ONE

INTRODUCTION

Amorites, Their Legacy, and the Study of Identity

During the eighteenth century BC, a fraternity of Amorite kings held sway over a vast expanse of the Fertile Crescent, from Babylon to the southern stretches of Canaan. Where records permit, the founders of dynasties from Babylon to Mari, Assyria, Yamḫad, Qatna, Byblos, and Hazor laid claim by different means to a collective social identity as Amorites. By 1665 BC, Asiatic "foreign rulers" of Levantine origins and bearing linguistically Amorite names, who are identified as the Hyksos, established themselves in the eastern Nile Delta, likely by means of a coup against local Egyptian rule. Thus, between the establishment of the earliest principalities ruled by Amorites at the end of the twentieth century BC and the fall of Babylon in 1595 BC, Amorite rulers held power in many centers from the Nile Delta to the Persian Gulf. Their legacy is largely identified with its elites, especially its rulers, who fostered a cultural renaissance in which robust legal and literary traditions, building programs, and warfare were products of an age of intense competition and emulation. It has come down to us in many ways, not the least of which are legal traditions that were codified under Amorite regimes. The most famous of these are the Laws of Hammurapi, which are echoed in biblical legal traditions.[1] Other elements of this legacy are less transparent but

[1] For example, Westbrook 1985; also Wright 2009.

were propagated through the cultural traditions of later groups such as Assyrians and Israelites well into the Iron Age.

A clear consensus regarding Amorites as an identity or cultural phenomenon in Near Eastern history has not been reached, however. Varied memories of the Amorites in different parts of the ancient Near East and distributed among textual sources spanning approximately two millennia have confounded efforts to understand what Amorite identity signified at different moments in antiquity. Twentieth-century scholarship largely viewed the Amorites as an invading group representing the conquest of the "desert over the sown," while more recent efforts have characterized the Amorites as a social phenomenon but without a clear articulation of its meaning. More recent discussions have thrown into question not only the general enterprise of exploring ancient identities[2] but also specifically that of the Amorites.[3] So we might ask: What is the aim of studying Amorites, or any similarly labeled group for that matter?

There is certainly a tension in the twenty-first century concerning identity and its construction. On the one hand, great emphasis is placed on fundamental aspects of the diversity of individual communities, and in this school of thought all identities merit attention and none should be elevated above another. On the other hand, identities, understood as cultural constructs, are mutable and not exclusive, meaning that an individual's or group's identity exists in relationship to one or more individuals or groups simultaneously, and they are negotiated in different contexts, as circumstances warrant over time. It is clear, however, that no single approach, whether historical, linguistic, or archaeological, can seek to adequately address these issues in ancient societies and that a holistic and diachronic approach is required. Historical and philological studies have nearly exhausted what can be said concerning Amorite identity from the sources we possess, yet it remains the case that archaeology has only haphazardly addressed the subject, usually relying on historical studies as their point of departure, often testing these hypotheses but usually in a manner that either reifies or dispenses with them. If a middle ground exists, it has not been adequately articulated. While this should hardly be surprising given the challenge of constructing identity from archaeological remains, archaeology's chief contribution is very likely its ability to interrogate identity in antiquity, whether we are speaking of ethnicity or variously constructed social identities.[4]

Lacking among existing approaches to the study of Amorites and Amorite identity are both a pan–Near Eastern perspective and one that is concerned with the *longue durée*, which are now warranted in the light of advances in the

[2] Quinn 2017; Martin 2017.
[3] See Homsher and Cradic 2018.
[4] Insoll 2007.

study of identity and social interaction in antiquity. The question is not whether Amorite identities between 2500 and 1500 BC were one and the same, since they could not possibly be. Rather, the inquiry centers on how Amorite identities developed over this long span of time and how these developing identities might have related to one another, and ultimately what an understanding of Amorite identity in each major period of its development contributes to the study of the ancient Near East. As the scope of this work suggests, Amorite identity, in and of itself, merits such study for the very reason that its study in particular, among a very select few identity groups in the ancient Near East, has raised such issues since early in the twentieth century AD. Furthermore, the processes relating to the construction and maintenance of identities raised by the study of such an enduring identity, albeit changed through time and space, reveals a great deal about the range of factors, processes, and cultural institutions that shape identity and likely have applications to the development of other enduring identities, particularly among Old World sources, such as Greek, Phoenician, and Egyptian identities, to name a few.

AN AMORITE LEGACY

A frequent starting point for the study of identity in the ancient Near East, often under the ethnicity label, is the question of the particular group's legacy. By this I mean the widely regarded cultural contributions of a particular group, if such were necessary to warrant their study. Such is the case, for example, for groups such as the Israelites and Greeks, and for larger cultural configurations like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, but also more recently for groups like the Philistines and Phoenicians. But why should we care, and why should we endeavor to address the history and cultural contributions of a particular group, as offered to us by ancient sources, skewed as they often are by the idiosyncrasies of their contexts? In the case of the Amorites, we are drawn to consider Amorite identity, on one hand, because of the sheer temporal scope across which references to Amorites are found among ancient sources, which almost serves as an empirical measure of the extent of their influence.[5] On the other hand, the historical and cultural achievements of notable figures who claimed Amorite identity, like Hammurapi of Babylon and Shamshi-Adad of Assyria during the Old Babylonian (OB) Period, expose the contributions of Amorite cultures to a global cultural heritage, not merely restricted to Western Civilization. Similarly, perhaps we are also drawn to this inquiry because many Mesopotamian sources appear to have been consumed with portrayals of

[5] For overviews, see Liverani 1973; Whiting 1995; Fleming 2016.

Amorites as the "other" threatening Near Eastern civilization at the end of the third millennium BC, which forces us to reconcile very different characterizations.

Intriguing, if mixed, characterizations of the Amorites first appear among more familiar sources, like the Hebrew Bible, through which Near Eastern and biblical scholars were introduced to the Amorites, long before their identification in cuneiform sources. For this reason, despite being nearly a millennium later than the appearance of the last Amorite dynasty, they have invariably colored earlier discussions of Amorites. In total, the terms "Amorite" and "Amorites" occur eighty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible. Yet three biblical verses may suffice to expose Judah's pervasive interest in its relationship to its neighbors past and present, among whom the Amorites evidently held a significant place.

In the Bible, Amorites are first identified within the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10.

> Canaan sired Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites (*'emorīm*), the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites.
>
> *Genesis 10:15–18*

When the Hebrew Bible began to assume its present shape in the late seventh century BC, Judah was acutely aware of its place as a nation among many thanks in large part to the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. It was compelled therefore to articulate its relationship to the peoples of the world around it. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 provided just that, a cultural geography, the principal aim of which was to frame Judah's place within a Near Eastern and Eastern Mediterranean political landscape – Judah's cosmos. It did so not only by reference to extant states but also by means of eponymous ancestors who represented groups that were reckoned to have played a role in greater Israel's prehistory. Among these were, of course, the Amorites. (Similar though perhaps better-known processes were contemporaneously underway among the Greeks as well.[6])

Because the Amorites were identified among Canaan's traditional inhabitants, they were also among those peoples that Israel defeated to take the "Promised Land," as the prophet Amos reminded Israel already in the eighth century BC.

> Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them,
> who were tall like high cedars, and strong as oaks;
> I destroyed his fruit above,
> and his roots below.
>
> *Amos 2:9*

[6] See Hesiod's *Theogony*.

More than a century later the prophet Ezekiel went even further, characterizing the legacy of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, as the result of a union between Amorite and Hittite ancestors, seemingly resurrecting, as it were, the role of Israel's traditional, though now ancient, enemies.

> Thus says the Lord God [lit. *Yahweh*] to Jerusalem:
> "Your origin and your birth are in the land of the Canaanites;
> your father was the Amorite and your mother a Hittite."
> *Ezekiel 16:3*

While the Table of Nations, written as it was during the late Iron Age, permits neither a reconstruction of Bronze Age history nor a study of Amorite identity, this reference to the Amorites taken together with other biblical references to Mamre the Amorite, an ally of Abraham in Genesis (14:13), and references to later battles with the Amorite king Sihon reveal the complexity of bringing together the region's cultural memories into a single tradition.

From roughly the same period, at the Assyrian capitals of Nineveh and Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad), copies of the so-called Assyrian King List (AKL) reveal an analogous interest to invoke an Amorite legacy. However, while the Amorites were again remembered, here they are grafted into the genealogy of Assyrian kings.[7] This list opens with seventeen eponymous ancestors, several of which are the names of well-known Amorite tribes in the early second millennium.

> Tudiya, Adamu, Yangi, Suhlamu, Harharu, Mandaru, Imsu, Harsu,
> Didanu, Hanu, Zuabu, Nuabu,1 Abazu, Belu, Azarah, Ushpia, Apiashal.
> Total: 17 kings who lived in tents.[8]

This text has been identified as considerably older than the Neo-Assyrian Period, and it may serve therefore as an important record of Assyrian cultural memory with respect to its relationship to an Amorite past.

A more ambiguous characterization of Amorites is also to be found in Neo-Assyrian times among a collection of Assyrian proverbs, copies of which come from the library of Ashurbanipal (ca. 630 BC).[9] Here the opening lines of what may have been a conversation between an Amorite and his wife read as follows: "[A low] fellow/[An A]morite speaks [to] his wife, 'You be the man, [I] will be the woman.'"[10] Consequently, in whatever esteem former Amorite rulers were held during the late Iron Age, mixed characterizations persisted and the context of biblical references therefore can be more clearly understood.

[7] Millard 1997; Yamada 1994: 12.
[8] Millard 1997: 463.
[9] Lambert 1960: 225.
[10] Ibid., 230.

Perhaps because of the evidence for an Iron Age cultural memory of Amorites, Abraham, the Jewish patriarch in Genesis, is the most likely reason for the position Amorites held in Near Eastern studies, particularly biblical studies.[11] This is not, however, because Abram/Abraham was ever identified explicitly with the label Amorite. Rather, this interpretation was in large part bolstered by the assumption that the late third and early second millennia constituted a fitting chronological setting for the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, during which time Amorites were replete in Mesopotamian sources. Efforts to demonstrate plausible linguistic comparisons between patriarchal names and Amorite names seemingly lent still further support to this reconstruction.[12]

Abram's journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran and then to Canaan, was further seen as a cultural memory of Amorite population movements, at least as they were envisioned in the mid-twentieth century AD. Yet despite attempts to identify Abraham as an Amorite,[13] the closest the biblical texts comes to such an suggestion is a statement in Deuteronomy 26:5: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number and there became a great nation, mighty and populous." While it mentions neither Abraham nor the Amorites by name, some have maintained that this reference to Arameans is to be read as a corruption of Amorite, and thereby the reference to Abraham's descendants as "wandering Arameans" was intended to identify them as Amorites.[14] Further identifications of early Aramean groups, such as the Ahlammu-Arameans, as also Amorite have only further convinced some of the merits of this position, be they tenuous.[15] Nevertheless, approaching this literature as cultural memory, with its intensely etiological concerns, moves the discussion of this tradition away from seeking its validation as historically plausible to recognizing its important place in ancient Israel's cultural memory.[16]

As both biblical and historical sources illustrate, it seems that an Amorite legacy or cultural memory influenced later traditions, and quite significantly early biblical traditions. Similar associations of Amorites to a wide range of customs and practices have been voiced in more recent scholarship on a range of subjects, from pastoralism to kinship, donkey riding, sacrificial customs,

[11] The earliest such research was pioneered in W. F. Albright 1961. For a review of the question of the identification of the biblical patriarchs with Amorites and attempts to historically situate these traditions, see McCarter 2011, but also critical discussions by Thompson 1974 and Dever 1977.
[12] Knudsen 1999. See also chapter 2 in Thompson 1974.
[13] See Hendel 2005.
[14] Millard 1980.
[15] For a review of the evidence, see Younger 2007: 133–37.
[16] Hendel 2010, but also Hendel 2005.

burial practices, and temple architecture, among others. But who were the Amorites and how was Israel's cultural legacy perceived that they should still be mentioned in texts nearly a millennium after their OB heyday? And, more generally, is there any basis for seeking to address references to Amorites through time? Were such references the product of a meaningful relationship between terms early and late, and how can such a relationship be articulated?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In this book, which is born of more than twenty years of thought and research on the Amorites and the Middle Bronze Age (MBA), and inspired by observations like those previously mentioned, I contend that recent historical, literary, and archaeological studies make it possible to articulate a meaningful social and cultural history of the Amorites and the negotiation of their identity from the mid-third through the mid-second millennium BC. In this work I have, of necessity, drawn upon my training in Near Eastern and Egyptian archaeology, Assyriology, and anthropology, and I consider that it is this training that has stoked the ambitions of this study. This research has led me to observe that, for a discipline as geographically and temporally expansive as Near Eastern studies, analogous and contemporaneous circumstances are often overlooked by specialists associated with the study of one region, particularly when their focus is situated at one end of this geographic expanse. Yet in antiquity borders that limited the movement of people were almost nonexistent, unlike the obstructed national borders that define states today. As this study reveals, a wide range of factors contributed to a greater degree of mobility and exchange before the mid-second millennium than is often recognized in scholarly literature. My specialty in Bronze and Iron Age Levantine archaeology has required that I continually juggle attempts to maintain some degree of familiarity with cultural developments in Egypt, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the eastern Mediterranean, and many of the observations in this work are a direct result of this effort. The greatest impediments to a study like this are, however, the great variety of data, which can be broken into three major components: textual sources such as literature and inscriptions, archaeological data consisting of a range of excavation, iconographic, and survey data, and theoretical approaches, particularly as they concern approaches to cultural exchange and identity negotiation. Each of these areas are integrated in the historical progression of my argument, which form the basis of the chapters in this work. A few preliminary words regarding the main elements of my approach are necessary so as to avoid distractions that might result during exploration of such a complex subject.

Studies of identity during the past two decades, during which concepts such as the negotiation of identity have been increasingly incorporated into archaeological studies, have been particularly significant in shaping the thinking

behind the present work.[17] Concepts derived from such studies, but also including my own research on refugees,[18] I hope distinguishes it from earlier examinations of this subject. I do not embrace an approach that seeks to qualify Amorite identity in strict terms as an ethnicity – at least not in most periods where the term occurs – and for some time now this has been untenable.[19] Rather, despite but also perhaps because of its nebulous character and multiple registers of meaning, I instead employ the term "identity" throughout this work. As the basis for understanding the negotiation of identity through time and during different circumstances, identity can be further qualified in moments where, for example, Amorite identity was elevated – in certain contexts – by means of its association with with the rise of Amorite dynasties, or demoted when associated with unwanted social elements. Thus, shifting constituencies and changes in our sources mean that in one moment references to Amorites may conform to traditionally accepted definitions of ethnicity, while in others (and more frequently this is the case) it can be understood as a social identity in which benefits were accrued through association with a broader social collective.

Because this work covers such a lengthy period of time it is most useful to invoke relevant theoretical frameworks as evidence from these contexts warrants, rather than cloud their explanatory value by attempting to define and defend these choices at the outset of this study, outside of the historical settings that permit their description. That said, the reader will find that in the context of defining diachronic negotiations of Amorite identity, I have drawn on a range of mostly familiar approaches, including migration and refugee studies, koinezation,[20] peer polity interactions,[21] monumentality,[22] entanglement,[23] cultural memory,[24] communities of practice,[25] and still others. I have, however, avoided major digressions on these subjects, assuming that their application is now sufficiently familiar to allow me to avoid a lengthy defense of their employment. This diversity of theoretical approaches is the result of the fact that Amorites in antiquity are a moving target for scholarly investigation, and no singular approach could ever hope to qualify the adaptations and

[17] Notable examples include Goody 1982; Shehan 1989; Emberling 1997; Hall 1997; Costin 1998; Wenger 1998; Hall 2002; Díaz-Andreu, Lucy, Babić, et al. 2005; Twiss 2007; Yoffee 2007; Roymans and Derks 2009; Pohl and Mehofer 2010; Steadman and Ross 2010; Gruen 2011; Demetriou 2012.
[18] Burke 2011a; Burke 2012; Burke 2017.
[19] See Kamp and Yoffee 1980: 97.
[20] Kerswill 2008.
[21] Renfrew 1986.
[22] Osborne 2014a.
[23] Dietler 2010.
[24] Jonker 1995; Connerton 1989.
[25] Wenger 1998.

developments witnessed among Amorite communities across the Near East over the course of more than a millennium.

Such concepts have prodded me to grapple with the circumstances that faced different Amorites communities during the Bronze Age, in an attempt to understand how these communities may have related to one another and how they negotiated their unique circumstances. The notion of community, which has come into vogue as a means of bounding and defining groups in antiquity,[26] has likewise played a significant role in this effort by providing an alternative to the tribal identifications on which most Amorite studies have fixated. This is not to say that tribes, and their smaller subdivisions, clans, are not significant units for observing the negotiation of identity among Amorite communities. They certainly are. However, the historical plight of many Amorite groups suggests that tribes were merely the largest collective that can be ascribed an Amorite identity – confederacies of tribes not withstanding – and not necessarily the most significant unit for understanding the wide range of responses to different social, economic, and political circumstances by individual Amorite communities. Indeed, it is less common, outside of the Mari texts, that the tribal affiliation of individual Amorites are made explicit, and so when we do encounter these individuals at what level of social organization are we to consider them collectively? To invoke the language of community is to suggest that kinship affiliation, as tribal terminology underscores, is but one fairly restricted way of conceptualizing Amorite social affiliation. Insofar as I occasionally refer to Amorite states, I do so assuming that the state's ruling elites, and not necessarily its full constituency, are the basis for such an ascription, recognizing full well the distinction, as will be made clear. For such states, when sources permit, I attempt to demonstrate how Amorite communities might be identified, usually through material culture, as a significant, albeit not exclusive, source.

Another critical element of my effort is the recognition of the varied trajectories of Amorite communities that are possible within the broader scope of a collective Amorite identity – what might be identified as a supra-tribal social identity. Indeed, individual Amorite communities can be associated with entire settlements, such as towns or cities, but also with quarters or economic enclaves. Just as Amorites can be identified across a wide geographic extent of Mesopotamia already during the mid-third millennium, the increasing appearance of Amorite groups and individuals in the centuries to follow in still wider regions demands reflection upon the mechanisms of these dispersions, but also of the mechanisms that functioned to maintain the identity of these groups, and the contacts and bonds between them. This might explain, for instance,

[26] Kolb and Snead 1997. For specific examples, see Mac Sweeney 2011; Porter 2013; and Feldman 2014.

how diaspora communities shared a broader Amorite identity and what this fundamentally meant.

Hand in hand with the issue of the appropriate identification of Amorite social structures is the question of their occupation and subsistence. Historically, Amorite studies have also been transfixed by pastoralist qualifications of Amorites, which have shaded their social, political, and economic characterization.[27] More than fifty years of such studies since the 1960s have certainly offered an understanding of the important role that pastoralists, generally, and Amorites, specifically, played in Near Eastern society. However, as I hope is evident in this work, Amorites engaged a wide range of occupations, a number of which were particularly significant to their social and political elevation, in ways that cannot be explained through a nearly exclusive emphasis on pastoralism. More recent qualifications of settlements and communities as agropastoral, because they engaged in agriculture and pastoralism for their subsistence, have not significantly altered the emphasis placed on pastoralism or for that matter nomadism, in connection with Amorite identity.[28] Mine, therefore, constitutes a considerable departure from most of the earlier studies, even as it relies on a range of extant observations, principally by Sumerologists and Assyriologists who have engaged the texts in question. Even so, there remains a place for pastoralism within the identity and cultural memory of Amorite groups, as discussed in Chapter 2.

While breaking with the pastoralist economic and tribal social orientations of earlier scholarship on the Amorites, I have not endeavored in this work to provide anything resembling a history of scholarship on the subject of the Amorites, as such enterprises are one of the great pitfalls of studies like this, derailing a wholesale reconsideration (if this is possible) of such well-trodden territory. Although reviews of scholarship are common in area and historical studies, there is a need to break free of the shackles that often needlessly constrain research by excessive digressions to sacrifice at the altar of old paradigms and tired ideas. I am not interested in a Talmudic treatise on what previous scholarship has claimed, and for this reason my footnotes are almost exclusively dedicated to citations of data and bibliography that is particularly germane to my arguments. Naturally, a massive bibliography has been consulted and assembled as part of this larger argument, and I hope that through this work these studies and others like them will be given greater consideration both in future research on the Amorites but also for similar contexts in which the negotiation of identity is of central relevance to identity in the *longue durée*.

In the process of describing the historical contexts in which Amorite identities were negotiated, I make occasional allusions to other, hopefully

[27] See Porter 2012.
[28] As, for example, in Lönnqvist 2008b; Lönnqvist 2009; Lönnqvist 2010.