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## AUTHORITY, POLITY, AND TENUOUS ELITES IN IRON AGE EDOM (JORDAN)

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*Summary. The strategies political elites implement to garner political authority and legitimacy in emergent polities are scrutinized in a case study from Iron Age Edom, located in modern southern Jordan and the south-east corner of the State of Israel. Edom provides a productive context in which to conduct this investigation as local elites managed a fractious polity consisting of unstable segmentary identities, while at the same time, remaining loyal to the successive Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires that dominated them. This tenuous position required elites to maintain a flexible elite identity while promoting broader metaphors of attachment (e.g. Edomite) among their disparate constituents. This case study ultimately moves toward an understanding of political polities, not as disembodied entities (e.g. States), but as embedded phenomena within the societies they comprise.*

### INTRODUCTION

A theoretical disjuncture has occurred in the archaeological investigation of emergent polities. While some scholars have implicitly characterized the archaic state as a disembodied entity, separate from society (Adams 1966; Childe 1950; Feinman and Marcus 1998; Flannery 1972, 1998; Wright 1977), alternative visions embed polities within society, examining how political and economic capital comes to be concentrated in the hands of the few (Barker and Pauketat 1992; Chase and Chase 1992; Mills 2000; Pauketat 1994; Richards and Van Buren 2000; Routledge 2004; Schortman *et al.* 2001; Smith 2003). While one is objective, and one subjective, these understandings are, in fact, two sides of the same coin that permit social scientists to discuss the State both as category and construct. This objective/subjective divide reconnects in the investigation of political elites who objectify their authority and naturalize their legitimacy in an abstracted entity that their constituents – and we – understand as the State. Elites must transform their authority, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, ‘from a diffuse symbolic capital, resting solely on collective recognition, to an objectified symbolic capital, codified, delegated, and guaranteed by the state’ (1999, 65–6); however, in emergent polities, where mandated political offices have only recently appeared, elites rarely possess the undisputed power required to negotiate this transition from collective to symbolic recognition. Instead, they must often implement strategies to resolve the tensions between traditional and emergent expressions of authority in order to garner the legitimacy necessary to rule.

Iron Age Edom, where elites organized a fractious segmentary polity, exemplifies such a case. Edom is one of several Iron Age (1250–500 BC) polities, including Phoenicia, Israel, Judah, Ammon, and Moab, that arose in the Levant (modern Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and the State of Israel) during and after the tenth century BC (Fig. 1). Monumental architecture, social differentiation, territorial borders, and political centralization characterize these polities, while historical sources such as the Hebrew Bible–Old Testament and excavated palaeographic evidence provide an historical context. Near Eastern archaeologists have sought explanations for the emergence and persistence of these polities only recently, relative to their colleagues in other culture areas (e.g. Mesoamerica, Mesopotamia, and the Mississippian Valley), and have drawn on traditional models of social evolution (band–tribe–chiefdom–state) (Dever 1995; Holladay 1995; LaBianca and Younker 1995), secondary states (Joffe 2002), Weberian patrimonial states (Schloen 2001; Master 2001), and segmentary states (Routledge 2000, 2004). Many of these analyses have considered the generative role elites played in these polities only superficially. Here, the strategies elites used to consolidate power and authority, organize an economically viable political entity, and invent a circumscribed ethno-political identity are investigated in the historical and archaeological evidence of Edom.

#### ELITE AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY IN PERSPECTIVE

Although the notion ‘elite’ as a powerful, universal, and restricted marker looms large in popular rhetoric, anthropological investigations of Western and non-Western elites in recent decades illustrate their productive role in shaping the societies in which they are embedded (e.g. Bourdieu 1985; Cohen 1981; Marcus 1983; Nader 1972; Shore and Nugent 2002). Cohen metaphorically characterized elite society as a cult that maintains itself through a shared set of symbols and practices learned through exclusive social contexts such as family, social clubs, and private school (1981, 3). The metaphor of cult is useful for understanding elites, for both lack the immediate transparency that allows outsiders (social scientists included) to grasp the group’s internal logic. Because modern elites often guard their privacy and restrict membership, investigators are left merely to identify elites through objectified and crafted symbols. Elites participating in political realms implement strategies that legitimize their authority as natural and inherent, while at the same time masking the motivations behind their political acts.

The transparency of political elites’ strategies must be recognized if we are to achieve a more nuanced understanding of emergent polities as the outcome of strategies and acts that concentrate different types of capital (symbolic, economic, etc.) into particular sectors of a society (Bourdieu 1999, 57–8). Individuals in the process of becoming elite often play an active role in gathering capital for themselves and promoting the transition between traditional and mandated authority. In doing so, however, elites’ abilities are by no means interminable. Rather, they must exercise power through prescribed genres of authority their constituents broadly understand as legitimate.<sup>1</sup> Lacking the security of the modern state, impersonal markets, and

1 Weber noted this point when he characterized three increasingly rationalized forms of authority – charismatic, traditional, and legal, dividing each according to the degree to which leaders could demand their subordinates’ loyalty before the traditional level of tolerance was surpassed and the leader was removed (1978, 226–41). Between traditional and legal authority, Weber identified differing degrees of rationalization as a distinguishing characteristic. Traditional authority was rationalized in that positions of power were broadly recognized, but its legitimacy was substantiated through custom, personality, and alliance.

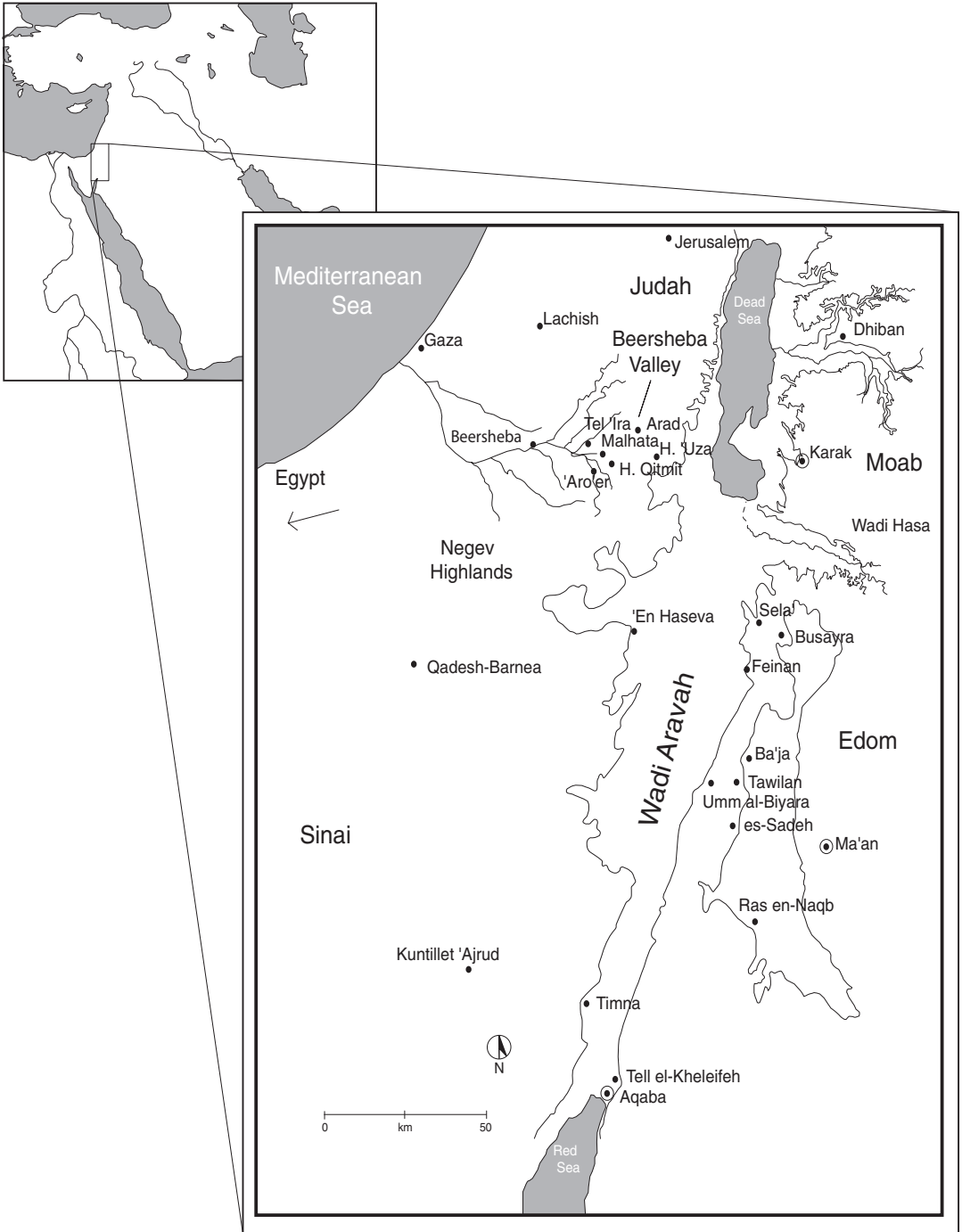


Figure 1  
Map of Iron Age Edom and surrounding regions.

technology, ancient elites carried on a more tenuous relationship with their subordinates, requiring them to balance traditional expectations with their increasing desire for power. Elites drew on tradition to shape their public identities in calculated forms. By acting the prescribed part, their subordinates made sense of elites (and their own) position in social hierarchies.

Elites ruling segmentary polities exemplify this necessity of balancing authority and tradition. The concept of segmentary polities, where distinct patronymic groups are united under a single political organization, has its origins in Evans-Pritchard's and others' research on segmentary lineage systems (Bourdieu 1977; Dresch 1986; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1979; Gellner 1969; Peters 1960)<sup>2</sup> and segmentary states (Stein 1994; Southall 1987, 1999). Although they may exhibit several characteristics of traditional archaic states, segmentary polities are highly unstable entities, making leadership, membership, and identity highly volatile. Segmentation creates this instability as segments form and dissolve according to unpredictable political events such as feuds, marriages, and political allegiances (Dresch 1986). Because unsatisfied members in one segment can easily join another and patronymic identities are interchangeable, elites face the difficulties of retaining legitimacy and membership. If unpopular, leaders find themselves managing 'empty' segments, their constituents having aligned themselves with alternative kin groups promising protection, patronage, and prestige. The transmission of authority from father to eldest son, a popular practice in segmentary societies, poses an additional problem as rarely is the office transmitted. The young leader must re-establish the necessary legitimacy from his constituents to maintain authority. Effective elites, therefore, possess the social knowledge that helps them exercise charisma across segments. Leaders will attempt to consolidate segments under their authority, promoting their cohesiveness under new metaphors of identity that are both inclusive and respecting of pre-existing segments' identities.

But what happens when elites wish to incorporate new genres of authority falling outside the purview of 'tradition'? Given their greater access to external, foreign modes of expression, elites are sensitive to new genres that reside just outside their society. A willingness to absorb practices signalling international stature with the hopes of increasing prestige and wealth is not beyond the limits of elites, ancient or modern. They face an even more problematic dilemma when these genres are incompatible with traditional assumptions. In this event, elites are required to produce multiple identities and search for practices communicable at both local and international levels.

This is particularly true when local elites come under external imperial control. Local elites bear the burden of reorganizing their economies to meet increased production requirements that empires demand from their peripheries as sources of revenue and resources (D'Altroy and Earle 1985; Stanish 1997; Sinopoli 1994). At the same time, elites' dependency on their own constituents increases to meet imperial as well as their own demands, usually in the form of

2 As time distanced each successive generation away from the primary founder, groups further segmented into increasingly smaller groups. Despite this distance, a segmented group could still trace their lineage upward to the primary founder and, when finding it necessary, could form alliances with other segments through locating their common affiliations within the lineage. Segmentary lineage systems play an important organizing role in tribal societies that lacked distinguishable political leaders and institutions associated with state-level societies. Under this political system, two or more segments combined to defend threatened territories and participate in feuds, easily separating again when alliances were no longer necessary. Soon after, these formerly aligned tribes could find themselves opposed to each other over cattle, murder, or territory, now aligning themselves with new segments with which they were previously feuding. Later scholars enhanced and critiqued Evans-Pritchard's model, notably Peters (1960), Gellner (1969), Geertz (1979), and Bourdieu (1977).

*corvé* labour and local taxation. Consequently, elites organize their constituents in ways that foster a high degree of social cohesion and increased production. Additionally, the relationship between local and imperial elites often results in the transmission of elite practices through several channels including visits to imperial courts, advice from imperial ‘counsellors’ placed in local courts, and the exchange of prestige items (Rowlands 1987; Schortman and Urban 1994; Schortman *et al.* 2001). While they may be permitted to adopt the symbols of imperial power, local elites must not overstep their subordinate position in the empire. Doing so risks, at best, demotion, and at worst, deportation or death. At the same time, these new practices require integration into local definitions of leadership that remain meaningful to elites’ constituents. Elites who fail to integrate new genres successfully risk losing their ability to navigate local politics. Effective local leadership within empires ultimately requires a flexible and balanced elite identity.

## IRON AGE EDOM

*I will surely make you [Edom] least among the nations; you shall be utterly despised.*

Obadiah 2

The Iron Age (1200–500 BC) polity of Edom was situated in the lower southern third of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the south-eastern edge of the modern State of Israel. Historical sources permit the reconstruction of Edom’s political borders (Bartlett 1989; Edelman 1995a; MacDonald 2000), beginning with the canyon-like Wadi el-Hasa in the north, and ending between Ras an-Naqb and Aqaba in the south.<sup>3</sup> Edom’s eastern border was not as defined, receding into the North Arabian desert, and in the west, the Jordan Rift Valley formed Edom’s western edge until the seventh century, when archaeological evidence suggests the polity’s borders expanded westward.

Historical and archaeological evidence suggests Edom developed from disparately organized pastoral nomadic tribes to a loosely centralized political polity. Egyptian royal correspondence records tent-dwelling migratory pastoralists (*shasu*) living in the region as early as the Late Bronze Age (Ward 1972; particularly Pap. Anastasi VI, 54–6). Later, in the Iron Age, the Hebrew Bible-Old Testament characterizes the relationship between the Edomites and Israelites as adversarial (e.g. Numbers 20:14–21; Amos 1:11), although attempts are made throughout to demonstrate the two groups’ shared pedigree (e.g. Genesis 25–7, 31, 36) (Bartlett 1989, 83–90; Glazier-MacDonald 1995; Prewitt 1981). The Hebrew Bible-Old Testament reports that the Israelites conquered Edom around 1000 BC (1 Samuel 14:47–8; 2 Samuel 8:13–14) and dominated Edom politically and economically for the next 150 years, appointing local leaders and maintaining military garrisons.<sup>4</sup> Edom revolted around 850 BC and established

3 There is no room here to provide an extensive review of Iron Age Edom. Instead, see Bartlett 1989, Bienkowski 1992d, and Edelman 1995b.

4 While the Egyptian and Biblical evidence suggests a collective Edomite identity persisted from the end of the second millennium into the first part of the first millennium BC (the Late Bronze and Iron Age I periods), archaeological evidence is lacking to provide physical corroboration of this historical picture. Evidence for intensified settlement was found lacking in the Iron Age I period and to date, only a limited number of hamlet-size settlements in Edom’s northern half, and a handful of diagnostic Iron I sherds from unstratified contexts in its southern half, have been identified (MacDonald 1983, 1992). Although a clearer picture of first millennium Edom may be gained through ongoing excavations at Wadi Fidan (Levy *et al.* 1999), the current lack of physical evidence poses a significant barrier to charting Edom’s emergence in its earliest stages (Bienkowski 1992a; Finkelstein 1992a, 1992b).

its independence (2 Kings 8:20). Following independence, an administrative capital was established at Busayra and several mid-size villages (e.g. Umm al-Biyara, Tawilan, and Gharareh) were also founded, reflecting increased levels of political and economic centralization, social differentiation, foreign trade, and the exchange of nomadic for sedentary subsistence practices.

Despite this evidence for increasing social complexity, scholars are reluctant to assign the social evolutionary category of 'state' to describe Edom's political organisation (Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001; Knauf 1992; LaBianca and Younker 1995). Acknowledging that tribal patronyms were markers of social identity before the eighth century, LaBianca and Younker (1995), and separately Bienkowski and van der Steen (2001), characterize Edom as a tribal 'kingdom' which monitored loosely defined political borders and economic thoroughfares, but remained politically and economically organized as tribes. Historical and ethnographic analogies from Jordanian tribal society during the Ottoman and British Empires, and the current Hashemite Kingdom, in which historical tensions between tribal society and the state have persisted, inspire this vision of Edom as a 'tribal kingdom'. In response, Routledge recently presented an alternative model for Edom's neighbour, Moab, that understands segments as unstable containers of social attachments that could be consolidated within larger metaphors of identity and cohesion (2000, 2004). Routledge's framework for Moab is most constructive in understanding the emergence of Edom's political and social organization, especially the ways segmentary systems constrained and promoted elites' ability to organize disparate tribal alliances.

Beginning in the eighth century BC and continuing over the next five centuries, the successive Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian empires exercised varying degrees of political and economic control over Edom.<sup>5</sup> Under the empires' control, Edom's kings gave tribute, paid heavy taxes, and made official visits to the imperial courts (see Weippert 1987 for a discussion of sources). The empires often sought to reorganize local production of valuable commodities, transfer large numbers of people to new regions of the empire, and institute new forms of currency, all of which transformed local political and economic organizations. Local elites, eager to maintain their prominent roles in the wake of imperial dominance, collaborated with the empires to bring about these political and economic changes. Edom had much to offer the empires including copper, agriculture (sheep, goat, and grains), a gateway to Western Arabian and Red Sea trade routes, and a military buffer zone with Egypt. The available evidence suggests the empires (especially Assyria) were willing to accommodate the polity as long as elites met their tribute payments, cooperated with imperial officials, and refrained from participating in regional revolts. Failure in any of these areas beckoned imperial involvement at the local level – from imperial officials monitoring and advising local policies, to the garrisoning of troops, to direct military campaigns and mass deportation. Elites in good standing paid visits to the imperial royal courts where they received property, slaves, and prestige goods for their obedience (van Driel 1970; Mattila 2000; Pecirkova 1977, 1987; Tadmor 1986; Kataja and Whiting 1995; Postgate 1974, 337). These visits were enormously instructive for elites and this is where they learned what imperial kings do and how they live. Postgate imagines them

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5 See Stern 2001 and Kuhrt 1995 for a broader discussion of these empires and their transformative role in the Levant.



'absorbing the scene in Nineveh (a later Assyrian capital), fingering the tapestries and envying the silverware' (1974, 337).

#### BUILDING, GIFTING, NAMING: STRATEGIES OF EDMOM'S ELITES

The constraints and opportunities placed on Edom's elites from both local society and their imperial authorities required them to walk a fine line between two opposing genres of authority. Given the precarious segmentary politics as well as the hazards of imperial authority, Edom's elites fostered Janus-like identities, appearing as powerful – yet generous – leaders to their local constituents while embracing practices transmitted from the imperial core. Five ways in which they consolidated their authority and fostered a larger Edomite identity among opposing segments are described below: 1) encouraging the exchange of pastoral nomadic subsistence practices for sedentary ones; 2) the promotion of a unified cult under Qos; 3) the construction of a political and administrative centre at Busayra; 4) the redistribution of prestige objects to loyal subjects; and 5) the territorial expansion of the Edomite polity.

#### *Exchanging nomadic for sedentary subsistence practices*

During the end of the eighth and beginning of the seventh centuries, several small villages and hamlets such as Ba'ja (Linder and Farajat 1987), Gharareh (Hart 1988), Jabal al-Qseir (Linder *et al.* 1996), Tawilan (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995), Umm al-'Ala (Lindner 1992), and Umm al-Biyara (Bennett 1966) are founded, signalling intensified levels of political and economic centralization around the capital Busayra (Bienkowski 2002; McDonald in Bienkowski 2002) (Fig. 2). Villages are established on high plateaux and consist of multiple architectural units constructed with stone and sharing adjacent walls.

The sudden appearance of these villages across Edom suggests that pastoralists were exchanging nomadic subsistence practices for sedentary village life (Bienkowski 1992c; LaBianca and Younker 1995). Explanations for why this transition occurs have ranged from increasingly suitable ecological conditions to a stable political situation, both of which guaranteed enough security to make investment in village life and seasonal agriculture worthwhile.

The role elites played in motivating the exchange of nomadic for sedentary subsistence practices has yet to be considered. With the population organized into villages and hamlets, Edom's elites gained several advantages. They could establish their political and economic dominance in ways that were impossible with nomadic populations, including census-taking, taxation, redistribution, and conscription. Bound by the difficulties of village life and small-scale agriculture, the general population grew increasingly dependent on elites to resolve internal conflicts and provide the goods and services they could not provide for themselves. Under imperial rule, villagers depended on elites to ease the burden of taxation, stave off invasion and deportation, and redistribute the prestige items elites received from their imperial superiors. This dependency transformed elites' tenuous legitimacy into a necessary office that represented and administered the common population. With this legitimacy, elites promoted alliances between segments through marriage and economic collectives and promoted larger metaphors of social cohesion.



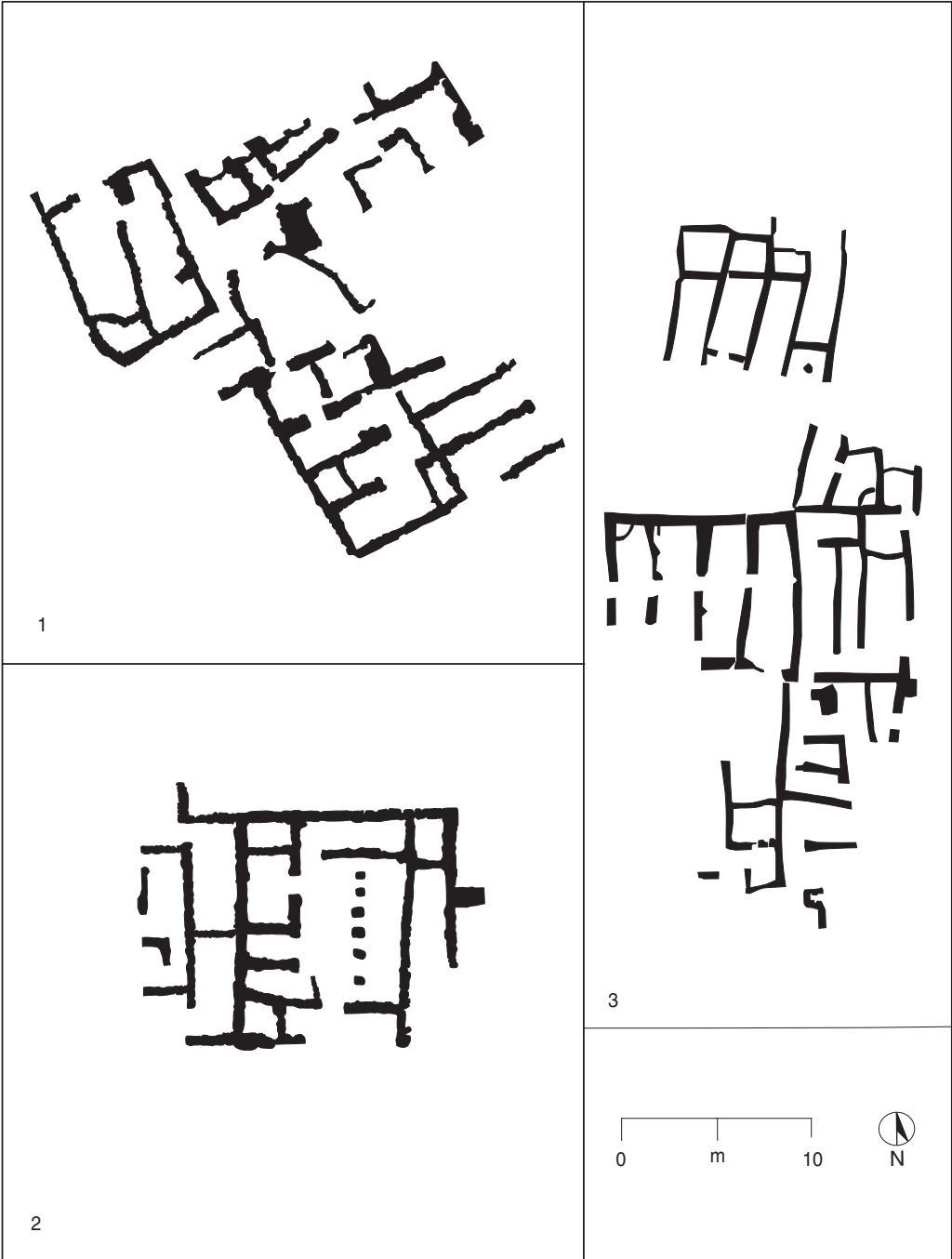


Figure 2

Examples of three Edomite villages: 1) Tawilan (adapted from Bennett and Bienkowski 1995, fig. 2.1), 2) Gharerah (adapted from Hart 1988, 92) and 3) Umm al-Biyara (adapted from Bennett 1966, pl. 14).

*The Qos cult*

Coinciding with Edom's emergence is the historical and epigraphic evidence for the increasing popularity of Edom's patron deity, Qos (Bartlett 1989, 130; Dearman 1995; Rose 1977; Vriezen 1965).<sup>6</sup> Evidence for Qos' increased popularity lies in two types of epigraphic sources: personal names and cultic expressions.

The Edomite onomasticon, a corpus of personal names, is largest ( $n = 50$ ) and they reveal much about Qos' worship in Edom.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 lists each instance's transliteration, translation, the type of individual (if known), its date, the type of object bearing the name, and its find-spot. When the evidence is assembled, five observations are possible. First, the number of personal names bearing Qos conspicuously increases at the same time as Edom's emergence, the earliest instance (No. 1) appearing in a cuneiform document dating to the eighth century. Several examples date to slightly later, to the seventh and sixth centuries (Nos. 2–33). The cuneiform tablet from Tawilan (Nos. 34–5), the Hebrew Bible (No. 36) and the Beersheba ostraca (Nos. 37–50) demonstrate names with Qos well into the late Persian period. Second, personal names bearing Qos appear concentrated within or on the borders of the Edomite polity. Third, the appearance of personal names bearing the Qos element west of the Wadi Aravah suggests that the Edomite polity extended its western borders, encroaching on southern Judah. Fourth, the Qos theophoric element was not restricted to certain individuals or office holders. Edomite kings, their servants, and seemingly ordinary individuals all carried Qos names. Fifth, the importance of Qos in naming practices is made obvious in their transmission between generations. In two instances (Nos. 34 and 35, 38 and 39), fathers bearing the theophoric element have passed it on to their sons.

There are six instances outside the Edomite onomasticon worth consideration, including expressions common to cultic activity, namely sacrifice (No. 51: 'May Qos be blessed' and Nos. 54–6 'for Qos'), blessings (No. 52: 'I bless you by Qos'), and prayers (No. 53: 'Please return, O Qos!') (Table 2). Four (Nos. 50, 53–5) of the six instances were excavated in or near cultic contexts, Busayra and Ḥorvat Qiṭmit. These suggest Qos' worship in Edom achieved some degree of institutionalization, where worship is centralized in prescribed locations and worshippers visit to offer sacrifices and prayers. Additionally, five (Nos. 52–6) of the six instances occur west of the Wadi Aravah, where the Qos cult likely spread along with Edom's territorial expansion into the region, suggesting Qos' worship was linked to Edomite political and economic practices.

6 Worship of Qos, however, precedes Edom's rise by several centuries and references to the deity appear in personal names from the region recorded in Egyptian sources (Knauf 1999; Oded 1971). Knauf links Qos to the deified bow of the Syrian weather god often associated with war (1999, 676–7). Bartlett has assigned a late date to Qos' promotion to the top of Edom's pantheon, arguing that his supremacy was repressed during Judah's domination of Edom when cultic worship likely centred on Judah's Yahweh cult (1989, 130). While the authors of the Hebrew Bible commonly castigated the gods of neighbouring polities (e.g. Jeremiah 48:7), Qos' condemnation is conspicuously absent until the sixth century, when the Edomites are accused of assisting the Babylonians in destroying Jerusalem, Judah's capital.

7 Naming in the ancient Near East was not simply a matter of identification, but expressed particular qualities about the individual's character (Zadok 1997). Personal names often contained theophoric, or divine, elements of a deity, for example, Qws-gbr, literally 'Qos is powerful'. Shortened (hypocoristic) versions of official names were used in daily practice, while the longer name was reserved for administrative purposes.

TABLE 1  
 List of 50 personal names containing the Qos theophoric element. An English translation, the bearer's rank, the proposed date, the artefact's context, and excavation details are listed for each instance. Instances of Qos in Greek, Idumean, Thamudic, Safaitic, and Lihyanite sources are excluded here, but see Bartlett 1989 for entire corpus. Only the original or most conclusive publication is cited here for sake of space

No.	Name	Translation	Character	Date (century)	Context	Object No.	Findspot	Publication	Comments
1	qa-us-ma-la-ka	Qos has become king	king	8th	cuneiform tablet	K 3751 (Summ. 7)	Nimrud	Tadmor 1984: 154–175; pls. LIV–LV	
2	qwsg[br]	Qos is powerful	king	7th	seal	(none)	Umm el-Biyara	Bennett 1966: 399–401	
3	qa-us-gab-ri	Qos is powerful	king	7th	cuneiform tablet	Prism B V.56	Nineveh	Luckenbill 1926–1927: 527–528	
4	qa-us-gab-ri	Qos is powerful	king	7th	cuneiform tablet	Prism C II.28	Nineveh	Luckenbill 1926–1927: 876	
5–26	qws'nl	Qos [answered?]	king's servant	late 7th / early 6th	seal impression	146, 215, 241, 243, 267, 278, 381, 463, 464, 466, 467, 528, 724, 742, 822, 1014, 2092, 2096, 2098, 6049, 9098, 20271 (n = 22)	el-Kheleifeh	Divito 1993: 53–55	
27	bdq[ws]	hand of Qos	individual	7th	ostrakon	6043	el-Kheleifeh	Divito 1993: 55–57	
28	qwsb[nh]	Qos has created	individual	7th	ostrakon	6043	el-Kheleifeh	Divito 1993: 55–57	
29–30	pg'qws	Qos attacks	individual	7th	ostrakon	6043	el-Kheleifeh	Divito 1993: 55–57	appears twice in list
31	qwsny	Qos has given	individual	7th	ostrakon	6043	el-Kheleifeh	Divito 1993: 55–57	hypocoristic for qwsnnt
32	[m]lkqw[s]	Qos is king?	individual	7th/6th	ceramic vessel	518/1	Horvat Qitmit	Beit-Arieh 1995b: 259–260	

33	qws'	?	individual	7th/6th	ostrakon	none	Aro'er	Biran and Cohen 1976: 139	hypocoristic
34	qu-u-su-sa-ma-a'	Qos has heard	individual	5th/4th	cuneiform tablet	873	Tawilan	Dalley 1995: 67-68	
35	qu-u-su-ia-da-a'	Qos has known	individual	5th-4th	cuneiform tablet	873	Tawilan	Dalley 1995: 67-68	
36	brqws	son of Qos	individual	5th	Ezra 2:53; Nehemiah 7:55	none	none	Knauf 1999: 674	
37	qwsnhr	Qos is light	individual	4th	ostrakon	28	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 183	
38	qwsynqm	Qos will avenge	individual	4th	ostrakon	33	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 185	
39	qwsbrk	Qos has blessed	individual	4th	ostrakon	33	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 185	
40	qwsml[k]	Qos is king	individual	4th	ostrakon	33	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 185	father of qwsbrk
41	qws'wt	Qos has helped	individual	4th	ostrakon	34	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 186	
42	qwsy	?	individual	4th	ostrakon	34	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 186	hypocoristic
43	qws'adr	Qos has helped	individual	4th	ostrakon	34	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 186	
44	qwswhb	Qos has given	individual	4th	ostrakon	36	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 187	
45	qws[. . .]	Qos . . .	individual	4th	ostrakon	36	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 187	
46	br qws	[son] of Qos	individual	4th	ostrakon	37	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 188	
47	qwsgr	Qos is powerful	individual	4th	ostrakon	37	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 188	
48	qws[. . .]	Qos . . .	individual	4th	ostrakon	41	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 189	
49	qos'hn	Qos [?]	individual	4th	ostrakon	41	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 189	
50	qosmlk	qos is king	individual	4th	ostrakon	42	Beersheba	Naveh 1979: 190	

TABLE 2

List of phrases mentioning the Qos deity. An English translation, the proposed date, the artefact's context, and excavation details are listed for each instance

No.	Phrase	Translation	Date (century)	Context	Object No.	Findspot	Publication	Comments
51	[b]rk / qws	may Qos be [blessed]	7th / 6th	ceramic vessel	583	Busayra	Bienkowski 2002: 432–433	
52	whbrtk / lqws	I bless you by Qos	7th / 6th	ostracon	(none)	Horvat 'Uza	Beit-Arieh and Cresson 1985: 96–101, pl. 12	
53	lšwbnqws	please return, O Qos	7th / 6th	stamp seal	575/1	Horvat Qitmit	Beit-Arieh 1995b: 264–265, 267	
54	lqws[. . .]	for qos	7th / 6th	ceramic vessel	550/1	Horvat Qitmit	Beit-Arieh 1995b: 261–262	
55	[. . .] blqwshp[. . .]	[?] . . . for Qos . . . [?]	7th / 6th	ceramic vessel	554/1	Horvat Qitmit	Beit-Arieh 1995b: 260–261	
56	'r'r/lqws	Aro'er / for Qos	7th / 6th	seal	(none)	Aro'er	Biran and Cohen 1976: 139	

The co-occurrence of the Qos cult and Edom's emergence suggests the polity's identity was linked to their patron deity. The patronymic metaphor of a polity's patron deity, here Qos, performing the role of celestial 'father' (*av*) over his earthly 'family', the Edomites, is typical of Levantine Iron Age polities (Schloen 2001). As the deity's earthly representative, elites used this familial metaphor between a god and his people to unify the polity's political and religious bureaucracies in a single administrative centre. This metaphor also promoted a unified identity that consolidated disparate segments within a single 'family', the deity and king as its primary sponsors.

### *Building Busayra*

Excavations at Busayra, the Edomite capital, reveal an expansive settlement, unprecedented in the region (Bienkowski 2002) (Fig. 3). A large perimeter wall surrounds two platformed monumental complexes.<sup>8</sup> Excavations in the first area (C) revealed a large (at least 624 sqm) platformed building interpreted as a palace and/or administrative complex (*ibid.*, 199) (Fig. 4). A rectangular courtyard with a thick plastered floor and possible throne niche is the building's centrepiece, with smaller chambers excavated on the south-west corner. Thick exterior walls bound the entire building. The building's size, the plaster-lined floors and walls, a toilet and bath, and flag-stoned storage areas all suggest conspicuous signs of elite use relative to the simple stone architectural units common in Edomite villages. Sitting adjacent to this

8 Both buildings exhibit evidence of two violent destructions, the first of which the excavators ascribe to Nabonidus' campaign to Edom in 553 BC (Bienkowski 2002, 477–8). Following this campaign and the Babylonian Empire's annexation of Edom, both buildings were rebuilt and occupied, presumably by elites loyal to the Empire's rule. The buildings persist into the Persian Period until destroyed in the late fourth century.

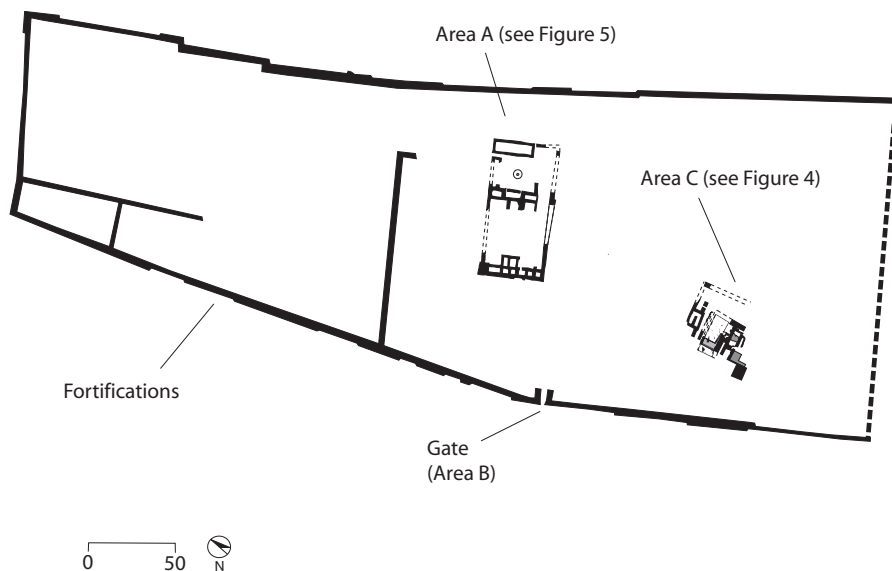


Figure 3

Map of Busayra with key features labelled (adapted from Bienkowski 2002, fig. 1.2).

administrative building, another large (2907sqm) elevated architectural complex was constructed, exhibiting two rectangular courtyards surrounded by a series of rooms (Area A) (Fig. 5). As in the first building, plaster lined the floors and walls. The small rooms surrounding the courtyards likely served storage purposes, evident in the vessels recovered during excavation. The excavators suggest this building functioned as a temple if the long narrow room partitioning the two courtyards is indeed a sanctuary (*ibid.*, 94–5).<sup>9</sup>

Both buildings' architectural plans possess construction styles popular in Neo-Assyrian buildings such as Khorsabad, Nineveh, Nimrud and Frt. Shalmaneser (Loud 1936; Turner 1970). Busayra's Area A building possesses large open courtyards surrounded by small chambers that are common in Assyrian palace plans. The Area C building presents limited evidence (only a niche for the throne has been excavated) for a royal presentation hall, a feature of Assyrian palaces that served as the administrative and ideological 'centre' of the empire (Russell 1999; Winter 1981). The replication of Assyrian styles in Levantine architecture is not without precedent and several excavated buildings with open courtyards and/or presentation halls suggest Assyrian influence (Amiran and Dunayevsky 1958; Reich 1992, 214–22).<sup>10</sup> The Busayra

<sup>9</sup> The patron deity of the building is unfortunately unknown, although one is tempted to suggest Qos.

<sup>10</sup> Notably: Ayyelet ha-Shahar (Guy 1957; Reich 1975), Hazor (Area B, Stratum III, Building 3002) (Yadin 1958, 45–54), Megiddo (Stratum III–II, Buildings 490, 1052, and 1369) (Lamon and Shipton 1939, 62–9), Lachish (Persian Residency, Level I) (Ussishken 1978), and Ekron (Field IV, Stratum IV, Building 650) (Gitin 1997). These buildings were used across multiple occupational periods, making the details of construction, remodelling, and abandonment difficult to identify. In the cases of Ayyelet ha-Shahar, Hazor, Lachish, and Ekron, the excavated material culture dates to a time period much later than the building's original construction.

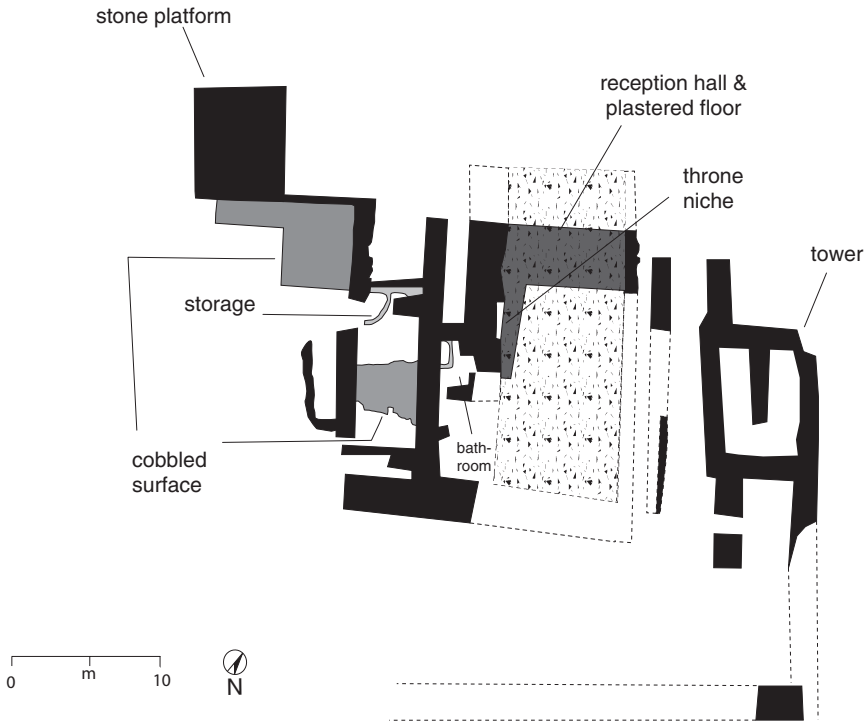


Figure 4

The elite complex at Busayra (Area C, Phases 3–5) with key features labelled (adapted from Bienkowski 2002, figs. 6.6, 6.13). Dashed lines indicate author's hypothesized reconstruction.

building programme stands out from these buildings, many of which were constructed following the previous city's destruction and subsequent introduction of Assyrian domination. Instead, the building programme at Busayra appears during a period of only minor Assyrian hegemony, suggesting Edom's elites replicated the Assyrian architectural elements they observed during visits to the imperial capitals.

Busayra's built environment speaks a clear message of imperial affiliation and local political domination. Compared to other, more or less contemporary, settlements such as Umm al-Biyara, Ba'ja, and Tawilan, Busayra's built environment is noticeably distinct from the village's simple stone buildings. The elites who built and lived in Busayra made a dramatic statement of power, expressing imperial affiliation with their imperial superiors while demonstrating political strength and legitimacy downwards to their constituents. No matter how symbolically potent this building project was in Edom, it should be recognized as a daring political move that could only occur following increased political centralization at the local level. Busayra's built environment, while meaningful at international levels as 'imperial', may have been understood as sublime spectacle in the local community. The archaeological and textual record is mute on these impressions, yet it is plausible that Busayra was interpreted in different ways depending on an individual's social distance from the centre of Edom's elite strata.



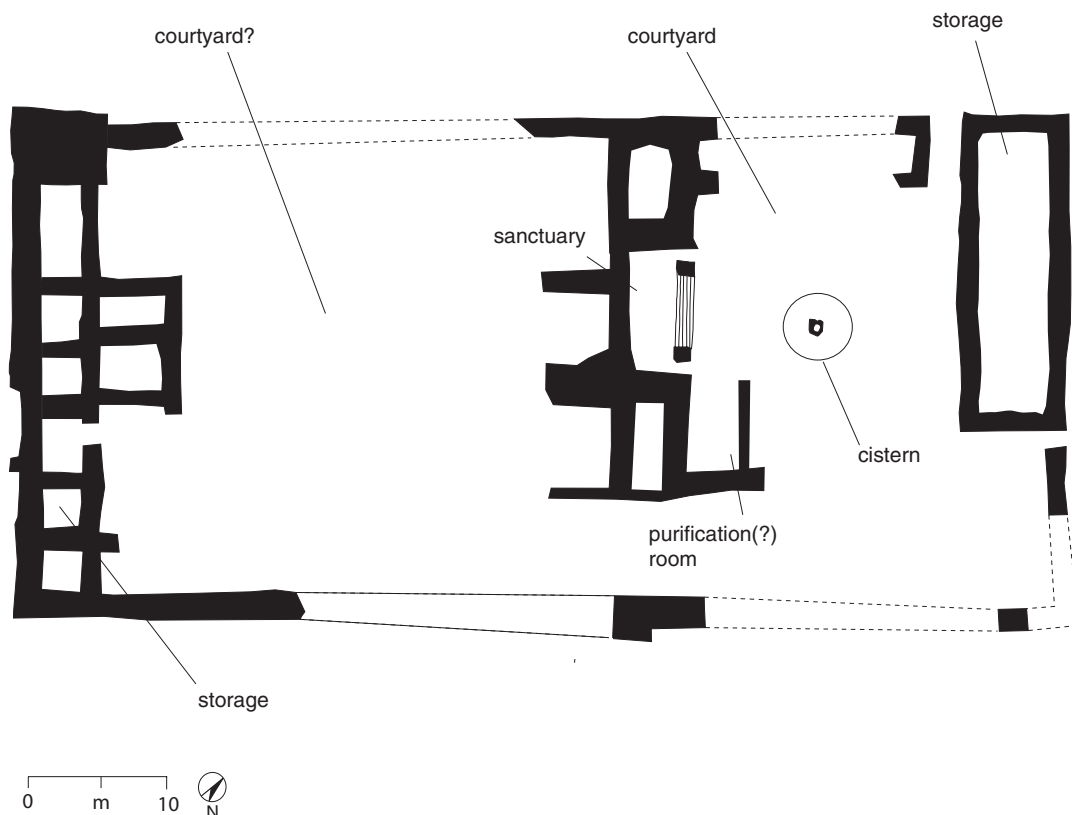


Figure 5

The 'temple' complex at Busayra (Area A, Phases 3–4) with key features labelled (adapted from Bienkowski 2002, figs. 4.6 and 4.7). Dashed lines indicate author's hypothesized reconstruction.

### *Gift-giving and redistribution*

The number of 'prestige' objects excavated in the Iron II Edomite villages belies interpretations that assume these settlements were relatively impoverished and lacked access to such wealth. In fact, a considerable degree of homogeneity stands out when comparing six excavated and thoroughly published Edomite settlements – Gharareh, Kheleifeh, Qitmit, Tawilan, and Umm al-Biyara – with the administrative centre, Busayra (Table 3).

While almost all of these sites possess Assyrian-like ceramic vessels, more than half demonstrate evidence for ties to the local and international economy in the form of seals, seal impressions, and weights. Additionally, items for body adornment such as cosmetic palettes, jewellery, and fibulae are present throughout. Fibulae, bone furniture inlay, and ivory, all precious commodities commonly reserved for elite use, broadly circulated throughout the Assyrian and subsequent empires (Stronach 1959; Winter 1976). The co-occurrence of these objects in both the capital Busayra and the seemingly non-elite settlement contexts is particularly conspicuous and demands explanation.

TABLE 3

Table identifying the presence/absence of ten categories of prestige objects at six Edomite sites

Site	Assyrian-like pottery	Cosmetic palette	Inlay	Fibula	Jewelry	Seals	Ivory	Tridacna shells	Weights	Seal Impressions
Busayra	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gharareh	X	X				X		X		
Kheleifeh	X			X	X					X
Qitmit	X				X	X				
Tawilan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Umm al-Biyara		X				X			X	X

While Bienkowski and van der Steen explain the presence of these elite goods as the result of caravan looting (2001), their appearance is better explained as the result of elite efforts to foster alliances among a faction-ridden tribal society through gift-giving and redistribution. Gift-giving, anthropologists have long recognized, creates and maintains lateral and asymmetrical social relationships (Mauss 1925; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992). A common practice in the ancient Near East as well, gift-giving occurred between elites to forge diplomatic ties as well as between elites and their subjects (Liverani 1979; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; Zaccagnini 1987). In the Neo-Assyrian period, kings habitually presented land, slaves, and tax relief as gifts to subjects in exchange for their loyalty (Mattila 2000; Kataja and Whiting 1995). Likewise, provincial elites received gifts and royal pampering when visiting the imperial court. It was here that Edom's elites had access to the international objects that marked them as part of the empire's cosmopolitan court. Returning home, however, they lacked the political power needed to exercise the same degree of force on their disparately organized society. To compensate, elites used these prestige objects as gifts to forge alliances between themselves and the segments they depended on not only to feed them and perform *corvée* labour, but also to supply enough to meet imperial tribute quotas. In these transactions, elites appeared to share the wealth, acting the role of the generous tribesmen, building and strengthening political alliances.

*Territorial expansion*

Following the polity's foundation and the extension of Neo-Assyrian vassalship over the region, archaeological and textual evidence indicates Edom's borders expanded west, across the Wadi Aravah, into parts of the Beersheba Valley and the Negev Highlands (Fig. 1).<sup>11</sup>

11 Several lines of evidence support this idea. One, the construction of fortified sites such as Arad, Horvat Radum, Horvat Tov, and Horvat 'Uza on Judah's retracted southern border suggests to Beit-Arieh (1995a, 1995b) and Mazar (1985) that the Judeans compensated for Edom's growing presence in the region through garrisons. Second, ostraca found at Arad contain letters discussing Edom's threatening presence near the border (Lindenberger 1994, 99-116). Finally, several authors in the Hebrew Bible suggest that the Edomites played a role in Assyrian and Babylonian campaigns to destroy Judah (Ezekiel 35; Obadiah 1-14; Psalms 137:7; Lamentations 4:21-2). Obadiah admonishes the Edomites,

You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity; you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress (Obadiah 13-14).

Edom's expansion is evident at Ḥorvat Qitmit and 'En Ḥaṣeva. In the former, epigraphic, ceramic, and architectural evidence strongly suggests a cultic installation dedicated to Qos was founded some time in the seventh century (Beit-Arieh 1995b). Likewise, excavations at 'En Ḥaṣeva in the Wadi Aravah revealed a small cultic installation similar in design to that of Ḥorvat Qitmit's. In a nearby pit, anthropomorphic vessels in ritual poses, incense shovels and burners, and chalices were excavated and likely associated with the temple (Cohen and Yisrael 1995a, 1995b).<sup>12</sup>

Additional evidence for Edom's expansion persists in historical evidence from the period. Before Edom's expansion, Judah was the dominant force in the region until the threat of a Babylonian invasion motivated the polity to consolidate its borders and resources. Judah's retreat from the area likely created a vacuum easily filled by Edom's political influence. Edom, which remained aligned with its Assyrian superiors, posed a threat to Judah's struggle to remain independent.<sup>13</sup> Knowing that the Neo-Assyrians, and later, the Neo-Babylonians, were increasingly unhappy with Judah's resistance, Edom's elites likely knew that Judah's resistance could not hold out forever. As Judah consolidated its territory and resources, areas west of the Aravah and south of Beersheba were left unattended, creating a vacuum into which Edom could expand. Edom's elites gained several advantages in this move, namely the creation of a larger buffer between Judah and Edom, the control of caravan routes travelling between Arabia and the Mediterranean sea-coast and the copper mines from which to extract the resource the Neo-Assyrians so desired. That the Qos cult followed on the heels of territorial expansion suggests the deity was successfully intertwined with the Edomite polity. We might suggest that placing a shrine to Qos in the region is a sign that Edom's elites sought symbolically to convert area once dominated by Judah into 'Edomite', offering a place of worship for the patron deity.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: LEGITIMACY AND AUTHORITY IN EDMOM AND BEYOND

Competing genres of authority together permitted and constrained elites' goals to maintain their legitimacy in the social order and manage a viable political polity. On one hand was the pre-existing segmentary society that required elites to reduce distinctions between factions and unite them under a single ethnic rubric. To do this, elites united segments through an inclusive Qos cult and distributed prestige items to maintain alliances. On the other hand, neighbouring empires demanded loyalty and tribute that required Edom's elites to consolidate further their rule by encouraging a pastoral society to adopt sedentary subsistence practices. In

12 Additionally, Instrumental Neutron Activation analysis comparing ceramics excavated on either side of the Wadi Aravah revealed that traditional 'Edomite' forms and styles were produced from clays in both locations (Gunneweg *et al.* 1991). This observation suggests that ceramic producers working in 'Edomite' styles and forms had accompanied Edom's political influence in the area.

13 While the idea that an Edomite presence developed west of the Wadi Aravah in the seventh century is generally accepted, scholars question the intensity of this presence as well as the historical reasons driving this expansion (Beit-Arieh 1995a; Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001). In one explanation, Bienkowski and van der Steen understand the expansion as the result of traders establishing economic networks between Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea; for them, Horvat Qitmit is a roadside temple established for the convenience of passing traders. While Bienkowski and van der Steen's reconstruction is certainly plausible – there is much evidence to suggest an increase in caravan activity in the southern Levant during the first millennium (Artzy 1994) – the role that elites played in the polity's expansion is worth consideration.

exchange for this loyalty, the empires offered elites symbols of power – prestige objects and building patterns – that expressed their dominance and authority in local contexts. Yet elites were careful to translate these imperial genres into forms communicable at the local level. At play here is the intersection of elites' agency and the structures that mediated and constrained their power. The ability to interpret competing genres, grasp the limitations of their authority, and forge identities inclusive of both, distinguished effective from ineffective leaders.

Elites' constituents were never powerless to resist, and this resistance could pose a challenge to leaders' legitimacy. In an unstable segmentary society such as Edom, groups could demonstrate their resistance in several ways, such as forging alliances apart from the dominant segments or returning to their pastoral nomadic lifestyle and moving outside the polity's borders. That this resistance did not occur, however, is reflected in Edom's territorial expansion across the Wadi Aravah. This expansion demanded the efforts of a well-organized population that could be conscripted to perform such efforts. In no way could a handful of elites achieve such an act without assistance. The establishment of the Qos temple at Ḥorvat Qīmit conspicuously suggests the deity played an important role in the polity's territorial expansion. Most tempting is the suggestion that Edom's elites had successfully objectified their authority in Qos so that political acts were performed in the deity's, rather than elites', name. Elites proved successful in convincing their constituents that their worship of Qos inherently linked them to an Edomite identity.

Further limitations to elites' control over their constituents are evident in the appearance of prestige objects in sub-elite social strata. If the ownership of prestige objects marked elite social status, then one would predict these objects would be limited to elite contexts like Busayra. That no apparent restriction of ownership is visible in these instances suggests prestige objects were quickly declassified for general consumption upon entering Edom, elites needing the objects to forge alliances with competing segments. Symbolic power in Edom was never so consolidated that elites could retain their privilege of restricting objects to reflect their social position.

Edom has served in this one instance of elites to make transparent the strategies individuals used to navigate a tenuous social field in their search for authority and legitimacy. This suggests that examinations of early complex polities are best served when the strategies that individuals and groups use to garner authority and legitimacy are closely scrutinized. This realization moves us away from the abstracted definitions of the State that have so often dominated archaeological research, and towards an understanding of polities envisioned not as 'things', but as the result of political acts ranging from the mundane to the monumental generated within and across situated social fields. In Edom, elites transformed and consolidated everyday practices in the region – familial relationships, economic production, cult practices, and subsistence strategies, for instance – under a single political organization objectified in the deity Qos.

Once its artificial nature is realized and the human motivations behind it are exposed, does the State still deserve inspection? Most certainly it does, if only to help us understand how ancient societies conceived of the political arrangements that dominated them. Ancient and modern societies so often share a willingness to accept the legitimacy of political authority, especially in instances where this authority is attributed to objectified, symbolic, and abstracted entities. How such states of consciousness come about in past societies – and how they dissolve over time – no doubt enhance our abilities to identify these processes in our modern lives.

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