In the Shadow of a Giant: Egyptian Influence in Transjordan during the Iron Age

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Introduction

Two monumental sculptures from sites south of the Wadi Mujib in central Jordan depict figures dressed in Egyptian style. Carved in relief on the Balu' stele are three figures. The first is a female figure wearing a long dress with a high waist, a broad necklace, and an atef crown; in her hand, she carries an ankhsign (Ward and Martin 1964: pl. I). The central figure is a male with his hands raised toward a second male, standing on the left and holding the symbols of authority. The garment of the central figure is an ankle-length pleated skirt, wrapped at the waist, in the style of a rich Egyptian noble. The male figure on the left wears a knee-length kilt, a necklace, and a conical crown. The second monument, the Rujm al-Abd Stele from Jabal Shīhān, is only partially preserved. A single male figure is shown in relief wearing a short kilt and holding a spear pointing downwards (Bienkowski 1991: fig. 34). Along with these two stelae there is a commemorative lion-hunt scarab of Amenhotep III found at Qla'at-Twal in Wadi Musa near Petra (Ward 1973: 45; pl. xxvii) to the south. In light of the topographical lists and itinerary of Tuthmosis III, which mention sites in Transjordan (Redford 1982), scholars usually assign these monuments to the Late Bronze Age, a time when direct Egyptian influence was prevalent (Ward and Martin 1964; cf. Strange 2001: 303).

Other stelae indicate the continuation or re-establishment of Egyptian control in southern Syria and the north of Jordan during the 19th Dynasty. The stelae of Ramesses II from Sheikh Sa'ad and of Seti I from Tell esh-Shihab in Syria are now joined by a stela of Ramesses II, discovered more recently at a-Turra

* John S. Holladay Jr.’s careful studies of Iron Age pottery and houses and his intensive seminars in the archaeology of Iron Age Israel at the University of Toronto laid the foundation for my own work in Transjordan. It is with great affection and respect that I offer this modest contribution based on my current research and excavations of Iron Age sites in ancient Ammon and Moab.

1 Redford (1982: 118) notes that the lists on Pylons 6 and 7 at Karnak identify the regions under the control of the pharaoh and “routes through those regions”.

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in northern Jordan (Wimmer 2002). These monuments, along with those from Lebanon and Palestine (Wimmer 2002), indicate a certain amount of Egyptian administration in the region during the 19th Dynasty.² While there is practically no evidence for Egyptian control in central Jordan during Iron I, excavations during the past 30 years have produced a steady stream of Egyptian style artefacts, many that date to an even later period, namely to Iron Age II (900–600 BC). In an attempt to determine the degree and origin of Egyptian or Egyptianizing influence in Transjordan, this paper presents a study of Iron Age amulets, scarabs, figurines and other works of art and glyptic with Egyptian features. The results of this study may shed more light on the two monumental sculptures from Moab mentioned previously, and provide a more reasonable chronological setting for these works of art, given the paucity of known Late Bronze Age sites south of the Wadi Mujib.

#### Egyptian-Style Artefacts

**Amulets**

The number of published Egyptian-style amulets from Transjordan is small, but is steadily increasing. Two amulets from Thamad Site WT-13, one from Hesban and an amulet mould from Amman are good examples of this trend; these objects represent Harpocrates, Ptah and Bes.

*Harpocrates (Fig. 1.1).* The Harpocrates amulet is of blue frit; it depicts a striding male with his left foot forward, hands at side and a hair lock of youth on the right side of his head (WT 162–2/662).³ Although the proportions of the slender body are very natural in appearance, the details of the face and body are somewhat obscured, due to the small size and worn condition of this amulet.⁴ Only the hairline across the forehead and the thickening of the forelock can be seen clearly. The hole for suspension is located behind the head and neck area,

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² Worschech (1997: 231) points out that because of its position Moab may have been of interest to Egypt during the 19th Dynasty, at the time when Hittites and Mitanni were expanding to the west and south, even though Moab was not yet an organized kingdom. However, evidence from controlled excavations is wanting.

³ Identification codes include the site code+object#-season#/artefact number (for example, WT 392–4/013). In those cases where the item did not have an object number, the complete registration number is given, consisting of site code+field letter+Square#:locus#/pottery pail#.item number (MT A18/3/7:3).

⁴ Incrustation of soil with a high lime content made it difficult to clean this fragile amulet.