

It is with a profound sense of ambivalence that I write this article, taking a critical stance towards the historical reconstruction of Gunnar Heinsohn. Not only do I regard Gunnar as a personal friend, he has long been a supporter of *Aeon*, first as a contributor of numerous articles and also through featured appearances at various symposia. Yet the suspicion has been building for some time now that all is not well with Dr. Heinsohn's handling of the ancient sources. Since *Aeon* has taken an active role in publicizing Heinsohn's researches, it follows that we have a certain responsibility to keep our readers informed of recent developments and, where necessary, point out problems as they come to our attention.

The current article examines Heinsohn's attempted identification of Hammurabi with Darius, arguably the most novel and controversial claim in a historical reconstruction remarkable for its radical nature. This identification, should it be upheld, would signal a revolution in our understanding of ancient history, since it would mean that the Old Babylonian king's reign—conventionally dated to c. 1792-1750 BCE (according to the middle chronology)—rightly belongs in the Achaemenid period (c. 500 BC).

Heinsohn's claims have the singular advantage of being easily falsified, one of the hallmarks of a sound scientific hypothesis. Jan Sammer accurately summarized the situation in 1988, in a special issue of *Aeon* devoted to Heinsohn's theory:

“Heinsohn's is not an abstruse argument about the succession of ancient dynasties. If Heinsohn is right, the entire history of the development of civilization will have to be written anew. The validity of his scheme will emerge in short order, since the theory is highly falsifiable: at every stage the double existences of historical figures and events must match, allowing only for the vicissitudes of historical preservation. Once the overall historical scheme has been declared, not only are the kingdoms and dynasties identified with their historical doubles, but individual rulers within each dynasty, and the peculiar events of their reigns as well. A single fact, if sufficiently substantiated, could ruin the entire structure. An example may usefully illustrate this point. If the Sumerians are indeed the Chaldeans, it follows that Shulgi, the greatest king of the so-called “neo-Sumerian” period is the same as Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king of the “neo-Babylonian” period. There is nothing arbitrary about this identification; it is a logical deduction from the postulated premises. If any discrepancy between the two men, such as lifespan, length of reign or ancestry is found and sufficiently established, the scheme proffered by Heinsohn would be disproved. On the other hand, with falsifiability being such an intrinsic feature of this revision of history, the continuing absence of disproof (the theory has been circulated among laymen and scholars alike for five years or more), increases its plausibility.”¹

For Shulgi and Nebuchadnezzar, we would substitute Hammurabi and Darius, two of the most famous kings in the history of the ancient Near East (We will discuss the proper

¹J. Sammer, “Reopening the Sumerian Question,” *Aeon* 1:2 (1988), p. 7. Clark Whelton has expressed a similar opinion: “But in my opinion Heinsohn's is not only the most rational of all the revised chronologies, it is the easiest to confirm or deny. To a much greater extent than his competitors, Gunnar follows a logical method of analysis.”

placement of Nebuchadnezzar along the way). Fortunately, there is an abundance of evidence bearing on the reigns of Hammurabi and Darius,² and thus a comparison of the two kings should rapidly reveal whether they are to be identified or not.

In order to provide a bit of context for the discussion to follow, a brief summary of the respective kings' careers is in order. Hammurabi was the most prominent ruler of the so-called first dynasty of Babylon, a period which saw Mesopotamia dominated by the Amorites, Semitic nomads thought to have emigrated from the deserts of Syria, whence they had long raided the various city-states of Babylonia.³ In various Babylonian texts from this period, Hammurabi is referred to as LUGAL MAR.TU, "king of the Amorites (or westerners)."⁴

The royal inscriptions from this period (the so-called date formulae) provide valuable clues towards reconstructing Hammurabi's various activities year by year, inasmuch as they typically record the king's major deeds and accomplishments. From his father, Sinmuballit, Hammurabi had inherited a relatively small kingdom some 80 miles long and 20 miles wide.⁵ The first thirty years of the king's reign were rather uneventful from a military standpoint, being largely devoted to internal affairs, such as the building of dikes and canals and the institution of his renowned legal reforms.⁶ According to Roux, Hammurabi "patiently waited for five years before making the first move" to enlarge his kingdom.⁷ Between the 6th and 11th years, Hammurabi defeated Isin, Uruk, Malgium, and invaded Emutbal.⁸ For the next twenty years, however, Hammurabi devoted himself "solely to the embellishment of temples and the fortification of towns."⁹ After nearly three decades on the throne, Hammurabi set about expanding the boundaries of his kingdom. In his 30th year, he conquered Elam. Hammurabi defeated his former ally Rim-Lim of Larsa in year 31. The same year saw him defeating Eshnunna, Subartu, and Gutium.¹⁰ In his 32nd year, he overthrew Zimri-Lim and Mari. Two years later Hammurabi returned and sacked Mari, burning the beautiful palace to the ground. In his 36th and 38th year, Hammurabi "overthrew the army of the country Subartu (Assyria)

²Of the Persian period, A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948), p. 70, remarked: "For no portion of the three thousand years of Babylonian social and economic history are we so well supplied with documentary evidence as for the two and quarter centuries after 625 BC." J. Oates, *Babylon* (London, 1979), p. 76 writes that Hammurabi's period (Old Babylonian) "is by far the best documented in the history of ancient Mesopotamia."

³J.R. Kupper, "Northern Mesopotamia and Syria," *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 2:1 (Cambridge, 1973), p. 25. See also the extensive discussion in G. Buccellati, "Amorites," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 101-111.

⁴J. Lewy, "Amurritica," *HUCA* 32 (1961), p. 32.

⁵J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 61, notes that, upon Hammurabi's accession, "Babylon was still but one of a number of petty states."

⁶See the discussion in J. Oates, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67.

⁷G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (New York, 1964), p. 185.

⁸A. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1964), p. 156.

⁹G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (New York, 1964), p. 185. See also the discussion of C.J. Gadd, "Hammurabi and the End of His Dynasty," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 2:1 (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 177-178.

¹⁰D. Frayne, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Old Babylonian Period*, Vol. 4 (Toronto, 1993), p. 339.

and ‘defeated all his enemies as far as the country of Subartu’.” By the end of his reign, Hammurabi controlled all of Babylonia and part of Northern Mesopotamia (see map). All told, Hammurabi reigned a period of 43 years.

Darius, in contrast to Hammurabi, was not born into the kingship; rather, he had to fight and conspire for everything he achieved. Darius’ father, far from being the king of Babylon, was a satrap of Parthia and Hyrcania.¹¹ At 28, Darius found himself serving as a spearcarrier in the army of Cambyses II, son of Cyrus the Great, as the Persian king set about conquering Egypt.¹² Upon the sudden death of Cambyses II, chaos overran the Persian empire, whereupon the rebel Gaumata (also known as Bardiya or Smerdis) usurped the kingship. Together with six other nobles, Darius succeeded in murdering Gaumata and claiming the throne for himself. The apparent chaos among the Persian leadership, in turn, inspired most of the satrapies to revolt and thus Darius found himself putting down one rebellion after another, first in Elam, then in Babylon as well as Armenia, Persia, Media, Assyria, Parthia, and Scythia. It took over two years of heavy fighting for Darius to establish himself as uncontested ruler. Thereupon Darius set about the task of restructuring and expanding the empire. First he organized the empire into twenty satrapies. This was followed by campaigns in India and along the Mediterranean, where he gained control of the Ionian islands. In 513, finally, Darius campaigned against the Scythians around the Black Sea, conquering European Thrace and most of the northern Aegean.¹³ Eventually Darius came to rule an area extending from India to Greece to Egypt (see map).¹⁴ All told, Darius reigned for a period of 36 years (from 521 to 486 according to the conventional chronology).¹⁵

Even from this brief survey it is obvious that there is very little resemblance between the political and military careers of Hammurabi and Darius. The length of their reigns is different, as is the manner in which they came to the throne. Hammurabi peacefully assumed the throne upon the death of his father, while Darius gained the throne by intrigue, assassination, and military conquest, his father (Hystaspes) surviving long enough to personally witness his son’s accession.¹⁶ Of the numerous date formulae from Hammurabi, *not one* can be matched against anything in the career of Darius. At the height of his career, Hammurabi ruled over a relatively small area, encompassing the greater part of Babylonia and parts of Assyria, his precarious hold on power being everywhere apparent throughout the better part of his reign. C.J. Gadd, upon reconstructing Hammurabi’s career from the voluminous correspondence which has

¹¹A.T. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³OEA, p. 297.

¹⁴According to the King’s inscriptions, his empire extended “from Sakai beyond Sogdia to Nubia, and from India to Lydia.” See J. Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia* (London, 1996), p. 7.

¹⁵A.T. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹⁶An inscription of Xerxes reads as follows: “My father was Darius. The father of Darius was by name Vishtaspa [Hystaspes]. The father of Vishtaspa was by name Arshama. Vishtaspa and Arshama were both living when Ahuramazda, by his will, made Darius my father king of the earth.” Quoted from A.T. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Darius himself made the same claim in his royal inscriptions at Susa.

survived from the Old Babylonian period, offered the following summary for the *Cambridge Ancient History*:

“The general view of the political and warlike situation in Babylonia and neighboring lands, which is so brightly illuminated by these letters, is that of a general weakness...Hammurabi, even upon the threshold of his victories, did not impress his contemporaries as a world-conqueror...It has to be admitted that the discoveries of recent years have been damaging to the reputation of Hammurabi as a dynast, in the sense of a conqueror and the founder of a far-flung empire. It is now apparent that he was for the greater part of his reign no more than a struggling aspirant, and that even his brief supremacy was much more narrowly circumscribed than once assumed by estimates for which there was, indeed, never any evidence.”¹⁷

Is it possible to imagine *any* historian describing Darius in such disparaging and unflattering terms?

Hammurabi, as we have seen, was of Semitic descent. The king describes his genealogy as follows: “[off]spring of Sumu-la-Il, mighty heir of Sin-muba[Il]it.”¹⁸ Like many Semitic (Akkadian) names, the latter name consists of noun phrases incorporating Semitic gods (Sin).

Darius, on the other hand, was of Indo-European descent. Thus, in the famous royal biography inscribed at Bisitun, Darius reports that he is an Aryan from the Achaemenid clan.¹⁹ Indeed, the Persian king seems to go out of his way to emphasize his Aryan heritage:

“In its ethno-linguistic and religious aspects, the word *ariya*...can be traced back to the Achaemenid period (and even earlier times). In their inscriptions, Darius and Xerxes not only emphasize their ‘Aryan’ origin, but also speak of Ahura Mazda as the ‘God of the Aryans’ and call their language and their script ‘Aryan.’”²⁰

Darius’ royal inscriptions at Bisitun are written in Old Persian, which he is said to have invented for just that occasion (note that these inscriptions are tri-lingual in nature, Elamite and Babylonian versions standing alongside the Persian). This language is Indo-European in nature and thus could hardly be mistaken for Hammurabi’s Akkadian (Old Babylonian) script. Here is what one scholar said about the Persian script:

“Surveys’ of the Old Persian cuneiform script show that its beginnings are as yet obscure. All we know for certain is its first application in the great account of Darius’ exploits found on the Bisitun (Behistun) rock in Media...The Old Persian script is not a development of the Mesopotamian cuneiform, which was already more than two

¹⁷C.J. Gadd, op. cit., pp. 181-184.

¹⁸D. Frayne, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Old Babylonian Period*, Vol. 4 (Toronto,), p. 34.

¹⁹See CAD, p. 104.

²⁰J. Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia* (London, 1996), p. ix.

millennia old by that time, but a new creation influenced by the Aramaic consonantal script and consisting of a mixture of syllabic and consonantal signs.”²¹

The Aramaic script, I hasten to add, was not yet around at the time of Hammurabi, being first attested around 1000 BCE.

The language of Hammurabi’s inscriptions was Old Babylonian. Indeed, modern scholars attempting to learn this ancient language still cut their teeth on the Code of Hammurabi, which is written in the purest Old Babylonian script. If Heinsohn is right, that Hammurabi and Darius are one and the same figure, the king engaged in some very curious behavior, writing in the relatively archaic Old Babylonian when cataloging his laws, yet adopting the more modern Babylonian and Old Persian scripts when celebrating his military accomplishments at Bisitun. If Hammurabi and Darius were one and the same, as Heinsohn would have us believe, one must naturally expect to find inscriptions of Hammurabi written in Old Persian or Aramaic and inscriptions of Darius written in Old Babylonian. To the best of my knowledge, however, no such inscriptions have come to light nor are they likely to be found at any point in the future.

Upon his death, Hammurabi left his kingdom to his son, Samsuiluna, who reigned for a period almost as long as the great lawgiver himself (some 38 years), although by the end of his reign the kingdom was being seriously threatened on various fronts.²² Darius left his kingdom to his son, Xerxes, who reigned for 21/2 years until his assassination. The Achaemenid empire, meanwhile, continued to rule the world for close to 150 years.

Remember here Jan Sammer’s admonition: “If any discrepancy between the two men, such as lifespan, length of reign or ancestry is found and sufficiently established, the scheme proffered by Heinsohn would be disproved.” From my vantage point, we could easily stop here, confident in the belief that Heinsohn’s thesis has been disproved. Discrepancies not only exist, they are rampant.

Upon what grounds, then, does Heinsohn seek to draw a comparison between the two kings? Heinsohn’s stated reasons for identifying the two kings can be summarized as follows: (1) both were intimately associated with the Mardian tribe; (2) both were great lawgivers; (3) both worshipped similar deities; (4) comparative stratigraphy. We will examine each of these points in turn.

Cyrus the Mardian

In various publications going back to 1986, Heinsohn has sought to draw a parallel between Hammurabi’s tribe—the Martu (or Amorites)—and the Persians. On numerous occasions Heinsohn has stated that the Martu were known as the “Perseus” people, the latter of which produced the eponymous ancestor of the Persians.²³ Witness the

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

²²CAD, pp. 31, 220.

²³“The mysterious ‘old Babylonian’ Martu or Perseus people are the Persians.” See “Did the Sumerians and Akkadians Ever Exist,” Aeon 1988, p. 45

following statement: “The word Martu means Perseus, after whose son Perses the Persians...take their name.”²⁴ Heinsohn elsewhere states that “the word Martu is translated as ‘Perseus’.”²⁵

When I first heard Heinsohn make this claim a decade ago, I knew it to be most unlikely, since Martu is a Sumerian word while Perseus is Indo-European, there being no apparent or even likely connection between these two languages.²⁶ Yet I’d never had a chance to track down Heinsohn’s reference until recently. As support for his “translation,” Heinsohn cites *The Assyrian Dictionary*, the definitive source on the language in question. The listing under Amurru—the Akkadian rendering of Martu—gives “west” as the primary meaning of this word. As is well-known, most scholars accept that the Sumerian word Martu originally had reference to a Semitic people who originated from Syria, literally to the west of Sumer. As a third meaning, however, the dictionary lists MUL.MAR.TU, interpreted as “Perseus (literally: west star).”²⁷ Almost unbelievably, Heinsohn has taken this English rendering of a Sumerian phrase—one specific to the astronomical texts—and used it to bolster his claim that the Martu of the Old Babylonian period were the Persians! Yet the Sumerian phrase in question—MUL.MAR.TU—simply means “west star” and has only been *interpreted* as referring to the asterism Perseus by modern scholars. It bears absolutely no relation to the Indo-European word Perseus and thus can provide zero support for Heinsohn’s identification of the respective peoples of Hammurabi and Darius.

Sadly, Heinsohn’s forays into philology do not stop here. In order to further bolster his identification of the Old Babylonian Martu/Amorites with the Persians, Heinsohn imagines a connection between the Martu/Amorites and the Persian tribe Mardoï. Here is what Heinsohn had to say on the matter in a recent article: “It could not have been by chance that the name of the Old Babylonians, Mardu or Martu, is identical with the name of the tribe of Cyrus the Great, the Mardoï of Herodotus I:84.”²⁸ Once arrived at, this identification of Cyrus as a Mardian chiefton becomes a rallying cry for Heinsohn and one can find dozens of references to “Cyrus the Mardian” throughout his various writings. In a recent article on Cyrus, for example, Heinsohn refers to the Persian king as “the young Mardian,” or “the rising star of the Mardian/Amardian tribe.”²⁹ Heinsohn has actually gone so far as to claim that Darius was a Mardian as well!³⁰

Here, too, it is most unlikely that there exists a connection between the Sumerian word Martu and the Persian tribe name Mardoï, since the latter word is Indo-European in origin and, as previously noted, there is no known relationship between Sumerian and Persian.

²⁴“Sumerians and Akkadians Never Existed,” (Bremen, 1986), p. 23.

²⁵Ibid., p. 52.

²⁶J. Oates, *Babylon* (London, 1979), p. 19 writes: “In vocabulary, grammar and syntax, however, Sumerian stands alone and seems not to be related to any other known language, living or dead.”

²⁷*The Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, 1968), p. 93.

²⁸“Ancient Near Eastern Chronology Revisited,” *The Velikovskian* I:1, 1993, pp. 34-35.

²⁹“Cyrus the Mardian/Amardian...,” *The Velikovskian* III:1, 1997, pp. 13, 16.

³⁰See footnote 53.

About the only way there could be a relationship between the two words is if the Persian tribal name was a loanword from the original Sumerian.

In support of his claim, as we have seen, Heinsohn cites Herodotus 1.84. What, then, does the “Father of History” have to say about the “Mardoï”?:

“This was how Sardis was taken. On the fourteenth day of the siege Cyrus sent officers to ride around his lines and tell the troops that he promised a reward for the first man to scale the wall. Following this an attempt was made in force, but it failed and was abandoned; then a Mardian named Hyroeades resolved to try at a point in the fortification which was unguarded, because a successful attack there had never been supposed possible....He [Hyroeades] had then made the ascent himself, and other Persians followed; after them a great many more climbed up, and Sardis was taken and sacked.”

I dare say that few readers, apart from Heinsohn and his supporters, would understand this passage as conclusive proof that Cyrus himself stemmed from the Mardian clan.

Heinsohn elsewhere points to an obscure prophecy by Favorinus, a writer from the time of Hadrian, which states that “A Mardian will overthrow Sardis.” Heinsohn, not surprisingly, takes this as a reference to Cyrus since that king did indeed conquer Sardis.³¹ Yet as can be seen from the aforementioned quote from Herodotus, this prophecy does not refer to Cyrus at all! Rather, it refers to a fellow named Hyroeades who first succeeded in scaling the Sardian walls. That Cyrus, like the other Persian rulers, employed numerous foreign mercenaries is well-known, as is the fact that Herodotus is here embellishing his account with folktales of heroic ascents. Once again, there is no justification whatsoever for Heinsohn using this prophecy as support for the claim that Cyrus descended from the Mardian tribe.

Witness further that Heinsohn has taken this quote out of context, thereby distorting its original meaning. The original passage from Favorinus—*De Fortuna* 22—reads as follows:

“Why does Meles walk around the wall with a lion? For Cyrus will conquer the Medes, Zopyrus the Babylonians, a Mardian will overthrow Sardis, and Troy will fall to a horse.”³²

As can be seen, Cyrus is clearly distinguished from the unnamed Mardian in question, thereby undermining Heinsohn’s claim that Favorinus somehow supports the contention that Cyrus was a Mardian.

³¹In “Cyrus the Mardian...,” *The Velikovskian* III:1 (1997), p. 14, Heinsohn quotes this passage while inserting Cyrus’ name in parentheses: “A Mardian (i.e., Cyrus) will overthrow Sardis.” Here’s what Heinsohn wrote on Kronia in a post this past year (1997): “‘A Mardian will take Sardes <then, the New York of Asia Minor> and Troy will fall to the horse’, is a typical way the Greeks summarized ancient history. Cyrus was this Mardian.”

³²Quoted from Heinsohn’s own source, J. Pedley, *Ancient Literary Sources on Sardis* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 37.

Heinsohn elsewhere cites Herodotus 1:125 in support of his Mardian thesis. This passage proves to be of more relevance for Cyrus' bloodlines and thus will be quoted in full:

“The Persian nation contains a number of tribes, and the ones which Cyrus assembled and persuaded to revolt were the Pasargadae, Maraphii and Maspai, upon which all the other tribes are dependent. Of these the Pasargadae are the most distinguished; they contain the clan of the Achaemenidae from which spring the Perseid kings. Other tribes are the Panthialaei, Derusiaei, Germanii, all of which are attached to the soil, the remainder--Dai, Mardi, Dropici, Sagartii--being nomadic.”

Here it is apparent that Herodotus regards the Pasargadae *and not the Mardoii* as the original tribe which produced the Achaemenid rulers. In this Herodotus has the full support of the Persian sources themselves, which likewise present the Pasargadae as the ancestral tribe of Cyrus and Darius. Thus, the so-called Cyrus Cylinder quotes the king himself as saying: “I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king...son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, of a family [which] always [exercised] kingship.”³³

Teispes, according to Darius' inscriptions, was the son of Achaemenes, from whom derives the term Achaemenid. As is evident from this genealogy, there is not the slightest trace of Mardian blood in the immediate ancestry of Cyrus the Great.

The sole support for Heinsohn's idiosyncratic position that Cyrus stemmed from the Mardian clan consists of a statement from Nicholas of Damascus, ostensibly quoting Ctesias, the latter a Greek doctor who served at the court of Artaxerxes II (c. 414-397 BC). Nicholas states that Atradates the Mardian was the father of Cyrus.³⁴

Is there any reason, then, to take Ctesias as a reliable witness for the specifics of Persian history? On the contrary, he is known to be a most unreliable source. Amelie Kuhrt, writing for the *Cambridge Ancient History*, had this to say about Ctesias:

“Unfortunately, there is little evidence to indicate that Ctesias had access to any particularly reliable source about earlier Persian history, so that his use for the purposes of this chapter is negligible.”³⁵

Fol and Hammand, writing for the same publication, describe Ctesias as “far from dependable.”³⁶ J.M. Cook cautioned that modern historians should disregard Ctesias as a historical source altogether:

“When we discover that...Ctesias' familiarity with the Persian records did not prevent him from interpreting Darius' Behistun text as a description of Semiramis' ascent of the

³³Quoted from J. Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia: From 550 BC to 650 AD* (London, 1996), p. 45.

³⁴“Cyrus the Mardian...,” p. 13.

³⁵“Babylonia from Cyrus to Xerxes,” *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1988), p. 118.

³⁶“Persia in Europe, apart from Greece,” *op. cit.*, p. 240.

cliff on a mountain of pack-saddles, we have no choice left but to reject his entire claim to documentation... We can now check Ctesias at many points against Assyrian or Babylonian texts and the Old Persian inscriptions; and we find that—apart from the tittle-tattle about personages of the court which we have little means of checking—the specific information that he gives is usually quite false... On the balance, it seems most prudent to disregard him as a serious historical source, though the narrative of events will be the poorer for doing so; and this obliges us to jettison much of the historical information transmitted by later writers who used him as an authority.”³⁷

Yet this is the fellow Heinsohn would have us follow in rewriting Persian history!

One of Heinsohn’s most bizarre arguments for identifying the Persian Mardoï with the Semitic finds him referring to the Cyrus Cylinder, a famous bit of propaganda commissioned by the great King himself:

“In the so-called Cyrus-Cylinder one can read in cuneiform that the Martu chieftains kneel before Cyrus to render their allegiance. Assyriologists consider their use of the word ‘Martu’ an anachronism. I simply believe these Martu=Amurru=Amorites to be the Mardians from the heartland of Persian who swear allegiance to their tribe’s most famous son.”³⁸

As is so often the case with Heinsohn, however, he has completely misrepresented the contents of the Cyrus Cylinder. What is actually reported in the king’s chronicle is that leaders from both sides of the ancient Near East came to pay homage to the new king, even those from the West, such as the Martu, who live in tents: “All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon.”³⁹ Rather than coming from the Persian heartland, as imagined by Heinsohn, the nomadic Martu are clearly represented as coming from the “West”; i.e., the Syrian desert region where most scholars have sought their original homeland. Heinsohn’s treatment of the text here is shoddy in the extreme if not downright deceptive.

Darius as Lawgiver

Given Hammurabi’s renown as a lawgiver, Heinsohn is at pains to depict Darius in a similar light. Indeed, Heinsohn has stated, as if it was well-known, that Darius was the greatest lawgiver in all antiquity. Here’s a representative quote from one of his articles:

“Though Darius I—according to his own (5), but also Greek (6) and Hebrew (7) accounts—is considered to be the most important law giver of antiquity and the first king

³⁷ J.M. Cook, “The Rise of the Achaemenids and Establishment of Their Empire,” in I. Gershevitch ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2 (London, 1985), pp. 205-206.

³⁸ “Cyrus the Mardian...,” op. cit., p. 19.

³⁹ Quoted from J. Pritchard ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, 1958), p. 208. J.M. Cook, op. cit., pp. 212.

to have placed publicly legible laws in all parts of the empire, no law by Darius has ever been found (8).”⁴⁰

That Darius was considered the greatest lawgiver of antiquity is little more than a figment of Heinsohn’s imagination. As we will see, there is scant evidence that such was the case.⁴¹

The primary source for Heinsohn’s position here is Olmstead, who wrote as follows of Darius’ laws:

“Darius, however, was determined that he should be ranked with Hammurabi as a great lawgiver. Fortune was not so kind. While tablet after tablet has been unearthed with extracts from Hammurabi’s casebook, the Ordinance of Good Regulations [Darius’s laws] has been so completely lost that it is actually necessary to prove that it ever existed. The few contemporary references in the business documents do confirm its reality and witness certain legal categories it included, but there is not enough for comparison with the treatment accorded in the earlier lawbook [i.e., Hammurabi’s].”⁴²

Heinsohn, needless to say, takes the absence of Darius’ laws as a point in his favor, since he believes Hammurabi’s laws *were* the laws of Darius. As a fellow who otherwise emphasizes physical remains to the point of fixation, however, Heinsohn’s position here is hardly consistent. In order to believe in Darius’ status as a great lawgiver one would naturally like to see some physical evidence for his laws and legal reforms.

Yet despite the claims of Olmstead, most scholars have expressed doubt about Darius’ standing as a great lawgiver. T. Cuyler Young, writing for the *Cambridge Ancient History*, offered the following observation:

“Much has been made over the years of Darius as a law reformer and law-maker. It has even been suggested that he was the Hammurabi or Solon of his time and place. While it is true that the Persians (and the Medes) had something of a reputation in the ancient world for their law...nevertheless, convincing evidence for major legal reforms and codification under the Achaemenids, and particularly in the reign of Darius, remains elusive.”⁴³

Amelia Kuhrt, writing for the same publication, expressed similar doubts,⁴⁴ as did J.M. Cook:

⁴⁰“Ghost Empires,” op. cit., p. 14.

⁴¹Of the sources cited by Heinsohn, only Plato supports his view, few of the other sources even mentioning Darius, much less in a law-giving capacity.

⁴²A. T. Olmstead, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴³ T. Young, “The Early History of the Medes and Persians...,” in J. Boardman et al ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1988), p. 94.

⁴⁴A. Kuhrt, “Babylonia from Cyrus to Xerxes,” op. cit., p. 132: “In connexion with the administrative reform, Darius has often been credited with introducing an imperial law-code, although the evidence for

“A chance remark of Plato’s in his notorious seventh letter has conferred on Darius the posthumous distinction of being the great law-giver of ancient Persia and thereby the conservator of its empire. This goes beyond the facts. Darius certainly did not originate a body of law for the Persians or for the Persian empire. But he did recognize the importance of codified law and was much concerned to have regulations or patents that existed in the socially advanced provinces of the empire written down and transcribed for the use of officials there. This is most evident in Egypt, where a rescript of 518 B.C. to the satrap enjoined the formation of a commission to collect the law as it had stood in Pharaoh Amasis’ 44th year (i.e., at the end of his reign) and translate it into the scripts of everyday use.”⁴⁵

It is important to note, however, that even if Olmstead is right as to Darius’ standing as a lawgiver, the upshot of his discussion remains absolutely damning to Heinsohn’s historical reconstruction. As Olmstead points out, various ancient kings, including Sargon and Assurbanipal, quoted from Hammurabi’s famous law code.⁴⁶ Indeed, a copy of the Code of Hammurabi was discovered among the tablets in Assurbanipal’s library at Nineveh and this later version allows modern scholars to restore various sections damaged on the original stele.⁴⁷ Inasmuch as Assurbanipal lived over a century before Darius, it is difficult to understand how he came to possess the legal code of the Persian king.⁴⁸

In addition to Sargon and Assurbanipal, Olmstead lists Darius himself among those who copied from the code of Hammurabi. Upon enumerating numerous parallels between the law code of Hammurabi and that of Darius, Olmstead offered the following conclusion:

“In view of all these detailed parallels, there can no longer be any reasonable doubt that Darius and his legal advisors had before them an actual copy of Hammurabi’s lawbook. Quite possibly he used the original stele, preserved in the temple of Inshushinak at Susa.”⁴⁹

Olmstead goes on to add the following tidbit of information which, if true, is absolutely fatal to Heinsohn’s attempt to identify Hammurabi and Darius:

this is slight and disputed. Nor is a major reform in the local administration of law really traceable [in Babylon].”

⁴⁵ J.M. Cook, op. cit., p. 221.

⁴⁶ A.T. Olmstead, p. 121.

⁴⁷ J. Oates, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴⁸ In fairness to Heinsohn, he identifies Sargon with Artaxerxes I and Assurbanipal with Artaxerxes II, so it is still possible for him to claim that they could have quoted from Darius/Hammurabi. Yet these two identifications are quite impossible for a host of reasons. The annals of Assurbanipal, for example, mention Cyrus I—Cyrus the Great’s grandfather—among those who paid him tribute. This precludes Assurbanipal being placed *after* Darius as per Heinsohn’s reconstruction, since some 100 years separate Cyrus I from Darius.

⁴⁹ A.T. Olmstead, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

“Continued use of Hammurabi’s collection [of laws] was possible for well beyond a millennium...As such, it was adopted for use by the Persian conquerors. Cyrus, in an Akkadian proclamation intended for Babylonian reading, does sincere homage of the great lawbook by imitating its very phraseology. That this was no mere lip service is proved by a document of his third regnal year which bases the decision on the ‘king’s judgments.’”⁵⁰

No doubt Heinsohn missed this paragraph.

The Worship of Analogous Deities

As is apparent from the famous stele bearing his code of laws, which shows the king before Shamash, Hammurabi is famous for his devotion to the Semitic sun-god:

“By the command of Shamash, the great judge of heaven and earth, may I make righteousness to shine forth on the land. By the word of Marduk my lord may there be none to set aside my statutes.”⁵¹

Darius, as we have seen, was renowned for his patronage of Ahuramazda, the leading god of the Zoroastrian religion: “A great god is Ahuramazda, who gave this beautiful work, who gave favor to man, who gave wisdom and friendliness to Darius the king.”⁵² Indeed, in his numerous royal inscriptions, Darius never mentions any other god besides Ahuramazda.⁵³

Heinsohn would recognize a parallel between the Semitic god and Ahuramazda: “The devotion of Hammurabi the Mardu to Shamash—one Babylonian version of Darius the Mardian’s High God Ahura-Mazda (addressed as ‘Allwise Lord’)—provided one of the minor reasons for identifying the two figures.”⁵⁴ Why this should be the case, Heinsohn does not elaborate. Yet the identification of Ahuramazda with the sun, common in older works, has long since been abandoned.⁵⁵ In any case, it is difficult to see what Heinsohn would gain were the identification to hold, since he is still faced with the major problem of explaining why Hammurabi worships a vast Semitic pantheon while Darius tends toward monotheism, worshipping Indo-European gods alone. Until he answers this question, Heinsohn’s argument here amounts to little more than grasping at straws.

The argument from stratigraphy

Heinsohn has become famous for arguing that the key to understanding ancient chronology is a properly ordered stratigraphy. According to him, there are really only four distinct strata recognizable in the ground between the Stone Age and Hellenistic

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 121.

⁵¹J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵²A.T. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁵³Ibid., p. 195.

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⁵⁵See the discussion in J. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 103-106.

times, those corresponding to the Persian, Median (Mitannian), Assyrian (=Old Akkadian=Hyksos), and Early Assyrian periods respectively. Heinsohn claims that, at Mari and a handful of other sites, the strata associated with the “Old Babylonian” period are found directly beneath the Greek levels, thereby supporting his identification of Hammurabi’s period with that of Darius and the Persians, since the archaeological remains of the latter would naturally be sought for immediately before the arrival of Alexander the Great.

It is worth noting that even were this claim true—it is false, in fact—the presence of Old Babylonian strata immediately beneath the Hellenistic strata would still not obviate the unequivocal historical evidence that Hammurabi preceeded Darius and that the two kings were not one and the same (Hammurabi would still preceed Nabonidus and Nabonidus would still preceed Darius, for example). At most, one would be forced to entertain the conclusion that the Old Babylonian period needs to be downdated to some extent, a scenario that I, for one, would welcome. Before one could entertain that hypothesis, however, it would first be necessary show that the presence of Old Babylonian strata beneath the Hellenistic is not a result of pure chance, such as the abandonment of a particular site for two thousand years before reoccupation under the Greeks (this appears to have been the general situation which prevailed at Mari, for example). One would also have to rule out the possibility of intentional destruction of intermediate levels. How many ancient kings boast of razing a particular city to the very foundations before constructing their own city?

Note further that it is not the occasional presence of Old Babylonian remains beneath Hellenistic strata that would prove Heinsohn’s case; rather it would be necessary for such a relationship to consistently prevail at different stratigraphical sites. If Persian strata were to be found immediately beneath the Hellenistic strata accompanied by the presence of Old Babylonian or other intermediate strata *below* the Persian then Heinsohn’s thesis would be disproved immediately. It is this latter situation which typically prevails, needless to say.

As an example, let’s examine the stratigraphy at Mari, arguably the most extensive collection of Old Babylonian remains in the entire ancient Near East. According to his royal inscriptions, as we have seen, Hammurabi first attacked the famed city in his 32nd year, returning two years later whereupon he proceeded to thoroughly loot the city’s many treasures and burn the palace to the ground. Here’s how one archaeologist summarized the situation prevailing at this rich site:

“The destruction of 1760 BCE, put an end to Mari as the capital of a realm playing a major role in the interchange of the cities of the ancient Near East. However, the traces of later structures attest that the city did not disappear overnight. People continued to live in the ruins of the city Hammurabi devastated. The remains of that epoch, the Khana period (seventeenth-sixteenth centuries BCE), are generally rather poor;...The Middle Assyrian period (thirteenth-twelfth centuries BCE) is represented by a modest structure located on the tell’s northwest promontory and chiefly by a cemetery installed in the ruins of the Royal Palace, which demonstrates a certain affluence of the population.

Another cemetery belongs to the Seleucid, or Parthian, period and it seems that Tell Hariri was then occupied by a modest village dependent on Dura-Europos. It seems that from that time onward, except for a contemporary cemetery on the northeast, the site was deserted.”⁵⁶

In Heinsohn’s scheme, however, whereby the ancient powers are reshuffled like a stack of cards, the Middle Assyrian period is identified with the early Achaemenid period.⁵⁷ Thus it is quite impossible for the Middle Assyrian strata (which Heinsohn would associate with the reigns of Cyrus the Great and Cambyses) to follow the Old Babylonian strata (which Heinsohn would associate with Darius/Hammurabi), as at Mari. In short, using Heinsohn’s own best case for identifying the Old Babylonian period with the Persian period we have found it hopelessly flawed from a stratigraphical standpoint. And stratigraphy, it will be remembered, is supposed to be Heinsohn’s greatest ally.

Heinsohn and his followers are forever pointing to the relative paucity of Persian strata throughout the ancient Near East. In fairness to Heinsohn, this is a valid point and it deserves an answer. Yet a definitive answer to this question will most likely be possible only at some point in the future, once all the relevant sites have been thoroughly excavated. Here’s how one scholar summarized the relative scarcity of architectural remains from this period in ancient Palestine:

“Three characteristic features of Persian-period strata have contributed to the archaeological picture and the disappointing results from the excavations at the large mounds: (1) after the Persian period, numerous mounds were abandoned and never resettled (e.g., Megiddo, Tell el-Hesi, and Jericho, among others), and because the stratum from this period was the topmost on the site, it was exposed to the dangers of denudation; (2) at those sites where settlement continued (at Samaria, Shechem, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ramat Rehel, for example), the Persian-period level of occupation was severely damaged by intensive building activities in the Hellenistic-Roman period; and (3) at most of the large sites excavated (such as Hazor, Megiddo, Tell Jemmeh, Tel Sera’, Lachish, and Tell el-Far’ah [South]), the mound was largely occupied by a palace-fort or other large building.”⁵⁸

Heinsohn has written as follows of the Persian remains: “Mainstream’s shock over the archaeological absence of the *imperial* dimensions of the Persians is softened only by local finds in Persia proper.”⁵⁹ Yet this statement is quite false. While relatively rare, perhaps, Persian remains are hardly confined to Persia proper. Far from it. In addition to the spectacular Persian cities unearthed at Persepolis, Pasargadae, and Susa, Persian remains are definitely attested throughout Palestine. Here’s how one scholar summarized the situation with respect to the Persian strata in the Sinai region:

⁵⁶ J.C. Margueron, “Mari,” in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, 1997), p. 414.

⁵⁷ G. Heinsohn, “Cyrus,” *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 21.

⁵⁸ E. Stern, “Cities of the Persian Period,” in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1997), p. 29.

⁵⁹ G. Heinsohn, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

“The conquest of Egypt by the Persian Empire heralded the establishment of a well-organized road system along the coast of northern Sinai, which included the building of forts, way stations, and landing facilities... The North Sinai Expedition recorded 235 settlement sites from the Persian period... The expedition’s distribution map indicates large concentrations in northwestern Sinai... Impressive remains from the Persian period were explored at the coastal site of Tell Ruqeish... Exploration at the large site of Tell el-Her revealed, beneath the rich settlement strata of the Roman and Hellenistic periods, extensive occupational debris from the Persian period.”⁶⁰

Note: The Persian strata are found right where we would expect them—immediately beneath the Hellenistic remains.

It is significant that, in his short list of Babylonian cities which have Old Babylonian strata found immediately beneath Hellenistic strata, Heinsohn neglects to include Babylon itself. Whelton, however, is not so cautious: “In Babylon, directly beneath the Greeks are found ‘Old Babylonians’ who are said to have ruled in the -2nd millennium, but whose archaeological layers show continuity with the Greek period.” What do we know, then, of the stratigraphy which prevails in Hammurabi’s own city? Simply this: Old Babylonian remains *are not* found directly beneath Hellenistic strata. Rather, the famous Neo-Babylonian palace of Nebuchadnezzar—among other remains—lies intermediate between the Hellenistic and Old Babylonian strata. One archaeologist summarized the years of excavation as follows:

“One primary result of the excavation was the exposure of the layers of the Neo-Babylonian period, which document the time of Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty. Because of the high level of the groundwater, the deeper layers of the Old Babylonian period could be reached only rarely. The periods of Achaemenid, Seleucid, and Parthian settlement were verified partially through excavation and by means of numerous surface finds.”⁶¹

According to Klengel-Brandt, the Old Babylonian strata were found *deeper* than those of Nebuchadnezzar, the infamous Chaldean ruler of the so-called Neo-Babylonian period. Contrary to Heinsohn’s expectation, the Old Babylonian strata *do not* lie directly beneath the Hellenistic strata. This singular fact is enough to disprove Heinsohn’s argument from stratigraphy once and for all.

As is well-known, one of the most spectacular finds in all of modern archaeology was the excavation of the palace walls of Nebuchadnezzar, the latter distinguished by their exquisite glazed-brickwork. While building his own palace at Susa over a century later, Darius apparently copied Nebuchadnezzar’s brickwork, recruiting Babylonian masons for

⁶⁰ E. Oren, “Sinai,” in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 5 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 43-44.

⁶¹ E. Klengel-Brandt, “Babylon,” in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1997), p. 252.

the job.⁶² In Heinsohn's chronology, however, wherein the reign of Nebuchadnezzar *follows* that of Darius, the king's recruitment practices make little sense, as it would have him employing Babylonian masons to create what was in reality a Persian innovation.

As is well-known, the palace of Hammurabi has yet to be found.⁶³ Most archaeologists attribute this to the fact that the vast majority of Old Babylonian remains lie buried beneath the current water level.

“Unfortunately, we know virtually nothing of Hammurabi's Babylon. Houses of this date have been excavated in the quarter of the city known as Merkes, but most of the 18th-century BC levels lie below the modern water-table, inaccessible to ordinary archaeological investigation.”⁶⁴

There are some reasons for doubting whether much remains of Hammurabi's palace in any case, since Babylon was sacked on numerous invasions. According to conventional chronology, Babylon was first overran by the Hittites under Murshili (c. 1595).⁶⁵ Several centuries later, the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (c. 1244-1208) pillaged the city and removed its gods.⁶⁶ Babylon was later sacked by the Elamites (c. 1159), who removed the famous stele of Naram-Sin and the Code of Hammurabi to Susa. Babylonian accounts remember these dire events as follows: “[The Elamite's] crimes were greater and his grievous sins worse than all his fathers had committed...like a deluge he swept away all the peoples of Akkad, and cast in ruins Babylon and all the noblest cult-centres.”⁶⁷

In 709, Sargon overran Babylon, burning it with fire and tearing up its foundations.⁶⁸ Yet it was under Sennacherib that Babylon suffered its worst devastation, in c. 689. Here's how Oates describes the situation, quoting the Assyrian king:

“The Assyrian king allowed his troops an unrestrained hand in its sacking, and Babylon was systematically destroyed and burned, the rubble thrown into the Euphrates. A deliberate flooding was engineered and the city's ‘very foundations were destroyed’.

I made its destruction more complete than by a great flood, that in days to come the site of that city, and its temples and gods, might not be remembered; I completely blotted out with floods of water and made it like a meadow.”⁶⁹

⁶²J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶³E. Klengel-Brandt, “Babylonians,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1997), p. 261, writes: “The Old Babylonian period...is still relatively poor in architectural remains. In Babylon itself, the high level of the groundwater has prevented the excavation of the architecture of Hammurabi's dynasty.”

⁶⁴J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁶⁵J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁶⁶J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁶⁷Quoted from J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶⁸J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁶⁹J. Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

That Sennacherib's efforts were not entirely successful we know from the fact that Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal, Nebuchadnezzar and others repeatedly rebuilt the famous temple of Marduk right over its ancient foundations. Thus, Esarhaddon wrote as follows of his building efforts: "I laid its foundation platform directly on top of its ancient footings, according to its original plan: I did not fall short by one cubit, nor did I overshoot by half a cubit."⁷⁰ Just how closely Esarhaddon followed his predecessors has been revealed by modern archaeologists.

On Darics and Deadends

Ancient coinage practices offer an excellent test for Heinsohn's thesis. As is well-known, archaeologists frequently employ coins in correlating various strata, as distinctive coins from one king or culture serve to provide a secure context for their level of deposit. The practice of minting coins for commerce was first developed by the Lydians in the seventh century BCE. Cyrus the Great, upon conquering Lydia, appears to have begun minting coins of his own in gold and silver shortly thereafter.⁷¹ Yet it was the coins issued by Darius himself, depicting a crouching Persian archer on one side, which were to become famous throughout the Persian empire. The gold coins became known as darics, and the silver ones as sigloi.

Such coins present seemingly insurmountable difficulties for Heinsohn's reconstruction. For if he is right in identifying Darius with Hammurabi, one would naturally expect to find gold darics galore in Old Babylonian deposits, such as those at Mari. Yet such coins are nowhere attested in Old Babylonian strata, to the best of my knowledge. One might also expect to find gold coins showing the Old Babylonian king in garb typical of that period. Once again, such coins are not to be found. Yet Persian coins were found in Babylon itself.⁷² How likely is it that Darius only minted coins in his Persian avatar, even when in Babylon?

The Interlocking Web of History

While no one would claim that conventional history as we have it is completely secure or without flaws, certain facts seem so well established as to approach certainty. For example, various Babylonian king-lists, chronicles, and inscriptions make the Assyrian king Sennacherib precede the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar and the latter precede Nabonidus, the king whom Cyrus overthrew while conquering Babylon in 539 BCE.⁷³

⁷⁰ Quoted from A.R. George, "Babylon Revisited: Archaeology and Philology," *Antiquity* 67 (1993), p. 743.

⁷¹ A. Bivar, "Coins," in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1997), p. 44.

⁷² E. Haerinck, "Babylonia under Achaemenid Rule," in J. Curtis ed., *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period...* (London, 1997), p. 31.

⁷³ Babylonian King List A, for example, includes a list of kings from the First Dynasty (Ammizaduqa) through the foundation of the Chaldean dynasty in 625 BCE. There Sennacherib definitely follows Hammurabi's dynasty but precedes that of the Chaldeans. The Uruk King List preserves a list of kings from Kandalanu (647 BCE) to Seleucus II (246 BCE), and there Cyrus and Darius are listed as following

These Babylonian records, in turn, agree with the general order of these kings in the Old Testament, which leaves little room for doubt that Sennacherib lived before either Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus. That Cyrus lived after Nebuchadnezzar is insured by the fact that he is credited with having freed the Jews from captivity, thereby reversing the earlier actions of the Chaldean king, who had ordered the Jews carried off to Babylon. This general chronology of the Old Testament accounts, in turn, agrees with Greek historians such as Herodotus, who likewise places Sennacherib well before Cyrus.⁷⁴ Nor does stratigraphy contradict the ancient texts on this score: The three uppermost strata at Lachish, for example, are clearly associated with Sennacherib's conquest of the city in 701 BCE (level III); Nebuchadnezzar's sacking of the city in 588/86 BCE (level II); and the Persian occupation (level I).⁷⁵

In recent years, however, Heinsohn has thrown all caution to the winds and sought to rearrange the periods of even these well-known kings, identifying Sennacherib (c. 700 BCE) with Darius II (404-359) and Nebuchadnezzar (c. 580) with Artaxerxes I (c. 450 BCE). In short, Heinsohn is now arguing that the greatest Chaldean king and one of the most famous Assyrian kings are to be identified with Achaemenid rulers! Writing for Kronia, an email-based discussion group, Heinsohn offered the following observation:

“As I have thought for a long time, one of the Artaxerxes (because one of them is credited with a Jewish exile)...is a good bet for an alter ego of Nebukadnezzar [sic] with his father Nabopolassar being an alter ego of Xerxes, the successor of Darius the Great. This would bring Nabonidus close to the younger Cyrus.”

Cyrus the Younger was the grandson of Artaxerxes I (c. 464-424 BCE) who, in an ill-fated attempt to seize the Persian throne, met his demise in the famous battle at Cunaxa in 401 BCE. As we have seen, Nabonidus' proper placement is some 150 years previous to this junior Cyrus, since he was conquered by Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE. How do we know this? Because there are letters and inscriptions from Nabonidus himself which confirm his intimate relationship to Cyrus the Great. Indeed, it is well-known that a cylinder text of Nabonidus from c. 554/53 or 550/49 BC BCE describes the impending threat posed by the Persian leader upon the latter's defeat of the Median army of Astyages:

“And indeed, in the third year [of Nabonidus' reign] came to pass, Marduk made rise against them [the Umman-manda, here identified with the Medes] Cyrus, King of Anshan, his young servant, and Cyrus scattered the numerous Umman-manda with his small army and captured Astyages, King of the Umman-manda and brought him in fetters into his [Cyrus's] land.”⁷⁶

Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus. See here the extensive discussion of A.K. Grayson, “Konigslisten und Chroniken,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 6 (19XX), pp. 86-135.

⁷⁴ Book II:141ff. As Peter James has argued, it is quite clear that Herodotus placed Sennacherib before the 26th Dynasty.

⁷⁵ D. Ussishkin, “Lachish,” in E. Meyers ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 320-323.

⁷⁶Quoted from J. Oates, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

Cyrus himself, in turn, provides an account of the capture of Babylon and its heretical king—the so-called Cyrus cylinder. Here’s a brief sampling from that document: “Without any battle, he [i.e., Marduk] made him enter his town Babylon...He [Marduk] delivered into his (i.e., Cyrus’) hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e., Marduk).”⁷⁷

In short, aside from completely ignoring the historical record, it is difficult to see how Heinsohn is going to succeed in downdating Nabonidus nearer to the time of Cyrus the Younger.

Given these apparently insurmountable problems, one can’t help but wonder why Heinsohn and his followers would seek to remove Nabonidus from his proper place in history alongside Cyrus the Great and downdate him to the time of Cyrus the Younger? As near as I can determine, Heinsohn seems motivated by the need to counter an important objection to his thesis raised by the historian William Stiebing. As Stiebing showed in 1988, Nabonidus excavated an inscription bearing the name of Hammurabi, an impossible situation given Heinsohn’s reconstruction, whereby Hammurabi (Darius) comes to rule *after* Nabonidus:

“If Heinsohn is right, a truly amazing feat would have been accomplished by Nabonidus, the ruler of Babylon whose reign began seven years after Nebuchadnezzar’s death. At Larsa Nabonidus found an inscription of Hammurabi (Oates, 1979, p. 161; Langdon, 1915/16, p. 105). Since Heinsohn identifies Hammurabi with Darius I of Persia (1987:123), Nabonidus succeeded in excavating a royal inscription of a man who would not come to the throne until eighteen years after Nabonidus himself died!”⁷⁸

Heinsohn’s most vocal defender, Clark Whelton, in apparent recognition of the force of Stiebing’s objection, proves no less reckless in attempting to rewrite history. Pointing to an unpublished article by Zeller and Völker which purportedly supports a radical downdating of Nabonidus, Whelton likewise holds out the possibility that Nabonidus lived *after* Darius. This, he claims, “could explain why Nabonidus claimed to have restored a temple of Hammurabi.”

The mind boggles at this sort of historical “reconstruction”.

Conclusion

In the present essay we have not been concerned with obscure minutia of ancient history or with distantly remembered people and places. Rather, the names of Hammurabi, Darius, Cyrus the Great, and Nebuchadnezzar are among the most famous in all of antiquity. Their exploits are the subject of numerous accounts at the hands of their native peoples, contemporaries, the Greeks, and various books of the Old Testament. The

⁷⁷ J. Pritchard ed., op. cit., p. 207.

⁷⁸ “Some Comments On Heinsohn’s Revised Chronology For Mesopotamia and the Near East,” op. Cit., p. 5.

relative chronology of these pivotal figures can be reconstructed in great detail from countless ancient documents and archaeological sources, making it quite certain that Darius reigned *after* Nebuchadnezzar and Hammurabi. What, then, are we to make of a historical reconstruction which attempts to turn this intimately intertwined and precisely constrained chronology upside down and topsy-turvy? The answer, quite frankly, is perfectly obvious: Heinsohn's reconstruction cannot be taken seriously for the simple reason that it is entirely at odds with the historical record it seeks to reform.

The mark of a sound theory is how many anomalies and unexplained problems it can handle without introducing a host of new problems requiring ad hoc solutions. While I do think it is possible that Heinsohn's historical reconstruction answers a few anomalies of history, it seems clear that his theory raises more problems than it solves and requires ad hoc suppositions galore. That Heinsohn is forever misrepresenting his sources does not inspire confidence in his methodology. Nor has Heinsohn been forthright or prompt in responding to criticisms as they arise. Witness his response to the objection raised by Stiebing: The fact that Nabonidus excavated an inscription of Hammurabi is impossible under Heinsohn's scheme. Rather than just admit he was wrong or offer a substantive rebuttal, Heinsohn recently admitted that he hadn't even bothered to check out the source in the ten years since it has come to his attention! Having previously offered up the claim that Nabonidus wasn't really referring to Hammurabi the lawgiver, Heinsohn then seized upon the idea that Nabonidus didn't really come before Darius/Hammurabi after all, as all the history books inform us. Now Heinsohn would have us believe that Nabonidus actually lived *after* Darius! The desperation apparent in this gambit is indicative of what many of us had known for some years now: Heinsohn's reconstruction cannot be made to square with the historical record.