

Hammurabi and the Revised Chronology

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Editor's Note: The present article is a modified and partially updated version of one of the original unpublished chapters of *Ages in Chaos*. Readership response is welcome. - *LMG*

King Hammurabi is the best known of the early monarchs of ancient times due to his famous law code, found inscribed on stone. This great lawgiver of ancient Babylon belonged to the First Babylonian Dynasty which came to an end, under circumstances shrouded in mystery, some three or four generations after Hammurabi. For the next several centuries, the land was in the domain of a people known as the Kassites. They left few examples of art and hardly any literary works - theirs was an age comparable to and contemporaneous with that of the Hyksos in Egypt, and various surmises were made as to the identity of the two peoples.* A cartouche of the Hyksos king Khyan was even found in Babylonia(1) and another in Anatolia, (2) a possible indication of the extent of the power and influence wielded by the Hyksos.

* In the original version of the present text, Velikovsky theorized that the Kassites were both contemporaneous "and apparently identical with the Hyksos"; and though he later abandoned this equation, his conjecture is worth noting as a matter of intellectual interest. - *LMG*

Until a few decades ago, the reign of Hammurabi was dated to around the year 2100 before the present era. This dating was originally prompted by information contained in an inscription of Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, who reigned in the sixth century until the conquest of his land by Cyrus. Whereas his son and co-ruler, Belshazzar, occupied himself with the administration of the land, Nabonidus indulged in an avocation: he showed a marked interest in archaeology, and excavated the foundations of ancient temples, looking for old inscriptions.(2a)

In the foundations of a temple at Larsa, Nabonidus found a plaque of King Burnaburiash. This king is known to us from the el-Amarna correspondence in which he participated. On that plaque Burnaburiash wrote that he had rebuilt the temple erected seven hundred years before by King Hammurabi. The el-Amarna letters, according to conventional chronology, were written about -1400. Thus, if Burnaburiash lived then, Hammurabi must have lived about -2100.

When Egyptologists found it necessary to reduce the el-Amarna Age by a quarter of a century, the time of Hammurabi was adjusted accordingly, and placed in the twenty-first century before the present era. It was also observed: "The period of the First Dynasty of Babylon has always been a landmark in early history, because by it the chronology of Babylonia can be fixed, with a reasonable margin of error."(3) The period of Hammurabi also served as a landmark for the histories of the Middle East from Elam to Syria, and was used as a guide for the chronological tables of other nations.

Since the dates for Hammurabi were established originally on the evidence of the plaque of King Burnaburiash found by Nabonidus which indicated that King Hammurabi had reigned seven hundred years earlier - the revision of ancient history outlined in *Ages in Chaos* would set a much later date for Hammurabi, for it places the el-Amarna correspondence and King Burnaburiash in the ninth, not the fourteenth, century. Burnaburiash wrote long letters to Amenhotep III and Akhnaton, bore himself in a haughty manner, and demanded presents in gold, jewels, and ivory. In the same collection of letters, however, there are many which we have identified as originating from Ahab of Samaria and Jehoshaphat of Jerusalem, and from their governors.(4)

Therefore, seven hundred years before this correspondence would bring us to the sixteenth century, not the twenty-first. Also, the end of the First Babylonian Dynasty - in circumstances recalling the end of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt - would point to some date close to -1500, or even several decades later.

A connecting link was actually found between the First Babylonian Dynasty and the Twelfth Dynasty of Egypt, the great dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. At Platanos on Crete, a seal of the Hammurabi type was discovered in a tomb together with Middle Minoan pottery of a kind associated at other sites with objects of the Twelfth Egyptian Dynasty, (5) more exactly, of its earlier part.(6) This is regarded as proof that these two dynasties were contemporaneous.

In the last several decades, however, a series of new discoveries have made a drastic reduction of the time of Hammurabi imperative. Chief among the factors that demand a radical change in the chronology of early Babylonia and that of the entire Middle Eastern complex a chronology that for a long time was regarded as unassailable - are the finds of Mari, Nuzi, and Khorsabad.

At Mari on the central Euphrates, among other rich material, a cuneiform tablet was found which established that Hammurabi of Babylonia and King Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria were contemporaries. An oath was sworn by the life of these two kings in the tenth year of Hammurabi, The finds at Mari "proved conclusively that Hammurabi came to the throne in Babylonia after the accession of Shamshi-Adad I in Assyria".(7)

Shamshi-Adad I could not have reigned in the twenty-first century since there exist lists of Assyrian kings which enable us to compute regnal dates. Being compilations of later times, it is admitted by modern research that "the figures in king lists are not infrequently erroneous".(8) But in 1932 a fuller and better-preserved list of Assyrian king names was found at Khorsabad, capital of Sargon II. Published ten years later, in 1942, it contains the names of one hundred and seven Assyrian kings with the number of years of their reigns, Shamshi-Adad I, who is the thirty-first on the list, but the first of the kings whose regnal years are given in figures, reigned much later than the time originally allotted to Hammurabi whose contemporary he was.

The Khorsabad list ends in the tenth year of Assur-Nerari V, which is computed to have been -745; at that time the list was composed or copied. By adding to the last year the sum of the regnal years, as given in the list of the kings from Shamshi-Adad to Assur-Nerari, the first year of Shamshi-Adad is calculated to have been -1726 and his last year -1694. These could be the earliest dates; with a less liberal approach, the time of Shamshi-Adad needs to be relegated to an even later date.

The result expressed in the above figures required a revolutionary alteration in Babylonian chronology, for it reduced the time of Hammurabi from the twenty-first century to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The realization that the dating of Hammurabi must be brought forward by three and a half centuries created "a puzzling chronological discrepancy", (9) which could only be resolved by making Hammurabi later than Amenemhet I of the Twelfth Dynasty.

The process of scaling down the time of Hammurabi is an exciting spectacle. Sidney Smith and W. F. Albright competed in this scaling down; as soon as one of them offered a more recent date, the other offered a still more recent one, and so it went until Albright arrived at -1728 to -1686 for Hammurabi, and S. Smith - by placing Shamshi-Adad from -1726 to -1694 - appeared to start Hammurabi at -1716.(10)

If Hammurabi reigned at the time allotted to him by the finds at Mari and Khorsabad - but according to the finds at Platanos was a contemporary of the Egyptian kings of the early Twelfth Dynasty then that dynasty must have started at a time when, according to the accepted chronology, it had already come to its end. In conventionally-written history, by -1680 not only the Twelfth Dynasty, but also the Thirteenth, or the last of the Middle Kingdom, had expired.* On the accepted timetable, the Hyksos (Dynasties 14 to 17) ruled from that year for one century, until, in -1580, the Eighteenth Dynasty initiated the era of the New Kingdom.

* There is even apparent disagreement among Egyptologists as to which dynasties constitute the Middle Kingdom as well as the time of its end. E.g., Aldred includes the Thirteenth Dynasty and has it ending in 1640 B.C. Muller includes the Thirteenth and has it ending in 1650 B.C. Gardiner and Stevenson Smith do not include the Thirteenth and end the Twelfth in 1786 B.C. Wilson does not include the Thirteenth and ends the Twelfth ca. 1800 B.C. Steindorff and Seele likewise exclude the Thirteenth and end the Twelfth in 1780 B.C., and so on. - *LMG*

We have previously discussed the difficulties that followed from leaving only one hundred years for the Hyksos period.(11) The great change in scenery between the end of the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom made Flinders Petrie claim that an additional period of 1461 years (one Sothic period) must be placed between the two eras; but this view did not prevail. Nor were retained as valid the historical sources (Josephus-Manetho) that allotted 511 years for the Hyksos period; nor was the consideration of cultural changes, as advocated by H. R. Hall - who pleaded for four or five centuries for the Hyksos period - given a chance.

When the end of the Twelfth Dynasty was brought down to -1680, there was no time left for the Thirteenth; and with only one century for the Hyksos, the bottom of the Middle Kingdom had apparently reached a level below which it could not be reasonably or securely dropped. This also constituted a barrier against any further reduction of Hammurabi's time. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to eliminate the Hyksos period altogether: of the five hundred and eleven years of Hyksos rule, as given by Manetho and preserved by Josephus, not a single year was left.(12) This proposed elimination of the Hyksos period, though made by a qualified scholar, was received with mixed reactions. But even this elimination did not bring the scales of the balance to rest.

Even without a further reduction of Hammurabi's time, the scaling down of his date by Albright and Smith was sufficient to call for a general lowering of the dates assigned to all west Asian and Aegean material.(13) Consequently, three to four centuries were subtracted from all west Asian and Aegean chronology of the period corresponding to the Middle Kingdom in Egypt. Only the beginning of the New Kingdom was not moved from -1580, for it was regarded as "absolutely certain" and "mathematically certain".(14)*

* Despite the convictions of Hall and Breasted, the beginning of the New Kingdom has, in fact, been assigned by Egyptologists variously to 1546 B.C. (Steindorff and Seele), 1550 B.C (Wilson), 1552 B.C. (Lange), 1570 B.C. (Muller and Stevenson Smith), 1557 B.C. (Woldering), 1575 B.C. (Gardiner), and 1567 B.C. (Michalowski). This is hardly consistent, much less "certain". -
LMG

Yet the finds in Mesopotamia required a further lowering of the dates of the First Babylonian Dynasty. In one case of Middle East chronology before the New Kingdom - the date of the so-called Cappadocian tablets - a full six hundred years was excised. On tablets from Araphkha and Nuzi, seal impressions of the First Babylonian Dynasty were found. These tablets dated from the fifteenth century, "which points to a much later date than currently accepted".

If Hammurabi lived in the sixteenth century and the First Babylonian Dynasty ruled until the beginning of the fifteenth century, then many dates of early history must be revised even more drastically. But the Middle Kingdom in Egypt could not be lowered below -1580 because such a shift would make a portion of the Middle Kingdom contemporary with the New Kingdom.

In my reconstruction of ancient history, the beginning of the New Kingdom is shown to correspond with the later part of Saul's reign, in the second half of the eleventh century. The Middle Kingdom (Thirteenth Dynasty) ended not in -1720 or -1680 but shortly after -1500. The Hyksos period regains its place in history: it continued for over four hundred years and corresponds in Biblical history to the time of the Wandering in the Desert, the Conquest of Canaan, the Judges, and to a part of Saul's reign.

The Assyrian king lists lend support to our reconstruction by exposing the need to lower the dates of the Twelfth Egyptian Dynasty. With Hammurabi belonging to the sixteenth century, the time of Burnaburiash is in the ninth century. This is also the period to which we ascribed the el-Amarna correspondence; and not the Assyrian and Babylonian material, but the Biblical and Egyptian evidence compelled us to move the beginning of the New Kingdom from -1580 to ca. -1040, and the time of el-Amarna to ca. -860 until -840 or -830.

The archaeological facts discussed above lead to the conclusion that the First Babylonian Dynasty reigned from the eighteenth century to the very beginning of the fifteenth and was contemporaneous with the Egyptian Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties - the Middle Kingdom.* The time of the Kassites in Mesopotamia corresponds more precisely to the time of the Hyksos in Egypt and Syria.** The fall of this Amalekite (Hyksos) Empire brought down their power "from Havila [in Mesopotamia] to Shur, over against Egypt" (I Samuel 15:7).

* While accepting Velikovsky's placement of the Exodus and the end of the Middle Kingdom to ca. 1450 B.C., Dr. John J. Bimson has argued for a 320 year duration for the Thirteenth Dynasty. Thus the XIIth and XIIIth Dynasties are made to span the period from 1975-1450 B.C. This would obviously require a different dating for Hammurabi than that proposed by Velikovsky. Bimson was not concerned with the date of Hammurabi, however, and the subject did not come up. (See J.J. Bimson, "A Chronology for the Middle Kingdom" in *SISR* III:3, pp. 64-69 and *SISR* IV:1, pp. 11-18.) - LMG

** According to conventional dating, "The Kassites, a mountain people who had threatened Babylon from the time of Samsuiluna, Hammurabi's son (17th cent. B.C.), found their path clear after the transient conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Mursilis I (ca 1550). None of the known architectural monuments of Kassite origin, however, dates back further than the 15th century; they continue until the 12th century, when Kassite domination ended." (A. Moortgat, "Mesopotamia", *Encyclopedia of World Art*, IX, p. 768.) - LMG

The discoveries at Platanos, Nuzi, Mari, and Khorsabad demand that the Middle Kingdom in Egypt be brought down to the fifteenth century, and though they involve archaeological material of an epoch preceding the period discussed in *Ages in Chaos*, they give strong support to the reconstruction presented therein.

REFERENCES

1. B. Porter and R. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Relief and Paintings*, Vol. VII (Oxford, 1951), p. 396.
2. H. Stock, "Der Hyksos Chian in Bogazköy", *Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin*, 94 (1963), pp. 73ff.
- 2a. Regarding Nabonidus' archaeological activity, Roust had this to say: "Other temples in Mesopotamia - including the great temple of Marduk in Babylon - also benefited from his zeal, and the eagerness with which, before building anew, he sought the *temenu*, or foundation-deposit, which authenticated the sacred ground testifies to his attachment to the religious traditions of Sumer and Akkad. On account of his lengthy excavations in search of these written documents, Nabonidus has been nicknamed 'the royal archaeologist', though neither his aims nor his methods had anything to do with archaeology. Nevertheless, the king certainly shared with his subjects that passion for the study of the past which characterizes his epoch" (*Ancient Iraq*, pp. 347-348). - LMG
3. Sidney Smith, *Alalakh and Chronology* (London, 1940), p. 2.
4. *Ages in Chaos*, Chapters 6-8. [But cf. Peter J. James, "The Dating of the El-Amarna Letters", *SISR* II:3, pp. 80-85 and Martin Sieff, "The Two Jehorams", *SISR* II:3, pp. 86-90 for different identifications which, nonetheless, also support a ninth century B.C. dating for the el-Amarna letters. - LMG]
5. F. Matz, "The Maturity of Minoan Civilization" in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Third ed.), Vol. II, pt. 1 (1973), p. 144.
6. But cf. Smith, *Alalakh and Chronology*, n. 58.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. Cf. A. Ungnad, "Die Venustafeln und das Neunte Jahr Samsuilunas", *Mitt. altorient. Ges.*,

XIII, Heft 3, 1940. - JNS; [However, G. Roux (Ancient Iraq, p. 397, n. 12) cites dates of 1792-1750 B.C. for Hammurabi as put forward by S. Smith. And - following Smith - Saggs, Parrot, Frankfort, and Amiet accept 1792-1750 B.C. Following Albright, Woolley and Moortgat date Hammurabi to 1728-1686 B.C. As recently as 1964, Strommenger placed Hammurabi in the years 1930-1888 B.C. Aside from Velikovsky, the most drastic reduction of Hammurabi's dates was made by Donovan Courville. In *The Exodus Problem and its Ramifications* (Loma Linda, 1971), II, p. 300, Courville places the reign of Hammurabi in the period ca. 1411-1368 B.C. (see Chapter XVII, "The Era of Hammurabi"). This would make Hammurabi exactly contemporaneous with Moses which raises some interesting questions, though beyond the scope of the present paper. - LMG]

11. *Ages in Chaos*, Chapter 2.

12. R. Weill, *XIIe dynastie, royauté de Haute-Egypte et domination Hyksos dans le Nord* (Cairo, 1953).

13. Smith, *Alalakh and Chronology*, *op. cit.*

14. H. R. Hall, "Egyptian Chronology" in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (First ed.), Vol. I, p. 170; J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (2nd ed.), p. 22. [Also see *Peoples of the Sea*, p. 231. - LMG]