

A New Ancient Middle Eastern Chronological Model

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue for a new ancient Middle Eastern chronology in which the Mesopotamian “high” chronology is used in correlation with K. A. Kitchen’s “low” chronology for the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty. Although my primary focus is on the Akkadian empire and the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties in Egypt, I also show that this chronological reconciliation obtains widespread consistency with data over the total period of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisation throughout the third and second millennia B.C. I also discuss the Hebrew chronology in the framework of this new ME chronology.

Keywords: ancient Middle-Eastern chronology; Akkadian empire; Egyptian Fifth Dynasty; Egyptian Sixth Dynasty; Makkan, Punt; *smt* land; Sopdu

Introduction

After centuries of archaeological endeavour in the Middle East there is still no consensus about the dating of the early Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations, both in absolute terms as well as in relation to each other. In this paper I make a new proposal using well-established chronologies, namely that the Mesopotamian high chronology be correlated with K. A. Kitchen’s low chronology for the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty (Kitchen 1987; 1991; Ward 1992).¹ In this chronological reconciliation, the Semitic Akkadian empire (2370 to 2190 B.C.) is taken to have been simultaneous with the Fifth

1 Kitchen’s low chronology is consistent with Rolf Krauss’s (1985) assumption that the observation of the heliacal rising of the star Sirius in the seventh year of king Senusert III of the Twelfth Dynasty was made at Elephantine, which gives a date of 1830 B.C. In Kitchen’s low chronology, the Twelfth Dynasty is dated from 1937 to 1759 B.C. (Kitchen 1991; Ward 1992, 63). A very useful and detailed tabular exposé of Kitchen’s high and low chronologies together with the reign lengths of the kings, which includes reference to both his published work and subsequent oral conversations, was published in Lilyquist (1993).

and early Sixth Dynasties in Egypt (2387 to 2120 B.C. for the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties). This period is the main concern of this paper.

Introducing a New Chronological Model

This paper reengages with the old question: Which chronological model best fits the data? In this regard we can only work with those chronologies that are known to us (there may be better ones that have not yet been discovered). In general, four possible Mesopotamian chronologies are distinguished, namely the “high” (“long”), “middle”, “low” (“short”) and “ultra-low” chronologies (dating the beginning of the reign of Sargon the Great of Akkade to 2370 B.C., 2334 B.C., 2270 B.C., 2100 B.C. respectively), as well as two Egyptian ones, namely K. A. Kitchen’s “high” and “low” chronologies (dating the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty in Egypt to 1963 B.C. and 1937 B.C. respectively). Scholars usually prefer to use the Mesopotamian “middle” chronology (presumably as a compromise) together with K. A. Kitchen’s “high” chronology (which is consistent with the traditional chronologies for the earlier period). (I call such a particular alignment of Mesopotamian and Egyptian chronologies a chronological “model” for the ancient Middle East.)

Within the space of a short paper such as this, it is obviously not possible to seriously engage with the wide spectrum of possible data relevant to our investigation. Instead, one may focus on those moments in history when the story of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians overlap in such a manner that we have good information about the interaction between them at a particular date. The problem is, however, that there is seemingly not much to go on in this regard for the period that we are interested in! There may, however, be evidence of mutual contact that had not been acknowledged as such for the simple reason that the traditional chronological models used do not allow for such a reading of history.

And this is my assertion: There is substantial evidence of Akkadian presence during the Fifth and early Sixth Dynasties in Egypt which becomes observable as such once we take the new chronological model that I propose as basis. This interpretation of the evidence only makes sense within my chronological model; it cannot be reconciled with traditional chronological models, all of which align the Akkadian empire with later periods in Egyptian history (the details depend on the particular chronologies used). Accordingly, I do not include any detailed discussions of the other Mesopotamian chronologies or the traditional Egyptian chronologies in this study.

What is the kind of evidence for Akkadian presence in Egypt that I am presenting? My primary focus is on Sopdu, the god of the twentieth nome of Lower Egypt, who was worshipped by the Asiatics of the Nile Delta region. I argue that we have good reasons to think that this deified Asiatic warrior-king, who makes his appearance for the first time in Egypt during the reign of Sahure, the second king of the Fifth Dynasty, is in fact

a depiction of the Akkadian emperor. Accordingly, I understand the strange statement in the Pyramid Texts of Unas, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, that this king was killed by Sopdu, as referring to Naram-Sin's claim to have killed the king of Makkan, agreeing with scholars such as Thorkild Jacobsen (1960, 184) that Makkan refers to Egypt.

Such a new reading of history (made possible by my model), must obviously go hand in hand with good arguments for interpreting other data consistent with this view. This does not mean that I am trying to "prove" that my model is the correct one (or even the best one). In my view, such an approach is not hermeneutically sound, given the fact that there are so many layers of interpretation underlying all such models. As William Ward (1992) discussed regarding the Egyptian chronology, we know that much of our evidence is inconclusive, with various interpretations of the archaeological, astronomical and textual data (such as king lists) possible, which in turn allows for various possible chronological models based on such interpretations. The best that we can hope for is that certain interpretations and models would eventually be excluded as unviable when data inconsistent with them becomes available. Accordingly, what I am arguing for is that my chronological model should be taken seriously, not only because it is consistent with the data, but also since it allows me to explain certain things such as the figure of Sopdu more convincingly than other such chronological reconciliations.

Methodological Approach: A General Outline

In presenting this new chronological model, my methodological approach is as follows:

1) I use well-established chronologies, namely the traditional Mesopotamian high chronology together with Kitchen's low chronology (Kitchen 1987; 1991; Ward 1992), which is extended backwards using the Turin Royal Canon.² The high chronology had

2 The decision to use of the Turin Royal Canon to extend Kitchen's chronology backwards was based on the following considerations: simplicity (for the purposes of a paper such as this), consistency (using the same set of data), and the fact that it provides the most extensive list of kings compiled by the ancient Egyptians available to us which forms the basis for most chronological reconstructions before Ramesses II, especially for the period under consideration (the validity of the Manethonian tradition is nowadays seriously disputed; Ward 1992, 54, 62). Although the reigns (and co-reigns) of the many kings who ruled during this period have all sorts of problems, this is not our concern in this short paper. Using Kitchen's low chronology as the basis, we may proceed as follows to obtain the dates used in this paper: The Eleventh Dynasty lasted for 143 years according to the Turin Royal Canon, which brings us to a date of ca. 2080 B.C. for the beginning of that dynasty. The Tenth and Ninth Dynasties, located at Heracleopolis, coexisted with the Eleventh Dynasty based at Thebes (both the Heracleopolitan and Theban dynasties commenced in 2080 B.C., but the first mentioned ended earlier). One may assume that the Eighth Dynasty lasted only for about 21 years. The Seventh and Sixth Dynasties together lasted for 181 years according to the Royal Canon. This gives a date of ca. 2282 B.C. for the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty. For the Fifth Dynasty, the Royal Canon lists nine kings, seven of whom's reign-lengths are preserved giving 103 years (given consecutively as 7, 12, x, 7, x, 11, 8, 28, 30 years). The reign length of the sixth king, Nyuserre Ini, is only partially preserved and

been defended as giving the best fit with the data by the astronomer Peter Huber (2000; 2012).³

2) I show that the Mesopotamian high chronology and Kitchen's low chronology taken together allow for a remarkable correlation between Akkadian and Egyptian history which coincide with the dates of the Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin's military campaigns to the Mediterranean coast (and presumably the Nile Delta, as I argue). Sargon came to the throne in ca. 2370 B.C. (in accordance with the traditional high chronology). If he visited Egypt during his campaign to the Mediterranean Sea in the third year of his reign (as mentioned in the omen tradition), that would have been in ca. 2368 B.C. In my version of the Egyptian chronology, this would have coincided with the end of the reign of Sahure who came to the throne seven years after the Fifth Dynasty commenced in ca. 2387 B.C.

According to the Sumerian King List, Naram-Sin came to the throne 80 years after the beginning of the Akkadian empire, that is, in ca. 2290 B.C. A reasonable reconstruction of Naram-Sin's reign suggests that he conquered Makkam (which I take as Egypt) in the eighth (or early in the ninth) year of his reign (Frayne 1993, 85) which coincides with the end of the Unas's rule as well as that of the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2282 B.C.). The window within which this chronological reconciliation takes place is tight since two sets of data (coinciding with the campaigns of the two mentioned kings) from Akkade and Egypt must be aligned—both of which are quite narrowly delineated. This fixes not only the period between the end of the reign of Sahure and the end of the reign of Unas on about 86 years, but also fixes the date of Unas's death as ca. 2282 B.C.—the proposed year in which Naram-Sin conquered Makkam.

may be reconstructed as 11 years. Although a Sed-festival (held every thirty years) is represented in his sun-temple, this should not be taken seriously (without additional evidence) since there are indications that the kings of the Old Dynasty with shorter reigns celebrated Sed-festivals (Smith 1971, 185). Since the fourth and fifth kings of the dynasty, namely Shepseskare and Neferefre Isi, are nowadays thought to have ruled not much longer than 2 to 3 years in total, it is possible that the seven-year reign was mistakenly ascribed to Shepseskare (who ruled for barely a few months) instead of Neferirkare Kakai who ruled directly before him. (Five cattle counts are ascribed to Neferirkare Kakai, which probably took place every year. Although the Palermo stone says that it was done every second year, this is disputed, for example, in the case of Khufu. It was performed yearly by the time of Pepi I of the Sixth Dynasty.) This reconstruction gives a total of about 105 years for the Fifth Dynasty which then commenced in ca. 2387 B.C., which allows for a sensible correlation with the Akkadian chronology. Khufu's reign started about 83 years earlier in ca. 2470 B.C.

3 I use the traditional high chronology. Peter Huber's analysis (2000) established the following dates on astronomical grounds: Sargon, the Great, year 1 = 2380 B.C. or 2326 B.C.; Amar-Sin, year 1 = 2093 B.C.; Ammisaduqa, year 1 = 1701 B.C.; Fall of Babylon = 1650 B.C. For a dissenting view, see Gurzadyan (2000).

What we find is that in this chronological reconciliation, the data from the Akkadian and Egyptian worlds coincide with each other to a very remarkable degree. What is more, this tight alignment between the two chronologies (mentioned above) gives a much more stable configuration of dates than any one chronology. It is, nonetheless, also true that this does not give absolute dates; the whole chronological ensemble for the Akkadian period could be adjusted upwards/downwards. Huber (2000), for example, suggested on astronomical grounds that Sargon's reign commenced in 2380 B.C. instead of 2370 B.C.

3) I show that this reading of history has strong explanatory power (beyond that available to other such models). I explain and make sense of a) the Sumerian iconography in Egypt dating from Sahure's reign, b) the figure of Sopdu, who is depicted as a mighty and deified, conquering Asiatic ruler of the *ssmt* land, whose earliest depiction shows him with a row of prisoners below him, and who is said in the Pyramid Texts to have been responsible for the death of king Unas. An essential aspect of my identification of Sopdu with the mentioned Akkadian emperors involves his dress, and especially his *ssmt* apron, which seems to find its closest equivalent in Akkadian iconography. Sopdu's Asiatic origins (in the east), his depiction as a mighty and deified warrior-king as well as his dress is consistent with him being a representation of the deified Akkadian emperors Sargon and Naram-Sin.

4) I show that this chronological reconciliation is also consistent with the available data from these lands for the third and second millennia B.C. Although other interpretations of that data are possible, all the data taken together do give a coherent picture in line with my chronological model.

5) I apply this chronological model (in a purely secondary application) to early Hebrew tradition.

In presenting my view, I use certain geographical terms from these lands as the point of departure for the discussion. As such, I argue that we should make the following identifications regarding geographical terms: 1) the Mesopotamian name Makkan, which is often identified with Oman, refers to Egypt. 2) The Egyptian name Punt refers to the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, which was called Dilmun in Mesopotamia. 3) The Egyptian name *ssmt*, which is usually identified with the Sinai, refers to Sumer. I argue that the first appearance of iconography associated with the *ssmt* land, which coincides with iconography originating in Sumer, during the reign of Sahure—which was closely associated with a sudden burst of copper mining activity in the Sinai—corresponds with the newly founded Akkadian empire's relations with the copper-mining land of Makkan during the reign of Sargon.

After discussing the above terms and presenting the arguments for my view, I show how the rest of ancient Middle Eastern chronology is influenced by this approach. All in all,

my approach is able to obtain widespread consistency with data over the total period of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations throughout the third and second millennia B.C.

The Land of Makkan

The identity of the land of Makkan is of central importance in any attempt to reconcile Egyptian and Mesopotamian history, especially if it can be shown to refer to Egypt. As mentioned above, some older scholars such as Thorkild Jacobsen believed that it refers to Egypt, mainly because we know that this identification held in later centuries. Most scholars, however, believe that during the third and early second millennium B.C., Makkan was not identified with Egypt but with a southern region, closer to Mesopotamia, reached through the Persian Gulf (Heimpel 1987). Their scepticism originates from the fact that in Akkadian and Sumerian texts from that period Makkan is said to have been reached through the southern sea route whereas in later times the great Mesopotamian kings who went to Egypt did so via the north-western overland route, proceeding along the Euphrates River to Syria and then to Egypt. To these scholars, this suggests that the Makkan of the third and early second millennium B.C. which was reached through the southern sea route cannot be the same as the Makkan of later centuries which was reached via the northern overland route.

One of the main problems in trying to identify the Makkan of the Mesopotamian texts of the third and early second millennium B.C. is that these texts, as discussed, for example, by Serge Cleuziou (1986) or more recently by Alessandra Lombardi (2015), do not include enough information to prove either of these options. One therefore has to consider other things. Although the southern sea route to Egypt might have become unimportant in later centuries, I show below that there is substantial evidence that this route was not only in general use but was very important during the early second millennium B.C. (which implies that it must have been in use before that time). In using this route, the Akkadians would have followed in the footsteps of the Sumerians from the time of the Uruk expansion (towards the end of the Uruk Period), when Sumerian influences were brought to Egypt via the southern sea route (Kantor 1965, 12) as well as through the north-western overland route (O'Connor and Silverman 1995, 103).

Interestingly, as Henry Frankfurt (1951, 102) observed, during the period of the Uruk expansion, we even find a depiction of the Sumerian ruler in southern Egypt as can be seen on the Gebel el-Arak knife-handle, which date from the Naqada II or III period: "his garment, his beard, his hair, wound round his head and bound up in a chignon at the back—the often recurring figure of the 'leader' or king depicted on a granite stele from Erech [Uruk] and on numerous seals." This is consistent with what I assert regarding the Sopdu-figure, namely that he is a representation of the Akkadian emperors.

The land of Makkan is first mentioned during the reign of Sargon the Great (2370 to 2314 B.C.), the founder of the Akkadian Empire (Cleuziou 1986, 148). Sargon mentioned it together with two other countries, namely Dilmun and Meluhha: “Sargon, king of the world, was victorious in 34 battles. He destroyed their city walls as far as the shore of the sea. He moored ships of Meluhha, Magan [Makkan] and Dilmun at the quay of Agade [Akkade]” (Frayne 1993, 29). I assume that Dilmun refers to the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, which Sargon is said to have conquered, and that Meluhha refers to the pre-Vedic Harappan civilisation that flourished at that time in the great Indus valley (Potts 1982, 280).

The next Akkadian king who mentioned Makkan was Naram-Sin. He was the fourth Akkadian king and came to the throne in about 2290 B.C., 80 years after Sargon founded the empire. He is said to have conquered Makkan during the time of the Great Revolt against him. He wrote in an inscription: “(When) all the four quarters together revolted against him and confronted him ... Further he crossed the sea and conquered Magan [Makkan], in the midst of the sea, and washed his weapons in the Lower Sea [the Persian Gulf]” (Frayne 1993, 97). He also captured Manium, the ruler of Makkan, and is said to have quarried diorite in those mountains for a statue of himself, which he dedicated to the god Dagan (Frayne 1993, 117). We find the same outline later in the Chronicle of the Early Kings (BM 26472), according to which Naram-Sin’s conquest of Makkan followed directly after his victory over Res-Adad, the king of Apisal in north-western Mesopotamia (Potts 1986, 278).

In the last-mentioned inscription Naram-Sin is said to have crossed from Makkan, located in the “midst of the sea”, to the Persian Gulf. Although one may take this as implying that Makkan was located in the Persian Gulf area, it is also consistent with Makkan being Egypt if we reconstruct Naram-Sin’s route as follows: after he subdued the north-western regions towards the Mediterranean Sea during the first part of the Great Revolt led by the king of Apisal, he proceeded to Egypt and then from there via the sea route down to the Persian Gulf. As such, the location of Makkan might for good reason have been described as being in the “midst of the sea”, as located between the Upper and Lower Seas.

Literary evidence suggests that the sea route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf was known at that time. We read, for example, in the Sargon Birth Legend: “The entire sea I went around, Dilmun did submit to me.” The words “the entire sea I went around” implies that Sargon travelled by sea around the known world. The Akkadian word used literally means “surrounded” (Lewis 1980, 64), which means that he went around the entire sea. Although our earliest available text of this document dates from sometime after the Akkadian period (Lewis 1980, 273; Lewis dates it between 2039 B.C. and 627 B.C.), one may suggest that this tradition is grounded in real history.

We find this same picture of the world being surrounded by the sea in the story of Etana—that great Kishite hero who became very popular during the Akkadian period (Horowitz 1998, 60; Frankfort 1939, 137). According to the story, Etana saw the world from above when he looked down from the back of the eagle. It looked like an “animal enclosure”, surrounded by the ocean (Wiggermann 1996, 209). Although the earliest text of this document dates from the Old Babylonian period, the story presumably did not change a lot since Akkadian times. This suggests that the general opinion at that time was that the sea surrounded the Mesopotamian world. Consistent with this view, it might have been possible at the time of the Akkadian empire to sail from the Mediterranean Sea through the Nile delta, the Wadi Tumilat and the Eastern Lakes to the Red Sea (Nibbi 1975, 18).

A northern location of Makkan would be consistent with another inscription of Naram-Sin, in which Makkan is grouped with the north-western lands: “Mahazum, Puš... Ebla, Mari, Tuttul... Urkiš, Mukiš... Abarnum and the land where the cedars are cut down, along with their provinces. The land of Subartum on the shores of the (Up)per Se(a), and Magan [Makkan], along with (its) province(s)... the other side of the se(a)” (Frayne 1993, 163). Although one might argue that Subartum and Makkan represent the extremities of Naram-Sin’s conquests, this seems to go against the fact that all the nine other lands mentioned in the text were located in the north-west (Salgues 2010, 268). In fact, this text strongly suggests that Makkan was a great land with various provinces located “on the other side” of the Upper Sea, in accordance with the location of Egypt, which was (also) reached by sailing from the northern Canaanite coast via the Mediterranean Sea to the Nile Delta.

In my view there are various other reasons to identify Makkan with Egypt:

1. Egypt is the only location that has been identified beyond a reasonable doubt with this name, namely during the reign of Takulti-Ninurta I, king of Assyria (1243 to 1207 B.C.) (Albright 1968, 83).
2. Although Makkan was primarily associated with copper, Naram-Sin also mentioned that he obtained diorite for a statue from there. Since the diorite deposits of Oman are not found in large enough blocks to be used for the carving of statues, it has been suggested that Makkan included areas on the Makuran coast (the southern parts of present-day Iran and Pakistan) across the Strait of Hormus (Possehl 1996, 136). The problem with this view is that another Akkadian king, named Manishtushu, who got his diorite from there, never called this area Makkan (Frayne 1993, 76). In fact, in one of his inscriptions it is associated with Meluhha (Possehl 1996, 141), which corresponds with the fact that archaeological evidence shows that it belonged to the Meluhha cultural sphere (as did Oman) (Dales 1962, 5; Vogt 1996, 110, 119). On the other hand, we know that high quality diorite statues were synonymous with Egypt since early times.

3. The name Makkan is for the first time mentioned by Sargon (Cleuziou 1986, 148). This is quite significant because the Sumerians got their copper from Oman since they first used the metal—and it would be strange indeed if this land is first mentioned in Akkadian times. We also find that Makkan is mentioned only by the two most prominent of the Akkadian rulers (although it is also mentioned by the later Ur III rulers)—whereas Meluhha is mentioned already in the previous period. Makkan is also not mentioned as often as Meluhha (Possehl 1996, 145). These points suggest that it was a much longer journey to Makkan which was made less frequently—only during those periods when the Akkadian empire reached its greatest extent.

4. The alabaster vase that Naram-Sin inscribed with the words “booty of Makkan” is distinctly similar to vases from the late Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (Edwards 1971, 445). Alabaster vases of Egyptian origin (from the Fifth and Sixth Dynastic periods) were also found at the Barbar temple on Bahrain (level IIa), which suggests that contact with Egypt happened during the Akkadian period via the sea route (Mortensen 1986, 184).

After the Akkadian period, the contact with Makkan was re-established during the Ur III period (2168 to 2060 B.C.). During this time two kings, namely Amar-Sin and his brother Su-Sin, mention that Makkan recognised their rule (Astour 2002, 101)! We also read that a governor (*ensi*) ruled over Makkan in the name of the king during Amar-Sin’s rule. Now, although such claims would be nonsensical in traditional chronologies if Makkan is taken as referring to Egypt (since that would be during the Old Kingdom period), in my chronological reconstruction it makes sense: Amar-Sin (2096 to 2088 B.C.) and Su-Sin (2087 to 2079 B.C.) ruled during the chaotic period which followed the fall of the Old Kingdom in 2120 B.C. until the Ninth Dynasty was established in 2080 B.C.

The Ur III dynasty also had some control over Byblos on the Canaanite coast and a governor (*ensi*) is even said to have ruled this city on their behalf (Sollberger 1959–60, 122). A cuneiform tablet dating from that period was discovered there (Albright 1961, 45) as well as an inscribed seal of a merchant (Malamat 1975, 373). The lady of Byblos (Baalat) was even worshipped at that time at Ur in Sumer (Dalley 1998, 15). In fact, it seems that she was also worshipped in the Sinai in the form of Hathor, who had the epithet *nbt kpn*, which may be an Egyptian translation of Baalat Gebal (Baalat of Byblos; Givon 1978, 61). This Hathor was also called Lady of Punt, which was located down the Red Sea route. This suggests that the sea route was used to travel from Byblos to the Sinai and from there to Ur.⁴

4 A seal from the Ur III period which belonged to the merchant Shukur-ili, who might have been an agent of a Mesopotamian trading firm, was discovered in Egypt (Smith 1922, 209).

The *ssmt* Land

The iconography associated with the *ssmt* land appears for the first time in Egypt during the reign of King Sahure (2380 to 2368 B.C.), second king of the Fifth Dynasty. There can be no doubt that the name *ssmt* was somehow related to the copper mining activities in the Sinai that commenced at this time and which are attested for nearly two hundred years thereafter. As such, depictions of boats appear in the mortuary complex of Sahure and again in the Causeway of Unas, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, whereas inscriptions appear at the mining areas in the Sinai during the reign of Djedkare Iseki, the second-last king of the Fifth Dynasty, as well as during the reigns of Pepi I and Pepi II, the third and fifth kings of the Sixth Dynasty.

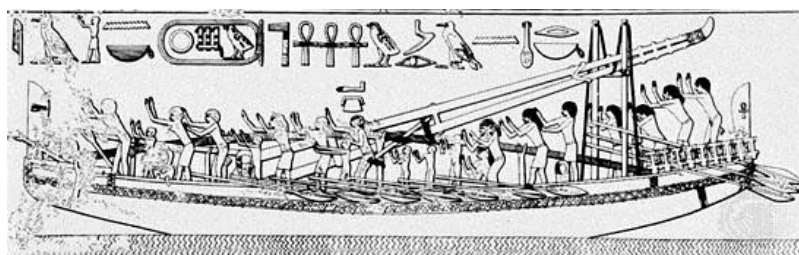


Figure 1. Depiction of a boat with Asiatics from Sahure's mortuary complex.

The hogging-truss on the boats shows that these were seafaring boats which were able to carry huge loads (Nibbi 1975, 131). Both Egyptians and Asiatics are shown on the boats and there is a specific reference to translators, which may imply that the Asiatics came from elsewhere to work the mines in the Sinai (Nibbi 1975, 131). These boat depictions are consistent with inscriptions in the Sinai in which reference is made to copper, scribes, translators, pilots of boats and other naval officials (Cerny 1955, 61). The depicted boats clearly transported copper—presumably to the land from where these Asiatics came.

At the same time that these mining activities commenced, another remarkable figure makes his appearance (in the mortuary complex of Sahure). He is called Sopdu and appears again during the Fifth Dynasty in the funerary temple of Neuserre, the sixth ruler of the dynasty (Nibbi 1981, 35). He is also mentioned in the Pyramid Texts inscribed in the funeral temples of the kings of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties since the time of Unas to Pepi II. In later periods he is also attested in the Sinai as one would expect (although this is attested only by the Twelfth Dynasty).

Sopdu is depicted with a naked upper body, wig, curly beard, collar, kilt, and an ankh in the one hand and a *w3s*-sceptre (“power” or “dominion”) in the other. On his head are two straight feathers. The kilt is fastened with a girdle from which tassels hang. This girdle or apron is called the “*ssmt*-apron” and is identified with the *ssmt* land (Nibbi 1981, 34). This depiction is consistent with those of the spirits/souls of (deceased) deified kings, except for the headpiece and the tasselled girdle (and the leash with which he holds his prisoners) (Frankfort 1948, 97; Baines 1985, 35, 38). Two such deified ancestor-kings are shown on the doorjamb of Sahure’s mortuary complex (see Figure 2). This is the first time that they are depicted in this form and may have reference to two statues of such kings. Such dual statues are also attested in Sumer, where two of them stood before the Enlil temple at Nippur in pre-Sargonic times (Hallo 1992, 390).

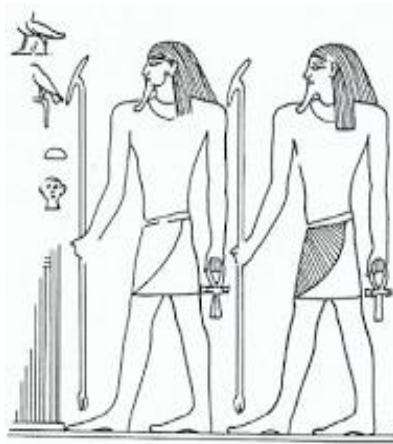


Figure 2. Deified ancestor-kings: Sahure’s mortuary complex

Who is Sopdu? Sopdu is afforded the following titles: “Lord of foreign lands”, “Lord of the *ssmt* land”, “Lord of the east” (Cerny 1955, 42). The first depiction of this figure shows him as a great conquering warrior-god-king. He walks behind Seth and his captives are shown in a panel underneath them. According to this depiction it was the god Seth who went with him and gave him the victory. The inscription above identifies Sopdu as “Lord of foreign lands” (see Figure 3). The fact that Sopdu is associated with the Sinai does not imply that he was a local lord of that region. Obviously, Sopdu was not a local king associated with the Sinai since no signs of such a kingdom have ever been found. We never find any suggestions that such mighty kings ruled from the Sinai during the Old Kingdom period! Rather, one would think that he might have been the ruler or god of those Asiatics who were involved in the mining activities in the Sinai.

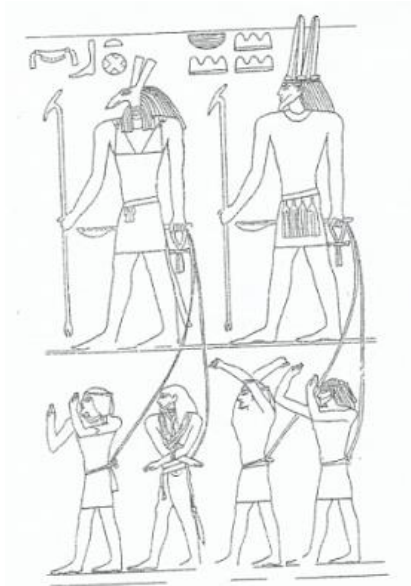


Figure 3. Sopdu as conquering god-king

Sopdu seems to be a representation of great and mighty Asiatic kings who ruled somewhere in the east over the *ssmt* land—his titles explicitly present him as a “lord” of the *ssmt* land, also called “foreign” land, expressly located in the “east”. These kings did not always have peaceful relations with Egypt since we read in the Pyramid Texts of Unas that Sopdu was the one who killed that king: “Sopdu he (who resides) under his *kesbet*-tree. Has he killed you (the king) after his heart told him that you shall die through him? Lo, you come into being against him as the Bull of the wild bulls, who remained (after the fight). He remains, he remains, the bull who remained, and you will also remain, Unas, at their head, at the head of the spirits forever” (utterance 306).

In my view there are various reasons to think that Sopdu was originally a representation of the deified Akkadian king (before he became worshipped as a god by the Semites in the Nile Delta and Sinai regions) and that the *ssmt* land refers to Sumer:

1. The copper mining activities in the Sinai during the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties correspond with the Akkadian reference to boats from Makkan, where copper was mined during the empire period. In my chronology the Akkadian empire not only co-existed with these dynasties; the duration of these activities over a period of about two hundred years is consistent with the duration of that empire. Furthermore, translators and escorts (*viaticum*) on boats are also attested in Akkadian relations with Meluhha (Glassner 1996, 235, 236).

2. Sopdu as conquering king is consistent with the traditions of Sargon, who conquered the outlying areas of north-western Mesopotamia. According to the omen tradition, "He (Sargon) crossed the sea of the west [Mediterranean Sea] and in the 3rd year his hand conquered the land of the west to its full extent, he made its mouth to be one (i.e. he made it obedient to him); he erected his steles in the west; their booty he brought over (the sea) in rafts" (Malamat 1975, 366; Edwards 1971, 425). Sargon says in an inscription: "Sargon, the king, bowed down to the god Dagan in Tuttul. He [the god Dagan] gave to him [Sargon] the upper land: Mari, Jarmuti and Ebla⁵ as far as the Cedar Forest [the Amanus] and the Silver Mountains [the Taurus mountains in southern Turkey]" (Frayne 1993, 29). If the Jarmuti referred to is the same one that is mentioned in the Amarna letters, Sargon's conquest brought him south of Byblos or maybe even to the Nile Delta, depending on where this city was located (Astour 2002, 70). Of special interest is the reference to the western weather god Dagan⁶ who gave these victories to Sargon. If we take Seth as being identified with the western weather god since the time of Sahure (as he was later during the Middle Kingdom), then the depiction of Seth leading Sopdu to victory is consistent with Dagan leading Sargon to victory!

5 There has been a lot of debate about the dating of Ebla's destruction in the Akkadian period. Is the archaeological evidence consistent with destruction during Sargon's time or during that of Naram-Sin? Paolo Matthiae, who excavated the ruins, dated palace G (from the last phase before the city was taken) on stylistic grounds to the time of Naram-Sin (Matthiae 1977, 92, 159). The excavated Ebla archives, however, belong to an earlier period and some have used that to argue that the destruction took place earlier and was done by Mari (Archi and Biga 2003, 13). Sargon also claimed to have subdued Ebla (see the quote in the main text; E2.1.1.11 in Frayne 1993). In my view Naram-Sin would not have boasted in an inscription and introduced a new title for himself regarding such a great and remarkable victory ("Smiler of Armanum and Ebla" (Frayne 1993, 136)) if it did not really happen. In my chronological model, Ebla could not have been destroyed before Naram-Sin's reign. The earliest possible date for this destruction of Ebla is during the reign of King Pepi I, the third king of the Sixth Dynasty, since an alabaster vase bearing the titles of this king had been discovered in the ruins. If we allow that Pepi I's two predecessors as kings of that dynasty ruled for about 14 years in total, then Naram-Sin would have conquered Ebla sometime after the twenty-third year of his own reign. This is consistent with the reconstruction of the chronology of events during Naram-Sin's reign done by Douglas Frayne, according to which this event happened later in his reign, which is usually taken to have been 36 years long.

6 It has been proposed that Dagan's name was derived from the Semitic root *dgn*, which means "to be cloudy, rainy". This is consistent with his spouse being called Salas, who in later tradition was the spouse of the storm god Adad (Roberts 1972, 19). In the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods, Dagan was considered to be the principal god of the Middle Euphrates region whereas Adad was the principal god of the regions further west (Archi 2004, 323). Although the name Dagan was homophonous with grain (*spn*) and is so reflected in the writing of these periods, this does not mean that he was an agrarian god (Archi 2004, 331). In fact, as "Lord of the land" (north-western Mesopotamia) he was sometimes equated with Enlil, the king of the gods in southern Mesopotamia, who also had the characteristics of a weather god (Archi 2004, 331).

We find consistent with this that steles of Sopdu were later placed next to that of Baal and Anat when Baal supplanted Dagan as the Canaanite weather god.

3. Sopdu is depicted as a deified king. This is also what we know about Sargon, for example on his victory stele, where he is identified with the god Ningirsu.⁷ On this stele he is shown standing before the enthroned Ishtar, holding a net in which his enemies were caught. This depiction is taken over from an earlier dynastic stele erected by king Eanatum where Ningirsu held the enemies of the king in a net (ca. 2500 B.C.). In this case Sargon himself does not only hold the net, he is depicted in the pose of the god, which led Lorenzo Nigro to write: “Sargon presents himself in the classic position of a city-god” (1998, 87). Naram-Sin was also famously declared to be a god after his victory in the Great Revolt (and might have been acknowledged as such after his victories in the north).

4. Sopdu’s tasselled girdle is identified with the *ssmt* land. Such a tassel on a girdle is also shown on a statue of the funerary priest Kaemqed, which dates from the Fifth Dynasty (see Figure 4). What is especially interesting about the priest is the way in which his hands are folded together. It had been observed by the French scholar Pierre Gilbert that it is in the typical Sumerian convention (Gilbert 1960, 101). Usually the Egyptian priests hold their hands apart. This may imply that the tasselled girdle is also of Sumerian origin.

7 In the Pyramid Texts, Sopdu (as well as Isis) is identified with Sirius, the brightest star in the celestial skies. In Mesopotamia, this star was identified with Ningirsu/Ninurta (as well as Ishtar) who is described in the Hymn to Ninurta as Sirius as the greatest warrior amongst all the gods, the “Indefatigable arrow [šukūdu] that [kills] all enemies”. Sargon’s identification with Ningirsu on his victory stele may therefore suggest a corresponding identification with Sirius which could explain Sopdu’s identification with this star. The name Sopdu is written with the hieroglyph for “sharp” (combined with the third person plural suffix, a quail), depicted as a pointed triangle which may be an arrow point. As such, the name means “sharp ones”. This is consistent with the name given to Sirius in Mesopotamia, namely šukūdu, meaning “arrow”—a name which shows a remarkable correspondence with “Sopdu”! Sirius was, in fact, widely associated with a bow and arrows as a weapon of battle which was also closely identified with the Akkadian kings. We read in one text: “Arrow-star, by name, making battle resound” (Reiner 1995, 19).



Figure 4. Kaemqed

Since the girdle is the only item (with the feathers) that distinguishes Sopdu from the (deceased) deified Egyptian kings, we may ask if this piece of clothing was part of the Akkadian royal dress. We do, in fact, find that tasselled girdles were worn by the so-called *lahmu*'s ("hairies") on Akkadian seals. One can even see a girdle with tassels on Naram-Sin's Bassetki sculpture. A variation of this figure is the naked bearded hero who is shown in the Akkadian period as a "royal hero", with a flat cap, long hair, beard and fringed kilt (Costello 2010; see Figure 5). This royal dress may reflect the king's participation in the cult. The dress of the Akkadian "royal hero", with tasselled girdle⁸ and kilt (and the long hair and beard), looks distinctly similar to that of Sopdu, except for the Egyptian iconographical convention, which includes a feathered headpiece—with the two feathers signifying the two divine eyes, the sun and moon (Richter 2012, 108). Interestingly, the god Ningirsu with whom Sargon was identified on his victory stele also had the sun and moon for eyes (Jacobsen 1976, 235).

8 The tassels worn by the Egyptian fertility figures may in some way be related to those worn by the Sumerian "hairies" since these seem to be equivalent figures in the different traditions. The tasselled girdle of Sopdu which corresponds with that worn by the Akkadian "royal hero" may have been a particular variation of the one worn by the hairies which originated in Akkadian times.



Figure 5. A seal from Ur showing the “royal hero” (ca. 2200 B.C.)

As far as I know, Sumer is the only place (except Egypt) where the tasselled girdle associated with the *ssmt* land is attested in iconographic depictions of this early period (as is shown on the “royal hero”). Although Egyptian fertility figures also wear tassels on a girdle (as is shown already in Sahure’s mortuary complex (Nibbi 1975, 39)), these are different from the *ssmt* girdle worn by Sopdu—which was obviously not the typical Egyptian habit since it was identified with the *ssmt* land.

5. What is especially significant is that Sumerian iconography appears in Egypt exactly in the period that the relations with the *ssmt* land commence. Pierre Gilbert mentions, apart from the posture of the priest Kaemqed, the depiction of twin lions looking in opposite directions that appear during the reign of Sahure. This depiction is in accordance with Sumerian iconography that goes back to the royal tombs of Ur in pre-Akkadian times (Gilbert 1960, 95; Frankfort 1939, 98). There cannot be any reasonable doubt that this confirms that contact between Egypt and Sumer happened during Sahure’s reign.

Gilbert even suggested that these Sumerian influences in Egypt which appeared since the time of Sahure is connected with the boat depictions in his mortuary complex. This is also what I propose. One may suggest that the reason we find Sumerian influences instead of Akkadian ones even though this corresponds with the early Akkadian period in my reconstruction of events, is that Sargon visited the north-western lands

early in his reign (in his third year, according to the omen tradition). His usage of Sumerian motifs is also visible on his victory stele discussed above.

6. The appearance of Sopdu in Sahure's mortuary complex (died ca. 2368 B.C.), as well as the death of Unas by Sopdu's hand (died ca. 2282 B.C.), is consistent with Sargon and Naram-Sin's visits to the north-western lands (Makkan). Sargon's campaign took him to the Mediterranean Sea in about the twelfth year of Sahure's reign (if we assume it was in Sargon's third year). In my chronological model Sargon's visit to these areas (and presumably the Nile Delta where Jarmuti might have been located) coincides with the end of Sahure's reign, who might have died at Sargon's hand—and which would explain the depiction of Sopdu (as Sargon) as a conquering and deified king.

Naram-Sin's conquest of Makkan seems to have taken place directly after his victory over the north-western rebels led by the city of Apisal in the north-west (in the eighth or early ninth year of his reign) as discussed above (Frayne 1993, 97). This does not only imply that Naram-Sin was in these north-western areas shortly before his conquest of Makkan, but also that this conquest coincides with the end of Unas's reign in 2282 B.C. (and the end of the Fifth Dynasty).

Naram-Sin calls the conquered king of Makkan, Manium (Westenholz 1997, 245). Some of the older scholars suggested that this refers to Menes, but this Egyptian king lived too early (Foster 2018, 212). One may, however, suggest that the name by which the Egyptian kings were bewailed in the Osiris cult of later periods according to Herodotus in his *Histories* (2.79; see also Plutarch in *Isis and Osiris* 1.17), namely Maneros (who was said to have been the son of the first king of Egypt), was derived from the name Menes, who share some motifs with Osiris. In this case, it might be possible that the Akkadians also used this name for the king, who in this instance would have been King Unas.

The above-mentioned points provide substantial evidence that the *ssmt* land refers to Sumer. One of the main aims of the Akkadian king's military campaigns to far-away regions was to establish supplies of metals. Their visits to Egypt would have led to Sinai copper being shipped to southern Mesopotamia through the southern sea route. An important intermediate stop on this route would have been Bahrain, which the Sumerians called Dilmun. In my view this island was called Punt by the Egyptians.

The Island State of Punt

There is another land that also for the first time became significant since the reign of Sahure, namely Punt (Kitchen 1982, 1198)—which is only mentioned once before in connection with a Puntite slave in the time of King Khufu. What is significant about Punt is that it was reached by the sea route down the Red Sea. It seems to have been located within the geographical sphere of influence of the *ssmt* land. As Punt is

mentioned more often in inscriptions, we may assume that it was located closer to Egypt than the *ssmt* land.

Kings who are associated with Punt are Djedkare Isesi of the Fifth Dynasty and Pepi II of the Sixth Dynasty. Of special interest is the fact that only kings that are associated with depictions of the mentioned boats or inscriptions in the Sinai are associated with Punt! Mereruka, a high official of Teti, first king of the Sixth Dynasty, probably also undertook expeditions to Punt. In his mastaba is a depiction of a flotilla of more than 20 boats. Also shown are dwarfs in a metalworking context. Another official who visited both Punt and Byblos was Khnumhotep, a high official of Pepi II (Kitchen 1982, 1199). The inhabitants of Punt are called the “bearded ones” (Nibbi 1981, 51). Various esoteric products have been associated with Punt which may imply that it was a great trading centre.

A particularly colourful story about Punt from a later period (Middle Kingdom) is about the “shipwrecked sailor”. According to this story a sailor was on his way to certain mines on the king’s behalf when his boat sunk during a storm and he washed ashore on an island located about two months sailing from Egypt. The lord of the island is described as a snakelike figure who showed him hospitality and pronounced that he will be found by sailors from his homeland in four months’ time. When that day eventually came, the lord gave the sailor all sorts of precious gifts including spices, incense, elephants’ tusks, greyhounds, and baboons.

In my view there are various reasons to accept the identification of Punt with Bahrain (at least for this early period; in later periods it might have been identified with an area somewhere on the horn of Africa):

1. The only place that fits the description of Punt in the story of the “shipwrecked sailor”—and with which a snake-cult was associated—is Bahrain (Dilmun). Michael Rice, who has done a lot of research about the relations between Egypt and the Gulf, writes: “Dilmun is the only example in the Old World of *an island-based society* [my accentuation] ... To anyone familiar with Dilmun’s customary merchandise the gifts [from the serpent-king to the sailor] make interesting reading for they are all products for which the island’s trade was later celebrated” (Rice 1986, 204, 123). The mentioned mines would refer to those of Oman, which is located not very far from Bahrain. It seems to me prudent to identify Punt with a known place which agrees with this description instead of postulating a place which does not even conform with the available evidence for this early period.

2. Bahrain is the *only known island state* that could have had substantial trading relations with Egypt consistent with boats carrying copper to that destination (which seems to be a sensible deduction in the light of the discussion above). After the Akkadian conquest, Bahrain became the centre of a node of trading relations that

stretched to distant lands. The scholar Gregory Possehl, who studied this period extensively, writes: “In the ancient texts there is talk of Dilmun merchants and, as noted, many references to this place as a commercial centre. One gets a sense that Dilmun was the operational ‘nerve-centre’ for this early Gulf and Arabian Sea Trade” (Possehl 1996, 147).

3. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom (i.e., the end of the Sixth Dynasty), we read about the so-called Fenekhu and “bow-people” who appeared in the Nile Delta from the east. We read in the last Pyramid Texts about “the Ram gate which repulses the Fenekhu” and “fear of me extends to heaven ... my slaughter impresses the Fenekhu” (Redford 1992, 63). The name Fenekhu shows a close correspondence with that of the later Phoenicians. It seems likely that it refers to early forefathers of the Phoenicians who appeared in Canaan in the early Middle Bronze Age (since the end of the Old Kingdom). What is important for our purposes is that the name Fenekhu (Fen) clearly corresponds with the name “Punt”.

There is, in fact, an ancient tradition that the forefathers of the Phoenicians came from the Persian Gulf to settle on the Canaanite coast! The Greek historian Herodotus wrote, for example: “[The Phoenicians, they say,] came to our seas [the eastern Mediterranean] from the Erythrean Sea [Persian Gulf], and having settled in the country which they still occupy, at once began to make long voyages” (*Histories* 1.1). This tradition explains why the names of the Phoenician cities correspond with similar names in the Gulf as Strabo mentions: “On sailing further [down the Erythrean Sea], one comes to the other islands, I mean Tyre [Dilmun] and Aradus, which have temples like those of the Phoenicians. It is asserted, at least by the inhabitants of the islands, that the islands and cities of the Phoenicians which bear the same name are their colonies” (*Geography* 16.3.4).

If we take the forefathers of the Phoenicians as the Fenekhu of the last Pyramid Texts, then their origin from Punt (from which the name Fenekhu seems to have been derived) is consistent with that island being the Dilmun of the Phoenician traditions. This would reaffirm that Punt refers to the island of Bahrain (Dilmun). There is substantial archaeological evidence that Canaanite migrants came from southern Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf during the early Middle Bronze Age. One may mention the stone-built corbel-vaulted tombs that now appear in Canaan and which are known from Bahrain and even Ur where such (mud-brick) tombs also appear under the floors (Weadock 1975, 109), the practice of placing anchors at temples such as those at the Baal temple at Ras Shamra and at the Barbar temple on Bahrain (Mortensen 1986, 184), the Canaanite bull-cult which had a long history in the Gulf, seals with Gulf designs that appear not only in Egypt but also in Syria-Cappadocia (but not in Mesopotamia; Kjaerum 1986, 275) as well as seals with mixed Egyptian-Gulf designs that were found in the Gulf (Frankfort 1939, 297; Rice 1994, 282).

Scholars such as Michael Rice (1994) and Poul Kjaerum (1986) made a convincing case that people migrated between the Gulf and Canaan (through the Nile Delta) during the First Intermediary Period (which includes the Seventh to Tenth Dynasties) in Egypt. Kjaerum (1986, 275) writes: “the influence is so strong and of such a nature that it cannot solely be due to relations like trade and sporadic personal contacts of various kinds.” He refers to another article by Briggs Buchanan (1965, 207) who writes: “It seems possible that around 2000 B.C. the Persian Gulf merchants had a relationship, other than involving trade, with some ethnic element in Syria (merchants or colonists?)” (Kjaerum 1986, 273–4).⁹ Although some Phoenician cities are older than this, it does not negate the evidence of such migration (which is consistent with later tradition) of a migration during this period.

4. A recent genome study, in which the authors studied the genomes of people who lived in Canaan in about 1700 B.C. at Sidon along the coast, suggests that a large migration of people took place into this area during the preceding centuries—people who had their origins in the Caucasus and ancient Iran. The date for this migration shows close correlation with the Akkadian period. What is more, some of the genes are associated with populations in the Arabian Peninsula with proposed origins in the Zagros and Taurus mountain regions (Haber et. al. 2017, 277). Although the study was not able to be more specific regarding the period of migration or the route(s) taken, it is nonetheless consistent with the view that the Akkadian kings, whose military campaigns took them to Canaan (and the Nile Delta), opened the way for migrations from the lands bordering the Persian Gulf to the Canaanite coast. It supports the above-mentioned tradition of such migrations.

Other Considerations

I have now argued that we have good reasons to assume that the Akkadian empire co-existed with the Fifth and early Sixth Dynasties in Egypt. What about the earlier period? Is this dating—which uses astronomical data (the observations of Venus and eclipses in Mesopotamia and that of Sirius in Egypt)—consistent with other such data from earlier periods? In my view it is.

The most important archaeoastronomical monument in Egypt is the Great Pyramid, which was built during the reign of Khufu, the second king of the Fourth Dynasty. Although the pyramid has a very special design that blends in with the particular orientation of the shafts in the Queen’s and King’s Chambers, I do not believe that these should *only* be considered as an architectonic feature. Rather, I believe that

9 Kjaerum views the migration as going in the opposite direction due to his way of reconciling the chronologies, which changes direction in my chronological reconstruction.

their alignment with certain stars (within the range of error that is to be expected) is a perfectly legitimate way of dating that beautiful structure.

Chronological dating based on the alignment of the shafts with those stars gives a date of ca. 2450 B.C. This corresponds very well with the dating of the pyramid that supposes that it was aligned with the cardinal points, namely ca. 2480 B.C. (Spence 2000, 320). Although these dates are about 150 years later than that which is usually assumed, they are consistent with each other and also fit in very well with Kitchen's low chronology.

I acknowledge that the shafts are not perfectly straight and that their alignment with the relevant stars is not exact, but we know that we cannot expect modern precision for a monument that is about 4500 years old. Realistically, we know that all ancient archaeoastronomical alignments involve a degree of error due to 1) the restricted measurement and building tools available at that time, and 2) imperfections due to ageing.

The point is that the agreement is good enough to assume an archaeoastronomical basis—especially since the relevant stars also play an important role in the Pyramid Texts. This is why scholars such as Edwards (1981) had no problem accepting the usage of these shafts for archaeoastronomical dating. One may even assume that the orientation of the shafts has historically been used to establish the traditional chronology because those dates are perfectly consistent with previous calculations of their orientation. Based on these archaeoastronomical considerations I date the beginning of Khufu's reign to ca. 2470 B.C., which is 100 years before the start of the Akkadian empire according to the high chronology of Mesopotamian dating.

When we go further back to the beginning of the dynastic period, we find that these dates are consistent with that period commencing with the Sothic new year on 17 July 2781 B.C. Since the Egyptians observed the heliacal rising of Sirius at that time, as can be seen from an inscription on an ivory tablet from the time of King Djer, the successor of King Horus-Aha, we may assume that the Egyptians probably considered it significant when the heliacal rising of Sirius occurred on a new year's day—planning the unification of the lands to coincide therewith.¹⁰

Insofar as the pre-dynastic period is concerned, there is a lot of archaeological evidence for contact with Sumer which has been extensively studied and is not our concern here.

10 This interpretation of the helical rising of Sirius during that time had been criticised by adherents of the traditional (high) Egyptian chronology (Grimal 1988, 52).

When considered in the context of my chronological reconstruction, the end of the Uruk period in Mesopotamia may be dated to ca. 2850 B.C.¹¹

Hebrew Chronology

When we move in the opposite direction to investigate later periods, there is not a lot to go on in searching to reconcile Egyptian and Mesopotamian chronology for many centuries. I agree with William Ward (1992) that the identification of Yantinhammu of Byblos, who lived during Hammurabi's reign, with E/Antin of Byblos who lived during the reign of Neferhotep I, the twenty-first king of the Thirteenth Dynasty, is based on "questionable reconstructions of damaged texts" (Ward 1992, 54).

One group that did interact with both lands is the Abrahamic family. According to the Hebrew Bible Abraham, who came from Ur in Sumer, journeyed to Canaan and visited Egypt. Of particular importance in this respect is an Elamite incursion that is said to have happened in the period after Abraham migrated from Harran (where he and his family are said to have stayed for some time) to Canaan.

We are in the fortunate position that we do not only now know that such an incursion of the Elamites into north-western Syria actually took place during that time but also when, namely in 1822 B.C. (it happened only once during the relevant period). This provides us with an important marker in dating the Abrahamic tradition. Although we should be careful when interpreting the Hebrew tradition, it is nonetheless so that one has to acknowledge that the correctness of this information suggests that we have good reason to include this early part of the Hebrew tradition in our discussion. Of particular interest is the fact that the date of this event is consistent with the Septuagint dating of

11 Although this date is substantially later than dendrochronologically obtained dates, this is not a problem for my position because such dates can never be more than relative dates. In his book *A Slice through Time*, the dendrochronologist M.G.L. Baillie acknowledges that the master chronologies "are not 100% matches" and that the application of the technique is based on subjective judgement: "The practiced dendrochronologist is looking for matches that he/she is willing to accept, based on experience, as correct matches between long ring patterns." In his review of this book, Ron Tappy wrote: "This subjective intuitive aspect of dendrochronology might easily fail to satisfy the tolerances and significance levels expected by statisticians... Recognition of this subjective human element and the inconclusiveness of many of the case studies introduced in the course of the book dampen somewhat one's appreciation for the purportedly absolute precision of the science. Various factors, such as the loss of the outermost layers of unconsolidated sapwood from a collective sample, seem to compromise the accuracy of the overall method" (Tappy 2001, 215). Dating archaeological layers have other problems as well. Sometimes the dendrochronologically derived dates for samples from the same archaeological layer differ substantially. So, for example, the grain and charcoal samples taken under well-controlled circumstances from the destruction signifying the end of layer 6 at Tell Brak (this is the period just before the Naram-Sin palace) gave dates of 2023 B.C. and 2662 B.C. respectively (Oates 1985, 144). Many similar examples can be added.

Abraham's arrival in Canaan, namely in 1837 B.C.¹² This may imply that the Septuagint dating corresponds with the chronological model that I am using.

If we take this date according to the Septuagint reading seriously,¹³ then the Elamite incursion would have happened 15 years after Abraham's arrival in Canaan, during the reign of Siwe-palar-huppak, king of Elam, which is about 4 years before Hammurabi became overlord of Mesopotamia in 1818 B.C. after his victory over Rim-Sin of Larsa. The invaders of the north-western regions might have marched under the leadership of Kudu-zulus, the brother of the king, who ruled in Esnunna (Van de Mieroop 2005, 17).

Another interesting piece of information in the Hebrew Bible is that Abraham journeyed to Egypt—seemingly directly after his first arrival in Canaan because there was famine in the land (see Gen 12:5–10). According to the Septuagint this happened in about 1836 B.C., which is consistent with the well-known depiction at Beni Hassan in Egypt of a man called Abishai/r, which is of the same Amorite name-type as Abraham (Hoffmeier 2008, 42). This Abishai/r is shown in the tomb of Khnumhotep II, administrator of the Eastern Desert who had close ties with the royal court, with his entourage arriving with “greeting gifts” in Egypt in the sixth year of King Senusert II (Staubli 1991, 33). According to Kitchen's low chronology, this happened in 1836 B.C.¹⁴ He is described as a “ruler of the hill-lands” (Canaan), which corresponds to the Biblical description of Abraham as a “mighty prince” from Canaan (Gen 23:6).

Abishai's entourage included thirty-seven men with their families (even though only some of these are shown; Kamrin 2009, 24) who were Asiatics of Shu, a geographical term which probably refers to the southern Levant (Kamrin 2009, 25). Most scholars identify it with the region east of the Jordan River—which is also the region through

12 According to the Septuagint, Abraham's journey from Harran in upper Syria to Canaan took place 430 years before the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt (Exod 12:40), which in turn happened 440 years before Solomon commenced with the building of the temple in 967 B.C. (1 Kings 6:1). This gives a date of 1837 B.C. for Abraham's arrival in Canaan. According to the Masoretic text, the 430 years commenced much later in Israel's history, namely with Israel's migration to Egypt (giving a much earlier date for Abraham). The text reads (the differences with the Septuagint are shown in italics): “And the sojourning of the children of Israel, *and of their fathers, while they sojourned in the land of Canaan* and in the land of Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years”. Saint Paul also uses the Septuagint reading (Gal 3:17).

13 The extent to which the Septuagint is dependent on the Masoretic text is a matter of dispute. In accordance with the contemporary assessment that the source text or *Vorlage* of the Septuagint differed from that of the Masoretic text (Dines 2004, 119), I suggest that the relevant readings in the Septuagint reflect a textual variant which should be taken seriously.

14 I assume that Senusert II ruled for only 6 years in accordance with Kitchen's dating of his rule to 1842 to 1836 B.C. (see note 1; Lilyquist 1993, 30). He might have started some of his building projects while he was co-regent with his father. This means that the depiction at Beni Hassan of Abishai/r arriving in the sixth year of king Senusert II from Canaan would place this event in 1836 B.C.

which Abraham came from Harran to Canaan. Also relevant to the discussion, is the colourful robe “patterned with stripes and chevrons” worn by Abishai/r (Kamrin 2009, 25) which reminds of such a robe mentioned in the Biblical tradition in connection with Joseph (Gen 37:3).

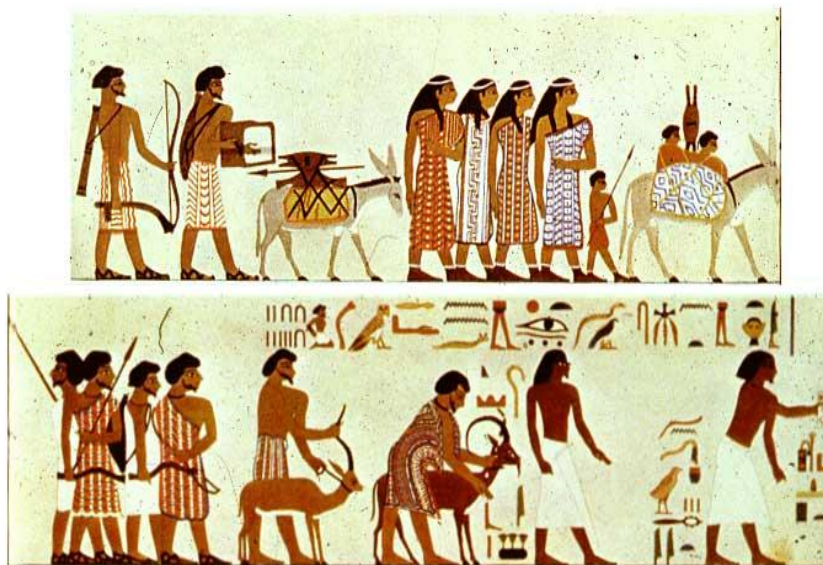


Figure 6. Abishai and his entourage arriving in Egypt from Canaan

What shall we make of this? These correspondences may be a mere coincidence. It is, however, also possible that a Semitic prince called Abraham/Abishai in the Hebrew and Egyptian traditions respectively arrived from Canaan in Egypt in the year 1836 B.C. (according to my chronological model, in which the Septuagint is consistent with Kitchen’s low chronology and the Mesopotamian high chronology).¹⁵ The reason for taking this possibility seriously is that the Hebrew tradition does, in fact, include data that is consistent with evidence from Mesopotamia in accordance with the high chronology, namely about the Elamite campaign into Syria in 1822 B.C. Also, according to the Hebrew tradition, Abraham’s coming to Egypt was noted even at the

15 The dating of the Septuagint also aligns with later Israelite history. We find, for example, regarding the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt, that according to the Septuagint this happened 430 years after Abraham’s departure from Harran to Canaan, which would be in 1408 B.C. When we compare that with Kitchen’s low chronology, this coincides with the reign of Amenhotep II (1427 to 1401 B.C.). Interestingly, we find that some scholars, who use the Egyptian high chronology together with the Masoretic text of the Bible, have also suggested that Amenhotep II was the pharaoh of the exodus. In this case Amenhotep II’s rule is dated to 1455 to 1418 B.C. whereas the exodus is placed in 1446 B.C. See Petrovich (2006).

royal court which would be consistent with the remarkable (and unique) depiction at Beni Hassan.

The identification of Abraham with Abishai, which becomes a realistic possibility in my chronological model, would provide one of those rare instances where the Mesopotamian and Egyptian worlds overlap (with events pertaining to both associated with Abraham). This assessment is, however, subject to further confirmation of my reading of ancient Middle Eastern chronology, which for this later period means that Hammurabi's (1848 to 1806 B.C.) becoming overlord of Mesopotamia in 1818 B.C. happened towards the end of Senusert III's rule (1836 to 1817 B.C.), who was succeeded by his son Amenemhat III (1817 to 1772 B.C.).

Conclusion

In this short paper I present arguments for a new ancient Middle Eastern chronology in which the Mesopotamian high chronology is used with Kitchen's low chronology for the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty. I propose that the Akkadian empire co-existed with the Fifth and early Sixth Dynasties in Egypt. In my view the land Makkan refers to Egypt whereas the *ssmt* land and Punt refer to Sumer and Dilmun respectively. I discuss a wide range of data to show that this position is consistent with the evidence and also explains data that has until now merely been ignored, such as the Sumerian influences in Egypt during the reign of Sahure which I ascribe to the first Akkadian contacts with Egypt in the early part of the reign of Sargon when copper was mined in the Sinai with the purpose of export to Dilmun as well as Sumer and Akkade (I am also not aware of data that directly contradicts this assessment).

I also explain why a mighty, conquering, deified king named Sopdu, who was called "Lord of the foreign countries" as well as "Lord of the *ssmt* land" in the east, appeared in Egypt at exactly the same time that these large-scale copper mining activities commenced in the Sinai. I argue that we have good reasons to think that this king is Sargon the Great (and that Sopdu was later also identified with Naram-Sin). Not only was Sargon a mighty and deified Asiatic warrior-king, the god who is said to have given him his victories in the north-western areas was the weather god (Dagan), whom (I argue) the Egyptians identified with Seth since that time—which explains Seth leading the warrior-king Sopdu to victory. Sopdu's tasselled apron finds its closest parallel in Sumer and Akkad. The apron is also worn by the priest Kaemqed who is depicted according to the Sumerian convention. My view also explains the extremely strange statement in the Pyramid Texts of Unas that this king was killed by Sopdu. I show that Unas's death in ca. 2282 B.C. is indeed consistent with Naram-Sin's conquest of Makkan at that time. None of these things about Sopdu had previously been convincingly explained.

In general, my chronological model is consistent with Egyptian and Mesopotamian history for the second and third millennia B.C. As such, we have good reason to take it seriously as an alternative to the traditional chronological models.

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