From 1987 to 2001, three documents from Mari were published and reinterpreted, attesting to the notion of Dumuzi as a dying and rising god. One of the documents is a letter dated to the twelfth year of the reign of Zimri-līm (first half of the eighteenth-century BCE), composed by the chieftain of a semi-nomadic Amorite tribe; it mentions the death and resurrection of Dumuzi in passing. The other two records are economic in nature: one refers to the day of Dumuzi’s burial in the fourth year of Zimri līm; the other to the day of his return. Prior to the publication of these records, only a single cuneiform account of Dumuzi’s return from the underworld was extant – standing in stark contrast to the innumerable accounts of his death. The accounts from Mari can thus shed important light both on the specific Mesopotamian mythologem of Dumuzi and on the general theme of dying and rising gods in Western Asia.

That traces of this mythologem were found in Mari, of all places, and the fact that the most decisive piece of evidence was written by an Amorite chieftain (and not, for instance, by a state ambassador or a priest) naturally raises questions about the mythologem’s origins in Mari. Does the basic fact that the Mesopotamian name “Dumuzi” is employed point to origins in the region lying to the east of Mari – Mesopotamia? Or perhaps this notion of Dumuzi’s resurrection originated in the culture of Amorite tribes who immigrated from the Levant to Mari towards the end of the third millennium? After all, scholars have long noted the Western-Semitic characteristics of Mari’s Amorite culture, which hailed from the neighboring regions of Syria and the Levant; perhaps, accounts of Dumuzi’s death and rebirth represent yet another one of these characteristics?

In order to broach this question, I propose to briefly review the extant accounts of dying and rising gods from Mari and neighboring cultures. I will begin with Mesopotamian accounts, which include some of the first modern discoveries of cuneiform scholarship. I will continue by discussing the relatively new information from Mari and conclude by discussing accounts from the Levant. In light of these findings, I will offer a new perspective on the question of dying and rising gods, with a specific focus on the resurrection of Dumuzi, issues that have occupied scholarship since the late nineteenth century.