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About the *mātum* in Early Second Millennium Middle Euphrates Region The Royal Inscriptions of Yahdun-Lîm

*Diego A. Barreyra Fracaroli**

Abstract

The Mari archives show the conspicuous presence of social groups committed to a mobile way of life in early second millennium Syria, but these never constituted an element foreign to settled farmers in the river valleys. If taken as different populations, one should recognize anyways that they were only ideal vectors that came from the same social milieu. In tune with this overall view of landscape, modern scholarship no longer assigns tribal characteristics exclusively to mobile groups, but instead understands a tribal socio-political mode as a manner of resolving tensions in societies with significant mobile pastoralist components. Hence, apparently different social groups belonged to the same political entities and owed allegiance to the same authorities. The question now arises as to whether distinct cultural identities springing from the same socio-political soil need to be explained by the correlated existence of a single political unit encompassing them all (kingship) or we can see alternative ways of establishing social ties across distance. In early settings where expansionary kingship projects were still absent in the Middle Euphrates region, tribal identities seem to have offered an alternative or rather a complement to local urban citizenship, as we know from earliest Mari royal inscriptions. The *mātum* category is used there for the first time to refer to socio-political entities on their own, not necessarily subordinate to larger polities. This work discusses the precise

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meaning of this term as used in the royal inscriptions of Yahdun-Lîm.

Key-Words: Syria; Mari Archives; socio-political domains

Acerca del *mātum* durante el II milenio temprano en la región del Éufrates medio. Las inscripciones de Yahdun-Lîm

Resumen

Los Archivos de Mari muestran la notoria presencia de grupos sociales con un modo de vida móvil en la Siria de la primera mitad del segundo milenio, pero estos grupos jamás constituyeron un elemento extraño a los agricultores sedentarios de los valles fluviales. Si se los entendiera como poblaciones diferentes, uno de todos modos debería reconocer que son sólo vectores ideales provenientes del mismo medio social. A tono con esta visión general, los estudios más recientes ya no asignan rasgos tribales exclusivamente a los grupos móviles: el modo sociopolítico tribal se entiende en cambio como una manera de resolver tensiones en sociedades con componentes pastoriles móviles significativos. Por lo tanto, grupos sociales aparentemente diferentes pertenecían a las mismas entidades políticas y obedecían a las mismas autoridades. En este contexto surge la cuestión de si identidades culturales distintas que provienen de un mismo medio sociopolítico necesitan explicarse en relación con una sola unidad política que envuelve a todas aquellas (dinastía) o estamos en condiciones de visualizar modos alternativos de establecer vínculos sociales a distancia. En escenarios previos, cuando los proyectos dinásticos expansionistas aún estaban ausentes en la región del Éufrates Medio, las identidades tribales parecen haber ofrecido una alternativa, o más bien un complemento, a la ciudadanía urbana local, como sabemos por las primeras inscripciones reales de Mari. Se usó allí la categoría *mātum* por primera vez, para referirse a entidades sociopolíticas en sí mismas, no necesariamente subordinadas a formaciones políticas mayores. Este trabajo examina el preciso significado de este término tal cual es usado en las inscripciones reales de Yahdun-Lîm.

Palabras claves: Siria; Archivos de Mari; dominios sociopolíticos

A Tribal World

Textual sources from early second-millennium Syria-Mesopotamia show the full development of long processes of tribal formation¹ in the region, processes that might have originated in the mid-fourth millennium. Indeed, once we begin reading the textual corpora from Mari and other contemporary sites we get used to the conspicuous presence of tribes and their political leadership (individual or collective) side by side with the city governments and larger kingdoms that supposedly encompass the tribal sphere of social influence. However, it is unusual to find such a focused attention to tribal social organization as found in the Mari documents. This concentrated evidence provides a particular benefit: it may be only because of Mari's rare perspective that we find out so much about the tribal dimension to the Syrian-Mesopotamian landscape in the early second millennium BCE.

These tribes have often been understood to have originated from successive immigration waves of nomadic groups into the agricultural lands of the main river valleys, allegedly coming from the highlands east of Ugarit, the so-called Land of Amurru². According to this hypothesis, different nomadic

¹At this point everybody is aware of evolutionist connotations in the way the word "tribe" was created in the past, with its last versions presented by both Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service in late 1960s (Sahlins 1968; Service 1971). They certainly treated the concept as referring specifically to a particular stage of socio-cultural evolution to state, a general theory that has received mass of critiques from specialists through last decades; however, and in order to differentiate those politically organized groups showing up in Mari letters from other kinds of organization (kingdoms clearly, city collective governments probably), it seems to me that there are no alternative sociological, anthropological term that describe better all the internal features of these groups, explaining their existence *vis-à-vis* essentially different political associations. That tribes are composed of segmentary groups that integrate themselves into a unity through the ideological creation of solidarities always related to kingship is something critiques never proved to be false. On the other hand, speaking of corporate social systems instead of using the word "tribe" does not offer a real solution, since in several occasions individual leadership is associated to particular tribes in Mari documents, which makes differences with the concept of kingship to be more blurred than expected.

²Today there seems not to be unanimous consensus about the geographical origin of these allegedly pastoralist newcomers. A different line has been recently expressed by Bertille Lyonnet, who underlines the fact that rounded cities associated to sheep herders in northeastern Syria, dated in the first half of third millennium BCE, do not have correlated similar construction in the west. Based mainly in archaeological studies conducted in Turkey, she would rather identify these pastoralist groups responsible for the construction of rounded cities as coming from Transcaucasia: the Kura-Araxes culture. With their intrusion, she argues, groups of westerners got pushed and migrated also to the east/northeast (Lyonnet 2009: 191-192).

groups from the “Amorrite homeland” would have moved eastward because of the difficult conditions created by climatic changes, finally to settle down next to cities and villages, first in the Middle Euphrates region and then elsewhere in Upper and Lower Mesopotamia. Insofar as traces of tribalism are not clearly attested in archives from late third millennium urban sites, it has been suggested that Amorrites brought tribal forms of socio-political organization with them into the agricultural river valleys around the very end of the third millennium BCE. So, in principle, this longstanding view advocates for the existence of two different and separate socio-political phenomena, which at some point co-occurred in the same space: on the one hand a local, urbanized model based mainly on agriculture and sedentary village life; on the other hand an exogenous structure, that is semi-nomadic (in the most recent versions of this view) tribal groups, whose basic features would not contribute whatsoever to the state formation, unless it blends with previous local socio-political institutions (Porter 2004: 69-70, 2012: 9-12).

However, the only we get both from ethnographic studies and textual analysis is that tribal organizations appear to make more sense on the side of entire groups committed to a mobile way of life, but this does not mean they were so specialized as to constitute an element foreign to settled farmers. In other words, we cannot take for granted the simple attribution of tribalism to any pastoralist group as socially separated from settled communities of farmers, since they (as ideal different vectors) actually come from the same social milieu³. We should work definitely from a different argument,

³In his review of different approaches to the topic of nomads-tribe-state interaction in the Ancient Near East, Jeffrey Szuchman pointed out that all questions about nomad pastoralists could be synthesized in two competing theories about what exactly is implied in the integration of them into villages, towns, and cities. He identifies a group of studies whose big picture is a regional economy, in which fully integrated sectors specialize themselves in different practices, but they are truly indistinguishable from the other elements of the same social structure. On the other hand, Szuchman pictures other group of academic work that argues an ultimate distinction of nomadic elements from sedentary communities, no matter degrees of integration. According to Szuchman, for the first group the pastoralism is an economic phenomenon, while the second group thinks of it as also cultural. Problems arise when we observe that complex processes of creation for nomads’ self-identity have gone beyond the scope of their economic base (Szuchman 2009: 3). Anatoly Khazanov chooses to stress the economic side of nomadism as its most important aspect, but comes to reinforce the traditional idea of a divorce nomad-sedentary by arguing that extensive mobile pastoralism is a specific type of food-producing economy in which two socio-economic opposites are implied: animal husbandry/mobility and cultivation/sedentism. According to him, what determines the degree of mobility of pastoralists turns to be the size and importance of cultivation. Thus, the main characteristics of the

considering that what was coined as tribal in recent times has been historically a manner of resolving tensions implicit in societies with significant mobile pastoralist components.

A much more fruitful perspective would be to consider neither a socio-political evolution from tribe to state stage-by-stage, with the obvious pejorative connotation of a term that would imply the notion of backward tribal organizations as a logic correlation, nor a separate treatment of “tribe” and “state” as pure social categories. To the contrary, the interesting line of thought that places the existence of mobile pastoralism and tribal organization at the very base of civilization, defined by early urbanism and state formation, needs elaboration with help from both archaeology and Assyriology. Now, especially after the work of Anne Porter, there is a relative consensus that in ancient Syria-Mesopotamia the greater the role for broad-scale mobile pastoralism the more striking are the features of civilization, since one key factor in economic development in the whole region throughout millennia was the textile industry of woolen garments (McCorriston 1997). One major factor in the development of extensive mobile pastoralism may thus be understood as the need of long-distance commercial networks, and this economic dimension would itself become a driving force for Mesopotamian civilization. At the same time, the long-distance migratory pattern of the pastoralist activities created cultural diversity in the long run.

Anne Porter points out that the political process here is complex, since in the ancient Near East we have a variable combination of several ideologies, social practices and principles on the same ground at the same time, resulting from this an equally variable number of choices for socio-political organization (Porter 2012: 9-63). In consequence, it is pointless either to continue looking for single exogenous factors (i.e. the so-called Amorrite western immigration waves) or to observe radical separation between mobile pastoralists and sedentary farmers to explain cultural diversity in the Middle Euphrates. Specialized long-distance shepherds and settled agriculturalists belonged to the same socio-political entities, owed allegiance to the same authorities, and worked together to maintain social integrity over

pastoralist phenomenon as proposed by Khazanov are: a) husbandry is the predominant economic activity, while cultivation is insignificant or non-existent; b) extensive character; c) mobility within the boundaries of specific grazing territories; d) the majority of the population participate in the migratory movement; e) subsistence-oriented economy; f) social organization based on kinship, around various segmentary systems and genealogies; and g) cultural characteristics connected to mobile way of life, such as political peculiarities (cf. Khazanov 2009: 119-120)

long periods of time⁴. So tribal organizations in the Middle Euphrates, as found at the beginning of the second millennium in the Mari documents and contemporary royal inscriptions along with other models of political organization, actually represented one possible way to solve problems posed by the extreme mobility of the pastoralist components in larger social groups across time and space, which at every turn would put communal identities already created at risk of fragmentation⁵. Hence, tribes are to be taken as a socio-political category, not a strictly political one, implying the creation of identity by the pastoralist communities themselves (Porter 2012: 37; Fleming 2013).

The reality of distinct cultural identities springing from the same socio-political soil has offered a topic of great importance for the history of ancient Syria-Mesopotamia. Yet an integrated social system that included different specializations and settlement patterns, available to the whole region, need not be explained by the correlated existence of a single political unit encompassing them all. On the contrary, tribal organizations come increasingly into view through textual documents from the early second millennium BCE, though they were present long before. Indeed, in early settings where expansionary kingship projects that might transcend their limits were still absent, tribal identities offered an alternative to local urban citizenship as a way of establishing strong social ties across distance, when face-to-face interaction became impossible. Of course, the question of how exactly these distinct models of socio-political organization interacted in their interface at the very beginning of the second millennium is tricky because of the meagre textual data, which in turn demands attention to every archaeological/historical detail in order to make sense of the process, at least partially. Nevertheless, it seems to be a historical fact that there was an interface at which the two relatively autonomous models interacted; this reality *per se* allows an analy-

⁴The picture presented here is all pointed by diverse archaeological evidence from fourth-millennium Syria. Indeed, both faunal remains and botanical data in urbanized sites, such as Tell Brak or Ziyadeh, show signs of an increased focus on pastoral specialization (McCorriston 1997; Akkermans & Schwartz 2003: 205-206).

⁵In this respect the work of Michael Casimir offers a brilliant insight into the question of how human beings ensure their access to essential resources, not restricting the meaning of these to the basic needs but considering also what Maurice Godelier has defined as *social utilities*, i.e. places of religious value. In consequence, securing resources must involve various spaces at the same time, including the set of social relationships across territories, which in the case of mobile groups is no doubt a key resource. Social groups construct and defend social boundaries, but tribes conceive the territory as a conjunction of different sub-territories held by descent groups (Casimir 1992: 4-15; 157-175).

sis that joins both models together in the treatment of documents. To be sure, this method follows the way Middle Euphrates cities and tribes were presented in early texts, as they were pictured acting most often together in political inter-regional affairs, but it is precisely due to the fact that they appear conjoined in several instances, never blended in a single unit, that the tribal dimension of ancient Syrian society must be treated as a distinct category.

While the tribe and the city are in principle different and alternative, the textual data show a clear complementarity, especially in the face of larger and expansionist kingship projects such as those centered at Mari and Aleppo. Hence, it is impossible to explain the situation of any city in the Middle Euphrates throughout the early second millennium without referring to contemporary tribal organizations (Fleming 2004: 24)⁶.

The complex early second-millennium world was fluid and diverse. Indeed, numerous small polities such as Tuttul, Abattum, Samânum, and even Mari, whose precise territorial borders by the 19th century BCE are hard to delineate, all represented units within an ephemeral general structure, in which no larger dynastic project lasted more than two generations at best in its aim to control a number of them. Barriers to consolidating regional kingship have been associated with the nature of mobile pastoralism and correlated tribalism, which seem to have resisted accepting dynastic rule from any single political center (cf. Lafont 2000: 51-52)⁷. Babylon's first dy-

⁶In order to elaborate on this line, one could say that, as long as a Syrian urbanism developed in the Middle Euphrates region, the agro-pastoralist social structure may have been in place for centuries. Cities such as Imâr and Tuttul represented social and politically the settled urban side of the system. However, at some point these polities got embedded in a political matrix whose main vector had a definite tribal character. This socio-political phenomenon becomes visible in textual data for the first time through the Yahdun-Lîm's royal inscriptions.

⁷Bertrand Lafont does not neglect the existence of frontiers, political borders, between political entities, but wonders on the other hand whether they really functioned as territorial marks dividing populations' allegiances. The Akkadian word for "frontier" was *pâtum*, and its usage in Mari archives appears almost exclusively related to "international relations" among great kingdoms and their internal jurisdictional divisions: the districts, often for tax purposes. Mobile groups of pastoralists were not subjected to these demarcations, and in fact the ambiguous role of the official chief of pastures, the *merhûm*, comes to exemplify the extent of this complex reality: his sphere of influence moved all around following the seasonal migration of stocks and shepherds, no matter where they were. If near an important district, his authority overlapped that of the governor (Lafont 2000: 52-54). Anne Porter comes also to contribute to this line with her analysis of Samsî-Addu's political relations with tribal groups. She argues that the king of Upper Mesopotamia achieved success in taking a census of mobile contingents that happened to

nasty proved an exception to this general rule, and the same could be said of Aleppo in western Syria, which combined the personal political skills of its kings with strong connections to tribal organizations. Nonetheless, the ephemeral condition of the system was far from confined to such kingship projects: the same pattern is evident in tribal structures, whether or not associated with kingship, especially in the reign of king Zimrî-Lîm and due probably to the fluid nature of tribal organizations. In this context, Middle Euphrates cities like Tuttul and Imâr, with urban institutions going back to the third millennium that persisted into the early second millennium, apparently stood the test of time, even as they merged on several occasions with tribal organizations and were sometimes integrated into larger kingdoms. The socio-political situation of these cities was clearly linked to particular tribal structures at least from late 19th century BCE, but one cannot assume this alignment reflects a long-standing reality.

Generally speaking, the tribal world of pastoralist groups in Syria was comprised of two distinct confederacies: the Yaminites, whose selected pastures were located in the Middle Euphrates and lands in the west, and the Sim'alites, who practiced their seasonal migrations around the Habur River valleys, the steppes on each side, and the land of Ida-Maraş (in the upper Habur). Five tribes are said to have formed the Yaminite confederacy: the Urapû, Yahrurû, Amnanû, Yarihû, and Rabbû, each one with a supreme individual leader. In contrast, the Sim'alites do not show the same organization, since the Mari texts depict them as numerous clans split into two groups, with no single ruler attested⁸. However, one should be extremely cautious with this picture, since it comes from later texts. Insofar as tribal affiliations were fluid, there is no need to take for granted the existence of a similar Yaminite confederacy throughout the entire historical period. It is true that cities Tuttul and Imâr were connected only to Yaminite tribes (Charpin & Durand 1986; Durand 1990, 1992, 1998, 2004; Fleming 2004; Heimpel 2003), though we cannot simply assume longstanding stable relationships between them.

have their bases within the confines of the great kingdom, but they owed allegiance to other smaller polities as well. In my personal view, and as a side comment, she wrongfully thinks that the Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia did better with Yaminite groups than Sim'alites (cf. Porter 2012: 35).

⁸Daniel Fleming has differentiated the tribal confederacies' organizations, pointing out that central Mari administration used to speak of Yaminite tribes as *limums*, while referring to counterpart Sim'alite divisions always implied the use of the term *gayum*, "clan". The differentiation made in texts finds support in paralleled different roles played by local leaders *sugāgums* within each confederacy (Fleming 2004: 27; 45).

A World of *mātums*

In a royal inscription, the Babylonian king Samsu-iluna described the essence of his powerful dominion over vast regions of ancient Mesopotamia as a divine gift. In accord with ancient ideological principles, the god Marduk, chief of the Babylonian pantheon and patron of the city-capital, gave him various domains to be ruled from Babylon⁹. Remarkably, the text does not differentiate in the terms referring to the divine kingdom of Marduk, which one should equate with the Babylon kingdom, along with its smaller constituent domains, like pieces in a puzzle. For both the larger kingdom and its subordinate units they used the same word, *mātum*. Thus, the individual units of the Babylonian kingdom were not simply treated as provinces or districts, though in practical terms they were the seat of governors who reported directly to the central court. On the contrary, the official discourse recognized them as socio-political entities on their own, only now under the supreme authority of a larger expansionist polity. If strictly political in nature, this term *mātum* does not seem to be a recent creation by larger polities, which would no doubt come up with a different concept for subordinate units if given the chance. One wonder at this point if there is a cultural/social dimension of this category to seriously consider.

The few preserved texts for the period of Yahdun-Lîm at Mari demonstrate that the political system conceived in seventeenth-century BCE Babylon was the same in late nineteenth-century BCE Mari in the Middle Euphrates, indicating a notable continuity of political tradition and ideology of power across centuries. Indeed, king Yahdun-Lîm defined his own royal domain, centered around the Euphrates valley cities of Mari, Terqa and Saggarâtum, as a *mātum*, while his later conquest of the valley further upstream will be defined also in terms of equal domains comprising a city center and an associated tribe. The same picture is found in the Old Assyrian Eponym List, where the entry for the year Atanum presents Yahdun-Lîm of Mari as followed by twelve “kings” that would have represented different smaller but conceptually equal constituents of his whole domain, his own *mātum* (Charpin & Durand 1985: 295).

Yet what does the word *mātum* mean for Assyriologists, precisely? The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary displays four possible definitions of this socio-

⁹Samsuiluna A Inscription (lines 17-23): *īnušu* ^dAMAR.UTU, ^dEN.LÍL *mātīšu*, ^d*bani nēmeqim*, *ana Samsuiluna, šar lalēšu yāti, naphar mātātīm ana rē'im, iddinam* “By that time, Marduk, the Enlil of His Domain, the Creator of Wisdom, gave the entirety of domains to Samsuiluna, to me, the king of His Choice, the shepherd.”

political term, according to contexts and genres of use: a country as political unit or simply a piece of land; an open, flat country; homeland; and last, the population of a country. It is immediately evident that definitions one and four overlap, perhaps as well as number three. All of these share a political dimension that seems essential to the term, and politics in the early second millennium was characterized by the rise and often rapid fall of expansionary kingdoms. Indeed, being expansionary was all about subduing available human resources, through whom commodities would flow to the center of a social system, so there was no point in differentiating political subjects from the places they lived, permanently or temporarily. Regarding the third definition as “homeland,” identity construction naturally involves political and economic elements. Examples from the volume’s editors show the impossibility of separating this category from the others¹⁰.

In general, academic work on Mari and its world has been well aware of the political dimension of the *mātum*, although its precise definition has been elusive. Since the 1980s Jean-Marie Durand and Dominique Charpin of the French Mari research team objected to identification of the term, which usually appears in bound form and accompanied by another noun, with a precisely demarcated individual territory. Their argument appears in a discussion of how to characterize Mari kingship, especially during the reign of Zimrî-Lîm. They discarded the hypothesis of a two-fold power structure for Yahdun-Lîm’s kingdom, based on interpretation of the royal title *king of Mari and the māt Hana*: that is, a purely administrative capital in Mari divorced to some extent from the religious center of Terqa and its hinterland, seat of the Dagan clergy and future capital of the socio-political entity called Hana by the mid-second millennium. Rather, they drew attention to the fact that the word Hana in the early second millennium was often used for mobile groups of shepherds, whose movements can be traced across the many urban centers in the Upper Habur region, far from Terqa. By proving that the *mātum* of Hana was never located either in any of the Middle Euphrates cities or in a precise part of Ida-Maraş, though people from Hana were frequently associated with that region in the Mari texts, Charpin and Durand proposed instead that the *māt Hana* was a socio-political entity over which king Yahdun-Lîm ruled before he took Mari: his own constituency,

¹⁰To cite only some of the examples: *šarrum māssu ana pišu uš[šab]* “the country will live in obedience to the king;” *aššum šarrum mišaram ana mātum iškunu* “inasmuch as the king has granted the country release from debts.” It seems clear from these that the country means either the whole constituency of the kingdom or their traditional authorities, who recognize central royal power (cf. *CAD*: 414-415)

his people, away from the Middle Euphrates where he installed himself on Mari's throne. Yet, they did not develop this interesting idea further: on the contrary, their definition of the term *mātum* was still tied to a limited territorial notion when they described it as the whole number of territories under a king's control, which were in opposition to other political formations of the same kind (cf. Charpin & Durand 1986: 141-150; Durand 1989: 29-30). If a geographical/territorial definition of *mātum* were correct, we would have severe difficulty reconstructing an accurate map of distinct royal domains, especially in a Syrian world where true effective control from a political-administrative center was only possible in adjacent lands and over village settlements, while most territory consisted of steppe-land intersected by nomadic paths. Francis Joannès realized the complexity of this world when he cited the example of the three main city capitals of the Yamûtbâl and Numhâ peoples (West and East): Andarig, Karanâ and Kurdâ, which were located very close each other. The obvious conclusion would have been that political space need not equate to simple geographical space, but Joannès did not explore this idea more deeply, though he was clearly aware of the intersection between what he coined as three different types of geographic and political space in Syria: cities, nomads, and new Amorrite kingdoms (Joannès 1996: 335-350). The complexity of a brand-new political formation, which comprises these different modes of socio-political integration, probably explains by itself why the mention of a *mātum* always includes reference to the political entity that is exerting power over some constituency.

After systematic review of the Mari texts, Daniel Fleming proposed a more appropriate definition of the term *mātum*: a political unit able to make its own decisions, which implies a fairly high degree of political autonomy. This way, the term is ultimately defined by population (with its settled and mobile segments) and not (only) by land, but judging strictly from Fleming's argument this category would not refer simply to the whole constituency of a single kingdom, since this population had been going through a long process of tribal identity creation in Syria-Mesopotamia and owed allegiance mainly to local authorities. Nevertheless, Daniel Fleming underscores the fact that the very existence of a decision-making entity at the top of a particular constituency included a mobile pastoralist sector, an entity that acted as independent entity, which explains the whole phenomenon of the new *mātum* language in the early second millennium. Leadership of the *mātum* means a king, as well as his royal court and corps of administrators, but Fleming envisions the preexistence of the *mātum*, since this population is what recognized an emerging ruler. In consequence, the *mātum* might not need a king: it has

its own voice, its own political will (Fleming 2004: 27, 105-106). Thus, there is a tension in his analysis: while the *mātum* appears to have existed as an entity unto itself, not requiring a king but a decision-making entity, its terminology, he argues, is only used in political constructions led by kings. One possible way to resolve this tension is to remark the essentially monarchic nature of our archives; we have no textual information from other sources that could allow a sort of history from below. This royal perspective makes it difficult to find any socio-political domain not related in any way to a king. Indeed, judging only from the Mari texts, is there any socio-political space in early second millennium Syria-Mesopotamia completely separate from kingship systems? In the world depicted in the Mari letters, every local polity followed a great king one way or another, no matter how autonomous their local dealings were. However, this royal perspective in Mari documents does not invalidate Fleming's first line of argumentation: inasmuch as the study is firmly based on available textual data, more emphasis on the *mātum*'s essence would pave the way for slightly different readings¹¹. Thus, it would be of great importance to understand fully the way the term appears in different contexts, which may sometimes have nothing to do with dynastic rule¹². To be sure, the use of the word *mātum* in early second-millennium texts does relate directly to a politically organized community, but in essence it was up to this polity to select a kingship mode. While this interesting concept needs to be tested through a serious process of operationalization with all available data, it opens up a more complex picture of Syrian socio-politics by simply turning the classic evolutionist trend upside down. If tribal ultimately means a cultural way of resolving social problems posed by mobility through the creation of identities in time and space, the very existence of

¹¹This important historical-social concern finds material for further discussion in Daniel Fleming's previous work. If the analogy with later socio-political scenarios is acceptable in academic debate, what we know about Late Bronze Age city of Imâr from the municipal archive of a diviner may serve well as a point of reference. Texts of urban main religious festivals speak of a stronger allegiance to this city diviner than the local king from the part of people. The king is actually almost absent in this archive. The question is whether the archive pictures a completely different socio-political reality in Late Bronze Age or simply represents a different approach on a similar landscape (cf. Fleming 2000).

¹²In one of his seminal articles, Jean-Marie Durand rapidly discarded any possible connection of alleged early West Semitic form of the term *mātum*, that is *dadmum*, with the KA.UKKEN (*da-da-mu*) attestation in Ebla texts, because he could hardly figure out how the notion of a sum of territories ruled by a king was related to texts where he could easily observe city assemblies (Durand 1989: 27-32). In principle, such rejection looks too fast if based on pure historical reasons. A review of linguistic arguments for a possible association of assemblies with a political domain seems desirable.

a decision-making entity in each of these social/cultural formations makes the *mātum* category a tribal one, essentially different from larger kingship projects.

Socio-Political Domains of the Middle Euphrates Region as Depicted by the Royal Inscriptions of Yahdun-Lîm

There is not much available textual evidence for the Middle Euphrates cities during the reign of Yahdun-Lîm, but quantity here diminishes neither its importance nor its richness. First in chronological order, the great foundation inscription of Yahdun-Lîm, written in honor of building the Šamaš temple named *Egirzalanki*, is the primary source of data, followed in importance by the Disc Inscription of Yahdun-Lîm.

Keeping in mind the *mātum* concept and the macro-politics of the time, analysis of these royal inscriptions will help to elucidate the socio-political situation in the Middle Euphrates. Administrative texts and letters for this early period are quite rare¹³, but both the Disc Inscription of Yahdun-Lîm and the Šamaš Temple Inscription offer a vivid account of the king's policy regarding the upstream cities of Tuttul, Abattum, and Samânum, in the Banks of the Euphrates, clearly presented as urban centers of distinct *mātums*, also depicting how these cities had labored to build regional powers opposing the monarchic project of Yaggîd-Lîm and Yahdun-Lîm. Along with the explicit participation of these three cities, Imâr's involvement in the conflict has been inferred from other texts. Tuttul, Abattum, Samânum and probably also Imâr would have pursued political objectives similar to those of the Mari kingdom.

In terms of precise historical events, the little we know at this point is that by the beginning of the second millennium the city of Şuprum, on the left bank of the Euphrates, close to Mari across the river, seems to have been the most important political center in the Middle Euphrates region, seat of

¹³Tablets from this period were not found among the texts of extant Mari archives. When Yasmah-Addu installed himself in the palace, he ordered to dispose of earlier documents, which were unearthed by excavators below the last level of occupation. From those findings we have only a handful of letters and some hundreds of economic/administrative texts. In Terqa and Tuttul archaeologists also discovered some texts dated to Yahdun-Lîm's years (Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 36).

a kingdom headed by Yaggîd-Lîm, Yahdun-Lîm's father¹⁴. This conclusion is drawn partly from data provided by the eponym list for the contemporary kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia, where we find reference to a military incursion into the Middle Euphrates by its leader Ila-Kabkabu, saying that he captured a prominent political leader from his seat in Şuprum. This man must have been Yahdun-Lîm (Charpin & Durand 1985: 294; Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 34), though we do not know for certain whether Mari was part of this new polity. Given that the city was so close to his capital at Mari, it would make sense that Yaggîd-Lîm annexed it at some point. Insofar as his son Yahdun-Lîm showed clear links to the Sim'alite tribal confederacy (Fleming 2004: 9), Yaggîd-Lîm has also been considered to have a close association with them. ARM I 3, the well-known letter of Yasmah-Addu to underworld god Nergal after a terrible epidemic struck the region, mentions him as rival to Ila-kabkabu, father of Samsî-Addu. What is implied in the confrontation's description is that Yaggîd-Lîm had achieved his ambition of putting under his rule all the small polities of the Middle Euphrates and perhaps more, while Ila-kabkabu held a domain mainly in the Tigris and eastern Djezirah (Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 32-33). Despite an alleged military victory by Ila-kabkabu over Yaggîd-Lîm, the Middle Euphrates did not appear to have been threatened seriously by easterners, and Yahdun-Lîm succeeded his father on the throne as planned, in ca. 1810 BCE.

It seems that soon after Yahdun-Lîm succeeded his father on the Mari throne he had to deal with serious difficulties in the Middle Euphrates region. According to the speech recorded in the Šamaš Temple Inscription, the king of Mari took this war against a coalition of three cities that challenged his already established authority over the region¹⁵. If taken for granted, this

¹⁴The most important urban center in this region was always Mari, but for some reasons it lost his preeminence around the very end of third millennium BCE. Mari no doubt flourished with its *šakkanakku*-governors, to the point of its main buildings being reused by king Yahdun-Lîm, but archaeological surveys on these administrative centers could not prove a continuous occupation through the gap of two hundred years between the last *šakkanakku* and the new Sim'alite ruler. This peculiar situation has made one to shift ground from earlier perspectives about a southern presence/culture, more urban and the like, and rather advocate for taking Mari as a kind of ground zero in which Yahdun-Lîm built his political dominium *de novo*. If so, choosing Mari as new capital makes sense if we think that Yahdun-Lîm was in the need of a new empty arena to fill it with a mix of ancient and new traditions (Fleming 2004: 7-12).

¹⁵Lines 17-19 of Column One: *Yahdun-Lîm, mār Yaggîd-Lîm, šar Mari u māt Hana*. Lines 25-26 of Column One: *mušabši mimma šumšu, ina mātīšu*. Lines 3-23 of Column Three: *ina šattim-ma šāti, Lâ'ûm šar Samânim, u māt Ubrabim, Bahlukulim šar Tut-tul, u māt Amnanim, Ayâlum šar Abattim, u māt Rabbim, šarrû annûtum, ikkirûšû-ma,*

text would have us understand that Tuttul, Abattum and Samânum, along with the tribes associated with them, had been part of his royal inheritance, assuming Yaggîd-Lîm's previous dominion over these polities, whose territorial scope reached beyond the outflow of the Habur River. Yet no preserved text demonstrates the accuracy of Yahdun-Lîm's argument. We can only say that Yahdun-Lîm probably inherited Mari, perhaps along with Terqa, as part of a kingdom already organized by his father¹⁶.

Trying to cope with socio-political currents in the early second millennium BCE, the Mari kingdom has been understood to consist of two distinct and in some ways contrasting socio-political dimensions, revealed in Yahdun-Lîm's royal title as found in lines 17-19 of column one. Indeed, the title *king of Mari and the Hana* might have to be read with a whole regional tribal perspective in mind, in which the brand-new monarchic ideology was embedded. Seen this way, the political domain of Yahdun-Lîm was symbolically divided into two constituencies: this would mean differentiating the one settled in the Middle Euphrates agricultural valleys around important cities and villages, including mobile pastoralist components (mostly politically integrated into Yaminite tribes) that were committed to seasonal grazing movements, from the one defined by extended grazing lands claimed by the Sim'alite (Hana) tribal confederacy as its temporary/seasonal abode, as in Daniel Fleming's earlier work (Fleming 2004: 27, 121-123; Fleming 2009:

ana tillûtîšunu, šāb Sûmû-ebuh, ša māt Yamhad, illikam-ma, ina ālim Samānim, ummāt marmîm, ištîniš iphurûšum-ma, ina kakkim dannim, 3 šarrî annâtin, ša marmîm ikmi, šābāšunu u šābi tillâtîšunu idûk, dawidāšunu imhaš. Lines 28-30 of Column Three: alam Hamân ummat Hana, ša abû Hana kalûšunu ipušûšu, iqquršû-ma. Lines 2-4 of Column Four: u šarrāšu Kašûri-Hala ikmi, māssunu itbal, u kišād Purattim igmur-ma (Dossin 1955; Fleming 2004: 153). Yahdun-Lîm, son of Yaggîd-Lîm, king of Mari and the Hana (...) The one who produces anything in his domain (...) That same year Lâ'ûm, king of Samânum and the Ubrabûm; Bahlukulim, king of Tuttul and the Amnanum; Ayâlum, king of Abattum and the Rabbûm; these kings confronted him, (and) an army of Sûmû-ebuh, from Yamhad, came to help them. They came together against him in the city of Samânum, of the Yaminite confederacy, but with a mighty weapon he captured these three kings of the Yaminite confederacy. He utterly defeated their troops and the troops that came to reinforce them (...) He demolished the city of Hamân, of the Hana confederacy (Sim'alite), which all the fathers of Hana had built (...) Besides, he captured its king, Kašûri-Hala, and brought their people to complete (the works) on the Euphrates Banks.

¹⁶Linguistic-formulaic arguments draw our attention to the fact that early Mari texts were in an archaic style, when year-names were not used as dating system yet. In consequence, neither Yahdun-Lîm's accession nor his change of capital-city to Mari were celebrated in writings (Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 38).

229-230; also Charpin 2004: 84)¹⁷. Later, Fleming (2009) reinterpreted the royal title and its definition of the kingdom, understanding Mari as the city capital alone. A parallel for this construction is found in the title “king of Mari and the Sim’alite people/country,” attested in some royal letters and seals (Charpin & Durand 1986: 141-152). Jean-Marie Durand, in contrast, sees the *māt Hana* as uniting Sim’alites and Yaminites, considering them political counterparts within a same cultural entity. He stresses cultural and ideological bonds linking the two groups, such as language and a pastoralist ethos (Durand 2004: 115-116). Characterization of Yahdun-Lîm’s kingdom through his royal inscriptions revolves around the precise definition of the term *Hana* as seen in different textual/historical contexts. Durand advocates a generic nature to this concept, based almost exclusively on philological arguments, deriving the term from verb *hanûm*, “living in tents.” Thus, a term describing a specific way of life would be valid for both tribal confederations; however, Durand recognizes the fact that in the reign of Zimrî-Lîm scribal practice most often implied the “Sim’alites” when writing “Hana” (Durand 2004: 116). This raises the question of whether this scribal use for later times matched the use some decades before, correlated from a generic perspective. Certainly, if *Hana* as “pastoralist” is to be applied to every attestation of the term, no matter the reign, and if Zimrî-Lîm chose to call his Sim’alite people *Hana* for political-ideological reasons, why could not his kinsman Yahdun-Lîm do the same just fifty years before? In fact, Fleming’s proposal seems more natural to the most frequent association *Hana/Sim’al* in the Mari letters.

What the Šamaš Temple Inscription seems to imply, as a general view of this pseudo-historical account, is that Yahdun-Lîm was king of Mari and the most prominent leader of the Hana-Sim’alites only because he won the Middle Euphrates contest described in the text: that is, he defeated the three polities of Tuttul-Amnanû, Samânum-Ubrabû and Abattum-Rabbû, which joined against him. In this way he eliminated an important block of opposition that would have limited his expansionary ambitions, while guaranteeing the introduction and/or the defense of Sim’alite socio-economic interests on

¹⁷Daniel Fleming observes that there was never a *māt Yamina*, at least attested in texts. He advances here his hypothesis that where Yaminites were related to a particular domain, this space appeared as defined in terms of settlements, i.e. towns and villages. According to Fleming, this must be considered customary, since the Mari texts portray a socio-political ideology “oriented toward kings and kingdoms in settled seats of power.” In other words, tribal organizations would have had to connect to urban centers if they want to be recognized as *mātums* (Fleming 2004: 123). My interpretation follows a slightly different line.

the Euphrates. The inscription recounts events in Yahdun-Lîm's political life, starting with his famous campaign to the Mediterranean coast. Right after this, it is said with dramatic tone that the aforementioned polities challenged the Mari kingdom that same year. Then, when in lines 25-26 of column one Yahdun-Lîm is presented as "the one who produces anything in his domain (*mâtum*)," this indicates leadership of Mari/Şuprum, Terqa, Saggarâtum and probably also Qaţţunân¹⁸, the core cities of the Mari kingdom, as known from the reign of Zimrî-Lîm, plus the new annexed territories/populations, in the fashion of land property. Hence, by the time this inscription was written the Mari kingdom was imagined as including Tuttul and other cities upstream, which bordered the kingdom of Aleppo in northwestern Syria. This situation after the defeat of the Yaminite tribes and cities of Tuttul, Samānum and Abattum is, however, just a snapshot in a long regional process. Just before Yahdun-Lîm conquered these cities, they were kingdoms on their own, showing exactly the same political construction as Mari-Hana (Fleming 2004: 124)¹⁹. For example, the city of Samānum and the Ubrabû tribe as a more scattered constituency that owed allegiance to king Lâ'ûm together represent the well-known binary political organization, typical of Middle Bronze Syria. Had these upstream polities really been under the new Mari kingdom's control by the time Yahdun-Lîm showed up with an army in coastal Syria-Lebanon, and they only then rose in revolt against their master, the scribe would hardly have given them such a political autonomy in his speech.

A year name of Yahdun-Lîm would allow us to infer the involvement in the conflict of a fourth important city, traditionally related to Abattum via political associations with Rabbû tribe: Imâr (Durand 1990: 44-45)²⁰. If Imâr was at this time inside the area controlled by Sûmû-epuh of Aleppo as during the reign of Zimrî-Lîm, then the Yamhadean military support

¹⁸A.4280, text published by Dominique Charpin, shows how the list of troopers defined as DUMU.MEŠ *mâtim*, i.e. population settled in the Middle Euphrates valley, is divided in four districts that matched exactly the ones during the years of Zimrî-Lîm (Charpin 2004: 85-87).

¹⁹Dominique Charpin and Nele Ziegler seem to have chosen a different line of reasoning when interpreting the Šamaš Temple Inscription, taking for granted the account of the text to finally argue for a revolt of cities and tribes (Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 41). Rather, Jean-Marie Durand recognized the existence of a block of opposition to Yahdun-Lîm in the form of a league of four important cities in the Middle Euphrates: Imâr, Abattum, Tuttul and Samānum (Durand 1990: 48).

²⁰Yahdun-Lîm's year name reads "when Yahdun-Lîm defeated the Yaminites and Imâr at Abattum's gates" (Durand 1990: 44).

mentioned in the text would have come specifically from Imâr, the only city not located in the area Mari claimed to control after the war. This would explain why Imâr was not listed among the coalition in the Šamaš Temple Inscription. The four cities surely would have been linked through tribal solidarities and longstanding association through the region's process of urbanization, most likely sharing the same economic and commercial interests that would explain the conflict. Each of these allied Yaminite polities seems to have had an urban center as capital city or, at least, as a meeting place for decision-making. While we cannot determine the exact nature of this relationship between town and tribal organizations, it is clear from the cuneiform texts that each component in the binomials represents a whole socio-political structure able to confront Yahdun-Lîm's Sim'alite project.

The text then describes a separate success, this time involving a Sim'alite city that rebelled against Yahdun-Lîm by not accepting his role as king for the whole tribal kin. While the scribe appears to have been far from intending to link events in the Middle Euphrates to the conflict with Hamân, probably located in the Upper Habur, he did indicate a clear difference between Yaminite and Sim'alite sides, which allows comparison based on the notion that behind the differences in socio-political organization both tribal confederacies were nevertheless acting in the same social milieu.

Hamân is said to have been built by *all the fathers of Hana*, meaning that the Sim'alite confederacy had a collective government with decision-makers of a type almost never otherwise known: they were simply fathers, as an undifferentiated body. Whether or not he came from a group like this, an individual leader emerged and opposed his kinsman, the Sim'alite Yahdun-Lîm, who had done the same thing in the Middle Euphrates. Indeed, Kašûri-Hala, the king of Hamân, was a rival of Yahdun-Lîm in the quest to unite all the Sim'alite groups under his rule (the *mât Hana*), choosing Hamân as his capital city in the same way Mari was chosen by Yahdun-Lîm (Fleming 2004: 154). If he had won the contest, his inscriptions would have undoubtedly named him *king of Hamân and the Hana*. Now, Kašûri-Hala took over the city of Hamân to create a new polity, and mention of a collective government that created it in the past could indicate that he conquered an established place with working urban institutions. He did not choose a political vacuum, an empty stage for de novo political construction. Mari is different, however, since there is no clear evidence that the city was inhabited, not to mention ruled by any government, during the one to two hundred years before the

arrival of Yahdun-Lîm (Fleming 2004: 7)²¹. Both Hamân and Mari had new political leaders who arrived simultaneously as kings of each city along with a more scattered constituency that owed allegiance to the same tribal confederacy of the Sim'al. This peculiar process took place no matter how the chosen capital city had been organized previously.

We observe that no king in the coalition against Yahdun-Lîm appears to have claimed leadership over the whole tribal constituency of the Middle Euphrates region, in contrast to Yahdun-Lîm and Kaşûri-Hala, but only of a particular tribe that can be identified as Yaminite in texts from the later kings at Mari. In fact, the inscription never classifies the tribes associated with Tuttul, Abattum and Samânum as members of a larger Yaminite confederacy, as they will appear during the kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia. Two other Yaminite tribes known from later Mari texts are absent here: Yarihûm and Yahrurûm, and we may wonder whether they already belonged to the confederacy and refused to participate. Compared to the Sim'alite world, the Yaminite political space appears to have been more fragmented, showing no sign of centralization, at least according to the Mari documents. It is possible that Yaggîd-Lîm/Yahdun-Lîm's political and military actions in the region ultimately disabled a trend toward centralization on the Yaminite side, but in historical terms, this would be a contra factual statement. As a result, the Middle Euphrates counterpart to the Sim'alite dynastic project of Yahdun-Lîm, which comprised the whole tribal confederacy, was instead a cluster of tribal small kingdoms that joined temporarily along what may have been longstanding ties that eventually paved the way for the creation of a Yaminite confederacy, perhaps from the seat of Samânum. This contrast must not be neglected; judging from this text alone, if the Yaminite coalition had won, none of the three or four named polities would have been in a position to claim effective leadership over the whole confederacy.

A second and later royal inscription, the Disc Inscription of Yahdun-Lîm, proves this course of events when he introduces himself as *Yahdun-Lîm, son of Yaggîd-Lîm, king of Mari, Tuttul, and the Hana*²². This new title surely represents the spatial parameters of his power or influence, but

²¹Whether inhabited/abandoned or not, Mari had truly been replaced by Şuprum as principal political center in that region. It must have been a crucial decision for Yahdun-Lîm to reverse a more tribal-oriented approach in regional politics and change his seat to Mari, leaving behind the chance of creating a real alternative political structure. As a result of shifting capitals, Yahdun-Lîm would have embraced old urban institutions, as seen in curses section of the Šamaš Temple Inscription, while the construction of regional politics kept on following a very tribal perspective anyways.

²²Lines 1-5: *Yahdun-Lîm, mār Yaggîd-Lîm, šar Mari, Tuttul, u māt Hana*.

the socio-political role of Tuttul offers a remarkable aspect of Yahdun-Lîm's domination of the Middle Euphrates region. To some extent he had to put Tuttul under his rule: as stated in the Disc Inscription, it was with the god Dagan's weaponry that Yahdun-Lîm achieved regional supreme power²³, and Tuttul held one of the key Dagan sanctuaries in the Euphrates valley, along with Terqa. It is no coincidence that the text has the famous chthonic god of the Middle Euphrates legitimate the new state of affairs, for Dagan is the chief god of the region, meaning that to dominate Tuttul is to dominate the Middle Euphrates from an ideological standpoint²⁴. This text offers a tripartite fragmentation of political space in the region.

The king of Mari tried to piece these together under his rule, and we should place the city of Tuttul in opposition to both the tribal confederacy of Sim'al and the recently created Mari monarchy, which had created the structure as a social binomial. In contrast, Tuttul's relationship to the Amnanû tribe and its own nature are difficult to define beyond what the Šamaš Temple Inscription offers. Tuttul was a fully urban political entity associated with a tribe in terms analogous to the case of Hamân and the Sim'alites in the Upper Habur and unlike Mari.

It is proposed here that the key term *mātum* refers to a population ruled and ultimately defined by a decision-making entity that need not involve exclusionary kingship. If this understanding is correct, then the cities of Samânum, Abattum and Tuttul should be taken in principle as distinct older polities associated with tribal *mātums* (domains) later attested inside the Yaminite confederacy. The urban sites might have offered prestige and legitimacy to the new political model, as Mari did for Yahdun-Lîm. Judging strictly from textual evidence, these cities would be in this way to be understood as particular domains, equal in status to the *mātums* of the tribes, and this explains the basis for alliance. While these social constructions were different in essence, they were also complementary in the face of expansionary dynamics from the Mari kingdom.

²³Lines 9-14: *Dagan, šarrūti ibni, kakkam dannam, mušamqit, šarrānī nakirīya, iddinam-ma* "Dagan created my kingship. He gave me the powerful weapon, the one causing the downfall of the kings, my enemies."

²⁴Charpin and Ziegler have mentioned two remarkable references that came to reinforce this seemingly historical fact. It was certainly in Tuttul that Sargon of Akkad was earlier considered as receiving from god Dagan's hands the royalty in the region. Besides, in the epilogue of the Hammurabi Codex, the king of Babylon refers to the political domain of the Middle Euphrates as related to the temple of Dagan in Tuttul (cf. Charpin & Ziegler 2003: 37).

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