Emar, modern Meskene, is located on the great bend of the Euphrates River in northern Syria. Excavations under J. Margueron between 1972 and 1976 brought to light more than five hundred cuneiform tablets, of which nearly three hundred were legal documents written in Akkadian. More than two hundred additional legal documents have since been published, derived from illegal excavations at Emar and sites in the vicinity. All the texts date to the thirteenth and twelfth centuries. Excavations at Ekalte (Tall Munbaqa, 23 km north of Meskene) have produced some eighty tablets of legal content.

1. Sources of Law

1.1 With the exception of a few royal orders, the texts are all records of private legal transactions, although many of them involve the king of Emar or the royal family. There are also a few records of litigation.

1.2 The texts from official excavations were found in archives. The palace archive contains documents of a public nature and transactions concerning the royal family. Some records appear to be duplicates (without seals), kept for the purpose of a land registry. The archive of the Temple of NIN.URTA contains several archives, including that of Prince Iṣṣur-Dagan, of the city council, and of a
priestly family.\(^5\) In view of the number of different individuals whose transactions were kept in its archives, it has been suggested that the temple functioned as a central record office.\(^6\) Private archives include that of the female merchant Tattashe/Ra’indu and her husband, who conducted international trade (Emar 23–29), and of the family of the real-estate dealer Hima.

1.3 A special feature of the documentation is the existence of two scribal traditions. “Syrian” texts are written across the short side of the tablet; “Syro-Hittite” texts across the broad side. They embody numerous differences of style and drafting.\(^7\) They are not, however, found in separate archives.

2. Constitutional and Administrative Law\(^8\)

2.1 Sovereignty

Emar was at the time of the documentation a Hittite vassal, an important city in (or capital of) the land of Ashtata. Its kings, however, were not sovereign rulers even within their own realm. The Hittites maintained a parallel jurisdiction through their viceroy in Syria, the king of Carchemish, and Hittite officials.

The two lines of legal authority are graphically illustrated by the two different scribal traditions. “Syrian” tablets derive from the jurisdiction of the kings of Emar and local institutions; “Syro-Hittite” tablets from the Hittite/Carchemish administration. It should be noted, however, that the two jurisdictions do not appear to differ significantly in the principles of substantive law applied.

It is not possible to discern the spheres of authority of the two sovereigns. In one instance, both kings had sealed the same legal document (Emar 201). In SMEA 5, Ini-Teshub, king of Carchemish, sells land at Emar as a private person.\(^9\) A reference to an “oath of

---

\(^{5}\) Temple M 1. The reading of the god’s name is unknown. Arnaud proposes Ashtar: TBR, p. 15.


\(^{7}\) Wielcke, “AH . . .”


\(^{9}\) See Adamthwaite, Late Hittite Emar, 128–31.