

Chapter 15

Lovers, Sisters, Cooks (Scenes from Mesopotamian
Palace)

Shibtu

Shibtu: sends letter, calls herself “servant” (term of respect, she is a powerful woman: king's chief wife).

Fond of husband (when he fought, she would write him begging him to take care of himself)

When Zimri-Lim was gone, Shibtu handled the day-to-day palace operations, managing royal household (included a staff that consisted for weavers, leather workers, stonemasons, jewelers, woodworkers, goldsmiths, bronze workers, gardeners, water carries, basket weavers, cooks, scribes)
paid in rations of bread, oil, and wool

Zimri-Lim, King of Mari

Zimri-Lim King of Mari: Shibtu's husband, wrote her telling her of his military campaigns

He was a warrior, judge, diplomat, religious leader, devoted king to people

Personal life, unlike Hammurabi, not a mystery: had 11 daughters (one son also but he died young)

9 of daughters married rulers of nearby lands (no say in choosing husbands)

arranged marriages designed to cement friendships between king and allies (insurance policies) against war

The daughters

Inib-sharri: one of Zimri-Lim's daughters, unhappy in her marriage (didn't get along with husband's other wife), convinces Zimri-Lim that her situation was “impossible,” advises her to leave

Shimatum: another one of Zimri-Lim's daughters, married King Haya-Samu (marriage also doesn't go well), Zimri-Lim sends another daughter (Kirum) to marry King Haya-Sumu, become rivals, write back to Zimri-Lim each asking him for his support over the other.

Ancient case of sibling rivalry: Kirum should've had the lesser position in court (Shimatum was the king's 1st wife and had priority), but Kirum wants place of honor.

The Result

King Haya-Sumu divorces Kirum and returns to Zimri-Lim's household

More than 20,000 cuneiform tablets at Mari have been found

Many from reign of Zimri-Lim who lived at the time of King Hammurabi of Babylon

Letters show that sisters stayed in touch with families even after marriage sent and received gifts, kept up-to-date in politics

Letters show Zimri-Lim received advice from advisors of various palace officials, letters from other governors of the cities within the kingdom and ambassadors in foreign courts

Ama-dugga

She was a high-ranking woman servant of Zimri-Lim who controlled all the food in his palace.

Commanded large staff of men and women who brewed beer, ground four, made cakes and pastries, cooked and then served meals

Recipes written on clay tablets (earliest known recipes in the world) called for meat and bread dishes, herbs, spices, onions, garlic and leeks.

Mesopotamians favorite fruit: dates.

The Palace

Zimri-Lim's Palace: enormous for its time. 6 acres, 260 rooms on ground floor

The King and family had private quarters (guards protected it for his safety)

when ambassador arrived: servants would fill bathtub with water for a complimentary soak, the bathroom had a “flush toilet” which was perched over a running stream and would wash the waste away

Throne room: one wall decorated with large painting depicting king, other walls hung with tapestries, floors covered with rich carpets. The throne was made from ivory and gold.

After he met with the king he could've gone to the temple or the archive rooms in the palace where records were kept

Night: king honors him with a feast (cooks and kitchen servants would have worked all day to prepare this)

