TRIBUTE OR LOOTING IN SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM: SHOSHENQ IN JERUSALEM?

André Lemaire

E.P.H.E., Paris

According to the tradition of the Ancient Near East, the capitals of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Samaria and Jerusalem, were fortified cities, in principle able to resist a siege and used as a refuge by the people around in time of war. However this resistance was not always successful, especially facing an enemy with a well organized army, and there was great danger for the population that the enemy might finally succeed in entering and plundering the city, and then slaughter its inhabitants. It might have been wiser to surrender just before the siege, agreeing voluntarily to pay tribute. It was the king’s weighty responsibility to choose between these two strategies. The historiography of the books of Kings mentions several times this problem, which so influenced the history of both kingdoms. An analysis of these texts from this viewpoint may help better to understand the historical importance of several military campaigns, especially the expedition of Shoshenq I.

The “tribute or looting” alternative seems very clear in 1 Kgs 20:1–9.1 According to this Biblical story, “Ben-Hadad king of Aram… put Samaria under siege and fought against it. He sent envoys into the city to Ahab king of Israel saying: ‘… Your silver and gold are mine, your best wives and sons are mine’. The king of Israel answered: ‘As you say, my lord king, I am yours and all that I have’”. However a second embassy2 demanded still more: “…I will send my servants to search

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your palace and your subjects’ houses and they will take possession of everything you prize, and remove it (wēlāqāḥū)”. This time, the king of Israel refused, with the elders’ concurrence: “Do not listen to him; you must not consent”. He replied to Ben-Hadad’s envoys: “I am ready to satisfy your first demand; but what you now ask I cannot do”.

Setting aside here the historical problem of showing that the king of Aram is probably “Bar-Hadad son of Hazael”, and the king of Israel is probably originally Jehoash son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, the difference between the two messages in content can be highlighted. In the first message the king of Israel must surrender and give his most precious things (silver and gold) and persons (wives and sons, probably as hostages) as a kind of exceptional tribute. In the second message, the king of Israel must surrender unconditionally and the servants of the king of Aram will plunder the palace and the city, taking anything they want. It is clear that, in the second case the king of Israel is totally passive: the servants of Bar-Hadad take (verb lāqah 1 Kgs 20:6b) for themselves what they want. Actually they will plunder the city as if they had entered by force. Under these conditions the king of Israel and his counsellors think it better to resist, leaving them some chance to escape total plunder. The story has apparently a happy ending with the defeat of the Aramaeans: the enemy did not enter the city and Samaria was not looted.

Actually Samaria seems never to have been looted before being taken by Sargon II (ca. 722 B.C.E.). However, probably ca. 740 B.C.E., “Pul king of Assyria invaded the country, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to obtain his help in strengthening his hold on the kingdom” (2 Kgs 15:19). The use of the verb nātan, “to give”, is characteristic, as is the explanation: it is a kind of exceptional tribute so that Tiglath-pileser III may recognize Menahem as a kind of vassal king. Thereafter Israel is the vassal of Assyria. The price is exorbitant:


Menahem is mentioned among the kings giving tribute on a Neo-Assyrian stele. See H. Tadmor, The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III King of Assyria (Jerusalem 1994),
about 34.2 tons of silver; moreover, since the royal treasury was probably empty after two previous coups d’état, this sum could only be got by means of levying a new capital tax of “fifty silver shekels” on “all the men of wealth (gibbôrêy hahayîl)”, that is, about 60,000 men. This exceptional tribute was successful: Tiglath-pileser III went back to Assur “without staying in the country” (2 Kgs 15:20), meaning without transforming it into an Assyrian province.

Later on, probably ca. 732/1 B.C.E., Hosea became king, apparently with the help of Tiglath-pileser III6 whose army was in the Southern Levant, more precisely in Damascus. Hosea paid tribute to him, as well as to his successor Shalmaneser V (2 Kgs 17:3). However, when he withheld this tribute (2 Kgs 17:4) he was arrested, and Samaria was captured after a long siege (2 Kgs 17:6). Although plundering is not explicitly mentioned, because the historiography emphasizes the deportation of the people, it is implicit. Tribute or looting? King Hoshea made the wrong choice, and in the end Samaria became an Assyrian province.

The history of Jerusalem as capital of Judah seems to have been still more dramatic even though it lasts for a longer period. After the expedition of Shoshenq I, which we shall study at the end of this paper, about 900 B.C.E., “Baasha king of Israel attacked Judah” (1 Kgs 15:17) and threatened Jerusalem; Asa king of Judah “took (wayyiqqah) all the silver and gold that remained in the treasuries of the house of Yhwh and of the royal palace, and he gave them through his servants, and he sent them to Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion, king of Aram, residing in Damascus” (1 Kgs 15:18). This sending of a “gift” (v. 19: šohad)7 was tied to a vassal/alliance treaty (bĕrit).8 The intervention

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of the Aramaean army in the North forced Baasha to withdraw, and Jerusalem did not have to suffer looting.

In the last quarter of the 9th century B.C.E., after taking the Philistine city of Gath, Hazael king of Aram “started to go up against Jerusalem. And Joash, king of Judah took (all the holy-gifts that Jehoshaphat, Joram, and Ahaziah his forefathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own holy-gifts, and) all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of Yhwh and in the royal palace, and sent them to Hazael King of Aram; and he withdrew from Jerusalem” (2 Kgs 12:18b–19). Joash of Judah did not want to suffer the same fate as the king of Gath (2 Kgs 12:18a) and preferred to pay a heavy tribute so that Jerusalem would not be looted. His initiative is emphasized: it is he who takes (lāqah) the holy-gifts and all the gold, and sends them to Hazael.

Around 800 B.C.E., Amaziah king of Judah provoked Jehoash king of Israel (2 Kgs 14:8): the Judean army was defeated at Beth-Shemesh and Amaziah was taken prisoner. Jehoash entered Jerusalem (2 Kgs 14:13) and “took (lāqah) all the gold and silver and all the vessels found in the house of Yhwh and in the treasuries of the royal palace, as well as hostages, and returned to Samaria” (2 Kgs 14:14). Here it is clear that Jerusalem was looted by the king of Israel, without any agreement on the part of the king of Judah!

About 734 B.C.E. Jerusalem is again threatened and besieged by an Aramaean army, that of Rezin, king of Aram, together with that of Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel (2 Kgs 16:5) to force Jerusalem into an alliance against Assyria. Instead of consenting or letting Jerusalem be looted, Ahaz chose to send a gift to another, more power-

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10 The words in parentheses might be those of the historiographer, i.e., secondary (see E. Würthwein, Die Bücher der Könige. 1. Kön. 17–2. Kön. 25 [ATD; Göttingen, 1984], p. 358).
11 The mention of “gold” is textually somewhat uncertain.
12 Pace Würthwein, Die Bücher der Könige, p. 372. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of this plundering and accept hostage-taking alone.
ful king: “Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria”. Declaring himself his vassal (“I am your servant and your son”), “Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the house of Yhwh and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent them to the king of Assyria as a bribe (šohad)”, (2 Kgs 16:8). Again, his initiative is clearly indicated: it is Ahaz who took and sent (wayyiqqah . . . wayyišlah) the silver and gold.

In 701 B.C.E. Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded the territory of Judah and threatened Jerusalem. As is well expressed in the speech of the Rabshaqeh, King Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were confronted with a grave choice; resistance or submission. After some resistance “Hezekiah king of Judah sent a message to the king of Assyria at Lachish” and paid him a heavy penalty of “three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold; and Hezekiah gave him all the silver found in the house of Yhwh and in the treasuries of the royal palace . . .” (2 Kgs 18:14–15). This heavy tribute, which is confirmed with some variations (800 talents of silver instead of 300) by the Assyrian annals, explained why Jerusalem was not taken and Sennacherib did not enter Jerusalem (compare 2 Kgs 19:32). After some hesitation Hezekiah made the right choice: (heavy!) tribute rather than being looted.

In 597 B.C.E. “the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up against Jerusalem and the city was besieged. Nebuchadnezzar arrived while his troops were besieging it, and Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his courtiers, his officers and his eunuchs, went out (/surrendered) to the king of Babylon . . . and the king of Babylon carried off all the treasures of the house of Yhwh and the treasures of the royal palace . . . as Yhwh had said” (2 Kgs 24:10–13; see 20:17; 21:14). Apparently here, because the king surrendered at the last moment, the city had to suffer looting, and the king and his court were made prisoners but were safe. The king made the right choice, albeit almost too late.


16 See CS II, p. 303.
17 Würthwein (Die Bücher der Könige, p. 470) considers this sentence “jüngere Nachträge” but is it likely, especially after a siege, that the Chaldaean army entered the city without plundering its treasures?
This fearful experience was useless for Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. “Nabuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced with all his army against Jerusalem, invested it and erected watch-towers against it on every side... In the fourth month..., on the ninth day of the month... the city was thrown open” (2 Kgs 25:1–4). The city was plundered, especially the bronze objects from the Temple (2 Kgs 25:13–17), and later burnt down (2 Kgs 25:8–9). This was because Zedekiah refused to surrender till the last moment, resisting the counsels of Jeremiah: “If you go out and surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, you shall live and this city shall not be burnt down...” (Jer 38:17). The looting of the city is emphasized by the use of the verb lāqah, with the Chaldaeans and the rab-ṭabbāhim as its subject in 2 Kgs 25:14–15.

Now with all these parallels in mind, let us go back to the first example: the campaign of Shoshenq I against Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25–26). 18 For most commentators, here we clearly have the use of some annalistic or archival source, and the indication of a precise date attests to that kind of source.19 Moreover this mention and date can be compared to the list of cities submitted to Shoshenq I on the southern outer wall of the Karnak temple. Unfortunately this list of city-names is fragmentary and difficult to interpret; nor does Jerusalem appear on it. So we are left only with the statement of 1 Kgs 14:25–26: “In the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt went up against Jerusalem. And he took (wayyiqqah) the treasures of the temple of Yhwh and the treasures (lāqah) everything”.

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Leaving aside developments regarding the golden shields (vv. 27–28), this comment is terse and does not detail precisely the events connected with this expedition against Jerusalem. For instance, the text does not mention whether Shoshenq took Jerusalem and entered the city. Most commentators actually interpret this very short statement as indicating that Shoshenq went up toward Jerusalem, but because Rehoboam paid him a heavy tribute taken from the treasures of the Temple and of the royal palace he did not enter the city. Moreover, some commentators maintain that this explains why Jerusalem is not mentioned in the list on the Karnak wall.

Several objections to such an interpretation can be raised.

1) Though it is very often interpreted as a list of conquered and destroyed cities, with the destruction eventually discoverable in archaeological excavations, this interpretation of the list on the Karnak wall is not necessarily correct and seems hardly likely. For instance, as emphasized by D. Ussishkin, it is unlikely that Megiddo, mentioned in this list, was destroyed by Shoshenq since he erected there a stele, part of which was found during the excavations; Pharaoh would probably not erect a stele in a destroyed city. In fact, as indicated by the iconography of the Karnak wall these cities were very probably subdued cities but not destroyed cities. Furthermore, since Jeroboam had been a protégé of Pharaoh Shoshenq in Egypt (1 Kgs 11:40), he would presumably welcome this Pharaoh when he visited his country. In this context, even if Shoshenq had not entered nor destroyed
Jerusalem, this city’s name should nevertheless have appeared in this list of subdued cities; the absence of this city from the list is more probably the consequence of its fragmentary character. In any event, the problem of the absence of Jerusalem from this list remains the same whether or not Rehoboam paid tribute to the Pharaoh, and whether or not Shoshenq entered and looted the city.

2) The generally proposed interpretation of a heavy tribute given or sent by Rehoboam to the Pharaoh – eventually at Gibeon – is pure conjecture: it is nowhere mentioned, not in 1 Kgs 14:25–26 nor in any Egyptian text. In fact, in 1 Kgs 14:25–26 Rehoboam is only mentioned in the date formula. In these two verses the story seems to be told from Pharaoh’s viewpoint, as if Rehoboam did not exist or was not present.

3) The main objection against a tribute sent by Rehoboam is the Massoretic Text itself: the subject of the verb lāqah, “to take”, is clearly Shishaq/Shoshenq, not Rehoboam.

M. Noth tried to justify the interpretation of a tribute paid by Rehoboam saying that lāqah may sometimes mean “to receive”, but this interpretation seems forced, as clearly seen by E. Würthwein. Nor does the context allow such an interpretation, first because there is no mention of Rehoboam giving or sending anything; second, as we have just seen, all the parallel Hebrew passages of the book of Kings indicate that when the subject of the verb lāqah is evidently not the king of Judah this clearly means that Jerusalem was looted by a foreign power.

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28 *Pace* Noth, *Könige I*, p. 331.
31 Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige*, p. 183.
army. Actually J. Fichtner and B. U. Schipper also see well that the general interpretation of a voluntary tribute is contradicted by the subject of the verb lāqah, but they take this to indicate a "Konflikt mit der historischen Wahrheit" and propose that this was done to conceal the fact that king Rehoboam paid tribute to Shoshenq. However, we have seen above that the Hebrew historiographer(s) had no difficulty recognizing such a fact, and such an explanation looks arbitrary.

Actually, if Shoshenq was welcomed, and even invited by his protégé Jeroboam, one could well understand that the first aim of this campaign was directed against Jerusalem, presumably to stop any attempt to suppress again the new pro-Egyptian kingdom of Israel.

Thus, the Massoretic Text must normally be interpreted as indicating implicitly that Shoshenq’s army entered Jerusalem and plundered the city’s treasures. Unfortunately it does not give any details of this campaign or of Rehoboam’s attitude. Since Rehoboam appears to have kept his throne and not to have been taken prisoner, one could suggest, for instance, that he temporarily left Jerusalem to take refuge elsewhere, an attitude that we could liken to David’s, when faced with the revolt of Absalom (2 Sam 15:14ff.). However this is only a conjecture and the historian can only recognize that 1 Kgs 14:26 indicates that Shoshenq entered and plundered Jerusalem.

Actually this was almost already recognized by M. Noth: “Die Formulierung in 25b.26 klingt zunächst so, als sei das Ziel des Feldzuges Jerusalem gewesen, als habe der Pharao diese Stadt eingenommen und die wertvollen Schätze aus ihr mit sich weggeführt”. There is apparently no serious reason why a historian could not accept such an obvious interpretation which reveals a defeat of king Rehoboam and the vulnerability of Jerusalem.

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32 Fichtner, Das erste Buch von Königen, p. 221.
33 Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit (OBO 170; Fribourg – Göttingen, 1999), p. 124.
34 Würthwein, Das erste Buch der König, p. 183.
36 Wilson, ibid., p. 99.
38 Noth, Könige I, p. 331.
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