

From Burckhardt to Bell What Does the 19th Century AD Tell Us About the Iron Age?

In this paper, a comparison is made between the events of two historical periods that saw considerable changes in the Levant: the 19th century AD, and the Late Iron Age, the time of the arrival of the Neo-Assyrian empire in southern Jordan. Comparing these two periods may provide us with an insight, and possibly a framework, for the political and economic changes of the Late Iron Age.

Two travelers: John Lewis Burckhardt, who traveled in the Levant around 1812, and Gertrude Bell, who was there almost a century later, left accounts of the beginning and the end of that century. They had much in common. Both were experienced travelers in the Near East, both spoke fluent Arabic, and both were deeply interested in, and knowledgeable about, the situation of the Bedouin tribes, as well as their ways of living. For a large part they traveled in the same regions, and therefore comparing their notes is highly enlightening.

In the days of Burckhardt the whole area of present-day Jordan, like most of the rest Bilād ash-Shām, was inhabited by Arab Bedouin tribes (FIG. 1). The Banī Ṣakhr were continual inhabitants of the Ḥawrān, while the ‘Anaza used it as their summer quarters (Burckhardt 1822: 301). The ‘Adwān had been masters of al-Balqā’ until shortly, (Burckhardt 1822: 354), but now they had been severely weakened by inroads from the Banī Ṣakhr, who were in the process of extending their territory to the north. Now the ‘Adwān had been driven into the ‘Ajlūn mountains (Burckhardt 1822: 354-5, 368). In 1812, the year in which Burckhardt traveled down south, there was a war between the Banī Ṣakhr, the ‘Adwān and the Ruwala (a tribe of the ‘Anaza), in which the Turkish government was also involved. The center of the skirmishes lay near Wādī az-Zarqā’ (Burckhardt 1822: 355).

In the south, al-Karak sat between the territories of the Banī Ṣakhr to the north, and the Ḥuwayṭāt to the south (Burckhardt 1822: 389). In the Iron Age land of Edom and the southern part of Moab, the Ḥuwayṭāt were the undisputed masters of the area.

There were a number of smaller tribes, who were sub-

jected to the main tribes, and usually paid protection (*khāwa*) to them. These were pastoralists, sometimes breeders of camels and horses, and some had become full-time peasants (Burckhardt 1822: 416).

There were no bridges across the River Jordan, so that contact between east and west was possible only in summer, when the water was relatively low, and even then it was considered dangerous (Seetzen 1854: 31, 32, 374).

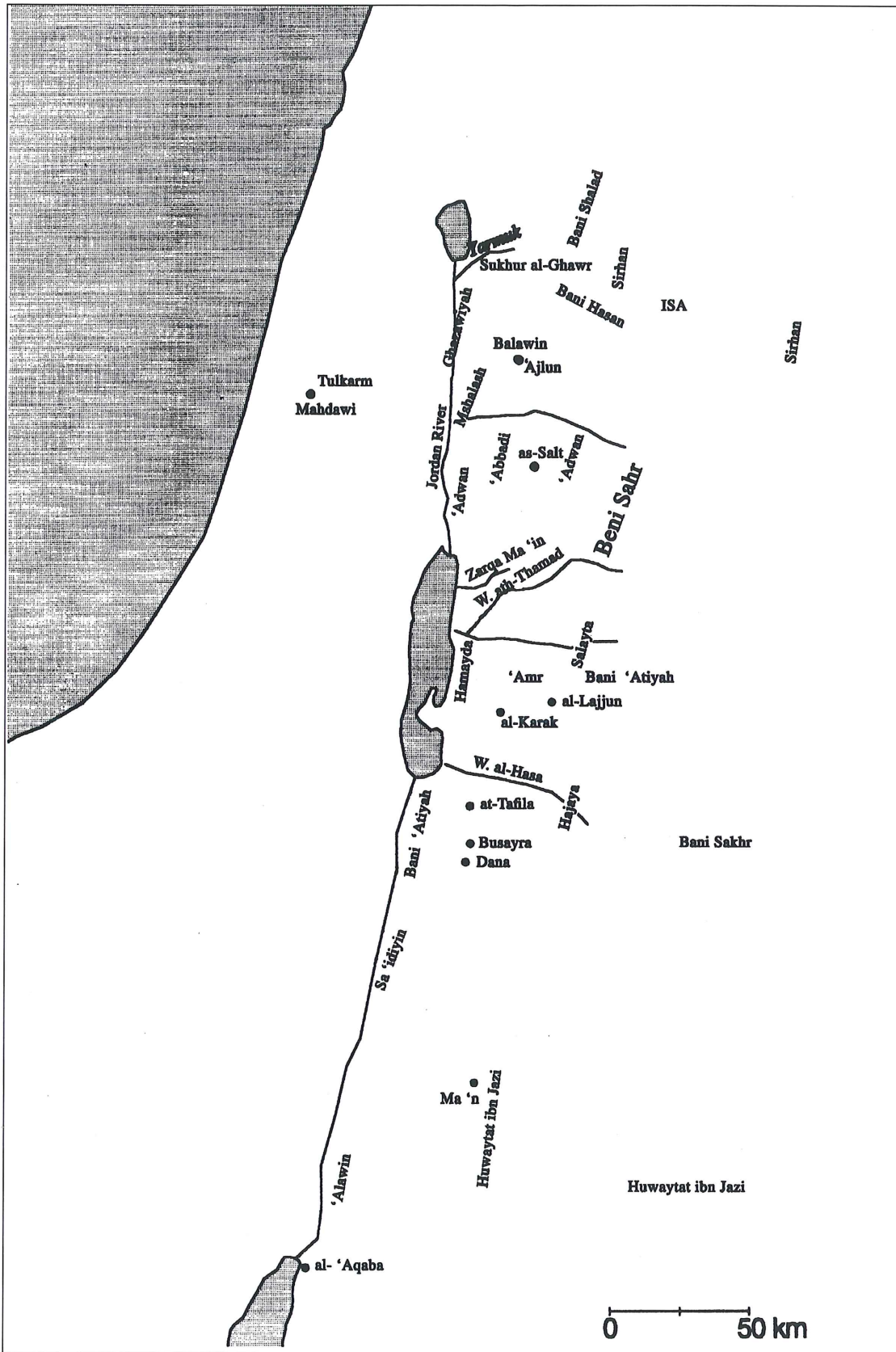
The basis of any tribal society, is obviously the tribe. The keyword here is “loyalty”. Loyalty to the tribe comes immediately after loyalty to one’s own person and one’s immediate family circle. This system pervaded the whole of the Arabian society in the 18th and 19th centuries, as is shown by Burckhardt in his *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahabys* (1830). He has recorded the Bedouin law system, and shows the implications of this system.

Every tribe has a head *shaykh*, whose authority is based on his personal character and influence. He cannot order or command, only advise. Law and judgment is passed by the *shaykh*, but he has no power to enforce a sentence. Tribes consist of subtribes and families, all of which have their chiefs, and together these form the council, in which matters of general importance are discussed.

“The sheikh of Kerak has no greater authority over his people than a Bedouin sheikh has over his tribe. In everything which regards the Bedouins, he governs with the advice of the most respectable individuals of the town; and his power is not absolute enough to deprive the meanest of his subjects of his property” (Burckhardt 1822: 382). The office of *shaykh* is hereditary within the family.

Cases that could not be solved by the tribes or families themselves, or intertribal affairs were brought before the *quḍāh* (sing. *qāḍī*), independent judges who were esteemed for their insight and wisdom.

A crime committed by or against one member of a tribe, was considered to have been committed by or against the whole tribe. Likewise, a bond with one member or family extended to the whole tribe. This made the system of *rufaḳā’* (sing. *rafiq*), guides/protectors, ef-



1. Map of Arab Bedouin tribes settlements.

fective: travelers had to ensure the protection of the tribe or tribes through whose territory they passed, by hiring a *raftiq*, a guide belonging to that tribe. The protection offered in this way by one tribe, usually extended to allied tribes as well.

This system of tribal loyalty did not end when nomadic ways of living were (partly) given up: Layne (1984: n. 10) has shown that even towards the end of the 20th century in the Jordan Valley, the settled 'Abbād Bedouin put their tribal name as 'place of birth' on official documents.

The tribe was therefore the most important unit, for each individual as well as within the higher levels of confederations and governments.

At the end of the 18th century the Ottoman government in the Levant was something of a lame duck. Everything south of the Ḥawrān was in fact Bedouin territory, virtually independent. Efforts of the Government to regain control in these areas had disastrous effects: in 1810 the government army had fought the Banī Ṣakhr, and lost.

The Bedouin had created their own society, with their own economy. They had towns, like as-Salt, Nāblus, al-Karak, and their own trade system between them.

As-Salt was the only inhabited place in al-Balqā' (Burckhardt 1822: 349, Lewis 1987: 23). It was governed by a coalition of tribes, and it was the political and economic center of the region. Only the Banī Ṣakhr had the power to extract *khāwa* from it. The economy consisted of agriculture, horticulture and trade, mainly with Jerusalem and Nāblus. Al-Karak had a comparable function on the plain of Moab (Burckhardt 1822: 377-391). It had a mixed population of Christians and Muslim tribes. Here also was agriculture and horticulture, controlled by the tribes and the town together. It was almost like an independent city-state. Al-Karak paid *khāwa* to the Ḥuwaytāt and to the Banī Ṣakhr.

There were several villages in Edom. Aṭ-Ṭafīla was one of the larger ones: 600 houses in Burckhardt's day (Burckhardt 1822: 403-406), of the Juwabir tribe, but controlled by the Ḥuwaytāt, whose *shaykh* had built a small "castle" there. Other villages were Buṣayra (50 houses) and Ḍānā, both Ḥamyda villages, and also under the control of the Ḥuwaytāt. Buṣayra also had a small fortress, built by the Ḥuwaytāt (Burckhardt 1822: 407). The villages were centers of agriculture and horticulture, under the control of the Ḥuwaytāt.

A main source of income for many tribes, directly or indirectly, was the annual *Ḥajj*. The two main *Ḥajj* routes, the one from Gaza through Sinai and the one from Damascus through Ammon and Moab, came together in al-'Aqaba. Much of the agricultural produce was meant for the *Ḥajj*, and was transported to trading points along both routes, like Gaza, Nakhil in the Sinai, and Ma'ān in Edom. Camels for the *Ḥajj* were bred by the Ḥuwaytāt, the 'Anaza and some other tribes. They were an important

source of income (Burckhardt 1830: 1-18). Until the beginning of the 19th century the 'Anaza were carriers of the *Ḥajj*, which meant that they "made yearly contracts with the Pasha for several thousand camels, by which they were considerable gainers...". Apart from that they extracted *khāwa* from the pilgrims, and occasionally plundered part of the *Ḥajj* (Burckhardt 1822: 309). On the whole their relations with the Turkish government in Damascus were relatively good.

In the past, wars had been fought between the different tribes for the right of protection of the route. By the beginning of the 19th century the situation had consolidated somewhat, and the "Ḥajj rights" divided between the different tribes: the 'Anaza protected and controlled the northern part of the Syrian *Ḥajj* (Burckhardt 1830: 1), the Ḥuwaytāt the southern part (Burckhardt 1822: 412-413), and the Ṭiyaha the Egyptian route (Oppenheim 1943: 147).

Several events in the first half of the 19th century made the government realize that they had to strengthen their grip on the empire, in order to survive. The conquest by Napoleon, the invasion of the Wahābi from the south, and the ensuing invasion by Muḥammad 'Alī and Ibrahim Pasha from Egypt, laid bare their military weakness and lack of control (Hourani 1991: 265; Lewis 1995: 308, 310). At the same time, trade relations with the West made them see their economic backwardness (Hourani 1991: 267).

A new administrative system was devised, followed by a reorganization of the empire, known as the *Tanzimat*. The often corrupt local rulers were replaced with civil servants, governors who were directly responsible to the Ottoman government. A new tax system was imposed (Hourani 1991: 272).

At first these measures had little effect. The Bedouin were too powerful, and too elusive, to be subdued. Over time however, the government managed to gain more control in the south, not so much by subduing the Bedouin tribes, but by integrating them in the administrative system (ao. Lewis 1987). At Bīr as-Sab' (Beersheba), already a natural gathering place for a number of Bedouin tribes because of its springs, the government created a tribal court, with tribal judges and recognizing tribal law (Morton 1934: 136-141; Marx 1967: 32; Gerber 1986).

The government realized that cultivated land made more money than pastoral land, and so they devised the "Land Laws" in 1858 (Hourani 1991: 287). The idea was simple: the leading tribes were given their territories in virtual ownership, in exchange for *mīrī*, taxes. The *shuyūkh* themselves were appointed tax collectors, which made them responsible for the procurement of the taxes, and at the same time gave them an opportunity to make a little on the side. The result was that the main tribes themselves started to encourage agriculture, and partly settled, or forced other tribes to either leave, or settle.

The *Hajj* route, its protection and provisions, remained in the hands of the Bedouin. The government made no attempts to take over the tasks of feeding, transporting and protecting the *Hajj* pilgrims. What they did do, however, was start to control the rights of the different tribes of protection, and the rights of providing camels and provision. While maintaining the status quo, they 'officially' turned the Bedouin into the guardians and providers of the *Hajj*.

The Ibn Jāzi, a *Huwaytāt* tribe, gained the right to protect the *Hajj* route between Ma'ān and Tabūk.

The 'Alawin, another *Huwaytāt* tribe, had protection right around al-'Aqaba.

The Bani Şakhr acquired the protection rights between Muzayrib and Ma'ān. With the coming of the *Hiĵāz* railway, they were paid for protecting the railway.

The *Ṭiyaha* of Sinai controlled part of the Egyptian *Hajj*, between Jabal Ḥuṣn and Nakhl, in exchange for taxing rights on the market in Nakhl (Oppenheim 1943: 147).

The *Şaqarāt* had the monopoly of transport for the *Hajj* between Gaza and Nakhl until the 20th century.

So when Bell traveled the region at the beginning of the 20th century, the situation had changed considerably since the time of Burckhardt. The area where the government was in control had moved south and east. The economy had changed as well: agriculture and horticulture had become much more widespread, and if the roaming Bedouin needed wheat, they usually bought it, instead of robbing it (Bell 1907: 40). The Jordan Valley, as well as the region of Moab and Ammon, was more cultivated than it had been before, and the cultivators were mostly Arab Bedouin who had settled. It could be crossed without particular danger, and there were bridges across the Jordan.

In 1867 the Turkish government had conquered as-Salt and defeated the 'Adwān. In 1893 they conquered al-Karak and occupied the south. The Bani Şakhr were expelled from 'Ajlūn. The area of as-Salt, always prosperous, was now firmly under the control of the Sultan, even though its inhabitants still considered themselves Arabs, and belonged to the same tribes that had reigned here a hundred years earlier (Bell 1907: 22).

Although *ghazū* and robbery were still common, and the main tribes: the 'Anaza, Bani Şakhr and *Huwaytāt* were still frequently at war with each other, the government now had the power to interfere, and to demand military service, horses and camels of the Bedouin in times of war (Bell 1907: 13, 32).

Along the Syrian *Hajj* route ran the new railway line, which made it easier for the Sultan to control the area down to Ma'ān, even if the Bedouin tribes were still paid to protect it.

Coalitions and territories had also changed. In Burckhardt's days, the *Huwaytāt* of the south, and the Bani Şakhr were deadly enemies. When Bell traveled through the country, to her disappointment she just missed a raid

against the Bani Ḥasan, allies of the 'Anaza, by a coalition of the same Bani Şakhr and the *Huwaytāt* (Bell 1907: 65-66). She found that there was a continuing struggle for power over the Syrian desert between the Bani Şakhr and the 'Anaza (1907: 24). The Bani Şakhr's summer quarters were in northern Moab (Bell 1927: 68), whereas in winter they roamed the desert down to below Bāyir (Bell 1927:326). The Balqā' was back in the power of the 'Adwān, whose main *shaykh* now had his headquarters in Ḥisbān (Bell 1907: 16). The 'Anaza camped on Jabal ad-Drūz (Bell 1927: 84). South of them and far to the east, the winter quarters of the *Huwaytāt* were found (Bell 1927: 329).

Still, even though they prospered, the Arab did not welcome their loss of independence: the stronger government levied taxes that were difficult to escape, and commandeered soldiers, camels and horses for the wars, without compensation.

Therefore, at the onset of the first world war the Europeans, the English especially, started negotiations with the main tribes, and found that it was not too difficult to win them over. Eventually the Ottoman army was beaten thanks to the Bedouin.

The Late Iron Age

In general we can say that, like in the 19th century AD, in the Late Iron Age society in southern Transjordan was largely tribal, in spite of the fact that Ammon, Moab and Edom are referred to as "kingdoms".

LaBianca and Younker have proposed a model for these "tribal kingdoms" (LaBianca 1999: 20-23), based on their reconstruction of Ammonite society. Some characteristics of this model are:

- Most people were range-tied shepherds or land-tied farmers, and the extent to which one or the other mode of living was pursued was dependent on local circumstances, and the availability of other possibilities, like for example involvement in trade. Different modes of living usually existed together, within one tribal unit.
- Tribal affiliations were based on a "flexible" line of claimed ancestors. Tribes could affiliate with others or change their affiliation, depending on circumstances. This made the forming and changing of coalitions or confederations very easy.
- Eventually this flexibility also facilitated the rise of kings, a supra-tribal layer of organization, without extinguishing the tribal order.
- The association of specific tribes with their territories was maintained.
- Tribal hinterlands were administrated from fortified towns.
- Most people lived in the rural hinterland, in direct relation to their food-procuring activities. Settlement patterns were fluid, quickly responding to circumstances of

climate, politics, or economy.

- The presence of heterarchical power structures, where several power centers could exist beside each other, each basing its power on a specific political resource, like a religious center, its location on a trade route, its function as a distribution center, etc.
- Overlapping territories. Overlapping of territories was not only possible, but necessary, as the different ways of life complemented each other. This could only work within the flexible tribal structure mentioned above, where different economic pursuits within one tribal or confederate unit were the normal way of life.

Mesha and the State of Moab

Our perception of Moabite society is largely shaped by the survival of one important monument: the Mesha inscription. There are different ways of reading the inscription (Dearman 1989; Steiner 2001). Clearly, King Mesha succeeded his father as king, and strived to turn Moab into a “real” kingdom: he built roads, cisterns, palaces, and expressed a responsibility towards all of the territory of Moab. Knauf (1992: 49) maintains that with Mesha, Moab became a real secondary state. Still, several aspects of the inscription itself suggest that the state of which Mesha was the leader, was largely tribal.

Mesha calls himself “King of Moab, the Daiboni”. It is usually assumed that “Daiboni” means “inhabitant of Dibon”, Dibon being the town that was later known by that name (now Dhibān). There are several earlier, Egyptian sources that have been interpreted as referring to the town of Dibon: The topographical list of Tuthmoses III (around 1450 BC) mentions *Tpn* which is interpreted as Dibon by several scholars (Kitchen 1992: 25, with references). The second is a topographical list by Ramses II in the temple at Luxor, mentioning *Tbn* with the determinative for town (*dmi*). The main drawback for both these identifications with Dibon is that there is no evidence of any Late Bronze Age settlement on the site of present-day Dhibān. This fact has been a source for much discussion and disagreement among scholars (Kitchen 1992: 28). Dearman suggests, referring to the Mesha Inscription itself, that this may mean that Dibon was a district or a region, rather than a town (Dearman 1989: 172). This is impossible, however, because of the “town” determinative in the Ramses II list. The problem has not been solved, and scholars seem content to leave it at that, until new evidence comes to light (MacDonald 2000: 84).

There is, however, another possibility. Dearman introduces his historical reconstruction as follows: “Mesha’s self-identification as Dibonite king of Moab is unusual. He may have inherited the title and the city from his father; perhaps he was the leading family in the area of Dhiban”.

However, if that were the case, why did he not refer to

that leading family? On the other hand, if we assume that “Daiboni” does not refer to a town or a region, but to a TRIBE, his self-identification as “Mesha, king of Moab, the Daiboni”, makes perfect sense. “The town of *tbm*” in Ramses II’s inscription could refer to any Daiboni stronghold, anywhere in Moab, not necessarily on or even near the site of Dhibān, given the constant changing of tribal territories.

In fact, none of the references to Dibon in the inscription specifically refer to a town, and the place that is honored especially, in which walls, gates, a temple and a palace are built, is Qarḥoh, not Dibon. This discrepancy has usually been solved by scholars by suggesting that Qarḥoh was the royal quarter, the acropolis of Dibon (Dearman 1989: 171, with references). This is not suggested by the text, however. In fact, every mention of Dibon in the text may just as well refer to the name of a tribe, and if we had not known the name Dibon to be that of a town, it might easily have been interpreted as a tribe.

If we look at the Mesha Inscription as a whole, it is an account of the territorial struggle between the Israelites and the Moabites, over the territory north of the Arnon. A number of towns or strongholds have been built in the region, both by the king of Israel, and by Mesha himself. Ataroth, Nebo and Yahas were Israelite strongholds, Mesha built Baalmaon, Qarḥoh, and rebuilt Beser and Bet Bamot.

In the same way the 19th century AD tribes had their towns: al-Karak and as-Salt; the Ḥuwayṭāt built and strengthened villages, and built “castles” in villages in Edom, partly in order to control the “agrarian” tribal population and their products, and also as bases from which to defend their territory.

In order to take Nebo, one of the Israelite strongholds, Mesha “went at night, and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon”. This sounds remarkably like a Bedouin *ghazū*, where a party set out and traveled during the night in order to raid its victims at dawn.

When he went to conquer Yahas, another of the Israelite strongholds, Mesha “took from Moab two hundred men, its entire unit”. This is a somewhat tenuous translation of the words “*kl rsh*” literally meaning “all its heads”. According to the translators, the translation “all its leaders” is impossible, because the suffix of the following verb, relating to these “heads” is singular, not plural. However, elsewhere in the inscription, the word “*as*”, men, is referred to as single, not plural (line 10, the “men from Gad”), so “two hundred men, all its heads”, is perfectly possible in this case, provided the next verb refers to “*as*”, and this makes, in my opinion, a much more convincing translation. The term “heads”, or leaders, suggests the existence of a tribal confederation, and therefore a largely tribal society.

Yahas was conquered, and occupied by the tribe of

Daibon.

Line 28: “I built Bezer — because it was in ruins — with fifty men from Daibon, for all Daibon was obedient...”, or, literally, “all Daibon listened”. The root here is *sm*’. Why would Mesha specifically mention the fact that “all Daibon listened”? It can only have meant that the Daiboni were not his legal subjects, that this was a voluntary act on their side. Mesha was a tribal leader, the head of the Daiboni tribe, whose men were independent, and had the right to consider and refuse his call.

If Mesha built Qarḥoh as his capital, it could well be called Qarḥoh of the Daiboni, which might easily turn into Daibon later, just like Rabbath Ammon, Rabbath of the Ammonites, turned into Ammon.

The name Ammon was probably also originally the name of a tribe, not of a region: the kings of Ammon call themselves “king of the Bene Ammon”. This seems suggestive of a tribal affiliation, just like the Banī Ṣakhr, or the Banī Hilāl. Later, in Assyrian sources, Ammon is called Bit Ammon: the house of Ammon, also suggestive of a tribal affiliation, like the Bit Umri in Assyrian sources and in the Mesha stele, or the Bit David from Tel Dan (Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001).

In this sense, the term “tribal kingdom” seems appropriate for both Moab and Ammon, certainly to the extent that we are talking about a tribal community, with a supra-tribal and supra-territorial layer of “kings”.

Edom

Edom is often seen as the least developed region at the time of the beginning of the Pax Assyriaca. It is unlikely that it was a kingdom at all before the late eighth century BC (Bienkowski 1992: 8).

It has been suggested recently that the development of sedentarization, and of a state structure, was initially triggered by the development of copper industry in the Wādī Fīdān. The earliest exploitation of copper in the Wādī Faynān area, after the Early Bronze Age, has now been radiocarbon dated between the 12th and 10th centuries BC (Levy, Adams and Shafiq 1999). No settlements have been associated with this industry, and it is likely that nomadic, non-settled tribes were involved. In the Wādī Fīdān, a number of tenth to ninth century burials were found, with beads, textiles, leather, metal jewelry, and wooden bowls, but no associated pottery, and no settlement connected to them.

The earliest Iron Age settlements in Edom so far discovered are at Khirbat an-Nuḥās and Barqa al-Ḥaṭīya in the Faynān area, both radiocarbon dated to the ninth century BC, and perhaps to be interpreted as small mining settlements (Fritz 1994; 1996; Levy, Adams and Shafiq 1999: 303-304).

The development of Edom into a supra-tribal society seems to have taken place at the end of the eighth century

(Bienkowski 1992: 8). That this happened at the time of the Pax Assyriaca is probably no coincidence. Copper production increased greatly (Hauptmann 2000: 97 Table 9, 99, 155, 189-190). It has been suggested (Knauf-Belleri 1995: 113) that the Assyrians were involved in this copper production, and stimulated, if not organized it. It is possible that the Assyrians demanded a tribute in copper. The tribute lists do not mention copper in relation to Edom, but they may have only mentioned “whatever was precious enough for a royal treasure...” (Annals of Shalmaneser III, Pritchard 1969 = *ANET* 283). Copper was not very prestigious. It had been, and still is, used as a *valuta*, a means of payment, like silver and gold, but its value at the best of times compared to silver had been 1:80 in the Ur III period, and in Neo-Babylonian times it was 1:190 (Röllig 1980: 347). It was therefore not very valuable, although it is quite possible that the weights in silver and gold, demanded as tribute by the Assyrian kings, were actually paid in copper by the Edomites according to the current rate. Another possibility is that copper was produced as a trade commodity in the Arabian trade (see below).

There is, in any case, no trace of archaeological evidence in the form of pottery, other artifacts, or architecture in the copper-producing centers that point to Assyrian involvement in the copper production at any point. This makes direct Assyrian involvement in the development of the copper industry unlikely. Still, demands were made on the resources of the Edomite territory, and the largely mobile, flexible tribal population of Edom adapted itself to the new situation. Copper was already being produced on a small scale, possibly by partly nomadic groups. Expanding this production to an industrial scale, a scale that would — directly or indirectly — meet the Assyrian tribute demands, required considerable organization, but we should not underestimate the capacities of a tribal and mobile population for organization when the need arises. Keeping this in mind, it may be significant that Edom’s capital Buṣayra was located close to the Faynān area.

Arabian Trade

The Arabian trade in luxury goods such as frankincense was certainly operating by the eighth century BC, and possibly earlier (Singer-Avitz 1999; Daviau and Steiner 2000: 14). The ultimate termini of this trade were in Mesopotamia, Damascus and Gaza. Although its Iron Age routes are far from certain, it seems likely that one route went through Edom (specifically Buṣayra) via the Beer-sheba Valley to Gaza (Singer-Avitz 1999: 59, Fig. 16).

It has been suggested that in the battle of Qarqar (853 BC) Gindibu of the Arabs joined forces with Israel and Damascus against Shalmaneser III, mainly out fear of disruption of their coinciding trade interests (*ANET* 279;

Eph'al 1982: 76). The 1000 camels mentioned by the Monolith inscription suggest a considerable force. At the very least they point to the fact that Gindibu and his Arabs raised and kept camels for their livelihood, which makes it almost certain that they were involved in the trade.

Adadnirari III's account of his expedition to Palestine in 796 BC (*ANET* 281) mentions, in a row, Tyre, Sidon, Israel, Edom, and Philistia. This is suggestive of a trade route from Arabia to the coast, which then went through the Sinai and Negeb, through Philistia and Israel to Tyre and Sidon. In 738 BC sites on both sides are mentioned, like Ashkelon and Gaza, but also Ammon, Moab and Edom, Judah and Samaria, and further north Damascus and Byblos, making clear that by this time Assyria had interests east of the Dead Sea, so it is likely that there was a trade route through this area.

Edom's second main asset was its position on the Arabian trade route, and consequently, involvement in the Arabian trade. The nature of the tribute paid by Edom demonstrates this involvement, but again there is no evidence of permanent Assyrian presence in the area and it is unlikely that Assyria mingled in the internal affairs of the region. It is possible that the copper industry was enhanced in order to stimulate the Assyrian trade.

Therefore, both the development of the copper industry, and the involvement in the organization of the Arabian trade, were probably indigenous, Edomite developments.

Archaeological arguments for trade in the period before the Assyrians can be found in the Egyptian objects and influences that entered Jordan: a faience chalice dated to the 10th or 11th century was found at Buşayra (Milward 1975), and seal-stones often displayed Egyptian or Egyptian-inspired devices, alongside with Syrian or Mesopotamian-related motives. The inscription on the incense altar found at Mudaynah on Wādī ath-Thamad proves that incense was known and used in those days. This incense must have been imported via the same trade route (Daviau and Steiner 2000; Dion and Daviau 2000), in the eighth century.

Nomads are notorious in archaeology for leaving no traces of their presence (Finkelstein 1995: 23-30). The only traces we have are texts, if there are any, and the traces that may have been left by the reactions of others to their presence. In the Neo Assyrian texts Arabs are mostly mentioned as paying tribute. It is the nature of the tribute that indicates their role in the trade: gold, silver, camels, and spices.

Tiglath-Pileser III tells us in one of the numerous accounts of his victories (*ANET* 283), that the inhabitants of Masa, Tema, Saba, Haiappa, "whose countries are far away", all brought tribute: camels and all sorts of spices. Presumably all these tribes lived in or near North Arabia (Eph'al 1982: 88-89), and it seems probable that they

were involved in the Arabian trade. The tribute or gifts mentioned may have functioned as a means to secure the continuation of this trade, conducted by these tribes, either given freely, or demanded as tribute by Tiglath-Pileser.

One letter, dated in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, and referring to a road station near Ḥums, shows that Arabs dwelt among the settled population. "The Arabs, as formerly, go in and out. It is well indeed" (Harper 1892-1914: 414). This suggests that contact with wandering Arabs was a normal means of communication, and possibly of transporting goods and information.

One trade route went through Edom, via Wādī 'Arabah and 'Ayn Ḥaşab/En Haseva, to Beersheba and Gaza, perhaps also further north, to Tyre and Byblos. The pottery that was found at several sites along the route shows Judean, coastal, Edomite and Assyrian characteristics, although it was produced locally (Singer-Avitz 1999; Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001). This is suggestive of a line of way-stations, manned by members from different tribes, who were responsible for transporting the goods to the final ports.

We also encounter Arabs as raiders and robbers of the borders of the vassal states in numerous references. Some may also have raided the trade caravans, although there are no direct references to it. A possible clue may be found in the fact that Idibi'ilu, the Arab (Eph'al 1982: 24, 93) was given "wardenship" over the border with Egypt. The crux here seems to lie in the term "Arab". Does it have territorial significance, meaning that Idibi'ilu and his people were inhabitants of the Arabian desert? If so, what were they doing on the border of Egypt? On the other hand, the term "Arab" may have already signified a lifestyle, that of the wandering nomad, rather than an ethnic or territorial meaning. If that was the case, this may well have been a case of "organized protection" of a sensitive part of the trade route by a nomadic tribe, in the same way as the Ottoman empire "organized" the protection of parts of the *Hajj* route. Perhaps Idibi'ilu's wardenship was merely a confirmation of a status quo.

In all three vassal states, but especially in Ammon, fortresses and towers were built in the Assyrian period. The function of these towers has been discussed at length. Glueck (1939) thought they were part of a string of fortresses, built by the Assyrians in order to protect the east border of Ammon, Moab and Edom. Research has shown that this is untenable. The towers that can be securely dated to this period do not form a "string", but are dispersed over the plain in an irregular fashion (Kletter 1991, with references).

Ammon, like Edom, only ever became a vassal state, and paid tribute. There is no evidence that Assyria ever interfered in its internal affairs. If this settlement surge and the Assyrian advance are related, what was the cause? Some people state that the increased safety of the area in-

duced settlement (Kletter 1991: 43). However, that hardly seems enough of a reason. The highly defensive nature of the towers speaks against this "safety".

The same situation existed in medieval Europe, where warfare and lawlessness forced the inhabitants of the countryside, and even of the towns sometimes, to live in fortified towers, with entrances well above floor level, to be reached only by means of a removable ladder.

On the whole it seems most likely that the Ammonite "Rujm al-Malfūf towers" were fortified farmsteads, protecting their inhabitants against roaming nomad bands, or even against each other.

I would like to suggest that, just like the Land Laws, and the associated tax demands from the Ottoman empire in the 19th century forced the Bedouin to settle and cultivate their land, the demands for tribute from the Assyrians forced the Bene Ammon to do so. Therefore small agricultural units started to appear in a still rather unsafe area, where raiding and robbing by Arab or by contending tribes must have been a very real danger.

Arabs were a pawn in the Assyrian, and especially the Sargonite "divide and rule" policy. Sargon's policy seems to have been directed towards bringing the international trade under his control. Where Tiglath-Pileser III was content to have the Arabian tribes pay for their right to conduct the trade, and left the organization and the protection of it in their own hands, Sargon tried to get a grip on the gateways of the trade: he subdued the local population near the border by laying Raphia waste and destroying its inhabitants, and settled new tribes near the Wādī al-'Arīsh under the supervision of the local shaykh of Laban, in order to get control of the trade to and from Egypt (Eph'al 1982: 93, 106-108). His policy towards the faraway tribes of Tamud, Ibadidi, Marsimanu, and Haiapa, who are probably to be sought in North Arabia (Eph'al 1982: 90), was to "crush" them and deport the survivors; whereas some of the other tribes involved in the trade: the tribes of Piru of Musru, of queen Samsi of Arabia and of It'amra of Sabaea, paid tribute.

The destruction of Beersheba, most likely by Sennacherib in 701 must have been a continuation of these efforts to get more grip on the trade. After the destruction of Beersheba we find Assyrian storehouses, administrative centers and citadels at the western end of the trade route towards Gaza.

Tall Jammah (van Beek 1983) had an Assyrian administrative center, with a typical barrel-vaulted building. At tel Sera' two Assyrian citadels were found (see also Finkelstein 1995: 147 for a summary with references; Herr 1997). There are no indications that the trade stopped, but it seems likely that the most lucrative end of it was taken out of the hands of the local and Arab population, and brought under the direct control of the Assyrian empire.

Like in the 19th century, the tribes did not like their independence being curbed. They may still have profited from the trade and from the Pax Assyriaca, that does not mean that they simply submitted to the situation. They started to support the greatest contender of all: the Babylonians, eventually with success.

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