The purpose of this article is to reconsider the date of King Josiah’s death. It is divided into three sections: a short survey of the history of research; the relevance of Demotic Papyrus Berlin 13588 for the date of Psammetichus I’s death and Necho’s accession; and its significance for determining Egyptian-Judean Political Relations.

1. A Short History of the Research: The Accepted Date of Josiah’s Death

Dated Babylonian documents can be calculated with precision down to a single day. Josiah’s death can be backdated from the destruction of the temple. It would have fallen in 609 or 608 BCE, depending on whether the temple was destroyed in the month of Ab 586 or 587 BCE, while Zedekiah could have counted his first regnal year from Nisan 597 or Nisan 596 BCE. In Jer 25:1; 32:1; 52:28–9 and 2 Kgs 24:12; 25:1–9, 19, several synchronisms between the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the last kings of Judah are found, showing that the temple was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar’s nineteenth year, which is Zedekiah’s eleventh year—i.e. 586 BCE.
Until the publication in 1956 of the chronicle of the last days of Nabopolassar (B.M. 22047), many scholars assumed that the campaign of Necho II against the Babylonians, during which Josiah was killed, took place in 608 BC. However, with the publication of the above chronicle, it became clear that in 608 BCE the Babylonians campaigned along the Tigris and fought against Izalla and Bit Hanunaia in the vicinity of Urartu, so that no battle could have been fought between the Babylonians and the Egyptians in 608 BCE. The crucial encounter between Necho II and Josiah was placed in 609 BCE.

In “The Fall of Nineveh” Chronicle the following is stated for Nabopolassar’s sixteenth year [610–609 BCE]: “…In the month Marcheshvan the Medes, who had come to the help of the king of Akkad, put their armies together and marched to Harran against Aššur-uballit, who had ascended the throne in Assyria. Fear of the enemy overcame Aššur-uballit and the army of Egypt that had come to help him, and they abandoned the city, and crossed the Euphrates. The king of Akkad reached Harran, fought a battle, and captured the city. He carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple. In the month Adar (27.3–28.4) the king of Akkad left his troops and their camp, and went home. The Medes, who had come to help the king of Akkad, withdrew. In Nabopolassar’s seventeenth year [609–608 BCE] in the month Tammuz (25.6–24.7) Aššur-uballit, king of Assyria, with a large army from Egypt crossed the river Euphrates and marched against Harran to conquer it. They captured […] They defeated the garrison that the king of Akkad had stationed inside. When they had defeated it they encamped against Harran. Until the month Elul

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7 All Babylonian dates are based on: Parker and Dubberstein, Babylonian Chronology, 27–28.