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FELICE ISRAEL

**AMORITES.** The term *Amorite* is the English rendering of the Hebrew word *'ēmorî*, which is derived in turn from the Akkadian *Amurrūm* or *Amurr-ī-um*. This gentilic is derived from the term *Amurrum*, which corresponds to *mar-dū* in Sumerian (written MAR.TU), of unknown origin. The Hebrew form is a gentilic from a name such as \**'emôr*,

which is otherwise unattested in Hebrew. The English term *Amurrite*, derived directly from the Akkadian version of the word, is preferred by some scholars.

No distinctive archaeological evidence can be convincingly associated with the Amorites. The material culture found in the urban centers where they were active does not exhibit stylistic traits that could positively be identified with them; this holds true even for smaller provincial cities closer to their home ground, such as Terqa. [See Terqa.] Nor has any site been identified in the steppe that could even be dated to the period in question. What is left are only tantalizing textual clues that speak of weapons and garments fashioned in the Amorite style and that indicate that they were the suppliers of products associated with herding and with the steppe (salt and a special kind of truffle, both resources still being exploited).

The pertinent textual documentation falls into three major periods:

1. *Second half of the third millennium (2500–2000 BCE):* The relatively few explicit references to Amorites are primarily from southern Mesopotamia and Ebla. [See Ebla.] The few individuals so identified are generally labeled in the texts by the Sumerian appellation MAR.TU.

2. *Old Babylonian period (c. 1900–1600).* Large numbers of individuals are mentioned in cuneiform texts of the Old Babylonian period (which corresponds in part to the Middle Bronze Age) who bear names identifiable linguistically as Amorite; they are not, however, explicitly labeled MAR.TU. Besides personal names there are also names for larger social groups and a few words referring to the landscape and the material culture. The majority of the texts were found at Mari. [See Mari; Mari Texts.]

3. *Late Bronze Age.* No trace is left of the Amorites in LB Mesopotamia, except that the term *Amurrum* is still in use to denote the west. In Syria there is an important kingdom that bears the name *Amurrum* (written as either MAR.TU or *A-mur-ri* in Akkadian texts from el-Amarna, Ugarit, and Boğazköy and as *'mrr* in Ugaritic texts). [See Amarna Tablets; Boğazköy; Ugaritic Inscriptions.]

**Origin and Ethnolinguistic Identification.** The widespread opinion among scholars is that the Amorites spoke a West Semitic language and were essentially a nomadic population interacting with the urban centers of Syro-Mesopotamia. The nature of this interaction has been variously defined as representing a gradual infiltration (Kupper, 1957; Anbar, 1991) or a symbiosis based especially on economic factors (Rowton, 1987). Their origin would be in the Syrian steppe, and this would have shaped their ethnic identity as essentially nomadic, whatever nuance is placed on this definition.

An alternative interpretation views the Amorites as peasants originally at home in the narrow valley of the Middle Euphrates River (Buccellati, 1992; a preliminary suggestion in this sense was advanced by George Mendenhall and by

his student, John T. Luke [Luke, 1965]). From their restricted home base, they would have moved toward the steppe in a successful effort to gain control of the vast steppe rangeland for their flocks. In the process, they would have acquired nomadic traits and developed considerable social and political autonomy. In this perspective, their language represents the rural Semitic counterpart of urban Semitic (Akkadian/Eblaite), vis-à-vis which it retained more archaic traits.

The Amorite language is known almost exclusively from personal names (more than four thousand text occurrences; Gelb, 1980). Like all Semitic names, they consist of recognizable sentences and noun phrases, so that much can be said about phonemics and morphology. Some traits are most distinctive, in comparison to Akkadian, the other Semitic language with which it is contemporary in (Buccellati, 1966; Huffmon, 1965).

1. The phonemic inventory includes more consonants than Akkadian, which is most likely the result of the retention of archaic traits (rather than an innovation); see, for example, the retention of 'ayn, as in 'ammu-rapi, "the paternal uncle has healed."

2. Several morphophonemic alternations are also indicative of archaism: the retention of the middle vowel in *šalamatum* (compare Akk. *šalimtum*), "well-being."

3. The third person of the verb retains the original vowel in first position: *Yasma'-Dagan*, "Dagan hears" (compare Akk. *Išmē-Dagan*).

4. A possible innovation in the verbal system is the development of a perfect with suffixed pronominal elements: *Mutu-malaka*, "the man has ruled."

5. The word order retains for the most part the sequence verb-subject, as in *Yantin-Erah*, "the moon god gives" (compare the semantically equivalent Akkadian name *Sīn-iddinam* where the word order is inverted).

The few Amorite words that have survived outside onomastics include some toponyms that refer to the local landscape. Thus, *nawū* connotes the specific perception of the Syrian steppe, dotted with wells and herding camps. As such, it may be an Amorite word (borrowed in Akkadian), while *sērum* is the proper Akkadian term for the southern steppe, more sharply differentiated from the irrigated agricultural areas. Similarly, the Amorite term *yamina* refers to the "right (bank of the river)," looking at the Euphrates flowing downstream (only secondarily did it acquire the meaning "south"). Also Amorite are the terms 'aḫaratum/'aqdamatum, which refer, respectively, to "the region behind" or "in front," looking at the river from the western side, where the major cities were located.

**Geographic Background.** The Amorites represent one of the better-known nonurban societies of the ancient Near East. The question about their origin has a bearing on a proper understanding of their socioeconomic institutions. If they were nomads, or seminomads, on their way to seden-

tarization, a well-established social organization would have to be assumed that had developed apart from urban civilization and came to face it full blown from a position of outright distinctiveness—and from a distant location that did not allow contact. As indicated above, some scholars prefer to see them instead as peasants in an incipient stage of nomadization, with a persistent geographic and institutional link to the urban setting from which they originated. Like the other rural classes more directly under the sway of city influence, they were essentially "paraurban" at the same time that they were developing antiurban tendencies. It is this perspective that is followed here.

The area of the Middle Euphrates is well within the arid zone (below the 200-millimeter rainfall line), so that agriculture is impossible without irrigation. [See Irrigation.] However, the bed of the river has cut a deep trough in the steppe, and the irrigable area is limited to a narrow strip that is for the most part no more than 10 km (6 mi.) wide; it is called *zōr* in Arabic, and in Akkadian *aḫ Purattim*. The urban density in the area of the Middle Euphrates is correspondingly much lower than either in the irrigable alluvium to the south or the rain-fed plains to the north and the west. As a result, a single political center (Mari, for most of the Amorite period) controlled a much vaster territory (comprising valley floor and steppe) than any other Syro-Mesopotamian kingdom.

The exploitation of the steppe as a rangeland for herding turned out to be of major economic benefit: this was possible through the development of a network of wells that provided water for animals (not for cultivation, much less for humans, because it was too brackish). The peasants of the valley floor seized on this opportunity and expanded immeasurably the territorial boundaries and the economic base of the kingdom to which they belonged. Even though it remained without urban settlements until the latter part of the second millennium BCE, the entire steppe was the domain of the Mari herders, who were in direct contact with the cities from the Orontes valley to the Khabur plains.

**Social and Economic Institutions.** The peasant-herders acquired a high degree of autonomy, simply because the steppe, however temporary a residence it might have remained for them, provided a safe distance from the forces of the central government, which was aiming to enforce regulations pertaining especially to military conscription and taxation. Certainly the government never undertook the task of imposing direct central controls in the steppe: it is significant that of the several military confrontations between the urban government and the various Amorite groups, only those initiated by the kings of the Old Akkadian dynasty speak of battles in the steppe; those involving the kings of Mari take place at or near the cities by the riverbanks.

From this perspective it may be said that the Amorites extended beyond the limits of territorial contiguity the ties that, in the urban and rural settlements, had grown to be

intimately dependent on just such contiguity. The *‘ibrum* is the smallest unit to transcend the village and function as an extended nonterritorial neighborhood, a “clan.” (The term *‘ābirum*, could then be understood as “the one who joins the *‘ibrum*,” referring to an individual escaping from a city to a clan and in this respect it would be semantically, though not morphologically, equivalent to the Hebrew gentile form *‘ibr-î*). The clustering of clans into higher units would result in a tribe, to which the Amorite term *gayum* seems to apply.

The larger tribal families were defined by proper names: Amorites in the earlier periods and then, as a result of demographic increases, a variety of other names, including especially the Ḫaneans and the Suteans. (Mention is found of the “dynasty of Amurru,” referring to the Hammurabi line in Babylon.) The term *mārū yamina*, on the other hand, which is generally interpreted as the name of an analogous tribal family, can best be interpreted as the generic, and potentially derogatory, term for tribal people—literally, “sons of (the steppe on) the right (bank)” —much as *mārū uḡārim* and *mārū ālim*—literally, “sons of the irrigation district” and “of the city”—mean, respectively, “peasants” and “urban dwellers.” Only clans and tribes were associated with specific geographic areas, but not the larger tribal families.

**Political Consolidation.** The development of a tribal structure had significant political ramifications. In the first place, the tribe became the major alternative to the territorial state as a factor in providing political cohesion. In other words, while the city had been the first major state organization, which built on the solidarity deriving from territorial contiguity, the tribe achieved similar goals without presupposing such contiguity. What little is known about Amorite tribal history is, therefore, of great consequence in typological terms. The development of putative kinship ties (as evidenced, among other things, by the prominent role played in the onomastics by kinship terms such as *‘ammu*, “paternal uncle”) bears evidence to this. More important, however, is the ability to retain the cohesion of a large human group over the vastness of the steppe, which was the last region of the Near East to become urbanized. The term *chiefdom* might be used, but such political units had very special dimensions. It is out of this experiment with tribal institutions, which the Amorites were the first to undertake, that the political configuration of a national state eventually arose (as distinct from city-states and expanded territorial states).

A clear indication of the degree of political autonomy achieved comes from the titulary of the leaders. The office of village headman (*sugāgum*) was extended to provide leadership, beyond the village, to the clan. The title *king* (LUGAL or *šarrum*) was used for the leader of the tribe (*gayum*). It is important to note that only the name of an individual tribe, and never the name of a major tribal family, appears in the royal titulary of these tribal “kings,” with the following qualifications.

1. The plural “kings of Ḫana” and “kings of the sons of *yamina*” (alternating with “fathers of . . .”) is not properly a royal title, but rather a descriptive designation for the leaders of individual Ḫanean or nomadic tribes.

2. The title “king of Ḫana” (assumed by the rulers of Mari and possibly Terqa, but never used by individual tribal leaders) may be understood as programmatic in that it proclaimed the broad authority of the king of the city-state over the entire tribal family, rather than over any single tribe.

3. The Old Babylonian title *wakil Amurrim*, “leader of Amurru” (translated as “general”), may be a carry-over into the urban sphere of the position of the minor tribal kings after their political and military integration had taken place: a “king of Amnanum,” for instance, would be called leader of Amurru after he was absorbed within the military cadre of Babylon. From there the title would have assumed the generic connotation of “military leader, general.”

4. The title “king of Amurru,” as found at a later date in Syria, would represent a parallel development, with the added dimension of political independence.

The situation may be summarized as shown in table 1.

**Expansion and Assimilation.** The tribal entities under the rule of these kings acquired sufficient military strength to pose a threat to the established territorial states. Eventually, in fact, most of these kingdoms of ancient Syro-Mesopotamia were overrun by Amorites. The full dimension of this danger became apparent by the end of the third millennium, when Shulgi and Shu-Sin of the third dynasty of Ur built a defensive system called—presumably in a mixture of Sumerian and Akkadian—*ḪAD-murīq-Tidnim*, “the wall (or fortress) that repels Tidnum” (another general name for the Amorites). This may have been a line of watchtowers stretching “like a net” into the steppe on either side of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, for a length of some 280 km, or 174 mi. (cf. Wilcke, 1969, p. 9). By the second century

TABLE 1. *Socio-political Categories*

	Generic	Tribal Family	Tribe	Clan
Group	<i>Amurru, mārū yamina</i>	<i>Ḫana, Sutū</i>	<i>gayu</i>	<i>hibrum</i>
Leadership				
Tribal			<i>šarrum</i>	<i>sugāgum</i>
Urban		<i>šar Ḫana</i>	<i>wakil Amurrim</i>	

of the following millennium, most of the royal dynasties of Syro-Mesopotamian city-states were Amorite, least in terms of the linguistic affiliation of the names of their kings. Because it is unlikely that this was purely on account of stylistic preferences, it can be assumed that the name bearers were Amorite not just onomastically, but ethnically.

The counterpart of the political takeover was a thorough "urbanization" of the Amorites—a complete assimilation into the culture of the Syro-Mesopotamian cities. It may not be necessary to speak of the Amorites becoming Mesopotamians if it is accepted that, as a local rural class, they had in fact been Mesopotamian all along. Thus, it may be assumed that those Amorite elements who established themselves as the new ruling dynasties simply became fully urban, from the parurban that they were, while other segments of the same population remained just as rural and parurban as they had been. This is the picture that the Mari texts, in particular, paint.

In the area of the Middle Euphrates, the steppe remained the exclusive domain of the peasant population, without the urban leadership ever trying to intervene there directly. After the fall of Mari and then of Terqa as the capital of the Middle Euphrates (by the middle of the second millennium BCE), the entire region underwent a devolution process of deurbanization. The tribes moved their geographic focus to the west, where they eventually established (by about 1300 BCE) the first true steppe-based state, the kingdom of Amurru. Because of its unique typological traits, this final efflorescence of the Amorites may be regarded as their first true state formation; the other kingdoms called Amorite are so only in terms of the origin of their dynasties and part of the population, but not institutionally.

**Ideology and Intellectual History.** In the early stages of the confrontation between the Amorites and the southern city-states, Sumerian characterizations are found of the Amorites as nomadic: they "do not bend their knee" (no organized temple cult), they "do not bury their dead" (no permanent cemeteries), they "do not grow grain" (no agriculture—at least at the point of contact in southern Mesopotamia). However, no convincing, independent trace of their culture, and in particular their ideology, was transferred to the urban culture into which they became assimilated.

It is only in the west that such traces may be found, possibly transmitted over the intermediary of the kingdom of Amurru. It has long since been argued that the patriarchal tradition of the Bible can be understood against the setting of Amorite expansion. Because several scholars tend to accept a much later date for the patriarchal tradition, this interpretation is now generally downplayed. There are still, nevertheless, good reasons in its favor, such as the close parallels in onomastics (e.g., Amorite *Ya'qubum* and Hebrew *Ya'qob*) and institutions (e.g., the agropastoralist economic

base, the rejection of the urban milieu, the significance of wells).

There is also, however, a more generic argument that bears mentioning. The figures of the patriarchs are relatively modest from the point of view of the court and temple that sanctioned their introduction in the canon. A later process of literary invention would have been likely to present grander figures and more heroic events. If that is not so, it is very likely because the Amorite conquest of the steppe was indeed perceived as epic in its proportions by those who had carried it out in the first place. Similar echoes are found in Mesopotamia—in, for example, the Assyrian king list, which gives the names of earlier kings "who dwelt in tents" and in the retention of Amorite personal names for rulers who had long since lost their nomadic identity. These are, however, no more than echoes; the interaction of the pastoralists with urban culture was too close, and the cultural weight of urban tradition too massive, to allow for the crystallization of any true internal Amorite ideology. The distance (in time and space) resulting from the relocation in the west, and the eventual establishment of a culturally autonomous steppe kingdom, that of Amurru, were possibly the catalysts for such crystallization. If so, the "Amorite" steppe, having remained the last empty, nonurban space of the Fertile Crescent, was to prove, by virtue of its very barrenness, one of the most fruitful bridges across space and time in ancient Near Eastern history.

[See also Akkadian; Hebrew Language and Literature; Mesopotamia, *article on Ancient Mesopotamia*; and Syria, *article on Syria in the Bronze Age*.]

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GIORGIO BUCCELLATI

‘AMRIT (ancient Marathus), site located 7 km (4 mi.) south of Tartus, Syria, and 700 m inland from the Mediterranean Sea, behind tall sand dunes, where recent discoveries from the Hellenistic and Roman periods were made. East of the dunes the plain is dominated by a rocky plateau. The dimensions of the ancient town were  $3 \times 2$  km ( $2 \times 1$  mi.). Two springs, 1,300 m apart, about 1.5 km from the sea, feed the Nahr ‘Amrit to the north and Nahr al-Qubleh to the south. Both flow toward the sea, the first one directly; the second one, which forms an angle to the north, runs along the coast before it joins Nahr ‘Amrit close to its estuary.

‘Amrit served as the continental port for the island of Aradus/Phoenician Ruad (Arwad). Recent excavations recovered a simple harbor that had sheltered ships. The rocky and arid island of Aradus faces the continent 2.5 km (1.5 mi.) away; it has two large, well-protected deep-water bays that form a natural harbor. When Ugarit declined, Aradus became the principal commercial and naval power on the Syrian coast, as important as Phoenician Sidon to the south. Until Roman times, the entire region depended on the harbors of Aradus and ‘Amrit. Ancient historians recount that Alexander the Great spent four days at Marathus while his army conquered Damascus. [See Arwad.]

Prior to excavation, the only visible monuments were from the Persian period: funerary towers, two of them called

the spindles by the local population and a third that is cube shaped (see below). In addition, two temples were built around a spring: the Ma‘abed and a temple at the “spring of the serpents.” The latter, although visible long ago, has disappeared entirely: early visitors to the site, M. Maundrell (1697), Richard Pococke (1743), and Ernest Renan (1860), described two sanctuaries there. A small archaeological investigation was undertaken by Maurice Dunand in 1926 at the Ma‘abed, but it is only since 1954 that major explorations of the tell and stadium have taken place. The Ma‘abed was partly excavated in 1957 and a hypogeum in 1976. [See the biographies of Renan and Dunand.]

Led by Dunand, excavations were begun at the tell east of the Ma‘abed and south of Nahr ‘Amrit. The tell is rectangular, measuring 110 m at its north–south axis and 140 m at the east–west axis. The summit platform is 16.25 m above sea level and the bedrock about 10–11 m. The archaeological occupational layer is about 7–8 m thick. At the northern side of the tell, a main building came to light that is preserved on 24.2 m east–west and to a width of 21.8 m; only the southern wall is preserved in its entire length. The most significant objects from the building date to the end of the Persian period (end of the fifth and the first half of the fourth centuries BCE). During the excavations on the tell, a deep test trench indicated the earliest levels (dated by the ceramics) to be from the end of the third millennium: jugs with small handles and short necks that are decorated with clear, closely spaced horizontal lines.

In the excavated area, eight corbeled tombs were discovered. Small stones formed a circular dome that closed a pit 2.5–3.5 m deep. The skeletons found in the better-preserved tombs were folded over on themselves because the tomb's diameter was not large enough to accommodate an extended body. Among the grave goods were a bronze pin, a fenestrated ax, a semicircular ax, a dagger blade, a terra-cotta cup, a spearpoint, a jug, cream-colored goblets with incised lines, and decorated jars. [See Burial Techniques; Grave Goods.]

These silo tombs can now be added to the known forms of burial in Phoenician Syria: their dates vary between the Middle Bronze III and Late Bronze I or II. [See Tombs.] These dates are interesting for their potential connection with the Amorite invasion of Phoenicia. ‘Amrit lies at the maritime outlet of the Eleutherus valley, which served as one of the main routes of the Amorite invasion.

The site's porticoed temple is known to the local population by the name *Ma‘abed*. Excavations were undertaken in 1955 to clarify a few problems resulting from Renan's *Mission de Phénicie* (1864). The Ma‘abed was excavated from the rocky slope of gravel near Nahr Marathus. The temple site was completely covered with rubble; only the T-shaped corner pillars and the sanctuary at the center of the building were visible. The 1957 excavation reached the bot-

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