

THE POTTERY OF EDMOM: A CORRECTION*

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Summary: The Pottery of Edom: A Correction

This article deals with several claims recently made by Levy *et al.*¹ regarding pottery from Edom and sites in the Negev. Building their argument on two assumptions—that Khirbet en-Nahas constitutes part of Edom and that the fortress there dates to the 10th century BCE—they maintain that sites on the Edomite plateau had been dated to the late 7th–6th centuries BCE based on a single find—the seal impression carrying the inscription “Qos Gabr king of Edom”—and hint that this pottery should in fact be dated earlier. And based on the architectural similarity between the fortress at Khirbet en-Nahas and the fortresses of Tell el-Kheleifeh at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba and of En Hazeva in the western Arabah south of the Dead Sea, they date the latter two to the 10th century BCE, several centuries earlier than the broadly-accepted date in the Iron IIB/C. In this article we take issue with these claims. We show that dating the sites on the Edomite plateau to the late 8th-to-early 6th centuries BCE is backed by meticulous comparison to well-stratified and dated sites in southern Judah. We also show that the fortresses of Tell el-Kheleifeh and En Hazeva cannot be dated earlier than the late 8th century. We then deal with the reasons for Levy *et al.*'s errors.

Keywords: Edom – Khirbet en-Nahas – Tell el-Kheleifeh – En Hazeva

Resumen: La cerámica de Edom: una corrección

Este artículo se refiere a varias afirmaciones hechas recientemente por Levy *et al.*² respecto de la cerámica de Edom y sitios en el Negev quienes, forjando sus argumentos en base a dos supuestos—que Khirbet en-Nahas es parte constituyente de Edom y que

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¹ Levy *et al.* 2007; partially also 2004; 2005.

² Levy *et al.* 2007; también parcialmente 2004; 2005.

su fortaleza data del siglo X a.C.— sostienen que los sitios en la meseta edomita fueron datados a finales del siglo VII y el VI a.C. en base a un único hallazgo—la impresión de sello con la inscripción “Qos Gabr rey de Edom”—e insinúan que esta cerámica debe ser, de hecho, datada más tempranamente. Y, basados en la similitud arquitectónica entre la fortaleza de Khirbet en-Nahas y las fortalezas de Tell el-Kheleifeh, en la entrada del Golfo de Aqaba, y de En Hazeva, en el Arabá occidental al sur del Mar Muerto, datan las dos últimas en el siglo X a.C., varios siglos antes que la fecha comúnmente aceptada en el Hierro IIB/C. En este artículo nos oponemos a estas afirmaciones. Demostramos que la datación de los sitios en la meseta edomita entre finales del siglo VIII a.C. y principios del VI a.C. está basada en una meticulosa comparación con sitios bien estratificados y datados de Judá meridional. También demostramos que las fortalezas de Tell el-Kheleifeh y En Hazeva no pueden ser datadas antes de finales del siglo VIII a.C. para luego tratar las razones de los errores de Levy *et al.*

Palabras clave: Edom – Khirbet en-Nahas – Tel el-Kheleifeh – En Hazeva

Levy *et al.*³ recently made several statements regarding pottery from Edom and sites in the Negev, which led them to suggest far-reaching changes in the conventional reconstruction of the historical processes that took place in the south in the Iron Age. In view of their excavations at Khirbet en-Nahas in the eastern Arabah, and especially their dating of a square fortress there to the 10th century BCE, they argue that:

A) State formation in Edom should be dated to the 10th–9th centuries BCE, a century or two earlier than the widely-accepted 8th century BCE date.⁴ Since Levy *et al.* are aware that an Edomite state must include the Edomite plateau, and as the pottery retrieved from Iron Age sites there had been dated to the late-Iron II, they challenge the conventional dating of this pottery. They claim that the dating of the Edomite pottery assemblages to the late 7th–6th centuries BCE had been based on a single find—the seal impression carrying the inscription “Qos Gabr king of Edom”—hinting that this pottery should, in fact, be dated earlier.

B) Because of the architectural similarity between the fortress at Khirbet en-Nahas and the fortresses of Tell el-Kheleifeh at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba⁵ and of En Hazeva in the western Arabah south of the Dead Sea,⁶ the pottery of the latter two should be dated to the 10th century BCE, several centuries earlier than the broadly-accepted date in the Iron IIB/C.

³ Levy *et al.* 2007; partially also 2004; 2005.

⁴ E.g., Bienkowski 1994.

⁵ Pratico 1993.

⁶ Cohen and Yisrael 1995a.

In this article we wish to take issue with these claims.

DATING OF THE EDMOMITE POTTERY

Levy *et al.* have stated that “*until quite recently, the Iron Age chronology of Edom rested on the discovery of a single clay seal impression found at the highland site of Umm el-Biyara The seal contains the name of Qos-Gabr ... known from the 7th century BC Assyrian annals*”.⁷ This seal, they say, “*served as the single chronological anchor for dating the Iron Age pottery of Edom*”,⁸ and for the conventional dating of the emergence of the Edomite kingdom.⁹ Elsewhere they have taken these statements one step further, arguing that “*the entire corpus of Iron Age pottery from the Edomite plateau represents a ‘floating chronology’ that is not fixed to a stratified archaeological sequence...*”.¹⁰

These statements are incorrect. The Qos-Gabr seal impression indeed led Bennett¹¹ to date the pottery of Umm el-Biyara to the 7th century BCE. However, this discovery was made and the ensuing conclusions proposed long ago, during the 1960s; Levy *et al.* ignore the rich pottery assemblages which have been unearthed, studied and published since then.¹²

Due to Edom’s location on the southern fringe of the Levant, and since sites in this area do not supply reliable stratigraphic sequences for the Iron Age, proper observations regarding dating can be done only by comparing material from the Edomite sites to that found in well-stratified sites in southern Judah, mainly in the Beer-sheba Valley. Indeed, there are many similarities between late-Iron II Judahite and Edomite vessel types such as open bowls (platters), carinated bowls, cooking pots, decanters and lamps.¹³

In addition, many Edomite vessels (decorated and undecorated) have been found at sites located west of the Jordan, in late-Iron II horizons dated between the late 8th and early 6th centuries BCE. Vessels belonging to this group have been found at Beer-sheba Valley sites such as Tel Beersheba Strata

⁷ Levy *et al.* 2007: 15–16.

⁸ Levy *et al.* 2007: 18.

⁹ Levy *et al.* 2007: 16.

¹⁰ Levy *et al.* 2004: 867.

¹¹ Bennett 1966: 399–403.

¹² E.g., Bienkowski, Oakeshott and Berlin 2002; Dornemann 1983; Hart 1989; 1995a; 1995b; Mazar 1985; Oakeshott 1978; 1983; Pratico 1993; Zeitler 1992.

¹³ See, for example, Bienkowski *et al.* 2002; Oakeshott 1978; Pratico 1993: 38–50. Some similarities can also be discerned among small finds, such as figurines (Bienkowski and Sedman 2001; Sedman 2002: 427).

III–II,¹⁴ Arad Strata X–VI,¹⁵ Tel ‘Ira Strata VII–VI,¹⁶ ‘Aroer Strata II–I,¹⁷ Tel Malhata,¹⁸ Horvat Qitmit,¹⁹ Tel Masos fortress,²⁰ Horvat ‘Uza²¹ and Horvat Radum.²² They have also been found in contemporary strata at sites in the area of Nahal Gerar and Nahal Besor—Tel Haror,²³ Tel Shera²⁴ and Tell Jemmeh,²⁵ and in Kadesh Barnea in northeastern Sinai.²⁶ We should reiterate that all these strata date between the late 8th and the early 6th centuries BCE. Equally important, not a single Edomite vessel has been found in Judah in earlier strata which are dated to the Iron IIA period, that is, to the late 10th and 9th centuries BCE.²⁷

Moreover, many vessel forms found in the Edomite plateau sites display a marked Assyrian influence.²⁸ Assyrian influence can also be observed in their architecture and art.²⁹ In Edom, as well as west of the Jordan, such influence does not exist before the beginning of direct Assyrian involvement in the region in the 730s.

Both the Assyrian records and archaeology show that the Edomite kingdom was consolidated during the later part of the 8th century BCE, following the Assyrian take-over of the region by Tiglath-pileser III.³⁰ It is apparent, therefore, that the Qos-Gabr seal impression is not the single chronological anchor for the absolute date of the Edomite settlements and Edomite state-formation. Ceramic studies, architectural observations and historical considerations all place the sites of the Edomite plateau not earlier than the late 8th century BCE. Not a single Iron IIA sherd has thus far been found on the Edomite plateau.

¹⁴ Singer-Avitz 1999: 33–39; 2004.

¹⁵ Singer-Avitz 2002: 160, 162.

¹⁶ Freud 1999: 227.

¹⁷ Biran and Cohen 1981: 265.

¹⁸ Kochavi 1993; Beit-Arieh 1998.

¹⁹ Freud and Beit-Arieh 1995.

²⁰ Zimhoni 1983: 129, Pl. 164: 7–10.

²¹ Freud 2007a.

²² Freud 2007b.

²³ Oren 1993a: 584.

²⁴ Oren 1993b: 1333.

²⁵ Van Beek 1983.

²⁶ Bernick-Greenberg 2007: 168–170.

²⁷ For the Iron IIA pottery horizon in Judah see Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004.

²⁸ Bennett 1978; 1982: 187; Oakeshott 1978: 167–178; Dornemann 1983: 175; Pratico 1993: 41–43.

²⁹ Bennett 1978; 1982; Bienkowski 1995; Reich 1992: 219–220.

³⁰ Oakeshott 1978: 181; Pratico 1983: 194–195; Bartlett 1989; Bienkowski 1992a: 104; 1992b.

TELL EL-KHELEIFEH AND EN HAZEVA

Radiocarbon results from the copper production site of Khirbet en-Nahas cover a period of ca. 300 years, from the late 12th to the late 9th centuries BCE—the Iron I and the Iron IIA.³¹ Levy *et al.* date the square fortress, which is well-preserved on the surface of the site, according to ¹⁴C results from samples ostensibly related to the structure, to the 10th century BCE. The Khirbet en-Nahas fortress closely resembles the fortresses uncovered at Tell el-Kheleifeh³² and En Hazeva.³³ They therefore reject the conventional late 8th-to-early 6th century BCE dating of these fortresses³⁴ and suggest dating them to the 10th–9th centuries BCE.³⁵

The pottery of Tell el-Kheleifeh, thoroughly discussed by Pratico,³⁶ dates to the Iron IIB/C, that is, the 8th-to-early 6th centuries BCE. This assemblage, too, was dated on the basis of detailed comparison with sites in southern Israel. Furthermore, not a single Iron IIA vessel or pottery sherd was found at this site. In sound archaeological research this means that the fortress of Tell el-Kheleifeh cannot date earlier than the late 8th century BCE. En Hazeva has not as yet been fully published, but several vessels have been presented in an exhibition catalogue;³⁷ they too date to the Iron IIB. Indeed, the construction of these large fortresses should be connected with the Assyrian efforts to protect the northern outlets of the desert roads, which supplied the empire with lucrative Arabian goods.

With no clean pottery assemblages on floors, the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress may be dated according to similarity to the well-dated Iron IIB/C fortresses of Tell el-Kheleifeh and En Hazeva; not the other way around.

DISCUSSION

There are three reasons for Levy *et al.*'s errors:

1. They rely on a site with no clear stratigraphy and on ¹⁴C results of samples taken mostly from unstratified industrial refuse.³⁸ Pottery assemblage

³¹ Levy *et al.* 2005; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2008.

³² Pratico 1993.

³³ Cohen and Yisrael 1995a.

³⁴ Pratico 1993; Na'aman 1997.

³⁵ Levy *et al.* 2007: 20–21.

³⁶ Pratico 1993.

³⁷ Cohen and Yisrael 1995b.

³⁸ Finkelstein 2005; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2006.

(and/or ^{14}C samples) from floors clearly associated with walls is the only way to accurately date the fortress at Khirbet en-Nahas. If this is not available, one can resort to circumstantial evidence; but circumstantial evidence cannot serve as an anchor for the pottery sequence in Edom, certainly not in contradiction to the well-reasoned pottery chronology which has been established by comparisons to well-stratified sites in Cisjordan.

2. Levy *et al.* base their entire archaeological and historical reconstruction on an assumption—that Khirbet en-Nahas constitutes part of Edom and should be understood together with the sites excavated on the Edomite plateau. Yet, the finds—also beyond pottery—clearly speak against this assumption. Copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas started in the Iron I. Several Iron I sites—though probably less than argued by one of us long ago³⁹—did exist on the Edomite plateau. But none of them provided clues for a copper-industry connection. In contrast, several settlements developed at that time in the Beer-sheba Valley.⁴⁰ Copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas continued in the Iron IIA and probably reached a peak in the later phase of the period.⁴¹ No Iron IIA material has thus far been published from the many excavations and surveys that were carried out on the Edomite plateau—not even a single vessel.⁴² At that time strong activity continued in the Beer-sheba Valley, including at the large site of Tel Masos Stratum II, which produced evidence of copper activity⁴³ and yielded an exceptionally large number of copper/bronze items.⁴⁴ Finally, when a wave of settlement commenced on the Edomite plateau in the Iron IIB, copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas had already ceased. Therefore, the areas of Wadi Feinan and the Edomite plateau provide contrasting settlement histories. Instead, the site of Khirbet en-Nahas should be linked with the settlement activity, including copper production and trade, in the Beer-sheba Valley, along the roads leading to the coastal plain.⁴⁵

3. Behind Levy *et al.*'s view on the emergence of Edom stands a highly literal reading of the biblical text. They take the list of the kings “who reigned

³⁹ Finkelstein 1992.

⁴⁰ Herzog 1994.

⁴¹ Finkelstein and Piaseckzy 2008.

⁴² A single find had been proposed as evidence for Iron IIA activity there—a small faience rim fragment from Buseirah identified by Milward (1975) as part of an Egyptian relief chalice, stylistically belonging to the 21st or 22nd dynasty. Yet, this identification was apparently based on erroneous drawing (Sedman 2002: 364).

⁴³ Kempinski a.o. 1983: 21.

⁴⁴ Crüsemann 1983; Lupu 1983: 202–203.

⁴⁵ Finkelstein 2005 for both the Iron I and the Iron IIA; Singer-Avitz supports this description for the Iron I.

in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites” in Genesis 36: 31 as historical testimony of the existence of a territorial polity there in the 12th and 11th centuries BCE; and the reference in 2 Samuel 8: 14 to garrisons put by King David in Edom as reflecting a 10th century BCE reality.⁴⁶ It is true that many scholars accepted the list in Genesis 36 as containing genuine historical information.⁴⁷ Yet, there are other possibilities: the list may represent a post-monarchic situation in Edom,⁴⁸ a late Iron II reality,⁴⁹ or may refer altogether to Aramaean (rather than Edomite) kings.⁵⁰ And the reference to Edom in 2 Samuel 8 most likely depicts an 8th century BCE reality, reflected back to the time of the founder of the Jerusalem dynasty.⁵¹ Archaeological dating should be established on archaeological considerations and safely-dated historical records, not on vague biblical references to the formative periods in the history of ancient Israel.

Levy *et al.*'s chain of assumptions can be described as follows: The Khirbet en-Nahas fortress dates to the 10th century BCE > Khirbet en-Nahas belongs to Edom > the sites on the Edomite plateau must pre-date the late-Iron II > Tell el-Kheleifeh and En Hazeva must be contemporaries of the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress in the 10th century BCE > they, too, belong to Edom > Edomite state formation took place in the 10th century BCE > this is documented by certain biblical references.

These arguments are contrary to the archaeological data from both the Edomite plateau and the Negev. They are based on the erroneous assumption that Khirbet en-Nahas constituted part of Edom, and probably also on erroneous dating of the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress. If one removes one of the two first items in this chain of assumptions the entire structure of their argument collapses.

CONCLUSIONS

Several sites on the Edomite plateau, for instance Buseirah, produced Iron I sherds, which means that they were established in the Iron I. There is no evidence for activity there in the Iron IIA—contemporary to the peak prosperity at Khirbet en-Nahas. The sites on the plateau date to the Iron IIB/C,

⁴⁶ Levy *et al.* 2005: 158–159.

⁴⁷ E.g., Eissfeldt 1966: 25; Von Rad 1961: 341; Westermann 1986: 561.

⁴⁸ Knauf 1985.

⁴⁹ Bartlett 1989: 94–102.

⁵⁰ Lemaire 2001.

⁵¹ Na'aman 2002: 214.

when copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas has already ceased. The date of the Edomite plateau sites was established according to detailed comparative studies with well-stratified sites in Cisjordan, not only according to the Qos Gabr seal impression from Umm el-Biyara. Khirbet en-Nahas was strongly connected to the Iron I (and IIA—IF) settlement activity in the Beer-sheba Valley and areas further to the west; it had no influence on the settlement history of the Edomite plateau and had no bearing on state-formation in Edom. The date of the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress is difficult to establish. The similarity between this structure and the fortresses unearthed at Tell el-Kheleifeh and En Hazeva may call for down dating the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress to the “Assyrian Century” in the history of the south. In any event, by no means can the former two be dated to the Iron IIA.

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