

Chapter Three

Empires Collide – Contestants for Syrian Domination in the 9th/8th Centuries B.C.

The Contestants

In chapter one of the present book we reasoned that Ramses II must have ruled Egypt in the time frame 840-774 B.C. In chapter two we argued that the Amarna letters, at least those originating from the Palestine region, were written in the final decades of the 10th century B.C. (roughly 930-910). It follows that the kings of Egyptian dynasties 18 and 19 must have been contemporaries of the Jewish rulers of the united and divided kingdoms, whose lives are detailed in outline form in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible. They must also have lived and interacted with many of the powerful neo-Assyrian kings who dominated the trans Euphrates region during this time period, many of whom left for posterity detailed records of their dealings with the surrounding near eastern world. It should be possible, at least in theory, to synchronize the histories of these three dominant countries - Egypt, Israel and Assyria - particularly as they relate to the region of Lebanon/Syria, a land centrally located between, and therefore of considerable importance to, all three nations. The development of such a synchronized history lies far beyond the purview of this book. Let others take up the task. Our interest here is restricted to the most obvious synchronisms between significant events and prominent historical figures in the respective countries.

Yet a fourth nation enters the picture. Several times already we have had cause to mention the Hittites, the dominant Anatolian kingdom during the reigns of the 18th and 19th dynasty kings, unknown to modern historians until the discovery of the archives of several Hittite rulers early in the 20th century. Those archives, in conjunction with the Amarna letters, leave no doubt that Suppiluliumas, the most prominent king of the Hittite Empire period, was a contemporary of the terminal 18th dynasty kings, and that his successors Mursilis, Muwatallis and Hattusilis, were contestants for dominance in the Syrian region in the days of Seti and Ramses II of the 19th dynasty. As such these Empire kings are central to our discussion of the two centuries which concern us in this revision.

Our objective in this chapter is patent. All scholars accept the fact that the Empire Hittites were contemporaries of the (late) 18th and 19th dynasty Egyptian kings. When we moved the two Egyptian dynasties forward in time by well over four hundred years, we necessarily moved Suppiluliumas and his successors forward an equal number of years, into the 9th/8th centuries. This fact doubles our chances of confirming the accuracy of our 9th/8th century B.C. placement of Egyptian dynasties 18 and 19. We can now search for further evidence that *either* the 18th or 19th dynasty Egyptians, *or* the Empire Hittite successors of Suppiluliumas belong to the 9th/8th centuries. That will be our objective in the balance of this book. But first, as a necessary backdrop to our discussion, we need to produce king lists for Egypt, Assyria and Hatti for the time period in question. The chronology of Israel in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. is generally well known and will not be reproduced here. Dates for these kings will be noted on an ad hoc basis.

Egypt

To date we have provided dates for most of the terminal 18th dynasty kings, having established provisional dates for Amenhotep III (964-928 B.C.), Amenhotep IV/Akhenaton (940-923), Tutankhamon (923-914) and Ay (918-914) (see table 5 on page 25, reproduced below as table 6).

We also reasoned that the 19th dynasty king Ramses II ruled the country from 840-774 B.C., in substantial agreement with the Berlin chronology. But it has no doubt occurred to critics of our revision that we are left with an embarrassingly long interval of 74 years between Ay and Ramses II in which to insert the reigns of Horemheb, Ramses I and Seti I, who are credited with 27, 2, and 10 years respectively by the traditional history. How are we to account for the 35 superfluous years which fill the gap following Ay? Clearly we must either adjust our dates for Ramses II, lengthen the reign lengths of the kings Horemheb, Ramses I and/or Seti I, or assume an extended period of civil unrest during which no king ruled in Egypt (an interregnum). Either that or we must adjust our previously established chronology for the kings of the Amarna age. Whatever we do, we must be guided by the Berlin genealogy, which indicates that Horemheb was ruling Egypt at least as late as 885 B.C., while Seti

assumed power at least as early as 869 B.C. In the end we will adopt, in part, three of the four suggested remedies.

The dates for Ramses II are sacrosanct and cannot be changed appreciably. To set them aside would mean that we cannot rely on the chronology imbedded in the Berlin and Ashakhet stelae. In the discussion below we argue instead that the combined reigns of Akhenaten, Smenkhare, Tutankhamon and Ay may have extended to a slightly later date than suggested earlier, perhaps as much as ten years later. We also argue that the deaths of Ay and Tutankhamon may have been followed by a brief period of civil unrest. And finally, we increase the reign length of Seti considerably beyond the dozen years assigned to him by modern scholars. Our discussion will result in the following revised dates for the terminal 18th dynasty kings and the initial two kings of the 19th dynasty.

Table 6: Proposed Dates for the Late 18th Dynasty Kings, including Ramses I & Seti I of the 19th Dynasty

Name	Regnal Years
Amenhotep III	964-928
Amenhotep IV (co-regent with his father)	940-928
Amenhotep IV	928-923
Smenkhkare	923-920
Tutankhamun	923-914
Ay	918-904
Interregnum (Haremheb as general)	904-897
Haremheb (as king)	897-870
Ramses I	870-869
Seti I	869-840

Our defense of these dates proceeds upward from the reign of Seti.

Seti I

Seti I is widely acknowledged as one of the great builders in Egyptian history. The vast number of monuments and constructions credited to his reign, and the number and frequency of his military enterprises, all but demand that he be assigned more than the dozen years accorded him by

modern historians. In fact, earlier generations of Egyptologists did credit this king with a reign length at least double this number, and the incontestible fact that he died just short of his first heb seb (30 year) jubilee festival, based on at least one monument long known to scholars, makes us wonder at the strained chronology which insists on maintaining for him the fiction of a short reign. As early as the turn of the 20th century, Breasted argued in his *Ancient Records* that ...

Seti's reign may have been considerably longer than is usually attributed to him. He was about to celebrate his jubilee when he died, having left an obelisk unfinished, so that it was completed by his son, Ramses II. If his father reigned two and a half years, Seti's jubilee might have fallen in the middle of his twenty-eighth year. But as he did not live to complete the obelisk and celebrate the jubilee, he may have died a few years before the jubilee, after a reign of over twenty years. BAR III 131 (p. 67).

The logic of Breasted's calculations escapes me. If he is suggesting that Seti included the two years of his father's rule as part of his own we should point out that there is no evidence of this practice. The all but completed jubilee monument, taken at face value, establishes the fact that Seti reigned into his own 29th year. Scholars are agreed that Ramses II used the stele, modified only slightly, to commemorate his 30th year in office. Why would Seti have intended it to be used otherwise?

The twenty nine years brings the date for Seti's inauguration back to the year 869 B.C., in full agreement with our interpretation of the Berlin chronology, which places him in office in the years 869 and 853 B.C.

Ramses I

The two years assigned to Seti's father Ramses I in the revised history (870-869 B.C.) is consistent with the monuments and with the traditional overview of this king's very brief reign. We say no more about Ramses I in this revision.

Horemheb

If we assign to Horemheb the 27 years credited to him by the traditional history (a somewhat arbitrary figure based as much on the "inscription of Mes" (see below) as on any monuments), and if we assume his reign followed immediately the death of his predecessor, then his kingship would span the years 914-887 B.C., leaving a gap of 17 years between his death and the beginning of the reign of Ramses I. This state of affairs has no support from the monuments which indicate that Horemheb's tenure as pharaoh terminated the year Ramses I declared his kingship. In the revised history that would be 870 B.C. The 17 years unaccounted for must precede, rather than follow, his kingship, which means that his reign officially began in 597 B.C., or slightly earlier if he reigned longer than 27 years.

We know from multiple strands of evidence that Horemheb functioned as a general in command of the Egyptian army long before he became pharaoh. That military career dates as far back as the reign of Akhenaten. Through the reign of Ay his power increased sufficiently that he became, in his own words, the *de facto* ruler of Egypt. In a lengthy document known as his "Coronation Inscription" (BAR III 22-32) he recounts his rise to power from his youth, through his career at court, to his ultimate coronation. The wording of the text allows for the possibility, assumed here, that for some period of time following the death of his predecessor, and before he assumed the status of pharaoh, he ruled Egypt as an administrator. How else are we to interpret his declaration that after a period of time as an appointed deputy of an unnamed king (either Ay or Tutankhamon [see below]) there existed another phase of his career when

Behold, he administered the Two Lands during a period of many years; (when) there reported [to him] -- there [bowed down] to him the council in obeisance at the front of the palace, there came to him the chiefs of the Nine Bows, South as well as North; their hands were spread out in his presence, they offered praise to his face as (to) a god... When he came, the fear of him was great in the sight of the people; prosperity and health were besought for him; he was greeted : "Father of the Two Lands, excellent counsel of divine gift ... BAR III 26

There follows in the text a lengthy description of his coronation, said to have taken place only after "many days had passed by" during which he

functioned as "chief and hereditary prince". There is no suggestion that his coronation immediately followed the death of an existing sovereign. We assume therefore that Horemheb ruled the country for "many days" before assuming pharaonic status. If he became pharaoh in 897 B.C., or perhaps a few years earlier, then we hazard a guess that this "protectorate" might have begun as early as 904 B.C. It was certainly in force around the year 900 B.C. when the Hebrew Bible records an aborted attack by "Zerah the Cushite" on the fiefdom of Asa, the son of the Israelite rebel Jeroboam. We have previously suggested that this Zerah should be identified as Horemheb during the later's ascendancy, before he was widely recognized as pharaoh within Egypt.

Before proceeding we underscore the fact that this assumed interregnum is not an essential element in our argument. It is possible that Horemheb's reign actually extended seven or 8 years beyond the 27 years credited to him, and that he began ruling Egypt *de lecto* as early as 904 B.C. It is for other reasons that we document the high esteem in which this "army general" was held long before he became pharaoh. At least one monument preserves a memory of his extended "kingship" and since the text of this inscription also confirms one other aspect of our revised chronology it deserves mention in passing.

We have suggested, based largely on the Berlin chronology, that Amenhotep III ruled Egypt from 964-928 B.C. His successors, beginning with the sole reign of the "heretic" Akhenaton, were not highly regarded by the Egyptian populace, and the country was thrown into a period of confusion. Horemheb's rise to power occurred largely in this chaotic time frame. It appears that he was first appointed to office under Akhenaton after the later's move to Akhetaten (Amarna) following the death of Amenhotep III, thus in 928 B.C. If our relative chronology is correct Horemheb's career spanned the years from 928 to 870. He would have died in his 59th year of "ruling" in Egypt. It is therefore significant that at least one monument mentions that year in its dateline.

Since first published in 1901, a document popularly known as the "Inscription of Mes" has intrigued scholars, not only as one of the longest and most comprehensive legal documents ever unearthed in Egypt, but for the insights it provides into the chronology of the 18th and 19th

dynasties. The inscription documents a legal battle over the ownership of land which lasted for over a century, the latest phase of which took place during the reign of Ramses II. As in all legal manoeuvres, the various stages of the litigation process are historically referenced, and one phase in particular is clearly indexed to the "year 59 under the Majesty of King Horemheb".²³ Loret, who first published the document, "proposed as an explanation of the high date" that "Horemheb reckoned the reigns of his heretic predecessors as belonging to himself", an understanding shared by Egyptologists generally.²⁴ They are undoubtedly correct.²⁵

The significance of this document for our revised chronology is obvious. Our relative chronology assumed as its basis the reliability of the genealogy provided by the Berlin and Ashakhet stelae. The fact that the absolute chronology derived from it agrees with the "Inscription of Mes" so precisely, confirming as it does that Horemheb lived into his 59th year in office, is at least suggestive of the fact that we are on the right track. The combined "reigns" of Horemheb (ignoring Akhenaten, Ay and Tutankhamon), Ramses I, and Seti, precisely fill the time frame from the death of Amenhotep III to the advent of Ramses II.²⁶ There are no superfluous years.

Akhenaten, Smenkhkare, Tutankhamon & Ay

The observant reader will have noticed that we have revised our earlier dating of Ay, assuming he was in fact the pharaoh who preceded Horemheb. In the above discussion we have suggested that either

²³ See Alan Gardiner, "The Inscription of Mes: A Contribution to the Study of Egyptian Judicial Procedure", Vol 4 in Kurt Sethe ed. *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Aegyptens*, p 11

²⁴ Thus Gardiner (op cit p. 22) adds the comment "This is undoubtedly the correct view". The original remarks of Loret are found in ZAW 39 (1901) 4.

²⁵ The so-called "Table of Abydos", a king list constructed by Seti I, cites Horemheb as the immediate successor to Amenhotep III, omitting mention of the reigns of Akhenaten, Tutankhamon and Ay, providing support for Loret's interpretation.

²⁶ Critics might argue that the chronology of the traditional history also allows for precisely 59 years between the Amenhotep III (1405-1367) and the death of Horemheb (1335-1308?). But this chronology was constructed with the "Inscription of Mes" dateline specifically in mind. (We note especially the question mark affixed to the date for Horemheb's death, supposedly in 1308 B.C., reproduced from Gardiner's *Egypt of the Pharaohs*.) Not so with the revised history chronology which followed necessarily the genealogy of the Berlin stele.

- 1) Horemheb began to rule Egypt around the year 905/904 B.C. or that
- 2) his predecessor died around that time and an interregnum followed for several years until Horemheb officially declared his kingship. Previously, based largely on the Berlin chronology, we had suggested that Ay, who presumably preceded Horemheb in office, ruled from 918-914 B.C. How do we justify this "change of mind".

In fact, we have not changed our mind. The dates provided earlier were based on the reign lengths of the 18th dynasty kings Tutankhamon and Ay provided by the traditional history. At the time we were concerned only to explain how Ay might have been pharaoh in 917 B.C., in keeping with a strict interpretation of the Berlin chronology. But the reign lengths we used for Ay and Tutankhamon are at best an educated guess on the part of scholars, as is the assumed order of the two kings. The traditional history considers that the young king Tutankhamon was dethroned by the elderly Ay, who in time murdered his young rival. But this is pure guesswork on the part of scholars. There is no evidence of this in the monuments. We could argue instead that when Akhenaten died, Tutankhamon was still an infant, and that Ay ruled during that infancy, eventually yielding power to Tutankhamon. In that case his reign began at the death of Akhenaten in 923 B.C. and may well have extended half a dozen years beyond the four years typically assigned to him, say from 923-914 B.C.. Tutankhamon's nine years would occupy the time frame from 914-905 B.C. Considering the chaotic conditions that prevailed at the time, as suggested by the odd inscription that has been preserved from this period, we simply do not know precisely what transpired.

Alternatively, we might lower the 917 date referenced to Ay in the Berlin genealogy. Throughout we have allowed the possibility of minor local variations in the dates based on that monument, though we have had no reason to change a single number. It is possible that Akhenaten began and ended his kingship at dates slightly lower than those suggested, thus reducing the length of time he ruled jointly with his father. If so then it is possible that Ay did not begin his reign until around 915, or even a year or two later. And if he did, and if he and Tutankhamon ruled in succession, then their combined reigns would extend as late as 900 B.C., when Horemheb's reign might have begun. Under these conditions we could discount the hypothetical "interregnum" discussed earlier.

We leave the matter there. One point only should be borne in mind from these considerations. The reign of Ay and Tutankhamon may well have extended to the year 900 B.C., about 15 years beyond what was previously proposed. This implies that the dates for the Amarna correspondence (though not necessarily the letters from Palestine) should be lowered somewhat from those previously suggested. Those documents may date as late as the beginning of the 9th century.²⁷ The Amarna age, as adjusted, must lie in the years 930-900 B.C., and perhaps a few years beyond. And we need not assume, as is done in the traditional history, that Akhetaten (Amarna), the site of Akhenaten's reforms, was destroyed by Ay. It may not have been abandoned until a few years into the reign of Horemheb. Its destruction may have awaited the onset of the reigns of Seti and Ramses II.

Assyria

Since the end of the 19th century scholars have more or less agreed on absolute dates for those Assyrian kings who ruled during the 9th through 7th centuries B.C. This agreement is based largely on a few references to individual Assyrian kings in well defined historical contexts in the Hebrew Bible, augmented by detailed lists of kings, with regnal lengths included, preserved on cuneiform tablets excavated in the Assyrian homeland (the so-called Assyrian king lists). Additionally the Assyrian Eponym Canon provides a year by year accounting of the reign of each Assyrian king, referenced to the name of a leading official (*limmu*) in the country. The Canon extends from the end of the 10th century through the end of the 8th century, thus providing a reliable *relative* chronology for this important time frame. Variations do exist in the *absolute* dates assigned individual kings by the current generation of scholars, but these differ from the dates provided below by at most a few years. With that in mind we reproduce one such modern list, with dates sufficiently accurate for the purposes we have in mind.

²⁷It is generally assumed by scholars that Ay was the party responsible for the destruction of the site of Akhetaton (Tel el-Amarna). We believe instead that Horemheb should be viewed as the party responsible, and that the event took place very early after he became pharaoh. At least one of the Amarna letters, that from the Hittite king Suppiluliuma, is likely addressed to him.

Table 7: Neo-Assyrian Kings of the 9th and 8th Centuries B.C.

Adad Nirari II	909-889	
Tukulti Ninurta II	888-884	son of Adad Nirari II
Ashurnasirpal II	883-859	son of Tukulti Ninurta II
Shalmaneser III	858-824	son of Ashurnasirpal II
Shamshi Adad V	823-810	son of Shalmaneser III
Shammuramat (Shamiram)	809-792	wife of Shamshi Adad V during infancy of their son
Adad Nirari III	791-782	son of Shammuramat & ShamshiAdad V
Shalmaneser IV	781-772	son of Adad Nirari III
Ashur Dan III	771-764	
Adad Nirari IV	763-754	
AshurNirari V	753-746	
TiglathPileser III	745-722	
Shalmaneser V	726-722	
Sargon II (722-705)	722-705	
Sennacherib (705-681)	705-681	son of Sargon II
Esarhaddon (680-669)	680-669	son of Sennacherib, conquered Egypt in 670 B.C.

Hatti

The situation for the Hittite kings is quite different from that which prevailed in Assyria. On the one hand, because Hittite chronology is inextricably linked to that of Egypt, the commonly accepted dates for its Empire kings must be radically lowered to conform to the changes in Egyptian chronology introduced in our earlier chapters. On the other hand

the reign lengths of the Hittite kings is not so well established as those for Assyrian (and Egyptian) kings, and must, for the most part, be surmised from other considerations.

It is well known that three of the Empire kings of Hatti - Muwatallis, Mursillis and Hattusilis - were contemporaries of the Egyptian king Ramses II, whose dates we have moved forward 450 years. It follows that the accepted Hittite chronology must move in step an identical number of years. We reproduce below the table of Hittite kings from Gurney's Pelican classic on *The Hittites*, followed by a second column with all traditional dates reduced by 450 years. The resultant chronology (in the third column) serves as a basis for the minor adjustments made in the final column. An explanation of these refined dates follows the table.

Table 8: Hittite Kings of the Empire Period

Name	Traditional Dates	Dates Reduced 450 yrs.	Dates Further Adjusted
Suppiluliumas	1375-1335	925-885	908-858
Arnuwandas III	1335-1334	885-884	858-857
Mursilis II	1334-1306	884-856	857-836
Muwatallis	1306-1282	856-832	846-832
Urhi-Teshub (Mursilis III)	1282-1275	832-825	832-825
Hattusilis III	1275-1250	825-800	825-800
Tudhaliyas IV	1250-1220	800-770	800-775
Arnuwandas IV	1220-1200	770-750	775-765
Suppiluliumas II	?	?	765-760

In the traditional history the final years of the reign of Muwatallis, the whole of the reign of Urhi-Teshub, and much of the reign of Hattusilis III are inextricably linked to the years of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II. Documents from both Hittite and Egyptian archives confirm that Muwatallis fought a battle against Ramses at Kadesh on the Orontes in

Ramses' 5th year. Egyptian documents also attest a peace treaty forged between Hattusilis and Ramses in Ramses' 21st year, and a marriage alliance between Ramses and a daughter of Hattusilis in Ramses' 34th year. Since we have dated the beginning of Ramses' reign to the year 840 B.C., these three events must have taken place in the years 836, 820 and 807 B.C. respectively. Our refined chronology must ensure therefore that Muwatallis was on the throne in 836 B.C. and that the reign of Hattusilis spans the years 820 and 807. Accordingly we have left the reigns of Urhi-Teshub and Hattusilis unchanged from the reduced dates assigned them in column 2 and we have maintained the 832 B.C. date for the death of Muwatallis. Changes elsewhere in the king list, including a ten year reduction in the reign length of Muwatallis, and the assumption of an overlap in the reigns of Mursilis and Muwatallis, require some explanation.

It should be pointed out at the outset that the changes to the reign lengths of the first four and final three kings of the Hittite Empire can neither be confirmed nor denied. None of these kings, save Mursilis II, have left for posterity any documents which specify how long they actually reigned. Most have left no dated material of any sort. When traditional historians produced the dates in column one of our table they were, for the most part, making an educated guess as to the length of each king's reign. In modifying these reign lengths we are merely extending to ourselves this same privilege.

Traditional historians have correctly surmised that Suppiluliumas reigned for at least three or four decades, based in part on his legendary status and the accomplishments credited to him by subsequent generations, especially by his son Mursilis II. He died when plague ravaged the Hatti lands (see below). Scholars typically assign to him somewhere between 35-50 years. We assume the highest of these numbers although, as we explain below, our chronology can accommodate a reduction in that figure, lowering the beginning date for his reign by as much as ten to twelve years. On the other hand his son Arnuwandas III cannot have reigned for more than a few years before succumbing to the same plague that killed his father. Another son of Suppiluliumas, our Mursilis II, then replaced his brother as king. Fortunately the annals of this king have been preserved for us to read. One inscription in particular provides us with a

year by year accounting of Mursilis' military actions spanning the first ten years of his reign. Another group of inscriptions, less well preserved, can with difficulty be cross referenced to the "ten year annals" and appear to extend those annals a further ten to twelve years. Accordingly Albert Goetz, arguably the 20th century's foremost authority on the Hittite inscriptions, credits Mursilis with a reign of 22 years.²⁸ This figure may be excessive, though for convenience it is retained in the table 9 listing, where we have assumed that Mursilis ruled into his 22nd year.

The traditional history credits Muwatallis, son of Mursilis, with a reign of 24 years, but this is an approximation based on historical references contained in the inscriptions of his brother Hattusilis, who much later usurped the kingship from Urhi Teshup, the son of Muwatallis. Hattusilis claims to have served under Muwatallis in a quasi regal capacity defending the northern frontier of the country, then to have assisted his brother quell a revolt in Arzawa, and finally, to have commanded the Hittite army on behalf of Muwatallis in the battle of Kadesh against Ramses II in 836 B.C. In one reference Hattusilis claims to have served his brother for ten years, which we believe to be the full extent of that service. And since Muwatallis appears to have promoted his brother to his elevated status soon after he became Great King of Hatti we need not assume that he ruled for much longer than that time, though in table 9 we credit him with 14 years, admittedly only an educated guess. The 24 years assigned this king by the traditional history has little support.

We have no quarrel with the registered reign lengths of Urhi-Teshup (Mursilis III) and Hattusilis. And our modest reductions to the reign lengths of the successors of Hattusilis are made to accommodate our belief that the Hittite Empire ended around the year 760 B.C.

Only one aspect of the table 9 adjusted chronology requires further comment. We have somewhat arbitrarily assumed an overlap between the reigns of Mursilis and his son Muwatallis, an adjustment forced on us by

²⁸According to Goetze "The preserved parts of the annals of Murshilish justify the assumption that his reign covered more - and probably not much more - than twenty two years". (CAH II Part 2 p. 126-7) The operative word here is "assumption". Goetze admits that "What we possess of annals from the later years of Murshilish - it is unfortunately incomplete - does not relate any large-scale military operations anywhere." (p 125-6) During these years Mursilis apparently fought only defensive battles on the north of his realm.

other considerations. In the next section we present arguments that Suppiluliumas ruled in the approximate time frame 908-858 B.C. We are fairly certain of the year 858 for his death. We are also certain that the rule of Muwatallis extended through the year 836, the 5th year of Rames II. And we see no reason why he might not have ruled into Ramses 9th year as argued by the traditional history, thus placing his death in 832 B.C. If we are correct in these assumptions then there exist only 26 years available to accommodate the reigns of both Mursilis II and Muwatallis, to whom we have assigned 22 and 14 years respectively. Even if we reduce the reign of Muwatallis from 14 to 10 years, the combined reigns of these two kings exceed the years available to them. One solution to the problem is to assume the existence of a "co-regency", for which there is ample precedent in Hittite politics. We have already seen how Hattusilis acted as a regional king for upwards of ten years in support of his brother Muwatallis, who alone retained the title of "Great King of Hatti". Many Hittite kings assigned their near relatives, often their sons, suzerainty over key cities, with the title "king of [city name]". In the course of our research we will see that Assyrian annals frequently refer to rulers of Syrian city states as kings of Hatti or Hattini, most of whom are only regional kings. It should therefore be no major problem if we argue that Muwatallis ruled some portion of the Hittite Empire while Mursilis was alive, and that his achievements during this phase of his career might mistakenly be attributed by scholars to his sole reign. And in the case of Muwatallis and Mursilis (II) we can suggest a reason why Mursilis might even relinquish to his son many of the functions typically assigned to the "Great King", all this while he was still alive. The reason is manifest in several of his extant inscriptions. For much of his life beyond his tenth year *he was not well*.

The Illness of Mursilis

In the initial paragraphs of his ten year annals Mursilis mentions the recent demise of his father and brother resulting from a devastating plague that ravaged the Hittite Empire.

Thus (speaks) My Sun Mursilis, Great King, King of Hatti, the Valiant, son of Suppiluliumas, Great King, the Valiant. Even before I sat on my father's throne, all the enemy lands were hostile to me. When my father became a god (i.e. died),

my brother Arnuwandas sat on his father's throne. Afterwards, he too became ill. When the enemy lands heard Arnuwandas (was) ill, the enemy lands began to be hostile. CTH 61

In yet another document the young king identifies the plague as divine punishment for certain sins of commission and omission on the part of his father Suppiluliumas, sins which he then sets about to atone for. This inscription (of which multiple copies exist), popularly known as the "Plague Prayers of Mursilis", appears to date sometime after the king's tenth year, this based on internal considerations.²⁹ In it Mursilis describes the extensive loss of life inflicted on the Hittite nation by a plague which has lasted twenty years, beginning late in the reign of Suppiluliumas, and persisting through that of his brother Arnuwandas into his own. We suspect, though Mursilis does not clearly admit it, that he himself is now ill.

Hattian Storm-god, my lord, and ye, Hattian gods, my lords! Mursilis, the great king, your servant, has sent me (with the order:) Go! To the Hattian Storm-god, my lord, and to the gods, my lords, speak as follows: What is this that ye have done? A plague ye have let into the land. The Hatti land has been cruelly afflicted by the plague. For twenty years now men have been dying in my father's days, in my brother's days, and in mine own since I have become the priest of the gods. When men are dying in the Hatti land like this, the plague is in no wise over. As for me, the agony of my heart and the anguish of my soul I cannot endure any more. Drive ye forth the plague from the Hatti land!" ANET 394-5

The prayer becomes more personal and more intensive as it continues. Near its end Mursilis pleads for his own life.

²⁹The fact that twenty years have passed since the plague first appeared in the Hatti land necessitates dating the stela sometime before the fifteenth year of Mursilis, probably closer to the tenth. The plague must have appeared five to ten years before the end of the reign of Suppiluliumas considering the sequence of actions by that king which are cited as its cause. It certainly does not date from the first ten years of Mursilis. Toward the end of his lament/prayer Mursilis acknowledges that "the protectorates beyond the frontier, (namely) the Mitanni land (and) the Arzawa land, each one has rebelled; they do not acknowledge the gods and have broken the oaths of the gods. They persist in acting maliciously against the Hatti land." Further on he notes that "those countries which belong to the Hatti land, (namely) the Kashkean country ... also the country of Arawanna, the country of Kalasma, the Lukka country, the country of Pitassa - these lands have also renounced the Sun-goddess of Arinna. They cast off their tributes and began to attack the Hatti land in their turn" ANET 396 This state of affairs differs markedly from that which prevails in the ten year annals.

Hattian Storm-god, my lord, save my life! Let this plague abate in the Hatti land.

Loss of life was widespread - both human and animal populations were drastically reduced.

What is this, O gods, that ye have done? A plague ye have let into the land. The Hatti land, all of it, is dying; so no one prepares sacrificial loaves and libations for you. The plowmen who used to work the fields of the god are dead; so no one works or reaps the fields of the god at all. The grinding women who used to make the sacrificial loaves for the gods are dead; so they do not make the sacrificial loaves any longer. From whatever corral (or) sheepfold they used to select the sacrifices of sheep and cattle, the cowherds and the shepherds are dead and the corral [and the sheepfold are empty] ANET 396

According to our makeshift chronology the plague lasted from about 865 to 845 B.C., into the twelfth year of Mursilis II. If the plague did not take the king's life, then we assume minimally that it did prompt him to elevate his son Muwatallis to assist him in defending the country. And soon thereafter Hattusilis, another of Mursilis' sons was also summoned to help.

Even if Mursilis survived the plague and lived out the balance of the twenty-two years credited to him by Goetze, he was hardly fit to govern the country. At least one other document suggests that about the same time he also suffered a stroke which permanently affected his speech and perhaps also his capacity to govern effectively.

Thus spoke His Majesty Mursilis, the Great King. I rode to Til-Kunnu ... and suddenly a thunder-storm broke out, whereupon the storm god caused terrible thunder and I became afraid and the speech faded away in my mouth and the words rose up with some difficulty. These happenings I forgot completely. But as the years came and passed by, it happened that this matter repeatedly occurred in my dreams and the hand of god struck me during a dream and my mouth went askew. Houwink ten Cate, 1966 p.34

We leave the matter there. We are confident that our dates are approximately correct. Further corroboration is forthcoming as we relate the lives and actions of the Hittite kings to the activities of their contemporaries in Assyria.