AMORITES. The term Amorite is the English rendering of the Hebrew word '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 (sail 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 appellative 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 re-
stricted 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 recogn-
izable 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 Se-
mitic 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 reten-
tion of archaic traits (rather than an innovation); see, for
example, the retention of 'ayn, as in 'ammu-rapi, “the pa-
ternal uncle has healed.”

2. Several morphophonemic alternations are also indic-
ative of archaisms: the retention of the middle vowel in sal-
amatum (compare Akk. salimatum), “well-being.”

3. The third person of the verb retains the original vowel
in first position: Yasmē'-Dagan, “Dagan hears” (compare
Akk. 'īmē-Dagan).

4. A possible innovation in the verbal system is the de-
velopment 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 Yamin-Erah, “the moon god gives”
(comparing the semantically equivalent Akkadian name Sin-
iddinam where the word order is inverted).

The few Amorite words that have survived outside ono-
mastics include some toponyms that refer to the local land-
scape. Thus, naβiū 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),
where sērum is the proper Akkadian term for the southern
steppe, more sharply differentiated from the irrigated agri-
cultural areas. Similarly, the Amorite term yaminna 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 'aharatum/
'aqdamatum, which refer, respectively, to “the region be-
hind” 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 civiliz-
ation and came to face it full blown from a position of out-
right 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 no-
madization, 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 agri-
culture 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 sōr in Arabic, and in Akkadian ab Paratum. The ur-
bahn density in the area of the Middle Euphrates is corre-
spondingly 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 (com-
prising valley floor and steppe) than any other Syro-Meso-
potamian 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 millen-
nium 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-herd-
ers acquired a high degree of autonomy, simply because the
steppe, however temporary a residence it might have re-
mainned for them, provided a safe distance from the forces
of the central government, which was aiming to enforce reg-
ules pertaining especially to military conscription and
taxation. Certainly the government never undertook the task
of imposing direct central controls in the steppe: it is signif-
icant 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
spoke 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 gentilic form 'ibr-ī.) 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 Haneans and the Suteans. (Mention is found of the “dynasty of Amurrum,” referring to the Hammurabi line in Babylon.) The term mārā 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 mārā ugārim and mārā ašīm—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 'āmmu, “paternal uncle”) bears evidence to this. More important, however, is the ability to retain the cohesion of a large human group over the vasteness 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 (sugā gum) was extended to provide leadership, beyond the village, to the clan. The title king (Lugal or sarrum) 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 Ḥana” 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 Hanean or nomadic tribes.

2. The title “king of Ḥana” (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 Amurrum, “leader of Amurrum” (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 Amurrum 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 Amurrum,” 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Socio-political Categories</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribal</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
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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 paraurban that they were, while other segments of the same population remained just as rural and paraurban 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 Terrac 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 Yəḥoḇ) 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.]
and Lexical Study. Baltimore, 1965. Still the most detailed and balanced reconstruction of the Amorite language.


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 × 2 km (2 × 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 shallow 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: jars 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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