

Divide and Conquer: Pharaoh Shishak's Campaign in Post-Solomonic Palestine

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Introduction

“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation” (Mark 12:25, NKJV). These words of Jesus are particularly applicable to the time following Israel’s United Monarchy under David and Solomon. According to the biblical account, the kingdom’s split into northern and southern domains was soon followed by Egyptian invasion (2 Chronicles 12:1-4). The scholarly community has long associated the Bible’s invading Pharaoh Shishak with Shoshenq I, a 22nd Dynasty Egyptian ruler—linguistic similarity makes it rather simple to equate the two,¹ though some scholars have argued otherwise.² This equation is further justified by a triumphal relief commissioned by Shoshenq I at the Egyptian temple of Karnak; the relief, specifically located at the Bubastite Portal, depicts a military campaign in Palestine and names over 140 locations that were presumably conquered.³ Scholars have attempted to correlate city names to known Palestinian sites, and from this information synthesize a possible route for Shoshenq’s troops through the territory he invaded.⁴ However, some scholars have expressed doubt about the historical reliability of the Karnak list, as well as debating the generally accepted dating for this event.⁵ The critical audience often substantiates these arguments by citing insignificant Palestinian settlement in the 10th century BC, particularly cracking down on the exclusion of Jerusalem—a key player in the biblical account of Shishak’s invasion.⁶ This brings up questions

¹ Kenneth Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips LTD, 1973), 287; Mayes, “Pharaoh Shishak’s Invasion of Palestine and the Exodus from Egypt,” In *Between Evidence and Ideology*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 129.

² Eric Cline, “Review of the Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70, no. 1 (2011): 131.

³ Epigraphic Survey, “The Bubastite Portal,” *Oriental Institute Publications LXXIV* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), vii; Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 186-188.

⁴ Michael Hasel, “The Sociospatial Analysis of the Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I),” (forthcoming): 6-7.

⁵ Kevin Wilson, *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 46-47; Israel Finkelstein, “The Campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 118, no. 2 (2002): 110.

⁶ Israel Finkelstein, “The Campaign,” 111-112; Andrew Mayes, “Pharaoh Shishak’s Invasion,” 131-134.

about Shishak's motives and whether destruction layers attributed to the campaign should be reexamined.⁷ Discovery of a stele fragment in Megiddo with Shoshenq's name inscribed has also contributed to the question of Shishak's role in Canaan during the 10th century.⁸ In summary, the literature debates the following questions: is the biblical Shishak equivalent to Shoshenq I, and did he really invade Palestine? If so, when and for what purpose? Were Israel and Judah even significantly settled at the time of his campaign? What route did he take? Why does the biblical account focus on his interactions with a city that is not even present in the Karnak inscription? The purpose of this paper will be to (1) demonstrate that Shishak and Shoshenq I refer to the same individual who invaded Palestine in the late 10th century BC, (2) discuss the chronological significance of Shishak's campaign as it relates to biblical scholarship, (3) elucidate the economic and political motives of Shishak's campaign and its implications regarding state formation in Israel and Judah, and (4) explain the absence of Jerusalem from the Egyptian record. Due to limitations in the author's familiarity with Palestinian geography and linguistic interpretations of potential site names, a thorough investigation of Shishak's potential campaign route will not be made; instead, generalized routes proposed by more experienced scholars may be referred to. Similar assumptions will be made regarding dating of archeological site layers via pottery analysis. Most significantly, the author will regard biblical evidence as a reliable account of events and seek to interweave that account with the current archeological evidence and corresponding interpretations of the scholarly community.

Overview of biblical account

⁷ Israel Finkelstein and Eli Piasezky, "Radiocarbon-Dated Destruction Layers: A Skeleton for Iron Age Chronology in the Levant," *Oxford Journal of Archeology* 28, no. 3 (2009): 268.

⁸ David Ussishkin, "Notes on Megiddo, Gezer, Ashdod, and Tel Batash in the Tenth to Ninth Centuries B.C.," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 277/278 (February-May 1990): 71-74.

Much of the impetus for scholarly discussion of Shishak and his campaign comes from apparent equations of Pharaoh Shoshenq I with the biblical character Shishak of Egypt, who invades Palestine during the 5th regnal year of Solomon's son, Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25; 2 Chr. 12:2). The book of 1 Kings provides a two-verse summary of the event which focuses heavily on Shishak's encounter with Jerusalem and the temple valuables (1 Kings 14:25-26). The version of the story described in 2 Chronicles 12 is a bit more complete; the first four verses add details about the composition of Shishak's army and Shishak's success against "Judah's fortified towns," and the remaining eight verses of the account describe, in more detail, his interactions with Jerusalem and events inside the city walls before the actual raid occurred (2 Chr. 12:1-12). According to both of these accounts, Shishak did not obliterate Jerusalem but did carry off all the riches of the royal palace and Solomon's temple; interestingly, both records specifically mention removal of the gold shields that Solomon had made (1 Kings 14:26; 2 Chr. 12:9). Especially in Chronicles, this story is heavily framed as a punishment for Rehoboam and Judah's unfaithfulness to God, and Shishak sparing Jerusalem from total destruction is portrayed as God's mercy to a repentant nation (2 Chr. 12:2, 7).

Shishak versus Shoshenq I

The biblical account of Shishak's invasion in Judah has long been associated with Shoshenq I's triumphal relief at Karnak Temple's Bubastite Portal.⁹ But are these two individuals really one and the same? Kevin Wilson's 2005 book *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine* asserts that they are, citing parallels in vocalization and addressing Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew transcriptions of the name(s).¹⁰ Cline's review of Wilson's book criticizes the latter's failure to acknowledge that not all scholars agree on this point; he seems

⁹ Kevin Wilson, *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 2.

¹⁰ Kevin Wilson, *The Campaign*, 1.

think that glossing over the point was a mistake since it forms a key foundation for the rest of the book.¹¹ One such example of disagreement is found in Wallenfels’s 2019 review of a 2011 BICANE colloquium; this paper describes a “Centuries of Darkness” (CoD) model which would shift Egyptian chronology, move Shoshenq I down to the late 9th century, and equate biblical Shishak with Ramesses III.¹² Despite this and other alternate hypotheses, scholars generally associate biblical Shishak with Shoshenq I; papers often do not even address the issue, which seems to demonstrate an assumption that the correlation is already well-established.¹³ Andrew Mayes says that the linguistic similarity makes association simple.¹⁴ Even Israel Finkelstein—who disputes the generally accepted date for Shoshenq’s campaign—says that “there can be no doubt that the biblical Shishak refers to Shoshenq I and that he reigned in the 2nd half of the 10th century BCE.”¹⁵ Based on this collective opinion, this paper will heretofore use the names Shishak and Shoshenq interchangeably.

The direct evidence and its ties to chronology

There are two pieces of archeological evidence that refer explicitly to the presence of Shoshenq in Palestine. The first is the Bubastite Portal at Karnak Temple, which was briefly mentioned earlier. This triumphal relief depicts Shoshenq’s victory over enemy chieftains,¹⁶ and contains a large list of locations that were presumably conquered during his military campaign—this list is illustrated using an individual for each location who seems to be holding an oval with

¹¹ Eric Cline, “Review of The Campaign,” 131.

¹² Ronald Wallenfels, “Shishak and Shoshenq: A Disambiguation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 2 (2019): 488-489.

¹³ Frank Clancy, “Shishak/Shoshenq’s Travels,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 86 (1999): 3; David Ussishkin, “Notes on Megiddo,” 71; Benjamin Mazar, “The Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak to Palestine,” in *Volume du Congrès International pour l’étude de l’Ancien Testament, Strasbourg 1956*, Vol. IV (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1957): 57; Michael Hasel, “Sociospatial Analysis,” 1.

¹⁴ Mayes, “Pharaoh Shishak’s Invasion,” 129.

¹⁵ Israel Finkelstein, “The Campaign of Shoshenq I,” 110.

¹⁶ Epigraphic Survey, “The Bubastite Portal,” viii.

the place name inscribed within.¹⁷ These are sometimes referred to in the literature as name rings.¹⁸ Anson Rainey describes the organization of the name rings well:

The text as it is inscribed on the temple wall naturally divides into an upper and lower register. The former is comprised of a series of short rows of topographical names with thirteen name ovals per row. The lower register has four lines with seventeen ovals per row, followed by a bottom line with spaces for some fifty-five ovals, about thirty of which have been effaced. The first line of the upper register begins with the “Nine Bows,” the traditional legendary enemies of Egypt.¹⁹

Rainey goes on to describe how most of the upper register consists of places from the northern kingdom and the lower register—the one with heavy damage—seems to pertain more to the Negev and Judah.²⁰ This description of the name rings’ organization is roughly agreed upon by Wilson, who divides the upper register into two sections by isolating the Nine Bows.²¹

The other piece of evidence we have for Shoshenq’s presence in Palestine is the Megiddo Stela, which is just a fragment of an impressive monument bearing Shoshenq’s name that was estimated to have been around 5 feet wide, 10 feet high, and more than 20 inches thick.²² This stela provides direct evidence for Shishak’s presence at Megiddo,²³ corroborated by the city’s inclusion in the third row of name rings at Karnak.²⁴

Unfortunately, the Megiddo Stela was not discovered in situ, but in a surface dump—it therefore cannot be used in stratigraphical arguments about the date of Shishak’s campaign.²⁵ However, we know from another stela set up by the Bubastite Portal’s construction overseer that Shoshenq’s triumphal relief was commissioned during the 21st year of Shoshenq’s reign, which

¹⁷ Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 185.

¹⁸ Frank Clancy, “Shishak/Shoshenq’s Travels,” 4; Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 186.

¹⁹ Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 185.

²⁰ Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 185.

²¹ Kevin Wilson, *The Campaign*, 61.

²² Clarence Fisher, *The Excavation of Armageddon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), xi.

²³ Clarence Fisher, *The Excavation of Armageddon*, 61; Ussishkin, “Notes on Megiddo,” 74.

²⁴ Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 186.

²⁵ Clarence Fisher, *The Excavation of Armageddon*, 60-61.

is the last year scholars are sure he was in power;²⁶ this is substantiated by the idea that his additions to Karnak temple were not yet completed at the time of his death.²⁷ According to Kenneth Kitchen, Shoshenq I reigned from 945-924 B.C.²⁸ The biblical record states that Shishak invaded in the 5th regnal year of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25); Edwin Thiele indicates that Rehoboam's reign lasted from 930-913 B.C.²⁹ This would place the campaign in 926/925 B.C., during one of the last few years of Shoshenq's reign.³⁰ If these two anchors are accepted, the campaign in Palestine provides a profound historical synchronism between the generally well-accepted Egyptian chronology and relatively less-accepted dates for Israel's United Monarchy.

Shishak's motives

Shishak's reign in Egypt marked the beginning of a new dynasty, and Kenneth Kitchen suggests that the majority of his time as Pharaoh was spent consolidating his power internally.³¹ Once this was suitably completed, Shishak apparently set his sights on international objectives; he reopened trade relations with Byblos and extant texts describe him boasting of the goods he acquired for Amun in the land of Nubia.³² The Karnak relief actually says that Shishak had "trodden down the natives of Nubia," an allusion to military conquest that parallels the Palestinian campaign recorded in that same relief.³³ Therefore it is certainly possible that Shishak's campaign was at least partially motivated by efforts to open up trade routes across the Levant, as suggested by several scholars.³⁴

²⁶ Epigraphic Survey, "The Bubastite Portal," vii; Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 185.

²⁷ Kenneth Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 302.

²⁸ Kenneth Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 287.

²⁹ Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 11.

³⁰ Epigraphic Survey, "The Bubastite Portal," viii; Anson Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 185.

³¹ Kenneth Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 287-288, 292.

³² Kenneth Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 292-293.

³³ Kenneth Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 293.

³⁴ Israel Finkelstein, "The Campaign of Shoshenq I," 116; Mayes, "Pharaoh Shishak's Invasion," 134; Frank Clancy, "Shishak/Shoshenq's Travels," 18.

Irrespective of Shishak's underlying desires, Israel and Judah's political situation in the 920s B.C. presented him with a golden opportunity. Even in the earlier days of David, the Israelite army was insurmountable—"The Lord made David victorious wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:14). During the prosperous time of Solomon, the United Kingdom was a formidable empire all its own, worthy of an alliance with Egypt as between equals (1 Kings 3:1).

What about Jerusalem?

Conclusion

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