Between 1987 and 2001, three documents from Mari were republished and reinterpreted, providing evidence that this culture considered the Mesopotamian god Dumuzid to be a dying and rising god. One of the documents is a letter from the twelfth year of Zimri-līm’s reign (the first half of the 18th century BC), written by the head of a semi-nomadic Amorite tribe, in which the death and resurrection of Dumuzid is mentioned in passing. The other two texts are financial documents – one notes the date of Dumuzid’s burial in the fourth year of Zimri-līm’s reign, and the other notes the date of his resurrection. The evidence from Mari is highly significant, as before the publication of these documents researchers had only a single testament in cuneiform for Dumuzid’s resurrection from the underworld, whereas his death was amply documented. The Mari documents are particularly important for understanding Dumuzid’s Mesopotamian mythologeme, and the mythologeme of dying and rising gods in Western Asia in general. Yet the fact that it was in Mari, of all places, that evidence of this mythologeme was to be found, and that the clearest testimony is contained in a letter of an Amorite chieftain (and not, for example, in the letter of an emissary or priest), are a reason to question the source of this mythologeme in Mari: Does the use of the Mesopotamian name “Dumuzid” indicate that we should search for the source of this mythologeme in the Mesopotamian culture to the east of Mari, or could the source be the Amorite tribes that emigrated to Mari from the Levant at the end of the third millennium BC? Researchers have already noted the Wester-Semitic characteristics of the Mari Amorite culture, which can be traced to neighboring cultures in Syria and the Levant; is it possible that the death and resurrection of Dumuzid is another such characteristic?

In order to discuss this question, I will briefly review the evidence we have for dying and rising gods from both sides of Mari: I begin with the data from Mesopotamia, which belong to the first discoveries of modern cuneiform research, and continue to the relatively new data from Mari, concluding with an examination of the data from the Levant. In light of these findings, I suggest a new vantage point regarding the question of dying and rising gods in general, and Dumuzid’s resurrection in particular – subjects that have occupied scholarly research since the end of the 19th century.