

AN ANALYSIS OF EGYPT'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE SAITE PERIOD

by

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Abstract

This study consists of an analysis of Egyptian foreign policy during the Saite period (including the reign of Necho I), and also briefly examines the actions of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty in order to establish the correct context. Despite the large gaps in the historical record during this period, judicious use of sources from a number of different cultures allows the historian to attempt to reconstruct the actions of the time, and to discuss possible motivations for them, seeking to identify concerns linking the foreign policy of all the Saite kings.

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Introduction

The motivations behind the actions of those in power can be extremely difficult to ascertain, and this is possibly why although the Late Period has increasingly become the focus of many scholars' interest and ensuing publication, we could still be said to be lacking a recent comprehensive treatment which seeks to bring together evidence from as many sources as possible to analyse the foreign relations of the Saite period.

As the term 'Saite period' will be used constantly throughout this thesis, it seems natural to define it before we go any further. The Saite period, referring to the time when Egypt was ruled by the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, is slightly more difficult to define than would first appear. It is most commonly thought of as beginning in 656 B.C., when the reign of Psammetichus I over the whole of Egypt began, and ending in 525 B.C. with the Persian invasion of Egypt. If the end point is indisputable, the start is not, and I am including Necho I in this analysis since not only has Perdu's work suggested that he was more powerful than has previously been believed,¹ but, more pertinently for our purposes, the actions of his reign dealt with the foreign threat to Egypt.

Just like 'Saite period', so 'foreign relations' is a term that will be used again and again, and therefore it would seem to be an appropriate time to define it also, especially since it initially seems somewhat nebulous. Foreign relations can occur on several different levels of society; at the highest level we have contact through gift exchange and what would now be termed diplomacy, while lower down the social scale trade might be a factor, although the presence of royal monopolies on certain

¹ Perdu 2002b

items must not be forgotten, whereas military matters would largely be a concern of the elites, although not all the troops would have been drawn from this level of society by any means. Although all of these factors could be said to be part of the political armoury of a country, our main focus will be on the more specific interpretation of political contact – generally concerned with the higher echelons of society, although it is important to remember that what happens at ground level can affect attitudes higher up the social scale.

The aim of this study is to determine what motives there were behind the actions of the rulers of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty in connection with other nations and peoples. Naturally, over what is a relatively lengthy period of time, it is only to be expected that there would be different pressures, factors and catalysts influencing decisions, although it is possible that some themes, such as the need to secure Egypt's defence, will be seen to have been present in political thinking throughout the period.

As such, it seems best to treat the actions of the kings of this dynasty in a relatively strict chronological manner. Consequently, in the first chapter I will initially examine the actions of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the Kushite kings who preceded the Saite period, in order to establish context for later actions, as well as the intrigue involving Necho I and the Assyrians. With the context established, the early actions of Psammetichus I will be examined. Although it is at first tempting to look at the startlingly long reign (664-610 B.C.) of this king as one entity, the reality is that we have essentially no evidence for the majority of the middle section of his reign. It would seem foolish, then, to attempt to treat the two quite separate periods of time we are presented with as one.

Chapter two will include a discussion of possible reasons for this lack of evidence, as well as an examination of the latter period of the reign of Psammetichus

I. The reigns of his successors Necho II (610-595 B.C.) and Psammetichus II (595-589 B.C.) will also be analysed, paying particular attention to their actions in Western Asia and Nubia, and how they built upon the foundations set down by Psammetichus I. The reigns of Apries (589-570 B.C.), Amasis (570-526 B.C.), and Psammetichus III (526-525 B.C.) will be dealt with in the third chapter, focusing on the increasingly important role of the Aegean in the Egyptian world view (and vice versa), before in the conclusion I pick out any trends that can be spotted throughout these three time spans.

As suggested earlier, one of the reasons why foreign relations of this period cannot be said to have been over-analysed by scholars is because little evidence survives, particularly in Egypt itself. There is a large gap in our knowledge covering the periods circa 650 B.C. – 620 B.C. and 565 B.C. – 535 B.C. To put it in starker terms, for more than a third of the period this study is concerned with, we simply have no evidence. Unfortunately, this means that any conclusions reached must at best be tentative if we seek to apply them to the intervening gaps as well as the specific points in time from which they are drawn. However, it will be seen that pragmatism and opportunism mean that political motivations for actions were ever changing during the Saite period.

To add to the historian's sense of despair, much of the evidence from shores further afield is inherently problematical; be it the historically ambiguous Biblical material or the much-maligned testimony of Herodotus, discussed shortly. It is apparent that the sheer variety of sources also poses a problem in itself, for the scholar investigating this period must deal not only with Egyptian monumental texts and archaeological evidence, but also with a variety of sources from peoples with quite different historical traditions, such as the Assyrians and the Greeks (the term 'Greeks'

is used here for convenience, but it should be remembered that there was in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. no concept of Greece as a nation-state, simply a number of *poleis*).

Despite these obstacles, a synthetic approach taking into account the individual drawbacks, and, indeed, strengths, of each source should prove successful. In terms of the Egyptian material, the majority of the little we do have is of a textual nature. Archaeologically speaking, however, the excavations at Naukratis² for example have provided us with a variety of pottery and other finds that suggest certain key points about the relationship between the Aegean and Egypt during this period. Nevertheless, the material from Naukratis is not without problems since, as much as anything else, as Möller intimates, the sheer wealth of material from the site, and the fact that much of it remains unpublished, makes it a difficult task to draw conclusions.³ Although archaeological material is always of critical importance, one problem, which is not the case with the material from Naukratis, is that it can occasionally be difficult to tell the origins or uses of finds, especially when dealing with Egyptian material where there is often the further problem of insecure or unknown provenance.

The textual material, on the other hand, presents us with a different set of problems. Much of it consists of monumental inscriptions set up by the Saite kings; a good example is the Victory Stela of Psammetichus II found at Shellal.⁴ Although it would be unwise to take the proud posturing of kings as gospel truth, it would be just as unwise to dismiss pharaonic claims as brazen fabrication. Therefore, great care

² Initially excavated by Sir William Flinders Petrie in 1884-1885, although after a series of campaigns in the years 1886-1903 led by various other archaeologists, there was a lack of further meaningful work till the excavations that took place from 1980 to 1983 under the aegis of William D.E. Coulson and Albert Leonard, Jr.

³ Möller 2000:90

⁴ First published in Bakry 1967:225-244

must be taken when dealing with this material in terms of judging to what extent we can take the text at face value.

If, as in the case of this example, several copies of the text are known,⁵ then that raises further questions as to why the king wanted this information disseminated. This underlines the fact that it is important to look not only at the text itself but also the context within which it was placed. On a more specific level, this particular source raises many questions – why was there a lag in reaction to the Nubian domination? Does this gap suggest other reasons for the campaign? What might these reasons be? These questions will be discussed in chapter two.

An earlier stela of a generally similar character is one known as Stela VII of Psammetichus I from Saqqara.⁶ One of the problems in this case is that the text is broken, with the lower part of the stela missing, preventing us from knowing how the text concludes as well as ensuring considerable lacunae at the end of each line, which in turn prevents us from being certain about how the campaign ended – this demonstrates another type of limitation that occasionally crops up with these sources.

Another possible problem with monumental texts is displayed by Amasis' Elephantine Stela which has been interpreted⁷ as representative of a propaganda campaign retrospectively portraying support for the rebel king Amasis. If this is the case, then it needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the writings of Herodotus, for example, who would have been seeking information from people who would have had the time and opportunity to have been affected by a long-running propaganda campaign. Such questioning of veracity becomes particularly important

⁵ Copies are known from Tanis and Karnak as well as Shellal. All three are published in Der Manuelian 1994

⁶ First published by Goedicke 1962:33-44, although later publications in Der Manuelian 1994:323-332 and Perdu 2002a:30-35 both contain a number of amendments.

⁷ Leahy 1988:197-199

during this period as despite the fact that we have sources from a wide variety of different peoples, very rarely do several sources treat the same events.

As well as monumental texts, there are documents written on papyrus such as Papyrus Rylands IX.⁸ Although the very nature of this text is uncertain, it has most recently been seen as being a family chronicle of some sort,⁹ perhaps prepared in connection with a legal case, certainly dating from the Persian period. Its interest for our purposes however comes from the mention of an expedition to the Levant, during the reign of Psammetichus II. That this campaign took place is not in much doubt, for although the document spans a considerable length of time, this event seems to have taken place approximately eighty years before it was written,¹⁰ probably a short enough amount of time for the information to be relatively accurate.

One area of uncertainty, however, is exactly where the campaign was to, and to what extent it was of a military nature. Concerning the exact location of the campaign, the papyrus lists *Hr* (Khor),¹¹ which in the New Kingdom was the name for what is now Palestine,¹² but it is far from certain that this meaning was retained in the Late Period, and this uncertainty hinders any possible conclusions. As can be seen from this brief and partial overview, the Egyptian sources alone provide us with many problems to overcome and questions to consider.

Regrettably, Psammetichus II's campaign to Khor is not mentioned in any of the Western Asian material available. However, there is a wealth of other information pertaining to Egypt. The earliest sources of interest for our purposes are the Assyrian annals; that is, records of campaigns of the Assyrian kings which include much

⁸ First published, exemplarily, in Griffith 1909, more recently in Vittmann 1998a and Vittmann 1998b.

⁹ Chauveau 2004

¹⁰ As suggested by Griffith 1909:93

¹¹ Vittmann 1998a:162

¹² Tvedtnes 1981:140

information on the invasion of Egypt.¹³ Although my use of the term ‘records’ might suggest that these sources are impartial observations of events, in fact they were written from a dogmatic viewpoint whereby armies attack and punish on behalf of the god Assur, rather than for any other pragmatic or strategic motive. If, indeed, motives for actions cannot be easily extrapolated from these sources, the events themselves can be relatively securely dated due to the chronological format of Assyrian campaigns (one a year, essentially).

Moving onto later periods, we have sources of a similar nature written by the Babylonians.¹⁴ Although these are often painted as more dispassionate accounts than the Assyrian annals, an anti-Assyrian point of view stemming from the fractious relations of the period is visible and thus must be taken into account, especially as the Egyptians are often mentioned in conjunction with the Assyrians. It is frustrating for the Egyptologist that the reason for the Egyptians joining forces with the Assyrians is not explicitly stated, but then it is wholly unrealistic to expect this to be included since analysis was not the purpose of these texts. Rather, they were simply a record of what had happened that year, with no commentary on the whys and wherefores – possible motives will however be discussed in later chapters.

If the Western Asian material is of a different character to the Egyptian material, then the biblical material¹⁵ is of a different kind again. The problem with using it for our purposes is all too apparent; if theological-political concerns play a key role in shaping most of the texts mentioned so far, then that is even more the case with the books of the Old Testament which deal with events of the Saite period. The prophetic books in particular are difficult to use since although they may refer to

¹³ Handily collected in Pritchard 1969

¹⁴ Also published in Grayson 1975 as well as Pritchard 1969

¹⁵ References to events which bear on the topic of this study can be found in the books of Jeremiah, II Kings, II Chronicles, and Ezekiel.

historical events, this is often a matter of contentious debate, relying on interpretation of oblique imagery which was used to serve the didactic undercurrent.

Perhaps it could be said that the more obviously ‘historical’ books, such as the Second Book of Chronicles, are more trustworthy although this is again somewhat a contentious point, and it is certainly true that any distinction here between the divinely-engendered ravings of prophets and the careful considerations of historians is an oversimplification. Nevertheless, the problem remains that these texts are notoriously difficult to get to grips with.

Perhaps easier to use are the writings from the Greek world concerned with Egypt. In this case, we are dealing principally with Herodotus, since subsequent writers often leant on his knowledge rather heavily. Herodotus has been called many things, not all of them complimentary, and certainly his early history of Egypt should be viewed with a healthy amount of suspicion. It is just as certain however that from the Saite period onwards there was an influx of Greek people in Egypt, and Herodotus could have had meaningful dialogue with this community during his travels in Egypt. Consequently, his description of this period seems much more informed, even if here and there one can detect occasional flights of fancy and a perhaps understandable urge to mythologise.

Herodotus mentions the presence of Carians in Egypt¹⁶ and we have evidence along these lines in the shape of Carian inscriptions attesting to the presence of communities in Egypt, mainly from Saqqara,¹⁷ but the problem in this case is that, although advances have been made since the publications of Masson’s works,¹⁸ Carian is still far from understood. It is indeed difficult to extrapolate a great deal of

¹⁶ Herodotus II.151-155

¹⁷ To be found, for example, in Masson 1978

¹⁸ See Ray 1982 and Ray 1995

information explicitly from this evidence, but as the presence of foreigners in Egypt certainly affected political thinking during the Saite period, this evidence must be kept in mind.

As can be seen, the difficulty posed by the varying types of material, allied to the need to combine them together, suggests that a chronological review of the period is the best – certainly the most straightforward – way of dealing with these complexities, with Egyptian, Western Asian, Biblical and Greek material all to be used in an analysis of the emergence of Psammetichus I in what has become known as the Saite renaissance.

Chapter One: “Those kings who had repeatedly schemed...”¹⁹

The difficulty with attempting to analyse the foreign relations of the early kings of the Saite dynasty is that first the actions of their predecessors in the Twenty-fifth dynasty must be examined to establish context. Therefore, I will briefly provide an overview of these actions, before moving onto the fall of Necho I and the rise of Psammetichus I.

Although the Twenty-fifth dynasty's presence in Egypt was formally inaugurated by Piye's excursion north in year 21 of his reign,²⁰ it is not until the reigns of his successors that we have information about foreign relations, no doubt a result of Piye returning to his base in Nubia after the campaign. One notable event, not in keeping with much of what followed, was when in 707/6 B.C. Iamani of Ashdod was extradited by Shebitku to Sargon of Assyria, whose aggressive expansion westward he had tried to flee from.²¹ Shebitku was, at the onset of his reign at least, not prepared to take sides against Assyria.

Nevertheless, following Sargon's death, no such reticence was shown, and tensions escalated into a pitched battle between an Egyptian force and that of Sennacherib, at Eltekeh, in 701 B.C.²² While this clash itself seems to have been more of a stalemate than an outright victory by either side,²³ it is certainly no exaggeration to suggest that as a whole Sennacherib's western campaign was strikingly successful, and resulted in

¹⁹ Ashurbanipal's description of, amongst others, Necho I and Psammetichus I, see Pritchard 1969:295

²⁰ The stela commemorating this event is published in Grimal 1981. See Frame 1999, Redford 1999 and Kahn 2001 for a more up-to-date discussion of Kushite chronology (Piye's year 21 corresponding to 734 BC - Kahn 2001:18).

²¹ Pritchard 1969:286

²² Related in the final edition of the *Annals of Sennacherib*, translated in Pritchard 1969:287

²³ See Kitchen 1983 for an informative discussion of possible outcomes.

a situation whereby pharaoh could claim little influence over the city-states of the Levant.

Under Taharqa, however, after a time seemingly spent paying attention to domestic consolidation, it seems that a more substantial presence in the Levant was desired, as Taharqa's inscription from the seventh pylon at Karnak suggests.²⁴ This time, the resulting, probably retaliatory, Assyrian campaign of 671 B.C., under Esarhaddon, reached as far as Egypt, removing the Kushite vestiges of authority and driving Taharqa south, although little more was done in terms of attempting to incorporate Egypt into the empire. Once the Assyrians had retreated, Taharqa attempted to re-establish his rule, and this eventually prompted Ashurbanipal's first campaign, wanting to right the wrongs that had been perpetrated at the end of his father's reign. We have an in-depth knowledge of this campaign due to Ashurbanipal's historical prisms, most recently published, with a vast number of new joins, by Borger.²⁵

Ashurbanipal once more drove Taharqa south, and reinstated the kings and governors who had ruled on a more local level, notably including "Necho (*Ni-ku-ú*), king of Memphis and Sais (*Sa-a-a*)".²⁶ The fact that Necho I is first named perhaps reflects the relative power of the house of Sais, with his sphere of influence including the historically important political and religious centre Memphis. Indeed, it seems that other rulers of the Delta, such as Akanosh of Sebennytos, were already starting to rally round Necho I as a counterpoint to Kushite power.²⁷

²⁴ Published by Vernus 1975. The key phrase which interests us, addressed to Amun, is found on p.31 - "*puissé-je le faire...avec ton tribute de la terre de Khor qu'on a détournée de toi*"

²⁵ Borger 1996, see particularly pp.210-215 for the campaigns against Egypt, and pp.217-219 for the Gyges episode.

²⁶ Pritchard 1969:294

²⁷ As suggested by Perdu 2002b:1238, and Perdu 2004:105

Having established this political situation, Ashurbanipal then returned to Assyria although some troops remained in Egypt. Despite the claim that “I made the garrisons stronger than before”²⁸ it is unlikely that this presence was much more than the very minimum needed; it should always be remembered that despite any posturing to the contrary “even a great power’s ability to react was restricted because of the difficulty of operating a relatively small army in extensive areas”.²⁹

Although their number may well have been limited, these troops nevertheless became aware of plotting by the very same Delta ‘kinglets’ Ashurbanipal had recognised, aiming to return Taharqa to the throne.³⁰ Presumably the motivation for this was that Kushite rule had been more *laissez-faire* than that of those other foreigners, the Assyrians. On the other hand, that a revolt was planned in the first place suggests that the Assyrian presence in Egypt was somewhat ephemeral; rebellions are rarely undertaken in close proximity to a large, well-drilled and experienced, locally-stationed military force. Although Ashurbanipal’s reaction to this rebellion will be examined more closely presently, suffice it to say for now that Egypt was raided once more, and the rebels were punished.

Our dependence on Assyrian textual sources for this period has perhaps overemphasised the success of the Assyrian invasions. It is important to remember that it is likely that the Assyrians never had any long-term ambitions to incorporate Egypt into their empire, rather merely to pacify it in order to strengthen their hold on the Levant. No doubt, as Eph’al underlines, this was as much to do with the logistics involved as any recognition of Egypt as a great power.³¹ Regrettably little is known of how the Assyrian war effort was managed; transporting all of the army’s

²⁸ Pritchard 1969:294

²⁹ Eph’al 1983:96

³⁰ Pritchard 1969:295

³¹ Eph’al 1983:99

equipment from Assyria to Egypt for each campaign would have been a massive undertaking, but we have no evidence of strategically-placed arsenals that might have lessened this considerable expenditure of time and effort.³²

A key point to be made is that the Kushite kings were intensely pragmatic when it came to foreign relations, in contrast with the dogmatic nature that one might expect from their expressed devotion to Amun. This pragmatism manifested itself as switching between a policy of conciliation and interference with Assyria as the times demanded. Retrospectively, this seems like a foolish game to have played, and perhaps meek obeisance would have ensured the Twenty-fifth Dynasty's survival, but the Kushites had no reason to fear that Assyria would actually cross the Wadi el-Arish. Furthermore, success overseas would have been a useful way of papering over the cracks of Egypt's political make-up. The fact that the political division between Upper and Lower Egypt can be seen in Tanutamani's Dream stela³³ just as much as in Piye's aforementioned triumphal stela suggests that they did not succeed in this aim. Psammetichus I would not make the same mistake.

Turning to look at the actions of the nascent Twenty-sixth Dynasty, Ashurbanipal's reaction to the Egyptian rebellion is of great interest. As has been mentioned, the Assyrians discovered the Egyptian plans for rebellion, but it is their subsequent actions that stand out as not quite being what one might have expected. The rebels were rounded up and carried away to Nineveh. Here, they were all executed, except that Ashurbanipal "had only mercy upon Necho and granted him life",³⁴ and also his son, the future Psammetichus I.

³² *op. cit.*:101-2

³³ Most recently published in Breyer 2003; a relatively recent English translation is to be found in Eide, Hägg, Pierce, & Török 1994:193-207

³⁴ Pritchard 1969:295

Indeed, not only was Necho I not killed, but he was rewarded with a treaty, gifts, and was returned to rule in Sais and Memphis, while Psammetichus I, referred to in the texts by the Assyrian name Nabushezibanni, was given rule of Athribis.³⁵ The actual nature of the treaty is open to interpretation, Spalinger stating “It is highly probable that this treaty, although obviously recognizing some type of Assyrian sovereignty over Egypt, also recognized how fragile that hold really was”.³⁶ As such, some arrangement whereby Necho I was allowed to essentially do as he wished with Egypt as long as it was not to the direct detriment of Assyria is probably to be imagined.

Given the Assyrians’ not unwarranted reputation for brutality, well demonstrated by other aspects of their response to the attempted rebellion,³⁷ this clemency is striking, yet we must remember that we only have the Assyrian viewpoint for this particular incident – why was the act of clemency mentioned in this account? It is possible that Ashurbanipal’s magnanimity is supposed to impress the reader, but bearing in mind how little is made of it elsewhere, it seems more likely that the passage is included primarily to suggest that the Egyptians are in debt to the Assyrians for this act of mercy.

The description of the act of mercy itself is tantalizing, and the mention of gifts makes the exchange seem more vivid to the modern reader, but ultimately reveals little about any possible motivations. The obvious question concerning this event is, why? Why did the Assyrians spare the life of one of the Egyptian rebels? Why was the recipient of this mercy specifically Necho I? It is possible that this represents a major change in thinking on the part of the Assyrians. Although the

³⁵ *op. cit.*:295

³⁶ Spalinger 1974b:323

³⁷ “They hung their corpses from stakes, flayed their skins and covered...the wall of the town” – Pritchard 1969:295

Assyrians stationed in Egypt had discovered the rebellion and therefore justified their having been left behind, it is extremely debatable as to how long the Assyrians were willing to maintain a presence in Egypt, and as to how long such a presence would have been capable of suppressing native power.

On the other hand, a relatively strong king in the Delta, owing his position of strength, and indeed his life, to Assyrian kindness, would be able to prevent Egyptian meddling in the Levant at its source. Although it has long been thought that Necho I was the strongest Nile Delta leader of the time, Perdu's publication of a donation stela of Akanosh, a ruler of Sebennytos, who dates according to Necho, underlines the fact that his power-base was greater than just the western Delta, at least including the area of Sebennytos in the north of the central area of the Delta.³⁸ Further, as has been mentioned earlier, it seems that he may have also been trying to offset Kushite power himself.³⁹

The impetus for this change in Assyrian thinking may have come from Necho I himself, using every diplomatic trick he knew to not only safeguard his life but also to ensure he retained power in Egypt. Tempting though this interpretation is, it cannot be substantiated and must remain a supposition at best. Whether the initiative belongs to the Assyrians or Necho I, it certainly suited both, and it no doubt reinforced in Necho's mind, and that of the observing Psammetichus I, that diplomacy can be far more effective than simple dogmatic belligerence – this is one of the strong themes underlying the actions of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty.

Psammetichus I may well have also noted how useful foreign aid can be. Certainly, he was not afraid to turn to others for help against fellow 'Egyptians', as events following the attempted invasion of Tanutamani show. The invasion is

³⁸ Perdu 2002b:1236

³⁹ *ibid.*:1238, and Perdu 2004:105

detailed in the aforementioned Dream Stela, wherein a dream in which Tanutamani sees two snakes is interpreted as suggesting “South-land is yours (already), now seize for yourself North-land” (*iw n(y)=k T3-rsy it n=k T3-mhw*).⁴⁰ A campaign northwards follows, which Necho attempted to repulse⁴¹ although it seems that he died in attempting to do so – Herodotus mentions him dying in an attack by “Sabacos the Ethiopian”.⁴² This is clearly incorrect, as he was certainly still alive during Taharqa’s reign, and, unless Herodotus has simply made a mistake, must therefore refer to a later Ethiopian king, i.e. Tanutamani; unfortunately Assyrian sources are silent on the death of Necho I.

Our only source regarding the actions of Psammetichus I during this period, Herodotus, suggests he fled to Syria.⁴³ In Classical sources, Syria and Assyria were often confused,⁴⁴ and that Psammetichus fled to Nineveh would certainly be more than possible, remembering that he had been given the name Nabushezibanni in Nineveh previously, reflective either of an attempt to ‘Assyrianize’ him, or as a “token of friendship”.⁴⁵ Of course, it is certainly also possible that this episode in Herodotus is a garbled version of that earlier journey. Even if we do take Herodotus literally, ‘Syria’ was at the time still part of the Assyrian Empire, and as such fleeing there would probably have led to the same result, politically, as fleeing to Nineveh, although again one must consider the not unlikely possibility that Herodotus was simply wrong on this count.

⁴⁰ Translation and transliteration following Eide, Hägg, Pierce, & Török 1994:197

⁴¹ See Eide, Hägg, Pierce, & Török 1994:200. Necho I is not named, but a battle took place in the vicinity of Memphis, after which Pakruru of Per-Soped appears to be leader of the rebels, not Necho I as would be expected if he was alive at the time.

⁴² Herodotus II.152

⁴³ Herodotus II.152

⁴⁴ Lloyd 1988:132

⁴⁵ Spalinger 1974a:325

Nevertheless, I feel Psammetichus I leaving the country would have been quite feasible and here the pragmatic actions of Psammetichus, choosing to flee to the safety provided by his foreign friends rather than risk death at the hands of a Kushite force, not only saved his life but probably played a large role in his eventual return in a position of power. The Assyrian sources, however, neglect to mention Psammetichus I in the description of Ashurbanipal's return to Egypt to punish Tanutamani, culminating with the famous sacking of Thebes.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Herodotus includes no mention at all of the Assyrians in his account of the rise of Psammetichus.⁴⁷

It seems likely that this absence of Assyrians is to be explained by the fact that Herodotus is relating a nationalistic, propagandist Egyptian version of history that he was exposed to. It is easy to imagine a situation whereby over many years Psammetichus I and his successors instigated a portrayal of the king as a returning hero, saving Egypt from the foreign rule of the Kushites, although as Lloyd points out there are also Greek flourishes to the story (notably the enigmatic manner of the oracles).⁴⁸

On the other hand, we should not be surprised that the Assyrian sources neglect to mention Psammetichus I. Naturally, the intent in the description of this campaign is to emphasise the might of Assyria, therefore admitting to involvement by others (no matter how minimal it may have been) would be counterproductive. It seems, though, that the success of Ashurbanipal's campaign presumably weakened the other Delta leaders, while returning Psammetichus I to his father's former power base.

⁴⁶ Pritchard 1969:295

⁴⁷ Herodotus II.151-152

⁴⁸ Lloyd 1988:160

However, it is nevertheless difficult to see how Psammetichus I could have amassed enough manpower from his fellow countrymen for his unification of Egypt at this point, with him still being one power amongst many (although, with Sais, Memphis, and Athribis under his control, his was a significant power). We turn again to Herodotus for his rather picaresque description of how Psammetichus I came to employ Carian and Ionian troops - after being told by an oracle that 'men of bronze' would come to his aid, the sceptical Psammetichus was informed in just these terms of men "voyaging for plunder...forced to put in on the coast of Egypt, where they disembarked in their mail of bronze"⁴⁹ with whom he then made friends. Although it is indeed possible that shipwrecked pirates were recruited by Psammetichus, it seems unlikely that this would provide as great a number of mercenaries as the Egyptian king, "a rich man with problems",⁵⁰ would have needed. Sullivan sees the tale in Herodotus as the residue of "a systematic policy pursued by Psammetichus to obtain foreign assistance".⁵¹ If then, Psammetichus I sought this aid, rather than reacting to a fortuitous turn of events, where did he get it from?

One possibility is from Gyges, king of Lydia. The Rassam Cylinder includes a passage mentioning how Gyges sent troops to Psammetichus I, who is described as having "thrown off the yoke of my sovereignty".⁵² Spalinger sees the two as unrelated, suggesting that the troops were used to secure power in the Delta rather than to expel the Assyrians,⁵³ whereas Lloyd suggests that the proximity of the two statements implies a link between the two,⁵⁴ and I am inclined to agree with him. Although it is certainly possible that Psammetichus concentrated on strengthening his

⁴⁹ Herodotus II.152

⁵⁰ Ray 1995:1189

⁵¹ Sullivan 1996:186

⁵² Luckenbill 1927:298

⁵³ Spalinger 1976:135

⁵⁴ Lloyd 1988:134-135

hold on the Delta before removing the Assyrian ‘yoke’ it is hard to see why he would have used the mercenaries in the earlier action, but not the later. It is better to visualise Psammetichus I’s expansion in the Delta as a process of diplomacy backed with military means and threats, and his removal of the Assyrians as part of the same process, but with perhaps more achieved militarily than diplomatically.

Herodotus then goes on to mention the founding of *stratopeda*.⁵⁵ Although the actual location and foundation date of these camps is disputed,⁵⁶ their very establishment is of interest. It is impossible to know whether Psammetichus I had these camps in mind as a long term power-base supporting him, or merely as a short term bulwark in the initial turbulent phase of his reign. In light of the political shrewdness suggested by the length of his reign it is tempting to go with the former suggestion, and in this respect it is of great interest that a Carian form of the name Psammetichus is common in Carian inscriptions found in Egypt dating from the Saite period, suggesting a sense of loyalty and gratitude to the king.⁵⁷ The location Herodotus mentions,⁵⁸ on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, does also suggest a strong defensive motive, since “The Pelusiac mouth of the Nile had for centuries served as a major point of defence for Egypt against traditional enemies in the Levant or those who approached by sea”.⁵⁹

Perhaps we should view the founding of Naukratis in a similar way. That is certainly the supposition that Sullivan makes in an informed discussion of the possibilities.⁶⁰ Although a statement by Herodotus⁶¹ has been interpreted as

⁵⁵ Herodotus II.154

⁵⁶ See Smoláriková 2002:97-101 for a discussion of changing scholarly opinions on the location of these *stratopeda*.

⁵⁷ Ray 1982:189

⁵⁸ Herodotus II.154

⁵⁹ Sullivan 1996:186

⁶⁰ Sullivan 1996

suggesting that Amasis was behind the foundation of Naukratis, more recent views suggest that “the reign of Psammetichus I seems likely for the inception of Naukratis, and probably early rather than late”.⁶² The dating early in the reign of this pioneering king is contentious but although only a small amount of the pottery found has been assigned to as early a date as circa 650 B.C., this can be partly explained since Naukratis was probably initially a rather small settlement and if this was the case then even a small number of early finds would thus take on an increased significance.⁶³

On the other hand, an attractive possibility, which fits the political picture of the time, is that Naukratis began life as being of a military character, and therefore “Little leisure for large-scale manufacture of pottery would be available”.⁶⁴ It should be remembered that although it was later formalised, under Psammetichus I “The initial arrangement need have been no more than a loose agreement that Greeks in his service could locate there, only a few miles from his capital...with an arm of the Nile...available”.⁶⁵

Again, was this just a short term measure, bolstering the western Delta? Or was a more long term strategy involved, especially since “Egyptian external trade is...characterized by inactivity...the...Pharaoh...regarded the Greeks as welcome transporters of much-desired prestige items and made available to them a ‘port of trade’”?⁶⁶ It is difficult to answer this question, but either way, the length and relative stability of the reign of Psammetichus I (especially compared to the uncertainty that preceded it) no doubt contributed to the growth of Naukratis in importance.

⁶¹ “he gave those [Greeks] who came to Egypt the city of Naucratis to dwell in” – Herodotus II.178

⁶² Sullivan 1996:190

⁶³ *ibid.*:188

⁶⁴ *ibid.*:188

⁶⁵ *ibid.*:190

⁶⁶ Möller 2000:32

The presence of the aforementioned mercenaries in Egypt does however pose a question when we come to interpret Stela VII from Saqqara,⁶⁷ which unlike the simple boundary markers along the Dahshur road is, along with Taharqa's stela relating the prowess of his army, one of two "memorial stones properly speaking".⁶⁸ There are certain problems with using this stela, dated to Year 11 of the king (654 B.C.), not least the fact that the text is damaged, and indeed the entire lower portion of the stela is missing. How much of the stela is lost is open to question,⁶⁹ but in this instance we are certainly trying to view history through a broken window.

In the stela, Psammetichus I, having returned from spending time at what seems to be a building with an oblique connection to Amenemhet I,⁷⁰ is told that Libyans are responsible for "some sort of trouble...at hand to the west of Egypt",⁷¹ although the incompleteness of the initial statement prevents us from knowing much more detail. Spalinger interprets the situation as being that "the Libyans had control of the Western territory of Egypt from the Bahr Youssef area around the Fayum to the Mediterranean"⁷² but the fact remains that we cannot be completely sure of the scope and seriousness of the situation.⁷³

Of great interest is the phrase – "Then were pronounced the name(s) of the mayors of every town, in order to mobilize the great ones" (*st̄ dm.tw rn n hstyw- ' nwt nbt r thm wrw*).⁷⁴ Although Spalinger points out that this is important – "Psammetichus had to call upon his nome leaders to supply him with troops-the

⁶⁷ Most recently published by Perdu 2002a

⁶⁸ Moussa 1981:334

⁶⁹ Der Manuelian 1994:330 suggests that perhaps a greater part is missing than is usually thought

⁷⁰ See Der Manuelian 1994:328 for a brief discussion of this problem

⁷¹ *ibid.*:329

⁷² Spalinger 1976:140

⁷³ Perdu 1986:27

⁷⁴ Translation and transliteration following Der Manuelian 1994:325

monarchy did not have at its disposal a ready standing army”⁷⁵ – he takes the view that Psammetichus I had not acquired his mercenaries by this point, perfectly understandably since their arrival is not securely dated, but one is still tempted to believe that they would have been used in his unification of Egypt, and therefore would have been in Egypt at this time.

As such, the real question is, why would Psammetichus I need to levy troops if he had a bevy of experienced soldiers waiting for his command? It suggests that the motivation for this action was as much political as it was military – ensuring different local troops fought together as a unified force would prove a singularly effective way of transferring local loyalties into national ones. This would also add further resonance to the stela if it is true that barracks lay at the end of the Dahshur road,⁷⁶ underlining the unity and strength of Egypt to the very troops that supported it. Spalinger rather sees it as an act of ‘broadening his horizons’ now that “he was secure in his domain”⁷⁷ but I think this rather simplifies the complex balancing act of domestic and foreign politics.

This military action could also have served as an effective means of erasing doubts possibly resulting from the fact that Psammetichus I’s “ancestry was probably of Libyan origin”.⁷⁸ If this was the case, it was probably at least successful in this regard, although one must be slightly reticent in agreeing with Basta’s assertion that the other Dahshur stelae were buried by Libyans “who apparently wished to hide the records of their defeat by King Psmatek (*sic*) I. This could have happened...after the Saitic era, perhaps in the Persian time”,⁷⁹ since the ability of the Libyans to read the

⁷⁵ Spalinger 1978a:15

⁷⁶ Decreed likely by Basta 1968:62-3

⁷⁷ Spalinger 1976:140

⁷⁸ Spalinger 1982a:1166

⁷⁹ Basta 1968:62

stelae must be questioned. This rather *realpolitik* interpretation of why Psammetichus mounted this campaign does not suggest that this was necessarily a manufactured threat on Egypt's western border, and it is certainly possible also that some of the so-called *machimoi* had left the Delta to join forces with the Libyans after Psammetichus I's expansion,⁸⁰ although the idea of them reacting in such a way to the influx of Greeks is possibly somewhat overemphasising the Greek presence and influence during this period.

Although the inconclusive ending of the stela prevents us from knowing exactly how the campaign ended, the fact that the stela exists in itself suggests a positive outcome for the Egyptian king and goes some way to rebutting Assman's judgement on the Saite dynasty, "that enacting the past was more important than shaping the present".⁸¹ Also suggesting the campaign was successful are subsequent events; all seems to have been quiet on the Western border of Egypt for the remainder of Psammetichus I's reign, although this could of course also be due to an accident of preservation. Nevertheless, our inability to be certain of the details of this action is well transmitted by the various possibilities mooted in der Manuelian's summing up: "it seems that the king succeeded in surrounding and defeating his enemies, and either building some sort of containment structure, or attacking that of the Libyans".⁸²

In conclusion, it can be seen that although the Saite dynasty may well have come to power through a weakness in Egyptian foreign relations, Necho I and, especially, Psammetichus I quickly proved themselves to be more than able at exploiting diplomacy for their own ends. In the period that has been covered so far one would probably say that an initial concentration on securing internal defence can

⁸⁰ As suggested by Spalinger 1976:140

⁸¹ Assmann 2002:341

⁸² Der Manuelian 1994:324

be seen, making Egypt ready for the more outward-looking phase that will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Building On New Foundations

After the flurry of activity during the early reign of Psammetichus I, securely-dated evidence for foreign relations becomes sparser, indeed non-existent, till the final years of his rule. Egypt's foreign relations under his successors Necho II and Psammetichus II are, by the standards of the Saite period, very well known, attested by a number of sources, although many of these sources are beset with problems.

Why then is there this disparity, in terms of the evidence that survives, between the majority of the reign of Psammetichus I, and those of his immediate successors? An accident of preservation is perhaps the most appealing explanation, especially if we take into account the fact that Sais, the political centre of the time, is not preserved to the same standard as, say, New Kingdom Thebes (which does provide us with information on foreign relations of that period). It should also be pointed out that, for the most part, "the practice of celebrating foreign involvements and successes by making them public in text and relief, a fad of the New Kingdom, had long since fallen into abeyance",⁸³ though, as we shall see, Psammetichus II proved an exception. Nevertheless, it does seem surprising that this accident of preservation within Egypt should be reproduced without, where there is again no evidence from this middle period that seems to deal with the actions of Psammetichus I.

Another possible reason was that the upheaval of the previous decades of foreign interference led Psammetichus I to concentrate on domestic matters rather than anything outside Egypt's borders. On the other hand, the sheer length of his

⁸³ Redford 2000:183

reign suggests a level of political stability that would have provided a strong foundation suitable for furthering foreign relations.

One example of an incident that may be dated to this unknown mid-period of Psammetichus I's reign is his siege of Ashdod, as related by Herodotus: "Psammetichus ruled Egypt for fifty-four years; for twenty-nine of these he sat before Azotus...and besieged it till he took it".⁸⁴ The archaeological evidence⁸⁵ seems to uphold Herodotus' record of Egyptian violence against Ashdod, for after the destruction of Stratum VII, Stratum VI, which lasted "until the end of the seventh century BCE and the rise of Babylon",⁸⁶ seems to have been under Egyptian influence, as suggested by the presence of a number of hieroglyphic inscriptions.⁸⁷

If we thus accept that a siege did take place, it is harder to countenance it lasting twenty-nine years; especially since even Herodotus himself seems disbelieving.⁸⁸ This extraordinary length has been ingeniously justified in a variety of ways by different scholars, but there is always the possibility that Herodotus was simply incorrect on this point, that it is "a mere fiction".⁸⁹ It could be an intended reference to Herodotus' earlier mention of the Scythians ruling Asia for twenty-eight years,⁹⁰ implying that Psammetichus I besieged Ashdod during this time and ultimately ended their rule, but that seems somewhat unlikely.

Strange and Tadmor have suggested that the siege took place in the twenty-ninth regnal year of Psammetichus I,⁹¹ and Herodotus misunderstood his information.

⁸⁴ Herodotus II.157

⁸⁵ See Dothan & Freedman 1967 and Dothan 1971 for excavation reports.

⁸⁶ Dever 1997:220

⁸⁷ Malamat 1974a: 447

⁸⁸ "Azotus held out against siege longer than any city of which I have heard", Herodotus II.157

⁸⁹ Spalinger 1977:223

⁹⁰ Herodotus I.106

⁹¹ Strange 1966:136 and Tadmor 1966:102

Dothan thought that “This town may have been destroyed by Psametik about sixty years later”⁹² than 712 B.C. although the archaeological record is not as illuminating as one would like. Lloyd sees the time range of circa 655 to 630 as most likely,⁹³ but one must accept that this statement of Herodotus simply does not allow us to date this event precisely.⁹⁴ It surely, however, happened before Psammetichus I’s troops crossed the Euphrates (*vide infra*), so a *terminus ante quem* of 616 B.C. seems fair.

Why would Psammetichus I have moved against Ashdod? Firstly, it was a site of substantial tactical importance, needed for “control of Philistia...whilst any northern power with ambitions to the south had to take or...neutralize it”.⁹⁵ Securing Ashdod would have been a vital first step towards re-founding Egyptian interests in the Levant and possibly even further afield, maybe replacing the fading power of the war-torn Assyrians. It has been suggested that these actions were part of “Egypt’s traditional defensive strategy of creating a buffer-zone against, or a counterweight to, any great power which might threaten Egypt from that quarter”.⁹⁶

One interesting source relating to this area is a stela recording the burial of the Apis bull in 612 B.C., wherein craftsmen and their chiefs charged with preparing the casket, made of cedar wood (a product of the Lebanon), are termed “subjects of the palace, with a royal courtier placed over them”.⁹⁷ It seems therefore that Psammetichus I had control of Phoenicia at this time, which, bearing in mind the events of 616 and 610 B.C. (*vide infra*) one would fully expect. Before examining the

⁹² Dothan 1971:115

⁹³ Lloyd 1988:148

⁹⁴ *ibid.*:148

⁹⁵ *ibid.*:146

⁹⁶ *ibid.*:147

⁹⁷ Freedy & Redford 1970:477 for the translation, the text is published in Perdu 2002a:39-41

actions of Psammetichus further west, another presence in the Levant that possibly affected Egyptian interests must be mentioned – the Scythians.

Again, Herodotus is our starting point - “they marched against Egypt: and when they were in...Palestine, Psammetichus king of Egypt met them and persuaded them with gifts and prayers to come no further”.⁹⁸ Herodotus also describes the Scythians not only as “masters of all Asia”,⁹⁹ but further states that they “ruled Asia for twenty-eight years”.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, none of this is reflected in the extant cuneiform record, although the absence of Assyrian historical texts after the 630s suggests that if this “historically dubious incursion”¹⁰¹ by the Scythians did occur, it would have been during this time.¹⁰² Muddying the issue is the fact that “La chronologie d’Hérodote n’est...qu’une reconstitution fondée sur des calculs généalogiques, et cette reconstitution ne peut être tout à fait précise”.¹⁰³ Although earlier historians did identify the Umman-Manda of Babylonian texts as being the Scythians,¹⁰⁴ this term has now been shown to refer to the Medes.¹⁰⁵

One would not expect Psammetichus I to have recorded an event whereby he had to resort to buying off his enemies to prevent an attack (certainly not in those terms), or indeed, the nomadic Scythians themselves to have left evidence, but the limited likelihood of a Scythian hegemony of Asia suggests that few conclusions should be drawn from Herodotus on this incident. There is always the possibility, albeit somewhat unlikely, that this passage is a confusion over Psammetichus II’s trip

⁹⁸ Herodotus I.105

⁹⁹ Herodotus I.104

¹⁰⁰ Herodotus I.106

¹⁰¹ West 2002:437

¹⁰² Ivantchik 1999:511

¹⁰³ Ivantchik 1993:112

¹⁰⁴ Malamat 1950:155 for example.

¹⁰⁵ See Zawadski 1988 for an in-depth discussion of this problem

to Palestine (*vide infra*). We can at the very least however, due to the events to be discussed shortly, “suppose that in 616 B.C. the Scythian threat was already over”.¹⁰⁶

For in 616 B.C. the Babylonian Chronicle records that “In the month of Tishri the army of Egypt and the army of Assyria went after the king of Akkad as far as Gablini but they did not overtake the king of Akkad (so) they withdrew”.¹⁰⁷ It is reasonable to assume that for the Egyptians to have been mounting operations this far east, they would have had to have been secure in the belief that supply lines would not have been disrupted by Scythian incursions into the Levant, even allowing for the presence of an Egyptian garrison at Carchemish. This suggests that “Psammetichus controlled the *via maris* as his line of supply to Egypt...it was only when Josiah became bold enough to attack Necho at Megiddo...that Judah impinged upon Egypt’s support lines”.¹⁰⁸

The real question here is why did Psammetichus I turn from being an enemy of the Assyrians during the Gyges episode into an ally in 616 B.C.? It is possible that the treaty drawn up when Necho I and the young Psammetichus I were taken to Nineveh was re-asserted and the Egyptians were fulfilling a vassal obligation, but the time span involved and the relative strengths of the two nations at the time renders this somewhat unlikely. An alliance of some sort perhaps came into being between 622 and 617 B.C. since “in the first tablet of the Chronicle...reporting on the king’s initial years, up to 623 B.C., there is no mention of Egypt in the struggle between Assyria and Babylonia”.¹⁰⁹

It seems more than likely that the Egyptians helped the Assyrians for their own benefit, maybe in a far-sighted attempt to quell the power of the Babylonians,

¹⁰⁶ Ivantchik 1999:516

¹⁰⁷ Grayson 1975:91. Gablini was a city on the Middle Euphrates.

¹⁰⁸ Spalinger 1978b:52

¹⁰⁹ Malamat 1974a:447

who eventually did attempt to attack Egypt during the reign of Necho II. Acts including the siege of Ashdod (not, as we have seen, dated, but which presumably happened before a campaign to the east) suggest that Egypt was already in relatively secure control of the Levant, so it is unlikely that Assyria ceded these territories to the Egyptians in return for their help; rather, the Egyptians simply moved into the power vacuum.

It may indeed have been that the Egyptians linked with the Assyrians so that they themselves would not lose the Levant to the expanding Babylonian empire.¹¹⁰ Sadly, the “gradual disintegration of Assyrian rule in Palestine in the second half of the 7th century B.C. is obscured by a paucity of data”¹¹¹ making it difficult to conclusively determine what happened. The latest evidence for an Assyrian presence in the area includes “Assyrian deeds of sale...at Gezer, dating to 651 and 649 B.C...the mention of an Assyrian governor in 646 B.C...the punitive expedition undertaken by Ashurbanipal to...Tyre...now to be dated 644/643”.¹¹²

Perhaps Psammetichus I desired a successful military campaign which he could have used to further build his prestige at home. The Babylonian Chronicle is completely silent on the motives of the Egyptian force, but it is tempting to suggest that maybe Psammetichus, who had tasted Western Asian court life early in his career, and owed his rule both to support from, and defeat of, the Assyrians, would have wanted to involve Egypt in the area.

Six years later, at the very end of Psammetichus I's reign, Egyptian troops are again mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle, abandoning the town of Harran to the Babylonian force of Nabopolassar: “Fear of the enemy overcame Ashuruballit (II) and

¹¹⁰ Spalinger 1977:224

¹¹¹ Malamat 1974a:446

¹¹² Malamat 1973:270

the army of Eg[gypt *which*] had come [*to help him*] and they aban[doned] the city”.¹¹³ These two Egyptian involvements in Western Asia under Psammetichus I do not appear to have been gloriously successful campaigns, yet that might be largely due to the fact that it is the Babylonians who recorded them for posterity, since possessing the capacity to utilize troops so far from their natural base underlines the fact that Egypt was once more a player on the international scene.

Psammetichus I died with Egypt playing a vital, if ultimately unsuccessful, role in international relations. Indeed, as Smith has shown,¹¹⁴ there appears to have been an Egyptian tradition of Psammetichus I dying abroad, which other than possibly reflecting the actuality of his death, might also reflect that he came to be associated not only with the flourishing of Egypt on the domestic front, but also on the international stage.

Psammetichus I's successor Necho II wasted no time in following in these policy footsteps, and famously clashed with the Judean king Josiah in 609 B.C. as he personally led a force to the Euphrates. This incident is mentioned in both II Kings – “Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, set out for the river Euphrates to the king of Assyria. When King Josiah confronted him, (Necho) put him to death at Megiddo as soon as he had seen him”¹¹⁵ – and a fuller (but considerably later) passage in II Chronicles.¹¹⁶ In the later account certain details are added, namely Necho II instructing Josiah not to confront him, and an explicit mention of a battle, conspicuously absent from the first telling, whereby Josiah is shot by archers and taken back to Jerusalem before dying.

¹¹³ Grayson 1975:95

¹¹⁴ Smith 1991 for an illuminating discussion of P. Berlin 13588

¹¹⁵ II Kings 23:28-29

¹¹⁶ II Chronicles 35:20-24. II Kings is thought to have been written largely towards the close of the seventh century B.C., with additions circa 560 B.C., while II Chronicles is thought to have been written probably between 450 and 435 B.C.

The II Kings passage does not have to be taken as recording a meeting on the battlefield, for the Hebrew does not “necessarily imply warlike action”¹¹⁷ even if it is often translated in such a manner. One cannot then discount the possibility that the meeting between Necho II and Josiah was not a battle, which could lead to a great deal of irresolvable speculation over the reason for Josiah’s death. Putting this to one side, the “general impression remains of an account which, in trying to convey its content as shortly as possible, had ended up by being obscure”.¹¹⁸

The passage in II Chronicles could be taken as evidence that a military clash did take place, but it is important to remain aware that even more so than the other sources from this period “Chronicles presents history to convey a certain interpretation of the events”.¹¹⁹ In this respect it must be noted that one of the additions - Necho II speaking as what seems to be a prophet of God (“God has purposed me to speed me on my way, and God is on my side; do not stand in his way, or he will destroy you”¹²⁰), but being ignored - provides the reader with a reason for the untimely death of the good king Josiah, whose cultic reform should have ensured a long and peaceful reign. Therefore, this addition, unknown in any other source, conveniently fitting a theologically defined worldview, should not be viewed as undisputable fact.

Whether or not Josiah did meet Necho II militarily, the reason for any kind of delaying action or attempt to prevent free passage is relatively obscure too, since both the II Kings and II Chronicles passages make it clear that Necho II was merely passing through Judah on his way to help the Assyrians. Moreover, the Egyptians

¹¹⁷ Cogan & Tadmor 1988:301

¹¹⁸ Frost 1968:373

¹¹⁹ Jones 1993:99

¹²⁰ II Chronicles 35

must have made a similar movement at the end of the reign of Psammetichus I, but we have no evidence of Josiah attempting to stop that.

Yadin has also shown how inscription 88 from Arad could be a copy of an original message: “I (Aššur-uballit) am now ruling in Carchemish. Do not be afraid (or: be strong) and let the king of Egypt cross your country and come to my help”.¹²¹ If this is the correct interpretation (and it should be noted that this three line inscription had previously been seen as “an order from Jehoahaz to the commander of Arad to make vigorous military preparations against Pharaoh Necho II in anticipation of the latter’s return from Harran”!¹²²) it disputes the suggestion that Egypt would have been in a much stronger position to ensure safe passage through the Levant themselves than the fading power of Assyria. It is difficult to reconcile this interpretation with what had gone on before.

It seems most likely that the loss of face the Egyptians suffered at Harran (*vide supra*), combined with the attendant possibility of support from the Babylonians who earlier had been “beyond the political horizon of the Kingdom of Judah”¹²³ and the ascendancy to the throne of a new, untried ruler in the form of Necho II were the catalysts for Josiah’s action. It does, however, still seem strange, and it is perhaps wise to agree with Spalinger that this action must be seen as one that was unexpected and out of character for Josiah, and therefore difficult to explain.¹²⁴ His defeat “put an effective end to the prosperity of the Judean kingdom and dispelled all hopes for restored grandeur”.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Yadin 1976:14

¹²² *ibid.*:9

¹²³ Malamat 1950:219

¹²⁴ Spalinger 1977:225

¹²⁵ Malamat 1974b:124

Although not immediately involving himself in the decision of who should succeed Josiah, no doubt because of more pressing matters further east, Necho II is described in II Kings 23:31-35 as removing Josiah's successor Jehoahaz from power and replacing him with Jehoiakim, ensuring that Judah was now clearly under Egyptian control.

In Tammuz in the seventeenth year of Nabopolassar's reign, Necho II and the Assyrians were successful in retaking Harran; with Necho II's force described as "the large army of Egypt"¹²⁶ – clearly Necho II attached a great deal of importance to this campaign. The Egyptian troops were so well established in the area (see figure 1) that in the twentieth year of Nabopolassar,¹²⁷ they besieged Kimuhu for four months before capturing it. We are also told that the army of Egypt was in Carchemish, predictably as a base for the area, although they did push the Babylonians in Quramati back.

The Egyptians' relative mobility in Western Asia came to an end with the famous battle at Carchemish in 605 B.C. The entry in the Babylonian Chronicle is rather dry, but describes a comprehensive victory achieved in two stages; the Babylonian troops, under the aegis of the crown prince Nebuchadrezzar (II) fought the Egyptians, who in all likelihood did not include Necho II in their number,¹²⁸ and as the latter retreated, in Hamath they "inflicted a [defeat] upon them (and) finished them off completely...They (the army of Akkad) inflicted a defeat upon them (so that) a single Egyptian man [did not return] home".¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Grayson 1975:96

¹²⁷ See Grayson 1975:98 for the following events

¹²⁸ Yoyotte 1960:385

¹²⁹ Grayson 1975:99

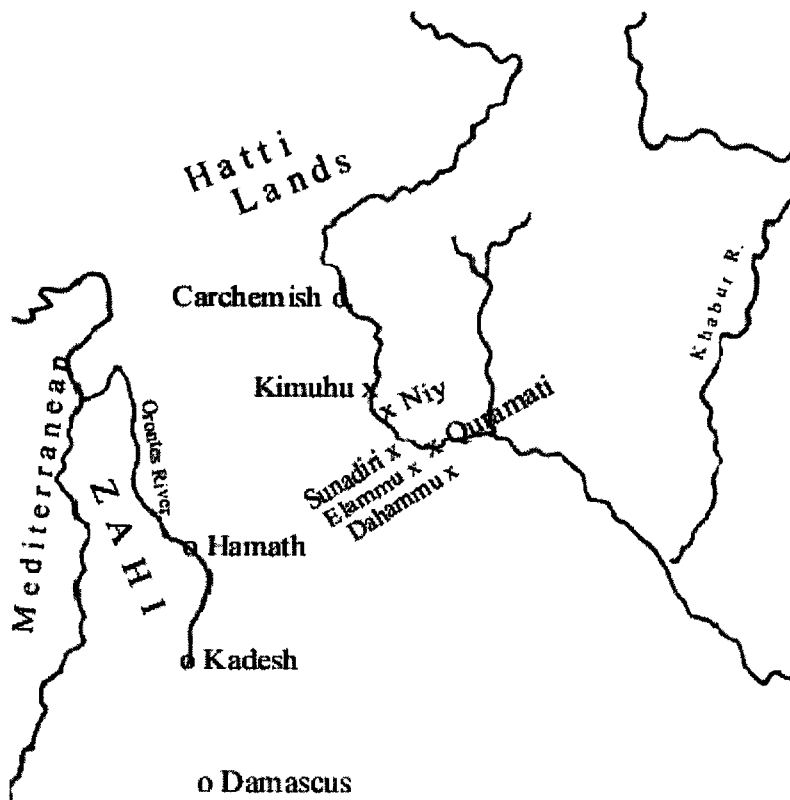


Figure 1: map of the location of Necho II's Western Asian campaigns¹³⁰

The biblical account in Jeremiah of what is probably the same battle (although it could be that there were multiple battles in the Carchemish area over this period) is more colourful, with phrases such as “Their mighty ranks shattered / They flee pell-mell, / Without looking back / Everywhere panic”,¹³¹ and reflects the importance of this event (which fitted in with Jeremiah’s view of the Babylonians as an instrument of God coming to punish the Judeans). We also possess testimony from Carchemish itself, in the form of “clay seal impressions bearing the cartouche of Necho”.¹³²

¹³⁰ Map taken from <http://www.kent.net/DisplacedDynasties/606-605.html>, 19 Sep 2006.

¹³¹ Jeremiah 46:5

¹³² Woolley 1921:126

After this battle, we have no evidence of Necho II involving himself in Western Asian affairs, although four years after Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar marched to Egypt and the two nations “fought one another in the battlefield and both sides suffered severe losses...The king of Akkad and his army turned and [went back] to Babylon”.¹³³ Although the margin of victory may have been slight, Necho II nevertheless succeeded in preventing a Babylonian invasion of the country, so perhaps his policy should be viewed as more successful than is usually the case.

Indeed, Herodotus mentions Necho II defeating the “Syrians at Magdolos, taking the great Syrian city of Cadytis after the battle”.¹³⁴ For a variety of reasons well summarised by Lloyd,¹³⁵ it seems most likely that Magdolos is Migdol rather than Megiddo, and that Cadytis is Gaza. These identifications seem to suggest that the ‘Syrians’ were the Babylonians (Herodotus seems to use the term as a catch-all for the Assyrians and their Western Asian successors) and that this passage refers to the events of 601/600 B.C.

As has been mentioned, it is true that we have no evidence after this point for Egypt’s presence in the Levant, but Herodotus’ passage suggests it was feasible, and “Malgré la défaite de Karkémish, la possibilité d’une intervention égyptienne en Phénicie n’est pas exclue dans les décennies suivantes”.¹³⁶ It could be to this time that the foundation of a fort at Tel Qedwa, in northern Sinai, is to be dated, although it could well also have been founded as part of Necho II’s initial movements east.¹³⁷ It may also be to this time that we are to date a letter found at Saqqara from a Levantine

¹³³ Grayson 1975:101

¹³⁴ Herodotus II.159

¹³⁵ Lloyd 1988:162-163

¹³⁶ Leclant 1968:17

¹³⁷ See Redford 2000:185-186

vassal addressed to a Saite pharaoh asking for aid against the Babylonians, although it does not seem as if his pleas for help were heeded.¹³⁸

Examining other areas of foreign relations, it can further be seen that Necho II was in fact a fairly astute operator, unfairly lambasted for one defeat on the battlefield. It has long been thought that he “appears to have been vilified by the Egyptians as a result of his failures in Asia and names compounded with his virtually disappear until the Persian Period”¹³⁹ but Gozzoli’s list of monuments bearing Necho’s name, some recut and some not, suggests that this was not the case.¹⁴⁰ Although the list does include some monuments with erasure, there are also, for instance, monuments likely to be from Sais which have not been recut, and if there had been a campaign by Psammetichus II to erase the names of his father, it would presumably have been thoroughly followed in the capital.¹⁴¹ Gozzoli also points out that although the erasure from donation stelae is more suggestive of a campaign to remove the name of Necho II, we also possess donation stelae from his reign without any evidence of erasure, contradicting any conclusions one might be tempted to draw from the other examples.¹⁴² As such, it seems likely that there was no *damnatio memoriae*, and there is certainly not enough evidence for it to be more than an unlikely possibility.

Unfairly lambasted or not, it is as an astute operator that his attempt, albeit abandoned, to build a canal to link the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, mentioned by Herodotus,¹⁴³ is best explained. Sadly, we have no Egyptian evidence confirming Necho II’s actions, and although “Darius speaks of inspecting a waterway before

¹³⁸ Dupont-Sommer 1948:44

¹³⁹ Spalinger 1977:232

¹⁴⁰ Gozzoli 2000:72-77

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*:77

¹⁴² *ibid.*:79

¹⁴³ Herodotus II.158

beginning his project...Darius may have been looking at the irrigation canal...through the Wadi Tumilat”¹⁴⁴ rather than Necho’s earlier attempt.

Why would Necho II have wanted to build a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea? Before answering this question, it is important to look closer at Herodotus, and his stated aims for Necho abandoning the project; not so much the Greek-style oracular pronouncement that played a role,¹⁴⁵ but rather the claim that “Necos then ceased from making the canal and engaged in warlike preparation; some of his ships of war were built on the northern sea, and some in the Arabian Gulf”.¹⁴⁶

Therefore we need to envisage a situation whereby Egypt had a maritime presence on both its northern and eastern coasts. As Lloyd summarises, the ships in the Mediterranean would have provided support to any Egyptian forces in the Levant, or on the other hand they could have threatened an enemy land-force, and they also could have formed part of a defence against any Phoenician attacks.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, this was a wise move; an Egyptian presence off the Levantine coast would no doubt have made Egyptian involvement in the area much more of a possibility.

If the reasons for stationing a fleet in the Mediterranean are relatively self-apparent, this is not really the case for the Red Sea. There is no evidence that the Babylonians would have attacked by crossing the Arabian Gulf. Indeed, the events of 601/600 B.C. reinforce the truth that the Babylonians would have followed the Assyrians in trying to enter Egypt through its eastern border, by far the most natural invasion route. Lloyd has persuasively argued that this fleet in the Red Sea was

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd 1988:150

¹⁴⁵ Herodotus II.158 states that “Necho ceased from the work, being swayed by a prophetic utterance that he was toiling beforehand for the barbarian”.

¹⁴⁶ Herodotus II.159

¹⁴⁷ Lloyd 1988:161

linked to a desire to resume trade with Punt, protecting ships from any pirate activity that might have threatened this trade.¹⁴⁸

Another aspect of this interest in maritime affairs is shown by the fragmentary inscription from Elephantine from the reign of Necho II, published by Junge.¹⁴⁹ It consists of a list of ships, and appears to indicate that under Necho there was a military campaign into Nubia. Although little else can be extrapolated from the meagre fragment of the stela that we possess, this again shows not only the importance of naval policy to the Egyptians, but also re-emphasises the expansionist nature of this king.

It also, of course, raises the question of an Egyptian presence in Nubia, and the evidence from the Saite fort at Dorginarti suggests that it was occupied throughout the Saite period (starting during the reign of Psammetichus I),¹⁵⁰ in turn implying a considerable measure of control of the area. It seems likely, therefore, that this campaign during the reign of Necho II would have been a “reaction either to nomadic infiltration into Lower Nubia or to aggression from Upper Nubia”.¹⁵¹

An interest in the lands to the south of Egypt, was matched by an interest in cultivating relationships with the Greek states to the north. We know, for example, that “une série de fragments de faïence portent le nom du pharaon Nécho II...étaient primitivement incrustés dans un objet en bois dédié par le pharaon à Athena Ialysia”¹⁵² at Ialysos on Rhodes. Herodotus also writes that Necho II “sent to Branchidae of Miletus and dedicated there to Apollo the garments in which he won

¹⁴⁸ Lloyd 1977:148

¹⁴⁹ Junge 1987:66-67 (+ plate 40.c)

¹⁵⁰ Heidorn 1991:205

¹⁵¹ Lloyd 2000:85

¹⁵² Leclant 1979:406

the victories”.¹⁵³ The political value in making overtures to the Greeks is self-evident, and “Necho’s dedication in the major Milesian shrine can only reflect the rôle played by Ionian mercenaries in the victories of Magdōlos and Kadytis”¹⁵⁴ while “Branchidae...was a pan-Ionian and pan-Aeolic oracular shrine famed throughout the Greek world...It was, therefore, ideally suited for public-relations gestures such as that of Necho”.¹⁵⁵ Necho II shrewdly attempted to involve the Greeks in the wider world of which they were now a part.

The reign of Necho II then, often portrayed as a failure in matters of foreign policy,¹⁵⁶ is one which saw Egypt, for a time at least, control the Levant and have the capacity to operate much further east, as well as to the south of the country. Moreover, an invasion by the great power of the day, Babylon, was repulsed. Furthermore, Egypt incorporated itself deeper into the Mediterranean scene by cultivating relationships with states to the north, something that would be built upon by subsequent rulers. Necho II’s outlook has been aptly summarised by Lloyd – “an essentially defensive strategy in the Levant, however aggressive its manifestations, a keen eye to any commercial advantages that might accrue from such a policy, and an acquisitive attitude” towards the South.¹⁵⁷

If Herodotus’ brief mention of Necho II managed to cram enticing information into a relatively small amount of text, that is even more so the case when it comes to Psammetichus II. The relevant passage for our purposes simply reads “Psammis reigned over Egypt for six years only; he invaded Ethiopia, and immediately

¹⁵³ Herodotus II.159, the victories mentioned are those at Magdolus and Cadytis.

¹⁵⁴ Lloyd 1988:163

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*:163

¹⁵⁶ E.g. “When Necho died in the summer of 594, a promising and somewhat imaginative life had apparently ended in failure.” Redford 2000:193

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd 1988:149

thereafter died".¹⁵⁸ Luckily, given the bare-boned nature of the statement, this campaign to Nubia is one for which we do not have to rely only upon Herodotus. Indeed, several stelae relating this event have been recovered from Egypt, namely the Shellal, Karnak and Tanis stelae of Psammetichus II.¹⁵⁹ It should be pointed out that the very fact that several copies are extant to us suggests that great stock was laid by Psammetichus II on this campaign.

As the Shellal stela contains the complete version of the text, it seems best to start by examining that particular version. The text begins with Psammetichus II being brought a message that "The army (6) which Your Majesty sent to Nubia has reached the country of Pnubs" (*mš' (6) sb.n hm=k r T3-Stt ph=sn h3st Pr-nbs*),¹⁶⁰ a "turning-point before some...change of mood...on the part of the Pharaoh to profound concern...a transition from peace to war".¹⁶¹ A battle, where it is not entirely clear if the king is present or not, ensues, with unhappy results for the Kushites since "one waded in their blood like water" (*d3=tw m trw=sn mí nw*)¹⁶² and 4200 prisoners were taken.¹⁶³

It should be noted that the Egyptians are the aggressors in this action rather than reacting to Kushite military overtures, with the first mention of military motive in the inscription being the notification that the army has reached Pnubs (*vide supra*) where trouble subsequently flared. In fact, the stela seems to stress that the Nubians did not attempt to put up much of a fight: "it was without an arrow hitting them, or them shooting, that the rebels turned their backs" (*dí h3kw-ib s3=sn nn hwd w' 'h3w*

¹⁵⁸ Herodotus II.161

¹⁵⁹ These three stelae although initially published separately, are brought together in Der Manuelian 1994, pp.337-350 for the Shellal stela, pp.351-355 for the Karnak fragment and pp.365-371 for the Tanis stela.

¹⁶⁰ Translation and transliteration following Der Manuelian 1994:339

¹⁶¹ Bakry 1967:236

¹⁶² Der Manuelian 1994:340

¹⁶³ *ibid.*:340

r=sn r sti).¹⁶⁴ This suggests that we should rule out the purpose of this campaign as being to prevent a renewed attempt by the Kushites to rule Egypt, since although we know so little concerning Nubia during this period, Necho II's Elephantine inscription makes it seem unlikely that this was the first Twenty-sixth Dynasty excursion south. Therefore, maybe some kind of rebellion is to be envisaged. Furthermore, although some have claimed that Psammetichus II "made no effort to annex any Nubian territory; the Egyptian boundary at Elephantine remained fixed, as did the no-man's land of the Dodecaschoenos...between Egypt and Kush",¹⁶⁵ the evidence from Dorginarti suggests the area was under Egyptian control and had been for some time,¹⁶⁶ and the troops appear to have reached at least as far as the third cataract during the course of the campaign.¹⁶⁷

However, the Tanis stela records a slightly different series of events, with its statement that the Nubians "are planning to fight with [you...]"¹⁶⁸ (although this is "a standard, indeed, banal, *casus belli*"¹⁶⁹) and the apparent killing of a Kushite king.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, although we have very little evidence for any movement by the Kushites at this time with respect to Egypt, this campaign must still go down as having "une signification politique et une ampleur géographique...considérables",¹⁷¹ and the possibility of "an economic interest in this area is not to be ignored".¹⁷² Light on this episode is shed further by the Greek inscription from Abu Simbel, written by soldiers returning - "those who sailed with Psammetichos son of Theokles wrote this;

¹⁶⁴ My own translation, largely following Der Manuelian 1994:340, and Der Manuelian 1994:347-348

¹⁶⁵ Spalinger 1982b:1171

¹⁶⁶ Heidorn 1991:205-206

¹⁶⁷ Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952b:168-169

¹⁶⁸ Der Manuelian 1994:367

¹⁶⁹ Spalinger 1978a:23

¹⁷⁰ Der Manuelian 1994:367

¹⁷¹ Yoyotte 1951:239

¹⁷² Lloyd 1988:167

and they came above Kerkis as far as the river allowed; and Potasimto had command of those of foreign speech, and Amasis of the Egyptians".¹⁷³

For such a short reign as that of this king, it is perhaps surprising that we also have a sliver of evidence for another foreign campaign, albeit one of disputed nature. Papyrus Rylands IX¹⁷⁴ contains a mention of Psammetichus II in regnal year four asking for priests to accompany him on a trip to *Hr*, apparently referring to Palestine.¹⁷⁵ Lloyd's statement that this "looks more like a triumphal progress than a military campaign"¹⁷⁶ is a common view amongst many historians, that this campaign of "Psammétique II ne serait ainsi qu'une des différentes manifestations par lesquelles ce roi aura chercher à tirer parti de l'effet moral produit par son triomphe africain".¹⁷⁷

However, it would seem to me that the need for priests would be felt also on a campaign of a more military nature. More to the point, since we have little evidence between the battle of Carchemish and this excursion to Palestine we either have to posit that an unknown campaign put the Levant back into Egyptian control to such an extent that free passage was guaranteed (in contrast to 609 B.C., when Egypt, already a presence in the east, was blocked), or that this event in itself played a key role in Egypt re-integrating itself into Levantine politics.

Ultimately, it must be accepted that if we have no evidence of conflict taking place (and it should be remembered that there would be no reason for such conflict to be mentioned in Rylands IX), a military presence would have surely been a vital part of any Egyptian incursion to Palestine. I do accept, however, that broadcasting Psammetichus II's successful vanquishing of the Nubians "aura sans doute contribué

¹⁷³ Meiggs & Lewis 1988:13

¹⁷⁴ Initially published by Griffith 1909, more recently in Vittmann 1998a

¹⁷⁵ See Vittmann 1998a:67 for a standardized hieroglyphic version of this passage (14, 17), p.162 for the transliteration and p.163 for the translation.

¹⁷⁶ Lloyd 1988:167

¹⁷⁷ Sauneron & Yoyotte 1951:144

à fortifier la position de l'Égypte dans les relations internationales",¹⁷⁸ reminding these people of the might of a once-and-now-again great Egypt, and ensuring that Psammetichus II himself would be remembered as "le dieu parfait qui frappe l'Asie...les Nubiens".¹⁷⁹

From the end of the reign of Psammetichus I to that of his like-named successor, Egypt's fortunes may have oscillated somewhat in the Levant and further, but they were certainly re-established as a major power, and too often this success is forgotten. It was the expansion during this period that allowed for the greater involvement in the Greek world that came with the reigns of Apries and Amasis, although that was to ultimately lead to Egypt's downfall in the shape of the Persian invasion.

¹⁷⁸ Sauneron & Yoyotte 1951:140

¹⁷⁹ An inscription taken from a sphinx, published in Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952b:196

Chapter Three: “Apries being thus deposed, Amasis became king”¹⁸⁰

After the short but eventful reign of Psammetichus II, Apries came to the throne. That his foreign adventures are known only from a limited number of sources creates a number of uncertainties, although it is true that this is hardly out of the ordinary for much of the rest of the Saite period. It should also be pointed out that the civil war that ended his reign, as the usurper Amasis came to the throne, has often been interpreted with an emphasis on a reaction to the foreign presence in Egypt; a result of the foreign policies of Apries and his predecessors.

As for Amasis, we are largely indebted to Herodotus, although his portrayal as a lover of the Greeks is reinforced by some archaeological material from outside Egypt’s borders. He seems to have followed a policy of wide-spread diplomacy, no doubt at least partly in recognition of the growing Persian threat from the East, although it was ultimately unsuccessful since the brief reign of his successor Psammetichus III was ended in 525 B.C. by an invasion of Egypt by the Persians.

However, this eventual fate could hardly have been predicted when Apries came to the throne. The threat from the East was not the Persians but the Babylonians, who had a commercial and military interest in the Levant. In this context, the siege and sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians seems a particularly momentous incident, no doubt as much because of our reliance on partisan biblical sources as Judah’s inherent strategical importance, and a story in which the Egyptians play a minor, but vital, supporting role. Using Malamat’s chronology,¹⁸¹ it seems that an Egyptian force attempted to relieve the siege in the spring of 587 B.C. This date, in the early years of the new pharaoh’s reign, suggests that this act was a show of

¹⁸⁰ Herodotus II. 172

¹⁸¹ Malamat 1968:151-152

strength, to prevent any doubts about the might of Egypt on the part of Levantine kings, although it was more important to also show the Babylonians that Egypt could not be easily dominated.

On the other hand, one prophetic passage that has been taken as referring to this event emphasises the small size of the Egyptian force: following an appeal for help from Jerusalem, the response from Egypt is given this description; “And *with no great force or large assemblage* will Pharaoh deal with him in battle, when ramps are thrown up and a siege-wall built for cutting down many lives”.¹⁸² If the Egyptian troops were a particularly small group, it seems unlikely to have been very successful as a show of strength.

However, the extent to which we can take this passage at face value is debatable. Firstly, it has been suggested that this particular phrase is a later addition to a passage that otherwise belongs to a time before the siege of Jerusalem.¹⁸³ Secondly, since one of the running themes throughout almost all the utterances by prophets on the subject is to portray Egypt as a ‘broken reed’ (i.e. an unreliable and indeed damaging source of support); and this is exactly what this passage attempts to do, it may prove to be an example of an impassioned Ezekiel bending the truth to serve his didactic purpose. Thirdly, another piece of biblical evidence - “The army of the Pharaoh had come out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they withdrew from Jerusalem”¹⁸⁴ - indicates that the force was sizeable enough for reports of it to alert the Babylonians sufficiently to cause at least a temporary retreat.

¹⁸² Ezekiel 17:17 (my italics)

¹⁸³ Greenberg 1983:323

¹⁸⁴ Jeremiah 37:5

Herodotus neglects to include mention of this incident, if he knew of it, and neither do we have any Egyptian evidence that can be brought to bear. Relying on this biblical evidence, what reasons might there have been for Apries to follow this course of action? It is probably true that Apries had no particular interest in seeing Jerusalem remain independent for its own sake, especially as under Psammetichus II, Egypt seems to have at the very least enjoyed the freedom to campaign in the region (*vide supra*). Had the relief action proved ultimately successful, presumably Apries would have expected hegemony over Judah, and Jeremiah 47:1 - “This came to the Prophet Jeremiah as the word of the LORD concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh’s harrying of Gaza” - could be interpreted as indicative of an Egyptian campaign to take Gaza. Following the Assyrian encounter with Egypt, it is obvious to see why an Egyptian pharaoh would have been wary of a Western Asian power coming closer and closer to Egypt’s eastern border and sphere of influence; eliminating any buffer zone that might have existed.

This intended aggression against the Babylonians might have been the reason behind the posited Babylonian invasion of Egypt in 582 B.C., although whether or not this invasion actually took place is open to debate. Much of the evidence we have is of a questionable nature, and mainly consists of a variety of prophetic statements in the Old Testament. The Babylonian Chronicle is unknown for this time period, and contemporary Egyptian evidence for this event is non-existent.

Examining the biblical evidence, one related passage is when Jeremiah says that “Nebuchadrezzar...shall come and smite the land of Egypt”¹⁸⁵ after his act of burying some stones in an official building in ‘Tahpanhes’ (Defenneh/Daphnae), and also when Jeremiah states that “I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the

¹⁸⁵ Jeremiah 43:10ff.

hand of those who seek his life”.¹⁸⁶ There is also a poem warning Egypt of her impending doom consisting of “The word which the LORD spoke to the prophet Jeremiah when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon was coming to harry the land of Egypt”.¹⁸⁷ The first statement, dated only to a time after the capture of Jerusalem, could be taken as referring to Nebuchadrezzar’s thirty-seventh year (*vide infra*), as indeed could the second (similarly ‘dated’) and the third (completely undated). Although Jeremiah himself had stopped prophesying by Nebuchadrezzar’s thirty-seventh year, a tradition of editing did continue for some time after his death, no doubt emphasising Jeremiah’s main purpose as a prophet who “creates and presides over the annihilation of the enemy (e.g. Judah, Egypt, Babylon)”.¹⁸⁸ It is difficult therefore to use the book of Jeremiah as convincing evidence of a Babylonian invasion of Egypt in 582 B.C.

The remaining biblical evidence takes the shape of Ezekiel 29-30. Ezekiel 29, the first half of which is dated to 7 January 587,¹⁸⁹ has Yahweh warning that he “will turn the land of Egypt into ruins of parched desolation from Migdol to Syene, to the border of Cush”¹⁹⁰ for 40 years. Clearly, the date suggests that Ezekiel assumed that the Babylonians would move onto Egypt once they had taken Jerusalem, and therefore he forecast a terrible fate for Egypt; to use this to suggest a Babylonian invasion actually took place is suspect. The second half of Ezekiel 29 is dated substantially later,¹⁹¹ but is of a similar character, Yahweh informing Ezekiel that he is “giving the land of Egypt to Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon”.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Jeremiah 44:30

¹⁸⁷ Jeremiah 46:13

¹⁸⁸ Carroll 1986:727

¹⁸⁹ Bright 1986:601

¹⁹⁰ Ezekiel 29:10

¹⁹¹ 571 BC - Spalinger 1977:236

¹⁹² Ezekiel 29:19

Ezekiel 30:1-19 is again of a similar character while 30:20-26, dated to 29 April 587,¹⁹³ once more has Yahweh promising that he will “put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon...against the land of Egypt”.¹⁹⁴ This is clearly dated to a time when the Egyptian relief force had retreated, for Yahweh initially states that “I have broken the arm of Pharaoh”.¹⁹⁵ This particular passage can thus be seen again as part of Ezekiel’s reaction to the siege of Jerusalem, rather than a comment on a later invasion of Egypt.

More evidence comes from the Jewish historian Josephus, who is quite unambiguous in his account - “on the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the twenty-third of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar...he fell upon Egypt, in order to overthrow it; and he slew the king that then reigned, and set up another”.¹⁹⁶ There are immediately apparent problems with this statement. It is accepted that Apries ruled until 570 B.C. and survived a few years longer; he was certainly not killed by Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, Egyptian evidence which we shall examine later suggests that Nebuchadnezzar and Apries eventually combined forces in an attempt to depose Amasis.

Although it is not inconceivable that Josephus could have got this one detail wrong but the essential account of an invasion correct, quite what access he might have had to extra-biblical sources is questionable. Since there is no Egyptian archaeological evidence of an invasion at this time and in light of the fact that Josephus was writing 600 years after the events he purports to describe, and with the highly partisan writing of Old Testament prophets another testimonial of this supposed invasion of 582, it seems best to proceed on the basis that it did not take

¹⁹³ Bright 1986:631

¹⁹⁴ Ezekiel 30:25

¹⁹⁵ Ezekiel 30:21

¹⁹⁶ Josephus, *AJ X*, 9, 7.

place. On the other hand, a selection of later Egyptian texts do seem to preserve a tradition of a Babylonian invasion of Egypt during the reign of Apries,¹⁹⁷ and since the historical record for the Saite period is nowhere near being complete, an invasion cannot be ruled out conclusively.

Herodotus does not mention this invasion, but he does state that Apries “sent an army against Sidon and did battle by sea with the king of Tyre”.¹⁹⁸ This is supplemented by a more in-depth account from Diodorus Siculus.¹⁹⁹ He emphasises that substantial forces were used, that the rest of Phoenicia and also Cyprus, which would have provided a key strategic base, were defeated, and that this took place shortly before the infamous campaign to Cyrene (*vide infra*). The taking of Cyprus particularly would have provided the Egyptians with a strong hold over the trade routes up and down the Levantine coast, including those of copper and also of the timber needed for a navy growing in importance.²⁰⁰

Lloyd²⁰¹ has suggested that the difference between the two accounts implies that Diodorus Siculus had access to independent sources, and it is true that there is nothing in his account to arouse much scepticism. Lloyd also indicates that the period 574-570 B.C. would have been the most likely for such activities on the part of Apries,²⁰² for a variety of reasons, not least because if Ezekiel and Josephus are correct in their description of a thirteen year siege by the Babylonians of Tyre starting in 587/6 B.C.,²⁰³ Egypt and Tyre would presumably have had good relations during this period.

¹⁹⁷ As mentioned in Spalinger 1977:238-240

¹⁹⁸ Herodotus II.161

¹⁹⁹ Diodorus Siculus I, 68, 1.

²⁰⁰ Lloyd 2000:89

²⁰¹ Lloyd 1988:171

²⁰² *ibid.*:170-172

²⁰³ Ezekiel 26ff. and Josephus, *Ap*, I, 21.

If we are to take Diodorus Siculus as correct, then the picture in the Levant towards the end of the reign of Apries would have been much rosier than after the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, and Apries should perhaps be viewed as having possessed a more expansive agenda. An Egyptian foothold in the Levant would have been provided by Phoenician conquests which would also have fortified the Egyptian trading network.

As has been mentioned previously, however, these successful campaigns were followed by an attack on Cyrene that ultimately led to Apries being deposed. Again, Herodotus is our main source, relating that “Apries sent a great host against Cyrene and suffered a great defeat”.²⁰⁴ Herodotus also records that the Egyptian *machimoi* rebelled after this defeat for “they thought that Apries had knowingly sent his men to their doom, that by their so perishing he might be the safer in his rule over the rest of the Egyptians”.²⁰⁵

Why would Apries have sent troops to Cyrene in the first place? Perhaps having secured his eastern frontier and expanded Egypt’s influence in that direction after the campaigns recorded by Diodorus Siculus, Apries felt that it would be easier to follow a similar program to the west, rather than push on further eastwards. The campaign has often been seen as a response to Libyans feeling the pressure from Cyrenaic expansion asking the Egyptians for aid,²⁰⁶ the Egyptians only too happy to help because of both the Libyan background of much of the *machimoi* and, more importantly, the fact that Cyrene would have provided yet another economic boost (in

²⁰⁴ Herodotus II.161

²⁰⁵ Herodotus II.161

²⁰⁶ Chamoux 1953:135



which case the campaign would have fitted in perfectly with the importance given to trade shown by Apries in targeting the Phoenician coast).²⁰⁷

However, it appears that this campaign was much more unsuccessful than those east, as evidenced by Diodorus Siculus' claim of Apries, that "il envoya une force considérable...mais la plus grande partie de ces troupes ayant péri, les survivants se tournèrent contre lui",²⁰⁸ although it must be remembered that he may here be doing no more than elaborating on Herodotus.

This rebellion will be dealt with *infra*, but it would be instructive at this point to briefly mention a rebellion by foreign troops at Elephantine which took place during the reign of Apries. It is known from a statue of Neshor, who served under Necho II, Psammetichus II and Apries, and who took titles including "préposé à la porte des pays étrangers méridionaux",²⁰⁹ published by Schäfer.²¹⁰ We know little of this revolt, but it is probably better seen as a local, small-scale issue arising from mercenary forces rather than anything to do with the native Egyptians.²¹¹

Although the coup d'état perpetrated by Amasis is strictly speaking a matter of domestic interest, as shall be seen it is integral not only to an understanding of Egypt's foreign relations towards the end of the Saite period, but also to understanding how these relations have been perceived by historians, from Herodotus onwards.

One Egyptian source that refers explicitly to this period is the intriguing double dated Elephantine stela of Amasis. Originally published by Daressy it has

²⁰⁷ The possible motives for the attack are discussed in Lloyd 1988:173-4

²⁰⁸ Diodorus Siculus, I, 68, 2 as translated in Chamoux, Bertram & Vernière 1993

²⁰⁹ de Meulenaere 1966:14

²¹⁰ Schäfer 1904:155ff.

²¹¹ Leahy 1988:198

since been discussed by Edel and Leahy.²¹² Originally thought to have been dated to year three of Amasis, Edel has shown that it is in fact two sections dated separately, year one and year four.²¹³ The year one section begins with Amasis as king, and Apries, accompanied by Greeks, moving against him. These forces are defeated, although no mention is made of exactly what happened to Apries. The second section, dated three years later, sees the defeat of an attempted Asiatic invasion of Egypt, and Apries, who appears to have been in league with these Asiatics, is buried honourably by Amasis. The double-date in itself suggests that this is at least partially an attempt to rewrite history to serve the ends of the new pharaoh, but what other evidence do we have backing this assertion up?

Intriguingly, Leahy has shown how our last known reference to Apries as king (from Thebes, importantly) is several months later than our earliest known reference to Amasis as king (donation stela BM 952, from Sharuna) - this suggests not a co-regency but a period whereby each individual had different power bases within Egypt. That the Apries reference is from Thebes goes against the relatively lengthy and in-depth account of Herodotus of this period and also the aforementioned Elephantine stela, in which Apries' reliance on mercenary Greek support in the Delta is emphasised.²¹⁴

Diodorus Siculus also explicitly mentions Apries' mercenary support,²¹⁵ although since his only departure from Herodotus is the manner of Apries' death, it is debatable to what extent he functions as an independent source. Our final (partial)

²¹² Edel 1978, Leahy 1988

²¹³ Edel 1978:13, the year one date had previously been suggested by Posener 1945:129

²¹⁴ E.g. in II.163 Apries' force is described as "a bodyguard of Carians and Ionians" while II.169 sees the assertion that Amasis enjoyed "the whole force of the Egyptians".

²¹⁵ Diodorus Siculus I, 68, 4

account of the intrigue between Apries and Amasis is a Babylonian tablet, BM 33041,²¹⁶ recording an attack on Egypt in year thirty-seven of Nebuchadnezzar (corresponding to year 4 of Amasis). On what survives of the tablet, the outcome of the attempted invasion is unknown, and there is no mention of Apries.

The picture created by these disparate sources is an intriguing one, and ultimately the exact course of these events cannot be surmised. On the one hand, we have Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus and Amasis himself painting a picture whereby the usurper was little more than the lucky recipient of a groundswell of native Egyptian ill will against Apries and his apparent over-reliance on mercenary Greek support. Further, Amasis was in fact inclined to treat Apries honourably after his usurpation, in what is largely an overwhelmingly positive treatment of his character. Allied to this is the Babylonian evidence confirming the attempted invasion of year 4 of Amasis, during which, the Elephantine stela tells us, Apries died (differing from Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus on this point).

On the other hand, we have two documents of an administrative nature confirming that in the Egyptian heartland Apries was considered king while Amasis was also claiming the title. Would this have happened if the Egyptian/Greek separation was as clear-cut as the other sources suggest? It seems unlikely. In which case, how is this to be explained? As Leahy plausibly suggests, it seems probable that Amasis, conscious of his position as a usurper, mounted this stela for propaganda purposes,²¹⁷ and if this was the case, one would think it would be merely one facet of a multi-pronged attack. As such, Herodotus and Diodorus, who apparently independently confirm Amasis' version of events, may rather merely confirm the success of his propaganda.

²¹⁶ Re-published in Wiseman 1956, translated Pritchard 1969:308.

²¹⁷ Leahy 1988:190

Our main source for the rest of Amasis' reign is Herodotus, though much of his account is occupied with excursions which are of little interest for our purposes, although it should be pointed out that the tradition of Amasis as a lawgiver, preserved by Herodotus,²¹⁸ is probably a result of an attempt to at least partially re-organise the country's administration in the wake of his usurpation.²¹⁹

One of these actions that would have affected foreign relations that Herodotus does mention is Amasis' act of giving to Greeks "who came to Egypt the city of Naucratis to dwell in".²²⁰ This does not refer to a founding of the city (at least, the city was founded earlier, though Herodotus may have not known this) but rather to a concentration of the Greek presence in Egypt. Although Herodotus portrays this as a result of Amasis' love for all things Greek, Lloyd²²¹ suggests that it is more likely to have come from a quite opposite kind of feeling; certainly it was a restrictive move - although it need not have been an expression of anti-Greek sentiment. A usurper who was, to some extent at least, shoring up the organisation and administration of his country to secure his power base, would have been well-served in restricting Greek presence to an easily observed and controlled location not far from Sais. It is perhaps in this light that the moving of Greek soldiers from their camp in the eastern Delta to Memphis to be his 'bodyguard' is to be seen.²²²

The final paragraphs of Herodotus Book II discuss Amasis' diplomatic relations with a number of Greek states. Firstly, Amasis is presented as contributing towards the rebuilding of the temple at Delphi, giving a thousand talents' weight of

²¹⁸ Herodotus II.177

²¹⁹ See Posener 1945 for a discussion of commercial re-organisation at the start of Amasis' reign.

²²⁰ Herodotus II.178

²²¹ Lloyd 1988:221

²²² Herodotus II.154

alum to the Delphians,²²³ presumably to be sold on by the Greeks.²²⁴ Although it is indeed possible that this was purely an exercise in compassion, motivated by Amasis' love of the Greeks mentioned by Herodotus,²²⁵ it is far more likely that Amasis acted in self-interest, attempting to cultivate a relationship with Delphi for both trade and military purposes. It hardly needs saying that at this time, Persia was becoming a force on the world stage, precipitating the need for dependable military support.

Furthermore, Amasis also appears to have used diplomatic means to secure a peaceful relationship with Cyrene, the state that had caused so many problems for Apries. Indeed, Cyrene aided him in repelling the Babylonian threat early on in his reign,²²⁶ suggesting an alliance that also, if Herodotus is to be believed,²²⁷ led to Amasis taking a wife called Ladice, from Cyrene. Peace on the western front would have been a valuable fillip for Amasis, preventing him from having to worry about an attack from the east and the west.

Herodotus also maintains that Amasis made offerings to Hera in Samos as well, as a result of his friendship with Polycrates, the tyrant ruler of Samos.²²⁸ Again, gifts are an indicator of a political alliance. Indeed, Herodotus provides a longer version of the gestation of this alliance in Book III, ending with Amasis renouncing it since he believed a great misfortune was about to fall on Polycrates, who promptly sent troops to aid Cambyses' invasion of Egypt.²²⁹ It would seem likely that the folk-story qualities of this narrative are evidence that it is a construction to disguise the

²²³ Herodotus II.180

²²⁴ Parke & Wormell 1961:144

²²⁵ Herodotus II.178

²²⁶ Edel 1978:15-16

²²⁷ Herodotus II.181

²²⁸ Herodotus II.182

²²⁹ Herodotus III.39-46

fact that Polycrates joined the Persians of his own volition.²³⁰ If the attempt to build an alliance to combat the Persians was unsuccessful, it was nevertheless the right strategy to follow.

Herodotus also states that Amasis' gifts to Athene of Lindus were not politically motivated, saying that it was because "it is said that the temple of Athene in Lindus was founded by the daughters of Danaus, when they landed there in their flight from the sons of Egyptus",²³¹ but one is inclined to disagree. Indeed, archaeological evidence has suggested that there was a close relationship between Rhodes and Egypt at this time,²³² no doubt at least partially motivated again by military threat and commercial benefit.

Herodotus also briefly states that Amasis "was the first conqueror of Cyprus, which he made tributary to himself".²³³ Although he was not in fact the first conqueror of Cyprus, that Herodotus thought so perhaps suggests a high level of control of the area by Amasis. These overtures to the north may have been symptomatic of a development in the importance of the Egyptian navy; as suggested by the number of naval officers known to us from the later part of the Saite period.²³⁴

Unfortunately, this greater emphasis on maritime connections with the Greek states to the north of the country did not prove enough to prevent a Persian invasion. After the death of Amasis and the accession of Psammetichus III, the Persians marched against Egypt in 525 B.C., aided by the defection of a mercenary commander by the name of Phanes, if Herodotus is to be believed.²³⁵ So ended the Saite

²³⁰ Mitchell 1975:79

²³¹ Herodotus II.182

²³² See Francis & Vickers 1984:69

²³³ Herodotus II.182

²³⁴ Spalinger 1977:235-236 for a brief summary, and Lloyd 2000 for a fuller discussion of the importance of the navy throughout the Saite period.

²³⁵ Herodotus III.1-15

renaissance, curtailed by a Western Asian power and the changeable nature of mercenary support, although it was indeed the actions of a Western Asian power and mercenary support which had helped install Psammetichus I on the throne.

Apries has often been seen as a failure upon the international stage, but it has been shown that this is perhaps an unfair reading affected by the nature of the sources that treat the subject. Amasis, too, was relatively successful, and indeed Herodotus' glowing portrayal has been key in Amasis being remembered as a success - especially since Egypt was not invaded under his watch, although it is debateable whether or not he could have stopped the Persians had he survived longer. Ultimately, the reigns of Apries and Amasis saw the interest in safeguarding trading interests and furthering contacts with the wider international world that is the hallmark of Egypt's foreign relations during the Saite period.

Conclusion

After a century and a quarter of rule of Egypt, the Saite period came to an ignominious end under the stewardship of Psammetichus III, when the Persians invaded Egypt in 525 B.C. During previous chapters I have attempted to analyse the actions of these Saite rulers with regard to foreign relations, aiming to show that although the underlying thought behind many of their actions was a concern for Egypt's defence, foreign relations during the Saite period were nevertheless far more successful than is suggested by the fact that invasion by the Persians was the final action.

The Twenty-sixth Dynasty arose from the political situation created by the foreign dealings of the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty. The pragmatic approach taken by the Kushites, oscillating between subservience and antagonism towards the Assyrians, had unfortunately not succeeded in preventing a succession of attempted invasions by the Assyrians. However, before declaring their rule of Egypt an unmitigated failure it must be pointed out that our main chroniclers of this period, the Assyrians, no doubt colour our view of the time in their favour, and also that the Kushites had little reason to expect in the first place that the Assyrians would actually attempt to invade Egypt.

With Egypt invaded by the Assyrians, an attempted rebellion by the native Egyptian chiefs and princes was uncovered, and the perpetrators were killed, except for a Nile Delta leader, Necho I, and his son, the future Psammetichus I. These two were taken to Nineveh and entered into a treaty with the Assyrians, Psammetichus I even being given an Assyrian name. It appears to me that this act heralded a change in policy. Initially, the Assyrians had tried to control Egypt themselves, stationing

troops to uphold the status quo. This could only ever be a short-term measure due to the prolific campaigning of the Assyrian empire and, besides, it is unlikely that the Assyrians wanted to include Egypt in their empire; they merely wanted their own interests in the Levant to be free from Egyptian meddling. A sympathetic Egyptian leader, such as Necho I, who now owed his very life to the Assyrians could, if he controlled the Nile Delta, at least guarantee Assyria free rein in the Levant.

There would have been clear benefits for both sides if this arrangement had been given the chance to last; for Necho I, the execution of his rivals by the Assyrians would have allowed him to expand his power base in the Delta, while the Assyrians would have benefited from the aforementioned security in the Levant, and greater availability of their troops. Unfortunately, the arrangement was not given the chance to flourish since, although his death is not explicitly recorded, it appears that Necho I died resisting an attack by the Nubian king Tanutamani which aimed to remove the Assyrians from Egypt for once and for all.

It seems likely that at this time, possibly fearing for his own life, having seen his father killed, Psammetichus I fled the country, almost certainly for safety provided by the Assyrians, be it in the Levant or Nineveh. It seems more than likely that he returned with the Assyrians in the punitive campaign of 664 B.C. that led to the sacking of Thebes. Once he was back in Egypt, Psammetichus I quickly gained overall control of the Delta, perhaps indirectly benefiting from the Assyrian emasculation of native Egyptian dynasts, although I feel it is very unlikely he would have had any access to Assyrian troops. In 656 B.C., the Nitocris Adoption Stela commemorated the effective subjugation of the Theban nobility and as such the unification of Egypt.

Although it is not certain at which point in this train of events Psammetichus I, who may very well have established contact with other vassal leaders at Nineveh,²³⁶ sought foreign help, he certainly did so, gaining mercenaries possibly from Gyges of Lydia in return for a promise to attack the Assyrians. Clearly, a united Egypt led by an Egyptian would not be able to expand or function properly with Assyrian troops in the vicinity and they were promptly expelled. Although this process is often seen as separate from the growth of the power of Psammetichus I, I think the two should be seen as having taken place hand in hand, with it being difficult to contemplate how Psammetichus I would have garnered enough local troops to take over the Delta, unless the Assyrians played a larger helping role than seems likely.

The settling of these foreign mercenaries in camps in the Delta would have increased the king's control of Egypt, ensuring that they could both be usefully controlled by the king, and could themselves be used as an instrument to control the local population. They could serve a useful purpose in the short-term in discouraging any possible rebellions, and also provide a long-term power base.

Once his control was established, one of the first acts of foreign policy of the new king that we know of was to conscript troops to quell some sort of disturbance on the Libyan border, in 654 B.C. It appears likely that although there may well have been a threat, the Libyans attempting to take advantage of the relative uncertainty of the reign of a new king, the episode was shrewdly exploited by Psammetichus I. He did this through exerting his control over the whole of the country by levying troops from every nome. As well as obviously providing a force to be used, the bringing together of different nomes may have gone some way to recreating the concept of a united Egypt with the country's citizens. Either way, it is likely that the threat was

²³⁶ Bresciani 1990:247

successfully neutralized since we hear of no more trouble on Egypt's western border till the reign of Apries. Certainly, the setting up of stelae commemorating this action would have had a beneficial effect on morale, reinforcing the idea that the prestige of Egypt was on an upward curve. At the end of this initial period of his reign, Psammetichus I and his country were secure domestically, although little action had been taken outside Egypt's borders.

There is little evidence pertaining to domestic or foreign affairs during the middle years of the reign of Psammetichus I, perhaps due to an accident of preservation and the fact that "it seems to no longer matter whether the mighty acts of the king are prominently displayed for public consumption".²³⁷ This is particularly frustrating as no doubt this period would have been a time of great change, Psammetichus I being "intent upon uplifting Egypt's fallen condition".²³⁸ Psammetichus was a relatively newly-installed king when he had to deal with stirrings in Libya, a relatively local problem, yet his kingship was presumably of a completely different nature nearly half a century later when we can at last again securely date his actions.

Nevertheless, it appears that it was during this unknown middle time period that Psammetichus I besieged the Philistine city of Ashdod. This town was of great strategic importance, and securing its allegiance would have provided the Egyptians with a key foothold into the vibrant commerciality of the Levant. It would be surprising if the Egyptians had not expanded their control out of Ashdod, perhaps filling the void left by the contracting Assyrian empire, and a certain amount of control of this area is suggested by the Apis stela of 612 B.C., which seems to indicate suzerainty over the Lebanon.

²³⁷ Redford 2000:184

²³⁸ Spalinger 1978a:35

This is hardly surprising in context of the actions of 616 B.C., which saw an Egyptian force taking part in military action with the Assyrian army near the Euphrates. It is likely that they allied themselves with the Assyrians to prevent the Babylonians from moving into the Levant; any suggestion that the Assyrians 'gave' the Egyptians the Levant in return for their support is unfounded, since the available evidence suggests that the Egyptians had already moved into a vacuum left by the decline of the Assyrian civilization. Over the next few years, the Babylonian Chronicle provides us with occasional insights into the presence of the Egyptian army in Western Asia. The last mention during the reign of Psammetichus is the abandonment of Harran in 610 B.C.

At the death of Psammetichus I a year later, Egypt was firmly ensconced once more in its traditional position of strength on the international scene. Necho II was forced to be involved in foreign affairs from the very start of his reign by the expansive policies of his predecessor, although his presence with the initial force after he came to power suggests he himself was keen to initiate further gains in the East. Egypt clearly must have had a vested interest in the outcome of these wars in Western Asia to remain involved over a considerable number of years.

On their way to Western Asia, the Egyptians, led by Necho, were confronted by Josiah, who paid for this bold move with his life. No doubt he felt that the new king of the Egyptians, who had recently shown some military weakness at Harran, was vulnerable at the start of his reign, but this was not the case. The Egyptian control of the area was further heightened by subsequent interference in the succession of the kings of Judah, which ensured that the ruler of this kingdom was not interested in warmongering against Egypt.

In Western Asia, however, Necho II's forces clashed with the Babylonians several times, establishing themselves in the area, but they were ultimately worsted in a defeat at Carchemish that appears to have been quite comprehensive, although we must always take into account the bias of the Babylonian sources that are our only testimonial of this activity. Despite the eventual failure of the joint Assyrian-Egyptian force, the ability to retake Harran and to take Kimuhu prior to this suggests that the Egyptians were vital allies for the Assyrians.

Not a great deal more is known from the reign of Necho II, but in 601 B.C. the Egyptian troops proved strong enough to repel an attempted Babylonian invasion on the Egyptian border. It may have been that Babylonian movements before the attempted invasion were the catalyst for Adon's undated letter asking for help from the Egyptian king.²³⁹ Despite the pessimistic portrayal of Egypt's position after the battle of Carchemish by historians, one cannot rule out the possibility that Egypt continued to make its presence felt in the Levant. In fact, the rebuttal of the attack mentioned above suggests that Egypt was stronger than it is often given credit for.

Although the Babylonian invasion was repelled by land-based troops, the reign of Necho II saw more emphasis placed on Egypt's naval strategy. There appears to have been a campaign, involving a substantial fleet of ships, to Nubia during his reign. His ships in the Mediterranean provided a useful corollary to any possible land troop movements in the Levant, as well as combating any Phoenician threat, while the ships stationed in the Red Sea were probably stationed there due to a resumption in trade with Punt. Both commercially, and militarily, an Egyptian navy could prove to be an important asset, and through gift exchange Necho II sought closer contacts with the Greek states to the north. In all then, despite being much-

²³⁹ Shea 1976:61-64

maligned by many historians, Necho II defended Egypt, managed to operate militarily a long way from home, and established relations with Greek states.

The reign of his successor, Psammetichus II, was short, but appears to have contained two foreign campaigns. The first was southerly, an armed force heading into Nubia and apparently subduing the native peoples in a series of battles. It is debatable to what extent this campaign was undertaken as a result of a distinct military threat, appearing rather to “have taken the form of a pre-emptive strike on a grand scale”.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the Egyptian testimony of the campaign in a variety of stelae is not as clear-cut as one would hope. Similarly, we have little evidence from this period from Nubia itself. It is certain however, that Psammetichus II exploited this campaign for political reasons in the aforementioned stelae, attempting to use a backlash against the expelled Nubian rulers of Egypt to bolster his own popularity. One could suggest that this was an attempt to win back the native population to the Saite ruling house after the ‘unsuccessful’ reign of Necho II although it is true that the supposedly unsuccessful nature of Necho II’s reign has been overstated and overplayed somewhat, if not enormously.

The second campaign, into Syria-Palestine, has also been ascribed to propaganda motives traditionally, although it seems to me that a desire to parade through the Levant would have been impractical for an Egyptian king without a sizeable military force, a force that may well have been needed to battle on occasion. Letting the rulers of the various cities in the Levant know that Psammetichus II had vanquished a traditional foe would not have been without its benefits, certainly, but that is not to say that the campaign was ‘peaceful’ and only mounted for propagandist reasons. At the end of the reign of Psammetichus II, the Saite Dynasty had overseen a

²⁴⁰ Lloyd 1988:167

variety of successes and failures in the Levant, but Egypt's prestige was once more considerable.

Psammetichus II was succeeded by Apries. The siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. by the Babylonians, with their commercial and military interest in the Levant, saw the Egyptians lose their control of this area, even though an Egyptian relief force, probably acting as a show of strength at the start of the reign of Apries, did make the Babylonians temporarily retreat. Apries had no inherent interest in seeing Jerusalem become independent, except to perhaps act as a buffer zone between Egypt and Babylon. Although many historians believe that this event was followed by a Babylonian invasion of Egypt in 582 B.C., I find the evidence to be somewhat unreliable, and therefore suggest that it did not take place, although an invasion cannot be dismissed entirely.

During his reign, Apries appears to have gained dominance over certain key strategic bases, such as Cyprus, and also Phoenicia, particularly in the shape of Sidon and Tyre. These sites would be not only important to the navy from a military point of view, but controlling the sea to a greater extent would have led to greater ease of trade. At this point, Egypt's foreign relations looked to be in an overwhelmingly positive state. Maybe this prosperity led to the ultimately misguided campaign against Cyrene; taking Cyrene would certainly have provided an economic boost, and may have pleased the Egyptian machimoi of Libyan extraction.

After defeat against the Cyreneaens, Apries was deposed by his general Amasis. Although this coup was subsequently painted as an Egyptian reaction against foreign presence in Egypt, and the king's closeness to his foreign troops, the support lines appear not to have been so clearly divided between natives and foreigners. In his fourth regnal year, Amasis defeated an attempted Babylonian invasion, with the

aid of troops from Cyrene; the attempted invasion perhaps showing that Nebuchadnezzar viewed Egypt under Amasis as a renewed threat.²⁴¹ Amasis' treatment of the Greeks within Egypt, concentrating them in Naucratis and moving the soldiers from their camps to Memphis, suggests that he wanted to shore up their support for him.

His relations with the Greeks outside of Egypt performed a similar function, attempting to create a network of alliances that would have allowed Egypt to fend off the Persian threat. Herodotus states that he cultivated friendships with Delphi, Samos and Lindus, and it seems likely he would have courted other Greek states as well. Although Apries had mainly been castigated by the historical record it seems to me that one mistake has blemished his record, while Amasis has benefited hugely from the glowing write-up that Herodotus gives him, no doubt due in part at least to Amasis' own propaganda.

Under the reign of Psammetichus III, the Persian threat was not fended off, and Egypt was invaded by Cambyses, aided by the defection of Phanes of Halicarnassus. No doubt influenced by this final act, Spalinger has written that "the Saite monarchy could not operate the kingdom internally or externally without the support of foreigners"²⁴² but bar the obvious exception of the Apries and Amasis civil war, the Saite period was one that saw Egypt more unified than it had been for several centuries, and it seems that this had little to do with the foreign presence in Egypt.

If defence was the main concern underlying foreign relations during this period, it must be said that, till the Persians invaded, Saite foreign relations were successful in safeguarding the integrity of Egypt as a nation-state. Furthermore, under every Pharaoh of the dynasty Egypt appears to have, for a time at least, held sway in

²⁴¹ Spalinger 1978a:14

²⁴² *ibid.*:36

the Levant, despite the powerful foes it faced in the forms of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. Ultimately, the Saite period saw not only a renaissance in domestic terms, but also in the sphere of foreign relations.

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