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Kaper, O.E.

Citation

Kaper, O. E. (2008). The Libyan Period in Egypt. *Egyptian Archaeology*, 32, 38-39.
Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14166>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Libyan Period in Egypt

An international conference was held in Leiden in 2007 to discuss the 'Libyan Period'. **Olaf E Kaper**, one of the organisers, summaries the event.

From 25 to 27 October 2007, an international conference was held at Leiden University, entitled *The Libyan Period in Egypt: Historical and chronological problems of the Third Intermediate Period*. The Libyan Period, which started about 1000 BC and lasted for over three hundred years, is one of the least known periods of Egyptian history. Investigation of this period, one of the 'Dark Ages' of antiquity, is still severely hampered by a lack of historical sources.

During the larger part of the so-called Third Intermediate Period the ruling families were of Libyan tribal origins. The only solid footing for the sequence of kings in this period, comprising the Twenty-First to Twenty-Fourth Dynasties, is provided by Manetho, the Egyptian priest who wrote a *History of Egypt* during the third century BC. Unfortunately, his text survives mostly as quotes in the polemic writings of later classical authors, and is therefore not fully reliable. Because of the administrative fragmentation of the country, a proliferation of royal houses took place, at least from the reign of King Osorkon II onwards. The chronology of this period, from about 1069 until 715 BC, is still highly uncertain and hotly debated. We also don't know the extent of the various separately ruled territories, and there is still much obscurity surrounding the identity of the administrative capitals during this period.

The conference in Leiden brought together, for the first time, a wide range of specialists working on Egyptian material from this period, some 120 scholars and students in all, coming from fifteen different countries. The subtitle of the conference indicated that historical developments were to be the focus of attention, but in addition, several lecturers were invited to speak on cultural topics and the archaeology of this period, also presenting unknown material from storerooms and excavations. The result was a fertile combination of topics, providing a comprehensive image of a confusing time.



Kenneth Kitchen (foreground) in discussion with Karl Jansen-Winkel



Conference participants at the opening session in the historic Kamerlingh Onnes Gebouw building of Leiden University

The chronology of the period is important, because we still lack absolute dates for the Libyan dynasties. Only from 690 BC onwards, the year of accession of the Nubian king Taharqa, can we claim that our dates are certain. Counting backwards from the accession of Taharqa is hampered by the absence of a clear sequence of kings for the Libyan Period and by uncertainty about the lengths of individual reigns. There are a few chronological links between Egypt and the Near East at this time, with references to the Libyan princes and kings in Assyrian documents and in the Old Testament. The siege of Jerusalem by King Shoshenq I (Shisak), mentioned in the Bible is generally accepted to date to around 924 BC, which is one of the important anchor points of the chronology.

It is now becoming more and more apparent that the Libyan Period saw the start of some important cultural developments in Egypt. For instance, in the field of art history, several lecturers spoke about the inspiration drawn from the past during the second half of the Libyan Period. The return to the art forms of Egypt's Old and Middle Kingdoms, commonly known as the 'Saite Renaissance' (after the Saite period around 600 BC) can now be shown to have had its beginning 200 years previously. Initially, the examples for this archaizing style were chosen from the Middle Kingdom. Proportions and iconographic details were being copied from art works dating to this classical era of Egyptian civilization.

At the closing discussions, a proposal on behalf of the organising committee on the numbering of the kings called Shoshenq was read and adopted by the audience. Usually, pharaohs bearing the same birth name can be distinguished through their throne names. But for the number of pharaohs bearing the birth name Shoshenq



Kings Shoshenq

The participants in the conference agreed on the following numbering of the kings named Sheshonq of the Twenty-Second and other dynasties during the Libyan Period.

Twenty-Second Dynasty main line:

Hedjkheperre Shoshenq:	Shoshenq I
Heqakheperre Shoshenq:	Shoshenq IIa
Tutkheperre Shoshenq:	Shoshenq IIb
Maakheperre Shoshenq:	Shoshenq IIc
Usermaatre Shoshenq Sibast:	Shoshenq III
Hedjkheperre Shoshenq Sibast:	Shoshenq IV
Aakheperre Shoshenq:	Shoshenq V

Upper-Egyptian collateral line:

Usermaatre Meriamun Shoshenq:	Shoshenq VI
Hedjkheperre Shoshenq Siese:	Shoshenq VIa

there seem to be a surplus of throne names, with as a result a proliferation of Shoshenqs in our king lists, sometimes based upon a single piece of evidence. The Leiden conference agreed upon a temporary numbering system for those kings whose place is not yet quite certain. Some striking results are the renumbering of Heqakheperre Shoshenq (previously Shoshenq II), who was found buried at Tanis in a falcon-headed coffin, and Hedjkheperre Shoshenq Siese (previously Shoshenq VII). The position of the former in the dynastic line is still unclear, and the latter is only known from a single piece of evidence. Until we know more about these kings, they will be designated Shoshenq IIa and Shoshenq VIa respectively.

As one symposium participant commented: 'It doesn't happen every day that questions of succession in the Middle East are settled so amicably'.

□ Olaf E Kaper is Professor of Egyptology at Leiden University. He organised the conference jointly with Robert J Demarée (Leiden University) and with Gerard Broekman (independent researcher, Bergen op Zoom). Photographs: Cocky Demarée. The papers of the conference are being prepared for publication in 2008 in the series *Egyptologische Uitgaven* of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden.

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