



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Amorites in the early Old Babylonian Period

Boer, R. de

Citation

Boer, R. de. (2014, May 28). *Amorites in the early Old Babylonian Period*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25842>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25842>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/25842> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Boer, Rients de

Title: Amorites in the Early Old Babylonian Period

Issue Date: 2014-05-28

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What can we say about the early Old Babylonian Amorites in Southern Mesopotamia in the period from ca. 2000 to 1815 BC? Let us look back at the main research questions in chapter 1 and see what answers can be given.

- 1) Was there a clear Amorite ethnicity and discernible Amorite migration-movements in early Old Babylonian Southern Mesopotamia?

It is important to distinguish an Amorite ethnicity from an Amorite language because the existence of a separate Amorite language within the Semitic family is still debatable. It is difficult to distinguish an Amorite population from a local population on the basis of the texts available to us. Even so, Amorite personal names are often clearly distinguishable. There does seem to have been a distinction between ‘Amorites’ and other people, especially in the earliest time of the Old Babylonian period. One could even speak of an ethnicity. This is based on the fact that almost all early Old Babylonian kings bore Amorite names, the mentioning of an Amorite assembly as a political institution and the indication of (military) encounters with MAR.TU people. This Amorite ethnicity must have existed until ca. 1850-1800 BC. However, over time, tribal realities and affiliations changed and by the time of the Mari archives, around 1770 BC, this Amorite ethnicity from a century earlier had disappeared. There was no longer explicit talk of people having an Amorite ethnicity. Even though some echo of being Amorite remained in collective memory (in the title GAL/UGULA MAR.TU and the Babylonian edicts for example), it was not referred to actively from the reign of Samsu-iluna onwards.

Migration movements are not mentioned explicitly in the cuneiform record, still evidence for migrations can be inferred from the sources. This is however not conclusive. In chapter 3 we saw that the distribution of Amorite personal names shows the pattern of a migration (names are less frequent than Akkadian names and there are relatively more hapax and *dis legomenon* names). This pattern might also be explained differently: out of social-economic grounds for example (Amorite names were the names of poorer

people). In fact, a strong argument against the Amorites as newcomers to Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region is the prominent occurrence of the gods Erah and El in the Amorite names, which is mirrored in the Akkadian names, where the counterparts Sîn and ilum are ubiquitous. There must have been some migration from the KUR MAR.TU (upper Diyala region), but not in very large numbers.

- 2) How did these Amorites take control over a territory as large as Southern Mesopotamia?

A distinction can be made between two groups of Amorites: one in the south around Larsa and one along the Diyala River and in Northern Babylonia. In order to seize political power, these Amorites must have had military power. It seems likely that many Amorites were mercenaries hired first by the Ur III kings and later by independent cities and local rulers. They may have been hired to protect them against other groups of Amorites or aggressive neighbors. The best evidence we have for this is the very early Old Babylonian 'list of Amorites' from Ešnunna published by Gelb in 1968, showing groups of Amorites organized by section. A theory that might explain the Amorite take-over is the 'elite transfer' model: at a certain point in time the Amorite mercenaries ousted the local elites that had hired them, but they left most institutions and political structures intact: they styled themselves as Amorite leaders, but also as traditional Sumerian-Akkadian kings, they did not pillage the cities, left the religious status quo as it was, etc. This ensured a smooth and relatively uninterrupted regime change: the people did not rebel and there are no accounts of Amorite brutalities. Over time these Amorites were so much integrated into Mesopotamian culture that the Amorite ethnicity disappeared.¹²⁶⁹ Such an explanation is different from the traditional view of Amorite mass-migrations into southern Mesopotamia.

- 3) To what extent have the Amorites and their migration changed prevalent structures in early Old Babylonian Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region?

¹²⁶⁹ It was however kept alive out of dynastic grounds by the Babylonian monarchy and in other petrified institutions such as the *mīšarum* edicts.

- a. Population structure: how many ‘Amorites’ can we perceive in the texts and what is their relation to the local population?

Considering the personal names in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region (the only evidence we have to answer this question), it turns out that 8% of the people had a clear Amorite name, versus 60% Akkadian, and 5% Sumerian. No less than 27% of the population had a name that was unclassifiable: it could be either Akkadian, Amorite or belong to another language. This means that the actual percentage of people carrying Amorite names lay somewhere between 8% and 27%. The stock of Amorite personal names was smaller and also less frequent. They occur more often only once or twice compared to Akkadian or Sumerian names. This makes the Amorites (people with an Amorite name) a sizeable minority that may have been new to the region.

- b. How were the Amorites themselves organized militarily and tribally? Did this influence the existing military and societal structures in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region?

The Amorites had some kind of military organization still reflected in a title such as *rabi amurrim*. This title shows similarities to the *rabiān amurrim*, which was used by some early OB kings, apparently as a epithet. From the later Mari archives we know that the *rabi amurrim* commanded several hundred men. Several tribes are mentioned in the early OB material: the Amnānum, Yahrūrum, Rabābum, Yamutbalum, Numhā, Mutiabal, and Yabasa tribes. However, these tribes are *never* called ‘Amorite’. We can only assume that these tribes fall under our catch-all term ‘Amorite’. Similarly, we cannot tell whether our Amorites were organized militarily along tribal lines, even though this seems likely because in the Mari archives groups of soldiers were divided according to tribe.

The title *rabi amurrim* was adopted all over the Middle East for military commanders, but lower ranks were called AGA.ÚS (‘crown following’) or ŠU.HA (‘fisherman’),¹²⁷⁰ not reflecting any Amorite titles. The title *rabi amurrim* was not used in the Middle Babylonian period. The cuneiform texts present no evidence that tribal divisions influenced everyday life in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region. On the other hand, it did very much influence OB politics: many cases of armed conflict are explainable from a tribal perspective

¹²⁷⁰ In addition to other less frequent titles such as RÁ.GABA or AGA.ÚS LUGAL.

because rulers from the same tribe often supported each other. However, tribal allegiances were also fluid and could just as easily be changed, downplayed, or stressed if the situation demanded so. In the eastern part of Mesopotamia, 'Amorite' tribal divisions disappear from our sources at the end of Hammurabi's reign (ca. 1750 BC). Thanks to the Tell Leilan archives we know that in Upper Mesopotamia politics were still very much tribally oriented after this period. However, from ca. 1720 BC onwards, there are no references to Amorite tribes or their political relevance anymore.

- c. Where did these Amorites live? Were they part of the urban population or were they pastoralists living on the fringes of society?

There is a paradox concerning the Amorites: even though Amorite kings were in charge all over Mesopotamia, people carrying Amorite names hardly occur in the extant family archives. When they do, they are people of seemingly little importance.

One explanation is that people with Amorite names lived mostly in the countryside, outside of the scope of the cuneiform record because it was mostly the urban elite and institutions that resorted to writing. Amorite names occur more often in family archives from small towns, such as Halhalla and Damrum. There is some logic to this: if the Amorites started out as mercenaries, the city population must have been reluctant to allow them to live in the city, forcing them to live in the countryside surrounding the urban centers. It is interesting to note in this respect that people with Amorite names tend to appear clustered together in certain texts.

There is little to no evidence that the Amorites were nomads or even pastoralists in the early OB period. This might again be the result of the nature of our documentation, there are no early OB herding contracts and references to sheep and goats are never associated with Amorites.

- d. What role did the Amorites play in the texts? Were they landowners, creditors or debtors, rich or poor? How did they fare compared to the local population?

The people with Amorite names do not seem to have had radically different roles in the texts than people with Akkadian or Sumerian names. There is a slightly higher percentage of Amorites owning property in Sippar and Kiš and Damrum (11 and 13%), than there are Amorites (8 and 9%), but this is hardly

proof of a landowning elite. The same goes for debtors and creditors: it is impossible to establish any pattern based on the personal names alone. Because we only have parts of family archives it is almost impossible to determine whether even one family was rich compared to another: we lack the whole picture.

- 4) Did the early Old Babylonian Amorite kings and their kingdoms lead to more diversity or uniformity in Southern Mesopotamia?

The Ur III empire had unified southern Mesopotamia for a century, but political fragmentation was already a fact before Ur's last king Ibbi-Sîn was defeated around 2004 BC. Isin, Ešnunna and probably also Malgium and Dēr had already asserted their independence before this date. Interestingly, Amorite rulers were not yet a factor of importance at this time: none of the kingdoms was led by someone carrying an Amorite name. The first Amorite rulers entered the historical stage decades later: first Larsa kings such as Zabāya and Gungunum (from ca. 1945 BC onwards) and later the Kisuṛra kings and the many Amorite 'petty rulers' in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region. Around 1880 BC southern Mesopotamia was a patchwork of small states ruled by Amorite kings. Eventually, all small kingdoms were incorporated by Sumu-la-El of Babylon and Ipiq-Adad II of Ešnunna. Much later, Hammurabi conquered all of southern Mesopotamia, neutralizing the last independent states of Malgium and Larsa. He deported the population of Malgium and annexed the territory of Larsa in 1763 BC. Ešnunna remained independent, but was severely crippled after the Elamites had killed the royal family and pillaged the land in 1765 BC. The south never adapted completely to Babylonian rule and under Hammurabi's successor Samsu-iluna it broke free. During the subsequent late Old Babylonian period, Southern Mesopotamia was divided into the Babylonian kingdom in the north and the Sealand dynasty in the south. The whole of Southern Mesopotamia was united again under Kassite rule around 1500 BC. This was never possible were it not for the fact that the Babylonian kingdom had been consolidated over hundreds of years after Sumu-la-El, laying the foundation for a state that lasted for more than a thousand years.

Either directly or indirectly the time of the Amorite kingdoms also had a major unifying effect on Southern Mesopotamia's culture: the Nippur calendar was adopted all over the area, making the many local calendars redundant.

The literature was akkadianized and Sumerian as an administrative and literary language gradually lost its importance.

It remains difficult to ascertain whether 'Amorites' were really seen as very different from the local city urban populations and whether this difference was mostly ethnic or social.