

## Notes on the Concept of Time in Mesopotamia: Horizons and Semantics on Time in the Documentation from Mari<sup>1</sup>

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[This paper aims to study how the horizons of time were envisioned by the Mariotes. To achieve this goal, we must ask if the concepts of *beginning* and *end* were somehow present in their worldview. We must also analyze the general idea of an *eternity* as expressed in the documentation from the Syro-Mesopotamian kingdom of Mari. Thus, we propose to focus on the analysis of some key expressions, such as *dāriš*, *ūm šiātīm*, or *urram šēram* and the contexts in which they were used. We will then try to ascertain how the Mariotes thought of time in general and how they related it to their presence in the universe.]

**Keywords:** Mari; Zimrī-Lîm, concept of time, future, Mesopotamia.

The Mariote's idea of time (like the Mesopotamian's, in a broader perspective) was based on a very simple assumption: time, in its totality, was merely a differentiated set of spaces, located at different distances, situated in different directions (either *behind*<sup>2</sup> [*warkānum*] or *in front*<sup>3</sup> [*pānānum*]). These different spaces were based on that which was lived, the time-space in which the subject found himself –the *now*, the present. As such, they could be more, or less, distant. Proximity and distance are the concepts that stand out in this logic.

When distant, time could be both future or past, which is conveyed in the expression *ūm šiātīm* (literally: «the day of the exits», free translation: «the origin»). This formula can be found in the famous disc inscription of Yahdun-Lîm, where two different dimensions are conveyed: the past (*ištu ūm šiātīm*) and the future (*ana ūm šiātīm*). The inscriptions of Yahdun-Lim, with clear Sumerian and Akkadian influences, are actually the only Mariote examples with this expression<sup>4</sup>.

Since *ūm šiātīm* could refer to a past, or a future time, we can say that both were symmetrical time formulas. The future was the space diametrically opposite to the past, like a mirror in which its shape was reflected. The two constituted therefore an equal time, in the sense that both

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2. The word *warkānum* constitutes the future, a space which the human being cannot visualize, so it causes fear and unrest.

3. The word *pānānum* constitutes the past, the space that the human being sees, and therefore serves as an example for him (to follow or avoid) in his daily life.

4. In other contexts, the word *šātu* is often used alone. It is possible that it is more of a Mesopotamian expression, used in literary, religious, and monumental texts, or even sometimes in Assyrian annals. See the examples of *CAD* Š, pp. 117-119 and *CAD* U/W, *ūmul*b, p. 146, 7' and 8'.

corresponded to «distant»: «the distant in front» and «the distant behind». The time formula is identical. It is the preposition that alters it and gives it direction, pulling it «from» (*ištu*) or pushing it «until/to» (*ana*).

In the expressions *ištu ūm šiātīm* and *ana ūm šiātīm* evoked in the Yahdun-Lîm disc, time –the distant– corresponded, ultimately, to all time («from» or «to») in which a given *happening* was ascertained. Yet would this far-away distant, past or future, convey the idea of an *eternity*? Or would the Mariote have had the notion of a *beginning* and an *end* of time? Would these reflections have been part of his conceptual and historic discourse? These are the aspects we would like to address in this paper, having in consideration the epistolary and monumental *corpus* from the Syro-Mesopotamian kingdom of Mari.

### 1. *An Idea of Beginning?*

As the past and the future were based on the present, its dimension could not be very accentuated. In fact, as Jean-Marie Durand observed, in Mari, memory did not go beyond three generations<sup>5</sup>. The Mariote remembered a close past. The events remembered in epistolography remount, in fact, to the periods of Yagîd-Lîm (grandfather of Zimrî-Lîm), of Yahdun-Lîm and Samsî-Addu. In monument inscriptions, namely those of Yahdun-Lîm, are celebrated mainly the achievements and conquests of this same king. Yahdun-Lîm is the main actor of the narrative, and his main preoccupation is to give evidence of his glorious past and his promising future. The commemorative inscriptions, however, have the most comprehensive temporal perception. This is because frequently, when referring to a particular achievement it is portrayed as a feature never before accomplished; therefore, as an event *since always*<sup>6</sup>, never seen. The temporal horizon is, in these cases, much broader and indefinite than in the epistolary documentation. This aspect is obviously related to the actual nature of the inscription. As it was intended to be placed in a public place, and remain there, whatever was inscribed would have a permanent value. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the commemorative stela was meant to never be erased or destroyed, for fear of evoking divine wrath. Proof of this fact were the curses that often figured in the inscription. Therefore, the horizon envisaged therein could contemplate the *since always* and the *forever*. That is, the inscription and its contents were to remain immune to the vicissitudes of time. It remains to be understood what this *always* meant for the Mariote.

*ūm šiātīm*, which we referred to above, is perhaps the expression that is most distant from present time, and goes back to a more remote period. It appears not only in the so-called Yahdun-Lîm disc, but also in the monument inscription which alludes to the construction of a temple to the god Šamaš, citing that «Since ancient times (*ištu ūm šât*), when the god created (*ib-nu-û*) the city of Mari<sup>7</sup>, no king residing in Mari reached the sea»<sup>8</sup>. Here, what is distant is the construction of the

5. J.-M. Durand, «La conscience du temps et sa commémoration en Mésopotamie: l'exemple de la documentation mariote», *Akkadica* 124 (2003) 7.

6. This concept is not, as we will see, identical to today's. *Since always* and *forever* (which could be distinguished by the expressions *ūm šiātīm* or *dāriš*), correspond to something indefinite: an open time, with no end in sight, which does not necessarily imply infinity.

7. We should point out the linguistic choice in the inscriptions of Yahdun-Lîm and the divergence between the verbs *bašûm* and *epešûm*. In this example, the divinity creates (*bašûm*) the city of Mari. In the text *RIME* 4, E4.6.8.1, Yahdun-Lîm builds (*epešum*) the city of Dûr-Yahdun-Lîm.

8. *RIME* 4, E4.6.8.2, l. 34-37.

city of Mari by the divinity, that is, it is a kind of original past, of the genesis of Mari. It is up to us, therefore, to pose a question: is it possible to consider that in Mari there was the perception of an initial time, or of a beginning of times? The creation of the city of Mari necessarily implied a start, a historical beginning, the beginning of its existence, of its *being* (*bašûm*)<sup>9</sup>. And that *being* entailed, likewise, a measure, a *ûmum* (*ûm šiâtîm*). Thus, we can say that time was merged with the created work<sup>10</sup>.

However, this time refers strictly to Mari –to its history– and is thus a reflection of its context, an allusion to its edification long ago by the gods, entities that preceded its creation. There is no beginning of time here, neither is there an absolute, in the sense that time is only thought of as a representation of human experiences, whereby the idea of divine is exclusively to give it sense and significance.

The Mari term that conveys the most concrete idea of beginning is *šurram*. However, it never refers to an initial time, but rather to an initial subject or idea = originally. Therefore, the word is not used to refer to a metaphysical temporal concept, or an idea about the origin of time, but rather to a specific moment within the past. *Šurram* was meant to remember something that had been thought of earlier and had, in the meantime, been put aside<sup>11</sup>. The term *šurram* is, consequently, a reflection of an experience in a previous time. For example, in *ARM XXVIII 102*, Šadum-Labua, sovereign of Ašnakkum, recalls: «Primordially (*šurruram-ma*), my lord, in accord with his great royalty, appointed me to his service»<sup>12</sup>. In other words, the beginning is part of the story of Šadum-Labua and his initiation into the service of the Mari king.

In fact, for the Mariotes, time stood, above all, for what had been *lived*<sup>13</sup>; it represented the memory of a concrete experience, or, at least a celebration of an event transmitted through a specific series of cults and traditions –what we would call identity. In this sense, it is impossible to consider that in the Mariote's perception is denoted anything similar to a beginning of time.

## 2. The Concept of Future

Just as with the concept of a beginning, there was no notion of an end in Mariote thinking, contrary to what we find, for example, in the biblical narrative<sup>14</sup>. And as for the eternal? The concept which in Akkadian was perhaps closest to the idea of an absolute future was *dāriš*. This

9. The verb *bašûm* (used in the inscription) may have the meaning, among others, of «be available», «exist» or «happen» (*CAD B*, p. 144 and ss).

10. For example, the Babylonian myth *enûma eliš* shows us a pre-created world stadium, where the gods Tiāmat and Apsû are pre-existent entities. This concept should not diverge from a more Mariote way of thinking, despite the fact that there are no evidences that can clarify their cosmogonical perceptions. We should point out that this poem begins with the temporal clause *inûma* («when»), constituting, therefore, not a beginning, but rather a continuity.

11. J.-M. Durand, “Notes brèves”, *MARI 5* (1987) 669.

12. L. 8-9.

13. Of course, the idea of a time before the existence of the human beings was not absent. This consisted, however, of a projection of reality in a mythical place. In fact, the battle between Addu and Têmtum symbolized, above all, the eternal struggle of the Mariotes against the devastation and floods that befell their territory and jeopardised stability: order against chaos.

14. In reality, the idea of *end*, as portrayed in the Apocalypse of St. John, is more related with a renovation and recovery of the historic and social balance than with the announcement of a last limit.

concept<sup>15</sup> consisted of a time which extended throughout an indefinite space, whose main characteristics were permanence and immutability. To understand these concepts, it is necessary, in the first place, to comprehend how the conceptual space that was *behind* was perceived and represented. In fact, how future was this future? What is the idea of it, and what really does *dāriš* mean? Would there have been awareness of an absolute future in Mari? Would it have been a real metaphysical preoccupation for the Mariote? Would it have been represented somehow in his imagination?

In Mari, the future was the space of the gods. To gain access to that space the Mariotes had to intercede before the divine sphere. Now, in the divinatory texts this future is immediate. That is, the Mariote scrutinized the future in a merely pragmatic way. He was interested in its immediate and practical effects.

The importance of this anticipated knowledge of the future is evident in *ARM XXVI/1 104*. In this letter, Ibâl-pî-El informs the Mariote king about his concern that the generals of Išme-Dagan had listened to the report about the oracle consultations of the Mariote diviners. Ibâl-pî-El feared that Išme-Dagan would use the information to overthrow the order and turn Mari's allies against their sovereign. The account described by Ibâl-pî-El in *ARM XXVI/1 104* took place in the court of Hammu-rabi of Babylon. Diplomatic protocol stipulated that foreign embassies met with the monarch and took part in his private council, giving him all the information that they carried. According to the ambassador Zimrî-Lîm: «When Hâlî-hadûn and Inib-Šamaš (Mari diviners), took omens several times and when they reported (the results) of the omens, Išar-Lîm, Mutu-Hadqim and Rîm-Addu (generals of Išme-Dagan) would not step aside. They would stand and would listen attentively to the results of the omen (inquiry)». The danger of this exposition is then expressed in the form of a question: «Beyond the secret conveyed by a diviner, what other secret (could there be)»<sup>16</sup>. The question raised by Ibâl-pî-El shows the great importance of divination. It was by these consultations that the king (and the Mariote in general) conducted their lives. Asking the gods about the future was the only secure and correct way to act. We could even affirm that nothing in Mari (and in Mesopotamia in general) was done without first consulting the gods. The warning of the queen mother Addu-dûrî in *ARM X 54* can be analysed in that light: «May my lord intensify his expeditions according to his good omens»<sup>17</sup>.

Oracular consultations encompassed, therefore, different issues, like the king's well-being, an enemy's intentions, the advantage of carrying out military or diplomatic expeditions, the convenience of the *entry*<sup>18</sup> of the gods, or the right date for the grazing of the herds. What was at stake here was the survival of daily practices. Oracular consultation frequently had the objective of obtaining an answer to a concrete question. An example of the type of questions asked of the gods can be found in *ARM XXVI/1 185-bis*. In the epistle Zimrî-Lîm asks his wife to obtain information about the intentions of the Babylonian monarch, Hammu-rabi. Šibtu was to ask the following:

15. Although dictionaries attribute the more common meaning of «für immer»/«forever» to the word *dāriš* (cf. *AHW* III, p. 163 e *CAD D*, p. 113), this does not seem to comply with the concept displayed in the Mari texts, as we will see further on.

16. J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives. An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters*. Winona Lake, Indiana 2015, p. 272.

17. *Idem, ibidem*.

18. The *erēbum* («entry») was the moment when the gods who came to visit Mari from other sanctuaries entered the royal palace (*ARM XXVI/1 162*). Regarding the Eštar celebrations, the *šūrubtum* ceremony was the moment when (the statue of) the divinity was introduced in the palace. This ceremony was to coincide with the first crescent moon (*LAPO* 18, p. 127d)).

«Will this man die? Will he be honest with us? Will he battle against us? If I go north, will he besiege us?»<sup>19</sup>. Here, like in other cases, the questions raised were related to a very specific matter. Consultations were done for an exclusive topic. The aim was to know what would happen in the immediate future: what measures should be taken to guarantee social cohesion and internal stability. The social and economic order was at stake, and to maintain it, it was necessary to understand how the *other* (in this case Hammu-rabi) would act. It was also necessary to understand the external factors, either political or natural, that would influence the unfolding of events. For example, it was important to perceive how time influenced the crops, how the gods would receive a sacrifice made on a certain day, or how the king's health would be.

All this was summed up in a simple fact: the Mariote hoped to avoid any evil befalling him; he hoped to improve or preserve his present condition. Through divination he would have a safeguard for the future. Since oracular consultation quite often referred to a well-defined topic<sup>20</sup>, it could not cover extended time-cycles. In fact, oracular consultations in Mari were done for relatively short periods of time<sup>21</sup>. These periods could be for a space of 2 or 3 days, of 5, 10, 15 or 20 days, or even of 1, 2 or 6 months<sup>22</sup>. The longest period of time recorded in the Mari documents is 6 months, although this is only mentioned in one case<sup>23</sup>. In that text, the diviner Asqudum mentions that, having arrived in the district of Sagarâtum, «I took the omens for the well-being of the city of Sagarâtum for 6 months»<sup>24</sup>. In most cases the consultation was carried out for a period of one month (or more concretely, until the end of (this) month [*adi rēš warhim*<sup>25</sup> (*annîm*)])<sup>26</sup>.

As we can see, the space of the contemplated future in the Mariote imagination is the *next*; that which remains *behind*, but in the immediacy of today<sup>27</sup>. The same concept appears in the temporal formulas regarding the future, in epistolography. The expression *urram šēram*<sup>28</sup> (or

19. On the term *e-el-le-e-em*, see ARM XXVI/1, p. 369h). Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, pp. 275-276.

20. When it wasn't a routine consultation *ana šulum NG* («for the well-being of NG»).

21. In effect, only over a short period of time could events be controlled with precision.

22. D. E. Fleming studied the counting of time in Mari, using as a base the divinatory documents and other texts from the royal archives. The author reached the conclusion that the conventional time units in Mari were those mentioned. The study was published in the article «Counting time at Mari and in early second millennium Mesopotamia», *MARI* 8 (1997) 675-692.

23. Obviously, the longer the period was, the less foreseeable it would be. Cf. *idem*.

24. ARM XXVI/1 88, l. 18-20.

25. Cf. D. E. Fleming, *MARI* 8, p. 691. On the complexity of the expression *rēš warhim* (literally, «the head of the month»), see J.-M. Durand, *LAPO* 18, pp. 161-162a) and «La religion amorrite en Syrie à l'époque des archives de Mari», in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites Occidentaux. Volume 1: Ebla, Mari*, Leuven - Paris - Dudley (2008) 593. According to the author, the expression referred to a period comprising the end of the present month and the beginning of the next. In reality, it was with the *tēbibtum* («calculation») that the *rēš warhim* was decided. The *tēbibtum* calculated when the month should end so that the moon would reappear on the second day of the following month. In most cases, *rēš warhim* had the meaning of «end of the month».

26. Usually this was the duration of the omen.

27. If today (*ūmam*) was the present, tomorrow (*urram*) was the future. Cf. note below.

28. *šērum* is the word from which denominates the verb *šērum* (*AHw* III, p. 1219), which means «to rise early» (*CAD* Š/2, p. 335). Would it make sense, perhaps, that a perception of «origin» (or of «beginning») is present here? The morning (*šērum*) might correspond to the dawn of *another* day. In *ARM* IV 51 (l. 20), the meaning of the verb is clear. Išme-Dagan gives the following order to Yasmah-Addu: «come the next day, as early as possible (*še-rum še-ra-am alkam*)» (*CAD* Š/2, p. 335). Both terms, *urram* and *šēram* therefore share a similar semantic meaning. *urram* was «the day of tomorrow». It appears especially in texts from the Paleo-Babylonian period, in Mari, in Alalah and in Boğazköy. (cf. *CAD* Š/2, p. 334). J.-R. Kupper points out the following: in the Mari archives, the expression is found in texts from Upper Mesopotamia and Aleppo (*BiOr* 11 (1954), 119); which is correct, if we exclude some examples from the Mariote territory that were published later. In *RA* 78, p. 12d), B. Lafont considered the possibility of the expression having

simply *urram*) usually introduces prayers where concern about the possibility of certain occurrences is evident. Misgivings, unrest and fear are feelings that come with these temporal formulas. The writers intended to underline the inevitability of a catastrophe (or an undesirable situation) happen if people didn't act otherwise. As an example, in *ARM XXVI/1* 145, the diviner Šamaš-înâya complains to the king about the fact that he does not have a territory at his disposal, nor any help or the necessary materials to carry out his profession. The complaints of Šamaš-înâya take on more worrying proportions when he states: «Sooner or later (*urram šēram*) –God forbid– there will be a fault!»<sup>29</sup>. The same type of warning is given by Yaqqim-Addu in *FM II* 27. The high-ranking official feared for the life of the merchants from Emar who travelled to Mari. Yaqqim-Addu stated that they would be taking a risk by starting their journey: «Those men are from Emar and since the men are from Emar, sooner or later (*urram šēram*), they will be killed»<sup>30</sup>. The text is not explicit, but according to the words of Yaqqim-Addu, the mere fact that the merchants were men from Emar placed them in a fragile position. It is possible that this situation was a result of the importance of that city as a trading centre, and its political status<sup>31</sup>. *urram šēram*, «sooner or later», or, if we prefer, «one day or another», expressed, in most cases<sup>32</sup>, the idea of inevitability: the unshakeable certainty that an (undesired) phenomenon would take place if things remained the way they were. *urram šēram* signals the indefinite moment of the realization of that feared event –a moment that would happen in the near but indeterminate future<sup>33</sup>.

At times, it is the actual royal officer, the remitter of the epistle, who fears future rebukes from the king for lapses in communication. Often the *urram šēram* formula is preceded by the expression *assurri* («I fear that ...» or «I hope that X doesn't happen»). An example of this can be found in a letter from Zakira-Hammû, governor of Qaṭṭunân. The royal administrator feared that in the future Zimrî-Lîm would ask him for an explanation about the situation experienced in the district. Zakira-Hammû is clear in his assertions: «I am afraid that (*assurre*), sooner or later (*urram šēram*), my lord will say: «Why didn't you write to me about their ration of grain? Well! I wrote to my lord»<sup>34</sup>. The matter to which the governor referred had to do with the grain provisions allotted to a supplementary army that protected the fields and the transportation of mail. Yasîm-Sûmû, the

Hurrian origins. According to Jean-Marie Durand, it could be translated as «bientôt». Literally, it would mean «tomorrow at dawn» (*LAPO* 16, p.461a)).

29. J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, p. 172. The apprehension of the diviner is understandable in the sense that the scarcity of means prevented him from communicating with the divine, and consequently, of foreseeing potential alterations in his district.

30. L. 5'-8'. Also in A.1121+ (= *LAPO* 18 984) the possibility of a failure/loss is mentioned (*hiṭṭum*): «If tomorrow or after, any loss occurs, my lord will not say...» (Cf. F. Caramelo, *A linguagem profética na Mesopotâmia (Mari e Assíria)*. Cascais, 2002, p. 115).

31. Emar was an important trading post which enjoyed certain political autonomy. See M. Bonechi and A. Catagnoti, «Compléments à la correspondance de Yaqqim-Addu, gouverneur de Saggarâtum», *FM II* (1994) 62d).

32. In some documents, the expression *urram šēram* alludes merely to a future event, which was not necessarily nefarious. This was the case of A.2924 (See J.-M. Durand, «Peuplement et sociétés à l'époque amorrite (I) Les clans bensim'alites», *Amurru* 3 (2004) 162). The royal official, Sûmû-hadû, indicates that: «Sooner or later (*urram šēram*), all the Benjamite Bedouins, the *merhû* and the *sugāgû* will reach Dûr-Yahdun-Lîm» (l. 10-13).

33. *ARM VIII* 67 is an exception. It is a juridical document, unfortunately fragmented, where the *urram šēram* formula replaces the more common *u 4 . k ú r*. After the expression, there was an indication that none of the parties would be able to make claims once the contract was concluded. It was a more or less close future (in the lives of the people that were bound by the contract). It is possible that some curses would be presented at the end of the text, whereby we can assume that here again there was an attempt to avoid undesired occurrences.

34. *ARM XXVII* 44, l. 19-23.

*šandabakkum*<sup>35</sup> of the Mari palace had reduced them and the governor was apprehensive about losing the support of this troops. His main concern, therefore, was to write to the king, giving him a detailed account of the matter, and emphasising that he was fulfilling his duty to provide information.

In summary, *urram šēram* represented an indefinite time in the future which was dependent on the present. This uncertain space was rarely deemed favourable, and in it was projected a vague hope that some dreaded event would not come to happen. The future was a feared space where uncertainty was the main mark. Divine intervention can be understood in this sense: appease the fears of the population. The present alert was to avoid that hypothetical, but quite real, future. We are not, therefore, looking at a comprehensive, abstract, or absolute future. On the contrary, it is an immediate time, a future that depends on the present and is the direct reflection of a situation experienced *today*. We can say, therefore, that with some rare exceptions, in the epistolography there is no future that exceeds the period of the current reign or the present population. There is no prospective frame where the experience of the later generations is projected and conceived.

There is, however, some epistolary evidence where scatological and apocalyptic nuances can be detected<sup>36</sup>, precisely because they denounce the existence of an invincible destiny; these are documents that evoke images of such greatness that they transcend the geographical and temporal domain which they are inserted in.

In *ARM XXVI/1 208*, a letter with prophetic content, the family of gods and goddesses, gathered in an assembly, make the following oath: «We will do no harm to Mari's brickwork or to its (protective) guardian»<sup>37</sup>. This pronouncement appears to push towards a sort of *ad aeternum* happiness of the country of the banks of the Euphrates; or, to put it another way, leaves the future open. Contrary to what we said earlier, and despite the prophecy coming from a concrete context (the war against Elam), there is no evidence herein of a temporal concept as limited as in other cases. The oath of the celestial assembly takes place after drinking a liquid in which parts of the «Gate of Mari» had been melted. So, the absorption of the dirt/clay of these parts presupposes a timeless connection of the gods to the capital of the middle Euphrates.

Consequently, in the course of events, others would benefit equally from the protection of the Mariote pantheon, like Zimri-Lîm. That is, the oath ensured that the glory of Mari, and its central historical role in Syria-Mesopotamia, was to be continued. In a way, the oath transformed the future in a *sempiterna* regeneration of a past time when tranquility was obsessively sought. A past time that is represented by the substance of the city, which in turn evokes the work created by the divine sphere.

This letter also underlines the importance of revitalising the established order. Dissolving the matter of creation, swearing on it, meant replacing the essence of the city, the country, and its leader. For the future to proceed without trepidations it was necessary to return to the past; understand where the origins of Mari laid, and where its authority came from. There was a sort of recreation or rebirth of the country. The future would only materialise if its true nature was respected, if the past (that is, its identity) was recycled and projected to the *behind*. This way its

35. Important official in the administration of the palace of Mari, in charge of the royal archives.

36. Apart from the example cited above, we can refer to *ARM XXVI/1 196*. On the apocalyptic nuances in some of the Mari letters, see J. M. Sasson, "An Apocalyptic Vision from Mari: Speculations on *ARM X:9*", *MARI 1* (1982) 151-167 and "Utopian and Dystopian Images in Mari Prophetic Texts", in E. Ben Zvi (ed.), *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*. Göttingen, 2006, pp. 36-37.

37. J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, p. 282.

history would be preserved. Therefore, it was a vision of a future that was moulded on the image of the past and the historical *alliance* between man and god, where there was no room for the notion of the transcendence of time.

### 3. *Is dāriš Tantamount to Eternity?*

Votive and commemorative inscriptions offer us a broader vision of the space *behind*. As stated, *dāriš* is perhaps the term that best describes the idea of a comprehensive future. However, we do not believe that there was a real preoccupation with the infinite. The long-lasting nature of time arises merely from the need to give an open, unfinished and unlimited character to things observed in the present. However, its *eternal* prevision (*dāriš*) did not imply its eternity *per se*. For example, when the term reflected the hope that the reign of a given sovereign would be «eternally» prosperous and abundant, it appeared, especially<sup>38</sup>, in the form of *ana ūmī dārūtīm* («for eternal days»)<sup>39</sup>. Now, in this case eternity is not bestowed on the king, since he is not immortal<sup>40</sup>, but rather to the measure of his life, his days. The Mariote preferred to mention the success of a dynasty in terms of the long-lasting («eternal») days that were hoped for under his king's rule. Thus, eternity was not projected on the person of the sovereign, like it was not projected on time itself, but rather on its smallest finite unit. All this seems logical if we think that the Mesopotamian conception excluded the possibility of conquering death. This both at the individual and at the state levels<sup>41</sup>, or even to a certain degree, the cosmic level<sup>42</sup>. This thought is perhaps more accentuated in the Mariote conception. In fact, in the West, the cult of a god that regularly went through the cycle of life and death is a constant presence<sup>43</sup>.

One important aspect is the type of records and contexts in which we find expressions with *dārûm*. We have two main types of documentary sources –epistolary, and monuments. On the other hand, the contexts in which *dārûm* (or the adverb *dāriš*) were used were very limited: either in the

38. In A.1258+ (D. Charpin, “Les malheurs d’un scribe ou de l’inutilité du sumérien loin de Nippur”, in M. de Jong Ellis (ed.), *Nippur at the Centennial (CRAI XXXV)*. Philadelphia, 1992, pp. 8-14), text of Sumerian-Akkadian influences, Enki is asked to grant perpetual life (*ba-ta-[tam da-ri-tam]*) to the king. In this case, the *dārūtīm* is applied directly to the «life» of the king. The text has two columns, one in Sumerian and the other in Akkadian. The Akkadian version was reconstructed based on the Sumerian *na-m-ti-il du-rí-šè* (D. Charpin, p. 9). The term *du ri* corresponds to the Akkadian word *dūrum*, meaning «permanent», «eternity».

39. The expression appears in the Yahdun-Līm inscription referring to the construction of the temple of Šamaš: *RIME* 4, E4.6.8.2, l. 116. In the epistolography, the expression *ana ūm dārūtīm* could be substituted by *dāriš ūmī* («for an eternity of days»).

40. Only the gods, who in principle were immortal, did not have time («days», *u d*). In fact, in the *Lamentation for Sumer and Ur*, it is indicated that at the time of the destruction of their cities, the goddess Bau, «as if she were human, also reached the end of her time», or «of her days» (*ETCSL* 2.2.3, l. 174).

41. We recall the Sumerian lamentation that recounts the fall of the city of Ur and the composition *The curse of Akkad*. We are speaking, naturally, in both cases, of the loss of political power. In the Old Babylonian concept, the fall of a dynasty was interpreted as a divine punishment. The death of a sovereign or the ruin of the state was seen as a consequence of the god intervening in history.

42. These cases involved a violent death. We recall the *deaths* of Inana (described in the composition «The descent of Inana to the Infra-world») and Dumuzi (mentioned in several Sumerian compositions). Also, Ereškigal, the Sumerian goddess who presided over the Netherworld, is in this category of «*dead* gods». The god Enlil was supposedly judged by the divine assembly after Ninlil's rape, and after being expelled from his city, he left for the Netherworld.

43. This aspect is referred to by J.-M. Durand, “Assyriologie”, *Annuaire du Collège de France*, Paris (2010-2011) 390: «en syrie –et pour les régions limitrophes qu'elle a influencées, comme l'anatolie–, même le dieu doit passer par le cycle de la vie et de la mort; sa part propre n'est que de pouvoir “revivre”».

description of an alliance between two monarchs, or a petition to a god, or finally, the stipulating the duration of a curse. All these contexts have a common trace: the direct or indirect presence of the deities.

For example, the words in a votive inscription which presaged that «Adad be responsible for his misfortune forever (*ana dārêtim*)»<sup>44</sup>. The receiver of this curse was the un-named individual who might attack the monument, erasing the name inscribed there and substituting it for his own. The formula of the curse is exactly the same as the one on the foundation disc of Yahdun-Lîm<sup>45</sup> and in other inscriptions relating to Samsi-Addu. This fact led Jean-Robert Kupper to verify the existence of a certain continuity between the Akkad and the Old Babylonian periods<sup>46</sup>.

In these cases, *ana dāriātim* would emphasise the hope that the gods would intervene to prevent the foundation document and the name (*šumum*) of the king inscribed therein from being erased or forgotten. In this logic, the *dārûm* was conceived as the future open space, but not necessarily absolute, which was dependent on present generations and did not exclude the performance of future ones. It was a future which foresaw the remote, that is, duration. Reference to the deities Adad, An and Enlil is within the conceptual framework where the human and divine worlds interact. The king, he who dedicated the stele, and the gods, those to whom he dedicated it to, participated in the same destiny. An attack against the monument was to depreciate its intrinsic meaning –the imposition of order. The edification and dedication of this type of monument was inserted in the logic of affirmation of the cosmic order. The act symbolised the materialisation of the *alliance* between the human and the divine worlds, expressed mainly in the figure of the king. In fact, the dedication respected the full compliance of the prerogatives implied by this alliance: on one hand the king granted honours and praised the gods; on the other hand, the gods extended his life, ensuring the *eternal* exaltation of his name. It was a logic of reciprocity.

An identical meaning can be found in a prophetic epistolary text. In this epistle, whose sender is unknown, the following discourse is narrated: «May Zimrî-Lîm erect in xxx a monument–*humûsum* and I will make his name remain forever (*ana dārîtim*)»<sup>47</sup>. Here also the term «eternity» is intimately linked to the name of the king. The consecration of the *humûsum*<sup>48</sup> and the ritual associated with it would substantiate the divine initiative to perpetuate the king's name<sup>49</sup>. The religious and sacrificial context of this document is based on the same logic. The edification of the monument, an act carried out by the king, would be compensated by the perpetuation of his name, a

44. M.7905, l. 11'-13' (see D. Charpin, "Inscriptions votives d'époque assyrienne", *MARI* 3, (1984) 63-65). It refers to an inscription from the period of the kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia.

45. *RIME* 4, E4.6.8.1, l. 77-78: «May An and Enlil be responsible for his misfortune forever (*ana dārîatum*)».

46. J.-R. Kupper, *AOAT* 25, p. 301, *apud* D. Charpin, *MARI* 3, p. 65.

47. *ARM* XXVI/1 218, l. 6-8, in F. Caramelo, *A linguagem Profética*, p. 99.

48. The *humûsum* was a commemorative monument. In "Réalités amorrites et traditions bibliques", *RA* 92 (1998) 27-30) and in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites Occidentaux*, pp. 325-326 and 351-353, J.-M. Durand reveals the cultural, sacrificial and funerary aspects of this type of monument. It could serve to mark the burial site of a prince fallen in combat (*ARM* XIV 86 e A.9), it could commemorate a victory in battle (like for example, the case of the monument erected by Yahdun-Lîm), or it could serve as evidence of an agreement (for example, the conflict described in A.3592 edited by B. Lafont, "Sacrifices et rituels à Mari et dans la Bible", *RA* 93 (1999) 71). It was an element of support for the cult, and not an object of cult, as opposed to the *sikkanum*. B. Lafont (*RA* 93, pp. 71-72) points out this last aspect: its support character for offerings. The author even believes that in the document A.3592, the *humûsum* served as a sort of «table sacrificielle» where the lambs sacrificed for the alliance were placed. In the case of the document under analysis, *ARM* XXVI/1 218, despite the difficulty in recovering the context of the epistle, we can say that the *humûsum* is part of the logic of a sacrifice and a cultural action of this type.

49. *Idem*, p.100.

feature made possible by divine intervention. *Eternity* here is a mere synonym of permanence (*izuzzum*). The verb used indicates the permanent (or perpetual) nature which is given to the object. Thus, what stands out is the idea of preservation, of persistence –the evocation of a name that would not be forgotten, and would remain unchanged over time. The future is conceived as a space where present actions are perpetuated, like a time that eternalises its *unfinished* nature<sup>50</sup>.

In a clearly different style, the *dārītum* might classify an alliance. Therefore, in *ARM XXVI/2 449*, Hammu-rabi of Babylon expresses his desire to «An eternal bond/fringe (*sissiktum dārītum*) shall be knotted between us»<sup>51</sup> and that «A peace accord between us must last forever (*salimum dārūm*)»<sup>52</sup>. In these examples, *eternal* describes the alliance that will take place (the peace or the fringe, symbol of their unity), knowing that this could only be valid during the period that both parties were in power<sup>53</sup>. More than eternity, what is foreseen here is the inalterability and durability of the peace being celebrated. Hammu-rabi hoped that the alliance would resist the adversities and would not be compromised by anyone.

The same desire appears in the declaration of Išme-Addu in *ARM IV 20*. During the conflict against Elam, Išme-Addu, the sovereign of Ašnakkum, embraced the Elamite party/side and acted as ambassador of the *sukkal* in the area of Ida-Maraš. In order to attract new followers in the region, the monarch of Ašnakkum proposed to his neighbor Ibâl-Addu<sup>54</sup> an alliance. Išme-Addu then addressed a letter to him in which he formalised his proposal: «While you and I are alive, you will always be (*ana dārītum*) on your throne. Let us establish between us a strong oath by the gods and meet, me and you. That between us be established forever (*ana dārītum*) a brotherhood»<sup>55</sup>. The first affirmation of Išme-Dagan seems somewhat paradoxical: the *dārītum* (eternity) is opposed to the lives of the two monarchs. The permanence of Ibâl-Addu on the throne, as well as the alliance, could never be eternal. In fact, how could he anticipate that the alliance would last forever if the time he wanted the agreement to prevail for was delimited by *anāku u atta balṭānu*, that is, «as long as me and you are alive». Once again, what was expected was the resistance and the stability of peace. Contrary to what we have seen in the previous example, (*ARM XXVI/2 449*), there is an indirect reference to divine intercession. Mediation and acceptance of peace between Išme-Addu and Ibâl-Addu were naturally dependent on the gods and on the oath. Any alliance required divine approval. Therefore, even if this is not mentioned in the previous example, we can deduce that Hammu-rabi's longed-for peace followed identical parameters. The *eternal* nature, as such, was a prerogative granted by the celestial sphere. By conferring *eternity* to their protégés, the gods guaranteed the functioning of a political order that directly affected the cosmic order.

Finally, the adverb *dāriš* can be found in the prayers/salutations that were written often in epistolography. In this case, the *dāriš* is a personal reflection –the prayer directed to a divinity was meant to watch over someone's life and make it long-lasting<sup>56</sup>. Normally these pleas were at the

50. In grammatical terms, we can divide time in two large modes, finished and unfinished, with the last one corresponding, in broad terms, to a habitual or lasting action.

51. J. M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archive*, p. 86.

52. *Idem*, *ibidem*.

53. Or during the period in which took place the circumstances that led to the conclusion of the alliance. Regarding the alliance that would later occur between Mari and Babylon, we know that it had the same specific goal: declare Elam as a common enemy and swear to not establish a separate alliance with him.

54. King of Ašlakkâ and important Mariote ally.

55. L. 18-26.

56. According to *AHw*, the verb *darûm*, which means precisely «(ewig) dauern» (*AHw* I, p. 164) must be a denominative from *dārum*. The adverb *dāriš* means “für immer” (p. 163).

beginning of a message sent in a tablet, and followed the formula  $ND_1 u ND_2$  (*aššumīya*) *dāriš liballiṭūka*<sup>57</sup>, «May  $ND_1$  and  $ND_2$ , for the love of me, grant you an eternal life»<sup>58</sup>. The adverb *dāriš* is, often complemented with the nouns *ūmī* («days») or *šanātum* («years»), resulting in the literal expressions «eternity of days» and «eternity of years». The expression is preceded by the preposition *ana* in only one example<sup>59</sup>. Therefore, *dāriš* does not necessarily indicate a temporal direction. More than that, it represents a condition: the condition of being long-lasting<sup>60</sup>. *Eternity* represents, in these cases, a personal reflection of time –the ability to last; longevity. The days and the years are the measure of the life of the beneficiaries of the prayers, which was hoped to be prolonged by way of divine intervention. *dāriš* is, in summary, a life cycle<sup>61</sup>, the full expression of this individual measure.

A similar meaning can be found in two letters of the women's correspondence. Despite the idea of fatalism present in the metaphysical perception of the Mesopotamians, there was a notion that if they carried out their social roles wisely, fairly and obediently, their lives on earth could be extended. And to fulfil humbly her role is precisely what Gabētum, a priestess during the rule of Yasmah-Addu, promises to do. In *ARM X 1*, the servant of the king assures: «I will be happy praying for you until the end of days»<sup>62</sup>. The term used to describe the idea of «end of days» or «cycle of years» is *dāriš*<sup>63</sup>. The same meaning is used in the document *ARM X 115*. The letter addressed by the priestess Yataraya to Šibtu urges that «the lady of the palace give life to my queen for a cycle of years (*dār šanātīm*), for the love of me!»<sup>64</sup>.

*dāriš* is, therefore, the time reflected in the person of the priestess (in the first example) and the queen (in the second case). It is a perception of existence that defines time as a complete cycle. Each person's experience is circumscribed in it, as if it were a personal reflection of the universe. *dāriš* represents the cycle of existence. It is the total measure, complete and finite, of each human being.

57. Typical formula of the letters from the Paleo-Babylonian period. See *CAD U, ūmu* 1d, p. 152, 5'.

58. One aspect that should be highlighted is the fact that these formulas for blessing always involved characters linked by an egalitarian status, or by friendship/fraternal love. They are the rule in private documentation, but are absent in official documentation (D. Charpin, *Lire et écrire à Babylone*. Paris, 2008, p. 169). We have evidence, for example, of a servant (a high-ranking official or a governor) that initiates his letter entreating god to grant the king a long life. The relationship between the supplicant and the subject of divine grace is private, and possibly of an egalitarian nature: Hulâlum pleads for Asqudum in *ARM XXVI/1 75*; Išme-Dagan pleads for Yasmah-Addu in *ARM IV 50*; Hittipânium pleads for Bahdî-Lîm in A.3572 (J.-M. Durand, «Unités et diversités au Proche-Orient à l'époque amorrite», *La Circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien*. Paris, 1992, pp. 114-115); Tarîš-Hattum pleads for Yassi-Dagan (?) in *ARM X 104*; Yataraya pleads for Šibtu in *ARM X 115*; Habdu-malik pleads for Iddiyatum in *ARM XIII 101*. *ARM X 1* is a different case. Gabi'atum indicates that she spends her time praying for the life of Yasmah-Addu and believes that that way she will be happy forever (*dāriš*). Durand claims that the blessings are almost exclusively done by foreigners, people from the east (*Mythologie et religion des Sémites Occidentaux*, p. 602).

59. *ARM IV 50*, l.

60. We recall the derived formula *dūrum*, which may be present in the etymology of the word *andurārum*, meaning «permanent status» (*CDA*, p. 62). Cf. D. Charpin, «Les Décrets Royaux à l'époque Paléo-Babylonienne à Propos d'un Ouvrage Récent», *AfO 34* (1987) 40.

61. See the interpretation of D. Charpin, cited in *LAPO 18*, p. 422d).

62. Translation supported in the proposal of J.-M. Durand presented in *LAPO 18* 1216, p. 421.

63. According to the proposal of reconstitution by Durand (*ibidem*). On the meaning of *dāriš*, see D. Charpin, *apud LAPO 16*, p. 632c). *dāriš* has the meaning of «boucle totale d'un temps imparti» and not «temps indéfini».

64. L. 7-10.

#### 4. Final considerations

All in all, it is not possible to affirm that the considerations on time, as observed in the discourse of the documentations from Mari, evoke notions of eternity, or on the contrary, of a beginning and an end of time.

On the one hand, *dāriš* conveys the concept of immutability, durability and permanence. More than eternity, it was the unchangeable preservation of the nature of a given phenomenon that was foreseen. On the other hand, reflection about the future, as portrayed in the semantics and epistolary discourse, was not something that the Mariote was overly concerned about, in the sense that the *behind* only preoccupied him in the immediate. Even ARM 208 is based on a very specific *present* context. Therefore, there is no *end*, or *eternal*, but rather a *happening*, a passing of time, open and indefinite, without barriers, lasting but not necessarily infinite.

#### 5. Abbreviations

AfO – *Archiv für Orientforschung*

AHw – *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*

Akkadica – *Akkadica. Périodique bimestriel de la Fondation Assyriologique Georges Dossin*

AOAT – *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*

BiOr – *Bibliotheca Orientalis*

ARM – *Archives Royales de Mari*

CAD – *The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*

CDA – *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*

CRRAI – *Compte rendu, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*

ETCSL – *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*

FM – *Florilegium Marianum*

LAPO – *Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient*

MARI – *Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires*

NABU – *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*

RA – *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*

RIME – *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods*

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### 7. Webgraphy

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