A Note on the Chronology of Dynasty 25 and the Inscription of Sargon II at Tant-i Var

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Lines 19 to 21 of the above inscription, with the new evidence they contain, matters Egyptian, will be of more than passing interest to scholars. It cannot now be doubted (a) that Shebitku (Ši-ša-ia-ka-[u]-a[]), as šar Meluḫḫa, was known to Assyrian scribes before the accession of Sennacherib, and (b) that it was Shebitku, not Shabaka, that extradicted Yamani to Assyria. The death of Sargon II is now the terminus ante quem for the appearance of Shebitku with a title indicating the status of a head of state. Since the stela most probably was inscribed in Sargon’s final year (see above), the extradition of Yamani could have taken place as late as 706-705 B.C.

Inspite of scholarly activity in recent years in trying to resolve the outstanding issues, the chronology of the 24th and 25th Dynasties before Tahrqa’s accession remains problematical. In the virtual absence of dated texts from his reign, estimates of the accession date of Shebitku have ranged widely in the literature: 695 n.c., 699 n.c., 701 n.c., 702 n.c.

The new information makes it possible to re-open the question of the trustworthiness of the versions of the Epitome of Manetho on Dyn. 25. It would now appear that, as in so many cases, Africanus’s version (14 years) is to be preferred to that of Eusebius (12 years)!

The as yet intractable problem in the chronology of the 25th Dynasty is the length of Shabaka’s reign and, now in particular, the date of his death. Dated texts, almost all with an Egyptian provenience, range from year 2 through years 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13 and 14, ending with the British Museum cube statue dated to year 15. If Shabaka maintained the same sequence of regnal years from his accession, presumably on the death of Pi’ankhdy, and did not associate Shebitku with him as coregent, then the new evidence would oblige us to place his accession no later than 720 B.C., and possibly higher according as his reign exceeded 15 years. His conquest of Egypt, clearly accomplished by his year 2, and the consequent termination of the 24th Dynasty, could have fallen no later than 719 B.C. But this presents a major difficulty. For the decade preceding 713/12 B.C. the Assyrian and Biblical records contain several allusions to Egyptian rulers, but none of them can be interpreted as allusion to a Kushite king ruling over Egypt. The individuals referred to must, in fact, be the ephemeral or otherwise unidentified rulers belonging to pre-25th Dynasty regimes. The implication, then, is that as late as 713 B.C., when Yamani sought aid from Pi’u, Shabaka’s invasion had not yet taken place. It follows that Shabaka year 1 must fall in or after 713 B.C., and his 15th in or after 699 B.C.

One solution must be to reascribe the old theory of a “coregency” between Shabaka and Shebitku, although in the past such a notion has won Counting back from 691 as his last full year, Africanus’s “14” will have represented a rounding-down of a figure recording year total – calendrical notation. The dependence of Eusebius on Africanus, and the generally inferior nature of his transmission, has long been known: cf. H. Oeden, Septimius Septimius and the Byzantine Chronography (Leipzig 1859) 22-23, 196-98.


It has usually been assumed that Shabaka did this: cf. T. G. H. James, CAH III (2) (Cambridge 1991) 672.


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only half-hearted acceptance. One is struck by the fact that, while Shaba-
ka’s dated texts (in the main private documents from the business com-
nunity or the chancery, and therefore liable to date by the years of the re-
gime in power) are relatively plentiful from the Thebaid to the Delta, 
Shebitku’s are conspicuous by their absence. Only the year 3 graffito from 
the Karnak quay is a clearly attested text germane to the problem of a coregency. It is conceivable that, with Shaba’s conquest of the lower Nile valley and the subsequent removal of the royal administration to Memphis, the conqueror had created the necessity of a bifurcation in the government of his vast dominion. While his own reign provided the dating scheme, Shaba had, by his 8th year, realized the need to separate off the administration of the Kushite heartland; and this he assigned to his nephew Shebitku, complete with the trappings of kingship. One of the latter’s initial acts would have been the extradition of Yamani who, as the text says, had fled anu bita Meluhha, and had been living there ever since.

The above is suggested with a diffidence born of the knowledge of how spotty is our historical record of the period in question. A number of other solu-
tions are conceivable, and undoubtedly will be trotted out in due time. But it is difficult now to deny that already in 705 B.C. Shebitku was a power-holder whose name could be attached to an important policy decision as extradition.

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W. J. Murnane, *Ancient Egyptian Coregencies* (Chicago 1977) 189-96; Redford, review of W. J. Murnane, *Ancient Egyptian Coregencies*, JEA 69 (1983) 182; Kirchhoff, *Altes Aegypten*, 34, 67. The term as used to-day sometimes refers to parallel reigns with overlapping reign years (rare), but also confusingly, to the phenomenon of a second contemporary royal regnal year (rare), but also confusingly, to the phenomenon of a second contemporary royal regnal year (rare), but also confusingly, to the phenomenon of a second contemporary royal regnal year (rare), but also confusingly, to the phenomenon of a second contemporary royal regnal year.

I. Zum Text des Taueruattis-Briefes: abhijjua-Frage und Textkritik

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