

A Further Look at the Institution of *sugāgūtum* in Mari

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Since J.-R. Kupper dealt with an institution called *sugāgūtum* at some length in his book,¹ many scholars have contributed to our understanding of this institution. We are particularly thankful in this connection to A. Finet who put together in an article² all the information that was available at the time of his writing concerning the *sugāgū* and to Ph. Talon who not only published articles devoted wholly or partially to one or another aspect of the *sugāgūtum*-institution³ but also made available texts some of which have direct bearing on it.⁴ Yet there still remain matters to be clarified and problems to be solved. One such matter is how to define the *sugāgūtum* especially in connection to the state structure of Mari.

It was this question that Talon attempted to answer in his article published in 1982. He stated at the outset: "Je m'attacherai surtout à replacer les *sugāgū* dans la structure de l'état en montrant qu'ils occupaient un poste particulièrement délicat, à la frontière entre deux conceptions très différentes: la centralisation du pouvoir urbain et la fluidité des structures semi-nomades."⁵ In this article, Talon postulated that the presence of a semi-nomadic element within the rigid system of Mari kingdom constituted a perpetual menace of insecurity. In his words, "Des populations dont le caractère même est d'être fréquemment en mouvement, en transhumance saisonnière, ne peuvent représenter qu'un facteur d'imprévu à l'intérieur de ce système où tout est conçu, précisément, en fonction de la prévision, de la sécurité."⁶ Thus, it is for the purpose of minimizing the insecurity caused by this "élément mouvant," he believed,

This humble paper is presented to the memory of my former teacher, Dr. Moshe Held, who first introduced me to the Akkadian language and literature and with Dr. Theodor H. Gaster suggested that I work on Mari texts for my dissertation. I fondly remember many exciting days I spent as a student in his classroom at Columbia University.

1 J.-R. Kupper, *Les nomades en Mésopotamie au temps des rois de Mari* (Paris, 1957), 17f.

2 A. Finet, "Les autorités locales dans le royaume de Mari," *Akkadica* 26 (1977), 1-16.

3 Ph. Talon, "La taxe «*sugāgūtum*» à Mari," *RA* 73 (1979), 143-151; "La '*sugāgūtum*' à Mari: un pouvoir local récupéré," in A. Finet, ed., *Les pouvoirs locaux en Mésopotamie et dans les régions adjacentes* (Bruxelles, 1982), 54-68; "Quelques réflexions sur les clans Hanéens," in J.-M. Durand et J.-R. Kupper, eds., *Miscellanea Babylonica, Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot* (Paris, 1985), 277-84; "Les nomades et le royaume de Mari," *Akkadica* 48 (1986), 1-9.

4 Ph. Talon, *Textes Administratifs des Salles Y et Z du Palais de Mari, ARM XXIV*, I-II (Paris, 1985).

5 Talon, "La '*sugāgūtum*'," 54.

6 Ibid., 67.

that the kings of Mari took recourse to the institution of *sugāgūtum*. Talon further thought that it was the role of contact more than that of being buffer between “les nomades et le pouvoir central” that had given importance to the *sugāgū*.⁷ Here can be found Talon’s basic understanding in 1982 of the structure of the kingdom of Mari and the position of the *sugāgūtum*-institution therein. In other words, the Mari kingdom had a basic structure made up of two conflicting elements, the semi-nomads and the central power. However, is it possible to understand the local (or provincial) power, which logically opposes the central power and which was the topic to which Talon was addressing himself, as the title of his 1982 article shows, only in terms of (semi-)nomads? And is it reasonable to regard the *sugāgūtum* only as a means of keeping these (semi-)nomadic population under control?

Talon maintains basically the same understanding of the *sugāgūtum* in his 1985 article, where he says: “A Mari, une institution particulière, la *sugāgūtum*, a été mise sur pied, sans doute pour régir quelque peu les rapports parfois difficiles entre l’état et son administration, d’une part et les tribus semi-nomades, principalement Hanéens et (Ben)jaminites, d’autre part.”⁸ However, at the same time, he does recognize that in some of the administrative texts a number of *sugāgū* are given local affiliation, while others are given clanic affiliation.⁹ This last point is given further elaboration in his latest article touching upon the *sugāgūtum*-institution.¹⁰ There he distinguishes *sugāgū* who are related to a clan and those who seem responsible for a town or village (“agglomération”) and notes that each town or village is subjected to a *sugāgum*, while large migratory groups are under the leadership of a plural number of sheikhs.¹¹ Talon, thus, recognizes, as Kupper¹² and Finet¹³ did earlier, *sugāgū* who are connected to a locality alongside of those connected to non-sedentary nomads in his 1985 and 1986 articles. Nevertheless, his basic understanding of the *sugāgūtum* as a device for controlling the semi-nomads does not seem to be modified, as he says, “Au départ, le royaume de Zimri-Lim est limité à la ville de Mari et à son hinterland agricole immédiat, comme l’était à l’origine celui de Yahdun-Lim. Même dans cette zone très restreinte, il devra imposer son pouvoir. Il installe très tôt un système administratif dans lequel les nomades jouent un rôle important. Dès les toutes premières années de son règne, on dispose maintenant de documents illustrant le rôle des chefs de clans, les *sugāgū*.”¹⁴

Actually, however, there are not many who seek to define the institution of *sugāgūtum* solely in terms of the Mari administration’s effort to keep the nomadic population under control. Young-Matthews says: “Once the pattern of command is set, all direct relations between the nomadic and sedentary societies are then mediated by the appointed chief.”¹⁵ However, there is a certain confusion of terminology, since

7 Loc cit.

8 Talon, “Quelques réflexions,” 277.

9 Ibid., 281.

10 Talon, “Les nomades,” 1–9.

11 Ibid., 5.

12 Kupper, *Les nomades*, 17–18; “Les pouvoirs locaux dans le royaume de Mari,” in *Les pouvoirs locaux* (see n. 3), 50.

13 A. Finet, “Les autorités locales dans le royaume de Mari,” *Akkadica* 26 (1977), 11.

14 Talon, “Les nomades,” 4.

15 D. W. Young and V. H. Matthews, “On the *raison d’être* of the *sugāgum* in Mari,” *Or.* 46 (1977), 123.

this appointed chief, the *sugāgum*, is said to be a tribal leader. A somewhat similar confusion of terminology can also be seen in Evans¹⁶ and possibly even in Talon.¹⁷

Finet finds *sugāgū* of the sheikh-type among the nomads, but this is only one of the two types of *sugāgū* he recognizes with the other being a mayor-type among the sedentary.¹⁸ Thus, Finet should be grouped together with Kupper¹⁹ and, in a way, with Talon²⁰ in that they all distinguish different types of *sugāgū*.

Others like Luke,²¹ Marzal,²² and Matthews²³ carefully avoid the term (semi-)nomad/nomadic and use instead the term tribe/tribal in defining the *sugāgum* or *sugāgūtum*-institution.

If we are to define the institution of *sugāgūtum* solely in terms of the central government's effort to control the (semi-)nomadic elements, as against the fully sedentary elements of the society, the institution would have no direct bearing on its sedentary elements. It is true that the existence of groups who practiced seasonal transhumance was a perpetual source of trouble for the farmers and for the central government,²⁴ but the *sugāgūtum* was not limited to the (semi-)nomadic elements alone. Rather it should be understood against the general societal background where a close symbiosis of (semi-)nomads and farmers was a norm.²⁵ It is communities of this sort that the rulers of Mari most often found in the territory where they tried to extend their control.

A perusal of the relevant texts gives us an impression that an appointment of an individual *sugāgum* was made in connection to a specific locality rather than to a group in movement. ARM 14, #46, Yaqqim-Addu's letter to Zimri-Lim, is most interesting. Yaqqim-Addu writes:

(5) *i-nu-ma i-na Ma-ri^{ki} wa-[aš-b]a-ku* (6) *IGI be-lī-ya A-ḥa-am-nu-t[a] ki-a-am* (7) *iq-bi um-ma-a-mi š[u-g]a-gu-ut* (8) *BĀD^{ki} Ya-aḥ-du-Li-im {x}* (9) *ū-ul e-ep-pé-(x)-eš₁₅* (10) *du-pu-ra-ku ša ša-ka-nim li-[i]š-ku-nu* (11) *i-na-an-na aš-šum ṭe₄-mī-[i]m* (12) *ša a-na še-er be-lī-ya* (13) *aš-pu-ra-a[m]* (14) *¹Ma-aš-ḥu-um LÜ.NU.BĀNDA* (15) *a-bu-ul-la-tim ka-li* (16) *ū A-ḥa-am-nu-ta i-na Ma-r[i]^{ki}-ma* (17) *a-lum BĀD^{ki} Ya-aḥ-du-Li-im [n]a-di* (18) *i-na-an-na ¹{x}A-ḥa-am-nu-ta* (19) *be-lī li-na-aḥ-ḥi-id-ma* (20) *a-na BĀD^{ki} Ya-aḥ-du-Li-im* (21) *li-ūt-ta-al-kam šum-ma A-ḥa-am-nu-[i]a* (22) *la im-ga-ar l LÜ tāk-lam* (23) *ša BĀD^{ki} Ya-aḥ-du-Li-im ū-ša-al-la-mu* (24) *be-lī li-wa-e-ra-aš-šu-ma* (25) *li-iṭ-ru-da-aš-šu*

16 G. Evans, "The Incidence of Labour-Service at Mari," *RA* 57 (1963), 67.

17 Talon, "Les nomades," 4.

18 Finet, "Les autorités," 11.

19 Kupper, *Les nomades*, 17f.; "Les pouvoirs locaux," 43-53.

20 Talon, "Quelques réflexions," 277-84 and "Les nomades," 1-9.

21 J. Luke, *Pastoralism and Politics in the Mari Period* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1965), 86f.

22 A. Marzal, "The Provincial Governor at Mari: His Title and Appointment," *JNES* 30 (1971), 194 and 201, for example.

23 V. H. Matthews, *Pastoral Nomadism in the Mari Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 139ff.

24 Talon, "La 'sugāgūtum'," 67 and M. B. Rowton, "Economic and Political Factors in Ancient Nomadism," in J. Silva Castillo, ed., *Nomads and Sedentary People* (Mexico, 1981), 28.

25 M. B. Rowton's studies on the nomadism in Western Asia in a series of articles are presupposed here. Some of the more pertinent among them are: "Enclosed Nomadism," *JESHO* 17 (1974), 1-30; "Dimorphic Structure and Topology," *Or. Ant.* 15 (1976), 17-31; and the one referred to in note 24. It may be added that M. Anbar also mentions progressive sedentarization of the Bini-Yamina without their stopping their periodic transhumance; "La distribution géographique des Bini-yamina d'après les Archives Royales de Mari," in *Miscellanea* (see n. 3), p. 17.

When I was staying in Mari, Aḥam-nūta[a] said thus before my lord, "I will not exercise *sugāgūtum*-ship of Dūr-Yaḥdun-Lim. I am driven out. Let them install whomever to be installed." Now, because of the report I wrote to my lord, Mašḥum, a *laputtum*-officer, is detained at the city gate. As Aḥam-nūta is in Maṣ[i], the city of Dūr-Yaḥdun-Lim is left unattended. Now let my lord give order to Aḥam-nūta so that he may come. If he does not agree, let my lord give order to some trustworthy person and send him here.

Dūr-Yaḥdun-Lim, originally founded by Yaḥdun-Lim, was one of the walled cities (cf. the meaning of the city, "Fortress of Yaḥdun-Lim") and even had a royal palace (*ēkallum*) (*ARMT* 13, #51:7, for example). The founding of this city may have been prompted by defense considerations, but the fact that a canal called Išim-Yaḥdun-Lim was dug²⁶ indicates that agriculture was an important part of its life. From the letter quoted above, the following inferences can be drawn. (1) A *sugāgum* was appointed to a city. (2) There was only one *sugāgum* in this city. (3) He had responsibility of managing the city with a help of a *laputtum*-officer. (4) Without a *sugāgum* the city might fall into disorder.

A letter to Yasmaḥ-Addu (*ARM* 5, #24) reports that a group of citizens of a town called Tizraḥ came to the writer of the letter (= Tarīm-Šakim) and requested that a certain Ka'ali-iluma be appointed to the *šāpirūtum* of the town (*Ka-a-li-AN-ma a-na ša-pi-ru-ti-ni šu-kun*) to fill the vacancy created by the death of the former occupant of the position. It is clear from lines 20–22 (*be-lí a-na su-ga-[g]u-tim [ša] Ti-iz-ra-aḥ^{ki} [li]-iṣ-[ku]-un-[š]u-ma*) of the same letter, however, that the *šāpirūtum* was meant to be *sugāgūtum*. Two possibilities exist here. Either Tarīm-Šakim used the two terms synonymously, or *šāpirūtum* was what the people of Tizraḥ thought the position to be. In any case, it is quite possible that there was a close similarity in nature or in function between the positions indicated by these two terms. Unfortunately, however, this would not help us understand the nature of the *sugāgūtum* except that something of chief administratorship may have been meant by *šāpirūtum* / *sugāgūtum*, since the meaning of the *šāpirūtum* is not very clear at present.²⁷ Nevertheless, it may be that the appointment of a *sugāgum* here is meant for a town and that there seems to be only one *sugāgum* in a locality.

Let us consider a letter written by Inbatum, one of Zimri-Lim's daughters and married with Atamrum, the king of Andariq, to Zimri-Lim who had some suspicion toward Ḫimdiya who was a commander under Atamrum.²⁸ In this letter (*ARM* 10, #84) Inbatum defends Ḫimdiya by saying:

(5) *aš-šum URU A-ma-az^{ki} ma-da-tim be-lí ú-úr-ri-[kam-ma]* (6) *iš-pu-ra-am URU A-ma-az^{ki} iš-tu pa-na wa-ar-[ki]* (7) *ma-a-at be-lí-ya i-il-l[a-a]k ú ki-ma URU šu-ú* (8) *i-na i-di be-lí-ya iš-lu-ṭū¹ Ḫi-[i]m-di-ya IR-ka* (9) *il-li-ik-ma URU ša-a-t[u] a-na i-di be-lí-š[u] ú-t[e-e]r-ma* (10) *ma-a-tam ša-ti ú-uš-ki-i[n] ú LÚ su-ga-ag-[šu]* (11) *ša-ki-in be-lí-ya iš-ku-un*

Concerning the city of Amaz my lord wrote to me many things at length. The city of Amaz had followed the country of my lord for a long time, but this city began to go along its own way. So Ḫimdiya, your servant, went and re[gain]ed this city to the side of h[is] lord and subjugated this country and installed its *sugāgum* as appointee of my lord.

26 F. Thureau-Dangin, "Iaḥdunlim, roi de Ḫana," *RA* 33 (1936), 52.

27 Cf. A. Walther, *Das altbabylonische Gerichtswesen*, *LSS VI*, 4–6 (1917), 135–46.

28 This understanding of *ARM* 10, #84 is based on K. R. Veenhof, "Observations on Some Letters from Mari (*ARM* 2, 124; 10, 4; 43; 84; 114) with a Note on *Tillatum*," *RA* 76 (1982), 136–38. See also B. Lafont,

Here again it is in a city that a *sugāgum* was installed. We doubt that the *sugāgum* here had proper approbation of the people of the city, because of the special circumstances of the appointment. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a *sugāgum* was installed as a chief administrator who could hold a tight rein over the city.

There are other references to *sugāgū* or *sugāgūtums* of specific localities such as Dīr (Benj., 984), Dumtān (*ARM* 3, #38:15–18) and Ya'il (*ARM* 1, #119:5–6).²⁹ References to *sugāgū* or *sugāgūtums* of a specific locality are rather limited, but local affiliations of a number of *sugāgū* are known, and we assume that they were the *sugāgū* of localities with which they are affiliated. Among those localities are Abattum (*ARMT* 24, #59), Dabiš (*ARM* 9, #248:11'), Ḫimaran ([*ARMT* 9, #248:8'], 24, #57), Ḫumzan (*ARMT* 18, #54:2), Šubātum (*ARMT* 24, #60), Šakka (*ARMT* 24, #55), Šamdānitum (*ARM* 9, #248:10'), and Utaḫum (*ARM* 9, #248:13'). It is also probable that Ka'ali-iluma (*ARM* 14, #62:4, 9 and 28) and an unnamed *sugāgum* (*ARM* 6, #40:5–8) are also *sugāgū* of Barḫan and Ḫiṣamta, respectively.

The names of *gayums* such as Yakallit (*ARM* 24, #53 and #56), Wer'um (*ARM* 9, #248:15'), Yamaḫammūm (*ARM* 4, #1:5–17), and Yabasum (*ARM* 9, #70; 248:13') with which some of the *sugāgū* are affiliated are in all probability meant to be geographical designations as well, judging from the fact that the names of all these *gayums* were, if not always, written with the determinative KI.³⁰

From all these, it can safely be said that a *sugāgum* was appointed to a specific locality or a geographically identifiable area for the purpose of holding the reins of the locality or the area. It is also probable that each locality had only one *sugāgum* at a time, as most of the pertinent texts indicate (*ARM* 1, #119, 3, #38, 4, #1, 5, #24, 10, #84, 14, #46, Benj. 984). However, there may have been some exceptions. For example, three elders of Sagarātum reportedly became installed as *sugāgū* (*ARMT* 7, #311 = Bottéro, *RA* 52, p. 167). However, because one of them (Mut-ramê) is reported to be a man of Yamaḫammū which belonged to the district of Sagarātum (*ARMT* 22, #290:8–9),³¹ Sagarātum of *ARMT* 7, #311:15 might have meant the district of Sagarātum rather than the city. If so, *ARMT* 7, #311 = Bottéro, *RA* 52, p. 167, may not constitute an exception. More troublesome is Talon's report that more than one person are known to have been *sugāgū* of such *gayums* as Ibal-aḫum, Naḫan, Sibiyum and Yabasum.³² It is quite possible, as Talon suggests,³³ that some of the *gayums* were divided into subgroups each of which was headed by a *sugāgum* with the result that more than one *sugāgum* were affiliated with a *gayum*. However, since Talon's report on this point is mostly based on unpublished texts, we must wait until these texts are published.

There are references to *sugāgū* of the Yaminites (*ARM* 2, #53:12, 26; Benj. 984), the Hanaeans (*ARM* 2, #53:10, 17; 98:9; 24, #6:20, 25'), the Suteans (*ARM* 24,

"Les filles du roi de Mari," in J.-M. Durand, ed., *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique*, *CRRA XXXIII* (Paris, 1987), 115.

²⁹ For example, *sugāgū* of Ša-ḫušurātīm (*ARMT* 23, p. 496, n. 113; p. 526), Abattum (Anbar, "La distribution géographique," 22, n. 19) and Tābatum (A.825 apud Talon, *RA* 73, 151).

³⁰ Talon, however, thinks that these names cannot be construed as designations of fixed localities but should rather be considered as designations of clanic origins. He also states that attachment of the determinative KI cannot be a sure criterion for distinguishing geographical names from others. See Talon, "Quelques réflexions," 281.

³¹ *ARMT* 22, #290:8–9. Cf. Talon, "Quelques réflexions," 283.

³² Talon, *ibid.*, 281–83.

³³ Talon, "Les nomades," 5.

#32:16), and the Suhites (*ARM* 4, #16:11'). Finet³⁴ and Talon³⁵ seem to regard the *sugāgū* in these references as those of the sheikh type (Finet) or those who are related to a clan (Talon), different in type from those of the mayor type (Finet) or those who are responsible for an "agglomeration" (Talon). However, we think these references should be considered to be collective, just as a reference to "the *sugāgū* of the cities/towns of the Yaminites (LÚ.MEŠ *su-ga-gi₄ ša a-la-ni ša DUMU.MEŠ Ya-mi-na*)" probably in the district of Terqa (*ARM* 2, #92:12) is. We also know that a census was taken of the military (or labor) forces of the Yaminite towns with the help of their *sugāgū*, and a census list of the men under the jurisdiction of these *sugāgū* was drawn up according to the town (*ālīšam*) (*ARM* 3, #21:5–17). We are even tempted to say that to speak of the *sugāgū* of the Yaminites or the Hanaeans is synonymous with speaking of the *sugāgū* of the cities/towns of the Yaminites or the Hanaeans.

Similarly, references to the *sugāgū* of the district of Sagarātum (*ARM* 14, #8:5) and those of the Bank of Euphrates (*Aḥ Purattim*) mean nothing but the *sugāgū* of the cities/towns of Sagarātum and those of the cities/towns on the Bank of Euphrates. Yaqqim-Addu writes:

(5) *aš-šum DUMU.MEŠ um-me-ni ša Su-mu-di-ta-na* (6) *DUMU Ḥa-am-mu-ra-pi* (7) *ša in-na-bi-tu* (8) *be-lī iš-pu-ra-am* (9) *ki-ma na-aš-pa-ar-ti be-lī-y[a]* (10) *a-na LÚ.MEŠ ša ba-za-ḥa-tim* (11) *dan-na-tim aš-ku-un* (12) *ù a-li-ša-am LÚ su-ga-gi MEŠ* (13) *ù LÚ.NU.BĀNDA.MEŠ ut-ta-ḥi-id* (14) *šum-ma a-na ḥa-al-ši-im* (15) *i-ša-ab-ba-tu-nim LÚ.MEŠ šu-nu* (16) *ù-ul uš-šú-ú*

My lord wrote to me regarding the artisans of Sumuditana, son of Hammurapi, who had run away. I have given a strict order to the men of the outposts and have put on alert the *sugāgū* and *laputtum*-officers according to the town in accordance with the message of my lord. Even if they head toward the district (of Sagarātum), those men will not be able to escape. (*ARM* 2, #103:5–16)

Here again a *sugāgum* (together with a *laputtum*-officer) is found, it would seem, in every sizable city or town. From the confidence shown in lines 15–16 ("Even if . . ."), we assume that the populated areas with their immediate vicinities were covered by the *sugāgū* and the *laputtum*-officers, while the remaining areas were guarded by the men of the strategically located military outposts with the result that the entire district was placed under full alert. Similar calls to alert are found in another letter of Yaqqim-Addu (*ARM* 14, #75:7–9) and one of Kibri-Dagan's letters (*ARM* 2, #92, a portion of which has already been quoted).³⁶

What we have discussed above may be summarized as follows. (1) The *sugāgum* was appointed to a locality, normally one to a locality. It is also possible that a *laputtum*-officer is found together with a *sugāgum*. (2) There is only one type of *sugāgū*, though their nature and function might have varied slightly depending on each individual case (cf. the *sugāgum* of the city of Amaz). (3) The institution of *sugāgūtum* was an important part of the mechanism for the provincial rule and was not limited to the nomadic, as against the sedentary, elements who practiced seasonal transhumance.³⁷

³⁴ Finet, "Les autorités," 11.

³⁵ Talon, "Les nomades," 5.

³⁶ *ARM* 2, #92, a portion of which has been quoted earlier.

³⁷ Rowton's following statement is particularly pertinent in this connection, because we believe that *sugāgū* belonged to these tribal elites: "The richest and the poorest among the nomads tend to sedentarize, thus reinforcing social stratification within the sedentary non-tribal population. While the destitute tribesmen become detribalized, the members of the tribal elite tend to retain influence among the nomads. They thus constitute a link between nomad and sedentary, between tribe and town"; "Enclosed Nomadism," 17.