THE AMORITES AND THE BRONZE AGE NEAR EAST

In this book, Aaron A. Burke explores the evolution of Amorite identity in the Near East from ca. 2500 to 1500 BC. He sets the emergence of a collective identity for the Amorites, one of the most famous groups in ancient Near Eastern history, against the backdrop of both Akkadian imperial intervention and declining environmental conditions during this period. Tracing the migration of Amorite refugees from agropastoral communities into nearby regions, he shows how mercenarism in both Mesopotamia and Egypt played a central role in the acquisition of economic and political power between 2100 and 1900 BC. Burke also examines how the establishment of Amorite kingdoms throughout the Near East relied on traditional means of legitimation, and how trade, warfare, and the exchange of personnel contributed to the establishment of an Amorite koine. Offering a fresh approach to identity at different levels of social hierarchy over time and space, this volume contributes to broader questions related to identity for other ancient societies.

Aaron A. Burke is Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and the Kershaw Chair of Ancient Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has written on warfare, culture, and social change in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

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THE MAKING OF A REGIONAL IDENTITY

AARON A. BURKE

University of California, Los Angeles

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108495967
DOI: 10.1017/9781108856461

First published 2021

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
NAMES: Burke, Aaron A., author.
TITLE: The Amorites and the Bronze Age Near East : the making of a regional identity / Aaron A. Burke, University of California, Los Angeles.
DESCRIPTION: First edition. | New York : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2020023259 (print) | LCCN 2020023260 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108495967 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108811361 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108856461 (epub)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: Amorites | Bronze age–Middle East. | Middle East–Antiquities. | Syria–History–To 333 B.C.
CLASSIFICATION: LCC DS72.5 .B87 2021 (print) | LCC DS72.5 (ebook) | DDC 939.4/301–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020023259
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020023260

ISBN 978-1-108-49596-7 Hardback

For Richard E. Burke, whose passion for antiquity inspired this work.

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PREFACE

It was tempting to title this work a social history of the Amorites. This, however, would have been inaccurate, as I have made no attempt to provide a complete historical narrative of developments in the history of peoples who, at one time or another, identified as or were identified by others as Amorites. Furthermore, for reasons explained in the introduction, I have not sought to cover the Amorites in all periods, but rather to end the temporal scope of this study with what I regard to be the pinnacle in Amorite identity, what some have termed the "Amorite age." Thus, a complete history of the Amorites remains to be written. Nevertheless, it probably will never be written owing to the sheer scope of the endeavor, as evident in this work, and in this regard this work admittedly stretched my capabilities with the types of sources represented across the vast geographical and linguistic scope covered herein. Indeed, some will no doubt write off the endeavor for this very reason, though this would be a mistake, since if one does so, many other past phenomena would also be disregarded for the sheer lacunae in our data.

If anything has kept a social history of the Amorites in the ancient Near East from being written, it has been both the political boundaries of the modern world and the academic silos with which those of us in ancient Near Eastern studies are all too familiar. I have often asked myself why I have endeavored to attempt to write this book. The answer, I believe, is to be found in my training in Near Eastern studies that, while firmly rooted in Near Eastern archaeology, required intensive exposure to the languages and historical traditions of the ancient Near East from Egypt to Mesopotamia. In particular, I grew to love the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2000–1500 BC) while at The Oriental Institute at The University of Chicago. I began to recognize it as the true roots of the Late Bronze Age, the ugly, imperialist stepchild of the Middle Bronze Age that is often identified as the "age of internationalism," and that has received, frankly, too much discussion, particularly in secondary literature. This is likely because its predecessor has simply been overlooked, owing to the challenge of stitching together the type of historical narrative that so easily fills the pages of secondary literature. Nevertheless, it is arguable that we actually have many more variegated sources from which to write histories of the Middle Bronze Age than we do for the Late Bronze Age, which is likely the reason many have

shied away from it. The Mari Letters alone are a formidable corpus, and more formidable still because of the threat posed to our intellectual assumptions by yet more unpublished documents from this corpus that remain to be studied.

Although I began my career with interests in biblical studies, and through this lens I first viewed much of the ancient Near Eastern tradition, like many in the field, my interests were only further piqued by study of the cultural traditions from Egypt to Iran. Since my earliest dealings with the archaeology of the Middle Bronze Age, I have been struck by the range of shared cultural expression across this vast region. Although many careers have been built stressing the "uniqueness" of particular Near Eastern traditions, less attention has been paid to the similarities or continuities that existed across the ancient Near East, which to me seem often to be veiled by little more than window dressings that stress the distinct character of one tradition over another. Indeed, the entire enterprise of ancient Near Eastern studies is rooted in the creation and defense of artifactual typologies, whether linguistic or material, and through these differences we justify the menagerie of specialties required to carry on our collective discipline. Nevertheless, synthesis requires standing in the gap and viewing the world from the spaces between our islands of understanding.

Since the early days of my study of Biblical Hebrew, I was curious exactly to what we referred when we spoke of the Proto-Semitic forms from which Hebrew descended. I was, of course, less interested in the linguistic details than a philologist would be, but I found myself primarily interested in the cultural context in which Proto-Semitic languages existed and in the precise linguistic traditions to which they pointed. Was this Proto-Semitic some form of Amorite or related to Amorite? (Was this akin to the difference between pure and applied mathematics?) What was clear, however, is that even if one trained in philology, the answer could not be adequately provided along purely philological lines, since, fundamentally, language is a cultural artifact, with varied expressions relating to time and place, most of the details of which remain beyond our ability to satisfactorily reconstruct. Consequently, our understandings of the broad cultural developments in which language is situated are fundamental to our reconstructions of the development of a particular linguistic tradition. For this reason, I was often struck by the veritable interchangeability of references to "Northwest Semitic," "Proto-Semitic," and "Amorite" linguistic traditions, for example, that might be employed in given discussions depending on the presuppositions, academic tradition, and degree of caution exercised by the scholar discussing it. Likewise, I often wondered why, after working through the range of options, scholars were not bolder in their conclusions. As I have learned, while this is in part a result of an appropriate caution, it has likely as much to do with the limits of familiarity that philologists have with archaeological and historical data, and vice versa.

Similarly, archaeology offers discrete datasets associated with regional traditions that did not exist in isolation. Egyptologists identify communities of Levantine "Asiatics" in the eastern Delta, and Levantine archaeologists refer to sites as inhabited by Amorites, while Mesopotamian archaeologists excavate the remains of Old Babylonian sites ruled by textually-identified Amorite dynasties. In other cases, even after sites are excavated, in the absence of textual evidence for the identities of the communities in question, archaeologists rarely seek to reconstruct the nuances of social affiliations of their research subjects from the data they possess. Certainly, it is rarely the case, when compared for example to the archaeology of Mari, that one can be sure of the identities of (i.e., labels for) a settlement's population. Nevertheless, if we regard that our best efforts to do so are, as they really are, merely the latest in a series of hypotheses, then we are freed to venture the comparisons that, in the end, should enable a refinement of our arguments. This then advances our understanding of how ancient populations were affiliated and how they may have identified. Obviously, our data is limited, but this can be no excuse for not trying, lest we be permanently hamstrung except in cases that seem otherwise straightforward. This, of course, raises the issue of whether any cases of identity in the ancient Near East are straightforward, and the answer to this is a resounding no.

There is certainly little that we can be unequivocally confident about in the ways in which we would like to be. This work does not offer, therefore, definitive conclusions concerning a social history of Amorites. Instead, it outlines a series of hypotheses about how Amorite identities were likely shaped by a broad set of circumstances and institutions, resulting from a range of factors situated in specific times and places, yet often partaking of cultural traditions that circulated more widely than we often acknowledge. In this regard, this study has exposed the need to reexamine overarching vectors such as trade, warfare, and migration that were responsible for the transmission of traditions. Although trade has received the most attention, historically its treatment in Near Eastern studies has often bordered on facile, with little consideration of the sorts typical to the field of anthropology, that require working beyond the limits of the sources to reconstruct the range of possible outcomes the data may embody. Warfare on the other hand, with all of its negative connotations, has not been adequately considered as a major vector of cultural exchange, as it most certainly was in the ancient Near East. Not only did armies move vast distances across the Near East during the Bronze Age for months at a time – with troops levied from across the landscapes of their kingdoms – their movements included coteries of non-combatants whose services were required for the operations of these armies. To this we can add the considerable displacements of populations caused by warfare, ranging from prisoners of war and enslavement, to refugees and deportees. Warfare, as in

modern times, mobilized a chain of human dominoes. As discussed in this work, it also created new environments in which professional warriors and mercenaries emerged as major social actors. Migration, which is often underestimated or dismissed under the guise of early twentieth century concerns with "hordes and invaders," also played a significant role in the shaping of cultural exchanges. While mass migrations were certainly rare phenomena, considerations of ecological and environmental change open our eyes to its long-term effects. Perhaps more significantly we will recognize that many migrations were actually localized phenomena, as populations shifted their allegiances and affiliations, or may have sought protection within the boundaries of a neighboring state. Migration therefore sometimes constituted a form of resistance by relocation, but it often did not involve the great distances attributed to invading hordes blown in from the steppe.

These forms of mobility thus embody timeless phenomena by which cultural memory and traditions have been formed. This, then, is the contribution that I hope that this work can offer in furthering discussions of the mechanics by which trade, warfare, and migration impacted the shaping of cultures in the ancient world. Fundamentally, the archaeological signatures with which we are familiar were the product of social interactions that are all too often veiled in our sources. While archaeology and textual sources may not permit the writing of a historical narrative in the sense of most histories, like pegs on a board, they do provide the framework within which most other subjects must be considered. It is my hope therefore that exploration of the Bronze Age will proceed more boldly to consider issues surrounding the social and economic identities of Near Eastern communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was nearly a decade in the making since it was first conceived and therefore owes a great deal to interactions with colleagues in North America, Europe, and Israel. Their suggestions and critiques have been engaged with in various ways throughout this work, and each has left their indelible imprint on the direction of this project. I have done my best to keep track of these discussions over the years, and therefore must apologize if I have left anyone out in these acknowledgments.

The Borderlands seminar organized at the University of California, Santa Barbara played an instrumental role in the early shape of this work in 2011. I would like to express my gratitude, in particular, to Stuart T. Smith, Elizabeth Digeser, and John Lee for including me in this seminar. A substantial portion of the research for this book was undertaken during a sabbatical at Johns Hopkins University during the 2012–2013 academic year. I am grateful for numerous stimulating conversations with faculty and students of the Near Eastern Studies Department. I would like to thank the department chair at the time, Theodore Lewis, as well as the current chair, Glenn Schwartz, for their support during my residence, and the many other colleagues with whom I enjoyed numerous discussions on a wide variety of related subjects: Jacob Lauinger, Paul Delnero, Michael Harrower, Emily Anderson, and Mellon fellow, James Osborne. The opportunity to return, if virtually, to present in a department graduate seminar in Fall 2018 led by Jacob Lauinger pressed me further to consider the issues addressed here, and I thank him in kind for his participation in a Middle Bronze Age seminar on the issue of land tenure in early 2019. In April 2013, I was also fortunate to attend the *ARAM* Seminar on Amorites in Oxford, where I had the benefit of stimulating exchanges on the question of an Amorite koine with Daniele Bodi, Minna Lönnqvist Silver, and others. In May 2013, Peter Machinist kindly hosted a seminar at Harvard University in which I also presented some of the early thinking behind this work. I thank students of that seminar for their engagement on the subject.

Parts of this work were also presented at the eleventh annual Oriental Institute Seminar organized by Felix Höflmayer at The University of Chicago in February 2014. Later that year, I presented a portion of this research

in a talk titled "Ebla & the Identification of the Levantine Amorite *Koiné*" in connection with the "Ebla and Beyond: Ancient Near Eastern Studies after Fifty Years of Discoveries at Tell Mardikh" colloquium in Rome in December 2014. I would like to thank Pascal Butterlin, Corrine Castel, Lisa Cooper, Marian Feldman, Leonid Kogan, Augusta McMahon, Davide Nadali, Adelheid Otto, Graham Philip, France Pinnock, Andrea Polcaro, Walther Sallaberger, Piotr Steinkeller, and Irene Winter for their remarks and suggestions. Additional research was presented at Trinity International University at the invitation of Lawson Younger in 2015, and in a 2017 ASOR session called "Altered States" chaired by Geoff Emberling with responses by Norman Yoffee, with whom I have been fortunate to interact further on the subject since his fellowship at the Getty in the fall of 2017. In 2018, papers on this research were presented at Loyola Marymount University moderated by Caroline Sauvaget, in a session at the 11ICAANE meetings in Munich, and at the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting in a session titled "Revisiting the Amorites" that was chaired by Jeffrey Cooley. In 2019, I participated in the "Archaeology of the Invisible" workshop where I sought to place Amorite (alongside Subarean and Gutian) movements in the context of refugee relocation, and I thank Simone Mühl for her invitation to this event at Ludwig Maximillian University in Munich. Later that year, I presented research on Amorite mercenaries in the late third millennium at the ASOR Annual Meeting in San Diego, and I thank Nadia Ben-Marzouk and Amy Karoll for their invitation.

I would also like to thank the many colleagues who entertained discussions and answered queries concerning various issues, sites, and personages addressed in this work. Among them are Marta D'Andrea, Bettina Bader, Manfred Bietak, Dominique Charpin, Susan Cohen, Michael Dietler, Marian Feldman, Daniel Fleming, Steven Garfinkle, Felix Höflmayer, David Ilan, Christine Kepinski, E. E. Knudsen, Nicola Laneri, Mogens Larsen, Peter Machinist, Sturt Manning, Paolo Matthiae, Adam Miglio, Adelheid Otto, Luca Peyronnel, Frances Pinnock, Anne Porter, Seth Richardson, Lauren Ristvet, Michael Roaf, Walther Sallaberger, Caroline Sauvaget, David Schloen, Thomas Schneider, Lawrence Stager, Michael Streck, and Harvey Weiss. Over many years, Martin Peilstöcker has kept me abreast of developments relevant to this project within the Israel Antiquities Authority as well as providing stimulating discussions on the subject. Recently, I have also benefited greatly from dialogue with David Ilan at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and graduate students in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles for interactions that over the years have influenced many aspects of this work. Countless discussions were had with William

Schniedewind, Elizabeth Carter, Robert Englund, and Jeremy Smoak on the topics at hand. Over the years a number of students from the department engaged with and challenged the ideas presented here, and the final work is greatly indebted to their comments and suggestions. Among them are Amanda Bauer, Nadia Ben-Marzouk, David Brown, Danielle Candelora Jacob Damm, Andrew Danielson, Heidi Fessler, Jordan Galczynski, Timothy Hogue, Amy Karoll, Brett Kaufman, Kyle Keimer, Jeffrey Newman, George Pierce, Nicholas Schulte, Kylie Thomsen, and Candise Vogel. Likewise, members of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology have played an instrumental role over the years in shaping my approach to this subject, and I am especially grateful for discussions with my colleagues Sarah Morris, John Papadopoulos, Greg Schachner, and Charles Stanish.

For assistance with the figures in this work, I am grateful to University of Pennsylvania staff, the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, Manfred Bietak, Stephen Bourke, Corinne Castel, Danielle Morandi Bonacossi, and Peter Pfälzner who provided the opportunity to reprint figures from their publications in this context. My student, Amy Karoll, graciously assisted with the production of maps and technical drawings. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers whose comments were instrumental to a final revision of the work.

Last by not least, I wish to thank Katherine Burke, who along with my children, Nathaniel and Ian, have endured many a weekend without me as I ventured into a forgotten past to spend time with the Amorites. Katherine also kindly spent not a few hours reading the manuscript, if to spare many a reader additional affliction. Over more than two decades, many conversations with my father, Richard Burke, have also shaped the effort and thinking behind this work, and for this reason and his inspiration to my study of the past, this work is dedicated to him.

To whatever extent the writings of and discussion with so many different colleagues have influenced the shape of this work, its research and writing, I nonetheless assume all responsibility for any errors herein.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	*Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*
ÄAT	*Ägypten und Altes Testament*
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 6 vols. D. N. Freedman, ed. New York: Doubleday.
AEL 1	*Ancient Egyptian Literature 1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms.* M. Lichtheim. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
Akk.	Akkadian
ANES	*Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AnSt	*Anatolian Studies*
Ar.	Arabic
ARE	*Ancient Records of Egypt.* J. Breasted. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906.
ARM	Archives royales de Mari. Paris.
ÄuL	*Ägypten und Levante*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BM	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. A. L. Oppenheim and E. Reiner, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965–2011.
CAJ	*Cambridge Archaeological Journal*
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4 vols. J. M. Sasson, ed. London: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
CKU	*Correspondence of the Kings of Ur*
COS 1	*The Context of Scripture 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World.* W. W. Hallo, ed. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
COS 3	*The Context of Scripture 3: Archival Documents from the Biblical World.* W. W. Hallo, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
COS 4	*The Context of Scripture 4: Supplements.* K. L. Younger, Jr, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
CRAIBL	*Comptes rendus de l'académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology

DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst, eds., 2nd rev. ed. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
DM	*Damaszener Mitteilungen*
EBA	Early Bronze Age
EI	*Eretz-Israel*
FIP	First Intermediate Period
ha	hectare
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*
JANER	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JAR	*Journal of Archaeological Research*
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JAS	*Journal of Archaeological Science*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JMA	*Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSSEA	*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
Kt *or* KT	Old Assyrian text from Kanesh Kültepe
LAPO	*Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient*. F. Daumas, ed. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1967–.
LBA	Late Bronze Age
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NEAEHL	*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 5 vols. E. Stern, ed. Jerusalem: Simon & Schuster, 1993–2008.
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
MK	Middle Kingdom
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*
OA	Old Assyrian
OB	Old Baylonian
OEAE	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 4 vols. D. B. Redford, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
OEANE	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, 4 vols. E. M. Meyers, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OHAL	*The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant (c. 8000–332 BCE)*. M. L. Steiner and A. E. Killebrew, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
OJA	*Oxford Journal of Archaeology*
OK	Old Kingdom
OLA	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*
Or	*Orientalia*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PNAS	*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
RA	*Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie orientale*
RIMA	*Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC). The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods*. A. K. Grayson, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

RIME 1	*Presargonic Period: (2700–2350 BC). Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Vol. 1*. D. Frayne, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
RIME 2	*Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC). The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods, Vol. 2*. D. Frayne, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.
RIME 3/1	*Gudea and His Dynasty. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Vol. 3/1*. E. Otto, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
RIME 3/2	*Ur III Period (2112–2004 BC). The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods, Vol. 3/2*. D. Frayne, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
RIME 4	*Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC). The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods, 4*. G. Frayne, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
Sum.	Sumerian
TA	*Tel Aviv*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
Wb	*Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols. A. Erman and H. Grapow, eds. Leipzig: Akademie-Verlag, 1926–1963.
Wb Beleg.	*Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache. Die Belegstellen*, 5 vols. A. Erman and H. Grapow, eds. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, repr. 1973, 1935–1953.
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*