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AMORA, AMORAIM. The traditional title for the Jewish rabbinic authorities ("rabbis") living from about 200 c.e. to around 500 c.e. (the "Amoraic period" of rabbinic Judaism). The term (Heb ^ʾāmôr^ʾa [sing.], ^ʾāmôr^ʾa'im [pl.]) comes from the root (^ʾmr) which means "to speak" or "to interpret." The name stems from their activities in interpreting the Mishnah.

The location and importance of the rabbis changed during this period. Palestine comprised the Amoraim's first center, but after approximately 400 c.e., they disappeared from history. The Amoraim in Babylonia were initially subordinate to the Palestinians, but after 400 they constituted the only rabbinic movement. As archaeological and literary evidence makes clear, however, in neither area did the Amoraim control the religious activities of the Jewish people early on. It was not until about 500 c.e. that the Babylonian Amoraim gained authority among the populace.

Each group of rabbis bears responsibility for a legal compilation called a TALMUD. The two Talmuds show similarities in form and goal. Each text is organized as a "commentary" on the Mishnah. The Amoraim thus reinterpret the Mishnah's focus on the temple cult as a way of life based on the synagogue and school—with emphasis on prayer, study, and right actions. This transformation also appears in Leviticus Rabbah—a "commentary" to Leviticus—which changes Leviticus' focus on temple worship to an interest in morality and prayer. Thus, the Amoraim played the pivotal role in transforming Judaism from a religion of sanctification through the temple cult to a religion of salvation through sanctification by ethical behavior, prayer, and study.

There is a second, rare, usage of the term *amora* found in the Talmuds. It is a technical term designating someone who interprets for teachers. In a school, the teacher would briefly make a point, usually in a low voice; the Amora would then repeat the point in a louder voice and in a simpler manner so that all could hear and understand.

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AMORITES [Heb ^ʾemōrî]. In biblical tradition, the designation of one of the seven to ten nations (Josh 7:10; Gen 15:19–21) that inhabited Canaan before the formation of the Israelite federation.

A. The Name

The term *amurru* first occurs in Old Akkadian sources as the general designation of "the West," referring to the W wind, and to the geographical area lying to the (N) W of Mesopotamia. The most frequent usage of the term refers to the population of that W region as an ethnic designation. Its semantic equivalent, Sumerian MAR.TU was used already in the mid-3d millennium b.c. even at Ebla in an ethnic or cultural sense, designating the population of the "West" that was recognized to be foreign to the population of Mesopotamia proper by culture as well as by language. It was also the name of a deity the characteristics of which are obscure. The meaning of the Sumerian term and how it came to designate the Amorites is unknown.

B. The Language

Amorite was a very important factor in the history of the Semitic languages, but information about it derives almost exclusively from personal names that can be identified as Amorite by grammatical and other contrasts to the standard onomastics of Akkadian. Nevertheless, considerable information concerning the language has been obtained from these names (Huffman 1965). Some 6000 Amorite and other non-Akkadian personal names have been identified (Gelb 1980), and in addition some Amorite words appear in cuneiform sources, especially the archives of Mari.

Though early investigations of the language induced some scholars to term it "East-Canaanite" (Bauer 1926), it is clear that Amorite was an independent branch of Northwest Semitic, though it is far from clear to what extent it contrasted to the languages of the inland Syrian region to its W, and to the languages of the coastal region of Palestine and Lebanon (Mendenhall 1985; *fc.c.*) Its West Semitic affiliation is guaranteed by the verbal system with prefixed and suffixed tenses, and preformatives with *ya-* instead of the East Semitic *i-*, as well as by a predominantly West Semitic lexical inventory (but see below).

C. The People and Culture

It has been a conventional scholarly opinion for decades that the Amorites were a nomadic population of the Syro-Arabian steppeland (Kupper 1957), who infiltrated into N Syria, gradually became sedentary, and then civilized enough to form states and empires. This view was based ultimately upon old 19th-century romantic ideas about the nomadic origins of all Semitic populations (Kupper 1957: xiv), and probably more immediately on the Sumerian satire on the Amorites preserved in Sumerian literature of the OB period. In this famous satire the Amorites are described as not burying their dead, eating uncooked meat, not living in houses—in short, as uncivilized nomadic barbarians (Cooper 1983). Though the description is patently untrue, or perhaps only technically apposite, the scholarly world seems to have taken this urban Sumerian-Akkadian scurrilous description of Amorite culture at face value because it fitted in with preconceived theories about successive waves of nomads from the Arabian desert as the origin of the Semitic-speaking populations.

In sharp contrast to traditional ideas, a much more productive and realistic approach to the problem of Amorite culture is based upon a recognition of the fact that this

population complex had its homeland in the region from the Euphrates River to the upper Khabur and Balikh river valleys S of the Anatolian mountains (Luke 1965). The many hundreds of small unfortified village *tells* in this region (Mallowan 1947: 10–11; Meijer 1986), many of which were occupied already in the Chalcolithic period, identify the culture as basically a village farming culture from time immemorial, but characterized also by a constant contact with urban cultures that were themselves powerfully influenced by the Sumero-Akkadian urban civilization of Mesopotamia. This region also was traversed by the main trade routes between Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia. It is entirely possible that in early 3d-millennium sources the entire region from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea may have been included in what the Sumerians called *MAR.TU* (Haldar 1970), and that the term may already have been applied therefore to non-Semitic-speaking persons as well.

The N part of this region was characterized by adequate rainfall for agriculture and intensive utilization of arable land. The archaeological record of the dense population of this region inevitably meant that an increasing portion of the population was dependent upon large-scale animal husbandry as their economic base. This was in turn greatly facilitated by the enormous range of steppeland to the S, extending all the way from W Mesopotamia to the Arabian desert, and to the SW to the fringe area of E Syria through the oasis of Palmyra. This large-scale sheepherding in turn implied a symbiotic relationship with urban societies that utilized the wool for the production of, and international trade in, textiles that is already attested in the texts from Ebla (Matthiae 1980). The seasonal movements of village shepherds, especially those residing along the Euphrates Valley, with their flocks between these steppe regions to the S and what is termed the "Upper Country" in the Mari texts, probably led to a contrast designated by the Amorites themselves as the group called *Banu-Yamina* "Southerners," i.e., residents of the Euphrates Valley region who engaged in irrigation agriculture as well as pastoralism, and the *Banu-Sim'al* "Northerners," of the rainfall agriculture region. This seasonal movement also has usually been confused by modern scholars with relatively recent nomadic cultural adaptations.

The economic base of the old Amorite society was thus a diversified one combining the high productivity of agricultural villages with the equally high productivity of animal husbandry. The bureaucratic archives of Mari in the 18th century B.C. give abundant evidence of this. The tax receipts of the palace indicate that persons with Amorite names made contributions of *agricultural* produce equally with such contributions made by persons who had Akkadian names. It is interesting, however, that tax payments of *animals* were made by persons who bore Amorite names only (Kerestes 1982). The evidence strongly suggests that, at least in the irrigation-based villages around Mari, the population engaged in agriculture was much more likely to become "Akkadianized" than were the shepherds. It is probable that the irrigation canals maintained by the king of Mari created a dependency and tendency toward assimilation to the Akkadian urban culture on the part of village farmers that was not characteristic of her much more independent shepherds.

Already at the dawn of history urban societies within the Amorite geographical region had been powerfully influenced by the urban cultures to the east (Matthiae 1980), but not until the Mari texts of the Old Babylonian period do we have some concrete evidence for the potential and actual friction between the urban society and the village/pastoral productive complex upon which it was dependent. The famous warning to the king of Mari not to ride upon a horse but upon a donkey because he was the king "not only of the Akkadians, but also of the Khana" illustrates the contrast. Much more important, however, is the evidence for the nearly constant conflict between successive kings of Mari and a coalition of tribes called "Benjaminites." The conflict ultimately stemmed from the fact that two generations earlier a king of Mari had, through military conquest, extended his control over city/village complexes to the W, absorbing their territory and populations into his imperial domain (see Kupper 1957: 47–81, who completely misunderstood the historical situation).

The tribal organization of the Benjaminites as well as other social entities referred to in the Mari texts had nothing to do with nomadism; rather, such organization is a constant in village society, especially when solidarity among villages is necessary to counterbalance the increasing domination of a central government. See also *BEDOUIN AND BEDOUIN STATES*. Unfortunately, little is known of the internal social organization of Amorite populations: they had officials known as *rabi amurrim* ("chief of Amurru") and *ʔabi amurrim* ("father of Amurru") and Amorite towns and villages had officials appointed by the king. These village heads were called *sugugum* in Amorite but *šāpirum* in Akkadian, and had to pay large sums to the royal treasury for their appointment (*CAD s.v. sugugum*). Furthermore, some regions had kings (*šarrum*) such as those defeated by the grandfather of Zimri-Lim. Their territory became part of the Mari empire, and their cities (Abattum, Tuttul, and Terqa, as well as no doubt others) became seats of provincial governors.

D. Amorite History Reconstructed

Contrary to present accepted opinion, it is probable that the sedentary Amorite culture of NE Syria had a continuity from the Chalcolithic or even Neolithic period on to the end of the MB Age. Though earlier Assyriologists identified this region of high population density with the land of Subartu and a non-Semitic-speaking folk, all the evidence we have indicates persons of the region have perfectly good Amorite names. It is not until the end of the MB Age that there is evidence for a massive shift of population in the entire N Syrian region, with the establishment of the empire of Mitanni and its predominantly Hurrian and Indo-European population.

In the absence of usable written documents prior to the EB Age, there is no way of proving or disproving this thesis. What does appear to be certain is that the growth of population in this region resulted in increasing emigration to the E, and there is now no reason to believe that what was happening in the W was any different. By the end of the 3d millennium B.C. Amorites were already settled in fairly large numbers in the cities of Mesopotamia (Bucellati 1966). Before the end of the 3d Dynasty of Ur, the king had erected a long wall that was intended to stop

the Amorite infiltration and incursions into his territory. According to ancient traditions, a coalition of Amorites and Elamites destroyed Ur (ca. 1960 B.C.), and within a century virtually all of the old cities of Mesopotamia were ruled by kings who bore Amorite names.

It is certain that a similar process was taking place in the W regions along the Mediterranean coastal plain (Mendenhall 1985), though the evidence is very meager compared with that available for Mesopotamia and provides little, if any, basis for a chronology of the process. Ugarit had an Amorite dynasty in control of the city by about 1900 B.C. that continued in power until the city was destroyed at the end of the LB period. Similarly, Byblos had kings with Amorite names by about 1800 B.C., and it is perhaps no coincidence that the first (known) Amorite king of Byblos, Shemu-Abu, had the same name as that of the founder of the 1st Dynasty of Babylon, Sumu-Abum. Whether or not the destruction or collapse of the city-states of Palestine and Lebanon at the end of the EB III period (about 2300 B.C.) had anything to do with Amorite infiltration is at present an unanswerable question. It would seem improbable, to judge from what is known of Mesopotamian history. Furthermore, the earliest evidence for Amorite political control of coastal city-states comes half a millennium after the EB III destructions, and therefore makes most implausible the theory that Amorite incursions were responsible.

The turbulent times that attended the transition from the MB to the LB Age (16th century B.C.) seem also to have seen the disintegration of the old Amorite culture in the N Syrian homeland. There can be little doubt that this was brought about by incursions of Anatolian populations from the N. It is possible that the process was already beginning in the earlier phases of the MB period, and may help account for the Amorite migrations to the E and W. By the end of the 16th century the whole of N Syria was under the domination of the Hurrian empire of Mitanni; by the beginning of the 14th century many of the city-states of Syria, the coastal region, and Palestine (as far S as the Hebron area) were ruled by kings who bore Hurrian or Indo-European names. Alalakh in N Syria shows a significant population shift from very predominantly Semitic names to equally predominant Hurrian names between the 18th and 15th centuries. Ugarit on the coast had a population less than 40 percent Semitic, and in most of N Syria and the coastal region dynastic names shifted from Semitic, to Hurrian, and then to Luwian. By the Iron Age N Syria was known as *mat hattî*, "land of the Hittites."

During the LB Age, the Amorites had evidently become thoroughly assimilated into local populations both in the E and the W, as well as in the NE Syrian homeland, so that after that is no longer possible to identify a specific Amorite cultural/linguistic population group.

E. "Amorite" as a Political Designation

It was noted above that in native Amorite society there were already kings and other titles that designated political functions or offices. Following the diaspora of Amorites in the 20th to 19th centuries, there was evidently a multitude of political titles that made use of the term Amurru or the Sumerian MAR.TU. The term "father of the land of Amurru" was used at Larsa by an Elamite king, and

subsequently by other kings including Hammurapi. The title became "king of the Amorites" by Hammurapi's 35th year and was a standard appellation of kings from then on, obviously devoid of any ethnic connotations. It was even included in standard lexicographical texts: LUGAL MAR.TU = *šar-ru a-mur-ri-i* (Kupper 1957: 174-77).

In the LB Age there was established a kingdom of Amurru in the upper Orontes Valley region of Syria. It is attested already in the Alalakh texts of the 15th century, and its history is well recorded in the Hittite and Amarna archives until its destruction at the beginning of the Iron Age. Abdu-Ashirta, a vassal of the Egyptians, established a dynasty in that kingdom that can be traced for six generations. His successor, Aziru, became a vassal of the Hittites as Egyptian power in the N began to wane, and we even have the text of the suzerainty treaty between him and the Hittites.

The next and last occurrence of the royal title "king of the Amorites" occurs in the biblical references to Sihon, who associated with Heshbon in Transjordan, and who was defeated in the earliest recorded battle of the newly established Israelite federation (Numbers 21). There can be little doubt of the historicity of the event, even though the present narratives are of course garbled by the overlay of later tradition and interpretations. His royal title must have derived from, and represented a continuation of, the political traditions of the old N Syrian principality of Amurru. Together with a number of other puzzling traditions (notably the Balaam narratives), this title strongly indicates a considerable influx of population into Transjordan and Palestine at the time when destructions in N Syria were leaving much of that region virtually depopulated. At the same time (i.e., the transition from LB to Early Iron Ages) the population of Transjordan saw a very sharp rise in density, and the only reasonable source for this rapid growth was the region to the N. Even the name Sihon (as well as Og of Bashan, who is also identified as an "Amorite" king) has no reasonable Semitic etymology. As was true also in Mesopotamia, the term "Amorite" no longer had any ethnic or linguistic significance and had simply become part of the traditional titulature of kings with N Syrian cultural connections. The conclusion is inescapable that Sihon and others were the remnants of N political entities that attempted to reestablish their old political regimes in another region—exactly as the neo-Hittite state of Carchemish successfully did for a time, after the destruction of the Hittite state and empire ca. 1200 B.C.

That Sihon and Og were not the only illustrations of such a process is indicated by the fact that the Amorites are also included in all of the various "Tables of Nations" scattered through the Pentateuch and Joshua. These lists designate political regimes and not merely "ethnic" groups. This is evident both from the fact that they are labeled *gōyîm* (which is probably best defined as "a politically organized military gang") and from the fact that some of them, such as the Jebusites of Jerusalem, can definitely be identified with specific city-states. It has been established that the regime of Jerusalem already in the Amarna period derived from N Syria (Moran 1975). Its Amorite derivation is indicated not only by its name, *Yebus* (which is Amorite *Yabusum*), but also by the bitter condemnation of the prophet Ezekiel (16:2-3), who accurately

described its origin as a hybrid of Amorite and "Hittite" (i.e., N Syrian) forebears. Even the language of standard biblical prose, that of Jerusalem, betrays its Syro-Hittite heritage in its use of the verb *hyh*, "to become," that is attested elsewhere only in Amorite and at Zenjirli (and of course in the much later attested Aramaic), instead of the otherwise standard Phoenician-Arabic verb *kwn* that stems from the EB Old Coastal Dialect of Palestine.

F. The Amorite Cultural and Religious Legacy

To the E, the disappearance of the Old Akkadian language and its replacement by Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian is most probably the result of Amorite influence in Mesopotamian speech and eventually writing. A similar but not identical process took place in the W. The Old Coastal Semitic of the Byblos Syllabic texts was replaced by a complex of local dialects that have long been termed "Canaanite," but all of which exhibit a blend of the older dialect with very strong influence from Amorite that can be traced especially in proper names and vocabulary (Mendenhall 1985: chap. 10; fc.b). In contrast to the E, where the older Old Akkadian disappeared entirely, the basic structure of the older language, the Old Coastal Semitic, survived in various fringe areas from the Biqa' of Lebanon to the Sinai peninsula, and eventually became literate in the inscriptions of Old North Arabic and Old South Arabic.

Historically more important, however, is increasing evidence suggesting that venerable cultural and religious traits all over the ANE have Amorite origins. Long ago it was noted that the myth of cosmic conflict was probably Amorite in origin, and was adapted in the E in the Babylonian creation epic, and in the W in the Ugaritic myth of the conflict of Ba'al and Yamm. Accompanying the mythical motifs, the Amorite deities Dagan, Hadad, and 'Anat became established in the W superimposed upon earlier deities of 'Athirat and Yamm, 'Il, 'Ilat (Ba'alat), and a Ba'al, whose proper name is unknown, but who is later identified with the Amorite storm god Hadad. The details of the process remain to be worked out, but the syncretistic process itself can hardly be questioned (Vine 1965).

Furthermore, it is now possible to trace, at least in theory, the reasons for the extremely close parallels between biblical and Old Babylonian literary works. It is virtually certain that such motifs as the flood story were mediated to the Palestinian region through N Syrian (Hurrian) versions of an old Amorite narrative. However, much more impressive is the earliest biblical law code of Exodus 21-23: its striking similarities to the Code of Hammurapi and other Mesopotamian law codes reflect their common derivation from Amorite traditions and customary law.

Probably the single most important Amorite contribution to the biblical tradition was the Abraham narrative in Genesis, which was in all probability a specifically Palestinian epic tradition (for the archaeological correlations, see Dever *IJH*, 70-120). In spite of the fact that it has been thoroughly reworked to fit the political concerns of a much later period (Mendenhall *AIR*, 337-56), the basic structure of the narrative fits entirely the nature of the historical process of Amorite migrations attested in the Bronze Age sources: from infiltration to political control legitimized through a divine gift of the land (though the latter stage

is, of course, presented in the biblical narrative as realized only with King David).

Finally, it should be noted that some of the most important concepts in the theological vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible are either demonstrably or probably of Amorite origin. Foremost is the concept of divine deliverance that became the concept of "salvation" expressed in various forms of the root *yšc*. At least sixteen gods and divine epithets appear as subjects of the verb "to save" in the Amorite personal names. Other key theological terms that are probably Amorite are *sdq*, "righteous"; *nqm*, "vindication"; *yšr*, "upright" (there was probably a native Coastal Dialect cognate, but with a semantic contrast); *špt*, "to judge"; *hsd*, "faithful," and perhaps *zkr*, "remember" (Mendenhall fc.b).

In summary, from the MB Age on there was no region of the Levant that had not been influenced by the Amorite language and culture in various ways and various degrees. Their cultural and linguistic influence was a lasting one that is gradually coming to light, especially in the areas of religion and law. Past generations of scholars credited the Babylonians with these cultural achievements; however, it now appears that the Babylonians themselves were merely the recipients, in part the product, and to some degree the vectors of the ancient Amorite village heritage, until they succumbed to the perpetual temptation of urban imperialism. It is equally clear that the Amorite populations were themselves drastically modified by the various cultures into which they became integrated in the later phases of the Bronze Age, so that eventually they ceased to exist as a distinct cultural group.

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