

## Jordan between Mesopotamia and Egypt in the Bronze and Iron Ages

### Preliminary Remarks

Jordan lies at the southeastern extreme of the fertile crescent at the edge of the land that is sufficiently watered for dry farming. It lies in the land bridge between Asia and Africa, between Mesopotamia and Egypt where the two high civilizations flourished in the third to first millennia BC; but it is askew of the route between the two, the main traffic passed on the coastal road through Palestine to the west (the early importance of this route may perhaps be seen already from the Early Bronze Age I period in tombs at 'Ayn Asāwir, with imports from both Egypt and the Upper Euphrates region, see Yannai and Braun 2001). It was separated from Jordan by the central range in Palestine. Only when the highway later called "The King's Highway" and "*Via Nova Traiana*" was created has there been an appreciable traffic through Jordan, probably after the camel had been domesticated for transport (Retsö 1991). But of course there were gateways to Jordan: From Damascus there must have been a gateway rather early, finds at Tall al-Fukhār from the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age point to this, and this gateway became all important in the Iron Age, when the Assyrian Empire conquered the Levant. From the south there must have been a caravan routes that may be seen, for example, from the Midianite pottery found at 'Ammān (Parr 1988). From the west Pella was the gateway to the markets at least from the Middle Bronze Age and in the Late Bronze Age, and also later Tall Dayr 'Allā has been a gateway. There must have also been a gateway from the southwest through Wādī as-Sirhān, although in our period not earlier than the first millennium BC (Parr 1988: 83).

It is always a difficult and delicate task to assess the foreign influence on a culture. This is because every time we try to assess the origin of a component in an institution, whether cultural, political or economic, we face a choice. It could be an indigenous development or it could be diffusion from outside, or it could be implementation by foreign rulers or perhaps even immigration. This will have to be decided in every single case and I do

not think it is possible to set up rules about it. The important thing to assess is not so much the individual artefacts or classes of artefacts that have come into Jordan from these gateways, e.g. Mycenaean pottery did not entail Aegean influence in Jordan, even if artefacts may be an indication of a trade pattern. No, the important thing is the influence on the economic, political and cultural institutions. Finally it should be pointed out that one of the difficulties is that whereas the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations were already literate from the middle of the fourth millennium BC, Jordan did not become truly literate before the first millennium BC, despite some attempts like the Dayr 'Allā tablets and the occasional evidence of Egyptian and/or cuneiform texts in the second millennium BC. This circumstance makes the discussion lopsided in favour of certain periods like the period of the Egyptian and the Assyrian empires when Jordan was under direct foreign rule and consequently literate.

Given these preliminary remarks, I shall try to give some examples, of course not being exhaustive in my analysis.

### Early Bronze Age I

Jordan was a village culture in the Chalcolithic Age. After a settlement crisis, this did not change appreciably in the Early Bronze Age I period (beginning ca. 3500 BC). The period was marked by a great number of open villages, which at the end of the period — in another settlement crises — shrank to a fraction of their former size or were abandoned, while the population became pastoralists or migrants (Strange 2000a: 68 with references; for the settlement pattern see Joffe 1993: 41-61 with map).

It is doubtful if Egyptian influence, which in this period was prominent in southern Palestine, did extend to Jordan. Even though some Egyptian palettes were found at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Schaub and Rast 1989: 452-456, Fig. 261), this may only be an indication of trade in curios, while the Egyptian military penetration proposed by Yadin (1955) based on the similarity of a kite-like depiction

of a structure above the right figure on the lower panel on the reverse of Narmer's palette seems dubious, although it is of course possible. However this, if real, is likely to have been only a demonstration of force without any great consequences. So I hesitate to see any Egyptian influence on Jordan at this early period, while on the other hand Mesopotamia could have had no more than indirect influence. The possible immigration of the people characterized by the Esdraelon Ware came from Anatolia and not Mesopotamia (Hennessy 1967: 35-46; for Esdraelon Ware in Northern Jordan see Kamlah 2000: 96-98); and I have not been able to find any other influence from the north.

### Early Bronze Age II-III

When society recovered after an abatement at the end of the Early Bronze Age I period (about 2900 BC), it was on a smaller scale. There were fewer settlements, and they were smaller, but many of them were now walled and the southern Levant, including Jordan, became urbanized (Joffe 1993: 64-79) and probably organized into a system of city-states (Strange 2000a: 68-69). It has been much discussed whether this development was an indigenous process (Finkelstein 1995; Gophna 1995: 274-275), or whether it was diffusion from abroad. Though Egypt has been proposed as the origin because of its earlier domination over the southern part of Palestine (Kempinski and Gilead 1991: 189), a much stronger case can in my opinion be made for Mesopotamia via North Syria, because Tall Jāwā in northern Jordan was built already at the end of the Early Bronze Age I period, and because there are several similarities between sites in North Syria and Tall Jāwā which cannot be fortuitous (McClellan and Porter 1995). This development then probably spread at the beginning of Early Bronze Age II to the rest of Jordan. There is not yet sufficient material to make a map of the city-states, but some settlements are obvious candidates for capitals in a city-state, e.g. Tall al-Fukhār/ Khirbat az-Zayraqūn which I regard as one city (cf. Kamlah 2000: 191), Irbid in the north, Pella in the Jordan Valley, Umm ad-Danānir/ al-Quşayr in Central Jordan, Bāb adh-Dhrā' in the Lisān, just to mention a few.

Later in the Early Bronze Age, it is not possible to detect any influence whether from Egypt or from Mesopotamia. Egypt seems to have lost interest in the southern Levant from the beginning of the Early Bronze Age II and concentrated its efforts on Byblos further north, while direct access from Mesopotamia was blocked by the strong state of Ebla in northern Syria.

### Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Period

By the very nature of this period, a period of decline and collapse in the Near East, as observed in Egypt, in Palestine and to a certain degree also in Syria, we should not expect any influence from either Egypt or Mesopotamia.

### Middle Bronze Age

When urban society recovered after 2000 BC, it was again probably by diffusion from the north as may be seen for example from finds at Tall al-Fukhār, especially a very early unpolished carinated bowl (Strange 1997: 402; McGovern 1997: 421). The influence did not come directly from Mesopotamia but rather from northwestern Syria, and the north of Jordan was henceforth tied to the north. In Central Jordan the decisive factor was Egypt where the XII and XIII Dynasties sought to dominate the Levant, as may be seen in the so-called Execration Texts from between ca. 1850-1750 BC (Redford 1993: 87-93; Kitchen 1992: 21-23), where a number of names from Jordan ranging from the north of the Yarmūk to the south of Wādī al-Ḥasā are attested (see map in Kitchen 1992: 22). The later part of the Middle Bronze Age was characterized by the Hyksos Period, when parts of the Delta and probably all southern Palestine may have been ruled from Avaris (Bietak 1997; Oren 1997a; 1997b; but see Redford 1997: 33 note 247 and Ryholt 1997: 103), and when there were close trade relations with Jordan (McGovern 2000: 70-82 and Tine Bagh *apud* McGovern 2000: 54-64). The main gateway for trade was Pella, which was in the Middle Bronze Age an important centre in a network of trade routes, and where the magnificent ivory-inlaid box — whose lid is a symbol for this congress — was found (if this box is not later, from the Late Bronze Age, see best Knapp 1993: 24-28, 85-88). The box is in Egyptian style with Egyptian style decorations, but locally made and shows how strong at least the artistic influence was. Otherwise Jordan mostly seems to have stayed in the Syrian cultural sphere.

### Intermediate Middle Bronze-Late Bronze Period

The Middle Bronze Age ended in a prolonged decline with the destruction of cities. There was, however, continuity over the period to the Late Bronze Age (Strange 2001: 319-320); as seen from Chocolate-on-White ware, manufactured probably near Katārat as-Samra and/or in southern Lebanon near Mount Hermon. The ware may be considered a "leitfossil" for this period, it originated in the Middle Bronze Age and continued into the Late Bronze Age (Strange 2001: 331; Fischer 1999: 17-20). As this period was characterized by turbulence and decline we cannot expect to find any real influence from abroad.

### Late Bronze Age

In this period, as we know from epigraphic material, Jordan was part of the Egyptian empire in the New Kingdom (Kitchen 1992: 23-29). It is to my mind best to define the Late Bronze Age in Jordan as coinciding with Egyptian domination. I find it safest to date the Egyptian empire in Asia according to the low chronology of Kitchen and let it begin in 1457 when Tuthmosis took control of Palestine. This would give a date for the Late Bronze Age from ca.

1450 to ca. 1150 BC (Strange 2001: 320-321).

In this period Jordan was part of the Levantine-Eastern Mediterranean koine and as such open to influence from many quarters. It is accordingly difficult to assess the degree of Egyptian domination; the main interest of the Egyptian kings was obviously to keep the main routes open which is perhaps indicated already under Tuthmosis III in his great list at Karnak, where, at least according to Donald Redford (Redford 1982) and supported by Kenneth Kitchen (Kitchen 1992: 25), the itinerary in Jordan goes from the north of the Yarmūk River to al-Karak along the later "King's Highway". Also the military expeditions of Sethos I and Ramesses II show this: Sethos erected a stele at Tall ash-Shihāb on the River Yarmūk, and Ramesses at Shaykh Sa'āda, ca. 30km northwest of Dar'ā, showing the need to keep the routes to the north open (Strange 2001: 323). The other purpose was of course the economic exploitation of the land (see however Bienkowski 1989: 60), this was done by a network of routes which can be reconstructed with some confidence. The main gateway was Pella, from where the goods were transported via Baysān, Megiddo and Tall Nā'mi or Tall Abū Ḥawām or 'Akkā on the Mediterranean coast and from these places further by ship. From Pella there was a route to Tall as-Sa'idiyya and Tall Dayr 'Allā and 'Ammān, and from there to Saḥāb or Mādabā; or there was a route to the north to Irbid and from there to Tall al-Fukhār and further to the east (Strange 2001: 339-340). The goods exported were wine and oil, and possibly grain and cattle (Strange 2001: 340), and then probably the Egyptian army also took prisoners and brought them to Egypt as forced labour (Redford 1993: 168-169).

It is on the other hand difficult to determine how great the impact of the Egyptian rule was. Some impact can be seen in architecture where we find probable Egyptian "governors' residences" e.g. at Pella and Tall as-Sa'idiyya, while the palace at Tall al-Fukhār cannot be classified as such (Strange 2001: 336-338). Also a number of artefacts of Egyptian origin or in Egyptian style have been found, such as ivory work, bronze work, stone objects, sculpture, scarabs (Strange 2001: 328-331) and faience (Strange 2001: 335-336). Of course there were also lots of imports from other parts of the world, Mesopotamia, Arabia and the Aegean. Jordanian sculpture is another most important class, as its nature may point to an Egyptian origin of the kingdoms of Moab and Ammon from the Intermediate Bronze-Iron Age and the Iron Age respectively. As for religion it is premature to speak of an Egyptian influence, more finds are needed to determine this factor.

One further important aspect must be mentioned, which is the Egyptian lack of interest in Jordan south of Wādī al-Ḥasā, where the country was inhabited by nomadic tribes.

### Intermediate Bronze-Iron Age

Bronze Age society collapsed when the Egyptians left Jordan, first the highlands and then later the northern part of the Jordan Valley, where the Egyptian influence lingered on until perhaps the 10th century BC (Strange 2000b: 1573-1574). Then most of the cities in Jordan were replaced by a great number of open villages. As stated above, sculpture is the most interesting class of artefacts from the Late Bronze Age showing Egyptian influence; the most important artefact is of course the Bālū'a relief that should be dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age or a little later. I mention it here because it has some bearing on the date of the emergence of Moab, see further below. In this connection it is perhaps significant that Moab is mentioned already in Ramesside texts (Kitchen 1992: 26-29).

### Iron Age II A-B

The first part of this period is characterized by the flourishing of the two kingdoms Ammon and Moab, while the great powers, Egypt and Assyria, were absent from the scene. Egypt tried in these years to regain its suzerainty over Palestine, but as may be seen from the Sheshonq inscription, only the old gateway to Jordan, Wādī az-Zarqā' — in case the town Mahanajim lying some 12km east of the River Jordan — was affected in a feeble demonstration of force. Otherwise Jordan was free from direct Egyptian interference, and it is significant that although there had been an Egyptian outpost in Timna on the western side of Wādī 'Arabah in the XIX and XX Dynasty, there was no exploitation of the copper ores in Wādī Faynān east of Wādī 'Arabah, and the mines at Timna were even abandoned long before this period.

On the other hand, I think that the very idea of kingdoms in the Iron Age was due to diffusion from Egypt, if not direct Egyptian influence at a very early stage. I have mentioned above how the Egyptians had organized the trade pattern in the Late Bronze Age, and how the Egyptian military occupation from the Ramesside period persevered at least in the northern Jordan Valley during at least part of the Intermediate Bronze Age-Iron Age period. Here the Bālū'a relief has a great importance, showing perhaps that the kingdom of Moab existed already at the very end of the Late Bronze Age. The relief shows a Shasu-king having his investiture from a god, probably Kemosh, with a goddess, probably Astarte, standing behind him. The figures are dressed in Egyptian clothes from the latter part of the New Kingdom, and the whole investiture scene is Egyptian. The relief is executed by an artist, who used Egyptian iconography, but was himself not an Egyptian to judge from the complete incomprehensible attempt at an Hieroglyphic inscription above. But whatever the date (Late Bronze or 10th century BC), the relief clearly shows that the Moabite kingdom was inspired from Egypt (for the relief see Strange

2001: 29-31; for the date see also Kitchen 1992: 29).

Additionally, the many portraits of kings found especially in 'Ammān might point in the direction of Egyptian influence on the political structure, because they belong to "a local school which has incorporated Egyptian elements to varying degrees" (Dornemann 1983: 154; Bienkowski 1996: 38-51). This does not prove anything in itself but it might corroborate the Bālū'a stele. It seems then, that although Egypt was not directly acting in Transjordan, it nevertheless had a considerable impact by diffusion.

The whole picture, however, changes fundamentally when Tiglat-Pileser and his successors conquered Syria and Palestine. To understand what happened, we must also go to Syria and Western Palestine. In the second half of the eighth century Tiglat-Pileser III and Sargon II conquered the southern Levant. In 738 a rising led by Azrijaou of Jaudi was suppressed, and the kings of Ḥamath, Damascus and Israel were made tributaries (Pritchard 1955: 282-283; Otzen 1979: 253). In 734 Tiglat-Pileser subdued Gaza and made the city a vassal state, the king Hanun had gone to Egypt to get help, but he was brought back and reinstated on the throne (Pritchard 1955: 283-284; Otzen 1979: 255-256). This is probably due to the fact that Gaza was the terminal for the Arabian trade, and the Assyrians wanted to secure their trade interests (Tadmor 1966: 87-88). At the same time Ashkelon and Ashdod were made Assyrian vassals (Otzen 1979: 252), while Dor became an Assyrian province (Otzen 1979: 252-255), probably because this area and the town was under Israelite suzerainty and had no independent king who could act as a vassal. The same happened to Megiddo and Gilead the following year (Pritchard 1955: 283; Otzen 1979: 254), while the king of Israel (or the rump state Samaria) was replaced by a puppet king, and Damascus was made into an Assyrian province, probably to prevent rebellion (Pritchard 1955: 284; Otzen 1979: 254). After the death of Tiglat-Pileser there was a new rebellion, and Sargon made Israel into a province, while the Philistine city-states, and Judah, Ammon, Moab and Edom all continued to be vassal states (Pritchard 1955: 284-285; Otzen 1979: 257). Again there were rebellions in 720, 713, 705-701, but the *status quo* was retained.

It seems that Assyria had a strategic policy of keeping the periphery as vassal states and not provinces under direct rule, in the same manner as the Phoenician cities which had a special status (Pritchard 1955: 286-288; Otzen 1979: 258). Finally Esarhaddon conquered Egypt in 671 (Pritchard 1955: 291-294), but even then the states east and west of the Jordan River kept their half-independent status that ended in the later Babylonian conquests in 605 (cf. Otzen 1979: 258; Gitin 1998: 163).

The reason for this policy should be sought in Assyria's need for raw materials. In the same way as Phoenicia

which supplied Assyria with materials from the west (Frankenstein 1979: 269-273; Niemeyer 2000), so did the other states in the periphery of the empire, in the case of Edom most certainly copper (and wool). In this period the copper mines in Wādī Faynān and at Khirbat an-Nuḥās (meaning copper ruins) were exploited for the copper industry, and the largest slag mountains in the Levant were made; the copper/bronze industry was directed from Buṣayra/Bozra and Umm al-Biyāra/Petra (Hauptmann 1997: 310). The lands with their roads connecting Syria and these supplying states were secured by making them provinces whenever events showed that their kings could not be trusted.

From the texts we can see that Assyria exercised a great influence on Jordan in the years between Tiglat-Pileser and Esarhaddon. From the archaeological finds, however, it is much more difficult to see the influence. Crystal Bennett investigated the Assyrian influence in Jordan with the result that "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" (Bennett 1982: 187). Perhaps the big slag mountains in Wādī Faynān and Khirbat an-Nuḥās mentioned above are another archaeological evidence, although indirect, and the import of the Aramaic language as seen from the Bala'am inscription from Dayr 'Allā could be yet another evidence of Assyrian influence, although the inscription might be slightly earlier than the Assyrian conquest (for the date see Ibrahim and van der Kooij 1991: 27-28). And finally the thorough devastation with plunder and deportations in the northern provinces which have left their tell-tale archaeological marks, and which is also a kind of influence, as well as the later small agricultural settlements on the northern plateau mentioned at this conference by Roland Lamprichs and Katrin Bastert (see Lamprichs and Bastert in this volume).

### Iron Age IIC (Persian Period)

With the Babylonian conquest Jordan became part of the Babylonian empire. In this period Jordan was important at least in one respect: through the land went the important route from Babylon via Karan in northern Mesopotamia to Taymā' in Saudi Arabia where Nabonid resided. In this respect the relief found near aṭ-Ṭafila commemorating Nabonid is of great importance (Zayadine 1999). This must be the time when this route acquired the name "The King's Highway" (see however Oded 1970). Another, indirect, influence may be traced in the wine industry, apparently developed at this time to pay tribute to the Babylonian court, and from which the

building ruins on and around Tall al-'Umayrī were found (Herr 1995). But the Babylonian rule was too short to leave any traces in the material culture.

After Cyrus conquered Babylonia, the Persian Empire ruled Jordan (see Homès-Fredericq 1996 for a good summary of the archaeology of the period; for the geography see Lemaire 1990: 67-74; 1994). Politically Jordan was part of the V. satrapy, Abar-Nahara, divided into three or four provinces, Karnaim and Gilead under direct rule, Ammon governed by the Tobiads (mentioned in two Aramaic inscriptions in caves at 'Irāq al-Amīr, Birta, see Zayadine 1997: 177) and possibly Moab (Lemaire 1990: 67-88; 1994: 14). Edom apparently was a tribal area and was outside Persian control (Avi-Yonah 1966: 11-13, 26-27; Lemaire 1994: 14), although it seems that the Persian government had control of the King's Highway down to 'Aqaba (Graf 1993: 156-160). The copper mines in Wādī Faynān went out of use not to be exploited again until the Hellenistic period, and the main cities, Buṣayra, Ṭawilān and Umm al-Biyāra were abandoned (Hauptmann 1997: 310; Bienkowski 1992: 99-104). The general impression is that Jordan was outside the main interest of the Persian kings, and the satrapy was governed from Damascus. Nothing much is found to show the impact of the Persian culture, but one thing is very important indeed: the Persian government made Aramaic the administrative language and eventually made it into the language spoken by everybody. Also coinage must be seen as a Persian influence, setting new standards for commerce. At several places in northern and central Jordan (Tall as-Sa'idiyya, Tall al-Mazār, Tall al-Fukhār and Khirbat Mughayar), a combination of silos and possibly a public building were found. Whether these installations were for military or civilian, fiscal, purposes, they are evidence for a firm and detailed government administration and planning. In the material culture we find some influence in pottery forms, glyptics, bronze-work and burial practice (Homès-Fredericq 1986: 174-177; 1996: 70-76; Strange 1997: 403; Weippert 1988: 705-718).

With the conquest of Alexander in 332 BC and the ensuing Hellenistic-Roman period, Jordan was transformed by influences from the west, and Mesopotamia or Egypt did not have real impact on Jordan again until the Muslim Conquest.

This short overview of the influence from Mesopotamia and Egypt has first shown that the urbanism and the organisation of Jordan into city states probably originated in Northern Mesopotamia, but as its main result it has shown that Jordan was of interest to the great powers only in two respects, when they needed to dominate it to secure trade routes or areas nearby, and as a supplier of materials, most notably in the period of the New Kingdom in Egypt in the Late Bronze Age and of the Assyrian Empire in the Iron Age.

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