

The Archaeology of Tell el-Kheleifeh And the History of Ezion-geber/Elath

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Résumé. Cet article examine les données archéologiques de Tell el-Kheleifeh et les références bibliques à Éziôn-Gèvèr et à Eilat/Eilot, afin de proposer une reconstruction mise à jour de l'histoire du site, en particulier, et de la région en général. Il suggère de dater le fort carré à casemates de la première moitié du VIII^e siècle avant notre ère, et l'associe aux entreprises de commerce du royaume du nord le long des routes du désert. Il propose en outre d'attribuer aux Assyriens l'édification de la grande forteresse à murs pleins, et s'intéresse à son rôle dans le système de contrôle assyrien du secteur nord des routes commerciales arabes.

As a consequence of the final publication of the excavations at Tell el-Qudeirat (Kadesh-barnea)¹ and Kuntillet 'Ajrud,² the excavation of En Hazeva³ and Khirbet en-Nahas,⁴ and the renewed

¹ R. Cohen and H. Bernick-Greenberg, *Excavations at Kadesh Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) 1976-1982*, Jerusalem, IAA Reports 34, 2007.

² Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*, Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 2012.

³ R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, "The Iron Age Fortresses at 'En Hazeva", *BA* 58, 1995, p. 223-235.

⁴ T.E. Levy, R.B. Adams, M. Najjar, A. Hauptmann, J.D. Anderson, B. Brandl, M.A. Robinson and T. Higham, "Reassessing the Chronology of Biblical Edom: New Excavations and 14C Dates from Khirbet en-Nahas (Jordan)", *Antiquity* 78, 2004, p. 865-879; T.E. Levy, M. Najjar, J. van der Plicht, T. Higham and H.J. Bruins, "Lowland Edom and the High and Low Chronologies: Edomite State Formation, the Bible and Recent Archaeological Research in Southern Jordan", in T.E. Levy and T. Higham (eds.), *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science*, London, Equinox Publication, 2005, p. 129-163.

field work at Timna,⁵ the southern arid zone of the Levant—the Negev, Arabah and northeastern Sinai—has recently regained the attention of scholars. An important link in this system of sites in the south—Tell el-Kheleifeh—has been neglected since the publication of Pratico’s “reappraisal” of Glueck’s excavations.⁶

Tell el-Kheleifeh presents several conundrums, which prevent proper reconstruction of its archaeology and, as a result, preclude the accurate interpretation of the history of the head of the Gulf of Aqaba:

1. Several “Midianite” (Qurayyah Ware) sherds, dating to the 12th century BCE, were found at the site.⁷ Yet, no remains of this period have been unearthed there.

2. At least two biblical references—to the construction of Elath in the days of Azariah (2 Kings 14:22) and the take-over of the region by Rezin (2 Kings 16:6)—describe events that ostensibly took place before the beginning of direct Assyrian intervention in the region. Unlike the references to the shipping endeavors of Solomon and Jehoshaphat at Ezion-geber, they are not easy to dismiss as retrojections of realities from a time closer to the days of the author/s into the past. Yet, the conventional wisdom since Pratico’s reappraisal has been that Tell el-Kheleifeh was founded in the late 8th century.

3. Taking into consideration that Kuntillet ‘Ajrud in north-eastern Sinai was a north Israelite royal road-station⁸ dating to

⁵ E. Ben-Yosef, R. Shaar, L. Tauxe and H. Ron, “A New Chronological Framework for Iron Age Copper Production at Timna (Israel)”, *BASOR* 367, 2012, p. 31-71.

⁶ G.D. Pratico, *Nelson Glueck’s 1938-1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal*, Atlanta, American Schools of Oriental Research archaeological reports no. 3, 1993.

⁷ N. Glueck, “Some Edomite Pottery from Tell el-Kheleifeh, Parts I and II”, *BASOR* 188, 1967, p. 8-38.

⁸ For instance, N. Na’aman, “The Inscriptions of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud through the Lens of Historical Research”, *UF* 43, 2012, p. 1-43; T. Ornan, “The Drawings from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Reconsidered”, in S. Ahituv, E. Eshel, Z. Meshel, and T. Ornan, *To Yahweh Teiman and his Ashera, the Inscriptions and Drawings from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud*, Jerusalem (Hebrew), in press.

the first half of the 8th century BCE and evidence for the existence of Arabian trade with the Levant prior to direct Assyrian rule in the region (for both see below), one would expect to find remains of a road-station, a fort or an administrative center also at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. This was the most strategic spot in the south, where the two main roads leading from Arabia and the Hejaz to the settled lands split—one traveling via the Edomite plateau and the other via the Darb el-Ghazza in northeastern Sinai (Fig. 1). Yet, no early 8th century remains have thus far been detected at Tell el-Kheleifeh and in its vicinity.

4. The biblical text mentions two toponyms in relation to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba—Ezion-geber and Elath/Eloth. Several texts (below) seem to imply that they were different places. Yet, to date, no other Iron Age site has been found at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba.

These and other problems motivated me to take a fresh look at Tell el-Kheleifeh's architectural remains and pottery finds and put them into the context of the history of the southern desert in the Iron Age.

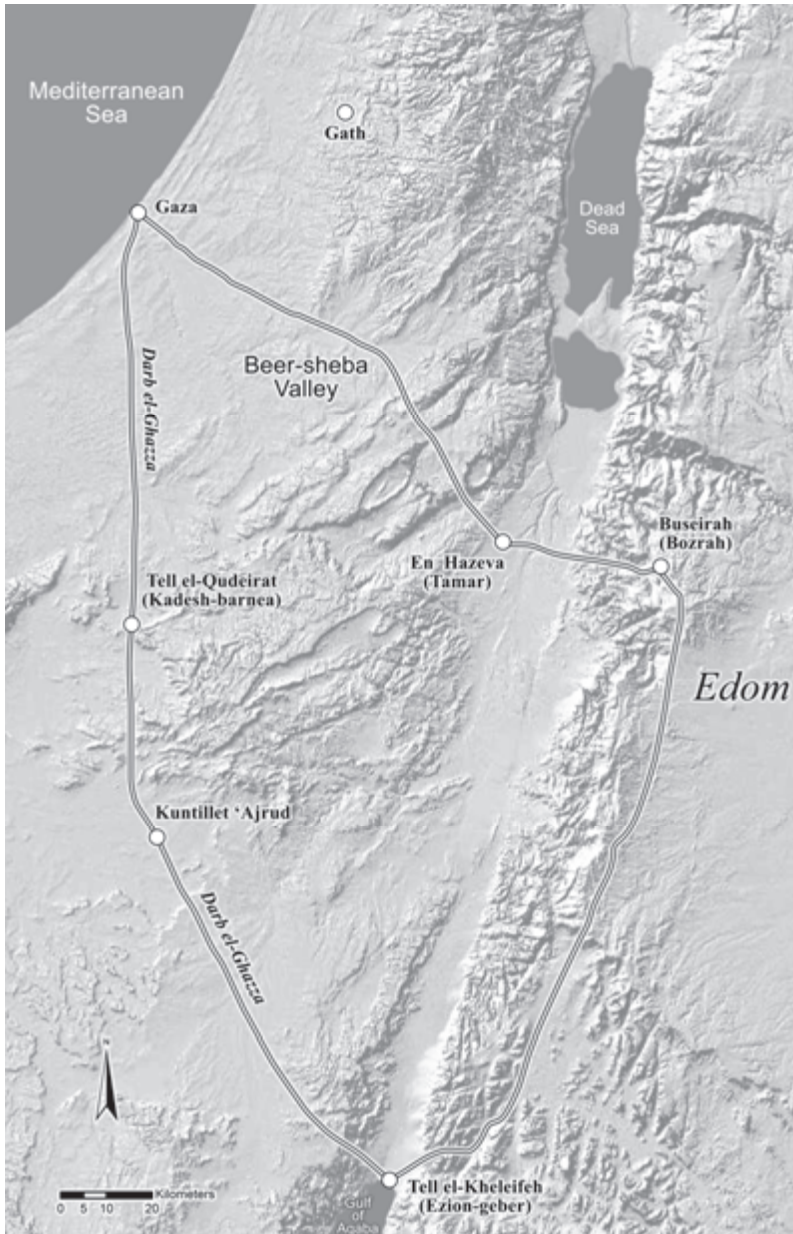


Fig. 1: Map of the south, indicating main sites and ancient roads mentioned in the article.

Tell el-Kheleifeh: History of Research

Glueck excavated Tell el-Kheleifeh between 1938 and 1940.⁹ He divided the remains into five periods of activity and dated them from the 10th to the 4th centuries BCE, identifying the first four according to biblical references to Ezion-geber and Elath, with each monarch who is mentioned in relation to the region granted a layer: Glueck associated Period I with the days of Solomon; according to him it developed in several stages, starting as a single building—a copper refinery—and finally achieving the layout of an “industrial square”;¹⁰ the latter is the casemate fort referred to below (later also identified as such by Glueck).¹¹ Glueck interpreted these remains—including what he described as flue holes, air channels, hand bellows, clay crucibles and furnace rooms—as evidence of a large copper smelting industry. Rothenberg¹² dismissed the notion that the site was involved in large-scale copper production and consequently Glueck¹³ changed some of his interpretations; yet, he continued to argue that copper production did take place at the site and adhered to his original dating of Period I to the 10th century BCE. A large solid-wall fortress was erected in Period II and continued to function at least until the time of Period IV. Periods II and III were dated by Glueck to the days of Jehoshaphat and Uzziah respectively, and Period IV was related to the take-over of the area by Edom in the days of Ahaz.

⁹ N. Glueck, “The First Campaign at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion-geber)”, *BASOR* 71, 1938, p. 3-17; idem, “The Second Campaign at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion-geber: Elath)”, *BASOR* 75, 1939, p. 8-22; idem, “The Third Season of Excavation at Tell el-Kheleifeh”, *BASOR* 79, 1940, p. 2-18; idem, “Ezion-geber”, *BA* 28, 1965, p. 70-87.

¹⁰ For example, Glueck, 1940, *op. cit.* (above n. 9).

¹¹ Glueck, 1965, *op. cit.* (above n. 9), p. 80.

¹² B. Rothenberg, “Ancient Copper Industries in the Western Arabah”, *PEQ* 94, 1962, p. 5-71.

¹³ Glueck, 1965, *op. cit.* (above n. 9).

Pratico¹⁴ published a “reappraisal” of Glueck’s results and interpretations—in fact a final report of the results of the dig. He divided the remains into three architectural phases:

1. A square casemate fort, ca. 45 × 45 m in size, with a massive four-room structure in its courtyard (Figs. 2, 4).¹⁵ Pratico compared this fort to the early Iron IIA Negev “fortresses”,¹⁶ but for lack of pre-8th century pottery refrained from dating it to this period.¹⁷

2. A larger solid-wall fortress with an outer fortification, ca. 75 × 70 m in size (Figs. 3, 4);¹⁸ its walls were protected by a revetment and entrance was through a four-chambered gate. Part of the earlier casemate fort was incorporated as an inner compound in the northwestern sector of the large fortress. The four-room house of the previous phase was also incorporated into the new fortress—as a structure in the inner compound.

Pratico dated both phases—the casemate fort and the larger solid-wall fortress—to the 8th to early 6th centuries BCE.¹⁹

3. Scanty remains of a 5th-4th century BCE settlement found close to the surface. They were built over the walls of the previous fortress and in a different alignment.²⁰ The Attic pottery²¹ and Aramaic ostraca²² found at the site were affiliated with this layer.

¹⁴ Partico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6); see also idem, “Nelson Glueck’s 1938-1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal”, *BASOR* 259, 1985, p. 1-32.

¹⁵ N. Glueck’s Periods IA-C; Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 25-26, Pl. 3.

¹⁶ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 29-31.

¹⁷ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 34.

¹⁸ Glueck’s Periods II-IV; Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 26-28, Pls. 4-5.

¹⁹ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 33-34, 49-50.

²⁰ Glueck’s Period V; Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 5, Pl. 6.

²¹ For instance, Glueck, 1940, *op. cit.* (above n. 9), p. 16.

²² R. DiVito, “The Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions”, in Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 51-63.

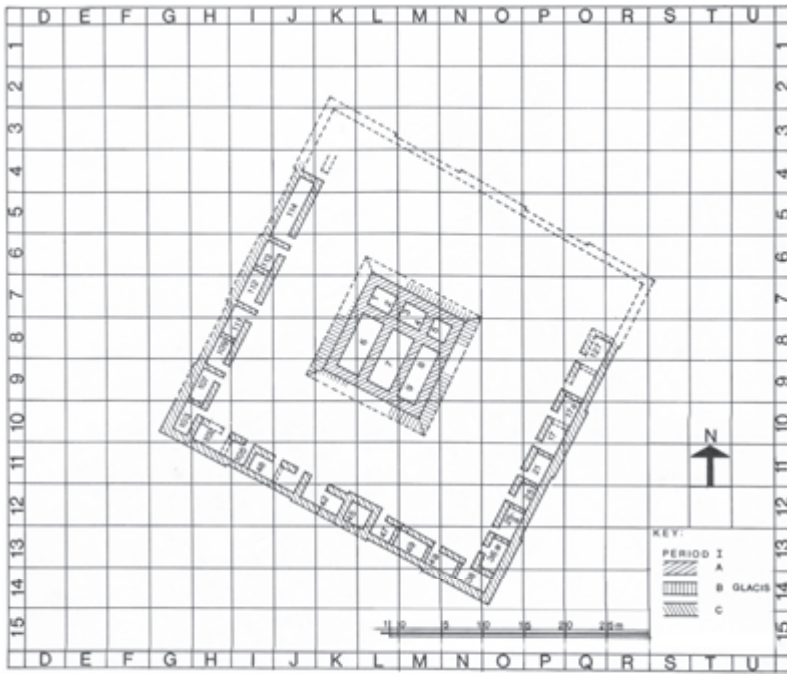


Fig. 2: The square casemate fort (Pratico, op. cit. [above n. 6], Pl. 3).

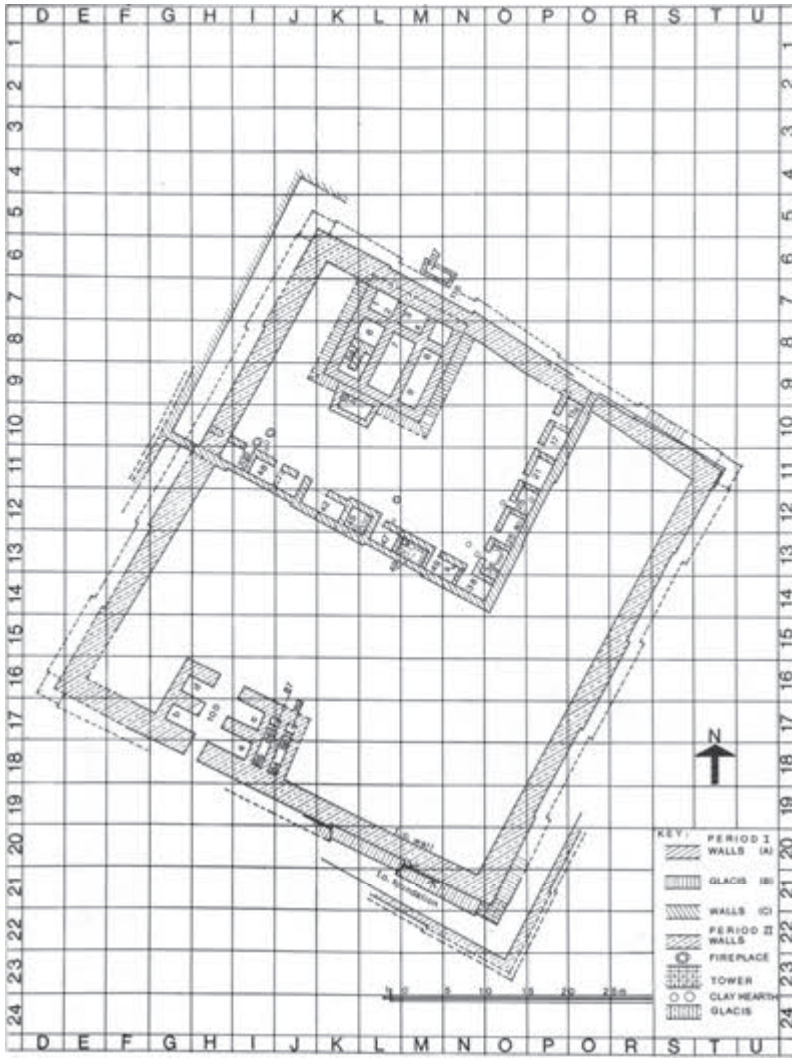


Fig. 3: The solid-wall fort (Pratico, *op. cit.* [above n. 6], Pl. 4).



Fig. 4: Aerial photograph of Tell el-Kheleifeh, 1940 (Pratico, *op. cit.* [above n. 6], Pl. 45).

Excursus: Ezion-geber And Elath/Eloth: One Site or Two?

Two place names appear in the biblical text in relation to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba: Ezion-geber and Elath/Eloth. The relationship between them—whether they represent one or two plac-

es—has been debated.²³ Two references support the latter possibility:

“So we went on, away from our brethren the sons of Esau who live in Se‘ir, away from the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber” (Deut 2:8).

“King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom” (1 Kings 9: 26; see also 2 Chr 8: 17).

So far only one Iron Age site—Tell el-Kheleifeh—is known in this area. The island of Jezerat Fara‘un, suggested by Rothenberg²⁴ as the location of Ezion-geber, did not yield Iron Age finds,²⁵ and the earliest finds known in Aqaba date to the early Roman period.²⁶ Still, several clues support the possibility that Tell el-Kheleifeh was not the only Iron Age site at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba.

First, the presence of Qurayyah Ware sherds, with no corresponding architectural remains, hints that they originated somewhere in the vicinity (below). Second, the name Elath was preserved in Roman-Byzantine Aila, located beneath the modern town of Aqaba. This is also the preferable spot for habitation in the region, thanks to the existence of water and the possibility of an anchorage. The Roman-Early Islamic site found there is intensive and spread over a large area²⁷ and hence the possibility that

²³ Summaries in N. Glueck, “The Topography and History of Ezion-Geber and Elath”, *BASOR* 72, 1938, p. 2-13; J.R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, Sheffield, Journal for the study of the New Testament: Supplement series 77, 1989, p. 46-48; Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 17-22.

²⁴ B. Rothenberg, *Negev: Archaeology in the Negev and the Arabah*, Ramat Gan, 1967, p. 189-213 (in Hebrew).

²⁵ Z. Meshel, “On the Problem of Tell el-Kheleifeh, Elath and Ezion-Geber”, *Eretz-Israel* 12, 1975, p. 49-56 (in Hebrew).

²⁶ A. Retzleff, “A Nabataean and Roman Domestic Area at the Red Sea Port of Aila”, *BASOR* 331, 2003, p. 45-65; B.J. Dolinka, *Nabataean Aila (Aqaba, Jordan) from a Ceramic Perspective: Local and Intra-Regional Trade in Aqaba*, Oxford, British Archaeological Reports: International series 1116, 2003.

²⁷ See, e.g., map in Retzleff, *op. cit.* (above n. 26), Fig. 1.

remains from the Iron Age are still undiscovered cannot be discounted. Third, Tell el-Kheleifeh was covered with dunes, to the extent that the northern part of the square casemate fort remained buried; large piles of sand that were removed by Glueck can be seen in the aerial photographs of the location.²⁸ A small Iron Age site might therefore be hidden under the dunes somewhere nearby.

The most logical solution to this riddle would place the main settlement in present-day Aqaba. This was Elath/Eloth of the biblical text, Aila of the Roman-Byzantine period and later times. The early settlement could have been called after a grove of (sacred?) trees that were located in this better-watered place (and probably better location for a port). Tell el-Kheleifeh was no more than a fort, which was called Ezion-geber. Ezion is believed by many to equate *ḡadyān*;²⁹ to differ from other places carrying the same name, this spot was designated by the word *geber*—the name of a person or a tribe. Could Geber signal strength, that is, Ezion-the-strong (though this word functioning as an adjective would not be a common toponymic pattern)?³⁰

The Date of the Square Casemate Fort

The final report of the excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh³¹—and probably the original documentation—does not allow a proper stratigraphic and chronological analysis. No floors are marked on the plans; the plans have no elevations for the walls; there are no baulk drawings; the architectural sections are of no help, as they are not sufficiently detailed and are not accompanied by infor-

²⁸ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 42-45.

²⁹ For instance, A. Gay, “Yotvata”, *Beth Mikra* 125, 1991, p. 179-181 (in Hebrew); rejected by Y. Elitzur, *Ancient Place Names in the Holy Land, Preservation and History*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 2004, p. 378.

³⁰ I am grateful to Ran Zadok for his help with the interpretation of this toponym.

³¹ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6).

mation on earth layers; there is no proper registry of finds according to architectural units and elevation; the photographs do not provide much information on the relationship between the main architectural features; not enough pottery was published and certain types, such as storage jars, are missing. Also, though Glueck³² and Pratico³³ mention in passing destructions at the end of Periods I and III (Glueck associated them with the assaults of Shishak and the Edomites in the days of Ahaz respectively), there is no documentation of such events, e.g., photographs of burnt debris, collapsed walls and vessels on floors. Despite all this, some new information, which may help answer at least some of the conundrums raised at the beginning of this article, can be retrieved from the report.

The key to a proper analysis of the finds is to decide which of the two forts was built first. Pratico accepted Glueck's description, according to which "... part of this great fortification scheme of Period II [the solid-wall fortress – I.F.] in places cuts through, and in other places is built over part of the rooms of the industrial square [the casemate fort – I.F.]".³⁴ Much of the information provided in the report is insufficient to prove this: a) both the foundations of the walls of the two structures and their preserved top have similar elevation;³⁵ b) the sole relevant picture³⁶ is not clear in this regard. Still, one of the aerial photographs (Fig. 4)³⁷ indeed shows the massive walls of the large fortress passing through (and hence blocking) the two side casemates—105-102 in the southwest and 127 in the northeast.³⁸

³² For example, Glueck, 1940, *op. cit.* (above n. 9), p. 13; idem, 1965, *op. cit.* (above n. 9), p. 82.

³³ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 26.

³⁴ Glueck, 1940, *op. cit.* (above n. 9), p. 8; see also there p. 6-7.

³⁵ See architectural sections in Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 9.

³⁶ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 58b.

³⁷ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 45.

³⁸ The plan (Pratico, *op. cit.* [above n. 6], Pl. 2) shows walls of the casemates passing over the massive walls of the large fortress, but this may be a drawing error.

What is the date of the square casemate fort? Pratico³⁹ dated the earliest pottery (apart from the Qurayyah Ware sherds) found at Tell el-Kheleifeh to the 8th century. Based on parallels to “classic” Iron IIB forms at strata such as Beer-sheba II and Lachish III, I tended to assign the beginning of activity at the site to the late 8th century.⁴⁰ One could argue that the square casemate fort was constructed in the early days of Assyrian rule in the region, and that it was replaced by the larger solid-wall fortress in the later days of Assyrian domination. A fresh look at the pottery opens the door to an alternative interpretation.

Since the finds are not presented according to strata or archaeological/architectural units, the only way to date the beginning of activity at the site is to extract from the figures items that look earlier than the main assemblage. With our knowledge of Iron Age pottery, this is a relatively straightforward task when one tries to separate late Iron I or Iron IIA items from those that date to the Iron IIB-C. Yet, distinguishing forms of the Iron IIA-B transition, or the early phase of the Iron IIB (first half of the 8th century), from those that date to the late Iron IIB (the later part of that century) is difficult and for many vessel-types impossible. This problem is demonstrated by the dispute over the date of the pottery assemblage from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,⁴¹ which was decided only by radiocarbon dating organic materials from the site.⁴² The

³⁹ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 50; 71-72.

⁴⁰ For instance, I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible Sacred Kings and the Roots of Western Tradition*, New York, Free Press, 2006, p. 284; I. Finkelstein, “Khirbat en-Nahas, Edom and Biblical history”, *Tel Aviv* 32, 2005, 119-125.

⁴¹ E. Ayalon, “The Iron Age II Pottery Assemblage from Horvat Teiman (Kuntillet ‘Ajrud)”, *Tel Aviv* 22, 1995, p. 141-205; L. Freud, “The Date of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: A Reply to Lily Singer-Avitz”, *Tel Aviv* 35, 2008, p. 169-174 contra L. Singer-Avitz, “The Date of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud”, *Tel Aviv* 33, 2006, p. 196-228.

⁴² I. Finkelstein and E. Piasezky, “The Date of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: The 14C Perspective”, *Tel Aviv* 35, 2008, p. 175-185 based on I. Carmi and D. Segal, “14C Dating of an Israelite Biblical Site at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Horvat Teiman): Correction, Extension and Improved Age Estimate”, *Radiocarbon* 38, 1996, p. 385-386; Boaretto in a lecture at Tel Aviv University, January 2013.

case of Tell el-Kheleifeh is even more difficult, because critical information, mainly regarding the treatment of the vessels (slip and burnish), is not given, and as the assemblage is incomplete (e.g., no storage jars are represented). Another obstacle, characteristic of Negev sites, is the difficulty in dating the hand-made, crude “Negebite” vessels.⁴³ They appear in different phases of the Iron Age⁴⁴—in the Iron IIA Negev Highlands sites,⁴⁵ as well as in Iron IIB-C layers at Tell el-Qudeirat.⁴⁶ To sum up this point, had the site been inhabited for the first time in, say, 760 BCE, it would be very difficult to identify the pottery that represents the initial phase of activity.⁴⁷

Despite these obstacles, several items in the pottery assemblage of Tell el-Kheleifeh can be isolated as closer in shape to Iron IIA than Iron IIB forms. I refer to:

- The cooking pot in Fig. 5a: 4⁴⁸ has parallels at Iron IIA sites in the Negev Highlands,⁴⁹ Tell el-Qudeirat Stratum 4⁵⁰ and Beer-

⁴³ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pls. 11-14, 15: 1-6.

⁴⁴ Possibly slightly before (B. Rothenberg, “Archaeo-Metallurgical Researches in the Southern Arabah 1959-1990, Part 2: Egyptian New Kingdom [Ramesside] to Early Islam”, *PEQ* 131, 1999, p. 158, 170-171).

⁴⁵ R. Cohen and R. Cohen-Amin, *Ancient Settlement of the Negev Highlands. Volume II: The Iron Age and the Persian Period*, Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority Reports No. 20, 2004, p. 135-141.

⁴⁶ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), pp. 187-210; see also the finds from 8th century BCE Horvat Shimon in the Shephelah—A. Dagan, “Negebite Pottery beyond the Negev”, *Tel Aviv* 38, 2011, p. 208-219; for a summary of this issue see J.-M. Tebes, “Iron Age ‘Negebite Pottery’: A Reassessment”, *AO* 4, 2006, p. 95-117.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., the cooking pots in Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Ayalon, *op. cit.* [above n. 41], Fig. 6: 5-6) which do not differ from those found in late 8th century sites.

⁴⁸ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Fig. 18:7 (possibly also the somewhat similar items in Pl. 19: 1, 4).

⁴⁹ For example, Cohen and Cohen-Amin, *op. cit.* (above n. 45), Fig. 86: 3-4, 7.

⁵⁰ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), Fig. 11.2: 5; for the date of this layer see I. Finkelstein, “Kadesh Barnea: A Reevaluation of its Archaeology and History”, *Tel Aviv* 37, 2010, p. 111-125.

Sheba Stratum VII.⁵¹ It is not found in "classic" late Iron IIB strata.

- The cooking pot in Fig. 5a: 5⁵² also looks earlier than the late 8th century. It is comparable to items at Beer-sheba V⁵³ and Arad XI,⁵⁴ both dating to the late Iron IIA.
- The vessel in Fig. 5a: 6⁵⁵ has parallels at Tell el-Qudeirat Stratum 4⁵⁶ and Nahal Boqer in the Negev Highlands.⁵⁷ Recent radiocarbon dates demonstrate that the latter site was inhabited until the late 9th century BCE.⁵⁸
- The krater in Fig. 5a: 7⁵⁹ can be compared to a vessel in the Negev Highlands,⁶⁰ though a somewhat similar (but smaller) specimen was found at Tell el-Qudeirat Stratum 3.⁶¹
- Bowls with bar-handles (Fig. 5a: 1-3).⁶²
- Rounded-body cooking jugs (Fig. 5b: 1-3)⁶³ have parallels at Tell el-Qudeirat Stratum 4⁶⁴ and Beer-sheba Stratum VII.⁶⁵

⁵¹ F.R. Brandfon, "The Pottery", in Z. Herzog, *Beer-sheba II: The Early Iron Age Settlements*, Tel Aviv, Published by the Institute of archaeology, Tel-Aviv University, no. 7, 1984, Fig. 22: 7.

⁵² Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 19: 3.

⁵³ Y. Aharoni, *Beer-sheba I: Excavations at Tel Beer-sheba 1969-1971 Seasons*, Tel Aviv, 1973, Published by the Institute of archaeology, Tel-Aviv University, no. 2, Pl. 54: 10.

⁵⁴ L. Singer-Avitz, "Arad: The Iron Age Pottery Assemblages", *Tel Aviv* 29, 2002, Fig. 8: 7.

⁵⁵ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 28: 13 (a cooking pot rather than 'jar?').

⁵⁶ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), Fig. 11.9: 13.

⁵⁷ Cohen and Cohen-Amin, *op. cit.* (above n. 45), Fig. 16: 11.

⁵⁸ R. Shahack-Gross, E. Boaretto, D. Cabanes, O. Katz and I. Finkelstein, "Subsistence Practices in the Negev Highlands: The Iron Age and the Byzantine/Early Islamic Period", *Levant* (In press).

⁵⁹ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 28: 14.

⁶⁰ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 45), Fig. 85: 12.

⁶¹ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), Pl. 11.31: 16.

⁶² Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pls. 24: 4; 34: 5, 6.

⁶³ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), Pl. 31: 4-6.

⁶⁴ Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), Pls. 11.3: 4, 11.24: 1.

⁶⁵ Brandfon, *op. cit.* (above n. 51), Fig. 22.

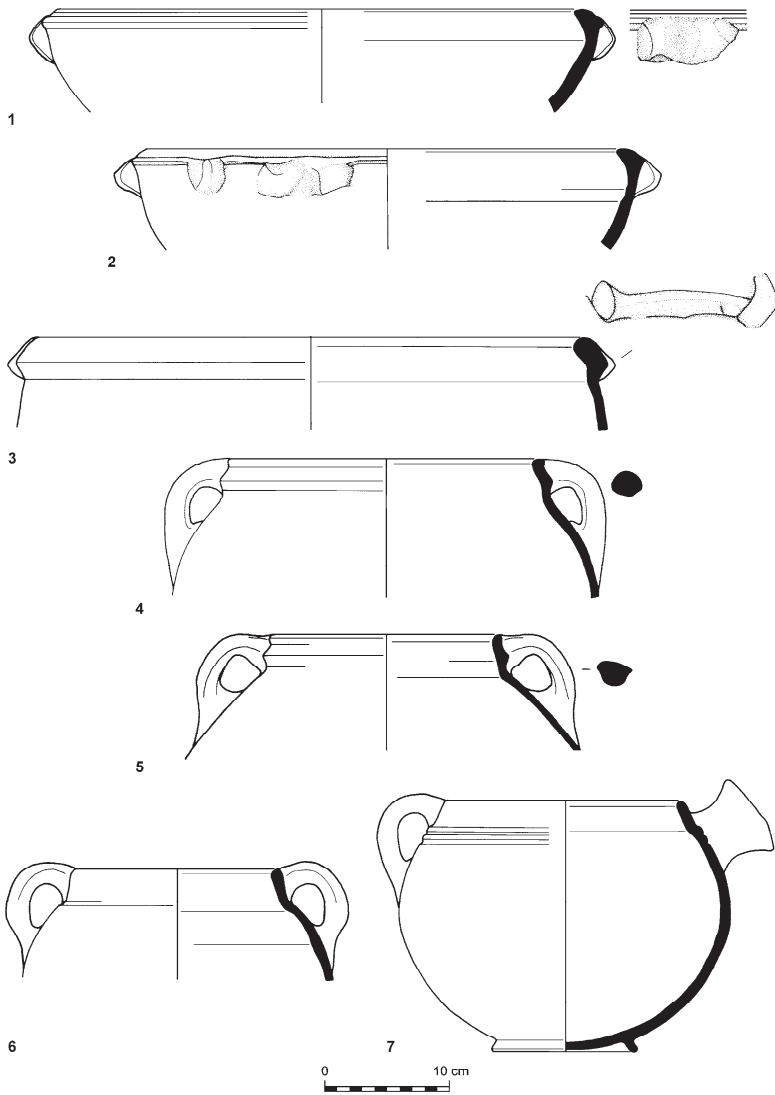


Fig. 5a: Pre-late-8th-century forms.

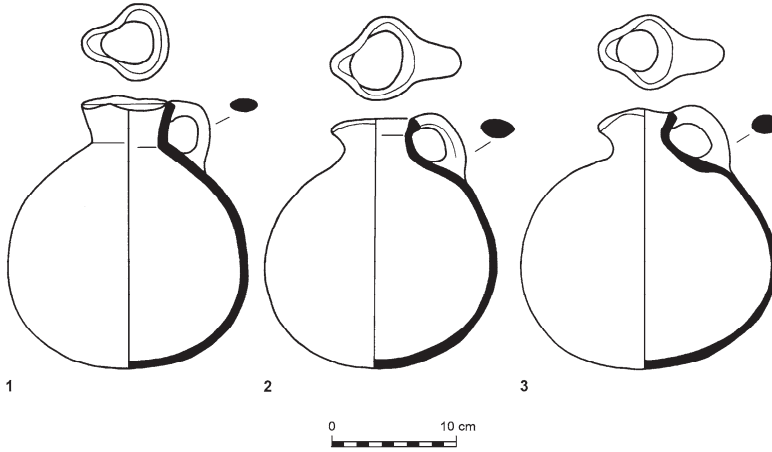


Fig. 5b: Pre-late-8th-century forms.

Additional items, not listed here, can date to both the late Iron IIA and the Iron IIB.

Since the number of items that are similar to Iron IIA forms is limited, and as most types of the Iron IIA are missing, a date for the beginning of activity at the site in the early Iron IIB is the most logical solution. Interestingly, the “early” items all come from either the casemates of the square fort or from units adjacent to the casemates (Table 1). Though the casemates were re-used in later days in the history of the site, this evidence seems to provide another clue that the casemate fort was constructed in the first half of the 8th century BCE.

Table 1: provenance of supposed early Iron IIB vessels found at Tell el-Kheleifeh (compare to Fig. 2)

Vessel	Pratico	Provenance	Type of provenance
Cooking pot	18:7	Room 38a	Casemate
Cooking pot	19:1	17a	Casemate
Cooking pot	19:4	25a	Casemate
Cooking pot	19:3	Room 24	Adjacent to casemates but marked as Period IV in Pl. 2
Cooking pot?	28:13	n.d.	n.d.

Krater	28:14	Room 46	Adjacent to casemates but marked as Period V
Bowl with bar handle	24:4	Room 42	Casemate
Bowl with bar handle	34:5	Room 35a	Adjacent to casemates but marked as Period IV
Bowl with bar handle	34:6	Room 29	Adjacent to casemates but marked as Period IV
Jug/cooking jug	31:4	Room 49	Casemate
Jug/cooking jug	31:5	Square P12	Either Room 25 in the casemates or adjacent to it
Jug/cooking jug	31:6	Square P12	Either Room 25 in the casemates or adjacent to it

The History of Tell el-Kheleifeh

I would suggest dividing the history of Tell el-Kheleifeh into three to four phases (Table 2). In order to avoid confusion with previous treatments of the site, I will use the letters A-D. Though the number of phases is close to that suggested by Pratico, the interpretation of the remains and the ensuing historical reconstruction are different.

Phase A

The existence of this phase is questionable. The earliest finds at Tell el-Kheleifeh—the Qurayyah Ware sherds⁶⁶—cannot be affiliated with any architectural remains. A layer from this period—representing a small settlement—could have been erased in leveling operations carried out in preparation for the construction of the large solid-wall fortress. Or, these sherds could have originat-

⁶⁶ Glueck, *op. cit.* (above n. 7); Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 49. It is possible that the Qurayyah ware items caught the attention of the excavators because of their decoration, and that additional early sherds were not kept or not published. I thank Eran Arie for this observation.

ed at a nearby site, still either buried under the dunes or located under the modern city of Aqaba.

The Qurayyah Ware dates in the main to the 12th century BCE.⁶⁷ But to judge from items found at Tel Masos and the Negev Highlands,⁶⁸ their chronology can be somewhat extended, into the 11th century BCE. Similar items were found in other places in the south; especially noteworthy are Timna⁶⁹ and Yotvata⁷⁰ close to Tell el-Kheleifeh, and also Wadi Fayanan and the earliest layer at Tell el-Qudeirat located further away.⁷¹

Even if there had been a small settlement here in the 12th and (part of?) the 11th century, it was followed by an occupational gap in the late Iron I and Iron IIA, ca. 1000-800 BCE.⁷² This period of abandonment includes the time of both Solomon and Jehoshaphat, who are mentioned in 1 Kings (9:26; 22:49) in connection with maritime activity at Ezion-geber. Regardless of the question of whether a late Iron I and/or Iron IIA settlement lies under Roman-Early Islamic Aila and modern-day Aqaba, these stories

⁶⁷ L. Singer-Avitz, "The Qurayyah Painted Ware", in D. Ussishkin, *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973-1994)*, Vol. 3, Tel Aviv, Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University 22, 2004, p. 1280-1287; L. Singer-Avitz, "The Earliest Settlement at Kadesh Barnea", *Tel Aviv* 35, 2008, 73-81.

⁶⁸ For the latter see Cohen and Cohen-Amin, *op. cit.* (above n. 45), Fig. 80: 1; for the commencement of the wave of settlement in this region already in the Iron I see A. Fantalkin and I. Finkelstein, "The Sheshonq I Campaign and the 8th-Century BCE Earthquake—More on the Archaeology and History of the South in the Iron I-IIA", *Tel Aviv* 33, 2006, p. 18-42.

⁶⁹ B. Rothenberg and J. Glass, "The Midianite Pottery", in J.F.A. Sawyer and D.J.A. Clines (eds.), *Midian, Moab and Edom*, Sheffield, Journal for the study of the Old Testament: Supplement series 24, 1983, p. 65-124.

⁷⁰ Z. Meshel, "Yotvata", *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* 4, 1993, p. 1517-1520.

⁷¹ Details in Singer-Avitz, 2004, *op. cit.* (above n. 67); for the latter site see Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* (above n. 1), p. 140-141; Singer-Avitz, 2008, *op. cit.* (above n. 67); Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 50).

⁷² For the dates of these phases of the Iron Age see I. Finkelstein and E. Piasezky, "Radiocarbon Dating the Iron Age in the Levant: A Bayesian Model for Six Ceramic Phases and Six Transitions", *Antiquity* 84, 2010, p. 374-385.

should be interpreted as retrojection of later realities—Judah participating in the Arabian trade under Assyrian domination—into the past. Recent archaeological and biblical research have shown that Solomon’s golden age is a myth that stems from Judah’s ideology regarding its future destiny mixed with memories of the internationalism of the Assyrian century.⁷³ In the days of the two monarchs Judah was not strong enough to operate as far off as the head of the Gulf of Aqaba; Judah’s growth and first fortifications should be dated to the second half of the 9th century—later than the reign of Jehoshaphat.⁷⁴ This is also the time of its first expansion to the Beer-sheba Valley.⁷⁵

Phase B

The next phase in the life of Tell el-Kheleifeh is represented by the square casemate fort, which was erected in the first half of the 8th century. This was a period of expansion of north Israelite power in the south, best manifested by the activity at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, which demonstrates domination over the Darb el-Ghazza. The site yielded extraordinary assemblages of Hebrew inscriptions⁷⁶ and drawings on ceramic vessels and plaster.⁷⁷ The dating of the site to this phase in the history of the region, already hint-

⁷³ Finkelstein and Silberman, *op. cit.* (above n. 40), and bibliography.

⁷⁴ Fantalkin and Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 68).

⁷⁵ Fantalkin and Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 68); A. Fantalkin, “The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation”, in A. Fantalkin and A. Yassar-Landau (eds.), *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, Leiden, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East Series 31, 2008, p. 17–44; I. Finkelstein, “The Southern Steppe of the Levant ca. 1050–750 BCE: A Framework for a Territorial History” (in press in *PEQ*).

⁷⁶ S. Ahituv, E. Eshel and Z. Meshel, “The Inscriptions”, in Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*, Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 2012, p. 73–142; Na’aman, *op. cit.* (above n. 8).

⁷⁷ P. Beck, “Horvat Qitmit Revisited via En Hazeva”, *Tel Aviv* 23, 1996, p. 102–114; Ornan, *op. cit.* (above n. 8).

ed by the pottery assemblage⁷⁸, the inscriptions⁷⁹ and the old radiometric results,⁸⁰ has recently been confirmed by new radiocarbon determinations.⁸¹

Scholars pointed to north Israelite influence in the inscriptions,⁸² several of which seem to refer to a king of Israel,⁸³ and in other traits of material culture.⁸⁴ A plaster drawing on the entrance wall to the site apparently describes a king of Israel sitting on a throne.⁸⁵ Ornan⁸⁶ has recently identified additional drawings as expressing royal scenes and consequently refers to the site as a royal Israelite road-station. Kuntillet 'Ajrud was therefore an Israelite trading-post on the Darb el-Ghazza—the caravan road from the head of the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean coast—in the days of Jeroboam II.

What kinds of commodities were transported along the Darb el-Ghazza? Scholars have wondered whether early contacts with Arabia existed before the period of Assyrian hegemony in the region, that is, before the late 8th century BCE.⁸⁷ Clues for such

⁷⁸ Ayalon, *op. cit.* (above n. 41); Frued, *op. cit.* (above n. 41); contra Singer Avitz, *op. cit.* (above n. 41).

⁷⁹ A. Lemaire, "Date et origine des inscriptions hébraïques et phéniciennes de Kuntillet 'Ajrud", *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 1, 1984, p. 131-143.

⁸⁰ Carmi and Segal, *op. cit.* (above n. 42); Finkelstein and Piasezky, *op. cit.* (above n. 42).

⁸¹ Boaretto in a lecture at Tel Aviv University, January 2013.

⁸² For instance Lemaire, *op. cit.* (above n. 79); B.A. Mastin, "Who Built and who Used the Buildings at Kuntillet 'Ajrud?", in J.K. Aitkin K.J. Dell, and B.A. Mastin (eds.), *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies*, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter 2011, p. 69-85; Ahituv, Eshel and Meshel, *op. cit.* (above n. 76); Na'aman, *op. cit.* (above n. 8).

⁸³ See in details Na'aman, *op. cit.* (above n. 8).

⁸⁴ For instance, Ayalon, *op. cit.* (above n. 41).

⁸⁵ P. Beck, "The Art of Palestine during the Iron Age II: Local Traditions and External Influences (10th-8th Centuries BCE)", in C. Uehlinger (ed.), *Images as Media: Sources for the Culture History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean (1st Millennium BCE)*, Fribourg, OBO 175, p. 165-183.

⁸⁶ Ornan, *op. cit.* (above n. 8).

⁸⁷ For instance, M. Jasmin, "Les conditions d'émergence de la route de l'encens à la fin du II^e millénaire avant notre ère", *Syria* 82, 2005, p. 49-62; B. Sass, *The Alphabet at the Turn of the Millennium*, Tel Aviv, journal of the Institute of

trade-relations have accumulated in recent years. They come from the archaeology of south Arabia, where prosperity started no later than the early 8th century,⁸⁸ from the archaeology of the oases in the Hejaz, which attests to pre-Assyrian-period activity,⁸⁹ and from the studies of organic residues in ceramic vessels from Philistia and Phoenicia, which demonstrate the existence of Far East trade as early as the late Iron I and the Iron IIA.⁹⁰ One branch of this trade could have passed via the Hejaz and northeastern Sinai.

Evidently, one cannot control remote and isolated Kuntilet ʿAjrud without certain domination in the Shephelah and the southern coastal plain. And it is only logical to assume that whoever dominated the southern trade would have wanted to establish an outpost at the strategic head of the Gulf of Aqaba (Fig. 1).

Indeed, in the first half of the 8th century Judah, including its Shephelah territories, passed from Damascene to Israelite hegemony.⁹¹ The subjugation of Judah to Israel is described in the biblical reference to the defeat inflicted by Joash king of Israel on Amaziah king of Judah at Beth-shemesh and the ensuing events in

Archaeology of Tel-Aviv University: Occasional publications no. 4, 2005; for the wider geographical picture see M. Liverani, "Early Caravan Trade between South-Arabia and Mesopotamia", *Yemen* 1, 1992, p. 111-115.

⁸⁸ C. Robin and M. Arbach, "Nouvelles données sur la chronologie des Labuʿides de Nashshān", in M. Arbach, R. Audouin and C. J. Robin, "Dossier. La découverte du temple d'Aranyadaʿ à Nashshān et la chronologie des Labuʿides", *Arabia* 2, 2004, p. 29-41.

⁸⁹ A. Hausleiter, "The Oasis of Tayma", in A. I. Al-Ghabban, a.o. (eds.), *Roads of Arabia. Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Paris, 2010, p. 219-236.

⁹⁰ D. Namdar, A. Gilboa, R. Neumann, I. Finkelstein and S. Weiner, "Cinnamaldehyde in Early Iron Age Phoenician Flasks Raises the Possibility of Trade with South Asia", *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 12, 2013, p. 1-19; Y. Gadot, I. Finkelstein, M. Iserlis, A. M. Maeir, P. Nahshoni and D. Namdar, "Tracking Down Cult: Production, Function and Content of Chalices in Iron Age Philistia" (In press).

⁹¹ N. Naʿaman, "The Historical Background of the Battle between Amaziah and Jehoash", *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 9, 1987, p. 211-217 (in Hebrew).

Jerusalem (2 Kings 14:8-14). Neither archaeology, nor the biblical text, tells us about the situation along the southern coast.

As for the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, the square casemate fort at Tell el-Kheleifeh could have been erected by Israel—or Judah in the service of Israel. The construction of this fort—and/or activity at a nearby site—may provide the reality behind 2 Kings 14:22, which reports that Azariah (Uzziah) “built Elath and restored it to Judah”.⁹² This text speaks about a period not too remote from the time of the author-s and so I doubt if it can be regarded as reference based on later realities. In “restored” the author probably refers to the (a-historical) earlier verses in 1 Kings, which speak about Solomon’s and Jehoshaphat’s activities in this region. Azariah reigned in Judah in the first half of the 8th century BCE, parallel to Jeroboam II in Israel. The Bible says little about the relationship between the two Hebrew kingdoms in his time,⁹³ but judging from the long-term picture, it is reasonable to suggest that he was Jeroboam II’s vassal. The square casemate fort could have been manned with a Judahite garrison.⁹⁴ The power of Israel in the southeast is hinted at also by 2 Kings 14:25, which states that Jeroboam II “restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath (= the city of Labu in the Valley of Lebanon)⁹⁵ as far as the Sea of the Arabah” (= the Dead Sea).

⁹² That the reference is indeed to Uzziah see N. Na’aman, “Azariah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel”, *VT* 43, 1993, p. 227-234 and bibliography.

⁹³ Na’aman, *op. cit.* (above n. 92).

⁹⁴ For a somewhat parallel situation—an Israelite site with a certain connection to Judah—see the pottery of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Ayalon, *op. cit.* [above n. 41]; J. Gunneweg, I. Perlman and Z. Meshel, “The Origin of the Pottery of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud”, *IEJ* 35, 1985, p. 270-283). For conflicting views regarding the language of the inscriptions written in Phoenician script, and the identity of the writers—whether Hebrew written by Judahites or Phoenician written by Tyrians—see Ahituv, Eshel and Meshel, *op. cit.* (above n. 76), p. 130; A. Lemaire, “Remarques sur les inscriptions phéniciennes de Kuntillet ‘Ajrud”, *Semitica* 55, 2013, p. 83-99 respectively.

⁹⁵ N. Na’aman, “Lebo-hamath, Subat-Hamath and the Northern Boundary of the Land of Canaan”, *UF* 31, 1997, p. 417-441.

I am not aware of a similar square casemate fort in Israel or Judah in the first half of the 8th century. But this should not be taken as a critical obstacle. Large scale casemate constructions are characteristic of north Israelite architecture in the days of the Omride dynasty.⁹⁶ They include the square casemate forts of En Gev (60 × 60 m in size) and Har Adir (80 × 80 m).⁹⁷ Israelite monarchs could also have deployed this plan in the first half of the 8th century. The fort of Stratum XI at Arad (ca. 50 × 50 m), which dates to the late Iron IIA,⁹⁸ in the second half of the 9th century BCE,⁹⁹ also somehow resembles the square casemate fort of Tell el-Kheleifeh. This comparison is not free of difficulties as the evidence for this phase at Arad is fragmentary¹⁰⁰ and because the fort there was equipped with corner towers. Another comparison can be found in the Iron II ca. 43 × 35 m trapezoid fort with casemates unearthed at el-Lehun in Moab.¹⁰¹ A certain similarity of

⁹⁶ I. Finkelstein, "Omride Architecture", *ZDPV* 116, 2000, p. 114-138; I. Finkelstein, and O. Lipschits, "Omride Architecture in Moab: Jahaz and Ataroth", *ZDPV* 126, 2010, p. 29-42.

⁹⁷ S. Hasegawa and Y. Paz, "Tel 'En Gev: Preliminary Report", *ESI* 121, 2009, http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=1013&mag_id=115; D. Ilan, *Northeastern Israel in the Iron Age I: Cultural, Socioeconomic and Political Perspectives*, Tel Aviv, Ph.D. thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1999.

⁹⁸ Z. Herzog and L. Singer-Avitz, "Redefining the Centre: The Emergence of State in Judah", *Tel Aviv* 31, 2004, p. 209-244.

⁹⁹ Fantalkin and Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 68). The casemate fortress at Tell el-Qudeirat (50 × 30 m in size; Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* [above n. 1], Plan 8) was dated by the excavators to the Iron IIC in the late 7th century (Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* [above n. 1], p. 13-16). Yet, the casemate system was probably constructed in Stratum 3 of the late 8th century (Finkelstein, *op. cit.* [above n. 50]). A somewhat earlier date in the 8th century cannot be ruled out. This fort is different from the one at Tell el-Kheleifeh in its massive support walls and corner towers. The casemates at En Hazeva are not comparable to those of Tell el-Kheleifeh.

¹⁰⁰ See plan in Z. Herzog, "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report", *Tel Aviv* 29, 2002, p. 3-109, here Fig. 9.

¹⁰¹ D. Homès-Fredericq, "The Iron Age II Fortress of al-Lahun (Moab)", in P. Bienkowski (ed.), *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau*, Leuven, Ancient Near Eastern studies: Supplement n. 29, 2009, p. 165-182.

architectural concept also exists in some Negev Highlands Iron IIA sites.¹⁰² All in all, then, the layout of the Tell el-Kheleifeh casemate fort is not alien to 9th century BCE and later military architecture in the region.

2 Kings 16:5-6 too may be read against the background of this phase in the history of Tell el-Kheleifeh. This text says that Rezin king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel assaulted king Ahaz of Judah and adds that: “At that time the king of Edom (Heb. Aram) recovered Elath for Edom (Heb. Aram), and drove the men of Judah from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day”. Scholars read here either the MT Aram or Edom.¹⁰³ Either way, this reference should be interpreted against the background of Rezin king of Damascus’ conquest of the Israelite territories in Transjordan. Rezin could have attempted to renew past Damascene hegemony (in the days of Hazael) in the Levant, including control over the southern trade. To that end he could have deployed the southern Transjordanian kingdoms to serve his interests. His pressure on Judah (the Syro-Ephraimite war) should be seen, at least partially, in the same context—an attempt to inherit Hazael’s and later Israel’s control in the southwestern lowlands, aimed at dominating the southern trade.

¹⁰² Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 29-31; see, for instance, the Hatira fort (Z. Meshel and R. Cohen, “Refed and Hatira: two Iron Age Fortresses in the Northern Negev”, *Tel Aviv* 7, 1980, p. 70-81). But note that the Negev Highlands sites are not forts (I. Finkelstein, “The Iron Age ‘Fortresses’ of the Negev Highlands: Sedentarization of the Nomads”, *Tel Aviv* 11, 1984, p. 189-209; R. Shahack-Gross and I. Finkelstein, “Subsistence Practices in an Arid Environment: A Geoarchaeological Investigation in an Iron Age Site, the Negev Highlands, Israel”, *JAS* 35, 2008, p. 965-982); their architecture is different and most of them are smaller in size.

¹⁰³ For instance, N. Na’aman, “Rezin of Damascus and the Land of Gilead”, *ZDPV* 111, 1995, p. 105-117 for the former; Bartlett, *op. cit.* (above n. 23), p. 127; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *2 Kings*, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, The Anchor Bible v. 10-11, 1988, p. 186; A. Lemaire, “Edom and the Edomites”, in A. Lemaire and B. Halpern (eds.), *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum v. 129, 2010, p. 233 for the latter.

Phase C

Phase C is represented by the large solid-wall fortress. This is one in a system of Assyrian strongholds in the south, which also included En Hazeva and Khirbet en-Nahas (Fig. 6). En Hazeva, which also dates to the Iron IIB-C, is a larger fortress;¹⁰⁴ still, it resembles the fortress at Tell el-Kheleifeh in the nature of the insets-offsets outer wall, the inner casemate compound and the four-chambered gate. For Khirbet en-Nahas I should mention the size of the fortress (73 × 73 m), the solid outer wall and the four-chambered gate. Levy *et al.*¹⁰⁵ indeed compared it to Tell el-Kheleifeh and proposed to down-date the latter to the 10th century BCE. Several points stand in opposition to their view: a) Tell el-Kheleifeh has no late Iron I or early Iron IIA finds; b) organic samples found under the gate of the Khirbet en-Nahas fortress were radiocarbon dated to the 9th century, making it impossible to date the construction of the gate to the 10th century;¹⁰⁶ and c) the pottery from Khirbet en-Nahas belongs mainly to the Iron IIB-C.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, both fortresses were probably constructed in the late 8th century.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ca. 100 × 100 m; on this site see Cohen and Yisrael, *op. cit.* (above n. 3); D. Ussishkin, "En Haseva: On the Gate of the Iron Age II Fortress", *Tel Aviv* 37, 2010, p. 246-253.

¹⁰⁵ Levy *et al.*, *op. cit.* (above n. 4), p. 139.

¹⁰⁶ I. Finkelstein and E. Piasezky, "14C and the Iron Age Chronology Debate: Rehov, Khirbet en-Nahas, Dan and Megiddo", *Radiocarbon* 48, 2006, p. 373-386.

¹⁰⁷ I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz, "The Pottery of Khirbet en-Nahas: A Rejoinder", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 141, 2009, p. 207-218 contra N. G. Smith and T. E. Levy, "The Iron Age Pottery from Khirbat en-Nahas, Jordan: A Preliminary Study", *BASOR* 352, 2008, p. 41-91.

¹⁰⁸ Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 40); I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz, "The Pottery of Edom: A Correction", *AO* 6, 2008, p. 13-24; *idem*, *op. cit.* (above n. 107).

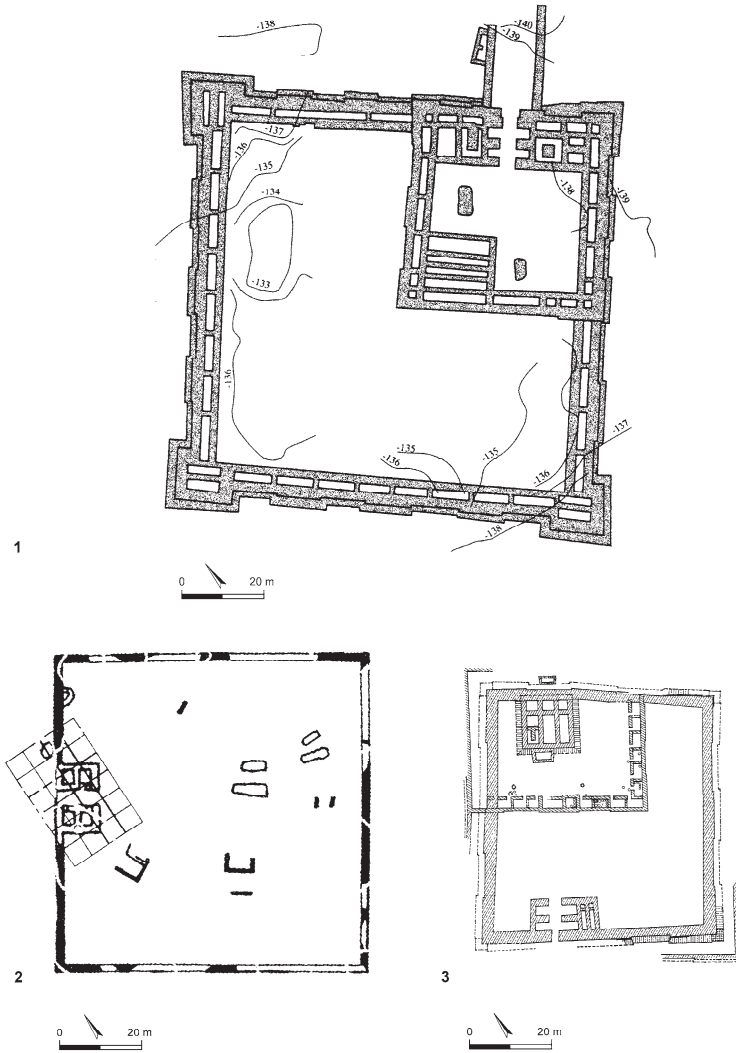


Fig. 6: The three Assyrian forts in the south: 1. Tell el-Kheleifeh; 2. En Hazeva; 3. Khirbet en-Nahas.

Assyria shifted the main trade route from the difficult-to-control Darb el-Ghazza to the eastern alternative, which passed via the Edomite plateau and the Beer-sheba Valley—a road that was protected by the vassal kingdoms of Edom and Judah. The three As-

syrian fortresses guarded strategic spots along the Arabian trade route: Tell el-Kheleifeh controlled the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, Khirbet en-Nahas the descent from Buseirah to the Arabah,¹⁰⁹ and En Hazeva the crossing of the Arabah. They were probably manned by soldiers from the vassal kingdoms of Edom and Judah, as well as desert tribes. Another fortress was built by Judah under Assyrian auspices at Tell el-Qudeirat in the west.¹¹⁰ It was probably aimed to control movement of people and commodities along the now suppressed Darb el-Ghazza. The pivot of the system in the south was located at Buseirah (biblical Bozrah), where the Assyrians established an administration center, comprised of a system of elaborate edifices constructed on an elevated platform.¹¹¹ This formidable system of fortresses and administrative center could not have been built overnight. Construction probably started a short while after the Assyrian take-over of the region, and the system was fully implemented a while later, in the very late 8th or first half of the 7th century BCE.

Since no inscription connected to imperial administration was found in any of the forts, one may ask what makes them Assyrian. The answer comes from several directions:

1. The architectural uniformity, in layout and size, attest to a royal authority. The magnitude of the system does not fit the small vassal kingdoms. Architecture representing the latter can be seen in the contemporary, much smaller Judahite forts of Tell el-Qudeirat, Arad and Khirbet 'Uza. They also feature a different architectural layout and yielded a relatively large number of Hebrew ostraca.

¹⁰⁹ Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, *op. cit.* (above n. 107).

¹¹⁰ N. Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah", *Tel Aviv* 18, 1991, p. 48-49; Finkelstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 50).

¹¹¹ R. Reich, "Palaces and Residences in the Iron Age", in A. Kempinski and R. Reich (eds.), *The Architecture of Ancient Israel from the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods*, Jerusalem, Israel Exploration Society, 1992, p. 219-220; P. Bienkowski, "The Architecture of Edom", *SHAJ* 5, 1995, p. 140-141.

2. The solid-wall fortress at Tell el-Kheleifeh is surrounded by revetments.¹¹² This feature is typical of Assyrian military and administrative buildings in the region. It can be found at, e.g., Tell Qudadi at the mouth of the Yarkon River,¹¹³ Tell Abu Salima in northeast Sinai¹¹⁴ and Blahiya near Gaza.¹¹⁵ A typical feature of these revetments is their steep angle.

3. The second largest pottery group in the Tell el-Kheleifeh assemblage consists of imitations of Assyrian bowls.¹¹⁶

4. The architecture of the Buseirah palaces, which recall Assyrian plans and construction method,¹¹⁷ should be added to this list.

Thanks to the participation of Judah and Judahites in the defense of the southern trade routes, and the presence of Arabs in the kingdom,¹¹⁸ the Assyrian system in the south was well-known to biblical author-s of late-monarchic times. Indeed, three of the main strongholds of this system—Tamar (En Hazeva), Kadesh-barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) and Ezion-geber (Tell el-Kheleifeh)—

¹¹² Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), 26-27, Pls. 62A-B, 63A.

¹¹³ A. Fantalkin and O. Tal, "Rediscovering the Iron Age Fortress at Tell Qudadi in the Context of New Assyrian Imperialistic Policies", *PEQ* 141, 2009, p. 194 and n. 19.

¹¹⁴ R. Reich, "The Identification of the 'Sealed karu of Egypt'", *IEJ* 34, 1984, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ J.-B. Humbert and M. Sadeq, "Fouilles de Blakhiyah – Anthédon", in J.-B. Humbert (ed.), *Gaza Méditerranéenne Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*, Paris, Errance, 2000, p. 106, 113. The stone revetment at Tell el-Qudeirat (Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg, *op. cit.* [above n. 1], p. 10, Plan 1.2 in p. 11; 123 Fig. 9.7, 325 Section 27-27) may also be influenced by Assyrian construction methods.

¹¹⁶ Pratico, *op. cit.* (above n. 6), p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Reich, *op. cit.* (above n. 111), p. 219-220; Bienkowski, *op. cit.* (above n. 111), p. 140-141.

¹¹⁸ Y. Thareani, *Tel 'Aroer: The Iron Age II Caravan Town and the Hellenistic-Early Roman Settlement*, Jerusalem, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion no. 8, 2011, p. 223-228; Y. Shiloh, "South Arabian Inscriptions from the City of David, Jerusalem", *PEQ* 119, 1987, p. 9-18; A. Lemaire, "New Perspectives on the Trade between Judah and South Arabia", in M. Lubetski (ed.), *New Inscriptions and Seals Relating to the Biblical World*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature no. 19, 2012, p. 93-110.

make up the skeleton of biblical references to the southern desert (see Ezekiel 47:19; 48:28 for Tamar and Kadesh). The references to Ezion-geber in Numbers 33:35-36 (with Kadesh appearing immediately thereafter) and in 1 Kings 9:26 and 22:49 seem to reflect this knowledge. The same holds true for the mention of El-paran (Elath?), Enmishpat that is Kadesh (Kadesh-barnea) and Hazazon-tamar (Tamar) in Genesis 14:6-7. This chapter has several layers, most of them late in date,¹¹⁹ but the reference to the three main forts in the south probably comes from the reality of the Assyrian century.¹²⁰

Phase D

This is the Persian period settlement, which yielded the Attic pottery and Aramaic ostraca. Closer to the surface of the site and hence damaged, it was found fragmentary. It is not even clear if the outer walls of the fortress were still in use at that time, or whether the buildings were constructed on top of the ruined fortress.

Table 2: Phases in the history of Tell el-Kheleifeh

This article			Glueck 1965		Pratico 1993	
Phase	Features	Date	Period	Date	Features	Date
A?	Qurayyah sherds, no architecture	Late Bronze III/early Iron I, 12 th cent. and/or a bit later	—		Reference G. D. Pratico, <i>op. cit.</i> (above n. 6), p. 49	12 th cent.

¹¹⁹ G. Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek: Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalms 10*, Berlin, New York, de Gruyter, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft Bd. 406, 2010.

¹²⁰ I. Finkelstein, "The Wilderness Narrative and Itineraries: What, How and When did Biblical Authors Know about the Southern Desert?", in T. E. Levy (ed.), *Out of Egypt: Israel's Exodus between Text and Memory, History and Imagination* (Forthcoming).

B	Square casemate fort	Early Iron IIB, first half of 8 th cent.	IA-C	10 th cent. Solomon	Casemate fort	
C	Large solid-wall fortress	Late 8 th to late 7 th cent.	II-IV	9 th to early 6 th cent., Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Edomites	Solid fort	8 th to early 6 th cent.
D	Settlement (fortress?)	Persian period, 5 th -4 th cent. BCE	V	Persian period	Settlement	Persian period

Conclusion

My main points in this article can be summarized as follows:

- It is logical to suggest that the strategic spot along the southern desert routes at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba was settled during much of the Iron Age and later periods. Two places were probably active in the Iron Age—the preferable site of the later Aila/Aqaba and Tell el-Kheleifeh. In the Bible they are probably known by two names—Elath for the former and Ezion-geber for the latter.
- The Qurayya sherds found out of context at Tell el-Kheleifeh attest to activity in the 12th/11th centuries somewhere in this area, possibly beneath Aila.
- Tell el-Kheleifeh was uninhabited in the late Iron I and Iron IIA. There is no way to know about the situation at Aila/Aqaba. In any event, the references in 1 Kings to maritime trade activity at Ezion-geber in the days of Solomon and Jehoshaphat should be seen as a retrojection of the reality in the Assyrian period into the past.
- The square casemate fort was erected in the first half of the 8th century by the Northern Kingdom or by Judah in the service of Israel. It aimed at controlling this strategic point; the main trade route of this time went north via the Darb el-

Ghazza, passing at Kuntillet ʿAjrud. A contemporary settlement could have existed beneath Aila/Aqaba. 2 Kings 14:22 and 16:6 should be read against this background.

- The Assyrians shifted the main Arabian trade route from the Darb el-Ghazza to the Edomite plateau and Beer-sheba Valley. They replaced the square casemate fort by a formidable solid-wall fortress, which was one in a system of three strongholds built along this road. Biblical references to Ezion-geber in 1 Kings, Deuteronomy, Numbers and possibly Genesis are influenced by this Assyrian-period system.
- The last phase at Tell el-Kheleifeh dates to the Persian period. Later activity at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba was restricted to the main settlement—at Aila/Aqaba.

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