

Combining Prophetic Oracles in Mari Letters and Jeremiah 36

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It is a basic fact that although the oracles of the biblical prophets are presented to us in written form, the Bible portrays the prophets as speakers who communicated their message orally.¹ This basic fact would probably not be worth mentioning if there were not a growing awareness in scholarly discussions during the last decades that the transformation from oral to written form represents an important shift in the transmission of prophetic oracles.² The narrative of Jeremiah 36 indicates very clearly that the collection of different oracles is one important part of the process of writing those oracles down. This paper seeks to broaden our understanding of the process of combining prophetic oracles through a closer look at some of the prophetic letters from Mari.³

1. I am deeply indebted to Professor William W. Hallo, who made several stimulating comments on this paper and encouraged me to publish it. I also thank Professor Mark S. Smith for his suggestions, which included improving the English of this essay. In addition, Dr. Howard Perry-Trauthig has proof-read the manuscript. The paper was written during my stay as a Research Fellow at Yale University. I would like to thank the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung for supporting my visit.

2. One may name Robert P. Carroll as a recent example of one who has vehemently insisted that it is almost impossible to reconstruct the oral oracles and original behavior that presumably lay behind the written texts. Compare his "Prophecy and Society," in R. E. Clements, ed., *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1989), 203–25; see esp. 207–8: "We know prophecy now as literature rather than as spoken word. Such a shift from orality to literacy has removed prophecy from its original social setting to a decontextualised, timeless setting and any search for the *Sitz im Leben* of specific prophecies is irrelevant. The transformation of oral speech into literary text displaces the words in such ways that any analysis of them cannot also and at the same time be an account of the original word and situation. Changing situations have changed the import of the words." For a response, see T. W. Overholt, "Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation," *JSOT* 48 (1990), 3–29; and Hans M. Barstad, "No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993), 39–60, who points out the importance of the Mari letters as a close parallel to biblical prophecy.

3. The prophetic letters from Mari have been studied very often. They represent so far the closest parallel to biblical prophecy in cuneiform literature. A good recent introduction to Mari prophecy is found in H. B. Huffmon, "Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 5 (1992), 477–82. For Mari in general, see Jean-Marie Durand, "Mari (Texts)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4:529–36; Brian E. Keck, "Mari (Bibliography)," *ibid.*: 536–38; Jean-Cl. Margueron, "Mari (Archaeology)," *ibid.*: 525–29. The most recent studies on the prophetic letters from Mari in comparison to biblical prophecy are Simon B. Parker, "Official Attitudes toward Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," *VT* 43 (1993), 50–68; and H. M. Barstad, "No Prophets?" Most of the so-called prophetic letters are conveniently edited and translated into French by J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* I/1, *ARM* 26/1 (Paris, 1988), 377–412.

1. The Pattern of the Prophetic Letters from Mari

The prophetic letters from Mari never found their way into the stream of literary tradition that was carefully preserved by the scribes, presumably because this tradition was considered to have value for future generations, and may well be called the canon of cuneiform literature.⁴ In striking contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the Mari letters are contemporary reports of oral communications, in some cases even written on the same day the prophet appeared before the royal official to deliver her/his message.⁵

The prophetic letters from Mari evince a fairly regular pattern.⁶ For the purposes of this paper, this pattern can be described as including the following five form-elements⁷: (1) head of the letter (name of addressee; name of sender; relationship between sender and addressee); (2) introductory remarks, if necessary⁸; (3) presentation of the prophet (title, name, and status of the prophet; circumstances of his/her entrance; citation formula); (4) speech of the prophet (claim to speak in the name of a deity; statement about how the divine message was received: oracle, vision, or dream; quotation of the divine utterance, speaking in the name of the god [1 pers. sg.]; and (5) statement of the sender concerning the prophet and his/her message (assurance of the authenticity of the given message: appeal to the king to make a decision in this case; occasionally the hair and fringe of the prophet are sent with the letter).

The fact that this pattern applies virtually to all the letters, no matter who actually writes them, can best be explained by the assumption that the letter writers follow well-known procedures in reporting the appearance of a prophet. Apparently it was not uncommon for a prophet to address the king, and the writer of the letter knew what to do in such a case. It should be noted that the pattern of the letters reflects a serious intention to give a reliable and verifiable record of the prophetic message: the message of the prophet is given in direct quotation, and the authen-

4. William W. Hallo, "The Concept of Canonicity in Cuneiform and Biblical Literature: A Comparative Appraisal," in K. Lawson Younger, William W. Hallo, Bernard F. Batto, eds., *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective* (Lewiston, NY, 1991), 1-19.

5. Alan R. Millard, "La prophétie et l'écriture: Israël, Aram, Assyrie," *RHR* 202 (1985), 137, states: "En ce qui concerne les textes de Mari, la rédaction de la version écrite fut beaucoup plus proche du moment de la révélation quoique les dates précises nous échappent." Although in some cases there may be a larger time span between oral communication and written version, especially in the case of letters that include more than one oracle, all the reports "are essentially contemporary"; Maria deJong Ellis, "Observations on Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts: Literary and Historiographic Considerations," *JCS* 41 (1989), 131.

6. Esp. Klaus Koch, "Die Briefe 'prophetischen' Inhalts aus Mari," *UF* 4 (1972), 53-77, and John F. Craghan, "The ARM X 'Prophetic' Texts: Their Media, Style, and Structure," *JANES* 6 (1974), 39-57, have analyzed the pattern of the prophetic letters. Their results are still valid although their studies are based on only the 28 letters which were published then.

7. K. Koch has worked out a much finer description of the pattern. J. F. Craghan has also studied some of the form-elements in detail. As usual, when describing a typical pattern one has to exclude atypical exemplars of the pattern and ignore the differences between subtypes.

8. It is hard to decide whether one should include this form-element in the structure of the basic type, since we have quite a few letters without this element. On the other hand, in most cases where this element is missing, the writer of the letter may presuppose that the king has the relevant information available.

ticity of the message is explicitly stated.⁹ The author also adds details which the king might not know but are important for evaluating the message.

However, the written version of a prophetic oracles does not in most cases represent an unbiased stenograph of it. Abraham Malamat has speculated that at least some of the oracles were not originally spoken in Amorite.¹⁰ One might also ask whether the oral version was spoken in poetic form.¹¹ Further, Simon B. Parker has demonstrated that the authors of the letters sometimes exercised "considerable freedom in shaping" prophetic oracles.¹² Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to show that some of the letters altered the meaning of the spoken oracles by grouping them together with a second or even a third oracle. This last aspect may be illustrated with the example of three letters, the first written by Addu-duri (*ARM* 10, #50), the second by Nur-Sin (A.1121 + A.2731), and the third by Sammetar (*ARM* 26/1, #199).¹³

2. A Letter from Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (*ARM* 10, #50)

2.1. Normalization and structure

(1) head of the letter

1) *ana bēlīja qibīma: umma Addu-dūri amatkama:*

(2) introductory remarks

3) *ištu šulum bīt abīka matīma šuttam annītam ul āmur—ittātūja
ša pānānum annittan:*

A. The dream

(A.3) presentation of the prophet

8) *ina šuttija ana bīt Bēlet-ekallim,*

(A.4) speech of the prophet

10) *ul wašbat u šalmānū ša maḥriša ul ibaššū.
u āmurma arḫub bakām—šuttī annītum ša barārtim.
atūrma Dada, šangūm ša Ištar-pišra, ina bāb Bēlet-ekallim izzazma
piu nakrum šāsam išanassi ummami "tūra Dagan tūra Dagan,"
ki²am išanassi.*

9. A. R. Millard, "La prophétie et l'écriture," and H. M. Barstad, "No Prophets?," 57, insist on that fact and suggest that the same intention was operative when oracles of biblical prophets were written down.

10. A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford, 1989), 84–85.

11. S. B. Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 60, has detected some traces of poetry in letter *ARM* 26/1, #207:13–17.

12. Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 57–60, quotation on p. 60.

13. Letters which clearly contain more than one prophetic utterance are: *ARM* 10, #50, 94; *ARM* 13, #112; *ARM* 26/1, #194, 196, 199, 200, 207, 208, 209, 212, 216, 219, 221-bis; (A.1121 + A.2731). Some of the more fragmentary letters may have included more than one prophetic utterance as well. The letters I have chosen as examples are basically well preserved, rather long, nicely written (the writers try to build up rhymes at the end of adjacent lines), and well-known in the scholarly discussion.

B. The oracle

(B.2) introductory remarks

21) *šanītam*:

(B.3) presentation of the prophet

muḥḥūtum ina bīt Annunitim itbēma ummami:

(B.4) speech of the prophet

23) *Zimri-Lim ana ḥarrānim lā tallak, ina Mari šibma! u anākuma atanappal.*

(5) Statement of the sender

27) *bēlī aḥṣu lā inaddi ana pagrišu naṣārim.**anumma šartī u sissiktī anāku aknukamma ana ṣēr bēlija uṣabilam.*2.2. Translation¹⁴

Speak to my lord: Thus says the lady Addu-duri your maid-servant: (3) Since the restoration¹⁵ of your father's house I have not seen this dream. These then were my signs (as) of old. (8) In my dream I entered into the temple of Belet-Ekallim (10) and Belet-ekallim was not seated nor were any of the statues which are (usually) in front of her present. Then I looked and wept ceaselessly. This dream of mine was in the evening-watch. I turned around¹⁶ and Dada, the priest of Ishtar-pishra, was officiating in the gate of Belet-ekallim and a strange voice was crying this over and over, saying: "Come back, o Dagan! Come back, o Dagan!"¹⁷ It was saying this over and over. (21) Secondly, the female ecstatic arose in the temple of Annunitum, saying as follows: (23) "Zimri-Lim, do not go on campaign! Stay in Mari! Then I myself will take the responsibility!" (27) Let not my lord be negligent in guarding his person. I myself hereby seal my hair and my fringe and send (them) to my lord.

2.3. Interpretation

Addu-duri follows basically the pattern of prophetic letters. Already in the introductory remarks—form-element (2)—she points out that she will report more than

14. I present here the slightly altered translation of William W. Hallo, *The Book of the People* (Atlanta, 1991), 162 (57b). For older translations into English see his notes.

15. The word *šulum* in l. 3 is ambiguous. It can mean "destruction" or "well-being." If it means "destruction" (so the original translation of W. W. Hallo: "fall"), then Addu-duri probably refers to the fact that she had a similar dream before Zimri-Lim's father was defeated. That would mean that her first dream had become true in the course of history. One would expect a clearer statement if this were the case. In my understanding it is more likely that *šulum* means "well-being" (I follow William L. Moran, *ANET* 3, 631; idem, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica* 50 [1969], 38). In this case, Addu-duri would refer to Zimri-Lim's regaining of the throne of his father after returning from exile. The importance of this event is also highlighted by the letter of Nur-Sin (see below). Jack M. Sasson, "Mari Dreams," *JAOS* 103 (1983), 286, and more firmly in his "Thoughts of Zimri-Lim," *BA* 47 (1984), 111, gives the interesting suggestion that the ambiguity is intentionally employed.

16. How to interpret *atūrma* is a problem. Is Addu-duri telling a second dream later in the same night? This is the way in which Hallo and Moran have translated this passage. The other possibility is to assume that Addu-duri has turned around in her dream and faces another scene; so Sasson, "Mari Dreams," 288.

17. This sentence is ambiguous; it can also be read as "Tura-Dagan! Tura-Dagan!", referring to a former ruler of Mari. See Hallo, *Book of the People*, 162, n. 218. I think that Sasson, "Mari Dreams," 289, and idem, "Thoughts of Zimri-Lim," 111, is right when he conceives of this sentence as deliberately ambiguous. This ancient dream is—as are dreams in modern times—notoriously difficult to interpret.

one sign. The first sign is her dream. An elaborate presentation of the prophet—form-element (3)—is not necessary, since Addu-duri writes the letter herself and the king knows her; it is important, however, that she received her supernatural message in a dream in which she was transferred into the temple of Belet-ekallim.¹⁸

The dream is filled with bizarre features and threatening images. The goddess Belet-ekallim does not sit at her place. She seems already to have left her temple, leaving the city with an empty temple and without her protection. As a result, the cult is now meaningless and the city no longer capable of resisting the attack of an enemy. No wonder Addu-duri weeps ceaselessly. But the dream becomes even more bizarre and threatening. A priest of another goddess officiates in the temple of Belet-ekallim, and an unidentified voice addresses the god Dagan. The unidentified voice urges Dagan to return. Apparently he has also left the city. The god Dagan has brought back Zimri-Lim on the throne in Mari. If he has left, the kingdom of Zimri-Lim is in serious danger, unless one can move the deity to return.¹⁹ Or does the strange voice shout “Tura-Dagan,” the name of a former ruler in Mari?

After Addu-duri completes her dream report, she transmits the utterance of a *muḥḥūtum* as her second sign. Through the *muḥḥūtum* Annunitum²⁰ demands that the king stay in Mari, and in exchange she promises to take exclusive²¹ responsibility for the city. The question arises: Why does Addu-duri include a second prophetic utterance in her letter? Several reasons may be suggested. First, one has the impression that the oracle was given shortly after the dream, but since the letter does not mention the time, it probably was of no significance for Addu-duri. Second, one may speculate about the spatial relationship of the dream and the oracle. Both were located in the temple of a goddess (*bīt GN*). It may be that Belet-ekallim and Annunitum stood in a special relationship. In this context, at least, they are portrayed as mutually supporting each other. Third, Addu-duri is a lay person. She has no official role in the cult, nor is she known for her capability to predict the future. She simply had a threatening dream. No god or goddess spoke in her dream, and she was not commissioned by a deity to deliver a message to someone else. In contrast, the second oracle was spoken by a professional who further was authorized to address Zimri-Lim in the name of the goddess. Fourth, the dream of Addu-duri is, as she herself admits, unusual and, in addition, not easy to interpret.

Furthermore, the dream includes no advice to the king. The dream is a kind of “nightmare” (Sasson), but it leaves open the question of how one should respond. Here the oracle provides additional information. Since the oracle shows certain thematic connections to the dream, it can function as a key to decipher the meaning of the dream. The *muḥḥūtum* picks up the motif of a person who leaves the place where he/she is at home. Leaving home means risking one’s own safety and, probably

18. As Craghan, “The ARM X ‘Prophetic’ Texts,” 43, has noted, a dream report needs to be marked by the phrase *ina šuttija*.

19. Moran, “New Evidence from Mari,” 40: “For the dynasty of Yaḥdun-Lim whom he (= Dagan) made king, the absence of the god could only mean the end of its rule.”

20. Although it is not explicitly stated, one can safely assume that the *muḥḥūtum* speaks in the name of the goddess Annunitum because she “arose” in her temple.

21. Note the emphatic *anākuma* in l. 26.

more important, leaving one's own people without protection. This connection is underlined by the use of the same verb *wašābum* (in l. 10 and l. 25) and by the opposition of *tūra* (imperative, "return") and *lā tallak* (prohibitive, "do not leave"). An important difference, however, is that in the dream deities are addressed whereas in the oracle it is the human king. On the other hand, it was noted that the imperative "come back, O Dagan!" can also be read as the proper name "Tura-Dagan," thus referring to a former ruler of Mari. Here Addu-duri might have seen a connection, too. All these connections demonstrate that the oracle and the dream must be interpreted together. If Zimri-Lim does not obey the command of the goddess Annunitum and stays in Mari, this may ultimately lead the goddess to abandon her responsibility for the well-being of the kingdom of Mari and the dream will begin to come true.

Addu-duri seems to be very anxious. After she has finished the report of the oracle, she does not state the authenticity of the message of the *muḥḥūtum*, which would have been typical, but instead immediately gives her advice to the king. Furthermore, she sends her own hair and fringe with the letter, probably in order to let the diviner confirm her report.²² Since the dream was so frightening, she suggests that the king check its validity.

In sum, although the *muḥḥūtum* presumably spoke without knowing the dream of Addu-duri, the thematic connection of her oracle with her dream convinced Addu-duri that the city and especially Zimri-Lim are in serious danger. Without the second oracle, this letter would have never been written, although its most important content is the report of the dream.

3. A Letter from Nur-Sin to Zimri-Lim, (A.1121 + A.2731)

3.1. Normalization and structure²³

(1) head of the letter

1) *ana bēlija qibīma umma Nūr-Sîn waradkama*

(2) introductory remarks

3) *1-šu, 2-šu, u 5-šu aššum zukrim ana Addu nadānim u niḥlatim ša Addu bēl Kallassu ittini irrišu ana bēlija ašpuram: aššum zukrim ana Addu nadānim Alpān maḥar Zuḥatnim Abikuri u NN. iqbēm ummami: "zukram ša . . . u*

22. Sasson, "Thoughts of Zimri-Lim," 112: "Upon presenting her own nightmare, Addu-duri turns hurriedly to a prophecy that confirms the negative thrust of her own nightmare. She then sends along material that will be used by Zimri-Lim's diviner to authenticate the reliability of the dreamer as carrier of divine messages: a lock of her own hair, and fringes of clothing she was presumably wearing when she had her dream." See also D. Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique des prophéties dans les textes retrouvés à Mari," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 23 (1992), 29: "When the reporter of a prophecy (or of a dream) sends the hair and the hem of the garment of the ecstatic or the dreamer, it is not because their honesty is suspected. It allows, in their absence, to make an oracular interrogation in order to get a confirmation, exactly in the same way as in an hepatoscopic interrogation, which is obligatory followed by a counter-examination (*piqittum*)."

23. After the join of the fragments A.1121 and A.2731 the text was edited anew by Bertrand Lafont, "Le roi de Mari et les prophètes du dieu Adad," *RA* 78 (1984), 7–18.

liātim idin!" *bēli maḥar awīlī NN. zukram nadānam iqbēm ummami:* "ana urram šeram lā ibbalakatanni!" *awīlī šībī aškunšum. bēli lū ide!*

A. First oracle

(A.3) presentation of the prophet

13) *ina tērētim Addu bēl Kallassu izzaz ummami:*

(A.4) speech of the prophet

14) *ul anāku Addu bēl Kallassu ša ina birit paḥallija urabbušuma and kussē bīt abišu uterrušu?*

ištu ana kussē abišu uterrušu atūrma ašar šubti addinšum.

inanna kīma ana kussē bīt abišu uterrušu niḥlatam ina qātišu eleqqe.

šumma ul inaddin bēl kussēm eperi u ālim anākuma ša addinu atabbal. šumma lā kī²amma erišti inaddin, kussām eli kussēm, bītam eli bitim, eper eli eperi, ālam eli ālim anaddinšum u mātam ištu šītiša ana erbiša anaddinšu.

(A.5) statement of the sender

29) *annītam awīlū āpilū iqbū u ina terētim ittanazzaz. inanna appunama āpilum ša Addu bēl Kallassu maškanam ša Alaḥtim ana niḥlātim inazzar. bēli lū ide!*

(A.6) appendix: reason why this oracle is transmitted

34) *pānānum inūma ina Mari wašbāku āpilum u āpiltum mimma awātam ša iqabbūnim ana bēlija utār. inanna ina mātīm šanītim wašbāku ša ešemmu u iqabbūnim ana bēlija ul ašappar. šumma urram šeram mimma ḥiḫītum ittabši bēli kī²am ul iqabbi ummami: awātam ša āpilum iqbīkum u maškanka inazzar, amminim ana šērija lā tašpuram?*

anumma ana šēr bēlija ašpuram. bēli lū ide!

B. Second oracle

(B.2) introductory remarks

46) *šanītam:*

(B.3) presentation of the prophet

āpilum ša Addu bēl Ḥalab itti Abuḥalim illikamma kī²am iqbēm ummami:

(B.4) speech of the prophet

48) *ana bēlika šupur ummami:* 49) *Addu bēl Ḥalab ul anāku ša ina suḫātija urab-bukama ana kussēm bīt abīka uterruka? mimma ittika ul erriš, inūma ḥablum u ḥabiltum išassikkum izizma dīnšunu dīn! annītam ša ittika errišu. annītam ša ašpurakkum teppešma ana awātija taqālma mātam ištu šītiša ana erbiša u māt NN.-ma anaddinakkum.*

(B.5) statement of the sender

60) *annītam āpilum ša Addu bēl Ḥalab maḥar Abuḥalim iqbēm. annītam bēli lū ide!*

3.2. Translation²⁴

To my lord, speak: Thus (says) Nur-Sin, your servant. 3) Once, twice, five times have I communicated to my lord concerning the delivery of the livestock to Adad and concerning the *niḫlatum* which Adad, Lord of Kallassu, demands from you. Concerning the delivery of the *zukurum* to Adad, Alpan has said to me in the presence of Zu-hatnim, Abi-Shadi and NN-han, as follows: "Deliver the *zukurum*, also deliver the cattle!" My lord, in the presence of NN., told me to deliver the *zukurum*, as follows: "Never shall he break (his agreement) with me." I have brought witnesses for him (= Alpan). Let my lord know this.

13) Through oracles, Adad, Lord of Kallassu, spoke to me, as follows: 14) "Am I not Adad, Lord of Kallassu, who raised him (= the king) between my legs and restored him to the throne of his father's house? After I restored him to the throne of his father's house, I again gave him a residence. Now, since I restored him to the throne of his father's house, I will take from him an estate. Should he not give (the estate), am I not master of throne, territory and city? What I have given, I shall take away. If otherwise, and he satisfies my desire, I shall give him throne upon throne, house upon house, territory upon territory, city upon city. And I shall give him the land from the rising (of the sun) to its setting."

29) This is what the *āpilū*-diviners said, and in the oracles he (= Adad) "stands up" constantly. Now, moreover, the *āpilum*-diviner of Adad, Lord of Kallassu, is standing guard over the tent-shrine of Alaḫtum to (be) an estate. Let my lord know this.

34) Previously, when I was residing in Mari, every word the *āpilum*-diviner or *āpiltum*-diviner told me, I would report back to my lord. Now that I am living in another land, that which I hear and which they tell me, would I not communicate to my lord? If ever anything remiss should occur, let not my lord speak thus, as follows: "The word which the *āpilum*-diviner has spoken to you—while over your tent-shrine he is standing guard—why have you not communicated to me?" Herewith I communicate (it) to my lord. Let my lord know this.

46) Moreover, the *āpilum*-diviner of Adad, Lord of Ḫalab, came to Abuḫalum and spoke thus to him, as follows: 48) "Communicate to your lord: Am I not Adad, Lord of Ḫalab, who has raised you at my breast and who made you regain the throne of your father's house? I never demand anything of you. When a wronged man or woman cries out to you, stand and let his/her case be judged. This is what I demanded from you, and what I have communicated to you, you will do. You will heed my word and the land from the rising (of the sun) to its setting and the land of NN. will I give to you."

60) This is what Adad, Lord of Ḫalab, told me in the presence of Abuḫalum. Let my Lord know this.

3.3. Interpretation

In this letter Nur-Sin begins with unusually lengthy introductory remarks—form-element (2). The presupposed situation is difficult to discern. Nur-Sin seems to have some trouble, and his own king seems reluctant to take action in the matter. Five times he apparently did not react to a previous letter of Nur-Sin. This new letter is motivated by the fact that the situation has now become more complicated: the god Addu, lord of Kallassu, has begun a campaign against Zimri-Lim. Again and again the prophets of this god come up with the same message.²⁵ The tone of the oracle is harsh: it commences with a reproachful question and the king is addressed in the third person, a fact that produces a chilly atmosphere. The content is threatening: Addu presents Zimri-Lim with a cold ultimatum. If he does not give Addu what he wants, Addu will take from Zimri-Lim what he has given

24. I give a slightly altered version of the translation of Abraham Malamat, "A Mari Prophecy and Nathan's Dynastic Oracle," in J. Emerton, ed., *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer* (Berlin, 1980), 68–82. Malamat's translation stems from the time before the two fragments were joined. I have combined his translations.

25. Note the plural *tērētīm* (II. 13 and 29), *āpilū* (I. 29), and the Gtn-stem *ittanazzaz* (I. 30).

him. As Malamat has shown, behind this oracle stands the question of loyalty to the suzerain. The god demands that Zimri-Lim submit.²⁶

One can imagine that it was not an easy task to transmit this oracle to the king, especially in an apparently critical situation. Nur-Sin surely felt himself to be in an uncomfortable position.²⁷ His appendix (form-element A.6) makes that obvious. He tries to explain to the king why he is sending this oracle. His loyalty to the king demands that he report all relevant oracles to the king, be they favorable or not. Nur-Sin chooses to end his letter with an oracle with which the king should be more pleased.

The second oracle is closely connected with the first. The following juxtaposition of both oracles should make it easier to demonstrate the many words which the two oracles share:

Oracle of Addu, lord of Kallassu:

13) *ina tērētim Addu bēl Kallassu izzaz ummami:*

14) *ul anāku Addu bēl Kallassu
ša ina birit paḥallija urabbu^{šuma}
ana kussē bīt abišu uterrušu?
ištu ana kussē abišu uterrušu
atūrma ašar šubti addinšum.
inanna kima ana kussē bīt abišu uterrušu
niḥlatam ina qātišu eleqge.
šumma ul inaddin bēl kussēm eperi u ālim
anākuma ša addinu atabbal.
šumma lā ki²amma erišti inaddin,*

*kussām eli kussēm, bītam eli bītīm,
eper eli eperi, ālam eli ālim anaddinšum
u mātam ištu sītiša ana erbiša
anaddinšu.*

29) *annitam awilū āpilū
iqbū u ina tērētim ittanazzaz.
inanna appunama āpilum ša Addu bēl
Kallassu maškanam ša Alaḥtim ana niḥlātīm
inazzar.
bēli lū ide!*

Oracle of Addu, lord of Halab:

46) *šanitam:
āpilum ša Addu bēl Ḥalab itti Abuḥalim
illikamma ki²am iqbēm ummami:
ana bēlika šupur! ummami:
Addu bēl Ḥalab ul anāku
ša ina suḥātiya urabbukama
ana kussēm bīt abika uterruka?
mimma ittika ul erriš, inūma ḥablum u
ḥabiltum išassikkum izizma dīnšunu dīn!*

annitam ša ittika errišu.

*annitam ša ašpurakkum teppešma
ana awātiya taqālma*

*mātam ištu sītiša ana erbiša u māt NN.-ma
anaddinakkum.
annitam āpilum ša Addu bēl Ḥalab
maḥar Abuḥalim iqbēm*

annitam bēli lū ide!

Where the first oracle refers to the king with the 3rd m.s. morpheme, the second oracle does so with the second person, which conveys a familiar tone. Where the first oracle confronts Zimri-Lim with an ultimatum (*šumma*, if-clauses), the second speaks as if the king already does what the god demands (present tense, indicative). Where the first wants the king to submit to the suzerain, the second presupposes his own jurisdiction.

26. Malamat, "A Mari Prophecy and Nathan's Dynastic Oracle," 75.

27. Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 66: "Nur-Sin faces a dilemma."

There can be no doubt that the second oracle counterbalances the first. Two different local manifestations of the same god have spoken differently but with a high amount of overlap.²⁸ The first oracle was spoken in public and repeatedly, the second only in front of one witness. Now it is up to the king to decide how to respond. Nur-Sin does not provide the king with his own evaluation of this situation.

4. A Letter from Sammetar to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26/1, #199)

4.1. Normalization and structure

(1) head of the letter:

1) *ana bēlija qibima: umma Sammêtar waradkama*

A. First oracle

(A.2) introductory remarks / (A.3) presentation of the prophet

5) *Lupaḥum, āpilum ša Dagan ištu Tuttul ikšudam. ĩemam ša bēli ina Saggarâtum uwa²⁸erušu ummami "ana Dagan ša Terqa piqdanni!" ĩemam šâti ūbilma kī²⁸am ĩpulūšu ummami:*

(A.4) speech of the prophet

11) *ēma tallaku ĩūb libbi imtanaḥḥarka. jāšibum u dimtum nadnūnikkum, ina id-ika illakū, tappūtkā illakū.*

(A.5) statement of the sender

15) *ĩemam annēm ina Tuttul ĩpulūšu.*

B. Second oracle

(B.2) introductory remarks / (B.3) presentation of the prophet

16) *u ištu Tuttul kīma kašādīšuma ana Dīr ušerdīma. sikkūrī ana Dīrītīm ūbil. pānānum šernam ūbil ummami: "šernum ul sanīqma, mū ĩšuppū. šernam dunninī." inanna sikkūrī ūbil u kī²⁸am šapīr ummami "assurri ana salīmim ša awīl Ešnunna tatakkalīma aḥki tanaddī maššārātuki eli ša pānānum lū dun-nunā."*

29) *u ajāšim kī²⁸am ĩqbēm ummami:*

(B.4) speech of the prophet

30) *"assurri šarrum balum elam šālim ana awīl Ešnunna napištašu ilappat. kīma ša ina pānītīm inūma mārī Jamīna urdūnimma ina Saggarātum ušbū u ana šarrim aqbū umma anākuma:*

35) *ḥārī ša mārī Jamīna lā taqaṭṭal ina ḥubūrrē qinnātīšunu aṭarrassunūti u nāram ugammarrakkum.*

28. It seems unlikely that both oracles had so many words in common when they were announced orally. The first oracle seems to summarize many oracles with the same contents (but presumably not in the same wording). My guess is that Nur-Sin has carefully reworked the wording of the oracles for the purpose of this letter.

38) *inanna balum elam iša²⁹allu napištašu lā ilappat.*"

(B.5) statement of the sender

40) *īēmam annēm Lupahum idbubam*

C. Third oracle

(C.2) introductory remarks

41) *warkīšuma*

(C.3) presentation of the prophet

41) *ina šanīm ūmim 1 qammatum ša Dagan ša Terqa illikamma kī³⁰am iqbēm ummami*

(C.4) speech of the prophet

44) *šapal tibnim mū illakū ana salimim išanapparūnikkum, ilīšunu itarradūnikkum u šāram šanēmma ina libbišunu ikappudū. šarrum balum elam išāllu napištašu lā ilappat.*

(C.5) statement of the sender

51) *1 šubāt laḥarēm u šerretam īrišma addinšim. u wūrtaša ina bīt Bēlet-ekallim ana waqqurtim Inibšina iddin.*

(5) statement of the sender concerning all of the collected oracles

54) *īēm awātīm ša idbubūnimma ana šēr bēlija ašpuram. belī lištālma ša šarrūtišu rabītim lipuš*

Another topic

58) *u aššum Janšib-Dagan bēḥrim awil Dašran ša ana qaqqadišu nakāsīm bēlī išpuram qātam ana qātim Abi-epuḥ ašpur. awīlam šāti ul imurūma bissu u nišēšu ana waradūtīm iddin. ina šanīm ūmim ṭuppi Jasim-Dagan ikšudam ummami: awīlum šu iktašdam. inanna annītam lā annītam bēlī lišpuram nišēšu luwaššer.*

4.2. Translation²⁹

1) To my lord speak: thus (says) Sammetar, your servant:

5) Lupahum, the *āpilum*-diviner of Dagan, arrived from Tuttul. The message which my lord sent from Sagaratum: "To Dagan of Terqa entrust me!"³⁰ This message he delivered, and they answered him as follows: 11) "Wherever you go, satisfaction will constantly turn to you; ram and siege-tower are given to you; they go by your side; they go in partnership with you." 15) This message they gave him as an answer in Tuttul.

29. I want to thank Professors Benjamin R. Foster and William W. Hallo for many helpful comments on this translation. For a thorough study of the historical setting of this letter, see Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 23 (1992), 21–31.

30. According to Durand, *ARM* 26/1, 427, this sentence should mean something like: "Put the proof of my case before Dagan." I prefer to assume a broader meaning of the phrase. The narrower meaning Durand proposes is an important aspect of it.

16) Then, when he arrived from Tuttul, I caused him to go to Dir, and he brought my bolt to Diritum. Previously, he had transmitted a *šernum*³¹: "the *šernum* is not in order, it is waterlogged, make strong the *šernum*!" Now, he transmitted my bolt together with the following message: "I am worried lest you, O Diritum,³² trust in the friendship of the man of Eshnunna³³ and that you are neglectful, may your watchfulness be stronger than ever."

29) Then, he spoke to me as follows: 30) "I am worried lest the king touch his throat³⁴ without asking the god in regard to the man of Eshnunna. This situation is comparable to the former one, when the sons of Jamina went down to me and settled in Saggaratum. Even then I (= the deity) spoke to the king as follows: 'Do not slaughter donkeys³⁵ because of the sons of Jamina! I will send them back in their scattered³⁶ nests, and I will stop the river for you.' 38) In this instance now, he should not touch his throat without asking the god." 40) This message Lupahum spoke to me.

41) Thereafter, on the following day, there came a *qammatum*-woman belonging to Dagan of Terqa, and she spoke as follows: 44) "Under the straw there flows water. They regularly send a message to you (assuring their) friendship, (even) send their gods to you, but in their hearts they plot another treachery.³⁷ The king should not touch his throat without asking the god!"

51) She demanded one *laharem*-garment and a nose ring, and I gave (them) to her. Then she gave her commission in the temple of Belet-ekallim to the high priestess Inib-shina.

54) A report of the words which they spoke to me, I have sent to my lord. My lord may think about them and act according to his great majesty.

58) Further, concerning Jansib-Dagan, the *behrum*-soldier, the man from Dashran, whose head my lord has written to me to cut off, I wrote immediately³⁸ to Abi-Epukh. They did not find this man; instead he (= Abi-Epukh) sold his (= Jansib-Dagan's) house and his people into slavery. On the next day there arrived a tablet of Jasim-Dagan: 62) "That man has come here." Now, my lord may write to me one way or the other, let him release his people.

4.3. Interpretation

The form of this letter is unusual in two major respects. First, the prophetic oracles are presented in a kind of narrative framework which includes not only place names but also a time frame. As a result, the clear distinction between form-elements (2) and (3) of the basic pattern are blurred. The "presentation of the prophet" is only one topic in the "narrative framework." The narrative framework divides the oracles in two parts: the first part deals with the journey of Lupahum,³⁹ the *āpilum* of Dagan (ll. 5–40); the second part deals with the *qammatum* of Dagan

31. Probably a wooden object.

32. The feminine morphemes (l. 25: *tatakkali*, l. 26: *aḥ-ki*, *tanaddi*, l. 27: *maššārātu-ki*) must refer to Diritum. See Durand, *ARM* 26/1, 428, note c.

33. For the role of Eshnunna, compare the following quotation from J.-M. Durand, *ABD* 4:533: "Moreover, we know (even if we do not understand all the details) that at the final end of Mari, its king, breaking the ancient alliances with Babylon, had tried a rapprochement with that country's traditional (almost ancestral) enemy, Eshnunna. This city was destroyed at the same time as Mari, although it was, like Mari, one of the millennial powers of the ANE."

34. The phrase *napištam lapātum*, "to touch the throat," refers to a gesture associated with an oath; it stands for the whole ceremony of taking an oath. See Paul Hoskisson, "The *Nišum* 'Oath' in Mari," in Gordon D. Young, ed., *Mari in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Mari and Mari Studies* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1992), 203–10.

35. "Slaughtering donkeys" is a symbolic gesture of alliance, the meaning therefore is "do not make a treaty with."

36. The meaning of *huburrê* is uncertain; see Durand, *ARM* 26/1, 428, note d.

37. *ibid.*, For the meaning of *šarum šanūm*, see 429 note e.

38. Literally "hand to hand."

39. This part commences with the name Lupahum (l. 5) and ends with this name (l. 40).

(ll. 41–54). The first part contains two oracles which were given as answers to questions presented to the deities Dagan and Diritum. These oracles were elicited by the initiative of humans, in the first case by the king himself, in the second instance by Sammetar. The second part comprises only one oracle spoken without any prior activity by human beings. Second, the letter deals not only with prophetic utterances but also with the case of a certain Jansib-Dagan (ll. 58–62). This second matter seems to be—at least in our understanding⁴⁰—totally unrelated to the first part of the letter.⁴¹

The letter combines three prophetic utterances. The first (ll. 11–14) is a more general assurance that Dagan has equipped the king with irresistible power. The oracle does not mention any specific circumstances or enemies in which the king would need to use this power. The second prophetic oracle (ll. 30–38) urges the king not to take an oath without further inquiries. The first and last sentence of this oracle express this exhortation in almost identical words. The goddess adds even more weight to her advice by quoting an older oracle that she herself spoke in a similar situation. One can safely assume that this quotation powerfully underlines the present message because the former oracle was proven right in the course of history.⁴² It is not easy to discern what this oracle has to do with the first one. The narrative framework (ll. 16–28) makes clear that Lupahum now has a different mission. There are no verbal connections between these two oracles. However, other connections may be identified.

First, one may speculate about the relationship of the two deities involved. Dagan of Terqa and Diritum both played a role during the rebellion of the Jaminites.⁴³ It may have been appropriate to inquire of both deities in a situation that resembled the former one. Second, there is some connection on a thematic level. The first oracle serves to encourage the king to trust in his divine power. No enemy will be able to resist his attack. But the oracle is vague. How should the king make use of his power in a concrete situation? In order to find an answer to this question, Lupahum addresses the goddess Diritum. The second oracle is unambiguous. The mana of Eshnunna is portrayed as a hostile power that endangers the peace and order of Mari as the Jaminites did formerly. But the king is able to act out of a position of strength. He need not seek an agreement with Eshnunna. In addition, Sammetar reports a third oracle (ll. 4–50), which, like the first oracle, stems from Dagan of Terqa, in whose advice the king is so seriously interested. As noted above, this time the god has sent his message spontaneously.

40. If there was any relationship, there is no reference to it in this letter.

41. The second part (ll. 58–62) is also written in a different way: the lines contain many more syllables than those in the first part.

42. Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 54: "Again, the earlier warning and promise must have been proved right and are cited here as a forceful motivation for taking the present oracle seriously."

43. Diritum herself highlights her role by quoting an older oracle. The importance of "Dagan of Terqa" for Zimri-Lim during the rebellion of the Jaminites can be illustrated with the following quotation from Durand, *ABD* 4:534: "Two exceptional texts have been found at Mari which could possibly fall under the rubric of 'literary'. The first is the large 'Epic Poem of Zimri-Lim,' almost entirely preserved, of more than 100 lines, which sings the praise of the king and culminates in his entrance into the Temple of Dagan at Terqa at the end of the Benjaminite rebellion (cf. *AEM* 2)."

The connection between the third and the second oracles is obvious. First, both oracles close with exactly the same sentence. As S. B. Parker has shown, this sentence is formulated by Sammetar himself.⁴⁴ Second, the third oracle presupposes the second oracle inasmuch as its third person plural morphemes refer to the men of Eshnunna, who are mentioned in the second oracle. This third oracle does not refer to the first oracle: it does not employ military metaphors and does not mention the power given to Zimri-Lim, although both oracles were spoken in the name of the same god. The third oracle serves instead to underline the oracle of Diritum. In what sense? The king could react to the oracle of Diritum by insisting that the case of the Jaminites and the case of Eshnunna are fundamentally different, inasmuch as the Jaminites endangered Mari whereas Eshnunna offers friendship. Consequently, Diritum's advice is inessential insofar as she does not recognize this difference. At this juncture, the third oracle adds an important point: the friendship of the men of Eshnunna is only pretended; they are anything but reliable friends. In this way the three oracles combined represent a consistent and powerful message to the king. It is quite probable that Zimri-Lim did not like this message of the prophets since he finally concluded the alliance with Eshnunna.⁴⁵

5. The Mari Letters and Jeremiah 36

The letters from Mari allow some insight into the very first stage of a literary tradition of prophetic oracles. For the very first time prophetic oracles which were communicated orally were written down. No later editor has redacted these letters, nor did they ever become part of the canonical tradition.

There is one text in the Bible that provides us with a more detailed picture of how the oracles of a prophet were written down: Jeremiah 36.⁴⁶ Although this text

44. Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 57–60, argues convincingly that the letters ARM 26/1 #197 and #202 refer to the same prophetic message as this third oracle. A comparison of the different letters shows that this last sentence "appears in neither of the other versions" (59). Sammetar must have added these words himself. This observation sheds new light on a problem that Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique," 25, has noted: "The way both the *âpilum* and the *qammatum* insist on Zimri-Lim questioning the god is remarkable: apparently they are sure that the answer will be a negative one: don't conclude peace with Eshnunna. But they don't indicate the manner in which the king must question the god." If Parker is right, it is not the prophets who insist that additional inquiries must follow, but rather the letter writer Sammetar, who may even have hoped that the prophetic oracles were overruled by hepatoscopy. Interestingly, Sammetar has hidden himself behind the prophets.

45. Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique des prophéties dans les textes retrouvés à Mari," 25: "Returning to the alliance with Eshnunna, we may add something to the traditional opinion, which considers that prophecies in the Mari texts are never directed against the king. It is true that here, Dagan promises victory to the king. But in this particular political context, this means he does not support the royal policy, since he is hostile to the conclusion of an alliance which Zimri-Lim already initiated. We know the end of the story: finally, Zimri-Lim did not listen to the messages of Dagan and did conclude the alliance. We possess the text of the treaty, which I recently published, and economic texts attest the sending of gifts from Mari to the king of Eshnunna in the twelfth month of the same year."

46. R. Lansing Hicks, "Delet and M'gillāh: A Fresh Approach to Jeremiah xxxvi," VT 33 (1983), 48: "All who work on the subject of scribal practices in Old Testament times agree that Jer. xxxvi furnishes the most detailed, and indeed the only substantial, information about the making of a Hebrew book."

is colored by deuteronomistic editing, its historical plausibility is high.⁴⁷ A comparison between the Mari letters and Jeremiah 36 should help us to better understand both sides.⁴⁸

The prophetic letters from Mari are in most cases very clear that the prophetic oracles were originally delivered orally.⁴⁹ A prophet spoke one oracle, meant for one specific occasion. In most cases the prophets spoke spontaneously. Occasionally, they spoke in response to inquiries. In very rare cases, one utterance would include another oracle. This is especially so when a former oracle was proven right in the course of history and can serve in a new situation as a kind of proof text.⁵⁰ No speeches combined several different oracles.

These findings are valid for Jeremiah, too. Jer. 36:2 states that the oracles that are to be written down had been orally proclaimed. Further, Jer. 36:2 gives the impression that Jeremiah spoke in independent oracles. When the oracles were written down, they were also collected. In Jeremiah the collection of the oracles is part of the prophetic message, inasmuch as God gives the command to combine the previously independent oracles. In Mari the collection of oracles is done by the authors of the various letters; and in Mari usually two or three oracles are combined. The first scroll that Baruch wrote (Jer. 36:4) probably comprised many chapters.⁵¹

In Mari the first reason that oracles were written down is that a letter is the easiest and most reliable way the prophet can reach the addressee of his or her divine message; prophets and kings were often at a far remove from each other.⁵² One can compare the situation in Jeremiah 36: the prophet is not allowed to enter

47. In my opinion Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981), 49–51 is right; he considers only the verses 3, 7, and 31 to be deuteronomistic additions. Concerning the historicity of the account, I agree with Barstad, "No Prophets?" 59, who admits that Jeremiah 36 is not an accurate report of what really happened, but who insists that all the details could have happened in pre-exilic times. The story may be fiction to some extent, but it is not anachronistic. In his words, "the *phenomenon* is 'historically' correct." The reliability of Jeremiah 36 is underlined by the unique fact that stamp seal impressions of three of the persons mentioned in this chapter were excavated: the impressions of "Gemariah son of Shaphan" (36:10), of "Berechiah son of Neriah the scribe" (36:4), and of "Jerahmeel the king's son" (36:26). See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Minneapolis, 1989), 215, 257, 260.

48. For the methodological problems involved, see William W. Hallo, "Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature," in Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly, eds., *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature* (Lewiston, 1990), 1–30.

49. Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique," 24: "Generally, an *āpilum* delivers his message orally, and it is his listener, either an official or a member of the royal family, who writes to the king. We have nevertheless an example where an *āpilum* insists on dictating himself his message to a scribe." See ARM 26, #414.

50. See the letter of Sammetar II. 30–39.

51. The extent of this first scroll is debated. More recently, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 16–19, sees the core of this scroll preserved in Jer. 25:1–7 and most of Jer. 2:1–7:12. Klaus Seybold, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (Stuttgart, 1993), 29–30, assumes an extent comparable to that of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. According to Hicks, "Delet and M^cgillāh," 66, the scroll written by Baruch comprised at least 14 chapters of the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah. Siegfried Herrmann, *Jeremia* (Darmstadt, 1990), 36, asserts that a reconstruction is impossible and fruitless.

52. Charpin, "Le contexte historique et géographique," 26 remarks rightly: "Of course, we only know prophecies delivered to local governors, mostly Kibri-Dagan in Terqa, who report immediately to the

the temple, so Baruch reads the scroll in his place. The scroll facilitates communication between Jeremiah and the people and, albeit unexpectedly, between Jeremiah and the king. On the other hand, the scroll does not become worthless after Baruch has done his job. After the king has destroyed the scroll, a second scroll has to be written, although no specific addressee is in sight this time. The second scroll is written not for special purposes but because the words of Jeremiah need to be preserved, presumably because they have value for future generations.⁵³ It is worth noting that the prophetic oracles were written down before their predictions came to pass.

There is a striking contrast between the king of Mari and King Jehoiakim. The king of Mari stores the prophetic letters in his archive the same way he stores other correspondence. The Israelite king throws the scroll of Jeremiah in the fire. It is dramatically obvious that the king of Judah saw the scroll of Jeremiah as subversive, whereas the king of Mari saw the prophetic oracles at least as tolerable.⁵⁴ However, the Mari letters were all located in the royal archive probably because they show concern for the king and seldom imply any critique of the king or his policies.⁵⁵ Perhaps there were other prophecies and/or prophets of a somewhat subversive character; but unless new letters—presumably outside the palace⁵⁶—are found, this is merely speculation.

Only rarely did the prophets in Mari write down their oracles.⁵⁷ Normally it was officials or ladies belonging to the palace who wrote down prophetic utterances in order to send them to the king. The important role of royal officials to transmit prophetic utterances to the king is also highlighted by Jeremiah 36. Officials inform the king about the prophetic activities in the temple and let him decide what to do.⁵⁸

king in Mari; or prophecies made in Mari when the king is not in his palace. But we must reckon with a lot of prophecies delivered orally directly to the king and which are lost for ever."

53. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Philadelphia, 1986), 668: "Committed to writing, the word has a permanence beyond the exigencies of human existence and can survive even the absence of its original bearer."

54. The letter of Nur-Sin reflects the delicate task of transmitting an unpleasant oracle to the king. In the letter of Sammetar the letter writer is likewise confronted with oracles which quite probably do not support the intention of the king.

55. Abraham Malamat, "A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents," in Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia, 1987), 36: "At Mari, nearly all the 'prophetic' documents were discovered in the royal-diplomatic archive of the palace (room 115), and this would explain their tendency to concentrate on the king. Prophecies directed toward other people presumably existed, but on account of their nature they were not preserved. In comparison, had only the historiographic books of the Bible—Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles—survived, we would be faced with a picture resembling that at Mari, in which Israelite prophecy as well was oriented primarily toward the king and his political and military enterprise."

56. One may point to the fact that most of the so called "prophetic" texts, dealing with "the problem of the desecration or destruction of cult cities and the absence of a city's deity in exile," e.g., the Shulgi, Marduk, and Uruk Prophecies, were found in private libraries (deJong Ellis, "Observations on Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts: 165–71).

57. Compare Friedrich Ellermann, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel* (Herzberg, 1968), 157.

58. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 258: "The officials feel impelled to tell the king, not to get Baruch and Jeremiah into trouble (v 19 suggests that the officials wish to protect them), but because the issue of the truth or falsity of the words is of the highest importance."

Whereas the Mari prophets focus their messages on the king, Jeremiah's written oracles are primarily addressed to the people of Israel. However, as Jer. 36:29–31 shows, Jeremiah can also address the king.⁵⁹

One important reason that different oracles were combined has to do with the difficulty determining whether or not the message of a prophet is valid. The probability that an oracle is true is higher when it can be confirmed by other measures. In many cases in Mari the prophetic oracle is checked by a diviner in order to produce additional evidence.⁶⁰ The value of an oracle is also increased if a second prophet has spoken in a similar manner, in this way supporting the first prophecy.⁶¹ Especially unusual, ambiguous, and unfavorable oracles must be confirmed because they are normally suspected to be untrue.

The cumulative, confirming effect of a collection of prophetic utterances is likewise envisioned in Jeremiah. Israel has rejected the individual oracles, but it might be moved to accept the evidence of the oracles combined. In this respect it is interesting that the people (36:8) and the officials (36:15–16) listen to the whole scroll without interrupting Baruch. In contrast, the king does not defer his evaluation of the scroll's content until the scroll is read in its entirety. Having heard only three to four columns, he cuts off this piece of the scroll and destroys it (36:23). In this way he destroys the context in which the oracles are now embedded. It is noteworthy that in Mari most of the letters which include more than one oracle combine utterances of different prophets.⁶² In contrast, in Jeremiah 36 all the oracles of the first scroll stem from Jeremiah. However, in Jer. 36:32 it is left open whether all the additional oracles of the second scroll were spoken by Jeremiah himself.⁶³ One is reminded that in Jer. 26:18 we are told that Jeremiah's revolutionary speech is confirmed by a quotation of the prophet Micah. One may recall, too, that the stubbornness of Jeremiah's audience is highlighted by the fact that they reject two prophets who, independently of each other, speak a message of judgment (Jeremiah 26: Jeremiah and Uriah). One must not forget, however, that a second oracle may also serve to counterbalance an earlier one, so that the reader is caught by a tension between the two oracles; e.g., the letter of Nur-Sin.⁶⁴

59. Note that Jeremiah does not speak directly with the king. As Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 664, has noted, "the editing of the book of Jeremiah invariably presents the prophet and king Jehoiakim as two figures who never encounter one another."

60. Many letters recommend that the king should check the prophetic oracles by omens. This is a fact which is noted often in the scholarly discussion; see, e.g., Parker, "Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," 64, and Craghan, "The ARM X 'Prophetic' Texts," 41–42.

61. As Professor William W. Hallo has pointed out to me, in extispicy it was customary to take more than one omen—sometimes many more—before accepting their results.

62. An exception is ARM 26/1, #221-bis, where Kibri-Dagan reports that the same *muhhûm* has repeated an oracle against building a city gate. Both oracles are cited.

63. Note the Nifal *nôsap*.

64. In a later development this concept may be one reason why complete prophetic books were grouped together. In the Akkadian canonical tradition the combination of the Marduk and the Shulgi prophecies may serve as an example; see Rykle Borger, "Gott Marduk und Gott-König Šulgi als Propheten: Zwei prophetische Texte," *Bi.Or.* 28 (1971), 3–24. In the biblical tradition there is the surprising fact that twelve separate prophetic books were written on a single scroll forming together the Book of the Twelve Prophets.

Oracles were conceived as belonging to each other for different reasons. One has the impression that in some cases the oracles were spoken shortly after one another. The relationship of the gods in whose name the oracles are delivered also seems to play a role. The most important reason is that they exhibit a thematic connection. This is likewise true for the scroll of Jeremiah, if one may understand Jer. 36:32 in this way. The most significant literary feature highlighting such a connection is verbal repetition. In the case of the letter of Sammetar it was obvious that Sammetar had reformulated the prophetic oracles in his own words in order to demonstrate their mutual relationship by means of verbal repetition. This has probably happened in other letters, too.

It is important to recognize that oracles gain new meaning when interpreted in the light of others. We have seen this phenomenon in all three letters: the dream of Addu-duri became a message to Zimri-Lim; the harsh oracle of Addu, lord of Kallassu, somehow lost its harsh tone; and the general and unspecific assurance that the king will triumph over his enemies was perceived as directed against the man of Eshnunna. It should also be mentioned in this context that letters that include more than one oracle seem to have a tendency to concentrate on the word of the god. The other parts of a prophet's speech are ignored. Likewise, there is usually no information concerning the way in which the oracle was received by the prophet.⁶⁵ This also underlines that fact that because the oracles were words of the gods, their meaning transcends the one specific situation in which they were originally spoken.⁶⁶

Jeremiah 36 shows how a collection of oracles already fixed could be understood in a different way after the reaction of the hearers to its content became manifest. The first scroll of Jeremiah was written with the purpose of calling the people of Israel to repent (36:3, 7).⁶⁷ But after King Jehoiakim had burnt the scroll, the disaster was definite.⁶⁸ The king had missed the last chance to avert the coming disaster. It became dramatically obvious that the goal of the first scroll was obsolete. As a consequence, the rewriting of this scroll had to serve a new purpose. The sec-

65. One can perceive the same tendency in the neo-Assyrian *Sammeltafeln*, as noted by Manfred Weippert, "Aspekte israelitischer Prophetie im Lichte verwandter Erscheinungen des Alten Orients," in Gerlinde Mauer and Ursula Magen, eds., *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum* (Kevelaer, 1988), 304: "Über Art und Lokal des Offenbarungsempfangs schweigen sich die meisten Sprucheinheiten aus."

66. Compare Millard, "La prophétie et l'écriture," 141.

67. It should be noted that Jer. 36:3, 7 are deuteronomistic additions to the story (see Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45*, 49). However, the additions only seem to explicate a dimension of the story which was implicit before. As is often noted, Jeremiah dictates the first scroll in the year when "the Babylonian army had marched west to the Mediterranean Sea and south along the Palestinian coastal plain, sacking the Philistine city of Ashkelon. This event clearly threatened Judah" (Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 256). As Arnulf Baumann, "Urrolle und Fasttag: Zur Rekonstruktion der Urrolle des Jeremiabuches nach den Angaben in Jer. 36," *ZAW* 80 (1968), 350–73, and Abraham Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *VTS* 28 (1975), 130, have proposed, the fast mentioned in Jeremiah 36 was called because of this crisis. It seems reasonable to assume that Jeremiah hoped finally to find open ears for his warnings. In my judgment, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 256, misses the point of the story when he argues that "a scroll that included words of warning about Yahweh's sending a foe from the north would hardly have been burned even by so insensitive a king as Jehoiakim." Jeremiah 36 wants to demonstrate precisely this: the unbelievable stubbornness of Jehoiakim.

68. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 663: "the fate of Jerusalem and Judah is determined by the ashes of that scroll lying under the king's brazier."

ond scroll could no longer function as a call for repentance, but instead served to demonstrate that the king rightly deserved the divine punishment.⁶⁹ The new understanding of the scroll culminates in an editorial addition to it. A new oracle announces unambiguously the death of Jehoiakim and the downfall of Jerusalem and Judah (Jer. 36:29–31).⁷⁰ It is worth noting that this first editorial change of the original scroll is presented as being inaugurated by God. Many more of those editorial activities followed and yielded, in the end, the canonical book of Jeremiah. The canonization of once subversive collections of prophetic oracles demonstrates an important difference between the Bible and the Mari letters.

69. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 16: "By contrast the purpose of the second scroll is Yahweh's declaration of irrevocable punishment (vv 28–31)."

70. Although it is not explicitly stated that the new oracle was included in the second scroll, this is quite possible.