THE DATE OF THE W3 GJ-FEAST
Considerations for the Chronology of the Egyptian Old and Middle Kingdom

by

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In 1950 Richard A. Parker had accepted[1] Borchardt's thesis[2] that the tḥ feast was a full-moon feast, consequently that the w3 gj feast taking place two days before the tḥ feast corresponds to the 13th day of the lunar month. Parker did not prove his assumption only quoted Brugsch[3] and Borchardt.[4] He hinted however at the rnwtt feast in the temple of Esnah as being a full-moon feast parallel to the tḥ feast.[5] This point of view was criticized by Sauneron who considered the alleged feast name to be that of a building.[6]

The conclusion arose that neither the w3 gj feast, the tḥ feast nor the rnwtt feast is rightly determined in Parker's system. To begin with the facts known from the archive of Illahun.[7] There are two w3 gj feasts, one fixed on I 3 ḥt 18, the other moving in II/III šmw. The fixed feast is acoompanied by the tḥ feast on I 3 ḥt, 20 the moving feast appears always alone.

The fixed w3 gj feasts of the Illahun archive are:
1. P Berol 10282 rt 3rd headline: full congruence,[8]
2. P Berol 10007 rt (23): no day given,[9]
3. P Berol 10052 vs (11): the feast name is broken away,[10]
and
4. Siut (283), (290)–(291), (293).[11]

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[1] The Egyptian Calendars, SAOC 26, § 187.
[2] L. Borchardt: Mittel zur zeitlichen Festlegung der ägyptischen Geschichte, Kairo 1935, 34.
[3] H. Brugsch, Thesaurus inscriptionum aegyptiacorum, 393.
[4] See above note 2.
[5] Calendars § 249, and note 49 to § 187.
[6] S. Sauneron, Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna, Esna V, Le Caire 1962, 24 with note (n).
[7] Cf. my Die chronologische Fixiernung des ägyptischen Mittleren Reiches nach dem Tempelarchiv von Illahun, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenchaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, Sb. 598. Bd., Veröffentlichungen der Ägyptischen Kommission 2, hrsg. v. M. Bietak, Wien 1992, 150-152, 201-202, 221. 231-32.
[8] Borchardt, Mittel 46 with note 1, 5, 12, and 56 with note 3; R. Krauss, Sothis- und Monddaten, HÄB 20, Hildesheim 1984, 101; Luft, Fixierung, 2. 49.
[9] Krauss HÄB 20, 90-91; Luft, Fixierung, 2. 7; A. Spalinger, Three Studies on Egyptian Feasts and Their Chronological Implications, Baltimore 1992, 8-9. 22-23.
[10] Borchardt, Mittel 9 with note 2; Luft, Fixierung, 2. 20.
[11] F.Ll. Griffith, The Inscriptions of Siût, and Dêr Rîfeh, London 1889.

The tḥ feast follows the wȝgj feast in P Berol 10282 rt 3rd headline and 10052 rt (12) on I ȝḫt 20.

The moving feasts are:

1. P Berol 10016 rt (1): Year 18, II šmw 17,[12]
2. P Cairo CG 58065 rt (3): Year 9, II šmw 29,[13]
3. P Berol 10165 rt headline: no year, II šmw 22,[14]
4. P Berol 10007 rt (19): Year 1, II šmw, no day given,[15]
5. P Berol 10419 a rt II (4): Year 38, III šmw, no day given.[16]

The movement of the second wȝgj feast allows for the conclusion that this feast is a lunar one. A simple calculation could prove it. Both full dates may fall in the reign of king Sesostris III or Amenemhet III, respectively. The sum of days between the two dates had to be divided by 29.53059^d, the average length of one lunar month. The result should give near whole number or a whole number.

If both dates belong to one king's reign then 3273 days had passed between both. The result with 110.834 lunar months is not satisfying. If Year 18 precedes Year 9, then the change of kings falls between them. It is now established by other calculations that king Sesostris III had reigned for 19 years.[17] In this case the difference amounts to 3662 days or 124.007 lunar months, a very satisfying result.

The third full date without a regnal year may be placed in the 12th year of Sesostris III. In this case 2185 days passed between this date and that of P Berol 10016 what corresponds to 73.991 lunar months, or 5847 days between this date and that of P Cairo CG 58065 which in turn corresponds to 197.998 lunar months.

The result could not be better only if the last date would show the figure of the year. In this case thereof the result rests a little uncertain because the date could be placed also in the 18th year of Amenemhet III. Here the lettertypes of the script offer some help which are small and stout as on the documents belonging to the reign of king Sesostris III.[18] This is why P Berol 10165 was placed in Year 12 of Sesostris III.

These dates of the wȝgj feasts correspond with an unknown day of the lunar month. The calculation to resolve the question is rather simple. The dates were related to the new moons mentioned in P Berol 10090 rt (7) and 10248 rt II (14). The first is dated to Year 3, III šmw 16, presumably of Amenemhet III as shown by the style of the script and proved by calculations with other dates. The latter of Year 14, II ȝḫt 17 is of Sesostris III.

The difference of P Berol 10248 to
P Berol 10016 amounts to 1700 days or 57.567 lunar months,
P Berol 10165 amounts to 485 days or 16.424 lunar months,

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[12] A. Scharff, "Briefe aus Illahun", ZÄS 59 (1924) 24-25; E. Winter, Das Wag-Fest, Diss.Wien 1950, 13; Krauss HÄB 20, 86-88; Luft, Fixierung 2. 15.

[13] Parker, Calendars § 336 and Pl.VI.B; Luft Fixierung 2.64.

[14] Borchardt, Mittel 34 with note 5; Krauss HÄB 20, 93; Luft, Fixierung 2. 41.

[15] See above note 9.

16 Kraus HÄB 20, 91-92; Kraus GM 50 (1981) 81; Luft, Fixierung 2. 63.

[17] Based on archaeological evidence by W.K. Simpson, LÄ s.v. Sesostris III on assocmoical evidencs by h. Krauss, GM 70 (1984) 37-43.

[18] L. Borchardt, "Der zweite Papyrusfund von Illahun und die zeitliche Einordnung des mittleren Reiches der ägyptischen Geschichte", ZÄS 37 (1899) 100.

P Cairo CG 58065 amounts to 5362 days or 181.574 lunar months.

The difference of P Berol 10090 to

P Berol 10016 amounts to 1489 days or 50.442 lunar months,

P Berol 10165 amounts to 3674 days or 124.413 lunar months,

P Cairo CG 58065 amounts to 2173 days or 73.585 lunar months.

The average difference between the w3gj feast and the new moon comes to 0.578 lunar month divided by 0.034 lunar month (i.e. one day in the average length of the lunar month) resulting 17 days.[19] The 17 days should be augmented by one day because the difference is calculated with the omission of one day. The w3gj feast is therefore identical with the 18th day of the lunar month.

The result explains the fixed date of I 3ht 18. The apparent coincidence of the fixed date with the day of the lunar month raises the next question, in which lunar month after the New Year was the w3gj feast placed. The fixed w3gj feast proposes the first lunar month after the New Year. In the 28th century BC the New Year of the civil year and Heliacal Rise of Sothis fell into the first month or were identical for a short period.[20] Feasts connected with this astronomical event should move in the civil year as only the w3gj feast demonstrates. The lunar month in which the moving w3gj feast was celebrated in the Middle Kingdom was exclusively the second lunar month after Heliacal Rise of Sothis.

There is no sign of a special lunar year beginning after Heliacal Rise of Sothis in the archive of Illahun. It should be accepted that a divergence appears between the fixed and the moving w3gj feast concerning the lunar month. This feature may be explained by the dominance of the civil calendar and the occasional application of the lunar months to the temple service.[21]

The Hekanakhte Papers are supposed to have shown the use of three month-names of the so-called lunar calendar.[22] There is however no evidence for these names to be related to the lunar months exclusively. When monthnames were used they were applied to the civil year as in the special case of the Ebers calendar[23] or in Deir el Medineh during the Ramesside period.[24] Thus the conclusion may be allowed that the month-names of the Middle Kingdom, too, relate to the months of the civil year. It is supported by the occasional use of the lunar months in the temple service at Illahun where at the beginning of the archive the priestly group was in service a full civil month.[25] This fact

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[19] Krauss HÄB 20, 86-88 takes the 17th day of the lunar month as day of the w3gj feast.

[20] Parker, Calendars §§ 261- 262.

[21] The inscriptions of Siut do not make any allusion to the application of the lunar months.

[22] T.G.H. James, The Hekanakhte Papers and Other Early Middle Kingdom Documents, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, New York 1962, 3-4; cf. H. Goedicke, Studies in the Hekanakhte Papers, Baltimore 1984, 30. 109.

[23] The Ebers calendar shows the effort to establish the regnal year counted from the ascension to the throne in the New Kingdom, cf. U.Luft, "Noch einmal zum Ebers-Kalender", GM 92 (1986) 69-77; cf. the objections against this thesis of J. v. Beckerath, "Das Kalendarium des Papyrus Ebers und das Sothisdatum vom 9. Jahr Amenophis' I.", SAK 14 (1987) 30 and of R. Krauss. " Das Kalendarium des Papyrus Ebers und seine chronologische Verwertbarkeit", Ägypten und Levante 3 (1992) 81. 85. I have formulated my point of view once again in "Remarks of a Philologist on Egyptian Chronology", Ägypten und Levante 3 (1992) 112-13.

24 R. van Walsem, "Month- names and Feasts at Deir el-Medîna", Gleanings from Deir el-Medîna, Leiden 1982, 215-244.

led Borchardt to the conclusion that all lunar days of Illahun are uncertain.[26] This position however, turned out unjustified.

Mme Posener-Kriéger has recently published dates of the archive found by the Czech mission in Abusir.[27] The large fragment Document I+II shows the dḥwtjt feast followed by the wȝgj, and this feature appears once again in Document IV. Document I+II has apparently no date, while the Documents III and IV have dates.

In Document III the month sign and a vertical stroke are visible, there is thereof no security for the length of the month sign. Thus one may conclude that the figure shows more than one stroke. The vertical writing of the months figures in the dates during the later Old Kingdom is fully demonstrated by Elmar Edel.[27] Document IV shows exactly III [ȝḥt] 28 as date of the wȝgj feast here preceded by the dḥwtjt feast. It would be to accept the absence of a dḥwtjt feast in document III because of its condition of preservation. On the other hand, it can be concluded that the figure in Document III may be III, too. Then one has two dates in III ȝḥt on different days for the wȝgj feast.

The feasts in Document III and IV move clearly. The date is given in terms of the civil calendar. If it may be supposed that both dates belong to III ȝḥt and that the moving wȝgj feast follows Heliacal Rise of Sothis we may conclude placing this astronomical event in II ȝḥt or at the beginning of III ȝḥt. Thus the wȝgj feast moves in the first lunar month after Heliacal Rise of Sothis. This is supported by the wȝgj feast being fixed in the first month of the civil year.

It is true that our knowledge of fixing a feast in the civil calendar is rather slight. The case of the wȝgj feast is therefore striking and there is not much room for doubt.

Another reason to assume this opinion to be right is the following. If the moving wȝgj feast corresponds with the 18th day of lunar month one can compute approximatively the exact date of the new archive in the Old Kingdom. The date of Document IV gives the certain figure of day 28. Then the new moon must fall on III ȝht 11. Following Parker's rule that the beginning of the first lunar month should correspond with a day from the 11th day after Heliacal Rise of Sothis the latter is to be date on a day before III ȝht 1.[27]

The date of Document III can only be calculated approximately. Accepting the figures 23, 25, 26, and 29 respectivly the interval between the two dates may be -18 years, -8 years, -21 years, -13 years, and +5 years, +16 years, +2 years, +10 years respectively. The figures of years may be augmented with 25 years because the moving lunar date falls on the same day of the civil year each 25 civil years.

Heliacal Rise of Sothis fell on one day before II ȝht 27, 29, 30, or III ȝht 2. Generally, it could be dated to the end of II ȝht. Assuming an alleged date IIȝht 26 the archive could be fixed about 2430 BC. This result is in accordance with the chronological

[25] Luft, Fixierung 190-91.
[26] L. Borchardt, "Sind die Neumondsdaten der Illahun-Papyri chronologisch zu verwerten?", ZÄS 41 (1904) 34-36.
[27] "Remarques préliminaires sur les nouveaux papyrus d'Abousir", Ägypten – Dauer und Wandel, Mainz 1985, 35-43.
[28] Altägyptische Grammatik, Analecta Orientalia 34/39, Roma 1955/1964, § 415.
[29] Calendars § 151 Krauss, Ägypten und Levente 3 (1992) 83 has objected to this rule.

knowledge about the Old Kingdom.[30] Thus the moving lunar feast could help to establish the absolute chronology.

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[30] Cf. the paper on chronology prepared by the late Professor Klaus Baer of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, in Winter 1975.