

DEBATING POWER IN BRONZE AGE EMAR: A SURVEY OF SCHOLARLY MODELS¹

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This article surveys the political organization of Bronze Age Middle Euphrates states, focusing on Emar (Tell Meskene). It analyzes the scholarly debate about the city's unique, non-linear political evolution. Third-millennium sources attest to rulers with the title EN ("lord"), yet 18th century BC texts reveal a complete absence of kingship, with authority vested in communal assemblies like the "elders".

Kingship reemerged in the Late Bronze Age (14th–13th centuries BC), but its power was notably limited by other bodies. This trajectory sparks scholarly debate. Some propose the third-millennium ENs were merely presidents of a city council, while the later monarchy was a product of a foreign influence. An alternative hypothesis posits that executive leadership was a permanent feature, with its apparent absence being a gap in the fragmentary record. A consensus agrees that power in Emar was inherently shared and never absolute.

Explanations for this distinct model vary. One approach attributes it to a semi-nomadic populace that maintained strong clan structures, resisting power concentration. Another argues for continuity with older Syrian urban traditions of the third millennium. Socio-economic models highlight a persistent balance between the palatial and communal sectors.

However, neither cultural nor socio-economic approaches yet offer a full explanation. The critical period between the 18th and 14th centuries BC remains opaque. Future epigraphic discoveries from this "dark age" are essential for a coherent understanding of Emar's complex political evolution.

Keywords: Ancient Near East, Bronze Age, Middle Euphrates, Emar, political organization, royal power, urban authorities, community.

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The Middle Euphrates valley is one of those regions in the Near East where, in antiquity, crucial socio-economic and political processes unfolded. The first evidence for existence of statehood here date back to the third millennium BC. The social dynamics in the region had in general the same pace as in the neighboring areas known as cradle of the Near Eastern civilization: Southern and Northern Mesopotamia, North-Western Syria. A special significance of the Middle Euphrates region was due to its strategic location at the junction between these civilizational centers. The major communication routes ran through the Euphrates valley allowing commercial and cultural exchange. Situated at the crossroads the region was open to various influences.

The survey below focuses on an urban center in the Middle Euphrates valley: the ancient city of Emar. Assyriologists were aware of this city from mentions in cuneiform texts of various origins as early as the first half of the 20th century. However, it was only with the discovery of Emar's ruins at the modern site of Tell Meskene in the 1970s that a detailed study of its history and culture could begin.

The cuneiform texts from Emar were published in the 1980s and 1990s². Consequently, their evidence could not be incorporated into a number of important theoretical works by Orientalists written in the 1960s to 1980s. This refers primarily to the articles by I.M. Diakonoff on the community and the state in early antiquity in Western Asia (D'yakonov 1968, 1968a). In these works, Diakonoff developed his typological classification of ancient societies based on his research findings. Beginning in 1975, several Western publications — particularly in Italy — put forward similar assessments of ancient Near Eastern social structures, some of which were directly influenced by Diakonoff's work (e.g., Liverani 1975; Zaccagnini 1989). Undoubtedly, had the evidence from Emar and other Middle Euphrates centers been available, it would have significantly contributed to the scholarly discussion at that time.

The peak of scholarship on Emar occurred in the 1990s and 2000s, when the initial interest in theoretical generalizations gave way to a new phase of factual data accumulation. Now seems an opportune

² The epigraphic finds from the official excavations were published primarily in Arnaud 1985, 1986, 1986a, 1987a. Tablets from illicit digs that subsequently appeared in private collections and the antiquities market have been published in various sources, including Arnaud 1991, Beckman 1996, and numerous articles by D. Arnaud, A. Tsukimoto, and other scholars. Detailed bibliographies on this corpus can be found in Adamthwaite 2001, Rutz 2013, and Viano 2023.

The following abbreviations are used in the article to refer to cuneiform texts: **AIT** — texts from Alalah / Tell Atchana catalogued in Wiseman 1953; **ARET** — Archivi Reali di Ebla Testi; **ARM** — Archives royales de Mari; **ASJ** — Acta sumerologica; **Emar** — texts published in Arnaud 1985, 1986, 1986a, 1987a; **GS-Kutscher 6** — text edited in Cohen, Viano 2016; **TM** — inventory number of the texts from Ebla / Tell Mardikh.

time to pause and consider how the Emarite material aligns with the broader theoretical views of Assyriologists from the last quarter of the 20th century, offering a chance to assess the predictive power of their models.

Having situated Emar within the trajectory of modern scholarship, we may now turn to its earliest attested political history. As the archaeological and epigraphic record indicates, political processes in the Middle Euphrates valley were no less intense than those in neighboring regions. The first states emerged along its banks at roughly the same time as in Syria and Mesopotamia — as early as the third millennium BC.

A defining characteristic of the early history of Emar and its neighboring cities is that the primary sources of information are not the cities themselves, but external archives. For the 24th century BC, the key evidence comes from Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh in Syria), while for the first half of the second millennium BC (the Old Babylonian period), it derives from the archives of Mari (modern Tell Hariri in Syria).

The Ebla documentation consists primarily of economic records from the palace archives. Although the corpus is substantial, the texts yield little direct information on political and social history. The primary source for the political geography of Syria during this period is a series of lengthy documents detailing the distribution of textiles to Eblaite officials and foreign representatives present in the city.

All these texts reveal that Emar was initially within the sphere of influence of Mari, a city located downstream on the Euphrates. The Mariote kings Ištup-išar and Iblul-Il led two campaigns against the city, which resulted in its defeat and plunder (ARET 13.4: 7–8, 18). Subsequently, however, Emar came under Ebla's control. As noted by A. Archi, the population of Emar was linguistically indistinguishable from that of North-Western Syria, as evidenced by onomastic data (Archi 1990: 23). This linguistic affinity would have facilitated Emar's incorporation into alliances with neighboring states.

Information on Emar's political system in this early period is, of course, of paramount interest. The Ebla texts record the names of four kings of Emar: Ruzi-Damu, Ib-Damu, Išgi-Damu, and Nar-Damu. They also mention two sons of a king — Rī-Damu and Sursa-Damu — and a royal brother named Ibdi-malik.

As in Ebla, the rulers of Emar during this period were designated by the Sumerian logogram EN ('lord, master'), read in the local Semitic dialect as *malikum*. This titulary differed from the Mesopotamian tradition, where the ruler bore the title LUGAL (*šarrum*, 'king' in Akkadian). This naturally raises the question of whether the EN's power was truly monarchical. A significant scholarly position, represented by L.M. Muntingh (1984) and M. Adamthwaite (2001), argues against a monarchical

interpretation. Their view is based on several observations: hereditary succession was not the primary principle in Ebla, ENs were elected for limited terms, and the elders formed a council over which the EN merely presided. However, all these points are debatable and have been challenged in scholarship on Ebla³. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the political structure of Emar was identical to that of Ebla.

A further argument against monarchical rule in third-millennium Emar derives from chronological considerations. P. Michalowski (1985: 296) hypothesized that the timespan covered by the Ebla archives is remarkably brief, likely as short as a decade—a similar view also endorsed by M. Bonechi (2020). If correct, the four kings of Emar mentioned in these texts could be interpreted as having reigned simultaneously, thereby challenging the monarchical nature of their authority. However, the prevailing view in current Ebla studies posits that the archives span a period of approximately fifty years, dating to ca. 2400–2350 BC (Archi 2015: 13–31). This chronological framework allows for each of the Emarite rulers to have enjoyed a reign of normal duration, albeit of varying lengths. Consequently, there is no compelling reason to deny their status as kings and to recast them merely as leading representatives of a local elite.

Among these rulers, Ruzi-Damu stands out prominently in the Ebla records. As the most frequently cited individual from Emar, he likely enjoyed the longest reign. His status is further underscored by his marriage to Tiša-Lim, who bears in texts the syllabically written title *maliktum* ('queen').

Several documents from Ebla mention this queen of Emar. According to the edict TM.75.G.2396 (ARET 13.7), Tiša-Lim received plots of land within the Eblaite kingdom from its king (Fronzaroli 2003: 83–87). She assumed the duties associated with this land and settled people from Emar on it. These individuals were not bound by any obligations to Ebla and retained the right to return to Emar. Furthermore, merchants from Emar were granted the right to trade in Tiša-Lim's settlements and on her land, but were prohibited from conducting business in other cities of the Eblaite state.

A second edict, TM.75.G.1986+3221+4544 (ARET 13.8), records the Eblaite king Irkab-Damu renouncing all claims to the people living on the land estates of Tiša-Lim and Ruzi-Damu (Fronzaroli 2003: 88–93). Further evidence of her wealth is found in economic documents listing

³ For instance, A. Archi argues for the "absolute preeminence" of the EN / *malikum* and maintains that the distinction between this title and LUGAL / *šarrum*, 'king' was lexical, not institutional (Archi 2015: 123). Further reinforcing the ruler's elevated status is the fact that deceased kings of Ebla were deified, and the royal wedding ritual identified the royal couple with the city's patron deities, Kura and Barama (ibid.: 16–17, 259–260, 517, 736, n. 3).

grain rations, land, cattle, servants, wagons, and other goods assigned to her by the Eblaite administration (Dietrich 1993). Some of these land parcels, such as one near the town of Šadab, were likely located close to Emar itself (Archi 2015: 222; cf. Archi 1990: 27). Additional records register more of her assets, including silver, gold, large quantities of grain, livestock, and textiles, noting that these were only partially received by her (Archi 1993). Her administrative reach is further demonstrated by a text listing personnel under her authority in various locations (ARET 3.460+; Bonechi 1997: 527–528). Finally, another document, TM.75.G.2304, mentions both Tiša-Lim and Ruzi-Damu as owners of large flocks, a portion of which was designated for divine offerings (Archi 1990: 24–25). This extensive documentation naturally raises a pivotal question: why was a foreign queen so prominently and abundantly attested in the state archives of Ebla?

The prevailing explanation in scholarship, based on this evidence, is that Tiša-Lim was a native of Ebla, likely a member of its royal family, and that her marriage to Ruzi-Damu formed a matrimonial alliance between the two polities (Archi 1990: 27). A. Archi hypothesizes that king Irkab-Damu gave his sister (?) Tiša-Lim in marriage to the ruler of Emar to strengthen their ties and consolidate Ebla's control over the Middle Euphrates (Archi 2015: 257). While the details of her life in Emar are obscure, one document, ARET 3.277, refers to her as the “mother” (*ama-gal*) of the Emarite king, and it is known she outlived her husband by fifteen years, retaining her queenly title (Archi 1990: 28–29). Her continued presence in the Ebla records likely reflects ongoing contact, perhaps through visits to her native city on ceremonial occasions. However, one may suspect that Tiša-Lim returned to Ebla and resided there on a permanent basis. A clue to this situation may be provided by a reinterpretation of ARET 2.27a recently advanced by I. Arkhipov and L. Kogan: in fact, Ruzi-Dagan seized some of his wife's property and may have even divorced her (Arkhipov, Kogan 2025: 1).

Notably, the Eblaite distribution lists record textiles and garments being granted not only to the king of Emar but also to its “elders” (*ábba*), who received gifts of equivalent value (Archi 1990: 29). However, unlike members of the royal family, the elders did not receive presents of precious metals. When these elders acted in Ebla as the king's representatives, the generic title “elders” was sometimes omitted; in such cases, they were identified simply as “envoys” or by their specific occupation.

These Emarite representatives participated in ceremonies involving not only the Eblaite king but also high-ranking officials like vizier Ibrium. For instance, six emissaries from Emar attended the wedding of Ibrium's daughter (Archi 1990: 30). The institution of elders also existed at Ebla itself, where a group of 40–50 elders was permanently present at the royal

court, likely evolving from an earlier class of ‘chiefs’ (Archi 2015: 21). Furthermore, an assembly designated as *da-da-mu* (KA.UKKEN in Sumerian) is believed to have functioned in Ebla (Durand 1989).

In summary, the third-millennium BC texts depict Emar as a city ruled by kings, designated by the title EN rather than the more common LUGAL⁴. While not a major power and often in a subordinate role within alliances, Emar enjoyed a period of privileged relations with Ebla, cemented by a dynastic marriage between its king and an Eblaite princess. The king was assisted by a council of elders, who performed key diplomatic and ceremonial functions and were honored with gifts nearly equal to those of royalty abroad. Nevertheless, given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it would be premature to assert a predominance of collective bodies over the monarchy in this period.

Admittedly, it would be convenient to explain the strong communal institutions of the second millennium BC as a direct continuation of an earlier era where kingship was subordinate or non-existent. However, such a linear projection would be methodologically unsound.

A significant gap in the documentation occurs after the 24th century BC. New epigraphic sources illuminate the political landscape of the Middle Euphrates once again only from the 18th century BC. By this time, the geopolitical situation had transformed, yet certain features persisted. While the Near East of the 24th century BC was dominated by the triad of Ebla, Kiš, and Mari, a new configuration emerged: Ebla was replaced by the kingdom of Yamhad (based in Halab/Aleppo) in Syria, and Babylon supplanted Kiš in Mesopotamia. Mari retained its importance, even if at times it was incorporated into larger political entities.

Overall, Emar’s geopolitical position remained consistent: having been within Ebla’s sphere of influence in the third millennium BC, it was now dominated by another Syrian kingdom, Yamhad. Other regional powers also vied for influence over the city.

This information comes primarily from the Mari archives, namely administrative letters and economic documents. These sources indicate that Emar in the Old Babylonian period lacked a monarchy (Durand 1990: 55). Instead, political authority rested with the elders, whom J.-M. Durand identifies as urban authorities from noble families (ibid.: 56). Another attested institution is the assembly, known in Emar as the *taḥtamum*. A similar assembly, called the *tātamum*, functioned in the downstream city of Tuttul, which was subordinate to Mari; there,

⁴ In the Ebla texts, the logogram LUGAL did not denote a king, as in Mesopotamia, but rather the vizier (expressed by the compound *lugal-ša-za_{ki}*). According to S. Seminara, this distinctive usage of the title, effectively meaning ‘governor, high official’, persisted in the written tradition of Emar during the Late Bronze Age (Seminara 1996).

it was convened by a mayor (*ḥazannu*) appointed by Mari. Unfortunately, the specifics of the *taḥtamum*'s functions in Emar remain unclear.

J.-M. Durand interprets the *taḥtamum* as an institution continuing Syrian traditions from the third millennium BC, specifically the assemblies of Mari and Ebla designated in texts by the Sumerogram KA.UKKEN (Durand 1990: 56). He posits that the word *taḥtamum* likely underlies this logogram. A connection has also been drawn between this term and the Sumerian city assemblies, such as the one depicted in the poem "Gilgameš and Agga". The *taḥtamum* is attested exclusively in urban centers like Emar and Tuttul. Its absence in the nomadic Amorite milieu supports the conclusion that it was a phenomenon of sedentary urban culture (*ibid.*).

Our information on the *tātamum* in Tuttul is more substantial. This assembly deliberated and made decisions on legal, economic, and political matters. It did not automatically ratify decrees from Mari and could oppose the will of the Mariote king and his representatives. Significantly, the king of Mari communicated his proposals not directly to the assembly, but through the mediation of Tuttul's mayor (*ḥazannu*), who was formally integrated into the local political structure.

It has been suggested that the *taḥtamum* may have consisted primarily of merchants. Given the intensive trade carried out by Middle Euphrates cities and the historical parallels, the political standing of merchants within them was likely strong. The *taḥtamum* should be distinguished from other assemblies in the Mari documentation, namely the *puḥrum* and the *riḥṣum*. The former was likely an assembly of the entire population, represented by family heads, while the latter was an assembly of the pastoralist population that included commoners (*muškēnum*) (Durand 1990: 57).

Emar paid tribute (*sīrum*) to foreign hegemon⁵, with three centers — Halab, Carchemish, and Mari — vying for control and claiming these payments.

⁵ An illustrative letter from the Mari archives (ARM 34.110 / A.885) sheds interesting light on this political dynamic. The sender, Lanasum, a representative of the king of Mari Zimri-Lim (= "my lord") stationed in Tuttul, reports the following: «Regarding the *sīrum* of my lord which was imposed on the people of Tuttul: as I spoke to the *tātamum* for three times, I asked them, and these people wrote twice to Emar. And the people of Emar replied them as follows: "We are paying *sīrum* to three kings, yet you do not want to pay your lord Zimri-Lim!" This is what the people of Emar replied them. The people of Tuttul took 180 shekels of silver and returned to Emar. They purchased jars of wine. They gathered with the elders of Emar and drank. As the land refused this (proposal), the people of Tuttul convened for a second discussion and deliberated: "Let us send envoys to Zimri-Lim; we will not pay the *sīrum* this year". They reached this (decision)» (Durand 2023: 233–235).

Thus, during the Old Babylonian period, the city appears to have been governed by a system of collective bodies, among which the *tahtamum* was the most significant, indicating a decline of centralized personal rule.

However, some scholars caution against interpreting the Mari sources as definitive proof for the absence of monarchy in Emar. M. Viano, for instance, argues that a form of individual leadership, embedded within the framework of collective institutions, likely existed in the pre-Hittite period (i.e., before the second half of the 14th century BC; Viano 2010: 146). This view is contested by specialists like M. Adamthwaite, who maintains that a monarchy was absent in Emar during both the 24th and the 18th centuries BC (Adamthwaite 2001).

There is also a discussion regarding the origin of the collective governing bodies at Emar. We have already mentioned J.-M. Durand's view on the deep roots of these institutions in the urban culture of the third millennium BC (Durand 1990: 56, 85), a position shared by D. Fleming (Fleming 1992).

Conversely, another school of thought posits that the elders of Emar represent a relic of the population's semi-nomadic past. This view is championed by D. Arnaud, the principal editor and pioneering researcher of the Emar texts. Arnaud argues that the population of Emar was formed by Semitic pastoral tribes undergoing sedentarization. These groups possessed a developed clan system that defined all aspects of urban life. Within this structure, assemblies, including the council of elders, served as tools for negotiating and arranging mutually satisfactory decisions. They upheld principles of collectivism and social justice, countering any attempts by powerful individuals to impose their will on the community. Under such conditions, royal authority had little opportunity to emerge and develop fully (Arnaud 1980: 259–261; 1981: 14; 1987: 10; 1991: 15). H. Klengel, who studied a vast body of material on the institution of elders across the ancient Near East in the first half of the second millennium BC, observed that the presence and active socio-political role of elders are characteristic of societies with a nomadic heritage (Klengel 1960: 359).

After the 18th century BC, the historical record falls silent for a long period. The archives from Emar itself, which comprise about 1500 documents, date from the second half of the 14th to the beginning of the 12th century BC (Pruzsinzky, Solans 2015: 318). For the interval between the 18th and 14th centuries BC, we have only scattered mentions of Emar in texts from other sites. During this time, Emar first came under the sway of the Upper Mesopotamian state of Mittani, before eventually being conquered by the Hittites in the second half of the 14th century BC.

The absence of monarchic institutions in Emar during the 15th century BC, and likely earlier, is inferred from indirect evidence. According to the inscription of Idrimi, found at Tell Atchana (Alalakh), his family — a former royal dynasty from Halab — fled to Emar, his mother’s homeland, after their exile. The text states that the people of Emar were his mother’s kin, yet Idrimi makes no mention of a king when describing his stay in the city (Durand 2011: 136). M. Adamthwaite concludes that Emar likely had no king at that time (Adamthwaite 2001: 188).

A 15th-century BC list of merchants from various lands, also from the Alalakh archives (ALT 268), provides another clue. While merchants from Tunip are identified as representatives of their king, no such designation is made for the merchants from Emar. Admittedly, this argument carries little weight on its own (Adamthwaite 2001: 186–187). M. Viano offers further indirect evidence: new documents from Tell Bazi (Bāširu) demonstrate that the Mittanians were adept at controlling polities with collective power structures, making it unlikely that they would have imposed a monarchy on Emar (Viano 2010: 146).

However, at this point we must consider a hypothesis advanced by D. Arnaud and supported by D. Beyer concerning the so-called “seal of Ninurta”, which was used by the elders of Emar in the 14th–13th centuries BC. The individual named on this seal, Rab-ša-dadi, is attributed with lofty titles indicating divine descent, extensive political authority, and military victories. He was likely a usurper who capitalized on the Hittite invasions in Syria at the turn of the 17th and 16th centuries BC, seized power in Emar, and established a royal dynasty there (Beyer 2001: 197).

The monarchy is definitively attested in Emar from the 14th century BC onward. This era was dominated on the international stage by several great powers: Egypt, Mittani, Babylonia, Assyria, and the Hittite Empire. In the second half of that century, the Hittites wrested the Middle Euphrates valley from the Mittani kingdom and established political control over local cities, including Emar. This period is well-documented by written sources unearthed at the site of Tell Meskene, which covers the ruins of the ancient city.

It is now commonly accepted that two royal dynasties ruled in Emar during the 14th and 13th centuries BC. The first of these dynasties was identified by A. Skaist (1998). A characteristic feature of this royal house is that its rulers’ names are never directly accompanied by the royal title (LUGAL / *šarru*). Only contextual analysis allows us to identify these individuals as sovereigns. For instance, in the document GS-Kutscher 6, the title appears separately from the name, yet the context clearly indicates that it refers to king Limi-šarra. In total, the two dynasties span seven generations.

The first dynasty emerged and consolidated its power in the 14th century BC. This process culminated in the kings securing permanent membership in the city council — a significant enhancement of their political standing (Exel, van 2010: 65).

In scholarly literature, royal power in Late Bronze Age Emar has been defined as “limited” (Fleming 1992). This limitation manifested itself in several key aspects. Unlike their counterparts in other contemporary Syrian states, the rulers of Emar did not play a central role in local religious festivities and rituals. For instance, in the ritual for the installation of the high priestess of Ba‘al, the king performs no ceremonial functions: he does not lead the proceedings, choose the candidate, perform the anointing, enthrone her, or conduct sacrifices (Fleming 1992: 62). Instead, it is the elders (“the sons of the city”) who pay homage to the priestess during the ceremony and present her with the priestly garments. On the final day of the celebrations, they also partake in the ritual feast. Thus, it was the elders — not the king — who sanctioned the new priestess on behalf of the city. Although the king is mentioned in the ritual text (he receives a portion of the consecrated food, albeit after the priestesses), it is quite possible that he was not even physically present. Similarly, while the king provided extensive sponsorship for the *zukru* festival, he did not participate in it personally (ibid.).

Inscriptions glorifying a king’s personality, deeds, or piety are unattested at Emar. While this fact alone may not be significant, it carries considerable weight when considered alongside other peculiarities of the royal institution in the city. It is noteworthy that even in Ugarit, which had a strongly developed institution of monarchy, Mesopotamian-style royal inscriptions are similarly unknown. In our view, this commonality can be linked to the limited sovereignty of both polities: during the Late Bronze Age, they were vassals of neighboring great powers. The prevailing tradition likely reserved the commission of such glorifying inscriptions for fully independent rulers. This, however, was not a strict rule but rather a strong tendency.

Nevertheless, a distinct type of royal inscription was produced in Emar. The formal features and content of these texts themselves reveal the limited nature of the king’s power. From a genre perspective, it is unusual that these texts are legal documents — specifically, records of land grants or prebends. These grants are presented as rewards for services rendered by an individual to both his city and its king (Seminara 2024: 80). For example, the aforementioned text GS-Kutscher 6 records how king Limi-šarra of the first dynasty granted a certain Irib-Ba‘al, son of Lala, a priestly and administrative office in the temple

of Nergal. This appointment was made to reward Irib-Ba'al for having redeemed the king's daughters with his own assets and returned their valuables, along with four thousand shekels of silver and four thousand shekels of gold. As the text states, all of this was restored to the city and to his lord (the king).

Another text, *Emar 17*, contains a brief narrative about a failed coup d'état and the subsequent reward given to the individual who exposed the conspiracy to the king (Arnaud 1986: 26–28; Durand, Marti 2003: 142–145). According to *Emar 42*, Pilsu-Dagan, a ruler of the second dynasty, offered a golden cup to the god Ba'al and his temple in gratitude for favorable omens received during the city's defense against Hurrian troops (Arnaud 1986: 57–58; Yamada 2006). A related legal record, ASJ 12 7, documents the same Pilsu-Dagan granting a parcel of his own land to the diviner Mašruḫe, who had performed the auspices mentioned in *Emar 42* (Tsukimoto 1990: 189–193). It is worth noting that this is the sole royal land grant attested in the entire Emar corpus (Cohen, Viano 2016: 66). All these texts share a common theme: royal authority manifests itself primarily in contexts where it is necessary to reward citizens for significant services. Thus, the monarchy derives its legitimacy from its role as a recompenser.

The Emar corpus also includes an intriguing bilingual composition in Sumerian and Akkadian that invokes the blessings of gods and natural forces upon the king (Arnaud 1987a: 371–374; Dietrich 1998). A copy of this same text was also found at Ugarit. Although many of its images and expressions are derived from Mesopotamian sources, other elements lack exact parallels in that tradition. For instance, scholars have noted a certain similarity between the composition's opening line, *buluḫ bēli* ("Live, my lord!"), and the acclamation addressed to King Solomon after his coronation ("Long live King Solomon!"; 1 Kings 1: 39). Furthermore, the text primarily emphasizes abstract divine blessings, a feature that distinguishes it from Mesopotamian parallels—where concrete gifts such as a throne, crown, or scepter are prominently highlighted—and aligns it more closely with the list of gifts in Psalm 71 (Dietrich 1998: 196). Be that as it may, this composition provides supplementary evidence for a distinct concept of kingship at Emar, one that was not wholly imported from Mesopotamia but was also influenced by Syro-Palestinian traditions.

A large number of legal texts have been found at Emar, yet the king is conspicuously absent in the role of judge or arbiter (Fleming 1992: 64). In instances where a case is designated to be heard "before the king", it is unclear whether this refers to the king of Emar or the king of Carchemish. The rulers of Carchemish acted as representatives

of the Hittite imperial power in Syria during the 13th century BC and, in this capacity, exerted significant control over Emar's internal affairs, particularly in the legal sphere. There are even documented cases of Emarites appealing directly to the imperial court at Hattusa.

Alongside the kings of Carchemish and the Great King of Hatti, legal disputes involving Emarites were also adjudicated by officials of the Hittite administration — specifically, the “sons of the king” (DUMU. LUGAL) and “overseers of the land” (UGULA KALAM.MA). Furthermore, legal cases were judged by the elders of Emar and those of neighboring cities (Fleming 1992: 64–65).

In summary, it is clear that the kings of Emar had to share power with other institutions. Foremost among these was a collective body designated in the sources as “Ninurta and the elders” or “Ninurta and the city” (Adamthwaite 2001: 189–190; Viano 2010: 145–146). The cuneiform sequence NIN.URTA refers to the city's patron god, though its precise reading remains a matter of scholarly debate. While some researchers have interpreted “Ninurta” and “the elders / the city” as two distinct entities — one religious, the other civil (Bunnens 1989: 27, 29–30) — the prevailing view is that both terms referred to a single corporate body representing the city's urban authorities (Yamada 1994: 59).

This institution operated independently from the palace and possessed its own seal, the so-called “seal of Ninurta”. Unlike the dynastic seal of the kings, it was executed in the Old Babylonian style and bore the legend: *Rab-ša-dadi, mār^dDagan, šar (= LUGAL) dadmī, kāšid zāwānē*, i.e. “Rab-ša-dadi, son of the god Dagan, king of the inhabited world, conqueror of enemies” (Beyer 2001: 206). The Ninurta seal was impressed on all land sale contracts where “Ninurta and the elders” were a contracting party. In transactions where a king or prince acted as a witness to a land sale conducted by the elders and Ninurta, both the dynastic and the Ninurta seals were used. Breach of contract incurred a penalty payable to “Ninurta and the city”, and the very ability of this body to sell land plots attests to its control over urban property.

An intriguing aspect of the Emarite institution of elders is its close connection with the city god and, evidently, its temple, which possessed its own seal. Such a connection is not attested in other Syro-Palestinian states of the Late Bronze Age. This distinctive feature appears to be unique to the Middle Euphrates region, representing a special socio-cultural heritage of the area (Yamada 1994: 62).

It is also worth mentioning that, according to the document GS-Kutscher 6, the hostages — four princesses — are described as hostages of both *the city* and *its lord*. The city also played an active role in suppressing the revolt against King Zu-Aštarti. Furthermore, the elders

are documented as interacting directly with the Hittite administration on city governance matters. Significantly, no documents attest to joint actions between the king of Emar and Hittite officials; the Emarite kings are conspicuously absent from texts where Hittite officials are active.

In addition to the elders and the city assembly, judicial power was also vested in the “great ones” (*rabûtu*), though much less is known about this group (Adamthwaite 2001: 191; Démare-Lafont 2012: 130). They are recorded as holding court sessions alongside representatives of the Hittite administration.

Another important institution was the body of “brothers” (LÚ.MEŠ *aḥ-ḫi-a / aḥḫū*). They were present at the conclusion of private transactions and the signing of deeds pertaining to land estates. Secondary literature suggests they functioned as private adjudicators and oversaw the transfer of property. In Emar, however, the “brothers” remained a non-public institution. This stands in contrast to other Middle Euphrates polities, where they assumed public functions, as evidenced by several facts: they possessed their own seal, employed a herald (as seen in Ekalte), and were headed by a “chief of the brothers,” indicating an internal hierarchy within the body (as attested in Azu) (Démare-Lafont 2012: 137–140).

Finally, the office of *ḫazannu* (‘mayor’) held a significant place in the political systems of the Middle Euphrates cities (Viano 2018). Some scholars have suggested that there was no monarchy in the politically dependent centers of Ekalte and Azu (Mayer 2001: 48)⁶, and that Emar’s political will was communicated to the local population through these mayors. While this interpretation is likely incorrect, the mayors of these centers were undoubtedly important figures, as evidenced by their role as eponymous officials.

The *ḫazannus* are mentioned in the Emar texts exclusively as witnesses listed at the end of legal documents. In total, they appear in 17 texts (nine dating to the period of the first dynasty and eight to the second), with the mentions referring to nine individuals. In each instance, the *ḫazannu* holds the final position in the witness list, directly before the scribe. This placement suggests that a key function of the *ḫazannu* was to oversee transactions involving land estates that belonged to or were associated with urban institutions. Notably, the *ḫazannu* in Emar was not a representative of the royal family (Viano 2018: 50).

⁶W. Mayer’s argument for the absence of monarchy pertains specifically to Ekalte; however, the lack of any mention of a king in the texts from Azu (Tell Hadidi) (Torrecilla 2019: 39) can similarly be taken as an argument for its absence in that city as well.

The office persisted throughout the history of Late Bronze Age Emar, although it is mentioned less frequently in later texts. The *ḫazannu* was responsible for representing the city externally and presiding over litigations involving foreigners. Only one *ḫazannu* could hold the office at a time, indicating it was not a collective body. A single *ḫazannu* could serve across multiple royal reigns, meaning he was not required to resign upon a change of ruler, though he may have needed reappointment. In many respects, it was a mediatory role, facilitating cooperation between the king and collective bodies such as the elders.

With the arrival of the Hittites, the office gradually died out. The new overlords chose other institutions through which to interact with the city, and with the eventual abolition of the local monarchy, the office of *ḫazannu* likely lost its relevance entirely (Viano 2018: 54).

Finally, the special – and limited – nature of royal power in Emar is further evidenced by the crown's lack of substantial economic resources, which precluded the pursuit of an autonomous policy (cf. Fleming 1992: 67–68). As previously noted, only a single royal land grant is attested in the entire Emar corpus, whereas dozens are known from contemporaneous Ugarit. The palace was not a major economic institution; it possessed neither vast agricultural estates nor control over a large dependent workforce. An *ilku* duty-system did exist at Emar, but its scope was limited and its administration was linked to the Hittite overlords (Adamthwaite 2001: 87–91; Yamada 2006a: 232–233). Furthermore, Emar lacked a powerful temple sector based on latifundia, as was characteristic of Southern Mesopotamia. Instead, the subsistence of Emarite temples was secured through private and communal donations (Arnaud 1980: 253).

The restricted nature of royal power was not a unique feature of Emar but characterized many urban centers in the Middle Euphrates valley during the latter half of the second millennium BC. For example, in Ekalte, whose archives date to the 14th century BC, a city council composed of elders played a central role. As at Emar, this council was closely linked to the temple of the city god, Ba'alaka. The kings of Ekalte neither controlled this council nor were members of it (Torrecilla 2014: 41).

Scholars have adopted different approaches to explain the distinct character of the Middle Euphrates states. The first can be termed the socio-cultural model. This framework posits that the institutions of Emar and other cities in the region originated from the cultural and economic way of life of the population at an earlier stage of its development. Reconstructions of this previous stage vary. For some scholars, such as D. Arnaud and H. Klengel, the largely collective style of urban governance is a heritage from the pastoralist ancestors of the Emarites,

who roamed the steppes adjacent to the Euphrates valley. Their society was characterized by a clan system with a strong emphasis on solidarity and equality. Monarchy, by contrast, is seen as a later phenomenon that did not organically emerge within Emarite society but was introduced under foreign influence or even imposed by direct intervention.

This viewpoint is challenged by other scholars who interpret the data from the Emar archives in conjunction with sources from the third and first half of the second millennium BC. They argue that the population of Late Bronze Age Emar were the direct descendants of urban inhabitants from previous eras, who maintained the political traditions of their ancestors. According to this perspective, there is evidence for direct institutional continuity throughout the entire millennium of the region's documented history, as attested in the written sources. Collective bodies of power, alongside a weak monarchy, are thus viewed as an original feature of the wider Syrian region, permanently embedded in its urban culture since the time of the Ebla archives.

Another approach can be characterized as socio-economic. It originates largely from the works of I.M. Diakonoff in the 1960s on the communal and state sectors in Western Asia during antiquity (D'yakonov 1968, 1968a). Building on these publications, a typology of ancient societies was formulated towards the end of the 1970s. According to this model, the developmental trajectory of a given society within the Near Eastern *oikumene* was influenced primarily by its natural and economic conditions (D'yakonov, Yakobson 1982).

The influence of alluvial plains was considered particularly significant, as they enabled the development of intensive, irrigation-based agriculture. This economic type, however, demanded substantial organizational efforts, leading to the emergence of a stratum of professional managers. To sustain this early bureaucracy, society allocated a portion of its resources, laying the foundation for the state sector. In the states that emerged on alluvial plains, this sector eventually became predominant; in some cases, such as Egypt, it almost entirely absorbed the communal sector. Diakonoff termed these two variants (Mesopotamia and Egypt) the first and second ways of development in early antiquity (third and second millennia BC), both characterized by the exclusive role of the state in all spheres of life.

On the periphery of these river civilizations, in territories less suited to irrigation agriculture, a different correlation between the two socio-economic sectors emerged. The state did not assume major economic functions, which allowed communal and state structures to maintain a certain equilibrium, with one or the other prevailing depending on local conditions and traditions. This constituted the so-called

third way of development, typical of Upper Mesopotamia, the Syro-Palestinian region, Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Armenian Highlands. The interaction of these socio-economic sectors also defined a society's ideology and political system. For states of the third way, this meant greater involvement of collective bodies in administration and a reduced role for royal power. While I.M. Diakonoff did not explicitly include the Middle Euphrates valley in his typological scheme, it is clear from the general description of the third way that its cities should be classified within this group of ancient states.

Subsequent scholars further developed Diakonoff's approach by applying it to the Syro-Palestinian region. Particularly noteworthy are the numerous articles and three English-language monographs by M.L. Heltzer (Heltzer 1976, 1978, 1982). In Western historiography, this approach is associated with the work of M. Liverani and C. Zaccagnini, where it is known as the "two-sector model" (e.g., Liverani 1975; Zaccagnini 1989). This model conceptualizes social dynamics as being fundamentally shaped by the interaction between a village sector — represented by free peasantry — and an urban-palatial sector, which was based on the labor of dependent royal workers exploited by state officials.

Within Diakonoff's typology, Ugarit, Emar, and a number of other Syro-Palestinian polities would be classified under the same socio-economic type. However, the significant differences observed between them have compelled scholars working within the two-sector model to incorporate explanations from the socio-cultural approach. For instance, when comparing the political institutions of Ugarit and Emar, M. Heltzer attributed the underdeveloped monarchy in Emar to the enduring heritage of a nomadic past, interpreting this trait as a marker of societal archaism (Heltzer 2001).

The problem with the two-sector model is not merely its overly general classification, which pays insufficient attention to the local specifics of individual polities. In the case of Emar, several key elements fundamental to the model are missing. As previously discussed, the sources lack any reference to a developed palatial sector. Furthermore, a kind of void appears on the opposite side of society: the community, as an economic institution, exerted only very limited influence, if any, on the lives of the Emarites.

Scholars note that property was predominantly private and individual in character. In only about 5% of documented cases are land plots owned by a group designated as "the sons of PN". Such groups appear as sellers of land on three occasions, but never as buyers (Viano 2010: 133). The "brothers" as a controlling body are involved only in contracts where the parties are relatives; their presence in land deals between

non-relatives is not attested. The sale of land to individuals outside the family was unrestricted; the community imposed no limitations, and no sanction from the “brothers” was required. The small nuclear family, averaging about five members, was the predominant social unit (ibid.: 141–142). It is also likely that there were no large private or public landed estates.

One of the objectives of M. Liverani’s two-sector model was to explain the collapse of Late Bronze Age civilization in the Syro-Palestinian region. Liverani argued that the royal policy of extensive land grants eroded the communal sector, depriving many community members of their hereditary land shares. This, in turn, forced them into debt bondage, transforming them into royal clients (Liverani 1975: 159–164). Simultaneously, widespread privatization was occurring within the state sector. This over-exploitation of the communal sector triggered a social crisis, compounded by migrations and natural disasters.

However, this scenario does not fit the case of Emar, which also did not survive the Late Bronze Age collapse. As recent studies show, debt slavery in Emar was not linked to the mass impoverishment of ordinary community members, but rather to the commercial activities of a specific social stratum that operated on credit (Viano 2023: 15–16). There is no evidence of a major social catastrophe in Emar on the eve of its destruction. While the population undoubtedly faced hardships such as crop failures and military conflicts, nothing indicates that these events were extraordinary in scale or nature.

In conclusion, it is evident that the distinctive character of the Middle Euphrates region in the Late Bronze Age is far from being fully explained by current historical research. Each of the approaches discussed accounts for only a portion of the facts and processes reflected in the sources. It is also worth noting that our archives provide limited illumination of the period of Mittanian supremacy over Emar. It is possible that many key developments of the 15th–14th centuries BC remain concealed, and future discoveries may well provide the evidence needed to refine our reconstructions and deepen our understanding of the political logic governing the Middle Euphrates polities.

Nevertheless, this corpus of evidence, though insufficiently known outside a narrow circle of specialists, deserves broader attention. It offers a non-standard perspective on a sophisticated urban culture and robust collective institutions during a historical period traditionally associated in the scholarly imagination with large, bureaucratic military monarchies. The example of the Middle Euphrates valley vividly demonstrates the remarkable diversity of the Near Eastern political landscape in this era.

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ВЛАСТЬ В ЭМАРЕ ЭПОХИ БРОНЗЫ: ОБЗОР СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЙ⁷

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В статье рассматриваются особенности политической организации государств бронзового века в долине Среднего Евфрата, при этом основное внимание уделено древнему Эмару (совр. Телль-Мескене). Анализируется научная дискуссия об уникальной, нелинейной политической эволюции этого города. Источники III тыс. до н.э. свидетельствуют о правителях, носящих титул EN («господин», «владыка»), однако тексты XVIII в. до н.э. не содержат упоминаний о царской власти, которая в тот период принадлежала коллективным органам (*tahtatum*, очевидно, собрание старейшин).

Царская власть вновь появляется в позднем бронзовом веке (XIV–XIII вв. до н.э.), но её полномочия были существенно ограничены другими институтами. Эта траектория развития порождает научные споры. Одни учёные полагают, что правители-эны III тыс. до н.э. были лишь председателями городского совета, а более поздняя монархия стала продуктом внешнего влияния. Альтернативная гипотеза предполагает, что какая-то форма личной власти была постоянным элементом системы, а её кажущееся отсутствие объясняется жанровыми особенностями и лакунами наших фрагментарных источников. Согласно преобладающему мнению, власть в Эмаре была распределена между различными институтами и никогда не являлась абсолютной.

Трактовки этой уникальной модели разнятся. Один подход связывает её с полукочевым населением, сохранявшим прочные родовые структуры и сопротивлявшимся концентрации власти. Другой подчёркивает связь с более древними городскими традициями Сирии III тыс. до н.э. Социально-экономические модели объясняют её особым сочетанием двух основных общественно-экономических секторов: дворцово-царского и общинного.

Тем не менее ни социокультурный, ни социально-экономический подходы пока не дают полного объяснения. Ключевой период между XVIII и XIV вв. до н.э. остаётся наименее изученным в истории средне-евфратского региона. Будущие эпиграфические открытия, относящиеся к этому «тёмному веку», необходимы для целостного понимания сложной политической эволюции Эмара.

Ключевые слова: древний Ближний Восток, бронзовый век, Средний Евфрат, Эмар, политическая организация, царская власть, городские органы власти, община.

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