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Ichiro Nakata

Presses Universitaires de France | « Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale »

2011/1 Vol. 105 | pages 129 à 136
ISSN 0373-6032
ISBN 9782130587378
DOI 10.3917/assy.105.0129

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :
https://www.cairn.info/revue-d-assyriologie-2011-1-page-129.htm

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THE GOD ITŪR-MĒR IN THE MIDDLE EUPHRATES REGION
DURING THE OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD*

BY
Ichiro NAKATA

The god Itūr-Mēr1 was one of the most important deities in the cultic life of Old Babylonian Mari, especially during the reign of Zimrī-Lim (1775-1762 BCE),2 as demonstrated, for example, by the existence of his temple and temple personnel, as well as by records of the sacrificial animals and barley rations supplied to his temple establishment. However, he was hardly known outside the capital city of Mari before its destruction. Itūr-Mēr is also well, if not abundantly, attested in Mari personal names dated to the Old Babylonian (hereafter OB) period, but he is virtually unknown in personal names elsewhere. Thus, the characterization of Itūr-Mēr as the city deity of Mari, at least until the end of Zimrī-Lim’s reign,3 is well in accord with the known data.

However, even after the destruction of the capital city of Mari by Hammurabi of Babylon (1792-1750 BCE), Itūr-Mēr remained prominent, as an oath deity in the late OB land of Ḥana (kur ḥa-na), whose capital was Terqa.4 Why is this? Furthermore, the god Ikrub-El, the Lord of Terqa,5 seems to have completely disappeared from Terqa; at least he does not appear in the late OB documents unearthed in Terqa and its vicinity that have been published so far. Again, why is this? These are the questions that we should like to speculate about.

Before considering these questions, however, we must first investigate the importance of Itūr-Mēr not only in the official cult of the capital city of Mari, but also outside of it, by surveying the pertinent texts dated to the half century preceding the conquest of Mari (ca 1810-1761 BCE).

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* This is a slightly revised version of my paper presented at the third meeting of the Sakura-Project, a Franco-Japanese cooperative project, held in Tsukuba, Japan on October 10, 2010.

1. Of the two alternative suggestions made in the past about Itūr-Mēr, namely that he was an Erscheinungsform of Mēr or an apotheosized tribal hero, the latter is definitely the better one. See I. Nakata, “A Mari Note: Ikrub-El and Related Matters,” Orient 11, 1975, pp. 15-24, especially pp. 17ff.; J.-M. Durand in Mythologie et Religion des Sémites Occidentaux, ed. by G. del Olmo Lete, OLA 162/1, Leuven, 2008, pp. 189-192.

2. The dates used here are those that are proposed by D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, Mari et le Proche-Orient à l’époque amorrite, FM V, Paris, 2003.


4. The view that the capital of the land of Hana was Terqa is tentative. In fact D. Charpin expresses his doubt about considering Terqa as the capital of the land of Hana in his article, “Le « Pays de Mari et des Bédouins » à l’époque de Samsu-iluna de Babylone,” in the present issue of RA 105, p. 41-59, especially p. 51-53.


1. **The temple of Itūr-Mēr and its personnel**

Queen Śītu reports in one of her letters addressed to King Zimrī-Lim, her husband, that Kakka-li-di saw a dream in the temple of Itūr-Mēr.⁶ There is another reference to his temple in A.337.⁷ There is also a reference to the gate that presumably gave access to the temple of Itūr-Mēr.⁸

The šangâ-priest of Itūr-Mēr appears in one of the letters of the queen mother Addu-dûr.⁹ We also know that there was a muḥšān prophet of Itūr-Mēr, named Ea-maši (ARM XXI 333; XXIII 446: 19’), although no divine message of Itūr-Mēr delivered by him is preserved.¹⁰

2. **Supplies of sacrificial animals for Itūr-Mēr**

According to a record of the supply of sacrificial animals, which G. Dossin called the “Pantheon List” at the time of its publication,¹¹ six sheep were supplied as sacrificial animals for Itūr-Mēr on the 27th day of the month of Lilli-ā, following Zimrī-Lim’s assumption of the kingship of Mari.¹² Eight other deities of the Mari pantheon were also supplied with the same number of sheep that day, i.e. Addu, Amnûtûm, Bēlet-et-kallim, Dağān, Ea, Nergal, Ninįṣarsagga and Šāmaš. The god Dērûm alone was given seven sheep, the largest number, while the rest of the deities in the list received two sheep or less.

We know that Itūr-Mēr was also mentioned as a recipient of sacrificial animals in five other records dated to different dates of an unspecified year (or years) (ARM XXI 22 [2 sheep], XXIII 255 [5 sheep], 295 [1 sheep], 318 [3 sheep], and 330 [1 sheep and 1 fat tailed sheep]).¹³ If the number of sacrificial animals meant anything, it must have had something to do with the size of the temple/shrine establishment of each individual deity and hence with the relative importance of that particular deity. If so, Itūr-Mēr must have been one of the important deities in the official cult of the capital city of Mari.

Let us note, though, the following fact. Of the 43 records that we have of sacrificial animals supplied to specific deities, 16 texts deal with localities other than Mari (ARM XXI 17, 20, 23, 41, XXIII 246, 263, 264, 265, 266, 269, 274, 298, 303, 319, 320 and 334). However, none of these latter record that sacrificial animals were supplied for Itūr-Mēr, the city deity of Mari.¹⁴

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6. ša-na-tam 1ka-ak-ka-li-di i-na 2i-tūr-me-er i-ma-ur um-ma-a-mi (ARM X 10: 5-7). See also 2i-tūr-me-er in ARM XXIII 96: 10.


8. 2 sag-ir ša é-kāl-lim [\(\ldots\)] be-el-tim [\(\ldots\)] ša [\(\ldots\)] ša-tūr-me-er [\(\ldots\)] ša-ma-nim-ni (ARM XIII 26: 8-11).

9. 2i-din-i-li ša ša-ni-ta 3ša ša-tūr-me-er ša-at-ta-am i-ti-il um-ma ša-a-ni (ARM X 51: 4-8).


11. G. Dossin, “Le panthéon de Mari,” Studia Mariana, Leiden, 1950, pp. 43-45. However, in order to understand this text properly, it must be studied together with the more than 130 other texts of a similar nature which were studied and published by J.-M. Durand in 1983 (ARM XXI 15-58, pp. 16-63), as well as those published by B. Lafont (ARM XXIII 246-334), D. Soubeyran (ARM XXIII 496-503) and G. Bardet (ARM XXIII 60) in 1984.

12. See D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, FM V, 2003, p. 178, for the historical context against which the so-called Pantheon List must be read.


3. Barley rations (še-ba) for Itūr-Mēr

We also have records of barley rations for oxen and agricultural workers that worked in the fields of the temples of Itūr-Mēr and Addu (ARM XXIII 110, [112], [113], [114], [115], 116, [117], [118], [120]). Those fields were in all likelihood the source of nourishment for the temple personnel. 15

4. Issuance of gold and silver

A small amount of gold (1 and 5/180 šiqil) was issued to Mukannišum, who was in charge of the workshop in Mari, to be used for a necklace of Itūr-Mēr on the occasion of a festival (intāma zāmīrīt) (ARM IX 176: 1-9). There is another record of issuance of three mana and ten šiqil of silver to five deities including Itūr-Mēr (ARM XXIII 73: 1-7), but the import of this second text escapes us. J.-M. Durand draws our attention to one other text which informs us that artisans were working on a throne of Itūr-Mēr. 16

5. Itūr-Mēr as the second most important deity of the kingdom of Mari

A letter addressed to Zimrī-Lim by his first wife Dam-ḫurāšim 17 testifies to the relative importance of Itūr-Mēr in the kingdom of Mari during the reign of Zimrī-Lim. She says, “Another matter. [May] Dagān, the lord of paqrū-sacrifice and Itūr-Mēr, the lord of Mari (lugal ma-rātu) [deliver to] you your enemies and your hostile ones” (ARM X 63: 15-19). We should like to note that the form of the divine title used here for Itūr-Mēr, namely lugal+Geographical Name (hereafter GN), was usually used for a city deity, which implies that Itūr-Mēr was considered the city deity of Mari. 18

Zimrī-Lim’s victory over the Yaminites is attributed to Dagān and Itūr-Mēr in a letter written by Rip’i-Lim, a high official of the royal court of Mari. 19 The pertinent part of the letter reads, “When the Yaminites rebelled against my lord, my lord wrote you (plural) to send an army contingent, but you did not send an army contingent [to] my lord. However, my lord at the command of Dagān and Itūr-Mēr inflicted a defeat upon his enemies and he turned their cities to heaps of ruins.” 20

Šīibu counts Itūr-Mēr as one of five divine allies in a letter to her husband Zimrī-Lim, saying, “The allies for me are Dagān, Šamaš, Itūr-Mēr, Belet-ekallim and Addu, the lord of decision, who go by my lord’s side.” 21 The order Dagān, Itūr-Mēr and Belet-ekallim is expected, but the inclusion of Šamaš in the second position and Addu in the fifth and last position with a comment is rather difficult to explain.

All these letters, except the one written by Šīibu (ARM X 4), attest to the fact that Itūr-Mēr held the second most important position after Dagān, the supreme deity of the middle Euphrates region (Alḫ...
 Assyriologie_105.indd   132 17/12/12   15:19

Assyriologie_105.indd   132

(T. 142). 28 J.-M. Durand, however, dates this text to the god Dagān. This seems strange if we recall that Sargon 25 and Narām-Sīn 26 of Akkad attributed their successful military campaigns to the Upper Land (middāt elittum) (= the middle Euphrates region) and beyond to Dagān (of Tuttul). Yaḥdun-Lim expressed his feeling of indebtedness to Dagān (of Tuttul) as well. 27 Second, in the eyes of Samšī-Adad, Ištar-Mer’s domain of influence was not limited to the city of Mari, because he attributed to Ištar-Mer his successful domination over not only the city of Mari, but also the banks of middle Euphrates river. However, these features should not really surprise us, because the said dedicatory inscription was written specifically on the occasion of dedicating a throne to Ištar-Mer.

Ištar-Mer was known in the Mari region even before Zimrī-Lim assumed the kingship of Mari. The earliest textual reference to Ištar-Mer, as far as we know, is found in the so-called Ur III pantheon list (T. 142). 28 J.-M. Durand, however, dates this text to the Šuprum 20 period of the “Lim dynasty,” before the royal residence moved to Mari. 30 It is possible that the cult of Ištar-Mer was brought to Šuprum from Idamaraz by a group of Sim’alites led by Yağgid-Lim (or Yaḥdun-Lim). 31


23. A. 2231 obv. = A.K. Grayson, RIMA 1, A.0.39.4. See A.K. Grayson, RIMA 1, A. 0.39.5, for a similar dedicatory text. See also D. Charpin, MARI 3, p. 42 for his translation and comments.

24. ṣutu-li 4IM la-li-in 4 en-lī ēnši 4a-šar, i-ru-ma 4i-tūr-me-er) be-li ma-at ma-ri 4it a-ah 4bu[ran-na] a-na be-ri-im 4i ša-pa-ri-l[i-m] ii ša-ak-li-la-a(m) ak-ru-ub 3a-ur 4u[n-m]l 1 4u-ga-za 4enur [bab]bur …

25. “Sargon, the king, bowed down to the god Dagān in Tuttul. He (Dagān) gave to him (Sargon) the Upper Land (ma-tāl[m] e-li-tām): Mari, Iarmuti, and Ebla as far as the Cedar Forest and the Silver Mountains” (Provenance: Ur. D.R. Frayne, RIME 2, 1993, E2.1.1.11: 14-28; see also RIME 2, E2.1.1.12: 6’-21’).

26. “Further, from the side of the Euphrates River as far as (the city of) Ulišum, he spoke the people whom the god Dagān had given to him for the first time, so that they perform service for the god Iliša, his god” (D.R. Frayne, RIME 2, 1993, E2.1.4.26 ii 8-23).

27. “Yaḥdun-Lim, son of Iaqid-Lim, king of Mari, Tuttul, and the Land of Hana, mighty king, who controls the banks of the Euphrates – the god Dagān proclaimed my kingship (and) gave to me a mighty weapon that falls my royal enemies. Seven kings, leaders of Hana who had fought against me, I defeated. I annexed their lands” (D.R. Frayne, RIME 4, 1990, E4.6.8.1: 1-20)


29. Šuprum was located on the east bank of the Euphrates about 12 km upstream of Mari. See the map in D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, FM V, 2003, p. 177.


II. ITÛR-MÈR OUTSIDE THE OFFICIAL CULT OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF MARI

1. Itûr-Mèr in Mari personal names

One important indication of the importance of Itûr-Mèr among the people is his appearance in personal names. We were able to collect ten different name-types \(^{32}\) of personal names containing Itûr-Mèr. This shows that Itûr-Mèr was reasonably popular among the people of the OB Mari texts.

Ana-Itûr-Mèr-taklûku (I trust in DN): ARM XXIV 249 i 10
Hûmat-Itûr-Mèr (DN is my male-relative): Durand, OLA 162/1, p. 194
Hûanna-Itûr-Mèr (DN is gracious): ARM XXII 13 iii 23
Ipuq-Itûr-Mèr (DN is gracious / protection): Syria 21 (1940), p. 155
Itûr-Mèr-gamil (DN is merciful): ARM XXIII 436: <29>
Itûr-Mèr-hûmaya (DN is the two eyes [of the country]?): M. 5465 (Durand, OLA 162/1, p. 194)
Itûr-Mèr-ûnsra (DN is?): M. 5583 iv (Durand, OLA 162/1, p. 194)
Itûr-Mèr-ûnsrah (DN listens): M. 18110 (Durand, OLA 162/1, p. 194)
Itûr-Mèr-tillû (DN is my ally): ARM XXIII 85: 39
Itûr-Mèr-tukul (DN is trust): M. 7791 (Durand, OLA 162/1, p. 194)

2. Itûr-Mèr in the social life of the people of the Mari texts

Itûr-Mèr played an indispensable role as an oath deity in the social life of the people of the Mari texts, as can be seen in a number of texts.

For example, we know from a sales document of a field that an oath of no future claim was taken in the names of Addu, Itûr-Mèr and Samumû (Sunu-Yamam). \(^{33}\)

Samûd-ûhum, a general who led an army contingent to the city of Zibbat to help Qatna, reported to Šamsît-Adad, his lord,

I assembled a captain (gal-kud), (a) lieutenant(s) (nu-banda), leader(s) of 10 (ugula 10 lú) and regular soldiers (aga-ši-si-sa), and gave (them) an ordinance (šiḫu), saying, “Since you do not give me my [portion (of the booty)] in accordance to the protocol fixed by my lord,” \(^{34}\) you have trespassed the taboo of Dagûn, Itûr-Mèr, and the taboo of Šamsît-Addu and Laskamû-Addu, be you a general, a general’s scribe, a captain, or a lieutenant. \(^{35}\)

Kibrî-Dagûn, the governor of the district of Tenqa, reported to Zimrî-Lim, “I appointed trustworthy men (to make a census list) according to the city (dilišam) in Zurubban, Ḫûšamta, Ḫîmaran and Ḫanna, and made them take an oath by Dagûn, Itûr-Mèr and my lord.” \(^{36}\)

According to one legal text, Pulût-Addu, a resident of Saprtatûm in Sûlu, (together with his brothers) contested the palace’s ownership of a piece of land, but he lost his case in a lawsuit and was

\(^{32}\) In the following list of different name-types containing Itûr-Mèr, we give only one textual reference each, because we are concerned here only with the number of different name-types as an indication of the popularity of a deity among the populace. For justification, see I. Nakata, “A Study of Women’s Personal Names in the Old Babylonian Texts from Mari,” Orient XXX-XXXI, 1995, pp. 234f.

\(^{33}\) A general whose name is Itûr-Mèr (DN is merciful) is also mentioned in one legal text, M. 105: 2. CAD I/J, p. 191 under “̄IM mu ści-tür-m[e-e]t sa-mu-mu-û in-pád-mèš” (ARM VIII 3: 16-18).

\(^{34}\) I here follow the translation of J.-M. Durand, LAPO 17, 1998, p. 31.

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\(^{36}\) For the historical background of this letter, see D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, FM V, 2003, p. 102.
made to swear an oath of no future claim by Dagān, Itūr-Mēr, Ḫanat and Zimr-Lim, saying that, if he broke the oath, might the stick which is found on the upper border of the field be driven into his mouth.37

We also have the record of the settlement of a dispute between the sons of Šu-Dagān and Išar-Lim over the ownership of a piece of field which had been the subject of a previous lawsuit during the reign of Zimr-Lim (i-na pa-le-e Zi-im-ri-li-[im]). According to this document, the sons of Šu-Dagān successfully justified their claim and took an oath in front of Itūr-Mēr. It is also stated that this document was written in a tavern (⌈bitr sabitr[m]⌉) in the presence of witnesses.38 D. Charpin and N. Ziegler think that this text dates to the post-Zimr-Lim period.39

There were occasions when an oath taken by Itūr-Mēr had to be administered far away from the temple of Itūr-Mēr. In such cases, the oath was taken in the presence of a scepter (A.4529) or a statue (A.1890) or an emblem (M.134) of Itūr-Mēr.40

This aspect of Itūr-Mēr as an oath deity remained prominent, even after the fall of Mari, in the late OB land of Ḫanat, whose capital was Terqa. In legal documents that are considered to have come from Terqa, such as sales documents of immovables,42 royal land grant documents,43 and an adoption contract,44 an oath formula appears which invokes the names of Šamaš,45 Dagān, Itūr-Mēr and the ruling king of the land of Ḫanat in this order. If we put aside Šamaš, who played a special role in the legal field as the deity of universal justice, it is remarkable that Itūr-Mēr retained his position as a very important deity in the social life of the people of the region, second only to Dagān, the supreme deity of the middle Euphrates region.

3. Itūr-Mēr as a deity of healing

Itūr-Mēr also seems to have been known as a deity of healing, analogous to Asclepius.46 Šu-nuḫra-Ḫalu reported to Zimr-Lim that a sick little boy (prince?)47 from Aleppo had been healed in Abatumm by Itūr-Mēr, “the god of my lord.”

When Dadi-ḫadnu wrote to my lord regarding the little boy Abban who was sick, I [ente]red Tuttul. I had extispicies taken concerning this little boy. Itūr-Mēr appeared (in the omens). I had the pirikkum of Itūr-Mēr set up(?) in Abatumm, and the little boy made a sacrificial offering. Now, this little boy is healed. The god of my lord came to [his help].48


41. These pieces of information are given in J.-M. Durand, OLA 162/1, 2008, pp. 192-193. For some other cases of oath-taking by Itūr-Mēr, see J.-M. Durand in Jurer et maudire, ed. by S. Lafont, 1996, pp. 60-64.

42. O. Rouault, Terqa Final Report No. 1, BM 16, Malibu, 1984 (hereafter TFR 1), Nos. 1, 2 (Alt./No. 2E), [4], 6, 9, 10 and A. H. Podany, The Land of Hana, Bethesda, 2002, Nos. 1, 3.

43. A. H. Podany, The Land of Hana, Bethesda, 2002, Nos. 9 (VAT 6685 = BA VI/5, 26-32; VS VII, No. 204, p. 82) and 10 (AO 2673 = RA 4, 69-78).


45. Šamaš does not appear in the oath formulas found in O. Rouault, TFR 1, Nos. 5 and 9.


Itūr-Mēr as a deity of healing is not as well attested as we should like, but this text shows clearly that he was believed to have some power of healing and that his fame as a deity of healing seems to have reached as far as Aleppo.

III. A SPECULATION

The Old Babylonian texts from Mari abundantly testify to the importance of the city deity Itūr-Mēr inside as well as outside the official cult of Mari. However, why did he continue to remain important as an oath deity in the land of Ḫana, as mentioned above, even after the destruction of the city of Mari, including his temple, his cultic base?

The middle Euphrates region that corresponded to the districts of Ṭṭṭunān, Saggarātum, Terqa and Mari under Zimrī-Lim formed a single political entity, and furthermore there existed an overall cultural and institutional continuity in the region from the beginning of the so-called Lim dynasty of Mari to the end of the Old Babylonian period in 1595 BCE. One indication of such continuity is the continuous appearance of Dağān and Itūr-Mēr in the oath formula. The invocation of Dağān in the first position in the oath formula should not surprise us, because he was after all the supreme deity of the middle Euphrates region. However, the case of Itūr-Mēr is different. He was a local deity of the city of Mari and was not a member of the local pantheon of Terqa before the fall of the kingdom of Mari. Why then did Itūr-Mēr remain prominent as an oath deity in the middle Euphrates region in the post-Zimrī-Lim period? Why was Ikrub-El of Terqa not invoked in the oath formula? During the Zimrī-Lim period, in the greetings formula of the letters of Kibrī-Dagan, the district governor of Terqa, Ikrub-El had been invariably mentioned after Dağān, the supreme deity of the middle Euphrates region, as the second most important deity of the district.

I would speculate that, if not immediately, at least sometime after the takeover of Mari by Hammurabi, a part of Itūr-Mēr’s temple establishment together with a segment of the Mari royal administration, however small it may have been, fled to Terqa, and established a miniature government in exile there.

Let us recall that Itūr-Mēr and Ikrub-El were both known as lugal+GN, “the lord/owner of GN.” Perhaps, there could not be two lugal’s in one place, and so if Itūr-Mēr and a part of his religious establishment did indeed flee to Terqa, one of the two gods would have had to disappear, or perhaps be absorbed by the other.

My guess is that Itūr-Mēr in exile took over the position of Ikrub-El because Itūr-Mēr was relatively more popular as an oath and healing deity than Ikrub-El was and could command support from the populace, despite the possibility that his political prestige had diminished because of his failure to defend the city of Mari and its kingdom against Hammurabi.


50. See A. H. Podany, The Land of Hana, Bethesda, 2002, p. 35 and especially S. Yamada’s extensive regional as well as historical study on the culture of the middle Euphrates region in a paper in the present issue of RA 105, pp. 61-84.

51. D. Charpin and N. Ziegler think that such a possibility cannot be excluded. See D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, FM V, 2003, p. 245. Please see a more detailed and extensive study in D. Charpin, “Le “Pays de Mari et des Bédouins” à l’époque de Samsu-iluna de Babylone,” in the present issue of RA 105, pp. 41-59.

52. The phrase, “the house (belongs to) Šamaš, Dağān and Itūr-Mēr” in the document of a royal bequest of a house in Terqa (LH 10 in A. Podany, The Land of Hana, pp. 122-125), dated by A. Podany to the middle period (16th century BCE) of the Land of Hana suggests that there was some concrete institutional base in Terqa at least by the 16th century BCE not only for Šamaš and Dağān but also for Itūr-Mēr.
Furthermore, if the original home of Itūr-Mēr’s cult was somewhere in Idamaraz, the home of the group of Sim’ālites who moved south and established the Lim dynasty in Mari, then the cult of Itūr-Mēr may have been able to count on support from Sim’ālites who had remained in Idamaraz and the lower Habur regions.33