

# The Egyptian expansion in the near east in the saite period

## Abstract

The Saite foreign policy in the Near East in the seventh and sixth centuries BC is revisited, the Saite expansion into the region is reconsidered and the existence of Egyptian empire and the nature of Egypt's presence at the time and interests in the region are discussed.

**Keywords:** Saite, psamtik, nekau, apries, amasis, levant, nubia, Cyprus, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, trade, diplomacy, warfare

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## Hussein Bassir

Director of Antiquities Museum, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt

**Correspondence:** Hussein Bassir, Director of Antiquities Museum, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt, Email [hussein.bassir@biblalex.org](mailto:hussein.bassir@biblalex.org)

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## Introduction

The Saite foreign policy is well documented in Egyptian, biblical, Assyrian, Babylonian and Classical resources. We use these primary resources to reconstruct the history of the region in the period. While some scholars suggest that Egypt established an empire in the Levant in the Saite Period, this article demonstrates that after the end of the Egyptian empire in the Levant by the Late New Kingdom in ca. 1085 BC, then a gap before the Saite kings started to set up points of interest and influence in the region to renew Egypt's trade interests in South West Asia and keep the Assyrian vassal state system in the Levant under Egyptian control in the face of the Babylonian ambitions in the region.

## Assyria invading Egypt

The Ancient Near East in the first millennium until the late seventh century BC was dominated by Assyria. This imperial state continued to expand its control over a vast region from Iran in the east to Syria-Palestine in the west and Anatolia in the north to Egypt in the south; and until it succeeded to establish a unified empire: Neo-Assyrian Empire (ca. 934-609 BC).<sup>1</sup> Egypt was an appealing target for the Neo-Assyrians because of its great wealth and its continuous support of Syro-Palestine rebels against Assyrian rule from the ninth century BC. The Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty had conquered Egypt in the mid-eight century BC and retained control until 664 BC. After consolidating his hold over southern Palestine, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (ca. 680-669 BC) organized three campaigns to invade Egypt and he finally defeated the Kushite king Taharqo (Assyrian: Tarqu) (ca. 690-664 BC) and conquered the central capital of Egypt in the north, Memphis in 664. In order to maintain control over this remote country, Esarhaddon created a system of loyal vassals among a number of local dynasts of the Egyptian Nile Delta. Regarding this, his son and successor, Assurbanipal later in year wrote: "...the people of Assyria who were in Egypt, my servants, whom Esarhaddon king of Assyria, my father, had entrusted with kingship there, the kings and governors, my servants, the kings of Egypt, my servants.

Nikkû, Sharru-lu-dari and Paqruru, the kings whom my father had established in Egypt, violated the oath of Assur and the great gods, my lords and broke their word. They forgot the good my father had done to them and planned evil in their hearts. They spoke false words and they counseled each other in a counterproductive way. "If they chase Tarqu out of Egypt, where shall we stay?" They sent their emissaries to swear an oath of peace, saying: "We want to establish peace and be in agreement amongst ourselves. We want to divide the land amongst ourselves. Let there be no lord among us."

They repeatedly planned evil against the mass of the troops of Assyria, the strength of my rule. They plotted to take their lives and endeavored to do unheard evils. My officials heard of these things and played a trick on them. They captured their messengers with their messages and saw their treacherous doings. They captured Sharru-lu-dari and Nikkû and shackled their hands and feet. The curse of Assur, king of the gods, came upon them, they who had sinned against their might oath. Those to whom I had done good deeds, I called to task. The people of the cities, all who had joined them and had plotted evil, great and small, they cut down with their weapons and not a single person inside these cities was saved. To him, whom they brought to me in [Nineveh], my royal city, I Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, the broad-minded, the well-doer who seeks goodness, to Nikkû, my servant, to whom had been entrusted the city Kar-Bel-Matati, I showed mercy, although he had sinned. I laid upon him a loyalty oath that was stricter than what existed before. I encouraged him, put bright garments on him and gave him a golden hoe, the symbol of his kingship. I put golden rings on his fingers and gave him an iron dagger with a sheath inlaid with gold on which I had written my name. Chariots, horses and mules I granted to him for his royal journeys. I sent to him my officials and governors to help him. I sent him back to Sais, which is now called Kar-Bel-Matati, where my father had made him king. I showed him kindness ever greater than my father had done."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English translation after Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 257-58 [Document 13.1 *Assurbanipal and Egypt. Excerpt from Assurbanipal's account written after 664*], who bases his on H.-U. Onasch, *Die assyrischen Eroberungen Ägyptens* (Wiesbaden, 1994), 104-15.

However, Assyrian control over Egypt was weak and by the death of Esarhaddon, Taharqo had reasserted Kushite rule over the whole of Egypt. Assurbanipal dispatched an ultimately successful campaign to regain control over Egypt, which was interrupted by a rebellion of the Delta dynasts. The Assyrian king defeated the rebels, with the assistance of an army from some Syro-Palestinian states including Judah and he punished the vassals. Even so, he appointed one of them, Nekau (ca. 676-664 BC) (commonly Nekau I or Necho/ Necho I Assyrian Nikkū), as king of Sais (Sau) in the central Delta and Mimpi (Memphis) and as head of the Saite house and gave him special prominence among the Delta vassals. The Saite Period started when the Assyrian ended the Kushite rule of Egypt and left Egypt due to the rise of Babylonia which made Assyria busy centering in Mesopotamia. When the Assyrian army left Egypt, the new Kushite king, Tanutamun (664-656 BC), turned northward and reestablished Kushite power at Thebes, Memphis and Heliopolis, expelling pro-Assyrian elements from Memphis.<sup>2</sup> This move by Tanutamun forced Assurbanipal to conduct a final, revengeful major attack against Egypt in 664 and 663 BC.<sup>1</sup> He reached the eternal capital of ancient Egypt in the south, Thebes (Assyrian: Ni') and plundered it ending any Kushite hope of ruling Egypt forever. The Assyrian administrative system of ruling Egypt during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (663-655 BC) was based on controlling Egypt from their remote imperial capital in Nineveh by appointing native Egyptians, such as Nekau to serve as royal vassals and then returning home to manage their own imperial affairs.<sup>2</sup> However, the Assyrian system of loyal vassals in Egypt did not last for long.

### Psamtik I wahibre (664-610 BC): founding the saite dynasty (664-526 BC)

The Saite Period, the Saite Renaissance, or the 26th Dynasty (664-525 BC), is often considered to be among the last glorious phases of ancient Egyptian history. After regaining its independence, unification and centralization under native Egyptian Pharaohs during this period, Egypt started a glamorous era of renaissance. The Saite Pharaohs drew attention to the past of Egypt and put emphasis on the major golden periods of Egyptian civilization, such as the Old, Middle Kingdom and New Kingdoms.<sup>3</sup> Upon the death of Nekau, who was probably killed in battle with Tanutamun, his son Psamtik (Psamtik I) ascended the throne in Sau in the central Delta. He had been educated in Assyria and given the Assyrian name Nabu-shezzi-banni. Upon his return to Egypt, he was installed as ruler of the Delta town Hut-her-ib (Athribis).<sup>3</sup> From being a loyal vassal to the Assyrians to be the sole and strong ruler of Egypt, Psamtik I completely succeeded to free Egyptian peacefully and gradually from the Assyrian occupation and led the country to a long period of renaissance and prosperity. In 664 BC Psamtik I first took over the whole of the Nile Delta through diplomatic relationships. Over time, Psamtik I gained enough strength to become independent and in 656 BC, he declared himself sole king over the entire country of Egypt, now independent under a native Egyptian pharaoh. It was not astonishing that Psamtik I ignored the reign of the last Kushite ruler Tanutamun and dated his reign from the death of the Kushite king Taharqo. Psamtik I probably used the tradition royal title 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt' in his regnal year 9 after he successfully secured his position and supremacy at

<sup>2</sup>On the Assyrian administration and ideology of the empire, see Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 258-60.

<sup>3</sup>On the Saite renaissance, see, for instance, Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire*, 169-80, 278-80.

Thebes by adopting his daughter, Neitiqerti (Nitocris/Nitokris),<sup>4</sup> by Amenirdis II, daughter of Taharqo, to be the future God's Wife of Amun,<sup>5</sup> therefore he spread his power over Upper Egypt. Therefore, he gradually ruled and united Egypt. When Psamtik I, the true architect of the Saite Dynasty, founded this dynasty, Egypt enjoyed a long, prosperous and strong period for around 140 years. For instance, the military texts of Psamtik I partially imitated the early New Kingdom models.<sup>4</sup> In the seventh century BC, exactly after 608 BC, Assyria abandoned, as an imperial power the international scene, the Levant to have control over internal affairs at home and under the rising power of Babylonia which represented a major threat to the Assyrian heartland. Then Babylonia became a major player in the Levant to fill the political vacuum that was created when Assyria left the region. Moreover, Babylonia became a serious threat to Egyptian interests in the east, therefore, Egypt had to encounter the Babylonian ambitions in the region at some point.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptians furthermore intervened to support their former ally, the Assyrians, against the Babylonians. As a result, Psamtik I filled the vacuum in the southern Levant.<sup>5</sup> According to the Babylonian Chronicle for 616 BC, the Egyptian army supported the Assyrian army in pursuit of Nabopolassar, king of Babylonia, to the Euphrates.<sup>7</sup> Herodotus (Book II: 157) mentions that the king of Egypt besieged Ashdod, the Philistine city that fell after 29 years. Another passage in Herodotus (Book I: 105) states how Psamtik I stopped an invasion of Scythians<sup>8</sup> from invading Egypt by presenting them with gifts. There are some doubts concerning those two occurrences, however, Egypt was probably involved in some activities in South West Asia toward the end of Psamtik's long reign.

However, this empire collapsed because of the dynastic struggles and the highly centralized structure of the state.<sup>1</sup> Once Assyria's control over southern Mesopotamia had slipped after the death of Assurbanipal, the local official Nabopolassar (626-605 BC),<sup>9</sup> usurped the throne of Babylon in 626 BC and in 616 BC he successfully united the entire region under his strong rule. As a result, he established the so-called Neo-Babylonian Dynasty of the Chaldean Dynasty of Babylon (626-539 BC) and was a crucial element in putting an end to the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Because of the weak grasp of Assyria over its Syro-Palestinian vassal states and its defeat in the last decades of

<sup>4</sup>See more on this, see R. A. Caminos, *The Nitocris Adoption Stela*, *JEA* 50 (1964), 71-101.

<sup>5</sup>TGH James Egypt. *The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, In: J Boardman, IES Edwards, E Sollberger, NGL Hammond editors. *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. III, Part 2. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries BC, 2nd Edition*. Cambridge: 2008. p. 711,708-09.

<sup>6</sup>See, for instance, N. Na'aman, Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires, *BASOR* 332 (2003), 81-91.

<sup>7</sup>James, *Egypt: The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 714; Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 173-74.

<sup>8</sup>The Scythians first appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC in the south of Russia. Herodotus (Book IV: 11) mentioned that the Scythians were nomadic tribes living in Asia, see O. Szemerényi, *Four Old Iranian Ethnic Names. Scythian – Skudra – Sogdian – Saka*, Veröffentlichungen der iranischen Kommission 9 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 5; Vladimir G. Petrenko, *Scythian Culture in the North Caucasus*, In J. Davis-Kimball, V. A. Bashilov, and L. T. Yablonsky (eds.), *Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in the Early Iron Age* (Berkeley, 1995), 5-25.

<sup>9</sup>DJ Wiseman, *Babylonia 605-539 B.C.*, In J. Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, E. Sollberger and N. G. L. Hammond (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. III, Part 2, The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries BC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Cambridge, 2008), 229-41.

its existence, Babylonia took over most of these states. Thus, Egypt had to fill the void in the Levant and had to encounter Babylonia for control over this very important and strategic region.<sup>1</sup>

### **Nekau II wahemibre (610-595 BC): confrontation with babylonia**

The support for Assyria and expansion into Palestine continued in the reign of Nekau II, Psamtik I's son and successor.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Nekau II marched northward to assist his Assyrian allies and to extend Egyptian control over the Levant. In 605 BC the Egyptians fought and extended their control in Syria, but they were defeated in the battle of Carchemish by the Babylonians. The Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC)<sup>10</sup> stopped Egypt from gaining control over the Levant and Egypt was restricted to its own borders.<sup>6</sup> The Babylonian forces secured dominion over Hamath, the Aramean States/Damascus, Philistia and all the kings of western Asia became Babylonian vassals (including Judah for three years, 603-601; cf. 2 Kings 24:1). In his fourth year (601/600) Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, but his army was crushed near Migdol by Nekau II, who occupied Gaza (Herodotus, II, 159; cf. Jer. 47:1b) and persuaded the Judean king to revolt. In his seventh year, Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against Judah and conquered Jerusalem in March, 597, appointing Zedekiah as king. At that time Nekau had evacuated Gaza.<sup>11</sup> When Josiah,<sup>12</sup> king of the kingdom of Judah (Mamleket Yehuda), tried to stop the advancing Egyptian army, he was killed in a battle at Megiddo in 609 BC. However, there is no mention of this event in Assyrian and Egyptian sources. The biblical accounts (II Kings 23: 29-30; II Chronicles 35: 20-5) mention the attempt of Josiah, king of Judah, to be in the way of an Egyptian advance to the Euphrates. The fighting armies met at Megiddo. As a result, in 609 BC Josiah, was killed and his army was defeated.<sup>13</sup> The son of Josiah, Jehoahaz, succeeded his father on the throne, however three months later Nekau II replaced him by with another son of Josiah from the Davidic line, his brother Jehoiakim (his throne name) or Eliakim (608-598 BC), who became a loyal Egyptian vassal and then Nekau II took Jehoahaz captive to Egypt and Judah paid tribute to Egypt.

When the Babylonians attacked the Egyptian eastern frontier, the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, became a Babylonian vassal, however, the Babylonians never succeeded in conquering Egypt and they withdrew.<sup>14</sup> According to the Babylonian Chronicle, late in 610 BC the king of Assyria, Ashur-uballit II (611-?), with the support of the Egyptian army left Harran in Syria before the arrival of the forces of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar (626-605 BC). The support of the Egyptian was probably sent in the end of the reign

<sup>10</sup>For more, on his wars with Egypt, see Y. H. Katzenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Wars with Egypt, Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993), 184-86.

<sup>11</sup>Katzenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt*.

<sup>12</sup>On more on the king, see M. A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah. The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford-New York, 2001).

<sup>13</sup>II Kings 23, 29; M Cogan and H Tadmor. *II Kings. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 300-302; cf. A. Malamat, *The Kingdom of Judah between Egypt and Babylon. A Small State within a Great Power Confrontation*, *Studia Theologica* 44 (1) (1990), 65-77.

<sup>14</sup>Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament*, 288; M. Cogan, *Into Exile. From the Assyrian Conquest of Israel to the Fall of Babylon*, In M. D. Coogan (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York, 2001), 242-75.

of Psamtik I. In 609 BC the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II retook Harran through the Egyptian support. The Egyptians might have had supremacy over Phoenicia and Lebanon.<sup>15</sup> During his reign, Nekau II probably maintained a general control over South West Asia from the Phoenician coast to Carchemish in the north on the Euphrates, which showed some traces of Egyptian occupation, including Judah. After the retreat of the Assyrians from the Levant, Egypt took over. In 609 BC the Egyptian army defeated Babylonian forces. In 606 BC an Egyptian army besieged and occupied Kimuhu,<sup>7</sup> south of Carchemish in Syria, with its Babylonian garrison and later in the year, Egyptian force crossed the Euphrates and defeated the Babylonian army at the city of Quramati, south of Kimuhu and east of the Euphrates.<sup>8</sup> According to the Babylonian Chronicle, the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Egyptian army. In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC) defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish and destroyed another at Hamath.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Nekau II abandoned Asia Minor and the Babylonians took over. Nabopolassar attacked the eastern Egyptian border. There is a letter from a ruler of a Phoenician city seeking help from the king of Egypt against the Babylonians. According to Babylonian, *The Chronicle*, in December 601/January 600 BC. Nebuchadnezzar II attacked the eastern frontier of Egypt but he was forced to withdraw to home.<sup>3</sup> However, there was no clear winner on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup> Herodotus (Book II: 159) records a campaign of Nekau II in which he gained a victory over Magdolos<sup>9</sup> and captured Kadytis (probably Gaza?), without fixing locations or dates. In Judah, King Jehoiakim died before the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem on March 16 597 BC,<sup>3</sup> and his young son Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon and replaced by Jehoiakim's uncle, Zedekiah.<sup>17</sup>

### **Psamtik II neferibre (595-589 bc): invading the levant**

The strong struggle between Egypt and Babylonia for control over Palestine continued.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Egypt had to secure its interest in the southern Levant. Although in 591/90 BC Psamtik II did not dispatch military campaign to Palestine, there is mention in Papyrus Rylands IX of an expedition Psamtik II led to the land of Kharu (Syria-Palestine) in 592 BC in his fourth regnal year.<sup>19</sup> However, some scholars confirm

<sup>15</sup>James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 715.

<sup>16</sup>D Kahn, *O Tammuz. Egypt is Difficult to Enter. Invading Egypt - A Game Plan* (Seventh-Fourth Centuries BCE), *JNSEA* 35 (2008), 60.

<sup>17</sup>James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 715-17.

<sup>18</sup>G. Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods* (Dynasties Late 20 to 26). In T. Schneider and K. Szpakowska (eds.), *Egyptian Stories. A British Egyptological Tribute to Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement* (Münster, 2007), 233; S. Sauneron and J. Yoyotte, *Sur la politique palestinienne des rois saïtes. Vetus Testamentum* 2.2 (1952), 131-36; K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 B.C.)* (Warminster, 1996), 406-7.

<sup>19</sup>Mumford, *Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods* (Dynasties Late 20 to 26), 233; K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, *The Dates in Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources*, *JAOS* 90 (3) (1970), 479; James, *Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties*, 718; F. L. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, Vol. III (Manchester, 1909), 93-98; G. Vittmann, *Der demotische Papyrus Rylands 9, Vol. I, Text und Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 349-50.



the military nature of this expedition.<sup>20</sup> In 589 BC, Psamtik II was the pharaoh who encouraged Judah to revolt against Babylonia,<sup>10</sup> probably to have control over this very important kingdom to Egypt.

#### **Apries wahibre haaibre (589-570 BC): in the footsteps of the saite fathers**

It is not strange that Apries Wahibre Haaibre (biblical: Hophra) followed the same policy of his father Psamtik II and his grandfather Nekau II. In 589, Apries Wahibre Haaibre persuaded Zedekiah to revolt (cf. 2 Kings 24:20). When the Babylonian king sent forces to occupy Judah and its capital, the Egyptian king tried in vain to intervene (cf. Jer. 37:7). After the conquest of Jerusalem and the abolition of the Judean kingship, Nebuchadnezzar deposed all the other kings in western Asia. The Judean prophets expected military action against Egypt (cf. Jer. 43: 10 ff; Ezek. 29: 18; 30 3 f), but the long siege of Tyre (ca. 585-573/2) postponed the Babylonian campaign against Egypt, which took place only in Nebuchadnezzar's thirty seventh year (568/567), when the revolt of the soldiers had deposed Apries Wahibre Haaibre and Amasis had become king in Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, in 589 BC Apries Wahibre Haaibre sent a military force to put an end to the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, however, the Egyptian army failed and retreated and Nebuchadnezzar II took the city in 586 BC.<sup>3</sup> Apries Wahibre Haaibre attacked the Phoenician towns of Sidon and Tyre held under Babylonian occupation.<sup>22</sup> In 568 BC Nebuchadnezzar II led a campaign against Egypt and attacked the east Delta frontier in order to reinstate Apries Wahibre Haaibre had been ousted by his general, Amasis, where the archaeological evidence shows destruction levels at Tell el-Maskhuta and probably at Tel Qedwa.<sup>23</sup> Apries Wahibre Haaibre was killed, probably in a battle and buried by his successor Amasis at the royal necropolis at the capital Sais in the central Delta.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Amasis khnemibre (570-526 BC): turning to the greek world**

Amasis (or Ahmose II) came to the throne during an army rebellion following the failure of a campaign sent against Cyrene by Apries Wahibre Haaibre. Apries Wahibre Haaibre attempted to regain the throne with the help of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II

who invaded Egypt. However, the invading force was defeated and Apries Wahibre Haaibre was killed.<sup>3</sup> Amasis followed a new policy and directed his interests toward the Greek world. Therefore, Amasis attacked and defeated Cypriots and imposed tribute payments upon it.

<sup>24</sup> Both the Babylonians and the Egyptians claimed victory, but it was suggested that an agreement was reached, giving Nebuchadnezzar the overlordship in western Asia and Amasis a firm position as the Egyptian Pharaoh. Many years later, Babylonia and Egypt became as allies (together with Lydia) against Persia, the rising new power.<sup>25</sup> In ca. 562 BC Nebuchadnezzar II died. The new threat to Egypt and Western Asia was Persia under Cyrus the Great who invaded Babylonia in 539 BC<sup>7</sup> and expanded power over the Levant in ca. 539-538,<sup>26</sup> and he died in 530 BC.

#### **Psamtik III ankhkaenre (525-526 bc): the fall of the saite dynasty**

Psamtik III, son of Amasis and the last king of the Saite Dynasty, did not reign for long, only for six months. In 525 BC the Persian king, Cambyses, invaded Egypt and ended the rule of the Saite Dynasty. There was a battle at Pelusion and the Egyptian army was defeated and withdrew to Memphis which the Persians captured.<sup>3</sup> According to Herodotus, Psamtik III was executed by the Persians after the discovery of his role in a plot. As a result, Cambyses ignored his reign and dated his reign in Egypt from the death of Amasis.<sup>3</sup> In the face of the Persian danger, stable and diplomatic relationships between Egypt and Babylonia were established.<sup>27</sup>

#### **The nature of saite expansion and presence in the levant**

Some scholars argue that the Pharaohs of the early Saite period, Psamtik I and Nekau II, "practiced a form of imperialism by establishing a system of vassal states in the Southern Levant." However, it is not easy to speak of establishing an Egyptian empire at the Southern Levant at the early Saite Period for some reasons. Egypt had always interests in the Levant and the trade routes were the main focus of Egyptian attention in the region. The Southern Levant was a region of Egyptian influence and interest and was not part of a huge empire as it was in the time of the New Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

The Saite foreign policy in the Levant in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, (664-526 BC), changed over time due the mosaic nature of the region and the different external players on the Levantine scene, such as Assyria, Babylonia and Persia in addition to Egypt. As always, South West Asia was a source of danger for Egypt and the Saite kings

<sup>20</sup>D. Kahn, Some Remarks on the Foreign Policy of Psammethichus II in the Levant (595-589 B.C.), *JoEH* 1 (1) (2008), 148; A. B. Lloyd, The Late Period (664-332 BC), In I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 381.

<sup>21</sup>Katzenstein, Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt.

<sup>22</sup>Mumford, Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26), 234; Morkot, *The A to Z of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 249.

<sup>23</sup>DJ Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (626-556 B.C.) (London, 1956), 94 BM 78-10-15, 22, 37 and 38; J. S. Holladay, Jr. et al. *Cities of the Delta*, Part III. *Tell el-Maskhuta. Preliminary Report on the Wadi Tumilat Project 1978-1979*. American Research in Egypt Reports, Vol. 6 (Malibu, 1982), 23-4; G. D. Mumford, *International Relations between Egypt, Sinai and Syria-Palestine in the Late Bronze Age to Early Persian Period (Dynasties 18-26: c. 1550-525 BC)*, (PhD Dissertation: University of Toronto, 1998), 483-4 [n. 137].

<sup>24</sup>Mumford, Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties late 20 to 26), 234; E. Edel, Amasis und Nebuchadrezar II, *GM* 29 (1978), 13-20; Herodotus II, 178-82; Diodorus I: 68.

<sup>25</sup>Katzenstein, Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Egypt.

<sup>26</sup>James, Egypt. The Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasties, 720, 725; E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster, 1982), vii; Mumford, Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26), 234.

<sup>27</sup>Mumford, Egypto-Levantine Relations during the Iron Age to Early Persian Periods (Dynasties Late 20 to 26), 234 [n. 57]; A. L. Oppenheim, *Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts*, In J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Princeton, 1969), 561-3; J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, 1986), 428-9.

were forced to participate in the complicated politics of their Asiatic neighbors to secure Egypt's interests into the very strategic region of Syria-Palestine. In order to achieve so, the Saite pharaohs utilized some ways to deal with the Levantine affairs which were rapidly changing; and as a result Egypt's foreign policy was not stable over time and was colored by warfare with the powers of the period. The Egyptians were looking for trade and abandoned interference into the internal affairs of the Syro-Palestinian vassal states. The Saite foreign policy in the Levant had many faces, changed over time and was based on warfare, trade and diplomacy. Psamtik I is the Egyptian pharaoh who tried to restore Egypt's interests in the Levant. His successor, Nekau II Wehemibre had an active military policy in the Levant. Psamtik II also focused on the Levant as well. Apries Haaibre also got involved in the affairs of the Levant. However, Amasis depended on his alliances with the Greeks and the very short-reigned king, Psamtik III, did not have any activity in the Levant.

The assumption of the existence of Egyptian empire in the Levant is hard to be accepted for some reasons. In general the Saite policy toward the Levant was mainly concerned with securing Egypt's trade routes into the region and with defending Egypt's frontiers. Warfare was among the major tools that Egypt employed to achieve its goals in this very important region. The struggle between Egypt and Babylonia over control in the Levant was strong and occupied the whole of the sixth century BC. However, in 539 BC the Persians, in the reign of Cyrus the Great, invaded Babylonia and ended the power of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and in 526 BC they put an end to the Saite Dynasty and annexed Egypt to their vast empire.

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## Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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