

CHAPTER TWO

Saite Egypt: A Brief Historical Outline

The Saite Period, which endured for 138 years (664–526 BCE) was one of the last glorious periods in Egyptian history.⁹² The Saite Dynasty came to rule Egypt due to a combination of factors: the flight of the Kushites to the south under Assyrian attacks⁹³ and the retreat of the Assyrians⁹⁴ back to their own country. With the withdrawal of the Assyrians, Saite warriors rose to fill the political vacuum in a politically fragmented Egypt. Although it was a vassal state, Egypt benefited from the Assyrian invasion through the ending of Kushite rule and the reuniting of the country under native rule. Psamtik I first consolidated his control over the Delta and ascended to the throne in 664 BCE. In 656 BCE, he succeeded in integrating Upper Egypt into his newly united kingdom through the appointment of his daughter, Nitocris, as the future God's Wife of Amun at Thebes.⁹⁵ Therefore, the Saite unification of Lower and Upper Egypt⁹⁶ might have passed through a peaceful and diplomatic process. It is notable that only two kings of this dynasty, Psamtik I and Amasis, ruled two thirds of its duration. After the century-long Saite rule over a unified Egypt, the Persian occupation ended this dynasty and made Egypt part of the Persian Empire.⁹⁷

⁹² For more on the period, see James 2008. See most recently Hussein 2009: 24–38; Perdu 2010: 140–149; Dodson 2012: 169–180; Agut-Labordère 2013. For more on the fundamental principles of the ideology of the Saite kings, see Pressl 1993: 223–254.

⁹³ For the Assyrian invasion of Egypt in Egyptian narrative tradition, see Ryholt 2004.

⁹⁴ For more on the relationships between the Saite and the Neo-Assyrians, see Von Zeissl 1955; Vittmann 2003: 21–33.

⁹⁵ See Caminos 1964: 71–101; Török 1997: 357–362; Myśliwiec 2000: 112–115; Spalinger 2001b: 74; Gozzoli 2006: 87–92; Dodson 2012: 169–180.

⁹⁶ The evidence shows that the Saite did not remove the provincial elites of Upper Egypt from their offices; see, for example, Vittmann 1978; Myśliwiec 2000: 110.

⁹⁷ For more on the international relations in the ancient Near East especially at the time of the Persian invasion of Egypt, the history of the Persian Empire and the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses, Persian rule in Egypt, and the continuity of Egyptian culture under the Persians, see Collins 2008: 187–204; Vittmann 2003: 120–154; Spencer 2005: 43–44; Smoláriková 2013; Johnson 1994: 149–159; Briant 1996: 23–38, 55–56, 59–72; 2002: 31–61; 2005: 12–18; Quack 2011; Van De Mieroop 2011: 283–315; Ruzicka 2012; Abd El-Maksoud and Valbelle 2013.

SOURCES OF THE SAITE PERIOD

The sources of the Saite Period are varied. Internal sources, especially from the royal realm, are scanty. However, external sources are plentiful, particularly such as those from classical writers (for example Book II of Herodotus⁹⁸ and Diodorus Siculus), Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and biblical mentions of Egypt.⁹⁹ Donald B. Redford declared that “The Saïte period stands largely bereft of textual sources.”¹⁰⁰ However, the Saite Period was very productive in scripts¹⁰¹ and texts¹⁰² and statuary; only a few tombs¹⁰³ and temples¹⁰⁴ have survived. The texts of the Saite non-royal elite are abundant and commemorate the beneficent achievements of their owners. These sources provide us with numerous data that can aid the understanding of the period.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE SAITE PERIOD¹⁰⁵

The chronology of the Saite Period can be divided into three phases:

EARLY SAITE PERIOD: PSAMTIK I WAHIBRE (664¹⁰⁶–610 BCE)¹⁰⁷

The early Saite Period represents the early foundations of the state. The only figure in it is Psamtik I,¹⁰⁸ the first Saite king, who succeeded in uniting Egypt after a

⁹⁸ See De Meulenaere 1951; Lloyd 1975; 1988.

⁹⁹ For more on the relations between Egypt and the Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and Persians, see Van De Mieroop 2007: 247–299; Vittmann 2003; Wiseman 2008; Van De Mieroop 2011: 304–305; see also Ataç 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Redford 2006: 240.

¹⁰¹ For different scripts, see Verhoeven 1999a; 1999b; 2001; Griffith 1909; Thissen 1980; Donker van Heel 1996; El-Aguizy 1998; Vittmann 1998.

¹⁰² For more on Saite textual practices and forms, see De Meulenaere 1972; Jansen-Winkel 2014.

¹⁰³ For more on Late Period tombs, see Stadelmann 1971; Thomas 1980; El-Sadeek 1984; Eigner 1984; Quack 2006a; Castellano Solé 2007; Smoláriková 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2013; Stammers, 2009; Pons Mellado 2009; El-Saddik 2010; Sherbiny 2012; Budka, Mekis, and Bruwier 2012–2013; Ziegler 2013; Sherbiny and Bassir 2014; Bassir and Creasman 2014; Gosford 2014; Pischikova 2014.

¹⁰⁴ For more on Late Period temples, see Zivic-Coche 1991; 2008; Assmann 1992b; Arnold 1999.

¹⁰⁵ For the royal titulary of the Saite kings, see Von Beckerath 1999: 214–219; El-Enany 2007; Blöbaum 2006; Dessoudeix 2008: 499–510; Quirke 2010: 96–97; Dodson 2012: 206–207, 210–211, 216–217, 224–225, 232; Leprohon 2013: 164–167.

¹⁰⁶ Depuydt (2006: 268) started this king's reign in 664/3 BCE.

¹⁰⁷ See Josephson 2001a: 66; Spalinger 2001b: 73; Redford 2006: 239.

¹⁰⁸ Ray (2001: 268) stated that the career of Psamtik I resembles that of “the adventurer Mohammad Ali,” the ruler and founder of modern Egypt at beginning of the nineteenth century CE.

long period of division. He followed his father Necho I¹⁰⁹ as a vassal to the Assyrians and then became the native and sole ruler of the whole country. He reigned for 54 years. He campaigned against his neighbors, the Libyans, and, at the end of his reign, in Syria-Palestine, militarily encountered the rising power of the Neo-Babylonians in 616 and 610 BCE.¹¹⁰ In his reign, the number of Greeks in Egypt increased,¹¹¹ and he hired foreign mercenaries, especially Greeks, Carians, and Ionians who lived in the city of Naukratis in the delta.¹¹² Psamtik I allied himself with the king of Lydia, Gyges.¹¹³ The text of the Adoption Stela of his daughter Nitocris indicates that he moved peacefully into Upper Egypt and he was aware of the religious norms of Thebes and the Amun temple.¹¹⁴

*MIDDLE SAITE PERIOD: NECHO II WEHEMIBRE (610–595 BCE)¹¹⁵
AND PSAMTIK II NEFERIBRE (595–589 BCE)*

The middle Saite Period was not very long and witnessed only a few historical events; the most important among them were the construction of the Red Sea canal by Necho II¹¹⁶ and the Nubian and Asiatic¹¹⁷ campaigns of Psamtik II.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁹ His Egyptian name was “N(f)-k3w;” his Greek name, “Nekos;” his Assyrian name, “Ni-ku-u;” see Lloyd 2001a: 504. For more on him, see Lloyd 2001a: 504–505; Dessoudeix 2008: 499; Ryholt 2011a; Leprohon 2013: 164.

¹¹⁰ Vittmann 2003: 33–43; Spalinger 2001b: 73–74; Wiseman 2008.

¹¹¹ For more on the interaction between Egypt and Greece, see Laronde 1995; Boardman 1999: 112; Möller 2000; Ashton 2001; Vittmann 2003: 194–235; Shapiro 2007; Nightingale 2007: 171; Van De Microop 2011: 295–299; Chauveau 2011; Agut-Labordère 2012; Mendoza 2015.

¹¹² See Myśliwiec 2000: 116; Spalinger 2001b: 73; Ray 2001: 268. For more on Naukratis, see Leclère 2008: 113–57.

¹¹³ See Myśliwiec 2000: 116. For more on the alliance between Psamtik I and Gyges, see Younes 2003.

¹¹⁴ See Caminos 1964: 71–101; Spalinger 2001b: 74; Dodson 2012: 169–172, figs. 127–128, 204. See also Ayad 2001; 2009.

¹¹⁵ For more on this king, see Lloyd 2001b: 505–506; Ryholt 2011b.

¹¹⁶ See Posener 1947; Lloyd 1972: 268–279; 1977: 142–155; Somaglino 2010.

¹¹⁷ See Griffith 1909: 93–98; Jansen-Winkel 1996b; Vittmann 1998: 349–350; Sauneron and Yoyotte 1952a; Freedy and Redford 1970: 479; Kitchen 1996: 406–407; Lloyd 2002: 381; Hauben 2001; Mumford 2007: 233; James 2008: 718; Weippert 2010: 397–402; Chauveau 2011.

¹¹⁸ For more on this king, see Jansen-Winkel 1996a. Military action by the Saïtes in Nubia is most known from the famous campaign of Psamtik II, the major event in his short reign, which took place in his third regnal year (593 BCE) with an army of Egyptians and mercenaries under the generals Amasis and Potasimto, as recorded on the king's stelae from Shellal, Karnak, and Tanis (see Hansen 1984; Gozzoli 1997: 5–16). Gozzoli (1998: 46–49) furthermore explained the differences between the accounts of the Nubian campaign of Psamtik II in the southern version of the king's Shellal Stela, which describes just the final battle (also inscribed at Karnak), and the

*LATE SAITE PERIOD: APRIES HAAIBRE (589–570 BCE),
AMASIS KHNEMIBRE (570–526 BCE),
AND PSAMTIK III ANKHKAENRE (526–527 BCE)*

The late Saite Period is the last phase of the Saite rule in Egypt before the Persian occupation. Apries and Amasis were the major kings of this period in addition to the very short-reigned Psamtik III. Amasis is the most important figure of the period, and he successfully utilized religion and diplomacy to achieve what force of arms failed to do.

The Reign of Apries (H^{cc}-jb-R^c) (589–570 BCE)¹¹⁹

Apries was the fourth Saite king. His foreign policy focused on stopping the Neo-Babylonian expansion into the Ancient Near East. He first tried to put an end to the Neo-Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 589 BCE, but he was defeated. In 582 BCE the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II invaded Egypt.¹²⁰ In order to block the Neo-Babylonian advance to the south, Apries made successful campaigns against Tyre, Sidon, and Cyprus between c. 574–571 BCE.¹²¹ In 571–570 BCE Apries launched a military expedition against Cyrene, the Greek Mediterranean city in eastern Libya, but his army was defeated, and that led to a revolt by the Egyptian warriors. An officer of Apries, Amasis, led the rebels who defeated Apries in 570 BCE, but Apries escaped. In 567 BCE Nebuchadnezzar II dispatched an invading army to Egypt to reestablish Apries on the Egyptian throne, probably as a Neo-Babylonian vassal.¹²² However, the Egyptian army defeated this force, and Apries was drowned.¹²³ Afterwards, Amasis buried Apries with the full honors of a late Saite king in the royal necropolis at the Neith temple at the royal capital, Sais.¹²⁴ The scanty historical sources from the reign of Apries reveal that he paid much attention to the temple

northern version of the text at Tanis with its description of the complete development of the war (originally set up at Sais and Memphis) (?). For more on this campaign, see Weigall 1907: 39; Sauneron and Yoyotte 1952b; Adam and El-Shaboury 1959: 39 [b]; Bakry 1967; Habachi 1974; Goedicke 1981: 187–198; Der Manuelian 1994: 333–371; Gozzoli 1997; 1998; Török 1997: 371–374; 2009: 359–363; Schmitz 2010; Dodson 2012: 177.

¹¹⁹ Lloyd 2001a: 98; Josephson 2001a: 67; De Meulenaere 2011.

¹²⁰ Spalinger 1977; 1979; Vittmann 2003: 40–42; Collins 2008; Schipper 2011; Abd El-Maksoud and Valbelle 2013.

¹²¹ Lloyd 2001a: 98–99.

¹²² For more on this invasion, see Ladynin 2006b.

¹²³ Various sources preserve contradictory stories of the end of Apries; see Josephson 2001a: 67.

¹²⁴ Lloyd 2001a: 99.

organizations¹²⁵ and kept the Theban priesthood on his side through the appointment of Saite royal women as God's Wives of Amun.¹²⁶ The building activities of Apries are few; he had a palace at Memphis,¹²⁷ and Herodotus mentioned another at Sais.¹²⁸

*The Reign of Amasis*¹²⁹ (*Jḥ-msj*) (569–527 BCE)¹³⁰

Amasis, the fifth Saite king, was an army general selected by Egyptian troops to replace Apries. As Jack A. Josephson points out, "Amasis had a very productive reign, proved himself capable of making both domestic and foreign-policy decisions, and demonstrated great acumen as a statesman."¹³¹ Amasis maintained fruitful diplomatic relationships with numerous foreign alliances, especially with the different Greek states, to support Egypt's foreign trade interests.¹³² To keep the flow of the foreign trade to his country, he avoided any military confrontation with the Neo-Babylonian power.¹³³ Amasis was successful in domestic policies as well. He operated a massive building program throughout Egypt. After his death he was probably buried in his tomb at the Saite royal necropolis at the Neith temple at Sais. His son Psamtik III succeeded him on the throne for a very short reign.

¹²⁵ The Apries stela from Mitrahina, for example, shows that this king made a land donation and its exemption from public works in favor of Ptah of Memphis. For more on this stela, see Gunn 1927; Der Manuelian 1994: 373–380, fig. 70, pls. 9, 19; Gozzoli 2006: 104–106.

¹²⁶ I.e., Ankhnesneferibre succeeded Nitocris in that office in 584 BCE. For more on the adoption of Ankhnesneferibre at Karnak, see Leahy 1996; Lloyd 2001a: 99.

¹²⁷ For more on the palace of Apries at Memphis, see Petrie 1909; Kemp 1977; 1978; Leclère 2008: 63–69; Smoláriková 2008: 55–65; Lopes 2010; 2012; 2013; Lopes and Braga 2011; Lopes and Fonseca 2012; Pagliari 2010; 2011.

¹²⁸ See Lloyd 2001a: 99.

¹²⁹ For more on the family of Amasis, see Parker 1957; De Meulenaere 1968; Josephson 2001a.

¹³⁰ This king is given a reign from 570–526 BCE. However, Depuydt (2006: 268) gave him a reign from 570–527/6 BCE; see also Quack 2011.

¹³¹ Josephson 2001a: 66–67. This is contrary to the image of Amasis in the classical sources of Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus and the well-known demotic narrative "*The Tale of Amasis and the Skipper*." This narrative is a good example of Egyptian kings as subject of tales in literary traditions. For more on this narrative, see, for example, Ritner 2003: 450–452; Hoffmann and Quack 2007: 160–162, 347; Agut-Labordère and Chauveau 2011: 13–15, 325. The demotic tale and classical writers portray him, as Josephson (2001a: 67) states, "as a plebeian who drank too much and did not act in a properly regal manner."

¹³² Josephson 2001a: 67.

¹³³ For more on the Neo-Babylonian invasion into Egypt in 567 BCE, see Redford 2000; Vittmann 2003: 33–43; Ladynin 2006b.

The Reign of Psamtik III (ʿnh-k3-n-Rʿ)¹³⁴ (527–526 BCE)¹³⁵

Psamtik III,¹³⁶ son and successor of Amasis, only ruled for a few months. The most important and dramatic event in his very short reign was the Persian¹³⁷ invasion of Egypt by Cambyses in 526 BCE.¹³⁸

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF LATE SAITE SELF-PRESENTATIONS

History in the context of Saite self-presentation is “history of the individual” rather than the “history of society.” Societal history is broader, more general, and is comprehensive in focus and approach, while “individualistic history” is specific and private. “Individualistic history” may or may not intersect with societal history. History in the texts of Neshor and Payeftjaumawyneith is absolutely an individualistic trend. Hayden White deals with the literary text as a piece of history.¹³⁹ Some scholars do not draw attention to the historical significance of such biographies. For example, in the final comment in his study on the statue of Udjahorresnet, Baines states his belief that “the statue should be read first as a dedicatory piece in the temple of Neith in Sais”; he then further declares that the historical value was not the main aim of its creation. In his view, “its presentation of general and cosmological concerns” is the main concern of the front of this statue.¹⁴⁰ Thus he does not believe in the historical implications of biography. Baines’s argument is only partly true in a sense, but this view or treatment of biographies is limited in approach and does not reveal the richness of the contexts and several levels of biographies.

CONCLUSION

The self-presentations of Neshor and Payeftjaumawyneith were not composed for writing general history. Neither individual intended to write a chronological

¹³⁴ Based on demotic evidence, Cruz-Uribe (1980: 35–39) and Pestman (1984: 145–155) referred to the existence of a king called Psamtik IV.

¹³⁵ See Spalinger 2001a: 274. However, Depuydt (2006: 268) gave him “some (6?) months in 527–525?” BCE, while Herodotus gave him a reign of only 6 to 7 months in 525 BCE. The king-list published by Quack (2009a) seems to give him 5 months.

¹³⁶ Josephson 2001a: 67. The mother of Psamtik III was called Tenkheta, see Dodson and Hilton 2004: 244, 247.

¹³⁷ For more on the relations between Saite Egypt and the Persians, see Vittmann 2003: 120–154.

¹³⁸ See Spalinger 2001a: 274. For an Egyptian account of this event, see the self-presentation of the late Saite/early Persian official Udjahorresnet in Lichtheim 2006c: 36–41; Baines 1996.

¹³⁹ White 1978.

¹⁴⁰ Baines 1996: 92.

history of the period, but rather he selected from his own history a corpus of deeds of which he was proud. Their texts were composed for writing a different kind of history, the “history of the individual.” Although the ancient Egyptians did not attain the sense of history known today,¹⁴¹ they were aware of recording and keeping track of their public and private activities in several ways. It is very hard to think that these texts do not provide history since every text provides history in some way. In these self-presentations, the history is basically that of these non-royal individuals, even if their texts illuminate many broader historical realities or the sociopolitical history in the late Saite Period. As a mixture of “societal history” and “individualistic history,” the biographies of Neshor and Payeftjauemawyneith reveal that they were extremely influential elite members in the late Saite Period, and they mirror the period and reflect its spirit and events.

¹⁴¹ For more on the sense of history in ancient Egypt, see Redford 1986; 2003; 2008.