CHAPTER 4

L'affaire d'Alahtum

Introduction

In this chapter, I consider a group of letters from Mari that concern the acquisition of a settlement named Alahtum by Mari’s king, Zimri-Lim (Durand 2002). These letters are of great comparative value to this study for more than the parallels offered by their subject matter. The fact that the Mari documentation is in epistolary form is especially useful because its discursive language differs from the laconic formulae of the legal and administrative texts from Alalah that have been our object of study so far. The substance of the Mari letters on Zimri-Lim’s acquisition of Alahtum allows us not only to confirm the conclusions that we have reached so far but also to clarify certain matters, such as the nature of a settlement’s pāṭum.

Before moving on to look at the letters concerning the acquisition of Alahtum in more detail, I must justify bringing them under scrutiny at all, given my stated desire to explore the ownership of settlements at Level VII Alalah as a local phenomenon (pp. 3–4). Are the differences in the historical context of the Alahtum letters—a king of Mari acquiring a settlement in Yamhad some half century or more before the Level VII transactions—potentially too great to illuminate in any meaningful way the local context in which the Alalah VII texts were produced? I believe that the contexts in which the two groups of texts were produced are similar enough to allow us to use the earlier to inform our understanding of the later for the following reasons:

First, the fact that the queen mother of Yamhad, Gašera, already owned part of Alahtum, as discussed below, reveals that Zimri-Lim’s acquisition of the settlement was not a practice restricted to heads of state but rather one that a broader cross-section of elites within Yamhad participated in—just as the Level VII texts document the situation at Level VII Alalah.

Second, the difference in time (perhaps around 50 years between l'affaire d'Alahtum and the beginning of Level VII and then perhaps even another century to the end of Level VII; see Appendix 1, especially pp. 201–08) is long enough that substantial changes in what it meant to acquire and exploit settlements could have occurred between Zimri-Lim’s acquisition of Alahtum and the Level VII documentation. However, the fact that the practice appears in

1 For parallels in the Mari texts for this (Yamnite?) practice, see Durand 1998: 518–19.
its fundamentals to have continued unchanged during the entire period of Level VII (see the discussion of the chronological distribution of texts concerning Murar and Emar in Chapter 3) decreases the likelihood that some radical change was introduced.

Third, the fact that the settlement acquired by Zimri-Lim, Alahtum, is very likely identical with the city of Alalah reduces the likelihood of differences due to environmental factors. We may never possess the smoking gun that will establish the identification of Alahtum with Alalah without doubt, but Durand (2002: 60–66) has marshaled an impressive array of evidence to demonstrate that Alahtum was a settlement that was located in the northwest of Yamhad in the same geographical region as the Late Bronze Age territorial kingdom of Alalah-Mukiš and was probably situated on a river. Thus, even if the settle-

An administrative text not among the Alahtum dossier, ARM 25 134, documents the sending of silver objects to Alahtum in the course of Zimri-Lim’s return from Ugarit (Villard 1986). From the toponyms occurring in the other entries in this text, it was written when Zimri-Lim was traveling in the region of Tunip, which is known from the Level IV treaty ALT 2 to have shared a border with the late Bronze Age kingdom of Alalah-Mukiš (Villard 1986: 398, Durand 2002: 65). Further, Durand (2002: 63) notes that one Alahtum letter mentions two smiths who fled to Qaṭna, presumably from Alalah (FM 7 40 rev. 18′–26′; Durand plausibly restores [i-na a-la-ah-tim]ki in line 18′), a destination that makes good sense only if they were already located in the west of Yamhad. Indeed, a number of toponyms that appear in the Alahtum letters also appear in the Level VII or Level IV Alalah texts, namely Kallassu, Tuhul, Nuraddi, and perhaps also Aluda and Tawarambi. Although Durand (2002: 61) sees some difficulty in the fact that neither Kallassu nor Tuhul are attested in the Level VII texts, their absence from that corpus in fact supports the identification of Alahutn with Alalah; see pp. 185–86 for discussion. Finally, in FM 7 28, Nur-Sin recalls how Zimri-Lim told the Yaminite leader Dadi-Hadun that he wanted to purchase a settlement on a river (“[Inquir]e conc[erning a] river se[tlement] which is ne[ar] to the river,” aš-š{um a-a}l na-ri-im ša a-na I.ĐA qé-e [r-bu…ši-ta-a]l, lines 5–6, following the restorations and emendation of Durand [2002: 105]). Dadi-Hadun responded that the price would be expensive (šīmšu dān, line 9 and cf. Durand 2002: 72 n. 177), and he advised him to locate a different settlement in the area (“let your [servant search for (another) settlement] in the land of the [riv]er town,” [lúTUR]-ka i-na ma-a-at a-al n[a-ri-im a-lam]ki li-ba-ʾi-i, line 10, following the restorations of Durand [2002: 105]; in particular, the restoration of the precative li-baʾi is justified by the imperative buʾi occurring in the line immediately following). The river in question should be the Euphrates, but the situation seems to be raised by Nur-Sin “as a template for wishing the same done in Yamhadian territory” (Sasson 2009: 198; an interpretive difficulty of the text lies in identifying where Nur-Sin’s recollection of Zimri-Lim’s dialogue with Dadi-Hadun ends and where he moves on to quoting Zimri-Lim’s instructions to himself. The difficulty is signaled by Durand [2002: 110 n. b], who understands Zimri-Lim’s instructions to Nur-Sin to begin at line 11, but cf. Sasson 2009: 198 notes 19 and 20).