THE OLD TO MIDDLE BABYLONIAN TRANSITION: HISTORY AND CHRONOLOGY OF THE MESOPOTAMIAN DARK AGE

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The publication of *Dating the Fall of Babylon* (GASCHE *et al.* 1998) has revitalised the debate about the so-called Mesopotamian Dark Age, a period of poor historical documentation that separates the demise of the First Dynasty of Babylon (following its last king Samsuditana) from the first rulers of the Kassite Dynasty on the throne of Babylon who are documented by contemporary evidence (starting with the reign of Kara-indaš). The significance of this debate is all but parochial because the amount of time one wishes to allocate to this period is of direct relevance for the absolute chronology of early Middle Eastern history. This is because the First Dynasty of Babylon forms the tail end of a five hundred year block in the history of Lower Mesopotamia which is characterised by a secure internal chronology and includes names and events that are used as historical benchmarks far beyond the confines of Mesopotamian studies (most famously Hammurabi of Babylon). Whereas until recently scholarship had been largely content to anchor this block in time by means of the astronomical observations recorded in the Venus Tablets of Ammiṣaduqa, *Dating the Fall of Babylon* and its responses have effectively discredited the reliability of this and all other astronomical evidence thus far employed. With no alternative dating tools of sufficient accuracy yet available, it is at present not possible to assign absolute dates to the block or any of its components, and as a result the textual sources for mid-second millennium BC Mesopotamian history have once again taken center stage as the most pertinent evidence to elaborate a chronological estimate of early Mesopotamian history.

All schemes of absolute dating on the basis of astronomical criteria result in dark ages of appropriate length to bridge the gap between the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon and the earliest secure dates for the Kassite Dynasty. Accepting that Kara-indaš was king of Babylon in 1410 BC (but almost certainly had come to the throne before that date, see below), the conventional Middle Chronology puts him no less than 185 years after the fall of Babylon of 1595 BC, but the chronological scheme presented in *Dating the Fall of Babylon*, where the same event is dated to 1499 BC, results in a gap of only 89 years. Although the recognition of a dark age by its very nature has encouraged a flexible approach to accommodate one's desired scheme of dating, it is the purpose of this contribution to show that the available historical evidence nevertheless sets clear limits on the elasticity of this dark age. As we shall see, the sources do allow to follow the main outlines of Babylonian history over this period, and in sufficient detail to check the viability of the proposed dating schemes. In the following I will try to demonstrate that the Babylonian historical evidence falls in line with other data sets in supporting a lowering of the reign of Hammurabi well beyond his conventional Middle Chronology date of 1792–50 BC, possibly as low as 1696–54 BC as proposed in *Dating the Fall of Babylon*, and I hope to do so without resorting to unnecessary emendation of the sources.[2]

The sources

It is sensible to separate contemporary sources from later evidence. The latter category consists of king lists, chronicles and a few texts purporting to

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be copies of original inscriptions of Babylonian rulers of the relevant period. Almost all of this material was published more than one century ago.[3] Textual sources from the period itself are quite scarce and comprise some inscribed objects with names of historical figures known from sources of the first category and, more importantly, archival records with dating formulas invoking kings of the First Sealand as well as the early Kassite dynasties. Much of the relevant archival material has become available only recently.

First millennium BC evidence

Babylonian King Lists

The *Babylonian King List A* (*BKLA*) is the cornerstone for the history of the second and first millennium BC. The text survives as a single manuscript of Neo-Babylonian date (second half of the first millennium BC) and lists all Babylonian dynasties as consecutive, including those that in reality overlapped. In this way the First Babylonian, the First Sealand and the Kassite dynasties are presented as a sequence. The text includes summaries of total regnal years and number of kings for each dynasty, informing us that 11 kings of the First Sealand Dynasty ruled for 368 years, and 36 kings of the Kassite Dynasty for a total of 576 years and 9 months.

All names and reign lengths of the First Sealand Dynasty are preserved but the reign lengths for the first three rulers are difficult to read due to damages to the tablet. The same sequence of names is also found (but without reign lengths) in another late document, *Babylonian King List B* (*BKLB*), and the damaged *Synchronistic King List* (*SyKL*) records the last seven names and adds one extra name (king "6a", see BRINKMAN 1993–97: 7). Since most names are also known from contemporary or near-contemporary sources, it would seem that this is a list of authentic historical figures, without any obvious embellishment drawing on legend. However, the significance of the dynastic total of 368 years in *BKLA* is unclear because it cannot be obtained by adding up the reign lengths (BRINKMAN 1976: 429). Individual reign lengths are moreover suspiciously high,[4] and at least in one instance the

figure is clearly wrong (see below), so that their reliability overall is low.

The king list of the Kassite Dynasty in *BKLA* is severely damaged, with the passage for kings 7–23 lost altogether. The damaged *SyKL* gives the first 13 names before a lacuna but the name of king 11 is entirely missing and those of kings 12–13 are too damaged to be read with certainty. *SyKL* is an Assyrian creation of the early first millennium BC on the basis of a Babylonian source similar but not identical to *BKLA*. Minor differences between passages dealing with the first six names in the two documents highlight that no uniform tradition for the sequence of the early Kassite rulers was recognized in the scribal circles of the first millennium BC. As we will see below, the list of Kassite kings includes at least one legendary name and combines separate ruling houses into a fictional account of linear succession. Since the dynastic total of 576 years and 9 months no doubt results from totalling all individual reign lengths, we must disregard it for chronological purposes.

The Assyrian King List

The *Assyrian King List* (*AKL*) is relevant for the present discussion insofar as it produces historical dates with a high degree of accuracy as early as in the late 15th century BC. It is an account of all kings on the throne of Assur with their relations and lengths of reign down to the 7th century BC but problematic entries, textual ambiguities and broken numbers mean that the list does not allow exact dates of reigns before that of king 67 (1420 BC, +2/−1 year, according to the adjusted and lowered Middle Assyrian chronology proposed by BOESE & WILHELM 1979) without recourse to textual conjectures and unproven assumptions. Problems accumulate as one moves back in time, depriving us of a secure date for the reign of Šamši-Adad (*AKL* king 39), whose years can be synchronised exactly with those of Hammurabi of Babylon (the only synchronism between Assur and the First Dynasty of Babylon). As a consequence, it is impossible to securely date the 500 year block of Lower Mesopotamian reigns on the basis of this document alone. More helpful for our purpose are two synchronisms between Assyrian and early Kassite rulers mentioned in another Assyrian source, the

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[3]   For a more comprehensive discussion with full bibliography we refer to PRUZSINSZKY 2009.

[4]   Three or four kings rule more than 50 years and the average length of reign for the dynasty exceeds 30 years.

Synchronistic History (*ABC* 21), recording treaties between two Assyrian kings and their early Kassite counterparts. Only the more recent of the two can be dated securely with the help of *AKL*, the significance of which will be discussed below.

Babylonian narrative texts

A number of Babylonian narrative sources pertain to the Mesopotamian Dark Age. The Neo-Babylonian *Chronicle of Early Kings* (*ABC* 20) narrates events in the reigns of early Kassite kings who are not mentioned in the surviving portions of the *BKLA* or *SyKL* and may have to be placed among the missing successors of Burna-buriaš I (10th Kassite king in *SyKL*). The *Inscription of Agum-kakrime* is a late rendering of what seems to be an authentic mid-second millennium BC royal inscription.[5] The name of the king is not fully preserved and does not occur elsewhere.[6] The text reports how the ruler had the cult statues of Marduk and Ṣarpanitum returned to Babylon and their temple renovated. The source has been routinely rejected as a primary witness for second millennium BC history, but the arguments for this view do not stand to scrutiny. There are a few more first millennium BC texts mentioning people and events of the Dark Age but they are of little relevance as primary sources.

Contemporary evidence

Tablets and other inscribed objects produced by (subjects of) rulers from the Mesopotamian Dark Age are, not surprisingly, in short supply. As a reason for this dearth of material one might consider an abrupt decline in the production of inscribed artefacts following the demise of the First Dynasty of Babylon, but more to the point seem changes in the circumstances favouring their survival and recovery. Under Hammurabi's successors environmental breakdown and human destruction reduced, or even terminated, urban settlement at many Lower Mesopotamian sites,

resulting in rich archaeological deposits and a large body of texts dating to that period. No widespread decline of a comparable scale seems to have occurred in the centuries that followed – at least not in those parts of Mesopotamia where official and clandestine excavations have yielded material – resulting in a very limited corpus of inscribed artefacts (VAN KOPPEN 2007: 218–19).

Inscriptions

Only two inscribed commemorative objects from the Dark Age have come to light.[7] Both were found in secondary archaeological context. The mace head of "Ula(m)-burariaš, son of king Burna-burariaš, king of the Sealand" was part of hoard find in a Parthian-period house in Babylon.[8] The agate stone weight in the shape of a frog inscribed with the name of "Ulam-burariaš, son of king Burna-burariaš" was found in an early Iron Age tomb at Metsamor, in Armenia, in the Ararat plain west of Yerevan (Fig. 1).[9] Notwithstanding their inclusion in much later assemblages, the objects are genuine and were manufactured for one and the same sponsor, who is almost certain-
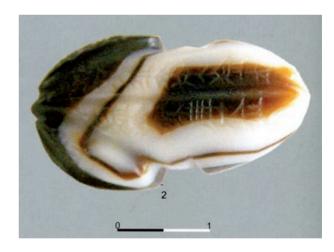

Fig. 1 Frog weight of Ulam-burariaš (illustration from *The Gold of Ancient Armenia,* Yerevan, 2007, plate 62)

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[5] Text and bibliography STEIN 2000: 150–165. English translation by F. van Koppen in CHAVALAS 2006: 135–139.

[6] [Agum]-kakrime is a modern restoration which may be wrong, but is here maintained for the sake of convenience.

[7] The following objects of uncertain date will not be considered: a clay *kudurru* either of very early Middle Babylonian date, or written in a deliberate archaic style

(SASSMANNSHAUSEN 1994: GASCHE *et al.* 1998: 8 note 29), and the inscriptions of Ḫašmar-galzu (BOESE 2010), the date of which needs to be reconsidered on the basis of a more detailed study of Middle Babylonian Sumerian as well as monumental palaeography.

[8] Edited in STEIN 2000: 129. For a photograph see MARZAHN & SCHAUERTE 2008: 112 Abb. 44 left.

[9] Edited in STEIN 2000: 129. See also KOHL 1992: 128.

ly the same person as Ulam-burias, the "brother of Kaštiliaš," who according to *ABC* 20 conquered the Sealand. His father is generally identified with Burna-burias I. The inscriptions therefore not only confirm that authentic names are recorded in these late sources, but also that the chronicle seems to contain accurate historical facts.

Date formulas

More numerous are archival records, bearing dating formulas that are important for matters of history and chronology. Years were designated in Mesopotamia with reference to the ruling monarch, after the incumbent of a particular office, or by referring to an era. The method of dating under the First Dynasty of Babylon was completely uniform, with the central authorities naming each new year after a recent royal accomplishment and disseminating its name throughout the state, where it was used for dating everyday records. Year names remained in use in Babylon at least until the reign of the Kassite king Kurigalzu I (early 14th century BC) but were then phased out in favour of a numerical system ("year x of king Y") which was used until the first millennium BC. Designating years after office holders was standard practice in Assyria, and similar practices are attested elsewhere. Dating by era is virtually unknown in the second millennium BC, although it could occur within a particular reign: Rim-Sin I of Larsa, for example, used an era following the conquest of Isin celebrated in his 30th year name, designating his 31st–60th regnal year as year 2–31 after that event.

Sources from the Sealand

The first group of relevant archival material was published by DALLEY 2009: an archive of over 500 tablets dating to Pešgaldaramaš and Ayadaragalama, 7th and 8th king of the First Sealand Dynasty (according to *BKLA* and *BKLB*). The archive is the product of a palace administration in an as yet unidentified city under their control. The Sealand was a state in the southeastern part of the Mesopotamian alluvium, which included the marshes at the head of the Persian Gulf, hence its name. A line of rulers controlled this area from the reign of Hammurabi's successor Samsuiluna onwards, when Ilīma-ilum, the dynastic founder according to the king list tradition, is mentioned in contemporary sources, presumably until the time of the Kassite ruler Ulam-burias.

The archive documents a span of little over ten years, covering the end of the reign of Pešgaldaramaš and the early years of Ayadaragalama. It would seem that two systems of dating are attested side by side in the archive. The first makes use of year names that commemorate royal activity, similar to those of the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon. Such dating formulas only occur in connection with Ayadaragalama, the second of the attested rulers. The other dating system uses ordinal numbers, often without mention of the king's name. Numerical dates are attested for both kings, more specifically the year 27 and 29 of Pešgaldaramaš and year 7 and 8 of his successor Ayadaragalama. DALLEY (2009: 10–11) notes that *BKLA* attributes 50 years to Pešgaldaramaš and considers these numerical dates to refer to the 27th, respectively 29th, repetition of the king's 22nd year name, hence assuming a 'personal era' comparable to the one of Rim-Sin I (discussed above). It would seem, however, that a different explanation is required when we consider the use of numerical dates under his successor Ayadaragalama. Almost all of his dating formulas (year names and numerical dates) are attested in many texts but no other numbers than "year 7" and "year 8" occur. If these numbers imply a repetition of any of his other year names, one would expect to find evidence also for its second to its sixth repetition, but this is not attested. Starting from Ayadaragalama's seventh year the practice of dating therefore seems to have switched from year names to numerical dates.[10]

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[10] Seven year names (DALLEY 2009: 11–12 D–J) may represent Ayadaragalama's first six years if we accept that year name D could have been used to abbreviate any other year name, particularly the first (G is a likely candidate to be a fuller version of the name of the first year). Year name M (mu gibil egir) is a variant for K (mu gibil), both well-known expressions to indicate the absence of a novel name for the current year, in this case during the year when numerical dating took over from year naming (see DALLEY 2009: 10 for the suggestion that K and "year 7" denote the same year). Year names O–Q are each attested only once and should almost certainly be seen as variants for other year names of Ayadaragalama.

The implication for the length of the reign of Pešgaldaramaš is that he in all likelihood reigned no longer than 29 years, meaning that the figure of 50 years assigned to him in *BKLA* is erroneous.

Since the reign lengths in *BKLA* are unreliable (see above), we lack a source that would allow us to synchronise the reigns of Pešgaldaramaš and Ayadaragalama with the First Babylonian or the Kassite dynasties. As DALLEY (2009: 4) observed, the text themselves do not allow us to establish whether the archive precedes or follows the fall of Babylon. Two details might however be relevant when considering this issue. The first is a letter of a border commander to his superior, asking for instructions what to do in case boats of the people of Ešnunna arrive (DALLEY 2009: 21 text 3). The implication is that Ešnunna was at this time still a political factor of importance, which suggests a date before Agum-kakrime (see below). If, on the other hand, the Burna-buriaš mentioned in another letter quoted by DALLEY (2009: 31) really is the early Kassite king of that name, then a later date for the archive should be envisioned. This identification is however far from certain and the matter will have to be considered once the letter is published in full.

Tell Muḥammad

The second group of dated archival records have been excavated at Tell Muḥammad, an Old Babylonian town of which the ancient name is unknown. The site lies inside the modern city of Baghdad, near the convergence of the Diyala river with the Tigris. Its location east of that river means that the history of the town has to be seen in the wider context of the Diyala region. This area was highly urbanised in early Old Babylonian times but prone to political fragmentation. The city of Ešnunna (Tell Asmar) however was traditionally a centre, and the seat of a powerful dynasty which for several generations succeeded in unifying the area and making their influence felt far beyond. Its fortune came to an end at the time of Hammurabi, after which many urban centres in the Diyala region went into decline. The political independence of Ešnunna and other

places however survived, and Babylon only sporadically managed to impose effective control on the region beyond the river Tigris.

The known tablets from Tell Muḥammad are reported to have been found in levels III and II, both of which the excavators attributed to the Old Babylonian period; the ceramic assemblage from these strata indeed contains items similar to the inventory at Tell ed-Der, datable down to approximately 30 years before the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon (GASCHE *et al.* 1998: 83). The tablets have not yet been published in full but 31 of them have been edited in the unpublished MA thesis of ALUBAID 1983. These texts come from private contexts and share many characteristics with late Old Babylonian records, including some unusual features of the contracts from Sippar of the time of Samsuditana. Their prosopography confirms that the recorded division over two levels corresponds to two sequential phases in the history of families, and moreover allows to exclude any significant interval between the texts of the different levels. Their dating formulas have received ample attention in the recent literature, but many problematic readings in individual dates still remain.[11]

The method of dating employed in the texts is most unusual because we find dates referring to an era, which is singular for the second millennium BC. Moreover, these dates were used alongside conventional narrative dates on the same tablet, a practice of dual dating which also does not appear elsewhere. The corpus of dated Tell Muḥammad texts can be subdivided in three phases, with dual dates appearing only during the second phase:

(1) In the oldest group of six documents (all from level III) the year is designated by means of a brief formula commemorating a recent event of local importance.

(2) On nine tablets of the next group (all from level II) two date formulas are inscribed (typically set on different faces of the tablet), one narrative like before and the other of the numerical variety with reference to an era involving the city of Babylon (mu-x-kam-ma *ša* ká-dingir-ra[ki] *uš-bu*; for the meaning see below). The era dates men-

[11] The dating formulas are discussed and presented in translation (for some texts with the benefit of collation) in GASCHE *et al.* 1998: 84–87; in transliteration by GENTILI 2002: 211–212 (see also GENTILI 2003–04: 35); and in transliteration and translation by SASSMANNSHAUSEN 2004: 302–305 (see also SASSMANNSHAUSEN 2006: 166).

tion years 36 to 39. Three more documents are linked with the other tablets of this phase because of their level provenance and prosopography but only bear narrative dates.

(3) The three most recent documents (also from level II) no longer contain narrative dates but only dates of the Babylon era, referring to years 40 and 41.

We thus see that in phase 2 a new style of dating appears, which was used for four years in conjunction with dates of the conventional type but was not mandatory. By phase 3 the earlier method of dating was entirely supplanted by the new system. The reception of a new dating system is generally thought to signify that the town had switched allegiance to a new overlord (GASCHE *et al.* 1998: 87).

Narrative dates were clearly the traditional way of dating at Tell Muḥammad. By designating the year with the help of a recent event these dates are reminiscent of the year names of Babylon or other royal houses, but in other aspects the practice at Tell Muḥammad seems different from the Babylonian paradigm. While some dates look as if they might be the product of official proclamations to the town's scribes, others are better explained as products of a local custom of dating by means of ad-hoc formulas. The latter seems to apply to all narrative dates of phase 2 (if we accept that the use of an era eliminated the need to promulgate formal year names), showing that the habit of dating by event was deeply entrenched in the local scribal culture and only reluctantly given up.

The narrative dates cast light on the origin of the era dates and how they came to be introduced. Only two individuals are designated as "king" in the Tell Muḥammad dates: Ḫurbaḫ in the older phase 1,[12] and Šipta-ulzi in phase 2.[13] Their presence signifies that each, at different

times, was acknowledged as the sovereign of the town. Ḫurbaḫ apparently also exercised some kind of influence in Ešnunna,[14] but it is not clear whether this town, Tell Muḥammad, or yet another place was his seat of government. Šipta-ulzi is the only named king in narrative dates combined with era dates. The conclusion seems inescapable that it was his government that promoted the use of an era. Other narrative dates moreover suggest that Šipta-ulzi confronted a son of Ḫurbaḫ,[15] who eventually got killed.[16] Both the drastic chance in dating customs and his struggle with Ḫurbaḫ's son suggest that Šipta-ulzi did not come to power through normal dynastic succession, but more likely was an outsider who took over Tell Muḥammad and, perhaps, more of Ḫurbaḫ's possessions, bringing him into conflict with his legitimate heir. That Šipta-ulzi and the House of Ḫurbaḫ competed for power does not surprise in the setting of the Diyala region, which was prone to political fragmentation. Šipta-ulzi's origins are nowhere stated but there are two pieces of evidence that seem relevant for this question: his use of an era relating to Babylon, and the fact that *SyKL* mentions Ḫurbaḫ and Šipta-ulzi as the 7th and 8th king of the Kassite lineage (BOESE 2008). The meaning of his era formula, and the implications of the era and the king list for the chronology of the Mesopotamian Dark Age will be discussed below.

Bahrain

The last group of archival records with relevant year names still awaits publication. In the mid-1990s some twenty tablets were excavated in mid-second millennium BC context in a monumental building at Qal'at al-Baḥrain on the island of Bahrain. At least three of them bear dates mentioning a ruler named Agum. They corroborate the existence of an early Kassite king of that name

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[12]   *ḫu-ur-ba-aḫ* lugal in the date of IM 90602 (phase 1). His name is to be read like this (also in IM 90606, IM 92721 and IM 92725), rather than Ḫurduzum (GASCHE *et al.* 1998: 86), *ḫu-ur-ba-tum* (SASSMANNSHAUSEN 2004), or *ḫu-ur-ba-zum* (BOESE 2008: 204).

[13]   *ši-ip-ta-ul-zi* lugal in the narrative dates of IM 92720 (in combination with era year 30+[x]) and IM 92728 (in combination with era year 37), both phase 2.

[14]   "The year when Ḫurbaḫ renewed the gods of Ešnunna" (mu dingir-didli *ša* áš-nun-na *ḫu-ur-ba-aḫ ú-ud-di-šu*), date of IM 90606 (phase 1).

[15]   "The year when the son of Ḫurbaḫ became hostile to the king" (mu dumu *ḫu-ur-ba-aḫ* ki lugal *ik-ki-rù*), date of IM 92725 (phase 2).

[16]   "The year when the son of Ḫurbaḫ was slain in Tupliaš" (mu *ša* dumu *ḫu-ur-ba-aḫ i-na tu-up-li-ia-aš di-ku*), date of IM 92721 (in combination with era year 36) (phase 2). That the same "son of Ḫurbaḫ" is meant in IM 92725 and IM 92721 is likely but not confirmed by other evidence.

(later sources feature no less than three), more specifically Agum son of Kaštiliaš who according to *ABC* 20 campaigned in the Sealand. Qal'at al-Baḥrain was previously subject to the Sealand kings and may have fallen to Agum as part of their realm. The one date published in full is of the numerical type, comparable to the Sealand dates discussed above.[17]

HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The usual suspects for taking over Samsuditana's vacant throne in Babylon have always been the Kassites. They did not arrive on the scene unannounced because Kassites had already played an important role in the kingdom of Babylon for a century and a half (VAN KOPPEN 2007: 213–17). Their role was almost exclusively military, both employed in the Babylonian army and residing in the land, and in self-governing territories at the periphery of the state from where they could embrace or threaten Babylonian interests in equal measure. By the time of the last generations of the Old Babylonian period a terminological differentiation had developed between resident Kassites and peripheral groups, with the term Kassite applied to troops settled inside the kingdom, and the terms Samḫarû and Bimatû used for (potentially) hostile outsiders. The latter terms presumably had specific geographical connotations. So far this can only be demon-strated for Samḫarû, which was used for armed bands in the Middle Euphrates region. Later on, this was the name by which the Kassite royal house of Babylon was known in the West (VAN KOPPEN 2004: 22; SASSMANNSHAUSEN 2004: 289 note 17).

Old Babylonian sources inform us that autonomous groups of Kassites had their own kings (SASSMANNSHAUSEN 2004: 289, 296). One would expect the names of some of their leaders to match those of the earliest Kassite kings as recorded in the later king lists. The evidence is presented here in Table 1, alongside the royal genealogy of the Agum-kakrime inscription (BRINKMAN 1976: 9–11).

The beginning of the three lists is essentially the same, except that *BKLA* and *SyKL* feature an extra name at the start as the father of the traditional dynastic founder, and insert a sixth name in different positions. The inscription of Agum-kakrime, on the other hand, gives just four predecessors. Rulers named Agum and Kaštiliaš are indeed documented for the Middle Euphrates region in Old Babylonian sources (PODANY 2002: 43–51), and while the evidence is still too fragmentary to support any particular sequence of kings, it nevertheless adds credibility to what the later history of the name Samḫarû independently suggests: that a Kassite ruler originating from the Middle Euphrates region gained control of Baby-

Agum-kakrime	BKLA	SyKL
	1 Gandaš	1 Gandaš
1 Agum "the Great"	2 Agum "the First, his son"	2 Agum "the First, his son"
2 Kaštiliaš	3 Kaštiliaš	3 Kaštiliaš
	4 Ušši "his son"	
3 Abirattaš (his son)	5 Abirattaš	4 Abirattaš
		5 Kaštiliaš
4 Urzigurumaš	6 Urzigurumaš	6 Urzigurumaš
	7 [...] x	7 Ḫurbaḫ
	(continuation broken)	8 Šipta-ulzi[18]
5 [..]-kakrime (his son)		9 Xxx
		10 Burna-buriaš

Table 1 Sources for the beginning of the Kassite Dynasty

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[17] "Fourth year of Agum" (mu ki-4 *a-gu-um*), see ANDRÉ-SALVINI & LOMBARD 1997: 167. With the publication of DALLEY 2009 reservations against this reading as voiced by SASSMANNSHAUSEN (2006: 167) are no longer necessary.

[18] *SyKL* gives the name as *ti-ip-t[a-a]k-zi* (Assur photograph 4128) but the identification with Tell Muḥammad's Šipta-ulzi is not in doubt, see BOESE 2008: 204–205.

lon, be it in direct succession to Samsuditana or by forcing out some rival.

The inscription of Agum-kakrime is the key source for the identification of this king. To be sure, the text contains nothing to suggest that he was the first of his lineage to occupy the Babylonian throne, other than the fact that it celebrates the return of the city's main deities. The name of the king who commissioned the inscription cannot be linked to any entry of the king lists. Traditionally the inscription is attributed to the ninth ruler of *SyKL*, whose name has however not been deciphered. Connecting it with either of the two preceding entries cannot be categorically excluded in view of the genealogy of the inscription, but this is even more problematic as these names have now been properly read: Ḫurbaḫ and Šipta-ulzi, both known from Tell Muḥammad. Their absence from Agum-kakrime's genealogy is striking. In order to explain their omission we either have to assume that the inscription deliberately excluded them from the king's ancestry, or that they were not his predecessors at all. If so, their inclusion in the king list tradition may be the result of a later revision of the history of the royal house. The insertion of Gandaš as the dynastic founder is a case in point of a later modification, and could serve as an argument in favour of this assumption, as it shows that adding names to the royal pedigree was a feasible strategy for those who wished to enhance the prestige of their ancestors.

The inscription contains another detail that supports the idea that Agum-kakrime did not inherit his throne from Šipta-ulzi and Ḫurbaḫ. In a description of his kingdom stretching from Babylon to the Zagros foothills the king portrays himself as one „who settles the land of Ešnunna with many people." This obviously refers to a concrete event, more specifically the traditional gesture of reconciliation after warfare. As already discussed, the land of Ešnunna is the Diyala region, or part thereof, where we have seen Ḫurbaḫ and Šipta-ulzi in action. If indeed Šipta-ulzi was defeated and his realm annexed by Agum-kakrime (or his predecessor), then Ḫurbaḫ and Šipta-ulzi would indeed have no place in the king's genealogy. But for being the last independent rulers of the Diyala region their names would certainly have been remembered. Descent from them may still have mattered generations later, and could easily explain their retrospective integration into the line of the Kassite royal family.

The one argument that could be staked against this view is the era which Šipta-ulzi used for his dates (mu-x-kam-ma *ša* ká-dingir-ra^{ki} *uš-bu*), a phrase that some take to imply control of Babylon. However, the syntax of the phrase is ambiguous and the meaning of the verb open to different interpretations, so that any translation will be guided by whatever historical context is presupposed. Therefore, its meaning cannot be used as an argument for any particular historical scenario, which is why we will leave it for the end of this paper. Here it suffices to say that the formula in all its possible interpretations implies a connection between Šipta-ulzi and the city of Babylon.

It is not certain that Agum-kakrime was the first Kassite king to rule in Babylon. Neither his father Urzigurumaš nor his predecessor Abirattaš appear outside the genealogy of the inscription and the king lists. Their presence in Babylon cannot be excluded, but there is no independent evidence for it either. There is however some reason to believe that Abirattaš' father Kaštiliaš is the same man as a ruler of that name in Terqa (Middle Euphrates region), active perhaps some eighty years before the end of First Dynasty of Babylon (PODANY 2002: 51). If this is accepted, it would strengthen the case for Agum-kakrime being the first Kassite king of Babylon. Moreover, any additional predecessor on the Babylonian throne would push the date of the First Dynasty further back in time, and weaken the case for the identification of Kaštiliaš of Terqa with Kaštiliaš of Agum-kakrime's genealogy. If we therefore accept as a working hypothesis that Agum-kakrime was the first of his lineage to rule in Babylon, and furthermore assume that nobody else controlled the city for any considerable period of time after Samsuditana's demise, then textual evidence from Samsuditana's reign can be used to shed some light on the Diyala region in Agum-kakrime's time.

Ešnunna is encountered with some frequency in texts from this period: several contracts (some dated to Samsuditana's 12th–14th year) deal with trading missions to this destination whereas a letter reports that „the enemy from Ešnunna, who for a long time has not witnessed the [pow]er of my lord, has come and burned [the whole dis]trict" (PIENTKA 1998: 263–264). Although the letter cannot be dated with any more precision, the sources are suggestive of two phases in the relations between Babylon and Ešnunna during

Samsuditana's reign. We have also seen that the Tell Muḥammad texts share some specific features with Sippar texts from Samsuditana's time. All of this can be aligned if we assume that the reigns of both Ḫurbaḫ and Šipta-ulzi coincided with Samsuditana's rule in Babylon. Ḫurbaḫ could then be identified with „the enemy from Ešnunna," and Šipta-ulzi seen as an ally of the Babylonians who defeated Ḫurbaḫ, presumably with Samsuditana's backing. Conceivably even Agum-kakrime's overthrow of Šipta-ulzi might have taken place during Samsuditana's reign and before Agum-kakrime ascended to the throne of Babylon, but this hypothesis requires further study (van Koppen forthc.).

How Agum-kakrime in the end seized control of Babylon, and whether the Hittites played any part it this (who famously marched on Babylon "at the time of Samsuditana," according to *ABC* 20), remains for now unclear. By this time the archival sources (including Tell Muḥammad) have run dry and we rely completely on later sources for the main events. These have been frequently related so we can be brief. Agum-kakrime describes himself as „king of Kassites and Akkadians," but fails to mention Sumer or the Sealand, which was to survive as an independent state for a few more generations. The resilience of the Sealand in withstanding the attacks of Old Babylonian and early Kassite kings alike was conceivably due to its proximity to Elam (southwestern Iran), with which it maintained close relations as alley or client. Because of the presence of the First Sealand Dynasty in the king lists it is often assumed that it must have controlled the city of Babylon for some time, but the historical events as they are presently understood leave very little opportunity for this. Alternatively, and more convincingly, one might consider its inclusion in the king list tradition the result of the interference of the Second Sealand Dynasty (1025–1005 BC), who ruled in Babylon and sought recognition as the heirs of the first (Brinkman 1993–97: 8). *ABC* 20 narrates that two Kassite rulers, Ulam-buriaš and Agum, waged war in the Sealand, and we have seen that both are documented in contemporary sources. They should be placed among the successors of Burna-buriaš I (*SyKL* king 10) but it is not possible to reconstruct this section of the royal line, or for that matter the remaining names in *SyKL* (Brinkman 1976: 12–13). Other than the treaty of Burna-buriaš I with his Assyrian counterpart (*ABC* 21) and the conquest of the Sealand nothing is known about

what must have been a formative phase in Babylonian history: the incorporation of the Sealand was after all the first time that the Mesopotamian alluvium was again united under a single ruler since the days of Hammurabi's son Samsuiluna, some two centuries ago. At the end of this poorly documented phase stands Kara-indaš, known from his buildings and inscriptions at Uruk, the existence of which not only demonstrates the political success of the Kassite dynasty but equally their undertakings in canal digging and agricultural recovery of land long abandoned by farmers: the once proud city of Uruk had not seen any urban habitation for more than two centuries.

Chronological considerations

The chronological evidence for the 15th century BC is not good enough to calculate a date of the Fall of Babylon solely on the basis of historical sources, but it may be useful to summarise the few established facts.

The previous discussion has allowed us to confirm that Agum-kakrime was the Kassite ruler who ascended on the throne of Babylon, almost certainly immediately after Samsuditana, the last king of the First Dynasty of Babylon. This, in combination with the identification of the era of the Tell Muḥammad dates as contemporary with the last Old Babylonian kings rather than subsequent to the end of their dynasty, allows us to put forward an estimate for the date of the fall of Babylon on the basis of long-familiar evidence: *AKL* and its correlations with Babylonian history in *ABC* 21, as well as a generation count for the Kassite Dynasty on the basis of *SyKL* and *ABC* 20.

ABC 21 presents two Assyrian kings as contemporaries of early Kassite kings: *AKL* king 61 is said to have concluded a treaty with Burna-buriaš I and *AKL* king 69 (1407–1399 BC, +2/–1 year, according to Boese & Wilhelm 1979) with Kara-indaš. The text does not specify when in their reigns these treaties were concluded, so that hypothetically the first year of the Assyrian ruler could correspond to the last one of his Babylonian counterpart, or vice versa. *SyKL* has Burna-buriaš I as 10th ruler of the Kassite Dynasty but the king lists are broken where Kara-indaš may be expected; he is nevertheless often taken as the 15th king of the lineage (Brinkman 1976: 169). The chronology of his better-documented successors makes it almost certain that Kara-indaš was the senior of his Assyrian counterpart and his reign must be placed in the last quarter of the

15th century BC, and might conceivably have started even earlier.[19] Allegedly five Kassite rulers (representing a minimum of three and a maximum of four generations), plus the years that Agum-kakrime occupied the throne of Babylon, separate Kara-indaš' accession from the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon.

A similar exercise can be done working from *AKL* king 61, provided one is willing to accept an estimate for the missing length of *AKL* reigns 65–66. BOESE (2008: 206–207) estimated 58 years for the total length of *AKL* reigns 62–68, meaning that the death of *AKL* king 61 occurred in 1466 BC (+2/−1 year), and that at some time during the previous 14 (variant: 24) years of his reign *AKL* king 61 concluded a treaty with Burna-buri-aš I. The end of the First Dynasty of Babylon occurred sometimes during the lifetime of the predecessor of Burna-buriaš I, Agum-kakrime.

While neither estimate can produce an exact result, they nevertheless bring us within striking distance of the date for the fall of Babylon as elaborated in *Dating the Fall of Babylon* (1499 BC), albeit on the basis of different arguments. Our discussion can therefore serve as independent proof for the necessity of significantly lowering the dates of the five hundred year block of early Mesopotamian history away from its conventional Middle Chronology date.

THE ERA

In conclusion the meaning of the era formula used at Tell Muḥammad needs to be briefly addressed. The era is documented for years 36–41 counting from *šattu ša Bābilim ušbu* (or *ušbū*), a phrase which is ambiguous because Babylon could be its subject ("the year that Babylon sat down") but equally well qualify the verbal action of some unspecified subject, which could then be singular or masculine plural ("the year that he / she / they sat down (in) Babylon"). The verb "to sit down" moreover has many shades of meaning

but the formula lacks sufficient context to allow the decision for any particular one.

Most scholars consider the era a method of dating supported by a king of Babylon (*e.g.* GASCHE *et al.* 1998; BOESE 2008). The problem with this approach is that it puts the Tell Muḥammad texts some forty years after the end of the reign of Samsuditana, or even later, which is difficult to harmonise with the stratified Old Babylonian context of the tablets (GENTILI 2003–04: 34–35), or their close similarities with formulas attested in the late Old Babylonian tablets from Sippar. It moreover fails to account for the evidence about the Diyala region from texts of the time of Samsuditana. Also, why a highly unusual manner of dating should have been introduced in the Babylonian heartland is perplexing.

As far as I can see GENTILI (2002; 2003–04) is the only scholar who proposed that the era was used exclusively in the Diyala region. He translates the formula as "year after Babylon was established (in the region)," and interprets it as a celebration of the establishment of Babylonian control over Tell Muḥammad, which he dates to Hammurabi's 37th year. This puts the texts some eighty years before the beginning of the reign of Samsuditana. This is excluded in view of their late Old Babylonian character, and moreover cannot be harmonized with *SyKL* or the information from the time of Samsuditana. Nevertheless, the idea to look for a non-Babylonian origin is profitable, and this aspect of Gentili's hypothesis can be rescued if a later start date is accepted, or an alternative rendition considered, for example "Year that he (or they) took up residence in Babylon". In this translation, and in our scenario, the unmentioned subject would be a Kassite prince or garrison that had been awarded the privilege of guarding the capital city. Such an event would have been important and celebratory enough to be upheld by Šipta-ulzi, and perhaps his unknown predecessor(s), for over forty years.

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[19] The length of reign for Kara-indaš or the next two kings, Kadašman-ḫarbe I and his son Kurigalzu I, are unknown but it seems highly unlikely that these energetic rulers were short-lived. For the next king, Kadašman-Enlil I, there is a reference to his 15th year which may have been his last (BRINKMAN 1976: 142–143). The start of the reign of his successor Burna-buriaš II can be dated with a fair degree of precision: SASSMANNSHAUSEN (2006: 173) places his accession within the range

1364–1355 BC, and BOESE (2009: 92) dates the same event to 1350 BC (+/− 3 years). Following Boese's proposal and accepting 15 years as an average length of reign for Kara-indaš, Kadašman-ḫarbe I and Kurigalzu I puts the reign of Kara-indaš in 1410–1396 BC; assuming that their average reign was 20 years long brings him up to 1430–1411 BC, too early for the synchronism with *AKL* king 69 (1407–1399 BC).

Abbreviations for Mesopotamian historical sources

ABC 20 *Chronicle of Early Kings* (GRAYSON 1975: 152–156)

ABC 21 *Synchronistic History* (GRAYSON 1975: 157–170)

AKL   *Assyrian King List* (GRAYSON 1980–83: 101–115)

BKLA *Babylonian King List A* (GRAYSON 1980–83: 90–96)

BKLB *Babylonian King List B* (GRAYSON 1980–83: 100)

SyKL   *Synchronistic King List* (GRAYSON 1980–83: 116–121; BOESE 2008)

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