Dating the Fall of Babylon Once Again

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GASCHE *et al.* 1998 presented an ultra-short chronology for Western Asia arguing a date of 1499 B.C. for the Fall of Babylon, which would place the reign of Hammurabi at 1696-1654 B.C. The general framework of the new chronology was based on archaeological evidence while astronomical data allowed a degree of chronological precision which pottery typologies cannot provide. In this respect, therefore, the most crucial evidence was a lunar eclipse of 27 June 1954 B.C. which seems to be compatible with the omen concerning the death of Shulgi (KOCH 1998).

Koch suggested that the second omen, concerning the end of Ur III was incompatible with any eclipses, and thus the value of the eclipses as chronological tools was thrown into doubt. In any case however, Koch's critical analysis suggested that the earlier omen was incompatible with the eclipse of 2095 B.C. Regardless of any doubts about the value of the later eclipse, this conclusion means therefore that this astronomical evidence cannot be used in favor of a long chronology, and therefore support for a long chronology or arguments against this ultra-short chronology must be based on other evidence.

AMIET (1998) has identified one problem by drawing attention to a Cappadocian seal in the treasure found at the temple of Tod in Egypt. Cappadocian seals are firmly associated with the Assyrian trading colony at Kanesh and the treasure of Tod has been associated with the Egyptian King Amenemhat II whose name graced the boxes containing the treasure. Since Beckerath dates the reign of Amenemhat II to 1914-1879, this would imply that Kanesh be dated to ca. 1900 B.C., which would effectively prevent a logical argument in favor of dating Shamshi-Adad to ca. 1700 B.C., as his association with Kanesh is as indisputable as his association with Hammurapi.

Since the chronological relationships between Hammurapi, the Fall of Babylon, and the reign of Shamshi-Adad remain fixed, there are three important variables which could influence the interpretation of the chronological significance of the seal in the treasure of Tod : (1) the date of the treasure of Tod ; (2) the date of the reign of Amenemhat II, and (3) the dating of the Cappadocian seals.

(1) In discussing the stratigraphic position of the treasure of Tod, KEMP & MERRILLEES (1980 : 296) concluded that the objects from the treasure of Tod could not be used in any

chronological argument. A fragmentary inscription dating to the reign of Amenemhat II specifically states however that he supplied an endowment for the temple of Tod (ALTENMÜLLER & MOUSSA 1991 : 8). The material in the treasure included cups which were probably Middle Minoan II, as well as Akkadian seals. The latest material in the treasure seemed to be either the Middle Minoan II cups or the seals assigned stylistically to the Isin-Larsa and Cappadocian groups (BISSON DE LA ROCQUE 1950 ; BISSON DE LA ROCQUE *et al.* 1953). Like the Montet Jar from Byblos, the treasure does not include any items from Cyprus. As the material was found in boxes inscribed with the name of Amenemhat II and does not appear to have been mixed with any material from the second half of the second millennium B.C., the find may be regarded as potentially having been *in situ*. All these elements suggest that a Dynasty XII date under Amenemhat II is a reasonable assumption for the treasure of Tod.

(2) BECKERATH (1997) dates Amenemhat II to 1914-1879. This date is based on the assumption that coregencies were common during Dynasty XII, as recently argued by JANSEN-WINKELN (1991, 1997). The issue cannot be resolved at present, but it seems certain that one can interpret the evidence of the story of Sinuhe as implying that Sesostris I was not coregent at the time of the death of his father, and therefore it is advisable to adopt a chronology based on a lack of coregencies rather than their presence. The sequence can thus be lengthened slightly with respect to Beckerath's dates. The basic pillar for any chronology of Dynasty XII must be the astronomical date based on the year 7 heliacal rise of the Sothis star in the Illahun papyri. LUFT (1992) assigned this to the reign of Sesostris III suggesting either 1866 or 1841 B.C. Accepting the earliest date for this event and eliminating the coregencies, Amenemhat II can be assigned a reign of 1916-1983 B.C. Taking the lower date for the Sothis rising and permitting overlap via coregencies would allow the date to be pushed down by a decade, but it is unlikely that it can be pushed higher, and thus a date of ca. 1900 for Amenemhat II is the earliest possible.

(3) In his chronological analysis, LANDSBERGER (1954 : 119) originally assumed that the Cappadocian seal was the latest element in the Tod treasure, and the Isin-Larsa ones earlier. Isin-Larsa seal impressions are however also associated with the trade, and thus contemporary with Kanesh II (COLLON 1987 : 44). Aside from stylistic similarities, one Cappadocian seal from Kanesh II actually belonged to an Ur III official and was recut (PORADA 1976-80 : 384). The earlier group can therefore be placed in proximity to Ur III. PORADA (1966 : 254) has identified another Cappadocian seal of the Kanesh II tradition in the Montet Jar at Byblos. WARD (1987) has since dated the scarabs in the Montet jar to early Dynasty XII, after revising his earlier dates (TUFNELL & WARD 1966 ; Ward 1978). Cappadocian seals thus link Ur III and Egyptian Dynasty XII. It is thus clear that an early Dynasty XII date (via Tod and Byblos) for Cappadocian seals would imply the 20th century B.C.

The ultra-short chronology proposed by GASCHE *et al.* 1998 and the modifications of Beckerath's chronology discussed above would allow for the reign of Amenemhat II to overlap with the end of Ur III, both systems being supported by astronomical and archaeological data. Based on the evidence from Byblos, Tod and Kanesh, the early style of Kanesh II seems therefore to imply an overlap with both Ur III and early Dynasty XII. The implication that the Tod seal arrived in Egypt from Anatolia via the Levant extremely rapidly would suggest that the connection might be "too close for comfort". The connection is possible, but just barley. It would be eased by making the chronological adjustments suggested above, which would lower the dates for the reign of Amenemhat II by several decades, but there is no compelling reason to do this. The date of the reign of Amenemhat II would appear to have been roughly contemporary with the end of Ur III and therefore to be a bit tight for the arrival of the seal.

There is however another kind of evidence. A Cappadocian seal linked stylistically to Kanesh II was also found at Ashkelon in Israel, where there is a hiatus in the Middle Bronze I period (STAGER 1993 : 106). This seal could hardly date to before MB IIA and the 18th century B.C if it arrived while Cappadocian seals were in use. This seal would thus be contemporary with the Kanesh trade according to the ultra-short chronology, assigning Shamshi-Adad a reign around 1700 B.C. This argument is hardly compelling, as the evidence is circumstantial.

PORADA (1982 : 286-287) argued that the Cappadocian Seal from Tod could be identified as Syrian and suggested parallels with the Middle Bronze Palace at Ebla which has been equated with Dyn. XIII by her and others. The present argument is that the seal could be dated earlier, but Porada's suggested parallels underscore the claim that the duration of the tradition may be significantly longer than is generally recognized.

Of more import therefore is the city of Hazor, which is mentioned in the Mari archives (BARDET *et al.* 198 : 434-435 ; HOROWITZ 1996). Hazor likewise has a hiatus in MB I and the settlement mentioned in the Mari texts must be the MB IIB city (YADIN & BEN-TOR 1993). The Palestinian material in the archaeological excavations at Tell ed-Daba'a in the Egyptian Delta permits a direct relationship between Egypt and Palestine for the first half of the second millennium. Regardless of debates about the precise stratigraphic and chronological sequence, MB IIB cannot be contemporary with Dynasty XII (1991-1793 according to the chronological fixpoints identified above). Despite their differences, neither M. Bietak nor W. Dever date the beginnings of MB IIB earlier than 1750 B.C. or after the end of Dynasty XII (DEVER 1997 : 295). Given the references to Hazor in the Mari archives, the Egyptian and Palestinian archaeological evidence indicates therefore that Shamshi-Adad and Hammurabi cannot antedate MB IIB, and therefore a chronology dating Hammurabi and Shamshi-Adad to the 19th century B.C. is prohibited.[1]

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[1] Prof. A. Ben-Tor has informed me (pers. comm.) that the C-14 dates for the destruction of the palace currently

The style of the seal from Tod cannot therefore be used as a decisive argument on its own against the ultra-short chronology, unless buttressed by additional evidence. The use of the Kanesh II Cappadocian style in Kanesh immediately antedates the reign of Shamshi-Adad, and Shamshi-Adad can be placed parallel with Palestinian MB IIB and thus in the 18th century B.C. (via Tell ed-Daba'a and Hazor). On the other hand, the evidence from Tod suggests that the Cappadocian style already existed around 1900 B.C. The Egyptian material therefore indicates that the Cappadocian style endured for at least two centuries. The Montet Jar may suggest an even earlier date for the style, which would ease the travelling time required for a fragmentary Cappadocian seal to reach Tod by 1890 B.C. or so. On the other hand, many of the seals in the Tod treasure — including the Cappadocian seal — are made of lapis lazuli. Lapis lazuli was common in Egypt and Mesopotamia from the third millennium B.C., but rare in Anatolia before the second millennium. This suggests a later — rather than earlier — date.

None of the details of the Tod treasure or the Cappadocian seals affect the importance of the stratigraphy at Hazor and its relationship to Mari and Tell ed-Daba'a however. The contents of the treasure of Tod and the Montet Jar provide circumstantial evidence for the contemporaneity of Ur III and Dyn. XII (as suggested by the ultra-short chronology), but this is hardly compelling. More important therefore is dating the Mari correspondence of the MB IIB — via Hazor and Tell ed-Daba'a — to second half of the 18th century B.C., and this is the relevant chronological evidence from Egypt, not the seal from Tod.

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being excavated are 18th century B.C., which would necessarily be the date of construction of the Middle Bronze palace at Hazor, regardless of whether or not the wood was reused.

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