

Marbeh Hokmah



Victor Avigdor Hurowitz

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Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East
in Loving Memory of

Victor Avigdor Hurowitz

edited by

S. YONA, E. L. GREENSTEIN, M. I. GRUBER,
P. MACHINIST, and S. M. PAUL

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Siege Mentality: Fighting at the City Gate in the Mari Archives

JACK M. SASSON

Writing on the art of war, Chinese General Sun Tzu praised the military values of deception, secrecy, speed, surprise, and the foreknowledge that comes from spies rather than from omens. He offered this succinct assessment, “What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategies. Next best is to disrupt his alliances by diplomacy. The next best is to attack his army. And the worst policy is to attack cities.”¹ He reasons that preparation takes months and that generals lose patience, sending many on useless assaults.

Not surprisingly, there is debate about the date of this treatise and its attribution to a sixth-century B.C.E. general, with many scholars placing it several centuries later. For us, however, this dispute about the true circumstances for these sentiments should not be as relevant as is his advice on avoiding besieging cities. Yet such sensible counsel could not have had antecedence in early eighteenth-century B.C.E. Mari, for according to its archives, the principal method for bringing an enemy to his knees is to besiege and capture his city.²

1. Cited from Su Tzu, *The Art of War* / Shang Yang, *The Book of Lord Shang* (Wordsworth Classics of World Literature; Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998), 25. He goes on to explain that to

prepare big shields and wagons and [to] make ready the necessary arms and equipment require at least three months, and to pile earthen ramps against the walls requires an additional three months. The general, unable to control his impatience, will order his troops to swarm up the wall like ants, with the result that one-third of them will be killed without taking the city. Such is the calamity of attacking cities.

Another translation of the same passages is posted online at <http://www.chinapage.com/sunzi-e.html>, sub section III.

2. I have profited much by consulting the works of Israel Eph'al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and of Paul Bentley Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1999). See also Laura Battini, “Lorsqu’une ville est en état de siège: Étude de cas néo-assyriens,” in *Les armées du Proche-Orient ancien (III^e–I^{er} mill. av. J.-C.): Actes du colloque international organisé à Lyons les 1^{er} et 2 décembre 2006, Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée*, ed. Philippe Abrahamsi and Laura Battini, BAR International Series 1855 (Oxford: Hedges, 2008), 185–206; and Sébastien Rey, *Poliorettique au Proche-Orient à l’âge du bronze:*

In this essay, offered in fond memory of Avigdor, a colleague and friend who left us when he had so much more to share, I evaluate some of the evidence.

War in the Old Babylonian Period

War was a frequent visitor in the Old Babylonian period as several centuries of instability followed the collapse of the Third Dynasty of Ur. In the half-century or so covered by the OB Mari archives, the area was a vast “Serengeti Plain, where predators were most deadly when operating in packs and their preys most vulnerable when striking out on their own.”³ There was much scurrying toward and away from overlords who were shopping for vassals. Control of territory was never permanent or guaranteed, and “Musical Thrones” was the tune heard in many “capitals.” Babylon was among few major centers that could boast of dynastic continuity. In most others, change occurred suddenly and frequently, Mari itself typifying this condition, with four rulers sitting on the same throne in just over a score of years.

A corollary to this situation is that, in most states of the region, allegiance was personal and limited to the cities in which the ruler had set a throne. Control of outlying territory was never permanent or guaranteed. Bureaucrats dutifully paid lip service but knew better than to invest lives rather than careers. For this reason, rulers stayed on the move or forced their vassals to do the same. They relied much on relatives or tribal kinfolks and shipped off daughters and sons to enlarge family ties. Under these circumstances, combat was endemic, and I cannot point to any appreciable stretch in which Mari kings were not embroiled in combat, whether it was their choice or not.

Armies

The size of armies mentioned in letters was substantial. A Shemshara letter reports that Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum was leading 60,000 men toward Nurgum; but its author was trading in rumor while the sexagesimalism suggests a hyperbole (SH 827 = SA1 64).⁴ I would discount it. Normally, the numbers of troops on major campaigns hover from 10,000 to just over 30,000, with occasional spikes toward half as many more.⁵ These numbers were achieved by cobbling a force from diverse resources. Thus, for a campaign to Syria, Samsi-

Fortifications urbaines, procédés de siège et systèmes défensifs, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 197; Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient 2012), 129–84.

3. J. M. Sasson, “The King and I: A Mari King in Changing Perceptions,” *JAOS* 118 (1998): 458.

4. Jesper Eidem and Jørgen Læssøe, *The Shemshāra Archives, 1: The Letters*, Historisk filsofiske Skrifter 23 (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2001), 135–38.

5. Philippe Abrahams, “La circulation militaire dans les textes de Mari: La question des effectifs,” in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche Orient ancien*, ed. Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès, RAI 38 (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1992), 159–61.

Addu provided 10,000 men from the Upper Country, and his ally Ešnunna sent 6,000. Mari was asked to raise less than 5,000 from tribal groups (Sim'al and diverse Yaminite units) and from the southern Suḫum district.⁶ It is telling that, when Zimri-Lim faced insurrection in the Upper Ḥabur region, he could not meet the challenge because his own troops were aiding Hammurabi of Babylon.

Pitched battles in open country, of the sort known in the first millennium, are not easily reconstructed. While they may have occurred, only one possible example can be retrieved from the vast Mari documentation.⁷ Rather, we read much about ambushes, fast raids, or swift razzias, with loot uppermost in mind. Harassing an army as it set off against a fortified city was known, as was hounding it as it retreated (*FM* 3 135). Samsi-Addu, a committed confrontationist, is often cited for his jaundiced view on this sort of clashes when writing to his son, Yasmaḥ-Addu (ARM 1 5 = LAPO 17 517).

To wipe out the enemy, all of you devise tricks and maneuver against him; but the enemy likewise devises tricks and maneuvers against all of you, just as wrestlers use tricks against each other. This is just like the old proverb, 'In her shuttles back and forth, a bitch bore blind puppies.'⁸ Now you must not act like this, lest the enemy maneuver you into a trap.

Samsi-Addu would obviously not invest time and energy on tactics that could impair success or lead to disastrous consequences.

Samsi-Addu continues by telling his son,

About the instruction I have conveyed to you via Ušur-pi-šarrim—when he heard the rumors about the armies gathering to Išme-Dagan, the enemy who stays by Lidaya (king of the Turukku) facing Išme-Dagan abandoned his city, pulled out and left. Išme-Dagan seized his city, Burullum. The entire land of Uta is now quiet and settled. He placed it under a single authority. The troops are now headed into the land.⁹

6. ARM 1 42 = LAPO 17 448, with good comments by Durand there. See also Dominique Charpin, "Shamshi-Adad's Lebanon Campaign: Royal Inscriptions and Archival Texts," *Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Study Journal* 4 (2010): 4–11. To give conscripted troops stability, Samsi-Addu would draw equally from self-supporting citizens and those who were heavily subsidized by the crown; see Nele Ziegler, "Samsi-Addu et ses soldats," in *Les armées du Proche-Orient ancien (III^e–I^{er} mill. av. J.-C.)*, ed. Philippe Abrahams and Laura Battini, BAR International Series 1855 (Oxford: Hedges, 2008), 49–56.

7. ARM 4 85+ = LAPO 17 621. The text is studied by Nele Ziegler, "L'armée, -quel monstre!" *FM* 3 (1997): 145–52. In ARM 26 521, we hear about a vassal moving his army toward an enemy busy transporting spoils from a captured town. Nothing happens, however.

8. This apothegm had a long life in world literature; the latest discussion is in J.-M. Durand, "Dictons et proverbes à l'époque amorrite," *Journal asiatique* 294 (2006): 29–30.

9. The note continues, "They will rest for 2 or 3 days in their homes, then reassemble. I will take up leadership of the entire army and within the month together with the armies will reach destination, there. You are now informed. Just keep the troops safe until I come up. From Šubat-Enlil, I have posted to you this note of mine on 8th of Abum (11th month)."

Battles near Cities

We have no idea how long the Turukku had been in Burullum.¹⁰ The likelihood is that they had occupied it awhile back and, facing Išme-Dagan, had to choose whether to defend the city. In this case, they decided otherwise, leaving it until a better occasion. “Musical Towns” is a dance that was widely practiced in those days: an army might occupy a town, only to withdraw based on the rumor that a superior enemy force was advancing (ARM 1 43 = LAPO 17 492). Nonetheless, in his note, Samsi-Addu conveyed this basic premise: waging war is about occupying an enemy’s cities. Real battles—rather than skirmishes or raids—occur at the enemy’s gate. Thus, when Yarim-Lim of Aleppo threatens a fickle vassal hundreds of miles away (Transtigridian Der), he vows to bring troops to his city gate.¹¹ Yaḥdun-Lim triumphs over Samsi-Addu at “the gate of Nagar” and attacks Yaminite tribal groups at their strongholds, Samanum, Tuttul, Abattum, and Ḥaman.¹² There can therefore be no meaningful confrontation without such a backdrop. In fact, a Zimri-Lim official drips with sarcasm as he tells a tribal group, “You are writing to my lord about war (as if) you are a powerful king or (have) a spacious city encircled by walls.”¹³

10. A fuller description of events appears in Eidem and Laessøe, *Shemshāra Archives*, 52–55. Burullum is mentioned in administrative texts from Shemshara as Burulliwē; see Jesper Eidem, *The Shemshāra Archives, 2: The Administrative Texts*, Historisk filisofiske Skrifter 15, Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1992), 56, 88.

11. Whether the text is historical or not, the point of the threat is clear. On this text, see my “Casus Belli in the Mari Archives,” in *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien: 52e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, International Congress of Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology, Münster, 17.–21. Juli 2006*, ed. H. Neumann et al., AOAT 401 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 686–90.

12. The former is known from a year-name of Yaḥdun-Lim; the latter from his brick inscription:

In that same year: Laʿum, king of Samanum and the land of the Ubrabium, Baḥlu-kullim, king of Tuttul and the land of the Amnanum, Aialum, king of Abattum and the land of the Rabbum—these kings rebelled against him. The troops of Sümû-Epuḥ of the land of Iamḥad came as auxiliary troops (to rescue him) and in the city of Samānum the tribes gathered together against him, but by means of (his) mighty weapon he defeated these three kings [a Yaminite army]. He vanquished their troops and their auxiliaries and inflicted a defeat on them. He heaped up their dead bodies. He tore down their walls and made them into mounds of rubble.

Text cited from Douglas R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595)*, RIME 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 606 [E4.6.8.2]. On all these details and more, see D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient à l’époque amorrite: Essai d’histoire politique*, FM 5, Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 6 (Paris: SEPOA, 2003), 38–43.

13. A. 3862, cited in D. Charpin, “Guerre et paix dans le monde amorrite et post-amorrite,” in *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien: 52e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale—Münster, 17.–21. Juli 2006*, ed. Hans Neumann et al., AOAT 401 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 207.

The notion here is that tribes cannot threaten war because they have no fortified cities of their own.

Burullum, famous for its wine, may not have been heavily defended, concretely or by choice, thus allowing shifts in occupation. Many towns in the Mari age were easily conquered, although sometimes through deception. Talḥayum, for example, was breached while it was under a nonaggression accord (A. 2417 = LAPO 17 607). Others matched Jericho in falling within a week.¹⁴ Such towns may not have had strategic value; but armies captured them just the same, for the taking of spoils—it was said—lifted the spirits. The brutal and vain Išhi-Addu of Qatna invited his son-in-law Yasmaḥ-Addu to Syria, telling him, “Time is propitious for your coming up here. Feed your troops spoils so they will bless you. These three towns are hardly fortified and we can take them in one day” (ARM 5 16 = LAPO 17 443).¹⁵ As it happened,

14. Išme-Dagan wrote these notes to his brother, Yasmaḥ-Addu:

I moved against Ḥadka and overwhelmed it within the same day. Rejoice. (ARM 1 138 = LAPO 17 526)

Once I took Tutarrum, Ḥadka, and Šunḥum, I headed against Ḥurara. I have besieged the city, setting up a siege tower and a ram against it. On the 7th day of the campaign, I captured the city. Rejoice! (ARM 1 131 = LAPO 17 528)

Once I headed to Kerḥum city, I had a tower set against it. I then downed its wall by breaching it (*ina pilšim*). I took Kerḥum city by the 8th day. Be happy. The fortified towns of the land of Qabra are now taken, with just Qabra itself remaining. I am well as are the troops. You should not worry. (ARM 1 135 = LAPO 17 529)

Appreciably later, Išme-Dagan is reported (ARM 26 521) to have captured a city, emptying its grain and treasures into another town.

Samsi-Addu wrote these to his son, Yasmaḥ-Addu:

Just 5 days after my victory over Qabra, I defeated the Ya-ilanum (tribes) and seized the city Ḥimara. In this city, I defeated 300 of its men within the citadel as well as one of its sons. Rejoice. (ARM 1 92 = LAPO 17 530)

Išme-Dagan took Nilimmar, the city he was besieging. As long as the earth (ramp, *epiru*) had not reached the level of the town’s summit, he could not take it. Once it did so, he was able to take it. Išme-Dagan is well, as is the army. The army has now moved on, having reached Ḥamša. Rejoice! (ARM 1 4 = LAPO 17 480)

Daniel Fleming finds reasons to compare Mari and biblical reports on sieges that last seven days, “The Seven-Day Siege of Jericho in Holy War,” in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 211–27.

15. A passage appears in a letter from early in the reign of Zimri-Lim, in which he is invited to take Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan), capital of the late Samsi-Addu,

Turum-nakte (elsewhere Turum-nadke) and the citizen of Šubat-Enlil are constantly writing your lord to open the city Šubat-Enlil, saying, “Come and capture this city, take its silver, gold, and spoils. You must surely know that the treasure of Samsi-Addu is inside this city; so along with Sim’al brothers follow your leaders on this campaign. Who does not have a slave can now get one for himself, who does not have a handmaid can have one for himself, and who does not have an *agālum*-equid can have one for himself. Gorge yourself with spoils and give acclaim to your lord.” (FM 2 116)

Yasmaḥ-Addu was busy elsewhere.¹⁶ His general, however, reported from somewhere “near the seashore”: “With no booty or food, the troops were hungry. Later we besieged Šerum, between *Saren and Labnan* (Mt. Hermon and the Lebanon range). On the second day, we had a battle and the town offered terms. It let out its garrison-members and hostages.”¹⁷ Coercing allegiance, taking hostages, and imposing tribute were common demands for lifting a siege.¹⁸

We learn a bit more about easy conquests from the campaign that kept Yasmaḥ-Addu from going to Syria. He and his brother Išme-Dagan had joined his father’s coalition in moving against Qabra on the Lower Zab. The large dossier about this enterprise includes steles by Samsi-Addu and by his allies Daduša of Ešnunna, although each takes credit for the victory.¹⁹ The records reveal that heavy weaponry making its way to Qabra made short shrift of weakly defended towns. This ordnance might include towers (*dintum* and *ḥamanum*) which were often paired with rams (*yašibum*), footbridges (*ḥummudayûm*; ARM 26 318; 27 142), ladders (*simmiltum*), ropes, chains (*saparrûm*), and

That capturing a city gave prestige and earned credits for overlords is also illustrated by this Shemshara letter exchanged between two vassals of Samsi-Addu (SH 913 = SA1 39; Eidem and Læssøe, *The Shemshāra Archives*, 108–9):

Šikšabbum, your enemy, is trouble for you and for me. We should plan to besiege it. As soon as you listen to this tablet, promptly muster your full army and the Lullu-tribesmen and march on. Let us promptly besiege Šikšabbum and gain prestige in our lord’s sight. Indeed, I am now at the Tarum frontier, waiting for you. Come here quickly and let us bring Šikšabbum to terms, before the king arrives. Within 3 to 4 days the king should seize Nurrugum and with his army head toward Šikšabbum. Still, before the king comes here together we could carry out a great feat for our lord! Don’t delay, just come here.

16. Samsi-Addu had expected Yasmaḥ-Addu to go to Qatna and (unfairly) accused him of staying put in a harem when his brother was facing the enemy at Qabra; see ARM 1 69 (= LAPO 17 452).

17. M. 5423.11’–21’; see D. Charpin, “Toponymies amorrite et toponymie biblique: La ville de Šibat/Šobah,” *RA* 92 (1998): 84. The event took place “by the seashore” (*ina lēt tēm-tim*); as Charpin suggests, the reference is probably to a lake rather than the Mediterranean.

18. In ARM 2 42 (= ARM 26 518 = LAPO 17 599), an ambassador named Iddiyatum reports to Zimri-Lim from Karana that Turukku troops have besieged a town. They offer a peace agreement if the city delivers its king and allows a Turukku garrison in its midst. When the townsmen reject the terms, the Turukkus simply make a new peace proposal. We never learn how the confrontation ends, because the writer moves on to other topics. According to A. 1610 (sent to Zimri-Lim) and A. 1212 (= LAPO 17 604, 605), faced with an enemy at their gates, citizens of Talḥayum murder their king and massacre a garrison sent by Zimri-Lim. The full story is detailed in J.-M. Durand, “Les anciens de Talḥayûm,” *RA* 82 (1988): 97–113.

19. For the Samsi-Addu inscription, see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)*, RIMA 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 63–65 (§A.O. 39.1001). A nice translation of the Daduša stele is by Frans von Koppen, “Old Babylonian Period Inscriptions,” in *The Ancient Near East*, ed. Mark W. Chavalas, *Historical Sources in Translation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 98–102.

other tools.²⁰ The building of earthen ramps was left to specialists; but the besieged also had experts to counter the effort (ARM 2 30+ [= LAPO 17 58] 26'–28'). Also known are sappers and breach-makers.

Singly and serially, the allies conquered a string of cities before reaching Qabra: Arrapha, Ninet (Nineveh), Nurrugum, Šibanum, Tutarrâ, Hatkum, Hurârâ, and Kerĥum and left us a dossier about their fall.²¹ The population of Sarri simply abandoned its town to advancing Samsi-Addu, fleeing to Qabra (ARM 4 49 = LAPO 17 527). Panic that led to flight was part of the strategy, for an infusion of escapees into the target city strained resources for its defense. Facing major odds, Qabra fell in just over two months.²²

*Fortifications*²³

Qabra was a fortified town (*dannatum*; *âl dannatim*) somewhere on the Lower Zab.²⁴ One of its conquerors (Daduša of Ešnunna) has left us an image of its façade on his victory stele, which portrays towers and massive walls flanking a sturdy gate. Parallel crenulated lines represent a frontal view of the parapet, a broad walkway that suggests very thick walls. How similar towns were fortified is discussed in other documents. Thus, about Karana by Jebel Sindjar, we learn: “The wall is enclosed within a glacis[?] (*šulĥum*), while the palace is encircled by a glacis as well as a moat (*ĥiritum*)” (ARM 6 29.16–18 = LAPO 17 597). Another town, itself the site of a major battle, was Ĥiritum which literally means “a moat.” From one letter (ARM 2 30+ = LAPO 17

20. Among these tools are *lab/kalbanātum*, “hooks[?],” and possibly also *kammum*, “planks[?]”; see LAPO 17, p. 298. On the use of siege engines, see D. Charpin, “Données nouvelles sur la poliorcétique à l’époque paléo-babylonienne,” *MARI* 7 193–203; and J. Vidal, “La guerra de asedio en el período paleobabilónico según los textos de Mari,” in *Fortificaciones y Guerra de asedio en el mundo antiguo*, ed. Jordi Vidal and Borja Antela (Zaragoza: Pórtico, 2012), 21–37.

21. See n. 14 above.

22. The story of the fall of Qabra is told well in Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 90–94. It relies on tablets from Mari and Shemshara, as well as inscriptions by Samsi-Addu and Daduša of Ešnunna; see D. Charpin, “Chroniques bibliographiques 3: Données nouvelles sur la région du Petit Zab au XVIIIe siècle av. J.-C.,” *RA* 98 (2004): 151–78. Davide Nadale offers a fine study of its iconography, “La Stele di Daduša come documento storico dell’età paleobabilonese. Immagini e iscrizione a confronto,” *Vicino Oriente* 14 (2008): 129–46. The inhabitants of Šurnat take all their possessions into its *kerĥum* (ARM 26 422). Daduša certainly exaggerates when he says that no king had ever controlled Qabra before he did; likewise, when he claims to have conquered it in ten days. This is probably the period of time in which his own army was involved. In fact, Išme-Dagan spent the better part of a month (and certainly more) there (ARM 26 291).

23. Nice overview in Amihai Mazar, “The Fortification of Cities in the Ancient Near East,” in *CANE*, 1523–37. For fortified cities in Upper Mesopotamia, see David Oates, “Walled Cities in Northern Mesopotamia in the Mari Period,” *MARI* 4 (1985): 585–94; and Rey, *Poliorcétique au Proche-Orient*, 15–85.

24. Possibly Tepe Ya‘qub; see Karlheinz Deller, “Eine Erwägung zur Lokalisierung des aB ON Qabrâ/Qabarâ,” *NABU* 1990/84: 62–63.

581), we learn that it also had (a series of) channels (*amrummum*) by the main gates and at defensive points, leading to deep trenches (*abrum*). Water could be forced into them, presumably to sap any earthen ramp that was piled up against its walls.²⁵

About Mari itself, archaeology and texts agree that it had three concentric layers of defenses. A moat doubled as a catch-basin for flood-waters as well as a nice fish pond. It fronted an outer layer of brick walls that was 3 m thick. A glacis-like heap leaned on the interior, rising perhaps as high as 10 m. On the inside was the *adaššum*, the lower city, where the *gupārum* could be found (probably a group of casernes) and the *bīt naṭṭarim* (barracks for safely lodging foreign soldiers). 300 m inward was the *kirḥum*, “citadel,” with its own massive walls.²⁶ Within, the palace itself was a fortress defended by massive pillars; it was a conglomeration of blocks, each with just a single entry point. Its massive doors were bolted during the siesta hour and at night. At one corner, probably the harem area, the walls were 13 m thick.²⁷

Protected by a similar armature, a writer from an earlier era assured his king (Bilalama), “The army is well and the city is safe. My lord’s garrison is so strong that, were Amorites to battle (us) for 10 years, bringing 10 battering rams, 10 siege towers, and 20 *samukānū*-engines, I would still be in control. My lord should not worry.”²⁸ We do not know how long it took a combination of armies from Elam, Mari, and Babylon to bring down Ešnunna;²⁹ but Larsa, which was attacked by Hammurabi and his allies a bit later on, took 6 months to fall.³⁰ To besiege such fortifications required stamina, durable siege instruments, secure (re)supply channels (ARM 18 5 = LAPO 17 666), access to

25. For Durand’s explanation of these terms, see LAPO 17 209–10. Denis Lacambre makes reference to similar installations at Choga-Zambil, “La bataille de Ḫīrītum,” *MARI* 8 (1997): 440–45. The relevant section of Ibal-pi-El’s letter to Zimri-Lim reads as follows (lines 5–13), “Once the enemy realized that a decision was formed in Ḫīrītum, he tried twice to build a ramp, but my lord’s troops blocked him and would not let him build the ramp. When he did not succeed with the ramp, the enemy realized about his ramp that we and the servants of Hammurabi *enlarged* the channels and opened (them) ahead of his ramp (so that (it carried) the ramp toward the river.”

26. We know of cases in which troops entered the *adaššum* (Kiyatan; Amaz) and set up camp but could not penetrate the *kerḥum*. On the siege of Kiyatan, see ARM 26 424.23–33; ARM 26 520. Eventually, the city fell (ARM 26 521) and was despoiled; but the victor (Išme-Dagan) faced a counterattack. Against Amaz, Ḫimdiya succeeded in occupying its *adaššum*; but to save face, he tried to negotiate the return of the previous king, who had been dethroned by the population (ARM 26 433).

27. On the archaeology of Mari’s fortifications, see lastly Jean Margueron, “Tell Hariri/Mari; Archéologie” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, fasc. 77–78 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 2008), 50–61; and for the palace area, pp. 132–40.

28. Text #9 cited from Robert M. Whiting, *Old Babylonian Letters from Tell Asmar*, AS 22 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1987), 46–47. On *samukānū*, see CAD S 132.

29. Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 212.

30. At least 40,000 allied troops were involved, according to ARM 26 379.

water, fresh relays of allied troops, prudent guidance by diviners, obstinacy no less than patience, and a great deal of luck.³¹

Besieging

At the city gate, the blockaders settled down for the long haul. We do not have evidence regarding the type of investment that Caesar installed at Alesia.³² However, Mari documents give rudimentary hints of circumvallation to minimize counterattacks, and even of contravallation to discourage siege-breaking by allies. Attackers quickly built camps (*karāšum*) around the target city. Several of these camps were posted strategically (ARM 26 405) to create a noose around the target. These military camps mirrored the besieged city, in that they too were fortified (*karāšam epēšum*) and were encircled by moats (ARM 1 90 = LAPO 17 497; see also ARM 26 343). What they were defending against were unpredictable sorties (*tūšitum*) by townsmen (ARM 14 104+ = LAPO 17 548; ARM 27 133, 142), who awaited gaps in attention induced by boredom. The game was cat and mouse, at the gate as well as behind the lines of the invaders. Reflecting on how he would relieve pressure on Andarig, an allied city, Zimri-Lim planned to besiege the attackers, “When I besiege and it (Ešnunna’s army) breaks out from its camp to move against me, I will fight it then” (ARM 27 18 10’–16’).

Mari’s Fall

Taking a fortified city, then, was no easy task. Second-millennium Mari itself was taken only once, when a conjunction of disasters befell Yasmaḥ-Addu. The illness and death of his father distanced vassals and allies from their loyalty oaths, because treaties in the Old Babylonian period were personal and not bequeathed dynastically. When at first tribes began harassing major strongholds (Tuttul and Dur-Yasmaḥ-Addu), a lieutenant (Sumiya) from a nearby fortification (Šuprum) assured Yasmaḥ-Addu that marauding tribes could not harm him because they lacked siege engines (ARM 2 44 = LAPO 17 532). The king should not even bother to launch sorties from Mari but wait for the arrival of allies. Soon, however, the gig was up; the enemy (likely led by Zimri-Lim) forced those in captured strongholds (Saggaratum and Terqa) to cut canes and reeds with which to manufacture siege towers.³³ Harrassed on all sides, Yasmaḥ-Addu was probably executed by Bannum, a Sim’al leader who had once served his father.³⁴

31. There is a note to the queen mother reassuring her that her son, Yasmaḥ-Addu, was not allowed near the fortification walls while a ram was in operation, thus alleviating her fears; ARM 10 171 (= LAPO 1086).

32. Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare*, 302–7.

33. M. 6427; cited in Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 139 n. 521.

34. See *ibid.*, 144 n. 560; as well as Michäel Guichard and Nele Ziegler, “Yanûḫ-Samar et les Ekallâtéens en détresse,” in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen, Uitgaven van het Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten 100 (Leiden: Netherlands Institute for the Near East, 2004), 229–47. The population exchanges

I might add here that the same combination of misfortunes did not take place when Hammurabi of Babylon occupied Mari. On the basis of the administrative records of Zimri-Lim's final year, I have argued elsewhere that, to its last dated document, life seemed normal with nary a hint of stress.³⁵ The king was receiving tributes and gifts from vassals and sheikhs. Unless Hammurabi was operating in total secrecy, there is no sense that a Babylonian coalition was ready to bring down the formidable walls. Despite a vigorous defense of the regnant view, which attributes Mari's destruction to Hammurabi's weaponry,³⁶ I reiterate my earlier speculation that Zimri-Lim died a sudden but natural death and that Hammurabi, an old ally, was invited to protect Mari.³⁷ For reasons that remain obscure—possibly the aging city was too distant for him to defend—Hammurabi went there and methodically moved its population before shutting down the city, destroying its walls, and via his soldiers leaving behind the archives and treasures that we have found there.

The Siege of Razama³⁸

Several sieges are mentioned in the Mari archives, none with as many details as the one around Razama, the capital of a Mari vassal state in the Yussan

that occur when a city is about to change patrons can be encapsulated in two letters. The first (A.3356, Guichard and Ziegler, "Yanûḫ-Samar et les Ekallâtéens," 230–33) concerns the last days of Yasmaḫ-Addu. Zakura-abum, a top Sim'al military leader (*merḫum*), writes to Yanuḫ-samar, then likely a supporter of Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum:

Earlier, I listened to the tablet you had sent to me, saying, 'You are wise, for my father (god?) had augmented for you wisdom upon wisdom. Just as my father has been gracious to you, do the same for me. Speak on my behalf before Qarni-Lim king of Andarig. Just now I sent Ḫiṣniya back to you. I have now arrived and spoken well to Qarni-Lim about you. I have gone to Mari and had Mari and other (people) go out. All citizens from Ekallatum who lived there have left safely. Your brother, with his tools, has left safely. Haletar has left safely.

The second letter was sent by (the obscure) Habbusum to Zimri-Lim (TH 72.5):

I went in the land Šbartum to the fortified towns that have until now held back from making peace. They have all now given word about making peace. So, fearing along with Šeparu, I did not enter these fortified towns. Now Šeparu will proceed to enter the fortified towns. I will go with him myself. I will have the nomads and the Mari citizens who now live in fortified towns in Šbartum brought out directed (to Mari). Do send me a servant of yours to accompany me.

See D. Charpin "Une lettre d'un roi inconnu: Nouvelles données sur le début du règne de Zimri-Lim," in *The Ancient Near East, A Life! Festschrift Karel Van Lerberghe*, ed. T. Boiy et al., OLA 220 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 92–96.

35. Sasson, "The King and I," 461–62.

36. Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 242–45.

37. A Babylonian conquest of Razama in the Yussan is suggested by OECT 13 278, leading D. Lacambre to propose it as one stage in the conquest of Mari; see his "Études sur le règne de Zimri-Lim de Mari," *RA* 96 (2002): 19–21. I doubt it.

38. The Mari documents on the siege of Razama include the following: ARM 14 104+ (= LAPO 17 548); ARM 6 51, 52, and 65 (= LAPO 17 553, 552, 850); and ARM 27 132, 133,

region, not far from Tell Leilan. I leave to a footnote the background on why and how, in Zimri-Lim's tenth year, King Atamrum of Allaḥad, having successfully occupied Andarig, moved against Šarriya (Šarraya) of Razama. Suffice it to say that these two kings were vassals of Zimri-Lim; but, because the king had gone to visit Aleppo and Ugarit, in the process depleting the region of soldiers, Atamrum took advantage of circumstances to destroy his rival. The siege lasted two months, tops; yet, despite the interval's brevity, the event generated a nice collection of documents, posted from near and far, suggesting a lively traffic in networked news. It is useful to collect these tweets around a juicy letter that Governor Yaqqim-Addu of Saggaratum province sent to Zimri-Lim, then still in transit; ARM 14 104+ = LAPO 17 548.³⁹

Yaqqim-Addu writes, "On the same day I convey this letter to my lord, three men from Bāb-naḥlu (near Mari), who had been taken to Ešnunna during the past campaign of Dannum-taḥaz against Mari, escaped here from the army at Atamrum's disposal and appeared before me." Let us keep in mind the source of this information: local boys who had been conscripted into an army allied to Atamrum had managed to escape home. They had good reasons, therefore, to fear being treated as traitors or spies, so they may well have adopted an ingratiating tone as well as the practice of telling everything "slant."

Continues Yaqqim-Addu, "I questioned them about events, and they told me the following, 'An army reached Razama, and as it did so, a contingent from the town came out and killed 700 Elamite warriors and 600 Ešnunna men.'" The numbers killed seem incredible; in fact, in other notes sent to Zimri-Lim, the numbers vary, although it is not always easy to tell whether they are reporting on the same incident. Details on how it happened are conveyed to distant Zimri-Lim by a diplomat (Yamšum) stationed in Ilanšura (ARM 26 318): It seems that Šarriya dropped bitumen in front of Atamrum's siege towers and set it on fire. The fire also burned the footbridges (*īkul*).

Once again, I quote Yaqqim-Addu: "They let 10 days pass (without fighting); then the elders came out before Atamrum and told him, 'We want peace.

318. There is a great deal of literature on this famous event. A succinct account is found in C. Michel in *RIA* 11.278–79. Diverse aspects of the siege are discussed in Wolfgang Heimpel, "Details of Atamrum's siege of Razama," *NABU* 1996/102: 89–90; and in two articles by Jordi Vidal, "The Siege of Razama: An Example of Aggressive Defence in Old Babylonian Times," *AoF* 36 (2009): 365–71; and "La guerra de asedio." More details are offered in Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 212–14, 219–22. On the location of Razama, see *ibid.*, 22.

The other siege occurred at Ḫiritum, also in Zimri-Lim's tenth year, when Elam, flush with its victories against Ešnunna, sought to take control of Babylon (*ibid.*, 212–14, 219–22). Documents about this siege include: ARM 27 141–42; ARM 2 30+ (= LAPO 17 581); ARM 26 384; and A. 3669 (D. Lacambre, "La bataille de Ḫiritum"). Discussions about the siege there appear in Wolfgang Heimpel, "The Defense of Ḫiritum," *NABU* 1997/103: 97–8.

39. See D. Charpin, "Données nouvelles sur la poliorcétique," with a new edition of the core text.

As soon as the army stays within its campsite (*karāšum*) a good distance away,⁴⁰ I [= Šarriya] shall deliver the money.” With their ten-day wait, the elders were sharpening Atamrum’s anxiety. The elders probably knew by then that Zimri-Lim was rushing back to defend his turf (ARM 27 132).⁴¹ In fact, we have a note that they may also have received in which Zimri-Lim was warning Atamrum about taking Razama (ARM 14 103 = LAPO 16 431). Razama and Mari had once “shared the same couch”—that is, their armies had merged in fights against an enemy (Ešnunna). Moreover, its king (Šarriya) was faithful to the loyalty oaths he had sworn, when other vassals were not (among them, Qarni-Lim).⁴² The elders may also have heard that Atamrum’s main ally (Elam) had become concerned about fighting Zimri-Lim and wanted the siege lifted (ARM 14 103 = LAPO 16 431).⁴³ Moreover, another note informs us that 4,000 men had already abandoned Atamrum and his siege, heading for easier targets.⁴⁴

Atamrum, however, would have none of it. Yaqqim-Addu cites what he said to the elders: “This is what you are plotting, ‘Let us trick him with words and he will move away within his campsite. In this way, let us thus put an end to trouble in Idamaras.’” “If you really want peace,” continues Atamrum, “why has Šarriya not come out to meet me? Go ahead and fight; just strengthen your

40. The phrase *duppurum ina* can have the meaning of moving away from something or moving away toward something; so it is not clear whether they are to abandon their camp or to move out with it.

41. Zimri-Lim’s move toward Razama is confirmed by ARM 23 545; on the date, see Charpin and Ziegler, *Mari et le Proche-Orient*, 220 n. 466.

42. A.2730 (cited by Charpin in ARM 26/2, p. 33 (text in n. 24), is a letter that Ibal-El sent to Zimri-Lim:

On the matter of Atamrum who wrote to my lord, “Send me troops!”; my lord should answer like this, “Now you must ask Hammurabi (of Kurda), Ḫatnu-rabi (of Qattara), Šarru-ki-kalima (Razama of Yamutbal) kings who are with you—and Yanuḥ-samar, your servant. (They will tell you that) between me and Šarraya (of Razama) there endures powerful blood agreements (merismus: *damu u dannātum šaknā*). With me, there were 100 tribesmen and 100 banks-of-the Euphrates followers of mine—therefore, 200 reliable followers, the pick of my land—when they attested to the blood (covenant) and when I indeed imposed an oath by the gods on him (*ina dami izzizā u niš ilim lā zakrakšum*).”

Once more, when my father, the *sukkal* (of Elam) wrote me about troops, I sent (them) and wrote to Qarni-Lim, “Do you not belong to my blood (covenant)? Send me your army, for it to share my couch (*ina rubšiya lirbiš*).” He did not give me his army, and he was brought to a bad end (*ištalušu*). I also sent a letter to Šarraya telling him, “You belong to my blood (covenant). Give me an army, for it to share the couch of my army. . . . [segment broken, probably includes Šarraya’s acceptance of Zimri-Lim’s request, reporting,] “I will give you an army if you plan to besiege another town.” This is what you should write him.

43. Nur-Sin writes to Zimri-Lim (*FM* 7 25), “Just before Iši-qatar, my lord’s servant, was leaving, this is what I heard from my sources, ‘Fourteen people trafficking information for the *sukkal* of Elam and who were carrying errands were seized and were moved into confinement. This is what was posted to Atamrum: Make peace with the ruler of Razama. Give him silver or gold and release (his servants).’”

44. Asqur-Addu was said to lead 4,000 soldiers toward Šubat-Enlil; ARM 27 133.

town!’” In essence, Atamrum knew that Razama’s king was not likely to give himself up as hostage and so had heightened pressure by declaring war, a move that always took place when armies were encircling a town.

Razama took the dare and mocked Atamrum, “This town belongs to Zimri-Lim, but the levied army has followed him. Stick around, then, until the town’s lord [= Zimri-Lim] catches up with you!”⁴⁵ In fact, given the good prospect of Zimri-Lim’s arriving to the rescue, Razama’s king (Šarriya) proceeded exactly as Atamrum was fearing. We cannot tell how much Yaqqim-Addu’s informers were telescoping events; but they report fresh sorties by the defenders. As I have said, diverse sources give suspiciously changing numbers for the victims.⁴⁶ Realizing the brevity of opportunity, Atamrum was building a ramp with which he hoped to reach the crest of the outer wall. By night he had a tunnel cut under the ramp.⁴⁷ One dawn, however, the townsmen made a sortie that allegedly killed half of Atamrum’s troops, taking much weaponry into town. In telling this tidbit, Yaqqim-Addu steps out from simply reporting to comment, “The goal for these townsmen is only to remain loyal to (lit., keep in mind) my lord only!”

Hurting badly, Atamrum tried a ruse: “He had bronze lances picked up for 30 impostors (lú.meš *sarrārū*) and they taunted (*usahḫimū*) the townsmen, ‘Why do you keep thinking (*taḫtanassassā*) of Zimri-Lim? Is it not the case that his soldiers are besieging you now?’ But the townsmen answered [Atamrum], ‘These are deceitful men that you have equipped and made come near here! Indeed, you will see when within 5 days the armies that are with Zimri-Lim catch up with you!’”⁴⁸ What Atamrum had done was to outfit 30 deceivers

45. In the G, *kašādum* is commonly construed with an accusative rather than a dative, as here and in line 44.

46. 600 in ARM 6 65 [= LAPO 17 850].8–12) and 300 just from Ešnunna in ARM 27 133.6–9. It is possible that these soldiers bore the brunt of the defenders because they fronted a strategic spot; but more likely is that the deserters were regaling Zimri-Lim with inflated numbers of kills because they knew Zimri-Lim had no love for Ešnunna.

47. “Once the front sections of the ramp reached the jutting portion/base of the outer fortification, the townsmen *broke out from town/tunneled the town* and made two big holes, right and left, at the ramp’s front sections. At night, they moved to the front of the ramp via the tunnel, at dawn the town’s soldier surged out and killed half the army. They plundered their bronze lances and shields, taking them into town. The goal for these townsmen is to remain loyal to (lit., keep in mind) my lord only!”

48. A vivid taunt takes place at the base of the rampart of Ašnakkum, a city in the upper part of the Ḫabur River. At the moment of writing ARM 28 98, Ili-Sumu, a vassal of Zimri-Lim of Mari, was trying to remove Ašnakkum from the control of Terru of Urgiš: “When I approached Ašnakkum for combat, the king of Urgiš shouted to me from the rampart, ‘When did a minion [*šaknum*, literally, “vassal”] of Zimri-Lim ever set up a king at Ašnakkum?’ But I answered him, ‘As to the kings of Elam—when, O when did they ever install a king in Ašnakkum? The whole land belongs to my lord.’” We have a wonderful example of a taunt at the walls of Shechem, with Zebul succeeding in shaming Gaal into facing Abimelech, (Judg 9:38).

with garments and weapons associated with Zimri-Lim's men and had these impostors claim that Zimri-Lim had sided with Atamrum. The term applied to them (lú.meš *sarrārū*) comments on their character instead of their activity and thus may be equivalent to Hebrew אנשים ריקים ופוזים (Judg 9:4).

From here on, the text becomes difficult to follow clearly. The gist, however, is clear. Panic began to spread among the attackers—so much so that they feared sending some of their men to haul the necessary water. Yaqqim-Addu ends on this laconic note: “But in (Atamrum's) campsite, this army is under alert and remains fearful of my lord. My lord should act to reach and save the city.”⁴⁹

We also lose the thread of the drama. I am sorry to say that there is no record of the way that the siege ended, but because we find Atamrum marrying one of Zimri-Lim's daughters (Inbatum), I imagine that he pulled back from Razama without challenging Mari.⁵⁰ I might note that, as Zimri-Lim was entering his own final year as ruler, he received news that Atamrum died. We do not know how. He was unmourned by his father-in-law, and his death was attributed to a just but vengeful God (ARM 26 185b = LAPO 18 1145).

Conclusion

The Razama dossier, then, illustrates yet another failure to take a well-fortified city by siege. It therefore vindicates General Sun Tzu's opinion on the wastefulness of such efforts. The Mari documents I cite come to us from an age in which chariotry, not to speak of cavalry, had still to emerge as major units of warfare. I therefore propose that, with these new armaments entering the fray, the need for plenty of room in which to maneuver altered military strategy, thus bringing armies into wider confrontations. In this way, rulers could lose control long before the enemy successfully stormed their cities. Still, the art of besieging and defending cities never died out. It also came to be such a dependable literary feature that we still thrill at reading about an Assyrian challenge hurled at the defenders of Jerusalem and about the last moments of a ten-year siege at Homeric Troy.

49. “With the rumor about the arrival of my lord rife over the army, while it was still night, in the campsite twice the armies would come *under alert* (*ummanātum isallulā*). It was said, ‘If non-stop (lit: night and day) they could haul water for the troops from a good distance, who among the 2–3000 men . . . has gone to raid the water haulers, so that those within the city could come out and kill many soldiers?’” The phrase *ummanātum isallulā* is difficult; see W. Heimpel, “*Šalālum*, to be sleepless,” *NABU* 1995/93: 83–84. The context suggests an unusual amount of activity, due to their fear.

50. The treaty is published by Francis Joannès, “Le traité de vassalité d'Atamrum d'Andarig envers Zimri Lim de Mari,” in *Marchands, Diplomates et Empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli*, ed. D. Charpin and F. Joannès (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991), 167–77.