

A BATTLE ON THE BORDER AT THE BITTER LAKES

THE PHAROAH'S VENGEANCE

In 925 BC the forces of Pharaoh Shoshenq I launched a punitive campaign through the Sinai desert and the Philistine cities into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Shoshenq I is thought to be the same Shishaq we know in the Bible who invaded Judah to punish King Rehoboam. The once-united Kingdom of Israel had been split five years earlier, following the ten northern tribes securing their independence under the leadership of King Jeroboam. This king had been a guest at the Pharaoh's court after he fled from Israel for intriguing against Solomon, and had remained there until the death of Solomon.

By Warren Gleeson

Rehoboam, son of Solomon (and so grandson of David), was left holding the southern half of the old Kingdom, now called Judah. He had been campaigning for five years against the upstart kingdom to the north.

Now Shoshenq I came to

Jeroboam's aid with a large army. Along the way he took the opportunity to settle old grudges, remove some annoying raiders, and secure slaves and tribute. One of the annoying groups he wished to pacify was a nomad tribe of the Sinai that lived near the Bitter Lakes. They had been an ongoing irritation for some time, raiding into Northern Egypt

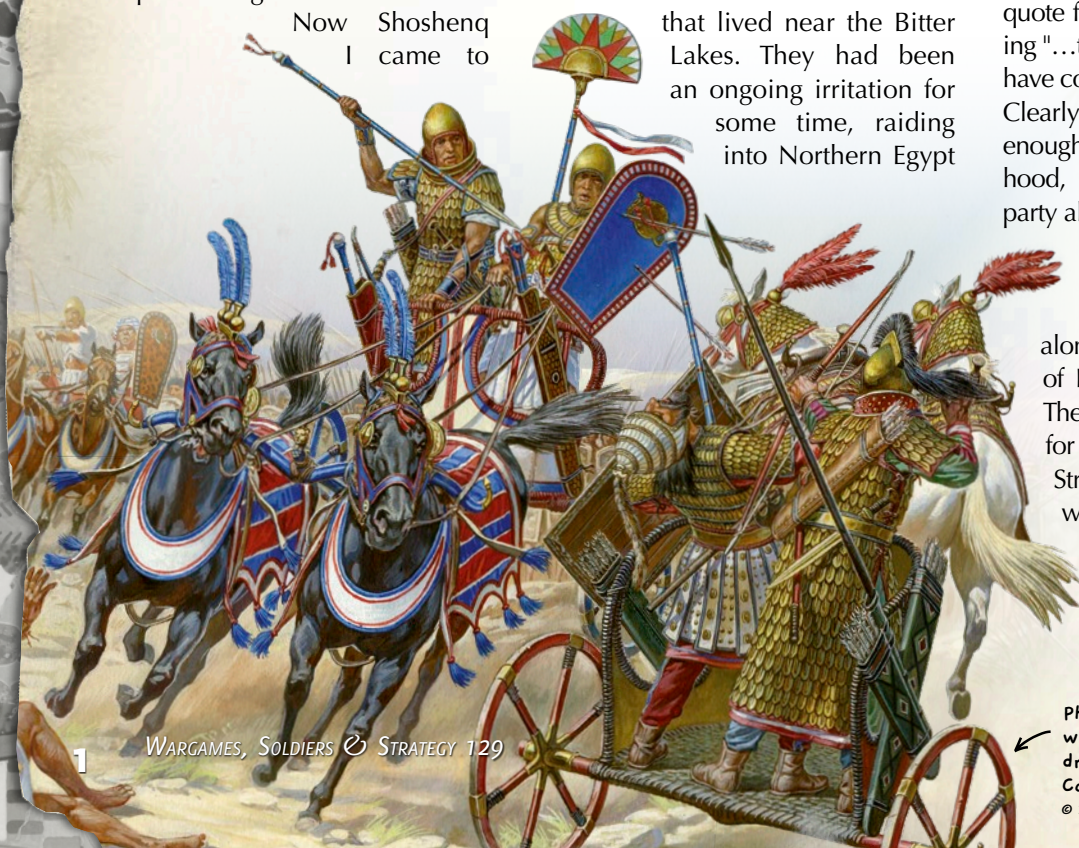


as well as the scattered mines in Western Sinai.



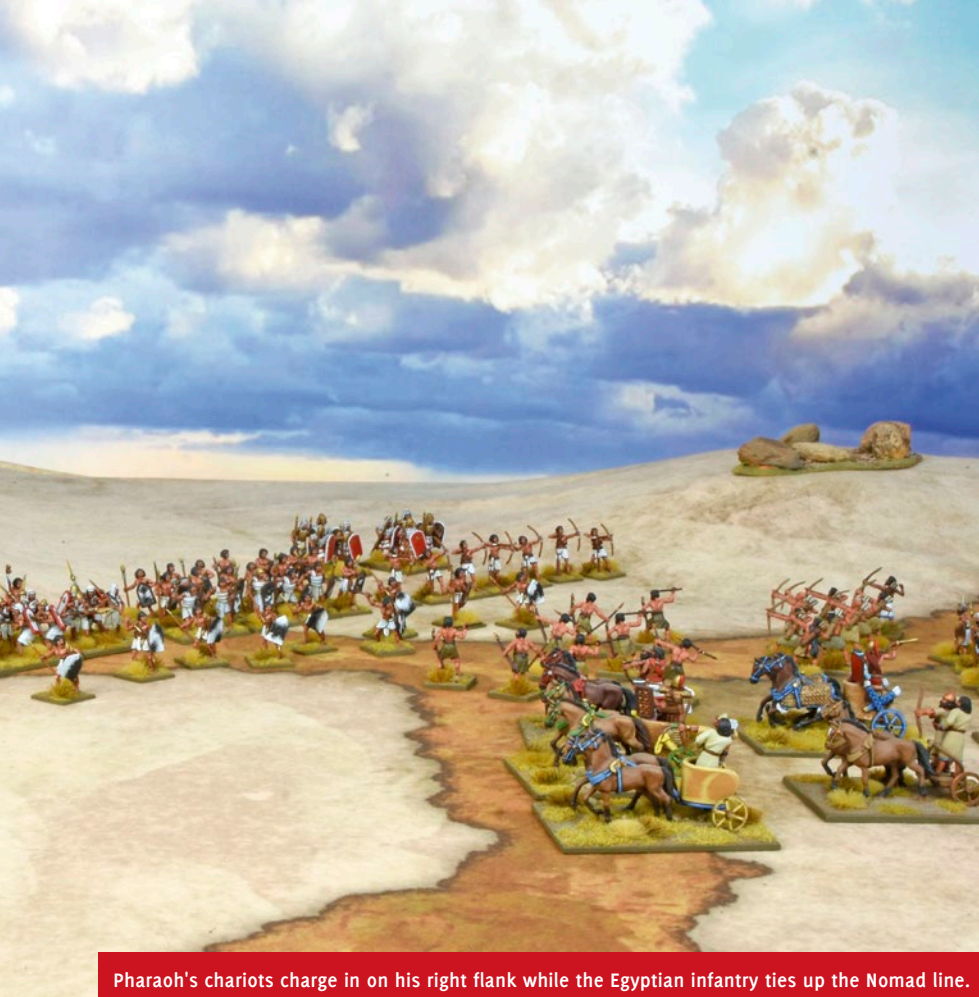
Whether there was a battle in the sense that we would understand it, isn't really clear. We know that an enemy was surprised near the shores of the Bitter Lakes, and that "many foes" were killed and captured in the surprise attack. The enemy was clearly considered a threat, with the quote from an Egyptian stela referencing "...the atrocities they [the Nomads] have committed" against the Egyptians. Clearly, they made the Pharaoh angry enough to send his army. In all likelihood, the 'nomads' were a raiding party allied to, or directly from, Judah.

Fortunately, the Bitter Lakes are an easily identified landmark along the join between the body of Egypt and the Sinai peninsula. They were the traditional boundary for the kingdom of Egypt. Although Strabo later comments that the water in the lakes was "well supplied with fish and full also of aquatic birds" due to the canal joining them to the Nile, it is unclear whether the ca-



Pharaoh, in his chariot with his well-protected driver, charges at a Canaanite opponent.

© Igor Dzis



Pharaoh's chariots charge in on his right flank while the Egyptian infantry ties up the Nomad line.

nal had been completed at the time of the battle. Without this connection, the waters would have been bitter with a very high salt content. The area is arid sand with desert scrub.

THE SCENARIO

The Bitter Lakes form one edge of the long table edge. The Nomad camp is behind the Nomad army, which has hastily formed in response to the arrival of the Egyptian army.

Initiative – the Egyptians have the initiative for the first turn.

Each force is formed into 3 commands.

Army lists

I would suggest that the Nomad army should be taken from Israel/Judean army lists. Exclude some of the heavier troop types. Here are list suggestions from several common rulesets:

Hail Caesar (Biblical to Early Medieval Army Lists)

- New Kingdom Egyptian army (p17)
- Israel and Judeah (p22) – no Ne'arim, Philistine, Phoenecian, Gibborim Guard



Sword & Spear (Biblical Lists) New Kingdom Egyptian

- Hebrew – no Gibborim, Merce-nary Foot, or Heavy Chariots

Sword Point (Chariot Armies)

- New Kingdom Egyptian
- Israel and Judean

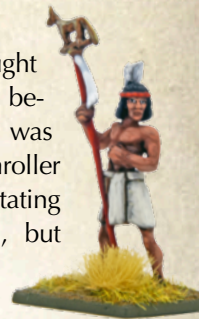
FIGHTING THE BATTLE

We did our playthrough using *Hail Caesar* with the New Kingdom Egyptian and the Israel and Judean lists. To



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make things more even, we fought the battle using equal points. I believe that historically the 'battle' was more likely an Egyptian steamroller that quickly squashed the irritating Nomads before heading north, but we took this as an opportunity to fight a largish game with an opportunity for the Nomads to bloody the Pharaoh's nose.



Forces (Hail Caesar)

Use 500-point armies

New Kingdom Egyptian

- Right wing
- Pharaoh C-in-C leadership 9
- 2 units of Light Chariots
- 2 units of Chariot runners
- 1 unit of Sherdan Guard
- 1 unit of Egyptian Marines - Medium Infantry
- 2 units of Skirmishers with javelins (small units)

Centre

- Commander leadership 8
- 2 units of Egyptian Medium Infantry - Spears & Shields
- 2 units of Egyptian Medium Infantry with 2-handed weapon
- 2 units of Egyptian Medium Infantry - Archers
- 2 units of Skirmishers with javelins (small units)

Left wing

- Commander leadership 8
- 2 units of Libyan, Syrian, Kushite Light Infantry
- 2 units of Libyan, Syrian, Kushite Light Infantry - archers



While the Egyptian chariot units travel through an open valley, the infantry moves to secure hilltop settlement.

- 2 units of Light Chariots
- 2 units of Chariot Runners

Israel/Judea

Right wing

- Commander 1 - leadership 8
- 2 units of Light Chariots
- 1 unit of Light Infantry Warband with spears & Javelins - Bodyguard
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Slings
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Javelins

Centre

- Commander 2 – leadership 8
- 5 units Light Infantry Warband spears & with Javelins – Eager
- 2 units Light Infantry Archers
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Slings
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Javelins
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with short bows

Left wing

- Commander 3 – leadership 8
- 2 units of Light Chariots
- 1 unit of Light Infantry Warband with spears & Javelins - Bodyguard
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Slings
- 1 unit of Skirmishers with Javelins

Deployment

The Egyptians were deployed with Pharaoh on the right flank, with the other chariot command on the opposite flank and the infantry



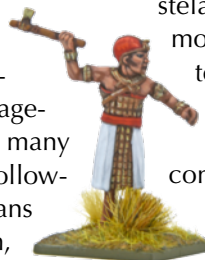
in the centre. The Nomads deployed their first command on the left flank, the second in the centre, and the third command on their right.

His Majesty went forth, his chariotry accompanying him without the enemy knowing it. His Majesty made great slaughter among them at the edge of the Bitter Lakes.

Stele of Shoshenq I – Karnak

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...

The stela of Shoshenq I on the Great Karnak Inscription at Karnak Hall K explicitly states that the engagement was a massacre, with many Nomad prisoners taken following the battle. The Egyptians went on to scour the Judean,



Philistine, and Israelite cities. Shoshenq's stela identifies many known ancient cities in the region, while Book of Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles from the Bible detail the invasion of Judea. Whilst the two accounts don't agree regarding the fall of Jerusalem, it is nice to think that King Rehoboam used the wealth of the Temple (including the Arc of the Covenant if *Indian Jones* is to be believed) to bribe Shoshenq, thereby saving Jerusalem from the same fate as the other captured cities.



In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made.

1 Kings 14:25-26

Not to let friendship get in the way, the Pharaoh took his army and continued north through Israel to Megiddo, where he built a victory stela in an early 'Kilroy was here moment'. Shoshenq then returned to Egypt with his newly acquired wealth, while Rehoboam remained in power in Judah and continue his war against Israel under Jeroboam for the next dozen or so years. **WS&S**



Gotcha! Using their speed, the chariots easily outflank the enemy.