

The Land of Benjamin between the Emerging Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: A Historical Hypothesis on the Reign of Rehoboam

Joachim J. Krause

In a recent textbook of the history of Israel, doubts have been raised whether a Judahite king by the name Rehoboam existed at all.¹ According to this view, Rehoboam, translated as “he who makes room for the people” (*Volksweiter*), was a fictitious eponym created as a counterpart to the no less fictitious Jeroboam, or “he who contends against the people” (*Volksstreiter*).² In an onomastic seminar, one would of course have to object that the sentence-name Rehoboam should be translated as either “the godhead has made room” or rather “the people has expanded” (or “he—that is, YHWH—has expanded the people,” which, however, results in a tripartite syntax hardly attested in Hebrew names), while Jeroboam, being built on the root רִבב, not רִיב, would in fact come quite close to that meaning, to be translated as something like “may the people become many.”³ Yet, the argument goes, the names have been employed against their more original meaning for an ideological purpose, and in any case

1. Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, Studienbücher Theologie 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 151.

2. Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 151.

3. For Rehoboam, see Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinemitischen Namengebung*, BWANT 46 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1928), 193 with n. 4; Johann J. Stamm, “Hebräische Ersatznamen,” in *Beiträge zur hebräischen und altorientalischen Namenkunde*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Martin A. Klopfenstein, OBO 30 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1980), 69–70; Stamm, “Zwei alttestamentliche Königsnamen,” in *Beiträge zur hebräischen und altorientalischen Namenkunde*, 137–43. For Jeroboam, see Noth, *Personennamen*, 206–7; for a different view, see Stamm, “Königsnamen,” 143–46.

this presumed purpose is more important than the guess at a pun on the two names. This purpose would be to create a narrative account of the separation of a great united monarchy that historically did not happen, since a united monarchy did not exist.⁴ To be sure, the latter contention is a burning issue, but not so much for the present paper.⁵ The following discussion presupposes no more and no less than that a “king” (or “chief”) called Rehoboam existed, was based in Jerusalem, and for the better part of the last quarter of the tenth century ruled the kingdom of Judah, which later existed alongside the rival kingdom of Israel, ruled by a certain Jeroboam.⁶

While one end of the interpretive spectrum doubts the very existence of Rehoboam, the other end offers mere paraphrases of the biblical record. According to these, King Rehoboam forfeits ten out of twelve tribes destined for him to rule due to his unfathomable folly. Nevertheless, among those who follow “the house of David” is not only Judah (thus 1 Kgs 12:20b) but also the tribe of Benjamin (12:21a). Seemingly on his side right from the beginning, they allow Rehoboam to mobilize a rather formidable number of warriors—180,000 chosen troops—for his attempt to restore his lost reign. In the end, Jeroboam of Israel can count his blessings, for it is only due to a divine intervention at the hands of a certain man of God, Shemaiah, that he is saved from losing his unexpected kingdom just as quickly as he has gained it (12:21–24).

Working toward a balanced picture between these polar positions, I hope to put a piece of the puzzle dubbed “the trouble with Benjamin” in

4. Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 151.

5. See, e.g., the various contributions collected in Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, eds., *One God—One Cult—One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives*, BZAW 405 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), esp. Israel Finkelstein, “A Great United Monarchy? Archaeological and Historical Perspectives,” 1–28; Amihai Mazar, “Archaeology and the Biblical Narrative: The Case of the United Monarchy,” 29–58; and Erhard Blum, “Solomon and the United Monarchy: Some Textual Evidence,” 59–78. For a recent restatement of his pointed position as argued in the above and numerous other previous publications, see Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, ANEM 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

6. For the existence of Jeroboam I as a historical figure, see the balanced discussion of evidence in Lester L. Grabbe, “Jeroboam I? Jeroboam II? Or Jeroboam 0? Jeroboam in History and Tradition,” in *Rethinking Israel: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel in Honor of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. Oded Lipschits, Yuval Gadot, and Matthew J. Adams (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 115–23.

its proper place.⁷ In the main, my contribution will be to reevaluate the textual material that we possess on Rehoboam (§1), which is quite diverse not only in what it discloses but also in how reliable a given piece of information is. While some are hardly of any use for a historical reconstruction of Rehoboam's reign and its circumstances, others quite possibly are. In terms of method, it seems crucial to me to evaluate every piece of evidence in its own right and to distinguish between varying degrees of value as a source. Only in doing so will it be possible to correlate, in a second step, the available extrabiblical evidence (§2) before finally sketching a historical hypothesis (§3).

1. Rehoboam of Judah: Evaluating the Biblical Evidence

Sifting through the biblical evidence for Rehoboam of Judah, the following broad survey seeks to evaluate which information commends itself for being used in a historical reconstruction, and in what way. Working backward, I will begin in Chronicles and only from there move on to the book of Kings. In so doing, I will focus on those passages that pertain to the topic at hand, the affiliation of the region of Benjamin.

1.1. The Account in Chronicles

It comes as no surprise that the account in Chronicles (2 Chr 9:31; 10–11) has more to say about Rehoboam than the book of Kings. It has more to say about the man of God Shemaiah as well, the latter playing his role as advisor at critical crossroads not only in the story of Israel's breakaway from the house of David (11:1–4) but also when the pharaoh approaches (12:5–8). We also learn that Rehoboam was an ambitious and strategic builder (11:5–12), a benefactor of the priests and Levites driven away by the infamous Jeroboam (11:13–17), and a father of many sons and

7. Philip R. Davies, "The Trouble with Benjamin," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, VTSup 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93–111. See esp. Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 121 (2009): 211–24, 335–49; and Israel Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel': An Alternative View," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 348–67, each with bibliography.

even more daughters, whom we hear of for the first time in Chronicles (11:18–23).⁸

Within this account, two passages call for a closer look in the present context. The first one is the notice of Rehoboam fortifying a number of cities together with a list of these cities in 2 Chr 11:5–12. Like enumerative genres in general, this list has led historians to hope to gather reliable information from Chronicles.⁹ But that hope has been dashed by careful analyses that have adduced strong arguments for understanding the list as reflecting later circumstances. Whether one opts for a Hasmonean reality behind the text or a reflection of the rule of Hezekiah or Josiah, either way the notice of Rehoboam's fortification of Judahite cities has to be excluded from a historical reconstruction of the time it purports to reflect.¹⁰ In any case, it hardly pertains to the question under scrutiny here, for despite the concluding verse giving the impression that fortifying the enumerated cities allowed Rehoboam to hold Judah *and* Benjamin (11:12b; see also 11:10a_y), it is striking that the fortification measures focus on places to the southwest of Jerusalem, while the critical northern border remains broadly out of scope.¹¹

The second passage to look at is the Chronicler's version of Pharaoh "Shishak" threatening Jerusalem (12:2–9). To state the obvious at the outset, there are no historical data to be garnered from this account that could not be garnered from the parallel passage in Kings (certainly not the

8. For an analysis and interpretation of the Rehoboam account in Chronicles in its own right, see, e.g., Gary N. Knoppers, "Rehoboam in Chronicles: Villain or Victim?" *JBL* 109 (1990): 423–40; Itzhak Amar, "The Characterization of Rehoboam and Jeroboam as a Reflection of the Chronicler's View of the Schism," *JHS* 17 (2017): art. 9, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL2636b>.

9. See, e.g., the discussion in Peter Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern*, WMANT 42 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 11–15.

10. For a Hasmonean background, see Israel Finkelstein, "Rehoboam's Fortified Cities (II Chr 11,5–12): A Hasmonean Reality?," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 92–107. For the time of Hezekiah or Josiah, see Herbert Donner, *Von der Königszeit bis zu Alexander dem Großen*, vol. 2 of *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen*, 3rd ed., GAT 4.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 274, with further references in n. 54.

11. For literary-critical considerations of this section, see Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung*, 13. The focus on the southwest is observed by Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 150.

details regarding the Egyptian army in 12:3). But it will prove illuminating for the subsequent discussion of that *Vorlage* to see how it is embellished by the Chronicler. In fact, the Chronicler employs the Shishak episode for a theological lesson that he carefully prepares for in the preceding context. Thus, he concludes the notice of Rehoboam receiving the priests and Levites ousted by Jeroboam (11:13–17) by stating that “they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam son of Solomon secure,” for Rehoboam and his people walked in the way they were supposed to walk in (11:17).¹² This they do for three years. But after that, in the fourth year, Rehoboam “abandoned the torah of YHWH, he and all Israel with him” (12:1). It is against *this* background that the Chronicler invokes the traditional date of the fifth year of Rehoboam (12:2 par. 1 Kgs 14:25) and the corresponding report of Shishak taking away the temple and palace treasures. The significance of this is quite obvious: The Chronicler interprets the event as an act of divine retribution. Indeed, this interpretation not only arises from the contextual position of the episode, but is also spelled out in theologizing additions vis-à-vis the *Vorlage*. This is done succinctly at the beginning, where the Chronicler states his conviction that Shishak came up against Jerusalem “because they had been unfaithful to YHWH” (כי מעלו ביהוה; 2 Chr 12:2b). He elaborates on this by having the prophet Shemaiah appear on the scene for a second time. Shemaiah explains to Rehoboam and the officials of Judah who have gathered at Jerusalem—and at the same time of course to the hearers and readers of Chronicles—the lesson to be learned from this event: “Thus says YHWH: ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak’” (12:5). The pharaoh’s campaign, directed by YHWH, is the immediate consequence of Rehoboam’s transgression. This comment betrays the Chronicler’s hand.¹³

1.2. 1 Kings 12:1–24

Turning to 1 Kgs 12, the vivid story of the separation of the united monarchy, I shall limit myself to some brief observations on its aftermath

12. Throughout this paper, biblical translations are based on the NRSV, with modifications.

13. See also Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament*, GAT 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 228 n. 2: “eine theologische Begründung des Feldzugs als Strafaktion Jahwes” (with reference to 12:2b).

as reported in verses 21–24. The story itself distorts Rehoboam beyond recognition. Fool incarnate, pretentious to the bone and utterly resistant to good advice, the break-away of the ten northern tribes is presented as his fault and his fault alone—presumably in an attempt to legitimize his antagonist who, almost without any effort of his own, becomes king of Israel. Thus, even though he hardly appears on the scene at all, 1 Kgs 12 is a chapter about Jeroboam. An in-depth analysis of that chapter and of the antecedents given in 1 Kgs 11:26–39, including the puzzling calculation of twelve minus ten equaling one and the puzzle it indeed provoked in the textual transmission, is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁴ For the present purpose, it is enough to recall the outcome of the episode: “There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone” (לֹא הָיָה אַחֲרַי בֵּית־דָּוִד זֹלָתִי שְׁבַט־יְהוּדָה לְבָדוּ) (12:20b). To be sure, the Septuagint makes an addition that appears quite necessary in light of later times: “except the tribe of Judah *and Benjamin* [καὶ Βενιαμιν] alone” (LXX 3 Kgdms 12:20). However, this textual variant is hardly of help for the task at hand.¹⁵

Yet the prosaic note on Rehoboam’s kingdom consisting of Judah alone is not the end of the story as we know it. Its continuation in 1 Kgs 12:21–24 has the new king draft his troops in order to restore the *status quo ante*, which he is prevented from doing only by the word of YHWH. According to this short passage, Benjamin appears to have been part of the southern kingdom right from the start. Here one might gain the impression that

14. See, e.g., Martin Noth, *Geschichte Israels*, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 214 n. 1; differently Martin Noth, *I Könige 1–16*, vol. 1 of *Könige*, BKAT 9.1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 259–60. See further Ernst Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige: Kapitel 1–16*, ATD 11.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 141–42. See now also Kristin Weingart, “Jeroboam and Benjamin: Pragmatics and Date of 1 Kings 11:26–40; 12:1–20,” in the present volume.

15. Beyond this variant, in the Greek we actually possess a self-contained “alternative story of the division of the kingdom” (to use the words of Zipi Talshir) in 3 Kgdms 12:24a–z. While some would look with Adrian Schenker, “Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom in the Ancient Septuagint: LXX 3 Kingdoms 12.24 A–Z, MT 1 Kings 11–12; 14 and the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi, JSOTSup 306 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 214–57, for earlier material preserved in this text, Zipora Talshir, *The Alternative Story of the Division of the Kingdom*, JBS 6 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1993), has made a strong case for reading it as a midrash of sorts.

the political reality of later monarchic (and postexilic) times is but an extension of a state of affairs established in the very beginning. On closer inspection, however, it seems that this reality of later times is merely retrojected into the foundational phase of the two kingdoms. The reasons for this judgment are well known; suffice it here to repeat them briefly.¹⁶ The edifying tone, together with the appearance of the man of God Shemaiah, better known from Chronicles, clearly makes the passage stand out from its context. Historically, it sounds quite improbable. The number of warriors is, if not “fantastic,” certainly too high to be taken at face value (even if we were to lower it with the Greek tradition to 120,000).¹⁷ In addition, the plea for peace between the “brothers” and its documented observance seem to be in latent disaccord with the more matter-of-fact notice of 1 Kgs 14:30 that “there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.” Most important, the passage clearly betrays a certain interest. From a self-confident southern point of view, it explains why the north was allowed to break away at all, even though frustrating this effort should have been a simple task. It is hard to miss Judaeen ideology in this train of thought.

In sum, it does not commend itself to include 1 Kgs 12:21–24 in an attempt to reconstruct the affiliation of Benjamin in the early phase of the kingdom of Judah.¹⁸

1.3. 1 Kings 14:21–31

Drawing an interim conclusion, apart from the pragmatics of the Jeroboam account in 1 Kgs 11 and 12, which, albeit indirectly, have a bearing on the question of Rehoboam and Benjamin as well, so far we have encountered evidence of rather meager value as a source.¹⁹ Now the actual Rehoboam account in 1 Kgs 14:21–31, picking up the thread where 11:43 has left it,

16. See Noth, *1 Könige 1–16*, 279–80; Würthwein, *Könige*, 161; Volkmar Fritz, *Das erste Buch der Könige*, ZBK 10.1 (Zurich: TVZ, 1996), 136.

17. Quotation from Würthwein, *Könige*, 161.

18. *Pace* Na‘aman, “Saul, Benjamin,” 217. Notwithstanding the question of the literary provenience of this passage (which Ernst Axel Knauf, *1 Könige 1–14*, HThKAT [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2016], 379 recently categorized as “post-chronistisch”), I concur with Finkelstein, “Saul, Benjamin,” 349 when he argues that it sets “the ‘trap’ of Deuteronomistic ideology” the historian ought not to walk into.

19. For Rehoboam and Benjamin, see again Weingart, “Jeroboam and Benjamin,” in this volume.

unmistakably betrays its Deuteronomistic provenience. Notwithstanding some peculiar features that are called for by the context, 14:21–24 and 29–31 are textbook examples of the Deuteronomistic framework in the book of Kings.²⁰ However, it must be mentioned in the same breath—trivial as it might seem—that the Deuteronomistic history of Israel narrative is not freely penned, but based on sources, both oral and written. Notably, this holds for the history of the tenth century no less than for that of, say, the seventh. Against the oft-repeated argument, I fail to see how an alleged lack of *widespread* literacy, even if accurate for a given period, should preclude this assumption.²¹ In the case of Rehoboam's reign according to 1 Kgs 14, several aspects point to source material having been used: both Rehoboam's age at accession and the duration of his reign are non-schematic, in marked contrast to the forty years of David and Solomon respectively;²² the name and origin of Rehoboam's mother (cf. 1 Kgs 11:1, 5) are mentioned; and this fits well with a rather brief but soberingly realistic overall record of Rehoboam's reign.

Two points should be considered in more detail. The first is the notice of continuous conflict or “war” between Rehoboam and Jeroboam (14:30; cf. 1 Kgs 15:6). As we saw, it does not correspond to the ideologically motivated insertion of 1 Kgs 12:21–24, but it is in keeping with an essential imperative faced by any emergent territorial entity, namely, the need to define its borders vis-à-vis neighboring entities. That is to say, the word מלחמה should not be taken to mean full-scale warfare between Israel and Judah but rather a constant struggle over Judah's border to the north—in other words, over Benjamin. The pointed term “border banter”

20. For the peculiar features, see Erhard Blum, “Das exilische deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk,” in *Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk*, ed. Hermann-Josef Stipp, ÖBS 39 (Bern: Lang, 2011), 281–82. For the Deuteronomistic nature, see Noth, *1 Könige 1–16*, 325–28.

21. For the oft-repeated argument, see David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-archaeological Approach*, JSOTSup 109 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), cited by, e.g., Israel Finkelstein, “The Campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine: A Guide to the Tenth Century BCE Polity,” *ZDPV* 118 (2002): 112. But see now Erhard Blum, “Institutionelle und kulturelle Voraussetzungen der israelitischen Traditionsliteratur,” in *Tradition(en) im alten Israel: Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation*, ed. Ruth Ebach and Martin Leuenberger, FAT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 3–44.

22. See, however, Knauf, *1 Könige 1–14*, 403, with considerations regarding the variant dates given in the Greek tradition.

(“Grenzplänkeleien”) coined by Martin Noth probably fits the extent of this conflict, but not the vital importance it had for Judah, with Jerusalem being located in a most vulnerable position right on the border.²³ In any case, it should be noted here that the trouble with Benjamin is one of the border and where within the region of Benjamin it is drawn, not so much of Benjamin as a whole. The repeated notice of continued “war” (see also 1 Kgs 15:16) suggests that this border remained neither uncontested nor unchanged over time.²⁴

More important still is the second point, the campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I to Palestine as reflected in 1 Kgs 14:25–28, including a lengthy elaboration on its consequences for the Judahite protocol:

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of YHWH and the treasures of the king’s house; he took everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made; so King Rehoboam made shields of bronze instead and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king’s house. As often as the king went into the house of YHWH, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

The opening verses, which pertain to the actual campaign of the pharaoh, have recently been reevaluated by Manfred Weippert.²⁵ Confirming the possibility that the taking away (לקח) of the treasures need not indicate a violent looting of Jerusalem but may describe the pharaoh receiving tribute, he argues against authors who detach Shoshenq’s campaign from the reign of Rehoboam, thus doubting the existence of an archival source behind the notice.²⁶ To this end, Weippert adduces two solid arguments.

23. Quotation from Noth, *I Könige 1–16*, 332, echoed by Fritz, *Könige*, 150.

24. On the latter assumption, see also Finkelstein, “Saul, Benjamin,” 348–49; as well as Noth, *Geschichte Israels*, 214; and Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines israelitischen Stammes*, BZAW 86 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963), 169 and passim.

25. Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 228–30.

26. Among those detaching Shoshenq’s campaign from Rehoboam, see now also Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 165–71; for reference to 1 Kgs 9:16 and a resulting dating of the campaign to the time Solomon, see Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 124. See further Ernst Axel Knauf, “Le roi est mort, vive le roi! A Biblical Argument for the Historicity of Solomon,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy, SHCANE 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 93; and Hermann M. Niemann,

First, the fifth year of Rehoboam is a specific, nonschematic date; second, the tradent who wrote the text that is handed down to us in the book of Kings knew not only the name of the pharaoh but also how to pronounce it correctly (note the *ketiv* form of the name Shushak as opposed to the *qere* Shishak, the latter likely being the result of a scribal error).²⁷ From where, Weippert asks, has the tradent, working several centuries after the event, taken this information if not from an archival record?

Without even asking this question, some would of course say that he did not take it from anywhere. Rather, the entire passage was contrived and added by the author.²⁸ Yet what would be the point of such an invention of tradition, a rather inglorious tradition at that? In a short essay, Theodore Mullen proposed the following explanation: “For the deuteronomistic writer, this episode [1 Kgs 14:25–28] provides a comment on the rule of Rehoboam: because he continued in the ways of Solomon, the treasures of the House of Yahweh were carried off by an invading monarch.”²⁹ What is more, Mullen ventures to reconstruct an entire literary genre based on this passage: “The account of the reign of Rehoboam provides a pattern of punishment to be exacted on those kings who fail to lead the people to worship Yahweh in the proper way.”³⁰

However, this explanation does not fit the specific profile of the passage at hand. Already a cursory glance at the proportions of the text indicates a different interpretation. While the note concerning the actual event in

“The Socio-political Shadow Cast by the Biblical Solomon,” in Handy, *Age of Solomon*, 296–99. Admitting that there is an intricate problem in the dating of Shoshenq’s campaign based on the biblical chronology, Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 228 n. 3 rightly emphasizes that this problem is not solved by freely associating the campaign with Solomon.

27. For details on the second point, see Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 228–29.

28. For a more nuanced discussion, see Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 112–13.

29. E. Theodore Mullen, “Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 237. Prominently adopted by Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 113; Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 41.

30. Mullen, “Crime and Punishment,” 237. The problems of this approach could not possibly become more obvious than in Mullen’s own attempt to apply the alleged pattern to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:13–16) of all kings (Mullen, “Crime and Punishment,” 244–47). For 1 Kgs 14:25–28, Mullen in fact acknowledges the possibility of “the use of some type of chronicle or annalistic report” (Mullen, “Crime and Punishment,” 237 n. 19).

14:25b–26a could hardly be more taciturn, the author dwells at length on what he presents as its consequence, a rearrangement of ceremony at the Jerusalem court (14:26b–28). Obviously he employs the notice found in the annals merely as an introduction for the matter he wishes to depict.³¹ The marked interest in the details of the protocol only confirms this interpretation.³² As regards our present discussion, the interpretation just proposed is tantamount to the conclusion: 1 Kgs 14:25–28 does not attest to an alleged Deuteronomistic theology of retribution; in fact, it does not attest to theology at all. The “comment on the rule of Rehoboam” Mullen and others have found here is made only by the Chronicler.³³

2. The Campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine: Correlating the Extrabiblical Evidence

With this reevaluation of the biblical evidence in hand, we can now go about correlating the extrabiblical evidence to it, in this case coming from Egypt. Fortunately enough, the campaign of Shoshenq I, the founder of the Twenty-Second, or Bubastite, Dynasty, who ruled roughly during the third quarter of the tenth century, is documented not only in the biblical book of Kings but also in a monumental inscription the pharaoh himself has left on a wall in the temple of Amun at Karnak.³⁴ The inscription provides a list of places covered in the campaign (or rather, series of campaigns), although it does not detail what the pharaoh’s troops did in these places (merely passed through? collected tribute? or brought forth captives from?).³⁵ In any event, Shoshenq apparently sought to establish some sort of Egyptian hegemony in the region.

31. Thus with Noth, *I Könige 1–16*, 330–32.

32. Differently Knauf, *I Könige 1–14*, 405, who explains the *tabula rasa* created by 14:26 (ואת־הכל לקח) as a “Realitätsannäherungs-Notiz, um Salomos phantasierten ungeheuren Reichtum rechtzeitig mit oder vor dem Einsetzen der Annalentradiation für Juda zu entsorgen.”

33. Quotation from Mullen, “Crime and Punishment,” 237.

34. Jan Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 89–102.

35. For it as a series of campaigns, see, e.g., Bernd U. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems*, OBO 170 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 127. For an argument that it was captives that were brought forth, see Karl Jansen-Winkeln, “Zur historischen Authentizität ägyptischer und biblischer Quellen: Der

What is there to learn from this source regarding the struggle for Benjamin? Pursuing this question might easily go beyond the constraints of the present context, yet in what follows no attempt is made at a self-contained study of the material. Instead, I merely seek to match some basic results of the scholarly discussion regarding Shoshenq's campaign to Palestine as recorded in the Karnak inscription with the biblical attestation of that same event as reevaluated above.

Before doing so, it is fitting to briefly recall the findings as they pertain to the question at hand. First and foremost, notwithstanding the fact that one line is partly illegible due to physical damage, the inscription offers a rather clear picture regarding the scope of the campaign. While the heartland of Judah as well as Jerusalem remained broadly unimpaired, the Northern Kingdom must have come under great pressure. Judging from the main sites mentioned in the list, including Jeroboam's residence of Penuel, it appears that Shoshenq actually targeted the kingdom of Israel. This operation included several sites in the region of Benjamin that presumably were under Israelite control at that time.³⁶ Thus, regarding the consequences of the campaign for Judah and Jerusalem, the Karnak inscription actually concurs with 1 Kgs 14.³⁷ Admittedly, this is a matter

Palästinafeldzug Schoschenks I," *OLZ* 103 (2008): 171–72, cited in Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 230 n. 12. With regard to the southern territories mentioned in the list, Alexander Fantalkin and Israel Finkelstein, "The Sheshonq I Campaign and the Eighth-Century-BCE Earthquake—More on the Archaeology and History of the South in the Iron I–IIA," *TA* 33 (2006): 18–42, argue on archaeological grounds that, rather than destroying local structures, the campaign seems to have marked the onset of an intensified involvement in the region. For introduction and further references, see Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten*, 119–32; and Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 228–41. See also Kevin A. Wilson, *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine*, *FAT* 2/9 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 60–65; Shirly Ben-Dor Evian, "Shishak's Karnak Relief—More than Just Name-Rings," in *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature*, ed. Shay Bar, Dani'el Kahn, and J. J. Shirley, *CHANE* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 11–22.

36. Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 233–38; Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten*, 125–29. By contrast, others hold that Benjamin was Judahite at the time, and that it was there, namely in Gibeon, that Rehoboam met Shoshenq and paid tribute. Most recently, see Omer Sergi, "Rethinking Israel and the Kingdom of Saul," in Lipschits, *Rethinking Israel*, 371–88; see also Nadav Na'aman, "Shishak's Campaign to Palestine as Reflected by the Epigraphic, Biblical and Archaeological Evidence" [Hebrew], *Zion* 63 (1998): 247–76.

37. See, e.g., Donner, *Von der Königszeit bis zu Alexander dem Großen*, 274.

of considerable dispute.³⁸ The question remains as to *why* Judah was not covered by the campaign. Furthermore, assuming that the reason for this was a tribute paid by the ruler in Jerusalem, one wonders why Jerusalem was not included in the list of subdued places. The latter problem seems both valid and hitherto unresolved.³⁹ Yet it does not undermine the main point in which the Karnak inscription and 1 Kgs 14 agree, *that* Judah and Jerusalem did not suffer from Shoshenq's campaign into Canaan—in stark contrast to the kingdom of Israel.

In order to account for this fact, Israel Finkelstein has outlined an explanatory approach, also integrating the archaeological data available, which I find both persuasive and helpful in its general direction.⁴⁰ Contrary to the impression one might gain from 1 Kgs 14, Shoshenq's campaign was not directed at Jerusalem. (This impression is created solely by the emic perspective prevalent in the biblical depiction according to which any event of world politics is focused directly at the hub of the world.) Rather, Finkelstein argues, the pharaoh targeted a polity to the north, in his words, “an emerging territorio-political formation, which endangered the Egyptian interests in Palestine.”⁴¹ In search for a “forgotten kingdom,” it is only reasonable *not* to connect this polity with Jeroboam I. Yet Bernd Schipper, Christian Frevel, and others remind us of 1 Kgs 11:40, disclosing as it does an intricate affiliation of Jeroboam with Egypt and indeed with Pharaoh Shoshenq I.⁴² This allows at least for the suspicion that, among pursuing other strategic goals, Shoshenq exacted retribution when visiting this polity to the north, taking “punitive action against a rebellious vassal,” to quote Schipper.⁴³ This suspicion might be

38. See, e.g., Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 111; Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 43.

39. The problem is pointed out by Knauf, “Le roi est mort,” 93. See, however, the fresh approach to solving it by Jansen-Winkeln, “Zur historischen Authentizität,” 171–72.

40. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq.”

41. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 123; repeated in Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 44.

42. Schipper, *Israel*, 127–28; Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 168.

43. As Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten*, 128–29 states in view of Shoshenq's activities in the Negev recorded in the second part of the list, an assumed punitive expedition against Jeroboam would, if accurate, be merely one goal among other, and more important, goals of the campaign. Quotation from Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten*, 128: “eine Strafaktion gegen einen abtrünnigen Vasallen.” See also Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*,

further substantiated by the fact that, according to the Karnak inscription, Penuel and other places of official importance in the kingdom of Israel were targeted.

Whatever the case may be, Finkelstein makes a strong point by emphasizing that not only capitals of what we call the kingdom of Israel were covered by the campaign, but also a range of places in Benjamin. As regards the role of the southern entity, or kingdom of Judah, Finkelstein offers two options. Either Shoshenq simply ignored it as irrelevant or “in order to enhance the Egyptian interests in the region Shoshenq sided with the dimorphic chiefdom of the south against the stronger polity which emerged at that time to its north.”⁴⁴ The latter option is compared to archaeological data for the Philistine cities, which seem to indicate that they “cooperated with Shoshenq and were probably among the main beneficiaries of this campaign.”⁴⁵ Either way, the Egyptian pressure on the main sites of the Northern Kingdom as well as on its strongholds in Benjamin must have been a major advantage for Rehoboam in the struggle for dominion over the Benjaminite borderland.⁴⁶

Along these general lines, I can only follow the penetrating analysis of Finkelstein, which I find convincing—save for one deviation. This deviation, however, pertains to a point of decisive importance, both here and in the argument as presented by Finkelstein; and in light of the above discussion, it will not come as a surprise that it concerns the biblical evidence of 1 Kgs 14:25–26. Assessing the value of this passage as a source has considerable implications for assessing the historical context of the Shoshenq campaign. Endorsing Mullen’s interpretation of that text, Finkelstein argues that “the fifth-year-of-Rehoboam datum may have been schematically arranged to fit the theology of the Deuteronomistic Historian, for instance, his understanding of sin punished by the assault of a foreign power.”⁴⁷ Hence it is no valid evidence. Without taking into account this

168: “eine Strafexpedition gegen den abtrünnigen Vasallen Jerobeam I ... oder wie sich der lokale Herrscher auch immer genannt haben mag.”

44. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 112.

45. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 116.

46. Cf. Donner, *Von der Königszeit bis zu Alexander dem Großen*, 275: “Jerobeam I ... muß in arge Bedrängnis geraten sein, über deren Auswirkungen wir leider nichts erfahren.”

47. The quotation is from Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 41, but the argument has been developed in Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 110 and *passim*.

date, however, there is no way to know when exactly the pharaoh appeared in Palestine; “the Shoshenq campaign could have taken place almost any time in the mid- to late tenth century BCE,” Finkelstein concludes.⁴⁸ As I see it, and hope to have shown, the evidence of 1 Kgs 14 cannot be swept aside quite so easily, and the fact that it is consistent with the picture that emerges from the Karnak inscription, namely, that the Southern Kingdom did not suffer from the campaign in the same way the Northern Kingdom did, only confirms this.

Assuming such a more confident assessment of 1 Kgs 14:25–26, let me add a note in passing on the vexed problem of the dating of Shoshenq’s campaign. It is true, and lamentably so, that for an absolute dating of the campaign there is no other basis than the relative date to be gleaned from the biblical record.⁴⁹ From a methodological point of view, this is certainly less than one would wish for. However, the deplorable shortage of additional evidence per se is no reason to dismiss the traditional date out of hand. But even if one prefers to refrain from an absolute dating of the campaign of Shoshenq I, the fact remains that according to biblical tradition this pharaoh is associated with both Rehoboam and his contemporary Jeroboam I, whereas 1 Kgs 9:16, the notice of an Egyptian campaign to Palestine during Solomon’s reign, does not mention the name of that pharaoh (to say nothing of Saul here).⁵⁰ In the end, it should be stated clearly that it remains a task ahead, one for the historian of Egypt in the first place, to put the absolute dating of the campaign of Shoshenq on a more solid footing than that provided by a putative reconstruction of some elusive Judahite annals. Equally clear, however, is the fact that this campaign is explicitly tied to the reign of Rehoboam, which is consistent with the notion of Jeroboam I having maintained a special relationship with Shoshenq I, while any reference whatsoever to another king of either Israel or Judah is not forthcoming.

At this stage, it is possible to summarize my result in three points. First, the campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine must have had considerable

48. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 110; and Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 41.

49. For helpful references to earlier scholarship, see Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 109–10.

50. For the more recent proposal to date the campaign of Shoshenq I to the time of Solomon, see, e.g., Knauf, “Le roi est mort,” 93; Niemann, “Socio-political Shadow,” 297.

implications for the rival kingdoms' struggle for Benjamin. This is shown cogently in Finkelstein's analysis. Against Finkelstein, however, I would argue, second, for Rehoboam's reign as the historical context of this development. The burden of proof lies with any alternative view; and sufficient proof has not been presented so far. In particular, the interpretation of 1 Kgs 14:25–26 as an example of Deuteronomistic retribution theology is not fit to bear that burden. Third, if Shoshenq's campaign took place during Rehoboam's reign, the aforementioned implications are relevant to the question at hand, that of *Rehoboam* and Benjamin.

3. Rehoboam and Benjamin: Sketching a Historical Hypothesis

In this final section I shall do no more than retrace the lines just indicated. To do so, however, let me bring in briefly yet another piece of evidence relating to the same situation some twenty to thirty years down the road. Here I refer to 1 Kgs 15:17–22, which reports an alliance between Asa of Judah (Rehoboam's grandson) and Aram-Damascus against Israel. Following the note that "there was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days" (15:16), we read of Baasha going on the offensive in Benjamin, building Ramah as a border fortification (15:17). In reaction to this, Asa summons up the available treasures of temple and palace in order to win the favor of a certain Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon son of Hezion, king of Aram-Damascus (15:18).⁵¹ On the initiative of Asa, the two enter into a ברית, according to which Ben-Hadad shall invalidate his ברית with Baasha (15:19).⁵² Following this, as requested by Asa, Ben-Hadad assaults Baasha by invading Israel from the north, thus forcing Baasha to withdraw from the southern front (15:20–21). Asa pushes forward, gains territory in Benjamin, and succeeds in building Geba and Mizpah as border fortifications (15:22; cf. Jer 41:9).

It goes without saying that we cannot take this report at face value either. Just as we did with the notice of "Shishak" coming up "against Jerusalem," we have to take into account the emic perspective here as well. In the case of Asa's coup, it seems hardly credible that the king of marginal

51. For the rather dubious identity of this otherwise unattested king, see Omer Sergi, "The Emergence of Judah as a Political Entity between Jerusalem and Benjamin," *ZDPV* 133 (2017): 13.

52. On the diplomatic language used, which gives the impression that this alliance is merely the renewal of an earlier one, see Noth, *I Könige 1–16*, 339–40.

Judah of his own volition prompted a military confrontation between the more powerful neighbors to the north. More probably, Judah as a bystander benefited from such a conflict.⁵³ Omer Sergi, in his recent piece on “the emergence of Judah as a political entity between Jerusalem and Benjamin,” has made a strong case for such a scenario.⁵⁴ Thus presupposing a critical reading of 1 Kgs 15, a rather clear picture comes into view. We see Judah being involved in what has been dubbed “border banter” over the strategic Benjaminite territories to the north of Jerusalem. In this struggle, Judah was clearly outgunned by Israel in terms of military strength. But, as Sergi puts it, “Asa gained from the geopolitical circumstances: Israel’s struggle over political hegemony in the north Jordan Valley enabled the weaker Judah to strengthen its political authority over the Benjamin Plateau.”⁵⁵

Quite comparable to this scenario, I suggest, was the case of the Shoshenq campaign and its implications for the struggle for Benjamin between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Here, too, there is the vital necessity for small Judah to define and defend the border vis-à-vis its stronger neighbor to the north, especially in view of the vulnerable position of Jerusalem. Here, too, Judah’s chances of succeeding in an escalation of the latent conflict would have been rather scant measured against Israel’s comparative military strength. And here, too, a window of opportunity was opened by the intervention of a foreign power pursuing its own goals in the region.

Following Finkelstein, there are two options to weigh in this case.⁵⁶ One could think of Judah under Rehoboam as a mere profiteer of Shoshenq’s campaign against the Northern Kingdom. Alternatively, it seems possible to conceive of Rehoboam and Shoshenq as coalition partners. Either way, the struggle for power among the major geopolitical players in the region had repercussions on marginal Judah.⁵⁷ In this case, it presumably allowed Rehoboam to push the border northward and gain control over the better part of the Benjaminite borderland, whether as “vassals under a short-lived Egyptian domination, or after the Egyptian

53. For such a reading of 1 Kgs 15:17–22, see Joachim J. Krause, “Asa,” *WiBiLex* (2017), <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/13937/>; drawing on Sergi, “Emergence of Judah.”

54. Sergi, “Emergence of Judah.”

55. Sergi, “Emergence of Judah,” 15.

56. See Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 112; and §2 above.

57. See Finkelstein, “Saul, Benjamin,” 349.

withdrawal from the hill country.”⁵⁸ A similar suggestion has recently been probed by Frevel: “Perhaps the internationally still uninfluential kingdom (or chiefdom) in Jerusalem profited from the campaign and was able to temporarily gain dominance (with Egyptian approval) over territories in the north.”⁵⁹

That this advantage in the struggle for Benjamin hardly lasted long is another story. Indeed, we learn of the volatility of the situation from Asa at the latest who, one generation after Rehoboam, faced exactly the same strategic challenge that his grandfather was confronted with. But that is written as well: “There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.”

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58. Finkelstein, “Campaign of Shoshenq,” 128–29. For the first option, see already Knauf, “Le roi est mort,” 94.

59. Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 171: “Möglicherweise hat die international noch einflussarme Monarchie bzw. das *chiefdom* in Jerusalem von dem Feldzug profitiert und im Anschluss kurzfristig (mit Billigung der Ägypter) Dominanz über Territorien im Norden entfalten können.”

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