

Chapter 1: Nebuchadnezzar's Wars

Rise of Nebuchadnezzar

The Egyptian Holocaust

In 564 B.C. a foreign army invaded Egypt, laying waste the country. Tens of thousands died. Thousands more, primarily the skilled and educated elite, priests and artisans alike, were taken captive and deported. A minority escaped into the surrounding desert, among them the ruling pharaoh. Only a small remnant survived.

The physical structures of the country were also decimated. Temples and tombs were destroyed and looted. Cities were burned. From Migdol in the eastern Delta to Syene near Elephantine south of Thebes, 500 miles upriver on the Nile, the country was ravaged.

It was, quite literally, a holocaust.

Twenty years passed as the land languished, raped of its treasure by garrisons left behind by the foreigners. No pharaoh ruled to restore order. Another twenty years saw limited rebuilding and the gradual renewal of religious and political life. Temples were repaired. Training began for a new generation of priests and artisans.

The few traumatized survivors of the exile, now old, had only a vague recollection of the days when the priests were taken away and the population vanished. They told tales about the *nšn*, “the devastation”.

The name of the invader, familiar to even the most casual student of ancient history, was Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, at the time the dominant power in the ancient Near East.

Only one problem surfaces in connection with this unprecedented act of genocide and material destruction. Without exception, historians categorically deny it ever happened.

But they are mistaken. This book, and those which follow, are dedicated to proving the historicity of the event. It will not be an easy task. The denial by historians is based on the accepted chronology of 6th century Egypt, what we consistently call the “traditional history”. Proving our case will necessitate altering that chronology. It will be no minor revision. When all is said and done, in four lengthy books filled with closely reasoned argument, a “revised history” will emerge which bears little resemblance to the story of Egypt told in the textbooks. Entire dynasties will be dislodged and displaced, often by as much as seven hundred years.

The argument will be difficult to follow, though charts and diagrams are provided to illuminate the way. The reader will be challenged to master two histories, both the errant traditional history and the revised alternative. It will be toilsome work, especially

for those not well versed in ancient history. This is not light reading.

Our story begins fifty years before the Egyptian invasion of which we speak, in the final days of Nabopolassar, the father of the famed Babylonian king. The nation he ruled, then known as Akkad, at the time a tributary of the Assyrian Empire, is fighting to free itself from its suzerain. Soon it will emerge as the short-lived, but powerful kingdom known to the modern world as the neo-Babylonian Empire.

Fall of Assyria; Rise of Babylon

The recently published *Chronicles*¹ of the kings of Akkad waste few words describing the fall of Assyria in 612 B.C. In short terse sentences the text of tablet BM 21901 describes how, in the 14th year of Nabopolassar, the army of Akkad (Babylon) crossed the Tigris River and joined forces with Cyaxares of Media. Together the two armies advanced on Nineveh. For two months, from Sivan (May/June) to Ab (July/August) the battle raged, then ended abruptly. The narrative is garbled, the result of considerable damage to the 2600-year-old cuneiform tablets, but there is no mistaking the outcome. The city was ransacked; its army routed. Its king Sinsharishkun was deposed and likely killed. The treasure of the city was divided, and Cyaxares returned to his homeland. Nabopolassar used the ruined city as a base of operations as he continued his military assault on Assyrian lands.

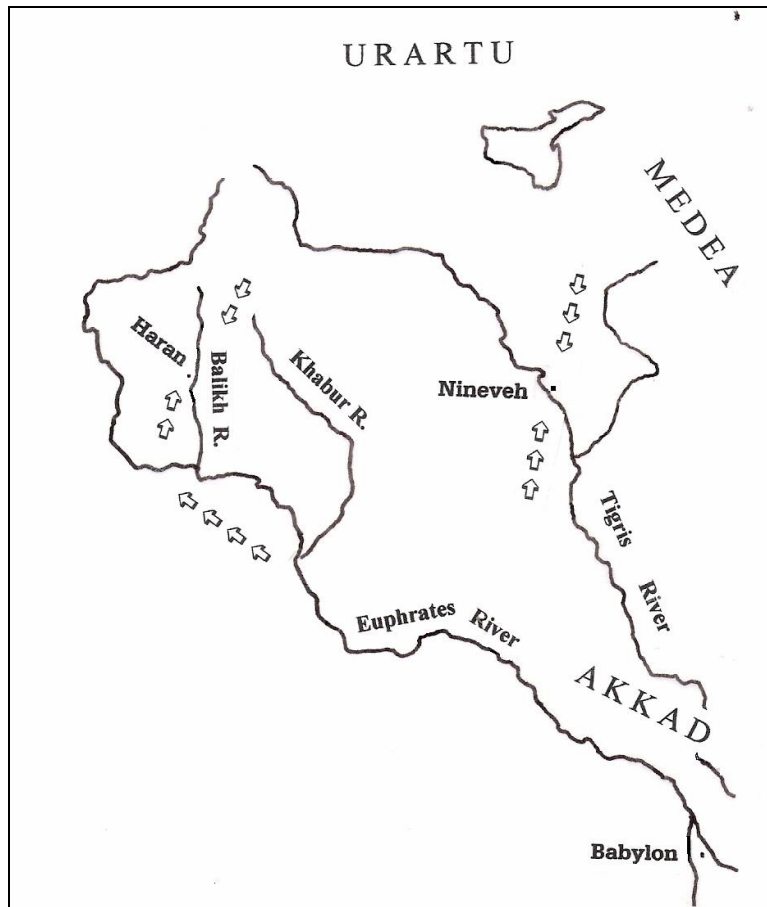
If Sinsharishkun did not die in the assault, then he certainly died within the year. According to the *Chronicle*, at the end of the fourteenth year (612/611 B.C.) a new king, Ashuruballit, ruled in Harran, a provincial capital near the Euphrates on the extreme western fringe of the kingdom. Nineveh was lost, its king had been killed, but Assyria survived. At least for the moment.

The fall of Nineveh was not immediately followed by an assault on Harran. Nabopolassar tarried. For two years he continued to conquer and plunder largely undefended Assyrian territory. The delay resulted, in part at least, from Nabopolassar's reluctance to attack Harran alone, without the help of the Medes.² The alliance between the two aggressors was renewed only in the latter part of the sixteenth year. In the month Marcheswan (October/November) the united armies moved to unseat Ashuruballit.

¹ D.J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (1955). This publication provides a transliteration and translation of British Museum tablets B.M. 21901, 21946, 22047, 25124, and 25127, with commentary by Wiseman. Only tablets 21901, 21946, and 22047 are quoted in this chapter.

² This is the opinion of Wiseman, *Chronicles*, p. 18.

Figure 1: End of the Assyrian Empire (612 & 609 B.C.)



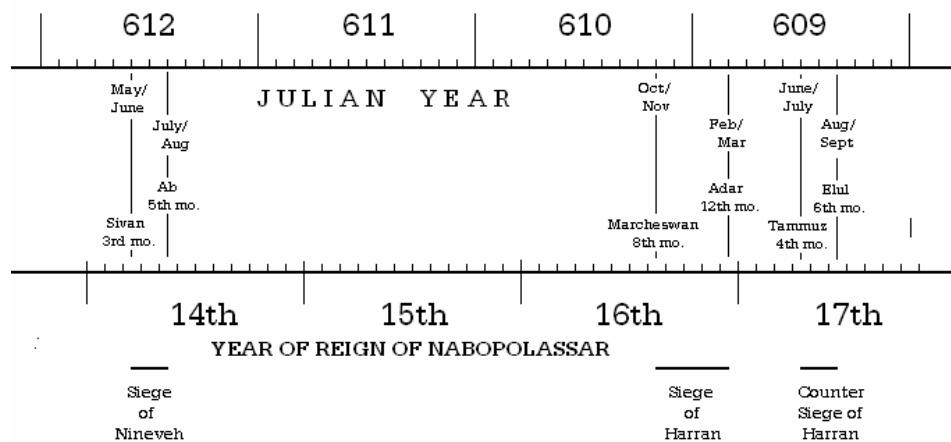
Why were Nabopolassar and Cyaxares unwilling to pursue their advantage after the fall of Nineveh, and immediately attack the remnant Assyrian army in Harran? Why the two-year delay before they resumed their aggression against the Assyrian king? The Chronicler hints at one possible answer. He notes, almost in passing, that an Egyptian army was present in Harran.

Either during or immediately following the fall of Nineveh, Egypt must have sent troops to assist Ashurballit. Nabopolassar and Cyaxares, perhaps intimidated by the allied armies of the defenders, broke off their attack. By the 16th year of Nabopolassar conditions had apparently changed. The Egyptian/Assyrian alliance remained but was

reduced in strength. We don't know why. Media and Akkad responded. Ashurballit's army and the remaining Egyptian troops were taken by surprise. For a time they defended, then fled from Harran, finding sanctuary west of the Euphrates. The Medes and Babylonians overran and plundered the city, then returned to their respective homelands, leaving Harran defended by a garrison of troops.

Ashurballit made only one futile attempt to retake his city. In the seventeenth year of Nabopolassar (609/608 B.C.) his remaining forces, fortified by the arrival of "a great Egyptian army"³ laid siege to Harran. The garrison of Median and Babylonian troops held out long enough for Nabopolassar to march to its relief. Though critical parts of the Chronicle are "broken and uncertain", sufficient text remains to confirm that the Babylonians repelled the counter-attack.

Figure 2: Timeline - Siege of Nineveh & Harran⁴



³ BM 21901, line 67.

⁴ The timeline as shown contains a few technical inaccuracies and is provided only to illustrate the sequence of events. The Babylonians followed a lunar calendar in which the 12-month cycle was considerably shorter than a solar year. Intercalary months were inserted every several years to maintain accuracy but for the years in question we do not know precisely their location. The reader should also note that the initial siege of Harran did not last the whole of the time shown. Nabopolassar began the siege in the 8th month (Marcheswan) and left the city in the hands of a garrison of troops in the 12th month (Adar). When, in the interim, the Assyrian and Egyptian troops abandoned the city is not known for certain. It might be that the city actually changed hands in the latter days of 610 B.C., rather than in 609 B.C. as the figure suggests. We will continue to use the 609 date regardless. This is the date typically used in the textbooks.

There is no further mention of the Egyptian army. Ashurballit is never heard from again. When the *Chronicle* continues the historical record on another tablet (BM 22047), with the eighteenth year of Nabopolassar, the king of Akkad has turned his attention to Urartu.

Babylon and Egypt

Who was the pharaoh who led the "great Egyptian army" to assist Ashurballit in 609 B.C.? Surprisingly, scholars have determined it was not the same pharaoh who aided the Assyrian king in 612 B.C., whose mere presence had deterred the initial aggression of the combined armies of Media and Babylon? Historians have identified both pharaohs, but the identification is not based on the narrative of the *Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* in both instances refers to an Egyptian army; it fails to name the Egyptian king.

The identification of the two Egyptian pharaohs is based instead on the accepted chronology of 7th century Egypt, wherein the country was ruled by a sequence of 26th dynasty kings with capital in Sais, a town on a Nile tributary in the western Delta.⁵ The regnal years of these Saïte dynasty kings have been precisely determined. According to this chronology Egypt was ruled in 612 B.C. by Wahibre Psamtik I, the first king of this dynasty, at the time into the 52nd year of his 54-year long kingship. Psamtik must have been the pharaoh whose fame intimidated the armies of Cyaxares and Nabopolassar.⁶ But according to this same traditional history Psamtik died in 610 B.C. A son named Wahemibre Necho succeeded him. It must have been the neophyte king Necho who came to the aid of Ashurballit in 609 B.C.

This identification receives support from an incident described in the Hebrew Bible. The garrison of Egyptian and Assyrian troops in Harran abandoned the city in the final months of the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar, possibly January/February 609 B.C. The counterattack by Ashurballit and the "great Egyptian army" which had arrived in the interim took place in the two-month period between Tammuz (June/July) and Elul (August/September) of that same year (now the seventeenth of Nabopolassar). In the spring of that year, according to Jewish historians, Josiah king of Judah had an unfortunate and fatal encounter with an Egyptian army moving northward from Egypt

⁵ There is some debate whether Sais was located in the eastern or western Delta. That debate need not concern us here.

⁶ By all accounts Psamtik must have been an elderly man at the time, well over 80 years old. He hardly qualifies as a threat to the combined might of Babylon and Media. How is it that his fame was able to stay the advance of the armies of these two powerful nations? In the sequel to the present book, entitled *Piankhi the Chameleon*, we discuss the unlikelihood that the Egyptian king on whom Ashurballit relied for help was actually Psamtik I, a king not known to have ventured beyond the eastern border of Egypt. At the time we will identify the true ally of the Assyrian king.

along the Mediterranean coast.

While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo. (2 Kings 23:29)⁷

It is clear that the biblical text is describing the movement of the "great Egyptian army" en route to assist Ashurballit. Elsewhere we are informed that Pharaoh Necho is impatient, consistent with the urgency of his mission.

But Neco sent messengers to him saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me ... (2 Chron. 35: 20,21)

The temporary delay at Megiddo was inconsequential. Necho soon arrived to support the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish, whence he joined forces with Ashurballit and his surviving army. Together they attempted to retake Harran but within two months of engagement the counter siege was lifted. The attempt had failed. The details are unknown. Necho returned to Egypt.

With some certainty we can date the Megiddo encounter and Josiah's death to June, 609 B.C. Three months later Necho, en route to Egypt, passed through Judah. There he deposed Jehoahaz⁸, the son of Josiah, who had assumed the kingship of Judah at his father's death. "He installed as king Eliakim, another son of Josiah, and carried Jehoahaz off to Egypt." (2 Chron. 36:4) Necho changed the name of Eliakim to Jehoiakim.

This corroborative evidence provided by the Hebrew Bible convinces scholars absolutely that the pharaoh whose army came to assist Ashurballit in his struggle with Nabopolassar, the pharaoh who deposed and established kings in vassal states at will, was Wahemibre Necho, the second king of the Saïte dynasty, who ruled Egypt for sixteen years from 610-595 B.C. The name is right. The time is right. The identity is considered a certainty.

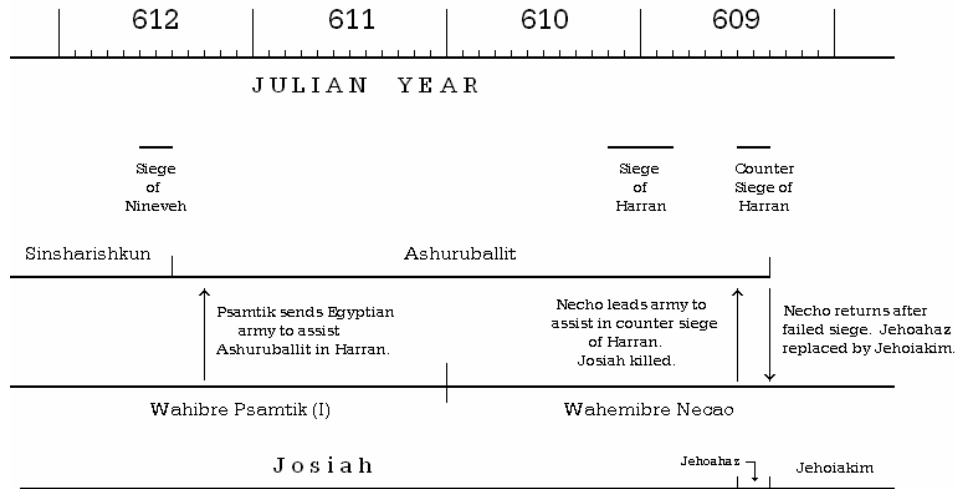
It is unfortunate that Necho/Necho left no written record of his wars.⁹

⁷ All quotations from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, are taken from the New International Version (1973) unless otherwise stated.

⁸ The son of Josiah was actually named Shallum. Necho changed his name to Jehoahaz at the same time as he deposed and deported the king.

⁹ In chapter 8 we will argue our case that this coincidence of name and date is simply that – an unfortunate coincidence. Wahemibre Necho, as in the case of his father Psamtik, did not venture beyond the eastern border of Egypt. He left no record of any battles with Media and/or Babylon, or of any alliance with the Assyrians. In fact, he left for posterity no inscriptional evidence of any wars, though as we will see, he did reluctantly participate in one.

Figure 3: Timeline – Psamtik & Necho Alliance with Assyria



Rise of Nubuchadnezzar

The eighteenth year of Nabopolassar not only begins a new tablet (BM 22047) but a new era. Babylon is now in control of all former Assyrian territory east of the Euphrates.¹⁰ The aging king campaigned extensively and successfully that year in the mountains of Urartu and then, in his nineteenth year, divided the army and shared leadership with his son. Nebuchadnezzar¹¹ enters history.

Later in his nineteenth year Nabopolassar, flush from victory in the northern mountains, began to challenge Egyptian dominance west of the Euphrates. He moved to take possession of the city of Kimuhu on the western bank of the Euphrates, south of Carchemish. The city was presumably an Egyptian possession. From Tisri (September/October) to Kislev (November/December) he laid siege to the city until it fell. Two months later, in the month Sebat (January/February), he returned home with prisoners, leaving behind a garrison to defend the city.

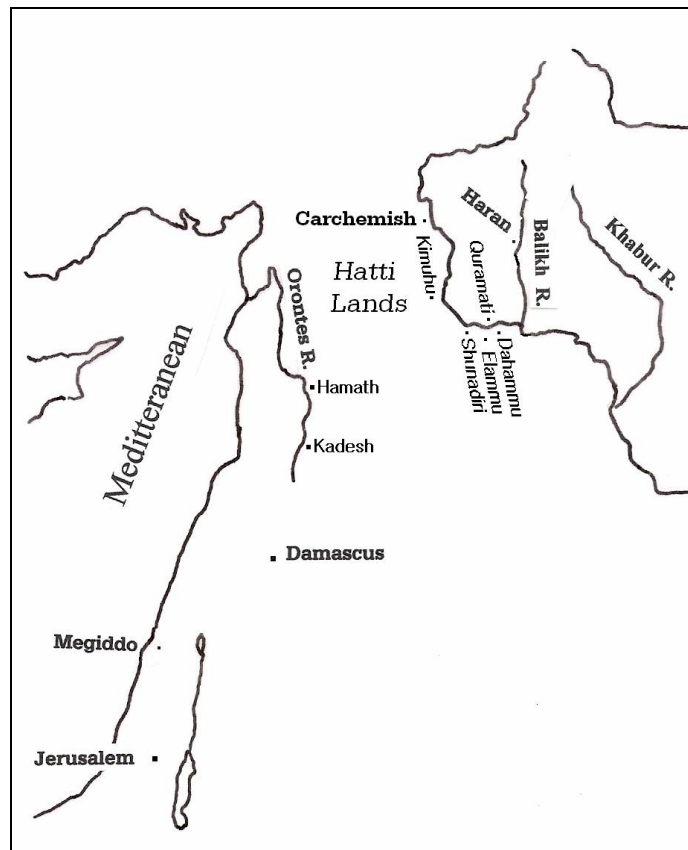
¹⁰ Babylon apparently claimed all Assyrian lands east of the Euphrates extending as far as Lake Van in the northeast. Media appears to have occupied territory north of Carchemish and north of the Euphrates. Boundary issues do not arise in the existing *Chronicle*.

¹¹ The spelling “Nebuchadnezzar” has been used as the book title, and in the early sections of this first chapter, in view of its familiarity to the public. It is also maintained when used within quoted material. For technical accuracy the spelling “Nebuchadrezzar” is employed elsewhere.

This aggression prompted a response from Necho. Early in the 20th year of Nabopolassar, only months after that king had departed for Babylon, Egyptian troops arrived to retake the city. The Egyptian army battled the Babylonian garrison at Kimuhu for four months, most likely from May through August. The Chronicle records the event, but provides no specific dates. The city fell and once more became an Egyptian possession.

Nabopolassar responded. In the month Tisri (September/October) he moved once again up the Euphrates toward its western bend. He may well have been destined for Kimuhu, but en route he stopped at Quramati, a Babylonian city on the eastern bank, and sent troops across to attack the towns of Shunadiri, Elammu and Dahammu, defeating those cities. Four months later, in the month Sebat (January/February) he returned to Babylon.

Figure 4: Nabopolassar & Necho Battle at the Euphrates



Again Necho acted quickly. Although the main Egyptian army had long since departed for Egypt, a garrison of troops remained at Carchemish. These troops immediately crossed the Euphrates and proceeded southward to attack Quramati. The Babylonian army withdrew. We assume that the three cities on the western bank also returned to Egyptian control at this time. It was still within the 20th year of Nabopolassar.

"In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad stayed in his own land. Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown prince, mustered the Babylonian army and..."¹² The damaged conclusion to the *Chronicle* tablet leaves us guessing why the king stayed home and where the prince went with the army. But since Nabopolassar died the next year, we can surmise that he was ill.

The Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.)

BM 21946 continues the *Chronicle* with a terse description of one of the most famous battles of antiquity. In Nabopolassar's 21st year Nebuchadnezzar replaced the ailing king at the helm of the army and returned to the western bend of the Euphrates, ostensibly to avenge his father's recent defeats. He crossed the Euphrates at Carchemish and thoroughly routed the Egyptian garrison. The survivors fled toward Egypt, but were overtaken at Hamath. All were killed. Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to take possession of the whole of northern Syria east of the Orontes, a land mass that the *Chronicle* calls the "Hatti-lands". What had once belonged to Egypt now belonged to Babylon. Movement further south was delayed by the untimely death of Nabopolassar in the month of Ab (July/August). Nebuchadnezzar briefly interrupted his campaign in Elul (August/September), the month following, and returned to Babylon for his coronation. Within the month he was back in the Hatti lands, gathering tribute. The year's campaign ended in Sebat (January/February). It was the conclusion of his father's 21st year, what the Babylonians called the "accession year" of the new king.

The defeat of the Egyptian army in 605 B.C. was cause for celebration in Judah. The death of Josiah and the deposition and deportation of Jehoahaz had left the Judaeans with bitter feelings toward Necho. The prophet Jeremiah expressed the sentiments of the nation in a lengthy diatribe:

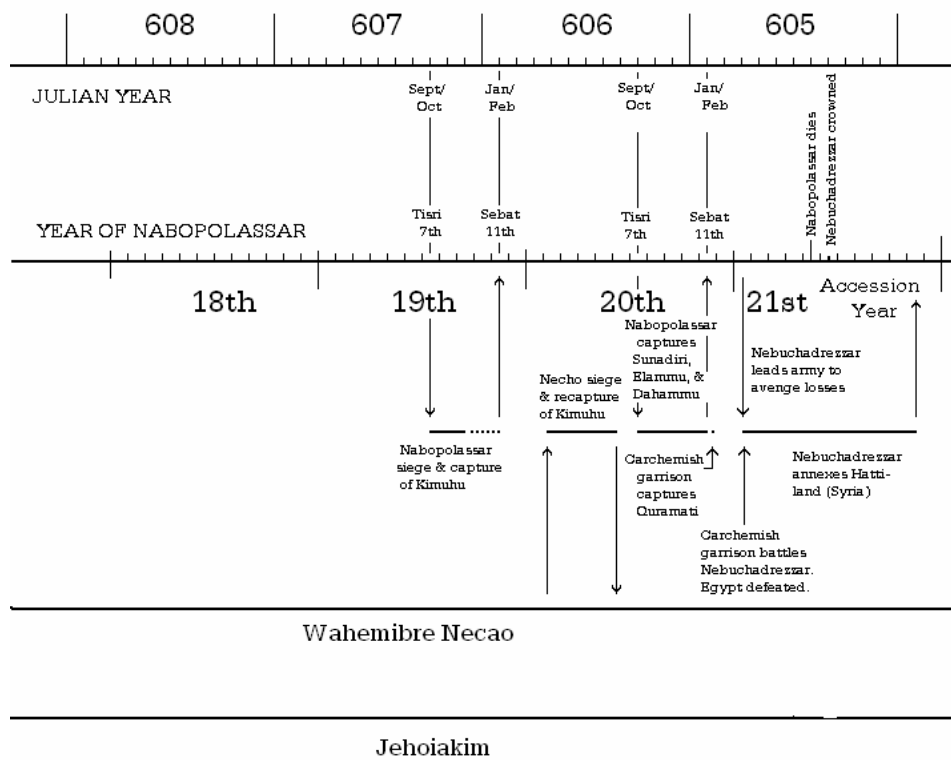
This is the message against the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: Prepare your shields, both large and small, and march out for battle! Harness the horses, mount the steeds! Take your positions with helmets on! Polish your spears, put on your armour! What do I see? They are terrified, they are retreating; their warriors are defeated. They flee in haste without looking back,

¹² BM 22047, lines 27,28

and there is terror on every side, declared the Lord. The swift cannot flee nor the strong escape In the north by the River Euphrates they stumble and fall... (Jer. 46:2-5)

The loss of Carchemish significantly changed the balance of power in the region. Following the battle Nebuchadnezzar roamed freely throughout Syria. In his first official year (604-603 B.C.) "All the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute. He marched to the city of Askelon and captured it in the month of Kislev."¹³ Ashkelon was only a day's march from the border of Egypt. Phoenicia and the kingdom of Judah changed allegiance.

Figure 5: Timeline - Battles at the Euphrates (608-605 B.C.)



¹³ BM 21946, lines 17,18

Jewish historians note the transition from Egyptian to Babylonian control of Judah at the end of 604 B.C. "During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years." (2 Kings 24:1) During this time, "the king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again, because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River." (2 Kings 24:7).

Both Jewish historians and the Babylonian chroniclers agree that this first phase of Babylonian suzerainty over Judah ended three years after it began.

In 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar mistook Necho's inactivity for weakness. He moved to attack Egypt. He marched his army through the Hatti land to the border of Egypt. In the month Kislev (November/December) the two armies met in open battle. According to the *Chronicle* both suffered considerable losses. In the end "the king of Akkad and his troops turned back and returned to Babylon."¹⁴ It was the 4th year of Nebuchadnezzar.

While the *Chronicle* describes a standoff battle, it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar lost the war. Judah changed allegiance, falling once again under Necho's control. Jehoiakim withheld tribute from Babylon.

It is again regrettable that Wahemibre Necho fails to mention his wars with the great Babylonian king. The lack of any memorial to the conflict in 601 B.C. is particularly disturbing. For the first time the battle was fought near the border of Egypt. And for the first time pharaoh Necho could claim a victory over Babylon.

Jewish historians do not describe this conflict. They record only the fact that after three years of paying tribute to the Babylonians, Jehoiakim "changed his mind and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar." (2 Kings 24:1)

Nebuchadnezzar remained in Babylon the next year, his fifth, "and gathered together his chariots and horses in great numbers."¹⁵ In years six and seven, his military strength renewed, he moved to recover what territory he had lost in his fourth year. First he re-established his base in Syria, and then he moved in year seven (598/97 B.C.) to retake Judah. Jerusalem quickly fell.

The First Jewish Captivity (598/97 B.C.)

Concerning the attack on Jerusalem the Babylonian *Chronicle* is brief and to the point. In his 7th year, in the month Kislev (November/December, 598 B.C.) Nebuchadnezzar

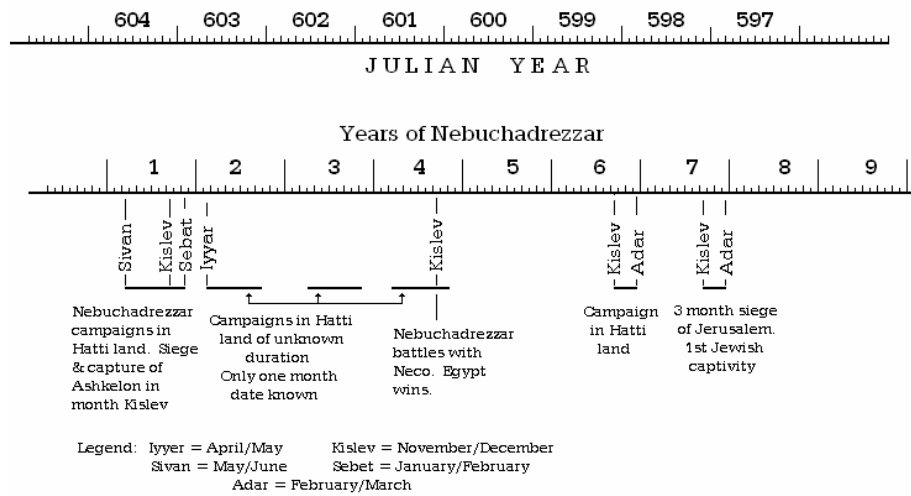
¹⁴ BM 21946 rev., line 7

¹⁵ BM 21946 rev., line 8

moved through the Hatti land and laid siege to Jerusalem (“the city of Judah”). By the second day of Adar (February/March, 597 B.C.) the city fell, its king was captured and deposed, and a replacement installed. No names are given.

For details of this first siege of Jerusalem we rely on Jewish literature. The assault was not directed against Jehoiakim, who had died three months before it began, but against his eighteen-year-old son and successor Jehoiakin.

Figure 6: Timeline – Nebuchadnezzar's Wars (604-597 B.C.)



At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year¹⁶ of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. (2 Kings 24:10-12)

¹⁶ The entire siege of Jerusalem took place within the 7th year of Nebuchadnezzar. The Jewish historians are apparently using a non-accession year system of dating, in which the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar is counted as his 1st regnal year. Thus the 7th official year in the Babylonian tabulation becomes Nebuchadnezzar's 8th year in the Jewish reckoning.

Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to remove from Jerusalem to Babylon everything transportable and of value. This included skilled labour for his numerous building projects and conscripts for his army. It was a massive deportation.

Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the Lord... He carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans - a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans. He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah" (2 Kings 24:13-17)

The Jewish historian Josephus, a citizen of Rome writing in the first century A.D., informs us that Ezekiel, a prominent prophetic spokesman within the exiled Jewish community in Babylon, was one of the deportees in this captivity.

It is important to note the key elements of this invasion. Collectively they constitute a *modus operandi* repeated with few variations in Nebuchadnezzar's second assault on Jerusalem a decade later (586 B.C.), and during his invasion of Egypt three decades removed (564 B.C.) They include 1) extensive physical destruction; 2) the removal of all portable treasure; 3) the deportation of a majority of the educated elite, including artisans; 4) the removal of the king and replacement by an authority loyal to Babylon; and finally, 5) the abandonment of the decimated land to a remnant of the poor and illiterate.

The balance of the Babylonian *Chronicle* recorded on BM 21946 describes sundry nondescript activities through the tenth year (595/594 B.C.). Having recovered the Hatti land in its entirety in year seven, Nebuchadnezzar's army marched as far as Carchemish in year eight, battled with Elam in year nine, and for unknown reasons mutinied in year ten. The last we hear from the *Chronicle* Nebuchadnezzar is actively suppressing this rebellion. He "slew many of his own army," and "captured his enemy" (rev. line 22). The balance of the *Chronicle* is lost. For the remaining 32 years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule we are almost entirely dependent on information from Jewish sources.

The Second Jewish Captivity (587/86 B.C.)

For all but the last two years of the rule of Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.) Judah routinely paid tribute to Babylon. We have details of only the last few years of the kingdom when "Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon". (2 Kings 24:20) The response was swift and severe. In Zedekiah's ninth year (588 B.C.), "on the tenth day of the tenth

month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah." (2 Kings 25:1,2) After a year and a half of confinement the population of Jerusalem succumbed to famine. Unable to resist any longer the city fell (586 B.C.).

By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, but the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:3-7)

Four hundred years of continuous occupation of the land by the descendants of king David ended ignominiously. What remained of the Judaeon population was removed to Babylon. It is a heart wrenching narrative.

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields. (2 Kings 25:8-12)

Anything of value was taken as pillage. The Jerusalem temple was stripped of all gold and silver and bronze; anything of significance spared in the destruction of 597 B.C. was now removed.

So Judah went into captivity, away from her land. (2 Kings 25:21)

Judah After the Invasion

It was not Nebuchadnezzar's policy to leave conquered lands without some regulating authority. A land without administration can pay no taxes. As he had done a decade earlier, Nebuchadnezzar left in place local leadership to regulate the decimated

population. In the absence of royal sons he appointed as governor Gedaliah, son of Ahikim, from a prominent Judaeans family. Babylonian officials were left behind with Gedaliah in Mizpah. A military garrison at Riblah, near Kadesh in Syria, served to ensure the allegiance of the Hatti lands, including Judah.

Once again we see here a typical Babylonian pattern of assault: extensive physical destruction with looting, deportation of the educated elite, death or deportation of existing royalty, establishment of loyal leadership from within the community with native Babylonian officials to assist, and the resettlement of a largely poor and illiterate remnant.

There is one additional characteristic of this 586 B.C. invasion of Judah worth noting. Shortly after the exit of the Babylonian army, many Judaeans who had left the country before the assault, seeking safe haven in neighbouring countries such as Moab and Ammon, returned to the desolate land and ruined cities. A remnant of the army, including several officers who had fled the city with Zedekiah and had not been captured by the Babylonians, also returned. The land was desolate, the cities ruined, the population seriously depleted; but there was a surviving remnant and there were returnees.

The Judaeans remnant included at least one notable exception to the Babylonian policy of deporting the educated elite, namely, Jeremiah, the Judaeans prophet whose anti-Egyptian sentiments have already been noted. The invasion that enslaved the nation of Judah freed Jeremiah from a temporary incarceration. His incessant public proclamations urging surrender to the Babylonians had incurred the wrath of Zedekiah, and had resulted in his confinement. It is Jeremiah exclusively who provides information on the flight to Egypt that soon followed.

Dependency on Egypt

The rebellion of Zedekiah that precipitated the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar was encouraged by Egypt. Zedekiah was counting on the Egyptian army to discourage any Babylonian advance. His trust was misplaced. Only after the blockade of Jerusalem had begun did Egypt respond. According to Jeremiah, "Pharaoh's army marched out of Egypt, and when the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem" (Jer. 37:5). Jeremiah warned Zedekiah that the reprieve would be short lived. He was correct. For reasons not given, the Egyptian army returned to Egypt and the Babylonian assault resumed.

According to Ezekiel, writing from Babylon, Zedekiah was ill advised to depend on the Egyptians. He recalls how, following the earlier (597 B.C.) captivity Zedekiah had entered into a treaty with Babylon. He had sworn an oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, and the survival of his kingdom depended on maintaining that treaty.

But the king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt to get horses and a large army. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Will he break the treaty and yet escape? (Ezek. 17:15)

The questions are rhetorical. Ezekiel knows that Zedekiah's dependence on Egypt will be futile: "Pharaoh with his mighty army and great horde will be of no help to him in war, when ramps are built and siege works erected ..." (Ezek. 17:17)

In the traditional history the Egyptian king on whom Zedekiah relied in vain must be the fourth king of the Saitte dynasty, Ha'a'ibre Wahibre, known to the Greeks as Apries. According to this history Necho died in 595 B.C., two years after Zedekiah was installed as king, and for the balance of Zedekiah's reign Egypt was ruled by Necho's son Psamtik II (595-589 B.C.) and then by Ha'a'ibre Wahibre (589-570 B.C.). Psamtik II and Apries must have been powerful kings to tempt Zedekiah to withhold tribute from Nebuchadnezzar. Sadly they have left no monuments commemorating their struggles with Babylon.¹⁷

While the Egyptian king was unable to prevent the fall of Jerusalem, he did open Egypt's borders to receive Judaeans refugees. The available safe harbor in Egypt appealed to the remnant that survived in Judah. When Gedaliah, soon after his appointment as governor, was murdered by Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, a Judaeans of royal blood and an officer of the king, fear of reprisal from Babylon made an Egyptian sojourn seem even more inviting. Against the advice of Jeremiah the Jewish remnant fled to Egypt. The majority settled in the fortress city of Tahpanhes (tell Defenneh - modern Daphnae) on the eastern edge of the Egyptian delta. It is in this context that we hear for the first time of an impending Babylonian attack on Egypt.

Invasion of Egypt

According to Jeremiah

The first clear statement of the impending disaster comes from Jeremiah, the reluctant refugee:

In Tahpanhes the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Then say to them, This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here; he will spread his royal canopy above them. He will

¹⁷ In chapter 9 we will identify the actual historical context in which these Saitte kings lived.

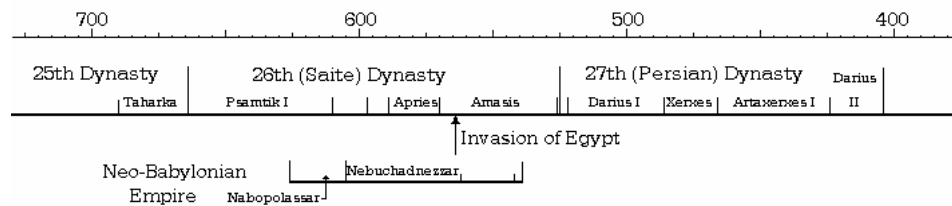
come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, and the sword to those destined for the sword. He will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he will burn their temples and take their gods captive. As a shepherd wraps his garment around him, so will he wrap Egypt around himself and depart from there unscathed. There in the temple of the sun (Heliopolis) in Egypt he will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt. (Jer. 43: 8-13)

Jeremiah supplies no specific date for the Babylonian invasion. For the refugees in Tahpanhes he provides a single clue: first the death of the pharaoh Apries; then the invasion.

‘This will be the sign to you that I will punish you in this place,’ declares the Lord, ‘so that you will know that my threats of harm against you will surely stand.’ This is what the Lord says: ‘I am going to hand Pharaoh Hophra (Wahibre in the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible) king of Egypt over to his enemies who seek his life, just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the enemy who was seeking his life.’ (Jer. 44: 29-30)

As mentioned earlier, Wahemibre Neco (610-595 B.C.) was succeeded briefly by Psamtik (II) (595-589 B.C.) and then by Ha'a'ibre Wahibre (589-570 B.C.). This Wahibre, called Apries by the Greek historians, the fourth king of the Saïte dynasty and the object of Zedekiah's misplaced trust, must be the Pharaoh Hophra alluded to by Jeremiah. This, of course, if the traditional Egyptian chronology is accurate. The invasion must therefore postdate the end of Wahibre's reign in 570 B.C. Since a fifth king, Ahmose-sa-Neith (Amasis), succeeded Wahibre and ruled Egypt for 44 years, the invasion must have occurred early in his reign.

Figure 7: Timeline – Invasion of Nebuchadrezzar (Traditional History)



The 586 B.C. Babylonian invasion of Judah was the prototype for what was about to happen in Egypt. Jeremiah warns the Jewish refugees: "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: 'You saw the great disaster I brought on Jerusalem and on all the

towns of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins.... Why bring such great disaster on yourselves?" (Jer. 44:2,7) He predicts for the Jews in Egypt the same threefold curse - "sword, famine, and plague" - that earlier decimated their homeland. (Jer. 44: 12; cf. Ezek. 5:12) Very few of the Jewish refugees would escape death. (Jer. 44: 27)

Memphis, the Egyptian capital, is likened to Jerusalem. "Pack your belongings for exile you who live in Egypt, for Memphis will be laid waste and lie in ruins without inhabitant" (Jer. 46: 19) The largely mercenary army defending Egypt would flee the onslaught:

Announce this in Egypt, and proclaim it in Migdol; proclaim it also in Memphis and Tahpanhes: Take your positions and get ready, for the sword devours those around you. Why will your warriors be laid low? They cannot stand, for the Lord will push them down. They will stumble repeatedly; they will fall over each other. They will say, Get up, let us go back to our own people and our native lands, away from the sword of the oppressor. (Jer. 46: 14-16)

The anticipated destruction would be immense; the depopulation of the country almost total. From the Nile Delta five hundred miles upriver to Thebes the Babylonian army would plunder and destroy. But in Egypt, as in Judah earlier, a remnant of the poorest of the land would survive. Others would flee to neighbouring countries and return later.

The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I am about to bring punishment on Amon god of Thebes, on Pharaoh, on Egypt and her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh. I will hand them over to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Later, however, Egypt will be inhabited as in times past," declares the Lord. (Jer. 46:25-26)

In the case of Judah, Jeremiah had predicted a seventy-year exile. (Jer. 25:12; 29:10) He leaves the length of the Egyptian exile unspecified. "Later" is all he will say. For more specific information on the invasion, and the nature and duration of the exile, we depend on Ezekiel.

According to Ezekiel

Ezekiel is more graphic as well as more specific in his description of the anticipated invasion. He is also less concerned with the Jewish refugees than was Jeremiah. His words are directed toward the native Egyptian population:

With a great throng of people (i.e. the Babylonian army) I will cast my net over you, and they will haul you up in my net. I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. I will spread your flesh on the

mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh. (Ezek. 32: 3-6)

There is no ambiguity concerning the pervasiveness of the destruction. No part of Egypt would escape. The slaughter would proceed from Migdol in the northeastern corner of the Delta in the north of Egypt, to Syene, modern Assuan, in the south. There is no mistaking the language of the prophet. In the aftermath of the invasion the whole of Egypt would lie deserted and in ruins. "Egypt will become a desolate wasteland." "I will make the land of Egypt a ruin and a desolate waste from Migdol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush." (Ezek. 29: 9-10) Included in the carnage were the neighbours and commercial allies of Egypt. This was no mere border skirmish as many critics claim.¹⁸

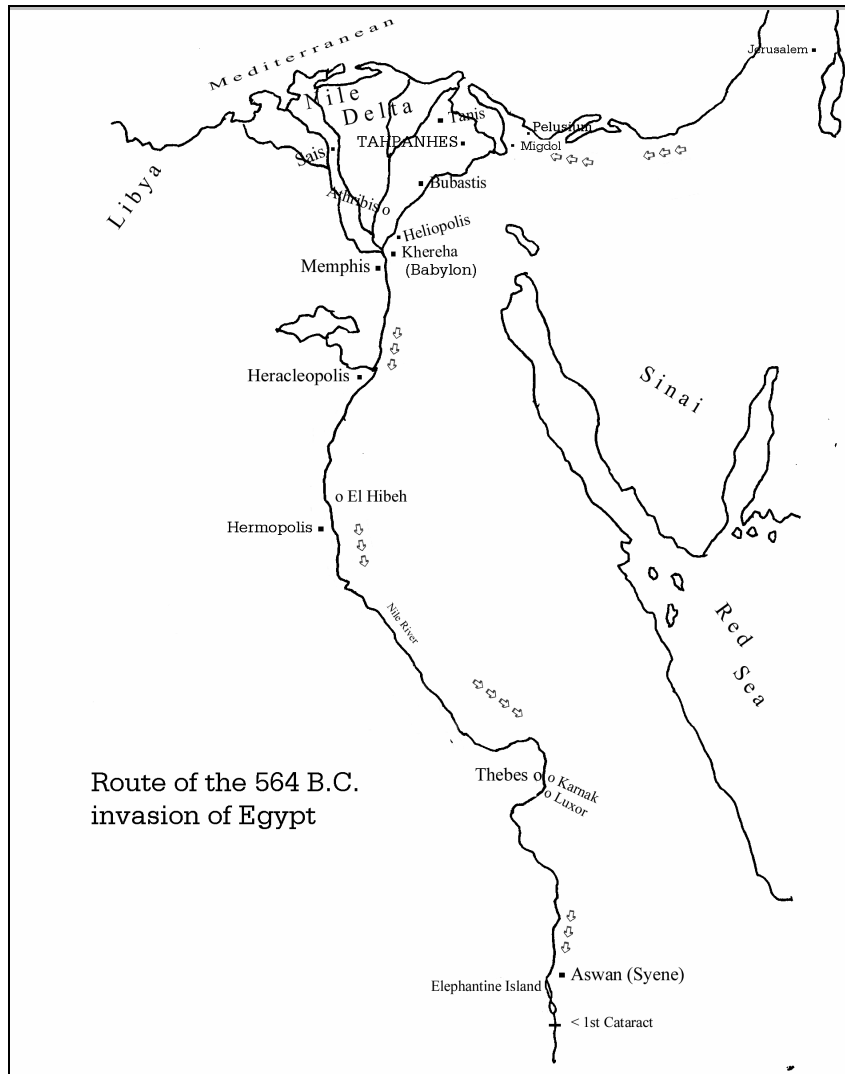
A sword will come against Egypt, and anguish will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, her wealth will be carried away and her foundations torn down. Cush and Put, Lydia and all Arabia, Libya and the people of the covenant land will fall by the sword along with Egypt. This is what the Lord says: The allies of Egypt will fall and her proud strength will fail. From Migdol to Aswan (Syene) they will fall by the sword within her, declares the Sovereign Lord. They will be desolate among desolate lands, and their cities will lie among ruined cities. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I set fire to Egypt and all her helpers are crushed. (Ezek. 30: 4-8)

Ezekiel adds to Jeremiah's list of conquered cities. We can clearly follow the path of destruction through representative towns of the Egyptian Delta southward to Thebes.

This is what the sovereign Lord says: I will put an end to the hordes of Egypt by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He and his army - the most ruthless of nations - will be brought in to destroy the land. They will draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land with the slain. I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis. I will lay waste Upper Egypt, set fire to Zoan (Tanis) and inflict punishment on Thebes. I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the hordes of Thebes. I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium will writhe in agony. Thebes will be taken by storm; Memphis will be in constant distress. The young men of Heliopolis and Bubastis will fall by the sword and the cities themselves will go into captivity. Dark will be the day at Tahpanhes when I break the yoke of Egypt. There her proud strength will come to an end. She will be covered with clouds and her villages will go into captivity. (Ezek. 30: 10-11; 13)

¹⁸ According to K.A. Kitchen, "although Nebuchadnezzar II duly marched against Egypt as prophesied by Jeremiah (46:13ff.), and attested by a Babylonian text, he perhaps came to some agreement with the new king Amasis (Ahmose II) who had displaced Hophra." ZPEB 2:246; Cf. James Henry Breasted in his classic *History of Egypt* (1905), p. 592-93 and H.R. Hall, CAH 2nd 3:304.

Figure 8: The 564 B.C. Invasion of Egypt.



And what fate befell pharaoh? Ezekiel's language is figurative and vague on that account, but he appears to say that the pharaoh escaped both death and capture. His throne was lost but his life was spared, at least for the time being.

Son of man (God speaking to Ezekiel), set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. Speak to him and say: "This is what the Lord God says: I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams. You say, "The Nile is mine, I made it for myself." But I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales. I will pull you out from among your streams, with all the fish sticking to your scales. I will leave you in the desert, you and all the fish of your streams. You will fall on the open field and not be gathered or picked up. I will give you as food to the beasts of the earth and birds of the air. (Ezek 29:2-5)

"I will pull you out" from among your streams is better translated "I will drive you out (lit. cause you to leave)" from among your streams. Pharaoh would be driven from the Nile delta into the desert, possibly into the western oasis or southward into Ethiopia. There in exile he would die.

The Forty Year Exile

How long did the devastation last? Jeremiah says only that Egypt would recover. Ezekiel sets specific limits.

I will make the land of Egypt a ruin and a desolate waste from Midgol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush. No foot of man or animal will pass through it; no one will live there for forty years. I will make the land of Egypt desolate among devastated lands, and her cities will lie desolate forty years among ruined cities. And I will disperse the Egyptians among the nations and scatter them through the countries. (Ezek. 29: 10-12)

The desolation that followed the invasion of Egypt was of long duration - a forty-year hiatus in the normal political life of the nation. There was for Egypt as there was for Judah, an exile, which left the land bleak and barren. For Judah the exile ended by degrees with a succession of returns of exiled Jews under Cyrus and his Persian successors. We assume that the Egyptian exile, as understood by Ezekiel, ended with the 525 B.C. arrival in Egypt of Cambyses, son and successor of Cyrus.¹⁹ Working

¹⁹ When we examine the Cambyses expedition in the pages that follow, we will see that the Persian king was accompanied by at least one notable expatriate Egyptian, Udjahorresne, whom we assume was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar forty years earlier. There were no doubt a multitude of other returnees, whether surviving captives from Nebuchadnezzar's invasion or their descendants, who took advantage of the opportunity to return to Egypt at this time. The Egyptian

backward from that date, and taking Ezekiel's figure of forty years literally, a tentative date around 565 B.C. is determined for the invasion. Other considerations lead us to reduce that figure by a single year.²⁰ For the chronological revision that follows, the date 564 B.C. will be adopted as a working hypothesis.

The Babylonian invasion of 586 B.C. put an end to the institution of kingship in Israel. The 564 B.C. invasion of Egypt likewise ended the reign of independent Egyptian pharaohs. Ezekiel is clear and concise: "there will no longer be a prince in Egypt" (Ezek. 30:13b). For several decades Egypt would be without a resident pharaoh, while the land languished in ruins. When kingship returned the Egyptian pharaoh would be subservient to foreign rulers.

If Egypt followed the pattern of Judah we anticipate that a remnant of the population remained and/or returned in the months following the invasion. A Babylonian garrison would be left to superintend the newly conquered territory. The appointment of native leadership to replace the deposed pharaoh is a distinct possibility. Religious institutions would be long dormant since few priests and fewer if any temples survived the destruction. Recovery would be tortuously slow. It would also be turbulent.

That there was a Babylonian garrison in Egypt we will soon see. In fact there were several. But Egypt dwarfs Judah in size. Policing the country proved difficult. Unlike Judah, Egypt had dozens of wealthy cities and hundreds of tombs stuffed with treasure. It was not all plundered by the advancing Babylonian troops. In the months following the invasion Babylonian mercenaries and an unrestrained populace competed in the search for salvage. Anarchy had been minimal in Judah, manifesting itself in the one instance of the assassination of Gedaliah. In Egypt it was pervasive.

The Egypt that emerged from the exile was different from that which preceded the invasion. New laws were required to govern a unique nation emerging from anarchy. Education was essential to instruct an ignorant priesthood, to recreate a capable administration, and to train a new generation of artisans. And the physical infrastructure, burned and broken by the Babylonian troops, had to be rebuilt. Law, education, and reconstruction were the hallmarks of the years immediately preceding the arrival of Cambyses and the end of the exile. This, of course, if the invasion really happened.

exile officially ended at that time, though in fact the country had long since begun to recuperate.

²⁰ If 564 B.C. is regarded as the 1st year of the exile, then the arrival of Cambyses, marking the official end of the exile, took place in the 40th year. We can still take Ezekiel at face value by assuming he numbered the years of the exile ordinally.

Prior to the Invasion

The invasion has been provisionally dated in the year 564 B.C. Partial confirmation is forthcoming from Ezekiel, whose oracles, unlike those of Jeremiah, are dated. They are numbered from the year 597 B.C., the year of his captivity.²¹

In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month on the first day, the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre, every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre. Therefore this is what the Lord God says: I am going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will carry off its wealth. He will loot and plunder the land as pay for his army. I have given him Egypt as a reward for his efforts because he and his army did it for me, declares the Lord God (Ezek. 29: 17-20)

The 27th year of Ezekiel's captivity was 570 B.C. The invasion was imminent. The assumption that it began in 564 B.C. cannot be far wrong.

The campaign against Tyre mentioned in the same quotation also assists in dating the invasion. In combination with yet another incident, described below, it all but confirms the accuracy of our 564 B.C. date. Both matters warrant our attention.

Siege of Tyre

According to Ezekiel the Babylonian siege of Tyre preceded the invasion of Egypt by only a few years. And in the view of most scholars it immediately followed the 2nd captivity of Judah. It is therefore dated in a very specific time frame. G. A. Cooke, in his influential *International Critical Commentary* on Ezekiel, sums up the consensus opinion. "After he (Nebuchadnezzar) had sacked Jerusalem, he resolved to punish Tyre, and laid siege to it for thirteen years, 585-573, according to the Phoenician sources quoted by Josephus (Antiquities x. II, I; c. Apion I, 21.)"²². The unusual length of the conflict can be attributed to the location of Tyre. "In ancient times it stood upon a small rocky island, some 142 acres in area, half a mile from the mainland"²³. According to Ezekiel, who consumes three chapters discussing the political and economic fortunes of Tyre (chs. 26-28), the island city was eventually conquered. The complaint that little of value remained when the city fell seems to imply that Phoenician ships escaped with the

²¹ Cf. K.S. Freedman and D.B. Redford, "The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *JAOS* 90 (1970) 462-485; and Jack Finegan, "The Chronology of Ezekiel," *JBL* 69 (1950) 61-66.

²² G.A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel* The International Critical Commentary (ICC), 1936. p. 287.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

last defenders and with what remained of the city's proverbial wealth. What concerns this revision is the nine-year time span between the fall of Tyre and the beginning of the invasion of Egypt. This is the only available space in which to locate our second event, the mania of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar's Mania

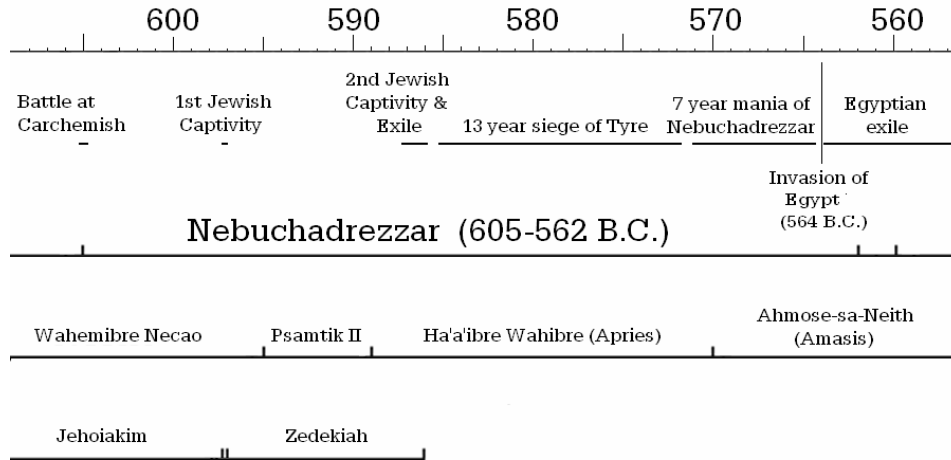
A third Jewish prophet contributes to our knowledge of the activities of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, of "lion's den" fame, was, like Ezekiel, a deportee domiciled in Babylon. A youth of high intellect, he was given a Babylonian education and employed his skills in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. One of his functions was the interpretation of dreams. The meaning of a particularly troublesome nightmare is the subject of an extensive dialogue recorded in the Hebrew Bible. With due deference Daniel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar, whose dream it was:

This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men ... (Dan. 4: 24-25)

According to Daniel the predicted illness struck suddenly. Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and went into seclusion. "His hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird." (Dan. 4:33) The illness lasted seven years.²⁴ It must be placed between the end of the assault on Tyre and the beginning of the invasion of Egypt, that is, in the years 572-566 B.C. During this time the armed might of Babylon languished along with its king. It is probable that Egypt took advantage of this respite to extend her domains. When Nebuchadnezzar recovered he regained not only his mind but also his kingdom. In his own words: "At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honour and splendour were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before." (Dan. 4:36) He not only regained his kingdom, he enlarged it. He immediately began plans to invade Egypt!

²⁴ The nature of the illness is irrelevant. Nebuchadnezzar lived in seclusion and was unable to effectively govern the country. We will argue in chapter 4 that Taharka took advantage of this incapacity of the Babylonian king to encroach on Babylonian territory at least as far as the Armenian highlands and the vicinity of Ashur.

Figure 9: Nebuchadnezzar's Wars (597-564 B.C.)



The invasion awaited only one other preliminary event. This time our attention is directed toward Egypt.

The Nile Flood.

Consistently we have quoted the Hebrew Bible in English translation from the *New International Version*. Only once have we needed to alter the translation. At the time we refrained from doing so. When Ezekiel was quoted regarding the duration of the exile the troublesome passage was left unchanged (see above, p. 21). Now we return to correct our oversight. For convenience we repeat the quote with the necessary change. God is speaking:

I will make the land of Egypt a ruin and a desolate waste from Midgol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush. *A man's foot will not pass over it and no foot of beast will pass over it; then it will be uninhabited for forty years.* I will make the land of Egypt desolate among devastated lands, and her cities will lie desolate forty years among ruined cities. I will disperse the Egyptians among the nations and scatter them through the countries. (Ezek. 29: 10-12²⁵)

²⁵ The italics are added and the italicized line is my own translation. Explanation follows immediately.

According to the *NIV* all clauses of verse eleven, the highlighted section, are descriptive of the state of affairs in Egypt during the forty-year exile. It translates accordingly: "No foot of man or animal will pass through it; no one will live there for forty years." (Ezek. 29:11 NIV) This appears to overstate the case. Elsewhere Ezekiel identifies a surviving remnant. Long before the exile ends rebuilding activity will be feverishly underway. Admittedly hyperbole is a common feature of prophetic literature, and is often employed by Ezekiel. But the reference to a total absence of migratory life forms, both human and animal, for a period of forty years, is unparalleled. The initial clauses of verse eleven cannot reasonably refer to the post invasion state of affairs.

Hebrew syntax admits the possibility, and circumstances suggest the probability, that the initial clauses of verse eleven refer to the state of affairs immediately *preceding* the invasion. First there would occur a temporary cessation of movement within Egypt, then would follow the invasion and a forty-year desolation of the country. There is only one possible explanation.

One of the three seasons of the Egyptian calendar is called Akhat - the inundation. That fact reflects the importance of the event. The inundation of the Nile was without doubt the most dominant aspect of life in ancient Egypt. The claim by Herodotus that "Egypt is a gift of the Nile" well deserves its proverbial status. On the annual flood all life depended. But the Nile flood had negative aspects. When the Nile floods, movement within Egypt is severely restricted. When the Nile floods excessively, movement on land all but stops. "No foot of man or beast passes over it." We should therefore interpret the initial clauses of Ezekiel 29:11 as a reference to a Nile flood, probably one of unprecedented proportions, and translate the verse accordingly as an inferential statement. When A happens then B will follow. Before the invasion Egypt would have a brief time in which to reflect, a poignant pause before the coming storm. First an inundation of the Nile which would literally bring all movement in the country to a halt, albeit temporarily; then an invasion and resulting devastation which would interrupt for forty years the "settled life" of the nation. The historical revision that follows will confirm this interpretation.

The Reliability of the Prophetic Oracles

So much for the historical record provided by the two prophets. Before proceeding, we should underscore the fundamental reliability of these eyewitness accounts. We cannot imagine two witnesses more aptly positioned to view the events they describe. Ezekiel - domiciled in the homeland of the invading army, privy to the local "news", able to view the departing and returning armies, and, more importantly, the arrival of captive Egyptians; and Jeremiah - inhabitant of Tahpanhes, the fortress town initially conquered by the Babylonian army and the base camp of Nebuchadnezzar for the military operations which followed. While we know nothing of the fate of these prophets, we do know they had disciples who faithfully recorded their oracles and who collated and

disseminated their writings. The substantial historicity of their "prophecies" with respect to activity beyond the borders of Egypt, particularly in Judah, has never been questioned. We should expect therefore, that in relation to the invasion of Egypt they can be taken at face value.

The critic will surely counter with the claim that the books which bear the names of Ezekiel and Jeremiah are prophetic in nature and poetic in composition, and are unreliable as historical sources on that account. We respond to this opinion with one important observation. No scholar critical of the historical accuracy of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel dare claim they were recorded after the fact of the invasion. That a prophet would deliberately create a fiction, open to the ridicule of his contemporaries, flies in the face of reason. The critic is therefore obliged to claim that the prophets spoke before the event, responding reasonably but wrongly to developing political trends. Their prognoses were well intentioned, but as events unfolded they proved to be inaccurate. But this view ignores the minutia of detail in the oracles. A political forecast is one thing; a detailed exposition of an invasion is quite another.

This opinion also disregards the basic tenets of the Jewish literary tradition that preserved the writings of Ezekiel and Jeremiah through the ages. Within decades of the return of Judah from its exile in 539 B.C., and only shortly after the end of the Egyptian exile in 525 B.C., the Jewish community began the process of collecting its national literature. One of the essential qualifications for the incorporation of a prophetic writing into these national archives was its substantial accuracy. The false prophet was not honoured by giving his work pride of place among the literature of the nation; he deserved to die. This philosophy is clearly articulated in the biblical text:

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. (Dt. 18:20-22)

It is inconceivable that the oracles of Jeremiah and Ezekiel would have been accepted as legitimate by a community not yet a generation removed from the events they describe, if they were not true in every detail. The critic who rejects the historicity of the invasion of Egypt as described above is not discrediting two eyewitnesses; he is rejecting the acknowledgment of a nation. The entire post-exilic Jewish community consisted of returnees of those Judaeans dispersed by Nebuchadnezzar's wars. It is unthinkable that they were mistaken. There should be no doubt that the Egyptian exile is a fact of history. If 20th century historians say otherwise, they are wrong.

Amasis or Exile

The Opinion of Contemporary Historians

What do modern historians say about the invasion and ensuing exile of Egypt? When we read any current history of Egypt we are perplexed to find, in most instances, no reference to either event. Much is made of the Assyrian invasions of 671, 667, and 664 B.C., the alleged Persian conquest in 525 B.C., and the victory of Alexander in 332 B.C., though these assaults pale in comparison with the holocaust of 564 B.C. A few authors entertain the possibility of a border encounter between Babylonian and Egyptian armies, but no devastation beyond the eastern delta. The notion of a forty-year interruption in Egyptian political history is never entertained as a possibility. Why this state of affairs in spite of the clear testimony of the prophets? There must be some compelling reason for dismissing outright the contrary opinion. We find the answer by reading any history of the time in question.

The exile, as we have noted, must have occurred in the forty-year period ending with the arrival of Cambyses in Egypt, that is, in the time frame 564-525 B.C. In the currently adopted Egyptian chronology this time slot is occupied by the terminal kings of the Egyptian 26th (Saïte) dynasty. The penultimate king of this dynasty, Ahmose-sa-Neith, called Amasis by the Greek authors, ruled almost the whole of this time, a proverbial 44 years, from 570 B.C. to 526 B.C. Only the brief six-month reign of his son Ankhkanre Psamtik (Psamtik III) separated Amasis' death from the arrival of Cambyses and the end of the dynasty. In the view of historians, the reign of Amasis was one of thriving commercial activity. A single comment by one early Egyptologist says it all:

Of the home government of Amasis, ... we know little save the fact that, as Herodotus says, the kingdom under his rule attained a high state of wealth and prosperity and populousness. The Mediterranean trade in corn, wine and oil flourished, as also did that across the desert from Babylonia and from Yemen with lapis, incense, and other products of the East, and from Cush came ivory and gold in barter. According to the Greek historian, Egypt had twenty thousand towns in his time. We see that Amasis was able to build temples to the gods on the great scale, rivalling that of the older Pharaohs, and here again the monuments confirm Herodotus. Several are dated in the joint reign of Amasis and Apries, who had himself been no inconsiderable builder. The Saïte kings were wealthy ...²⁶

Small wonder that an extended exile has no place in Egyptian history. If Amasis ruled for forty-four years in the time frame specified, whether or not Herodotus is correct regarding the prosperity of the country, then the prophets are mistaken. Conversely, if

²⁶ H.R. Hall CAH 1st 3:306-7

the prophets are correct, as we believe them to be, then Amasis must be wrongly positioned in history. The issue is as simple as that. Is it possible that historians have misplaced the Saïte king? On what bases is Amasis placed in the latter half of the 6th century B.C., immediately preceding the arrival of the Persians?

When we quoted H.R. Hall concerning the prosperity of Egypt in the age of Amasis it was immediately apparent that his primary source of information was the Greek historian Herodotus. In fact most of what is known about the Saïte and Persian dynasties derives from this one historian, including our knowledge of the transition period between the two dynasties. In book three of his *Histories* Herodotus describes in great detail Amasis' death, the defeat of Psamtik III by Cambyses, the execution of Psamtik's children, and Cambyses' brutal treatment of the religious institutions of the country. If this history is even remotely factual, there can be no doubt that the reign of Amasis ended only shortly before the 525 B.C. arrival of Cambyses. But the reliability of Herodotus has been seriously questioned. It is therefore important to note that he is supported in his placement of Amasis by two other sources, Manetho and Udjahorresne(t). We mention them briefly at this time. More will be said later.

Manetho, an Egyptian priest living under Seleucid rule in the 3rd century B.C., wrote a history of Egypt in the Greek language, unfortunately no longer extant, but preserved in extract form by Africanus and Eusebius, Greek authors who lived in the early centuries of the current era. What is preserved of Manetho's history amounts to little more than a listing of Egyptian pharaohs from Menes, the proverbial founder of kingship in Egypt, to the arrival of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. This "king list", divided for convenience into thirty dynasties, continues to function as the basis of the traditional Egyptian historical framework. Manetho's apparent support for Herodotus is marginal, but needs to be noted. By listing the Saïte dynasty as his 26th, and the dynasty of Persian kings from Cambyses to Darius II as his 27th, he gives at least the impression that the two dynasties ruled Egypt sequentially. Citing Amosis and Psammecherites as names of the last kings of the Saïte dynasty, and Cambyses as the first Persian ruler, he appears to confirm the details of the succession provided by Herodotus two centuries earlier. But this apparent confirmation is mitigated by two factors, namely, 1) the fact that several of Manetho's dynasties have been shown to overlap one another, which leaves room for the possibility that they are not to be taken sequentially in this instance, and 2) the possibility that Manetho is merely following Herodotus and mirroring his mistake.

Much stronger support is forthcoming from a hieroglyphic inscription written by an Egyptian official named Udjahorresne, identified as "the commander of sea-faring ships under both Amasis and Psamtik III"²⁷. This tiny statuette preserves the only hieroglyphic inscription of significant historical value contemporary with the beginning of Persian rule in Egypt. It is extremely important precisely on this account. Where Herodotus and Manetho postdate the Persian arrival in Egypt by at least a century, the

²⁷ Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (1961), p. 366

Udjahorresne inscription unquestionably dates to the time of Cambyses and Darius I. The stela was apparently brought to Rome by one of the imperial Roman emperors and is today the property of the Vatican. The text was one of the first inscriptions translated after Champollion's decipherment of the hieroglyphic script in the early 19th century. What is singularly important in the present context is the identity of Udjahorresne as stated above. The identification is that provided by Udjahorresne himself, for he begins his inscription by listing among his credentials his official duties as "head of the royal navy under the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Khnemibre" and "head of the royal navy under the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Ankhkare". Since Khnemibre and Ankhkare are recognized as the throne names (prenomen) respectively of Amasis and his son Psamtik III, Udjahorresne's association with Amasis and his son has never been questioned. And since Udjahorresne goes on to describe the beginnings of a new career under Cambyses and then under Darius, we have here what appears to be unimpeachable evidence that Amasis was the immediate predecessor of Cambyses.

Since Herodotus, Manetho, and Udjahorresne were all accessible to 19th century historians, the terminal date 525 B.C. for the end of the Saïte dynasty was widely accepted early in that century. Two discoveries of significance later in the 19th century established, with equal assurance, the date when the dynasty began, and provided an important synchronism between the date of the beginning of the dynasty and the independently established chronology of Assyria. We refer to the excavation of the famed Serapeum of the Apis bull cult of Memphis, and the recovery of the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in Nineveh.

Serapeum Stelae & Assyrian Annals

In 1850 Auguste Mariette discovered the location of the burial chambers of the Apis bull cult of Osiris/Ptah, a sequence of surface chapels and subterranean tombs known in antiquity as the Serapeum. In these vaults were buried the mummified remains of the deified Apis bulls, animals conceived to be, while alive, the temporal residence of the god Osiris. In these chambers Mariette found hundreds of inscribed stelae, placed there by devotees of the cult through the hundreds of years during which the cult flourished. Of particular relevance are a half dozen "official" stelae deposited by the priests during the time of the Saïte dynasty, so worded that they enable historians to reconstruct the length of reign of the first five Saïte kings with remarkable accuracy. According to these stelae the kings from Psamtik I to Amasis ruled for a combined total of 138 years. The addition of a year for the brief reign of Psamtik III, for which no Serapeum material exists, brings the length of the dynasty to 139 years. If it ended with the arrival of Cambyses in 525 B.C., then its beginning must be dated to 664 B.C. Firm absolute dates were thus provided for the entire dynasty (see Table 1 below).

At this point the second 19th century discovery comes into play. The excavations conducted by the pioneering archaeologist/adventurer Layard at Nineveh recovered

thousands of inscribed cuneiform tablets from the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, whose reign spanned the years 669-628 B.C. Several of these tablets were from the official historical annals of Ashurbanipal and revealed *inter alia* the hitherto unsuspected fact that Egypt was once a vassal state of Ashurbanipal and his father Esarhaddon. The annals describe the invasion and conquest of Egypt in 671 B.C. by Esarhaddon, detail several attempted rebellions of the subject kings and their suppression by Ashurbanipal, and name an Ethiopian king Tarqu as the earlier opponent of Esarhaddon and the instigator of the subsequent coup attempts. In 665 B.C. Ashurbanipal drove the rebel Tarqu from Egypt for the last time. Since the next year a king Urdamanie had replaced Tarqu as the opponent of Ashurbanipal the assumption is made that Tarqu died in 664 B.C.

The combined evidence from the two 19th-century discoveries provided a chronological anchor date for the traditional history and further confirmed the accuracy of the Saïte dynasty chronology. The argument is essentially as follows:

- 1) The Serapeum stela²⁸ confirm the length of the Saïte dynasty as 139 years. Since Cambyses killed the last Saïte king in 525 B.C., the dynasty must have begun in 664 B.C.
- 2) One Serapeum stela²⁹ clearly identifies the immediate predecessor of Psamtik I as Taharka, who must be the same as Manetho's Taracos, the last of the 25th Ethiopian dynasty kings of Egypt. Since Psamtik began his reign in 664 B.C. it follows that Taharka must have died that same year.
- 3) The Assyrian annals that describe the invasions of Ashurbanipal name Tarqu as the Libyan king who stirred up both Egyptian rebellions. Tarqu was driven from the country around 665 B.C. and probably died the next year.
- 4) The probability is thus established that Tarqu of Ashurbanipal's annals and Taharka of the Serapeum stela are one and the same person.
- 5) The date 664 B.C. for the death of Taharka (Tarqu) thus synchronizes the chronologies of Egypt and Assyria.

The identity of Tarqu and Taharka has never been questioned. The coincidence of name and date is compelling.

²⁸ Strictly speaking they confirm that the dynasty, from Psamtik I through Amasis, lasted 138 years. The extra year is added to accommodate the reign of Psamtik III, which is unattested.

²⁹ This stela is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Two important chronological facts are forthcoming from the Apis stela which links Psamtik I and Taharka. The first, already mentioned, is confirmation that Taharka immediately preceded Psamtik, thus confirming that the 25th and 26th dynasties are sequential. But the stela also provides information about the length of Taharka's reign. It refers to an Apis bull born in the 26th year of Taharka, which died in the 20th year of Psamtik I. Since the deceased bull was twenty-one years old at death the inscription left no doubt that the 26th year was Taharka's last regnal year. This established the length of Taharka's reign. Accordingly, the dates of this Ethiopian king are listed by most authorities as 690-664 B.C.³⁰ These dates for Taharka, with only slight variations, have been firmly in place since the time of Breasted at the turn of the 20th century.

Table 1: Traditional Saïte Dynasty Dates³¹

<i>25th (Ethiopian) dynasty (earlier kings omitted)</i>
Taharka 690-664 B.C.
ASHURBANIPAL ATTACKS THEBES 664 B.C.
<i>26th (Saïte) dynasty begins (139 years)</i>
Wahibre Psamtik (Psamtik I) 664-610 B.C.
Wahemibre Necao (Necho) 610-595 B.C.
Neferibre Psamtik (Psamtik II) 595-589 B.C.
Ha'a'ibre Wahibre (Apries) 589-570 B.C.
Khnemibre 'Ahmose-sa-Neith (Amasis) 570-526 B.C.
'Ankhanre Psamtik (Psamtik III) 526-525 B.C.
INVASION OF CAMBYSES 525 B.C.

³⁰ We will demonstrate in chapter 5 that the rule of Taharka extended briefly into his 27th year. Regardless, he reigned a full 26 years, and on the assumption that he died in 664 B.C., his reign must begin in 690 B.C.

³¹ Apart from the 690 B.C. date for the beginning of Taharka's reign, the dates in this table are taken verbatim from Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, p. 450-452. Since we argue later that Ankhkanre Psamtik III does not belong where positioned in the traditional history it follows that the dates in the few years at the close of the 5th century will be altered in this revision. The changes will be slight.

The chronological outline sketched above evokes from Sir Alan Gardiner, the author of the popular *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (1963), a rare expression of confidence. Referring to the dates for Taharka he confidently affirms: "These two dates are certain".³² This assurance necessarily extends to the dates of the Saïte dynasty kings who follow. The "certain" dates for the Saïte dynasty are reproduced in Table 1 above.

While this by no means exhausts the evidence that undergirds the confidence of Egyptologists, these are its main features. The evidence is indeed persuasive, at least in the summary form in which it has been outlined. We would have expected nothing else. To set aside testimony of eyewitnesses of the most impeccable character as has been done in discounting the Jewish prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah, there needed to be compelling evidence to the contrary. The 664 B.C. date for the beginning of the Saïte dynasty has stood the test of time. Historians and historical revisionists alike begin their careful treatment of Egypt's past by working backward from this date. It has become an axiom among students of Egyptian history that from 690 B.C. through the end of the dynastic period of Egypt and the arrival of Alexander in 334 B.C., Egyptian chronology is on secure footing. The date 690 B.C. for the beginning of Taharka's reign, and the date 664 B.C. for his death, are the anchor points of all historical studies related to dynastic Egypt.

The cautious reader is perhaps wondering by now whether this revision should proceed - it being apparent that we do intend to relocate Amasis. What is more, it must be evident that the entire Saïte dynasty must move along with Amasis. In spite of appearances to the contrary, it does not belong in the time frame 664-525 B.C. But the proposed revision is far more comprehensive than the relocation of a single dynasty. Already it has been established that the beginning of the Saïte dynasty is linked to Taharka and thus to the end of the 25th. It follows that the 25th dynasty in its entirety must follow the movement of the 26th. As we shall soon see, we are unable to break the established connection between Egyptian dynasties as far back as the middle of the sequence of Libyan kings of Egypt, Manetho's 22nd dynasty. When the Saïte kings are moved to their rightful place in history, they will trail behind them almost four other dynasties. Fully 300 years of established history will be displaced. And this is just the beginning.

³² Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, p. 450, n.3. Gardiner, for unexplained reasons, begins the dynasty in 689 B.C. rather than 690 B.C. We adopt the 690 B.C. date along with most scholars, especially in view of the comments in note 30.