

Celebrations of the Gods in the Light of Mari Texts

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/j5n1wn83>



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Abstract:

The city of Mari had a pantheon consisting of a large number of gods who bore the same names and attributes that were worshiped in their original regions, some of which were local and others foreign countries, and at the same time, we find that the people of Mari showed great interest and preferred some gods without neglecting other gods. Perhaps this preference or interest was reflected as a result of the population structure of the city, especially since it consists of people of the “Arabian Peninsula”, such as (Akkadian - Amorite - Assyrian), in addition to the Sumerian and Hurrian races, who all contributed to the formation of the pantheon in the city of Mari. Especially since the large number of gods reflected the importance of the city of Mari itself, so the importance of this research came to study the celebrations of gods and their original centers, attributes, names, and their role in the social, political and economic life in the city of Mari, and the nature of the religious rituals held there and their holidays and celebrations held in their temples.

Keywords: celebrations, gods, Mari city, rituals, temples

Introduction:

The city of Mari held annual religious celebrations, the most famous of which was the offering of sacrifices to Ishtar. This celebration was equivalent to the Akītu festival in Mesopotamia, which was held at the beginning of the year. Despite the presence of Dagan, the main god in the Middle Euphrates region, and the god Itur-Mer, the king of the city of Mari, in this celebration, the tasks of installing the rulers were assigned to Ishtar. The celebration took place in two locations: the first stage of the celebration was in the “Temple of Ishtar”, where religious rituals were performed, and the second stage was held in the palace, which was the second stage of the celebration, which concerned installing the king and offering banquets. Although the religious manifestations were not limited to the celebration, it aimed to achieve legitimate, political and economic goals aimed at serving the king and authority in the city of Mari and taking allegiance to him, and granting legitimacy when the king appears in the celebration and is installed there by the goddess, and in front of the rulers of the cities and representatives of other countries and kingdoms. Then the loyalty of the rulers and cities in the Middle Euphrates region to the king is renewed, and in it gifts, taxes and collections are received, which strengthens the state treasury or the royal family, and the meeting between kings and representatives of countries, during which alliances and peace agreements are concluded, whether in the Middle Euphrates region or other regions of the ancient Near East.

As the central city that managed and supervised the religious celebrations of the gods in the Middle Euphrates region, the local goddess Deritum was associated with the royal family, and for this reason she enjoyed a large share of offerings and an annual celebration was held for her journey from the palace in the city of Mari to her center of worship in Al-Der city, the stronghold of the Banu Samal in the south of the city of Mari. The royal procession, the entourage and the guests from the cities and kingdoms of the Middle Euphrates accompanied her in this celebration. Also Nergal had a celebration called "Nergal's Chariot" in which Nergal traveled from his center of worship in Subrum to the city of Mari or vice versa. The celebration was held in the palace amidst manifestations of joy and the preparation of feasts for him. We find that Dumuzi in the Middle Euphrates region represented his nomadic nature, so a celebration was held for him when he entered the temple of Anunitum as her husband. This celebration represented Dumuzi's death during the summer and then his return in the spring (Fayhaa, p.1041-1053). The following are

some of these celebrations that took place in the city of Mari, including:

The celebration of Šamaš:

The process of celebrating the god Šamaš was not reached in Mesopotamia except by mentioning him very little, so we do not have detailed information about him, but it appeared in the texts of the city of Mari that this celebration was linked to the continuation of the *Kispum* rituals in the Amorite period, as cuneiform texts were found inside the palace indicating the interest of the ruling authority in the *Kispum* celebration from the reign of King (Zimrī-Līm), and it is clear that Dagan participated in the *Kispum* exclusively, especially in the paragraph of (*humtum*), and we can recognize the formula (*humtum*) which refers to leading a group whether of humans or animals and even material things (such as symbols and banners), and it is a common formula in the city of Mari, especially in leading the army, and the ritual of *humtum* here refers to leading the sacrifices offered by the king, knowing that this ritual begins with the entrance of the king, and the establishment of the prayer that the priest repeats, then the offerings begin accompanied by religious hymns, as the king ascends to a platform (or balcony) and offers sacrifices to perform the consecration (*litum*) and blessing (*ikribum*) (Black, *CDA*, p. 126), which corresponds to the titles of religious hymns, and it seems that the king accompanies the symbols of the gods during the performance of this religious ritual (Crowell, pp.67-69).

The Akkadian-originated *humtum*, when celebrated by King Man-iš-tu-su (2306-2292 BC), was also celebrated in the city of Sippar, and one of the months in its calendar was named (*humtum*) at the beginning of the new year (Gelb, *CAD*, H, p. 236). Also in the city of Aššur, it was celebrated in the month of (*Nisannu*), and for this reason (the *humtum* festival) was established in the calendar of the city of Mari during the reign of King Zimrī-Līm as in the reign of his predecessor, and that this festival is held in the eighth month (*urâhum*), i.e. corresponding to the first month of spring (Jacquet, p.414).

The *humtum* appeared as a religious ritual specific to the change of climate (in the spring), so it was closely linked to the movement of the sun, and this is what led to the multiplicity of opinions about the interpretation of the meaning of the weather (*humtum*), which may mean (hasten), meaning that the *humtum* is the moment when the sun resumes its path in the sky after the end of the season and a new season begins, while the other interpretation is that it means (hot), meaning that it is a weather of high temperatures when the sun is very

hot, and it was also interpreted as (hurry up), which is a type of personal communication that appeared in the Amorite religion, so this ritual is one of the royal rituals and is performed by the king without the participation of the population, as it appeared in the celebrations of northern Mesopotamia in the form (*našum*), which is the thing raised upwards, as the texts from the city of Mari showed the allocation of a quantity of oil, which must have been used to anoint (or grease) this symbol (to Šamaš), and the king appeared leading the procession that enters (with quick steps) to the temple of the gods, and it is not unlikely that the participants carry gifts and offer a sacred meal to Šamaš and his hosts from the gods (Jacquet, pp.415-416).

The *humtum* ritual is a ritual that concerns the political gods and is specific to each city. It was celebrated in the city of Sippar in the temple of Šamaš, the city's main god, while King Šamši-Adad I celebrated it in the Lower Zab region in the temple of (Addu) in his capacity as the king of the gods, in which Šamaš participated in this celebration. While it was celebrated in the city of Mari in the temple of Dagan, the main political god of the Middle Euphrates region, along with Šamaš. It is worth noting that this ritual (*humtum*) is dedicated in all regions and exclusively for Šamaš. In the city of Mari, the text does not mention Šamaš's role in the celebration, but it mentions Šamaš's participation in it. In Mari, the celebration takes place in the temple of Bēlēt-Ekallim inside the palace. For this reason, the elegy in the *humtum* ritual is dedicated to Šamaš, and the king offers him four sheep sacrifices (Jacquet, p.415). We read in the text that states:

((... The king takes charge of (*humtum*), and (the king) brings (*humtum*) into the temple of Dagan, 4 sheep (are) the king's sacrifice (will be offered) to Šamaš in the courtyard (?) of the palm tree (?) inside the palace, 1 (cow) after the king has (...) 8 sheep, 4 (...) will be the king's sacrifice to...)) (Biro, p.143).

As for the city of Mari, it explicitly indicated the existence of a celebration of the god Šamaš in the Assyrian period, and the texts indicated the allocation of a quantity of oil (to anoint the *sabum* on the occasion of the Šamaš festival *inūma isin^dšamaš*) which was allocated in the last years of the reign of Yasmah-Adad (Sasson, p.134), as it says:

((... 1 *silā₃* of cypress oil, 1 *silā₃* of myrte oil, 1 *silā₃* of *marmit* oil, 1 *silā₃* of butter oil, 10 *silā₃* of excellent Mari oil, 80 *silā₃* of *tamriru* oil for anointing the staff, on the feast day of Šamaš, month: *Abum*, day: 18, year: Tab-Širi-Aššur)) (Bottero, *ARM*, vol. 7, No. 13).

The religious nature of the distribution of sweets dedicated to the god Šamaš, which appears in the formula (*ša* ^d*UTU* / *šu-gu-nu*) (Sasson, p.134), is not known, as in the following text: ((... 90 *silā*₃ of cakes, 1/2 7 *silā*₃ of oil, 3 *silā*₃ of honey, distributed for Šamaš, in the month *Uraḫum*, day: 30, year: Aššur-Malik)) (Burke, *ARM*, vol. 11, No. 5).

In the city of Mari, there appeared skilled cooks, each working in his specialty, including pastry makers of various types, a team that works according to the stages of making sweets and uses the formula (*nuḫatimmu*) in general, meaning cooks or food makers, and the dish is prepared through or according to their skill. Bakers also appeared with the formula (*epu*), meaning baker, and confectioners of all types were specialized and known by the formula (*kakardinnu* / *karkadinnu*), meaning pastry chefs, and one of these specializes in making cakes and is known by the formula (*mersu*) (Jean Botero, p.148).

The day on which the *humtum* ritual is performed is not specified in the texts, but the calendar of the city of Mari from the Assyrian period has proven that the *humtum* ritual was practiced in the (tenth) month, while the ritual was held in the first month in the city of Mari from the reign of King Zimrī-Līm. The ceremony begins with the offering of a sacrifice of the type (*niquṃ*), and this sacrifice is for the king himself. This ceremony is held inside the palace and in the presence of a group of the public who are referred to as absent (unknown), and the ritual may be with the participation of the king himself by standing on it and then raising the sacrifice on the balcony, accompanied by chanting hymns (unknown but chanted orally) with mysterious gestures that are not documented in the text. As for the animal (the sacrifice), it must be known to everyone or it must be determined by the god who approves of this ritual (Jacquet, pp.397-398), as stated in the following text:

((... when the king sacrificed for (*humtum*) and (...) even during the sacrifice, the high priest is the one who chants (the lament) to Šamaš, and when (*humtum*) is raised and before (*humtum*) must chant with him, and they ascend to the terrace (which is a place in the palace in the open air) and he rests in front of the sacrifice, at the time of (*liptum*) or (*ikribum*), or after (*ikribum*), during the sacrifice (the hymns are chanted) (the foundation of the vast heaven) the great god in heaven and earth, you are the great god, the supreme hero: the great god, the supreme hero)) (Durand, *NABU*, vol. 4, p.71).

It seems that this ceremony may have used wine, as one of the texts recorded a quantity of wine as offerings from people for this

occasion, stating: ((... 5 jars of wine for the storehouse, the wine jars were a contribution (*Aplahanda*) when the king (*humtum*) entered the temple of Dagan, month: 1 day: 21 year: 7 of the reign of Zimrī-Līm)) (Durand, *ARM*, vol. 21, No. 95).

Dr. Shibani Al-Rawi pointed out that Šamaš is one of the gods of Mesopotamia and was not at the level of Enlil, Aššur or Marduk, but was less important than them, and for this reason no celebration was dedicated to Šamaš independently or alone, as Šamaš played the role of a secondary participant in most of the main celebrations, and was alongside the main gods in the case of the celebration of the *Akītu* festival, and for this reason Šamaš's celebration in the city of Mari is his participation in the celebrations of the *humtum* alongside Dagan, who is the main god in the Middle Euphrates region.

Nergal Chariot Celebration:

The Mesopotamian texts mention the existence of a celebration for the god Nergal of Sumerian origins, and this celebration continued in the Babylonian and Assyrian periods, as this celebration is held in the ninth month (*Kislīmu*) (Labat, *MDA*, p. 101), and what distinguishes this ritual practice is that it is directed to the gods of the underworld, but the dates of the celebration differed between cities. In the calendar of the city of Nippur, this month is called in Sumerian (KAN.KAN.E₃), perhaps meaning (the festival of lighting the hearth), and in the calendar of the city of Lagash it is called (*mu-šu-du*) meaning (the month of carrying fire) (Langdon, 1935, p.135). These names are based on ancient beliefs that in this month the sun descends to the underworld, that is, with the arrival of winter, and magical rituals are practiced and fireplaces and fires are lit (to spread light) in order to accelerate the return of the sun again, and a Sumerian hymn is chanted in this celebration that says:

((... O Nergal, the mighty one, by whose cry the closed door is opened, O god who comes in the night, to whom the closed doors are opened by themselves, O god who comes in the night, let the pregnant mother be dear to you...)) (Langdon, 1935, p.138).

The Babylonians celebrated the god Nergal and performed rituals for him as the sun god in winter. The celebration took place on the 25th of the month, when palm fronds were carried, and on the 27th they celebrated the appearance (or rising) of Nergal from the underworld. Then they lit (fire) and spread lights in the houses and streets at night, as people walked around the city walls in order to commemorate (Ninurta) when he defeated the bird (Anzu). It is likely that this festival was held in the city of Mari in the month (*Lilatu*), that is, in the ninth month as well. The celebration is called (Nergal's Chariot)

and is linked to the mythical idea of the festival that was celebrated in Mesopotamia (Cohen, 1993, p.292).

As for the Assyrians, the celebration would begin at the beginning of the month with magical rituals by sprinkling water in front of the cattle in streets, and the priests would carry palm fronds high, and on the 15th day, water would be sprinkled on the (statue) of Ereshkigal, the goddess of the underworld. This celebration had two meanings: the first was to spread lights in order to hasten the return of the sun, and the second was to wave the fronds and sprinkle water in order to increase crops and prevent drought (Langdon, 1935, p.135 , p.139). Perhaps these were not magical practices, but rather the lights, sprinkling water, and waving the palm fronds were nothing but signs of celebration and receiving Nergal from the underworld.

The Nergal Chariot Festival was documented in the city of Mari about four times during the reign of Zimrī-Līm, which was recorded on the (seventh) day of the ninth month, but the texts did not mention any details about how the celebration was held, and usually spoke about a chariot and the mention of the sacrifice of Nergal's chariot, as the texts indicate that the celebration was held in the Assyrian period, one of which recorded the allocation of a quantity of oil for Nergal in the year of the Assyrian *Limmu* (Aššur-Malik), while other texts recorded the celebration being held at a time that corresponds to the time of the Nergal celebration from the reign of (Zimrī-Līm) (Jacquet, p.421), and this was confirmed by the text that stated:

((... 1 *silā*₃ of excellent oil, 1 *silā*₃ of cedar oil, to Nergal, on the day of his chariot, by: sin-nassir, month: *Lilliatum*, day: 5, year following Tab-siri-Aššur)), and another text: ((... 1 *silā*₃ of excellent oil, 1 *silā*₃ of cooking oil, 1 *silā*₃ of cedar oil, Nergal's allowance on the day of the chariot, month: *Lilliatum*, day 7)) (Bottero, ARM, vol. 7, No. 28; No. 29).

This agreement in the dates of the celebration may have indicated that the last texts were recorded at the end of the reign of King Yasmah-Adad, and that the month of *Liliatum* was the month of the transfer of power between the two periods (Assyrian-Amorite), since the first year of Zimrī-Līm's reign recorded the honoring of the goddess Mari on the twenty-ninth day of the month of *Liliatum*, which indicates that military events had occupied this period until Zimrī-Līm came to power in Mari, which led to the delay of holding the celebration at the beginning of the month, so he worked to compensate for it by honoring the goddesses, especially (Ishtar, Bēlēt-Ekallim, and Nergal) in the palace garden, since the celebration of Ishtar and Nergal are ritual practices that did not appear in the Assyrian period, but were

practiced by Zimrī-Līm's ancestors, and that Yasmah-Adad preserved the cycle of these celebrations (Jacquet, pp.421-422).

One of the religious celebrations that the city of Mari witnessed, dedicated to the god Nergal during the period of (5-7) days of the month (*Liliyatum*), is called the celebration of (the war chariot MAR.GID₂.DA) (Cohen, p.292), as a statue plated with gold was presented to (Nergal), and it had the emblem (weapon) and a throne, and perhaps he put on the crown and wore clothes, and the making of this statue is an important event in Mari, and it is dated in the calendar, so in the Assyrian period, one of the years was called (the year of Yasmah-Adad when Nergal entered his house (temple)) (Stephane Dalley, pp.182-185).

In the temple of Nergal, a ceremonial ritual called "Nergal Chariot Day" was held. The chariot was placed in the temple and large quantities of food for the celebration, called "*hukum* bread," were collected in it. The texts in the city of Mari recorded allocations for this celebration, which stated:

((2,588 liters of *hukum* bread, the meal of the king and his men at the Nergal Chariot Festival)) and also: ((1,040 liters of *Abanum* beer, the meal of the king and his men at the Nergal Chariot Festival)) (Stephane Dalley, pp.182-185).

This celebration revolves around the chariot of the god Nergal as the god of the underworld. In the texts of the city of Mari, the seventh day of the ninth month in the Mari calendar (Bottero, 2001, p.153) was recorded as the day of the celebration of Nergal's chariot, and it states:

((... 7 *kur*, 30 *sil₃* of *hašlum* bread, 2 1/2 *kur*, 40 *sil₃* of leavened bread, 1 1/2 *kur*, 40 *sil₃* of cakes, 46 *sil₃* of *sipku*, 1 1/2 *kur*, 10 *sil₃* of milk, 10 *sil₃* of *pishallurum*, 20 *sil₃* of oil, (x) *sil₃* of honey, 10 *sil₃* of sesame, total 1 *akar*, 3 *kur*, 36 *sil₃* of bread, 1 1/2 *kur*, 10 *sil₃* of milk, the king's table, for the day of Nergal's chariot)) (Biot, *ARM*, vol. 9, No. 209).

In another text: ((2 *akar*, 9 1/2 *kur*, 20 *sil₃* of HUGU bread, the table of the king and his men, for the day of Nergal's chariot, the month *Liliatum*, day 7)) (Biot, *ARM*, vol. 12, No. 273).

It is clear from the texts above that large quantities of food items such as bread, beer, cakes and honey were allocated to meet the requirements of the Nergal chariot festival, indicating that this celebration was important in the city of Mari. Perhaps this was a celebration to welcome Nergal's ascent from the underworld, and so large numbers of people participated in it in the presence of the king and his entourage. Also, the date specified in this text is the month of

Lilium (i.e. the ninth), which is the month of the celebration that matches the celebration of Nergal in Mesopotamia, but the date of the start of the celebration in Mari differs to be on the seventh day of this month.

Other texts record the allocations for the Nergal festival from the reign of King Zimrī-Līm, when he allocated a quantity of bread (*hugu*) and a large quantity of beer, perhaps a kind of sacred libation, or a table shared by the gods with the king and his family. This celebration took place in the royal garden, as it says:

((... 2 *akar*, 9 1/2 *kur*, 20 *silā*₃ of *hugu* bread, the table of the king and his family, for the day of the chariot of Nergal, day: 7, month: *Lilliatum*, the year in which Zimrī-Līm presented the statue of Khata)), and in another text: ((... 8 and 1/2 *kur* of beer *alappanu*, the meal of the king and his family, for the day of the chariot of Nergal, day: 8, month: *Lilliatum*, the year in which Zimrī-Līm presented the statue of Khata...)) (Biro, *ARM*, vol. 12, No. 272, 274).

The workers in the temple of Nergal might receive a tribute from the king on the occasion of the Chariot Day, as stated in the text: ((... 1 (piece) of woolen cloth, penny-mars, the miller in the temple of Nergal, which the king presented on the Chariot Day, the 9th month, the 7th day)) (Durand, *ARM*, vol. 21, No. 328).

Another text from the city of Mari from the Assyrian period (Sasson, p.134) records the organization of the date of the Chariot Festival of Nergal, which states:

((To Yasmah-Adad, say this, thus spoke (Tarim-šakim) your servant, regarding the Chariot Sacrifice of Nergal, which the *Muškinnum* of the cities may propose next month, my lord must give his instructions to (šamaš-illasu) to inform the cities and that this sacrifice must be adjusted (its date) to (the Chariot Day) after the sacrifice of Ishtar, my lord must reply to my letter so that I may be able to alert the upper regions...)) (Dossin, *ARM*, vol. 5, No. 25).

It is clear from the text above that there was interest in this celebration in the Assyrian period, and perhaps the celebration was central in the city of Mari, but this celebration was also held at the same time in other cities, and that the city rulers supervised this celebration. It is also clear that in this month the Ishtar sacrifice celebration was held, which preceded the Nergal celebration by several days. Therefore, the chariot is an important symbol in the celebration. It is likely that the origin of the name of the Nergal (Chariot) Festival is due to the chariot that carries the statue of Nergal in the procession (Cohen, p.292). Texts from the city of Mari from the

time of Zimrī-Līm mentioned the manufacture of the Nergal chariot, which stated:

((You wrote to me, my master, regarding the plating of Nergal's chariot with bronze and gold, and the engraving (writing) on the chariot, and sent you a wax tablet (engraving), and upon it I met with the craftsmen and showed them the letter that my master sent, and we discussed the matter together, and I sent to my master through the blacksmith (Qišti-mamma) a list of the required materials. My master must provide the required materials for the chariot, and send the man (the blacksmith) back to me. The task is still suspended because the bronze for the chariot (the box) has not yet arrived, and therefore the work will take a month)) (Sasson, p.253).

We see from the text that King Zimrī-Līm gave orders to one of his followers to build Nergal's chariot and decorate it with bronze and gold. The chariot was built by the palace, not the temple. The text also indicates that the palace provided metals, which indicates that the chariot is a symbol of Nergal and is important in the celebration, as is the emblem and the throne. There is also an inscription written on the chariot, the nature of which is not mentioned in the text, but we believe that the name Nergal is written, and perhaps hymns glorifying Nergal.

Another text sent by the palace overseer (Yasim-Sumu) to King Zimrī-Līm, indicating the location of the inscription on Nergal's chariot, states:

((I send you (Zimrī-Līm) a copy of the inscription on Nergal's chariot, and the carrier (a box with a canopy carried on the shoulders) of the god Itur-Mer, the inscription (*Narum*) of Nergal's chariot: Is it to be written on the front of the chariot (the front of the chariot) or on the back (the tail of the chariot)? Perhaps my lord will think about it, but this inscription must be written on the back (the tail of the chariot) where the weapon (the weapon of Nergal) is located, so that the herald (reader) can read it. As for the inscription on the carrier used (ridden) by the god Itur-Mer, it can be written on the front or the back. My lord must send a message with his decision so that I can prepare these inscriptions before my lord arrives here)) (Sasson, p.253-254).

We see in the text above that it refers to the manufacture of Nergal's chariot, and on it is an inscription specific to Nergal, and it refers to the presence of Nergal's emblem (weapon) being fixed to the back of the chariot, indicating that the chariot carries a statue of Nergal, and one of the individuals (perhaps priests) reads the inscription to the others, and it is clear from the text that Itur-Mer, king of Mari, participates in the celebration of Nergal's chariot, by

mentioning him next to Nergal, this means that Nergal's procession walks next to Itur-Mer, and we believe that Itur-Mer receives Nergal from the walls of the city of Mari until he reaches the temple.

The god Nergal enjoyed having his own singers, perhaps some music accompanied this celebration, as the text referred to the return of a special singer for Nergal who was exiled from the temple of Nergal in the city of (Shubat-Enlil) from the Assyrian period, it says:

((To Yasmah-Adad, say this, thus spoke Shamshi-Adad your father, Kulbi-atal son of Ḫaṣri-amum the singer of Nergal, from the city of Ḫubšalim he was banished (farther) to the city of Mari, now he is released, he must serve in singing to the god Nergal)) (Propos, and Parrot, ARM, vol. 1, No. 78).

There is another textual reference from Mari to correspondence with the king of Carchemish about transferring the services of the singer of Nergal to Mari, but the king of Carchemish refused Mari's request on the grounds that he was gifted to Nergal, which reads:

((Say to my lord, thus speaks Ištaran-našir, your servant, I have delivered the message that my lord charged me with regarding *Aplahanda* (the king of Carchemish) and have presented the gift that my lord gave me, and he was very happy about it. I told him about the musician (Yamhadeen) according to my lord's instructions, but (the king of Carchemish) dedicated his servant to the god Nergal, and said: If my singer (*gerseqqum*) about whom Zimrī-Līm wrote to me is present, but let me remember him, let the god *Aplahanda* test him!...)) (Ziegler, NABU, vol. 10, pp. 66-70).

In another text, which is a response to the first letter, it says: ((Say to my master, thus spoke Ištaran-našir, your servant, I told *Aplahanda* about the musician (*gerseqqum*) for whom my master sent me, as my master wrote before, he only wants musicians for Nergal, he said: If the musician (*gerseqqum*) about whom Zimrī-Līm wrote to me is present, but I keep him, tell this: God of *Aplahanda*! This is what he said to me, and I answered him: Since my master's request was not fulfilled, I must go, but with what shall I answer my master? This is what I said to him, but he gave me no answer, so write to my master so that I may depart...)) (Ziegler, pp.66-70).

The main center of the god Nergal is located in this *Šuprum* regardless of other centers (Durand, p.307), and the city of *Šuprum* is located near the Mari region (Heimpel, p.623), and therefore the procession route can be traced starting from *Šuprum* until it reaches the city of Mari, as it enters through the Nergal Gate (abullim / bāb ša GIR.UNU.GAL) (Kupper, ARM, vol. 13, No. 14), which is the second gate of the palace that leads outside the city walls, in order to visit the

local gods and hold the Nergal Chariot Festival (Durand, p.230), and also it is received by Itur-Mir from it, as indicated in the previous text about the making of Nergal's Chariot, as a regular royal procession may accompany the king and his family and the retinue, as the statue of Nergal visits the city and the temples of the gods in the city of Mari, and therefore the Nergal Chariot Festival is within a specific area (Pappi, 2012, p.587), and Durand suggests that Nergal's visit to the city of Mari is part of the gods' journeys to the other gods to complete the main celebrations, and he even adds that Nergal's presence in Mari allows him to obtain a wife by tradition (Durand, p.362).

The celebration of Dumuzi:

The Sumerians called the sixth month is the month of (Tammuz), while the Babylonian and Assyrian calendars gave this name to the fourth month. There is no doubt that in this month the vernal equinox begins. In the past, this month was called (the month of planting). However, the occurrence of the ritual celebrations of mourning and lamentation for the death of Dumuzi, and in this month made the Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians hold mourning ceremonies and name one of the months after those celebrations that pertain to Dumuzi, which was also popular in the regions of West Asia (Langdon, 1914, pp.166-167).

The king's rituals were linked to the rituals of the god Dumuzi, and so it was natural for the temple of Dumuzi to be in the king's residence. While the excavations revealed in the palace of the city of Mari from the Sargonid period indicated the presence of a statue dedicated to the goddess (Ama-ušumgal), which is also (one of the names of the god Dumuzi), and it is clear from it that the king's residence included a temple or shrine to the god Dumuzi (Durand, 2008, p.222).

The celebration of Dumuzi was also linked to the periodic climatic changes that occur in the same month of each year, and in which the seasons change (spring to summer and autumn to winter). In southern Mesopotamia, the celebration of Dumuzi was linked to the beginning of the year and the end of the agricultural season (especially barley), i.e. after the harvest, but in the city of Mari this did not happen, as the character of Dumuzi in the Middle Euphrates region was influenced by nomadic life. In the summer season, specifically in the month of *Abum* in Mari, it was the time of Dumuzi's death, and during this month the texts recorded the allocation of quantities of oil during the 19th and 28th days during the reign of King Zimrī-Līm. The text mentions the burial ceremonies (*temrum*) for Dumuzi on the 19th

day, in the month of *Abum*, of the 5th year of Zimrī-Līm's reign. Therefore, the texts did not show how the rituals of the celebration were performed, but there is a text allocating a quantity of grain for the mourners (MI₂.MEŠ ba-ki-tim), who may have been participants in the mourning ceremonies in celebration and eulogy for the death of the god Dumuzi (Jacquet, p.418).

Anunitum was associated with the god Tammuz in the rituals of celebration (and mourning), as Anunitum was identified as a star near the constellation Aries (which is the constellation of Dumuzi). The Babylonians considered Anunitum to be a heavenly goddess who was identified with the group of eastern planets that rise after the vernal equinox, and thus she was associated with (Anu) who was seen as the god of the sky and the source of water (rain). In the Babylonian astrology, the Tigris River was associated with the eastern fish, and thus Anunitum had an influence on the Tigris River, and its eastern land (perhaps the land of Akkad) (Langdon, pp.102-103).

In the city of Mari, cuneiform sources mentioned, in the fourth month of *Abum* in the calendar of the city of Mari from the time of Zimrī-Līm, holding a special celebration for the god Dumuzi, in the first year of his rule, and a quantity of oil was allocated to anoint the statue of Dumuzi, which was recorded on the nineteenth day of the fourth month of *Abum*. In another text, it indicated the allocation of quantities of barley for several people, some of whom were described as mourners, and this text was dated on the ninth day of the fourth month (Cohen, p.289), perhaps it is a reference to those participating in religious rituals when the deceased god is buried in a typical manner, for in the month of *Abum* in which Dumuzi's entry into the god's temples was mentioned, it stated:

((... 25 *akar*, 5 *kur* were given to (Iaḥatti-li), 16 *akar*, 5 *kur* of barley, were given to (satran-našir), 6 *akar* of barley were given to (Iantin-Addu) son of (Iaḥatti-li), 3 *akar* of barley for the mourners, 4 *akar* of sesame for the palace, the month of *Abum*, the 9th day, the year of the king Zimrī-Līm was built (the house) of Yaḥdun-Lim)) (Biro, *ARM*, vol. 9, No. 175).

After six months have passed since Dumuzi's death, Dumuzi's return will be in the coming winter season, specifically in the tenth month (Bêlet-bêrî), as Dumuzi's return will be by entering the temple of Bêlêt-Ekallim (i.e. the palace) in the city of Mari, and this means Dumuzi's entry into the sacred area in the sanctuary of the gods, and Dumuzi resides in the palace near (Anunitum) (Jacquet, p.418), as it was recorded in another text, without a date, that Dumuzi entered the palace of the city of Mari as a guest of the temple of Bêlêt-Ekallim

(Cohen, p.289), as a quantity of oil was allocated to him for this occasion, and it says: ((1/2 a *silā*₃ of oil for Dumuzi, when Dumuzi entered the temple of Bēlēt-Ekallim)) (Duponchel, NABU, vol. 4, p. 222), and another text confirmed the following:

((... On the day that I sent this letter to my lord, the (*Pudum*) (i.e. atonement) was offered to my lord in the temple of Anunitum in *Šahrūm*, and I brought (the statue of) Dumuzi to the temple of Anunitum in (the city of) Mari, the queen offered the sacrifice in the temple of Anunitum in *Šahrūm*...)) (Durand, p.244).

The character of Dumuzi in southern Mesopotamia was associated with the growth and prosperity of grains in the fall and their harvest in the spring. This power fades in the summer after the harvest is complete, and the life force derived from Dumuzi has turned into dried straw. Therefore, the summer is the appropriate time to mourn Dumuzi and the loss of life force and grain. However, the worship and role of Dumuzi in the city of Mari and the Middle Euphrates region is isolated from the agricultural aspect and takes on a different dimension, as the character of Dumuzi here is symbolic of nomadic life. This is why the boasting of the Amorite leaders who compare themselves to Dumuzi is not a comparison to the agricultural dimension, but rather a comparison to the proximity to death and salvation. It is not unlikely that the worship of Dumuzi by the Amorites is the closeness and comparison of the nomadic character to the character of Dumuzi (Jacquet, p.419).

In the summer, when Dumuzi died, mourning might be held, and this was a suitable time to celebrate the ancestors of the lineage, whose mention was also associated with the month of *Abum*. The character of Dumuzi was divided into two seasons: the first represented nomadic life and its activities, travel and war, and here the male character of Dumuzi appeared when he risked his life and escaped death, while the second season was dedicated to life inside the palace, where he settled close to the life of the more feminine goddess Anunitum (Jacquet, p.419-420).

There is another text from the city of Mari in which it was mentioned that a quantity of oil was allocated to the god Dumuzi on the occasion of his return to life, and the text did not mention the occasion of the return of the statue of Dumuzi to the palace, or any reference to the rituals of his return from the underworld. It stated: ((1/2 of the oil for the *gibbum* ritual, 1/2 of the oil for the god Dumuzi (on the occasion) of his return)) (Charpin, Mari, vol. 5, 1987, p. 559).

We see that the text refers to the offering of an atonement in the temple of Anunitum on behalf of the king of Mari, and in it the transfer of the statue of (Dumuzi) to the temple of Anunitum in Mari is mentioned, which indicates the existence of a relationship between Anunitum as a (female) goddess, and Dumuzi (the male god). It appears in this text that Dumuzi was associated in the Middle Euphrates region with the goddess Anunitum, which indicated his marriage to her and his entry into the temple of Anunitum in Mari. The temple of Dumuzi in the city of Mari was not mentioned, and for this reason it was moved to the temple of his wife Anunitum. Perhaps (Dumuzi and Anunitum) participated in the sacred marriage, especially their contributions according to religious beliefs, in increasing agricultural production and animal reproduction, as the text sent to the ruler of Mari by Itur-ašdu stated:

((On the day that I sent this letter to my lord, my lord offered (*Pudum*) (i.e. atonement) in the temple of Anunitum in *Šahrūm*, and I brought (the statue of DUMU.ZI) to the temple of Anunitum in (the city of) Mari, and the queen offered the sacrifice in the temple of Anunitum in *Šahrūm*...)) (Durand, p.244).

In the month of *Abum*, which is the first full moon after the summer solstice, in which Dumuzi dies, and his wife Anunitum mourns him, a text refers to the process of Dumuzi's death and his return in the temple of Anunitum, which is a comparison of Hammi-Ištamar to the state of Dumuzi (Jacquet, *Studia Chaburensia*, vol. 9, pp. 141-142), as another text refers to one of the princes of the Banu-Yamin in which a comparison was made to him in his capacity as the god Dumuzi, as it seems that the belief in the god Dumuzi spread to the regions east of the Balikh, as the text refers to the ruler of the city (*Ahhuna*) which witnessed internal conflicts and rebellions against the ruler, who was able to survive all difficulties, and in it gives a comparison to the quality of the god Dumuzi as survival from death, which indicates that the god Dumuzi was famous in the Middle Euphrates region for the quality of death and returning to life again, which is the quality he was famous for in Mesopotamia, and it seems that these beliefs about the god Dumuzi were common among the inhabitants of the region, as it says:

((... In the city of (*Ahunâ*) during the rebellions (...) Look at me, I myself escaped the death of the rebellion, and I managed to escape ten times, why don't you now consider me Dumuzi? At the end of the year they kill him, and in the spring he returns every time to the temple of Anunitum...)) (Lion, *NABU*, vol. 1, 1991, p.119).

It seems that Dumuzi's entered into the underworld accompanied by Anunitum, or what is interpreted as her going out of the palace and returning again, as another text recorded about Anunitum's return in the month (*Abum*) of the reign of King Yaḥdun-Lim, which states:

((... for Anunitum (on the occasion of) her going out (return), the month *Abum*, day: fourth, year: when Yaḥdun-Lim seized (the land of) *Zalpah*, and burned their crops...)) (Bottero, *ARM*, vol. 7, No. 1).

Several texts from the Assyrian period were found that recorded Anunitum receiving quantities of oil on the third and fourteenth days of the month (*kininum*) and on the seventh day of the month (*Mammitum*), which (according to the Assyrian calendar corresponds to the month of Bēlēt-Peri: i.e. the tenth month) and it is not possible to guess whether Anunitum was celebrated in these two months (Sasson, *AOAT*, vol. 203, p. 130), as stated in the following texts: (Half a gallon of excellent Mari oil, for Anunitum...), and (15 shekels of excellent Mari oil, for Anunitum...), and (X of excellent oil for Anunitum...) (Bottero, *ARM*, vol. 7, No. 5, 64, 70).

The term (*taqibtum*) in the texts of the city of Mari refers to a religious ritual that means a “meal” offered to the gods and accompanied by lamentation. This term goes back to the Sumerian formula (ER.A+ŠI) meaning water of the eyes (i.e. tears) and evokes lamentation and mourning (Briot, *ARM*, vol.9, No.355). In the Assyrian period, the expenses were (4 *silā*₃ of flour), and in the period of Zimrī-Līm, expenses were recorded accompanying this religious ritual (5 *silā*₃ of flour) (Sasson, p.135).

Conclusions:

The gods of local origins existed and coexisted alongside the gods of other regions without recording conflicts between them, which is contrary to what was reflected by religious beliefs in the ancient Near East in general, as the gods of various types and origins enjoyed respect and attention from all the inhabitants without discrimination, and they offered them sacrifices and celebrated their seasonal festivals, so they had their religious stability which was reflected in political stability.

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احتفالات الآلهة في ضوء نصوص مدينة ماري

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الملخص:

كان لمدينة ماري مجمع آلهة متكون من أعداد كبيرة من الآلهة التي حملت الأسماء والصفات ذاتها التي عبدت في مناطقها الأصلية، كان بعضها محلية والأخرى اجنبية، وفي الوقت نفسه نجد أن سكان مدينة ماري ابدوا اهتماماً كبيراً وفضلوا بعض الآلهة من دون اهمال الآلهة الأخرى، وربما عكس هذا التفضيل أو الاهتمام نتيجة للتركيب السكانية للمدينة، ولا سيما أنها تتكون من الاقوام الجزرية مثل (الأكدية- الآمورية- الآشورية) فضلاً عن الجنس السومري والهوري، الذين اسهموا جميعاً في تكوين مجمع الآلهة في مدينة ماري. لا سيما وأن عدد الآلهة الكبير عكس أهمية مدينة ماري نفسها، لذلك جاءت أهمية هذا البحث في دراسة عدد الآلهة ومراكزها الأصلية وصفاتها واسمائها ودورها في الحياة الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية في مدينة ماري وطبيعة الطقوس الدينية التي تقام فيها واعيادهم واحتفالاتهم التي تقام في معابدهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مدينة ماري، الآلهة، الاحتفالات، المعابد، الطقوس، بلاد الرافدين.