The Name Shishak
Peter van der Veen replies to Carl Jansen-Winkeln

In the Preface to the Third Edition of *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (1995, p. xlv) Kenneth Kitchen wrote:

There is also no philological alternative to the equation Shoshenq = Shishak, varying only by an amissible nasal ‘n’. Rohl’s attempted equation with Sessi (the short name for Ramesses II and rarely III) is totally false and ignores what is known of the linguistic facts.¹

Carl Jansen-Winkeln shares the same opinion:

The equation of the biblical Shishak (1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chronicle 12:2-9) with Shoshenq I has been accepted since the very beginning of Egyptology. … The rejection of this connection is one of the anchor points of the New Chronology. But this, in my opinion, cannot be justified. … The phonetic analogy is perfect. The name Shoshenq was written contemporarily (but also later on) either as Shishak or as Sheshak. The latter corresponds exactly to the Hebrew Shishak.²

Both also argue that, as the name of the pharaoh mentioned in 1 Kings 14:25 is transcribed into Hebrew as ‘Shishak’, there is no way that it could be derived from the Egyptian abbreviation š, because the Egyptian ‘s’ is never written as shin in biblical Hebrew (to give us Shesh, i.e. Shisha) but always as samekh. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egyptian name</th>
<th>Hebrew version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pt) Ramesse – ‘City of Ramesses’</td>
<td>Raamses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pt-Bast – ‘City of (the goddess) Baster’</td>
<td>Henes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha-nisnu (haret-nis) – ‘House of the King’</td>
<td>Pinhas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa-nehesi – ‘The Southerner’</td>
<td>Tahpenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta-pa-nisnu (I3-p3-nis) – ‘One of the King’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, this is not the whole story. Some scholars have noted that a number of Egyptian words containing the letter ‘š’ have been transcribed with shin in Hebrew. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egyptian name</th>
<th>Hebrew version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mes – ‘offspring’ (i.e. Moses)</td>
<td>Mosheh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An-mes – ‘offspring of An (or Anat)’</td>
<td>Anmash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kad-bes – ‘Bes has formed’</td>
<td>Kadbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kes(cm) – an eastern Delta region</td>
<td>Goshen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asar (šr) – ‘Osiris’</td>
<td>Ashar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most scholars agree that the biblical name Mosheh (Exodus 2:10) comes from the Egyptian name Mes or Mose (‘offspring’ or ‘born of’). It is considered to be a hypocoristicon of names such as Pahmose, Dudimose, Ahmose, Thutmose, Ramose, etc. This abbreviated form is preserved in texts from the 19th Dynasty.³

However, there is still discussion as to whether or not the shin of the Hebrew version is original or whether it results from typical biblical word-play. The name Mosheh may be linked to an existing Hebrew verb mashah (‘to draw out’ [of the Nile waters']).⁴

The Egyptologist Gwyn Griffith nevertheless took the position that the biblical Mosheh was a correct West-Semitic reproduction of the Egyptian form ‘Mose’.⁴ This has found recent support from James Hoffmeier who argues that Egyptian ‘s’ can certainly be transcribed by Hebrew ‘š’, also giving the name Moseh as his example:

These considerations show that we cannot always expect sibilants going between Egyptian and Semitic languages to conform to rigid rules set by modern linguists. Consequently Hebrew Mosheh may well correspond to Egyptian Mš.⁵

Further support can be found in Egyptian name forms which are attested in ancient Hebrew documents dating from the Israelite Monarchy period. Thus we find the name Anmash on an ostracan from Samaria (c. 780 BC). Both Albright and Griffith argued that this was the old Hebrew form of Egyptian Anmose (‘Born of An/Anat’).⁶ However, as is so often the case with etymological studies, this interpretation has been disputed. Other translations have been offered, such as: ‘the blessed one is on the lake’ or ‘the beautiful one is at the pond’.⁷

Similarly, the name Kdbš is also found on an ostracan from Samaria. Several contemporary scholars take this name to be the Old Hebrew rendering of Egyptian Kadbes (‘Bes has formed’ or ‘Bes has created’), following the example of Kšt-Ph – ‘Ptah has formed’.⁸

Tsevat has drawn attention to another name in which the Egyptian š was transcribed as shin – the Phoenician šr-šlh. He translates the first element as Asar (Osiris).⁹ But, again, Layton considers this to be questionable.¹⁰

A further example would be the biblical name Goshen – if, as many scholars presume, it is derived from Egyptian Kes or Kesem.¹¹ Unfortunately, the name only appears in later Egyptian inscriptions from the time of Nectanebo I (on the Saft el-Henne Naos (written Kes) and in the Ptolemaic temples (the geographical list from Edfu VI, p. 42, footnote 71 (written Kesem)).¹²

22

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³ Ibid., p. xlv.
However, there are also other plausible explanations for how Sis (Syα) could have become Shishak in Hebrew.

(a) *Shin in cuneiform texts*

It is important to ask the historical question: what was the original documentary source from which the biblical name Shishak derived? The New Chronology places Solomon and his son Rehoboam (contemporaries of Shishak/Syα) during the Late Bronze Age in Palestine. The language used for diplomatic correspondence at this time was Akkadian. This East-Semitic language was also used as:

... the language ... of local affairs, both legal and administrative. It was also the language of learning.\(^{13}\)

Gösta Ahlström’s summary of LBA Akkadian is also quite revealing.

The Akkadian cuneiform language had been the *lingua franca* of the Near Eastern empires and their vassals. This means that learned scribes and schools had existed in different courts and major trading centres. With the fall of the Hittite kingdom and the destruction of several Syro-Palestinian cities and trade centres, such as Alalakh, Carchemish, Ugarit, Qatna, Hazor, Abu Hawam, *et al.*, some scribal schools disappeared and, as a consequence, international acceptance of the cuneiform writing tradition came to an end.\(^{14}\)

The cuneiform texts of that period consistently transcribe Egyptian names such as Ramesses with Akkadian *shin*. Rohli has shown that the hypocoristicon for Ramesses was common currency in the Levant (used in various toponyms) and probably, therefore, also in local diplomatic correspondence. Given that we place Solomon and Rehoboam in this period, it would hardly be surprising to find the Israelite court writing its letters in Akkadian. So, if the biblical authors of Kings and Chronicles had, centuries later, come upon the popular hypocoristicon of Ramesses II in a cuneiform text from LBA Jerusalem, they would certainly have read ‘Shisha’, not ‘Sisa’.\(^{18}\)

(b) *The name game in the Old Testament*

There is a further reason why the *s* in Syα could have become *shin* in Shishak. And the question of the problematic *goph*, at the end of ‘Shishak’, will also be taken into account here. So, where did the *k* come from, since it doesn’t appear in the Egyptian form *Sis*?

Name specialists such as Moshe Garsiel and Richard Hess have often referred to the frequent use of the name game in the ancient world. A classical example comes from the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). The title ‘Epiphanes’ (‘glorious’) was mockingly altered by his contemporaries to ‘Ephimanes’, meaning ‘madman’. Names of people and locations in the Bible were also sometimes changed to give another meaning thought to be more suitable for the subject being described. Usually these alternative names had a negative or ironic slant. I propose that something like this happened with the name Shishak.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign name</th>
<th>Original Meaning</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>New Meaning</th>
<th>Biblical Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yhbul</td>
<td>'Baal is prince'</td>
<td>Yh affirmation</td>
<td>'where is prince [Baal] or (with bhl meaning 'dung') [Baal] is a piece of dung'</td>
<td>1 Kings 16:31ff; 2 Kings 9:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baal-zebul</td>
<td>'Baal is prince'</td>
<td>B’l’zabh</td>
<td>'lord of the flies'</td>
<td>2 Kings 1:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madbach or Naba-hazer</td>
<td>'disfigured altar' or 'Naba returns'</td>
<td>Nhaz</td>
<td>'he who barks' (i.e. dog)</td>
<td>2 Kings 17:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabu-kudur-usur</td>
<td>'Naba has protected the succession rights' (?)</td>
<td>Nvsskdn’tsr</td>
<td>'[temple] treasure' ('tetas')</td>
<td>2 Kings 24:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bab-ilim</td>
<td>'gate of the gods'</td>
<td>Shshk</td>
<td>'the oppressor'</td>
<td>Jeremiah 51:41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether the *šin* in Shashak derives from its Akkadian form, or whether the author replaced the original *samekh* with a *šin* to facilitate a word-play can no longer be established with certainty. However, the name Shashak, as it is found in the narrative, could well be an example of the name game based on the existing Hebrew personal name Shashak (1 Chronicles 8:14), germinated from the verbal stem shakah. This verb means 'to rush at' or 'to rush upon [e.g. the spoils]' (cf. also the Akkadian verb shakaku, 'to rush at' or 'to plunge'). Interestingly, the biblical name Sheshak (the so-called AT-BaSH style or 'disguised name' for the city of Babylon) was also derived from a similarly sounding verb shakak. Moreover, this name was not arbitrarily chosen but, as Garsiel emphasizes, consciously 'presaged' to the subsequent fall of the Babylonian monarchs.

As I have stated, the name game was a common practice of the ancient world. A Hebrew allusion to Shashak ('he who rushes about' or 'he who rushes upon (the spoils of war)') would be a particularly suitable epithet for Ramesses II, the Egyptian pharaoh who plundered Jerusalem – especially given that he was popularly known by his short-form name Syss/Shysa.

I hope I have demonstrated that an unequivocal rejection of the equation Ramesses/Shysa = Shishak is somewhat premature and quite unreasonable. There are several ways to explain the differences between the Egyptian king’s hypocoristicon and the biblical name of the conqueror of Jerusalem. But, I would also wish to emphasize that Kohl’s arguments for the identification rest much more on the historical evidence provided by the monumental inscriptions than the vagaries and interpretations of palaeography and orthography.

### Appendix: The Greek forms of the name Shashak

P. van der Veen has proposed that Sstr was reinterpreted as Shshk because of the Hebrew name Shashak. He understands this name as meaning ‘the one who assaults’ (from shk), but the Greek version of this name (cf. Koehler/Baumgartner: *Hebraisches und armäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, (1990), p. 1536) makes this interpretation rather doubtful. (quote from Jansen-Winkeln’s note 2)

But what does the Greek version of the name Shashak in 1 Chronicle 8:14 actually tell us? It becomes obvious from the Greek instances, listed below, that the Septuagint renders the Hebrew name not as Shashak but as Sosek, a name which shows strong similarities to the Egyptian personal name Shoshe(n)k. A connection to the verb shashak therefore seems rather difficult. On the other hand, the Lucan version of the Greek Old Testament renders the name as Sisach, which not only points to an association with Shashak but also with Shishak!

#### The Septuagint spellings of Hebrew Shashak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sosek - Greek Σοσηκ</th>
<th>Codex Alexandrinus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sokel - Greek Σοκηλ</td>
<td>Codex Alexandrinus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sosek - Greek Σοσηκ</td>
<td>Codex Venetus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sopek - Greek Σοπηκ</td>
<td>Codex Vaticanus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sosel - Greek Σοσηλ (various sources)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisach - Greek Σισαχ (Lucan version)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the spelling Sosek, in any case, most likely goes back to the Hebrew verb *shkk*. Although the name was vocalised with *o* and *η*, a closer consideration of the context of the eighth chapter of the book of Chronicles is very revealing. Not just Sosek but all the other names in this passage are consistently written with omega and etha when representing Hebrew names employing the vowels *gamet* + *patah*/*gamet* + *sera*. For example:

- (a) Verse 12: Hebrew Eber (or Ebed?) becomes Greek *Obed* (Οβηδ).
- (b) Verse 15: Hebrew Arad becomes Greek *Orrη* (Ορρη).
- (c) Verse 15: Hebrew Adar becomes Greek *Oded* (Οδηδ).
- (d) Verse 20: Hebrew Elienai becomes Greek *Eleenai* (Ελειναί).

Examples (a) and (b) are Sosek’s brothers whilst (c) and (d) are his sons. *Omega* is used here to render the Hebrew

24 • JACF VOL. 8
vowel qamets and ehtu transcribes patah and/or sere. There is therefore nothing in the text which would indicate an historical preference for Soek rather than Shashak—other than the scribes quirkiness of vocalisation, demonstrated above. I cannot see a problem here.

Notes and References


2. In this issue, p. 17.

3. Yet the word-play is not perfect. If ‘Moses’ was intended to mean ‘he who was drawn out’, then the author would have written Hebrew Mashtay instead of Masheh—see, V. P. Hamilton: ‘Moshé/Moses’ in R. L. Harris et al. (eds.): Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1 (Chicago, 1980), p. 330, word 12541, p. 1254–55; cf. also B. S. Childs: Exodus, Old Testament Library (London, 1974), p. 19.


7. S. Mus PROP 1:5; Q. Keel & Chr. Uehlinger: Götter, Götter und Gottheitsmythe, Neue Erkenntnisse vor Religionsgeschichte Kanaan und Israels aufgrund bisher unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen, Vossziones Disputatae 134 (Freiburg i. Br., 1995), p. 232; J. Renz & W. Böllig: Handbuch der Althelitischen Epigraphik, Volume III: Die Althelitischen Inschriften (Darmstadt, 1995), p. 80; Ch. van der Toom et al. (eds.): Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (Leiden, 1995), p. 336; the divine name ‘B’ is also presumably to be found in the post-exilic name Besay (Ezra 2:49; Nehemiah 7:32) where it is written with a semech. If indeed both names contain the element ‘B’, it would prove positively that Egyptian ‘B’ could be written both with semech and with zin in biblical Hebrew.


9. M. Tsevat: ‘The Canaanite God Shašah’ in IJAT 17.4 (1954), S. 48; Tsevat explains Shašah as meaning subterranean river (Hebrew Shašah — cf. Job 23:18; 26:12; 33:18). But Ouiss was the god of the underworld and judge of the dead. The meaning of the word would then have been: Ouiss is a subterranean river’. Cf. also the PN ‘Bashith’ – The (divine) father is a subterranean river’.


15. AVET, pp. 201 ff., also, J. D. Griffith, op. cit. [4], p. 230.

16. I am pursuing the very plausible equation of Riyamasheshet with the ‘General of the Lord of the Two Lands’, Ramose, who is indeed attested at Tel el-Amarna; see D. B. Redford: Egypt and Canaan in the New Kingdom (Beersheva, 1990), p. 13.

17. Further Egyptian names from the Amarna onomasticon with the shift from Egyptian to Akkadian shin are EA 50: Egyptian title li-ism-nu (‘King’s Wife’) > Akkadian is-ha-um-un-šaš, EA 234 + 288: Egyptian PN Sn-šaš > iššu (‘Set’ > Akkadian šu-ta or šu-šaš; EA 162: Egyptian Ptšḫ-ni > ‘the prince’ > Akkadian P’tš-tš-tš-ni. For the idea that the biblical author of Kings based his information on material found in an ancient Jerusalem archive, see D. J. Wiseman: 1 & 2 Kings, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries IX (Leicester, 1993), p. 17.


19. M. Garsiel: Biblical Names – A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns (Ramat Gan, 1991), p. 44. The biblical author placed an aleph before the original PN, which drastically changed its significance. For the Yahwist author, Ba’al was nothing more than a idol. The question, ‘Where is Prince Ba’al?’ demands a negative answer in Hebrew – in other words ‘Ba’al is not a Prince’ because ‘ba’al does not exist: The Egyptian element ‘b’ also has the meaning of ‘dung’. The deity is not only reduced to nothing, but he is equivalent to a piece of excrement. In the Old Testament idols were often described as ‘dung-ids’ (e.g. Leviticus 26:30; 1 Kings15:12). See also the Hebrew expression in the narrative on Jehe where he defiles the temple of Ba’al in Samaaria and turns it into a ‘toilet’ (literally ‘places of dung’ – 2 Kings 10:27).

20. M. Garsiel, op. cit. [20], p. 118. The god Ba’al Zebul is demoted here to a ‘prince of flies’.

21. G. W. Ahlstrom: Biblical Names – A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns (Ramat Gan, 1991), p. 44. The biblical author placed an aleph before the original PN, which drastically changed its significance. For the Yahwist author, Ba’al was nothing more than a idol. The question, ‘Where is Prince Ba’al?’ demands a negative answer in Hebrew – in other words ‘Ba’al is not a Prince’ because ‘ba’al does not exist: The Egyptian element ‘b’ also has the meaning of ‘dung’. The deity is not only reduced to nothing, but he is equivalent to a piece of excrement. In the Old Testament idols were often described as ‘dung-ids’ (e.g. Leviticus 26:30; 1 Kings15:12). See also the Hebrew expression in the narrative on Jehe where he defiles the temple of Ba’al in Samaaria and turns it into a ‘toilet’ (literally ‘places of dung’ – 2 Kings 10:27).

22. M. Garsiel, op. cit. [20], p. 118. The god Ba’al Zebul is demoted here to a ‘prince of flies’.

23. M. Garsiel, op. cit. [20], p. 133. AT-Brutt is a literary method by which the first letter of the alphabet (aleph) is replaced by the last letter (tau), the second by the penultimate (sin), etc. Hence ‘Ba’al’ becomes ‘Sh’ilah’.


25. Verse 26: weyyiskahh et-oit-nit beyt-JHWI we’t-ot-nit beyt hameyot nete et-hakk lakah. Verse 27: weyyiskahh et-kol maqayin hazzah ash’er ash’ier shelomoth. The verb lakah is mentioned here three times in the context of the plundering of the temple and palace. Besides the common meaning to ‘take’ or to ‘gasp’ in Qal, it also has the meaning: (a) ‘to take/carry away’ or ‘to deprive of’, (b) ‘to take possession of’, (c) ‘to take (in the sense of capture/seize)’, (d) ‘to carry off (the spoils of war)’. A further play on words may lie hidden in the first element ‘Sh’ of Shashak, because Sh’ means ‘gift or tribute’ (brought to the God of Israel).