

ENTANGLEMENT, THE AMORITE *KOINÉ*, AND AMORITE CULTURES IN THE LEVANT¹

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is the result of initial efforts to reassess the Amorites within the broader socioeconomic context of the late third and early second millennia B.C. by addressing the contexts of and processes inherent in identity construction and maintenance during this period. It is born of an interest in the question, which was aroused by my earlier study of Middle Bronze Age fortifications during which I suggested that these defensive efforts were part of a constellation of material culture in the Levant, the Delta, and northern Mesopotamia that formed a cultural *koiné* that developed from the late third millennium B.C. through the first half of the second. While intensive scholarship persists on the question of the Amorites, in many respects the perspectives are more diverse than at any point in the study of the subject and for this reason consensus is difficult to identify. Furthermore, research of Amorites in the third millennium B.C. (Early Bronze Age) seems increasingly unrelated to the discussions of Amorites during the first half of the second millennium B.C. (Middle Bronze Age), and yet questions persist concerning the relationship between phenomena traditionally identified with Amorites during these two periods.

Most research on the Amorites continues to adhere to trajectories defined for Amorite studies during the 1960s, the most notable of which is the overriding identification of Amorites as pastoral nomads and the prevalence of textually-defined but mostly unnuanced explanations of phenomena perceived to relate to the Amorites. Many old notions continue to be entertained that now simply seek to incorporate prevailing anthropological jargon,² but still fail to address the diversity of the contexts in which Amorites are attested or to explain the relationship of these contexts to each other. These problems are exacerbated by the fragmented nature of Amorite studies, whether due to the geographic zones in which the Amorites were attested (e.g., Northern and Southern Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt, Iran) or due to the divide that exists between philological and archaeological approaches to the data.

I would like to propose therefore an approach that departs in significant ways from previous studies by examining a wide range of socioeconomic contexts in which intensive cultural contact shaped social interactions over the *longue durée* resulting in varied Amorite identities across the Near East (i.e., Amorite cultures). The growing critique of the role of pastoral nomadism in the Near East serves as a point of departure for emphasizing an

¹ I would like to thank participants of the 2013 ARAM conference on ‘The Amorites and Hurrians,’ particularly Daniel Bodi and Minna Lönnqvist for their insights. Additionally, I am grateful to members of the Mesopotamia Seminar at Johns Hopkins University including Glenn Schwartz, Michael Harrower, Jacob Lauinger, and Paul Delnero whose observations and critiques have encouraged an improved articulation of the argument presented here. I am likewise grateful for remarks on drafts of this paper as well as additional bibliography provided by Adam Miglio.

² The heavy emphasis placed on pastoral nomadism in more recent discussions persists in the works of M. Lönnqvist (e.g., 2000, 2006, 2008; 2011) and A. Porter (2002b, 2002a, 2004, 2007, 2009; esp. 2011), but also continued work of G. Buccellati (e.g., 2010). The nearly exclusively textual focus continues to overshadow Mari-related research.

altogether different approach to the study of the Amorites.³ While there is still a place for pastoral nomadism, it should be recognized as but one of a number of processes shaping cultural exchange that contributed to the evolution of Amorite identity. As I argue here, a number of other important cultural processes play a potentially more significant role in the exchanges that contributed to the spread of Amorite culture from the mid-third through the early second millennium B.C.

Another point of departure in my research concerns the assumption of the role played by the middle Euphrates in the identification of Amorite societies. This region certainly permits a well-informed articulation of one strand of Amorite culture during the Middle Bronze Age, as described in the Mari texts and attested in the archaeological record.⁴ This, however, does not mean that Mari provides ipso facto the archetype of Amorite culture or is its origin. Too little about neighboring cultures, particularly those to the west of Mari, is known owing to the limits of textual sources to make Mari the center of the Amorite existence. It is illusory to employ the Mari texts to define a trait-list by which Amorites should be identified given the contemporaneous attestations of Amorites throughout the ancient Near East. Instead, Mari should be regarded as but one facies of Amorite culture, which like a lithic tool possessed many sides resulting from the unique contexts in which Amorite identities were negotiated from southern Mesopotamia, to the Northern Levant, and including the Egyptian Delta. Although this has not been the case to date, an effort to address the development of Amorite culture is, consequently, to engage in the study of pan-Near Eastern phenomena ranging from the mid-third through the mid-second millennium B.C.⁵

Despite acknowledging the longer legacy of Amorite culture that many have recognized as fundamental in the shaping of many Near Eastern institutions and cultural practices, the present analysis addresses the first half of the second millennium B.C.,⁶ outlining the basis for the identification of the Amorite *koiné* in the west and the context of its origins during the late third millennium. In order to do so this study seeks to engage anthropological approaches to the study of the Amorites in which philologists, archaeologists, and historians can identify common ground. For a number of reasons, not the least of which is the quantity and nature of available archaeological data, the Middle Bronze Age, as the pinnacle of ‘Amorite’ activity, serves as a logical starting point for attempting to establish criteria for identifying Amorite identities that can then be traced back in time. Observing that fortifications were but one element of constellations of material culture among many Amorite societies during the first half of the second millennium, I have previously referred to this shared material culture as the ‘Amorite cultural *koiné*’ (Burke 2008:160) but it can perhaps be more simply identified as the Amorite *koiné*. While this observation was largely based on archaeological data from the Levant and Egyptian Delta, comparable discussions of Amorite culture in Northern Mesopotamia and the existence of an Amorite *oikumene* there during the

³ Among the notable recent critiques of the emphasis placed on pastoral nomads are those of Daniel Potts who has sought to correct perspectives regarding nomadism as it relates to the historical and archaeological record of Iran (Potts forthc.).

⁴ This observation is reflected in recent efforts to adopt a different spelling of the term Amorite culture as described for Mari (i.e., Amorrite), which is intended to avoid associations with biblical Amorites (Fleming 2004:13–14). This approach sidesteps, however, the significance of identifiable relationships and furthermore invites continued distinctions where some attempt to understand similarities among Amorite cultures and the bases for them is warranted. Furthermore, there would be no end to the imposition of invented terminology in an attempt to account for the nuances distinguishing Amorite cultures across the Near East.

⁵ The recognition of this constitutes a major departure from Porter’s recent work (Porter 2011) where the discussion of the Amorite phenomenon, while extending into the first half of the second millennium and employing archaeology as well as textual sources, does not spatially account for territory south of Ebla to discuss the southern Levant or Egypt.

⁶ For discussion of cultic and religious influences, see Burke (2011b).

Middle Bronze Age demand a broader perspective the study of Amorite cultures. These parallel studies also open the door to the consideration of the social and cultural processes that contributed to these phenomena. As these early studies already suggest, a variety of processes were at work during the Middle Bronze Age that are fundamentally related to the movement of groups and individuals, which were arguably already at work during the second half of the third millennium B.C. In contrast to earlier studies which have emphasized simplistic migrations or conquests, in this study these processes are collectively discussed here within the framework of entanglement.

The thesis of the present assessment is that from the second half of the third millennium B.C. through the first quarter of the second millennium, under the aegis of Amorite political hegemony that formed the basis of the Amorite *oikumene*, discrete cultural processes contributed to the construction of a constellation of material culture, the Amorite *koiné*. This material culture functioned as a medium for transcending encounters among individuals and groups that resulted from increasingly frequent long-distance contact between groups and individuals of diverse social, economic, political, and religious identities. To address this I will begin by identifying major elements of the Amorite *koiné*, focusing specifically on its identification within one broad cultural zone or facies, the western half of the Fertile Crescent from northern Mesopotamia to the Egyptian Delta. Second, I will identify the cultural and historical processes out of which this Amorite *koiné* developed. Finally, I will suggest how these processes under the heading ‘entanglement’ permit an understanding of the Amorite *koiné* as a medium for transcending encounters with alterity.

THE AMORITE OIKUMENE

In order to address elements of the Amorite *koiné* that took shape by the second half of the Middle Bronze Age in the west, a few words are necessary concerning my choice of terminology for this constellation of Middle Bronze Age material culture. First, as I hope to demonstrate, it is appropriate to refer to it as ‘Amorite’ because of its predominant associations, whether characterized as religious, political, ethnic, or social, with individuals and groups that scholars, by means of textual sources, have long since identified as Amorite and would situate within the Amorite *oikumene*.⁷ Irrespective of the degree to which this identity in certain circumstances may have constituted an ethnic affiliation, I would contend that identifying as or being identified as Amorite was fundamentally a social identity by the first half of the second millennium, carrying with it a wide range of connotations including ancestral relations, political associations, etc. Second, I have employed the term *koiné* to underscore that the cultural identity suggested by material finds and associated practices resulted from intentional efforts to construct a common identity by the creation and appropriation of conspicuous markers of group solidarity. Lastly, the persistence or legacy of this identity is a direct result of its flexible character, illustrated by the permutations of the Amorite *koiné* associated with regional cultural assemblages of the Middle Bronze Age across the Near East.

The identification of the Amorite *koiné* is fundamentally relatable to the notion of the Amorite *oikumene*, which has obtained currency for Syria and northern Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian period. Lauren Ristvet, for example, remarks on the existence of a ‘common Amorite’ *oikumene* spanning Mesopotamia, southern Anatolia, and western Syria observing that textual sources of the period ‘reveal a world united by a shared written

⁷ In Mesopotamia a wide range of sources permit the tracking of Amorites among textual sources from the late third to first half of the second millennium B.C. (see discussion by Porter 2011), while in the Levant and Egypt the data consist predominantly of naming conventions as among the rulers listed in the Execration Texts (Redford 1992; Ritner 1997) and the Hyksos rulers (Dynasty XV).

language, extensive diplomatic contacts, and ongoing trade relations’ (Ristvet 2012:46). She notes the existence of the ‘culture’ of ‘Greater Mesopotamia’ alongside the Akkadian cultural legacy dated to the second half of the third millennium B.C. and underscores that ‘Amorites states of the early second millennium B.C. actively constructed a shared culture, often adapting Southern Mesopotamian imagery and institutions to Northern Mesopotamian milieu.’ She goes on to remark that ‘within this unified cultural framework, political fragmentation was the norm.’ Glenn Schwartz has likewise employed the expression to characterize this phenomenon, and notes the processes that contributed to its construction (see Schwartz 2013). Both Ristvet and Schwartz, while noting the variety of cultural processes responsible for constructing the Amorite *oikumene* underscore, however, the seemingly unidirectional flow of ideas and material cultural influences from the south to the north. It remains to be further investigated given the evident bidirectional flow of individuals whether this was entirely the case. Nevertheless, the Amorite *oikumene* was primarily limited to customs and practices for which any material reflection was secondary. For instance, the adoption of Old Babylonian, which is reflected in literary and legal traditions,⁸ did not lead to particularly conspicuous markers in the archaeological record. Likewise other traditions and social customs may not have left material remains. In this regard, I would suggest therefore, that the primary difference in the employment of the concepts of Amorite *koiné* and *oikumene* is their fundamental relationship to practices that, respectively, were or were not ‘inscribed’ in material culture—to use Paul Connerton’s terminology (Connerton 1989), which is further discussed below.

THE AMORITE *KOINÉ*

A number of recent studies, to say nothing of a large corpus of earlier scholarship now facilitate the identification of a constellation of material culture in the west that have recently been labeled the Amorite *koiné*. The conspicuous nature of the Amorite *koiné* may explain why many scholars, while rejecting the conquests and migrations inherent to the Amorite Hypothesis, remain convinced relationships existed between Amorites and the emergence of a distinct corpus of material culture in the Levant and the Egyptian Delta, the precursors or prototypes of which can be identified in northern Mesopotamian. W. F. Albright, Kathleen Kenyon (1966, 1973), Jacob Kaplan (1971), Aharon Kempinski (1992:210), Lawrence Stager (1999), Manfred Bietak (1996, 2010), Minna Lönnqvist (2000), Ann Porter (2011, and bibliography therein), and others have documented material cultural elements that permit their recognition as part of the Amorite *koiné*, especially as it is manifest from northern Mesopotamia to Egypt. By the second half of the Middle Bronze Age the Amorite *koiné* in the west reflects the pervasive influence of cultural interactions and the movement of individuals that typified this period. The very brief discussion here is restricted principally to material cultural indices as they extend to the west from northern Mesopotamia to the Levant and the eastern Nile Delta. Here major elements of the Amorite *koiné* are discussed with respect to their conspicuousness within the archaeological record.

In addition to fortifications, within the palatial sphere one element of the Amorite *koiné* appears to be the subpalatial royal mortuary complex as exemplified at Ebla, Mari, and Qatna. These appear to relate to an ideal type to which many Middle Bronze Age burials throughout the Levant also conformed.⁹ Additionally, there are palatial ornamentation traditions including mural production that were adopted as a shared style of ornamentation

⁸ Hammurapi’s laws are the most notable example, the contemporaneous significance of which are particularly notable in light of the recent discovery at Hazor of a tablet fragment containing elements comparable to those within the laws of Hammurapi, see Horowitz (2012).

⁹ See, for example, Carter and Parker’s discussion of shaft tombs (1995:113–114).

though they were often executed with different techniques and styles.¹⁰ In the sphere of cult, the *temple in antis* (cp. *migdôl* or Syrian temple) emerged as a common building type for state cult with antecedents from the mid-third millennium in Syria.¹¹ Accompanying temples is the evidence for the employment of *massebôt* or standing stones.¹²

On the individual level the Amorite *koiné* was expressed in burial traditions ranging from so-called ‘warrior burials’¹³ to family crypts,¹⁴ and distinct practices in infant burial, predominantly subfloor infant jar or pot burials.¹⁵ These examples primarily reflect a tradition of intramural burial whenever circumstances permitted, but with some flexibility when burial elsewhere was required. Other practices such as the ritual interment of equids are reflective of shared cultural practices both in burial rites (see Wapnish 1997), but likewise in oath making and ritual practices as indicated by textual sources (e.g., ARM II 37). The individual categories of material culture can be regarded therefore as Amorite ‘ideal types’ occurring among regionally distinct constellations prevalent within the western extent of the Amorite *oikumene* by the second half of the Middle Bronze Age.

In order to underscore that these observations for Levantine material culture are not unique, it is worthwhile to mention a number of recent studies that have independently characterized these phenomena within the Levant and Egyptian Delta, resulting in the use of very similar terminology. Frances Pinnock has used ‘Amorite *koiné*’ to refer to ‘public architecture,’ ‘art and handicrafts,’ ‘ceramic repertoires,’ and profound changes among political and economic trends (Pinnock 2009:79). The phrase ‘Amorite cultural *koiné*’ has also been recently employed in connection with discussions of Old Babylonian society by Bill Arnold (2004:38). In discussions related to frescoes in Middle Bronze Age contexts similar uses of the term *koiné* have been employed. Susan Sherratt, for example, references the use of the frescoes in the formation of an ‘elite *koiné*’ (Sherratt 1994:237), while Knapp identifies this as an ‘artistic or ideological *koiné*’ (Knapp 1998:205). Given the Middle Bronze Age palatial contexts of these frescoes in the Near East, these discussions of the existence of a *koiné* fundamentally concern Amorite society.¹⁶

It is worthwhile to mention in this context, however, that this perspective is not shared by a number of scholars, illustrating the persistence of outright rejections of any archaeological interpretations that would associate the Amorites with a distinct cultural legacy. Members of the British school, for example, appear quite ready to disengage Amorites from any archaeological interpretation that would bear the faintest of association with the movement of Semitic groups inherent in Kathleen Kenyon’s work *Amorites and Canaanites* (Kenyon 1966). Consequently, many British-trained scholars have become comfortable with discussions of the material culture and historical development of the Middle Bronze Age Levant that avoid even a single reference to the Amorites. Curiously, there

¹⁰ For a recent discussion of frescoes in Middle Bronze Age contexts, see Feldman (2007, 2008).

¹¹ A number of studies can now be cited that permit the recognition of the adoption of the temple in antis in the west. However, the most important may be the results of relatively recent excavation in Ebla where such a temple could be traced back to the late third millennium (Matthiae 2007), providing a ‘missing link’ of sorts to connect third millennium temples in antis (e.g., Akkermans and Schwartz 2003:251) to an already well-established tradition of so-called *migdol* temples during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages from the Middle Euphrates to the southern Levant (e.g., Mazar 1992).

¹² These are well known in the Levant (e.g., Gezer), but also at Mari during the Middle Bronze Age.

¹³ See Philip (1995), but also Garfinkel (2001).

¹⁴ See Hallote (1994, 1995, 2002), also discussion by Baker (2006), but also general overviews of Middle Bronze Age burial traditions.

¹⁵ Infant jar burials were largely adopted in the Levant and well documented in the south (Mazar 1990:214), although the use of cooking pots was also attested in the north alongside jar burials (e.g., Phases F-G in the Amuq Braidwood et al. 1960: 258, 263; at Alalakh, see Woolley 1955:219–221).

¹⁶ Likewise, Marian Feldman has employed the term in reference to an “international *koiné*” exhibited within elite art and craftwork during the Late Bronze Age (Feldman 2006).

remains an almost ironic predilection among the same scholars to associate Middle Bronze Age material culture in the same fashion with Indo-European or Hurrian elements.¹⁷ Certainly, there once was a basis for what might be called a correction in British scholarship concerning Amorite scholarship in the wake of Kenyon's work, and it is clear that there is also room for a discussion of the presence of other ethnic elements in Near Eastern societies during the Middle Bronze Age. However, what appears to be a largely atextual and ahistorical approach is fundamentally problematic in light of the abundance of the written record concerning Amorites that is available for this period and the potential for their comparison to archaeological contexts. To avoid doing so requires ignoring references to what is, by almost any account, the most frequently mentioned group and most conspicuous cultural identity during the period throughout the Levant and northern Mesopotamia.

The above observations reveal that disjunctures between historical and archaeological approaches continue to mark Amorite studies. This may be the reason that the Amorite *koiné*, as noted above, has been identified by archaeologists. While there appears to be a growing consensus among archaeologists concerning an Amorite *koiné*, there seems to be far less clarity (and perhaps a bit of despair) among philologists regarding Amorite identity and the relationship between Amorites and material culture. Without dealing with this issue in too much detail here, which requires a diachronic and contextual evaluation of references to Amorites in a wide variety of sources, it is imperative that any archaeological interpretation address a range of social, economic, and political contexts that may be reconstructed from both textual and archaeological sources for the millennium under discussion. For this reason, it is necessary to articulate the historical and cultural contexts responsible for shaping the Amorite *koiné*.

ENCOUNTERS WITH ALTERITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE AMORITE *KOINÉ*

Insofar as the aforementioned elements of the Amorite *koiné* were manifest in varied ways within different regions, the issue of their identification as part of a cohesive phenomenon is a matter of interpretation resulting from consideration of the varied contexts in which these elements were encountered and appropriated. Here it is necessary to note that I am by no means suggesting that these elements were adopted en masse or as a package or kit, or that they should constitute a 'trait list.' Indeed, an examination of any of the specific elements that comprised the Amorite *koiné* reveals a range of reactions to those elements that Michael Dietler, in the context of processes of entanglement, has characterized as the 'logic of demand, indifference, and rejection.'¹⁸ However, by suggesting that these elements did constitute ideal types that were drawn upon I am implying that their analysis must be concerned with the processes by which they came to embody social interactions or intercultural encounters.¹⁹ I am, for the moment, leaving aside discussion here of accelerants to these processes, such as climate change in the second half of the third millennium B.C., which no doubt added a multiplier effect to the anthropogenic contexts for cultural encounters central to the argument made here.

¹⁷ See, for example, Tubb (2009) and Bourke (forthc., 2012). Tubb in his work *Canaanites* (Tubb 1998) exposes the extent to which this approach has sought to characterize developments in Levantine material culture during the second millennium as resulting entirely from endogenous processes, while mostly ignoring cultural associations and influences associated with Mesopotamia and influences from there (see also Tubb 2003).

¹⁸ See M. Dietler (2010:66–74). Dietler notes that demand for 'foreign goods and practices may vary according to social position or category, and indifference may be generated largely by the relational dynamics among social groups or fields' (ibid., 66) and that 'consumption of foreign goods entails both intended and unintended consequences' (ibid., 74).

¹⁹ For a recent collection of essays on intercultural encounters in the Near East, see Maran and Stockhammer (2012).

Several processes of social interaction within the Amorite *oikumene* involved enduring contact between individuals and groups over substantial distances, and consequently contributed to intensive exposure to foreign customs and practices. These provide the context for understanding the emergence of a material reflection of these interactions, namely the Amorite *koiné*. These processes have been well documented in Mari studies.²⁰ While they are by no means unique to the period in question, there is little disputing the extension, frequency, and intensive nature of long-distance interaction during the late third and early second millennia B.C. and I suggest that the overarching processes included *conflict*, *trade and diplomacy*, and *land management*. For each of these phenomena I will briefly describe a range of examples from the late third through early second millennium of the varied types of interactions encapsulated within these three overarching categories, and will suggest their role in the emergence of the Amorite *koiné*. At the outset it should be noted, however, that the evidence for these contexts is not that of an exclusive association with individuals or groups identified as Amorites. Rather, these contexts framed the encounters that shaped the development of varied yet related Amorite identities employing the material elements of the Amorite *koiné* as a medium for transcending alterity.

CONFLICT

Warfare and conflict create important contexts for situating cultural contact, a topic of central importance to scholarship on the Amorites from early studies. To begin with, long-distance military campaigns in southwest Asia, for which the earliest historically attested evidence dates to the second half of the third millennium B.C.,²¹ set the stage for the much of the interaction to follow. It was during this period, first documented with a campaign by Eanatum of Lagaš (c. 2450 B.C.) against Mari that long-distance campaigns originating in southern Mesopotamia began to impact the Middle Euphrates region and zones further to the north and west. This was followed up by another campaign by Lugalzagesi of Uruk about a century later and perhaps a century later with campaigns by the Akkadian kings Sargon and/or Naram Sin, c. 2250 B.C., which famously recount the destruction of Ebla in the northern Levant. That such events were not already by this point exclusively Mesopotamian is, however, evident in the wars between Mari and Ebla. It is only during later campaigns by Ur III kings that Amorites (specifically the *Tidnum*) are identified. It is within the context of the first attestation of Amorites, which requires consideration of the earlier existence of Amorites within the region, that it is necessary to consider a major aspect of ‘war in the tribal zone,’ namely its impact on zones of lesser political complexity (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992). In such areas, if warfare did not contribute to secondary state formation (Price 1978) it often contributed to a variety of other cultural developments such as the shaping of social identities, the emergence of political alliances, and technological advances. Concerning *Tidnum*, for example, Piotr Michalowski suggests a secondary state formation-like process, although without calling it such, when he observes that the ‘same processes that gave rise to the Zabšali confederation also had the effect of pressing disparate Amorite tribal or kinship groups into some larger political entity that, with greater numbers and unified tactical potential, created some level of danger for the progress of Mesopotamian forces along the Hamrin’ (Michalowski 2011:166). Furthermore, he observes that decades of war may have served to ‘unite fragmented polities...and different elements of the large polities or confederations’ in border regions (Michalowski 2011:168).

²⁰ See especially essays in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (Charpin and Joannès 1992).

²¹ For a review of the history of late third millennium and early second millennium warfare, see Burke (2008:87–102).

Documentation in connection with Mesopotamian sources suggests that not only were Amorites increasingly the targets of Mesopotamian military efforts during the Akkadian and Ur III periods, but that warfare itself in the perceived traditional heartland of Amorite identity—the Middle Euphrates and regions to the west—would ultimately contribute to their integration into southern Mesopotamian society. The mechanisms for this included not only the taking of prisoners and deportations,²² but the gradual reliance on mercenary service provided by battle-hardened Amorites, as is well attested among Ur III sources. As Michalowski has recently observed, the term *Amurru* during the course of the Ur III period was likely used to designate ‘elite Amorite guards’ (Michalowski 2011:110). In the many roles in which sedentarized Amorites are identified during the Ur III, only those identified with military roles can be identified as *Amurru* with any certainty, due to the association of their Amorite names with explicit designations as MAR.TU (Michalowski 2011:107–109). These data suggest that after an initial phase that saw the enslavement of Amorites as war captives, integration into southern Mesopotamian society followed through the timeless tradition of military service.

In addition to warfare with, enslavement, deportation of, and the employment of Amorites as mercenaries, conflict resulted in a range of other social contexts from the Akkadian period to the Old Babylonian period that played a significant role in cultural exchange. Refugees, driven into new landscapes, were among these, if poorly documented and often given little consideration. Dominique Charpin has enumerated a number of instances of this phenomenon (Charpin 1992:208–212).²³ Such scenarios suggest that rather than viewing, as Kenyon did, the Amorites as aggressors responsible for the destruction of urban centers, Amorites were often the likely victims of early long-distance campaigns, displaced from their communities and forced to seek refuge in nearby territories. This stems from the recognition of the fact that the chronology for the destruction of late third millennium urban centers aligns with the primary evidence for its agents, namely the emergence of long-distance military campaigns from southern Mesopotamia (Burke 2008:91–2). A similar process seems to have been at work during the period of aridification at the end of third millennium, as suggested by Harvey Weiss. He identifies habitat tracking toward riverine refugia among the characteristics of this movement (see esp. 2000:88, 91, 2012).

Warfare during this period was also significant in that large numbers of individuals often travelled hundreds of kilometers from their communities of origin engaging, most likely, for the first time in intensive social interactions for extended periods with individuals from distant and foreign communities. The coalitions and armies of Middle Bronze Age Mesopotamia, which could number ten thousand on a single side, depended on military service from individuals from villages scattered throughout their kingdoms and those of their allies (see Abrahams 1992). Such a context undoubtedly played a role in the period’s unique character, as it certainly did, for example, for the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid empires.²⁴

Many of those who participated in military activity were well positioned to parlay their experiences into professional military service as mercenaries or in other related capacities. A burgeoning overland caravan trade during the Middle Bronze Age also provided

²² Sallaberger states that Amorites are never characterized as ‘prisoners of war’ in Babylonia, contrasting this with the case of the ‘people of Shimanum’ (Sallaberger 2007:445). However, see Porter’s discussion of arua women (Porter 2011:302). This process is more amply documented during the Old Babylonian period (Charpin 1992:213(217), as for Mari where the range could be extended to include hostages taken from royal courts. For references, see Sasson (2008:96, n. 2).

²³ For recent treatment of the issue of refugees in the Near East, see Burke (2011a, 2012).

²⁴ The Assyrian period may serve as an apt example of this process, a period during which not only did the Assyrians incorporate foreigners into their armies where they encountered each other, but coalitions were formed to oppose the Assyrians, which spurred but may also reflect more intensive intercultural contacts that occurred between communities within these regions.

another significant context for mercenary service, and I would suggest that many of the so-called armed individual male burials, identified as ‘warrior burials’ during the MB IIA and later, should be identified as the burials of individuals employed in such a capacity, displaying no evidence of exposure to armed conflict but often possessing the trappings of merchants.²⁵ In sum, warfare and conflict during starting in the late third millennium provided a crucial context that resulted initially in *contact with* but fundamentally led to the *social integration of* Amorites among others. This was the result of a range of interactions including enslavement and deportation, mercenary and enlisted military service, and refugee migrations.

TRADE AND DIPLOMACY

Trade and diplomacy constituted another major context for the emergence of the Amorite *koiné*. I will devote far less attention to this factor here owing to the constraints of space and to the fact that trade, as well as diplomacy, are well-studied components in cultural exchange and the examples for the period in question are well known. Little needs to be said concerning robust long-distance trade, both overland and maritime, during the Middle Bronze Age,²⁶ except to underscore that in this regard an inordinate amount of attention has been given to this subject for the ensuing period, the Late Bronze Age. This is facilitated on the one hand by Late Bronze Age sources, such as the Amarna letters and, ironically on the other hand, by the widespread assumption that comparable networks to the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian *karu* persisted during the Late Bronze Age. Nonetheless, not only does the documentation from Kanesh, but also from Mari, reveal the existence of robust, long-distance trade networks, but archaeological evidence abounds to reconstruct additional networks that connected these textually referenced networks, illustrating how goods were transported across the vast distances that separated, for example, Iran and Egypt. What is more, the initial formalization of these is once again a byproduct of the late third millennium, when as Steven Garfinkel has argued both private and state mercantile endeavors were at work (Garfinkel 2012). While these and later networks are by no means explicitly Amorite, the mechanisms, intensity, and frequency of activity associated with them from the late third millennium through the early second millennium played a vital role in cultural exchange by increasing and intensifying long-distance contact, particularly across the region that would ultimately come to be associated with Amorite polities of the Middle Bronze Age. The role of merchants in processes of social exchange included not only the desirability of the products they conveyed, but also their capacity as emissaries of different communities, suggested by their conveying of royal correspondence, intermarriage with local women, the establishment of social networks with indigenes, and even in the liberation of captives.²⁷ An analogous role for pastoralists is also indicated in the Mari letters:

I oversee the (Simal) pastoralists and (that) like the merchant who goes about during war and peace, the pastoralists goes about for the *šepatim*-exchange during war and peace. (A.350+, translation from Guichard 2002:161–162)²⁸

²⁵ For MB IIA warrior burials see, Philip (1995) and (Garfinkel 2001).

²⁶ For discussions, see P. Gerstenblith (1983), Ilan (1995), Barjamovic (2011:chap. 2), and essays on the Middle Bronze Age in Aruz et al (2008:13–93).

²⁷ See Barjamovic (2011); concerning captives, see Sasson (2008:95).

²⁸ I would like to thank Adam Miglio for calling this text to my attention.

LAND MANAGEMENT

The last of the contexts I suggest contributed to the development of the Amorite *koiné* during the Middle Bronze Age is land management. Here I refer to the varied socioeconomic and political processes by which distant territories were often exploited for agriculture, horticulture, pastoralism, resource extraction, and land grants. In the west this was the direct result of the renaissance of urban centers in the northern Levant and the foundation of new centers in the south, which gradually expanded into their hinterlands to appropriate resources for the sustenance of growing populations and for the export of commodities as part of the trade networks discussed above.

Settlement analyses for the Levant suggest patterns of land management associated with increasing agricultural production, movement into the highlands for horticulture, and into marginal zones for herding. The exploitation of land for agricultural production increased over the course of the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant as a necessary result of the growth of settlements. This is attested in the southern Levant through the intensification of settlement patterns, but particularly illustrated in the nuanced development of settlement in the coastal plain of the southern Levant (Cohen 2002) that may be connected with the role played by ports along the coast (Ilan 1995), but also the routes from the ports to inland regions from which products and resources were brought (Stager 2001). Among the most valuable products from the highlands of the Levant were both wine and olive oil, reviving a much earlier industry that by its nature required multi-generational investments of energy to provide substantial yields (Stager 1985). Higher elevations yielded timber resources such as cedar (Meiggs 1982:49–87), resuming a trade that had fallen dormant during the late third millennium B.C. as attested by the collapse of maritime activity during the First Intermediate Period.²⁹ Pastoral nomadic activities that are well attested in zones too marginal for agriculture further flesh out the exploitation of ecological niches for the development and expansion of specialized economies. While no single land use strategy dominated from southern Mesopotamia to the southern Levant, the consequence of these land and resource management activities was an increasingly intensive economic integration of the hinterland with urban centers, which contributed to social interaction with and integration of urban centers, villages, and semi-nomadic populations.

In northern Mesopotamia where rain-fed agriculture was practiced, in the wake of the aridification of the late third millennium, agricultural production largely collapsed and with it the population of the region (Weiss 2012). As indicated in the Mari archives, the exploitation of much of this land in this region away from the river valleys permitted an expansion of pastoral nomadic activity and associated industries. It was, however, within the limits of this niche that pastoralism played a dominant role in the regular movement of Amorites (Porter 2011). Pastoralism in this context provided, therefore, an opportunity for only a limited number of individuals to exploit a particular ecological niche following the dramatic changes that took place prior to 2000 B.C. Thus, the increase in territory exploited by pastoral nomadic activities, like the activities mentioned above, was a form of economic opportunism. In Babylonia, however, a more formal side of land management is presented among land grants to individuals, included among them a number of persons identified as the ‘overseers of Amorites’ (UGULA MAR.TU) (see Voth 1981:118). Thus, while only visible in textual sources, and for this reason not discussed in the Levant for the Middle Bronze Age, such

²⁹ This is attested in the absence of ports with EB IV occupation along the coast of the Levant, references to the cessation of maritime activity with Byblos in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Lichtheim 1973:152), and a dearth of evidence for traded goods moving in either direction along the coast.

processes were at work across the region, integrating large cities and rural communities in significant ways.

ENTANGLEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE AMORITE *KOINÉ* IN THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL BONDS

The net effect of the interactions discussed above were steadily increasing and intensifying, long-distance interactions from the mid-third through the mid-second millennium that became characteristic of the Amorite *oikumene*. These interactions were, however, neither new nor exclusively Amorite, and they are therefore they remain inadequate to explain the emergence of the Amorite *koiné*. To explain how a shared culture could emerge within this context it is helpful to introduce Michael Dietler's notion of entanglement.

In *Archaeologies of Colonialism: Consumption, Entanglement, and Violence in Ancient Mediterranean France*, Dietler articulates a framework for evaluating the types of interactions that were characteristic of the late third and early second millennium. In his analysis processes such as trade, consumption, the inhabitation of space, and violence³⁰ function as a means for evaluating the manner in which various groups interacted with each other during colonial encounters. While his work addresses these interactions in southern France from the Iron Age through the early Roman period, his observations reveal conditions for and effects of intercultural contacts analogous with the late third and early second millennia. For Dietler entanglement defines a wide array of relationships between different groups that were both the intended and unintended consequences of cultural, political, and economic interactions (Dietler 2010:74). By favoring the term entanglement over terms such as hybridity offered in post-colonial discourse, Dietler underscores that the outcomes are part of processes that include 'creative appropriation, transformation and manipulation played out by individuals and social groups with a variety of competing interests and strategies of action embedded in local political relations and cultural perceptions' (Dietler 2010:55). Within this process intercultural contacts and their material representations are employed by individuals for their own agendas, often political, and consequently 'borrowed cultural elements' are significant primarily in the context of consumption due to their 'perceived use and meaning.'

Within the framework of entanglement it is worth revisiting the cultural processes associated with Hellenism that make it a potentially viable analog to the processes associated with the Amorite *koiné*. Without resurrecting debates over the last few decades about the definition of Hellenism, I suggest adopting Glen Bowersock's characterization of Hellenism as fundamentally a medium of cultural discourse. As he observes, Hellenism 'represented language, thought, mythology, and images that constituted an extraordinarily flexible medium of both cultural and religious expression...not necessarily antithetical to local or indigenous traditions. On the contrary, it provided a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them' (Bowersock 1990:7). This characterization of Hellenism takes into consideration extensive critiques of the concept of Hellenization with its assumptions regarding cultural primacy. As Michael Dietler notes, 'Greek culture was not passively emulated in a blanket fashion but, rather, consumed in a highly selective and creative manner...[and]...ignored or rejected with equal selectivity' (Dietler 2010:46). Thus, Hellenism, as an example of a medium of cultural exchange, is *not* synonymous with Hellenization. Instead, Hellenism comprised different responses to various elements of Greek culture that were not only selectively adopted, but modified for their own ends. While the material representations of Hellenism certainly include Greek material culture, Hellenism became a medium for the consumption of Greek culture by non-Greeks, where the use and

³⁰ Dietler refers to these as 'exemplary themes' (Dietler 2010:13).

meaning of this material culture and these practices were uniquely mediated in each region in which these encounters occurred.

As the byproduct of processes of entanglement the Amorite *koiné* reflects various efforts to negotiate individual and group identity within the *Amorite oikumene*, in contexts not dissimilar from those in which Hellenism spread. The Amorite *koiné* is, however, the embodiment in material culture of negotiated identities, revealing that within different regions particular practices and customs were intentionally adopted, adapted, rejected, or ignored as a shared or common cultural legacy was created. The unique regional articulations of the Amorite *koiné* that grew out of centuries of interaction played a mediating role in transcending cultural differences encountered through processes of entanglement. The Amorite *koiné* was not an inevitable outcome of cultural interactions from the late third to the early second millennium, but a consequence of processes of entanglement created within the *Amorite oikumene* (Dietler 2010:74). Such a reconstruction has a number of implications for topics of central importance to understanding Amorite society and economy during the Middle Bronze Age. Among these are the role of social memory, emulation among elites, the construction of social bonds, and the maintenance of cultural boundaries.

Within the framework suggested here, Amorite *identity* during the first half of the second millennium is not synonymous with Amorite *ethnicity*, which is primarily articulated by means of textual sources from the late third millennium. Although largely in the absence of material culture that can be easily labeled Amorite and fully recognizing the implications of many recent definitions of ethnicity, there seem to be textual grounds to argue that a clear shift took place in what it meant to be ‘Amorite’ from the late third millennium to the early second. This is perhaps nowhere more conspicuous than in the temporal distributions of references to MAR.TU and the explicit identification of individuals as MAR.TU in the late third millennium, contrasting with the early second millennium when individuals are principally identified as Amorite on the basis of their names or conspicuous claims of Amorite descent, as in the case of Hammurapi who claimed to be ‘king of the Amorite land’ (see Finkelstein 1966). The onomastic evidence for Hammurapi and others whose lineage is not unambiguously Amorite reveals the entangled nature of social relationships and the negotiations of identity that underlay these interactions. Insofar as participation in Hellenistic practices did not make one Greek, the embracing of customs commonly associated with individuals and rulers identified as Amorite did not imply that one necessarily sought to be identified as predominantly or exclusively Amorite. Individuals could further strengthen their associations with Amorite identity through participation in Amorite rites as well as speaking Amorite.³¹

Seen in this light the study of Amorite society emerges as a *longue durée* history of a social identity that is fundamentally bound to social memory. The maintenance or adoption of the ascription as ‘Amorite’ represents a conscious choice to associate oneself, one’s city, or one’s kingdom with a perceived legacy for the advantages it was seen to provide. In this regard, elements associated with the Amorite *koiné* are in essence what Paul Connerton refers to as *inscribing practices* (Connerton 1989:73), the material legacy of which outlasts the agents responsible for the original production of the material culture or custom. The *koiné* of temple, fortification, and palatial architecture, iconographic and artistic traditions, and burial customs, for example, are conspicuous markers of group solidarity, drawing in participants through the perceived economic, social, and political benefits of affiliation.

For those active in the socioeconomic networks at the heart of this process, this was more likely a rather routine exercise in attempting to overcome differences inherent to the

³¹ The challenge of assigning ethnic affiliation on the basis of linguistic practices is illustrated in a letter in which Yasmah-Addu, whose name is Amorite, is chided by Šamši-Addu for not being able to speak Amorite (Ziegler and Charpin 2007).

preexisting social, economic, or political associations of the actors in question. Within Connerton's glossary such actions are identified as *incorporating practices* (Connerton 1989:72). As it concerns Connerton's choice of terms, incorporating practices, to which ritual and performance belong, are difficult to reconstruct with any certainty from archaeological contexts and are better preserved, ironically, in written or inscribed sources. Connerton's dichotomy is useful as it underscores the difference between the active world of the past, the memory of which is predominantly preserved in textual sources and ritual practices (incorporating practices), and the inert monuments with which archaeologists are confronted (inscribed practices). Both inscribing and incorporating practices were central to creating an Amorite social memory. Within the framework proposed here, I would suggest that the Amorite *oikumene* reflects incorporating practices, while the Amorite *koiné* embodied inscribed practices. Together, although in different measures, such practices were responsible for the construction of diverse, but related Amorite identities during the first half of the second millennium.

The majority of the evidence for the Amorite *koiné* originates from the circles of elites,³² who were in contact as a result of the contexts described earlier, playing a vital role in the propagation of the ideal types and social memory embodied in the Amorite *koiné*. That this constellation of material culture occurs in repeated association with particular social frameworks, such as the royal household, is suggestive of an intentional effort to express solidarity with other elites by means of the adoption or emulation of select practices. The process not only occurs in cases we may regard as cooperative, but likewise included competitive processes, which is the clear legacy of Middle Bronze Age states. Competitive emulation, for instance, has been suggested to be at play among indigenous elites in the southern Levant (Ilan 1995:300–301), where labor was conspicuously consumed in the construction of fortifications (Bunimovitz 1992). However, it was also arguably at work among customs of dress, palatial construction and decoration, and temple construction throughout the Fertile Crescent.

While in some circumstances there may be sufficient grounds to refer to Amorite solidarity as an ethnic affiliation, in most instances the varied and mixed heritage of individuals within these cultural encounters suggest that other forms of solidarity such as political identity were as important, if not more so. Consequently, some individuals manifesting the hallmarks of so-called Amorite *koiné* may have neither self-identified as Amorite nor would necessarily have been regarded as Amorite by others, leading to a silence among textual sources. While the phenomenon seems rather concrete among Amorite kingdoms, such as those identified in the Mari texts, it was undoubtedly the case that for many individuals and groups during this period this cultural *koiné* was no more Amorite than it was Babylonian or Assyrian. Such malleability likely contributed to the widespread appeal of the Amorite *koiné*.

Despite all of the positive associations that may have been accumulated through active participation in the Amorite *koiné*, if we return to the specifics of entanglement that

³² As a label, Amorite variously refers in textual sources to individuals from or within a certain region, belonging to a descent tradition, or likely linguistic group, as evident principally in textual sources from the late third through first millennia. For various review of Amorites through time, see Liverani (1973) and Whiting (1995). As Dietler's work reminds us, however, the textual sources while important, often reify concepts of the other that were not necessarily normative of individual or group experiences (Dietler 2010:43–45). Consequently, texts from Mari, Alalakh, and southern Mesopotamia will provide first and foremost evidence of local and mostly elite attitudes, during specific times, regarding Amorites and permit a depiction of their social integration within those cultural contexts. Only in the instances where observations repeat themselves or can be correlated with archaeological findings is it possible to employ such sources for more than generalizing principles as I have attempted to do here by identifying the broader contexts and specific processes among elites that contributed to the formation of the Amorite *koiné*.

make this theoretical framework useful, we must acknowledge the limits of its adoption as reflecting what Dietler describes as indifference or rejection. These limits are most conspicuous in the geographic limits of the phenomena in question, which certainly indicate that there were limits to the perceived value of the Amorite *koiné*. While this is an important line of inquiry, it is more difficult to interrogate simply because similarities of traits are frequently more conspicuous and therefore more easily identified in archaeological contexts than differences, for which a wider range of explanations is available. Nevertheless, examples such as Hyksos material culture in Egypt, born from Amorite practices within an Egyptian context, reveal a range of outcomes in which some local practices can be adopted while others are rejected or ignored. Burial customs at Avaris, as but one example, were in many cases clearly ‘foreign’ (Levantine), while others suggest the possible blending with local (Egyptian) practices (see van den Brink 1982; also I. Forstner-Müller 2010).

CONCLUSION

Models for the study of Amorites that prejudice the centrality of a certain place or particular documentary sources in seeking to reconstruct Amorite identity fail to convey the complicated nature of Amorite identity. A single corpus can only speak to aspects of Amorite identity in one geographic region during a relatively short period of time. It is increasingly clear, however, that it is not possible to speak of a single or monolithic Amorite culture. Rather we must begin to address Amorite cultures (in their plurality) through regional contexts and to reconsider grounds for treating the Amorites as a single phenomenon. In attempting to define Amorite identities, entanglement provides a flexible and nuanced framework for reexamining Amorite society and economy without attempting to identify direct relationships of descent or to salvage old migration hypotheses. Entanglement implies a broad range of cultural processes associated with contact between diverse populations that permitted the emergence of a *koiné* culture, which played a role in facilitating continuous although not always harmonious social interaction. The Amorite *koiné* was not, therefore, a reflection of an affiliation with an original group of ethnic Amorites. Rather, it was a medium for cultural interaction that established and maintained social, political, and economic bonds among diverse agents across the Near East during the Middle Bronze Age.

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