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Amorites in the early Old Babylonian Period

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Introduction

This thesis was written within the N.W.O-financed project ‘The Impact of Migration: Migrant Related Change in the Ancient Near East’ led by Dr. J.G. Dercksen at Leiden University. The thesis deals with one of the project’s three sub-programs called ‘The Effects of Amorite Migration to Mesopotamia’.

The Amorites are a people that are attested throughout the history of the Ancient Near East. There is and was much discussion about almost every aspect of the Amorites: their language, ethnicity, religion, way of life etc. They remain elusive because the cuneiform texts present them differently over time. In addition, it is often unclear whether we can distinguish them from other groups of people. Much must be inferred from Amorite personal names and scraps of information.

In an early phase of the research it was decided to focus on the early Old Babylonian (OB) period and the role that the Amorites played therein. The main reason for this limitation is that a comprehensive study of the Amorites is simply too big to fit into one thesis.

The early OB period is the period of time between the fall of the Ur III empire around 2004 BC and the accession of Hammurabi of Babylon in 1791 BC.¹ This period is defined by the existence of many small rivaling kingdoms all over the Middle East ruled by Amorite kings.

Our sources for this period are limited mostly to Southern Mesopotamia where we can distinguish between several regions. The whole of Southern Mesopotamia is called Babylonia, which we can divide into Northern Babylonia and Southern Babylonia. To the northeast of Northern Babylonia flows the Diyala river, its valley is referred to as the Diyala region. Here we can distinguish between a Lower Diyala region and an Upper Diyala region. These territories were not called by these names in the early OB period, but they will nevertheless be used throughout this thesis.

¹ The time limit used in this study is however the end of the reigns of Ipiq-Adad II of Ešnunna around 1815 BC and of Apil-Sin of Babylon around 1813 BC (according to the Middle Chronology).



The focus in this study will be mostly on Amorites in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region. Southern Babylonia was torn between the two rivaling cities of Isin and Larsa during this period (that is why the early OB period is sometimes called the Isin-Larsa Period). However, in Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region many of the political developments remain unclear, even though we have numerous texts from many sites.² This study was able to use many recently published and unpublished texts and studies to reconsider the early OB period and the role that the Amorite people played.³

The central research question in the project ‘The Impact of Migration: Migrant related Change in the Ancient Near East’ is:

- What institutional changes can be perceived in ancient Mesopotamia and Anatolia during the selected periods and what is the role of migration therein?

The two related sub-questions are:

- Did migration lead to cultural uniformity or rather diversity?
- What interregional effects of economic or political expansion can be observed?

These overarching research questions needed to be adapted to the situation in the early OB period and the available textual material. The main research questions in this thesis are:

- 1) Was there a clear Amorite ethnicity and discernible Amorite migration-movements in early Old Babylonian Southern Mesopotamia?
- 2) How did these Amorites take control over a territory as large as Southern Mesopotamia?

² The most recent reconstruction is Charpin 2004a, see also Wu Yuhong 1994a, and the pioneering work by Edzard 1957.

³ Amongst these texts is the unpublished Ikūn-pīša Letter Archive (*IPLA*) from Sippar, which will be published in the near future, as well as several unpublished texts from the British Museum and the Yale and Nies Babylonian collections, which can be found in the Appendix. Among the recent relevant studies we can mention for example Michalowski 2011 and Hussein 2008.

- 3) To what extent have the Amorites and their migration changed prevalent structures in early Old Babylonian Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region? The texts enable us specifically to take a closer look at:
 - a. Population structure: how many Amorites can we perceive in the texts and what is their relation to the local population?
 - 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?
 - c. Where did these Amorites live? Were they part of the urban population or were they pastoralists living on the fringes of society?
 - 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?
- 4) Did the early Old Babylonian Amorite kings and their different kingdoms lead to more diversity or uniformity in Southern Mesopotamia?

The above questions are dealt with in chapters 2-8. In chapter 2 we will explore the term 'Amorite'. Chapter 3 will deal with the Amorite language and Amorite personal names. Chapter 4 will consider every occurrence of Amorites in texts from Northern Babylonia to determine the role(s) they had in the texts: were they landowners, where did they live etc. Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the extremely complicated political situation in Sippar and the vicinity of Kiš; this will result in a new relative chronology for the early Old Babylonian period. Chapters 6 and 7 aim to reconstruct the political history of Northern Babylonia and the Diyala region from the fall of the Ur III empire until ca. 1815 BC. Special attention will be given to the Amorites and Amorite rulers. The basis for this reconstruction is new textual material and insights from the previous chapters. Lastly, we return to the above research questions in Chapter 8.