



THE EXPULSION OF THE HYKSOS AND THE END OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE: A REASSESSMENT IN LIGHT OF RECENT CHRONOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Felix Höflmayer

Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

ABSTRACT

The end of the Middle Bronze Age and its connection with the end of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt and the alleged expulsion of the Hyksos is of key-importance for understanding the development of the subsequent Late Bronze Age and the rising Egyptian interest in the region. For a long time it was assumed that the destruction levels observed at many Middle Bronze Age sites throughout the southern Levant could be linked to the Hyksos expulsion and the immediate aftermath. The low chronology of Manfred Bietak and others dated the end of the Middle Bronze Age to the early 18th Dynasty, up to the Thutmosid period and implicitly opened the possibility to connect these destructions with the attested military campaigns of the Thutmosid kings. Recent radiocarbon data, however, challenged both the low and the conventional chronology and placed the end of the Middle Bronze Age earlier, probably even before the start of the New Kingdom. This paper reviews both the chronologies and the historical narratives involved and argues for a new model for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age.

INTRODUCTION¹

After a heated debate in the 1980s and early 1990s, the discussion concerning the absolute chronology of the Middle Bronze Age and its synchronization with Egypt became rather quiet.² While general handbooks still followed the traditional chronology,³ several leading archaeologists in the field seemed to have settled on the low chronology,⁴ which was most prominently advertised by Manfred Bietak based on his excavation results at the site of Tell el-Dab'a in the eastern Nile Delta (ancient Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos rulers in Egypt).⁵ However, the 2012 publication of a radiocarbon sequence of Tell el-Dab'a by Walter Kutschera and colleagues not only challenged Bietak's dating of Tell el-Dab'a and undermined his arguments for a low chronology, but also sparked a new wave of debate around the absolute date of the Middle Bronze Age and its synchronization with Egypt.⁶

Following these groundbreaking results, recent years saw several additional publications on the question of Middle Bronze Age chronology and its synchronization with Egypt. New radiocarbon sequences were published or revisited for several sites in Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, such as Tell el-Burak, Tel Kabri, Megiddo, Tel Ifshar, Tell el-Hayyat, and Ashkelon, all pointing to a significantly higher Middle Bronze Age chronology supporting the high radiocarbon dates published for Tell el-Dab'a by Walter Kutschera et al. in 2012.⁷ In 2017, a special volume of the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* was devoted to the renewed discussion around the Middle Bronze Age chronology and first ideas about the potential historical impact have been offered.⁸ Needless to say, not all scholars in the field were willing to adopt the new radiocarbon-backed high chronology with Daphna Ben-Tor as the first one trying to challenge

the high chronology based on her interpretation of Egyptian scarabs found in the southern Levant.⁹

The present article aims to explore the potential implications of a high radiocarbon chronology for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age in the southern Levant and its connection with the end of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt. We will first review the different chronologies and historical narratives currently in use and outline in brief the different methodologies and assumptions involved, then summarize the state of research of the high radiocarbon chronology, and finally trace the historical impact of the high chronology particularly for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age and the so-called expulsion of the Hyksos.

CHRONOLOGIES AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The reconstruction of a historical narrative of times as remote as the Middle or Late Bronze Ages is no easy task. Sources are limited and often subjective interpretations prevail. Usually, much later sources of, e.g., Greek historians were already accessible and known before any archaeological research took place, so that the latter often had been interpreted through the lens of the former. Historical and archaeological chronologies had to be linked and the interpretation of contemporary and later textual sources had to be aligned with the archaeological evidence in the ground. The transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age is an exceptional example of the intersection of contemporary and much younger texts, historical, archaeological and scientific approaches to chronology, and historical/political events and archaeological transitions detectable in the field.

Since the times of William Foxwell Albright, the end of the Middle and the start of the Late Bronze Age has been linked to the expulsion of the Hyksos and the start of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty.¹⁰ For a long time, scholars have noted that the end of the Middle Bronze Age is characterized by widespread destruction horizons that primarily occur in the southern part of Palestine.¹¹ The historical narrative at that time saw the Egyptian armies under Ahmose conquering Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a) and subsequently besieging and capturing Sharuhén (most likely modern Gaza), as mentioned in one of the few contemporary sources, the autobiography of Ahmose, son of Ibana.¹² In the wake of this campaign, the Egyptian pharaohs of the early 18th Dynasty would have devastated much of the

prevailing cities of the southern Levant, leading to the catastrophic termination of what archaeologists call the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1550/1500 BCE). According to James Weinstein, "the complete destruction of the hated Hyksos princes and their cities was the primary goal of Ahmose's one or more campaigns into Palestine,"¹³ and William Dever argued that "long series of campaigns repelled the intruders into Palestine and even into Syria as far as the upper Euphrates, as attested by violent destruction levels at nearly every known Syro-Palestinian site at the end of MB IIC or on the MB IIC/LB I horizon."¹⁴

Which sources did scholars use to reconstruct an historical event such as the expulsion of the Hyksos and the military campaigns into the southern Levant in addition to the obvious destruction horizons of many of the southern Levantine cities? Contemporary historical sources are in fact meagre. The Kamose Stelae I and II recount events that have been interpreted as echoes of the Egyptian liberation wars against the occupying force of the Hyksos during the last king of the 17th Dynasty, and the fall of Avaris is generally believed to be reflected in the colophon of the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus.¹⁵ The only contemporary text that could be linked not with the *Reconquista* of Lower Egypt but with the actual expulsion (and subsequently with the destruction of Middle Bronze Age cities throughout the southern Levant) was the autobiography of Ahmose, son of Ibana, an official of El Kab in Upper Egypt.¹⁶ In this text, the author recounts the events that led to the conquest of Avaris and describes a three-year-long siege and the eventual fall of Sharuhén (most likely near modern Gaza).

This brief survey summarizes the contemporary textual sources that could be related with the expulsion of the Hyksos. It is quite obvious that based on these meagre sources nobody would have reconstructed "long series of campaigns" (Dever) and "the complete destruction of the hated Hyksos princes and their cities" (Weinstein). Instead, the historical narrative of the expulsion of the Hyksos was already part of the scholarly tradition, and new textual and archaeological evidence that came to light has been interpreted through this specific lens. William Dever (although himself very much a supporter of this historical narrative) was right to point out that in fact much of the historical narrative of the Hyksos period and the subsequent expulsion by the Egyptians goes back to Manetho's

Aigyptiaka.¹⁷ The relevant part was quoted in Flavius Josephus' *Contra Apionem*:

Thereafter, he says, there came a revolt of the kings of the Thebaid and the rest of Egypt against the Shepherds, and a fierce and prolonged war broke out between them. (...) the Shepherds, he says, were defeated, driven out of all the rest of Egypt, and confined in a region (...) by name Auaris. Thummosis (...) attempted by siege to force them to surrender, blockading the fortress with an army (...). Finally, giving up the siege in despair, he concluded a treaty by which they should all depart from Egypt (...). On these terms the shepherds (...) left Egypt and journeyed over the desert into Syria.¹⁸

Despite the fact that this account was written more than one thousand years after the events presumably had taken place, it predetermined heavily the scholarly image of the end of the Hyksos period and subsequent interpretation of the Egyptians being involved in the violent end of the Middle Bronze Age in southern Palestine.

However, in 1989 James Hoffmeier published a thought-provoking article in the journal *Levant*, in which he challenged the predominant narrative from a philological point of view.¹⁹ Hoffmeier argued that the Egyptian sources are in fact silent about any Egyptian military expeditions and widespread conquest and/or destruction of Levantine cities prior to the time of Thutmose III. He pointed out that there is actually no reason to connect the destructions of the late Middle Bronze Age attested at so many sites with Egyptian military activity, except for the siege and conquest of Sharuhén, according to the autobiography of Ahmose, son of Ibana, mentioned above.

Already earlier on, Donald Redford questioned whether the Egyptian army from the times of Ahmose would have been capable to conduct large-scale military expeditions that would have resulted in wide-spread destructions throughout the southern Levant during a limited amount of time, especially when one accepts a three-year siege for a single stronghold like Sharuhén.²⁰ Redford also pointed out another very important issue: the fact that the chronological equation of the start of the

Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the 18th Dynasty might not be as clear-cut as it seemed to be. In fact, he argued that one could also assume a start for the Late Bronze Age still in the Second Intermediate Period or well after the start of the New Kingdom, maybe as late as the Thutmoseid period.²¹ It is true that the historical narrative of the expulsion of the Hyksos and the subsequent destruction of Levantine cities at the end of the Middle Bronze Age rests entirely on the chronological assumption that the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age could be equated with the end of the Second Intermediate Period and the beginning of the New Kingdom. This equation, however, has never been conclusively established with clear-cut archaeological data; it was nothing more than an assumption that entered, and established itself in, the scholarly debate as a factoid that soon became a fact.

James Hoffmeier's article immediately sparked harsh rejoinders from many archaeologists, most notably by William Dever and James Weinstein.²² While both had to agree that the Egyptian textual sources are indeed silent regarding potential widespread destructions in the southern Levant in the early 18th Dynasty, both basically argued that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. They emphasized that the emerging Egyptian New Kingdom with its increased interest in the state of affairs in the Levant would be the only possible option for the Middle Bronze Age destructions, and they dismissed the possibility of internecine warfare or any other internal causes. Instead, both Dever and Weinstein maintained that the destruction had to be linked to Egyptian warfare of the early 18th Dynasty as the only likely candidate. One has to emphasize again that Dever and Weinstein's narrative stands and falls with the traditional chronological synchronization they both employ.

Another model for the end of the Middle Bronze Age was the expansion of the Hurrians, most recently advocated by Nadav Na'aman.²³ Na'aman left the chronological question open but pointed out that one could argue for an end of the Middle Bronze Age still during the late Second Intermediate Period. His core argument was that the advancement of the Hurrians would have weakened the Middle Bronze Age city-states of the southern Levant, eventually leading to warfare and the destructions observed archaeologically. From his point of view, it was possible that the Middle Bronze Age ended before

the Egyptian expansion of the New Kingdom, and that the Egyptians in fact took advantage of a weakened political system in the southern Levant. Not surprisingly, this explanatory model was outright rejected by William Dever, who maintained that only the developing New Kingdom would have been capable of the destructions we see at the end of the Middle Bronze Age.²⁴

While also other scholars such as Shlomo Bunimovitz were cautious to find the culprit in the Egyptian army and Ahmose, citing indications of a long-term settlement crisis that culminated in the destructions at the end of the Middle Bronze Age,²⁵ in general, the view of Dever and Weinstein largely prevailed. To date, the predominant scholarly opinion adheres to the model that the pharaohs of the early 18th Dynasty, from Ahmose down to the Thutmosid kings, were culprits for the destruction horizons.²⁶

Significantly, this model stands and falls with the assumption that the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age and the early New Kingdom are indeed contemporary in time. However, little evidence for this historical assumption exists. There is no epigraphic Egyptian material found in late Middle or early Late Bronze Age archaeological contexts to bolster such an assumption. On the contrary, both the traditional Middle and the Late Bronze Age chronological synchronizations with Egypt seem to be highly schematic. Dever himself pointed out that the shift from the 12th to the 13th Dynasty could be considered as “a convenient starting point” for Middle Bronze II,²⁷ claiming that the Middle Bronze III was “exactly equivalent” to the 15th Dynasty,²⁸ and the beginning of the 18th Dynasty again was regarded as “a convenient date” for the end of the Middle Bronze Age.²⁹ Thus, it seems that the traditional synchronization with the Egyptian historical chronology has been based on very schematic historical assumptions instead on actual archaeological evidence.

Archaeological evidence for the synchronization of Middle/Late Bronze Age chronology with Egypt was for the first time produced by the Austrian excavations at Tell el-Dab‘a in the eastern Nile Delta (ancient Avaris, the capital of the Second Intermediate Period) under the direction of Manfred Bietak.³⁰ Here, excavations uncovered a sequence of stratigraphic phases that started in the early 12th Dynasty, covered the Second Intermediate Period,

and continued into the New Kingdom. Finds included not only local Egyptian pottery but also Levantine Middle Bronze Age imports and later local production of Middle Bronze Age pottery shapes, as well as significant amounts of imported Middle and Late Cypriot material (such as White Painted Ware, White Slip Ware, Base Ring Ware, etc.) important for interregional chronological synchronization. The Cypriot material proved to be crucial for synchronizing Middle and Late Bronze Age chronological phases in the Levant with the Egyptian historical chronology via the stratigraphy of Tell el-Dab‘a; as Manfred Bietak pointed out: “Especially significant was the repetitive pattern of the first appearances of Kamares ware and Middle and Late Cypriot wares in the stratigraphy of a series of sites (...). This enabled the export of the Egyptian chronology to the Levant and to Cyprus by establishing timelines.”³¹

Based on the historical dates assigned to the Tell el-Dab‘a stratigraphy and the associated Near Eastern imports, Manfred Bietak argued for a low Middle and early Late Bronze Age chronology.³² According to his model, the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age would have occurred approximately during Stratum C/3, in the early-mid 15th century BCE, roughly equivalent to the Thutmosid period in Egypt. This low date was based on the first appearance in Strata C/2 and C/3 of what are considered to be key-markers for the Late Bronze Age in the Levant, such as Cypriot White Slip I and Base Ring I ware.

Employing the low chronology model, the violent destructions of the end of the Middle Bronze Age would not be contemporary with the end of the Second Intermediate Period, but instead with the Thutmosid period in Egypt, therefore removing the chronological basis of Dever and Weinstein’s argument for interpreting the destructions as an outcome of the expulsions of the Hyksos. Instead, one could argue that the Middle Bronze Age destructions, now falling into the Thutmosid period, could be explained by the many military campaigns of, e.g., Thutmose III, for which we also have an abundance of textual sources in Egypt itself.

In summary, by employing the traditional chronology of the Middle/Late Bronze Age, the common historical narrative still viewed the Egyptian pharaohs of the early 18th Dynasty as the culprits of the widespread destruction horizons at

the end of the Middle Bronze Age. A smaller, but very outspoken, number of scholars argued for a significant lower chronology, synchronizing the end of the Middle Bronze Age with the more advanced 18th Dynasty, maybe as late as the Thutmosid period. While adherents of the low chronology never traced the potential historical impact of their suggestion, it might be speculated that, according to their model, the destruction horizons of the end of the Middle Bronze Age period might have been connected to the well-documented military campaigns of the Thutmosid kings at the dawn of Egyptian involvement in the southern Levant. In both scenarios, the Egyptian army stands as the most likely (or even only) candidate for causing the destructions of the end of the Middle Bronze Age.

A NEW CHRONOLOGY EMERGES

As discussed above, the traditional historical narratives stand and fall with the chronological synchronizations employed. For the Middle Bronze Age southern Levant, recent years have seen the development of a new radiocarbon-backed chronology that has challenged both the traditional, and especially the low, chronology, as it suggests significantly higher dates for the Middle Bronze Age phases.³³ This chronology is based on site-specific Bayesian models of a large number of radiocarbon data from several sites in Egypt, the coastal Levant, and the Jordan Valley, including Tell el-Dab'a,³⁴ Tell el-Ajjul,³⁵ Ashkelon,³⁶ Jericho,³⁷ Tell el-Hayyat,³⁸ Tel Ifshar,³⁹ Megiddo,⁴⁰ Tel Kabri,⁴¹ and Tell el-Burak.⁴²

These data suggest a Middle Bronze Age chronology that is about 120 years higher (older/less recent) than the low Middle Bronze Age chronology advocated by Manfred Bietak and up to 50 years higher (older/less recent) than the traditional chronology suggested by William Dever.⁴³ While the historical implications of higher dates for the Middle Bronze Age are a topic on its own, for the scope of this paper, we are interested specifically in the dates for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age.

When does the Late Bronze Age start from a radiocarbon point of view? Currently we have several datasets at our disposal. Radiocarbon data for the end of the Middle Bronze Age, or more specifically for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age, exist for Tell el-Dab'a, Tell el-Ajjul, Jericho, and Tell el-Hayyat. Data for the Santorini

eruption provides additional evidence,⁴⁴ and new, soon-to-be-published radiocarbon determinations for the end of the Middle Bronze Age at Tel Lachish and the start of the Late Bronze Age at Gezer complement the picture.⁴⁵

The radiocarbon evidence proved to be both consistent but also challenging from the point of view of traditional relative pottery-based chronology. At Tell el-Dab'a, the beginning of the Late Bronze Age is connected with Strata C/2–3 and the first appearance of key-Cypriot markers such as White Slip I and Base Ring I.⁴⁶ At the same time, pumice from the Minoan eruption of Santorini appeared at the site.⁴⁷ According to the radiocarbon model published by Walter Kutschera and colleagues, these strata should be dated around or just before 1600 BCE.⁴⁸

Tell el-Ajjul provided more ambiguous results. Here, Horizons 7–6 were dated to the Middle Bronze III period, Horizon 5 to a transitional Middle/Late Bronze Age phase, and Horizons 4–3 to the early Late Bronze Age proper. Horizon 5 saw the first appearances of Cypriot White Slip I and Base Ring I wares and, as Tell el-Dab'a Strata C/3-2, pumice from the Minoan eruption of Santorini.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, only few radiocarbon dates are available for this site, but according to the published dates, Horizon 5 would date to sometime in the 16th century BCE.⁵⁰

A significant earlier date is suggested by a radiocarbon sequence for Tell el-Hayyat in the Jordan Valley. This Middle Bronze Age site ends with stratigraphic Phase 1 dated to the Middle Bronze Age III, while Late Bronze Age is not present.⁵¹ According to the radiocarbon data, the end of Phase 1 falls in the 17th century BCE, maybe as early as the late 18th century BCE.⁵² This date, however, should be treated with caution. The younger phases of Tell el-Hayyat are not well represented in the radiocarbon sequence and it remains unknown whether the actual end of the Middle Bronze Age III is present at the site.⁵³

More precise data is available for Jericho. Here, several short-lived (and also charcoal) dates were published for the end of the Middle Bronze III, falling to around 1600 BCE.⁵⁴ Additional circumstantial evidence comes from Santorini. It has been shown that pumice from the Minoan Santorini eruption appears in Tell el-Dab'a Stratum C/2–3 and in Tell el-Ajjul Horizon 5, in both cases together with White Slip I and Base Ring I wares. White Slip I was

also present on Santorini before the eruption took place in the late Late Minoan IA period.⁵⁵ Radiocarbon data for the eruption falls consistently to the late 17th century BCE and is in agreement with data from Tell el-Dab‘a.⁵⁶ Additional, not-yet-published radiocarbon evidence supports the overall picture: the end of the Middle Bronze Age III palace at Lachish dates to the 16th century BCE (cf. the data for Tell el-Ajjul), while early Late Bronze Age data for Gezer and the appearance of White Slip I dates to pre-1600 BCE.⁵⁷

Thus, although the radiocarbon data for the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age is currently rather ambiguous, it suggests a date sometime in the first half of the 16th century BCE. At some sites, the start of the Late Bronze Age can already be traced before or around 1600 BCE; other sites, such as Tell el-Ajjul or Lachish, seem to have continued well into the 16th century BCE. Based on current evidence, the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age might have lasted several decades, maybe even half a century (cf. Fig. 1).

While the start of the Late Bronze Age could be dated slightly earlier than the traditional chronology (c. 1550/1500 BCE) and significantly earlier than the low chronology (c. 1500/1450 BCE), a significant question is where to put the start of the Egyptian New Kingdom according to these radiocarbon data.

For a long time, no suitable radiocarbon sequence was available to check the Egyptian historical chronology. Based mostly on textual sources, the start of the New Kingdom was dated to c. 1550/1540 BCE.⁵⁸ In 2010, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Michael Dee, and others published several Bayesian models for dynastic Egypt based on over 200 new high-precision radiocarbon determinations and the known succession of the Egyptian pharaohs and their individual reign-lengths.⁵⁹ Based on their results, the start of the New Kingdom proved to be essentially in agreement with historical estimates, but allowed for a slightly earlier start, somewhere between 1566 and 1552 BCE (at 68% probability). Later, Sturt Manning re-modeled these dates also according to new estimates of reign-lengths of certain New Kingdom rulers as suggested by David Aston.⁶⁰ According to these models, the earliest start for the New Kingdom could fall between 1578 and 1569 BCE, some 20–30 years earlier than previously assumed (and—interestingly enough—around the same time as suggested by Edward Wente and Charles van Siclen III in their chronology in the mid-1970s).⁶¹

What does this mean for our alleged link between the start of the New Kingdom and the end of the Middle Bronze Age in the southern Levant (Fig. 1)? According to our radiocarbon data, the end of the

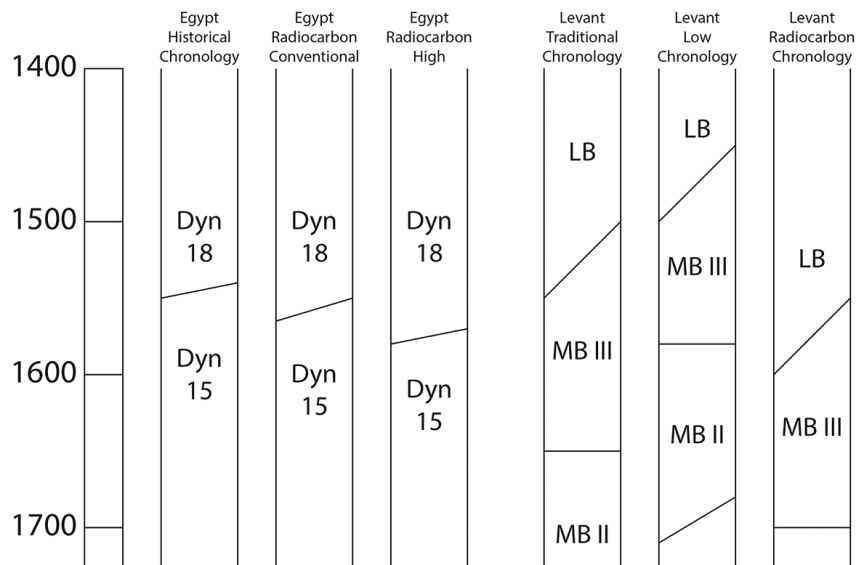


FIGURE 1: Comparison of different chronological models for Egypt and the Levant.

Middle Bronze Age started around or before 1600 BCE and seems to continue well into the 16th century BC. At the same time, radiocarbon data puts the start of the New Kingdom around 1575 BCE at the very earliest. Therefore, the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age already commenced during the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt and continued probably into the early New Kingdom. From a chronological point of view, therefore, a causal link between the destructions at the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the expulsion of the Hyksos and/or any hypothetical military campaigns by early New Kingdom rulers is simply not possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Our brief survey of historical narratives and chronological reconstructions led to a somewhat dissatisfying result. Little can be told about this time period, which is often seen as a significant watershed in the development of the ancient Near East. Manfred Bietak was completely right when he pointed out several years ago that “little is known about the end of Hyksos rule in Egypt,”⁶² and, we might add, even less so about a hypothetical link between what generations of Egyptologists and archaeologists have called the “expulsion of the Hyksos” and the actual destruction horizons that have been dated to the end of the Middle Bronze Age in the southern Levant.

Our current historical narrative that the Egyptian *Reconquista* of northern Egypt first led to a forced mass-exodus of Hyksos rulers and population to the southern Levant and then to wide-spread warfare in southern Palestine resulting in the destruction of many sites by the invading Egyptian army is not backed by contemporary evidence. This narrative, in fact, is based on an unfortunate alliance between a much later literary tradition (Flavius Josephus) and a very simplistic approach by earlier archaeologists to equate each destruction horizon with an Egyptian military campaign, an effort that Susan Sherratt several years ago very rightfully described as the “Find the Pharaoh” game.⁶³ This approach was coupled by a chronological synchronization with Egypt that was in fact more myth than reality. The equation of the end of the Middle Bronze Age with the end of the Second Intermediate Period was partly argued for by the many destructions in the southern Levant being viewed as the result of the expulsion of the Hyksos. Further, once the traditional

synchronization was adopted, the alleged Egyptian military campaigns were the only possible way to explain the widespread destructions, which, according to this view, all happened around the time of the emerging New Kingdom in Egypt.

It was only in the late 1980s when James Hoffmeier rightfully denounced this historical narrative as being based on very weak arguments. Hoffmeier at that time implicitly followed the low chronology advocated by Manfred Bietak and for the first time de-coupled the Middle Bronze Age destructions from the end of the Second Intermediate Period.

In the meantime, radiocarbon dating added yet another facet to the enigma surrounding the end of the Hyksos period and the end of the Middle Bronze Age. While the high radiocarbon chronology is far from being widely accepted in the field, more and more data emerges that challenges not only the low Middle Bronze Age chronology, but also the traditional one, and, even more so, opens up questions regarding the limitations of relative pottery-based chronology overall. Markers for the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, such as Cypriot White Slip I ware, consistently appear pre-1600 BCE at Tell el-Dab‘a, Santorini, and now at Gezer, while other sites, such as Lachish, that have been described as being terminal Middle Bronze III, seem to fall to the 16th century BCE. While these dates substantiate the notion of previous researchers that the destructions at the end of the Middle Bronze Age in fact may span over several generations, it also becomes clear that the destructions start before the beginning of the Egyptian New Kingdom. While absolute calendar dates for Ahmose and the beginning of the 18th Dynasty may be raised to c. 1580 BC, they still post-date the start of the Late Bronze Age and the first appearance of White Slip I ware at several sites.

An easy solution is not at hand. But as “it is better to be vaguely right than exactly wrong,”⁶⁴ we should accept the fact that our previous historical narrative lacks both contemporary textual evidence and chronological possibility. We might not be able to offer a new coherent historical reconstruction at the moment, but we can conclude that (a) the Middle Bronze Age destructions start before the end of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt, and therefore (b) we have no reason to assume any widespread Egyptian military interventions prior to the

Thutmosid period (except for the siege and conquest of Sharuhen), in agreement with the textual sources, and thus (c) based on our current knowledge (and as also pointed out by Bietak) “we have no evidence that the Western Asiatic population who carried the Hyksos rule in Egypt was expelled to the Levant, except for the Manethonian/Josephus tradition.”⁶⁵

These conclusions do not solve the issue of the Middle Bronze Age destructions in the southern Levant. But, as James Hoffmeier pointed out almost 30 years ago, “It is easier to dismantle a hypothesis than to construct a new one. (...) But having no solution is better than having one that lacks historical evidence.”⁶⁶

NOTES

- 1 This paper presents research conducted by the author while being a Glassman Holland Fellow in residence at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and of the author’s project “Tracing Transformations” funded by the Austrian Science Fund START-grant Y-932 G25.
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