

Neo-assyrian influence in Transjordan

Inevitably economics play the most important role in influencing the policies and fortunes of a country. One of the outstanding examples of this is the resurgence of the neo-Assyrian empire under Tiglath Pileser III, King of Assyria from 744–727 BC. From early times, the countries from the north (Syria, Mesopotamia, etc.) and from the south (primarily Egypt), had fought each other for the possession of the vast resources of untapped wealth in the land which lay between them and for control of the very lucrative trade routes.

When a ruler combines extraordinary political judgement, with brilliant business acumen and tremendous gifts as an organizer, then a Tiglath Pileser III is born. During his reign, a short-lived but excellently administered politico-economic organization came into being, its underlying concept being divide and rule, which meant at the same time deportation and exportation—a concept which was followed by subsequent empire builders. Tiglath Pileser III split his empire up into provinces, which were the areas conquered by the generals, who, if not of suitable blood, were then replaced by royally appointed neo-Assyrian governors. This is well documented in the Assyrian Annals¹ and in the Bible².

Tiglath-Pileser III's campaigns into Palestine between the years 734–732 BC were almost the culmination of his policy to control the economic resources between the Tigris, Euphrates and the Nile. By 722, Aram-Damascus, Hazor, Megiddo and the Northern Kingdom with its capital at Samaria had succumbed to the might of the neo-Assyrians. It is possible that the whole of the north, Qarnini (Qarnaim), Haurina (Hauran) and Gala'za (Gilead), the latter with Ramoth-Gilead as its capital, became typical Assyrian provinces, of which Samaria was a prime example³. At the latter, Tiglath-Pileser III's policy of deportation and importation was fully implemented. The important members of a defeated people, and these undoubtedly included craftsmen, particularly skilled metal workers and perhaps potters, were de-

ported either to the conqueror's capital or to another province and were replaced by other defeated ethnic groups or veteran soldiers. It seems most unlikely that the lives of ordinary people were affected.

The north, however, seems to have been treated differently from the states east of the River Jordan. In dealing with neo-Assyrian influence in Transjordan, one should remember that further south, the states of Ammon, Moab and Edom had existed for some time and from what evidence is available both in the Bible and the Assyrian Annals, had already made treaty agreements with the Assyrians prior to Tiglath-Pileser III's campaigns. On a stone slab found at Calah (Nimrud), which records Adad-Nirari III's (810–785 BC) expedition to Palestine, reference is made to the countries including Edom, which he intimidated and on which he imposed tribute⁴. With Tiglath-Pileser III, however, the actual names of the Kings of the various states are mentioned. Thus we read of him receiving tribute from Sanipu of Bit-Ammon, Salamanu of Moab and Kaush-Malaku of Edom. It seems that after Tiglath-Pileser III's reign, later kings exacted more than monetary tribute from these vassal states⁵. For example, under Esarhaddon (680–669 BC), subjects of Qaus Gabr, King of Edom, Musari, King of Bit-Amman, together with nineteen other kings were employed on transporting various materials to Nineveh for the building of palaces. In Assurbanipal's reign (668–627 BC), they went one step further and pressed the subject peoples into military service, although some may have volunteered. Qaus Gabr of Edom, Musuri of Moab and Amminabdi of Bit-Ammon are listed among twenty-two kings who helped in Assurbanipal's wars against Egypt. They also helped in his campaigns against the Arabian King Uate⁶.

As all empire builders throughout the ages have realised, rapid communication is an essential factor, both for military control of the conquered provinces and for economic prosperity, particularly in the latter case, where economic considera-

¹ See references in H. Tadmor: 'The Southern Border of Aram', *IEJ*, 12, 1962, pp. 114–122.

² See references in B. Oded: 'Observations on Methods of Assyrian Rule in Transjordan', *JNES*, 29: 1970, p. 177 note 2.

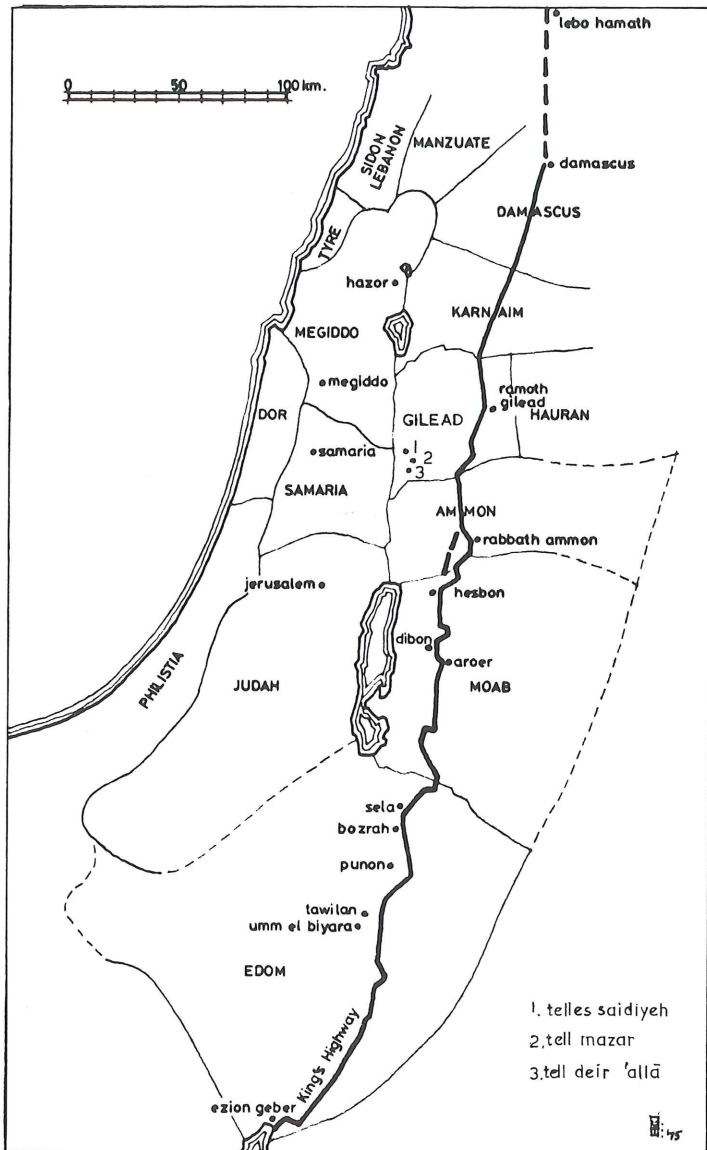
³ Oded, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁴ J. B. Pritchard (ed): *Ancient Near Eastern Texts, relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition, col. 281.

⁵ *ibid.* col. 291.

⁶ *ibid.* cols. 297–300.

1. Map showing the location of places mentioned in the text.



tions sparked off the military campaign and the conquering power relied on the products of the conquered or of the vassal states. The map (FIG. 1) shows not only the various provinces, states and towns mentioned in this paper, but also one very important road marked as the King's Highway, running north from the Gulf of Aqaba, through Transjordan and on to Hamath in Syria. This linked up at strategic points with arteries running to the west and east. It would be inconceivable that there would not have been a whole network of posting houses, lookout posts and signal stations positioned at important points along these roads. It is probably in this sphere that we should look for the most visible traces of military neo-Assyrian influence.

In his monumental survey of Eastern Palestine⁷, Glueck

⁷ N. Glueck: 'Survey of Eastern Palestine' (AASOR, Vols xiv, xv, xxviii and xxix: 1933-5 and 1951).

constantly drew attention to the existence of strong fortresses along the frontiers of the Transjordanian states and dated them as early as Iron I. From the pottery published, the writer queries such an early assignment and would prefer to bring it down to the beginning of the 8th century BC at the very earliest. This would apply particularly to the eastern frontier. We know from the account of Assurbanipal's war against the Arabs⁸, that the Assyrians stationed garrison forces along the edge of the desert as a bulwark against the ever present threat of Arab nomadic incursions. On the other hand, on the evidence of the Bible, such as in 2 Samuel 8:13f., J. R. Bartlett⁹ supports Glueck's dating and has suggested a Davidic date for their beginning.

The evidence from the north is different from that from the south as is the evidence between east and west. All the writer can say is that the signal stations or fortresses which she has visited within the environs of Buseirah (Biblical Bozra) have yielded no sherds earlier than those found in the excavations at Tawilan¹⁰ (Teman?) and Buseirah, that is the 8th-7th century BC¹¹. In recent years, greater interest has been shown in the later Biblical periods, partly due to our increased knowledge of Assyrian texts, and, with the greater number of excavations in Transjordan, more information has become available. In this paper, reference is made to some of the sites marked on FIG. 1, which might have relevance to our subject. From north to south they are: Ramoth-Gilead (Tell er Rumeith), Tabaqat Fah'l, Tell es Saidiyeh, Tell Mazar and Deir 'Alla in the Jordan Valley; Rabath-Ammon (Ammon); Hesbon (Hesban), Dibon (Dhiban) and 'Arô'er in Moab; and Bozra (Buseirah), Teman? (Tawilan), Umm el Biyara and Ezion Geber (Tell el Kheleifeh) in Edom.

As was said earlier, the pattern in northern Jordan is different from that further south. At Tell er Rumeith^{12,13}, it appears that there was a violent destruction at the end of Stratum v, which was probably due to Tiglath-Pileser III, followed by a short re-use of houses with brick floors. Unfortunately, no house plans are available and the ceramic finds have not yet been published. Dr Sauer, who has been working on the material and who has seen the writer's material from her three sites in Edom, found very little similarity between the pottery from the two regions and he had no neo-Assyrian imported or type pottery. But there were affinities between the Tell er Rumeith pottery and that from Samaria, Megiddo and Hazor, which suggests a separate cultural tradition for the north and which may have stemmed from the neo-Assyrians' different treatment of the people under their control.

⁸ Ancient Near Eastern Texts, cols 297-300 (The Rassam Cylinder of Ashurbanipal).

⁹ J. R. Bartlett: 'The Rise and Fall of Edom', *PEQ* (1972), p. 29 f.

¹⁰ C.-M. Bennett: 'A Brief Note on Excavations at Tawilan, Jordan 1968-70', *Levant* III (1971), pp. v-vii.

¹¹ C.-M. Bennett: Preliminary Reports in *Levant* v (1973), vi (1974), vii (1975) and ix (1977).

¹² P. W. Lapp: *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 70 (1963), pp. 406-411, Vol. 75 (1968), pp. 98-105.

¹³ N. Lapp (ed.): 'The Tale of the Tell', pp. 111-119.

During the excavations conducted by Dr Fawzi Zayadine on the Citadel in Amman¹⁴, in the small area uncovered, plaster floors, which were such an outstanding feature in the neo-Assyrian levels at Buseirah (see below) were found. The pottery associated with these plaster floors accords well with that from Buseirah. Dr Zayadine has dated his Stratum v on the basis of the pottery, epigraphical material and the double faced heads (see below) to the 7th century BC.

Also found on the Citadel, was the all-important Tomb of Adoni-Nur with a splendid collection of pottery and seals, including one in a silver mount of Adoni-Nur, servant of Ammi-Nadab (King of Ammon). There was also one with the name Shub-El. The style of all the seals showed a dominant Assyrian influence. Whether the three large pottery coffins found in this tomb also represent Assyrian influence is open to doubt, but it is possible. Another 7th century tomb was found in the environs of the Citadel and this contained pottery similar to that found in Adoni-Nur's tomb. An example of Assyrian influence was also found in the chalcedony and cylinder seals found in the Muqabalain tomb. As in the second tomb mentioned, there were pottery horses and riders, but in this case the rider's head was intact and he was wearing a high pointed hat. The Muqabalain tomb also had imports from the west—two fine multi-coloured glass perfume flasks. This tomb typifies only too well the difficulties of trying to relate objects categorically to a specific culture. One can compare the problem of assigning the engraved tridacna squamosa shells, which belong essentially to the neo-Assyrian period and which have been attributed variously to Cypro-Phoenician, Greek and neo-Assyrian craftsmen¹⁵.

The painted pottery, which is such a feature of the neo-Assyrian period in Ammon, Moab and Edom, but not in the north which we have already decided had a different relationship with Assyria, does not seem to be present in the sites being excavated in the Jordan Valley, except for Deir 'Allā, where, in Stratum vi, the band painting is present on the pointed base bottles¹⁶. These relate closely in shape to those found in the Amman tombs mentioned above.

The pottery from Tell Mazar¹⁷, north of Deir 'Allā has some affinities with attested 8th/7th century BC pottery, but generally looks much later, perhaps neo-Babylonian or even Persian. The plans of the buildings, however, are similar to some of those from Buseirah and a detailed study and comparison would be helpful.

It is unfortunate that no plates of the pottery found in the burning which everywhere covered the floors of the 8th century houses at Tell es Saidiyeh (ADAJ 8/9, 1964 and BA 1965, No. 1) have been published. Dr Pritchard said that the

pottery pointed to a date within the 8th century BC for the destruction of the city, which could well be the neo-Assyrian campaigns. There was also the foundation of a city wall built over the paving in the courtyard of one of the houses. Was this built by the neo-Assyrians?

It is too early to comment on the Iron Age levels at Tabaqat Fah'l as these have only just been reached, but from the pottery the writer has been shown kindly by Dr Hennessy, there is certainly 8th and 7th century BC occupation there, but, so far, neither the architecture nor the pottery shows a neo-Assyrian influence. It will be very surprising if it does not exist.

One of the writer's theories is that the neo-Assyrians not only secured their eastern frontier, but also the eastern bank of the River Jordan. There would have been little point in subduing the whole of the coast down to Egypt without having a strong line of defence on the eastern borders of Israel and Judah.

From the references to Heshban (Hesbon) in the Bible, it would have been natural to have expected a long sequence of occupation from the time of Sihon, King of the Amorites, throughout the subsequent Biblical periods. No buildings have been published which could be assigned definitely to a neo-Assyrian period or could reflect neo-Assyrian influence. According to Dr J. Sauer¹⁸, the pottery covers a time span of 200 years (700–500 BC) and confirms definitely the ceramic tradition of the Adoni-Nur tomb. His terminus post quem is 650 BC, which means that there should also be affinities ceramically with Umm el Biyara, where the pottery is dated very securely by a seal impression of the then king of Edom, Qaus Gabr, who is mentioned twice in the Assyrian Annals as paying tribute to the neo-Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

A most interesting site for this period is Dhiban (Biblical Dibon), and provenance of the famous Mesha stele. Dhiban is to be found between the Wadis Wala and Mojib (see FIG. 1). No other site in Jordan resembles Buseirah so closely in terms of difficult excavation, because successive occupiers of the site re-used their predecessors' stone walls as foundations for their own, thus most successfully destroying the contemporary stratigraphy. Like Buseirah, and as Tushingham has pointed out¹⁹ there was no evidence of violent destruction anywhere in the area at Dhiban so one might assume, therefore, that the town suffered nothing at neo-Assyrian hands. On the contrary, Moab benefitted from the successful campaigns of Tiglath Pileser III and his successors, because it meant the end of the power and threat of a long-time enemy, and the consequent end of Israel.

'Arô'er, a fortress protecting Dhiban, shows no neo-Assyrian influence either in architecture or pottery in the areas excavated, but according to the excavator²⁰ 'Arô'er

¹⁴ F. Zayadine: 'Recent Excavations on the Citadel of Amman', *ADAJ* xviii (1973), pp. 17–35.

¹⁵ C.-M. Bennett: *Antiquity*, xli (1967), 197–201.

¹⁶ Written communication from the excavator Dr H. Franken to whom my thanks are due for permission to publish the photograph in FIG. 2.

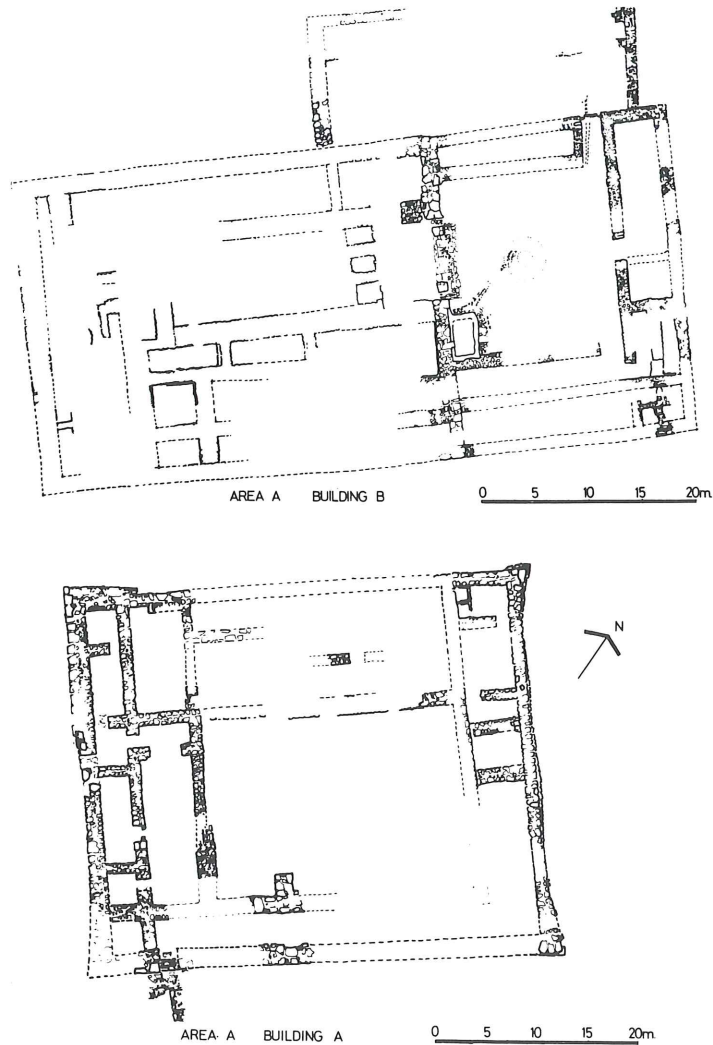
¹⁷ I am grateful to Dr Kheir Yassin for showing me his plans of and pottery from Tell Mazar.

¹⁸ E. N. Lugenbeal and J. A. Sauer: 'Pottery from Heshbon', *AUSS*, x (1972).

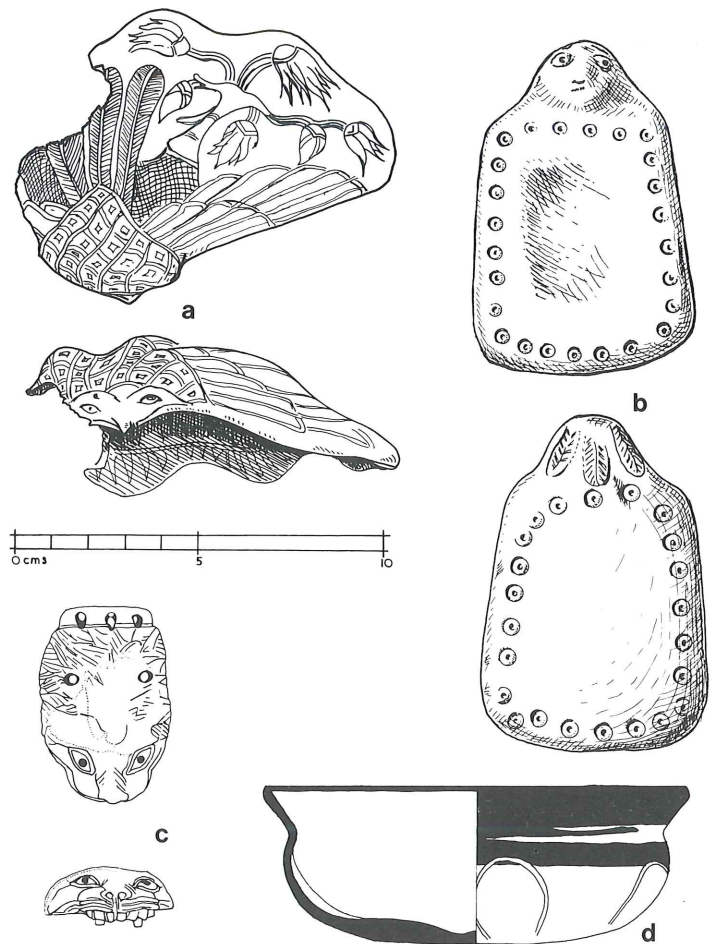
¹⁹ A. D. Tushingham: 'Excavations at Dibon (Dhiban) in Moab', *AASOR*, xl, (1972).

²⁰ E. Olavarri: 'Sondages à 'Arô'er', *Revue Biblique*, lxi (1965), 77–94.

2. Buseirah, 1974: plans of the two major building periods on Area A, the so-called 'Acropolis'. Building A is the 'winged' building.



3. a) A bird of prey engraved on a *Tridacna Squamosa* shell; b) A cosmetic palette; c) Beast's head in ivory; d) Dimpled bowl.



ended at the same time as the fall of Samaria (which suggests a change in the neo-Assyrian attitude to Moab).

In Edom, four sites in the past forty years have been excavated—Buseirah, Tawilan, Umm el Biyara²¹ and Tell el Kheleifeh²². No comment can be made on the architecture of the latter as the plans for the buildings assigned by Glueck to the 8th/7th century BC have not yet been published. There is no doubt, however, that this period (Glueck's Period IV) belongs ceramically to the neo-Assyrian period as the pottery is identical in many instances with that found at the other three sites mentioned above.

Architecturally, neo-Assyrian influence is not apparent in the very small Edomite settlement on the top of Umm el Biyara, which is what one would expect as we have already suggested that the lives of ordinary people were unaffected by

a neo-Assyrian presence. The same comment applied to the much larger settlement at Tawilan. Even though the houses there were built to a larger pattern and were more sophisticated, they do not compare in size with the buildings at Buseirah, which in some areas were either palaces or temples.

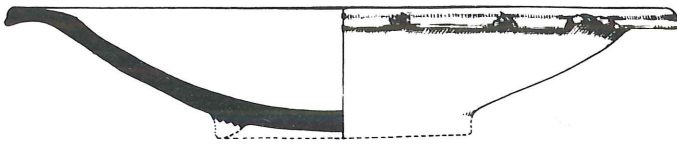
The pottery, however, and the small finds from both Umm el Biyara and Tawilan reflect the finds from the Tomb of Adoni-Nur; and, in certain cases, perhaps a very strong neo-Assyrian influence, such as in a scaraboid (Levant III (1971), PL. IIb) which has been commented on fully by Mlle A. Spycket in the *Revue Biblique* (1973), pp. 384–395.

It is at Buseirah, on Area A (see FIG. 2), (the so-called 'Acropolis'), and on the little Tell to the south, Area C, that a foreign architectural influence becomes apparent. There are monumental buildings, on foundations sometimes reaching a depth of three metres, and, judging from the extent of the mud brick debris, with very extensive superstructures in mud brick. As can be seen in the Preliminary Report in *Levant VI* (1974), on Area A, there are two major building complexes, one overlying the other, plans of which are illustrated in FIG. 3, the latter being the 'winged' building. It is worth noting

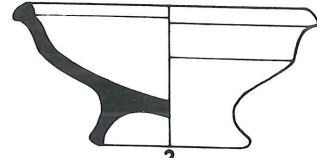
²¹ C.-M. Bennett: 'Fouilles d'Umm el Biyara: Rapport Préliminaire', *Revue Biblique*, 73 (1966), pp. 372–403.

²² Tell el Kheleifeh (Ezion Geber): for a complete bibliography see E. Vogel: 'Bibliography of Holy Land Sites', *HUCA*, XLII (1971), 85–86.

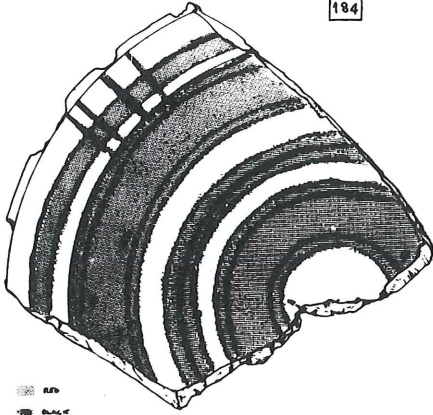
4. Painted pottery from Buseirah, for which there are parallels on sites in Moab and Ammon (7th century BC).



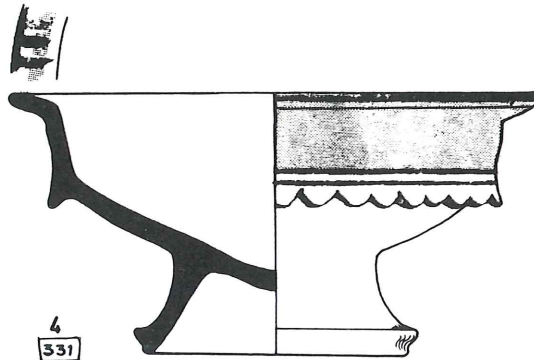
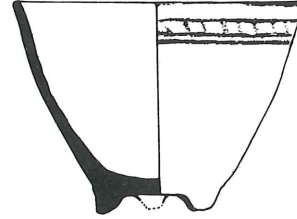
1
184



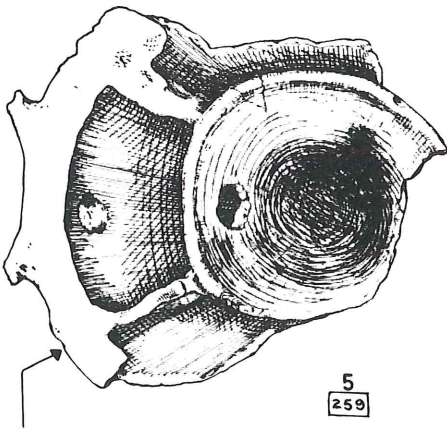
2
196



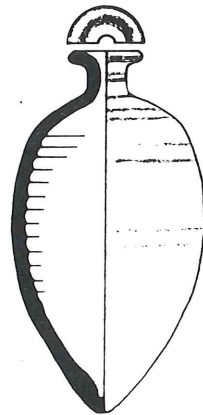
3
189



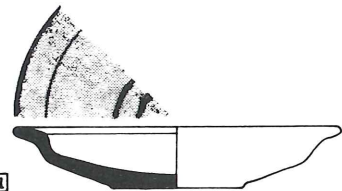
4
331



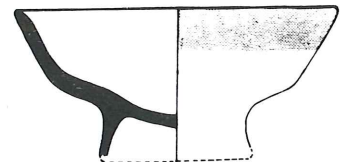
5
259



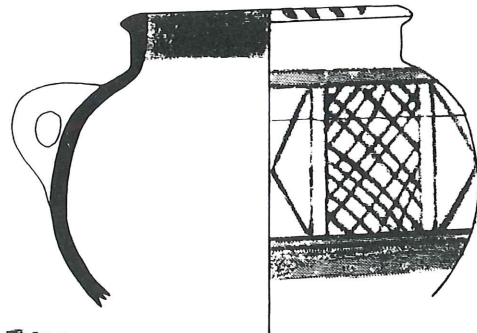
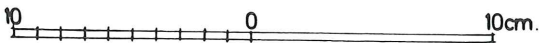
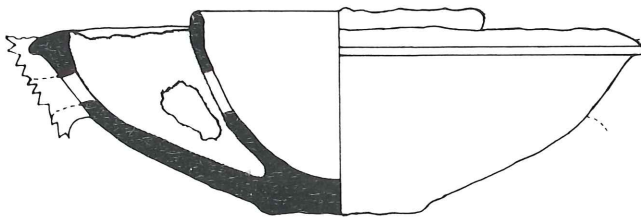
6
258



7
261

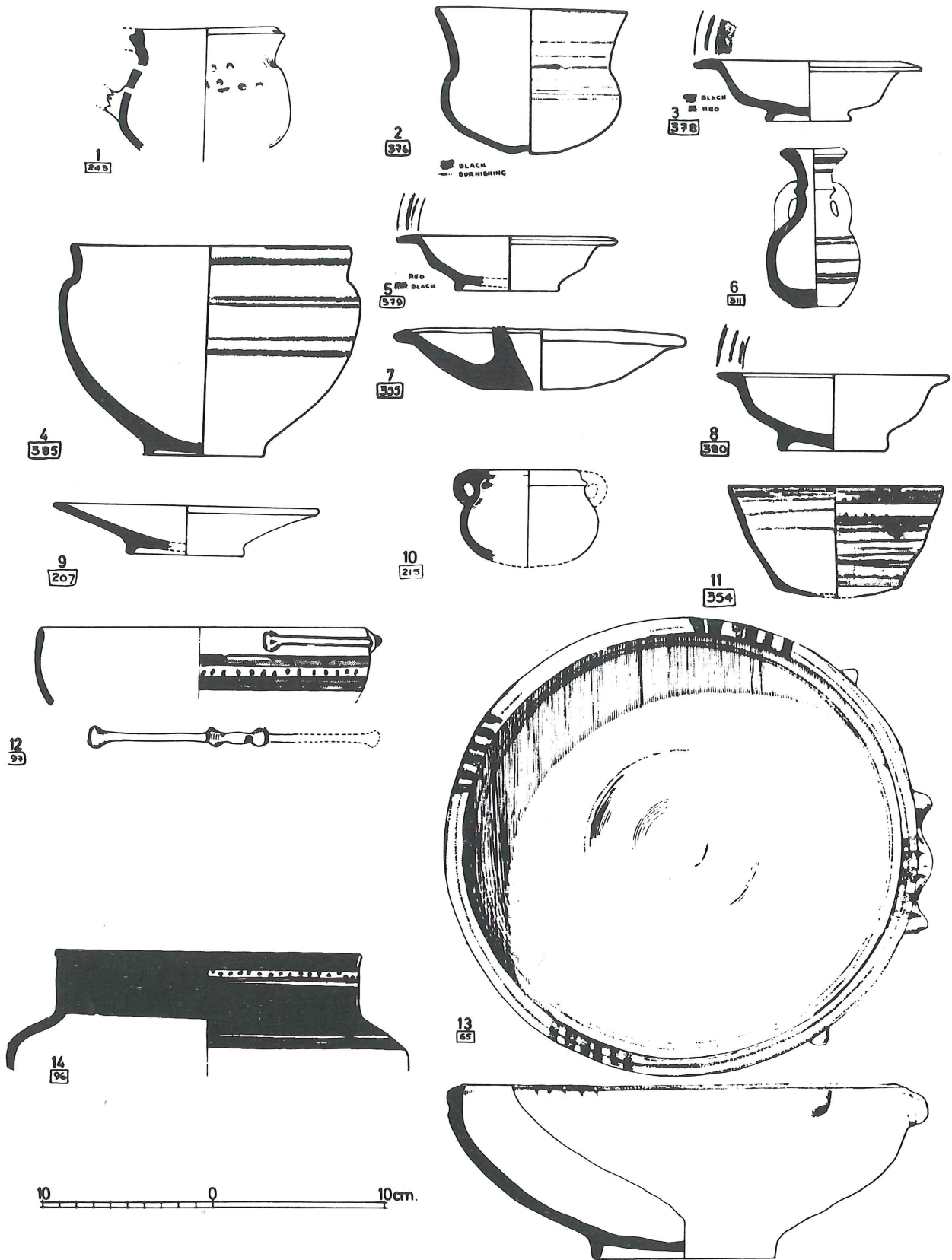


8
265



9
260

5. Painted and plain pottery from Buseirah for which there are parallels on sites in Moab and Ammon (7th century BC).



that on Site C (for its location, see *Levant* VI (1974) FIG. 1), where there are several periods of buildings, which are in process of being excavated, a type of building very similar to the earlier one on the 'Acropolis' was found but with a lavatory and bathroom. According to Turner^{23,24}, bathrooms first appeared in Assyria in the larger Sargonid palaces at Khorsobad and in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh. In the earlier building on the 'Acropolis', we have steps leading up to an inner sanctum with column bases on either side, which were perhaps for statues, reminding us of Assyrian temples with stands for deity statues.

Architectural evidence, however, for direct Assyrian influence is tenuous, even for the more grandiose buildings erected to house the governor, high priest or vassal king, and it might well be that when the plans of the many buildings overlying each other are finally elucidated, some of the structures may have more in common with the Bit Hilani of Syria.

We are left basically, therefore, with an assessment of the extent of Assyrian imports or of locally made pottery showing Assyrian influence. The tomb of Adoni-Nur is the touch-stone for this period, particularly as a conical carnelian seal showing a deity standing in a crescent, wearing a long garment and with the typical Assyrian heavy beard was one of the finds. The ware of the pottery from this tomb was of very high quality and could be compared with similar groups from Samaria, Tawilan and Buseirah. A close study of the pottery from these two latter sites shows that there is very little pottery that can be said categorically to be an Assyrian import. A most interesting find, however, at Buseirah was two sherds from different vessels bearing the impressed stamp of a cow and calf motif, which is well known in Assyrian art. The ware was of very high quality and almost certainly was one of the few imported. A drawing of them appeared in *Levant* VII, p. 14, FIGS 8, 9 and 10.

A distinctive characteristic of neo-Assyrian household ware is a thumb impressed or dimpled effect on utensils, particularly on bowls. This type has been found both at Buseirah and at Tawilan and an example is shown in FIG. 3(d). Bowls with rounded bases are also a common Assyrian type and compare with bowls from Period VII at Samaria, which followed the destruction there in 722 BC. Similar bowls have been found at Umm el Biyara, Tawilan and Buseirah (FIGS 4 & 5). The bi-chrome and band painted pottery, which occurs on so

many sites in Ammon, Moab and Edom and is to be found occasionally in the Jordan Valley, seems to be indigenous, though it is important to point out that at Buseirah this pottery only occurs in the neo-Assyrian period, a fact which has just come to light in the most recent excavations.

Small finds, other than pottery, have been surprisingly few on the three sites excavated by the writer, but three should be mentioned. On Umm el Biyara a cosmetic palette²⁵ (FIG. 3b) was found in a stratified level of the 7th century BC. Other examples have been found in Transjordan. The claim for an Assyrian origin is based on two facts: the presence of some Assyrian decorative details and, above all, on the number of these objects found in Mesopotamia.

From Tawilan, in a very burnt pit within an Iron Age II (7th century BC) room came an ivory animal (FIG. 3C), probably used as a top for a box and similar to other representations of such a beast elsewhere in the neo-Assyrian empire.

The third object, illustrated in FIG. 3a, was found on a beaten earth floor in one of the simple houses which covered the terrace between the casemate town wall and the monumental buildings on the 'Acropolis' at Buseirah. It is a winged bird of prey carved from the upper part of a *Tridacna Squamosa*. The use of these shells for decorative purposes is known in many places in the Near East in the 7th century BC. Whether they are of Egyptian, Syro- or Cypro-Phoenician or Greek workmanship is not pertinent. Like the double faced sculptured heads found in a drain on the Citadel in Amman²⁶, which have similarities in Nimrud, particularly with the famous lady at the window²⁷, their importance is that they are often to be found on sites where the neo-Assyrians were in direct control, or exercised authority either through vassal kings or treaty arrangements.

As is obvious from this short survey, the extant evidence for a direct and definite neo-Assyrian influence on the territory east of the River Jordan is hardly overwhelming: there is some in the monumental architecture, in the establishment of defensive posts against incursions by thrusting nomadic Eastern Arab tribes or uprisings from conquered peoples to the west and in the making of pottery. The excellence of some of the finer wares could well be the result of potters being imported from elsewhere, and it is in this sphere that the neo-Assyrians made their greatest contribution to the culture of Transjordan.

²³ G. Turner: *The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces: Iraq*, xxxii, Pt 2 (1970), 177-214.

²⁴ G. Turner: *The Palace and Bâtiment aux Ivoires at Arslan Tash: Iraq*, xxx, Pt 1 (1968), 62-69.

²⁵ C.-M. Bennett: *op. cit. Antiquity*.

²⁶ See note 14 and P. Bordreuil 'Inscriptions des Têtes à Double Face' in the same volume.

²⁷ M. E. L. Mallowan: *Nimrud and its Remains*, II, p. 513, 429 ND 316 (B).