

The Genesis of Moab: A Proposal

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We propose that an early Moabite territorial entity emerged south of Wadi Mujib (the biblical Arnon) in the late Iron I – the late 11th and 10th centuries BC. A chain of fortresses protected Khirbet Baluʿa — the hub of this polity — on the north and east. The Baluʿa Stele may be associated with this polity. We further propose that the prime-mover behind the rise of the south Moabite territorial entity was the trade of copper from the Wadi Faynan area south of the Dead Sea. Its abandonment in the late 10th century BC may have been the result of the campaign of Sheshonq I in the south and the diversion of at least part of the Arabah copper flow to the west, in the direction of the Mediterranean coast and Egypt.

Keywords: Moab, state formation, Jordan, Iron Age, Mesha, Baluʿa, Khirbet en-Nahas, copper, Sheshonq I, Omrides

The Mesha Inscription testifies to the existence of a territorial polity in Moab in the second half of the 9th century BC. Was this the first such polity in this region? What do we know about the emergence of Moab in pre-Mesha days?

The study of the rise of the first territorial polity in Moab has been influenced by two schools of thought. The first has been dominated by the biblical account, which refers to Transjordanian kingdoms in the time of the Exodus (Num. 20–21). Scholars of this school have attempted to provide evidence for a Late Bronze or Late Bronze/very early Iron I (13th–12th century BC) polity in Moab. The most obvious examples are Glueck’s theory on a chain of fortresses that protected the boundaries of Moab (e.g. 1940, 134–35; 1967, 445; see also Worschech 1990, 54–59), Kitchen’s insistence on the identification in Moab of toponyms mentioned in the Ramesses II relief in the Luxor temple (1964; 1992; 2007; see also Haider 1987; Worschech 1990, 99–101; 2009), Herr’s interpretation of the Tell el-Umeiri finds as indicating an ‘Amorite, pre-Reubenite’ culture in the Late Bronze (e.g. 1999; see critique in Finkelstein 2011) and the tendency of archaeologists working in Moab to date early Iron Age sites to the ‘Late Bronze/Iron I’ period (e.g. Homès-Fredericq 1992, 188; Worschech 2009; for the early Moabite state theory, see also Boling 1988; Timm 1989; for a rejection of the notion of a Late Bronze/

early Iron I kingdom in Moab, see already Miller 1992). The second school investigated the rise of Moab in light of extra-biblical sources, mainly the Mesha Inscription and anthropological models. Scholars belonging to this school dated the earliest polity in Moab to the days of Mesha in the second half of the 9th century BC (e.g. Miller 1992; Routledge 2004; for a middle-of-the-road theory, which sees a gradual rise of a Moabite polity in the Iron I, see Alt 1940).

In what follows we wish to highlight archaeological evidence for the existence of an early polity in Moab in the (middle to) late Iron I, that is, in the 11th–10th centuries BC (for radiocarbon dating the middle and late Iron I, see Sharon *et al.* 2007; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2006; 2007; 2010a; 2010b). In this paper, we will deal with the archaeological record and historical processes rather than anthropological questions, e.g., whether Moab was a tribal or a segmentary state (see, e.g., LaBianca and Younker 1995; Younker 1997; Routledge 2000a; 2004, 114–32; Van der Steen and Smelik 2007; Bienkowski 2009).

In order to establish a comprehensive picture of the processes in Moab, one needs to look at a broader picture both chronologically and geographically. Chronologically, we will deal with the period of time which is covered by the later phase of the Late Bronze Age, Iron I and Iron IIA, that is, from the 13th/12th centuries to the late 9th century BC. Geographically, we will assemble evidence from Moab and from neighbouring regions — Wadi Faynan in the south, and the Beersheba Valley and Negev Highlands in the west (Fig. 1).

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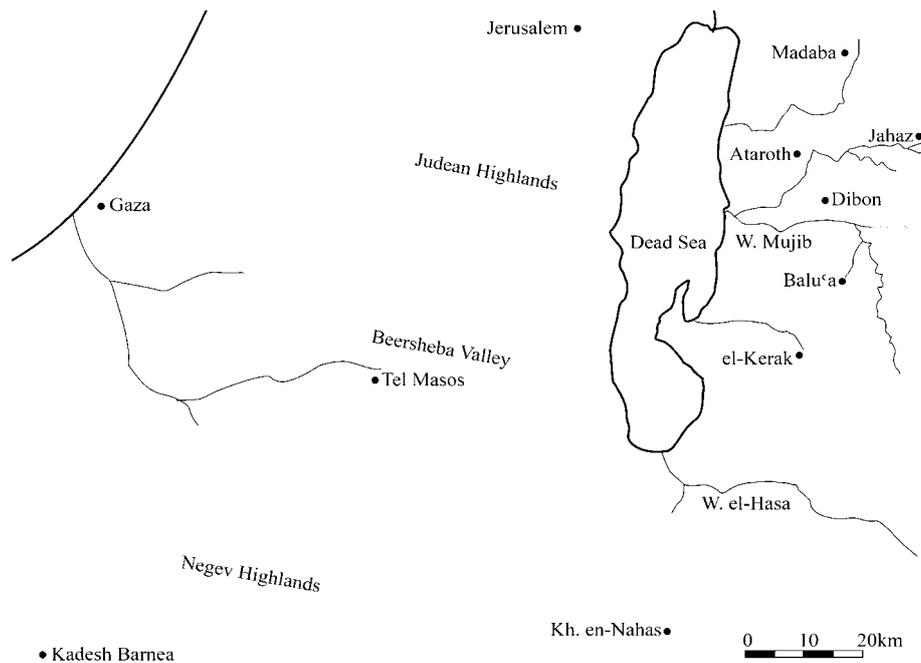


Figure 1 General map of the southern steppe region, showing the main sites mentioned in the text

We are aware that the chain of evidence supporting an early Moabite territorial formation presented below is sometimes fragmentary and hence calls for a degree of extrapolation, but this would be true for most historical reconstructions based almost solely on archaeology. So, although the data are far from complete, we decided to opt for a comprehensive reconstruction of the processes that took place in the arid zones of the south in the early phases of the Iron Age. Our goal is first and foremost to stimulate discussion regarding the rise of territorial formation in Moab in particular, and in the Levant in general.

The Late Bronze Age

Archaeologists have frequently dated excavated sites in Moab to the 'LB/Iron I' period, or the 13th/12th centuries BC (e.g. Olàvarri 1977–78; 1983; Homès-Fredericq 1992, 188; Worschech 2009). Yet, because of the similarity in local pottery forms between the end-phase of the Late Bronze Age and the Iron I, Late Bronze activity can be verified only according to diagnostic forms such as Aegean imports. A critical scrutiny of the finds reveals that the southernmost settlements on the Transjordanian plateau with unequivocal evidence for Late Bronze activity are Tell Jalul and Madaba (Younker 2007; Harrison 2009 respectively; see summary in Goren *et al.* 2004, 333–34, 337–38 and bibliography). The Kerak plateau survey reported over 100 Late Bronze sites (Miller 1991). A much smaller number of sites were reported for the Dhiban plateau (Ji and Lee 2000;

summary in Routledge 2004, 79). Elsewhere one of us explained in detail why these numbers stem from errors in dating survey sherds — it seems that painted medieval sherds were wrongly interpreted as dating to the Late Bronze Age (Finkelstein 1998). Bienkowski's soundings at Khirbet Dubab, where the Kerak plateau surveys reported Late Bronze sherds, revealed no such pottery. Routledge (2004, 79–82), Bienkowski and Adams's (1999) and Worschech's (2009) assertions that a (much lower) number of Late Bronze sites did exist in southern Moab cannot be accepted until drawings of diagnostic Late Bronze material are published; not a single such sherd has thus far been presented.

Without brushing aside the possibility that evidence for some Late Bronze activity will surface in the future in a few places in southern Moab, and taking into account that pastoral nomadic subsistence was practised in this region throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, it is clear that the southernmost line of significant sedentary activity can be drawn around Madaba. Most, if not all, of the 'LB/Iron I' sites further south in Moab in fact date to the Iron I. Whether the area of Amman-Madaba was the hub of one polity centred at Tell el-Umeiri (for the finds, see Herr and Clark 2009), or two polities — one near Amman and another in the northern part of the *mishor*, around Madaba, is beyond the scope of this article.

Looking beyond Moab, it is noteworthy that not a single Late Bronze site has thus far been identified on

the Edomite plateau and only meagre evidence for copper-related activity has thus far been revealed in the Wadi Faynan area (Ben-Yosef *et al.* 2010). West of the Araba Valley, not a single Late Bronze site has been recorded in the Beersheba Valley or the Negev Highlands (the earliest activity at Kadesh-barnea should be dated no earlier than the 12th century BC — Singer-Avitz 2008; Finkelstein 2010). The southernmost line of sedentary activity west of the Dead Sea passed around Hebron in the highlands (with exceptionally meagre activity) and Nahal Besor (Wadi Ghazza) in the southern coastal plain.

Turning to the textual evidence, scholars suggested identifying Moabite place names in Egyptian topographical lists dating to the time of the 18th and 19th Dynasties. Redford (1982a; 1982b) proposed identifying toponyms 96–101 in the list of Thutmose III in Transjordan. The most important are No. 98 *tpn*, identified with Dibon, No. 100 *yarutu* placed in Yarut and No. 101 *hrkr* located at Kerak (see also Worschech 1990, 20–27; 2009; with some reservations, Kitchen 1992, 25). These identifications were criticized by Timm (1989, 34–60), and a different location for these places was suggested by Görg (1979). In the Amarna period, Moab was far beyond the settled land of Canaan.

Another ostensible textual evidence for sedentary activity in Moab in the Late Bronze Age comes from Kitchen's interpretation of the reliefs of Ramesses II on the east wall of the great court in the temple of Luxor. The first scene in the lower register of the reliefs relates to the plundering of a town named *Bwtrt* in the land of *Mw-i-bu*, which Kitchen identified with Rababatora of the Peutinger Map — in Moab. In line with the reference to this Moabite town, Kitchen identified the town of *Tbn* in the second scene with Dibon (Kitchen 1964, 48–51; 1992; 2007; accepted by Helck 1968, 478; Ahituv 1984, 82; Worschech 1990; Weippert 1995, 335–37 and others). Yet, the identification of *Bwtrt* with Rababatora is baseless archaeologically; no site in the vicinity of er-Rabba — the location of Rababatora — yielded Late Bronze finds (on this identification, see also Knauf 1985, 45; Timm 1989, 16–19). Dibon, too, did not produce evidence for Late Bronze occupation (Tushingham 1993, 350–52). Moreover, Na'aman (2006) has convincingly shown that the two toponyms and the land of *Mw-i-bu* should be sought in northern Canaan (Ahituv 1972 rejected the identification of *tpn* with Dibon, but did accept the placement of *Bwtrt* in Moab).

To sum up, as the evidence stands today, there were no sedentary settlements south of Madaba in the Late Bronze Age and there is no unequivocal

mention of Moab or Moabite towns in Egyptian New Kingdom texts. The area was probably inhabited by pastoral nomads, similar to the Shasu of Edom (for the latter, see Giv'eon 1971, 235; Kitchen 1992, 27).

The Iron I: A preliminary note

During the Iron I settlement activity expanded far to the south of the Madaba-Jalul line, into the *mishor* around Dibon and the land of Kerak south of Wadi Mujib. This is evident from results of excavations and surveys alike. Iron I pottery, including collared rim jars, was found on excavated sites such as Dibon (various items in Reed 1964, figs 73–76), Balu'a (Worschech and Ninow 1992, 172), possibly Arair (e.g. Olàvarri 1965, figs 1 no. 3 and 2 no. 7) and Khirbet Mudeineh Aliya (e.g. Routledge 2000b, fig. 7 [Fig. 2, 4 in this article]; 2008, fig. 6), and in surveyed sites south of Madaba and the area of Dibon (Ji and Lee 2000) as well as the land of Kerak (Worschech 1990; Miller 1991; see summary map in Gass [2009, 296], though dating of sites in Moab should be accepted only according to published pottery). Iron I pottery was retrieved at several sites even further to the south, in the Edomite plateau (Finkelstein 1992).¹ In contrast to the area west of the Jordan (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2006), establishing phases within the Iron I in Transjordan is difficult. Still, it is clear that some of the sites to the south (and possibly north) of Wadi Mujib were fortified no later than the late Iron I (below).

Radiocarbon determinations for samples from Khirbet en-Nahas provide evidence for the beginning of significant copper production activity there in the 12th century BC, continuing into the 11th and 10th centuries (Levy *et al.* 2004a, 870; 2005, 135; 2008; Hauptmann 2007, 89; Ben-Yosef *et al.* 2010; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2008; and see below). Early Iron I determinations are also available in Khirbet el-Jariya in the Wadi Faynan area (Ben-Yosef *et al.* 2010).

West of the Rift Valley, in the Beersheba Valley the first Iron Age settlements appeared quite early in the Iron I. Here, we refer mainly to Stratum III at Tel Masos, which probably dates to the late 12th and 11th centuries BC and to Stratum IX at Beersheba (Herzog 1994), which seems to date to the 11th century. The only site with evidence for early Iron I activity in the Negev Highlands and its surroundings is Kadesh-barnea (Singer-Avitz 2008; Finkelstein 2010). At least some of the Iron Age Negev

¹ Some of the types which one of us identified as belonging to the Iron I in fact date to the late Iron II, but there can be no question that Buseirah was inhabited in the Iron I (e.g., Finkelstein 1992, fig. 2, 17); the same holds true for some of the survey sites.

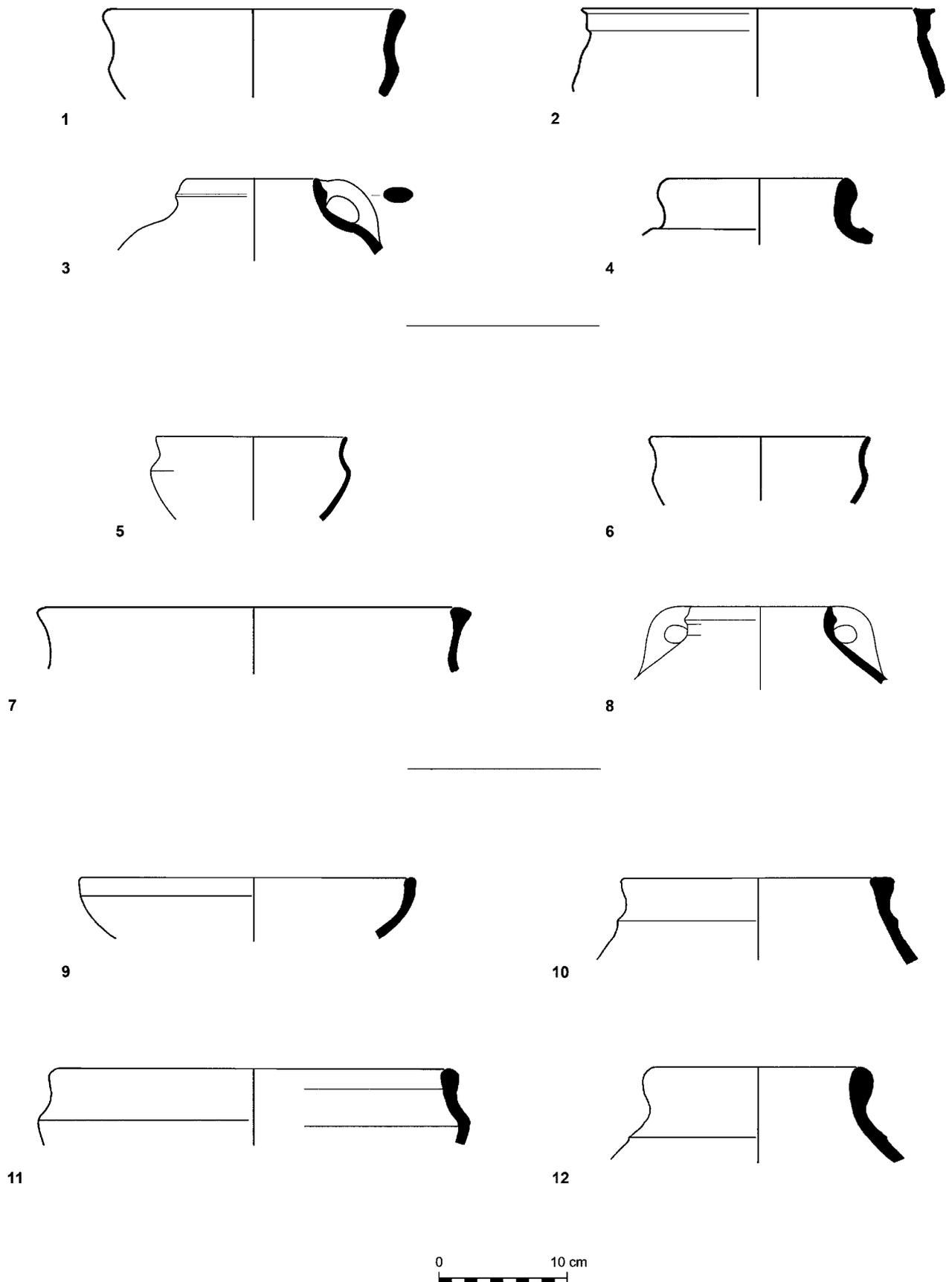


Figure 2 Datable (middle to-) late Iron I pottery forms from the south Moabite sites discussed in this article: Khirbet el-Medeineh ʿAliya (1–4, Routledge 2000b); Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Muʿarrajeh (5–8, Olavarri 1977–78; 1983); Khirbet el-Muʿmmariyya (9–12; Ninow 2006)

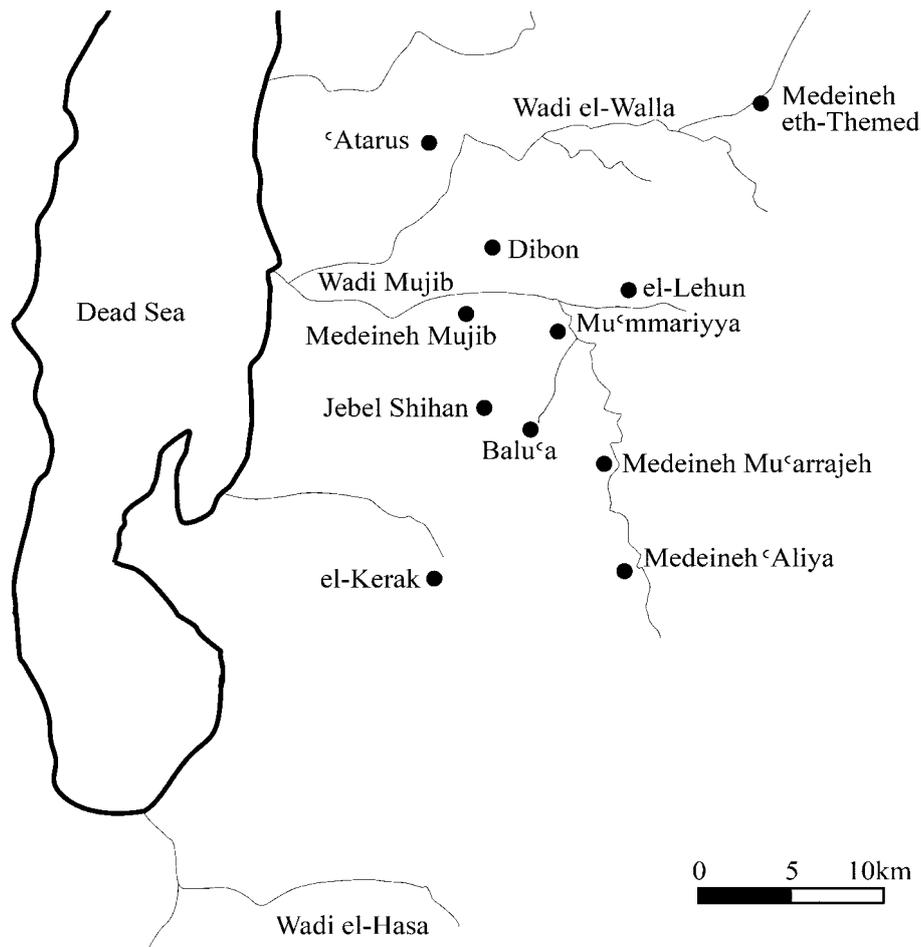


Figure 3 Map of Moab south of the Mujib, showing key sites in the region

Highlands sites may have been founded in the late Iron I (Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006, 20–21).

The Late Iron I

Significant changes took place in Moab no later than the late Iron I, changes that mark the rise of a territorial entity south of Wadi Mujib. The most important among them is the founding of a number of fortified settlements along Wadi Mujib and its tributary, Wadi el-Lejjun. Most of these have been excavated. They show similar characteristics in their date (beginning and desertion), topography, layout and architectural features, and they form a defence system which seems to surround a central place of authority. We suggest this to be a capital of an early Moabite territorial formation.

The sitesⁱⁱ (Fig. 3)

Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Mu'arrajuh (for the many sites in Moab called Medeineh, see Miller 1989;

Ben-David 2008) is the first to have been excavated (Olàvarri 1977–78; 1983). It is an oval, *c.* 1-ha site built on a steep hill on Wadi el-Lejjun, a tributary of the Mujib, 6 km to the north-east of the village of Smakieh, on the fringe of the farmlands (UTM G.R. 7726 4691). The hill is surrounded by deep ravines on all sides except for a saddle, which connects it to the ridge on its south. The site is protected by a casemate wall, with an additional line of fortification on its western side. The gate is located near the saddle, and is protected by an extra-mural tower. A moat was cut in the saddle in order to provide a better defence for the vulnerable gate. Pillared houses were built along the fortification, making use of its casemates. Olàvarri dated the construction of the site to the 12th century (or end of the 13th century) BC and its desertion to 1075–1050 BC, and connected it to the biblical tradition of a Moabite kingdom at the time of the Exodus. In view of today's knowledge, the pottery of this site (Olàvarri 1977–1978, fig. 2; 1983, fig. 6 [several items in Fig. 2 in this article]) should be dated to the late Iron I, with a possible extension into the early phase of the Iron IIA (see cooking pot in

ⁱⁱ Of the sites discussed here, the authors have visited *Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Mu'arrajuh*, *Khirbet el-Medeineh 'Aliya*, *Kerak*, *Khirbet Balu'a* and *Khirbet el-Lehun*.

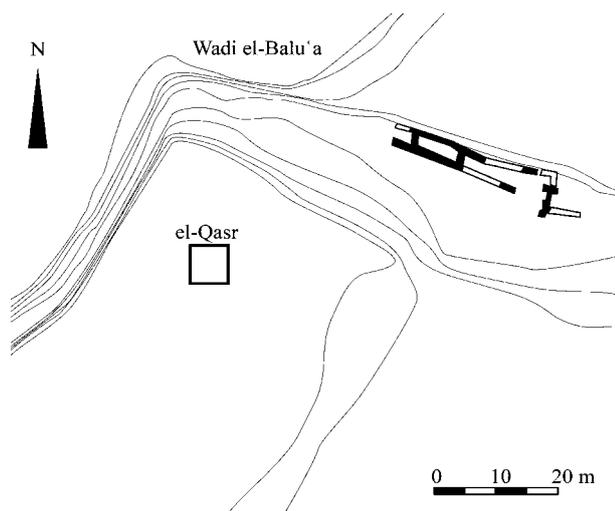


Figure 4 Plan of Khirbet Balu'a, with a strip of casemates (?) excavated in 1930 by Crowfoot. The latter may indicate the existence of an el-Lehun type of site near the promontory

Olàvarri 1977–78, fig. 2 no. 1; and possibly a cooking jug [?] in Olàvarri 1983, fig. 6 no. 5). It is difficult to decide about the latter, as the early Iron IIA is not sufficiently well known in Moab and its vicinity.

Khirbet el-Medeineh 'Aliya, also located on Wadi el-Lejjun, 5 km south of Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Mu'arrajah (UTM G.R. 7735 4644). This site has exactly the same features as Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Mu'arrajah, namely, location on a well-protected, isolated hill a few km to the east of the farmlands' margin; separated from the surrounding area by a rock-cut moat; a casemate wall; an extra-mural tower between the site and the moat; and pillared buildings built adjacent to the wall. This is the largest of the fortified sites listed here, covering an area of 2.2 ha. Khirbet el-Medeineh 'Aliya was excavated by Routledge (2000b; 2004, 101–08; 2008), who dated it to the second half of the 11th century BC (2000b, 47). The published pottery (Routledge 2000b, figs 5–7; 2008, figs 5–6; see Fig. 2 here) dates to the middle to late Iron I, with a possible extension into the early phase of the Iron IIA (e.g. the cooking pots in Routledge 2000b, fig. 6, 10; 2008, fig. 6, 7; Fig. 2, 3 here). A set of conventional radiocarbon dates from the University of Laval (Routledge 2000b, 47–48) gave dates which were too high according to any accepted chronological system (Routledge 2000b, 48). However, four short-life radiocarbon dates recently provided by the Oxford laboratory are consistent with the late Iron I dates from sites west of the Jordan (Lev-Tov *et al.* 2011, 72).

Khirbet el-Mu'ammariyya is a single-phase site situated on a long, narrow hill surrounded by steep

slopes (Ninow 2004, fig. 2; 2006, fig. 3). It is located near the point where Wadi esh-Shuqayfat runs into Wadi en-Nukhayla (the northern end of Wadi el-Lejjun), near the meeting point with the Mujib (UTM G.R. 768 478). The site is surrounded by a casemate wall (Ninow 2004; 2006). The excavator dated the site to the late Iron I, comparing its pottery to that of nearby Khirbet el-Medeineh el-Mu'arrajah. Some of the forms found at Khirbet el-Mu'ammariyya (e.g. the classical collared rim jar in Ninow 2006, fig. 5, 14; see Fig. 2, 12 here, and the cooking pot with everted rim, Ninow 2006, fig. 4, 9) may be dated somewhat earlier in the Iron I. An ash-layer was identified in one part of the site (Ninow 2004, fig. 9).

Khirbet Medeineh on Wadi Mujib is a relatively small site covering an area of *c.* 120 × 30 m (Ninow 2004, 264), located on a narrow ridge with dramatic steep slopes, overlooking the Mujib west of the south–north road that crosses the plateau (picture in Ben-David 2008, fig. 3; Worschech 1990, taf. V, 2). It is connected to the area surrounding it by a saddle in the south-east (UTM G.R. 7600 4805). The site was apparently fortified (Worschech 1990, taf. VI, no. 1), and Iron I, Iron II and later sherds were collected (for the Iron I material, see Worschech 1990, 56–57). *Khirbet Medeineh Saliyeh*, which displays rather similar topographical characteristics (a narrow spur surrounded by steep slopes), is located on the northern rim of the Mujib, *c.* 10 km south-east of Khirbet el-Lehun (UTM G.R. 780 480). Ji and Lee (1998, 556–58) report Iron I and Iron II sherds from this site, while Ben-David (2008, 79–80) reports Iron II sherds. The site was clearly inhabited in post-Iron Age times, however, and further field research is needed to clarify its nature and date.

Khirbet el-Lehun, located on the northern rim of the Mujib, features similar characteristics to at least some of the sites described above. It has been quite thoroughly excavated (e.g. Homès-Fredericq 1997; 2009). This is a relatively large, 1.6 ha settlement protected on three sides by the Mujib and two small tributaries. Still, Khirbet el-Lehun is less well protected than the sites south of the Mujib, as its entire northern wall runs through the plateau. The site is surrounded by a casemate wall with houses (including pillared buildings) adjacent to it. An additional set of houses was unearthed in the centre of the site. The southern tip of the casemate compound was built over by an Iron II fort (Homès-Fredericq 2009). The construction of the casemate compound was dated by the excavator to the 12th–11th centuries BC and related to the Exodus tradition (Homès-Fredericq 1992, 198–99). A scarab

found at the site was dated to the time of the 20th Dynasty. Only a single pottery plate has thus far been published (it includes items found in the Iron II fort), with no details of provenance. This makes dating difficult, but it seems that the casemate compound covers a similar time-span to the sites south of the Mujib, namely the late Iron I with a possible extension to the early Iron IIA. It is worth noting that the phenomenon of casemate compounds is not restricted to the area of the Mujib. Another irregular casemate compound of Iron I date, on a ridge with steep slopes, protected by a moat on the only accessible side, is Boz el-Mushelle, located near Macherus (Strobel and Wimmer 2003, 84–88; Routledge 2008, 153–54; for Iron I pottery, see Strobel and Wimmer 2003, abb. 25; for the location of the site 2003, taf. 22B).

Two more sites located south of the Mujib should be mentioned — Kerak and Khirbet Balu'fa.

Kerak. The southern end of the Kerak spur, surrounded on three sides by deep ravines, features a topography which suits the nature of the late Iron I fortified sites discussed above. The site seems to have yielded Iron I pottery (Miller 1991, 89) and its importance in the Iron II is indicated by a 9th-century BC Moabite inscription (probably found there; Reed and Winnett 1963; Timm 1989, 269–77) and by a lion orthostat now on display in the Kerak Museum (Gass 2009, 264). It seems reasonable to suggest that Kerak was an important site as early as the Iron I. A casemate compound could have been built on the spur (for the possible identification of the site, see Na'aman 1994 with further literature). All remains of the ancient settlements were probably eradicated by the huge medieval castle.

Khirbet Balu'fa. The possibility that a similar fortified site existed here will be discussed below.

The Moabite sites described above have much in common: topographical locations on isolated steep hills; fortifications which include casemate walls and moats; large open spaces at their centres. The sites are contemporaneous, though they were not necessarily built and deserted at the same moment. Since they were abandoned rather than destroyed by fire, they produced sherd collections rather than assemblages of complete vessels. These sherds represent the life of the sites, with the earliest dating their establishment and the latest dating their abandonment (Fig. 2). The earliest sherds, e.g., cyma shaped bowls, cooking pots with everted rims and collared rim jars, put the construction of the sites in the middle to late Iron I, probably in the 11th century BC. The latest sherds (specified above) indicate that the Moabite fortified

settlements were abandoned in the late Iron I, or possibly during the early phase of the Iron IIA. The transition from the Iron I to the early Iron IIA is now dated in the second half of the 10th century BC (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2009; 2010a; 2010b). A set of determinations from the early Iron IIA site of Atar Haroa in the Negev Highlands provided dates well into the 9th century BC (Boaretto *et al.* 2010). Hence, the desertion of the sites should be placed around the second half of the 10th century BC, or in the very early 9th century at the latest — *c.* 900 BC seems a reasonable approximation.

The Early Iron IIA

Turning to the area west of the Rift Valley, several compounds of somewhat similar layout, though smaller, less fortified and located in less dramatic topography than the Moabite examples, are known in the Negev Highlands. These sites, too, were short-lived. They were located in an arid zone and were well adapted to the topography; and they, too, feature casemates surrounding a large open space, as well as pillared houses adjacent to the casemates. We refer mainly to the sites of Horvat Refed and Horvat Hatira between Dimona and Yeruham (Meshel and Cohen 1980) and Quseima (Meshel 1994) near Kadesh-barnea. They belong to the system of early Iron IIA sites in the region, which is related to several contemporary sites in the Beersheba Valley; the most important among the latter is Stratum II at Tel Masos (on this settlement system, see Finkelstein 1995, 103–26; on the relative chronology, see Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004; on the absolute chronology, see the set of ¹⁴C determinations from Atar Haroa near Sede Boqer in Boaretto *et al.* 2010). The similarity in the layout of these sites may stem from the pastoral background of their inhabitants (e.g. Herzog 1983; Finkelstein 1995, 103–26).

The two systems — one in Moab and the other in the Negev Highlands — are close in date and may have had an overlapping phase, though they were not completely contemporary: the Moabite system flourished in the late Iron I, with a possible end-phase in the early Iron IIA; some of the sites in the Negev Highlands system could have been established as early as the late Iron I (Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006), but the system reached its peak in the early Iron IIA.

Discussion

Copper production and copper trade as prime movers in the rise of an early polity in Moab

What brought about the sudden rise of a chain of fortified settlements in southern Moab — a marginal

zone from the standpoint of its farming potential — in the 11th century BC? And what brought about their desertion in the second half of the 10th century BC? Before the surge in Assyrian-dominated Arabian trade in the late 8th century BC, it seems reasonable to link the prosperity of southern Moab to the sudden rise in copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas (and neighbouring sites) south of the Dead Sea and the transportation of large quantities of this copper through the ‘King’s Highway’ along the Transjordanian plateau to the north.

Khirbet en-Nahas is a 10 ha Iron Age copper production site located in the Wadi Faynan basin. It is ‘the largest Iron Age copper-smelting site in the southern Levant,’ which is evidenced by an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 tons of slag (Levy *et al.* 2004a, 867; Hauptmann 2007, 127). A large number of radio-carbon determinations for charcoal samples taken from the piles of waste indicate that Khirbet en-Nahas was active continuously for about three centuries, from the late 12th century to the late 9th century BC, with an increase in copper production during the 10th–9th century BC (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2008 updated, based on data published in Levy *et al.* 2004a, 870; 2005, 135; Levy 2010; Hauptmann 2007, 89; Ben-Yosef *et al.* 2010). The Khirbet en-Nahas copper must have played a crucial role in the geopolitical and economic affairs of this period. Following the meltdown of east-Mediterranean trade in the course of the 12th century BC, Khirbet en-Nahas may have replaced Cyprus as the main supplier of copper to the Levant and beyond, and probably also Egypt (Knauf 1991, 185; 1995, 112–13; Hauptmann 2007, 153). Large amounts of copper would then have been transported from the site in two directions, to the west, via the Beersheba Valley to the coastal plain and Egypt; and to the north, via the Transjordanian plateau to Damascus and beyond.

Intensive participation in the copper trade could have brought about prosperity on the Transjordanian plateau, especially in the southernmost area (the closest to Khirbet en-Nahas that enables a combination of dry farming and animal husbandry) — Moab between Wadi el-Hasa and the Mujib. The area north of the Mujib was more vulnerable to threats from both north and west and could have been dominated by another polity, e.g., one located around Madaba or Tell el-Umeiri. The prosperity along the ‘King’s Highway’ brought about the rise of an early territorial formation south of the Mujib in the middle to late Iron I, in the 11th century BC. The late Iron I Moabite sites did not yield evidence for copper-related activity — but why should they, if

copper (as raw material) was merely transported through their area? In any event, no evidence of the transportation of the thousands of tons of Khirbet en-Nahas copper has thus far been found anywhere in the region.

In the west, transportation of copper to the southern coastal plain and Egypt brought about the rise of the Tel Masos chiefdom in the Beersheba Valley, the Negev Highlands and the area of Nahal Besor (Finkelstein 2005). Prosperity in this area probably reached its peak at the end phase of the south Moabite system or immediately after its decline (for the reasons for this chronological difference between the two areas, see below).

Plotting the fortified settlements of southern Moab on a map (Fig. 3) seems to indicate that the intention was to fortify the eastern and northern approaches of the Kerak plateau: two sites are located along Wadi el-Lejjun in the east and two are situated on the Mujib in the north. They are all located in defensible spots, away from cultivable land. Glueck was correct, therefore, in interpreting sites such as Khirbet Medineh Aliya as fortresses, and in looking for a chain of such forts around Moab. This is *contra* Routledge (2000b; 2004; 2008), who sees these sites — most of which are located beyond the present-day cultivated zone — as agricultural villages and wrongly compares them to settlements west of the Rift Valley, such as Izbet Sartah which differ in location, layout and duration. However, Glueck — because of his naïve reading of the Exodus narrative — was wrong about the date of the early Moabite polity and its territorial extent.

Khirbet Balu'a and the Balu'a Stele

Where was the hub of the early Moabite polity? The four main sites dealt with above are located to the east and north of Khirbet Balu'a — the most important and largest Iron Age site south of the Mujib. The four sites were built in defensive positions, not related to arable land, and were probably aimed at protecting Khirbet Balu'a, which seems to have been the hub of this south Moabite late Iron I territorial entity (as far as we can judge, Khirbet Balu'a was the capital of Moab in the Iron II as well: this subject will be examined elsewhere). The strategic location of the sites on the Mujib facing north near the spot where the King's Highway crosses the canyon is clear. The two eastern sites may have been built in order to defend the eastern fringe of the south Moabite polity from marauding pastoral nomads, or to prevent an attack from the north which would bypass the Mujib from the east.

Khirbet Balu'a is a large, 22 ha site, excavated many years ago (Crowfoot 1934) and in recent years (Worschech *et al.* 1986; Worschech 1989; Worschech and Ninow 1992; 1999). The site was probably inhabited throughout the Iron Age, but because of a substantial presence of Iron II and later remains, the archaeological evidence for the Iron I is fragmentary and the layout and history of the settlement of that period obscure. The Iron Age remains, including Qasr el-Balu'a, next to which the Balu'a Stele was apparently found, are located in the central-northern part of the site (covering *c.* 4 ha of the entire area — Routledge and Routledge 2009, 73), on a sort of a rocky promontory on the edge of Wadi el-Balu'a.

Looking at this topography and comparing it to the fortified sites mentioned above, and more so to the large settlement of Khirbet el-Lehun on the northern rim of the Mujib, which is located in a somewhat similar position, one can imagine a late Iron I enclosed casemate compound near the promontory. Indeed, *c.* 150 m to the east of the promontory, along the edge of the wadi, Crowfoot (1934) unearthed a fortification line which he described as a casemate wall (Fig. 4). The lower deposit in the casemates apparently yielded Iron I pottery (Crowfoot 1934, 79; discussion in Routledge 2008, 165). In the same place Worschech uncovered a system of rooms which look like a casemate fortification of the type known in the late Iron I sites described above (Worschech and Ninow 1992, fig. 3). Rims of Iron I collared jars were found here (Worschech and Ninow 1992, 172; for other Iron I forms, see Worschech 1990, 79–80; Worschech and Ninow 1999, 169). The claim made by both Worschech (1992) and Herr (2001) that in Transjordan alone, collared-rim jars continued into the Iron II is based upon unacceptable stratigraphic and ceramic assertions and should therefore be rejected (see Finkelstein 2011). We would suggest therefore that these casemates belong to a large el-Lehun-type settlement.

The most famous find from Khirbet Balu'a — the Balu'a Stele, which was found in 1931 — probably belongs to this period in the history of southern Moab; as far as we can judge, it originated from the Iron I settlement discussed above (for early studies of the monument, see Horsfield and Vincent 1932; Drioton 1933; Ward and Martin 1964; for recent treatment, see Bossherd-Nepustil and Morenz 2003; Routledge 2004, 82–85; Routledge and Routledge 2009). The scene on the stele depicts a god wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt on the left, a goddess, or a queen wearing an Osiris crown on

the right and a royal figure in the centre. The headdress of the latter is similar to that worn by *shasu* in Egyptian reliefs. Though the general outline of the scene is reminiscent of the Egyptian royal art tradition, the details seem to hint that the scene is Egyptianized.

Most scholars have dated the stele to the time of the 19th or 20th Dynasties (e.g. Van Zyl 1960, 109–12; Worschech 1990, 131; 2009; Kitchen 2007). They were probably influenced by the tendency to read Moabite toponyms in New Kingdom topographical lists, in turn influenced by the biblical Exodus account. Yet, such dating is impossible in view of the absence of any evidence for sedentary activity in Moab in general and at Khirbet Balu'a in particular, at that time; the archaeological evidence from the region allows dating the stele no earlier than the 11th century BC. H. Weippert (1988, 666–67) noted that the crescent moon and the full moon, which appear above the shoulders of the central figure in the stele, are not known before the Iron Age. All in all, based on a combination of arguments — the artistic representation, the archaeological evidence from the region, and the general geopolitical scene (below) — dating the Balu'a Stele to the 11th–10th centuries BC seems the most plausible solution. But how can one explain Egyptian influence in Moab at that time?

With the decline of trade in the western Mediterranean in the 12th century BC, Egypt was cut off from Cypriot copper and may have turned to the mines of the Wadi Arabah. Egyptian intervention in the south is recorded in the early 22nd Dynasty (below), but it is reasonable to assume that it commenced during the days of the 21st Dynasty. We would suggest that this provides the best scenario for the Balu'a Stele. The monument itself could have been executed by local artists at Khirbet Balu'a — the centre of the south Moabite late Iron I polity — depicting the Moabite ruler as a *shasu* leader by drawing on Egyptian artistic motifs.

The abandonment of the fortified south Moabite sites

What brought about the desertion of the fortified sites south of the Mujib? If this process too was related to the copper industry and trade, two main possible scenarios present themselves.

Sheshonq I

The first scenario would tie this process to the Sheshonq I campaign in the south. This event should be dated in the second half of the 10th century BC, probably not too late in this time-span (Ben-Dor Evian 2011; any attempt to date it precisely without over-reliance on the problematic biblical material must

be hypothetical) — close to the time of desertion of the Moabite sites. The long list of southern toponyms in the Karnak relief (Kitchen 1986, 432–47) indicates that the southern fringe of Canaan was one of the main targets of the campaign: the area had not previously appeared in Egyptian topographical lists. Sheshonq I's goal in this region seems to have been the monopolization of the Khirbet en-Nahas copper trade, or at the very least, to direct as much as possible of the Khirbet en-Nahas copper to the west along the Beersheba Valley, to the southern coastal plain and Egypt. This would have given Egypt a renewed important status in Levantine and, in fact, broader Near Eastern affairs.

Fantalkin and Finkelstein (2006) argued that, *contra* the conventional theory, Sheshonq I did not destroy the network of settlements in the Beersheba Valley and the Negev Highlands; rather, the Egyptian interest in the Khirbet en-Nahas copper-trade was a major driver in the rise of this network. The chronology of the late Iron I and early Iron IIA as delineated by recent radiocarbon studies supports this notion. Results for short-lived samples from early Iron IIA Atar Haroa (Boaretto *et al.* 2010) and Nahal Boker (yet unpublished) put the peak activity at these sites — and by ceramic comparison at contemporary Stratum II at Tel Masos in the Beersheba Valley (with clear evidence for a copper industry — Kempinski *et al.* 1983, 21; Artzy 2003) — in the late 10th and 9th centuries BC, that is, *after* the Sheshonq I campaign. Apart from the Sheshonq I list, which refers to a network of small settlements in the south, Egyptian involvement in this region may be detected in the architecture of Tel Masos (Oren 1984).

As for the toponyms mentioned in the Sheshonq I list, the number of late Iron I sites in the Besor area, Beersheba Valley and Negev Highlands is limited compared to the number of southern toponyms in the list (for the latter, see Kitchen 1986, 439–42; Na'aman 1998). We suggest therefore that some, at least, of the latter may be located in southern Transjordan. Earlier studies which located these toponyms solely to the west of the Arabah, reflected the greater intensity of research in the Beersheba Valley and the Negev Highlands, and to some extent the psychological impact on scholars of current political boundaries.

Egypt must have preserved its influence in the Levant, including the southern fringe, after Sheshonq I. Fantalkin and Finkelstein (2006, 26–27) assembled evidence for the continuation of Egyptian involvement in Canaan in the late 10th and early 9th centuries BC. Diversion of part of the copper trade from the Transjordanian plateau to the west via the

Beersheba Valley to the southern coastal plain and Egypt could have inflicted a major blow on the south Moabite territorial polity and brought about the (gradual?) desertion of the fortified sites that were located away from the better farmlands of the plateau. This scenario may explain the small chronological difference that exists between the time of peak prosperity in southern Moab (in the late Iron I) and that in the Beersheba Valley and the Negev Highlands (in the early Iron IIA), Sheshonq I intervention in this area brought about the decline of the Moabite polity and the rise of the Tel Masos chiefdom, which continued to prosper in subsequent decades (below).

The Omrides

Regardless of a possible earlier Egyptian intervention in the region, the second scenario would tie the decline of the south Moabite polity to the Omride advances in northern Moab. As mentioned above, it seems that an increase in production at Khirbet en-Nahas can be dated to the late 10th and early 9th centuries BC (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2008, updated). This is not surprising, as the early 9th centuries BC marked a growing Assyrian imperialism and the rise of strong territorial kingdoms in the Levant — mainly Israel, Damascus and Hamath. These kingdoms developed strong armies in order to gain hegemony over the region as well as withstand Assyrian pressures. The strength of these armies, which included large forces of chariots, is reflected in the Shalmaneser III Kurkh Stele, which specifies the participants in the anti-Assyrian coalition in the battle of Qarqar in 853 BC. Development of strong Levantine armies necessitated a large amount of copper for the production of bronze implements for the chariot forces and other items of weaponry. To this one should add the growing population in the Levant and the expansion of agricultural activity, which required large amounts of utilitarian tools made of bronze (iron came to the front in the Levant only in the Iron IIB; see, e.g., Gottlieb 2010). Before the resumption of strong trade connections with Cyprus in the mid to second half of the 9th century BC, the main source for Levantine copper was Khirbet en-Nahas.

The Omrides could have tried to take control of the flow of copper from Khirbet en-Nahas to the north along the Transjordanian plateau. Domination of the copper caravans could have given them a meaningful strategic and military advantage over other powers in the region, not to mention economic gains. The Mesha Inscription says that the Omrides conquered the *mishor* of Moab and that the 'king of Israel' built two fortresses in Moab — Ataroth and Jahaz.

Ataroth is identified in Khirbet Atarus and Jahaz is identified in Khirbet Mudeineh eth-Themed (Dearman 1984). Both sites feature Omride architectural concepts (Finkelstein 2000; for details, including the dating of the foundation of the sites in the Iron IIA, see Finkelstein and Lipschits 2010). They were built along the line of Wadi el-Walla, the northern tributary of the Mujib, facing the territory of Dibon. The construction of the two forts may have been intended to dominate the flow of copper on the Transjordanian plateau, or block it in order to direct material towards the Beersheba Valley. This could have weakened the south Moabite polity significantly, and could have brought about the desertion of the fortified sites on the Mujib and Wadi el-Lejjun. The fact that the Omrides built their forts on Wadi el-Walla and not on the deeper Wadi Mujib means that the area of Dibon, including the site of Khirbet el-Lehun, belonged to the south Moabite polity.

Needless to say, this scenario assumes continuity of activity in the south Moabite sites into the early phase of the Iron IIA.

Choosing between the two alternatives presented above depends on one's dating of the latest pottery from the south Moabite fortified sites. Dating all the pottery from these sites to the late Iron I, that is, no later than *c.* 930/920 BC, would leave only the Shoshenq I option. Dating the latest sherds to the early phase of the Iron IIA, in the late 10th and possibly early 9th century BC, opens the possibility for the Omride alternative as well. Assuming that the radiocarbon samples from Khirbet Medeineh Aliya represent the latest phase of activity at the site, the results support the first option (none of the four samples provided a date that would fit the early Iron IIA).

All in all, as the evidence stands today, the first scenario is the preferable one; from both the pottery perspective and the radiocarbon results from Khirbet Medeineh Aliya, dating the decline of the south Moabite polity to the 870s–850s seems somewhat too late. Still, since for the time being the published pottery assemblages from the south Moabite sites are small in both absolute amount of items and number of forms, and as radiometric results come from a single site, we prefer not to discard the Omride expansion as an alternative explanation, at least not until additional data come to light.

The long term

Adhering to the state of knowledge today, the following scenario seems the most plausible: a south Moabite polity emerged in the 11th century and reached its peak prosperity during the 10th century BC. Egyptian

influence on this polity during the time of the 21st Dynasty can be observed in the scene on the Balu'a Stele. The intervention of Sheshonq I in the south was aimed at diverting at least part of the copper flow to the west, which caused, in turn, the decline of the south Moabite polity and the rise of the Masos chiefdom. But copper production at Nahas continued (as before, by the local population — Levy 2009; see also Levy *et al.* 2004b). Omride expansion in northern Moab may also be connected — among other reasons — to the Nahas copper trade; the Omrides could have replaced the Egyptian 22nd Dynasty as the dominant power behind the Nahas copper trade. The rise of Damascus, decline of the power of the Northern Kingdom, and resumption of importation of Cypriot copper to the Levant dealt a deathblow to copper production at Nahas in the late 9th century BC. The latter events opened new possibilities for the Moabites, as they enabled Mesha to expand to the more fertile farming areas between Dibon and Madaba. Moab now became better organized, and since the capital of Moab must have remained at Khirbet Balu'a, the building activity at Dibon, as depicted in the Mesha Inscription, probably answered the need to establish an administration centre in the new Moabite territories to the north of the Wadi el-Walla. The rise of this more organized Moabite kingdom is hinted at — in addition to the Mesha Inscription — in the Kerak inscription, which dates to the 9th century (Reed and Winnett 1963; Timm 1989, 269–77), the Kerak lion orthostat (Routledge 2004, 182; Gass 2009, 264, fig. 26), the Rujm el-Abed (Jebel Shihan) Stele which dates to the 9th or 8th centuries BC (e.g. Routledge 2004, 178 and 243–44 n. 31; personal communication from Tallay Ornan and Benjamin Sass), and the new Moabite inscription, which dates to the 8th century BC (Ahituv 2003; see also Dearman 2009 and bibliography).

Is there textual evidence for the south Moabite polity?

Can we connect the above archaeological-historical reconstruction to the biblical text and to the ancient Near Eastern records? Two sources come to mind. The first is Na'aman's (1994; 1997) reading of line 31 in the Mesha inscriptions, 'And Hauronen, there lived the House of [D]WD[H]' (against other proposals to read here *bt[d]wd* — 'the house of David' — Lemaire 1994a; 1994b; Rainey 1998, 246–48). This may indicate the existence of a Moabite dynasty to the south of the Mujib (at Hawronen=Horonaim).ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ Na'aman (1994, 28–29) identified Horonaim-Hawronen in Kerak. We do not accept this identification and plan to suggest an alternative identification in a future article. We do agree, however, that Horonaim should be located in the area of Kerak.

Na'aman suggested that Daudoh was the name of the founder of the dynasty of Hauronen, and that he conquered the area north of the Mujib, including the territory of Dibon. The mention of DWDH (Daudoh) in line 12 of the Mesha Inscription may indicate that this king dedicated his statue, a cult stand or an altar hearth at Ataroth before Omri's conquest and before the crystallization of the Dibon dynasty north of the Mujib. One of Daudoh's offspring was defeated by Omri and lost his northern territories, but the Moabite king was able to retain Hauronen and the areas south of the Mujib. This area was later taken over by Mesha the Dibonite.

The second text is biblical. Numbers 21, 21–35 says that there was a king before the Dibonite dynasty (Sihon), who ruled from Heshbon in all the region of the later Moabite Kingdom, as north-east as Jahaz (v. 23), and the border of his land was 'from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon' (v. 25). The interesting part of the story remarks that 'Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the first king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon' (v. 26, and cf. this story to Deut. 2, 24–37 and to many other places in Deut. [1, 4; 3, 2 and 6; 4, 46; 29, 6; 31, 4] and Josh. [2, 10; 9, 10; 12, 2, 5; 13, 10, 21, 27]). Na'aman (1997, 90) suggested identifying this first/former king of Moab with the above-mentioned Daudoh or one of his heirs to the throne of Hauronen (=Horonaim), who attacked the area north of the Arnon and conquered this territory up to the southern border of Sihon. A discussion of the sources and editions of these stories within the Deuteronomistic history and in the Pentateuch is beyond the scope of this paper (and see, e.g., Frevel 2009). Suffice it to say that the new archaeological-historical interpretation presented here may have some vague echo in these texts. Though they cannot be treated as straightforward historical testimonies, these verses may preserve northern (Transjordan Israelite) traditions/memories. An early version of these traditions could have been preserved in writing in northern shrines as early as the first half of the 8th century BC — long before they were transmitted to Judah and incorporated into the biblical texts.

Conclusion

Combining the archaeological finds in Moab with real-time historical documentation (especially the Sheshonq I Relief and the Mesha Inscription) enables us to propose a historical reconstruction for the emergence of the Moabite kingdom. In this article we suggested dating the rise of an early Moabite polity

south of Wadi Mujib to the mid- to late Iron I (11th–10th centuries BC) and relate it to the prosperity in copper production at Khirbet en-Nahas in the Arabah south of the Dead Sea. According to this reconstruction prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Mesha, the area south of the Mujib harboured a territorial polity that could have expanded to northern Moab. The decline of the south Moabite polity was a result of the 22nd Dynasty's involvement in the region — mainly the diversion of much of the Arabah copper flow to the west, to the Mediterranean coast and Egypt. Later on, the northern areas of Moab (the *Mishor*) were conquered by the Omrides, while the area south of the Mujib was probably taken over by Mesha the Dibonite. The defeat of the Omrides by Hazael of Damascus opened the way for Mesha to expand to the northern territories of Moab and establish a large Moabite kingdom, which stretched from Wadi el-Hasa in the south to the area of Heshbon in the north.

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