

# Trade or Gender – Which Was More Influential in Relations between the Royalty of the Neo-Assyrians and the “Queens of the Arabs”?

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## Abstract

The “Queens of the Arabs” are women who have the title “Queen of the Arabs” in Neo-Assyrian sources. These women only feature in Assyrian sources, as we have very little textual evidence from the Arabian peninsula during the Neo-Assyrian period. This thesis will first ask why the Assyrians were interested in controlling Arabia at all by investigating the importance of the region in terms of trade. Many valuable goods were traded through the Arabian peninsula, such as frankincense and myrrh. These were carried by another valuable resource – camels. This thesis will investigate whether the importance of the trade routes is enough of an explanation for the portrayal of the “Queens of the Arabs” in the Assyrian sources. The second half of this thesis will ask whether their gender was more important than trade in their portrayals by the Assyrians. Here we have the problem of modern racist and sexist views clouding the views of scholars writing about these women. These have to be identified, and we must be able to look past these. What also becomes evident is that the Assyrians themselves had misunderstandings about the “Queens of the Arabs” and the way their societies were structured. With this in mind, this thesis will use the royal women of the Assyrian courts as a comparison in order to understand what the Assyrians expected from women associated with power. What we find is that there are very few visible royal Assyrian women in the texts and reliefs. To counter this problem, we will look at the visible exceptions. Women like Zakutu and Sammu-ramat are seen as unusual, and we can use this to determine how Assyrian women were meant to behave. In turn, we can see what the Assyrians expected to encounter with the “Queens of the Arabs”. These women appear to be the opposite to what the Assyrians would have seen in their royal women. They were actively engaged in battle, they could engage in diplomacy and trade on behalf of their people, and (perhaps most telling) their titles are not based on their relationships with powerful men. This difference in expectations clearly had an impact on the Assyrians, and this thesis will investigate this.

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# 1. Introduction

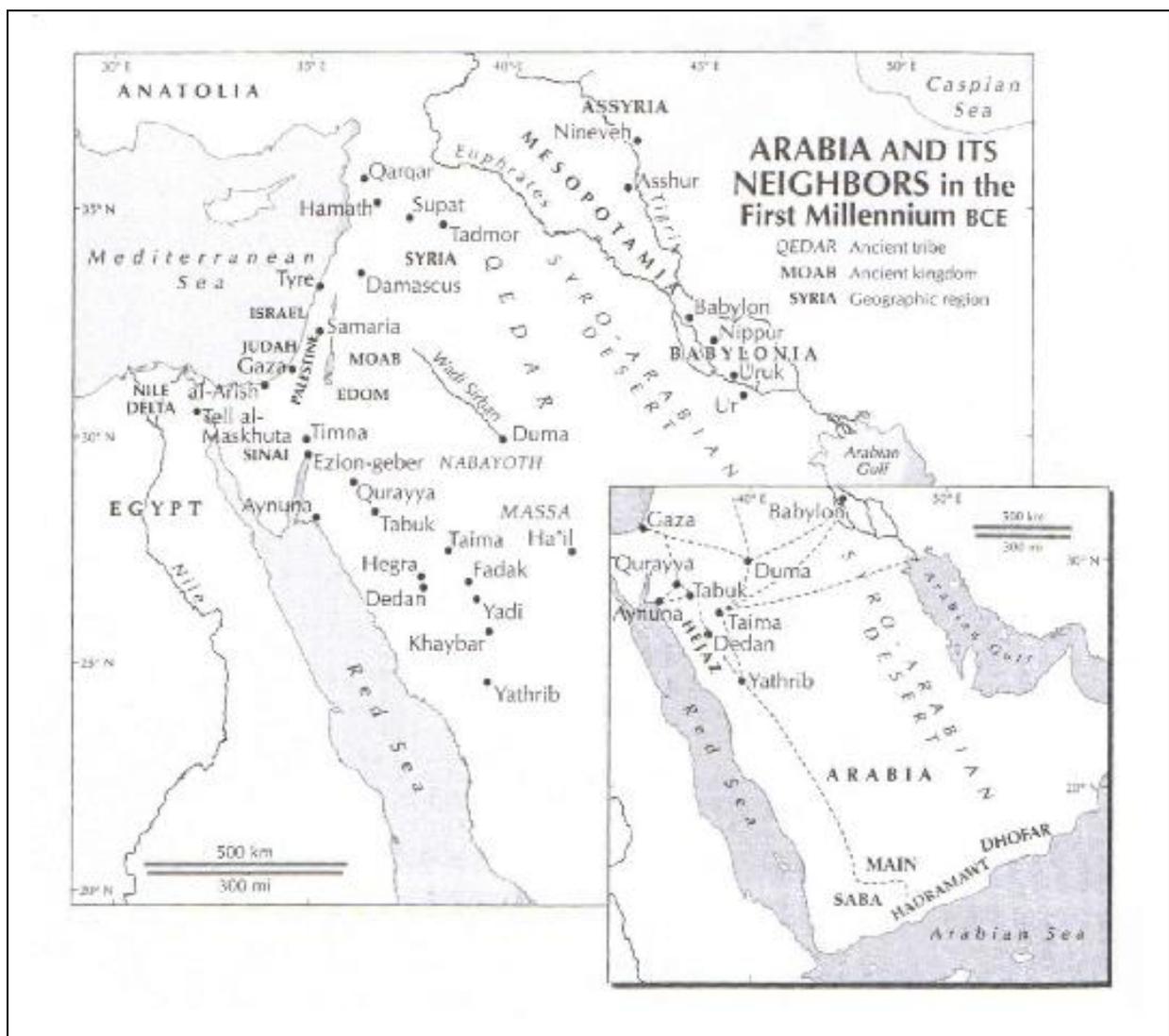
The Assyrian empire during the Sargonid period had many contacts outside of the empire. One of these, and arguably one of the richest, was Arabia. This was not the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but a much larger area encompassing the whole Arabian peninsula, as well as the Syrian desert between the Levant and Mesopotamia (as seen in Figure 1). One of the most interesting features of this area involved the activities of “Queens of the Arabs” who seem to have exacted absolute rule in the first millennium (all dates, unless stated otherwise, will be in BC). What we know of these women is limited, but what we can see is that they were in contact (whether it be in trade or war) with the Assyrians. Since trade played a large part in the history of Arabia, we have to investigate the role this played in the relationship between the “Queens of the Arabs” and the Assyrian empire. We shall look at Zabibe’s tribute to Tiglath-pileser III to establish what the Assyrians found valuable in Arabia, and we shall assess the relative wealth of these queens by looking at Samsi and Te’elḥunu and what was taken from them in booty.

However, trade cannot be the only factor in the interaction between the Arabs and the Assyrian kings. Since Arabs were occasionally ruled by queens, and the norm in Assyria was rule by a king, gender must have played a role at some level with these female rulers. There is little written about these queens, so we need to use what little we have, and compare it to the sources on contemporary Assyrian royal women.<sup>1</sup> This will inform us to some level on how the “Queens of the Arabs” were both treated and portrayed by the Assyrian kings. We shall start with Arabian queens like Adiya and Iatī’e, who act most like the Assyrian royal women by being passive actors in the historical record, and we shall compare them to arguably the most well-known Assyrian royal woman – Zakutu. She will act as an introduction as to what was expected of royal women in Assyria, largely because she is the most visible Neo-Assyrian woman in the historical record. Through Zakutu’s behaviour we can see how she acts both in accordance with tradition, and how she goes against it, thus demonstrating to us what was unexpected of a royal woman. After this we will ask whether the title “Queen of the Arabs” was an appropriate title the Arabs gave to the women who had power, or if this was a title bestowed upon them by the Assyrians. For this, Iapa and Baslu will be used, and the nature of their power will be contrasted with the implicit power the royal Assyrian women held in the royal harem. The extraordinary nature of power the Arabians held shall also be explored through Samsi and Te’elḥunu.

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<sup>1</sup> This comparative approach is one I find most appropriate for this thesis. For an anthropological approach (one that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper) to “forgotten” women in the Middle East, see Mernissi 1993.

These two women are recorded as being in control of a military force, and we shall very briefly ask if this kind of power in women's hands changed the way they were treated by the Assyrians. We shall compare with Sammu-ramat, the only Assyrian royal woman who is vaguely connected to violence or battles. Finally, we shall turn to Tabua, and see how the expectations that come with gender in Assyria can alter how a woman could rule. Manipulation of her gender norms in Assyria was done in the hope she would become sympathetic to Assyria whilst she ruled Arabia. Hopefully these comparisons and analyses will answer some of the many questions we have about these women, but there are also many other questions whose answers lie beyond the scope of this thesis.



**Figure 1:** Map of Arabia and the main trade routes in Arabia.

Macdonald 1995: 1356.

As we shall be looking at the role gender played in history, we have to be clear about the strategy taken to analyse our sources. Bahrani has described how gender studies in ancient history has gone

through several “waves” of theory. Whilst these divisions are based on the trajectory gender studies has taken in Classics, I would argue that in studying the ancient Near East, we can learn from these theories and take the best aspects into Assyriology and adapt them to the discipline. The first of these “waves” was in the 1960s, and was based on locating and writing women into history. The second of these was in the late 1970s, and divided sex from gender whilst asking why women were subordinate in the sources.

Finally, the third wave was in the 1980s, where the influence of postmodernism was evident through the questioning of all assumptions (such as the nature of oppression, patriarchy, sexuality and identity), and there was a break away from the white, middle class, Euro-American cis women who had made up gender studies until this point.<sup>2</sup> I would also add another “wave” to this. In near Eastern studies we can see a new wave forming, which has particular influence from the modern concept of “intersectionalism”. This is where we have to be aware of other forms of oppression that can change an author’s world view, and may influence how they either interpret previous sources, or how they write about the contemporary world. These can be external factors such as race, age, class, gender, or even if they are disabled or not. For example, Bahrani has complained that women’s studies has tended to focus on Western ideas of feminine subjects, and that the focus on gender in Classics has been due to Euro-centric notions of history.<sup>3</sup> Svärd has also raised the issue that in the study of the near East, we need to address the position of men in gendered power structures.<sup>4</sup> Possibly the most pointed criticism is from Van de Mieroop, who has shown it is very easy for a modern scholar to project preconceived ideas of Middle Eastern women (such as the harem and the veil) backwards in time.<sup>5</sup> With regards to the harem, it is often used in near Eastern scholarly writings without any clarification as to how the Mesopotamian harem functioned. This has created a false idea that the Mesopotamian harem was like its much later counterpart, with women at the sexual disposal of one man.<sup>6</sup> There is also almost no iconographic sources of veiled women in Mesopotamia. There is only one Middle Assyrian text which refers to veils, which is not enough to conclude that all Mesopotamian women were veiled.<sup>7</sup> These examples of the harems and the veils demonstrate that how we picture Mesopotamian women is informed by an undercurrent of our modern ideas of Middle Eastern women,<sup>8</sup> and as scholars we must be aware of these undercurrents.

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<sup>2</sup> Bahrani 2001: 14-19.

<sup>3</sup> Bahrani 2001: 9.

<sup>4</sup> Svärd 2012: 48.

<sup>5</sup> Van de Mierop 1999: 138, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Van de Mierop 1999: 147; Melville 2005: 220.

<sup>7</sup> Van de Mierop 1999: 150.

<sup>8</sup> Van de Mierop 1999: 151.

Despite this, it is important to recognise that gender studies in Assyriology is still in the first wave, and is committed to writing Assyrian women into history (but with a fourth-wave eye).<sup>9</sup> This lag in gender studies is partly because of modern sexism keeping women out of academia until recently, and partly because studying near Eastern women is difficult to do.<sup>10</sup> Assyrian women are not portrayed often on reliefs, and are not often referred to in written sources such as annals, legal texts or mythology. The best evidence we have is a ninth century queen's burial from Kalhu, but there is no such evidence for the later kings.<sup>11</sup> From this small amount of evidence, we have to negatively infer gender roles using the "fourth wave" approach as described above. This will inform us about Assyrian royal women, and through the comparison as outlined previously, will help us interpret the "Queens of the Arabs".

The sources in which these women appear are mainly from the Sargonid dynasty – the period of the Assyrian empire from the reign of Sargon II until 612 BC.<sup>12</sup> This period has the largest number of sources within the Neo-Assyrian period, and the availability of more sources has uncovered more evidence about Assyrian women. Sargonid Assyria is therefore the best period in Assyrian history to try and ascertain gender roles by looking at women, and what it means for the "Queens of the Arabs". What is particularly difficult in studying these women – or indeed, anyone outside of the Assyrian empire – is that we only have Assyrian evidence for the period. We therefore have to try and peel away this "Assyrian lens" in order to find the truth behind the sources. The only other source that throws a different light on the periphery of the empire is the Old Testament. This only really tells us about Judah, and was written much later than the events it describes, and as such this source will not feature prominently in this investigation.<sup>13</sup>

In comparison to the number of sources for Assyrian history, the number of sources for Arabian history is very limited. This has led to a situation where there have been few attempts at a comprehensive history of pre-Islamic Arabia, and has resulted – as Retsö rightly demonstrates – in a problematic use of terminology.<sup>14</sup> This is especially evident in the conflation of the terms "Arab" and "nomad". The word "Arab" was never used in the sources exclusively for nomads, and was used for those in towns and cities as well. This problem with terminology stems from our modern conceptions of "Arabs", which consists of nomadic Bedouins who dominated the Arabian peninsula until the first world war.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Svärd 2012: 25.

<sup>10</sup> Van de Mieroop: 139.

<sup>11</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 526.

<sup>12</sup> Svärd 2012: 27.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 473-77; Retsö 2003: 119; Groom has a very convincing argument as to why the Old Testament is unreliable for Assyriology, which mainly focusses on the late canonisation of the text.

<sup>14</sup> Retsö 2003: 105-115; Retsö rightly criticises Eph'al for using the term "Arab" during the Neo-Assyrian period for "desert nomads", but then Eph'al says "Arab" encompasses everyone in the Arabian peninsula – including settled populations. Retsö 2003: 110.

<sup>15</sup> Castillo 2007: 142.

This stereotype of modern “Arabs” has worked as a social undercurrent which has influenced our assumptions about ancient “Arabs”. This has happened because there is no Akkadian term for the concept of “nomadism”,<sup>16</sup> much less semi-nomadism, and so modern authors’ assumptions have not been conclusively challenged by the sources.<sup>17</sup> Hoyland’s work is an example of this, describing how nomadic populations were economically dependent on sedentary populations, and doesn’t consider that the situation could be the reverse, or even that there may have been a symbiotic relationship.<sup>18</sup> In reality, nomadic populations are on a sliding scale – from nomads to settled populations, and including semi-nomadic groups.<sup>19</sup> Whilst defining how settled a population was is undoubtedly useful for our understanding of how the society functioned, for the period discussed we cannot do this. Simply due to a lack of evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period in Arabia, we do not know how settled the Arabian people were. In order to avoid a conflation of the different categories of “sedentary”, “nomadic”, and “Arab”, I shall be calling those who lived or came from the Arabian peninsula as “Arabs”, those who are not settled “nomads”, and those who are partially settled “semi-nomadic”.

The picture that emerges of Arabian history during the Neo-Assyrian period is vastly different from what modern sources tell us. Instead of dangerous wanderers who pillage towns, Akkadian sources and archaeology describe a more peaceful and cooperative relationship between nomadic and settled populations – whether they were Arab, Assyrian, Babylonian, or even Egyptian.<sup>20</sup> The first mention of “Arabs” in the cuneiform sources involves an Arab leader of an army battling against Shalmeneser III at Qarqar in 853 BC.<sup>21</sup> This tells us that instead of the stereotypical image of disorganised groups of nomads, the Arabs here were highly organised and had enough power to raise an army and challenge Assyria. From this point we see that Arabs did not exist just in the Arabian peninsula, but in Babylonia, Palestine, the Sinai peninsula, and the Nile Delta.<sup>22</sup> The Arabs were penetrating into many settled areas, and slowly the Assyrian kings learnt of places as far away as Tayma and Dilmun. In fact, during the Sargonid dynasty, places such as Dilmun were used to emphasize just how powerful the ruling kings were.<sup>23</sup> If the great deeds of an Assyrian king were known in lands as far away as Dilmun, then surely the enemies which were located closer to Assyria should be scared of him, and pledge their loyalty to him. Without the trade through Arabia, such a claim would not be possible, and can only

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<sup>16</sup> Whilst there are Akkadian terms for “tents”, and words used for territories specifically used by nomads, there is no word in the *CAD* for the concept of “nomadism”.

<sup>17</sup> Castillo 2007: 144.

<sup>18</sup> Hoyland 2001: 98.

<sup>19</sup> Castillo 2007: 143. For a more in-depth discussion on nomads, see Streck 2001. For an anthropological perspective of nomadism, see Briant 1982.

<sup>20</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1359.

<sup>21</sup> Eph’al 1982: 75; Retsö 2003: 126.

<sup>22</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1355.

<sup>23</sup> Potts 1990: 339.

serve as an example of how successful the Arabs became. Undoubtedly, this must have played a role in how the “Queens of the Arabs” were treated, but the question arises as to whether this was a bigger factor than their gender.

## 2. Trade

During the reign of Esarhaddon, we encounter a curious event. The king makes a young woman named Tabua the “Queen of the Arabs”, and she is sent to Arabia with Hazael, “King of the Arabs”, to rule. Tabua had grown up in the royal household, and children like her were installed as rulers over lands the Assyrian kings wanted to indirectly control. Control of a leader, or the creation of loyalty in the leader from an early age, means the land will be controlled as well. This incident shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. For a large, arid land like Arabia, it seems odd for the Assyrians to desire control over it. Whilst there is an argument that this was part of the Assyrian world view of expansion, I would argue that this was because of a desire to access the trade routes through Arabia. These trade routes seem to have been the main motivator in the interaction between the Assyrian kings and the Arabian queens, and it is clear why Assyria wanted control over Arabia when we examine the goods which were traded. In fact, Arabia had so much trade flowing through it that even Egypt had a vested interest in Arabia – in the second millennium, copper was mined at Timna (on the Sinai peninsula, see Figure 1 for the exact location), which was controlled by the Egyptians, and the metal was then shipped to Egypt by sea.<sup>24</sup> The extent of this interaction even extended as far as Bahrain, where in the “Palace of Uperi” from the first millennium, an Egyptianising silver signet ring was found in a currency hoard.<sup>25</sup> Whilst this is not proof that Egyptians were present in Dilmun (ancient Bahrain), it is proof that trade brought Egyptian ideas to the other end of the Arabian peninsula. This relationship with the Egyptians may also have been the reason behind Tiglath-pileser III’s installment of an Arab governor on the Egyptian border.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most famous “Queen of the Arabs” was the Queen of Sheba, who demonstrates to us the wealth generated by the trade through Arabia. The unnamed queen visited King Solomon, along with “a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones”.<sup>27</sup> Whilst she only seems to function as a narrative device to prove how wise Solomon was, she is depicted as a wealthy, powerful woman; and this is attributed to a vastly wealthy trade which is said to go through her kingdom.<sup>28</sup> Where this kingdom was located has been the source of much debate, and her location will give us a much better understanding of the trade through Arabia. Traditionally,

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<sup>24</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1363.

<sup>25</sup> Boucharlat 1995: 1349.

<sup>26</sup> Elat 1998: 48.

<sup>27</sup> Abbott 1941: 1; Groom 1981: 46; 1 Kings 10.1-13.

<sup>28</sup> Groom, 1981: 48; Abbott 1941: 1.

she is said to rule the Sabaeans – a tribe that existed in Southwest Arabia from the tenth century until 115 BC.<sup>29</sup> However, there is nothing which positively ties her with Southern Arabia, and the pairing of the Sabaeans and Taymanites in tribute lists like Tiglath-pileser III's raises the possibility of a Sabaean group which may have settled in Northern Arabia. I would agree with this theory, largely because the distance between Saba' and Israel seems too long to warrant a state visit.<sup>30</sup> It seems more likely that the Queen of Sheba was from an area close to Judah, but was also close to the trade routes through Northern Arabia. Where she ruled was somewhere close enough to Judah that if Solomon decided to cause trouble in the area, it would adversely affect the trade routes, and thus economically harm the Queen of Sheba's kingdom. A diplomatic visit of this kind would clearly help to keep the region of Northern Arabia stable. It was these kinds of diplomatic visits which helped to lay the foundations for the trade routes from Arabia into different areas.

These trade routes, and access to the goods found in Arabia, would not have been possible had it not been for a valuable resource – the camel. Initially domesticated for milk, meat and fur in Southern Arabia in the third millennium, they were not prominent in Northern Arabia until 1200.<sup>31</sup> Soon after this domestication, the usefulness of camels as a pack-animal quickly became evident. Camels can last much longer than a horse in desert conditions, as they can retain water for longer, and can eat shrubs which are unsuitable for horses. According to Groom, this gave the Arabs (especially those in the North of Arabia, close to Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Levant) "a commercial and strategic importance... that was out of all proportion to their economic and military strength".<sup>32</sup> In other words, the ability to navigate through the desert was a more important commodity to external powers than any finished product the Northern Arabs could provide, or any army they could raise. This is not strictly true, as the products from Arabia were very valuable, but this quote does help us to understand how important the camel was to the Arabs.<sup>33</sup>

As hardy as the camel is, the amazing qualities mentioned before are only when we compare camels to horses or donkeys. Camels cannot traverse the entire Syrian desert without stops for water (albeit less frequent stops than if a horse was being used), and these stops would be at temporary watering-holes, or at permanent oases. Over time, the trade routes through Arabia built up around these stops for water, and the oases became permanent residences that flourished on the trade which passed through them.<sup>34</sup> The biggest oasis towns were the most successful, such as Adummatu and Tayma.

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<sup>29</sup> Abbott 1941: 2.

<sup>30</sup> Groom 1981: 53.

<sup>31</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357; Groom 1981: 35.

<sup>32</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>33</sup> For more on camels, see Irwin 2010.

<sup>34</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

Adummatu (usually identified as Dumat al-Jandal, modern al-Jawf,<sup>35</sup> Duma on Figure 1) is even described as “the fortress of the Arabs” (in Assyrian: URUdan-nu-tu LÚ.a-ri-bi<sup>36</sup>) during Esarhaddon’s reign. This is counter to the archaeological evidence we have, of which there is little evidence for substantial settlements in Northern Arabia before Nabonidus’ stay at Tayma for ten years.<sup>37</sup> Despite the lack of evidence, Livingstone speculates that Adummatu was at least an urban centre of some importance by the sixth century, largely due to the fact their gods were previously captured by Sennacherib – if Adummatu was not an important city here, then why steal their gods?<sup>38</sup> This sits well with the theory that Adummatu was a religious centre,<sup>39</sup> however I would argue that although Adummatu may have had a religious function, it was first and foremost a market town. This is due to the importance of the trade routes passing through this city. Adummatu was in a pivotal position on a main trade route – from here caravans could go either North West to Syria and Palestine, or North East to Babylonia.<sup>40</sup> It would therefore make sense if Adummatu’s economy had been built upon passing traders, not on religious festivities. However, this is just a tentative guess – I would not go so far as Hoyland and describe it as being run by whichever was the most important tribe in the area, as this suggests there is hard evidence for such administrative structures.<sup>41</sup> This is the same situation at Tayma (Taima in Figure 1), as from here Gaza, Amman, and Adummatu are accessible.<sup>42</sup> Traders could also go straight to the Levant and Mediterranean from this point, and they could avoid the rival oasis of Dedan (which Tayma had hostile relations with at one point).<sup>43</sup> However, we do have more evidence for a large settlement at Tayma – recent excavations have revealed a large walled city dating back to the early second millennium,<sup>44</sup> and remains of ancient fields with an irrigation system have been discovered.<sup>45</sup> Despite this implying an economy based entirely on agriculture, archaeological finds of religious reliefs show a cosmopolitan nature to Tayma, as these reliefs have been found with Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Southern Arabian elements.<sup>46</sup> This could only mean that the people of Tayma had some sort of contact with people from these areas, and I would say this was because of the trade routes passing through this city which created its wealth and growth.

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<sup>35</sup> Eph’al 1982: 120; Potts 2012: 74.

<sup>36</sup> *RINAP* 4.1.iv1. For the definition of “fortress”, see A. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, R. Harris, E. Bowman, *CAD*, s.v. *dannatu*.

<sup>37</sup> Hoyland 2001: 58 Whilst Nabonidus’ stay was undoubtedly important for the history of Arabia, this falls outside of the scope of this paper, so sadly will not be addressed in detail.

<sup>38</sup> Livingstone 1989: 101.

<sup>39</sup> Eph’al 1982: 120.

<sup>40</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1360.

<sup>41</sup> Hoyland 2001: 109.

<sup>42</sup> Edens and Bawden 1989: 87.

<sup>43</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1361; For Dedan’s location, see Figure 1.

<sup>44</sup> Dalley 2013: 183; Eichmann, Schaudig and Hausleiter 2006: 165.

<sup>45</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1361.

<sup>46</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1361.

The routes through these cities were relatively stable, but there was never just one route from the South to the North of the Arabian Peninsula throughout its history. Many forces determined the route taken, such as weather, threat of raids, and the political situation of the region.<sup>47</sup> Despite this, Assyria understood that if they controlled the termini of these trade routes, they would effectively control the whole route. By controlling where the goods went to, the Assyrians could determine what goods could enter and leave the trade routes, and thus control the trade through Arabia. The Arabs in turn recognized this threat, and were keen to keep the Assyrians on side in order to stop a war with one of the world powers at the time.<sup>48</sup> This direct control of Arabian transportation and communication routes meant the Arabians were indirectly controlled by Assyria, and were effectively (though not officially) acting as a vassal state.<sup>49</sup>

With these large trade routes only being possible because of the camel, the Assyrians quickly realized how useful camels could be, so they were brought in tribute. Whether the Assyrians asked for them, or if those giving tribute knew they were a valuable commodity and offered them freely as a gift, is an important question, but beyond the scope of this essay. This need for camels is evident in SAA 1.175, as the escape of Arab raiders was blamed on the fact their camels were better suited to the stony ground than the Assyrian horses:

1. *a-na* ᵀLUGAL ᵀEN-ᵀia ᵀ
2. ARAD-ka ᵀ10-ᵀḥa ᵀ-ti
3. ᵀlu ᵀDI-mu ᵀa-na LUGAL EN ᵀ-ia
4. ᵀDUMU ᵀᵀa ᵀ-mi-ri
5. ina ŠÀ-bi ᵀ03 me\* ᵀANŠE.a-na-qa-te
6. ú-za-ta-ᵀki ᵀma-a ina UGU
7. ᵀLÚᵀ.ḥu-ub-ᵀte ša TA ᵀ
8. ᵀURU ᵀ.[di]-maš-qa ᵀa-na ᵀKUR-aš-šur
9. [ú-še]-ᵀta-qu ᵀ-ú-ni
10. [ma-a ina] ᵀUGU ᵀ-ḥi a-ᵀma ᵀ-qu-[ut]
11. [a-se-me ina] UGU ᵀEN-ᵀiq ᵀ-[bi]
12. [a]-ᵀsap ᵀ-ra i-tal-ᵀka ᵀ
13. [i]-ᵀsa ᵀ-a-ḥi-ši ina ᵀGABA ᵀ
14. [LÚᵀ].ᵀḥu ᵀ-ub-te ni-ta-lak
15. [e-ta]-ᵀmar ᵀ-na-a-ši

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<sup>47</sup> Edens and Bawden 1989: 87.

<sup>48</sup> Eph'al 1982: 91.

<sup>49</sup> Edens and Bawden 1989: 83.

16. [ina] ṣub<sup>1</sup>-tú ina ku-ta-li-ni
- b.e. 17. [ú-se]-ṣib<sup>1</sup>
18. [ni-it]-ṣa<sup>1</sup>-ḥa-ša [0]
19. [x]-ṣim<sup>1</sup>-05-me UDU-ḥI.A-[MEŠ]
- r. 20. [ḥu-ub<sup>2</sup>]-ṣe<sup>1</sup> TA<sup>v</sup> URU.ḥu-za-za<sup>1</sup>
21. [x]-ṣim-05-me UDU-[ḥI.A]
22. [x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x x] ṣx<sup>1</sup>
23. [x x x] URI.ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x-x]-ṣtu<sup>2</sup>
24. [x x x] 02 ERIM-MEŠ
25. [x x x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x] ERIM-MEŠ
26. [x x x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x] ṣx-na<sup>2</sup>
27. [x x x] te [x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> mu [x]
28. [x x] ṣx x x<sup>1</sup> šú [x x]
29. ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x]
30. [a]-ṣni<sup>1</sup>-nu ṣni<sup>1</sup>-su-ḥu<sup>1</sup>-[ur]
31. [i]-ṣda-ta<sup>2</sup>-šu<sup>1</sup> ni-ṣir<sup>1</sup>-ti-di-pi
32. [x x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> KUR.il-ṣla<sup>2</sup>-ba<sup>2</sup>-a-ni
33. ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x] ṣni<sup>1</sup>-iq-ṣri-ṣib<sup>1</sup>
34. la ni-ik-šu-du\*
35. ma-ri-ši la-a a-na
36. ANŠE.KUR.RA-MEŠ ṣla<sup>1</sup>-a a-na
37. GIŠ.ṣGIGIR.MEŠ<sup>1</sup> [o]
38. <sup>m</sup>ṣni<sup>2</sup>-ba<sup>2</sup>-[x] ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x]
39. ina ṣx<sup>1</sup> [x x] ṣsi<sup>1</sup> [x]

Translation:

1. To the king, my lord: Your servant Adda-hati. Good health to the king, my lord!
4. (Ammili'ti) the son of Amiri *readied himself* with 300 she-camels, intending to attack the booty being [tran]sferred from Damascus to Assyria
11. [I heard of this and] sent word to Bel-i[qbi]; he came and we went together to meet the booty. He saw us, ambushed us from behind, and we had a fight. [I], 500 [boot]y sheep from the city of Huzaza, [1],500 sheep [...] city of [...], [...] 2 men [...] men [...]
- (Break)

30. We returned and went in pursuit [after] him, getting as far as Il[...]ani, but could not catch up with him; (the terrain) was too difficult, [it was not fit] either for horses or for chariots [...]

In this source, we see camels being used in a raid against a trade caravan from Damascus to Assyria. Adda-hati, the local ruler, asked another local ruler Bel-iqbi to help bring back the booty. However, we can see that the raiders were able to speed across the desert terrain at a faster rate than the horses and chariots the local rulers had at their disposal. This was then used as an excuse to the Assyrian king for the failure of retrieving the stolen booty from the raiders. In order to change the situation on the periphery of the empire, it is clear the Assyrians had to breed their own camels for the army in order to be able to suppress any kind of resistance from the Arabs.



**Figure 2:** Two Arab soldiers fleeing from Assyrian troops.

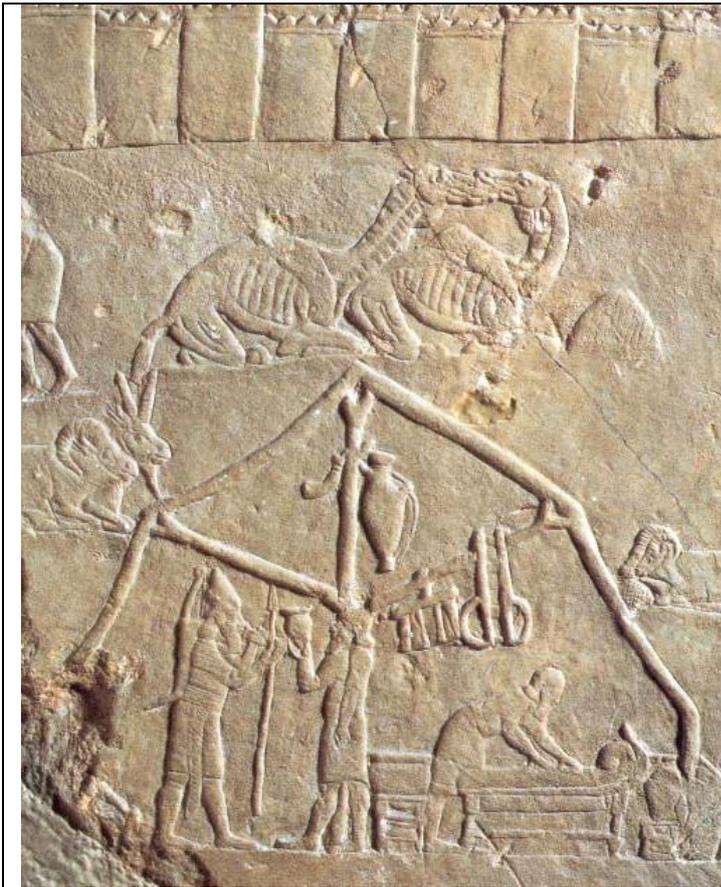
Barnett 1976: Plate XXXIII

This small incident on the outskirts of the empire demonstrates to us a much larger problem faced by the Assyrian army – the size and aridity of the Syrian Desert prevented any large crossing by a large Assyrian army based around horses and chariots.<sup>50</sup> We can see this best in Esarhaddon's attack on Egypt, as he needed the cooperation of Arab nomads in order to supply his army with water across the Sinai using camels.<sup>51</sup> Eph'al estimates that at least two hundred camels would have been needed

<sup>50</sup> Eph'al 1982: 141.

<sup>51</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1366.

for every one thousand men to cross this desert, which shows the scale of such an operation.<sup>52</sup> Whilst this is a smaller number than if horses were used, such numbers would have been best achieved by gaining the allegiance of the local population who were skilled in breeding camels. Bringing them from breeding centres in Assyria, where it was not as commonly bred, would not have been as effective. This is not to say there were no camels in the Assyrian army – in fact, Sargon’s successors tried to have camels in army stations. Esarhaddon had camels in army stocks,



**Figure 3:** Two camels in Ashurbanipal’s military camp.  
 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 1992: 184.

and Ashurbanipal had camels in his military camp.<sup>53</sup>

In light of this, it seems logical that camels should feature in a tribute list to Tiglath-Pileser III which also mentions Zabibe, “Queen of the Arabs”. These tribute lists pose an interesting problem. At the point of their writing, the Assyrian army did not have control of the rulers in the Southern Palestine or Transjordan area (this is where most of the leaders in the tribute lists come from).<sup>54</sup> Why did Zabibe pay tribute if she was not controlled by Assyria? Eph’al, whilst problematically describing her as a “nomad leader”, asserts that this group were very important for trade. I would rather

say that the Arabs were important for trade, as I do not believe Zabibe would be ruling over just nomads. However, there is evidence to believe that the nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab populations were the main demographic the Assyrians came into contact with.<sup>55</sup> This may be where the confusion between the terms “nomad” and “Arab” stems from, as the Assyrians were only in contact with the

<sup>52</sup> Eph’al 1982: 140.

<sup>53</sup> Elat 1998: 50; See Figure 3.

<sup>54</sup> Eph’al 1982: 83.

<sup>55</sup> Eph’al 1982: 98.

nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, and therefore would have assumed that the Arabs were made up of non-settled populations.

From this tribute list, it seems that when Damascus and Tyre came under Assyrian control, Zabibe gave tribute in order to avoid the disruption to Arabian trade and therefore her income.<sup>56</sup> Even though she was not directly threatened by the Assyrians, they could disrupt the Northern end of the trade routes, and therefore decrease traffic through her area in the Syrian Desert.<sup>57</sup> This has also been interpreted in a way that tells us the commercial relations with the Arabs was less about trade, and more about tax – tributes like these were effectively given for protection, which is one of the functions of tax.<sup>58</sup>

The tribute list itself is a long list of those sending tribute, followed by an itemisation of the tribute itself, so it is difficult to determine who gave what in tribute. Due to the intrinsic link between Arabia and camels (as described above), we can only assume that Zabibe was the leader who sent the camels:<sup>59</sup>

- iii 1. MAN. MEŠ šá KUR.ḫat-ti KUR.a-ri-me šá UŠ tam-<sup>r</sup>tim<sup>r</sup>
2. šá SILIM <sup>d</sup>šam-ši KUR.qid-ri KUR.a-ri-<sup>r</sup>bī<sup>r</sup>
3. <sup>m</sup>kuš-taš-pi URU.<sup>r</sup>ku<sup>r</sup>-muḫ-a-[a]
4. <sup>m</sup>ra-qi-a-nu KUR.šá-ANŠE.NÍTA-šú-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
5. <sup>m</sup>mi-ni-ḫi-im-<sup>r</sup>me<sup>r</sup> KUR.sa-<sup>r</sup>me<sup>r</sup>-ri-i-na-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
6. <sup>m</sup>tu-ba-il URU.šur-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
7. <sup>m</sup>si-bít-ba-il KUR.gub-la-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
8. <sup>m</sup>ú-ri-ik KUR.qu-ú-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
9. <sup>m</sup>su-lu-mal KUR.mi-lid-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
10. <sup>m</sup>ú-as-sur-me KUR.<sup>r</sup>ta<sup>r</sup>-bal-a-a
11. <sup>m</sup>uš-ḫi-ti KUR.a-tú-na-a-a
12. <sup>m</sup>ur-bal-la-a KUR.tú-ḫa-na-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
13. [<sup>m</sup>]tú-ḫa-me KUR.iš-tu-un-di-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
14. <sup>m</sup>ú-i-ri-mi KUR.ḫu-bi-iš-na-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
15. <sup>m</sup>da-di-ìl KUR.kaš-ka-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
16. <sup>m</sup>pi-si-ri-is URU.gar-<sup>r</sup>ga<sup>r</sup>-miš-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>
17. <sup>m</sup>pa-na-am-mu [KUR.sa]-<sup>r</sup>ma<sup>r</sup>-al-la-a-[a]
18. <sup>m</sup>tar-ḫu-la-ru KUR.[gúr]-gu-ma-a-<sup>r</sup>a<sup>r</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Eph'al 1982: 83.

<sup>57</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1364.

<sup>58</sup> Elat 1998: 39.

<sup>59</sup> RINAP 1.35.iii1-23.

19. *ʿza-bi-bé-e šar-ʿrat* KUR.*a-ri-ʿbi*  
 20. *bíl-tú ma-da-tú* KÙ.BABBAR KÙ.GI AN.NA AN.BAR  
 21. KUŠ AM.SI ZÚ AM.SI *ta-kil-tú ar-gu-man-nu*  
 22. *lu-bul-ti bir-me* GADA ANŠE.A.AB.BA.MEŠ  
 23. ANŠE.<a>-*na-qa-a-ti* UGU-šú-nu ú-ʿkinʿ

Translation:

- iii1. (As for) the kings of the land Ḫatti (Syria-Palestine), the Arameans who are on the shore of the Sea of the Setting Sun, (the people of) the land Qedar, (and) the Arabs: Kuštašpi of the land Kummuḫu, Raqiānu (Reziu) of the land Damascus,  
 iii5. Menahem of the land Samaria, Tubaʿil of the city Tyre, Sibitti-baʿil (Sibitti-biʿil) of the city Byblos, Urik(ki) of the land Que, Sulumal of the land Melid,  
 iii10. Uassurme of the land Tabal, Ušḫitti of the land Atuna (Tuna), Urballâ of the land Tuḫana, Tuḫamme of the land Ištundi, Urimmi of the land Ḫubišna,  
 iii15. Dadīlu of the land Kaska, Pisīris of the city Carchemish, Panammû of [the land Sa]mʿal, Tarḫulara of the land [Gur]gum, (and) Zabibe, queen of the Arabs –  
 iii20. I imposed upon them tribute (and) payment of silver, gold, tin, iron, elephant hide(s), ivory, blue-purple (and) red-purple garments, multi-coloured linen garments, camels, (and) she-camels.

This is the first time a “Queen of the Arabs” is mentioned in the Akkadian sources, and as we can see, she is inextricably linked with the exchange of goods. Since this is a tribute list, we cannot say this is mercantile trade, but it certainly demonstrates to us the Assyrians’ perception of the wealth the Arabs had access to. Even if Zabibe was not the provider of the camels in this list, being listed alongside luxury goods such as elephant hides, brightly coloured garments and precious metals demonstrates that the Assyrians believed she and the other leaders could provide such luxury goods to Tiglath-pileser III.

Just like the Queen of Sheba, it is important to locate Zabibe, but this is difficult. She is not listed as a queen of a specific town or city but a queen of a general area, and there is no mention of where she could be specifically located. Adummatu has been suggested, but this city only seems to be mentioned in the Akkadian sources from Sennacherib onwards. It has been suggested that Zabibe was from Southern Arabia,<sup>60</sup> but like the Queen of Sheba, I believe the distance is too great for Zabibe to send tribute to Assyria. It seems unrealistic that a leader based in the South of Arabia had any real interest in the dealings of Assyria – a nation that the rulers in the south of Arabia had no direct contact with. I

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<sup>60</sup> Dayton 1970: 254.

also believe that her association with the other leaders means that she should be located in the Syrian Desert.<sup>61</sup> I would not go so far as to say Adummatu, but a town like this (located in the Syrian desert, and an economy based on wealthy trade routes going through it) would be reasonable, especially somewhere close to the other leaders.

We encounter a recurrent problem with the “Queens of Arabia” – were they in charge of all Arabs? Were they all part of the same tribe of Arabs? Or were they in charge of different tribes? I would say the latter, but due to confusion on the Assyrians’ part in describing the Arabs and their “Queens”, we cannot say for sure which tribes they belong to. Eph’al says it was only after Ashurbanipal that the socio-ethnic units of “Arabs” and “Qedar” were separated in Akkadian sources.<sup>62</sup> This means that it took many years for the Assyrians to realise that there was more than one tribe who classified themselves as “Arabs”. Qedar was one of the most important Arab tribes in the middle of the first millennium, was a confederation of loosely related tribes, and was based near Adummatu.<sup>63</sup> With this in mind it is tempting to place Zabibe as the ruler of this city, and as one of the leaders of the Qedarite confederation. I will not do so, as there is no evidence to support this assertion, and the confusion the Assyrians obviously had about the Arabs means this assertion is inappropriate.

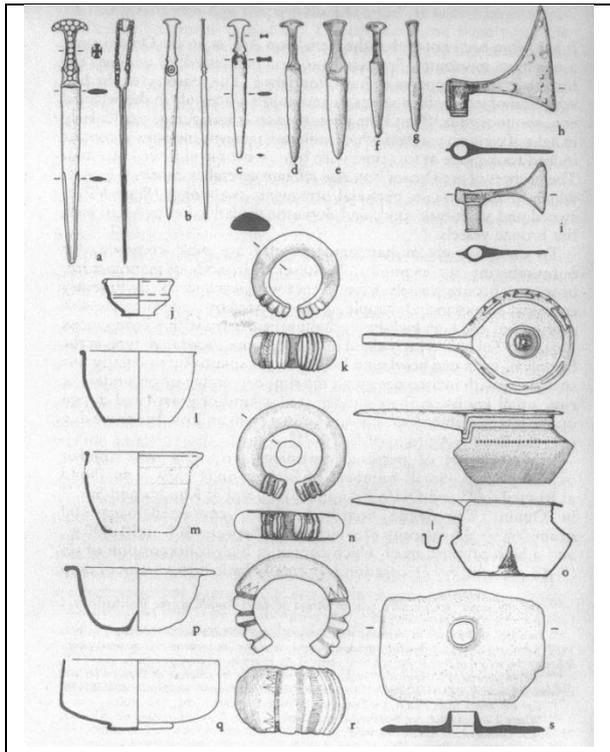
What is important to notice is that if our interpretation of this tribute list is correct, Zabibe took the initiative and made contact with the Assyrians. That is to say, the Assyrians did not demand tribute, but she offered it in a move to placate Tiglath-Pileser III. This was done to maintain control over the trade routes that ran through her land, and to keep the peace in her territory. This seemed to have worked, as there is no record of any battles involving Zabibe, implying that trade rather than expansion was the most important factor in early Assyrian relations with the Arabs. Tiglath-Pileser III had a steady trade in luxuries coming in to the empire, so why should he wage a war with Zabibe? This would therefore be evidence that trade was more influential in the way the Assyrians treated the “Queens of the Arabs” than their gender.

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<sup>61</sup> Other leaders are from sites along the Levantine coast, and from South West Anatolia.

<sup>62</sup> Eph’al 1982: 82.

<sup>63</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1359.



**Figure 4:** Some of the bronze objects from Oman.  
Potts 1990: 384.

Alongside camels, copper was brought into Mesopotamia through Arabia.<sup>64</sup> Copper was mined in Oman (ancient Magan) from the fourth millennium, and in the third millennium this was sent to Mesopotamia in various stages of the metallurgical process.<sup>65</sup> This helped create an industry in bronze production, which flourished in Oman until the Seleucid era.<sup>66</sup> These help to dispel the myth that trade in Southern Arabia was based entirely on aromatics. This myth is found in modern authors, but was based on the assumptions of Classical authors that Arabian wealth was from aromatics alone.<sup>67</sup> Whilst this is untrue, the aromatic trade did play a large role in international trade. Whilst we must acknowledge the trade in copper, we must also recognise that it did not have the international demand or economic impact that aromatics did.

The aromatics the Southern Arabian people grew and traded were mainly frankincense and myrrh, which are resins tapped from trees which only grow in Southern Arabia and the East African coast.<sup>68</sup> Not only this, but Arabian aromatics were famous for their high quality in comparison to the African variants.<sup>69</sup> As is evident now, Arabia had a monopoly on the best aromatics in the ancient near East, and as such demand was very high for frankincense and myrrh. This is even clearer when we take into account that frankincense was most commonly used in the ancient world for religious rituals.<sup>70</sup> As Groom explains in more depth than allowed at present, the spreading of the smoke had a symbolic relationship to prayer, as the movement of smoke upwards symbolised the messages in prayers and worship being transmitted to the gods.<sup>71</sup> In Assyria, we find sculptures at Nineveh which depict incense being burnt for the sun-god, and many Assyrian relief carvings have a tall incense stand separating the

<sup>64</sup> Monroe 2007: 182.

<sup>65</sup> Boucharlat 1995: 1335, 1341.

<sup>66</sup> Potts 1990: 383.

<sup>67</sup> Groom 1981: 10.

<sup>68</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>69</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>70</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>71</sup> Groom 1981: 2.

king from his god.<sup>72</sup> From these we can see that incense played an important part in the communications between the Assyrian kings and their gods. This incense stand would have had lit charcoal in it, and the incense would have been sprinkled on this, thus creating the aromatic smoke.<sup>73</sup> This seems to be standard practice for diviners and priests across the Assyrian empire, so it would be logical to expect a large demand for frankincense. Myrrh was used in much the same way as frankincense, but was also used as an oil in medicines, perfumes and embalming.<sup>74</sup> MacDonald suggests that the Egyptians were using Southern Arabian myrrh (as well as the Eastern African variety) from the beginning of the first millennium, and if this is true it would serve as more evidence for the trade links between Arabia and Egypt.<sup>75</sup> As excavations continue at sites such as Tayma, we find more and more items which are decidedly Arabian, but have Mesopotamian, or even Egyptian, styles and features.<sup>76</sup> Finally, Groom makes the valid point that perfumes and incense were necessary for living comfortably due to the period's sanitation problems.<sup>77</sup> All of this proves that although trade with Arabia was not important for Assyria's economic stability (as these are, by all accounts, luxury materials), aromatics were certainly in high demand. We do not know what proportion of the aromatics produced were for external trade, but I would guess it was substantial.<sup>78</sup> This would be because not only was Arabia trading in aromatics with Assyria, but with Egypt as well. This high demand from many different countries means that I doubt the Arabians would be trading in small amounts. I would go so far as to say that aromatics were very important for the economic stability of the tribes in Arabia, whether they grew the plants or traded in the resin.

This high demand for frankincense and myrrh kept prices high, but these were made higher by the transport costs.<sup>79</sup> As described earlier, trade through Arabia was over land, and camels were used to transport the goods between oases. Running costs of keeping camels fed and watered, as well as the costs that could be incurred for ensuring protection of the caravans, meant that the overall cost of aromatics was very high. In fact, the price was so high that by the Roman period, the price of aromatics was the same as gold.<sup>80</sup> These high prices created the perception (especially with Classical

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<sup>72</sup> Groom 1981: 1.

<sup>73</sup> Groom 1981: 11.

<sup>74</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>75</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>76</sup> For more about the recent finds at Tayma, as well as more Egyptian-influenced finds, see both Hausleiter 2010, and Eichmann, Schaudig and Hausleiter 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Groom 1981: 8.

<sup>78</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1357.

<sup>79</sup> Groom 1981: 8.

<sup>80</sup> Groom 1981: 8.

authors) that Southern Arabians were extremely wealthy in general, when the Arab people were no wealthier than the rest of the ancient near East.<sup>82</sup>

The high value of these aromatics meant that they were taken as part of the booty from Samsi and Te'elḫunu by Tiglath-Pileser III and Sennacherib respectively. In terms of Samsi, "Queen of the Arabs", we do not have as much material as we would like, but the general outline is as follows. In 734,



**Figure 5:** A pedestal/altar with Egyptian-style bull.<sup>81</sup>

Hausleiter 2010: 254.

Samsi joined the anti-Assyrian kings of Damascus, Tyre and Israel.<sup>83</sup> Samsi was then defeated by Tiglath-Pileser III near Mount Saqurri, many of her men were killed, and a large amount of booty was taken by the Assyrian king (which included captives, camels, sheep and aromatics). Samsi then fled into the desert, but ultimately surrendered to Tiglath-Pileser III. She then paid a tribute of camels, she-camels and their young, spices and sheep.<sup>84</sup> After this, Samsi remained queen after her surrender, but a <sup>lu</sup>*qepu* (a governor) was appointed over her by Tiglath-Pileser III.<sup>85</sup>

19b'. *ša* <sup>f</sup>*sa-am-si šar-rat* KUR.a-ri-bi <sup>f</sup>*ina* KUR.sa<sup>7</sup>-qu-ur-ri <sup>f</sup>KUR.i<sup>7</sup>

20'. [9 LIM 4 ME *di-ik-ta-šú-nu a*]-duk 1 LIM UN.MEŠ 30 LIM ANŠE.A.AB.BA.MEŠ 20 LIM GU<sub>4</sub>.NÍTA.MEŠ

21'. [...].<sup>f</sup>MEŠ<sup>7</sup> 5 LIM ŠIM.ḪI.A DÙ-*ma* x TU DU *né-mat-ti* DINGIR.MEŠ-*ni-šá*

22'. [GIŠ.til-li GIŠ.NÍG.GIDRU.MEŠ <sup>d</sup>*iš-tar-šá*] <sup>f</sup>NÍG.GA<sup>7</sup>-šá *e-kim* <<KI>> <sup>f</sup>ù<sup>7</sup> *ši-i a-na šu-zu-ub* ZI.MEŠ-šá

23'. [... *a-na ma*]-<sup>f</sup>ad<sup>7</sup>-ba-<sup>f</sup>ri<sup>7</sup> *a-šar šu-ma-me* GIM MUNUS.ANŠE.EDIN.NA

<sup>81</sup> Found at Tayma, but dates slighter later than the Neo-Assyrian period, this find shows how persistent the link with Egypt became.

<sup>82</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1358.

<sup>83</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1364.

<sup>84</sup> Eph'al 1982: 85.

<sup>85</sup> Eph'al 1982: 86; *RINAP* 1.42.19b'-33'.

- 24'. [taš-ku-na pa-ni-šá si-ta-at NÍG.GA-šá kul-ta]-ri-šá ḥu-ra-da-at UN.MEŠ-šá i-na MURUB<sub>4</sub>  
KARAŠ-šá
- 25'. [ina IZI áš-ru-up ʿsa-am-si la-pa-an GIŠ.TUKUL].MEŠ-ia KAL.MEŠ taš-ḥu-ut-ma  
ANŠE.A.AB.BA.MEŠ ANŠE.a-na-qa-a-te
- 26'. [a-di ANŠE.ba-ak-ka-ri-ši-na a-na KUR aš-šur a-di maḥ]-ri-ia taš-šá-a LÚ.qe-e-pu ina muḥ-  
ḥi-šá áš-kun-man
- 27'. [10<sup>3</sup> LIM<sup>2</sup> LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ<sup>2</sup> ... URU].ma-as-'a-a-a URU.te-ma-a-a LÚ.sa-ba-'a-a-a
- 28'. [URU.ḥa-a-a-ap-pa-a-a URU.ba-da-na-a-a] URU.ḥa-at-te-e-a LÚ i-di-ba-a-a'-il-a-a
- 29'. [...] ša mi-šir ʿKUR<sup>1</sup>.KUR ša šu-lum ʿšam-ši
- 30'. [ša má-ma la i-du-šú-nu-ti-ma a-šar-šú-un ru-ú]-qu ʿta<sup>1</sup>-nit-ti be-lu-ti-ia
- 31'. [al-ka-ka-at qur-di-ia iš-mu-ma<sup>2</sup> ú-šal-lu-ú<sup>2</sup>] be-lu-ti KÙ.GI KÙ.BABBAR
- 32'. [ANŠE.A.AB.BA.MEŠ MUNUS.ANŠE.a-na-qa-a-ti ŠIM.ḤI.A DÙ-a-ma] ma-da-ta-šú-nu ki-i 1-  
en
- 33'. [a-di maḥ-ri-ia ú-bi-lu-nim-ma<sup>2</sup> ú-na-áš-ši-qu] GÌR.II.MEŠ-ia

Translation:

19b. As for Samsi, queen of the Arabs, at Mount Saqurri, [I] de[feated 9,400 (of her people)]. I took away (from her) 1,000 people, 30,000 camels, 20,000 oxen, [...] ..., 5,000 (pouches) of all types of aromatics, ..., thrones of her gods, [the military equipment (and) staffs of her goddess(es)], (and) her property.

22b. Moreover, she, in order to save her life, [...(and) set out] like a female onager [to the de]sert, a place (where one is always) thirsty. [I set the rest of her possessions] (and) her [ten]ts, her people's safeguard within her camp, [on fire].

25'b. [Samsi] became startled [by] my mighty [weapon]s and she brought camels, she-camels, [with their young, to Assyria, befo]re me. I placed a representative (of mine) over her and [... 10,000 soldiers].

27'b. The people of the cities Mas'a (and) Tema, the (tribe) Saba, the people of the cities [Ḥayappa, Badanu], (and) Ḥatte, (and) the (tribes) Idiba'ilu, [...], who are on the border of the western lands,

30'. [whom none (of my predecessors) had known about, and whose country is remo]te, [heard about] the fame of my majesty (and) my heroic deeds, and (thus) they beseeched] my lordship. As one, [they brought before me] gold, silver, [camels, she-camels, (and) all types of aromatics] as their payment [and they kissed] my feet.

The numbers in the sources about the booty taken from Samsi – like many numbers in Assyrian reliefs – may be exaggerated in order to emphasise how much booty or tribute was given, or they may even have been changed in order to fit a mystical figure to prove divine backing of the king.<sup>86</sup> I choose to view the figures as mostly accurate, at least in magnitude (I doubt the numbers quoted are exact). This source demonstrates what the Assyrians viewed as valuable in the Arabian camps – camels, oxen, aromatics, people and statues of the Arab gods were taken. Camels were taken because of their advantage to the Assyrian army in desert areas, whilst oxen and people were taken as a source of labour. Aromatics were taken because they were of a very high value in Assyria, so to the Assyrians this was a direct taking of wealth (akin to taking gold as booty). Finally, Arab gods were taken as a political statement. They were essentially kidnapped by the Assyrians, and could be ransomed back to the Assyrians if necessary. Not only this, but we can see that the news of this defeat reached tribes as far afield as the South Arabian Sabaeans, who then sent wealthy gifts of gold, silver, camels, and aromatics to Tiglath-pileser III. This is very much like the decision of Zabibe to send tribute to Tiglath-pileser III, as they clearly wanted to placate Assyria before they were defeated like Samsi. The conflict with Samsi demonstrates Tiglath-Pileser III great desire to control over Arabia (and especially Northern Arabia). Control over the region of Arabia would give Assyria effective control over the rich trade through Arabia. Tiglath-Pileser III managed to reach 500km away from Tayma, but the conflicts with Samsi show the king wasn't able to completely subdue the populations in this area.

Sennacherib campaigned against Adummatu between 691 and 689 BC, and this is the first mention of both Adummatu and Te'elḥunu – another “Queen of the Arabs”.<sup>87</sup> She led the Arab army with Hazael (called the “King of the Arabs” – this title raises a host of other questions which shall be addressed later), but was attacked in the desert by the Assyrians.<sup>88</sup> After this, Te'elḥunu fled deeper into the desert to Adummatu, but she was overtaken and carried to Assyria with extensive booty and the images of her local gods:<sup>89</sup>

53'. [... *te-'e-el-ḥu<sup>2</sup>*]-*ri nu<sup>2</sup>* šar-rat LÚ.a-ra-bi i-na qé-reb mad-ba-*ri*

54'. [...] LIM ANŠE.GAM.MAL.MEŠ *e-kim qa-tuš-ša ši-i it-ti mḥa-ri za-DINGIR*

55'. [... *ḥur-ba-šú ta-ḥa*]-*zi-ia is-ḥup-šú-nu-ti kul-ta-ri-šú-nu ú-maš-še-ru-ma*

56'. [*a-na ...*] *ri<sup>2</sup>* URU.a-du-um-ma-te a-na nap-ša-a-ti in-nab-*ri tu*

57'. [... URU.a]-*ri<sup>2</sup>*-um-ma-tu ša qé-reb mad-ba-ri šit-ku-na-at ša-bat-*ri sún*

58'. [... *qaq*]-*ri<sup>2</sup>* qar<sup>2</sup> šu<sup>2</sup>-me ša ri-i-tu maš-qí-tú la ba-šú-ú qé-reb-šú-[un]

<sup>86</sup> De Odorico 1995.

<sup>87</sup> Eph'al 1982: 118; Potts 2012: 74.

<sup>88</sup> Eph'al 1982: 118-199.

<sup>89</sup> Eph'al 1982: 119; *RINAP* 3.35.53'-9''.

59'. [...] x x x x x x x (x)

Lacuna

1''. [...i-na] ṣuk<sup>1</sup>-bu-us ṣa<sup>1</sup>-ram-ṣme<sup>1</sup> [...]

2''. [...]x-ma<sup>2</sup> man-da-at-ta-šú-nu ṣka<sup>1</sup>-[bit-tu am-ḥur<sup>2</sup>...]

3''. [...]lu<sup>2</sup>-ni URU.ka-pa-a-nu URU.[...]

4''. [...] a-šar ni-šir-ti-šá i-ṣna<sup>2</sup> [...]

5''. [... ṣte-<sup>1</sup>e-el-ḥu-nu<sup>2</sup> šar]-rat LÚ.a-ra-bi a-di DINGIR.[MEŠ-šá<sup>2</sup>...]

6''. [...]x-a-ti NA<sub>4</sub>.BABBAR.DILI.MEŠ NA<sub>4</sub>.ṣBABBAR<sup>2</sup>.[MIN<sub>5</sub><sup>2</sup>.MEŠ...]

7''. [...] ṣḥa<sup>2</sup>-šur-ru ŠIM.MEŠ ka-ṣla<sup>1</sup>-[ma...]

8''. [...] x-a-te ú LUGAL.MEŠ-ni x [...]

9''. [... áš-lu]-la URU.MEŠ-ni šá-tu-ṣnu<sup>1</sup> [ap-pu-ul aq-qur i-na ḏGIŠ.BAR aq-mu]

Translation:

53. [... Te'elḥunu], queen of the Arabs, in the middle of the desert [...] I took away [...] thousand camels from her. She [...] with Hazael. [Terror of doing battle with me overwhelmed them. They abandoned their tents and fled for (their) lives [to the city ...] and the city Adummatu.

57''. [(As for) the city... and the city Ad]ummatu, which are located in the desert, [... a place of thirst in whi[ch] there is no pasture (or) watering-place, [...]]...

Lacuna

1''. [...by having] ramp[s] trodden down [...] ... and [I received] their sub[stantial] payment [...] ... to me.

3''b. (As for) the cities Kapānu, ...[... its secret place, (which is) in [...

5''. ... I carried] off [Te'elḥunu, que]en of the Arabs, together with [her] god[s, ...] ..., pappardilû-stones, pappar[mīnu]-stone[s, ...] ḥašūru-wood, all types [of] aromatics, [...] ... and kings ... [... I destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire] those cities.

In this fragmented source we have much fewer actual figures of items taken from Te'elḥunu, but we can see that at least one thousand camels were taken from her by Sennacherib. Like the booty from Samsi, the Assyrians saw an intrinsic value in the camels of Te-elḥunu for the expansion of the Assyrian empire. After an initial defeat, Te'elḥunu (who was working with Hazael) fled to the city Adummatu. This evidently did not shelter Te'elḥunu for very long, as she, like Samsi, was captured and taken to Assyria with her gods. After this there is a short break, and then a list of precious stones and wood, as well as aromatics. It can only be presumed that this was either taken as booty from Te'elḥunu, or asked for in tribute afterwards. Either situation implies that the "Queen of the Arabs" Te'elḥunu had access to precious stones that could only have been used for trade during the campaign in order to afford supplies for her army. Again, we see an Arab army carrying a large number of valuables whilst

on campaign, and after their defeat the Assyrian army took advantage of this wealth by plundering the Arabs' army.

These sources demonstrate the interesting fact that both Samsi and Te'elḫunu carried valuable goods such as aromatics whilst on military campaign. Why was this? I would say it played a role in rituals carried out whilst on campaign, but the numbers quoted in the sources also point to another use – trade whilst campaigning. It would be logical for an army that was largely based in the desert to carry some commodity to trade with sedentary populations in exchange for important supplies such as food, water, and perhaps the rights to camp around these settlements. This is speculation, but I would still argue that this is the main purpose for carrying these amounts of such a valuable commodity during wartime. To the Assyrians, this was further reason for controlling Arabia and the Arabs. The Arabian armies seemed to be so wealthy to the Assyrians that they were able to carry luxuries on campaign like aromatics. Of course the Assyrians would want control over the Arabs, so they could share in this wealth.

After this evidence, it is clear why part of the tribute imposed on Iata', Hazael's son, included aromatics.<sup>90</sup> Assyria wanted to be part of a wealthy trade which flowed through Arabia, and the quickest way of doing this was to control the populations found in North Arabia through both military and trade actions such as booty from wars and imposing tribute. The best example of this control and manipulation for the benefit of the Assyrians was the restriction of trading iron with the Arabs.<sup>91</sup>

20. LUGAL *be-lí lu-u-da ša* LUGAL *be-lí iš-<sup>r</sup>pur<sup>r</sup>-a-ni*  
 21. *ma-a* URU.*hu-za-za a-na* URU LÚ\*.DAM.QAR  
 22. *te-ta-<sup>r</sup>ap<sup>r</sup>-šá ma-a* AN.BAR UN.MEŠ *a-na*  
 23. LÚ\*.*ar-ba-a-a in akas-pi i-tan-di-nu*  
 24. [*man-n*]u *šu-nu* LÚ\*.DAM.QAR.ME *ša ina ŠÀ-bi*  
 25. [*i-d*]i-*nu-ni* 3 ERIM.ME LÚ\*.AB.[B]A.M[E]  
 e26. [*š*]a KUR. *'a-ta-a-a ina ŠÀ-bi* x [x x]  
 27. [GIŠ.KI]N.GEŠTIN.MEŠ *lu 20 lu* [30 ANŠE]  
 28. <sup>r</sup>*a<sup>r</sup>-mar nu-še-rab-u-ni ú-k[a]-[u]*  
 29. [*a*]-<sup>r</sup>*na* LÚ\*.*ar<sup>r</sup>-ba-a-a i-d[u-nu]*  
 r1. <sup>r</sup>*a-na-ku* AN.BAR *a-na* LÚ\*<sup>r</sup>.*hu-ub-<sup>r</sup>ti<sup>r</sup>-[ma]*

<sup>90</sup> RINAP 4.1.iv19-iv22: “<sup>m</sup>ḫa-za-DINGIR *šim-tu ú-bil-šú-ma<sup>m</sup> ia-ta-a'* DUMU-šú *ina* GIŠ.GU.ZA-šú *ú-še-šib-ma* 10 MA.NA KÙ.GI 1 LIM NA<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *bé-ru-ti* 50 ANŠE.GAM.MAL.MEŠ 1 ME *kun-zi* ŠIM.ḪI.A UGU *man-da-at-ti* AD-šú *ú-rad-di-ma e-mid-su*”. Translation: “Hazael died and I placed Iata', his son, on his throne. I added ten minas of gold, one thousand choice stones, fifty camels, (and) one hundred bags of aromatics to the tribute of his father and imposed (it) on him.”.

<sup>91</sup> Cole 1996: 115; SAA 1.179.20-r.2.

2. ʿeʿ-ra ʿa-naʿ LU\*.ʿarʿ-ba-a-a a-ʿda-anʿ

Translation:

20. As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: “You have made Huzaza into a merchant town! The people have been selling iron for money to the Arabs!” – who are the merchants that have been selling there? Three men, elders of the ‘Ateans, [are...] there; they stock grapes, 20 or [30 homers], as much as we bring in, and sell them to the Arabs. I sell iron to the deportees [only], copper to the Arabs.

In this letter from a provincial governor of the Assyrian king Sargon II, there was an extreme interest from the Assyrian kings as to who was trading iron. We can see above that trading iron with the Arabs was seen as a terrible action, and the governor wanted to prove to Sargon II that this was not happening in his town. In fact, he is keen to point out that it was only copper that was being traded with the Arabs. So why was it acceptable to trade copper with the Arabs and not iron? Iron was the material the Assyrians used to manufacture their weapons, whilst most other areas (such as Arabia) were using bronze weapons. Restrictions on the trade of iron were therefore a way of mitigating the damage that could be done by Arabian troops in future battles.<sup>92</sup> If the Arabians did not use iron, then they would not be on an equal footing with the Assyrians in battle, and therefore the Assyrians would have an advantage and defeat the Arabians. From this we can see that the Arabs were a genuine military threat to the Assyrians, and that the Assyrians were not averse to manipulating trade in order to gain control of an area. Arabia was therefore facing trade restrictions so that they were more susceptible to defeat by the Assyrians, and then the Assyrians could be in control of the trade routes through Arabia.

All of this creates a picture that contact with the “Queens of the Arabs” was the result of Assyrian kings wanting control of a wealthy trade in goods including camels and aromatics. This seems to have motivated further conflicts with the Arabs, not just the Queens, so trade was a crucial factor in the motivations behind relations between the Assyrians and the “Queens of the Arabs”. Yet, when contact had been made, it is important to ascertain if their treatment was any different purely because they were female rulers.

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<sup>92</sup> Retsö 2003: 152.

### 3. Gender

The first queen we shall discuss is lati'e. She is a contemporary of Sennacherib, but she is only mentioned in relation to her brother Basqanu.<sup>93</sup> He was captured on campaign, but is mentioned as "Basqānu, a brother of lati'e, queen of the Arabs".<sup>94</sup> It is interesting that his identification was in relation to her, when normally Assyrian women were identified in relation to powerful men. Was this a reflection of the unique position that women could hold in Arabia? The Assyrians may have known about lati'e, and having previous knowledge of "Queens of the Arabs", felt they had to give her respect by acknowledging the family tie. She seemed to have held some kind of power, otherwise why else would she be referred to in an Assyrian source? What is important with lati'e is that she is only known through the family link she had with a male relative. This means she was probably a passive actor, at least in military affairs. She seems to act more like a passive Assyrian woman with no direct power, but aside from this we cannot determine much.

This is the same situation with Adiya, the wife of Uaite'. He was a leader of the Arab forces against Ashurbanipal in his first campaign sometime between 650 and 647 BC.<sup>95</sup> During the conflict, the Arabs were beaten, and Adiya was captured.<sup>96</sup> As with lati'e, we only know Adiya through her relationship with an important male leader – all that is written about her is that her camp was attacked by Assyrians, no more. This is more in line with what is written about other foreign women during conflicts:<sup>97</sup>

8. KUR.É-<sup>m</sup>ši-la-a-ni a-ni si-ḫir-ti-šú ki-ma ḫaṣ-<sup>r</sup>bat<sup>r</sup>-ti ú-daḳ-<sup>r</sup>qi<sup>r</sup>-iq URU.sa-ar-ra-ba-a-nu

9. URU LUGAL-ti-šú-nu GAL-a GIM DU<sub>6</sub>a-bu-bi ú-ab-bit-ma [šal]-la-su áš-lu-la <sup>md</sup>MUATI-ú-šab-ši LUGAL-šú-nu

10. mé-eḫ-ret KÁ.GAL URU-šú a-na GIŠ.za-qi-pi ú-še-li-<sup>r</sup>ma<sup>r</sup> <ú-šad-gi-la> KUR-su DAM-su DUMU.MEŠ-šú DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-šú NÍG.GA-<sup>r</sup>šu<sup>r</sup>

11a. ni-ṣir-ti-<<šú>> É.GAL-šú áš-lu-la

Translation:

8. I smashed the land Bīt-Šilāni in its entirety like a pot. I destroyed the city Sarrabānu, its (text: "their") great royal city, (making it) like a *tell* after the Deluge and I [plun]dered it.

<sup>93</sup> Eph'al 1982: 113.

<sup>94</sup> RINAP 3.1.28: "a-di <sup>m</sup>ba-as-qa-a-nu ŠEŠ <sup>f</sup>ia-ti-i'-e šar-rat LÚ.a-ri-bi".

<sup>95</sup> Eph'al 1982: 142.

<sup>96</sup> Eph'al 1982: 143.

<sup>97</sup> RINAP 1.39.8-11a.

10. I impaled Nabû-ušabši, their king, before the gate of his city <while making> (the people of) his land <watch>. I carried off his wife, his sons, his daughters, his possessions, (and) the treasures of his palace.

This is the more typical depiction of foreign women in Assyrian inscriptions. There is a description of violence perpetrated by the Assyrians against a foreign power, and then the foreign women are mentioned alongside the foreign ruler's children and booty taken from the palace and the foreign king. With this inscription in mind, it is not surprising that Adiya appears in the source like this. The norm was to treat foreign women – particularly royal women – as part of the booty to be taken for the Assyrian king. Therefore, whilst we are investigating the “Queens of the Arabs”, these women are proof that not all Arab women had power, or were even entitled to power. They often took passive roles in Arabia's history, but occasionally Arab women appear in positions of real power. This is also the case with Assyrian women, but the power they held was more subtle, and was not as obvious as being queen.



**Figure 6:** Bronze plaque depicting Esarhaddon and Zakutu.

Parrot and Nougayrol 1956: Plate IV.

The most famous of these royal Assyrian women was Zakutu. She was the mother of Esarhaddon – but this does not mean that she was Sennacherib's primary wife. The mother of a new king automatically became the escort of the father of the previous king, so in inscriptions during Esarhaddon's reign she is referred to as the escort of Sennacherib.<sup>98</sup>

This means that successions which may not have been completely smooth or legitimate would not have been at odds with the ideology of legitimacy the Assyrian kings prided themselves on. In terms of Zakutu, this practice means we do not know the exact status of her in Sennacherib's palace.<sup>99</sup> What we do know about Zakutu for certain is that during Esarhaddon's reign she held a special status, which is reflected in her depiction on at least one relief, and her image on a royal statue.<sup>100</sup> Royal statues had attention paid to every detail of them, as every aspect depicted a message the royalty of Assyria wanted conveyed to either

<sup>98</sup> Melville 2004: 46.

<sup>99</sup> Melville 2004: 46.

<sup>100</sup> Melville 1999: 31-32; See figure 6.

the gods or to their (largely illiterate) subjects.<sup>101</sup> Normally, royal women were not depicted in royal statues, so it is interesting that the mother of a king would have statues of her, especially ones made of gold.<sup>102</sup> The question then becomes why did Zakutu have a special status, and how can we use her to analyse the “Queens of the Arabs”?

The images of Zakutu imply that she had some kind of power, but there are two differing views about the power she held. The traditionally held view is that Zakutu was the power behind Esarhaddon’s throne, and was the reason behind why Ashurbanipal became king.<sup>103</sup> This theory depicts Esarhaddon as a weak king, and Zakutu being heavily involved in political matters. The problem with this theory is that only one of Zakutu’s many letters touches on politics, and for this reason I place more faith in Melville’s views on the nature of Zakutu’s power.<sup>104</sup> Melville says that Zakutu’s symbolic power of having several kings in relation to her meant she could ensure a peaceful succession without incident. This is based from the fundamental standpoint that Esarhaddon was an astute statesman, and that any power Zakutu possessed was due to Esarhaddon allowing her to have power.<sup>105</sup>

Esarhaddon had a precarious position on the throne, with rebellions against him in the first two years of his reign.<sup>106</sup> In order to protect the status quo, and to create stability for his children, he needed someone of unquestionable loyalty in a position of authority. This person would be able to preside over the succession, and help to prevent rebellions like the ones Esarhaddon faced. Zakutu best fit this profile, and so Esarhaddon carefully created a public image for her through building projects and temple activities.<sup>107</sup> This image had to communicate that Zakutu had a very high status, so she could be established without a doubt as the guardian of Esarhaddon’s heirs. This was only done in the last four years of Esarhaddon’s reign, but this was vital to ensuring that the royal succession went smoothly.<sup>108</sup>

When Esarhaddon died unexpectedly *en route* to a campaign in Egypt, Zakutu temporarily stepped into the power vacuum he left behind.<sup>109</sup> She did this not to secure power for herself, but to impose a loyalty oath – apparently on behalf of Ashurbanipal, Zakutu’s grandson.<sup>110</sup> Whilst this has been taken

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<sup>101</sup> Cole and Machinist 1998: XIV.

<sup>102</sup> SAA 13.61 asks for 7 talents of gold to be made available quickly for the creation of royal statues, and the “statue of the queen mother”. There clearly already seem to have been plans for this statue, so the craftsmen were just waiting on the gold in order to make the statues.

<sup>103</sup> Melville 1999: 31.

<sup>104</sup> Melville 1999: 62.

<sup>105</sup> Melville 1999: 32.

<sup>106</sup> Melville 1999: 33-34.

<sup>107</sup> Melville 1999: 36-37.

<sup>108</sup> Melville 1999: 59-60, 79; Kuhrt 2002: 528.

<sup>109</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 528.

<sup>110</sup> Melville 1999: 86.

to mean that Ashurbanipal was Zakutu's favoured grandson, I agree with Melville that the "Zakutu Treaty" was ensuring Esarhaddon's heirs enacted his careful plan of succession. If she was so involved and invested in the heirs to the throne, we would expect to find more evidence that she was at least interested in political affairs before or after the Zakutu Treaty. This is not the case with Zakutu, so it seems that she, like Iat'e and Adiya, was a passive actor in the political running of Assyria.<sup>111</sup>

We will now look in more detail at the Zakutu Treaty, as it is important to understand her role in this document. Below is the treaty itself.<sup>112</sup>

Obv.

1. [a-d]e-e ʿšá] <sup>mí</sup>za-ku-u-te MÍ.KUR šá <sup>m30</sup>-P[AB!.MEŠ-SU]
2. [MA]N KUR aš AMA <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR aš-šur.KI <AMA <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÛ-A>
3. TA· <sup>md</sup>GIŠ.NU<sub>11</sub>-MU-G[I].NA PAB ta-li-me-šú
4. TA· <sup>md</sup>GIŠ.NU<sub>11</sub>-UG<sub>5</sub>.GA-TI.LA ù
5. re-eḫ-te PAB.MEŠ-šú TA· NUMUN LUGAL TA·
6. LÚ.SAG.MEŠ LÚ.NAM.MEŠ LÚ šá ziq-ni
7. LÚ.SAG.MEŠ LÚ.GUB-IGI TA·ZÚ ʿzak-ke-e
8. ù LÚ.TU-KUR gab-bu Ø! TA· DUMU.MEŠ KUR aš-šur
9. ʿLÚ ʿ [qà]l-lu LÚ dan-ʿnu! ʿ man-nu šá ina ŠÀ a-de-e
10. ʿan-nu-ʿte s^à <sup>mí</sup>za-ku-u-te MÍ.KUR ina UGU
11. [<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-D]Û-A DUMU ŠÀ-ŠÀ-bi-šá ḫÚL TA· UN.MEŠ KUR gab-bu
12. [taš-k]un-u-ni man-nu šá a-bu-tú la de-iq-tú
13. [la ṭ]a-ab-tú ù na-bal-kàt-tu
14. [ina UG]U <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÛ-ʿA MAN ʿ KUR aš-šur EN-ku-nu
15. [x x t]a-sa-ʿli-ʿa-ni te-ep-pa-šá-a-ni
16. [nik-l]u! la da-an-qu da-ba-a-bu
17. [la ṭa]-ʿa-ʿbu ina UGU <sup>m</sup>aššur-DÛ-A MAN KUR aš
18. [EN-ku-nu ina Š]À ŠÀ-bi-ku-nu ta-nak-kil-a-nin-ni
19. [ta-dáb-bu-b]a-a-ni us-su-uk-tú
20. [la de-i]q!-tú mil-ku! (text: lu) la ṭa-a-bu šá si-ḫi bar-te
21. [ina ŠÀ-bi-ku]-nu! ina UGU <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÛ-A MAN KUR aš EN-ku-nu
22. [ta-mal-l]ik!-a-ni ta-dáb-bu-ba-a-ni
23. [TA· x x x] x 2-e ina UGU du-a-ki

<sup>111</sup> Melville 1999: 86.

<sup>112</sup> Parpola 1987: 165-167.

24. [šá<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A MAN] KUR aš EN-ku-nu ta-dáb-bu-ba-a-[ni]

25. [aš-šur<sup>d</sup>30<sup>d</sup>UTU] <sup>d</sup>SAG.ME.GAR<sup>d</sup>dili-bat

Edge:

1. [<sup>d</sup>UDU.IDIM.SAG].UŠ!<sup>d</sup>[UDU.IDI]M!.GUD.[UD]

2. [šal-bat]-<sup>r</sup>a!<sup>r</sup>-[nu<sup>d</sup>GAG.SI.SÁ ]

(break of 2 lines)

Rev.

1. [x x x x x] <sup>r</sup>i<sup>r</sup> u <sup>r</sup>x<sup>r</sup> [ ]

2. [ù šum-ma] at-tu-nu TA: ŠÀ! (text: TA:) UD-me an-ni-<sup>r</sup>e<sup>r</sup>

3. [a-bu-tú la] de-iq-tú šá si-ḫi bar-te

4. [šá ina UGU<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A MAN KUR aš be-lí-ku-nu

5. [i-dáb-bu]-bu-u-ni <ta-šam-ma-a-ni> la tal-la-ka-nin-ni

6. [uz-ni] ša<sup>mi</sup>za-ku-u-te AMA-šú ù šá<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A

7. [MAN KUR aš E]N-ku-nu la tu-pat-ta-a-ni <sup>r</sup>ù<sup>r</sup> [š]um-ma

8. [at-tu]-nu šá da-a-ki ù ḫul-lu-qí

9. [šá<sup>m</sup>aš-šur]-DÙ-A MAN KUR aš EN-ku-nu ta-šam-ma-a-ni

10. [la ta]l-la-ka-nin-ni uz-ni šá<sup>mi</sup>za-ku-te Ø!

11. [AMA-šú] <sup>r</sup>ù<sup>r</sup> šá<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A MAN KUR aš be-lí-ku-nu

12. [la tu-pa]t-ta-a-ni ù šum-ma at-tu-nu

13. [ki-l nik-l]u la da-an-qu ina UGU<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A

14. <sup>r</sup>MAN KUR aš be-lí<sup>r</sup>-ku-nu i-nak-kil-an-ni

15. ta-šam-ma-a-ni la tal-la-ka-nin-ni

16. ina IGI<sup>mi</sup>za-ku-te AMA-šú ù ina IGI<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A

17. MAN KUR aš be-lí-ku-nu la ta-qab-ba-a-ni

18. ù šum-ma at-tu-nu ta-šam-ma-a-ni

19. tu-da-a-ni ma!-a ERIM.MEŠ mu-šam-ḫi-iš-su-u-te

20. mu-šad-bi-bu-u-te <<šá>> ina bir-tuk-ku-nu lu-u

21. ina LÚ šá ziq-ni lu-u ina LÚ.SAG.MEŠ lu-u ina PAB.MEŠ-šú

22. lu-u ina NUMUN MAN lu-u PAB.MEŠ-ku-nu lu-u EN ṭa-ba!-te-ku-nu

23. lu-u ina UN.M[EŠ K]UR gab-bu ta-šam-ma-a-ni

24. [tu-da-a-ni l]a ta-šab-ba-ta-nin-ni

25. [la ta-du-ka-ni ina] <sup>r</sup>UGU<sup>mi</sup>za-ku-t[e]!

Edge:

1. [AMA-šú ù ina UGU<sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A MAN KUR aš]

2. [be-lí-ku-nu la tu-ba-l]a-n[in-ni]

Translation:

1. The covenant of Zakutu, the queen of Senna[cherib, ki]ng of Assyria, mother of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, <and mother of Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, >

3. with Šamaš-šumu-ukin, his equal brother, with Šamaš-metu-uballit. and the rest of his brothers, with the royal seed, with the magnates and the governors, the bearded and the eunuchs, the royal entourage, with the exempts and all who enter the Palace, with Assyrians high and low:

9. Anyone who (is included) in this covenant which Queen Zakutu has made with the whole nation concerning her favourite grandson [Assurba]nipal

11. anyone (of you) who should [...] fabricate and carry into effect an ugly and evil thing or a revolt against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria,

16. in your hearts conceive and put into words an ugly [sch]eme and evil plot against [your lord] Assurbanipal, king of Assyria,

19. [in yo]ur [hearts] deliberate and formulate one ugly suggestion and evil advice for rebellion and insurrection against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria,

23. (or) plot [with] another [...] for the murder of your lord [Assurbanipal, king] of Assyria:

25. [May Aššur, Sin, Šamaš], Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, [Mars, and Sirius...]

(short break)

Rev.

1. [Also, you swear that should] you from this day on <hear> an ugly [word] of rebellion and insurrection being spo[ken against] your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you will come and inform Zakutu his mother and Assurbanipal, [king of Assyria], you lord;

7. and you swear that should you hear of (a plan) to kill or eliminate your lord [Assur]-banipal, king of Assur, you will come and inform Zakutu [his mother] and your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria;

12. you also swear that should you hear of an ugly [scheme] being elaborated against your lord Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, you will speak out in the presence of Zakutu his mother and your lord, Assurbanipal, king of Assyria;

18. and you swear that should you hear and know that there are men instigating armed rebellion or fomenting conspiracy in your midst, be they bearded or eunuchs or his brothers or of royal line or your brothers or friends or anyone in the entire nation – should you hear and [know] (this), you will seize and [kill] them and bring them to Zakutu [his mother and to Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, your lord.]

In line 1, we can see that Zakutu was the guardian of this royal loyalty oath. No other Assyrian treaty was imposed by someone other than the king, and we must ask why this is.<sup>113</sup> With Melville's view of Zakutu and Esarhaddon's relationship fresh in our minds, it seems that this situation was planned by Esarhaddon and Zakutu in order to restore order after the king's death.<sup>114</sup> Zakutu acted as a senior family member who could patronize Ashurbanipal, thus reaffirming a previous succession treaty from 672 BC.<sup>115</sup> This is done throughout the Zakutu Treaty by having Zakutu acting as the highest authority in the matters of royal succession – if anyone wanted to rebel against Ashurbanipal, they had to report to Zakutu. If they heard a plot against the king, they had to report to Zakutu. No matter who was forming the plot, they had to report to Zakutu. We can see here that this is certainly planning for the worst case scenario, with Zakutu acting as the highest authority to ensure the succession went smoothly.<sup>116</sup> That her role was successful is evident because after this point, Zakutu seems to have retired from public life.<sup>117</sup>

Yet despite her undoubtedly important role in the succession from Esarhaddon to Ashurbanipal, as well as her unusually high status, Zakutu is always defined and identified in relation to her male relatives who had explicit power. In line 1 of the Zakutu Treaty, she names herself, and then the titles that follow are all descriptions of her relations with other kings. She is the wife of Sennacherib (whether she was the principle wife or not is up for debate), mother of Esarhaddon, and then curiously calls herself the “mother of Ashurbanipal”. As Zakutu was actually Ashurbanipal's grandmother, this is a strange description of their relationship. One theory as to what seems to have happened was that Ashurbanipal's real mother had died years earlier, and Zakutu stepped into her daughter-in-law's shoes as the head of the family – becoming the “mother” of Ashurbanipal.<sup>118</sup> No other titles are given, so it seems that even a relatively powerful or high-profile woman was only important in terms of her powerful male relatives. Zakutu's relationship with not just one, but three Assyrian kings meant she was in a unique position, one which allowed her even more gravitas in her position as guardian of the Zakutu Treaty. It is therefore less surprising that mentions of Arabian royal women such as Iati'e and Adiya are done so with mentions of their powerful male relatives. This was the standard way of describing royal women in Assyria, but also served as a courtesy to women from an area used to women with explicit power. If a member of their family is mentioned, then of course the royal woman should be mentioned – thus allowing the Arabian royal women to occupy the same diplomatic status

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<sup>113</sup> Melville 1999: 86.

<sup>114</sup> Melville 1999: 86.

<sup>115</sup> Parpola 1987: 168; Melville 1999: 89.

<sup>116</sup> Melville 1999: 90.

<sup>117</sup> Melville 1990: 90.

<sup>118</sup> Parpola 1987: 168-169.

of the royal men in Assyrian sources. From this we can see that Arabian royal women were treated in sources both as typical royal women, but also were treated in such a way as to demonstrate their special status in Arabian culture.

The exact nature of power these “Queens of the Arabs” had is uncertain, and an examination of this seems to only raise more questions than answer them. Part of their power lies in their title, but there seems to be confusion in the sources over this. Iapa and Baslu were queens, and were contemporaries of each other. These women were in the same coalition against Assyria, and are both described as “queens”:<sup>119</sup>

- iv53. KUR.ba-a-zu na-gu-ú šá a-šar-šú ru-u-qu  
iv54. mi-šit na-ba-li qa-qar MUN a-šar šu-ma-a-me  
iv55. 1 ME 20 KASKAL.GÍD qa-qar ba-a-ši pu-qut-ti u NA<sub>4</sub>.ZÚ.MAŠ.DÀ  
iv56. a-šar MUŠ u GÍR.TAB lù-ma kul-ba-bi ma-lu-u A.GÀR  
iv57. 20 KASKAL.GÍD KUR.ḥa-zu-ú šad-di NA<sub>4</sub>.SAG.GIL.MUD  
iv58. a-na EGIR-ia ú-maš-šir-ma e-ti<sub>7</sub>-iq  
iv59. na-gu-ú šu-a-tú ša ul-tu u<sub>4</sub>-me ul-lu-ti  
iv60. la il-li-ku LUGAL pa-ni maḥ-ri-ia  
iv61. ina qí-bit 'aš-šur EN-ia ina qé-reb-e-šú šal-ṭa-niš at-tal-lak  
iv62. <sup>m</sup>ki-i-su LUGAL URU.ḥal-di-su <sup>m</sup>ak-ba-ru LUGAL URU.il-pi-a-tú  
iv63. <sup>m</sup>ma-an-sa-ku LUGAL URU.ma-gal-a-ni  
iv64. <sup>f</sup>ia-pa-a' šar-rat URU.di-iḥ-ra-a-ni  
iv65. <sup>m</sup>ḥa-bi-su LUGAL URU.qa-da-ba-a'  
iv66. <sup>m</sup>ni-ḥa-ru LUGAL URU.ga-a'-u-a-ni  
iv67. <sup>f</sup>ba-as-lu šar-rat URU.i-ḥi-lum  
iv68. <sup>m</sup>ḥa-ba-zi-ru LUGAL URU.pu-da-a'  
iv69. 8 LUGAL.MEŠ-ni ša qé-reb na-ge-e šu-a-tú a-duk  
iv70. ki-ma MUNU<sub>4</sub> áš-ta-ṭi pa-gar LÚ.qu-ra-di-šú-un  
iv71. DINGIR.MEŠ-šú-nu NÍG.ŠU-šú-nu NÍG.GA-šú-nu ù UN.MEŠ-šú-nu  
iv72. áš-lu-la a-na qé-reb KUR aš-šur.KI <sup>m</sup>la-a-a-le-e  
iv73. LUGAL URU.ia-di-i' šá la-pa-an GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-ia in-nab-tú  
iv74. ḥa-at-tu ra-ma-ni-šú im-qut-su-ma a-na URU.ni-na-a  
iv75. a-di maḥ-ri-ia il-lik-am-ma ú-na-áš-šiq GÌR.II-ia  
iv76. re-e-mu ar-ši-šú-ma na-ge-e URU.ba-zi šu-a-tum

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<sup>119</sup> RINAP 4.1.iv53-iv77.

iv77. *ú-šad-gil pa-nu-uš-šú*

Translation:

iv53. (As for) the land Bāzu, a district in a remote place, a forgotten place of dry land, saline ground, a place of thirst,

iv55. one hundred and twenty leagues of desert, thistles, and gazelle-tooth stones, where snakes and scorpions fill the plain like ants – I left Mount Ḥazû, the mountain of *saggilmud*-stone, twenty leagues behind me and crossed over to that district to which

iv60. no king before me had gone since earliest days. By the command of the god Aššur, my lord, I marched triumphantly in its midst. I defeated Kīsu, king of the city Ḥaldisu, Akbaru, king of the city Ipiatu, Mansāku, king of the city Magalani, Iapa', queen of the city Diḥrani,

iv65. Ḥabīsu, king of the city Qadaba', Niḥaru, king of the city Ga'uani, Baslu, queen of the city Iḥilum, (and) Ḥabaziru, king of the city Puda', eight kings from that district

iv70. (and) laid out the bodies of their warriors like (drying) malt. I carried off their gods, their goods, their possessions, and their people to Assyria. (As for) Laialê, king of the city Iadi', who had fled before my weapons, unprovoked fear fell upon him, and he came to Nineveh, before me, and kissed my feet. I had pity on him and put that province of Bāzu under him.

With this source we see rulers from an area called Bāzu coming together in a coalition against Esarhaddon who were ultimately defeated. The location of Bāzu is uncertain, but I believe this is to be found in the Syrian desert, under the area called "Arabia" in the sources. The two queens Iapa' and Baslu are included just as the other kings are, listed with their name, title, and where they ruled. The very fact that these women are included in such a list demonstrates that these women had enough power to field some sort of armed force. Clearly, these were not large enough to threaten Assyria on their own, but the very fact that they were able to give military support to such a cause gives us an insight to the nature of their rule. Queens in Arabia, no matter their prominence in Assyrian sources, seem to be able to field some sort of military force, which tells us that they had a similar power to the kings listed in the sources. Esarhaddon then tells us that he defeated this coalition and placed the province of Bāzu under an Assyrian governor.

This source also raises the question as to whether "queen" was a title of respect, or whether it described a female equivalent of the power wielded by a king (which was total explicit power over a population). I would argue that the latter is the case, as Assyrian royal women were not referred to as "queen", but as "woman of the palace" (*MÍ.É.GAL*, *MÍ.KUR*, or *ša ekalli*).<sup>120</sup> This would mean that Iapa' and Baslu would have had an elevated status in comparison to even the highest Assyrian royal woman.

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<sup>120</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 526.

As the Akkadian for “queen” (when referring to the “Queens of the Arabs”) is the female version of “king”, we have to ask whether they had the same power as kings, but in a female body.<sup>121</sup> I would argue that the military roles and the tribute sent from these “Queens of the Arabs” would demonstrate that they did – at least to the Assyrians. Svärd argues that when it comes to royal women’s power, the Akkadian is clear. If the Assyrians wanted to convey a concept, they ensured the language described it.<sup>122</sup> With this in mind, it seems clear that the use of the Akkadian for “queen” for lapa and Baslu (as well as the other “Queens of the Arabs”) was used to convey the concept of someone with the same powers as a king, but who was a woman. In the above source we can see this even clearer when we read the total number of rulers Esarhaddon defeated. They are referred to as “eight kings”, and this number includes the two “queens”. We can see from this that lapa’ and Baslu were categorically rulers of their cities, as they are counted alongside the “kings” in the coalition against Assyria. The title “queen” here definitely means the female equivalent of “king”, with no less power than the kings in the coalition.

This is completely counter to what Groom (and other older sources) argue, which is that “queen” describes their status as queen-consort, not as rulers in their own right.<sup>123</sup> If this was true, then the “Queens of the Arabs” would have been referred to the same way as Assyrian royal women were described, not as “queens”. This would give the queens more power than they held, and it does not seem plausible that the Assyrians would do this, unless they were being extremely respectful. If this were the case, why by so exceptionally polite to women on the very periphery of the empire? This scenario seems very unlikely, therefore I would continue to argue that the “Queens of the Arabs” were called “queen” because they held the equivalent power to kings.

Despite this, it is important to remember that in the Akkadian sources the Assyrians are attempting to use their language (and thus, their political concepts) to describe a kind of society that was different to theirs.<sup>124</sup> Even though the Assyrians were able to accurately describe the power these women had, there were clearly problems in using Akkadian to describe the wider political structure of the Arabs. This is evident through the confusion of the titles used for lapa and Baslu. Literature has assumed that these women were based in Arabia, and I agreed with this location earlier.<sup>125</sup> However, if this were true, then there would have been three “queens” operating in Arabia during the reign of Esarhaddon,

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<sup>121</sup> A. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, R. Harris, E. Bowman, *CAD* pge 72 s.v. *šarratu*.

<sup>122</sup> Svärd 2012: 66.

<sup>123</sup> Groom 1984: 53.

<sup>124</sup> MacDonald 1995: 1364.

<sup>125</sup> The combination of the mention of the two queens and the description of the area of Bāzu as a “forgotten place of dry land, saline ground, a place of thirst, one hundred and twenty leagues of desert” is the reason for locating Bāzu in Arabia. *RINAP* 4.1.iv54-55.

with two of these queens even ruling at the same time: Iapa, Baslu, and Tabua. This raises the question of whether the title “Queen of the Arabs” was an Assyrian title. The fact that there are three women from Arabia who are described as “queens” of the whole area demonstrates a confusion as to how the area operated politically. It is only natural for the Assyrians to try and linguistically impose their political system onto these people, as this helped enable them to understand how to address these rulers. What results from this is after contact with one powerful woman she is called the “Queen of the Arabs”, who is perceived by the Assyrians as ruling the entire area of Arabia. After this initial contact, the Assyrians seem to have called powerful Arab women by this title only, as this is the only language the Assyrians had to describe these women and the power they held. This would therefore imply that the “Queens of the Arabs” were all from the same area, but this is far from certain. I would argue that all of the “Queens of the Arabs” discussed in this essay were from the same general area, but I require more evidence before I agree that they were from the same city or town. To the Assyrians, this seemed enough for all of the “Queens of the Arabs” to have the same title – did the Assyrians think they were all related? I would argue so. This would mean that any other female rulers from the area, like Iapa’ and Baslu, would just be referred to as rulers of their immediate area, even if they had the same political power as the “Queen of the Arabs” in Arabia. It is therefore more than likely that several female rulers who we would consider to be “queens” existed in Arabia at the same time. We only have evidence of a few queens due to the nature of the Akkadian sources – the Assyrians only came into contact with a few Arabian rulers, and of these, only a few were women. From Iapa’ and Baslu, we can therefore see that it was not completely unusual for Arabian women to have high levels of power – even wielding the same power as Assyrian kings. This is in stark contrast to the experiences of royal Assyrian women.

With no explicit power, the royal Assyrian women could only express their implicit power through the hierarchy of the royal harem. Whilst we know that the Assyrian king had multiple wives, we do not know if these wives were strictly ranked, or what impact this ranking specifically had.<sup>126</sup> What we can tell is that there was a near-constant jostling of power within the harem based on the royal women’s relationship to their male family members who had explicit power (such as kings and princes). The royal women were ranked in relation to each other and the king, and these ranks were important. The closer a royal woman was to the king, the higher her status.<sup>127</sup> As an example, Sammu-ramat held the highest position in the harem, as she could claim to be the daughter-in-law of a king, wife of a king, and the highest rank of all – the mother of a king.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 526.

<sup>127</sup> Melville 2004: 39.

<sup>128</sup> Melville 2004: 39.

From what we can determine in the sources, there were several definite titles and rankings with the royal women in the harem. The lowest rank was called “MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL”, and was used to describe any woman who lived in the palace who was not a royal consort.<sup>129</sup> The “MÍ.NIN.LUGAL” was the sister of the king, whilst the “DUMU.MÍ.LUGAL” was the daughter of the king.<sup>130</sup> At the higher end of the ranking system, we find the “MÍ.É.GAL” (the consort) and the “AMA LUGAL” (the mother of the king). The consort (or consorts – Melville suggests that there may have been many consorts to counter their high mortality rate through the need to produce an heir) was in charge of the women’s quarters.<sup>131</sup> Melville also puts forward the idea that the reason why we cannot tell if there was one or many consorts is that the highest ranking woman would not have any extra title or defining piece of clothing, thus making the consort hard to identify in the sources. Melville says this was to mitigate any jealousy from the other consorts.<sup>132</sup> The mother of the king was the highest ranking woman in Assyria, largely because she had produced an heir to the throne of Assyria.<sup>133</sup> In Assyrian ideology, these women had produced kings, who imposed order onto chaos. The mothers of kings therefore helped to establish order in the world, so it is easy to see why these women held such an important position.<sup>134</sup> These ranks are rarely mentioned in the sources, in an attempt to mitigate jealousy and jostling for more power within the harem. This power play within the harem is best seen in a letter in which Šerua-ēṭirat chastises Libbi-ali-šarrat:<sup>135</sup>

1. *a-bat* DUMU.MÍ-LUGAL *a-na*
2. MÍ.URU.ŠÀ-URU-šar-rat
3. *a-ta-a* ṭup-pi-ki la ta-šaṭ-ṭi-ri
4. IM.GÍD-ki la ta-qab-bi-i
5. *ú-la-a* i-qab-bi-ú
6. *ma-a an-ni-tu-u* NIN-sa
- r1. ša MÍ.<sup>d</sup>EDIN-e-ṭè-rat
2. DUMU.MÍ GAL-tú ša É-UŠ.MEŠ-te
3. ša <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-NIR.GÁL-DINGIR.MEŠ-GIN-in-ni
4. MAN GAL MAN *dan-nu* MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR *aš-šur*
5. *ù at-ti ma-rat kal-lat* GAŠAN-É ša <sup>m</sup>aš-šur-DÙ-A
6. DUMU-MAN GAL ša É-UŠ.MEŠ-te

<sup>129</sup> Melville 2004: 39-40.

<sup>130</sup> Melville 2004: 42.

<sup>131</sup> Melville 2004: 43-48.

<sup>132</sup> Melville 2004: 50.

<sup>133</sup> Melville 2004: 50.

<sup>134</sup> Melville 2004: 57.

<sup>135</sup> SAA 16.28.

7. *ša maš-šur-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR-aš*

Translation:

1. Word of the king's daughter to Libbi-ali-šarrat.

3. Why don't you write your tablet and do your homework? (For) if you don't, they will say: "Is this the sister of Šerua-eṭirat, the eldest daughter of the Succession Palace of Aššur-etil-ilāni-mukinni, the great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria?"

r5. Yet you are (only) a daughter-in-law – the lady of the house of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

The translation given here is a modern correction, as the original was mistranslated as:<sup>136</sup>

"Why do you not write me any letters, why do you not send me any royal message?"

This reading tells us that Šerua-eṭirat simply wished to remain informed of developments in the palace. Yet this is a mangled version of the source. The correct translation (as given by Livingstone, and not the SAA) reads as follows:<sup>137</sup>

"Why don't you write your tablets and recite your exercise, or people will say 'Is this the sister of Šerua-eṭirat, the eldest daughter of the succession palace of Aššur-etil-ilāni-mukinni, the great king, the legitimate king, king of the world, king of Assyria?'"

In this reading, we can clearly see that Šerua-eṭirat was chastising Libbi-ali-šarrat for shirking her duties and not learning how to write. This not only tells us that high level women within the palace were expected to be literate, but that this was used in the power play between the women in the royal harem. Here we see how women's behaviour in the Assyrian courts influenced how they were treated as queens. This very distinct difference in translations leaves us with a feeling that the original translator intentionally ignored the clear meaning of the source, as they did not like the idea of a woman (not only this, but a royal woman) being able to write.<sup>138</sup> Not only is this letter evidence for the power play in the royal harem, but it proves the need to analyse every piece of evidence we come across when discussing royal Assyrian women. Due to a previous scholar's prejudices and assumptions based upon their modern conceptions of women from the ancient near East, a source was changed and thus knowledge was intentionally masked from us. Whilst not directly relevant to the "Queens of the Arabs", this source certainly demonstrates to us how careful we must be when looking at translations and interpretations from previous scholars about Assyrian women. If we have to be

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<sup>136</sup> Livingstone 2007: 103.

<sup>137</sup> Livingstone 2007: 104.

<sup>138</sup> Livingstone 2007: 104.

careful with the sources we are using as a comparison, then we must be even more so with scholars discussing the “Queens of the Arabs”.

The letter itself shows us that Libbi-ali-šarrat was letting down her sister-in-law by not studying, and forms as negative evidence for literacy amongst the royal women of Assyria.<sup>139</sup> This need for literacy has been taken by Livingstone as preparation for her role as the future wife of the king of Assyria, but has also been seen by Svärd and Luukko as preparation for her role as the earthly counterpart of Ištar.<sup>140</sup> This role came as part of the title of “lady of the house” – which Libbi-ali-šarrat is called in the above letter. Part of this woman’s duties included acting as a mediator of divine love and wisdom through literacy – at the very least on a symbolic level.<sup>141</sup> I would argue that this was not the main reason for the “lady of the house” to be literate. No matter the argument as to whether kings were literate, I would say it would make sense for the wife of a king to be literate. She was meant to be in control of the royal harem, and part of this would be involvement in the administration of the harem. Part of this literacy would also be attributed with status, as the wife of the king would have had the time to learn to read and write. This would have been even more emphasized with Libbi-ali-šarrat, as she was the wife of Ashurbanipal. He was a king famous for his pride in being able to read and write, so Libbi-ali-šarrat clearly would have felt the pressure to live up to her husband’s claims to literacy.<sup>142</sup>

The most important aspect of this letter is the sense that Libbi-ali-šarrat does not recognize that her failure to do her lessons will not just impact her status and reputation, but her female relatives who also live in the harem. Whether this is truly her attitude we do not know, as this is Šerua-eṭirat’s perspective on the situation. Šerua-eṭirat treats Libbi-ali-šarrat with the utmost respect by addressing her by royal titles, which reminds Libbi-ali-šarrat of her position and the expectations this position brings.<sup>143</sup> This then forced Libbi-ali-šarrat to study, but the question remains why Šerua-eṭirat has done this. The tone of the letter reveals that Šerua-eṭirat is very concerned with status, but I would say that her chastisement of Libbi-ali-šarrat was due to a concern for her own status and reputation within the harem. With the emphasis on literacy that Ashurbanipal had, we can only imagine the gossip that could have happened if his wife could not read. Mockery of anyone tied to the king could be seen as a weakness of the king and of those associated with him – this included Šerua-eṭirat. This need for mitigating any negative change to her rank and status seemed to be Šerua-eṭirat’s motivation for this

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<sup>139</sup> Livingstone 2007: 105.

<sup>140</sup> Svärd & Luukko 2009: 291.

<sup>141</sup> Svärd & Luukko 2009: 291.

<sup>142</sup> For more about Ashurbanipal and literacy, please read Livingstone, A. 2007. “Ashurbanipal: literate or not?”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*. 97. 98-118.

<sup>143</sup> Livingstone 2007: 105.

letter. With this letter we can see not only an unexpected behaviour that was expected of high-ranking royal women in Assyria, but also the importance of rank for these women.

Despite this clear dependence on male relatives for political power, we have many records that tell us that women in the harem were financially independent.<sup>144</sup> We do not know where their wealth has come from, but they clearly have a spending power that is not determined by male relatives.<sup>145</sup> This is not just a spending power over trinkets, either. These were substantial transactions over land, and possibly the best example of the financial power royal women of the harem had was Zakutu's palace for Esarhaddon at Nineveh from around 676 BC.<sup>146</sup> Only kings in Assyria built palaces, so whilst this was financed by Zakutu, the palace was more a statement of the status she and Esarhaddon were cultivating (as discussed in more detail earlier).<sup>147</sup> As well as this, Zakutu regularly sent materials for ritual purposes, thus demonstrating both her financial power, and her deep interest in religion and rituals. *LAS* 276 records how she sent jewels for a tiara on a statue of the god Nabû, and *RINAP* 4.2005.2b and *RINAP* 4.2006.r2 both describe how Zakutu commissioned gold for ritual purposes as well. We can see that royal women like Zakutu had enough wealth disposal to exercise an interest in activities outside of the royal household (such as religion and rituals). Zakutu had enough disposable wealth to donate not just ordinary items, but rich items for statues like gold.

The interests of the royal women like Zakutu also demonstrate to us how indirect power could be exercised by these women. Her interest in ritual meant that she was consulted by priests, and she was asked about the mechanisms of the rituals.<sup>148</sup> Since this is Zakutu, it is important to keep in mind that this may be a result of the public image she and her son were cultivating, and she was being consulted as part of her new status.<sup>149</sup> I would say that this is not completely the case, and that she genuinely had a deep interest in rituals and religion. The point still stands that Zakutu had such standing amongst the priests that they consulted her about matters of ritual. I would argue that this was at least partly a token effort – these may not be real consultations, or at least they were consultations about minor aspects of the ritual. These consultations could have been the priests just paying their respects to the queen mother, in order to receive royal patronage for their activities. Even if these consultations were just a token effort, the very fact they were paying respects to this woman still demonstrates the power Zakutu had. Gaining the loyalty of the queen mother could allow the priests more freedom in their

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<sup>144</sup> *SAA* 6.91,96,97 and 99 all record Assyrian women from the harem purchasing property such as slaves, silver and real estate, with no mention of help from male relatives.

<sup>145</sup> Melville 2004: 41; Svärd & Luukko 2009: 284.

<sup>146</sup> Melville 1999: 32.

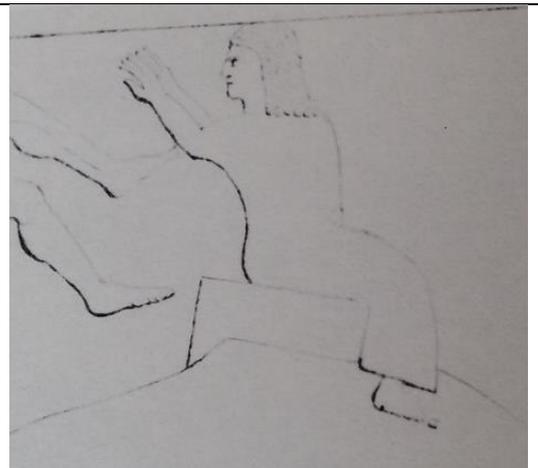
<sup>147</sup> Melville 1999: 38.

<sup>148</sup> *SAA* 10.313 is a response to a recommendation from Zakutu about what should be given in a ritual.

<sup>149</sup> Melville 1999: 42.

activities, and thus we can see that the queen mother had an implicit power which could profoundly influence the king's attitude towards certain groups of people. From this we can see that the royal women of Assyria held power within the royal harem, and had financial independence from men. Outside of the royal harem, royal women could hold implicit power over the king – if a female relative held strong views over a person or a group of people, then the king would surely be influenced by this. What this shows is that Arabian queens like Iapa' and Baslu, whilst being defined by their relationships with male relatives, also probably held more power than we can currently prove. If women in Assyria held implicit power, and could not hold explicit power, then women in a culture where female rulers were acceptable definitely held implicit power. Unfortunately, this appeared to the Assyrians like some of the "Queens of the Arabs" were taking a passive role, and this has meant that to modern scholars those queens who did not hold explicit power did not have any power. Just because a woman in the sources has not been portrayed as having explicit power, does not mean this woman held no power. We do not know if the "Queens of the Arabs" who are not described as being in control of military sources had explicit power, but by comparing the power held by the women in the royal harem, we can see that these Arabian queens probably at least held implicit power like Zakutu.

One of the "Queens of the Arabs" who definitely held explicit power was Samsi (who we came across in chapter 2). We can tell this because she is described as being in charge of an army which battled against Tiglath-pileser III, but was defeated and became a vassal ruler.<sup>150</sup> Samsi's defeat has been treated with contempt in the past by authors such as Abbott. Abbott seems surprised that Samsi was allowed to continue to rule, despite the "failure of her foreign policy", and her "military defeat and humiliation". Abbott concludes that this shows how secure the office of "queenship" in Arabia was, but there are many problems with this analysis.<sup>151</sup> Firstly, we do not have evidence that defeat in one battle would be



**Figure 7:** A (potentially) female figure riding a camel on a raised seating fleeing from battle with the Assyrian forces. Barnett & Falkner 1962: Plate XVII.

interpreted by Samsi's subjects as a failure – even if Samsi portrayed it as such. If this was seen as a failure, one battle does not constitute a whole, consistent foreign policy. Arguably, after the battle, Samsi's foreign policy was better than before and seemed to work in Samsi's favour. Being a vassal

<sup>150</sup> *RINAP* 1.42.19b'-33'. For more information about these events, please see chapter 2.

<sup>151</sup> Abbott 1941: 4.

meant Samsi saw fewer hostilities with powers like Assyria, and friendly contact with one of the most powerful empires in the ancient near East. Granted, they were a vassal of Assyria politically, but for the daily activities of her subjects, this was probably a success. Abbott’s opinion that one defeat should be enough to prove that queens were not eligible to be rulers stems from the sexism of an author writing in 1941. This sexism was made even worse by the fact we are talking about Middle Eastern women, and modern stereotypes has made the conclusions even more eschewed in order to fit Abbott’s contemporary world view. To counter effects like this when talking about women like Samsi, we have to go directly to the source material.



**Figure 8:** An Arab tent burning in an Assyrian raid with two dead figures – a male on the right, and a female on the left.

Barnett 1976: Plate XXXIII.

In the sources, Samsi is described as a leader of an army, so in contrast to Iapa’ and Baslu, Samsi is an active actor in conflict and violence. What is interesting is that she is described as an “onager”.<sup>152</sup> Is this part of an “othering” technique to make it seem inevitable that she would be defeated? This can only be answered when we look at the greater nature of Assyrian sources, and whether they tend to portray the truth or not. This question is raised again in one of Tiglath-pileser III’s reliefs of his Arab campaign from the Central Palace at Kalah. We can see in one battle scene a camel with a rider, and

<sup>152</sup> In *RINAP* 1.42.23’: MUNUS.ANŠE.EDIN.NA, See A. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, R. Harris, E. Bowman, *CAD*, s.v. *sirrimu*. Translated as “onager, wild ass”.

Retsö tentatively identifies her as Samsi (see figure 7).<sup>153</sup> Barnett and Falkner do not make such identifications, but they say that the figure is an Arab woman.<sup>154</sup> We cannot be certain about this, as the original relief is missing, so we have to work off Layard's drawings of the relief.

Clearly, this poses problems in terms of interpretation, but if this is a woman on a camel in battle, we could probably name her as Samsi. There does not seem to be any other reason for depicting a foreign woman in battle – in a society that never depicts women unless they were unusual or giving tribute, a foreign woman in charge of an army of Arabs means it seems likely that she would be depicted. In general, the Assyrians seemed to make an exception for the depictions of Arabs. The only women to be shown being killed in a raid by Assyria are Arabian women in Ashurbanipal's reliefs (see figure 8). I would argue this is because of the special status the "Queens of the Arabs" had which the Assyrians saw. They seemed to be the polar opposites of the Assyrian royal women by being active actors in direct violence. Due to this, it seems that the Assyrians made a point of showing that just because they were women, they would not treat them any differently in punishment or retribution. The way they did this was by treating the Arabs differently in reliefs and specifically showing the deaths of women in an Arab camp. This served the Assyrians in another way, as this would show to other foreign emissaries and diplomats that the consequences of going against Assyria were very grave. Not only would they kill the men, but they would kill the women in the camps as well. This shows the overwhelming nature of Assyrian sources, which is that whilst total falsehoods are rare in Assyrian sources, pictures of events and images are created by emphasis and omission.<sup>155</sup> This seems to be what happened with Samsi, and the passage about her being like an "onager" I believe refers more to her movement than her gender.

Ultimately, whilst probably enjoying a friendlier state of affairs with Assyria, Samsi had an official placed over her to ensure she was behaving in Assyria's best interests.<sup>156</sup> This was clearly an attempt by Tiglath-pileser III to keep the edge of his empire stable, so in this way Samsi is clearly being treated just like a foreign, male ruler.<sup>157</sup> I would argue this tells us that the Assyrians saw Samsi, the "Queen of the Arabs", as just another foreign ruler, and that her gender didn't seem to factor in her treatment. Was this potentially because of the importance of trade? With the importance of the trade routes through Arabia, it is possible that this overrode the impact the "Queens of the Arabs" gender would

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<sup>153</sup> Retsö 2003: 133; See Figure 3.

<sup>154</sup> Barnett & Falkner 1962: 11.

<sup>155</sup> Kuhrt 2002: 476.

<sup>156</sup> Eph'al 1982: 86.

<sup>157</sup> Eph'al 1982: 87.

have had in international relations. This can only be confirmed by more investigation into these more prominent queens.

We know about Te'elḥunu from several sources which describe her battle against Sennacherib between 691 and 689 BC.<sup>158</sup> Together with Hazael, the “King of the Arabs”, she camped in the desert and was attacked by the Assyrian army who captured thousands of camels.<sup>159</sup> After this defeat, Te'elḥunu fled deeper into the desert to Adummatu. This did not help her, as she was overtaken and was carried to Assyria with booty and images of local gods.<sup>160</sup> Te'elḥunu is described as being in charge of an army, and this makes her an active actor in conflict and violence – another “Queen of the Arabs” who is the opposite to what the royal Assyrian woman should be.

Interestingly, the majority of the sources which refer to Te'elḥunu name her as “Apkallatu”.<sup>161</sup> In the *CAD*, this is translated as “wise woman”, so we have to ask why Te'elḥunu is referred to like this.<sup>162</sup> What seems to have happened is that a title of Te'elḥunu was misunderstood by the Assyrians to be her name, and in the reliefs of Esarhaddon onwards she is only called this.<sup>163</sup> There is only one source which calls her Te'elḥunu, and this was from Sennacherib. What this has led to is all Arabian queens being described as priestesses – particularly in the older literature. For example, Hoyland and MacDonald say that after Te'elḥunu's capture, the Arabs were at a loss because their priestess was missing.<sup>164</sup> I believe these authors were allowing the religious nature of Arab culture to have too much of an influence in their view of military and political events. Whilst religion undoubtedly played a large part in the role of the “Queens of the Arabs”, I believe these conclusions have been made due to the influence of Arabian archaeology.<sup>165</sup> The main monuments which have survived and have been extensively excavated are temples, and has led to the conclusion that Arabia's society was essentially theocratic.<sup>166</sup> I would not completely agree with this yet, as archaeological reconnaissance of Arabia during this period is still in its infancy. The temples have therefore been excavated in little to no context. This means that without further evidence, we cannot say that religion played such a large role in Arabian culture that it heavily influenced foreign and military policy. I also cannot imagine a priest or priestess being directly in charge of an army in this period.<sup>167</sup> Here, I would argue that

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<sup>158</sup> Eph'al 1982: 118; *RINAP* 3.35.53'-9'' – this source is quoted in full in chapter 2.

<sup>159</sup> Eph'al 1982: 118-119.

<sup>160</sup> Eph'al 1982: 119.

<sup>161</sup> *RINAP* 4.1.iv4; *RINAP* 4.2.ii49; *RINAP* 4.4.ii'5'; *RINAP* 4.6.iii'1'.

<sup>162</sup> A. Oppenheim, E. Reiner, R. Harris, E. Bowman, *CAD* s.v. *apkallatu*.

<sup>163</sup> Parpola, Baker & Whiting 2011: 1322.

<sup>164</sup> Hoyland 2001: 133; MacDonald 1995: 1366.

<sup>165</sup> Parr 1997: 163.

<sup>166</sup> Parr 1997: 163.

<sup>167</sup> This runs counter to MacDonald, who explicitly says that priestesses led the Arabs in the eighth and seventh century BC. MacDonald 1995: 1360.

“Apkallatu” was referring to an official title, much like “king of the world” of the Assyrian kings.<sup>168</sup> Whilst the Assyrian kings may have been called this, it does not mean that the Assyrian kings were actually kings of the world. It was just an official title. Following this same logic, Te’elḥunu was probably not a priestess, but was called so as a matter of respect within her own culture. When the Assyrians encountered her, they mistook her religious title for her proper name, and so she has been recorded as “Apkallatu”. This misunderstanding has warped our view of the “Queens of the Arabs”, and has afforded them a larger religious role than they really had.

The only royal Assyrian woman who can be used as a comparative about women in battle is Sammu-ramat. Whilst she is from a slightly earlier period than the “Queens of the Arabs”, she is the only woman in Assyria who was closely tied to conflict. She is described as crossing the Euphrates with her son Adad-nirari III (810-783 BC) for a battle:<sup>169</sup>

1. *ta-ḥu-mu šá* <sup>m</sup>10-ÉRIN.TAḤ MAN KUR *aš-šur*
2. A <sup>m</sup>šam-ši-10 MAN KUR *aš-šur*
3. <sup>f</sup>sa-am-mu-ra-mat MUNUS.É.GAL
4. *šá* <sup>m</sup>šam-ši-10 MAN KUR *aš-šur*
5. AMA <sup>m</sup>10-ÉRIN.TAḤ MAN KAL MAN KUR *aš-šur*
6. *kal-lat* <sup>md</sup>šùl-ma-nu-MAŠ
7. MAN *kib<rat>* 4-ti ina *u<sub>4</sub>-me* <sup>m</sup>uš-pi-lu-lu-me
8. MAN URU *ku-mu-ḥa-a-a a-na* <sup>m</sup>10-ÉRIN.TAḤ MAN KUR *aš-šur*
9. <sup>f</sup>sa-am-mu-ra-mat MUNUS.É.GAL
10. ÍD *pu-rat-tú ú-še-bi-ru-u-ni*
11. <sup>m</sup>a-tar-šúm-ki A <sup>m</sup>ad-ra-a-me URU *ár-pa-da-a-a*
12. *a-di* 8 MAN.MEŠ-ni *šá* KI-šú ina URU *pa-qi-ra-ḥu-bu-na*
13. *si-dir-ta-šú-nu* KI-šú-nu *am-daḥ-iš uš-ma-na(?)*-šú-nu
14. *e-kim(\*)*-šú-nu-ti *a-na šu-zu-ub* ZI.MEŠ-šú-nu
15. *e-li-ú* ina MU.AN.NA *šá-a-te*
16. *ta-ḥu-mu šú-a-tú* ina *bir-ti* <sup>m</sup>uš-pi-lu-lu-me
17. MAN URU *ku-mu-ḥa-a-a* ina *bir-ti* <sup>m</sup>qa-al-pa-ru-da(?)
18. A <sup>m</sup>pa-la-lam MAN URU *gúr-gu-ma-a-a ú-še-lu-ni*
19. *man-nu šá* <TA> ŠU-at <sup>m</sup>uš-pi-lu-lu-me
20. DUMU.MEŠ-šú DUMU.DUMU.MEŠ-šú *e-ki-mu*

<sup>168</sup> SAA 16.28.4 - “MAN ŠÚ”.

<sup>169</sup> Grayson 1996: 200; RIMAP 3.3.

21. *aš-šur* <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR <sup>d</sup>30 <sup>d</sup>UTU  
 22. *a-na di-ni-šú lu la i-za-zu*  
 23. *ik-kib aš-šur* DINGIR-ia <sup>d</sup>30 *a-šib* URU.KASKAL

Translation:

1-7a. Boundary stone of Adad-Nā-rā-rī, king of Assyria, son of Šamši-Adad (V), king of Assyria, (and of) Semiramis, the palace-woman of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-Nā-rā-rī, strong king, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmeneser (III), king of the four quarters.

7b-10. When Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites, caused Adad-Nā-rā-rī, king of Assyria, (and) Semiramis, the palace woman, to cross the Euphrates.

11-15a. I fought a pitched battle with them – with Ataršumki, son of Adramu, of the city of Arpad, together with eight kings who were with him at the city Paqarahubunu. I took away from them their camp. To save their lives they dispersed.

15b-18. In this (same) year they erected this boundary stone between Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites, and Qalparuda, son of Palalum, king of the Gurgumites.

19-20. Whoever (dares) to take (it) away from the possession of Ušpilulume, his sons, his grandsons:

21-22. may the gods Aššur, Marduk, Adad, Sîn, (and) Šamaš not stand (by him) in his lawsuits.

24. Taboo of Aššur, my god, (and) Sîn, who dwells in Ḫarran.<sup>170</sup>

As we can see, in this inscription Sammu-ramat (in this translation called Semiramis) is included from the very beginning and is named as one of the establishers of the inscription. As with Zakutu, she defines herself in relation to her male relatives (in this case, it is her son Adad-nirari III, her husband Šamši-Adad, and her father-in-law Shalmeneser III). What is interesting in this inscription is that it is written in the third person until line 11, and then is written in first person. This means that Sammu-ramat is included in the description of Adad-nirari III crossing the Euphrates, but as soon as the inscription describes the actual conflict and battle, it switches to being the king's narrative. It seems unlikely that Sammu-ramat was not included in the battle (she was probably not in the actual combat, but at the very least was present in the camp and possibly helped the king strategise). Svärd asks whether the change to first person was to exclude Sammu-ramat from the conflict because the portrayal of physical aggression by a royal woman was deemed too controversial.<sup>171</sup> This would be the

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<sup>170</sup>RIMAP 3.3.

<sup>171</sup>Svärd 2012: 67.

only hint of such a belief by the Assyrians, as no other royal woman is known to have been involved in military campaigns.<sup>172</sup>

Assyrian royal women were not meant to be passive, and they were certainly not meant to be involved in combat or battle. This means that Arabian queens such as Te'elḫunu and Samsi were engaging in activities and behaviours considered completely contrary to how Assyrians would expect these royal women to behave. This is emphasised even more when we consider most foreign women the Assyrian kings came across were portrayed as property, and were often listed as booty.<sup>173</sup> If this effected how the Assyrians treated the "Queens of the Arabs", this is not shown in the sources. If anything (as mentioned before), this may have stiffened their resolve to treat these women as they would kings. As the Arabian queens did not fit the mould of powerful women (by holding explicit and direct power), they seem to have been treated as the only other alternative in Assyrian society – powerful men. As women with explicit power were rare in Assyria, the Arabian queens seem to have been treated as powerful men. The Assyrians were very used to dealing with powerful men, and so these rules of interaction were much clearer to them than if they treated the "Queens of the Arabs" as women. By classifying the "Queens of the Arabs" in this way, the Assyrians were able to comfortably interact with these women.

Over time, it seems that the Assyrian kings were aware that they could manipulate the different gender conventions of the Assyrians and the Arabians in order to change political situations. We can see this in the treatment of Tabua. We know very little about her from the sources, but many unfounded assertions have been made. For example, Abbott says that Tabua was born at Nineveh, was a priestess, that she was loyal to Assyria and lost favour with the Arabs.<sup>174</sup> The most persistent unfounded claim is that Tabua was the daughter of Te'elḫunu.<sup>175</sup> There is no evidence to support this, and it is based entirely on speculation. I would argue that if she was indeed the daughter of a "Queen of the Arabs", then surely we would have heard about her before this source. I have found no evidence for this or any of the previous claims, but what I have found shows a distinct sophistication by Esarhaddon in the understanding of how gender norms can influence political behaviour. Wherever Tabua was originally from (there have been many unfounded assertions about this), she was raised in Esarhaddon's palace and was then sent back to Arabia with Hazael, "King of the Arabs".<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Svärd 2012: 67.

<sup>173</sup> For example, *RINAP* 1.47.15b,20; *RINAP* 3.1.30.

<sup>174</sup> Abbott 1941: 5.

<sup>175</sup> Eph'al 1982: 123.

<sup>176</sup> *RINAP* 4.2.ii46-ii62. This source is quoted in full later in this chapter.

It was far from unusual for foreign children to be raised in the Assyrian royal household. Sennacherib had installed Bēl-ibni, who was raised at the Assyrian court, as the king of Babylon in 703 BC.<sup>177</sup> As well as this, there is a letter to the Elamite king Urtak from Esarhaddon which refers to an exchange of royal children. This points to at least some of the kings' children being present at each other's courts, and demonstrates that this practice was also held by other powers in the region.<sup>178</sup> Situations like this could be due to many factors, but largely these factors are political. In the case of Urtak's children, this was to cement a peace treaty between previously hostile nations.<sup>179</sup> This seemed to have worked, as peace continued between Assyria and Elam until the early part of Ashurbanipal's reign.<sup>180</sup> Another example that shows Tabua's childhood was not an anomaly are the events after Urtak's death. Many Elamites fled to Nineveh, which included sixty members of the royal family. Amongst these were three sons of Urtak: Huban-nikaš II, Umma-nappa and Tammaritu.<sup>181</sup> Ashurbanipal installed Huban-nikaš II as king of the Elamites to fill the vacuum after Te-umman's death, but was kept under Assyrian control.<sup>182</sup> The standard view of Tabua's origins is based on what we know about the Elamite princes. She was a girl in the royal household who was singled out for ruling over a vassal state, and as such it seems most likely that she originated from the vassal state (Arabia). With these precedents, we can clearly see that Tabua was one of many children who were non-Assyrian, grew up in the Assyrian royal household, and who were then placed upon foreign thrones in order to make potential foreign enemies more sympathetic to Assyrian policies.

What is very interesting is that when we read the sources about Tabua, it is clear that Esarhaddon wanted to impose Tabua as ruler on the Arab people. Hazael, the "King of the Arabs", came to Esarhaddon asking for the Arab gods Sennacherib had taken as booty. He does not ask for Tabua, and it seems that he may not have even known that she existed:<sup>183</sup>

ii46. URU.a-du-mu-tu URU dan-nu-ti KUR.a-ri-bi

ii47. šá<sup>md</sup>30-PAP.MEŠ-SU MAN KUR aš-šur.KI AD ba-nu-u-a

ii48. Ik-šu-du-ma NÍG.GA-šú DINGIR.MEŠ-šú

ii49. a-di<sup>f</sup>ap-kal-la-ti šar-rat KUR.a-ri-bi

ii50. Iš-lu-lam-ma a-na KUR aš-šur.KI il-qa-a

ii51. m<sup>h</sup>a-za-DINGIR LUGAL KUR.a-ri-bi

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<sup>177</sup> Waters 2000: 23.

<sup>178</sup> Waters 2000: 44.

<sup>179</sup> Waters 2000: 44.

<sup>180</sup> Waters 2000: 45.

<sup>181</sup> Waters 2000: 47.

<sup>182</sup> Waters 2000: 56.

<sup>183</sup> RINAP 4.2.ii46-ii62.

- ii52. *it-ti ta-mar-ti-šú ka-bit-ti*  
 ii53. *a-na NINA.KI URU be-lu-ti-ia*  
 ii54. *il-lik-am-ma ú-na-áš-ši-iq GÌR.II-ia*  
 ii55. *áš-šú na-dan DINGIR.MEŠ-šú ú-šal-la-an-ni-ma*  
 ii56. *re-e-mu ar-ši-šu-ma*  
 ii57. *DINGIR.MEŠ šá-tu-nu an-ḥu-su-nu ud-diš-ma*  
 ii58. *da-na-an ᵈáš-šur EN-ia u ši-ṭir MU-ia*  
 ii59. *UGU-šú-nu ú-šá-áš-ṭir-ma ú-ter-ma ad-din-šú*  
 ii60. *ᵀta-bu-u-a tar-bit É.GAL-ia*  
 ii61. *a-na LUGAL-ú-ti UGU-šú-nu áš-kun-ma*  
 ii62. *it-ti DINGIR.MEŠ-šá a-na KUR-šá ú-ter-ši*

Translation:

ii46. (As for) the city Adummutu, the fortress of the Arabs, which Sennacherib, king of Assyria, (my) father, who engendered me, conquered and whose goods, possessions, (and) gods, together with Apkallatu, the queen of the Arabs, he plundered and brought to Assyria – Hazael, the king of the Arabs, came to Nineveh, my capital city, with his heavy audience gift and kissed my feet.

ii55. He implored me to give (back) his gods, and I had pity on him. I refurbished those gods and I had the might of the god Aššur, my lord, and (an inscription) written in my name inscribed on them and I gave (them) back to him.

ii60. I placed the lady Tabūa, who was raised in my palace, as ruler over them and returned her to her land with her gods.

This not only adds evidence to the theory that Tabua was not a significant child (such as a princess) before finding her way to the Assyrian royal household, but also demonstrates the lack of knowledge the Assyrians had about the political powers and institutions of the Arabian tribes. As an example, the title of Hazael, “King of the Arabs” is probably much like the title “Queen of the Arabs”. The Assyrians saw Hazael as a ruler in his own right, but could not discern between his Arab tribe and other Arabs the Assyrians had come across (such as those from Adummatu). This means he was given the title of a “king”, as he demonstrated explicit power by mobilising troops, but is said to rule the general people called “Arabs” because the Assyrians did not know who exactly Hazael ruled over.

Once Tabua was put in power in Arabia by Esarhaddon, she is not mentioned in the sources again. I would argue this is because of her upbringing in the Assyrian household. As we have discussed earlier, the expectation of royal Assyrian women was to be passive actors, and the power they should hold

was implicit, indirect power. I believe that Tabua, who appears to have been in the Assyrian household her whole life until this point, would have been brought up with these values. When she left for Arabia, she brought these values with her, and continued to act as a woman in the royal Assyrian household would. Not only did Esarhaddon want to make the Arabs more sympathetic to the Assyrians, but he was able to manipulate the behaviour of a young woman based on her gender in such a way that it would minimise the number of combatant “Queens of the Arabs” he would have to encounter. As we have seen in the discussion of Zakutu, Esarhaddon had a sophisticated knowledge of how manipulations of gender norms could change a woman’s political status and her activities. Using this knowledge, Esarhaddon tried to ensure the next Arab ruler he came across was like an Assyrian woman: passive, deferring to male relatives, and not holding any direct power herself. Whilst hostilities with Arabia continued until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period, in terms of the prominent women from Arabia this seems to have worked. We do not hear about Tabua again, and I would say this is because she acted as an Assyrian royal woman and took a passive role in the politics of the area. The next “queen” we hear of is the aforementioned Adiya, who is only mentioned in relation to her husband’s activities. For the rest of the Neo-Assyrian period female rulers in Arabia seem to have been reduced to the spouses of male rulers who had explicit power, and we do not come across another “Queen of the Arabs” for the rest of this period. For the duration of the Neo-Assyrian period, the only Arab rulers we see in the sources are more typical of foreign rulers – male rulers who hold explicit power and who pass this power on to their sons. Through Tabua we see the Assyrian rulers attempting to placate the situation in Arabia by manipulating Arabian gender norms to fit Assyrian ones in order to make the rulers more sympathetic to them.

Whilst the “Queens of the Arabs” were often visible in the sources due to their roles in combat, we can clearly see these women were the opposite to what the Assyrian kings expected of royal women. The kings were accustomed to passive women whose experience of power was limited to rank and status in the royal harem. The most power a woman could hold in the Neo-Assyrian period was seen in Zakutu, who could potentially influence the king Esarhaddon’s decisions – and Sammu-ramat, who crossed the Euphrates with her son as part of his campaign. In contrast, the “Queens of the Arabs” had armies at their disposal, and were potentially even personally participating in the battles against the Assyrians. The reaction to these women was a combination of an emphasis that they would be treated no different to other male foreign rulers, and an exploitation of this difference in an attempt to placate Arabia.

## 4. Conclusion

As there is little evidence for the Queens of the Arabs, we cannot conclude as much as we would like. What we can tell is that Arabia was an incredibly wealthy area, due to the production of aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh in the South of the peninsula. There were very few places these plants could flourish in antiquity, and the myrrh in Arabia was the best quality known in the ancient near East. This fact in and of itself meant these were very valuable goods. This value was only added to when the travel costs are taken into account. These aromatics had to travel over land, which took a long time from the South of Arabia. This great distance would not have been possible to traverse had the Arabs not domesticated the camel. In comparison to horses and donkeys, camels could retain more water and found it easier to walk in the arid desert of the Arabian peninsula. This meant camels could go for longer distances without needing to stop for water. The watering-holes and oases which they did stop at slowly grew into large towns and cities, such as Adummatu and Tayma. Obviously, when stopping at these cities and towns, the merchants had to pay for food for themselves and their camels, which would also increase the price of the aromatics they were transporting. Once the aromatics made it to Mesopotamia, Egypt or the Levant, the price of the aromatics was very high. This led to a perception seen in the description of the Queen of Sheba that the Arab people were incredibly wealthy due to aromatics alone. Whilst other goods were traded from Arabia, aromatics were by far the most expensive and most impressive aspect of their revenue. Even in the military camps of Samsi and Te'elḥunu aromatics were found – partly for religious use, but largely for trade - the revenues of which kept these women's armies fed and watered. The Assyrians took these aromatics as booty, as if it were gold, which demonstrates to us the value of aromatics during the Neo-Assyrian period.

Another important and valuable commodity the Arabs were able to trade was the aforementioned camel. Not only were camels useful in trade, but they were also used in battle. The Assyrians very quickly saw the advantage of camels in traversing the desert. The Arabs were able to raid provincial towns with little consequence due to the speed at which camels could reach in comparison to horses in the desert. Zabibe, if our connection between Zabibe and camels in the tribute list is correct, understood the importance and value the Assyrians held in camels. She sent camels (male and female) as a gift to try and placate the great military power of Assyria by giving them the means to create their own camel breeding centre. From this we can see the Assyrians were interested in controlling the means to traverse the desert, as well as the trade routes the camels enabled. Trade was therefore the

motivating factor in Assyria's activity in Arabia, and was the reason behind Assyrian contact with the "Queens of the Arabs".

When dealing with the "Queens of the Arabs" and the Assyrian royal women, the most surprising aspect of studying ancient near Eastern women is how previous scholars have used contemporary prejudices and opinions to inform their work. We can see this in how Arabian queens were frequently incorrectly described as priestesses, and deliberate mistranslations of sources which have obscured the nature of royal Assyrian women's power. Hopefully this thesis has clarified these errors.

Despite this confusion caused by modern scholars' prejudices, we have been able to ascertain several factors of the "Queens of the Arabs" through comparisons with the royal Assyrian women. One of these is that the Assyrians were uncertain as to the political structure of the Arabs, as demonstrated through the confusion as to who is called the "Queen of the Arabs". We can also see that despite this confusion, the most prominent Arabian queens like Samsi and Te'elḫunu were completely counter to what the Assyrians expected of royal women. Assyrian royal women, whilst financially independent, only held implicit and indirect power, and were passive actors to be dominated by Assyrian men. They were important due to their relations to kings, which made Zakutu one of the most powerful royal Assyrian women we read about. She was related to three kings of Assyria, which meant she was used by Esarhaddon to inhabit a unique position in order to ensure a smooth succession of power. In comparison, the "Queens of the Arabs" held explicit power which enabled them to be in control over military forces. This power was visible in the evidence for Samsi, Te'elḫunu, Iapa' and Baslu, as these queens were all able to control a military force. In fact, there is tantalising evidence that these women were even in the battles themselves.

What we see develop from this is the Assyrian kings attempting to treat the "Queens of the Arabs" in a manner which makes sense to the Assyrian kings. These women did not act how the Assyrians expected them to – passive and holding indirect power, like the Assyrian royal women. As the Assyrians lived in a world like ours, where we understand gender as a binary system (someone is either male or female), these women were categorised and treated like men. We can see the Assyrians made a concerted effort to prove the "Queens of the Arabs" would be treated just the same as other male foreign rulers. For all intents and purposes, these queens were kings to the Assyrians.

Not all Assyrian kings kept to this binary. Esarhaddon used his sophisticated understanding of gender to manipulate relations between Assyria and Arabia. Tabua was taught to act like an Assyrian royal woman, and when she was imposed as leader of the Arabs, she took this behaviour with her. This seems to have discouraged any more "Queens of the Arabs" from interacting with the Assyrians, and as such do not appear in our sources. From this point on, whilst Arabian women had their due respects

paid, no other women were described in the same way in the Neo-Assyrian sources. From this, we can see that the gender of these “Queens of the Arabs” was seen as more of a tool by the Assyrian kings to help placate a troublesome area on the periphery of the empire.

Arabia was an incredibly wealthy area, and this wealth was derived from aromatics and camels that came from Arabia. This wealth was the reason for Assyrian interest in the area, but the interactions with the “Queens of the Arabs” show that despite attempts to prove there was no difference between these women and male foreign rulers, the gender of at least one of these women was exploited by Assyrian kings. From this we can say that whilst trade was more influential in the Neo-Assyrians’ overall actions in Arabia, gender was more influential in their individual interactions with the “Queens of the Arabs”.

## **5. List of Abbreviations**

**CAD** = The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

**LAS** = Parpola, 1970. *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*.

**RIMAP** = The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods

**RINAP** = The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period

**SAA** = State Archives of Assyria

**SAAS** = State Archives of Assyria Studies

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