



REPORT ON A PROJECT TO SYNCHRONIZE EGYPTIAN AND LEVANTINE CHRONOLOGIES OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BCE

Karin Sowada
Macquarie University

For the last seven years, the writer has been involved in the Associated Regional Chronologies of the Ancient Near East project (ARCANE). The purpose of this project has been multifaceted, built around the primary aim of developing a new and integrated chronological synchronization of eleven regions of Western Asia during the third millennium BCE.

ARCANE sought to replicate the success of the SCIEM Project by drawing together a cross-disciplinary international cohort of around 120 scholars from 82 institutions representing 28 countries (see <http://www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de/index.html>). Each had worked in different areas of ancient Near Eastern studies—archaeologists, scientists, epigraphers and art historians. The project received significant funding from the European Science Foundation. A key aim was to facilitate a consensus chronological dialogue between disciplines, between scholars working in different regions, and, importantly, between those often separated by external geo-political events. After some years of research, discussion, workshops and conferences, the ARCANE publications are now beginning to appear. These will have a significant impact on how the chronologies of the region during the third millennium BCE are viewed.

The initial research design was highly ambitious. It involved the assessment of both archaeological and radiocarbon data, with a reliance on assemblages and samples only from secure contexts, largely drawn from more recent excavations. Many project directors were involved and shared their material, much of it unpublished. The ARCANE centerpiece was the creation of a large open-access searchable database, using many archaeological sites and types of material (see <http://www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de/database/index.html>). Criteria for inclusion of a site or context in the database were very tight, with the result that some well-known but poorly excavated sites, such as Byblos, did not make the cut. Standard typological and archaeological descriptors were also developed and enforced to create a common terminology, thus enabling use of the database for data drawn from many sites, which would normally use localized, and sometimes idiosyncratic, recording nomenclature. The final result was a table of revised regional synchronisms for the whole of Western Asia (Figure 1), utilizing a standard set of new terms for different

periods (e.g., Southern Levant Early Bronze Age II = E[arly]SL II; Central Levant Early Bronze Age II = ECL II).¹

Despite ARCANE's seeking to replicate the SCIEM model, Egypt was not included in the research design. This in itself was interesting and reflected the geographical "separateness" of eastern Mediterranean Early Bronze Age studies that I had observed while conducting research for my PhD and its subsequent publication.² I was invited to participate in the ARCANE Project owing to my crossover research on Early Bronze Age interrelations, and I was assigned the task of re-examining and developing revised chronological synchronisms for Egypt and the Levant.³ This research is now complete and awaiting publication, with the first major contribution having already appeared.⁴

My research has achieved a major revision of the work by L. Stager (1992).⁵ Importantly, it has integrated old and new archaeological data with recently published radiocarbon dates from both Egypt and the Levant.⁶ In so doing, it provides a basis on which to consider the intersection of Egypt with its neighbors through the lens of the three separate regional chronological schema that were developed by ARCANE: the Southern Levant (SL), the Central Levant (CL) and the Northern Levant (NL).

There are several important points to note arising from the ARCANE Project as a whole and from my specific contribution. Firstly, the radiocarbon results from all these regions (including Egypt) point to generally higher dates than hitherto accepted, creating a new "high" chronology for the Levant in the third millennium BCE (see note 5). Secondly, by enabling a more detailed understanding of region-specific synchronisms with Egypt, the implications of gaps in the dataset are more clearly apparent.⁷ These gaps are significant, and there is still much we do not understand.

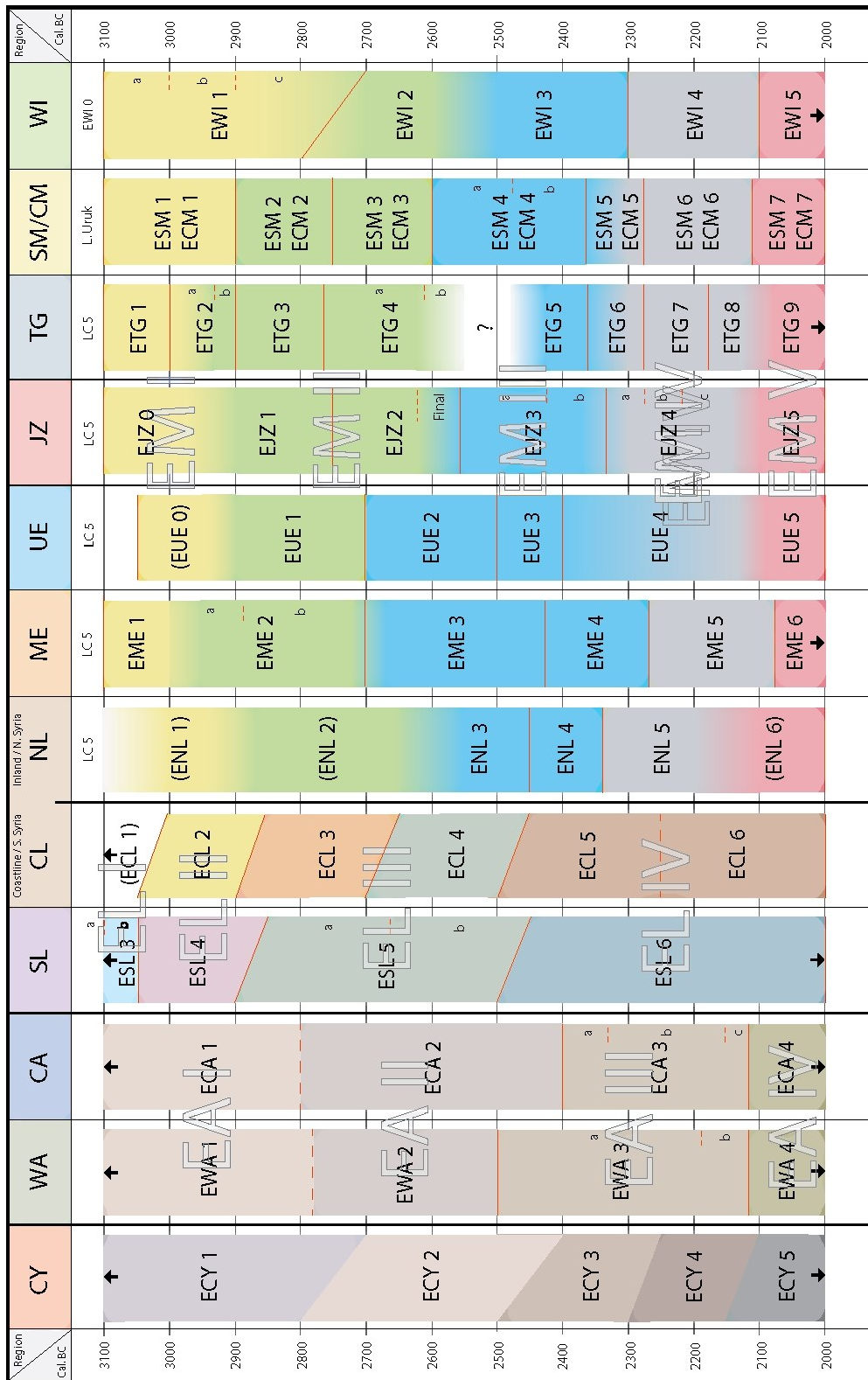
On a regional level, the long relationship between Egypt and the CL, which ebbed and flowed over the long period of the third millennium, is also seen in a fresh light when set against its neighbors. The recent publication of the Sixth Dynasty biographical inscription of Iny,⁸ when combined with the archaeological evidence and relevant ¹⁴C, means that Egyptian relations with the CL/NL must be regarded as more nuanced than previously thought. For the SL, the results mean greater caution is

required when considering the Egyptian historical record. For example, it is evident from the ¹⁴C and archaeological evidence that the end of the SL Early Bronze Age III (ESL III) likely concluded before the much-discussed campaigns of Weni of the Sixth Dynasty. The ESL IV (the old SL EB IV) was a long period overlapping the 6th Dynasty and the First Intermediate Period.

The ARCANE Project has been the catalyst for much revised thinking on many issues. On the question of Egyptian-Levantine chronological synchronisms, I look forward to sharing the detail of my research shortly.

NOTES

- 1 Marc Lebeau (ed.), *Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, Arcane Interregional, Vol. I: Ceramics* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2014), xi.
- 2 Karin Sowada, *Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Old Kingdom: An Archaeological Perspective*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 237* (Fribourg/Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 2009).
- 3 I am very grateful to Dr. Pierre de Miroschedji (team leader) for inviting me to be part of the SL Regional Group, Dr. Jean-Paul Thalmann (team leader, CL/NL Regional Group) for including me in the CL Group publication program, and to Dr. Marc Lebeau and Dr. Pierre de Miroschedji (chairmen, ARCANE Steering Committee) for their overall guidance and support.
- 4 Jean-Paul Thalmann and Karin Sowada, "Levantine 'Combed Wares,'" in Marc Lebeau (ed.), *Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, Arcane Interregional, Vol. I: Ceramics* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2014) x1, 355–378. Other publications are Karin Sowada, "Chronological Synchronisms between Egypt and the Central Levant during the Third Millennium BC," in Jean-Paul Thalmann (ed.), *Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean: Central and Northern Levant* (in press) and "Chronological Synchronisms between Egypt and the Southern Levant during the Third Millennium BC," in Pierre de Miroschedji (ed.), *Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean: Southern Levant* (in press).
- 5 Lawrence Stager, "The Periodization of Palestine from Neolithic through Early Bronze Age Times," in R. W. Ehrich (ed.), *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22–41.
- 6 Michael Dee, "A Radiocarbon-Based Chronology for the Old Kingdom," in Andrew Shortland and Christopher Bronk Ramsey (eds), *Radiocarbon and the Chronologies of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford/Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2013), 209–217; Michael Dee, David Wengrow, Andrew Shortland, Alice Stevenson, Fiona Brock, Linus Girdland Flink, Christopher Bronk Ramsay, "An Absolute Chronology for Early Egypt Using Radiocarbon Dates and Bayesian Statistical Modelling," *Proceedings of the Royal Society A* 469/2159 (2013): 1–10; Johanna Regev, Pierre de Miroschedji, Rafi Greenberg, Eliot Braun, Zvi Greenhut and Elisabetta Boaretto, "Chronology of the Early Bronze Age in the South Levant: New Analysis for a High Chronology," *Radiocarbon* 54/3–4 (2012): 525–566.
- 7 Karin Sowada, "Never the Twain Shall Meet? Synchronising Egyptian and Levantine Chronologies in the Third Millennium BC," in Felix Höflmayer and Ricardo Eichmann (eds), *Egypt and the Southern Levant in the Early Bronze Age*, *Orient-Archäologie Band 31* (Leidorf: Orient-Abteilung des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Rahden/Westf., 2014), 293–313.
- 8 Michele Marcolin and Andrés Diego Espinel, "The Sixth Dynasty Biographic Inscriptions of Iny: More Pieces to the Puzzle," in Miroslav Bárta, Filip Coppens, and Jaromir Krejci (eds), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2010/1* (Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, 2011), 570–615.



EA (Early Anatolian) – EL (Early Levantine) – EM (Early Mesopotamian)* Cultural Horizon Table v. 5.4.6**

The regional phases or sub-phases reflect changes in the material culture (predominantly ceramics), and/or the level of urbanisation, and refer to the comparative stratigraphy of chronological benchmarks, at a regional and inter-regional level. Use of the same colour denotes the existence of strong cultural links or parallel phenomena between neighbouring regions. The absolute date ranges are based on the harmonised radiocarbon data.

E: Early Cy: Cyprus, WA: Western Anatolia, CA: Central Anatolia, SL: Southern Levant, CL: Central Levant, NL: Northern Levant, ME: Middle Euphrates, UE: Upper Euphrates, JZ: Jezirah, TG: Tigris region, SM: Southern Mesopotamia, CM: Central Mesopotamia, WI: Western Iran.

*EMI (Early Mesopotamian/Iranian) for WI, ** EA, EL, EM & EMI are labels proposed by M. Lebeau and adopted by the ARCANÉ community at the Bern final meeting, on December 8-11, 2011.

Figure 1: ARCANÉ periodization table for Western Asia in the third millennium BC (Reproduced with the kind permission of the ARCANÉ Project, courtesy M. Lebeau, Chairman, ARCANÉ Steering Committee)