

# Assyria and the West





# Assyria and the West

A Fresh Look at the Unshakeable Pillars  
of Late Bronze and Iron Age Chronology  
in the Eastern Mediterranean World

*Edited by*

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Cover: Left: pedestal with inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta I (photo and courtesy of bpk-Bildagentur, Berlin);  
right: painted stela from Tell el-Amarna, 18th Dynasty (photo and courtesy, the British Museum Trustees, London).



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Dedicated to the memory of

**Oscar White Muscarella (1931–2022)**

archaeologist, rebel, sceptic, critic and low dater

R.I.P. Oscar!



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# Preface and Acknowledgements

We are happy to present to you the conference Proceedings of the Fourth ‘Bronze to Iron Age Chronology of the Ancient Near East’ (BICANE) colloquium, held in 2021 as a Webinar, some ten years after our Third BICANE colloquium (held at Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge). Unfortunately, the publication of this volume has been delayed by other obligations and extended illnesses on our part.

Already the realisation of the colloquium itself was plagued by several challenges, foremost among them the Covid-19 pandemic. While we had originally planned to have the meeting at the new premises of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) by the Thames in Greenwich (London), we were finally forced to turn the event into a Zoom-Seminar. This despite many previous months of organisation, mainly by Dr David Ellis of Cambridge Science and Archaeology Forum and his team (CSAF) and Felicity Cobbing (executive secretary of the PEF), for which and to whom we remain grateful. Further, we are particularly thankful that David Ellis and his team (especially Adrian Umpleby) provided their impressive technical expertise when the Webinar proved to be the only viable option short of indefinite postponement. We are also grateful for the financial support we received from the boards of CSAF and Wort und Wissen during the editing process. Without their support this volume would not have seen the light of day. We also wish to thank the authors for taking the time to research and to write up their articles and, most especially, for their patience with the editors. A warm thank you also

goes to those lecturers, who did not submit an article, but participated in the discussions at the conference and shared their views on related subjects.<sup>[1]</sup> We also thank Archaeopress (Oxford) for kindly accepting the proceedings – especially so David Davison and Mike Schurer who saw us through the process – and Friedrun van der Veen and Johannes Weiss for assisting with the editing, layout, and typesetting of the volume.

With the help of all these and other people (not mentioned here by name) we now can present the reader with a solid contribution to the topic of the colloquium ‘Assyria and the West’ (as related to the ‘Dark Age’ around the turn of the second to first millennium BC) that has plagued the archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond for so many years. Since the publication of *Centuries of Darkness* in 1991 this subject has continued to intrigue many scholars. The articles in this book bear clear witness to that. We hope that this book will contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discussions in the field and will stir further interest in the subject matter, hoping that it will solve some of the remaining enigmas in Ancient World Chronology. Even so, the alternative scenarios outlined in this volume will remain mere working hypotheses.

Peter James†, Pieter van der Veen,  
and Ronald Wallenfels  
(the editors) Summer 2024

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<sup>[1]</sup> Dr David Ellis (CSAF), ‘Towards Consilience in the Chronology of the Ancient Near East’; Dr Alexander Fantalkin (Tel Aviv University), ‘Tell Qudadi and Iron Age Chronology of the Southern Levant’; Dr Norma Franklin (Haifa University), ‘Construction, Correlation and Chronology. Megiddo: from an Omride city to an Assyrian regional capital’; Dr Takayoshi Oshima (Leipzig University), ‘The Cuneiform Scribes in the Southern Levant in the Sargonid Period’; Dr Johanna Regev

(Israel Antiquities Authority), ‘The Microarchaeological Radiocarbon Approach to Building the Iron Age Chronology in Jerusalem’; Dr Willelmin Waal (Leiden University and NINO), ‘“The Dark Age” and the Greek Alphabet’; Henry Zemel (CAENO Foundation), ‘Astronomy is the Arbiter of Chronology’. The abstracts of their lectures are found in the colloquium booklet, available on <https://uni-mainz.academia.edu/PetervanderVeen/Drafts>.

## Reader's Note

A completely consistent rendering of the names of people and places from among the widely different ethno-linguistic realms across the ancient Near East whose languages and scripts are only imperfectly understood by modern scholars – themselves of widely differing linguistic backgrounds – in a modern Roman-based script without resorting to specialized individual characters or potentially ambiguous digraphs is difficult. However, in a synthetic work such as this, some measure of consistency among the presentations seems a worthy goal. To that end, the editors have suggested to the contributors conventions for normalizing given foreign names guided by, e.g., Brinkman (1977) for Assyrian and Babylonian names, Kitchen (2009) for Egyptian names, Bryce (2005) for Hittite and Luwian names, Potts (2016) for Elamite names, and RSV for biblical names. These have been variously adopted by the contributors as suited their individual needs and preferences.

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# A General Introduction: ‘Assyria and the West’

Peter James†, Pieter van der Veen and Ronald Wallenfels (eds)

Some seventy years ago George Hanfmann (a true ‘great’ in the fields of both classical and Near Eastern archaeology) wrote that:

... a word of caution must be added regarding the so-called ‘absolute’ dates. Because the Near East is so vital for the chronologies of the European, Central Asiatic, and possibly even Far Eastern areas, it is well to remind ourselves from time to time that the two great pillars of the chronology of the Bronze Age, the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian, are not two stout towers resting on immovable foundations. They may rather be likened to two buoys linked by a chain and anchored, to be sure, yet raised or lowered by the waves of the sea. Both chronologies include problems which cannot as yet be solved except by reasonable guesses – the specific years to which observed astronomic data should be assigned, the estimates for the lengths of obscure periods, and the evaluation of possible gaps, duplications, and exaggerations in Royal lists and building inscriptions.<sup>[1]</sup>

Somewhat overlooked, Hanfmann’s caveats should have come into even greater focus in recent years. His first ‘great pillar’, the standard chronology of Egypt, has come under ever increasing scrutiny, particularly with respect to the ‘Third Intermediate Period Egypt’ (TIP) which separates the firm ground of Saite 26th Dynasty history (664–525 BC) from the New Kingdom.<sup>[2]</sup> Claims that secure dates for the Egyptian New Kingdom may be arrived at by ‘dead reckoning’<sup>[3]</sup> backwards through the TIP are demonstrably fallacious.<sup>[4]</sup> There remains a disconcerting amount of reliance on the fragments of Manetho,<sup>[5]</sup> while the alleged methods

of astronomically dating Egyptian history – both lunar and Sothic – have been realised to be far less reliable than once believed.<sup>[6]</sup>

Hence scholars now point increasingly to synchronisms with Mesopotamia as confirmation of the Sothic-derived Egyptian dates.<sup>[7]</sup> While Egypt and the southern Levant were at the core of our third BICANE colloquium (2011) and its subsequent proceedings (2015), the chronology of Assyria and the West is the focus of the fourth BICANE Proceedings, based on the conference held in 2021.

Assyria is clearly linked to other great cultures of the ancient Middle East, including the lands of the pharaohs, the Kassites of Babylonia and the Elamites, the Hittites and ‘Neo-Hittites’, as well as other local cultures of Syria, Cis- and Transjordan. They involve links between the 18th–19th Dynasty pharaohs and various Middle Assyrian and Kassite kings. The question must be asked, however, how valid those synchronisms really are. And how reliable is the Assyrian King List in general, which essentially provides Hanfmann’s second ‘pillar’ for Bronze Age chronology? Does Mesopotamian history, based solely on native and contemporary evidence, provide confirmation of the standard Egyptian-based chronologies of the Ancient Near East or are we dealing with circular arguments here?

In many respects, Mesopotamian chronology seems antagonistic rather than complementary to the Egyptian. Throughout the Late Bronze Age to the late Iron there exist tensions between the two in regions all the way from Anatolia to the Negev of Israel. From the Amarna letters we can see that some Syro-Canaanite rulers were using an Assyrianising variety of Akkadian,<sup>[8]</sup> which seems premature: according to the

[1] Hanfmann (1951, 361). He was reviewing Claude Schaeffer’s monumental *Stratigraphie comparée et Chronologie de l’Asie Occidentale (III<sup>e</sup>–II<sup>e</sup> Millénaires)*, *Syrie, Palestine, Asie Mineure, Chypre, Perse et Caucase* (Oxford University Press, 1948).

[2] See e.g. James *et al.* (1987; 1991a; 1991b; 1992; 1998); Morkot (2017); Morkot and James (2009); James and Morkot (2010); Morkot and James (2015); James (2017a, 2017b; 2021); Hagens (1996; 1999); Dodson (1993; 2012; 2013; 2015); Porter (2008); Thijs (2015); Wallenfels (2019).

[3] Kitchen (2007b, 166–167). Kitchen’s reasoning is uncritically accepted by most Egyptologists. For a conspicuous example, see Shortland (2005).

[4] See James *et al.* (1998); Morkot and James (2015); Thijs (2015).

[5] James and Morkot (2013, esp. 221–222). ‘Manetho’ gives us

an invaluable glimpse into Hellenistic chronography (Kokkinos 2015; Dillery 2015) and, crucially, the development of modern views of Aegean chronology (Kokkinos 2009, esp. 245–46) but should not be used for reconstructing pre-26th Dynasty history.

[6] Wells (1996); O’Mara (2003); Kitchen (2002, 11; 2007, 164).

[7] E.g. Spalinger (2002, 248); Depuydt (2005, 32; 2007, 60–69); Wiener (2006, 326–327); Krauss and Warburton (2006, 477); Kitchen (2007b); Dodson (2012, xi, 181–189); cf. James (2017a, 337–338); Dodson (2013); Aston (2013, 307–309).

[8] ‘Certainly the most striking feature of the Jerusalem scribe’s language, though so far it has not been recognized, is its large Assyrian component’ (Moran 2003, 265). For details of the anachronistic use of Assyrian script in the west in general, see von Soden (1986).

standard model, Assyria c. 1350 BC being only a nascent international state, still to make any military or political impact on the Levant or even on western Mesopotamia. It is Egypt, again, that provides the dates for the empire of Hatti based at Hattusa (Boghazköy), while Assyria controls those of the ‘Neo-Hittite’ kingdoms which succeeded it at Carchemish, Malatya, Aleppo, Hamath and Unqi in northern Syria during the Iron Age. Here, Imperial Hittite styles (in nomenclature and orthography) come into direct conflict with indications from Assyrian-dated artistic sequences. Despite the recent re-excavation of Carchemish on the Euphrates, the seat of a cadet branch of the Hittite imperial family, the question is still being asked:

Can we bridge the gap between Suppiluliuma II and the Suhi-Katuwa dynasty, a period of 200–300 years? ... the present picture given in various contributions that more or less eliminate the previously postulated gap of the Dark Ages is overly optimistic ...<sup>[9]</sup>

In southern Anatolia the rock carvings of Hartapu at Kızıldağ-Karadağ have provoked much head-scratching since their formal publication in 1992:

... there proves to be a chronological gap of about 300 years between the paleographical and the art-historical datings of the Hartapu monuments, which to this day remains without a satisfactory explanation. As an attempt, it was suggested that, while the inscriptions date to the late 2nd millennium BC, the figure of the king has been added later.<sup>[10]</sup>

The problem is acute (James 2021–2022). Further south, at Byblos on the Lebanese coast, links with Neo-Assyrian art have raised a long-standing mystery concerning its royal inscriptions. Whereas these would argue for the 9th–8th centuries BC, contemporary Egyptian finds push them back into the 10th century and earlier.<sup>[11]</sup> The problem bleeds over into the Aegean where the adoption of an ‘11th-century’ Phoenician alphabet by the Greeks in inscriptions no earlier than the 8th century, still provokes controversy.<sup>[12]</sup> In the far south, a ‘gap’ is apparent in the Negev between locally dated pottery, ultimately reliant on Mesopotamian links, and earlier Iron Age wares dated by pharaonic inscriptions.<sup>[13]</sup>

Between these two regions, Israel remains the focal point of one of the most heated debates in archaeology.

[9] Aro (2013, 246).

[10] Oreshko (2017, 48).

[11] Wallenfels (1983; 2019, 496–498); James *et al.* (1991a: 250–251, 276–277, 389, nn. 53–54); James (2008, 153–154); van der Veen (2015); more half-heartedly, Sass (2005).

[12] James *et al.* (1991a, 81–85; 1998, 29); Papadopoulos (2016); Waal (2018; 2019).

[13] Bimson and Tebes (2009).

Based on her conclusions from the palace of Omri-Ahab at Samaria, British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon dated the contemporary buildings of Megiddo Stratum IV (since referred to as VA/IVB) with the same pottery and architecture to the 9th century BC. This was against the American school of George E. Wright and William F. Albright, who held that they were from the 10th century BC.<sup>[14]</sup> Their argument was that the close similarity of the six-chambered gateways of Iron IIA Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer meant they were designed by the same architect, a fact allegedly echoed in the biblical verse stating that Solomon built at those three cities (1 Kings 9:15). A Kenyon-style low model has been famously promoted (without any due credit) by Israel Finkelstein in the so-called Tel Aviv ‘Low Chronology’.<sup>[15]</sup> But a corollary of the highly controversial Finkelstein version is a lengthening of the time during which the Philistine Monochrome and Bichrome wares were current – and, if Iron IIA began with the Omride Dynasty, a stretching of the Iron I period from 200 years to an implausible 300–350.<sup>[16]</sup> With the end of the LBA set at 1200/1175 BC by Egyptian chronology and the late Iron Age set by epigraphic and Neo-Assyrian evidence, the appearance of a clear ‘Dark Age’ in Israel, to match those in Anatolia, the Aegean and the Near East, is a logical fallout. As a chronological artefact this should have always been there but was masked by the very belief that Solomon belonged to the Iron IIA period and that this began c. 1000 BC.<sup>[17]</sup>

Albright, the last great polymath in the field, saw the onset of such a long Dark Age and the interconnectedness of many of the problems summarised here – exemplified by the title of one of his vintage papers: ‘Was the Age of Solomon without Monumental Art?’<sup>[18]</sup> Albright accused the then leading expert on ancient Near Eastern art, Henri Frankfort, of having unconsciously conducted ‘what amounts to a systematic campaign to discredit the entire Solomonic building tradition by the simple expedient of denying the existence of art or architecture in Greater Syria between ca. 1200 and 850 B.C.’ Frankfort had, for example, insisted on a 13th-century date for the ‘Neo-Hittite’ sculptures at Malatya

[14] Kenyon (1970, 248–250, 268–271; but cf. 346–347). For a restatement of Kenyon’s position at the last BICANE colloquium, see Chapman (2015).

[15] With the notable exception of Wightman (1990), James *et al.* (1991a; 1991b; 1992, 130) carried a lone flag for the Kenyonite position until Finkelstein began to resurrect the same basic arguments in 1996. For brief discussion, see James *et al.* (1998, 41, ‘Postscript’); James (2008); van der Veen (2020, 65–66).

[16] Perhaps because he has felt the weight of this problem, Finkelstein, in an astonishing *volte face*, seems to have announced in 2018 that the Megiddo gateway is Solomonic after all!

[17] See Kokkinos (2009, 51, n. 50).

[18] Albright (1958).

– and, at the other end of the divide, the (‘archaising’) sculptures from Aramaean Gozan (Tell Halaf) to the mid-9th century BC. Albright was also concerned about ‘the drastic lowering of the Iron Age chronology of Cyprus by Einar Gjerstad, which would logically carry with it similar lowering of dates in adjacent Syria, Palestine and Cilicia.’<sup>[19]</sup> Albright sought to solve the problem by nudging finds into the gap. Where Frankfort dated the sarcophagus of Ahiiram at Byblos to before 1200 BC, Albright moved it into the tenth century BC, still too high for comparanda from Neo-Assyrian art but not the conventionally dated Egyptian evidence.<sup>[20]</sup> Eric Cline’s recent claim, that this ‘Dark Age’ was rather ‘a new age with new inventions and new opportunities, as well as failures, in an age of chaos and reconfiguration’ cannot gloss over the fact that we are still dealing with troubling anachronisms, suggesting that we are in fact dealing with what appears to be a modern construct.<sup>[21]</sup>

Rather, as *idée fixe* the LBA/IA transition set at c. 1200 BC has also allowed a conceptual barrier to develop in our understanding of the origin and identity of various Levantine peoples. Several decades ago, it was thought that the Neo-Hittite states arose because of a migration of Luwian-speaking ‘Hieroglyphic Hittites’ who, pushed from Cilicia by the equally nebulous ‘Sea Peoples’, overran Syria to maintain a ‘strange afterglow’ of Imperial culture for several centuries.<sup>[22]</sup> Similarly old textbook assumptions that the Aramaeans, Philistines, Phoenicians and Israelites all somehow ‘arrived’ c. 1200 BC still influence our preconceptions. Earlier references to Aramaeans (cuneiform records), Philistines (Hebrew Bible), Tjekker and Sherden (Egyptian records), Phoenicians (Egyptian Fenkhu) and Israel, even Asher and other tribes (Egyptian records),<sup>[23]</sup> let alone Habiru (cuneiform), are still brushed aside as awkward curiosities. Other notions that still infest the literature are the ideas that cremation burial came onto the scene at the same time, and that bronze manufacture was miraculously replaced by ironworking with the advent of the Iron Age. (In Near Eastern terms it is at least a convenient though nicely misleading ceramic term.<sup>[24]</sup>)

<sup>[19]</sup> Kenyon (in Crowfoot, Crowfoot and Kenyon 1957, 196) invoked Gjerstad’s chronology for the Black-on-Red pottery from Samaria to support her 9th-century Omride date for the construction of its palace; cf. Tappy (1992, 126–132); James *et al.* (1998, 31).

<sup>[20]</sup> See Wallenfels (2019, 496–498).

<sup>[21]</sup> Cline (2024, jacket cover).

<sup>[22]</sup> See the magisterial handbook of Gurney (1954, 39–40, 129–130); and that of Roux (1966, 245); earlier, see e.g. Bonfante and Gelb (1944, 171–172).

<sup>[23]</sup> For an apparent pre-Merenptah reference to Israel in an 18th or early 19th Dynasty toponym list, see Zwickel and van der Veen (2017). For other possible references to tribal names in Egyptian topographical lists, see van der Veen (2022).

<sup>[24]</sup> See Chapman (1989 and 1990) for discussion and a suggested reform of the terminology for the ‘three age

Sometimes a single blow can smash through the conceptual barriers of what might be termed ‘1200ism’. The prevailing opinion that the Mycenaeans could not have been Greek was proved wrong, flatly, by the relative ‘outsider’ Michael Ventris when he deciphered Linear B in the early 1950s.

An option, now long discussed, is to simply lower the start of the Iron Age along with a revision of Egyptian Third Intermediate Period chronology – and there is much evidence from Mesopotamia that is in step. The Levant, the interface between the two areas is of key importance here due to its rich archaeology, and one strategy to resolve the complex issues involved is to work from the known to the unknown. Invasions of Mesopotamian conquerors such as Nabonidus, Nebuchadrezzar II, Sennacherib, Sargon II and Tiglath-pileser III (as well as Saite and Kushite pharaohs) have provided plausible links with the destruction levels of key cities such as Ekron, Lachish, Samaria and Megiddo, though some of these possibilities need closer re-examination.<sup>[25]</sup> Late Assyrian and post-Late Assyrian imports (glazed vessels, seals, fibulae, weights and other small finds) found *in situ* are of primary importance.<sup>[26]</sup> The same is of course true of Egyptian finds.<sup>[27]</sup> Imitations of ceramic styles such as ‘Assyrian Palace Ware’ and other Assyrianising styles in Cis- and Transjordan need careful consideration with respect to the time of their production in the Mesopotamian homeland and the adoption of styles in the distant peripheries of the empire.<sup>[28]</sup>

The stable chronologies of Assyria post 910 BC and Babylonia post 747 BC are also, of course, our best handle not only on the ‘mysterious numbers’ of the Hebrew kings but those of Tyre and other Phoenician, Philistine, Transjordanian and Syrian kingdoms.

The contributions in this volume deal with several of these important chronological aspects. We have also included a section on ‘science-based’ dating methods (radiocarbon dating, astronomical dating and DNA analyses). We are told by practitioners of these methods that they can confirm or refine the standard chronologies for the Bronze and Iron Ages. But have they really proved to be the *deus ex machina* that historians once dreamt of?<sup>[29]</sup>

system’ as used in the Levant.

<sup>[25]</sup> Bagg (2011); James (2004; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2015b); Franklin (2018a; 2018b); van der Veen (2020).

<sup>[26]</sup> Fantalkin and Tal (2015); van der Veen (2020).

<sup>[27]</sup> Knauf (2002); Fantalkin (2001); James (2008, 147, 156, 164); van der Veen (2020).

<sup>[28]</sup> Hausleiter and Reiche (1999); Na’aman and Thareani-Sussely (2006); Singer-Avitz (2007); van der Veen (2014); Hunt (2015); van der Veen (2020).

<sup>[29]</sup> For some critiques, see Keenan (2002); James (2012; 2013); Porter (2015); Zerbst and van der Veen (2015).

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## Obituary

### Peter J. James, 1952–2024



Peter James gained a BA Honours degree in Ancient History and Archaeology at Birmingham University, specialising in the archaeology of Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Syria/Palestine. He followed this with postgraduate research in Ancient History at London University. In 1976 he joined the core group of the Society for Interdisciplinary Studies (founded the previous year as the Interdisciplinary Studies Group) and was appointed History Editor for its journal, the *SIS Review*. The purpose of the SIS and its journal was to promote academic discussion of the theories of Immanuel Velikovsky in the areas of catastrophism and revised chronology. Peter also became a Senior Editor of the American publication *KRONOS*, another journal devoted to Velikovsky's theories. For both journals he produced many important articles in the area of ancient history, and also displayed an impressive knowledge of ancient astronomy and mythology.

Although it was chiefly through reading Velikovsky that Peter became convinced the chronology of the Ancient Near East was flawed, he was far from uncritical of Velikovsky's views. As the following example shows, he was diligent in checking the soundness of Velikovsky's arguments. In *Ages in Chaos, Volume 1: From the Exodus to King Akhnaton* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1953) Velikovsky pointed out that the Septuagint version of 1 Kings 12 contains extra information on the time Jeroboam spent in Egypt at the court of King Shishak; it states that while there he was given Ano, sister of the king's wife, in marriage. Velikovsky tells us that the name Ano is known from only one other source, namely a canopic jar dated on stylistic grounds to the time of Thutmose III. This seemed like convincing confirmation of Velikovsky's 500-year revision, in which Thutmose III is the biblical Shishak. Peter wrote a typically courteous letter to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, to whose Egyptian Antiquities collection the jar belonged. He requested more information, citing the catalogue number given by Velikovsky. He discovered

that the jar is actually from the time of Amenhotep III, one of many belonging to that king's family and harim.

In 1978 a conference on Velikovsky's theories was organized by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies and Adult Education at Glasgow University. Eight of ten papers delivered at the conference were related to Velikovsky's revision of ancient chronology; the remaining two were concerned with his cosmological theories. Peter gave a paper on 'Chronological Problems in the Archaeology of the Hittites'. He described the paper as 'of necessity, brief and sketchy', but in fact the level of detail was impressive. The paper presented a wealth of evidence for 'a radical lowering of the chronology for the Hittite Empire..., enabling it to overlap with the so-called "Iron Age Neo-Hittite" civilisation'. To that extent Velikovsky's revised chronology seemed vindicated. But Peter also made it clear that stratigraphical evidence from Anatolia and northern Syria entirely ruled out Velikovsky's separation of Egypt's 18th, 19th and 20th Dynasties. (Other conference papers, including the present writer's, agreed that these dynasties could not be separated.)

Later that year Peter returned to this problem in an extended review of Velikovsky's latest publication, *Rameses II and His Time* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978, published too late for discussion at the Glasgow conference). Peter focused on detailed evidence that there could be no gap between the 18th and 19th Dynasties ('A Critique of "Ramses II and His Time"', *SISR* III/2, 1978, 48–55). He ended his critique as follows: 'Some tentative beginnings of an alternative "Glasgow Chronology" are offered in this issue by Geoffrey Gammon and John Bimson. Many problems remain... but I would like to urge other workers in this field, and Dr Velikovsky himself, to consider this alternative possibility for the continuation of *Ages in Chaos*.' Further discussion of the putative 'Glasgow Chronology' appeared in *SISR* IV/2–3 (1979/80), with Peter replying

to criticisms from John Day (who wrote from a conventional standpoint) and Lynn Rose (a defender of Velikovsky). Velikovsky died in 1979 without – so far as I'm aware – responding to the challenges which emerged from the Glasgow conference.

So far Peter had not rejected Velikovsky's dating of the 18th Dynasty, though he had argued for some adjustments. However, when the *Proceedings* of the Glasgow conference were finally published in 1982 (SISR VI/1–3), Peter added a telling Postscript to his paper: 'The writer would like to add that he now feels somewhat higher dates than those experimented with in this paper are required by the evidence.' For those of us who knew the thinking behind this cryptic sentence, it marked Peter's departure from Velikovsky's revision, and also from the 'Glasgow Chronology'. I and others soon followed his lead.

But Peter remained convinced that something was seriously amiss with the chronology of the Ancient Near East and that the conventional Egyptian chronology was the root of the problem. The next stop on his journey became known as the James/Rohl chronology, as it emerged from his collaboration with David Rohl. Together with others they experimented with less drastic reductions for the dates of Egypt's New Kingdom, but eventually there was a parting of the ways. While David Rohl favoured a reduction of c. 350 years, Peter became convinced that a reduction of c. 250 years was to be preferred. In collaboration with I. J. (Nick) Thorpe, Nikos Kokkinos, Robert Morkot and John Frankish, he produced *Centuries of Darkness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991). David Rohl's revision (which became known as the New Chronology) appeared four years later (*A Test of Time: The Bible – From Myth to History*, London: Century, 1995).

Peter was the lead author of *Centuries of Darkness* and also designed its striking and symbolic cover – an incomplete jigsaw puzzle based on one of the battle scenes from Tutankhamun's painted wooden chest. The book was soon translated into Spanish (Barcelona: Critica, 1993) and later into Greek with an Introduction by Nikos Kokkinos (Athens: Aiolos, 2006). Unfortunately Peter's cover design wasn't preserved in either case.

The initial reaction of conventional scholarship to *Centuries of Darkness* was predictably negative; Peter and his co-authors were kept busy responding to volleys of criticism from defenders of orthodoxy. Peter was always gracious and entertaining in debate and for the most part seemed to thrive on it. He only became irritated when a critic didn't take the trouble to understand the issues before going on the offensive.

Peter held firm to the *Centuries of Darkness* chronology for the remainder of his life, believing c. 250 years to

be the maximum, and indeed the optimal, possible reduction from conventional dates. He continued to develop aspects of it in numerous papers, many of them published in mainstream academic journals – a testimony to the recognition he earned through his meticulous scholarship. An impression of his prolific output can be gained from the *Centuries of Darkness* website (<https://www.centuries.co.uk> – especially under 'The Continuing Debate: Replies to Critics and Further Research', and 'Recent Developments'); and see also <https://bham.academia.edu/PeterJames>.

By 2004 Peter, Pieter van der Veen and I felt more should be done to further discussion of revised chronology. The idea that emerged was to organise occasional conferences where scholars could discuss the pros and cons in an open-minded spirit. The first conference was held in Berlin (2006) and the second in Cambridge (2009). It was at this time that the discussion group would call itself BICANE. But it was not until the third meeting in 2011 (also in Cambridge) that publication plans originated, culminating in the first proceedings in 2015, edited by Peter James† and Pieter van der Veen. The conferences and proceedings have engaged scholarly discussion as Peter had wished and have advanced the initial thesis proposed in *Centuries of Darkness*. The present volume contains the latest fruits of that process.

Peter always described himself as a generalist, and indeed his interests were wide-ranging. He had a long-term fascination with the origin of Plato's account of Atlantis, and his evolving view on the subject eventually gave rise to *The Sunken Kingdom: The Atlantis Mystery Solved* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995). His ability to encapsulate prodigious research in a popular style is clearly on display here, and also in the two books he co-authored with Nick Thorpe: *Ancient Inventions* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1995) and *Ancient Mysteries* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

Our frequent e-mail exchanges ranged over many topics, including cosmology, vegetarian cookery (another subject on which he had thought of writing a book), growing raspberries and Doctor Who – a TV show we had both followed since the first episode in 1963 (he was no fan of the most recent series).

But above all Peter simply loved research and writing. He once told me he would need at least three lifetimes to achieve everything he wanted to do. I'm sure all who knew him are wishing his one lifetime had been a great deal longer. We have lost a dear friend, and the academic world has lost an original and brilliant scholar. Instances of 'James in prep.' in this volume and elsewhere will be a lasting reminder of his unfinished task.

John J. Bimson, 1st October 2024