively small is known already from literary texts, see J. G. Westenholz, "Writing for Posterity: Naram-Sin and Enmerkar," in *kinattūtu ša dārāt: Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume*, ed. A. F. Rainey et al. (Tel Aviv, Occasional Publications 1; Ramat Aviv, 1993), 213–16.

Still, the positioning of the inscriptions is critical here. Yasim-sumu is of the opinion that, as far as the palanquin is concerned, the inscription could be set front or back, but he advises that it should be set toward the rear of the chariot, nearer the weapon. His reason has something to do with ease of reading. But why mention two types of readers when the verbal conjugation precludes making a choice ("reader or reciter")? Does the reading involve antiphony ("read to each other")?

I have used M.7481 to clarify 2 Sam 6:2 in "The Lord of Hosts, Seated over the Cherubs," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible. Essays in Honour of John Van Seters*, ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer (BZAW 294; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 227–34.

24. The verb *rasābum* (construed with accusative) occurs in A.2701, a text Charpin has published in "Lies natürlich . . .," 48–50. Hulalum writes to a king, likely Yasmah-Addu:

5] Among the tablets that were brought from Qatna to the king [Šamši-Addu], there was one tablet that was to be brought to my lord [= Yasmah-Addu], but Qatna messengers mixed it up and presented it to the king.

14] I opened it and, observing it to have been written to my lord, I did not recite it to the king. I am herewith getting this tablet sent to my lord.

As Charpin himself notes in "Errare humanum est (à propos de verbe *rasābum*)," *NABU* 1995/28, 23–24, the verb *rasābum* occurs also in AbB 7, 110:28 (about a field mistakenly mentioned in a sealed tablet) and in AbB 10, 192:22 (about a theft, contrasting how the writer mistakenly took something [*ina la idim arsubma elqe*], and how someone else made a mistake but continued to speak without knowledge [*irsumma ina la idim iqbi*]).

D. Charpin refers to another document that seems to have gone astray, the unpublished A.977 ("Tāwītum »libellé, formulaire«," *NABU* 88/85, 58–59). General Samidahum writes, "Yasim-El came

found in Mari there are several “A”-signs that could be taken for a “Ha”-sign (because they can have a *Winkelhaken* at the bottom left), for a scribe to misread “Ha” for “A” would not be as likely.<sup>25</sup> To explain how the sequence *-dura-* in Hadurahā could have been copied as *-par-* in Aparhā, I have tried to match possible combinations of relevant signs, even distortions of relevant signs, with those in the Mari repertoire; but it was in vain. Consequently, I am reasonably satisfied that if there was an error, it would not have occurred during a copying process, not when the scribe created the letter I cite above after consulting his own notes, and not when he copied the information from a letter reaching Hamman with news of Bunuma-Addu’s triumph. (For that matter, I might excuse on similar grounds Ibalpi-El’s own scribe, unpracticed though he may have been, when he copied the information from Hamman’s tablet.<sup>26</sup>) Rather, the mistake was likely to have happened a step or two earlier, during an oral transfer of information—either when the scribe misheard what Hamman was telling him to write Ibalpi-El or when Hamman himself was hearing news of Bunuma-Addu’s victory.

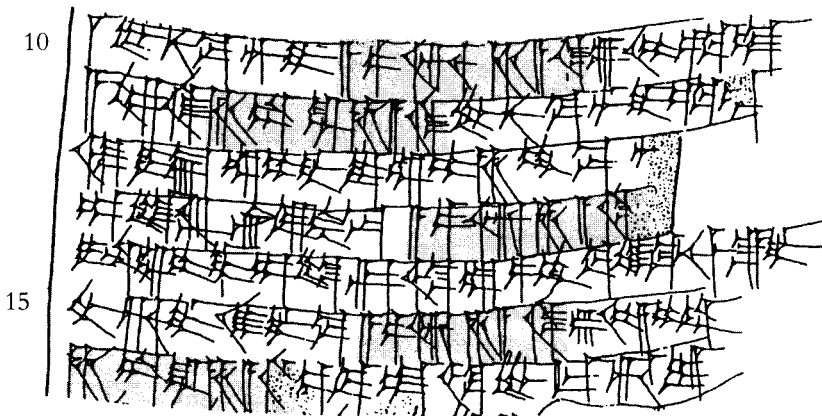


Fig. 1. Relevant passages citing Aparhā (lines 10, 13, 15) and Hadurahā (lines 11, 16). Copy: D. Charpin.

here with 200 troops from the palace gate, carrying a tablet from my lord; but the bullae had no formulations. Although it bore my lord’s seal, it did not give at the bottom whether (it was) for me or Hamman.”

25. See Bottéro’s sign list (#311, 217) in ARM 15, 21–22 and his notes to #311 on p. 29. Other relevant signs are **du** (#135), **dur** (#82), **ra** (#178), **pa** (#153 could look like **tap**), **pár** (#47s).

26. Contra Charpin, who writes (“Lies natürlich . . .,” 47),

La question qu’on ne peut manquer de se poser consiste à savoir si l’erreur est vraiment celle qu’Ibâl-pî-El prétend: est-ce vraiment le scribe de Hammān qui s’est trompé? N’est-ce pas plutôt au moment où son propre scribe a recopié l’information qu’il a commis une erreur? On ne peut exclure cette seconde solution, d’autant qu’on constate que le scribe de A.427+ a oublié un signe à la l. 5.

Now I will admit to lacking an inner ear for the native pronunciation of “Hadurahā” and “Aparhā,” given the many possible phonemes represented by the consonants in the cuneiform orthography. Still, the phonetic difference between the two names does not seem wide enough to believe that a scribe would have put down “Aparhā” just when Hamman was telling him “Hadurahā.” This comment also means that I strongly doubt what essentially is Ibalpi-El’s second charge: that had the scribe only recited his text (to a colleague, but especially to Hamman) to aurally verify its contents, he would have caught the error and made the needed correction before dispatching the faulty letter to Ibalpi-El. So, while Ibalpi-El remains technically accurate when implicating the scribe, the transmission of false information must have taken place *before* Hamman called him in for dictation.<sup>27</sup> In other words, when a letter to Ibalpi-El about Bunuma-Addu’s conquest was first drafted, everyone in Hamman’s circle placed it at Aparhā and not Hadurahā.

Still, while exonerating a scribe from a crime against the profession should in itself be a noble goal for any of us, there is nevertheless need to offer a plausible accounting for Ibalpi-El’s own motivations in drafting his corrective letter to Zimri-Lim.

In the Mari age, people high and low wished to be first with the latest, communicating what they learned not only to the king, but also to those who had the king’s ear; for the game was to keep themselves in the king’s mind, and therefore in his favor. Consequently, officials did not hesitate to plagiarize the latest news, even when forwarding the tablets from which they themselves learned that news. Perhaps they imagined that only their own version of account would stick in the king’s memory.

In doing so, these officials were hardly frugal with their supply of clay. One episode drawn for illustration has the king complaining that when he sought a certain Yahadum, he received instead information on Yadiha-abum. A close reading of the text allows me to reconstruct the exchange of at least nine tablets via teams of messengers shuttling among Terqa, Qattunan, and the king’s quarters. In addition, at least four *lāsimū* were entrusted with an oral version, if not versions, of the original request.<sup>28</sup> This whole undertaking suggests an administration with little discipline for ordered exchange. Yet, I might add, this Rube Goldberg style in state administration, with its consequent webbing of recycled information, is precisely

27. Occasionally, one reads of the reticence of correspondents to send material before checking its accuracy; but they seem to be excuses rather than formulation of policy. In ARM 26, 304:9–10, Yamšum writes, “News that I hear here or there or that I witness, I am not sending it to my lord until I have confirmed it. It is possible that once in a while I have not checked on some news; but it is in no sense a lie. I cannot lie to my lord.” Iddiyatum is less verbose in 26, 521 when he claims that he does not send what he writes until he sleeps on it and checks it out.

28. The choice of messengers is occasionally discussed in the texts, e.g., ARM 26, 318:5–7, where Zimri-Lim is quoted as saying, “Write me above all whatever news comes to you, but make sure that your message carrier remains vigilant (*ana wābil tuppika nu*”*idma lidnin*).”

what gives Mari its thick texture but also confers upon its world an intimacy that is rarely matched elsewhere.

The dossier is treated by Charpin, “‘Lies natürlich . . .’” (50–54) and includes two letters, A.2453 and ARM 3, 68. I give them in the chronological order in which they were written. (My rendering of the final paragraph in A.2453 is not certain; Charpin understands it differently.)

[ARM 3, 68 = LAPO 18: 1068] To “my lord,” from Kibri-Dagan, “your servant”

5] Regarding Yadiha-abum, a Sahri man about whom my lord wrote to me, I promptly wrote to Yaqqim-Addu, giving him strict instruction. Yaqqim-Addu wrote to Yapah-Lim, a royal agent at Sahri, and townsmen searched for this man—imposing oaths where there was a town—but this man was not to be found.

15] Now, the tablet that Yapah-Lim conveyed to Yaqqim-Addu, Yaqqim-Addu had it conveyed to me with urgency telling me, “send this letter to my lord so that he can hear it.”

23] Now, then, my lord should hear this tablet: this man has not been found in Sahri.

[A.2453] To “my lord,” from [Yaqqim-Addu], “your servant”

5] My lord wrote to me, “I have written you about Yahadum, [a Sahri man], but you wrote to me about Yadiha-abum.” This is what my lord wrote to me.

9] No (royal) courier ever came to me! Instead two men from Terqa came to me to say, “Kibri-Dagan has sent us with urgency to you saying, ‘write to Sahri for them to search for Yadiha-abum, then send him to me.’” This is what they told me.

19] Promptly I sent two of my servants to Yapah-Lim, the royal agent at Sahri and this man wrote to me, “I have toured the province, but there is no Yadi<sup>1</sup>-abum.”

24] But I minded the oath of my lord; [the men?] did not pronounce Yahadum’s (name). Had they told me, “Convey to me the man whose son Hana-tribesman kidnapped,” I would have heeded the words . . .

Here is a reconstruction of events:

[YA = information drawn from Yaqqim-Addu’s letter, A.2435]

[KD = information drawn from Kibri-Dagan’s letter, ARM 3, 68]

1. [KD] The king asks Kibri-Dagan to find a man in Sahri, a town under Yaqqim-Addu’s jurisdiction. **Tablet**
2. [YA] Kibri-Dagan sends two Terqa men to Yaqqim-Addu, asking him to search for Yadiha-abum. **2 men**  
NB [KD] Kibri-Dagan claims to have *written* Yaqqim-Addu. **Tablet**

3. [YA] Yaqqim-Addu asks Yapah-Lim of Sahri to search for Yadiha-abum.  
     NB [KD] Kibri-Dagan claims that Yaqqim-Addu wrote to Yapah-Lim.  
     **2 men**
4. [YA] Yapah-Lim sends a tablet to Yaqqim-Addu, reporting the absence (non-existence?) of a Yadi<sup>1</sup>-abum in Sahri. **Tablet**
5. [KD] Yaqqim-Addu relays this tablet and a report to Kibri-Dagan. **Tablet**
6. [YA] Yaqqim-Addu sends a report to the king. **Tablet**
7. [KD] Kibri-Dagan forwards Yapah-Lim's report, plus his own letter, where Yadiha-abum is said to be the person sought. **Tablet + ARM 3, 68**
8. [YA] King, upset, writes Yaqqim-Addu an angry letter about searching for the wrong man. **Tablet**
9. [YA] Yaqqim-Addu writes the king to exculpate himself. **A.2435**

As it is not likely that the king would have sent apologies to Yaqqim-Addu, this segment of the episode may not have generated more documents. Inspecting this dossier carefully, however, leads me to believe that the initial error took place in the first communication between the king and Kibri-Dagan: If the commission was made *by letter*, then the error was likely the king's (or his secretary's), since Kibri-Dagan always looked for a "Yadiha-abum" (see ARM 3, 68:5-6); but if the commission was done orally, then any of those involved (king, messenger, or Kibri-Dagan) could have made the error. The possibility that there was an oral/aural lapse gains if nicknames had been used during the commission: Yadiha-abum = *Yadihum* vs. *Yahadum* = Yahad-abum/DN. Each of these spellings of names (as well as others coined on the same verbal roots) is attested in Mari documents.

We know from other correspondence that Hamman himself was in direct contact with Zimri-Lim; but neither he nor Ibalpi-El was the king's only reader of events in the Balih area. Events were very fluid throughout the Mari age and information flew fast and hard.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the region leaked like a sieve, as far as the trade in news was concerned, and the likelihood is great that the king was made aware separately of Bunuma-Addu's activity. In fact, it is also likely that Ibalpi-El himself must have learned the true account of Bunuma-Addu's conquest from the same types of sources. So he went back to Dēr because he needed to confirm the news before correcting it; but he also needed to finesse his way out of embarrassment, and I believe that the main aim of the letter I presented above is to do just that.

But Ibalpi-El's real scapegoat is not the scribe, who remains protected by anonymity, but Hamman himself. Worth noticing is line 5, which reads, *ṭuppi Hamman ša ana šēriya ušābilūnim*. Now in Mari as elsewhere in OB texts, the third-person plural was used as an indefinite subject to facilitate focus on an activity when there was no particular interest in who was responsible for it. But in the royal correspondence,

29. See ARM 26, 490:4-7, excerpted from a note a diplomat wrote the king, "My previous tablet was hardly placed in an envelope than couriers, four of Asqur-Addu's men, came here to say . . ."



which includes the reports of diplomats, this locution also served to disguise immediate accountability for acts that were being reported.<sup>30</sup> By assigning to anonymous deliverers the posting of a letter which, moreover, was sealed by an undisciplined scribe, Ibalpi-El is censuring Hamman doubly, not only for generating defective news but also for sloppy and lax supervision of underlings. In contrast, the king is invited to compare Hamman's unprofessional behavior with that of Ibalpi-El who, as is shown in lines 6 to 8, takes full responsibility for transmitting the latest news.

This episode, in fact, is not the only one in which Ibalpi-El gives an unflattering portrait of Hamman. In A.2995, an unnamed *suqāqum* of a neighboring town shares with Hamman highly sensitive news about Bašsum, a trusted officer of Zimri-Lim who nevertheless was apparently in cahoots with the same Bunuma-Addu. The next day Hamman hides three witnesses behind a door despite having taken a solemn oath never to betray the *suqāqum*'s secret. Incredibly enough, Hamman persuades this gullible leader to repeat his incriminating information. Ibalpi-El relays this whole episode to Zimri-Lim; but while he is subtly disapproving of Hamman's behavior, Ibalpi-El does cloak the identity of the *suqāqum*, a potential victim, in the same way as he does that of the scribe of A.427.<sup>31</sup>

In this example, as well as in the text featured above, Ibalpi-El has done more than report on regional events; he has also taken aim against a potential competitor for the king's attention, launching another salvo in a never-ending campaign to

30. See my comments in "On Reading the Diplomatic Letters in the Mari Archives," *Amuru 2* (forthcoming).

31. A.2995 + M.14337 (= LAPO 16: 310; Ghouti, "Témoins derrière la porte," 63; see also ARM 26, 24), a letter Ibalpi-El sent to Zimri-Lim:

4] The *suqāqum* (king's agent) of Arduwan in Zalmaqum came here to Dēr and told Hamman,

A man who normally does Bašsum's business with Bunuma-Addu—well, once, when he conveyed a garb and a jacket (*naḥlaptum*) to Bunuma-Addu, the latter said, "No doubt, look how Bašsum is being forthright with me."

This is what this man told Hamman.

15] The next day, Hamman stood 3 men behind wooden double-doors to witness for him—Dada, Yašub-Lim and Yaptuna-El. He called this man from Ardawan, and began to question him as follows, "Go back to the words you spoke yesterday." This man proceeded to tell Hamman, "If you reveal this conversation to anyone, I will die beyond doubt!" Hamman proceeded to place himself under oath for him, "I shall not reveal your words to anyone."

28] Because he placed himself under oath for him, [the man from Ardawan] went back to the words which he spoke the day before, "For 2 years now, Bašsum has been continually beholden to Bunuma-Addu." Dada, the resident-agent, Yašub-Lim, and Yaptuna-El of Dēr could each hear these words from behind wooden double-doors.

35] As for me, having come to Dēr, Hamman set matters before me, "[From] there, he cannot [protect] nor preserve the city." My lord should pay careful attention to these matters and answer me one way or another. Either I should send Bašsum to my lord like [a criminal?] or would it be better for me to grab him here? My lord should answer me one way or another so that I can carry out my lord's order.

prove himself more dependable and more loyal than any other colleague, and therefore to be more deserving of the king's favor.<sup>32</sup>

As for Zimri-Lim, how did he react to receiving first false then correct news about Aparhā? He could have consulted with his private secretary, Šunuhra-halu, about the likelihood of Ibalpi-El's scenario. However, on other occasions in which he was likewise the recipient of dubious information, Zimri-Lim proved to be remarkably tolerant of human error. Not surprisingly, Ibalpi-El and Hamman continued to occupy their high positions throughout Zimri-Lim's relatively brief reign. As to Hamman's scribe at Dēr, I do not know what eventually happened to him; but protected by the anonymity Ibalpi-El conferred on him, I am sure he continued to ply his trade long after Zimri-Lim had given up the ghost.

32. One of the longest letters in the Mari archives is a diatribe against Ibalpi-El, ARM 27, 151.