Responses from Scholars Cited in the Series "When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?"

<u>Appendix D</u> of the text <u>Brief Analysis of series "When was ancient Jerusalem destroyed?"</u> (for now available only in Portuguese).

I wrote to some scholars* cited in the series "When was ancient Jerusalem destroyed?", asking what they think of the conclusions published in the "Watchtower" (10/1/2011 and 11/1/2011), and the way they have been cited to discredit the year 587 BC. Although there is a note in the magazine stating that "none of the secular experts quoted in this article hold that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E.," it is interesting to know what they think because Watchtower's writer tries to find in these experts some information that may weaken the date 587. In a role reversal, it is as if scholars were ignoring information in favor of a preconceived misconception.

Since these scholars may be being inundated with emails because of these recent articles published by the "Watchtower", maybe not all of them feel comfortable to answer. But those who give some feedback I will publish their answers here.

To see the communication with each scholar use the bookmarks.

* I point out that some important scholars mentioned in the Watchtower magazine can not be asked about the issues because they have died. This is the case of Raymond P. Dougherty and J. Abraham Sachs^a. Fortunately, the latter was interviewed on June 24, 1968 at Brown University, Rhode Island, by Raymond Franz, who had been charged by the Watchtower to write the article "chronology" of the Bible encyclopedia "Aid to Bible Understanding", in English (Franz later became a member of the "Governing Body" of the "Jehovah's Witnesses"). The purpose of this interview was to know from Dr. Sachs if had any evidence that would favor the date 607 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem. Raymond Franz tells in his book "Crisis of Conscience" that Sachs made it clear that there is no such possibility. - Crisis of Conscience, 4th edition, in English, p. 30 and private communication maintained with the author.

^a Dougherty is mentioned in footnote 10 and Sachs on pages 26 and 27, and some notes. - The Watchtower, 11/1/2011.



1. RONALD H. SACK

On October 12, 2011 I wrote the following email to Dr. Sack:

Hi Dr. Sack,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology. The magazine mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view, they quote you several times, among other experts. See an example below:

"What have experts said? R. H. Sack, a leading authority on cuneiform documents, states that the chronicles provide an incomplete record of important events. He wrote that historians must probe 'secondary sources... in the hope of determining what actually happened.'

"What do the documents show? There are gaps in the history recorded in the Babylonian chronicles.3 (See the box below.) Logically, then, the question arises, how reliable are deductions".

So I ask, do you agree somehow with Watchtower on this application? Is there really any chance of the year 587 BC be wrong?

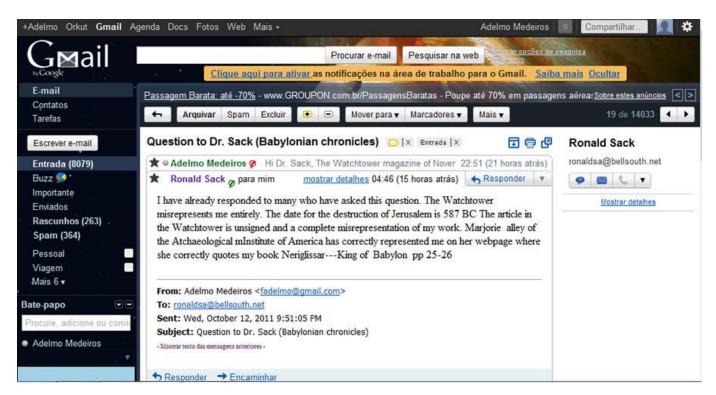
I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient Biblical history and I would appreciate your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 13, 2011 Dr. Sack sent me the answer below:

I have already responded to many who have asked this question. The Watchtower misrepresents me entirely. The date for the destruction of Jerusalem is 587 BC The article in the Watchtower is unsigned and a complete misrepresentation of my work. Marjorie alley of the Archaeological Institute of America has correctly represented me on her webpage where she correctly quotes my book Neriglissar---King of Babylon pp 25-26.



2. JOHN M. STEELE

On October 12, 2011 I wrote the following email to Dr. Steele:

Dear Dr. Steele,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November, 2011 (published by Jehovah's Witnesses) quoted you several times in an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology. The author mentions the tablet <u>VAT 4956</u>, and says that its astronomical information could have been made by calculating backwards. In other words, such

observations were calculated and not observed. To support this point of view you was quoted in Article, on page 24:

"But could the Babylonians project backward to calculate when eclipses had occurred in the past? 'It is possible,' states Professor John Steele, 'that some of the earliest predictions could have been made by projecting the scheme backwards when the text was compiled'. (Italics ours.)"

So I ask, the above statement actually apply to the VAT 4956?

From: Steele, John [email address deleted]
To: marjoriealley [email address deleted]

Date: Fri, Sep 2, 2011 9:32 am

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient Biblical history and I would appreciate your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

Dr. Steele removed his email on site of the University of Durham. This seems to indicate that he no longer wants to answer emails on the subject published in the "Watchtower". Fortunately, Dr. Steele had already responded to an email with a similar content that was sent by Marjorie Alley, which is from the <u>Archaeological Institute of America</u>, as reported for Dr. Sack.

On September 2, 2011, Alley received the following response from John Steele:

Dear Ms Alley,

Thank you for your email concerning the citation of my work in the recent Watchtower article. As you suggest the author of this piece is completely misrepresenting what I wrote, both in what they say about the lunar three measurements, and in what I say about the possibility of retrocalculation of eclipses (my comments on the latter were restricted to a distinct and small group of texts which are different to the Diary they are discussing). Just glancing through the Watchtower article I can see that they have also misrepresented the views of other scholars by selective quotation out of context.

I've looked at the date of VAT 4956 on several occasions and see no possibility that it can be dated to anything other than the conventional date.

Regards,

John Steele

Dear Ms Alley,

Thank you for your email concerning the citation of my work in the recent Watchtower article. As you suggest the author of this piece is completely misrepresenting what I wrote, both in what they say about the lunar three measurement, and in what I say about the possibility of retrocalculation of eclipses (my comments on the latter were restricted to a distinct and small group of texts which are different to the Diary they are discussing). Just glancing through the Watchtower article I can see that they have also misrepresented the views of other scholars by selective quotation out of context.

I've looked at the date of VAT 4956 on several occasions and see no possibility that it can be dated to anything other than the conventional date.

Regards, John Steele

3. DAVID RODNEY BROWN

On October 13, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Brown:

Hi Dr. Brown,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology. The magazine mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view, they mention your work, among other. See below:

"Professor David Brown, who believes that the astronomical charts included predictions made shortly before the recorded events, acknowledges that it is conceivable that some of these were 'retrocalculations undertaken by scribes in the 4th and later centuries BC.' If these are retrocalculations, could they really be considered absolutely reliable unless corroborated other evidence?"

Watchtower says that VAT 4956 is not reliable for the reasons above. In other words, the observations were calculated and not observed.

So I ask, do you agree somehow with Watchtower on this application of your work? Is there really any chance of the year 587 BC be wrong? The year 607 would be correct, for destruction of Jerusalem?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and I would appreciate your response.

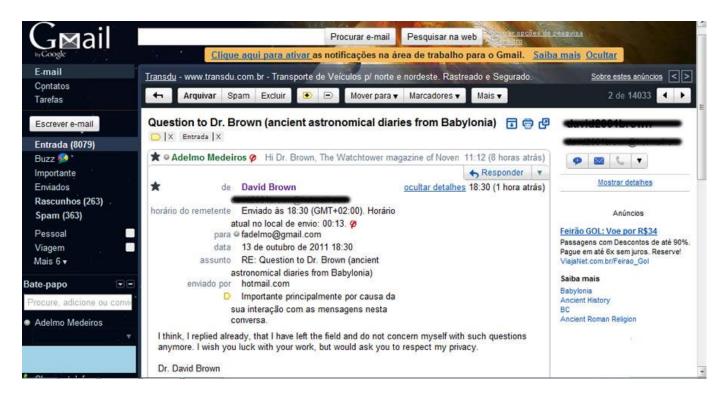
Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 13, 2011, Dr. Brown answered:

I think, I replied already, that I have left the field and do not concern myself with such questions anymore. I wish you luck with your work, but would ask you to respect my privacy.

Dr. David Brown



Due to the above e-mail content, I post my answer here, sent on October 13, 2011:

Thanks for replying, Dr. Brown. Sorry to bother you with this matter. I did not know you did not work more in the field. I'll try to find the answer you gave about what I asked. But I confess that I do not really know where it is published.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

4. R. J. (BERT) VAN DER SPEK

On October 13, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Bert van der Spek:

Hi Dr. van de Spek,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology. The magazine mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view, they mention your work. See below:

"Even if an eclipse did occur on a certain date, does this mean that the historical information the writer of the tablet assigns to that date is accurate? Not necessarily. Scholar R. J. van der Spek explains: 'The compilers were astrologers, not historians.' He describes sections of the tablets that contain historical records as 'more or less casual,' and he warns that such historical information must 'be used with caution.'"

Watchtower says that VAT 4956 is not reliable for the reason above, among other.

So I ask, do you agree somehow with Watchtower on this application of your work? Is there really any chance of the year 587 BC be wrong? The year 607 would be correct, for destruction of Jerusalem?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and I would appreciate your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 24, 2011, Dr. Bert answered:

Dear mr. Medeiros,

Thanks for your e-mail. Someone from the Netherlands also contacted me about this question.

The quotes from my article are correct, but quoted out of context. What I have argued is actually exactly the opposite. The Babylonian scholars were good scientists and made accurate records of the celestial phenomena, which can be checked by modern astronomers. The historical information of the astronomical diaries can very often also be checked with the help of other sources and they are usually correct. This I showed in the rest of my article, which you can find here:

http://vu-

nl.academia.edu/RJBertvanderSpek/Papers/854442/The Astronomical Diaries as a source for Achaem enid_and_Seleucid_History

The same is true for the historical information of the chroniclers, who were the same people, as I have argued in the Festschrift Stol Reference to the book (though not to the article) you can find here:

http://vu-

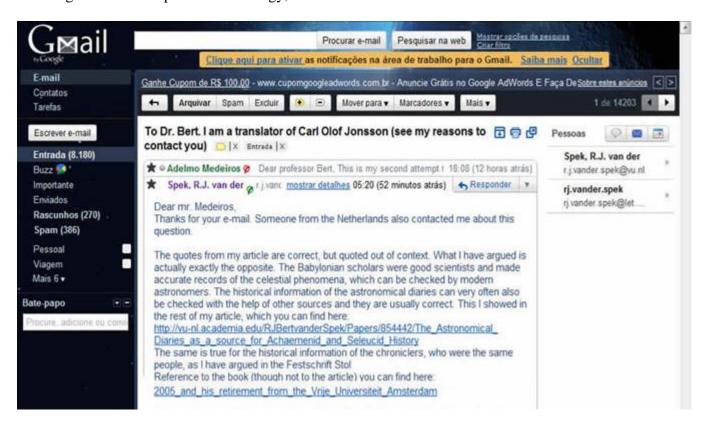
nl.academia.edu/RJBertvanderSpek/Books/826505/Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society presented to Marten Stol on the occasion of his 65th birthday 10 November 2005 and his retirement from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

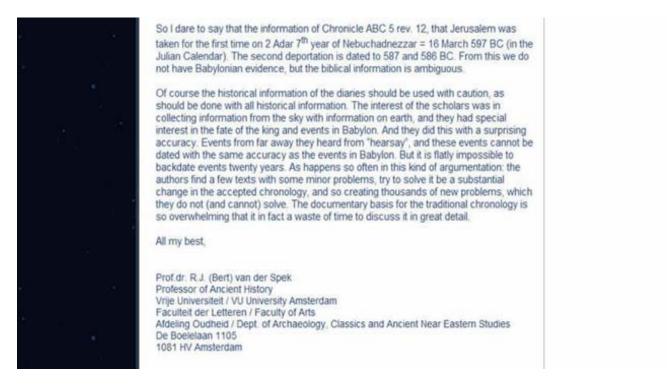
So I dare to say that the information of Chronicle ABC 5 rev. 12, that Jerusalem was taken for the first time on 2 Adar 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar = 16 March 597 BC (in the Julian Calendar). The second deportation is dated to 587 and 586 BC. From this we do not have Babylonian evidence, but the biblical information is ambiguous.

Of course the historical information of the diaries should be used with caution, as should be done with all historical information. The interest of the scholars was in collecting information from the sky with information on earth, and they had special interest in the fate of the king and events in Babylon. And they did this with a surprising accuracy. Events from far away they heard from "hearsay", and these events cannot be dated with the same accuracy as the events in Babylon. But it is flatly impossible to backdate events twenty years. As happens so often in this kind of argumentation: the authors find a few texts with some minor problems, try to solve it be a substantial change in the accepted chronology, and so creating thousands of new problems, which they do not (and cannot) solve. The documentary basis for the traditional chronology is so overwhelming that it in fact a waste of time to discuss it in great detail.

All my best,

Prof. dr. R.J. (Bert) van der Spek
Professor of Ancient History
Vrije Universiteit / VU University Amsterdam
Faculteit der Letteren / Faculty of Arts
Afdeling Oudheid / Dept. of Archaeology, Classics and Ancient Near Eastern Studies





5. PETER J. HUBER

On October 14, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Huber:

Dear Dr. Huber,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable.

The magazine also reports that the tablet VAT 4956 has evidence that the Neo-Babylonian period was 20 years longer than we think. To support this point of view your book Babylonian Eclipse Observations From 750 BC to 1 BC is quoted on p. 28 (see attached images).

Your work does really provide a clue to reach the above conclusion?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and would appreciate receiving your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 15, 2011, Dr. Huber answered:

Dear Dr. Medeiros,

I do not think that our book provides evidence for an earlier date of VAT 4956 from the 37th year of Nekukadnezar, quite on the contrary! Both eclipses of July 4, 568 BC and July 15, 588 BC were invisible in Babylon (below the horizon), and the earlier eclipse actually is mentioned in a text as occurring in month IV, see Huber - De Meis, p.89.

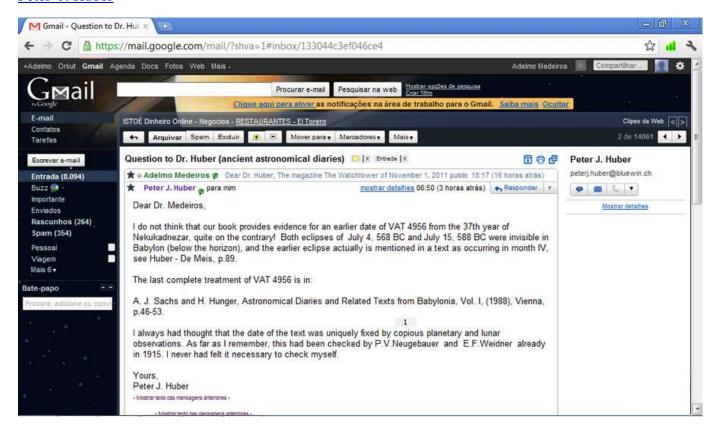
The last complete treatment of VAT 4956 is in:

A. J. Sachs and H. Hunger, Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia, Vol. I, (1988), Vienna, p.46-53.

I always had thought that the date of the text was uniquely fixed by copious planetary and lunar observations. As far as I remember, this had been checked by P.V.Neugebauer and E.F.Weidner already in 1915. I never had felt it necessary to check myself.

Yours.

Peter J. Huber



(See the box below as type text in next page)



Dear Mr. Medeiros,

I forgot to elaborate on my statement "quite on the contrary!" by pointing out that between the years 2 and 42 of Nebukadnezar, there are at least 15 observed lunar eclipses, see Huber and De Meis, and they agree with the generally accepted Nebukadnezar chronology. A shift of 20 years is incompatible with these eclipses.

Yours,

Peter J. Huber

6. F. R. STEPHENSON

On October 14, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Stephenson:

Hi, Dr. Stephenson

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history, and would like to know your opinion about a subject. I would greatly appreciate your response.

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. In addition, the magazine also reports that the astronomical diary VAT 4956 has evidence that the Neo-Babylonian period was 20 years longer than we think.

By introducing the above subject, your article "The Earliest Datable Observation of the Aurora Borealis" is mentioned (as you know, it was published in Under One Sky - Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East).

So, I ask, since you are an expert in archaeoastronomy, is there some possibility of these ancient astronomical diaries support this matter published in this magazine?

Regards,

Adelmo Medeiros

See the answer below from Dr. Willis, who also responded on behalf of Dr. Stephenson.

7. DAVID M. WILLIS

On 10/18/2011 Dr. Willis replied:

Hi, Dr. Willis

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history, and would like to know your opinion about a subject. I would greatly appreciate your response.

The Watchtower magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. In addition, the magazine also reports that the astronomical diary VAT 4956 has evidence that the Neo-Babylonian period was 20 years longer than we think.

By introducing the above subject, your article "The Earliest Datable Observation of the Aurora Borealis" is mentioned (as you know, it was published in Under One Sky - Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East).

So, I ask, since you are an expert in archaeoastronomy, is there some possibility of these ancient astronomical diaries support this matter published in this magazine?

Regards,

Adelmo Medeiros

On 10/18/2011 Dr. Willis replied:

(One part was omitted temporarily at the request by the sender)

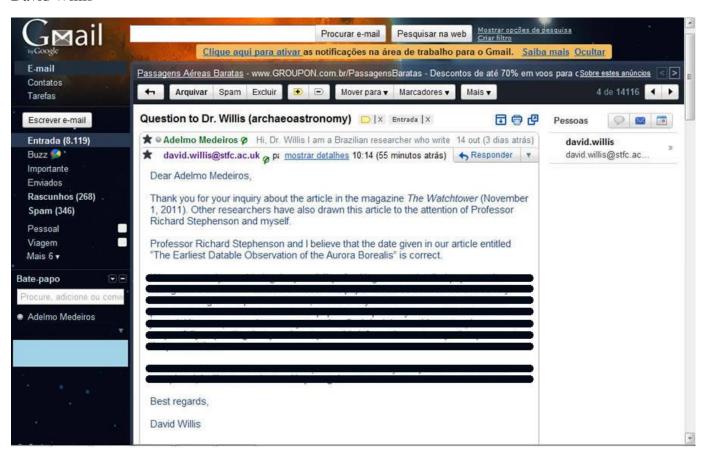
Dear Adelmo Medeiros,

Thank you for your inquiry about the article in the magazine The Watchtower (November 1, 2011). Other researchers have also drawn this article to the attention of Professor Richard Stephenson and myself.

Professor Richard Stephenson and I believe that the date given in our article entitled "The Earliest Datable Observation of the Aurora Borealis" is correct.

Best regards,

David Willis



8. ANNETTE IMHAUSEN

On October 14, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Imhausen:

Dear Dr. Imhausen.

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history, and would like to know your opinion about a subject. I would greatly appreciate your response.

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. In addition, the magazine also reports that the astronomical diary VAT 4956 has evidence that the Neo-Babylonian period was 20 years longer than we think.

When introducing the subject above, they cite the article "The Earliest Datable Observation of the Aurora Borealis" which was published in the work Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East.

So, since you were editor of the book above (see attached image), I ask:

In your opinion, is there some possibility of these ancient astronomical diaries support this matter published in this magazine?

Regards,

Adelmo Medeiros

I got no answer from Dr. Imhausen.

9. SALVO DE MEIS

On October 16, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. De Meis:

Dear Dr. De Meis,

The *Watchtower* magazine of November 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable.

The magazine also reports that the tablet VAT 4956 has evidence that the Neo-Babylonian period was 20 years longer than we think. To support this point of view your book Babylonian Eclipse Observations From 750 BC to 1 BC is quoted on p. 28 (see attached images, I forgot to attach the files in another email).

So, I ask: Do you think your work does really provide a clue to reach the above conclusion?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and would appreciate receiving your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 18, 2011, Dr. De Meis answered:

Dear Dr. Medeiros,

Many thanks for your request.

In "Babylonian Eclipse Observations", Huber and I do not support the 20 years shift in the chronology.

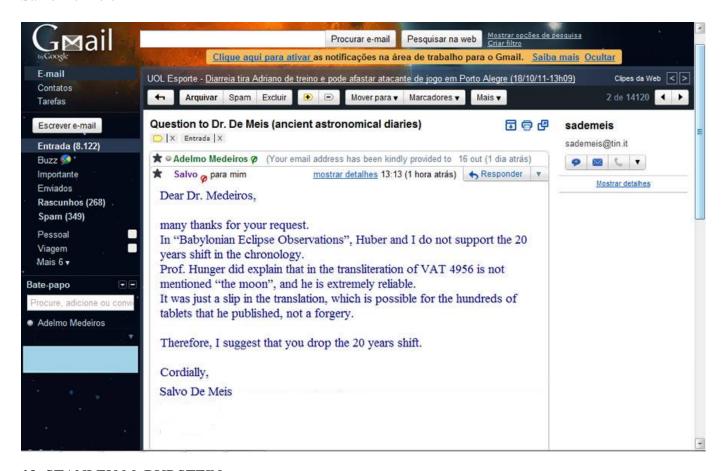
Prof. Hunger did explain that in the transliteration of VAT 4956 is not mentioned "the moon", and he is extremely reliable.

It was just a slip in the translation, which is possible for the hundreds of tablets that he published, not a forgery.

Therefore, I suggest that you drop the 20 years shift.

Cordially,

Salvo De Meis



10. STANLEY M. BURSTEIN

On October 16, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Burstein:

Dear Dr. Burstein,

The *Watchtower* magazine of October 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view your book is quoted on p. 29:

"How do other scholars view Berosus? 'In the past Berosus has usually been viewed as a historian,' states S. M. Burstein, who made a thorough study of Berosus' works. Yet, he concluded: 'Considered as such

his performance must be pronounced inadequate. Even in its present fragmentary state the Babyloniaca contains a number of surprising errors of simple fact... In a historian such flaws would be damming, but then Berossus' purpose was not historical."

So, I ask: Your book really provides information that leads to conclusion that the year 587 is not supported by reliable sources, being that the book of Berosus is one of them?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and would appreciate receiving your response.

Thank you,

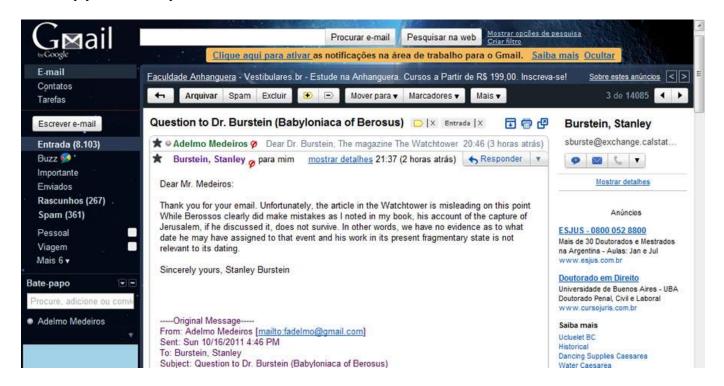
Adelmo Medeiros

On October 16, 2011, Dr. Burstein answered:

Dear Mr. Medeiros:

Thank you for your email. Unfortunately, the article in the Watchtower is misleading on this point While Berossos clearly did make mistakes as I noted in my book, his account of the capture of Jerusalem, if he discussed it, does not survive. In other words, we have no evidence as to what date he may have assigned to that event and his work in its present fragmentary state is not relevant to its dating.

Sincerely yours, Stanley Burstein



11. LEO DEPUYDT

On October 16, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Depuydt:

Dear Dr. Depuydt,

The *Watchtower* magazine of October 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view your book is quoted on p. 30:

" 'It has long been known that the Canon is astronomically reliable,' writes Leo Depuydt, one of Ptolemy's most enthusiastic defenders, 'but this does not automatically dependable.'

So, I ask: Your book really provides information that leads us to conclusion that the year 587 is not supported by reliable sources, being that the Canon of Ptolemy is just one of them?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and would appreciate receiving your response, even if your answer is only a few words.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

On October 16, 2011, Dr. Depuydt answered:

Dear Mr. Medeiros,

Instead of answering directly, I am forwarding my recent correspondence with someone who had a similar question. 607 BCE is out of the question as the date of the destruction of Jerusalem and the evidence is solid.

Thanks and best wishes.

Leo Depuydt

- -

(Korpela is a reader from Filand).

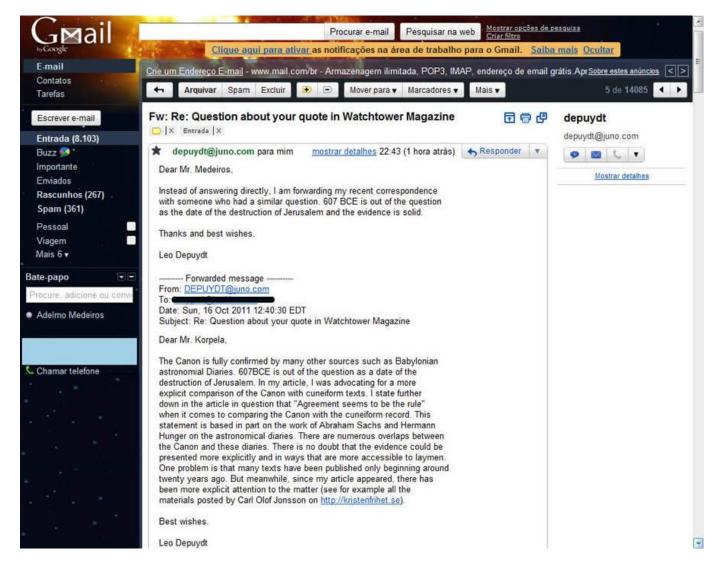
Dear Mr. Korpela,

The Canon is fully confirmed by many other sources such as Babylonian astronomial Diaries. 607BCE is out of the question as a date of the destruction of Jerusalem. In my article, I was advocating for a more explicit comparison of the Canon with cuneiform texts. I state further down in the article in question that "Agreement seems to be the rule" when it comes to comparing the Canon with the cuneiform record. This statement is based in part on the work of Abraham Sachs and Hermann Hunger on the astronomical diaries. There are numerous overlaps between the Canon and these diaries. There is no doubt that the evidence could be presented more explicitly and in ways that are more accessible to laymen. One problem is that many texts have been published only beginning around twenty years ago. But meanwhile, since my article appeared, there has been more explicit attention to the matter (see for example all the materials posted by Carl Olof Jonsson on http://kristenfrihet.se).

Best wishes.

Leo Depuydt

PS I do not have a scanner.



12. CHRISTOPHER B. WALKER

On October 16, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Walker:

Dear Dr. Walker,

The *Watchtower* magazine of October 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view your book Mesopotamian and Iran in the Persian is quoted on p. 30:

"Thus, Christopher Walker of the British Museum says that Ptolemy's canon was 'an artificial scheme designed to provide astronomers with a consistent chronology' and was 'not to provide historians with a precise record of the accession and death of kings.""

So, I ask: Your book really provides information that leads us to conclusion that the year 587 is not supported by reliable sources, being that the Canon of Ptolemy is one of them?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and would appreciate receiving your response.

Thank you,

Adelmo Medeiros

I got no answer from Dr. Walker. Currently, he is retired and no longer works at the British Museum, as the person who is now in his place informed me.

13. GERALD JAMES TOOMER

On October 17, 2011, I wrote the following email to Dr. Toomer:

Dear Dr. Toomer,

The *Watchtower* magazine of October 1, 2011 published an article on Neo-Babylonian chronology, where it mentions that the sources that support the date 587 BC for the destruction of Jerusalem are not reliable. To support this point of view your translation of the Almagest is quoted on pp. 30, 31:

"By astronomical calculations, Ptolemy computed 'back to beginning of the reign of Nabonassar,' the first king on his list." – Almagest, III, 7, translated by G. J. Toomer, 1998, page 166.

So, I ask: Do you think that your work really provides information that leads us to conclusion that the year 587 is not supported by reliable sources, being that the Canon of Ptolemy is just one of them?

I am a Brazilian researcher who writes about ancient history and one of the translators of "Gentile Times Reconsidered", a work on Neo-babylonian chronology written by Carl Olof Jonsson, from Sweden. I would appreciate receiving your response, even only a few words.

My best wishes,

Adelmo Medeiros

On 17 October 2011, a professor emeritus at Brown University sent me an email stating that Dr. Toomer is now retired and no longer works in the university.