Cambridge Colloquium Presentation

(Friday 25 July – Sunday 27 July)

A Contribution to Ancient Near Eastern Chronology (c. 1600 – 900 BC)


Handout tables:

Table A: Proposed Collateral Kingdoms in Assyria and Babylonia During the Early Iron Age

Table B: Attested LBA Synchronisms between the Kings of Egypt, Hatti and Mesopotamia

Table C: Chronology A-E – An Alternate Chronology for the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Near East (3/3)
A Contribution to Ancient Near Eastern Chronology

(c. 1600 – 900 BC)

Slide 1

I wish to divide this presentation into three parts: methodology, core hypotheses and major historical repercussions.

Slide 2

I Methodology

In assessing the possibility of significant revision to LB and EIA Near Eastern chronology, there are two fundamental aspects that need to be addressed: firstly whether there is sufficient evidence to argue that the conventional/orthodox chronology is seriously deficient; and second, if such an argument can be made, what type of alternate chronology would be required in order to successfully replace the prevailing chronological paradigm. Having established to my own satisfaction that a strong case has been made against the historical reliability of the conventional chronology, I have set out to address the second crucial aspect of chronological revision, namely the requisite methodological attributes required of a viable alternate chronology.

Slide 3

As an ideal goal, I believe that we should expect both the conventional chronology and any alternate hypothetical chronology, to satisfy certain minimum criteria. First and foremost one should expect a unified trans-regional chronology that encompasses all the major literate societies of the time. By this I do not mean, as I believe to be currently the case, the relatively loose juxtaposition of, for the most part, semi-independent regional chronologies that are incapable of providing a coherent historical narrative across the different chronological divides. Rather, in an ideal situation, one would hope to be able to establish a precise integrated chronology where the individual regional chronologies are tightly intermeshed, one with another, and so that they have very little leeway for relative movement. Moreover, were one to successfully reconstitute such a chronology, then the addition of each chronologically sensitive piece of historical data should tend to enhance the rigidity and precision of that chronology as the number and complexity of cross linkages grows. Although each piece of this chronological puzzle might appear insignificant on its own, their totality should produce a recognisably coherent outcome.
A second criterion of our ideal chronology must be one of historical accuracy. And to achieve that aim one will, of course, have to provisionally accept the reliability of the Assyrian King-list figures, the only regional chronology with sufficient precision and continuity to form the backbone of any such Near Eastern absolute chronology. This does not, of course, mean that one must believe these figures to be, a priori, historically accurate, simply that in the absence of essentially reliable King-list figures then it will be impossible to reconstitute an accurate chronology for this period, and therefore one capable of being tested in a truly meaningful way against the available historical and archaeological evidence. Now admittedly, King-lists cannot be considered of equal value to contemporary historical texts. Nonetheless, a clear measure of their reliability is how well they integrate the history of the various neighbouring kingdoms. Should the King-list figures be significantly in error, then, when they are used to correlate one kingdom or dynasty relative to its neighbours, the resulting synchronisms cannot, by definition, reflect historical actuality. On the contrary, under such non-historical conditions one would expect an accumulation of unacceptable historical and archaeological anomalies to gradually emerge. And this is just what I believe has arisen from using the conventional Assyrian-Egyptian chronology.

It is only after one has established these two criteria, that a third minimum criterion of our ideal chronology can be achieved, namely testability. The two most potent measures of such testability are, firstly, a chronology’s success in minimising the production of chronology dependent historical or archaeological anomalies; and secondly, the chronology’s capacity to enhance the historical value of currently available documents. Without a chronology possessed of acute historical accuracy and precision it will become practically impossible to develop truly testable chronological/historical arguments spanning the Great Kingdoms of the Near East, since there can be no stable chronological point of reference from which to begin. Indeed, at present, the chronological uncertainty involved in synchronising the histories of these neighbouring kingdoms means that each embryonic argument is quickly dissipated as the number of historical interpretations capable of being assigned to each historical text begins to rapidly multiply. Conversely, I believe that one can achieve a significant level of testability by integrating the chronologies of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia into a tightly connected supra-chronology. And where historical data from each of the presently loosely connected chronological regions can be brought together in a far more mutually enhancing manner; in other words, the whole can become greater than the sum of its individual parts.

There are many documents from the ancient Near East that fall into the category of so-called historically ‘isolated texts’: these documents may lack the name(s) of the author, the addressee, or the principal third-party protagonists. However, by being able to re-examine the content of these documents within the context of an historically accurate and chronologically precise trans-regional
chronology, then data from individually isolated texts can be brought together with far greater confidence to produce a cross-referential historical narrative, and where one can productively examine the historical and archaeological evidence from the various ancient Near Eastern kingdoms to see whether or not the different bodies of evidence are mutually supportive or contradictory. In this way one can meaningfully compare the conventional chronology with any alternate hypothetical chronology to see which provides the most coherent historical narrative.

**Slide 4**

**II Core Hypotheses**

As the focus for establishing a viable alternate chronology I begin by defining two core hypotheses. Firstly, combining six apparent anomalies from Assyria during the historically and archaeologically impoverished century leading up to the foundation of the Neo-Assyrian empire under Ashur-dan II, I propose that all six anomalies can be parsimoniously explained were Ashur-dan to have deposed Shalmaneser II during the latter’s final 12th year of rule, and to have then introduced his (i.e. Ashur-dan’s) three immediate ancestors into the Assyrian king-list at that point. Noting a certain arithmetical congruence associated with some of these anomalies, I argue that this proposed usurpation amounts to the removal of precisely 85 years of absolute chronology, and so that Ashur-rabi II, Ashur-dan’s great-grandfather, rather than being a successor of Shalmaneser II, actually becomes a younger contemporary of Shalmaneser’s own great-grandfather, Tiglath-pileser I (see handout Table A). I further argue that Ashur-rabi II and his two successors were kings of Hanigalbat until finally Ashur-dan II captured the Assyrian throne from Shalmaneser II; thereby essentially repeating Ninurta-apil-Ekur’s capture of the Assyrian throne from Enlil-kudur-usur some 170 years earlier.

The second core hypothesis of my chronological model, termed Chronology A-E for convenience, is that Egyptian (Memphite) dates must be lowered by a further 115 years relative to the above revised Assyrian chronology in order to match historical actuality, thereby equating to an absolute lowering of LBA Egyptian dates by a full 200 years. A consequence of this chronological reconfiguration is that the accession of Ashur-uballit I now coincides with Year 24 of Tuthmosis III (1481 CC = 1281 AC). This synchronism permits that the particular gifts sent by Ashur-uballit to the pharaoh in the famous Amarna letter 15 are potentially amongst those received from the unnamed king of Assyria by Tuthmosis III in the latter’s 24th regnal year.

In placing Ashur-uballit I as a contemporary of Tuthmosis III, I am rejecting possibly the strongest single piece of evidence supporting the conventional Egypto-Assyrian chronology, namely that Ashur-uballit I belongs to the Amarna period, as apparently evidenced by EA 16, a
second letter written by Ashur-uballit and addressed to Amenophis IV (see handout Table B). If Chronology A-E is correct, as I argue, then I must conclude that EA 16 was an Egyptian copy of a 100 year-old Assyrian letter, presumably made as a template at the time Akhenaten moved the Egyptian capital from Thebes to El-Amarna, and where the copyist incorrectly added the name of the then reigning pharaoh as the addressee. In making such a radical proposal, I highlight both the greatest strength and potentially the greatest weakness of Chronology A-E, namely its testability. If EA 16 should prove to be an original document, with more or less the same petrographic fingerprint as EA 15, and not a Nile based Egyptian copy as I believe, then the whole methodological foundation of Chronology A-E becomes null and void.

It goes without saying that neither of these two core hypotheses can be used in any way to support the validity of Chronology A-E. Rather, the proof of Chronology A-E’s validity, to the extent that one can speak of proof in the current context, lies in the historical and archaeological repercussions of adopting these two core hypotheses. Based on this proposed chronological realignment, I argue for a downward displacement of New Kingdom dynasties relative to Assyrian chronology by 115 years. In addition, I reduce the period allocated to the Egyptian Third Intermediate Period by 200 years, and the period allocated to the post-Kassite Babylonian dynasties by 85 years; these latter two measures therefore require a radical overlapping of conventionally understood successive Egyptian and Babylonian dynasties. And I maintain that all this historical realignment is contained within a far more accurate and chronologically precise trans-regional chronology than is provided by the conventional chronology. The question I now pose is this: if the conventional chronology is more or less accurate, or indeed if Chronology A-E is significantly inaccurate, then what is the probability that one could make any sense whatsoever of such a paradigmatic chronological realignment. On the contrary, such an endeavour should result in a proliferation of new historical and archaeological anomalies, and certainly not the significant resolution of existing anomalies, as I maintain Chronology A-E is able to achieve.

The task I have set myself is to create a stable and practical chronological instrument that would allow the specialist historian to better understand the material at their disposal. My alternate chronology therefore has to be easy to use, and it must also have a sufficient degree of redundancy, that is, where it can withstand a certain level of perturbation (e.g. the above interpretation of EA 16) without immediately losing credibility. I believe Chronology A-E can provide both these essential attributes through its adoption of accuracy, precision and geographical breadth. My only request to ancient Near Eastern historians is that they bear this alternate chronology in mind, and should they encounter chronologically related anomalies from their own areas of expertise that they examine just a few to see whether or not the material makes greater sense when interpreted according to Chronology A-E. If the answer is no, then, Chronology A-E can be quickly discarded. For my part,
the functionality of this alternate chronology will necessarily be the essential measure of either its success or failure.

I now wish to outline some of the major historical conclusions arising from Chronology A-E:

### III Major Historical Repercussions

**Slide 5**

It is accepted by most historians that the Hittite recorded raid on Babylon by Mursili I corresponds to the Babylonian tradition that the Hittites marched on Akkad during the time of Samsuditana; the general understanding being that Mursili’s campaign brought the reign of Samsuditana, and therefore the First Dynasty of Babylon, to an end, thereby opening the way for the Kassite rulers to occupy the Babylonian throne. According to the favoured Middle Mesopotamian Chronology, the fall of Babylon in the 31st year of Samsuditana occurred c. 1595 CC. However, based upon a recent detailed study of Babylonian archaeology, Gasche et al. (1998) have argued that this date should be lowered to about the time of the Kassite king Burnaburiash I, that is, c. 1500 CC.

This proposal has been challenged on historical grounds, in that it would effectively eliminate the 16th century CC, a period that is currently occupied by a known succession of rulers of the Hittite kingdom. By lowering the fall of Babylon to c. 1500 CC, and therefore the reign of Mursili I in equal measure, this would require that some eleven generations of Hittite kings be accommodated within a maximum period of 170 years, that is, from the death of Mursili I to the accession of Mursili II. This equation approximates to the wholly improbable average figure of just 15.4 years per generation.

**Slide 6**

However, in terms of Chronology A-E, Gasche et al.’s date of c. 1500 CC is perfectly acceptable. According to the Synchronistic History, Puzur-Ashur (III) of Assyria and Burnaburiash (I) of Karduniash established an agreed border between their two kingdoms. Therefore, when I argue in Chronology A-E that Assyrian dates must be displaced upwards by 115 years relative to Egyptian, and consequently Hittite, chronology, this will apply to Puzur-Ashur and to Burnaburiash. This chronological realignment therefore reopens a relative 16th century CC (14th century AC) gap into which to place the known generations of Hittite kings. Indeed, according to Chronology A-E, the eleven generations of Hittite kings will now occupy some 220 years, thereby producing the biologically acceptable average figure of 20 years per generation.
Meanwhile, in Tuthmosis III’s Year 23 (1482 CC = 1282 AC), he achieved a crushing victory over a confederation of Syrian and Canaanite states at Megiddo. In the following year (1481 CC now = Ashur-uballit’s accession year) he again campaigned in Syria-Canaan and received gifts from the king of Assyria. And in his Year 32, Tuthmosis III crossed the Euphrates close by Carchemish, and defeated a Mitannian army on native soil, as a result of which he received congratulatory messages from Assyria, Babylonia and Hatti. I argue that Ashur-uballit, and his Babylonian contemporary Karaindash, were these same two kings of Assyria and Babylonia respectively; and, indeed, Burnaburiash II tells the pharaoh in EA 10 how it was his distant ancestor Karaindash who had initiated diplomatic contact with Egypt. This Egyptian military success in Syria-Canaan during the years 1482 to 1473 CC (1282 to 1273 AC) could not have gone unnoticed by the reigning Assyrian monarch. I therefore propose that when Ashur-uballit I succeeded his father, Eriba-Adad I, in 1281 AC (his accession year), he must have judged this an opportune occasion to declare independence from his Mitannian overlord, and in so doing he opened exploratory diplomatic relations with the Egyptian Pharaoh, as outlined in EA 15.

Slide 7

Currently, historians encounter considerable difficulties in trying to integrate the histories of the three Great Kingdoms of Assyria, Mitanni/Hanigalbat and Hatti during the late 14th and 13th century CC. Taken at face value, the three generations of Middle Assyrian kings, Adad-nirari I, Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I won control of territory lying west of the Euphrates, the first two claiming to have taken possession of the city Carchemish, and the third of having deported some 28,000 Hittites from beyond the Euphrates, i.e. from Syria. Indeed, Shalmaneser I, in his war to conquer Hanigalbat, specifically refers to having slaughtered the armies of the Hittites and Ahlamu, allies of the king of Hanigalbat. And a Hittite letter addressed to Shalmaneser (KBo XVIII 24) accepts that the latter had captured cities belonging to the Hittites, including the city Malatya, located in specifically Hittite territory west of the Euphrates.

However, according to the conventional chronology, the late 14th and 13th century CC was the period of maximum Hittite hegemony in Syria, and across the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia. Shuppiluliuma I had captured Syria, including Carchemish, by about 1350 CC; and he had also overseen the extension of Carchemish territory to include various cities on the east bank of the Euphrates. At this time Shuppiluliuma, through the efforts of his son Piyashili, had installed his son-in-law Shattiwaza as king of Mitanni. Based on Hittite evidence this appears to have remained the political status quo for the next 100+ years until about the second half of Tudhaliya IV’s reign. There was, however, one brief disruption to this state of affairs following the accession
of Murshili II. By the latter’s second year the king of Mitanni had rebelled, and during his Year 9 (c. 1340 CC) the Assyrians crossed the Euphrates and invaded Carchemish territory. Murshili quickly drove the Assyrians from Hittite lands west of the Euphrates, and would appear to have recaptured Hittite territory east of the Euphrates shortly thereafter; certainly the territory of Mitanni was listed amongst the lands that provided troops to Muwatalli at the battle of Qadesh in 1300 CC. According to any version of the conventional chronology, this major Assyrian attack on Carchemish territory must have occurred during the reign of either Ashur-uballit I or of one of his two immediate successors, Enlil-nirari and Arik-den-ili; yet there is absolutely no indication of any of these three kings having even come near to encountering the Hittites.

Documents dated to Muwatalli’s brother and successor Hattushili III, and to the latter’s son Tudhaliya IV, seems to confirm that the Hittites maintained control of their northern Mesopotamian territory; in Hittite documents from these two reigns the king of Hanigalbat is either independent or else a Hittite vassal, but is never identified as an Assyrian vassal. However, some time during the second half of Tudhaliya IV’s reign disaster struck the Hittite empire. An Assyrian letter to the king of Ugarit reports that Hittite soldiers of Tudhaliya had been expelled from the region of Nihriya and Shura, both cities located in Hanigalbat. And a Hittite treaty most probably belonging to Tudhaliya IV seems to confirm this event, as the author acknowledged that he had lost the Hurrian lands in a war with Assyria, having been forced to flee from the northern Mesopotamian city of Nihriya (KBo IV 14).

According to the conventional chronology a very incongruous picture is therefore painted. At the same time as Shuppiluliuma I is fighting the king of the Hurri Land and his Assyrian ally, and later when the Assyrian king invades the land of Carchemish, there is no indication in the Assyrian texts of conflict with the Hittites. Meanwhile the Assyrian kings Adad-nirari I and Shalmaneser I are claiming to have captured the city of Carchemish, and to have repeatedly subjugated the kingdom of Hanigalbat, at the very same time Hittite sources speak of Hittite control not only of Carchemish but also of Hurrian lands lying east of the Euphrates. Conversely, the conventional chronology would, almost certainly, place the disastrous Assyrian inflicted defeat of Tudhaliya IV during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. However, this latter king makes no mention whatsoever of successful warfare against the Hittites, but simply records the removal of Hittite people from beyond the Euphrates, which, in itself, is contrary to the above cited Hittite and Assyrian evidence which speaks of battles fought, and lands won by the Assyrians, east of the Euphrates.

According to Chronology A-E, the picture is radically transformed. The campaigns of Adad-nirari I and Shalmaneser I now occur before Shuppiluliuma I’s conquest of Syria, and when Carchemish still belonged to the Hurrians. When Adad-nirari and Shalmaneser subjugated the king
of Hanigalbat both could therefore legitimately claim to possess Carchemish. Moreover, it further turns out that the blitzkrieg victory claimed by Shalmaneser over the king of Hanigalbat and his Hittite and Ahlamu allies now coincides almost precisely with the catastrophic collapse of the Hittite empire late in the reign of Tudhaliya II, as independently defined by Egyptian dates. Finally, Tukulti-Ninurta’s claim to have uprooted some 28,000 Hittites from Syria, and which only occurs in annals composed to celebrate his victory over Babylonia, will now also be dated just after Year 9 of Murshili II and the Assyrian invasion of Carchemish territory, as noted above.

**Slide 8**

Chronology A-E also has profound consequences for the history of Mitanni/Hanigalbat. According to the conventional chronology we have three distinct, and currently unrelated, LBA dynasties ruling over the territory of Mitanni/Hanigalbat. The first comprises the Great Kings of Mitanni descended from Saushtatar, and attested in Egyptian, Hittite and Hurrian documents. The second two dynasties are far more enigmatic. Artatama II, king of the Hurri Land, and his son Shuttarna III, were bitter enemies of Tushratta and his son Shattiwaza. Moreover, Artatama II and Tushratta appear to have had a long-standing legal dispute before the gods over which one of them was the legitimate ruler of their disputed territory. However, modern scholarship has great difficulty in placing the origins of Artatama II’s dynasty within any extended historical, geographical, or genealogical framework. As for the later dynasty headed by Shattuara I, it is only known from Assyrian annals, and this dynasty’s relationship to these two earlier dynasties is completely unknown.

**Slide 9**

According to Chronology A-E, Shattuara I must be identified with Shuttarna II; a correspondence between the names Shuttarna and Shattuara having been first proposed by Weidner. This identification will further mean that Uasashatta, a son of Shattuara I, was the (elder) brother of Artashumara and Tushratta, both sons of Shuttarna II. And we read in the annals of Adad-nirari I that at the time he defeated Uasashatta, king of Hanigalbat, that he also captured the latter’s ‘wife of the palace’, his sons and his daughters, and that he brought them to his city Ashur. I argue that Artatama II was most probably one of these sons of Uasashatta, and who was installed as king of Hanigalbat following Shalmaneser I’s defeat of Shattuara II and his Hittite allies, thereby providing the basis for the legal dispute just discussed.
One must therefore imagine the division of a ‘Greater Mitanni/Hanigalbat’ into two lesser kingdoms at this time: a western kingdom of Mitanni ruled by Tushratta, and an eastern kingdom of Hanigalbat (known to the Hittites as Hurri Land) ruled by Artatama II. And, indeed, this very division between two kingdoms of Mitanni and Hurri Land is explicitly recognised in Shuppiluliuma I’s treaty with Shattiwaza, son of Tushratta. Moreover, a direct correspondence between the ‘king of … Hanigalbat’ and the ‘king of the Hurri Land’ appears in a Hittite text dated to the period immediately following Shuppiluliuma I’s defeat of Tushratta;¹ and at a time when I argue that Artatama II, king of the Hurri Land, had captured Greater Mitanni/Hanigalbat.

The great wealth of Assyrian annals from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I, when combined, according to Chronology A-E, with Hittite and Syrian documents from the period of Tudhaliya IV and his two sons and successors, Arnuwanda III and Shuppiluliuma II, permit the elaboration of a chronologically detailed and historically rich narrative covering the final decades of the LBA. I noted above two documents, apparently referring to the same events, which show that Tudhaliya IV lost the Hurrian territories lying east of the Euphrates to the Assyrian king. I develop a chronologically detailed argument to identify this Assyrian victory over Tudhaliya IV with the start of Tiglath-pileser I’s reign when he explicitly records that he expelled Hittite troops from the land of Shubartu, and implicitly from the land of Mitanni; this event corresponds to 1230 CC (1030 AC). Following a period of peace, Tiglath-pileser launched a second campaign against the Hittites about his Year 17 (= 1014 AC), during which he conquered the entire land of Amurru, the Phoenician cities of Byblos, Sidon and Arvad, and the Hittite territories in northern Syria ruled over by Ini-Teshub, king of Carchemish. I argue that the catalyst for this sudden campaign, after some 16 years of Hittite-Assyrian peace, was the death of Tudhaliya IV. The latter’s immediate successor was Arnuwanda III, who reigned for only a very short time before he was killed by the people of Hatti, whereupon he was replaced by Shuppiluliuma II, the last known Hittite Great King before the LBA collapse. And the reason for Arnuwanda’s murder was, I argue, the sweeping victory of Tiglath-pileser in Syria.

The impact of Tiglath-pileser I’s Syrian campaign is, I believe, evidenced by various other pieces of historical and archaeological evidence from just this period. There are numerous Ugarit documents dealing with warfare in the region of Ugarit and Mukish: in one, a Hittite coalition is defeated, apparently close by Mount Amanus (RS 18.40); in another, an Ugarit commander located somewhere on the Mediterranean coast warns his king to protect his country and appeals for supply

ships and 400 Apiru (troops?) (KTU 2.47); and in another, an unidentified enemy has invaded Mukish and is pressing hard upon the Ugarit defences, even requiring the king of Ugarit to join the fray (RS 16.402). Moreover, archaeological evidence from Alalakh, the capital of Mukish, shows that the Hittites lost control of this city shortly before the LBA collapse, as evidenced by the destruction of a temple and the fact that a statue of prince Tudhaliya, probably a son of Murshili II, was placed underfoot to be dishonoured. Moreover, in the following final phase of the LBA city, the temple was rebuilt along different architectural lines recalling the much earlier (pre-Hittite) ‘native’ buildings. Finally, a dramatic increase in the amount of Mycenaean pottery was found in this final phase, and which is said to suggest strong international trade at that time.

I argue that this evidence, and much more, finds a coherent explanation in terms of Tiglath-pileser I’s Syrian campaign. Having marched along the Phoenician coast as far as Arvad, Tiglath-pileser returned by boat to Samuru, from where he presumably turned due east towards Qadesh on the upper Orontes River, and then travelled via the Orontes Valley towards its terminus in Mukish, before heading in a north-easterly direction to the city of Carchemish. It was presumably at a strategic point on this route, i.e. near Mount Amanus, that the Hittite coalition prepared to face the Assyrian army, only for the Hittite king to flee in panic. Djikstra’s interpretation of RS 16.402, i.e., that an enemy king took territory in the region of Mukish to his own land, is perfectly matched by the actions of Tiglath-pileser, who claims to have done precisely that in his own annals.

The archaeological evidence from Alalakh, a city that would have lain directly in the proposed path of the Assyrian army, is also highly compatible with this scenario. The destruction of the temple would now find a suitable date during the capture of Mukish by Tiglath-pileser’s army. And the change in architecture would neatly reflect the changed political conditions prevailing in the immediate aftermath of that Assyrian victory. As for the blatant dishonouring of the statue of Tudhaliya, one simply cannot imagine this occurring while the Hittites controlled Mukish, and so the fact of its occurrence clearly demonstrates a lack of Hittite sovereignty for at least some short period prior to the final destruction of the LBA city.

Furthermore, Tudhaliya IV had instituted an embargo on Assyrian trade with, and through, Amurru: Shaushga-muwa, its king, was specifically told that ‘[n]o ship [of] Ahhiyawa may go to him (the king of Assyria?)…’. These trade stipulations would surely have also applied to all the Hittite vassal territories in Syria, including Ugarit and Mukish. With Tiglath-pileser having taken control of all Syrian lands lying between the Mediterranean and Assyria, this previously prohibited trade with Ahhiyawa – generally identified with the Mycenaean kingdom(s) – would now have been able to take place along whichever route best suited, thereby explaining the sudden prevalence of Mycenaean pottery in the final LBA phase at Alalakh.

The maritime activities of Tiglath-pileser I at Arvad, prior to his return trip to Samuru by
sea, may also have been specifically referred to in a Hittite treaty with Alashiya. The text (KBo XII 39), as restored by Meriggi, ‘mentions the king of Ashur “who never crossed the sea (who) never passed the gate of Alashtia”…’ This treaty has been dated to either Tudhaliya IV or to one of his two sons, Arnuwanda III or Shuppiluliuma II; the presently argued historical scenario would make the treaty partner almost certainly Shuppiluliuma II. While, according to the conventional chronology, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that any of the contemporary Assyrian kings ever reached the Mediterranean Sea, let alone to have sailed upon it, I believe that such a specific reference to ‘passing the gate of Alashiya’ should be taken at face value. From the perspective of the Hittites, the ‘gate of Alashiya’ was presumably a reference to the relatively narrow passage separating the northeast tip of Cyprus from the Syrian mainland directly opposite at Ugarit. And with Arvad a mere 60 km south of Ugarit, and only some 100 km from Cyprus, the maritime voyage(s) of Tiglath-pileser’s army c. 1014 AC would have been of immediate relevance to the Hittite and Alashiyan signatories of a treaty signed shortly thereafter.

Two further events of major historical importance from this period also merit interpretation in light of the presently argued chronological hypothesis. First, Shuppiluliuma II signed a treaty with Talmi-Teshub, the immediate successor of Ini-Teshub, in which both kings were apparently deemed of equal status. Second, one of the first known actions of Talmi-Teshub was to negotiate the divorce of Ammurapi, king of Ugarit, from Ehli-Nikkalu, a daughter of the Hittite Great King. In one of three documents dealing with this divorce, the king of Carchemish accuses Ammurapi of precipitously expelling the Hittite princess from her estate just as a diplomatic agreement was about to be finalised.

It would therefore appear that we are dealing here with a period of momentous change in the power relationship between Hatti and its Syrian vassal kingdoms, a change that is eminently explainable in terms of Tiglath-pileser’s conquest of Hatti’s Syrian territories, and which would have initially nullified, for all practical purposes, the treaty relations between the Great King and both Ammurapi and the king of Carchemish. While one can only speculate on the precise course of events, the kingdom of Ugarit was presumably to be released from a vassal relationship with Hatti. As regards Ammurapi this would then explain the need for his divorce from Ehli-Nikkalu. It would also explain the presumptuousness and newfound independence that allowed Ammurapi to unceremoniously evict the Hittite princess from her estate. And, as regards the apparent near-equality between Shuppiluliuma II and Talmi-Teshub, this must surely have concerned Carchemish’s future relationship with both Hatti and Assyria. Certainly Carchemish could no longer be expected to militarily support Hatti in a war with Assyria, or to carry out any instructions from the Hittite king that would disadvantage Assyrian trade through Carchemish territory. The result of this imposed, and more equal, approach by Carchemish towards Hatti and Assyria might
then explain the particular nature of apparent near-equality between Shuppiluliuma and Talmi-Teshub in their joint-treaty.

According to the conventional chronology, the LBA collapse associated with the so-called Sea Peoples migrations is a somewhat strange phenomenon. As generally understood, by Year 8 of Ramesses III (1200 CC): the LBA Mycenaean cities lay in ruins; the Hittite empire in Anatolia had collapsed; the Syro-Palestinian coast had suffered major invasion; inland Syria appears to have suffered various contemporary destructions; the land of Amurru had apparently been overrun; and the Sea Peoples were massing on the borders of Egypt. Meanwhile, east of the Euphrates, there is no historical evidence to suggest this apparently migration led epoch changing collapse. Indeed, both Assyria and Babylonia continued on as usual for the next century engaged in the same competition for power that had marked the previous century. The situation did, however, change radically for both kingdoms towards the very end of Tiglath-pileser I’s reign, when there is evidence that Aramean tribal invasions almost brought the kingdom of Assyria to its knees. And, at almost the exact same time, Babylonia was similarly overrun by invasions of Aramean and Sutean tribes during the reign of Adad-apla-iddina.

Dated according to Chronology A-E, the situation is transformed, for the tribal invasions that struck both Assyria and Babylonia would have occurred almost immediately following Year 8 of Ramesses III (see handout Table C). Consequently, one can now imagine that the shock wave that seemingly stretched from Greece to the Euphrates rolled on into Mesopotamia and even beyond. Indeed, the reign of the last known LBA king of Elam (Humban-numena) would also have come to an end at just about this time; and with subsequent evidence of an Elamite king not appearing for almost two centuries.