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The Palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari

By MARIE-HENRIETTE GATES

To Zimri-Lim
communicate the following:
thus says
your brother Hammurabi (of Yamḥad):¹
The king of Ugarit
has written me
as follows:
"Show me the palace of Zimri-Lim!
I wish to see it."
With this same courier
I am sending on his man.

(Tablet from Zimri-Lim's archives,
translated by Georges Dossin, 1937)

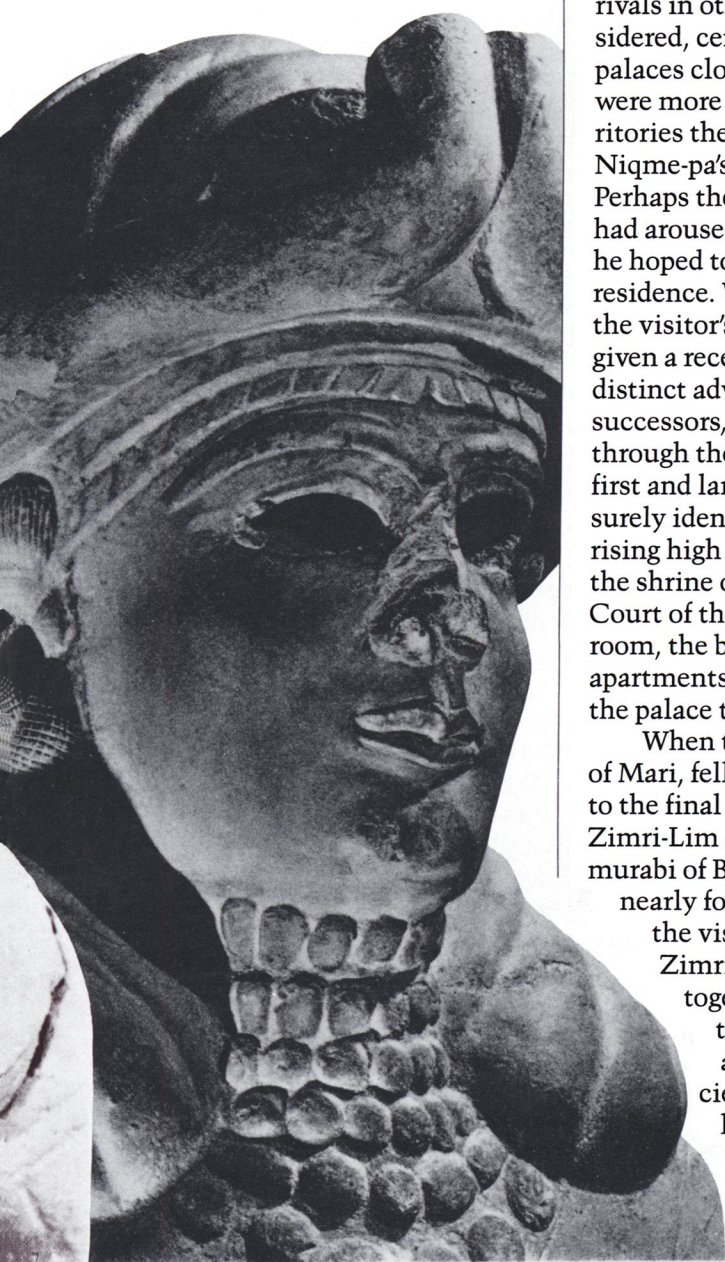
Zimri-Lim's palace was certainly famous
everywhere as one of the marvels of its
time (Parrot 1974: 113).

This building is not . . . the gem of the
Orient, rather one palace on a par with
many others (Margueron 1982: 380).

The three quotations given
above represent changing at-
titudes toward a building
which, after decades of exca-
vation in the Middle East, remains
one of the richest sources of archival,
historical, and architectural docu-
mentation discovered at a single site.
The palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari,
which deservedly draws its modern
name from its last royal resident, has
now passed through three stages of
investigation: The first can be as-
signed to the ancient Ugaritic
emissary; the second, to André Par-
rot's intensive excavations there
from 1935 to 1938; the third has
evolved from Parrot's publications in
a variety of attempts by scholars to
analyze, interpret, and reinterpret



Statue of a goddess with a flowing vase. This nearly life-size, stone statue (1.42 meters high) was found broken in several pieces; its inlaid eyes had been gouged out, and its nose was badly damaged—yet it has become one of the most famous examples of Mari art. The woman's massive headdress with two horns identifies her as a goddess, as does the vase that she carries. A channel drilled inside the body of the statue would originally have been connected to a tank, permitting water to flow from the goddess' vase. The statue is now in the Aleppo Museum. Photographs from Mari by André Parrot, Editions Ides et Calendes, CH-Neuchâtel, Switzerland, and Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 70.



his finds. While we can only surmise the reactions of the Ugaritic emissary, both Parrot's excavations and subsequent studies provide inexhaustible questions for discussion.

The Ugaritic Visitor

The Ugaritic emissary who traveled to Mari in the early seventeenth century B.C.E.² observed a multistoried building of well over 260 rooms at ground level. Why he chose to visit Mari is unknown; perhaps he was on a grand tour of architectural marvels including the palaces of Zimri-Lim's rivals in other cities.³ If scale is considered, certainly contemporary palaces closer to the traveler's home were more modest, as were the territories they controlled (for example Niqme-pa's palace at Alalah). Perhaps the decoration of the palace had aroused his ruler's curiosity, and he hoped to imitate these in his own residence. Whatever the reason for the visitor's trip, he certainly was given a reception that put him at a distinct advantage to his modern successors, for when he was taken through the main gate and into the first and largest court (131), his guide surely identified the building units rising high around them. No doubt the shrine of Ištar of the Palace, the Court of the Palms, the king's throne room, the banquet hall, and the royal apartments were pointed out during the palace tour.

When the palace, and indeed all of Mari, fell victim a few years later to the final confrontation between Zimri-Lim and his former ally Hammurabi of Babylon, it fell silent for nearly four thousand years. Today the visitor to the remains of Zimri-Lim's palace must piece together evidence found throughout the building in an attempt to match ancient activities with specific locations.

Parrot's Excavations

The palace that Parrot began excavating in 1933 was, in essence, Zimri-Lim's; that is, it was the palace at its final stage of occupation. The fire set by Hammurabi's soldiers to destroy the building ironically helped preserve it for later study by baking the bricks and causing the upper stories to collapse and fill the lower rooms, thereby protecting the wall stumps from erosion. The walls in the southwest are preserved over 4 meters high. Parrot uncovered this enormous complex over a period of five seasons. Whereas his excavating techniques reflect the unrefined methodology common during the 1930s, he achieved striking success





The fire set by Hammurabi's soldiers to destroy the building ironically helped preserve it for later study.

in clearing its entire preserved area (more than 6 acres) with fairly systematic care. His final report on the palace, its paintings, and its contents appeared in 1958. It is remarkably detailed: Each room is presented in turn with a plan and summary of the finds. The building's units, as he saw them, emerge one after the other. Parrot hesitated rarely in his interpretations, identifying and labeling the functions of most of the rooms. He always admired their refinement, ornamentation, and rich contents. But the palace Parrot presented in his excavation report is a monolithic one. He barely considered the possibility of a long history for the building or was simply not interested in investigating it. Thus the modern visitor was first introduced to the palace at Mari as solely belonging to Zimri-Lim.

Parrot's progress into Zimri-Lim's palace did not begin, like the Ugaritic emissary's, at the north gate. Instead, he first descended into the small court unit in the southwest area of the complex (court 1) and from there advanced due north across a series of rooms organized around rectangular courtyards.⁴ His investigations, therefore, followed a route precisely contrary to that of his ancient predecessor: Starting from the residential wings he moved into the major official block (court 106 and rooms 64–65–66), then on to the largest courtyard of the palace (131), then to the main entrance building to its north, and finally to the rooms and shrines to its south.

The building was immediately identified as a palace from the monumental character of the walls. They were built of heavy, carefully plastered sun-dried brick, with little or no structural timber used except

for the ceilings and roofs. Suites of rooms in the northwest quadrant were unusually well finished with plastered plinths and polychrome bands painted along the upper parts of the walls. Considerable attention had been lavished on water supply, proper drainage (also from upper stories), and bathrooms. Finally, tablets recovered from the first days of excavation confirmed that the building and its residents were closely bound to the cultural and political history of Mesopotamia in the early second millennium B.C.E.⁵

Our route through the palace should not, however, follow the excavator's but rather the sequence published in his final report and, no doubt, that followed by the palace inhabitants during the time of Zimri-Lim. There is only one firmly recognized entrance—to the north from the paved street that runs along the complex's fortified outer wall (Parrot 1958a: 7–19).⁶ It leads into a vestibule (156) with, perhaps, a sentry box, then into a large open court (154) where, according to Parrot, guards or visitors killed time by playing the board games scratched into the pavement. In the final stage of the palace, the doorways connecting this court to the rooms to the east (Parrot's twelve-room hostel for foreign couriers and merchants) and the rooms to the west (Parrot's postdestruction residence) had been filled in (Margueron 1982: figure 148). One could enter these rooms only by proceeding south into the huge courtyard 131. This courtyard was the largest in the palace, measuring approximately 48 by 32.5 meters, and indeed served as the central nexus for the entire eastern half of the complex.

It is difficult to assess the quality

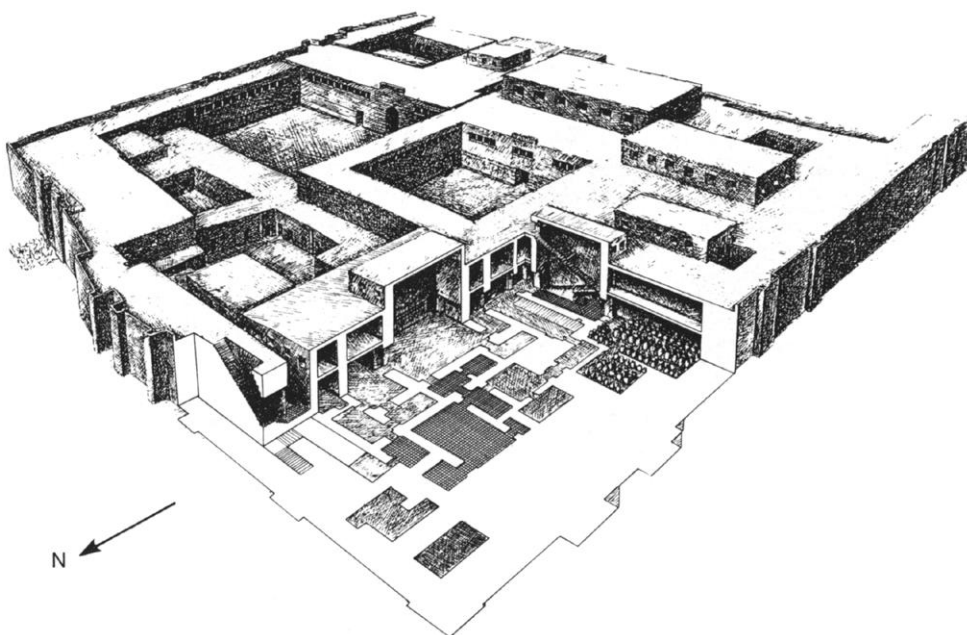


Aerial view of the palace at Mari. Photograph is used courtesy Mission archéologique de Mari.

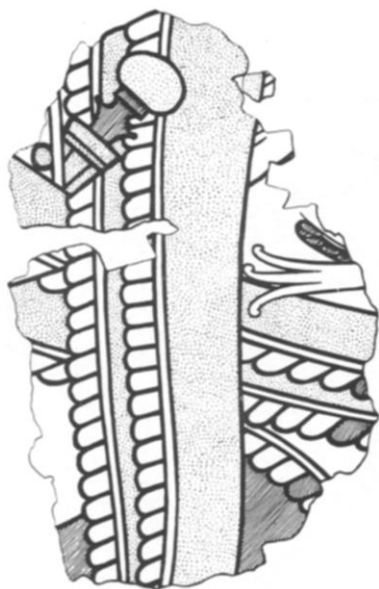
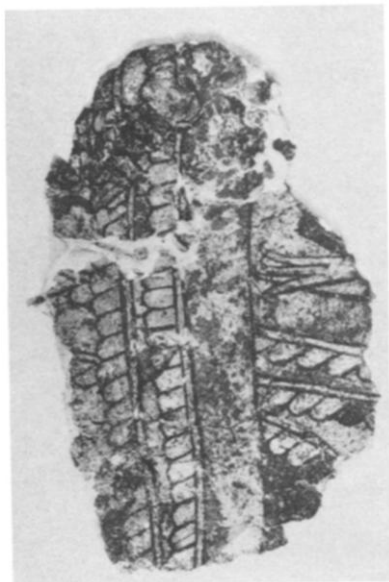
of the reports concerning precise finds from these rooms in the north-eastern quadrant of the palace. The "hostel" (rooms 158–167) was filled with domestic debris that may well obscure its original function. For instance, from bathroom 153, two letters to Yaḥdun-Lim and thirty account tablets were associated with crockery and a grindstone (Parrot 1958a: 19); more tablets and large jars were found in the putative kitchen unit (rooms 165–167); and large jars and a heap of bitumen obstructed the door of room 152, an area where one would expect evidence of heavy traffic into court 131. Here, as elsewhere in the palace, pillage and collapsed superstructures confuse the original furnishings of the rooms; one cannot, given the pace of Parrot's excavations, expect much more. Even court 131 is enigmatic. Parrot noted that a large and fairly regular area in the middle of the court was stripped of paving bricks. Although he acknowledged this may have been the result of accidental preservation, he also proposed that the area may never have been paved but was rather planted with date palms; the Mari archives refer to a "Court of the Palms" (Parrot 1958a: 57). Parrot further suggested that the narrow room (132) that opens to the south onto court 131 by a semi-circular flight of steps was the king's audience chamber, which had a brick podium at the back for his throne (Parrot 1958a: 63–66). A large number of wall-painting fragments were recovered from the south-western end of this room. When reconstructed, they form a very large composition of at least five registers, with scenes drawn from myth, religion, and secular themes. Thus in terms of decoration, access, and even plan, room 132 was quite distinct from the others opening onto court 131; the latter's contents suggest they functioned as store-rooms or archives, and in one case (room 130) as a converted passageway.



Two representations of the palace at Mari. One is the palace plan, after Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 68, foldout. The other is an artist's reconstruction of Zimri-Lim's palace, used courtesy of Histoire et Archéologie, February 1984, issue number 80, page 38.



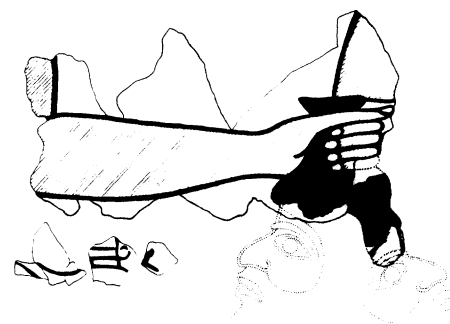
Figural wall paintings were recovered in five rooms, but only one was found in situ.



Painting fragment and drawing of a partial life-size figure from court 106. The figure is wearing an elaborate garment and has a dagger in his belt. Height is 44 centimeters. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plate XXI, 2 and figure 35.

By Zimri-Lim's time, one could reach the inner official section of the palace from court 131 by a single door in the northwest corner. It led through a dogleg corridor (114 and 112) to the main entrance of court 106, which was also the main entrance on the central axis of the palace's major official block. At first glance, this unit appears to be the result of a unified architectural program: Court 106 and rooms 64, 65, and 66 to its south could have been built at one time. Parrot identified room 106 as an open forecourt, room 64 as an antechamber, and rooms 65 and 66 as the palace's throne room and temple (Parrot 1958a: 78). These rooms were indeed the most monumental in the palace.

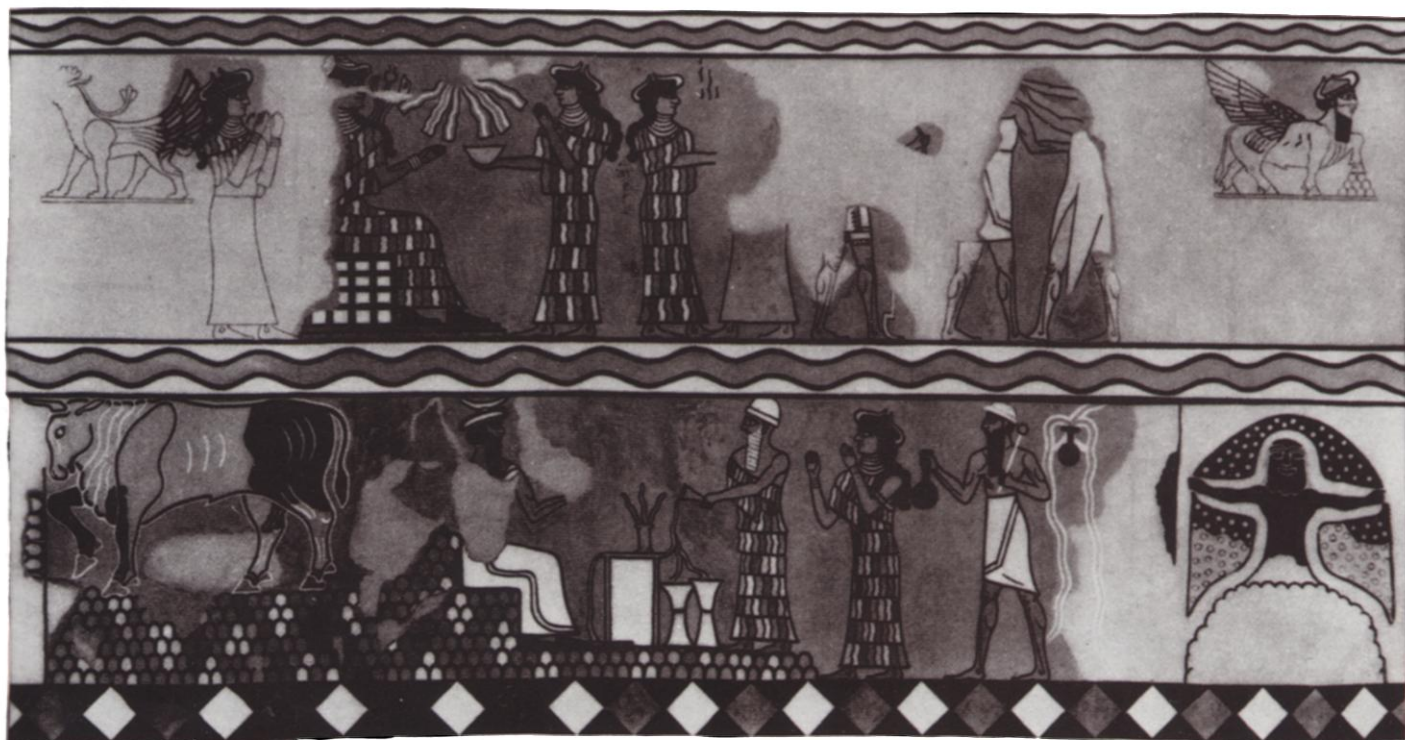
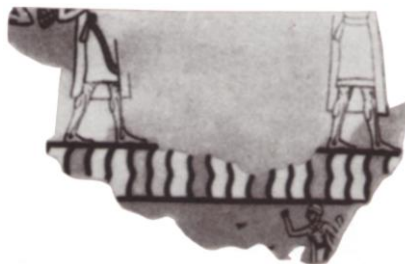
Court 106—half the size of court 131 but quadrangular in plan—was decorated with paintings. The famous "Investiture of Zimri-Lim" panel, found in situ on the court's south wall just west of the door, was one of a series of panels (as can be judged from the extension west of the upper painted border—Parrot 1958b: plate A). It is very different stylistically from the much larger sacrificial procession scene that was found in fragments collapsed at the base of the same wall's eastern half. More large figures painted in the same style were discovered on fragments in the southeast and southwest corners of this court.⁷ They include a life-size figure with a dagger in his belt, a second figure in front of an architectural background, a large hand grasping a mass of hair in the Egyptian fashion, two goats in heraldic pose nibbling a sacred tree, and hundreds of other fragments suggesting a lively and ambitious composition. Unlike the "Investiture" scene, which was painted on a thin film of mud plaster set directly on the brickwork, the fallen fragments were painted on a thick and carefully prepared coating of gypsum (Parrot 1958b: 17–18; 1958a: 86–87). Finally, a red and blue geometric band decorated the other



Two drawings of fragmentary paintings discovered in court 106. One shows a large hand grasping a mass of hair. This pose mimics the traditional Egyptian scene of a pharaoh conquering his enemy by grasping the enemy's hair in one hand and raising a mace in his other, ready to strike the final blow. Height is 23 centimeters; length is 33 centimeters. The other drawing reconstructs part of a now fragmentary painting with two goats heraldically flanking a sacred tree. Height is 43 centimeters; length is 31 centimeters. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, figures 36 and 23.



Wall Paintings from the Palace at Mari



Above: Reconstruction of the wall painting from room 132. **Below:** Fragment from the original mural showing a warrior. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plates XVII and XX, 2.



Figural wall paintings were recovered from five rooms within Zimri-Lim's palace at Mari. Unfortunately only four compositions were restorable. In room 132 (Parrot's "audience hall") numerous fragments from a composition of at least five registers had collapsed along the southwestern corner of the west wall. It was restored to a height of at least 2.8 meters and a width of 3.35 meters, thus representing a composition of considerable size. The two major registers illustrate two cult scenes (offerings made to deities) framed by mythological creatures. Above and below this double panel are smaller striding men with bundles (booty from war?) on their backs and a man pierced by arrows. The colors in the painting are red, gray, brown, black, yellow, and white. The figures are outlined with a thick black line.

Two separate compositions were found at the south end of court 106. The first, consisting of a number of fragments found in the debris, was on a larger scale than the painting from room 132. Restorable fragments show a multiregister scheme with men leading sacrificial animals in a procession; in front of them strides a much larger figure represented life-size. This procession scene is, however, only one of what appears to be a wide variety of themes. The colors are the same as in the room 132 painting but without yellow.

Strikingly different in style and with a far broader range of colors (including

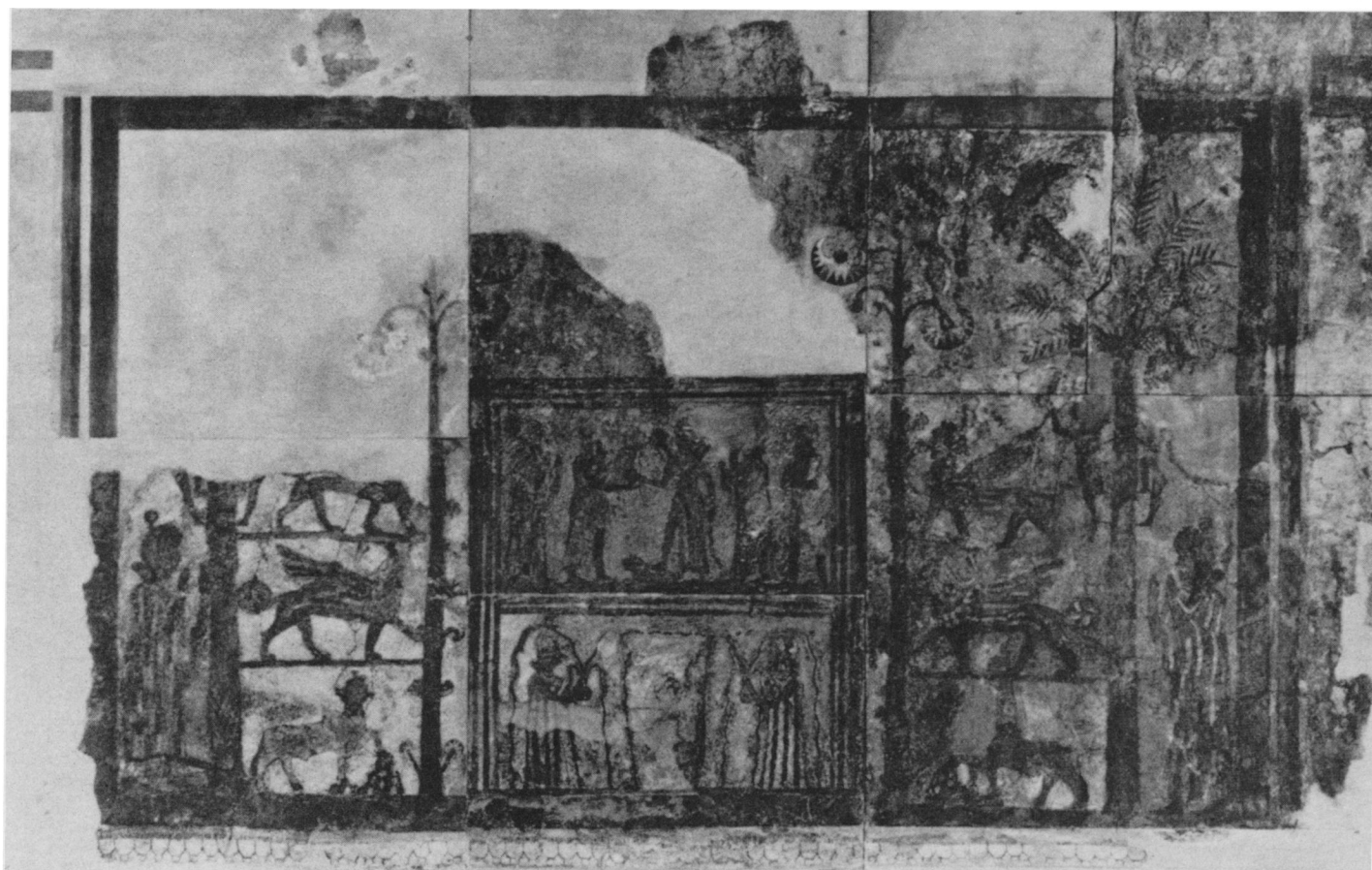
blue and green) is the second composition from court 106, called the "Investiture" panel. This is the only figural wall painting discovered by Parrot in situ. It was found on the south wall of court 106 immediately to the west of the doorway leading into room 64. Like the paintings from room 132, it consists of two registers depicting a king who is invested with power by the goddess Ištar in the presence of other deities. The scene is framed by mythical animals and palm trees.

Finally, very fragmentary paintings were recovered from debris (probably the result of the collapse of an upper story) in room 220. They seem to fall stylistically into two groups: one with life-size figures (from a royal hunt?) resembling the procession scene from court 106, and another with figures similar to those in the upper register in room 132. Parrot noticed that there were two super-imposed paintings on at least one fragment (Parrot 1958b: 87, note 31). As in the "Investiture" painting, blue appears frequently as a background color. There is no indication that these fragments belonged to a scene with registers.

I would sort these four compositions (actually five, counting the two from room 220) into two general categories: The first group includes the procession scene from court 106 and the larger figures from room 220; the second group includes the religious scene from room 132 and the "Investiture" panel from court 106 plus a few figures from room 220 (see, for example, Parrot 1958b: plate XXIII). Parrot also divided his paintings into these two groups (Parrot 1958b:



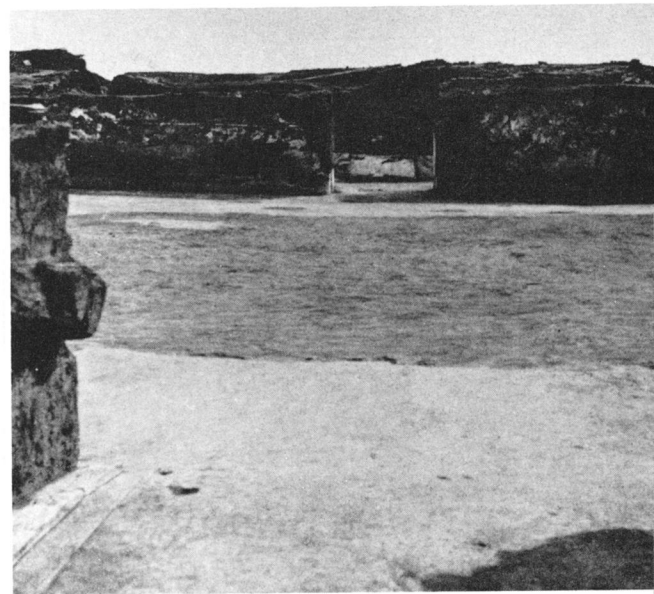
Above: Fragment of a sacrificial scene discovered in court 106. Approximate height is 80 centimeters. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plate VI.
Below: "Investiture of the king of Mari." Original wall painting found in situ on the south wall of court 106. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plate VIII.



107–08) and remarked on the strong connections between the religious scene in room 132 and Mesopotamian art of the Third Dynasty of Ur at the end of the third millennium B.C.E.

Moortgat's dating of the wall paintings is more ambitious. The stylistic and iconographic features of the three reconstructed paintings (excluding those from room 220) presented him with precise chronological correlations. The horned tiaras of the deities shown in the "Investiture" scene are painted in profile, a technique which he thinks can first be dated by the Hammurabi stele (set up in the king's thirty-third or thirty-fifth year, which coincides with the last months of the Mari palace). In contrast, the deities portrayed in room 132 have frontal tiaras which, in conjunction with the entire composition, point to an artistic tradition practiced several hundred years earlier during the Third Dynasty of Ur. As for the large striding figure in the procession scene from court 106, Moortgat convincingly compares his garment to that worn by Šamši-Adad on a stone relief found at Mardin in southeastern Turkey. Thus the paintings at Mari would extend over three precise periods: the Third Dynasty of Ur, the Assyrian interregnum, and the last years of Zimri-Lim's reign.

Moortgat's arguments can be countered with archaeological, rather than stylistic or iconographical, observations. First, concerning the composition in room 132 (Parrot's "audience hall" and Margueron's chapel), Parrot is not specific in describing the findspot of these fragments, but it appears from the excavation photographs that they correspond to the rear of the room along the west wall (Parrot 1958a: 64, figure 63; and 1958b: 71, figure 56), precisely where one finds a blocked doorway. The paintings must belong to a phase when the room, and indeed the entire sector, underwent considerable modifications—modifications that cannot be dated, but which must have taken place some time long after the original construction of this room. Second, and more significantly, these paintings, like the ones from room 220 and the "Investiture" scene, were painted on a thin mud plaster applied directly onto the brick wall. In contrast, the procession scene from court 106 was painted on a thick gypsum plaster, which was also used for the east, south, and west walls of that same court. Parrot described this plaster technique in some detail, since it was exceptional in the palace. The brick wall was first coated with a thin layer of mud and then with a second, much thicker layer of mud that was scored so that the outer, plaster layer would adhere securely



Above: The southern wall and doorway of court 106. The "Investiture of the king" painting was found on the wall to the right of the doorway. Photograph from Mari by André Parrot, *Editions Ides et Calendes*, CH-Neuchâtel, Switzerland. **Below:** Copies and drawing of the "Investiture" scene from court 106. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plates XI; XII, 2; and XIII, 2.

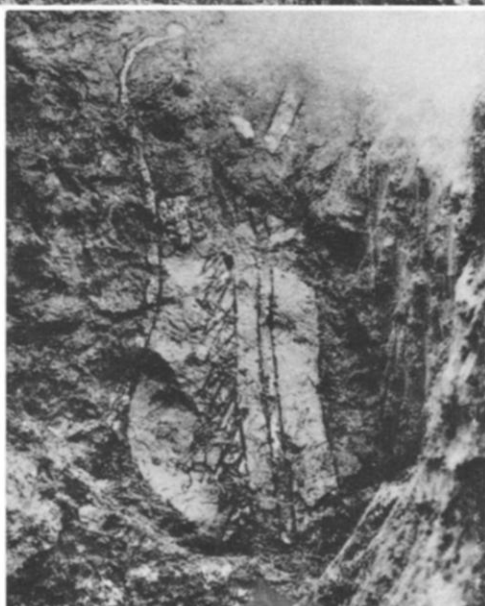
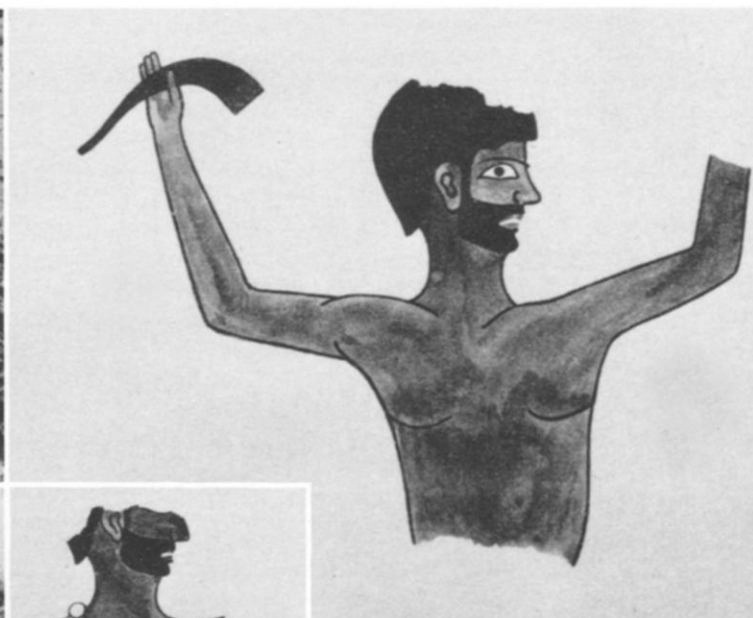


(Parrot 1958a: 86–89 and figures 90 and 91). If one examines the excavation photographs (especially 1958b: figures 46 and 51), one can readily make out the thin mud plaster on which the “Investiture” scene was painted in contrast to the patches of bright white plaster applied over both a thicker mud layer *and* the fine mud plaster.

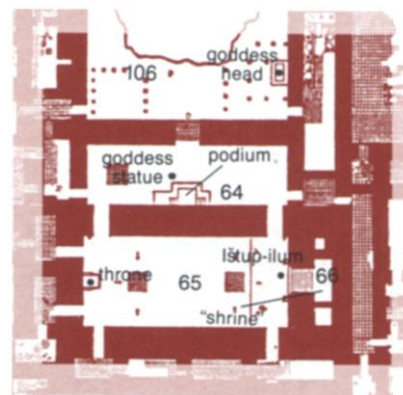
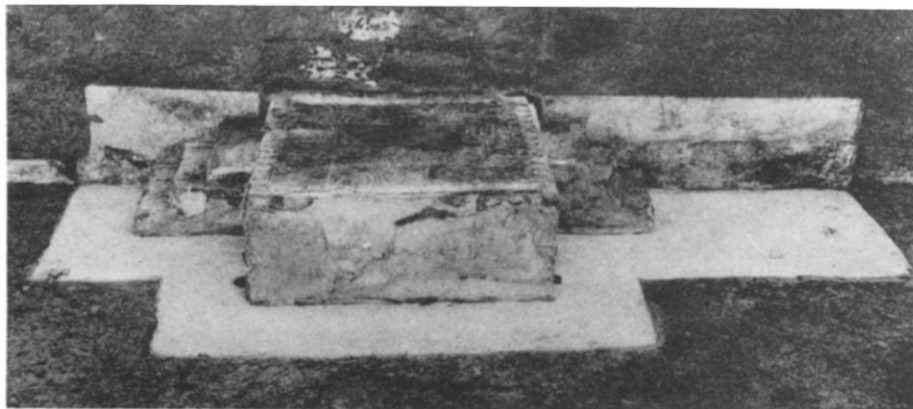
The presence of both the procession scene fragments and the in-situ “Investiture” painting can be explained in only one fashion: The “Investiture” painting is an earlier decoration that was later plastered over and the life-size procession scene and others were painted on top of it. This covering layer of plaster protected the “Investiture” panel from the fate that the others suffered. Parrot attempted to reconcile his difficulties in locating the original placement of the procession figures by setting them 3 meters above the floor level of the court (Parrot 1937: 334). In fact, the sacrificial procession scene was in the same place as the “Investiture” painting but was separated by 0.25 meter of plaster.

I will not at this point attempt to re-sort the chronological parallels for the wall paintings at Mari, for such a study would require a careful reexamination of all of Moortgat’s arguments. I will only underline the implications of this discovery concerning the paintings in court 106: If the “Investiture” scene can be firmly linked to the iconography of Hammurabi’s thirty-third or thirty-fifth regnal year, who then commissioned the procession friezes in the Court of the Palms?

Marie-Henriette Gates



Top: Drawing of a painting fragment from room 220. This large figure is similar to those in the procession scene from court 106. The significance of the quadrangular object to the left of the figure is unknown and the man’s face and hairstyle are hypothetically reconstructed. Height of reconstruction is 65 centimeters; length is 52 centimeters. **Middle and bottom:** Photographs and drawings of painting fragments found in the debris of room 220. The man preserved from the waist up, holds a horn in his raised hand. Parrot identified the damaged figure to the left as a dignitary on the basis of the elaborate garment and pendant that he wears. Height is 40 centimeters; length is 54 centimeters. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plate XXIII and figure 66.



This large podium, with an imitation marble surface and steps on either side, was prominently located against the center of the southern wall of room 64. Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 69, plate XV, 1.

The focal point of room 64 was a large podium built of brick but with an outer limestone coating painted to imitate marble.

walls of court 106 at a height of 2 meters from the floor.

South of this court, which was bright from sunlight and decoration, there were two rectangular halls whose lengths (east–west) were equal to the width of the court. The focal point of the first hall (room 64), was a large podium set against the south wall opposite the 106–64 doorway. It was built of brick but had an outer limestone casing that was painted to imitate marble. Decorative wooden paneling once protected the wall behind the podium. Parrot reflected little on the function of this podium and, indeed, on the entire room: He concentrated rather on the fine statue of the goddess with a flowing vase found in several fragments beside the podium. (The statue's head was discovered in the basin in court 106 – Parrot 1959: 5–11.) He was especially eager to place the king's throne on the socle found against the west wall of the furthest room in the series – room 65. From his throne, the king could thus look across the room – almost 28 meters long – to the platform situated at the top of a low flight of steps in room 66. Parrot interpreted this platform, no doubt correctly, as a shrine. It had suffered from the general pillage, but enough remained

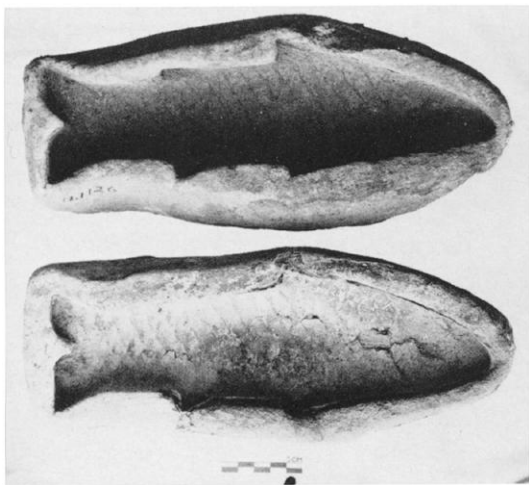
to give an idea of the original installation. At the foot of the steps lay a basalt statue of Ištup-illum, an early governor (*šakkanakku*) of Mari known for his lavish gifts to the Ištar temple. Around him were three stone bases for small statues (presumably tossed down from the platform during the pillage), as opposed to the two brick and bitumen-coated bases still in place on either side of the stairway. Like these bases, the steps were exceptionally well coated with bitumen: The rituals performed in the shrine must have involved an unusual amount of liquid. Parrot imagined that this entire unit enraged the invaders so much that they set fire to large logs dragged into the center of the rooms (Parrot 1958a: 111–44). Most likely Parrot's burned logs were, in fact, the collapsed beams from the roofs of both rooms and served ultimately the same purpose.

If this official section (rooms 106, 64, 65, and 66) was isolated in terms of accessibility from the eastern half of the palace (at least at ground level), the opposite is true of its relation to the western wing, for it is linked directly by rooms 106, 64, and 65. Here the scale was domestic, with the rooms arranged neatly in standard Mesopotamian fashion

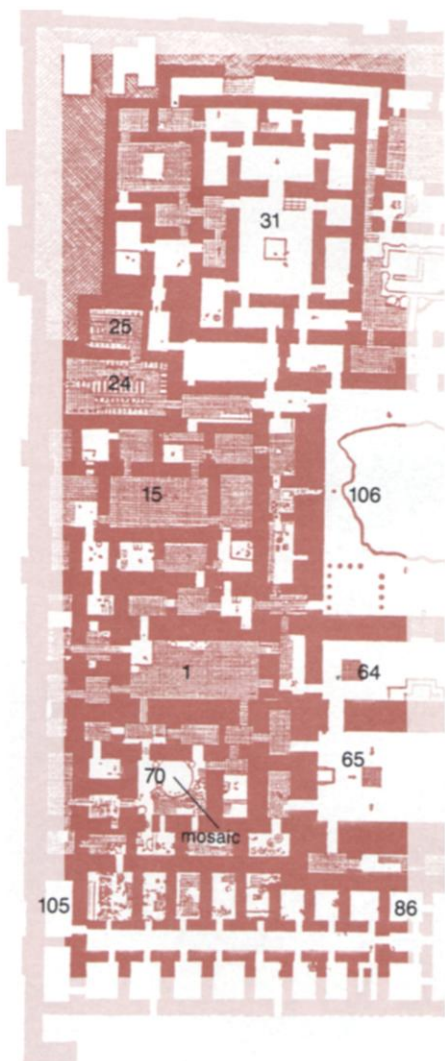


Statue of Ištup-illum found in room 65. The inscription on his shoulder identifies this man as a governor or šakkanakku of Mari during the early second millennium B.C.E. Height is 1.52 meters. The statue is now in the Aleppo Museum. Photographs from Mari by André Parrot, Editions Ides et Calendes, CH–Neuchâtel, Switzerland.





Terra-cotta molds in the shape of fish. The molds are approximately 30 centimeters long. Photograph is used courtesy Mission archéologique de Mari.



around a succession of four courts. The northernmost block, which is centered around court 31, is the largest in terms of area, size, and number of dependent rooms. It is here that Parrot identified the royal apartments, for the careful preparation of the walls, the painted bands in most of the rooms similar to court 106's geometric decoration, and the numerous bathrooms implied a degree of comfort and luxury distinct from the other sectors in the palace (Parrot 1958a: 161–85). Due west of court 106, a second unit around court 15 and a third unit around court 1 were assigned to the palace officials and, perhaps, to the queen's entourage since tablets of the queen's correspondence were discovered here. West of throne room 65 is a smaller unit whose purpose is unclear: Its central court (70) contained a superb floor mosaic, two large ovens, and a staircase—all crammed into too small a space, indicating they were not contemporary.⁸ The debris from this unit, including jars, assorted pottery, a large number of terra-cotta molds used for bread or cheese, and tablets,⁹ was rich and perplexing. It is thus too varied to provide a reasonable interpretation. Finally, Parrot claimed to have discovered the only Mesopotamian scribal school, in rooms 24 and 25, which were outfitted with benches.

The southernmost preserved unit of small rooms, placed on either side of a narrow corridor and opening onto a court at the east end, was interpreted by Parrot as the palace magazines (rooms 86 to 105). From these one could reach the otherwise isolated group of rooms behind and south of court 131 and the "audience hall" 132—a direct route of some significance, since Parrot placed the palace workshops here. Architecturally, these are structured around room 220, where more wall-painting fragments in the style of the large procession frieze in court 106 were found (Parrot 1958b: 83–106). East of

these workshops, and thus in the southeast quadrant of the palace, a sequence of paved rooms led from court 131 to a pair of halls (rooms 149/150 and 210) where Parrot recognized the second cult center of the palace. The fragmentary statues of former Mari rulers Laasgaan and Idi-ilum found here suggest an installation comparable to the religious platform (66) at the east end of the throne room. These are the only two areas in the palace that housed statuary at the time of discovery; we can thus be quite certain that the Mari statuary recovered in Babylon (a statue of the *šakkanakku* Puzur-Ištar—see also Sollberger 1967) originally stood in one of these two sanctuaries. Perhaps the horns of divinity on Puzur-Ištar's cap qualified him—to the illiterate Babylonian soldier—as a god to be carted home as an ultimate symbol of victory. The deities of these shrines, whom Parrot tentatively identified as Ištar/Inanna in room 210 (on the basis of the inscription on the statue of Laasgaan) and Anunit in 149/150 (Parrot 1958a: 273), have disappeared like virtually all Mesopotamian cult statues, the victims of systematic deportations.

This religious sector was on higher ground than court 131 and the official royal halls 64 and 65 to the east. Rooms led up to the southeastern shrines through a sequence of well-paved staircases. In 1966 and subsequent seasons Parrot's excavations in this higher sector uncovered earlier versions of the palace from the Early Dynastic ("pre-Sargonic") period. The discovery of these earlier versions of the palace would now support a major revision in understanding the sequence of construction for Zimri-Lim's residence. Parrot's publications suggested that the building of the palace began in the west wing and then expanded east with the construction of the official block (rooms 106, 64, and 65) and culminated in the building of the Court of the Palms (131), the



Above right: Drawing of the damaged statuette of Laasgaan which was found in a box in room 149. Height is 19.5 centimeters. The statuette is now in the Aleppo Museum. Drawing is reproduced from Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 70, figure 10.



religious sanctuaries just discussed, and the workshops located in between (Parrot 1958a: 6; 1974: 139–40). Parrot thought the earliest builders at Mari were the governors contemporary with the Third Dynasty of Ur but he was hardly concerned with charting the building accomplishments of their successors. He believed his role as excavator was to reveal to the scholarly community the palace at the time of its destruction—a “jewel box” studded with gems (Parrot 1958a: 342).

New Work and Interpretations

Parrot's final report was met with some criticism and recently has been the basis for several systematic studies. These mark the third phase in the investigation of the palace—a phase characterized by efforts to interpret Parrot's findings beyond the conclusions he made in his publications. The most significant of these studies have proceeded along two fronts: The first is an effort to articulate the chronological evolution of the building (Moortgat 1964; Margueron 1982); the second is interested in redefining the functions of the palace's sectors (Margueron 1982) or ascribing to them functions referred to in the Mari archives (Al-Khalesi 1978). The results of these analyses are uneven but always provocative. It is to Parrot's credit that he provided such detailed evidence that now others can rework his original interpretations.

If Parrot puzzled little over the chronological sequence of the palace at Mari, others have closely scrutinized it. Moortgat (1964) was the first to present an influential argument for a precise building history when he reassigned the three major wall-painting compositions to three distinct periods. According to Moortgat the panel from the “audience hall” 132 belonged to the Ur III/Gudea period, the sacrificial procession painting was the product of the Assyrian interregnum, and only the “Investiture” panel dated to the



Three views of the steatite statuette of Idi-ilum, governor of Mari. Height is 41.5 centimeters. The statuette is now in the Louvre. Drawings are reproduced from Mission archéologique de Mari, tome 70, figures 13 and 14.

reign of Zimri-Lim. His proposals are based on iconographic parallels rather than style and they are elegant, concise, and convincing. Despite some faint protests (for example Ellis 1975: 85 and Al-Khalesi 1978: 2, 63–65), a majority of commentators have relied, at least to some extent, on Moortgat's reconstruction.¹⁰ It even underlies the chronological scheme proposed by Margueron, who recently has produced an exhaustive reappraisal of Zimri-Lim's palace in the context of monumental Mesopotamian secular architecture during the Bronze Age (Margueron 1982: 377). Margueron's conclusions, like his methods, are in almost all instances at odds with Parrot's. There emerges from his study a somewhat different palace in which Zimri-Lim was merely the final occupant and not an influential builder (Margueron 1982: 376–78; 378, note 1). It is to this version of the palace that we will now turn.

In the course of his examination of Mesopotamian palatial architecture, Margueron decided that by analyzing associations between rooms he could appraise most accurately the coherence of units within a building. He thus examined at Mari the traffic patterns within room blocks identified by Parrot, and concluded that not only were the blocks misidentified but they had undergone considerable remodeling. He could chart the remodeling from obstructed doorways; however, it was difficult to determine precisely when the remodeling had been done. The western wing of the palace was subject to the most reorganization, but even the major official rooms—the “audience hall” 132 and sanctuary 66¹¹—had been affected (Margueron 1982: figure 148).

Margueron also attempted to provide conclusive evidence for superstructures over certain parts of the palace. He relied heavily on the height of preserved walls, correctly assuming that the collapsed superstructures were responsible for

Two Identifications of the Rooms in Zimri-Lim's Palace		
André Parrot	Room Number(s)	Jean Margueron
scribal school	24 and 25	magazines
royal apartments	northwest room block around 31	administrative rooms
antechamber	64	shrine
throne room	65	throne room
shrine	66	room connecting 65 and 68
magazines	86 to 105	housing for minor personnel or slaves
workshops	room block south of 131	magazines
—	second story above rooms south of 131	royal apartments
Court of the Palms	131	—
audience hall	132	chapel
shrine	149/150	—
shrine	210	shrine

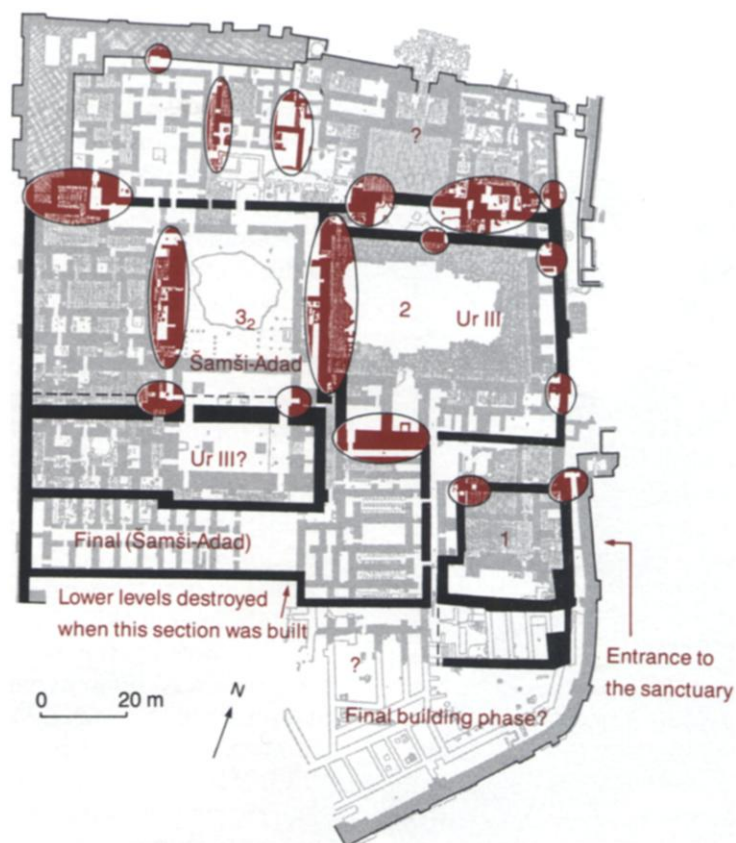


Room 24 at the palace of Mari. This room was originally identified by André Parrot as a scribal school with rows of benches for the students. Today, other scholars prefer to identify it as one of the palace magazines where various goods would have been stored. Photograph from Mari by André Parrot, Editions Ides et Calendes, CH–Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

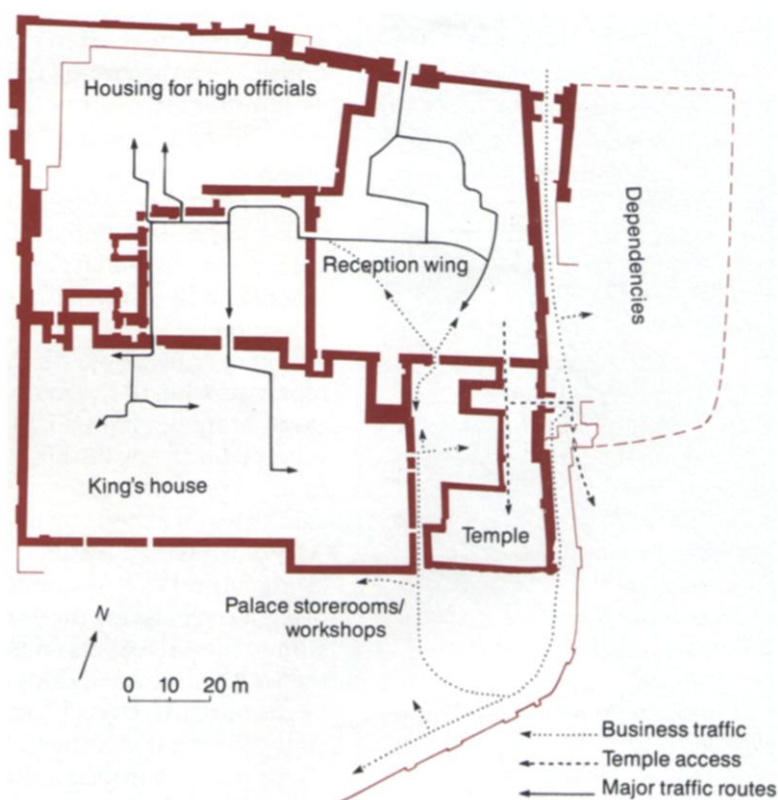
preserving the lower story from erosion (Margueron 1982: 19 and 306). While Parrot did not record the stratigraphic sequence of deposits in the rooms he excavated, Margueron drew attention to anomalies such as finding tablets in unexpected areas like hallways and courts and discovering painting fragments in room 220 high in the fill (Margueron 1982: 291). Margueron believed these features were as convincing as the rare ramps and staircases for evidence of a second story.

Finally, Margueron established a hierarchy for his room blocks according to the precept that plans closest to the Mesopotamian model (rooms organized around a court and strict orthogonality) indicate a more recent construction than units showing extensive remodeling and walls askew (as in the area of the entrance gate and court 131).¹² The palace's building sequence would therefore appear to have evolved from east to west, and its sectors take on very different functions from those assigned by Parrot.

Margueron's study (which is as long as Parrot's final publication) agrees with Parrot only on the identification of room 65 as the throne room (Margueron 1982: 354) and of the southeastern unit above the third-millennium palaces as a sanctuary—but with a shrine in room 210 only (Margueron 1982: 334). While he discounts the platform at the far end of the throne room (66) as a further chapel,¹³ he would set a cult statue on the brick podium in Parrot's "audience hall" 132¹⁴ and would put the statue of the goddess with a flowing vase on the painted podium in room 64 that Parrot thought was a throne dais.¹⁵ Margueron refutes Parrot's identification of the room block south of court 131 as a workshop and of rooms 24 and 25 as the scribal school. Both, he rightly suggests, were magazines that were part of the economic activities of the palace (Margueron 1982: 335–39 and 345). The royal



Above: Major building phases of the palace as identified by Jean Margueron. Walls showing remodeling are circled. After Margueron 1982, figure 248. **Below:** Jean Margueron's plan indicating highly controlled traffic routes between the major sectors of the palace. After Margueron 1982, figure 247.





Two views of court XXVII in the pre-Sargonic-1 level of the palace's southeastern religious sector. Photographs are used courtesy Mission archéologique de Mari.

apartments he shifts from the north-west block around court 31 to a second story above the magazines south of court 131. This identification is supported by the ready access to this sector via a staircase (81) behind the throne room as well as the fragmentary wall paintings in the debris of room 220 (Margueron 1982: 364–65). Parrot's magazines—the row of rooms running along the preserved southwest limit of the palace—become housing for the minor personnel or slaves of the king, as does the tawdry set of rooms immediately to the west of the north gate (Margueron 1982: 340–42).

This organization of the palace takes on a very different pattern from that presented by Parrot. Margueron rearranges the main axes of the complex into a southern and northern plan: He puts the “king's house” to the south, its northern boundary coinciding with the south walls of courts 131 and 106; it includes the administrative quarters directly west of this line (that is, the rooms organized around courts 1 and 70). The northern half of the palace mirrors the principles of the king's house, with the ground floor serving as administrative rooms and the upper story or stories as residential quarters for the large number of official personnel of the king (Margueron 1982: 366). The north gate, court 131, and its directly associated rooms remain the reception wing.

In conjunction with this reorganization of the room functions, Margueron proposes a new scheme for the evolution toward this final stage of the palace, which he thinks was reached during the Assyrian Yasmaḥ-Adad's tenure (Margueron 1982: 378, note 652). Margueron believes the earliest version of the palace was constructed in the southeastern religious area. The large court 131, chapel 132 with its wall paintings (Moortgat's Ur III attribution), and throne room 65 were added next, along with the room

blocks immediately west of 65. The palace then expanded north (Parrot's royal apartments and the north gate). In a fourth stage, court 131 was truncated along its western side for the construction of court 106 and antechamber 64—a bold undertaking of Šamši-Adad and his son—which was shortly followed by the final addition of the wing south of chapel 132 and the slave quarters south of the throne room (Margueron 1982: 377–78). Thus identified, the apparent homogeneity of the entire western half of the palace would disintegrate; it would be the result of monumental remodeling rather than an organic architectural development.

While Margueron's scheme adheres to the conclusions drawn from his very close reexamination of architectural features in the palace, it nonetheless skirts certain categories of evidence that one might reasonably consult as further chronological indices. Epigraphic evidence is rare but it does exist. The door socket from the first room inside the north gate (156) indeed offers little help since the king, Enim-Dagan, whose name is inscribed on it, has yet to find his place in the Mari sequence (Margueron 1982: 213 and 373).¹⁶ One might mention, however, a discarded tablet giving the name of Zimri-Lim's official Zaziya, which served as rubble in the pivot-stone casing for the door to corridor 152 nearby (Parrot 1958a: 15). It may represent no more than a repair; Margueron would indeed ascribe the frequent stamped bricks bearing Zimri-Lim's name throughout the palace (they are the only stamped bricks found in situ) to repairs as well (Margueron 1982: 370 and 378, note 652). One might stress, however, the epigraphical finds that do give fixed chronological points: a fragmentary impression with the name of Yaḥdun-Lim recovered from a lower floor in court 131 (Parrot 1964: 98) or—in the southeast stratigraphic probes that may well be



Drawings by Constance Spriesterbach

Above: Reconstruction of the chapel (room 66) by Yasin Al-Khalesi. Reproduced from *The Court of the Palms: A Functional Interpretation of the Mari Palace*, plate VI, courtesy of Undena Publications. **Right:** Life-size diorite statue of Puzur-Ištar of Mari. This statue was discovered in the museum of Nebuchadnezzar's palace at Babylon (604-562 B.C.E.) along with a second identical statue whose head is lost. The inscription on the hem of the statue's skirt mentions Puzur-Ištar, šakkanakku of Mari, and his brother the priest Milaga. The horns on Puzur-Ištar's cap signify deification. Horned caps were usually limited to divine representations in Mesopotamian art but they do occur on depictions of kings during the Ur III period. The body of this statue is now in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul; its head is in the Berlin Museum.

under the final floor of rooms 220 and 221 that are at the core of Margueron's latest building phase—three floors dated by tablets to Yaḥdun-Lim, Sumu-Yamam, and the Third Dynasty of Ur (Parrot 1967: 4). I would agree that the accumulation of floors in throne room 65 (Parrot 1958a: 124, figure 132) implies a long history for this room but I would hesitate to reconstruct a development for the entire palace without comparable stratigraphic probes elsewhere in the complex. Finally, a building sequence relying in any way on the wall paintings can readily be demonstrated as tendentious. It remains for Margueron to test his premises: He has resumed excavations at Mari since 1979.

Margueron deliberately avoided correlating textual references from the Mari archives to specific sectors of the palace (Margueron 1982: 330). He was forced, however, to tackle Parrot's identification of court 131 as

the "Court of the Palms" and was thus drawn into considering a location for the associated *papāhum*/shrine (Margueron 1982: 360–63). The identification of rooms mentioned in the Mari texts involves yet another branch of scholarship in this third phase of investigations of Zimri-Lim's palace, and one that should, given patience and alertness, prove most fruitful. In a recent bold study, Yasin Al-Khalesi has attempted to demonstrate that the Court of the Palms should be located in court 106 and that the palms in its title refer not to real trees but rather to the date palms that frame the "Investiture" painting (Al-Khalesi 1978: 10).¹⁷ He would place the "sealed oil storehouse," mentioned in another text (ARMT IX.9) as a dependent of the Court of the Palms, in room 116 on the court's southeastern side. This room was filled with large jars still in situ. Further references to railings and "prancing *lamassūs*"



(dLAMA.HI.A raqidūtum: ARMT XIII.6) could also be reconciled with this court (or with court 131 – Margueron 1982: 360–63). The roofed *papāḥum*/shrine would thus become the chapel 66.¹⁸

It is for this chapel (room 66) that Al-Khalesi offers a most daring reconstruction based on the ceremony that he thinks took place there, and which he suggests was illustrated and commemorated by the “Investiture” painting. He transposes the five figures of the panel’s upper register – the king, the goddess Ištar, and three attendant deities – onto the chapel platform as statues (Al-Khalesi 1978: 37–43). The two goddesses with flowing vases depicted in the lower register would find their places as statues set on the bitumen-coated bases that stand on either side of the steps leading up to the platform. He cites, among other evidence, the statue of such a goddess found at the base of the podium in room 64, drain or water conduits necessary for water to flow from the statues’ vases at the east end of throne room 65, and – for the platform statues – the three bases discovered by Parrot. (Al-Khalesi’s drawing is incorrect here for the statues stand directly on the platform – Al-Khalesi 1978: plate VI.) There is no place for Ištup-illum’s statue in this scheme, for he could hardly be the deity on the far right of the painting’s upper register. The statue of Puzur-Ištar, to pursue this issue further, might have been a better candidate because of the horns on his cap. In fact, any number of valid objections might be raised to what at present should be recognized as too sensational a reconstruction. Nonetheless, it is precisely along these lines of investigation that one can hope to progress beyond the bare architectural plan of the palace to a structure that functions as a three-dimensional entity.

Was Zimri-Lim’s palace, as Parrot believed, one of the marvels of its time or was it merely a palace

among many as Margueron asserts? The issue will only be resolved by the discovery of comparable Mesopotamian structures, especially Šamši-Adad’s own palace at Tell Leilan.

Notes

¹Dossin published this tablet more completely in *Ugaritica I* (Schaeffer 1939: 16, note 1) than in his preliminary article two years earlier (Dossin 1937: 74) and demonstrated that the Hammurabi in question is the ruler of Aleppo – not Babylon or Kurda.

²The traditional high-middle-low chronological system for the First Dynasty of Babylon is invalid (Reiner and Pingree 1974: 25) and should no longer be used. For adapted dates for Hammurabi of Babylon, see Gates 1981: 36–37: late eighteenth through the first quarter of the seventeenth century B.C.E.

³Unfortunately little is known of Mesopotamian palaces contemporary with Zimri-Lim’s. The Old Babylonian monuments at Babylon have been destroyed both by later energetic kings of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. and by a high water-table. At present Šamši-Adad’s palace has not been found, although it could be at the site of Tell Leilan, which is currently being excavated by H. Weiss.

⁴The numbering system for the rooms of the palace indicates the order in which they were discovered by Parrot.

⁵During the third and early second millennia Mari’s temples were consistently West Syrian in plan; however, the secular architecture and art were closely linked to southern Mesopotamia – a sure indication of Mari’s cultural and political aspirations.

⁶There are two other possible entrances: Parrot’s “chariot gate” in the northeast corner of the palace, and a service entrance in the southeast located near the temples (Margueron 1982: 283 and 334). Since the mound is badly eroded on this side, one cannot be certain of the palace’s layout here.

⁷Exact findspots for the fragments are not given in the excavation report. I suspect that the field notes with this information were lost (along with the actual fragments) when the excavation house was destroyed during the war (Parrot 1958b: 18–19).

⁸Margueron (1982: 251–53) discusses the problems of this court in great detail but does not suggest what seems to be the likeliest explanation: The oven in the southeast corner was used first and then abandoned; a wall and a staircase were built over it (thus creating a small room, number 77, at the east end of truncated court 70); and a second oven was set up in the middle of the now smaller court 70.

⁹It would be interesting to know whether any of these tablets had been baked in antiquity and whether these ovens were used for baking bread (Parrot found two querns – Parrot 1958a: 234) or for baking tablets (as at Ugarit – Schaeffer 1962: 31–33). It should be noted that most of the tablets here were found in room 71 and had fallen from an upper story.

¹⁰The most recent example is the work of M.-L. Buhl (1982).

¹¹The platform and flight of steps leading up to the sanctuary were built into what was originally a room (66) connecting the throne room to corridor 68 (Margueron 1982: 228).

¹²Parrot’s “hostel” to the east of the main entrance gate would then become the exception that confirms the rule. Margueron considers that this plan around a court evolved after considerable modifications (Margueron 1982: 220–21).

¹³The presence of statues in room 66, however, links the platform there to room 210 in the southeast, which Margueron agrees was a cella. Statues were not found elsewhere in the palace. Moreover, the plan of this platform is strikingly similar to those in Assyrian cellas known from later periods (for example the thirteenth century B.C.E. Ištar Temple at Aššur). Can this be an Assyrian installation in the throne room at Mari?

¹⁴Margueron argues that the platform is made of brick, as is used in temple architecture, and not stone, as is used in the throne room (Margueron 1982: 332). The podium does not, however, resemble at all the podia in contemporary or earlier temples at Mari.

¹⁵Margueron uses the same argument for the podium in room 64 (that it is made of brick) as for the podium in room 132. He concedes that the statue of the goddess with a flowing vase must originally have been installed elsewhere, since there is no water supplied to the podium to activate the flowing

mechanism of her vase. He further underlines the narrowness of the podium, which would make it difficult to sit gracefully on a chair set upon it. Finally, he remarks that the painted decoration of the podium shows no sign of wear (Margueron 1982: 356–58). I would point out that there is no evidence that the statue was *not* linked up to a water supply, that the unmarred surface of the podium may be the result of the throne being placed on a rug, that without the rug the statue also would have left a mark on the platform, and that the steps on either side of the podium were surely functional. The problem of identifying the function of this room cannot be resolved given the present evidence.

¹⁶Margueron (following Kupper) places Enim-Dagan early in the sequence of kings at Mari. Parrot tentatively puts him at the end (Parrot 1974: 180).

¹⁷The texts mentioning the Court of the Palms date both from the Assyrian interregnum and Zimri-Lim's reign. They are all listed by Al-Khalesi (1978: 6–9).

¹⁸Margueron (1982: 362) prefers to identify room 64 with its podium as the shrine; since he identifies "audience hall" 132 as a chapel, it could also be the *papāḥum* for a Court of the Palms situated in court 131.

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