

1. Introduction

Cuneiform came late to the Land of Canaan (Modern Israel and Palestine) when compared with Mesopotamia and Syria, arriving only at the time of the Old Babylonian period, c. 1800-1600 BC. At this time, Hazor in the Galilee emerged as a center of cuneiform writing, and maintained ties with Hammurabi's Babylon, Mari on the Middle Euphrates, and other cities in Syria such as Qatna and Ekallatum.

However, excavators at Hazor have yet to recover more than a scattering of tablets in contrast to the estimated 30,000 or so tablets and fragments recovered at Mari (Tel Hariri), and tens of thousands of Old Babylonian tablets from the remains of the contemporary cities and towns of Mesopotamia proper. Yet, the relatively small number of texts we do have from Hazor, now 17, is a large collection when placed in the local context considering that all the cuneiform finds from all periods from Israel and Palestine still total less than 100 (the current figure is 93). Thus, in our examination of the Hazor tablets, we will be interested not only in what we have found, and why we have found what we have found, and what we can learn from what we have found, but also as to why we have found comparably so little.

In the 15-20 minutes allotted to me in this setting, we will consider these issues in the following order. First, I will briefly describe the Cuneiform in Canaan corpus of the second millennium including the finds from Hazor. Then, we will survey the Hazor texts of the Middle Bronze Age = Old Babylonian Period, paying particular attention to some very fine points of grammar, writing, and sign selection, which we will then find useful as we conclude our presentation with an examination of the texts from Hazor from the perspective of the topic of our meeting; namely the Hazor tablets as the first set of written sources from a newly literate area, this being what I shall call the cuneiform southwest.¹

At all times during our discussion, I will be referring to texts and tablets by Site and Number, for example Hazor 4 and Hebron 1, using the numbering system established in my own 2006 book *Cuneiform in Canaan*, co-authored by Takayoshi Oshima now of The University of Bucharest.

1. The area south and west of the modern Syria including all or parts of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt.

2. Hazor and Cuneiform in Canaan

Tel Hazor, located on the southwestern flanks of the Hula Valley overlooking what remains of Lake Hula, is the largest Biblical era tel in the Land of Israel, covering some 200 acres = .8+ square kilometers. The site sits in what is called in Hebrew 'The Finger of the Galilee,' in the Rift Valley with the mountains of the Upper Galilee to its West and the Golan Heights leading to the Syrian Plain to its East. As a regular visitor to the site, especially when there are new cuneiform tablets to be deciphered, I can tell you that one's eyes are immediately drawn to the far northeastern horizon, where Mount Hermon, towering some 2,814 meters above sea level, dominates the view, particularly in winter when the mountain is snowcapped.

From Hazor, to the south, if one continues along what is now modern Israel Route 90 following the ancient roadway, one comes soon to the Sea of Galilee, and from there one can continue southward into the Jordan Valley and on to sites such as Beth Shean, or turn to the west and enter the system of valleys and passes that lead, by way of ancient cities such as Taanach and Megiddo, into the mountain heartland of Judah and Samaria, the coastal plain, and on eventually into Egypt.

My own connection with the Hazor tablets dates back to the summer of 1991 when on the very first day of the excavations for that year a tablet fragment was found in a brick. Soon after I received a cryptic telephone call from Professor Ben-Tor of The Hebrew University, "it would be worth my while to come down to the offices of The Israel Exploration Society and meet with him," and by the time that meeting was over I was effectively the epigraphist of the Hazor Excavations. In the 16 summers since then, more tablets have been recovered in drips and drabs: the one tablet from 1991, one more in 1992, 4 in 1996, 2 more in 2000, one more in 2004, in 2006, and in 2007. All these, when added to the 6 tablets found in the Yigal Yadin era at Hazor in the 1950's and 60's, now brings the total number of cuneiform finds at the site to the 17 aforementioned items. Again, not impressive in terms of Syria and Babylonia, but just under 20% of the entire corpus of Cuneiform from Canaan.

All 17 of the Hazor texts date to the second millennium BCE: 10 from the first half of the second millennium (the Old Babylonian Period = The Middle Bronze Age in Canaan), 5 from roughly the period of the 14th century Amarna Tablets in Egypt, with two small docket

being of uncertain date. The 10 items from the Old Babylonian Period can be further divided into two sub-groups; an earlier group from the time of Hammurabi of Babylon himself, and his contemporaries Zimri-Lim of Mari and King Ibni-Addu of Hazor; and a second later group.

For the earlier group we have a clear historical context, this being the period of contacts between Hazor and the cuneiform centers of Syria and Babylonia to her north and east. Now, Hazor becomes the first and only city in Canaan to be known by name outside the country, and the name of Hazor's King, Ibni-Addu, occurs in a number of Mari administrative tablets documenting trade between Hazor and points east (see Bonechi 1992). Even more explicit evidence for contacts between Hazor, Mari, and Babylon is to be found in the Mari letter ARM 6 78, from the time of Zimri-Lim, which I excerpt here:

. . . 2 messengers of the man of Babylon (Hammurabi) who were previously residing in Hazor and 1 man of Hazor who is going with them to Babylon have passed by . . .

The slightly earlier Hazor 12 in our corpus offer further evidence for contacts between Hazor, Mari, and Ekallatum:²

. . . let them send to me quickly to Mari. Some mishap might happen!
After I have arrived at the city of Mari, I intend to go to Ekallatum
to perform sacrifices and celebrations . . .

Hazor 12: 20'-25'

In fact, Hazor at this time became such an important scribal and commercial center that its name entered into the Mesopotamian academic scribal tradition appearing in later geographical lists and protases of dream omens (If a man in a dream went to Hazor . . .).³

The second sub-group of Old Babylonian period tablets seems to be later than the

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2. For the historical background of this tablet, dating to before the restoration of Zimri-Lim and his dynasty to the throne of Mari, see Horowitz and Wasserman 2004.
 3. Oppenheim (1956) 313 and see Horowitz (2000) 27.

time of Ibni-Addu/Zimri-Lim/Hammurabi, dating to perhaps the 17th or 16th centuries depending on whose chronology one uses.⁴ In the context of the Hazor tablets, the distinction between early and late is in many ways subjective rather than objective since it is not possible to establish a firm chronology for the tablets based on archaeological criteria as the same Middle Bronze IIb level covers the time of both our early and later groups, and in any case, a majority of our texts were found in Late Bronze Age or otherwise, for our purposes, useless archaeological contexts (for example the tablet inside the brick).⁵ Thus, we must attempt to separate the later tablets from the earlier on the basis of other criteria including sign forms, loss of mimmat in nouns, and intrusions of apparent West Semitisms into the language of the texts. Such intrusions of the native Western Semitic languages into the Akkadian of Old Babylonian period Hazor is part of a much larger and longer process by which the Akkadian in use in Old Babylonian period Canaan evolved into a separate dialect(s) of the language that is best known from the Amarna Archives, but is also the language of most Middle Babylonian period/Late Bronze Age texts from Canaan itself including the letter Hazor 10.⁶

3. The Old Babylonian Period Tablets and The Cuneiform Southwest

The 10 Old Babylonian period tablets from Hazor are our best available tool for unraveling the intricacies of early writing in the cuneiform southwest. No cuneiform texts from this period are as yet available from Egypt and Jordan, and only 6 other items dating to the Old Babylonian period have been recovered in Canaan: these being: Hebron 1: a local administrative tablet dealing with animals (sheep and goats); Shechem 1: a letter; the envelope fragment Gezer 1; and the three cylinder seals Beth Shean 1 and Beth Mersim 1, and Tel Jemmeh 1. Thus, our attempt below to use the Hazor materials to examine the spread of cuneiform writing into the southwest will be fraught with difficulties, most notably not enough texts, and the absence of a clear chronology for the texts we do have. These problems notwithstanding, I thank the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to examine the Hazor tablets, which I have come to know so well, from the new perspective as

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4. For discussion of the chronology of the Middle Bronze Age see recently Charpin 2004: 35-38.
 5. The archaeological context of each find is given in the list of sources below.
 6. For these dialects see e.g. Rainey 1996 and Izreel 1991.

examples of ‘early writing.’

3.1 The Old Babylonian Period Cuneiform Finds of Hazor: A Survey⁷

Let us now briefly review the 10 Middle Bronze Period texts from Hazor, with an attempt to date the items to either the early group (the time of Ibni-Addu, Hammurabi, and Zimri-Lim) or the later group; again utilizing the numbering system set out in the *Cuneiform in Canaan* volume.

Hazor 1: Inscribed Vessel - Uncertain [MB IIb]

An inscribed vessel in which the name, *Išme-^dAddu*, ‘The God Addu has heard,’ seems to have been etched onto the surface of the vessel after the clay had already dried.

Hazor 2-3: Liver Models - Later Group [Late Bronze I]⁸

Two clay liver models, written in a language and grammar consistent with an Old Babylonian Period date, but with some sign forms that seem closer to those of the Amarna period, a form of *nadānu*, ‘to give’ (*id^l-dan^l*) that may be from the local language, and URU = *ālu*, ‘city,’ as grammatically feminine in the local language rather than masculine as in Akkadian.⁹

Hazor 5: Court Record - Early Group [Surface Find]

Three junior attendants (*šuhāru*) come before the king bringing a law-suit against a Ms. Sumulailum regarding a home and garden in Hazor, and a garden in what may be Gilead (URU *Gi-la-di-ma*). The king finds for the defendant. One of the plaintiffs is a certain ^m*Ir-pa-^la^l-du* who may also be named in Hazor 8. Note the western theme-vowel for *erēbu* (*i-ri-bu* rather than *i-ru-bu*), and a writing for *bīti*, ‘house,’ E-*ti* without mimmation.

7. Full editions of Hazor 1-14 are available in *Cuneiform in Canaan*. Hazor 15 is published in Horowitz and Oshima 2007. Publication of Hazor 16-17 is forthcoming in *The Israel Exploration Journal*.

8. In a temple also in use during the Middle Bronze Age.

9. See Horowitz and Oshima (2006) 68.

Hazor 7: Administrative Document - Early Group [Late Bronze]

The lower half of a payment list in which individuals receive the small sums of 1/2 and 1/3 shekel each. All 19 names are semitic, either Akkadian or West Semitic. These include *Išpuṭ-Addu*, 'Addu has Judged' (with the theme-vowel *u* as at Mari instead of *i* for *išpiṭ* in standard Akkadian), and *Ib-lu-ṭà-du*, 'Addu has healed/given life,' with *ṭà* being the reading for the sign HI, a reading also particular to Mari.

Hazor 8: Letter Fragment - Early Group [Late Bronze]

Fragment written in an exceptionally fine hand, perhaps from a royal letter to Ibni-Addu of Hazor from Irpadu, the same man mentioned in the Court Record Hazor 5. Hence the possible restoration: *a-na Ib-ni-[^dAddu LUGAL bēlīa]*, *um-ma ^mIr-p[a-(a)-du ÌR-ka]*, 'To Ibni-[Addu, the King, my lord] Message of Irp[adu, your servant].'

Hazor 9: Prism Fragment: Combined Multiplication Table - Early Group [Late Bronze]

A fragment from the upper corner of the first and last sides of a four sided prism with the standard series of multiplication tables. The first is the standard table of reciprocals ($X.Y = 60$) which opens with the Sumerian introduction 60-da 2/3(šanabi)^{bi}.bi 40.àm (60 - its 2/3 is 40), with the unusual feature of two BI-signs following the numeral for 2/3: the first being a phonetic complement for Sumerian šanabi. The sequence šanabi^{bi}.bi is attested only three times: here on the only such tablet at Hazor (100%), and elsewhere on the only known parallel from Mari (100%), and one of approximately 100 reciprocal lists from Babylonia (1%). The prism is made of local clay and so was written at Hazor, rather than imported by a visiting scholar.¹⁰

Hazor 12: Letter - Early Group [Late Bronze]

The lower half of the obverse and top half of the reverse of a letter in which the writer commands that an underling send a great number of textiles, luxury goods, and metal objects to him at Mari. The writer also notes his intention to go on to Ekallatum. It has been proposed that the letter refers to the preparation of the dowry for the marriage of Beltum,

10. For studies of the provenance of the clay used in this and other tablets found at Hazor see Goren (2000).

princess of Qatna, to Yasmah-Addu, King of Mari.¹¹ In this text we find a number of writings which are not typical of the Mari scribal tradition, including that of the name of Mari itself, here *Má-ri*^{ki} and URU *Má-ri*^{ki} as at Babylon, but never at Mari, with one further lemma, DU₈.ŠÚ.A for Akkadian *duhšum*, written as in the Qatna inventories.¹² Thus, in contrast to Hazor 7 and 9, the writer of Hazor 12 is apparently not trained in the Mari scribal tradition, and we might even conjecture that he is from Qatna.

Hazor 15: Letter Fragment - Later Group [Late Bronze]

A fragment of a what appears to be a letter with unusual sign forms, grammatical inconsistencies, and an unusual physical format as the tablet is inscribed only on the upper portion of the obverse with room for an additional 8 lines on the obverse, and many more on the reverse. The subject matter seems to be dispensation of a debt, perhaps involving some sort of tenancy. The scribes inconsistent use of mimmation (*[a¹-wa-ta*), as well as apparent West Semitic verbal forms, place this text in the later group.

Hazor 17: Liver Model Fragment - Later Group [End of The Middle Bronze Age]

This unpublished tablet was unearthed in the excavations of this past summer. Preliminary study indicates it is of the same type and date as Hazor 2-3.

3.2 Summary

Of the total of 10 items from Old Babylonian Period/Middle Bronze Age Hazor, five seem to belong to the early group (Hazor 5, 7-9, 12), while four can be placed in the latter group (the three liver fragments Hazor 2-3, 17, and the letter fragment Hazor 15) on the basis of sign-forms, inconsistent use of mimmation, and the intrusion of West Semitic features. The very short inscription on the vessel Hazor 1 (only a name) cannot be dated to any particular part of the Old Babylonian Period. We date Hazor 5 (the Court Record) to the earlier group of the basis of sign forms, but note the anomaly of the writing *bīti* without mimmation.

3.3. Hebron 1, Shechem 1, and Circular Arguments

11. Horowitz and Wasserman 2004, Charpin and Zeigler 2004.

12. See the discussion in Horowitz and Wasserman 2004: 336-337.

Finally, to conclude this section, a few words in support of the methodology we have used above to divide ‘early’ from ‘late’ in light of the danger of falling into a circular argument by which one determines which Hazor tablets are ‘late’ solely on the basis of criteria developed from these very same tablets. In answer to this danger, let us consider two tablets from outside Hazor: the administrative tablet Hebron 1 and the letter Shechem 1. Both can be assigned to the latter part of the Old Babylonian Period on the basis of the criteria that we have used above for Hazor: Hebron due to inconsistent mimmat, and Shechem 1, with even greater certainty, because its scribe makes use of the conjunction *u* and subordinating conjunction *inūma* as at Amarna.¹³ Happily, the two tablets can also be assigned to the time of our later group at Hazor on the basis of other evidence as well, namely their prosopography as the two include non-Semitic personal names: *Su-ku-hu* in Hebron 1 and a name Pirašše-x (with the end of the name missing) at Shechem. Naaman 1994 and others date the appearance of such non-Semitic names in Canaan to the later phases of the Middle Bronze Age/Old Babylonian Period, and this trend continues into the Middle Babylonian period/Late Bronze Age when, at the time of the Amarna archives, approximately 1/3 of all personal names in Canaan are non-Semitic. This stands in marked contrast to our ‘early group’ in Old Babylonian period Hazor when all names are Semitic. Thus, Hebron 1 and Shechem 1, and tablets at Hazor sharing similar phenomena, can be assigned to a period of time earlier than Amarna, but later than the time of our early group at Hazor; i.e. the time of our Hazor later group.

4. Early Cuneiform Writing in Canaan

A number of minutes ago I promised to conclude my remarks with an examination of the Hazor tablets as the earliest recovered examples of writing in the cuneiform southwest. After our discussions thus far, we have whittled the number of sources that belong to the earliest group from all 17 texts thus far recovered at the site, to the 10 that can be assigned to the Old Babylon Period, and from there down to the 5 sources that I assigned to the early group. These five are, so to speak, a mixed bag. Four of the five come from the realm of everyday life, the court record Hazor 5, the administrative document Hazor 7, and the letters

13. See Rainey 1996, vol. III 74-89. For the late Middle-Bronze Age date of Shechem 1 and Hebron 1, see also Rainey 1999: 154*-155*.

Hazor 8 and 12. The fifth, however, is an academic text, the mathematical prism fragment Hazor 9. Further, Hazor 7 and 9 show affinities to the scribal tradition of Mari, Hazor 12 does not, and there is no clear link between any of the tablets indicating that they come from a single archive unless one accepts the premise that the litigant in the court case Hazor 5 *ṁIr-pa-[a]-du* is the same person as the broken writer of the letter Hazor 8: *ṁIr-p[a-. . .]*. Finally, there is a great deal of variation in sign forms between the five tablets suggesting that the tablets were not written by members of the same scribal group. So, then, what we have found, and why we have found what we have found, and what can we learn from what we have found. I am embarrassed to say that I am not sure since with only 5 sources in our data-base we remain distant from having a statistically reliable sample upon which to base our conclusions. Nonetheless, I would explain our evidence, or better lack of evidence as follows. I believe that cuneiform was introduced to Hazor to serve the needs of the city as it began to become a full participant in the cuneiform writing international economic and political system of the Old Babylonian Period. I suggest that the first scribes were imported from Mari, and that they established at Hazor a scribal school in the Mari tradition. Hence, the Mathematical Prism Hazor 9 with Mari features but inscribed on local clay. The evidence also suggests that some of these scribes, both those from Mari and perhaps local students, worked in the service of the king (the court record Hazor 5 where the case is brought before the king, and the maybe Royal Letter Fragment Hazor 8), but also fulfilled the writing needs of foreigners visiting or based at Hazor (Hazor 12), and local administrators (the list of payments Hazor 7). All this is not surprising, since this is how scribes worked in many places in many periods, even in Mesopotamia proper. What might be surprising is how quickly the language of the five texts already seems to be taking on a local flavour - for example West Semitic-like *išput* instead of *išpit* in Hazor 7 (albeit in a personal name) and the loss of mimmatation (*bīti* instead of *bītim*) in Hazor 5. Thus, it appears that the scribal community at Hazor, perhaps from its earliest phases, began to introduce features of the local language into the dialect of Akkadian written in cuneiform in the city. Yet, when one takes a longer chronological perspective, the pattern of change seems slow. It is not until centuries after the introduction of cuneiform into Canaan, during the Middle Babylonian Period/Late Bronze Age, that the cuneiform and Akkadian of Canaan really began to deviate from that in use in the Mesopotamian homeland. In particular, in Old Babylonian period Canaan it appears that the scribes remained faithful to the academic languages of Ancient Mesopotamia, Sumerian and Akkadian, never using cuneiform to write

Canaanite, Amorite, or any local language as is the case elsewhere: for example Eblaite in Ebla, Hittite in Hattusas, Ugaritic at Ugarit, and in Middle Babylonian Period Canaan, dictionary lists with West Semitic columns,¹⁴ and the three alphabetic cuneiform texts Bet Shemesh 1, Taanach 15, and Tabor 1. Thus, in answer to the question why we have found what we have found, I would say that the repertoire of cuneiform texts from Old Babylonian period Hazor closely resembles the types of tablets we find in Mesopotamia because cuneiform was introduced into Canaan closely bundled to the Sumerian-Akkadian written culture of Mesopotamia, or better to the literate traditions of the cultural continuum which included Mesopotamia proper, as well as the much nearer Syrian cities which were Hazor's neighbors, trading partners, and diplomatic equals. As such Hazor, from the perspective of cuneiform, should not be seen as a Canaanite city, but rather as the furthest southwest extension of the system of Amorite ruled states that included Mari, Qatna, and Eshnunna in Syria, and Hammurabi's Babylon. Thus, it should not be surprising that the Hazor's scribes, even at this far southwestern corner of the scribal world, still wrote according to the traditions of the scribes of Syria and Mesopotamia.

Finally two last questions. We have we found so little, and how is all this relevant to the spread of other scripts into previously virgin territory including those lands peripheral to the borders of China. In terms of tablets, so little, yes, but I believe that the presence of the mathematical prism indicates that an academic scribal community was functioning at Hazor soon after cuneiform was introduced to the city, perhaps under the patronage of the Hazor kings as may be indicated by the notice of the king in the court record Hazor 5. As such, I hope that it may only be a matter of time before the long sought royal archive(s) from Hazor are recovered. On the other hand, it may be that the earliest scribes at Hazor were not employed directly by the king, and so that our failures thus far to find royal archives in the vicinity of the palace are not simply a matter of bad luck, but rather an indication that many?, most?, all? of the earliest tablets at Hazor were not to be found in palace archives, but in private collections which may have been quite distant from the palace with the scribes of Hazor 5 and perhaps Hazor 8 serving the needs of the king, at first at least, on an ad-hoc

14. Ashqelon 1 which preserves a parallel to Urta = *hubullu* with a West Semitic column, and Aphek 1 and 3, fragments of dictionary lists with West Semitic words expressed in cuneiform. Cf. at Amarna the Egyptian-Akkadian glossary EA 368 published in Izreel (1997) 77-81.

basis. If so, the development of a scribal community and school at Hazor could have been a secondary development.

Given the above, the study of the earliest tablets at Hazor does not yet offer any single model which allows us to understand how cuneiform spread into what is now Israel and Palestine in the Old Babylonian period, and so I must apologize that I am not sure how to apply what I have learned, surmised, hypothesized, and even guessed in my presentation to problems regarding the spread of characters and other scripts in Asia. Yet, to conclude, it seems to me that Hazor may offer a model of “conservative innovation” in newly literate areas. That is to say, that the cuneiform of early Hazor remained faithful to the language and scribal traditions of the Mesopotamian homeland for centuries, throughout the Old Babylonian Period, despite the introduction of small innovations here and there, which ultimately gave way to the drastic changes we can observe in tablets from the time of Amarna in the Middle Babylonian Period. Yet, as is often the case in Assyriology, a more clear picture of what happened will only be available when more tablets are available - so only time, and the Tel, will tell us the full story of the beginnings of writing at Hazor.

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