

Beate Salje
Director
Vorderasiatisches Museum, SMB
Bodestr. 1-3
D-10178 Berlin
Germany

Beate Salje

The Kingdoms of Transjordan and the Assyrian Expansion

The general policy of the Assyrian Empire was the expansion to all surrounding territories, especially to the West, to secure the lucrative trade routes in general and especially the access to the Mediterranean Sea. This led in the first Millennium to an alteration in the balance of power in the Levantine region. The Assyrians occupied territories, erected new provinces, demanded heavy tributes or/and deported people. Only in unstable times after the death of an Assyrian king people in the West dared to rise against this mighty power. In the region itself the decline of power for example of Aram-Damascus and the kingdom of Israel led in the eighth century BC in Transjordan to a strengthening of the kingdoms of Moab and Ammon, they could extend their influence. One of the important main routes besides the coastal one for the military operations of the Assyrians was the 'Kings Highway' 8 North to South through Transjordan. Under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III Ammon, Moab and Edom had become vassals of the Assyrian empire. But they seemed to be loyal to Assyria paying their tribute regularly, so they could maintain their independence until the fall of the Assyrian Empire.

To follow the process of involvement of Transjordan a study of the witnesses of the Assyrian influence through the centuries is necessary, first in Assyria, then in Transjordan. As a result there may be a clearer answer to the question, whether the Assyrian rulers on their campaigns to the West got in direct contact with the rulers and the people on the East side of the Jordan.

Ninth Century BC

King Shalmaneser III (858-824BC) was not the

first Assyrian ruler expanding to the west, but the first, who extended the distance and consolidated the control on the Levant. In a bull inscription¹ Shalmaneser III mentions a campaign in his sixth year (853BC) to the west against the Aramaean coalition, led by Damascus, which ended in the decisive battle in Southern Syria, in Karkar, NW of Hama. He departed from Nineveh, crossed the Tigris and marched to the towns on the river Balih, approached Aleppo, Hamath, Argana and Karkara: 'I destroyed, tore down and burned down Karkara, his royal residence. He brought along to help him 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalymen, 20,000 foot soldiers of Adad'idri (i.e. Hadadezer) of Damascus (...), 700 chariots, 700 cavalymen, 10,000 foot soldiers of Irhuleni from Hamath, 2,000 chariots, 10,000 foot soldiers of Ahab, the Israelite (...), 500 soldiers from Que, 1,000 soldiers from Musri ... [...],000 soldiers from Ba'sa, son of Ruhubi, from Ammon — (all together) these were twelve kings. They rose against me [for a] decisive battle. I fought with them with (the support of) the mighty forces of Assur, my lord, has given to me, and the strong weapons which Nergal, my leader, has presented to me, (and) I did inflict a defeat upon them between the towns Karkara and Gilzau. ...' It is the same report as on a stele of King Shalmaneser III from Kurkh² found in 1861. The stele shows the king himself, King Shalmaneser III, clad in a long garment with fringed edges, and sandals, who stands in a typical royal gesture with an upraised hand before the symbols of the gods. In his left hand he holds a mace (?).

The Assyrian kings erected such stele as political demonstrations during the retreat of their troops

¹ Sixth Year according to the Bull-Inscription, bull statues, Calah. ANET 1969: 279.

² BM 118 884 Annals from his six year <853>. For translation of the inscription see ANET 1969: 277-279.

back home on the borders of the Assyrian empire. There will be further examples of Esarhaddon in Sam'al and Til Barsip from the Seventh Century BC.

The fights of the Syro-Palestinian States against Shalmaneser III, and the Assyrian pressure on the Kingdom of Israel led to a strengthening of the Transjordanian Kingdoms. There are several monuments witnessing this development in Transjordan. The inscriptions are in West Semitic languages, using alphabetic scripts.

The strengthening of the Moabite Kingdom is best demonstrated on the Mesha Stele (FIG. 1) found in Dhibān, on which King Mesha (830-805BC) reports in Old Phoenician-Canaanite that after a long time of paying tribute to Israel by his father and by himself, he has been victorious over the Israelites in 845BC. In gratitude he dedicated this stele to his god Kemosh.

The strengthening of the Moabites was also possible because the Assyrian kings after Shalmaneser III seemed not to put pressure on the region.



1. Mesha Stele (cast Berlin: Vorderasiatisches Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

Eighth Century BC

The four successors of Shalmaneser III were not very visible in the west they had to deal with problems in other regions of their empire and with a general weakness in their power. But from the middle of the Eighth century on there is nearly uninterrupted information on the involvement of the Assyrian kings in the West: Annals, reporting on military campaigns and the installation of new provinces, correspondence, reporting exactly what sort of tribute the vassal states had to deliver, and the treatment of the delegations at the Assyrian court.

Nearly 80 years after the campaign of Shalmaneser III it was Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727BC) who tried on his campaigns into Palestine 734-732 to consolidate the areas in the West by the establishment of three provinces (FIG. 2): Qarnini (Qarnaim), Haurina (Hauran), and Gal'aza (Gilead).

This policy did not really affect the Transjordanian kingdoms. But Ammon, Moab and Edom became vassals, having to pay from now on regular tribute to Assyria. During military campaigns they had to supply the Assyrian troops with equipment and food and they had to assure safety on the main streets. One of the main routes was the Kings' Highway, whose use by the Assyrians was not only a burden, but brought much economical effort to the region.

From the Assyrian royal correspondence, i.e. from the Nimrud Letters (Letter XVI) concerning the relations with the West, we know from the tributes, the Transjordanian Kingdoms had to pay³: 'I have inspected forty-five horses from The MAH-officials [LU.MAH.MES = emissaries, bringing tributes from states, which were not under Assyrian administration] of the Egyptians, the people of Gaza, of Judah, of Moab, of the sons of Ammon, when they entered Calah on the twelfth, delivered them at their hands ... The Edomites ...'.

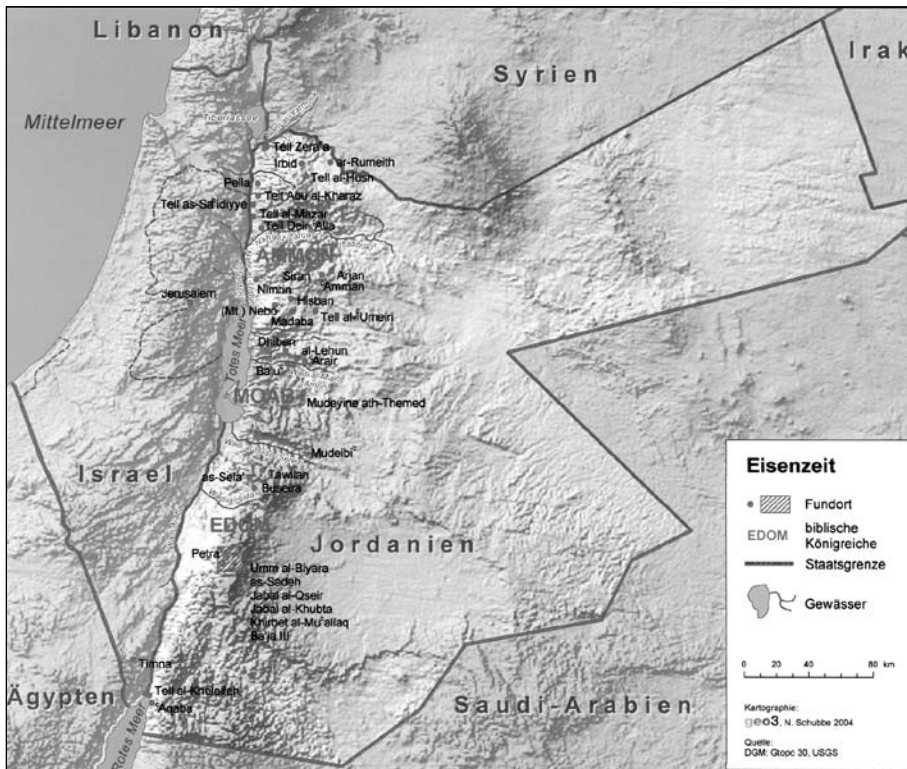
Under the rule of Sargon II (722-705BC) there are letters from Nimrud⁴ 'reporting the arrival of envoys from the West in Nimrud, bringing tribute. On the other hand there are mentioned gifts of wine, delivered to the Edomites ...'.

On a receipt of tribute from Palestine from texts in Nineveh (British Museum K 1295 = ABL 632), dated to the period between Sargon II and Esarhaddon, we get to know the sort of items they had to

³ Saggs 1955: 134 XVI <ND 2765>.

⁴ Bienkowski 1992: 36.

THE KINGDOMS OF TRANSJORDAN AND THE ASSYRIAN EXPANSION



2. Map 'Iron Age of Jordan' (Berlin: GdO geo3) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

provide⁵ 'Two minas of gold from the inhabitants of Bit-ammon (*mat**Bit-Am-man-na-a-a*); one mina of gold from the inhabitants of Moab (*mat**Mu-'ba-a-a*); [...mi]nas of silver from the inhabitants of [Edom] (*mat**[U-du-ma]-a-a*)...., ... the inhabitants of Byblos, the district officers of the king, have brought'.

On a tablet from Nineveh from the palace of Sennacherib there is another hint of gifts given to the kingdom of Ammon⁶ (K 8787 = No 58): Precious items issued to visiting delegation: '...., 2 rings, gold, small, Padu-il, from Bit-Ammon; ...'.

On a prism inscription there is mentioned a rebellion of Yamani of Ashdod. Allies are Philistra, Judah, Edom and Moab. Sargon names them as tributaries to him. Edom's rulers seem to be loyal to Assyria afterwards.⁷

Beside the mentioned Assyrian testimonies there is an important one from Transjordan, the Bileam Inscription (FIG. 3) of the eighth century, found in Tall Dayr 'Allā in 1967, which reports in Aramaean-Canaanite (red ink on plaster) of the prophet Bileam, son of Beor, and the relation between Israel and Moab and the different cult and religion.

The main deity of Ammon was the god Milcom.

Eighth/Seventh Century BC

The Assyrian king Sennacherib (705-681BC) started again with mighty campaigns against the uprising provinces — they always tried to start rebellion during weak periods of change in the Assyrian Empire.

As demonstration of the self-image of the Assyrian kings may stay the introductory passage of the Oriental Institute Prism⁸ of Sennacherib. Col. I-III:

Col. I⁹: 'Sennacherib, the great king / the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria / king of the four quarters (of the earth); the wise ruler / favourite of the great gods, guardian to the right / lover of justice; who lends support / who comes to the aid of the needy, who turns (his thoughts) to pious deeds; / perfect hero, mighty man; / first among all princes, the powerful who consumes / the insubmissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt; / the god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivalled kingship / has entrusted to me, and above all those / who dwell in palaces, has made

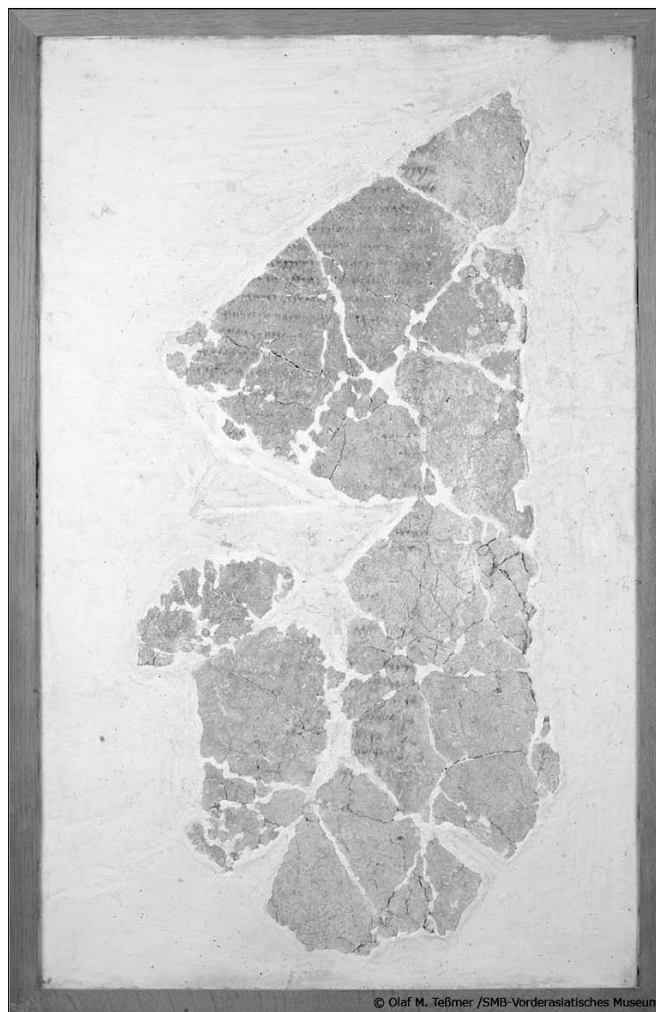
⁵ ANET: 301; Fales 1995: 30.

⁶ Fales 1992: 73.

⁷ Bienkowi 1992: 36.

⁸ OIP Prism Col. IV-VI (read OIP p. 44f. V,61-V,80): In Col. V be find all the gods and weapons cited. s.a. Rassam Cyl. ~ 700.

⁹ Luckenbill 1924: 23 I,1 to I,19.



3. Bileam Inscription ('Ammān: Jordan Archaeological Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

powerful my weapons; / from the upper sea of the setting sun / to the lower sea of the rising sun / all humankind (the black-headed race) he has brought in submission at my feet / and mighty kings feared my warfare — / leaving their abodes and / flying alone, like the *sudinnu*, the bird of the cave / to some inaccessible place'. It is clearly visible that everything is done in the name of the god.

*In Col. II*¹⁰ in connection with the siege of Jerusalem tributes by the Transjordanian Kingdoms are mentioned: 'In my third campaign I marched against the Hittite land / Lule, king of Sidon, — the terrifying splendor / of my sovereignty overcame him and far off / into the midst of the sea he fled. (There) he died / Great Sidon, Little Sidon / Bit-Zitti, Zaribtu, Mahalliba, / Ushu, Akzib, Akko / his strong, walled cities, where there were supplies /



4. Ammonite Ruler ('Ammān: Jordan Archaeological Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

for his garrisons, - the terrors of the weapon of Assur / my lord, overpowered them and they bowed in submission at my feet / Tuba'lu I seated on the royal throne / over them, and tribute, gift(s) for my majesty / I imposed upon him for all time without ceasing / From Menachim, the Shamsimurunite / Tuba'lu, the Sidonite, / Abdi-liti, the Arvadite, / Uru-milki, the Gublite / Mitinti, the Ashdodite / Budu-ilu, the Beth-Ammonite / Kammusu-nadbi, the Moabite / Malik-rammu, the Edomite / kings of Amurru, all of them, numerous presents / as their heavy tribute / they brought before me for the fourth time, and kissed my feet ...'.

In Transjordan, at the same time, we find an impressive example for a powerful local craftsmanship, the Ammonite Ruler (FIG. 4), found on the Citadel of 'Ammān, showing Egyptian elements as

¹⁰ Luckenbill 1924: 29 II,37 to II,60.

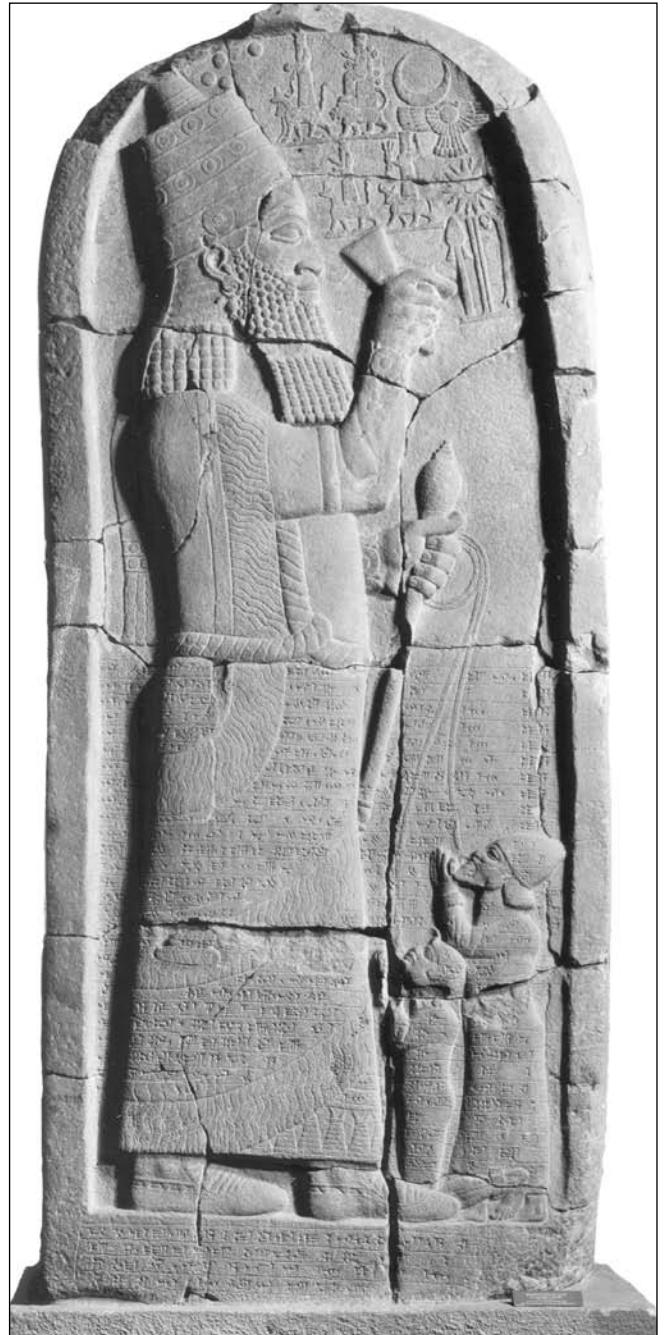
well with his Atef-crown.

Seventh Century BC

The direct successor of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681-669BC), led again a campaign to the West. The Syro-Palestinian campaign on the ‘prism’ of Esarhaddon mentions that the king called among others Transjordanian kings to transport building materials from Lebanon to *Nineveh*¹¹: Col. (V,54 to VI,1) ‘I called up the kings of the country Hatti and (of the region) on the other side of the river (Euphrates) (to wit): Ba’lu, king of Tyre, Manasseh (*Me-ne-si-i*), king of Judah (*Ia-u-di*), Qaushgabri, king of Edom, Musuri, king of Moab, Sil-Bel, king of Gaza, ..., Puduil, king of Beth-Ammon, ... - 12 kings from the seacoast; ...; all these I sent out and made them transport under terrible difficulties, to Nineveh, the town (where I exercise) my rulership, as building material for my palace: big logs, long beams (and) thin boards from cedar and pine trees, products of the Siara and Lebanon (*Lab-na-na*) mountains, which has grown for a long time into tall and strong timber, (also) from their quarries in the mountains, statues of protective deities (of lamassu and Shedu) made of asnan-stone, statues of (female) *abzaztu*, thresholds, slabs of limestone, of asnan-stone, of large- and small-grained breccia, of *allalu*-Stone ...’.

The most impressive manifestation of the Assyrian power is a stele in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin, the Esarhaddon Stele (FIG. 5), depicting the king himself after his successful battle against Egypt in 671. On his way back to Assyria he gave order to erect three victory stelae, one in Sam’al, and two in Til Barsip. The illustration of the king himself on the front, humiliating his captives Abdi-Milkutti from Sidon and the crown prince of Egypt, and of his heirs on both sides, seems at the first glimpse very similar. But there are differences on a closer view, as Barbara Nevling Porter showed in two articles¹². As ‘vehicles’ for Assyrian propaganda they contain different messages.

The Esarhaddon Stele in the provincial capital of Sam’al was placed at the gate leading to the citadel. It was erected at the gateway to Asia Minor¹³ ‘for the astonishment of all enemies unto distant days’ (rev., II, 52-53¹⁴). One of Esarhaddon’s titles is ‘holder of the leashes of kings’ (obv., I, 24¹⁵), and



5. Esarhaddon Stele (Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin

in this function he is shown with his captives. The kings of Assyria acted as representative of the god Ashur, so every campaign against foreign countries happened in the name of the god Ashur. The stele is also praise for the warrior god Ashur.

Til Barsip on the other side was a provincial capital on the upper Euphrates, so the craftsman-

¹¹ ANET: 291.

¹² Porter 2000; 2000a: 157, 174.

¹³ Porter 2000: 10.

¹⁴ Porter 2000: 11.

¹⁵ Porter 2000: 11.

ship of the two stelae was not so spectacular as in Sam'al. One stele was placed near the Assyrian palace, the second one at the lion gate. Although the general scene is nearly the same on all three stelae, the texts on the Sam'al and the Til Barsip stelae are completely different.

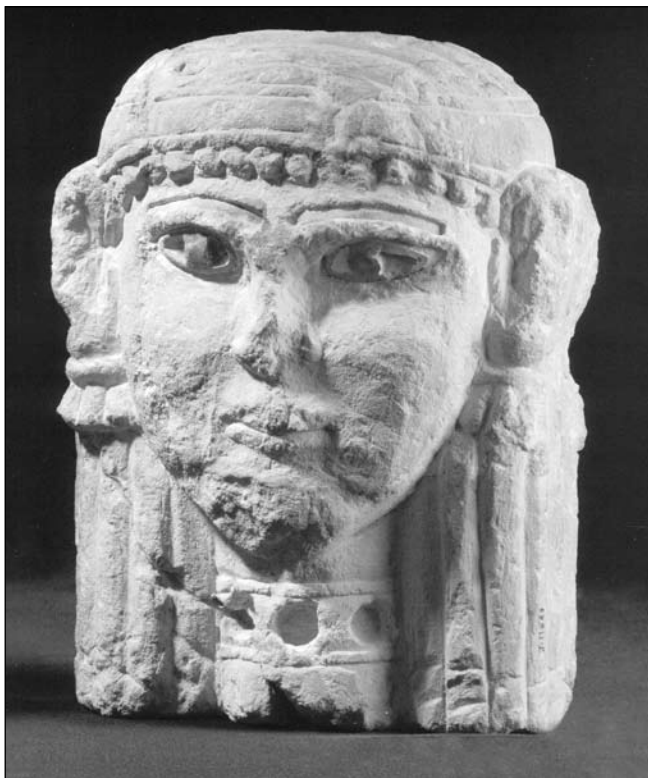
At the same time in Transjordan we notice in the double-faced sculptured heads of women from the second half seventh century (FIG. 6) strong connections to the Assyrian court. Found at the Citadel in 'Ammān, the bifacial heads show stylistically strong Phoenician influence. On the other hand with the famous 'Lady at the window' from Nimrud it is part of the Assyrian palatial art. So in craftsmanship, there seems to have been a direct influence from the neighbouring powers.

Under the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-627BC) during his campaigns against Egypt and Arabic nomads, people of Transjordan had to serve in the military. They had to join his first campaign against Egypt¹⁶. 'Ba'al, king of Tyre, Manasseh, king of Judah, Qaushgabri, king of Edom, Musuri, King of Moab, Sil-Bel, king of Gaza ..., Ammi-

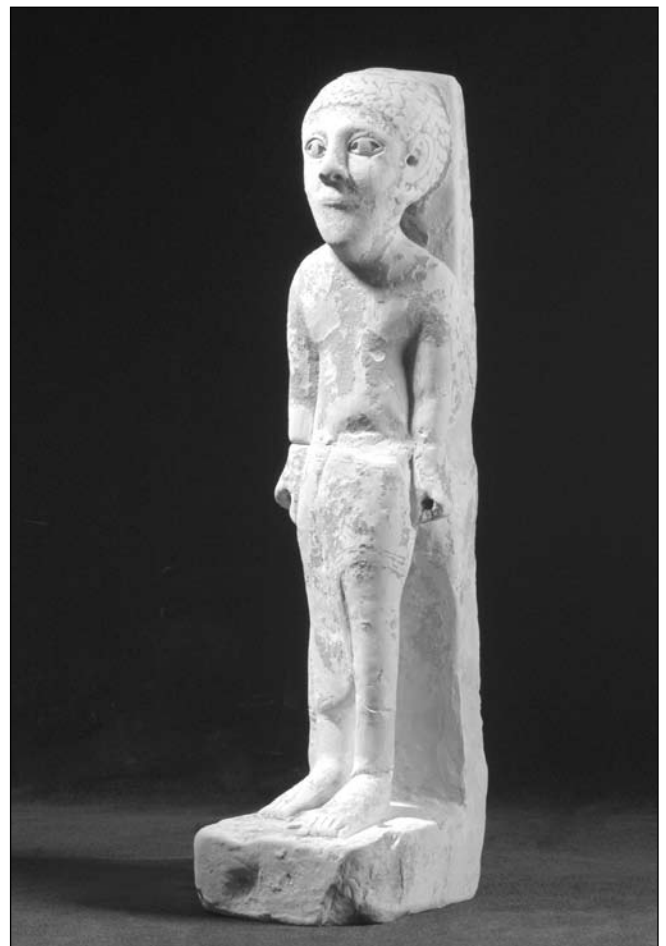
nadbi, king of Beth Ammon ..., Kisu, King of Silua [Sela?], ..., together 12 kings from the seashore, the islands and the mainland; servants who belong to me, brought heavy gifts (*tamartu*) to me and kissed my feet. I made these kings accompany my army over the land — as well as (over) the sea-route with their armed forces and their ship (respectively) ...'.¹⁷

In Transjordan, the figure of the so-called 'Warrior' of Arjan (FIG. 7), a limestone figurine of around 50cm height, may be a good example for the reports in the Assyrian texts of Transjordanian warriors, showing a man in a fringed short skirt, whose weapons are missing.

Amminadbi, the king mentioned by Ashurbanipal, is found in an inscription on a sixth century bronze bottle from Siran (FIG. 8): '... Amminadab, the king of the Ammonites ...'.¹⁸



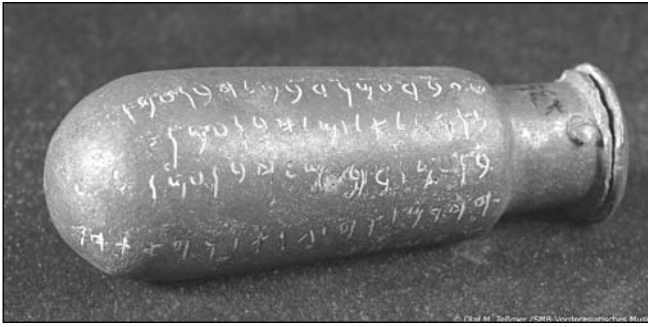
6. Bifaced head of women ('Ammān: Jordan Archaeological Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.



7. 'Warrior' of Arjan ('Ammān: Jordan Archaeological Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

¹⁶ Rassam Cylinder 'C' from Nineveh I, 24-46; Weippert 1987: 99.
¹⁷ ANET: 294.

¹⁸ Weippert 1987: 99.



8. Bronze bottle from Siran ('Ammān: Jordan Archaeological Museum) Olaf M. Teşmer / SMB – Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.

To sum up:

After the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 under its Neo-Babylonian successor, there are only few hints to Transjordan.

As we have seen by the monuments there seemed to be very little direct contact of the Assyrians with people in Transjordan. Only the late Assyrian king Ashurbanipal incorporated local troops in his army for his battle against Egypt and against the Arabs. In earlier times the Transjordanian Kingdoms are mentioned in Assyrian texts as allies of the Aramaean coalition against Assyria, but their territory is not mentioned as a battlefield. Maybe that is one of the reasons that they were not pressed into the provincial system of the Assyrian Empire. From Tiglath-Pileser III on they were only forced to pay their annual tributes, and to support Assyrian troops, give them way on their streets and transport from time to time precious materials to Assyria. There are no depictions at all of Transjordanian tributes or captives on Assyrian victory monuments.

So in general the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom benefited from the political situation in the First Millennium, strengthening their power against the states on the Western side of the Jordan.

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BEATE SALJE