

RESUMEN

“Las cartas de Mari y el profetismo bíblico: Similitudes y diferencias – Parte II”— Este artículo es la segunda parte de un estudio de dos partes. En la primera parte, se desarrolló la descripción del profetismo bíblico, su naturaleza y características, con el fin de comprender los conceptos básicos de los fenómenos proféticos. Se describió la terminología utilizada por las Escrituras para descubrir la naturaleza de los profetas bíblicos. En este segundo artículo, se sigue el mismo procedimiento con las cartas de Mari y se ofrece una comparación entre estos dos registros para establecer su relación, similitudes y diferencias. Como resultado de esta evaluación, se establece que aunque existen algunas similitudes entre estos dos grupos, existen diferencias sustanciales. El profetismo bíblico se considera único y no encuentra su origen en ningún otro fenómeno antiguo sino en Dios mismo.

Palabras clave: profetas, cartas de Mari, profetismo bíblico, Antiguo Cercano Oriente

ABSTRACT

“Mari Letters and Biblical Prophetism: Similarities and Differences— Part II”— This article is part two of a two-part paper. In the first part, the description of biblical prophetism, its nature, and features, were developed in order to understand the basics of the prophetic phenomena. The terminology used by the Scriptures was described in order to find out the nature of the biblical prophets. In this second article, the same is done with Mari letters and a comparison is offered between these two records in order to establish their relationship, similarities, and differences. As the result of this assessment, it is established that though there are some similarities between these two groups, there are substantial differences. Biblical prophetism is considered unique and does not find its origin in any other ancient phenomenon but in God himself.

Keywords: prophets, Mari letters, biblical prophetism, ancient Near East

MARI LETTERS AND BIBLICAL PROPHECY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES—PART II

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Introduction

In the first part of this study, it was described the prophetic phenomenon as it is shown in the Bible itself, highlighting the nature and characteristics of a biblical prophet. Here the same work is done but based on Mari letters in order to establish the nature and characteristics of the so-called prophetic movement or phenomenon in Mesopotamia.

Prophetism in Mari

Mari was an ancient city in Mesopotamia. It is located in Tell Hariri, near the Euphrates River, and fifteen miles north of the border between Syria and Iraq.¹ The ancient Mari “was one of the principal centers of Mesopotamia during the third and early second millennia B.C.”² Its excavation began in 1933 with André Parrot as the chief of the expedition until 1970.³ One of the most important discoveries was the royal palace in Mari and the temples of Dagan, Shamash, Ninhur-sag, Ishtar, Ishtarar, and Ninni-Zaza.⁴

In the royal palace at Mari, more than 20,000 tablets written in cuneiform were found and around 3,000 of those documents have been published.⁵ Most of the published documents are part the so-

1. Abraham Malamat, “Mari,” *BA* 34, no. 1 (1971): 2.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 3. See Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Writings from the Ancient World*, ed. Peter Machinist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 13.

4. Malamat, “Mari,” 3, 5.

5. *Ibid.*, 7. However, according to Huffmon, only 2,800 documents were published. See Herbert B. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” *BA* 31, no. 4 (1968): 105.

called *Archives Royales de Mari* (ARM) and it is possible to classify the documents as “political-diplomatic archives (ARM I-IV and XIII),” the “women’s correspondence (ARM X),” the economic and administrative archives (ARM VII, IX, XI, and XII), legal texts (ARM VIII), and a small corpus of religious documents.⁶

The following section deals with 50 letters, which have been classified as prophetic oracles.⁷ The description of these letters is focused on two main topics: the terminology used to talk about the *prophet*,⁸ and the purpose of the letter, which includes the addressee, the deity involved in the *prophetic* manifestation, and the given message.

Akkadian Terminology for Mari’s *Prophets*

Mari letters attest that the manifestation of this *prophetic* activity occurred many times. In that way, there are some terms used to refer to the appearance of *prophets* and their activities.

The first word in these records is *āpilû* and its grammatical variations. It is attested in 13 letters (1-5, 9, 14, 18, 19, 29, 34, 47, 48).⁹ This word means “answerer”¹⁰ or “one who answers”¹¹ and is in connection with a god and cultic environment.¹² Some *āpilû* are identified by name as the case of Abiya (2), Iši-aḫū (5), Lupaḫum (9), Innibana (14), Qišti-Diritim (18) and Atamrum (48). In the other cases, there are no

6. Malamat, “Mari,” 8.

7. The following analysis has been carried out based on the work of Martti Nissinen and his study of the prophecy and prophets in the ANE. See Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 13-78.

8. In this section, *prophet(s)* are those who have been classified by the documents of Mari and Nineveh as human beings with any kind of communication with gods. This term does not refer to the OT prophets. Any time that the term appears in *italics* it refers to non-biblical records; the same for the word *prophetic*.

9. In this document, when a number is given between parentheses and is related to a specific letter of Mari or Niniveh, it represents the number according to the book by Nissinen. In this section, there are 50 letters and they can be found in Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 13-78.

10. Yoshitaka Kobayashi, *The Analytical Babylo-Assyrian Dictionary* (n.p.: 19--), s.v. “*āpilû*.”

11. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” 105.

12. *Ibid.*

names, but the *āpilū* can be identified as male or female. In every case, though, each person is a follower of a god. In some cases, the text says “*prophet of*” followed by the name of the deity. Such a description is found in the case of the *prophets* of Adad (1, 2), Šamaš (4, 48), Dagan (9, 19), Diritum (18), Ninḥursag (29) and Marduk (47). In other cases, the term *prophet* is only related to a deity, such as Dagan (3, 34) or Ḫiṣamitum (5).

The second word that appears in Mari letters is the noun *muḥḥū* and its variants. It appears in 13 documents (10-12, 16, 25, 30-33,¹³ 42, 46, 49, 50). This word means “ecstatic”¹⁴ and, as with the previous word, it is connected with a cultic function.¹⁵ In contrast with the *āpilū*, there are only two cases with a proper noun; one *muḥḥūtum*, a female, is identified by the name Ḫubatum (10), and the other is identified as Irra-gamil (33). The others are basically identified as *muḥḥū*. In some letters, it is possible to identify directly who are their gods thanks to the use of the phrase “*prophet(s) of*” in connection with Dagan (16, 30, 31, 46), Amu (49), Adad (50) and Nergal (33); others are connected with a deity such as Dagan (25), Dagan and Yakrub-El (32) and Annunitum (42).

There is a third word, *assinnu*, that occurs 3 times (7, 22, 23). This expression refers to a “male cultic prostitute”¹⁶ with a cultic role, even a part of the personnel.¹⁷ In all the cases the character is identified by his name, one is Šelebum (7, 8, 23) and the other is I[li-ḫa]znaya (22). In both cases, they are related to the temple of Annunitum.

The fourth Akkadian word used to refer to any *prophetic* activity is *qammatum* (7, 9, 13). These were women who had a special religious role based on the term used to talk about them, and it is

13. In letter 33, the word *muḥḥū* does not appear, but in another document the *prophet* mentioned there appears labeled as such. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 58.

14. Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitzs, 2000), s.v. “*maḥḥū(m)*.”

15. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” 112.

16. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*as-sinnu(m)*.”

17. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” 111.

suggested that they were “priestesses” at that time.¹⁸ Jean-Marie Durand suggests that they were *prophetesses*.¹⁹

Finally, there is only one use of the word *nabî* (26) and a special and unique mention of the term *šangû* (43). The last term is translated as “priest” or “temple manager.”²⁰ The name of the person here referred to is Iddin-ili. Now, the word *nabî* is understood as someone “called, [an] authorized person”²¹ but in Old Akkadian, this word means “nominate.”²² This nomination could be done by a deity or a king. In that way, this word implies to “call someone (to something).”²³ In letter 26, there is a group of *prophets* that are summoned by a royal official.

As a summary, it is possible to find four main words, *āpilû*, *muḫḫû*, *assinnu*, and *qammatum*. These words are translated as *prophet*, in the different grammatical variants by Nissinen in every case except for *assinnu* and *qammatum*. There is the unique use of the words *nabî* and *šangû* translated as *prophet* and priest respectively. In all these cases, these characters have a special relation to the gods of Mari.

Main Features of Mari’s *Prophets*

In order to understand the work of these *prophets*, it is important to see the function of these personages. The first thing that should be noticed is the importance of the receiver of the letters. Most of these records have Zimri-Lim as addressee,²⁴ and only five letters are not

18. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*qammatum*.”

19. Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives Epistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), 396, quoted in Herbert B. Huffmon, “Prophecy,” *ABD*, 5:479.

20. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*šangû(m)*.”

21. *Ibid.*, s.v. “*nabû(m) I.*”

22. *Ibid.*, s.v. “*nabû(m) II.*”

23. *Ibid.*

24. Zimri-Lim reigned in Mari between 1775 and 1761 BC. He called himself the “King of Mari” but he was named by contemporaries as “son of Yahdun-Lim,” referring to the former king of the city. However, his official title was “son of Yahdun-Lim, king of Mari and the land of Hana” while his religious titles were “regent

directed to him. One of them was sent to Yasmaḥ-Addu²⁵ (3), another to Dariš-libur,²⁶ (33), one to Addu-Duri²⁷ (45), and there is a report without addressee (36). The fifth letter (34) does not have an addressee because the beginning of the letter is destroyed, but in comparison to letter 3, some parallels suggest the same addressee.²⁸

This phenomenon shows that the function of the *prophets* in Mari was strongly connected with the royalty and all the messages were personal. There are no letters with a collective addressee, even though there is a message that involves the community and the oracle was given in front of the elders, not in private (16). That fact implies that the role of these characters (*prophets*) was directed to a specific target, even with a proper noun. Only one letter is a report, the *Report of Ayala* (36); however, the message is sent to a king or someone important since the final clause of the letter suggests it when it states that the lord (*bēlī*) inquire about the issue. This word in Akkadian refers to a king or a superior.²⁹

Second, it is known that it is not the *prophet* but rather a messenger who comes from the *prophet* to the king or the final addressee. This is

of Dagan,” called by gods as “guardian of Mari,” “regent of Dagan and Addu,” and other different titles. His father was Hadni-[Addu] and his mother Addu-Duri. He was king of Mari when the city was conquered by Hamurabi, king of Babylon. For further information see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, xvi; Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 569-570.

25. Yasmaḥ-Addu was predecessor of Zimri-Lim as king of Mari between 1793 and 1775 BC. His brother, Išme-Dagan, was designated as king of Ekallatum by his father Šamši-Adad I, king of the Assyrian power during 1835/30 and 1777 BC. Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari*, 566.

26. According to Mari records, he was an official of Zimri-Lim. It seems that he was very close to the king because he was concerned with the wardrobe of the king. *Ibid.*, 534.

27. Mother of Zimri-Lim who relays dreams to the king and on an occasion, she gave orders when the king was absent. *Ibid.*, 526.

28. Both are talking about ships, the same recipient of the oracle, Binum, and the same place in Tuttul where the temple is located. See Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 23, 58.

29. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*bēlum*.”

evident because in many of these records, the messenger, entitled as “your servant” (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9-12, 16-26, 28, 30-32, 37-42, 44-50), is different from the *prophet*; and when this word is not in the text, the messenger calls the addressee as my lord (*bēlī*).

Moreover, it is clear that the *prophet* is not the messenger because, in most of these letters, the *prophet* sends something to the king/addressee. Then, the royal messenger gives it to the king/addressee. The Mari letters show that some hair and a piece of the garment of the *prophet* are attached to the letter (2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 36, 38, 39, 42).³⁰ It serves as the signature that the message surely comes from the *prophet*.

Third, it is evident from the letters that the messages given come from a deity. In many cases the grammatical construction “thus says” followed by a proper noun—a deity—is used: “Thus says Adad” (2), “Thus says Šamaš” (4), “Thus says [Ea]” (18), “Thus says Annunium” (23), “Thus says Dag[an]” (34), “Thus says God” (39), or an equivalent expression such as “Ḫanat says” (6) and “Dagan said” (6). In other cases, the text says that the deity demands something from the king/addressee: “Adad... demands [from u]s” (1).

On some occasions, the deity talked to the *prophet*. It is seen in the expressions “Dagan... spoke to me” (38), “Dagan spoke to me” (37) or when the *prophet* said, “Dagan has sen[t me]” (30). All these expressions help to comprehend that these *prophets* had a message from a deity to be delivered.

Fourth, the manner of the communication of the divine message from the deity to the *prophet* is described in some cases by the term “oracles,” a translation of the Akkadian *têrtum* that means “directive of gods, omen, oracle,”³¹ which “denotes the divine presence in the process of divine-human communication mediated by the diviner, whether a haruspex or a prophet.”³² This kind of transmission of the message to

30. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 16.

31. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*têrtu(m)*.”

32. “The word *têrtum* is used for divine messages, in association with both inductive divination (extispicy) and prophecy.” Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 18.

the *prophet* is seen in various letters without differentiation of the term used to designate the *prophet*, be it an *āpilû* (1, 14, 34), a *muḥḥû* (10, 12, 16), an *assinnu* (7), a *qammatum* (7) or even a *nabî* (26); in every case, the word *têrtum* is related to the *prophetic* activity.

In other cases, dreams are the way to deliver the message to the *prophet*. This mode of communication is evident in some letters of Mari which use the word *šuttam*. Many letters describe that phenomenon such as a woman who receives a dream (35), Ayala, another woman who receives a dream, (36), Malik-Dagan, a man from Sakka to whom Dagan speaks in his dream (38), and an unknown character who has a dream about Belet-ekallim (42). In another case the dream must be checked by divinatory practices (44), and it appears that Belet-ekallim, a deity, sent a message by a dream (45). It is important to say that some visions are attested to in Mari letters. *Kakka-līdi*, a woman has a vision (*īmur*)³³ in the temple of *Itūr-Mēr*.

Another means of communication is evident when the *prophet* comes into trance. This is seen in the case of Irra-gamil, who goes into trance—[*imma*]ḥēm (33)—, when Šelebum goes into trance—*immaḥḥu* (23)—, and in the case of a servant girl of Dagan-Malik who also goes into trance—*immaḥḥima* (24). In all these cases, the trance should be understood as a manifestation of divine power upon the *prophet*.³⁴ There is a special mention of a specific Akkadian word, *egerrûm*, which means “ominous utterance;”³⁵ this word refers to a sound considered as portentous by the hearer.³⁶

Finally, one more feature in the Mari letters is the content of the message given by all of these *prophets*. As was noted above, the messages given were very personal and there is no reference, at least in

33. The word *īmur* is a derivation of the word *imru* that means “observation” and this one a derivation of *amarû* that means “to see.” Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*imru*,” “*amarû*.”

34. The idea of a trance of ecstasy or simply trance involves is the possession of the *prophet* and an “abnormal state of consciousness.” Helmer Ringgren, “Ecstasy,” *ABD*, 2:280.

35. Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. “*egerrû*.”

36. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 39.

these letters, to a moral issue. The only mention of a good behavior is evident in only one letter (16) where the order to not act violently is given but no details are explained. Some letters are related to a building of a specific place like a temple to Dagan (3), the donation or tax for two doors of a temple (25), the erection of a commemorative monument, maybe a religious one because it is told that the sacrifice was not made (28), the building of a city gate with the promise of success (32), and the divine order to not rebuild a house (39).

There is a second group of messages with a military concern. Some oracles suggest to the king that he should protect himself and advise him to consult for an oracle before acting (7, 23, 42, 43). In other cases, a message of victory against the enemies is given (2, 4, 17, 18-22, 24, 26, 41), and to not make a treaty with other people (9).

Another group of messages have a specific religious content. These messages require from the king to show his commitment to the deity through sacrifices (1, 8, 30), surrender life and existence to gods (2), and collect some taxes for the building of two gates for a god's temple (25). It is important to notice here that many of these manifestations were the result of a sacrifice, which implies that this phenomenon occurs in the temple of a specific god (6, 12, 29, 38, 42).

Regarding the religious connection with the *prophetic* oracles in Mari letters, there is some relation to the inductive method of divination. As noted in letter 36, the Report of Ayala, the *prophet* has a dream but it has to be confirmed by bird divination. In the case of letter 37, the woman of the dream is surprised because "nobody had performed an incubation ritual on" her. By the testimony of another letter written in cuneiform, the incubation ritual appears and, according to some scholars, it refers to a "sexual behavior,"³⁷ which means an inductive way to provoke divine manifestation.

37. Ibid., 191.

Similarities and Differences between the Mari Letters and Old Testament Prophetism

In this section, the purpose is to establish the parallel between these two models of prophetism, the one of the OT and the one of Mari letters. For that purpose, this section is divided into two parts; the first one deals with the similarities and the second with the differences. The section finishes with the conclusions of this study.

Similarities

As noted by many scholars, there are some similitudes between the prophetic manifestations of the OT and those of ANE texts. After the analysis of 50 Mari letters, the coincidences between the two ancient records are depicted in the following paragraphs.

First, there is a variety of terms used to refer to a prophet in the OT and Mari letters. There are at least three Hebrew words that are connected with the prophet directly, רֹאֵה, נָחַז, נְבִיא, which are synonyms, and there is a special phrase, “the man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים), depicting the nature of the labor of the OT prophet.

In the Mari letters, it is possible to recognize the same phenomenon; there are in these letters at least four terms connected with *prophets*: *āpilû*, *muhḫû*, *assinnu* and *nabî*. All of them are related in some way but it appears that each one had a specific cultic function in that culture. Concerning the word *qammatum*, the issue is not completely clear. On the other hand, the word *šangû* means “priest,” but there is one occurrence that gives the idea of *prophetic* activity.

Second, there is at least one word with a basic meaning, which is almost the same in the OT and Mari letters. In the biblical text the Hebrew word נְבִיא is found, while in Mari letters the equivalent word *nabî* is also found. It is not possible to say that the Akkadian word was the original root for the Hebrew one, but the meaning is similar. The Hebrew word means one who is called to *utter* or *communicate* a specific message and the Akkadian root means called or authorized person and implies calling someone to do something.

Third, it is evident that in both cases, the prophets serve deities. In the Hebrew text appears the phrase “man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים),

which denotes the relationship between the OT prophets with a deity, יהוה. Such connection is portrayed by the genitive relation between these two words, אֱלֹהִים and אִישׁ. In the same way, in Mari letters, it is attested many times that the *prophets* (*āpilû* or *muhhû*) are related in a genitive relation, not necessarily of possession but instrumental,³⁸ with deities such as Adad, Šamaš, Dagan, Diritum, Ninḫursag, Marduk, Ḫišamitum, Amu, Nergal, Yakrub-El, or Annunitum.

Fourth, there is another similarity between these two records: the divine communication. In other words, there is a reception of a celestial message. The OT texts suggest that the prophet receives information as a revelation of God's will. On the other side, Mari documents consider that the message received comes from the deity.

Fifth, following the previous thought, in both cases, it is possible to consider the idea of an inspired message. Both the OT and Mari letters claim that the message given is inspired because it comes from God/a god.

Sixth, the method of giving the message from the deity to the prophet is almost the same. In OT literature, a prophet receives the celestial message by dreams (חֲלוֹם), visions (חֲזוֹן or מְרָאָה), and by the word of God (דְּבַר). In Mari texts that method is described as received by dreams (*šuttam*), visions (*īmur*), and the voice of the god which is known as "ominous utterance" (*egerrūm*), which is heard by the *prophet*.

Seventh, the prophet has personal messages to give; in the case of Mari records, all the messages have a specific and personal addressee. In every case, it is the king or another ruler. In the OT record, the messages are sent in some cases to specific persons, as in the case of David (2 Sam 12:1) and Josiah (2 Kgs 22:18-20).

Eighth, Mari documents present messages related to the military realm or in some cases describe the advice to make a sacrifice to a

38. This is suggested because in a relation of possession with a deity, according to the Bible, the prophet should belong only to one God and be loyal to this one, while in the Canaanite theology it is possible to serve many gods at the same time. But that said, there are no examples found in Mari texts of a *prophet* identified by proper name serving two different gods.

deity or make something for the gods such as build a temple, collect money for it, or even give one's existence to the deity. The OT prophets had messages about a military context, such as in the case of the conquest of the Promised Land (Josh 6; 8:1; 1 Chr 14:10), and some others related to religious life. Moreover, there is a big corpus related to the sacrificial system that was given by God Himself (Lev 1-7; 16). In other cases, God asks for donations for the building of His sanctuary (Exod 35:4-29) and even delivers through the prophet messages requiring commitment to God and His law (Amos 5:4; Deut 4:29; Jer 29:13; Deut 6:4-9).

Ninth, the prophetic activity is connected with the temple/sanctuary. In Mari letters it is evident that the divine oracles came while the *prophet* was in the temple in the presence of a god. This same situation is seen in some cases of the OT. Samuel received a vision while sleeping in the temple of God (1 Sam 3:1-15), or in the place where a sacrifice was made (Gen 46:1-4). It should be noticed too that in Mari, the oracles are god's response to something requested by the *prophet*, while in the Bible some revelations are the result of a petition from the prophet (Dan 2:18; 9:20-23).

Differences

Now, it is time for dissimilarities. As noted in the previous part, there are similarities. But it is possible to trace some clear differences between these two ancient records.

First, there are indeed different words used to refer to a prophet. However, while in the Bible the terms used are synonymous, in the Akkadian texts there is no specific parallel between them. Some *āpilū* and *muḥḥū* serve Adad and Dagan. But there are no records where an *āpilū* serves Nergal or Annunitum, or a *muḥḥū* serves Diritum, Marduk or Šamaš. It is possible that these *prophets* had some differences between them and did not have the same level, position, or function.

Second, OT prophets and Mari letters *prophets* serve a deity. However, there is a contrast because while the OT prophets belong to a monotheistic religion, Mari *prophets* are part of a polytheistic religion serving different deities. This fact implies that OT prophets

serve the same God and the same purpose. On the other side, the fact of the existence of different deities in the Mesopotamian religion may produce conflicts between the interests of different gods. Therefore, the service of the *prophets* could be contradictory and/or opportunist because of the plurality of the gods.

Third, in both cases, there is a service to the deities, but it is not clear in Mari texts the origin of the *prophetic* ministry. According to the OT, the prophet receives a call to serve God. Then, the human being should decide to serve or not the Divinity as a prophet. In the case of Mari texts, there is no account of a calling by the deity to his/her personnel. Being that this call is very important in the biblical record, it stands out as a difference with the *prophets* in Mari documents.

Fourth, following the previous idea, both are in the service of a deity but in the case of the biblical record, this service is a spiritual work, guided by God's Spirit. In Mari documents, there is no mention of the spirit of the gods or something similar. On the contrary, it is common to see some actions by Mari *prophets* by which they can provoke the manifestation of the divine being.

Fifth, something that is not attested in Mari documents is the revelation of the god himself. Mari texts present some kind of revelations given by the deity as the will of the divinity, but there is no revelation of the character of the deity. In contrast, in the Bible there are many revelations regarding who God is and His character in order to make Himself known to the people (see Exod 3:14; Ezek 20:12; Exod 34: 6-7).

Sixth, the method of revelation in Mari letters differs from the one of the OT. According to the analyzed records, there is a manifestation of a trance when the *prophet* is in contact with the deity. This process is known as the *immahhu*. In that sort of communication, the *prophet* is possessed by a god, losing his/her consciousness. This fact is in contrast to the OT documents, where the prophet is taken by God to give him/her a revelation; the prophet is in complete consciousness, even if some physical phenomena appear. For that reason, the prophet is able to tell what happened during the vision to others (Dan 10:8).

Seventh, in Mari documents, there are no collective messages, since the addressee is always the king or ruler. By contrast, in the Bible, the receiver of the message was not only the king, but also the

whole nation of Israel (Isa 1:1) or even other nations (Jon 1:1).

Eighth, in order to make known the message given by the deity, the prophet in the biblical record is not only the recipient of the message, he is most of the times the messenger or proclaimer (Jon 1:1-2; 3:1-3). In contrast, the *prophets* of Mari are only the container of the message, and a royal messenger is needed to bring the message to the royal house.

Ninth, Mari letters do not give evidence about messages related to the moral life of the nation or even the king. There is only one letter where good behavior is required (16). This reference does not have any details that could help to understand the moral issue, only the order to not act violently. On the other hand, the message of OT prophets is strongly related to the moral life of the addressee, not only saying what God expects from His people, but rejecting their evil actions (Deut 12:28; 2 Sam 12; Mic 6:8; 2 Kgs 17:13).

Tenth, in Mari letters it is suggested that the prophetic manifestation is related in a direct way to the sacrifices. Moreover, it seems that the manifestation of a god is the result of a special sacrifice, as in the incubation ritual. However, the OT prophetic messages were not the result of a sacrifice in the temple, but a more spontaneous phenomenon coming from God (Exod 3; Ezek 1:1; Dan 7:1).

Eleventh, the suggestion made by some scholars about the presence of incubation rituals³⁹ in the OT needs some attention. It should be noted that in at least some of the suggested cases, neither Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-15) nor Israel (Gen 46:1-4) were looking for a specific prophetic manifestation from God. It came by God's will. For that reason, in the OT there are no incubation rituals among the prophets of God.

What we have in Mari is a mixture of some inductive methods of divination with non-inductive methods, if it is possible to make the difference in those texts. As previously presented, there are two

39. About the incubation ritual, it should be understood that its purpose is to provoke a divine manifestation. See Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "Ancient Views of Prophecy and Fulfillment: Mesopotamia and Asia Minor," *JETS* 30, no. 3 (1987): 257; Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 22, 23; Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 73.

mentions where the *prophets* in Mari records require an inductive method to receive any answer from their gods. In one of them the *prophet* suggests that the oracle given should be confirmed by bird divination while in the other the dreamer is surprised because “nobody had performed an incubation ritual on” her before the divine manifestation. This last document suggests the idea that an oracle from a god is given when an incubation ritual is done. In this case, a “sexual behavior” is possibly involved.

Conclusions

According to the comparison of prophetic manifestations between Mari texts and OT records, it is possible to affirm that there are some parallels between them. But this parallelism is only partial. The similarities found are only in the form but not in the essence of the prophetic phenomenon.

As seen in Mari documents, there are some connections with the biblical text. The words used to name the prophets present a plurality of terminology and, in both records, the basic meaning of a prophet is someone called by the deity to give a message. In that sense, they are servants of the divinity as the receptors of the celestial revelation. This revelation is received by dreams, visions, and the spoken word of the heavenly beings while in a place of worship. Concerning the message, it should be given to the specific addressee where military and religious affairs are described.

In contrast, based on a more specific and detailed analysis, there are strong differences between these two manifestations. Thus, the essence of these phenomena cannot be equated. The biblical record, unlike Mari records, has something that makes the biblical prophets unique concerning the nature of the biblical phenomenon.

In the biblical text of the OT, the different terms used to refer to prophets are synonyms and help to give a complete understanding of the OT prophets who serve the only true God and have the same level of importance and authority. For this reason, they have an exclusive service and loyalty to the same Divinity who guides them by His Holy Spirit. Regarding the given revelation, the OT shows that it is not only

information which is revealed but also a self-revelation of God where the consciousness of the prophet is preserved; the prophet can decide to follow God's requirements and accept the divine invitation to be his direct messenger. The message received by the prophet should be given personally to the addressee that God chooses, despite his/her social position or political status, whether an individual or a group, having a moral concern as its main objective and not only a military, kingly, or cultic motivation.

Finally, two main subjects mark a significant difference between the OT and Mari records. The first one is the nature of an inspired message. Even if it is true that both records claim an inspired nature, according to the biblical foundations, the only true and divinely inspired writings are the biblical texts. Then, the prophetic inspiration of the Bible has superiority over any other text, and as a consequence, the biblical prophetic movement is unique in that sense. Therefore, the inspired text of the Bible does not relate in nature to Mari texts because it does not accept any kind of incubation ritual to invoke God. On the contrary, God is the one who starts the process of communication with the human being. In this way, the OT prophetism is *theo-centric* and not *anthropo-centric*; therefore, biblical prophetism is not in its essence a sociological behavior, but a divine and theological manifestation.

The second feature of the biblical prophetism that clarifies the difference with Mari *prophets* is the character of its content. The OT prophets are interested basically in giving the message from God in order to provoke changes in the moral life. The right behavior toward God and human beings is intended by the prophet. In this way, the external forms are not the most important but the internal ones. Isaiah showed that, more than rituals in the sanctuary, God values the intentions of the heart. The same is shown by other prophets (Isa 1:11-20; Mic 6:6-8). This aspect is not evident in Mari records.

Therefore, the prophetism in the OT is a unique phenomenon by its nature and character, though it has some similarities in form or external features with Mari letters, as has been shown. For that reason, the OT prophets should not be seen as a copy of the ancient *prophetic* manifestations. The prophets of God are, on the contrary,

the starting point for comparison with other sorts of *prophetic* manifestations and the test model for the acceptance of new prophets (Joel 2:28). Its origins should not be traced to the *prophets* of ancient Mesopotamia, but to the true God himself, whose purpose is to communicate the Gospel, the plan of salvation.

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